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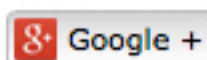
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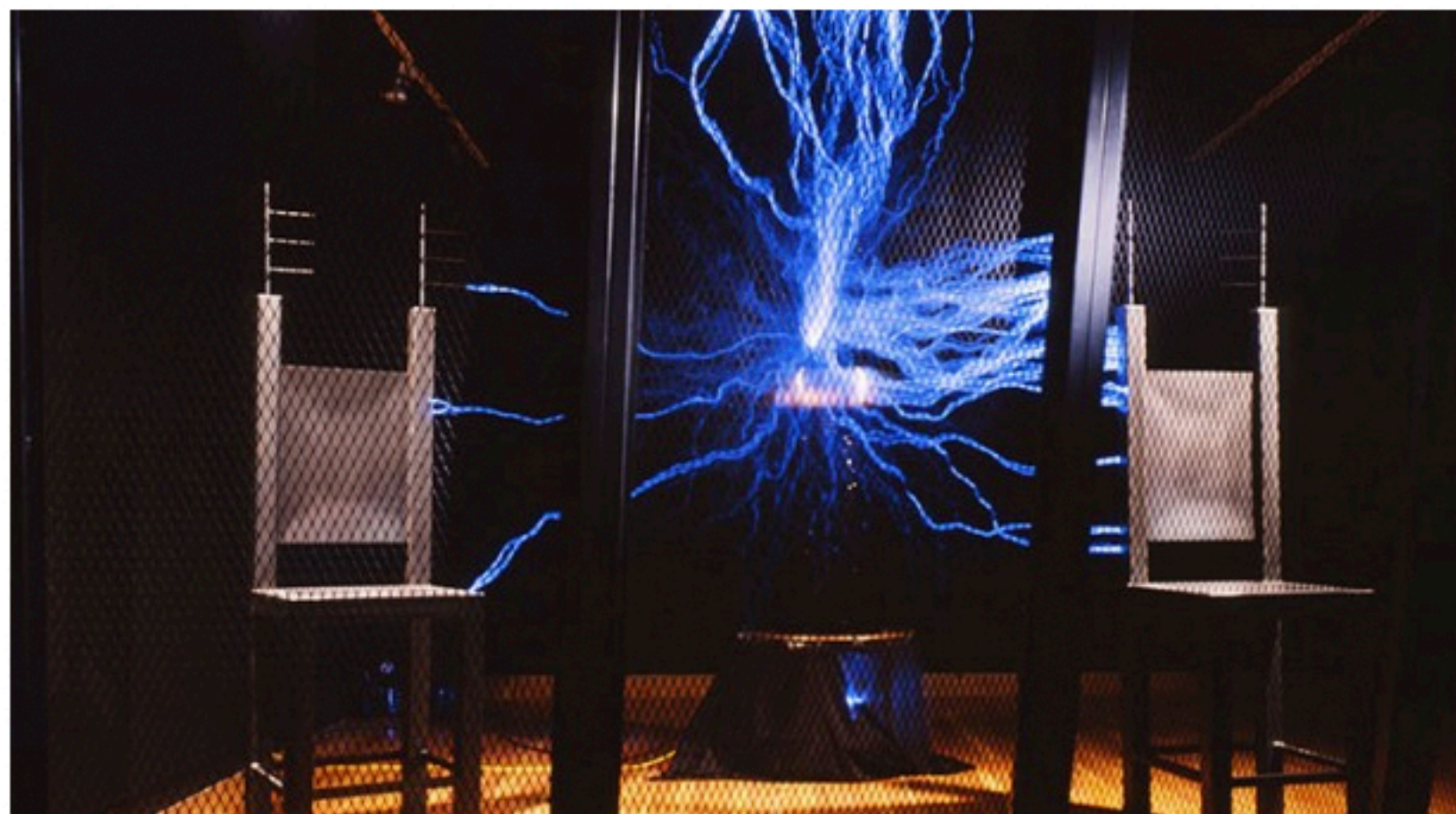


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You Really Need to Go See Doug Hall's 'The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described'

Annie Tittiger | Photo: Courtesy Doug Hall/San Francisco Art Institute | March 27, 2015

We'll give you ten good reasons why.



The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described

Starting this weekend, the [San Francisco Art Institute](#), in collaboration with SFMoMa's On the Go campaign, hosts the 1987 multimedia electronic installation by Bay Area artist Doug Hall, *The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described*. Without exaggeration, this is the most incredible piece of art by the internationally renowned artist. Here, as if you need them, are ten reasons to go see it. (*Walter and McBean Galleries, 800 Chestnut St., March 28–June 6.*)

1. There's a freaking electrical storm indoors.

Let's take a moment to discuss what, exactly, the *Terrible Uncertainty* is. Back in the '80s, Hall created what has become one of the most influential video installations of all time. Footage of natural disasters is displayed on CRT televisions while nearby are two chairs placed in front of an operating Tesla coil. It's a comment on modern technology and the sublimity of nature. But mostly, it's freaking awesome.

2. Legend has it that the exhibit could fry a gallery's electrical system.

Back in the early '90s rumors spread that Hall's Tesla coil was so strong and took up so much energy that it could fry the entire electrical system of a gallery. Of course, that could be apocryphal, but the SFAI will soon find out.

3. It's so noisy that it has driven SFAI professors from their offices.

The installation includes horrifying sound effects (think high winds and seas), and is located directly under some profs' offices. So they've temporarily relocated for the duration of the exhibit. Understandably.

4. SFAI is actually where Doug Hall created the piece.

Hall was a professor at SFAI from 1981 to 2008 (and now a professor emeritus) and was editing the piece during his tenure.

5. The space is basically made for it.

As joint SFAI curator Hesse McGraw explains, "To think that Doug made this work while he was on faculty, and now that we see the work in the space it's almost site-specific. It's almost as if it was built for this brutalist, hyper-masculine, semi-rational location."

6. Hall went through hell to create this.

Hall created the *Terrible Uncertainty* long before YouTube ever existed, so all the footage you see is his own. He had a residency with the Coast Guard in the Bering Sea to take the ocean footage, and another two stints with storm chasers in Oklahoma for his tornado footage, and even went to a (now-closed) smelting factory in Oakland for his industrial shots.

7. You just have to see it to believe it.

As SFMOMA Media Arts curator Rudolph Frieling explains, "you can't just go down to the storage room and pull it out. It needs to be installed." It's impossible to capture in photos how alarming (in a good way!) this exhibition can be, mainly because Hall plays with the idea of the horizon throughout. So really, you just need to experience it, IRL.

8. Uh, it's free.

And open to the public. All day, every day. Okay, really from 11a.m.–7p.m. on Tuesdays and 11a.m.–6p.m. every other day of the week except Mondays, but that's basically all day, everyday (hence why those professors moved offices).

9. When you're done here, you can check out more of Hall's work on Mid-Market.

Hall's more recent work will be on display at the [Rena Bransten gallery](#) on Market Street through May 16.

10. When a Doug Hall retrospective comes to SFAI, *The Terrible Uncertainty* will play a big part.

Unearthing an installation that hasn't been shown in 15 years is no cakewalk. They had to figure out how to convert the footage to digital without it looking crappy and make sure that the Tesla coil was still in commission.