

Week 11, Lecture 18: Earthworks

key decade: 1970s
terms: Earthworks, Land Art

I. Sources/ stimuli

- A) Minimalism's interest in the *situation* of the observer and *site* of the artwork
- B) Performance and Body art's interest in where the *body* goes, traces of its actions
- C) Postwar civil engineering: superhighways, airports, bomb shelters
- D) New views of the earth from space (Apollo missions, 1968 "Whole Earth" photo)
- E) neo-primitivism (neolithic burial mounds, menhirs, lingams, monoliths, Nacza lines, ritual paths, ancient astronomical sites, etc.)

II. Practitioners (most had a "Minimalist" phase)

- A) Robert Smithson – New Jersey
 1. Named "Earthworks" in 1968 essay (from Brian Aldiss science fiction novel)
 2. Self-taught naturalist, geologist, theorist, critic, poet, as well as artist
 3. Theoretical impact:
 - a. Conscious of "post-modern" and "post-studio" position
 - b. theorized Site/Non-Site relationship
 - c. nascent post-structuralism: "I'm interested in the apparatus I'm being threaded through"
 4. Mythic status: dead in airplane crash by 1973
- B) Robert Morris (again)
- C) Nancy Holt (Smithson widow) – paleolithic geometries
- D) Walter De Maria – search for sublimity
- E) Michael Heizer – "the alternative to the absolute city system" (or its surrogate?)
- F) Dennis Oppenheim – ephemeral land art
- G) Christo ("and Jeanne-Claude") – social work

III. Forecast of "Process" art: Gordon Matta Clark

SELECTED IMAGES

Smithson, Aerial Map, (Study for aerial sculpture), 1967

Smithson, Site/ Nonsite series, ca. 1968

Smithson, Spiral Jetty 1970 (film, photograph, Salt Lake earthwork, collage, mental image...)

Morris, Observatory, Flevoland, Holland 1971

Holt, Sun Tunnels, NW Utah desert 1973-76

De Maria, Mile-Long Drawing, Mojave desert, 1968 (also figures in Minimal, conceptual, "process" art)

De Maria, New York Earth Room, Manhattan 1977

De Maria, Lightning Field, Quemado, New Mexico 1977

Heizer, Double Negative, Virgin River Mesa, Nevada, 1969

Heizer, Complex 1, central East Nevada, 1972

Oppenheim, Directed Seeding/Cancelled Crop, Finsterwolde Holland, 1966

Christo, Valley Curtain Project, Rifle Gap, Colorado, 1970-72

Christo and Jean-Claude, Wrapped Reichstag, 1985

Matta-Clark, Splitting 1974

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