

Visual Diary/Research Development

How can site-specific artwork transform a site itself?

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Marco Casagrande and Chen Zhen have both transformed the sites themselves, by displaying their work in a suitable space which encourages the audience and the viewers to visit the locations. Transforming the atmosphere, landscape and room of the locations, the artists are able to highlight the issues around society and the conditions of the environments. The site-specific nature of the artwork shows how different spaces can influence perception and how the audience experiences the artwork.

Sandworm (2012), see figure 1, is an organic structure, 45 metres long and 10 metres wide and high. Made by the artist Marco Casagrande, he describes the structure as "weak architecture" (Arch Daily, 2024), meaning it is fragile in terms of its material. Sandworm is built in the form of a creature which looks as if it is arising from the ground. Casagrande made this sculpture out of intricate and flexible willow mesh and sand, which he bent and intertwined throughout the sculpture. It has been created on the dunes of the Wendvine coastline, in Belgium where it shifts openly in-between architecture and the environment. Sandworm transforms the site by celebrating the site-specific conditions of Wendvine tidal beaches and the community and visitors can also engage in the space, whether that be to relax, meditate or go on a picnic. They have the opportunity to touch the willow and feel the breeze coming through them appreciating the environment they are in, in a different light. Within the interior of the Worm, visitors can also experience the soft light of the sunlight, which shines through the woody mesh, creating beautiful abstract shadows throughout the day (see figure 2). This work is meant to meditate on the nature around it, the materials which surrounds it connects this organic structure with the landscape which becomes part of this site as it integrates with the landscape while nature takes over.



Fig.1: *Sandworm*



Fig. 2 *Sandworm*

Purification Room (2000-2015) is an art installation created by Chen Zhen (see figure 3). The installation is a room in the form of a stage, showcasing mundane objects such as a cart, furniture, cables, shoes and used bottles, along with other items which are all covered with clay. The artist provokes the viewer to reflect on conditions within all areas of life, which Zhen has shown by creating communications to settle conflicts within society, nature, science and politics. Zhen has displayed this work in multiple locations and reconstructed the piece inside galleries such as the Centquatre in Paris (2014) and the Hanger Pirelli in Milan (2020). Displaying this work in different locations doesn't change the meaning of the work, it rather emphasizes the different human and environmental conditions of each place, making a social commentary on the permanence of life and the objects around us. The objects themselves which Zhen has displayed have created a dialogue between the work and the location itself; the objects have created a new life for themselves which '...provoke a new destiny...' (Afasia, 2024), a new life which shows the transition between the living and what comes after death. This installation would have to be inside of a gallery because outdoors it would disintegrate, within the gallery space it gives the installation a sense of claustrophobic feeling as it isolates itself from the space and the real world; the present and the cold future.



Fig.3: *Purification Room*

Both pieces of artwork are influenced by the environment they are in, with the location interacting with the perception and understanding of the piece, transforming the site also. Casagrande created his work in the natural environment whereas Zhen has presented his work inside galleries, the artists have chosen these locations on purpose and both pieces work within the space they are in. *Purification Room* made to look like a room within a room which gives the visitors an inside experience in the gallery along with the work itself. Both artists have been interested in humans and their environments which is included in their work. The location of *Sandworm* brings positivity to those who visit, because they can

experience nature through touching the structure and feeling the wind, it intentionally invites people in to interact with its surroundings, beautiful interior and exterior. It has given the site some recognition and its future goal is to keep the structure alive to grow along with nature. Whereas in the work of Zhen *Purification Room*, the location fits well with the work because it keeps the work isolated from the real world, these two works compare or rather differ, Sandworm shows the beginning and continuity of life whereas the Purification room draws attention to the end of life and its materials.

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