

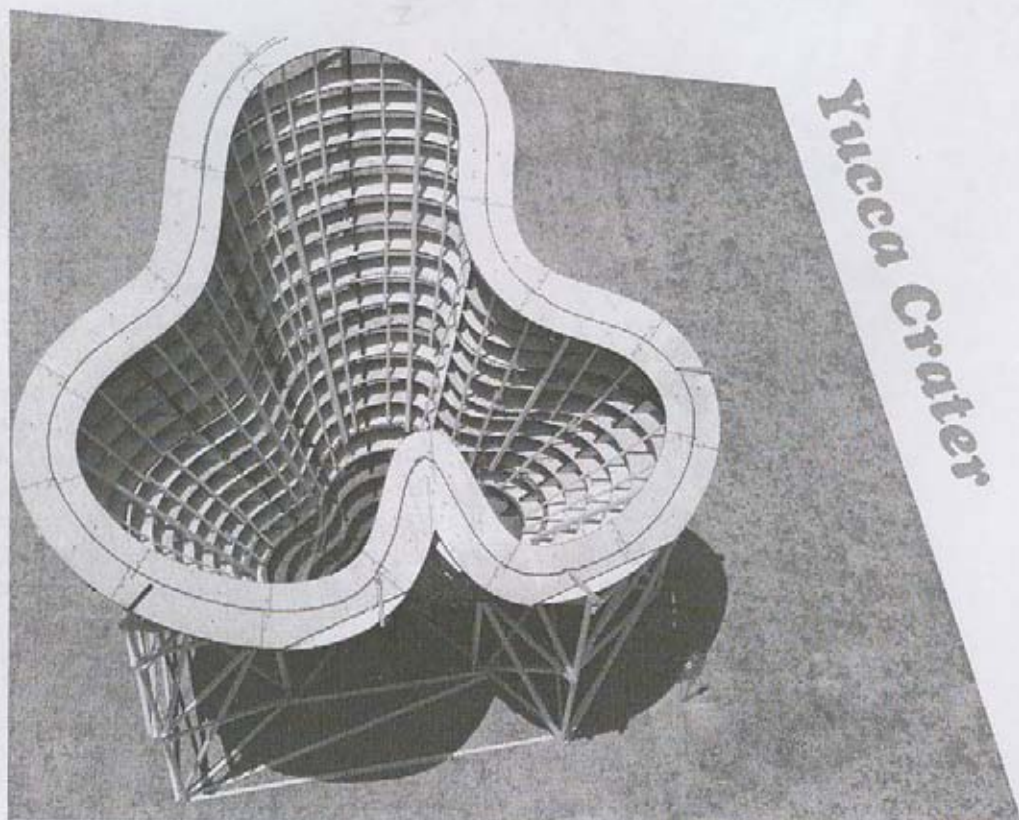
hdts

2011



Ball-Nogues Studio

This elevated crater and its aquatic basin are a nod to the abandoned suburban swimming pools scattered across the Mojave. While the piece is decidedly man-made, it recalls the works of the land art movement by using materials at hand to construct the final product. By this, we mean that the massive structural formwork of Yucca Crater is the by-product of another Ball Nogues work: Talus Dome. Situated along the embankment of a freeway in Edmonton, Alberta, Talus Dome is an enormous mound constructed of stainless steel spheres. The elaborate formwork we will use to assemble Talus Dome is a feat of design and engineering in its own right. Our plan is to repurpose the formwork for High Desert Test Sites to become Yucca Crater.



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I am an architect, but I dropped out of the architecture scene in the 1990's out of sheer boredom with the formalist paradigm that to this day continues to be the dominant model for new architecture. I found much smarter and more radical practices and production in art at the time, and learned to ask more interesting questions of my own work (-some of which I still have not answered). In fact, Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley's 1992 video Heidi was one of the things that made it impossible for me to even make architecture for almost ten years. There was just no way to care about the kind of architecture that was being made at the time- big abstract formalist sculpture essentially- after seeing something like Heidi frightfully and humorously tearing apart conventions of constructed domestic space, the myth of formal purity, and ideals of privacy. Countless other artworks since then have also set the bar very high and suggested other new approaches, while the basic issues of architecture - everyday functionality and the transformation it fosters, the relationship between building and nature, and the intersection between private life and public culture- are always what I end up working with.

Robert Stone

I have seen HDTS projects over the years that have succeeded or failed with sometimes equal profundity and beauty in the uncontained culture and environment of the desert. I've seen projects wither in the face of cultural, political, natural and economic systems that we sometimes shorthand in our studios and abstract in galleries. I have also seen small, smart gestures transformed and amplified by the surrounding situation into powerful expressions of truth and beauty. I took on the role of curator out of admiration for HDTS and because I hoped I could find and support an underground in architecture that is less concerned with generating forms, and that might bring new strategies for engagement of the situation in all of its complexity. I am still hopeful.

This time, Ball-Nogues brings us Yucca Crater. It is the left-over formwork materials from an officially sponsored project 2,000 miles away in Canada, deposited in the desert with only the slightest suggestion of plausible functionality. It is literally the "form" that was used to make the abstract "formalist" object that is so much the state of things in architecture. But sometimes, the most interesting part ends up in the trash. And while formalist architecture pretends completeness and finality based on the "playing out" of real or imaginary generative systems, this leftover form is incomplete without it's "male" component, but engages the viewer in questions about what happens next- What function can it take on? How will it break down over time? Is it recycling or littering? What does it mean? This more open, experimental approach points in a direction which, among many others, I hope to see more architects explore.

