

**Position Paper by the Huntingdon County Arts Council  
Environmental Art  
January 2003/ January 2004**

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**Huntingdon County Arts Council**

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## **Environmental Art in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania**

**Environment(al)** – The circumstance, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded, an artistic work that encompasses the spectator.

**Art** - The conscious use of skill and creative imagination

Webster's Dictionary, 1977.

### **I. Summary**

The Huntingdon County Arts Council (HCAC) is presenting a position paper on environmental art, including work permits, rights of way, maintenance, aesthetics, relevant artists, community interest, and feasibility. It is the Council's intent to encourage and support the creation of environmental art by working with groups and individuals to plan and implement environmental art projects.

### **II. Environmental Art Along the Greenway**



**“Head Waters of the Juniata,” after Thomas Cole, 1834.**

The Huntingdon County Arts Council has developed a thesis to explore the inclusion of environmental art along the trails and streams of Huntingdon County, including the Juniata Greenway. It is not the intention of the Huntingdon County Arts Council to “establish a How-To” handbook for environmental art. The Art Council is setting forth to show examples from other communities, artists, and times of how art can be incorporated in future planning and enhance visual and tactile experiences for those using the trails and greenways, by raising the conscious of the traveler to the offerings of the landscape.

### III. What is Environmental Art?

- Environmental art is objects of natural material in a natural landscape, with viewer interaction as the main priority.



#### **Salisbury Plain, Somerset, England. Limestone Megalith.**

In a local quarry, the natural material may be sandstone or limestone. Art work from the native stone may be placed along the highways, hiking and walking trails, riverbanks, public parks and public spaces. A cooperative landowner may be willing to place art in agricultural fields or other available spaces visible to the public.

Andy Goldsworthy uses the quality of the unexpected in his work with stone, rock, leaves and water, common things. He uses materials found on a site to express the natural energy and creativity of that place and material. His work is often touchable and changes with the weather. “Hands and Earth, Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture, 1976-1990” shows art that is simple and non-intrusive.

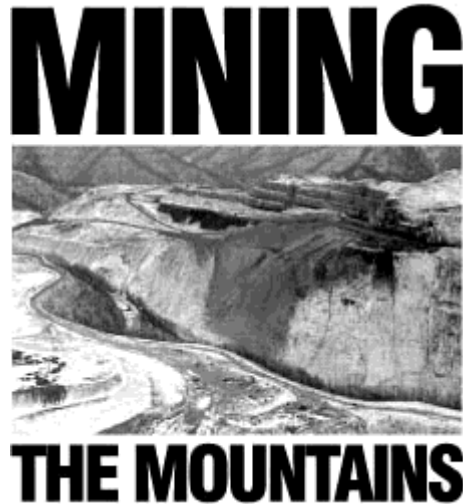
The “Art Works” from Goldsworthy, such as “Balanced Slates,” a five level construction of triangular pieces of slate about six feet long, or “Lambton Earthwork,” a serpentine graded fill of earth, would be visible from both river and highway travelways, thus suitable for both the Juniata River and the “Pathway to Progress, Heritage Route.”

**- Environmental Art is out of the gallery, into the natural world, often places with rich layers of history. It gives an art experience to people who may otherwise never step into a gallery or museum.**

In the Forest of Dean Sculpture Project, at the site of an old railroad, Kier Smith created The Iron Road, 20 railway sleepers carved with natural and industrial references to the area, laid out in a curving pattern along the old railway path. Viewers can interact with the piece as one large story, or as smaller individual glimpses into the area’s history.

**- Environmental art is the documentation of imposed human influences on the environment, both positive and negative.**

Some environmental art takes place in rural sites primarily for the few people who have access to it. Artists can bridge the gap between the art on site and people in other places by displaying photographs of the work in galleries and art books.



**From West Virginia, Mine Reclamation information Poster.**

In 1962, Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring" was published. At that time, artists would photograph the impact of toxic materials on the environment, showing the effects of acid mine run off, of pesticides on animals, and urban sprawl. The photographs, displayed in galleries and books, were the environmental art.

- **Environmental art is created to last a brief moment in time, or generations.**



**Robert Smithson. "Spiral Jetty", Utah.**

In the beginning of placing art into the natural environment, artists experimented with a wide range of techniques. There has been continual debate about pieces like Robert Smithson's long lasting "Spiral Jetty," a 1,500 foot rock and salt jetty built in the Great Salt Lake, which functions in some ways more as an assault on the earth than a project benefiting nature. Other important pieces include Christo's "Running Fence," 24 miles of nylon fabric fence that ran through California. This work cost \$3.2 million and stood for two weeks. Walter DeMaria's "Lightning Field" draws down an awesome display of nature's power: It consists of 400 lightning rods laid out into a grid in New Mexico. Richard Long documented his walks through the English countryside, photographing sensitive little arrangements and marks he made with sticks, flowers, dirt, or whatever else he found. In Boone, North Carolina local artist used three trees to support a sculpture constructed of recycled newspaper. Another local material is the use of railroad ties, recycled into a sculpture.

#### IV. What is the history of Environmental Art in Huntingdon County?

In 2002, the HCAC, in cooperation with the Huntingdon Borough, supported Environmental Art. As part of the Juniata River Pedestrian Walkway, Joe Brenman, a mosaic artist from Philadelphia, completed a mosaic mural at the entrance of Portstown Park in Huntingdon Borough. The mural is visible from the “Pathway to Progress, Heritage Route.”



**Joe Brenman, 2003, “Huntingdon Mural”**

Juniata College has permanent environmental art adjacent to Huntingdon Borough land. Maya Lin’s “Peace Chapel” is a 40-foot circle of stone recessed in the center, accessible to the public.



**Maya Lin, Peace Chapel, Public Circle,  
Juniata College**

**Maya Lin, Peace  
Chapel. Private Circle**

An example of environmental art occurring naturally can be found along the Aughwick Creek, near Shirleysburg, PA. A single large tree, as all the other trees were removed, has a large swinging rope with many knots attached at a high branch. The rope sometimes drags in the water, and sometimes hovers above the surface. Occasionally, the rope just touches the surface of the Aughwick, creating a gentle movement in the rope, and splashing patterns on the water below.



At Canoe Creek Park (Blair County), hikers can visit the site historic industrial landscape of an old limestone kiln, read about the process of obtaining and processing the lime for agriculture, and climb around the site imagining to be a limestone mine worker. The old kiln remains and the information on site is environmental art. Similar industrial relics in Huntingdon County are the stone pyramids of the charcoal iron furnace.



### **Lime Kilns, DCNR, Canoe Creek State Park, Blair County.**

Terra forming on a large scale or the creation of new landscapes is an old form of environmental art. It was introduced in the 1960's, in the Broad Top Region of Huntingdon County. Through mine reclamation, simple plantings create new landscapes in the location of old industrial mining sites.

### **V. Creating Environmental Art In a Public Space**

The art work is to be designed around the location it is to be placed. Principally the design is to be a part of the local environment. The longevity of the art work is dependent on the materials, lifestyle of the visitors, and the local climate. The Arts Council encourages individual creative work. The Council is aware that each trail and public right of way is subject to local rules and regulations. The council has the following suggestions for the artist.

1. Decide on the focus and placement of the art. The artist should identify the primary trail or highway user. If the art work is on a hiking trail, can the hiker be interactive with the art? If the art is along a public highway travel by motorist, will its placement create or be a hazard?

2. How will the artist and the design address the following three questions if the art is subject to permits or question?

- a. If the art is to be created on site, how will public access be maintained during 'work in progress?'
- b. Who will maintain the art after completion?
  1. biodegradable
  2. permanent, but will be allowed to decay
- c. If the art is to be removed who is responsible for the removal?

The artist is encouraged to coordinate with the Arts Council and local land and trail owners once a designed or concept is to be created. The success of the program is going to be determined by the attitude of the county residents.

## **VI. Funding**

The Arts Council is pursuing funding sources for Greenway art.

Art along the greenway is an expression of the values of the County and Greenway Communities. It is the intent of the Arts Council to take time and effort to ask organizations involved with the Greenways to assist with future planning, funding, and implementation of environmental art to allow the art to have community ownership.

## **VII. Conclusion**

It is the Council's intent to encourage and support the creation of environmental art by working with groups and individuals, to plan and implement environmental art projects. If you have an interest in helping with the project, please call the Huntingdon Area Arts Council at 814-643-6220.

The "Position Paper By the Huntingdon County Arts Council Environmental Art, January 2003/ January 2004," was prepared to encourage communities and local governments to view new community development projects with a more informed artistic approach.

Does the new development have to have a conventional rectangular retention ponds for storm water? Why can't the retention pond be constructed of concentric circles?

The new park the community is constructing, why cant there be a series natural native material art sculptures?

Again this is not a how to do document, but rather a way to put public art in public places using local and natural material.

## VIII. Attachments

### Is the Relic, Ruin or Scar Art?

One aspect of art and the environment that needs to be considered is how past relics, ruins, and scars are part of art in the landscape. The concept of environmental art is to be temporal, with the intent of nature removing the art work through natural elements, wind and rain, and to combine and slowly erode the art back to nature.

During the discussion developing this paper, it was pointed out that past artists to the Juniata Valley, notable Thomas Cole, painted a landscape that was to be endearing to travelers journeying west in America.



### **Thomas Cole, "Notch in the White Mountains," Hudson River School**

Thomas Cole's "environmental art" work in America, contrary to that presented as environ art after Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," was to show the lack of man made elements placed in the natural landscape. In England, Cole painted the "Study for Ruins of Kenilworth Castle" showing a ruin on the landscape. Cole, born and educated in England, painted English landscapes with views of relics and ruins that dated from the Middle Ages. Relics that survived in the landscape over 200 hundred years.

Once in America Cole, and others of the Hudson River School, began the painting of landscapes showing the United States being devoid of relics, ruins and scars. In most cases, the American landscape showed the progress of a new nation. It was later the railroad and the canal, were presented as youth and progress being fresh and not decaying within the natural surroundings.

The concept of environmental art is to be temporal. As art is a product of human activity, the artist paints, photographs and sculpts their inter-vision of the world around them. There is a misconception that all ruins, relics and scars in the landscape need to be removed. And this carries over in the County with new highways, developments, and land reclamation.

Jack Troy pointed out in comments for the "Position Paper," that once the environmental art program progresses, the massive fossil-bearing sandstone quarried in Mapleton and Fousttown, near the Mapleton water reservoir, be incorporated in the public art space.

The quarries, in the Juniata Valley, near Jacks Narrows, are still visible (Scars) and the tram ways, foundations of crusher and conveyors, the long gravity chutes cut into the mountain to slide stone from the upper quarries to the awaiting railroad cars (Relics and Ruins) are still present and when viewed from a distance, are akin to strokes of a brush on canvas.

The ruins of the brickyards of Mount Union and Alexandria are now gone. But if allowed to decay, as depicted in Cole's Kenilworth Castle, they would be part of the environmental art work of today.

As Troy points out, there is precious little left of the brickyards. Gone are the offices, company housing, shops, and kilns. But their representative shapes could be reproduced. Using locally produced fireclay bricks found at the sites and incorporating the local stone, an artist can reintroduce the materials and geometric shapes lost. To conceptualize the lost arches and domes of brick kilns, lineal rows of bricks being the representation of the transportation system. The representation of the accomplishments of long forgotten labors and immigrants to the County who were themselves highly skilled craftsmen. No, they were highly skilled artists.



**From Huntingdon Mural, The Craft (Potters), Joe Brenman 2003.**

Bill Hunter sums the lost of past relics, ruins, and scars. Art is a space in which to launch a critique and project for the recovery of an authentic sense of the past. He suggests the best environmental art can play off the tensions between natural and cultural environment and can work to challenge both the artist and the viewer by breaking down some of the common sense assumptions about our history and or heritage. Playing with the idea of palimpsest is a handy tool, as is a collage of themes, allowing the forgotten people whose work actually created the landscape we enjoy.

Hunter's suggestion of palimpsest is medieval. It was a common practice, to rub out an earlier piece of writing of a parchment by means of washing or scraping the manuscript, in order to prepare it for a new idea or illumination. For environmental art, either incorporating existing historic cultural artefacts in the landscape or creating a new artistic expression using local material. The creative aspect of environmental art may motivate or "convert" others in a new way to see the landscape and environment.

To conclude, Huntingdon recently lost one such relic, ruin, and scar along a tributary to the Juniata River. Along Black Log Creek a highway improvement project erased a ruin that was part of the landscape. The Orbisonia Narrows contained a rich collection of historic elements as identified by Hunter's comments and Troy's observation. The Narrows contained a stone grist mill, that ceased operation in 1870'd and was part of a vast industrial iron working complex. The original site contained two charcoal-fueled iron producing furnaces, a village, and assorted mills. The hillside was scoured with ore mines and quarries. Had the site been visited by Cole or other artist of the 1830's it may have appeared as the memorable scene from Coalbrook Dale, England in 1805.



**Coalbrook Dale, 1805. By P. J. De Louthborough, R.A.**

Had Cole or others painted the Narrows, as depicted in the De Louthborough painting, the environmental art painting of Orbisonia Narrows would have been a reminder of the influence of the lost heritage of the County. It is now up to those communities interested in promoting environmental art with local natural material, stone, brick, wood, to promote their lost heritage through art and reintroduce the lost patterns on the landscape.

GJD, Feb. 2004