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(Lawrence Alloway)

To the access problem of ecological art can be added the patronage problem of getting it made at all. Who will fund, for example, "an estuarial farming system in the midst of the Colorado desert, using a mix of waters from the All-American Canal, the Pacific Ocean and the Salton Sea"? That is a brief description of Newton Harrison's proposal for "The Fourth Lagoon," one of two major projects at the Ronald Feldman Gallery (until December 28). It is visualized with maps, photographs and a text that outlines in convincing detail the tasks involved and the procedures to achieve them. The other big project is a "Meditation On the Condition of The River Seine and The Excavation of Les Halles." It is important to realize that such proposals are absolutely in earnest. They are not like the urban transformations proposed by the Surrealists, such as Paul Eluard on the Arc de Triomphe: "Lay it down and make it the most beautiful pissotière in France." Harrison's scale is enormous but his scenarios read convincingly. "The waterflow system can be designed to present a generally placid surface or to generate turbulence or even a fountain." Harrison is an artist aiming at the scale of macro-aesthetics with systems of information sufficiently sophisticated to make it believable. He has not lost, however, any of the traditional artistic gift of image-making. His proposals are not only an interim step between the conception of a work and its realization. The complexities of the maps and the codes he uses are lyrically handled to make an ambiguous exchange between site and metaphor, real world and imagined world. □