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Fine art: Studio site and context

Research In Context (ADAD5003)

Question 3: Analyse the impact of environment and sustainability on art practise by describing how artists have responded to these issues in they're work.

Can we make sustainable art, in the 21st century?

In this essay I will be answering the question of, in the new century of modern and contemporary art if we can make the materials in which we use more sustainable and less harmful for the environment. I will be taking a look at three examples of artists, and they're pieces of work, with first being a artist by the names of Jose Berchara with his art piece 'Margarida stripe', which consists of using the process of rust and that natural orange oxidised pigment as a process. As well as Jose berchara I will be talking about Richard Long in his 'River Avon Mud Drawing 1983' where Richard used the conventional matter in displaying the work on paper but using the mud as a form of paint, on to the paper itself. I will then move on to Jospeh Beuys and the materials, and symbolism used in the works of 'Fat Chair 1964-1985' and notice of his disregarded materials compared to today's world being something we can derive from now. Lastly, I will be analysing Olafur Eliassons Riverbed 2014 piece again within similarities with other of the artists in the selection his work is bringing environments and natural landscapes physically into the gallery space with the addition of sound and smell you become so immersed into the place itself.

What is sustainable art?

Definition: "Sustainable art is art in harmony with the key principles of sustainability, which include ecology, social justice, non-violence, and grassroots democracy. Sustainable art may also be understood as art that is produced with consideration for the wider impact of the work and its reception in relationship to its environments (social, economic, biophysical, historical, and cultural)."

Why should we care about sustainability in art practises?

Due to today's knowledge on practises and how they effect the environment it's very much a needed question to ask and to be answered. Sustainable art is a means to produce new ideas, and new ways of perceiving art. Also, for the future generations if we want the world to be that of advancement we need to analyse and think in new ways, healthier and more passive ways of the production of art work. There are multiple movements that have been made previously off these idea developments alone, earthworks, land art, arte povera and many more. And we should care, because it'd be ignorant not to care about practises that'll only benefit things for the world we live in as well as just improving on quality of life for all in adversity there is a growth for redevelopment, introspection and overcoming to be a better future.



Figure 1 - Berchara 2008 – *Margarida Stripe*

Two massive squares of oxidised tarp put together on the gallery wall the nature in which this art exists is in that of the process of something happening naturally, Berchara again uses a process in which isn't that of convention but one of natural process being that of oxidation. One of the reasons needed to discuss Margarida stripe was due to Berchara choice in materials, like that of Richard Long with mud, instead using rust as the base material for the statement but using the lifetime of rust, it's changes and it's states of being as the means of interest.

'Margarida Stripe' also leads into the movement of both earth art, and arte povera which was the art movement made in the late 1960's to early 70's, the decree and basis of arte povera was that of 'poor art' (Tate) which has a negative connotation, Margarida Stripe to be of something different, it is always evolving, and it is itself is that of something living *'Living things have a variety of characteristics that are displayed to different degrees: they respire, move, respond to stimuli, reproduce and grow, and are dependent on their environment'* (Living things 2004) which is exactly the basis of what rust does, it reacts with water, oxidises which is the process of water and oxygen combining to then multiply in its numbers, like a form of metallic fungus, and that is the beauty of this work.

'Margarida Stripe' when displayed in a exhibition here, brings into the question of rust as it is, a disregarded material that is of rust against other objects much like it has no focal point it's just a item, much a like to Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' but when put into context of a gallery something beautiful happens and the context gets changed, when put into a gallery you notice the complexities and pigment due to most galleries just being a white box, that radiating brown and orange consistency really does just feel like something else, it doesn't look like charcoal or paint it is own species of aesthetics. There's a phrase used in Japan that describes as such 'Wabi—sabi' which is in transcribed as "a way of living that focuses on finding beauty within the imperfections of life and accepting peacefully the natural cycle of growth and decay" (*Collinsdictionary.com, 2020*) which speaks to the aesthetics of rust itself there's a process of things that have aged that we bring into the association of nostalgia and things of better memories.



Figure 2 - 1964-1985 Bueys 'Fat Chair'

A slab of Greece like triangle angled on a used and patinaed chair with a hook on the back of the chair, indicating for the chair itself to maybe be hung or not to be conventionally used as just a chair. Sparingly minimal details on the objects themselves, and they are not what would be deemed to be of something pristine or perfect. Joseph beuys 'Fat chair', is one of the most prolific known pieces when it comes to Josphe beuys, but how does it relate to that of sustainable art? Aesthetically beuyses materials are that of a dialled back character, and not one of stylisation but that of a '*ignoble material*', not only do his materials cater that to a neglectful or disregarded nature but his actions with which he interacts with said objects, he gives power to which these objects exist so they're no longer as such, but they are now what

he'd call a "*independent sculpture*" (Rosenthal, Rainbird and Schmuckli, 2005) and this relates to my essay due to the fact Beuys uses these 'not' materials and gives them a purpose, and thus they are "*becoming a work of art*" (Rosenthal, Rainbird and Schmuckli, 2005). As well as his materials Joseph Bueys was known for being one of that for being a different individual when it came to politics and critiqued the capitalist and communist agendas, that again is the big part of sustainability now in western culture and eastern culture. Beuys brings the point the route of what the issue was, and still is now the capitalist nature in which we live in, when you're dependent on a system that routinely focuses of that of consumption and money in the context of today, what bueys was doing before he was way ahead of his time during his work, he brings the global issues that are talked about now but from 40 years ago "Bueys was actively politically as a forerunner and then cofounder and candidate of the German green party, in addition he led a series of imaginative public political demonstrations for ecological causes." (Adams, 1992) Joseph Bueys also leads into the question which I've indicated before about using objects themselves as something other than what they are, this brings into the psychologist theory of Carl yung with the quote "It all depends on how we look at things, and not how they are in themselves." (BrainyQuote, n.d.) Fat chair again is a great ideal of art and how things are to be perceived, just because the notion of items have this already ideal of what they are originally, the addition of a different perception to an idea of an item is something that adds a new dynamic to art itself, and this applies to the question, if we can apply this to the unused, disregarded items of our own art practises.



Figure 3 - Richard Long – *'River Avon Mud Drawing 1983'*

A massive circle consisting of mud on paper with indentations of hand like dragging like smears in a perfect like circle formation. These smeared like consistency dragged on paper bring to the interpretation of that of like an extremely dialled back and absolute natural form of mark making. Using the mud, as a form and tool Richard long uses his mud as a form of paint, much alike to Kazuo Shiraga in his gutai action painting, but instead of oil muddied textured being spilled over the floor, Richard long has minimized his materials to that of just *'natural raw materials'*. (Long, Clarrie Wallis and Londres, 2009) The reasoning as to why, this relates to my question is that Richard Long has brought in the extremely dialled back nature in which we in origin, had initially created art and this is inherently a integral part of who he is as an artist as well.

Richard long brings to the point in art, that just lines and the natural area of which we reside can be questioned, and be made into pure and beautiful works, where in a world of plastic and oil-based paintings are the status quo for the basis of art, when these processes aren't sustainable. The process in which Richard Long works, is that there again is the basis of nature, which sustainability is devolved from, to prolong the future generations a better world and more cleaner one, it's needed to think in more of the lines of nature and our environment in which it is experienced and made which, Richard long has said here "I always considered that students on a fine art course, as they proceeded with their art work, should also gain some understanding of the philosophic and social context within which art is experienced". (Long, Clarrie Wallis and Londres, 2009) As well as this there is a lot we can take from the basis of nature and sustainable processes not just as means to have a better future but as a place of reflection, it's scientifically proven that being in the environment is beneficial for work as a artist. Richard Long also speaks to the process of just creation and making itself, *"There was a movement in the 1960's when the idea of filling more and more objects became questionable"* Long, R. and Wallis, C. (2009) this again keeps to the question of my essay of over-production and the capitalist basis of consumption, and the status quo of supply and demand being that of too much supply and not enough demand. Richard long also writes about, the lifetime of his works being that of never being forever, and that's the vital question. Long's quoted as said 'I like making something, from nothing' (Richard Long In Conversation) which by it's main basis is again a testament to the subject of sustainability from being able to make nothing to something, and again back to nothing again is the most pure and extreme minimal form of creation, it's again nature as a extender of form and vision. So to answer how long responds to environment and sustainability is that, he does what can be done the maximum point of sustainability to the most minimalist value in materials.



Figure 4 - Eliasson 2014 'Riverbed'

The gallery space filled with a black and white rocks with a natural formed like river running the space, elevation of the ground beneath the exhibition being lifted of as if it has just been taking from somewhere completely different, a contrast from the clean white spacing of the gallery white room to the natural real land of the riverbed underneath. Eliassons Riverbed artwork is a example of again, using environments themselves as the medium similar to that of Richard Long whereas Long used his photos as documentation of his work, and again markings with mud supplementary Eliasson works in the same field of structure and theology "art is very easily connected to the world – it shouldn't be marginalised into a disconnected path." (artreview.com 2014) but he makes the exhibition the landscape, he moulds the room as his oyster and makes it something more than just an image, he makes into a form of ultra reality.

And again, similar to Margarida stripe, within the context of putting these natural things and settings into a totally new diversion, separating the elements of something that is natural into a curated world in a gallery which is that of cleanliness and absolute blankness but when you switch this dynamic and natural you start to notice a lot more than you'd see of something in its natural setting. A lot of the work Eliasson makes is in relation to global warming, his other piece of work again relating in similar regards to 'Riverbed' when making the natural as real as possible in the art world "For instance, the climate debate is incredibly academic and science-driven and very hard to understand because it's so abstract, so how do we understand it? Is it through intellect or is it through our somatic, muscular bodies? Is it through our senses?" (The talks 2015) Eliasson really wants you to experience the place, he wants all the senses to awakened not to that of just sight itself but more than just sight, smell, sound, he wants you to be completely immersed in the landscape.

In conclusion to answer the question if is still possible to make sustainable art in the 21st century, yes and it's still being pushed to the limit with many possibilities on presentation and sustainable processes, dating back to the 1960's and 1980's with Richard Longs, and Joseph Beuys to very recently with the names discussed to that of new generations of artists with Olafur Eliasson and Jose Berchara two new generations and two older generations of artists that are undeniably that of a sustainable background and still proving today that it's still a growing and prosper way of working.

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List of figures

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Figure 2 - <https://www.wikiart.org/en/joseph-beuys/fat-chair-1964-1>

Figure 3 - <https://www.wikiart.org/en/richard-long/river-avon-mud-drawing-1983>

Figure 4 - <https://www.archdaily.com/540338/olafur-eliasson-creates-an-indoor-riverbed-at-danish-museum>

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