

# Environmental Art



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## **Introduction**

The link between people and nature was the main focus of environmental art, sometimes referred to as Land art or Earth art, which first appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. It entails producing works of art that are situated in or made from the natural world. Natural elements like rocks, soil, and plants are frequently used by environmental artists to produce their works. I have selected, Joseph Beuys and Hamish Fulton who are two artists that are particularly identified with environmental art. They both have been influential on my journey through art. In particular shaping my concern for the environment and how to represent this artistically.

## **Joseph Beuys**

German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) is regarded as one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. He is renowned for his unusual approaches to art and was an important member of the Fluxus movement. Beuys was fascinated by how people and nature interacted, and he thought that art had the ability to change both society and the environment. He produced a lot of pieces with the goal of bringing attention to environmental problems and inspiring people to take action to save the environment.

## **I Like America and America Likes Me**

"I Like America and America Likes Me" is a performance art piece created by Beuys in May 1974. The artwork involved Beuys spending three days living in a small room with a wild coyote in the René Block Gallery in New York City. The room was separated from the gallery visitors by a wire fence and a felt blanket.

Beuys saw the coyote as a symbol of the United States, representing its wild, untamed spirit and its potential for renewal and regeneration. He believed that by communing with the coyote, he could connect with the deeper spiritual and cultural aspects of America.

During the three-day period, Beuys performed various actions, such as wrapping himself in a felt blanket, which is one of his signature materials in his artworks. He also communicated with the coyote through gestures and sounds, such as howling and whistling. The coyote, on the other hand, mostly remained aloof and wary of Beuys.



Figure 1.

The performance was intense and emotional, with Beuys attempting to bridge the gap between humans and animals, and also between different cultures and ways of living. The artwork was seen as a commentary on the relationship between nature and culture, and the need to find a balance between them.

"I Like America and America Likes Me" is considered one of Beuys' most iconic and controversial works, as it challenged conventional notions of art and performance, and raised questions about the role of the artist in society, Figure 1

### **7000 Oaks**

Another of Beuys' well-known environmental artworks, "7000 Oaks," was initially conceptualised in 1982. 7,000 oak trees were planted in the German city of Kassel, the project was a component of a larger initiative to combat the negative impacts of urbanisation on the environment and to raise awareness about environmental issues. Beuys viewed the initiative as a means of encouraging sustainability and getting people to consider their activities more carefully in relation to the environment, Figure 2 & 3.

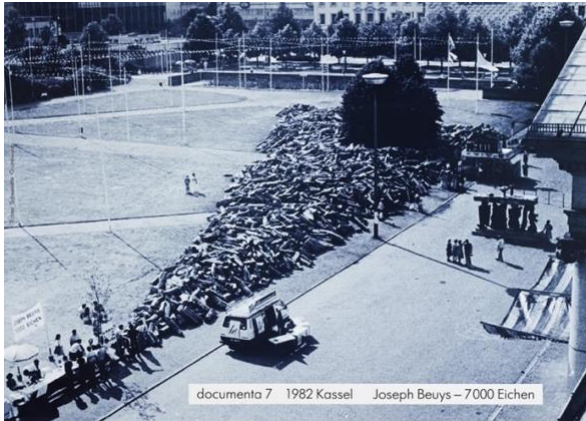


Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Beuys started the project while he was a participant in Documenta 7, an international art show which is held in Kassel. Through financing the planting of an oak tree, Beuys extended an invitation to the residents of Kassel to take part in the endeavour. At the base of each tree, there was a basalt stone that acted as a memorial and a memory of the labour that had been done.

*"I think the tree is an element of regeneration, which in itself is a concept of time. The oak is especially so because it is a slowly growing tree with a very solid heartwood. It has always been a form of sculpture, a symbol for this planet ever since the Druids, who are called after the oak." Beuys in conversation with Richard Demarco 1982.*

The procedure of planting the trees was methodical and labour intensive, and it lasted over several years. Beuys thought the act of planting the trees was just as significant as the outcome. The project was meant to be an ongoing, protracted undertaking that would develop over time. The trees were planted in a way that would support their growth and survival and were specifically chosen to complement the local ecosystem.

"7000 Oaks" is now regarded as one of Beuys' most significant and influential pieces of art. Numerous artists, activists, and environmentalists have been motivated by the project to consider how their actions may affect the natural world more carefully. It has been replicated in other cities throughout the world. It is a potent reminder of the value of protecting the environment and the part that art can play in encouraging constructive social and political change.





Figure 4. Modern image of the Oak Trees planted between 1982-87

### **Hamish Fulton**

British artist Hamish Fulton, who was born in 1946, is well-known for his walking artwork. Fulton bases his artistic creations on his experiences when strolling through natural settings. He has travelled extensively, including the Himalayas, the Amazon rainforest, and the Australian outback. The goal of Fulton's walking artwork is to build a bond between the observer and the surrounding environment. He views walking as a way to discover the surroundings and comprehend our place in them. The artwork of Fulton serves as a potent reminder of the value of protecting nature and the part that art can play in raising environmental consciousness.

## 21 Days in the Cairngorms



Figure 5.

Deveron Projects is an arts organisation based in Huntly. In 2010, Fulton was invited to participate in this artistic project; Linking Huntly with the Cairngorms National Park through a 21 day walk. The Cairngorms is one of Europe's last remaining wilderness zones. Huntly is located in the Cairngorms' foothills but is

outside of the bounds in terms of geography and politics. Fulton's trail disregards these boundaries as it leads you from Huntly's town square and into the Cairngorms. This work, as most of Fulton's works explores the idea of walking as both a political and artistic act. He attempted to draw a geographical connection between Huntly and the Cairngorms National Park while examining the literal and figurative meanings of the town of Huntly's motto, Room to Roam. Which involved wandering the Cairngorms for 21 days with only one rucksack. Fulton's journeyed from Huntly's square to Glenmore Lodge came to its conclusion. As a result of the initiative, a new path now connects Huntly with the Cairngorm National Park. It was added, in connection with the walking festival in Huntly. I'm not sure how the addition of the path registers with Fulton's own ethos, "Leave on trace"!

Interestingly, in 2016 the Deveron Project; A living memorial to peace, planted 1,700 native trees, shrubs, and wild flowers, and includes 49 oaks that were raised from acorns from Joseph Beuys' 7000 Oaks in Kassel.

## No Darkness



NO DARKNESS  
TRACKS OF THE ARCTIC FOX, LATE SPRING, DRIFTWOOD FROM SIBERIA.

Title: "No Darkness", 1979

Medium: Black and white photograph and lettraset mounted on paper,

Dimensions: 137.2 × 109.9 cms

A coastal walk in north west Iceland from Holmavik to Holmavik, June 5-12 1979.

Fulton travelled to Iceland in 1979, for the walk that inspired the above photograph from a coastal walk in northwest Iceland, underneath the picture, phrases are used to give the viewer an impression of the journey.

Soft Ground  
No Darkness  
Tracks of the Arctic Fox,  
Late Spring  
Drift Wood from Siberia.

Figure 6.

In regards to "No Darkness" you can see the shape of the trail in the photograph you're told it is soft under foot by the words below the photo. The viewer is now starting to get a sense of place, its July in Iceland hence the title due to the midnight sun. However, you are still left with questions is it cold? Is the wind blowing?



## My Work

My environmental work has taken several forms, the one I will focus on is video. The use of moving image, while not a normal technique used by Fulton, mainly photograph. Beuys however, is well known for using video to capture his performance art, e.g. "How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare, 1965" Video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L5gIMHZ7\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L5gIMHZ7_8) I believe video to be more powerful at imparting an emotion or message across to the viewer.

Both Beuys and Fulton have inspired me to be more challenging in my video work to highlight the man-made disaster that is currently happening to the planet. Beuys through the very challenging environment he creates in his artwork and also the very direct through, "7000 oaks". Whereas Fulton has physical contact with the environment through his walking.

## Whale Song



Figure 7. Screenshots from Whale Song

The premise of my video "Whale Song" is the highlighting of the plastic pollution in the sea told through, a journey from mountain spring to ocean, a short video, 2:25. My self Imposed target was under 3 minutes, as I believe if you want to capture the attention of the audience, then the shorter the video the better, additionally it was designed to loop.



The environmental problems relating to the use of plastic and its effects on our marine environment are the most urgent. The original idea of the video was using flashes of plastic waste accumulating on a beach to represent the flow of plastic into the ocean from a mountain spring to the sea. In the end, I did adhere to this narrative, but with a few detours until the final video.

The natural flow and sound from the mountain stream to the waterfall are used to give a sensation of calm and tranquillity, as in, everything is alright with the world. The waterfall serves as a point of



transition, as seen by the use of slow motion and the beginning of the colour overlays that ripple across the surface like oil on water. Then the flashes of pollution start to further highlight something is wrong with the river.

In order to reflect human interference with the river, the sound shifts from natural to discordant noise, which has a jarring effect when compared to the sounds of a babbling stream. The haunting song of the whale is the final sound to enter. The whale's song competes with human noise until eventually just the despondent sound of the whale can be heard, as the waves pound the beach. The beach scene is in B&W in contrast to the first half of the video's full colour, which represents respectively health and decay. Since humanity was too late to take action, the whales' deaths from choking on our "civilization's" plastic pollution is represented by silence and fade to black.

## **Conclusion**

Environmental art is a significant genre of the arts that has developed in reaction to current environmental issues. The genre has been utilised by artists like Beuys and Fulton to highlight the interaction between humans and nature and to produce pieces that increase public awareness of issues, e.g. deforestation and biodiversity. These artistic creations are meant to compel viewers to consider their relationship to the environment and to take action to preserve the natural world. Environmental art serves as a powerful reminder of the world's beauty and fragility as well as our duty to preserve it for future generations. In some small part I hope to develop my art that I can add my "voice" to this urgent need.

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## **Figures**

Cover Image. “Akg-Images - Search Result.” *Www.akg-Images.de*, [www.akg-images.de/archive/-2UMDHUKDWHMR.html](http://www.akg-images.de/archive/-2UMDHUKDWHMR.html).

Figure 1. “JOSEPH BEUYS: I like AMERICA and AMERICA LIKES ME.” *Kids of Dada*, 2015, [www.kidsofdada.com/blogs/magazine/35963521-joseph-beuys-i-like-america-and-america-likes-me](http://www.kidsofdada.com/blogs/magazine/35963521-joseph-beuys-i-like-america-and-america-likes-me).

Figure 2. ““7000 Oak Trees”, Joseph Beuys, 1982.” *Tate*, [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beuys-7000-oak-trees-ar00745](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beuys-7000-oak-trees-ar00745).

Figure 3. “Akg-Images - Search Result.” *Www.akg-Images.de*, [www.akg-images.de/archive/-2UMDHUKDWHMR.html](http://www.akg-images.de/archive/-2UMDHUKDWHMR.html).

Figure 4. “Joseph Beuys’ Ambitious Plan to Plant 7000 Oaks.” *Public Delivery*, 21 Apr. 2020, [publicdelivery.org/joseph-beuys-7000-oaks/](http://publicdelivery.org/joseph-beuys-7000-oaks/).

Figure 5. “Hamish Fulton: 21 Days in the Cairngorms - Deveron Projects.” *Www.deveron-Projects.com*, [www.deveron-projects.com/hamish-fulton/](http://www.deveron-projects.com/hamish-fulton/).

Figure 6. “Hamish Fulton a Walking Artist.” *Meer*, 17 Aug. 2019, [www.meer.com/en/56780-hamish-fulton-a-walking-artist](http://www.meer.com/en/56780-hamish-fulton-a-walking-artist).

Figure 7. Screenshots from my video Whale Song.