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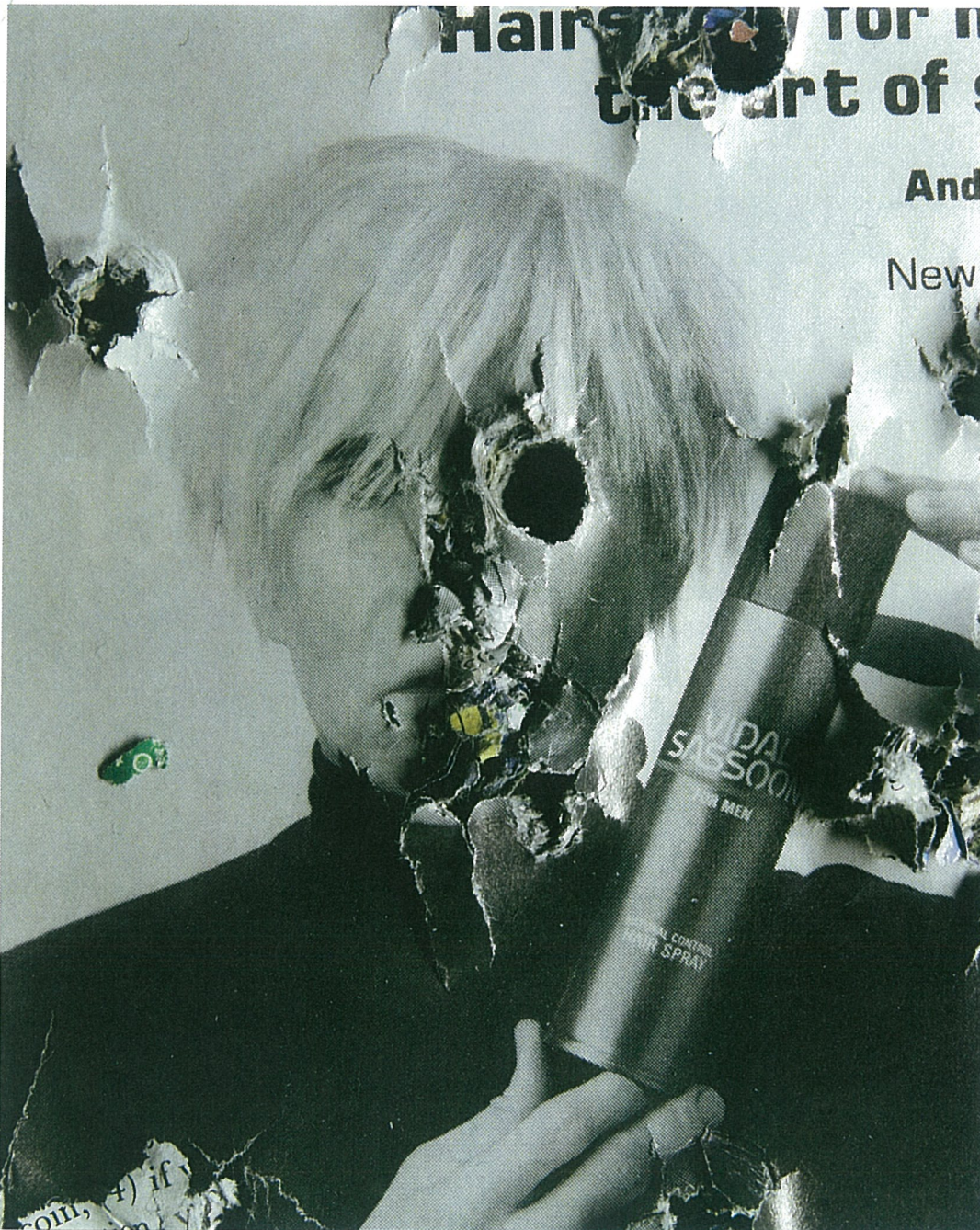


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Chris Finley
Artist at Work



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CONTEMPORARIES

A publication of the **Museum of Contemporary Art** at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts in partnership with the Northern California Contemporary Art Consortium

SPRING 2004



MUSEUM of CONTEMPORARY ART
at the LUTHER BURBANK CENTER for the ARTS

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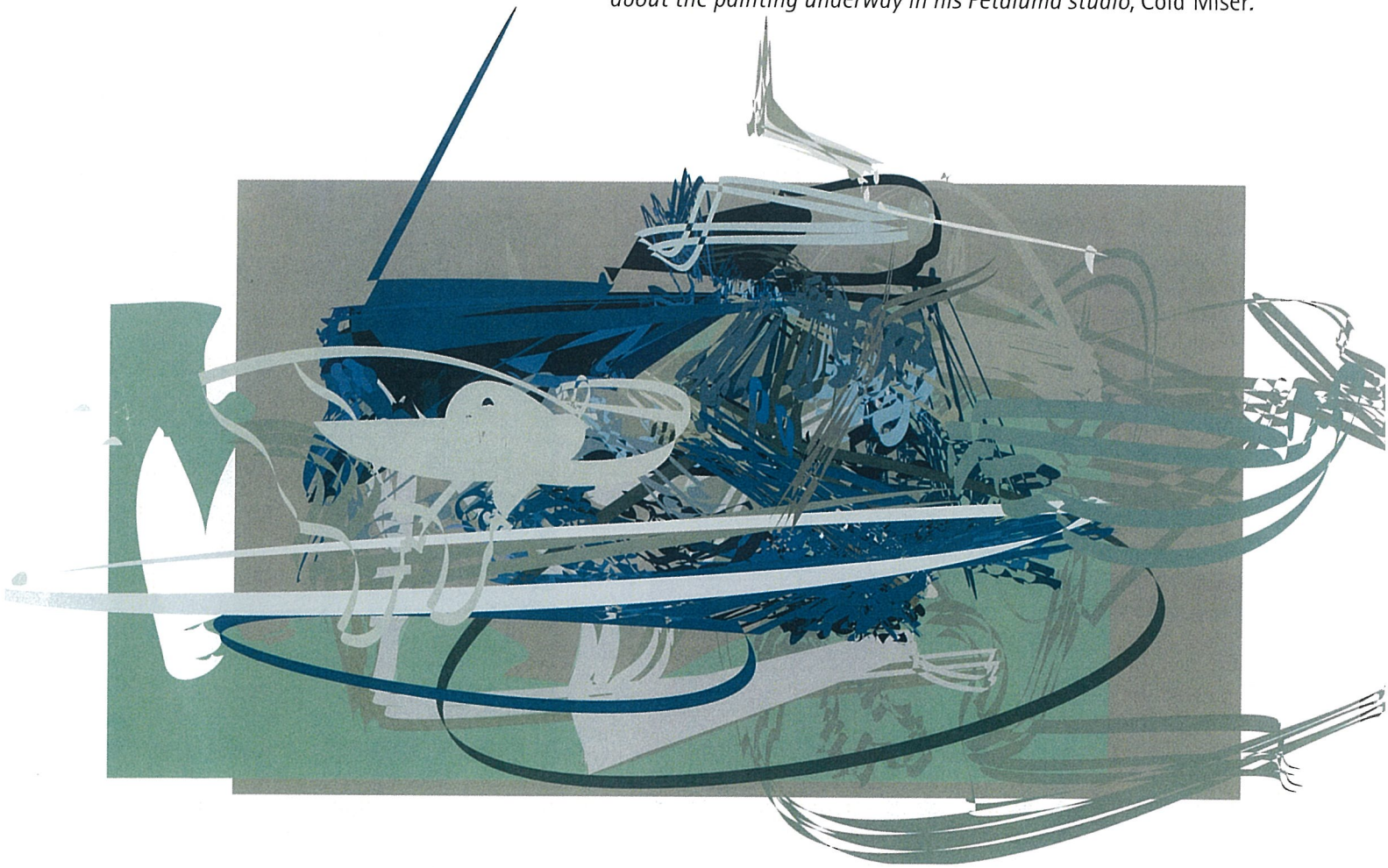


A publication of the **Museum of Contemporary Art** at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts in partnership with the Northern California Contemporary Art Consortium

contributed by Jeannine McDonald

Artist at work: Chris Finley

Chris Finley first showed as an installation artist, offering a group of sculptures that nested in space like the different levels of a video game. Critic Christopher Knight called this work an "impressively idiosyncratic debut" and said it explored the formal properties of sculptural space in a way that sent tradition spinning. Finley's recent works are paintings, but they still emerge from the digital world and they still engage the viewer with quirky, vibrant forms. In January, he talked with Art Contemporaries about the painting underway in his Petaluma studio, Cold Miser.



The "Cold Miser" was a character in an old television show, "The Year Without a Santa Claus." It was low-budget, stop-frame animation made with puppets. I grew up watching it; the songs are engrained in my brain. I still sing the "I'm Mr. Cold Miser" theme once in a while. This painting started as a picture of the Cold Miser from a Web site. I take images of things that stick in my head, put them in a computer and keep altering them until they don't look anything like the original. But all the colors are the same.



I keep the painting as true to the computer version as I can. When I have the image exactly the way I want it, I print out a palette of color chips so I can match what I have on the screen, mix my colors, and become a human printer. All the intuitive gestures that would normally come with brushstrokes happen in the computer. An image goes through fifty or sixty versions before it's finished but you can't see them in the painting. Normally in a painting you can see order in the way it evolved, but in these works all that process is missing. I'm interested in how technology changes how we see. It accelerates our daily activities, but we miss some of the depth. The flatness of these paintings mimics the way we see things today. ●

LEFT: *Cold Miser*, (2004), Chris Finley, digital sketch for oil on canvas over wood panel painting, finished dimensions 84" x 58"

ABOVE: *Mallardbridepolarcoord*, (2002), Chris Finley, acrylic sign enamel on canvas over wood panel, 54" x 48"

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By Meredith Tromble

A Journey to the bottom of the sea

*The Pacific Ocean Lures
Contemporary Artists*

Our stretch of the Pacific Ocean defines northern California. It shaped our history: the California Current that flows swiftly south along our shores made stiff going for explorers in sailing ships, slowing settlement. The ocean makes our weather: in windy dialogue with the Sierras it distributes our rains. And it forms our self-image: icons like the Golden Gate Bridge wouldn't exist without the water. Artists have never been able to resist it. But early California landscapists stood back, contemplating the waves from a painter's viewpoint. Contemporary artists dive in.

At the Edge: ELISE BREWSTER,
ROBIN GROSSINGER, AND SUSAN
SCHWARTZENBERG

For a while, at least, the ocean has allowed us to live in its edge. In 1861, Carleton Watkins photographed the East Bay estuary. In 2003, photographer Susan Schwartzberg found his image in the archives at the University of California Berkeley and realized that drivers on Highway 580 whizzed by the same view. She convinced the librarians to scan the fragile image (a salt print that can only be exposed to light for a few seconds at a time) for *BayBoards*, an installation of roadside billboards



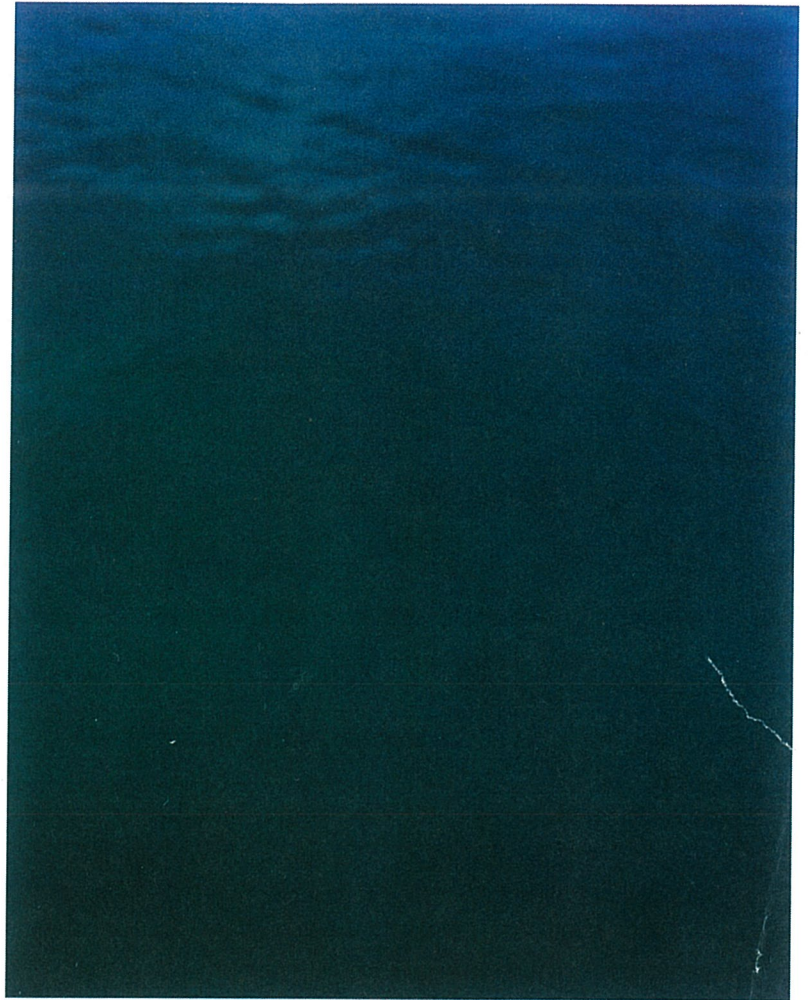
BayBoard, (2004) (detail), Elise Brewster, Robin Grossinger, Susan Schwartzberg, photographic installation on billboards and bus kiosks, dimensions variable

and posters by Schwartzberg, visual artist Elise Brewster, and landscape ecologist and historian Robin Grossinger.

BayBoards offers passers-by a visual meditation about the water they walk on. The Watkins billboard is a "re-view" showing the familiar features of Albany Hill and the Bay, but with marshlands and meadows instead of freeways. A second board in the series, placed so drivers see it a heartbeat later, presents what Schwartzberg calls "a worm's eye view of the pickleweed which is the dominating plant in the salt marshes—and a remnant of the historic landscape depicted in the Watkins image." She explains, "The boards represent two ways of looking from two different centuries—the nineteenth century grand view and the twentieth/ twenty-first century obsession with microscopic detail."

On the Surface: SONJA THOMSEN

A comment by a senior scientist at the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, Edward F. DeLong, inspired Sonja Thomsen's photograph *a milliliter of water*. "A milliliter of seawater, in a genetic sense, has more complexity than the human genome," he told a *New York Times* reporter. Thomsen was struck by the way the limits of our sight limit our thinking, when we self-centeredly call a stretch of water "empty." In fact, the cycle of life, of which we are only a part, begins at the surface of the ocean, where sunlight enters the water and feeds the micro-beings that feed the beings that feed us. "This is a space that seems familiar and yet I know nothing about it," Thomsen says. Her "minimal" image poetically condenses this mystery, presenting opaque water with a suggestive ripple.

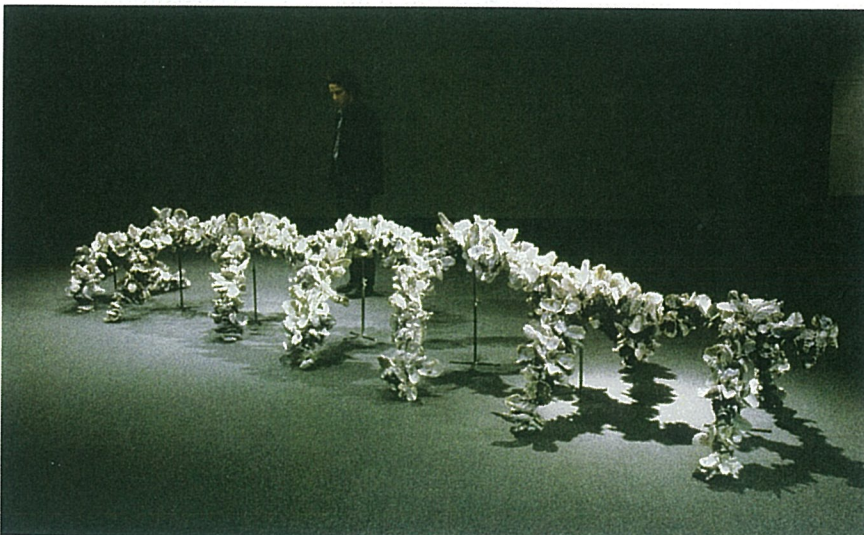


Under Water: PHILIP ROSS

Philip Ross's sculpture *Was Below, Now Above* looks like skeleton crawling out of the sea. And essentially, that's what it is. Ross built a metal armature and loaded it with young oysters, with the help of oyster farmers from the Johnson Oyster Company in Point Reyes. First they dunked old shells into a thousand-gallon tank with temperature-controlled seawater and free-swimming oyster sprat. Following their instincts, the young oysters glued themselves onto the old shells. Ross threaded these inoculated

ABOVE: *a milliliter of water*, (2003), Sonja Thomsen, light jet photographic print, 50" x 40"

BELOW: *Was Below, Now Above*, (2002), Philip Ross, oyster shells on metal armature, 25' x 4' x 5'



continued on page 10

SEG



Contemporary paintings and sculpture
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Pacific Journey *continued from page 9*

shells onto the armature, which was then hung from a wooden structure, submerged in the ocean, and left undisturbed for three years. During this time, the oysters grew as a colony and their shells fused together into a solid mass. When it was pulled out, each section weighed about 150 pounds and required four people to berth. Ross moved it to brackish water in the Oakland estuary, where the changes of temperature and salinity killed the oysters. Scavengers cleaned the shells, revealing the sculpture: a human/sea animal collaboration.

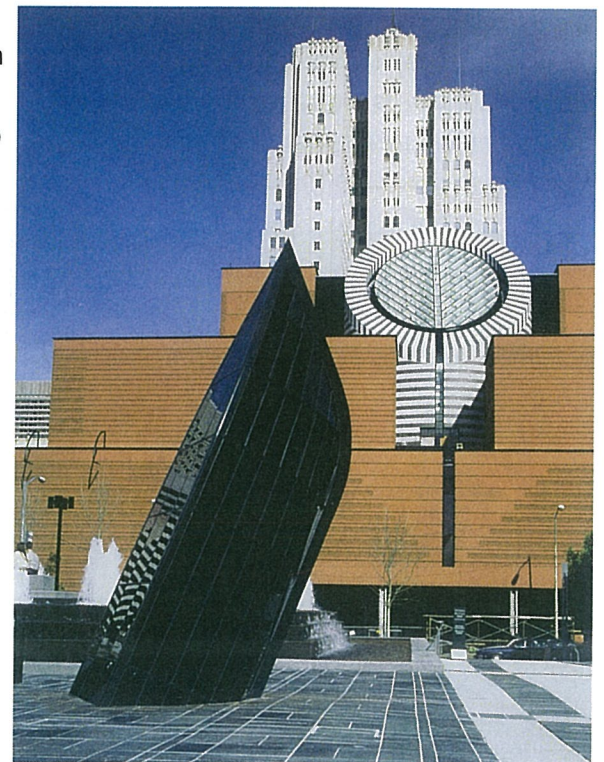
From the Depths: JOHN ROLOFF

John Roloff went to great depths to obtain dissolved northern California for use in *Deep Gradient/Suspect Terrain*, one of San Francisco's best public sculptures. In 1993, he chartered a fishing boat to voyage out from the coast, where with the help of friends he dredged four cubic yards of sediment from the ocean floor, twenty-five fathoms down. This sediment, deposited by the rivers of the watershed, is distilled from all the rocks of our terrain. Read out loud, the list of minerals that could be in it sounds like a tone poem: "... albite, amphibole, anatase, andalusite, andesine..."

Roloff sealed this sample of the continental shelf inside a twenty-foot-tall, deep green, ship-like structure constructed of painted steel and glass, sitting at a steep angle in the Yerba Buena Gardens just across the street from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. For him, the ship—which could be seen as either descending or ascending—is "a metaphor for the long, slow process of deposition, the settling of sediment from the land onto the sea floor (the seasons and cycles of drifting materials), later to be returned to the land by the accretion process."

Inside the sculpture, the sedimentary earth nourishes plants once again, grown from seeds that washed with it into a long, wet hibernation. Brought to "see" level, they come to life, a metaphor for the action of art as it brings new awareness to our lives. ●

Deep Gradient/Suspect Terrain, (1993), John Roloff, permanent sculpture installation at Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco: painted steel, tinted laminated glass, sediment and plant growth from the Pacific Ocean floor, water, misting system; two pavement level glass view port units (not shown), 20' h x 6'w



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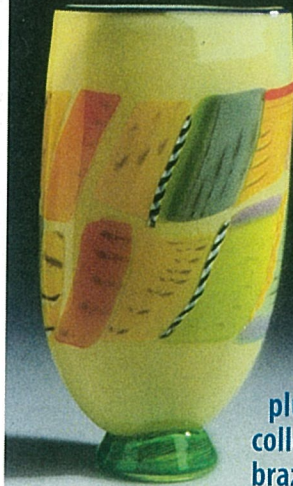
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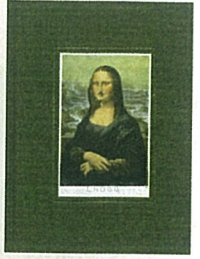
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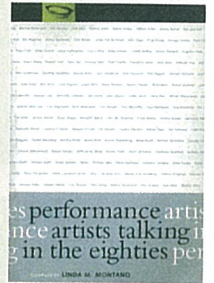
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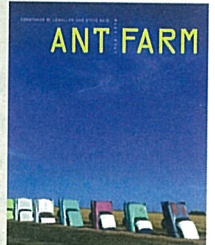


Lanier Graham's new study of Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp and Androgyny: Art, Gender, and Metaphysics*, upends received ideas about the granddaddy of 20th century conceptual art. Published in a collectible, boxed edition by Berkeley's No-Thing Press, Graham's essay connects the dots between the alchemical notion of the androgyne and Duchamp's work. This shouldn't be news—art historians have been recovering the esoteric content of modernist work since 1985, when Maurice Tuchman broke the ice with *The Spiritual in Modern Art*. But Duchamp's image as a cool, cerebral flaneur veiled the metaphysical content of his work.

A dip into Linda M. Montano's *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties* (University of California Press, Berkeley) reveals the garden-variety human yearnings that animate some very esoteric art. Montano, a leader in the 1970s flowering of performance art in the Bay Area and herself an extreme performer, asks simple questions: Is that your real name? How do you define love? What have you learned from your work? We learn, for example, that Stelarc — notorious for piercing his body with hooks and hanging himself from the ceiling — was inspired by Leonardo's obsession with flying and practices biofeedback techniques. The surprising thing about this collection of interviews with more than 100 artists is that their work is not difficult to understand, in the context of their lives.



Originally founded as an architecture and design group in 1968 by Doug Michels and Chip Lord, Ant Farm started with inflatable environments, then went on to make some of the world's greatest satirical performance pieces. *Ant Farm 1968-1978* (University of California Press, Berkeley), was edited by curator Constance Lewallen and serves as the catalog for an exhibition the Berkeley Art Museum through April 25, 2004. The story of this rollicking collective — who took their name from a popular child's toy — proves that conceptual art can be fun.



— Jeannine McDonald

COLLECTOR INFORMATION

- (pp. 6-7) *Chris Finley*: Acme Gallery, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., Spaces 1 & 2, Los Angeles, CA, (323) 857-5942, www.acmelosangeles.com
- (pp. 8-10) *Elise Brewster, Robin Grossinger & Susan Schwartzberg*: www.stillhere.org; *Sonja Thomsen*: thomsensonja@hotmail.com; *Philip Ross*: www.philross.org; *John Roloff*: Gallery Paule Anglim, 14 Geary Street, San Francisco, (415) 433-2710, www.gallerypauleanglim.com
- (pp.11-12) *Richard Misrach* represented by Fraenkel Gallery, 49 Geary Street, San Francisco, (415) 981-2661
- (pp.14-15) *Joseph Grigely*: Revolution Detroit, 23257 Woodward Avenue, Ferndale, MI, (248) 541-3444, www.revolutn.com
- (pp.16-17) *Julie Mehretu*: carlier|gebauer, Holzmarktstr. 15-18, Bogen 51/52, 10179, Berlin, Germany, +49.30.280 81 10, www.carliergebauer.com
- (pp. 18-19) *Bruce Conner, Paul Kos, and Jim Melchert*: represented by Gallery Paule Anglim, [see info for pp.8-10]; *Wally Hedrick*: Linc Real Art, 1632 C Market Street, San Francisco, (415) 503-1981, www.lincart.com
- (pp. 28-29) *David Ireland*: Gallery Paule Anglim, [see info for pp.8-10];
- (p. 30) *No-Thing Press*, 2625 Alcatraz Avenue, Number 451, Berkeley, CA, Fax: (510) 420-5810; *University of California Press*, 1 (800) 777-4726, www.ucpress.edu