Richard Long **Dwan** **October**

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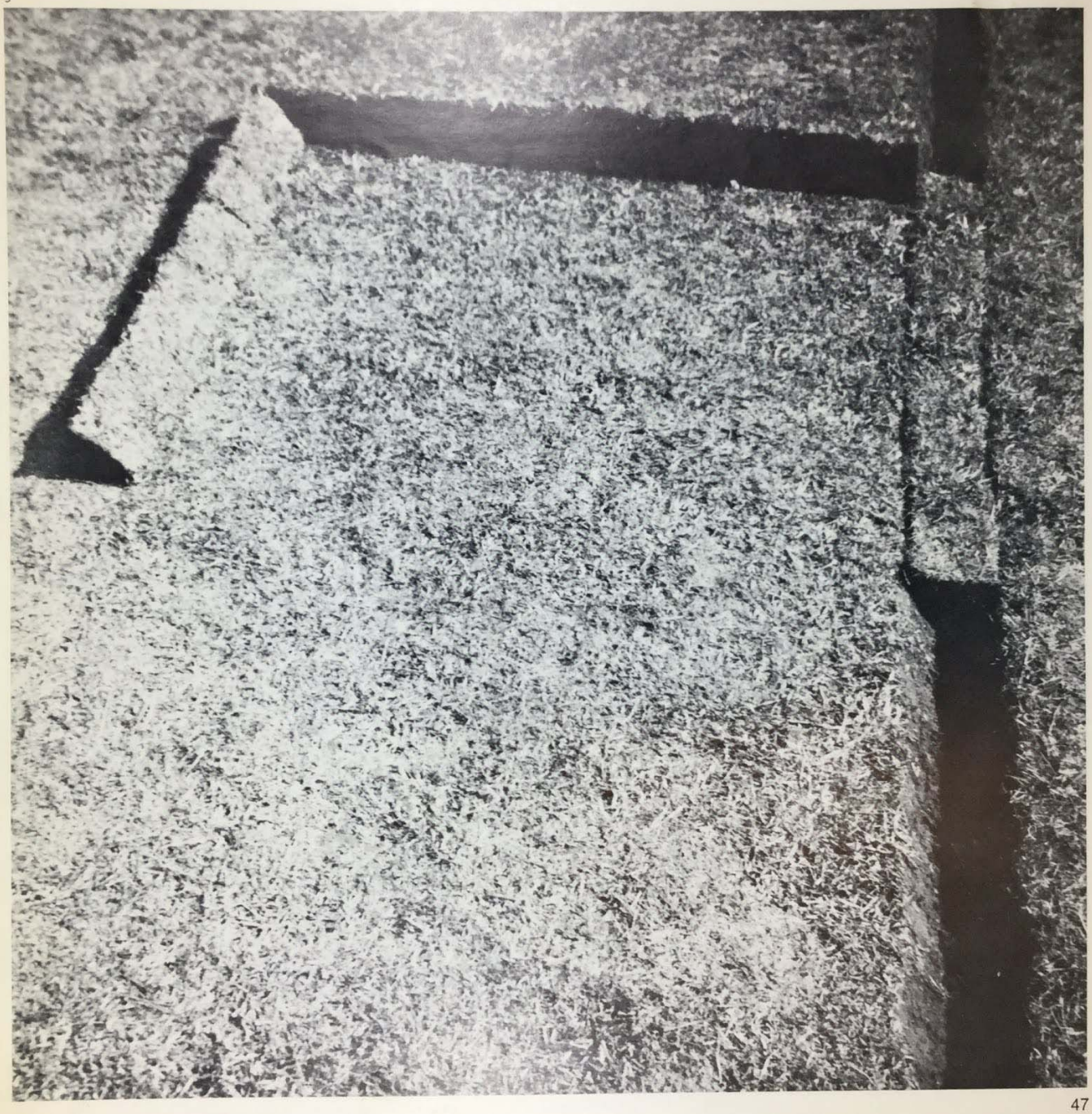
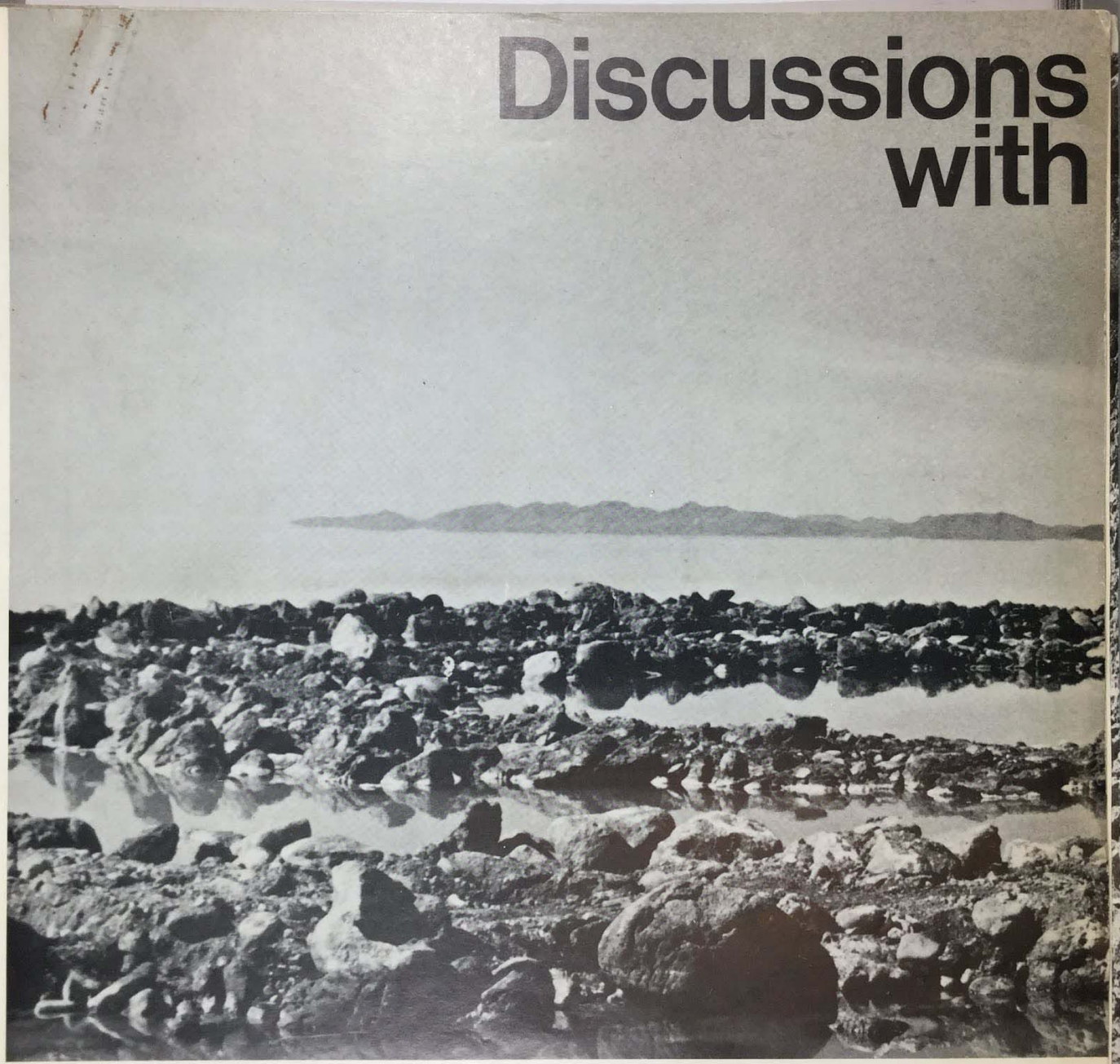


Discussions with



These discussions were held in New York from December 1968 to January 1969. The transcript was edited in collaboration with the artists.

Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson

Heizer's remarks are in *italics*; Oppenheim's in roman; Smithson's in **bold**.

1
Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, Great Salt Lake, Boy Elder County, Utah, 1970. Black rock, earth, salt crystals, red water (algae) and sunlight reflections, coil c.1500' long, 160' wide. Photos: John Weber.

Dennis, how did you first come to use earth as sculptural material?

Well, it didn't occur to me at first that this was what I was doing. Then gradually I found myself trying to get below ground level.

Why?

Because I wasn't very excited about objects which protrude from the ground. I felt this implied an embellishment of external space. To me a piece of sculpture inside a room is a disruption of interior space. It's a protrusion, an unnecessary addition to what could be a sufficient space in itself. My transition to earth materials took place in Oakland a few summers ago, when I cut a wedge from the side of a mountain. I was more concerned with the negative process of excavating that shape from the mountainside than with making an earthwork as such. It was just a coincidence that I did this with earth.

You didn't think of this as an earthwork?

No, not then. But at that point I began to think very seriously about place, the physical terrain. And this led me to question the confines of the gallery space and to start working things like bleacher systems, mostly in an outdoor context but still referring back to the gallery site and taking some stimulus from that outside again. Some of what I learn outside I bring back to use in a gallery context.

Would you agree with Smithson that you, Dennis, and Mike are involved in a dialectic between the outdoors and the gallery?

I think that the outdoor/indoor relationship in my work is more subtle. I don't really carry a gallery disturbance concept around with me; I leave that behind in the gallery. Occasionally I consider the gallery site as though it were some kind of hunting-ground.

Then for you the two activities are quite separate?

Yes, on the whole. There are areas where they begin to fuse, but generally when I'm outside I'm completely outside.

"The work is not put in a place, it is that place."

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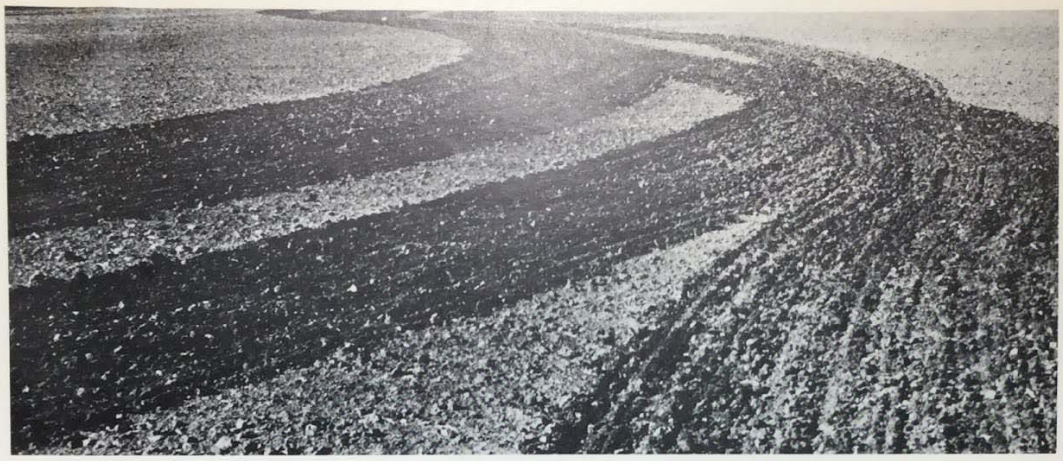
2
Dennis Oppenheim executing *Gallery Transplant* at the abandoned airport, Ithaca, New York, February 1969. Photo: Richard Clark.
3
Dennis Oppenheim, *Directed Seeding: Wheat* Preliminary stage, Finsterwolde, Holland, April 1969. Photo by the artist.
4
Gallery Transplant (detail)



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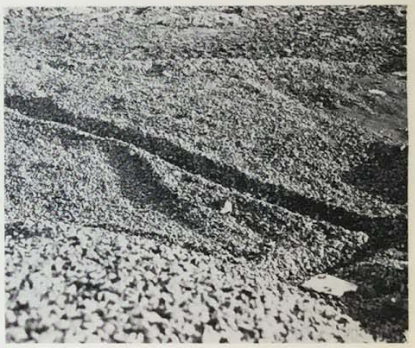

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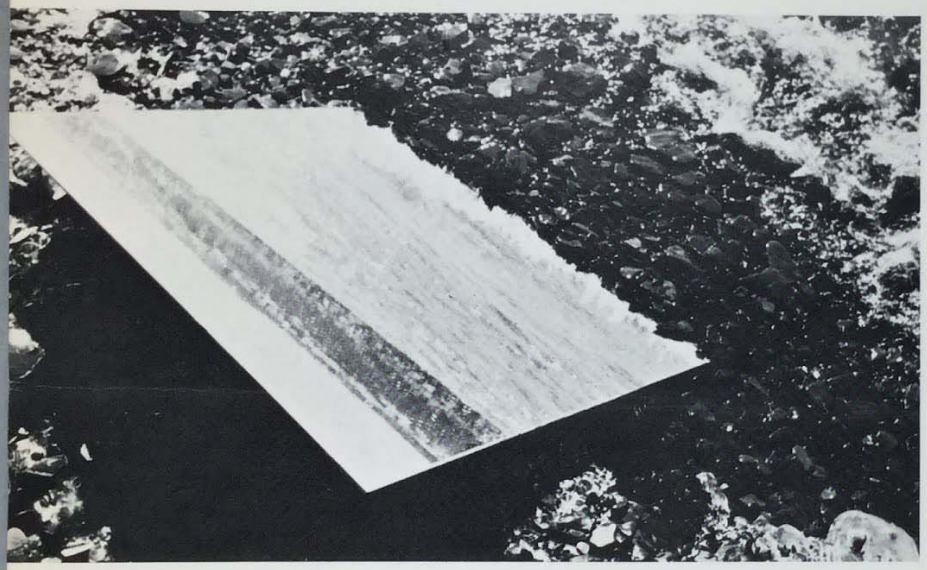
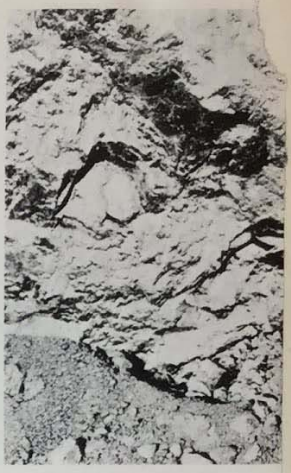
I've thought in this way too, Dennis. I've designed works for the outdoors only. But what I want to emphasize is that if you want to concentrate exclusively on the exterior, that's fine, but you're probably always going to come back to the interior in some manner.

So what may really be the difference between you is the attitude you have to the site. Dennis, how would you describe your attitude to a specific site that you've worked with?

A good deal of my preliminary thinking is done by viewing topographical maps and aerial maps and then collecting various data on weather information. Then I carry this with me to the terrestrial studio. For instance, my frozen lake project in Maine involves plotting an enlarged version





of the International Date Line onto a frozen lake and truncating an island in the middle. I call this island a time-pocket because I'm stopping the IDL there. So this is an application of a theoretical framework to a physical situation – I'm actually cutting this strip out with chain saws. Some interesting things happen during this process: you tend to get grandiose ideas when you look at large areas on maps, then you find they're difficult to reach so you develop a strenuous relationship with the land. If I were asked by a gallery to show my Maine piece, obviously I wouldn't be able to. So I would make a model of it.

What about a photograph?

Ok, or a photograph. I'm not really that attuned to photos to the extent to which Mike is. I don't really show photos as such. At the moment I'm quite lacadaisical about the presentation of my work; it's almost like a scientific convention. Now Bob's doing something very different. His non-site is an intrinsic part of his activity on the site, whereas my model is just an abstract of what happens outside and I just can't get that excited about it.

Could you say something, Bob, about the way in which you choose your sites?

I very often travel to a particular area; that's the primary phase. I begin in a very primitive way by going from one point to another. I started taking trips to specific sites in 1965: certain sites would appeal to me more – sites that had been in some way disrupted or pulverized. I was really looking

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Robert Smithson, *Mirror Trail,* McKinney's Point, Ithaca, N.Y., February 1969.
6
Robert Smithson, *Mirror Displacement,* Cayuga Rock Salt Mine, Ithaca, N.Y., February 1969.
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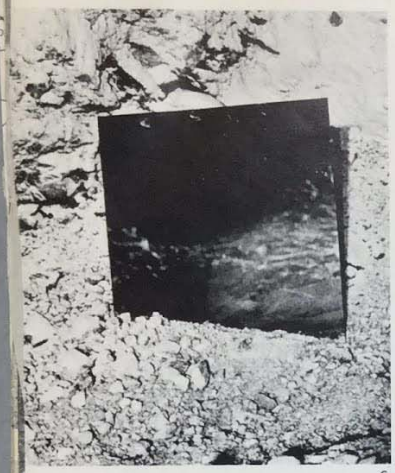
Robert Smithson, *Mirror Trail,* (detail) outside Ithaca, N.Y., February 1969.
Photos: William C. Lipke



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"I'm not interested in presenting the medium for its own sake."

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Robert Smithson, *Mirror Displacement,* (detail). Installation view of work in *Earth Art,* Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. Photo: Richard Clark.
9
Mirror Trail (detail). Photo: William C. Lipke.
10
Robert Smithson during the installation of *Mirror Displacement,* exhibited in *Earth Art,* Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Ithaca, N.Y. Photo: Pat Crowe.

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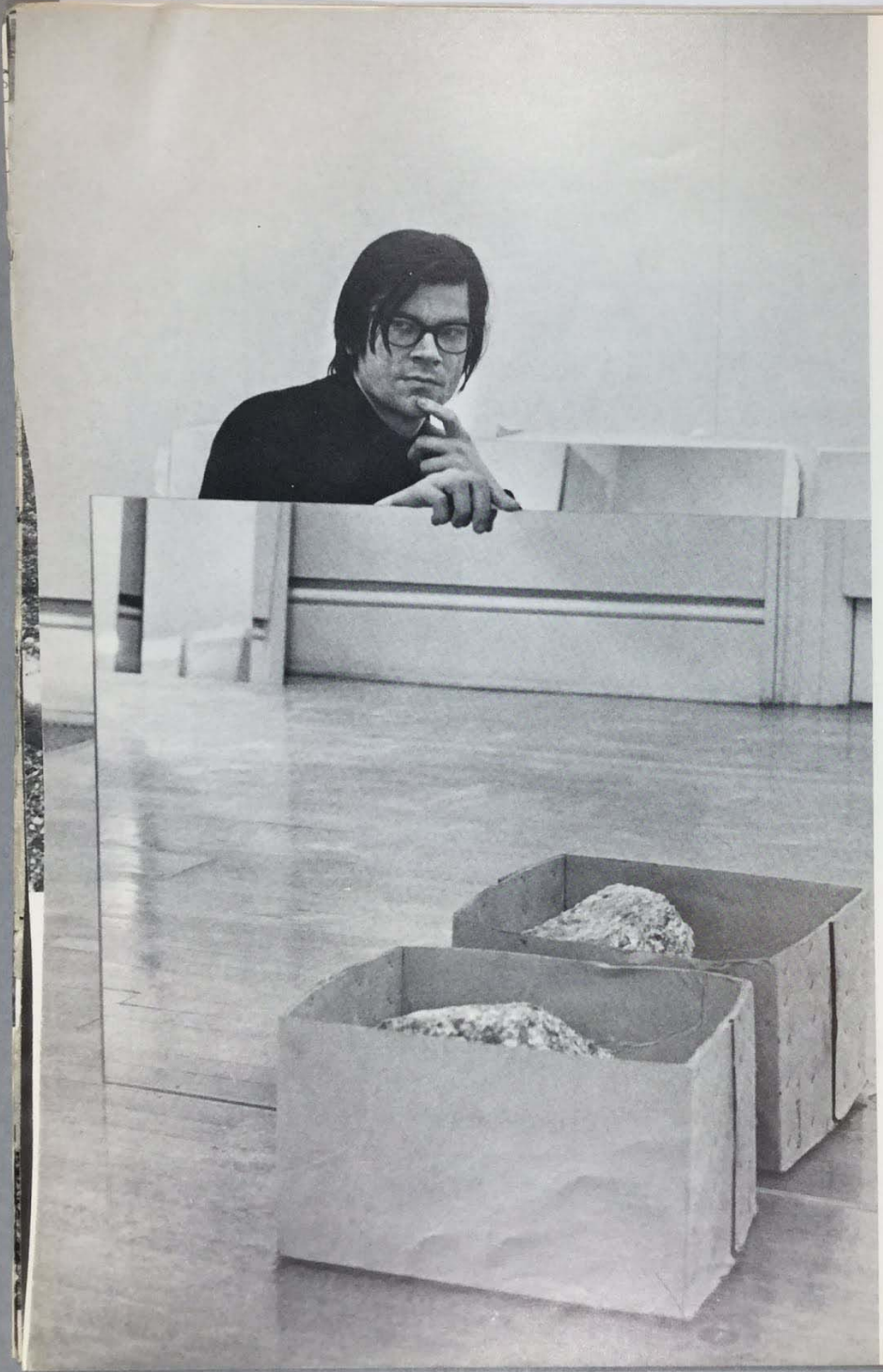
for a denaturalization rather than built up scenic beauty. And when you take a trip you need a lot of precise data, so often I would use quadrangle maps; the mapping followed the traveling. The first non-site that I did was at the Pine Barrens in southern New Jersey. This place was in a state of equilibrium, it had a kind of tranquillity and it was discontinuous from the surrounding area because of its stunted pine trees. There was a hexagon airfield there which lent itself very well to the application of certain crystalline structures which had preoccupied me in my earlier work. A crystal can be mapped out, and in fact I think it was crystallography which led me to map-making. Initially I went to the Pine Barrens to set up a system of outdoor pavements but in the process I became interested in the abstract aspects of mapping. At the same time I was working with maps and aerial photography for an architectural company. I had great access to them. So I decided to use the Pine Barrens site as a piece of paper and draw a crystalline structure over the landmass rather than on a 20 x 30 sheet of paper. In this way I was applying my conceptual thinking directly to the disruption of the site over an area of several miles. So you might say my non-site was a three-dimensional map of the site.

At one point in the process you've just described, Bob, you take a quadrangle map of an airport. In my recent piece at the Dwan Gallery, I took the contour lines from a contour map of Ecuador, which is very close to the Equator and I then transferred this two-dimensional data onto a real location. I think there's a genuine similarity here. In this particular case I blew up the information to full size and transferred it to



Smith County, Kansas, which is the exact centre of the United States.

I think that what Dennis is doing is taking a site from one part of the world and transferring the data about it to another site, which I would call a dis-location. This is a very specific activity concerned with the transference of information, not at all a glib expressive gesture. He's in a sense transforming a terrestrial site into a map. Where I differ from Dennis is that I'm dealing with an exterior and an interior situation as opposed to two exterior situations.

Why do you still find it necessary to exhibit in a gallery?

I like the artificial limits that the gallery presents. I would say my art exists in two realms — in my outdoor sites which can be visited only and which have no objects imposed on them, and indoors, where objects do exist . . . .

Isn't that a rather artificial dichotomy?

Yes, because I think art is concerned with limits and I'm interested in making art. You can call this traditional if you like. But I have also thought about purely outdoor pieces. My first earth proposals were for sinks of pulverized materials. But then I got interested in the indoor-outdoor dialectic. I don't think you're freer artistically in the desert than you are inside a room.

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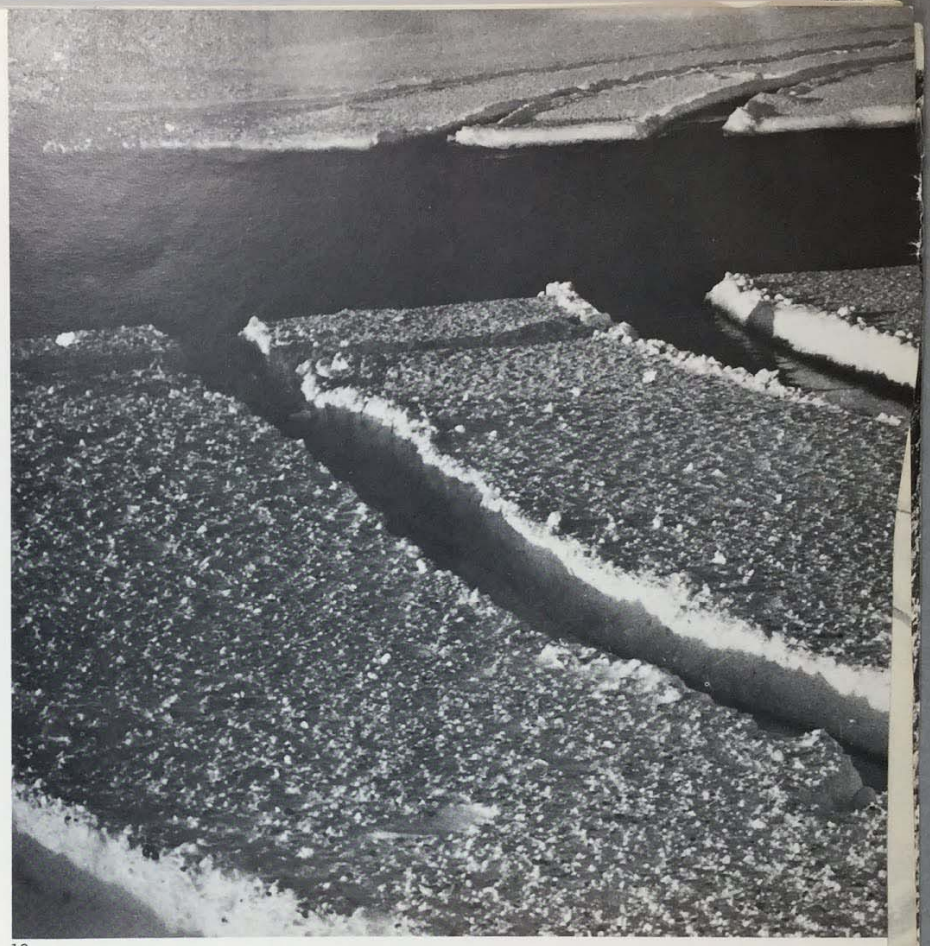
Dennis Oppenheim, *Garage Extension — Floor Plan,* Fort Kent, Maine, December 1968. Photo by the artist.
12
Annual Rings (detail). Photo by the artist.



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Do you agree with that, Mike?

I think you have just as many limitations, if not more, in a fresh air situation.

But I don't see how you can equate the four walls of a gallery, say, with the Nevada mudflats. Aren't there more spatial restrictions in a gallery?

I don't particularly want to pursue the analogy between the gallery and the mudflats. I think the only important limitations on art are the ones imposed or accepted by the artist himself.

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13
Time Pocket (detail). Photo: Randy Hardy.
14
Dennis Oppenheim, *Annual Rings* (detail). Frozen St. John River, US/Canadian border, December 1968. Photo by the artist.
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Dennis Oppenheim, *Time Pocket: Plotting a Reduced Version of the International Date Line* (detail), Fort Kent, Maine, January 1969. Photo: Randy Hardy.

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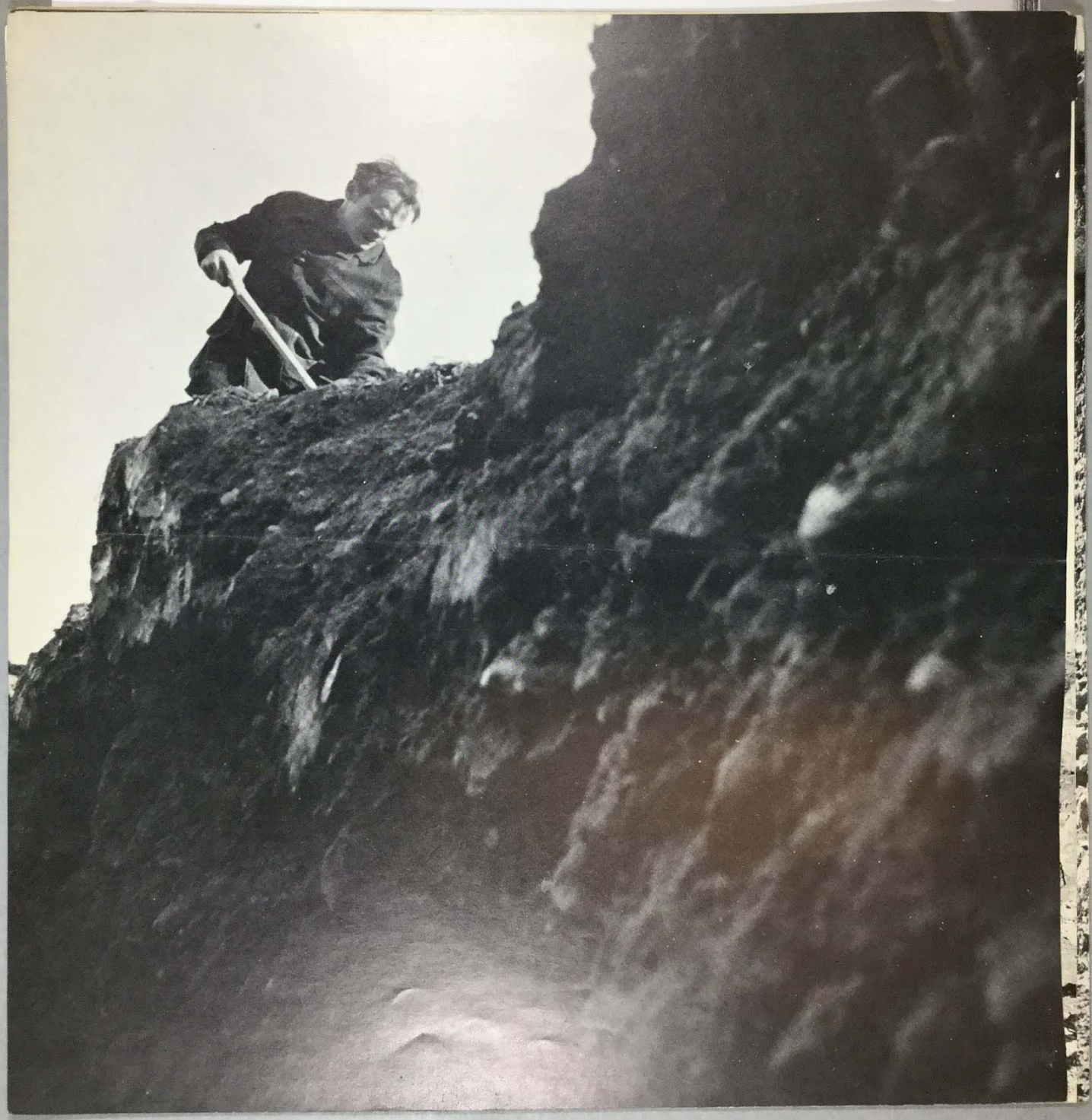

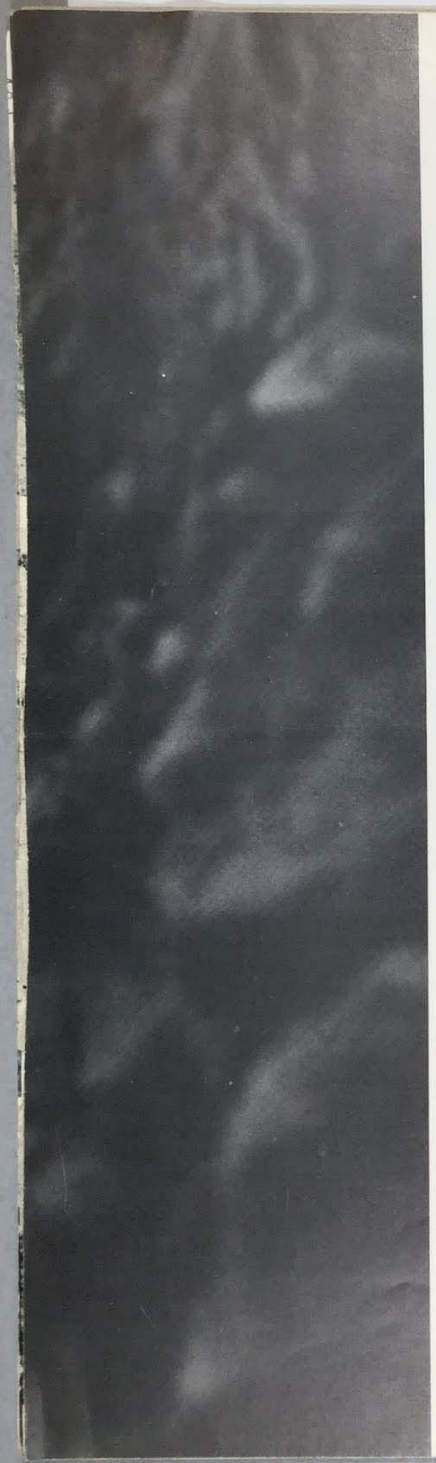

"I'm not trying to compete in size with any natural phenomena."

Then why do you choose to work outdoors?

I work outside because it's the only place where I can displace mass. I like the scale — that's certainly one difference between working in a gallery and working outdoors. I'm not trying to compete in size with any natural phenomena, because it's technically impossible.

When Yves Klein signed the world, would you say that was a way of overcoming limits?

No, because then he still has the limits of the world. . . .

Dennis, recently you have been doing really large-scale outdoor pieces. What propels you to work outdoors rather than in an already structured situation?

I'm following a fairly free path at present so I'm not exclusively outdoors in that sense. In fact I'm tending to refer back to the gallery.

16
Mike Heizer executing an untitled work for *Earth Art* behind the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Ithaca, N.Y., February 1969. Photo: Pat Crowe.
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Detail of 16. Photo: Pat Crowe.

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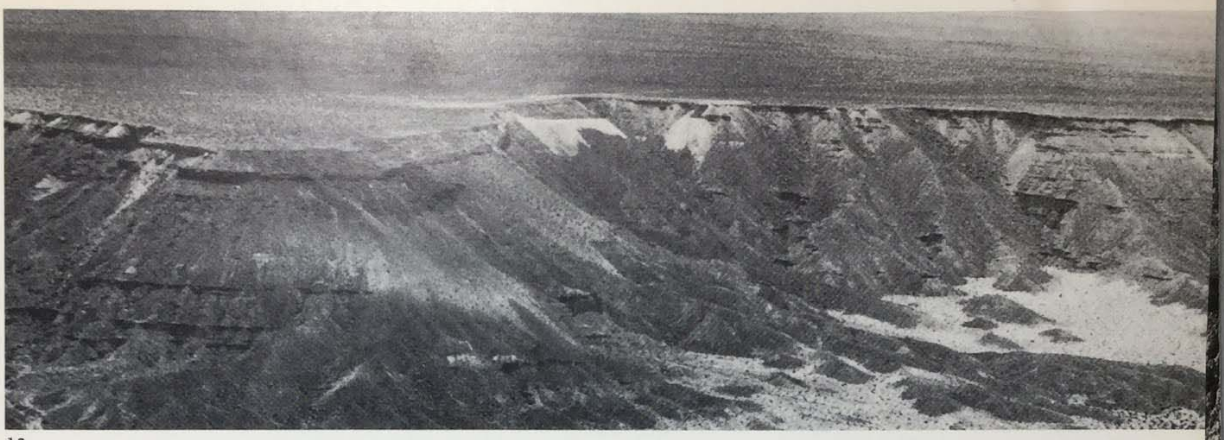

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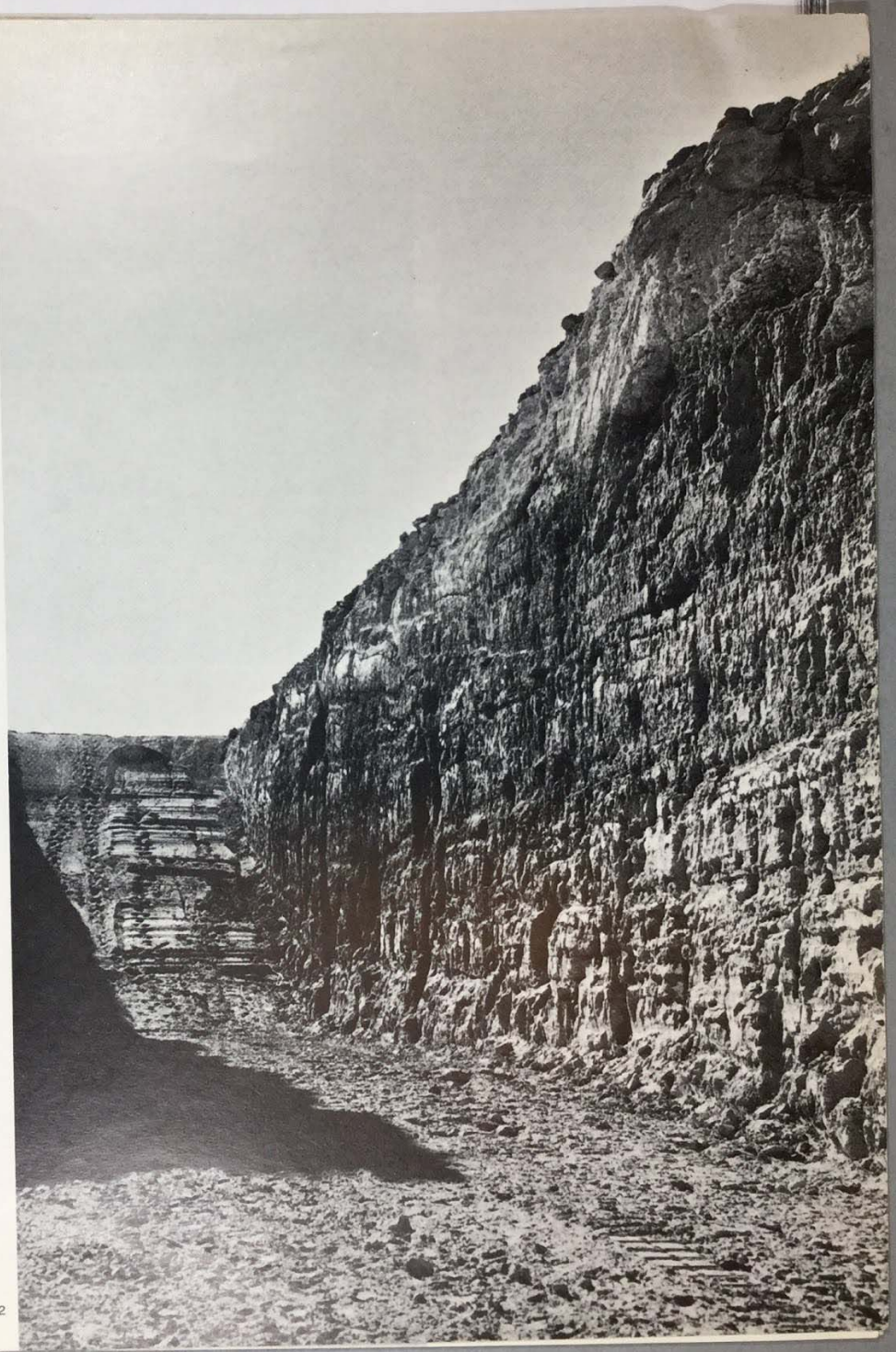
18-22
Michael Heizer, *Double Negative* (Second Displacement), 1969-70. 40,000 and 200,000 tons displaced. 1600 x 50 x 30'. Virgin River Mesa, Nevada. 18 & 19 Aerial views. 20 View of West cut. 21 & 22 Views of East cut.



Why do you find that necessary?

It's a kind of nostalgia, I think. It seems to me that a lot of problems are concerned mainly with presentation. For some people the gallery issue is very important now but I think that in time it will mellow. Recently I have been taking galleries apart, slowly. I have a proposal that involves removing the floorboards and eventually taking the entire floor out. I feel this is a creeping back to the home site.

Bob, how would you describe the relation between the gallery exhibit and nature?

I think we all see the landscape as coextensive with the gallery. I don't think we're dealing with matter in terms of a back to nature movement. For me the world is a museum. Photography makes nature obsolete. My thinking in terms of the site and the non-site makes me feel there's no need to refer to nature anymore. I'm totally concerned with making art and this is mainly an act of viewing, a mental activity that zeroes in on discrete sites. I'm not interested in presenting the medium for its own sake. I think that's a weakness of a lot of contemporary work.

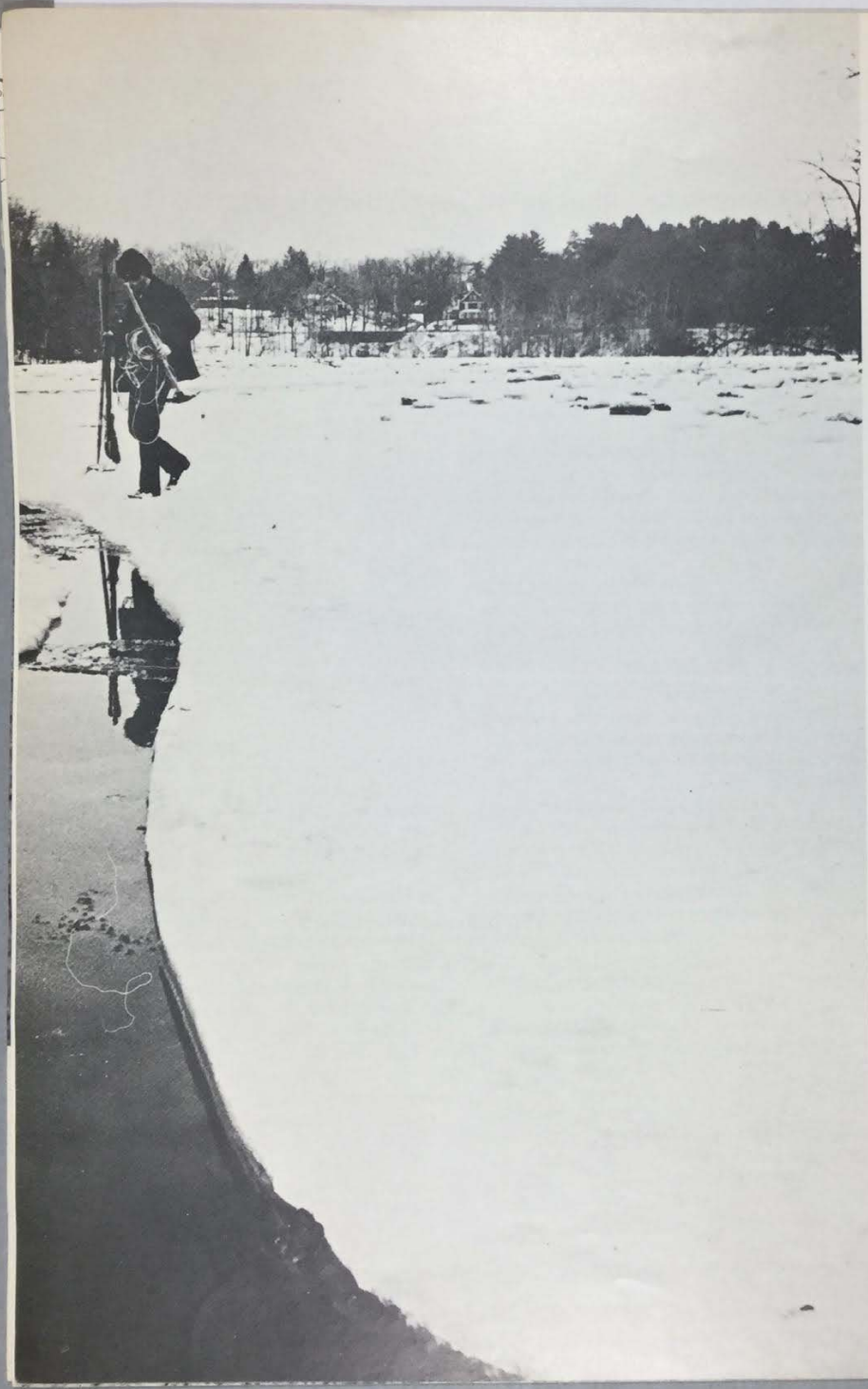
Dennis, how do you see the work of other New York sculptors, specifically Morris, Judd, Lewitt and Andre?

Andre at one point began to question very seriously the validity of the object. He began to talk about sculpture as place. And Sol Lewitt's concern with systems, as opposed to the manual making and placement of object art can also be seen as a move against the object. These two artists have made an impact on me. They built such damn good stuff that I realized an impasse had been reached. Morris also got to the point where if he'd made his pieces a little better, he wouldn't have had to make them at all. I felt that very strongly and I knew there must be another direction in which to work.

Are you referring to Morris' minimal work?

Yes, his polyhedrons. The earth movement has derived some stimulus from minimal art, but I think that now it's moved away from their main preoccupations.

I don't think that you're going to be able to say what the source of this kind of art is. But one aspect of earth orientation is that the works circumvent the galleries and the artist has no sense of the commercial or the utilitarian. But it's easy to be hyperesthetic, and not so easy to maintain it.



If you're interested in making art then you can't take a kind of facile cop-out. Art isn't made that way. It's a lot more rigorous.

Eventually you develop some sense of responsibility about transmitting your art by whatever means are available.

What do you have to say about that, Dennis?

I think we should discuss what's going to happen to earth art, because the cultural reverberations stimulated by some of our outdoor pieces are going to be very different from those produced by a piece of rigid indoor sculpture.

For one thing, I think a lot of artists will begin to see the enormous possibilities inherent in working outdoors.

23
Dennis Oppenheim, *Accumulation Cut*, Beebe Lake, Ithaca, N.Y., February 1969.

"Everything is beautiful but not everything is art."

Do you mean something ought to be said about the IMPORTANCE of what's being done with earth????

Yes.

Well, look at it this way. Art usually becomes another commodity. One of the implications of earth art might be to remove completely the commodity-status of a work of art and to allow a return to the idea of art as . . .

Art as activity?

No, if you consider art as activity then it becomes like recreation. I guess I'd like to see art become more of a religion.

In what sense?

In the sense that it wouldn't have a utilitarian function any more. It's okay for the artist to say he doesn't have any mercenary intentions, knowing full well that his art is used avariciously.

So the artist's responsibility extends beyond the creative act?

The artist is responsible for everything, for the work and for how it's used. Enough attacks have been made on my work for me to have considered protecting it, like a dog burying a bone in the ground.

Don't you see art as involved with weather or perhaps redirecting traffic?

I like your idea, Dennis, but it sounds as though you want to make a rain machine, which I don't think is what you mean at all.

Aren't you indicating possibilities here that other artists haven't really explored? It seems to me that one of the principal functions of artistic involvement is to stretch the limits of what can be done and to show others that art isn't just making objects to put in galleries, but that there can be an artistic relationship with things outside the gallery that is valuable to explore. Mike, what are you trying to achieve by working in nature?

Well, the reason I go there is because it satisfies my feeling for space. I like that space. That's why I choose to do my art there.

Has your knowledge of archaeological excavations had any bearing on your work?

It might have affected my imagination because I've spent some time recording technical excavations. My work is closely tied up with my own experiences; for instance, my personal associations with dirt are very real. I really like it, I really like to lie in the dirt. I don't feel close to it in the farmer's sense . . . And I've transcended the mechanical, which was difficult. It wasn't a legitimate art transition but it was psychologically important because the work I'm doing now with earth satisfies some very basic desires.

So you're really happy doing it.

Right. I'm not a purist in any sense and if I'm at all interested in Bob's or Dennis' work, it's because I sense in it the same kind of divergence from a single ideal as in my own. That's why I said earlier that earth art is a very private thing. And of course I'm not at all concerned about style.

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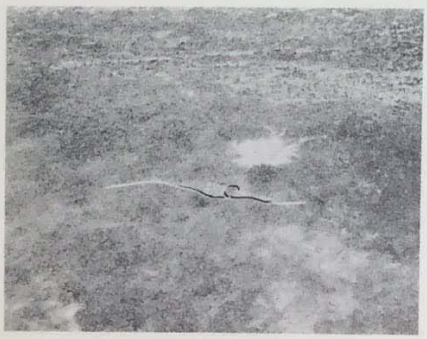
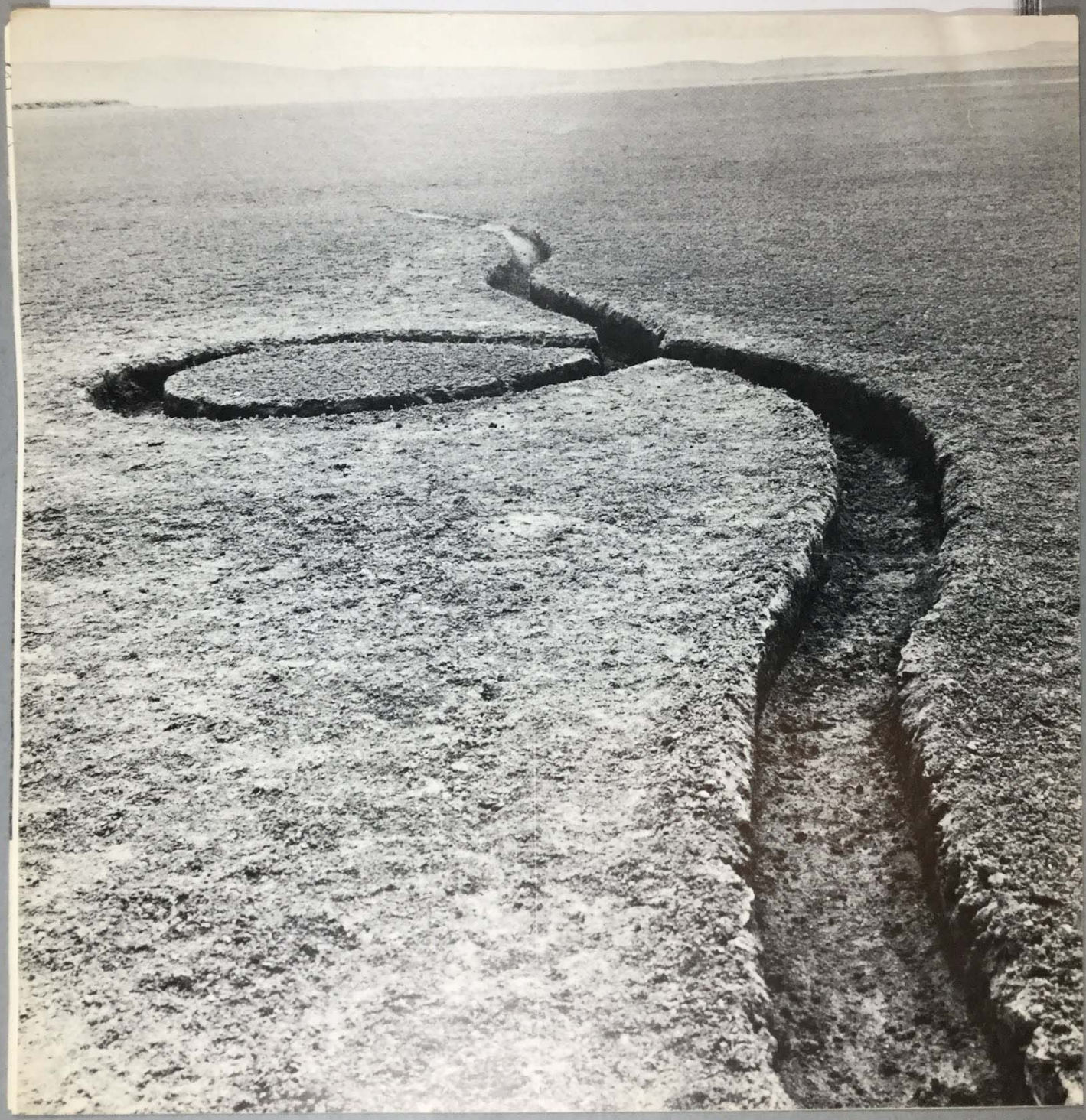
Mike Heizer, *Circumflex,* Massacre Creek dry lake, 1968. About 120' long, 18' wide, 12" deep tapering to the surface at both ends. Photo by the artist.
25
Aerial view of 24





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Robert Smithson, a section from the invitation to his recent one-man exhibition, *Nonsites,* Dwan Gallery, New York, February 1969. (Mono Lake Site—Mono Lake Nonsite).

I think most of us are very aware of time on a geological scale, of the great extent of time which has gone into the sculpting of matter. Take an Anthony Caro: that expresses a certain nostalgia for a Garden of Eden view of the world, whereas I think in terms of millions of years, including times when humans weren't around. Anthony Caro never thought about the ground his work stands on. In fact, I see his work as anthropocentric cubism. He has yet to discover the dreadful object. And then to leave it. He has a long way to go.

It seems to me that this consciousness of geological process, of very gradual physical change, is a positive feature, even an aesthetic characteristic of some of the more significant earth works.

It's an art of uncertainty because instability in general has become very important. So the return to Mother Earth is a revival of a very archaic sentiment. Any kind ofcomprehension beyond this is essentially artificial.

Geological thinking seems to play an important role in your esthetic.

I don't think we're making an appeal to science at all. There's no reason why science should have any priority.

Scientific theories could just as well be magic as far as I'm concerned. I don't agree with any of them.

Do you see them as fiction?

Yes.

Yes. I think that if we have any objective in mind it's to supplant science.

I wrote an article recently entitled "Strata" covering the Precambrian to the Cretaceous periods. I dealt with that as a fiction. Science works, yes, but to what purpose? Disturbing the grit on the moon with the help of billions of dollars. I'm more interested in all aspects of time. And also in the experience you get at the site, when you're confronted by the physicality of actual duration. Take the Palisades non-site: you find trolley tracks embedded in the ground, vestiges of something else. All technology is matter built up into ideal structures. Science is a shack in the lava flow of ideas. It must all return to dust. Moondust, perhaps.

To me the permanent aspects of the physical are not what's interesting, only what I can remember is. And I like to embody memories in my work.

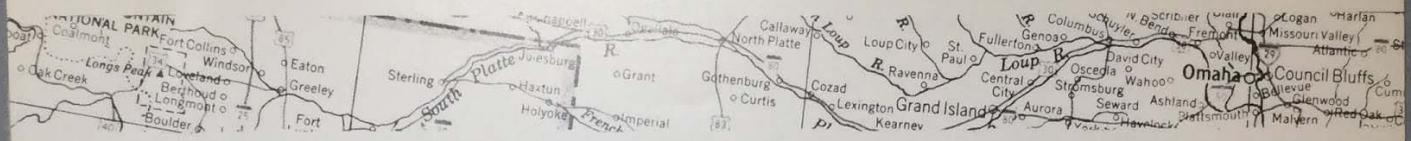
"Photographs steal away the spirit of the work . . ."

27
Robert Smithson, *Mono Lake*, Mono Lake, California, 1968. Photo by the artist.

Why don't we talk about one of your pieces, Bob, the one on the Mono Lake, for example.

The Mono Lake non-site , yes. Maps are very elusive things. This map of Mono Lake is a map that tells you how to get nowhere. Mono Lake is in northern California and I chose this site because it had a great abundance of cinders and pumice, a fine granular material. The lake itself is a salt lake. If you look at the map, you'll see it is in the shape of a margin — it has no centre. It's a frame, actually. The non-site itself is a square channel that contains the pumice and the cinders that collected around the shores of the lake at a place called Black Point. This type of pumice is indigenous to the whole area.

What exactly is your concept of a non-site?



There's a central focus point which is the non-site; the site is the unfocussed fringe where your mind loses its boundaries and a sense of the oceanic pervades, as it were. I like the idea of quiet catastrophes taking place . . . . The interesting thing abput the site is that, unlike the non-site, it throws you out to the fringes. In other words, there's nothing to grasp onto except the cinders and there's no way of focusing on a particular place. One might even say that the place has absconded or been lost. This is a map that will take you somewhere, but when you get there you won't really know where you are. In a sense the non-site is the centre of the system, and the site itself is the fringe or the edge. As I look around the margin of this map, I see a ranch, a place called the sulphur pond; falls, and a water tank; the word pumice. But it's all very elusive. The shorelines tell you nothing about the cinders on the shore. You're always caught between two worlds, one that is and one that isn't. I could give you a few facts about Mono Lake. Actually, I made a movie about it with Mike Heizer. It's in a state of chaos, it's one of those things that I wouldn't want to show to more than a few people. But Mono Lake itself is fascinating. Geologists have found evidence of five periods of glaciation in the Sierra. The first began about half a million years ago, the last ended less than fifteen thousand years ago. The glaciers left prominent marks upon the landscape, they gouged out canyons, broadening and deepening them into U-shaped valleys with steep headwalls and then advanced onto the plain. They built up high parallel ridges of stony debris called moraines. There are all sorts of things like that. The Mono craters are a chain of volcanic cones. Most of them were formed after Lake Russell evaporated. That's why I like it, because in a sense the whole wite tends to evaporate. The closer you think you're getting to it and the more you circumscribe it, the more it evaporates. It becomes like a mirage and it just disappears. The site is a place where a piece should be but isn't. The piece that should be there is now somewhere else, usually in a room. Actually everything that's of any importance takes place outside the room. But the room reminds us of the limitations of our condition.

Why do you bother with non-site at all?

Why do I?

Why don't you just designate a site?

Because I like the ponderousness of the material. I like the idea of shipping back the rocks across the country. It gives me more of a weighty sensation. If I just thought about it and held it in my mind it would be a manifestation of idealistic reduction and I'm not really interested in that. You spoke about evil: actually for a long time people thought mountains were evil because they were so proud compared to the humble valleys. It's true! Something called the mountain controversy. It started in the eighteenth century.

How would you characterize your attitude to nature?

Well, I developed a dialectic between the mind-matter aspects of nature. My view became dualistic, moving back and forth between the two areas. It's not involved with nature, in the classical sense. There's no anthropomorphic reference to environment. But I do have a stronger tendency towards the inorganic than to the organic. The organic is closer to the idea of nature: I'm more interested in denaturalization or in artifice than I am in any kind of naturalism.

Are there any elements of destruction in your work?

It's already destroyed. It's a slow process of destruction. The world is slowly destroying itself. The catastrophe comes suddenly, but slowly.

Big bang.

Well, that's for some. That's exciting. I prefer the lava, the cinders that are completely cold and entropically cooled off. They've been resting in a state of delayed motion. It takes something like a millennium to move them. That's enough action for me. Actually that's enough to knock me out.

A millennium of gradual flow . . . .

You know, one pebble moving one foot in two million years is enough action to keep me really excited. But some of us have to simulate upheaval, step up the action. Sometimes we have to call on Bacchus. Excess. Madness. The End of the World. Mass Carnage. Falling Empires.

Mmmm . . . What would you say about the relationship between your work and photographs of it?

~~Photographs~~ steal away the spirit of the work . . . .

"I go to nature because it satisfies my feeling for space."

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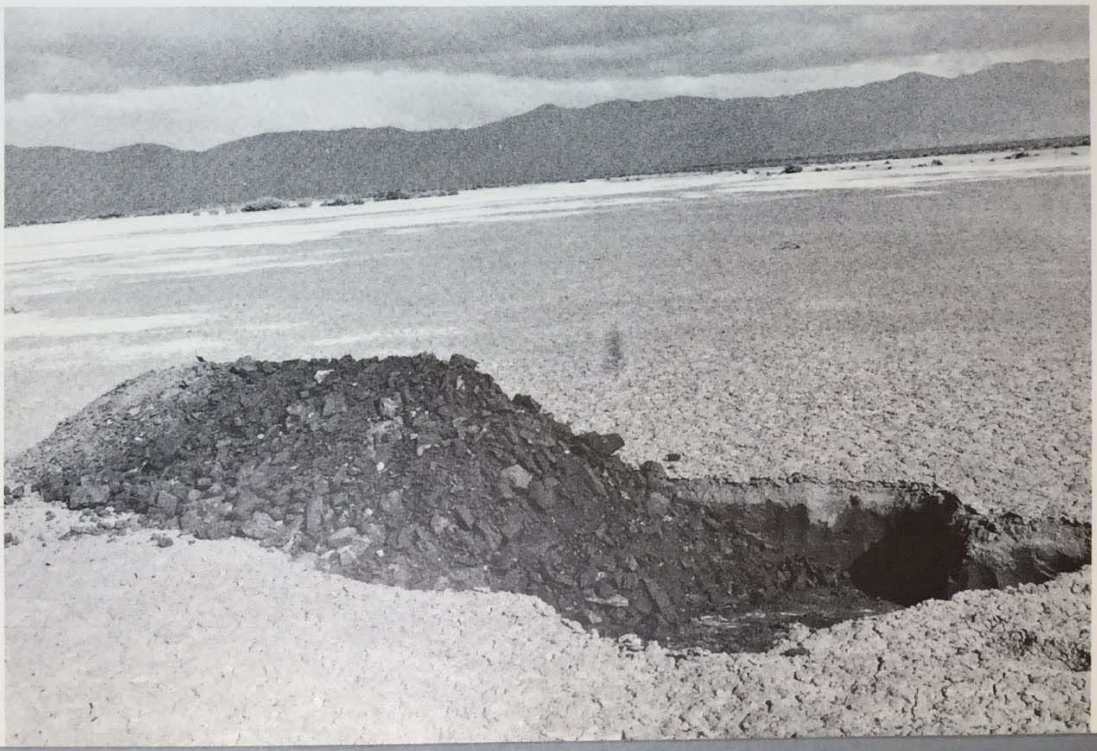

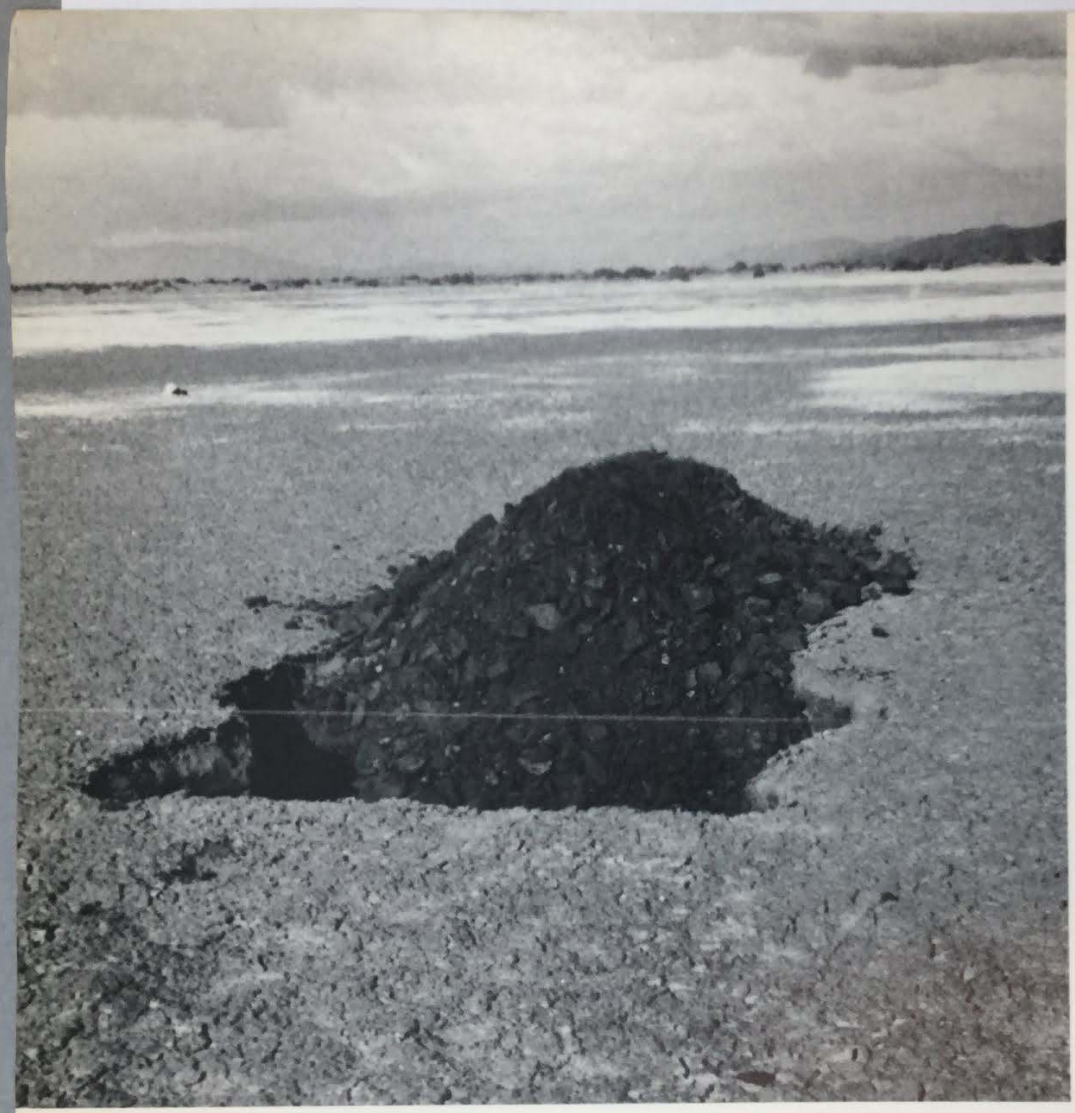

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28
Mike Heizer, *Fault,* Kunsthalle, Bern, March 1969.
Photo: Shunk-Kender.
29
Mike Heizer, *Depression,* Nevada mudflats, 1968.
Photo by the artist.
30 & 31
Details of 23

Directed Seeding: Wheat

"Stage I: A field is seeded in accordance with topographical configuration from point of origin at Finsterwolde to a storage silo approximately ten kilometers away. (The area is reduced six times).
Stage 2: In September 1969, I directed the harvest to follow a large X pattern in this 20 x 30m field. Stage 3: The media (grain) from the X cut was placed in 25 kilo sacks which were sold at the *Prospect* exhibition in Düsseldorf during September. The medium is isolated from further processing.
Stage 3: The media (grain) from the X cut will be placed in 25 kilo sacks which I intend to sell at the *Prospect* exhibition in Dusseldorf during September.
The medium is isolated from further processing."

Dennis Oppenheim

32
Dennis Oppenheim, *Directed Seeding: Wheat* (Part I), Finsterwolde, Holland, April 1969.
Photo by the artist.

One day the photograph is going to become even more important than it is now — there'll be a heightened respect for photographers. Let's assume that art has moved away from its manual phase and that now it's more concerned with the location of material and with speculation. So the work of art now has to be visited or abstracted from a photograph, rather than made. I don't think the photograph could have had the same richness of meaning in the past as it has now. But I'm not particularly an advocate of the photograph.

It's sometimes claimed that the photo is a distortion of sensory perception.

Well, the experience of looking is constantly altered by physical factors. I think certain photographs offer a precise way of seeing works. You can take a photograph into a clean white room, with no sound, no noise. You can wait until you feel so inclined before you look at it and possibly experience to a greater depth whatever view you have been presented with.

What are your primary concerns, Mike, in carrying out one of your Depressions?

I'm mainly concerned with physical properties, with density, volume, mass and space. For instance, I find an 18 foot square granite boulder. That's mass. It's already a piece of sculpture. But as an artist it's not enough for me to say that, so I mess with it. I defile . . . if you're a naturalist you'd say I defiled it, otherwise otherwise you'd say I responded in my own manner. And that was by putting some space under the boulder. My work is in opposition to the kind of sculpture which involves rigidly forming forming, welding, sealing, perfecting the surface of a piece of material. I also want my work to complete its life-span during my lifetime. Say the work lasts for ten minutes or even six months, which isn't really very long, it still satisfies the basic requirements of fact . . . . Everything is beautiful, but not everything is art.

What makes it art?

I guess when you insist on it long enough, when you can convince someone else that it is. I think that the look of art is broadening. The idea of sculpture has been destroyed, subverted, put down. And the idea of painting has also been been subverted. This has happened in a very strange way, through a process of logical questioning by artists. It hasn't been like these various looks which appear every twenty years or so; they're just minor phenomena within the larger one that will be remembered.

Do you approve of this undermining of existing art forms?

Of course I do, because then the artist will realize that only a real primitive would make something as icon-like, as obviously pagan as a painting. I worked all those years painting and now I'm critical of the fact that I won't allow myself to do those mindless things any more. It looks as though the whole spirit of painting and sculpture could be shrugged off, in two years' time perhaps. It's almost totally inconsequential. Of course it'll never happen, but it's conceivable, it could happen. □

Valley Curtain Corporation

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New York, New York 10013
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Rifle, Colorado 81650
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303 625 1750

Christo completes Valley Curtain.

On August 10, 1972, in Rifle, Colorado, at 11 am, a group of 35 construction workers and 64 temporary helpers, art school, college students, and itinerant art workers tied down the last of 27 ropes that secured a 200,000 square foot orange curtain to its moorings at Rifle Gap, seven miles north of Rifle on Highway 325.
The project, by New York artist Christo, took 28 months to complete.

Some had said "it cannot be done," however it was realized in perfect team work by hardhats and longhairs. On completion Christo was carried on the shoulders of construction workers and traditionally dunked into Rifle Creek while a Denver skydiving group came sailing down the Gap on colored parachutes, cars and horses competed for the honor of first passing through the 24 foot arched opening in the curtain. On October 10, 1971, when the ill-fated Curtain hung in shreds, Christo vowed to finish his project, and 10 months later he made good on this promise. The 1972 Valley Curtain was designed by Unipolycon, Lynn, Mass., and the Ken R. White Company of Denver. It was built by A and H Builders of Boulder and Thornton, Colo., under the site supervision of Henry B. Leininger, with Universal Steel Erectors of Denver, as sub-contractors. Dr. Ernest Harris, senior staff engineer, and Delbert Sutton, field engineer for Ken R. White, redesigned the Curtain's suspension system, slope anchors were reinforced, some were added and others were abandoned.

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A. and H. Builders, Inc. Thornton, Colorado, General Contractors
Jan van der Marck, Project Director
Scott Hodes, Legal Counsel, Chicago
Photo Documentation Shunk-Kender, New York
Film by Maysels Brothers, New York
Publication Verlag Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart

The main anchorages and the 4 supporting cables were used as planned and completed last year. The number of connections between the 4 main and the upper secondary cable, to which the Curtain was laced, had been expanded from seven to eleven. Design failures prevented the completion of the Curtain in 1971. To avoid a recurrence of ripping and snagging the bottom and excessive billowing in the wind, the 1972 Curtain was designed by Unipolycon partners D. Zagoroff and J. Thomson, and also made of woven polyamide made by J. P. Stevens and fabricated by Pioneer Systems of Columbia, Miss., with a tighter fit and tailored to the Valley's contour. By suspending it at a width of 1,313 feet and a height curving from 365 feet at each end to 180 feet at the center, the Curtain remained clear of the slopes and the Valley bottom. Instead of using a steel cable running through a channel in the slope and bottom anchors, the present Curtain had been laced to a three inch dacron rope from which control and tie-down lines, three-eighth, one-half and three-quarter inches in diameter, run to the 27 anchors. A ten foot skirt attached to the Curtain visually completes the area between the thimbles and the ground. An outer cocoon was put around the fully fitted Curtain for protection in transit and at the time of its raising into position. An inner cocoon, integral to the Curtain, provided added insurance against a premature unfurling. Both cocoons caused delays in the Curtain's release but added suspense to an event watched by hundreds.

On August 11, 28 hours after the successful completion of the Valley Curtain project, a gale estimated in excess of 60 mph. made it necessary to start the removal procedure.

Rifle, Colorado, August 16, 1972.

For further information: Christo, Rifle 303-625-2220, and 625-1750

New York 212-966-4437

189 West 81st Place
Denver, Colorado 80221
February 24, 1972

Mr. Calvin Tomkins
% The New Yorker
25 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Tomkins:

A native and former resident of the region near Rifle, Colorado (any community within 100 miles is a "neighbor" out our way) I appreciated your excellent article about Christo's Valley Curtain project and your kind words about my "Nixonian, hardhat, and cowboy" friends. I'm proud of them and happy (if slightly envious) that they have had the chance to know and accept an internationally-famous artist---and vise versa. This is, in itself, a kind of art.

Christo's project fascinates me as a Happening. I'm no art authority, my own art career was ruined when I was eight. A teacher assigned my class to draw pictures of houses. Everyone else dutifully drew a normal house; I decorated each board of mine a different color. Horrified, the teacher exclaimed, "But there are no houses like that!" I should have replied, "Well, there is now!" but in those days we didn't question the Establishment. How delightful that Christo ignores those who say, "But nobody hangs a curtain over a canyon!"

I saw the torn curtain at Rifle Gap, came as a curious onlooker, left as a believer. The vision of loss, of shattered hope even a Nixonian could understand. (I even dreamed about the curtain---in living color.) On sudden impulse I wrote a letter to Christo, then felt faintly ridiculous---he would probably never read it, surely not care that I cared. To my surprise, he answered---quickly, sincerely, unprentiously. At this point I would cheer his installing a network of stovepipes over the Gap. Thank God there are still artists who don't spit in our eyes.

You may have stepped on a few deserving toes: the construction crew (there was a credibility gap in news accounts of just what did go wrong; I'm glad to see Mother Nature let partially off the hook); the "cultural chauvinists"; and the super-environmentalists who, in battling very real ecological dangers, have lost their perspective. How often do Edward Conners and his associates run over to Rifle Gap to enjoy its natural beauty? They probably never heard of the place until Christo found it. If our civilization is to survive, equal time must be given to the ecology of the human spirit.

Like the Rifle woman, I, too, am awaiting impatiently the conclusion of this project, which has become symbolic of man's triumph over adversity. If it is true that genius often transcends the artist's conscious purpose, the Valley Curtain will indeed qualify as a work of art. I'll be waiting for your follow-up article later this year.

Sincerely,

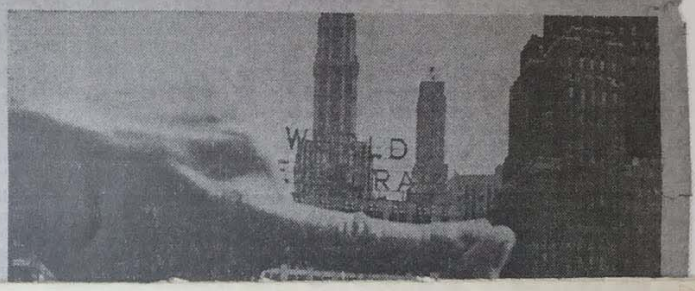
Patricia Eskoz

(Mrs.) Patricia Eskoz
Assistant Professor of Library Science
Metropolitan State College of Denver

Art Notes

Surprise Catch From Pier 18

By GRACE GLUECK



PIER 18, a rinky-dink ... Hudson River structure recently ravaged fur- ... as — well,

by Willoughby Sharp, exhibition organizer, impresario of downtown doings, and publisher of the art quarterly, Avalanche.

*

"It was an extension of my exhibitions, 'Earth Art' (Cornell, 1969) and 'Place and Process' (Edmonton, Alberta, same year), in which the works were a response to specific sites," says Sharp, who has no less than 24 shows under his wide belt. "I'm also concerned that a number of artists are doing work that doesn't get out into the culture." Sharp stumbled on Pier 18 last November—"a perfect place, totally disassociated from art-making and open to a large variety of work." He got on the pipe to a number of outdoor site-responders—conceptualists, "process" and "body" artists (who use their own anatomy as a medium).

art, the work — important more for the sake of idea than object—was performed primarily for the camera. "I didn't have permission to use the pier, and it was obvious that people couldn't see the work in situ," Sharp explains. "So it had to be recorded. Then I thought of transferring it via the photographic process back to the museum site." *Et voila!* MOMA snapped it up, though reports have it that the museum wanted mainly to fill a summer gap and is somewhat surprised by the success of its sleeper show.

None of the artists got a fee, no work was sold, and nobody was paid, including Janos Kender and Harry Shunk, the young photographic team whose genius at documenting artists' work deserves wider recognition. (Ironically, despite the "anti-object" stance of most of the

playing eight descending notes on a trumpet as a snapping turtle "descended" an improvised ramp.

For Sharp, who believes that art "in the sense of consumable objects" is dead, and "the structure and economy supporting that kind of art is crumbling," the pier show and its documentation is one way of insuring that the new work gets exposure to the public. "In the last few years, no one's really looked at modern art—the process and conceptual pieces that are often of only fleeting duration. That may be because none of the new work conforms to traditional definitions of what art is—in fact, I'm not even sure you could call it art anymore." Whatever it is, MOMA viewers seem to find "Pier 18" very much worth their attention.

SO, HO!

After having recently won

*

"The city finally said, 'OK, live there,'" says Doris Freedman, chairman of Citizens for Artists Housing, "but now artists were faced with the problem of how to live there safely and comfortably." Members of the C.A.H. Volunteer Architects Committee set to work, as did another group called Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. The result: a drafted amendment that made the law more flexible without violating its safety or health standards.

A slew of meetings with the Building Department, the Fire Department, the City Planning Commission and other city agencies produced support for the new amendment, introduced in the Legislature by Sen. Roy Goodman and Assemblyman William Passanante. Passed on June 7, a speedy 10 weeks after its introduction, the

is restoring churches, palaces and art treasures in the endangered city. . . After recent deliberations, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has decided not to take over operation of the new Pasadena Art Museum, suffering heavy building and operational deficits. To streamline expenses this summer, the museum will stay open only four days a week. Incidently, Pasadena recently appointed as director William C. Agee, formerly assistant curator of painting and sculpture at New York's Museum of Modern Art. . . The Nyack, N.Y. birthplace of the late Edward Hopper, recently declared a state landmark, has been acquired by the Edward Hopper Landmark Preservation Committee, a group of local citizens. Plan: to restore the house for display of Hopper's work and for use as a local cultural center.

Patricia Eskoz
189 West 81st Place
Denver, Colorado 80221

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Art Notes

Surprise Catch From Pier 18

By GRACE GLUECK

PIER 18, a rinky-dink Hudson River structure recently ravaged further by fire, is hardly what you'd call a prime art showcase. But last winter it served as the setting for one of the season's liveliest art occasions—a two-month affair for which each of 27 concept-oriented artists created a piece related to the pier.

Non-swimmer Lee Jaffe, for instance, while holding a Persian cat, had himself lashed, Ulysses-like, to a "mast" that dangled perilously over the water. Wolfgang Stoerchle had a friend pile wood in his arms, then lurched along the pier until he stumbled and dropped the pile. And Allen Ruppersberg, a Coast conceptualist, cast on the water a suitcase wrapped in chains, its interior containing a brick from the Hollywood home of Houdini (with Houdini-esque chutzpah, it stayed afloat).

Ephemeral, you say? Well, missed at the time by all but a handful of devotees, the show lives on in a series of brilliant documentary photographs currently on view at the Museum of Modern Art. Unadornedly titled "Pier 18," it was birthed and nurtured by Willoughby Sharp, exhibition organizer, impresario of downtown doings, and publisher of the art quarterly, Avalanche.

*

"It was an extension of my exhibitions, 'Earth Art' (Cornell, 1969) and 'Place and Process' (Edmonton, Alberta, same year), in which the works were a response to specific sites," says Sharp, who has no less than 24 shows under his wide belt. "I'm also concerned that a number of artists are doing work that doesn't get out into the culture." Sharp stumbled on Pier 18 last November—"a perfect place, totally disassociated from art-making and open to a large variety of work." He got on the pipe to a number of outdoor site-responders—conceptualists, "process" and "body" artists (who use their own anatomy as a medium). Their response was—well, heartening.

Some did their thing in terms of the pier's physical structure — George Trakas, for instance, paddled around it in a sort of kayak to make drawings; Bill Wegman remained in California but specified that a professional bowler be hired to send a ball down the pier and scatter a row of ninepins (the ball splashed into the soup). Others made use of the camera. For one of his pieces, John Baldessari squared his fingers before the lens to frame a nearby ship (see right); Mario Merz, absent in Italy, asked photographers to take 20 shots that "precisely annotated" the pier. And still others established a "body" relationship with the structure. Using various parts of his anatomy (hands, knees, chest) as a camera tripod, Dan Graham snapped whatever came into range to produce a series of topsy-turvy cityscapes; non-swimmer Vito Acconci, ears plugged, hands bound, eyes blindfolded, had himself led about the rickety pier by a comrade whose motives he didn't "fully trust."

As with much conceptual art, the work—important more for the sake of idea than object—was performed primarily for the camera. "I didn't have permission to use the pier, and it was obvious that people couldn't see the work in situ," Sharp explains. "So it had to be recorded. Then I thought of transferring it via the photographic process back to the museum site." *Et voilà!* MOMA snapped it up, though reports have it that the museum wanted mainly to fill a summer gap and is somewhat surprised by the success of its sleeper show.

None of the artists got a fee, no work was sold, and nobody was paid, including Janos Kender and Harry Shunk, the young photographic team whose genius at documenting artists' work deserves wider recognition. (Ironically, despite the "anti-object" stance of most of the performers, Shunk-Kender's documentary photos are works of art—art objects—in their own right. But "Pier 18" is in line with an increasing trend among artists to work outside the traditional confines of the museum-gallery structure—in parks, streets, trees, on mountaintops, in the sky, and even underwater. "I like the freedom to work out of a specific place that's still around the city and accessible to people," says Bill Beckley, whose "sound" piece involved playing eight descending notes on a trumpet as a snapping turtle "descended" an improvised ramp.

For Sharp, who believes that art "in the sense of consumable objects" is dead, and "the structure and economy supporting that kind of art is crumbling," the pier show and its documentation is one way of insuring that the new work gets exposure to the public. "In the last few years, no one's really looked at modern art—the process and conceptual pieces that are often of only fleeting duration. That may be because none of the new work conforms to traditional definitions of what art is—in fact, I'm not even sure you could call it art anymore." Whatever it is, MOMA viewers seem to find "Pier 18" very much worth their attention.

SO, HO!

After having recently won its 2½-year fight to get artists' residence legalized in downtown SoHo, previously zoned only for light manufacturing, Citizens for Artists Housing turned around to discover a further hurdle. Under the state's Multiple Dwelling Law, now applied to SoHo, artists could only improve their lofts for joint studio-living occupancy by building codes so rigid that they virtually prohibited renovation of the seedy manufacturing buildings they occupied.

*

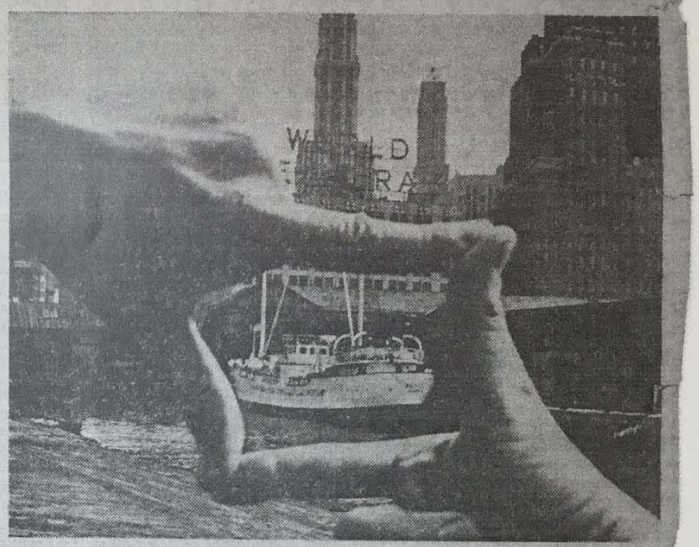
"The city finally said, 'OK, live there,'" says Doris Freedman, chairman of Citizens for Artists Housing, "but now artists were faced with the problem of how to live there safely and comfortably." Members of the C.A.H. Volunteer Architects Committee set to work, as did another group called Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. The result: a drafted amendment that made the law more flexible without violating its safety or health standards.

A slew of meetings with the Building Department, the Fire Department, the City Planning Commission and other city agencies produced support for the new amendment, introduced in the Legislature by Sen. Roy Goodman and Assemblyman William Passanante. Passed on June 7, a speedy 10 weeks after its introduction, the amendment was signed in law by Gov. Rockefeller o July 6.

Isn't it nice to hear th State's done *something* fo the city?

COLLAGE

Mrs. John V. Lindsay has accepted the honorary chairmanship of the New York chapter of the Venice Committee of the International Fund for Monuments. The committee, primarily concerned with saving the art and architecture of Venice, is restoring churches, palaces and art treasures in the endangered city. . . After recent deliberations, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has decided not to take over operation of the new Pasadena Art Museum, suffering heavy building and operational deficits. To streamline expenses this summer, the museum will stay open only four days a week. Incidently, Pasadena recentl appointed as director Williar C. Agee, formerly assistar curator of painting and sculp ture at New York's Museun of Modern Art. . . The Nyack N.Y. birthplace of the lat Edward Hopper, recently de clared a state landmark, ha been acquired by the Edwar Hopper Landmark Preserv tion Committee, a group local citizens. Plan: to resto the house for display of H per's work and for use a local cultural center.



Shunk-Kender

Artist John Baldessari's fingers frame a ship in "Pier 18" show, Museum of Modern Art

"As with much conceptual art, the work was performed primarily for the camera"

Newspaper Rock

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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	TOMKINS	II.A. 34

NEWSPAPER ROCK located in Indian Creek State Park between Monticello and Moab, Utah. The petroglyphs were created over a period of hundreds of years by ancient inhabitants. These represent at least two ancient Indian cultures.

Dear CALVIN TOMKINS,
The Jetty is surfacing.
As it is now, half of the
Jetty tail is completely
covered with salt crystals.
The rest is like an arch-
ipelago of white islands.
I have never seen the
water so red. The name
of the man at the Golden
Spike Motel is Lafe Jensen
We are now in Price
Utah on our way to
Moab to look for new
sites. Be back in N.Y.C. in
about a week + a half.
Bob Smithson

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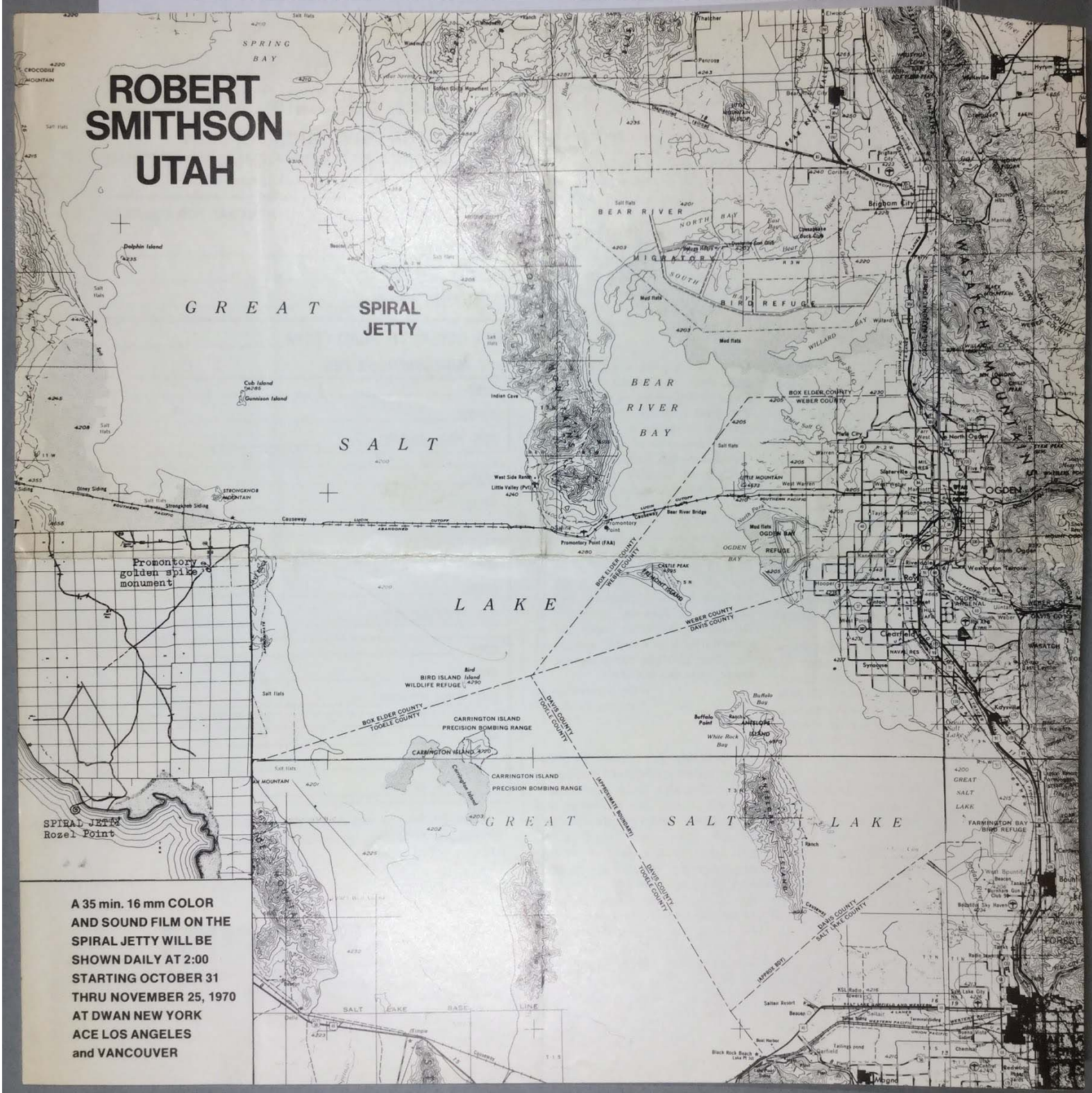


MICHAEL HEIZER

ACTUAL SIZE

DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

MARCH 25 TO APRIL 25, 1971

THE REMAINDER OF THIS PUBLICATION HAS NOT BEEN SCANNED.

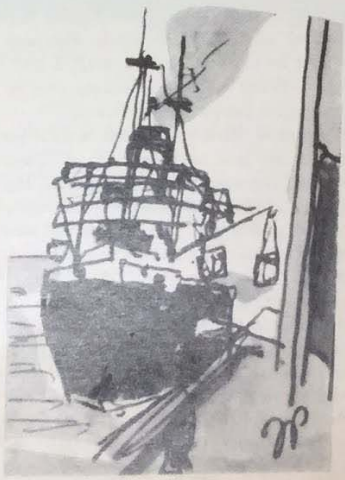
ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

MAYBE A QUANTUM LEAP

A LOT of people have not yet made up their minds about earth art. Although the phenomenon has been with us for several years, examples of it are so inaccessible that hardly anyone has actually seen an earthwork, and this in itself has led to misconceptions. Some people refer to the form as "conceptual art"—the term applied to works by those contemporary artists who simply specify an art project in writing and then feel no need to carry it out. "Friends of mine often look very surprised when I tell them that Michael Heizer's Double Negative, say, has nothing to do with conceptual art," Virginia Dwan, whose New York gallery, the Dwan, represented several of the leading earth artists until she closed it last June, has noted. "They say, 'But you can't really *see* it, can you?' or they try to argue that it exists only in photographs. So I have to explain that anybody can see it simply by going to Nevada, and that when an artist has moved two hundred and forty thousand tons of dirt around, it is *not* just a concept."

Earthworks are real enough—there is no doubt of that—and at this point in the twentieth century no one has to ask whether or not they are art, because art today, as we are only too frequently reminded, is whatever an artist says it is, and if an artist wants to dig into a Nevada mesa instead of carving a block of wood or marble, that is well within the mainstream of current aesthetic practice, and may even strike future art scholars as historically inevitable, in the light of space exploration, the ecology movement, and other recent developments that have tended to make us all more keenly aware of our own perishable planet. At any rate, enough artists have loosed their creative energies upon the landscape to give earth art (or land art, as it is sometimes called) the status of an international movement. Michael Heizer works mainly in the desert, displacing large masses of rock and dirt with the aid of bulldozers, pneumatic drills, and dynamite. Walter De Maria also favors desert regions, although he spent the better part of last year on a project (now abandoned) to sink a three-hundred-and-ninety-foot air shaft through the center of a mountain near Munich, on the site of the 1972 Olympic Games. Robert Smithson's recent works have all incorporated water, the most ambitious one to date being his fifteen-hundred-foot-long Spiral Jetty in Utah's Great Salt Lake. Dennis Oppenheim, who used to chop large semicircles in the ice of frozen rivers and direct the seeding and harvesting of wheat fields in prescribed patterns, has abandoned earth art in favor of body art, a form involving the use of the artist's own body in various ways that one hopes will not prove fatal; Richard Long has imposed geometric patterns on fields of daisies and has draped in cloth (and then photographed) the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, in Africa; Peter Hutchinson, a British earth artist, has cultivated bread molds on the lip of an active volcano in Mexico; Urì Buru, an Argentinian, has poured dyes into the waters of the River Plate, the Seine, the East River, and the Grand Canal in Venice.

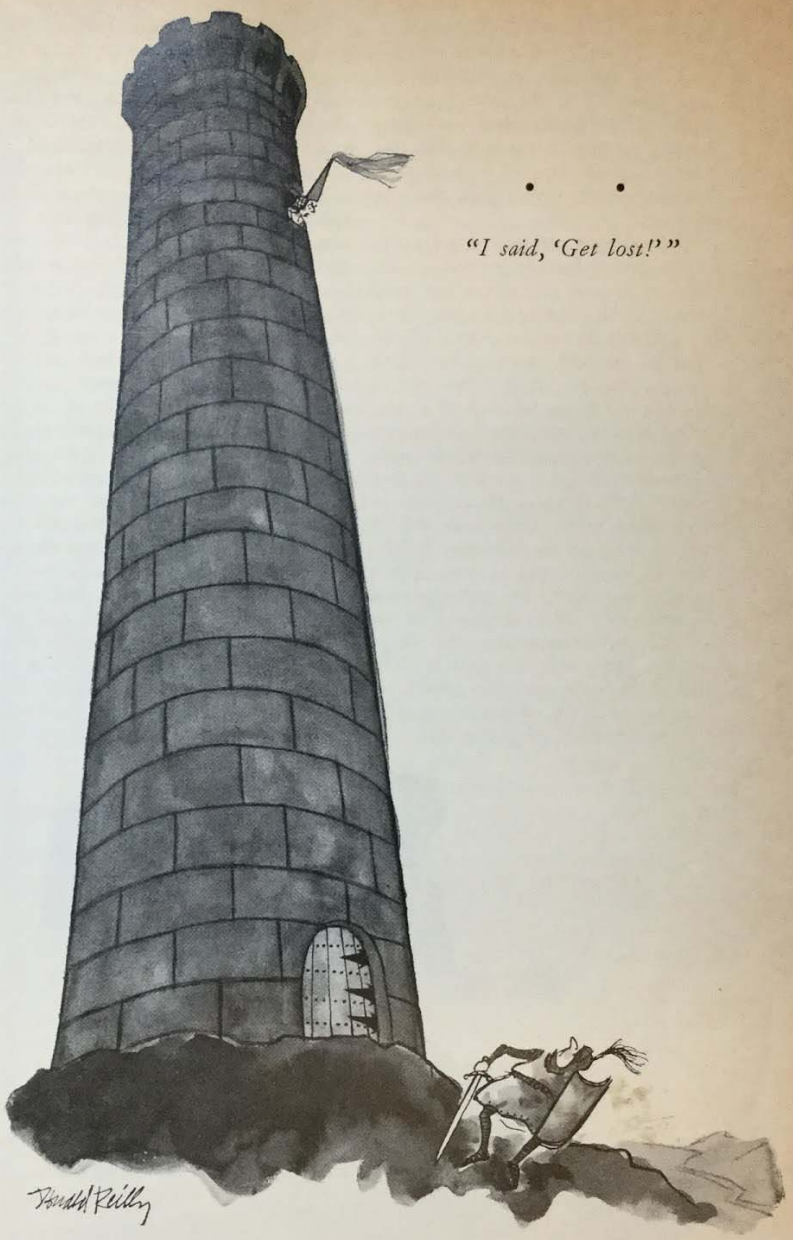
Some of these doings are ephemeral by nature, but others may be around for centuries, and the problem of what to do about the more durable earthworks is much discussed. Robert C. Scull, the collector, commissioned Heizer's Nine Nevada Depressions in 1968, but because they were done on government-owned land their future is somewhat uncertain. A Swiss dealer named Bischofberger and a German dealer named Friedrich *thought* they had acquired Heizer's Double Negative from the Dwan Gallery last year. (Double Negative is on sixty acres of land bought by Heizer, who made over the property deed to the Dwan.) Bischofberger was planning to sell it to a German collector at a price rumored to be in the neighborhood of sixty-five thousand dollars, but Heizer abruptly decided that he didn't want dealers dickering over the work, and he cancelled the deal. Last winter, Jennifer Licht, an associate curator at the Museum of Modern Art, showed slides of Heizer's Double Negative, Smithson's Spiral Jetty, and De Maria's untitled Nevada land work to the trustees on the museum's purchasing committee. "I told them beforehand that I knew they weren't going to buy the works but that I thought this was one of the most interesting areas in recent art, and what *should* the museum do about it?" she has said. According to Mrs. Licht, the trustees seemed impressed by the works, but no clear answers to her question emerged.



So far, the earth artists have had to rely on private patrons, like Mr. Scull, or on the two or three dealers who have elected to support them (the Dwan Gallery here, the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Munich), or on their own limited resources. The sale of preliminary sketches and working drawings, models, and even photographs of the earth projects has helped to some degree, but clearly no one is making a bundle from earth art at the moment. The artists themselves, most of whom are in their twenties or early thirties, seem content to put everything they can scrape together into the next project and let the future take care of itself. They are a dedicated lot, and a certain scorn for the New York art world and its commercial machinations is seldom absent from their thinking. "One of the implications of earth art might be to remove completely the commodity status of a work of art and allow a return to the idea of art as . . . more of a religion," Heizer said in a recent interview. In fact, he went on, "it looks as though the whole spirit of painting and sculpture could be shrugged off in two years' time, perhaps. It's almost totally inconsequential. Of course, it'll never happen, but it's conceivable; it *could* happen." Walter De Maria believes that art galleries are "as outmoded as night clubs" today, and something like the same notion may have induced Miss Dwan to close her gallery. None of the earth artists appears to suffer, at any rate, from a lack of confidence. "Whether we have made a jump beyond style—that's the real question," De Maria said last spring. "Everybody talks about the art world as a succession of styles—Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Abstraction, Minimal, and so forth. But this may be something way beyond all that—maybe a quantum leap. I think the experience

of this work will make you feel different than you've ever felt before in the presence of art."

THE jumping-off place for a tour of American earth art is Las Vegas, a city whose signal achievement has been to obliterate or subvert nature in all its forms, and last June I flew out there for a few days of intensive earth-art appreciation. I had expected to meet Michael Heizer in Las Vegas, but the manager of the motel where he was staying said that he had left a few days before to go to Wyoming, or perhaps Montana—no one knew for sure. Virginia Dwan, who had arrived from Los Angeles on the same day, seemed a little put out that he had gone off without leaving a message, but she said philosophically that this was typical of Heizer's current frame of mind. "Michael is very negative right now," she told me. Earlier that spring, during his one-man show at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Heizer had undertaken an outdoor project called Dragged Mass, which involved hauling a thirty-ton granite block a hundred feet across the lawn in front of the museum. Heizer considered the whole thing a great success, but afterward, when he offered to give the piece to the Institute, the trustees declined to accept it. "He's fed up with the art world," Miss Dwan said. "All he wants to do is work, and he feels he hasn't really worked for a year, because he's been that long looking for a site for his new vertical piece." She explained that the vertical piece was to be executed on the face of a granite cliff; Heizer planned to cut out a large section of rock—two thousand tons or more—in one piece and move it down the cliff face, or perhaps across the cliff face, to a previously prepared cavity. He had spent several months looking for a site in the Swiss Alps, because a European benefactor wanted him to do the work there. Although most of the suitable Swiss cliffs overhung tidy villages, whose inhabitants might react unfavorably to the prospect of art-engendered rockslides, Heizer did find a site in the Säntis Alps and began work there. Winter stopped him, though, and he decided to relocate the project in the United States. Only granite would do—any other sort of rock would shatter into fragments when dynamited—and so far Heizer had not been able to find a proper granite cliff in Nevada, the site of most of his other works. In any case, he had gone off to Wyoming, or Montana, leaving no address, and Miss Dwan seemed reasonably certain, on the basis of past experience, that no one was likely to hear from him for some time.



"I said, 'Get lost!'"

In New York, in his barren loft studio on Spring Street, Heizer had struck me as a quietly keyed-up young man who saw no particular value in talking to strangers. He did say that he had been born in Berkeley, California, in 1944, and that his father, Professor Robert Heizer, was a well-known archeologist there. (I later found out that Professor Heizer is a world authority on the methods by which the Olmecs and other pre-Columbian people had managed, without benefit of the wheel, to move stone blocks even larger and more recalcitrant than Heizer's own Dragged Mass.) Heizer, who travelled around Mexico and Latin America with his parents as a child, went to school in Berkeley. After graduating from high school there, he spent a year or so at the San Francisco Art Institute, without bothering to enroll formally. He told me that he had "always" painted, and that when he came to New York, in the early nineteen-sixties, this was what he had done, mainly, experimenting with various current styles in the usual exploratory man-

ner. "After I'd been in New York for a couple of years, I saw art here as really dead," he said. "A lot of things had been killed off at the same time, because the forms themselves were coming into question. I was lucky. Because I wasn't really involved with all that, I was prepared to deal with the new situation."

Heizer's new situation turned out to be the desert. Because he was a Californian, he said, the desert had been present in his thinking for a long time, even though he had never been to one. One day in 1968, weary of New York and its dead art, Heizer flew out to Nevada and began to work on a piece called NESW, which he does not care to discuss at present but whose name implies that it had to do with the four points of the compass. He returned to New York a few weeks later and resumed work on his paintings; he also had the good fortune to meet Robert Scull, who liked his paintings but seemed even more interested in his rapidly proliferating ideas for desert works. The result was that Scull financed Heizer's extremely productive summer of 1968, which he spent in various desert regions of Nevada.

From the outset, Heizer's land works were inclined to take the form of excavations, or "displacements," rather than additions to the landscape. Displaced Replaced Mass, one of the principal works of that summer, involved dynamiting huge boulders out of a mountainside, moving them sixty miles by truck, and depositing them in concrete-lined holes ("depressions") of varying sizes and shapes. Heizer rented heavy-duty construction equipment and hired local contractors to assist him, and at one point he even permitted his patron to come out and watch one of the displacements. Scull speaks rapturously of the experience. "I saw Mike Heizer stand on top of a fifty-ton piece of granite and then jump down and give the order, and the dynamite split it right in half!" he told me. "I watched them take it to the place where he'd dug out a huge hole. It was night, and the cars of the workmen lit up the place with their headlights. And suddenly I realized that art didn't have to involve the walls of my house. I was involved with nature—the whole desert became part of my experience."

Displaced Replaced Mass was one of Nine Nevada Depressions executed by Heizer during the summer of 1968. The eighth in the series, called Dissipate, took the form of a group of five rectangular holes, each twelve feet long and a foot wide, dug in conformity with a pattern established by five matches that Heizer dropped at random and then taped down on a sheet of paper—a somewhat Duchampian gesture that seems out of place in Heizer's *œuvre*. In addition to the Depressions, Heizer, using a pick and shovel, also managed to carve a graceful loop, a foot deep and a foot wide and forty yards long, in the basin of Nevada's Massacre Dry Lake (Isolated Mass: Circumflex) and, using a motorcycle, to carve a series of eight fifty-foot circles in Coyote Dry Lake, California (Ground Incision: Loop Drawing). The circles were cut by the tires of a professional motorcycle racer's Triumph, driven flat out in the soft, dry soil of the desert.

The most ardent collectors of advanced American art in recent years have been German—a phenomenon traceable in part, at least, to the activities of several young, magnetic, and vastly enterprising German art dealers. Heiner Friedrich, who may very well be the most magnetic German since Wotan, was sufficiently impressed by Heizer's land works to offer him a one-man show in his Munich gallery in the spring of 1969. Heizer elected to exhibit two works there. The first, which was shown in the gallery, was a Line Drawing, consisting of the gallery's printed announcement of the show cancelled out by a crayon line drawn through the words. The other work of art was situated in a vacant lot on the outskirts of Munich. It was a circular pit, a hundred feet in diameter, whose sides sloped symmetrically to a central point fifteen feet deep, and it was called, naturally, Munich Depression. Heizer's most important work to date, which also happens to be the world's largest sculpture (provided that is what it is), was started in the fall of 1969. The Dwan had offered him a one-man show in January, 1970, with the understanding that he would do a major earthwork somewhere and that the gallery would pay for it. Heizer went out to Nevada in October, and nobody heard anything from him for a couple of months. He returned in December with photographs of Double Negative. This was the work that really made Heizer's international reputation, and it was the one I had come to see. Although Heizer was not around to take us out to it, Miss Dwan, having been there a number of times, felt reasonably certain that

"But, Dad, you've got it all turned around. Archie Bunker is the wrong guy."

she could locate it. We rented a car and set out from Las Vegas at about four o'clock in the afternoon, heading northeast on the freeway.

Driving out of Las Vegas into the arid and empty Nevada landscape is a fairly memorable experience in itself. After the preposterous air-conditioned hotel lobbies, with their twenty-four-hour gambling tables and housewife-mesmerizing slot machines, the seared desert valleys and eroded hills looked equally unreal, and nearly as hostile to life. The military installations and nuclear-test sites, which show up on the road map as "Danger Zones," are for the most part invisible to freeway traffic; we saw jet fighters flash down over a rust-colored mountain range as they headed for Nellis Air Force Base, eight miles north of Vegas, but we could not see the huge base itself. Roughly eighty-seven per cent of Nevada is government-owned land, and one has the impression, from the radar and other electronic sentinels on the hilltops, that the owner is watching. "Walter De Maria and Michael really dig this place—no pun intended," Miss Dwan told me. "They feel it sums up where we really are now in this country—all the materialism and vulgarity of Vegas, and the death industries outside. It's a kind of instant America—instant marriage and divorce, instant winning and losing, instant life and death. The boys cut their hair before they come out here, because the local police are tough on hippies, but they like the frontier mentality, and they're very much into the whole gambling thing. The title of Michael's piece, Double Negative, really refers in part to the double zero on the roulette wheel."

Approximately thirty miles north of Vegas, we left the freeway and drove east, in the direction of an immense plateau that Heizer calls Virgin River Mesa. A filling-station attendant told us how to get up on top of this eminence, and added a warning about going there on such a blistering day—the temperature, which had been a hundred and five degrees when we left Vegas an hour before, showed no signs of relenting. As we approached the mesa, the blacktop road changed to dirt. Suddenly it became quite steep. The rented car churned and skidded through soft sand that had drifted over the track in places, and I became acutely aware of the sharp drop at the outer edge of each hairpin turn. Just as the road seemed about to disappear completely, we lurched over a ridge and were on top of the mesa, which was just as flat as it had looked from a distance. Twin car tracks led across to the other side, where Double Negative was situated. "We've done it!" Miss Dwan said, prematurely.

The next hour and a half were spent searching up and down the mesa's far side. Double Negative had turned out not to be where Miss Dwan thought it was. The mesa extends for miles and miles, and is cut into at frequent intervals by narrow canyons, each of which looked as though it might be the site of Heizer's dig. Miss Dwan, a tall, chic woman dressed in dark-blue slacks and a Western-style shirt, reconnoitred every one. The temperature remained above a hundred; the car shuddered on the verge of boiling over. Just after seven, with the sun approaching the horizon, we finally found it.

Two enormous rectangular cuts, each thirty feet wide and fifty feet from top to bottom, had been dug out on opposite sides of a narrow canyon as neatly and precisely as though someone had sliced into the mesa with a gigantic cake cutter. Following Miss Dwan's lead, I started to descend the sharply sloping back wall of one cut, trying to decide en route whether a cautious sidestep or a sit-down slide was less likely to result in a sprained ankle, and ended up in a dead run that took me to about the middle of the cut. I looked up. Some erosion had taken place in the year and a half since the piece was finished, and the vertical side walls showed striations and indentations near the top which, when viewed from fifty feet down, suggested the stone carvings of a medieval church. The color was a warm ochre with yellowish streaks, verging to dull reds and greens in places where the minerals had leached out. Heizer had said that he didn't know how rapidly the work would erode but that he hoped it would last a hundred years. It had already acquired graffiti: peace symbols, a fashionable four-letter word, and the name "Willie Weed" had been scratched into the wall, and there was also a surprisingly realistic drawing of a shark. We walked to the front edge of the cut and looked down into the valley. The two hundred and forty thousand tons of earth and rock that Heizer's bulldozer had pushed over the edge were barely noticeable; the debris blended into the ochre of the canyon's walls—a minor landslide in a vast uninhabitable landscape.

We climbed back up the wall, drove the car around to the other side of the canyon, and clambered down into the other cut. It was exactly the same as

the first, only longer from front to back. Willie Weed had been here, too, and he or someone else had left a beer can. Miss Dwan sat down on the ground and looked up, getting the sky and the setting sun into her perspective. A small lizard watched, unblinking, while I emptied the dirt from my shoes. "My personal associations with dirt are very real," Heizer had said once in an interview. "I really like it; I really like to lie in the dirt."

Every time she saw Double Negative, Miss Dwan said, it took her by surprise. "It's so much bigger than I remembered," she added. I thought it seemed smaller than I had anticipated. Seen in relation to the long mesa, with its wind-carved sandstone ridges and turrets and ravines dropping sharply down to the green valley below, Double Negative looked distinctly man-made, and somehow less majestic than the blown-up photographs of it that I had seen. Heizer, I remembered, had said that he really didn't think about his works in terms of size, because they were not that big—"just big enough to give the idea," he said. The experience of being inside Double Negative was certainly different from the experience of looking at a landscape by Claude or Turner, but whether it could qualify as a religious experience, or as a quantum leap beyond style, I must leave to the judgment of more physically robust critics than I. Heat and thirst had dulled my perceptions; I was thinking of the trip back.

The little lizard disappeared behind a rock. He seemed to be very much at home in this work of art. It was nearly eight o'clock. According to Heizer, one should really spend twenty-four hours experiencing Double Negative, so as to see it in all the changing conditions of light. I am sure that all the physically robust critics do this. Miss Dwan and I started back just as the sun was disappearing behind the horizon, and managed to make it down the dirt track on the other side of the mesa before dark.

THE next day, we started earlier, leaving Las Vegas at about two o'clock in the afternoon—the car radio gave the temperature as a hundred and eight degrees—and again heading northeast on the freeway. Walter De Maria had drawn a rough map showing how to get to his untitled piece. "Walter is a very mysterious person," Miss Dwan said as we left the freeway and started to follow a dirt road leading straight back into the desert hills. Several other people had told me the same thing, although when I talked

with him in New York a month before he had impressed me as the most articulate of all the earth artists I had met. Somewhat older than Heizer—he is thirty-six; Heizer is twenty-seven—he was born just outside Berkeley, California. His grandparents had come from northern Italy about the turn of the century. De Maria grew up in and around San Francisco, and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with a B.A. in history, and then went on to do graduate work there in fine arts. "As soon as I graduated—in 1959—I stopped painting, because I realized that what we had been taught was basically a closed-end system," he told me. "At Berkeley, they started you with plaster casts, then went right to Cézanne—breaking up the casts into facets. Then to Picasso—breaking them up a little more and getting wilder. Then on to Hans Hofmann, who taught there at one time. Everything kept getting a little looser and more broken up, but you still kept essentially to some kind of a balanced picture, with a little green here, a little red there, and so forth. And at the end they brought you right up to de Kooning, which at that time was being up to date. Having gone through all those stages, you were considered a bona-fide painter, and you could go out and become an art teacher, too. The system was just *doomed*. I was so disgusted that I quit painting and started making little boxes."

De Maria also moved to New York, where he saw a lot of his friend La Monte Young, a fellow-Californian and a musician, who had been powerfully influenced by the composer John Cage. De Maria lived in a very small loft on the Bowery with a San Francisco girl he had married, and during their first New York winter, 1960-61, he made a total of thirteen plywood boxes in various shapes and sizes. Robert Scull, who likes to find young artists before they find themselves, admired De Maria's work and, in 1965, commissioned him to remake several of his plywood pieces in stainless steel. One of these was a narrow, seven-foot-high cage constructed of inch-thick rods and entitled Cage, which Scull had admired in an earlier version in wood, when it was called Statue of John Cage. Another, somewhat more enigmatic, was a series of High Energy Bars—stainless-steel ingots fourteen inches long and one and a half inches square, each inscribed with the words "High Energy Bar" and accompanied by a certificate affirming that it was indeed a high-energy bar. The steel version of the Cage statue impressed a number of

critics as one of the best pieces in the 1966 "Primary Structures" exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York, the first comprehensive showing of the stripped-down, non-relational, highly impersonal objects that became known as Minimal art. De Maria has continued to make sculptures, although earthworks now claim the major part of his interest. In 1969, he exhibited at the Dwan Gallery five rather dangerous-looking Spike Beds—rectangular platforms bristling with stainless-steel spikes honed to the sharpness of barracuda teeth; visitors were asked to sign a release absolving the artist and the gallery of responsibility in the event of spectator impalement. De Maria said that the five-part piece, which was recently purchased by the Kuntsmuseum, in Basel, "summarized some of my ideas about New York at the time."

Theoretically, at least, De Maria's involvement with earth art goes back to 1962, when he made drawings for what he called Walls in the Desert. What he envisioned then were two parallel cement walls, at least fourteen feet high and eight feet apart, running in a straight line for one mile. "As you walk between them," he explained, "you can look up and see the sky; as you continue to walk, and get near the halfway point, the perspective will appear to close, and then as you come near the end it will open up. The walls will be constructed so that when you come out you'll be able to see for an enormous distance, and you'll really feel what space is." His first earthwork, in 1968, was a kind of sketch for Walls in the Desert—two parallel lines, half a mile long and twelve feet apart, put down with a chalk marker in the Mojave Desert. They blew away within a month. That year, while Heizer was busy with his Nevada Depressions, De Maria had a show at Heiner Friedrich's gallery in Munich, which consisted of filling the gallery's three rooms with sixteen hundred cubic feet of earth—a wall-to-wall dirt carpet three feet deep. From Munich, bankrolled by the endlessly agreeable Herr Friedrich, he went down to the Sahara, hired a bulldozer and crew, and dug a mile-long twelve-foot-wide line, running from north to south, which was to be the first installment of a Three Continent Project. The two other parts were to be a one-mile square, cut somewhere in the western United States, and another one-mile line, this one running east to west, in India; when completed, the three works would be photographed from the air and the photographs superimposed to show a cross within a square. Unfortunately, De Maria and his crew were unable to photograph the first cut. Local authorities in the tiny Algerian village where they were staying became suspicious of their activities and insisted that they leave the country immediately. By now, the original bulldozed line has undoubtedly eroded to some extent, but De Maria plans to go back and recut it. He will do the two other parts when time and funds become available.

Although photographs would seem to play a key role in the Three Continent Project, De Maria took a firm stand in 1969 against any photographic reproduction of his land work. His refusal to let his recent earthworks be photographed has not helped his reputation, and he is a little resentful about that. "I felt that I had to go back toward direct personal experience, no matter what the difficulties were," he told me. "Maybe only twenty or thirty people would see my work in a year, but that was better than a lot of people partially seeing it through photographs." De Maria did not even want people to know ahead of time what his major land work to date (the one that Miss Dwan and I were searching out) looked like. In New York, he had described it to me as three miles of lines cut in the Nevada desert by a bulldozer "in a certain configuration," and he had added that "basically, the piece is experienced by walking." As Miss Dwan and I drove along the dirt road into the Tule Valley, throwing up a long cloud of dust and subjecting the rented car's tires and front axle to severe abuse, she further explained that one was supposed to walk the piece alone, solitude being an essential aspect of the experience. "It's a kind of ritual," she said. Another important element was time. "It really takes all day to see my piece, counting the time spent getting there and back," De Maria had told me. "You're involved with it for ten hours or so. There's no other kind of sculpture that demands that of you—if you come into an art gallery you may spend one minute, two minutes, five minutes looking at a David Smith or a Brancusi. Rarely more than five minutes. But with an earthwork you're really *in* the piece, you're in time, and your whole personality cuts through it in a much larger way."

About an hour and fifteen minutes after we left the freeway, it became evident that we were on the wrong road. The landmarks on De Maria's map were not materializing. We went

back about ten miles, found a turn we had missed, and continued on in hopeful silence. But half an hour later, having followed this road to an abandoned mining site that did not appear on De Maria's map, we realized that error had again crept in. The evening drew on apace. We doubled back and, after a period of eagle-eyed reconnaissance, managed to locate one of De Maria's landmarks. We turned there, drove one mile, as instructed, parked, and set off on foot, taking pains to skirt the juniper and the low-growing cacti, because De Maria had said they might harbor snakes or scorpions. Twenty minutes later, Miss Dwan said we must have missed the earthwork somehow. We retraced our steps to the car, drove it a little farther along, and then struck off again into the purple sage. The two desert hikes were not without their compensations. The wide, level valley, ringed with jagged mountains, some of which were still snow-capped; the desert flowers; the pungent smell of juniper carried by the light breeze; the hot disc of the sun sinking luridly toward the horizon—all this was admittedly something that I had not previously experienced in an art gallery or a museum, although I did get a few brief, semi-hallucinated associations with old John Wayne movies. In the end, having spent a little more than ten hours looking for it, we never did find Walter De Maria's earthwork.

Driving back to Las Vegas that evening, Miss Dwan mentioned that De Maria was deeply interested in the idea of invisibility. Two of his earth pieces—the 1968 parallel lines in white chalk, and a more recent chalk cross, also in Nevada, whose longitudinal axis was a thousand feet long—had both disappeared within weeks, she said. At the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in 1966, De Maria had shown a Large Landscape made up of six of his "invisible drawings"—framed sheets of blank paper on each of which was inscribed, in the exact center, a faintly pencilled word: "TREES," "SKY," "RIVER," "FIELD," "MOUNTAIN," "SUN." "Invisibility may be the main common denominator in art," De Maria had told me. "After all, science says that all matter is composed of invisible particles—electrons, that is." De Maria's projected work for the 1972 Olympics in Munich—the three-hundred-and-ninety-foot shaft in the mountain—would have been about ninety per cent invisible. He felt that the concrete-lined shaft, surmounted by a raised solid-bronze disc, twenty-one feet in diameter, on which people could stand,

would serve to "activate" the mountain itself as a piece of sculpture. The mountain was an artificial construct, made of rubble from the wartime bombings; by turning it into sculpture, the artist hoped to make a statement about the earth, cities, wars, nations, and (one guessed) athletic contests. Unfortunately, the Olympic officials decided against the project. Although it had received the support of the Games' architectural committee and had become front-page news in several German newspapers, the officials eventually decided to commission a more visible work by a German artist.

ROBERT SMITHSON was born in Passaic, New Jersey, in 1938. He spent most of his childhood in Rutherford; his pediatrician was William Carlos Williams. Smithson is, in a sense, the theoretician of the earth-art movement, but his published articles have not always pleased the other earthworkers, and a certain degree of bad feeling exists between Smithson and Walter De Maria. Neither artist cares for the other's work, and neither hesitates to say so.

As a boy, Smithson had a private museum in the basement of his house, where he kept collections of rocks and shells. "I was always on the lookout for fossils," he said when I interviewed him in New York last spring. "It was a sort of private world that kept me going. At that time, I was interested in becoming a zoologist or a naturalist, but gradually I discovered that my interest was more aesthetic than scientific. When I was fifteen, I decided to be an artist." While he was still in high school, he started taking classes at the Art Students League, in New York. After graduation and six months in the Army, plus another six months spent hitchhiking around the country, he found a cheap room in New York, got to know a number of young artists, and worked his way through some of the leading influences of the late fifties and early sixties—de Kooning, Dubuffet, Pollock, Rauschenberg. This took about three years. By 1964, he had made his way out of painting and into three-dimensional plastic constructions. Smithson had his first one-man sculpture show at the Dwan Gallery in 1966, and he was prominently represented in the "Primary Structures" show that year at the Jewish Museum. But Minimal abstraction turned out to be only another transitional stage. "Abstraction, in a funny way, seems to take you very far away from any kind of natural problem, and I've always been drawn

to natural problems," he told me. "There are maybe a hundred different ways of looking at nature, but abstraction is a kind of renunciation of all that."

Smithson dropped out of the New York art scene for a while in the sixties and did a lot of reading and thinking. He was not at all happy, he said, with the whole art-gallery setup—"the business of things going from one white room to another"—and he felt, along with Heizer and De Maria, that painting and sculpture were pretty well played out. He found himself thinking a lot about the growth of crystalline structures and other natural forms, and about the possibility of working with nature directly, instead of at some sort of aesthetic remove. Out of that thinking, in part, came the first of his three-dimensional "non-sites." A typical Smithson non-site consists of a section of a topographical map cut out and mounted on the wall, in front of which stand two or three steel bins containing natural particles—stones, earth, gravel, and such—taken from the actual area shown on the map. The non-sites are for Smithson a kind of "personal archeology." A number of them have been bought by collectors and museums. Smithson sees a somewhat ironic parallel between this activity and the Apollo missions to the moon. "The moon shots are like very expensive non-sites," he says. "Going all that way to bring back some particles from up there. The whole idea of gathering together remnants and then trying to make sense of them—that's what I find interesting."

Although art for Smithson is primarily a mental activity, he has no real interest in conceptual art, which exists solely in the realm of ideas. "A lot of the so-called conceptual art is nothing but atrophy," he told me. "I think we're just discovering the multiplicity of nature's ways." Smithson, however, is far from being a nature freak, and he tends to be a trifle scornful of the recent wave of environmental concern. "The ecology thing has a kind of religious, ethical undertone to it," he said. "It's like the official religion now, but I think a lot of it is based on a kind of late-nineteenth-century, puritanical view of nature. In the puritan ethic, there's a tendency to put man outside nature, so that whatever he does is fundamentally unnatural. There's this dualism lurking around the subject—this Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir, return-to-the-wilderness idea. To me, nature has three different aspects: there's wilderness; there's the country, where man has been; and then there's the urban area. It's like a crystal growth; the urban area is no more unnatural than Yellowstone Park. A lot of people have the sentimental idea that nature is all good; they forget about the earthquakes and typhoons and things like that. Not that I'm opposed to the ecology movement—far from it. One of the things that interests me most, in fact, is the idea of using abandoned quarries, old strip mines, and such places as sites for earth art. These ruined landscapes could be recycled, too, and given over to a different type of cultivation."

Early in 1969, Smithson read a book called "Vanishing Trails of Atacama," which described the strangely colorful process of mineralization in isolated bodies of water. He subsequently called a ranger in Utah, and found that at the northern end of the Great Salt Lake extremely heavy concentrations of salt and other minerals promoted a growth of algae that made the water red—"the color of tomato soup," the ranger said. Smithson went out to Utah and spent a couple of months scouting the area. Then, with financial support from the Dwan Gallery here and the Ace Gallery, in Los Angeles, he took a twenty-year lease on ten acres of lakefront land, hired a contractor, and in April, 1970, started work on the Spiral Jetty.

At the Dwan Gallery, I had seen Smithson's thirty-five-minute color film of his jetty. The film interspersed shots of maps, charts, and prehistoric bones with scenes of Smithson staking out the design with string in the shallow reddish water; trucks backing cautiously to the edge of the steadily lengthening spiral form to dump their loads of rock and dirt; white salt crystals forming on the rocks; and a final, spectacular view from a helicopter of Smithson running the length of the completed jetty—from its terminus on shore to the central point of the curling spiral, sixty yards out in the lake. The film had excited considerable interest in New York and in Europe, and, partly because of it, the Spiral Jetty had become the most widely reproduced example of contemporary earthworks.

In order to confront the Spiral Jetty, Miss Dwan and I flew from Las Vegas to Salt Lake City, rented another car, and drove about ninety miles north, to Brigham City. Smithson, who was in Holland at the time, creating a new earthwork in a sand quarry (he had intended to do it in a peat bog, but that idea fell through), had suggested that we stop in at the Golden

Spike Motel in Brigham City, where he and his wife, the artist Nancy Holt, had stayed while they were working on the jetty; the manager there, Lafe Jensen, he said, could give us precise directions to the site. We had a terrible time finding the Golden Spike Motel, which seemed rather a poor omen, and when we finally did find it Mr. Jensen offered directions so detailed and so thick with homely rural landmarks that our spirits sank. He also mentioned that we might find the jetty under water, because the lake was unusually high at the moment. Mr. Jensen had not been out there since the previous fall, he said, but he was hoping to take his wife out again some Sunday for a picnic. As far as he knew, nobody else had been there recently, except for a group of newspapermen from out of state.

Thirty miles beyond Brigham City, just past the Golden Spike National Historic Site, where the first transcontinental railroad was linked together in 1869 (two antique locomotives and a memorial plinth mark the spot), we took a dirt road that led across rolling acres of rich farmland, but from that point on none of Mr. Jensen's local landmarks were in evidence. However, the landscape looked vaguely familiar to Miss Dwan (she had been there twice before, but each time someone else had been driving), so we held our course for another eight miles, in the general direction of the lake. We got down to the water at about five in the afternoon, and great was our relief to find, as prophesied by the seer of the Golden Spike, a ramshackle wooden jetty with some oil-drilling rigs on it. About half a mile down the shoreline, we could just make out Smithson's Spiral Jetty, and we covered the remaining distance on foot.

Lafe Jensen had been right about the high water, because most of the Spiral Jetty was submerged. Only the big boulders at the edges of the causeway were above water, and when I took off my shoes and tried to wade out I sank to my knees in mud. A whitish salt crust formed on my ankles as the water evaporated. The water was rust-colored, warm, and smooth as glass. I remembered Smithson's saying that there were three different ways of seeing the jetty—walking on it, from a hill on the shoreline, and from a helicopter. "I like to think the piece has a multiplicity of scale," he said. The action of salt-crystal formation also changed the look of the work, he went on. In the late summer, as the water in the lake evaporated, heavy concentrations of salt made a whitish sludge all

along the edges of the spiral, with yellow streaks where the sulphur content showed through. The water became much redder then, he said—more like tomato soup. In the winter, the lake rose and the salt crystals dissolved. The Spiral Jetty was thus an organic work of art, responding like a tree or a plant to the changing seasons.

Unable to walk out on the jetty and lacking a helicopter, I climbed the hill behind the beach. The shape of the jetty was very clear from up there, just as Smithson had said, and the scale was altogether different. Set down in that flat immensity of water bounded by hazy, towering mountains, it looked precise and gemlike, obviously man-made yet unaccountably believable as a natural object. (The spiral itself, as Smithson had pointed out, is one of nature's basic forms.) There was something decidedly pleasing about Smithson's stone-and-earth spiral down there, curling so gracefully upon itself in the placid, reddish water. The dialogue between abstraction and nature that Smithson often mentions in connection with his work seemed to be going on very agreeably, in a modest and nonassertive way, and the problem of art competing with nature did not arise. Later on in the summer, when I was back in New York, I got a postcard from Smithson, in Utah, saying that the water in the lake had receded and that the jetty was surfacing nicely. "Half of the tail is completely covered with salt crystals," he wrote. "The rest is like an archipelago of white islands. I have never seen the water so red."

Christo Javacheff does not consider himself an earth artist. Although the focus of his extraordinary projects has broadened in recent years to include rural as well as urban areas, these projects tend to be in the nature of "events" rather than stationary works of art—to involve varying numbers of people in a common enterprise that exists for a brief time and then dissolves, leaving only photographs and controversies in its wake. Christo (he uses only his first name) is a Bulgarian-born artist of thirty-six, who escaped to Vienna from Prague at the time of the Hungarian revolt, made his way to Paris in 1958, and came to New York, where he lives now, in 1964. He established his reputation, in the early sixties, as a wrapper, rather than as a maker, of art works. He began by wrapping bottles, furniture, and other familiar items in rough canvas or polyethylene and tying off the bundles with yards of heavy twine—a process that

struck some admirers as a wry Surrealist commentary on the modern preoccupation with packaging in industrialized societies. Since then, he has gone on to wrap motorcycles, trees, nude women, museum buildings, and, in 1969, a million square feet of rocky coastline near Sydney, Australia—surely one of the more ambitious art works of the nineteen-sixties. Although the emphasis on spectacle in Christo's work has barred him from consideration as a true earthworker, it would have been unthinkable for me to conclude my earth-art tour without a visit to Rifle, Colorado, where he was making preparations just then to hang an orange nylon curtain across a twelve-hundred-foot-wide canyon in the Grand Hogback area of the Rocky Mountains.

The Valley Curtain project had been initiated more than a year before—in March, 1970—and I had been following its progress with interest and awe. Not the least of Christo's talents is his ability to raise money for his bizarre undertakings. The wrapped coastline in Australia had cost about eighty thousand dollars, most of which Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude—a Parisian girl whose financial, promotional, and administrative genius just might make her the ideal person to reorganize Lockheed—had raised from various private sources in Europe and the United States. Valley Curtain was going to cost a good deal more than that. The initial estimate by Lev Zetlin Associates, the engineering firm engaged by Christo to make the structural-feasibility studies, came to two hundred and fifty-nine thousand dollars, which was subsequently revised upward to four hundred thousand. By early June, 1971, Christo and Jeanne-Claude had raised three hundred and seventy thousand of that, most of it from European collectors, dealers, and museums. They felt confident that they would bring in the rest by the time the curtain itself was raised, in late July—it was to stay in place for three months—and they were rather proud that not one penny had come as a donation; the backers were all being paid off with individual art works by Christo.

In order to finance the project, Christo had incorporated himself. He was the sole stockholder of something called the Valley Curtain Corporation. Christo gave the corporation all his drawings, models, and photomontages relating to the Valley Curtain, together with a number of unsold Christos (wrappings, mostly) that dated back to 1958. All the money generated by the sale of these things would be spent on the Valley Curtain project, so that when the corporation closed its books and dissolved itself, in December, 1971, the final audit would show no profits, and, accordingly, there would be no federal tax. Scott Hodes, a Chicago lawyer who worked out the legal details of the corporation, told me that Jeanne-Claude had been absolutely invaluable to the project. "She runs the books, and she sees to it that everything gets done and that the materials get sent where they ought to be at the right time," he said. "She's an amazing woman." Hodes, who collects modern art and owns three small Christos (two sketches of the Valley Curtain project and a copy of the 1966 annual report of the Chrysler Corporation wrapped in canvas and stout twine), had been highly enthusiastic about the Valley Curtain from the beginning. Oddly, so had many of the citizens of Rifle, a town of some two thousand inhabitants not previously known for its devotion to modern art. The local Chamber of Commerce likes to describe Rifle as the Oil-Shale Capital of the World, but the only local oil-shale plant—an experimental one run by the federal Bureau of Mines—closed down three years ago, throwing a number of Riflians out of work. The town, in fact, has been in something of an economic depression for several years. Although a Union Carbide vanadium refinery just outside town provides a number of jobs, the big-game hunting that is Rifle's other major industry has not been as good as usual in recent years (some people claim that Union Carbide's smokes and effluents have offended the elk, bear, and mountain lions), and, to compound the environmental irony, what was described as the World's Largest Trout Fish Hatchery, established by the Colorado State Game, Fish, and Parks Department in Rifle Creek, a few miles to the northeast, had to be closed down indefinitely a few years ago because *it* was polluting the water downstream. And yet it was not economic considerations alone that caused so many of Rifle's prominent citizens to look with favor upon an enterprise whose very oddity, it seemed, might help to put Rifle on the map.

Rifle Gap, some seventy miles due west of Aspen, is an exceptionally narrow valley, running between nearly perpendicular sandstone cliffs. Christo looked at a number of other possible

sites in Colorado, but none of them could match Rifle Gap's natural advantages, and so, in the spring of 1970, he approached the landowners on either side of the valley. One of them, Lloyd Wilson, was an airline pilot who happened to have seen Christo's wrapped coastline in Australia the year before. He wanted, and got, six thousand dollars for a nine-month lease on his land. Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Kansgen, who owned the land on the west side, were so startled at first by the whole idea that for several weeks they were afraid to mention Christo's proposal to anybody. When they finally met the artist in person, though, he so charmed them that they said he could rent their land for four hundred dollars. Christo promised to give Mrs. Kansgen, who runs a small historical museum of Western artifacts about a mile from Rifle Gap, a good-sized piece of the Valley Curtain to put on display there when the project was terminated.

Although Christo's English is still a little erratic, his obvious sincerity and his beautifully considerate manners seem to have captivated nearly everyone in Rifle, including those who thought he must be off his rocker. In Denver, however, two hundred miles away, opposition to the Valley Curtain soon began to build up. The Colorado Open Space Council, a recently formed conservation group, expressed grave anxiety that the curtain's shadow, falling across the Gap for three months, would adversely affect the animal, insect, and plant life of the area, and that birds might be injured by flying into it. Christo referred the ecological question to Professor William Weber, the head of the Biology Department of the University of Colorado, who assured them that the curtain's shadow would have no effect whatever on the wildlife or plant life (neither of which abounds in the Gap), and he intimated that any bird that could not manage to fly over the curtain would have to be in pretty bad shape to begin with. His arguments apparently satisfied the environmentalists. The Open Space Council expressed its continued disapproval of what it termed a "frivolous use of the land" (since most of the project's financial backing seemed to have come from Europe, Edward Connors, the Council's president, said, why were the Europeans being "deprived of the opportunity of having such art in their back yard?"), but it agreed to take no legal action against the project.

More serious problems were being generated, however, by the Colorado State Highway Department. State

Highway 325 runs right through Rifle Gap. Christo had designed an arch in the curtain—fifty feet wide by twenty feet high—to accommodate passing traffic, but the Highway Department wanted to make very sure that an eight-thousand-pound curtain in a narrow valley where strong gusts of wind could be expected was not going to fall upon the vehicles of the "travelling public." Before it would issue a permit to proceed, therefore, the Department demanded a thorough investigation of the project by an independent engineering consultant; it also demanded that liability insurance of up to a million and a half dollars be taken out, and that it have access to the premises at all times, "in the event it becomes necessary to remove the curtain." The extra insurance policy (the Valley Curtain Corporation already had its own) was a major factor in the steadily mounting costs, which Christo and Jeanne-Claude were spending most of their time trying to meet. They had also engaged the Ken R. White Company, of Denver, to make the independent engineering study. The curtain was originally scheduled to be raised on July 1st. When I flew down from Salt Lake City on June 21st, however, work was still being held up by a series of test borings into the sandstone cliffs on either side of the valley, to make sure they would support the weight of the art.

The project director for Valley Curtain was a forty-one-year-old Dutchman named Jan van der Marck, who was also vice-president of the Valley Curtain Corporation. (The president and treasurer, naturally, was Jeanne-Claude.) He seemed moderately cheerful in spite of all the delays and difficulties, which he told me about after dinner on the night of my arrival. Van der Marck is full of enthusiasm for the work of Christo and other vanguard artists. As chief curator of the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, and, more recently, as director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, he gained a reputation in museum circles for putting on highly original and, at times, somewhat controversial exhibitions, the most spectacular of which involved the wrapping of the Chicago museum, inside and out, by Christo in 1969—an event that led one fellow museum director to refer to van der Marck as another of those heathens "who have defiled the sanctuary." Having resigned his museum position early in 1970 (for reasons that had nothing to do with Christo), he agreed to work on the Valley Curtain project, not only because the idea appealed to

him but because of his own belief that certain art forms can no longer be contained within museums. The Valley Curtain and some of the more celebrated earthworks struck him, he said, as "the primitive beginnings of a new type of art," with which, he felt, contemporary museums must sooner or later come to terms.

We talked for a while, van der Marck and I, about Christo's rather curious position in the contemporary art world. Christo has never been quite accepted by the avant-garde establishment in New York, as one might gather from the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Valley Curtain's sponsors were Europeans. Van der Marck thought this was due in part to cultural chauvinism. Some of the critics still tend to look on Christo as a European aesthete, he said, whereas earth art is very American. "It reflects the vast scale of the country, the back-to-the-earth sentiments of the ecologists, and also a kind of frontier romanticism that many Europeans find so appealing," van der Marck said. He paused and then went on, "Maybe Christo is not tough enough, either. He never spits in your eye, the way some of the earth artists do. People seem to like that truculence now; there is the new mystique of the slap in the face. But Christo is always courteous and helpful, so some think he's just a self-promoter. And yet, you know, I have never heard him make a snide or vicious remark about another artist's work, which is unusual, to say the least. Few artists of my acquaintance are as fair or objective about others' work as Christo is."

I met Christo and his eleven-year-old son, Cyril, at the Aspen airport the following morning (Jeanne-Claude was in New York, too busy with financial and other matters to leave), and the three of us drove over to Rifle that afternoon with Charles Russell, a graduate student from Cornell, who was spending the summer helping out. It is a spectacular drive, gradually descending the western slope of the Continental Divide and running parallel to the Colorado River for many miles. Christo was in fine spirits. He is a slim, rather frail-looking man with shoulder-length dark hair and a thin, intelligent face that frequently breaks into an engaging smile. He told us that his Aspen friends had been horrified when they learned he was going to hang the curtain in Rifle. "In Aspen, they are very intellectually conscious," he said. "They said that the people in Rifle were all Nixonians and hardhats and cowboys, and that they would probably kill me. But, you see, we have nothing but good relations with the people there. They are good people, very straight."

I asked whether the idea of a curtain was not something of a departure for him, inasmuch as he had been principally known as a wrapper. Not at all, he said. As far back as 1962, in Paris, he had made an Iron Curtain out of oil drums—two hundred and four oil drums, piled to a height of fifteen feet—which completely blocked the Rue Visconti for three hours. "The idea of closing off, of stopping the circulation between two places, has always interested me," he said. In 1969, he proposed the temporary closing off of all east-west highways in the United States by means of glass walls forty-eight feet high, but so far this work has remained in the conceptual stage.

Rifle has the dusty, hard-bitten look of a good many Western towns. As we drove through it, Christo pointed out Mc's Cafe, where he and van der Marck had held several meetings with the local citizenry during the past six months. He also pointed out the Harris Jewelry Store, whose owner, William J. Tadus, was the mayor of Rifle and a good friend of the Valley Curtain. By the time he had singled out these landmarks, we were out of town, heading north on Highway 325 toward Rifle Gap. The countryside, watered by Rifle Creek, offered pleasant vistas of green meadows being cropped by well-put-together horses and cows. About seven miles north of town, the valley narrowed abruptly: we were approaching the Gap. Just beyond its narrowest point, we turned off to the right and parked beside a large air compressor marked "Morrison-Knudsen, Boise"—the name of the contracting firm that was going to hang the curtain. The engineering crew greeted Christo with great warmth. Cyril, who was going to be staying with Charles Russell and his wife in Rifle for the next few weeks, gave each man a brisk, European-style handshake and asked about the swimming. The Morrison-Knudsen people, it appeared, were feeling somewhat frustrated, because they were still being held up by the independent engineering survey. In fact, several rock drillers were high up on both cliffs at the moment, taking samples of rock at various levels. Wes Hofmann, the Morrison-Knudsen project manager, said that the results so far looked very promising, and that he and his crew hoped to start installing the cable anchors the next week. The

110,060 pounds of cable—custom-made for the project by the United States Steel plant in Trenton—had arrived a few days earlier at the railroad siding in Rifle. The curtain itself, made by the J. P. Stevens Company—two hundred and fifty thousand square feet of industrial nylon polyamide, dyed bright orange to screen out the sun's infrared rays and prevent loss of tensile strength—was not expected until the end of the month. (At the factory in Richwood, West Virginia, where it was made, a foreman said it was the biggest sewing job they had ever attempted; it had taken eight people four weeks to sew the estimated sixty miles of seams.) I asked Hofmann what he thought of the project, and he said that it was somewhat similar to stringing a high line over a dam, except for the problem of wind load. "The curtain isn't heavy," he said. "It's the force of the wind blowing on it that you have to consider." Hofmann didn't want to get into a discussion of the aesthetics of the Valley Curtain, but he did say that he found it "one hell of a challenge." Jack Webb, his associate, said that they had had some difficulty explaining to people passing through Rifle Gap just what it was they were doing. "Trouble is, after you explain what it is, then you're *really* in deep water," Webb said. "Now I've got so I just tell 'em it's to feed my wife and kids." The plan, he said, was to string four main cables across the Gap and anchor them securely. The curtain would be furled around a slack fifth cable, and when all was ready this would be gradually tightened and pulled up into position. The last step would be to fasten the curtain to the four main cables and then unfurl it. In a strong wind, the curtain would billow out as much as thirty-five feet, and the engineers had to allow for two and a half million pounds of pull on the cables. Hofmann said that getting the curtain up there was going to take a lot of thinking.

Charles Russell suggested that we climb up the western cliff—a suggestion that young Cyril greeted with enthusiasm. We struggled up the nearly perpendicular ascent, slipping on loose shale all the way, and at the top held a brief shouted colloquy with the drillers over the roar of their equipment. The head driller showed Christo a box full of long, sausage-shaped cores he had drawn out of the cliff, and said the rock was as good as any he had ever seen. This pleased Christo, because the question of the rock's solidity was the only remaining obstacle to the Highway Department's issuance of a permit. The

driller said he expected to finish the test borings the next day and get the results through in a hurry. Sargis Sako Zafarian, the chief structural engineer of the White Company, had already told van der Marck that he hoped to see the project approved. According to van der Marck, Zafarian had said that while he didn't understand Christo's curtain from an artistic point of view, he thought it interesting enough from an engineering point of view to want to see it go up. This was always the way it was with engineers on his projects, Christo explained. At the beginning, they would be suspicious, but then they would get into the spirit of things and become very involved and enthusiastic—would become, in Christo's mind, "artist-engineers" collaborating in the creative process.

On the way back to Rifle, we stopped off at the Rifle Golf Club, a mile or so down the road from the Gap, to see Jimmy Ledonne, the manager there. Ledonne had been one of Christo's staunchest supporters from the beginning, speaking up for the Valley Curtain at every opportunity and offering the use of the club restaurant and bar to all Valley Curtain personnel. (He was also enlarging the club parking lot to accommodate sightseers.) "Some of these old farmers around here were pretty skeptical when they first heard about the curtain," Ledonne said, "but I told 'em you've got to be a little broadminded in this world. Different people do different things. Christo here knew what he wanted and he had the money to do it with, so why not let him go ahead?"

I was impressed by Ledonne's readiness to accept the curtain on its own terms, without bothering about whether or not it was a work of art. This struck me as a Western attitude, and I found it reflected in my conversations with other local citizens that afternoon. Most people had apparently assumed at first that the curtain was going to have something painted on it—a portrait or a design of some kind—and the idea that it was just going to *hang* there was a little hard to fit into Rifle's conception of the fine arts. But in the end nearly everyone had been willing to take it on faith that Christo, a famous artist from New York, knew what he was doing, and ought to be allowed to do it, as long as it didn't cost Rifle any money. "I thought it was the greatest thing I'd ever heard of," Anthony C. Macchione, who owns Mc's Cafe, Mc's Boat and Camper Sales, a block of apartments, and about seven hundred head of cattle, said to me later that after-

noon. "It sounded just fine to me. I want people to be people. To me, the important thing is that there's a man in this world who's thinking great things. Christo's putting up all his own money—he's not out here begging for cash. And I think as long as that's the case, in *any* country a man ought to be able to express his ideas."

A few weeks earlier, in May, a telephone poll by the manager of the Rifle radio station had found a hundred and twenty-seven people in favor of the Valley Curtain and twenty-three opposed to it. Jimm Seaney, who runs Station KWSR from the lobby of the Winchester Hotel (Teddy Roosevelt once stayed there on a hunting trip), took down the name and address of each person he called, and he claims that most of the negative votes came from people in other towns. As soon as he had finished his poll, Seaney got together with the mayor of Rifle and some of his fellow-members of the Chamber of Commerce and put through a conference call to the governor's office in Denver. Governor John Love had rather carefully avoided taking a position on the Valley Curtain up to this time. He had been quoted as saying that the project "doesn't appeal to me as a great work of art"—undoubtedly a prudent remark in a state where newly hatched conservationists are thicker and more active politically than lovers of advanced art. According to Seaney, though, the Governor took their call right away and listened respectfully to the results of the telephone poll. "Why do you people want that curtain, anyway?" Seaney remembers his asking. "I told him that we were in a depressed economic situation over here, and that, if nothing else, Christo's curtain would bring an influx of tourists and give us a shot in the arm," Seaney said. "The Governor said, 'I'll accept that.' He asked how the weather was, and hung up, and the next day he got thrown off a horse." A lot of people think that Seaney's poll was a big factor in the Highway Department's decision to give Christo his permit, which came through on July 12th.

TIME was going by, and I had to get back to New York. Christo, too, had to leave—in his case for Houston, where the Houston Museum of Fine Arts was opening a special exhibition of documents, photographs, drawings, and models related to the Valley Curtain. From time to time for the rest of the summer, I kept wondering how the project was faring. Then, at a dinner party one evening in October, a New York art-world luminary reported with enormous glee and satisfaction that the Valley Curtain had come to grief that very afternoon—had broken loose from its moorings while it was being raised into position, and had torn itself to pieces on the rocks below. The local anti-Christo brand of cultural chauvinism had never been more clearly in evidence.

By the time I saw Christo again—in New York, about a week later—he had more or less recovered from the experience. Disasters of one sort or another were not altogether new in his career. During the wrapping of the Australian coastline, for example, a freak storm, with winds up to a hundred miles an hour, had destroyed about a third of the fabric and set the project back for several weeks; the year before, a two-hundred-and-eighty-foot sausage-shaped balloon called 5,600 Cubic Meter Package, which Christo was making for the "Documenta IV" exhibition in Kassel, Germany, ripped apart three times while being inflated or hoisted into position. In Rifle, Christo had announced that the Valley Curtain would be hung without fail in June, 1972, and he and Jeanne-Claude were now throwing themselves cheerfully into the work of raising funds for a new curtain. This was going to cost at least seventy thousand dollars (the insurance on the original curtain applied only to potential victims, not to the fabric itself), but neither Christo nor Jeanne-Claude seemed worried about that. As she put it, in her brisk and chipper fashion, "the money is not the problem."

The real problem, according to Christo, van der Marck, and several other witnesses I talked with subsequently, had been the Morrison-Knudsen contracting crew. For a long time, Christo had been unwilling to take seriously the reports he kept hearing from friends in Rifle—reports that the construction workers looked upon the whole project as a joke and were saying so night after night over their beers in Mc's Cafe. It is important to Christo to believe that the workers become artists when they work on one of his projects, and he kept on believing it in this instance as long as he could. As the summer wore on, though, the number of engineering breakdowns and failures did begin to seem a little excessive. Equipment proved inadequate for the job at hand and had to be replaced. A winch that was to pull the steel cable from its shipping drum pulled too fast, causing a monumental tangle that took

the whole day to straighten out. Soon afterward, one of the main support cables for the curtain came loose as it was being moored to the cliff and went crashing down into the valley, narrowly missing several workmen and a passing Buick. Morrison-Knudsen had designed a special cable car that was supposed to ride above the support cables and serve as a vehicle for the men who would attach the curtain, but it did not work at all and had to be replaced by an improvised platform hung from the cables on pulleys. Unforeseen problems kept arising, and each one meant a further delay in the hanging schedule. Christo and van der Marck got several extensions of their permit from the Highway Department, but by late August the end still was not in sight. Finally, in desperation, Christo put in a call to Dimiter S. Zagoroff, the engineer who had worked with him on the Kassel air structure. Zagoroff, who lives in Boston, came out to Rifle and made a number of helpful suggestions, but this, in turn, accelerated the deterioration in relations between Christo and Wes Hofmann, the Morrison-Knudsen crew chief.

Not until the first week in October were the cables at last in place. The original plan had been substantially modified to meet the Highway Department's specifications. The four heavy cables spanning the Gap were now attached to two two-hundred-and-ten-ton concrete blocks anchored to the sandstone cliffs by dozens of stressed-steel rods driven forty feet into the rock. Eighteen men were at work on the site, including a team of six structural ironworkers from Chicago. The raising was now to take place on Saturday, October 9th. Alerted by the Christos, art-world followers from both coasts, reporters, and camera crews of the three major TV networks were converging on Rifle, along with scores of curious Coloradans and friends or relatives of the local boosters. By raising day, Rifle's motel and hotel rooms were booked solid, and the merchants who had set high hopes on the project were feeling distinctly bullish.

A sizable traffic jam developed on both sides of Rifle Gap that Saturday morning. Some people arrived before eight o'clock, and spent the next four or five hours wondering when something was going to happen. There were, inevitably, more unforeseen difficulties and delays. Shortly after noon, though, the crew started to raise the slack cable around which the curtain had been carefully furled. The curtain itself, wrapped in tarpaulins to protect the nylon fabric while it was being

raised from the valley floor, would be left overnight in its furled state. Then, on Sunday, it would be unfurled gradually and secured to its thirty ground anchors.

Christo was nervous about the plan that Hofmann had worked out for lowering the curtain. The furled curtain was fastened with ropes tied in what the construction team called "magic knots," each of which trailed a long end that reached the ground; a tug at the rope end would untie the magic knot and allow the curtain to fall free. Christo lacked faith in the knots, and his anxiety increased when he learned that the workmen on the east cliff, having run out of the special tape that was to be used in securing the knots, were making do with some used tape. Communications between Christo and Hofmann were almost nonexistent at this point. At four-fifteen in the afternoon, though, when Hofmann let it be known that his crew was going to quit work at four-thirty, even though the curtain on its pickup cable had been raised only about two-thirds of the way to the top, communications suddenly became very heated indeed. Christo and Jeanne-Claude argued with marked vehemence that to leave the curtain in that state, without securing it in any way to the four main cables, would jeopardize the entire project. What if a strong wind came up? They implored Hofmann to keep his men on the job at least until nightfall so that the pickup cable could be secured. Hofmann said that it would be dark before they could secure it, and that the lives of his men were more important than Christo's curtain.

At four-thirty sharp, the construction crew knocked off for the day. Christo, Jeanne-Claude, van der Marck, and a few others worked frantically for the next hour or so, trying to make everything as secure as possible. At about five-fifteen, while there was still light, they went down the road to Jimmy Ledonne's golf club for a drink. Just before six, van der Marck and two friends of his who had driven down from Salt Lake City for the hanging decided to walk back for a last look at the site. As they approached Rifle Gap, van der Marck suddenly saw a fold of orange curtain material come loose from its shroud and begin to flap in the wind. "It was amazing," van der Marck said afterward. "You somehow never expect to be there when disaster strikes—you're usually somewhere else. But we saw the whole thing happen before our eyes. Up there on the east side of the valley, one of the magic knots had come loose. Then a

lot more of the orange material poured out, and more and more, as other knots gave way. It was astonishing and frightening, and also strangely beautiful, in a way. The sky was a sort of deep blue—and in that light the billowing orange fabric looked like flames, and the noise it made in the breeze even sounded like a huge conflagration. About half the curtain came loose in all, and reached all the way to the ground on the east side. Although there was not much wind—only eight or ten miles an hour, I'm told—the curtain moved with such force that it picked up boulders and flung them around, and even turned over some of the heavy equipment. Everybody came running back, of course—you could see what was happening from the golf club. Some people saw it from farther away and thought the curtain was going up after all. There was nothing anybody could do. We drove up to the top of a hill nearby and watched until ten o'clock, and then I went back to Christo's apartment in Rifle and we called our lawyer."

Christo had wept openly during the destruction of the curtain, more than fifty per cent of which was irreparably damaged, and he left Rifle four days later without saying goodbye to Wes Hofmann. At a press conference held at Jimmy Ledonne's clubhouse on Tuesday, October 12th, however, Christo and van der Marck, on the advice of their lawyer, blamed the accident on "mechanical failure," and refrained from saying what they really thought about the construction crew. The press conference was well attended by Rifle citizens, most of whom joined in a standing ovation for Christo following his statement, in which he promised to return the following June to finish the project. One woman, a member of the Rifle City Council, got up and said that until the accident most people had tended to look on the curtain as a crazy idea that just might help the town, but that since they had seen how beautiful it looked, even in its death throes, the Valley Curtain had become *their* project as well as Christo's, and they all looked forward impatiently to his return next year. Christo was moved. It was as though the town of Rifle had become, through his efforts, a community of artists.

—Calvin Tomkins

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Average hourly earnings for employes of the Transit Authority are $11,251, for the Manhattan and Bronx Authority $12,602.—*The Times.*

You can't make some people happy.

A lot of people have not yet made up their minds about earth art. Although the phenomenon has been with us for several years now, examples of it are so inaccessible that hardly anyone has actually seen ~~one~~ an earthwork, and this in itself has led to misconceptions. Virginia Dwan Kondratiev, whose New York gallery, the Dwan, represented several of the leading earth artists until she closed it last June, is frequently bothered by people who refer to what Michael Heizer or Walter de Maria are doing out in the Nevada desert as "conceptual art" -- the term applied to works by those contemporary artists who simply specify an art project in writing and then feel no need to carry it out, the idea being the salient aspect of the work. "Friends of mine often look very surprised when I tell them that Heizer's ~~xxxx~~ 'Double Negative' has nothing to do with conceptual art," Mrs. Kondratiev told me. "They say, 'But you can't really see it, can you?', or they try to argue that it exists only in photographs. So I have to explain that anybody can see it simply by going to Nevada, and that when an artist moved two hundred and forty thousand tons of dirt, it is not just a concept."

Earthworks are real enough, there is no doubt of that, and at this point in the twentieth century no one has to ask whether or not they are art because art today, as we are ~~frequently~~ often enough reminded, is whatever an artist says it is, and if an artist wants to dig into a Nevada mesa instead of carving a block of wood or marble, that is well within the mainstream

of current aesthetic practice, and may ~~will~~ even strike future art scholars as historically inevitable in the light of space exploration, the ecology movement, and other recent developments that have tended to make us all more keenly aware of our own perishable planet. Some of the earth artists have run afoul of ecologically concerned citizens who accuse them of desecrating the landscape and disturbing the natural balance, although it is a little hard to see how any existing earthworks could pose a serious threat to the environment. The truth is that earth workers probably have more in common with ecologists than they do with art critics, which is not saying very much.

Enough artists have loosed their creative energies upon the landscape, at any rate, to give earth art (or land art, as it is sometimes called) the status of an international movement. Michael Heizer works mainly in the desert, displacing large masses of rock and dirt with the aid of bulldozers, pneumatic drills, and dynamite. Walter de Maria also favors desert regions, although his current project is a two-hundred-foot air shaft through the center of a mountain near Munich, on the site of the 1972 Olympic Games. Robert Smithson's recent works have all incorporated water, the most ambitious one to date being his fifteen-hundred-foot-long "Spiral Jetty" in the Great Salt Lake, in Utah. Dennis Oppenheim has chopped large semicircles in the ice of frozen rivers and directed the seeding and harvesting of wheat fields in prescribed patterns (and has since abandoned earth art in favor of body art, a form that involves the use of the artist's own body in various ways that one hopes will not prove ultimately fatal); Richard Long has imposed geometric patterns on fields of daisies; Peter Hutchinson, a British earth artist, has cultivated bread molds on the lip of an active volcano in Mexico and poured dyes into the waters of the Grand Canal in Venice. Some of these doings are ephemeral

by nature, while others may be around for centuries, and the problem of what to do about the more permanent earthworks is much discussed. So far, nobody has actually bought an earthwork. Robert C. Scull, the collector, commissioned Heizer's "Nine Nevada Depressions" in 1969 and presumably he owns the results, which are situated on land leased from private owners for a period of twenty years -- what happens when the lease is up is anybody's guess. A Swiss dealer named Bischofsberger thought he had acquired Heizer's "Double Negative" from the Dwan Gallery last year ("Double Negative" is on sixty acres of land bought at auction by Heizer, who made over the property deed to the Dwan). Bischofsberger was planning to sell it to a German collector at a price rumored to be in the neighborhood of sixty-five thousand dollars, but Heizer decided rather abruptly that he didn't want dealers dickering over the work and he cancelled the deal.

Jennifer Licht, an Associate Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, showed slides of Heizer's "Double Negative," Smithson's "Spiral Jetty," and de Maria's untitled Nevada land work to the trustees of the museum's purchasing committee last winter. "I told them beforehand that I knew they weren't going to buy the works, but that I thought this was the most interesting new art being done now and what should the museum do about it?" she told me. According to Miss Licht, the trustees seemed impressed by the works, but no clear answers to her question emerged; she plans to bring the matter up again soon. Generally speaking, most museum purchasing committees still tend to think in terms of collecting objects that can be exhibited in museums, and they have some difficulty with the notion, put forward by Miss Licht and some of her colleagues, that museums, and particularly museums of modern art, should find their future role as agencies to help artists do their work.

So far, the earth artists have had to rely on private patrons such as Mr. Scull, or on the two or three dealers who have elected to support them (the Dwan Gallery here, the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Munich), or on their own limited resources. The sale of preliminary sketches and working drawings, models, and even photographs of the earth projects has helped to a degree, but clearly no one is making a bundle from earth art at the moment. The artists themselves, most of whom are in their twenties or early thirties, seem content to put everything they can scrape together into the next project and let the future take care of itself. They are a dedicated lot, and a certain scorn for the New York art world and its commercial machinations is seldom absent from their thinking. "One of the implications of earth art might be to remove completely the commodity status of a work of art and allow a return to the idea of art as...more of a religion," Heizer said in a recent interview. In fact, he went on to say, "It looks as though the whole spirit of painting and sculpture could be shrugged off in two years' time perhaps. It's almost totally inconsequential. Of course it'll never happen, but it's conceivable, it could happen." Walter~~x~~ de Maria believes that art galleries are "as outmoded as nightclubs" today, and the same notion may have induced Mrs. Kondratiev to close her gallery for good last June. Just how Heizer, de Maria, and Smithson will manage without the Dwan is an open question, but as the chefs d'école of an international art movement they will undoubtedly find backing somewhere. None of them appears to suffer, at any rate, from a lack of confidence. "Whether we have made a jump beyond style -- that's the real question," de Maria told me last spring. "Everybody talks about the art world as a succession of styles -- Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Abstraction, Minimal, and so forth. But this may be something way beyond all that -- a quantum leap. I think the

experience of this work will make you feel different than you've ever felt before in the presence of art."

The jumping-off place for a tour of recent American earth art is Las Vegas, Nevada, a city whose signal achievement has been to obliterate or subvert nature in all her forms. I had expected to meet Michael Heizer there, when I flew out in June for a few days of intensive earth art appreciation, but the manager of the motel he was staying at said that he had left a few days before to go to Wyoming, or perhaps Montana, no one knew for sure. Virginia Kondratiev, who arrived from Los Angeles the same day I did, seemed a little put out that he had gone off without leaving a message, but she said philosophically that this was typical of Heizer's current frame of mind. "Michael is very negative right now," she told me. Earlier that spring, during his one-man show at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Heizer had had some bad luck with an outdoor project called "Dragged Mass," which involved hauling a thirty-five-ton granite block 00 feet across the lawn in front of the museum; because the ground was still partly frozen and accordingly very hard, the block did not dig up, or "displace" the earth along its path as planned. Afterward, when Heizer offered to give the piece to the Institute, the trustees declined to accept it. "He's fed up with the art world," Mrs. Kondratiev said. "All he wants to do is work, and he feels he hasn't really worked for a year because he's been that long looking for a site for his new vertical piece." She explained that the vertical piece was to be executed on the sheer face of a granite cliff. Heizer planned to cut out a large section of rock, thirty tons or more, in one piece, and move it down the cliff face, or perhaps across the cliff face, to another location where a cavity would

previously have been hollowed out to receive it. He had spent several months looking for a site in the Swiss Alps, because a European benefactor wanted him to do the piece there, but in Switzerland every suitable granite cliff face seemed to have a tidy village at its base, whose inhabitants might react unfavorably to art-engendered rock slides. Only grahite would do -- any other sort of rock would shatter into fragments when dynamited -- and so far Heizer had not been able to find a proper granite cliff in Nevada, the site of most of his other works. In any case he had gone off to Wyoming, or Montana, leaving no address, and Mrs. Kondratiev seemed reasonably certain on the basis of past experience that no one was likely to hear from him for some time.

In New York, in his ~~xxkkxx~~ barren loft studio on Spring Street, Heizer had struck me as a quietly keyed-up young man who saw no particular value in talking to strangers. He did say that he had been born in Berkeley, California, in 1944, and that his father, Professor Robert Heizer, was a well-known archaeologist there -- I later found out that Professor Heizer was a world authority on the methods by which the Olmecs and other pre-Columbian people had managed, without benefit ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ of the wheel, to move ~~xxxxxxxx~~ stone blocks even larger and more recalcitrant than Heizer's own "Dragged Mass." Heizer, who travelled around Mexico and Latin America with his parents as a child, had gone to school in Berkeley. After graduating from high school there he spent a year or so at the San Francisco Art Institute, without bothering to enroll formally. He told me that he had "always" painted, and that when he came to New York in the early nineteen sixties this was what he did mainly, experimenting with various current styles in the usual exploratory manner. "After I'd been in New York for a couple of years I saw art here as

really dead," he said. "A lot of things had been killed off at the same time because the forms themselves were coming into question. I was lucky. Because I wasn't really involved with all that, I was prepared to deal with the new situation."

Heizer's new situation turned out to be the Mojave Desert. As a Californian, he said, the Mojave had been present in his thinking for a long time, even though he had never been there. In the summer of 1967, weary of New York and its dead art, Heizer flew out to the West Coast, rented a truck, and started digging in the dry lakes of the Mojave. From the outset Heizer's land works were inclined to take the form of excavations, or "displacements." His first earth project, which proved impossible to realize, was a series of four "Essential Geometric Variations" -- cube, cone, circle, inverted cone. He planned to have these made up by a foundry in Cor-Ten steel prior to emplacing them in a sunken space in the Mojave, but an engineer's feasibility study showed that this would cost about forty thousand dollars; because Heizer at that time had no money at all and no backing, he had to settle for building the four variations himself out of wood and experimenting around with them, that next winter, in the deep snow of the Sierra Mountains. The earthworks that he did manage to execute in the desert that summer were seen only by Heizer and one or two of his friends, and most of them have long since disappeared.

Heizer came back to New York in the fall of 1967 and did some more paintings. He also met Robert Scull, who liked his paintings but who seemed even more interested in the desert diggings. The result was that Scull financed Heizer's entire output during the summer of 1968, which he spent in various desert regions of Nevada. The works of this highly productive period included the series of "Nine Nevada Depressions,"

eight of which involved digging up an enormous boulder, moving it a certain distance, and replacing it in a concrete-lined pit that was slightly larger than the boulder's own mass. Heizer rented heavy duty construction equipment and hired local contractors to assist him, and at one point he even permitted his patron to come out and watch one of the displacements. Scull speaks rapturously of the experience. "I saw Mike Heizer stand on top of a ~~xxxxx~~ fifty-ton piece of granite," he told me, "and then jump down and give the order, and the dynamite split it right in half! I watched them take it to the place where he'd dug out a huge hole -- it was night, and the cars of the workmen lit up the place with their headlights. And suddenly I realized that art didn't have to involve the walls of my house. I was involved with nature -- the whole desert became part of my experience."

The ninth Nevada Depression, entitled "Dissipate," was a group of five rectangular holes dug in conformity with the pattern established by five matches that Heizer had dropped at random and then taped down on a sheet of paper -- a somewhat Duchampian gesture that seems out of place in Heizer's oeuvre. In addition to the Depressions, Heizer also managed that summer to carve a graceful, one-foot-deep by one-foot-wide loop in the cracked earth of Nevada's Massacre Dry Lake ("Isolated Mass: Circumflex"), using a pick and shovel, and a series of eight fifty-foot circles in Coyote Dry Lake, California, using a motorcycle ("Ground Incision: Loop Drawing"). The circles were cut by the tires of the artist's Harley-Davidson (???), which he ~~enjoys driving~~ likes to drive flat out in the soft, dry soil of the desert.

By this time, Heizer was aware that a number of other artists ~~xxx~~ had discovered the earth as a ~~xxx~~ medium. He had met Walter de Maria in New York, ~~xxxxxxx~~ and that fall he joined the Dwan Gallery, which already

represented de Maria and Smithson. The Dwan put on its first earthworks exhibition in October, 1968, a group show that included Smithson, de Maria, Heizer, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, (FIRST ???NAME) Keltenbach, and Sol Lewitt; a lot of the exhibition was given over to photographs, but viewers also experiemced the novel frisson of finding real dirt, straw, and axle grease on the floor of a New York art gallery. There had been a few earthworker exhibitions before this, at and , and the earth artists were beginning to be interviewed and quoted. Asked why he chose to work in the desert, Heizer told a Saturday Evening Post writer that out there he could find "that kind of unraped, peaceful, religious space artists have always tried to put into their work. I don't want any indication I've been here at all," he added. "My holes should have no history, they should be indeterminate in time and inaccessible in locale."

The most ardent collectors of advanced American art in recent years have been Germans, a phenomenon traceable in part, at least, to the activities of several young, magnetic, and vastly enterprising German art dealers. Heiner Friedrich, who may very well be the most Maghetic German since Wotan, was sufficiently impressed by Heizer's land works to offer him a one-man show in his Munich gallery in the spring of 1969. Heizer elected to exhibit two works there. The first, which was shown inxkxx the gallery, was a "Line Drawing" that consisted of the gallery's printed announcement of the show, cancelled out by a crayon line drawn through the words. The other work of art was situated in a vacant lot on the outskirts of Munich. It was a circular pit, one hundred feet in diameter, whose sides sloped symmetrically to a central point fifteen feet deep, and it was called, naturally, "Munich Depression."

Heizer's most important work to date, which also happens to be the world's largest sculpture (provided that is what it is), was started in the fall of 1969. The Dwan had offered him a one-man show in January, 1970, with the understanding that he would do a major earthwork somewhere and that the gallery would pay for it. Heizer went out to Nevada in October, and nobody heard anything from him for a couple of months. He returned in December with photographs of "Double Negative," a monumental excavation that was featured soon afterward on the cover of both Art News and Artforum. This was the work that really made Heizer's international reputation, and it was the one I had come to see. Although Heizer himself was not around to take us out to it, Mrs. Kondratiev had been there a number of times and felt reasonably certain that she could locate it again. We rented a car and set out from Las Vegas at about four o'clock in the afternoon, heading northeast on the Freeway.

Driving out of Las Vegas into the arid and empty Nevada landscape is a fairly memorable experience in itself. After the preposterous air-conditioned hotel lobbies, with their twenty-four hour gambling tables and housewife-mesmerizing slot machines, the seared desert valleys and eroded hills looked equally unreal, and nearly as hostile to life. The military installations and nuclear test sites, which show up on the road map as "Danger Zones," are for the most part invisible to Freeway traffic; we saw jet fighters flash down over one rust-colored mountain range as they headed for Nellis Air Force Base eight miles north of Vegas, but we could not see the huge base itself. Roughly two-thirds of Nevada is government-owned land, and one has the impression, from the radar and other electronic sentinels on the hilltops, that the owner is watching. "Michael and Walter really dig this place, no pun intended," Mrs. Kondratiev told me. "They feel it sums up where we really

are now in this country -- all the materialism and vulgarity of Vegas, and the death industries outside. It's a kind of instant America -- instant marriage and divorce, instant winning and losing, instant life and death. They boys cut their hair before they come out here because the local police are tough on hippies, but they like the frontier mentality and they're very much into the whole gambling thing. The title of Michael's piece, 'Double Negative,' really refers in part to the double zero on the roulette wheel."

Approximately thirty miles north of Vegas, we left the Freeway and headed east to the town of Overton, where Mrs. Kondratiev stopped at a filling station to ask how to get up on top of Mormon Mesa. The station owner obliged us, and added a warning about going up there on such a blistering day -- the temperature, which had been 105 degrees when we left Vegas an hour before, showed no signs of relenting. The blacktop road changed to dirt as we approached the mesa. Suddenly it became quite steep. The rented car churned and skidded through soft sand that had drifted over the track in places, and I became acutely aware of the sharp drop at the outer edge of each hairpin turn. Just as the road seemed on the verge of disappearing completely we lurched over a ridge and were on top of the Mormon Mesa, which was just as flat as it had looked from a distance. Twin car tracks led across to the other side, where "Double Negative" was located. "We've done it!" Mrs. Kondratiev said, prematurely.

The next hour and a half were spent in searching up and down the mesa's far side. "Double Negative" had not turned out to be where Mrs. Kondratiev thought it was. Mormon Mesa extends longitudinally for miles and miles, and is cut into at intervals by narrow canyons each of which looked as though it might be the site of Heizer's dig, and ~~and too~~

Mrs. Kondratiev, a tall, chic woman in dark blue slacks and a western-style shirt, reconnoitered every one. The temperature remained in the hundreds; the car shuddered on the verge of boiling over. Just after seven, having searched the mesa for an hour and a half, we finally found it.

Two enormous square wedges, fifty feet deep and thirty feet wide, had been cut out on opposite sides of the narrow canyon, as neatly and precisely as though someone had sliced into the mesa with a gigantic cake cutter. Following Mrs. Kondratiev's lead, I started to descend the sharply sloping end wall of one cut, trying to decide en route whether a cautious sidestep or a sit-down slide was less likely to result in a sprained ankle, and ended up in a dead run that took me to about the middle of the cut. I looked up. Some erosion had taken place in the year and a half since the piece was finished, and the vertical sidewalls showed striations and indentations near the top which, when viewed from fifty feet down, suggested the stone carvings of a medieval church. Lower down, near the floor level, large blocks of soft earth had crumbled and fallen to the ground. Heizer had said that he didn't know how rapidly the work would erode, but he hoped it would last a hundred years. It had already acquired graffiti: Peace symbols, a fashionable four-letter word, and the name "Willie Weed" had been scratched into the sandy wall in several places; there was also a surprisingly realistic drawing of a shark. The color was a warm ochre with yellowish streaks, verging to dull reds and greens in places where the minerals had leached out. We walked to the end of the cut and looked over into the valley. The two hundred and forty thousand tons of displaced earth and rock which Heizer's bulldozer had pushed over the edge were barely noticeable; the debris blended into the ochre of the canyon's walls, a minor landslide in a vast uninhabitable landscape.

We climbed up the end wall again, drove the car around to the other

side of the canyon, and clambered down into the other cut. It was exactly the same as the first, only longer -- one hundred feet from end wall to canyon edge. (Mrs. Kondratiev said that originally both cuts had been the same length, fifty feet, but then Heizer had decided to make this one longer). Willie Weed had been there, too, and he or someone else had left a beer can. Mrs. Kondratiev said that Mormon Mesa was a popular place for motorcycle buffs to race their bikes. She sat down on the ground and looked up, getting the sky and the setting sun into her perspective. A small lizard watched, unblinking, while I emptied the dirt from my shoes. "My personal associations with dirt are very real," Heizer had said once in an interview. "I really like it, I really like to lie in the dirt."

Every time she saw it, Mrs. Kondratiev said, "Double Negative" took her by surprise. "It's so much bigger than I remembered," she added. I thought it seemed smaller than I had anticipated, ~~but not less impressive for that reason.~~ Heizer wants to make it clear that he is not trying to compete with nature in size. "I really don't think about my things in terms of size because they're not that big," he had told me. "I just want them to be big enough to give the idea." Walter de Maria had expressed the same notion in an article once, saying that no work of art could ever stand up to the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, or the redwoods. Seen in relation to the long mesa with its wind-carved sandstone ridges and turrets and ravines dropping sharply down to the green valley below, "Double Negative" looked ~~somewhat~~ distinctly man-made, temporary, and somehow, to me, at least, less majestic than the blown-up photographs of it that I had seen. The experience of being inside it was certainly different from the experience of looking at a landscape by Claude or Turner, but whether it could qualify as a religious experience, or a quantum leap beyond style, I must leave up to

the judgement of more physically robust critics than I. Heat and thirst had dulled my perceptions; I was thinking of the trip back.

The little lizard disappeared behind a rock. He seemed to be very much at home in this work of art. It was nearly eight o'clock. According to Heizer, one should really spend twenty-four hours experiencing "Double Negative," so as to see it in all the changing conditions of light. I'm sure that the physically robust critics all do this. We started back just as the sun was disappearing behind the horizon, and managed to make it down the dirt track on the other side of the mesa before dark.

The next day we started earlier, leaving Las Vegas at about two o'clock in the afternoon and again heading northeast on the Freeway. Walter de Maria had drawn a rough map showing how to get to his untitled piece, which Mrs. Kondratiev referred to once or twice, casually, as "Rip-off." When I asked about that, she explained that de Maria had done the piece on government land, without bothering to get permission. The car radio gave the temperature as 108 degrees. Also in the news was an underground nuclear explosion at the Nevada Test Site, the first since the December 18, 1970 shot that had resulted in a radiation leak measured in eighteen states. There didn't seem to be any radiation in the air, but with the temperature at 108 it was hard to tell.

"Walter is a very mysterious person," Mrs. Kondratiev said, as we left the Freeway and started to follow a dirt road leading straight back into the desert hills. Several other people had told me the same thing, although, when I talked with him in New York a month before, he had impressed me as the most articulate of all the earth artists I had met. Somewhat older than Heizer -- he is thirty-five, Heizer is twenty-

seven -- he had established himself during the sixties as one of the more interesting innovators in a vein that came to be known as minimal art. His minimal works all had a somewhat mysterious quality to them, though, and I had been told that in contrast to Heizer's earthworks, which had to do with sculptural mass, volume, and displacement, de Maria's land pieces seemed to invoke an element of ritual. For this reason among others, de Maria refused to allow photographs of his land work to be published.

Born just outside Berkeley, California, the son of a first generation American whose parents had come from northern Italy about the turn of the century, de Maria grew up in and around San Francisco and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with an M.A. in fine arts. "As soon as I graduated, in 1959, I stopped painting," he told me, "because I realized that what we had been taught was basically a closed-end system. At Berkeley they started you with plaster casts, then went right to Cezanne -- breaking up the casts into facets -- then to Picasso -- breaking them up a little more and getting wilder -- and then on to Hans Hoffman, who taught there at one time. Everything kept getting a little more loose and broken up, but you still kept essentially to some kind of a balanced picture, with a little green here, a little red there, and so forth. And at the end they brought you right up to de Kooning, which at that time was being up to date. Having gone through all those stages, you were considered a bona fide painter and could go out and become an art teacher, too. The system was just doomed. I was so disgusted that I quit painting, and started making little boxes."

He also moved to New York, where he came under the influence of La Monte Young, a fellow Californian and a musician who in his turn had been powerfully influenced by the composer John Cage. De Maria lived in

in a very small loft on the Bowery with a San Francisco girl he had married, and during their first New York winter, 1960-1961, he made a total of twenty-six plywood boxes in various shapes and sizes. The boxes gradually evolved into larger, box-like constructions that invited the viewer to become a participant -- taking something out and putting something else inside, for example, or inserting a wooden ball in an opening at the top and having it roll through a maze of pinball-style partitions, pinball-style, until it appeared at the bottom. The sounds made by the rolling ball were in de Maria's mind an important part of the work. De Maria was interested in Cage's idea that "everything we do is music," and he occasionally performed during this period, playing drums, in avant-garde concerts by La Monte Young and with the Velvet Underground and other rock groups.

Robert Scull, who likes to find young artists before they find themselves, admired de Maria's work and commissioned him to re-make several of his plywood pieces in stainless steel. One of these was a narrow, seven-foot-high cage made of one-inch rods, entitled "Statue of John Cage." Another, somewhat more enigmatic, was a series of "High Energy Bars" -- stainless steel ingots fourteen inches long and one and a half inches square, inscribed with the words "High Energy Bar" and accompanied by a certificate affirming that it was, indeed, a high energy bar. The steel version of the Cage statue, now simply titled "Cage," impressed a number of critics as one of the best pieces in the 1966 "Primary Structures" exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York, the first comprehensive showing of the stripped-down, non-relational, highly impersonal objects that became known as minimal art.

Theoretically, at least, de Maria's involvement with land art goes back to 1962, when he made drawings for what he called "Walls in the Desert."

What he envisaged then were two parallel cement walls, at least fourteen feet high and eight feet apart, running in a straight line for one mile. "As you walked through them," he explained, "you could look up and see the sky; as you continued to walk, and got near the half way point, the perspective would appear to close, and then as you came near the end it would open up. The walls would be constructed so that when you came out, you'd be able to see for an enormous distance, and you'd really feel what space is." For several years de Maria thought of his "Walls" as a sort of conceptual piece, an idea too sweeping to be realized. In 1967, though, he had what he calls "the greatest sculptural experience of my life," an automobile trip across the country from New York to California. De Maria had met Heizer by this time, and had been out to the Mojave with him. He had also been divorced, and was feeling the urge to get out of New York.

De Maria's first earthwork, which coincided with a show of his minimal pieces at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles, was a kind of sketch for "Walls in the Desert" -- two ~~mile-long~~, parallel lines, half a mile long and twelve feet apart, put down with a chalk marker in the Mojave Desert. They blew away inside of a month. That summer, while Heizer was busy with his Nevada Depressions, de Maria had a show at Heiner Friedrich's gallery in Munich, which consisted of filling the gallery's three rooms with 1,600 cubic feet of earth -- a wall-to-wall dirt carpet two feet deep. From Munich, bankrolled by the endlessly agreeable Herr Friedrich, he went down to the Sahara Desert, hired a bulldozer and crew, and dug a mile-long, twelve-foot-wide "line," running from north to south, that was to be the first installment of a "Three Continent Piece" conceived originally in 1967. The other two parts were to be a one-mile

square cut, somewhere in the western United States, and another one-mile line, this one running east to west, in India; when completed, the three works would be photographed from the air, and the photographs superimposed to show a cross within a square. Unfortunately, de Maria and his crew were unable to photograph the first cut. Local authorities in the tiny Algerian village where they were staying became suspicious of their activities, and insisted that they leave the area immediately. By now the original bulldozed line has undoubtedly eroded to some extent, but de Maria plans to go back and re-cut it sometime. He will do the other two parts when time and funds become available.

Although photographs would seem to play a key role in the "Three Continent Piece," de Maria took a firm stand in 1969 against any photographic reproduction of his land work. "A lot of people got the idea that land art was something you experienced by photos in magazines," he explained to me. De Maria's refusal to let his recent earthworks be photographed has not helped his reputation, and he is a little resentful about that. "But I felt that I had to go back toward direct personal experience, no matter what the difficulties were," he told me. "Maybe only twenty or thirty people would see my work in a year, but that was better than a lot of people partially seeing it through photographs."

De Maria did not even want people to know ahead of time what his major land work to date (the one Mrs. Kondratiev called "Rip-off") looked like. He had described it to me in New York as three miles of lines cut in the Nevada desert by a bulldozer, "in a certain configuration," and he had added that "basically, the piece is experienced by walking." As we drove along the dirt road into the Tule Valley, throwing up a long cloud of dust and subjecting the rented car's tires

and front axle to uncontracted abuse, Mrs. Kondratiev further explained that one was supposed to walk the piece alone, solitude being an essential aspect of the experience. "It's a kind of ritual," she said. Another important element was time. De Maria had said that it took a minimum of four hours to see, or, rather, to "walk" this earthwork, and that in point of fact the total time involved was considerably longer because it took three hours to get there from Las Vegas and three hours to get back. "I think time is a major factor in all our work," de Maria had told me. "The appreciation of slowly moving time -- it may have something to do with the drug culture of the sixties. Earthworks have a very extended sense of time, and the time is actual, too, not figurative. It really takes all day to see my piece. You're involved with it for ten hours or so. There's no other sculpture that demands that of you -- if you come into an art gallery you may spend one minute, two minutes, five minutes looking at a David Smith or a Brancusi. Rarely more than five minutes. But with an earthwork you're really in the piece, you're in time, and your whole personality cuts through it in a much larger way."

About an hour and fifteen minutes after leaving the Freeway, it became evident that we were on the wrong road. The landmarks on de Maria's map were not materializing. We went back about ten miles, found the turn we had missed, and continued on in hopeful silence. According to the map, we were supposed to pass a green trailer and some corrals, and shortly thereafter a dirt landing strip. About a mile past the landing strip we would find another dirt road coming in from the left. We were to take that road and follow it for exactly one mile, then park the car and walk straight ahead, into the desert, until we came to de Maria's "lines in a certain conformation." But half an hour later, having followed the road to an abandoned mining site that did not appear on de Maria's map, we realized that error had again crept in.

The afternoon drew on space. We doubled back again, and after a period of ~~[illegible]~~ eagle-eyed reconnaissance managed to locate the dirt landing strip (it was somewhat overgrown) and the dirt road coming in from the left. We turned there as instructed, drove one mile, parked, and set off on foot, taking pains to skirt the juniper and low growing cacti because de Maria had said they might harbor snakes or scorpions. As we walked, I gave some thought to the element of danger in art. Not too often over the centuries, it seemed to me, had the experience of art entailed this element so far as the viewer was concerned. Michaelangelo was presumably in some peril of falling off his scaffolding in the Sistine Chapel, but for Pope Julius and all subsequent viewers the only serious concern has been the possibility of ~~[illegible]~~ a stiff neck. Walter de Maria, on the other hand, in his most recent show at the Dwan, had exhibited three "Spike Beds," ~~[illegible]~~ rectangular boards bristling with upright stainless steel spikes honed to the sharpness of barracuda teeth, and the gallery, as requested by the artist, had obliged each visi or to sign a release absolving it of responsibility in the event of spectator impalement. (De Maria said the piece "summarized some of my feelings about New York at that time"). When a gallery in Canada wanted to show this work in a room that would be roped off to viewers, de Maria refused; the danger, he said, was part of the work. It occurred to me to wonder what other perils de Maria's elusive desert work might have to offer, aside from the snakes and scorpions and the ever-present possibility of running out of gas or breaking down in a desert valley fifty miles from any highway, and in which the only sign of human habitation, the green trailer, looked as though no one had been near it for years. It even seemed conceivable that the "different feeling" in the presence of earth art that

de Maria had promised me might turn out to be heat prostration.

Twenty minutes later, Mrs. Kondratiev said we must have missed it somehow. Perhaps we had not clocked the distance correctly from the turn-off. We retraced our steps to the car, drove it back to where the two roads met, returned, parked a little further than we had before, and struck off again into the purple sage. The two desert hikes were not without their compensations. The wide, level valley ringed with jagged mountains, some of which were still snow-capped in mid-June; the desert flowers; the pungent smell of juniper carried by the light breeze; the hot disk of the sun sinking luridly toward the horizon -- all this was admittedly something that I had not previously experienced in an art gallery or a museum, although I did get a few brief, semi-hallucinated associations with old John Wayne movies. In the end, though, having spent a little more than teh hours looking for it, we never did find Walter de Maria's earthwork.

Driving back to Las Vegas that evening, Mrs. Kondratiev said that de Maria was deeply interested in the idea of invisibility. Two of his earth pieces, the 1968 cross in white chalk and a more recent and larger chalk cross, also in Nevada, whose longitudinal axis was a mile long, had both disappeared within weeks. His projected work for the 1972 Olympics in Munich, the 200-foot shaft in the mountain, would be about ninty per cent invisible (the Olympic officials were still seriously considering it at that time; they have since decided ((DECISION TO COME)). "Invisibility may be the main common denominator in art," de Maria had told me. "Science says matter is composed of invisible particles called electrons. The notion that things exist that you can't see -- it's not really accepted, but it's there/."

Mrs. Kondratiev also told me about the unfortunate occurrence at a

group show of earthworks at Cornell in February, 1969. Through a clerical oversight, Michael Heizer received a bill from the university for the labor involved in digging the large hole that was to have been his contribution to the show. This made him so angry that he decided he did not want to me in the show at all, and demanded that his hole be filled in forthwith. By then, however, what with the scarcity of good loose dirt in Ithaca in February, de Maria and Robert Morris, who were also in the show, had incorporated the earth from Heizer's hole into their own pieces. Heizer's hole was covered over with a tarpaulin, instead, which presumably made it invisible. But was it there? Such knotty questions await the exegesis of future scholars.

Robert Smithson was born in Passaic, New Jersey. He spent most of his childhood in Rutherford, where his father was a banker who specialized in mortgage loans and his pediatrician was William Carlos Williams. One might expect his aesthetic approach to differ in some respects from those of his West Coast colleagues, Heizer and de Maria, and one would be right. Smithson is in a sense the theoretician of the earth art movement, but his published articles have not always pleased the other earthworkers, and a certain degree of bad feelings exists between Smithson and Walter de Maria. Neither artist cares much for the other's work, and neither one hesitates to say so.

As a boy in Rutherford, Smithson had a private museum in the basement of his house, where he kept his collections of rocks and shells. "I was always on the lookout for fossils," he said, when I interviewed him in New York last spring. "It was a sort of private world that kept

me going. At that time I was interested in becoming a zoologist or a naturalist, but gradually I discovered that my interest was more aesthetic than scientific. I decided to be an artist when I was fifteen."

While he was still in high school he started taking classes at the Art Students League in New York. After graduation, a six-month hitch in the Army, and another six months spent hitchiking around the country, he found a cheap room in New York, got to know a number of young artists, and worked his way through some of the leading influences of the late fifties and early sixties -- de Kooning, Dubuffet, Pollock, Rauschenberg. This took about three years. By 1964, he had worked his way out of painting and into three-dimensional plastic constructions. Smithson had his first one-man show at the Dwan Gallery in 1966, and he was prominently represented in the "Primary Structures" show at the Jewish Museum later that year. But minimal abstraction turned out to be only another transitional stage. "Abstraction in a funny way seems to take you very far away from any kind of natural problem, and I've always been drawn to natural problems," he told me. "Having started out as an expressionist and gradually come around to a greater consciousness of abstraction, it began to occur to me that the urge toward abstraction involves a fear of nature. There are, maybe, a hundred different ways of looking at nature, but abstraction is a kind of renunciation of all that."

Smithson dropped out of the New York art scene for a while in the sixties, and did a lot of reading and thinking. He was not at all happy, he said, with the whole art gallery setup -- "the business of things going from one white room to another" -- and he felt, along with Heizer and de Maria, that paintin and sculpture were pretty well played out.

He found himself thinking a lot about the growth of crystalline structures and other natural forms, and about the possibility of working directly with nature directly, instead of at some sort of aesthetic remove.

In the spring of 1966, Smithson, Robert Morris, Sol Lewitt, and Carl André (three other minimal artists who also showed at the Dwan) decided to seek out nature directly -- to find an outdoor site and make something on it. The collaboration was Smithson's idea. Together with Virginia Kondratiev, they drove down to the Pine Barrens in south Jersey, looking en route at various abandoned quarries, graveyards, and other sites that were "in some way disrupted or pulverized," as Smithson put it (scenic beauty was far from their thoughts), and taking any number of photographs. Nothing came of the collaboration. Nature in the Pine Barrens is thickly wooded, and a lot of costly clearing would have been required to make the land suitable for art works. But the outing did lead to the first of Smithson's three-dimensional "non-sites," which occupied him for the next few years. A typical Smithson non-site consists of a section of a topographical map, cut out and mounted on the wall, in front of which stand two or three wooden bins containing natural particles -- stones, earth, gravel, etc. -- taken from the actual area shown on the map. The non-sites are for Smithson a kind of "personal archaeology." A number of them have been bought by collectors and museums. Smithson sees a somewhat ironic parallel between this activity and the recent Apollo missions to the moon. "The moon shots are like very expensive non-sites," he says, "going all that way to bring back some particles from up there. The whole idea of gathering together remnants and then trying to make sense of them -- that's what I find interesting."

In 1967, a bussinessman-collector named Walter Procosch persuaded the engineering firm of Tippets, Abbett, McCarthy, and Stratton to engage Smithson as an artist-consultant for a giant airport that the firm was building outside Fort Worth. Smithson came into their New York office once a month or so to talk with the architects. He was interested primarily in what they were going to do with the spaces around the airport, out on the peripheries. As the airplanes came in to land, Smithson thought, it would be pleasant for the pilot and the passengers to have something to look at on the ground, apart from the usual barrier fences and strings of blue lights. Although the firm failed to use any of his ideas, an article that Smithson published on the airport project caught the attention of Michael Heizer and Dennis Oppenheim, both of whom got in touch with him. Smithson, in turn, was struck by the photographs of Heizer's early earthworks in the Mojave, which nobody in New York knew about at the time. When Heizer joined the Dwan Gallery soon afterward, a useful exchange of ideas ensued. Morris, Lewitt, and Andre went their own separate ways, but from then on the Dwan began to be known as the earthworkers' gallery.

Although art, for Smithson, is primarily a mental activity, it has been more and more an activity focussed on natural phenomena. He has no real interest in conceptual art, which exists solely in the realm of ideas. "A lot of the so-called conceptual art is nothing but atrophy," he told me, "a kind of purist abstraction carried out on the linguistic level. I think we're just discovering the multiplicity of nature's ways." Smithson, however, is far from being a nature freak, and he tends to be a trifle scornful of the recent wave of environmental concern. "The ecology thing has a kind of religious, ethical undertone to it," he

said. "It's like the official religion now, but I think a lot of it is based on a kind of late nineteenth century, puritannical view of nature. In the puritan ethic there's a tendency to put man outside nature, so that whatever he does is fundamentally unnatural. There's this dualism lurking around the subject, this Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir return-to-the-wilderness idea. To me, nature has three different aspects: There's wilderness; there's the country, where man has been; and then there's the urban area, and it's like a crystal growth, the urban area is no more unnatural than Yellowstone Park. A lot of people have the sentimental idea that nature is all good -- they forget about the earthquakes and typhoons and things like that."

Smithson's sympathy for the ecology movement was not enhanced by his recent experience in Vancouver, where he planned to blanket a small, uninhabited island in Vancouver Bay with broken glass. His "Glass Island" project, although authorized by the city fathers, was stopped by local environmentalists who said that the seals in the Bay would cut themselves trying to climb up on it. "Ecology is an interesting movement," Smithson said afterward, "but it doesn't look into its own sources enough. No seals ever went near that island."

Early in 1969 Smithson read a book called "Lost Lakes of Bolivia," which described the strangely colorful process of mineralization in isolated bodies of water. He subsequently wrote to several geologists, and found that at the northern end of the Great Salt Lake, in Utah, extremely heavy concentrations of salt and other minerals promoted the growth of algae that made the water red -- "the color of tomato soup," one geologist said. Smithson went out to Utah and spent a couple of months scouting the area, until he found a piece of shoreline that suited him. Then, with the financial support of the Dwan Gallery in New York and the Ace Gallery in

Los Angeles, he took a twenty-year lease on ten acres of privately owned lakefront land, hired a contractor, and started work in April, 1970, on the "Spiral Jetty."

The actual construction of the "Spiral Jetty" took only two weeks. Finding a contractor took somewhat longer, because of the reluctance of several operators to risk seeing their heavy trucks and front-loaders sink out of sight in the thick gumbo mud of the region, but according to Smithson the man who finally agreed to do the job, Bob Phillips of the Parsons Asphalt Company in Ogden, became "quite excited" by and enthusiastic about the project. "At first the workmen seemed a little doubtful," Smithson said, "but as soon as they got into it they responded on a really gut level." An abundance of black basalt boulders on the shoreline made it unnecessary to quarry materials elsewhere, and aside from an occasional brush with the resident farmer, who did not much ~~xxxxxfxx~~ like Phillips' trucks using his road, no mishaps or unforeseen problems arose.

I had seen, at the Dwan Gallery, Smithson's thirty-minute color film of the "Spiral Jetty." The film interspersed shots of prehistoric bones, maps, and charts with scenes of Smithson staking out the design with string in the shallow, reddish water; trucks backing gingerly to the edge of the steadily lengthening spiral form to dump their loads of rock and dirt; white salt crystals forming on the rocks; and a final, spectacular view from a helicopter of Smithson running the length of the completed Jetty, from its terminus on shore to the central point of the curling spiral, sixty yards out in the lake. The film had excited considerable interest in New York and in Europe, and partly because of it the "Spiral Jetty" had become the most widely reproduced example of contemporary earthworks (Heizer, I ~~xxx~~ learned, had been working on a film of his "Double Negative" just before he went off to Montana or

Wyoming). Like the other earth artists, Smithson had somewhat complicated feelings about photographs and films of his work. Although he once wrote that photographs "steal away the spirit of the work," he has permitted the gallery to sell photos of the "Jetty," and his recent mirror pieces -- oddly unsettling image displacements in which sections of mirror are inserted into a natural landscape and then photographed -- seem to depend rather largely on photographic reproduction. "I have to consider photographs as material of a different order," he told me. "The camera aids perception in some sense, it gives a kind of objectivity, suspends and freezes your experience. I think the use of film or photos is not to be run away from, but you still have to confront the problem of the natural world."

In order to confront the "Spiral Jetty," Mrs. Kondratiev and I flew from Las Vegas to Salt Lake City, rented another car, and drove about ninty miles north to Brigham City. Smithson, who was in Holland at the time creatin a new earthwork in a sand quarry (he had intended to do it in a peat bog, but that idea fell through), had suggested that we stop in at the Golden Spike Motel in Brigham City, where he and his wife, Nancy, had stayed while they were working on the "Spiral Jetty," and ask the manager there, Lafe Jensen, for precise directions to the site. We had a terrible time locating the Golden Spike Motel, which seemed rather a poor omen, and when we finally did locate it Mr. Jensen offered directions so detailed and so replete with homely rural landmarks that our spirits sank. He also mentioned that we might find the "Jetty" under water, because the lake was unusually high at the moment. Mr. Jensen had not been out there since the previous fall, he said, but he was hoping to take the wife out again some Sunday for a picnic. So far as he knew, nobody else had been out there recently,

except for a group of newspaper men from out of the state.

Twenty miles beyond Brigham City, just past the Golden Spike Historical Site where the first transcontinental railroad link was joined in 1869 (two antique locomotives and a memorial plinth mark the spot), we took a dirt road that led across rolling acres of rich farmland -- the farm whose owner had questioned Smithson's right to cross his acres. "If he stops us,," Mrs. Kondratiev said, "tell him we have a deed to the land there, a legal deed." About fifteen minutes later a moving cloud of dust that resolved itself into a farm pickup approaching from the opposite direction gave rise to more thoughts of the uncertainties inherent in earth art appreciation, but the truck passed us without stopping and we continued on. None of Mr. Jensen's local landmarks seemed to be in evidence. The landscape looked vaguely familiar to Mrs. Kondratiev, though (she had been there twice before, but each time someone else had been driving), so we held our course for another eight miles, in the general direction of the lake. We got down to the water at about five P.M., and great was our relief to find, as prophesied by the seer of the Golden Spike, a ramshackle wooden jetty with some oil-drilling rigs on it. We could just make out Smithson's "Jetty", about half a mile down the shoreline, so we covered the remaining distance on foot.

Lafe Jensen had been right about the high water. Smithson had said that at this time of year there should be about two feet of water around the "Jetty," but the level must have been at least twelve or fourteen inches higher than that because most of the "Spiral Jetty" was submerged. Only the big boulders at the edges of the causeway were above water, and when I took off my shoes and tried to wade out I sank to my knees in mud. A whitish salt crust formed on my ankles as the water

evaporated. The water was rust-colored, warm, and smooth as glass. Mrs. Kondratiev said it was too bad we couldn't walk out to the end and experience the kinetic aspect of the work. I remembered Smithson saying that there were three different ways of seeing the "Jetty" -- "When you're on it, the rocks echo the horizon, so there's this back and forth kind of scale change concentrated in the area of the spiral. If you walk up on the hill behind the shoreline, the whole shape emerges. And then, if you fly over it in a helicopter, there's the possibility of working with the sun, getting the sun right into it, so you get this burnoff effect. I like to think the piece has a multiplicity of scale." The action of salt crystal formation also changed the look of the work, he said. Later on in the summer, as the water in the lake evaporated, heavy concentrations of salt made a whitish sludge all along the edges of the spiral, with yellow streaks where the sulphur content showed through. The water became much redder then, he said -- more like tomato soup. In the winter, the lake rose and the salt crystals dissolved. The "Jetty" was thus an organic work of art, responding like a tree or a plant to the changing seasons.

Unable to walk out on the "Jetty" and lacking a helicopter, I climbed the hill behind the beach. The shape of the "Jetty" was very clear from up there, just as Smithson had said, and the scale was altogether different. Set down in that flat immensity of water bounded by hazy, towering mountains, it looked precise and gemlike, obviously man-made yet unaccountably believable as a natural object. The spiral itself, as Smithson had pointed out, was one of nature's basic building blocks. "You find it everywhere, from the nebula of a star down to the salt crystal," he had said. "All crystals grow in a spiral. The D.N.A. and the double helix are spirals. Hurricanes form in spirals.

There's a strange little sketch by Brancusi, a 'Portrait of James Joyce' that shows Joyce's ear as a spiral -- and ~~then~~ of course people say the structure of 'Finnegan's Wake' is a spiral."

~~T~~There was something decidedly pleasing about Smithson's stone-and-earth spiral down there, curling so gracefully upon itself in the placid, reddish water. The dialogue between abstraction and nature that Smithson often mentions in connection with his work seemed to be going on very agreeably, in a modest and non-assertive way, and the problem of art competing with nature did not arise. Later on in the summer, when I was back in New York, I got a postcard from Smithson, in Utah, saying that the water in the lake had receded and that the "Jetty" was surfacing nicely. "Half of the tail is completely covered with crystals," he wrote. "The rest is like an archipelago of white islands. I have never seen the water so red."

Christo Javacheff does not consider himself an earth artist. Although the focus of his extraordinary projects has shifted in recent years from urban to rural areas, these projects tend to be in the nature of "events" rather than stationary works of art -- to involve varying numbers of people in a common enterprise that exists for a brief time and then disappears, leaving only photographs and controversies in its wake. Christo (he uses only his first name), a Bulgarian-born artist who escaped to Vienna at the time of the Hungarian revolt, made his way to Paris in 1958 and to New York, where he lives now, in 1964, established his reputation in the early sixties as a wrapper, rather than a maker, of art works. He began by wrapping bottles, furniture, and other familiar items in rough

canvas or ~~plastic~~ polyethylene and tying off the bundles with yards of heavy twine, a process that struck some admirers as a wry surrealist commentary on the modern preoccupation with "packaging" in industrialized societies; since then he has gone on to wrap automobiles, motorcycles, trees, nude women, museum buildings, and, in 1969 one million ~~sqrs~~ square feet of rocky coastline near Sydney, Australia, surely one of the more ambitious art works of the nineteen sixties. Although the theatrical aspects of Christo's work have barred him from consideration as a true earthworker, it would have been unthinkable for me to conclude my earth art tour without a visit to Rifle, Colorado, where Christo was making preparations just then to hang an orange nylon curtain across a twelve hundred-foot-wide canyon in the Grand Hogback area of the Rocky Mountains.

The "Valley Curtain" project had been initiated more than a year before, in March, 1970, and I had been following its progress with interest and awe. Not the least of Christo's talents is his ability to raise money for his bizarre undertakings. The "Wrapped Coastline" in Australia had cost about $80,000, most of which Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude, a Parisian girl whose financial, promotional, and administrative genius might just make her the ideal person to reorganize Lockheed, had raised themselves from various private sources in Europe and the United States. "Valley Curtain" was going to cost a good deal more than that. The initial estimate by Lev Zetlin Associates, the engineering firm engaged by Christo to make the structural feasibility studies, came to $259,000, which was subsequently revised upward to $400,000. By early June, 1971, Christo and Jeanne-Claude had raised $370,000 of that, most of it from European collectors, dealers, and museums. They felt confident they would bring in the rest by the time the Curtain itself was raised, in late July, and they were rather proud

that

that not one penny had come as a donation -- the backers were all being paid off with individual art works by Christo.

In order to finance the project, Christo had incorporated himself. He was the sole stockholder of something called The Valley Curtain Corporation, whose shares were redeemable in original Christos -- drawings, models, and photo-montages relating to the "Valley Curtain," and also older works (wrappings, mostly) dating back to 1961 or 1962. All the money generated by the sale of Valley Curtain Corp. stock would be spent on the "Valley Curtain" project, so that when the corporation closed its books and dissolved itself in December, 1971, the final audit would show no profits, and accordingly there would be no federal tax. Scott Hodes, a Chicago lawyer who worked out the details of the financing, had originally thought of setting up a non-profit foundation, but he had decided that the "Curtain" could no qualify for that because Christo might eventually reap some sort of profit from it, if only in the form of an enhanced reputation. "Christo doesn't really understand the setup and doesn't want to," Hodes told me. "He figures that's my problem. You see, he wants to involve everybody in the process of creating art -- lawyers, engineers, administrators, everyone -- and he views my role as that of a lawyer-artist." Hodes also said that Jeanne-Claude had been absolutely invaluable to the project. "She runs the books, and she sees to it that everything gets done and that the materials get sent where they ought to be at the right time. She's an amazing woman, very level-headed, and she's as much responsible for the success of the 'Valley Curtain' as Christo."

Hodes, who collects modern art and owns a small Christo (a copy of the 1966 Annual Report of the Chrysler Corporation, wrapped in canvas and stout twine), had been highly enthusiastic about the "Valley Curtain"

from the beginning. Oddly enough, so had many of the citizens of Rifle, Colorado, a town not previously known for its devotion to modern art. The local Chamber of Commerce likes to describe Rifle as the "Oil Shale Capital of the World." Prospects of an economic boom from large-scale mining of the oil-bearing shale in the Grand Hogback mountains is viewed with some scepticism by the local farmers, ranchers, and tradesmen, who have been hearing such talk for fifty years or more; the technology for oil-shale extraction does not appear to have advanced much in the meanwhile, and three years ago a nearby experimental oil shale plant run by the Federal Bureau of Mines was closed down, throwing a number of Riflians out of work. The town, in fact, has been in something of an economic depression for several years. Although the Union Carbide vanadium refinery a few miles away provides a number of jobs, the big game hunting that is Rifle's other major industry has not been as good as usual in recent years (some people claim that Union Carbide's smokes and effluents have offended the elk, bear, and mountain lions), and to compound the environmental irony, what is described as The World's Largest Trout Fish Hatchery, established by the Colorado State Game, Fish, and Parks Department in Rifle Creek, a few miles to the north, had to be closed down indefinitely a few years ago because it was polluting the water downstream. And yet it was not economic considerations alone that caused so many of Rifle's prominent citizens to look with favor upon an enterprise whose very oddity, it seemed, might help to put Rifle on the map.

When Christo first decided that he wanted to drape a mountain valley, his friend John Powers, a wealthy collector and a part-time resident of Aspen, Colorado, persuaded him that the ideal place to do it would be in or near Aspen. Powers brought Christo out there and introduced him to George Nelson, an engineer who has lived in Aspen since 1946 and knows

the surrounding area as well as anyone. A great deal of the land around Aspen is in National Forests, however, and getting permission to curtain off government-owned valleys promised to be difficult. When Nelson had recovered from the initial shock of hearing what Christo wanted to do, his first thought was of Rifle Gap, some sixty miles due west of Aspen. The valley there is an exceptionally narrow one, running between ~~xxx~~ nearly perpendicular sandstone cliffs, and the land on either side happens to be privately owned. Although Christo and Nelson looked at a number of other possible sites, nearer Aspen, none of them could match Rifle Gap's natural advantages, and so, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ in the spring of 1970, Christo approached the land-owners on either side of the Gap. One of them, Lloyd Wilson, was an airline pilot who happened to have seen Christo's "Wrapped Coastline" in Australia the year before. He wanted six thousand dollars for a nine month lease on his land. Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Kansgen, who owned the land on the other side, were so startled at first by the whole idea that for several weeks they were afraid to mention Christo's proposal to anybody. When they met the artist in person, though, they were so charmed by him that they said he could rent their land for four hundred dollars. Christo insisted on paying them a good deal more than that; he has also promised to give Mrs. Kansgen, who runs a small historical museum of western artifacts about a mile from Rifle Gap, a good-sized piece of the "Valley Curtain" to put on display there when the project is terminated.

Although Christo's English is still a little erratic, his obvious sincerity and his beautifully considerate manners seem to have charmed nearly everyone in Rifle, including those who ~~xxxxx~~ thought he must be off his rocker. In Denver, however, opposition to the "Valley Curtain" soon began

to build up. The Colorado Open Space Council, a recently formed conservation group, expressed grave anxiety that the Curtain's shadow, falling for three months across the Gap, would adversely affect the animal, insect, and plant life of the area, and that birds might be injured by flying into it. In a letter to Christo and Jan Van der Merck, the project director of "Valley Curtain," the Council's president, Edward Connors, asked how they had happened to select Rifle Gap in the first place. Since most of the project's financial backing seemed to have come from Europe, Connors said, why were the Europeans being "deprived of the opportunity of having such art in their back yard?" Colorado and its citizens were "as avant garde as the rest of the country," Connors insisted. "We do love art and we love our mountains in their pristine state, but we feel that each has its proper place." Christo and Van der Merck subsequently referred the ecological question to Professor William Weber, the head of the Biology Department at the University of Colorado, who assured them that the Curtain's shadow would have no effect whatsoever on the wildlife or plant life (neither of which abound in the Gap), and he intimated that any bird that could not manage to fly over the Curtain would have to be in pretty bad shape to begin with. His arguments apparently satisfied the environmentalists. The Open Space Council expressed its continued disapproval of what it termed a "frivolous use of the land," but Connors said the group would take no legal action against the project.

More serious problems has arisen, however, in connection with the Colorado State Highway Department. State highway 325 runs right through Rifle Gap. Christo had designed an arch in the curtain, one hundred feet wide by twenty feet high, to accomodate traffic passing from one side of

the Curtain to the other, but the Highway Department wanted to make very sure that the eight thousand pound Curtain was not going to fall down upon the vehicles of the "travelling public." Before it would issue a permit to proceed, the Highway Department demanded a thorough investigation of the project by an independent engineering consultant; it also demanded insurance of up to a million dollars, and access to the premises at all times "in the event it becomes necessary to remove the Curtain." The extra insurance policy (Valley Curtain Corporation already had its own) was a major factor in the steadily escalating costs, which Christo and Jeanne-Claude were spending most of their time trying to meet. They were also paying for the independent engineering study that had delayed work on the site for several weeks, and had forced a postponement of the actual hanging of the Curtain, originally scheduled to take place on July 1. When I flew down from Salt Lake City on June 21, work was still being held up by a series of test borings into the sandstone cliffs on either side of the valley, to make sure they would support the weight of the curtain and the steel cables supporting it in a narrow valley where wind velocities of seventy miles an hour could be expected.

Jan Van der Marck, who in addition to being the project director was also the vice president of the Valley Curtain Corporation (the president, naturally, was Jeanne-Claude) seemed moderately cheerful in spite of all these delays and difficulties, which he told me about after dinner at his house in Aspen (he and his wife were living temporarily in Aspen; they would move out to Rifle on July 1). Van der Marck is forty-one, Dutch, and full of enthusiasm for the work of Christo and other vanguard artists. As Chief Curator of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and,

more recently, as Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, he had gained a reputation in museum circles for putting on highly original and somewhat controversial exhibitions, the most spectacular of which involved the wrapping of the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, inside and out, by Christo in 1969, an event that one fellow museum director referred to publicly as a "catastrophe." Having resigned his museum position early in 1971 (for reasons that had nothing to do with Christo), he agreed to work on the "Valley Curtain" project not only because the idea appealed to him but because of his own strong belief that museums are becoming increasingly obsolete these days, as artists seek a more direct and active involvement with society. The "Valley Curtain" and some of the more celebrated earthworks struck him, he said, as "the primitive beginnings of the new art," with which he felt that contemporary museums must sooner or later come to terms.

We talked for a while, Van der Marck and I, about Christo's rather curious position in the contemporary art world. Christo has never been quite accepted by the avant-garde establishment in New York, as one might gather from the fact that the overwhelming majority of "Valley Curtain's" sponsors were Europeans. Van der Marck thought this was due in part to cultural chauvinism. Before Christo came to the U.S. in 1964 he had been associated with the Nouveau Réaliste group in Paris, a band of artists whose use of advertising imagery and consumer product ikons led to a certain rivalry with the American Pop artists. Some of the younger Americans still tend to look on Christo as a European aesthete, and his recent involvement with large-scale, environmental projects is viewed in these quarters with suspicion. "Earth art is very American," Van der Marck observed. "It reflects the vast scale of the country, the back-to-the-earth sentiments of the ecologists, and also a kind of frontier romanticism

that many Europeans find very appealing. Compared to America, Europe is so tight, so filled-up and small-scale." He paused, then went on reflectively, "Maybe Christo is not tough enough, either. He never spits in your face, the way some of the earth artists do. People seem to like that now; there is the new mystique of the slap in the face. But Christo is always courteous and helpful, so some think he's just a self-promoter. And yet, you know, I have never heard him make a snide or vicious remark about another artist's work, which is unusual to say the least. Few artists of my acquaintance are as fair or objective about others' work as Christo is."

Christo and his eleven-year-old son, Cyril, arrived in Aspen the following morning (Jeanne-Claude was too busy with financial and other matters to leave New York), and the three of us drove over to Rifle that afternoon with Charles Russell, a graduate student who was spending the summer as Jan Van der Marck's assistant on the "Valley Curtain." It is a spectacular drive, gradually descending the Western slope of the Continental Divide and running parallel to the Colorado River for many miles. Christo was in fine spirits. He is thirty-five years old, a slim, rather frail-looking man with shoulder length dark hair and a thin, intelligent face that frequently breaks into an engaging smile. He told us that his Aspen friends had been horrified when they learned he was going to hang the Curtain in Rifle. "In Aspen they are very intellectually conscious," he said. "They said that the people in Rifle were all Nixonians and hardhats and cowboys and that they would probably kill me. But you see, we have nothing but good relations with the people there. They are good people, very straight."

I asked whether the idea of a curtain was not something of a departure for him, inasmuch as he had been known principally as a wrapper. Not at

all, he said. As far back in 1961, in Paris, he had made an "Iron Curtain" out of oil drums -- 204 bil drums, piled to a height of eighteen feet -- which completely blocked the Rue Visconti for three hours. The authorities had given their permission grudgingly, he said, because the Algerian War was still going on then and civil disorders were on everyone's mind. Christo had also made a number of "shop windows" and "store fronts," free-standing sculptures that were exact replicas of shop windows and store fronts, but empty of merchandise and curtained off inside from the spectator's prying gaze. "The idea of closing, of stopping the circulation between two places has always interested me," he said. In 1969, Christo proposed the temporary closing off of all East-West highways in the United States by means of glass walls forty-eight feet high, but so far this work has remained in the conceptual stage.

Rifle has the dusty, hardbitten look of a good many towns in western Colorado ~~Western towns~~. As we drove through it, Christo pointed out Mc's Cafe, where he and Van der Marck had held several meetings with the local citizenry during the last six months. He also pointed out the Harris Jewelry Store, whose owner, William J. Tadus, was the mayor of Rifle and a good friend of the "Valley Curtain." By the time he had singled out these landmarks we were out of town, heading north on Route 325 toward Rifle Gap. The countryside, watered by Rifle Creek, offered pleasant vistas of green meadows being cropped by well put-together horses and cows. The valley narrowed abruptly as we approached the Gap, about seven miles north of town. Christo explained that the area had once been a prehistoric lake, whose bed was thrown upward by cataclysmic forces to form the jagged, sandstone cliffs that rose almost vertically on either side of the road. Just beyond the narrowest point of the Gap, we turned off to the right and parked beside a large air-compressor marked "Morrison-

Knudson, Boise," the name of the engineering firm that was going to hang the Curtain.

The engineering crew greeted Christo with great warmth. Cyril, who was going to be staying with Charles Russell and his wife in Rifle for the next few weeks, gave each man a brisk, European-style handshake, and asked about the swimming. The Morrison-Knudson people were feeling somewhat frustrated, because they were still being held up by the independent engineering survey. Several drillers were high up on both cliffs at the moment, taking samples of rock at various levels. Wes Hoffman, the Morrison-Knudson project manager, said that the results so far looked very promising, and that he and his crew hoped to get started installing the cable anchors next week. The 110,060 pounds of cable, custom-made for the project by the United States Steel plant in Trenton, N.J., had arrived a few days before on the railroad siding in Rifle. The curtain itself -- 250,000 square yards of industrial nylon polyamide, dyed bright orange to screen out the sun's infra-red rays and prevent loss of tensile strength -- was not expected until the end of the month (at the J.P. Stevens Company factory in Richmond, Virginia, a foreman said this was the biggest sewing job they had ever attempted; it had taken eight people four weeks to sew the estimated sixty miles of seams). I asked Hoffman what he thought of the project, and he said that it was somewhat similar to stringing a high line over a dam, except for the problem of wind load. "The Curtain isn't heavy," he said; "it's the force of the wind blowing on it you have to consider." Hoffman didn't want to go into discussing the aesthetics of the "Valley Curtain," but he did say that he found it "one hell of a challenge." Jack Webb, his associate, said that they had had some difficulties explaining to people passing through Rifle Gap just

what it was theyx were doing. "Trouble is," Webb said, "after you explain what it's for, ~~xxxyxxxxxxxxxx~~ then you're really in deep water. Now I've gotten so I just tell 'em it's to feed my wife and kids." The plan was to string the two main cables across the Gap first, anchor them securely, and then raise the Curtain by means of its own pick-up cable. ~~(The plan was substantially modified later on. Four main cables were used, instead of two, and the top anchors were strengthened by two-hundred-ton reinforced concrete blocks fastened to the sandstone ridge with fifty-nine stressed steel rods sunk forty feet into the rock).~~ In a strong wind the Curtain would billow out as much as thirty-five feet in either direction, and the engineers had to allow for two and a half million pounds of pull on the cables. Hoffman said that getting the Curtain up there was going to take a lot of thinking.

Charles Russell suggested that we climb up the cliff on the left side of the road , a suggestion that young Cyril greeted with enthusiasm. We struggled up the nearly perpendicular ascent, slipping on loose shale all the way, and held a brief, shouted colloquy with the drillers over the roar of their equipment. The head driller showed Christo a box full of long, sausage-shaped cores he had drawn out of the cliff, and said it was as good rock as he had ever seen. This pleased Christo, because the question of the rock's solidity was the only remaining obstacle to the Highway Department's issuing a permit. The driller said he expected to finish the test borings tomorrow and get the results through in a hurry. Sergis Seko Safarian, the Chief Structural Engineer of the Ken. R. White Company in Denver, which was making the independent survey, had already told Van der Marck that he hoped to see the project approved. According to Van der Marck, Safarian had said that while he didn't understand Christo's

Curtain from an artistic point of view, he thought it was interesting enough from an engineering point of view for him to want to see it go up. This was often the way it was with engineers on his projects, Christo explained. At the beginning they were suspicious, but then they got into the spirit of things and became very involved and enthusiastic. - become, in Christo's sense of the word, "engineer artists" collaborating in the creation of a work of art. Cyril and the head driller shook hands, and we began to pick our way back down the precipice.

On the way back to Rifle we stopped off at the Rifle Golf Club, a mile or so down the road from the Gap, to see the manager there. Jimmy Le Donne, who owned and managed the club, had been one of Christo's staunchest supporters from the beginning, speaking up for the Curtain at every opportunity and offering the use of the club restaurant and bar to all "Valley Curtain" personnel (he was also enlarging the club parking lot to accomodate sightseers). "Some of these old farmers around here were pretty sceptical when they first heard about the Curtain," Le Donne said, "but I told 'em you've got to be a little broadminded in this world. Different people do different things. Christo here knew what he wanted, he had the money to do it with, so why not let him go ahead?"

I was impressed by Le Donne's readiness to accept the Curtain on its own terms, without bothering about whether or not it was a work of art. This struck me as a Western attitude, and I found it reflected in my conversations with other local citizens that afternoon. Most people had apparently assumed at first that the Curtain was going to have something painted on it, a portrait or a design of some kind, and the idea that it was just going to hang there was a little hard to fit into Rifle's conception of the fine arts. But in the end generally everyone had been willing to take it on faith that Christo, a famous artist from New York,

must know what he was doing and ought to be allowed to do it, so long as it wasn't going to cost Rifle any money. "I thought it was the greatest thing I'd ever heard of," Anthony C. Macchione, one of ~~kxxx~~ the town's leading citizens, said to me later that afternoon. Macchione, who owns Mc's Cafe, Mc's Boat Sales agency, a block of apartments, and about seven hundred head of cattle, recalled that he had been vacationing in Las Vegas when Jimmy Le Donne called to tell him the news. "I asked him, 'What kind of a curtain is he going to hang?'" Macchione said. "'Well, I can't explain it,' said Jimmy. But it sounded just fine to me. I want people to be people. To me the important thing is that there's a man in this world who's thinking great things. Christo's putting up all his own money, he's not out here begging for cash. And I think as long as that's the case, in <u>any</u> country a man ought to be able to express his ideas."

A few weeks before, in May, a telephone poll ~~of Rifle~~ by the manager of the local radio station had found one hundred and twenty-seven people in favor of the "Valley Curtain" and only twenty-three opposed to it. Jimm Seaney, who runs station KWSR from the lobby of the Winchester Hotel (Teddy Roosevelt once stayed there on a hunting trip), took down the names and addresses of each ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ person he called, and he claims that most of the negative votes came from people who called in from other towns. As soon as he had finished his poll, Seaney collected ~~the~~ mayor Tadus and the president of the Chamber of Commerce and put through a conference call to the Governor's office in Denver. Governor ~~(First Name?)~~ John Love had rather carefully avoided taking a position on the "Valley Curtain" up to this time. He had been quoted as saying that the project "doesn't appeal to me as a great work of art," undoubtedly a prudent remark in a

state where newly hatched conservationists are thicker and more active politically than lovers of advanced art. According to Seaney, though, the Governor took their call right away, and listened respectfully to the results of the telephone poll. "Why do you people want that Curtain, anyway?" Seaney remembers him asking. "Being an honest man," Seaney told him, "I told him that we were in a depressed economic situation over here, and that if nothing else, Christo's Curtain would bring an influx of tourists and give us a shot in the arm. The Governor said, 'I'll accept that.' He asked how the weather was, and hung up, and the next day he got thrown off a horse." A lot of people think that Seaney's poll was a big factor in the Highway Department's decision to give give Christo his permit -- the official permit came through officially on July 12th -- and Christo's obvious gratitude to Seaney and other Rifle residents who went to bat for him further endeared him to the townspeople.

Christo left the next day for Houston, where the Museum of Contemporary Art was opening a special exhibition of documents, photographs, drawings and models related to the "Valley Curtain." I returned to New York, and for the remainder of the summer I kept wondering from time to time how the project was faring. Then, at a dinner party one evening in October, two New York art world luminaries reported with enormous glee and satisfaction that the Valley Curtain had come to grief -- had broken loose from its moorings that same afternoon, while it was being raised into position, and torn itself to pieces on the rocks below. The local anti-Christo brand of cultural chauvinism had never been so clearly in evidence.

By the time I saw Christo again, about a week later, he had more or less recovered from the experience. Disasters of one sort or another were not altogether new in his career. During the wrapping of the Australian coastline in 1969, for example, a freak storm with winds up to one hundred miles

per hour had destroyed about a third of the fabric and set the project back for several weeks; the year before, a two-hundred-and-eighty-foot-long, sausage-shaped balloon called "5,600 Cubic Meter Package," that Christo was making for the Dokumenta IV exhibition in Kassel, Germany, went through three versions, each of which ripped while being inflated or hoisted into position, before Christo and his engineers finally succeeded on their fourth try. Christo had announced that the "Valley Curtain" would be hung without fail in June, 1972, and he and Jeanne-Claude had thrown themselves cheerfully into the work of raising funds to have a new curtain made by then. This was going to cost an additional seventy thousand dollars, at least (the insurance on the original curtain applied only to potential victims, not to the fabric itself), but neither Christo nor his wife seemed worried about that. As Jeanne-Claude put it, in her brisk and chipper fashion, "The money is not the problem."

The real problem, according to Christo, Van der Marck, and several other witnesses I talked with subsequently, had been the Morrison-Knudson engineering crew. For a long time, Christo had been unwilling to take seriously the reports he kept hearing from friends in Rifle -- reports that the construction workers looked upon the whole project as a joke and said so, night after night, over their beers in Mc's Cafe. It is important to Christo to believe that engineers become artists when they work on one of his projects, and he kept on believing that such was the case in this instance as long as he could. As the summer drew on, though, the number of engineering breakdowns and failures did begin to seem a little excessive. Equipment proved inadequate for the job at hand, and had to be replaced. A winch rigged to pull the steel cable from its shipping drum pulled too fast, causing a monumental tangle that took the whole day to straighten out. Soon afterward, one of the main support cables for the Curtain pulled loose as it was being moored to the cliff, and came crashing down into

the valley below, narrowly missing several workmen and a passing Buick.

The cable car that Morrison-Knudson had designed specially for the job -- it was supposed to ride on top of the support cables and serve as a vehicle for the men who would attach the Curtain/ -- did not work at all, and had to be replaced by an improvised platform hung from the cables on pulleys. Unforeseen problems kept arising, and each one meant a further delay in the hanging schedule. Christo and Van der Marck got several extensions of their permit from the Highway Department, but by late August the end still was not in sight. Finally, in desperation, Christo put in a call to Dimiter S. Zagoroff, the engineer who had worked with him on the Kassel air structure. Zagoroff, who lives in Boston, came out to Rifle and made a number of helpful suggestions, but this in turn accelerated the slow deterioration in relations between Christo and Wes Hoffman, the Morrison-Knudson crew chief.

Not until the first week in October were the cables at last in place. The original plan had been substantially modified to meet the Highway Department's specifications. Instead of two heavy cables spanning the Gap there were now four. The cables were attached to two-hundred-ton concrete blocks, which had been anchored to the sandstone sliff on either side by dozens of stressed steel rods driven fifty feet into the rock. Eighteen men were now at work on the site, including a team of six structural ironworkers from Chicago. Alerted by the Christos, art world followers from both coasts, reporters, and camera crews of the three major TV networks were converging on Rifle, along with scores of curious Coloradians and friends or relatives of the local boosters. By Saturday, October 9th, the day the Curtain was scheduled to start going up, Rifle's motel and hotel rooms were booked solid, and the merchants who had set high hopes on the project were feeling distinctly bullish.

A sizeable traffic jam developed on both sides of Rifle Gap that Saturday

morning. Some people arrived before eight A.M., and spent the next four or five hours wondering when something was going to happen. There were, inevitably, more unforeseen difficulties and delays. Shortly after noon, though, the crew started to raise the pick-up cable around which the Curtain had been carefully furled. One end of the pick-up cable was attached to the top anchor on the east side of the Gap; the plan was to attach the other end to the appropriate anchor on the west side, (and gradually tighten it to raise the Curtain, which would then be fastened) to the four main overhead cables by means of huge clamps that had previously been installed there. The Curtain itself, wrapped in tarpaulins to protect the nylon fabric while it was being raised from the valley floor (a precaution that Wes Hoffman had not thought necessary; the tarpaulins were ordered at the last minute) would be left overnight in its furled state. Then, on Sunday, it would be unfurled gradually and secured to its seven ground anchors by supplementary cables.

Christo was nervous about the plan that Hoffman had worked out to lower the Curtain. The long ropes that laced the tarpaulin and the Curtain itself were secured by what the engineers called "magic knots," which were supposed to come unfastened, one by one, when the men on the ground pulled the rope ends that dangled from the Curtain at intervals. Christo lacked faith in the magic knots, and his anxiety increased when he learned that the workmen on the east cliff, having run out of the special tape that they used in tying the knots, were making do with some used tape that they happened to find on the tarpaulins. Communications between Christo and Hoffman were almost non-existent at this point. At four o'clock in the afternoon, though, when Hoffman let it be known that his crew was going to quit work at four-thirty, even though the Curtain on its pickup cable had been raised only about two-thirds of the way to the top, communications suddenly became very heated indeed.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude argued with marked vehemence that to leave the Curtain in that state, without securing it in any way to the four main cables, would jeopardize the entire project. What if a strong wind came up, as often happened in Rifle Gap? They begged and implored Hoffman to keep his men on the job until the pickup cable was secured. Hoffman said that it would be dark before they could secure it, and that the lives of his men were more important than Christo's Curtain.

At four-thirty sharp, the construction crew knocked off for the day. Christo, Jeanne-Claude, Van der Marck and a few others worked frantically for the next hour or so, trying to make everything as secure as possible. When it got too dark to do anything more, they all went to Jimmy Le Donne's golf club down the road for a drink. At six o'clock, Van der Marck and two friends of his who had driven down from Salt Lake City for the hanging decided to walk back for a last look at the site. As they approached Rifle Gap, Van der Marck suddenly saw a fold of orange curtain material come loose from its shroud and begin to flap in the wind. "It was amazing," Van der Marck said afterwa d. "You somehow never expect to be there when disaster strikes -- you're usually somewhere else. But we saw the whole thing happen before our eyes. One of the magic knots had come loose, up there on the east side of the valley. Then a lot more of the orange material came out, and more and more, as other knots gave way. It was astonishing and frightening and also strangely beautiful in a way -- the sky wasn't absolutely dark, it was a sort of deep blue, and in that light the billowing orange fabric looked like flames, and the noise it made sounded like some huge conflagration. About half the Curtain came loose in all, and it reached all the way to the ground on the east side. Although there was not much wind -- only eight or ten knots, I'm told -- the Curtain moved with such force that it picked up boulders and flung them around, it turned over heavy equipment, and once it nearly overturned a man's car. Everybody came running back, of

course -- you could see what was happening from the golf club. Some people saw it from further away and thought the Curtain was going up after all. There was nothing anybody could do. We drove up to the top of a hill nearby and watched until ten o'clock, and then I went back to Christo's apartmentxx in Rifle and we called our lawyer."

Christo had wept openly during the destruction of the Curtain, more than fifty per cent of which was irreparably damaged, and he left Rifle four days later without saying goodby to Wes Hoffman. At the press conference held at Jimmy Le Donne's clubhouse on Tuesday, October 12th, however, Christo and Van der Marck, on the advice of their lawyer, blamed the accident on " a small gust of wind" and refrained from saying what they really thought about the construction crew. The press conference was well attended by Rifle citizens, most of whom joined in a standing ovation for Christo following his statement, in which he had promised to return the following June to finish the project. One woman, a member of the City Council, got up and said that until the accident most people had tended to look on the Curtain as a crazy idea that might just help the town, but that since Saturday seeing how beautiful it had looked, even during its death throes, the Valley Curtain had become their project as well as Christo's, and that they all looked forward impatiently to his return next year. Christo was moved. It was as though the town of Rifle had become, through his efforts, a community of artists.

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- Calvin Tomkins