

Lyndsey Fenn

Coastline

Art in the Environment



Photo: Lyndsay Fenn

Section 1: Introduction

The 'Art in the Environment' is a 5-day module which includes classroom work and excursions. This module is designed to give an insight and understanding into the impact of environmental art on nature. The module enables students to understand the techniques and processes involved in constructing art work in the environment and also inspires students to construct a piece of art work by the end of the module. This report will discuss the learning, which took place along with the inspiration behind the artwork and justification behind constructing the artwork.

Section 2: What is Art in the Environment?

There is no true definition or guidelines for art in the environment. Each piece of artwork is different depending on its location, materials and construction. What one person may consider as environmental art, may be considered an eye sore to another. A common purpose of environmental art is to inspire people to think, feel or appreciate the surrounding environment differently. Environmental art has been going on for thousands of years. If

we consider the standing stones or the pyramids in Egypt we are made to think about their purpose. It was no accident that both pieces of work were constructed and shaped the way they are. They were probably constructed in that manner to convey some sort of message or meaning. *".....It must have some relationship more intimate than merely being there."* www-site/root

This can also be seen today in environmental art. Some pieces are designed to contrast with the natural environment and others are constructed to contrast with the environment. The pieces of artwork are mostly if not always purposely to enhance the outdoor experience they use the outdoors to enhance the artwork. Either way the artwork and the outdoor environment go hand-in-hand. *"We might consider stipulating that environmental art must be either site specific or site conditioned/determined."* www-site/root

Section 3 will go on to discuss in greater detail certain pieces of environmental art and their purpose and function.

Section 3: Sources of Inspiration

3.1 Perth Visit

Day one involved an excursion to Perth to visit the sculpture trail and the Battlebay Centre at Redgorton. The Perth Sculpture trail was constructed after heavy floods and showed that, *"With a bit of imagination, it is possible to incorporate art into a new landscape or for that matter major flood defence works that can often be quite ugly and unsightly. The end result is a quality product in the urban environment."* www.perthinbloom.org

Walking around the sculpture trail allowed me to think about and appreciate

environmental art for the first time. Shown below is the first sculpture that we looked at and discussed. Half of the group liked the piece and the other half didn't or weren't sure. I, myself didn't really feel anything for the piece of art. Although I say I didn't feel anything, I did however think about it. One of the artists aims was more than likely to make people stop, think and consider the piece. I was unsure about the mixture of materials used in the piece. The stone base blended in with the natural environment but the marble top piece looked to modernised and made it stand out.



Photo: Glen Coutts

This piece mostly made me consider the materials, which are used when constructing environmental art. I knew then that I wanted to use only natural materials.

Another piece which inspired me is shown below. It is a bench. This artwork is functional and serves a purpose on the sculpture trail. I especially liked the fact that the material was all natural being made from wood. The artist left the curves and wavy edges in the pieces of wood which I find aesthetically pleasing. I feel that the use of natural curves and shapes helps the artwork to blend into the environment and reflect how nature has no straight lines in it. I felt that the bench was drawing you to

it. I wanted to sit on it the minute I looked at it, which I feel is an important aim when designing benches, chairs or seats.



Photo: Glen Coutts

The picture below of the picture frame and artists work bench is by far the most inspirational factor regarding my artwork. I think this art piece is very clever. It makes you look beyond the art piece and appreciate the outdoor environment. Depending where you stand in front of the sculpture, you get a different view through the frame. It lets you decide what part of the landscape is the most beautiful to capture in a picture. Whatever the artists intentions from this art piece is, I think it is amazing!



Photo: Glen Coutts

3.2 Lecture Material

The lecture material and practical session in the art rooms provided a very useful insight into environmental artists and their work. Some of the artists mentioned and slides shown were the inspiration behind my art piece. One of the slides shown by John Van Alstine reminded me of the picture frame sculpture from Perth. The picture was of an easel made from steel rods placed in the environment. We briefly looked at the slide and discussed it. I then went and researched John Van Alstine on my own which is discussed in 3.3. Through discussions in the lectures, I realised that art in the environment can be used for educational purposes with groups in the outdoors. I now realise that art in the environment is an active way of engaging with the environment and can help individuals appreciate their surrounding environment.

3.3 Independent Research

I collected a pile of books from the university library and looked at various websites to gain inspiration for my art piece. I knew that I wanted my art piece to run along with the theme of framing an area of the landscape but I didn't yet know what materials to use or how to construct it. I firstly looked at John Van Alstine's (JVA) works, focusing on his easel landscapes. I noticed that *"None of his sculptures are without a stone, or the image of a stone."* Capasso, N. (year unknown, p.8)

From looking at these art pieces I decided that he had picked out the most important or impacting feature of each landscape and framed it. The main features being stone arches, piles or rocks or rock outcrops. JVA liked to use stone as his focal point of each piece of work, so I decided that I would like to pick a focal point for my work. The goal for JVA's outdoor work is *"..to address not only the landscape intrinsically, but extrinsically as well, in direct dialogue with*

the natural features that surround them." Capasso, N. (year unknown, p.8)

It was from studying Andy Goldsworthy's work that influenced my decision on the material to use. Goldsworthy (1991) explained that, *"When I'm working with materials it's not just the leaf or the stone it's the process that are behind them that are important. That's what I'm trying to understand, not a single isolated object but nature as a whole."*

This statement made me consider the materials I was going to use and how I was going to construct the art piece. I decided to use the mussel shells for the sea and seaweed for the land. Goldsworthy's work used natural materials but in a way never thought before. He would use natural objects to display shapes totally different from their original form. For example he has a whole series of works using sycamore leaves where he would make boxes out of them or triangles. He has a gift of producing such abstract art in the environment.

Section 4: Ardmore Point

4.1 The Site

Ardmore point lies south of Helensburgh where the peninsula cuts into the Clyde estuary. It takes around 45 minutes to walk around the perimeter of Ardmore point. This should give an idea of the size of the peninsula.

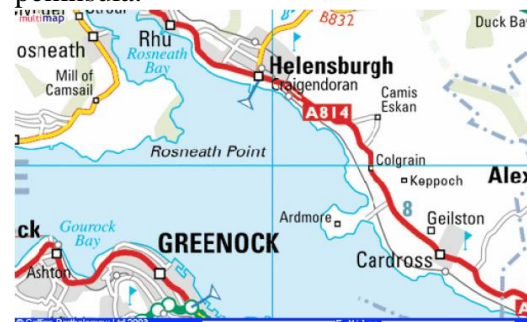


Photo: www.multimap.com

There are many different environments within Ardmore point. The centre of Ardmore has a shallow woodland with a path running outside the woodland. On the other side of the path, the coastline starts. The coastline is very different depending on which side of the peninsula you are standing. Due to the varying tides, there has been much rubbish washed up at Ardmore. This rubbish includes fridges, car tyres, logs, wooden beams from piers, beach glass and various bits of plastics and other rubbish.

This rubbish may look unsightly but it does tell a story of the surrounding areas and ways of life. The rubbish highlights the impact that modern society has on the environment. The old pieces of plastic nets and other bits represent how much Scotland used to rely on fishing for income and how the Clyde was once a busy passage with ship building and importing and exporting goods by ship.

The wooden beams from the piers are either from Gourock or Dunoon. The old Hunters Quay in Dunoon is currently being replaced because the old one was crumbling and beams kept falling off. The beam was more than likely once part of this pier now it has been carried by the tide over to Ardmore. The south side of Ardmore has the most amount of rubbish gathered on it and the North end has the least. The North side is the most aesthetically pleasing with the rocky shoreline with the beach consisting of pebbles and shells and grassy areas with water pools. Looking over the water from the North side, Greenock can be seen on the left, then Dunoon, Rosneath Point and finally Helensburgh.



Photos: Lyndsay Fenn

4.2 Justification

The chosen site for the artwork was the north-west point on Ardmore's coastline. This area was chosen for a few reasons. Firstly there wasn't as much rubbish on the beach, as it was mostly driftwood. The area chosen also had a rugged coastline with rocky outcrops. The main reason for the chosen sight was because of the connections I have with the surrounding areas. I learned to sail in Helensburgh as a child, I have a friend who stays near Rosneath where we go trail cycling and I stayed in Dunoon for the whole of last summer where I worked and I still take the ferry over a couple of times a week. *"That relationship with the source is so important."* Goldsworthy 1992. When looking out from Ardmore point I have many happy memories and feelings.

I had already decided what I was going to do for my artwork. The materials used were all natural and taken from the area. The artwork would have no lasting effect or cause any damage to the area. The artwork would be expressing an alternative view of the area and be recorded by photograph. I was inspired to construct a landscape picture of the coastline. This inspiration was discussed in 'section 3.'

4.3 Construction

I firstly decided where my artwork was going to be placed. I picked a flat grassy area shown below then went to collect my materials.



Photo: Lyndsay Fenn

I collected mussel shells to imitate the sea. The inside of the mussel shells resemble the pattern of coastlines with the blue sea around it. I also liked the shapes of the mussel shells to highlight the swirling tides and currents. I had to collect a whole bucket full of mussel shells in order to fill the whole area of my artwork.

I then collected seaweed and rocks to represent the shore and driftwood to frame my artwork. I laid out the driftwood to make a frame. This frame however, wasn't like a regular picture frame. I laid the driftwood out to make wavy edged frame. I didn't want any straight lines in my artwork, as there are no straight lines in nature. The wavy edged frame was also chosen to emphasise the rugged coastline, which was going to be my artwork.



Photo: Lyndsay Fenn

I decided that I didn't want to produce a regular landscape picture of the view from Ardmore. I constructed a landscape artwork with the main focus being the shore line and sea looking from above.



Photo: Lyndsay Fenn

I worked with the seaweed to make a rugged coastline then placed rocks in the seaweed. Imitating the sea in the artwork was the most complicated part. I placed the mussel shells in wavy lines and turned some upside down and in different directions to represent the waves.



Photo: Lyndsay Fenn



Photo: Lyndsay Fenn

The finished artwork can be shown above. I was pleased with the finished result as it worked out as well as I'd hoped. Hopefully my artwork lasted a while longer after we were at Ardmore for a few passers by to look at and think about. I called the finished piece, 'Coastline.'

Section 5: Conclusion

The art in the environment course has been very inspirational. I now understand what environmental art is all about and its purposes along with the inspirational artists such as Goldsworthy. It has come to light how powerful art in the environment can be in educational terms with groups and also to convey feelings, ideas or appreciation of surroundings. Art in the environment is everywhere you look whether it be in rural or urban settings. Environmental art is an active way of engaging with the environment and looking beyond the picture.

Section 6: Sources of Information

6.1 References

Capasso, N. (year unknown) *Bones of the Earth, Spirit of the Land*. In Alstine, J.V. (year unknown) *Bones of the Earth, Spirit of the Land*. America: Editions Ariel

Goldsworthy, A (1991) *Hand to Earth*. Leeds: W. S. Maney & Son Ltd.

<http://www.perthinbloom.org/what-we-do/art.asp>

<http://www-site/root/io98/ross.html>

6.2 Bibliography

Alstine, J.V. (unknown) *Bones of the Earth, Spirit of the Land*. America: Editions Ariel

Causey, A. (1998). *Sculpture Since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goldsworthy, A (1991) *Hand to Earth*. Leeds: W. S. Maney & Son Ltd.

Kwon, M. (2002). *One Place After Another*. England: The Mit Press.

www.strath.ac.uk/degas