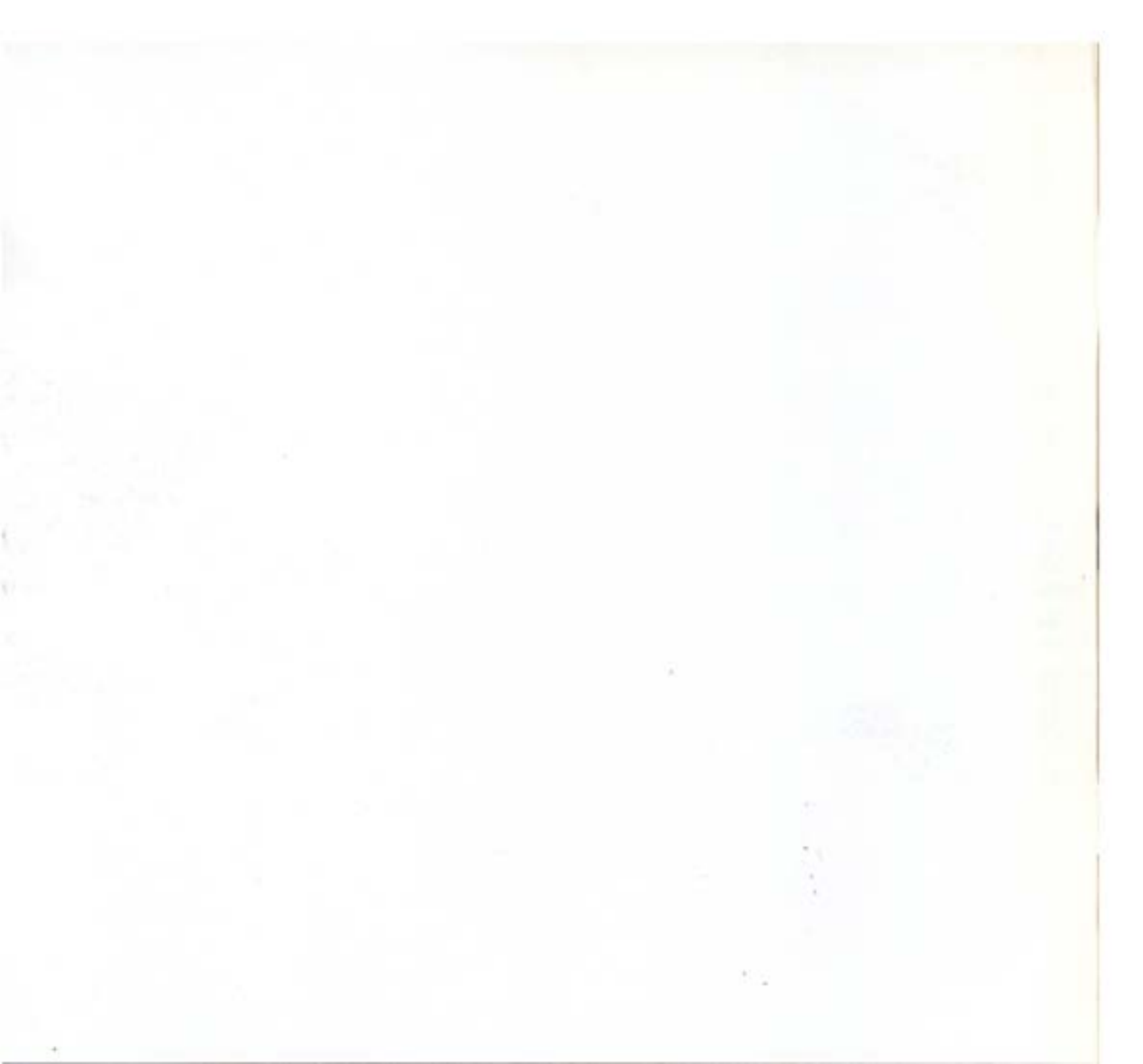


EARTHSCAPE



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EARTHSCAPE

HASTINGS TRUST AND THE PUBLIC ART SOCIETY

Tale of Ancient China

*Take me, oh my love,
to a land where
thunder rolls
and rain pours down*

Dragon scroll
Emperor's possession
Great drought
hardship

Dragon scroll
Emperor's procession
Unrolled
by the river

symbol beyond symbolism

*Take me, oh my love,
to a land where
thunder rolls
and the rain pours down*

Dragon rise
thunder roll
rain fall

Great rejoicing



Earthscape

Earthscape is the second in a series of Art and Architecture Exhibitions promoted by the Hastings Trust and the Public Art Society.

Commissioned to organise this year's exhibition, our brief was to promote new approaches towards improving the environment and to provoke a high level of dialogue on environmental issues.

Following the successful 1990 Architectural Ideas Exhibition, we decided to stage **Earthscape** as an open competition subtitled **New Visions for Environmental Solutions** – *by which the organisers hope to elicit a positive rather than a negative documentary response to the precarious state of the Earth's ecological balance.*

This precise yet open-ended brief was chosen to encourage a new response from artists. We felt that the role artists have played in expanding public awareness of the ecological crisis has been immense. For the past twenty years artists have relentlessly pointed up the nature of the problems, now that the flick of a TV switch gives virtually continuous access to a recognition of the 'problems', where has the art moved to?

Are artists really in the vanguard of society's involvement and response to change, or do they merely reflect existing consensus views? Is there a positive environmental art which is potentially more profound than the decorative escapism of much contemporary landscape work?

Art has always been inextricably linked to the environment. Landscape art ultimately features both artist and viewer as participants rather than as onlookers in the awesome expanse of Nature. Artists such as Richard Long and Chris Drury provide a continuation of nineteenth century landscape romanticism within a particularly British framework. We feel, though, that there is a totality to the vision and context of such art which is often ignored.

Art and environment are still being separated by the gallery/collector system. The total work is not simply the foot dragging in the desert, or the sphere made of antler fragments; it is how the artist arrived on site, using which airport and using what currency. Turner did not just paint sublime views of the Rhine or the Lake District, he painted them for collectors whose industries virtually destroyed parts of the north of England.

In the light of this we hope that **Earthscape** will function as a total art work, eliciting a positive response from artists and viewers alike, to promote a networking of contemporary and historical ideas. In effect, an extended performance piece, which uses the collective psyche as a medium.

In choosing the judges of the competition, contributors to the catalogue, venue and presentation of the event, we have aimed at developing a particular background or matrix

on which the creativity of individual contributors can resonate. We feel that our work highlights the relationship between the selection processes of the individual and the collective and, in so doing, evokes a positive sense of responsibility towards environmental solutions.

A directive towards the use of art not as a peripheral luxury commodity but as an essential and central aspect of society's well-being.

Christine Goldschmidt and Alan Rankle

May 1991

Acknowledgements

The organisers would like to thank the following for support, contributions and suggestions:

Nick Wates, Director of Hastings Trust; Jeremy Brook, Graphic Ideas; Lynne Green, Curator, Southampton City Art Gallery; Hannah Vowles and Glyn Banks, Art in Ruins; the judges of the competition: Victoria Cliff-Hodges, Andrew Graham-Dixon, Deryck Healey, Mike von Joel and Laetitia Yhap; Louise Scott, Barbara Browning and Susie Monnington; Catrina Colledge at Fabian Carlsson Gallery; especial thanks to British Telecom, the Civic Trust and Michael Oliphant.



Lessons for the Western World

It is very difficult for us to think positively about the future life of our planet at a time when we find ourselves in the middle of the world's worst ecological disaster since Chernobyl. The Gulf War is quite simply about who is to control the world's dwindling resources, and is a continuation of the war against the so-called Third World by military rather than by, as has been the case for a long time, simply economic means. Almost the whole of the Third world stands on the brink of disaster as its resources are expropriated to feed the wasteful and destructive consumer lifestyle of the West. Already crippled with the burden of an unpayable and immoral debt, the effects of the war will only make matters worse.

Whilst it seems that the overdeveloped countries are doomed to a constant series of resource wars as they continue to pursue a concept of 'growth' where technology and fashion merge together to ensure an ever more rapid destruction of resources; ironically, perhaps it will be those 'underdeveloped' countries who have failed to industrialise and therefore to make themselves dependant on oil, who might stand a chance of developing in an ecologically sustainable way over the next fifty years. Even at times of famine and civil war, which has raged for nearly thirty years, Tigray's people are concerned with ecology, placing environmental protection at the top of the agenda.

"Before the revolution began, the people of tigray were dominated politically, economically and socially. The peasants had no land, so many of them were forced to leave their homes and emigrate to other countries. The peasants suffered the most extreme poverty. This is one of the main reasons why our revolution emerged. Now because of our revolution we have taken the land from the landlords, we have struggled and we have won many rights. In the future we will struggle more and more strongly and we will win new victories." Margeta Assefa, peasant farmer

Tigray, Ethiopia's northern province, has its own language and cultural identity. For centuries it remained under a feudal system of administration overseen by rich landlords. Not only did the government try to suppress people's ancient traditions, but it also excluded Tigray from the social and economic development programmes which were being implemented elsewhere in Ethiopia. The situation changed little since the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, oppression being the hallmark of the present regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Since its formation in 1975, the TPLF has been at war with the Ethiopian government (Derg). At the same time it has successfully managed to promote the self-determination and self-reliance of farmers living in liberated areas. This has largely been achieved by dismantling the feudal system of government and replacing it with a People's administration, which enables the whole community to take an active role in the development process. From the outset, life in the liberated areas has been transformed in favour of the masses. The significance of giving 'land to the tiller' cannot be overstressed since it has broken the age-old exploitation of peasants by land-lords.

Traditionally the right of land ownership was forbidden to women. In a society where

90% of the population live from subsistence agriculture, this made women economically dependant on men, and left them vulnerable to a host of oppressive practices. Female circumcision was customary eight days after birth. Both pledging an unborn child and child marriage were common. Rape was not considered a serious crime and beating was seen as an assertion of male authority.

Women were also forbidden to plough and to slaughter their own animals. They were restricted to the hardest and most laborious agricultural tasks. They worked in the fields, walked miles each day for water and firewood, did all the food preparation and even had to grind grain by hand. Women who were widowed or chose to escape child marriage and a life of back-breaking labour, had little means of supporting themselves. Many were forced into prostitution in the towns and neighbouring countries.

There are many examples of how life has changed for women in the liberated areas. Women all over Tigray at last have their own land and therefore the means to support themselves independently. Having benefited directly from the revolution, women have become a driving force within it. Women are now nurses, teachers and farmers able to plough with oxen, and are fighting alongside men to end all oppression.

REST, the relief Society of Tigray, was founded in 1978 with a mandate to co-ordinate programmes of relief, rehabilitation and development in Tigray. REST's activities include counselling, family re-unification and repatriation. In 1988, following the Ethiopian government's expulsion of all non-governmental organisations (NGO's) from northern Ethiopia, REST became the only humanitarian relief agency operation inside Tigray. While the immediate priority is to bring in relief supplies, REST is also working in the rehabilitation of drought victims, in primary health care, education, transport and communications, agriculture, soil and water conservation and ecological rehabilitation. The active involvement of the people is essential for such programmes, and REST, an indigenous agency, works in close co-operation with the elected local councils that provide the political and administrative structure of Tigray. Its programmes are aimed at promoting self-reliance and long-term sustainable solutions to the problems of famine and under-development.

While the immediate future looks bleak in the drought-affected areas of Tigray, the lesson of 1989-1990 is that drought does not necessarily mean famine. REST's policy of targeting the poorest of the poor, in co-operation with local councils through-out Tigray, has meant that the disaster scenario of 1984-5, with mass famine deaths, the establishment of feeding camps (where disease rather than hunger exacted the heaviest toll) and mass migration to Sudan, has been averted.

At the beginning of the century some 40% of Tigray was forested. It now has only 4%. Trees have not only been cut down to make more land available for farming, but also for firewood and building materials. This trend is now being reversed. In July of last year the

first session of the newly re-established area council met in Abi Adi, devoting itself to the demarcation of areas set aside for re-forestation, how these areas would be protected and which were priority areas for terracing. An education programme set up by REST and local people situated at demonstration centres is used to teach elected delegates to learn necessary skills and techniques preventing any further misuse of the delicate farming land.

One such demonstration centre is at Giget, in Tembian, central Tigray. The land for this centre was deliberately chosen; it had been rejected as unfit for distribution by the local council as being unfertile. It is divided into plots to replicate methods used by both more and less efficient farmers, to show practically the advantages of catchment terracing and earth bunds for soil and water conservation, use of compost, manure and early ploughing, and seed selection. When the rains finally came in July last year tree nurseries throughout Tigray embarked on an extensive programme of seedling distribution. The largest was carried out in Makelle, Tigray's provincial capital, in mid-July - more than half a million seedlings were given away free to the people of Makelle and its surrounding areas. From early in the morning crowds of people and young children could be seen making their way to the Elala nursery just outside Makelle town where two hectares had been planted with a variety of seedlings, including eucalyptus, lemon, papaya, acacia and neem.

It will clearly take some years before such programmes show marked results, but what is already obvious is how much greater awareness there is among peasant farmers about the need to improve land use and agronomic practises. The people of Tigray are clearly committed to change, to an improvement of their lives not just for the present or for the near future, but for many generations ahead. This has been made possible by working hand-in-hand with the environment, helping it along wherever necessary, planting trees and preventing soil erosion. We of the Western world can learn some valuable lessons from this approach to life and the environment; helping it along wherever necessary, planting trees and preventing soil erosion. We of the Western world can learn some valuable lessons from this approach to life and the environment; not only the fact that aid donations can be used to stimulate internal development rather than promoting aid-related dependency, as the programmes of REST are showing, but also that it is urgent not only to ensure that environmental concern is on the agenda but that it is also essential to tie everyday life and environmental awareness inexorably together.

REST is working with the people of Tigray to build a tomorrow without famine

Art in Ruins

Hannah Vowles/Glyn Banks 1991

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Andy Goldworthy
Sweet Chestnut
County Durham 1988
Courtesy of the artist

Art and Environment: Signposts and Solutions

The most complete change an individual can effect in his environment, short of destroying it, is to change his attitude to it.

Mark Boyle 1966

This essay is offered as a contribution to the installation/performance **Earthscope**. As individuals we are all threatened by humanity's attitude and behavior towards the environment. None of us will escape the consequences of our continuing disregard for the well being of the Earth. We all have the power to contribute to the solutions: each of us must do so if we are to succeed.

Earthscope is an important initiative. By articulating the contribution art can make to the environmental debate, it both mobilizes and draws attention to a potent force which has been largely ignored in the search for solutions.

I am convinced of the centrality of art to our humanity. Without the capacity to create and to respond to art we would not be human. In a society which has as its essential criteria of worth utility and economic performance, art is in danger of being at best trivialised as entertainment, at worst sustained purely as an investment. There is an urgent need to recognise art as an essential means by which we come to terms with and express our experience of the world – of our environment. The role of the artist is as crucial to our survival as that of the scientist. Both explore the world and our perceptions of it and both can offer new approaches to the environment. Art can help in the resolution of the developing crisis. Without this aid binding solutions will not be achieved, and we and the world are lost.

As an art historian and curator my experience and thought are constantly refined by my admiration for and contact with practitioners. What follows does not seek to represent the intention nor the activity of individual artists taking part in **Earthscope**. This is not an introductory essay, but rather a framework for discussion which offers some signposts on the road to solutions.

The threat we pose to the Earth has its root in an attitude which is itself embodied in the word we use to describe the problem. The word 'environment' means "the state of being environed", that is surrounded, encircled, beset, beleaguered or enclosed. The image is clear and it serves to reinforce the false notion which underlies our relationship with the Earth and with Nature – that we are apart and separate from them.

In 1991 we are plundering the Earth on a far greater scale and more efficiently than at any other period in our history. Gradually we are reducing the world to sterility, and in doing so are cutting our own collective throat. Why?

Putting aside the socio-economic rationale for humanity's wholesale exploitation of this planet, the answer is relatively simple. We do not *feel* ourselves to be *part* of the rest of life, nor recognize at a fundamental level our absolute identification with it. Environmental problems are identified as 'out there', but there is no such place; *in here* is all we have. What we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves, but not simply through cause

and effect. We are an element in the delicately balanced process of negotiation, cooperation and mutual dependence we call life.

The genesis of the environmental crisis lies in what John Seymour has called the 'ultimate heresy' of the belief that human beings stand apart from and above the natural world.¹ Engendered by the discovery of our power to control and exploit Nature without (until comparatively recently) any apparent reckoning, this attitude has led to the loss both of our sense of dependence on the Earth and of our perception of ourselves as inseparable from Nature.

It is only in the recognition of our Kinship with the rest of Nature and with the Earth that hope lies. Only when we know that this is so will we stop polluting and raping ourselves. And here the individual is in control, does have a say in the destiny of the planet. As individuals we cannot stop the Amazon forests being destroyed, nor prevent the oil wells of Kuwait burning. At least we cannot achieve anything of this instantly. But as individuals we can change the world.

Acknowledgement of this relationship represents a profound change in the understanding of our role as human kind upon the Earth. It will no longer belong to us, to use as we will, rather we shall share in it as a partner with all else that inhabits it and of which it is made. We do have a choice.

Today environmental issues are big news. During the recent war in Kuwait the resultant pollution and natural destruction received headline coverage. All wars cause environmental havoc. During the Vietnam War we heard little of the devastating effects of the defoliant Agent Orange. Only years later did it become the focus of concern. Saving the plant has itself become the subject of commercial exploitation. The 'Green' label sells products - from soap powder to newspapers.

No longer the preserve of cranks and alarmists, we are all to a lesser or greater degree going Green. Much of the Greening of our daily lives is the direct result of individual action. The rapidity with which lead-free petrol became easily available was remarkable - and was due entirely to our, the public's, demand for it. No demand, no Green products. As a result of consumer pressure 90% of aerosols are now free of CFCs and other substances which damage the ozone layer.² This is only the beginning.

Environmental destruction through the activity of our species is not new. Throughout our history voices have been raised in protest at our use (abuse) of the Earth. The effects of deforestation on the landscape of Greece were described by Plato. The concept of 'natural' in the sense of being formed without man's intervention is largely a figment of our imagination; it is part of our mythic interpretation of the world. In reality there are relatively few areas on the globe entirely untouched by humanity. Wherever we

developed we adapted and exploited the Earth to suit our own needs.

The most profound changes in the landscape were wrought with simple tools by people of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. In Ancient Egypt some 7,000 years ago a technological revolution took place which has had a lasting and dramatic effect on the surface of vast areas of the Earth – it was the invention of the plough. The barren hills of Central and Northern China were once richly forested. The deserts of the Near East and Asia are largely the result of overgrazing 4000 years ago.³ The moors of Scotland are the product of a similar use which continues today.

Mankind never has been, and never could be, a passive witness of Nature. We change the environment by our very presence. We shape our humanity in the process of interacting with the world and in moulding Nature to suit our needs, wishes and aspirations. Our options are limited, therefore, to how we deal with the Earth. Today we can continue to follow our present destructive path, or we can begin to regain a balanced, constructive, relation to the rest of the world. We must re-determine our needs and aspirations with an old imperative realigned – our survival understood now as encompassing all.

The history of the triumph of technology is the history of a divorce between humanity and the natural environment. Paradoxically the progressive estrangement, which has dramatically accelerated in the past two centuries, has been paralleled by a growing awareness of the cultural, aesthetic and spiritual importance of landscape. As we intruded more and more into it, we began to understand our need, on every level, for the natural world. This acknowledgement of meaning is expressed through the medium of art in all its diversity.

In the West the natural scene as an independent subject for visual art has a short history. This is no reflection on artistic ability, rather it reveals the anthropocentric preoccupation of much of our past. The concept of 'landscape' (or 'landskip') is an invention of the artist. As a word it comes from the Dutch term used to describe a painting which took as its subject inland scenery, as distinct from a painting of the sea, a portrait, etc.

Although direct studies from Nature are found in Ancient and Classical art, landscape painting did not emerge as a genre in its own right until the seventeenth century. Prior to this it was largely used as a backdrop to human drama. The subsequent division in the painting of landscape between the topographical and the ideal embodies a duality in our relationship with the world. The former stems from the scientific cataloguing and classification of the Encyclopaedists, the latter from philosophy's search for meaning. Both represent forms of control; on the one hand by practical and technical means, on the other through appropriation in support of philosophical propositions.



Stonehenge 1727 after David Loggan
Courtesy Southampton City Art Gallery

As a fundamental human means of interpreting and relating to the world, art inevitably exploits its subject in the service of both technical practice and philosophical premises. While recording or evoking its many aspects and moods, art employs the natural environment for its own ends. What is seen and experienced is interpreted and translated through the medium of art in the pursuit of humanity's goals. The history of landscape painting is, therefore, a history of manipulation. Claude Lorraine (1600-82), with whom pure landscape painting is judged to have come to its own, combined representational elements within a classically inspired matrix of proportion in order to create an 'ideal' Thomas Gainsborough (1728-88) constructed his 'natural' scenes with studio models, using broccoli for trees. Even when the emphasis moved away from the construction of a perfect scene in favour of the immediate appreciation of the beauty of Nature, John Constable (1776-1837) was not above moving a tree for compositional ends. 'Style', not reality dictates art's translation of life; thus a British painter who travelled in Italy might bathe an English landscape in a sunlight never found beyond Mediterranean shores. Art is not life, it mediates the experience of life. However through its mediation, through this translation, the face of life changes. Even in the 'natural' environment the artist's eye has profoundly altered the shape of our world as well as our perception of it.

The unconscious shaping of Nature through necessity has been accompanied throughout our history by a conscious aesthetic urge to transform our environment according to taste. In England the most obvious example is the tradition of landscape gardening. It reached its most remarkable and extravagant expression in the eighteenth century, when men like Capability Brown (1716-83) worked to 'tame' and 'improve' Nature. Transforming the gardens and parks of the aristocracy, he created landscapes à la Claude Lorraine. In France a century earlier Andre Le Notre (1613-1700) imposed Cartesian geometry on the natural landscape, in the prevailing belief that the key to the order of the universe lay in simple geometric shapes.



Capability Brown
The Gardens of Stourhead 1740-60

Much of England's present day 'scenic charm' expresses aesthetic values derived from seventeenth century painting, in turn inspired by Italian scenery and Classical, Arcadian, ideals. The notion of the 'ideal' as expressed in the art of Claude Lorraine continued into the nineteenth century to influence the judgement of beauty in Nature itself.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries artistic theories of landscape proliferated. Definitions, characteristics, and meanings established then inform our relation to landscape today. These notions of what in Nature is 'natural', 'romantic', 'sublime', 'awe-inspiring', 'picturesque', coined to categorise subjects for art, underly our contemporary perception of the Natural scene. Our present understanding, our image of Nature has been formed by art's mediation. More, the actual face of the landscape - its form and character - has been changed through the agency of art.

What we experience today is a *cultural landscape* which began to evolve from the

natural environment with the appearance of the Neolithic peoples. In a very real sense our environment is a record of ourselves in relation to Nature, and is therefore, a rich repository of meaning. Today we only faintly glimpse this relationship but it lies at the heart of our growing understanding that concepts of Nature, of wilderness, of landscape unsullied by human kind, are important to our psychological welfare. By distancing ourselves from the rest of life and from our close association with the Earth we have lost the emotional and spiritual bond with our context.

In the environmental debate the central role of this lost relationship is seldom touched upon. But the loss of meaning is the core of the problem. Only through recognition of this, and in pursuit of its regain is there real hope for change in our use of the world.

Art is a fundamental mode of interacting with environment. Not simply 'objects', art is a process – a continuous discourse with life. Within the framework of the dialogue truths are discovered, relationship established, significance acknowledged and understanding achieved. The artist is a Shaman who both reveals and imbues with meaning. Once art was, unlike today, central to human experience and its articulation. We need once more to recognise this impulse as an effective part of our lives, fundamental to our reality. Art is capable of offering solutions to the ecological problems we have set ourselves. Since the 1960s artists have increasingly recognised the need for them to re-address questions of Nature, landscape, environment (rural and urban) in the light of these concerns. The artistic approaches are various, but underlying them all is a presumption that we need to re-establish the relation with our context.

Whatever the individual expression of this premise, whatever practical solution is offered to specific environmental questions, the greatest contribution art can make to our ability to choose survival lies in its capacity to disclose and convey meaning. Re-charging the local and global environment with significance is the prerequisite to the re-establishment of relationship with our partners-in-life. Without a return to kinship no technological or scientific solution will stick.

For almost five hundred years artists applied themselves to the imitation of natural form. By 1900 the interest in facts was losing ground to abstract concerns and the exploration of the language of art. In this century art is no longer a window through which to view the theatre of life, but is an event in itself. Observed reality has become the inspiration for the creation of equivalents, not just representations. The artist continues to translate the experience of, and response to, the world through the available means. But in the twentieth century the means – the raw materials, the building blocks – have expanded to encompass anything encountered in the natural or man-made environment.

In the late 1960s the land became a focus for a small number of artists who were interested not in representation but in engagement. What subsequently became known as



Stonehenge, Wiltshire

'Land Art'⁴ marked the beginning of a development which has taken artists out from behind the easel and into the landscape. In the 'earthworks' of the Americans Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, and others, the land itself became the material. Made with earth, sod and stone, a large part of the content of these works is their relationship with the surroundings, with their context. They are not discrete objects; the boundary between them and their setting is deliberately unclear. By intention they function as extensions of existing forms, echoing the character of place. The shape of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* 1970 (Utah, USA) was informed by the molecular structure of salt crystals present on the shore of the Great Salt Lake into which the sculpture curls. The intention is to provide for both artist and audience an actual experience of *place within real space*.

The urge to create a place within and of the landscape is not new, in the U.K. Stonehenge and other prehistoric monuments are amongst the earliest examples. Silbury Hill, once with its white chalk capping a beacon in the sun, stands testimony to the fundamental human need to both worship and leave a mark upon Nature.

In combining symbolic form with landform the contemporary artist shares a desire with his ancient forebears to create differentiated and evocative *place*. The correspondence between the created shape and its site may not, as in Smithson's *Jetty*, to be confined to physical phenomena. A legend that the Salt Lake was connected to the ocean by an underground channel which revealed itself as an enormous whirlpool, informed the artist's choice - making *Spiral Jetty* a key to both physical and mythical identity of place.

Human intervention in landscape was seen by Smithson as no more unnatural than earthquakes or hurricanes - we are after all part of Nature. But he worked with an intention close to that urged by the English poet, Alexander Pope in 1731. Pope argued that in all things one should consult the 'Genius of Place' and "design in conformity with nature, drawing out the best characteristics of the site, and thereby enhance the work created upon it".⁵

In the 1990's we must accept that there is no return to a natural environment. Humanity exists through and by intervention, but we have yet to acknowledge the responsibility that that brings. Art can play a practical role in the reclamation of sites devastated by human activity. In the industrial countries reclamation is already a recognised need, but often this activity is itself carried out with little or no regard to the visual values of environments. Such values are the traditional preserve of the artist. Art has, therefore, the potential to mediate between ecology and industry, and in so doing become a central resource in the re-establishment of a healthy environment.

In his projects for post-industrial sites Robert Smithson did not seek to disguise the character of the site nor the materials he would use. Suggesting the incorporation of his earthworks within routine reclamation, he would have created an artistically enriched,



Robert Smithson
Spiral Jetty 1970

distinctly man-made, landscape which both acknowledged and commemorated industrial use. Unrelieved because of his sudden death, these works would have stood as memorials to the disruption of landscape and as reminders of our need to be circumspect in the management of the natural resource.

The social, economic and political structures which determine our environment and govern the landscape concern us all. They control from the seemingly simple to the complex and grand, from where we may walk, to the fate of all on the Earth. As individuals we apparently have little or no voice, yet we are ourselves part of these structures. In order, however, to affect them we need to perceive our role and to recognise our power.

By leaving the studio and adopting a plethora of materials, artists have exposed themselves to the cultural structures which define human intervention in the environment. The process of negotiation and the revelation of the mechanisms which control access and use, become integral to the artistic statement, if not the statement itself.

In 1976 Christo erected his *Running Fence*. Twenty four and a half miles long, it crossed two Californian counties. It took three and a half years of negotiation with landowners, 18 public hearings, 3 Superior Court Sessions and 450 pages of environmental reports to achieve. It was on site for two weeks. Documented in the book and the film *Christo* produced as part of the project, the exposure of structures and processes of control was integral to the work. Sadly this aspect of the project receives little attention.

Art is a force for change. It can reveal and expose, and can draw us through recognition, shame or anger, into action. Art in Ruins who share the pages of this catalogue use images and words to expose the exploitation and suppression of culture, race, people, resources. In *Lessons for the Western World* they offer precisely that, by focusing attention, as they have before, on one area of the world where ecological protection is at the forefront of human activity



Christo
Running Fence 1975 Collage
Courtesy of Anneli Juda Fine Art

Elsewhere Art in Ruins have argued that art in our Western society "serves as a satisfaction for cultural needs, and is bound to the capitalist system of exploitation, which is more orientated to commercial aspects than to the 'human' Art, they argue, has "lost its mythic autonomous character" ⁶ In the context of the commercialisation of art and the control of the artist by economic and political agency they may be right. I do not believe, however, that current artistic concerns which centre on Nature and the environment conform to this view. While ownership of final works is still controlled by market forces, the methods of working and the intention behind the processes are leading art back into the human and the mythic realm. The convictions which inform the practice reject the societal systems which they seek to expose as the root of the environmental crisis. In working methods there lie demonstrations of our capacity as individuals to re-evaluate our attitude to, and relationship with, the environment.

The sensibility of the British artists who moved into the landscape in the late 1960's differed from that of contemporary American land artists. Land-scale generates different responses, and a peculiarly British, Wordsworthian, reverence for landscape informs the development of art-in-the-land in this country.

Concerned by the heroic scale and interventionist methods of the Americans, Hamish Fulton sought to make no mark on the Earth's surface. Like Richard Long his principle activity was walking, and as with Long, the experience was recorded by photography. For Fulton the photograph and the text which accompanies it evoke the landscape encountered or his state of mind at the time. Image and word are the artwork, in an art which is: "a passive protest against urban societies that alienate people from the world of nature" (Fulton 1982) ⁷

Richard Long's interventions in landscape – paths trodden, stones and sticks reorganised – are often barely perceptible and invariably ephemeral. The elements with which he creates form will be reclaimed by Nature through its own forces. And it is as a *natural force*, as another layer of mark-making laid upon countless others, that Long operates. His activity is the artwork, a map or photograph its visual trace. Walking is the process of moving through, the sculpture a stopping place along the way. At times the walk is itself sculpture – performed in simple configurations which carry multiple references and associations. Lines, circles, spirals have been made in the environment by humanity since our beginnings – from ground markings in the deserts of Peru to patterns inscribed on prehistoric monoliths in Orkney.

Marks made, temporary forms left behind, are evidence of Long's private rituals which take place within a Shamanistic dialogue between artist and landscape. At times his layering, his ritualistic mark-making, takes places close to the evidence of earlier related activity, as in his series of walks around Dorset's Cerne Abbas Giant, cut into the hillside chalk 2-3000 years ago.

Long's activity expresses his dialogue with place, with the physical and metaphysical forces encountered in often isolated and inaccessible areas of the Earth. Art mediates experience. The object or performance created is the point of communication between artist and audience. Returning from the landscape with evidence of his journeys and discoveries – natural materials encountered or collected while walking – Long creates gallery-based works which evoke an experience of reality few of us are privy to. Dislocated from their material context, the sculptures are powerful signifiers of the land from which their constituent parts are collected. Of equal importance, the particular form in which the random parts are placed embodies an idea, a way of rendering experience by ordering, which is peculiarly human. It is a process of abstraction which, through selection and juxtaposition, confers meaning.



Richard Long

Circle in Africa

Mulanje Mountain, Malawi 1978

Courtesy of Anthony d'Offay Gallery

By bringing fragments of the natural world inside, Long sets up an encounter between two arenas of experience. Within the ensuing dialogue new truths about our relationship with each are revealed. The presence of natural materials within an urban, constructed, environment is peculiarly poignant. This poignancy, this evocation of one set of forces within the context of another, is employed by a number of artists for whom the Natural world provides both medium and subject. Operating primarily outdoors, they create works which, while embodying lessons learnt and experience gained from Nature, function effectively indoors.

Inherent in the process employed by Andy Goldsworthy is a profound sense of identification and partnership. When he first began to work outside he had to "establish instincts and feelings for Nature... I needed a physical link before a personal approach and relationship could be formed. I splashed in water, covered myself in mud, went barefoot and woke with the dawn"⁸ Born out of his physical experience of Nature, Goldsworthy's method is one of discovery. He uses no tools or artificial means of construction. Rather, he employs "the natural bonds and tensions that exist within the earth"⁹ The material and form of each work is determined in large part by season, weather conditions, specific properties or characteristics of the substances encountered. The method is collaborative. Goldsworthy's concern is with the substance of the land - its materials and structures, and the forces which govern their generation and decay. Like Long, much of the work he creates is transient - recorded only in photographs. While the transience reflects the fact of Nature, the photograph is intended only as an indication of the artist's activity - not as a substitute. "At best it is an invitation to others to find and experience the work processes for themselves where alone they can be found - outside"¹⁰ If his method is a process of exploration, then the more permanent objects Goldsworthy exhibits stand as evidence of his discoveries. An obvious delight in materials is combined with an inventiveness which demonstrates a deep understanding of natural structure and its potential for developed form. His work as a whole reflects the extraordinary diversity of Nature at the level of the specific. He focuses our attention on the ordinary and commonplace revealing it as a source of wonder and great beauty.

Goldsworthy's approach of negotiation and partnership with the environment is open to us all. It is a relationship with the Earth we need to establish. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the global problems we face and in so doing forget the needs of our local environment, our own place. When we lose sight of the particular, we lose sight of our power to effect change. As individuals we can, at a local level, begin the process which will change the world.

We are shaped by the place in which we develop and our responses to them. In our individuality we reflect the environments we have known. What is important is not just the physical character or condition of our surroundings, but the psychological, emotional and spiritual significance they have for us. Our relationship with place is as important to our



Richard Long

Wessex Flint Line 1987

Courtesy of Southampton City Art Gallery

psyche as our relationships with other human beings. Although varying individual to individual, there is a commonality in the relationship, in the bond with place, determined by the culture of the group to which as individuals we belong. The Bushmen of the Kalahari acknowledge every stone, every plant, every creature as brother or sister. We in the West, on the whole, do not. For the Bushmen environment is charged with meaning. We must, for survival's sake, re-discover that the same is true for us.

The environmental organisation Common Ground was founded on this premise. Since 1983 it has worked with practitioners from all branches of the arts to place cultural arguments and evidence alongside "the scientific, technical and economic rationales which so dominate and often debilitate our ways of thinking and doing". They urge that "while conservation arguments remain in the scientific constituency ...they remain partial and flawed."¹¹ It is within the cultural arena that concerns about our ethical relations with Nature, our ancient understanding of the land, its symbolism and myth are centred. It is by addressing these concerns that we will regain understanding of and relationship with our place in the world.

It is through the creative imagination that "the richness of our relationship with our surroundings" will be reawakened. This relationship is a complex matrix of natural history, archeology, social history, legend, myth and cultural tradition. Common Ground believe that our subjective, individual response to the environment holds the key to both our personal wellbeing and ecological survival. Through their work with artists they seek to excite recognition of the value of our cultural and emotional relationship with the environment. The New Milestones [Sculpture, Community and Land] Project¹² is concerned with helping people to express the meaning their place has for them. "in an imaginative and accessible way through sculpture". By bringing artist and community together Common Ground make possible the permanent, public, expression of the emotional response, the feelings, people have for their surroundings and for the history embodied therein. In so doing they liberate both parties involved, by demonstrating how imaginary the boundaries between the two really are. Art and artists are accessible to, and can become an integral part of, common experience.

Through New Milestones and all their other projects Common Ground seek to reawaken our caring for the place in which we live. In stressing the cultural, spiritual and aesthetic value of the environment they are attempting to make our relationship with the Earth once more whole. Without total involvement we cannot hope to maintain the motivation that is required if the world is to be brought back from the edge.

The tradition of art in the environment is as old as ourselves. Like any other human activity it is the subject of fashion. Within recent years it has become the focus of attention and debate. It is clear that the planning of the urban environment since World War II has rarely been successful. The separation of art, craft and architecture in education and in



Andy Goldworthy
Winding Wall
Grizedale 1988
Courtesy of the artist

perception has led to sterile and desolate city landscapes.

Most urban and many rural areas have their share of statues and other public monuments. These represent, however, only the most obvious manifestation of art in our surroundings. The increasingly vociferous 'art in public places' lobby is in danger of merely advocating a need for more art objects in more places. We urgently require to establish a far wider and more profound interpretation of the role of art within society and its functions. At the heart of the promotion of art in the public arena should lie the premise that the artistic sensibility is an imperative – not a luxury. If there is to be hope for harmonious living, evidence of the creative impulse must be part of our ordinary, daily experience. Enhancing the aesthetic quality of our cultural environment, making our daily lives more stimulating and rewarding, is a key role for art. But in the context of ecological survival it is the most superficial of the contributions art can make.

Solutions to environmental problems are not the sole preserve of the scientist, politician or informed campaigner. We all have a role in determining our future. Like the scientist, the artist works at the frontier of understanding, extending our knowledge, changing our perceptions of the world. The way we use the world has to change, there is no option. Artists are already leading the way in their approach to, and their relationships with, the environment. To follow their direction is the most difficult thing humanity can ever undertake, but this change of path will be both a return and a new beginning.

Lynne Green

April 1991

Notes

- 1 John Seymour *The Ultimate Heresy* Green books 1989
- 2 *Wake Up to What you can do for the Environment* Department of the Environment Pamphlet 1991
- 3 Rene Dubos *A God Within: A Positive View of Mankind's Future* Abacus 1976
- 4 For an elaboration of this discussion and information on other land-based art forms, see: John Beardsley *Earthworks and Beyond* Abbeville Press 1984
- 5 Quoted in Beardsley.
- 6 *Art in Ruins Export* exhibition catalogue Poitiers Musee Sainte-Croix 1990
- 7 Quoted in Beardsley from *Aspects of British Art Today* exhibition catalogue Tokyo 1982
- 8 *Hand to Earth: Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture* Henry Moore Centre for the Study of Sculpture Leeds 1990
- 9 Andrew Causey introduction to *Nature as Material* Arts Council 1980
- 10 Causey, as above
- 11 This and the following quotation is from: *An Introduction to the Deeds and Thoughts of Common Ground* 1990
- 12 Joanna Morland *New Milestones: Sculpture, Community and the land* Common Ground 1988



*First prize winner
Earthscape Art Competition*

Andrew Bick
Untitled (Clay Piece 14) 1991
found wood, clay, wax
31 x 34 x 8 cm
photo courtesy Todd Gallery

Catalogue

Andrew Bick

- 1 *Untitled (Claypiece 2)* found wood, clay, wax 28 x 29 x 3cm
- 2 *Untitled (Claypiece 14)* found wood, clay, wax 31 x 34 x 8cm

Ian Bottle

- 3 *Armchair Critique* oil on canvas 72 x 54ins
- 4 *Tree, House* oil on paper 30 x 23 ins.

Jean Boyd

- 5 *Herbal: Subtext* bronze, oil and paper on canvas 65.5 x 41.5 ins

Kevin Broughton

- 6 *The Offering* oil on canvas 45.5 x 45.5 ins

Kai Choy

- 7 *Creative* oil on canvas 14 x 14 ins
- 8 *Receptive* oil on canvas 14 x 14 ins

Lynne Collins

- 9 *In Harmony With the Earth* oil and sand 42 x 50 ins

John Eaves

- 10 *Leaning Stones* charcoal on paper 34 x 46 ins.
- 11 *Stonehenge Positive* charcoal on paper 34 x 46 ins

Luke Elwes

- 12 *Mother Earth, Father Sky* oil on linen 20 x 40 ins
- 13 *Desert Rising* oil on linen 18 x 18 ins

Chris Fordham

- 14 *The Gap* mixed media 37 x 49 ins

Jolie Goodman

- 15 *Studies for installation*

Howard Himage

- 16 *Mother/Earth* mixed media 12 x 16 ins

Kaori Homma

- 17 *Water* hand-made paper 40 x 145 cms
- 18 *Wind* hand made paper 126 x 76 cms diptych

David Laing

- 19 *Pages from an open book:*
Memento Mori etching 25 x 22 ins
Prayer etching 25 x 22 ins

Michael Lewisohn

- 20 *Twinkle* oil on canvas
Sunland Oil on canvas

- Hannah Liley**
21 *Bush grass* photogram 70 x 40 ins
- Alistair Macintyre**
22 *Overflow I (Sunset Horizon)*
23 *Blue Horizon III (Resurrected Horizon)*
- Susie Monnington**
24 *Red Shift* Oil on canvas 72 x 56 ins
- Nick Pearson**
25 *Landscape (balance)* mixed media 61 x 48 ins
26 *Landscape (fire)* mixed media 61 x 48 ins
- Ursula Saville**
27 *Drawing* pencil
28 *Drawing* pencil
- Dale Robertson**
29 *TVs 1* photographs 42 x 59.4 cms
30 *TVs 2* photographs 42 x 59.4 cms
- Howard Romp**
31 *Earth Rhyme for Today: The Performance* mixed media 48 x 22 ins
- Andrew Smith**
32 *Untitled* Mixed media 42 x 59.4 cms
- Jesse Smith**
33 *KAZ* mixed media 60 x 48 ins
34 *Forest Fires* Photographs 10 x 12 ins (x2)
- Leonard Shelley**
35 *Fred and Jerry* mixed media
- Katy Shepherd**
36 *Headscape* mixed media 48 x 51 cms
- Marcus Vergette**
37 *Scuffle* Welded steel
- Bruce Williams**
38 *Blinding View* oil on canvas 84 x 60 cms

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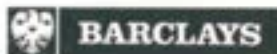
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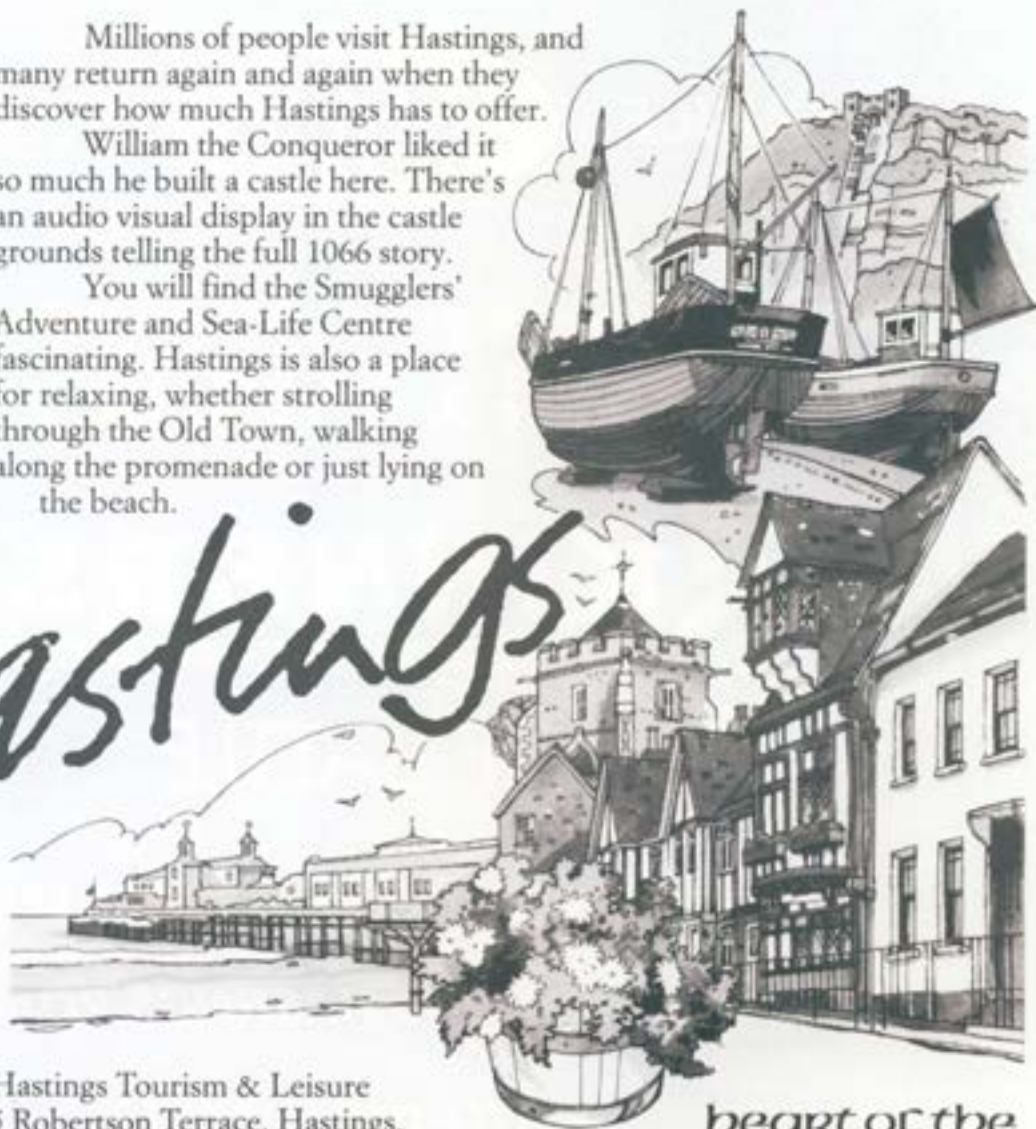
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