



ART AU NATUREL

More artists on open studio tours recycle, respect the environment

By Monique Beeler | Staff writer

BERKELEY ARTIST Zach Pine sculpts with whatever materials nature provides: a boulder on the beach, leaves floating in a tree stump or stones piled on driftwood.

Pine is one of a growing breed of artists whose art helps improve people's relationships with the earth.

"I call it nature sculpture," says Pine, who also runs an art program for people with disabilities. "That's a phrase of my own coinage. I think broadly I'm (considered) an environmental artist."



FALLING DOWN: Artist Cathy Zander of Los Altos will display sculptures such as "Mystic Falls," made from recycled plastic, at the 2006 Silicon Valley Open Studios.

For years, he built assemblages of pine needles, sticks and stones for his own fleeting enjoyment or for that of hikers or beachcombers passing by his temporary sculptures. In 2003, with encouragement from his wife, Pine began photographing his ephemeral compositions, which have ranged from volcanic rocks and coral arranged around a tidepool to golden leaves rolled up and stacked inside a long vertical slit in the bark of a redwood tree.

"The photographs... were a very long time in coming," he says. "Largely because of (my) environmental concerns. I wanted to share my work more broadly with the public."

Photos of Pine's nature sculptures will be on display and available for sale during the first two weekends in June as part of the Pro Arts East Bay Open Studios. More than 400 artists will invite members of the public into their studios to watch as glassmakers, painters and textile artists create pleasing and provocative work.

It's one of many open studio events scheduled in the coming month around the Bay Area in communities from Burlingame to Union City. Open studios visitors pick up a map at a gallery or business or print out an online map marked with the addresses of artists they'd like to visit. Many artists work on their paintings or pottery while guests look on and ask questions.

Only a handful of artists represented at open studio tours focus on environmental themes as consciously as Pine does, says Polly Harrold, program coordinator for Pro Arts, which runs a gallery, classes and events for East Bay artists. In recent years, however, she's noticed more artists reusing and recycling found materials such as old advertising banners, thrift store sweaters and the ubiquitous white plastic grocery bags printed with a red "thank you" message.

"Artists have always done stuff with the detritus (of society), nuts and bolts and wood and all the things that wash up in an urban environment and along the water," she says. "People have not limited themselves in terms of materials."

For her 3-D art projects, Cathy Zander of Los Altos goes out of her way to collect found objects and scraps of everything from metal to swimsuit fabric. Zander, along with some 330 fellow artists, will show

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ON THE BEACH: As part of the Pro Arts East Bay Open Studios, Zach Pine will display works including "Afternoon, Stinson Beach, California, Wet sand balls placed at low tide, along the line of the last night tide. 8/10/05."

Using environment as art

▶ ART, from Living 1

and sell her work at the Silicon Valley Open Studios starting today and running Saturdays and Sundays through May 21.

One of her favorite sources for recycled supplies is RAFT, Resource Area for Teachers, in San Jose. Zander is an art teacher and volunteer at non-profit RAFT, to which businesses donate surplus stuff for classroom use.

"It can be anything from used electronics to parts to things (used) to make books or calendars," Zander says. "It's probably something being diverted from the landfill because it had no specific use."

For several recent sculptures, Zander made assemblages using the kind of plastic found in juice and milk containers. When manufacturers clean out their mold-making machines, they end up with misshapen plastic pieces that artists such as Zander convert into conversation pieces.

Favoring realistic subjects, Zander has created giant shells and figures from plastic she has painted, drilled and torched.

"I did a waterfall that looks like it's suspended in air," she says. "I painted it so it really looks like flowing water."

Fremont painter Therese Ely brings a subtle style of environmental consciousness to her work, which will be on display in the Tri-City Open Studio Tour. The self-guided tour June 3 and 4 welcomes visitors into the studios of some 40 artists working in Fremont, Newark and Union City.

"I'm personally enchanted by the California Impressionists," says Ely, referring to an early

Bay Area open studio events

▶ Silicon Valley Open Studios — (888) 330-6177, <http://svos.org>; today and Sunday, northern Santa Clara County; May 13-14, southern Santa Clara County; May 20-21, San Mateo County.

▶ Benicia Artists Open Studio — (707) 747-0131, www.artsbenicia.org; today and Sunday.

▶ 15th Annual Hunters Point Shipyard Spring Open Studio — San Francisco. (415) 387-5936, www.springopenstudio.com; today and Sunday

▶ Marin Open Studios — (415) 499-8350, www.marinarts.org; today and Sunday; May 13-14.

▶ Hayward Area Artists Open Studio Tour 2006 — (510) 538-2787, www.haywardarts.org; May 20-21. Preview exhibition runs through May 19 at John O'Lague Galleria, 777 B St. in Hayward.

▶ Pro Arts East Bay Open Studios — (510) 763-4361, www.proartsgallery.org; June 3-4, 10-11. Preview exhibition runs through June 17 in the gallery, 550 Second St. in Oakland. Art bus preview tour June 2.

▶ 5th Annual Tri-City Open Studios — (510) 791-9290 or (510) 792-0905, www.fremontartassociation.org; June 3-4.

20th-century art movement that favored choppy brush strokes and plein air painting. "I like getting back to places that are pristine or nearly pristine, because I'm a backpacker and my husband and I do a lot of hiking."

Landscapes and waterscapes depicting Bay Area terrain such as Pigeon Point, a coastal spot 20 miles south of Half Moon

Bay, figure prominently in her canvases.

"These places are worth preserving," Ely says. "My way of expressing that is through the artwork."

Compared with traditional oil painters, she uses more earth-friendly supplies when cleaning her brushes. In place of turpentine, she prefers a non-toxic cleaner called turpenoid. She also soaks her brushes in cooking-grade vegetable oil before sudsing them up with hot water and bar soap.

Anyone can pick up a paintbrush — or in this case, a stone — and make art at Pine's studio.

When visitors come to his space during open studios, he says, he hopes they'll grab a rock and get busy.

"I encourage people who come by to join in, which is another big part of my art," Pine says. "I want people to get that hands on (experience)."

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THE GREAT OUTDOORS:

Environmental artist Zach Pine creates ephemeral pieces for the fleeting enjoyment of those passing by. He has begun photographing some of his work, such as "Stinson Beach, California, Toppled rock tower. 7/27/05," which will be shown during the Pro Arts East Bay Open Studios tour.