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National College of Art and Design

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"The lone and level sands slip far away."_
An appraisal of the work of The Boyle Family and
Michael Heizer

By

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INTRODUCTION

1

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desertNear them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which now survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty and despair!"
Nothing besides remains round the decay
of that colossal wreck
Boundless and bare
The lone and level sands slip far away

OZYMANDIAS — Percy Bysshe Shelley

As humans we don't accept the inevitable fact of our death. Like all other matter in the world, we most certainly will decay. In this flight from decay we give intimate attention to our bodies, this attention is in direct proportion to our denial and dissociation from our entrails and our waste. We have also been unable to deal with the world's collective waste. We protest in today's environmentally friendly era that our industries are pouring their liquid and gases, into our soils, seas and our air. Yet we are all guilty. We throw garbage "away". It has been suggested by Jackie Brookner that we are using the earth "as the recipient of our collective rage against the burdens and limitations of our physical nature, our human condition; that our anthropocentric culture's relentless subordination of the natural world to human desires, our fixation with power and control, is an acting out of our rage and frustration — that we are lashing out at the earth as the matrix of our materiality" (Brookner, 1992, p.8)

We have lost any emotional rapport with the natural world. Our attitude towards the world in which we are part has become one of apathy.

In the past we have made much of the idea of art as a mirror (reflecting the times); we have had art as a hammer (social protest); we have had art as furniture (something nice to hang on walls); and we have had art as an inner search for self. There is another kind of art however, that speaks of the power of connectedness and establishes bonds. Art that calls us into a sort of relationship with what it represents. Art that shows our relationship with the earth and our doings in the most honest form available. It presents us with the reality: That we are only part of this earth and not its ruler. We claim an assuming control over nature and in doing so have become alienated from the world that is surrounding us.

This is not a thesis on social and ecological correctness. I am like most people. I don't like to be lectured. Instead it focuses on two artists, neither of whom have set out to ask "Who's side are you on?". Their aims have not been directed to make us aware of our planet's demise. Instead their work, through no greater plan on their part, tells a story that puts our place on this earth into perspective. I feel that as their work did not set out to display the beauty and diversity of our surrounding landscape as have other artists of their time, such as Nancy Holt, Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, that they have succeeded in stimulating their audiences imagination and thoughts, without the burden of trying to.

The work of The Boyle Family and that of Michael Heizer undoubtedly utilises the land. Both The Boyle Family's and Michael Heizer's work stems from the 1960's. This was a time when many artists began to forsake conventional painting and sculpture, as did they both. The landscape has proved to be the most enduring of artistic inspirations. But with the industrial



Fig. 1 Rain, Steam and Speed-the Great Western Railway.
Oil on canvas, 91x11cm. R.A. 1844.
By Turner.



revolution in the nineteenth century there was an increased emphasis on the power of machinery, technology and its acceptance as part of our new and improved world. A reflection of his time, Turner's painting Rain Steam and Speed The Great Western Railway, 1844, (Fig. 1) is an example of nineteenth century optimism towards the power of man's machines. By now our dependency on industry has become a runaway force and our efforts to contain it seem feeble. Now relentless advertising campaigns to increase our consumerism; we have been tunnelled into a different world and not the world we actually live in. It is this increased consumerism which has led many artists to question their position as artists in such a society. Many ^{have} rejected increasingly capitalist galleries and museums as an outlet for their work seen as less tangible to the art world _ The land.

Michael Heizer wrote in 1969, soon after working in the Nevada desert, that

"the position of the art as malleable barter exchange item falters as the cumulative economic structure gluts. The museums and collections are stuffed, the floors are sagging but the real space still exists" (Heizer, 1969, p.11)

Both American and British artists in the 1960's began to explore the possibilities of working within the landscape.

" Rather than representing in paint, on canvas or in the rhythms of steel, a handful of artists chose to enter the landscape itself, to use its materials and work with its salient features"(Beardsley, 1989, p.7)

Depicting landscape was out, "Engaging" became the motive. Although many of these artworks produced in the late Sixties and Seventies referred to the nature, the artists' methods and styles and most importantly, intentions, varied widely. Many originally thought to be anti-urban are now seen to be quite the opposite.

In choosing to discuss and evaluate the work of The Boyle Family and Michael Heizer I hope to show their work's value in placing man in relationship with his surroundings. Each of their work has different objectives. The Boyles have set out to record the facts of the surface of the world, with no emotional input visible in their finished pieces. Their work is purely narrative, as they take impressions from the land, and recreate them as accurately as possible. Simply recording. Michael Heizer's work, on the other hand is bold and impressive in scale and demands attention. The land is merely the material he uses for his work. He is determined to make impressions on or in the land and does not deny that he would prefer if the surrounding landscapes were not visible in order that you should focus on his work. He openly competes with nature for your attention.

Yet both of these artists' works involves the viewer taking an abnormal view. Like being asked to stand on a table in a familiar room, and on standing on the table, you look around and you see the room as you have never seen it before.

The Boyle Family record reality, the reality of a surface that we rarely look at twice, even though it's under our feet. Their recordings show how man builds and manipulates the earth's surfaces, and yet how nature is never defeated. Nature takes claim to the land eventually.

Michael Heizer's work takes from the land, and nature takes it back. In order for Heizer's work to survive longer, it must be bigger and so he builds bigger and higher. But inevitably nature will reclaim his work again. Yet because of the scale of some of his works, they must be viewed from above, in the sky. The big can look so small from up there.

CHAPTER ONE

6

The Boyle Family consists of Mark Boyle, Joan Hill, and their children, Sebastian and Georgia. Initially the Boyles' work was exhibited under Mark Boyle's name although it was both the work of Mark Boyle and Joan Hill. This was done as, at the time their professional careers started, Joan Hills, had been working as a film editor in Edinburgh. Meanwhile Mark Boyle was offered a show in the Traverse Gallery during the Edinburgh Festival in 1963. The exhibition was launched under his name and when they were working together full time, it was seen as difficult to change it. At the time, the Boyles felt it was to their advantage to leave it. "because the world actually wanted - maybe still wants to believe - in a single preferably male obsessed artist"(Lydiate, 1986, p.6)

In the years that followed, their family grew up and were helping more and more:

"Sebastian and Georgia have been working with us ever since they were big enough to find a screwdriver, and increasingly as the years went by, became more and more involved in it until they are absolutely full-time and fully committed."(Lydiate ,1986 ,p.9) and so it seemed that they should call themselves "The Boyle Family" .

Although the techniques and media have varied throughout the years, essentially their work has tried to achieve the same objective throughout - to stimulate the senses. They have been like apprentices to themselves. Constantly improving on their methods and their skills as they have gone on. From their first random studies of a demolition site in 1964 at Northland Road, Sheperds Bush in London, where they made a frame from a piece of board found on site. Wherever the frame landed , that would be their composition. By way of a grid system, they would transfer and fix down onto the board all the materials that had been



Fig. 2 Norland Road Study (detail), 1964,
Mixed media, 81x59x15 cm.
By Mark Boyle and Joan Hills.

Fig.3 Detail of Westminster Study with curved Kurb,
Parking Line, Tarmacadam, Cobbles e.t.c., 1971.



Fig.4 Westminster Study with curved Kurb,
Parking Line, Tarmacadam, Cobbles e.t.c., 1971.
On display at Ulster Museum, Belfast, January 1995.



within the frame (Fig.2). Mark Boyle wrote of how he found this method crude and unsatisfactory:

" I was interested in using everything but at the time Junk was all that was available to me."(M. Boyle, 1970, Appendix 1)

Although unhappy with the results, it was the concept and preferably compositions found through random selection, which excited the Boyles. Methods changed. No longer did they use boards found on site but worked on predetermined square boards. Size had no reasoning-

"size was only dictated by the amount of wall space available."(Lydiate, 1986, p.8)

By 1965 they had developed a new method which gave them the results they desired. It was with the use of a plastically moulded shell called 'Epikote' that they began to produce the kind of work that they are still producing in the Nineties.

Now, after the site is randomly selected, a cast is taken from its surface. This gives the negative image of its surface. A cast is then taken from the negative image to produce a positive image of the site's surface. The method of this random selection I will refer to later. A certain amount of collage may be used on these pieces, such as a cigarette butt and so on, to add to the illusion of the piece, (e.g. (Fig.3). As the years have gone on, their technical knowledge has increased and less collage is used. Their techniques for making their pieces are closely guarded, but what is known through Colin Gardner's review (1988) is that they do use a loose surface layer of earth, sand or street debris. This they attach to the painted fibreglass simulation (i.e. cast).

The earth e.t.c.. is fixed, using a thin layer of invisible resin. The paint used on the fibreglass is made by the Boyle Family themselves. This is painted onto the back of the cast so the colours can be seen through the transparent cast. This way the paint's own qualities do not interfere with those of the cast's surfaces. When finished, the piece would hang vertically like a painting on the wall (Fig.4). These pieces are to be viewed in the same way as a



Fig.5 Detail of map of the World with arrows indicating the areas the 100 darts landed.

From 'Journey to the Surface of the the Earth', 1968.

By Mark Boyle and Joan Hills.



Fig. 6 No.3 of Gisborne Triptich, (World Series) 1990.
Painted fibreglass, 1170x1270 mm.
By The Boyle Family.

painting on canvas. Only now what is seen as a massive slice of reality lifted bodily out of the ground and placed on a wall.

" The illusion is so seamless and convincing that the mind cannot suspend what it views to be the truth. A tap with the Knuckles on the surface of the shell produces a hollow knock and the bubble of disbelief bursts."(Bogle, 1990, p.8)

Although the Boyles have spent the past twenty odd years producing work and before that worked under the titles of The Sensual Laboratory and The Institute of Contemporary Archeology. The work of The Boyle family, as it is known, stems from their "Journey to the Surface of the Earth". This began in 1968 when the Boyles had a blindfolded group of friends and family throw 100 darts at a large map of the world; by this method they selected one thousand locations randomly scattered all over the world (Fig.5). Through using progressively larger-scale maps, the Boyles narrow down the geographical objective to a specific spot of land. By throwing a right angle up in the air the specific spot of earth is found. Wherever it lands will be the subject of their studies. The Boyles have been systematically visiting as many as these 100 sites as possible.

There are great financial difficulties in undertaking "The Journey to the Surface of the Earth" and this is why the journey has been on-going for so many years. Between their works abroad such as the Gisborne Triptych (1990) (Fig.6), made in New Zealand as part of their "World Series", the Boyles have maintained their work using their home as the centre, and performing random studies of sites around the London area. The Docklands Series ,London (1991), (Fig7) is an example. This is an area which can be viewed across the river from the Boyle's home in Greenwich.

" The face of the Docklands is changing so fast , mushrooming like a mini-Manhattan, most of which is crass and ugly, but the Boyles decided that they must come to terms with it and even find beauty in it."(Beaumont, 1991, p.296)



Fig.7 Study of a Demolition site with black oil drum,
reinforced concrete and wire. London 1990-91.

Painted fibreglass. 213x152 cm.

By The Boyle Family.

(Fig. 7)

1937
Chapter One

1937
Chapter One

But whether it be a "World series" study or a "Random locality" site, the same programme of investigation and recording of information takes place. Using film, the Boyles record a 360° span from the centre of the site.

They remove insects from the site. These are then photographed under an electron-microscope to produce enormous enlargements of the creatures. These photographs may be part of the final presentation of the piece.

"The quantum leap in scale between the electron-microphotographs and the earthprobes subverts our ingrained sense of dimension so that hairs on the leg of an insect can look like the trunks of pine trees."(Bogle, 1990, p.14)

Also, where possible, the Boyles take a sample of the selected site's earth core. This shows the composition of the earth to a depth of 1.8 metres. Some of these tasks have proved to be impossible, for example where the arrow had landed on a concrete pavement or an extreme case where the dart had landed in the Atlantic ocean on the map. Darts that fell into the the sea or otherwise impossible material, from a casting point of view had to be disregarded, though the Boyles hope that technology will eventually provide them with the means of fixing sea water.

Methods were considered, however to show the features of snow. This happened when snow covered the beach at Camber Sands, England, while the Tidal Series (Nov. 1969), (Fig.8,9) was being fine finished during the December of 1969. Casts were made of the snow's features and when the snow melted, it was bottled with a plan to reconstitute it as snow again by passing it, atomised, through liquid nitrogen and then presenting it in a thinly refrigerated compartment behind a transparent cast of the surface's form. This was found to be far too impractical at the time due to it's cost.

Their methods of "collecting", "recording" and "preserving" have been compared to those early Colonial Archeologist of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the seventh Earl of

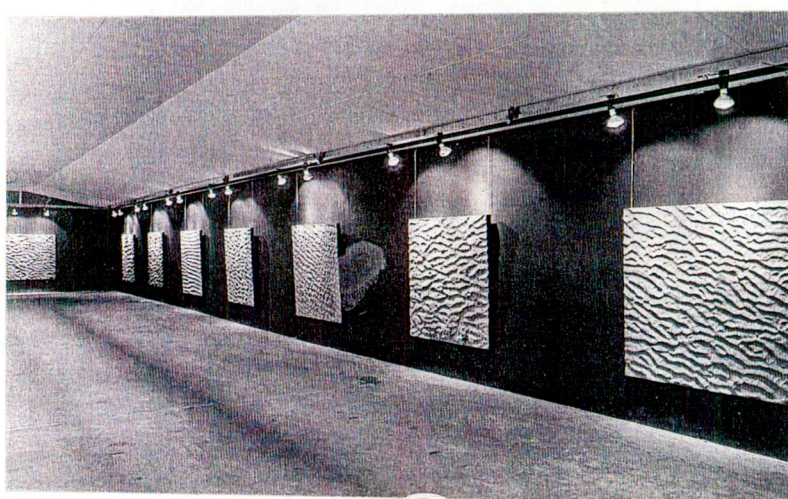


Fig.9 Photograph Of Tidal Series, 1969-70,
on display.

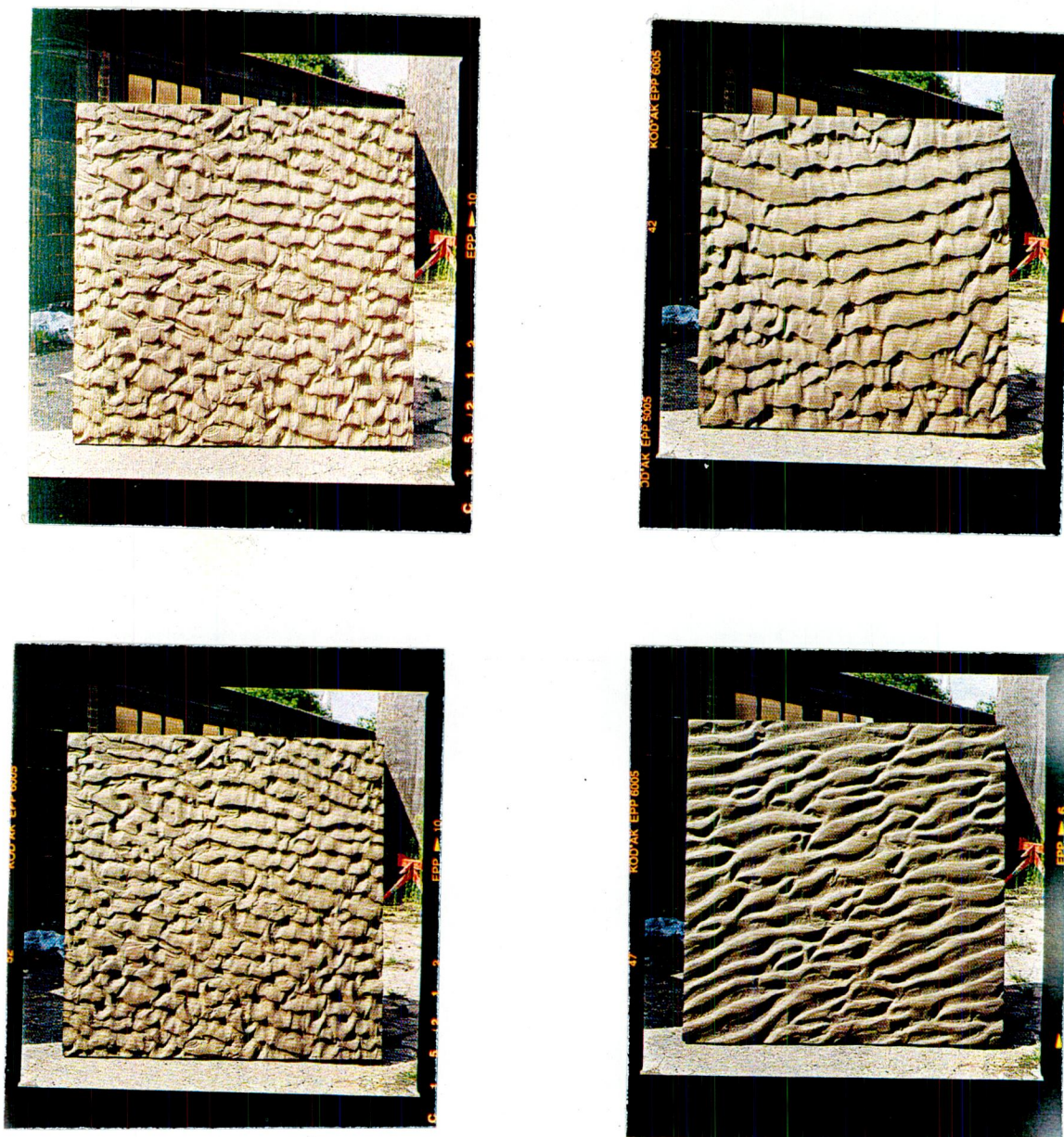
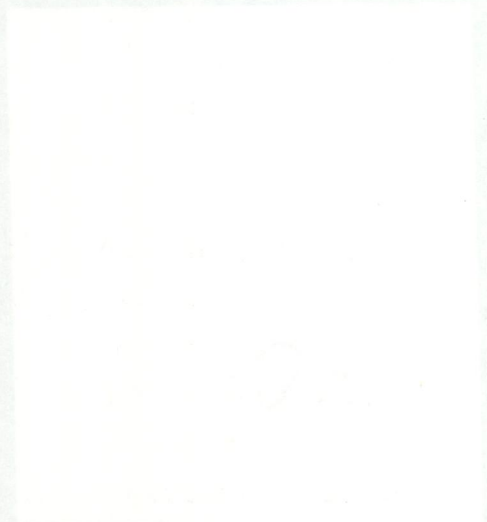
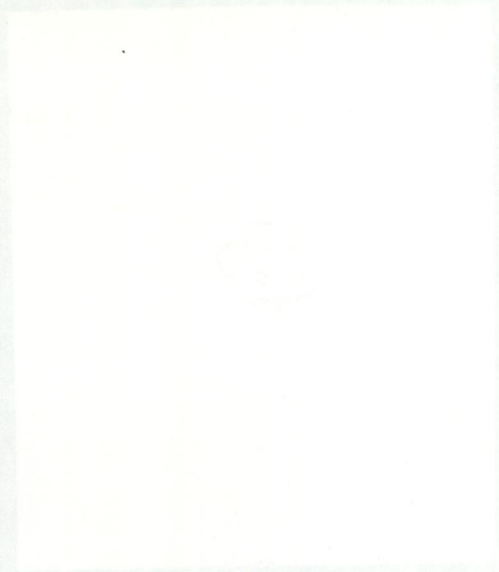


Fig. 8 The Tidal Series, 1969-70
Sand and fibreglass, each 122x122 cm.
By Mark Boyle and Joan Hills.



who secured the Parthenon Frieze and other antiquities for The British Museum.

But as Fred Fehlau points out, the work is

"Conceptually closer to photography than to archeology"(Fehlau, 1988, p.117)

In so far as archeology involves the removal of objects from a site, the Boyles do indeed remove insects e.t.c. from their sites. But the objects which they collect are not removed but reproduced. Their work is recognised as,

"Preserving frozen moments in time."(Gardner, 1988, p.146)

Yet revealing worlds within worlds has been a strong motivation in the work of the Boyles. Through the Institute of contemporary Arts in London , Mark Boyle and Joan Hills performed many works during the Sixties, which emphasised the vast entity of our own worlds and the worlds within our worlds .

BodyWork, performed in 1969 (Fig.10), involved the audience with the performer. A member of the audience is blind folded and asked to throw a dart at a photograph. The photograph is of the naked body of the performer (in this case Mark Boyle).

In the same room the performer himself stands naked. The photographs of him display his body front and back, both sides and from above and below. These act as the equivalent to a map of the performer's body. So in the same process as the Boyles' land probes, when the dart strikes the figure in the photographs, the corresponding area of the naked performer is located.

From there a similar programme of investigation took place:

"Photographs, X-rays, sound recordings and electricity readings are made of the spot. A square millimetre of skin is removed from the spot. It is examined in a micro projector. Any blood is examined ~~in the~~ examined in the micro-projector"(M. Boyle, 1970 ,Appendix 10)(Fig.11).

Similar work such as Son et Lumiere for Insects, Reptiles and Water Creatures (Sep. 1966),(Fig.12), took place ,the objective being to select a site, once again at random, to remove all creatures from it. These were then projected onto a screen using a micro-processor. Sounds made by the insects were also amplified .

As their work is the exploration of sites throughout the world and also worlds within this world, their work covers a great expanse. Where it not for their method of random selection, their work might not be so exciting.

"My ultimate object is to include everything .In the end it will be the only medium in which it will be possible to say everything will be reality"(M. Boyle, 1970, p. 8)

By setting out to show everything and present us with reality, most importantly at random, the Boyle family has presented us with images we might not otherwise see. By making the viewer actually look instead of glance, their work achieves a greatness even though it is merely presenting us with a simulation of the images which are available to us everyday but which we ignore.

In today's society we are constantly looking for change, change in our environment, change in ourselves. We spend time and money looking for these places and things to thrill and enthrall us, stimulate our senses. We rarely take stock of our own everyday surroundings.

"The most complete change an individual can affect in his environment, short of destroying it, is to change his attitude to it"(Hayward Gallery,1986,p.49)

In this same statement, made in Control Magazine 1965, Mark Boyle also pointed out that from an early age we have been taught to choose between, to select and separated good from bad; that we have already been planted with a code of snobberies and preferences. By removing everyday images and details from their environment, by placing them on the walls in a vertical position, when they would normally be horizontal, immediately makes their structures, patterns and details visible where they would not have been before. The General public and art pundits all stand in wonder before these pictures. Their appeal and shock value has not waned since the Boyles' first attempts to recreate reality back in 1969. Their work is still recognised as unveiling hidden qualities in the images we would not normally look twice at.

"What fascinates is the discovery of beauty in the unregarded and the exactitude with which it is reproduced, thereby giving us the

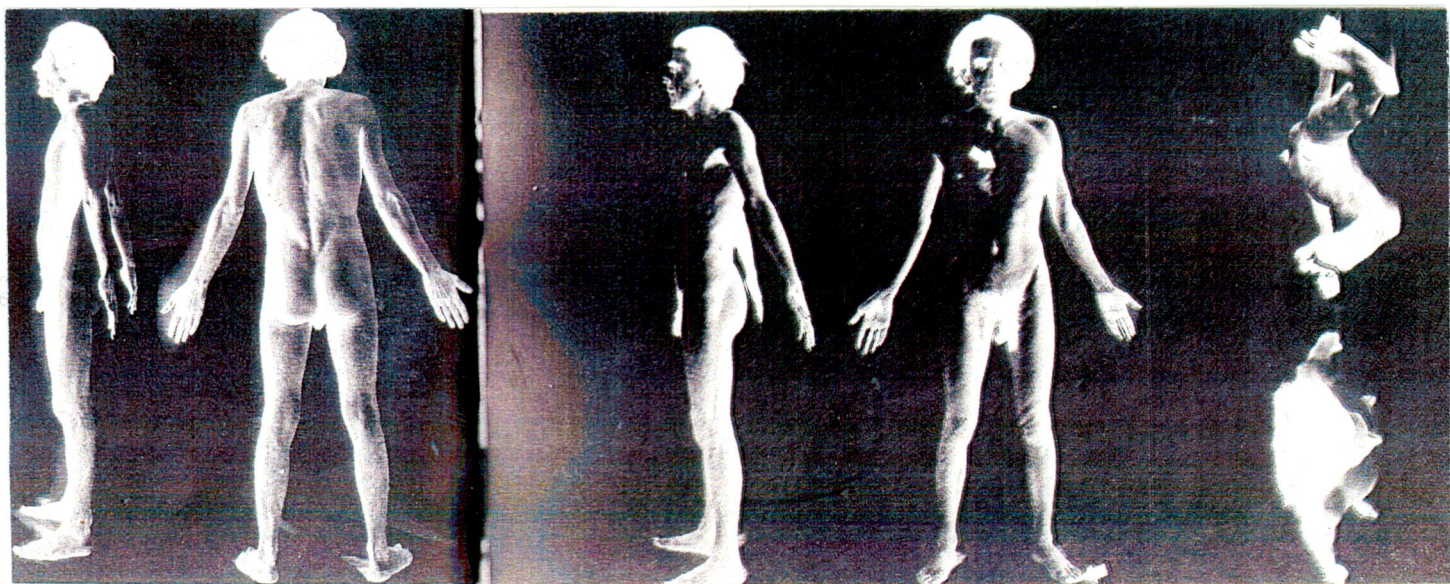


Fig.10 Photographs of Mark Boyle for performance
of Body Work 1969.

By Mark Boyle and Joan Hills.



Fig.11 Electron microscope of chest site:
Performance of Body Work 1969.

By Mark Boyle and Joan Hills.

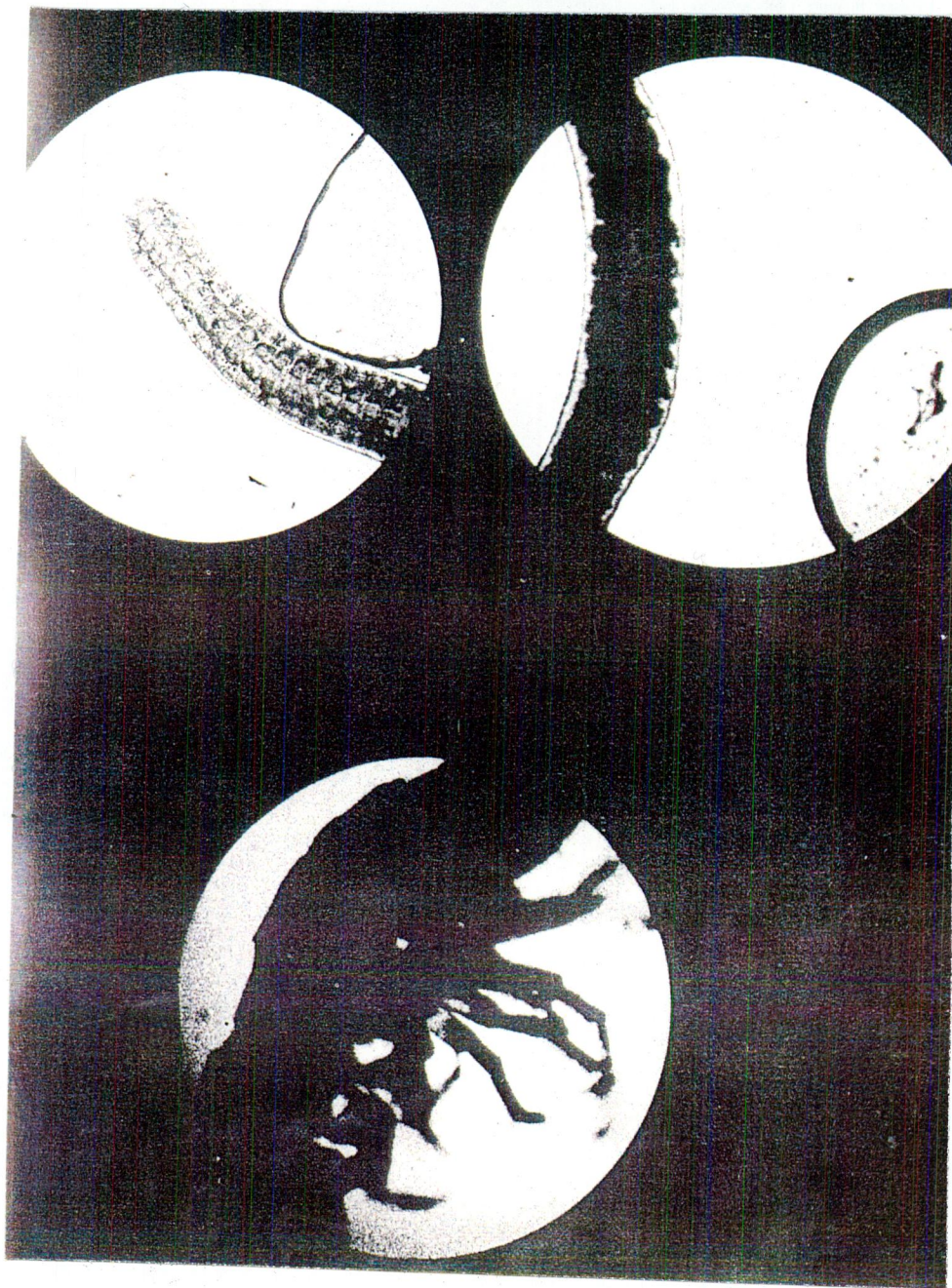


Fig.12 Micro projections of water creatures,
Cochrane Theatre, 1966.

From Son et Lumiere for Insects and Reptiles.

By Mark Boyle and Joan Hills.



gift of eyes to see what we would otherwise have passed by."
(Beaumont, 1991, p.296)

17

One of the objectives of The Boyle Family's work is to record and document. While the wall pieces are simulations of the source of their exploration, they are also presenting an added dimension. They are preserving for the viewer frozen moments in time. Unlike the camera's ability to "catch the moment", the Boyles' work is not like looking at a photograph. When we look at a photograph we accept the images in it as recalling these images, yet we know they are only images. When looking at the work of the Boyles, our eyes lead us to believe that what we see is the real thing with its colour, texture and form, and not an image of the real thing. The work has an ability to heighten our awareness of the earth's properties. But, most importantly, it has the ability to tell the story of man and nature, and their effects on one another.

"Time stands still for no man " is a phrase of whose truth we are all too aware of. Their work, by its very nature, can't help but be focused on the surfaces that are undergoing natural erosion and change, whether it be the laid down coverings of cracked pavings in London's street corners such as Westminster study with curved kurb, Parking line, Tarmacadam and Cobbles etc.(1971)(Fig.13), and tyre marks which have dried into the mud in a car park, as in -Study of an Urban Lorry Park with fragment of orange carpet(1979/86)(Fig.14).

The most literal of their works in relation to the earth and its natural changes is their work on the beach at Camber Sands, England in 1969 .Their objective was to examine the effect of the elemental forces on the site. Called The Tidal Series, each of these pieces demonstrated the force of the tide, its direction and gave very strong indications of the weather, i.e. stormy, or calm, rain or sunshine. As these pieces were all studies of the same square of beach , the variations in patterns and depth to the pieces show the sea's strength and give rise to thoughts on the tide and the reasons behind it. In order to be able to accommodate the tide and



Fig.14 Study of Urban lorry park with
fragements of orange carpet.1979/86.



Fig.13 Westminster Study with curved Kurb, Parking line, and Tarmacadam, Cobbles e.t.c. ,1971. Painted Fibreglass, 122x122cm.



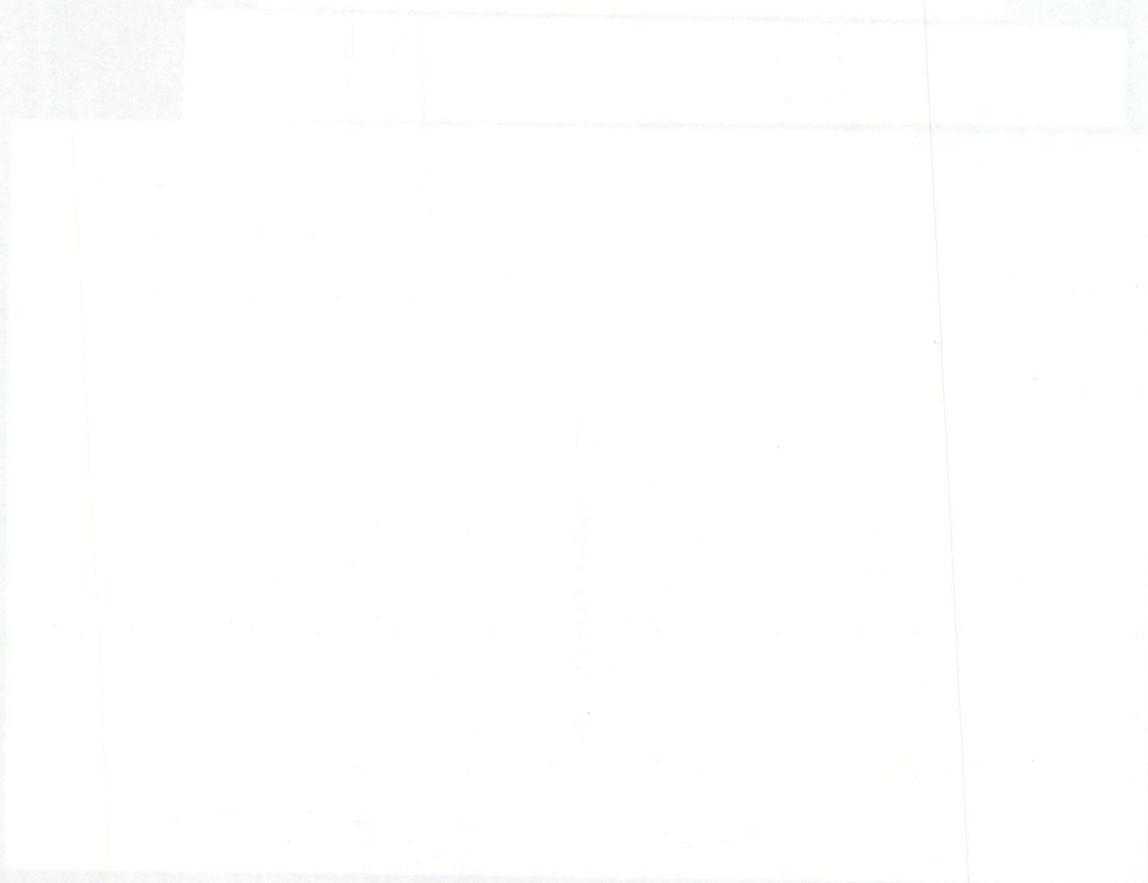
Fig. 15 Study of Potato Field, 1987.
Painted fibreglass, 1830x1270 mm.
By The Boyle Family.



Fig.16 Detail of Westminster Study with curved Kurb,
and Parking Line and Tarmacadam, Cobbles e.t.c, 1971.



Fig.17 Detail of Westminster Stidy with curved Kurb,
and Parking Line and Tarmacadam, Cobbles e.t.c., 1971.



their work the site had to be chosen. The series amply illustrate nature's strength and ability to shape and mould the earth.

20

The Boyles' cast have so much to offer in terms of evaluating the natural world and man's effects on it. Just as man has the ability to manipulate and change The earth, nature will never be passive. Man's ability to mark the earth is apparent in many of the Boyles' random studies. Some of man's effects are more severe than others. From the tracks left in the mud of Study of an Urban Lorry Park with Fragment of Orange Carpet (1979\86), to the lines ploughed in the land in Study of a Potato Field (1987-88)(Fig.15), right up to the studies of the more recent studies of broken streets such as Westminster Study with Curved Kerb, Parking line, Metal Plate and Cobbles (1987), they almost show with a graduating historical reference the marks that man has left on the earth as technology has increased.

But look long and hard at these images and it is apparent that there are two sides to our story:

"relentless subordination of the natural world to human desires,"(Brookner, 1992, P.8)

As I have stated earlier, the work of The Boyle Family presents frozen moments in time, and as time has gone on and as they are exposed to the elements, they begin to erode and decay. The pieces of orange carpet in the Study of an Urban Lorry Park is itself now barely visible and it is probable that it was eventually completely engulfed in the mud.

On looking at Westminster Study with curved Kurb, Parking Line and Tarmacadam, Cobbles e.t.c., the formal lines and shapes created by man are visibly blurring, as the grass and weeds creep back up through the cracks in the paving stones (Fig.16). Also the older cobble stones are really completely submerged in the soil gathered around them through time. The footprint (Fig.17) left behind in the soil is undoubtedly erased from the street itself.

This cast is merely a captive moment in the time of the street. The street might not even exist anymore. But just as the footprint in the dirt is an sample of nature's strength in removing the marks of it's surfaces, so too will the pavings be eroded untill they are part of the winds which settled the dirt inbetween the coble stones of the other streets.



Fig.20 Powder Dispersal 1968

Organic Dye and gypsum on playa surface, 150x40' area.
By Michael Heizer.



Fig.18 Slot. 1968

Wood in Playa surface, 1x6x12'

Location: El Mirage Dry Lake, Majave Desert. California.

By Michael Heizer.

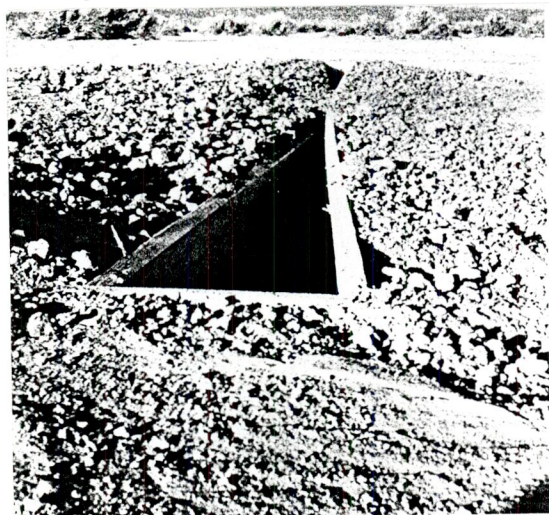


Fig.19 Compression Line. 1968

Wood in playa surface, 16x2x2'

Location: Black Rock Desert, Nevada.

By Michael Heizer.



CHAPTER TWO

It was in 1967 that Michael Heizer first began to make work on the land. His first land work North, East, South, West (1967), four open geometric shapes sunk into the ground in Sierra Nevada, California, was to be the first of many impressions, on and in the vast planes of America, that Heizer would make in the years that followed. Although Heizer would not confine his work to the landscape in those following years, it is the works built from 1967 to 1974 that would best illustrate nature and man in constant rivalry with the forces of nature.

Heizer had, previous to 1967, been a painter, and it was in those paintings that he would develop into sculpture. After attending San Francisco Art Institute for a year (1963 to 1964) Heizer moved to New York. As a child he had travelled to Europe, spent a year living in Paris looking at the Museum collections, and then travelled to Italy, where he admits he spent more time looking at sculpture and architecture than paintings. Yet when Michael Heizer moved to New York, as a young adult, it was to paint. "I had heard that New York was the only place you could make it." (Brown, 1984, p.8)

But Heizer felt that he was like a foreigner in New York and after two or three years there, painting solidly, he felt it was having a bad effect on his physical well being.

"I had ideas but wasn't able to realise them in the city. I had been in New York for a while and pretty much learned the limits. I wanted to make an American art which was trans-national." (Brown, 1984, p.10)

Heizer also realised in 1967 that the paintings he had been producing had grown to a point where they were more than two dimensional. His paintings were big and geometrical and the negative spaces, which would be the inspiration for his sculpture, had become the focus of his canvases. Heizer had recognised that his work did not have to be limited to the materials of canvas and paint.

Although Heizer greatly admired the art works which he had seen in Europe, he wanted to make work that would contribute to developing an identity of American art. But what was American? American is a multi cultural nation, a melting pot of traditions and ideas:

"The only sources I felt were allowable were American; South American, Mesoamerican or North American. That might mean Eskimos or Peruvians." (Brown, 1984, p.11).

There is no doubt that Heizer thought of America in terms of its history, before the Europeans came, to what for them was a New World. Through his father, a noted Anthropologist, Heizer had been acquainted not only with the archaeological excavations carried out by his father, but also with many other anthropologists. Through access to their writings and through being present from an early age at many of the excavations his father, Heizer had a working Knowledge of the cultures which existed in America. These included the Mayan Indians, who had evolved a sophisticated culture with advanced art, architecture, engineering, mathematics and astronomy, nearly a thousand years before any Europeans arrived in America. Such knowledge would influence his own work greatly.

Heizer felt strongly that in order to make an American statement you should try and experience as many parts of the country as possible. So in 1967, he began to travel throughout America, as many as fifteen trips a year, making sculpture and ground drawings. On these numerous trips from New York, he began to produce a series of sculptures, ground paintings, and drawings around the Mojave Desert, California, where the previous year he had made North, East, South, West. These new sculptures such as Collapse, Slot (Fig.18), Compression Line, (Fig 19) Kicked Foot Gesture, Black Dye and Powder Dispersal (Fig20) were all made on El Mirage Dry Lake, and Coyote Dry Lake in the Mojave Desert in 1968. All of these pieces were built by Heizer, on his own, and so were modest in size and materials. Collapse, Slot and Compression Line were all negative spaces made in the land's

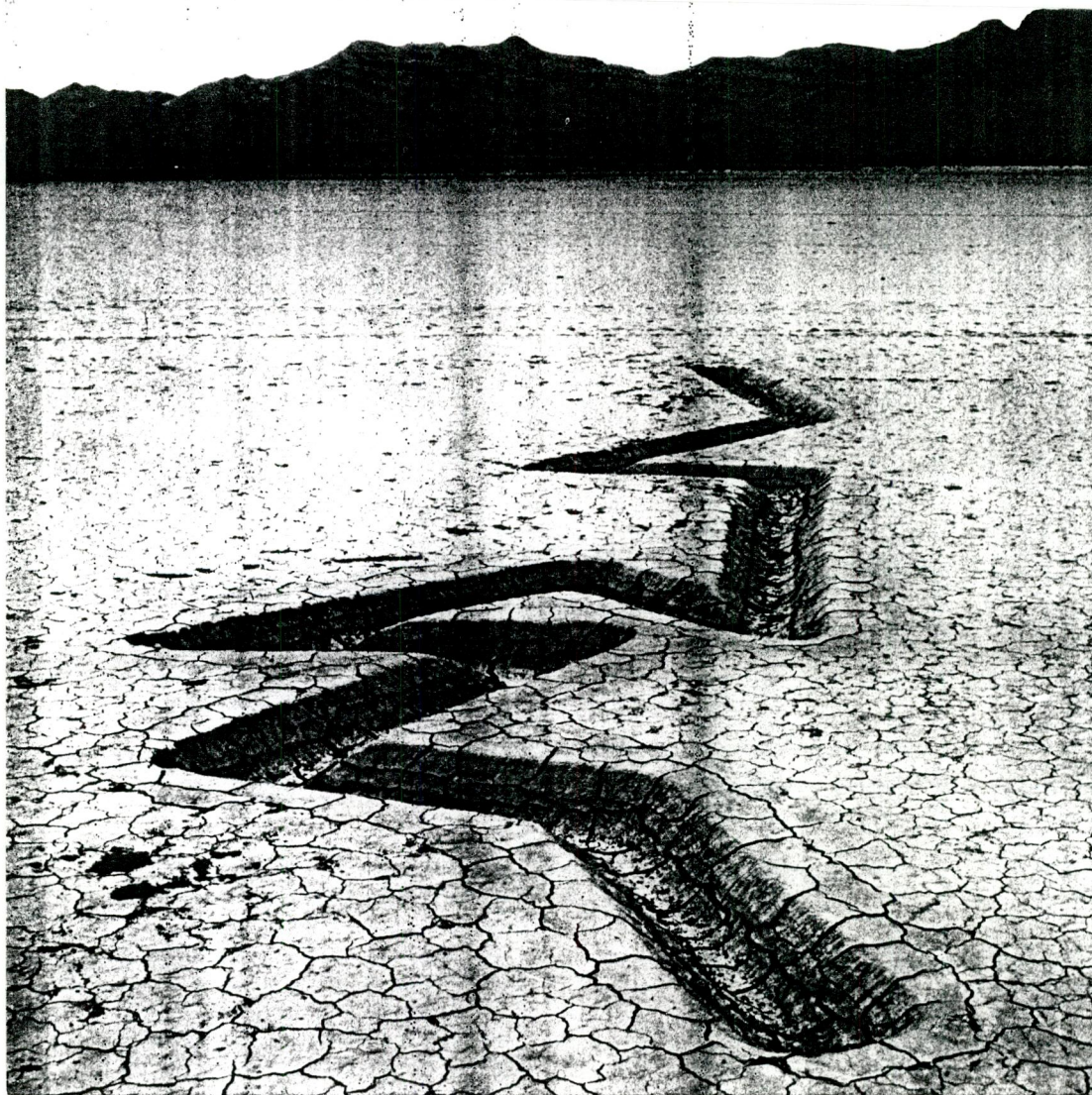


Fig.22 Rift, 1968

No.1 of the Nine Nevada Depressions.

1-2 ton displacement of playa surface, 52'x16"x1'

Location: Jean Dry Lake, Nevada.

surface using a shovel and some wood. Heizer had now begun to mark the land. Yet none of the above work remains; only photographs remain to confirm that they once existed. In the Sixties there was a growing awareness of nature and Earth. These earlier works by Heizer might be seen as the artist's response to the site, changing it as little as possible, but Heizer's work was not about its surrounding landscape. Heizer's work had nothing to do with the landscape and he would spend most of his time trying to produce work that would prolong the natural processes of decay. "Many negative sculptures I built in the late Sixties were inundated with water because they were built on dry lakes that flooded in the spring and winter or were eroded by wind.....I had to contend with the weather and its destructive effects."(Brown,1984, p.26)

Heizer's work was viewed as part of the growing movement of artists, such as Richard Serra, away from the commercialism of the gallery system. Heizer made the following statement in 1969, that would seem to affirm this view:

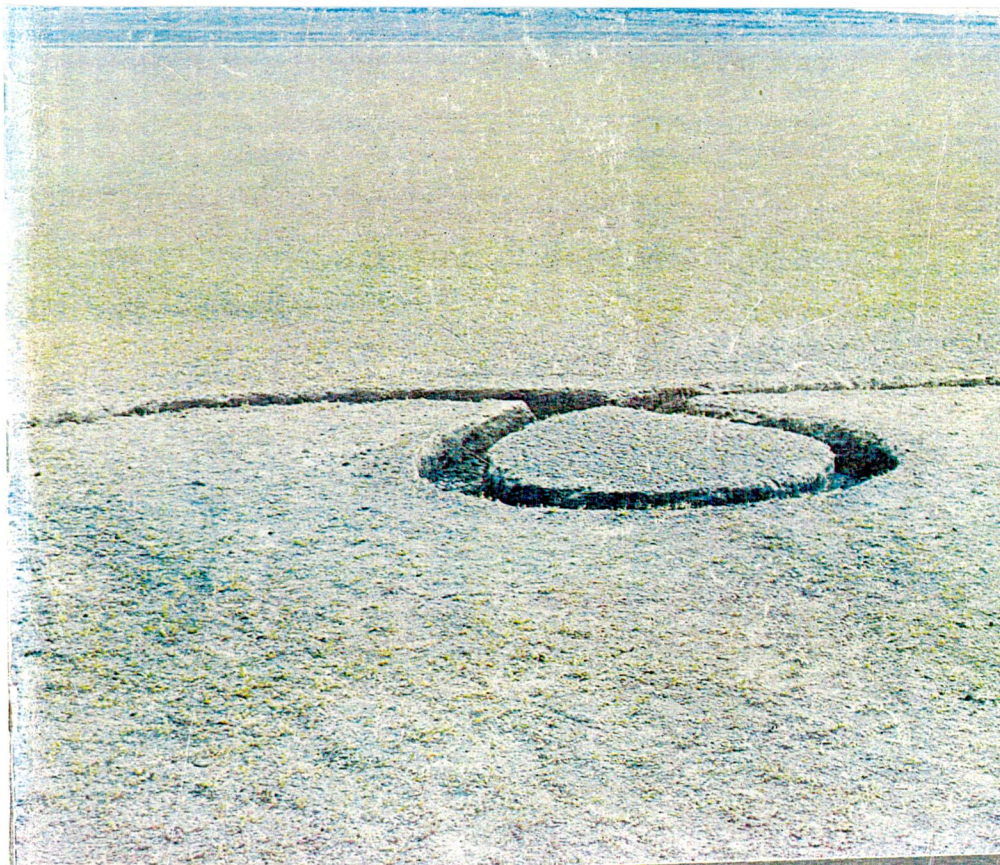


Fig.21 Isolated Mass Circumflex. 1969

No.9 of the Nine Nevada Depressions.

6 ton displacement of playa surface, 120x12x1'.



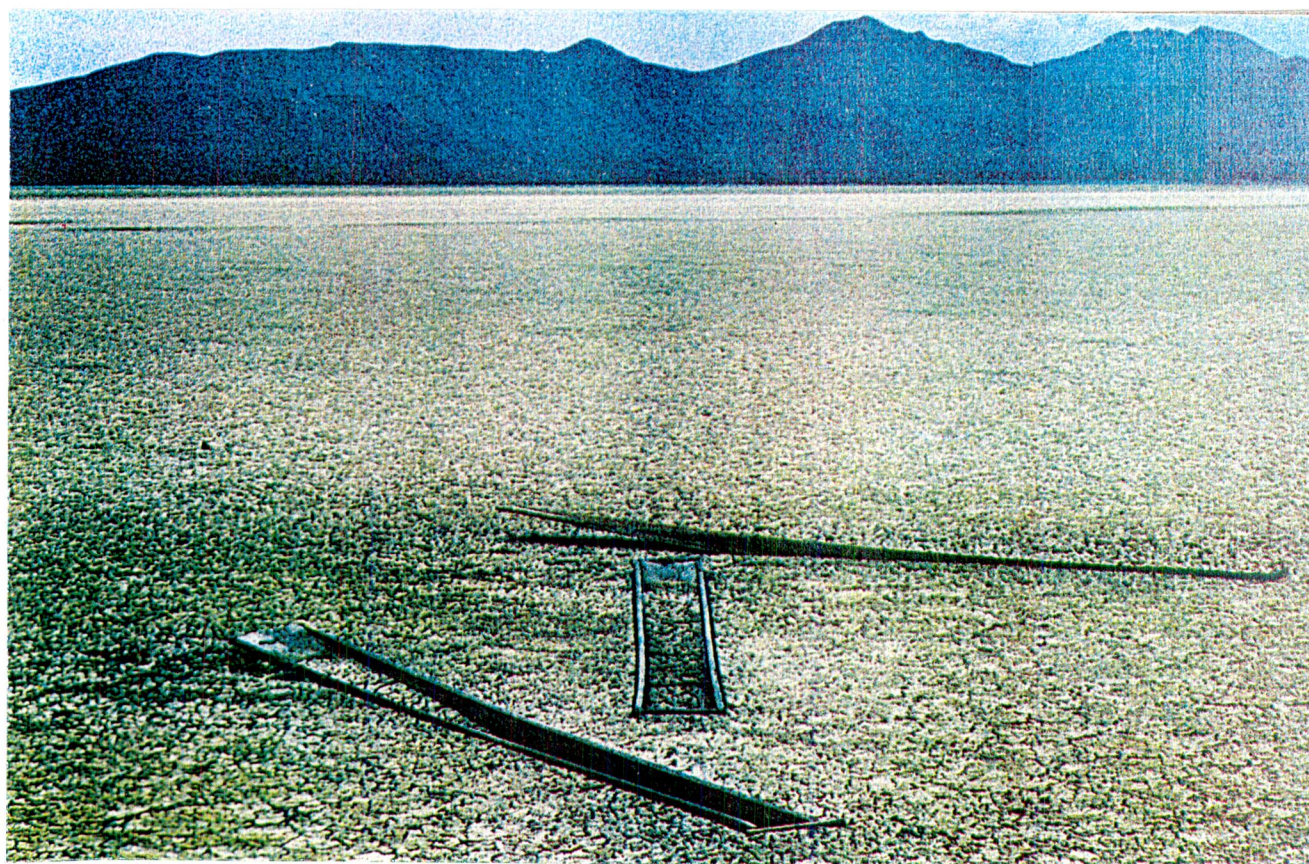
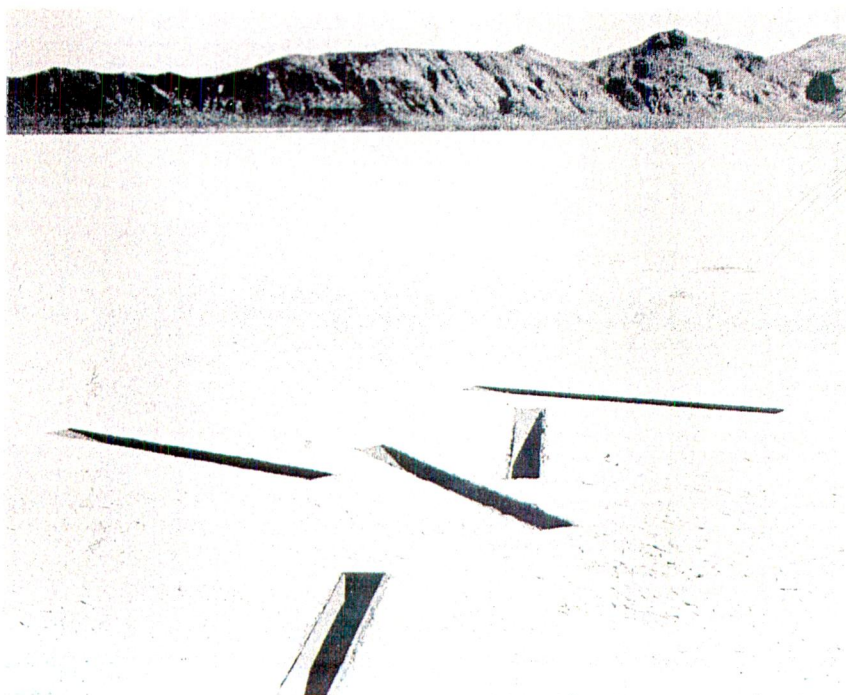


Fig. 23 Dissipate. 1969-70
No.8 of the Nine Nevada Depressions.
Wood and Steel, 40x50x1'.
By Michael Heizer.



"The position of the art as malleable barter-exchange item falters as the cumulative economic structure gluts. The museums and collections are stuffed, the floors are sagging, but the real space still exists."(Heizer,1969, p.13)

Yet it was in the summer of 1968 that Heizer received financing from Robert scull, an art dealer, to build the Nine Nevada Depressions; a 520-mile line of loops, faults, troughs, and intersections built into the lands surface, linking nine locations in Nevada's deserts. In order for Heizer to have received such financing, he would have presented photographs of his previous work, therefore he had gathered a portfolio with the intention of having his work not only financed, but presented. No dealer would finance an artist's work unless it was saleable. As Heizer's work was immovable from its specific site, photographs and documentation of his work were becoming the saleable commodities. It could be said that the dealers now recognised that people would consume sculpture in the same way they were already consuming paintings-through photographs.

Previously to the Nine Nevada Depressions (1968), Heizer's work was financed by himself. Now, with more money, Heizer could begin to the scale of his work. With the help of fellow land artists, Robert Smithson and his wife Nancy Holt, Heizer began work on the Nine Nevada Depressions. Increased manpower meant increased size and work, such as Isolated Mass/Cicumflex, (Fig.21) (1969), Massacre Dry Lake, Nevada, number nine of the Nine Nevada Depressions, required the digging and removal of several tons of earth. It also measured over 100 feet in length. Another of the nine was Rift(1968)(Fig.22), Jean Dry lake, Nevada, a zig zag shape also about a hundred feet long , which too had required the removal of tons of earth. The scale of both of these was a huge increase on Heizer's previous works, so much so that they were best viewed and photographed from above, i.e. in an aeroplane. Yet none of these works remain. Once again, nature has reclaimed the land through its winds, rain and erosion of these man-made lines. Although Heizer might lead one to believe that he accepted the inevitable fact that his work would disappear,

" They were extended and developed by natural forces, both physically and intellectually, beyond the 'completed' state I had left them in. I never planned this change, but I accepted it. It was an accelerated ageing process that all materials eventually undergo."(Brown, 1984, p.26)

With the making of Dissipate(1968),(Fig.23), Black Rock Desert, Nevada, number eight of the Nine Nevada Depressions(1968), Heizer would try to slow down the ageing process.Dissipate was intended to be permanent. It consisted of five trenches of equal length (40 x 50 feet) and equal depth (12 x 1 x 1 feet). The position of each piece in relation to each other was done at random, using matchsticks.

"The matchsticks were employed as a dispersal device. They were dropped from two feet above a sheet of paper and taped down. The photograph of this dispersal became the drawing for Dissipate." (Heizer,1969,p.12)

Dissipate, number eight of the Nine Nevada Depressions would be the only one to be lined with steel and wood, in an attempt to make it permanent. Yet once again the natural elements succeeded in wiping out the traces of Heizer's work. In relation to the permanence of Dissipate, Heizer wrote;

"There is no longer any photo that even loosely describes this work. These photos are taken 365 days apart. Next year the third and possibly final photo will be taken. It will probably only be the landscape."(Heizer, 1969, p.12)

Although the works of the Nine Nevada Depressions did not last, the physical properties of each would provide inspiration for the work that followed. The displacement of the earth and the physical being of the negative space remaining was viewed as having great expressive potential. But unfortunately Heizer saw the scale of these works as most important in order to make an expressive statement.

"Immense, architecturally-sized sculpture creates both the object and the atmosphere. Awe is a state of mind equivalent to religious experience. I think if most people feel a commitment they feel something has been transcended." (Brown, 1984, p.33)



Fig.24 Double Negative. 1969-70.

240,000 ton displacement of rhyolite and sandstone,
1500x50x30

Location: Mormon Mesa, Overton, Nevada.

By Michael Heizer.



The last of the Nine Nevada Depressions, Isolated Mass Circumflex, had provided Heizer with a new statement about physical presence. Its negative trench line moving into a loop creating a positive image. Now, with ideas of negative space creating its own positive space, Heizer set about creating Double Negative (1969),(Fig.24), Mormon Mesa, Nevada. Double Negative is, as its title suggests, an absence, a removal. This was Heizer's first work that would achieve the monumental status he sought. It is imposing in presence. It is approximately 1,500 foot long. There are two long, straight trenches, 30 feet wide and 50 feet deep, facing directly opposite each other over the Mesa. This sculpture is intended to be seen as a whole. Through the two cuts, the negative objects, we are led to what they are actually intended to imply i.e. the middle point. Although unshaped, from an intended aerial view, the eye connects the two trenches and shapes the space between them, so what is seen is a continuous line and not two trenches either side of one another. This work, one of the largest sculptures created in the history of American Twentieth Century art, is situated in the Mormon Mesa in Nevada.

In order for this work to be completed, it would require the removal of over 240,000 tons of sandstone. Heizer would have to rely not only on modern technology, but in order to lease the land for the work and hire the machinery, he required financial backing. Virginia Dwan of the Dwan Gallery, New York, commissioned Heizer to create the work in 1969. Having had a growing interest in Heizer's work, and having shown Heizer's work previously as part of a group exhibition-Earthworks in 1968, Dwan now not only offered Heizer finance, but also a one man show. In November of 1969 the drilling began into the fine grained volcanic rock of granite that the surface plateau consisted of. These drilled holes then had to be charged and exploded in groups of twelve, followed by ripping and pushing of the sandstone with tractors.(Fig.25). Two months later the operation was completed.

In 1970 the Dwan Gallery held a simultaneous opening of the work in New York and on site in the work in New York and on site

in the Nevada desert. While the opening ceremony took place in Nevada, in the Dwan Gallery they showed photographic documentation of the Double Negative from its first days drilling, to its completion. Here is one of the exhibitions reviews.

"The city dwellers at Dwan Gallery no doubt catch their breaths to see the natural vastness sullied by one punny man. It would better to be the man of course. Who would remain unmoved by the magnificence of the landscape? In fact you could be the man if you had the money, since this mountain was bought by the acre, and the work of art it becomes has a price. Well I have a weakness for people who want to make mountainous sculptures, and I like the grandiose gesture, and I'm glad its not a miniature didactic space in the Museum of Modern Art." (Ashton, 1970, p.120)

This commentary on Double Negative by Dore Ashton has a lot to say about Heizer's real motives behind his work and also about human nature in the Twentieth Century. Although many will gasp "to see the natural vastness sullied", there is also a hidden envy by many when viewing " the grandiose gesture" executed by one man.

Heizer's work was never about the landscape or man's relationship with nature:

" I have no interest in the landscape in terms of art. I think American landscape art is one thing but my work doesn't have anything to do with that, it has to do with materials."

(Brown, 1984, p.25)

Viewers of Heizer's work may be forgiven for the romantic reading of Double Negative, after all

"Who would remain unmoved by the magnificence of the landscape?"

For even though Heizer has stated that his work has no relationship to its site, and that in his opinion he has not yet seen a work of art which is referential to its location,

"I really dislike the word 'site' as applied to sculpture. You have to put it somewhere," (Brown, 1984, p.36)

Yet despite Heizer's insistence of the work's ambiguity to the land it occupies, nevertheless the land becomes a strong counter theme

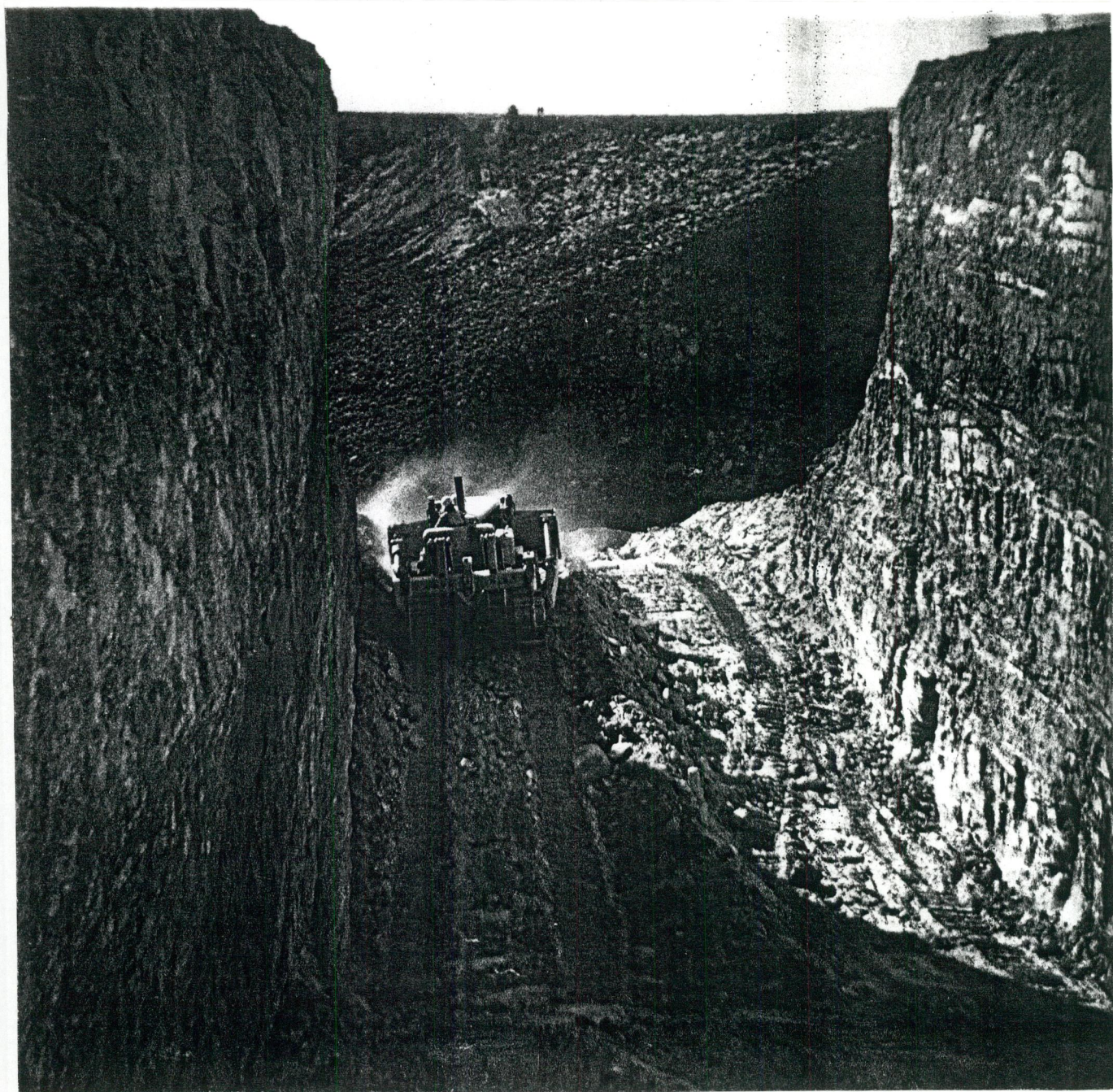


Fig.25 Photograph of tractor pushing the sandstone
of the Double Negative. 1969-70.

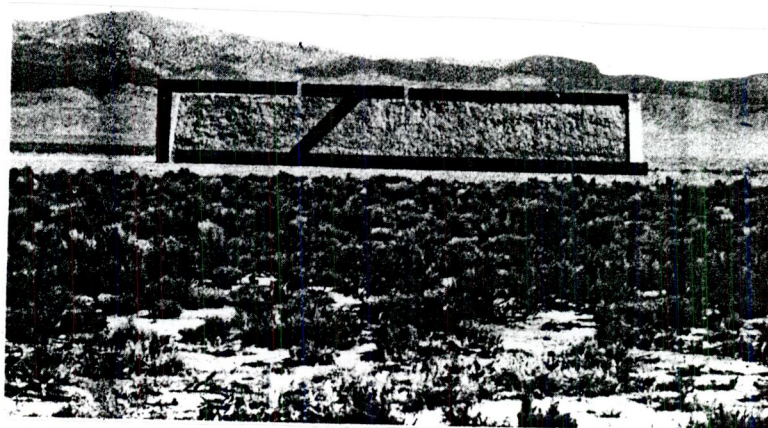
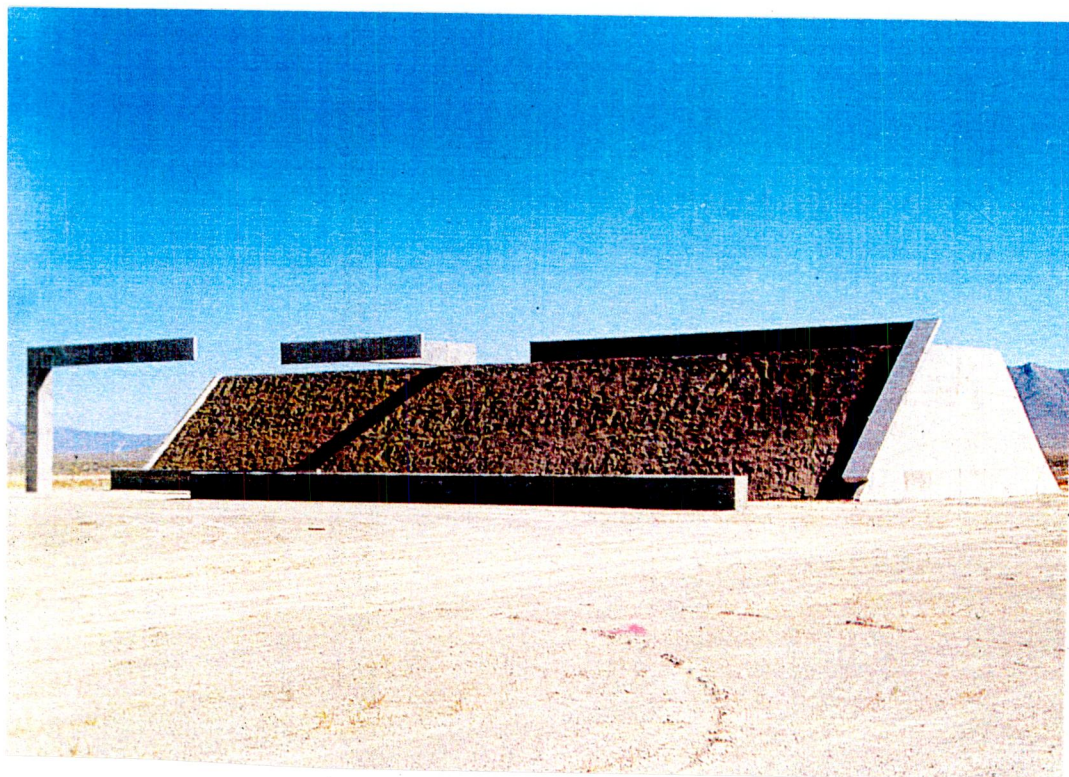


Fig.26 Complex One. 1972-74.

Concrete, steel, and compacted earth, 26'6"x140'x110'.

Location: Garden Valley, Nevada.

By Michael Heizer.



to the work's formal properties. Unmarked land is undifferentiated, whatever its beauty. Yet these sites have now become recognisable as the places which contain the work of art. The place, whether the artist intended it fully, partially or not at all, becomes part of the content of the work. Almost as if Heizer recognised the unwanted recognition the surrounding landscapes were receiving through his work, and wanted to put an end to nature stealing the centre stage, Heizer built Complex One, (Fig.26), under ground level, in Garden Valley, Nevada. Taking two years to build (1972-1974) this giant concrete and steel mound in the middle of the valley would bring Heizer's real intentions for his work out in the open finally.

It is necessary at this point to be reminded that Heizer Did not continually remain working in Nevada because of its natural beauty:

"It was nothing to do with landscape or the romanticism of the west, I was looking for material. The west isn't romantic to me, I'm from there." (Brown, 1984, p.38)

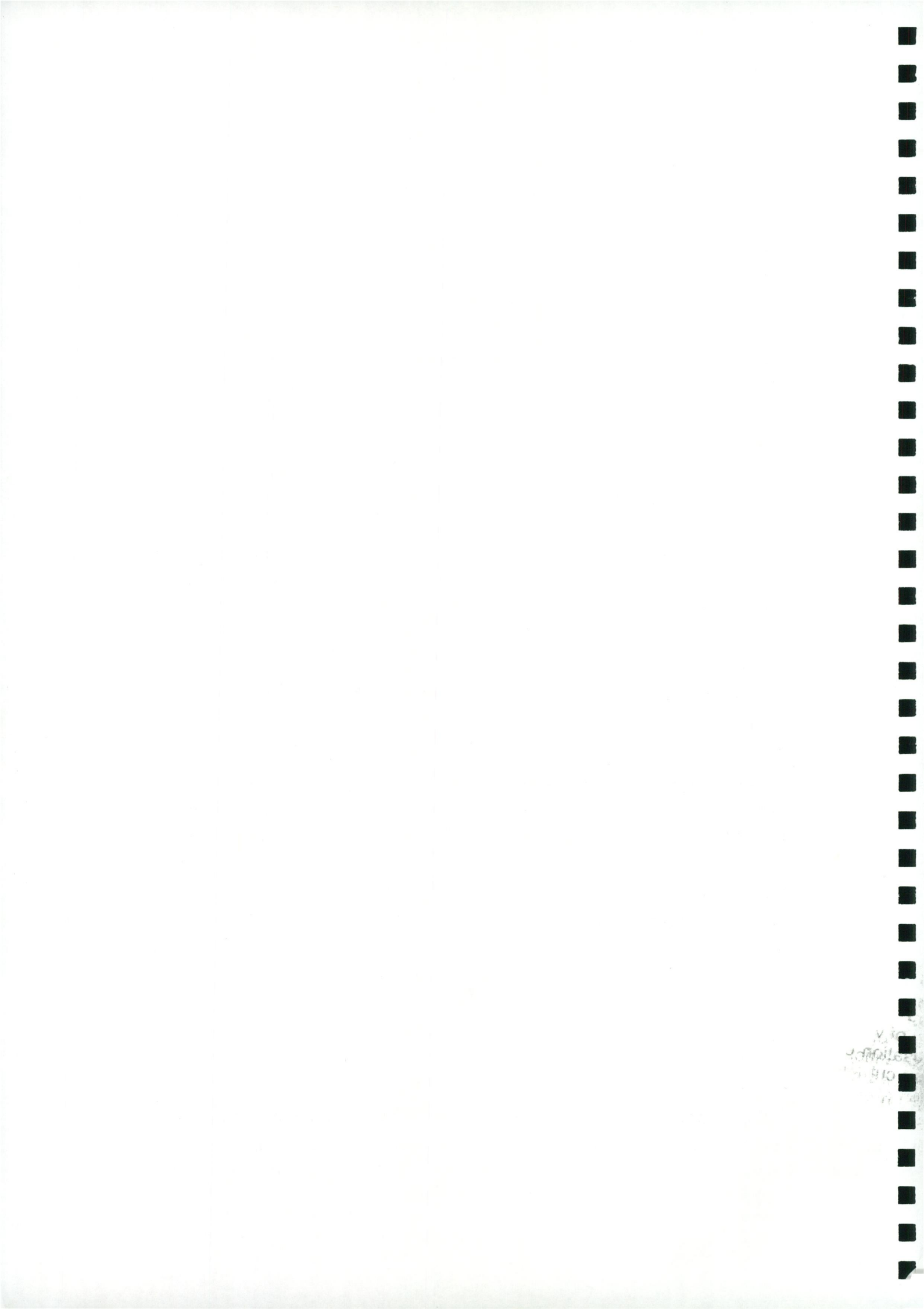
Heizer did however choose his site carefully for the building of Complex One. When he bought the property in the Garden Valley, Nevada, he did so because of the sands and gravels he had found during his earlier studies of the area. He made sure that the land contained running water and clay soils that could be used for soil cements. He went to Nevada for the raw materials it had to offer.

"If you bought an acre of land in that part of the world you were buying all the material you could use in a lifetime."

(Brown, 1984, p.12)

This three square plot of land in the Garden Valley was where he decided to build his rectangular complex i.e. Complex One, the first of a proposed group of sculptures, the size of huge buildings, that would be part of Heizer's City.

Complex One, when completed in 1974, was huge. It measured 24 x 110 x 140 feet altogether. Unlike Heizer's previous monumentally sized sculpture in Nevada, Double Negative (1968),



Complex One was not a negative form. It sat on the land's surface, made from earth, steel and concrete. It required the most modern tools available to Heizer. Its making

"required cranes, loaders, pumps, cats, graders, mixers and water trucks, batch plants, forms, re-bar, scaffolds, surveying, drilling, welding and compacting equipment; everything, almost a whole encyclopedia of construction was used in one sculpture."(Brown, 1984, p.33)

The western face of Complex One (the front) includes a group of concrete elements which frame the mound. These read as a continuous band when viewed directly from the front of the piece.

Unlike the previous work of Heizer which I discussed earlier, Complex One is created below ground level as Heizer excavated the area, creating an enormous depression, with the intention that it should be viewed from ground level and not from above. Heizer went to great lengths to eliminate the surrounding view from his work,

"If you walk down into the plaza, you either see the sky or the sculpture but you don't see any mountains or land."(Brown, 1984, p.17)

The land where Heizer's Complex one (1972-1974), is sited in the Garden Valley of Nevada and is next to a possible nuclear testing site. Although Heizer has said that he wanted his work to cut off the view from the possible M.X. missile base, and also the powerlines coming through the valley, if the previous statements on his work's intended ambiguity to the surrounding landscape are considered, and also Heizer's reluctance to discuss the potential missile base, reading between the lines it could be suggested that he chose this site for more than its raw materials.

Heizer saw the building of Complex one on a parallel with the ancient monuments of the Egyptians and Mayans:

"In sculptures I attempt to maintain the venerable traditions of megalithic societies. Since the reasons for creating megalithic

1894

1. The first part of the report is a general statement of the work done during the year. It is a summary of the work done by the various departments of the institution, and is intended to give a general idea of the progress of the work.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed statement of the work done by each of the departments. It is a summary of the work done by each of the departments, and is intended to give a detailed idea of the progress of the work.

3. The third part of the report is a statement of the work done by the various departments of the institution, and is intended to give a general idea of the progress of the work.

4. The fourth part of the report is a statement of the work done by each of the departments, and is intended to give a detailed idea of the progress of the work.

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9. The ninth part of the report is a statement of the work done by the various departments of the institution, and is intended to give a general idea of the progress of the work.

10. The tenth part of the report is a statement of the work done by each of the departments, and is intended to give a detailed idea of the progress of the work.

sculpture no longer have the same validity, I feel a dormant dialogue can now be rethought."(Brown, 1984,p.33)

Having recognised that the functions of our ceremonial buildings or huge burial chambers are no longer sacrificial in today's contemporary society, Heizer sought to make new monuments that would be identified with the twentieth century. Heizer, although drawing inspiration from the visual forms of the Egyptians' Stepped Pyramid of Zoser, c. 2600-2700 B.C., Saqqara, and the Mayans' Chichen Itza in Mexico, in order to design Complex One he used modern materials and machinery to build it. Technology only representative of the twentieth century, and Complex One's size and visual elements when viewed from the front, reminiscent of modern structures such as billboards, are all that Complex One has to offer to help our descendants to identify with us.

"The history of sculpture, as we know it, consists mostly of remains and fragments damaged by man or natural phenomena."(Brown, 1984, p.27)

In recognising that only fragments of the past will remain and Heizer's intentions through works such as Double Negative and Complex One, are part of his desire to be part of the future's past, what will his say about today's society and of the man himself, Heizer? If the truth is known, it will that technology built by man has been used to damage and destroy many of the Earth's natural resources, and although technology has also provided us with enough insight into nature's cycle to bring about the potential changes necessary for its and our survival, we as humans ~~we~~ insist on ignoring our reliance on the Earth for survival. If we are honest with ourselves Michael Heizer is like most humans in today's society. Following his work's progression from his early attempts to mark the land, such as Kicked Foot Gesture(1967), a cross made in the sand with the heel of his boot, to the more permanent Complex One, it is recognisable that as humans we seek to leave our mark, a mark that will hopefully outlive us , and in doing so lengthen our mortality. Although there is a strong

possibility that Heizer's Complex One will outlast his own time on Earth, it is undeniable that it will not stand forever.

We underestimate nature's strength's. Concrete is a material we consider strong yet when several pounds of seed were incorporated into a 3-inch-thick mat of wet concrete, sand and gravel by Robin Mackenzie in 1971, when the mixture had solidified, sprinkles of water induced the growth of the seeds. These seeds, over the course of a few weeks, actually caused the concrete to crack apart. Many of nature's presumably fragile processes display great strength.

"When dealing with a great mass, you want something that will, in a sense, interact with the climate and its changes. The main objective is to make something massive and physical enough so that it can interact with those things and go through all kinds of modifications. If the work has sufficient physicality, any kind of natural change would tend to enhance the work."(Sonfist,1983, p.261)

This statement by Robert Smithson can be applied to the thinking of Heizer. The notion is that if you built big enough, those natural elements can only alter the work moderately and these changes to the work are small enough for the artist to console himself, thinking that the work is in fact being enhanced by these changes. The bigger the work is built, the longer it may be enabled to remain. But it is a forgone conclusion that Heizer's monuments, like those of the "King of Kings"—Ozymandias, will decay, and just as Ozymandias asked us to "Look on my mighty works, ye mighty and despair!", and when we looked we saw nothing but the remains of decay, so too will Heizer's work disappear into

"The lone and level sands"(Shelley)

CONCLUSION

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The work of both these artists, i.e. The Boyle Family and that of Michael Heizer, have presented us with new ways of looking at the our relationship, on , within and with the land we occupy. Both artist's work are unconventional, outside the traditions of the artwork of framed painted canvases and bronze and stone sculptures which sit nicely in galleries and museums.

The Boyles have been presenting their viewers with reality for more than two decades now, a reality which is widely available for their viewers to experience without visiting a gallery. This was acknowledged by the Boyles as far back as 1966 when exhibiting in the Indicia Gallery in London. Although the Boyles exhibited various studies including those of the sites of streets and public parks, scenes widely available to the public already, the Boyles also encouraged the public to place white pieces of paper out of which a square was cut (13.5 by 13.5 inches) anywhere they pleased, thus framing corners of buildings e.t.c. which the viewer considered to have aesthetic qualities. The Boyles recognised that their work was not confined to the traditions of an artist as the creator. Yet despite this fact, their work has been increasingly recognised and supported by the galleries and museums. They represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1978 and have been supported by galleries as far and wide as Japan, the U.S.A. and New Zealand. From the Sixties, when Mark Boyle recalls "getting my hands on somebody's throat on the last night, saying how much money do you have in your pocket- the man said eight pounds- and I said, well you've just bought a piece of ours. Because I needed the eight pounds to get the entire exhibition on the train and us down to London again." (Lydiate, 1986, p.8) , to in 1990 being asked by the Auckland City Gallery to go to New Zealand to execute the study of a site upon which a dart had landed on a map back in 1967.

In order for the work of The Boyle Family and Michael Heizer to be widely published as it is today, many changes had to take place in the galleries and museums of Europe and of America.

Before the 1960's the Boyles' and Heizer's work might have faded away without recognition, but it was with the new movement of artists away from the commercial gallery system that not only enabled the artists to develop their work into their present forms. In the Sixties artists viewed the galleries and museums as elitist, governed by collectors and critics. Artists felt that like their work, they too had merely become commodities to be bought and sold. If modern artworks existed in relation to no specific site and were said to be autonomous, this would leave the work vulnerable to circulation from studio to the commercial gallery, from there to the collector's private dwelling, there to the museum or lobby of a corporate headquarters, all too often leaving out the public. This also left the artists, the creators of this 'commodity' out in the cold, with no control over their own work. The solution for many artists such as Richard Serra was to set about making work which was physically inseparable from its locale.

"To remove the work is to destroy the work."(Crimp,1993, p.153)

If the work was immovable it could not be controlled. This new idiom would set about a redefinition of what constitutes a work of art and would open the minds of many artists and lead them to work in the unconventional setting of the land. Not only would they work in the land, but they would use the land's resources as their materials. This was merely a broadening of the use of materials that the Earth has supplied artists with for centuries; pigment- paint. Yet this broadening of materials broadened the horizons and the minds of many artists, of the possibilities of work outside the constraints of the galleries and museums.

But in order to work on this sort ^{of} scale, locality, and with the necessary equipment it is necessary to have money to do so. Also an artist who says he does not care if his work is seen, is lying.

Both Heizer and the Boyles found it impossible to execute their ideas into finished work without the backing of galleries, dealers and museums.

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Many of the land-orientated works of the Sixties that were originall mativated partly by the desire to find a way of making art outside the art world's gallery and museum system, inevitably ended up lardely dependent on that system's mechanisims. It is now recognised as a practical impossibility to produce work without its financial aid.

Yet without this upheaval, the Boyles and Michael Heizer work would not be recognised today. Although th museums and galleries have maintained control over the circulation of information on these art works, they have helped change the public perception of art. If the work of The Boyle Family had never been exhibited would the public, like those at the Indicia Gallery in 1966, have recognised the potential beauty and symmetries on the everyday surfaces that surround them? Or would the viewers at the Dwan Gallery, in New York, 1968, have recognised the magnificence of the landscape surrounding Heizer's Double Negative or question can anybody who has the money create such work which violates the land?

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