

# Witches' Cradle

Existing at a technological crossroads where recreation, magic, and self-liberation merge together, the Witches' Cradles are an interactive public installation based on a contemporary re-envisioning of a medieval torture device.

*During the witchcraft persecutions in Europe, Inquisitors are said to have sometimes put an accused witch in a bag, which was strung up over the limb of a tree and set swinging. When witches' learnt about this punishment they experimented with it themselves and found that the sensory deprivation or confusion of senses induced hallucinatory experiences. A similar swinging motion has long been used by shamans and dervishes and is sometimes known as 'dervish-dangling'.*

*- Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*

## Background:

As seen from the description above, the witches' cradle is a simple technology that produces complex and mysterious results. Devised initially for interrogation and torture during the early witch trials, it eventually came to be used by its potential victims for flights of fancy and inward journeys to altered states of consciousness.

Since then, the past 100 years alone have shown us an array of related offspring that cast both light and shadows on how one might interpret the witches' cradle. Examples range from backyard tire swings to mob lynchings; New-Age sensory deprivation tanks to the haunting images from Guantanamo Bay. Even Houdini's famed illusion, Metamorphosis (in which he freed himself from a locked and tied canvas sack), promised "self-liberation" and "change in 3 seconds." Thus, the witches' cradle serves as a metaphorical pendulum swinging between our collective dreams and nightmares.

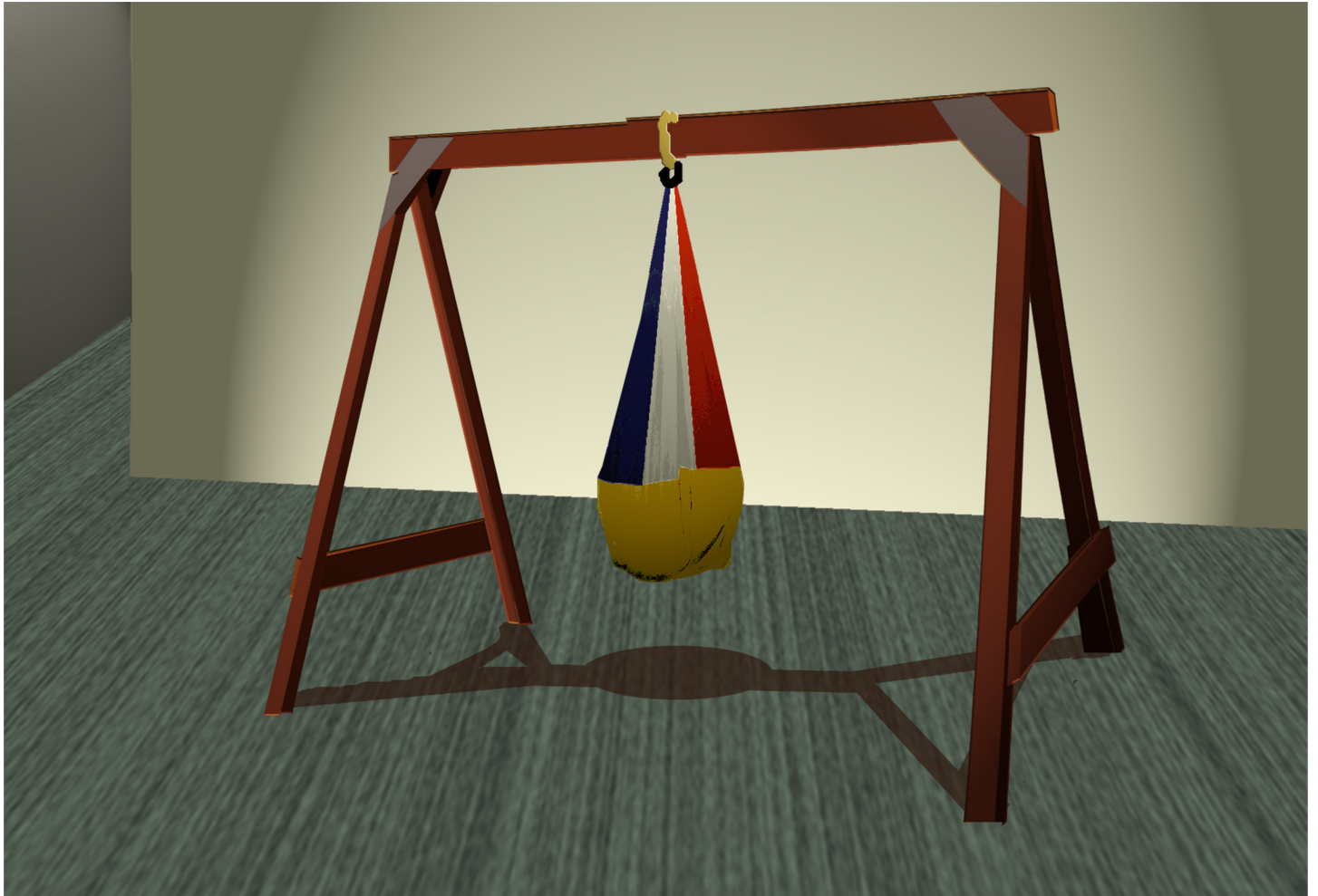
## Description:

The Center for Tactical Magic's re-envisioning of the witches' cradle plays on these historical notes while suggesting a present-day desire to conjure positive transformation from the shadows of restriction, conflict, and torture. The CTM's proposed installation consists of three structures (a pyramid, a gallows, and a swing set) that each support a separate "cradle". For all three, the traditional bag/sack is replaced by a "star-chamber" made from heavy-duty fabrics. The 5-pointed star-chamber is designed to simultaneously evoke its magical origins, the emblem of state power, and a cosmic source of light amidst darkness.

All three Witches' Cradles consist of a support structure, a hoisting mechanism, and the center star-chamber; yet, the materials, mechanisms, and structures of each vary to elicit different points of reference. Together, they work to illuminate a complex of power relations embedded in the practices, politics, and technologies of the past, the present, and the ever-unfolding future.

# Witches' Cradle: Swing Set

Center for Tactical Magic 2008

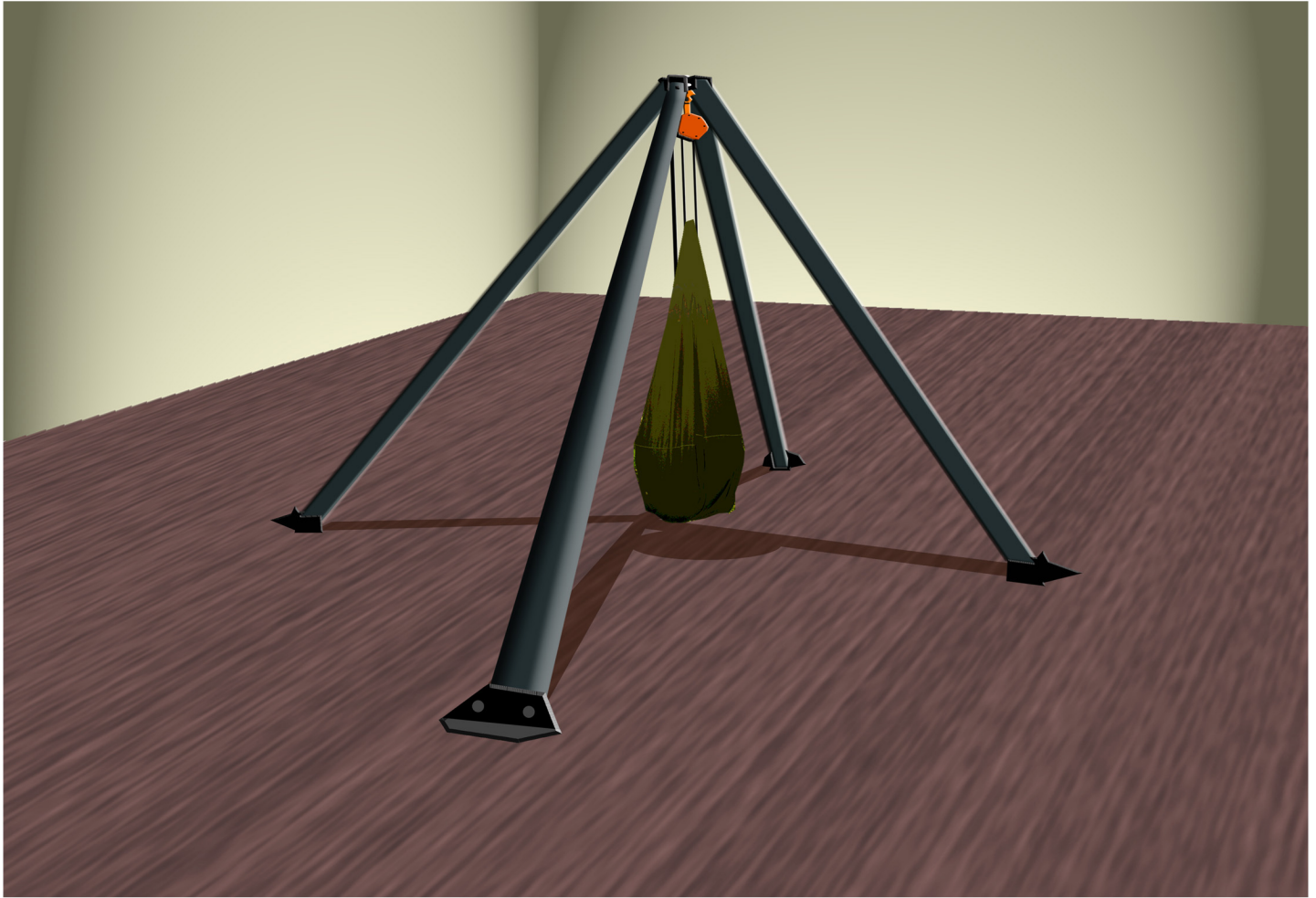


The swing set version of the Witches' Cradle blends playfulness, innocence, and domesticity. The structure at once conjures visions of tire swings, suburban backyards, school playgrounds, and public parks. The star-chamber is constructed from rugged-yet colorful outdoor fabric used for patio sets and lawn furniture. Each point of the star is a separate color (red, blue, green, white & black), and the center sitting area is a golden pentagon. The chain hoist that is used to connect the cradle with the support structure resembles the chains of typical swing set. Like Houdini's own carnivalesque performances, it ties together entertainment, amusement, and escape from the quiet complicity of everyday affairs.



# Witches' Cradle: Pyramid

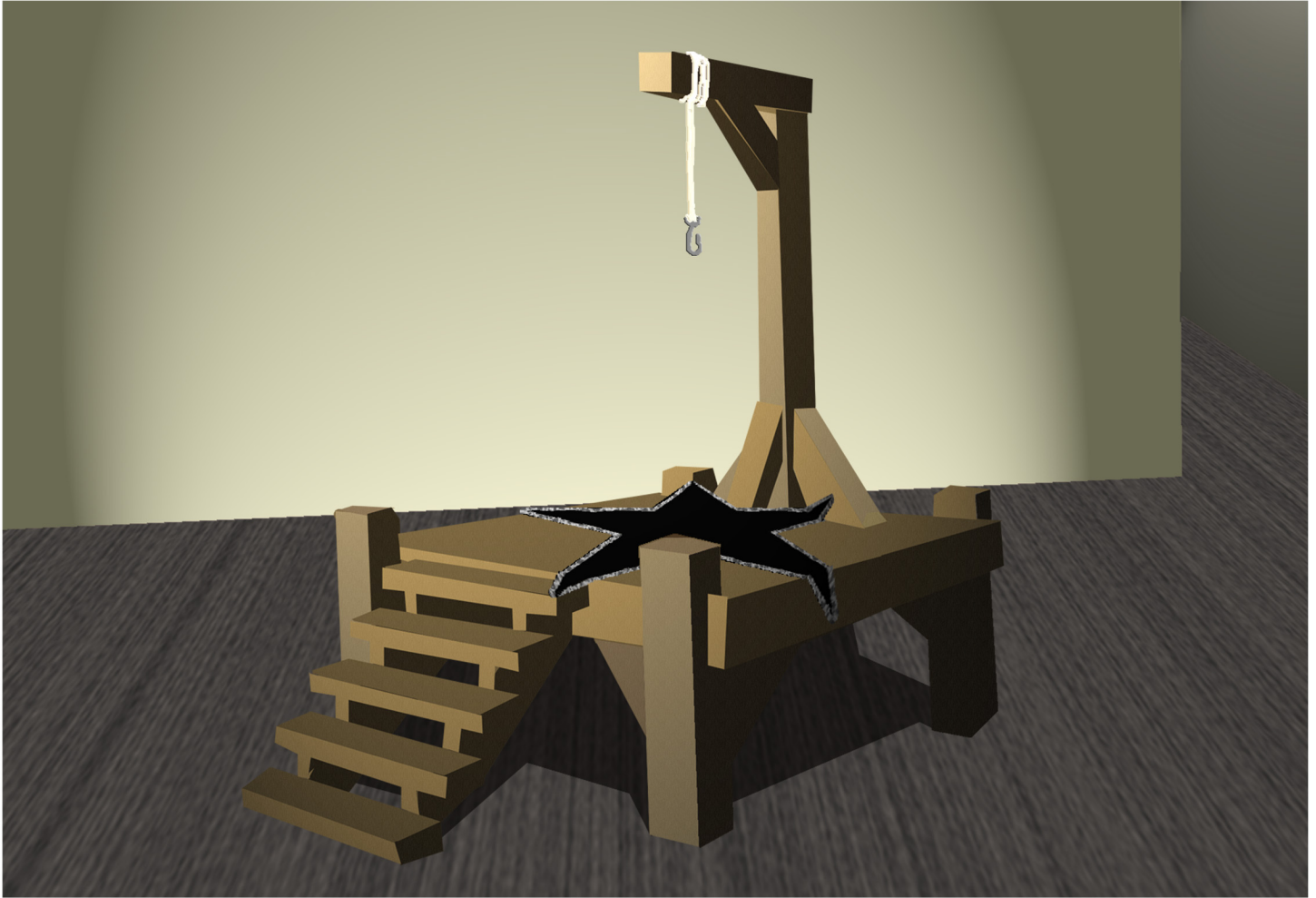
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The pyramid Witches' Cradle references utility, power, and industry. It takes its cues from the military-industrial complex, survival gear, meat processing, assembly lines, and other utilitarian applications. The star-chamber is constructed from heavy-duty, military-grade canvas that simultaneously evokes institutionalized violence, entrenched conflict, and imperial repression. Equally, it serves to represent durability, sacrifice, and service. The structure, made from industrial materials, takes on the powerful, dominant form of a 4-sided pyramid – a symbol of state authority, hegemonic organization, and a tomb to preserve the past. The hoisting mechanism is an electric hoist, such as those used in factories, garages, and slaughterhouses.

# Witches' Cradle: Gallows

Center for Tactical Magic 2008



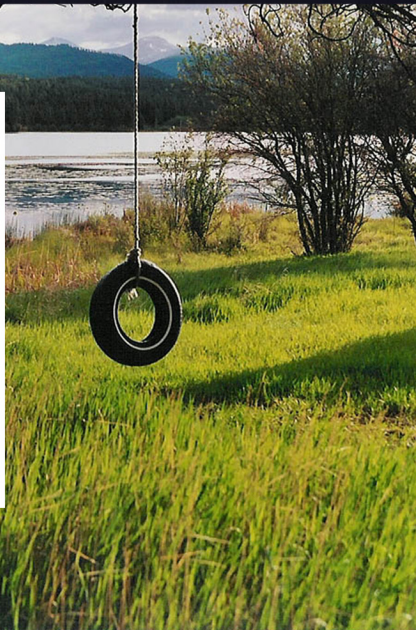
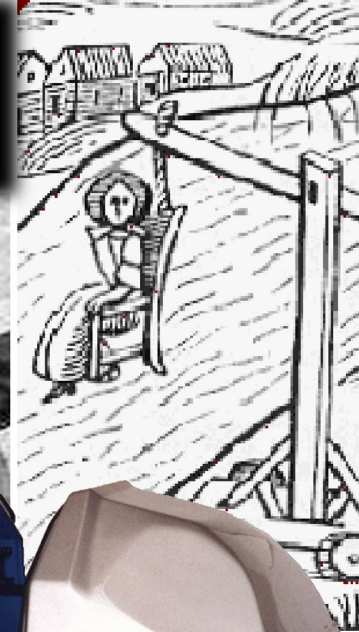
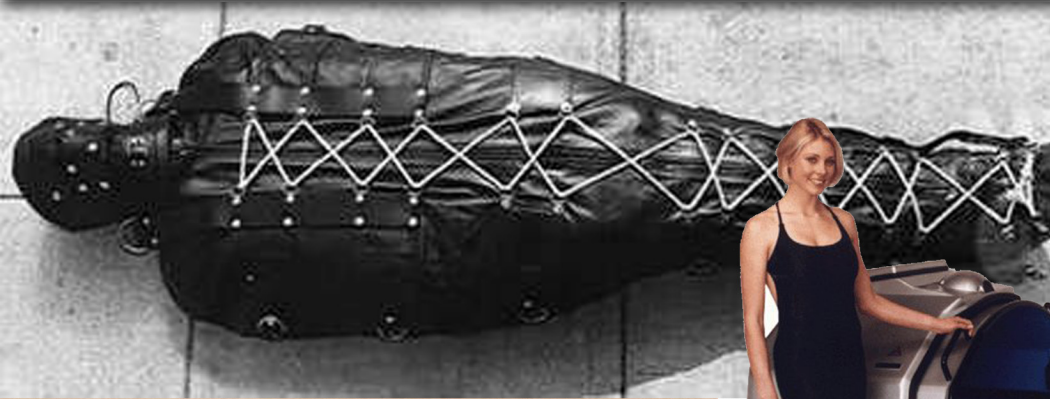
The gallows Cradle references discipline, punishment, and spectacle. The star-chamber is constructed from black vinyl and metal zippers; simultaneously evoking a body bag, S&M bondage equipment, and Goth fashion. It ties together a history of torture and persecution that encompasses early witch trials, lynchings, corporeal punishment, and Guantanamo Bay. But it also hints at the potential of “deviant” or “subcultural” activity to subvert the means of control. The hoist is a simple rope with a swivel hook. The wooden structure of the gallows plays much the same role as in the past: a public stage for morbid fascination where one contemplates life, death, and the role of authority.



# Witches' Cradle - Reference Collage

(Clockwise from top left):

bondage gear; sensory deprivation tank (luxury model); witch hunts; Guantanamo Bay detainee; lynchings; tire swing; mail bag escape; and Houdini's Metamorphosis





# How it Works:

## Witches' Cradle - Prototype

Center for Tactical Magic 2007



1

Spread out on the ground, the Witches' Cradle appears as a 5-pointed star made from military-grade canvas.

2

After a person sits in the center pentagon, the Cradle is hoisted into the air by the points of the star, causing the star to collapse around the person. The cradle is then set in motion by an attendant.



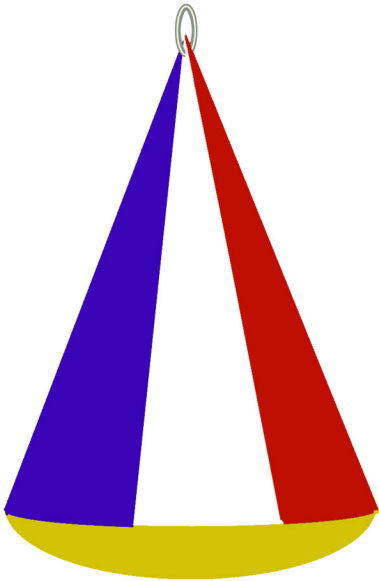
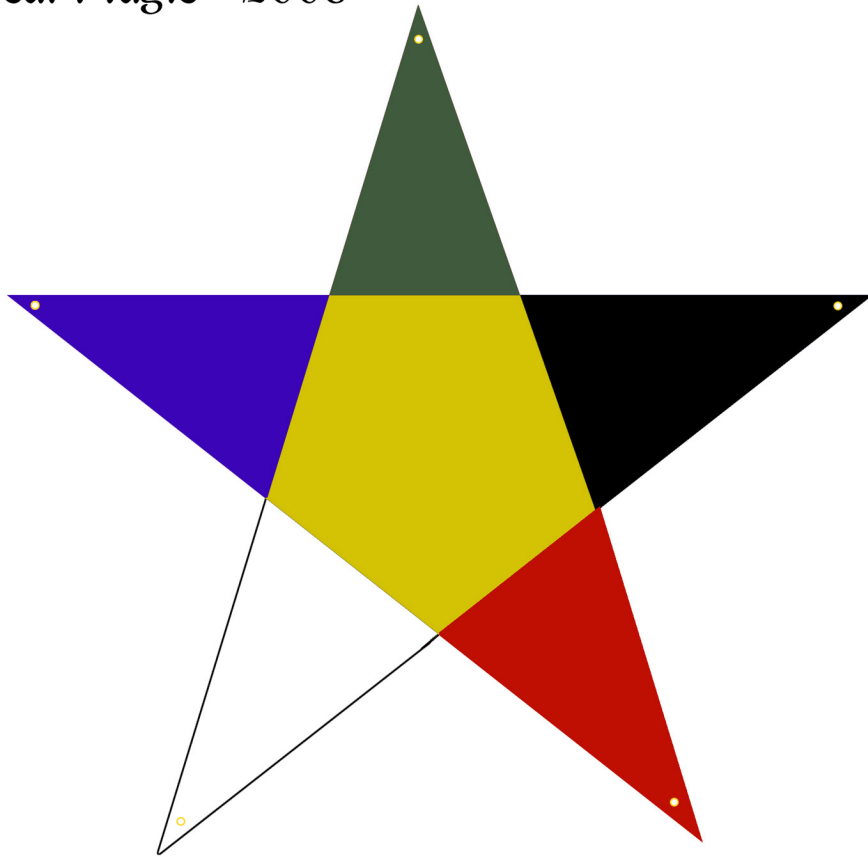
3

Like a black hole, a holding cell, or a metaphysical amusement ride, the Witches' Cradle begins to distort time, space, and perception; offering glimpses of a brighter future.



# Witch's Cradle

Center for Tactical Magic - 2008



## *Notes -*

- Pentagon base is sitting area
- All seams reinforced to support person's weight
- Star points fold in to a single suspension point
- Grommets or loops at point ends allow for closure with a single carabiner
- Carabiner attaches to webbing on tree branch or cabled to support structure/hoist