

. . . . ART NEWS

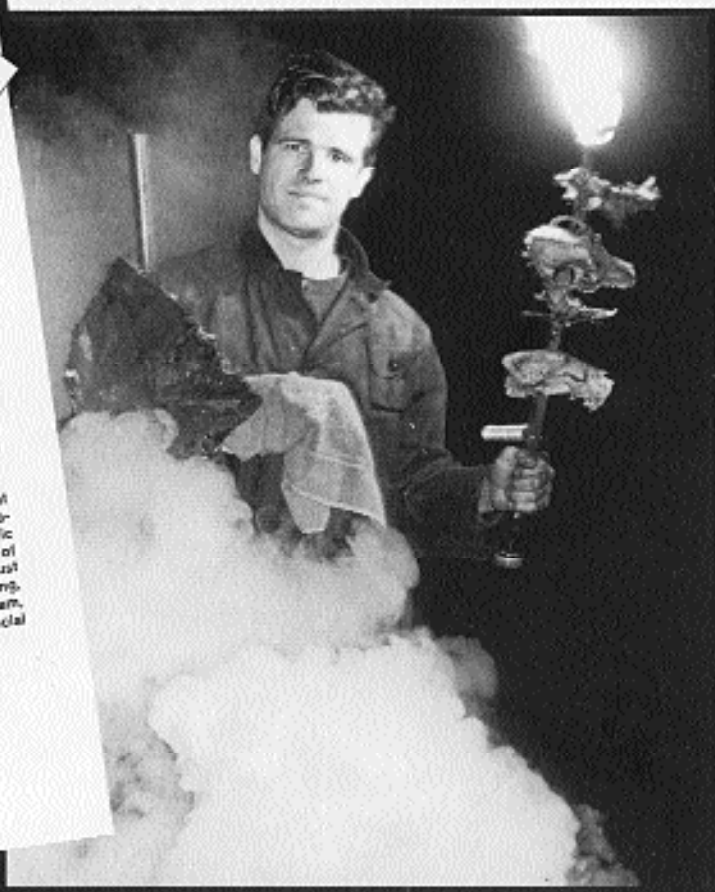
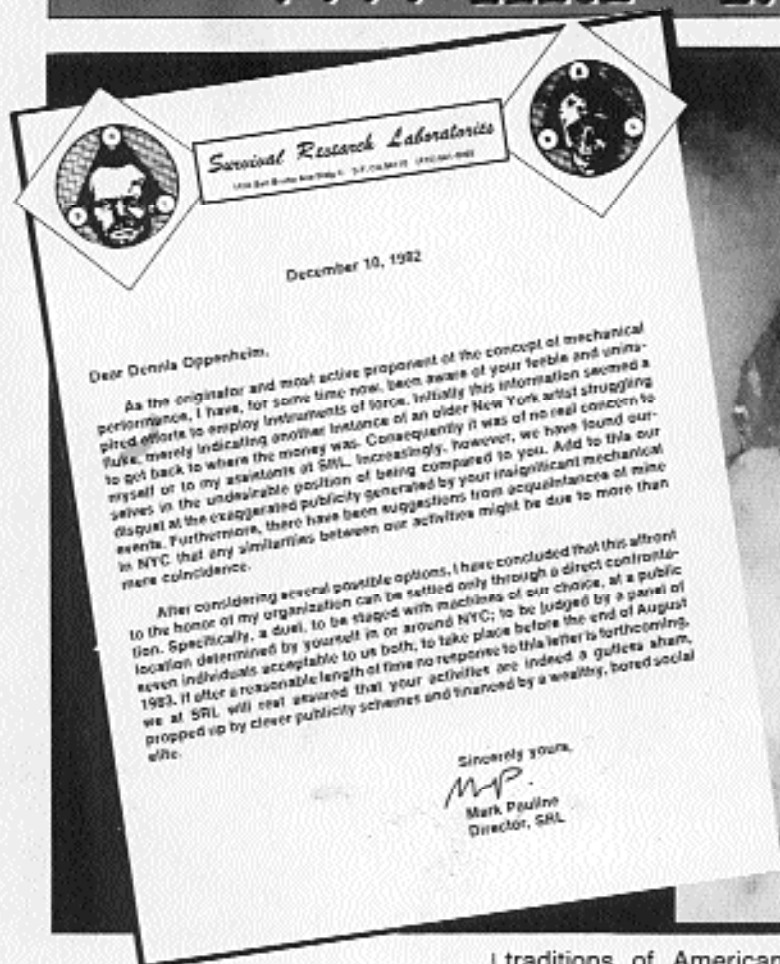


Photo: Mark Sargeant

| traditions of American Indians as I has on emotional mobility The tane

A4 S F. Progress Wed., June 11, 1980 1 2 3 4 5

Porno show on SF school property?

By Dan Borsuk

San Francisco Unified School District officials were caught off guard when a Richmond District resident complained that a local avant-garde show producer showed a pornographic movie at Cabrillo School Saturday night.

Based on an anonymous telephone complaint about a show at Cabrillo School's amphitheater, the resident said the movie showed a man and woman separately engaged in pornographic acts.

Some 250 persons attended the show, and among the audience were children.

A KQED reporter, Phil

Bronstein, who was at the show to film a different segment of the show produced by Survival Research Labs, described the movie as "pretty shocking" and it was "indeed pornographic."

Bronstein, who was there to cover an avant-garde light show involving old industrial equipment, said a number of people walked out of the show when the eight minute movie entitled, "SXXX 80," was shown.

But Mark Pauline of Survival Research Labs which rented the amphitheater from the school district for \$20 said the movie produced by England

avant-garde moviemakers Monte Cazazza and Tana Emolo was generally liked by the audience.

"This was an anti-sex film," said Pauline. "It was an experimental comment on sex. It was really a spoof on sex and didn't appeal to any purient interests."

Pauline said at least one or two children were in the audience during the movie's showing, and there were a number of 18 and 19-year-olds.

"It was anti-pornographic and showed people partly naked doing day to day activities," he said.

Pauline defended his show

saying, prior to getting Board of Education approval to stage his show at Cabrillo School, he described to school officials what would be presented.

Pauline said he has had other shows at the Palace of Fine Arts, the Golden Gate Park band shell, United Nations Plaza and Union Square. The Cazazza-Emolo movie was never shown at any of those City parks though.

The Saturday Cabrillo School show raises a question about the school district's monitoring of private organizations renting public school property.

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JEFFREY BLANKHART PHOTO

Eric Werner, Matt Heckert and Mark Pauline, as the Survival Research Laboratories, do strange and bizarre things to machines and animals — representing the violence and chaos in society.

Violent show explodes on target

By Regina Hackett
P-I Art Critic

Art has always doubled as target practice. Our oldest ancestors painted deer and bison on the walls of their caves, hoping that making images of their prey would help bring them to their knees.

At best that's the theory, and certain artists have taken it as their cue ever since. Art has been used not only to trap dinner, but to arrest decay and their culture. Images of dark furcs grace Indian temples, Asian screens and Northwest Indian carvings. Mysterious masks scare the uninitiated in African dances, and pyramids on Gothic cathedrals tell

sinners to check their laser instincts at the door.

Traditionally, art is used to acknowledge aggression and order it.

The three-man performance art team known as Survival Research Laboratories, performing in Seattle on Saturday night, believes that contemporary Western society lacks this ordering principle. They do not think of the American dream as societal glue, nor do they not assured that the people in charge of Trident submarines cruising under the surface calm of Northwest waters know exactly what they're doing.

They answer the charge, they see with chaos, making machines that

ART PREVIEW

Survival Research Laboratories, the three-man performance team from San Francisco, brings exploding machines to the old Metro trolley parking lot on 14th Avenue between Jefferson and Cherry streets Saturday night at 8. Admission is \$5 general and free for members of the Center on Contemporary Art. It is a local's sponsoring group.

attack and demolish each other in performances, laced by a charge of horrible science. They use dead

See STAGED, Page C-11

Correction

Representatives of the Center on Contemporary Art (COCA) say that no live animals will be harmed during the performance of Survival Research Laboratories tonight on a former Metro parking lot on 14th Avenue. An advance story in Thursday's P-I was partly based on an unverified source that reported animals might be harmed.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Saturday, May 24, 1986

Staged chaos reflects society's death quest for nuclear oblivion

From Page C-1

animals and have been known to torture and even kill live ones, trapping mice inside machines and cutting the heads off chickens. They rub their audience's faces in violence and aren't interested in providing a cathartic, ordering antidote.

Mistakenly, considering the debris and firebombs flying through the air, no audience members have been hurt in the six years that Mark Pauline, Matt Heckert and Eric Werner have been together, although Pauline lost a hand when a machine exploded on him.

Linda Burnham in *Artforum* magazine called their stance "problematic," which is art talk for she isn't sure why they do what they do, and this bothers her. She offered the touching hope that the 2,500-strong audience in Los Angeles last year "was not applauding violent spectacle but... offering appreciation for SRL's audacity, ludicrous zaniness and powerful integrity."

Nice try, *Artforum*, but no sale. People come to these events for their own reasons. Those who cheer while Rambo blows up villages and uses tactics to turn

retreating victims into carbon ash would probably cheer Survival Research Laboratories in the same spirit, even though watching machines kill machines in a live performance is different from watching Rambo waste people in a movie.

Answer to Dante

I've seen a video of a past SRL performance and can't write this group off, as much as I'd like to. In one sequence, a huge mechanical figure with what looked like a Mussolini face and talons waddled into view, pursued by a screaming, motor-driven chairbus that cut the figure's head off. There were 2,000-pound ghoul with whips, 7-foot warriors crawling across the ground, buzz saws, catapults, rocket-saw spears drilling into each other, exploding engines and flames roaring not through the air.

The formidable spectacle of these machines seemed to be a mind-blowingly vicious, 20th-century American answer to Dante's *Inferno*.

Robert Farris Thompson, the great African art scholar, said in a recent lecture at the Seattle Art Museum that African art could be thought of as built on the prin-

ple of yams and peppers, yams as the feminine, harmonizing element and pepper as the hot. SRL is all pepper. There's plenty wrong with that, but those who defend them say they are reflecting a runaway malignancy in our culture, the death threat hanging over all living creatures and all of our unborn.

'Invest in weapons'

Faced with nuclear oblivion, we can't expect all artists to remember and celebrate the yams. Some are going to act useful, and disapproving of them won't make the awful thing they see go away.

Pauline makes fun of art and of the left, particularly for its call for divestiture in South Africa. "They should be... raising money to run guns to South Africa for black people... They should invest in weapons."

Violence seems to be Pauline's answer to just about everything. Heckert, not to be outdone, said he prepares for a performance by imagining himself smashing his grandmother in the face. If his grandmother is reading this, she might want to consider communicating with him by phone or letter only.

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LETTER / JUNE 1990 REFERENCE / SEATTLE
SHOW

"This man left his right hand in hell." THE POPE. (24 June 1990)

"WHEN I WAS LITTLE, I WANTED TO BE AN EARTHQUAKE." PAULINE.

"IT IS NOT ART, IT IS WORSE". PAULINE.

SEATTLE, 23 June in a parking lot, 2000 people have been playing in an horror movie without being paid...
"It was my birthday, I wanted to do something really exciting, my sister took me to this show to see these famous Californian artists, they had been on T.V. once... The young lady is pressing on her breast a bloody foetus... It would have been a little girl... The sister continues: It was just hell, everything was fire and smoke, sparkles as long as broomsticks were flying around... and all of a sudden this unbearable noise, people were puking all over the place, screaming and crying, I saw all this blood on my sister's shoes and then her little baby fall down...."

An assistant of Pauline, few scars are crossing his face: "Art is painful, that is the main message of our show, it is important for us that the audience get it...
-What about these ladies which have lost their babies during the show?...
-we think that abortion should be free and obligatory, there is too many homeless..."

WE are reporting now more than 72 people injured, 23 abortions, difficult to estimate the other consequences as brain damage, in fact we must assume that the majority of the audience ~~was~~ ~~constitute~~ paying to see such stuff is suffering of mental deficiency, drugs abuse and perversity.

13 July, 1989

Dear Artspace,

I believe that Mark Pauline is a silly man who gets his thrill from putting himself and others in potentially dangerous situations.

Expanding this to make a Political or Universal or socially conscious statement is just an excuse to gain support for his irresponsible and immature behavior.

Many of my friends and colleagues have been injured at his performances. A woman had her head gashed by falling plaster. At another performance a clever clunking machine sprayed the darkened audience with BB pellets. My husband's tooth was cracked. After the performance we reported this to a stage manager who laughingly replied "of course, what do you expect?"

Fear, irresponsible destruction, recreating problems with no solutions, who needs it? Where's the art in merely

1944
mirroring reality with no creation,
transformation, ~~not~~ revelation? So it
out to enlist in an army and
fight in a war? Soldiers of
fortune being paid grants for
artists because they follow
their passion for violence and
inflict it on the world?

No thanks. Count me out.

I can get a tooth knocked out for
free, why should I support an
arts organization which pays an
artist to commit acts of violence.
I'm sending my contribution to
War Resistor's League.

Sincerely,
Cynthia Fiss

wasn't THAT fun!

What a novel idea: 5000 pound machines destroying each other with animals strapped to them
 oh I guess I'll get some Jack Daniels & go for a drive on the interstate

Amateurs do this. Pros do SDI. Top professionals make the the public pay for shows they'll never even live to tell about.

EVIDENCE. Showing the lack of funding and effort spent on research and development of non-violent alleviation of frustration techniques

support the peaceful use and colonization of outer space: another reason why: to give these people something else to do, something positive to work on... or at least a place to play where they won't hurt others

Your science fair project didn't win? someone insulted it or the teachers were stupid? want revenge?

Keep them away from the biology labs!.. I wonder what would happen if I put this gene there?

Does that behavior have survival value?

Does observing that activity have survival value?

What do you get out of it? what does it make you want to do?

What would they have to do next to entertain you?

Can we assume they are trying to provide a bad example?

Did they provide anything that indicates that that was their intent?

If this was an advertisement what would they be selling?

If this was educational TV what would it be teaching?

Bringing new meaning to the phrase: Wasting natural resources

You can have as much fun watching Saturday AM TV

Am I missing the point? If so what is the point? Tell me

write to ^{Roger} P.O. Box 45014 Seattle WA 98145-0014

write if you have anything else you want to say about this

flyer ~~if~~ if you want to ~~re~~ reduce violence.

Trendy violence: pay for it watch it reinforce it perpetuate it
 doesn't it just make you want to go out & blow up something?

wouldn't Ronbo like you to do that?

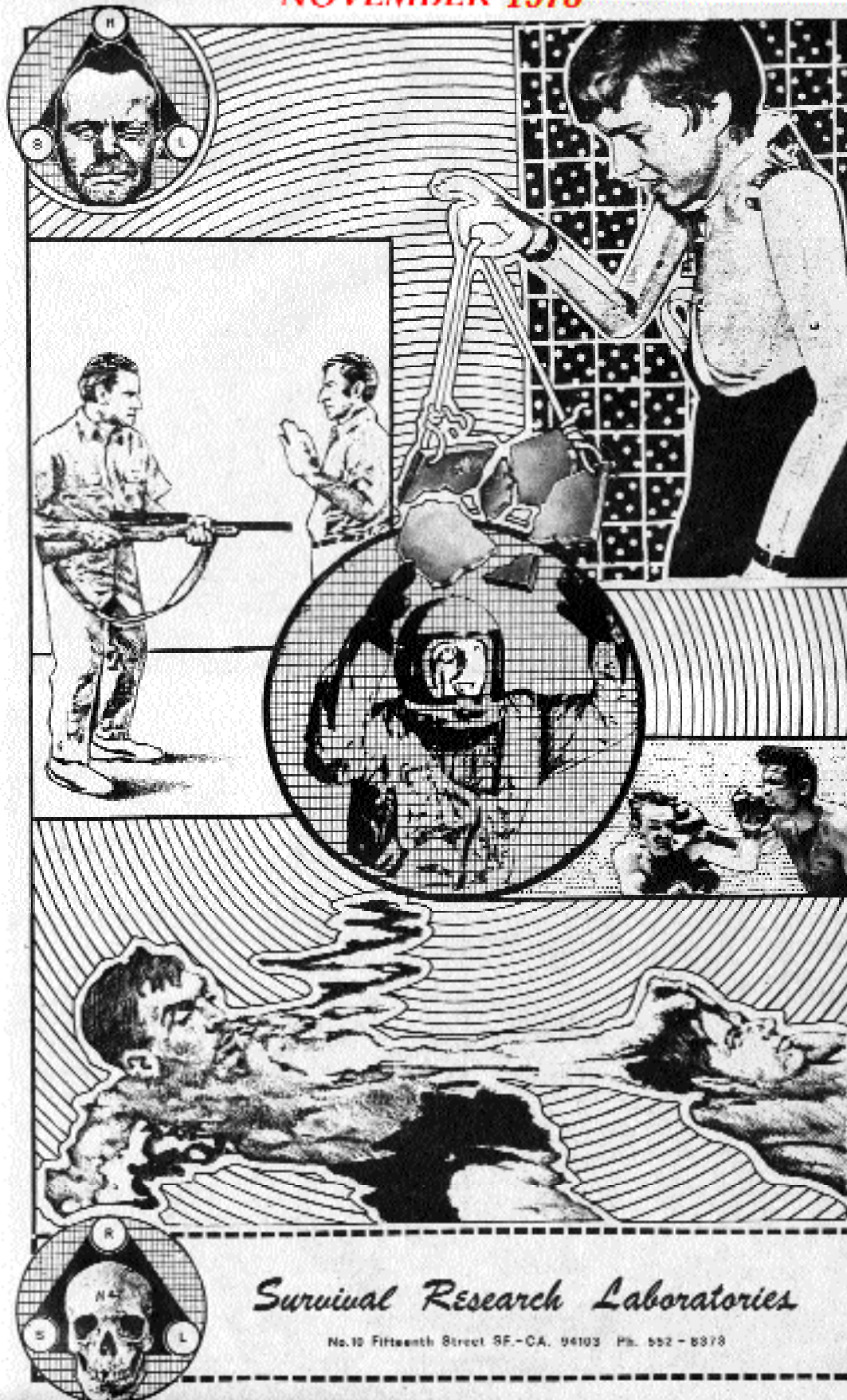
Are you mentally prepared for war yet?

~~This was~~ This was Brought to you as a non-affiliated independent project

OLD ARTICLES

ORIGINAL SRL AD, BOULEVARDS MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 1978



Survival Research Laboratories

No. 10 Fifteenth Street SF.-CA. 94103 Ph. 552 - 8878

HINCKLE'S JOURNAL/Art of Being Too Weird for Words

By Warren Hinckle

I met this weird guy the other day.

He has a rifle with a silencer and he goes out and zaps himself some rabbits and takes them home and takes them apart and reassembles them with radio-controlled machinery inside and parades them around a vacant lot and blows them up with stars coming at a couple of hundred miles per hour out of a blowgun that runs off 200 pounds of compressed air, and he complains that The Chairman won't list him under performing arts (Perry, Ky.).

When we're talking Mark Pauline, we're talking really weird, even in San Francisco he gives new meaning to the word.

The other day, the artist was in his bedroom, which is in a burnt-out place in an abandoned smelting factory, but up against the concrete jungle of the Army Street freeway interchange. This was not a bedroom you would furnish out of a Macy's ad.

The man sleeps with his tools. There are sharp edges everywhere — hand mines, wrist rocket slingshots, flamethrowers, blue carbon dioxide tanks. There is an unopened bar of Ivory soap on a tall shelf next to a stinky mummified dog with mechanical jaws. There are shot-dead rabbits in the fridge, and on a bureau, there is a PICKLE ball for \$62.07 — and cash. Lots of cash, tight little bundles of tens and twenties nesting and frowning.

"That's our look from our last show," said Pauline, victoriously waving the solitary finger remaining on his right hand, the hand he blew to pieces mixing a home brew rocket fuel for one of his industrial art deconstructive shows that he routinely stages in vacant lots and empty school yards all over town.

As a spectator sport this is more dangerous than horse ball. Machine animals are always attacking other machines and eating them up; there are lasers and sparks and sticky fuzz and clouds of acid smoke and the only smell of old V-8 motors painting, and charges of silver acetate exploding all over the place, and sometimes the people in the front row need Band-Aids after the show.

Pauline has put on more than a dozen of these violent outdoor performances here and, so far, nobody has even called the cops. "They don't seem to care what you do in San Francisco," said the artist.

The shows. There was one on a recent Saturday night in a vacant lot at 16th and Harrison streets. A thousand or more New Wave'ers piled into the place, terminally weird people with tipses in their hair, all metallic



By Warren Hinckle

'The ladies got real mad' at Mark Pauline for stubbing this mask of Leonid Brezhnev

and those who make punk rockers look as middle class as Lawrence Welk fans.

Horrible animal screams filled the night, Pauline said, these weren't animal sounds at all but a show-down tape of a woman screaming on a TV monster movie. "Screaming people slowed down sound worse than animals screaming at full speed," the artist said.

The lot was roped off as for a cocktail, and in the center was a *romany-go-round*, a device guaranteed to drive anti-visualists crazy. The revolving steel contraption held mummified cats and rabbits and the front ends of dogs and raccoons, all whirling and yapping their jaws by remote control while a laser spat at them from an unsafe distance.

Meanwhile, a robot car driven by a skeleton took turns out of a giant picture of Billy Graham. At the end a big black ball, like the bouncing ball that chased No. 8 in "The Prisoner," exploded into a mushroom cloud of slime and good, up the side.

"I knew then that we'd have to reanimate their flesh," he said.

In a perverse way, we have the people who wrecked the economy to thank for Pauline. He majored in weediness at an "experimental college" in Florida and began his artistic career in San Francisco as a billboard bandit, grossing out Foster and Krieger's faces, and then he discovered the industrial wasteland that was once the blue-collar Eden of South of Market.

"There were all these abandoned factories everywhere, and you could just go in and take anything that you wanted and nobody would stop you."

He scavenged enough junk to build machines that had clubs and hammers and were wired to beat themselves to death.

That was in the beginning, around 1970. Now he says he's working with people in robotics at Stanford, like Frankenstein's creaking in high-tech.

The day I visited Pauline in the old smelting plant that is his bar he was putting the finishing touches on a radio-controlled midjet deceptor copied from an "advanced military design" that resembled a microdaryl and would carry a giant claw to "grab things." Duck.

The bomb squad visited the artist when he was living in a junkyard on 13th Street and was into his rocket period. This was shortly before playing with rockets turned his right hand into baby food.

"I was working on this antitank rocket launcher and they just sort of went, 'Oh, what's that?' and they took a picture of me with the rocket launcher. And when they left, a cop said, 'This is really weird,' and told me that I should get a permit, but he didn't say what for."

Pauline's San Francisco shows are big on the European videotape circuit, but a show he did in 1980 on the late Leonid Brezhnev was banned in several Eastern European countries.

"I had this big mask of Brezhnev and this machine that stabbed him over and over, and every time it stabbed him green scum came out of his mouth and then his eyes exploded and shot red stuff all over the audience. The ladies got real mad at us."

I asked Pauline what he had against Brezhnev.

"In San Francisco the cops leave me alone, but if I was in Russia they'd put me in an insane asylum," he said.

Maybe this makes me a fellow traveler, but I don't think the Russkies are wrong about everything.

ence.

Pauline, who is 28 and has the clean-cut good looks of a demented Jack Armstrong, surveyed the mess with something approaching satisfaction. "Someone like me shouldn't have a laser," he said.

asked Pauline what had possessed him of such warped inspiration. To hear him describe a day in his life is like hearing Vincent Price describe a *berna* operation.

"This really weird guy I know who takes a lot of speed, and has to stay up all night and go places, wandered by mistake into the railroad tunnels under the south end of town and the camera running to us and said, 'Wow, there's this place, there's all these stuffed animals down there.' We didn't know whether to believe him — it sounded so weird — but we organized an expedition and went into the tunnels and there were all these mummified animals. They'd been chopped in half by trains and they were sitting in all these wild positions.

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 "Bohemia Afterdark"
 KATHY RIGGS
 JEFF CRAWFORD
 (602) 264-5515

'Horrifying' cable program shows animal killings

FEB 14 87

By STEPHEN HIGGINS
 Progress Staff Writer

A "horrifying" videotape with animal mutilations and killings shown several times on United Cable Television's public access channel in Scottsdale has some citizens and officials outraged.

"I was horrified," said Angela Frederickson, a Scottsdale resident who has seen the videotape twice. "I had nightmares. This video assaulted me in my living room. It is a threat to families and it's a violation of children."

Frederickson, a United subscriber for three years, attended a meeting of the Scottsdale Cable Television Commission this week to express outrage at the playing of the videotape. She is a member of the national Animal Protection Institute of America based in Sacramento, Calif.

Commission members, who had viewed an excerpt of the tape at an earlier meeting Feb. 4, said they also were outraged at the

video and pledged to look into the matter.

United showed the program to the panel in part to subscribers as they do in stop advertising the public access channel at an annual cost of \$100,000.

United Cable spokeswoman Ketra Wright said at the meeting that Federal Commission on Communications video production rules make it more difficult to produce even the content of public access programming due to First Amendment rights of broadcasting of speech. United runs public access programming as channel 32.

Wright said she was "horrified" when she first saw the video but that she had no choice but to air it on the nights requested by the producers.

The 10 to 15-minute videotape graphically shows the mutilation of a dog by a 30-gauge, 10-barrel shotgun machine, the animal, bloody and severed limbs of several dogs and the failure and blowing up of a guinea pig, said Frederickson. A man in the video

explains the machine "never says" depicted, she said.

The excerpt shows by United Cable as a snarling, growling animal being shot by a machine ripping up the dog, and included a curious response from the same tape with violence and profanity.

Other excerpts showed parts of other recent shows by different producers concerning witchcraft, animal births and violence.

"This was not liked," said Frederickson, who said she saw the video Feb. 4 at 11:15 p.m. and Feb. 7 at 1:15 p.m. "This was the real thing. I have marked it in my diary and I know what the real thing is."

The producers of the film could be charged with animal abuse and illegal use of firearms, Frederickson said, unless the mutilations and killings were halted.

Ted Craig, creative services director for AFI in Sacramento, said AFI will investigate whether any laws were broken in making the program.

At the Feb. 4 meeting, commission member Len Judd said, "I think we should protect the public from having offensive material related on them if they don't want it."

"According to FCC regulations, we may not control the content of the programming on the public access channel," said Wright, community programming director.

Wright said at the Feb. 4 meeting that anyone who is a resident of Scottsdale or a member of a Scottsdale-based organization has a right to produce a video and have it shown as requested on the channel.

Records show that neither the producers of the video in question, titled *Bohemia Afterdark*, or a person Wright said has requested the showing of the video, live in Scottsdale.

The producer, according to United Cable records, are Jeff Crawford and Kathy Riggs of Phoenix Media Productions. The address given for them is 44 E. Desdemona in

Phoenix. A phone number written on the videotape agreement for that company turned out to be a private residence unconnected with any of those parties.

The person who requested the tape be shown is listed as Rick Richardson of 2227 E. Osborn Road, Phoenix. On the videotape agreement the writer put that it was in Scottsdale. The Scottsdale Progress could not be reached with that address.

Wright said the videotape agreement sets a series of prohibited programming materials that includes "obscene or obscene material." It prohibited with such programming, Wright said, "I would not allow this in my room. However, my lawyer has indicated to me that if they hold the program be aired that I have to comply or I will violate their First Amendment rights."

Wright said Friday that she is returning the tape to the producers since the station has played it on all nights requested. She denied a request by the Progress to view it.

6 Scottsdale (Ariz.) Progress Tuesday, February 17, 1987

Mutilation video termed 'art'

By STEPHEN HIGGINS
 Progress Staff Writer

A videotape of animal carcasses being shot, stabbed and ripped apart that horrified some Scottsdale citizens was produced by an avant-garde San Francisco artist and used as part of a Phoenix-produced alternative music show that runs on public access cable channels in 12 cities.

"I do not kill or mutilate animals, and (the makers of the video) do not either," said Kathy Riggs of AA Modern Media Productions, producer of *Bohemia Afterdark*. "They went and bought the carcasses from a butcher."

The Scottsdale Progress reported Saturday that some citizens and members of the Scottsdale Cable Television Commission were outraged over "offensive" material being aired on the public access channel provided by United Cable Television of Scottsdale.

At one of a series of commission meetings designed to review United's request to stop funding community programming, United officials played excerpts from public access videotapes in an attempt to show that it is mostly low-quality programming. The 10-minute animal/machine sequence was prominently featured in the excerpt video.

At a meeting one week later, Angela Frederickson of Scottsdale, a member of the Animal Protection Institute of America, strongly protested the showing of the videotape.

Riggs set up a viewing of the entire videotape Monday for the Progress at her Phoenix studio.

The first sequence was taped at a theater in San Francisco, where several hundred people in the audience watched futuristic machines shoot, stab and rip up animal carcasses while

loud grinding, squeaking and mechanical noises fill the air.

The carcasses, which appear to be fresh, look like dogs, but Riggs said they are sheep or cattle. The machines and the activity were designed by artist Mark Pauline of San Francisco.

"It is meant to be shocking," said Riggs. "I thought it was offensive, too. But I showed it because my show, *Bohemia Afterdark*, is an alternative music video show."

"The audience for alternative shows likes shocking material. We chose to include this artist because we thought his work was interesting. No one has ever complained about my show in the two years it's been running. If people really don't like it they can always exercise their freedom of choice and change the channel."

Frederickson disagrees, saying that once offensive material is seen a person has already been violated and turning the channel comes after the damage is done.

The 1984 Pauline video, distributed by Target Video and titled *A Scenic Harvest in the Kingdom of Pain*, is an artistic statement about machines overpowering animals, Riggs said.

"I love animals," said Riggs, who has been placing her half-hour alternative music show on public access stations around the country for two years. "Even if the video is really heavy for you, it's interesting. It is a social statement of art."

A guinea pig that appears to be blown up in the video is shown alive after the machine hit it and was blown up. "It was the only live animal and they didn't hurt it," said Riggs.

Riggs, whose program runs regularly on public access in Phoenix and Glendale, said she will not run the animal sequence in the

Valley anymore. "I don't need to be dropped from cable over one sequence, because the rest of my programs are much different from this."

Riggs said the person who requested the video be played on Scottsdale cable is a member of her studio crew and a resident of Scottsdale. The cable station's rules state that as long as a resident requests a video it doesn't matter if the producers are residents.

The name used on the group's public access application was Rick Richardson, and the address listed could not be found. However, Richardson was contacted by the Progress this morning and said the address given by the cable company was incorrect and he is a Scottsdale resident.

"We're going to make sure that everyone who requests public access shows a driver's license to make sure they are Scottsdale residents," said Ketra Wright, community programming director for United Cable.

Riggs and partner Jeff Crawford of Phoenix produce videos as "an expensive hobby," she said, and they don't make any money from the show. "I get a lot of satisfaction out of it."

Bohemia Afterdark runs from once a week to once a month on public access channels in Albany, N.Y.; Albuquerque; Anchorage; Detroit; El Segundo, Calif.; Memphis; Milwaukee; San Diego; San Francisco; Tucson; and Phoenix, Riggs said.

She said public access should be retained because it is the only outlet for people who are interested in alternative art programming. "It's the only thing available to me," she said. "Otherwise you're saying that the only people that can have a voice are those with money."

"I'm glad someone complained. It's better than being completely ignored."

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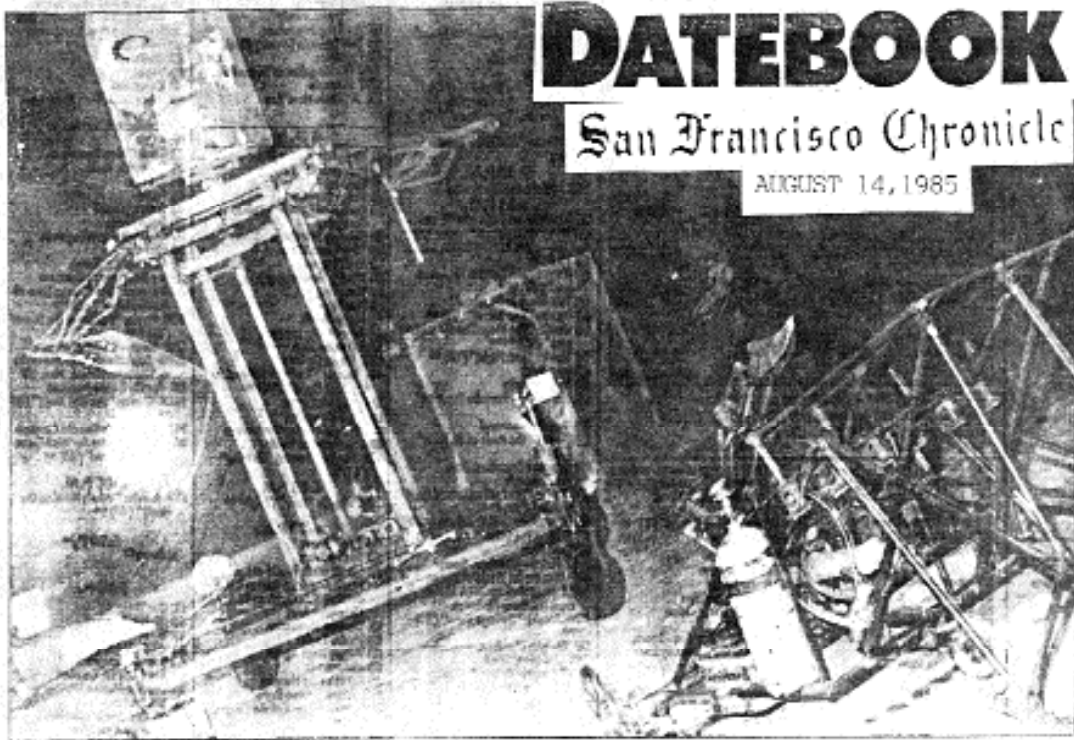
PM

DIMENSION CABLE CH. 32 MON 11 PM FRI 10:30
 REPUBLIC CABLE CH. 6 THURS 9 PM (Glendale)
 United CABLE CH. 32 FRI 9 AM (Scotts) ESTABLISHED RUNNIN

DATEBOOK

San Francisco Chronicle

AUGUST 14, 1985



BY ROBERT NEILL ALTMAN

Radio-operated contraptions whirled and flailed at each other in Survival Research Laboratories' 'machine performance' in L.A.

Robot Art Knocks 'em Dead in L.A.

BY KENNETH BAKER
CHRONICLE ART CRITIC

Los Angeles

The avant-garde never starts on time," someone complained while I waited with a crowd of more than 2000 for the first Los Angeles "machine performance" by the San Francisco-based group, Survival Research Laboratories.

Like most of their presentations, this one carried a long title full of grim promise: "Extremely Cruel Practices: A Series of Events Designed to Instruct Those Interested in Policies That Correct or Punish."

The group is known for building ingenious remote-controlled machines from used and scavenged parts and turning them loose to self-destruct, destroy each other or menace an audience.

The location — a littered open field behind a long, one-story freight warehouse in an industrial area of downtown Los Angeles — helped to set the tone. So did the fact that no one got in without signing a statement releasing the artists from legal liability for any accidental injury. Meanwhile, dozens of people — admission-bouncers or waver-evaders, I assumed — spied on the event from the Fourth Street bridge, a couple of hundred yards off.

The rest of us crowded six or eight deep in a semicircle around the cordoned, klieg-lighted performance area, which was bounded on one side by the warehouse platform. Early arrivals had filled the platform and some rickety bleachers. Game latecomers found a way to reach the warehouse roof or scavenged the field for the makings of a scaffold.

SRL's reputation had preceded it, bringing out a crowd that appeared to be thick with art school graduates and other stylish would-be renegades. There was a lot of multicolored hair and scruffy leather to be seen.

While SRL leaders Mark Pauline and Matt Heckert and their henchmen were still looting around in grime-smeared coveralls checking the contraptions they meant to unleash, a fire truck and ambulance came careening across the bridge and down behind the warehouse. "Aha," I thought, "if the fire department's already got wind of them, this may be more exciting than I imagined."

But word soon spread in the crowd that the ambulance was responding to a routine, non-fatal drug overdose. The collapsed victim was seen being wheeled away on a stretcher.

All the while, huge speakers were belting out something like electrified ballroom music, lending a Fellini-esque air to the scene.

Finally, portable generators and air compressors started up, the documentary video crew sprang to attention, and a couple of machine creatures began hitching around the staging area, to a sound track of electronically modified engine-growls punctuated with the ring of hammers on steel.

The sound track was effective, though I was surprised to find that the machines needed acoustical backup. Only occasionally were voices mingled in the sound. "You say you were tortured," a man's voice would ask, to which a female voice would make a garbled reply.

There were two main performers. The first to make a move was the "Tower of Power," a high steel scaffold on wheels that could move in any direction, its "head" snapping from side to side, its "arms," spanning more than 30 feet, swinging steel flails above the crowd.

The second star was a 25-foot-high figure of steel lattice known as "The Satan Man," looking something like the Wicker Man used for human sacrifices by the ancient Celts. Initially covered in black plastic, the "Satan Man" sprang up hydraulically to spit fire from a goalie-mask face, and wield a

spinning saw blade at the other machines.

The most ingenious machine was a platform equipped with arms. It silted about on what appeared to be spindle-studded sugars. And with its arms it pulled the plastic from the "Satan Man." Later it held another figure up for sharp abuse.

These characters and several others tormented each other for an hour or more, assaulted by a catapult that would propel home-made (or were they commercial?) bombs through the air, producing great blasts of noise and flame, to the crowd's delight.

By the end of the show things had pretty much broken down. Some shards of metal had flown over people's heads, but otherwise nothing much happened to set a lawyer's pulse racing. Anticlimax was avoided only by cutting the lights and shooting red flares into the sky. As Wynnham Lewis said to Ezra Pound of trench warfare: "Nothing there you cannot imagine; but it has the unexpected quality of reality."

SRL activities are the kind of thing that gets called "art" because no better word is available. Pauline, Heckert and company put tremendous energy and inventiveness into

their performances and they make resourceful use of the help they get from volunteers. In these respects, their work has a lot in common with the spectacles staged by Christo. They also have the obvious precedent of Jean Tinguely's kinetic hi-jinks behind them, and a long history of machine imagery in 20th century art. However, none of this matters as much as the gut impact of their shows.

Pauline and his cohorts have the good sense to disdain the art world, but when they go to so much trouble to make a dangerous mess in public, and the result is as ambiguous as art often is, they get branded artists in spite of themselves.

As a proclamation of the horrors of living in a power-drunk culture, their activities loom large in the art context, but are small beer next to the public threats posed by the average urban construction site. I can't help but wish their shows would shed some light on the taste for danger and violence they bring out in an audience.

San Franciscans may get a chance to see for themselves if tentative plans for another performance here in October get off the ground.

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