

# SF WEEKLY ≡

## FILM

### 'Lost Landscapes' Shows at Ft. Mason Drive-In

'Lost Landscapes of San Francisco' went digital and socially distanced for its 15th installment.

by [Benjamin Schneider](#) • 02/18/2021 5:26 pm - Updated 02/19/2021 10:15 am



*Haunting images of Alcatraz (and meta ones) were featured in this year's 15th annual 'Lost Landscapes of San Francisco,' now streaming.*

It was a *Lost Landscapes of San Francisco* showing like no other. Car horns substituted for [shouts](#) and applause. Instead of the velvet curtains of the Castro Theater, the twinkling lights of Marin County served as a backdrop for the screen.

It was a fitting chapter for an annual filmic event that documents the change — or lack thereof — in the city over the course of the 20th century. While the Fort Mason drive-in setting altered the tenor of the experience (woe to those watching from the back seat of a car), the film itself followed the same comforting formula as previous years. There was a trove of lovingly restored historical footage, spanning a panoply of eras and communities across our 49 square miles. And there was filmmaker Rick Prelinger's dulcet, non-judgmental descriptions, providing extra context about the footage and where he found it.

While no substitute for the live showing right next to the headquarters of sponsor, The Long Now Foundation, the film is available to stream on [the Internet Archive](#), another idealistic, knowledge-hungry San Francisco-based organization.

The film includes some remarkable gems that transport the viewer to another time and place. Early on in the [15th iteration](#) of *Lost Landscapes* we see mysterious footage of Alcatraz in 1968, in that strange period between the prison's closure and the island's occupation by Indigenous activists. For some reason, this clip includes images of children running between cells in the main cell block, and playing out in the prison yard. Later on, there's remarkable shots of Black Panthers in the Fillmore putting up flyers and looking incredibly cool.

The film features some fascinating audio archives, too, like a poetic Orson Wells radio broadcast reflecting on World War II, and a Joe Alioto mayoral campaign ad — in which the voiceover lists many of the same urban issues people like to complain about today.

There are a few more contemporary nods in the hour-long film, like the footage of a masked, but not socially distanced, parade in 1918 during the [Great Influenza](#) epidemic. There's lots of protest footage, recalling the racial justice protests of this summer. The most striking is an anti-Vietnam War protest that shut down Geary Boulevard. Before and after scenes show the Barbary Coast in bustling 1915, and then during the height of the Great Depression, when many storefronts are shuttered.

“As always, I was definitely trying to present historical footage that resonates with the present,” Prelinger wrote in an email. “This is one of the things that's most fun and provocative about making these events.”

*Lost Landscapes* serves as yet another reminder of San Francisco's many, many ups and downs. And even in the darkest of times, good news breaks through. At the screening, Prelinger announced that the Prelinger Library in SoMa had managed to extend its lease at its SoMa space — and at a discounted rate, to boot. He and spouse/co-librarian Megan Prelinger have been reorganizing the collection and are looking forward to welcoming guests back as soon possible. They will publish the latest information on reopening at [prelingerlibrary.org](#).

Meanwhile the Prelingers already have their sights set on *Lost Landscapes 16*. “There's such a hunger for local history and for experiencing this material together. I hope we're back in person next year,” Rick wrote. “And of course I hope people with film in their families will get in touch — many of the amazing images in the show came in that way.”



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