

Emma Sinclair

Creative Expression V Nature?

### WHAT IS ART?

“Art always serves beauty, and beauty is the joy of possessing form, and form is the key to organic life since no living thing can exist without it.” (Pasternak. 1958. Part 2, Chapter 14 Section 14)

What is art? This question has existed as long as art itself has been in existence. The dictionary defines art as *“The process or result of making material works (or artwork) which, from concept to creation, adhere to the “creative impulse”—that is, art is distinguished from other works by being in large part unprompted by necessity, by biological drive, or by any undisciplined pursuit of recreation.”*

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art> Retrieved 1st May 2006).

This definition is sweeping and encompasses the spiritual element that exists in the creation of art. However, many would define art as simply a painting; it is something that has to fit inside a picture frame and be hung on a wall. This has been the case in history, but is vastly developing into various different areas that this archaic view of art is

verging on the ignorant. One type of art which has developed over many years is Environmental Art. In the early part of the Twentieth Century the most prominent examples of Environmental Art were the magnificently portentous statues of brave soldiers and prominent scientists that adorned parks and city centres. Such statues still exist today and can be seen in every city and town in the UK.

However it is believed that public art is never fully “public”. Works are usually commissioned by companies or selected by small groups of individuals. This is very true in the case of the regal statues of years gone by. As with all art forms, public art has spawned less formal public art such as the sculpture of a pregnant disabled female in Trafalgar Square by Marc Quinn.

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4247000.stm> Retrieved 10th May 2006)

Environmental art is a response by artists to the human position within nature. It is a way of expressing feelings and ideas about the way people interact, treat or abuse nature. It is sometimes political, often ephemeral and occasionally permanent.



## 1. Photos – Angus McWilliam

Above are two examples of permanent environmental art pieces on display at the Gallery of Modern Art and the Dean Gallery, both in Edinburgh. The pieces are very different to one another and do not reflect a traditional view of art as a painting. Examples such as these emphasises the difficulty of defining what art is. “From the outset, it appears that the more one sees, the less certain one can be about what allows works to be designated ‘art’ at all.” (Archer, 1997. pg. 7) Ultimately, the only definition can be a personal one. Art is a personal taste and will affect or stimulate one person in one way that does not another. As the old cliché goes – “One man’s junk is another man’s treasure.”

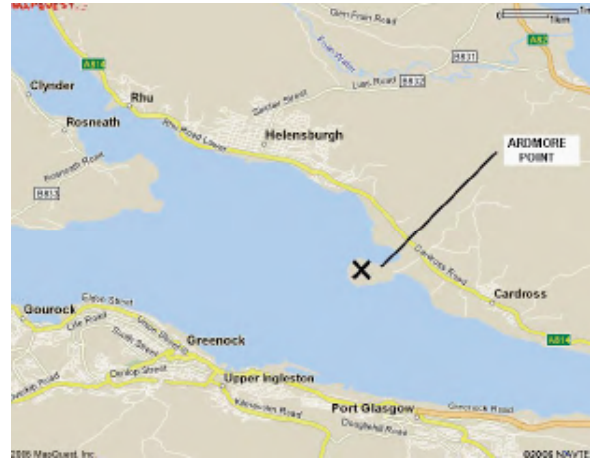
*“Modern Art and I?”*

*MacDuff Stones having a laugh*

*At my confused face.”*

Haiku by the writer

## THE RURAL SITE



## 2. Map courtesy of

<http://www.mapquest.co.uk> Retrieved on May 2nd 2006

Ardmore Point is a privately owned peninsula that boasts a nature trail which used to be managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust before a dispute between them and the owners. It is now solely managed by the owners and is unfortunately suffering from this dispute.



3.

<http://www.visitscottishheartlands.com/areas/lomond/helensburgh.cfm> Retrieved 12th

May 2006

The above photograph taken for a tourist website that promotes the region in which Ardmore Point is situated. It shows the natural beauty of this area, but it does not show the immense amount of rubbish (see below) which is destroying the once spotless beauty spot on the Firth of Clyde. Photos – Glen Coutts



4., 5. Photos – Glen Coutts

This area is a popular walking spot for dog owners and is also used regularly in nice weather for barbeques. Unfortunately those who use this spot do not seem to appreciate the beauty and leave much of what they bring with them behind. This has a devastating affect on the aesthetic value of

the area, and the plants and animals which live there. Waste washed up from the city of Glasgow and other surrounding areas also finds its way onto this small section of land. The terrain at the east side of peninsula is muddy with waste littered in much of the land. When the tide washes out it leaves muddy flats which stretch quite a distance. On a wet and possibly typical Scottish day the peninsula looks rather dreary and not a pleasant place to be at all.

However, when the weather changes for the better the natural beauty of the area can clearly be seen.



6. Photo – the writer

The east side, although affected by the problem of litter and waste, leads round to the west side where the terrain changes from sandy and muddy flats to mainly pebble beaches which face towards Helensburgh and the Mull of Kintyre. This area is much more pleasant than the other side. This may

be because it is a further walk from the main road. From this area the remnants of Glasgow's illustrious shipbuilding past can be seen in Port Glasgow. It has been a major influence in numerous art works past and present within the module of Art in The Environment. The area on the west side is littered with empty mussel shells and pebbles and stones which have been altered by the weather and the sea. This area was abundant with materials that are the perfect type of materials which could make a piece of Environmental art in ways similar to famous artists such as Andy Goldsworthy and Robert Smithson.



7., 8. Photos – the writer

This is a beautiful space in Scotland, one of many, and needs to be appreciated. The litter situation has grown worse since the Wildlife Trust is no longer the estate manager. If the rift was fixed maybe the point would be restored to its former glory. If this is not possible, the only other solution is to rely on those who use the point. It is the users' responsibility to adhere to country etiquette and "take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time." ([http://www.caribbeanhotels.org/Press%20Room/GG21\\_0106.pdf](http://www.caribbeanhotels.org/Press%20Room/GG21_0106.pdf) Retrieved 12th May 2006)

*"Litter everywhere.*

*Dog walkers & those who spoil*

*Kill the beautiful Point."*

Haiku by the writer.

## CREATIVE EXPRESSION VERSUS NATURE

"The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe at the living moment." (D.H. Lawrence as cited in Gooding, 2002. pg 6) Andy Goldsworthy is a prime example of such an artist. Goldsworthy was born in 1956 in Cheshire. Following his studies of

Art at Bradford Art College, he decided that his interest in Art could not be contained within an art gallery. It was nature that inspired him and it was in nature that he has produced some of his most creative and unusual art works. Goldsworthy works with only natural materials and uses very basic tools. He relies wholly on finding materials at his sites and generally has no preconceived idea of what he will create. His art work is always affected by the weather and by climate changes. He does not limit himself to working with only materials he is comfortable with or what he has used in the past. The transience of his work is in direct contrast to the traditional view of art being permanent.

Despite of Goldsworthy's conviction to making art that exists only in nature, he has displayed works in what is viewed as a traditional art context – art galleries. One project he was commissioned to create in 2001 was called “The Three Cairns”. This work consisted of three giant stone Cairns being created from rock from the state of Iowa. One cairn was placed in three museums across the USA – in New York, Iowa and San Diego.

Despite Goldsworthy's expansion of his

creative environments, his principles have remained unchanged. All of his art work is environmentally friendly, and aims to enhance the surroundings. “My art is an attempt to reach beyond the surface appearance. I want to see growth in wood, time in stone, nature in a city, and I do not mean its parks but a deeper understanding that a city is nature too-the ground upon which it is built, the stone with which it is made.” (Goldsworthy, 2000. pg 121) In stark contrast to Goldsworthy is Robert Smithson, an American born in 1938. He was a prominent figure in large scale environmental art, and continues to influence other artists after his death. His most well-known piece is the “Spiral Jetty” which he created in 1970. It is a land formation in the Great Salt Lake of the state of Utah and measured 1500 feet long and 15 feet wide. It was constructed using black basalt rocks that were natural to the environment it was constructed in.

It slowly disappeared from view but was once again on show in 2003 for the first time since 1980 due to the drop in the water level of the lake. When it reappeared it is covered with brilliantly white salt crystals. This piece of art work is huge in scale, and can be seen from miles away, but it has caused a

controversy which still rages today. Inside the main spiral the water has become stagnant and following ecological tests, it has been shown that no life forms can exist within it. From the picture below, the difference in the condition of the water can be clearly seen. This environmental change begs the question – is it acceptable to irrevocably change a natural landscape in pursuit of an artistic vision? From the detrimental affects this piece of art work has caused it is safe to say no. It is indeed a stunning piece of work, but aesthetics cannot be placed higher than the protection of nature. The human race continues to abuse nature and then wonder why natural disasters occur. Artists have to be aware of ecological issues and know that they are not above reproach. Not all of Smithson’s work has caused the ecology of the site to change, but the sheer scale of this one piece of work is enough for him to be used as an example of “what not to do” when aiming to create a piece of environmental art that exists in full harmony with its surroundings.

## **INSPIRATION FOR THE ARTWORK**

**John C Gillies. Edinburgh, Scotland**

**1995**

**Invisible natural conjurer of  
all things that exist.**

**Controlled by its energy it  
tests our faith and beliefs.  
From dinosaur to man it's  
been around a long time.  
It's incredible to believe  
that such a force exists.**

Nature has a powerful way of forcing a person into contemplation of “higher” things. It encourages the viewer to see and to question in ways not encountered before. The west side of the Ardmore Point peninsula looks onto the gateway to the Highlands. It is a beautiful and naturally ordered space. This sort of natural beauty spot often causes humans to consider the ideology of a Creator. Being from a religious background such beauty and order begs the question – how can people dismiss the idea of a creator and think such beauty happened by accident? Could such complexity exist from a bang? Questions concerning the Earth and its unknown beginnings appear to everyone, and form different answers for each individual. Artists have contemplated this question for centuries, using their art to express it in a significant way. One such artist is Charles Jencks. Jencks is renowned for using philosophy and science to underpin his architecture. The Landform Ueda built in the grounds of the Gallery of Modern Art in



Edinburgh is a striking piece of environmental art which is unavoidable as one enters the grounds of the gallery. The opening ceremony took place on August 1st 2001.



9. Photo – Glen Coutts

This structure is man made and created by an architectural genius. Such order and beauty can only exist from a creation. It could not have existed from nothing, or from an explosion (The Big Bang Theory). Deep philosophical matters such as this can arise throughout nature. This was part of the inspiration for the artwork created at Ardmore Point. Not only can one look to the Earth when considering nature and all of its order and beauty, one has to look to the skies – the other planets and the stars. Gustav Holst, an English composer of Latvian descent, was born in 1874. He was deeply interested in Astrology and was inspired to

compose his most famous piece of music – “The Planets.” See attached CD for the music which accompanied the art work. This music is inspiring, haunting and uplifting. It drew the focus of many random thoughts to use the resources found at Ardmore point to create a replica of the world beyond our own – The Solar System.

All in all many small and seemingly insignificant thoughts were gathered together from various sources of inspiration such as the gallery, the site and classical music to create the following artwork.

“The ignorant man marvels at the exceptional;  
the wise man marvels at the common;  
the greatest wonder of all is the regularity of nature.”

By G.D Boardman

(<http://www.adeepplace.com/nature/nature01.shtml> Retrieved 12th May 2006)

## THE CONSTRUCTION

“Sit down before fact like a little child, and be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abyss Nature leads, or you shall earn nothing.” Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895)

Following the initial site visit, a pebble beach on the west side was decided upon as

the most attractive area to create the art work. After examining photographs taken on the first visit to the site it was clear one of the materials that would be used within the art work would be mussel shells. This was because of their natural form, individuality and the beautiful colours which each possessed.



10. Photo – Nicola Dunn

The area in which the art work would be created had an enormous pile of the mussel shells, naturally piled together by the waves of the sea. Next to this beach was a smooth large rock held in place on the sand by the waters edge. Unbeknown to the writer, once the tide came back in it was nearly fully submerged by water. Luckily the aim of the art work was to be completely ephemeral; the only trace of it ever existing being photographs.



11. Photo – Nicola Dunn

The stones shown in the photograph above were gathered from the shore as the tide was out in order to represent each planet. The stones were chosen by their colour, size and shape. Each “planet” was picked because it was the colour according to what scientists know the colours of the planets to be, e.g. Pluto was a small white pebble and Jupiter was a much larger stone with red and white swirl patterns. The stones were then arranged from the top to the bottom of the boulder. Using the gathered mussel shells each stone was surrounded in order to distinguish it from the sea of shells.





12. Photo – The writer

The painstakingly slow process of gathering the mussel shells, then laying each individual shell began following this until the whole boulder was covered.



13., 14. Photos – The Writer

Finally, some deliberation preceded what material would be used to represent the sun. This was finally decided upon after some discussion with a colleague. Daffodils which had been broken or pulled from the ground already by some dogs were nearby and only the heads were used to represent the sun.

This was a striking contrast with the brightness of the yellow in the flowers to the relatively dull colours of the stones and shells.



15. Photo – The writer

To emphasise subtlety the influence of the music it was decided that the stone would be “signed” by the composer. Music accompanied this art work but unless the person viewing the work had an interest in Classical music, the connection may be lost. Bars of the written music of the piece were also hand drawn by chalk. When the tide washed the art work away, nature took control of what belonged to it, leaving

behind the materials where it wanted them to be.



16. Photo – The writer.

The water changed the art work and created what could be classed as a new piece. It gave the opportunity for an evolution of the art and some photographs which traces the art works short life span.

*“The hills are before,  
The Planet exist above.  
Where do I fit in?”*

Haiku by the writer.

## **ART MATTERS**

Aristotle once said “the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but the inward significance.” Art is a subjective and controversial topic. It is easily dismissed and often misunderstood. For centuries it has had a pompous and elitist reputation, but with the emergence of

Community Arts this is slowly changing. Environmental Art is an art form which is easily accessible and can be an immensely enjoyable activity. Its low status in the art world and being relatively unknown to the rest of society deprives those who would benefit from active participation within this art form from taking part. Pretentious public art seen in town centres is often the closest those who are not involved in the arts closely get to the art. This is often a negative influence, and can be seen as something which is beyond a non-artist. The artist believes herself to be someone who is not artistic in the visual arts medium. However, this week long intensive introduction to this art form which was relatively unknown previously has ignited a desire to pursue further knowledge and experience in the field. This is what community art is and what art in general should be about. It should be a way of expressing the artists’ thoughts and feelings in ways that touch and stimulate those who view or participate within it. Art is for everyone and can be, as long as those who create it and work within the field do not alienate others who have every right to engage also. “The essence of all art is to have pleasure in giving pleasure.” (Carnegie. 1936 pg. 38)

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