

ENDS OF THE EARTH AND BACK

Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon

Many people will think that a museum exhibition on Land art is impossible.¹ How can you bring monumental artworks that are continuous with the earth in remote locations such as the deserts of Nevada, Utah, or New Mexico into a gallery space? What can you exhibit inside the museum other than photographs, drawings, videos, films, and models—supplementary or documentary materials that, compared with the “real” works “out there,” seem so small, paltry, and inconsequential? Is it not going against the intentions of the artists and the very spirit of this kind of art to even try to stage such an exhibition? Can anything presented in an exhibition setting come close to conveying the experience of walking into, for instance, Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative* (1969–70), a massive 50-by-30-by-1,500-foot trench cut into the dry terrain of the Mormon Mesa in Nevada?

From the start, these types of questions accompanied the planning of “Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974.” They are, however, not exclusive to Land art, and are in many ways urgent concerns for the field of contemporary art in general. In recent years similar questions have been posed with regard to exhibitions of Performance and Body art, too, as the “real work,” done many decades ago and therefore temporally remote to our time, is entering the gallery and museum system today as so much documentation, instructions, object remnants, and, more controversially, re-performances.² Thus, the task of organizing “Ends of the Earth” has not only involved



GIANFRANCO GORGONTI'S photograph of a map featuring the Nevada, Utah, and Arizona borders, 1970.
MICHAEL HEIZER'S *Double Negative*, 1969–70, is located in Nevada's Mormon Mesa, which is marked by a circle here. Such remote locations came to typify Land art.

the apparent physical and conceptual improbability of presenting Land art in a museum setting—it has also meant facing the more profound methodological and structural problems that arise from the awkward meeting of institutions like museums, which are dedicated to the collection, preservation, and presentation of art (most commonly conceived as objects), and 1960s and 70s vanguard art, which in various

YVES KLEIN, *Je raserai tout à la surface de la terre entière...*, c. 1960: “I will raze everything at the surface of the entire earth, until it is flat. I will fill the valleys with mountains, then I will pour concrete over the surface of all the continents.”

¹ The terms “Land art,” “Earth art,” and “Earthworks” tend to be used somewhat interchangeably in contemporary art discourse. For us, Land art is the more encompassing term, with Earth art and Earthworks being subsets. (In the European context, Land art is a much more prevalent term.) Based on our research, the first occurrence of Land art as a categorical term was Gerry Schum’s use of it as the title

of his 1969 film. Initially, in 1968, Schum considered “Landscape Art” as a possible title, but changed to the shortened version after discussions with Richard Long, Jan Dibbets, and Barry Flanagan. See Ursula Wevers, “Love Work Television Gallery,” in Ulrike Groos, Barbara Hess, and Ursula Wevers, eds., *Ready to Shoot: Farnshgalerie Gerry Schum, Videogalerie Schum* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2004), 29.

Contrarily, according to Michael Heizer, “Land art” was coined by Walter De Maria in 1967. Conversation with Philipp Kaiser, February 1, 2011.
² The most well-known case is Marina Abramovic’s *Seven Easy Pieces*, presented at the Guggenheim Museum in 2005, for which the artist restaged several performances from 1965 to 1975. Two of these works were the artist’s own; the other five

performances were originally by Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Valie Export, Bruce Nauman, and Gina Pane. An institutional development related to this condition is the establishment of Performance art as a collection category in many modern and contemporary art museums, the Museum of Modern Art in New York being a leading example. For further reading relevant to this situation, see Carol Kino, “A Rebel Form Gains Favor.

Fights Ensuré,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2010, AR25; Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Against Performance Art,” *Artforum* 48, no. 9 (May 2010): 208–13; and Martha Buskirk, “Authorship and Authority,” in Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 21–56.

ways defined itself as an antiestablishment move against precisely such an art system, resistant to conventional beliefs regarding what counts as art, how it can be made, and where one might find it. As such, “Ends of the Earth” is simultaneously a revisionist art historical exhibition and a historical and cultural specimen in its own right, embodying the tensions and contradictions that exist in the uneasy reckoning of vanguard art of the 1960s and 70s and its institutionalization and historicization in 2012.

The point of interest for us remains not whether an exhibition such as this functions to contain radical artistic gestures of the past, blunting their capacity to change the status quo. The reductive and outdated presumption of opposition between art and art institutions that undergirds such thinking is a cliché that should be abandoned. Rather, this exhibition seeks to open up the past to move beyond such clichés and to challenge the conventionalized understanding of 1960s and 70s art in general, and Land art in particular. Under-recognized is the fact that the questions, challenges, and difficulties that Land art presents for the museum today are not new. They are, in fact, the same questions, challenges, and difficulties that accompanied the emergence of Land art as a practice and a discourse more than five decades ago and were integral to its definition and development.

To be clear, “Ends of the Earth” is not interested in merely representing inside the museum canonic projects such as Heizer’s *Double Negative*, mentioned above, Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* in Utah (1970),

or Walter De Maria’s *Lightning Field* in New Mexico (1977). Such works, whose significance is already well established, exist silently in far-off locations waiting for visitors to take the time and effort to experience their singular aesthetic offerings in situ. The museum can and should direct attention to these and other unique works such as Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* in Utah (1973–76), Charles Ross’s *Star Aris* in New Mexico (conceived in 1971 and under construction), and James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* in Arizona (conceived in 1974 and under construction). The goal of “Ends of the Earth” instead is to present a dense synchronic view of art activities covering an approximately fifteen-year period during which the designation of Land art emerged and subsequently achieved cultural consensus to become a fully congealed art category by the mid-1970s.

Not taking Land art as a given, then, the exhibition revisits various milieus and networks of heterogeneous practices around the world where the desire to engage the land or to work with the earth followed diverse artistic objectives and impulses. In researching this diversity, we found that the dominant art historical interpretation of Land art—as fundamentally an American sculptural phenomenon that developed out of Minimalism and Postminimalism, expanding into the “field” beyond art spaces to occupy or to become one with vast landscapes like the deserts of the Southwestern United States—accounts for only a limited number of artists’ works.³ The awe-inspiring creations of the American triumvirate of Heizer, De Maria, and Smithson continue to hold sway as the leading examples, if not *the*

paradigm, of Land art: permanent monumental sculptures in remote, inhospitable locations that ostensibly escape the art system and demand reverential pilgrimages to experience them in situ. But the power of that discourse, promoted over the past decades by art historical scholarship and major institutions such as the Dia Art Foundation, has obscured other contexts, approaches, and practices. Attending to these other contexts, approaches, and practices with equal seriousness as the well-established ones has been one of the goals in organizing “Ends of the Earth.” The exhibition, however, is not simply a display of artworks culled from around the world on the theme of earth and land or space and place. Rather, “Ends of the Earth” is an epistemological inquiry that returns to both artistic *and* curatorial activities of the 1960s and 70s to glean the conditions that contributed to the favorable promotion of Land art as a viable new art category. This return, of course, is not a return at all but a new discursive construction, a framework through which we might discern possibilities for histories of Land art other than those already familiar. (See Jane McFadden’s essay, page 43, in this volume.) “Ends of the Earth” provides a broader and more complex art historical framework for Land art and better contextualizes even those artists and projects that insist on physical and discursive isolation.

Following our research, “End of the Earth” presents four major propositions that counter the most common myths associated with Land art.

LAND ART IS INTERNATIONAL. Even a casual acknowledgment of the lines of influence, networks of communication, and sites of exchange beyond the American deserts and beyond the borders of the United States requires the full acceptance of Land art as an international phenomenon. “Ends of the Earth” presents works from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Philippines, Mexico, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This range recognizes both the geographical base of the artists and works as well as the complex crossing of artists and locations in the realization of works. The transatlantic dialogue between the United States and Germany in the late 1960s is of particular intensity and significance for Land art’s formation. (See Julianne Lorz’s essay, page 161, and Lazlo Glozer’s reflection, page 173, in this volume.)

To be sure, the deserts of the American Southwest, with their formal beauty and apparent empty frontiers, ripe for fantasies of Manifest Destiny as well as visions of endlessness and timelessness (of being outside history), captured the artistic imaginations of many American artists. It is important to acknowledge, however, that they also provoked grand visions of artistic interventions among European artists, including Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely, who engaged this landscape in their practice as early as 1961.⁴ And while American deserts are considered the prime sites for Land art, deserts in Antarctica, the Sahara, and Israel, with entirely different topographical, geopolitical, social,

³ The final chapter of Rosalind Krauss’s highly influential book *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977) reflects on Land art projects by Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Richard Serra, and Heizer to argue for the end of modernist sculpture and the opening up of a new paradigm of sculpture’s postmodernist dispersal in the United States. Krauss’s famous structuralist mapping of this dispersal in the essay

“Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” published in *October*, no. 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44, in combination with *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, has compelled the reception of Land art as fundamentally a sculptural phenomenon, although these texts are not on Land art per se. “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” is reprinted in Krauss’s book *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).

⁴ See Dore Ashton, “Exercises in Anti-Style: Six Ways of Regarding Un, In, and Anti-Form,” *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 6 (April 1969): 45–47. In an article that addresses the claims of remoteness and inaccessibility of Land art, the critic remarks on “The fresh outdoors and the beauties of Patterson, New Jersey, or Passaic. (Tinguely saw it first).” She is likely referring to the Swiss artist’s project *Study for an End of the World, No. 2* (1962), which was located in the Nevada desert outside Las Vegas.

historical, and aesthetic conditions, were significant sites of artistic activity, too, inspiring artists such as Iain Baxter of N.E. Thing Co. in Canada, Heinz Mack of Germany, and Pinchas Cohen Gan and Avital Geva from Israel, among others.

Moreover, if Claes Oldenburg's gravelike hole, *Placid Civic Monument* (1967) in New York's Central Park, in the backyard of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, can be evaluated as a "negative sculpture" that embodies a critical commentary on the Vietnam War, then the ten-meter-wide *Hole* (1965) dug



CLAES OLDENBURG, *Placid Civic Monument*, 1967; 108 cubic feet of Central Park surface excavated and reinserted northwest of Cleopatra's Needle, behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; commissioned for "Sculpture in Environment" and sponsored by the New York City Administration of Recreation and Cultural Affairs, 1967; gift to New York City from Claes Oldenburg

collectively by the members of Group "i" in Gifu, Japan, must be seen in the same light, or at the very least the two works must be thought of relationally. At the same time, however, the specific context of the Group "i" work cannot be overlooked, given the still-fresh history, if not visceral memory, of World War II and the American bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Of note, military conflicts around the world involving territorial and national boundaries as well as the specter of war and political violence permeate the history of Land art.



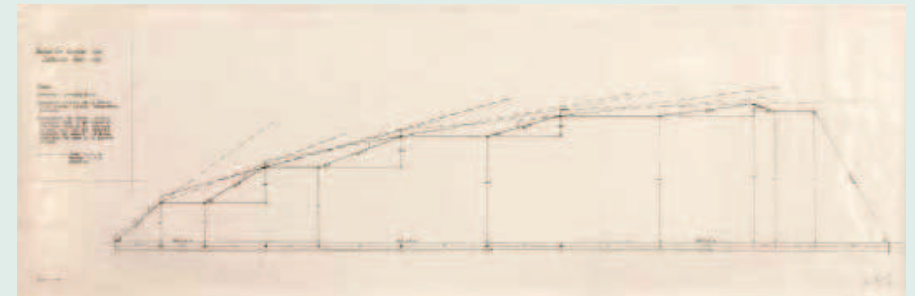
GROUP "i," *Hole*, 1965

LAND ART ENGAGES URBAN GROUNDS.

"Ends of the Earth" asserts that Land art is not an escape from the city, as it is commonly characterized, but is part of the complex processes of urban transformation and spatial politics of the period. In other words, the effort to leave the city and all that it represents, the desire to work with and work in seemingly uncultivated natural landscapes like the desert or the woods, must be considered in relation to rather than in opposition to the urban. It is perhaps no coincidence that the American desert emerged as a privileged geography of Land art discourse, since it seems to ideally fulfill the need for an Other to the urban, both metaphorically and physically, as a zone of imagined isolation and artistic autonomy. From a European perspective, marked by the experiences of the "deserts" created by the physical and psychological devastation of World War II, the American desert likely appeared as a potential utopian site for new beginnings. Yet such attitudes reflect a denial of the presence and histories of indigenous cultures, as well as the fact that the desert was already cultivated, rationalized, militarized, even wasted as an extension of the urban

grid before any artist arrived to make his or her mark in the 1960s. As such, what needs to be better understood is the historical and cultural specificity of the *desire* for another kind of non- or anti-urban space, the fantasy of an elsewhere, which Land art discourse helped to produce, rather than accepting at face value the presumption that the desert, or "nature," more broadly speaking, is indeed in opposition to the city. (See Emily Eliza Scott's essay, page 67, and Julian Myers's essay, page 129, in this volume.)

The attachment to the myth of Land art's antipathy to the city has also overshadowed the significance of works engaging the urban context, such as those by Alan Sonfist, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Joshua Neustein, among others. "Ends of the Earth" furthermore brings attention to early work by artists such as Alice Aycock, Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison, Nancy Holt, Patricia Johanson, Mary Miss, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles who would go on to develop practices variously incorporating civil engineering, architecture, urban planning, public art, and infrastructure design, beyond the art context and beyond the period covered by the exhibition.



ALICE AYCOCK, *Project for Elevation with Obstructed Sight Lines*, 1972

LAND ART DOES NOT ESCAPE THE ART

SYSTEM. The belief that Land art is a dematerialized or antiobject practice and, as such, a turn away from the art system as a rejection of the commercial market and the ideology of art institutions is inaccurate. Besides the fact that Land art is as much a material practice as an ideational one, this art involved, from the start, key collectors, patrons, dealers, and curators playing their part to support its production, public presentation, and distribution. These figures, along with the artists, contended with the difficult challenges of what to exhibit in a gallery or museum setting, and how to do so, as well as the translation of such work into the existing exchange system of ownership and/or sale.⁵ This reality is too often misunderstood and reductively characterized to claim Land art as an anti-institution and antimarket practice, by definition. Actually, it would be more accurate to say that Land art encouraged a hyperawareness of the conditions of production, presentation, and distribution among those who engaged with it directly.

It is notable that Land art emerged precisely at a moment of greater professionalization of the artistic field, which coincided with a significant expansion of the art market and the influence of media and publicity culture in general. Many of Land art's representative artists who achieved international recognition found early audiences in the context of newly ascendant art fairs, small and large institutional group exhibitions, and individual gallery presentations, particularly in Germany. (See interviews with Seth Siegelaub, page 61, and Germano Celant, page 123, and Yona Fischer's reflection, page 157, in this volume.)

Perhaps more important to the development of the Land art discourse are the exhibitions organized by Virginia Dwan, first at her Los Angeles gallery, then

in New York, especially the 1968 "Earthworks" show, originally planned for outdoors. One cannot overestimate the role of Dwan both as a dealer and as a patron seeing that it was with her support, financial and otherwise, that artists such as Heizer, De Maria, Smithson, and Ross were able to realize some of their most ambitious monumental constructions in the the land. (See Virginia Dwan's reflection, page 93, in this volume.)

The seminal 1969 "Earth Art" exhibition, organized by Willoughy Sharp at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art on the campus of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, was a paradigm-making endeavor in another way. With each artist asked to work both outdoors (making in-situ interventions into the existing landscape in and around the campus with found resources) and indoors (installing



LOUISE LAWLER'S photograph of DENNIS OPPENHEIM realizing a *Gallery Transplant* in Ithaca, New York, during the "Earth Art" exhibition, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, 1969

⁵ Despite the seeming incompatibility of Land art and the museum, the former's objectification by the latter may not be a complete impossibility. For example, in 1985 Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969–70) was donated by Virginia Dwan to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and it remains in the museum's collection. In 1999 Dia Art Foundation acquired

Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) from the artist's estate. What acquisition and ownership of such works means, however, is not very straightforward, since they are not discrete or transportable objects. The issue of the land itself being real estate that belongs to a person or entity other than the owner of the artwork further raises questions regarding not only

the limits of the work but also how those limits should be determined and maintained. More and more, these questions are becoming a legal rather than an artistic matter, or, the artistic and the legal are becoming a continuous field.

Installation view of "Earthworks," Virginia Dwan Gallery, New York, 1968





ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG seated to the right of his *Mirror Displacement (Cayuga Salt Mine Project)*, 1969; mirror and rock salt: 48 x 60 x 48 in. (122 x 152 x 122 cm) overall; during the installation of "Earth Art," Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1969

works in individuated gallery spaces), "Earth Art" established a model of a spatial relay between inside the museum and outside "in the world" as a defining condition for the exhibition. In doing so, "Earth Art" did not reject so much as highlight the museum's physical and conceptual limits.⁶ (See Willoughby Sharp's oral history, page 37, in this volume.)

These two exhibitions, one in a commercial gallery and the other in a university art museum, along with Gerry Schum's film *Land Art* (1969), conceived at the outset as an art exhibition with broadcast

television in Berlin as the means of its presentation and dissemination, constitute a convergence that marks the apex of the Land art discourse. As such, it cannot be denied that Land art is inextricably tied to developments in the art market, the art museum, and the mass media at once, and that dealers, curators, patrons, and critics contributed as much to the Land art discourse as did the artists.⁷

One might have to travel quite far to see some Land art works, but this should not be confused with or mistaken for moving outside the art system. Rather

⁶ One could recognize in some of the "Earth Art" projects a proto-Institutional Critique tendency in which the binary of inside/outside, art/life, institutional framework (limited and constrained)/social and natural field (expanded) are put in oppositional relation.

⁷ In addition to Virginia Dwan, Willoughby Sharp, and Gerry Schum, the following dealers, patrons, curators, and critics made major contributions to either the realization of Land art projects or their legitimation in institutional contexts or both, all prior to 1974: W. A. L. Beeren, David Bourdon, Jack Burnham, Germano Celant, Konrad Fischer,

Yona Fischer, Heiner Friedrich, John Gibson, László Glozer, Grace Glueck, Jorge Glasberg, Charles Harrison, Friedrich Wolfram Heubach, Howard Junker, John Kaldor, Lucy R. Lippard, Paul Maenz, Jan van der Marck, Franz Meyer, Grégoire Müller, John Perreault, Pierre Restany, Robert Scull, Seth Siegelbaum, Hans Strelow, Harald

Szeemann, Sidney Tillim, Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr., Diane Waldman, and John Weber. The role of photographers and filmmakers also cannot go unmentioned in this context, especially Rainer Crone, G. Robert Deiro, Bob Fiore, and Gianfranco Gorgoni.

Photograph taken at the International Hotel, Las Vegas, after one of Elvis Presley's record-breaking fifty-eight consecutively sold-out concerts, 1969; pictured, left to right: MICHAEL HEIZER, DEWAIN VALENTINE, HANS STRELOW, JOHN WEBER, ROY BONGARTZ, CARLO HUBER, AND VIRGINIA DWAN. By the late 1960s, an international dialogue around Land art was being established and expanded by artists, critics, and gallerists.



FERNSEHGALERIE BERLIN GERRY SCHUM

LAND ART

LONG: Walking A Straight 12 Mile Line - Southwest England

FLANEGAN: A Hole In The Sea - Schrammingen Holland

OPPENHEIM: Timestack - Fort Kent Zeligesse USA-Canada

BERTHELOT: Fossil Quarry Mosaic - Cayuga Lake N. Y. USA

BOGHESS: Sand Foundry - Camargue Frankreich

DUBREY: 12 Hours Table Object - Dutch Coast Holland

DE MARIA: Two Lines Three Centes - Mojave Desert USA

HELZER: Coyote - Coyote Dry Lake California USA

SENDUNG 15. APRIL 22.40 Uhr I. PROGRAMM

Eine Auftragsproduktion des SENDERS FREIES BERLIN - Prod. filmkunstfilm gerry schum
 Katalog zur Fernseh Ausstellung LAND ART DM 7,80
 Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum 5657 Haan / Düsseldorf Brucherhühle 02129 4737

Poster announcing the April 15, 1969, television broadcast of GERRY SCHUM'S *Land Art*, 1969

than rejecting the art market or art institutions, Land art developed squarely within these contexts and provoked their transformation through a self-estranging engagement with them.

LAND ART IS A MEDIA PRACTICE AS MUCH AS A SCULPTURAL ONE.

Another arena of the art system that contributed much to the production and legitimation of the Land art discourse is, of course, the media. Perhaps even more so than Pop art, Land art registered powerfully within the popular cultural imaginary of the 1960s and 70s, especially in the United States, attracting significant attention from mainstream publications, such as *Life*, *Esquire*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, which had extensive distribution around the world. These magazines provided vivid coverage of Land art for a broad general readership, delivering in words and pictures Land art's spectacular media-genic novelty, often highlighting its resonance with the rising environmental movement on the one hand and the Cold War race to space on the other. Some of the qualities commonly associated with Land art—its grand scale, remote location, difficulty of making, association with nature—were propagated within such contexts of popular journalism. Moreover, in some instances, media organizations directly sponsored Land art works, supplying funds and resources to an artist to pursue a project in exchange for exclusive coverage of its production.⁸ As such, it would not be wrong to state that some Land art works were produced *for* the media and *by* the media simultaneously, raising the more difficult question as to whether Land art can exist without the media.

Art critic Dore Ashton observed in 1969 that Land art seemed to require or generate its own publicity: "as the 'earth artists' point out, [their work] cannot be bought or owned (only commissioned, photographed, publicized and made the chic subject of every art-world conversation)... The orchid in the jungle does not go unseen. If it is not actually seen, it is photographed, reproduced, talked about, documented ad absurdum. These days."⁹ In other words, Land art involves not only, say, the digging of a trench in the desert—an "orchid in the jungle"—but also the processes that will ensure that this "does not go unseen." Rather than being supplemental or secondary, then, the production, distribution, and circulation of images and information about a work "out there" is defining of that work's existence. This is not to say that mediation fully eclipses "the work" but rather that the identity or meaning of "the work" cannot be fully realized without it. This is a structural condition, a fundamental attribute of Land art from the outset in the 1960s.

So in addition to the role of popular media in constructing certain narratives about Land art, Land art itself was media-bound from the beginning. (See Tom Holert's essay, page 97, in this volume.) As already noted, Schum's *Land Art* was conceived for broadcast television. Transferring material and bodily engagement with earthly conditions into electronic information transmission, Schum's notion of a television gallery (*Fernsehgalerie*) radically (re)imagined what an exhibition of art could be and how it might reach its audience.

8 Jean Tinguely's *Study for an End of the World, No. 2* was produced for David Brinkley's *Journal* on NBC television. Similarly, the realization of Peter Hutchinson's *Paricutin Volcano Project* (1970) in Mexico was initiated and financed by *Time* magazine in exchange for publication rights to the photographs. Two photographs from the project were published in the June 29, 1970, issue of *Time* as part of a two-page article covering Hutchinson's and Dennis Oppenheim's ecological artworks.

9 Ashton, "Exercises in Anti-Style," 45, 47.

Two years earlier, in 1967, while working on his proposal for the Dallas–Fort Worth Regional Airport involving Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Morris, Smithson also imagined the possibilities of experiencing large-scale outdoor artworks through real-time television transmission: “Remote places such as the Pine Barrens of New Jersey and the frozen wastes of the North and South Poles could be coordinated by art forms that would use the actual land as medium. Television could transmit such activity all over the world.”¹⁰

Beyond such artists’ engagements with media, Land art in general helped to redefine media’s function in relation to art, as did other art practices of the period, especially those associated with conceptualism and performance. Dave Hickey argued in 1971 that “earthworks” are not in fact “predicated upon the abolition of the object,” nor on the circumvention of the art-world system. In a prescient observation, he wrote that such myths are being produced by the art media, the new seat of power in the advent of so-called dematerialization of art. As Hickey saw it, the art magazine and the space of media were now the primary sites of art’s presentation, critical evaluation, and legitimation all at the same time, and Land art had a privileged position within this context.¹¹



Installation view of “Probing the Earth: Contemporary Land Projects,”
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., 1977



CHRISTO and JEANNE-CLAUDE, *Wrapped Coast, Little Bay, Australia, One Million Square Feet*,
from *Wrapped Coast—One Million Square Feet*, 1968–69

¹⁰ Robert Smithson, “Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 38. Art historians and critics have regularly quoted this essay, usually emphasizing the sculptural aspect of his enterprise: “Pavements, holes, trenches, mounds, heaps, paths, ditches, roads, terraces, etc., all have an esthetic potential....”

Instead of using a paintbrush to make his art, Robert Morris would like to use a bulldozer.” But what the ellipsis bridging these two sentences has obscured over the years (fully quoted above) is the extent to which Smithson was thinking through media technology alongside the bulldozer as an art-making tool.

¹¹ Dave Hickey, “Earthscapes, Landworks, and Oz,” *Art in America* 59, no. 5 (September–October 1971): 40–49. Hickey’s observation seems apt in relation to the changing conceptualization of the publication page as a site of artistic production (and presentation) among many artists and curators during the 1960s–70s. For example,

as noted by Willoughby Sharp in his oral history in this catalogue, the first issue of *Avantgarde*, edited with Liza Béar, published in 1970, was conceived simultaneously as an art magazine, an alternative catalogue for the “Earth Art” show, and an exhibition in itself.

Although some may continue to insist upon Land art's singularity and unrepresentability in opposition to such consolidation of media power and media culture in general, it is *through* media, or more precisely the control over it, that such notions of singularity and unrepresentability are maintained. Either way, whether one sees media as the enemy of Land art or as an integral extension of it, its significance to the discourse cannot be denied. Furthermore, these two opposing positions reflecting a profound division internal to Land art must be thought of together, as constituting a single, albeit disunited, discourse.

This disunity stems from two different views about media's function: as re-presentation or as relay. For artists who adhere to an idealist, even modernist, view of Land art as offering an unmediated, pure aesthetic experience, photographs, videos, films, texts, models, drawings, and the like are conceived as unacceptable substitutes. Lesser in relation to "the work" "out there," these are considered mere documentation; they are not the work. For other artists, media is conceived not so much as a representational surrogate for "the work," but as a relay or extension of it. Dennis Oppenheim's *Gallery Transplant* series, initiated in 1969 at the "Earth Art" exhibition in Ithaca, New York, is an early exploration of the connectedness of interior and exterior spaces through the physical and conceptual transposition involving floor plans, maps, and photographs. Smithson's notion of Site/Nonsite, a theory of the dialectical, nonhierarchical relationship between here and there, inside and outside, between the fact of material or geographical reality (of a particular

place) and the means of its "movement" into another reality (of a gallery or art system), is also exemplary. Or, as Holt put it more bluntly, media is a means of "expanding the work into the world" and as such an equally viable way of experiencing "the work," since it is continuous with it.¹²

"Ends of the Earth" recognizes the legitimacy of both positions as a determining contradiction internal to the Land art discourse. We respect the two artists—De Maria and Heizer—who have insisted that their work is only "out there" and therefore declined to participate in this exhibition. We also respect many other artists who consider media an integral component of Land art practice. Following these artists, we firmly maintain that what is on view in "Ends of the Earth," with very few exceptions, are artworks and not documentation. They were conceived, produced, and exhibited as such during the time frame covered by this exhibition, which is to say, we are not retroactively recasting past productions of ephemera or supplementary material into a new frame of elevated legitimacy.

It should also be noted that while "Ends of the Earth" might seem to some viewers as too willful in including too heterogeneous a range of artworks (conceptual, performative, sculptural, photographic, filmic) into the category of Land art, this heterogeneity is actually truthful to the moment of Land art's initial formulation. For instance, Virginia Dwan's category-defining "Earthworks" exhibition included photographs, drawings, blueprints, sculptures, written proposals, a film, a photo light-box, and a large monochromatic painting (many of the works from "Earthworks" are featured in "Ends of the Earth").

The curatorial parameters guiding the selection of works in this exhibition are encoded in its title. "Ends of the Earth" registers the notion of earth as a means—as a material or medium to achieve certain artistic ends, whether it is treated as raw matter, as socially and politically charged, or as symbolically meaningful. At the same time, "Ends of the Earth" can be read as describing a spatial relationship to the earth rather than a material one, highlighting distance and traversal, the notion of moving through or across space, as in, "to go to the ends of the earth." Thus, we embrace equally works that engage the land in physical and material terms and those that take abstract and conceptual approaches. Furthermore, we insist that there is no action upon materials without some kind of conceptualization, and, conversely, that there is no pure idea without a material manifestation.

Overall, we have approached Land art as a discourse, which means it is a cultural construction produced within very particular historical and political contexts involving the convergence of major transformations in artistic ideas, leaps in technologies of building, visualization, communication, and a newly expanded sense of the limits of the world. But the constellation of specific forces that brings Land art into focus starting around 1960 shifts, in our view, in 1974. Although land-based works continue beyond this date, paths of artistic inquiry diversify and develop into more discrete identities, such as public art, landscape design, outdoor sculpture, ecological art, and so on. This diversification coincides

with the general acceptance of Land art as an unquestioned artistic movement.¹³ The year also marks the beginnings of much larger-scale artistic endeavors that reach for another level, requiring more land, more labor, more money, more legal intervention, more institutional support, more words, and definitely more time.¹⁴

"Ends of the Earth" ends before this new phase of more of everything, and it captures the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions that defined the multiple paths of Land art's emergence. Our work in bringing this exhibition and catalogue together, then, has involved moving against one of the most powerful claims within Land art discourse: that the essence of Land art is isolation. Rather than taking a presentist view of Land art as one of autonomy, universality, and timelessness that transcends history, we have attempted to de-isolate it, to situate it historically, to reestablish its paths of connections and exchanges in order to see what has been missed.

¹² Nancy Holt, in conversation with Mwon Kwon, October 8, 2011.

¹³ Opening in October 1977 at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., "Probing the Earth: Contemporary Land Projects," curated by John Beardsley, marked Land art's full institutional arrival. The exhibition traveled to the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art and the Seattle

Art Museum through the spring of 1978. This exhibition can be viewed as a prelude to Beardsley's larger and longstanding contribution to the Land art discourse, the book *Earthworks and Beyond*, first published in 1984 (still in print today) and arguably the most well known compendium on the topic.

¹⁴ The year 1974 marks the opening of the Artpark program of outdoor sculptures in Lewiston, New York, as well as the official establishment of the Dia Art Foundation.