

Helwaser Gallery

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Freudenheim, Susan. "Under Euclpytus." Art Forum, Apr. 1988, pp. 127-128.

the statue itself is comically at odds with the monument as we know it in Western art—a 14-foot-high parrotlike bird standing anthropomorphically erect, its body patterned in bright reds, yellows, and blues, its comb sitting sideways on its head as a golden rising sun. It's a hoot, a pagan-hedonist inversion of the classical dignity usually aimed at in the monumental tradition. Still, to this viewer, its sarires are obvious for all their wit, and the piece is essentially conventional and unprovocative. Nor does it deal particularly sensitively with its site—the joke of the arch would work as well in any number of other places. *Sun God* has become very popular—it is the university mascot, and students make it the heart of an annual festival to welcome the spring. The work has become the centerpiece for some of the rituals and pleasures of the college campus. So maybe it was lucky that the Stuart Foundation started with the bird. Fortunately, however, they also moved on to more demanding works.

The most recent of these is *UNDA*, 1987, by Ian Hamilton Finlay, the first piece in America by this Scot whose art combines sculpture, landscape (his most elaborate work is the garden he has laid out around his house in Lanarkshire), and his own kind of concrete poetry. *UNDA* consists of a row of five 3-foot-high blocks of English limestone embedded in a grassy expanse overlooking the Pacific. The stone was chosen to match the color of the cliff's running down to the sea. Though it's not far from a sports field and a cluster of student dormitories, the piece stands somewhat secluded and apart. Entering the quiet space it occupies and drawing close to the roughly hewn stones, you see that each of them has an inscription carved into its top. To read in the left-to-right sequence that the words suggest, the first block bears a single sign, a / , an elegant version of the wavelike form editors use to indicate that words or letters in a text should be transposed. The sign reappears in different positions on the next four stones, along with four letters in four different sequences: the first inscription reads UNAD, the second UDNA, the third NUDA, and finally UNDA—Latin for "wave." The Latin reference is underlined by the Roman capitals and by the printing of the U's as V's.

This visual poem, carved in a language both forgotten and familiar in Western culture, alludes not only to the gentle rolling of the ocean in the distance, but also to the waves within language—to language's fluidity, its changeableness, its constant flux and revision. And the work, static though it is, also invites your own movement, a drift from stone to stone, following in your mind the intertwining movements of the letters. Your eye moves, your body moves, and so do your thoughts, always returning to the same image: wave. From blocks of solid stone and from the abstract codes of language, *UNDA* evokes a mesmerizing, whispering motion like the sea.

Finlay's sculpture gives back different information through its interaction with the landscape and



Richard Fleischner, *La Jolla Project*, 1984, 71 granite elements, the highest 12'. Installation view.

its delicate address of the changing humor of the viewer; the rocks themselves, of course, remain unchanged. Nam June Paik's *Something Pacific*, 1986, on the other hand, offers something literally new with every viewing. Installed, appropriately, in and around the Media Center building, the piece lives both indoors and outdoors, and its two parts come with quite separate but complementary associations. Outside, a dispersed series of works run variations on ideas and motifs with which Paik has often worked before: in different sites, for example, we find three bronze Buddhas sitting in the grass, each gazing into an antique TV console; elsewhere, a 10-inch replica of Rodin's *Thinker* perches atop a tiny Sony Watchman television and stares down into its screen. Some scattered TV debris sinking into the earth like the remains of an explosion, and a '50s-style TV console cast in concrete to become a planter for creeping vines, complete this part of the work. In the lobby of the Media Center, a bank of 24 working televisions broadcasts live MTV, interspersed at intervals with one of Paik's own tapes, a non-narrative color collage. Some monitors face the

viewer upright, some upside down, some sideways, for an overall topsy-turvy effect, despite the arrangement's underlying logic. And half of them are wired through a video synthesizer, which can be manipulated by the viewer to change the programs' colors, to draw on the screens, to alter completely the imagery of whatever is playing. The television turns into Everyperson's canvas and palette, an advanced, democratically participatory video game that it's a delight to manipulate. It's disorienting, then, to go outside again, to move from the futuristically alive TVs to the stilled ones with their meditative Buddhas and thinkers, their decay into the earth. Like Allen's *Trees*, *Something Pacific* brings together a long series of associations that we usually think of as dualities: inside/outside, culture/nature, endlessly-new/age-old, action/thought.

Richard Fleischner's *La Jolla Project*, 1984, takes over a large green lawn between the theater and the humanities complex. Arranging huge blocks of pink and gray granite primarily in post-and-lintel structures schematically varied to accord with the contours of the site (in terms of both its

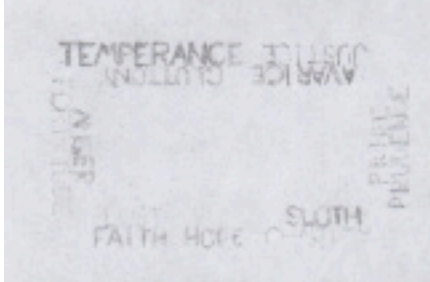




Robert Irwin, *Two Running Violet V-Forms*, 1983, steel chain-link fencing with plastic coating mounted on 5-inch-diameter stainless steel poles, ca. 25' high, installation view.



William Wegman, proposal drawing for *La Jolla Vista View*, 1988, watercolor on paper, 14 x 17".



Bruce Nauman, proposal drawing for *Virtues and Vices*, 1985, watercolor and pencil on paper, 36 x 52".

topography and the ways people use it), Fleischer has imposed an organization on an unarticulated space. From a distance, the forms resemble the doorways and arches of Stonehenge. Up close, however, the ritualistic becomes the mundane—or, rather, it becomes clear that the rituals are those of daily college life. The horizontal stones set within a number of the archways become seats for reading, or for stretching out in the sun; a round block in the lawn might be an altar if this were actually a druidic site, but seems to have become a table for picnicking.

Variations in light throughout the day, as well as the direction from which you approach the expressive space of *La Jolla Project*, affect your vision of the work. From one vantage the sculptural elements appear clustered, from another sparsely scattered. But there's a static and forbidding pristineness to the way these stones relate to their setting, and it makes the work somewhat less likable than the others at UCSD. In its grand monumental scale, *La Jolla Project* can be intimidating—"Are you good enough to sit here?" it seems to ask, announcing itself as a place to read Homer or Proust rather than a thriller or the daily paper. But this is a university, after all, and Fleischer's beautiful insular space does get you to close your eyes to what adjoins it: the monotonous grid of windows in a nondescript university building, and a vast parking lot.

Perhaps more than any other of the nonelectronic pieces in the collection, Robert Irwin's *Two Running Violet V-Forms*, 1981-83, changes from day to day and even minute to minute, depending on the weather, the light, the direction from which you approach it, how close you come. It consists of a pair of enormous fences zigzagging in two V configurations through the same grove of trees in which the Allen piece stands. (The distance between the two artists' works keeps them discrete.) The transparent mesh of these constructions, made of the same kind of interwoven wire as a Cyclone fence, is coated with a blue-violet plastic. And the fences begin well above the ground; they are elevated so that you can easily pass beneath them. The supports are stainless steel poles, 5 inches in diameter and mostly about 25 feet high. (The height varies so that the fences remain level despite the changing contours of the land.) From certain vantage points, these poles dominate, and the piece seems no more than an elaborate high-tech structure supporting a giant's tennis net. On dark days, the fence is almost invisible; the hazy sunlight on its surface turns it the same steely gray as the sky. On a windy day, the mesh may be dense with leaves. On a day when the fence zips in and out of sunlight and shadow, some areas may read gray, some violet, some almost azure, and any number of other gradations of their basic hue.

But whatever the weather, and unlike his earlier, and more successful, scrim works, which seem to dematerialize architecture at the same time as they depend on it, Irwin's San Diego piece never becomes pure color. The poles are thick enough

that the fences always remain fences; like a magic trick that exposes all its workings, the installation reveals the sleight of hand that makes its effects possible. That literalness may have been Irwin's intention, but it is less powerful than the mystery of his works in the past. Still, the V configuration and those poles do direct the eye to distant vanishing points. From some angles, on some days, the piece renders a South California eucalyptus grove the natural, three-dimensional equivalent of Renaissance pictorial space.

The Stuart Foundation plans much more artwork for UCSD, including projects by Jackie Ferrara and Jenny Holzer. Two works are scheduled for completion in the spring of 1988, and both show great promise in the planning stages. The 7½-foot-high colored neon letters of Bruce Nauman's *Virtues and Vices*, to be set in a circuit around a laboratory building on campus, will spell out the names of the seven qualities traditionally associated with each of the two categories of the work's title. They will be visible from some distance away, including a nearby highway. Flashing in changing sequences, overlapping at times to become a mesh of color (blending pride with prudence, envy with hope, and so on), they may serve as an ironic warning and exhortation to the neighboring community. William Wegman's *La Jolla Vista View*, also nearing completion, will resemble a landscaped scenic overlook. Behind a low wall commanding a broad panorama of the surrounding area will be mounted a telescope through which to study the local landmarks. But what that telescope will scan are the encroaching signs of suburban sprawl, a constantly developing landscape of increasingly densely packed condominiums, freeways, and shopping centers. A 12-foot-long bronze plaque will run along the top of the wall; etched with the artist's own drawings, it will depict these ticky-tacky developments and chart other significant sites and circumstances—a local supermarket, a lone bird chirping, a cat meowing.

Obviously the Stuart Collection doesn't propose itself as the only possible avenue for meaningful public work. Under director Mary Beebe, however, it has done something notable—it has achieved an accommodation to site and to its public that compromises neither the art nor the artists. And the contractual agreement between the university and James Stuart DeSilva, who established the foundation, is an unusual one in this respect, for it affirms that the works and the sites at UCSD are integral to each other. When Allen, in other words, sets his lead-covered trees in that living grove, the grove is considered part of the work; the grassy bank overlooking the Pacific is deemed an integral part of Finlay's *UNDA*, the Media Center an essential component of Paik's *Something Pacific*, and so on. If the university is to preserve the work, it must preserve the site. Thus all these pieces become political in a most imaginative way: simply by being in its site, the art exerts a pressure to preserve the environment around it for future