

Wesleyan University
College of the Environment
Art in a Mediated Landscape: Contemporary Issues of Art and the Environment.
Spring 2015
Professor: Joseph Smolinski

Course Description:

This course is an interdisciplinary course that focuses on contemporary issues of art and the environment. Lectures, readings, and research will provide an overview of the history of cultures and artists working with the land as a medium as well as contemporary artists that address human impacts of the environment.

The course will begin with an overview of ancient sites and geoglyphs from Europe, South America and North America that use the landscape as a medium. These sites will be referenced while studying the works and theories from artists involved with the Land Art movement from the 1960's and 70's such as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, and Nancy Holt. From this research students will develop a research paper and collaborative land art projects that engage the campus landscape and community.

The second section of the course will examine contemporary artists whose work reflects notions of the Anthropocene. In response, students will create studio projects that seek to develop new ways of looking at the landscape and encourage interdisciplinary approaches to art making. The course will cumulate with a portfolio of essays and artworks organized in a hand made book project and a student led tour of a researched landscape that engages current environmental issues.

Suggested reading list

Kastner, J. Land and Environmental Art (Phaidon Press) 2010, ISBN: 978-0-7148-5643-8

Lippard, L. Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West (New Press) 2014, ISBN: 978-1595586193

Taylor, C. & Gilbert, B. Land Art of the American West (University of Texas Press) 2009, ISBN: 978-0-292-71672-8

Smithson, R. Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings (University of California Press) reprint 1996, ISBN: 978-0520203853

Weintraub, L. To Life, Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet (University of California Press) ISBN 978-0-520-27362-7

Course Goals:

1. Gain an understanding and appreciation of art in relation to cultural histories, critical thinking and environmental concerns.
2. Develop the skills to critically analyze works of art.
3. Create a successful portfolio of research papers, critical reviews, group presentations, and collaborative and individual art projects.

Course Objectives:

Upon Successful Completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1 Understand the history of artists working with the landscape as a medium.
- 2 Understand critical issues and theories of art and the environment.
- 3 Develop an earthwork installation as part of a collaborative design team.
- 4 Create site-specific individual artworks that addresses issues of sustainability.

Assessment :

Grades are determined through class participation and the compilation of in-class projects, homework, research papers, critical reviews, presentations, critiques, and two major art projects.

Grading:

- 20% 1 graded research paper
 - 10% 5 critical review essays
 - 10% 2 class presentations
 - 20% Collaborative art project.
 - 30% Individual art project and site tour.
 - 10% Class participation that includes attendance and participation in critiques.
- =100%

Week

- 1** Class Introduction. **Lecture:** Historical Landscape as Art Medium.
- 2** **Lecture:** Sites from the Neolithic period in Europe.
Introduction to collaborative land art project.
Lecture: South American sites including the Nasca Lines.
Group research assignment.
- 3** **Lecture:** North American sites including the Blythe Intaglios and Serpent Mound.

Group discussion. Historical sites review.
Research site locations and create proposal sketches.

- 4** **Lecture:** Introduction to Land Art and the Earthwork movement of the 1960's.
Lecture: Survey of works by Walter De Maria and Alice Aycock.
Site proposal presentations and critique.
- 5** **Lecture:** Works by Micheal Heizer and James Turell.
Lecture: Works by Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson.
Facilities coordination for site projects
- 6** Land Art review and final group critique.
Group presentations and papers research papers due.
- 7** **Students present Land Art projects to facilities to gain proper permissions for installation.** Create calendar of spring installations.
Introduction to bookmaking and field guide artist book and walking tour final project.
- 8** **Spring**
- 9** **Break**
- 10** Introduction to Contemporary Art and the Environment.
Lecture: Temporary monuments: Works by Jean Claude & Christo, Andy Goldsworthy and others.
Walking tour proposals and critique.
- 11** **Lecture:** The engineered landscape as art: Works by Agnes Denes, Olafur Eliasson, Terraform, and others.
Site preparation for Land Art installation. Installations begin.
- 12** **Lecture:** Art as environmental activism: Works by Mel Chin, Futurefarmers and others.
Land Art installations open to the public.
- 13** **Lecture:** The Role of Artists in the Environment: Contemporary Issues overview.
Walking tour site overview.
Land Art installations removed.
- 14** Field Guide work week. Final designs and sketches due.

15 Field guide book critique.

16 **Walking tours begin. Field Guides and Research papers due.**

17 **(Final Exam Period) Walking tours end.**