Land art

Land art, Earthworks (coined by Robert Smithson), or Earth art is an art movement which emerged in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which landscape and the work of art are inextricably linked. It is also an art form that is created in nature, using natural materials such as soil, rock (bed rock, boulders, stones), organic media (logs, branches, leaves), and water with introduced materials such as concrete, metal, asphalt, mineral pigments. Sculptures are not placed in the landscape, rather, the landscape is the means of their creation. Often earth moving equipment is involved. The works frequently exist in the open, located well away from civilization, left to change and erode under natural conditions. Many of the first works, created in the deserts of Nevada, New Mexico, Utah or Arizona were ephemeral in nature and now only exist as video recordings or photographic documents.

History

Land art is to be understood as an artistic protest against the perceived artificiality, plastic aesthetics and ruthless commercialization of art at the end of the 1960s in America. Exponents of land art rejected the museum or gallery as the setting of artistic activity and developed monumental landscape projects which were beyond the reach of traditional transportable sculpture and the commercial art market. Land art was inspired by minimal art and Conceptual art but also by modern and minimal movements such as De Stijl, cubism, minimalism and the work of Constantin Brâncuși and Joseph Beuys. Many of the artists associated with land art had been involved with minimal art and Conceptual art. Isamu Noguchi's 1941 design for Contoured Playground in New York is sometimes interpreted as an important early piece of land art even though the artist himself never called his work "land art" but simply "sculpture". His influence on contemporary land art, landscape architecture and environmental sculpture is evident in many works today.

Alan Sonfist is a pioneer of an alternative approach to working with nature and culture that he began in 1965 by bringing historical nature and sustainable art back into New York City. His most inspirational work is Time Landscape an indigenous forest he planted in New York City. He also created several other Time Landscapes around the world such as Circles of Time in Florence Italy documenting the historical usage of the land. According to critic Barbara Rose, writing in Artforum in 1969, she had become disillusioned with the commodification and insularity of
Land art bound art. In 1967, the art critic Grace Glueck writing in the New York Times declared the first earthwork was done by Douglas Leichter and Richard Saba at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. The sudden appearance of land art in 1968 can be located as a response by a generation of artists mostly in their late twenties to the heightened political activism of the year and the emerging environmental and women's liberation movements.

The movement began in October 1968 with the group exhibition "Earth Works" at the Dwan Gallery in New York. In February 1969, Willoughby Sharp curated the "Earth Art" exhibition at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. The artists included were Walter De Maria, Jan Dibbets, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Neil Jenney, Richard Long, David Medalla, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, and Gunther Uecker. The exhibition was directed by Thomas W. Leavitt. Gordon Matta-Clark, who lived in Ithaca at the time, was invited by Sharp to help the artists in "Earth Art" with the on-site execution of their works for the exhibition.

Perhaps the best known artist who worked in this genre was the American Robert Smithson whose 1968 essay "The Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" provided a critical framework for the movement as a reaction to the disengagement of Modernism from social issues as represented by the critic Clement Greenberg. His best known piece, and probably the most famous piece of all land art, is the Spiral Jetty (1970), for which Smithson arranged rock, earth and algae so as to form a long (1500 ft) spiral-shape jetty protruding into Great Salt Lake in northern Utah, U.S.. How much of the work, if any, is visible is dependent on the fluctuating water levels. Since its creation, the work has been completely covered, and then uncovered again, by water. Smithson's Gravel Mirror with Cracks and Dust (1968) is an example of land art existing in a gallery space rather than in the natural environment. It consists of a pile of gravel by the side of a partially mirrored gallery wall. In its simplicity of form and concentration on the materials themselves, this and other pieces of land art have an affinity with minimalism. There is also a relationship to Arte Povera in the use of materials traditionally considered "unartistic" or "worthless".

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non-American land artists are the British Chris Drury, Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Long and the Australian Andrew Rogers.\cite{2}

Some projects by the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude (who are famous for wrapping monuments, buildings and landscapes in fabric) have also been considered land art by some, though the artists themselves consider this incorrect.\cite{3} Joseph Beuys' concept of 'social sculpture' influenced 'Land art' and his '7000 Eichen' project of 1972 to plant 7000 Oak trees has many similarities to 'Land art' processes. Rogers' "Rhythms of Life" project is the largest contemporary land-art undertaking in the world, forming a chain of stone sculptures, or geoglyphs, around the globe – 12 sites – in disparate exotic locations (from below sea level and up to altitudes of 4,300 m/14,107 ft). Up to three geoglyphs (ranging in size up to 40,000 sq m/430,560 sq ft) are located in each site.

Land artists in America relied mostly on wealthy patrons and private foundations to fund their often costly projects. With the sudden economic down turn of the mid 1970s funds from these sources largely stopped. With the death of Robert Smithson in a plane crash in 1973 the movement lost one of its most important figureheads and faded out. James Turrell continues to work on the Roden Crater project. In most respects 'Land Art' has become part of mainstream public art and in many cases the term "Land Art" is misused to label any kind of art in nature even though conceptually not related to the avant-garde works by the pioneers of Land Art.

Land Art can be found in virtually every country in Europe and America. In Africa it's a growing form of art with Strijdom van der Merwe \cite{4} from South Africa in the forefront. One of the Land Art in South Africa objects grounded in ancient history is 'Mama Africa' which is part of a privately owned botanical garden near Robertson in the Western Cape. This man made Earthwork is 3 metres high, 16 metres long and 7 metres wide.

## Contemporary land artists

- Vito Acconci
- Betty Beaumont
- Milton Becerra
- Eberhard Bosslet
- Mel Chin
- Christo and Jeanne Claude
- Walter De Maria
- Jan Dibbets
- Lucien den Arend
- Agnes Denes
- Jim Denevan
- Harvey Fite
- Andy Goldsworthy
- Michael Heizer
- Nancy Holt
- Richard Long
- David Nash
- Georgia Papageorge
- Beverly Pepper
- Andrew Rogers
- Robert Smithson
- Alan Sonfist
- James Turrell
- Nils Udo
- Bill Vazan
- Seth Wulsin
- Vik Muniz
• Junichi Kakizaki
• Maya Lin

References

Notes

Further reading
• Michel Draguet, Nils-Udo, Bob Verschueren, Brueeels: Atelier 340, 1992
• Robert Hobbs, Robert Smithson: A Retrospective View, Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg / Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University,
**External links**

- Monumental Land Art of the United States. ([http://www.daringdesigns.com/earthworks.htm](http://www.daringdesigns.com/earthworks.htm))
- Official UNM Land Arts of the American West Program Website ([http://landarts.unm.edu/](http://landarts.unm.edu/))
- Australian land arts ([http://www.land-arts.com/](http://www.land-arts.com/))
- Jacek Tylicki Land & Environmental Art projects ([http://www.tylicki.com/](http://www.tylicki.com/))
- (German) Using Land art as a form of advertising ([http://www.artfield.de/landartfield.html](http://www.artfield.de/landartfield.html))
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