

Student Name: Michael John Adam Mayhew

Student Number: 2405173

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Tutors: Alex Duncan & Holly Slingsby

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Question: Exploring art made or curated outside the gallery space, discuss how artists have developed art practice utilising space (and/or place). Providing evidence from at least 2 artists and thinkers.

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Table of contents

Figure list.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Richard Long.....	3
Robert Smithson.....	7
Ben Tufnell.....	10
Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Robert.....	11
Conclusion.....	12
References.....	13
Bibliography.....	14

Figure list

Figure 1, Tate (1976), '*A Line Made by Walking*', Richard Long, 1967. Available at:
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-a-line-made-by-walking-p07149>

Figure 2, Original Image (2025), '*Field*', Adam Mayhew, 2025.

Figure 3, Holt Smithson Foundation (2024), '*Spiral Jetty*', Robert Smithson, 1970. Available at:
<https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/news/robert-smithsons-spiral-jetty-named-national-registered-historic-places>

Introduction

Most of my earliest experiences of art have been in galleries, where everything has felt too orchestrated and carefully managed, with the temperature, lighting, and even the way people move through the spaces carefully controlled. For a long time, I accepted this setting as the “correct” environment for art. That began to change as I got older, when I came across a stack of stones near a walkway I live by. It was subtle and temporary, but thinking about it now, it stayed with me more than some artworks stuck behind a sheet of glass. This moment quoted Brian O’Doherty’s argument that the “white Cube” is an “ideal chamber for ideas of art” (O’Doherty, 1999: P. 34), but also a space that disconnects art from the real world.

Artists like Richard Long and Robert Smithson completely changed what art could look like by treating the landscape not just as a setting, but as a material and a collaborator. Their approach challenges traditional ideas about authorship, permanence and how audiences are supposed to experience art. Richard Long’s practice is a good example of this shift, in his work, such as *A Line Made by Walking* (1967).

Long uses the simple act of walking through a field to create a temporary mark in the land. The artwork wasn’t a physical object but a trace of movement, and what remains now is the photograph and the idea behind it. This challenges the gallery’s role because the real artwork was an action that happened in a place most viewers will never visit.

Robert Smithson took this idea even further with *Spiral Jetty* (1970), a huge earthwork built into the Great Salt Lake. Its changing visibility, erosion and salt formations show how outdoor artworks refuse to be fixed or stabilised (Smithson, 1996). As Tufnell (2019)

explains, many landscape-based artworks exist in a split state: the site is out there in the world, while the gallery only holds documentation.

Throughout this essay, I will explore how artists like Long and Smithson developed practices that depend on location, environment and embodied experience, and how thinkers such as Tufnell (2019) and Farley (2011) help us understand what it means to make and curate art outside the traditional white cube.

Richard Long

Firstly, I will begin with Richard Long, an English sculptor and one of the most well-known British artists for Land Art. He studied at Saint Martin's School of Art before going on to create artwork using various media such as sculpture, photography, text and maps. His work is typically made of earth, rock, stone and mud, and any other natural or nature-based material.

Several of his works are based on Long walking and the walks he has been on, as well as land-based sculptures. Long uses photography, text and maps to record his work and the landscapes he's walked all over. Long has been doing these walks since the 1960s; his work has been proven to be revolutionary, as it has changed how people view sculpture. His work has influenced that sculpture can not be limited by traditional materials and to use alternative materials in his works. Not only is Long using alternative materials such as earth and rock, but changing what art can be, as the creation of the artwork can be the art itself.

Richard Long is a key figure in land art, and his work shows how artists can rework what art is by creating their art outside of galleries. Since the late 1960s, Long has made art mainly through walking, using movement through the landscape as his creative method. This shows that the place where artwork is made is not just a background but something that actively changes and shapes the work. As Lailach (2007: P.36) notes, Land Art “shifted artistic practice into the open landscape,” challenging the idea that art has to exist within gallery walls.



Figure 1 (Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967)

One of Long’s earliest and one of the most important artworks is his *A Line Made by Walking* (1967). For this piece, he repeatedly walked across a patch of grass until a subtle line appeared in the grass. I can relate to this due to similar actions that have happened near my

walk to the train station in the morning. There has been a path that's been made through a field because other people don't want to walk the extra distance to the station, so they've decided to cut through the field even though it's currently boggy and slippery.



Figure 2 (Field, Photographed by Adam Mayhew, 2025)

It looked simple, but it represents a major rethink of how art can be made. Beardsley (1984: p.52) describes Long's early works as "gestures that redefined the boundaries of sculpture," because they relied on Long's action rather than the creation of a physical object. The artwork

exists because Long interacted with that specific field, which makes the site essential to the meaning of the work.

A strong theme in Long's work is its temporary nature, which means they never last forever. Because his outdoor works are exposed to the elements, they eventually disappear. And this temporary quality is part of what makes his artwork unique, since it will never be around forever, so it's almost like you have to see it if you happen to come across it. Long understands that most people will never see his art on the original site, so he uses photography and maps to share what happened. According to Long and Serota (1991: P. 25), these works are "evidence of a journey," not replacements for the walk itself. They act as records of his actions rather than the art object, since eventually it will disappear.

Long also brings different materials from his walks and outings into gallery spaces, such as driftwood, stones or mud. These installations don't attempt to reproduce the landscape, but they keep a connection to the places he has visited. Wart and Jones (2000: p. 120) explain that Long "translates bodily experiences into material form," meaning the materials and objects carry memories of the environment. This would help the viewer to imagine the landscape without needing to be physically present there.

Robert Smithson

To continue with the theme of earthworks, the next artist I would like to mention is Robert Smithson. Born in Passaic, New Jersey, and moved to the Allwood section of Clifton at the age of nine. He studied painting and drawing in New York City at the Art Student League of New York. From 1954 to 1956, and then briefly at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Smithson primarily identified as a painter in his early career, and his early exhibited work had a wide range of influences such as science fiction, catholic art and pop art. In 1967, Smithson's art began to change; he frequently visited industrial sites and was fascinated by dump trucks moving tons of earth and rock. This resulted in 'non-site' artworks in which earth and rocks collected from a specific area are installed in galleries as sculptures. Works from this period include *Eight-Part Piece (Cayuga Salt Mine Project)* (1969) and *Map of Broken Clear Glass (Atlantis)* (1969) (Hobbs, 1981).



Figure 3 (Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970)

Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* remains as one of the most famous examples of Land Art to this day, and one of the artworks that shows the limitations of a gallery space can be. This sculpture is massive, measuring up to a 1,500-foot coil made from mud, basalt rock and salt that extends

into the Great Salt Lake in Utah, and one of the most fascinating features about this sculpture is its instability and fluctuating nature, depending on the tide from the Lake. Also on the water level, the Sculpture can either be fully visible or completely submerged.

When it does re-emerge, it's often covered in a very thick layer of white salt crystals, making it look like a brand new artwork. Smithson wasn't bothered by this at all; in fact, he welcomed it. He was very interested in the idea of entropy, describing it as "the gradual disintegration of order" (Smithson, 1996: P. 72). For Smithson, nature wasn't something he could control or fight against, but something that could consistently change his works.

To fully understand *Spiral Jetty* is also to understand Smithson's differences between "site" work and "non-site" work. The site/location is the real landscape where artwork physically exists, while the non-site is what appears in galleries, as mentioned before, such as photographs, documents, and maps, or even samples of the landscape. Smithson called the non-site a "three-dimensional logical picture" of the site (Smithson, 1996: P. 364).

It gives the viewer a way to imagine the artwork, but it will never be able to replace the feeling of seeing the work in person. This shift is important because it challenged the role of galleries and forced artists/curators to think differently about how to present their art that can't be moved or controlled. Artists like Smithson are constantly and deliberately pushing the boundaries of art outside of institutional boundaries and into unpredictable environments making the landscape itself a part of the artwork.

Today, the Dia Art Foundation maintains *Spiral Jetty*, but their approach is more about stewardship than preservation; they can't stop the lake from rising and pulling the land back

into itself or the salt from crusting over the surface, and that's exactly how Smithson intended it (Dia Art Foundation, No Date). What makes the work so compelling is that, due to its nature, it refuses to confine or stabilise; you have to go there and experience it on its own terms, which completely changes the relationship between the artwork, the artist/curator and the audience.

Ben Tufnell

Now I would like to move on to a theorist, Ben Tufnell's *In Land* (2019) is a very important book for understanding why artists like Long and Smithson chose to work outside of gallery spaces, and why their work often challenges the whole structure of art and the art world.

Tufnell argues that artists working with the landscape aren't simply making art outdoors, they're fundamentally rethinking the relationship between the artwork, the environment and the viewer (Tufnell, 2019).

What stands out in his books is that he refuses to treat Land Art as just a 60s or 80s movement. But instead, he sees it as a part of a much broader and longer history of artists using place, walking, geography and natural materials to question how art should exist.

One of Tufnell's ideas is that artworks made in landscapes resist the way the museums depend on collecting, preserving and displaying. He explains that many of these works exist in a kind of split state, "the documentation might appear in the gallery, but the real artwork, 'the site,' remains outside, shaped by weather, time and change" (Tuffnell, 2019: P. 44). This fits in perfectly with Smithson's theory of the "site" and "non-site," and it also frames Long's walks and text pieces as forms of documentation rather than complete artworks in themselves.

Tufnell also points out that encountering art in the landscape often involves physical movement, walking, travelling and navigating the land becomes part of the artistic experience. This embodied engagement helps explain why Long's and Smithson's works depend so much on environment and place. Overall, Tufnell provides a framework that helps make sense of why these artists chose to work outside the gallery and how doing so fundamentally reshapes the role of curation and spectatorship.

Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Robert

Now, moving on to another theorist, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (2011), adds a very interesting angle to thinking about artworks made outside the gallery, especially when compared to the massive, dramatic landscapes used by artists like Smithson. Instead of focusing on lakes, deserts or mountain ranges, *Edgelands* is all about the overlooked spaces on the edges of town where the places most people pass by without thinking.

Farleys and Roberts describe these strange transitional areas with a mix of humour, honesty and genuine fascination, calling them “the places where our cities end and our imaginations begin” (Farley and Roberts, 2011: P. 5). Its a reminder that the landscape isn't just about the natural world, it's also about the scruffy and rough in-between areas shaped by our everyday lives.

What makes their writing relevant to Long and Smithson is the way the *Edgelands* shift our thinking about places and experiences. Long's walks, for example, aren't always in the

dramatic wilderness; he moves through lives in everyday environments, and *Edgelands* helps highlight why those spaces matter. Farley and Roberts show that these overlooked areas can be full of unexpected textures, histories and atmospheres, qualities Long often captures through his routes and text pieces. Their idea that the *Edgelands* require a different kind of attention fits with Tufnell's (2019) argument that landscape art isn't just about scenery, but about how we engage with the world around us.

Edgelands is also very helpful when you think about curation. If the artwork exists in places that are messy, rough, temporary or constantly changing, then curating becomes more about framing an experience rather than showing an object. Farley and Roberts basically argue that the mundane landscape has its own complexity and beauty, and this perspective helps expand how we understand site-based art, not just something that exists in wild, untouched nature, but also in everyday spaces right on our doorstep.

Conclusion

Exploring art made outside the gallery space shows how artists like Richard Long and Robert Smithson have pushed art into environments where it becomes inseparable from place, weather, movement and time. What really stands out across their practices is how deliberately they stepped away from the controlled, polished atmosphere of the gallery and instead embraced spaces that are constantly shifting.

Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, for example, quite literally depends on the unstable conditions of the Great Salt Lake, where its form changes through erosion, salt crystal growth and rising water levels. Long's walking works do something similar, more quietly, the landscape becomes

both the medium and the record, with the journey itself forming the artwork. In both cases, the site isn't just a background; it's the core of the meaning.

The thinkers/theorists I've looked at help frame why this shift matters. Ben Tufnell argues that landscape-based art resists traditional museum structures, since the real art often remains outdoors, while only fragments or documentation enter the gallery. This idea links directly into Smithson's distinction between the site and non-site, and it helps explain why curators have had to rethink their roles, moving from object preservation to guiding experiences, access and interpretation.

Paul Farley's writing on *Edgelands* adds another angle, showing how overlooked or marginal landscapes can become sites of creativity and reflection. These spaces, like Long's paths or Smithson's remote salt lake shore, blur the boundary between art and environment in ways the gallery simply can't replicate.

Overall, looking at these artists and thinkers shows that working outside the gallery isn't just a change of setting but a shift in how it's made, experienced and understood. It opens up new possibilities for artists and demands new approaches to curation, grounded in movements, environment and the unpredictability of place and space.

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