

Art in the Environment



"Tunnel Vision!"

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The Site - Ardmore Point



The picture above shows the wonderful scenic area of Ardmore point, an area of environmental beauty with stunning views right down the Clyde Estuary. Ardmore point is the perfect site for creating art in the environment because there are so many contrasting types of land in a small, condensed area. To begin with, the land is mainly sandy beaches, then walking round the land becomes more of a dense woodland type area with several bushes and trees, almost marshland in some places. Looking across the water, there is a complete contrast, the built up area of Greenock, with several high rise buildings and houses.

The area provides a wealth of opportunities and materials to create artwork. There was a lot of beautiful, natural driftwood on the beaches, thousands of different coloured pebbles and even a lot of litter and man-made object which had been left there by other visitors. All of these items along with the landscape of the area helped to spark the imaginations of everyone on the course, creating some wonderful and very interesting pieces of artwork.

The site which our group specifically chose for creating our artwork was close to the edge of the water and at a point in the land where views of the industrial area of Greenock were very clear, yet the area was still unspoilt, natural landscape. This was the perfect site to create the vision that we had planned, contrasting the built up, industrial area on one side of the water with the natural environment on the other.

Below is a picture of the site which we specifically chose to create our artwork.



Inspiration

Throughout the week of the Art in the Environment course, we were exposed to several diverse and beautiful artworks, most of which had been created in the natural environment, using natural materials. One particular artist's work particularly appealed to me, this was the work of Chris Drury.

Chris Drury refers to himself as *"Land artist – working with nature"* because his works involve working with natural materials and creating artworks which are spectacular and very original. His recent works, dating back to 1992, include the cuckoo dome, tree mountain shelter, tree vortex and redwood vortex. Some of which are pictured below. These works all have common themes throughout them, they are all made from different types of wood and their shapes are also remotely similar.

Cuckoo Dome

"To make a sculpture on the proposed cycle track to draw attention to local environmental issues during the 12 days of the Earth Summit in Rio. Made from woven hazel across the track. From the outside it is a dome, a sculpture. Within the work the beauty of the surrounding countryside is highlighted and drawn in."

Drury (1992)



Photograph: Chris Drury (1992) source: <http://www.chrisdrury.co.uk/>

The 'Cukoo Dome' is a wonderful piece of environmental art which is made from woven hazel wood and was situated in Sussex. This piece of environmental art first sparked the idea that I could use different types of wood to create a similar sort of pyramidal shape. Some of Drury's other works also inspired this idea, including the Tree Mountain Shelter, built in 1994 in Italy, pictured below.



Brief: *"Made for an international, biannual Art & Nature exhibition in the Sella Valley near Trento. The work draws attention to the surrounding mountains, which dominate the valley but are often hidden by trees.*

The shelter is made of rock over a hazel frame, surrounded again by an open weave hazel dome - the whole echoing the shapes of the surrounding mountains. By entering and looking out through a small window from the hollow mountain within the tree, you look through the trees to the mountain and the sky. The work has been documented through its stages of decay."

Drury (1994)

Photograph: Chris Drury (1994) Source: <http://www.chrisdrury.co.uk/>

As stated above this particular work was photographed through its stages of decay, shown in the photograph below.



Since we knew that our artwork was going to be temporary, we decided to place our artwork very close to the tide line so that by the end of the day, most of it would be gone and we could photograph the parts which were left, similar to the idea of many environmental artists, including Chris Drury who photograph their works slowly decaying, until there is eventually nothing left.

Photograph: Chris Drury (1994) Source: <http://www.chrisdrury.co.uk/>

Another environmental artist who photographed works as they slowly decayed was Andy Goldsworthy. Many of Goldsworthy's works were made from snow and as such he was able to photograph them even throughout one day and show their slow decay and then the final picture, where there appears to be nothing there, as if nothing had ever been made there.

"Goldsworthy's works are part of a transient process and some of them don't even last a day. He works with nature on nature's terms, stating "I cannot stop the rain falling or a stream running . . . when I work with a leaf, rock, stick, it is not just the material in itself, it is an opening into the processes of life in and around it. When I leave it, these processes continue".

Perlmutter & Koppman (1999) p 13.

A few examples of Goldsworthy's temporary works using ice and snow are shown below. From left to right these are, ice ball, ice star and tree soul.



Photographs: The Yang Fang Snow Saw. Source: snowsaw.com/Goldsworthy/Goldsworthy.html

Coming from more of a sporting background than an arts background, I never really appreciated the beauty and complexity of such works of art, but since taking an elective class in Art in the Environment, I have been introduced to a whole new world of art which I never formerly knew existed. The above works by Chris Drury and Goldsworthy inspired the idea for our own group art project. Our project would be based on the shapes and natural materials like the ones used by Drury but our work was intended to last less than a day, like many of the works by Goldsworthy.

Tunnel Vision

The inspiration for tunnel vision came from a variety of different sources, including other artists such as Goldsworthy and Drury and from the site at Ardmore Point.

The idea of 'Tunnel Vision' was to create a tunnel which would start on the natural, open land at Ardmore Point and if you looked through it you would see the contrasting built up, industrial area of Greenock.

The main idea was to ensure that the view was exactly right, this took more time and effort than we had initially planned. Our group were all devoted to ensuring that as you looked through the tunnel, the view would be of high flats over in Greenock to contrast the two areas on opposite sides of the water. The picture below illustrates this view exactly as we had hoped.



The

Process

Tunnel vision was created using natural found materials from the site, driftwood and pebbles. In the morning, we spent most of our time collecting the driftwood and carrying it back to the site. After we had collected the driftwood, we selected the best pieces to use and paired them up with other pieces of a similar height. Then came the difficult part, balancing the pieces of driftwood and placing them at the exact angles to create the perfect view through the tunnel. The pictures below illustrate the team working together throughout the different stages of the project.

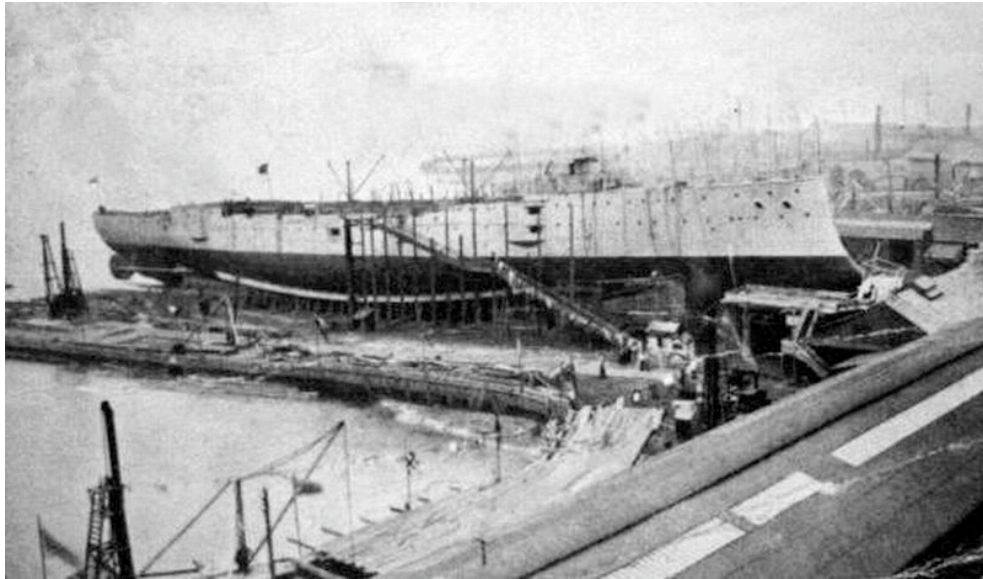


The task was difficult and hard work but a lot of fun at the same time. We were conscious of the environmental issues and made sure that our artwork would not harm the area. This is why we placed the project so close to the tide line, so that the wood would simply drift back out to sea and the area would be left exactly as it was before we had arrived.

As stated in the initial proposal tunnel vision was designed to be a tunnel from nature to industry, but after the artwork was finished, I realised that there are so many more interesting elements to the design.

Looking through in one direction shows the area of Greenock, historically a ship building industrial area:

“Shipbuilding in Greenock was formerly of great importance. In 1764 Peter Love built the first square-rigged vessel. This vessel was appropriately named the ‘Greenock’. In 1840 xxx vessels were built with a total tonnage of 7,338 tons.



During the years from 1875 to 1914 there was considerable development of the shipbuilding industry in Greenock. Tonnage figures had increased to 20,000 tons by 1876 and 52,744 tons by 1882. In 1958 Greenock yards built nine ships of a total gross tonnage of 60,015 tons.

The industry was affected by the depression after the First World War.”

www.greenock-town.co.uk

Now the area has a population of 45,467 (2001) which was a substantial decrease from the population in 1966 (approximately 78,000). The area is now a mixture of the old town and modern urban developments, such as the one photographed through our tunnel.

You may ask, why is the history of Greenock relevant to this piece of environmental art? The simple answer is that the shapes used in tunnel vision are very uniformed and straight, thus creating an abstract view of modern urban life; The straight lines represent the pressure to conform to societal expectations and stay in line. The pointed shape of the sculpture represents the direction that modern urban life is going in, an upward

direction with new skyscrapers being built daily and the natural environment being destroyed as a result.

However, these shapes have a contrasting side to them too. Looking in the other direction through the tunnel, a beautiful natural view of unspoilt landscape can be seen. This shows that although modern urbanisation may be taking over much of the landscape across the world, some areas will remain untouched and completely unaffected by the cruelty of urbanisation.



At first sight the artwork appears to be very peaceful, but when you take a closer, more in depth look and think about the deeper meaning behind it, you can soon begin to think about the need for balance in our lives and how we should balance our time and think about the environment before using it as a dumping ground or destroying out through other means of destructive pollution.

Below is a side view of the artwork and a small, rough sketch that I drew after the sculpture was completed.



In an interview for the art nature dialogues, Chris Drury stated *“Nature is an idea created by culture, and nature is an idea embedded in language. Its very term prepossesses that we are outside of it and therefore is anthropocentric. We are nature and nature ‘is’. Our lives are a process of nature”*
Grande (2004) p 236.



Art in the Outdoors

Coming from a sporting background, this elective class was a very new learning experience for me. I learned that art should not just be observed but it should be 'seen' and appreciated. This means that although in the past I may have been looking at a piece of artwork, I was never really seeing it and appreciating the thought that went into it as well as the issues that it may be conveying to its audience. Working alongside arts and outdoors students for the week as well as the lectures that I heard throughout the week, aided my understanding and appreciation of art in the environment.

"In the western world there has been since antiquity a tradition of viewing art as the mirror of nature. However the idea of aesthetically appreciating nature itself is sometimes traced to a less ancient origin"

Carlson (2002) p3

From the point of view of someone who was previously not very interested of appreciative of art; some works of art in the environment are greatly unappreciated and undervalued. If was not for the lecturers on this course pointing out to me that the heavy horse (pictured on the right) was a work of environmental art by Andrew Scott, I would have continued to pass it on the motorway and never taken a second look. For this reason, I believe that it is very important to educate young people about the value of environmental art and how much fun art in the outdoors can be. Making a simple collage out of twigs and leaves can be considered as art in the environment and it is a fun and practical method of teaching art in the environment and appreciation of the environment. This can then be developed into teaching young people about the worth of environmental art and the images and thoughts which they conjure up themselves when they look at an artwork. For example, one could ask, what do you think of when you see this? What do you think he is doing / thinking about?



These types of leading questions can stimulate the minds of young people and allow them to appreciate art and think critically about works without even realising they are doing it.

Art in the environment can be so stimulating and wonderful. Even looking at a simple student project such as ours, balanced pieces of wood created by a group of sport and outdoor education students. These pieces of wood were no longer simply pieces of wood, they became an object with meaning and thought behind it, they became a sculpture that was pleasing to the eye and they enhanced the relationship between nature and industry. Although they may have been swept away by the end of the day, the photographs and memories will last forever.



Conclusion

In conclusion to this assignment, the week of Art in the Environment was a stimulating and enjoyable one. Highlights in the week for me were, the visit to Edinburgh, constructing our artwork and of course the bbq to finish off the week in style. I have learned a vast amount in a very short, intense class and I hope that I will be able to convey this knowledge the young people whom I will be teaching when I graduate.

At the end of the day, our group project set sail and left the area as though it had been untouched.

*A sight which no one will now see
Was there for a moment but
Now it has gone
It was alas
Taken away by the tide
But we will remember thee
With joy and pride
A weeks worth of memories
We will keep in mind.*

References

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Photographs and direct quotes from Chris Drury retrieved from www.chrisdrury.com on 8th May 2006

Photographs: The Yang Fang Snow Saw. Source: snowsaw.com/Goldsworthy/Goldsworthy.html retrieved on 9th May 2006

Photographs and Greenock information retrieved on 9th May 2006 from www.greenock-town.co.uk