

eco+art COMMUNICATING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH ART

selected 21st century eco artists

robert smithson

About the Artist

Robert Smithson () was an American artist famous for his land art.

Smithson was born in Passaic, New Jersey and studied painting and drawing in New York City at the Art Students League. In 1967 Smithson began exploring industrial areas around New Jersey and was fascinated by the sight of dump trucks excavating tons of earth and rock that he described in an essay as the equivalents of the monuments of antiquity. This resulted in the series of 'non-sites' in which earth and rocks collected from a specific area are installed in the gallery as sculptures, often combined with mirrors or glass. In September 1968, Smithson published the essay "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" in Artforum that promoted the work of the first wave of land art

About Work: Floating Island

Under the supervision of Smithson's artist wife, Nancy Holt, Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island is now being assembled aboard a 30-by-90-foot barge. It's scheduled to set forth from September 17 to 25, and will complement the artist's retrospective at the Whitney. Smithson is usually associated with a primordial view of nature, but he was also a Manhattanite who revered Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of Central Park—an island garden within a concrete city. By floating a piece of parkland around Manhattan, Smithson, who liked to bring nature into the museum and the museum into nature, carried out a characteristic reversal. Suddenly, the park has escaped from its cultural moorings and is encircling Manhattan. Nature now observes the city even as the city observes nature. (Manhattan becomes the more confined place.)

New York Magazine (September 2005)

Other Works

Spiral Jetty 1970

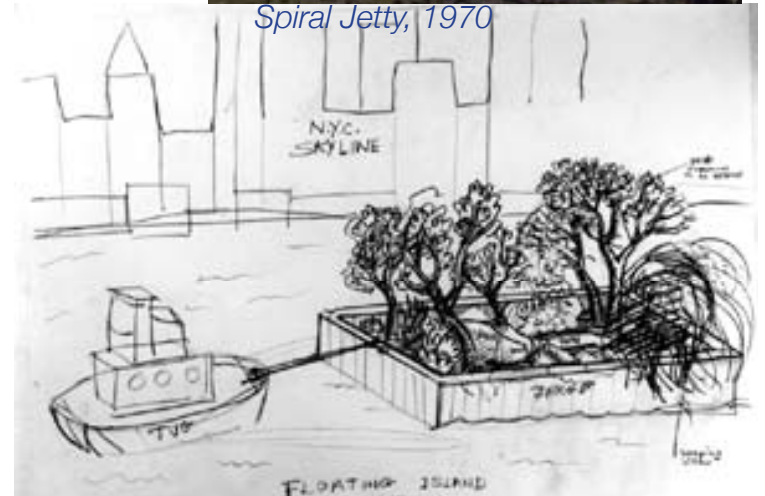
Broken Circle | Emmen, Holland 1971

Asphalt Rundown, Rome, Italy 1969

Floating Island, 2005



Spiral Jetty, 1970



agnes denes

About the Artist

Artist Statement:

"My work ranges between individual creation and social consciousness. It addresses the challenges of global survival and is often monumental in scale. I plant forests on abused land, and grow fields of grain in the heart of megacities. These works are intended to help the environment and benefit future generations with a meaningful legacy."

Agnes Denes is an American artist/scholar of international renown. One of the originators of Conceptual art, Denes has investigated the physical and social sciences, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, art history, poetry and music and transformed her explorations into unique works of visual art. Denes was one of the first artists to be involved with the relationship of science to art, and was also a pioneer of ecological art. One of the first artists to initiate the environmental art movement, her work involves ecological, cultural and social issues, and are often monumental in scale.

About Work: Wheatfield

One of the early pioneers of both the environmental art movement and Conceptual art, Agnes Denes brings her wide ranging interests in the physical and social sciences, mathematics, philosophy, linguistics, poetry and music to her delicate drawings, books and monumental artworks around the globe. In 1982, she carried out what has become one of the best-known environmental art projects when she planted a two-acre field of wheat in a vacant lot in downtown Manhattan. Titled, *Wheatfield -- A Confrontation*, the artwork yielded 1,000 lbs. of wheat in the middle of New York City to comment on "human values and misplaced priorities". The harvested grain then traveled to 28 cities worldwide in "The International Art Show for the End of World Hunger" and was symbolically planted around the globe.

Other Works

Tree Mountain — A living Time Capsule
A Forest for Australia
Masterplan -Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie
Uprooted and Deified

Wheatfield, 1982



What it Means to Plant a Forest, 1996

alan sonfist

born New York, 1954 - present

About the Artist

Described as “the ultimate purist of the Earthworks movement” and one of the early pioneers of eco-art, Alan Sonfist has dedicated much of his life to the restoration and celebration of native ecosystems throughout the world. Since the late 1960’s he has worked with city parks, major museums, botanical gardens and art galleries to create large scale outdoor projects that recreate natural landscapes as well as indoor pieces which highlight displaced local ecosystems.

Alan Sonfist is New York City based United States artist most often associated with the Land or Earth Art movement. He is best known for his “Time Landscape” found on the corner of West Houston Street and LaGuardia Place in New York City’s Greenwich Village. Proposed in 1965, “Time Landscape” was not realized until 1978 under Mayor Ed Koch. It was eventually landmarked by the city. It has often been cited as the first urban earthwork of its kind. More recently, Sonfist has continued to create artworks within the natural landscape, inaugurating a one acre (4,000 m²) landscape project titled “The Lost Falcon of Westphalia” on Prince Richard’s estate outside Cologne, Germany in 2005.

About Work: Time Landscape

Time Landscape: Greenwich Village, 1965/1978 to present, La Guardia Place, New York City, New York

Recognizing the ecological benefits of mini-landscapes sprouting around New York City, New York City’s Parks Department eventually folded Sonfist’s Time Landscape, the first urban forest to feature pre-Colonial plants, into its Greenstreets program.

Best known for his “Time Landscape”, (proposed in 1965, planted 1978) in Manhattan, New York City, Sonfist proposed a radical new purpose for art by transforming a city lot into a site-specific forest of native plants similar to what might have grown in the area prior to human intervention. This project was seen at the time as the polar opposite of fellow Earth Artist Robert Smithson’s efforts to apply art concepts directly onto the earth in remote places (which often polluted the land in the process). Sonfist has since created numerous “Time Landscapes”, planting historically accurate native landscapes in other parts of the world.

Other Works

Rocky Mountain Arch
Nature’s Protector

Greenmuseum.org

Time Landscape, 1982



Porthole of Ancient Rivers of New York 1999-2000



miererele ukeles

About the Artist

Mierle Ukeles received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History and International Relations in 1961 from Barnard College in New York. In the late 1960s, two events occurred in Ukeles' life that had a profound effect on her career. First, she gave birth to her first child, and the responsibilities of raising children led her to question the polarization between life and art. Secondly, she wrote her "Manifest for Maintenance Art," in which she defined all of her activities, all of her "work"--as a mother, as a wife, as a woman, and as an artist--equally "art."

Since 1970 she has been the unsalaried artist-in-residence for New York City's Sanitation Department where she builds and orchestrates major public projects that explore the social and ecological issues of waste management. Her work asks the community to rethink its common disregard of waste and its disrespect for those who work with it. Such reexamination of our cultural space will allow her, at Fresh Kills Landfill, for instance, literally to reshape our environment.

Learner.org

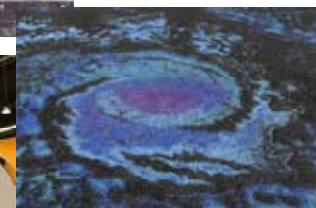
About Work: The Social Mirror

The Social Mirror, a twelve-ton, twenty-eight-foot-long New York City sanitation truck reconfigured with mirrored glass panels that will occupy the booth. The reflecting truck is a metaphor for the interrelationship between "us" whose images get caught in the mirror and "those" who collect our garbage. A highlight of the First NYC Art Parade in 1983, The Social Mirror is a permanent, mobile public-art work that continues to be used by the Department of Sanitation for parades and other special events.

Other Works

The Manifesto for Maintenance Art (1969);
Unburning Freedom Hall

The Social Mirror, 1982



joseph beuys

About the Artist

Joseph Beuys (May 12, 1921 – January 23, 1986) was an influential German artist who came to prominence in the 1960s. He is most famous for his ritualistic public performances and his energetic championing of the healing potential of art and the power of a universal human creativity. As well as performances, Beuys produced sculptures, environments, vitrines, 450 prints and posters, and thousands of drawings

[Wikipedia](#)

About Work: 7000 Oaks

At Dia Art Center in 1988, continued the sculpture project 7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks) by German artist Joseph Beuys. Five different varieties of trees were planted: gingko, linden, bradford pear, sycamore, and oak. In 1996 Dia extended this project by planting 18 new trees, each paired with a basalt stone, on 22nd Street from 10th to 11th avenues, adding Pin Oak, Red Oak, Elm Honey Locust, Gingko and Linden.

Beuys's project 7000 Oaks was begun in 1982 at Documenta 7, the large international art exhibition in Kassel, Germany. His plan called for the planting of seven thousand trees, each paired with a columnar basalt stone approximately four feet high above ground, throughout the greater city of Kassel. With major support from the Dia Art Foundation, the project was carried forward under the auspices of the Free International University (FIU) and took five years to complete, the last tree having been planted at the opening of Documenta 8 in 1987. Beuys intended the Kassel project to be the first stage in an ongoing scheme of tree planting to be extended throughout the world as part of a global mission to effect environmental and social change; locally, the action was a gesture towards urban renewal.

7000 Oaks, Minnesota continued in fall 1997, when Bockley and a group of students from St. Paul Central High School planted trees on the school grounds and in surrounding neighborhoods. The project's symbolic center is a single native cottonwood tree and basalt stele, planted on October 4, 1997, in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden adjacent to the Walker. 7000 Oaks, Minnesota was approved by Beuys' widow, Eva, who keeps a register of tree-planting efforts carried out in the spirit of her husband's work. She later responded with a letter of appreciation: "I am so glad to hear what you do! . . . An extraordinary idea and very fitting. Naturally I think it is very difficult to realize this [type of project]. I at least know how difficult the realization for Beuys in Kassel was. So I am very grateful that there are so many in America prepared to honor this project." 2

[Dia Center](#)

7000 Oaks, 1982



I Like America and America Likes Me

the harrisons

born New York, 1954 - present

About the Artist

Among the leading pioneers of the eco-art movement, the collaborative team of Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison (often referred to simply as “the Harrisons”) have worked for over thirty years with biologists, ecologists and urban planners to initiate collaborative dialogues to uncover ideas and solutions which support biodiversity and community development.

The Harrison’s concept of art embraces a breathtaking range of disciplines. They are historians, diplomats, ecologists, investigators, emissaries and art activists. Their work involves proposing solutions and involves not only public discussion, but extensive mapping and documentation of these proposals in an art context.

Statement:

“Our work begins when we perceive an anomaly in the environment that is the result of opposing beliefs or contradictory metaphors. Moments when reality no longer appears seamless and the cost of belief has become outrageous offer the opportunity to create new spaces - first in the mind and thereafter in everyday life.”

About Work: Future Gaden

Future Garden. Part 1: The Endangered Meadows of Europe is an exhibition project by the American artists Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison who have been active in the field of Ecological Art as artists and conceptual designers for 25 years.

The meadow will, as the first installation of a long-term exhibition, enable the visitor to experience the values of a vanishing eco-system. This project by the Harrisons, whose works are always developed in collaboration with scientists and experts from various disciplines, will continue the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle’s series of art exhibitions relating to science.

Greenmuseum.org

Other Works

The Lagoon Cycle (1972 - 1986)

Future Garden Part 1, 1996-1998



hans haake

About the Artist

Haacke studied at the Staatliche Werkakademie in Kassel, Germany, from 1956 to 1960. From 1961 to 1962 on a Fulbright grant at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Haacke's early work as a conceptual artist focused on systems and processes. Some of the themes in his early works from the 1960s, such as *Condensation Cube* (1963-65), include the interactions of physical and biological systems, living animals, plants, and the states of water and the wind. He also made forays into Land Art. His later works have dealt more with socio-political structures and the politics of art. Haacke has been outspoken throughout his career about his belief that museums and galleries are often used by the wealthy to seduce public opinion. From 1967 to 2002 Haacke was a professor at the Cooper Union in New York City.

About Work: Bowery Seeds

Best known for conceptual works that expose current social injustices and inequitable power relationships, Hans Haacke is an activist whose strategies have played an instrumental role in the history of eco-art. For Cornell University's 1969 "Earth Art" exhibition, Haacke grew grass without any pesticides on an indoor mound of soil. *Grass Grows* grew out of his 1965 manifesto, which called for a changing, indeterminate, living-in-time, non-stable work of art that the viewer could handle. It would also react to its environment, temperature changes, and light.¹² Not only were dirt and seeds little-known art materials back then, but the work's changing nature introduced an artistic interest in time-based materials.

Grass Grows focused the audience's attention on an event that one typically takes for granted, while offering each viewer incredibly different experiences. For those who revisited the exhibition, watching winter rye grass grow became a memorable experience that undoubtedly changed their awareness of this everyday event.

Other Works

Rhine River Purification Plant, 1982



Hans Haacke: Rhinewater Purification Plant, 1972
Afbelding uit *Ecovention* (Spaid 2002)



Bowery Seeds, 1970

mel chin

born New York, 1954 - present

About the Artist

Mel Chin was born in Houston to Chinese parents in 1951, the first of his family born in the United States, and was reared in a predominantly African-American and Latino neighborhood. He worked in his family's grocery store, and began making art at an early age. Though he is classically trained, Chin's art, which is both analytical and poetic, evades easy classification. Alchemy, botany, and ecology are but a few of the disciplines that intersect in his work. He insinuates art into unlikely places, including destroyed homes, toxic landfills, and even popular television, investigating how art can provoke greater social awareness and responsibility. Unconventional and politically engaged, his projects also challenge the idea of the artist as the exclusive creative force behind an artwork. "The survival of my own ideas may not be as important as a condition I might create for others' ideas to be realized," says Chin, who often enlists entire neighborhoods or groups of students in creative partnerships. [PBS, Art 21](#)

About Work: Revival Field, 1990

Mel Chin, part artist, part scientist is most famous for his Revival Field Project in Saint Paul, Minnesota, (1990-93). Revival Field was an experiment using plants to absorb toxic metals from the soil. Chin worked with Dr. Rufus Chaney, a USDA senior research scientist to determine which hyperaccumulators, plants that have evolved the capacity to selectively absorb and contain large amounts of metal or minerals in their vascular structure. Dr. Chaney selected three cadmium and zinc hyperaccumulators to match the local ecotype: *Silene cucubalus*, hybrid zea mays and *Thlaspi caerulescens* for this site that was affiliated with the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Chin has compared the plants absorption of toxic metals to the art of carving. Recently a new Revival Field was planted on the 10th Anniversary of this piece in Stuttgart, Germany.

Other Works

Revival Field, 1990



patricia johanson

Fair Park Lagoon, 1985

About the Artist

For over three decades, Patricia Johanson has designed functioning works of art, creating infrastructures that reclaim impacted ecosystems. Her projects involve the design of unusual trails and landscaping features, reintroducing endangered plant and animal species, and creating natural oxidation ponds and polishing pools for improving water quality.

Her first major work, Cyrus Field (1970), is a several mile long forest path near Buskirk, NY made from strategically placed marble, redwood and cement block. "When I built 'Cyrus Field' I wanted to do something that would incorporate the natural world □ gather it in rather than displace it. Because of the scale of the project and its intimate relationship to the living world □ you have to discover it step by step as you walk through the forest."

About Work: Fair Park Lagoon

Patricia Johanson, Fair Park Lagoon, 1985, Dallas, Texas

Not only did she totally reconstruct this lagoon's food web, but she placed sculptures in the lagoon, elaborate entangled walkable paths with bridges and arches. Her massive paths reference two native Texas plants: 1) a 225-foot by 112-foot by 12-foot sprawling causeway in the form of a "Pteris Multifada" fern and 2) a 235-foot by 175-foot by 12-foot entangled mass of pathways reminiscent of the "Sagittaria Platyphylla" (known locally as the "Delta Duck-potato").

When Johanson first visited Fair Park Lagoon, years of local lawn fertilization had washed fertilizer into the lagoon, causing algal bloom. A green slime covered the water, and there were hardly any plants or animals, let alone a sustainable food chain. Johanson's proposal to create "living exhibits" in the lagoon itself, rather than segregating natural artifacts in glass cases at the adjacent Dallas Museum of Natural History, excited the museum's scientific staff so much that they took an active interest.

