National College of Art and Design
Department of Industrial Design

Land Art, A Comparitive Study

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Contents:

Title :

List of Plates:

Fig 21 Andy Goldsworthy Untitled

Fig 22 Andy Goldsworthy Untitled

Introduction

The origin's of land art stretch back to the earliest settled communities. These early sculptures attempted to make sense of the environment in which the community lived. The ties between these communities and the rhythms of nature ,the seasons, the sun , the moon and the stars was much stronger than it is today . Before the invention of electricity for example it was common knowledge that the moon rose an hour later each evening and the full moon rose at sunset . Today few people in developed countries are aware of this simple phenomenon. Ambient light from our houses and city streets have all but blacked out the night sky above. For these early people the sky above was full of wonder . Life for these early people however was a struggle to survive . This world must have been a very threatening place.

The relationship between the earth an the cosmos create celestial phenomenon. Our ancestors found meaning in observing the order of movement of the Sun , Moon and stars. The regularity of their presence and motion conveyed a sense of order on the world around them . A yard stick as such from which the chaos of day to day life could be brought in to some sort of order. Regular phenomenon such as the summer and winter solstice were observed and worshipped by early civilisations all

over the world . They marked out the seasons and put order into life celestial calendars constructed of massive rocks such as newgrange in Ireland can be seen throughout the world. The stars defined a sense of direction for these early people ritualistic temples were aligned to specific directions using the stars as reference points .

As man kind advanced , a more thorough understanding of the celestial heavens was achieved . Stars were mapped out and grouped together into constellations Observatories were constructed by a range of different civilisations around the world , such as the Egyptians, Aztecs, Incas etc. One of the most elaborate ever built was constructed by Jai Singh , a counsellor of the court of Mohammed Shah. The aesthetic quality of these machines could be easily mistaken for contemporary sculpture. They are however over 250 years old , the first being constructed in Delhi in 1724. These works as can be seen go far beyond pure function. The ascetic of these machines is strictly functional . The resulting aesthetic is created from the geometric forms required to record the movements of stars and planets. These machines create a tangible link between mankind and the universe above. They put a structure and an order to the cosmos which is reflected in the pure geometrical aesthetic result.

Chapter 1: Section 1

The background in America

Land art was born in the America of the 1960s. In the 1960s America had become the most successful industrial nation in the world. This success was a result in part to the first and second world wars which had smashed the European economy. The industrial success was also a product of a system of mass production, consumerisation and powerful marketing. America which was still a relatively new country but industrial success now instilled fresh confidence. America no longer looked to Europe, which for so long had enjoyed the status of cultural centre of the western world. She soon became for many the youth cultural icon of the decade. All however was not well with America. The 1960s was also a time of great civil unrest, not only in America but throughout the world. Civil rights marches, feminism, student demonstrations and a growing awareness for the environment were but some of the many issues that were being heatedly debated. The old order was crumbling and there was a feeling that this period marked the beginning of a new world order. Artists two felt that they were being stifled by the conventions of the past. They now looked for a new way forward. It was time for change . It is to this backdrop land art first emerged.

The Emergence of Land Art

The first contemporary influences of Land Art can be found in the New York of the late 1950s and the early 1960s. At this time Abstract Expressionism ceased to be the dominant theme in America. The influence of its ideas on spontanaity and purity in art were however very much alive. The art that succeeded abstract expressionism delved even deeper into the ideas of purity in art. The work of Ad Reinhardt for example is characteristic of this search for purity. His works attempted to pare art down to perfection. He painted works abandoned all texture, content and illusion of depth. They instead placed all value on the optical quality of the work. In sculpture this search for purity could also be found. This type of work became known as Minimalism. It was prevalent in New York in the early and middle sixties.This school of sculpture had a large influence on the beginnings of land art. New York at this time was a vibrant intellectual and artistic centre. The main artists in this scene socialised in the same circles. Theory and ideology in art had become very important. These artists met regularly at Max's Kansas City Bar. They exchanged ideas and discussed the writing of others. Discussion and theorising lead to group generated ideas. The exhibitions of groups such as the minimalists displayed the individual interpretation to the group ideal. In 1966 Robert Morris, Walter De Maria and Robert

Smithson took part in a Minimalist group exhibition "Primary Structures" . The exhibition took place in the Jewish museum in New York. If we look at the work of Robert Smithson in this exhibition we can see to what an extent Minimalism had effected his early works. Works such as plunge make use of repeated geometric shapes to create the ascending aesthetic. The ideological discussion and group generated projects led a small number of new York artists to excursions into the western deserts of America, to test the limits of art. The expeditions included Michael Hizer, Walter De Maria, Robert Morris, Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson. These artists were to become the main protagonists of the Land Art movement of North America.

Section 2

Michael Hizer

Michael Hizer was born in 1944. By the late 60's he felt, as did many others, that that a new path was needed for American Art. One major fault he found in the works being produced at the time was their dependence on Europe as a source of inspiration. It now had to become American. A second problem he found with sculpture at that time was the method through which it was displayed and sold. The monetary criteria placed on art work by the galleries and patrons of the day governed to a large extent the shape , size and style of the work. Heizer's solution was to break with almost all conventions of the time in favor of environmental pieces.

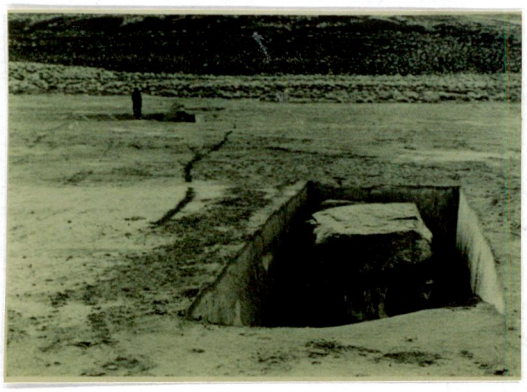
Two of the major sources of inspiration through the ages have been the human body and the landscape. It was to the latter that Heizer turned to forge his new direction. The particular landscape he turned to was not a garden or a field but the vast western deserts of America. He describes the landscape as that kind of unraped restful religious space artists have often tried to put into their work. This landscape is also truly American in its vast scale, massiveness and dominance. Now that he had discovered a source for his inspiration, he did not distill the elements of the deserts into a set of three-dimensional sculptures. He instead used the land itself as a

vehicle in which to create the environmental pieces for which he has become so well known.

By 1967 Heizer had completed some temporary works in the Western deserts. These consisted of trenches, Motorcycle drawings, Dispersal of soil from moving vehicles and pigments into the wind.

These pieces were however merely scratching the surface. In 1968 Heizer sank a cube into the ground in the Sierra Nevada desert, the first part of a four-part sculpture to be entitled "N.S.E.W." after the four cardinal directions. This was his first permanent landscape work and an inspiration to the group of young artists who were lo Óoking for a way forward through art in the landscape.

Heizer soon realized that in order to accomplish the scale which his concepts required, he would need financial backing. In 1968 he acquired the patronage of the collector Robert Scull.Scull commissioned two pieces from Heizer,"Nine Nevada Depressions" and "Displaced Replaced mass". The latter, Constructed in 1969, is characteristic of what Heizer's work had become.



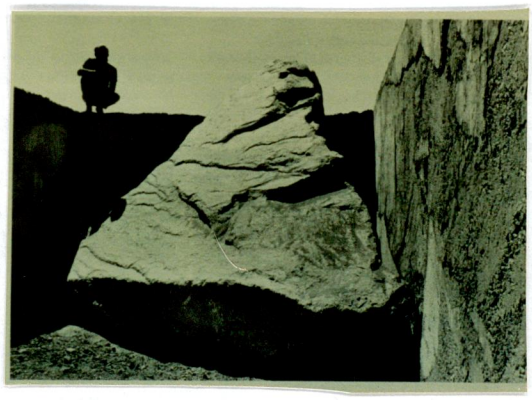


Fig 1.

This piece shows clearly and simply how he used the vast scale and mass of his works. Huge slabs of granite were hauled down from the High Sierra to the Nevada desert. There they were set in concrete lined depressions in the ground. The size of this piece, (50x100x13ft.) would evoke an enormous presence of weight and energy. The sheer mass of the slab itself is accentuated further by the flat sides of the concrete walls in which it is contained. When one was down in the depression viewing the piece, the surrounding expanse of desert is out of sight. The view of the desert in relation to the boulders would detract from its scale comparatively and so has been excluded.

In the same year another patron, Virginia Dwan, Was taking an interest in Heizers work. He had shown her a portfolio of photographs of his earlier work in 1968. On seeing this she offered him an exhibition of

his works and he agreed on condition that she finance an outdoor work, which was how he obtained the financial backing to create "Double Negative".

Fig 2.

"Double negative" was the piece that first brought Land Art to the attention of the general art world. Many were shocked, some horrified. One critic wrote, "It proceeds by marring the very land which is what we have just learned to stop doing".

The piece is indeed massive in scale. It displaced 2 40,000 tons of earth in its construction. The work consists of two sunken enclosures fifty feet apart facing each other across a ravine. The resulting sculpture itself is primarily composed of space. The pair of voids have become separate entities interacting with each other across the ravine. In "Double Negative" the ravine was chosen for its physical dimensions. It was used to create the

space between the two voids. How the works relates to the vast desert beyond is of little importance to Hizer. The landscape is user as little more than a vehicle in which to house his piece which, as with "Displaced Replaced Mass" relies heavily on scale to create the dynamic energy the viewer would experience. The unraped, restful, religious space Heizer described, is only used in his work as a clean page so as the viewer can focus more clearly on what has been achieved without distraction. When talking about a more recent project "complex City One, Heizer proclaims, "It is about art, not landscape".

It is the direction that Heizer took in taking his work to the Western deserts and his use of scale that has proven to be most influential. Following from this influence, although not of paramount importance to Heizer Himself, the idea of interaction with the landscape became a major theme with other American Land Artists.

Fig 3.

Section 3
Robert Smithson

Robert Smithson was born in 1938 and died in 1973. An interest he had in geology, crystallography,mining and the formation and change of the earth led in the late '60s to a series of poured or flowing works.

He investigated the properties of certain materials such as asphalt, mud and glue. These materials he poured down the sides of gravel pits and eroded cliffs. The materials movement down the sides of these slopes acted as a metaphor to the molten beginnings of these same surfaces on which they were poured. This idea of using materials to act as a signifier of another was carried further by works he entitled "Non Sites".

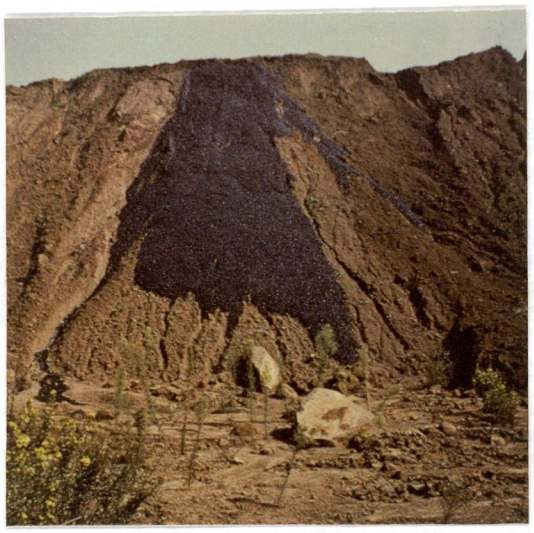


Fig 4.

For these pieces he collected elements from nature such as sand from the New Jersey in the Winter or limestone from Franklin New Jersey in the Spring. These elements were then placed in geometric containers and displayed in a gallery . They were accompanied by maps and photographs. All elements of the site - colour, texture, location, and interaction of the elements with their natural environment - have been provided in this sculpture.

By giving the viewer the actual elements, such as the limestone, the real material from the site has been represented. The photograph shows the material in location and how it interacts with its surrounding environment. The map shows the location of the material. He has distilled the sites to their base elements and the resulting works were indoor evocations of outdoor locations, establishing what Smithson termed a

"dialectic between site, the outdoor source of the material and non site, the sculpture in its disassociated settings functioning as a signifier of the absent site."

Smithson 1979 P115.

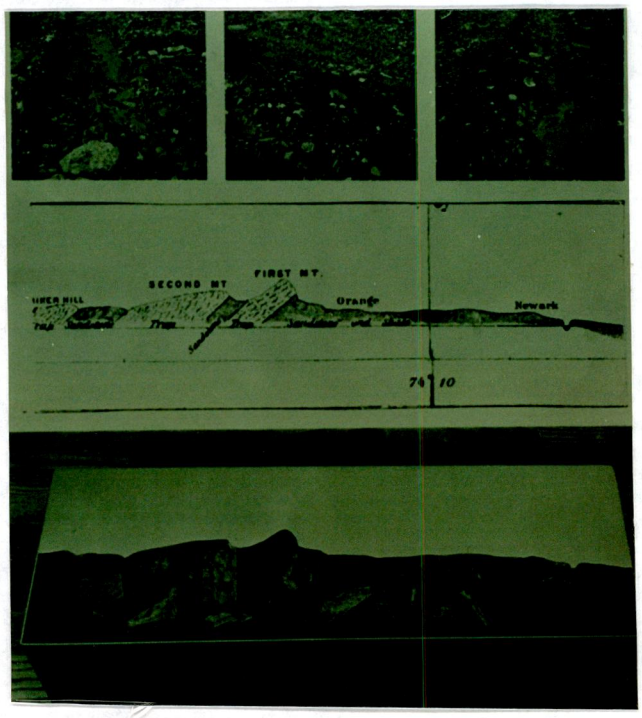


Fig 5.

In 1970 Smithson took his symbolism one step further in his creation "Spiral Jetty". It is a spiral of black basalt, limestone and earth, one thousand five hundred linear feet long, curled into the Great Salt Lake, Utah. As with Heizer, Smithson obtained financial backing from Virgina Dwan. He leased the site on the shore of the Salt Lake. In this piece, unlike the work of Heizer Smithson has taken the aesthetic of the environment as his major concern. He has distilled this aesthetic to a symbolic form with the sculpture, therefore reflecting the surrounding environment. The thinking behind the piece is more clearly explained in an essay he wrote on the work:

"It is one of the few places on the lake where the water comes right up to the mainland. Under the shallow pinkish water is a network of mud cracks supporting jigsaw puzzle that compromises the salt lake flats. As I looked at the site it reverberated out to the horizons only suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spreading into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the "Spiral Jetty"

Smithson 1972 P.226

Fig 6.

This interpretation of landscape in sculpture on such a vast scale has become a characteristic trait through much of American Land Art. Smithson's work reflects its environment: it dose not, however, fully interact with the environment. It was not until the works of Nancy Holt and Walter De Maria That the full potential of land art in America was realised.

Section 4
Nancy Holt

The work of Nancy Holt (born 1938) in her sculpture such as "Sun Tunnels" displays this fully interactive element of a piece with its surrounding environment. "Sun Tunnels" was Holt's first major work and was completed in 1976. It is situated in the Great Basin Desert in Northwest Utah. The site location is a flat desert, the bed of a prehistoric lake. It is ringed in the distance by low mountains.

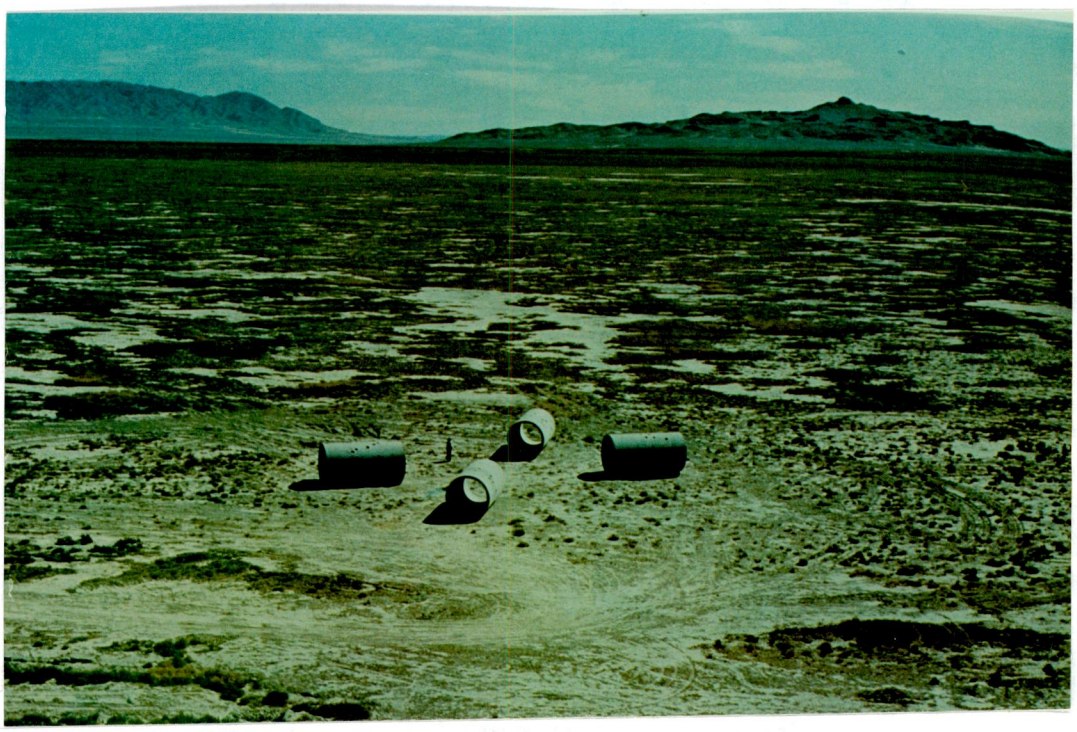


Fig 7.

The sculpture consists of four concrete pipes, each 18 feet long, with a diameter of just over 9 feet. The pipes are set in an X configuration 86 feet long on the diagonal. They have been positioned in such a way as to be aligned with the rising and setting of the sun on

the days of the 21st of June and the 21st of December. At these times the sun is perfectly centred through a pair of tunnels. Circles have been pierced through the upper half of each pipe. These circles vary in size from 7-10 inches inn diameter. These circles are positioned to correspond with four different star constellations of Draco, Perces, Columba and Capricorn. The sunlight that passes through the holes casts circles of light on the bottom of the pipes. Holt describes the effect in Art Forum of April 1972.

"Day is turned into night and an inversion of the sky takes place, stars are cast down to earth, spots of warmth in cool tunnels".

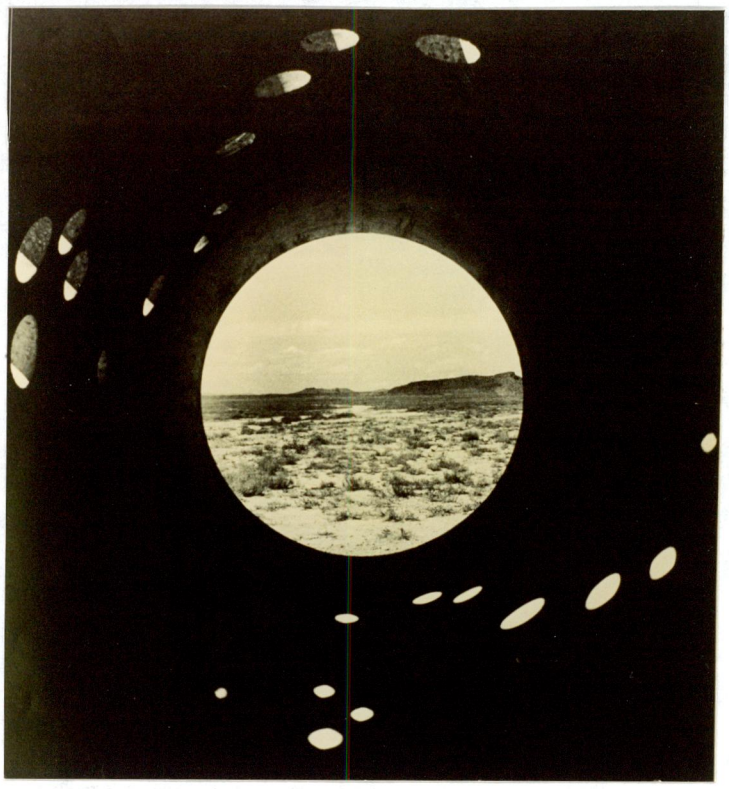


Fig 8.

Unlike the work of Heizer or Smithson, Holt's "sun Tunnels" is fully interactive with its environment. Heizer's work allows the observer to

interact with the sculpture. It uses the landscape as a vehicle to accommodate the vast scale required to animate his works. It has, however, little reference outside of this to its surroundings. Smithson reflects the environment through his sculpture. He distils the raw elements of the site to a pure symbolic form: the landscape is encapsulated in the form of the work. The "Sun Tunnels" of Nancy Holt dose almost the opposite. It dose not bring the landscape to the sculpture but instead brings the viewer through the sculpture, to experience more fully the elements of the landscape. "Sun Tunnels" tries to make sense of the incomprehensible elements of time and scale in the environment.

Desert Solitaire

Only sunlight holds things together.
Noon is the crucial hour the desert reveals itself nakedly and cruelly with no meaning but its own existence.

Edward Abbey

The vast scale of the desert landscape in which the piece is situated is almost beyond human comprehension. Without a focal point the panoramic view is too much for the brain to take in. As she describes herself in an essay she wrote in Art Forum in April 1977 " "The view blurs out rather than sharpens. Through the tunnels part of the landscape is framed and comes into focus."

Holt 1977 P35.

Just ten miles from the site of "Sun Tunnels" are the Bonneville Salt Flats. This is a huge expanse of flat desert where you can actually see the curvature of the earth. On visiting these salt flats for the first time Holt experienced the feeling of actually standing on the planet and being part of universal time. "Sun Tunnels" tries to recreate this feeling by marking the yearly extreme positions of the sun, indicating the cyclical time of the solar year. The concrete tunnels have no visual compatibility however with their surrounding physical environment. It is through the tunnels that the essential elements of this environment can be more fully experienced. There is a possible symbolic relevance to the shape of the tunnels in relation to the elements they deal with. This is described by Lucy Lippard in her book, Overlay,

"The round holes in the walls however offer micro/macrocosmic parallels between the human eye (looking in, looking out), the form of the earth itself and the motion of the sun and planets".

Lippard 1983 P 90.

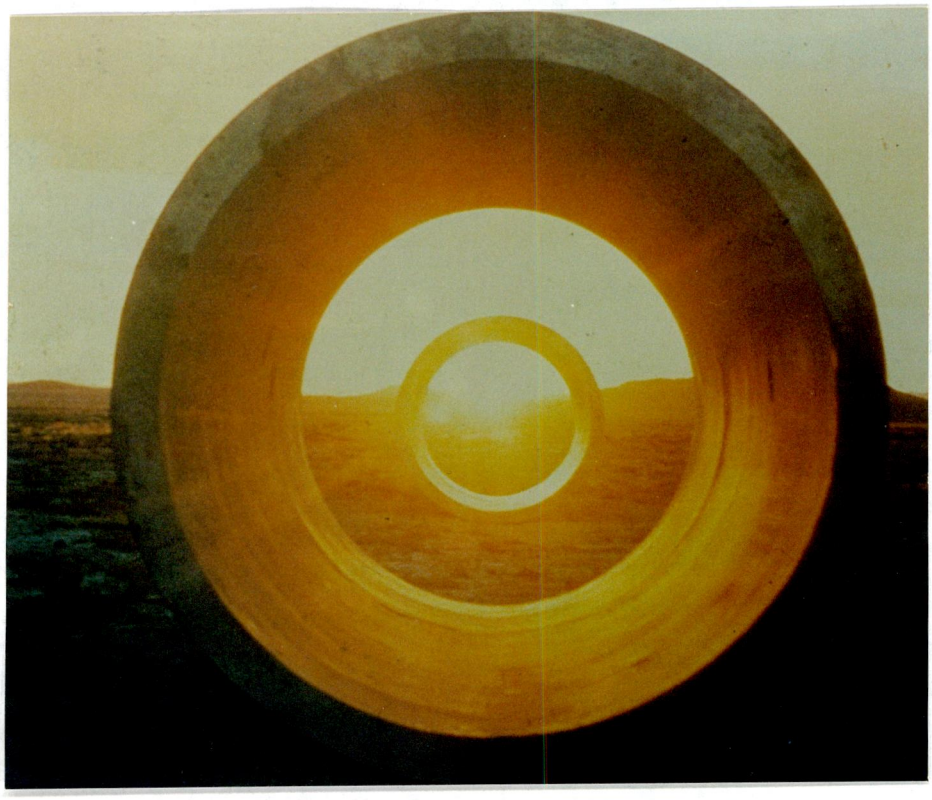


Fig. 9.

Section 5

Walter De Maria

Walter De Maria was born in 1935. By 1962 he had realised the potential of sculpture in the Western Deserts. A concept sketch done that year shows two parallel walls advancing one mile into the desert.

His first concepts were realised when, in April of 1968, in the company of Heizer, he drew two parallel lines one mile long in chalk on the flat Mojave Desert in California. A year later he returned to the west to construct his "Las Vegas Piece" in the central Nevada Desert. This work consisted of four shallow cuts made by the 6 foot blade of a bulldozer. These four sides join to form a square with half mile sides. Two sides extend another half mile at opposite corners. The sides of this work orientate themselves with the four cardinal directions, North, South, East and West. His work can never be fully expressed by photographs. To experience a work such as this the observer has to go and see it for himself. The work is not entirely visible from any one point. The piece has to be walked to be fully experienced. In earthworks and Beyond, John Beardsley described his experience of the ":Las Vegas Piece":

"DeMaria's lines are compelling: one feels that one's progress along them is somehow involuntary. Yet with this comes a feeling of relief that there is a delineated path on which to progress in a landscape where one might otherwise wander aimlessly. As one walks

the piece, its monotony is at first soothing and finally invigorating as one realises the completeness with which one has experienced both the work and the surrounding landscape. It is a work on a vast scale. This use of scale has become characteristic of DeMaria's work"

(Beardsley 1984, p60)

The Las Vegas Piece works well as an environment sculpture, allowing the observer, through walking around the piece, to experience completely the work, and its surrounding environment. The work, however, dose not relate its form to the surrounding environment. It is not until the work of "Lightening Field" that this element is included.

"Lightning Field" was completed in 1977. It is situated near Qumado in west central New Mexico. It is set in flat, semi-arid basin ringed by distant mountains. Particular attention was taken in choosing the location for the site. The states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and Texas were searched by truck over a five year period before the location for the piece was finalise. DeMaria had a number of criteria for closing the site. The location had to have a negligible population so that one could feel completely alone with the environment. The site had to be very flat and had to have a high lightning activity. (In the location finally chosen the thunderstorm season stretches from May through to September). As John Beardsly put it in his book Earth Works and Beyond:

"He wanted a place where one could be alone with a trackless earth and overarching sky to witness their interchange through apparently wanton electrical discharge". (Beardsley, 1984, P 62.)

The work itself consists of 400 stainless steel poles. These poles have been laid out in a grid format. The grid is aligned to the four cardinal directions. Sixteen rows of 25 poles run for a length of a mile on the East-West axis. Twenty five rows of 16 poles extend for just over a kilometre on the North-South axis. The use of the mile and the kilometre is interesting as it is with these two values of length that most of the world has been divided. Each pole is placed 220 feet apart. DeMaria considered it important to keep all the tips of the poles on the exact same plane. An imaginary sheet of glass could simultaneously rest on the top of each pole. The poles, therefore, vary from 26 feet 9 inches to 15 feet. The poles themselves are constructed from highly polished stainless steel, two inches in diameter, with solid tips. They are set in concrete foundations approximately three feet deep. The poles are earthed with traditional grounding rods to protect the foundations. The foundations themselves are buried one foot below the surface of the ground. Although there had been extensive work carried out in the construction of the work, there remained no trace of this process.Melinda Wortz, who has visited the field, described the effect in an article she wrote for Arts Magazine, in May 1980:

"Each individual pole in itself yields a complete aesthetic experience quite apart from its relationship to the grid, its orienting function as a point from which radiating lines extend. A pole's vertical movement directs us to both sky and the ground. Because it is taller than we are, it acts to make us more aware of the continuum between the two than we normally are when we are looking straight ahead or focusing on particular objects in our environment whether for pragmatic or simply pleasurable purposes, in which case we end up perceiving ourselves and the objects in our environment as discrete and separate from each other and from the spaces around us. Standing beneath the poles with their reflecting surfaces mirroring the light and the colours of the ground, the sky, and ourselves we see them as connectors between earth and sky. As human beings we have the same vertical orientation as the poles. We too are bridges between the earth and sky. How many times do we see ourselves in this manner?"(Wortz, May 1980 p 92.)

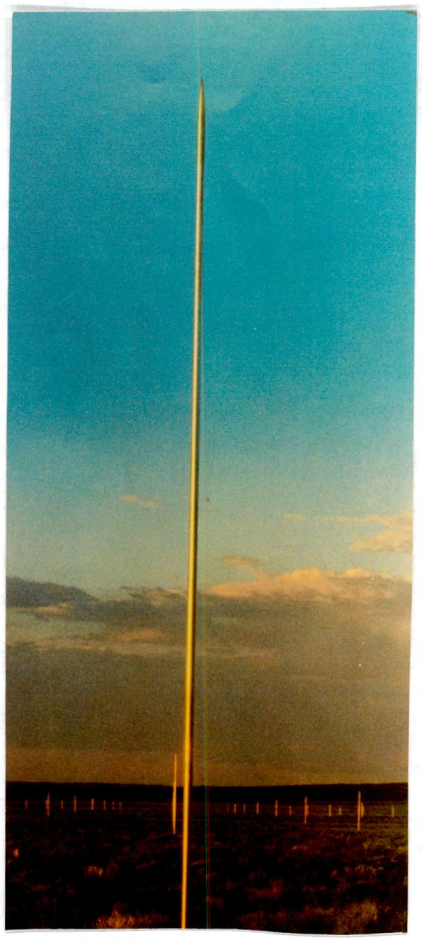


Fig 10.

The poles, However, are an integral part of the grid formation which itself acts as a single unit. Its primary objective is to express the relationship between the sky and the earth. The work has been meticulously planned to maximise this interaction between sky and earth through lightning. For 60 days within the year lightning activity can be observed from the field.

During the lightning season an average of three storms actually pass over the lightning field itself every 30 days. It is unusual however, for an observer to witness lightning actually hitting a pole itself. The poles instead act as a complete unit. The regimented rows of steel poles would be illuminated in a momentary flash as the lightning strikes. This would add an intensity to the storm to the viewer who would be actually standing in the middle of the Lightning Field, experiencing presumably an apprehensive excitement at the possibility of the sculpture actually interacting with the violent electrical storm above. The sculpture is organised in regiment and order. It is an aesthetic of human logic. It is this order and logic that allows the observer to become an integrity part of the sculpture thus allowing him the experience of actually interacting personally with the storm. DeMaria has channelled the storm physically and mentally through the steel poles. Physically the poles channel the electrical energy from the sky to the earth below. Mentally this sculpture channels the storm into an exciting interchange between the human logic and the rage of nature. The observer can relate to the regiment and order of the piece

and through this can experience the storm at a higher state of awareness.

Walter DeMarias's Lightning Field" is the most outstanding work of American Land Art. In this piece most of the elements of American Land Art come together. It is the channelling of nature as is exemplified by "Lightning Field", that is the most dominant theme of American Land Art.

Heizer's, Double Negative is situated in a natural ravine. The vastness scale of the sculpture animates the work. In the work of Smithson, the natural environment is brought into the sculpture in a symbolic manner. There is, however, no continuous interchange between the sculpture and its environment. The work of Nancy Holt adds an element of dynamic interchange between nature and her work. It relates little, however, ascetically to its surrounding environment. DeMaria's "Lightning Field" encompasses all these aspects of American land art, channelling the very rage of nature through his work.

Fig 11.

Fig 12

Chapter 2

British Land Art

Section 1:Introduction.

In England similar circumstances existed in the late 60's as in America. Some artists in Britain had become frustrated with the lack of scope the gallery system would tolerate. They looked with destain at many of the contemporary sculptures of their time as being little more than precious objects. In order to break free of these constraints, they also looked to the landscape to visualise their concepts.

The three major artists who led this crusade back to the land in an expression of this new direction were Hamish Fulton, Richard long and David Nash. All three graduated from college in London in the mid 1960s. The resulting art, however, differed radically from that produced in America during the same period.

Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, land in America was easily available for settlers. Today vast tracts of desert and wilderness still exist. From the Middle ages in Britain land had been managed and controlled by the land owning classes. In the 18th century a system of large scale landscaping of the landlords estates began to develop in Britain. This movement was led by the landscape designer Lancelot Capability Brown. Brown's object was to achieve a gentle smooth serenity in the landscape. A public perception was

developed on what the ideal landscape should look like. The heritage of this carefully tended landscape meant that people would not tolerate an intrusion on the landscape of the style and scale of American Land Art. This applied also to the artists, like those mentioned above, who wished to work in the landscape. Behavioural scientists have said that mental and phisicial attitudes are determined by the landscape in which one is surrounded by. If this is the case, it could not be better demonstrated than by the comparison of land art in England with that of America. Richard Long was once asked what he felt about the work of his American contemporary land artists, namely that of Robert Smithson,Heizer and DeMaria. He stated:

"I feel the three artists you mentioned use the landscape without any sense of respect for it... I see their art as a continuation of the Manifest Destiny, The so called Heroic Conquest of Nature".

Beardsley 1984 p.50

The resulting land art that occurred in England was unobtrusive and of a comparatively small scale. It used materials that are indigenous to the landscape. Some of these pieces, such as those of Andy Goldsworthy, are often ephemeral, captured on some occasions by film for a mere instant. Other works such as those of Richard Long sometimes do not exist at all in any three dimensional form and at their location there is no material whatsoever to mark their existence. It is the intriguing work of this artist, Richard Long,that I will firstly investigate.

Section 2

Richard Long

Richard Long graduated from St Martins School of Art in the mid-60s. While there he was already making some temporary sculptures out-of-doors. In 1967 he drew a set of concentric circles on the grass with paper. This style of temporary, ephemeral sculpture was to become a theme throughout Long's work. In 1968 he moved to working purely with indigenous materials easily available on the site where the sculpture is created. The act of realising the concept was becoming as important as the three-dimentional sculpture itself. This is shown well in a piece he completed in that year. In this work he placed stones on a beach in Somerset in the shape of a square. The piece itself is hard to see as the stone square is placed on the beach which itself is made up of the same stones.

Fig 13.

Another hint of what was to come is to be found in this sculpture. The sum total of the stones on the beach has not been changed but merely rearranged. This concept of creating sculptures that are an integral part of their surrounding environment constructed purely from indigenous materials is a common theme through many of the British Land Artists.

In 1969 long took a third step. Pushing the boundaries of sculpture as it was then known, Long made the act of walking itself into the sculpture. In his piece 164 stones in 164 miles, Long walked the width of Ireland form Clare to Wicklow. At one mile intervals along the way he would take a stone from the nearest source and place it on the road. He listed the number of stones he placed on the road per county, for example, Kilkenny, 27 stones, Leix 9 stones, Carlow 20 stones, Wicklow 21 stones. The walk is the sculpture, the stones mark out its path, size and direction.

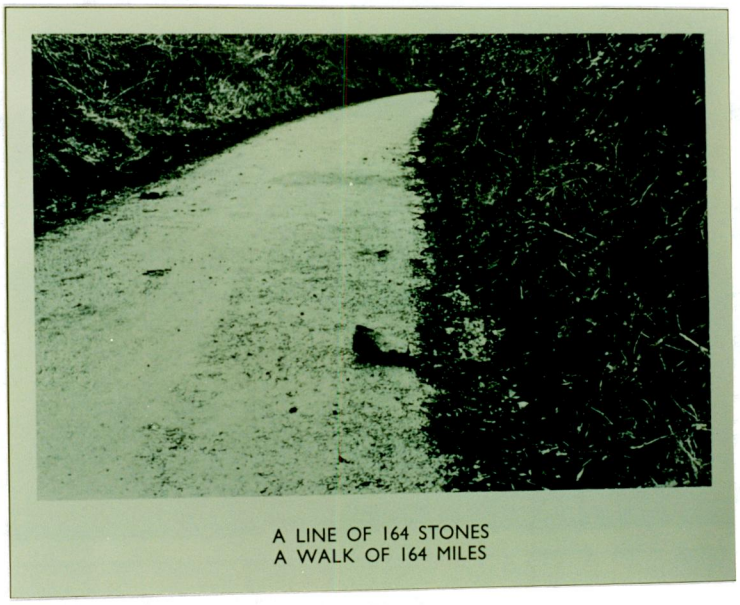


Fig 14.

An Eskimo custom may help to understand Long's Thinking more clearly. If an Eskimo got angry, he sometimes would relieve his emotions by taking a walk. This was taken in a strait line across the landscape. The point at which the anger s conquered is marked with a stick. The walk bears witness to the strength and length of the rage.

In the same year, 1969, Long produced a piece of art in which he abandoned three dimensional sculpture altogether. From the twelfth to the fifteenth of October, Long walked four concentric squares into the Wiltshire countryside. Each square was walked as accurately as possible, the time noted and the square drawn on a map. The walk itself constituted the art work.

A conventional piece of sculpture requires a mental and a physical process to create a three dimensional piece of work. Long's work asks the question, Is the three dimensional piece necessary at all? The resulting sculptural form of conventional sculpture is only ever at most a representation of the mental concept. Long's piece cuts out the three-dimentional representation. The sculpture if it can be called that, relies on a mental and physical process alone.

On much the same lines as that of Smithsons "non Sites" discussed earlier, Long exhibits these works in a gallery setting. The two dimensional maps and photographs he uses for this style of work

tells us the location of the piece. It also tells us the length, direction and time it took to walk each square. This is the sculpture . He perhaps has abandoned the three-dimentional representation of his concepts because it would not relate closely enough to the ideas he wants to express.

Although they use the same themes as Long not all British Land Artists strayed as far from the sculptural convention as Long has done. One such artist is David Nash.

Section 3

David Nash

After graduating from art college in London in 1967. Nash then moved to the small slate quarrying village of Blaenau Festiniog in the north of Wales, which has become his permanent base. During this period he was working with wood to create tower structures. These consisted of wooden framework structures that were then painted. However the price of wood was expensive, so he turned to obtaining his own wood. It was when Nash began to process this green wood that the natural processes of its aging began to intrigue him. He began, he says, to realise the importance of wood in its own right and not simply as a vehicle.

The pieces he now started to work on were made from green wood. This material would then start to crack and split as it seasoned. This gives his pieces a unique sense of life about them. Nash says,

"Rather than a monument which itself implies defiance of mortality these works are gestures of acceptance. The acceptance of decay".

(Beardsley, 1984, p.44)

His sculpture now started to work with the spirit of the material. Each piece began to accentuate particular characteristic elements of the material. One of his early pieces in this vein is called "Nine cracked Balls", 1970, for which he has carved nine roughly shaped balls from green ash. As the ash dries and shrinks, the balls began to split and crack. In the carving of the

piece, he has given the work a shape and a direction. The drying wood then gives it its life and energy.

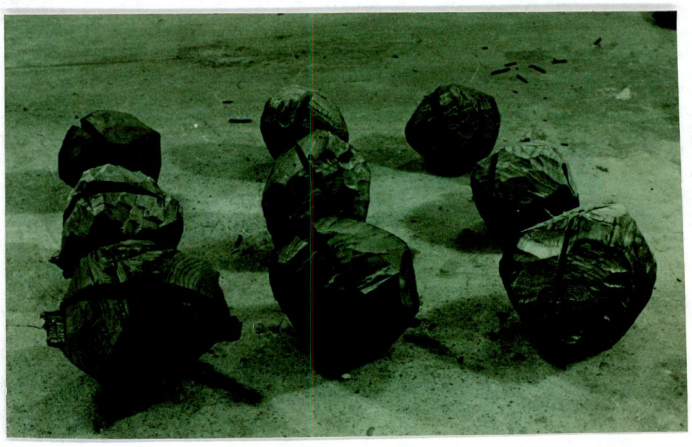


Fig 15.

One of the best examples of this theme in his work is a piece called "Cracked Box"

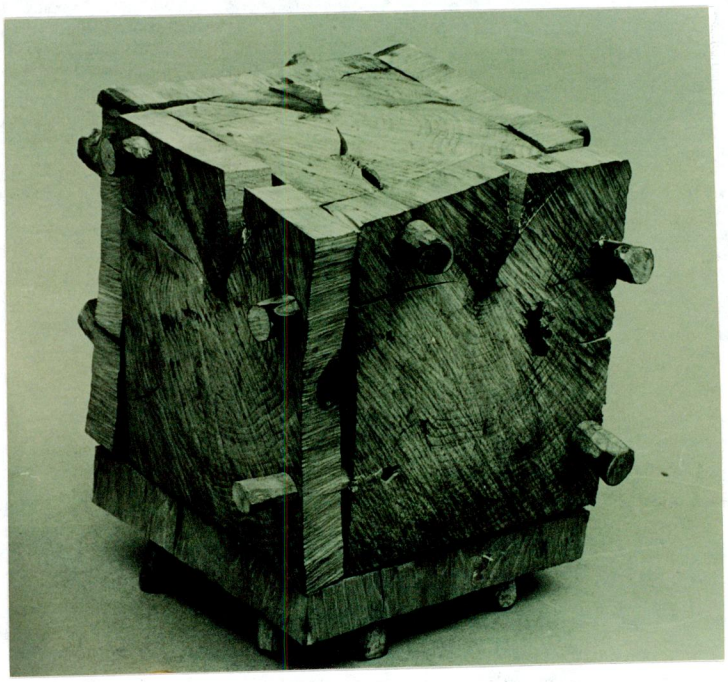


Fig 16.

for this piece square panels and pegs were first cut from green lumber. These were then assembled to form a hollow cube. This perhaps is a symbol of

mans logic and structure. Nash's input into the piece is now complete. The wood begins to react naturally to the circumstances under which it has been exposed. The resulting cube has been buckled and fractured by the shrinking of the wood. The wood, as such, has had the final say on the resulting aesthetic. The actual maturing process of the wood Nash used, constitutes half the work.

Nash creates a scenario in which nature expresses her own aesthetic. He sets up situations and lets nature decree the result all that is important is the experiment. The result is the aesthetic or continuing aesthetic.

In line with this process of working alongside nature, Nash then took his work one step further. He began to work with living trees themselves. The idea for this work came from the hedgerows used as fencing in the locality. In these fences, the farmer, through fetching the wood, persuade it to grow in particular directions. In 1977 Nash planted 22 young ash trees in a circle of 30 foot diameter. The trees were allowed to grow for 10 years. A branch was then grafted to the tree at right angles. At 13 years old the tree was fetched. This is a process whereby the tree is cut part of the way through and then bent to a right angle. This process is repeated in 10 year intervals over 30 years.

" The trees will have formed in that time an ash dome
A silver linear structure in winter
A green mass in summer
A volcano of growing energy"

Beardsley, 1984, p.45

Nash has described in "Fletched over Ash" the progression of his work over the years, as follows:

" Earlier I used wood mill wood, regular standard units, later, greenwood fresh from the tree, now the tree itself.The more I look at the tree, the more I see the tree; its space and location, its volume and structure, its engineering and balance. More than that, I see the uniqueness of each single tree and beyond that still I see it as a great emblem of life. A potent vibrant tower, a whirling prayer, a wheel of natural energy"

Nash 1984 p.40

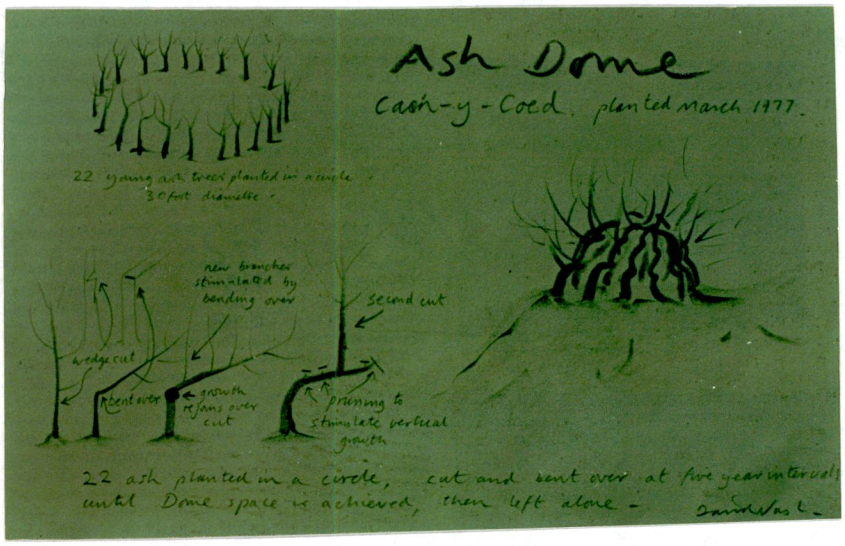


Fig 17.

Section 4

Andy Goldsworthy

Andy Goldsworthy (born 1956) grew up in the suburbs of Leeds in the West Yorkshire. In his teens he and his older brother found holiday work on a nearby farm. It was this experience of working on the farm during the summers that first fired his enthusiasm for working with the natural environment.

Near the farm there was a small wood and it was here that he created his first works. When he finished secondary school he had some difficulty in getting a place in art college. Eventually Bradford College of Art offered him a place on their foundation course. From this foundation course he acquired, again with a degree of difficulty, a place at Preston in a Fine Art course. The course itself was not located in Preston itself but in Lancaster. The students themselves lived four miles north of Lancashire in the sea side town of Morecombe. The accommodation here was cheap, living in out-of-season holiday flats. The town overlooks Morecombe Bay, a vast stretch of sand some ten miles long. It was here that Goldsworthy spent most of his college career. he describes his experience as follows:

"When I began working outside I had to establish instincts and feelings for nature, some I never had While others I had not used since childhood. I needed a physical link before a personal approach and relationship could be formed. I splashed in water, covered myself in mud, went barefoot and woke with the dawn."

Goldsworthy 1985, p.12

His initial works did not set out to create finished pieces. They were more exercises and experiments with the natural environment, honing body and sole to harmonise more closely with the pulse of nature. He examined such things as rock formations, marine life, sun and sand. He developed a set of rules at this time to which many of his works still ad hear. He decided not to use any tools whatsoever but to construct his works by his own hands, creating pure and natural forms. He worked at this time only with materials which were easily at hand. This included in one bizarre occasion, seagulls, which he attempted to induce into a set of formations with the aid of some bread crumbs.

In his time in college Goldsworthy ventured into college only once or twice a week to attend Art History lectures and to chat to people. Through these lectures he discovered works such as Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty", which he much admired. Works such as these bolstered his confidence in the direction he was taking.

Photography soon became an integral part of his work. In his first term he used black and white film to record his work. He soon realised that colour was necessary in order to fully document his experiments. From the second term on he used colour slide film. He was worried that photography might govern his work to some extent. He developed a system, therefore, whereby all work, good and bad, was documented. The photography became a matter of routine, thus lessening the chance of encroaching on the development of his work. Goldsworthy's works continued to develop by investigating different

charisticharacteristics in the rhythms of the natural environment.for example, as he himself explains:

"I have become aware of how nature is in a state of change and how that change is the key to understanding. I want my art to be sensitive and alert to the changes in material, season and weather".

Goldsworthy 1987,P5

His acceptance of the element of change in Nature leads him, like Nash, to accept also the element of decay and to reflect both in his works.Working in this coastal setting allowed him plenty of opportunities use water. One such piece worked with the tide itself.

Fig 18.

In this work several large boulders have been placed on a flat rock that submerges just below the surface of the water at high tide. Photographs have been taken showing the piece from tide full out to full in. In the final photograph the boulders appear to be floating on the sea.

A major objective of Goldsworthy's work is the creation of what he terms the innocent eye. By placing familiar natural objects in unfamiliar situations, he wants us to really see their shape, their colour, their texture, etc: to see them with an innocent eye. He places emphasis on the natural texture and colour of materials, accentuating these charistics by setting the material in an unrelated environment or constructing it in an abstract shape of form so the material is no longer familiar. This disorientation is necessary to provoke a response uncluttered by previous knowledge.Goldsworth has told a story which well illustrates this point. He describes meeting some walkers who had just seen a magnificent bird with beautiful wings of blue and black. When they were told that this bird was a common magpie they were obviously disappointed. If they had known beforehand what a magpie looked like, they might never have given it a second glance, never seeing those beautiful feathers.

If the following illustrations are examined, this element of his work can be clearly observed. This work "Wood Pigeon Wing Feathers partly buried, laid around a hole," was created while still in college in 1977. It illustrates the direction that was taking shape in his work. In the work the identification of the material surrounding the

hole without the aid of the caption would be difficult. We instead observe the linear quality of the feathers, the graduation of colours and the smoothness of their texture in contrast to the damp earth around them. The use of abstract shapes has induced the innocence of eye which has become one of Goldsworthy's primary objectives.

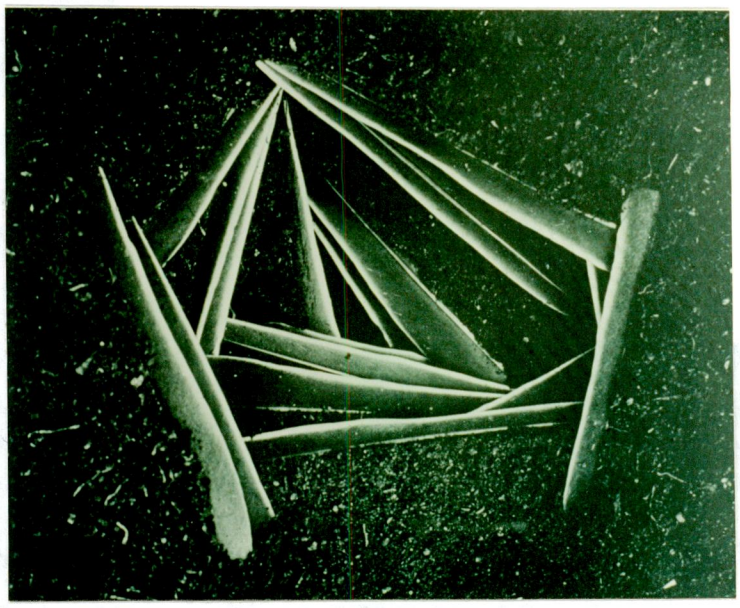


Fig 19.

On the following page are four illustrations of Goldsworthy's work with water. His treatment of water in his sculpture is characteristic of the processes to which all his work relates.

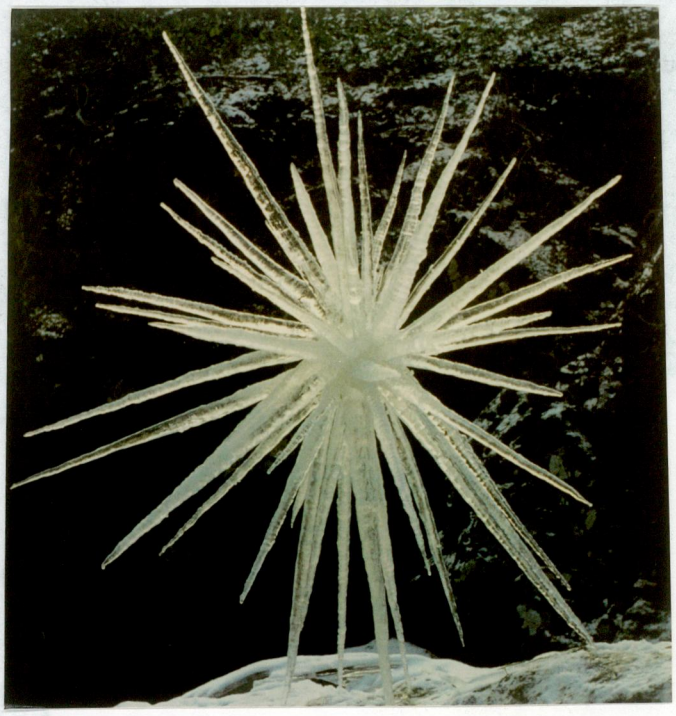
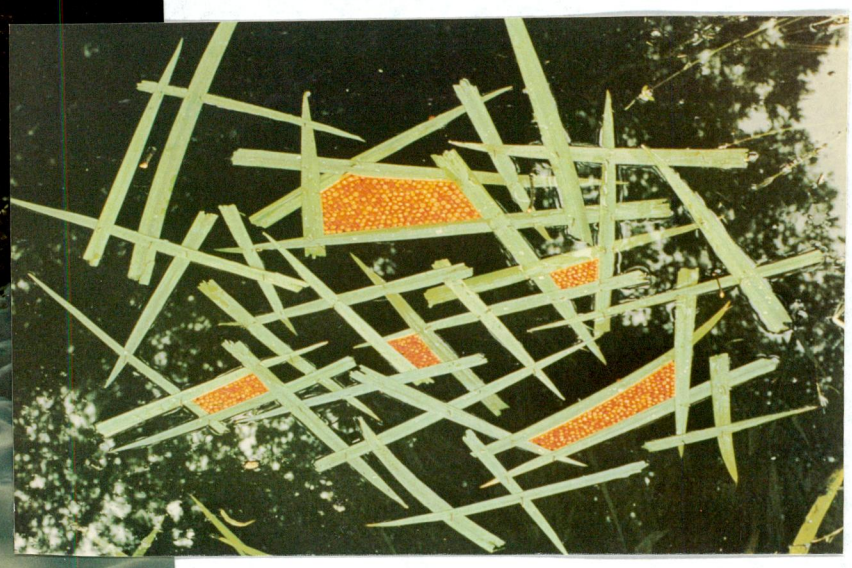


Fig 20.

Fig 21.



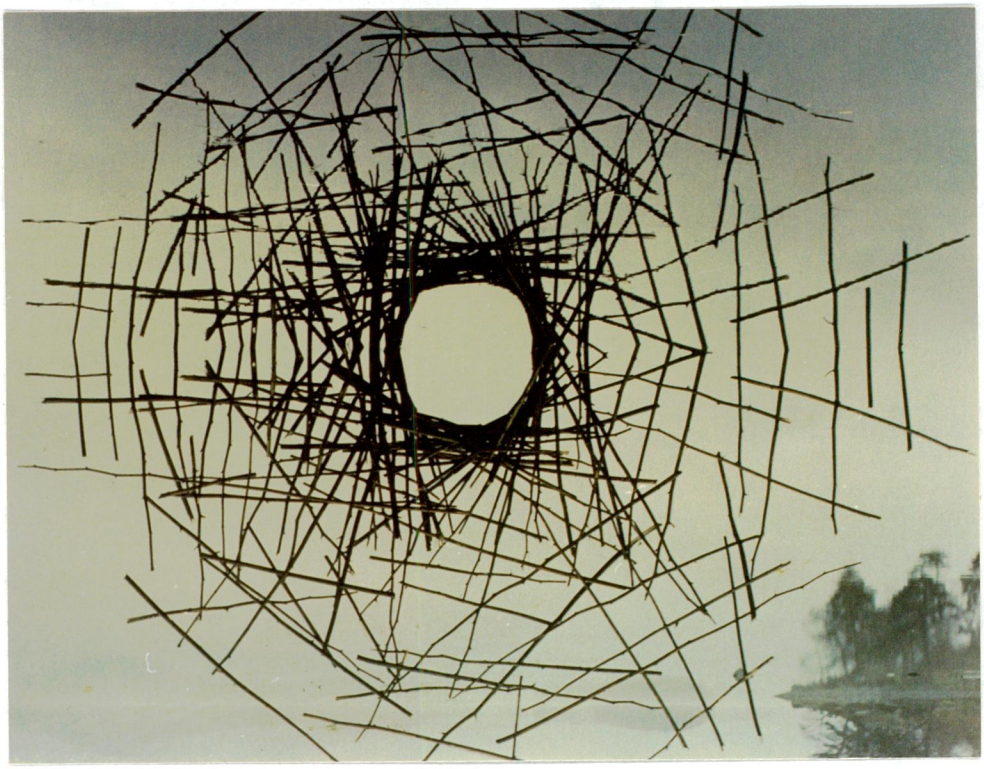


Fig 22.

Fig 23.

These examples show how he explores the many different properties of water in his work. Each piece works on a different theme: freezing, floating and reflecting, working with ice, snow and water.

In the snow slabs, for example the concentric circles give the slab an inner luminescence. This accentuates the immaculate crystalline whiteness of frozen snow also shown in its natural form in the background. These concentric circles focus our attention on the layered light. The gritty crunchy texture of the material is also expressed in the uneven circles. This piece contrasts sharply with the angular ferocity of the icicle ball.

The icicle ball was made by dipping the thick ends of the icicles in water and then holding them until set. The ball radiates the extreme cold which enabled its creation. The light shining through the icicles adds to its explosive energy.

The third photograph explores a totally different characteristic of water. Here he takes advantage of materials that float on water. Using the pond as almost a sketch pad, Goldsworthy draws an abstract pattern of green and red from iris blades and roan berries pinned together with thorns.

The last piece uses yet another quality of water , that of its ability to reflect light. The work in this photograph is constructed from knot weed stalks pushed into the bottom of the lake. It is made complete by its own reflection. It creates the Illusion of virtually hovering in space in front of the artist himself.

Goldsworthy's works are deceptively simplistic. As he describes it himself:

"The best of my work, sometimes is the result of much struggle, when made appears so obvious that it is incredible I didn't see it before. It was there all the time ".

Goldsworthy 1990, p.11

Andy Goldsworthy's work is typical of English land art in the small, intimate scale of his work, in his concern for working with nature causing as little interference as possible, and in his concentration on using natural materials to increase our awareness of nature. We see these characteristics reflected also in different ways in the other English Land Artists that have been mentioned.

In the work of Richard Long we have seen how his work interferes little with the natural environment in which it is created. By working with indigenous material, he implants rather than imposes his sculpture into the landscape. Long dose not, however, in his three dimensional work, investigate the natural qualities or express the aesthetic of the indigenous material with which he has created his works. He uses the landscape as a vehicle in which to create his work rather than creating his work to reflect the landscape.

The work of David Nash, as we have seen, expresses the natural qualities of his chosen material, wood. He works with the natural processes such as the seasoning of wood. His approach, however, is somewhat limited and in some ways, conventional. His resulting works refer little to the surrounding environment in which they are created

or have been placed. Even in his works with living trees, such as "ash dome". He manipulates nature so as to align it to his personal concepts. The resulting aesthetic of this work derives little from the material of which it is constructed.

The work of Andy Goldsworthy shows us how the aesthetic of his natural materials can be cleverly and beautifully expressed. The simplicity and apparent ease of his work in concept and construction allows it to relate to a vast range of people. It stimulates the eye of the innocent which we all once possessed allowing us again to see for the first time a leaf, a flower, a bud.

Chapter 3

Section 1

The Sublime and the Beautiful:

The earliest surviving writings on the sublime date from the Greek philosopher Longiunus of the first century AD. His treatise "Peri Hupsous" (On the Sublime) was first translated in the late seventeenth century and generated much interest and debate on the subject which has continued to the present day. Joseph Addison was responsible for popularising Longinus among the English in the papers "The Spectator" which were widely read at the time. The Sublime became a major topic of discussion in the intellectual circles and coffee houses of the time. Later Philosophers such as Burke, Hegel, Kant and Schopenhauer all became engaged in the subject.

The work of Longiunus is primarily concerned with the sublimity of style in literature. Longinius defines the sublime as "eminence or perfection in language ". He also describes however and more importantly the sublime in the natural world around us. Here he describes it as endless space, the sun and the stars, volcanic eruptions, great rivers . The sublime he describes is "greater and more divine than ourselves". This section on Natural Sublimity is a relatively small section of the work . It has been however for many the most important section. It is this area that the aesthetic theorists of the eighteenth century mainly concerned themselves with.

Theorists such as Addison concentrated on the physical world of nature around us. He describes the sublime as "Greatness Vast Uncultivated Desert or Huge Heaps of Mountains, High Rocks and Precipitates a Wide Expanse of Water.". By the middle of the century Longinus had become something of a cult figure He may , however have lost some respect and stature from his popularity. Edmund Burke who in 1757 published "Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful",the most important treaties on the Sublime that century, never once mentioned his name. In this work Burke discusses the Sublime and the Beautiful. The Sublime he describes as that which induces terror by a suggestion of solitude, vastness or total power which touches the instinct of self preservation. The Beautiful he sees as that which is smooth, gentle, pleasing and stimulates the instinct to self propagate. In 1927 the art historian Christopher Hussy attributed seven characteristics to the Sublime based on the readings of Burke. These he listed as follows. Obscurity, both physical and intellectual, Power,Privations, such as darkness, solitude and silence. Vastness either vertical or horizontal, both of which diminish the scale of the human observer. Infinity which could be either literal or induced by two final characteristics Uniformity and Succession both of which suggest limitless progression.

Longinus however seemed to imply much more than a physical quality. He seems in my mind to be attempting to describe the life blood of nature itself. This life blood which is most awe inspiring and prevalent in vast physical phenomena. He writes "man can easily

understand what is useful and necessary but he admires what passes his understanding". Admires is a tame description of the experience. In the teaching of Zen Buddhism one must be shocked out of his rational habits of thought before enlightenment can begin. This horrifying flash of enlightnment occures when the wiring under the board is momentarily revealed. Beauty the sheath of protection, the cloth that surrounds the spirit is stripped bare . The infinite abyss of the universe is nakedly revealed. This is the sublime.

To a large extent American Land Art could be classed as Sublime and English Land Art as Beautiful.

Section 2

American Land Art and the Sublime:

American and English Land Art are similar in that both return to the landscape for the inspiration and location of their work. Land Art in America has several distinctive features. The first and most obvious feature of American Land Art is their use of scale. The scale of these works such as Heizers "Double Negative" and "Complex City One" animates the work and gives it a strong presence. The rythems of nature are often incorporated.. In the "Sun Tunnels" of Nancy Holt. for example the tunnels of the sculpture are penetrated by the sun on the summer and winter solstice. Natural phenomena are also to be found as essential elements in American Land Art. One obvious example would be that of DeMarias Lightning Field. The use of primitive symbols can also be found in such work as Robert Smithsons "Spiral Jetty". All these elements imply a general theme of primitivism. Parallels can easily be drawn for example between American Land Art and the megalithic monuments of New Grange with their similar uses of celestial orientation and interaction. The similar use of symbol and scale. There is however a second and equally important theme that runs through American Land Art, that of the Sublime.

Hussey's seven attributes of the Sublime as described above, could almost be seen to be the brief to which DeMaria constructed

Lightning Field. It is probable that De Maria did indeed wish to evoke the Sublime in his work. The central theme of the piece is that of power, the power of lightning. Solitude is achieved in the remote location of the piece. Situated in a flat semi-arid basin of negligible population, ringed by distant mountains and capped by an immense over arching sky, a more secluded environment would be difficult to create. It is vast in both its own dimensions and in the setting it employs. Aspects of infinity can be found in the repetition of the poles and the element with which they interact. The grand scale and emptiness of the western landscape perhaps makes reference to the Sublime unavoidable. The choice of the American Land Artists to locate their work there in areas such as the shores of the Salt Lake or the Great Basin Desert in Utah mean the evocation of the Sublime was deliberate. In Heizer's work "Double Negative" the immense excavations of the piece plunges one from the vast desert expanse into a pit of solitude. The work of Nancy Holt deals with the infinite space of the universe and the unending cycle of time.

Section 3

The Beautiful:English Land Art

The English like the Americans turned to the landscape in the 1960s to forge a new direction in sculpture. The social and physical environment to which the English Land Artists were exposed differed greatly from that of America.The English Land Artists came from a heritage of a managed and controlled landscape. They felt that no one individual should have the right to impose any permanent change on the remaining countryside. The English Land Artists as a result almost always works on a small scale. No extraneous materials are used in the construction of the works. The only materials used are site specific. A human scale is used where everything must be man handalable. Armed with such rules they attempt to implant their concepts into rather than onto the specific site.

All things natural are in a constant state of change. In the work of all three English land artists, the sculptures Produced, work with the rythems of nature. The works grow ,stay and decay. The sculptures themselves work primarily with accentuating *natural phenomenon* in the chosen material. In the work of Nash for example this *natural phenomenon* is the different natural characteristics of wood as it is exposed to different environments and situations.An example of this approach is Cracked Box. In the work of Goldsworthy, he accentuates the individual characteristics of the material in which he is working by disassociating the material from its familiarity.for example Wood Pigeon Wing Feathers Partly Buried, Laid Around a Hole.

This gives the viewer a new way at looking at a familiar natural material.
.In Burkes treatise the attributes he ascribes to the Beautiful are smallness, smoothness, curviness, delicacy, cleanliness, soft colouration, lack of resistance and quietness".
These elements are clearly illustrated in the works of Goldsworthy. In many of his works the sculpture is captured only for a moment. This moment is captured by film and portrays an air of peace and stillness. In the work" Snow Slabs" for example the concentric circles cut into the snow layer the light which radiates cleanliness and purity.

In Paul Mattick Jr's article Beautiful and Sublime: Gender Totemism in the Constitution of Art written for The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism in the fall of 1990 draws attention to the fact that in Burkes treatise the Sublime is equated with the male and the Beautiful is equated with the female. The properties of an object that induce the sensation of Sublimity: vastness, roughness, hardness and loudness he states are of a masculine nature. The Land Art of America would therefore be described as Sublime and therefore masculine.. Works such as Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels unveil the infinity of the universe, the ageless cycle of the planets. This in turn evokes the sensation of fear as the observer is confronted with the inevitability of his own mortality. This evocation of fear is an attribute of the Sublime and the masculine. English Land Art contains the attributes of the Beautiful and therefore the feminine.. English Land Artists work with the rythems of nature. The resulting works are active transient sculpture in contrast to the static permanence of the American sculpture. The walks of Richard

Long,Goldsworthy's Icicle Ball and the Ash Dome of Nash are all examples of this transience. They make momentary art . The elements are arranged, constructed, shaped or formed and a concept is expressed. The moment passes and concept dissolves, the rhythm of nature continues unbroken. This is the Feminine, the Beautiful,. Birth, Death Rebirth. This is the attainable infinity of the living, Feminine mother earth ,eternal .

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