

**f**or the first part of the show, most of the audience kept at least one eye glued to the an imposing replica of the UT tower. SRL catered the show to the Austin audience by reenacting the Charles Whitman shooting of 1966. The "Randy Weaver" robot perched on the structure's upper rim, playing the part of Charles Whitman by repeatedly firing faux gun blasts onto the field. Meanwhile, the V1 slowly danced around the tower, blowing smaller props downfield before turning its attention to the plywood-and-steel foundation. Blasts of fire rattled the audience's dental work as the rocket pointed its snout into the tower.

Continuous rocket blasts quickly ignited the wood at ground level, and the audience cheered as sparks rose through the replica's inner cavity. This was the logical climax of the evening for many in the stands, and the V1 seemed the perfect tool for the job. Throaty booms from the rocket set more flame and a steady spring wind soon turned the tower into a 70-foot inferno of blazing wood, twisting metal, and liquefied robot parts.

As the structure became engulfed with bright flame, the crowd's reaction turned from loudly triumphant to strangely silent. Rather than cheering the Tower's demise, they quietly watched embers shoot upward as more combustibles burned to ash. With a series of creaks, the tower slowly twisted and crashed to the ground, and after a short cheer, some searched for the next spectacle while others quietly stared into the crumpled pyre.

**f**orty-five minutes into the performance, the infield was fully transformed into SRL's trademark war zone. Chaos ruled as the props burned, machines lay wounded on the track, and standing robots went after anything still standing. The rocket go cart sped through the obstacle course left by the wounded and dead mechanical participants.

The smell of smoke, burning petroleum, and bleeding machines filled the air as parts of the stands began to empty. Families were generally the first to leave, followed by the sound-sensitive, and then those racing Austin's 2AM bar curfew. Whether the audience left disturbed, disgruntled, or delirious with joy, they'd have plenty to discuss over breakfast the next day.

Back inside, the FlameBlower inched toward the huge tripod as the SRL crew kept looking for one last thing to burn....

[artistic  
mayhem](#)

[pit stop  
village](#)

[mixed  
reviews](#)

[the  
aftermath](#)



[SITE INDEX](#)



*Ranch Rocket*

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# BUILT FORD TOUGH.

## *appetitefordestruction* by Pableaux Johnson

### *the aftermath*

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**t**he following morning -- ten hours after the show's end -- Longhorn Speedway looked like the target of a surgical strike or a massive train derailment. The tower's contorted metal superstructure lay in a pile of ashes. The show's mechanical actors sat scattered across the field, resting up from a particularly strenuous performance. Claws and arms were streaked with residual carbon from the evening's little firestorms. The grass inside the track's perimeter was scorched black from rocket fire, burning debris cannons, and the occasional road flare.

Still-smoldering tires and creosote poles let off an AMAZING stench. The vapor mixed with other aromas of industrial warfare (melted plastic, gunpowder smoke, and diesel fumes). For the crew at SRL-- sleeping late after the post-show victory party-- it was the smell of victory.



**Art, entertainment, or just a lot of noise? Tell us what you think about SRL.**

***artistic  
mayhem***

***pit stop  
village***

But among the smoldering hulks and charred debris, it was obvious that the crew had tended to its wounded machines before turning in. The ill-fated Walking Machine (which had an indestructible reputation) had been put up on jack stands until further repairs could be attempted. The props had been destroyed, but the machines would be trucked back home to be reworked and used in the next show.

Close to the infield's center, the Carnival of Fools were busy cutting apart their donated carousel -- trying to salvage debris for use in future installations. The cleanup had begun, and parts of the art recycled.

***mixed  
reviews***

**Finally, a way onto the Internet for people who aren't way into computers.**

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 Southwestern Bell



SEAN KENNERLY

**Don't mess with Texas?**

When 4,500 Austinites crammed into Longhorn Speedway on Good Friday to witness Survival Research Laboratories' panoply of destructive machines, it was the perfect marriage. What people on earth are more open-minded than Texans when it comes to extremely loud, fire-breathing technological apparatus? And what better place and time for SRL's festival of ironies than a stock-car racetrack at the height of the Texas wildflower season? Along with the SRL staples (sound-and-fire-spewing cannons and an array of unlikely-looking machines that somehow evoke the medieval, Paleolithic, and industrial eras simultaneously), the show also included several Texas-themed "events." A cheer went through the crowd (punctuated by an occasional "Yeeee-haw!") as the fire-cannon ignited a four-story facsimile of the University of Texas tower. Other site-specific displays included the Bubbhacrane (the sole purpose of which was to repeatedly lift a burning dune buggy 30 feet in the air and drop it) and an equestrian flag ceremony, in which riders flew the SRL flag and the Texas Lone Star. As my 82-year-old grandmother from Brady, Texas, said, "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I never would have believed they could have done so much interesting stuff with all that junk."

**Growth in Online Entertainment**

**Market Has One Player Eyeing Technology Role**

**By Jodi Cohen**

**WEBWEEK magazine May 1997**

MONSTERBIT MEDIA started building Web sites in the early days of HTTP 1.0 for the Austin, Texas, music scene. *It was the first to do a wireless T-1 video broadcast of the nationally recognized Survival Research Laboratories performance art group.* The performance had to be done at a race track because of the pyrotechnics, so the company hooked up two 65 foot towers so the video signal could be transmitted back into town. "We pride ourselves on being the first to push the envelope, and it's usually stuff like this is that allows you to push the envelope," said Mellie Price, president of Monster Bit Media and affiliate MB Media "We were one of the first to try and use video technology."

The company handles on-line ordering, live broadcasting, mailing lists, and other items found on many music Web sites. "We are really a turnkey digital provider" said Price. "We have installed digital lines to do the broadcasting through MB Media for several large music festivals." If an independent-label artist wants to discount CDs online during a live broadcast, for instance, MB Media runs a special on the CD and offers online transactions, which generate revenue. With larger artists, such as George Clinton, MB Media establishes a link to a major CD provider and gets a cut of the profit from CDs sold. If MB features a live broadcast from one of its large venues, distribution is handled by the network and the site receives a flat rate, because the venue, not the artist, is the client

Currently, the company is both a content and a technology provider. But Price said she would like to evolve away from being a content provider toward becoming a provider of the backend network to keep everything running smoothly. "There are going to be really big players producing really big networks, and they are more suited for content delivery", she said. "But each of those networks is going to need a support network and infrastructure, longevity and a good reputation.

Price said she hasn't had a need to find advertisers and says that artists don't like sponsorship and advertising anyway. What she is working on are marketing campaigns in which advertisers related to the content are worked into the programming, such as a special on Gibson guitars. "I don't think the banner advertising model works," she said. But as the price of technology falls and becomes more readily available, the audience will broaden out on the Web anyway."



# IS PHOENIX BURNING?



City leaders and firefighters address the fire on the scene. Phoenix Fire Dept. Chief Robert Foy is on the left.

City officials say the fire was caused by a faulty electrical system in the building. Phoenix Fire Dept. Chief Robert Foy is on the left.

## BRIDGE STRENGTH



## THE PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT IS THE FIRST TO RESPOND TO THE PHOENIX FIRE

The Phoenix Fire Department is the first to respond to the Phoenix fire. The fire was caused by a faulty electrical system in the building.



The Phoenix Fire Department is the first to respond to the Phoenix fire. The fire was caused by a faulty electrical system in the building.

PHOENIX

PHOENIX, AZ



Laboratories (SRL) of San Francisco will present its *Million Inconvenient Experiments*, "with machine art tramping, stomping and shooting flames. The show, under the direction of artist Mark Pauline, has toured Europe and has been performed in Los Angeles, New York, and Seattle.

I'm pretty sure I can solve this mystery in Chandler, if the authorities are interested. Put out an APB for a scruffy male adolescent, a bright kid who sits at the family table sullenly radiating pot-rieger vibrations and bending fork tines with his molars. He has a deep, secret interest in Junjyars, whence he found those hinges, bolts, one-by-twelves, bungee cords, and powerful springs. Look for this kid, and while you're at it, look for his prankster friends.

In the meantime, SRL capo Mark Pauline, the 42-year-old adult upgrade of a deeply alienated teenage techie, stands in an abandoned Phoenix railway yard. I watch as Pauline checks a soldered connection, taps at a pressure gauge, steps back, confers with an associate in a set of coveralls even fitter and more tattered than his own, then presses a handheld switch.

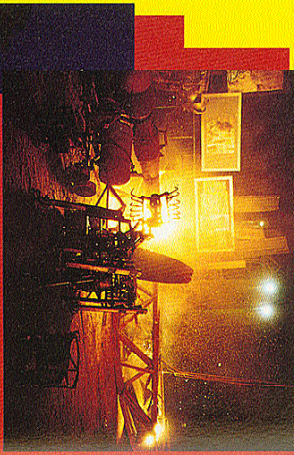
A couple feet away, one of the few V-1 jet engines in private ownership comes to sudden life. FWOOOOOO!!! A dragon tongue of misappropriated Nazi vengeance licks the desert sky. A pause, a few words of consultation. Mark couldn't be more blasé. FWOOOO!!! BLADDAU! LODDA- BLADDAU! LODDA - KA-EL-LAMI! Waves of heat kick up spinning torrents of yellow dust. Half-

combusted fuel explodes deep within the iron throat of the jet, producing a fiery beach that is not merely loud but insanely loud, louder at accident loud. The temperature in the freight yard, somewhere in the low 40s, soars at once to a toasty 90 degrees.

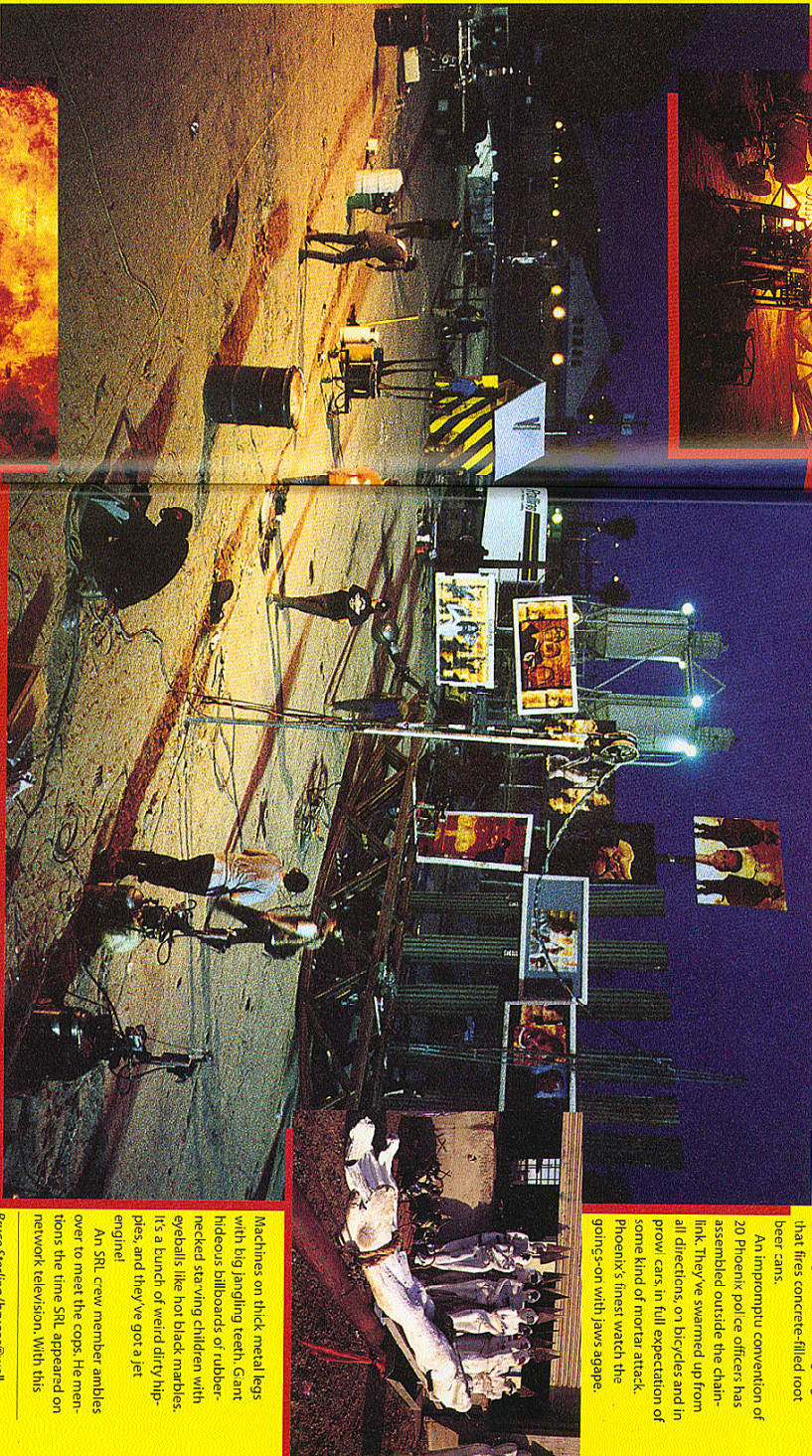
The SRL crew reacts with polite interest. Polite interest is the mental default-register of SRL roadies. Nearly 50 of these wonderfully odd people are roosting with purposeful step in and out of a forlorn warehouse, going about their individual businesses in their distributive, nonhierarchical, swarming fire-art fashion. They're adjusting fan belts, greasing drive chains, topping fuel tanks, and clamping pneumatic hoses.

Mark's jet vomits another massive gust of pyrotechnic hell. The crew looks up at the skull-spitting racket with limpid smiles of unfeigned appreciation. Watching Mark work his rocket is clearly giving them some deep arts-and-crafts fixation. Gustav Stickley assemble a classic hardwood settee. Four lads and lassies are skewering plaster corpses onto iron spears for the giant SRL catapult. They stop their work to cover their ears.

KABABLOOM! WHOOMP! BLUDDA BLUDDA. BLUDDA BLAMI! The jet begins to glow a cheerful cherry red around the seams. Mark maneuvers the V-1 on its self-propelled, radio-controlled platform. Many of SRL's engines of destruction are self-propelled on legs, or wheels, or tracks or four-looking helical screws. Then there are the emplacements, such as the Flamethrower, the



Grotesque billboards adorn the backdrop of SRL's stage in Phoenix (below); crew members weld, glue, saw, and clamp in preparation for the midnight show.



IMAGES: CENTER, COURTESY OF THE SRI; LOWER LEFT, FAR WEST VISUALS/ARTIST

Plaster corpses, skewered onto iron spears (above right), await their turn at the giant catapult, from which they'll be flung into SRL's pyrotechnic hell.

giant tooth-and-tailed wooden Ark; and the Air Launcher, a laser-sighted monster gas gun that fires concrete-filled foot beer cans.

An impromptu convention of 20 Phoenix police officers has assembled outside the chain-link. They've swarmed up from all directions, on bicycles and in prow cars in full expectation of some kind of mortar attack. Phoenix's finest watch the goings-on with jaws agape.

Machines on thick metal legs with big jangling teeth. Giant hideous billboards of rubber-necked star-wing children with eyeballs like hot black marbles. It's a bunch of weird dirty hip-pies, and they've got a jet engine!

An SRL crew member ambles over to meet the cops. He mentions the time SRL appeared on network television. With this

Bruce Sterling (bruce@well.com), a regular Wired contributor, is author of *Mirrorshades*, the definitive document of the Cyberpunk movement, and the *Hacker Crackdown: Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier*.

*Drunken Master lurches at Screw Machine (top), while the House explodes in a fiery demise (right).*



casual revelation, the attitude of the cops changes at once, and permanently. Television, huh? TV coverage absolves absolutely.

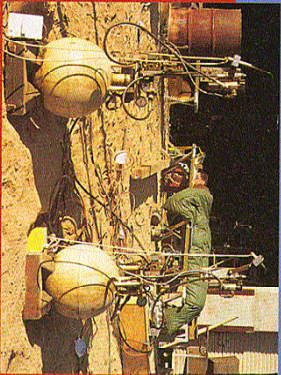


*Mike Fogarty, SRJ's electronics repair guy, does some last-minute tinkering before the performance.*

anything in America. If these guys have been on 20/20, then they must know what they're doing, right? They're not insane, they're artists. Artists? Not a problem! These cops have Superbowl crowds to worry about. Besides, five nuts with a rocket might be arrested. A small army of 50 nuts methodically deploying 30 tons of ranspanging machinery are a problem of a scale for the National Guard. Better just to let them be. What's the harm anyway? Nobody cares what happens in this neighborhood.

The area around us, Jackson Street in downtown Phoenix, defines industrial decline. Mechanical performance artist, producer, and local entrepreneur David Therrien, the man who brought SRL to Arizona, has

*Majordomo Mike Dingle crashes amid the Flame Bolla, which are filled with pressurized carbon dioxide and gasoline and used as flamethrowers.*

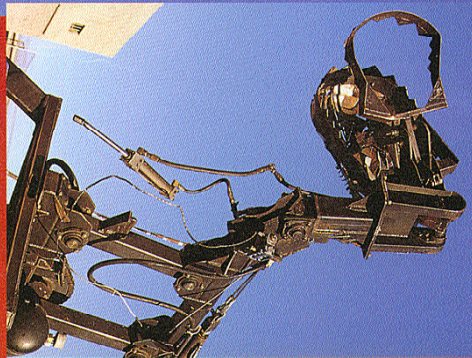


110



*The Drunken Master's "claw" with a tooth out of whack.*

*Mangled from bottles, Chip Flynn's Triangle Machine uses hydraulics to hop nimbly from side to side, bobbing and snipping its steel jaw at its victims.*



a Jackson Street performance space he calls the Icehouse. The club was an icehouse once, built to store, among other things, frozen beef carcasses for the railroad. Today, it's an almost windowless three-story bunker with scary, heretically sealed refrigerator doors.

Therrien also leased the derelict warehouse next door. It holds several tons of SRL's buzzing, whining, and sparking heavy machinery, trucked in from San Francisco by bus and flatbed. The old warehouse

111

might make a fine set of artists studios someday, Therrien tells me optimistically. Therrien has a goatee, wire-rims, a radio headset, and a visionary eye. He's a living exemplar of the urban principle that real estate of absolutely negative value can always be given to artists. Let Art play the phoenix here.

Artists are dying for studios, and they'll do anything to be left alone by the authorities. There's nothing wrong with this shattered, pock-marked, runous property that electricly, insulation, telephones, cleaning, heating, cooling, painting, furnishing, and rudimentary sanitation can't cure.

The SRL crew members work inside the warehouse, pretty much around the clock. When they do sleep, it's in yet another Therrien potential property, an abandoned broken-glass, utterly forgotten industrial cavern humorously known to SRL as "Hyster Heights. A Planned Community." Getting the quirky city authorities to approve the resurrection of this building may be tougher, since the Hyster machine shop still reeks of '50s-era environmental contaminants. The alleged health risk hasn't stopped the local vagrants from starting a swimming tent-and-grocery-cart encampment nearby, right under the ceaseless traffic noise of the local overpass. Throw in the night-constant ear-splitting racket of the Phoenix Sky Harbor flight path, and the Pauline aesthetic makes perfect sense here.

Mark Pauline has a good line of gab in his elliptical, left-handed fashion. He's at relative "retro-casual ease with classy theatre!"

WIRED JULY 1996 151



# SRL

◀ 111 cal jabber such as emergent behavior, cyborganics, chaos theory, transparent interfaces, artificial life, and the machinic phylum. However, the machinic phylum and 45 cents will get you a cup of coffee. They won't get you a "Spectacular Mechanical Performance," and Mark Pauline is a hardened 17-year veteran of more than 50 such shows. His performances always boast very apt titles such as the recent *A Calculated Forecast of Ultimate Doom – Sickening Episodes of Widespread Devastation Accompanied by Sensations of Pleasurable Excitement*, and the early but classic *A Cruel and Relentless Plot to Pervert the Flesh of Beasts to Unholy Uses*.

Lately, lots of chipware and digital robotics gizmology have been working their way into the SRL act. Still, the mainstay of SRL's dramatic craft was, and remains, not the microchip but the motorcycle drive chain. Long, rattly, oily chains on big, brutish, army-surplus gear are omnipresent on SRL cre-

with such miraculous anti-fashion sense. There are women with nice hipster tattoos and creative haircuts, women who would obviously know how to dress if they put their minds to it. They have a positive genius for hideous sleeve-ripped men's work shirts, cutoff male suit-trousers over beat-to-shit leotards, filthy ponytails knotted in place with the plastic cords of industrial ear-protection plugs. There are men wearing Illinois state cop T-shirts, duck-hunter's vests, stripey Can't-Bust-Em overalls full of burn holes and grease stains, red industrial jumpsuits with the flaccid arms cinched around the waist, and, most important, tools. Tools are the primal SRL fashion accessory. Ratchets, mauls, screwdrivers, soldering irons, shopworn leather tool belts, lanyards, engineer's boots, chipped-up safety glasses. But the premier gesture of SRL roadie cachet is a robotically blank welder's mask propped onto the forehead.

Everybody at SRL welds. They consume welding rods the way other artists use charcoal sticks. The machines are all violently

powder maker, Phil who's working the Flame Balls today, Todd and Liisa, Warren and Lance, Greg the neatly trimmed fed from the Stanford linear accelerator, Debbie and Christian and Mike, Brian and Amy and Lisa and Lauren. It's a tribe. The situation has the vibe of a cyberpunk Amish barn-raising.

Dingle is finishing up his rant. "If you don't have something to do, come see me!" He has to declare this for form's sake, but it's pretty clear that nobody is going to come asking. Everybody here is already busy.

Lunch is over, and Mark's among the last to leave. He's patiently explaining to the air gun guys how to "bake the liquid out of the rounds" without any sudden untoward detonations. Then Mark gets back to his work, beetle-browed, hunched, persistent, focused. He and Dingle have the same cast of features. They look like anything but a pair of ultraviolet hipsters from the crispiest edge of the contemporary art world. Mark and Mike have the careworn look of a pair of country vets about to lose a sick cow.

Mark, though very obviously the leader of SRL, doesn't waste much time fostering the Pauline personality cult. He doesn't offer praise or criticism, he doesn't give any rousing speeches to the troops. You don't get a lot of touchy-feely and back patting hanging out with Mark Pauline. But when he's around, stuff happens.

## The mainstay of SRL's dramatic craft is not the microchip but the motorcycle drive chain.

ations. Drive chains are tough, they're cheap, they work just great, and if you get anywhere near them they cover you with indelible gunk. Drive chains are very Mark Pauline.

Most of the SRL crew members have been in residence here for almost a week, sucking jet exhaust, chain-smoking, eating from big black tubs of tasty potato salad, and spattering themselves with tiny bits of flying solder. Over at the contaminated squat, they have one "shower," a water-spitting wall-mounted tap in a blank concrete cell lined with blue plastic sheeting. They sleep in bags on green canvas cots, in a vast echoing concrete hall where the least cough, sneeze, or snore sounds like a gunshot. Here, the strongest difference between the urban vagabonds at the local Saint Vincent's and the SRL crew is that SRL is much, much dirtier.

These people are setting entire new standards for nightmarish postindustrial anti-chic. Only heavy-duty cosmopolitan San Francisco Bay area performance artists, who double as the Dilberts from Hell, could dress

coming apart during the show anyhow, so when in doubt, just weld it. Failing that, bore a massive thumb-sized hole through it with the drill press and bolt it on. If that doesn't work, fetch the bungee cords, the C-clamps, and the metal epoxy. Don't worry: if you use too much, you can always trim it back later with the metal saw.

Fifty people who can weld, glue, saw, and clamp will get a lot of results. Mark and his longtime majordomo Mike Dingle are very results-oriented guys. Dingle bellows at the crew, reading from a filthy yellow notepad. "Home Depot's open till midnight! Whaddya need?" People raise their hands and ask cordially for duct tape. "Who's gonna fix that Allen bolt on the winch?" Two people volunteer at once. "We need more coffee grinders!" another shouts.

Jets from the airport roar periodically overhead, reducing everyone to involuntary silence as they munch their veggie salads and slurp their coffee. They all know each other. It's Scott the pyro guy, Kevin the

The show officially starts at 11. I go out to join the line at the ticket door and eavesdrop. (No doubt I could pitch in with the crew if I wanted, but I'm a novelist by trade – I could cut my thumb off slicing a bagel.) The clean-cut college kid in front of me is talking to his friend. "Yeah, he blew his hand off and had some toes sewn on for fingers!" I've never read an article on SRL that failed to take note of Pauline's injured hand. His uninjured left hand is also quite remarkable, very sinewy and dexterous, a real craftsman's hand. His left hand is probably the best-looking thing about the guy.

Not much happens till midnight. The audience filters in to stare in disgusted awe at the dozen inert machines and the truly vile backdrop of billboards with graphic images of such goeey and revolting hideousness that the eye can scarcely absorb them: a nude man absently hugging a withered starving child; a nude and hugely pregnant blond ostentatiously enjoying a tall

156 ▶



## SRL

151 beer and a cig: a wailing fetal head perched on a rubbery neck 6 feet long between a pair of devil-children sporting tri-dents. Mark used to deface other people's billboards as "pranks," but he's likely too famous for that amusement anymore. Now he can make his own billboards and set them on fire.

Hundreds of people stand patiently on a ramp of yellow dirt while the SRL crew confers over their silent machines. You'd think that people who tear animal carcasses apart with power machinery would be wild party animals, screaming drug-soaked Visigoths, utter no-brakes, destructo psychopaths, but nothing could be further from the truth. Their meals are vegetarian, their manners soft-spoken, and until the gig is over they don't even drink. Now they're clustered about, muttering quietly and making various last-minute hardware checks.

I'm convinced that this silent display is the one conspicuous ego-gratification that

expensive — fire permits, which Pauline says "won't happen."

Earplores are distributed, which help, a bit, with the "music." Mark usually plays at least an hour of impossibly inane or relentlessly irritating soundtrack to work the crowd into a properly destructive mood. Shortly after the midnight sirens go off and the fun starts.

The Bombloder, a previously inert piece of army green machinery, lurches into a nasty parody of life. More than life, really — the thing assumes actual character. Bombloder becomes a great horny galoot, his aluminum "bomb" thrusting and wiggling rudely. He stumbles drunkenly across the dirt. Eventually it becomes clear that the vile beast is heading for the appealing ventral orifice of the V-1.

V-1 isn't having any of this. She waggles coyly and spins aside repeatedly, perhaps taken aback by Bombloder's insistent aluminum organ. Now a few of the billboards begin to spin in place, thankfully diverting some attention from this unbearably

## The things won't kill each other fast enough; it's all one can do not to jump out and help.

obscene display.

Bombloder gets his way with a nasty series of jerks, humps, and screeches. He then backs off, apparently satisfied. V-1, scorned and furious, suddenly cuts loose on Bombloder with a withering blast of jet flame. The stink, dust, and shock are indescribable. Screams of disquieted glee explode from the audience, audible even over the sirens and the earplugs.

The angry and baffled Bombloder turns to vent his stupid fury on the Ark. The Ark, a skeletal shiplike device made mostly of leftover rafters from Therrien's lighthouse, is slow to anger. When it wakes, however, its eerie rage is made nastily manifest. It thrashes a long knucky flower stalk of steel and cabling, and opens a spinning tub-sized blossom with a stamen that's a mummified dog's head. Triple teeth of axlike butcher's steel spin and gnash at the Ark's prow.

Screw Machine rattles over gamely to pick a fight with Bombloder. Screw Machine, a veteran SRL device, has a long phallic metal

## SRL

156 successful counterculture artist in America. Peter Max, for instance, has become the "Official Super Bowl XXX Artist" and is having a reception and exhibit in tony Scottsdale's J.R. Fine Arts gallery this weekend. The astonishing thing about Pauline's art is that it obeys no logic, no shibboleths, and no rules other than the inherent nature of Mark Pauline.

He calls it "spectacular machine performance," but what does that conige mean? It isn't drama; there are no human beings, no dialog, scarcely a script. It isn't "destructive derby for the dressed-in-black crowd," because destruction derby, for all its many merits, does not confront you with the very worst feelings you have ever had. It's not "satire," unless a chunk of concrete dropping from a clear blue sky onto somebody's yuppie Saabmobile also counts as satire. It isn't sculpture, because it won't sit still on a pedestal.

David Therrien talks about the possibility

## Mark Pauline has bent the lines of postmodern culture into a superconductive arc.

of collecting and showcasing performance machines for the museum and collector crowd, but there would be something very sad about that — like an African ritual mask taken from the dancers and put in a Plexiglas box. It might well be collectible, but it wouldn't be Mark Pauline.

If SRL were just some shallow attempt to grandstand and outrage the bourgeoisie, then the effort would have lasted about as long as the average rock band. But Pauline's hair is shot with gray; he's given this effort the best years of his life. It's his life, he has no other.

You take some gravel-hearted techie kid

from Florida who knows how to weld boilers, put him in art school and teach him about graphic design and experimental theater, let him hang out with punk musicians even though he doesn't like music (one of the oddest things about SRL is that they don't listen to music on the job), and he finds his life's work. He gets a savage, brutal hammerlock on his Muse.

time and trouble.

Mark's work can be shoehorned into the "art" ghetto if you work at it. But, it looks and smells very much like certain other kinds of contemporary cultural activity. The holocaust of flaming oil are little versions of the machine dramas; of Saddam Hussein, who set fire to Kuwait just to produce a nice tank-war stage set for a personal attack of megalomania. The sight of machines macerating cattle flesh is an evil but accurate echo of mining machinery in Seb-held Bosnia clumsily obliterating the dead meat of the vanished, turn up the amps on SRL, adjust your set, and you suddenly have Arm Shinyo, gentle New Age vegetarian Pacific Rimsters, many from technical backgrounds, breaking out in a murderous collector's frenzy for high-tech, neat-o, extremely dangerous stuff. Not just the homemade bottle-rocket saine-dispensers that got them so much press, but all the other cool Shimrikyo gear: the electronic neuron hats, the stainless steel basements full of giant micro-waves, the ninja enforcers buying junked Russian tanks, the big and bouncy butolium breweries, the Ebola virus hunters, the giant microchip factories.

None of this happened because a half-blind master criminal in white pajamas needs his own microchip factory. It happened because the whole dead-clutter-of-postmodern tech is inherently fascinating in a particularly sickening and dangerous way that most of us cannot rationally sense. It's fascinating and evil, with the same imp-of-the-perverse element that makes humanity's automatic reflexes look as lovely as a sonnet while the homes and buildings and cities where we live and work and sleep and love tend to look like the crappy cartoons those rifles came in.

This is what Mark's work is about, what Mark Pauline really understands. The invisible becomes visible, everything that is repressed in the sterile prison of so-called rational engineering returns in a hideous and terribly authentic guise of claws and spikes and fangs. Everything that industrial society would prefer to forget and ignore and neglect takes on a pitiless Frankenstein vitality. It isn't beautiful, it isn't nice, it isn't spiritually elevating. It casts the darkest kind of suspicion on the lives we lead and the twisted ingenuity that supports those lives.

And it offers us no answers at all. ■ ■ ■

Great pillars of smoke shoot into the night air blanketing a twoblock radius near Folsom and Main with an ominous cloud of gray black soot For those of us not hip (or square) enough to get our directions on-line Sunday night, the smoke acts as a makeshift usher guiding us to the site of the latest constructive mayhem from the folks at Survival Research laboratories. Since Mark Pauline started the organization in 1979, it has staged nearly 50 events, to the delight of thrill seekers and industrial pagans worldwide.

From half a block away you can see 10foot columns of flame blaze through the darkness, illuminating the corrugated underbelly of the Bay Bridge and washing nearby buildings with a bloodred glow. Piercing airraid sirens squeal repetitively, complementing the industrial chorus of metalonmetal screeching and generator hum.

Though the conceptual artists of SRL have chosen an isolated, deserted lot for "Crime Wave" (described on the Internet as "the humorous aspects of violent human interaction"), nearly 1,000 people have shelled out \$10 each to stand on the temporary bleachers inside the fencedin arena while hundreds of others climb the surrounding hills or stand on car hoods, dumpsters, and balconies for a better view. Most everyone has brought camera equipment and earplugs.

"Never, I mean never get anywhere near SRL without plugs," warns a middleaged skater. As if to chase his point home, a flare gun shoots off nearby. Under the stark glare of the floodlights, the scene is a model of calculated anarchy. Dozens of men and women clad in Armygreen jumpsuits, industrial goggles, and protective earwear thread their way in between exploding flame-throwers, whirling helicopter blades, selfdestructing robots, re animated roadkill, and colliding vehicles. Their headsetwearing, walkietalkiecarrying counterparts move authoritatively through the crowd, lending the only semblance of control to the spectacle.

"It's an example of contained chaos," says an older spectator whose friend is on tonight's SRL crew. "I've seen videos, but live it's something completely different. On tape you see the overall theme, the concept of mechanized chaos. Live, it's dangerous. You feel the heat of the flame. You feel the music in your bones. There's the sense that something could go wrong at any time."

Despite the palpable threat of disaster, the rapt crowd seems fairly relaxed, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. Standing on the back windshield of a burnedout Corolla, Matt, an ecstatic 19 yearold, oohs and aahs. "Man, I wish I was on 'shrooms," he says. "I just didn't have time to get it together." Like the majority of the assembled, Matt only found out about the show a few hours ago. "Most of it's wordofmouth," says a helpfulman named Kimo. "It was released on the Net less than 20 hours ago." SRL generally keeps things under wraps until the last minute; not only does it keep the crowd size manageable, it keeps the cops away—until the explosions start, at least

Suddenly, the "Party" house, a small, colorfully painted structure built on an adjacent hillside, bursts into flame and slides down the incline onto the pavement below, crushing the copulating robots within.

"It's a modernday version of an ancient New Guinea custom," Kimo explains. "A chosen virgin has sex with each male of the village. During the last act, the house is lit on fire and the supports pulled out with both the man and woman still inside." He beams. "It's very tribalistic. The whole thing is, really. A good release, don't you think?"

The searing heat from a 15foot tornado of | flame pushes me to the back of the crowd. I Several veterans of the Police and Fire Departments stand glancing casually at the action and chatting. "We weren't given any advance notice," says Officer Patrick Driseoll. "I responded to a reported explosion, but so far, so good. They've been pretty cooperative." He points to the couple dozen SRL personnel working crowd control.

A final shot rings out as the last of the metal monsters is consumed in flame.

"Thank you very much for coming to our concert," booms the first human voice of the evening. "Please depart in an orderly and safe fashion." Surprisingly, most of the crowd obeys, leaving only a few souvenir hunters to loiter around.

"I've sold six of these," yells John, a young machinist who contributed to the show. He's holding an enormous smoking spear in his gloved hand. "I asked Mark [Pauline] if we could sell them, and he said, 'Why not?' I made these." Never one to pass up a work of art, David Duprey, Night Crawler's photographer, barter John down from 20 to 13 bucks. "Thirteen's a lucky number," says John as he leans the piece against a fence. "Be careful—it's hot," he warns. "It'll get you babes!" a spectator yells in support. Shouldering the monstrosity, Duprey heads for his motorcycle, blending into the smoldering backdrop of twisted, broken machines and charred pavement.

By Silke Tudor

# ArtBeat

## Chill winds

### Survival of the fittest

Several thousand lucky San Franciscans got to witness a rare outdoor performance organized by **Survival Research Laboratories** at the foot of the Bay Bridge last November—and some of the guests who showed up (in full force) were members of the police and fire departments. Although no spectator has ever been seriously injured at an SRL show, says group founder **Mark Pauline**, it was good to know our civil servants were there should the unforeseeable happen.

As it turned out, the unforeseeable did happen: Pauline and organizer **Mike Dingle** spent a total of 25 hours in jail last week for charges stemming from the November performance. Pauline said the San Francisco Fire Department had already issued an arrest warrant for what it called “unlawful open burning” and “using explosives without a permit.”

In the 15 years that SRL has been organizing performances in the city, this is the first time any serious charges have been brought against them. Several charges were initially issued by the police department, but they were eventually reduced to a very reasonable \$60 ticket for blocking the street.

Pauline said he would like to work more closely with the fire department but is dismayed by their lack of cooperation, especially in comparison to departments in other cities across the country. (SRL recently returned from a show in Phoenix, more extreme than the November show, and got complete assistance from the Phoenix Fire Department, which issued full permits and supervised the show.) For more on SRL, check out their Web site at <http://www.srl.org>, which features information about past performances and their recent run-in with the authorities.

► SF Weekly February 14–20, 1996

# Music



## Samples

### Fire Alarms

As Night Crawler reported last November, **Survival Research Labs** staged “Crime Wave” at an empty lot on Beale Street. Although no public property was damaged and no spectators were injured, **Mark Pauline** and **Mike Dingle** were slapped with arrest warrants two months later and charged with “unlawful open burning” and “use of explosive materials” by the SFFD. They turned themselves in (and were later released), and face a Feb. 14 court date. Though Pauline says “SRL had never had any direct confrontations with officials before,” an anonymous source claims that an SFFD representative told the DA that they’re sick and tired of dealing with SRL’s semifrequent events. But as anyone who has ever attended one can attest, safety is always foremost. “If they said that they want to work with us in the future, that I’d understand,” Pauline says. “We just did a show in Phoenix three block from City Hall, and the Sheriff’s Office laughed about it.” For more info, check out the SRL Web site at <http://www.srl.org>.