

# **Art and the Environment: British Environmental artists, Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long**

British environmental artists have forged major reputations undertaking environmental projects in art all over the world. What has been the reaction in the public domain to these projects? How is the role of artist being defined and explored in these projects?

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Throughout history the meanings of art have changed vastly and the concepts or ideologies in artworks have somewhat become more important than the actual object of art. Sturken and Cartwright (2001; 21) state that photography, text and visual images of any kind are distinct ways in which ideology enters into society. Ideology plays a significant role in our society; the way our mind interprets things, all depends on the way we see or hear things: ‘The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe’ (Berger, 1972; 8). Remollino discusses that artworks are impossible without ideology; art is a conduct or aspect of life because it uses visual, textual and auditory devices that arouses our thoughts and appeals to our consciousness (Emanila, 1998-08).

Inspiration is also an essential factor within art and throughout history landscapes have been a key motivation for many art projects. Landscapes have inspired artists and commonly been recreated on two dimensional surfaces for many years, however recently the ideas of working on the actual landscape with the available materials has become even more successful, with modern displays of photography, film, and natural objects brought into galleries. Art and the environment indeed compliment each other and thus bring about works that emphasize natural beauty and present creative ideologies to certain landscapes. The work of Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy are among these artists who work with natural materials in many environments around the world and bring back something of their experience for viewers. Their journeys, fragments of the

environment and past procedures through varied landscapes are predominantly displayed by photographic evidence, containing layers of meanings within time and space, culture, and references to personal journeys in the land. This paper will continue to address the works of these two British environmental artists, Goldsworthy and Long, and also how the role of each artist is being defined and explored in their work.

Richard Long describes his art as being simple and straightforward, with series of walks in remote environments around Europe and other areas like Africa, Nepal, Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, Canada and Australia. Long says he never makes permanent alterations to the landscapes, but as he passes through he may rearrange natural materials to form ephemeral artworks of circles or lines. Long documents and records his work by a series of photographs, written notes, drawings and maps, and eventually displays his journey in gallery spaces, often re-creating circles or lines by bringing natural objects into the gallery (Kemal and Gaskell, 1993; 171). Long stated that photography and text feed the imagination, and sculptures displayed in galleries feed the senses (Long, 1991; 248). Richard Cork interviewed Long with several questions about his works, and enquired if Long felt lonely when walking and creating art in these remote environments. Long replied that loneliness does not occur to him and that the times of walking and making art is a “pocket of freedom and silence, escaping from the normal chaos” (Long, 1991; 249). While some may think that artists like Long are missing out on associations within society, Long finds his idea of living and working an excellent opportunity to be able to see many amazing places of the world on new horizons; leaving behind remnants of his journeys or moments in time and evidently bringing something visual back for viewers elsewhere.

Long declared that his work is a portrait of himself in the world with an array of materials found along the way (Long, 1991; 251). Working with time, Long creates lines that symbolise journeys through landscapes, or circles which act as adaptable forms and systems. Some of these works include the 1988 *Sahara Line* in the African Sahara, *A line made by walking*, 1967, in England, and the walk in Peru, *Walking a line in Peru*, 1972.

Long stated that circles and lines are images which are shared by everyone, but they belong to no one; they have existed throughout history and are “a balance between the patterns of nature and the formalism of humans” (Long, 1991; 250). Some of Long’s circle works include many rock sculptures in various places; some refer to this idea as being a relation to the mysterious connotations of ancient stone circles. *Connemara Sculpture*, 1971, in Ireland, the *Circle in Alaska*, 1977, the Californian *Muir Pass Stones*, 1995, and the 15 day walk in the three sister’s wilderness, Oregon 2001, are some examples of his circle works. A circle is always the same form, which can be placed within different spaces and be adapted by using different materials. This idea was explained by Cork as being universal, because they are forms that everyone recognises, Long agreed with this and added that “we all live in different cultures but we all share the same nature of the world...the same air and same water [the same atmosphere]” (Long, 1991; 251). “A sculpture in a landscape...is like a celebration of the place and my feelings of me being there” (Long, 1991; 251).

Michael Rosenthal summarised the work of Long as being a “...ritualistic response to the site with which they are interacting. Their largely horizontal acquiesce in and compliment the landscape” (Kemal and Gaskell, 1993; 171). The idea of ephemeral is part of the artists’ ambitions when working in nature, as one has to understand that over time the work will change or disintegrate, so it must be recorded in some way; therefore photography is very important as it provides evidence of the activities and displays the intangible experiences to viewers in society (Bond, 2011).

Stephanie Ross declares that some of Long’s work falls into the category of environmental performance art (Kemal and Gaskell, 1993; 172), but in the interview with Long and Cork, Long states that his work is never a performance, and is usually a quiet and private activity, however always on free public grounds where people may find it (Long, 1991; 248). Ross also discusses that environmental art is site specific, which manipulates the landscape and express individual responses for viewers and relations about the environment (Kemal and Gaskell, 1993; 177). In accordance with this statement, Long’s art does express, relates to and manipulates the environment, however

his works are not visited by the mass public at the sites where they are created, his journeys of line walks and created circles are recorded by photos, drawings and text, and brought to civilization where the personal journeys are renewed and remembered. Long stated:

The simplicity and feeling of being alone is actually part of the work. So it would be quite inappropriate to have a load of people visiting it at a particular site, as that would change the whole nature of the place. So I think that is another way my photographs work. They present the idea that art can be made in solitude or in very remote places, or lasts for very few minutes, or be seen by very few people (Long, 1991; 248).

According to Ben Luke (Sperone and Westwater, 2001-11), during the 1960s and 1970s Long's diverse ideas of working in the landscape broke the boundaries of art, particularly the hegemony of painting and sculpture, thus helping to lay the foundations for a different idea on landscape art, and extending many possibilities of sculpture outside traditional materials. "Though he rejects the 'conceptualist' label and his work always has a powerful visual impact, the fundamental idea at the heart of his work is radical: he claimed the activity of walking as an artistic act (Sperone and Westwater, 2001-11). No longer was art restricted to a gallery or studio, but it could actively engage in other places around the world (National Museum Wales, 2011).

Beginning in the 1980s, Long started to apply painting techniques into his works, particularly with liquid-state mud from tidal rivers; applying it by hand on walls with similar swirling formations. *Heaven and Earth* was a later project with a series of walls painted in mud, which established "a dialogue between the primal gesture of the hand-print and the formal elegance of its display. He stressed that the meaning of his work lay in the visibility of his actions rather than in the representation of a particular landscape" (Costa, 2011).

In 1977, Long agreed to create several projects in Australia for John Kaldor; located in the vast landscape near Broken Hill, NSW, Long achieved an epic walk titled *A straight hundred mile walk in Australia*, also known as Project 7 (Kaldor Art Projects, 2011). This

project explored the area with a body of works consisting of unplanned and uncharted destination walks, spending eight days and nights in the Australian landscape; also creating *A line in Australia* with a rough line of red rocks. “Using a compass, he walked out and back each day in a straight line, returning each night to the same campsite, for a total of 100 miles” (Kaldor Art Projects, 2011). Later in the Sydney Art Gallery, nine tonnes of large blue metal stone, from a Parramatta quarry, was brought in and positioned on the gallery floor by Long and several other art students, forming a monumental scene of the 20-metre *Stone line* project (Kaldor Art Projects, 2011). Similar concepts could suggest an enlarged section of the bitumen roads or highways which seem never ending in the Australian landscape; unlimited journeys and rugged countryside.

In the written works of Richard, he discussed the meaning of walking, stating that it is not always recognised as art; people may consider it skill-less, negative or simply not art at all, nevertheless because we live in a modernised world where art is broad, new ideas and different ways of working in art are generally accepted and practised universally.

A walk traces the surface of the land, it follows an idea,  
it follows the day and the night.  
A road is the site of many journeys.  
The place of a walk is there before the walk and after it.  
A pile of stones or a walk, both have equal physical reality, though  
the walk is invisible.  
Some of my works can be seen, but not recognised as art.  
The creation in my art is not in the common  
forms---circles, lines---I use, but the places I choose to put them in.  
A good work is the right thing in the right place as the right time.  
A crossing place.  
Fording a river. Have a good look, sit down, take off boots  
And socks, tie socks on to rucksack, put on boots,  
wade across, sit down, empty boots, put on socks and boots.  
It's a new walk again.  
© Richard Long (Stiles and Selz, 1996; 566).

Long declares: “A good work is the right thing in the right place at the right time. A crossing place” (Stiles and Selz, 1996; 566). With society being accustomed to many picturesque styles of landscape art, artists like Long and Goldsworthy sort to “...dissolve the artistic ego within natural process...aiming to produce an anti-landscape where the intervention of the artist is reduced to the most minimal and transient mark on the earth”

(Schama, 1995; 12). And in order to capture the natural moments, the camera was required, thus displacing "...the hand on the paintbrush, to the finger on the shutter" (Schama, 1995; 12). Conceptual art, more than any other art movement, continues to arouse controversies in society, because it has an inclination to provoke viewers (Schellekens, 2007). Goldsworthy creates art that "invokes nature without forcing it into museum-ready shapes: found sculptures from shoreline driftwood...cairns made from beach pebbles; or balls of leaves...[sited to decompose] with the natural processes of the seasons (Schama, 1995; 12).

"Goldsworthy's artwork reinforces the relationship of human existence within nature [showing] that we as humans have some ability of controlling nature, but eventually, in the end, nature controls us" (Holmes and Busse, 1997-2011). No matter which site, Goldsworthy will adapt to any surrounding environment and utilise whatever is available, relying on what nature will give him at different times of seasons; contrasting colours or tones of nature are common within his work. Some of his works include the *Slate Arch*, 1982, *Rowan Leaves & Hole*, 1987, *Pebbles Broken & Scraped*, 1985, and *Russet Circle*, 1983. Like Richard Long, Goldsworthy uses photography as his main source to display his short-lived artworks to viewers; he states:

For me looking, touching, material, place and form are all inseparable from the resulting work. It is difficult to say where one stops and another begins. Place is found by walking, direction determined by weather and season. I take the opportunity each day offers... Movement, change, light growth and decay are the lifeblood of nature...

...I have become aware of raw 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 changes in material, season and weather (Hollis & Cameron, 1990).

Holmes and Busse (1997-2011) discuss photography as a process that is relatively new to the world of art. However, few people recognise artists from the fifteenth century and later, who were using optical devices to create their work; known as camera obscura (Kleiner, 2005). In years gone by, questions have continued on whether photography is art or not. Holmes and Busse (1997-2011) explain three different views which are discussed by critics, painters and photographers:

The first view is that photography is not an art because it is produced with a mechanical device and by chemical and physical phenomenon not by hand and inspiration. The second view is that photographs would be useful to art but should not be equal in creativeness to painting and drawing. The final theory is that because photography is so similar to lithography and etching then it would be beneficial to the arts as well as culture (Holmes and Busse, 1997-2011).

Nonetheless, photography is concurrently classed as a type of art today and has become a successful medium in contemporary arts, acting as a new form in providing accurate evidence seen by the eye, instead of the mind (Holmes and Busse, 1997-2011).

When land-art flourished in the seventies, artists like Goldsworthy and Long, "... represented a particular version of the 'dissolving of art into life': the replacement of conjuring up an imaginary world through real transformation of the real world [nature]" (Beyst, 2002). Long and Goldsworthy had both had ideas in common, changing the ideas of capitalism in the arts and freeing art from just being in shops or galleries. "One of the places where art was to be accommodated was nature, where it would be freely accessible to everyone and where everyone could create it as well" (Beyst, 2002).

In conclusion, a familiar principle in the art of Goldsworthy and Long is that art should be more modest in its relations with nature, and accepting land-art as a cultural practice and part of the earth's arrangement with beauty and ecological concerns. Both these individual artists work with time and space, creating remarkable patterns, shapes and rearrangements of natural objects that invoke the surrounding milieu. These bodies of works are then documented, brought together and displayed to viewers as portions from their experience or journey in the landscape. Although there may be some debates about these types of projects, it is apparent that land-art or works that are ephemeral are usually inaccessible for the public, thus making photography the main artistic resource in presenting and expressing concepts of art in the environments. As previously discussed, having masses visit the land-art sites would be inappropriate and also change the whole nature and feeling of the place, therefore photographs work well because it retains the work as a completely different art form, and presents ideas to viewers that art can be made in solitude at places where it only lasts for a moment.

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