

In the Studio: Alice Hope at the WQXR Studio and on Long Island hot spots

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Meeting new artists often opens my eyes to new processes and materials. Alice Hope was on a ladder hanging thousands of pieces of ball chain at the Greene Space, part of the WQXR radio station in Tribeca, when we met. The dangling metal strands in slightly different hues from dungeon gray to nickel clung together on a grid with neodymium magnets. A radio studio is a new kind of “studio” setting, and Hope’s delicate yet bold wall-sized installation is a new kind of sculpture.



Greene Space installation
2012, 6' x6', ball chain,

neodymium magnets, perforated steel plate
photo credit; Jenny Gorman

Alice is initiating the Greene Space's Artist in Residency program and will be doing installations throughout their season. I soon learned that she often works with magnets and recently exhibited a large outdoor work, *Under the Radar*, next to Camp Hero, a military base in Montauk. This was a Parrish Art Museum off-site project curated by Andrea Grover while their new Herzog and de Meuron building was under construction. Parrish Art Museum Director Terrie Sultan told me, "Alice Hope's Parrish Road Show installation was simply mind-expanding — her process is riveting and the end result was truly transformational."

Below is part of my conversation with Alice Hope. For even more, See alicehope.com. Videos of her Greene Space and "Under the Radar" projects are at <http://vimeo.com/54152077> and <http://vimeo.com/53875065> .

Jan Castro: How did you start working with magnets?

Alice Hope: My dad showing me the cartoon "The Emperor's New Clothes" on his home movie projector periodically throughout my childhood embedded its theme- the foolishness of believing in the presence of something when there's nothing present. My work with magnetism, in part, is driven by my interest in the invisible, but countering "The Emperor's New Clothes," I believe that aesthetic substance is usually what's not there, at least not to the naked eye. I believe the force of magnetism — maybe because the magnetic field is invisible— is by far the strongest part of my work, literally and metaphorically.



JC: How is the work going since we met at The Greene Space?

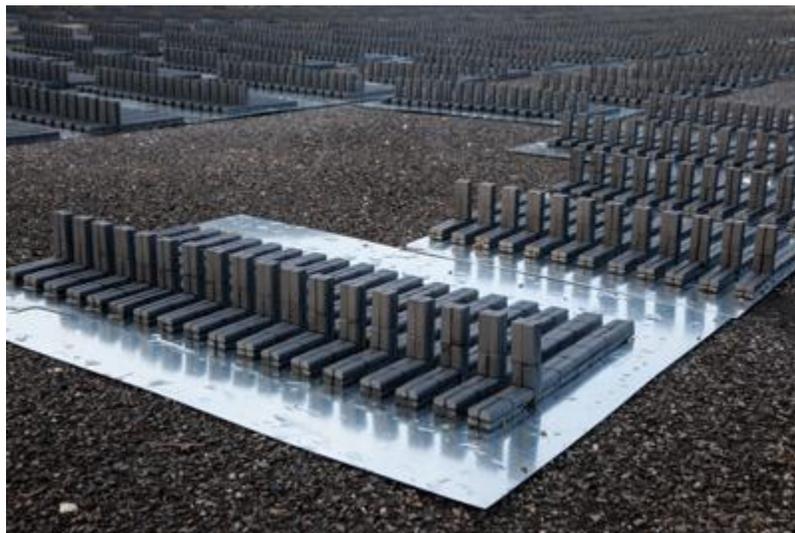
AH: I make the work on-site so I'm thinking of the Greene Space lobby as my primary studio for 2012-13. Because of its traffic flow my practice is pushed toward performance. The Greene Space's dynamic evocative programming and the space being regularly "on air" are also tremendous influences.

JC: How did you find Camp Hero and Montauk Point for *Under the Radar*?

AH: I did half of my growing up in Oak Ridge, Tennessee — the production site for the Manhattan Project, the operation that developed the atomic bomb. When Andrea Grover, the Parrish Road Show curator, and I discussed possible sites, we thought Camp Hero was especially relevant because of its commonalities with Oak Ridge, and because of its history with magnetism. Camp Hero was the site for the Montauk Project, an alleged series of secret US government projects. The military supposedly studied magnetism for psychological warfare, and the radar tower transmitted electromagnetic radiation.

JC: Could you describe the "Under the Radar" concept — constructing "NO" using a binomial code? What was the layout of this work?

AH: Numeracy — the power of numbers — loomed large in the Camp Hero project. I calculated the work hours, number of magnets, degrees in scale, weight, and distance; this generated its own hybrid aesthetic. But also, significantly, and in contrast to its voluminous numeracy, the installation was assembled with only 2 objects- a magnet and steel plate.



Under the Radar: Camp Hero State Park, detail, photo credit: Jenny Gorman

The 41' x 83' composition was constructed by laying 320 steel plates in a binary code of 19 repeating No's on an asphalt pad, and on the steel plates arranging 259,920 magnets in a strict Morse code repeating pattern, totaling 6,498 Morse "No's". I determined the direction of the

binary and the polarity layout as if the work were coming from the radar. The installation's overwhelming numeracy became a compelling force, holding its own in the company of the magnetic field. It overlaid a Baroque excess onto the Minimalist materials and composition.

JC: What fascinated you about Camp Hero's obsolete radar tower?

AH: It is not only obsolete in itself, but seems like a monument to obsolescence.

JC: Since this piece was so huge, what was its magnetism like? Did the forms embody mythic references? One reviewer compared them to the ancient Nazca glyphs in Peru.

AH: Mythic and military references came out of the work, but that wasn't an explicit intention, more an effect or result.



Under the Radar: Camp Hero State Park, detail, photo credit: Jenny Gorman

JC: Do you have any other 2013 projects in addition to the Greene Space?

AH: In the Spring I'll have a one-person show at Salomon Contemporary on West 26th Street, in New York.

JC: What are some of your aesthetic concerns?

AH: I try to maximize the visual effect of a simple process through the dense deployment of a simple physical palette and repetitive process. I transform my materials by controlling scale, placement, and pattern. Ultimately, my labor-intensive execution leads to opulent work that seems Baroque — an extreme contrast to the Minimal choices that produced it.

By [Jan Garden Castro](#)