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Contemporary Methods of Preserving Land Art: A Case Study of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty

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Sotheby's Institute of Art

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Contemporary Methods of Preserving Land Art: 
A Case Study of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*

by

Samara Johnson

A thesis project submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Master’s Degree in Contemporary Art Sotheby’s Institute of Art

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14,310 words
Abstract.

The preservation and conservation of Land art has become an increasingly complex and urgent issue as important Earthworks created in the late 1960s and early 1970s continue to age. They present a variety of challenges—both physical and philosophical—to those tasked with maintaining them. Using Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) as a case study, I have outlined four key guidelines for maintaining and preserving works of Land art. In order to survive, the artist’s intention intact, these works require collective stewardship, an interdisciplinary approach, the promotion of responsible visitorship, and an extension of the museum model. Today, social media has presented an existential threat to works of Land art as vastly-increased art tourism alters the unmediated pilgrimage experience Smithson wished for the Jetty. Additionally, climate change and natural erosion make the multidisciplinary aspects of many Earthworks—photographic documentation, film, drawings, and writings—more essential over time. Ultimately, many of these works may live on only through documentation and scholarship. Arts foundations and institutions, as well as environmental, local and state government agencies must come together to educate visitors so they may become individual stewards. Awareness and accessibility, combined with the elements discussed in this thesis, will allow Land art to thrive and live on. The research for this thesis included a curatorial internship at Dia Art Foundation, thorough reading and analysis of key literature on the topic, and a series of comprehensive interviews with a diverse panel of scholars and members of *Spiral Jetty* partnership organizations.
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Fig. 4. Johnson, Samara. “The author at *Spiral Jetty*.” June 3, 2019. Photograph.


Fig. 9. Álvarez Contreras, Cristian. “Photo by @lpz_rubi of Álvarez Contreras and his drawing in the sand at *Spiral Jetty*.” October 5, 2019. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/B3QN92qB03J/ (accessed November 23, 2019).


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I am grateful for my experience interning at Dia Art Foundation. I gained a breadth of knowledge on the topic of this thesis at an institution I have the highest respect for. A special thank you to Kelly Kivland for the conversations regarding my thesis.

The meaningful conversations that occurred during the following interviews provided me with a deeper understanding of the dynamic aspects of this subject. Thank you Lisa Le Feuvre, Executive Director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation; Chris Taylor, Director of Land Arts of the American West; Bonnie K. Baxter, Director of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College; Jaimi Butler, Great Salt Lake Institute Coordinator; Maria Celi, Director of Visitor Services at Dia Art Foundation; Matthew Coolidge, Director of the Center for Land Use Interpretation and Board President of the Holt/Smithson Foundation; Hikmet Loe, scholar, artist, and professor; Annie Burbidge Ream, Curator of Education at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts; and Whitney Tassie, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

My gratitude goes to Sotheby’s Institute of Art for their academic support, in particular my thesis advisor Kathy Battista. I would also like to thank Jenna Ferrey for our conversations and your time; your friendship has been invaluable.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends for your unconditional love and support throughout this process.
Introduction.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a group of American artists expanded the conventions of sculpture by creating Land art, or Earthworks, that engaged the landscape as a canvas.¹ Moving out of the gallery or museum to usually-remote outdoor locations, artists like Robert Smithson, Walter De Maria, Michael Heizer, and Nancy Holt used the earth itself to create works of unprecedented scale open to the elements. Land art took shape during a time of upheaval and change, including the Vietnam War, student riots around the globe, the Moon landing, and the first Earth Day in 1970. Artists responded to the rapidly-shifting, sociopolitical landscape by rewriting the traditional rules of sculpture.² In the summer of 1967, Artforum published an issue on new trends in contemporary sculpture. Essays such as Michael Fried’s “Theatricality,” Robert Morris’s “Notes on Sculpture,” and Smithson’s “Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site,” marked what Rosalind Krauss later termed “the expanded field” of sculpture,³ in which artists endeavored to make their work inseparable from the viewing experience.

Smithson became close with Heizer in 1967, when the latter artist was working on Double Negative (1969), two massive trenches dug into the Nevada desert (see fig. 1). Inspired, Smithson solicited the patronage of his dealer, Virginia Dwan, and began creating his own Land art.⁴ Smithson’s Spiral Jetty from 1970 is considered a quintessential example of the movement (see fig. 2). In 2005, University of Chicago economist David W. Galenson analyzed the illustrations, citations, and image reproductions in modern art history textbooks, declaring, “art

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scholars consider Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* to be the most important individual work made by an American artist during the past 150 years.”

Over a two-week period in April 1970, Smithson, with the help of a local contracting company, created *Spiral Jetty* on a lakebed in Great Salt Lake, Utah. Employing heavy machinery to alter the land, Smithson used the area’s basalt rock, mud, salt, and water to create a jetty in the shape of a spiral (see fig. 3). The federal government owns the lake and the mainland is private, but the area Smithson leased from Utah’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is known as the “meandering zone,” a 10-acre segment of government-protected, sovereign land where the lake meets the shore. Situated in the landscape, exposed to the elements, *Spiral Jetty* has been in a constant state of flux for the past 50 years. As it erodes and changes over time, *Spiral Jetty* encapsulates Smithson’s frequent theme of entropy. A few years after it was built, rising lake levels submerged the Jetty, although the arrangement of rocks was still visible through the then-red, algae-tinged water. The work has been exposed since 2002, following a drought in Utah. The black basalt rocks now protrude from the sand (see fig. 4). Dependent on the rainfall, salt crystals form around the work.

Its unique attributes make *Spiral Jetty* a prime example to discuss the criteria necessary to manage and preserve Land art: collective stewardship by an interdisciplinary group of organizations, measurements taken to ensure responsible visitation to the site, and an extension

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of the conventional museum model. For the purpose of this thesis I will be focusing on *Spiral Jetty*’s physical structure. Yet like much Land art, *Spiral Jetty* consists of more than its difficult-to-access site. Other multi-media components—photographic documentation, preparatory drawings, sculpture, essays, and film—shape and express the importance of “Jetty Pilgrims” experiencing it in person. It was important to Smithson that the site have little to no mediation, allowing every visitor to engage with it in their own way.\(^9\) However, the work’s prolonged exposure to the elements, coupled with social media’s impact on art tourism, has brought attention to the urgent need for measures necessary to maintain Smithson’s masterpiece.\(^{10}\)

The efforts that have been put in place to manage *Spiral Jetty* serve as an example for how organizations can collaborate to preserve works of Land art. Other Earthworks by artists like Heizer and James Turrell can count on the living artist to provide guidelines and insight into their care and meaning. Due to Smithson’s early death in 1973 at age 35, it became up to his wife, Nancy Holt (1938–2014), as well as friends and patrons, to lay the groundwork for institutional stewardship.\(^{11}\) The partnership between Dia Art Foundation, which owns the work; the Holt/Smithson Foundation; Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College (GSLI); Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA); Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FFSL) within the Department of Natural Resources Center (DNR); and Center for Land Use Interpretation

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\(^9\) Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.

\(^{10}\) In 1970 interest in Contemporary Art was very niche, unlike the global industry we see today. My focus here is on the impact of social media but of course many other factors impacted the increased interest in Contemporary Art that occurred around the millennium. New international museums, the art market, and a larger demographic of professional artists around the globe have all contributed to the increased popularity of Contemporary Art.

(CLUI), provides insight into how an interdisciplinary group of institutions can preserve the artist’s intentions and the legacy of the artwork.\(^{12}\)

In this thesis, I will proscribe the four elements necessary for the continued care of Land art, using Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* as a case study. Maintaining Land art is a collaborative effort with a variety of challenges. My methodology to arrive at these conclusions included a curatorial internship at Dia Art Foundation, where I worked under the guidance of curator Kelly Kivland and gained first-hand knowledge into the inner workings of the *Spiral Jetty* partnership.

Additionally, I conducted interviews, both through video chat and over the phone, with Bonnie K. Baxter, Director of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College; Jaimi Butler, Coordinator at GSLI; Maria Celi, Director of Visitor Services at Dia; Matthew Coolidge, Director of and Board President of the Holt/Smithson Foundation; Hikmet Sidney Loe, an art historian specializing in Land art; Annie Burbidge Ream, Curator of Education at UMFA; Whitney Tassie, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at UMFA; and Chris Taylor, the Director of Land Arts of the American West at Texas Tech University. I also analyzed key writings about *Spiral Jetty* as well as current debates about preserving Land art.

Collective stewardship is the first and most critical element to managing Land art. Even as it has weathered droughts and prolonged exposure to the elements, *Spiral Jetty*’s number of annual visitors has greatly increased over the years, making the need for comprehensive maintenance more important than ever. Second, the collaborative efforts of organizations from multiple fields is essential to addressing Land art’s diverse needs. The very nature of Earthworks, situated in open landscapes, produces dialogues far different from paintings or objects in a museum and

prompts reflections on the world we live in. In this thesis, I will elucidate the interdisciplinary nature of Land art and look at those involved in maintaining *Spiral Jetty* to understand the practical implications of art that extends beyond the museum. The third main attribute I will consider is public engagement. The conservation of *Spiral Jetty* is a constant balancing act; promoting the work and raising awareness about it necessitates informing the public how to be responsible visitors. They in turn must become its stewards. Finally, it is important to note that Land art did not abandon museums or galleries—it extended the traditional museum model to the outdoors. The institutions that maintain *Spiral Jetty* have a complex task that doesn’t always present clear steps forward: they are charged with preserving the increasingly-popular work for current and future visitors while honoring Smithson’s original intention to allow it to naturally decay.

Figure 1. Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative* (1969–70), a 240,000-ton displacement of rhyolite and sandstone in the Mormon Mesa in Overton, Nevada, is maintained by The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.
Figure 2. This aerial shot of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) by George Steinmetz is one of the most widespread images of the work. The Dia Art Foundation uses it on their website and in brochures.
Figure 3. Photographs by Gianfranco Gorgoni show Smithson during the construction of *Spiral Jetty* in 1970.
Figure 4. The author on a June 2019 visit to *Spiral Jetty*, which is now completely exposed due to drought in the Utah region.
Chapter One: Collective Stewardship.

The preservation of Land art requires joint action between arts institutions, local governments and communities, environmental agencies, and wealthy donors. Because they differ from the typical art objects found in museums, Land artworks require a different set of guidelines—and the collaborative efforts of many parties from different sectors—to protect and promote them. Organizations and individuals acting as stewards of Land art need to work collectively in order to conserve, preserve, maintain, and provide access to the work, as well as educate the public about its meaning. It is often a struggle to balance the needs of visitors and local communities with the mission to extend a work’s visibility and promote tourism.

The history and current state of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* offers insight into the importance of collective stewardship and the unique needs in managing and caring for art that is embedded in remote environments. Since Smithson’s death in 1973, various combinations of individuals and organizations have striven to balance the artist’s intent for the work and its messaging to the broader public with maintaining the fragile site. Nancy Holt and the Robert Smithson Estate donated the work to Dia Art Foundation in 1999, and the nonprofit has since established collaborations with several other organizations, most notably the Holt/Smithson Foundation, which owns the copyright to images and reproductions of the work.¹³ Local partners include the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA), which produces exhibitions in addition to educational initiatives. Great Salt Lake Institute (GSLI) tracks visiting conditions and leads scientific projects at the site that are instrumental in bringing attention to accessibility and

maintenance issues. The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) and the State of Utah—specifically the division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FFSL) within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR)—works with these partners and other departments in the state to promote awareness and care for the resources of Great Salt Lake. Such partnerships have been essential from the beginning; Smithson’s project may not have been realized without the joint support of his patrons and the Utah state government.

On March 10, 1970, Smithson and Holt submitted a 99-year lease proposal to the Utah Division of State Lands for 10 acres of land on Rozel Point, the north shore of Great Salt Lake in Utah, to build an “Earthwork sculpture resembling a jetty in the shape of a spiral.” They were granted instead a 20-year lease, at $10 per acre, for $100 a year. To realize the expensive project, however, Smithson turned to gallerist Virginia Dwan, his primary patron, and Douglas Christmas of Ace Gallery, to each contribute $9,000 for its construction. (While this financial dependence seems to fit the traditional collector business model of art patronage, to obtain sole

15 Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
16 Due to its remote location, the state government and the DNR have served as essential partners since the Jetty’s planning stages. It’s also crucial to note that Smithson relied on outside help and machinery to execute his monumental vision, contracting Parsons Asphalt, Inc. of Ogden, Utah, to deposit the rocks and dirt in formation on the lake bed. See Bob Phillips, “Building the Jetty” (2005), in Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty, eds. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press), 184–97.
17 Robert Smithson to Mr. Charles R. Hansen, “Special Use Lease Application,” March 10, 1970, Division of State Lands, Salt Lake City, Utah. With an eye toward future generations of visitors, in December 1971 Smithson and Holt Smithson revisited this request, but were again unsuccessful: “I am requesting a perpetual lease on the land I have already leased from the state... My reason for the request rests on the fact that ‘Spiral Jetty’ is a work of art made by me at my own expense. A perpetual lease would grant me greater security if I should ever have to invest more capital to repair or restore the jetty in the future, or transfer the lease to an art institution, should they want to own the ‘Spiral Jetty’ and have it as part of their collection to preserve the work for future generations.” Robert Smithson to Mark H. Crystal, “Perpetual Lease Request,” December 30, 1971, Division of State Lands, Salt Lake City, Utah.
ownership, Smithson traded some of his early works with his benefactors. After Smithson died, Holt took over the lease at an increased annual price of $160 until she transferred the work to Dia more than 20 years later.

As a guardian, Holt made it clear that, “I would always make sure that there would be an entity to take care of it, even after I am gone.” When she could no longer care for it, Holt began to search for an institutional partner that could help her manage the work’s particular needs for an extended period. Lynne Cooke and Michael Govan explained why an institution like Dia would be uniquely poised to care for Land art:

“No traditional museum could contain the geographically widespread, often large-scale achievements of this group of artists; few institutions, public or private, are willing or even always able to allow artists themselves to design not only their work but the manner of its presentation; and fewer still can allow the artist’s installations and projects, even in remote locations, to remain on view permanently, providing future generations with direct experience of the work.”

Dia has long been defining what stewardship of Land art entails. Founded in 1974 by Philippa de Menil (now known as Sheikha Fariha al Jerrahi), Heiner Friedrich, and Helen Winkler, the institution is known for commissioning and maintaining “visionary projects that might not otherwise be realized because of scale of scope.” They have the experience, manpower, and

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22 Dia had been at the forefront of Land art. They had commissioned Earthworks like Walter De Maria’s The Lightning Field, and had successfully managed it since 1977. “About Dia,” Dia Art Foundation, accessed August 9, 2019, https://www.diaart.org/about/about-dia.
resources to oversee a work of Land art. Made up of a constellation of sites, a majority of Dia’s projects exists outside of the museum setting.\textsuperscript{23}

Yet with its headquarters in New York and no staff on-site in Utah, problems arose. In 2011, Dia defaulted on the land lease due to a simple clerical error, revealing the need for better communication with the Utah government. This failure of stewardship required negotiations between Dia and the DNR, specifically the FFSL, to secure the lease renewal.\textsuperscript{24} As a stipulation for granting the continuation of the land lease, the DNR mandated that Dia partner with local institutions to help manage the care of \textit{Spiral Jetty}. Dia chose a cultural and an environmental institution with which it had previous relationships: the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA) and Great Salt Lake Institute (GSLI).\textsuperscript{25} This was a beneficial step in ensuring that Dia had “eyes and ears” on the ground in Utah. Additionally, the formalization of this local partnership expanded the collective approach to stewardship. The interdisciplinary attributes of each partner created a working group of institutions that could offer unique assets to the maintenance of the site. In 2017, the newly established Holt/Smithson Foundation joined the group as an official partner.\textsuperscript{26}

The access, scholarship, and active engagement fostered by these partnerships has resulted in stronger ties between the organizations and an improvement to relations with Utah communities. Institutionally, Dia provides resources and art-world clout to the management and advertisement


\textsuperscript{24} As Rachel Corbett reported in \textit{Artnet}, “Dia has said in the past that it has always paid its invoices and that the confusion came when the death of a Utah lands coordinator in 2010 led to a pile-up of paperwork.” Rachel Corbett, “Dia Negotiates \textit{Spiral Jetty} Lease,” \textit{Artnet}, August 10, 2011, http://www.artnet.com/magazines/news/artnetnews/dia-negotiates-spiral-jetty-jetty.asp.


\textsuperscript{26} Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
of *Spiral Jetty*. The Holt/Smithson Foundation, which owns the copyright for the work, promotes and continues Smithson’s legacy through the visual preservation of *Spiral Jetty*. GSLI, UMFA, and the CLUI, which has an outpost in Wendover, Utah, are proximate to the site, allowing for frequent visits and local advocacy. Dia is based in New York and the Holt/Smithson Foundation in New Mexico, so it is pertinent to have collaborating institutions near the Jetty to ensure proper care and communication between all parties.

The partnership has also been successful in fostering better communication regarding initiatives to maintain the site. Now there are bi-annual meetings with all of the *Spiral Jetty* partners that include visits to the site. Having a number of partners in a variety of fields ensures that the many dimensions of *Spiral Jetty* are addressed. For instance, Laura Ault, the Sovereign Lands Program Manager at the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, is instrumental to the partnership with the state of Utah. As a point person for the state, Ault oversees the *Spiral Jetty* property and facilitates communication between the government and the other partners. Dia’s Director of Visitor Experience, Maria Celi, stays in regular contact with Gary Wilden, the lead ranger of Golden Spike National Historical Park. Many visitors stop by Golden Spike on their way to the Jetty. It is the last site with a restroom on the way to the work, and visitors can also check the status of road conditions with the rangers. Without rangers stationed at *Spiral Jetty*, this relationship is important to maintaining the unmediated environment Smithson envisioned for his work while also meeting the needs of its pilgrims.

Although Holt willed *Spiral Jetty* to an institution to ensure its survival, the work is intentionally finite, moving toward what Smithson scholar Ann Reynolds describes as a “slow,

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imperceptible but inevitable dissolution.” Smithson was well aware of the work’s limited lifespan from its inception, and the notion of entropy was a guiding factor in his planning. Craig Owens called *Spiral Jetty* a “memento mori of the twentieth century.” He explained:

“Smithson’s focus was upon the more unfathomable expanses of geologic time and its accompanying agents of material decomposition—history deposited in layered sediment, held in a handful of dust. Impermanence and loss were therefore the active ingredients in what the artist referred to as ‘collaborating with entropy,’ interacting with the elements of a site in an indeterminate unfolding.”

Great Salt Lake’s changing water levels, combined with exposure to the elements and human interaction, will eventually erode *Spiral Jetty*. Over the past 50 years, the work has gone through various stages of visibility and invisibility depending on the height of the water line. “Smithson accepted signs of degeneration and the collapse of ordered systems,” John Beardsley reflected, “as evidence of inevitable entropic change.”

Since Smithson’s project is built on the concept of change, questions about its conservation are complicated. Smithson did not create guidelines for the continued life of *Spiral Jetty* before his death. His interest in objects disintegrating into nature is a theme throughout other works, including his 1970 installation for Kent State University, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, but is largely symbolized by *Spiral Jetty* (see fig. 5). Smithson did hint in one interview his intention for the Earthwork to be permanent and preserved. Holt reiterated this sentiment, telling *The

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31 “Even though the waters had been rising at a regular rate for the seven years before he built the Jetty, Smithson, according the Holt, expected the lake conditions to remain somewhat steady. She believes he did not anticipate an increase in water level since the lake was higher than it had been for several decades, except for a brief period in the fifties. Once, when asked what he would do if the lake covered the Jetty, Smithson responded that he would build the piece 15 feet higher—thus indicating his intention to keep weathering and change within strictly defined limits. After 1972, when the Jetty was underwater, he in
Guardian in 2004, “He didn’t want it to disappear completely. When the water was rising, he talked about adding rocks to make it more visible. He didn’t regard it as a sacred thing that couldn’t be touched.”  

The stewards of Spiral Jetty are therefore tasked with preserving the spirit of the piece rather than restoring it. Lisa Le Feuvre, the inaugural executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation, described the complexities of Spiral Jetty’s conservation, noting that it includes picking up garbage, wiping out marks made in the sand, and covering up the remains of campfires. Yet to stay true to Smithson’s intentions, the visitor experience must remain as unmediated as possible. This is where Dia becomes an instrumental steward.

Dia keeps Spiral Jetty open to the public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Foundation promotes a solitary experience with no rangers on site or signs to inform your experience. Dia’s website provides only brief background into the work and offers minimal suggestions for visitors, as the site is meant to be experienced without strict guidelines. There are intentionally no bathrooms, which would be an unwanted reminder of daily life in the viewing experience.

That said, over the years, there have been talks about restoring Spiral Jetty to its original appearance (see fig. 6). There have been legitimate reasons to consider the idea of building up the rocks in Spiral Jetty. The work is 80% rock, and will take generations to fully erode into the

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33 Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.

34 The spare directions Dia offers to visitors on its website: “Please leave Spiral Jetty and the natural environment exactly as you found it. Visitors must ‘leave no trace’ at the site. Do not take existing rocks from the artwork or trample vegetation. Making fire pits near the artwork or on the parking lot is strictly prohibited and will result in significant fines. Carry out any waste with you.” “Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty,” Dia Art Foundation, accessed November 2, 2019, https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit/robert-smithson-spiral-jetty.

landscape, but the degradation of the site can be extreme. Spiral Jetty has been under water for a majority of the past 50 years, starting 3 years after it was built. During the 1990s, the work had variable visibility as the water level fluctuated. A drought in Utah has left the work exposed since 2002.

In a 2004 New York Times article, Melissa Sanford revealed that Michael Govan, then the director of Dia, had discussed the possibility of raising the Jetty by adding more rocks. Smithson thought through these issues himself but died before making a decision. Holt affirmed Smithson’s intention to rebuild it, but although Govan acknowledged “anything the foundation does will be in close consultation with Ms. Holt,” ultimately this approach was deemed ill-advised by most of the partners. Le Feuvre of the Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia both agreed that the work will be maintained, not modified.

Art Historian Robert Storr has adeptly noted another potential pitfall of restoring the Jetty. “When refurbishing Earthworks, you don’t want to create a Tussaud’s wax sculpture,” he told the Times. Bob Phillips, the original contractor who worked on Spiral Jetty, raised questions

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41 Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
about perils to authorship if it were conserved: “Smithson had something to do with every rock out there. It would not be the same thing if somebody else monkeyed around with it. It would no longer be Smithson’s work.” An integral aspect of *Spiral Jetty* is the constant flux in its appearance. Once the rocks were placed in 1970, the natural elements have altered the work every day since.

It is important to remember that physical and environmental maintenance is only one aspect of the multi-media work. The steward’s role is not only to ensure the site is maintained but also to educate the public and carry on its creative legacy. One component of preserving *Spiral Jetty* is recording the piece over time. In addition to maintaining the land lease, Dia has been tasked with preserving the work through photographs and original scholarship.

Part of the legacy of the work includes visitor experiences, which help create a record of the *Jetty’s* constant evolution. As steward of the site, an element of Dia’s role is to record these stories and foster new scholarship. These descriptions through written essays and online posts contextualize a wide range of voices and, as a valuable part of the work’s meaning, are crucial to preserve. Dia also documents the work themselves, taking photographs of the *Jetty* from a fixed aerial point of view on a seasonal basis (see fig. 7). Long after the *Jetty* succumbs to the elements, its accumulated history will endure. The discourse that Dia is charged with navigating is both added to and complicated by the *Jetty’s* theme of entropy and the questions of its conservation.

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45 Dia’s photographic documentation of the work was an effort initiated by Smithson, which I will discuss in a later chapter. Dia worked with The Getty Conservation in 2009 and 2010 and now employs a Utah-based company specializing in geospatial documentation. See www.diaart.org/collection/spiraljettyaerials.
This ephemeral approach is a key component of the work and the way stewards have to approach it. Much like the ephemeral nature of the work it oversees, the Holt/Smithson Foundation is only meant to last 20 years (Le Feuvre said that it has a finite lifespan for a number of reasons, the poetic one that they “do not wish to be the Smithson and Holt police”). The Foundation will close in 2038, 100 years after Smithson and Holt were born.\textsuperscript{46} The foundation is currently working to produce catalogues raisonné for Smithson and Holt and is creating a definitive online database about Smithson. When they shut their doors, they will have ensured that the artist’s “creative legacy” lives on.\textsuperscript{47}

Preserving a work of Land art is too big a job for an individual—the support of multiple organizations is needed for effective stewardship. Each partner aids in maintaining the work. However, the many bureaucratic agencies involved in the maintenance of \textit{Spiral Jetty} each has a sense of ownership over the work. It can be a major effort to balance the different interests of these organizations and work together smoothly. Moving forward, the Jetty’s stewardship might not always look the same. But it is crucial that institutions work together to preserve it, especially in open communication with the state of Utah.

The current partnership has yielded insights that wouldn’t have been possible individually. Recommendations for ways to enhance the site include preserving the sitelines by obtaining the nearby land and finding new ways to promote responsible visitorship. Ascertaining visitor data is still in the early stages. Dia has been tracking visitors through a road counter with a formula to determine how many people are in the car.\textsuperscript{48} Additionally, they rely on data from

\textsuperscript{46} Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
\textsuperscript{47} Matthew Coolidge (director of the Center for Land Use Interpretation, and board president of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, September 16, 2019.
\textsuperscript{48} Maria Celi (director of visitor services at Dia Art Foundation) in discussion with the author, September 3, 2019.
Golden Spike. Social media can be used to get a sense of where most visitors are from. These examples prove that by working collectively, the institutional partners are better able to preserve *Spiral Jetty*, raise awareness of the site, and keep it accessible and safe for visitors while staying true to Smithson’s intention of an unmediated experience. Collective stewardship is necessary for the preservation and maintenance of *Spiral Jetty*—and other Earthworks—in all its forms, but to succeed, an interdisciplinary approach is essential.

Figure 5. Robert Smithson’s *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) as seen in a 1982 photograph by Glen Apseloff.
Figure 6. Gianfranco Gorgoni’s 1970 photograph, taken from a nearby hill, shows Smithson standing on top of the recently completed Jetty.
Figure 7. An aerial shot of *Spiral Jetty* taken in Spring 2018. Since 2012, Dia Art Foundation has had a geospatial aerial photographer document the work twice a year, in May and October.
Chapter Two: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Land Art.

An analysis of the multiple perspectives required to maintain and promote *Spiral Jetty* demonstrates the need for varied approaches to the stewardship of Land art more generally. Smithson’s interdisciplinary practice, and the inherently interdisciplinary nature of Land art, demand a methodology that combines artistic and scientific approaches to preserve the work. Therefore, a diverse group of stewards is best able to upkeep the artwork, spread awareness of it to a larger public, and foster engagement. The multiple stewards examined in the previous chapter have different areas of expertise that contribute to the overall maintenance, education, and communication for the work. Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College (GSLI) offers a scientific perspective; Dia and the Holt/Smithson Foundation provide scholarship; the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA) lends a local cultural point of view; the Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI) provides unique insight on humanity’s interaction with the landscape; and the Utah State government lends logistical know-how. Without these interdisciplinary partners, the work can neither be sufficiently cared for nor fully appreciated.

Twice yearly, representatives from GSLI, UMFA, CLUI, Dia, the Holt/Smithson Foundation, and the Utah government meet to discuss *Spiral Jetty*.\(^{49}\) Prior to these biannual meetings, there were a number of miscommunication issues relating to the work’s maintenance. For example, in 2010, the State of Utah used $18,000 of its tourism budget to pave a road to *Spiral Jetty* without consulting Dia.\(^{50}\) The route to the Jetty had not changed since Smithson first visited the site in 1970. The road previously ended at the Golden Spike National Monument. The last few miles to the Jetty were a hazardous stretch that often resulted in flat tires. The Box Elder county tourism

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\(^{49}\) Maria Celi (director of visitor services at Dia Art Foundation) in discussion with the author, September 3, 2019.

board sought to increase access to one of the state’s most popular tourist destinations but did not take into consideration the negative effects it might have on the work. The increased accessibility the re-grated road offered posed a problem for Dia: it polished the original nature of the pilgrimage to the site that had been vital to Smithson’s vision. The enhanced access brought in more visitors, yet there were no parallel efforts to accommodate the additional crowds. The failure to collaborate on this important decision highlights the challenges of maintaining a work of Land art and demonstrates the need for a communicative and well-rounded approach to stewardship. The *Spiral Jetty* partnership has fostered a positive relationship with the local government that leads to better care for the work. Today, GSLI is an important local partner; the Institute is beneficial in alerting the necessary parties when road maintenance and grating is needed.

In another instance of what might be considered over-mediation by the state government, in 2004 the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FFSL) installed street signs directing visitors to the *Jetty*. These signs were intended to alleviate the burden on Golden Spike, a popular tourist spot that fields many inquiries about *Spiral Jetty*. Although not an official steward, Golden Spike has, by default, taken on a significant administrative burden. The implementation of these signs went against Smithson’s desire for the journey to *Spiral Jetty* to be

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53 Now in regular communication with Dia, Golden Spike sells books about *Spiral Jetty* and Land art.
as unmediated as possible, but the logistical realities of accommodating visitors to the site has come to require multiple organizations ensuring it is both accessible and protected.\textsuperscript{54}

The 150th anniversary of Golden Spike in May 2019 brought with it an unprecedented dilemma and highlighted the success of partners working together to resolve it. The celebration drew a large number of visitors; over 20,000 people were in attendance. The stewards worked together to accommodate the crowds and make the decisions that would best preserve the work amid the overflow of visitors from Golden Spike. Laura Ault, the sovereign lands program manager of FFSL, and her team made the decision to close the road to the \textit{Jetty} and only allow 10 cars through per day.\textsuperscript{55}

In addition to addressing issues of maintenance, an interdisciplinary approach to stewardship is fundamental to preserving the intended spirit and experience of the work. Smithson was attracted to the \textit{Jetty’s} location because he felt it embodied the “abandoned hopes of man.”\textsuperscript{56} Smithson was especially drawn to the oil well debris—from rusted vehicles and oil rigs to a brine shrimper’s camp—left around the area. As Chris Taylor, director of Land Arts of the American West, mentioned in an interview, “turn right at the pink car,” was one of the only directional indicators to reach the work.\textsuperscript{57} Initiatives to clean up the \textit{Jetty} have sparked conflict.

\textsuperscript{54} In a more recent instance of poor communication, this time with the general public, in 2010 the Box Elder County Road Commissioner, along with the Box Elder Tourism Board, collectively received a grant to improve the road and create the ‘cul de sac,’ often used as a parking lot in an effort to aid visitors. This, however, was done without consulting other stewards. Most agree that it should be moved to another space in order to protect the site and enhance visitor experiences.

\textsuperscript{55} Maria Celi (director of visitor services at Dia Art Foundation) in discussion with the author, September 3, 2019.


\textsuperscript{57} Chris Taylor (director of Land Arts of the American West) in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.
and thrown into question how to preserve the work in a way that could be true to Smithson’s vision.

In 2002, when water levels retreated from the drought, a lot of this “junk” became more visible on the road to the Jetty. An article that ran in the *Salt Lake Tribune* that year, entitled “Junkyard at the Jetty,” painted a picture of the scene: “All kinds of debris, much of it bullet-riddled, litters the approach to the *Spiral Jetty* earthen sculpture… broken-down vehicles and metal scraps dotted the horizon…”58 Passing the detritus en route to the Jetty was, for Smithson, an important part of the experience but the complaints from visitors gave rise to a difficult question: if cleanup of the area were undertaken, who would manage it, and how much clean up should be done? In 2004, Dustin Doucet of Utah’s Division of Oil, Gas and Mining (DOGM) approached the FFSL when lake levels were low enough to facilitate the project, turning the cleanup into a joint venture under the umbrella of the Utah Geological Survey (UGS).59 Dia was not contacted before the cleanup, but in an effort to preserve *Spiral Jetty*’s historic viewing conditions, they left behind some wood piling, stone foundations, and rusted oil drums.60 The partnership the Foundation now has with the state has improved communications to prevent potential interference with the message of the artwork while working to preserve it.

A similar controversy arose in 2008, when the Canadian oil company Pearl Montana Exploration and Production LTD submitted a request to drill for oil five miles from the Jetty.61 Public outrage ensued. In a protest led by Nancy Holt, Dia, the nonprofit FRIENDS of Great Salt

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Lake, and scholar Hikmet Loe, thousands of letters were sent to Utah representatives. Their efforts were a success and the bid to drill was denied. However, the event raises an important question regarding what lengths can be taken to preserve the work in a way that still aligns with Smithson’s original intent. It is unclear what the artist would have thought about an oil drilling operation so close to *Spiral Jetty*. He liked the remnants of the oil expenditures at Rozel Point. “A great pleasure arose from seeing all those incoherent structures,” he wrote in 1972. “This site gave evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes.” Lynne Cooke, a former curator at Dia, echoed this sentiment: “he didn’t look for beautiful places, but rather despoiled landscapes where industry and the wild overlap.” Still, Dia was concerned that the drilling would “disrupt the viewshed for the artwork, introduce the potential for increased noise pollution and degrade the natural environment.” In this case, an interdisciplinary approach to stewardship aided in navigating a complex debate and helped the organizations to make a decision in the best interest of preserving the work. The difficulty of balancing maintenance and accessibility demonstrates how multiple points of view working simultaneously and collectively are needed to ensure the best interest of the site and work.

63 “As public support to preserve *Spiral Jetty* continued, the discussion took on a new tone leading to broader concern for the lake and the irreparable damage an oil spill would cause to its ecosystem,” Hikmet Loe wrote. “Drilling for oil in the area’s shallow water could lead to unknown consequences: many argued an oil leak or spill would forever damage the lake’s habitat, wildlife, and ecosystem.” Hikmet Sidney Loe, “The Double World: A Survey of the *Spiral Jetty*’s Stewardship,” *15 Bytes*, August 2014, http://www.artistsofutah.org/15bytes/14aug/page5.html.
The various practical concerns of maintaining *Spiral Jetty* clearly require partnerships between diverse organizations. This complexity is also reflected in Smithson’s interdisciplinary approach to his practice and the work itself. Likewise, varied approaches are needed to understand how to go about caring for the work from multiple angles based on his intent. *Spiral Jetty* is a multi-media work that includes the site-specific sculpture, film, and an essay. The work is additionally immortalized in photographs, most notably those Smithson commissioned from Gianfranco Gorgoni. Smithson understood that many people would not make the trek to *Spiral Jetty*. He ensured that the work would reach a wider audience and always live on through these reproducible mediums. Bob Phillips, the original contractor for *Spiral Jetty*, came to realize the work entailed more than the physical sculpture he helped create:

“I asked [Smithson] for a copy of the whole film, rather than just one piece of the film. He explained to me that belongs to the gallery. That I just couldn’t get that. At the time, I thought, oh, so it isn’t the Jetty that was the work he was doing, it was the film that was the work he was doing. So I had to think about that a lot over the years. And now, I know that it was two or three things: it was three projects in one—not just one. The jetty being one of them, the film being another—and the construction itself another part of it.”

Smithson shot the *Spiral Jetty* film with professional filmmaker Bob Fiore and debuted it in an exhibition at the Dwan Gallery in New York six months after he completed the work. The 32-minute film follows Smithson on his journey to the Jetty, recording the construction process and showing the work from an aerial view. The narration and additional imagery reference Smithson’s vast interdisciplinary interests, including paleontology, geology, philosophy, cartography, science fiction, mythology, astronomy, art, and history. “By documenting the process of the work’s creation, with the addition of historical maps and information that cannot

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be inferred from the site itself, he expanded its social space,” Art Historian Mira Banay has written. Thus, Smithson transformed *Spiral Jetty* into a visual, textual, photographic, and cinematic space, making it not a discrete work in and of itself, “but one link in a chain of signifiers that relate to one another in a dizzying spiral.”

A prolific writer, Smithson penned an accompanying essay about the work in 1972. The essay describes the unique attributes that drew him to Great Salt Lake and goes on to describe details of planning and building the work followed by a reflection on the themes inherent to the *Jetty*. “Weaving a quasi-documentary, quasi-poetic evocation of the process of realizing the earthwork with an excursus on the cinematic,” Lynne Cooke writes, the “essay adumbrates a pedigree for the project by referring to such art-historical precursors as Jackson Pollock, Van Gogh, and Brancusi.”

Smithson’s wide range of interests are again represented in his writing, merging art criticism with broader forms of writing. The essay adds another layer of accessibility to *Spiral Jetty*, and further clarifies his intentions.

Smithson’s interest in entropy, or things falling apart over time, was a guiding theme in his practice that firmly linked art and science. For the artist, the *Jetty* represented geological change. Smithson spent months in Utah studying the geology and history of the site, making note of every detail. “The formation of salt crystals was not too small an occurrence to consider, nor was the vastness of the solar system too large to contemplate; he valued both symmetrical

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73 Bonnie K. Baxter (director of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College) and Jaimi Butler (coordinator of Great Salt Lake Institute) in conversation with the author, August 23, 2019.
(crystalline growth) and asymmetrical (volcanic rock formation) occurrences equally,” Hikmet Loe wrote. Ultimately, he expected the Jetty fully to erode. When that happens, it will only be accessible through his other mediums, as well as scholarship and visitor accounts.

Situated within a vast landscape, in a constant state of flux, the Jetty has become part of its surrounding ecosystem. As a result, the artwork invites viewers to consider not just the art but the Earth. Beyond the history of its construction, Spiral Jetty relates to the broader world, and can be used to study the environment, climate change, animal migrations, civic planning, museum studies, and art history. The mediums Smithson employed to document the work allow multidisciplinary perspectives and unique approaches to understanding it. The Spiral Jetty partnership’s educational initiatives further demonstrate its interdisciplinary value.

Chris Taylor, director of the Land Arts of the American West program at Texas Tech University, brings students to camp at the Jetty as part of “a transdisciplinary field program dedicated to expanding awareness of the intersection of human construction and the evolving nature of our planet.” In addition to exploring the site, the group visits nearby attractions including Golden Spike and the ATK Rocket Garden. Taylor notes the importance of spending time with Spiral Jetty. After exploring, the group sets up for dinner and a screening of the Spiral Jetty film. Taylor advocates for the site as a place of embarkation for students to learn about larger issues facing the world.

Physically engaging with Spiral Jetty makes it more accessible to those not versed in art history. Several partners have founded initiatives to help a broad range of visitors engage with

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77 Chris Taylor (director of Land Arts of the American West) in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.
the site on a deeper level. For a project funded by GSLI, UMFA created an “educational backpack” available for the public to check out from local libraries. The backpack is geared towards children. Families can use tools like microscopes and binoculars to learn about the biology of the area. A provided sketchbook and worksheet engage visitors’ creativity.78 Although it might conflict with Smithson’s edict of no mediation, “Spiral Jetty Community Day,” a collaboration between UMFA and GSLI to bring in the local community, offers “a fun [free] day at Spiral Jetty for friends of all ages to create art, learn about the science of the lake, and explore the landscape.”79

Additionally, UMFA provides field trips for AP Art History students as well as for self-guided individuals, made available and promoted through relationships with teachers, public libraries, art galleries, and promotion through social and digital platforms.80 Hikmet Loe, who completed her Master’s thesis on Spiral Jetty in 1996 and continues scholarship in the area, has collaborated with many academics and institutions over the years, including practicing architects who teach at the University of Utah and University of Nevada, Las Vegas, with whom she has organized trips, symposia, and educational activities for students.81

Above all, the work allows visitors to experience both the landscape and an important moment in art history, considering the current implications of both. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Land art became popular, the world was gripped by environmental concerns. Climate change and humanity’s impact on the Earth is an anxious topic today. The changing

80 Whitney Tassie (curator of modern and contemporary art at Utah Museum of Fine Arts) in conversation with the author, September 12, 2019.
81 Hikmet Loe (scholar, artist, and professor specializing in Spiral Jetty) in conversation with the author, August 13, 2019.
water levels at Rozel Point make Spiral Jetty uniquely situated to discuss the issue. For scientists Bonnie Baxter and Jaimi Butler from Great Salt Lake Institute, Spiral Jetty is the only access point they can use to reach the northern arm of Great Salt Lake, which is crucial for the research they conduct.82 When Spiral Jetty was created, the lake’s elevation was 4,195.4 feet.83

In an interview, Butler explained that the water levels are determined by the amount of water that enters into the lake through the watershed, runoff from surrounding rivers, as well as evaporation in the summertime. “Even in one year’s period,” she explained, “you have these pretty dramatic ups and downs in water levels.” Today, however, Butler said, “people are diverting a lot of fresh water out of the watershed for human consumption and for agriculture and for salt evaporation.” The shorelines of Great Salt Lake are decreasing; they’re at about 40% of what they would have been on average 20 years ago. Butler and Baxter are currently writing Great Salt Lake Biology: A Terminal Lake in a Time of Change, which claims the upstream diversion will only continue due to the exponential population growth in the area.

Although the Jetty was submerged under water for 30 years, they do not anticipate the lake to rise to that level again. The American Southwest is anticipated to be a hotspot for climate change with increasing temperatures and therefore less precipitation. More water will be used for agriculture to serve the rising population, which means less runoff into the lake. According to records the U.S. Geological Survey has been keeping since the early 1900s, there is a downward trend in water levels. They are now near the 1963 record low, which Baxter and Butler hope will serve as a wake-up call for the region.84

82 Bonnie K. Baxter (director of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College) and Jaimi Butler (coordinator of Great Salt Lake Institute) in conversation with the author, August 23, 2019.
84 Bonnie K. Baxter (director of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College) and Jaimi Butler (coordinator of Great Salt Lake Institute) in conversation with the author, August 23, 2019.
Additional research projects near the *Jetty* include the PELI-CAM that Butler has been working on for years. Rozel Point is a pivotal place to research the migration patterns of the American White Pelicans from inland lakes down to Mexico.\textsuperscript{85} This migratory pattern is one of the environmental concerns at the heart of events like the 2008 oil drilling protest that brings *Spiral Jetty* into a conversation that is larger than the art world. There are many such points of embarkation for visitors to the *Jetty*, and their individual response to stewardship of the site aids in the protection of both natural and human-made wonders.\textsuperscript{86} The institutional partnerships that support *Spiral Jetty* highlight the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that combines art and science. The environment is just as important to the work as its place in art history. Museums are beginning to adopt more interdisciplinary methods, using the site as an entry point to discuss how Land art can be incorporated into larger environmental debates and responsible visitorship, an approach that challenges and expands the traditional museum model.

\textsuperscript{85} Bonnie K. Baxter (director of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College) and Jaimi Butler (coordinator of Great Salt Lake Institute) in conversation with the author, August 23, 2019.

\textsuperscript{86} Annie Burbidge Ream (curator of education at Utah Museum of Fine Arts) in conversation with the author, September 4, 2019.
Chapter Three: Responsible Visitorship and Public Accessibility.

The balance between maintenance and accessibility is a constant challenge for stewards of Land art, especially with *Spiral Jetty*. Various organizations from different disciplines ensure *Spiral Jetty* is open and accessible to all visitors, from art lovers to the general public. Some might expect that in order to preserve it, *Spiral Jetty* would only be open for scheduled viewings, perhaps by the request of scholars or educators. But Smithson, and many other Land artists, created Earthworks to be seen by a broad, public audience. This intention may have contributed to Holt’s decision to collaborate with the state government and Dia, rather than sell the work to private hands. As a public work, however, a compromise must be struck between accessibility and the lack of mediation Smithson intended. It is necessary to keep the route to the site accessible and to provide a safe pilgrimage for visitors. It’s also imperative that the stewards find ways to inform visitors on their role in preserving the work and the experience for others.

*Spiral Jetty* remains open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There are no guards, so responsible visitorship must be enforced in other ways. This has become especially important as awareness of the work and accessibility to it has increased. Since the Jetty resurfaced in 2002, it can now be walked on, leading to faster erosion. The interactive nature of Land art, and *Spiral Jetty* in particular, requires viewers to assume a certain level of responsibility. Art viewers today are conditioned to have a framed experience in a white cube, an idea contradictory to the hands-on experience of *Spiral Jetty*. The ability to visit *Spiral Jetty* at any hour and the lack of patrol at the site offers a rare experience.

Unguarded, *Spiral Jetty* is also vulnerable; in order for it to survive, visitors must behave by certain guidelines. The main way visitors can do this is by following a simple rule: “leave no trace”—an edict mainly communicated by Dia and other institutional partners on their
websites—that charges visitors with leaving the Jetty in the same condition or better than they found it. Because Spiral Jetty is in a remote location with no garbage bins or restrooms, visitors are encouraged to pack snacks and water. However, it is crucial that they take all waste with them when they leave. Additionally, taking a piece of the Jetty home as a souvenir is strictly forbidden and moving or taking rocks is also prohibited. The simple effort of picking up garbage, wiping out names drawn in the sand, and covering up campfire remnants are the main conservation tasks for the public to be mindful of as unofficial stewards of the work.

Camping at the Jetty is an issue of debate. As part of their annual two-month intensive field study, students in the Land Arts of the American West program spend a night at the Jetty to experience the durational aspect of the work, appraising its appearance as the light changes (see fig. 8). Taylor enthusiastically believes the Jetty should be experienced for an extended period of time. But camping can negatively impact the site, especially because many visitors light illegal campfires and leave waste behind. As long as camp is not set up on the meandering zone, camping can help teach responsible visitorship.

The educational programs discussed in the previous chapter are another way to encourage responsible visitorship. Lisa Le Feuvre noted that when Smithson was making his work only a

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87 Dia lays out these rules directly in an autoreply response to inquiries via email: “Visitors must ‘leave no trace’ at the site. Carry out any waste with you. Making fire pits at the site or on the parking lot is strictly prohibited and will result in significant fines. DO NOT take existing rocks from the artwork or trample vegetation. Visitors are advised to bring boots, food, and water along with weather-appropriate clothing. There are no bathrooms, food, fresh water, nor fuel at the Spiral Jetty. The nearest gas station is in Corrine, Utah. The nearest restrooms and drinking water are at Golden Spike National Historic Site Visitor Center.”

88 Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.

small community of people were interested in it, and now his art is increasingly popular. This popularity raises the necessity of promoting proper ways to engage with the work to ensure its survival. Enforcing proper visitor protocols without mediating the site is complicated. The partners are currently discussing ways this can be done. Even posting information on their websites is relatively new for them.

Relying on visitors to assume these responsibilities can both detract and add to the unmediated experience Smithson intended for the Jetty. Achieving balance can be tricky and create tension between the Spiral Jetty partners. There are often gray areas in acceptable behavior, especially when no one is there to enforce it. A brochure distributed by Dia at UMFA, GSLI, and Golden Spike maintains that as “a path for walking and looking, Spiral Jetty is a sculpture to be experienced.” Smithson’s 1970 film about the work shows the artist himself walking on the Jetty. Yet drawing in the sand, for example, could alter the next visitors’ experience. On the other hand, the elements will inevitably wash the marks away. For some visitors, that element of play is their way of engaging with the work (see fig. 9).

It’s a constant negotiation as where to draw the proverbial line in the sand. Other than the “leave no trace” sentiment echoed by the partners (which includes not moving the rocks, making fires, or littering), there are no official rules. Hikmet Loe reflected on this ambiguity in an interview: “It’s hard to visit Spiral Jetty and see the way the site is now sometimes used: Frisbees, pitched tents on the shoreline, ATVs, dog waste, people taking rocks as souvenirs. It’

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90 Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
hard to balance free access with preservation, yet limiting access goes against the artist’s intent, I believe.*\(^91\)

Other well-meaning interjections from the public have unwittingly gone against Smithson’s intentions for his visitors but illustrate the complications of supporting access without mediation. A podium with a *Spiral Jetty* plaque and guestbook sits on the hillside behind the Jetty. It’s not an “official” part of the work (Smithson did not want explanatory signage at the site) but was installed by Eagle Scouts in 2014 (see figs. 10 and 11). Creating a small monument to commemorate the space and provide more information to visitors was their way of engaging with the work, however, it goes against Smithson’s intention of an unmediated experience. Since it’s located on privately-owned land, the podium does not technically fall under Dia’s jurisdiction.\(^92\) Additionally, in a benevolent effort to make the site more accessible, in 2010, the owner of the hillside behind *Spiral Jetty* built a parking lot without consulting the official stewards. Moving the parking area to another space in order to protect the site and enhance visitor experiences is currently being discussed internally by the partners.\(^93\)

This parking lot and the re-grating of the main road discussed in the previous chapter have greatly altered the visitor experience. The few rugged cars that once made the journey have been replaced by numerous rental cars carrying large groups. Dia and the Holt/Smithson Foundation are considering the possibility of moving the access point to the Jetty to a location that wouldn’t involve the downward, rocky trek visitors currently take to the spiral, allowing for greater

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\(^91\) Hikmet Loe (scholar, artist, and professor specializing in *Spiral Jetty*) in discussion with the author, August 13, 2019.
\(^92\) Chris Taylor (director of Land Arts of the American West) in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.
\(^93\) Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
accessibility to people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{94} Partners are also considering the positive benefits of moving the current parking lot further down the road to return to a car-less sightline around the work and spacing out the groups as they embark upon the site to allow for a more solitary experience.

Access, however, goes beyond the physical site. The primary way Land art is experienced by the public is through photo documentation. Photography has long been an important instrument for the genre. The art historian Mira Banay describes it as the impetus for many visitors to make the trip to Utah to see \textit{Spiral Jetty} in person: “What motivates people to make a pilgrimage to one of these sites is their earlier acquaintance with photographs of the artwork, along with their awareness of the importance of the personal experience of art. Moreover, when the work is presented as part of the collection of a museum of art foundation, it gains an added aura of quality and exclusivity.”\textsuperscript{95} Smithson created a film and essay to complement the \textit{Spiral Jetty} installation, bringing the work to audiences that might never make the pilgrimage and allowing for the viewing experience to take place through a variety of mediums. In 1970, the artist commissioned photographer Gianfranco Gorgoni, famous in the art world for his documentation of Land art,\textsuperscript{96} to photograph \textit{Spiral Jetty} during its construction, aerially and from the hillside behind. His iconic images brought the remote work to the art public and remains a primary way the \textit{Jetty} is viewed today.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{94} Maria Celi (director of visitor services at Dia Art Foundation) in discussion with the author, September 3, 2019.
\textsuperscript{95} Mira Banay, \textit{The Making of a New “Differential Space”} (Berlin: Mann, 2104), 240.
Social media now serves as a major point of access for the *Jetty*, allowing a wide audience to engage with the work. The photos and written accounts posted by tourists aid in an informal kind of scholarship, preserving their first-hand experiences on the internet. Because social media shows real-time conditions, it is an effective and free tool to help people prepare for their journey. Planning the trip to *Spiral Jetty* is part of the experience, and therefore part of the artwork. Social media has replaced part of the uncertainty that previously went into this part of the work. Pivotaly, however, social media also allows for the stewards to monitor prohibited activities, such as the surprisingly frequent number of weddings that take place at the site.\(^98\) For the most part, user-generated content sets a positive example for how to engage with the site. A suggested example would be adding a “leave no trace” hashtag when posting images of the *Jetty* (see fig. 12).

Balance is particularly important as *Spiral Jetty* evolves. Many of the efforts to make the work more accessible can be both beneficial and potentially detrimental to the work. Social media has helped raise visitor numbers and awareness about the work. At the same time, visitors’ awareness of the work greatly varies: some of today’s tourists might not know who Robert Smithson is while others fly or drive to Utah specifically to see the work, renting a car or even helicopter. The wide range of visitors who can encounter a work located outside a museum or gallery increases the importance of raising awareness about its meaning.

There are no clear-cut answers when it comes to making *Spiral Jetty* accessible. The expanded re-grated road is beneficial for safety and allows variously abled people to visit. The downside is that it erased the once-rugged aspect of the pilgrimage. The fact that there is no

\(^{98}\) Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
guard at the site enhances the unmediated, solitary experience of the work. However, since there is no one to enforce the rules, many visitors steal a basalt rock as a token of their experience.\textsuperscript{99} John Beardsley sees the artist’s intention to involve human activity as central to the process of entropy, and was part of the reason why Smithson picked a place littered with industrial detritus.\textsuperscript{100} It is fair to say that the continued erosion of the work due to foot traffic from the increased number of visitors is simply another aspect of the inevitable dissolution of the work in this entropic process. During the government shutdown in 2018, the public was impeded from experiencing the work. At the same time, without thousands of visitors, the work was able to rest, and vegetation grew.\textsuperscript{101} It’s a constant balancing act to preserve \textit{Spiral Jetty}, and the public plays an important role in its survival.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Maria Celi (director of visitor services at Dia Art Foundation) in discussion with the author, September 3, 2019.
Figure 8. Chris Taylor, the Director of Land Arts of the American West at Texas Tech University, posted this shot of his students camping at *Spiral Jetty* to his personal Instagram in September 2019.
Figure 9. “Jetty Pilgrim” Cristian Álvarez Contreras posed next to a drawing in the sand on the banks of Spiral Jetty in October 2019. This Instagram post shows how different visitors engage with the site. Many make markings in the sand. Although the elements will dissolve them, it is best to wipe the marks away.
Figures 10 and 11. On Instagram, visitors to Spiral Jetty captured a podium and plaque installed by the Eagle Scouts in 2014. Although the monument was an act of good will, it is often confused as being part of the work and goes against Smithson’s wishes that the experience of visiting the site be unmediated by explanatory signage.
Figure 12. This Instagram post from the author’s personal account shows a way to promote the concept of “leave no trace” when visiting the Jetty by my idea of inserting the hashtag #LeaveNoTrace. Additionally, the post shows the correct caption for individual social media posts when using images of Spiral Jetty to acknowledge the copyright held by the Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia Art Foundation.
Chapter Four: Extending the Museum Model.

Land art poses a challenge to the museum model, pushing beyond traditional art experiences that take place in physical structures. Land art inherently contravenes the traditional museum model because it cannot be housed in a museum. As Lisa Le Feuvre commented, “I think so many of the questions that we’re dealing with are because this moment in art history recalibrated the limits of art completely.” The different experience Smithson provided for viewers served as a paradigm shift for interacting with art through multiple mediums and access points. Today, the use of social media has further expanded the boundaries of the museum and influenced the experience of the viewer. To preserve and maintain the work and the artist’s legacy, stewards of Land art must think past the traditional museum model.

Smithson wanted to challenge and push the limits of art and *Spiral Jetty* accomplished just that. It is important to note that rather than abandoning the art world, Smithson and other Land artists of the late 1960s who left cosmopolitan art centers to produce site-specific Earthworks in the American Southwest, sought to push its limits. Prime examples of Land art include Walter De Maria’s *The Lightning Fields* in New Mexico, Michael Heizer *Double Negative* in Nevada, and Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* in Utah.

Smithson often critiqued the art world in his writing. However, he learned to accept these perceived limitations. One way he did this was by exhibiting in museums and galleries open to experimentation. “He rebuked the system and yet partially worked within it and used it to his own advantage,” Robert Hobbs has written. By replacing traditional art materials with heavy machinery and bringing environmental sites not traditionally related to art into the gallery

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102 Lisa Le Feuvre (executive director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, August 23, 2019.
through Non-Site installations of photography, drawings, and film, Smithson made an expanded view of what art could be (see figs. 13 and 14). Even while garnering attention through sanctioned gallery and museum exhibitions, the remoteness of Land artworks allowed for the “dignified” viewing experience the artists desired for their works.\textsuperscript{104}

It is often a big decision for someone to visit a work of Land art. Smithson wanted visitors to \textit{Spiral Jetty} to have a pilgrimage to it, as he first did. In setting up that experience for viewers he was already challenging what they were used to at a traditional museum. When viewing art outside of a museum, time and space takes on a greater meaning.\textsuperscript{105} The duration spent with a work of Land art contrasts with the way many viewers walk through a museum, allowing for a more solitary and meditative approach to art viewing rather than stopping at a work for a few minutes. Land art disrupts and supplements but isn’t meant to erase the museum.

In an interview with Kenneth Baker, Smithson explained, “I was setting up a dialectic that pointed to a condition that was outside the gallery and that somehow returned to the gallery. The cycle is endless.”\textsuperscript{106} Smithson was referring to the multi-media elements of \textit{Spiral Jetty}. When he completed the work in 1970, the site was more remote, and visitation was limited. Simultaneously, Smithson exhibited Gorgoni’s photographs at the Dawn Gallery, in addition to putting on screenings of the \textit{Spiral Jetty} film and publishing his essay.\textsuperscript{107}

Smithson created the theory of the Site/Non-Site dialectic to guide his Land art practice and describe this cyclical condition. The “site” is the location outside of the gallery or museum. The

\textsuperscript{105} Hikmet Loe, \textit{The Spiral Jetty Encyclo: Exploring Robert Smithson’s Earthwork through Time and Place} (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2017), 276.
“Non-Site” includes ways of displaying the site within institutional walls. The photographs are one example of a Non-Site, but other notable artworks by Smithson also illustrate this idea. For *A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)*, 1968, and *Leaning Mirror*, 1969, exhibited at Dia Beacon, Smithson displayed dirt on the gallery floor (see fig. 15 and fig. 16). These works create a larger dialogue about the indoor/outdoor boundaries of art. By bringing dirt into the gallery, Smithson raised questions about what could be considered art and expanded the way natural materials were used and presented. These installations expand the relational experience to art and the cognitive impact of multiple approaches and access points to the works allow for a wider sense of engagement.\(^{108}\)

“In a Duchampian manner of reaching beyond the traditional artist space, Smithson was able to blend a new notion of inside/outside,” Flam said. Works like *Spiral Jetty* create a dialogue “between the immediate present and the remote geological past.” His sites evince the magnitude of the Earth while his Non-Sites show the possibility of making a small section, even if only a pile of dirt, into a significant artwork. As Jack Flam wrote in his introduction to his anthology of Smithson’s writings, “The Non-Site to some degree brings the site from the geographical, psychological, and social margins to a ‘center,’ be it the artist’s studio, an art gallery, a museum, or a page of a book.”\(^{109}\)

Dia’s role in managing Land art is directly related to that dialectic. The original vision of Dia’s founders “was to present artists’ work not only in depth but also in isolation, and in whatever location and circumstance were dictated by the artist and the needs of the work.”\(^{110}\)


From its inception, Dia has focused its efforts on a generation of artists that sought to reach beyond traditional galleries and museums, creating monumental works in out-of-the-way locations. Dia serves as an ideal steward, living up to their mission to showcase monumental Earthworks in unencumbered ways. The Foundation has adapted industrial buildings to create ideal showcases for this type of art and has additionally involved the artists or used their ideas for installation.\textsuperscript{111}

Dia is comprised of 11 locations, including site-specific installations; Earthworks; and a museum, Dia: Beacon, which was built in Beacon, New York, in 2003. This unique constellation of sites has given Dia the ability to manage works in the American Southwest including \textit{Lightning Fields} and \textit{Sun Tunnels} in addition to \textit{Spiral Jetty}. Compared to other museums that may extend the museum through community programming or a temporary installation of public art, Dia has more long-term experience managing non-traditional art destinations. In an article discussing James Turrell’s \textit{Roden Crater}, Andy Battaglia brought attention to a further “reinvention for the university and museum model… acknowledging that Dia has been doing so with \textit{Spiral Jetty} since 2012.”\textsuperscript{112} The reinvention in question refers to the interdisciplinary partnerships, in the case of \textit{Spiral Jetty} partnership between Dia, GSLI, and UMFA that was formalized in 2012. As previously discussed, interdisciplinary, collective stewardship is a vital component of maintaining Land art. In the future, if another work of Land art is donated to a museum, this model of constellation sites could be looked at as a way to successfully oversee Earthworks.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 12.
The internet as we know it has amplified the Site/Non-Site dialectic. Matthew Coolidge refers to this added dimension as the trialectic of Site, Non-Site, and website. Social media, in particular Instagram, has added to this third dimension. The internet has created a portal for viewers, who are implicit stewards of the work, to join the conversation of preserving Land art in an influential way. Their contributions—posts, comments, and photographs on social media platforms and various websites—enhance this trialectic by reaching a wide public audience and increasing accessibility with immediate effect. The viewer contributes to the work, including how it is perceived and experienced, and adds to scholarship by leaving behind a record of their time with it, in addition to serving as ambassadors by promoting awareness. Visitors’ outside points of view convey the democratic aspect of Land art. Most everyone who goes to Spiral Jetty now views posts about their experience to social media. Instagram furthers the Site/Non-Site continuum by bringing photography not into a gallery but online, bringing the concept full circle.

Art has moved from the art world and into the broader public largely because of social media. Museum visitorship has reached groundbreaking numbers in the past few years. In 2018, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York set a new attendance record with more than 7.35 million visitors, the highest in its recorded history. The Louvre in Paris has experienced a similar burst in attention, With more than 10 million visitors in 2018, the museum had to employ strategies from the French capital’s road management system, including screens at the entrance warning that the museum is full or crowded, including website notifications.

113 Matthew Coolidge (director Center for Land use Interpretation, board president Holt/Smithson Foundation) in discussion with the author, September 16, 2019.
general interest in far-flung Land artworks has exploded. A *National Geographic* article, entitled “How Instagram Is Changing Travel,” sums up the impact of social media on remote destinations. The article discusses how the tourism board in Wanaka, New Zealand, began hosting social media “influencers” in 2015 to post about their adventures, resulting in a whopping 14% increase in tourism. The article continues to describe the environmental issues and the potential for overcrowding, both of which can be approached through a more positive use of social media as a tool for interdisciplinary maintenance.

This third voice—the internet public—presents challenges but also opportunities for preserving Land art. “Wanderlusting” after social media pictures with little historical context does allow for an unmediated experience, which can be beneficial as long as efforts are made to foster responsible visitorship. Social media also provides daily documentation and access to people who cannot make the journey. For Smithson, it was important that it was available to see without making the physical trip, yet he tightly controlled documentation of his work. What does the fact that we can go online and see these unfiltered posts mean for the work’s legacy? *Spiral Jetty* will not last forever. Social media assists in recording visitor experiences and providing a historical record. It is up to the stewards to manage these records accordingly.

The popularity *Spiral Jetty* has found on the internet poses a threat because the more people visit, the faster the work decays. Yet the increased awareness of the site recalls the importance of balance when working with Land art. On the one hand, more people now know about Smithson and his work, which is one of the stewards’ primary goals. Artistic legacy has three parts: the work, the artist, and the foundations. Le Feuvre discussed bringing *Spiral Jetty* into the “art present.” This can be done through continued research made possible by the ongoing

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dialogue with the work. When the Jetty was completely submerged only a few years after construction, “a work that had always been difficult to see became totally inaccessible,” Ben Tufnell has written. “This inaccessibility, coupled with the evocative photographs taken in 1970 by Gianfranco Gorgoni, and the extraordinary essay and allusive film that Smithson made about the construction of the work, have contributed to the legendary status of the piece.”\(^{117}\)

Submerged for two-thirds of its life, Spiral Jetty had to live on primarily through photography and other mediums. Holt kept paying the lease and promoted the continued appreciation of the work by donating it to Dia in 1999, before its revival, after it became visible again in 2002. Her efforts convey the necessity of being committed long-term to preserving these kinds of works. In his essay on artists’ legacies, Eric Wolf notes that some works do not follow the typical path of future reception. “While there are many ways artists can attempt to control their legacies, ultimately, it is the survival, stewardship, and accessibility of their work that will determine how and if they are remembered,” he writes.\(^{118}\) Legacy can be constantly tended to with as little mediation as possible. Traditional artworks are protected through the museum that houses it. Without the traditional museum infrastructure, Spiral Jetty demands we expand the model to protect its future reception.

The legacies of the foundations that manage Spiral Jetty are intimately connected with how well they preserve the legacy of the artist. Defining what legacy means for Spiral Jetty is essential to protecting it properly.\(^{119}\) The partners and the public work together as stewards to contribute to this maintenance. As Land art constantly changes, there might someday be another

\(^{119}\) Interestingly, Smithson was very active in shaping how his works were received. According to Le Feuvre, Smithson “was a hustler.” He wanted to be a part of the art scene and consciously crafted the reception of his works.
voice added to this dialogue. The Holt/Smithson Foundation will only exist for the next 20 years, reflecting the ephemeral nature of the works it preserves. Through a series of grants, it will contribute to the preservation of the “creative legacy” of the work. One way this might come to fruition is through the realization of Smithson’s underground cinema, a concept he thought would allow visitors to experience the Jetty at the site, even when it was no longer present. If future patrons were to realize this idea, it would create a new way for the work to live on.\(^\text{120}\)

Figures 13 and 14. Two drawings by Robert Smithson in preparation for *Spiral Jetty*. The drawings are now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, and have been exhibited at various institutions as “Non-Site” extensions of the work.
Figure 15. Robert Smithson, *A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)*, 1968, installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.
Figure 16. Robert Smithson’s *Leaning Mirror* from 1969 is on display Dia:Beacon, the Dia Art Foundation’s permanent museum space, in Beacon, New York.
Conclusion.

Land art pushed boundaries and created new experiences for viewers. In turn, stewards of Land art must find new ways to incorporate these changes. Collective stewardship, an interdisciplinary approach, the promotion of responsible visitorship, and an extension of the museum model are needed in order to preserve Land art. The *Spiral Jetty* partnership is essential to fostering local advocacy, promoting awareness, enhancing communication, and preserving the legacy of Robert Smithson and this important work.

The interdisciplinarity inherent in Land art is important for the way it is managed. The collaborative efforts of individuals working in diverse fields allows for a comprehensive approach to stewardship. Additionally, educational initiatives with an interdisciplinary focus enhance the ability for *Spiral Jetty* to be used as a point of embarkation to speak about greater global issues. Earthworks, Elyse Goldberg has said, “are located in places where they live and breathe and they are often about big philosophical issues—time and memory, space and the negation of space, exploration and the journey and the human impulse to make a mark.”

Promoting responsible visitorship is also crucial to the conservation of Land art. There is a delicate balance between increasing awareness and bringing visitors to the site. The notion of “leave no trace” is the main takeaway for visitors, as they are effectively stewards. Finally, Land art extends the traditional museum model both in its construction and the way it is managed. A collaborative approach, beyond the traditional museum model, enables the continued preservation of works situated outside a museum or gallery.

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Widely regarded as a quintessential work of Land art, *Spiral Jetty* serves as a prime example for what it takes to effectively steward a work of Land art. Due to Smithson’s early death, measures were taken by various individuals and institutions to continue his legacy. The ambiguity of his masterpiece and attendant writings live on and serve as continuous points of discourse for new generations. Through looking at the collaborative efforts in place to maintain *Spiral Jetty*, one can see the importance of creating interdisciplinary partnerships to manage a work of art that exists as a part of the natural landscape. Experts from numerous fields are essential when forming such a partnership. Through learning about Land art, specifically *Spiral Jetty*, we can learn about the world we live in and the troubling issues such as climate change, the effects of which can be seen when studying the work.

One might think that no one should walk on the Jetty so as not to contribute to its erosion. Importantly, human interaction is an intended part of the work. Land art is more relevant than ever today in our over-mediated culture. The ability to have an unmediated experience and engage with the landscape is increasingly rare. That’s why it’s so important to preserve *Spiral Jetty* and the unmediated experiences Smithson intended.

Preserving Land art directly relates to the challenges our planet currently faces. Once *Spiral Jetty* succumbs to nature, the visitor experiences, scholarship, photographs, and Smithson’s film and essay will live on. In addition to record keeping, there is also the possibility of defining alternative ways to preserve *Spiral Jetty*’s legacy. The potential for a patron or foundation to realize Smithson’s underground screening area for the *Spiral Jetty* film would be an ideal way for visitors of the site to maintain the aspect of pilgrimage and experience multiple elements of the work. The realized underground museum would serve as a way to commemorate the original artwork and continue Smithson’s legacy. Even after the sculpture has eroded, the site
will always remain. Preserving works of Land art will look different in every case. With interdisciplinary and collective approaches to stewardship, efforts can be made to maintain the works and plan for their future in ways that ideally represent the artist’s intentions.
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