
Studio of Watershed Sculpture: Daniel McCormick & Mary O'Brien
Collection CAE1309

Introduction/Abstract

Artists Daniel McCormick and Mary O'Brien create artworks as ecological interventions, adding aesthetics to the restoration of compromised environments. They focus on projects as living laboratories where community-driven installations encourage civic awareness and communal stewardship.

Biographical Note: Daniel McCormick

Daniel McCormick is an interdisciplinary artist and design professional with integrated skills in the fields of sculptural installation, environmental design, and ecological restoration. McCormick earned a degree in environmental design from UC Berkeley, has studied with James Turrell, and is influenced by the works of Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including artist grants from the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation and George Sugarman Foundation, an Invitational Bridge Residency Award from the Headlands Center for the Arts, a Creative Capital Award and an Urban Landscape Award from the Friends of the Urban Forest. McCormick's work has been featured in exhibitions at the Oakland Museum of California, Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, Bolinas Art Museum, Headlands Center for the Arts, Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena, CA, The David Brower Center, Berkeley, CA, and the McColl Center for Visual Art, NC.

Biographical Note: Mary O'Brien

Mary O'Brien is a multi-disciplinary artist—a writer, and visual artist who initiates the research and community engagement programs for the practice, enlisting the support of art organizations, government agencies, and community groups. Her works are intended to become a catalyst for positive ecological thinking. She focuses on political landscapes and our anthropocentric relationships with them—the ways in which wars, capital, and infrastructure have molded lands and communities. Her writing delves into ecological loss and community resilience. She is a recipient of awards from the Blumenthal Foundation, Center for Cultural Innovation, the CA Department of Water Resources, as well as screenwriting and film production honors. O'Brien's essays and poems have been published in *Field to Palette*, Stanford University's *MAHB Journal*; *Solutions Journal*; *Women's Eco Artist Dialogue*, and *New Farmer's Almanac* and other art and science publications.

Scope and Content

For over thirty years, McCormick and O'Brien have been using art to restore and affect a positive ecological balance in damaged environments. Working in both urban and agricultural watersheds, they respond to environmental issues by moving away from an anthropocentric view to create sculptures that work with natural systems. Their collaborations reflect the artists' concerns for the environment and community, but also their belief that art has a responsibility to do more than document cultural changes.

In the late 1980s, artist Daniel McCormick went beyond witnessing environmental damage by creating artworks as interventions and adding aesthetics to ecological restoration. Joined by filmmaker and community activist Mary O'Brien in 1990, their projects often become community works involving conservation managers, water quality agencies, schools, and local nonprofits. Working as artist, designer, researcher, and writer with an approach that gives aesthetic weight to the commons, they focus on projects as living laboratories that activate the commons.

Their remedial interactions are place-specific and give a restorative advantage to damaged lands and waters by restoring the equilibrium of adversely impacted ecosystems. The sculptures the artists create grow into silt



traps, erosion control implements, habitats, carbon stewardship devices, and other ecological enhancements, eventually becoming part of the land and waters they improve, as well as part of the communities they serve.

This collaborative practice has evolved over the years taking on increasingly challenging environmental issues such as sea level rise, carbon sequestration, and reforestation as public art projects in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Charlotte, New Orleans and in rural communities around the country.

Studio of Watershed Sculpture has been awarded individual grants and artist residencies; received coverage by international media; and, garnered several NEA grants for engaging with communities. Their installation works can be found on public lands and watersheds across the United States.

Materials include models, maquettes, drawings, time-lapsed photography, correspondence, plans, maps, press materials, and other ephemera.

This archive is currently in process.