



Zach Pine

PHOTOS: LEFT BY DAANE DEWE; RIGHT BY ZACH PINE

Balancing act: Zach Pine uses rock, twigs, and sticks to build abstract sculpture. Right: "Morning, Kohala Coast, Hawaii," made of coral fragments, December 2005.



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Play ball: Zach Pine's August 2005 composition, "Afternoon, Stinson Beach, California," shows wet sand balls placed at low tide, along the line of the last high tide. When the tide comes in, it washes around some of the balls and makes a new line.

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Zach Pine is a rock balancer. Sometimes his totems have a whimsical element to them—a formation may bring to mind a waiter caught serving food in gale force winds. Other works are presented on a more intimidating scale—a gigantic boulder balanced on end at the tip of a precipice.

On a hike in the woods or at Stinson Beach, Pine gathers up rocks of varying shapes and sizes and stacks them, often precariously, into temporary monuments. If people venture by, he tries to engage them in the building process. When he's finished with a larger piece he pushes the sculpture over and walks away. Pine works like a rural graffiti artist: slipping into the scene, leaving his beautiful mark for passersby to admire, and then taking off.

As a kid, Pine loved to make sand castles, towers, and the like. But unlike most of us, he never really stopped. As an adult, he can still spend an entire day building stone constructions, only now he ropes people into his impromptu art events, and the scale of his projects is grander. His sense of wonder is what has remained constant.

"The process of art making has a lot to do with exploration," enthuses the wiry 40-something. "I explore when I'm out there. I learn a lot about the crystalline structure of rocks by trying to balance them. Certain rocks that look fine sitting on a flat surface crumble

when forced to bear the weight of other stones. This sparks my interest to try to find out more about that kind of rock when I get home."

In addition to rock balancing, Pine also crafts twigs, sticks, and leaves into abstract compositions similar to internationally known artists like Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long. During Open Studios, Pine creates on the sidewalk area in front of his West Berkeley space, encouraging visitors to build their own pieces. He is unable to do commissions, since his pieces are held together only by gravity. At the encouragement of his wife, he has recently started digitally photographing the pieces. Although he was reluctant at first given the demands of photographing his work—some pieces may be too big to fit in the frame, the light may have faded by completion, or the piece is just too unstable by the time he can get to the camera—the rewards are starting to pay off. People are buying prints and notecards, and he is able to get his work seen around the globe via the Internet.

In general, we like our art to be permanent. The idea of something continuing on after us makes the future seem more humane. But by offering moments rather than monuments with his sculptures, Pine helps us focus on the present. Enjoy his tower now—a strong breeze may be coming. ●

Timothy Buckwalter, a painter represented by Rebecca Ibel Gallery, is married to author Nell Bernstein. They live with their twins in Albany. Buckwalter is The Monthly's art critic.