

Good Practice Guidelines for Land Art Events

What is Land Art?

Land/eco/environmental art is, at the one end of its spectrum, art made entirely in situ in an environment or landscape; it is art that responds directly to that environment in concept and in the use of materials from it, reconfiguring them in unexpected ways. The landscape is the canvas; the re-patterned materials in the landscape are the work.

In so doing, land art throws aspects of the landscape into relief, into focus, opening up new ways of looking at landscape and its components. So this type of art not only has direct environmental content, it often makes a comment on the environment or contains an environmental message.

In its purest form, land art is temporary: the natural processes of change and decay will operate to dissipate the artwork in time. Sometimes the artists are expected to remove the artwork after a specified time interval. However, some land art works will last for considerable periods; some are built of permanent materials (e.g. rock) or partially of materials that are for all intents and purposes permanent.

Land Art & Environmentally Sustainable Practice

When considering the main purpose of Land Art creation (which is conservation/green commentary) it is important that the purpose is emphasised. In other words, it would be considered bad form to destroy the environment we are aiming to protect.

All interactions and impacts are to be carefully considered, including your own engagement, that of the visiting public, and that of the surrounding community.

The Artists' Practice

Please follow these suggestions:

- No damage is to be done to the environment.
- All materials are to be harvested sustainably i.e. don't be destructive in your selection of resource materials.
- Decide on either a temporary or permanent artwork. If materials need to be cleaned up after a temporary event, please follow through with that. Take full ethical responsibility for the habitat you're engaging.
- Inform yourself of any legal requirements and keep them in mind.

Location & Size

Be considerate in the selection of your location/site.

- If you intend on doing a large work consider the surrounding area and its inhabitants, i.e. property owners, local residents, etc.
- Consider the comment you wish to make regarding the habitat or landscape or site you're engaging.

Environmental art and its related forms require some in-depth research and exploration into the issues faced by the habitat you're exploring. What wildlife is there still, and what challenges is it facing in terms of ongoing survival? What was the original vegetation of the area, and how have farming and economic development practices impacted the habitat? Are any research scientists active in the area, and have you contacted them to find out more? As humans we tend to focus on the human story, and although it is still relevant to the site, environmental practice asks us to consider another viewpoint. Anthropological research also offers valuable insights, particularly where indigenous civilisations lived in harmony with their environment.

Remember outdoor environments change, especially when engaging with dynamic coastal shorelines or wetland areas. Keep your own and public safety in mind.

Material Procurement

When using materials ask yourself the following questions:

- Are they obtainable in the surrounding area of your chosen site?
- Might you be damaging or destroying other ecological processes by collecting these materials?
- Do these materials need to be stored in advance before construction or installation?

When working with materials you're bringing onto the site, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will they leave permanent components on or within the site?
- Are these materials harmful in any way to the environment?
- How can these materials be removed without harming the surroundings?
- Will these materials need to be assembled, mixed or installed or stored on site? If so, will they be secure from the public and will they have a negative impact on the environment?

Natural materials are great for on-site construction and installation and may not need to be removed. However, bringing in exotic seeds and plants could have serious long-term consequences to the natural habitat you are working in. Be considerate in all aspects, and make sure you inform yourself by seeking the advice of specialists before engaging the site in any way that may present a risk.

In principle artificial materials are not part of environmental art practices, and usually are only used in the context of on-site collections of found waste materials. As Site_Specific we encourage the use of natural, non-toxic, biodegradable, non-invasive materials and actively discourage the use of artificial materials such as paint, glue, plastics, rubber bands, wire, cotton thread, ropes, etc. Wire, thread, and rope in particular pose a risk to wildlife in terms of getting trapped, choked, or injured if not woven and wound securely. Fire is also considered environmentally unsafe, risky, and a pollutant - if used, please exercise prudence and caution.

Waste Disposal

During installation and after completion, if the artwork is to be dismantled and disposed of, appropriate means of disposal should be considered.

- Could any of the materials, or their residues be harmful to the public or the environment?
- How will the artwork be disposed of? Natural dissipation or by active removal?
- Who is going to remove the artwork if this is the intention?
- How and where will materials be disposed of?

No hazardous materials or processes should be employed, whether it is a part of the artwork or during its disposal.

Community Consultation

Any artworks that impact local communities must be authorised and approved by the relevant community organisations, committees etc. Any paperwork or documentation of permits or permission granted by the community needs to be kept for official record.

A Visitors 'Green Event'

Artists and organisers should anticipate the impact of visitors in terms of number and frequency, and provide for their needs at advertised events. Available facilities should be listed, or the lack thereof highlighted.

Compiled by

This document was compiled in reference to an extensive document compiled by Caroline Henderson for Site_Specific's International Land Art Biennale. For a more detailed rendition, please contact media@sitespecific.org.za. Edited by Site_Specific team member Erynne Ewart-Phipps, finalised by Site_Specific's media co-ordinator, katty vandenberghe.