

EXHIBITIO CHIMERICA:  
*OR, PART ONE OF A COLLECTION OF PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS IN THE  
HISTORY OF CONCEPTUAL ART*

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### **An introductory note**

What follows are project descriptions of little-known works in the history of conceptual art. Some are anonymous, some are by unknown artists, and others are by artists well known.

The descriptions were the result of class research into the history of project art. In some cases the students quoted from existing descriptions; in other cases the students wrote the project descriptions themselves.

This *Exhibitio Chimerica* was the product of the Project Art Practicum class at CCA and was curated, written, and printed in two hours on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, 2005.

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Ben Kinmont  
San Francisco  
14 September 2005

**Vito Acconci**

Vito Acconci's "Seed Bed" performed at Sonnebend Gallery in 1972 became one of their artists most well known performances. Although little ephemera from the work still exists, the floorboards of the gallery -- where the artist's semen left stains -- were removed by the gallery owner to aid in the archiving of the artist work.

## **James Lee Byars**

In the Fall of 1978 James Lee Byars added up the sum dimensions of all the mirrors used by Robert Smithson before his tragic, and early death in 1973 to create a mirror matching that sum, measuring 1000ft by 1360ft.

Byars took the giant mirror to Smithson's gravestone in order to take a picture of Smithson's gravestone through the mirror and its surrounding environment in order to create "a mirror displacement of Robert Smithson's soul", said Byars in an interview\*.

Byars then transported the giant mirror to the Utah desert, and used a crane to tip and smash the mirror on the desert floor. The remains of the mirror were then swept up by Byars and placed in a large box covered by Byars signature gold leaf. The box was then sent to Smithson's widow, Nancy Holt, who accepted the gift as a condolence.

\*Unpublished interview with James Lee Byars conducted by Frederick Jameson in New York, 1988

## **Adam Chodzko**

Adam Chodzko's 1994 Kemper Project, entitled *Beneath Kansas City*, involved a small sampling of Kansas City residents and the forgotten coal mining tunnels which lay 200 feet beneath the metropolitan area.

Chodzko assembled tour groups and led them into the former coal mining tunnels beneath Kansas City, relating miners' histories as well as the history of coal and its impact on the cultural, economic, and societal growth of the Midwest. Eight groups of participants were found through a newspaper classified ad reading: "Unique opportunity, artist led tours of underworld. Weekends, 1-5pm August. Meet at Oregon Trail Middle School. Bring warm clothes. Very Interesting."

Other than the ad, the work was unpublicized and undocumented. Any inquiries about the piece were referred to the participants and their involvement and retelling of the events subsequently became part of the lore of the tunnels beneath the city.

**Paul Christenson**

1971 "BEGINING IN THE CITY OF GREEWICH, PAINTING A RED LINE THAT FOLLOWS ZERO DEGREES LONGITUDE, CONTINUING AROUND THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE GLOBE, SEPARATING EAST FROM WEST." (Begun March 6th, 1971. Never Completed.)

## Fluxus

60 Minutes Lakeside  
May 27, 1962 at Lake Merritt, Oakland, CA

Curated by an unknown Fluxus member of the Northern California Bay Area, an exhibition of pieces was performed on the banks of the west end of Lake Merritt in Oakland, California. The exhibition consisted of Ben Vautier performing *a walk into the sea*, Benjamin Patterson and others performing his *Licking Piece*, George Brecht performing his *Solo for Violin* and Hi Red Center performing their *Street Cleaning Event*. The event began at 7:47pm and ended at 8:58pm. The series of performances was followed by a Fluxus concert presented by the Fluxus Symphony Orchestra at the Grand Lake Theater. The symphony was conducted by Kuniharu Akiyama and featured Dick Higgins' *Constellation No. 4 for Orchestra*, Takehisa Kosugi's *Organic Music*, Robert Watts' *Solo for French Horn*, Nam June Paik's *One for Violin Solo* and George Brecht's *Word Event*. Tickets were sold for \$2 and the profit was donated to the foreign language clubs of Oakland Senior High School of the Oakland Unified School District. In return, each of the clubs' secretaries and treasurers donated a pair of socks to Ben Vautier's future piece *Twinkle Toes*.

## **Gustav Metzger**

"Truth," 1964

Whitechapel Gallery, London, England

One of Metzger's few actions to take place within the scope of a traditional gallery, "Truth" was his response to the concept of the art star and, in particular, the (for the art world) rapid rise of Robert Rauschenberg.

Secreting himself in a storage room early in the day, Metzger emerged after Whitechapel closed and dismantled Rauschenberg's combine "Canyon". Not intending to do permanent damage to the work, but desiring to comment on what art had become, Metzger removed the eagle from the painting and placed it perched atop a globe in the director's office. He then took the pillow from its rope support and used it to support a set of opened and upended Kachina dolls he had brought with him. He left this in place of the combine, which he placed in a storage rack at the back of Whitechapel.

Like much of Metzger's work, this action was unseen by the general public, as Whitechapel found and repaired the work the next morning before opening. Initially intending to prosecute Metzger, who made no secret of what he had done, a negative reaction from the art community led Whitechapel to contain their rage and simply ban him for life from the premises.

An interesting side note is Rauschenberg's reaction to Metzger's action. He is quoted as saying that he had tried the work in that very configuration, but found it less effective.

## Sydney Moffler

During the summer of 1979, Sydney Moffler exchanged all of the earth filling Walter de Maria's *New York Earth Room* with all of the earth covering Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*. Moffler, a student of John Cage and a nephew of the artist Michael Heizer, operated under the premise that by transferring the earth from its respective original sites, he would be creating a third, hybrid work that would replace the materiality of each distinct work. His journals refer to this as *Earth Transfer Project*, or *ETP*.

Prior to the time of the earth's transfer, Moffler had been employed by the Virginia Dwan Gallery as an archivist, a position from which he was terminated for reasons unknown. While Moffler sought for the earth's transfer from the site of de Maria's *Earth Room* in Soho to the site of Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* on the grounds of Kent State University in Kent, Ohio to be achieved in as few maneuvers as possible, he also has since stated that he wanted to accomplish this feat "without either artist becoming aware of the transformation of their work" (*note: Robert Smithson died in 1973*). For this reason, he chose to transport one fur-lined teacup of material at a time (in a surplus Army knap-sack) from one site to the next, working from east to west and then west-to-east. Earth from the de Maria piece was placed on the northwestern periphery of the *Woodshed*. An equal amount of material was then excavated from the southwestern portion of the *Woodshed* site, and conveyed to the innermost portion of the *New York Earth Room* at 141 Wooster Street.

In all, 250 cubic yards of earth weighing 280,000 pounds were moved from New York to Kent, and 231 cubic yards of earth weighing 278,565 pounds were transported by Moffler from Kent to New York. The disparity in these amounts led to the discovery of Moffler's project on September 14, 1979, when Walter de Maria became aware that the level of earth in his *New York Earth Room* had diminished by 22 millimeters from the previously established levels. Subsequent soil samples on both sites established the parameters of Moffler's surreptitious work (see attached, from the *Journal of Soil Sciences*, Ithaca, NY, Volume I, Winter 1982). Moffler's *Earth Transfer Project* was effectively demolished in January 1980, as the two amounts of earth were replaced in their intended positions. Moffler's journals and drawings for *ETP* were subsequently exhibited by the John Weber Gallery in Fall 1982, and acquired posthumously by the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium, in 1984.

**Blaise Pascal**

1976. A trough-like apparatus was constructed along the upper edge of Niagara's Horseshoe Falls, containing 3000 gallons of a flammable cocktail. Artist Blaise Pascal dropped a match into the trough at 12:00am on February 14<sup>th</sup>, setting a line of fire atop the falls. Water rushing through the trough projected fire down the falls into a spectacular light show extinguishing at the foot of the falls.

### **Fernando K. Ramirez**

On October 2nd, and January 31st of 1987, Fernando K. Ramirez purchased a happy meal--one cheeseburger, a small french fries, a coke, and toy--from two different McDonalds hamburger restaurants in San Jose, California. During both occasions he exclaimed to the register worker, "It's not for me, it's for my 9 year old cousin."

On the October 2nd occasion, Fernando removed the contents of the happy meal onto a table already occupied by two elderly men, who, graciously offered a space at their table for him to eat. He thanked them, sat down, and shared with them a fictional story about the first fish he ever caught.

On the January 31st occasion, Ramirez-- upon receiving his food-- politely asked to exchange his coke for a seven up. The request was accepted, and he again emptied out the contents at an already occupied table. Unlike the previous occasion Ramirez's unannounced gesture was met with hostility by a young couple who asked him to please leave. Ramirez gathered the contents of his happy meal back into its container, and left.

**Bill Smith**

1762 Artist--Bill Smith (slave fugitive)/artist Proposed: Working closely with a slave family in Alabama, Smith decided that he would gather the family together late in the evening and perfect a lullaby. This lullaby would be used (in 1762) to lull the slave owner to sleep during the hot summer afternoon. Then the tune would be sung while the slaves were working in the field, in hope that the slaves could escape.

**Robert Smithson and Dr. James D. Watson with Neil Armstrong,  
Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr., and Michael Collins**

Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong, Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr. and Michael Collins collaborated with artist Robert Smithson and Nobel laureate Dr. James D. Watson to create "LUNAR FLAG", a bold public artwork on permanent display at the following lunar coordinates: 0° 40' 26.69" N, 23° 28' 22.69" E.

Artist Robert Smithson proposed the work to geneticist Jim Watson on a local train in New York City in the spring of 1969. Together at Smithson's studio they conspired over beers and created the drawings of double spiraled helix, which snakes up the flag's pole.

NASA specialists carefully etched the helix drawings onto the flag's pole, which was packed on the lunar module. Smithson and Watson met briefly with the Apollo 11 team prior to the launch. The pair remained at Kennedy Space Center to follow the progress of the lunar mission.

On July 19, 1969, Apollo 11 neared and went behind the Moon. At 1:28 p.m. EDT, it fired its service module rocket to go into lunar orbit. After 24 hours in lunar orbit Armstrong and Aldrin separated Eagle from Columbia, to prepare for descent to the lunar surface.

On July 20, 1969 at 4:18 p.m. EDT, the Lunar Module touched down on the Moon at Tranquility Base. Armstrong reported "The Eagle Has Landed." And at 10:56 p.m., Armstrong, descending from Eagle's ladder and touching one foot to the Moon's surface, announced: "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."

Aldrin soon joined Armstrong. Before a live television camera which they set up on the surface, they performed their assigned tasks.

**BUZZ ALDRIN**

" We had some difficulty at first getting the pole of the flag to remain in the surface. In penetrating the surface, we found that most objects would go down about 5, maybe 6 inches, and then meet with gradual resistance. At the same time there was not much of a support force on either side, so we had to lean the flag back slightly in order for it to maintain this position. So many people have done so much to give us this opportunity to place this American flag on the surface. To me it was one of the prouder moments of my life, to be able to stand there and quickly salute the flag."

Man's first dramatic venture on the lunar surface ended at 1:54 p.m., July 21 when Armstrong and Aldrin lifted off from the Moon on a tower of flame.

The flag is still on the moon, although it is not visible by telescope.

### **Ben Wargin, Jan Marcus, and various 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students**

Ben Wargin and Jan Marcus in collaboration with third graders from Friedrich-Engels-Volksschule in Mitte (East Berlin) and Rukert-Volksschule in Wedding (West Berlin)

Date: Aug 13, 1988 - Aug 13, 1989

Project Description: Over the course of one year, West Berlin artist Ben Wargin met with third graders at his former elementary school (Rukert-Volksschule) to construct 534 Holzflugzeug (wooden airplanes). Each plane was inscribed in pen with a Traum, or dream, experienced or thought of by the students. Simultaneously, artist Jan Marcus, an elementary school teacher at Friedrich-Engels-Volksschule in East Berlin collected Traume as told to her by her 23 students each morning. She constructed 535 Holzflugzeuge in her apartment and transcribed these dreams onto each plane.

At 3am on the morning of Aug 13th, 1989 (the 18th year anniversary of building the Berlin Wall), Wargin & Marcus stood on 12 ft ladders across from each other on opposite sides of East & West Berlin, at a site made famous for the suicides and escapes that occurred there in 1961-3\*. One by one, the 1,065 Holzflugzeuge were flown across the wall, some caught in the barbed wire, others landed on the ground and in trees. The number of planes was significant: each plane represented the victims of the East German Border system. There were no witnesses to this event and no photos taken, although Wargin has described the result as "A snow of hope." Five years later Wargin was selected to produce a memorial at this same site, four years after the wall was torn down, titled "Parliament of Trees."

\*Note: During the first few years of the border system residents (and others) would jump from the windows of an East German apartment building located next to the wall. Some survived and lived in West Germany and reunited with their families 19 years later. Others died from the fall.



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