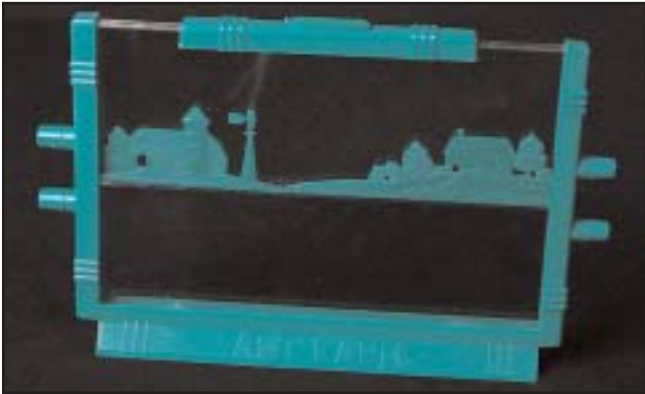


"Ant Farm was deeply committed to a revolution.....with a laughtrack."  
- Michael Sorkin, Architectural Record, Sept. 2003



1968

Ant Farm founded in San Francisco by Chip Lord, a graduate of the Tulane University School of Architecture and Doug Michels, a graduate of the Yale University School of Architecture. They described what they were doing as "underground architecture" to a friend who replied, "Oh, like the Ant Farm." The perfect metaphor also produced a logo – the Ant Farm toy and an official color – green.



1969

Michels and Lord are invited to teach in the School of Architecture at the University of Houston where they stage a series of enviro-events including **Astrodaze** and **Time Slice**, a summer workshop for architecture students.

The **Electronic Oasis** is an ongoing project in designing fantasy environments, often realized by collage. When invited to submit a piece to the Paris Biennial, Ant Farm sends a time capsule titled **The Electronic Oasis**. It's a cardboard box full of souvenirs (a french word) of 1969 Houston – NASA space images mixed with cowboy drag. In Paris, the box is opened and the souvenirs disappear. The empty box is exhibited and on the side it is labelled, "American". Enviroman is a prototype virtual reality machine staged for the camera as a photo shoot in a University of Houston science lab with Kelly Gloger and Ellen Goodman as the plugged in human subjects racing through cyber-space and visiting the **Electronic Oasis**.

Many of these ideas are synthesized in the **Expo 70 pavillion**, a proposal for a world's fair site in Osaka. Invited to do a performance/environment at a fund-raising event for Houston's Contemporary Art Museum, Ant Farm responds with **Plastic Businessman meets Space Cowboy** (aka Avenue to Infinity). This media environment combines





projected slides and live video and features seven technician/performers who keep the inflatables and the media moving.

In September Doug Michels attends the Paris Biennial and with a travelling companion performs **Make Love, Not War** under an American flag on the steps of the Musee de Arte Moderne.



1970

Ant Farm re-forms in Sausalito, California with the addition of Hudson Marquez, Joe Hall, Andy Shapiro, Kelly Gloger, Curtis Schreier, and Michael Wright. This marks the beginning of their involvement in **inflatables**.

Real©ity is a proposal for an instant city for rock festivals. Ant Farm is commissioned to build a prototype inflatable for a rock festival in Japan. The 50x50 pillow is the result, but the promoters of the festival bail out and Ant Farm keeps the pillow, renting it to Stewart Brand for the production of the Whole Earth Catalog supplement in the desert in late 1970.



Doug Michels returns to the US, is dubbed "Swami" by his colleagues and embarks on the design of the **Antioch Art Building** with Tom Morey of Southcoast. Amazingly the structure is realized as designed and opens in 1971 in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Back in Sausalito, Ant Farm publishes the **Inflatocookbook**, a how-to book consisting of loose pages collected in a hand-made vinyl binder. The first edition of 1000 sells out, and a second edition is printed by Rip Off Press in San Francisco. Twenty three years later, Roman Coppola uses the **Inflatocookbook** to build a 150 foot long inflatable in which he shoots a TV commercial for the Toyota Prius.



## 1971

Ant Farm designs the **Newman Media Studio** for San Francisco art collector Jim Newman. This project features the first convergence of architecture and media technology (telematics) in Ant Farm's architectural work.

In the spring, Lord, Hurr, Marquez, and Michels embark on the **Truckstop Network** tour in the Media Van. In New Haven they stage an impromptu performance at Yale's School of Art and Architecture in which aspiring lounge singer Johnny Romeo, whom they met working at a local car wash, sings "I Need Your Love" in front of an audience of surprised Yale students.

A series of slide lectures end with demonstrations of the nomadic lifestyle featuring **Ice-9**, the inflatable tent, alongside the Media Van. **The World's Longest Bridge** is also produced during the Truckstop Tour. Chip Lord and Doug Michels leave for Houston in November to begin the design of a vacation house for Marilyn Oshman. The Ant Farm warehouse in Sausalito is closed and Curtis's apartment in San Francisco becomes the West Coast office. **Inflatables Illustrated** is produced in late 1971 by Allan Rucker and Curtis Schreier

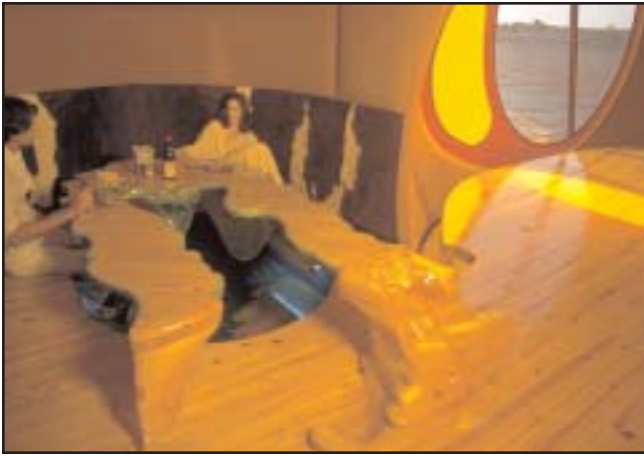


## 1972

Lord and Michels associate with Houston architect/builder Richard Jost to complete design and then begin construction of the **House of the Century**. They form Nationwide Builders with Southcoast friends Tom Morey, Pete Eichenlaub and Doug Hurr and break ground at MoJo Lake in early January. The design process continues throughout construction even as other projects intervene. Michels and Lord assemble **100 Television Sets** in the damp bog in front of the building site. Envisioned as an "evolutionary diagram" of the TV set, with three brand new sets in front and turned on to the three national networks **100 Television Sets** foreshadows **Cadillac Ranch**. But without the support of the Oshman family (funds) the piece is abandoned.

Inspired by their involvement with TVTV covering the 1972 political conventions on video, Lord, Michels and Schreier propose **Convention City**, a domed mega-structure with a giant TV studio at its center. They realize the project during a residency at Rice University working with architecture students.





In October, the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, commissions Ant Farm to create a time capsule for the opening of the museum's new building. Integral to this work is a video component, the result of six hours of taping amid the opening festivities and interviewing artists. The time capsule, a refrigerator stocked with ordinary household products, is designed to be opened in March 1984. However, the capsule will be damaged in a flash flood at the museum in 1977. Stored for many years at the studio of the Art Guys, a Houston-based artist team, it will finally be opened by Lord, Schreier, and Michels in September 2000, and documented on the tape, **Time Capsule 1972 – 1984**.



Work on the **House of the Century** continues and in Jan. 1973, Ant Farm wins a Design citation from Progressive Architecture magazine.



## 1973

Once the HOC is completed, Michels and Lord move back to San Francisco and open a studio at Pier 40. With Schreier and Marquez and National Endowment for the Arts support they embark on **2020 Vision**, a museum exhibition designed to present the future of the past as a basis for their own work. The exhibit is built around four key moments in design – 1939, the year of the New York World's Fair and a high water mark for the optimistic futurism of the 1930's exemplified in the General Motors pavilion; 1955 – the peak year for American auto design excess and the year in which the tail fin is introduced; 1984 – to represent the Orwellian vision of the future; and 2020 – the undefined far future. Ant Farm's **Dollhouse of the Future** is a playful working model of a house of the future, but it is just one part of a larger installation dominated by ready-mades. Gasoline pumps borrowed from Exxon greet the museum visitor, and four vehicles command the large gallery space: a 1939 Cord, a 1959 Cadillac, Ant Farm's Media van and a Lunar Rover lent by NASA. The Living room of the Present features a live video feed from NASA's orbiting space station. The Living room of the Present features a live video feed from NASA's orbiting space station.



Ant Farm ventures into the world of speculative commercial design with **Freedomland**, a shopping mall catering to teenagers, commissioned by Houston developer Kenneth Schnitzel. Under an inflatable roof, a free-form landscape (complete with cable television studio) invites new forms of leisure activity, combined with shopping. A videotape produced to make the presentation in Houston is a classic parody of the fifties industrial film. The project remains unbuilt.

Ant Farm took on real architectural commissions such as **The Poole Kitchen project**, a modest remodeling of a San Francisco house that used a brilliant red bubble window seat to expand the space of a small breakfast nook.



## 1974

Ant Farm members Lord, Marquez, and Michels meet Stanley Marsh 3 of Amarillo, Texas. Marsh invites a proposal for an artwork. Ant Farm proposes **Cadillac Ranch**, a monument to the American dream of mobility and excess. Ten used Cadillacs are purchased and positioned on Marsh property alongside Interstate 40, formerly Route 66. **Cadillac Ranch** is completed on June 19 and opened with a party. Marsh's Amarillo TV station KVII aids in the production of **The Cadillac Ranch Show**, a videotape that includes performance and commentary by Lord, Marquez, Michels, and Roger Dainton, as well as Marsh as Leo Wyoming.

**Dolphin Embassy** is first envisioned and drawn by Curtis Schreier as a floating research station for interspecies communication with dolphins. The project is published in Esquire magazine. Ant Farm continues to lecture at architecture schools and on a visit to the University of Michigan they propose and then perform an "opera" for cars titled **Horns and Headlights**.

Several proposals are made to various art institutions for an event in which a car would be driven through a wall of TV sets. The proposal, titled **Easy Money**, is rejected by each and every institution, so Ant Farm determines to produce it themselves. Tom Weinberg, a friend from Chicago and a co-founder of TVTV, puts up seed money to start the process.





1975

While plans are developing for **Media Burn** (the re-titled Easy Money) Uncle Buddy bolts together 7 pedal cars collected at flea markets and enters **7 Car Pile-up** in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's Artist Soapbox Derby. **Media Burn** is planned for July 4 at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. Schreier continues work on the Phantom Dream Car, a customized 1959 Cadillac Biarritz that is to be the central sculpture of the performance. Preparations include a press kit sent out to local TV and print outlets, the design and production of a souvenir booklet as well as t-shirts, and pre-production with an all volunteer group of six video crews. Produced by Lord, Michels, Schreier, Uncle Buddy, and Tom Weinberg, Media Burn takes place before 400 spectators and a substantial press corps. This marks Doug Hall's first appearance as the "Artist-President."



In August, Ant Farm (Lord, Michels, Schreier) and T.R. Uthco (Doug Hall, Diane Andrews Hall, Jody Procter), along with Stanley Marsh 3, head for Dallas to produce **The Eternal Frame**. This performance for video, shot on location in Dealey Plaza, is a faithful reenactment of the Kennedy assassination. Doug Hall plays the Artist-President, Doug Michels plays Jackie Kennedy, and Marsh plays Governor John Connally. An article commissioned by editor Doug Kinney at The National Lampoon helps finance the performance. Jim Newman is also a financial backer and comes along to shoot one of the super-8 films. The planned video artifact premieres on November 22, 1975, in San Francisco, and is exhibited as an installation at the Long Beach Museum the following year.





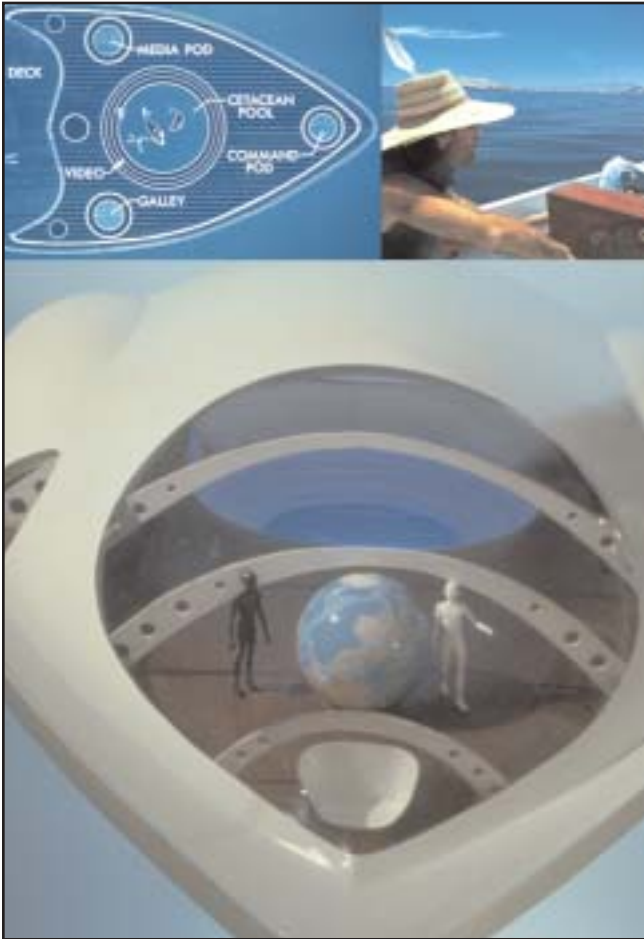
**TV Radiation Survey**, a pseudo-scientific performance is commissioned by Francis Ford Coppola for his CITY magazine and runs in the Aug. 3, 1975 issue along with a centerfold photo of Media Burn. September sees Lord, Michels, and Schreier burying a 1968 Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser station wagon at Artpark in Lewiston, New York. The car itself is the **Citizen's Time Capsule**, and contains a group of suitcases filled with magazines, household goods, and sundry toys and trinkets donated by local citizens. Intended for exhumation in the year 2000, the Capsule remains entombed as of this writing but is slated to be unearthed in August 2004 by the Castellani Museum and Artpark.

As Christmas approaches Ant Farm stages the anti-consumerist performance **Santa's Dead!** at the corner of third and Mission in San Francisco. Ten friends show up as a stuffed Santa is hung in effigy.

## 1976

Michels, Schreier, and Ant Farm auxiliary member Doug Hurr travel to Australia for the **Australian Tour**. Three principal performances are staged, two of which exist as video documentation in a tape called Off-Air Australia that combines Ant Farm-originated footage with media coverage of talk show appearances. CARmen, an opera for thirty-five autos, is performed in front of the Sydney Opera House, the signature architectural site of western Australia. Ned Telly and the Golden Spanner is executed on Sydney's Harbour Bridge. Making reference to the folk outlaw Ned Kelly, Ant Farm broadens the jest by using the gigantic "Golden Spanner" to symbolically unbolt the bridge. For their bicentennial performance on July 4, Ant Farm offers Future Cake, in which Ned Telly stands in an aquarium filled with simulated blood beside a massive ant-covered American flag birthday cake.

Lord stays behind in San Francisco to finish writing **AUTOMERICA** a personal history of the automobile as an influential cultural object. Lord and Schreier share design credit on the book which is published by E.P. Dutton in late 1976.



1977

Gray Whale Listening Station, along California's north coast and Expedición Delphin, in Baja California, Mexico, are early attempts at realizing the **Dolphin Embassy** project. A gallery exhibition of **Dolphin Embassy** drawings and models premieres at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Ambassador Michels, along with Hurr, returns to Sydney, Australia, to realize the Dolphin Embassy vision, and design the Oceania seacraft. Australians Alexandra Morphett and Bob Perry, who help disseminate Dolphin Embassy ideas to the greater public through creative mass-media events, join them. But the Dolphin Embassy is never launched due to financial constraints.



1978

Lord and Philip Garner perform **Chevrolet Training Film: The Remake** at La Mamelle, San Francisco, and at Some Serious Business, Los Angeles. The live performance (and subsequent videotape) is a restaging of an actual 1962 sales training film. Technically not an Ant Farm project, it is funded by a National Endowment for the Arts grant made to Ant Farm. **Chevrolet Training Film: The Remake** was performed and shown again at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1981

On August 7, fire destroys the Ant Farm studio at Pier 40, San Francisco. A majority of the group's slide and video documentation is saved, but little else survives. Ant Farm officially disbands.





## Ant Farm 1968–1978

Ant Farm 1968–1978 was curated by Constance Lewallen and Steve Seid and shown at the Berkeley Art Museum Jan. 21 – April 25, 2004. The exhibition subsequently traveled to the Santa Monica Museum of Art; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; The Blaffer gallery at the University of Houston; Zentrum für Kunst und Mediatechnologie, Germany; and Yale University Architecture gallery. . It is accompanied by a catalog, published by UC Press, that contains essays by Caroline Maniaque, Steve Seid, and Michael Sorkin; an interview with Chip Lord, Doug Michels, and Curtis Schreier by Constance Lewallen; and an excerpt from Chip Lord's AUTOMERICA.

Doug Michels died while the exhibition was being planned, in June 2003. Here he is pictured at the left between Chip Lord and Curtis Schreier, July, 2002. This work is dedicated to him.