

**DOWN TO EARTH: CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATURE  
AS REFLECTED IN THE WORK OF JENNY CULLINAN, LYNNE  
HULL AND THE CANDIDATE**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN FINE ARTS  
In the  
UNIVERSITY OF NATAL, PIETERMARITZBURG

JULY 2001

## ABSTRACT

### **Down to Earth: Changing attitudes towards nature as reflected in the work of Jenny Cullinan, Lynne Hull and the candidate.**

The central purpose of this dissertation is to discuss different ways in which land and the broader natural environment has been used as a vehicle or medium in art-making, with a specific focus on the works of Jenny Cullinan and Lynne Hull and the candidate. The work centres on artworks that are in the landscape, of the landscape, in the earth, of the earth or predominantly concerned with ecological issues and the inter-relatedness of all living systems. It is argued that artworks included under the general appellation land or environmental art may be widely divergent in character, notwithstanding threads of commonality and convergence. In addition, the often fluid or ambiguous nature of the terminology associated with this area of investigation has necessitated some definition of key terms.

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other institute.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D.M. Miller', with a stylized, cursive script.

D.M. Miller

Signed at Pietermaritzburg

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The candidate would like to thank Professor Terence King for his invaluable guidance and would also like to express appreciation for the financial assistance granted through the Rita Strong Scholarship fund.

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## **Preface**

The central premise of this dissertation is that there are different ways in which land and the broader natural environment has been used as a vehicle or medium in art-making. It is argued that artworks included under the general appellation land or environmental art may be so widely divergent in character as to be at times diametrically opposed in aim and content, notwithstanding that there may be threads of commonality and convergence. It is also contended that art-making under the umbrella term ecoart, is grounded in an holistic ethos that focuses on inter-relationships of nature and humankind. Ecoart can help develop an appreciation of the complex structures of ecosystems, address core societal values and even actively become positive restorative gestures within the natural environment, thereby becoming integrated into the praxis of life. Underpinning this research is, therefore, the belief, which is congruent with the argument of Lucy Lippard, amongst others, that: "...art has a social significance and a social function, which might be defined as the transformation of desire into reality, reality into dreams and change, and back again."(1983:5)

Visual elements are only one characteristic of an artwork; the artwork can also be multivalent and function in an interdisciplinary mode, straddling more than one discipline and become in a sense paradigmatic. An analysis of the artworks of South African Jenny Cullinan, American Lynne Hull and the candidate is made in order to try and substantiate and make manifest these contentions. However, the very diversity of approach of artists within this area of investigation is such that it necessitates that other artists and artworks be introduced as points of reference, comparison and elucidation.

In order to place this investigation in an appropriate contemporary context, a discussion of various approaches to the field, both academic and practical, is undertaken. The often fluid or ambiguous nature of the terminology associated with this area of investigation, will necessitate some definition of key terms, as there are a variety of sometimes conflicting

ideas on what constitutes, for example, earth art, land art, ecoart, landscape art or even the landscape itself.

Another feature of the approach used to underpin this research into aspects of ecoart draws on phenomenology<sup>1</sup>, as advanced by amongst others, the philosopher Heidegger and architectural theorist Norberg-Schulz. In broad terms, this phenomenological approach is one which takes into account the "genius loci"<sup>2</sup> or "spirit of" or the "essence" of a place or thing.(Norberg-Schulz 1976:5) It is a qualitative total phenomenon, which comprises concrete phenomena as well as the intangible phenomena, such as feelings (Norberg-Schulz:1976:3) and entails too "... a return to things as opposed to abstraction and mental constructions..."( Norberg-Schulz:1976:17). According to Heidegger, who distinguishes between dwelling and inhabiting, the way in which we humans are on earth is dwelling. Heidegger traces the meaning of dwelling from the high German word *buan* (building) and the word *bauen* (to build) which says man *is* insofar as he *dwells*, but that this word *bauen* also means to cherish and preserve.(1975:147) It is argued that this way of thought is closely allied to many current environmental concerns and underlines the interconnectedness of things and our given world, as well as creating a sense of rootedness and identity. In addition, "whole-system thinking" as opined by Suzi Gablik (1991:181) has been a useful touchstone for this research.

At the outset it needs to be noted that while the thesis of this work centres on artworks that are in the landscape, of the landscape, in the earth, of the earth or concerned with ecological issues, these artworks should not be seen in isolation but in relation to the times from which they issue.

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'phenomenology' derives from Phainomenon (phanomai, to appear), and logos (reason). The aim of phenomenology is described as the study of experiences concerned with their 'essences' and their underlying 'reason' (Pivcevic 1970:11)

<sup>2</sup> Genius Loci is a Roman concept. According to ancient Roman belief every 'independent' being has its genius, its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and places, determines their character or essence. The genius thus denotes what a being is or what it 'wants to be'.(Norberg-Schulz 1971:22 ).

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## Introduction

The geographer Andrew Goudie notes that:

Although during much of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century many geographers were concerned with *environmental determinism* - the effect that the environment had on the actions and character of people and their societies - it has become more apparent in recent decades that man himself is an extremely important environmental influence. (1994:369)

Inherent in this statement, which is written within a scientific rather than an art context, are a number of ideas of consequence. Firstly, of importance to this research, is that it gives another perspective to ecological issues. For Goudie this indicates a new awareness and a change in thinking within the discipline of physical geography, where the effect of the environment on people and societies is not seen in isolation but in conjunction with the fact that humanity also has an effect on the environment.(1994:370) In other words, there is an interrelationship between humans and the environment, and this awareness and perspective constitutes a more holistic viewpoint.

This change to which Goudie alludes can be viewed as a crucial element in understanding environmental relationships, as it underlines the point that change is integral to the natural world and humanity and that, in effect, such change becomes a constant. A reading of the rest of Goudie's text reveals that change is a constant constituent of the history of the Earth due to a number of factors, including what are termed catastrophes, such as hurricanes, or more long term events such as the Ice Age of the Pleistocene.(1994:369). Change is also an element of life and the human condition, both physical and societal, which are anything but static. Therefore, the environment and humanity not only change one another but are also intrinsically in a constant state of flux, and it is this element of change that underpins my own approach to ecology and its expression in artmaking. Put more concretely, because all things

have this element of change, a pragmatic attitude to environmental concerns and their reflection in art production should perhaps be adopted, whereby while it is accepted that some change and utilisation of resources is unavoidable, any detrimental impact on the environment must be limited wherever possible, specifically when this impact relates to significantly destructive actions such as the use and disposal of toxic pollutants and the annihilation of plant and life species. An ideal might be to aim for an holistic, 'down to earth', reverent and interdisciplinary approach to all forms of life and natural resources.

This then raises the issue of what part environmental or ecological movements and manifestations, such as ecofeminism and ecological art may contribute to halt the process of the decimation of the natural environment, and of how these movements may differ in approach from more traditional approaches to nature and landscape or to earth and land art. It is the interrogation of these fissures and contradictions that is attempted in this investigation. Or, as Timothy W. Luke asks in an essay on the environmental crisis: "What is the role of art in today's ecological crisis?" (1992:72)

An issue of broad relevance is that although having been written relatively recently, in a climate of changing historical, geographical, political and intellectual circumstances, Goudie's text quoted above wherein he refers to 'man' could be construed as being somewhat androcentric or male orientated if the text is taken literally, particularly if cognizance is taken of its scientific emanations which have increasingly come to be seen as patriarchal. (Birkeland in Gaard 1993:32)

A further relevant point in Goudie's quotation above, is that he notes that man himself is an important environmental influence (1994:369). This can be read on the one hand as man being environmental, that is, part of the environment<sup>3</sup>, part of nature, not separate from it, or, on the other hand, it may also be taken to mean that man has influence on the environment, which more or less implies a schism between humans and the environment.

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<sup>3</sup>Environment as set out in the New Webster's Dictionary is as follows: All the physical, social, and cultural factors and conditions influencing the existence or development of an organism or assemblage of organisms; the act of surrounding.

This then alludes to the Cartesian separation of culture and nature and attending discourses. However, from this writer's perspective, Goudie's statement that man is an environmental influence implies rather the interconnectiveness and interconnectedness of the world and nature in its widest sense, including humankind.

The key issues of import regarding Goudie's quotation above are drawn from his text and from the manner in which he uses language. Thus, at the outset it should be noted that the subject of this paper is approached from a particularly practical perspective, in tandem with an effort at an holistic approach. It is important too for it to be borne in mind that an artwork is always the product of a specific time or an extension of a world view, that is, as Linda Hutcheon asks rhetorically, whether "... an artwork, or its reading, can ever be value-free in terms of the society from which it emerged" (1989:46).

The main points taken from Goudie's quotation above, and other sources, namely:

- i) that there should be a change in thinking regarding ecological issues, which should not be seen in isolation, but from an holistic approach where everything is seen as interrelated and constantly changing, and
- ii) that there exists an artificially imposed schism between humans and nature, and
- iii) that within society a patriarchy predominates, particularly within the sciences, including natural and social sciences, (Mies:1993:43) and the large corporate conglomerates,

also form much of the basis of ecofeminist thinking within which parameters much of this discourse falls.(Mies and Shiva 1993, Gaard 1993)

The first chapter of this paper explores and broadly defines, for the purposes of this inquiry, the various terms, language, and concepts associated with art and nature, or earth, as well as some of the standpoints associated with relevant categories or 'isms'. At the same time arguments central to the position of this investigation are advanced, namely, that while these categories are all connected in some way with the natural environment, the concepts, reasons and ways in which the artworks are produced differ and are even at times

conflicting. In addition, a general overview of the various historic and artistic circumstances of production in which landscape art, land art, earth art and ecoart came about is given.

The second chapter discusses the work of artist Jenny Cullinan and situates her work within the wider context of ecoart, ecofeminism and a related discourse on other artists working in this genre. This chapter deals generally with ecoart, ecofeminism and land art in South Africa and aims to place Cullinan's artworks within this context.

The third chapter deals with the work of Lynne Hull and compares some of the concepts behind her work in relation to the art of Cullinan. Hull's work is situated within the context of some other artists working in the field under discussion and relative to arguments put forward in this paper that artworks can have a restorative, positive affect on, amongst other things, the natural environment.

The fourth chapter sets out some of the concepts underpinning the candidate's work in relation to the other artists under discussion, and the Conclusion attempts to draw the various threads of the discussion together and to consolidate the arguments advanced.

## Chapter 1

### THE LIE OF THE LAND

A 'landscape' cultivated or wild is already artifice before it has become the subject of a work of art. Even when we simply look we are already shaping and interpreting (Andrews 1999:1)

Art itself might be partially defined as an expression of that moment of tension when human intervention in, or collaboration with nature is recognized. (Lippard 1983:4)

During the course of this examination of ecoart, environmental, earth and land art, it became apparent that not only is art that engages with the land and nature relativist and subjectivist, as is evidenced by the quotations by Andrews and Lippard above, but equally, this sphere of exploration is broadly divided by the intents and processes of the artists concerned with such artworks. One such division is that of those artists who use the land or the natural environment primarily as a medium. It is argued here that these artists manipulate and co-opt nature or the environment on occasion in ways that are damaging to the environment, in order to project certain concepts. As an example of this, in the late 1960's some artists, chiefly in the United States and to a degree in Europe, set about demystifying art by taking it out of the sheltered milieu of the gallery into the outdoors, in order to show their resistance to Greenbergian-rooted modernist aesthetics. (McEvelley 1999:89) In effect, these artists were using the natural environment as a medium, much as they would any more traditional medium. On the other hand, a rather different approach is taken by those artists who seek through nature and art, to highlight environmental problems, such as deforestation and pollution, or who attempt in some way to achieve a positive or restorative gesture within the context of nature and art. They produce, to quote Lippard, "...art as an integral social function"(1983:6). While this latter group of artists may involve nature in their art production, the manner in which this is achieved generally causes little or no damage to the environment but, in contradistinction, their works are intended to promote the healing of the environment and to serve to create an



awareness of environmental problems. Thus, it becomes apparent that ideas underlying art that falls within the ambit of the terms ecoart or earthart and which utilizes aspects of nature in one form or another, can be diametrically opposed. It is these two interfacing dimensions of artmaking which form the main focus of this study.

Nevertheless, while it may well be useful and, indeed, at times appropriate in writings on art to have a variety of classifications or categorisations, for example ecoart, ecofemist art and earthart, the reasons for this divisive naming process must in certain instances also be questioned. It is argued here that this process of categorisation may simply be an effort to appear innovative, different, to show what one is not, to distance the particular "ism" from any others, but in practice many of these classifications have overlaps, congruities and intersections. In the case of art pertaining to nature, earth, landscape or ecology for example, the number of categories which have been developed, with at times only slight differences, can create confusion in the important area of conservation and ecology for those readers or viewers not versed in these fields. In his essay "Response to the Environment", Jeffrey Wechsler noted in 1983 that: "There is not yet a catch-all historical term of recent art that uses the natural environment and natural processes as its creative sources and there never may be". (in Sonfist 1983:260) The matter of who determines these classifications in art is a large and complex one but, broadly, this naming process may emanate from artists, critics or historians, a combination of these or institutionalized artworld structures including museums and galleries<sup>4</sup>. For example, Andrew Causey notes that in 1960 the British critic Lawrence Alloway first coined the phrase Pop Art which has become one of the catch-all terms for a range of art production. (1999:85). This naming process is an imposed set of divisions which have in some instances recently become conflated. The exhibition *Objects of Desire* brought to London in 1997 by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, explored the still life, a genre generally associated historically with painting. However, included in the exhibition were almost as many sculptures as paintings, which in effect dissolves the division between painting and sculpture. A

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<sup>4</sup> George Dickie's discussion of "the institutional theory of art refers to 'the artworld' - an institutionally enfranchised group of persons who serve, so to speak, as trustees for the generalized *musee imaginaire*, the occupants of which are the artworks of the world." (in Danto: 1981 )

paradoxical aspect of this dissolution of divisions is that the very artworld structures that have previously underpinned the distinctions between the *genres*, now make no reference to the dissolution of these boundaries. The lengthy catalogue which accompanied this exhibition makes reference only to "...the still life's appropriation of ..." Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* of 1913(1997:71). I would concur with the notions advanced by Colin Richards who, regarding the division of art history and fine art, speaks of the need to do away with the separatism of disciplines or discursive practices. (1987:70). In addition he notes that: "...territorialisation calls for enclosures, regimentation and, all too often, authoritarian management".(1987:71)

In as far as these thoughts on categorisation relate to this discussion of art and the environment, there are, for example, eco artists and ecofeminist artists and, as South African artist and art historian Hanri de la Harpe points out, even ecofeminism can be broken down into liberal ecofeminism, socialist ecofeminism, radical ecofeminism and so forth.(2000:9)

Lori Gruen, in her discussion of feminist theory and animal liberation theory, notes that: "... these theories are exclusionist in the sense that each creates or maintains a category of 'otherness'." (in Gaard 1993:80) In similar vein then, the emphasis on "feminism" in the word ecofeminism can be seen as exclusive of male ecologists. This exclusiveness, however, would appear to be counter to the purported inclusivity of an ecofeminist framework of ethics as quoted by Li.(in Gaard 1993:290) Thus it is, that as this relates to art with an ecological emphasis, the term ecoart would perhaps be a more practical and inclusive term than ecofeminist art.

At this point it may be helpful to clarify some of the cognate terms relating to this field of study. The slippage of meanings that occurs not only over time but within the various disciplines and media, makes the definition of terms sometimes difficult and, as noted above, may prove reductivist and exclusionary or even result in their gaining meaning quite contrary to their origins in some cases.

Quotations from a range of sources are cited, some at length, in order to convey fully the diversity, at times oppositional, and pace of change in the definition of some of the terms concerned.

### **Land, Landscape and Landscape Painting**

In the course of recent history, the depiction or use of landscape in artworks has undergone radical change. While an in depth discussion of these changes is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief outline needs to be extended to place landart, earthart and ecoart in an historical context. Broadly then, from the Renaissance in Italy, the idea of landscape, as an illusion of reality where perspective and space was scientifically postulated by the use of linear perspective, was developed in painting and shallow relief casting. The use of linear perspective of course continues to be used as a tool by many artists. However, several shifts have occurred historically within the *genre* of the painted landscape, including landscape as *parergon* or accessory, the landscape as autonomous subject matter, as metaphor, as vehicle for the extension of a world view, as the interrogation of subjective interpretation of space and form and as subjective personal rendering. For example, Andrews suggests that landscape in Renaissance painting is *parergon* to the "Argument"; it is in most cases marginal to the main human or divine subject. (1999:28) In this regard, Andrews makes an insightful comparison between paintings of St. Jerome, produced by a variety of artists, between approximately 1450 and 1519, (1999:25-51) where he investigates the way in which the introduction of Jerome into the landscape inflects it with new significance. Other examples could include landscapes by Caspar David Friedrich which represent the sublime or unrepresentable (Andrews 1999:129) and paintings by John Constable which can be seen as "portable icons" constituting a construction of English national identity as "fecund, domesticated and profoundly stable".(Andrews 1999:175)

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century where traditions and conventions in art were constantly questioned, deconstructed and recycled, landscape as theme, explored frequently by painters over the last century, became a new vocabulary for the sculptor. It is here, where the use of natural elements and the transformation of natural environments has extended the traditional definition of sculpture and enabled the rendering of unconventional forms of

landscape art, and where a natural environment can be activated to acquire new meaning. The rigid boundaries between landscape and sculpture as distinct activities have to a large extent collapsed. Within this softening of boundaries sculpture has been allowed to be detached from its normative historic connections to architecture or galleries and museums and, placed in sometimes unpopulated, inaccessible places, assumes a different meaning. Michael McDonough sees earthart as "architecture's unnoticed avant-garde". (in Sonfist 1983:233) and under the umbrella of sculpture may fall a variety of artmaking processes, including interventions in the landscape, such as earth, land and ecoart, landscaping, ephemeral works, walking, mapping, traditional sculpture, installations, as well as performance art.

Within the confines of the definition of landscape generally and landscape painting as it pertains to the scope of this paper, a schism between humans and nature emerges.

Mitchell avers that:

Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package. (in Andrews:1999:15)

While Andrews extends this argument and notes that:

Landscape in art, as conventionally conceived and executed, is a framed representation of a section of the natural world, a cropped view, ...land becomes landscape once this kind of conceptual process has begun ... just as the frame is implicated in the totality of the landscape representation (in a sense it is that which defines it as a 'landscape'), so the art gallery may be seen as a further kind of frame, since it helps to constitute the work... (1999:201)

That artists have long been aware of and questioned these considerations is apparent from works as diverse as Magritte's painting *Le Condition Humaine*, (1933) which depicts a canvas of a painted landscape framed by a window and overlapping the view of the same landscape, and the work *Rahmenbau* by Haus-Rucker-Co, exhibited at the Documenta 6 (1977) (Fig 1). Here a huge metal 'frame', approximately 10m square, is suspended outdoors from a viewing platform. This allows viewers to choose their own framed

landscape, which can never be perceived as static, as it changes constantly either through the viewer's slightest movement or natural forces such as light or wind.

Andrews notes further that "...the implication is that landscape art does not happen in nature".(1999:201) and that the tension generated "...renders both artist and spectator as detached observers of nature... and terminates in what is perceived as a profound distinction - 'art' and 'nature'...".(1999:201.) Within this statement lie two important points; the reference to landscape art in nature, and the separation of art and nature, that is, the dichotomous view of humans and the rest of nature. While both these points are relevant to ecoart and ecofeminism, which terms are discussed more fully under a separate heading, the perceived schism between culture and nature is addressed below, under the heading Nature, place, site.

In essence, Andrews defines landscape thus: "Landscape is the scope of nature, modified by culture, from some locus and in that sense landscape is local, located. ...Humans have both natural and cultural environments; landscapes are typically hybrid."(1999:192)

However, Marion Arnold notes that: "The land is not the landscape. The land is natural terrain with physical resources; landscape is a pictorial term signifying a way of looking at and rendering natural scenery".(1996:39) Arnold states further that: "In postmodern terms, the landscape is not just a phenomenon; it is also a 'text', an intellectual space or site of discourse comprising a series of signs that carry ideological and psychological meaning."(1996:40)

In a similar vein, N.J. Coetzee asserts that: " The ideological possession of land in the painted image is a blatant statement of the power of the spectator" (1986:14 ), while geographer, Rebecca Lammas notes that:

Landscape paintings are pregnant with messages about place: they convey the objective meaning of the environment and they harbour shared interpretations of the external world that are infused with socio-political implications.(1995:3)

and Rees states that: "The history of landscape painting (and writing) is the history of the conceptions of nature".(Rees 1982:253:5 )

What the above quotations make clear, when related to artworks, is that there are diverse readings and meanings that can be assigned to land and landscape. There is also the contradiction that, while inescapably and intricately bound up with human life, land or landscape are at times also perceived as separate from humans and that in broad terms landscape is a subjectively seen, living environment, not static and removed from reality. In addition, what is made manifest is that the terms and concepts 'nature', 'land' or 'landscape' and 'place', if not interdependent, are certainly closely linked, and that meanings will vacillate from artist to artist and era to era. There are further views on these and related terms:

### **Nature, place, site.**

The dichotomous view of nature and humans noted in the previous section is referred to by Arnold, who states that: "Landscape bridges the binary opposition posed by the dialectic between nature and culture, since landscape - the product of artifice - is a cultural concept derived from the study of nature".(1996:39)

The perception of a schism existing between humans and nature is one held by Gablik, amongst others, who suggests that from Renaissance times the spectator was placed outside the picture, a view also held by David Hanson who notes too "...in a certain sense what we have here is a geography of the mental landscape of our time." (In Gablik 1991:99).

While there are a variety of reasons advanced for this rift between culture and nature, Vandana Shiva regards 'development' as the root cause of this schism between culture and nature and notes:

Development has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature and within society, which has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities.(1991:99)

If this statement has merit, then the assertion by Norberg-Schulz that: "Place is the concrete manifestation of man's 'dwelling' and his identity depends on his belonging to places" (1980:6) underscores Shiva's comments regarding identity.

John Grande notes that the word nature derives from the Latin *nasci*, meaning 'to be born' (1994 :37), implicit in which are allusions to the female, a point taken up by Gaard who regards that in Western culture the feminization of nature is the sexualization of nature. (1993:304) Peggy Cyphers asserts that: "White male dominant culture continues to situate itself outside nature", where nature is perceived as that 'otherness' that extends itself to include the female and non-Caucasian races, and Cyphers thus argues that there is therefore a need to redefine what is understood as nature (1992:52). This redefinition according to Cyphers is an "attempt to redefine ourselves in light of a humanist Darwinism of co-operation." (1992:54), while Arnold on the other hand considers that: "All images of nature carry new moral imperatives and ask for a heightened consciousness of the threatened environment". (1996:66)

Nature, according to Andrews:

... is the entire system of things, with the aggregation of all their powers, properties, processes and products - whatever follows natural law and whatever happens spontaneously. The experience of nature as process rather than picture depends on shifting the emphasis from 'landscape' to 'environment'. Landscape is an exercise of control from a relatively detached viewpoint. Environment implies a mutually affective relationship between the 'organism' and its environing 'current field of significance'. (1999:192 )

Robert Smithson is quoted as noting that: "The desert is less 'nature' than a concept, a place that swallows up boundaries."(in Causey 1999:169) Robert Hughes on the other hand refers to the Arcadian scene and "culture preening itself in the presence of its opposite, Nature." (1980:112) which statement once again makes reference to the nature and culture schism, a line of thought that can be linked to Cyphers' statement that: "according to Marx, the goal of a society is to create an environment in which humans are equally heroic in their common mastery of nature". (1993:52)

Again Andrews notes that:

Site ceases to be a 'landscape' but becomes a complex of sensations of light colour, smell, sounds, and tactile experience. It becomes an environment. An environment does not exist without some organism environed by the world in which it copes. ... An environment is the current field of significance for a living being. (1999:192)

This brings into discussion the term "environment".

### **Environment and environmental art**

Wechsler writes regarding an exhibition entitled "Response to the Environment" that:

"Selected pieces for this show have at times been categorized as process art, conceptual art, performance, earthworks, ecological art and combinations of the above or for some, none of the above." (in Sonfist 1983:261) This statement highlights not only the fluidity of the terminology associated with this type of artwork but also the soft boundaries between the *genres*. The fact that ecoart and the various earth arts tend to fall within the parameters of sculpture further underlines the point being made by Wechsler.

In the extract below Kenneth Friedman is quoted at length in order to relay the full tenor of his explanation of some of the key issues related to the term "environment".

In considering environmental art, most critics and artists have failed to appreciate the meaning, context and nature of the environment. That is to say that the notion of environmental art has been elaborated from theories of art and from notions of the art that is related to nature, nature being 'the environment', in which 'environmental art' takes place. Nothing could be more sensible in today's artworld and nothing could be more wrong.  
What is the environment? Or perhaps, what does the word environment mean?

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1943), ... defines the word environment in this manner: "1: environing; state of being environed. 2: That which environs; surroundings; specifically the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development or an organism, etc., human behaviour, society, etc."



Current acceptable meaning in common English is evident in *Webster's 7<sup>th</sup> New Collegiate Dictionary* 1969 1: something that environs: surroundings 2a: the complex of climatic, edaphic, and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival b: the aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community." The term began to be inappropriately and almost exclusively applied to 'nature' with the growth and concern for the biosphere as a political issue and the movements identified with 'ecology' - 'environmental activism.'

The misunderstanding is bound up in this media influenced slippage of meaning and is evident in the fact that it is the total environment (social, political, economic, cultural and natural) that affects our relationship to 'nature and ecology' as it has come to be understood. Thomas Ford Hoult's *Dictionary of Modern Sociology* (1977) defines the word environment appropriately for our purposes: 'In the most general sense, all the external conditions, physical and sociocultural, which can influence an individual or group; sometimes used to denote physical surroundings as distinguished from the sociocultural; when employed in the general sense, often used synonymously with milieu.

A closer look at environmental art and at artists who engage environmental concerns in their art will reveal dimensions that are as much cultural as natural. (in Sonfist 1983:253-256)

While Causey opines that: "There is no simple dialectic between urban forms and rural environment or even inside and outside."(1998:197) Michael McDonough, on the other hand, is of the opinion that environmental art may be likened to the act of building where there are parallels with prehistoric constructions such as earthmounds and sacred rings, being thus the art of the natural and built environment. (in Sonfist: 1983:234)

While McDonough includes in his definition earthmounds, Beardsley would categorise these as earthworks as he is of the opinion that: "Only sculptures in earth and sod can properly be described as earthworks". (1982:7) Here the definition between environmental art, earthworks or earth art and land art begins to blur and interlock. In this connection Causey notes that: "Earth art was not one thing, it did not define a group and neither this name nor alternatives, such as land art, were welcomed by all artists included within them." (1998:172.) In Causey's view the term earthart can constitute a variety of manifestations, such as architectural constructions in the landscape, travelling, surveying, mapping, writing, removal from the landscape and the transference and installation of

some substance from the landscape into a gallery and in addition to being seen, he notes it can also be felt, as " it is a phenomenological art of direct experience and not just a perceptual one". (1998:172)

From the above statements it might be inferred that the naming processes were to an extent imposed on these artworks and artists by the various art world critical structures or institutions. However, the artists were to some extent also complicit in the process as they participated in various exhibitions under these terms. One such artist was Richard Long, who Gablik quotes as saying, "...it (his art) was the antithesis of so-called "land art" where an artist needed money to buy real estate to have possession of the land to wield machinery. I prefer to be a custodian of nature, not an exploiter of it".(1984:44) However, he nevertheless participated in an exhibition (1968) entitled *Earthworks* at Cornell University. (Causey 1998:181). Fundamentally, however, Long's statement leads to the issue of 'green theory' or an ecological approach to artmaking.

### **Ecoart, ecology, green theory.**

Under these headings fall various streams such as ecology, deep ecology, mainstream green theory, environmentalism, ecophilosophy, ecosophy, bioregionalism, hyperecology, to name but a few. While an in depth study of all these facets of so-termed green thought is beyond the scope of this paper, again a variety of thoughts on the subject provide provocative comparisons.

According to American writer Thomas Berry, "While ecology refers to an understanding of our life systems and their integral relations", he suggests "the term ecozoic simultaneously conveys the feeling of an immediate biological reality and of the historical realism"(1992 : 77)

From a somewhat different perspective English writer Colin Wilson states:

What I wish to propose is that, in the 1990s, the word 'ecological' will become the equivalent of the word 'metaphysical' as the task of restoring awareness of our symbiotic relationship with nature becomes the most pressing spiritual and political need of our time. I propose that in today's world, the word *ecological* has replaced the word metaphysical, as the

need for restoring awareness of our symbiotic relationship with nature becomes the most pressing spiritual and political need of our time. (in Gablik 1992:77)

While Gablik quotes Smithson as writing: "The ecology thing has a kind of religious ethical undertone to it ... There's no need to refer to nature any more. I'm totally concerned with making art".( 1992:140)

Many ecofeminist theorists and artists have problems with mainstream (or according to Gaard 'manstream' [1993 :23] ) green theory and, from an ecofeminist perspective, Marti Kheel states: "I prefer the term 'nature ethics' to that of 'environmental ethics' since it more clearly implies the inclusion of human within its parameters. The term 'environmental ethics' tends to reinforce a dichotomous view of 'humans' and 'the rest of nature'." (Gaard 1993 :262) and Janis Birkeland declares that "My central concern is to show that green theory in general has not yet come to grips with the deeper impediments to personal and social transformations because it is gender-blind and trapped in an androcentric prism" (in Gaard 1993:15)

Here I refer to Gaard who notes that:

The analysis of Gilligan and Karen Warren indicates that ecofeminism which asserts the fundamental interconnectedness of life, offers an appropriate foundation for an ecological ethical theory for women and men who do not operate on the basis of a self/other disjunction. In brief this psychological and political construction of the self and the associated ethical system explains why ecofeminists do not find their concerns fully addressed in other branches of the environmental movement. (1993:3)

The above quotations exemplify the variances in thought and the biases often inherent in the approaches taken by feminist and ecofeminist protagonists.

According to Luke "The concept of 'ecology' should imply concern for the total pattern of all relations between natural organisms and their environment " and that:

On the other hand, these manifest and latent meanings in mass consumption also can afford critical, ecologically concerned artists tremendous opportunities to challenge the symbolic essences of late capitalism, questioning both the media and the messages that the

hyperecology of late capitalism uses to integrate individuals and society into its reproduction. (1992:74)

Broadly, the ethos underpinning ecoart is one of holism, of inclusivity that takes account of the interrelationship, interdependency and multi-faceted nature of all things living and natural. It is an art that seeks to develop an appreciation and awareness of these complex structures, to address core societal values and even to provide positive restorative gestures within the natural environment. Thus, the pragmatic perspective taken by Luke is one that coincides with many of the concepts of ecoart, and the views quoted above can be seen as encompassing an holistic approach, which is purportedly also one of the basic tenets of the ecofeminism.

### **Ecofeminism**

As indicated by Lori Gruen, ecofeminism is not homogenous and there exist a number of different threads within the parameters of ecofeminist thought where emphasis is laid on different aspects, such as liberal, radical and socialist ecofeminism.(in Gaard 1993:74)

Mies regards ecofeminism as:

... a new term for an ancient wisdom, (which) grew out of various social movements - the feminist, peace and the ecology movements - in the late 70s and early 80s. Though the term was first used by Francoise d'Eaubonne, it became popular only in the context of numerous protests and activities against environmental destruction sparked off initially by recurring ecological disasters.( Mies 1993:13)

And Charlene Spretnak is quoted as writing that: "...today we work for ecopeace, ecojustice, ecoeconomics, ecopolitics, ecoeducation, ecophilosophy, ecotheology, and for the evolution of ecofeminism" (Gaard 1993:51) while Greta Gaard states:

Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality the physical attributes and species, is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. (1993:1)

From a South African perspective de la Harpe suggests that:

... ecofeminist art could be seen as art produced by female artists through a conscious or unconscious awareness of their socio-political or biological identity as women, which serves as the inspirational force

behind the creation of works which deal in one way or another with planetary transformation and ecological reform.(2000:8 )

In the above article de la Harpe discusses the environmental works of Wendy Ross whom she notes "disclaims an ecofeminist agenda" (2000:10), de la Harpe nonetheless includes Ross under the umbrella of ecofeminist art although she does acknowledge this ideology is by no means monolithic or homogeneous.(2000:9) De la Harpe acknowledges too that in many cases the exploration of environmental issues by artists whom she includes in her text is not intentionally ecofeminist.(*de Arte* 61 2000:8) However, the connections and inferences made by de la Harpe notwithstanding, in this instance Ross' work (and some of the other artists discussed by de la Harpe) would then perhaps fit more easily under the banner ecoart. It is this separatism and these particular categorisations and fine distinctions made by de la Harpe, and others, which can be seen as perhaps divisive to matters relating to ecology, ecoart and even to a degree, feminist thought. The positioning of one ecological practice as 'superior' to another is not always helpful to the area as a whole as one might imagine that they share a common goal if not common ground. de la Harpe opines that a distinction should be made between " art that deals with environmental matters through an interest in natural imagery or landscape, and art which deals with environmental issues from a feminist perspective".(2000:8) While within the particular parameters of her article this may be so, it is at the same time an exclusionary statement which somehow evokes the idea that these two approaches are mutually exclusive, and at the same time also negates what Huey-li Li states as the purported aims of inclusivity (or holistic views) central to ecofeminism. (Li in Gaard 1993:291)

A side issue, but nevertheless an important one, which should be addressed within ecofeminist thought in general and which may be relevant in the context of the multi-cultural situation in South Africa, is the point made by Li who draws attention to a general omission in ecofeminist discourse and nature-culture, male-female relations. Li notes that:

The association of women and nature is not a cross-cultural phenomenon, since nature as a whole is not identified with women in Chinese society... There are no parallels between Chinese people's respectful attitude towards nature and the inferior social position of women (In Gaard 1993:276).

Li further informs that: "Chinese misogyny, in particular, co-existed with an organic world view" (In Gaard 1993:278). These thoughts highlight the fact that overall most discourse within the ecofeminist paradigm is predicated from a predominantly Western perspective and as suggested by Li, more cross-cultural studies on the relations between various conceptualizations of nature and the corresponding social treatment of women are needed, and these studies must take socio-historical conditions into consideration.(Gaard 1993: 280).

From a comparison of the above quotations and discussion, it is apparent that in some respects ecofeminism is problematic. Not only are there conflicting critical views, but there are also grounds for further exploration in the field of ecofeminism, as within this realm, ideas and issues are at times subjective and exclusionary, notwithstanding the fact that many of the assertions made and demonstrated clearly have validity. The term ecoart would then perhaps be a more inclusive term to cover art dealing with the problematics of environmental awareness and conservation on all levels.

## Chapter 2

### **JENNY CULLINAN: THE POLITICS OF NATURE, IDENTITY AND PLACE.**

...it seemed so egocentric on a grand scale, to go out and abuse the land in the name of art. (Hull quoted in Gablik 1991:89)

Many young people, discovering art's separation from ordinary people and life, have turned to nature itself as a substitute (Lippard 1983:11).

Jenny Cullinan (1969) is an artist born and educated in KwaZulu-Natal. In addition to her mother tongue, English, she speaks Zulu, and the titles of her artworks reflect this. Her work has been exhibited in several public galleries in KwaZulu-Natal, was included in the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale, and has been included in international exhibitions such as *Colours*, which was held in Berlin in 1996. She has participated in various art workshops locally and in neighbouring countries, such as the Tulipambwe International Artists' Workshop held in Namibia in 1995.

Through the very fabric of her sculptures and her strong affiliations with nature, which she regards as her "role model" (pers. comm:1999), as well as her rootedness in KwaZulu-Natal as place, there is engendered in her work a keen sense of "spirit of place". Her approach to her work whether intuitive or intentional, may thus be termed phenomenological. Her choice of materials or media is concerned "exclusively with recycled or found botanic materials".(Cullinan 1999) These materials are generally acquired in the specific area in which she is working, and are a combination of indigenous and exotic plants, which gives the artworks a special physical connection with that area. In the context of KwaZulu-Natal, and on a metaphoric level, this combination of materials could also be seen in relation to the complex multicultural make-up of the human population of this area, which includes peoples of African, Asian, European and mixed descent. A work that incorporates these concerns is *Umdeni Abafazi (Family of Women)*

(Fig 2). This large work is confrontational, in both size and shape. It is reminiscent of a boat or vessel shape, the one end of pointed hewn wood, the other wider, container-like, lined with palm tree material spilling out into the viewer's space. It also includes a large slightly curved vertical member, which adds the impression of a somewhat protective element, analogous to a scorpion's tail. Included in this work are crescent-shaped seedpods which Cullinan relates to Hindu iconography (pers comm: 1999), while the thatching-like quality of the palm tree material and other woven natural materials have links with indigenous weaving techniques. In addition, the title of the work, which is in Zulu, is as much part of the work as are the physical aspects, as it links the work to Zulu speaking peoples of KwaZulu-Natal, as well as having feminist connotations. As with many of Cullinan's works, this piece is very large and intended to be confrontational. As such the work inhabits the viewers' space and, unlike a landscape painting, for instance, has no fixed position for viewing. The work harbours too the paradox of physically bringing the outdoors indoors, particularly when it is placed in a gallery situation. This indoor placement of the work with its natural elements, albeit in a transformed state, changes the meaning of the work, in a way making it more 'formal' on a visual level as it relates to pictorial values and concerns in a more orthodox modernist sense.

On another level, the materials are of the site and inextricably bound to the site, while not necessarily making the sculpture site specific. The use of only found natural materials underlines the value this artist sets on all life forms and her eco-awareness. (Cullinan: 1999) She does not destroy any part of the earth, trees or plant life in order to make her works, and for this reason then, her work may be seen as being made in the spirit of ecoart. Cullinan's approach to the earth or nature as a medium can be seen in direct contradistinction to that of an artist such as Michael Heizer. In his work *Displaced/Replaced Mass* (1969) (Fig 3), Heizer had enormous holes dug in the Nevada Desert which were then lined with cement. Three huge granite blocks, weighing approximately 30, 50 and 70 tons, which were dynamited from the Sierra mountains, transported 60 miles, were then placed inside the holes. In so doing, his work and its process of production, has a sense of brutality about it. Heizer destroyed part of the earth, using it solely as a medium. The work is monumental in size and through his choice of



media, the artwork, rather than preserving the earth or nature, preserves itself, and by association Heizer himself, or as Elizabeth Baker notes results in, "a certain amount of self aggrandizement", (in Sonfist 1983:83). Baker further notes that these kinds of works "present art in a very clear polarity with nature" (in Sonfist 1983:73). According to Lippard, "The earth was and often still is seen as a woman's body."(1983:42). If this be so, then certainly one might read connotations of violence against women into this work. While it is true that Heizer's work above, like the work of Cullinan, has to do with place and even rootedness, in that Heizer states that "Place is material: material is place" (1999:210), the works of these two artists not only have different contents and meaning but their approach to the use of the earth or nature, as medium is from diametrically opposite positions. While Cullinan destroys no part of the earth or natural materials in the making of her work, Heizer, on the other hand, by dynamiting, using heavy machinery and trucks and displacing rock and soil, does destroy the natural environment in his process.

The rootedness and sense of place inherent in Cullinan's work evokes a sense of identity, which is a concern central to this artist's artmaking and sense of self. She states that:

My work also deals with lesbian sexuality, as a conscious challenge to homophobic society globally. My experience of South African culture and society is an intrinsic part of my creative consciousness.(Cullinan: 1999)

That Cullinan's work falls not only within the scope of ecoart but also ecofeminism, is visibly so and is confirmed by her statement that:

My work speaks about my relationship to the earth, the many species and plants that share it, and my energies, which are Goddess-fed.  
(Cullinan: 1999)

Her work may also be seen as political comment. In her work entitled *Not Just the R.D.P.: Radical Dykes Pussy*<sup>5</sup> (Fig 4) issues concerning politics, identity, sexuality, 'otherness' and nature, conservation, as well as the matter of what is public and what is private, are

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<sup>5</sup> After 1994 R.D.P. was the abbreviation for the much discussed Reconstruction and Development Program which the Government began implementing.

questioned in an aggressive and confrontational way. The forms of her work generally, as with this work, most often evoke female shapes. Although the titles of some of her works, as in *Not Just the R.D.P.*, are oppositional and direct, almost vitriolic, other titles are wryly humorous, for example the work *Queer Jean* (Fig 5) where she makes a pun of the word 'gene'. Cullinan has stated, however, that she prefers to communicate through a visual language as she argues that it says more, (Cullinan: 1999) which suggests that the titles are not of primary importance. It can be argued that in instances where artworks are intentionally open-ended and multi-layered they allow the viewers to bring their own realities and meanings to the work, in effect completing the work. Elizabeth Rankin notes that: "This layering of meaning is not unusual in art of the later twentieth century, which often communicates through allusion rather than description." (in Sherman 1995:23)

Klinkowitz refers to Barthes' discussion of semiology and notes that where meanings are plural rather than singular, there is a sense that the ultimate act of writing or painting is completed by the audience (1988:5), as is the case with Cullinan's works.

In addition to the varied inferences and readings which can be assigned to her work, Cullinan acknowledges that it is also of a highly personally expressive nature. She regards the works as "soul works", and feels that the works are "like a journal" and "personal journey that records where I've been and where I'm going". (pers. comm:1999). While Cullinan does not think of her works as shrine-like in themselves, because of the very personal and intimate quality of the works, which serve too as a form of catharsis, she performs a personal and private ritual, in which she weaves herbs into many of the works, giving to the work its own life before letting it go.

While Cullinan uses mechanical tools such as electric drills, she also uses and collects antique hand tools as well as making for herself selected tools, for example, mallets. This use of modern mechanical tools places her directly in the present but at the same time, the use of antique and self-made hand tools connects her artmaking with fine craft and the hand made. She has a rapport with wood and studied carpentry under a master crafter (pers. comm:1999) and these aspects of her working process contribute to a degree to breaking down barriers between art and craft.

As Cindy Schwab notes:

Process and repetition, two important aspects of minimalist strategy, are given new meaning when applied to natural materials. The look of the handmade object is a dramatic turn from the fabricated structures that appeared in the early 1970s, and ... where artists practice an ethic of hard work, labour, craft (and the tedium that goes with it) and demands implied in most work related to the land. (in Sonfist 1983:257)

It is here that Cullinan's work differs considerably from that of an artist such as Heizer, who makes use of assistants and large trucks, heavy-duty machinery and dynamite to help produce the work.

Cullinan's chairs or *Thrones*, which are "portraits" of close friends and of herself (pers. comm:1999) (Figs 6 and 7) combine her affinity with natural material and nature, the skill of a craftsperson and have links with KwaZulu-Natal and Africa and have the shrine-like quality referred to above. An examination of Cullinan's *Thrones* in relation to the *Throne* made by Jackson Hlungwani (Fig 8) reveals differences in content and approach but concomitantly, highlights the shrine-like qualities, links with Africa and use of natural materials evident in the works of both artists. Hlungwani's *Thrones* were made in a religious context to form part of his sacred site, *New Jerusalem*, overlooking the village of Mbokhota. These *Thrones* were part of a total environment and speak of place, but are also integrally part of the artist himself and his personal synthesis and world-view in much the same way as Cullinan's *Thrones* are fundamental to her world-view and responses to her total environment.

According to the pamphlet *Dutch Biennale Bulletin* issued under the auspices of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science who were responsible for the sponsorship and curatorship of the section of the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale where Cullinan's work was exhibited, her work "... is a melange of Western sculptural traditions with authentic local heritage." The concept of what is sometimes critically viewed as the 'borrowing' or 'appropriating' of cultural images might be construed as problematic in her work. However, it is suggested that Cullinan's work does not speak for or on behalf of other

cultures but that it should be viewed as a personal path of discovery of self, steeped in the 'spirit of place', as she appears to be.

A work of Cullinan's which speaks not only of place but of the female, of the protectiveness of nature and nurturing, is the work illustrated in Figure 9, which was in progress at the time of taking the photograph and was as yet untitled. The circular container shape of a palm tree trunk is lined with soft, fluffy plant material, thus nest or womb-like, while the outer 'fence' of sticks encloses it and further protects it and forms a threshold. On this notion of threshold, it may be useful to note that Heidegger distinguishes between an outside and an inside thus: "A threshold separates the outside from the inside, and it is in the threshold that the problem of dwelling comes to the fore." (Norberg-Schulz 1980:9) a concept which alludes to elements of identity and belonging. The large centralised circular feature can also be equated with the sacred centre and womb and in this sense the fact that the matter from which this is made is a tree trunk, is noteworthy, as Brookner gives the definition of matter as: "Matter, L. material, material, stuff, wood (base of mater, Mother), orig. the growing trunk of a tree" (1992:9). The marks made by Cullinan on the outer 'fence' can be viewed in the light of artistic marks which form part of what Schaafma defines as "an embracing spiritual web of relationships defined along the lines of symbolic values and metaphor" (1988:4)

In some respects the collection and removal of the found natural materials from their original surroundings implies a sense of alienation or separation, which concepts in fact enhance the significance of the content of Cullinan's works where she comments on the treatment of the gay community and their position in society. Further, the use of natural materials with their implicit links with the female noted above, refers to gender issues.

The nature of found natural materials is also such that works situated outdoors may deteriorate with time, while vandalism is often another problem facing art works in a public space. For example, a work by Cullinan entered for a sculpture competition promoted by the Durban Art Gallery in 1998, for works to be situated in the Botanical Gardens in Durban, which won first prize, was subject both to vandalism and deterioration through the natural elements. The act of destruction or removal of sculpture

in the public sphere is a complex matter inherent in which is an aspect of violence.

Valerie Holman quotes Spike Lee in reference to his film *Do the right thing*, 1989, as saying:

... the time for public art as projecting fantasies of a monolithic, uniform, pacified public sphere is past. What seems called for now, and what many of our contemporary artists wish to provide, is a *critical* public art that is frank about the contradictions and violence encoded in its own situation, one that dares to awaken a public sphere of resistance, struggle, and dialogue.(1993:653)

In so far as this relates to Cullinan, she has been outspoken regarding the treatment of the lesbian community (pers.comm: 1999) and while the destruction of her work at the Botanical Gardens cannot be ascribed to her standpoint, certainly some of her work could be interpreted as having a brutal almost violent quality. For example, her works *Come Breathe in Me* (Fig 10) and *Queer Jean* (Fig 5) evoke these qualities of brutality and violence. Further, inherent in the use of tools such as chain saws, is a quality of potential violence. The juxtaposition of the welts and gouge-marks caused by the chainsaw, with the dried flowers enhances this sense of aggression. The association of flowers with the female and the fact that those used in the work are dried can evoke ideas of death or violence, specifically against women and nature.

Whether indoors or out, the sculptures are certainly rooted in Cullinan's encounters with place and nature and touch on aspects of gender, definitions of which cannot be examined in isolation from other forms of power relations, such as race and class.

The works of Cullinan discussed above, are multileveled and metaphoric and consequently lend themselves to being read as an 'open text', and one might, therefore, cite the works as incorporating a phenomenological, reader orientated, critical approach. Selden, with reference to written works, considers this approach as:

The type of criticism which tries to enter the world of a writer's works and to arrive at an understanding of the underlying nature or essence of the writings, as they appear to the critic's consciousness (1985:109).

This reader orientated approach is philosophically underpinned by ideas of Husserl (1901) and Heidegger (1927), that is, that the world has meaning only insofar as we absorb the phenomena of the world, internalise them, and then re-project them in our minds, according to our social, historical and psychological conditioning. (Cooper 1996) This may result in any number of slightly differing worlds as a consequence of which we may therefore have a number of different interpretations of an artist's work for, as Eco notes:

In fact, the form of a work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood. These give it a wealth of different resonances and echoes, without impairing its original essence (Eco 1981:49).

While Arthur Danto in referring to the mirror as metaphor in art notes that:

Hamlet made a far deeper use of the metaphor: mirrors and then, by generalization, artworks, rather than giving us back what we already can know without benefit of them, serve instead as instruments of self-revelation. (1981:9)

an analysis which has applicability to the works of Cullinan.

In South Africa the field of environmental art or ecoart has not been greatly explored. In redressing this situation artists have the opportunity to produce works which are not simply a manipulation of or intervention in nature but which constitute a positive or healing influence or serve to alert, inform and activate ecological awareness. In this context then, the framework of ecofeminism which is purportedly inclusive (therefore holistic?) appears to present a suitable methodological tack for analysis. However, as in the discussion above under the heading ecofeminism, it is argued that perhaps ecoart might well be a term more appropriate for this endeavour.

In a discussion on "ecofeminist consciousness" in South Africa, de la Harpe (2000:7) indicates some artists whom she sees as falling, at least to some degree, under the category of ecofeminism. While documentation such as this is both valuable and thought provoking, at the same time it also seems somewhat exclusionist. Once again here Gaard's analysis of writings by Gilligan and Warren quoted earlier regarding the fundamental inclusive approach (which specifically includes men) of ecofeminists is pertinent.(1993:3)

It might be reiterated that the term 'ecofeminism' is itself somewhat exclusionary. In effect then, in examining the "human-nature relationship in art", one cannot ignore "debates on gender issues" to which de la Harpe refers but which she does not probe. These are intrinsically part of the issue as a whole and must be addressed, specifically if mention is made of "patriarchy". Another factor which is inherently a part of the culture-nature debate and which is particularly relevant in the South African instance, is the realisation that there is no *one* culture. This issue is one which does not seem to generally be addressed within ecofeminist discourse with the exception of the writings of Huey-li Li who succinctly draws attention to the variances towards culture and nature within different cultural groups in her essay, "A cross cultural critique of Ecofeminism"(in Gaard 1993:272). She asks the reader to:

Consider for example the puzzling fact that the absence of transcendent dualism in Chinese society does not preclude women being oppressed ... The association of women and nature is not a cross-cultural phenomenon... The Taoist idea of *tzu-jan* (self-so) which is used in modern Chinese to translate the English word nature, aptly captures this spirit. Based on 'being together with nature', 'nature reverence' has been Chinese people's common attitude toward nature. However, this holistic worldview did not prevent the establishment of male-domination and female subordination and the ensuing oppression of women.(1993:276).

Ideas which developed during this research are congruent with those of Li in that, as can be seen from the above, it becomes evident that while ecofeminists purport a doctrine of inclusivity, ecofeminism practice generally fails to fully take cognizance of and address the different worldviews and practices within other cultures and that more openness and research to create an awareness is, therefore, needed in the conceptualising of nature and inter-cultural socio-historical conditions.(Li 1993:201).

It is with the above in mind that the term 'ecoart' as opposed to ecofeminist art may be preferable, although this may be seen as a fine distinction. There are artists, both male and female working within the sphere of earth or ecoart art in South Africa. Diana Graham's *The Ecological Shrine* (Fig 11) (1996, 33 x 16m Hogsback, Eastern Cape) for which she received a Green Trust Award in 2000, is a work by one such South African female artist.

Strijdom van der Merwe's *Documented Pigment* (1998) (Fig 12) is an example of a land artwork produced by a male South African. In the case of Graham, de la Harpe places her work within the ambit of ecofemist art. Graham's art performs the function of creating an awareness of nature and conservationist concerns as well as functioning as an artwork, thus the work also fulfils the ideas underpinning ecoart. Graham, however, unlike Cullinan makes use of both industrially produced and natural media and the specific work referred to above is fixed and situated outdoors.

In South Africa, landart and ecoart have formed part of festivals such as the Klein Karoo Nationale Kunsfees held annually in Oudtshoorn, thereby attracting a wider audience than might normally be the case. A case in point is *Quest: A journey into Sacred Space* (Fig. 13), a work by Elaine Matthews, which formed part of an exhibition, *!Xoe Site Specific* in 1998, held in and around Nieu Bethesda in the Eastern Cape. Viewers were invited to participate in the work by passing through the *yoni* to another space, which the artist saw as evoking rituals of palaeolithic people entering caves or of a shaman entering a trance (Mail and Guardian, July 24 1998:4). The artworks of Lynne Hull, below, however, are produced under markedly different circumstances.



### Chapter 3

#### **LYNNE HULL: TRANS-SPECIES ART**

The act you do may be very insignificant but it's very important that you do it. (Gandhi quoted by Gablik 1984:99)

Lynne Hull, an artist who works in the U.S.A, has moved away from the production of functional ceramic pots to artworks which make use of both found man-made and natural materials. (Thornton:1999) The use of clay in the production of the ceramics in some respects may bear a relation to her affinity with the earth and ecological matters. Her current artworks, which deal directly with nature, are positive in that they serve a practical purpose, do not destroy nature or natural elements, and are intended to have an element of healing or nurturing, a type of artwork which may be termed ecoart. This way of seeing and her approach to making art also puts Hull and her work within the ambit of ecofeminist concepts. In addition to work done in her country, she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in 1994 to work in the United Kingdom and has worked in other countries, including Kenya.

The quotation at the beginning of this chapter may be taken to epitomise Hull's artmaking. In 1984 Hull carved what she termed "hydroglyphs" into stone to capture rainwater for small wildlife, on which she comments thus:

When I put water in it to rinse it out the first time, I stepped back and realized that it was the inverse of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, which is that big earthwork out in the Great Salt Lake. I saw that it was water in stone, instead of stone in water. And that instead of being a big, macho, artist's gesture on the landscape, it was this little, nurturing, feminine gesture on the landscape. And I thought that might be a contribution from women towards outdoor art, that it could be a nurturing, supportive contribution. (Ellis:99)

It is useful to compare the *Hydroglyph* series, in this case part 3 of 5, *Scatter* (Fig 14), with not only Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (Fig 15) but also with Drury's *Spiral Dew Pond* (Fig 16). These works have in common the use of the symbolic spiral as basis for a central motif, as well as the use of various natural materials, and water, and also deal directly with nature. They could all then be termed environmental or earth art. However, there are distinct differences. In Drury's work the turf was cut and moved with a spade by hand. In this the concept of "work" is strengthened by the placement of the artwork in a rural farming environment and the connections with humans and the physical earth, and there are also associations with more ancient ritualistic earth works of the region. While large in size, (approx. 30m diameter) the work is comparatively unobtrusive, and has the ability to regenerate itself back to a natural state and is thus a more gentle and less permanent gesture in the landscape. The work of Smithson entailed the use of heavy machinery to move the vast tonnage of rock to the required location in the water and would require a huge effort to restore the site to its original state. While there is no doubt that this work is monumental, has aesthetic, theoretical and to a point didactic qualities, and may well also inspire thoughts regarding human-nature dichotomies it would not appear to contain a direct or close human-earth connections and it has no 'hands-on' process. The work is difficult to access physically as it is in the remote region of the Great Salt Lake, Utah and it has also become submerged beneath the water at this stage. The making of Smithson's work also entailed the use of large quantities of earth energy resources, such as oil and fuel, which can be considered a depletive gesture rather than a restorative one. In addition, unlike Hull's *Hydroglyph*, the works of Smithson and Drury are of a huge scale and were not made with the intention of being restorative.

Hull's works are environmental sculptures situated outdoors. Unlike the work of Cullinan, Hull's works are generally site-specific and constructed on site rather than in the studio. Materials used for Hull's works include not only natural material but also found and manmade materials and objects. For example, her work *Raptor Roost L-2 with Hawk* (Fig 17) consists of a metal pole, found branches, and latex paint which form a roost, and perch specifically for the hawks. The work is part of a series of what Hull calls "Acceptance Gestures", works which, to quote Hull: "... show an acceptance that man is equal with

animals" (Hull 1999 ). This type of sculpture may in some respects be termed groundbreaking in that it is made for specific birds or animals, it is also not reliant to any great degree on galleries or any other artworld infrastructures. In addition, the work becomes drawn into the praxis of life and the modernist concept as espoused by, for example, Greenberg, of an art that is largely autonomous, is denied, in that the work has very definite aims and *raison d'être* which situates this work within a broad postmodern paradigm. The area in which this sculpture has been erected, as is evident in Fig. 1, is devoid of large trees. As a result the raptors in the area have become vulnerable on the ground or even electrocuted on power poles (a problem which also exists in South Africa.)<sup>6</sup> Therefore the erection by Hull of sculptures in this treeless area serves a practical, restorative purpose as well as re-envisioning humankind's relationship to nature and creating an awareness of damaged habitats or environments. While the work is certainly tree-like in form, it is not simply mimetic but aims to provide an enriching experience for the viewers.

Another facet of Hull's work which could be termed innovative, is its interdisciplinarity, where she works closely with members of scientific preserves such as zoologists and wildlife biologists to ensure that the artwork produced is both practical and suited for the species for which it is intended. She therefore intentionally crosses or blurs the boundaries between the disciplines of science and art.

Collaboration is an important part of Hull's work but this is not restricted to collaboration with humans and she describes her work as "trans-species art". By this is meant that the artwork is a collaborative effort between species. In the work *Reservoir Tree* (Fig 17), Hull's tree-like structure forms her part of the artwork, the work is then completed and visually balanced by the mass of the nests constructed by the birds themselves making it collaborative and interactive, or as Hull terms the work, "inter-species art" (Hull:1999). In some respects it could be called a performance work, as the birds continue to live there and restore the nests. The work is also one that is integrated into the praxis of life and cyclical changes and birth and death.

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<sup>6</sup> The problem has been addressed in part with the co-operation of Eskom who have made the poles or wires more 'bird friendly'

It may be noted that Hull's approach is in contradistinction to Lippard's contention that:

At the same time, modern art and primal art are ideologically opposed. Primal art is integrated with daily life and modern art is set totally outside daily life - either above it all, as the product of some mysterious superior activity, or below it all, as 'useless'.(1983:10)

in that, as argued, Hull's artworks in fact serve a very useful life-sustaining purpose.

The collaborative aspect of Hull's work was taken further in 1993 with a larger project, *Dreaming Missoula*, which required the involvement of many different sectors of the population within a given urban area. This work, sponsored by Missoula Museum of the Arts in Montana, U.S.A., entailed creatively solving the problems caused by beavers that were decimating the trees along the downtown riverbanks. Specific trees were protected with decorated metal mesh as selected by Hull, while others were left free for the beavers thus accommodating the needs of both humans and animals. The involvement of Hull, the animals, the community as well as the art museum to produce an artwork as a solution in order that the city officials did not eliminate the "offending wildlife" (Thornton 1999) can be considered a collaborative and holistic approach.

In this work, however, Hull's use of industrially-produced materials within the context of what was seen as an environmental issue, elicited objections from some more radical environmentalists who objected not only to use of the materials but even to the intervention of art or artworks in these issues, and consequently the work was only partially completed. (Thornton 1999) It can of course be argued here that the use of man-made materials is a pragmatic approach to environmental issues, rather than an undesirable usage. In general, Hull uses discarded man-made materials, which usage is then environmentally friendly and to a degree didactic. From the objections lodged against the work, it once again becomes apparent that change and new ideas are not always readily accepted and this negative attitude may well prove detrimental as opposed to the multi-pronged "inter-species" approach of Hull, which is at once practical, innovative, accommodating and holistic and certainly collaborative.

The fact that the project was vetoed and halted at some point during its construction highlights the difficulties inherent in negotiating with various bodies, political, environmentalist and municipal, which makes this type of work in the public sphere both difficult and time consuming requiring skills on both organisational and communicative levels.

In this respect Hull's work echoes, at least in part, the work of Alan Sonfist. Sonfist is another artist who deals with nature and the land and whose aesthetic philosophy, according to Jonathon Carpenter, is "...a positive interdependence of humans and nature.(1983:146) This statement would certainly situate Sonfist's work within the paradigm of ecoart. In Sonfist's work, *Time Landscape*, (Fig 18) he attempts to recreate on various sites threading through Manhattan, pre-colonial forest by planting the sites with native species of trees that will grow as they did before the settlement in or colonisation of, North America by Europeans. Sonfist's endeavour also entailed negotiations with various official and non-official bodies, the procurement of the land and so forth. (Carpenter in Sonfist 1983:151) This work by Sonfist also alludes to the political issues of colonialism and the discourse surrounding it. As in Hull's work, Sonfist's *Time Landscape* may also be seen as a positive, pro-active, educative and restorative action, the antithesis of the interventions by artists such as Heizer whose work, to quote Mark Rosenthal, "bulldozed and penetrated the landscape for the purpose of incising a visual statement" (1983:64), and which Rosenthal equates with Picasso's statement that "nature exists to be raped"(1983:60).

Hull's *Dreaming Missoula* and Sonfist's *Time Landscape* also bring into the spotlight the thorny issues of the nature of ownership of 'public space' and the notion of 'public', the complexities inherent in public art and importantly, its purpose or what it does. Valerie Holman notes that: " It is not only the work that has changed - public art has always depended for its resonance on sensitive siting, scale and symbolism - but that *ideas about* public art have also undergone a series of transformations" (1993:653). To take this concept further, the works of Hull and Sonfist remove public sculpture from the realm of architecture or "a domain of art once virtually synonymous with monumental sculpture"(Holman 1993:653), to an interactive realm, specifically with nature, including

animals, and humans. While encoded within the works are also the ideas of restitution, and perhaps a limited element of advocacy in that both works and artists promote a reverence for nature and the environment, the works of Hull and Sonfist also address core issues and values such as consumerism and the detrimental effects of this on earth's resources. The work could also in some respects, be seen as confrontational in that it advocates political action.

Like Hull and Sonfist, another artist who works with restitution and whose works may be considered innovative in this regard, is Mel Chin. Chin has made an ecological, restorative and collaborative artwork in line with Hull's thinking in his repeatable work *Revival Field* (Fig 19). A plot of ground which is contaminated with heavy metal toxins is planted with plants known as "hyperaccumulators". These plants have the capacity to draw these heavy metals from the soil, and after a few seasons have the ability to ecologically restore the soil. (McEvelley 1999:257) In addition, the plants can also be harvested and the accumulated metals can be recovered by burning the plants. The work is ongoing and is monitored by scientists. Thus, like Hull, Chin involves different disciplines and thereby blurs the boundaries between art and science.

Hull's works have multi-faceted readings and can be read on various levels. For example a work like *Raptor Roost L-2 with Hawks* is a constructive reparative gesture and alludes not only to the tree, but also has totemic qualities which could be seen as relating to indigenous American peoples, although this association is not put forward by Hull herself. *Raptor Roost L-2 with Hawks* and many other works by Hull also evoke a shrine-like image, which further enhances the idea of reverence of nature.

Many of Hull's works are concerned with the making of homes and sites, not only for animals but also insects, as for example in, *Butterfly Sculpture* 1993 (Fig 21). This 'home' was located on a specific site where migrating butterflies stopped to rest and drink. When relating this work to *Stone Lavo* 1988 by Chris Drury (Fig 22) which is a stone shelter, the differences become apparent. Hull's work has a practical, useful, didactic, as well as aesthetic purpose, while Drury's, although visually pleasing and evocative and to a degree drawing attention to nature, serves no restorative or practical purpose. In addition, Hull's

work is of a semi-permanent nature, being constructed mainly of found unprocessed wood which is under pressure from the elements. On the other hand, Drury's work is of huge stone sheets, which creates a much more permanent and monumental form, in effect, this work becomes Drury's signature.

Hull's trans-species works give personal meaning to and engage with the world around them and are not, as Gablik phrased it, "an inconsequential exercise" (1991:16) but become part of the "partnership" model (Gablik 1991:62) which implies interaction with and a reverence for all living things. Notwithstanding the differing approaches of Hull and Drury their artworks fall within the ambit of ecoart with its reformulation of systems of meaning and social and environmental responsibility.

## **Chapter 4**

### **DI MILLER: TRANS - PLANTATIONS**

To create is to give of oneself and to endow the world which we inhabit with personal meaning. (Burgess and Gold 1982:1)

In her essay "Roots: Rejoining natural and social history" Stephanie Lahar states:

There is not a place in the world that does not reveal the touch and bear the consequences of human hands and minds ... at the same time there are no people who have not been shaped by the effects of landscape and water, the climate and natural features of the area in which they live. (Gaard 1993:91)

At the outset it should be noted that *Trans - Plantations* has been produced from a combination of exploration, observation and superimposed concepts. It is hoped that the artworks will be experienced and understood through associations or metaphorical interpretations of the artworks, which may be generated through the specific choice and use of material, titling, and imagery in the artwork. In other words, where the use of metaphors and media permits the work to be open-ended, and where this allows for the possibility of shifting meanings or unusual associations and divergent readings by the viewer.

The quotations at the beginning of this chapter succinctly encapsulate my central



*Trans - Plantations* is the overall title that I have given this body of work, the concerns of which address displacement, deracination or uprootedness, relocation, dislocation, disorientation, the alien and alienation, loss and incipient loss, traces and memories.

As a vehicle or metaphor for interpretation of these issues, I have chosen sugarcane. This includes the sugarcane's metamorphosis into products such as sugar, syrup and other by-products, and by extension associated imagery of the sugar industry, such as methods of growing, and harvesting, the ground where this is done and bags and packets used to transport the sugar, associations which are rich and multifarious.

The rationale underpinning the choice of sugarcane is that in South Africa sugarcane cultivation is largely synonymous with KwaZulu-Natal and forms a large part of the economic base of the region contributing R1.7 billion to the country's foreign exchange earnings. (South African Sugar Association:2001) However, sugarcane is an alien plant to KwaZulu-Natal which means it is not only a transplanted plant, but also that the vast sugar plantations have displaced indigenous flora. In addition, sugarcane has other associations to do with displacement and relocation, for example, of the indentured peoples from India. In this respect my own relocation from Johannesburg to KwaZulu-Natal some four years ago led me to relate my feelings of disorientation, translocation and displacement to those felt more substantially by such peoples, and by implication to sugarcane and its attendant sociology. Inherent in the work is a subtext relating to ecological, environmental, and identity issues which are approached from a personal perspective.

Another important aspect of my approach to this artmaking, is Norberg-Schulz' notion of "genius loci", or "spirit of place", of how the physical and emotional landscape tends to be constructed.

Place can be seen as a multivalent environment with layers of meaning, a qualitative total phenomenon, made up of concrete things, such as topographical character, climate, colour, texture, and more intangible phenomena, all of which constitute the "spirit of a place", which according to Norberg-Schulz give humans an "existential foothold". Norberg-Schulz is also of the opinion that:

"Man cannot gain a foothold through scientific understanding alone. He needs symbols and works of art that 'represent life situations'... A work of art is a concretization of a life situation. One of the basic needs of man is to experience his life situation as meaningful".(1980:6)

He further asserts that: "Place is the concrete manifestation of man's 'dwelling' and his identity depends on his belonging to places" (1980:6).

If one acknowledges this concept of "place" and "dwelling", then *Trans - Plantations: Kaross* (Fig 23) is a work that explores aspects of place, belonging and identity, in both a physical and metaphorical way. Empty, used sugar bags were opened out, placed flat on the earth and soil gathered from various parts of KwaZulu-Natal, including my home, the University of Natal grounds and some cane fields, rubbed onto and into the paper picking up the patterns of the earth in the technique of *frottage*, thus tracing the ground patterns of the earth with the earth itself. These packets were then stitched together with gold metallic thread to form a kaross or blanket. The use of gold thread to stitch together the usually discarded paper bags, has reference to consumerism, but more specifically to the value of natural resources. The work is meant to evoke associations of protection, a comforter, belonging, or 'portable' bed as place of safety but also paradoxically, in the allusion to the skins of animals, to the decimation of animals and nature.

This is the point at which my processes and work both converge and deviate from those of Hull and Cullinan as I understand them. For example, like Cullinan, my work deals with identity and place as well as ecology and the preservation of nature. However, where Cullinan uses only found natural materials, my works, while incorporating found natural materials and found man-made materials wherever possible, also make use of new materials. This personal viewpoint stems from a pragmatic approach. Where I find wastage of valuable natural resources problematic, in realistic terms, I see a complete and total reversal of the industrialized, mechanized and computerized global society in which we presently live, as highly unlikely. In addition, I use many of the products of this industrial age, for example, motor cars, computers and electricity, all of which impact in some concrete way on natural resources as a whole and cannot, therefore, totally exclude

the use of natural resources in art-making. The foregoing notwithstanding, while I concur with ecofeminists and ecoartists such as Gablik, Gaard, and Mies, that humankind has an ecological obligation not to pollute the world, with Goudie I would also argue that: "Most systems are complex and man is but one component of them..." (1994:369) and that as noted in the Introduction, above, change is an integral part of nature and human existence. In support of this view I quote Goudie who notes that:

The revolution in the earth sciences, involving the concept of plate tectonics has caused a recent re-evaluation of the importance of tectonic activities in moulding the face of the earth. The plates and their associated volcanism, earthquakes and land level changes, are fundamental to an understanding of broad-scale landscapes. Likewise, the discovery of a lengthy climatic record from the sediments in deep sea cores and from other sources has demonstrated that the other great control of our environment is also prone to frequent and major changes ... and that ... Other highly important changes in our environment result from the passage of time. Important concepts here include the ideas of long-term slope evolution proposed by workers like W.M. Davis and the ideas of plant succession in ecology. Thus, to understand the environment it is important to appreciate the significance of both time and history and that in the present landscape there may be many relict features. In many cases of environmental change it is not possible to state, without risk of contradiction, that it is man rather than nature that is responsible. The determination of cause is often a ticklish problem, given the intricate interdependence of different components of ecosystems. We seldom have any completely clear baseline against which to measure man-made changes.(1994:369)

This is not to say that I advocate the decimation and destruction of areas of the natural environment, but seek rather a balanced, less obdurate approach to ecology, ecofeminism and ecoart that has the efficacy to produce a change in attitude from one of exploitation to one where all living systems are taken into account. Or as Ynestra King notes:

... where we will fuse a new way of being human on this planet with a sense of the sacred informed by all ways of knowing - intuitive and scientific, mystical and rational. (in Brookner 1992 :9)

In this regard I concur with Gablik who states that: "...modern individuals do not see the Earth as a source of spiritual renewal, but as a stockpile of raw materials to be exploited and consumed."(1992:49) Certain of my ideas are congruent with those of ecofeminists,

for example, Gaard, who notes that: "Everything in nature has intrinsic value. A reverence for and empathy with nature and all life (or 'spirituality') is an essential element of the social transformation required".(1998 :20). However, while there are points of commonality here, there are also points of divergence, one of which concerns the very term ecofeminists which, as previously noted, may be deemed to be a somewhat restrictive, genderist and exclusive term.

Hull too has a practical approach towards materials; she to makes use of found natural and found industrially made materials but also uses new manufactured materials such as paint. Where the difference in approach to work occurs is that Hull's work serves a practical and restorative purpose as well as having aesthetic value where my works are intended to serve more as a commentary. Hull's artworks are also set in nature, made *in situ* and are participatory and interactive in that she liases with scientists in the production of her works and in that they are often completed by the particular animals involved, whereas my work, at this time, is made in the studio and in the main to be situated indoors. As opposed to Cullinan (and myself), Hull does not broach the subject of identity *per se*, but she does obliquely make reference to gender, although place and 'spirit of place', also play an important role in her work. The main point of intersection of ideas between Hull, Cullinan and myself, however, is a concern with environmental matters. Kenneth Friedman notes that:

The term environmental art has come to have a meaning involved with 'ecological investigations'. A closer look at environment art and at artists who engage environmental concerns in their art will reveal dimensions that are as much cultural as natural. (in Sonfist 1983 :256)

If one agrees with this statement then too the work of the above artists can be seen to touch on social and cultural issues, an indication that in most instances, soft boundaries exist between different approaches to art concerned with the environment.

While, as has been argued earlier, the term ecoart would seem to be more inclusive than ecofeminism, another point of convergence between the works of Hull, Cullinan and my works is that they are all made from what can broadly be termed a female perspective but

at the same time from different viewpoints. In relation to her hydroglyph, *Scatter* (Fig 13), Hull speaks of "... little, nurturing, feminine gesture on the landscape". (Ellis:1999) while Cullinan addresses issues of female identity, particularly connected with issues of gender and 'otherness'. In *Trans - Plantation: Untimely Ripped* (Fig 24) my work is meant to portray issues of female roles of mother, as nurturer, but also as individual, and identity in relation to violent loss, the dislocated, relocated and displaced, which is particularly relevant in South Africa at times of fragmentation of families. Notwithstanding this reference to a female perspective, however, the works need not necessarily be classified as ecofeminist art as they fall comfortably under the less exclusionary term ecoart.

In *Trans - Plantation: Untimely Ripped*, sugar is used as a medium to cast a variety of images amongst which are eggs, sugarcane and displaced earth. In addition, embedded in molten sugar are pieces of foil belonging to hormone replacement patches. The use of sugar as a culinary medium also makes reference to 'woman's work' while the pieces of foil point to the inroads of science that purports to improve choices for women, a point vigorously argued by some feminists. For example, Vandana Shiva argues that:

... the seed and women's bodies as sites of regenerative power are, in the eyes of capitalist patriarchy among the last colonies.

The ultimate step in converting nature into a resource is the conversion of the seed - the source from which plant life rises again - into a 'genetic resource' to be engineered, presented and owned for corporate profit.(1993:25)

While I would wish the work be open-ended in interpretative possibility to allow the viewers to bring their personal experience to bear, to make their own connections when viewing the work, the imagery, symbols and the materials used in my work have been consciously chosen to re-enforce the meaning of the work. In some instances symbols and imagery are those that have been a constant thread through my work over approximately a decade. In as far as the egg is concerned the associations and meanings are many, varied, and even intercultural. The egg has a latency, it is iconographic and relates amongst other things to seed, birth, the sacred, the secular, and the cyclical. Importantly for me, it also contains the binaries of fragility and strength.

The latency of the egg can be equated too with the latent energy of sugar cane and sugar. In *Trans - Plantations: Stripmine/Strip Mine* (Fig 25) the female torsos and the eggs are made of sugar and, mixed into the sugar, is earth and clay from KwaZulu-Natal. This refers to the Earth as female or mother and to the primal matter and energy, which once extracted from the ground, becomes a cycle of earth, sugar, growth, earth. The circular bowls of burnt sugar on representations of core samples below the torsos, represent the sacramental traces of process. According to Jaffe, "the symbol of the circle epitomizes the single most vital aspect of life and its ultimate wholeness."(in Jung 1978:266) On a personal level the work draws parallels both to my relocation away from my children and family but also to the way the earth is divested of its natural resources.

Inherent in the process of extracting the sugar from the cane is the idea of alchemy, and the *nigredo* or blackening and cooking phase of the alchemical process. McEvilly notes that this process is where a substance can be stripped of its qualities by a special burning, in effect being reborn as a new substance with other qualities.(1999:212)

A feature of Cullinan's works is the usage of material which denotes, amongst other things, place. This aspect of meaning inherent in materials is one that is important in my work. However, where Cullinan uses found botanic materials, which are generally indigenous, I have used sugar cane or sugar, both physical and inferred. By inferred usage is meant the different media and imagery used to make reference to the sugar cane and sugar. The hilly terrain of KwaZulu-Natal evokes connections and associations, with, for example, the mound, cairn or conical shape which has a large variety of associations ancient and new, mythic and real. Lippard notes that:

All over the world the natural cone-shaped hill and mountain and its human-made imitations are seen as mediators between earth and sky, entrances to the underworld, sites of visionary aspiration. They are frequently associated with sun and moon worship, with fertility, the snake, and water.(1983:214)

Processed sugar forms this conical shape naturally when it is poured and stored in huge mounds several stories high in the sugar terminals at Durban harbour. Goldsworthy uses the mound shape, which he calls cairns, in a different context, "...the very shape of the

completed cairn itself suggesting that it is "the tip of something bigger below ground". (1996:7) Mound-like shapes of Louise Bourgeois' work have been linked to the Ephesian Artemis whose upper torso has many such breast-like shapes and a cult name for whom was *Polymastos* (McEvelley 1999:238) (Fig 26). Artemis is the Greek name of the Roman Goddess Diana, and these hill-like shapes also occur as nodes on the sugar cane and are used extensively in clay pots from the KwaZulu-Natal region. I have incorporated these cone shapes in various forms in most of this body of work. In addition, the elongated upright format used for many of the works refers to the long upright shape of the sugar cane itself which perhaps paradoxically also has male associations, while McEvelley notes that rectilinear elements juxtaposed with more rounded ones suggest a male and female dichotomy. (1999:413)

In the context of my work *Trans - plantations: Portiere* (Fig 27), with Berger and Andrews I would argue that:

Landscapes can be deceptive. 'Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtains, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal'. The insight, introduced as a corrective to the outsiders perspective, is a valuable one. (Berger in Andrews 1999:21)

*Portiere* is a curtain constructed of small sugar female torsos based on the shape of a dressmaker's dummy or what would seem to be a 'model' female form. The curtain at once partly hides what is behind and creates a barrier of a temporary nature, both by allowing movement through it and due to the soluble properties of the sugar. These torsos are however bound and strung together with copper wire which would remain even after the sugar dissolved. The female, or feminine values are often represented by copper as the female body contains a larger quantity of copper than that of the male body which has more iron.(Adams 1992:31)

The artworks of Cullinan, Hull and myself carry linking elements of 'earth closeness' which is inherent in not only the materials but also the colours, tactility and almost rough-hewn feeling that is a fundamental characteristic of the works. These links are also to be

found in the theoretical bedrock from which the artists work, which is that of a conservatory or preservatory awareness and approach.

Heidegger discusses various words, their original derivations and meanings in *Poetry, Language, Thought* and notes that:

The old word *bauen* which says that man is insofar as he *dwells*, this word *bauen* however *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine (1975:147) and that ...the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve.(1975:150).

In this way, then our dwelling in the world should entail preservation of nature, including man, and natural resources, which is a fundamental tenet of ecoart.



## CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated only a few aspects of the complex area of eco and land art and implications inherent in these boundaries, and there are many more possible areas of study. However, as a result of the research undertaken here, it seems clear that while at a fundamental level all the artists discussed work with the earth, nature or natural materials in some form, not all the artists approach their 'medium' in the same way or with the same intent.

Heizer's statement, "I don't care about landscape, I'm a sculptor. Real estate is dirt and dirt is material" (Grande 1994:87) emphasizes one sector of land or earth artists' use of land, which according to Grand was an imposition of "...an idea of art in the forum of the exterior landscape - the imposition of an idea of art onto nature by an artist"(1994:87). On the other hand artists such as Hull and Cullinan work from the premise that art has social significance and a social function, and endeavour through their artmaking to project a reverence and connection with nature and to make positive, regenerative or healing gestures from a holistic based ethos, as opposed to, as Lippard suggests, art that "is still over defined in Western society, to the point where its function is limited to decoration or status symbol." (1984:5).

It is at the same time important to take account of, as Stimpson puts it, that "...like every great word 'representation' is like a stew". (Hutcheon 1989:33), and that "All representations have a politics, an history and overlap and inter-act with the social systems of the past and present" (Hutcheon 1989:460) or as Kenneth Friedman notes: "What is called environmental art is as clearly focused on culture as it is on anything else". (in Sonfist 1983:253-256) Thus while artworks may be related to matters ecological, they nonetheless implicitly carry with them several other meanings.

Ecoart could be, as Katy Deepwell notes in relation to feminist art criticism, "an invitation to dialogue, not just between the spectator and the work, the reader and the text, but specifically in opening up questions about the way social/political issues and ideas are

addressed through particular artworks ..."(1995:7) Ecoart need not be a singular approach but a broad umbrella term for a diverse number of positions and strategies for all people involved in creating awareness of and nurturing nature in all its variances.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

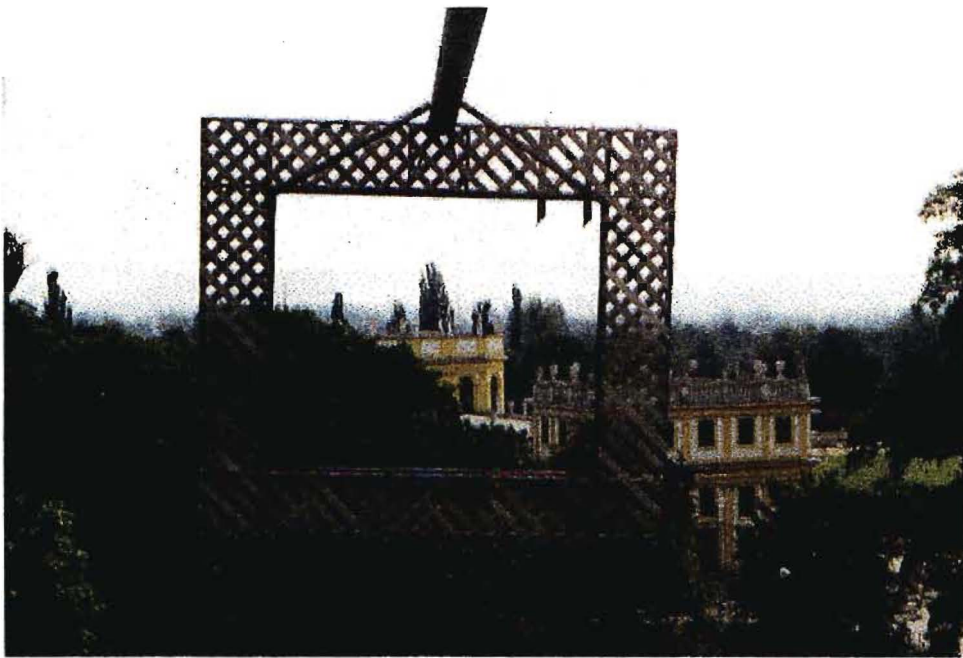


Fig 1. Haus-Rucker-Co  
*Rahmenbau*  
Documenta 6 (1977) Kassel  
945 x 488 x 122cm  
Photograph D. Miller



Fig 2. Jenny Cullinan,  
*Umdeni Abafazi (Family of Women)*  
1998-9  
260 x 370 x 130cm  
Botanical materials  
Photograph kind permission of artist



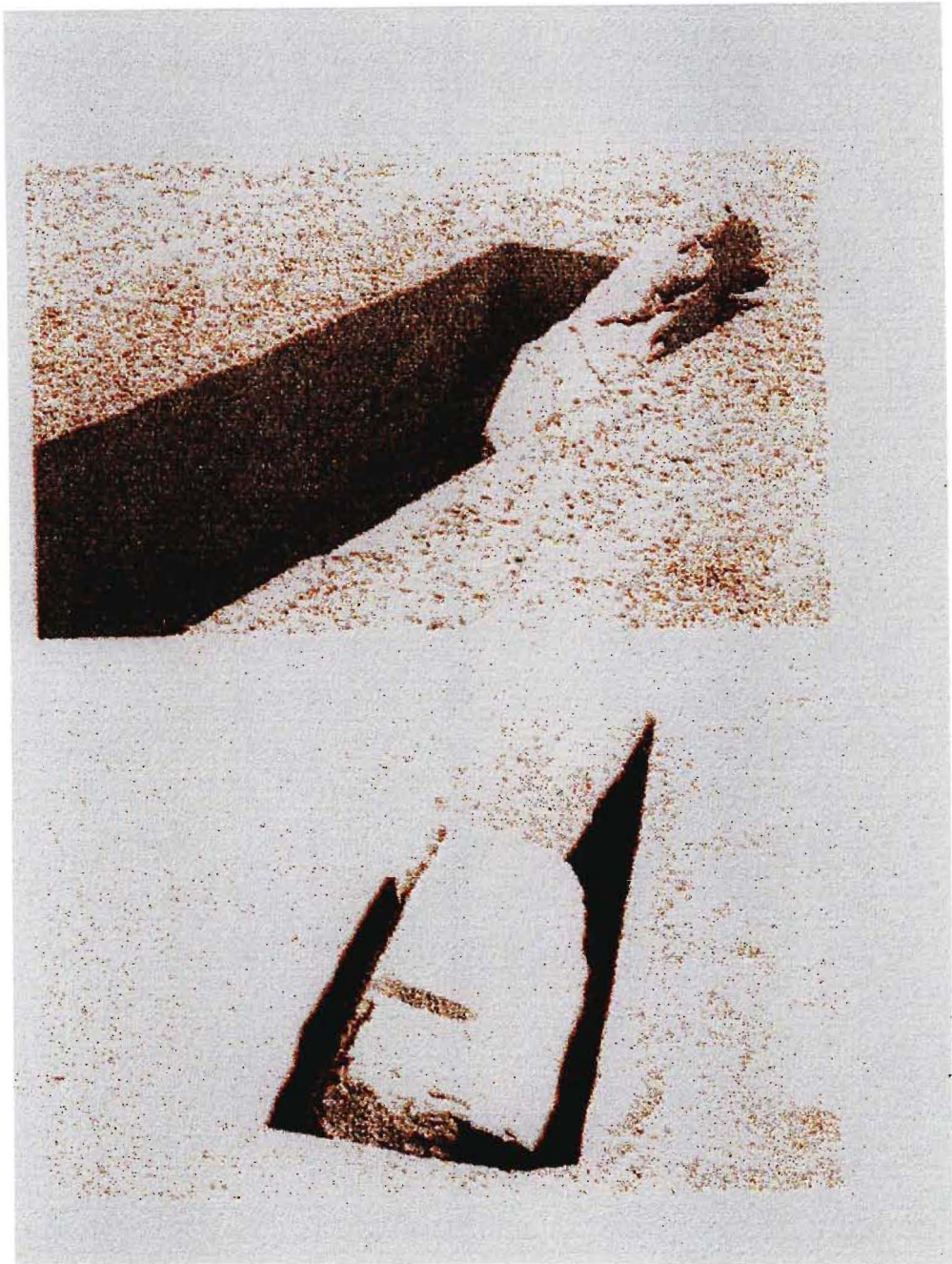


Fig 3. Michael Heizer  
*Displaced/Replaced Mass*)  
1969  
Stone, cement  
Silversprings, Nevada Desert  
Photograph Andrews, M. 1999

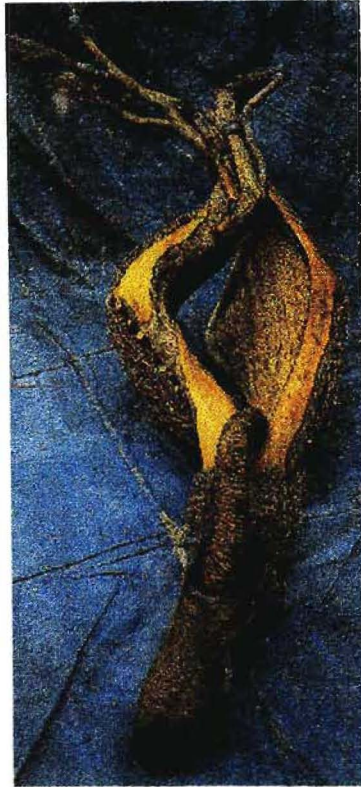


Fig 4. Jenny Cullinan,  
*Not Just the R.D.P. (Radical Dykes Pussy)*  
1994  
Approx 300 x 100 x 250cm  
Photograph Kind permission of the Artist



Fig 5. Jenny Cullinan,  
*Queer Jean*  
1994.  
Botanical materials,  
Approximately 300 x 120 x 150cm.  
Photograph kind permission of artist.



Fig 6. Jenny Cullinan,  
*Throne Series (Self portrait)*  
2000.  
Botanic materials, wax, hide,  
168 x 68 x 92cm.  
Photograph D Miller.



Fig 7. Jenny Cullinan,  
*Throne Series (Self portrait)*  
2000.  
Botanic materials, wax, hide,  
168 x 68 x 92cm.  
Photograph D Miller.

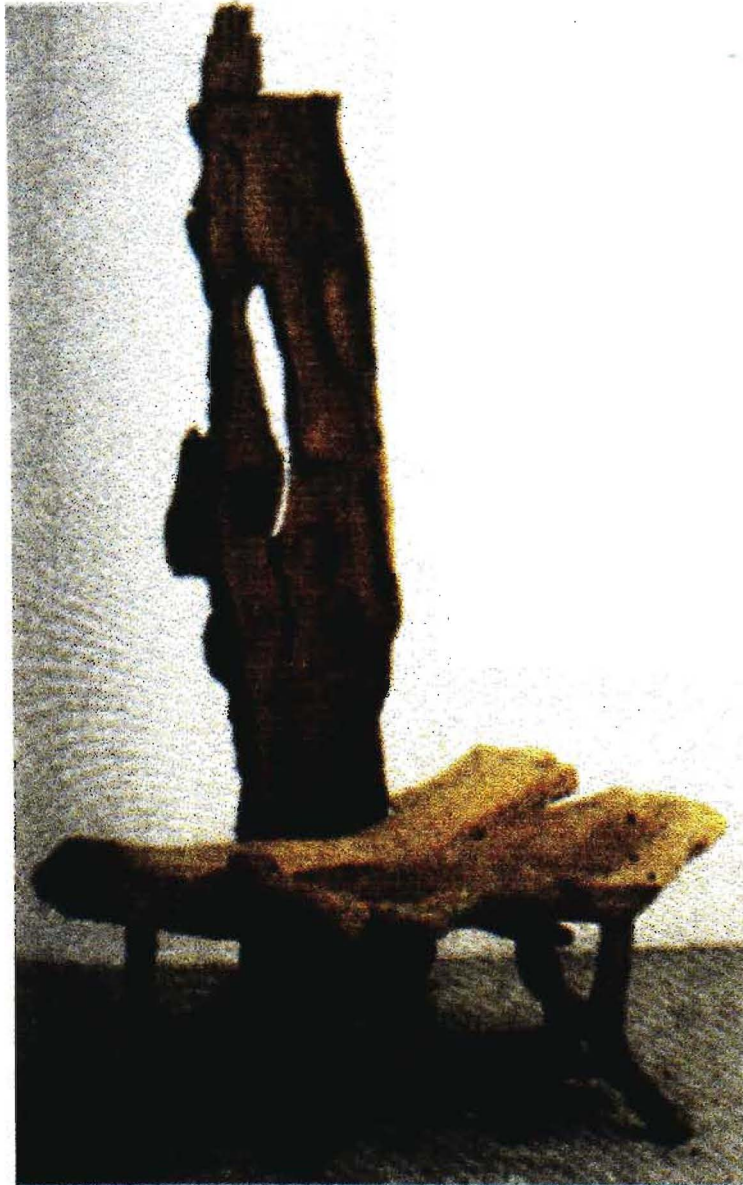


Fig 8. Jackson Hlungwane.  
1989  
*Throne*  
Wood  
265 x 160cm  
Photograph John Riddy



Fig 9. Jenny Cullinan,  
Untitled and unfinished at time of photograph  
1999.  
Botanical materials.  
120 x 80 x 160cm.  
Photograph D. Miller.

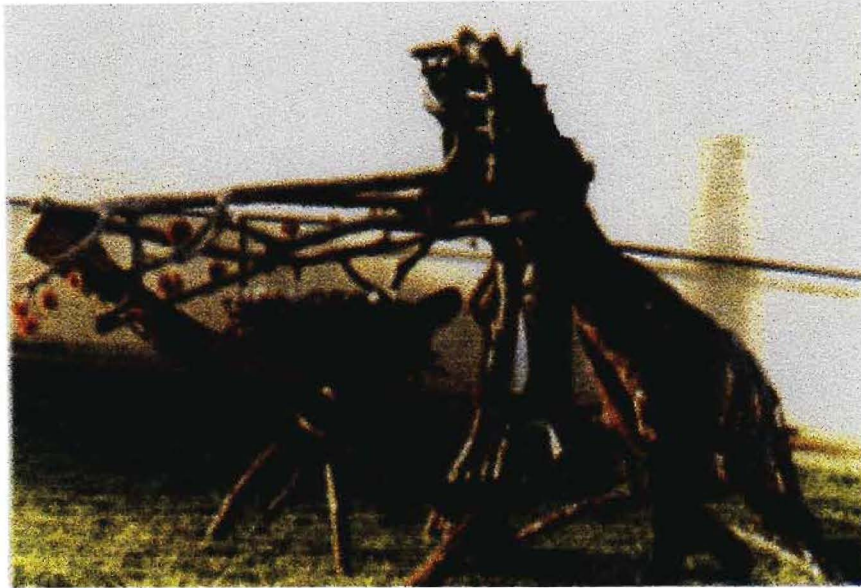


Fig 10. Jenny Cullinan,  
1994.  
*Come Breath in Me*  
Botanical materials,  
200 x 70 x 130cm.  
Photograph kind permission of the artist.



Fig 11. Diana Graham,  
*The Ecological Shrine*  
1996.  
Cement and mixed media,  
3300 x 1600cm.  
Hogsback, Eastern Cape  
Photograph Mail & Guardian June 4 - 10 1999.





Fig 12. Strydom van der Merwe,  
*Documented Pigment*  
1998.  
Sea Sand and mixed media,  
Photograph: Mail and Guardian May 29 to June 4 1998.



Fig 13. Elaine Matthews,  
*Quest: A Journey into Sacred Space*  
1998.  
Bones, botanic material, rock, mirror, water,  
Nieu Bethesda  
4000 x 1000cm.  
Photograph Anthea Garman.



Fig 14. LynneHull  
Scatter part 3 of 5  
1987.  
Carved stone,  
100 x 90 x 3cm.



Fig 15. Robert Smithson,  
*Spiral Jetty*  
1969-70.  
Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, U.S.A.  
Mud, precipitated salt crystals, rocks, water,  
Coil approx 457.2m long, 4.50m wide.  
Photograph Causey, A. 1999



Fig 16. Drury  
*Spiral Dew Pond*  
1997.  
Earth and botanic material,  
Diameter approx 30m.  
Photograph C. Drury 1998.

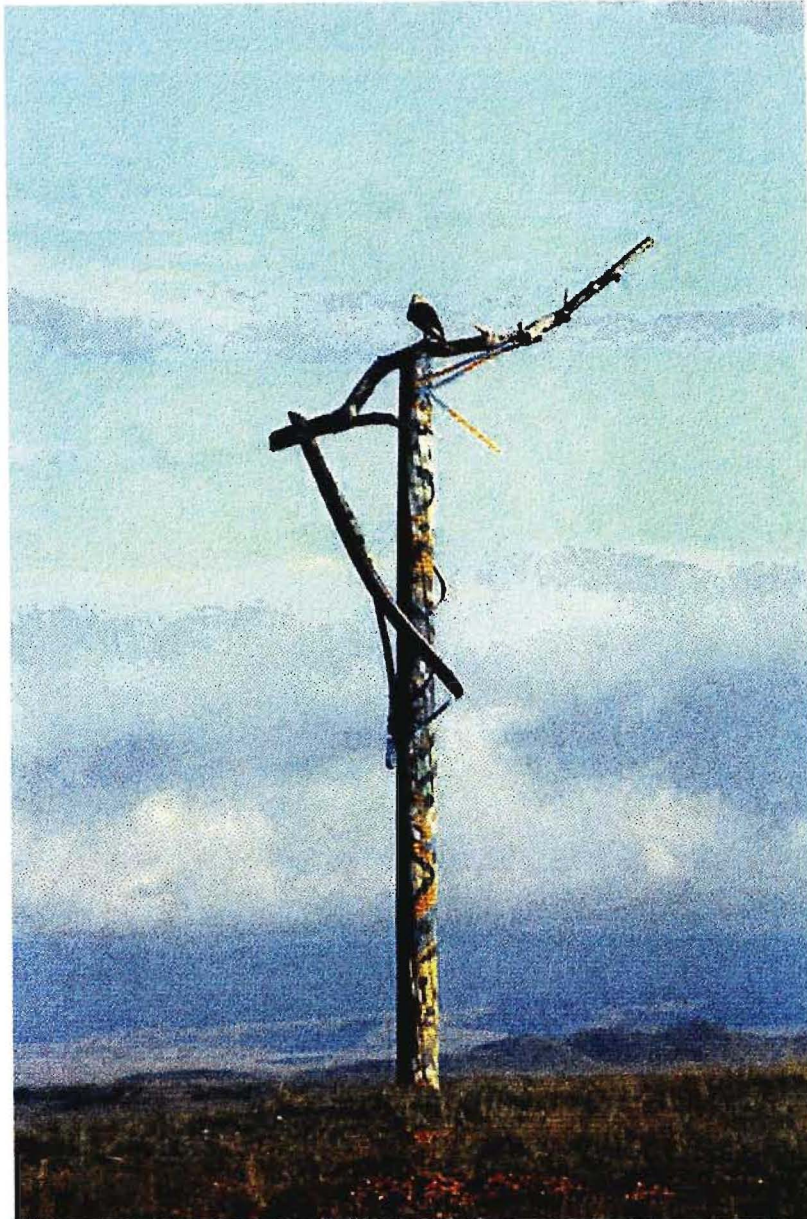


Fig 17. Lynne Hull,  
*Raptor Roost L-2 with Hawk*  
1988.  
Metal pole, found branches, and latex paint,  
H 500 cm.  
Photograph kind permission of the artist



Fig 18. Lynne Hull,  
*Reservoir Tree*  
1994.  
Wood,  
H 700cm.  
Photograph J. Milne.



Fig 19. Allan Sonfist,  
*Time Landscape*  
1965 - 1978.  
Indigenous plants,  
Houston Street and La Guardia Place, New York City  
743.20 sq m.  
Photograph Lippard 1983





Fig 20. Mel Chin,  
*Revival Field*  
1990 - present.  
Landfill, chain-link fence, 6 plant varieties, perennials and annual  
seeds and seedlings,  
16.72 sq.m.  
Pigs Eye landfill, St. Paul, Minnesota U.S.A.

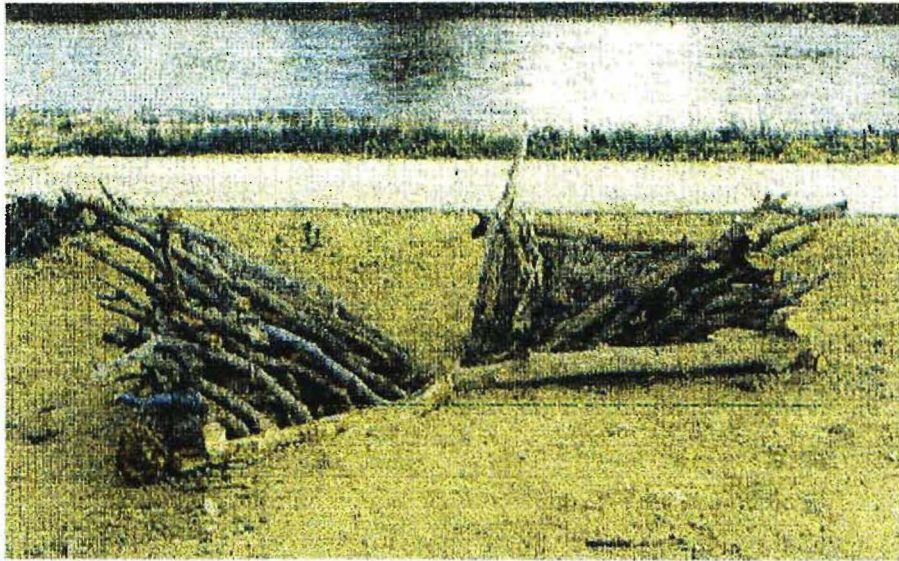


Fig 21. Lynne Hull,  
*Butterfly Sculpture*  
1993.  
Wood,  
304 x 183 x 91cm.  
Green River, Wyoming.

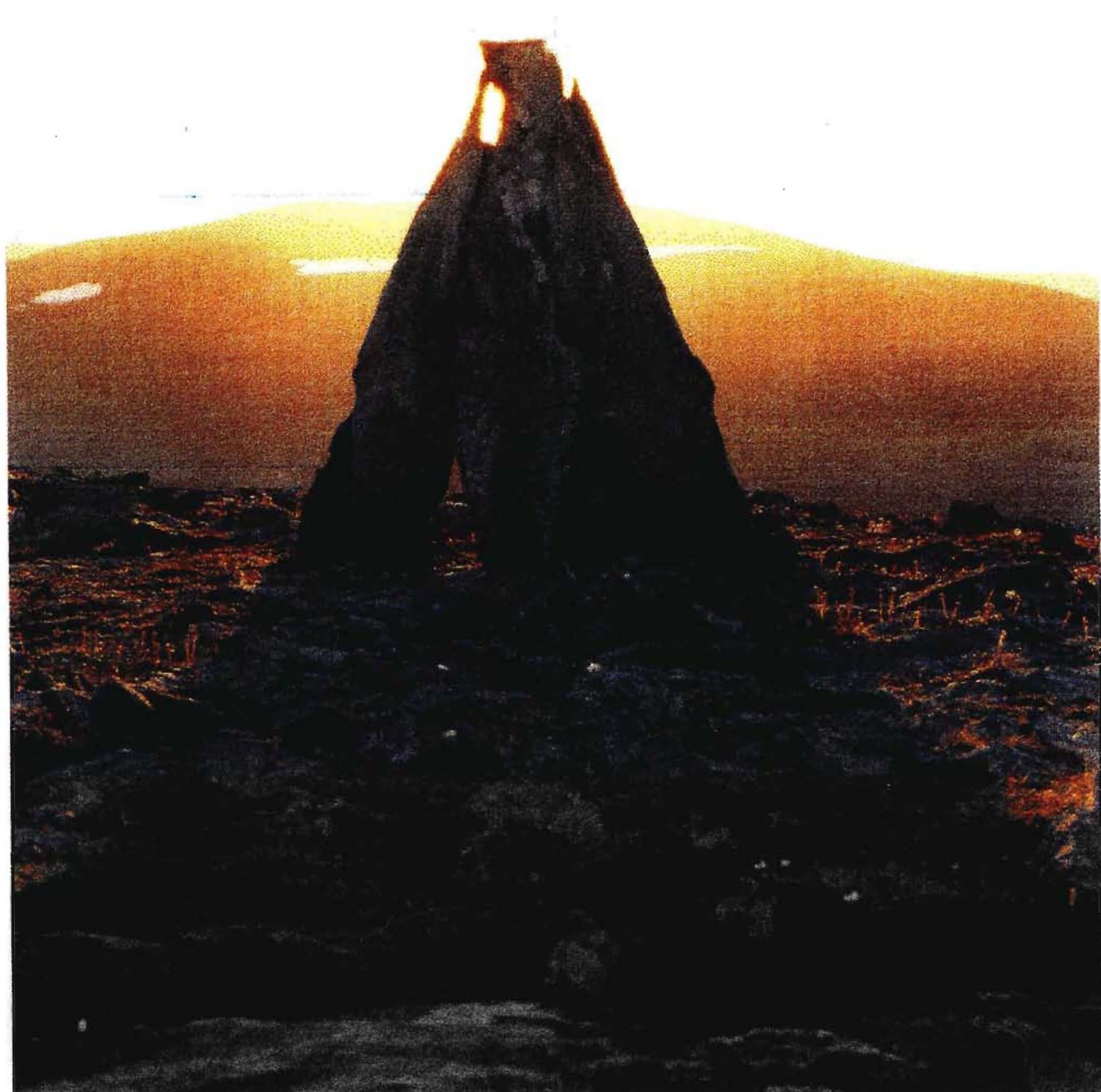


Fig 22. Chris Drury,  
*Stone Lavo*  
1998.  
Stone,  
Mageroyo Island, North Norway  
Photograph C. Drury 1998.



Fig 23. Di Miller,  
*Trans - Plantations: Kaross*  
2001.  
Sugar Bags, Natal earth, polish, gold thread,  
150 x 160cm.  
Photograph D. Miller.



Fig 24. Di Miller,  
*Trans - Plantations: Untimely Ripped*  
2000.  
Sugar, foil, lead, earth from Natal,  
5 pieces each 127 x 30.  
Photograph D Miller.



Fig 25. Di Miller,  
*Trans - Plantations: Stripmine/Strip Mine*  
(partial photograph)  
2000.  
Sugar, earth and clay from Natal, found metal, cement,  
6 pieces, 80 x 60, 80 x 60, 30 x 60, 30 x 60, 40, 40.  
Photograph D. Miller.



Fig 26. Artist unknown,  
*Artemis of Ephesus*  
(Ephesus founded approx. 1000 B.C.).  
Ephesus, Turkey.  
Photograph D Miller.



Fig 27. Di Miller,  
*Trans - Plantation: Portiere*  
2000.  
Sugar, copper wire,  
Approx 290 x 140cm.  
Photograph D. Miller.