

Terry Allen – *Trees*, 1986

Terry Allen is a multidisciplinary artist in the truest sense of the term. In addition to his indoor installation and sculptural work (which is emphatically mixed-media) and his paintings, writings and drawings, Allen is also a songwriter, composer, pianist, and the lead vocalist with his own Panhandle Mystery Band. Allen is well known for his installation and performance projects. One such piece, *Youth is Asia*, reflected on the experience of the Vietnam War by exploring American value systems through a variety of means ranging from mass cultural heroes to fairy tale protagonists like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, to the ethos of roadhouses in the American Southwest. More recently, Allen presented his extensive multimedia project, *Dugout*, based on the stories he heard while growing up in West Texas.

Allen's diverse talents and experiences are highlighted in his first outdoor project, *Trees*, for the Stuart Collection. He remarks upon the continual loss of natural environment at UCSD by salvaging three eucalyptus trees from a grove razed to make way for new campus buildings. Two of these trees, preserved and encased in skins of lead, stand like ghosts within a eucalyptus grove between the Geisel Library and the Faculty Club. Although they ostensibly represent displacement or loss, these trees offer a kind of compensation: one emits a series of recorded songs and the other a lively sequence of poems and stories created and arranged specifically for this project.

For the music tree, William T. Wiley, known for his paintings filled with literary puns and eccentric maps, sings *Ghost Riders in the Sky*, accompanying himself on a homemade instrument; West Texas singer Joe Ely sings *Mona Lisa Squeeze My Guitar*, while the Maines Brothers work pedal steel guitars, a Thai band plays, and filmmaker/musician David Byrne sings a song he composed especially for this project. For the literary tree, Terry Allen delivers his poem about scabs, the poet Philip Levine recites, plus there are Navajo chants, translations of Aztec poems, duck calls, and many other sound works. *Trees* is a continuous project and Allen and others are at work on future contributions.

One could walk through the grove several times before noticing Allen's two unobtrusive trees. Not only do these trees reinvest a natural site with a literal sense of magic but they implicitly make connections between nature and death and the life of the spirit. It is not surprising that students have dubbed this area the "Enchanted Forest."

At the entrance to the vast, geometric library the third tree of Allen's installation remains silent - perhaps another form of the tree of knowledge, perhaps a reminder that trees must be cut down to print books and build buildings, perhaps a dance form, or perhaps noting that one can acquire knowledge both through observation of nature and through research.

Since completing *Trees*, Allen has done many public works across the county, including *CORPORATE HEAD* and the Citicorp Building in Los Angeles and large bronze leaf (*BELIEF*) for The Vontz Cancer research center designed by Frank Gehry in Cincinnati. He has also released eleven CDs (Sugar Hill Records) and written and produced seven theater pieces including *Chippy* for the American Music Theater Festival in Philadelphia and the Lincoln Center in New York City. In 1997, he was inducted into the Buddy Holly "Walk of Fame" in Lubbock, Texas. He is currently working on *GHOST SHIP RODEZ*, a music theater piece and exhibition of multimedia works based loosely on the life of French theater visionary and artist, Antonin Artaud. Allen lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Folklore: People have been permitted - even encouraged - to scratch initials into the trees. The letters fade and new ones are scratched on top, creating the effect of the passage of time and people becoming part of the layers and history of the tree.