



# Expression

*"Be sure to take your paint spray cans with you, as the purpose of this monument is to let the audience participate in it. You can simply write down your name, or if you have an inspiring message, leave it on one of the cars for the other visitors to read (or to erase)."*

—Official Cadillac Ranch website

*Nancy at the Cadillac Ranch, this past summer.*

**O**n my countless trips back and forth to New Mexico over the years, I have witnessed the ever-changing artistic expression of the Cadillac Ranch, an art installation of graffiti-covered cars just off the highway outside Amarillo, Texas. The cars line the horizon, parallel to I-40 on a frontage road along the course of old Route 66.

The Cadillac Ranch consists of a row of ten Cadillac automobiles (1949–1963) half-buried nose-down at the same angle as the pyramids in Egypt. Supposedly an homage to the American automobile, it was created in 1974 by Stanley Marsh III, a local eccentric millionaire who owns the land on which it sits, and the Ant Farm, a San Francisco art collective. According to the Cadillac Ranch website, the Cadillac was the automobile of choice for the installation because of its prestige and "radical styling idea, the tail fin."

Perhaps the first monument to America's love of the automobile,

Cadillac Ranch has inspired other car-based installations such as Carhenge in Alliance, Nebraska (see page 24 of this issue), and Cars-on-a-Spike in Berwyn, Illinois. Maybe today's popular art form of the art car is due, at least in part, to the Cadillac Ranch's example. The automobile is certainly still used as a means of personal expression.

At Cadillac Ranch, the cars are set back a bit from the highway, but you can park along the frontage road and walk through an opening in the fence out to the site. As we parked our car this visit, we were surprised to see whole families, including small children, arming themselves with cans of spray paint. We had to dodge over-exuberant spray painters adding their own personal expressions. Though we certainly appreciated these parents' support of their children's artistic efforts, we found ourselves considering how we, as art teachers, could better encourage rich and meaningful artistic expression in our students.

Is there any area of schooling where students are better able to express themselves than through art? I think not. Yet the spray can approach (throwing paint at a surface) is not enough. We need to challenge students to express themselves through meaningful art problems that encourage both thoughtful and emotional responses. Who can do that better than dedicated art teachers?

## WEBSITES

[www.libertysoftware.be/cml/cadillacranch/crmain.htm](http://www.libertysoftware.be/cml/cadillacranch/crmain.htm)  
[www.carhenge.com](http://www.carhenge.com)  
[www.orangeshow.org/artcar.html](http://www.orangeshow.org/artcar.html)  
[www.artcarparade.com](http://www.artcarparade.com)

*Nancy Walkup*

Nancy Walkup, Editor