

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## OCEAN PROJECTS: HUTCHINSON AND OPPENHEIM

### Wall Label

Artists have recently been exploiting the landscape for its physical properties as well as for its metaphorical ones. The landscape, never merely a backdrop, is made to function as an integral part of a work, sometimes dictating its essential character. During the summer of 1969, Peter Hutchinson and Dennis Oppenheim began using the sea: Hutchinson worked under water off the shore of Cape Cod, Oppenheim on the beaches of Long Island. Together they went to the island of Tobago in the Caribbean, where they each did several projects in the ocean.

Hutchinson executed all his projects shown here under water at depths up to 40 feet. They range from the relatively permanent Underwater Dam to the ephemeral Flower Triangle. Floating Calabash, a project not documented in this exhibition, had a still briefer existence. The materials Hutchinson used most frequently were local plants and fruit, which he usually placed in simple arrangements. His long-standing interests in botany and in the bio-chemical processes of growth and decay are central to Arc: coral rocks and gas from decomposing calabashes (the inorganic and the organic) balance each other within the plastic bags and sustain the arc-shape of the work.

In addition to working on the ocean floor, Oppenheim used the surface of the water as well as its edge, the beach; his project Traps and Cowhide involves all three locations, within an eight-mile area. Removal-Transplant involves two locations. Crucial for the artist in the execution of this piece was the descending path of his own body from the cornfield 800 feet above sea level to the ocean floor 18 feet below. Almost all Oppenheim's projects are related visually by their use

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of contour as a formal device.

Frequently, as in Highway 20, he transfers a linear configuration from one context to another, often with radical change of scale. In Patch, the fabric conceals and at the same time traces the edge of a coral formation.

The color photographs included in this exhibition were taken by the artists themselves to document their projects. There were no spectators. These photographs and the stills from the film Back Track by Dennis Oppenheim and Anita Thacher are lent by John Gibson Commissions, Inc., New York.

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Sarah Weiner