

# Nature's delicate balance inspires

By Jennifer Modenessi

TIMES STAFF WRITER

Berkeley artist Zach Pine's studio lies right outside his front door.

The self-described "nature sculptor" finds endless inspiration in beaches, rivers, forests and grassy fields.

That's where the 47-year-old patiently collects the sea-tumbled stones, pine needles, leaves and other raw materials he fashions into poetic and poignantly impermanent sculptures.

Pine, who only recently began documenting his work through photography, a la well-known sculptor Andy Goldsworthy, will display images of his earth art at Berkeley's Open Studios weekends through Dec. 17.

And even though he hopes to create some sculptures indoors, Pine plans to keep the process as spontaneous and experimental as his outdoor work, which can change — or sometimes disappear — with the force of a wave or a shift in the wind.

But it's not just experimentation that keeps the artist hooked on creating the meticulously pinned and folded leaf trails and "how did he do that?" balanced rock sculptures. Pine also cites a deep respect for nature and a desire to share his passion as the driving forces behind his work.

**Q: When did you begin making works that address nature?**

**A:** I started making art in this way as a kid growing up in this area, on the beaches in Califor-

## EVENT

■ **WHO:** Berkeley sculptor Zach Pine.

■ **WHAT:** Berkeley Artisans Holiday Open Studios.

■ **WHERE:** Includes galleries, exhibition spaces and artists' studios in Berkeley. Visit [www.berkeleyartisans.com](http://www.berkeleyartisans.com) for a map.

■ **WHEN:** 11 a.m.-6 p.m. weekends, through Dec. 17.

■ **HOW MUCH:** Free.

■ **CONTACT:** 510-845-2612.

nia. But I didn't think of it as making art. I thought of it as making stuff at the beach. Then as an adult, whenever I would go to anyplace beautiful, I was always inspired to use what I found there and really, I felt like I was calling attention to things that were there, not changing them so much. I made rock towers and snow sculptures, things like that. I guess maybe 10 or 15 years ago, I started thinking of it not just as playing but as art.

**Q: Why did you decide to eschew traditional art-making materials and focus on creating art out of found objects like stones, pebbles, leaves, sticks, etc.?**

**A:** Because as I continued to do this somewhat playful, spontaneous, exploratory work, I realized that what was sort of motivating me more than anything was really a love of nature and a desire to transmit that to other people. If you paint portraits, you

can kind of convey certain things, but if you make art in nature with nature, you can convey something very specific about nature to people who otherwise might not notice it.

I also started to develop a mission to use my art as a form of activism and as a form of environmental awareness and consciousness-raising.

**Q: Are your projects spontaneous or does a lot of planning go into them?**

**A:** Very little planning goes into them. Almost always my process is to go into a site either that I know very well already, in which case I'm exploring something there in depth because I've already explored the surface, so to speak, or go to a new site which I don't know well, and then I explore the site and the materials there and then something will attract me and there's a message there for me in it.

**Q: What are some of the things that attract you to a particular site?**

**A:** Well, an example of that is my neighborhood in North Berkeley. There's a stone in someone's front yard, a huge boulder with a crack running through it I thought was just stunning. It occurred to me that a lot of people probably walk past that rock every day and never see that crack. I found it very evocative, because it was such a huge and seemingly permanent boulder and yet here it was, ripped. So I first got per-

mission from the owners of the property and then I used eucalyptus bark of various colors to make stripes in the crack. It was actually one of the first times I worked in a semi-public place.

A crowd of neighbors gathered, and people said things like "Gosh, how long has that rock been broken?" as if I'd just cracked it open then. Another neighbor came by and said "I broke my hip and it's just starting to heal up and that crack reminds me that you think your bones are permanent but they're really not." So to me, that was a very successful work.

**Q: Is the permanence of the artwork not a very big concern for you then?**

**A:** Well, permanence is a concern in the way that I think impermanence is part of the power of the work. If you look at the work and it gives you a sense of time, a sense of impermanence, then it's more successful to me, because that shows something about the fragility of nature that I always feel needs to be emphasized a little bit.

I feel like people take nature as more hardy than it really is sometimes. I think making works that are impermanent gives people that somewhat unsettled feeling that I think they need to have to take action, to prevent environmental problems.

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BERKELEY SCULPTOR Zach Pine creates spontaneous, temporary artworks from items he finds in their natural settings.