

# rhythms of life

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In 1897, painter Paul Gauguin completed the work he considered his masterpiece; titled *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, the painting presents a monumental tableau set in a mythological version of the Tahitian paradise the artist had escaped to from France six years earlier. This work, with its representation of groups of Tahitian women at different stages of life, poses a set of existential questions that continue to resonate today. For Gauguin, the search for answers arose in the context of the wrenching changes brought on by the rise of modernity and his own desire to escape to a simpler, purer world. Today, we are in a time of equally breathtaking change. The engines driving this change are different, involving developments like globalism, the electronic revolution, and the threat of climate change, but the feeling of unrest is similar. And the questions posed by Gauguin's painting present a template for thinking about humanity's past and present in the midst of this ever-shifting reality.



Paul Gauguin, French, 1848–1903  
*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*,  
1897–98  
Oil on canvas  
139.1 x 374.6 cm (54 3/4 x 147 1/2 in.)  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
Tompkins Collection—Arthur Gordon Tompkins Fund, 36.270

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Using a very different medium, employing a vastly expanded scale, and addressing a very different world, Andrew Rogers' *Rhythms of Life* represents a similar effort to explore the meanings and possibilities of human existence. This work consists of a set of twelve monumental earthwork projects inscribed on the landscapes of twelve very different geographical and cultural locations. They offer meldings of geology, mythology, archeology, and spirituality. In their depth and breadth, they reflect the spirit of Gauguin's questions, each of which points to a particular cluster of issues. *Where Do We Come From?* brings up history, archeology, religion, and culture, reexamining them in light of the awareness that we exist as part of a continuum. *What Are We?* deals with our relation to nature, the cosmos, and other humans. *Where Are We Going?* seeks meaning in the inevitable change shaping our lives. In contemporary parlance, it asks how, in light of technological advance and social upheaval, we can formulate principles of ethics and moral responsibility in the service of a sustainable future. Significantly, these queries are framed in the plural, indicating that the pursuit of meaning is a communal quest rather than a search for individual salvation or enlightenment.

Rogers' *Rhythms of Life* represents a breathtakingly ambitious effort to address these fundamental questions. Rogers notes that the works in his *Rhythms of Life* series 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." Spread across the globe and drawing on symbols from the Neolithic era to the present, these twelve Land Art projects embody Rogers' belief in humanity's interconnections across time and space. He adds, "It is fascinating that with modern DNA we can all see a common linkage. These symbols provide a context of history for all of us in which we are a link."

Rogers was trained as an economist and turned to art after a successful business career. He initially conceived of himself as a painter, but, deeply moved by the work of Auguste Rodin, soon turned to figurative sculpture. Eventually his bronze sculptures became abstract, expressing the internal spirit of life rather than simply recreating its outer sinews. In 1996, Rogers created the work that would become the linchpin of his subsequent Land Art projects. Titled *Rhythms of Life*, this bronze sculpture is composed of three elements: a ball, a gently curving geometric line, and an undulating line that intersects it. Together these elements comprise a symbolic expression of the path of life as an interplay between purposeful movements and serendipitous fluctuations. Rogers has returned repeatedly to this composition, siting versions of this sculpture in Jerusalem, California, Istanbul, and Melbourne. The original maquette of the *Rhythms of Life* sculpture is in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.

The series of earthworks, which share the title of the sculpture, began somewhat by chance during a 1998 artist residency at Technion Institute of Technology in Haifa Israel, when Rogers was offered the opportunity to create an art work in the Arava Desert during a visit. His first geoglyph in 1999 was a reconstruction of the Hebrew letters for the words "To Life"—an affirmation of the life principle that runs throughout the entire *Rhythms of Life* series. In retrospect, Rogers notes that Israel's Arava Desert served as the ideal starting point for this series, because it is historically regarded as the place of origin for several of the world's major religions.

As the series has evolved, each site is host to two or more geoglyphs, the archeological term for large drawings inscribed on the ground with stones, earth, gravel, or chalk. Rogers uses local stones to create his geoglyphs, either piling them to create linear walls, or at sites where stones are less plentiful, laying them out individually to create a pattern on the landscape. Each site contains a version of the original *Rhythms of Life* sculpture, while the other geoglyphs comprise symbols drawn from the collective mythology or history of the local peoples. It should be noted here that their involvement is an essential component of each work. Rogers seeks local involvement in the choice of the symbol, and depends on local workers and managers for the mostly hand-built construction of the geoglyphs. The initiation or completion of each project (and sometimes both) are celebrated with a ritual performance that draws on local traditions. These range from the communal sharing of strong wine and crushed coca in Chile and a communal sacrifice of a llama in Bolivia, to a blow-out celebration involving a brass band, firecrackers, traditional dancing and singing in China. Thus these are emphatically communal enterprises;

Rogers notes that overall, *Rhythms of Life* has depended on the involvement of over 5000 people across five continents.

Each geoglyph is designed for two vantage points—The viewer on the ground follows the raised walls of the sculptures, feeling rather than seeing the shape by moving through it, while the viewer from the air sees the shape whole and is also aware of its relative smallness within the vast landscape. Rogers notes that the tactility of the works is an essential characteristic, allowing viewers to come into intimate contact with the work. Occasionally Rogers builds a viewing platform to provide an elevated view. Some works can be viewed from nearby mountains, while others can best be viewed aloft from a small plane, helicopter, or air balloon.

The sites Rogers chooses are generally remote from cities or towns, and therefore free of the visual and perceptual static that an urban site might create. Because the figures in the land need to be visible from the air as well as the ground, he gravitates toward deserts and high plains. Locations are determined by a number of factors, including visibility, distance from urban civilization, relationship to human history, and a more intuitive sense of rightness and sublimity. Each site represents a different set of challenges. Rogers and his crews have weathered dust storms, extreme heat, extreme cold, high altitudes with thin oxygen that left him gasping for breath, and sites that required a daily forty-five minute trek up a mountain. He notes that in the Arava Desert, for instance, “we have worked in 40°C temperatures at 400 meters below sea level. The steel markers became so hot that if you picked them up without gloves, the flesh on your hands would become singed and burned.” By contrast, in Iceland, they built in the snow.

Over the ten years that Rogers has been engaged in this project, he has refined his working method. The early projects involved days of painstaking mapping, as the outline of the geoglyph was marked on the land using a tape measure to triangulate each point in three directions for accuracy. Now, thanks to digital devices, he maps the geoglyphs in detail with a GPS during the first days on the site. He notes that this has reduced the mapping process from seven days to two. After the points are marked on site, Rogers outlines the geoglyph by placing stakes in the ground and linking them with ropes. The instructions to the workers, many of whom do not share a common language with Rogers, are communicated through translators but also are often communicated with hand gestures. Each project involves the gathering of stones from around the site or the transfer of tons of local stones and boulders onto the site, where they must be fitted together following the template, generally using local masonry techniques. The sheer amount of material used to create these works can be staggering: over 2000 tons of stones were used in Slovakia for *Sacred*; in Nepal, three geoglyphs required 4500 tons; and in Turkey over 2000 tons of stones went into the making of *The Gift* and *Rhythms of Life*. The resulting figures in the landscape may last for centuries or may slowly erode into their surrounds. For Rogers, either outcome is acceptable, as he releases these works to the vagaries of time, climate, and the control and care of the locals.

What does it mean for a contemporary artist to undertake this kind of monumental project? Forty years ago, when artists like Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer were carving up deserts and engineering earthworks in industrial waste sites, conventional wisdom challenged the artistic validity of such enterprises. Eschewing normal distribution systems, materials, and aesthetics, the first generation of Land Artists posed a radical departure from the then waning modernist tradition. In one of the classic efforts to theorize this kind of work, critic Rosalind Krauss suggested in 1978 that the distinctions between sculpture—which traditionally was defined as a discrete object—and categories like landscape and architecture were no longer valid. Instead she proposed that these new kinds of artistic endeavors needed to be placed within a matrix that included all these categories and generated new forms of artistic creation which she termed “marked sculpture”, “axiomatic structures”, and “site construction”. Only such new terms, she believed, could fully describe the works of the original Land Artists, and only such a rather tortured explanation could allow critics to move beyond the confining definitions of modernism.<sup>1</sup>

Four decades on, Rogers is no longer burdened with a need to defend art that situates itself in the landscape and addresses pre-existing cultures, histories, and belief systems. We are now comfortable with the idea of art that transcends the object and that seeps into life in innumerable ways. This acceptance offers Rogers the freedom to draw on multiple disciplines and to incorporate into his land projects the vast spread of time from prehistory to the future. As a result, *Rhythms of Life* emerges from the intersection of many trajectories—not only Land Art and the ways it has evolved since the 1960s, but also environmentalism, multiculturalism, ethnography, and globalism. It also taps into renewed artist interest in religion and spirituality.

We turn first to the anthropological context for Rogers’ work. The impulse to make a mark upon the land goes back to the earliest human cultures. Many archeologists have noted the prehistoric tendency to regard Earth as a mother goddess and the source of life. Works created on and with earth became ways to connect with this primal force. Prehistoric “earthworks” take a variety of forms—some seem connected with fertility rituals and the cycles of planting and harvest. Others focus on death, consisting of tombs and memorials easing the passage between life and the afterworld. Yet others provide a connection with the movements of the sun, the moon, and the stars, aligning themselves with solstices, equinoxes, eclipses, and phases of the moon.

Among those prehistoric phenomena that have served as inspiration for Rogers’ work are the Peruvian *Nazca lines*, the British hill figures and the North American Indian mounds. The first of these provides one of archeology’s great mysteries. Created sometime between 200 BC and 700 AD, the *Nazca lines* comprise hundreds of individual figures, realized by sweeping away the top layer of the desert to reveal the lighter-colored earth below. Even though they are only 10 to 30 centimeters deep, they have been preserved thanks to the extremely dry and windless climate, though recent climate changes may threaten their future existence.





Nazca lines  
Peru

and hence provide local people who keep them swept an unbroken link to the distant past. Scattered throughout the British Isles, hill figures take a variety of forms. Among the most famous are the *Cerne Abbas Giant*, also known as the *Rude Giant* for his exposed and upright phallus, the Uffington White Horse, a highly stylized prehistoric creature 374 feet in length, and the *Long Man of Wilmington*, who is depicted standing and holding a pair of staffs.

Again, as with the *Nazca lines*, theories about the origins and purpose of the hill figures vary. The *Uffington White Horse* is believed to be 3000 years old. Archeologists speculate that it served as a tribal symbol for the builders of the nearby Iron Age Uffington Castle and played a part in religious ceremonies. The *Cerne Abbas Giant*, which may be only 400 years old, is believed to be a satirical image of Oliver Cromwell created during the English Civil War. Even less is known about the *Long Man of Wilmington*, which is first recorded in the eighteenth century and may have had other elements now lost.

Formally, the *Rhythms of Life* geoglyphs are more closely related to the North American effigy mounds found scattered throughout the American Midwest. These mounds take a variety of forms, ranging from simple rounded masses to elaborate animal forms. Among the most famous are the *Great Serpent Mound* of Adams County, Ohio, which stretches 1,330 feet and represents an undulating serpent with a triple-coiled tail and open mouth, and the *Rock Eagle Effigy Mound* of Putnam County, Georgia, which is composed of thousands of pieces of quartzite laid in the shape of a large bird. Unlike the hill figures and *Nazca lines*, these geoglyphs are convex rather than concave. Built of earth covered with turf, or, in the case of the *Rock Eagle*, piles of rock, some of these constructions apparently served as burial mounds while others are solid and hold no human remains. Both the age and the purpose of the mounds remain in dispute, though the siting of the *Giant Serpent Mound* seems to have some relationship to the summer solstice.

These early land figures were evidently linked to religious practices, early science, and now-lost social rituals. By contrast, the Land Art movement that arose in the United States and Britain in the late 1960s was a much more individualistic affair. Land Art emerged from a climate marked by the demise of Greenbergian formalism, the rise of minimalism, the emergence of the feminist art movement, and the general social discontent of that volatile era. Though the term Land Art is today rather sweepingly used to refer to works as diverse as Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* inscribed with rocks on the Great Salt Lake, Richard Long's perambulations through the British countryside, Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscapes* that recreate indigenous forests in urban settings, and Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* that mark the summer and winter solstices, in fact, all these artists arrived at Land Art from very different perspectives.

Earthworks is the term usually associated with the work of artists like Smithson, Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, and, more recently, James Turrell and Charles Ross. Art historian Suzaan Boettger, who has made a close study of this movement, attributes great significance in sculpture's



Uffington White Horse  
Uffington, Oxon, UK

The *Nazca lines* cannot be fully perceived from the ground and in fact are at times almost invisible from that vantage point. But at the time that they were created, no technology allowed their makers to view them from above, where they are clearly visible. This raises questions about their ultimate audience and the roles they may have played in their creators' society. The figures range from simple lines to stylized hummingbirds, spiders, monkeys, fish, sharks, llamas, and lizards. Theories about their purpose abound, ranging from speculations that they served as boundaries, surveyor's marks, signals to the gods, markers of kinship connections between the graves of clan members, and even, outlandishly, that they were left behind by extraterrestrials, who, it is claimed, came to earth to create them.

The British hill figures range in date from the Bronze Age to the seventeenth century. Like the *Nazca lines*, they were also created by cutting into the earth, exposing the underlying layer of chalk. They must be maintained to remain visible,



Great Serpent Mound  
Adams County, Ohio, U.S.A.

move from verticality to horizontality.<sup>2</sup> The vertical is assertive, putatively male, and seeks to dominate its surrounds, while the horizontal is relational and, arguably, female. As Carl Andre, one of the first artists to explore horizontality, put it, “When you build high, you become unstable. When you build low, you remain stable all through.”<sup>3</sup> This marked a change in the way sculpture was received, and hence also in its meanings. No longer an isolated object, separate from the viewer and meant to be perceived without reference to its surrounds, a horizontal work encourages movement, cannot be perceived fully from a single vantage point, and is inseparable from its environment.

The first-generation earth artists approached the move from gallery to land in a variety of ways. Dennis Oppenheim regarded earth as site and material for a critique of cultural systems, as, for instance, in *Annual Rings*, 1968, in which he dramatized the absurdity of national borders by shoveling the pattern of a tree’s annual rings on a field of snow at the Canadian-American border. The ephemeral nature of such works contrasts with those of Michael Heizer, who was driven by an identification with the frontier individualism of the American West. Inspired by the monuments of the ancient world (his father was in fact an archeologist), he sought to carve monumental structures into the land, expressing the desire to create works that would outlast a nuclear holocaust. Thus for instance, his *Double Negative*, 1969, is a 1,500-foot-long, 50-foot-deep, 30-foot-wide gash cut into facing slopes of a Nevada mesa. Since the early 1970s he has been working on *City*, a massive environmental sculpture in the Nevada desert that may well rival the lost cities of the ancient world.

The most profound theorist of this generation, Robert Smithson framed his activity in terms of the principle of entropy, whereby all things tend toward the state of equilibrium. In this view, the creation of order in one part of a system results in even greater disorder elsewhere. Applying this principle to human systems, as Smithson did, entropy became a comment on the destructive potential of human activity, as urban development required the devastation and exploitation of nature to provide energy, food, and space for human life. For this reason Smithson was drawn to industrial sites, where he could dramatize this process of decay. At the same time, however, he was not a narrowly focused critic of modernity. Instead, he took the long view—humans were simply part of the larger patterns of growth and decay, our waste dumps are the contemporary equivalent of the monuments of the ancient world, and the artist must go “into the places where remote futures meet remote pasts.”<sup>4</sup> British artist Richard Long took the quietest approach. Noting that his American compatriots appeared to manifest a high-handed sense of territorial imperialism, he chose to make a minimal impact on the land, creating art works which consist of documentation of his solitary treks across unpopulated landscapes, in which he limited his alterations to making piles or circles of stones, later recreated in gallery settings.

While their approaches varied widely, it is significant that this first generation of Land Artists were all male. In part this



Dennis Oppenheim  
*Annual Rings*, 1968  
U.S.A./Canada boundary at  
Fort Kent, Maine and Clair, New Brunswick  
150 x 200 Schemata of annual rings severed by political  
boundary  
Time: U.S.A. 1:30 pm  
Time: Canada 2:30 pm

was a reflection of the general composition of the art world of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But it may also be rooted in the way that they brought a masculine attitude to “Mother Earth,” regarding the earth as a blank canvas upon which to inscribe their works. Despite lip service to history, by and large, their works made little use of the larger cultural or natural history of the sites in which they worked. Products of their time, they were conceived as individualistic gestures imposed on the land.

In an influential book titled *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, critic Lucy Lippard offers a different genealogy for Land Art. Writing in the early 1980s, she notes the growing interest by artists working in the land in mythological and ritual content. She ties this to the changes in consciousness informed by feminism and the emerging interest in multiculturalism. Her book weaves back and forth between ancient monuments and rituals and present-day artworks to demonstrate how artists like Ana Mendieta,



Alice Aycock, Nancy Holt, and Mary Beth Edelson were moved by an interest in mending longstanding divisions in Western culture between nature and culture, mind and body, and male and female. She describes works like Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels*, 1973–76, in which four huge concrete pipes set in Utah's Great Basin Desert have been placed so that they frame the rising and setting sun during the summer and winter solstice. Similarly, Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* hark back to prehistoric female earth deities, by carving female forms into rock or creating them from natural materials like mud, flowers, and ash. Alice Aycock drew on the motif of the tomb and the cycle of life and death with works featuring mounds and/or subterranean tunnels, which drew viewers from one light source to another. Even the male heroes of Boettger's book—Andre, Smithson, and Oppenheim among them—acquire a different cast here in light of concerns about the revival of ritual, mystic geometries, prehistoric symbol systems, and the revival of nature as a primal source.

Thus, for Lippard, Land Art becomes part of a larger search for lost wholeness in a culture where the atomization of society has resulted in alienated, disconnected individuals. Toward the end of her book she makes note of a new development she calls "ecological art," which translates the search for wholeness into an environmental consciousness that places mankind within the circle of nature. Ecological art stands in contrast to first-generation Land Art, in which nature was still regarded primarily as an arena upon which the artist might act. By contrast, artists like Helen and Newton Harrison, Alan Sonfist, and Patricia Johanson are concerned with restoration of the environment and the return of a proper balance between humankind and nature. The Harrisons, who have been undertaking large-scale environmental planning projects since the early 1970s, use the power of metaphor to counter conventional thinking about flood control, irrigation, and land use. Their works consist of proposals worked out in a process they call "conversations" with specialists in the fields of environmental planning, engineering, ecology, and agriculture, and which present innovative ways of thinking about human impact on the environment. One of their most potent metaphors is drawn from the realm of aesthetics and involves the reversal of figure and ground, so that human activity, formerly dominating any land use decision, becomes instead a single "figure" within the larger ecological field. This notion of humanity as simply another natural element is key to the thinking of all the ecological artists.

While all these tendencies can still be found among contemporary artists, in the 1980s postmodern theories began to present a very different vision of nature. Drawing on poststructural theory and the notion that reality is merely a product of human language and consciousness, artists and writers like Jeffrey Deitch, Ashley Bickerton, and Peter Halley began to advance the view that nature was simply a "social construct." Rejecting the idea of untouched wilderness as romantic-era fantasy, they insisted instead that we consider nature as nothing more than a comfortable illusion. Halley put it quite concisely when he opined, "It is not just that an average person can easily go through years of life breathing air-conditioned air, playing football on

Astroturf, and the like, but that the new model of reality is replacing our old sense of the natural order. The jungle ride at Disney World may in fact be more real to most people than the real jungle in the Amazon... More and more people are becoming more comfortable in the simulated world than in the real one."<sup>5</sup>

These various and often conflicting permutations of Land Art must all be seen in the context of their times. The earthwork movement of the early sixties was in part a response to the social and political upheavals of that era, which included the trauma of the Vietnam War, the birth of the environmental movement, and the fight for civil rights. It also reflected the demise of modernism, at least as it had been championed by formalist critics like Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. The more archeologically oriented Land Art projects cited by Lippard, by contrast, reflected the rise of feminism and multiculturalism, the return of content to art, and a renewed interest in spirituality. Ecological art first appeared in the early 1970s and continues to this day as a response to the alarming threats to our environment posed by climate change. And of course the postmodern discourse on nature grew out of a disappointment with the failure of grand notions of modernization and progress.

In a similar way, Andrew Rogers' *Rhythms of Life* can be seen as a response to its time, growing out of the search for meaning in an age dominated by globalism, renewed environmental threat, and the inescapable interdependence of the world's peoples. He offers neither romantic-era purity nor postmodern dismissals of nature as a cultural construct. He shares certain assumptions about time, space, and scale with earlier Land Artists, while choosing a form of language that is at once more accessible, inclusive, and overtly spiritual. Like them, he accepts the fact that humankind's relationship with nature, history, and society is constantly changing. However, perhaps because of his distance from the American ideology of individualism that informed the thinking of many of the original land artists, his work is free of the anxiety and pessimism expressed by figures like Heizer, Smithson, and Oppenheim.

The distinction becomes clear with a comparison between Rogers' approach and the words and works of his precursors. Among the things they share is an awareness of the importance of scale. As Smithson noted, "Size determines an object, but scale determines art."<sup>6</sup> Works created on a large scale in sweeping open landscapes have a very different effect than works created to be seen within the walls of a gallery, or even to be viewed in an urban plaza where they share the stage with other human constructions. Set in deserts or high plains, Land Art projects simultaneously exist within two different perspectives. Close up they are tangible and even, at times, intimate. They encourage viewers to walk around and through them and to experience them temporally. But at the same time, there is a more cosmic vantage point, where they become little more than a dot in the vast reaches of landscape. As a result, these kinds of works have an inherent spiritual quality, whether that is intended or not, because they require their human viewers to acknowledge a reality greater than their own. One sees this in ancient megaliths, in works like Heizer's *Double Negative*

and Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, and in all of Rogers' *Rhythms of Life* geoglyphs.

Another point of convergence between Rogers and earlier land artists has to do with their understanding of the metaphorical meaning of materials. Creating works in the land out of the materials of the land provides a connection to primordial origins. Even Heizer, perhaps the least mystically minded of the Land Artists, acknowledged this when he remarked, "I realize there is expressive potential in materials, but I'm more interested in the structural characteristics of materials than their beauty. I think earth is the material with the most potential because it is the original source material."<sup>7</sup> Lippard put it more poetically when she noted the affinity of both prehistoric and contemporary Land Artists for the use of stone. She says, "Stones touch human beings because they suggest immortality, because they have so patently *survived*. Virtually every culture we know has attributed to pebbles and stones, rocks and boulders, magical powers of intense energy, luck, fertility, and healing."<sup>8</sup>

Rogers uses stone for all these reasons. Depending on local availability, he piles them to create walls or mounds, or, as in Iceland, where they are far scarcer, lays them in lines. For Rogers, "Rocks for me are about the present focus of our being. Rocks bring me together with the earth and being part of nature. They are the components which allow me to use my imagination."

However, in other aspects there are important distinctions between Rogers' approach and those of earlier Land Artists. Take, for instance, the issue of site. Many of the projects cited by both Boettger and Lippard took place in the desert. Boettger suggests that this relates to the American genesis of Land Art, and particular the fact that many of its early practitioners hailed from the American West, whose mythology was so profoundly shaped by the frontier mentality. Many of these artists spoke disdainfully of cities, and seem to prefer to locate themselves in an environment without population or history. Their desire to place works in natural environments often seems to involve a desire to cleanse themselves of the messiness of human contact. Nancy Holt remarked of her *Sun Tunnels*, "I wanted to bring the vast space of the desert back down to human scale. I had no desire to make a megalithic monument. The panoramic view of the landscape is too overwhelming to take in without visual reference points."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Smithson quotes Heizer: "The desert is less 'nature' than a concept, a place that swallows up boundaries." Smithson goes on to add, "When the artist goes to the desert he enriches his absence and burns off the water (paint) on his brain. The slush of the city evaporates from the artist's mind as he installs his art."<sup>10</sup>

For his own work, Smithson preferred industrial sites where he could explore his notion of entropy; but even here, he was not interested in aesthetics, communal interaction, or environmental restoration, in the manner of later ecological artists. He noted, "I started taking trips to specific sites in 1965: certain sites would appeal to me more—sites that had been in some way disrupted or pulverized. I was really looking for a denaturalization rather than built up scenic beauty."<sup>11</sup>

For all these artists, sites were essentially blank canvases upon which to mark the earth. Heizer remarked, "I work outside because it's the only place I can displace mass."<sup>12</sup> Oppenheim, even less attached to any romantic fantasies about the desert, described his process as "the application of a theoretical framework to a physical situation."<sup>13</sup> He cut concentric circles in the snow-covered land on the border of the United States and Canada and harvested grain from a field in an X formation and then withheld it from distribution, with the X then signifying cancellation. This highly cerebral attitude toward nature was shaped by the art-historical context in which these artists worked. Still fighting the battle against formalism and employing the visual language of minimalism and conceptualism, they were drawn to remote and deliberately "unscenic" sites as places where they could undermine any concept of a conventional beauty or of an autonomous object. Speaking for his fellow earth artists, Smithson remarked that, "I think we all see the landscape as co-extensive with the gallery. I don't think we are dealing with matter in terms of a back-to-nature movement. For me the work is a museum."<sup>14</sup>

And in fact, his interventions in nature often tended toward disruptive gestures that imposed a man-made order on the site, for instance, "drawing" on the land with a motorcycle, pouring asphalt down a hillside, or, in a proposal thwarted by environmental objections, creating an island of broken glass. In fact, Carl Andre, minimalist sculptor and somewhat of a fellow traveler, drew a sharp distinction between his work and those of the original earth artists. He remarked, "By 1968, it was clear to me that my mission was to bring the Neolithic, abstract earth-changing sensibility into the gallery. The Land Artists were, more or less, bringing the modernist sensibility into the countryside."<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, Andrew Rogers does not envision his sites as devoid of history and habitation. His notion of "site specificity," a term that came into being in the late 1960s to describe works that could not be separated from their surrounds, goes far beyond the formal integration of sculpture and site. For him, the context that gives meaning to a work includes not just issues of scale and material, but also the site's history, the culture of the people who live there, and the meanings and myths they have attributed to their land. In keeping with this attitude, Rogers is always actively engaged with the indigenous peoples and their cultures. In this, he shares with many contemporary artists a changed attitude toward notions of center and periphery mandated by globalism's breakdown of geographic, political, and cultural borders. In the twenty-first century, the hierarchy of developed and "underdeveloped" worlds has begun to break down, and culture and land are seen as part of an interconnected and interdependent ecosystem.

Nor does Rogers employ an abstract, modernist vocabulary. He provides a sharp contrast to Oppenheim, whose works often consisted of an overlay of some scientific or mathematical system over the landscape, and to Heizer, who displaces masses of earth to create huge minimalist fissures in the land. Speaking of his 1969 *Double Negative*, his deep gash in the Nevada desert, Heizer noted, "The title *Double Negative* is a literal description of two cuts but



has metaphysical implications because a double negative is impossible.”<sup>16</sup> This way of thinking is far from Rogers’ tendency to draw from history, mythology, and archeology for his forms. Rather than use a vocabulary drawn from geometry or the abstractions of science or mathematics, he is interested in making a bridge between cultures, creating, for instance, the outline of a shaman in Bolivia, a giant spread-winged eagle drawn from aboriginal mythology in Australia, and a stylized lion from a local folk painting in Sri Lanka. Rogers has also adapted characters and words from ancient languages, as when he inscribed the Hebrew letters for “to life” on the Arava Desert in Israel, and the Viking rune for the word “now” in northern Iceland.

In this, Rogers is closer to Smithson, who also thought in terms of universal archetypes and sometimes incorporated symbolic forms into his works. The most overt example of this is Smithson’s 1970 *Spiral Jetty*, a salt-covered spiral composed of 6,650 tons of basalt and earth coiled off the shore of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. In the years since its creation, the work periodically emerges and submerges within the red algae-tinged water of the lake. When it does reappear, the black basalt is partially coated with salt crystals, allowing it to glint in the sun. Smithson’s own writings about this work make clear a certain metaphysical state of mind. He described his first encounter with the site in hypnotically poetic terms: “As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the *Spiral Jetty*.”<sup>17</sup>

The film that Smithson created to document this work reinforces this mystical interpretation. Video footage of the work is interwoven with images of dinosaur skeletons, maps of Atlantis, crusty landscapes, and construction equipment.

Robert Smithson  
*Spiral Jetty*, 1970  
 Great Salt Lake, Utah  
 Courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York  
 © Estate of Robert Smithson/Licensed by VAGA,  
 New York



The film opens with a close up of the fiery corona of the sun and ends in an ecstatic sequence in which the cameraman in a helicopter follows Smithson from behind as he runs the length of the jetty and back.

Smithson’s figure here, the spiral, has symbolic meanings that cut across cultures. Spirals are found atop grave mounds in Ireland; they ornament the gates to the great stupa of Borobudur, Indonesia; and they serve in many societies as a metaphor for the passage from life to death. Their associations range from the macroscopic to the microscopic, from the spiral shape of a galaxy to the coil of a nautilus shell and the structure of crystalline growth. Smithson draws on this shift of scale in his discussion of *Spiral Jetty*, noting that “...each cubic salt crystal echoes the *Spiral Jetty* in terms of the crystal’s molecular lattice. Growth in a crystal advances around a dislocation point, in the manner of a screw. The *Spiral Jetty* could be considered one layer within the spiraling crystal lattice, magnified trillions of times.”<sup>18</sup>

Rogers shares this kind of thinking, and his land works reveal a consistent application of symbolic and spiritual motifs. He remarks: “The power of symbols are the basis of the Geoglyphs. Yes, these are universal archetypes. They do not just speak about the specific, but relate to the general. I see them as being saturated with history. Interpretations of these symbols and their messages get added to and changed over thousands of years. They inspire questions, especially about what went before. On one level they can be seen as the doodlings of cavemen frightened by some aspect of nature. On another level they are part of the heritage of mankind and I like to see them act as a catalyst for thoughts about the future.”

This is evident not only in the geoglyphs whose forms are based on ancient petroglyphs or representations of ancestor spirits. Even the original *Rhythms of Life* motif, which has provided the link between all Rogers’ sites, is made up of three entwined components that have a similarly metaphysical quality. There is first the thrusting diagonal element, which represents the line of life. Winding around it is a graceful looping line that suggests a principle of movement and change. Attached to the diagonal is a round ball, which represents our movement through life. As the leitmotif of the entire series, this composition is a reminder of the ongoing cycles of life and death that propel the universe forward.

Throughout the various sites, Rogers’ geoglyphs continually make reference to archetypal symbols: consider *Slice*, created in the Arava Desert. This work is the representation of a cut away of a nautilus shell, a reminder that this arid area was once an inland sea. The spiral of the shell also embodies the Fibonacci sequence, a number series discovered in the twelfth century by Leonardo Fibonacci. This number series is created by starting with 0 and 1 and then adding together the sum of the previous two numbers. This leads to a quickly accelerating sequence (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, etc.) that describes growth patterns of numerous natural phenomena, including nautilus shells, ferns, and other branching plants, leaves, seeds, and petal arrangements on pineapples and pine cones.

The Fibonacci sequence has a further remarkable property. By dividing any number in this sequence by the one before it, one gets a figure close to 1.610803. This number is known as the Golden Mean and is referred to in another geoglyph form constructed by Rogers in several sites. This work consists of a monument of stepped limestone blocks whose increasing sizes reflect the Fibonacci sequence. Constructed in the Arava Desert in Israel, it is gilded at the edges. These blocks thus reflect this archetypal sequence each day as the sun rises in the east. Rogers' description of *Golden Ratio* echoes the multilayered references found in *Spiral Jetty*. He offers this form as, in his words:

*A key to understanding harmony in nature.*

*It reveals the essence of the "beauty ideal" in the nature of art, the same beauty that attracts the eye of the beholder—the spirals of a shell, the design of rose petals.*

*Beauty is constructed from eternal repetitive patterns.*

*The work follows the rhythm and perpetuity of flawless mathematical law translated into a scheme of stone standing in a strict and disciplined formation.*

*The rhythm reflected in the stones is focused when meeting sunlight illuminating the contours of gold that give borders to every stone and number.*

This kind of thinking is evident throughout the whole series of Rogers' Land Art projects. For instance, the concentric rings formed by one of his Bolivian geoglyphs, titled *Circles*, is inspired by similar petroglyphs that appear on nearby cave walls and which may refer to kinship networks. This form also has a more general application, suggesting a vision of the cosmos as a set of interconnected realities rippling like a wave pattern from a single center. Similarly, many of the animal and human forms represented in his geoglyphs come from shamanic sources, representations of mystical unions of earth and cosmos.

One also senses Rogers' interest in symbolic thinking in the ritual performances that have accompanied the building of the geoglyphs. These have ranged from the staging of arrangements of pregnant women in Israel and Iceland, who serve as further embodiments of the life principle and the cycle of generativity described more abstractly in the form of the *Rhythms of Life* geoglyphs, as well as ceremonies drawn from local customs, including the ritual slaughter of a llama in Bolivia, the sharing of a communal cup of wine and coca leaves in Chile, and a parade of elephants in Sri Lanka.

This attraction to metaphysical meanings links Rogers to Smithson and pulls them both closer to the artists discussed by Lippard in *Overlay*. But while artists like Nancy Holt, Ana Mendieta, and Alice Aycock were drawn to Neolithic symbols and manifestations of the cyclical nature of time, they also tended to regard the land they worked on as a blank slate. Holt, in describing the site of her *Sun Tunnels*, remarked, "Time is not just a mental concept or a mathematical abstraction in Utah's Great Basin Desert. Time takes on a physical presence. The rocks in the distance are ageless, they have been deposited in layers over hundreds of thousands of years. Only ten miles south of the *Sun Tunnels* site are the Bonneville Salt Flats, one of the few areas in



Nancy Holt  
Sun Tunnels, 1973–1976  
Art © Nancy Holt/Licensed by VAGA,  
New York, NY  
Art © Estate of Robert Smithson/Licensed by VAGA,  
New York, NY

the world where you can actually see the curvature of the earth. Being part of that kind of landscape and walking on earth that has never been walked on before evokes a sense of being on this planet, rotating in space, in universal time.”<sup>19</sup> A realistic assessment suggests that the idea that Holt was the first to cross this terrain is simply a romantic conceit.

It may be impossible to work in these vast open landscapes without absorbing some sense of the diminution of human stature and the reversal of figure and ground. But these feelings were clearly sources of conflict for many of the early earth artists. In part this may go back to the receding modernist dogma that regarded spiritual expressions in art as retrograde unless distanced from any actual practice. For artists like Smithson and Heizer, spiritual expressions were acceptable only when separated from contemporary culture and distanced by eons of time. One senses this conflict when Heizer comment that, “In the desert, I can find that kind of unraped, peaceful, religious space artists have always tried to put into their work. I don't want any indication I've been there at all. My holes should have no history, they should be indeterminate in time and inaccessible in locale.”<sup>20</sup>

As Boettger notes, earth artists of the early 1960s manifested an ambivalence toward nature and natural cycles, as they were torn between an attraction to the earth as a primeval source and their confidence in the human ability to dominate and reshape nature. Four decades later, Andrew Rogers is free of that conflict. He resists the impulse to reshape the land without regard to other uses or meanings. He begins each project by ordering an environmental impact study (or consultation) and he determines the configurations of the geoglyphs in consultation with the local population. Rogers notes that it is important to him to involve the entire community, from officials to school children and teachers. He designs his geoglyphs to be as minimally invasive of the land as possible. The resulting earthworks animate the land with the spirit of the people who dwell there. In Australia, for instance, a giant eagle was drawn from the symbolism of aboriginal dreamtime; in China, an equestrian figure was drawn from a drawing found in a nearby tomb; and in Nepal, he paid homage to Buddhist tradition with the construction of a knot that represents one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism. The works thus combine cosmic time—favored by earth artists like Holt and Smithson—with human time—the time delineated by culture, religion, and mythology.





Andrew Rogers  
*Rhythms of the Andes*, 2000  
Machu Picchu, Peru



Andrew Rogers  
*Pillars of Witness*, 1999  
Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Elsternwick

It is tempting to link Rogers' vision of time and culture with his Jewish heritage. He has pointed out, "At a conscious level, as a Jew there is nothing more important in life than life itself. Our religion joins us to a past and a future, to a history and a destiny. I am part of this and, therefore, continually aware of people being underprivileged and, in particular, striving to be free. This is probably part of my heritage. I am a strong believer in memory. Without memory we are nothing. Jews have a long, shared memory, and I believe we are not free if others are oppressed."

He continues: "The *Rhythms of Life* project is probably a manifestation of what I see as the necessity of human solidarity. In ancient Jewish history it is the story of the escape from slavery that has inspired moves towards a just and free society. It is the continual regeneration of the Jewish people that shows vision can shape the destiny of a people."

Rogers is himself the progeny of Polish immigrants who moved to Australia in the early twentieth century to escape the economic hardships and prejudice of their native country. His extended family includes members who were not so lucky, a number of whom perished in the Holocaust. This personal narrative intersects with Rogers' interest in memory and the long sweep of human history. The *Rhythms of Life* geoglyphs are one side of this story, drawing on the past to find symbols of human hope, solidarity and aspiration. But they are closely related to another series of works that take the form of memorials. Rogers has completed five of these: one, which was erected in 2000, between his first two geoglyphs in Israel, commemorates the often-brutal history of the indigenous peoples of the Andes. The others, located in Australia and Brazil, deal with the Holocaust. In these

works, Rogers focuses on the darker side of human society and the human potential for cruelty.

Rogers' first memorial, titled *The Pillars of Witness*, was created in 1999 for the façade of the Holocaust Research Centre in Melbourne. Rogers' ideas for this work were solidified after an extended period of research in which he read voraciously about the Holocaust and interviewed numerous survivors. The work consists of six bronze columns set with relief panels of scenes realistically depicting the horrors of the Holocaust. Rogers based the relief panels on documentary photographs, using them to tell the story of the Holocaust from the early isolation of the Jews in their respective cities to the horrors of the camps. Rising above the relief panels, which are placed at street level for easy viewing, are more abstract symbols, including hands reaching futilely outward, coils of barbed wire, and the Star of David. The latter also appears in a separate bronze element above the pillars, depicted as it emerges from flames in a reference to the Jews' ultimate triumph and the founding of Israel. A selection of the panels from this memorial later became part of a Holocaust memorial wall in Curitiba, Brazil.

Rogers' next memorial, titled *Rhythms of the Andes*, is a bronze obelisk set in the town square in Machu Picchu, Peru. This spectacular site is surrounded by mountains and near the ruins of the pre-Columbian city that served as the religious center and legendary birthplace of the Inca people. Erected around 1460, the city was abandoned and left to decay less than 100 years later, following the invasion of the Spanish conquistadors. Rogers' memorial, unveiled in August of 2000, consists of an exterior shell created from 70 bronze panels that depict various aspects of Incan history and culture, including architectural details from the ruins, funeral masks, representations of sacrificial ceremonies, and replicas of pottery ornaments. The hollow interior is filled with stones, placed there by local people who are the Inca's descendents. The filling of the obelisk involved a ceremony in which the entire community, beginning with the mayor, passed the stones in a circle—symbolic of the continuity of past and present—before setting them inside the memorial. The whole is topped with a bronze sculpture of a condor bird in flight, a symbol of the reincarnation of the Inca in the persons of their descendents.

This was followed two months later with the dedication of Rogers' Buchenwald Memorial in Springvale Cemetery, the main Jewish cemetery of the city of Melbourne. To create this work he interviewed Buchenwald survivors who were children at the time of their incarceration and who miraculously survived and moved to Australia. The bottom of the memorial is a concrete base lined with plaques listing the names of the family members these survivors lost to the Holocaust. Rising above is a bronze structure that mimics the form of a fractured brick chimney. Its sides are incised with shapes meant to suggest smoke pouring from the incinerators at Auschwitz. In deliberate contrast to the surrounding upright tombstones, the chimney leans to one side, appearing as a crumbling ruin that embodies the hope that the hatred and prejudice that led to the Holocaust might be rendered equally impotent.



With *Tomb*, installed in 2005, Rogers returned to Springvale Cemetery in Melbourne. This work consists of six angled bronze chimneys commemorating the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust. These are filled with materials directly linked to that horrific event. These include ashes of people who died in Auschwitz, provided by a journalist who was present at the liberation of the camp; bones from Lodz, Poland, which, it is believed, come from people gassed in trucks there and buried in the forest; soil from a mass grave of murdered Jews in Rumbuli, Latvia; and crumbled leaves provided by the parents of a child killed in the Holocaust.

Finally, the *Babi Yar Memorial*, also installed in Melbourne's Springvale Cemetery and unveiled in 2006, commemorates the 100,000 Jews and other minorities killed in Babi Yar, Kiev, by Nazis during the Second World War. This work is designed to suggest an open abyss, like the ravine into which the Nazi's victims were thrown. Rogers notes that one of the most gratifying aspects of this, and his other Holocaust memorials, is that they provide a place for the bereaved to gather to mourn loved ones who never received a proper burial. One measure of this is the growing number of stones placed around the memorials by friends and family of the victims, in keeping with the Jewish custom of placing stones on graves as a mark of respect for the dead.

Rogers' memorials share a number of characteristics, among them reference to historical injustice, involvement of the community to whom the memorial is addressed, and the search for a form that embodies often-horrific memories. While the geoglyphs of the *Rhythms of Life* appear to offer a more optimistic take on human history than do these memorials, Rogers sees a connection between both series in the way they underscore the vagaries of human memory. He points out that time can have the effect of cleansing the past of its more egregious elements, noting, "As a geoglyph perpetuates what is more distant in time, we do not think of them in terms of the concept of science and technology being employed to destroy people, as was the case in the Holocaust; but I am sure equivalent forces have been at work through history." The geoglyphs and the memorials are thus flip sides to the same interrogation of history and invitation to reconnect with the struggles and triumphs of the past.

As the preceding discussion suggests, while Rogers is clearly an heir to the first generation of Land Artists, his work incorporates many other influences as well. Along with a global outlook and a concern with memory, history, and the human potential for good and evil, he also makes use of the postmodern notion of participatory art, a mode of working in which art is viewed as an action rather than simply as a static object. From this perspective, an artwork is not complete without the participation of the viewer. On one hand this is an extension of the ideas of the minimalists, who insisted that an artwork is not an isolated object, but has to be experienced in space and time. However, participatory art today goes far beyond the minimalists' simple reductive sculptures, encompassing a range of activities that may include everything from shared meals or celebrations, to the orchestration of rituals, parades, or other communal activities, to collaborations with non-artists or special





interest communities. This transfer of authority from artist to audience has the effect of empowering those who encounter the artwork, who share in its creation with the artist. As a result, the work's meaning cannot be separated from the perceptions and actions of those to whom it is addressed.

The original Land Artists also involved large numbers of people in the creation of their monumental projects, but these participants were never part of the narrative of the work. One seldom sees documentation of the works in progress, and photographs of the completed works typically depict them in splendid isolation in the landscape. By contrast, Rogers' projects are deliberate works of participation. This extends from his consultation with local officials and scholars as to the shape of the geoglyphs, to the organization of the local team who will execute it, to the ritual celebrations that mark the work's inception and completion. The numbers of people involved in these projects can be quite staggering, ranging from 550 people in Chile to a 1000-man-strong contingent of the Chinese Army in the Gobi Desert.



Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
*The Gates*, 1979–2005  
 Central Park, New York City  
 Photograph: Wolfgang Volz © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

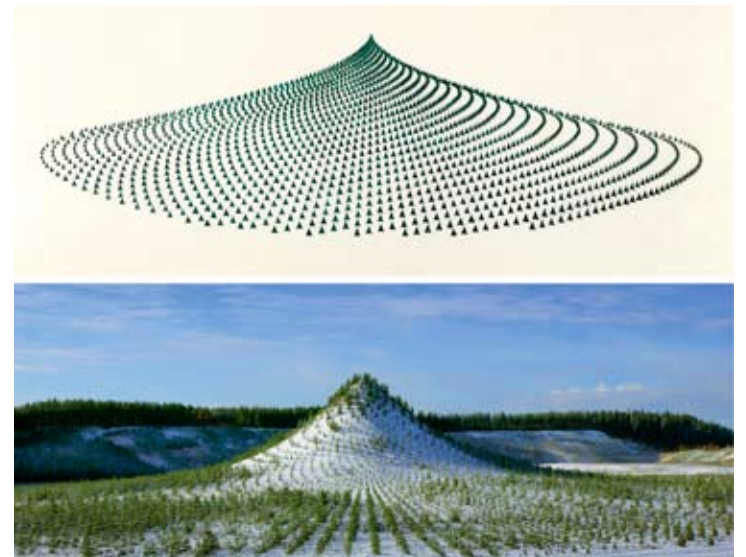
This aspect of Rogers' work links it with other artists also engaged in large-scale participatory projects. Perhaps most famous of these are Christo and Jeanne-Claude, a husband and wife team who have, over the last four decades, produced numerous high-visibility projects that engage huge numbers of participants. Their projects are always ephemeral and involve temporary transformations of significant buildings or landscapes. They have wrapped Berlin's Reichstag in a silver shroud, surrounded eleven islands off the coast of Miami with pink fabric, installed a *Running Fence* composed of a 24-mile curtain of white fabric in the hills of Northern California, placed 1340 blue umbrellas in the

landscape north of Tokyo and 1760 yellow umbrellas north of Los Angeles at the same time. Recently, they enlivened New York's Central Park during the gloomy winter weeks with thousands of bright-orange fabric "gates" that created a meandering path through the park.

While it is the final installation that generates publicity for Christo and Jeanne-Claude, in many ways the real "art" of these projects takes place in the months and even years of coordination required to bring them off. Christo and Jeanne-Claude must negotiate with local officials, secure permissions, and then orchestrate the vast army of volunteers who execute the work. The installation *The Gates* in Central Park in February 2006, for instance, required the participation of 600 people, who were paid minimum wage to raise the 7500 fabric arches. Taking a longer view, this work was the culmination of 26 years of planning and political maneuvering.

Similarly monumental in both conception and realization are the collaborative environmental works of Agnes Denes. These are an outgrowth of Denes' interest in the cultivation of a responsible human relationship to nature, which she expresses in works that range from beautiful line drawings of pyramids that present abstract models for human society,

Agnes Denes  
*Tree Mountain - A Living Time Capsule*—11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years, 1992–1996  
 Ylöjärvi, Finland  
 420 x 270 x 28 meters



to time capsules that safeguard key precepts of human wisdom for future generations, to large scale environmental works designed to foster international understanding. The most dramatic of the latter is her *Tree Mountain—A Living Time Capsule—11,000 People, 11,000 Trees, 400 Years*. First conceived in 1982, it was completed in the Pinsiö gravel pits in Ylöjärvi, Finland, in 1996. *Tree Mountain* is a living artwork created with the involvement of 11,000 people who together planted 11,000 trees in a spiraling pattern derived, like Rogers' *Ratio*, both from abstract mathematics and natural patterns like those found in the seeds of a sunflower. *Tree Mountain* has multiple purposes. It is designed to hold back the erosion of the land, provide a home for wildlife, and, on the symbolic level, create a model for the productive interaction of interconnected individuals.

A third artist who creates participatory works on a monumental scale is Cai Guo-Qiang, a Chinese artist who left his native country for Japan in 1986 and been based in New York since 1995. His work reflects his status as an immigrant and a cultural nomad, and in sculptures, paintings, installations, and drawings he meditates on the contradictions of living between cultures. He is perhaps best known for his *Projects for Extra Terrestrials*. These consist of controlled explosions of gunpowder and fireworks that draw lines on the earth or create transitory patterns in the sky. These often contain references to Chinese culture and history—for instance dragons, serpents, tornados and rainbows. The firework pieces are often commissioned as celebratory rituals accompanying big public events. For the opening and closing of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for example, he employed the image of the circle in the sky, recalling both the Olympic logo and Taoist notions of the circle as symbol of fullness and completeness.

Again, as with the Christos and Denes, such works involve the coordination of large numbers of people and are directed at mass audiences. In fact, as the title of the series indicates, Cai is thinking on a cosmic scale, addressing his works not just to human observers, but to alien life forms that will observe the light they generate millions of years hence. As a result, they suggest that we are all outsiders, emphasizing our precarious hold on this planet.

In a similar manner, Rogers' participatory approach to Land

Cai Guo-Qiang  
*Transient Rainbow*, 2002  
East River, from Manhattan to Queens, New York, USA



Art evolved from his multiple interests in global culture, universal archetypes, and his sense of the continuum of human history. The *Rhythms of Life* project began almost serendipitously, as the result of a meeting with the chairman of the Arava Desert area in Israel containing collective farms when he journeyed from Haifa where Rogers was an artist-in-residence at Technion University. During a discussion of ways to improve life in the settlements, Rogers was asked, “Why don’t you build us a large sculpture?” Taking up the challenge, Rogers set to work on *To Life*, his first geoglyph in the Arava Desert. Almost immediately, he began to sense that he was involved in something far larger than himself. He recalls, “Once I began the work and thought about the people who had gone before me and wandered in the same desert before me creating the beginning of a special civilized society, it became significant. It was the cradle of civilization. In this area there are ancient Nabatean ruins and what was the old ‘spice route.’ All of the foregoing served as catalysts to thoughts about the creation of Land Art. In particular I thought about stone—being part of civilization and being sacred to religions.”

Ultimately, Rogers created four geoglyphs in Israel: *To Life (Chai)*, which is inspired by the two Hebrew letters for the salutation “to life”; the first realization of his *Rhythms of Life* sculpture into geoglyph form; *Slice*, the cross section of the nautilus shell; and *Ratio*, a somewhat different work consisting of a stepped structure based on the Fibonacci series. With the completion of *Slice*, Rogers also inaugurated his practice of dedicating the works with a ritual performance. Here it was called a *Celebration of Life*, consisting of a group of 42 pregnant women dressed in white who reinforced the outline of *To Life*, thereby reaffirming the work’s message of generativity and continuity. The *Celebration of Life* points to an ongoing theme in Rogers’ work, namely the employment of the naked human body as a metaphor for unspoiled nature and the state in which we enter and leave the world. It appears as well in his earlier figurative sculptures and in photographic presentations of the abstract works.

His second set of geoglyphs was realized in between the creation of *Slice* and *Ratio* in the Atacama Desert in Chile, not far from the Nazca lines. In this dry and exacting landscape (it is reported to have gone 200 years without

rain), Rogers worked with local indigenous tribes to create three geoglyphs out of local stones fitted together with guano and clay in the manner first pioneered by the Incas. In what would become the pattern for later sites, the anchoring construction was another realization of the *Rhythms of Life* composition. The other two were drawn from local history. *The Ancients* reinterprets a pre-Columbian pictureglyph of a Tiawanaku figure known as the Lord of the Scepters. This extremely complex figure bears various symbols of power, including a feathered headdress and feathered circles hanging from his elbows. Rogers included a stone staircase at its lower edge, which serves simultaneously as a viewing platform and an evocation of the altars used by shaman priests in their rituals.

The third work, *Ancient Language*, had a similar source, this time in a local petroglyph of a double-headed llama whose body incorporates a serrated pattern referencing water, the most precious of substances in this arid climate. Again there was a ceremony to mark the beginning and conclusion of construction: based on local traditions, it involved the sharing of wine and crushed coca leaves in a communal cup.

From here it was on to Bolivia, to a high plain near the town of Potosi, a site which is 4500 meters above sea level, making it the highest location for any contemporary art work in the world. Here, work proceeded simultaneously on all three works, as the 870 workers had to climb 45 minutes each day to reach two of the sites. Along with the *Rhythms of Life* sculpture, the geoglyphs here included *Presence*, another shaman figure, this one from a petroglyph found in San Antonia, Betanzos, Bolivia, and *Circles*, a set of concentric circles based on petroglyphs found in a cave. The meaning of the latter is not certain, but thought to involve kinship links. In a move that recalls Cai’s *Projects for Extraterrestrials*, the walls of all three geoglyphs were painted with a cactus juice-based liquid that turned the stones off white, making them visible even from outer space. This time the ceremonial ritual involved an opening event consisting of a shaman ceremony in which mother earth was blessed with the blood of a ritually sacrificed llama whose organs were buried and whose carcass was cooked and eaten by participants. There was also a closing ceremony attended by 2000 people who danced and drank late into the evening.

Rogers traveled to Sri Lanka in 2005. There he installed a *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph called *Pride*, a stylized lion taken from a local folk painting, and *Ascend*, a steep staircase (also taking up the concept of stairs ascending towards infinity, as in a temple) whose configuration was again based on the Fibonacci series. This time the opening ceremony involved a procession of folk dancers and acrobats with gongs and cymbals, as well as a parade of government officials in traditional clothing. Milk was boiled by priests for good luck. The closing ceremony included feasting, dancing, and a parade of officials and elephants.

The next year, in association with the Commonwealth Games, Rogers returned to his native Australia to create a *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph in Geelong, Victoria, and a giant wedge-tail eagle titled *Bunjil*. This work is drawn from



the Dreamtime, based on aboriginal concepts of multiple time, and represents the great ancestor spirit. This time the opening ceremony drew on the traditions of the Wathaurong people who inhabit this area and served as part of his workforce.

Iceland, the next site, represented a different kind of challenge. Here difficulties were posed not by extreme heat or high altitudes, but by cold. In Akureyri, the northernmost town in Iceland situated 60 miles from the Arctic Circle, he created a *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph, another eagle, this one also serving as a guardian figure. A third geoglyph presented the Viking rune for the word “now,” a reference to the notion of the eternal present in which all these symbols and archetypes exist. In this site, hard land and the scarcity of rocks required a different approach to the construction of the geoglyphs, all of which are realized with lines of large single rocks laid out at regular intervals which may render them almost illegible to viewers on the ground. From the air, by contrast, they become distinctive outlines. For the ritual celebration, Rogers returned to the theme of pregnant women, who bravely stood on the *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph in a temperature of 3°C.

Next up was China in the fall of 2006. As the site for this set of geoglyphs, Rogers chose the Gobi Desert, near the western terminus of the Great Wall. Here the works were created by 1000 soldiers from the Chinese Army. Geoglyphs in China included the largest version of the *Rhythms of Life* to date, stretching out to 200 meters. This was joined by *The Messenger*, an outline of a messenger on a horse based on a drawing found in the nearby tomb of an emperor of the Weijin Dynasty drawing; and *The Caveman*, based on a stylized figure found in a petroglyph from 476–221 BC. The ceremonial celebration in China included the 400-piece drum corps and brass band of the Chinese Army, firecrackers, traditional dancing, singing, flag waving, and speeches.

Rogers’ project in India also involved a huge contingent of 1000 workers. Rogers chose to work in northwestern India in an area that once belonged to local maharajas whose palaces and temples, built out of the area’s signature red limestone, still dot the hills. Again relying on local stone masonry techniques, Rogers constructed two geoglyphs here: one was a recapitulation of *Ratio*, the stone steps based on the Fibonacci sequence that he had already built in Israel and Sri Lanka; the other was his signature *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph. He placed *Ratio* above a temple devoted to the local Goddess of Fire, a pilgrimage site for wedding parties and couples desirous of children. As he notes, both the temple set on the top of a steep rise and the *Ratio* geoglyph are about rising up, expressing human aspirations for ascendance. The *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph was set on a hill between two forts, and both works were constructed from the same red limestone as the surrounding structures. In keeping with Rogers’ acknowledgement of local beliefs, the land under the *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph was blessed prior to construction with water from the Ganges and milk curd. The completion of both works was celebrated with a massive parade and ceremony involving elephants, camels, horses, musicians, and a brass band watched by 2500 people.

For Rogers’ next project, he chose to build in southern Turkey, in the Cappadocian region, where East meets West and descendants of ancient peoples mingle, among them Persians, Hittites, and Summarians. He also created two geoglyphs here, one, the *Rhythms of Life*, at whose head he had a local carver inscribe the Turkish and English words for memory, and the other, *The Gift*. The latter image paid homage to the importance of the horse for the nomadic tribes who inhabited this land from ancient times. He found the form of his image in a relief carving of a stylized horse in the National museum dating from 6000 BC. This time the completion of the project was accompanied by traditional dancing and music.

In 2008, Rogers traveled to Nepal, where he created geoglyphs that drew on local Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Along with his iconic *Rhythms of Life*, he also constructed a *Labyrinth* that draws on this most ancient symbol of wholeness. Combining the imagery of a circle and a spiral, it creates a meandering but purposeful path that leads both to the center of the individual spirit and outward to the larger world. The third geoglyph in Nepal, *Knot*, is equally archetypal. Based on one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, it celebrates continuity as the underlying principle of the universe and is believed to have evolved from the symbol of two intertwined snakes. Rogers notes that prior to his construction of this geoglyph, the Seti Gorge in which it is located was considered cursed; the creation of the geoglyphs is believed by local people to have lifted that blight. The site was blessed by Buddhist monks in a traditional ceremony in which conch shells and trumpets were sounded, and a Stupa was unveiled.

This was followed by the creation of two geoglyphs in Slovakia: the *Rhythms of Life* and *Sacred*, a symbol derived from an ancient coin found on a castle’s grounds. The use of the coin as source pointed to the status of this region as the crossroad of a major trade route in ancient times. Created from travertine marble from a nearby quarry, it is a stunning presence in the landscape, crisply outlined in white just below the equally stunning remains of a 2500-year-old castle at the top of the hill. The *Rhythms of Life* geoglyph was sited in the High Tatra Mountains and created from granite boulders handpicked from nearby. At the completion of work, children of the workers, many of them Romanian Gypsies, performed traditional dances.

The final set of geoglyphs were created in California’s Mohave Desert, an almost surreal volcanic landscape that is home to a variety of hardy species of plants and animals and to the Serrano Indian Tribe, an indigenous people who have historically used the resources and lands to sustain their lives and culture. On a dramatic land formation called the Black Mesa, Rogers constructed two geoglyphs: the *Rhythms of Life* and *Atlatl*, based on an ancient Native American petroglyph of a spear thrower that he discovered inscribed on the rocks in a nearby rocky outcrop at Coyote Hole and the Rodman Mountains. The end of construction in the Mohave, which was also the end of the project as a whole, was celebrated with a Native American ritual known as a Smoke Ceremony, as well as traditional songs and dances

The geographic and historic sweep of the works constructed as part of the *Rhythms of Life* project is unprecedented in its scale and ambition. Taken together, the geoglyphs have been erected in every kind of climate, and have responded to geographical environments as distinct as Nepal's Himalayan Mountains, China's Gobi Desert, the volcanic mountains of Iceland and the harsh Israeli desert. To create these land art projects, Rogers and his architectural team had to adapt themselves to social structures ranging from the highly disciplined military of the People's Republic of China, to the chaos of contemporary India and the potentially explosive coexistence of Kurds and Muslims in Turkey and of Slovaks and Romany in Slovakia. And to determine imagery appropriate to each locale, Rogers had to delve into histories and cultures that encompassed the Neolithic petroglyphs in North and South America, the highly sophisticated civilization of the ancient Maya, the warlike Wei Jin Dynasty of China, the intermingled Hinduism and Buddhism of Nepal, and the still potent caste structures of India. The entire ten-year journey begins to resemble one of those open-ended expeditions undertaken by the great sixteenth-century explorers who laid the groundwork for the interconnected and interdependent global reality we inhabit today.

Thus, while the project celebrates the remarkable diversity of contemporary human culture, and underscores the fact that globalization has not destroyed the multiplicity of indigenous religious beliefs, local customs, and social arrangements, it also reminds us of the ties created by our common humanity. There is a remarkable consistency to certain human aspirations—for physical and spiritual sustenance, for a sense of connection to land and history, for meaningful social ties and purposeful lives. However different their sources and their forms, the various images recreated by the geoglyphs all, in the final analysis, are expressions of these common desires.

Thus, *Rhythms of Life* celebrates both our differences and our similarities: a Sri Lankan lion, an Australian eagle, a Chinese horse, a Buddhist knot, a spiral, a labyrinth, and a staircase all have meanings that resonate within their specific contexts. At the same time, they also communicate across cultures. The values they represent, of courage, continuity, spirituality and hope, are all part of our common human heritage.

One of the most striking aspects of Rogers' *Rhythms of Life* project is the attention paid to local rituals, mythologies, and belief systems. In particular, many of the inhabitants of his sites, perhaps because of their remoteness and the difficulties of life in extreme climates, are adherents of various forms of shamanism. An umbrella term for very diverse sets of practices, shamanism involves a pantheistic understanding of the cosmos in which forces of nature and unseen spirits must be addressed and ameliorated. Shamanism lies at the heart of the world's most ancient religions and its influence continues to play a role in the practice of today's most established creeds in which the religious calendar's major events are linked to traditional harvest, solstice, and spring festivals.

Rogers is drawn to places where shamanistic traditions and beliefs remain living practices. In particular, his work reflects a shamanistic sense of time that is linked to nature and the vast scale of the cosmos. Pulling back from

our everyday understanding of time as a linear series of concrete events dependent on the process of cause and effect, Rogers taps into a cyclical consciousness that is at once pre- and postmodern, reflected in everything from the Buddhist philosophy of eternal return to theoretical physics' explorations of ideas like space-time and synchronicity. He shares this sense with Smithson, who eloquently wrote: "The deeper an artist sinks into the time stream the more it becomes *oblivion*; because of this, he must remain close to the temporal surfaces. Many would like to forget time altogether, because it conceals the 'death principle' (every authentic artist knows this). Floating in this temporal river are the remnants of art history, yet the 'present' cannot support the cultures of Europe, or even the archaic or primitive civilizations; it must go to the places where remote futures meet remote pasts."<sup>21</sup>

Rogers is free of Smithson's pessimism, but like Smithson, he takes the long view. The title of the entire series, *Rhythms of Life*, is a statement of his position, and is meant to encourage us to look beyond immediate reality to the larger patterns that mark our place in history, nature, and the cosmos itself. This notion of time underlies Rogers' choice of symbols; drawn from history, mythology, and ancient culture, they are also completely contemporary, embodying universal concepts of identity, spirituality, and human continuity.

As might be expected, the execution of this monumental series involves vast amounts of coordination. Assisting throughout the whole project have been two Israeli architects, Tidhar Becker and Golan Levi. They are joined at individual sites by local architects, engineers, a logistics person, surveyors, translators, stonemasons, and workers. Rogers notes that his business background helped him hone the skills to orchestrate these huge projects. As he reports, Land Art requires bureaucratic procedures, applications for permits, environmental impact studies, historical authorities' approvals, engineering and building consultant approvals, and logistical expertise. "I am comfortable with responsibility and organizing large tasks and large groups of people. All of these are dimensions of creating Land Art."

*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* Rogers' *Rhythms of Life* brings us all a bit closer to the answers to these questions. As he likes to say, "Without memory we are nothing." His work reflects his belief that we come from a common history of peoples struggling to make a life in an often brutal and difficult world. Over the millennia, human groups have evolved very different systems of belief; but at their base, all religions and philosophies touch on the eternal mysteries of life and death. As to *What We Are*, these giant geoglyphs that shrink to tiny specks in the vast open landscapes serve as reminders that we are a part of nature and not its master. Removing us to a world little changed since the first appearance of man, we are humbled and also energized to understand our codependence on each other and on the environment that surrounds us. Which leads to the last question; *Where We are Going* depends on us. The *Rhythms of Life* offers a template of a way of thinking and connecting that affirms the precious gift of life.

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4. Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty" in *Arts of the Environment*, ed. Gyorgy Zepes, New York: George Brazillier, 1972; reprinted in Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis, *Land and Environmental Art*, London: Phaidon Press, 1998, p. 216.
5. Peter Halley in "Criticism and Complicity", roundtable discussion moderated by Peter Nagy, *Flash Art*, no. 129, summer 1986, p. 46.
6. Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," op cit, p. 218.
7. Michael Heizer, "Interview with Julia Brown," *Sculpture in Reverse*, ed Julia Brown, Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984; reprinted in Kastner and Wallis, p. 228.
8. Lippard, p. 15
9. Nancy Holt, "Sun Tunnels," *Artforum*, New York, April 1977; reprinted in Kastner and Wallis, p. 227.
10. Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," 1968; reprinted in Kastner and Wallis, p. 214.
11. Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, "Interview with Avalanche," *Avalanche*, New York, fall 1970; reprinted in Kastner and Wallis, p. 203.
12. Ibid.
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15. Carl Andre, quoted in Boettger, p. 165.
16. Heizer, "Interview with Julia Brown," reprinted in Kastner and Wallis, p. 228.
17. Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," reprinted in Kastner and Wallis, p. 218.
18. Ibid.
19. Holt in Kastner and Wallis, p. 227.
20. Quoted in Diane Waldman, "Holes with out History," 1971 reprinted in Kastner and Wallis, p. 210.
21. Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind," Kastner and Kastner and Wallis, p. 215