

ECO ART

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Abstract

In the second half of the 20th century, the general population started to feel concern for environmental issues caused by urban agglomeration as well as the development of an increasingly consumerist society. In the midst of all this, artists stand side by side with those who are in the battlefield for a clean environment. Through the use of artistic expression, and of natural and recyclable materials in their works, artists are able to convey the dangers that environmental degradation poses to our society.

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In the second half of the 20th century, the general population started to feel concern for environmental issues caused by urban agglomeration as well as the development of an increasingly consumerist society. Throughout the modern and contemporary age, polluting industries and mass production of goods led to residues in large quantities being left behind causing environmental pollution.

Up till now, we have not seen a common and coherent political movement for environmental protection and very little has been invested in its cause, all of which has contributed to the damage of the natural environment and the quality of life.

In the midst of all this, artists stand side by side with those who are in the battlefield for a clean environment. Through the use of artistic expression, and of natural and recyclable materials in their works, artists are able to convey the dangers that environmental degradation poses to our society.

Artists from around the globe, including Romanian and Japanese artists have created works with militant characteristics displaying man's relationship with his environment, as well as that of nature with industry; all of which warns the public of the dire need to protect the environment.

Eco Sculpture has risen in prominence in the recent decades due to the common citizen's desire for a clean environment, a healthy and harmonious atmosphere, and integration of nature into urban life, as well as dimensions and aesthetics in urban planning that contribute to the quality of life for the ecocomental system.

Through the works of Eco Art, Land Art, Earth Art and Sky Art, artists inspire us to participate in the healing of planet earth.

The concept of Land Art first appeared in the United States after 1950, and it refers to the creative linking of art and nature by placing objects in landscapes in an organic manner.

Visual artist Miya Ando has created an installation utilizing 1000 fluorescent ficus leaves which she let float on water. The leaves blend in with the natural scenery during the day. They were painted with a fluorescent, non-toxic substance, allowing the leaves to

absorb sunlight and to glow during the night, creating a magical atmosphere. The installation titled “Obon” lasted just one day.

In his project, “Coexistence” ceramic artist Mineo Mizuno combines ceramic material and several types of moss to create living miniature landscapes. The Japanese artist’s minimalistic sculptures have become a place of meditation centering around the symbiotic relationship between art and nature. The viewers find themselves emphatically imagining the creative process of these sculptures, as they observe them.

From 1970 and onwards, many artists in Romania began focusing on the relationship between art and nature and started to create Land Art and Earth Art.

In 1974, in Timișoara, the Sigma Group designed and developed structures out of natural materials with the purpose of integrating them into the landscape. Ștefan Bertalan reshaped nature around him by building a living artifact.

During the 70’s, after gaining influences from constructivism, Ștefan Bertalan began to study nature, which he perceived as the universal being. The artist observed the processes of growth, evolution and finally, decomposition of plants. He communicates and identifies with the whole of the botanical world found in the forests, from the individual leaf, all the way to the tuber. He has declared:

“The energy of trunks and branches overlaps life in motion, universal breaths, and my whole cosmos. It is then, that I paint a landscape (a politico-ecological encephalogram)”.

For Bertalan, nature also represents a storage of personal and collective memories, as is communicated to us in his works titled “The forest”. In this setting, the scenery becomes a place of remembrance, and communication with loved ones; with the mother and the father. It becomes a transtemporal space in which the artist enters a discussion of the present and seeks to understand the thought process of his community.

His drawings contain scientific observations, and also include animism, as he is ever concerned about the well-being of plants. The artist seeks to enter into a world free from constraints, in which he is able to discover the similarities within himself and human society.

For Ștefan Bertalan, biology and geometry in the constructivist, as well as the fractal sense convene in a single drawing; one that appears to search for the very reality of life. Harmony and pain seem to be the opposite poles that govern his art. A society that does not seem to understand him, and an eternal search for a place that truly resonates with him; these are the existential obstacles for the artist that is Ștefan Bertalan.

His curiosity about the living world, and its organic development is not limited only to the principle of growth, but also involves that of decomposition; the transition to non-existence. The stories of plants depicted in his drawings, and calligraphy are composed of lines that seek to decipher more than to specify form. These lines provide context, and a metaphor of a world created by people which is transferred into the botanical realm. His stories about plants reflect the imperfection of humanity, which the artist obsessively evokes in his work.

In Bucharest, Wanda Mihuleac opened her extensive exhibition at the Bucharest Art Collections Museum in 1980. The majority of the works ranged from drawings, objects, photography to installations; with the main theme being artistic intervention

through the use of objects within nature. One of the works exhibited titled “The Moebius Band” (1980) is displayed as a large spiral strip coated with a layer of earth and moss.

The transition from sculpture-specific materials such as wood, stone and metal, to materials found in nature represents an important step in the artistic community; an openness to unconventional materials and to alternative art, both of which will no doubt, see a continued increase in exposure in the late twentieth century. The artist’s workspace is no longer represented solely by the traditional workshop, but by a natural space in which the art dwells. This natural context, thus, acquires the value of an exhibition space.

Eco Art can be minimalistic works or complex constructions. From the object, installation, and to the environment, all is perfectly integrated into the natural interconnected setting. If I were to choose, I would refer to the installations of Hideo Kumaki to exemplify this idea. His installations not only protect the exhibition space, but also effectively contribute to the protection of its surrounding environment.

For the Biennale of Art in Venice in 2015, Chiharu Shiota created the work titled, “The key in the hand”. The installation demonstrates the concern and anxiety revolving around the theme of life and death. The two boats represent the hands that collect all of the painful memories (represented by the keys) left behind by those who have passed away. The work points the audience to the Tohoku earthquake in 2011, in which many lost their lives.

Another work that militarizes for environmental protection is that of the artist Isana Yamada titled “Samsara”. The six whales positioned in a circle represent the cycle of life, and the actions of people and their consequences. The title of the work itself signifies reincarnation or rebirth. The artist warns about the imbalanced relationship between humans and nature. For materials, transparent resin was used to emphasise the interior of the whales which represent a small part of the universe.

Delia Popa is part of the younger generation to whom the experimenting, the sociological art, and the art projects viewed either as an educational process or as related to nature and urban space, all equate to the field of research and the visual representation.

“The secret life of plants” is an interactive project that Popa initiated; a catalog of text-images displaying the answers of her fifteen interviewees from nine countries. The individuals participated in her questionnaire concerning their relationships with the botanical world. The images also show the locations where the interviewed people reside; places of physical and spiritual communion with the plants, the garden, and their fragments of the natural world which they take excellent care of.

Through this project we can observe how people have fond memories with plants, are friends with them, and have confidants in them. They love, protect, and have deep feelings for them. They are convinced that plants can react to and exchange energy as well knowledge with humans; that plants offer joy to people.

In the introduction of the catalog, Delia Popa informs, “Plants talk to us about mobility and adaptability.”

In terms of Eco Art, the point of view of the sculptor, Darie Dup, who was also my professor during my Master’s program stands out as noteworthy. Concerned with ecology, the artist signs sculptures which highlight the danger caused by the destruction of forests.

“On the one hand, the “Axis Mundi” exposition is about a social issue, the destruction of ecological and forest heritage. And on the other hand, it’s about an issue

that involves morality, the individual conscience. There are things in our lives to which we are not only witnesses but also perpetrators” (Darie Dup)

In the same spirit, the artist Marilena Preda Sanc, who has created several works with the theme of eco-politics and geo-mental ecology, has stated:

“I believe that the human being and the quality of life will be enriched once the self / geo / political consciousness will be fully integrated into an ecological mind of a new identity of a Man reborn.” (Marilena Preda Sanc)

The Abiko International Open-Air Art Festival takes place in the city of Abiko, 50 km from Tokyo. Now in its 15th edition, the project promotes a balanced artist-nature-society relationship. During the festival, the public is invited to watch various exhibitions, as well as the symposiums that take place.

In Japanese culture, the garden represents a place of contemplation and meditation. Inside zen gardens, the white sand is often utilized and represents water. The Japanese garden is a universe at a human scale, an Eco-Art environnement.

In 2012, Romanian artist, Emil Dobriban, was invited to Japan to hold a conference regarding Land Art. An associate professor at the University of Art and Design of Cluj, Emil Dobriban also organized the first Land Art camp in Transylvania in 2006.

Some of the well known Eco Art events that have taken place in Romania after 1990, are the Live Art Festival at Saint Ana Lake and the Land Art Symposium from Sangeorz Băi organized by Maxim Dumitraș.

The aggressive tendencies that society forces up on us, and the many compromises that we are bound to make, all exist as facets of human identity; the identity which we must assume. Ultimately, humans are the result of either pleasant experiences or less favorable ones that are shared with each other. Nature and the efforts to protect it; whether it be the recycling of garbage or the conversion of cultural and industrial spaces, oblige us as artists to get creatively involved.

There is a need for a new aesthetic for cities; one that involves central focus on intertwining urbanism with environment issues. We all desire a green city with ample artistic interventions in public space.

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