



EDITORIAL

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BOOK REVIEWS

Welcome to issue 44 of the LAN Journal - The Hopeful Earth issue. The title reflects the belief that, despite the increasingly ominous ecological and atmospheric situation, there are forces inherent in the natural and social world that give us hope. These are represented in an article on the work of American eco-artist Mel Chin on the interface between science and art, using the power of plants literally to clean up our human pollutants. Anna M. Heineman is a writer new to the Journal but we will hopefully publish further articles by her. As the news about bee colony collapse is coming in, it is great to be able to present the work and lifestyle of two human nomadic pollinators - Jed Picksley and Tomas Remiaz. They represent and chronicle the transforming power of that potent combination of idealism and practical hard work that is finding grass roots solutions to the demands of the future. Donna Sanders with Ben's Quest has devised a project involving looking, learning and experiencing the world of the Lowestoft shore and developing a conscious awareness of landscape in children in primary education. The final element of hope is thus to be found in education and the awareness of children that societies and landscapes evolve and mutate and that present, past and future are intertwined.

And don't forget the age of wood is returning after a short blip! You heard it here first. If you are interested in how people managed living and constructing their lives without oil (and you should be) you can attend the Summer Solstice Hands on History Show at Bentley Wildfowl and Motor Museum on June 21st and 22nd. I'll be there with member Clinton Chaloner, an oak log boat and a shelter inspired by Ice Age hunters!

Jeff Higley

Mel Chin's Revival Field: *The Postmodern American Landscape*

Anna Heineman

The landscape of America, ever since its inhabitation has been deforested, plowed up, and polluted. Throughout the generations, artists have visually documented their perspective in the changing of the land. Artists have been able to communicate the beauty and power of the landscape through their work, as well as lonely tree stumps and the aftermath of industrialization through aesthetically powerful scenes. However, the environmental issues that face this country today are ones that should not be overlooked, for pollution has the potential to destroy America's precious land.

During this contemporary era, new solutions are needed for ecological problems which this country faces. The United States disposes of over 200 million tons of waste each year. This garbage sits for the rest of its life in 3,500 landfills across America.¹ Landfills need to be away from residential areas, for methane gas and rotten odors are released into the air, and toxic chemicals leech into the ground.² A response to this problem is a work of art created by Mel Chin entitled *Revival Field* (Fig. 1). Chin's *Revival Field* is a Postmodern approach to the American landscape, for he creates a different language for this contemporary ecological problem which shows a reinterpretation of the landscape that is suitable to the time.

Mel Chin's work entitled *Revival Field*, created in 1990-91, is an ecological work which remediates toxic land. In this work, Chin incorporates an integration of art in the context of life issues by approaching an environmental crisis and offering a solution. Through the merging of science and art, Chin is able to educate others in alternative and creative ways to counteract pollution. This cross-disciplinary approach between ecology and art is a solution to a very pertinent problem in our country, and the American landscape will suffer if there are not more such responses to these issues.

Through the merging of science and art, Chin is able to educate others in alternative and creative ways to counteract pollution.



Figure 1: Mel Chin, *Revival Field*, 1990-91

Source: Art 21: Inc., "Mel Chin: *Revival Field*," *Public Broadcast System* (2001-2005), <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/chin/clip2.html> (accessed October 31, 2006).

Mel Chin created *Revival Field*, in collaboration with Rufus L. Chaney, in order to clean up waste from the soil at the Pig's Eye landfill in St. Paul, Minnesota.³ Chaney is a distinguished research scientist at the United States Department of Agriculture and agreed to assist in this artistic project. Chin and Chaney worked together to create a piece, sponsored by the Walker Art Center in cooperation with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, which would remediate the contaminated land which was infected with zinc, lead, and cadmium.⁴ The Pig's Eye landfill is located on the Mississippi River floodplain. The landfill was only in operation from 1956-1972, where it accumulated waste from the eastern part of the metropolis. According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, over the time the landfill was in use, 8.3 million cubic yards of waste were dumped in the 250 acre area.⁵ From 1977-1985, the dump site was also used for a place to dispose sludge ash. There was approximately 236,000 cubic yards of ash which was dumped on top of the old garbage during this time. Not surprisingly, in 1989, this landfill was listed on the state's Superfund program, which deals with places where "hazardous waste poses a

potential or actual threat to health or the environment.”⁶ Not only do these wastes pollute the land, but the land is connected to Pig’s Eye Lake, which has been tested for high levels of lead, boron, cobalt, aluminum, zinc, ammonia, chloride, and mercury.⁷ Because of the pollution that the landfill has caused, this inspired Chin to create work to bring awareness to this issue at hand.



Figure 2: *Revival Field*, A view of the artist plotting the land.
Source: Barbara C. Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies* (New York : Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992), 110.

Chin came up with the design and the framework for *Revival Field* at the Pig’s Eye landfill. The actual artwork is 60 feet across, and is placed in a 300 acre landfill (Fig. 2).⁸ The particular site that they chose had toxic soil which was filled with heavy metal leakage, with some of it coming from cadmium that has drained out of batteries. The “field” is a circular gate which is circumscribed around a square. The gate is necessary because the toxicity of the soil makes it hazardous.⁹ As Sally Kuzma noted in her article written in *Art Criticism*, the gate symbolizes that “it is no Eden; it is a danger zone, a warning place sprouting barbed wire on its perimeter. The seriousness and simplicity of the task at

A mandala is a generic term for a plan which represents the cosmos or universe.

hand are visible in these forms.”¹⁰ The interior circle’s shape can be symbolic in many ways. The circle is a symbol of nature’s purity, cosmic diagrams, or even the scope of a rifle.¹¹ It has also been likened to a mandala which can be seen in the Aztec calendar stone, Tibetan religions forms, Indian stupas, Voodoo iconography, and Chinese bronze shields.¹² A mandala is a generic term for a plan which represents the cosmos or universe. The circle and square together can be seen as symbols of heaven and earth, victim and healer, evil and good, ancient and modern, earth and sky.¹³ This imagery is shown to be cross-cultural and symbolic in having a particular axis with which everything centers around.

Inside the circle, Chin incorporated a large X, which marks this particular site for remediation (Fig. 3). The circle’s X created four distinct quadrants. Each one of the four quadrants, along with being symbolic, is also functional to separate

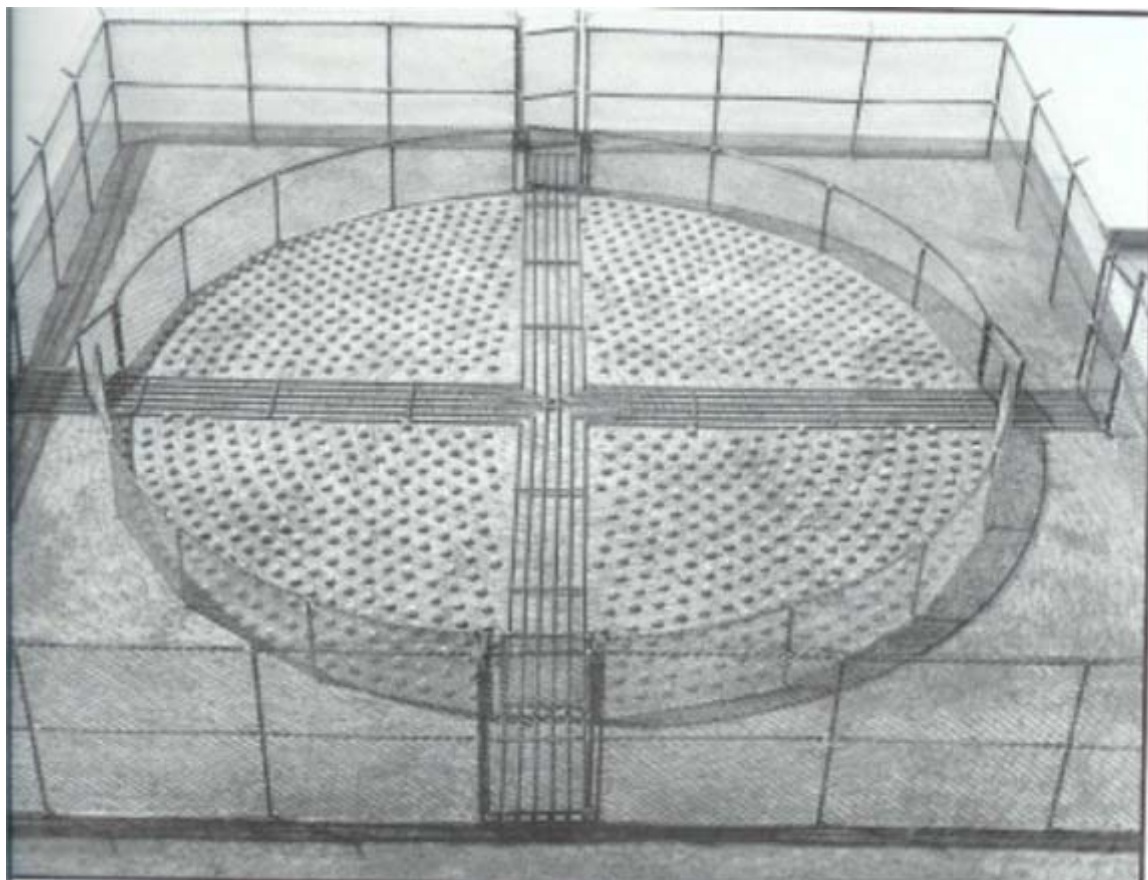


Figure 3 : *Revival Field*, maquette, 1990

Source : Barbara C. Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies* (New York : Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992), 109.

the types of plants needed for testing. Six types of plants, as well as two pH and two fertilizer tests, were placed in each quadrant (Fig. 4). Chin and Chaney used plants called "hyperaccumulators." The hyperaccumulators use a root system which takes zinc and cadmium out of the soil and stores them in their leaves. There were six different types of plants used: two different forms of alpine pennycress (*thlaspi caerulescens*), bladder campion (*silene cucubalis*), hybrid corn (*zea mays*), red fescue (*festuca rubra*), and romaine lettuce (*lactuca sativa*).¹⁴ Due to the biology of the



Figure 4: *Revival Field*, A view during July

Source: Barbara C. Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992), 98.

plants, they are able to take out the metals from the soil and store them in their leaves.¹⁵ Towards the end of the growing season, the plant would have absorbed about 20-40% heavy metal into its leaves. Once the plants were ready for harvest – which Chin and Chaney collected like hay – the plants were burned and the metals could be collected from the ash.¹⁶ According to Chaney, this is a recycling of metal, for "the ash is similar to commercial ore."¹⁷ Chaney also claims that these contaminants will stay in the soil for centuries unless removal takes place.¹⁸ Between the minds of the

scientist and the artist, the *Revival Field* – the postmodern American landscape – was brought into fruition.

Chin's work is heavily rooted in the Postmodern era. During the 1980s and 90s, art no longer needed to be created in a purely formalized manner in order for it to be considered quality work. According to H. H. Arnason, "Postmodernism implied a dissatisfaction with the narrow confines modernity seemed to have imposed on art, apparently promoting the accomplishments of white, male artists of European descent and refusing to admit social and political concerns as viable concerns of 'high' art."¹⁹ During this age, an artist no longer needs museum walls in order to get his or her work noticed. The landscape – or ironically in Chin's case, a landfill – can be used as the basis for a work of art.

Artists have worked directly with the landscape for centuries, thus this ecological concept is not unique to Chin. However, recent artists who worked with the land created a movement called "environmental art," which erupted in the 1960s. This definition is easily confused with the genre Chin is associated with called "ecological art." Environmental art consists of those artists who manipulate and create work in the environment around them. Because the work was not often available to the public, the work circulated as photographs and drawings.²⁰ Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, created in 1970 in the Great Salt Lake, or Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral creations made from leaves or branches are two examples of work from this genre (Fig. 5). Although both men created aesthetically pleasing work upon the landscape, neither artist made a statement about eco-activism or the earth itself. Instead they just use the land as a canvas.

Chin, by contrast, belongs to a genre of artists known as "ecological artists." These artists, "provide a unique approach to problem solving and offers artists a new way to synthesize art and nature."²¹ Patricia Johanson is an ecological artist who creates work in urban settings to help reclaim damaged ecologies (Fig. 6).²² Other examples of artists include Helen and Newton Harrison, who have used maps, hung on museum walls, to show "the arbitrary nature of national boundaries and the way they often hinder ecologically responsible thinking (Fig. 7)."²³ Although artwork with

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Figure 5: Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970

Source: Michael Archer, *Art Since 1960, New Edition*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 91.

years, today, it is vital for artists to create work to show viewers how fragile our landscapes are, and to propose ways to help remediate them.

Chin's idea in *Revival Field* was to create a garden, cultivated carefully in a place that life has been stifled. Chin's process of creation can be seen as similar to a sculptor. Chin, claims, "If Michelangelo takes a block of marble and starts to make a *David*, he carves it and carves it. The art is this idea transformed into reality. But what happens if your material isn't marble, but a toxic, dead medium – earth that can't sustain life? Scientific process, not artistic process, has to be the tool. To take that soil and make it live again, to sculpt a diverse ecosystem from it – that to me is beautiful."²⁴ Although gardens depend largely on science in order to grow, the aesthetic outcome

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can still be seen as a work of art.

Although this marriage between science and art in Chin's *Revival Field* is seemingly obvious, controversies around the concept almost hindered the project. Chin originally received a \$10,000 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant for the project from a fund entitled "Artist's Projects: New Forms." However, the chief of the NEA, John Frohnmeyer, initially denied Chin the money due to the fact that Chin's creation was not art.²⁵ In an interview, Chin claimed that the case was unfair for numerous reasons. First, it was not the NEA as a group who denied the project, for Chin's proposal had been passed by his peers and the national council. The problem was the auto-



Figure 6: Patricia Johanson, *Sagittaria Platyphylla*, Dallas, Texas, 1981-86

Source: Caffyn Kelley, *Art and Survival: Patricia Johanson's Environmental Projects*, (Salt Spring Island, British Columbia: Islands Institute, 2006), 21.

cratic decision made by John Frohnmeyer who initially went against the panel and rejected the proposal which led to the denial of funding for *Revival Field*.²⁶

The NEA grants are important for more than their mone-

tary value. Their mission is “dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education.”²⁷ Worth more than a dollar amount, NEA funding offers clout in the art world. In an editorial article written to the *Village Voice*, the former director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, David Ross, claimed, “I’ve never gotten a corporate grant without first getting an NEA grant.... The NEA is the most significant form of validation

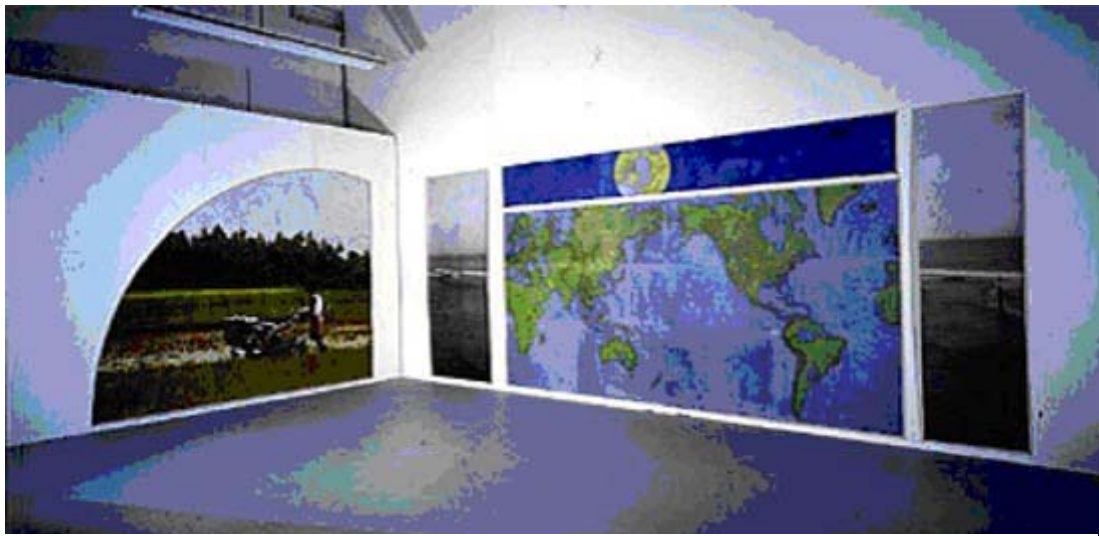


Figure 7: Newton and Helen Meyer Harrison, an image from *The Lagoon Cycle*, 1985.

Source: Newton and Helen Meyer Harrison, *The Lagoon Cycle*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1985), 76.

for getting funding from corporations and foundations.”²⁸ Thus, the NEA grant was very important for Chin to receive in order to create the *Revival Field*.

Frohnmeier’s original disapproval came because he believed Chin’s *Revival Field* did not possess aesthetic content, and that it was “science, not art.”²⁹ Although the majority of the panel members backed Chin’s ideas, a few voted against it because Chin’s grant contained “activism” and had “left-leaning motives.”³⁰ One panel member, Joseph Epstein – a conservative editor of the *American Scholar* – is to have said in response to Chin’s proposal, “I sniff politics.”³¹

In rebuttal to the panel, Chin claimed that his work is “not meant to make anybody do anything; it’s meant to present the case, to allow things to happen.”³² In response to Frohnmeier’s

claim that the project lacked aesthetic merit, Chin responded in an editorial in New York City's *Village Voice*, saying: "I'm just tackling something that's under the ground that you can't see, but it's sculptural material; it's heavy metals. I'm going to carve that with this elegant tool: plants. . . .The basic sculpturing process is invisible, based on a scientific premise that I thought was extremely poetic and extremely pragmatic."³³ Through persistence, Chin was able to eloquently defend his *Revival Field*, claiming the work indeed had artistic value.

A positive aspect which came from the NEA denial was the outside publicity his work gained. The highly reputable *Science* magazine published an article entitled, "NEA Dumps on Science Art."³⁴ *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Star Tribune*, *Newsweek*, and even *Fund Raising Management* were just some of many newspapers and journals who published articles about the NEA's denial of Chin's project.³⁵ In the science realm, according to Chin's partner Rufus Chaney, the publication about the rejection of the grant helped him get his research noticed because it "spread the concept to the scientific community a year ahead of the normal path where publications of the results of *Revival Field* would reach other scientists in peer-reviewed journals."³⁶ Because this made national news, an arranged meeting allowed Chin to talk directly to John Frohnmeyer himself, and this ended in the reinstating of the grant, and *Revival Field* was granted the \$10,000 from the NEA.³⁷

Chin was not concerned with placing his idea of *Revival Field* in an "art" or "science" box. In an interview, he claimed:

I suppose I understood its clarity as an art work and purpose as a scientific tool from the beginning. I saw it more as a series of actions that had to be completed. One might deduce that we live in a world that is both fragmented and compartmentalized. In the future I hope a revived landscape would make it difficult to know that a physical *Revival Field* ever existed.³⁸

Because he was solely concerned with the physical outcome and not the labeling of his work, Chin was able to create a cross-disciplinary

project that was able to reach others outside of the art realm.

Although Chin was eager to cross the two disciplines, Chaney, the scientist, was initially apprehensive to merge art with science. At the Ronald Feldman Gallery in 1992, Chaney told of his beginning apprehensions saying that scientists do not like to collaborate with artists, environmentalists, or activism. He claimed, "The first thing we want to do is to protect our professional status – we don't want [an artist] to screw up our science."

³⁹ Chaney agreed to help with the *Revival Field* only because most of the funding for environmental research from the government had been dwindling since 1983 during the Reagan administration, and continued into the George H. W. Bush years. According to Chaney, "People were laid off or reassigned to other projects. I stopped working on environmental things I'd been researching for fifteen years."⁴⁰ He had a collection of seeds which he wanted to test to see if they, in fact, could be hyperaccumulators in the field, for previously they had only been tested in the lab. However, he had no funding for his project.⁴¹

Because of this cross-disciplined approach, the artwork and scientific results helped the artist and the scientist respectively. Chaney realized that no manipulation of data would occur, thus it would be a scientific project. *Revival Field* became a way for Chaney to do his experimentations with ecological measures in a way that was not tied to the Reagan and Bush administrations. Although some skepticism among his peers occurred about a scientist's collaboration with an artist, Chaney claimed he was not concerned with his reputation. Instead, he was only concerned with the outcome of his research.⁴² Due to the favorable results of this project, Chaney was able to engage in scientific discussions and publications, which enabled him to delve into the research he was passionate about, yet was struggling with the lack of government funding. Once Chaney had a grant – ironically from an arts program and not from the well endowed sciences – the money was able to materialize these ecological ideas. Since then, he has been able to continue on in his environmental research even to this present day.⁴³

Likewise, because the *Revival Field* was funded by the

Art, through time, has been used to educate others, to spread ideas, and to encourage change.

NEA, sponsored by the Walker Art Museum, and the results from the data were published in scientific magazines, Chin was able to use this scientific evidence to bring to art circles. The work was discussed in journals such as *Art Criticism*, *Art News*, *Journal of Contemporary Art*, and *Art in America* to name a few. Therefore, the "ecological art" genre was able to reach artists, art historians, and other creative minds to provoke more people to create work of this ilk.

Due to the success of the first *Revival Field*, Chin created two more fields: one in Palmerton, Pennsylvania, and other in the Netherlands. The Pennsylvania field was created in 1991 in a Hazardous Waste Federal Superfund site and helped with the remediation of the land. The other was a replicated field test that was in rural Netherlands, created for an exhibition featuring "green" artists in the spring of 1992.⁴⁴ The site in the Netherlands was created on non-toxic soil, which allowed people to visit and see his creation. Because there were three sites instead of one, this allowed more publicity and notoriety about his ideas.

Art, through time, has been used to educate others, to spread ideas, and to encourage change. Chin's *Revival Field* is a prime example of art used in this manner. However, what makes Chin different from artists of the past is that through his use of art and science, his work encourages ecological sustainability. Those who are working to promote sustainability take the responsibility of "finding alternatives to the practice that got us into the trouble in the first place; it is necessary to rethink agriculture, shelter, energy use, urban design, transportation, economics, community patterns, resource use, forestry, the importance of wilderness, and our central values."⁴⁵ Because the goal for Chin, on a very small scale, is to restore the landscape, the work's aim is to bring back the native plants and animals. According to Don Krug, "in this way art, aesthetics, ecology, and culture become inseparable."⁴⁶ Ecological sustainability, which Chin is preaching, depends on more than just the artist who dreams up the idea. According to ecologists Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan, sustainability needs a community to come together in order for ecological strides to happen. They claim that "sustainability is an

idea that absorbs our genuine hope to create cultures and places with enough integrity to persist for our grandchildren and beyond.”⁴⁷ When artists collaborate with members of communities, creative energies can be used to approach the ecological issues at hand.

By using art as a vehicle, Chin is able to educate others about land remediation. Through publications, interviews, and articles, Chin spreads his ideas about ways to create a healthy landscape. Because Chin was working closely with Chaney who was a well respected scientist, they were published in distinguished scientific journals. However, if this experiment was only created in a laboratory setting and published in journals that only they read, the ideas would only spread to those who are educated in the scientific realm. The results could only be understood to those who speak the language of science, for the article is not written in the vernacular.⁴⁸ For example, Chaney’s publication in the *Applied and Environmental Microbiology* journal is entitled, “Effects of Metal Phytoextraction Practices on the Indigenous Community of Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi at a Metal-Contaminated Landfill.”⁴⁹ Obviously, this article is incomprehensible to those who do not understand the “biological” language which scientists speak. However, due to the collaboration between the two minds, Chin was able to bring the work outside the science circle and describe the results in layman’s terms.

Along with publications, interviews, and numerous sites which disseminated the information to others, Chin’s project also involved interactive teaching plans that educators can download from the internet. One example is the “Global Positioning: Exploring Contemporary World Art” project created by the Walker Museum of Art. This is a teacher’s guide designed for middle and high-school teachers for use in their classes to help educate students about art, and how artists are approaching the “complexities of living in a global world, and as a result their work often transcends cultural and political borders.”⁵⁰ Chin’s *Revival Field* is also affiliated with the Public Broadcast System which has used his project, along with other artists’ work, to spread the idea of ecology. The interview with Chin discusses the

The interview with Chin discusses the ways in which art can be intertwined with science, and how sustainability can only happen when numerous people come together to create change.



Mel Chin, 2005. Photo courtesy of HK Nagge.

ways in which art can be intertwined with science, and how sustainability can only happen when numerous people come together to create change.

As shown through this paper, Mel Chin's *Revival Field* has incorporated the aspects of art, merged with life, that state an ecological issue of our time. Through his ideas, Chin has created scientific artwork as a tool to be used to discuss the overflowing of our landfills. This cross-cultural approach helped to disseminate the information on a larger scale. Due to his project, Chin was able to widely spread his hopeful and optimistic ideas for landscape remediation in polluted areas. Chin's *Revival Field* will hopefully provoke change in thinking and in action, and inspire others to create in the same manner. Perhaps if more artists continue in this vein, the American landscape will never cease being the beautiful and bountiful land it once was.

1. Sharon Borglin, Curt Oldenburg, and Terry Hazen, "Landfill Problems," *Lawrence Berkley National Lab* (2002), http://www-esd.lbl.gov/ECO/smart_store/research.html (accessed November 21, 2006).
2. Victor B. Scheffer, *The Shaping of Environmentalism in America* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991), 187.
3. *Revival Field* was sponsored by the Walker Museum of Art in Minneapolis, and was maintained by the museum from 1991-1993. After 1993, the site was left to nature. Chin has two study drawings which are in the Walker's collection. They can both be viewed on the Walker Museum's website. This information was given to me by the archivist, Jill Vuchetich, who works at the Walker.
4. According to Vuchetich, "The artwork was not owned by the Walker as it was a conceptual work existing on a site owned by the State of Minnesota. The site was not open to the public as it was located in a highly toxic landfill. There were coordinated media visits to the site including periodic photographic opportunities." This information was given to me through email correspondence with the Walker on October 31, 2006.
5. "M.P.C.A. Agency Wide Fact Sheet." *Global Positioning: Exploring Contemporary World Art* (August 19, 1991), <http://collections.walkerart.org/item/text/559> (accessed October 11, 2006).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Barbara C. Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992), 109.
9. Ibid., 111. In order to create this, many hours of research was done, as well as government instructions that both Chin and Chaney had to have Hazardous Materials Incident Response Training because of the toxicity levels in the soil
10. Sally Kuzma, "Myth-Making and Myth Breaking: Multiple Meanings in Mel Chin's *Revival Field*," *Art Criticism* 10, no. 2 (1994), 84.
11. Ibid., 82.
12. Ibid., 84.
13. Lucy Lippard, "The Edge that Cuts. . . .," in *Inescapable Histories: Mel Chin*, eds. Helen Nagge and Deni McIntosh McHenry, (Kansas City, MO: Mid-American Arts Alliance,

- 1996), 9. Chin is quick to distinguish himself from the earlier artists who created 'land art', such as Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. Chin is not interested in formally shaping the earth from the outside, but instead altering the earth "from within."
14. This information came from Chaney's scientific description from the Walker Art Museum website found at: Walker Art Center, "Online Content: Science Hyperaccumulators," (2003), <http://collections.walkerart.org/item/text/560> (accessed October 11, 2006).
 15. The alpine pennycress was the species that was found to be the best at removing cadmium, zinc, and lead from the soil. The studies from this found that the plant could accumulate around 30,000 parts per million of zinc which would then be stored in its leaves. Chaney estimates that the pennycress plant can remove about 125 kilograms of zinc per hectare per year, and 2 kilograms cadmium, if tended to appropriately. A hypothetical plot of land with 2,000 kilograms of zinc in the soil and 20-30 kilograms of cadmium would take a hyperaccumulating pennycress 16 years to detoxify the soil. If a plant was bioengineered to absorb more metals, Chaney claims that the time would be reduced to only four years to create safe soil. This information is from the USDA government website: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/nov95/cleanse1195.htm>.
 16. From a PBS interview with Chin entitled, *Art 21: Inc.*, "Mel Chin: Revival Field," *Public Broadcast System*, (2001-2005), <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/chin/clip2.html> (accessed October 31, 2006).
 17. Don Comis, "Metal Scavenging Plants to Cleanse the Soil," *Agricultural Research* 88 (November 1995), 4.
 18. Ibid.
 19. H. H. Arnason and Marla F. Prather, *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*, Fourth Edition ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 699.
 20. H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art, Fifth Edition*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2003), 612.
 21. Matilsky, 57.
 22. Caffyn Kelley, *Art and Survival: Patricia Johanson's Environmental Projects* (Salt Spring Island, British Columbia: Islands Institute, 2006), 3.
 23. Eleanor Heartney, "Mapping a Better World," *Art in America* 91, no. 10 (October 2003): 114. The image on page 17

depicts a map of planet Earth and the hypothetical new shapes of the continents if all the glaciers and icebergs at the North and South Poles would melt. If this would happen, the Harrisons show the catastrophic results: a large lake would form in the Amazon river region, Florida and California would disappear, and much of Australia would be under water.

24. "Mel Chin: Revival Field," *Creative Capital Foundation* (2003), http://channel.creative-capital.org/project_297.html (accessed October 12, 2006).
25. John Frohnmeyer was the chief of the NEA from 1989 to 1992 and was appointed by George H. W. Bush.
26. Mel Chin, "A Composite Interview with Mel Chin," in *Inescapable Histories, Mel Chin*, eds. Helen Nagge and Deni McIntosh McHenry, (Kansas City, MO: Mid-American Arts Alliance, 1996), 41.
27. This mission statement came directly from the NEA website: <http://www.nea.gov/about/Facts/AtAGlance.html>.
28. Richard Regen, "Flinching and Fear: Is the Art World Doing Jesse Hel's Work for Him?" *The Village Voice* 27, no. 1 (1989), 29. David Ross has since been appointed director of the Whitney Museum.
29. Kuzma, 86.
30. *Ibid.*, 87. _____
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.* Another artist, Martha Clark, who was doing work on endangered species at this time was denied funding from the NEA. Kuzma responded in her article, "One wonders what exactly is so threatening about work that comments on ecological issues."
33. *Ibid.* Found in: Kim Levin, "Eco-Offensive Art," *The Village Voice* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 33.
34. Constance Holden, "NEA Dumps on Science Art," *Science* 250 (December 14, 1990): 1515.
35. A few of many publications about the denial include: Barbara Gamarekian, "Frohnmeyer Approves Environmental Project," *New York Times* (February 4, 1991): 11; Mary Abbe, "Sculptor eloquently confronts problems," *Star Tribune*, (November. 8, 1990); Barbara Gamarekian, "Frohnmeyer Approves Environmental Project," (February 4, 1991): 11; William Olcott, "NEA Funds Art Projects," *Fund Raising Management* (February 1991): 23; Mary Hager, "New Hopes for Old Plants," *Newsweek*, Focus (November 23, 1992): 1.

36. Chin, 42.
37. Ibid.
38. In an interview with Thom Meredith: Kuzma, 35.
39. Spoken at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York City on November 11, 1992. This was quoted in Kuzma, 89. Chin originally approached Chaney after reading about Chaney's research in a technology magazine. In regards to Chin's first impression of Chaney, Chin stated, "I knew I'd found the right person. It was also apparent from the first conversation that I had a lot to learn. In other words, I knew I'd have to speak the language of art to some, and know some of the language of science for you." This was spoken in an interview with Chin and Chaney in Chin, 40.
40. Kuzma, 89.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Chaney has continued on this work ever since. His latest publication about hyperaccumulating plants is entitled "Correcting Micronutrient Deficiency Using Metal Hyperaccumulators: Alyssum Biomass as a Natural Product for Nickel Deficiency Correction," *HortScience* 41, no. 5 (2006): 1231-1234. For a list of all his publications relating to ecology, see his government website at: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/pandp/people/people.htm?personid=949>.
44. This show was organized by Maria Rosa Boezem and Jouke Kleerebezem. The exhibition was in a 200 acre park, and featured 23 artists from around the world. The artists had to revolve their work around the theme of the park as "an architectural and ideological environmental for contemporary art, the musicological transformation of nature and the environment and the commercialization of public space." However, most of the artists, aside from Chin, did not take ecology into consideration.
45. Eleanor Heartney, "Skeptics in Utopia," *Art in America* 80, no. 7 (July 1992): 76.
46. Don Krug, "Ecological Restoration: Mel Chin," *Revival Field*, (2006), <http://www.greenmuseum.org/c/aen/Issues/chin.php> (accessed October 18, 2006).
47. Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan, *Ecological Design* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996). 4.
48. Another scientific journal publication by Alexander Felson and Steward T.A. Pickett featured Chin and Chaney's work using the idea that "designed experiments" are more bene-

- ficial in urban environments than just ecological experiments. Alexander J. Felson and Steward T.A. Pickett, "Designed experiments: New Approaches to studying urban ecosystems," *Front Ecol Environ* 3, no. 10 (2005): 549-556.
49. Teresa E. Pawlowski, Rufus L. Chaney, Mel Chin, and Iris Charvat, "Effects of Metal Phytoextraction Practices on the Indigenous Community of Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi at a Metal-Contaminated Landfill," *Applied and Environmental Microbiology* 66, no. 6 (June 2000), 1231-1234.
50. One example can be found at: <http://globalpositions.walkerart.org/TeachersGuide.pdf>. This is a teacher's guide for classroom use. Another example is found through the PBS website: <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/chin/>. This is another website for classroom use, which also includes video footage of an interview of Chin.

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The Art of Engaged Nomadism and the Transition Town Network

Jed Picksley

An introduction to the work of a remarkable couple who are engaging with the development of the kind of social and ecological ideas we will all be engaging with of necessity in the decades ahead.

Jeff Higley

I was delighted to taste the diversity of the LAN Journal especially in its recent reference to The Abundance Project in Sheffield. The same process of discovery, gathering, distribution, empowerment and reconnection over previously forgotten fruit, happens in Walthamstow and Hackney too, under the cheekier label of "The Scrumping Project"- an initiative of Organic Lea www.organiclea.org.uk, the Forest Recycling Project and the Hornbeam Centre.



desk-top, street corner, apple pressing!

Part of "The Scrumping Project" in Walthamstow, London, at the Hornbeam Centre.

I worked for that project from September to November 2007 and will do so again in 2008, though I shall rarely visit London in between. Myself and my partner, permaculture designer Tomas Remiarz, are nomadic artists, designers, workers, facilitators and pollinators cycling all around Britain each year. Our life is a long stream of short-term commitments focusing on permaculture projects [footnote 2 www.permaculture.org.uk], community allotments [3 The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens] social centres, conservation groups and gatherings of activists [4 The Camp for Climate Action, Big Blether etc]. Our broad, self-designed and constantly evolving remit is to connect people with their local environments and empower them to observe and value the resource networks they live in.



Permaculture plot with excellent low-impact house in Devon.

We have chosen this itinerant and massively varied life, as it seems most appropriate to us in this time of cultural transition. The diverse movements around ecological responsibility and self-empowerment are slowly growing within the current era of disconnection and commodification.

This optimistic overview of the British Isles is an extremely warm one. We tend to engage with groups and individuals who are themselves,

already engaged in social justice, climate responsibility, community empowerment and cultural sustainability. We are rarely exposed to the pessimism or predatory-capitalist consumerism of the most well-paid and the least well-paid residents of these islands, who share the affliction of No Time To Think.

When people can raise their heads from individual survival, and perceive the world around them, amazing projects are born. We spend a lot of time in West Yorkshire, particularly working with a group called Treesresponsibility [5] www.treesresponsibility.com]. Drawing a distinction between ownership of and access to land, they have mobilised local schools, organisations, religious groups, company staff and environmental teams in the reforestation of the Calder Valley. Not seeking to own any land themselves but with symbiotic relationships with diverse land owners, the group has planted future orchards and forests with a total of about 100,000 trees so far. All abilities can be catered for when they host tree-planting weekends throughout the winter. In the summer-time the group campaigns on the effects, causes, and social issues around climate change, with many publications about what we can do in our own lives. A particularly appealing publication is about how to start up your own treesresponsibility group, wherever you are.



**Mulching with whatever is abundant
In this case, slate in Wales**

Most people think in terms of roots and foundation, not migration and adaptation, and reflecting this, many projects we spend time with do own the land they work with. In a lovely further complication of the issue though, Co-ed Marros [6] own so much ex-plantation ex-forestry commission land that they have devised new public paths and re-opened old public rights of way within it. They also have strong relationships with local schools, all pupils engaging in seed saving, tree growing, tree planting and facilitated play and art in the woods, at some point within their curriculums.

We are frequently asked why we don't settle into our own permaculture land or community project, to which the best answer is, we know so many struggling projects, why initiate a new one! Spreading our energy around means that we are not indispensable anywhere, but we are valuable everywhere. Time to ourselves comes on the cycling and camping journeys between projects, and freedom from responsibility is always available, though we rarely embrace it for more than a couple of days! We enjoy the diversity and intensity of our work, and always find the will to move on, taking the excellent practices we find with us. Pollination really is our favourite metaphor, but unlike the wind, bees and butterflies, we won't last forever, and our work is never really the same, season to season. We are not unique, many people living in a similar symbiosis (with those who do take long-term responsibility for land, projects, or people) use the Willing Workers On Organic Farms (WWOOF) network [7] as a starting point to develop their own migrations.



Yes it's a banana plant. In London. We're waiting to see it flower. Growing Communities in Hackney have taken on these council-owned but unused greenhouses to extend their salad growing season.

With this United Kingdom overview, we can confidently spot trends and patterns. A recent development amongst thousands of those whose life circumstances afford them Time To Think, is the blossoming Transition Town Network [8]]. First developed by Rob Hopkins after a two year permaculture design course in Kinsale, Ireland, the movement is spreading fast, and there's probably a group near you. There are various websites outlining this method of positive community activism, so I shall not attempt to describe it in full here. In short though, permaculture activists and environmental campaigners have found the simple economic story of Peak Oil (the point at which global supply of oil can only descend, though demand will increase – a tipping point we may already have crossed) a more effective engagement tool than environmental warnings.

The old fossil fuel economy is founded on free energy; fossilised sunlight laid down millennia ago in biological and mineral processes which will never be repeated. When we think about how this affects our species, there are issues all around us. Looking at our current town-systems, it is clear that we must design new structures for transport, food, buildings, education and welfare. If we do not engage with a graceful withdrawal from the carbon economy, we will have no choice but to be dragged along with a chaotic retreat. We have to arrange our descent ourselves, because governments and councils are not acting quickly enough.

Spreading this message of the inevitability of change, Transition Town groups try to engage whole communities in the formulation of an Energy Descent Action Plan.



Simple but effective solar cooker, reaches boiling in an hour, and stays there as long as you like. Excellent for beans and pulses. Boiling water is a piece of cake.

The lessons to be learned from each other for this process are enormous and diverse. Even in our carbon-addicted British societies everyone has something to offer, and everyone has much to learn.

The most far-on group I know, is Transition Town Totnes. Examples of their ambition are the drive to make Totnes the nut tree capital of Britain and the setting up of a local currency, independent of the aggressive and unethical habits of multi-national banks. The Totnes Pound is an active experiment in keeping energy circulating locally, including strategies to discourage hoarding (stagnation of money/energy). The group considers itself to be past the stage of simple dissemination of information, and is now formed into working groups (education, housing, transport, buildings etc) developing the Energy Descent Action Plan for Totnes.



Mending a fence in Wales to stop sheep nibbling the young trees. The sheep don't mind getting their feet wet, but I avoid it!

When I met Jeff Higley recently, he was particularly interested in my analysis of when Transition Town groups have failed. Instances of failure hold teaching just as strongly as instances of success. I shall mention names, but do appreciate that these examples are my own versions of the multi-faceted truth, and are already out of date. The idea, not necessarily in the same human minds but the fluid idea itself, is reborn to overcome setbacks constantly



Herbs drying in the loft. Even the most exposed and over-cultivated soils can usually support herbs which slowly break up and revitalise soil that has been stripped and compressed by years of industrial monoculture.

Transition Town Networks begin by harnessing existing groups in a locality. Diversity is strength, or, in more ecological terminology, bio-diversity is eco-system-resilience. The most common problem in setting up Transition Town groups is that insufficient diversity leads to stalling, where blossoming could have occurred. For example, if everyone who came together under the Transition Town banner in one particular town knew about food growing, but no-one felt capable of approaching schools, councils or land owners, the initiative would stop there.

Lancaster is lucky enough to contain the facilitation, mediation and community empowerment group "Seeds For Change [9]", but the non-hierarchical working methods championed by that group clashed with the background of others in the emerging Transition Town Group. Consensus decision-making is at the heart of the approach for "Seeds For Change" but it was too new or too alien an idea for the whole community to embrace.

At the heart of some activist groups in Brighton is the very old idea of resistance and confrontation. Some activists wished to present current campaigns of resistance (for example the Rossport/Shell

campaign in North West Ireland [10] and the Welsh pipeline [11]) at a Transition Town meeting, but other individuals in the group vetoed the presentation. They explained that they wanted their Transition Network to be entirely solution-focused, with no reference to the loaded imagery of resistance, confrontation or fight. This was disappointingly inward-looking for the more traditional activists, who as a result have left the process.



Wild food, captured that morning!

Informing people about local free food and sustainable harvesting is very satisfying work, or an honest living can be made where local people are too busy to learn for themselves but will happily pay for fresh local produce.

Both these examples say something about Diversity. I am not claiming that the groups were trying to be too diverse, though that might be the filter through which some would analyse the problem. Rather there was insufficient flexibility, humility and time for people to learn new ways. Humility of course works both ways: people entering a group with new ideas need to respect the established culture of that group, while the group itself needs to stay open to the possibility of changing its culture, as it attracts new people. Learning does not always happen quickly. I am reminded of Kim Stanley Robinson's [12] metaphor of the flocking of birds: the whole flock can change direction together, but never at right angles, and every bird needs its own space. Our challenge as artists is to engage people at all levels of influence and understanding.

From my own perspective, in all my fields of work and interest, I am convinced that engaged people are the limiting resource on any endeavor. Funding, space, materials and projects are all easy to find in this country, provided you find or can become the engaged humanity for the core.

Since writing that update, Jed and partner Tomas cycled from Bangor down to Bristol visiting 4 excellent permaculture projects in Wales on the way. Each one of these could happily absorb a few months of their energy, which they intend to give, over the next year or three! For the next few months though they're working for the activist and education eco-village in Kent near Kingsnorth Power station, which will be set up as part of the Camp for Climate Action in early August. www.climatecamp.org.uk



Spreepark, the old East German Alton Towers, abandoned and overgrown but now in slow, beautiful development with a local Permaculture group.

- 1 www.organiclea.org.uk
- 2 www.permaculture.org.uk
- 3 the federation of city farms and community gardens
www.farmgarden.org.uk
- 4 www.climatecamp.org.uk and Scotland-specific
www.earthrites.org.uk/weegibber/
- 5 www.treesresponsibility.com/
- 6 www.coedmarros.com/
- 7 www.woof.org/woof_uk/links.html
- 8 www.transitiontowns.org/
- 9 www.seedsforchange.org.uk
- 10 www.indymedia.ie/article/82086
- 11 www.schnews.org.uk/archive/news576.htm
- 12 Kim Stanley Robinson is an American author specialising in near-future ecological intervention scenarios. His visions are as complete as any I've ever seen, including permaculture, psychology, politics, science, art, spirit...

Ben's Quest

Donna Sanders, Local Project Co-ordinator,
Museums, Libraries and Archives,
East of England

In the Autumn term of 2006 I was asked by my then Headteacher if I would be interested in working on a project to create some teaching materials for Year 3 and 4 pupils to enable them to use the Lowestoft Maritime Museum more effectively. I was very interested in being involved in the project and agreed to meet with the project leaders Stephanie Parmee and Lesley Walker, and another local Primary School Teacher Denise Harmer. It was decided that we would meet over a course of several days with volunteers from the museum spread over the Autumn and Spring Terms to discuss and create the materials. Denise and I would also be given the opportunity to use the Local Records Office for our research.

Our first meeting at the museum, which is housed in an old fisherman's cottage, was a daunting yet interesting one as neither Denise nor myself had used the museum before in our teaching. We therefore had to be introduced not only to Stephanie, Lesley and the volunteers from the museum [more of them later] but also to the collection itself. On that first day we were presented with a vast amount of visual, tactile and emotional information that we had to assimilate and process. Denise and I felt overwhelmed and somewhat burdened by our task. We went away with lots of information and a few ideas of where we might go with the project.

The next time we met we had all had an opportunity to think about what we had seen and heard and what we thought the project should involve. At this point Denise and I were given some very good advice by Lesley, who told us to think about the children in our own classes rather than all of the Year 3 and 4 children in Suffolk when we were thinking about what we wanted in the project. This made it much easier for us to think clearly and much more importantly plan work, which was aimed precisely at the children that we knew well and their abilities. The five of us (the volunteers from the museum had shrunk from three to one, but the one, Peter Parker the Chairman of the Museum was to prove our major asset) then set to work planning the project. We had been given an initial brief by the Primary Headteachers in the North Lowestoft Learning Network that our main aim was to raise the standards of writing for the pupils in Years 3 and 4 in our schools. As both Denise and I were at this time the Literacy Co-ordinators for our schools and well used to using Literacy skills across the wider curriculum, we felt confident that we would be able devise some teaching plans that we

could use with the children in our classes to fulfil this aim. However when we started to look at the avenues that we could go down; Literacy, Mathematics, History, Geography, Science, Design and Technology, ICT, Music, Art - we decided that we needed to focus on just two. Therefore we finally opted for Literacy and History especially as we knew that this could link well to the Local History Unit that the children would be following in the National Curriculum later that academic year. By the end of the day we had decided our children would need work that was accessible, interesting and had lots of practical elements. Denise and I were also emphatic that the project should increase the children's self-esteem and their pride in the place where they live.



At our next meeting we finally got down to the work of creating our 'story'. It was about a boy named Ben who had lived in Lowestoft but now lived in Aberdeen (his family had had to move there when Shell Oil relocated a few years before). Ben's grandmother had recently died and Ben and his father had found an old sea chest belonging to his grandmother that was full of family objects that Ben wanted to find out about. Ben would send a message to the children asking them to be detectives and to find out what the objects were and what they were used for. To do this the children would need to visit the museum to conduct some of their research for Ben. The children would be investigating four generations of a fictional family, (although we did give the family a familiar local surname) whose lives would be involved in all areas of local industry; fishing, boatbuilding, the oil industry and RNLI.

Our next task was to plan a museum visit, which would give the children meaningful experience of both history and landscape. Our main problem was that the museum is very small and is unable to cater for a normal class of school children at any one time, we therefore had to plan some activities outside the museum to enable the class teacher to divide the class into groups for their visit to the museum. We decided that we would need three separate activities; one group in the museum, one group undertaking The Scores Trail* and one group doing a Seafront Discovery Walk**.



The Lowestoft Scores Trail entails investigating ten Scores or paths which have been used for many hundreds of years by the local people of Lowestoft to access the shore area from Lowestoft Town which is built on a cliff. The local people would have needed to do this over generations to get to their place of work either on fishing boats, making and tending the nets or preparing, packing and curing the fish. Although many of the local people working in the fishing industry within the past 150 years would have lived in The Fishing Village which was on the beach itself until it was devastated by the 1953 floods. The word Score is thought to come from the Norse word Skor meaning Notch and each of the Scores has its own particular name and history. The Ravine, Cart Score, Lighthouse Score, Mariners' Score, Maltsters' Score and Herring Score are very evocative of times gone

past. The Scores are not used as much today for the purpose of accessing the beach as the local people tend to use their cars to do this rather than walk down or up the very steep Scores.



The Scores Trail was already available for teachers to use and therefore did not need any planning on our parts but the Sea-front Discovery Walk would be new and would need to be written by us. Lowestoft is fortunate to have an internationally recognised beach which often receives a Blue Flag for its cleanliness and facilities and is used regularly by the children of Lowestoft especially during the summer months, however the part of the beach that is adjacent to the Lowestoft Maritime Museum is not used much by families and Denise and I were sure was not used for investigation when they did visit the beach. We decided that this would be an excellent opportunity to involve the children in activities that they would not have done before when they visited the beach. Also Denise and I had been a little disappointed that we had not been able to develop any of the work connected with the landscape in the main project. This was an opportunity to get the children to explore the area outside in a new way, especially to make them aware of the landscape under the sea and the effect of the sea on the landscape and what changes, if any, had occurred.

The most important change to Lowestoft in the past few years has been the decline in the fishing industry and its impact on the

harbour area and the related industries. It is now rare to see fishing vessels put to sea although fish is still sold in the fish market most of this being flown down from Aberdeen. Denise and I also wanted the children to find out why there was a Birds Eye factory overlooking the beach. After the 1953 floods the Beach Village was no longer fit for habitation and the occupants were moved to houses further inland which was considered safer. The Birds Eye factory was then built on the old Beach Village site, and there is still evidence of the 1953 floods on and around the beach area. A sensory Seafront Discovery Walk was created with equipment backpacks containing everything that would be needed to undertake the activities; binoculars, wind socks, colour matching charts, stop watches, sea charts, scene matching photographs, compasses, pencils, clip boards and paper.

The children would be asked to use their various senses to find out about the Maritime history of the area, on the beach and out to sea. To help them there would be many objects in the area related to the past: anchors, anchor chains, cardinal buoys, drying racks, rudders, remnants of the old sea wall and a wonderful working lighthouse. They would look for evidence of the past, listen for the different sounds and detect the various smells around them. Also they would gain experience in using the equipment in the backpacks.

The project was trialled at the end of the Spring Term and officially launched in June 2007.

Since its launch the project has achieved a great deal of success, so much so that the Museum has had to create a second chest to satisfy the demand from schools and is also offering the loan of the Seafront Discovery Walk Backpacks for family use during the school holidays.

And what of the people who created the materials? Denise continues to work in her school, Stephanie and Lesley continue to support teachers in developing resources for their pupils and I have been engaged by MLA East of England to support schools in the use of the 'Ben's Quest' materials. Through this work two teachers have written their own teachers' plans to follow up the Seafront Discovery Walk [Land Detectives] where the children discover how the land was used in the past and how it has changed and also the effect on the people who lived in the area after the 1953 floods. These plans are now being used by other schools in the Lowestoft area and pupils from another school have created a digital movie travelogue of the seafront at Lowestoft. The feedback so far from teachers using these resources is very positive, with the main comments being that the children really enjoy the project especially learning new things about their town and its landscape through real experiences. Peter Parker and the volunteers at the museum meet regularly with teachers and their pupils and are actively involved in promoting and developing the 'Ben's Quest' materials.

The future also looks very positive. The Lowestoft Maritime Museum has received a National Lottery Grant to build a classroom attached to the museum and Peter and I hope to work together to create a stimulating learning environment and programme for the children of Lowestoft and the surrounding area. In addition MLA have provided funding to develop the 'Ben's Quest' materials for Foundation Stage and Year 5 and 6 pupils, and this will include creating plans for Geography and Design Technology. Investigating the local environment will finally become part of 'Ben's Quest'.

- * The Lowestoft Scores Trail. Waveney District Council
- ** Seafront Discovery Walk. Lowestoft Maritime Museum.
- *** Ben's Quest. Lowestoft Maritime Museum.



BOOK REVIEWS

VIEWING ART AT THREE LEVELS

ART IN ACTION.

Nature, creativity and our collective future

Natural World Museum, San Rafael, CA: Earth Aware Editions, 2007, hbk, 180pages, \$45, ISBN 978-1-932771-77-0, www.earthawareeditions.com

ARTFUL ECOLOGIES [papers from Art, Nature & Environment conference, 2006]

Research in Art, Nature & Environment RANE, University College Falmouth, 2007, 145pp. available free as pdf from <http://rane.falmouth.ac.uk/home.html> [printed edition pending]

ETHICS, PLACE & ENVIRONMENT vol. 10 nr., 3 October 2007 Special issue on Environmental & land art, ed. Emily Brady Colchester: Routledge, ISSN 1366-879X, www.tandf.co.uk

"The need to speak differently", urges Chris Desser, in an article on the Green Museum website [<http://greenmuseum.org>], "has never been so urgent; speaking differently is what artists do best." Involvement – or at least academic interest – in what we variously call environmental art, ecoart, etc. is spreading. It is, then, ironic that one of the best sources of ideas and commentary on the matter, the Green Museum, is having to solicit supporters to avoid closing its virtual doors. Heaven forbid! Meanwhile, exhibitions, publications, websites, and meetings come thick and fast. Such art may not have yet impressed itself on the Wider Public, and it is looked on askance by parts of the Art world, but it is present in a spectrum of situations from coffee-tables to research programmes. Here are samples from three points of the range. In their different ways, each has plenty to offer. I shall save the colour photos until last.

I.

Do not expect many pictures in the themed issue of *Ethics, place & environment*. This is a geography-oriented academic journal – which is not said to put you off, though it is a relatively strong read. This is not surprising: it is concerned with 'I think this is what is, and why' arguments, rather than merely 'I like / don't like it' statements. Research into environment & art now surfaces in many interesting places. It is

encouraging, for instance, that the current issue of *Environmental Ethics* includes a contribution to the debate on environmental art as an affront to nature. Though in their specialised language, such writings point even a mere browser to the deeper facets of environmental art, so often left unnoticed or ignored by practitioners, their public, and indeed critics.

The papers begin with Sheila Lintott exploring the complexity of making ethical evaluations of land art, Or, indeed, of Art: even Michelangelo's 'David' can be looked at disapprovingly, remembering that even a masterpiece has resulted in a deeper hole in the ground and a tad more waste or pollution. John Fisher echoes the concern for a broad basis for evaluation for artworks which "unlike representations of nature ... self-consciously alter it". Emily Brady ponders to what extent environmental art-making fosters "positive aesthetic-moral relationships between nature and humans", concluding that yes: such 'artistically generated relationships' [including the likes of 'Spiral Jetty'] can stretch and offer new insights into the understanding of aesthetic value, "drawing attention to deeper forms of aesthetic environmental engagement". Jason Simus, in response, wonders if environmental art should further these relationships even if at expense to the environment, and urges a better knowledge of the balance between aesthetic regard and ecological cost.

'Unauthorised interventions' means things like art graffiti and a little door someone has playfully fitted to a hole in a forest tree. I must thank Isis for alerting me to the fact that in the depths of Wastwater in the Lake District "is a gnome garden complete with picket fence", its 40-plus occupants helped down there by divers. She uses this as an entree to discussing our tendency to mark- engage with, intervene in -- our environments. Picking up this interest in whimsy and 'edginess', Jim Toub points out similarities to the evaluation of avant-garde modern art.

Jonathan Maskit's interest is in the aesthetics of post-industrial environments, usually neglected because of our focus on the so-called natural. His illustrated paper looks into aspects of the relationship between art and nature. Thomas Heyd focuses on artists' involvement with degraded land, in particular the prospects for 'artistic reclamation'; and Alison Hagerman's response is to stress the importance of not perpetuating the ecological damage that has been caused by drawing attention to it. Environmental art may indeed help propagate the "inclusive and progressive mindset of environmentalism" [Lintott], but it is not without misunderstandings and potential dangers.

II.

Some work from University College Falmouth's Research in Art, Nature & Environment group was noted in *L&A online* 43 [February 2008]. A more substantial RANE product is the write-up of its 2006 conference. Learned journals are expensive. As a free download, *Artful ecologies* is good value. The eight conference talks fill about 90 pages. There is the briefest of introductions to them, and no

summary or overview follows, which is disappointing - if only for not pointing up 'Where do we go from here?'. [In fact, a second Artful Ecologies conference runs this summer.] What does follow the essays, however, is as interesting as them: seven RANE projects that were exhibited at the meeting. *Artful ecologies* is an easier read than *Ethics, place & environment*, but it, too, opens windows onto hazily distant views. In a sort of honorary opener, Alan Sonfist reiterates the significance of his 'Time-Landscapes', and his feeling that - along with those to fellow humans - we should make civic monuments in honour of "another part of the community: natural phenomena". George Steinmann signs off the last of the essays with "Artists have at their heart the task of transformation. This task is to provide the existential ground for the human condition. It is necessary for a full and dignified life."

Here are a few other glimpses.

Resonating with some of the *E,P&E* writers, Suzi Gablik observes that [in the West] art is usually seen in the context of an aesthetic paradigm that exempts it "from any moral tasks, and denies it any redemptive potential for social change". From an interest in environmental aesthetics, Tim Collins sees the function of art is to serve as an "... open space within contemporary culture" where things can be discussed that are unwelcome elsewhere - environmental matters and ecological relationships included, and, I guess, the function[s] of art.

The RANE projects include former miner Stephen Turner's exploration into the history of the local Carnon Valley through an examination of its soils and their contaminants. Jane Atkinson collected and analysed water samples, in order to produce maps of trace elements in Cornish rivers, finding that art and science "sit side by side in importance and relevance" in her work. David Pritchard's "fresh way of seeing" led to an exhibition of photos of trees with metalwork embedded in their wood, and grew into a consideration of tree biology, phenology [seasonal events in relation to climate], and consequences of climate change.

Andy Webster and Jon Bird lead us back to questions of ethics and of art changing people's values. They make the comment of some Andy Goldsworthy's work, for instance, that it represents [or at least presents] nature "as beautiful and ordered, but his process reveals a world controlled and mediated by human intervention". And Martin Prothero, asking how one could imagine a new relationship with the natural world, tells of ways in which he put himself into closer contact - by foraging from the land, or sitting for a day, just *being*.

The final contribution, by Kerry Morrison, is a little different. It is very hesitant, but I think rather important. It begins to work out the *impact* the Artful Ecologies conference itself had, by counting the CO₂-generation caused by participants *attending that conference*. All activities leave footprints. Understanding that is becoming increasingly important. 'What to do?' is an increasingly important question. Here is one participant's comment Kerry includes, from John Grande: "Flew

to London from ... Montreal, then train Gatwick to Truro, same vice versa – planted 120 trees in Laurentians north of Montreal... nature is art". More such research, please....

III.

Art in action brings us to the colour photos. Published in California, printed in China, two trees will be planted for each one used in its production. The copy I am reading was flown from New York. Two is a low number, and the trees will be small.... but this *is* an attractive and stimulating book, 'presented' by the 'official Art partner' for the U. N. Environment Programme, the Natural World Museum [a 'museum without walls': www.naturalworldmuseum.org].

Its purpose is to show works by "a range of renowned and emerging artists that demonstrate our connection to the environment" through a diversity of 'creative expressions'. Like other publications of its kind, it is prompted by the belief that artists can awaken society – to the dangers of environmental disruptions. Its forewords and afterword, and many individual artists' statements throughout, *assume* this is so.

One hopes the assumption is merited: I *think* it is, but looking though *Art in action* doesn't remove the doubt. There seems a persistent need for interpretation, because the 'message' is often uncertain – perhaps simply hidden behind a work's immediate beauty. And inevitably some is naive. Nonetheless, this is a useful sampler of what concerned 2D and 3D and some performance artists are doing, briefly introduced in their own words or at second-hand.

Contributions are in chapters labelled Celebrate, Reflect, Interact, and Protect, with a final chapter, Act – mostly biographies, credits and contacts. Contributions come from a wide range of artists, from Joseph Beuys and the Mayer Harrisons to Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, The Icelandic Love Corporation and many others I am grateful for having brought to my attention. Names are predominantly Western; there is one Native Australian painter. The contents of the various chapters seem occasionally arbitrary. No matter: what is [to me] more worrying is how one is to see – without it being spelled out in words – how, for example [in Interact], a 360 by 223 feet wall of 13,000 brightly coloured oil barrels, built inside a giant gasometer awakens us *anywhere* on the scale from, as Natural World Museum's Mia Hanak puts it, glorification of nature to political critique of contemporary issues. Except, that is, in the way Emily Brady sees Spiral Jetty, or as whimsy in Isis Brook's sense.

The environmentalist messages of many other examples read more readily: Chris Jordan's photo of dried, cracked silt completely flooring a room in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina[Reflect]; Cai Guo Qiang's gallery of leaping tigers beshot with arrows, and his noon-day thunderclap and puff of black cloud performed daily over the N. Y. Metropolitan Museum's roofgarden [Interact]; Ruud van Empel's generated images of a Black child, eyes somehow questioning, in somehow questionably lush vegetation [Reflect]; Shana & Robert ParkeHarrison's manipulated, nearly colourless, photo

'Reclamation', in which two suit-wearing men strain to tug a carpet of sward over a wide, bleak, indefinite landscape [Protect].

IV.

None of these 'levels' is more important than the others. Although their occupants may largely be distinct, they do share some; and creators, recipients, and students of environmental art in its several forms can all benefit from visits to these examples. I may appear to emphasise the unquestioning nature of the sort of book *Art in action* exemplifies, but I would play that down. This is – as the academic journal's papers show – difficult territory. Each publication in its way, and in a world where "weeks, even months, go by without our bare feet ever touching the earth", is exploring the question "Can art really change the environment?". As curator Randy Rosenberg hints, "science provides the facts while art tells the stories".

Martin Spray

PROJECT VITRA 1957 - 2007

Cornel Windlin & Rolf Fehlbaum, eds Birkhauser, 2008, hbk., 396 pp., £20, ISBN 978-3-7643-8593-4

I have often thought that using the rearrangement of chairs on the deck of the Titanic as a metaphor for futility does the chairs an injustice, as if they were somehow to blame or, at the very least, could never play a role in a problem-solving situation. Well, it all depends on the chairs and it all depends on the situation! Page 314 of this lavish volume on the life and times of Project Vitra shows a group of Eames chairs democratically deployed around a round table, Arthurian style, whilst smiling at the camera sit a dazzling array of world leaders from the 1990s - Clinton, Blair, Yeltsin and others - poised in summit mode to solve the problems of the world. Some chairs! Some situation!

Project Vitra 1957-2007 is a celebration of design, a history of the impact of one company on the evolution of the realm of the interior environment over the last half century, a company "no less interested in ergonomics, ecology, logistics and quality assurance than in the anthropology of dwelling." Reflecting the same degree of Teutonic thoroughness as suggested by the title of Daniel Kehlmann's 2005 best-selling novel *Measuring the World*, it was the bold intention of the founders of Vitra to design it! Eschewing divisive categorisation they embarked on a holistic assault on design problems across the disciplines of interior design, furniture, architecture and landscape design - "We do not regard homes, offices and public venues as strictly separate spaces but as related environments". Vitra's visual impact on our world has been remarkable, whether in terms of their own grandiloquent claims or the existence of retro-stores stocking their wares or the proliferation of imitators and

mass-produced, job-lot alternatives. And Vitra begat IKEA!

In fact the book looks rather like an IKEA catalogue but with the addition of frequent messages from the chairman, members of the founding Fehlbaum family, designers and hired intellectual luminaries. Divided into seven or eight sections, each comprises an impressive photographic section with accompanying texts effusively extolling the virtues of the company's achievements - and not always without good reason, though it would be disingenuous not to point out the lack of any sense of balance or proportion. This is, after all, little more than an up-market trade journal and rather less than an official corporate history.

In the section entitled 'Sites', the photographic record shows the Vitra Campus at Weil am Rhine as worthy of architectural pilgrimages yet scarcely meriting the hyperbolic claim that the "year in which the Berlin Wall fell was also the year Vitra entered the history of architecture", and certainly not the implication that mere coincidence means historical equivalence. But pre-Bilbao Gehry is there, and Grimshaw and Hadid (her first building), and Herzog and Meuren, together with the giant Balancing Tools sculpture by Oldenburg and van Bruggen in the grounds of Gehry's Vitra Design Museum. This is an architectural campus to die for with its three decades of 'architectural masterpieces'.

'Products' sits at the heart of the book and is dominated by the ground-breaking creations of Ray/Charles Eames and George Nelson with crowds of chairs and flocks of stools and herds of desks and clutches of office interiors, often randomly roaming the pages but sometimes tastefully posed for a photo-shoot like so many angular or sometimes rounded but always emaciated models. Everything is utilitarian - design based on the "recognition of need"- but everything is also designed to please - "every design task should be approached with the attitude of a good host" (Charles Eames), in the home, the office, the airport lounge.

The influence of Willi and Erica Fehlbaum and their Vitra Project on the built environment over the past half century has been a profound one. The book makes clear that the project is 'a work in progress' both as a business and as an inspirational and aesthetic activity, so watch out for future developments and in the meantime have a look at this book to see what has been achieved so far.

Terry Fairman

FINDINGS ON ICE

Hester Aardse & Astrid van Baalen eds. Lars Muller Pubs., 2007, pbk., 187 pages, £21.90 ISBN 978-3-03778-125-8

Findings on Ice belongs to that recent publishing genre that focuses

on a specific commodity - like silk or salt or cod - though unlike other works in the genre this one is no straight-forward narrative history. It is made up of 'thought notations' on ice and is the product - not of an author, but of 46 artists and scientists, a charitable foundation and a graphic designer. As a consequence, whilst it looks good, it is as difficult to navigate as the Northwest Passage, unless you start on page 161 - "If in doubt read me first"! The book is the brainchild of the Pars Foundation. Rather like the UK's NESTA, it is an organisation set up to explore ideas and visions from the perspective of both scientists and artists. Treating the world as both playground and laboratory, the intention is to produce a whole series of *Findings* that together will comprise an atlas of creative thinking. *Findings on Ice* is the first.

Ice is an exemplar of the simple and the natural which turns out ultimately to be neither. It is rarely white, for example, and when used to create art is often not natural. The romantic lyricism of the artist contributors is sometimes at odds with the science or, indeed, with the art, of ice: "Absolute, unadulterated, just so; if you have a deep love of the pure, how can you not love ice?" (Han Dong - Chinese poet, p154). - and, yet, ice is often manufactured in industrial plants or transported half-way round the world to realise an art commission.

The work is a scrap book on ice, the raw materials for a 'textual guide' - everything you ever wanted to know about ice... and, probably, a good deal more. I was not gripped by the statistics on the coefficients of ice friction that determine the speed of ice skaters but I did marvel at the photographs of the work of Olafur Eliasson and Dmitri Kourlianski, the delicate pencil drawings of Michaela Fruehwirth and the exquisite colour in the photograph of an ice crystal(?) by the botanist, Wolfgang Stuppy. There are literary gems here, too, and you can even play the music of ice.

"He asked me, 'What's ice?'" I answered, simply, "The stopping of time." He didn't ask for an explanation. He just nodded his head as if he knew exactly what I meant." (Iman Mersal - poet, p150).

Terry Fairman

GRADING FOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTS

Peter Petschek
Birkhauser Verlag, 2008, pbk., 220 pages,
£24.90 ISBN 978-3-7643-8502-6

Never judge a book by its cover - nor in this case by its title. Sounding like a dry, overly technical work most likely to be found in the engineering department, the book is, in fact, an inspirational de-

light. Just as the good landscape architect responds to concerns that are not only technical but also ecological and aesthetic, so too does this book. There is much here to satisfy those whose main interest is in the mathematics of stable inclines and tables and charts of site data or whose boys' own passion is for the vital statistics of dump trucks and earth moving equipment. But equally the book is a feast for those who would rather dwell on an early sixteenth topographical map of Tuscany by Leonado da Vinci or photographs of Charles Jencks' Earthwork outside the National Museum of Modern Art in Edinburgh.

The book is a paean to ground-down rock - to soil, "an elementary material in nature's household" - the essence of the seventeenth century Katsura Rikyu Gardens in Kyoto; the earlier Hohokam Native American Indian "football pitch" in Pueblo Grande, outside Phoenix, Arizona; Graeco-Roman recreational facilities, English landscape gardens, islands off the coast of Dubai, modern Olympic sites.

Whilst little if any mention is made of Land Art or land artists - Jenck's work is controversial in this respect - the many illustrations are reminiscent of the work of Robert Morris and Robert Smithson, and some of the information on gradients and slope stabilisation will not be unfamiliar to any would-be maker of earthworks who has attended one of Jim Buchanan's seminars at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park or who has struggled to use Land Art as a tool for reclaiming despoiled industrial sites.

This is a book for professionals but also for anyone with an interest in how man has shaped the landscape throughout history and how best he might continue to shape it in the future.

Terry Fairman

INTO PAINTING: BRENDAN STUART BURNS

David Alston

**Seren Books, Bridgend, 2008, pbk.,
£14.99, ISBN 978-1-85411-446-4**

This sixty-four page volume covers the career to date of painter Brendan Stuart Burns (b. 1963). David Alston, who is currently Arts Director of Arts Council, Wales, has written previously on a number of Welsh artists and knows his way around Welsh painting. Indeed Burns himself has commented on Alston, saying of him, "He truly looks; always with an acute eye", and that he values "the painting, always the painting", and Burn's view is backed up in this book.

This "looking," informs Alston's critical writing. He is particularly sensitive to the images that Burns produces and is careful to outline the ideas and experiences that gave foundation to each painting. Alston

covers the early 'political' paintings of Burns and continues through until his current work which focuses on Druidston Haven in Pembrokeshire.



'Swish - Back - West'

Alston sees Burns' works as visual conundrums of depth and surface, flatness and planes, colour and forms. And indeed, Burns' 'Druidston' works are supreme achievements – gems of slow, light movement and texture in which you can taste and smell the landscape of sand and sea. Alston fills in the background to these achievements with the understanding and care of a writer who really appreciates committed painting. He notes that Burns' paintings are a record of rocks

and rock pools and formations on the shoreline left by interactions of time, tide, weather, light and atmospheric conditions, and at the same time they are paintings which have "their own logic and dictates away from nature".

He compares Burns' singular focus on Druidston Haven with other precedents for this kind of focus, including Lanyon's relationship with depths of the land and the skies of Cornwall. Alston outlines, amongst others with long-term fascinations, Adrian Berg's twenty years of obsessive attention to the trees seen from his flat near Regent's Park in London.

This book makes enlightening reading for those who already know the paintings of Burns and who wish to learn more about the processes and experiences that go into the making of his pictures and the links with other modern landscape painters. It is fully illustrated, covering the range of his paintings, photographs and drawings and therefore provides additional insight for those interested in contemporary landscape painting.

Ron Boyd



Taste of Sight Series 2005, August 1st

Landscape & Arts Network (LAN)

was founded in 1993 by artist Francis Carr, becoming a charity in 1998. Its aim is to bring together landscape architects, engineers, architects, artists, educationalists and ecologists - in effect, all those individuals, professional or otherwise, who feel passionate about improving and sustaining the quality of our urban and natural environment. Through an ongoing programme of seminars, visits, conferences and meetings it has broadened the context in which we understand art and landscape. It continues to inspire and break professional boundaries in its journal Landscape and Arts. As a Network, one of its founding aims is to encourage collaboration and cross-fertilisation both in theory and practice.

Our website provides immediate global access to our work. The Network consults with the public and private sectors on policy and project development to maximise the potential of artistic collaboration to produce innovative, creative solutions to urban and rural regeneration projects.

The Journal

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