

A Report on Site-Specificity

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How does a site dictate what work is made?

Site Specific artwork is designed, created and curated for a precise location, highlighting and interacting with the characteristics of the space, considering it's cultural and historical relevance while also making it inseparable from the location it inhabits. Since it's introduction into Art and Architecture, Site Specific Artwork has known to foster connections between communities while also giving a voice to the common person and/or inviting the viewer to reflect and even interact in some cases.

Located on Great Salt Lake in Utah, USA. Spiral Jetty is often considered to be one of if not the most well-known pieces of land art. Designed by Robert Smithson in 1970, Spiral Jetty consists of a massive spiral shaped jetty. It extends 1,500 feet into the water and measures 15 feet wide. The artwork is formed from rocks, mud and salt crystals sourced from the local area. Spiral jetty purely emphasises the deep relationship between Art and unindustrialised nature. The nature of Spiral Jetty stems from Smithsons' spinning perspective when first standing in the location in which Spiral Jetty would later be formed. As expected, Spiral Jetty has succumbed to time as it has retreated back into the dry land- this is also due to the salt lakes ever changing water levels and salt formations- creating an artwork whose meaning is forever changing.

Chinese Artist Ai Weiwei created 'Sunflower Seeds' to be exhibited at the Tate Modern in London, 2010. The installation features over 100 million hand crafted porcelain sunflower seeds- each of these created by artisans in Jingdezhen, East China- a city known for its meticulous ceramics. Viewers are invited to engage with the installation physically with it's large and expansive scale. Weiwei decided to have sunflower seeds on display due to the significance of sunflowers in Chinese culture which are thought to exude warmth and positivity while also representing the common person's loyalty and devotion to chairman Mao during China's cultural revolution. Weiwei commentates on the blurred lines of indicates and mass production, how each individual creates a collective identity in society. As accustomed to Weiwei's past work, themes of censorship and mass consumerism are themes of Sunflower Seeds along with criticism of the Chinese political regime. Each seed in Sunflower Seed symbolises a voice, collectively creating a powerful statement about the nature of Humanity (Storr, 2011).

Both 'Spiral Jetty' and 'Sunflower Seeds' are interactive and/or traversable. Visitors of 'Sunflower Seeds' by Weiwei are invited to sense the environment and the porcelain

seeds in their hands. Spiral Jetty is traversable and interplays with the views you are seeing, replicating the experience Smithson had when first seeing the location. On the other hand, it would be important to mention that Smithson's work is Land Art while Weiwei's is more private and confident between 4 gallery walls. A similarity between the two is that they are made from recyclable materials but while the production of porcelain is non toxic, Spiral Jetty's production required heavy machinery which is polluting. As mentioned previously, Weiwei's sunflower seeds was a gallery installation. This does not mean it is not site specific. This artwork would only work in a gallery where visitors could mistake it for décor. It's intimacy and cultural themes are hidden but are expected with Weiwei's art style. Spiral Jetty is now apart of that land would lose it's historical, cultural and personal connections if moved to a new location. Both artworks are also reliant on time is a theme. To explain, 'Spiral Jetty' was designed to change and evolve over time while 'Sunflower Seeds' was high in its production time but was only open for a short while.

Add: Comparison

Conclusion

Quotes and Bibliography to Add for final submission:

Ai Weiwei: "The Seeds can no longer be managed, they became almost like a living entity" -2011

Weiwei, A, (2011), Sunflower Seeds: A journey into the heart of Ai Weiwei, London, Tate Publ.

Storr, R (2010), Commentary on sunflower seeds, Artforum international, pp. 102-107.