



Paul Kos / di Rosa



Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University

Left: "Lot's Wife," Paul Kos' 1969 installation. Above: A faded watercolor by Domenico Caligo, "Tribune of Buontalenti," can be viewed in its hypothesized original colors with augmented reality.

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

# Nature is muse for sculptor Kos

"Equilibrium: A Paul Kos Survey," an exhibition at **di Rosa** in Napa through Oct. 2, was an eye-opener for me. I have worked with Kos in a curatorial role, at Orange County's Laguna Art Museum in 1990 and again at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 2004. His work is conceptual to a degree, but it takes a real, generally sculptural, form. Add to that a strong vein of Dada absurdity and an ultra-dry wit, and it adds up to one of the Bay Area's most entertaining, influential and important living artists.

But what was not fully apparent until this exhibition is the work's strong connection to the natural world. The di Rosa is a 217-acre preserve that also encompasses a small museum-like space and a house museum chockablock with late 20th century California art. It was founded and endowed as a public trust by **Rene di Rosa**, who, before his passing in 2010, created a kind of year-round visual arts salon and artists' residency on his farm and in his home, barns and even on the small lake on the property.

**Amy Owen**, the curator

at di Rosa, and her collaborator **Tanya Zimbardo**, a curator of media arts at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, trace Kos' earliest significant works to the time when, still a student at the San Francisco Art Institute, he worked grafting vines on the property. With di Rosa's encouragement, he made two painted fiberglass sculptures before deciding to do something more suited to the natural site.

The result was "Lot's Wife" (1968-69), a stack of standard feed-store salt blocks on a tall spindle, set in the middle of a pasture. Visually reminiscent of Constantin Brancusi's famous "Endless Column" series, textually related to the biblical story of Sodom, Kos' pillar of salt gradually shrank and disintegrated as cattle in the field licked the lower blocks — absolution of human sin by the grace of nature.

Following upon the success of that work, Kos' boss became his most important patron, nature his constant

muse. Watching the artist's work develop through the lens of this concise and pellucid presentation, as he builds and balances on this uncertain foundation, is a deeply satisfying experience.

**In memoriam:** I was out of the country when the poet, teacher and art critic **Bill Berkson** died, at 76, on June 16. Bill had bouts with illness over the past several years, but on him they

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looked like the trappings of immortality. He would bounce back with the full force of his inexhaustible charm and free-ranging intellect, giving readings at venues across the country and warm encouragement to artists, students and friends wherever he found himself.

The art and literature communities, and all who wish to attend, will have the opportunity to remember

Berkson and express their condolences to his wife, the noted curator **Constance M. "Connie" Lewallen**, and their family at a memorial and reception to be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, July 24, at the San Francisco Art Institute.

The Chronicle's book editor, **John McMurtrie**, wrote our obituary, which is available at <http://bit.ly/29SM6cX>. The PBS "News-Hour" profiled Berkson in January; to hear a short excerpt from his last book, "Expect Delays," go to <http://to.pbs.org/1DM3MCv>.

**Augmented reality for art museums:** I haven't seen it yet, but I'm intrigued by the announcement of Art++, "an augmented reality mobile app created for art museum visitors," now available for use at Stanford University's Cantor Arts Center. It was put together by the Cantor and the Brown Institute for Media Innovation, a joint Stanford School of Engineering and Columbia Graduate School of Journalism project.

The most innovative aspect of the project is that the app allows curators to overlay — effectively draw

on — museum objects, to highlight and explain aspects of the work. Project manager **Maria del Carmen Barrios** described related content, beyond the object itself, offered by the app, like a panorama of the actual site depicted in a painting, explanation of conservation techniques and "color correction" of a faded watercolor. The best part of all, of course, is not the digital element, but the fact that you need the original object in front of you to make it work.

Information and a video description are available at <http://artplusplus.stanford.edu>.

**Last chance:** Anglim Gilbert Gallery has extended its exhibition "Constellated," which presents diverging but engaging approaches to the medium of collage by **Jean Conner**, **Lynn Hershman Leeson** and **Gay Outlaw**, through Saturday, July 23.

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