Andy Goldsworthy
A Collaboration with Nature
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Edited by Terry Friedman
and Andy Goldsworthy

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“As with all my work, whether it's a leaf on a rock or ice on a rock, I'm trying to get beneath the surface appearance of things. Working the surface of a stone is an attempt to understand the internal energy of the stone.”

Andy Goldsworthy
Contents

7 Foreword
9 Introduction
13 The Photograph
Andy Goldsworthy
21 Beginnings
Miranda Strickland-Constable
37 Environmental Sculptures
Andrew Causey
53 Leafworks
Paul Nesbitt
75 Monuments
Terry Friedman
93 Touchstone North
Andy Goldsworthy

Projects
113 Holes
119 Throws and Splashes
125 Haarlemmerhout
131 Holbeck Triangle
137 Glasgow
143 Quay Art Centre
149 Yorkshire Sculpture Park
155 The Lake District
161 The North Pole
167 Castres and Sidobre
173 Snowballs in Summer

179 Bibliography
185 Acknowledgments
189 Contributors
Andy Goldsworthy is best known for his small ephemeral works created ad hoc in the landscape and recorded as photographs. Since April 1984, however, when he made Seven Spires in Grizedale Forest in the Lake District, he has completed five commissions for large-scale works, and has several more at the planning stage. There have been two projects at Grizedale, another woodland sculpture at Hooke Park in Dorset, and two huge earthworks on the line of an abandoned railway at Lambton near Chester Street and Leadgate near Consett, both in County Durham. Goldsworthy has plans involving the use of stone walls in France and the United States, a series of artificial tree-clad mounds in Holland, and a set of cones made of layers of steel for a site overlooking the Tyne at Gateshead.

Understanding these projects involves both defining them as a category and distinguishing them from Goldsworthy’s ephemeral works. Setting the photograph pieces against the larger more permanent projects, Goldsworthy sees himself as two different artists, but does not want the large works’ growing demands on his time to draw him away from the photograph pieces, which he sees as the core of his art. The distinctions between the kinds of work are most obviously the contrast of size and the quite different ways they are made. For the large projects to be properly understood, these distinctions need to be refined.

Environmental Sculptures

Andrew Causey
The small works are inspirations of the moment, made intuitively without plans or drawings, the artist’s only tool being a knife. Goldsworthy is alone, he photographs the sculpture to preserve it, and a color print is then available for exhibition in an art gallery. The large works, on the other hand, are commissions, which may have been competed for. Drawings are important here to clarify the project in the artist’s mind, support applications and guide fellow workers. These projects involve assistants, art students brought in to dig holes and handle manual winches at Grizedale and Hooke, and the skilled operator of a mechanical excavator, Steve Fox, at Lambton and Leadgate.

2 The early commissions presented financial problems, and all of them confronted the artist with organizational challenges that the small works do not. The brief lives of the photograph pieces contrast with the long ones of the large works. Permanence eliminates the need for photographs, so the large projects do not become art works for sale in a gallery.

Beyond these technical distinctions are others that help define the types of work further. The photograph pieces are rearrangements of nature in which, for example, stones, leaves or flowers of a certain color are brought together, the randomness of nature is removed, and geometrical forms are created that highlight edges, crevices and holes. The works are elegant, refined exhibits of a craftsmanly virtuosity that makes us look at nature more closely. But in the sense that they bring the viewer up short, and surprise with their wit and resource, they are not natural. Their brilliance lies largely in their artifice, and the illusionism of color and scale aligns them with painting as much as sculpture. The photograph pieces often stand apart from their natural surroundings which become a form of background or context. Characterized in this way by having distinct boundaries, they work ideally as framed photographs on the wall of a gallery. Without exaggerating the distinctions between the types of project in this respect, it can be said that surprise, illusion, and other characteristics that make the small works immediately arresting and separate from their surroundings are less prominent in the large projects, where continuity with the environment is a part of their identity, and their character is partly defined by the modest, sometimes minimal, difference between the sculpture and the adjacent landscape. Although distinct objects, the environmental works differ from the small ones in that they cannot be removed from the landscape. To photograph one and place it on the wall of a gallery would simply be to document what the artist had done, rather than exhibit a work of art: the life of the large works is there in the landscape and nowhere else.
These points lead back to the question of what sculpture is. Goldsworthy did a sculpture course at Preston Polytechnic, and is called a sculptor. But what is sculpture if, within the work of a single artist, it is a photograph one moment and an earthwork the next? Understanding Goldsworthy means taking into account the way sculpture has expanded its field in the last twenty-five years, and distinguishing between something that was traditionally to be looked at is now, thinking of the earthworks, something to be walked over or cycled through. How sculpture related to a particular place was a minor issue when that place was an art gallery; the concern then was the space it needed rather than the place it was in. But for Goldsworthy the character of the place is the core of the brief he gives himself. How then, the issue becomes, can sculpture relate to forestry, or to archaeology? Tying these questions together is another, the relationship of the sculptor today to landscape, which has traditionally been much more the concern of painters than sculptors.

While sculpture has been thought of as permanent and outside time, Goldsworthy’s works change: the forest projects gradually decay, while the earthworks will, initially at least, grow, as woods and undergrowth cover them. Sculpture traditionally represents the imposed will of the maker, but Goldsworthy is a collaborator with nature, interested in the way wind and rain form pools in the folds of his earthworks, the sun and shadow encourage some growth and not other. He is concerned with the way people respond to his sculpture, without trying to influence them. Place is crucial to his art: a work must fit, must draw on its environment and become part of it. But place is distinct from mere space. Places have history and character and exist in time, and Goldsworthy’s sculptures, which gather meaning and character from places also exist in time, being subject to natural change and any other changes—of land use, for example—that affect public places as opposed to the protected space of an art gallery.

Grizedale is a working woodland run by the Forestry Commission, and finances for sculptors to work there using its timber has been available since 1977. It is open to the public and a leaflet locates each sculpture on the many miles of forest track. But Grizedale is not a conventional sculpture park, because its main purpose is to grow timber rather than provide the opportunity to view art in the open. Goldsworthy’s first commission, Seven Spires, takes this into account, not just because the seven sets of clustered pine trunks grouped in tall pyramid forms are made from the forest’s surplus timber. Seven Spires is part of the forest and not, like most sculpture, either distinct from its surroundings or to be looked at only from outside. One spire is easily visible from the track and its prominence signals the presence of the whole work. But to find the other spires and experience the sculpture in its entirety the viewer must leave the track and walk in among the trees.

Goldsworthy’s sculpture helps to form a new relationship between spectator and sculpture, because the viewer is inside the sculpture, among the spires and trees. Experienced from the inside, sculpture loses its character as monument, something external to the spectator and claiming a kind of superiority because it is special and outside the flow of time. In avoiding monumentality, however, Goldsworthy’s sculptures do not forego grandeur.

From the time of the eighteenth-century contemplative garden, furnished with sculpted busts and figures, to the Battersea Park sculpture exhibitions of the 1950s, and the installation in the same decade of the Kind and Queen and other sculptures of Henry Moore on Scottish moors, there has been a tradition in England of using nature as sympathetic background for sculpture. Goldsworthy goes beyond this. When selecting the site for Seven Spires, he avoided working in a clearing, which would have been the obvious choice if he had wanted to follow the tradition of giving sculpture its own space within a picturesque context. Goldsworthy, by contrast, needed Seven Spires to work with nature to the extent of becoming all but part of it. He wanted the pine trees to dictate the idea, scale and form of the sculpture, and in this has added a new dimension to the idea of what sculpture can be.

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The relation of the sculpture to its surroundings is not a stable one, because, as time passes, living trees grow and are ultimately felled, while dead ones slowly decay away. Most of Seven Spires can be seen properly only close-to, inside the wood, and a possible view is to look up the spires from close to the base, from where one can share Goldsworthy’s sense that there exists ‘within a pine wood... and almost desperate growth and energy driving upward’.
of individual expression, it cannot be assumed that forms will have the same meaning as in the past, or that a common understanding of forms will exist. Goldsworthy's reactions are instinctive, his sculpture has meaning for him, which may or may not be widely shared: what matters is that such analogies should be felt and not imposed. 8

Goldsworthy's third large scale project, Seven Spires, made in May 1985, and conceived as a contrast to Seven Spires, is a horizontal 'serpent'. From being a single log at one end, the body of the sculpture was built up by butting together an increasing number of sections of wood side by side, so that it grows in width down the length of the body. By contrast with Seven Spires, Sidewinder is close to the ground, and, as against the calm grandeur of the previous work, the rapid succession of sections of wood side by side, records his residency in an area scarred by the decline of heavy industry. 7

The entrance to Hooke Park, from an unclassified road away from the village, is also off the beaten track, but it is a public place and the sculptures are markers, registering passage from one kind of land, a public road, to another, a wood which is privately owned but with public right of access. Entrances and thresholds have symbolic value, acting as focal points and introducing what is beyond. Making the circles out of curved, and therefore commercially low-value, timber, was a reference to the school inside, part of whose function is dedicated to heightening awareness of landscape and encouraging local initiatives to commission sculpture in rural places. Makepeace was starting up a School of Woodland Industry there, one of its purposes being to develop economic uses for timber thinnings in the surrounding woods, which had been taken over from the Forestry Commission. Sue Clifford and Angela King of Common Ground describe the project in detail in this book, but something needs to be said about the place of Hooke in Goldsworthy's work as a whole.

This image was published as a card by Artist's statement, March 1987.  8. This image was published as a card by Makepeace, a group specializing in finding new uses for abandoned railway tracks, to build an earthwork on a section of the disused line between Consett and Sunderland. His new site was near Chester Street in County Durham, made in December 1988, faced him with a different type of location and size of project. He was commissioned jointly by Northern Arts and Sustrans, a company specializing in finding new uses for abandoned railway tracks, to build an earthwork on a section of the disused line between Consett and Sunderland. His new site was in an area scarred by the decline of heavy indus-
I have lived for most of the time within sight of the Lake District, although this is due more to circumstances than any great wish to be there. The mountains have become important to me not only to visit and work but as a place by which I orientate myself. It has taken on the significance that all mountains, hills, mounds and single trees have to people living nearby. It has become a landmark which creates a sense of presence and location, defining the surrounding landscape.

Many of the early works on Morecambe Bay were made in response to the space over the bay and the distant mountains which enclosed that space. I often made holes in rocks, ice, snow which usually opened out into and examined that space. The mountains were bait for the eye.

When I first visited the Lake District I was impressed by the mass and space—and the things that made that space active. It offered new experiences on a massive scale, being able to walk up into the clouds and touching snow when I thought winter was over. If there is such a thing in my work as a range of locations that have influenced the scale of my work the Lake District must rate as the place most instrumental in causing the largest things I have made.

I think the Lake District is a place where some of my basic interests were formed—a love of the last remaining patch of snow, becoming aware of the mass of energy of a mountain culminating at the peak manifesting itself in many of my works with tapered rocks, icicles and most recently seven 35-47' tall pine spires at Grizedale Forest in the Lake District—my first permanent work.

Having said all this I have to add that I am still very committed to the common place. My way of working developed in small works on the outskirts of Leeds. I have worked in ever smaller woods since and for a time worked under the Big dipper at Morecambe. I can work anywhere there is growth and I enjoy adapting to different environments—the Lake District is one of several places that are of special importance to me.

The Lake District
1988
Leaves polished, creased
made in shadow of tree which they fell
pinned to the ground by thorns
Le Jardin Massey, France

Broken pebbles
scratched white with another stone
St. Abbs, The Scottish Borders
Rhododendron leaves were stormed to catch the hazy to bright light held to the ground with thorns.

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Japanese maple leaves stitched together to make a floating chain. The next day it became a hole supported underneath by a woven briar ring.

Ouchiyama-Mura, Japan

Dandelions newly flowered; none as yet turned to seed undamaged by wind or rain. A grass verge...

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

The Lake District
Broken Ice
remains of several failed works
land in sun and shade
quickly melting
Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Thin covering of snow melting
rolled a snowball quickly...
Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Calm overcast
land was thick in grass
pinned together with thorns
filled in five sections
Yorkshire Sculpture Park
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