

# ART WEEK

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## EXTRACTS OF A DECADE

San Francisco / Janice Ross

In a main gallery of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, a black telephone sits on a pedestal below a chart of phone numbers. Next to each number there is the title of a different Linda Montana audiotape which the listener can presumably hear after dialing the phone. The catch is that all of the phone numbers are the same, and that after lifting the receiver, one is (apparently) instantly connected with a single, ongoing tape.

In the frustrating of one's expectations, this dysfunctional telephone might well stand as a metaphor for the entire *Space/Time/Sound-1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area*, at the SFMMA through February 10. Curated by Suzanne Foley, this show represents a commendable and ambitious attempt to document a sampling of Bay Area performance art, video and installations over the past ten years. In effect, however, the uniform method of presentation used for each of the twenty-one artists and groups represented makes the work look misleadingly similar — like twenty-one different phone lines to the one great performance of the seventies. With some exceptions, each participating artist or group is represented by one or more black and white photographs and panels with several hundred words of text. Aside from the videotapes by nine artists or groups and the installations by Bonnie Sherk, Peter D'Agostino, Paul Kos, Jim Melchert, Howard Fried and Steve Laub, the information in the show seems to have already been condensed into catalog format.

The paradoxes that arise when alternative art is surveyed by an established institution have already been eloquently discussed by Judith L. Dunham (*ARTWEEK*, January 12), but another issue — that of modes of representation and documentation — is also involved. Performance art and, to a lesser degree, installations are temporal forms. As in dance, the spiritual content can never be recaptured in a static format. Photographic documentation only flattens out the three-dimensionality of performance, deflating it.

Dance has solved this dilemma by incorporating the actual artifacts of a performance — costumes, properties, programs, reviews and costume sketches — into documentation of famous ballets, companies or eras. Museums, on the other hand, are accustomed to dealing with specific disciplines, and it may be some time until they realize that if a work is performance art it should be documented as perfor-



STEPHEN LAUB: DOG, from *Picturing* series, videotape of a 1975 slide performance at Mandeville Art Gallery, UC San Diego, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Megan Walker.

mance (read theater) rather than as art (read sculpture and painting).

If the documentation of Jock Reynolds and Suzanne Hellmuth's *Hospital* had included the programs, which were in the form of hospital admission slips, and a couple of oversized syringes and thermometers, or perhaps even a partial re-creation of the set and soundtrack, viewers could "experience" the piece in absentia rather than simply seeing it noted.

The addition of some kind of clear and persuasive organizational structure for arranging the participants also would have helped to elucidate the show's focus. In a highly informative lecture complementing the show, Moira Roth noted that Bay Area performance artists active in the 1970s have been preoccupied with four central concerns: meditation, humor, theater, and characters and costumes. Had the SFMMA grouped the various artists according to their demonstrated involvement with these or related aspects, the notion of performance as an art form might have been given some shape and credence.

One of the pieces that does work in the museum, Paul Kos' video installation, *revolution: Notes for the Invasion* — mar mar march (1974), plays interesting games with audience involvement. A video monitor, typewriter and several pages of text are situated at the far end of a separate room constructed within the gallery. In order to approach this setup, the viewer must traverse a series of 2x4s placed parallel and at even intervals covering the floor. The purpose of this task becomes apparent only after one leaves the monitor and finds that these planks force one to step in a march in time to the typewriter rhythms on Kos' tape.

Mel Henderson's *Yellow Cabs* (1969) and *Cows* (1973) are among the few pieces that lend themselves to photodocumentation. In fact, the aerial perspective of *Yellow Cabs* — a piece that involved the simultaneous summoning of 100 taxis to a certain intersection in San Francisco — likely provides a better

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## ILLUMINATION OF SEEING

Los Angeles / Adrienne Rosenthal

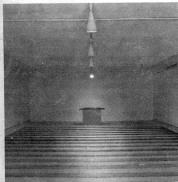
Peter Lodato acknowledges the influence of light- and space-illusionist artists, particularly Robert Irwin, on his work. Then it's no coincidence that the skylight-illuminated main room of the Rosamund Felsen Gallery, designed by Irwin with great attention to light sources and proportion when Mizuno occupied that address, should interact favorably with Lodato's dependence on light for his daring, one-color paintings. On each side of the room, painted directly on the wall, hovers an enormous rectangle. One colored a brilliant red and one in vibrant green fairly dance out from their space, while two mat black rectangles at opposing corners seem to suck you into their depths, punctuating the area like stop signs.

Single-hue paintings are not new; artists such as Miro, Reinhardt and Malevich made them years earlier. Yet Lodato's installation is notable for its tight, formal relationships to the verticals and horizontals of the space it was designed to occupy. Lodato clarifies the power of color as an illusory force within a space. More importantly, as he has for some time, Lodato uses no canvas. He dematerializes painting. No longer an object, this art is an integral part of the environment.

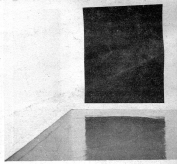
Located near the room corners, each rectangle's strong color is reflected by the adjoining white wall, creating more shapes and hues than actually painted there by the artist. In Lodato's words, he is "doing one thing to produce many things." This, of course, is the point of Lodato's art: to find an elegantly simple way to force viewers not only to look, but to see, and to notice with honed attention their own process of seeing. Lodato's piece exploits effects that fool our senses as well. The vibrations set up by the edges of the huge paintings against the white wall feel contagious. The colors appear to shift up and down the wall the more one looks. Afterimages of complementary colors affect our vision, their dialog altering the space of the room.

A second room offers a more subtle installation. Here a glossy enameled floor extends the reflections

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PAUL KOS: *revolution: Notes for the Invasion* — mar mar march, 1974, video installation, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Michael Arthur.



PETER LODATO: *BLACK AND WHITE #4*, 1980, enamel on sheet rock and enamel on wall, two rectangles, 11' x 9' each, at the Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Nancy Hirsch.