



CARL CHENG
LEWIS DESOTO
RANDY HAYES
ROBERT HELM
MIKE HENDERSON
OLIVER JACKSON
ROBERT C. JONES
JAMES LAVADOUR
SUSAN RANKAITIS
AKIO TAKAMORI

In fact, Lavadour identifies the work of the nineteenth-century English painter J. M. W. Turner as a more direct influence. Turner's paintings captured the dynamic energy of light and matter in the otherwise conventional form of landscapes and seascapes. Despite representing identifiable sites and incidents, Turner's paintings suggest an opening onto the infinite. The metaphysical aspect of Lavadour's work is underscored by the appearance in several of his works from the 1980s of mountain-size skeletons and towering figures that seem to emerge from the very core of the earth. The presence of these seemingly malevolent spirits calls to mind another nineteenth-century painter, Gustave Moreau, who populated his crags and mountains with similarly inauspicious demons.

For Susan Rankaitis, it is the intersection of nature, science, and technology that calls forth her dark and mysterious works. Fascinated by the startling new developments in complexity theory, biology, and genetics, she has delved deeply into these worlds, informing herself about the technical minutiae of flight dynamics, fractals, and DNA. While not commenting explicitly on these fields, her works possess a portentous tone, alluding to an aspect of science that is hardly the rational paradise promised by the Enlightenment and modern technocrats. In addition to scientific themes, Rankaitis's works express evocative aspects of the Southern California landscape. Invoking the allusive qualities of Song dynasty painting, she captures the ethereal mood of a rough, dry land transformed by industry and pollution.

Although Rankaitis trained as a painter, her unusual technique was inspired by the early twentieth-century photograms of László Moholy-Nagy. In these pieces, Moholy-Nagy created photographic images without a camera or negatives by manipulating the exposure of light on photographic paper, often by introducing opaque and transparent objects. Rankaitis's works are considerably more complex than Moholy-Nagy's, however, utilizing multiple negatives (twenty to one hundred in a single piece), appropriated images, and decals as well as painterly processes such as brushing emulsions directly onto light-sensitive paper and selective bleaching and tinting. The finished works may take months, even years, to complete. The scale of her work is commensurate with her expansive themes: several pieces have exceeded twenty-four feet in height.

Lewis deSoto has explored a wide variety of media in his efforts to express the nuances of various social histories and worldwide cosmologies. Although he worked primarily in photography until the late 1980s, deSoto's subsequent work has been almost exclusively in sculpture and installation. His installation work can be divided into two forms of practice: works that respond to and reflect a given site and works that create an autonomous space that transports the viewer to an alternate reality. The former type include several important public commissions that depended on a combination of deft and elegant formal gestures and in-depth research into local social, economic, and cultural histories.

DeSoto's cosmological installations have explored themes derived from Catholic, Muslim, and Buddhist traditions as well as from the mythology of the Cahuilla people of Southern California, from whom he is patrilineally descended. Utilizing light, space, text, sound, and various evocative objects and forms, deSoto



SUSAN RANKAITIS
Untitled, 1976
Multimedia photographic
collage; 11 x 14 in.
Private collection

has created works that do not merely rehearse sacred narratives but actively embody them, producing installations that are intellectually rigorous, sensually rich, and spiritually resonant. Recently he has begun to make discrete sculptural works such as his monumental *Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)*, an inflatable twenty-six-foot-long figure of the Buddha on his deathbed based on a twelfth-century carved figure in Sri Lanka. DeSoto has subtly substituted his own face, painted by hand with an airbrush, for the Buddha's, thereby alluding to the Buddhist notion of ego impermanence while simultaneously inserting his own history into a larger, cosmic narrative.

The unusual career of Carl Cheng has involved quasiscientific investigations of physical processes, the development of interactive public artworks, and the creation of a corporate "persona," known as John Doe Co. Cheng's explorations of natural processes, begun in the late 1960s, included phenomena such as erosion, wave patterns, and bubbles. His interest in physical systems paralleled that of artists such as Robert Smithson and Hans Haacke. Beginning in 1972, Cheng produced a series of works that investigated the flowing, dripping, and drying properties of paint, anticipating by decades the painting machines of Roxy Paine. Cheng's explorations of physical phenomena often had a powerful aesthetic dimension, as in his series of reflecting pools begun in 1976, which both demonstrated properties such as wave patterns and also had a profoundly contemplative effect.

Removing his own hand from the process of creation, Cheng made works that were animated by the flow of external information—such as weather reports—or by the involvement of viewers. Inspired in part by a two-year journey around Asia, where he witnessed diverse publics interacting with sacred monuments, he determined to focus on public art projects. His first such project, *The Natural Museum of Modern Art*, was installed on the Santa Monica Pier and allowed viewers to create drawings on a large bed of sand using a specially designed machine. He has gone on to develop numerous inventive and engaging public artworks around the country. Long skeptical of the personality-driven aspect of Western art practice, Cheng has established a shell company, John Doe Co., which he often uses as a surrogate identity.

AS SOMEONE WHO is uncomfortable with the art world's powerful consensus machine, I have particularly enjoyed being reminded, through the Flintridge Foundation's awards, of many wonderful artists who have been operating under the mainstream radar. Even with my own relatively broad exposure—and twelve years spent living on the West Coast—some of these artists were previously unknown to me. Perhaps even more important than its generous monetary support is the key role that the Flintridge Foundation plays in exposing these artists and their remarkable work to a broader public. It has been tremendously satisfying to participate in a small way in this important process.



LEWIS DESOTO
Paranirvana (Self-Portrait), 1999
Painted nylon, electric fan;
7 x 25 x 6 ft.
Museum of Contemporary Art,
San Diego; Museum purchase,
International and Contemporary
Collectors Funds



CARL CHENG
Santa Monica Art Tool, 1988
Concrete roller, steel
armature, hitch; 9 x 14 ft.
Commissioned by and collection
of City of Santa Monica

LEWIS DESOTO

MY WORK CAN BE characterized as a study of consciousness and cosmologies as experienced by myself and through my studies of religion and culture. As a Native American and Hispanic, I have often met the predominant culture at oblique angles. I have applied lessons learned in religious texts, meditation, and the hot-rod subculture to my work.



Derwish, 1997
Six motorized lights, speakers, amplifier, six discrete sound tracks with rhythms described by tenth-century Moorish scholar and adherent of Sufism Al-Farabi; dimensions variable
Commissioned by Rafael Tous, Barcelona



The End of Desire, 2001
Aromatic cocoa shells, wooden walkway, dimensions variable
Commissioned by Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California



Parallel Structures, 1984
Color photograph of a projection of a dinosaur skeleton onto an abandoned 1957 Cadillac; 30 x 30 in.