

2205239 Will Steadman – Research Report

Site-specificity has become a prominent way of working in the world of contemporary art. This method is intended to highlight the correlation between a location and an artwork created within it. Curator and art historian Miwon Kwon states that "site specificity challenges the autonomy of the art object by insisting that it can only be fully understood in relation to the place in which it is situated" (Kwon, 2002).

Our exhibition was located at Blackpill Bridge, a site which held many distinct aspects that hold concepts that can be touched upon in our installation. This location consisted of a bridge spanning across the Clyne River, which met Swansea Bay and by extension the wider Bristol Channel. There were two distinctive characteristics of our exhibition that linked together effectively. One of which was the concept of the constant but ever-changing state of the tides, flowing in and out. This interacted with another aspect that we observed: the build-up of plastic waste in the area. These two characteristics interlinked with each other showed how the tide brought with it a multitude of discarded waste, and this is what we decided to capture in our exhibition.



During planning for the exhibition, it was of crucial importance that we studied other site-specific exhibitions in order to gain a wider understanding of how to create one successfully. An important detail that must be considered was the way the environment can interact with the installation. The environment dictates the choice of scale, form and materials used in order to interact with the atmosphere of a site. This interaction between the artist and their surroundings is demonstrated within the work of land artist Richard Long. An example of his is "Ascott Circle 4" where he creates his work within nature and thus the landscape informs the resulting artwork.



This example demonstrates many different details to consider in order to create an interaction between the environment and the artwork. One of which is the consideration of scale and form. In this case the vast, open space has inspired a large-scale installation. This is relevant to our site due to its open-air, expansive location. It would be a wise decision to produce an installation of considerable size. One other important characteristic to contemplate is the choice of materials as the environment can often dictate the materials chosen for a site-specific artwork. Richard Long is known for using what he can find within the landscapes he works in, such as rocks, soil or plants. This is pertinent in our case, as we plan to use waste material found in and around the site.

During the production process, we experimented with many different techniques. This included creating small scale sculptures, projection, developing photograms and installing found materials to the site. The two most important material tests that we conducted were the development of photograms and the installation of found materials, which ultimately became the basis of our exhibition. For the photograms included in our exhibition we utilised both a natural element and an artificial element. The natural element took the form of creating the images using the water from the river. There were two methods for this process, one of which was to expose light sensitive paper whilst it was underwater, to then develop in the darkroom. The other method was done through exposing light sensitive paper, submerged in a tray with water sampled from the river, with an enlarger. Both of these techniques proved to be useful and ended up being included in the main banner. The artificial element took the form of plastic bottles being exposed onto light sensitive paper under an enlarger. This method provided us with photograms that could be used for the secondary banners on either side of the main one. The other material test that proved to be useful was the installation of found materials. We decided that hanging bottles from the bridge would provoke thought into the vast amount of rubbish being discarded and how it is affecting the environment. We poured a small amount of water into the bottles in order to create an interaction between them and the sun through reflections that created a visually appealing display. We also filled some of the bottles with light sensitive paper in order to create images that may increase the lifespan of the exhibition, even after its removal.



Aside from contributing to the installation itself, I also undertook the responsibility of managing our social media. I created an Instagram page equipped with a bio that included the key details of our exhibition while staying within the limits of the word count; I condensed the exhibition statement, which I also wrote, down to below 150 characters. I also ensured that I posted on a consistent enough basis to continue attracting new audiences. I made use of mainly drone photography and videography for these posts. I created images that acted as teasers for the exhibition and that gave people an overview of the site from a perspective that made the interaction between the river and the sea more obvious. I also created reels for the same purpose that displayed both the site before and after installation of our banners and bottles. These reels tended to have a higher amount of interaction from non-followers when compared to the images I had posted, which is why it was important to produce them.

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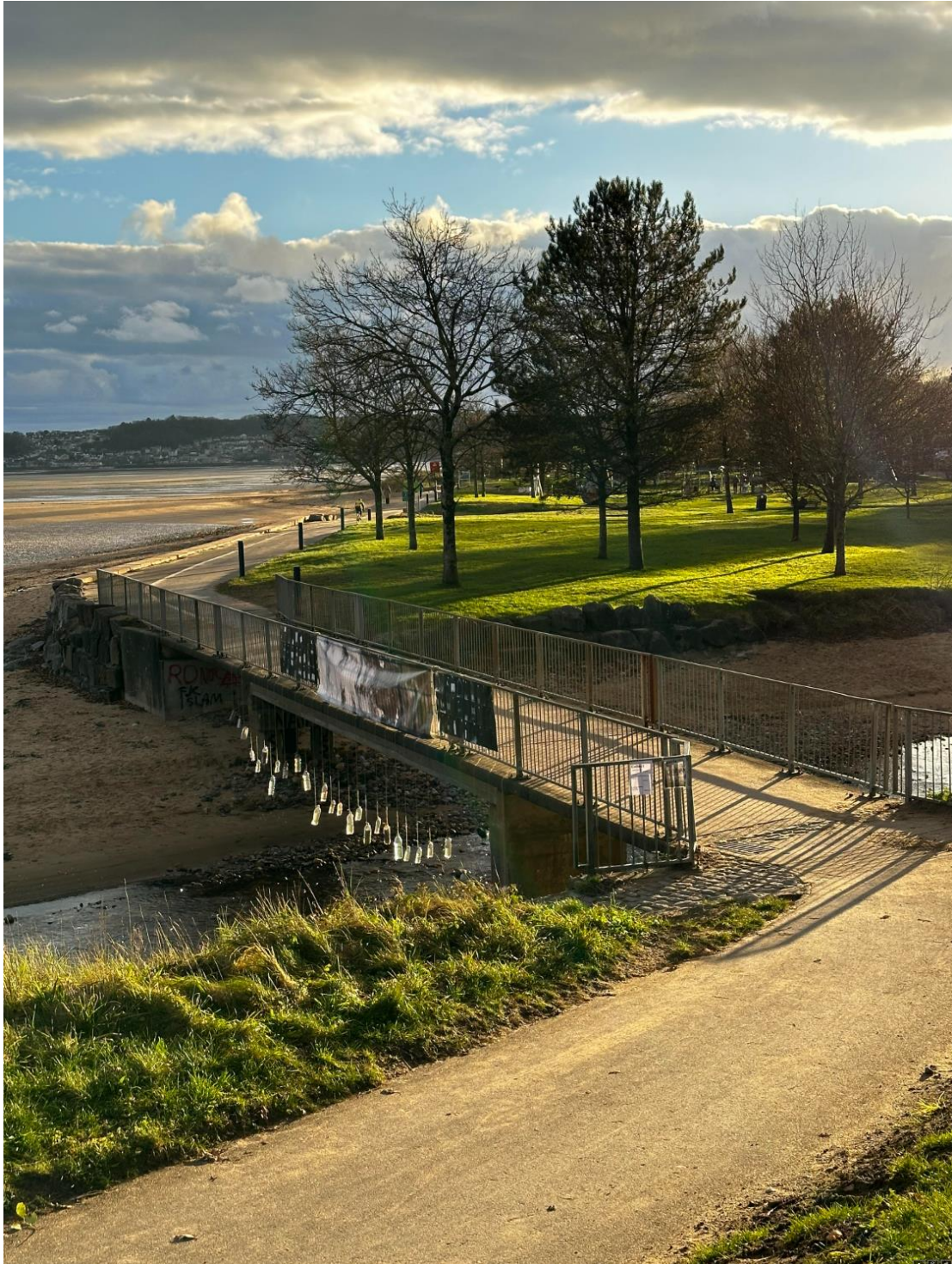


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Throughout this module I have learnt a lot of valuable information, not only about how to create a site-specific exhibition, but also on how to conduct myself as an artist through my online presence. I learnt that having a uniform theme with each post can help create a recognisable aesthetic and make the page look more professional. I also realised the significance of creating reels and how they can be a much more effective way of growing a following as opposed to the traditional method of posting an image to followers and relying on them being shared or stumbled upon by blind luck. As for the process of creation I learnt a lot about the importance of material testing, and how the first idea that comes to mind may not always be the answer. Infact, it is better to allow an idea to develop naturally through experimentation as this creates a more authentic result.

Overall, this exhibition went extremely well and exceeded my expectations. In hindsight however, if I were to make any changes, I would consider creating greater number of reels in order to maximise interaction between non-followers on Instagram. I would also say that in relation to my research on Richard Long and his large-scale installations and how they interact with the environment, our banners could have been of a more extensive scale. This would have allowed our exhibition to stand out even more and create a spectacle for passers-by.



References

Kwon, M. (2002). *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. MIT Press.