

Landform/ Land Art

scale and the tradition of regionalism

Gerard Damiani

QUESTIONS

This studio will look at land art, in particular the works of Michael Heizer (b. 1944), a contemporary artist who specializes in large-scale site specific sculptures such as Double Negative (1969-70) and City (1970-2022). The Double Negative is a 1,100-by-42-by-30-foot work located on Virgin River Mesa near Overton, Nevada. Heizer and his crew gouged and carved 240,000 tons of rock out of facing cliffs to form two massive horizontal trenches. The site is so huge that it can only be seen in its entirety by helicopter, plane, or satellite.

Many have categorized Heizer as a land art artist such as Nancy Holt, Walter de Maria and Robert Smithson. However, Heizer disagrees stating no one really knows or understands what he is doing.

Heizer suggests that his work relates to what he calls “the tradition of regionalism”. His work dares viewers to experience art on a super-human scale. His larger works reject the artist’s studio and the gallery by making monumental works within the desert landscape. Instead, his work relies on technology and the beauty of materials, rock, dirt and the land itself.

The studio will speculate on the term “traditional regionalism” to help to refine an appreciation of site, landscape and landform. As part of this studio, we will visit works that are site specific to best understand how these works transform or reveal a new awareness.

PROMPT

The coexistence between land art, building and landscape will be experienced at various scales during the semester. This studio will study the works and writings of Heizer and his contemporaries to discuss the distinction between sculpture (art/ architecture) and objects such as rocks, terrain and landscape. This studio will look at things that one might not consider art or architecture- the ordinary, the accidental, the natural, the mechanical, the molecular and the mundane- to find connections to these qualities of awareness.



Double Negative, Michael Heizer

“It is just not my inclination to make small work.”
-Michael Heizer



City, Michael Heizer

“As long as you’re going to make a sculpture, why not make one that competes with a 747, or the Empire State Building, or the Golden Gate Bridge.” - Michael Heizer



The Nazca Lines, Nazca Peru. Works so large that they can only be fully understood from the sky.



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CONTEXT

As part of this studio travel is encouraged.

We will start in the west near Las Vegas, a true urban invention, and travel to the desert to see how time and weather have affected the land art of the Double Negative and enjoy spring break in the middle of the country (a portion of it in Marfa, Texas seeing the works of Donald Judd and others) and later visit the east coast seeing the site specific works of the Dia Beacon in New York state alongside the Hudson River. Along the way we will experience the Horseshoe Curve (infrastructure), the Hoover Dam (engineering) and Native American glyphs.

The studio will record observations in photographs, drawings and models.

PROGRAM

Working at a super-size scale, the studio project will be the design of infrastructure for a new climate future applying the lessons learned through discussion, visitation and speculation. The work will operate at the scale of the individual, the helicopter, the plane, and the satellite.

Each student working independently will use as the conceptual/ compositional underpinning for their work the graphic and audio composition of Treatise (1963-67) by Cornelius Cardew to set the development of the project. Each week the design process will be interrupted by the sentences on conceptual art by Sol Lewitt which will infuse the work and the design process.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The proposed outcome of this studio is for you to experience large works to better understand your own existence and insignificance within a larger cosmos. This outcome is not to limit creative output but instead to help you better understand your potential contribution to civilization and the need to combat environmental degradation.

As a studio that will question size, space, sound and perception, architectural representation will also be challenged. Final drawings will be models and final models will be drawings and displayed in a gallery setting for the final review and reception.