

Charles Ross
Collection CAE1509

Introduction/Abstract

The archive *Charles Ross* contains materials related to his artistic career and to his long-term project *Star Axis*. Materials include exhibition ephemera, magazine articles and reviews, and writings by the artist about *Star Axis*—a project begun in 1976.

Biographical Note: Charles Ross

Ross received his BA in Mathematics (1960) and an MA in Art in 1962 from UC Berkeley. In the 1960s he taught sculpture at UC Berkeley, Cornell University, School of Visual Arts and worked with the Judson Dancers, including Yvonne Rainer and Deborah Hay, to create *A Collective Event*, performed at Judson Church, November 19 and 20th, 1963. Returning to San Francisco, Ross collaborated with dancer Anna Halprin to create *Parades and Changes*, (1964-66), which was performed in California, Stockholm, Helsinki, and was one of the first cultural events to tour behind the iron curtain in Warsaw, Poland.

In 1965 Ross abandoned his earlier work with lattice columns and colored Plexiglas stacks and began making large prisms. A few years later Michael Heizer wrote Ross's "obituary" describing this dramatic aesthetic transformation. Ross moved back to New York and helped form the first artist co-op building at 80 Wooster Street. Organized by George Maciunas in 1967, it was the co-op that launched SoHo. Ross exhibited at the Dwan Gallery between 1967 and 1971, where both the minimal and land art movements originated. Other artists with Dwan included Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, and Sol Lewitt who introduced Ross to Virginia Dwan. Ross's first sculptures exhibited with Dwan were transparent skewed and truncated cubes—minimal objects that bend and refract both light and perception.

In 1969 Ross shifted the emphasis of his artwork from that of the minimal prism object, to the prism as an instrument through which light revealed itself so that the orchestration of spectrum light became the artwork. Ross continues to create site-specific solar spectrum installations made up of arrays of giant prisms specifically tuned to the sun. Ross's permanent solar spectrum installations include: *The National Museum of the American Indian*, for which he was awarded the Washington Building Congress Award in 2005; *Conversations with the Sun* (2004), Meiji University, Tokyo; *Spectrum 12* (1999), Saitama University, Japan, created in collaboration with architect Riken Yamamoto; *The US Federal Courthouse*, Tampa, Florida (1998); and *Lines of Light, Rays of Color, Plaza of the Americas*, Dallas, TX (1985).

In 1971 Ross discovered that the solar burns traced a double spiral when laid end-to-end. While NEA Artist in Residence at the University of Utah in 1973-74, Ross, with a crew of students, created seven *Star Map Paintings*, the largest of which is 9 feet high by 27 feet wide. There he also worked on his book, *Sunlight Convergence/Solar Burn*, which chronicles a year of solar burns and reveals the nature of the double spiral. Published by the University of Utah Press in 1976, the book received the American Institute of Graphic Arts Award. For the past 10 years Ross has been creating several series of new solar burn artworks. One series—137 Solar Burns, each in the time it takes sunlight to reach earth, 8 minutes and 19 seconds—captures light's time distance between the earth and sun.

Scope and Content

Using sunlight and starlight as the source for his art, Charles Ross creates large-scale prisms to project solar spectrum into architectural spaces; focuses sunlight into powerful beams to create solar burn works; draws the

quantum behavior of light with dynamite; and works with a variety of other media including photography and video. For the last 40 years Ross has been building the geometry of the stars into his earthwork, Star Axis, now nearing completion in New Mexico. It is both architectural sculpture and naked eye observatory. The approach to building Star Axis involves gathering a variety of star alignments in different time scales and building them into sculptural form. Walking through its chambers you can see how star space relates to human scale and how the space of the stars reaches down into the earth. Ross conceived of Star Axis in 1971 and began building it in 1976 after a 4-year search through the southwest to find the perfect site—a mesa where one stands at the boundary between earth and sky. He's now finishing Star Axis with a crew of local stonemasons. It is made with granite, sandstone, bronze, stainless steel, and earth. When completed, Star Axis will be eleven stories high and a fifth of a mile across.

Materials include catalogs, magazine articles and reviews, and printed ephemera throughout the artist's career.

Inclusive Dates

1963 - 2015

Bulk Dates

1963 - 2015

Quantity / Extent

.25 cubic feet

Language

English and French

Arrangement

Charles Ross is organized into three series. The first series contain materials about Ross' project titled Star Axis. Series two contains exhibition ephemera, series three contains articles and press materials, both of which span Ross' career.

- Series 1: Star Axis
- Series 2: Exhibition Ephemera
- Series 3: Articles and Press Materials

Related Archive Collections

CAE0901: *The Deiro Collection*

Related Publications

Baldwin, J. & Stewart Brand, eds., *Soft-Tech*. Harmondsworth, England; New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1978.

DeMarinis, Paul. *Sensitive Chaos: Art + Science Sensitive Chaos. (Āto & Saiensu no Kyōshin: Senshitibu Kaosu.)* Tōkyō: NTT Publishing Company, 1997.

Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo. *El Espíritu de una Colección*. San José, Costa Rica: Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo, 1996.

Sakane, Itsuo. *Kyōkaisen no tabi*. Tōkyō: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1984.

Ross, Charles. *Charles Ross: The Substance of Light*. Santa Fe, NM: Radius Books, 2012.

Ross, Charles. *Sunlight Convergence Solar Burn: The Equinoctial Year, September 23, 1971 through September 22, 1972*. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press and Art Department, 1976.

Ross, Charles. *The Substance of Light*. La Jolla, CA: La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1976.

Weintraub, Linda. *Land Marks: New Site Proposals by Twenty-two Original Pioneers of Environmental Art*. Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Bard College, 1984.

Container Listing by Series:

CAE1509/1 Series 1: Star Axis, Folder 1, 1992 – 2012

Series 1 includes written information about Star Axis, the extensive Land Arts project begun in 1976.

CAE Box 94

1-1 Star Axis Project Information, 1992 – 2012

CAE0901/1 Series 1: Additional Materials

CAE Box 66

1-1 Piece of Star Axis, Pink Granite

CAE1509/2 Series 2: Exhibition Ephemera, Folders 1-5, 1963 – 2012

Series 2 contains exhibition ephemera that spans Ross' career.

CAE Box 94

2-1 1963 – 1969
2-2 1970 – 1979
2-3 1980 – 1989
2-4 1990 – 1999
2-5 2000 – 2012

CAE0901/2 Series 2: Additional Materials

CAE S-Box 12

- 2-1#1 *Prisms*: Charles Ross, Dwan Gallery, New York, NY, 1968
- 2-2#1 *Sunlight Dispersion*, Dwan Gallery, New York, NY, 1971

CAE1509/3 Series 3: Articles and Press Materials, Folders 1-6, 1969 – 2015

Series 3 contains articles and press materials that span Ross' career.

CAE Box 94

- 3-1 1969 – 1979
- 3-2 1980 – 1989
- 3-3 1990 – 1999
- 3-4 2000 – 2010
- 3-5 2011 – 2015
- 3-6 Undated Materials