SURVIVAL RESEARCH LABORATORIES
reviewed by antero alli

Tentative, I explore the battered maze of Larry Reid's ambitious curation, The Night Gallery — featuring multiple set environments by local installation artists amidst the metallic screech and howl of its grinding industrial soundtrack (if Timothy Leary was right about assuming that nailing the trip is in controlling the setting). I couldn't have imagined a better set for SRL and its iconoclastic director, Mark Pauline (100591, COCA, Seattle WA USA).

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

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

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

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

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

Gladson's SRL video (which includes footage from the July 1991 Seattle show, "Carnival of Misplaced Elevation") can be ordered by sending 232 to SRL at 1456-C San Bruno Ave., San Francisco CA 94110 or by calling (415) 641-8065.

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

Pablo Neruda
(Translation: William O'Daly)
Mark Pauline
1989 Sculpture Grant Award Exhibition

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Kathy Brew


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

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

Which brings up another reason tempers run so high around S.R.L. Their work is deliberately intrusive, leaving burn marks on other people's walls and always making a din. But it's also exclusive—the group's last performance was publicized solely by word of mouth and mysteriously worded posters, so you wouldn't have any idea what was in store unless you'd had previous experience with the 1-800. The situation at the event further reflected this tension. It took place in a parking lot under the freeway, surrounded by a chain-link fence. You had to pay nine dollars to get inside the fence (or be cool enough for the guest list), but as always at S.R.L. gigs, it was possible to see without doing so. Many more people were outside than in, lined up on rooftops and ladders they'd hauled down. Inside, dozens of "security" people threatened to kick people out if they got too close to the action (admittedly, a safety consideration), yet the machines regularly careened into the crowd, pugnaciously overstepping their bounds.

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

GALLERIES
Kenneth Baker

For sheer hair-raising mediocrity, I’ve seen nothing in the arts to compare with the current show at Artspace, 1258 7th Street (through August 18). By San Francisco performance artist and gallery owner Pauline, it makes even James Nares’ use of hot air guns look tame.

Pauline, founder of the San Francisco performance group Survival Research Laboratories and owner of Artspace, is a winner of Ars Electronica’s 1990 Audience Award.

SRL’s notorious for making outdoor events in which remote-controlled machines assault each other in a technological version of social and mental breakdown. Pauline’s gallery show is a rare, indoor version of these dangerous automatons.

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

Artspace visitors are issued hard hats and plastic protectors, but even these cannot save them.

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

To get inside you mount a heavy metal staircase. Before you reach the top you see it begins to shake and shake and shake like a nuclear reactor hit by an earthquake. Rumbling, grinding noise come from beyond the wall, punctuated by an occasional explosion that is enough to make hair fly in two directions.

At the top of the stairs a door with a heavy metal catch leads to a steel-encased catwalk. In the steel-encased room below you can see things moving and clanking around to the accompaniment of a blaring soundtrack of angry, jargon-filled machine noises. With a sense of morbid fascination you touch each moving component, feeling every vibration, wondering whether it is electrified and whatever you come to the center of the catwalk, the “privileged” vantage point.

In the dim and dust, you can see just below ceiling level a big, shiny cylinder that moves in jerks and jabs and sets up the explosive flashes. Behind it is a small piece of junk.

Alan Rath’s, “The Wave,” a high technology video installation at Artspace Annex across the street from the Mark Pauline show, is a long-awaited counterpart to a mechanical pseudo-techno, against its amnesic meaning.

The rushing, rumbling, clanging of this piece is invigorating, because you can see how such machinery still acts.

As regret at signing the release gives you heart, the platform on which you stand starts to descend on货运它的 floor level. A third device on the floor goes into action.

It has two spindly poles rising, in the upright arm. The arm begins to drop like a recto-recto and the boxship toward you and rebound.

The floor of the space is covered with electronic, sound, and video components, and there is a series of people inside. A device on the floor catches your foot, and you are raised up on the wave, which is a third device on the floor, going into action.


PLAYING WITH PERIL A WEEK

San Francisco / Mark Van Proyen

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

I have never seen a space so completely transformed by an artist. For a moment, I thought I had walked into the wrong door and discovered a nautical ship catering to alien spacecraft. A purgatorious odor of lubricating fluids emanated from within a large black box that serves as the sculpture’s inner sanctum, its floor covered with haphazardly applied electrical tape that serves to secure chaotic webs of insulated electrical cord and hydraulic hoses. Connected to this web were five large mechanical devices: a sinister-looking robotic finger mounted on an over-sized black, an unannounced looks at the end point of an over-sized catwalk, an evil-looking mechanical
gear, a long-edged contraption like a mechanical pseudo-techno, against its amnesic meaning.

A device on the floor catches your foot, and you are raised up on the wave, which is a third device on the floor, going into action.


Playing With Peril, continued

Continued from page 3 that the group pursues, but to what end? It seems that the consistent and behind all of SRL’s projects involves tying in with an exaggerated ambivalence about technology, the power it wields in a world of atomization, with the instrumentalization of violence and, at the same time, maintaining an ironic cut or criticality that seems to moralize about the familiar matrix of technology as a dehumanizing agent. The question is, can SRL have it both ways? As in terms of atomization, SRL’s exhibition is apparent, if we consider the devices that are shown, across a high technology industrial aesthetic; a drawing attention to a primal will that is underlying the very concept of machine.

As moral narrative, however, the installation seems partly in comparison with self-world morality issues such as the financing of anti-aviation aircraft. The technology, in this sense, is controversial to the kind of self-motion of a technological society that we are most comfortable with a tractor pull. The pinions that should accompany any examination of “dehumanized social relations” has been turned into a self-satirizing frame that seems propelled by narrative and an alternative to spectacular social experiment.

Because Artspace now has a second exhibition space (Artspace Annex), the two shows run for the major award can also exhibit, and this allows viewers to draw conclusions about the aesthetic pro-dispositions of this year’s jury (Christine O’Malley, Ed Laffingwell and Dab Riley). The technology-as-demon theme so apparent in the main exhibition is given a cooler, more electronic treatment in Alan Hall’s work, constructed out of conduct, found objects and video monitors mounted into simple computer programs. Mark Paechall creates quasi-functional objects out of the stacks of books, light in look but heavy in their implications that this exhibition is a fact in a postmodernist position.
**SURVIVAL RESEARCH BACKGROUNDER**

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

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

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

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

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

If you think crashing brand-new automobiles into concrete barriers to evaluate restraint systems, side intrusion door beams and energy absorbing bumpers is the epitome of destructive testing, you haven't seen the work of Survival Research Laboratories, SRL, a San Francisco-based performance art collective, regularly carries the instructive value of destructive testing to new heights (or depths). The group also goes to extraordinary lengths to protect its investment in test equipment by employing XTRA-GUARD cable, developed by Alpha Wire Corporation, Elizabeth, NJ. XTRA-GUARD is made for tough applications like steel mills and other high temperature, corrosive industrial and plenum applications.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"This more modern, more violent form of 'contact sport' may even foreshadow wars of the future," declares SRL founder Mark Pauline, who is an expert welder-machinist with an artistic -- and a philosophic -- bent.

"Our shows also can be viewed," he said, "as a metaphor of man's relationship with machines."

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

High-Tech Art

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

During a typical performance these are smashed, crushed, torn apart, shredded and burned to the accompaniment of fireworks and unexpected explosions. At the conclusion of each show, the area
has the appearance of a devastated battleground. Along with
the audience, which has been
kept at a safe distance during the
performances, the only survivors
are the charred, dented and other-
wise damaged -- but still func-
tioning -- robots.

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

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

Performance Solution
To cope with the stresses and
temperatures encountered by the
"Arm," last year, SRL switched
to XTRA-GUARD 5 cable
supplied by Alpha Wire Corpora-
tion, Elizabeth, NJ. Developed
for unusually demanding operat-
ing requirements and hostile
environments, such as glitch-free
transmission of digital data and
to meet safety requirements in
demanding industrial application,
the cable chosen by SRL carries
three pairs of wire wrapped in a
0.025-in. FEP-Teflon jacket that
withstands operating tempera-
tures from -80°C to +200°C. In
addition to passing the UL VW-1
flame test, the heavy duty insula-
tion offers excellent resistance to
moisture, abrasion and impact,
and is resistant to chemicals, oil,
solvents and fungus.

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

New Meanings
Many in the audience exit
SRL performances with a greater
understanding of what is tempo-
rary and what is lasting and with
a greater appreciation of the rela-
tionship between man and ma-
chine. As Mark Pauline noted,
"Once you've lived through one
of our performances, survival
takes on a whole new meaning."
The makers of XTRA-GUARD 5
cable agree.

XTRA-GUARD® ELECTRONIC
CABLE FAMILY MEETS TOUGHEST CHALLENGES

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

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

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

Family Line-Up
The five XTRA-GUARD cables are applications oriented:
XTRA-GUARD 1: Tough, extra heavy jacketing material for computer commu-
nications, instrumentation and control equipment indoors.
XTRA-GUARD 2: Withstands physical and chemical abuse in petrochemical
plants, machine tool operations and industrial robotics.
XTRA-GUARD 3: Excellent chemical, UV and fungus resistance for direct
burial, making it the choice for inter-building communications, petroleum
pipelines and irrigation systems.
XTRA-GUARD 4: Flexible in cold and resistant to alkaldoids in paper
processing plants, electric utilities and industrial cable tray applications.
XTRA-GUARD 5: Used in steel mills and in high temperature, corrosive
industrial and plenum applications. Pennsylvania Bureau of Deep Mine Safety
Approved P-MWMS-1-85.

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

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