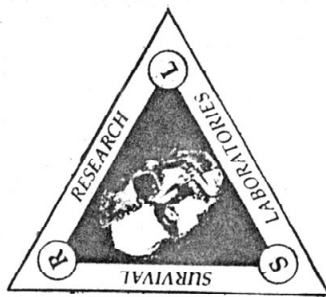


TALKING RAVEN
 Journal of Imaginative Trouble
 Vol. 1, # 5 Winter Solstice 1991
 "Sanctuary"



SURVIVAL RESEARCH LABORATORIES

reviewed by antero alli

Tentative; I explore the battered maze of Larry Reid's ambitious curation, The Night Gallery – featuring multiple set environments by local installation artists – amidst the metallic screech and howl of its grinding industrial soundtrack (if Timothy Leary was right about assuming that half the trip is in controlling the setting), I couldn't have imagined a better set for SRL and its iconoclastic director, Mark Pauline (10/05/91, C.O.C.A., Seattle WA USA)

Before Pauline stepped onstage, however, COCA subjected the audience to an electrifying opening act whereb* Tim "The Human Pin Cushion" Cridland stood in a bucket of water holding various light bulbs while touching a live electrical wire. I'm not kidding; he really did it. If I ever believed in the end of the world, this is probably what the local entertainment would look like: a dark smokefilled room faintly illumined by the numinous blue light emanating from a naked man onstage, electrocuting himself. After Tim's survival (if it wasn't an illusion, Tim would either be dead or walking around as some dead person needing the occasional electrocution to stay alive), the audience hooted and howled with appreciation and gratitude; Tim bowed humbly and then, left the stage.

After a short break, Seattle's favorite seedy carnival barker Larry Reid introduced Mark Pauline and the director of his new SRL videotape, Leslie Asako Gladsjo. Pauline usually articulates his work with impeccable skill yet tonight he chose to let the video speak for itself but not before demonstrating his new cannon: a high pressure air launcher (originally developed by NASA for use in avalanche control) firing beer-can size projectiles at the speed of 500 feet per second. Pauline instructed the audience to move out of the line of fire; which they did. He then pointed to a stuffed calf-like creature onstage wearing a large medallion-like seal, that rumor suggested was recently lifted from the outside wall of a local economic institution. This was now a political performance.

A laserscope mounted atop the cannon sent a point of ruby-red light onto the bank seal. Mark pulled the trigger a moment after the cannon accidentally tipped upwards, hurtling the projectile past its intended target: blasting through three walls in the COCA building. Larry Reid was jubilant, inviting audience members back to witness the damage. Mark apologized and proceeded to reload the cannon. The rich red tracking beam settled onto the bank seal when the abrupt boomsound shook the air again: direct hit! The crowd cheered. Mark reloaded, again and again, shooting as many as three or four more. I don't remember at that point; I was too captivated by the primitive wish levels aroused in the ensuing ritual. Eventually, the cannon was spent and the shooting was over.

Having already seen a SRL videotape, "The Will To Provoke", I wondered how much different a new release could be; the fiery destruction of "killer robots" was glorious enough yet how many more gasoline explosions and mechanical catastrophes would it take to finally wear thin? This, I discovered, depended entirely on the viewer; in the case of video, the film-maker's concept, the camera work and the editing process. The new video is absolutely extraordinary; it left me breathless. Confrontational camera angles and the rhythmic post-production editing is as explosive as the combusive action itself. Leslie Asako Gladsjo and her crew deserve much credit for bringing this kind of dangerous image into the comfort of our homes.

Anyone who has actually been to a SRL performance can attest to the difficulty of explaining to others its effect on their lives. Gladsjo's video picks up some of the living "signals" of objective threat so prevalent at SRL shows, an albeit simulated threat, so "real" that people walk away from the performance feeling more alive than before, by virtue of their survival. In this way, Survival Research Laboratories performs a unique community service in the name of poetic terrorism: they are able to scare the living shit out of you without killing you in the process. A culture as anesthetic and sheltered as ours often leaves its human microbes either sleeping or struggling to awaken; SRL is a provider of protein-rich shocks for the latter.

Gladsjo's SRL video (which includes footage from the July 1991 Seattle show, "Carnival of Mismatched Devotion") can be ordered by sending \$25. to SRL at 1458-C San Bruno Ave., San Francisco CA 94110 or by calling (415) 641-8065.

We Are Waiting

There are days that haven't arrived yet,
 that are being made
 like bread or chairs or a product
 from the pharmacies or the woodshops;
 there are factories of days to come;
 they exist, craftsmen of the soul
 who raise and weigh and prepare
 certain bitter or beautiful days
 that arrive suddenly at the door
 to reward us with an orange
 or to instantly murder us.

Pablo Neruda

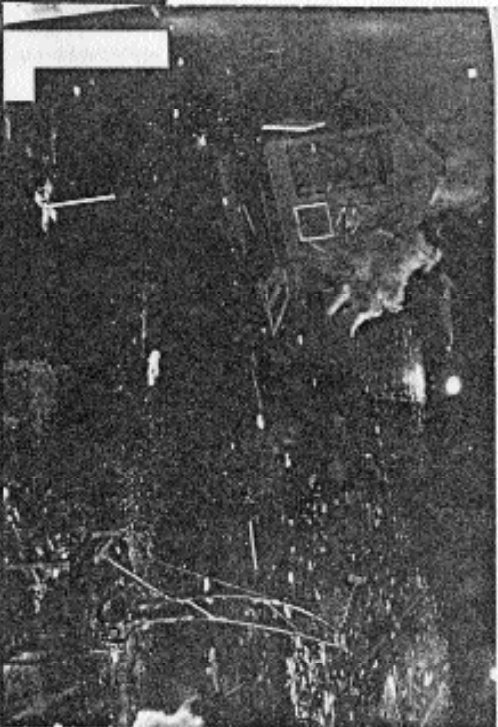
(Translation: William O'Daly)



 UK #10
 WINT 91

MEGHANIGAL

catastrophanes



MR. PINK: Boby Akon, Sph Short Sides

INTERVIEW: STUART MCGILMIV

Mark Pauline is the originator of Survival Research Laboratories (SRL) based in San Francisco. SRL create larger-than-life robotic creatures that run amok in spectacular and highly charged performances. SRL's work has often been interpreted as parodying the post-industrial machine age, and Pauline himself describes their work as the vaccine for the virus of social destruction. SRL's work has yet to be seen in the UK, but Pauline was in Newcastle recently on a flying visit to the 'Blasphemy' conference (see review). He was interviewed by Stuart McGilmiv.

The work of SRL relies on spectacle, but how is this a positive force in the performance?

It's sort of about recognizing the spectacle. There are not important people, usually on the basis of something very important. The money, the spectacle, I mean they're not people, they're supposed to be manipulators. It's somewhat of a positive relationship we have with spectacle—that's what is exciting, it excites you and that's one of the things we express. We try to make a spectacle that is a popular one, in the sense that it isn't about making money, it isn't about manipulating people, it isn't about anything other than just and its own boundaries.

What is the reason or meaning for using the word 'Survival' in SRL?

Before I was doing machines, I used to do these billboard installations and someone gave me the opportunity to do an advertisement in a local paper. I was doing these things

dirty so I couldn't take direct credit for them, so I needed a title. It was taken from a right-wing military magazine called *Survival of Famine*. I just felt it was something I could appropriate and make mean something different.

Is there any relationship between survivalists attitudes and outlooks and those of SRL?

It's related in an intense sense. Survivalists have this very shared kind of ideology, like a religious faith, and it's no surprise that survivalism in America is very closely allied with the far-right fringe religion, neo-nazism, etc. SRL is about a society of delinquents who do the things that they see and hear. The all those neo-producers of technology and the new relationship we're supposed to have with a and with wars. All those machines are sophisticated assumptions. It feels good to be able to take something and turn it into something else, and I think that the magic is when you do that. It's observed from very appreciative and very with that. It's observed from very appreciative and very disliking things like wars and the kind of relationship we

have to have with bureaucracy to really live in this society. I think that those are unreasonable comparisons to make and I don't think that people have to make them. I decided to have my color and not to go up against the expectations of the culture at large and still succeed even on their terms, even so that they will be able to forget you and even have you done, really. It is possible to do that in American culture. SRL is an anthem or some sort of protection against those things. It's not a gesture of rejecting the thing wholesale, we don't want to reject technology. I don't believe that you should kill the hen, I think that the hen will kill itself and in the meantime she encourages other sorts of growth to take over. It may take a long time to figure out whether that's effective or not. It certainly doesn't look now as if anyone who's trying to work in odds with the culture at large is being very successful. In fact, it looks pretty bleak really.

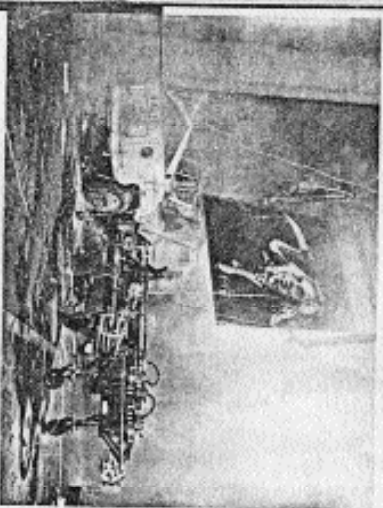
SRL and a lot of visually similar work takes as its basis a paranoia about the millennium and the



apocalypse, which seems fairly backward-looking. How would you defend your own work against such criticisms?

I think that everyone's speculating and how could you not speculate on something as momentous as the millennium, something that people have performed the consequences of for thousands of years? Like any other historic, it's based on this need that people have to believe that there will be something different. A change for a world that is more exciting, better than this one, or at least different. I don't think we're reacting to this sort of thing, though. I don't think what we do really poses a future at all. It's just trying to keep up with what's going on right now. Certainly the things we do are critical in some ways and it's very difficult to be critical of something unless you speak the same language as they do, then you have grounds for being accurate in your criticism. I don't try to measure why I do this stuff. I certainly don't make any money out of it.

38. Peter Bolyk, Salt Spring Island



You have said that SRL are gaining respect and moving closer to real research organisations within the scientific community who currently give you help and equipment.

It's only done in so far that you can purchase them, but otherwise there's a gap. For the most part I think that they're interested in SRL in the same way that rich people are interested in planning - they will go to those organisations and see what staff, that's very obvious. I don't think it's very harmful to me and I know that they're more going to be able to establish a link as it's maintained as the whole phenomenon, as its own historic self-supporting system. If I needed those people to survive then I think they'd be very dangerous. Their interest is basically scientific and that interest allows him to create SRL very well, because it allows us to get a lot of equipment. For instance, there is a research lab in the area which just recently gave us 20 - 30,000 dollars worth of gear. When military equipment. You can't buy those, there's no way you could ever get a hold of them, the person just had what we do over here. But it's not so much an interaction but a passive relationship.

Isn't there a possibility that something dangerous to the audience can occur at SRL performances?

I agree it's very much a possibility. We've done 42 performances in 12 years and you'd think that we had more knowledge than someone like Christo, whose large umbrellas in some ways killed someone recently. What's really scary, what is dangerous with something is when you feel yourself into doing that something's not what it is. That's why the good double show up. That's why I know up my hand, I found myself just thinking that something wasn't what it was.

How are the performances structured and where does the audience fit in?

Every person has a numbered hat, a guide that all of the operators of the machines are supposed to go through and within that guide they are allowed to interpret. Everyone is connected to the 30 helicopter blades and so during the performance we can orientate and I can direct the thing to an extent. In some performances there is no sound to the audience and it can be a very noticeable thing for the machine operators - it can be a people rather than a machine dimension, sometimes the machines ignore our audience, and sometimes the audience figure very prominently. The machine skills from show to show. As a rule of thumb we're always trying to get some kind of reaction from the audience, some kind of extreme reaction that can range from being doing things that are funny or surprising. It ranges from being entertaining to being frightening, but often doesn't seem to be much of a consensus about what frightens people.

What is the relationship between spectacle, audience involvement and audience provocation?

The audience's involvement is greater and to some extent the audience is just another element in the performance. In the same way that the sets and the machines are elements. The audience can move around as they like and have an intense reaction to something while another part of the audience can be watching that reaction. We've had a few instances when the audience has very definitely participated in the performance. One time we distributed about 3,000,000 dollars of orientated money, with these rubber spoons that were exploding over the audience. They were wanting to pick up the money, as were the police who were guarding the performance. All of which made for a very strange spectacle. And of course the people on the other side of the audience just saw these people scrambling, they probably couldn't see what they were doing or what the hell was going on. So some people saw something which had other uses than the operation situation. Some people thought the money was a souvenir but when they saw how good a character it was, it means the police weren't giving it in their pockets because they thought it was a souvenir, they knew that they could spend it when they got to Amsterdam. In a more recent performance, the audience could feel cans and bottles in the machines or throw metal objects onto a girl which then separated them. It's very difficult to involve an audience in a situation that you've created when they haven't been directly involved in the creation of it. The fact is a language between you and your audience are always involved.

SRL are also known for re-animating dead animal corpses. Is this still a part of the act?



39. Peter Bolyk, Salt Spring Island

corpse. Is this still a part of the act?

It depends on the theme of the show. In the Women of Alexander Alexander show there was a lot of organic material and an excess of feeding food. In Barcelona recently we used a lot of meat because we could get so much of it, there's so many slaughterhouses in Barcelona. It fitted in with the idea of space being a re-animating machine kind of thing. We were able to make fun of that.

You have to deal with boys with Toys criticisms a lot, but is this something you're very conscious of or have you been forced to deal with it by other people?

I will freely admit that this is a very ridiculous thing in some ways, but I think that as you get older and you keep doing things it just gets more complicated. Unless you maintain a strict hierarchy about what you do, you can't really grow unless you become paranoid. I think that that's sort of what's happened here. You have to shape things around you that change a little. You have to understand what it means to be accused of having boys with toys. We are the privileged class here, we're money white guys, I mean. There are some women and some people who aren't white but on the other hand we're the people who are educated, who have access to these skills, who don't get in trouble for breaking the law around. It's a part of a privileged class, one that in the traditional sense, has you have to be very sensitive to people who don't do these things. And the fact that you don't feel any these very categorisation gives you much more bargaining power in the face of a very hostile and acerbic culture that we live in.

What's your attitude to Republican and right-wing Christian organisations gaining increasing power in America, and how will SRL survive within such a climate?

I don't depend on those groups, but I think that groups like that depend on people that are, on groups that they want to marginalise for their own power base. They depend on the weak, that's what the far right in the country depends on. They depend on the weak so that they can have a symbol with which to marginalise the masses of people and so they can have a more base and a power base to make money and to gain more power and control. I mean, I don't think they believe in any of the things they talk about. But I think they depend on people like me being large, on areas being able to be victims, they depend on blacks, on women. But as soon as you aren't a victim, as soon as you are able to do what it did as good as they can, then you become a problem that they can never really deal with. I just don't worry about them. I'm always optimistic, right. I had a great time in the seven years at least on the surface more progressive beats held over. I don't really worry that the kind of optimism I have might become more polarised or less polarised. Maybe what I believe in will just get me into trouble someday, but that's just the way it goes. What she could I expect. I think history would assign to me and to the people here, anyone who tries to push an agenda that's different to the status quo to that kind of end. But how understanding it would be to be able to be successful and just use that to make money. There are many, many far things you can do. I certainly don't look forward to the apocalypse. I mean, I have a very paradoxical relationship with the culture. I would like to see the culture change but I don't really think you can have the world they dream and expect it to be any more interesting.

There's the list of three proposals by Stuart Macdon with artists addressing the uses and abuses of modern technologies in their work. Interviews with Genesis P. Orridge and with Seland will appear in forthcoming issues.

san francisco

High Performance Winter 1989

Mark Pauline**1989 Sculpture Grant Award Exhibition**

This past summer was an active one for Mark Pauline, founder of Survival Research Laboratories, the San Francisco machine/performance group. Over Memorial Day weekend, he kicked off with SRL's presentation of *Illusions of Shameless Abundance Degenerating Into an Uninterrupted Sequence of Hostile Encounters*, their most recent machine performance spectacle that occurred in a parking lot under the freeway in San Francisco's South of Market district.

The same title would have been equally appropriate for Pauline's gallery exhibition that opened some six weeks later at Artspace, where he transformed the typically passive gallery experience into a more risky scenario complete with forewarnings that alerted visitors of potentially hostile encounters. In this exhibition as the recipient of Artspace's 1989 Sculpture Grant Award, Pauline offered viewers one of the rare opportunities to see his work up close over a continuous period of time, rather than in the more usually distanced and one-night-only presentation of SRL's large scale performances.

Upon entering, each visitor was required to sign a release form absolving the gallery and Pauline of any liability for injury or death caused by viewing the exhibition. Ear plugs and safety glasses were mandatory passports into the interior workings of this ominous machine world, while people with pacemakers, heart conditions, hearing devices or those pregnant were strictly prohibited from entering the exhibition.

To arrive at the inner sanctum, one had to ascend a metal staircase that trembled as if activated by a seismic disturbance. High volume sounds were heard from behind the wall as one passed through the doorway that led to a steel-mesh catwalk. As one began to journey across this bridgelike form, complete with intermittent moving conveyor belt that threw one off balance, sensors signalled to the computer system to begin activating the machine world within. Each machine/sculpture was driven in an interactive way, dependent on the viewer's placement at different points on the catwalk.

There was a shock wave cannon that moved in spasmodic arcs and emitted explosive blasts when triggered by human motion.



1989 Sculpture Grant Award Exhibition

Here one was clearly a target—a decoylike sitting duck—for this mechanized aggressor gave one an eerie sense of being under surveillance by this machine world, inverting the sense of viewer/viewed relationship. Nearby was a robotic finger mounted on a horizontal track that allowed for a fairly wide lateral sweep of the area. It created a visual record of its attacks on a nearby wall. A set of guillotine-like chompers was appended to the finger and some visitors were provided with glass attached to a pole as sustenance to these menacing jaws—a bizarre feeding time at a postindustrial mechanized zoo. At a certain programmed moment, the platform of the catwalk began to descend (via forklifts) to floor level, giving one an even more intimate interaction with the clacker balls—two larger than life testicle-like spheres that became activated by the viewer's ground level proximity, causing the metallic orbs to flail about like a catapult gone awry. After a brief period of this vulnerability, the catwalk re-ascended, allowing again for a more removed, aerial perspective.

The close-up view provided by this exhibition gave one a sense of being inside the cen-

tral nervous system of the sculptural machine world, as well as raising ambiguity about the concept of viewer/viewed and subject/object. Pauline used the four-week exhibition period as a working laboratory. The work evolved as he changed and added new sculptural aspects and reconfigured the automated computer programming that controlled the machines. As with most automated situations, there were malfunctions and breakdowns as a result of the stress and output placed on the reconfigured industrial work horses, or mechanical systems. Pauline incorporated these breakdowns conceptually as part of his real-time, anti-gallery stance, aggressively confronting and inverting the normal constraints usually presented in gallery contexts. The work effectively raised questions concerning the spectacle of art commodity, art world protocol and decorum and notions of permanence and perfection.

—Kathy Brew

Presented at Artspace, San Francisco, July 11-August 19, 1989.

Kathy Brew is an artist and freelance critic who lives in San Francisco.

S.F. WEEKLY

A mere mention of Survival Research Laboratories elicits a violent emotional response from most people I know. Either they cheer Mark Pauline and his crew in a way that reminds me of rock and roll groupies or sports fans, or else they express a repulsion generally reserved for streetcorner flashers. The fans say S.R.L.'s fatal encounters among machines, explosives and burning animal heads shock life into otherwise complacent observers, blast away the boundaries of art and and are hel-la fun, besides. The naysayers cite Pauline's unctuous machismo and sneer at the pretentiousness of calling overblown high school shop experiments "art." Either way, a person's stance on Mark Pauline and his crew suggests more than his or her intellectual bent; it's a sign of the creature lurking within. Are you an art jock or a stuffy old fart? Which side are you on?

STREET TALK

ANN POWERS

The guys in S.R.L. (I know women are involved, too, but I agree with the stuffy old farts that this is really a boys' arena) are loved and hated because their projects are like deadly effective kids' games, and when confronted in such terms, people can't get their intellectual armor up fast enough. In a typical Pauline project, a fort is built and torn down, trash is transformed into play material, the guys act like mad scientists and soldiers; I did all this stuff as a child, if not on the grand and dangerous scale Pauline does it now. Hearing of a new S.R.L. project is like seeing a new treehouse in your neighborhood—if you like the people it belongs to, you're overjoyed, and if you hate them, you're furious.

Which brings up another reason tempers run so high around S.R.L. Their work is deliberately intrusive, leaving burn marks on other people's walls and always making a din. But it's also **exclusive**—the group's last performance was publicized solely by word of mouth and mysteriously worded posters, so you wouldn't have any idea what was in store unless you'd had previous experience with the Labs. The situation at the event further reflected this tension. It took place in a parking lot under the freeway, surrounded by a chain-link fence. You had to pay nine dollars to get inside the fence (or be cool enough for the guest list), but as always at S.R.L. gigs, it was

possible to see without doing so. Many more people were *outside* than in, lined up on rooftops and ladders they'd hauled down. Inside, dozens of "security" people threatened to kick people out if they got too close to the action (admittedly, a safety consideration), yet the machines regularly careened into the crowd, pugnaciously overstepping their bounds.

I can sympathize with the argument that Pauline's antics enforce, or at least pay tribute to, certain regressive power structures (might is right, the only difference between men and boys is the size of their toys). But I can also see Jean Tinguely's side of things. Tinguely, a Swiss-born artist who emigrated to America, made explosive art before Mark Pauline ever heard of an N.E.A. grant. In 1960, he performed his piece, *Homage To New York*, in the sculpture garden at the New York Museum of Modern Art. He presented a machine designed to destroy itself—and it did, with the help of the New York Fire Department. "The machine allows me, above anything, to reach poetry," Tinguely said. Watching one of S.R.L.'s cranes collide with a burning bank of pianos two Sundays ago, I understood how he felt.

26 REFLEX

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1990 7

performance

SURVIVAL RESEARCH LABORATORIES at Alaska Way and Royal Brougham (COCA, Seattle): The nostalgic air of a country fair with its seedy night life and its prize animals was perverted this savage June night before a large crowd of unusually good temper. The wonder of calliope music. We waited three hours for the frivolities to begin, and when they did I put in my dime-store ear plugs and prepared for enchantment. What I saw resembled a tractor pull, and had the potential of being as fun as demolition derbies or midget car racing, but it was actually like geriatric dinosaurs nodding to each other with what remained of their fierceness.

The big rumbling machines, "Calculated to Arouse Resentment for the Principles of Order," were perhaps not calculated enough. Few of them worked. But those that did made up for those that didn't. The best ones were guided by remote control. The control was indeed remote, but no heads flew, and no one was rushed to Harborview by helicopter. At one point one machine did go berserk, spraying a platoon of leopard kids with kerosene, and then moved in for the kill with a flame-thrower—but it was apparently just teasing. Ah, the smell of napalm in the evening!

The most beautiful thing was a giant Medusa dick-head, spitting horrific flame between its teeth. This, the *Tesla Coil*; and the sacrificial cow flying above the fray, transformed the spectacle into a near mythic event. —K.O.

Trembling Through Mark Pauline's Danger Zone

GALLERIES Kenneth Baker

For sheer, hair-raising immediacy, I've seen nothing in the arts to compare with the current show at Artspace, 1286 Folsom Street (through August 19), by San Francisco inventor and performance artist Mark Pauline. It makes even Jannis Kounellis' use of live gas jets look safe.

Pauline, founder of the "machine performance" group Survival Research Laboratories (SRL), is the winner of Artspace's 1989 Sculpture Grant Award.

SRL is notorious for staging outdoor events in which remote-controlled machines assault each other in techno-allegories of social and mental breakdown.

Pauline's gallery show is a contained version of one of these dangerous automated happenings.

You know something heavy awaits you when you are required to sign a release at the door absolving artist and gallery of legal liability for anything that may befall you on the premises.

Artspace visitors are issued

foam ear plugs and plastic protective eye wear. You'll need them.

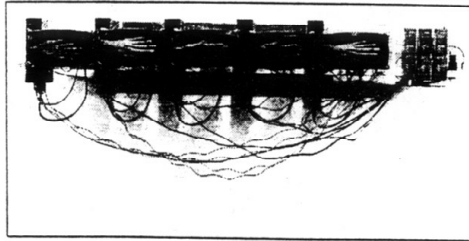
From the entry you can see that most of the gallery space has been walled off. The floor is littered with tools and other hardware, and there is a computer out front that controls the show. Sensors tell it when someone is entering.

To get inside, you mount a heavy metal staircase. Before you can set foot on it, it begins to shake and clatter like an earthquake has just hit. Rumbling, grinding noises come from beyond the wall, punctuated by an occasional explosive bang loud enough to be heard halfway down the block.

At the top of the stairs a doorway leads to a steel-mesh catwalk. In the semi-dark room below you can see things lunging and clanking around to the accompaniment of a blaring soundtrack of angry, largely unintelligible voices. Walk through a couple of metal gates you touch everything tentatively, wondering whether it is electrified) and you come to the center of the catwalk, the "privileged" vantage point.

In the dim and din, you can see just below ceiling level a big cannon-like cylinder that moves in jerky arcs and puts out the explosive blasts.

Behind it, along a sort of gantry



Alan Rath's 'The Wave,' a high technology/video installation at Artspace Annex across the street from the Mark Pauline show

track, runs a long-armed contraption like a mechanical pterodactyl, waving its arms menacingly.

The flailing, lunging and blasting of this gear is nerve-racking because you can see how makeshift it all looks.

As regret at signing the release grips your heart, the platform on which you stand starts to descend (on forklifts) to floor level. A third device on the floor goes into action.

It has two spherical buoys tethered to an upright arm. The arm begins to snap like a catapult and the buoys whip toward you and rebound.

The floor of the space is cluttered with scrap metal and wood, tools, hoses and tall canisters of compressed gas.

After a minute or two, the forklifts bring you back to catwalk level, whence you can leave if you've had enough punishment (and your

knees can negotiate the shivering staircase).

The late Minimalist romance with heavy industry and with erasing the line between life and art has never been more vividly expressed than here. The noise, intensity and danger of this show may be old hat to, say, steelworkers and oil riggers, but presented as aesthetic phenomena, they are pure nightmare.

Like all good sculpture, Pauline's work seizes you bodily. Part of the violence of his work is in the way it sweeps away representation and its decorum: His stuff — whatever it is — is right there in your face.

You go away thinking anew about the violence of industry and warfare that made the world modern and blasted its innocence.

Artspace also gave Support Grants to sculptors Alan Rath and Mark Paschall. Their works share the Artspace Annex at 1329 Folsom Street (through August 19). Their show is so much quieter than Pauline's that I recommend seeing it first. Otherwise you may be too rattled to enjoy it.

Mark Paschall has some nicely

mystifying constructions using discarded books, but he is upstaged by Rath's high-tech constructions using video displays and micro-processors. "Big Heart" displays a black and white grid that might be a banal office building facade that pulses silently with a recognizably cardiac rhythm.

In "Wave," five small screens offer identical, computer-synthesized images of a hand rotating its palm. As the images go in and out of synch, the sequence reads now as a wave good-bye, then as mimicry of an ocean wave, then as a magician's nothing-up-my-sleeve gesture.

AUGUST 12, 1989 /

PLAYING WITH PERIL ART WEEK

San Francisco / Mark Van Proyen

Some artists make a big deal about taking an active command of the exhibition spaces that present their endeavors, perhaps because the institutional "feel" of such places can seem at odds with the esthetic tenor of their work. One such artist is Mark Pauline, who serves as the director and pointman for a collaborative team known as Survival Research Laboratories (SRL). Pauline is also the winner of the biannual award in sculpture presented by Artspace and has (with his SRL teammates) a current exhibition at that institution.

I have never seen a space so completely transformed by an artist. For a moment, I thought I had walked in the wrong door and discovered a muffler shop catering to alien spacecraft. A pungent odor of lubricating fluids emanated from within a large black room that serves as the exhibition's inner sanctum, its floor covered with haphazardly applied electrical tape that served to secure chaotic webs of insulated electric cords and hydraulic hoses. Connected to this web were five large mechanized objects: a sinister-looking robotic finger mounted on an overhead track; an ominous-looking air cannon aimed at the end point of an overhead catwalk; an evil-looking mechanical



Mark Pauline, installation, 1989, mixed media, at Artspace, San Francisco.

toad called *The Scrambler*; a relatively sinister gizmo called *Clacker Balls*, featuring two medicine-ball-sized orbs dangling from a kind of bouncing gallows; and finally, a conveyor belt that went up and down on hydraulic lifts. When this conveyor belt reached its top position, it connected the end point of the catwalk with a stairway down to ground level, allowing access or escape. When the conveyor belt receded downward, whoever occupied the viewing platform at the end of the catwalk was trapped and exposed to the herky-jerky molestations of *The Finger* and *The Air Cannon*.

My usage of the past tense in the above description is intentional, because SRL's installation is very likely to keep changing during the course of the exhibition, so what I had a chance to view may be substantially altered by the time this is read. Also, what I had a chance to view (a week after the exhibition opened) happened to be nonoperating, so I was forced to use my imagination in describing mechanical processes that were temporarily down. My imagination was helped by my having seen several of SRL's performances in the past, making me familiar with the science-fictionalized esthetic of techno-madness
Continued on page 20

Playing With Peril, CONTINUED

Continued from page 3

that the group pursues—but to what end?

It seems that the consistent end behind all of SRL's projects involves toying with an exaggerated ambivalence about technology and power—that is, indulging in an atavistic fascination with the instrumentalization of violence and, at the same time, maintaining an ironic air of criticality that seems to moralize about the familiar theme of technology as a dehumanizing

agent. The question is, can SRL have it both ways? In terms of atavistic fascination, the Artspace exhibition is effective—at least when the machines work—because the devices appear at once highly technological and crudely archaic, drawing attention to a primal will-to-power underlying the very concept of machine. As moral narrative, however, the installation seems puny in comparison with real-world morality issues such as the financing of radar-avoiding aircraft. It is sentimentality overattached to the kind of rust-belt Newtonianism that one sees most commonly at a tractor pull. The

pathos that should accompany any examination of "dehumanized social relations" has lapsed into a self-satirizing bathos that seems propelled by naivete and an overcommitment to spectacular showmanship.

Because Artspace now has a second exhibition space (Artspace Annex), the two runners-up for the major award can also exhibit, and this allows viewers to draw conclusions about the esthetic predispositions of this year's jury (Christine van Assche, Ed Leffingwell and Bob Riley). The technology-as-demon theme so apparent in the main exhibition is given a cooler, more electronic treatment in Alan Rath's work, constructed out of conduit, found objects and video monitors patched

into simple computer programs. Mark Paschall creates quasi-functional objects out of the stacks of books, light in look but heavy in their implications that postmodernism is in fact a postliteracy. □

Live under the Freeway

Survival of the Fittest

JACQUELINE JOURNET

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hen one

asks of the subversive in art, is usually referring to the *aphor* of subversion, rather than to subversion itself. The art survival Research Laboratories, however, is a *literal* manifestation of that most avant-garde art courts to be about. SRL aren't talking theory, they're acting it in a multi-leveled, large-scale production.

The most recent SRL performance, "Illusions of Shameless Indulgence Degenenerating into an Interrupted Sequence of Hostile Counters," featured the usual array of radio-controlled things engaged in auto-struction in an empty parking lot beneath the freeway between 4th and 10th streets in Downtown

San Francisco. A crawling flame-thrower torched about 20 pianos stacked up around one of the pillars supporting the freeway, creating heat so intense that the freeway itself reportedly cracked. A 15-foot-tall mechanical horse pulled itself along the ground by its neck until it reached a piñata filled with rotten meat and vegetables, which it tore open and emptied into a shredder. The shredder, in turn, mulched and regurgitated the fecund material onto the audience, which, meanwhile, was being pelted with waves from a sonic boom cannon, which emitted loud explosions until the heat from the flamethrower melted half its tubes. All the while the PA system played back tapes of radio call-in shows, a demented "common sense" counterpoint to the violence of the performance.

Survival Research Laboratories create what is essentially a monster truck rally for a more urban

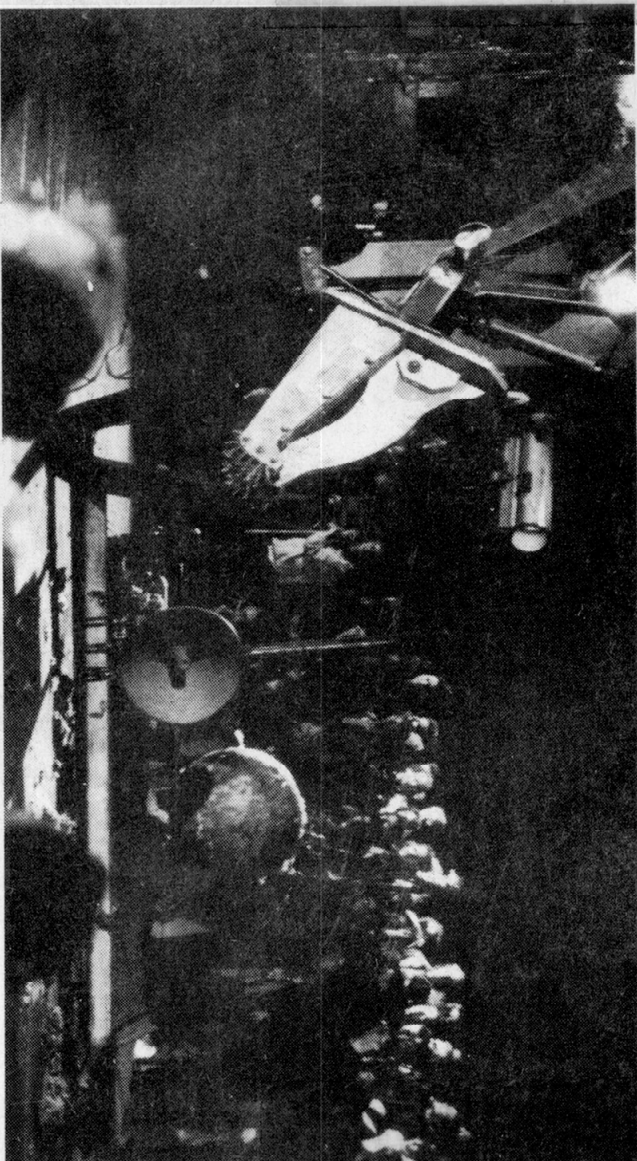


PHOTO BY RICHARD STARK

audience. The difference between SRL's machines and "Bigfoot — The World's Largest Four-Wheel Drive" is primarily aesthetic. Bigfoot crunches cars; the SRL machines crunch mounds of rotten beef and fish (and, yes, it does smell quite awful). As a spectacle, SRL holds much of the same appeal as any other destruction derby, albeit with a political agenda, as the performance's title suggests.

But, there is a distinct difference between watching multi-engined tractors from the stands at the Cow Palace and watching a radio-operated flamethrower disgorge diesel fire from 20 feet away, with only a rope separating the arena and the spectators. Perhaps this has something to do with the

illusion of safety in art — we are asked to *trust* SRL to keep the machines under control, even when the giant corkscrew heads into the audience with its blade spinning. In truth, we're protected only by our own trust and *naivete*. If there is any doubt that SRL is playing with a truly elemental and physical danger, one need look no further than SRL founder Mark Pauline's left hand (a peculiar case of reconstructive surgery) for confirmation.

The true spirit of anarchy — teetering on the edge of chaos — inherent in an SRL performance is equally embodied in the means by which the whole spectacle is carried out. According to an SRL member, the group, which derives

most of its funding from federal arts grants, staged the performance without a permit, without prior notification of the city's fire or police departments, without insurance, and without any kind of official sanction. Best of all, they managed to *get away with it* while still alerting the press and papering the city with posters advertising the event. SRL did structural damage to the freeway and stopped freeway traffic with clouds of black smoke and explosive noise. They also contributed to the closing of coastal routes in San Francisco and Marin County when a fake TNT canister from the show was found on the beach. The Situationists would have loved it.



SURVIVAL RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Despite the many advances in non-destructive testing (NDT), controlled automobile crashes are still a crucial step in evaluating the effectiveness of various safety features; from shoulder harnesses and air bags to energy absorbing bumpers and side intrusion door beams. Ordinarily, these destructive tests (Non-NDT, if you will) are carried out before audiences that are limited to engineers, corporate executives, safety experts and government officials.

To highlight safety features and increase sales appeal, however, car manufacturers occasionally reveal aspects of this form of testing in their TV commercials. Among the more dramatic are those that show a car being dropped on its roof from a height of several feet or -- for greater impact -- being driven off a multi-story building.

On one level, Survival Research Laboratories' performance art is strictly entertainment, providing both a catharsis and a philosophic lesson about man's mortality and relationship with machines. On another level, these performances test the capabilities and endurance of machines and materials to the ultimate limit.

XTRA•GUARD® CABLE SURVIVES PUNISHMENT, PERFORMS IN "DESIGNED FOR DESTRUCTION" SITUATIONS

Often, equipment used in destructive testing and in other extreme situations must perform and survive "where the action is." Major equipment is protected by barriers, shock isolation devices. However, often overlooked components, such as cabling, may become a weak link unless it is afforded equal protection. At Survival Research Laboratories (SRL), XTRA•GUARD 5 cable from Alpha Wire was selected to survive the rigors of explosions and crushing forces. This cabling is armored, plenum-type cabling that exceeds the NEC standard for resistance to temperature extremes, chemical attack, and corrosion in the most demanding OEM applications.

If you think crashing brand-new automobiles into concrete barriers to evaluate restraint systems, side intrusion door beams and energy absorbing bumpers is the epitome of destructive testing, you haven't seen the work of Survival Research Laboratories. SRL, a San Francisco-based performance art collective, regularly carries the instructive value of destructive testing to new heights (or depths). The group also goes to

extraordinary lengths to protect its investment in test equipment by employing XTRA•GUARD cable, developed by Alpha Wire Corporation, Elizabeth, NJ. XTRA•GUARD is made for tough applications like steel mills and other high temperature, corrosive industrial and plenum applications.

In 45-minute, live presentations before audiences in key cities throughout the U.S. and abroad, SRL fields a small army



Alpha's XTRA•GUARD 5 cable installation in the robots "Big Arm" has survived the torture of a half-dozen performances and dozens of rehearsals. The cable's FEP-Teflon jacket is rated to +200°C without wiring burn-through.

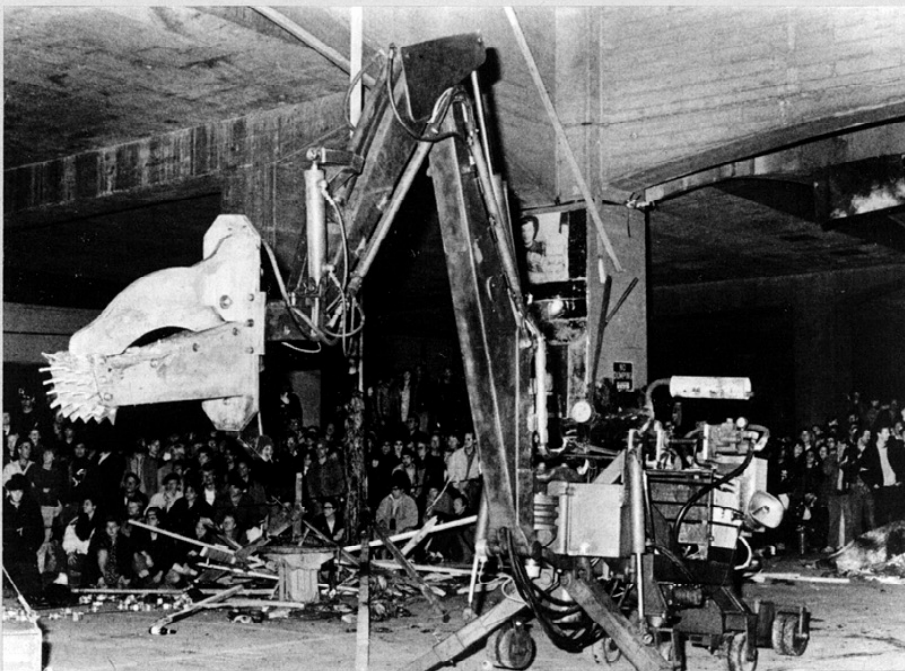
ROBOT ARMY

The army of anthropomorphic robots developed for SRL's shows include a 20-ft-long, power-driven "Big Arm" that is a combination backhoe and dinosaur; a four-legged "Inspector" that looks like a hospital bed with clawed arms; a 10-ft-tall, one-ton "Walking Machine" that resembles a skeletal elephant; a 20-ft-long "Inchworm" that has giant pinchers and can lift and throw 1000-lb objects; a two-story "Big Wheel" that consists of oil drums welded together; and a 12-ft "Shock Wave Cannon" that can shatter glass 100 feet away.

A 1400-lb catapult, aptly named the "Throwbot," can hurl heavy objects great distances and a "Sprinkler From Hell" is a diabolical conversion of an industrial sprinkler system into a flamethrower.

Adding to the noise of metal-to-metal contact experienced by the audience, during what SRL founder Mark Pauline calls exercises in "creative vandalism," are fireworks and unexpected, but carefully controlled ground explosions. Assuring maximum safety for the "vandals" and viewers alike, as many as 50 volunteers assist in programming the computerized robots and in directing the actions of the radio-controlled machines.

In the decade since Survival Research Laboratories was formed, the performance art group has given more than three dozen public shows to audiences of 3,000 and more in cities from New York to Amsterdam and Copenhagen.



SRL's computer-programmed and radio-controlled anthropomorphic robot is posed ready for "combat". The audience is kept at a safe distance during the performance.

of computer-programmed and radio-controlled anthropomorphic robots that engage in deadly combat. Its late-night, open-air shows are reminiscent of Roman Circuses, but with significant differences.

"This more modern, more violent form of 'contact sport' may even foreshadow wars of the future," declares SRL founder Mark Pauline, who is an expert welder-machinist with an artistic -- and a philosophic -- bent. "Our shows also can be viewed," he said, "as a metaphor of man's relationship with machines."

An engineering consultant by day, in collaboration with other performance artists, Pauline becomes a designer-fabricator of mind-boggling machines by night. Over the past decade, SRL has put metal and other man-made materials to the ultimate test while entertaining audiences with upwards of a dozen "muscular" robots that collectively weigh more than 22 tons. Each is capable of demolishing anything in its path.

High-Tech Art

SRL's blend of art and technology totally involves the audience, generating the visceral excitement of guerilla theater and demolition derbies. However random the destruction appears, it is meticulously planned and tightly controlled. The robots that produce the choreographed chaos survive the worst punishment while destroying large assemblages of wrecked car parts, discards from leveled buildings, collages of prosthetic devices and viscera from slaughter houses.

During a typical performance these are smashed, crushed, torn apart, shredded and burned to the accompaniment of fireworks and unexpected explosions. At the conclusion of each show, the area

has the appearance of a devastated battleground. Along with the audience, which has been kept at a safe distance during the performances, the only survivors are the charred, dented and otherwise damaged -- but still functioning -- robots.

Punishment Problems

During the presentations, cabling in one of the robots is frequently exposed to temperatures above 500° F as it moves various objects into the path of a two-ton "Flame Blower" for instant incineration. In the early days, potential failure of the cable in the 20-ft-long, power-driven "Big Arm," which has been described as a combination backhoe and dinosaur, proved to be a frequent problem.

Wiring burn-throughs during performances could be inadvertent "show-stoppers," disabling one of the stars of the show -- invariably, at a crucial phase of the performance. In the tradition of "the show must go on," a number of remedies were tried, but even wrapping the wiring in heavy aluminum foil did not provide dependable protection.

Performance Solution

To cope with the stresses and temperatures encountered by the "Arm," last year, SRL switched to XTRA•GUARD 5 cable supplied by Alpha Wire Corporation, Elizabeth, NJ. Developed for unusually demanding operating requirements and hostile environments, such as glitch-free transmission of digital data and to meet safety requirements in demanding industrial application, the cable chosen by SRL carries three pairs of wire wrapped in a 0.025-in. FEP-Teflon jacket that withstands operating temperatures from -80° C to +200° C. In addition to passing the UL VW-1 flame test, the heavy duty insulation offers excellent resistance to

moisture, abrasion and impact, and is resistant to chemicals, oil, solvents and fungus.

A year after installation in the "Big Arm", Alpha's XTRA•GUARD 5 cable has survived the torture of a half-dozen public performances and dozens of rehearsals. According to SRL's Pauline, "The cable has thrived on the toughest punishment we can dish out and looks as good today as when we first installed it."

New Meanings

Many in the audience exit SRL performances with a greater understanding of what is temporary and what is lasting and with a greater appreciation of the relationship between man and machine. As Mark Pauline noted, "Once you've lived through one of our performances, survival takes on a whole new meaning." The makers of XTRA•GUARD 5 cable agree.

XTRA•GUARD® ELECTRONIC CABLE FAMILY MEETS TOUGHEST CHALLENGES

The XTRA•GUARD family is a series of five separate and distinct cable types that survive just about any environmental hazard, while at the same time, increasing productivity, lowering operating costs, adding safety and reducing downtime.

XTRA•GUARD cables stand up to oils, fuels, solvents, chemicals, high and low temperature extremes and the toughest mechanical abuse. They give optimum electrical performance and provide exceptional environmental suitability. For additional protection, XTRA•GUARD cables are available with shielding and armoring.

The cables link together computer-controlled machines: industrial robotics, CNC and NC machine tools linked to Computer Automated Systems, CAD/CAM systems, sensitive electronics instruments, and a wide variety of computer control systems.

Family Line-Up

The five XTRA•GUARD cables are applications oriented:

XTRA•GUARD 1: Tough, extra heavy jacketing material for computer communications, instrumentation and control equipment indoors.

XTRA•GUARD 2: Withstands physical and chemical abuse in petrochemical plants, machine tool operations and industrial robotics.

XTRA•GUARD 3: Excellent chemical, UV and fungus resistance for direct burial, making it the choice for inter-building communications, petroleum pipelines and irrigation systems.

XTRA•GUARD 4: Flexible in cold and resistant to alkaloids in paper processing plants, electric utilities and industrial cable tray applications.

XTRA•GUARD 5: Used in steel mills and in high temperature, corrosive industrial and plenum applications. Pennsylvania Bureau of Deep Mine Safety Approved P-MWMS-1-85.

Survival Research/XTRA•GUARD 5

The Survival Research Laboratories application puts XTRA•GUARD 5 to the supreme test, and the cables perform admirably. XTRA•GUARD 5 cable constructions protect against temperature extremes, exposure to chemicals, oils, water and various types of mechanical abuse. It can be produced to exact specifications, from prototype to production quantities with from 2 to 100 conductors, from 2 to 60 pairs, in all AWC sizes from 24 to 14, in several UL styles (300V and 600V). Standard putups are 100, 500 and 1000 feet; or the cable can be cut to order.

Polyester-supported aluminum for shielding with copper drain wire is available. And SUPRASHIELD™, a triple-laminate shielding system that provides emissions protection far beyond requirements, is suitable for MIL STD 461, 462B and TEMPEST military shielding requirements.

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