



## FINE ARTS

### Richard Misrach's Golden Gate dreams

By: Lauren Gallagher | 05/30/12 4:04 PM

S.F. Examiner Staff Writer

When photographer Richard Misrach and his wife moved in to their Berkeley hills home in 1997, they stumbled on something that became an iconic project for Misrach.

"We didn't know about the view when we bought the house," says Misrach, who appears in a City Arts & Lectures presentation Monday at Herbst Theatre.

The home, where they still live, was engulfed in vegetation. After a week's manicuring, Misrach and his wife saw the full span of the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz and San Francisco's sparkling skyline.

"Once I saw the view, I knew I had a project," Misrach says.

For the next four years, Misrach photographed the bridge from his front porch, for the series "Golden Gate." The images, published in the book "Richard Misrach: Golden Gate" in 2001, are featured again in a sumptuous, new large-format edition published by Aperture slated for a June release.

"A phenomenal spectacle of light, color and weather comes through the Golden Gate," Misrach says. "It changes on an hourly, sometimes minute-by-minute basis."

Fixing his camera in the same spot, Misrach used the same lens, and cropped the same section of the bridge for each photo, allowing the Bay's atmospheric drama to take center stage. His prints, sometimes as large as 8-by-10 feet, are mesmerizing, and sometimes dwarf the viewer.

A Bay Area resident since 1967, Misrach investigates man's intersection with nature in his large-format landscape photographs. He has been inspired by Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and other influential Western photographers in Group f/64, but his work moves beyond the pastoral.



RICHARD MISRACH, COURTESY FRAENKEL GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO, PACE/MACGILL GALLERY, NEW YORK AND MARC SELWYN FINE ART, LOS ANGELES

He has photographed mass livestock graves in the Nevada desert, a petrochemical wasteland along Louisiana's Mississippi River known as "Cancer Alley," the 1991 Oakland-Berkeley fire and Hurricane Katrina.

"I use the Western landscape as a microcosm," Misrach says. "The man-made fires, floods, natural fires, dead animal pits and things like that are a microcosm for what's going on across the rest of the planet. I try to document a historical moment, and I think years from now they may speak to climate change issues, oil use and so on."

Clearly sensitive to time, and out of respect to his subjects, Misrach waited 20 years to show most of his Oakland-Berkeley fire photos, and his "Cancer Alley" series is being revisited by the High Museum of Art in Atlanta this summer, nearly 15 years after he began it.

He also waited several years before releasing images from "Destroy This Memory," his documentation of graffiti messages scrawled in Katrina's wake.

"Many of these situations are delicate," Misrach says. "But it seems important to me to have recorded as much, as thoroughly and as well as possible. I strive for a level of formal beauty that makes them function more like history paintings. They are about a historical moment."

#### **IF YOU GO**

**Richard Misrach in conversation with Steven Winn; presented by City Arts & Lectures**

**Where:** Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave., S.F.

**When:** 8 p.m. Monday

**Tickets:** \$22 to \$27

**Contact:** (415) 392-4400, [www.cityarts.net](http://www.cityarts.net)

[lgallagher@sfxaminer.com](mailto:lgallagher@sfxaminer.com)