

Land Art: Expanding the Atlas

It is generally agreed that the art historical movement known as Land Art—associated with marking, sculpting, and engaging with the Earth itself—was born in the late 1960s and early 70s as an outgrowth of Conceptual and Minimalist art. While Land Art has global roots, it is most frequently associated with monumental earthworks made in the deserts of the American West by artists such as Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, and Robert Smithson.

Land Art is continually changing. Increasingly, contemporary artists and practitioners seek to disrupt conventional definitions of the genre by critiquing, re-contextualizing, performing, and engaging in environmental and social dialogue about art of the land. These creative practices traverse conventional boundaries of art, geography, science, environmentalism and activism, while breathing new life—and needed perspective—into the field of Land Art.

Drawn primarily from the art and archive collections at the Nevada Museum of Art, this exhibition constitutes a unique atlas of sorts—a dynamic matrix linking together art and ideas of the past, while at the same time helping to map an expanded future for the field. Throughout the exhibition you will encounter terms and definitions intended to encourage thoughtful reflection. We hope these terms serve as helpful guideposts along your journey through the exhibition.

Nevada is home to numerous iconic Land Art interventions, and the Nevada Museum of Art has a long history of commissioning new artworks, publishing books, organizing public programs, and collecting artworks and archives related to this field. This exhibition represents more than a decade of strategic collecting by the Museum and aims to raise questions about precisely what constitutes Land Art today.

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque **775.546.1464** y presione **1787#**

ground

/ground/

noun

1. the solid surface of the earth
2. an area of land or sea used for a specified purpose.
3. an area of knowledge or subject of discussion or thought.
4. factors forming a basis for action or the justification for a belief.
5. a prepared surface to which paint is applied.
6. solid particles that form a residue; sediment.

verb

1. prohibit or prevent (a pilot or an aircraft) from flying.
2. (with reference to a ship) run or go aground.
3. give (something abstract) a firm theoretical or practical basis.
4. place or lay (something) on the ground or hit the ground with it.

mark

/märk/

noun

1. a small area on a surface having a different color from its surroundings
2. a line, figure, or symbol made as an indication or record of something.

verb

1. make a visible impression or stain on.
2. write a word or symbol on (an object), typically for identification
3. show the position of

ruin

/ˈruːɪn/

noun

1. the physical destruction or disintegration of something or the state of disintegrating or being destroyed.

verb

3. reduce to a state of decay, collapse, or disintegration.

monument

/ˈmɒnəmənt/

noun

1. a statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a famous or notable person or event; an outstanding, enduring, and memorable example of something.

border

/ˈbɔːdə/

noun

1. a line separating two political or geographical areas, especially countries.

2. the edge or boundary of something, or the part near it.

3. a band or strip, especially a decorative one, around the edge of something.

verb

1. form an edge along or beside (something).

2. (of a country or area) be adjacent to (another country or area).

3. be close to an extreme condition.

space

/spās/

noun

1. a continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied.
2. the dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move.
3. an interval of time (often used to suggest that the time is short considering what has happened or been achieved in it).
4. the freedom and scope to live, think, and develop in a way that suits one.
5. one of two possible states of a signal in certain systems.

verb

1. position (two or more items) at a distance from one another.

eco

/'ēkō/

adjective

1. not harming the environment; eco-friendly.

water

/'wōdər, 'wädər/

noun

1. a colorless, transparent, odorless liquid that forms the seas, lakes, rivers, and rain and is the basis of the fluids of living organisms.
2. a stretch or area of water, such as a river, sea, or lake.

verb

1. pour or sprinkle water over (a plant or area) in order to encourage plant growth.
2. (of the eyes) become full of moisture or tears.

environment

/in'vīrənmənt/

noun

1. the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates.
2. the natural world, as a whole or in a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activity.

place

/plās/

noun

1. a particular position or point in space.
2. a portion of space available or designated for or being used by someone.
3. a position in a sequence or series, typically one ordered on the basis of merit.
4. (in place names) a square or a short street.

verb

1. put in a particular position.
2. find a home or employment for.
3. identify or classify as being of a specified type or as holding a specified position in a sequence or hierarchy.

Acknowledging Land in Land Art

When it comes to Land Art in the American West, open land is often described as an “empty” or “blank” canvas just waiting for artists to leave their mark outside of the confines of a traditional gallery or museum setting.

This rhetoric is outdated and perpetuates a culture of conquest that has enabled and encouraged the exploitation of Indigenous lands. Such rhetoric also fails to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples who have nurtured, protected, and cared for these lands for thousands of years.

Each of the artworks on view in these galleries engages with land in a different way. Sometimes land is marked and manipulated, and other times artworks are made using pigments from the land itself. Occasionally, artists acknowledge the Indigenous inhabitants of the lands where they work and even partner with them in an effort to encourage a deeper understanding of the histories and fragile environments of these places.

We acknowledge that more can be done to further research and integrate the stories of Indigenous people and cultures into our collective knowledge of the lands where these artworks were made. Continuing these efforts is the only way to truly shape the future of the Land Art genre.

The Nevada Museum of Art is located in the Great Basin on the occupied territories of Indigenous people. The state of Nevada consists of 27 federally recognized tribes from four nations: the Northern Paiute, Shoshone, Washoe, and Southern Paiute people.

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque **775.546.1464** y presione **1788#**