

CHAPTER 10

The Documented (Land) Form

Practices Dada, land art, conceptual art, performance art and documentation, Australian Aboriginal sand painting, documentation and technology, documentation through collections.

Artists Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, James Turrell, Christo, Susan Derges, Chris Drury, Herman de Vries, Nikolas Lang, Lauren Berkowitz, James Darling.

Introduction

Documentation of artworks occurs when the artwork is temporary, located in a remote location or impossible to see with the human eye. Artists began to use the photograph as a form of documentation for performances during the 1960s. Photography was also used to record art created from unstable materials. Documentation has also been used by artists in displays of collections of objects from performances or events.

Conceptual Practice—the Documented Form

The caves at Lascaux or Australian Aboriginal rock carvings at Kakadu provide documentation of an ancient time and place. Their purpose was to explain natural occurrences and give image to thought. Just as a relic is a sacred fragment of a historical being, the photograph is a kind of proof of the subject's existence.

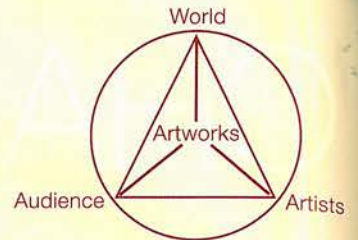
Contemporary artists do not see themselves as representing the world, but rather as reporting and recording from within it. This new art documents, records, reports and sets out procedures. Its images are registers of events rather than pictures or conventional signs. Artists have turned from *representing* aspects of the visible world, to the *presentation* of objects from the material world. They also provide reports of experiences, and trace and document events in which the artist has in some way been purposively involved. Many of these artists employ a variety of approaches, including reports, records, photographs, videos, films and texts.

In addition, technological inventions have altered the perceptions and methods of both artists and audience. The camera, film and video have enabled records of temporary, **transient** works that would normally be lost to all but a few present at the time.

Duchamp, **Arte Povera** and **conceptual art** were the historical precedents behind the artistic mediation of nature through art. Duchamp's '**ready-mades**' and their conceptual impact seems to have made possible any combination of **installation** materials. Dada groups of the 1920s used gallery spaces as total environments, thus needing documentation to create a sense of the works. For example, Kurt Schwitters filled several rooms on various floors of his home with idiosyncratic grottos. Called the **Merzbau** (1918), it commemorated friends through donated items (van Doesberg's ties, a pair of Moholy Nagy's socks and a piece of Sophie Taylor's bra). It became a diary on the grandest scale, integrating sliding doors, secret panels and over forty caves, grottos and caverns.

Performance artworks (such as body art) have also been documented by photographs. These include Marcel Duchamp's *Star* shaved skull (1920), Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* (1960) and Chris Burden's hands bearing the stigmata of nail holes from the *Transfixed* performance (1974) (see Chapter 16, page 234).

The Conceptual Framework



World

The historical events of the 1970s, including the Watergate political crisis, the end of the Vietnam War and the death of powerful Chinese leaders Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, affected artists' intentions. Similarly, environmental crises and oil shortages in the USA and record auction prices for artworks, especially in New York, had significant effects on artists who sought to bypass the monetary system of the artworld by creating art that could not be bought or sold.

There was an increase in the influence of French theorists such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, who all offered alternative ways of explaining the world. As postmodern philosophers, they opened discussion of the importance of cultural context—art meanings grounded in both culture and history, the artist as a product of his or her time, and audience perception relative to that time and place.

Duchamp, Dada, Arte Povera, and conceptual art were the historical precedents behind the artistic mediation of nature through art.

Artworks

Land artists such as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria and Christo made works in remote locations that could not be bought or sold. Artworks included Indigenous art and ephemeral cultural events.

When Carl Andre presented the Minimalist sculpture *Bricks* at the Tate, London, in the 1960s, it had implications for conceptual art because it emphasised the importance of process as well as materials. Artists have turned from representing aspects of the visible world to the presentation of objects from the material world.

Also during the 1960s, art performances by Joseph Beuys and Fluxus (including Korean artist Nam June Paik) were performed for small, select audiences. These temporary performances were documented by photography.

Documentation occurs in a number of ways, including collections and authentication with objects, relics or residues. Documentation also occurs through technology, in the recording of scientific data.

Audience

During the 1960s, art writers and philosophers (for example, Lucy Lippard, Linda Nochlin, Arthur Danto, Foucault and Baudrillard) emerged as a power source in the artworld.

The audience for many of these artworks was restricted, either by time or place. Few people were actually able to see artworks in remote places or experience performances. They therefore relied on documentation for knowledge of its existence. Consequently the media, either photography, digital technology, video or film became extremely powerful.

Artists have also involved the mass audience of the 'real world', either as participants or as viewers of artworks in public spaces.

Artists

Like other Indigenous groups, Australian Aboriginal artists have traditionally used the land as part of their cultural understanding of the human condition. Contemporary art recognises both the event and the documentation as art. Richard Long, Christo and James Turrell were some of the earliest artists to use the documented form as records of their installation or 'event' artworks.

Nikolas Lang, Herman de Vries and Chris Drury have all used the natural world, either through collections or installations in the environment.

James Darling and Lauren Berkowitz share an interest in the preservation of the environment and use their art as a powerful tool for that message.

The postmodern

The revolutionary nature of art has led many artists to challenge traditional concepts of society (for example, religion, politics, racism, feminism, and the views of marginalised groups such as homosexuals or indigenous peoples). In creating this art, artists are also challenging the artworld itself, and its ideologies of permanence, originality, uniqueness, the 'invaluable masterpiece' and the elitism of the collector.

An increased disenchantment with the commodification of the artworld has led some artists to create art outside the system of galleries and museums instead, located in remote landscapes or performed in front of a select audience. These artworks may rely upon a particular site or audience, and may allow the audience to participate or interact. This art is temporary, and is therefore unable to be bought or sold. Evidence of the works was usually documented by photography or video.

Following Duchamp's dictum that the audience is responsible for half the work in art's creation, many artists sought to include the audience's response, which was also documented through photography, audio tapes and video.

Extending this rebellion against the traditional artworld, some artists began to use 'poor' materials, perhaps from a site, or the artists' own bodies. Residues of installation pieces and performances were also presented as 'evidence' or authentication of the work being done (the process), either through photographs or collections of objects.

Documentation through photography

The documentation of artworks through photography has implications for artists. Photography provides evidence that the performance or installation actually existed and allows a broad recognition through reaching a mass audience (not just an elite few invited to the actual event). Paradoxically, it makes it possible to manipulate imagery in retrospect. Photography can also become an 'unintended' commodity. It also means a loss of immediacy—the documented artwork will never be the same as seeing it 'live'.

There are also significant implications for photography as an art form in its own right. When used simply to document the evidence (authentication), it is reduced to being journalistic. Similarly, it could be used as promotion (like advertising) rather than art. Photography, film and video can be illusion-makers, used to create fictions, able to be manipulated and therefore not factual. Photographs also greatly affect the psychological perception of the viewer (see for example, Christian Boltanski in *A.R.T: art, research theory*, Chapter 4, figure 4.2) either through **juxtaposition** or labelling.

The documentation and studies for and from ephemeral projects are permanent, and will remind future generations of art that would otherwise be lost. These contemporary artists have effectively redefined the meaning of the 'work of art' because it includes all of the processes and techniques, and not just a finished product. They have expanded the conventional divisions between different artistic media and the physical separation between art and everyday life. Additionally, aesthetic boundaries between the passive reception of art and the active engagement within real time and space have been broken down. Distinctions of cultural, political and social limits between the logic of capitalism and the non-materialistic, and between the professional artist and the audience are also blurred.

Australian Aboriginal sand painting

Traditionally, ground paintings had been constructed as secret sacred items for ceremonies. They were usually made by men. Kimber (In *Artlink*, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 40) states that Aboriginal women have only been recorded as constructing ground paintings since 1975. The majority of ground paintings have been associated with the area surrounding Alice Springs, from Tennant Creek to Papunya to Yuendumu.

The paintings are usually flat, but may involve a mound and some symbolic elements such as poles or stones. In its simplest form, paint is applied to a prepared surface, which may be the local sandy loam or ant-bed pounded and mixed with water to form a paste. More elaborate forms may require the use of white bird down or plant flock, made by pounding the soft-leafed native daisies and staining with appropriate colours. Colours are limited, chosen for symbolic and aesthetic reasons. Shapes are either geometric or **organic**, but all are symbolic of animals, humans, tracks and local landmarks. The technique of drawing in the sand during storytelling or ceremonies has always been a shared task and is by necessity a temporary one. The artworld has knowledge of their existence only through photographic documentation of specially staged ceremonies, such as those performed for the Adelaide Festival in 1990.



10.1

**Michael Nelson Jagamarra
The New York
Sandpainting Event
1988**

Photo © Marcia Weinstein. Courtesy of the South Australia Museum. Traditionally created for ceremonies in the Central Australian Desert, sand paintings were usually destroyed upon completion. As he was using dried and crushed daisies (*Wamulu*, representing the spirit), Michael Nelson Jagamarra has invoked the forces of the Dreaming whilst reconciled to the lack of ceremonial context. After two days of painting, both artists involved destroyed this piece.

Documentation of land art through photography and photomontage

The landscape is already rich with man-made forms—Stonehenge, the palace of Versailles and Mayan temples to name a few. Contemporary artwork in the landscape is known through documentation. For example, Hamish Fulton (UK) has made artworks that consist almost entirely and simply of his walks through the landscape. He states that his art is about physical movement, and the documentation is through photographs of an object in the landscape, with texts and diagrams marked boldly on a gallery wall.

Case Study

Richard Long (1945–), UK

Walking was the principal form of artistic activity for both Long and Fulton. They made photographs of walks, and sometimes reorganised landscape elements such as rocks and sticks, but in ways that were hardly discernible.

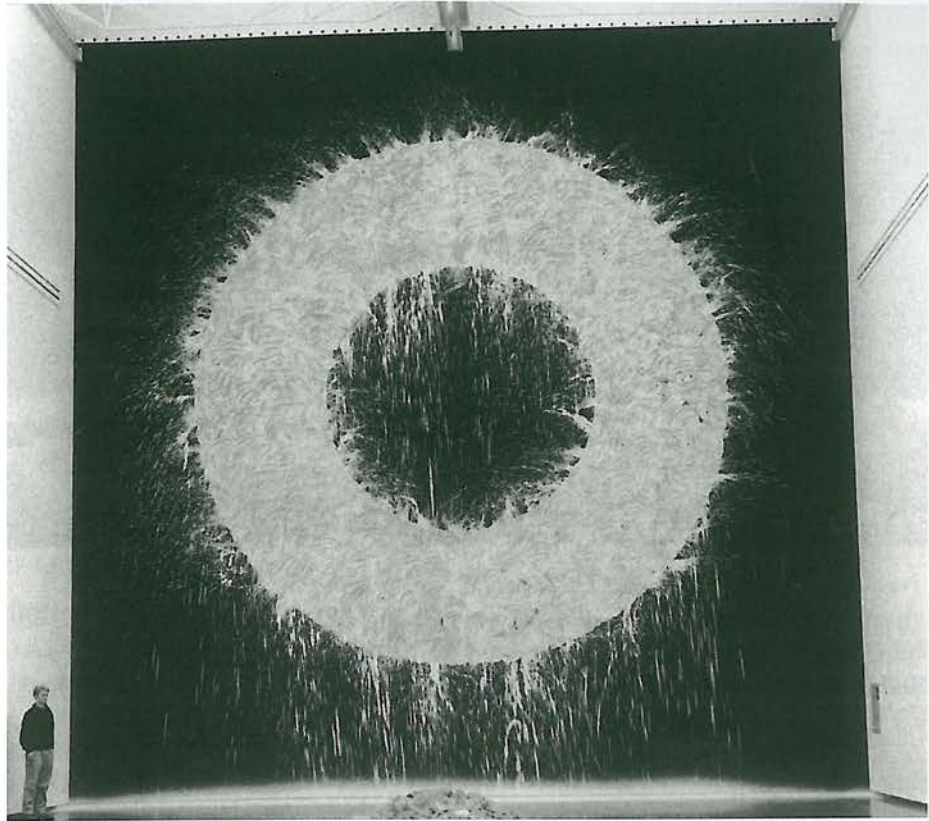
Long has walked everywhere—in remote locations of the Himalayas, the Andes, Dartmoor, Africa and Australia. Sometimes he simply walks and records his journey on a map. Documentation of the walks are records made without comment or elaboration in distinctive sans serif typeface on wall, or in screen-prints such as *To build a fire* (Argentina, 1997). At other times, he has made unobtrusive marks in the landscape with stones, driftwood, seaweed and mud. He prefers more isolated areas, and in his photographs there is a melancholy absence of any human trace except his own.

Richard Long
White Water Circle

1994

*installed in Kunststammung
Nordheim, Westphalia, and
Düsseldorf*

The enormous scale of this artwork is made obvious by the line of rocks on the floor of the museum and the onlooker. Long's vigorous and dynamic application of the mud is a solid illustration of moving water, the white mud falling like a waterfall to the floor.



I like the idea that my work lasting only a tide (just say) was interposed between past and future patterns of tides, made by natural and lunar forces repeating for millions of years. Often the transient is closely related to the eternal in nature. The mudworks are created through time and chance ... I have to work quickly to make the energy for the splashes ... the image is both my actual hand marks and also the chance splash, determined by the speed of my hand, the viscosity of the mud and gravity. Time is the fourth dimension ... often the subject of a walk—time as the measurement of distance, walking speed etc.

(Richard Long, 1997, in an interview with Mario Codognato)

In the gallery, stone, driftwood, slate and mud are arranged in geometric patterns on the floor or wall, to present a convergence of the cultural human order and the natural. Long, like Wolfgang Laib and Andy Goldsworthy, has used natural objects and materials arrayed in geometric configurations. He has created 'paintings' called 'mud circles', 'mudlines' and 'hand circles', using symbolic shapes such as the circle, the line and the spiral. These belong equally to many cultures and eras and are universally acknowledged as ritually or spiritually significant.

Long's interventions in the landscape have taken many forms, for example, lines created by walking, walks taken with a particular geometric or conceptual logic, or describing a circle of a particular scale. Long also documents walks involving minimal actions, like the carrying of a stone from one place to another, leaving a stone marker, recording specific objects and events or found feathers, birdcalls and creatures seen. Long has said that he prefers simple, elemental and natural materials.

His practice is to use photographs to realise the work and to complement the text works, map works, sculptures, water lines and mud works. He says a photograph is one way to bring the image or idea of a remote or temporary sculpture to the public although, by necessity, a photo work becomes art in a different way than the original sculpture.



10.3

Richard Long

To build a fire, a six day winter walk on Tierra del Fuego, building a fire at each campsite along the way, ashes blowing in the wind, Argentina, 1997

Long has used his typical style of documentation to ironically highlight the devastation of deforestation that is occurring in South America. Although the text is normally used to provide details of his walks, this image shows utter desolation and wreckage of the environment.

Nature is the source of my work. For me the Land Art label represents the North American monumental earthworks and my work has nothing to do with that. ... it has more in common with Italian Arte Povera (simple, modest means and procedures) or conceptual art (stressing the importance of ideas) ...

The landscape, the walking is at the heart of my work and informs the indoor work ... I do have a desire to present real work in public time and space as opposed to photos, maps, texts which are by definition second-hand works and thus imaginative.

(Richard Long, 1997, in an interview with Mario Codognato)

Case Study

James Turrell (1943–), USA

James Turrell attempts to merge light with the concept of space, raising questions about the nature of vision and the limits of perception. Although simple, his works highlight the nature of seeing.

Conceptual practice

Typically, Turrell has found ways to manipulate space and light that make the audience's participation visible, and which raise questions about our experience of art and perceptions of reality. Turrell's work has always been about the production of space, 'uncertain space', its volume, grain and density ambiguously dissolving and fluctuating. Much of his early work is based on his background as a pilot and aerial photographer. Turrell's installations set up a gap between the moment of experience and that of interpretation.

Artmaking practice

Turrell's work transforms something that was culturally invisible—empty space—by creating atmospheres of sourceless, evenly diffused illumination, which evoke a sense of presence so palpable that they seem to fill the rooms they occupy. In so doing, the void becomes an object of perception.

The method is based on the Ganzfeld spatial technology, developed during the 1930s by Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Metzger. Under sufficiently low illumination, a smooth white wall appears as an immaterial mist of light because the audience is unable to make out the surface's finely grained structure. Turrell incorporated this effect into installations where the audience is enveloped by a dense, evenly diffused atmosphere of coloured light that seems to come right up to your eyes. One of these works is *Orca* (1968).



10.4

James Turrell *The Live Oak Friends Meeting House* 2000

Houston, Texas

Turrell has created an open sky space in the ceiling, designed to create the illusion of bringing the sky right down to the ceiling's edge.

This is a place of spiritual contemplation. The work is most spectacular at sunset, creating an introspective awareness, like going into meditation and receiving divine inspiration.

By creating environments, Turrell's intention is to superimpose two types of spatial understanding: the 'objective seeing' and the 'imaginative vision'. Turrell's art is often discussed in terms of spiritual ideas such as Zen, and he owes much to his religious Quaker background. His work is a pared down, direct, quiet, straightforward and strict presentation of the sublime.

Audience

On the effect of his work on his audience, Turrell says 'I put you in a situation where you feel the physicality of light. This is an art that people try to touch, but there is no image, no object, no place of focus ...' Such is the profound effect of Turrell's work *The Live Oak Friends Meeting House* (2000).

The audience is also roused to anxiety by experiences that can neither be interpreted nor dismissed as inconsequential noise. Some of Turrell's installations produce extreme disorientation in the audience. In some cases, audiences have suffered vertigo and giddiness to the point of needing to get down onto their hands and knees and crawl.

Case Study

Christo (1935–), USA

Born in Bulgaria, Christo decided to become an artist very early and studied art history in Sofia. During the 1960s, he began to make artworks based upon the package, called 'wrappings'. Gradually, these artworks became very large installations in landscapes. They were temporary, theatrical and involved large numbers of people. Some of the early projects include *Valley Curtain*, Rifle Gap Colorado (1970–72), *Surrounded Islands*, Biscayne Bay, Miami (1980–83), *The Reichstag*, Berlin (1971–95) and *Wrapped Coastline*, Little Bay, Australia (1972).

The wrapping makes the items more sensuous, more alluring, because of what it hides rather than what it reveals. The artworks silently obscure elements in the environment whilst temporarily depriving them of utility. In 1990 Christo said 'When I wrap things it is very much linked to the traditions of art, the fascination artists have with cloth for thousands of years, how fabric creates new form, gives energy to the body. Real fabric is very teasing and provocative.'

Conceptual practice

With his partner Jeanne-Claude, Christo creates totally temporary artworks of **monumental** scale. No one pays to see any of the projects, as they are all in public spaces. The only evidence we have of these works are **photomontages**, drawings, photographs and **collages**. Typically, many of these images often incorporate technical data-maps, photographs of the site, engineering diagrams and specifications. Christo first started his documentation collages and wrapping projects in 1967. Since 1972, he has employed professional photographers to document his work. He also employs photographers to travel with him and document possible locations for future projects. Christo says he makes temporary works 'because I don't believe that any work of art exists outside of its prime time'. (Christo in Fineberg p. 363)

Artmaking practice and documentation

Christo's work is revealed in two ways. The first is through the plans, usually documented in photomontages. The second is through photographs of the artwork when it is installed. Because he does not accept any money from government or institutions, all finances are obtained through sales of wrapped objects, collages, drawings and graphic **editions**. These include images of large, short-term projects, reversible interventions in cityscapes and landscapes, completed projects and the artist's ideas.

As soon as a project is finished, Christo stops drawing his sketches. The realised project is actually the definitive drawing. Only when a project has vanished is it completed. At this point, Christo turns to media such as photography, film, statistics and reports to record the work and thus guarantee its survival, for after a few weeks or days it will all have disappeared. Christo carefully selects and authorises those images to be included in the documentary publications.

Christo has been one of the most successful artists in developing the potential of the media, including television. Preliminary planning is made through the media, which forces the public to become engaged over a long period of time.

With the Bridge in Paris there were so many arches, details. When it is covered, only the proportions show. The wrapping of the bridge becomes the abstraction of the bridge. The triviality is gone, only the essence is visible. All my work deals with the very complex nature of space and is related to the definition of boundaries.

(Christo, 1990)

Artworld

The large scale of many of the projects forced Christo and Jeanne-Claude outside the artworld into dealing with the public of the 'real world'. Christo finances his projects privately, and therefore avoids the major compromises required through the usual public-arts committee consensus. By transforming the mundane and challenging visual clichés, each of the projects help to diminish alienation of the viewer from his world. The art projects are easy for the public to bear because, although striking and monumental, they do not threaten the environment. They are more in the nature of performances than works and they continue to exist in memory as well as in photographic documentation.

The *Running Fence* project involved forty-two months of collaborative efforts, the ranchers' participation, eighteen public hearings, three sessions at the Superior Court of California, the drafting of a 430-page environmental impact report, and the temporary use of hills, sky and ocean. It was made of 165 000 yards of heavy, woven nylon fabric hung from a steel cable strung between 2050 steel poles. The poles were embedded 3 feet into the ground using no concrete and braced laterally with guy wires (90 miles of steel cable) and 14 000 earth anchors. The removal of *Running Fence* started 14 days after its completion. All materials were given to the ranchers.

This artwork captured the imagination of the world, partly because of its beauty, and also because of the huge logistical effort in obtaining bureaucratic and local endorsement. The administrative hurdles Christo faced are the cultural structures that help to determine the visible form of human interventions in the landscape. Revealing them was at least as important a part of the work as its physical configuration.

On the work's impact, Christo said 'I don't think any museum exhibition has touched so profoundly 300 people (as our ranchers) ... or 300 000 cars who visited *Running Fence*, in a way that half a million people in Sonoma and Marin counties were engaged in the making of the work of art for three and a half years.'

To finance *Running Fence*, the sum of three million dollars was raised privately through the sale of Christo's drawings and collages, for example, *Wrapped Tree Project* (1979), an edition of ninety-nine colour **lithographs** with collage of transparent polyethylene fabric, twine, thread and staples.

10.5

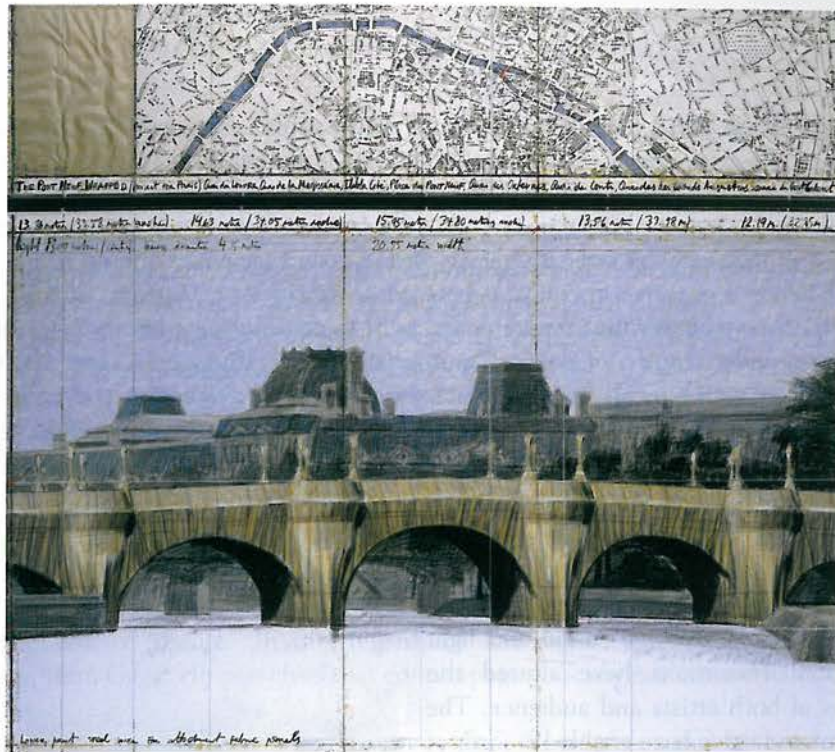
Christo *The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Project for Paris*

1985

drawing in two parts, pencil, charcoal,
pastel, crayon, fabric sample and map
38 x 165 cm and 106.6 x 165 cm

© Christo

Christo often incorporates technical data-maps, photographs of the site, engineering diagrams and specifications into drawings and collage. This image reveals the plans Christo and Jeanne-Claude had for the project, which was realised ten years later, when, in 1985, Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped the oldest bridge in Paris with shimmering sandstone-coloured fabric. It was covered for fourteen days.



Yet Christo was emphatic that the event of each installation was not the sole content of his work and said he didn't want a nice fence and a beautiful landscape. In 1988 he said 'In fact there have been many earlier examples of large scale projects architecture, gardens, palaces etc. What is inconceivable is that we can spend ten million dollars and not expect anything back. This adds an irrational dimension that puts into question our normal way of understanding and our sense of good behaviour.'

Audience

These artworks are theatre on a mass scale and Christo's role of producer and director is part of the work. As evident in the documentation collected and published during a project, and films used to record the construction process, the physical labour contributed by work teams plays an important part. Christo and his troop of assistants follow a ritual of procedures. Christo makes all negotiations in person and he manages to get everyone involved. The participants are drawn ever closer together until they are euphoric with a sense of victory at the completion of the work.

10.6

Christo *The Gates* (1979–2005)

Central Park, New York

© Christo 2005

Planned in the 1970s, this project incorporated the original Victorian design vision of the picturesque. It was intended to be a joyous, festive work of art, human in scale, providing energy through direct and personal experience. Christo and Jeanne-Claude paid all the expenses with their own money, as they accept no sponsors. All materials were recycled.



Because of the extraordinary interventions into people's lives, critics of Christo raise questions of relevancy and usefulness. Politicians, environmentalists, artists and technicians are all drawn into the controversy that Christo's plans inevitably cause. As an artist, Christo has moved further into the public realm than most others. All the big projects have captured the interest of thousands of ordinary folk, as well as collectors, critics and art lovers, so that a mass audience is engaged in critical debate. In *Art Since 1940, Strategies of Being*, author J. Fineberg observed that Christo was the first artist to communicate his aesthetic ideas and sophisticated understanding of political appropriation 'successfully on a scale that enabled him to compete with big corporations in shaping the public's perception of events'.

In February 2005, Christo and Jeanne-Claude transformed 23 miles of footpaths in Central Park, New York, with 7500 saffron coloured staples, like rectangular archways. Called *The Gates*, the estimated cost of the project was \$20 million.

Documentation through technology

Technological advancements have enabled a myriad of art works through sound and light magnification. Inventions have altered the perceptions of both artists and audience. The camera, film and video have enabled records of temporary, transient works that would normally be lost to all but a few present at the time.

Susan Derges (1955–), UK

Susan Derges's *Sound, Water, Light* (1991) is an image of a suspended jet of water. This was achieved by water being vibrated at its nozzle by a loudspeaker. Under constant light, sine waves caused the water to appear as a coherent standing wave. Under strobe light pulsing at the same frequency as the sound, the water was transferred into a series of individual droplets suspended in time and space. The combination of constant and strobe light revealed stationary droplets within the arc of flowing water, which could then be photographed.

Derges has also created **photograms** of eddies and rippled water made at night. Photographic paper is held in an aluminium slide and submerged just below the water's surface. The paper is exposed to a microsecond of flashlight, which prints the flow of the river directly onto the light-sensitive paper. This is then processed as normal in the darkroom to create a permanent record of the river at the time of exposure. Other presences such as moonlight and shadows of overhanging leaves may also be trapped in the images, forming a kind of collective memory. Ambient light in the sky adds a colour cast to the cibachrome images, which range from deep blue at full moon, to dark green at new moon.

10.7

Susan Derges *River Taw, April 7 1997*

Cibachrome photogram
169 x 61 cm

River Taw, Jan 21 1998

gelatin-silver photogram
220 x 61 cm

These photograms are made at night. In darkness, the river is used as a long transparency or negative, and the landscape as a large darkroom. Photographic paper is held below the water's surface and exposed to a microsecond of flashlight, which prints the flow of the river.



Documentation through collections

Some artists have documented their artworks by gathering and collecting materials and objects from nature and bringing them into galleries or other forms of publication that imitate scientific or ritualistic arrays. These are similar to the nineteenth-century museum exhibits. Artists herman de vries, Nikolas Lang and Lauren Berkowitz share similarities to Wolfgang Laib and Hossein Valamanesh (see *A.R.T: art, research, theory*, Chapters 5 and 13) in their dedicated and labour-intensive methods of collection and display. All these artists use natural materials gathered from the environment.

herman de vries (1931–), Netherlands

herman de vries has said that making artworks is part of the process of artists becoming conscious. He tries to restore the view of the natural world as a living entity and he has consistently refused to distinguish the study of the living world from the artist and spirituality. de vries has always promoted the 'natural' over the man-made. He earned his reputation as a scientist of medicinal herbs and drugs, but has since subordinated both artistic and scientific work to the task of 'nature'. In this regard, he has similar holistic concepts to Marcel Duchamp or John Cage. He perceives that contemporary society is obsessed with the artificial and superficial.

Calling his conceptual practice a 'primary reality', de vries says that his working method and presentation is objective and much more than simply a flimsy aesthetic. He has used many traditional scientific methods, such as collecting, drying, pressing, grinding and classifying found materials, and in so doing, challenges the boundaries of science and art, as well as arriving at a point in common. He collects earth samples from all over the world and has also installed artworks using flora, as seen in *rosa damascena* (Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum, Hagen, Germany, 1984) and *108 pounds of lavender flowers* (Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1998). His project *die wiese/the meadow* (1998) is a semi-scientific artwork that consists of a 400-square-metre piece of land in which the forces of nature are allowed to run free of human interventions.

10.8

herman de vries
rosa canina

1994
80 x 76 cm

In collecting and displaying, de vries examines and reveals diversity in the collected items and aims to counteract our habitual style of perception.



Nikolas Lang (1941–), Germany

Nikolas Lang is an artist who also works in a scientific and artistic **oeuvre**. He has presented a systematic array of **found objects** and materials from the environment that is instructive and spiritual. Some of the artworks have included performances (or actions), discovered objects, texts, photos, drawings and maps. In the work *Colour Field* (1987), specimens of ochre and sand are set out in a perfect grid, each item receiving equal attention and significance.

Since 1979, Lang has been returning to Australia, and his reference here is insistently Australian. He has collected earth samples from ancient Aboriginal collecting grounds. These earth pigments were used in rituals, artefacts, paintings and medicine. One of the artworks, *Samples of Earth Colours and Paintings* (1978 green colour range installation, 4 x 3.1 m) uses pigments arrayed in a geometric grid. In this work, Lang acknowledges the analytic, rational and mechanical systems of the civilisation that ravaged the Aboriginal cultures of kinship with things of the earth.

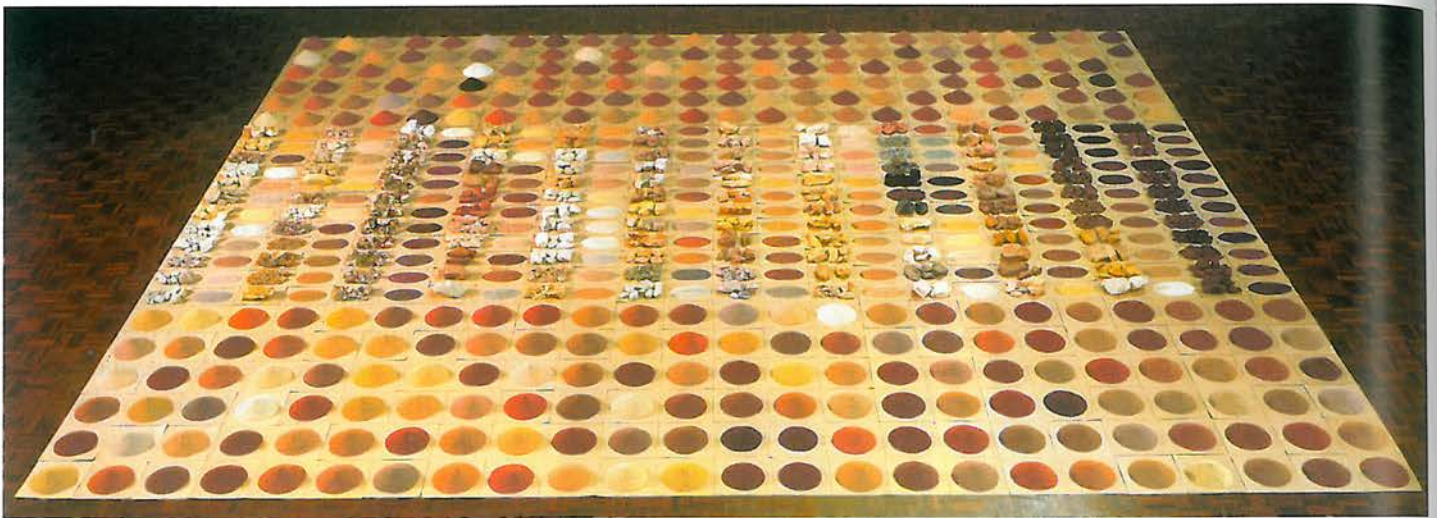
10.9

Nikolas Lang
Colour Field – Ochre and Sand; Dedicated to the vanished tribes of the Flinders Ranges and Adelaide area

1987

site-specific sand work, Australian Biennale, 1988

Here Lang assembled deposits of sand, earth and rock. Small, immaculately-shaped, pointed mounds of yellow and red ochres were placed beside the rocks which were ground to produce the ochres.



Lauren Berkowitz (1965–), Australia

Like Lang, Australian artist Lauren Berkowitz employs labour-intensive methods and uses materials from specific sites. Berkowitz has collected a number of symbolic materials to create artworks that relate a location to its history. The **assemblages** explore environmental themes and concerns, from the introduction of exotic plants into the Australian landscape (in works such as *Verdant* and *Colour Field*) to the impact of increasing salination on the country's waterways.

The work *Follies* (1997, installed in the Art Gallery of New South Wales) consists of lavender, chillies and banksia in the form of hanging curtains. The chillies are hung in a spiral (360 x 200 x 200 cm), the lavender in a circle (350 x 250 x 250 cm) and the banksias are flat (300 x 400 cm). The title refers to the absurd and playful, and each of the materials is symbolic of the different continents. Each of the materials is laden with meaning and recalls the time of collecting that occurred during the early museological period of botanical classifying, categorising and preserving. Banksias, named after Joseph Banks, were prized by Aboriginal people for their sweet nectar. They also symbolise Australian white middle-class modernity, as codified by paintings and prints by Margaret Preston. Lavender was introduced to Australia in colonial times and it is associated with England. Its fragrance and medicinal properties are associated with scenting and healing the body. The chillies symbolise America.

Berkowitz has been collecting items of detritus for many years and these have been assembled onto the floor or walls of a gallery. She is obsessive in her meticulous constructions, imposing order upon disorder. The assemblages are often based around form, colour, texture and source.

Strata (1999), an installation that was a commission by the gallery, filled an entire room, creating a carpet of collected local sands. The audience was invited to participate in the work by removing shoes and walking around the work with bare feet. Inspired by Abstract Expressionist Frank Stella's hard edge painting, Berkowitz has used sand as though it is paint, in rectangular bands.

In the work *Salt and Sand* (2004), brick, concrete and plaster sands are laid onto vertical perspex strips resting against the walls. These refer to the cycle of urban development in Sydney and the city's sandy geological composition. A complementary floor installation, *Tide* (2004), similarly suggested the damage done to the Australian environment in the past two hundred years by land clearing, grazing, rising salt levels and urban development.

Berkowitz has said that she is interested in materials such as salt and sand because of their beauty and banality. She is drawn to their rich poetic associations and contradictory meanings.

The ambiguous and varied meaning inherent in the use of materials is profound. For example, water is both healing and purifying, yet it has potential for destruction. Similarly, the symbolic nature of materials is essential to the work *Salt and Honey* (2002, installed in the Jewish Museum, Melbourne), which used salt. Salt represents preservation, it is both healing and purifying, yet its potential for environmental destruction is endemic.

10.10

Lauren Berkowitz

Strata

1999

sand and gravel

1400 x 700 cm

McClelland Gallery and Sculpture

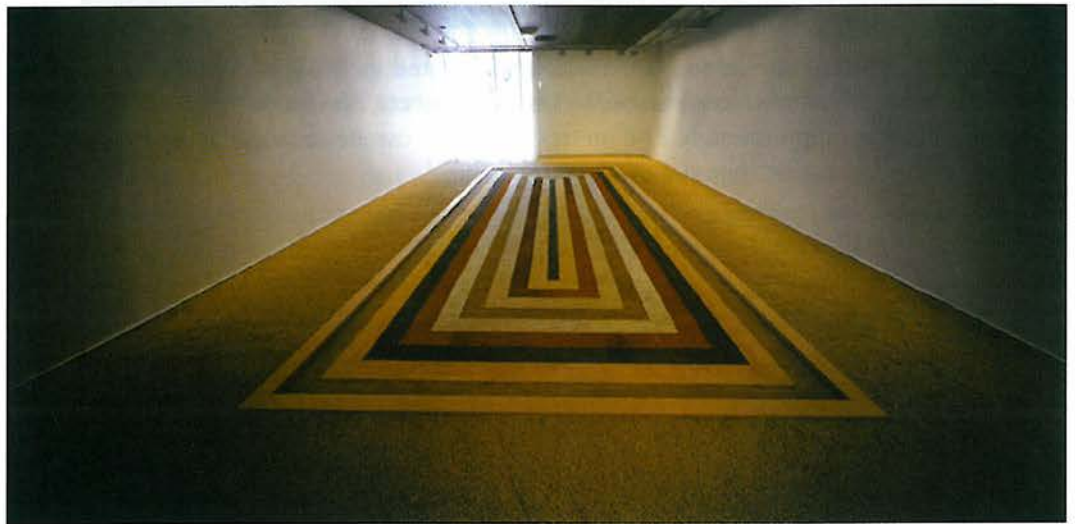
Park, Langwarrin, Victoria.

Photograph: John Gollings.

Courtesy the artist and Sherman

Galleries, Sydney.

Location has become an increasingly significant focus for Berkowitz in recent years and she has created works in response to specific sites and constructed from the materials particular to them. In *Strata* Berkowitz has used coloured quarry sands and crushed sandstone from the region surrounding the McClelland Gallery, in Victoria.



Chris Drury (1948–) UK

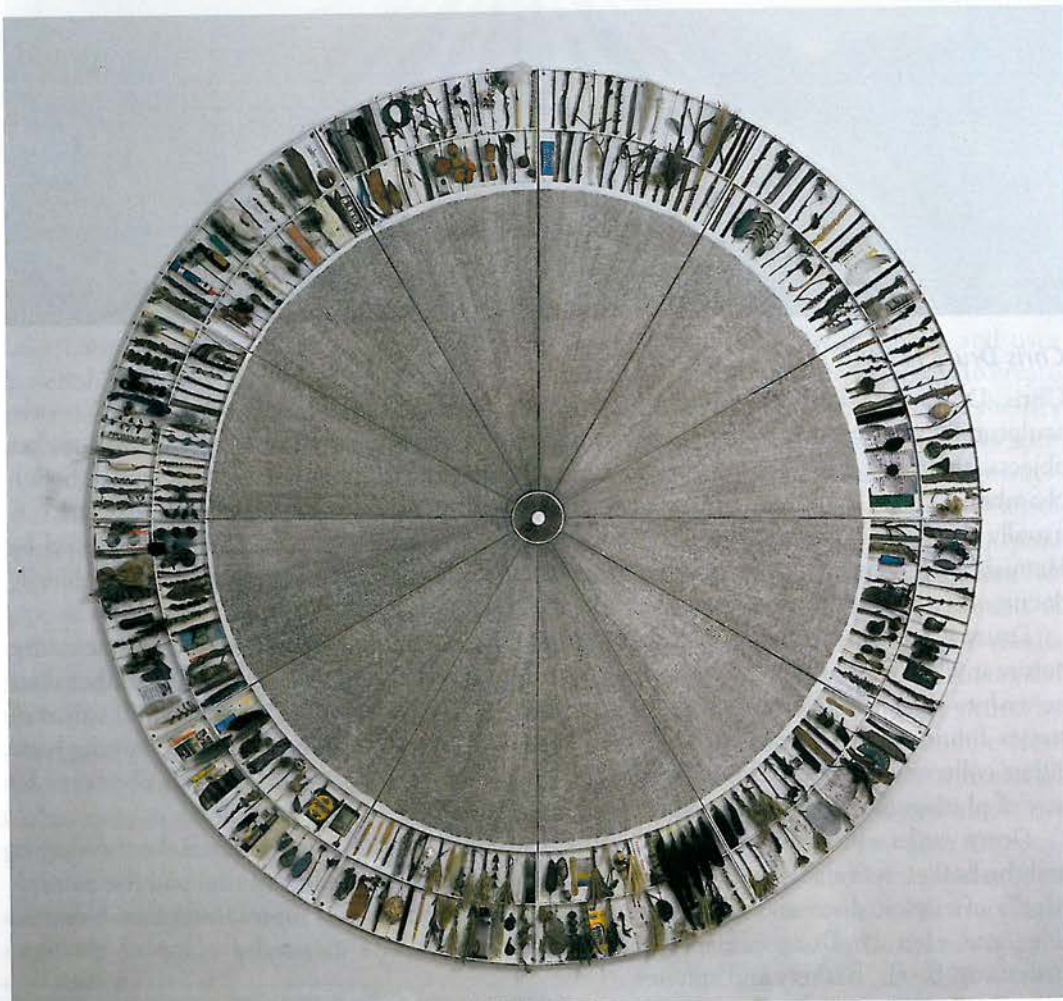
Chris Drury was born in Colombia, Sri Lanka. Like Andy Goldsworthy, Drury works sculpturally with natural materials in a wide variety of places around the world. He makes objects that are not necessarily art: shelters, **cairns**, baskets, and stone and wooden chambers. These are intended to be temporary, and the authentication of their existence is usually through photographs or collections of found objects. Drury has been influenced by Hamish Fulton and, in 1974, the two travelled to Canada to walk. (Fulton photographically documented this walk.)

Drury is opposed to the division between nature and culture. He does not sentimentalise nature in a political or moral way (in which nature is good and humans are bad). Neither does he wish to romanticise art, nor give it status above any other activity. Drury has built cairns of stones found in the immediate landscape, often at remote locations. These artworks have either collapsed (or been dismantled by the artist) and are now included in art discourse by way of photographic documentation.

Drury works with symbols, and the cairn is a marker of human presence. Like the shelter and the basket, it is also a metaphor for the connections between the cultural and the natural. Motifs of circles, discs and wheels are all signs of the world, and represent cycles, seasons, tides and eternity. Drury also constantly uses these motifs in ground plans of shelters, structures, bowls, baskets and spheres.



Mushroom Wheel is similar to *Medicine Wheel*, created in 1983, which has become very fragile. *Medicine Wheel* also consisted of 365 natural objects, one for each day of the year, 24 spokes of an 8-foot (approximately 2.66 metres) wheel; in essence a calendar of chance where 'objects came to me rather than me consciously looking'.



10.11

Chris Drury *Covered Cairn*

1993

hazel, willow, stone

Although both remote in time and place, Tranecker Castle, in Denmark, presented the artist with a 'culturally loaded' public site for this work. The dome is woven from hazel and willow, and the willow saplings would grow. The artist had intended the sculpture would therefore revert to the chaos of nature. In fact, deer in the park ate the new growth.

10.12

Chris Drury *Mushroom Wheel*

17 September 2000–16 September

2001

257 cm

On the two outer circles, Drury has displayed 365 found objects, one for each day of the year. Twelve segments radiating from a central mushroom print document diary entries made throughout the year. On this work, Drury says 'The point about the dense circle of words visually reflects the complexity and layered events of a personal year. This is a work about where the inner world touches outer everyday reality.' (Drury in M. Gooding, *Song of the Earth*, p. 78)

Case Study

James Darling (1946–), Australia

Darling calls himself an artist, writing novels and poetry, and making films, sculpture and installations. He is also a farmer, consciously conserving as much of his Duck Island property as bush. Darling believes that his farm is his largest work of art, and there is no culture without agriculture. He says 'Nature is not a background. Nature is us. Nature is everything from the inter-planetary song and dance of the Universe to what comes in under the back door in a cool wind and in particular, nature for farmers is to do with management.'

One of Darling's particular interests is salt. As a result of a huge flood in 1981, he began to actively seek government and scientific support for salt land agriculture as a vital component of Australian land management. He lives and works in South Australia, which is one of the driest states in one of the driest continents of the world.

Darling creates sculpture and installations with carefully selected mallee roots gathered on the property. These installations bear similarities to those of Richard Long, but they are inspired by the Australian bush. The branches symbolically represent the aridity and fragility of a degraded environment.

Mallee fowl and mallee roots are an intrinsic part of the flora and fauna of Australia. The bird, the only mound-building bird in arid land on the planet, is an endangered species. Darling has created a series of *Mallee Fowl Nests*, which are mounds that copy the shape of the nest made by the mallee fowl.

The mallee roots used as part of the sculptures may be up to 200 or 300 years old and have unique building properties. They are tough looking, gnarled and sinewy, clearly weathered, and are random, interlocking and unpredictable, completely opposite to contemporary minimalist architecture and aesthetic. The irregularity of the roots stands as a contrast to the geometric shapes that Darling ascribes to them—for example, a large flat-sided triangle in *Triangle 1* (7 tonnes of mallee roots, 2.53 x 5.06 m. Centro Culturale Conde, Duque, Madrid, Spain, 2002) and a long, straight wall topped with a roll of barbed wire in *Wave Wall 1* (mallee roots, November 2002–January 2003, 1.25 x 11.5 x 0.8 m, Australian Embassy, Paris).

10.13

James Darling *Wall Work 3*

December 2003–April 2004

8 tonnes mallee roots

2.0 x 13.5 x 0.8 m

installation by James Darling and
Lesley Forwood, Hazelhurst
Regional Gallery.

Darling installed this sinuous,
curved, S-shaped wall at the
Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Art
Centre in Gymea, New South Wales.



IDEAS FOR FURTHER CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Personal (subjective) frame

Detail your response to the work of James Darling and compare it to the work of Richard Long.

Social (cultural) frame

Examine the ways that social and historical identity are addressed in the work of Lauren Berkowitz.

Formal (structural) frame

What signs, symbols and visual codes are used in the work of Aboriginal artists? Compare these to the work of Richard Long and Chris Drury.

Contemporary (postmodern) frame

- 1 Photographs greatly affect the psychological perception of the viewer (see, for example, Christian Boltanski) either through juxtaposition or labelling. What are the implications for the audience when their only perception of an artwork is entirely dependent upon a photograph of an event or a temporary installation? How different is this to viewing an artwork in, say, a book of paintings?
- 2 The photograph as an object has changed in both purpose and intention. Photographs were historically recording a particular time and place, like the newspaper or journals. In contemporary times, it is more readily regarded as 'art' and discussed for its aesthetic value. However, photography as the 'documentation' of an 'art event' (that was temporary) is neither and both. Therefore, the audience and the artworld market of the 'documented' imagery is still to be clarified. Discuss both the audience and the artworld aspects of the 'documented form'.
- 3 Examine the implications for art that is entirely dependent upon photography.

SEARCH

International: Roger Ackling (UK), Hamish Fulton (UK), Wolfgang Laib (Germany), Andy Goldsworthy (UK), Kurt Schwitters (Germany), Christian Boltanski (France).

Australia: Jennifer Turpin, Robyn Backen.