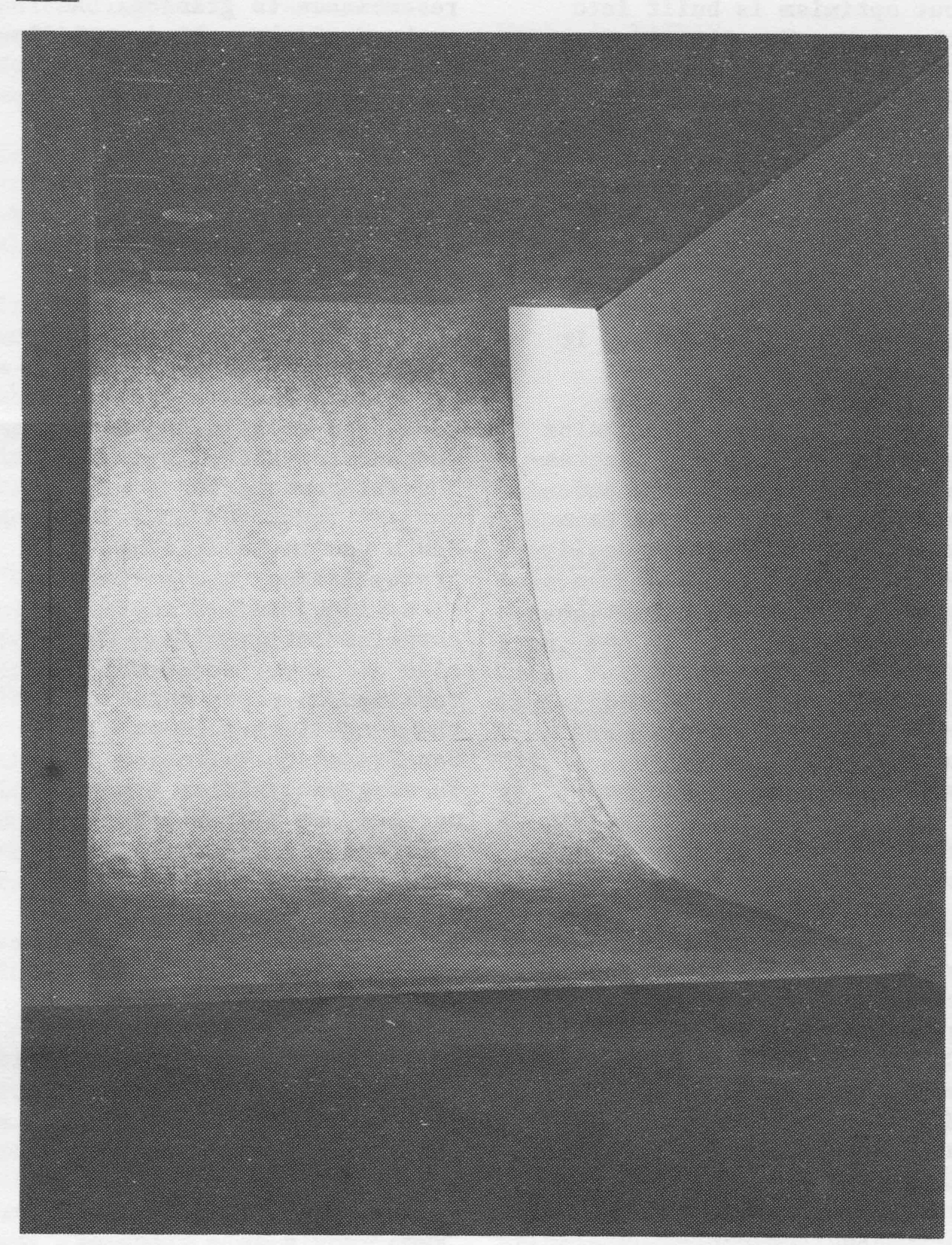
Ramp, 1980



Paul Kos' "Ramp" is a magic mountain which dares the viewer to attempt an ascent. The first few steps are easy, but then the 12-foot wide slope curves up sharply towards the 17-foot ceiling. It offers no holds; it is a pure friction, climb/sculpture.

At a certain point, Kos declares, "all humanity will start to slip." Failure, like morality, is inevitable, but optimism is built into the piece, Kos suggests, "because nobody knows that success is impossible. There's no fence, and the barrier that is gravity is hidden from view. Everyone would feel they could go higher than those who tried before."

Nor does the piece seem aesthetically forbidding. It is accessible to non-art oriented and to the nonclimber, although it remains slippery--ultimately inaccessible to both the weak and strong. "There are certain elitist elements that would yield rewards to those who search them out," Kos feels, "but archival inquiry is certainly not necessary. The problem isn't in the head; it's definitely physiological, and the accomplishment of the most daring, courageous person in any case will be only inches better than the norm."

"Ramp" is a transitional structure, from floor toward ceiling, from the domain of sculpture to that of painting. Unlike certain lean-to sculptures, like John McCracken's gleaming slabs and Richard Serra's rusted, Corten sheets, it is environmental, not merely a perceptual object. Kos' shaped canvas is a giant arc, sandwiched between two white walls; it is a corridor that

invites exploration.

Kos has sprayed his smooth, curved surface with Zolatone, an industrial, black-and-white-fleck paint composed of two immiscible bases. Normally used to coat ovens, Zolatone produces an all-over, randomized, matte image evocative of Pollock, Tobey, and Olitski.

Kos likes Zolatone's resemblance to granite. A weekend climber, he is serious enough to have taken a class with America's chief theoretician, Royal Robbins, and would like "Ramp" to be considered good climbing as well as good art, "an optimal/ minimal condensation into one clean area of all possible cruxes." (A crux is a key move in an ascent, although in Kos' personal iconography it would also be a crucial moment, a crossroads, an instance of suffering toward possible redemption.)

Kos began investigating grainy images in experiments with video "snow," another correlate of granite. He also did a series of wall rubbings on paper taped to the rough interiors of his San Francisco Victorian. These granularities could be matched, he discovered, by Zolatone; his painting therefore produces the facsimile of a huge, carved granite slide.

While Pollock himself entered the arena of his canvas, Kos admits the viewer. Footprints (skidmarks) are an essential part of "Ramp," a record of the viewer's adventure, a measure of cumulative achievement. Seen in cross section, "Ramp" would be a graph of that collective ambition.

The line of ultimate

ascent may even take the shape of a curve, if as Kos suspects, some canny climbers realize that the juncture of wall and floor would offer increased friction and therefore the possibility of climbing higher along the sides.

In an earlier Platonic pitch at the Everson Museum, Syracuse, in 1978, Kos built a non-walk-up ramp, which diagonally traversed a 35-foot wall, narrowing towards nothingness as it neared the ceiling.

In several of his video installations, Kos has used the monitor as bait to lure the viewer into the work.

In "Tokyo Rose" (1975) the monitor, contained within a colossal metal fly trap, showed Marlene Kos, made up as Tokyo Rose, trying to induce "American flyboys" to give up their struggle and fall into her trap.

"You have to approach these pieces," Kos explains, "in order to understand them, in order to complete them.

Then all of a sudden, everything fits together, although then it's too late to resist. It's like a challenge that hopefully cannot be refused, the way a kid will always take a dare."

Paul Kos was born in Rock
Springs, Wyoming, in 1942.
He attended Georgetown
University and received a
B.F.A. from the San Francisco
Art Institute in 1965 and an
M.F.A. in 1967. He taught
at the University of Santa
Clara from 1969-1977 and
currently teaches performance
and video at the San Francisco
Art Institute. He has
received two National
Endowments. He is currently

represented by the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Kos lives with his wife and two children in San Francisco.

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Works in MATRIX:

Ramp, 1980, wooden construction with Zolatone paint surface.

Selected one-person exhibitions:
Richmond Art Gallery, CA,
Participationkinetics, '69;
DeSaisset Art Gallery and
Museum, Santa Clara, CA,
Fish, Fox, Kos '71; Gallery
Reese Palley, NYC '72; Leo
Castelli Gallery, NYC '75 &'76;
Long Beach Museum of Art, CA
'77; Everson Museum, Syracuse,
NY '78; University Art Museum,
Berkeley, Video Screenings
Series '79.

Selected group exhibitions:
Richmond Art Center, CA,
Return of Abstract Expression—
ism '69; University Art Museum,
Berkeley, The Eighties '70;
Museum of Conceptual Art, San
Francisco, Sound Sculpture As
'70; 112 Greene Street, NYC,
Video Works '71; Newport
Harbor Art Museum, CA, The San
Francisco Performance '72;
Everson Museum, Syracuse, NY,
Video West One '72; Everson
Museum, Syracuse, NY, Circuit

'73; Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, All Night Sculptures '73; Rome, Contemporanea '74; Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, PA, Video Art '75; Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, The Whitney Biennial '75; Fort Worth Art Museum, TX, Exchange DFW/SFO '75; Palais du Tokyo, Paris, Paris Biennale '77; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Space/ Time/Sound 1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area '79.

Selected Bibliography about Kos:

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Albright, Thomas,
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"Paul Kos Sculptures,"
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