

PRESS RELEASE

Sea Change

PART ONE

Ocean Earth Development Corporation

15 September – 28 October 2001

SPACE X 2

The former Exeter Maritime Museum,
60 Haven Road, The Quay, Exeter EX1 8DJ
10am – 5pm, Tuesday – Sunday

PREVIEW: Friday 14 September, 6 - 8pm

PART TWO

Susan Derges, Liz Nicol, Jem Southam

15 September – 10 November 2001

SPACE X GALLERY

45 Preston Street
Exeter EX1 1DF
10 am – 5pm, Tuesday – Saturday

ADMISSION FREE

PART ONE

Ocean Earth Development Corporation

PARTICIPANTS: **George Chaikin** (USA) architect/artist/computer scientist, **Peter Fend** (USA) architect/artist, **Kate Glazer** (USA) videographer, **Tegwyn Harris** (UK) ecologist, **Steve Hughes** (UK) biologist/artist, **Mike Lawson-Smith** (UK) digital artist, **Samantha Lavender** (UK) oceanographer/geomatician, **Dennis Oppenheim** (USA) earth artist, **John F. Simon** (USA) artist/geologist, **Taro Suzuki** (USA) satellite scientist

The New York-based organisation *Ocean Earth Development Corporation* was established in 1980, emerging from the *Offices* founded by Peter Fend, Colen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince and Robin Winters. It was conceived as an instrument for implementing the goals of the environmental art movement, directly building upon the ideas of artists such as Joseph Beuys, Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark. It has no fixed membership but functions as a loose association of committed individuals, shifting according to the needs of each project as they take place around the world (although Fend and Chaikin have been relatively constant figures throughout). On this occasion the collective includes pioneer earth artist, Dennis Oppenheim. The project is co-curated by Fend and Chaikin, with Spacex. Through intensive, inter-disciplinary collaborations with scientists, connecting ecological imperatives with future-oriented technology, Ocean Earth has sought to develop a wide range of strategies for improving our relationship to the environment.

In the city of Exeter, where the Meteorological Office will be re-locating in 2003, Ocean Earth's *Sea Change* project starts from an exploration of the local relation of the Exe estuary to Lyme Bay, extrapolating out to explore the sea areas of the British Isles and their relations with the European land-mass / the Continental Shelf, then the North Atlantic / Arctic ocean basin and ultimately the whole world ocean. Working in collaboration with scientists from the Biology Department of the University of Exeter, and the Institute of Marine Studies, University of Plymouth, as well as locally-based artists, the project presents satellite imaging, maps, films and earth models. It includes a prototype for a locally-based renewable system of energy production based upon the collection of biomass (kelp) in the Lyme Bay basin cultivated on a submersible rig at the mouth of the Exe estuary, allowing the sediment that forms where the river meets the English Channel to yield large amounts of methane. The rig, entitled *Survival Raft*, has been moored in the Exeter canal basin. On a larger scale this viable alternative to fossil-based fuels becomes a model for replacing oil and gas rigs in the North Sea with vast marine-algae skeins, which, as well as yielding energy, actually clean the sea of pollution, so encouraging re-population of fish.

Sea Change also expands upon the Met Office's categories of 'sea areas' to include within them all the lands and rivers draining into them, rather than simply those from the British Isles. The effect of this re-definition is that an area such as 'Thames' is seen to include not only the outflow from the Thames but also all the outflow from the Rhine and Maas rivers, the biggest freshwater influence on the Continental Shelf by far. This includes run-off from the most industrialized parts of Europe, extending deep into the Alps. A particular focus will be placed upon the sea area 'Portland', or the Lyme Bay basin, i.e. the area of the English Channel, from Dartmouth to Bournemouth on the northern shore and Brieuc to Cherbourg on the southern shore, assessing the impact of run-off on the health of the Shelf.

Ocean Earth believes it can contribute to predictions of long-term climate change based upon a re-organization of geographical information according not to land masses or hemispheres, but to ocean basins. Ocean Earth views the globe from the centre of the world ocean, the South Pole, with the three major outlying oceans, the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, extending on out from Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. Exchange between North and South is primarily through the Atlantic corridor, driven by four main saltwater gyres that are fed by freshwater and silt from rivers like the Amazon, Mississippi, Congo, Niger, Plata, Rio Grande and the ice-cap of Greenland. At a regional level, all land can be viewed as sloping down, or draining into a saltwater basin, e.g. the Mediterranean Basin, the North Sea Basin, etc. The environmental conditions of the British Isles and Northern Europe are thus defined by the shallow waters of the Continental Shelf, with its own heightened mixing of fresh and salt waters, of run-off nutrients and, hence, of life-forms like phytoplanktons. The Shelf receives its salt waters, its incoming currents and clouds, from the Gulfstream, which in turn comes from a continuum of shelf flows along the northeast coast of Brazil on into the Caribbean and Cayman Seas, then the Gulf of Mexico, heavily impacted by the Mississippi/Missouri and Rio Grande flows. Flows from the Arctic past Iceland, from Greenland and Hudson's Bay, impact on the Gulfstream and either plunge deep, to resurface at the Weddell Sea by Antarctica, or slip over the relatively shallow shelf of the Northeast Seaboard. The collision of cold waters from the North with warmer waters from the South determines much of what will happen to climate, or weather, in Europe.

At issue is what changes in these circulatory patterns result from human actions, e.g. carbon emissions, deforestation, changes in river run-off, river dams, phyto-plankton depletion in shelf / ocean waters, monoculture, desertification, etc. The assumption is that humanity has become by far the dominant influence on the physical environment, such that one can speak of the weather and associated events, like drought and flood, as 'man-made'. To deal with this reality of human impact, Ocean Earth zeroes in on smaller regions, always defined as ocean or saltwater basins, and works with them comparatively, to assess the health of the sea.

Sea Change is twinned with an exhibition in Rockford Art Museum, Illinois, entitled *Policy Models*, exploring issues of water-circulation and the effects of comparative river flows upon sea basins, e.g. the Mississippi / Yangtze rivers in relation to the Gulf of Mexico / East China sea, etc. An internet convergence between the two projects will also take place at Roger Smith gallery, New York, entitled *Mediation*.

PART TWO

Susan Derges, Liz Nicol, Jem Southam

Part Two of *Sea Change*, at Spacex Gallery, continues the theme of the relationship between land and sea, but addressed through the work of three locally-based artists who work with photography. All three artists are associated with the *Littoral* research group of the University of Plymouth, the title of which refers to the area between high and low tides where land and sea continually interact. Their different practices share many concerns, both as a means of documenting 'nature' and as an investigation into the idea of the shoreline as an edge between physical states, and thus also as a metaphor for different forms of knowledge. The body is implicit in this process of re-presentation, both in the experience of time passing and in the contrast of the 'hard' facts of observation with the more 'fluid' states of felt experience. There is also a shared criticality about the photographic process itself, and the physical production of an image on light sensitive paper.

Susan Derges will present two large photograms of waves, taken at night by the light of a flashlight, breaking directly onto sheets of photographic paper at Dawlish Warren, at the mouth of the Exe estuary. The larger work is a cibachrome triptych, measuring 24 feet long, while the other is a recently completed work never exhibited before.

Liz Nicol presents the *Figureheads* series, in which the process of sponge developing photographic prints is contrasted with the land-locked images of figureheads, removed from ships to reside in museums. The works include images taken over a twenty year period. Other recent work includes the *Fish Photographs* and cyanotypes linked to a theme of the coast.

Jem Southam, who was nominated for the Citibank Prize last year, presents large-format photographs of rock-falls taken over a period of years, documenting specific cliffs along the south coast of England, and their process of erosion. These include a series of new works taken in Lyme Bay, not previously exhibited, revealing the accelerating process of decay.

Sea Change is curated by Tom Trevor, and presented in collaboration with the **Centre for Contemporary Art & the Natural World**. Peter Fend's residency and *Part Two* of the exhibition has been supported by the art & design research unit of **University of Plymouth**. Additional support has been given by **South West Arts**. *Sea Change* is sponsored by **Service Point**, with additional support-in-kind from **Exeter Phoenix Media Centre**, **University of Exeter** and **SCA Packaging**. Spacex would like to thank the **Cornish Coastal Group**, **Michael Hue-Williams Gallery** and **American Fine Arts** for their assistance. The gallery would also like to thank **Graham Rich** (artist / seaman), **Jack Nott** (River & Canal Manager, ECC), **Peter Granger** (geologist / filmmaker) and **Ginny Russell** (filmmaker).

Spacex Gallery receives financial assistance from **South West Arts**, **Exeter City Council** and **Devon County Council**. Spacex *open season* at the Quay is supported by **Exeter City Council** and **Exeter Canal & Quay Trust**.

For further information please contact **Tom Trevor**, Artistic Director, or **Caroline Mawdsley**, Education & Outreach Officer at the gallery.