

rhythms of life

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Andrew Rogers
Rhythms of Life
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, ACT

THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE SCULPTURE

Rhythms of Life is a dynamic structure in space that embodies the changing rhythms of life. These rhythms are reflected in the juxtaposition of shape and line echoing the unpredictable journey through life.

Rhythms of Life is an exploration of our state of reality as we interact with what is around us. The rhythms of our life oscillate as do our emotions as we move through a series of points punctuating time and space. These connected points comprise a line representing the individual's journey and the essence of life.

Rhythms of Life is a reflection of our society, our dreams, and our aspirations. It is a reflection of our interaction with people and the environment around us, including the states of change we pass through and the challenges that confront us. It is the interplay between the two things certain in life: being born and dying.

To express oneself is a timeless need; this sculpture is a manifestation of this need. It is a melding of intelligence and imagination, a reflection of an ability to put concepts into form. It is an expression of the heart, not just the application of a skill. These ideas manifest in the bronze sculptural composition *Rhythms of Life*.

It is this form and its encompassing philosophy from which the *Rhythms of Life* geoglyphs are derived.

GEOGLYPHS

Geoglyphs constructed in desert and altiplano landscapes, on sheer rock monoliths and gentle slopes, comprise my *Rhythms of Life*. They are metaphors for the eternal cycle of life, growth, and all the attendant emotions that color human existence. They are optimistic symbols of life and regeneration—expressive and suggestive of human striving and introspection.

Spectacular views are found distant from the city and, with an unfettered outlook, create in us the reverence that natural scenery and vastness of space can generate. The 'sublime' is expressed where the dome of the sky meets the pristine surface of the earth. It is in this terrain that the spiritual calls.

I have been creating earth art in the form of "geoglyphs" for many years. These contemporary creations form part of the spectrum of earthworks created by the Americans Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. However, my geoglyphs also reach back in history and to civilizations past. They are giant metaphors linked to the prehistoric traffic routes of ancient inhabitants and, as such, borrow from the ancients to devise new forms. But their message is greater than their forms. Derived from beliefs, rock carvings, and paintings, and related to my sculptures, they invoke what was awesome and wondrous to the hunter and to our predecessors.

The scale of the geoglyphs is imposing, even in their massive desert and altiplano landscapes, under great expanses of sky. Geoglyphs can alter the space and light around them in ways that cause heightened awareness. The geoglyphs provide a spatial experience that enhances the colors of sunrise and sunset and articulates the silence of the

land; they are a fulcrum for contemplation. Set in this theater of nature as they are, the geoglyphs reflect the absolute freedom to create art in this environment.

Geoglyphs suffer the wild vagaries of time, kissed by the hot sun and lashed by storms. Geoglyphs correlate with their surrounding environments. They are made of rocks and the earth, which are basic components of the geography of our world but are also intrinsic to the history of civilizations both old and new.

This is what intrigues me. Rocks for me are about the present focus of our being. Rocks bring me together with the earth as part of nature. They are the components that allow me to use my imagination. I enjoy stone—it is part of Mother Earth. The earth that geoglyphs are laid down upon is also part of their structure and a dimension of the form. The structures closely follow the contours of the ground upon which they rest.

If people encounter them, they should walk through and climb on these geoglyphs. The tactile sense we all possess helps us to discover the relativity of our bodies to the space or objects that surround them. It also helps us understand form and scale. It helps us sense the magnitude of the vista we are in at the time, and assists us to understand those spatial experiences that affect feelings and thoughts. Tactile qualities affirm our sense of the world and our three-dimensional selves.

Forms that help us to achieve this knowledge are perceived with an immediacy that is more effective than intellectual explanation.

To touch is to absorb emotionally, with our heart and mind, the significance of the geoglyph. There is special enjoyment creating large-scale forms that are eventually a minute element within the grandeur of nature—preferably sited outdoors so they can interact with space, varying light, and topography. No matter how large the form, it is just a speck in space. There is a message inculcated in the form—the reaction to this message is what is important. The eye leads, the mind follows. Creation of the form is one element, but the creation of the idea and experience derived from the form are central.

Time and movement are integral to life and geoglyphs—time to travel to exotic locations and to traverse around the geoglyphs, comprehend them, and the impressions received—time for the mental journey of our mind's eye.

The *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph's meaning is not absolute, but is contingent upon personal history and memory—and reaching back into the distant past—and on individual projections into the future. How geoglyphs are received depends on individual perception.

Physical and mental approaches to the geoglyphs provide an opening to how the past is encountered. They extend the continuity of history and project into the future that which may become future history. They are a contemporary symbol for contemplation about past society and its possible meaning. Geoglyphs are about time and the depth of our heritage.

Geoglyphs are about imagination and ideas—not simply about physical structures. They encompass feelings and dreams. It is taking the ordinary and making it extraordinary. Random stones lying on the earth’s surface are rearranged into an inimitable form.

THE PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

The act of creating geoglyphs is a huge logistical exercise that has found me, as an Australian sculptor struggling with teams of up to 1,000 indigenous people, having to communicate complex instructions in a foreign language and moving thousands of tons of rocks in all types of physical conditions. I have labored in dust storms, desert heat, at high altitudes panting with less than normal oxygen, and in freezing temperatures with snow falling. Such exercises, redolent with persistence and fortitude, are only undertaken in the service of the imagination. The final form will only come into being and resonate at a particular moment—a moment that has taken years of effort to arrive.

Integral to the creation of the geoglyphs is the process of creation, the experience of working closely with many people and coming to a common understanding of that which was an abstract concept to many minds. It is the smile of recognition and pride that lights up a face, in response to a positive comment about the skill or quality of the work. It is the invitation offered to come home, and the request to have photographs taken together, or the request to come and inspect a finished section of work. It is the cacophony of many voices.

It is a demonstration of what a focused, harmonious, whole community effort can achieve in the movement and placement of thousands of tons of rocks. It is the color of many a traditional dress. It is the notion of the geoglyph belonging to the community that helped create it, theirs for an eternity of future generations to experience. It is knowing that you have engaged with people and enriched their life experience. It is the diversity of rich and vibrant cultures, yet the sameness of the human spirit. It is the demonstration of the tenet of humans’ capabilities that within all communities of people there is a normal distribution of ability and intelligence, and the fact that some people just lack opportunity. Here destiny is a matter of chance, not a matter of choice.

Dedication of some sites has meant participating in exotic sacrificial rituals and “Pachamama” ceremonies celebrating Mother Earth, which brings to mind the antecedents of the monotheistic religions. These monotheistic religions have derived from such ancient traditions as those I experienced. Sacrifice was part of the ancient Jewish religion, and harvest festivals are still celebrated. It is the feeling of solitude at the end of the day when one sits upon the structure and thinks.

It is the noise of the silence of the land. Finally, it is the excitement and anticipation of climbing into a strange and often primitive flying machine, an air balloon, or an ancient Russian helicopter—preferably with no doors. Then it is lifting off into the sky and buffeting winds to see the marvel of the crisp new form revealed below.

THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE

Fecundity and the *Rhythms of Life*—the earth and its fullness and intimacy.

This first *Celebration of Life* with three of the largest sculptures in the world—stone geoglyphs in the Arava Desert, Israel, upon which 42 pregnant women stood on the 19 and 20th of September, 2003, with a sculptor who flew from Australia to create and be part of this event.

Pregnant bodies in the ancient desert landscape framed by distant mountains. A landscape of wonderfully taut and curved flesh signed with the *linea nigra* insignia of future birth. Attended by a gynecologist, an ambulance, and security; provided with accommodation, shade, chemical toilets, water, and transportation—a major logistical feat.

Celebration of birth and life is a dramatic contrast to the turmoil in the world. Beautiful pregnant women with all that this means for the human future—unspoiled, unblemished children coming into our world. Hope.

This was not a commercial happening. Participants, some of whom traveled up to five hours to attend, were not paid. It was about an idea and the joy of participation. To be in 40°C temperatures in the sandy, windy, dry desert contrasting with so many palpably physical, vibrant, expectant women about to give birth in a few weeks, was a wonder-filled, inspiring experience that I cherish. Three degrees Celsius, threatening to snow, clouded skies; densely grassed slopes dotted with a pattern of volcanic boulders and beautifully distended bodies. Bodies turning, standing still, sitting in unison on my command as the photographer—perched above a fjord that opens onto the Atlantic Ocean, not far distant from the Arctic Circle. A surreal scene etched in my memory. This was the Celebration of Life in Iceland. It was an affirmation that if you dare to dream boldly, anything is possible.

Naked figures in the landscape are part of the *Celebration of Life*—metaphors for coming into and going out of the world in the same state.

The body is a landscape and the body temporarily is an integral part of the unspoiled pristine natural landscape of Earth.

The human form is not just an object, but also an envelope for our values. Human forms highlight that that we are just a transitory, minor participant within the forces of nature—a small part of Earth’s existence. Humans are a foil to highlight the vista and its vastness.

In Chile, we took photographs at sunrise, 5:00 am, the start of a new dawn, freezing cold, in one of the most amazing desert landscapes of the world.

Human figures emphasise contrasts and harmony, and our simply being...

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