

Visual Enquiry 1

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A Report On Site Specificity.

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 its cultural and historical relevance while also making it inseparable from the location it inhabits. Since its 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 Smithson's 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 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 its 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. When detailing the process, Weiwei states that 'First I made three million. It was like a little mountain. Then you realize it is less than the number of cars in Beijing' (Osnos, 2010). This quote alone shows how expansive the message that is being portrayed especially when correlating the sunflower seeds to a singular human life. 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 nontoxic, 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 a part of that land would lose its 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.

In conclusion, both Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson and Sunflower Seeds by Ai Weiwei exemplify the profound connection between art and its environment, though they each engage with their respective sites in distinct ways. Smithson's Spiral Jetty, a monumental land art piece situated on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, transforms the natural landscape into a dynamic, evolving artwork. The physicality of the jetty—its spiral shape, the materials used, and its interaction with the fluctuating water levels—creates a compelling dialogue between art, nature, and time. As Smithson himself observed, the jetty was designed not only as an artwork but also as a process, one that would constantly change due to natural forces. Its interaction with the environment is a fundamental aspect of its identity, making it inseparable from its location (Smithson, 1979). On the other hand, Ai Weiwei's Sunflower Seeds engages with the concept of site specificity in a more intimate, yet equally impactful, manner. Installed at the Tate Modern in London, the piece invites tactile engagement, allowing viewers to walk through, touch, and even interact with the porcelain seeds. While not "site-specific" in the traditional sense of being embedded in a natural landscape, the installation's significance is deeply tied to the context of its display. The sheer scale of the piece, with over 100 million hand-crafted seeds, creates a profound visual impact. Each seed becomes a metaphor for the individual within a collective, echoing the theme of mass production and social conformity in the context of Chinese political history (Storr, 2011). As Weiwei remarked, the three million seeds he initially crafted felt like a "little mountain," and the final number is a striking commentary on the individual in relation to a much larger system (Osnos, 2010). Ultimately, both Spiral Jetty and Sunflower Seeds emphasize the importance of location, context, and time in shaping the meaning of art. As noted by art historian Miwon Kwon, "Site-specific works, even when experienced outside the site, retain their indelible connection to the location, challenging the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside,' the local and the global" (Kwon, 2002). Whether through the changing landscape of Spiral Jetty or the tactile, participatory nature of Sunflower Seeds, both pieces encourage viewers to reflect on the human condition, the forces of nature, and the collective forces that shape society.



The Spiral Jetty when the water was high.



The Spiral Jetty as it looks now with the Great Salt Lake at its lowest level since recording began in 1875.

Mapping Potential Territories

- **St Mary's Church**

History- "Christianity first reached the Gower through Celtic missionaries. However, it was only with the arrival of the Normans that a church was first built in Swansea, possibly as early as the twelfth century".

"The hospital of St David which was adjacent to St Mary's and founded in 1332, elements of the hospital's architecture can still be seen in the present Cross Keys pub."

- **Swansea Marina/ Waterfront**

History- Former South Dock, Swansea Marina opened in 1859 as Swansea experienced an industrial boom. Copper Smelting in the Tawe

- **Ampitheatre**

Located next to Leisure Centre- first opened by the queen in 1977, at its peak attracted more than 800,000 people every year.



Ampitheatre
Image: Carey Beor

Archive Research

St Mary's history as Archived Material

- As far back as the 16th Century, St Mary's was many people of Swansea's choice of church. Two head wardens are appointed by the Lord Mayor each year. During the Victorian times, rumours spread of a church in Swansea dating back to 6th century. However, the earliest documented evidence is from 1291 in the taxation of Pope Nicholas 4th. In 1739, the roof of the nave collapsed, from a combination of weather damage and poor grave construction. This would be temporarily fixed until 1835. In 1941, on the night of the third blitz on Swansea- the church was engulfed in flames and eventually destroyed. It is reported that the current church is at least the fifth built on the site. There has been a bell tower at the site since the 14th century, so it is safe to assume that St Mary's bells have been going for that amount of time. In 1549, it was reported to have four bells. Bells were a way of letting the towns know of public events such as royal weddings, celebrations etc.
- The Baptist font, used to baptise babies and to make members of the church using water and the Holy Spirit. The cover of the font resembles that of the Holy Spirit descending. Behind the Baptist font are stained glass windows. One of many on the site. Created by Japanese Artist Kuniko Chihuahua, the piece explores themes of death and/or resurrection. Standing firmly behind the Baptist font while relating to the messages that come with baptisms (e.g. new beginnings).
- Further relating to the same message, a set of beautiful butterfly wings are seen in the glass. This coordinates with the wider area due to a caterpillar's lifespan and the process of chrysalis and metamorphosis- eventually turning into a butterfly. At the bottom left of the stained panes, you can see the airplanes flying over Swansea- representing the blitz that had occurred on the site, and from that the fire shown in dark red hues. In the bottom right, the people of Swansea can be seen below what can be described as a Phoenix rising from the ashes, also coordinating with the themes of life, death and resurrection.
- Saved from the medieval era, the pewter cross sat on the high altar of the church, and during the blitz it was saved by two university students as the church went up in flames. After the blitz and a long 18 years, the church was reopened. During this time Swansea saw a dispersal in local communities and from that came additional community churches.
- Brought to the church in 1962, a Union Jack flag representing the 80,000 people that died on a railway, 150 of that British. Made from materials that the prisoners of the Japanese had at hand, mostly clothing or mosquito nets. A permanent memorial is seen at the site in relation to the 42 Welsh guardsmen who lost their lives in war conflict. Displaying many themes such as the Falkland's, a soldier and a yellow border. That border representing the gateway to heaven and its extension beyond the border of the window also reflects this.
- In the St. Anna Chapel, a painting brought in 1960 shows the position of Christ, from the cross. Showing debris and rubbish from the street. The artist also emphasises the size of the figure's hands and feet, which relates to the physical effects Christ would have had on the cross. Three people surround the figure, one in prayer.
- The biggest stained-glass window on the site, known as the Magnificat window- tells the stories of Mary from the Bible. The window was put up in memorial to all the memorials lost in the blitz.
- A group of stones displayed at the church are the effigy of an unknown priest. Although this would not be obvious looking at it due to the damage it has received from the blitz and the weather. It is unknown who the person is though it is rumoured to be the founder of the church or hospice.
- The organ on the site was converted to an organ. Used on many occasions, mostly for church services. One of six in the country, the monumental brass displays Sir Hugh and Dame Lord, his wife. Sir Hugh was noted to be knighted in the sepulchre in Jerusalem in 1441. He fought for the Emperor of Constantinople, John. This has also received damage over the years.
- When designing and carving, Bill Downs left two heads hidden on a chancel- Bill Montgomery and Winston Churchill, referencing the war.
- An extension of the church, the trinity chapel displayed two stained glass windows. The dorsal painting was painted in Covent Garden by Peter Courtier Piper. It is the furthest feature in the church, drawing your eye to it as you enter.
- A memorial window in the church, reflecting a helicopter disaster on 9/11 in 1982 resulting in the death of 9 Swansea divers. The memorial is based on Jacob's dream in Genesis where the angels ascend and descent. At the very top, hands holding hands can be seen, showing unity. The window in the northwest of the church reflects St Nicholas, a fourth century bishop, who is the patron saint of children. He was the forerunner to Father Christmas. Items such as a rocking horse, a ship and banks of gold. He was alleged to have thrown three bags of gold into the house of a poor man, who was about to put his daughters out to prostitution. Crude oil can also be seen which was noted to never run out.
- The millennium window, based on the revelation of St John the Divine. Who was a prisoner on the island of Patmos. He writes to the churches and describes the new Jerusalem and the new heaven. The window is based on revelation chapter 22 which states "They need no light of lamp nor sun for the Lord God will be their light and they shall reign forever and ever". It includes the tree of life, the new heaven and/or earth. The cross has a centre blue panel, often seen as the Virgin Mary, below is the dove of peace.

Audio Experimentation

St Mary's

- Minutes
- Images of church and for archive research.
- Ideas
- Spacing for ideas
- Audio ideas
- Group Members
- Roles
- Changes to ideas.
- Themes of Exhibition
- Title of
- Plan

