

THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN RELATION TO THE ARTISTIC PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the work of artists who are creating their work in nature using elements of art from the nature. It addresses the wide horizon and diverse approaches of the artists towards changing perceptions related to the artistic practices. Their aim is to work in harmony with nature so much so that they have used the elements of nature to treat their art work of very essential some outside material is also used but the material should be environmental friendly. The mesmerizing installations though mostly ephemeral not only beautify nature but also provocative and insightful. The field of environmental art is as diverse as the natural world that inspires it.

Keywords: environmental art, art and nature,

I. Introduction

An artist must possess nature. He must identify himself with her rhythm

Henry Matisse

From the time immortal nature is a recurring theme in visual arts. Artists like Monet, Constable and Turner took nature as their main motivational element and produced masterpieces. The main objective was to replicate nature's beauty through their art. But as change is inevitable so artist perception also changes with time. The language of art gets elevated. It encircles both the historical approach to nature and more recent ecological and politically motivated issues in art. Environmental art incorporates multiple fields of art like land art, earth art, textile art, ecological art and environmental installations.

Land art uses vast geographical and natural spaces made directly in the landscape using natural materials like soil, rocks, vegetation and water sites example *Spiral Jetty* by Robert Smithson and *Time Landscape* by Alan Sonfist. The move from land to environmental art tracks an evolution of human subjectivity and ideas about human relationship with environment.

Now art is without boundaries interdisciplinary knowledge exchanges new techniques methods and disciplines into the limits of art. Therefore, to appreciate the beauty of the environment and our responses we

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need to understand environmental art, which carries textile, weaving, embroidery, photography and other mediums in it. The new technology and artistic intervention focuses on new perspectives and highlight multiple aspects of environment.

The paper is exploratory on the changing perceptions of the environment in relation to the artistic practices. Not in term of methods and subject matter but product and outcomes were altered as well. Environmental art encompasses both the traditional genre and modern art. The environment became a work of art instead a subject. The artist uses the magnificence of nature as subjects of their art work.

The aim of the environmental artists is to work in harmony with the natural environment. They often use natural elements such as leaves, flowers, branches, ice, snow, reed, sand, stone, water, twigs to create their works. changing seasons bring new subjectsfor artists to work on. The natural processes of flowering, Autumn, summer and winter bring new energies that they try to tap through their work. The ephemerality of the work is an important feature. After documentation and photography, the work was left in open nature to decay. It is a challenge for artists to present something exciting and new to the audience. The new ideas and concepts that are more thought provoking. To name a few, Andy Goldsworthy, Nils Udo, Edith Meusnier, Rebecca Louise law. The works of these artists will be discussed later in detail in the paper.

Andy Goldsworthy

British sculptor and photographer who celebrated the magnificence of nature through his installations. His work explores aesthetics in the surrounding environment in nature stone, branches, rocks, twigs, leaves and ice. He aesthetically arranged these elements of nature in circles, spirals, lines and holes. Focusing on the ephemerality of his installation, nothing is eternal or permanent change is inevitable. Through his works he tries to investigate the energies and spaces around and inside the material. The actual work is an impermanent installation or the photograph of it.

Hole is a concept he repeatedly uses; it often signifies death. His works inside and outside the hole has been a constant theme throughout his career. He perceives these black spaces not as the absence of light but rather a positive presence of light. His last work before his death was a black hole. He focuses the association between death and art institutions. He perceives exhibition spaces as voids.

*I can't stop making them and I have the same urge to make holes as I do to look over a cliff edge"
"Looking into a black hole is like looking over a cliff's edge.... I have always been drawn to the black hole. I have been making them since 1976 and I keep on making them."¹(<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/goldsworthy-andy/>)*

For Andy black hole is like the ultimate enveloper of life. The final force in natural decay. Andy work with nature, in nature and with the elements of nature. His basic philosophy behind his work binds people places and environment.

We often forget that we are nature. Nature is not something separate from us. So when we say that we have lost our connection to nature, we've lost our connection to our self².(<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/goldsworthy-andy/>)

Through his work Andy try to convey the duration of the life cycle of different materials which he uses

for his installations their different stages from birth to death.

*Looking, touching, materials, places and form are all inseparable from the resulting work. It is difficult to say where one stops and another begins. The energy and space around a material are as important as the energy and space within it. The weather rain sun snow hail mist calm is that eternal spaces made visible when I touch a rock. I am touching and working the space around it. It is not independent of its surrounding and the way it sits till how it came to be there.*ⁱⁱⁱ³(www.Living your wide creativity.com)

His goal is to feel, experience, understand and then create his installation. Some work he exhibited in urban environment settings and indoor spaces. Most of his sculptures are placed outdoor in countryside settings or in remote locations. The material he uses is very fragile like ice, water, snow, flower, petals partially decomposed leaves, twigs and rocks.

Movement, change, light, growth and decay are the life blood of nature, the energies that I try to tap through my work. I need the shock of touch the resistance of place material and weather, the earth as my source. Nature is in a state of change and that change is the key to understanding. I want my work to be sensitive and alert to changes in materials, seasons and weather. Each work grows, stays, decays, process and decades are implicit. Transience in my work reflects what I find in nature.^{iv4}(www.Living your wide creativity.com)

His videos and photographs are the only record of his work every piece of his work is simple and beautiful in its own self. The natural beauty of God's creation is assembled in different forms through Andy's work. The natural colours of leaves from the duration of birth to decay, their changing tones, the shapes and beauties of natural stones twigs, leaves, ice, snow, reeds, and thorns.

Art critiques and historians sometimes criticized his work for solely beautifying nature, they also criticized his work for not being conceptual. His artistic contribution to the environment is that his inspiration of the nature inspired many artists and pleases common men.

Andy's ephemeral sculptures also got recognition as a documentary film 'River and Tides', was made by Thomas Riedelsheimer received a number of award

- Red leaf patch (1983) Cumbria
- Leicle Star (1987) Dumfriesshire
- Storm King wall (1997-1998)
- Rain shadow, time square (2010)
- Trench (1987)
- Red flowers threaded on crushed red river stone These are the few masterpieces of Andy

ART WORK OF ANDY GOLDSWORTHY



Nils Udo

German artist sculptor photographer and environmentalist creating art work since 1960's he left painting and started work in nature. Like Andy his work is ephemeral and for documentation and sharing of his work he introduced photography. For depiction of his work he established a connection between human and natural history i.e. a relation between nature and humanity.

Udo began his career by painting but after some time he realized that he could use natural materials in his work. In mid 60s he moved to German countryside in Bavaria and began his outdoor art in nature. He is doing two types of work one which he created in nature with the objects of nature to beautify nature and second he brings some natural pieces in urban setting and keeping in mind the architectural surrounding he incorporate his work into already existing architectural surrounding. Most of the time his creations are ephemeral and people will see the piece of art through pictures.

He himself said

*Nature is already art and the artist is just an intervener in it. It injures what it draws attention to, what is touches the virginity of nature. Art always deals with reality. Those who deny this reality are liars and they deprive themselves from society as it parts. What we are working for if not for man or for society. What counts for me is that my actions Utopia like fuse life and arts into each other.*⁵(<https://www.ecologicalart.org/nilsudo.html>)

Used only natural found materials like leaves, berries, sticks movement of water and the growth of plants, earth, stone, birch trees, birch branches grass. According to him he used the materials that he can smell to build the nest. His work highlight human effects on nature and create awareness among people about the importance of nature. His work the **nest** (1978) sparked an idea for an ongoing art series including **snow nest** (1993) and **Clemson clay nest** (2005). The features of these work is that the branches or birch trees, earth stones and grass work arranged into a nest shape.

By elevating the natural space to a work of art. I had opened myself to reality to the liveliness of nature. I had overcome the gap between art and life. The roundabout way of two dimensional extractions in painting

had been overcome. Henceforth my pictures were no longer painted but planted, watered, mowed or fenced.^{vi6}

(<https://www.morningearth.org/ARTISTNATURALIST/AN-Nils-Udo.html>.)



He was interested in lines so he created different arrangements of lines through the material which he uses. He used implied lines e.g. “Lava flames-flowers and lava flow Reunion Indian ocean”. “Dune Edge: Pampas grass, sand wind, Namibia 2001”. “Waterhouse: Spruce trunks, birch branches willow switches and sod on tidal flat Waddenzee mud flats”.

Potential Utopias are under every stone, on every leaf and behind every tree, in the clouds and in the wind. Pitting poetry against the inhuman river of time^{vii7}(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nils-Udo>)

He is minimalist artist who is shuffling or rearranging objects into a conceptual installation being a part of nature he is really sensitive towards nature. Perceiving the endangerment destruction and extinction of nature plantation have been his main focus.

The idea of planting my work literally into nature of making it a part of nature,” of submitting it to nature its cycles and rhythms, filled mean the one hand with a deep inner peace and on the other with seemingly in exhaustible new possibilities and field of action.^{viii8}(www.ecological art.org/Nils_udo.html)

According to him as a part of nature he lived and work each day in the rhythms of nature, life and work become a unity. This is the state of peace which he enjoys.

Nature and its phenomena’s are all potential issues he depicted through his work. He associates his existence with the cycles of nature and his work, he correlates the rhythm of nature with his use of lines, circles and patterns. The work was created in nature and with natural elements.

For documentation and sharing he introduced photography in his work. Some of the famous installations of Nils Udo are:

- Ovo
- Radeaud Autumn (2013-14)
- Water house spruce ranks, birch branches, willow switches and sod on tidal flats, Waddenzee mud flats Holland (1982)
- Chesnutt leaf (1986)
- The blue flower (1993-96) – planting 10 thousand wild flowers in Munich.
- Tadpole Willow (1994)

ART WORK OF NILS UDO



Edith Meusnier

A French environmental artist who created colourful installations through the technique of plaiting and sprang. She studied textile design and industrial creation. The work last for a season in open space like forest, parks, cloisters of monasteries and courtyards of museums like the piece the forest of Halatte. She left Paris and move to Aumonten Halatte in 1996. Exclusively doing outdoor work she was known through her exhibition landscape of “Artifice”.

Her art pieces are colourful combining other opposites like natural and artificial focusing important themes like public space and art. Sustainability and other environment related issues

Her works are brittle and fragile, simple and geometrical this parenthesis underline the tensions between realities and fictions of a particular place. Size of the work need open space to work in. After choosing the site for her installation she observed the surrounding of the landscape and the light effects and the weather then she started working on the project. Working outside is a perpetual challenge for her it looks as if the work is communicating with the environment. when ask about her work she described light, transparent, colourful, convertible, social and ephemeral.

She often used gift wrap ribbons there is a variety of hues, stainless steel wires for flexibility of frame often use bamboo and plastic tubes and synthetic materials. These materials are harmless temporary interventions. She prefers outdoor but started both inside and outside installation, the best part of her work is that she does collective workshops with different peoples' children adults and elderly people in different places like school, hospitals or art therapy units.

Her seductive work consists of ephemeral and artificial installation within nature. She is interested in monitoring the transparency effect and illusion created by sun and rain.

Successively, traps or offering, screens or windows my structures are never frozen, they vibrate between shadow and light they move with the wind in a succession of contradictory images which reflects a plural reality. With plastic ribbons I draw in space and unusual parenthesis that questions the ambiguous relationship between mankind and its environment.^{ix9}

([www.world of threads festival.com/artist-interview/038-edith -meusnier.html](http://www.worldofthreadsfestival.com/artist-interview/038-edith-meusnier.html))

She draws the inspiration of every new piece from the site specific location and its particular cultural surrounding then she chooses the material, colours and shapes depending upon the environment and the light of the place. She loves to play with the fabric, manipulate distort and transform textile. She is using the language of textile to convey her ideas through her installation.



In the current context where contemporary art is characterized by a mix of technique and materials. Textile art has the ability to sneak into the world of sculpture, architecture but also dance, performance and street art.^{x10}

(www.stirworld.com>see-featuresrebecca-louise.law)

My work uses the diversity of climate in creation of an installation. The installation question sustainability and vulnerability. Her new approach and different perspective on textile are

- Pavane (2016) on the river le Renaison Riorges France
- Sortilege (2010) on the river I Huisne Lee Forte Bernard France, 42 sculptures ofvarious

sizes

- Vibrato (2016)
- Debordement (2015)
- Effervescence (2016)
- Entre Deux (2006) 36 sculptures of 12x3 each En Contre Point (2011)

ART WORK OF EDITH MEUSNIER



Rebecca Louise Law

British artist uses flowers as an element or material for her indoor installation display. In an interview with STIR share

All of my life I have looked at nature's beauty and strived to capture an essence of life we have growing around us. The connection between the earth and how we inhabit it as human being has been the integral to my installation.^{xii1}(www.worldofthreadsfestival.com/artist-interview/038-edith-meusnier.html)

She one's said flowers are my paint and I work with space as my canvas. Her site specific installations are either hang from the ceiling or place on the ground.

I have learnt how to preserve flowers but it has taken many years of exploration or the fragility of flowers is a continual challenge and I am for ever learning how to get the best out of them as a sculpture material. I being with space and I continue with my exploration of my human interaction with nature within that space. I love to collaborate with people or local masses as volunteers.

I work together with the local community to create an installation thatcelebrate nature and the community that surrounds it.^{xiii12} (www.stirworld.com>see-featuresrebecca-louise.law)

It is over whelming to be surrounded with peaceful nature example the *womb* Florilegium. Rebecca the floral installation artist creates beautiful installation from thousands of real flowers suspended with copper wire. Her work explores the human relationship with nature. The artist transforms indoor spaces into indoor gardens with the thousands of flowers hanging or floating in and around with a wide spectrum of colours surrounds as if you are in nature.

She is a trained classical artist who is inspired from the Abstract expressionist for their bold use of colour. She creates mesmerizing site specific installation with flowers in three dimensions. Like *The hated flower* (2014) Coningsby Gallery, London.



ART WORK OF REBECCA LOUISE LAW



The paper analyses the artists who work in harmony with nature without disturbing the peace of the surrounding environment and explores their changing perception related to the artistic practices. An artist has the power to transform the beauties of nature and is capable of celebrating and promoting positive social changes. It can project sustainability and other environmental related issues. The analysis given in the paper is about the artists who belong to the environmental group as their work focuses. For this, Goldsworthy, Nils Udo and Meusnier were sighted as prime examples.

Andy Goldsworthy through his monumental constructions rearrange organic materials. His site specific pieces are ephemeral through his work he has shown the inevitable death and decay as part of life cycle. Nils Udo works with organic materials for his sculptures. In his view nature is already art and artist is just an intervener in it, he often uses the concept of nest because it reminds him of mother nature earth. Edith Meusnier working on the borderline of textile and art in situ. She crafted the material with primitive technique and produces simple geometric shapes then she installs those shapes in the urban and rural surrounding playing with the opposites, natural and artificial, continuity and brittleness, fragile, solid. This parenthesis underlines the tensions between realities and fictions of a selected landscape. Rebecca Louise Law restoring the beauty of flowers creating colossal installations of flowers. These installations carry a life for short interval. The wonders

of the nature inspire him. His installations depict a connection between the earth and how human being inhibit it. The mesmerizing installations though mostly ephemeral not only beautify nature but is also provocative and insightful. The field of environmental art is as diverse as the natural world that inspires it.

In the end the artists using natural medium are able to present the changing perceptions of the environmental art as diverse as the natural world.



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ⁱFootnotes:

1. <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/goldsworthy-andy/> ii
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- ^{iv} www.Living your wide creativity.com
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