



Donald R. and Joan F. Beall  
**Center for Art + Technology**  
University of California, Irvine



**EXHIBITION:**        ***INFLATABLE BODIES***  
                              ***Chico MacMurtrie/Amorphic Robot Works***  
                              Organized by David Familian

**DATES:**                February 3 – May 7, 2011 (Closed March 14-19)

**LOCATION:**            The Beall Center for Art + Technology, UC Irvine

**EVENTS:**

**ARTIST RECEPTION:** Thursday, February 3, 2011, 6:00-9:00pm

**BOXED MUSIC EVENT:** Thursday, March 10, 2011, 6:00-9:00pm

**FAMILY DAY:** Saturday, April, 13, 11:00am-3:00pm

**ADDRESS:**

Beall Center for Art + Technology  
University of California, Irvine  
Claire Trevor School of the Arts  
712 Arts Plaza  
Irvine, CA 92697-2775  
[www.beallcenter.uci.edu](http://www.beallcenter.uci.edu)

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(949) 824-6206

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**HOURS:**

Tuesday - Wednesday, 12 – 5 pm

Thursday - Saturday, 12 – 8 pm

Celebrating 10 years





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**THE BEALL CENTER FOR ART + TECHNOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE EXHIBITS INNOVATIVE NEW-MEDIA ARTWORKS THAT USE THE LATEST EXPERIMENTAL ARTISTIC AND SCIENTIFIC DIGITAL, AUDIO, AND VISUAL TECHNOLOGY.**

***INFLATABLE BODIES* BY ARTIST CHICO MACMURTRIE AND AMORPHIC ROBOT WORKS WILL BE ON VIEW AT THE BEALL CENTER FROM FEBRUARY 3 - MAY 7, 2011. MEET THE ARTIST AT THE PUBLIC OPENING RECEPTION ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 6PM – 9PM.**

### **ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY**

Chico MacMurtrie was born in New Mexico in 1961. He received his B.F.A. from the University of Arizona and an M.F.A. in New Forms and Concepts from the University of California at Los Angeles. Since 1989, MacMurtrie has exhibited in more than 20 countries worldwide, receiving support from more than 15 national, local, and international granting agencies, and 30 corporate sponsors. His awards include five grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and his work has been the subject of numerous international broadcasts and texts including the BBC's *Pandemonium*, the Discovery Channel's *The Next Step*, and Mark Dery's book *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century*.

Chico acts as the Artistic Director of Amorphic Robot Works (ARW), a collective he founded in 1991, consisting of artists and engineers who help in the realization of his work. Since that time, his investigations have resulted in the creation of more than 250 mechanical sculptures that assume anthropomorphic and abstract forms.

During the past twenty years MacMurtrie's kinetic, monumental sculptural installations have evolved from different representations of the human body and various forms of nature into his current, more abstract works such as *Inner Space*, which is having its United States premiere in this exhibition. In his sculpture, MacMurtrie utilizes various technologies to create the illusion of a live object or living being: using computational mechanisms to achieve a very subtle level of control and movement.

Since 1994 MacMurtrie has created large-scale robotic installations and performances. His 20-meter-long *Amorphic Landscape* (2000) is an organic environment engineered to provide both a physical and narrative structure for more than 100 individual robots. This environment, however, is more than a passive context for its robotic inhabitants, *The Landscape* is, itself, a robotic form capable of movement and transformation. One-hour theatrical performances of *The Landscape* depict the formation of the earth, the birth and rise of creatures and communication, the degradation of the environment, and the many intervening life cycles in which everything takes part.

Celebrating 10 years





After completing this 15-year body of work, MacMurtrie then progressed to *Skeletal Reflections* (2000): a closed loop, servo-controlled humanoid robotic form that is capable of performing moments in Art History, triggered by the viewer's gestures.

In 2007 Amorphic Robot Works had the opportunity to use its accumulated experience to create the *Totemobile*. ARW hand-formed an aluminum 1963 Citroën DS that transforms as it stretches 60-feet into the air. The initial form of the robotic sculpture belies the existence of nearly 24 interdependent machines of varying aesthetic and functional purpose. As the sculpture opens and rises, these metal and inflatable machines give voice to varying modes of mobile abstraction that develop throughout the growth and final "blooming" of the monumental totem.

In 2006 MacMurtrie started a new body of inflatable work in response to the logistic, artistic, and psychological limitations inherent in the use of heavy, rigid materials in interactive sculpture. In place of the cumbersome metal found in standard robotics, the *Inflatable Bodies* instead arise from high-tensile, inflatable, fabric "skeletons" which are shapeless until inflated with air.

Using this new technology, ARW has created sculptural forms such as trees, birds, and abstract shapes inspired by biological forms. MacMurtrie's sculptures expand, contract and oscillate through various configurations, creating the illusion of living objects.

*Inner Space* and *Biomorphic Wall* evoke the magnification of a microscopic living form, parts of our own bodies, or the reflection of the forms we have built around it, and gives us the opportunity to witness our direct influence upon such forms. When the work is at rest and deflated, it remains folded back on itself. As it inflates and extends in response to audience provocation, the articulated forms take various shapes. The percussive sounds of the clicking valves, the air flow and the tightening of the sculptural skin surrounding you generates part of your experience – ultimately the work displays a composition determined through its interaction with the viewers.

MacMurtrie states, "As part of my interest in exploring the parallels between living things, machines and architecture, *Inner Space* and *Biomorphic Wall* attempt to cross the boundaries between internal and external spaces, and between 'art' and 'audience'. By building on the visual commonalities between what we build and what we are built of, and our influence as actors on both, my works in Inflatable Architecture attempt to make us aware of the symbioses that we are embedded within."

## ABOUT ARW

Amorphic Robot Works is a collaborative group of artists, technicians, and programmers who create multi-faceted machine-sculptures that interact in their uniquely designed environments. The work involves a kinesthetic inquiry into the human condition, which





has resulted in the creation of more than 250 mechanical sculptures that assume anthropomorphic and abstract forms. Collaborators include Brian Kane whose work on this exhibition marks 20-years of collaboration with ARW; Tym Twillman who has been developing the sensing and Arduino based code over the last two years; and Frank Hausman who continues his 20 years of contribution on electronics and Show control.

In the last ten years, ARW has expanded in many new and exciting directions, growing to encompass tours abroad, commissioned works, and robot-building workshops for children, while still emphasizing gallery exhibitions and the development of new pieces. Chico and all Amorphic Robot Works endeavors are currently based in his studio in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Chico MacMurtire is represented by Artistic Agent, Luise Kaunhert.

## LIST OF WORKS

### ***Birds*** (2008)

*Birds* was the first multi-sculpture installation using Amorphic Robot Works' (ARW's) new *Inflatable Bodies* technology. The work consists of ten large, white fabric shapes that recall the simplest line drawing of a bird, hanging limp and lifeless from the ceiling at eye level.

As viewers enter the room, the tapered, joined cone-shapes gradually inflate with air, lengthen and take form, eventually reaching out with a graceful wingspan, robust with life. The *Birds* then begin their stationary journey with a slow, elegant flapping motion, all ten in a randomly generated sequence. The pneumatic mechanism that animates the work creates a constant, rhythmic breathing sound.

Moving through the installation allows you to find various compositions reminiscent of natural formations: compositions that change over the life cycle of the work. As in other natural organizations, however, the viewers' presence affects the work's life cycle, putting pressure on the system that may prematurely end the lives of the creatures on exhibition.

The exhibit gives responsibility to each person entering. As more humans enter the space, the *Birds* begin to accumulate air, filling their bodies as if human presence gives them life. The open, physically accessible nature of the installation gives the impression that visitors are free to roam within the *Birds'* space, but if the viewers encroach upon their space excessively, a death cycle is triggered. Once one *Bird* is infected, it begins to corrupt the others' behaviors, and soon all the *Birds* have prematurely ended their life cycles. If, however, the audience manages to respect the *Birds'* personal space, they will have an opportunity to witness the complete performance.

The shape of the installation as a whole can be varied in response to the venue, or the semantic or visual intent of the artist for a given show. The first installation of *Sixteen*





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*Birds*, for example, was patterned after the view of Adelaide, Australia from the air. The River Murray, renowned for its beautiful, curving shapes, is a river that is now dying because of the over-development surrounding it. In the Adelaide installation, the robotic *Birds* are suspended from their control system in a contour that traced the shape drawn by the River Murray upon the earth, allowing the river to serve as metaphor for the foundation of the *Birds'* lives.

### ***Inner Space*** (2010)

*Inner Space*, the third work from the Inflatable Architectural Body series, attempts to fully involve the audience in the inner workings of the inflatable machine environment. This work creates individual experiences of time and space, from the inside and the outside. Once the machine has invited you in and you accept by entering, you become a sculptural element to the audience outside as you are immersed in the inner space.

The inflatable robotic structure of *Inner Space* is meant to be installed in a physically accessible location. When the work is at rest and deflated, it remains folded back on itself. As it inflates and extends in response to audience provocation, the articulated form takes various shapes, much like a live system. The percussive sounds of the clicking valves, the air flow and crinkling sound of the extreme tightening of the skin of the tubes surrounding you, generates part of your experience, ultimately displaying a composition determined through its interaction with the viewers. *Inner Space* evokes the magnification of a microscopic living form, parts of our own bodies or the reflection of the forms we have built around it and gives us the opportunity to witness our direct influence upon such forms.

*Inner Space* was developed in a 10-day workshop in Skopje, Macedonia with 12 local participants. The work was directed by Chico MacMurtrie, with the support of CEC Artslink; Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Ss, Cyril and Methodius in Skopje; and the Visual Cultural Center, Euro-Balkan Institute. A subsequent exhibition at the National Gallery of Macedonia was curated by Melentie Pandilovski with support from the Museum of Contemporary Art of Skopje.

### ***BioMorphic Wall*** (2010)

A new work of ARW's & MacMurtrie's Inflatable Architectural Body series premiering at the Beall Center for Art + Technology in the exhibition *Inflatable Bodies*.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, IMAGES, AND RESOURCES**

[www.beallcenter.uci.edu](http://www.beallcenter.uci.edu)

<http://amorphicrobotworks.org/works/index.htm>

Artistic Agent Luise Kaunert: [luisekaunert@gmail.com](mailto:luisekaunert@gmail.com)

*Tours by Beall Interns are available free of charge during business hours*

*Private group tours available by appointment: contact the Beall Center at (949)824-6206.*

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*Birds* as installed in Adelaide, Australia's Experimental Art Foundation. Their configuration echos the flow of Australia's River Murray. Photo: ARW



*Inner Space* as shown in The National Gallery of Macedonia, Cifte Amam, Skopje in 2010. Photo: ARW