

# Art Basel: Mirrors, Mirrors on the Walls

By [KELLY CROW](#) and [MARY M. LANE](#)



Art Basel

Anish Kapoor's 'Untitled,' left, and Doug Aitken's 'MORE (shattered pour),' both of 2013, at the Regen Projects gallery outpost at Art Basel.

Contemporary artists are getting reflective.

Earlier this week, mirrored objects—from silvery faux fireplaces and staircases to looking-glass panels smashed into kaleidoscopic fragments—were selling big at Art Basel, the Swiss contemporary art fair that closes Sunday.

During the fair's VIP preview on Tuesday, New York's 303 Gallery sold two versions of Doug Aitken's \$250,000 "Movie," in which the artist used foam clad in reflective glass to spell out the word in giant letters. For the same price, Los Angeles-based Regen Projects sold a similar piece by the same artist that spells out the word "More." At Lisson Gallery, Anish Kapoor's 6-foot-tall stainless steel bowl, "Parabolic Twist," has been stretching viewers into funhouse-mirror shapes. It is priced to sell for around \$1.1 million. (The British sculptor is an old hand at using mirrorlike surfaces.)

Virginia Overton coated a sheet of plexiglass in acrylic-mirrored paint and then covered the surface with scratches that appear to glow. That's because the artist, born in Nashville, Tenn., framed this 8-foot-wide glass sheet atop a light box outfitted with fluorescent tubes. Mitchell-Innes & Nash sold it for around \$50,000 during fair previews on Wednesday.

Artists have long experimented with mirrors in their work—from the room-reflecting convex hanging in Jan van Eyck's iconic 1434 "Arnolfini Portrait" to the see-me-twice hand mirrors wielded by sitters in Salvador Dalí's surreal portraits.

The material itself has morphed from a Renaissance-era status symbol into a hardware-store staple chopped up by midcentury artists like Christian Megert, a Swiss member of the Zero Group, who sought to make art from everyday materials like nails and eggshells. During previews on Tuesday, London's Mayor Gallery sold a rotating "Mirror Object" assemblage (1966) by Mr. Megert for \$23,300.

Today's rising stars in the art world appear to be using mirrors primarily because they reflect the image of the observer—a useful tool for conceptual artists seeking to implicate viewers in their politically potent pieces.

In New York dealer Gavin Brown's fair booth, Rirkrit Tiravanija showed for the first time a series of mirrored wall panels covered in protest slogans like "Less Oil More Courage" and "The Days of This Society Is Numbered." The gallery said that several sold during the fair's opening hours but declined to divulge prices.

Artists today also often enlist mirrors as a way to play off the vanity of collectors who seek pieces that literally reflect themselves, said Swiss painter Arnold Helbling, who doesn't use mirrors in his own work. Zurich lawyer and collector Klaus Neff agreed, saying, "When people see something they love, they often want to see themselves in it."

Berlin dealer Eva Scherr conceded that "narcissism often plays a role" in the appeal of pieces like Jonathan Monk's "Paul Together Alone with Each Other," a 2012 installation that features a scraggly-haired puppet of a man in a suit sitting on a crate and staring into a door-size mirror. The installation sold for \$60,000.

Besides mirrored pieces, collectors are buying plenty more at this fair—lending a solid, reassuring atmosphere, with pieces under \$1 million selling at a brisker pace than the few masterpieces priced at \$10 million-plus. Collectors spotted during the VIP preview on Tuesday included Kanye West, financiers Leon Black and Donald Marron, and Russian philanthropist-socialite Dasha Zhukova.

Lawyer Kurt Büsser of Wiesbaden, Germany, and his wife, Maria, came to the fair on Wednesday in hopes of taking home a piece by Terry Fox, a Seattle-born artist whose wordplay installations have been gaining favor since he died a few years ago in the German city of Cologne. The couple's pick from Fox's one-man show at Galerie Löhrl? The artist's \$12,600 oval mirror from 1989 entitled "The Eye Is Not the Only Thing that Burns the Mind."

Mr. Büsser said he likes the idea that he will be able to see his own face in the reflection of a mirror that's already oxidizing, both changing over time: "I like that the edges of it look like they've been eaten apart by baby mice."

## ART REVIEW

# West Coast Art (Not Laid-Back)

## A California 'State of Mind,' Circa 1970, at Bronx Museum



**State of Mind** Barbara T. Smith's "Field Piece," in this show at the Bronx Museum of the Arts.

Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times

By [HOLLAND COTTER](#)

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If you're even just a little weary of the well-made, no-risk, eye-on-fashion fare in so many Manhattan summer group shows, consider a trip to the Bronx Museum of the Arts, where the exhibition "[State of Mind](#): New California Art Circa 1970" has breezed in from the West Coast, bringing with it a tonic of gawky rawness and moral purpose.

California in the 1970s was one of the weirder spots on the planet, home to radical strains of politics on both the right and left. It was a hub of the nation's defense industry and a feeder for the Vietnam War, to which disproportionate numbers of Latinos and blacks were consigned. Teachers at the state's universities were required to take loyalty oaths. Dissidents and deviants of various stripes were under the gun.

At the same time, the country's most powerful countercultures were born or nurtured there: from the Beats in the 1950s, to the campus Free Speech movement of the early 1960s, to the hippies and Black Panthers later in the decade. Berkeley held one of the first big antiwar protests in 1965. The Watts uprising in South Central Los Angeles happened the same year. So did the first farm labor strikes in what would become the Chicano movement.

What did California art have to do with any of this? A lot. True, you wouldn't guess this from most history books, which have confined 1960s California art to the high-polish, mostly abstract paintings and sculptures produced by a bunch of guys for the Ferus Gallery, in Los Angeles.

But well before that gallery closed in 1966, a new kind of art — Conceptual art — emerged, which, loosely defined, valued ideas and actions over things. The California version emphasized a commitment to politics a focus on nature and the body, and a tendency to prefer zaniness to braininess.

How this West Coast art developed makes for a fascinating and moving story, though it's hard to put across in a museum. Much of the work was done in an ad hoc, performance-based mode. It survives, if it survives at all, in funky photographs and videos and bits of ephemera that require some explaining. And if you want explanations, you have to read labels.

Fortunately, in this case, that's a pleasure.

The curators — Constance M. Lewallen of the Berkeley Art Museum and Karen Moss of the Orange County Museum of Art in Newport Beach — have written short, elucidating comments for almost everything here, about 150 items. Not only do their words bring individual images to life; but they also add up to an absorbing narrative of a place and an era.

In New York, the political content of Conceptual art could be elusive. In California, it was, as often as not, front and center.

Environmentalism was a major issue. In 1969 three young artists — Joe Hawley, Mel Henderson and Alfred Young — used biodegradable dyes to spell "oil" in giant letters on the waters of San Francisco Bay, calling attention to a massive crude-oil spill then devastating the coastline.

Other artists took a quiet approach to environmentalism. Over several years beginning in the 1970s, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, a married couple and teachers at the University of California, Santa Cruz, traveled widely compiling data on global sustainability. They then painstakingly recorded their findings in a grand, handwritten and painted volume called "The Book of the Lagoons," which sits in this exhibition's first gallery, its pages waiting to be turned.

A number of Bay Area artists — Mr. Henderson was one — were involved, as performers or aggressive documenters, in the antiwar movement. In Los Angeles, black and Latino artists targeted racism. The Conceptual art collective Asco — Harry Gamboa Jr., Willie Herrón III, Gronk (Glugio Nicandro) and Patssi Valdez were its primary members — staged elaborate, costumed guerrilla performances, the equivalent of living murals on downtown streets and freeway medians. Even in photographs, their visual impact comes through.

And California Conceptualism was particularly rich in experimental art by women. Starting in 1970, Bonnie Sherk, an East Coast transplant, took on a series of low-paying real-life jobs — waitress, short-order cook — tacitly treating each as an extended study about labor and female identity. Two years later, Linda Mary Montano gave identity an interspecies twist. Dressed in feathered wings and a high school prom gown, she took to the San Francisco streets as Chicken Woman, a character at once human and animal, clown and angel, transcendental and absurd.

The human body keeps turning up — vulnerable, gross, distressed, embattled — in the West Coast Conceptualism, and sometimes in an atmosphere of stress or danger. The danger was real when Chris Burden had a friend shoot him in the

arm with a rifle, but subtler in a 1973 performance by Barbara T. Smith, in which the artist, nude and alone, received visitors one by one, inviting interaction, no prohibitions imposed.

By contrast, the sight of the Dutch-born artist Bas Jan Ader rolling off a bungalow roof in a 1970 video has the goofy air of a Buster Keaton stunt. It's a reminder of a wide comedic streak in California Conceptualism, though in this case there's a dark flip side. Ader's courting of risk as art led him, in 1975, to set out across the Atlantic in a small boat. He vanished at some point en route. He was 33.

The cinematic flavor of his brief career, with its mysterious fade, has made him a romantic hero. Other artists may have been inspired by California's movie industry to create stagelike installations. In 1973 the filmmaker and digital art pioneer Lynn Hershman transformed a room in a San Francisco transient hotel into an environment dramatizing the lives of two fictional women. So detailed were the results, right down to two wigged mannequins lying in the bed, that a tenant called the police, and the work had to be dismantled.

Two years earlier, in Hollywood, Allen Rappersberg opened a hotel as a short-term art project. Of its several rentable rooms, one was furnished with cutout figures of Mr. Rappersberg in various guises: biker, cowboy, freak. From a New York perspective, the project's wacky humor might have been viewed as a California thing. So might the spiritual content of the deeply serious "Levitation," a 1970 performance by Terry Fox (1943-2008), in which the artist, who had Hodgkin's disease, lay for hours on a mound of earth trying to will himself into an out-of-body state.

Now, after decades of AIDS, "Levitation" makes perfect sense anywhere. So, in more global-minded American culture, does the witty, Zen-tinged art of Paul Kos, Fox's Bay Area colleague and friend, who finesse Conceptualism's art-as-process ethic by placing eight boom microphones around a block of ice for a piece called "The Sound of Ice Melting."

Finally, the artist Tom Marioni, a catalytic figure in San Francisco in the 1960s and '70s and the creator of the Museum of Conceptual Art, brings us from past into present. His signature work, a participatory bash called "The Act of Drinking Beer With Friends Is the Highest Form of Art," which had its debut in 1970 and is regularly revived, is basically an example of the trend to turn social interactions into art — "relational aesthetics" before the fact.

In a good, terse essay in the catalog, the art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson points to several younger artists — Ryan Trecartin, Kalup Linzy, Sharon Hayes — who, Californians or not, seem heirs to a West Coast Conceptualist groove. I would add others to the mix, like Tania Bruguera, Paul Chan and Rick Lowe. And, of course, California is constantly producing fresh candidates of its own.

A single profile is hard to define, but you can point to shared links: an investment in social agency, a focus on mercurial identity, an appetite for ideas and an appetite for art that has reasons for existing beyond itself. Their work is meant to wake us up. So is the circa 1970 art in "State of Mind." If we're willing to do some looking, reading and thinking, it can.

*"State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970"* runs through Sept. 8 at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse, at 165th Street, Morrisania; (718) 681-6000, bronxmuseum.org.

## IN CONVERSATION

## CONSTANCE LEWALLEN with Phong Bui

JULY 15TH, 2013

*State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970*, curated by Constance Lewallen and Karen Moss and co-organized by the Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA) and the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA), was first presented at the OCMA in the fall of 2011 as part of the Getty Research Institute's initiative *Pacific Standard Time*. It subsequently traveled to BAM/PFA and has been touring the United States under the auspices of the Independent Curators International. Right after the festive opening reception of the exhibit at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (June 20–September 8, 2013), Lewallen paid a visit to the *Rail*'s headquarters to talk with publisher Phong Bui about the genesis of the exhibit, and more.



Portrait of Constance Lewallen. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

**Phong Bui (Rail):** This exhibit seems timely in that while showing a real breadth, and the consistency of various sorts of conceptual thinking, it's in fact very useful in terms of ways in which an artist could reinvent their congenial mediums to express social, political, as well as artistic concerns.

**Constance Lewallen:** Well, what might be refreshing to general viewers who see the show, especially young artists, is the focus on the late '60s and early '70s before art was about the market. There was a collective and pervasive sense of freedom, especially in California, partly because there really was no infrastructure, or much of any kind of critical response, which in some ways worked to the artists' advantage. They had freedom to do what they wanted, to be playful and inventive with new materials and mediums. Karen Moss, my co-curator, and I hope that's what comes through in the exhibition.

Bui, Phong. "In Conversation: Constance Lewallen with Phong Bui." *The Brooklyn Rail*. July 15, 2013. <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2013/07/art/constance-lewallen-with-phong-bui>

**Rail:** Certainly. I think the show would attract particularly all artists, young and old, that good art doesn't need to rely on high production.

**Lewallen:** Bruce Nauman said in an interview that once an artist complained to him that he couldn't do something because he didn't have enough money, and Bruce said, and I am paraphrasing, "Then just do it some other way." In other words, money shouldn't affect what you do as an artist. If you look at Nauman's early work it couldn't be more pared down.

**Rail:** Like walking in a taped square in the studio ["Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square," (1967 – 68)].

**Lewallen:** The costs were practically nothing apart from the film and having it developed afterward. Nauman borrowed or rented the camera for very little from the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) where he was teaching. This was before the availability of portable video equipment. He simply set up the camera and enacted various exercises that were about movement, like, he said, doing dances without being a dancer. More importantly, it's about setting a task then carrying it through to its conclusion. William Kentridge, whose work I admire enormously but never had thought of in terms of Nauman, said in a lecture he gave some years ago at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, that he was inspired by Nauman's studio films. First, I thought perhaps the low-cost aesthetic appealed to him, but then I realized in a broader sense that Nauman gave permission to artists by insisting that whatever you do in your studio, that's your art.

**Rail:** Not to mention that a work of art is the mere product of where it's made, which inevitably evokes the spirit of that locale. We're again reminded by Maurice Vlaminck's witty remark, "Intelligence is international, stupidity is national, and art is local." Let's talk about Clyfford Still, who, as you mention in the conclusion of your essay for the catalogue, taught at SFAI from '46 to '50.

"There was a collective and pervasive sense of freedom, especially in California, partly because there really was no infrastructure, or much of any kind of critical response, which in some ways worked to the artists' advantage."

**Lewallen:** He had a huge influence on the Bay Area, because of his fierce stand against commercialism and his romantic view of the artist. The fact that he took it to such an extreme made a long-lasting impression, not just on his students. It's not true any more, but for quite a long time Still's legacy was very present.

**Rail:** Where and how do artists congregate in California?

**Lewallen:** In California, art schools were the communities that brought artists together—California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Southern California; SFAI in San Francisco, University of California, San Diego (U.C.S.D.), University of California, Davis (U.C. Davis), and so on. Paul Kos, for example, had not only been a student but also a longtime teacher at SFAI. Howard Fried was a student there as well. And in Los Angeles, both Ed Ruscha and Allen Rappersberg went to the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts) where in foundational courses they learned the skills that you would need to be an illustrator or a graphic designer. Ruscha, under the pen name "Eddie Russia," for

example, did work as a layout designer for *Artforum* (1965 – 69). Similarly, Ruppersberg is an excellent draftsman. And then, of course, John Baldessari established the first post-studio department in 1970 at CalArts, a radical thing to do at that time—the idea was that you did not need a studio if you’re weren’t making painting or sculpture. You could make your work in the street, in a field, on a typewriter, with a camera, and so on.

**Rail:** Like Baldessari’s “California Map Project” (1969), which is included in this show, made in the same year he gave up painting.

**Lewallen:** Exactly. Paul McCarthy, who graduated SFAI with a BFA and moved to L.A. to go to University of Southern California (USC), also gave up painting and began making conceptual works—video, film, sculpture, installation, and photography. His “May 1, 1971” in *State of Mind* is a slide projection work, a photographic record of what the street looked like outside of his window in 25 takes. But in general, whatever McCarthy does seems always to have a painterly quality to it.

**Rail:** I absolutely agree. Even in his recent and large bronzes and black walnut sculptures in his last two simultaneous shows at Hauser & Wirth.

**Lewallen:** And Karen and I liked juxtaposing McCarthy’s slide piece with Ed Ruscha’s “Every Building on Sunset Strip” (1966), because they’re both about the street, which served as both subject and site for many artists and is, therefore, one of the themes in the show. I should mention here that in order to emphasize the correspondences among artists throughout the state, we organized the show according to themes such as politics, public and private space, the street, etc.

**Rail:** And the street was a pronounced characteristic of both L.A. and, especially, San Francisco’s conceptual art—especially performance—where in New York you don’t usually associate the street with the performing art scene except for Tehching Hsieh’s third performance of his six one-year performances where he walked on the street without entering buildings for one whole year, 1981 – 1982, later than the time period of your show. More typical was Vito Acconci’s “Seedbed,” performed in 1972 at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York.

**Lewallen:** Acconci also did performance in the streets in New York. In fact, he had much in common with Bay Area performance artists and was often invited to participate in events at Tom Marioni’s Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA). But, yes, East Coast performance often took place in a gallery or for the camera, which, of course, was also true in California. However, many Bay Area artists such as Bonnie Sherk and Linda Mary Montano preferred the street. In her “Sitting Still” series (1970), Sherk sat in an armchair on the walkway of the Golden Gate Bridge and on a variety of street corners partly because she wanted to reach a wide, non-art audience. Also, there were very few venues that would show women artists during that time. Linda Mary Montano did one of her “Chicken Dances” (1972) in front of the Reese Palley Gallery, which was one of the few galleries in San Francisco that did show radical art. She said, “This is as close as I was ever going to get to showing in this gallery.” There’s a lot of humor and absurdity in her work and many of her contemporaries, which is a West Coast characteristic. Artists in New York felt

that if a work was humorous it wasn't serious, failing to see that an artist could be humorous and serious simultaneously.



Bonnie Sherk: Portable Park II, 1970; performance documentation: Sherk with Caltrans officials and cows at the Highway 101 Mission/Van Ness off-ramp, San Francisco; courtesy of the artist.

**Rail:** You mean like Baldessari singing Sol LeWitt's "Sentences on Conceptual Art"?

**Lewallen:** Yes. He admired Sol LeWitt. It wasn't supposed to a critique, but rather a humorous homage. Baldessari, like his East Coast peers, was interested in language and systems, albeit often laced with humor. Another West Coast artist who based his work on linguistic systems is Charles Gaines, but it wasn't the pervasive mode. Of course, artists like William T. Wiley who precedes this group of artists by a few years, and Bruce Nauman and Paul Kos were using language in the form of wordplay.

**Rail:** In a much different way than, say, Joseph Kosuth, Mel Bochner, Lawrence Weiner.

**Lewallen:** Yes, in the same way some of the artists who were working with the body were looking more to Europe than to the East Coast. One can see the influence of the Viennese Actionists, or Joseph Beuys. Terry Fox, who was an important artist in the Bay Area for about ten years, from '68 to '78, had spent time in Europe, revered Joseph Beuys and even did a performance with Beuys in 1971 at the Düsseldorf Art Academy called "Isolation Unit." He introduced Beuys to artists in the Bay Area. People didn't know about Joseph Beuys at that point—very little if at all. So there was a European connection—jumping over New York.

**Rail:** I was curious about Bas Jan Ader's three-part piece, "In Search of the Miraculous," the second part of which involved his crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a small boat to reach Holland, his native country. Sadly, he was lost at sea. In titling the series "In Search of the Miraculous," he was referring to P.D. Ouspensky's famous book of the same title there seems to be a mystical aspect to his work.

**Lewallen:** Yes. And a romantic spirit for sure. There's a kind of poignancy, not only because of the way he died—

which is tragic—but the way in which his philosophical interest is manifest in everything he did. His filmed performances are humorous and at the same time deeply melancholic. There's a new book on Jan Ader by Alexander Dumbadze (*Bas Jan Ader: Death is Elsewhere*), which is especially compelling in its account of his family background. Both his father, a minister, and mother sheltered Jews during World War II for which his father was executed at the very end of the war. Also, his father once biked from Holland to Palestine—perhaps there was an inner calling that was lurking in Ader's psyche. Claire Copley was the gallerist in L.A. who showed Ader's work, along with other European conceptual artists like Daniel Buren.

**Rail:** In my last conversation with Jock Reynolds he talked about his teacher at University of California Santa Cruz, Gurdon Woods.

**Lewallen:** Who later became the director of the San Francisco Art Institute.

**Rail:** Exactly. It was Woods, between 1968 and 1969, who applied and got a large grant from Carnegie Foundation, which enabled him to invite many Fluxus artists to come to the school such as Robert Watts, George Maciunas, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham. What about Allan Kaprow, who moved to California and taught at California Institute of Arts, before it was called CalArts, in 1969?

**Lewallen:** And he also taught at U.C.S.D. (1974 – 1993). And, yes, he definitely was an important influence both as an artist and as a teacher. We have one of his works in the show called “Pose, March 22, 1969” in which he instructed students in the Berkeley public schools to carry chairs throughout the city and sit, which Karen Moss describes more fully in the *State of Mind* catalog. Kaprow opened many doors to artists who either had seen his work or studied with him. His presence in California was enormously important.

**Rail:** So there was Kaprow on one hand and Nauman on the other.

**Lewallen:** Well, the idea of the show from the beginning was to encompass the entire state, north and south. Nauman is the only artist in the show who spent an equal period of time in both. He was a graduate student at U.C. Davis, which is north and east of San Francisco, from '64 to '66. He then moved down to San Francisco, rented a storefront studio in the Mission District, and taught part-time at SFAI. Nauman's friends were older artists who taught at Davis like William T. Wiley and Bill Allen. Nauman taught early morning classes at the SFAI, and never really integrated himself into the school or the budding conceptual scene in San Francisco. Although they didn't know him personally, because just as they were coming into the scene when Nauman moved to Pasadena, young Bay Area conceptual artists were aware of his presence. His 1969 exhibition of his film works at the Reese Palley Gallery was very influential on artists like Howard Fried, Paul Kos, and Terry Fox. Nauman stayed in Southern California throughout the '70s and then he moved to the Southwest. His most important teacher was Wiley who was only three years older. Wiley saw something in Nauman when others at Davis did not understand what he was doing. For a class assignment he would, for example, take a plank of wood and lean it against a wall, or turn on a fan. Wiley would say, “Great! Terrific! I like your spirit of experimentation.”

**Rail:** Or fundamental inquiry and play.



Robert Kinmont, "8 Natural Handstands," 1969/2009 (detail). Nine black-and-white photographs; courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. Photo: Bill Orcutt.

**Lewallen:** Exactly. As I said before, Karen and I decided to create a structure that would allow us to show that artists throughout the state shared certain characteristics. However, there were differences—to say there weren't would not be right. It's pretty obvious that in Southern California there was a strong interest in popular culture and Hollywood, which you can see in the works of Ruscha, Bill Leavitt, and Ruppertsberg, for example. Whereas Northern Californians were more invested in body art. An exception was Chris Burden who had an affinity with artists in the north. In fact, he came up to San Francisco and did several performances, including "Fire Roll" (1973) where he set fire to a pair of pants and then rolled on the ground until he extinguished the fire. There was a lot more live performance going on in Northern California than there was in Southern California. Many people have told me that during the '70s on any given night you could attend a performance somewhere—whether it be at the SFAI, or MCA, or at the Berkeley Art Museum (one of the few museums anywhere that presented performance from the start), or in one of the other 15 or so alternative spaces, which were getting financial support from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

**Rail:** Jim Melchert, one of the participating artists in the show, was the director of the Visual Arts Program at the NEA (1977 – 1981).

**Lewallen:** He later became the director of the American Academy in Rome for four years (1984 – 1988). Melchert is an amazing man—he has contributed in more ways than just through his own art. He's been a great inspiration to many artists; in fact some of the artists in the show, Paul Cotton (now Adam II) and Stephen Laub, and later Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, were his students. Charles Simonds, a New York artist who did his undergraduate work at Berkeley, was his student and credits Melchert with showing him that clay, as a medium, was a viable fine art material.

**Rail:** That makes great sense.

**Lewallen:** As you know, Melchert started out as a ceramic artist (and currently works with tiles) but in the '70s he became very interested in performance and other alternative modes.

**Rail:** What about the political climax that may have affected the differences in how artists made works in L.A. as opposed to those in San Francisco?

**Lewallen:** When we mention Southern California we're not just talking about L.A. but also San Diego, specifically U.C.S.D. where, you know, Martha Rosler, Fred Lonidier, and Allan Sekula were students, and Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, David and Eleanor Antin taught. It's ironic, because San Diego is a conservative city, very military-oriented, full of wealthy retirees, and so on, but U.C.S.D. and the Salk Institute combined were the center of a huge amount of political, Marxist intellectual activity. Sekula's piece, "Untitled Slide Sequence" (1972), which is in the show, was his first major work. It is composed of 25 projected black-and-white slides showing workers leaving a factory. Ever since then Sekula's work has been centered on labor issues. The same thing can be said of Lonidier's work, though his piece in the show, "29 Arrests" (1972), documents young war protesters getting arrested. In the Bay Area, Sam's Café, a collaborative of three artists, Terri Keyser, Marc Keyser, and David Shire, two of whom were students at Berkeley, made a lot of provocative art works using the strategies of civil disobedience, as did Joe Hawley, Mel Henderson, and Alfred Young who staged spectacular street performances, as well as, "Oil" (September 1969), when they spelled out the word "oil" in non-toxic blue dye on the bay outside the Chevron Refinery in Richmond in anticipation of a huge oil spill in January 1971 near the Golden Gate Bridge. Most of the artists who made direct social/political works were either in San Diego or San Francisco. The Los Angeles-based Chicano collective Asco was an exception. There were many more artists who were very involved in anti-war and Civil Rights activities throughout the state, but they didn't necessarily reveal those concerns in their work. That was true in New York, too.

**Rail:** Right. Like Carl Andre, for instance, was an active member of Art Worker's Coalition (AWC), but you don't see that political aspect in his work whatsoever.



Martha Rosler, “First Lady (Pat Nixon),” 1972. From the series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, 1967–72; photomontage; 20 &tilde;— 24”. Courtesy of the artist, Brooklyn, New York, and Mitchell-Innes and Nash Gallery, New York.

**Lewallen:** However, with the rise of feminism, and the First Feminist Art Program in Fresno, which was started by Judy Chicago in 1970, and then moved to CalArts, we see women throughout the state—Barbara Smith, Suzanne Lacy, Susan Mogul, Ilene Segalove, Lynn Hershman, Martha Rosler—making work that deals with feminist issues.

**Rail:** Exactly. Just to follow up on another side of Nauman’s work, in addition to his use of the body both as subject and object, ways in which he could explore its sculptural potentials and limits, as well as means of self-understanding and transformation, I mean the projected psychological and perceptual space that alter viewers’ perception like the “Yellow Room (Triangular)” (1973) you have included in the show.

**Lewallen:** Right after the remarkable body of work that he made as a student and the few years after, essentially with no material resources, Nauman began to make architectural, perceptual pieces, which like most of his work cause discomfort or disorientation. Longtime CalArts professor Michael Asher, who sadly died just a few months ago in October, also made works in relationship to architecture. Asher adhered to the basic idea of conceptualism in his nearly complete rejection of the object. His works were inextricably tied to the site and situation, as when he removed all of the windows at the Clocktower Gallery in New York so that you experienced the rain and the wind, or a series of forced air pieces from late ’60s. Only one of these, the “Column of Air” (1966 – 67), can be reproduced, which we did when *State of Mind* was presented at the Berkeley Art Museum. The idea was to create a column of air that viewers could, but were not forced, to walk through, making them suddenly aware of the environment. It sounds simple, but it’s a very difficult piece to engineer. The Asher piece we have in the Bronx, “No Title” (1965-67), one of Asher’s few objects, is a rounded corner square of pink Plexiglass adhered to the wall in such a way that it appears to be embedded in the wall, making viewers aware of the surrounding architecture. Michael never had a gallery, having virtually nothing to sell. I mean, what other artist can you say that of?

**Rail:** Stephen Kaltenbach is an amazing discovery for those who are not familiar with his work!

**Lewallen:** I agree. Kaltenbach was a graduate student at U.C. Davis, a year behind Nauman. He moved to New York in 1967, taught at the School of Visual Arts, and made provocative conceptual works like his “Artforum Ads,” which we have in the show. He placed anonymous ads with texts like “Perpetrate a Hoax” and “Become a Legend” in a year’s worth of the publication, from November ’68 to December ’69. Kaltenbach was especially interested in creating anonymous artworks that weren’t necessarily recognized as art. He also designed room installations even before Nauman. Two were built in 1969, but none after until we built “Peaked Floor Room Construction” (1967) in *State of Mind* when it was installed at the OCMA (its first venue) and again when it moved to Berkeley. Unfortunately, there hasn’t been enough space in any of the subsequent venues, including the Bronx, to build a room. For various reasons Kaltenbach left New York after only a few years, went back to Northern California, and taught for decades at Sacramento State, all the while continuing to make art. He contributed a piece called “Kiss” (1969) for the landmark show *When Attitudes Become Form* in Bern, Switzerland, in which he instructed Harald Szeemann, the curator, to have a stamp made in the form of lips and to stamp lip prints all around the city. He told me he doesn’t really know if it ever was done. Kaltenbach was also included in the *9 at Leo Castelli* at the Castelli Warehouse in 1968 along with

Nauman, Alan Saret, Keith Sonnier, Bill Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Giovanni Anselmo, and Gilberto Zorio. Szeemann saw that show when he was researching *Attitudes* and included every piece. Szeemann listened to what artists were telling him.

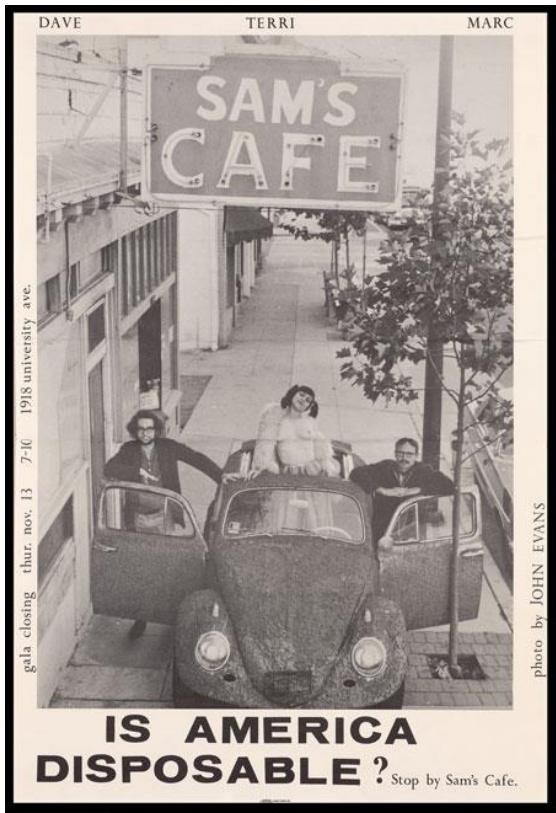
**Rail:** Every curator should embrace that practice. Anyway, how would you re-evaluate Tom Marioni as an artist and his MOCA?

**Lewallen:** Marioni was important for his own work and activities he organized at his museum, which doubled as his studio. Marioni always had terrific ideas, which inspired great work. For example, he came up with what might have been the first sound show anywhere called *Sound Sculpture As*, in which Paul Kos's "The Sound of Ice Melting" (1970) was included.

**Rail:** [Laughs.] It's a ridiculously brilliant piece, which I first saw at Nyehaus Gallery with you and Bill Berkson last year, in fact.

**Lewallen:** Right. Some people think they hear that sound. [Laughter.] It's called power of suggestion. But the microphones you see are live; otherwise, it wouldn't be as effective. He also conceived *All Night Sculptures*, where Barbara Smith did her "Feed Me" performance in 1973. Marioni also premiered *Avalanche* magazine publisher Willoughby Sharp's *Body Works* (1970) a video anthology of body-oriented performance, which Marioni claims was the first video art exhibition and first body art show. Marioni instituted weekly video screenings, "Free Beer," in a bar below his museum. Every Wednesday night everyone was welcome to come, watch videos, and drink free beer.

**Rail:** I really am responsive to some of his statements about art as social activity.



Sam's Café, "Terri Keyser, Marc Keyser, and David Shire, *Is America Disposable?*", 1970. Poster: offset lithography on paper; 30 x 20".

**Lewallen:** This was way before relational aesthetics or social practice. His first piece of that kind, Marioni's, "The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art" was presented at the Oakland Museum of California in 1970. The night before the show opened, he invited friends to come to the museum and have a party. The show then consisted of the debris from that party, emphasizing that the art was the social activity and the exhibition merely a record of what transpired. Now the art world is finally giving him credit for being one of the forerunners of socially engaged art.

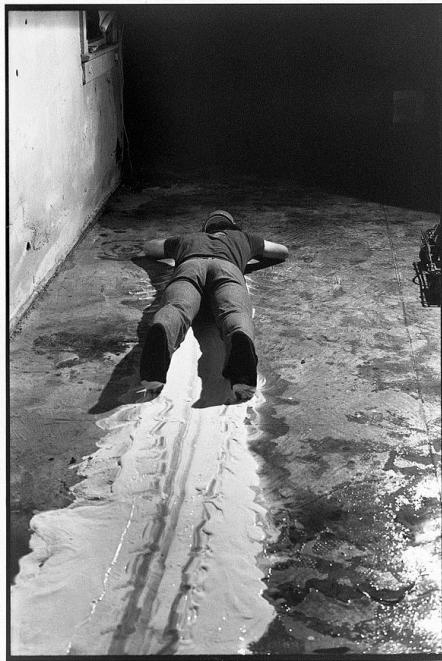
**Rail:** Like equivalent to Beuys, minus objects.

**Lewallen:** Yes—Beuys was, like I said, important in the Bay Area, because of Terry Fox. I should also mention how important Willoughby Sharp was as a frequent visitor to the Bay Area. He was democratic in his attitude about what he included in the *Avalanche*. Long interviews with Nauman, Fox and Fried, for example, were published alongside those by major East Coast and Europeans artists, and the magazine reported on conceptual activities internationally. *Avalanche* was, therefore, one of the few ways artists internationally could learn of likeminded peers—artists didn't travel like they do today.

**Rail:** Don't you also think the work of Douglas Huebler should be re-examined?

**Lewallen:** Absolutely. Huebler started his career in Massachusetts making image/text work that was very much in tune with what other artists were doing on the East Coast. In 1976, he was invited to teach at CalArts, bringing with him ideas and information from the East Coast. Like Baldessari and Asher, he had a big influence as a teacher and

artist. One of the reasons why his work hasn't been as visible as it should is that he hasn't had gallery representation in a long time. But now that Paula Cooper is representing his estate, people will have the opportunity to re-evaluate his work.



Paul McCarthy, "Face Painting Floor, White Line," 1872, from *Black and White Tapes*, 1970-75. Video: black and white; sound; 32.50 min.

**Rail:** Like with Ant Farm.

**Lewallen:** Well, most everyone knows of the "Cadillac Ranch" (1974), where 10 Cadillacs are partly buried nose down into the earth on a ranch in Amarillo, Texas, although they might not know that it is by Ant Farm. Ant Farm was group of artists and architects founded by Chip Lord and Doug Michels, and soon joined by Curtis Schreier and Hudson Marquez. They designed and promoted giant inflatable structures as a form of alternative architecture. They also were pioneer video artists who did some amazing early videos like "Media Burn" (1975) and "The Eternal Frame" (1975). They teamed up with T.R. Uthco in "The Eternal Frame," another Bay Area collaborative comprised of Doug Hall, Jody Procter, and Diane Andrews Hall. Collective artmaking, common now, was another innovation of the period, especially in Northern California. Since their retrospective that I curated in 2004, Ant Farm has been increasingly recognized for their innovative work, and Lord continues to do his own work in video and photography.

**Rail:** I love what Marsden Hartley wrote in his essay *What's American Art*: "The creative spirit is at home wherever that spirit finds its breath to draw. It is neither international or national."

**Lewallen:** True. We think the show will convey certain particular yet familiar kinds of energy, expansiveness, and experimentation, ways that humor and intelligence could coexist in every form of art, in every discipline.

Knight, Christopher. "Making Magic From the Mundane." *L.A. Times*, Sunday, January 23, 1994.

# Making Magic From the Mundane

Gallery Paule Anglim

Terry Fox's work is spiritual with a secular slant, exploring the order and meaning in our seemingly random existence

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT

**A**s an artist, Terry Fox has always seemed to be a European who happened to be born American (in Seattle, to be precise, in 1943). His work addresses matters of great philosophical complexity, which are most often suggested by objects and drawings of spartan simplicity. A spiritual dimension is at his art's core, but in a manner that chafes against material limitations without getting unctuous or affected.

Fox, whose touring 20-year survey of Conceptual art is currently at the Otis Art Gallery, has in fact spent a good deal of time in

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Europe. He went to Rome shortly after high school to study at the Accademia di Belle Arti. He was in Paris in 1968, where his participation in the dramatic student uprisings had a profound effect on his artistic direction. His first European gallery shows were in 1972, and he's had more one-person exhibitions in galleries and museums in Italy, Germany, France, Belgium, Austria and Switzerland than in the United States. In 1980, he became a full-fledged expatriate—moving from San Francisco and New York first to Berlin, then to Naples, on to Florence and, since 1988, to Liege, Belgium, where he currently resides.

The survey exhibition's useful catalogue, written by art dealer and former curator Constance Lewallen, pointedly notes that Fox chose to leave the United States for good "just after President Reagan had taken office." It's easy to see why: A spartan aesthetic concerned with issues of spiritual and philosophical moment is hardly compatible with a period whose profile is most vividly marked by consuming greed and debilitating political duplicity.

Tellingly, the Otis show was organized by Elsa Longhauser at the Moore College of Art and

Design in Philadelphia and will travel next to the University Art Museum at UC Berkeley. American art schools and universities, unlike most American museums, have always been more open to exhibiting artists whose concerns are not manifest in the fabrication of traditional objects. At Otis, Fox's spare materials include some piano wire, a couple of ordinary drinking glasses, four beer bottles, a button suspended from a pencil by a piece of string, a few ladders, long strips of paper marked with ink and pencil, a pair of battered stools—the stuff of everyday usefulness.

Neither is there much to look at. The show features almost three dozen works dating from 1972 to 1992, following a five-year period devoted to site-specific performances that cannot be reconstructed; but none is what you might describe as "visually compelling." As with other American and, especially, European Conceptual artists who emerged from the crucible of the 1960s, Fox employs the simplest materials necessary to his task.

If Fox's spare objects aren't visually compelling, many are nonetheless engagingly curious. You want to puzzle them out. Unassuming but oddly inviting—and sometimes eccentrically witty—the best of them sneak inside your consciousness and cause a gentle ripple in the cerebral cortex.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 23, 1994

## Gallery Paule Anglim

"Terry Fox: Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)" begins with the artist's preoccupation with the metaphoric possibilities of a pre-existing structure—namely, the famous, medieval labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France. Descriptive of a facet of medieval cosmology, at Chartres the labyrinth is about 43 feet in diameter and composed of rough, flat, blue-and-white paving stones embedded in the cathedral floor. It is not an object but an articulated path.

An articulated path is also perhaps the most succinct way to describe Fox's approach to the relationship between art and life. For the labyrinth, designed as a pattern of 11 concentric rings winding through 34 turns along 552 steps to its inevitable center, is plainly a metaphor for life's circuitous journey.

At Chartres the journey is endowed with a particular religiosity. Believers would get on their knees and recite specific prayers at each step along the path. But Fox attempts to untangle it from rigid doctrine. The mundane materials he chooses suggest a secular spirituality.

The labyrinth turns up in the exhibition at least a dozen times. A small plaster model is placed on a pedestal, its material suggesting the origin from which future repetitions of the object could be cast. Nearby, a plan of the labyrinth is scratched into the black, painted surface of a sheet of glass, allowing flickers of light to pass through while creating a reflective surface in which you glimpse your face through the pattern.

Drawings project the flat pattern of the journey into three dimensions, creating a surprising sequence of cruciform shapes. One

drawing, made on a tube of clear plastic, rests inside a large glass jar. Air holes punched in the lid trace the winding path, while allowing oxygen for an (unseen) butterfly that a kid might capture in such a jar. The principles of Fox's cosmography apply to all things—great and small.

Another plan of the labyrinth, drawn in black ink on a circle of paper, is suspended on a string stretched taut between two wooden stools that stand atop one another, feet to feet. This rudimentary object is in fact an unlikely model of the great cathedral.

The top stool rises above the conceptual plane of the cathedral floor, coincident with the surface of the Earth. It is mirrored by the stool below, which descends to a level equal to an underground water-table that, according to Fox, became the actual cathedral architect's measurement for the height of the building's tallest spire. Suspended between the secret "river of life" below and the soaring heavens above, the labyrinth goes round.

If Fox's use of the labyrinth as metaphor, which he explored for a half-dozen years, suggests a doctrinaire view in which all life's seemingly random movements are in fact worked out in advance, step by step along a predetermined road, the artist quickly cautions about who is truly in control. He does it with a little game.

"Experiment in Autosuggestion" is an unassuming work that includes instructions for a parlor game in which you hold a button, suspended by a piece of string from a pencil over a simple diagram. By moving your eyes in proscribed patterns, the button miraculously follows suit, shifting directions at your eyes' command.

Miraculously, that is, until you realize that your eyes and mind have imperceptibly conspired to direct the subtle movements of your body's central nervous system. This little demonstration of the unconscious power lurking within sight and mind is both amusing and sobering—and especially revealing for an artist who had given up painting, with its emphasis on the visual, in favor of an artistic focus on ideas, which is the basis of Conceptual art.

A kind of "Mr. Wizard" quality permeates works like these, which use laymen's materials—a glass jar, a button, bits of string, kitchen stools—to demonstrate philosophical rather than scientific principles that give order and meaning to the otherwise seemingly random twists and turns of life. ("Is that a science experiment?" a child at the gallery suddenly asked out loud, when looking at a lead pendulum slowly revolving around a half-filled water glass.) A spirit of playfulness is one source of the engaging curiousness of Fox's art, in spite of its minimal visual pull.

The simplicity of materials put at the service of a secular spirit links Fox's work to such contemporaneous European movements as *Arte Povera*, in Italy, where he'd spent much of his artistically formative life, or the performance "actions" of Germany's Joseph Beuys. How-

ever, its quirky and demonstrative tenor is also the specifically American half of this expatriate artist's equation, with its down-home suggestion of the artist as committed hobbyist or exalted tinkerer.

There's nothing traditionally "professional" about Fox's approach—no academic expertness that would otherwise separate the artist from the audience into simple hierarchy of the skilled and the unskilled. For instance, having stretched two piano wires the length of the gallery, with one end attached to a sounding board, the artist has made a walk-in musical instrument that anyone can play simply by sliding the rosin-covered wire through clenched fingers. You're invited to pick up chopstick and a sardine can, with which the instrument's low, resonating sound can be dramatically altered, and to play your own improvisational concert for time and space.

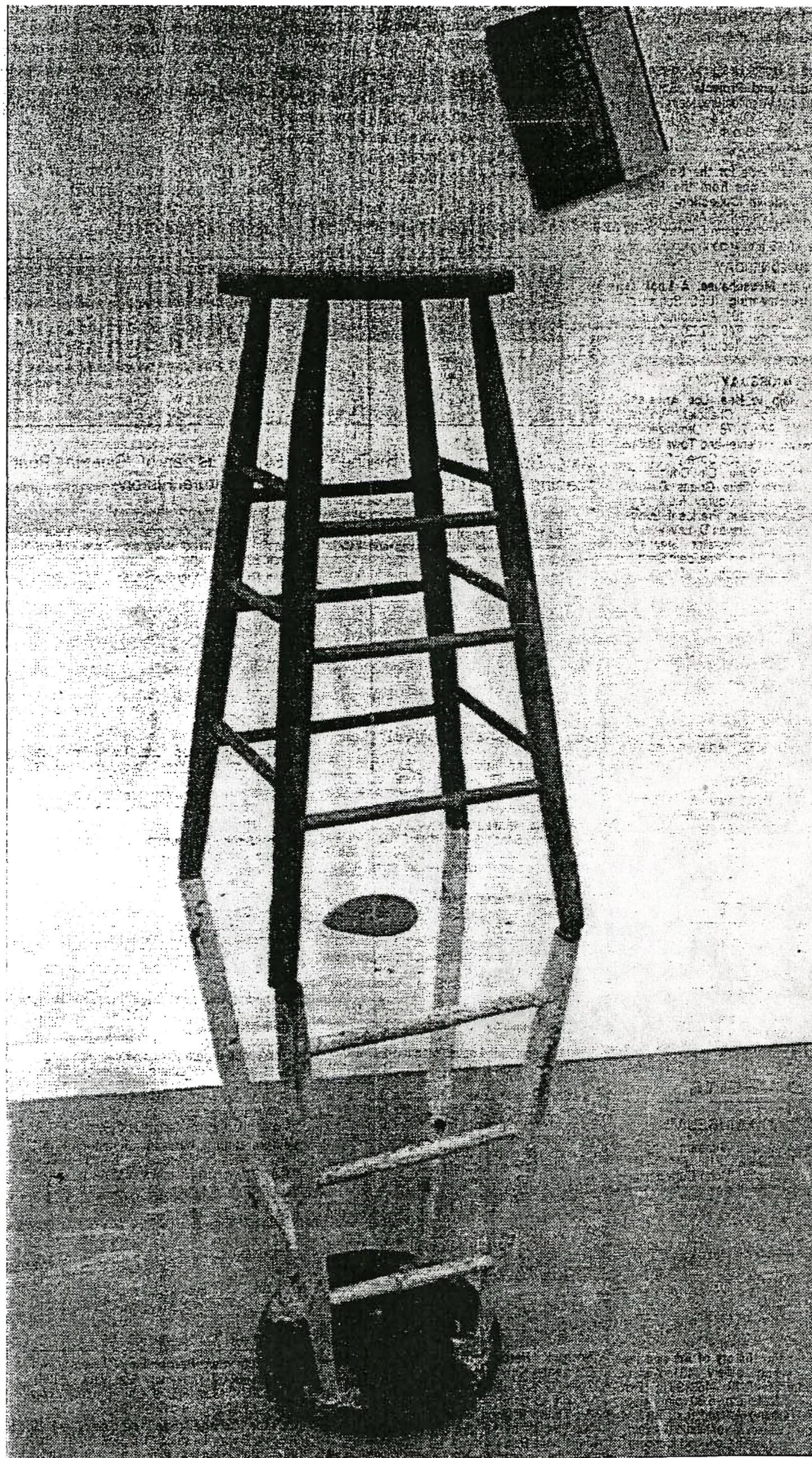
As with many other notable artists of his generation, Fox gives up a prevailing, popular view of art as the objectified manifestation of an interior self that is alienated from the world. Instead of a masculine, painterly tradition—Rembrandt to Van Gogh to Pollock—his quietly eccentric work simply attempts to externalize the mystery of consciousness.

Nowhere is that effort more wittily in evidence than in a recorded and amplified soundtrack that echoes continuously through the exhibition's rooms. With the twisting labyrinth at Chartres here extrapolated into the pattern of a musical score, the low rumble of cats purring in pure contentment improbably conjures the music of the spheres.

■ *Otis Art Gallery, 2401 Wilshire Blvd., (213) 251-0555, through March 6. Closed Sunday and Monday.*

Christopher Knight is a Times art critic.

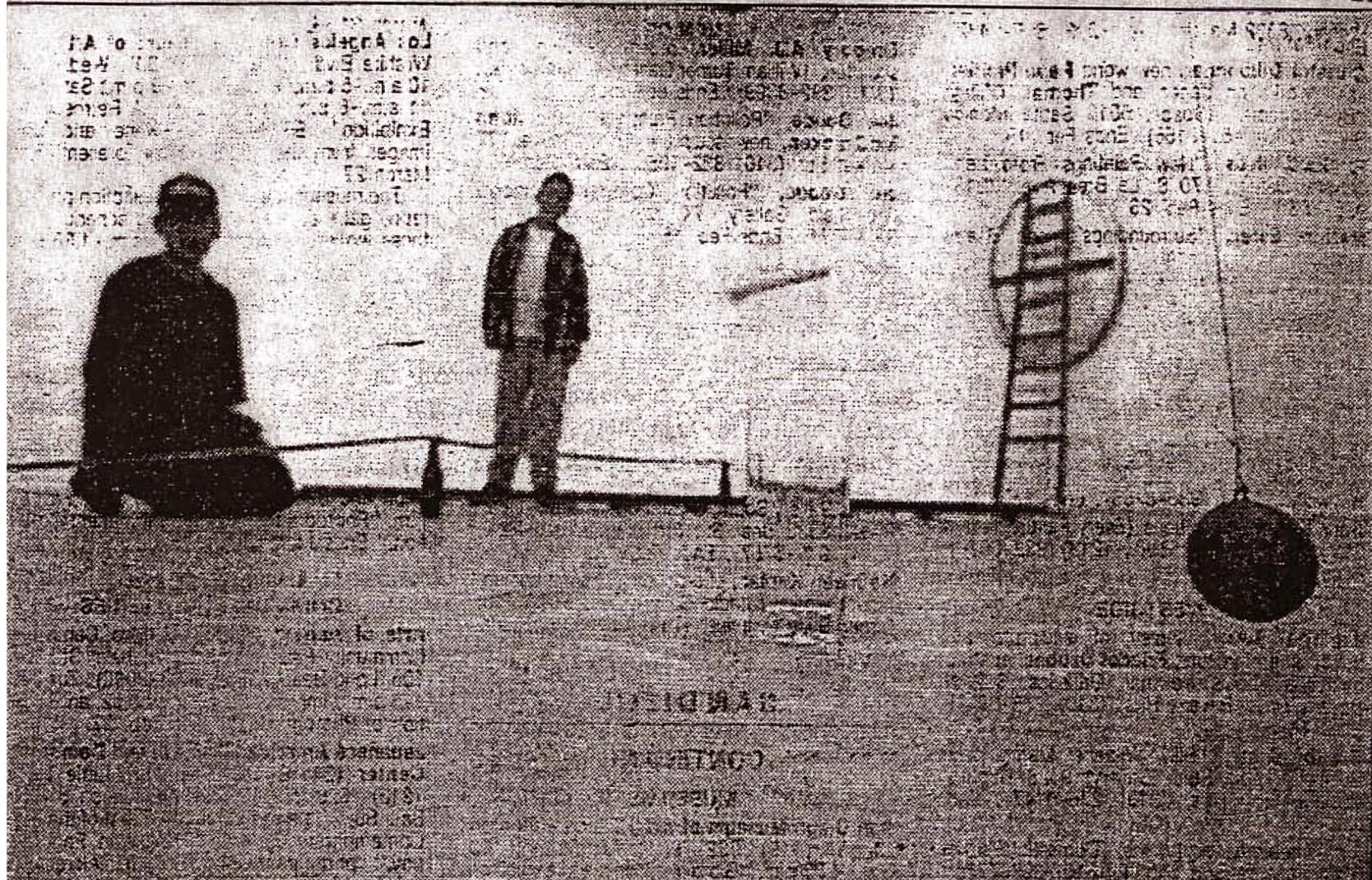
Gallery Paule Anglim



PATRICK DOWNS / Los Angeles Ti

Terry Fox's unlikely 1976 model of Chartres Cathedral is made from kitchen stools, with the famous labyrinth drawn on paper and suspended from string. A photo and text by Fox hangs behind.

## ART

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PATRICK DOWNS / Los Angeles Times  
Youngsters watch a lead ball revolve around a half-filled water glass in Fox's 1977 "Site Pendulum."

# TERRY FOX



Terry Fox with Maltese Cross from the Labyrinth at Chartres, 1975.  
(Photo: Chris Warner.)

## Sound performance at Otis College

BY JOSEF WOODARD

**G**iven the abundance of unorthodox materials installed in the Otis Gallery for Terry Fox's retrospective exhibition, *Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)*, visitors at the opening reception probably didn't think twice about the two long metal cables that ran cryptically along one long wall.

A little later, at the start of his sound performance, the artist calmly assumed his position in the far corner of the gallery and began striking the strings gently with sticks, rather in the way a percussionist would play a Brazilian berimbau. By judiciously applying a small pan to the vibrating strings, he achieved

springing echo-like effects that recalled cheezy sci-fi soundtracks and seminal electronic music experiments. But the point, of course, is that Fox generated his sounds in the most rudimentary, natural ways.

After this "prelude" of experimental manipulation, the artist spent the body of the performance walking very slowly along the length of the cables. As he rubbed them, he produced a rich, low drone from the friction of fingertips on metal (an effect also central to Ellen Fullman's *Long Stringed Instrument*). Dressed in black and studiously engaged in his task, he was not a performer in any exhibitional sense, but an activator, a supplier of friction. Meanwhile, irregular waves of purring, gurgling sound, suggesting something between an out-of-tune engine and a contented cat, were a sec-

ondary sound source that dribbled out of speakers mounted overhead.

The performance was site-specific, in that the length of the wall and the particular acoustical properties of the gallery were factors in the character of this transfixed, transfixing dance of overtones. The uninterrupted drone, and the artist's gradual progress through the gallery, had a contextual corollary in the long strips of letters placed on the wall, producing a flowing textual

stream-of-conscious. Essentially, Fox created a yearning, seamless sonic continuum, relying on geometric realities and concrete materials—walls and steel.

In the multimedia work on view, the use of raw materials and seemingly casual connections between them are integral to an aesthetic which is generally cooler and gentler than the work of many other contemporary conceptualists. Intuitive relationships lead to subtle rational discoveries, and patient viewers

who follow the scattered shards of letters are led on a satisfying trail of free-associative poetry. An excerpt, for example: "... black substance obtained by boiling shrill noise made by forcing the breath through the lips unnaturally gathering swelling bread made spongy by impregnation."

In the sound performance, too, simple materials yielded startling results. The physi-

cal sonic properties of friction and the whirring overtones became the focus of the piece at the outset, as viewers were asked to appreciate the phenomena at hand, the transformation of hard objects into something ethereal, in real-time. But somewhere in the midst of the nearly hour-

long performance, wonder at the process subsided and something more transcendental took over; under the spell of a sonic swirl, we were hooked, benumbed, and enlivened.

Terry Fox's sound performance took place January 8, in conjunction with the installation *Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)*, which closes March 6 at Otis Gallery.

Josef Woodard is a Santa Barbara-based musician and freelance writer who contributes to the *L.A. Times* and numerous cultural publications.

# The Labyrinth

*Articulations* at Otis Gallery

BY PAT LEDDY

**T**erry Fox's *Articulations* reflects a self-imposed migration that took the artist from his Washington home state to study the Chartres cathedral in France. This fascination led him in turn to reconstruct the labyrinthian cycle we view from its outer limits and come to appreciate inwardly through a series of encounters and intersectional windings. Fox's stark statements, seen, for example, in a large animal bone impaled on a long thin rod of iron, echo Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty," whereby the life envisioned under pressure of death must find its own path back to recovery.

Fox explores our very reason for being, raising issues of whether "life mirrors art" or "art mirrors life." His Chartres cathedral's *Rhythmic Schema of the 34 Turns of the Labyrinth* represents three decades of experimentation with his own personal life cycles of illness and health. *Articulations* also comprises the artist's first major exhibition in America since 1973.

Missing from the exhibit at Otis Parsons Gallery was the egg-shaped *Ovum Anguinum* (1990). The piece had suffered a fall, causing reverberations about "insurance," but the German curators reassured Anne Ayres, gallery director, that they have both earthquake and nuclear attack insurance.

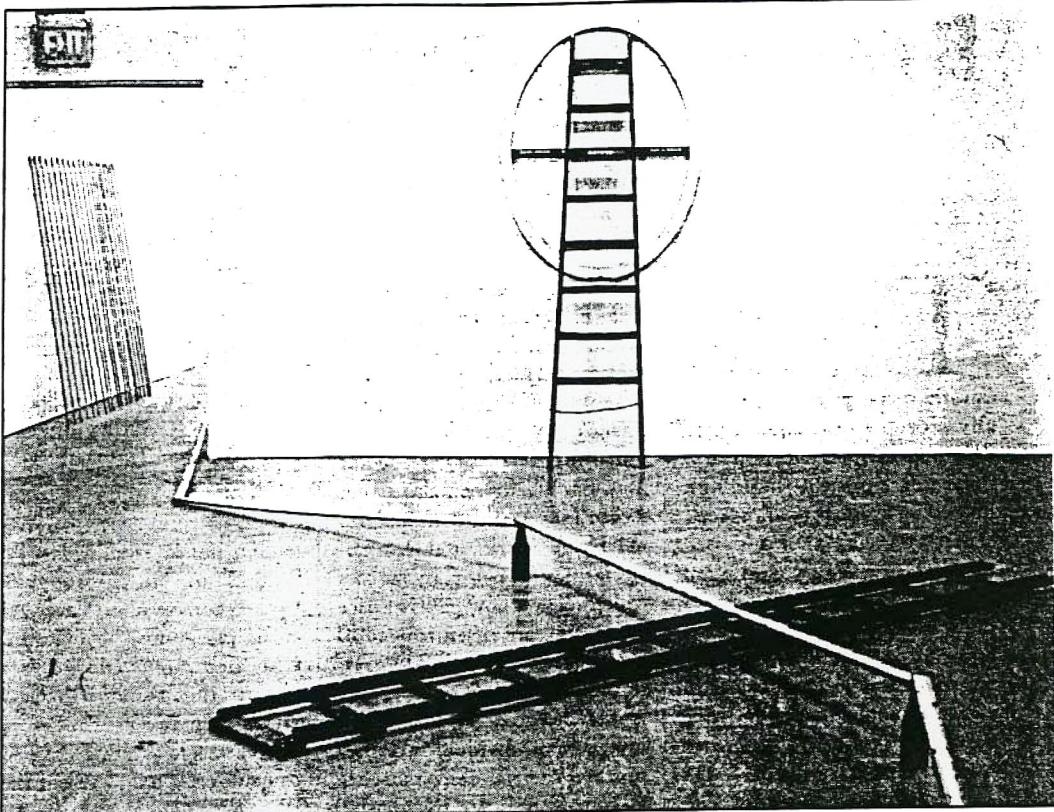
She asked me, "Do they know something we don't?"

I wasn't sure, but her remarks say something about the ephemeral nature of art and the price we are willing to pay for it. So, putting preconceptions aside, I went to work, trying to

solve Fox's riddles and crossword puzzles. I examined his *Children's Drawings*, *Catch Phrases*, and looked at the path angling oddly off into Gallery B, which led "to a way out of" the metaphorical *Labyrinth* created from wooden sticks propped up on beer bottles. Before I realized, I was on the scent, like a hound dog—my search rewarded with the "back matter" of the artist's work. Titled *Rebus 1-7*, these indexed objects amplify one of Fox's primary puns: *God spelled backwards is Dog*.

Myth-making our humanity with constricting images of orbiting pendulums in concert with piano strings and alphabet letters, Fox makes referential looks at body humors woven to humorous concepts. He offers up a headless warp to the body woof of belonging we all crave. His presence, however, felt within a complex, multilayered diagnostic view of the "hermetic" world in which he works, runs the risk of limiting our attention span, especially when the gallery itself, situated adjacent to MacArthur Park, opens upon a view of the "homeless" who must live under makeshift tents, waiting out the earth's constant rattling, now into its fourth day with Richter scale measurements of 4.1 to 4.7.

Fox uses his metaphorical reality as if taking blood samples so he can divine an undiscovered truth or fault about ourselves, apparent all along. His piano wires stretch the interpretative process and fine tune the deeper resonance inside of us to the synchronized purring of cats. These taped sounds remind us of the



Terry Fox, installation view of *Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)*, at Otis Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles. (Photo: Francy Bakcomb.)

obstacles we must overcome to better understand a human condition that is doomed to retrace in a circular fashion a way out of its predicament.

Looking through the whale-like ribcage standing in the middle of one of the galleries, testing its resilience, I follow Fox's charted biography of disease and dis-ease. If I don't slip, I'll make it through. Like large tongue depressors, the diagnostic sticks covered in masking tape and

marker pen footnotes reveal patterns that implicate a culture. The artist's compressed, fractured text, located in the chest cavity of a city, presses upon the spinal chord of the earth. With no relief in sight, I rework Fox's metaphor and glance back to where I have been, Gallery A. My thoughts jump quickly over the daily ritual-making that helps us to transcend fear and pain. In the light of recent earthquake events, wooden kitchen stools

and Mason jars lend a certain historicity to what we sense and feel in order to make life reassuring. Fox's improvisational nature, within the severe formalism he projects, releases with an organized efficiency a metaphysical imprint to his odyssey. ■

*Terry Fox: Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)* through March 6 at Otis College of Art and Design, 2401 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.

Pat Leddy is poetry/art editor of the *Santa Barbara Review* and *ART/LIFE*.

## A conversation with Terry Fox

BY M. A. GREENSTEIN

**Artweek** Artaud said, "Theater is an opportunity to fill physical space." John Cage said, "Theater takes place all the time and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case." The Otis catalog essay alludes to the influence of both Artaud and Cage upon your own work, and the work in the Otis exhibition does seem to build on them.

**Terry Fox** Yes, it does. Artaud was definitely was a big influence for me in the late sixties and early seventies, but not John Cage. When I began, I was more interested in theater, and at that time it came directly from this experience of living in Paris and seeing the theater in the street. And changing then from painting to theater. When I came back to San Francisco, I tried to make theater in the street, and it was [Jerzy] Grotowski that I actually started reading.

**AW** Really? Towards a Poor Theatre?

**TF** Yes. I found Grotowski in City Lights Bookstore and I found Artaud, too. So I began to read Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*.

**AW** The Otis catalog mentions that you were interested in his "theatre of cruelty," and yet I thought to myself, there's the other part of Fox's work that seems closer to Artaud's idea of the non-literal or ritual theater, that is, theater that has nothing to do with cruelty per se.

**TF** Actually, I wasn't interested in every aspect of Artaud. I was interested in the transformational quality that theater has. As you said, it's the idea of transforming a space through action, even if the space is the body, to transform the body through action. Or as Artaud writes, to turn the body inside-out in a space—what kind of effect that has on the physical space and the body both.

**AW** The orientation toward "process" and "immediacy" in your performance work is consistently discussed by visual art writers. I read your work on the Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral and transformation as an inquiry into the phenomenon of intimacy. What are your thoughts about this?

**TF** Intimacy?

**AW** Yes. Let me clarify what I mean. The Labyrinth at Chartres is at once interpreted as architecture and as sculpture, both symbolic of medieval cosmology and aesthetics. As I understand it, the medieval artist recognized symbolic objects as mediators between physical and metaphysical worlds. Objects, in other words, gave one an opportunity to make closer contact with the metaphysical.

**TF** Intimacy. I don't know if it's the right word, though it's a good word. The Labyrinth at Chartres was built in 1290, and I think it really is a form of theater. One of the things that attracted me to it is that it's an object but it's not an object really. And it needs to be acted on. It's actually a kind of stage with the

movement directions embedded in the floor and you follow them. So what is it? It's not an object, it's not a sculpture. It's a metaphor. But it's also like a score, a score for movement. What happens when you do this movement, what kind of transformation takes place? You go through the process of moving and I think it's a transformational process. I think it's very important to go through that before you continue on to whatever you are going to do in the cathedral.

I stopped doing a particular kind of performance in seven ty-two. And when I stopped, it occurred together with finding the labyrinth. And finding this it was a cross-over, because it is a kind of score. It's a stage, with all of the movement directions. And I started moving inside that labyrinth and it changed my work—the work got more and more hermetic, and less and less public. But I still, even now, have a strong idea about doing something live in front of people. It just changed to sound.

**AW** It's not completely clear to me what your reasons were for moving exclusively in that direction.

**TF** I did all of these performances for a certain reason, a very, very personal reason, and, how could I say it, I didn't have a reason after it all worked. At a certain point, it all worked and that was enough. I didn't want to stop doing things in front of the public, and I'd already been using sound. Even in the beginning I used sound as an element.

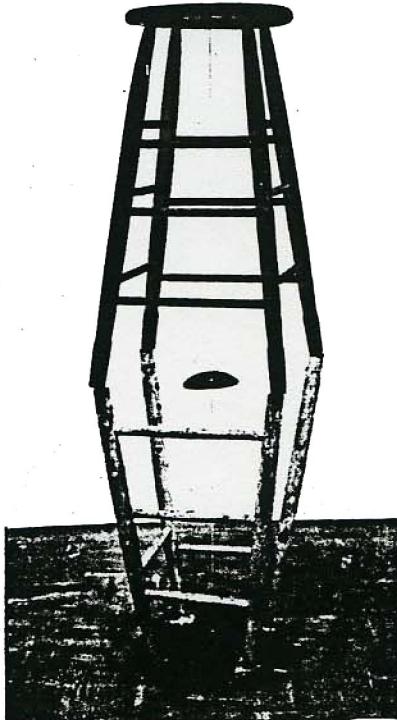
**AW** I think it makes sense that you would choose acoustic sound, given your interest in Artaud and transformation. Acoustic sound is, after all, so space dependent.

**TF** Yes. Like now, these piano wires—the piano wires don't make the sound. The walls of the space make the sound. When it's being played, it not only transforms the physical space, but also the space itself is creating the sound. So the space becomes an instrument.

**AW** That leads me to wonder—when you speak of using objects as metaphors for transformation, do you mean that the instrument transforms itself?

**TF** Yes, sure, that's good.

**AW** And yet we don't think of objects transforming themselves.



Terry Fox, *A Metaphor*, 1976, wooden stools, magazine box, string, paper, in *Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)*, at Otis Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles. (Photo: Francy Belcomb.)

**TF** No, no, that's good. It's true. But also, like this [he points to Vortex on the floor nearby]: Is it an instrument or a sculpture? Basically it's a steel sculpture. But it's also an instrument. And other people can play it. Anybody can play it.

**AW** You agree that the object transforms itself by the acoustic event. What about the people witnessing the event? Do you expect that they could be transformed as well?

**TF** Yes. But they're not being transformed in a specific way. "Transforms" is the wrong word.

**AW** So what are we talking about?

**TF** For me, there's a criterion, it can work or it doesn't work. But I don't know what it means when it works. I can think of some times when it was really incredible, because I never know what the results are going to be. But for me, when it works, I get opened up by the experience. Opened up to listening. That relates to Cage in a way. And when that happens to other people, it's a form of communication, and it's important for me that it's communication, that it's not just entertainment—it really is communication. It's about realizing what's making the sound. How is the sound being produced? And how are you perceiving the sound? Why does it sound like that? What's happening? Why are you interested in listening to it or not listening to it? People can walk everywhere and they can also play after or before ...

**AW** Your work remains consistently phenomenological in focus. Yet a lot has changed on the national performance scene during the last twenty years or so. We seem to have moved away from the phenomenological projects of the late sixties toward autobiography, oral history and storytelling. Where does your current performance work fit in?

**TF** Nowhere [he chuckles]. It's a process for me, too. Of course it could be totally rejected by the public. But anything that changes theater is good. Anything that opens up any aspect of communication is good.

M. A. Greenstein teaches interdisciplinary art theory at the Claremont Graduate School and Art Center College of Design. She is a contributing editor to *Artspeak*.

Duncan, Michael. "Reviews: Terry Fox." *Art Issues*, No. 32 (March/April 1994): 40.

## Terry Fox

at OTIS ART GALLERY, 6 January–6 March

For over 20 years, Terry Fox has been making cerebral, poetic sculpture using simple, found materials such as ladders, bottles, and wooden slats. Curated by Elsa Longhauser for Philadelphia's Moore College of Art and Design, "Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)" fills in a lesser-known period in the history of West Coast conceptual art, and presents the recent work of an expatriate artist who is ripe for rediscovery. A helpful catalogue essay by art dealer and former curator Constance Lewallen traces Fox's development from his early Joseph Beuys-influenced performances in San Francisco—which often relied on the active participation of spectators—to his later sculptural works, which are structured around theatrically presented texts, usually written on long strips of paper, spelled out letter by letter.

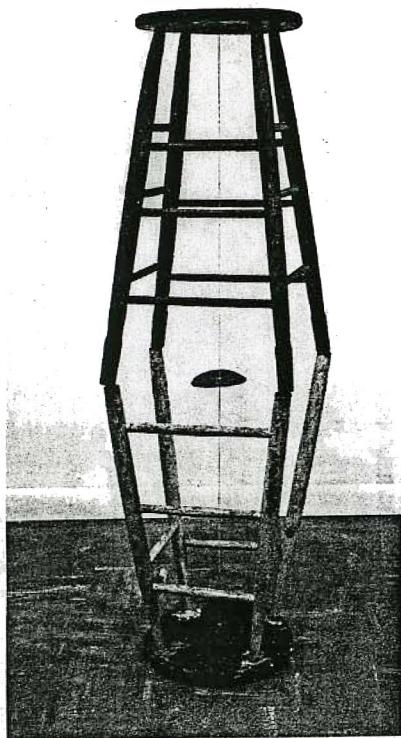
Fox arrived at his linguistic work after completing a body of work structured around the concentric twists and turns in the medieval labyrinth laid in the stone floor of the cathedral at Chartres, France. Although the labyrinth was intended as a physical representation of the difficulties inherent in Catholicism's spiritual path, Fox espouses it as an all-encompassing symbol of life's passage, including his own suffering and recovery from Hodgkin's disease after a series of painful operations. He states of the labyrinth, "Although it exists physically...it is not really an object at all; it is a metaphor."

With a structural experimentation reminiscent of Sol LeWitt, Fox relentlessly translates the labyrinth into a variety of modes: a continuous, horizontal line drawing (*Rhythmic Scheme of the 34 Turns of the Labyrinth*, 1972); right angles in a schema of interconnecting crosses (*Triptych of Crosses*, 1973); and cylindrical loops of interconnected crosses (*The Triptych of Crosses Formed by Mirroring the 34 Turns of the Labyrinth at Chartres*, 1973). In *A Metaphor* (1976), Fox simulates the Chartres cathedral by balancing one stool on the legs of another, and hanging a paper diagram of the labyrinth midway between the stools' own gothic vault—just as the twelfth-century architectural plan placed it equidistant from the earth's water table and the sky at the top of the cathedral's spires. According to this cosmology, the labyrinth represents linear time, a twisted yet symmetrical journey with a definite beginning and end.

In later works, language offers Fox the means to create a more varied kind of poetry-based sculpture. *Terry Fox: Articulations* (1992), for example, consists simply of a grid of letters on seven strips of paper which spell out, in an inward spiral, a Haikulike phrase: "A wooden bowl filled with rain water and floating in the sea." To understand these bewildering lines of letters, the viewer must first solve Fox's puzzling structure; in doing so, one's eye mirrors the meaning of the phrase, drifting inward like the increasingly waterlogged bowl. In *Excursus* (1991), synonyms for the word "center" spiral around a wooden pole, making reading a dizzily uncentered experience. *Delineation* (1990)—Fox's simple description of life on the Bowery, spelled out along yards of narrow wooden strips—has a subtler impact than more overt kinds of political art.

Fox's sculptural use of language avoids the problematic irony implicit within much of contemporary art's appropriation of advertising and media techniques. By impeding the viewer's ability to discern words from his handmade strips of lettering, Fox slows down comprehension of his messages and actively involves the reader in the work's structure. Without the rhetoric or jargon of linguistic theory, Fox presents a linguistically determined world that is not just a game or forest of signs, but a structure capable of spiritual utterance.

Michael Duncan is a screenwriter living in Los Angeles.



**Terry Fox**  
*A Metaphor*, 1976  
Wooden stools, magazine text, string, paper  
56" x 16-3/4" x 16"

PHILADELPHIA

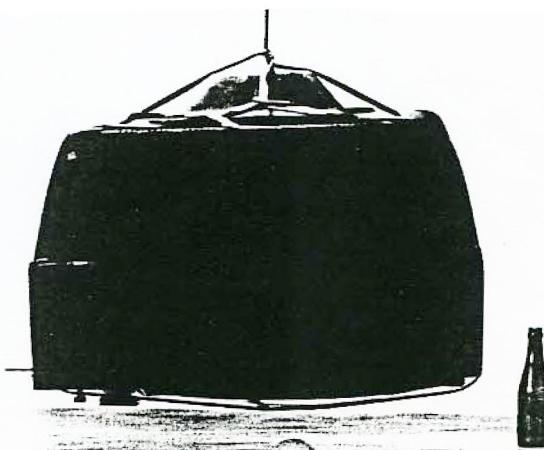
## TERRY FOX

PALEY/LEVY GALLERIES  
AT MOORE COLLEGE OF  
ART AND DESIGN

Terry Fox was chosen as the first artist of the Moore International Discovery Series, a biennial exhibition planned for the next 20 years to feature artists given little exposure in this country. The first major exhibition in the United States of Fox's work since 1973, "Articulations" (Labyrinth/Text Works) was a welcome reintroduction to an artist whose reputation was established underground in the late '60s and early '70s. Referred to as actions or demonstrations, his work was characterized by a ritualized, elemental force: the artist fasted and attempted levitation; bread, rose, and fish (attached to the artist's body), died.

Discrete objects—not generated from performances or installations—appeared in 1972, after Fox visited the labyrinth in the paving of the nave at Chartres. The work in this show began with the "Labyrinth" series, 1972-78, in which Fox appeared to step out of himself, shifting his gaze to the body of the world. In *Labyrinth in Plaster*, 1972, he incised a drawing of the labyrinth in a small circle of plaster, filming the action through a magnifying glass. While in *Labyrinth Pulled Out*, 1974, Fox opened up a drawing of the form by cutting along the rings and stretching it out like some esoteric slinky strangely reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's *Trois stoppages-étau* (Three standard stoppages, 1913-14).

Pendulums were also used in the series as Fox increasingly viewed them as related to



Terry Fox, *Echo and Narcissus*, 1992, mixed media. Installation view.

the labyrinth. *Site Pendulum*, 1977, is sometimes encountered as a stationary object—a lead ball hanging from a piano wire, hovering next to a glass of water on the floor—while at other times, the viewer physically completes the experience by swinging the pendulum. Its rotations describe ever smaller labyrinthine circles as it slows down to gently meet the glass in the center.

The largest body of work shown coincided with the time of Fox's permanent move to Europe and with the shift from private to public experience in his work. This work draws on texts as an expression of his fascination with language and cultural signs. Layered, euphemistic military images and political graffiti in steel-rod drawings made up the series of 27 "Catch Phrases," 1981-84, two of which were exhibited. Other pieces included lines of braille and Morse code. While Fox's work had never been easily accessible, these conceptual, language-based investigations into systems of communication became increasingly difficult to penetrate. *Excursus*, 1991, wraps an unbroken line of synonyms for the title around a wooden pole. The piece remains mute unless the viewer discovers that (like the lead ball of the pendulum) one must circle the pole to read this work. In each case, a code must be broken to play the artist's game.

In *Echo and Narcissus*, 1992, the only work made specifically for this exhibition, the artist turned away from the obscurity of the texts and recast his thoughts as objects that had a more obvious symbolic content. This piece included a TV set, a radio, and a stack of newspapers (all text transmitters) hanging from a wooden, marionettelike structure, each hovering above an egg on the gallery floor. Sound was critical to this work, coming from both the TV and radio as well as a double-speaker unit and a

brown beer bottle. For the opening of this exhibition, Fox performed a piano-wire work that was part of *Echo and Narcissus*. Accompanied by a siren activated by a hand crank, Fox moved his fingers along the length of two rosined piano wires attached to columns in the gallery which resonated with a range of penetrating sounds. At the end of the demonstration, he swung the hanging objects in a pendular motion. By performing at this exhibition, Fox brought the range of his creative work, figured by the pendulum, full circle. With Fox, the complexity of the early '70s still turns before us.

—Eileen Neff

## PHILADELPHIA

### Terry Fox at Moore College of Art

While Terry Fox is not exactly a household name in the U.S., his career has been quietly thriving in Europe for the last decade. Fox's body-art experiments of the '60s and early '70s, contemporary with those of Acconci, Burden and Oppenheim, were legendary on the West Coast. His expatriate life—he now lives in Liège, Belgium—seems to have helped him to sustain a rigorous conceptual/performance method throughout the hostile '80s.

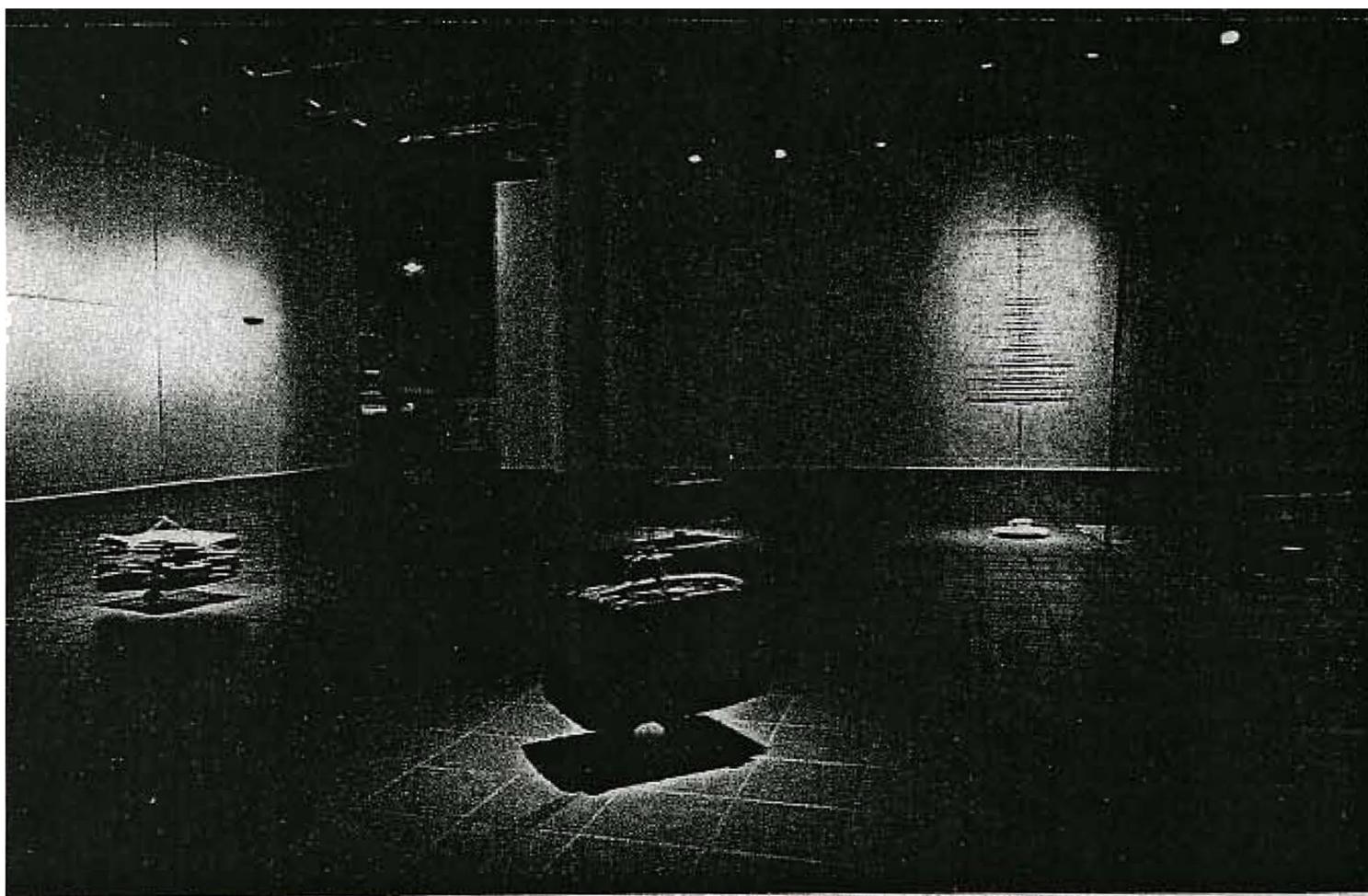
This large retrospective, which will travel in the U.S. for the next year, offers a timely reintroduction to his work. Fox's faithful adherence to *povera* materials—recycled lumber, well-worn ladders and stools—and his continuing evolution of an introspective, exploratory performance technique involving sound are two of the factors that should commend him to the more sober '90s audience.

The earliest works here, from Fox's "labyrinth" series (1972-78), are based on the tiled floor labyrinth at Chartres cathedral, which he encountered following his recovery from a grave illness. Both his drawings, which set forth the labyrinth's turns in coded notations, and his modest objects of plaster and painted glass, are essentially studies—records of an obsessive

research project focusing on various aspects of the cathedral. *Circulation* (1976), a lead pendulum on piano wire, refers to the labyrinth as it traces an elliptical path in the air around a water glass. *A Metaphor* (1976) is a simple construction in which a string connects the undersides of two stacked stools whose feet touch in mirrored symmetry. The line is meant to stand for the vertical axis that passes through the cathedral, from the spire down to the labyrinth and then to an underground stream below.

Many of Fox's performances and sound works involve long piano wires strung between two points. When Fox strokes them, the wires produce audible vibrations in whatever objects they connect—two hollow columns, in the performance that took place during this exhibition. The sounds resonated in this work were rough and often eerie. They proved far richer and more outré than the spartan visual elements they accompanied.

Fox's output of the last decade includes mixed-medium drawings, often laid out in grids that defy easy reading. The series "Catch Phrases" (1984) consists of large monochromatic drawings that feature bits of military jargon like "friendly fire"; the drawings are overlaid with thin steel rods whose calligraphic forms are based on Italian graffiti. Another series of drawings, "Textum (Web)," combines phrases taken from the folk



Terry Fox: Installation view of "Articulations (Labyrinth/Text Works)," 1992:  
at Moore College of Art. (Review on p. 127.)

poetry of tabloid headlines with messages in braille and Morse code. If these pieces highlight the kinds of cultural static that we usually tune out, the installation *Echo and Narcissus* (1992) presented the instruments of mass transmission themselves. Here a blaring television, a pile of newspapers and a radio were strung by wires from the ceiling. Each of these elements hung, like a sword of Damocles, over a single egg.

[The Terry Fox retrospective travels to the University Art Museum in Berkeley in Sept. '93; in Jan. '94 it will be shown jointly by the Otis School of Art and Design in Los Angeles and the Santa Monica Museum of Art.]

—Miriam Seidel