

SPOTLIGHT

Hunters Point exhibit traces decades of SF shipyard history

By James Salazar | Examiner staff writer |
Jun 3, 2025



"Decommissioned: The History of Hunters Point Shipyard" traces the site's evolution from an industrial center to an area that has experienced displacement, resilience and renewal.

Courtesy Liam Passmore

An upcoming exhibition at Hunters Point Shipyard will explore the 900-acre property's social, environmental and military roles throughout history with original artwork, photographs, artifacts, oral histories, archival films and audio recordings.

Neighborhood nonprofit Shipyard Trust for the Arts will open "Decommissioned: The History of Hunters Point Shipyard," an exhibition curated by artist and historian Stacey Carter, this Thursday with an artist reception at 6 p.m. The exhibition will be open on Saturdays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. beginning June 14 through Aug. 2, with a week off for the Independence Day weekend. Guided walking tours are available at 2 p.m. on each of those days, save for June 28 and July 12.

The trust supports the Hunters Point Shipyard Artists, an art collective spread over 500 acres of the former United States Navy facility. Carter, who has spent over 20 years chronicling the site's history, said her exhibition traces the shipyard's evolution from an industrial center to an area that has experienced displacement, resilience and renewal. Archival exhibition items and new artworks will challenge visitors to "think about how history shapes our present," she said.

As both an artist and historian, Carter said she saw this exhibition "as a way to bring the shipyard's hidden histories and overlooked voices to the forefront." Carter's educational dive into the shipyard began when she first got a studio on the site and began painting buildings around the property.

“Decommissioned” spans the shipyard’s status as a 19th-century commercial shipbuilding hub to a burgeoning artist community over the last 40 years. Carter said that “it’s incredibly moving to bring this history back to The City, especially in a space that has been so layered with memory, struggle and achievement.”

The site of “Decommissioned” is typically only open to the public two weekends a year. Organizers said the upcoming exhibition will allow more people to see it, and to view it in a new light. While headlines around the shipyard frequently center on toxic cleanup delays or radiation risks from the shipyard being an Environmental Protection Agency Superfund site, exhibition organizers said those conversations only tell part of the shipyard’s story.

Carter said that she also wanted to trace the shipyard’s transformation from one of the largest drydock ship repair facilities along the West Coast to a major U.S. Naval hub in the 20th century that played a key role in World War II, drawing migrating African Americans from the South in search of jobs. The exhibit also explores the shipyard’s role in the Cold War as a radiological research lab.

Shipyard Trust president Barbara Ockel said that both the site and “its history — represented by several landmark buildings and structures — must be recognized and preserved as a critical and unique landmark for San Francisco.”

She said it was “profoundly meaningful” for the organization to see the exhibition “finally connecting with the local community whose ancestors worked here, the broader Bay Area and those committed to historic preservation.”

One June 28, the gallery will host a panel of Black women leaders who have personal connections to the site and explore how the shipyard has shaped San Francisco’s Black community. Denise Pate, the director of community investments for the San Francisco Arts Commission, will speak. Her grandfather was among the first Black men who migrated from the south in the 1940s for work.

In a statement, Pate said that “helping support projects of this magnitude to life are critical to honoring the cultural and historical significance to our City.”

She said she hoped “that visitors walk away not only moved by the artwork, but also with a deeper understanding of the cultural legacy and creative resilience rooted in the Bayview Hunters Point community.”

Carter said that she also wants audiences to “come away with a deeper understanding” of the site’s “role in The City’s maritime and military history.”

“Hunters Point Shipyard has so many layers of history to it,” she said. “I hope to share and preserve this history before it is forgotten and erased.”

James Salazar

Neighborhoods & Culture Correspondent
