



sub(Merge)

Art Installation

with Responsive Light and Sound

Proposal commissioned by
NTC Foundation for
[Installations at the Station](#)
at Arts District Liberty Station, San Diego CA

Proposal created by
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OVERVIEW

“sub(Merge)” takes participants on an immersive journey, deep into a watery world of sound and vision. Exquisitely crafted light art brings walls and ceiling alive with undulating motion and saturated color forms. Complex woven-light patterns ebb and flow with shadowy shapes, gliding across illuminated surfaces. Participants are gently bathed with a dreamlike underwater soundscape, including marine animal voices.

Using choreographed light and sound, *sub(Merge)* transforms a once familiar alcove into an unforgettable audio visual experience.

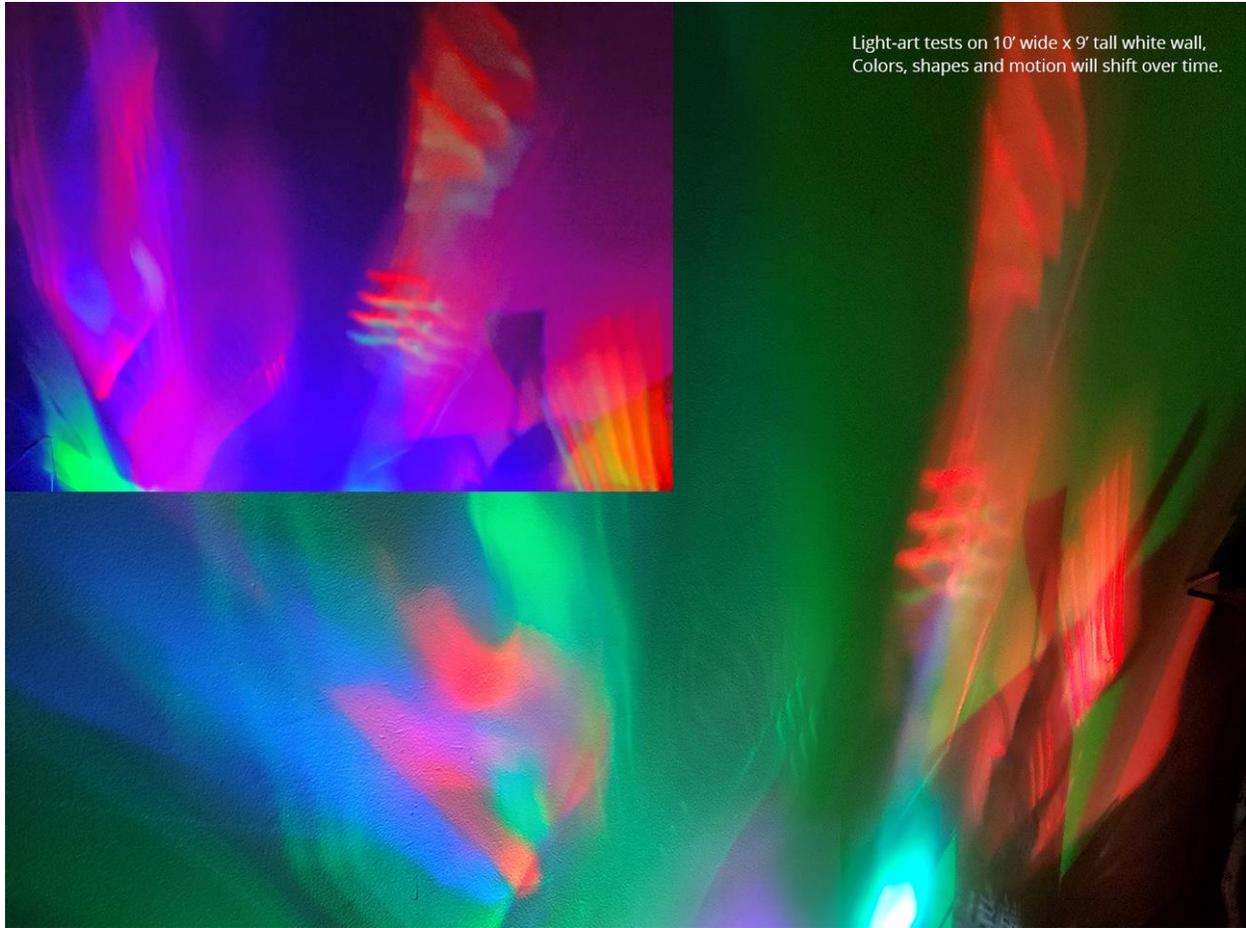
Site Specific

Like an impressionist painting, the installation’s lights and sound emulate the underwater world of Scripps Submarine Canyon, located just off Liberty Station’s Pacific coast where Navy submarines share space with migratory whales. Playing an important role in marine biology, Scripps Canyon is the most heavily studied submarine canyon in the world. With vividly colorful aquatic life, it is among the most beloved recreational diving sites in Southern California.

sub(Merge) is dedicated in loving memory to Frank Watlington, the Navy acoustics engineer who first recorded humpback whale voices. For decades he kept his recordings secret, fearing whalers would use the songs to find and kill endangered humpbacks. Recognizing his own mortality’s approach, he faithfully entrusted his recordings to marine biologists, inspiring a global moratorium on whale hunting, and rescuing the species from the brink of extinction.

sub(Merge) is structurally site-specific. The installation was conceived after extensive exploration of Liberty Station’s historic buildings and grounds. The installation physically conforms to and accentuates the site’s iconic Spanish Colonial Revival archways, taking into account foot traffic and behavioral patterns, plus directional sunlight interaction with translucent shadow-casting sculptural materials.

Archival sound recordings from Naval Training Center San Diego are incorporated into the soundscape, and, in promotion of sustainability, locally collected plastic refuse will be melted and formed into sculptural elements.



LIGHT ART

Light Painting & Choreography

The installation's primary visual element is a moving, color-shifting "light painting" cast on the site's main wall. LED spot beams shining on hand-crafted mylar reflectors cast unique light forms impossible to recreate with even the most sophisticated light kits. Each light form is utterly singular, not reproducible outside the specifics of this installation.

Small mechanized robots (Arduino servos) and/or fans lend motion to the light forms, while programmable lighting (DMX fixtures) achieve time-sequenced color blends. The artist will devote weeks to orchestrating light-sound compositions, requiring programming, physical construction, physical arrangement, time-motion-color choreography, plus synchronization with sound.

Demo Video

<https://youtu.be/9ydDM6NgbM8>

YouTube video showing light/sound tests for sub(Merge).

Accent Lighting

- RGB LEDs illuminate colorful acrylic ornaments, forming a glowing screen visible from both inside and outside the installation.
- An archway of programmable LED RGB strips echo the site's architectural archways on the installation's exterior facade.
- Light patterns project across the ceiling.
- Accent lighting illuminates the installations microphone(s).

Daytime / Nighttime

Strung across adjacent archways, a curtain of translucent ornaments scatters light. In daylight, sunlight activates the sculptural mobiles' fiery pearlescent sheen, shifting colorful shadows across the floor as sunlight moves throughout the day. At night, the illuminated ornaments glow with color, visible from inside the installation, and outside from afar.

SOUND ART

A lush soundscape bathes participants as they enter the installation. Like an underwater dream, marine-animal voices mingle with an ambient soundscore. Melodic waves merge with synthesized undertones, as sonar gently pings into awareness. Included in the mix are Mr. Watlington's original whale song recordings, along with archival sound recordings from the site's former Naval Training Center. Special attention will be paid to emulating whale song rhythms and cadence in the overall composition.

Interactivity

Interactive sound is a crucial thematic component of sub(Merge). Hovering near the installation's center, microphones blink with accent lighting, drawing participants to investigate. When people speak near or into the mic, they hear traces of their own voice merged into synthesized whale song.

Sound Constraint

- Sound is on only at night.
- Sound levels are constrained to avoid long-term impact on Liberty Station tenants.
- Proximity sensors may be included to turn sound on only when participants approach.

THEME

sub(Merge) takes its name from the following elements:

- Scripps *sub*marine canyon
- US Navy *sub*marines that operate within Scripps Canyon
- the installation works on the *sub*conscious level
- the *merger* of human voice with whale voice

The installation inspires participants to follow in Mr. Watlington's footsteps, by loving and protecting precious oceanic ecosystems. Echoing that environmentally conscious intent, glass and plastic "trash" collected on and near Liberty Station grounds are incorporated into the installation.

sub(Merge) is a subtle and beautiful offering that works in large part on the subconscious level. Seating created from plastic "trash" allows participants to spend quality time absorbing the installation's emotional and intellectual impact.

