

KRAJINA - NOVÝ PROSTOR PRO UMĚNÍ

LANDSCAPE AS A NEW SPACE FOR ART

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Abstrakt:

The article aims to suggest land art as an alternative way of reclamation of post-industrial landscapes and brownfields, and tackles land art as a new type of land use that could satisfy the needs of the modern human for aesthetic features in urban landscape.

How could be a desolate or devastated landscape utilised or reclaimed? How could spaces, which are not used for the traditional human activities any more, put to a new function? A new direction might be suggested by the work of land artists. Those artists who have worked with the landscape and the natural space since the 1960's do use the potential of forgotten, neglected and often badly damaged landscapes in order to create new aesthetic and cultural values. The landscape is used as a stage for the artistic action, as well as a material in itself. The hand of an artist can turn landscape into a sculpture, painting, object, or a concept. Thus, a space originally having no sensible use, receives a new ideological input, absorbs it, and comes back to life again.

Key words: land art, earthworks, land-use, visual arts, conceptual art, designed landscapes, art and nature, historic landscapes.



Landscape and art have always been closely related. The roots of this relationship can be found in the ancient human civilisations. The feeling or sense for landscape

reflects in urban planning, architecture, landscape architecture, as well as in all visual arts from painting to sculpture. All these fields of visual arts create what is called a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which imprints a unique character in the cultural landscape. The 20th century has brought, apart from the devastation of landscape, a new perspective on working with it. The feeling for landscape significantly influenced the newly emerging art discipline – land art. Land art was initiated in mid 1960's by a group of artists working with conceptual tendencies in art, and its relation with landscape. Although the crucial works of this "school" were created between 1968 and 1973, this experimental way of artistic expression still influences many contemporary authors. The artists working in accordance with this line of thought usually experiment with various means of expression and their function within the context of the entire artwork. A typical phenomenon is the rejection of classical methods and techniques of artistic expression. The artist creates in conjunction with the landscape and nature, trying to address the viewers, sometimes even shocking them. Land art works can be perceived by all the visitors to the landscape, who have a deep enough understanding of the environment and insight into oneself, the space, the thoughts, the matrix, and the land. Land art works with some of the methods used by conceptual art, using also certain analytic methods such as working with projects, designs, and plans, which can be either real, or imaginary.

Why does the artist take bulldozers and excavators out into the open land, why does he bother to touch the real landscape with his presence, when he can express his ideas on paper just as well? In its essence, the land art of the 1960's is nothing too new or revolutionary. Such attitudes were expressed by artists worldwide, from the very dawn of human history. What else is landscape architecture and spatial design but working with landscape and art? Land artists merely gave a new form and function to objects they create in the landscape. The core idea of working with the landscape space remains basically the same. Land artists just took up a different concept of what could be an artwork set in outdoor space. They do not create a space that should serve people to satisfying their everyday needs, often working in a landscape that is not frequently visited or otherwise popular. Despite all this, land art creates works that change the existing space with all the relations in it. Suddenly, landscape contains an idea, and in most of the cases it brings about a new and higher aesthetic value. Apart from their work, land artists shape also the spirit of the place or *genius loci*, adding just another inscription on the sheet of landscape's memory.

Land artists often adopt methods of sculptural work, but apart from regular sculptural artefacts, which only add something extra to the existing space and do not create a brand new idea of the space itself, land art creates an entirely new space, and is inseparably tied with it. There could be objections that such projects negatively influence the environment and landscape character. In my opinion, these unfavourable reactions should be aimed rather at industrial and various other developments that negatively impact the health of the landscape and its character in a much more serious and irreversible way.

Incorporation of artwork within the outdoor space and the making of a new landscape

Artists working with landscape view it as the basic material that just needs a new form. The creators add, move, and shift natural materials, especially those they can find at the site itself, and create sculptural forms, which often bear traces of minimalist attitude towards the use of matrix, form, simple geometry, and pure compositional rules. Their work aims to create an organic unity with the existing characteristics of the space they work with – the *genius loci* – and to bring in a new attitude towards the space itself. The existing space is able to accommodate the entire monumentality of the work, and the whole object is thus moved to quite different and new dimensions of space, concept, or ideas. Apart from the process of creative thinking, the formal strategy of land art encompasses performance as well – the action that accompanies the birth of the artwork, and is just as important as the existence of the work itself. The gathering, moving, removing, shifting, and marking, all these are the principles of the 1960's creation, which were applied by latter land artists in a more lyrical way, often even with a political or social context added.

A large part of the land art works are characterised by a connection between environmental and action work, linking the unnatural man-made materials, be it tarmac, glue, or cars, and the untouched natural landscape, as well as the urbanised space. The objects of art expand into immense sizes, which depend on the space offered by the changed environment. Artists work with new materials and technologies, defining the question what really is nature in contrast with the landscape. Works of art usually criticise the way of fast development and progress, which is a consequence of industrial and urban expansion. Works of such character may not even be permanent. More than the work itself, the artists value the effect of the act of creation. It is important to shock and shake the lax and careless public, and to stir their thinking on issues relating to the very core of existence.

The works of some artists are individual acts of connection, unity, and harmony between the artist and the environment. Artists use their bodies when performing in landscape or in the natural environment. The size of the final work ranges within proportions close or easily comprehensible to human perception. Special attention is paid to the primary and symbolic reference to the earth, and basically represents a contemporary form of ritual. Such work may comprise the artist's walk through the field, or another form of contact with the environment, which contains elements that accompany this creative work. The artist may also use his body for the mapping of the landscape. These actions and happenings are usually presented in the form of photographs. This group of expression may include also some conceptual attitudes and projects of artists who use words as the representation of earth images with their evocation and mental experience. In contradiction to the infinity and boundlessness suggested by the early land art works, the essence of landscape is uncovered, and serves as a zone of invasion or exclusion.

Besides formal and aesthetic innovations created by land art, there are a group of works that root in the social and political context. They work with the landscape as if it were a clear sheet of paper, studying nature as a dynamic and interactive system, pointing to parallels between nature and human social and political structure, as well as their mutual relationship. The demonstration of human interest in the natural environment is based on the perception and enjoyment, as well as on pollution, destruction, and damage. Industrial development, urban explosion, large-scale

intensive agriculture, and new scientific attitudes, all this leads to the global pollution and social estrangement. These ideas and criticism are expressed in various forms of artworks from sculptural artefacts to live performances.

Devastated landscapes, which are very difficult and expensive to reclaim and revitalise, become a suitable space for the work of artists possessing wide enough mental and aesthetic potential to be able to bring this seemingly dead part of the earth back to life. In relation to this work, such an area can be inhabited again, although sometimes in a limited form only. The main contribution of such an aesthetically changed land lies in its ideological context, which can serve as a memento and a special lesson to the viewer. The possibility to show art in contact with the environment – the landscape – to the viewers is perhaps the most important step land art has made and is still making. I am convinced that the contemporary human needs a contact with the landscape and nature (especially with the devastated one), to get to know and understand some crucial ideas and events that irreversibly damage the Earth. This message about the devastation of landscape transformed through art is accepted by people especially for its urgency and suggestiveness. The perception of space in which the artist works and gives it a new dimension, can lead us to thoughts on the future development and rescue of the whole ecosystem we call our home. Through a spiral shape, a dead lake may become a symbol of life, the dimension of the work leaves us thinking about the smallness of humans and the infinity of the space, which we long to conquer so much. Yes, every artist is a creator, and what could be stronger than the ability to take over space, shape it with our art, and control it with our ideas?

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