

ARTFORUM

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ANT FARM, a San Francisco-based collective, has produced several works, featuring that American culture icon—the automobile. In 1974 Ant Farm created the *Cadillac Ranch*, 10 vintage Cadillacs (1948–1962) planted nose down alongside Route 66 in Amarillo, Texas. A less sedate project, *Media Burn*, consisted of a specially re-vamped Cadillac crashing through a barricade of burning television sets in the parking lot of San Francisco's Cow Palace in 1975. Ant Farm has lovingly documented its own projects as well as the heyday of the automotive industry in *Automerica*, "a trip down U.S. Highways from World War II to the Future."

Chevrolet Training Film: The Remake occurs on a stage with video screen, desk, and in the corner a painted plywood facsimile of the rear end of a Bel Air Chevrolet. The performance begins with a videotape showing a vintage salesman's training film produced by Chevrolet. When the film cuts to a demonstration, the live performance begins. The mise-en-scene revolves around Dick, played by Chip Lord, trying to trade in his 1959 Chevrolet for a new model. Bob, a local salesman played by Phil Garner, is \$42 higher than a competitive dealer, but through a series of deliberately confusing calculations, Bob convinces Dick to buy the car from him for \$22 more than the competitor's bid. With the agreement consummated, the performance reverts back to the video, where the film narrator comments on the interaction.

Like Ant Farm's other works, *The Remake* has strong elements of satire and self-effacing comedy. Running less than 30 minutes, the characterizations are well developed, and the action, centering around the salesman's ploys, proceeds at a rapid pace—the reasoning and logic becoming more unrealistic as the performance draws to its climax. The selection of this particular film as the core involves not only its American automobilia content, but also the viewpoint that selling is art.

For example, in the final video clip the narrator refers to the salesman as "a real artist," and in analyzing the interaction, he identifies "the magnificent moment." "The magnificent moment," it seems, is not too distant from the photographic decisive moment, and the "real artist" is the individual who can persist in pulling off a ruse by coercing another person to accept his point of view. *The Remake* uses the automobile icon and tradition not only as a statement about the consumer culture, but also about art and artists.

The most provocative aspect of Ant Farm's work is its ability to raise issues without becoming dogmatic. The "Farmers," mostly in their 30s, are nostalgically linked to the late 1950s and early 1960s automobile era. But they understand that the wonderful excessiveness of that period has no place now or in the future, and they commemorate the ambiguous role of the car in American culture. Ant Farm conveys the ambivalent relationship we all have with the automobile with a polished sense of humor and craftsmanship.



Ant Farm, *Chevrolet Training Film: The Remake*, 1978 performance at La Marnelle.