

# 'AT THE RADICAL EDGE OF LIFE'



Diana Thater, *Rare*, 2008. The exhibition 'Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet' at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, in 2008 involved sending eight artists to some of the planet's most biodiverse regions to investigate their changing nature. Thater travelled to iSimangaliso Wetland Park, South Africa, where she located and filmed many of the park's endangered and threatened species.



Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey, *Testament*, 2010 (negative 1998). Working with environmental scientists, the artists developed a technique of plant photosynthesis that allowed them to project a negative image onto grass as it grows in a darkened room. The turf is thus transformed into a photograph.

**It seems almost impossible to walk into a contemporary gallery or museum these days, or to browse through an art magazine or website, without coming across work that expresses some kind of engagement with the natural world. Once an area of interest for a relatively small group of people, art that addresses environmental issues has in the last five years become part of the artistic mainstream. International exhibitions, conferences and festivals on ecological themes are announced on a more and more frequent basis; artists of all kinds are being commissioned in ever greater numbers to explore humankind's impact on the planet; and the volume of articles and papers devoted to the subject – in both the popular and specialist press – is growing rapidly. From being a peripheral activity, art that seeks to ask searching questions about the environment is now firmly centre stage, at once responding to and shaping debates in broader society.**

**Artists have always been inspired by the beauty and mystery of nature, of course, and have used elements of the natural world in creative ways for centuries. Painting and poetry, to name just two art forms, have long reflected the close bonds of mutual dependence that we have with our physical surroundings through landscape, still life and pastorals. In recent times, however, there has been a growing tendency in contemporary art to consider the natural world not only as a source of inspiration or subject to represent, but also as a realm to influence directly – a sphere of action to transform and improve through creative means.**

**As we will see, this trend has been some five decades in the making, with roots that go back to the land art and earthworks of the 1960s. Informed also by the strategies of early conceptual art, performance, institutional critique and agit-prop, artists dealing with the environment today adopt a wide range of approaches and methods: from passive commentator or enquiring researcher to visionary innovator or active interventionist seeking social and political change.**

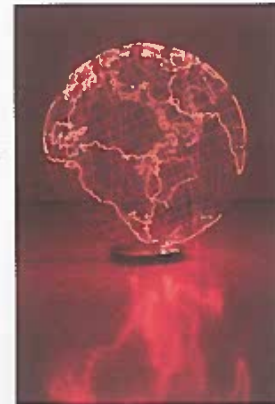
**Their works reveal similar diversity. Some may, for example, take the form of photographic or video pieces documenting the effects of deforestation; others might be research studies into the effects of global warming on the spread of malaria; some may use weather formations as a source from which to create elaborate visual data maps or 'singing sculptures'; while yet others could be long-term restoration projects that seek to reclaim a tract of land from the spread of industrialization or to protect a local ecosystem. Often, the artists producing these works do so in collaboration with others, undertaking complex projects with specialists from other disciplines, such as botanists, zoologists, ecologists, geologists, meteorologists, oceanographers, architects, engineers and urban planners, as well as with community members and environmental activists. The artists in this book rarely work in isolation.**

**The artistic activities featured here confront some of the most urgent social, political, economic, scientific, technological and ethical issues facing humankind today. These include the creeping submission of wilderness to civilization and the consequent change in our use of the planet's resources; the impact of technology on biology; our changed relationship to the land, to our fellow creatures and to each other as a result of industrialized agriculture, mass consumption and global transportation; the redefinition of national, cultural, geographical and social divisions, and the blurring or redrawing of boundaries between what have conventionally been considered opposites, such as nature/culture, individual/community, national/international and global/local; the impact of an ever-growing flow of information on the foundations of scientific knowledge; and even our very ability to survive into the future.**

**This trend has developed alongside an increasing awareness of ecological matters and the rise of the environmental movement since the 1960s. What is perceived as the current crisis of climate change has thus given added impetus and urgency to many of these artists' practice. The recognition that actions on one side of the world affect people and ecosystems on the other informs much of the work in this book, acknowledging our mutual interdependence across all borders, cultures and faiths. There is also a growing awareness that the health of the environment is dependent on a set of interrelated systems (ecology, politics, technology, social practices, business and**



Leonid Tishkov, *Journey of the Private Moon in the Arctic*, 2010. Tishkov's project was part of Cape Farewell's expedition to the Arctic in 2010. Founded by artist David Buckland in 2001 (see p. 77), Cape Farewell brings artists, scientists and communicators together to produce art based on scientific research that addresses the urgency of global climate change.



Mona Hatoum, *Hot spot III*, 2009. Hatoum's glowing 'red-hot' sculpture, an oversize globe, was a centrepiece of the 'Earth: Art of a Changing World' exhibition at London's Royal Academy of Arts in 2009.

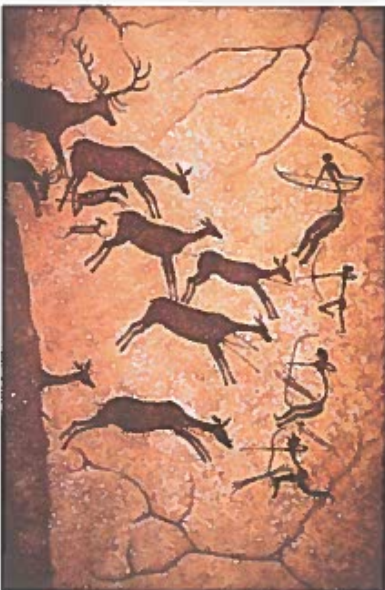


Nicole Dextras, *View*, 2007. Eco-artist Dextras created these six-foot ice letters on the shore of Lake Ontario by using wooden moulds filled with water from the lake that froze over two weeks. After removing the moulds, she left the letters in the landscape to melt naturally and be battered by strong icy winds. The work was part of a residency project that explored how we look at the landscape and turn nature into a commodity.

## INTRODUCTION



A painting of a bison in the Altamira caves in northern Spain, dating from some time between c. 16,000 BCE and c. 9,000 BCE.



Hunters hunting deer, from the Lascaux cave complex in southwest France, painted around 17,000 years ago. As in the contemporaneous paintings in Altamira, these Paleolithic images show only animals and humans but no landscape, giving us an indication of what our prehistoric ancestors considered to be the most significant elements of nature.

so on), meaning that interdisciplinary approaches are needed if we are to understand and solve the problems facing the planet.

In many cases, the artist's role is not, however, to provide definitive answers to these problems. Merely asking the question is often enough. Unlike the scientist, who must follow established scientific methods, the artist is free to question and redefine anything or everything at any stage, to be wide-ranging and open to all possibilities. As Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, two pioneering eco-artists of the past forty years, put it, the artist's function is 'to search, to discover value, to value discovery, to discover qualities of value ... to bespeak those values, to be self-critical ... to respeak the values more clearly, to be self-critical again. From this process, new metaphors emerge and old ones are tested for value.' As a result, artistic projects are able to withstand a far higher level of risk than typical scientific experiments, which often come with expectations of tangible results or even profit for their funders. They can engage local communities and garner broad support in ways that science alone can rarely do. They can offer tools for reflection, discussion, awareness and action that lead to new ways of thinking about and of being in the world. And they can bring about real change – sometimes deliberately, sometimes unintentionally – that has lasting benefit, whether to the few or to the many.

This way of working is not free of controversy, however. Environmental art raises a raft of questions, from the aesthetic to the ethical. Should art be a withdrawal or refuge from real life, or should it engage directly with the world? Should artists simply report on what they see or seek to change it for the better? Has art discovered a new sense of purpose? In what ways can an intervention be considered 'art'? Where does the line between art and propaganda lie? What is the relationship between art and science? Can art carry the weight of expectations that are being placed upon it? What responsibility does an artist – or indeed any individual – have to conserve and protect the natural environment? How can an artist balance that responsibility with the urge to leave a mark on the world? What are our obligations to each other in the face of a growing environmental threat? Are our psyches and social systems capable of comprehending and responding to the challenges confronting the planet?

These are just some of the practical and conceptual questions explored in this book. Many commentators believe that environmental issues will be the principal cause of major conflicts in the coming century. The artists who deal with these issues are thus operating not only at the vanguard of arts practice, but also, in the words of curator and critic Lucy Lippard, one of the early theorists of eco-art, 'at the radical edge of life itself'.

### THE ROOTS OF AN ENGAGED PRACTICE

Depicting the physical environment and humankind's place within it has been central to art-making since the earliest cave paintings over thirty millennia ago. The anonymous prehistoric men and women who painted bison, horses and aurochs on the ceilings and walls of caves from Europe to Australia were doing what artists have done ever since: representing their immediate surroundings in a visual language they understood.

But more than just picturing everything they could see around them, our Paleolithic ancestors were giving symbolic form to the elements of nature that were considered important, those that brought both life and death in equal measure. The tribe's survival depended on its relations with these awesome creatures – or at least with the supernatural spirits that created them in the first place. The paintings were a way of both celebrating and taming powers that were beyond their control in reality; they were also an attempt to make sense of natural forces that exceeded their limited comprehension, yet on which they owed their existence. But these images represent another form of reliance on nature, too (one that continues up to the present), for they were made with the very stuff of the physical world: pigments hewn from the earth such as ochre, haematite and charcoal, and surfaces and spaces formed by natural processes. They were thus both a visual representation of humanity's relationship with the environment and a literal enactment of that relationship.

In the centuries that followed, artists continued to represent the world around them. But it was not until the Renaissance in Europe that landscape and still-life painting proper first emerged. Coinciding with the rise of humanism, when man became the measure of all things, these two genres reflected a growing sense of ownership and entitlement in respect of the material world. Ancient faith and superstition started to fade away and in its place came a growing belief in the power of reason, science and mathematics. Nature was no longer something to be feared or revered but studied, understood, tamed, shaped to human will – and made to work. The Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century brought with it the first attempts to harvest and harness the planet's resources on a global level.

Enormous amounts of fossil fuels were now required across the world to feed the factories and furnaces that pumped out plumes of pollution in pursuit of progress. Mechanization demanded and enabled ever greater quantities of minerals, metals and materials to be extracted, processed and dispatched. Never before had the physical heart been wrenched from the Earth on such a massive scale and returned to it in a degraded and degrading state. William Blake and others cursed the 'dark satanic mills' and their merciless machines – but there was worse to come. This was just the start of an era in which humanity saw the environment as an endless supply



Giorgione, *The Tempest*, c. 1508. This celebrated Renaissance canvas, one of the earliest landscape paintings in Western art, has divided opinion for centuries for its mysterious symbolism and indeterminate meaning. Whatever its intended significance, the picture reveals a new understanding of the interconnected relationship between humankind and nature, one that was not only material – the built environment here is integrated with the natural – but also psychic, the storm overhead suggesting unease among the painting's human protagonists.



Willem van Aelst, *Game with Hunting Equipment in a Niche*, 1664. Still lifes are synonymous with the Golden Age of Dutch painting in the seventeenth century. They provided an opportunity not only to demonstrate virtuoso skill and the rendering of realistic natural forms, but also to express the growing materialism of the society of the day.

## INTRODUCTION



Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818. This figure by German painter Friedrich expresses the archetypal Romantic sense of awe in the face of Nature's immense and sublime splendour.



Albert Bierstadt, *Merced River, Yosemite Valley*, 1866. Bierstadt's large canvases of the American West helped create a national identity in the still young United States of the mid-nineteenth century.



Carleton Watkins, *Half-Dome, from Glacier Point, Yosemite*, c. 1865. The new medium of photography enabled millions of Americans to see their country's magnificent landscape for the first time.

of treasures that it could plunder in search of wealth, and a bottomless pit into which it could pour its unwanted detritus afterwards. Put simply, nature was now nothing more than a commodity to be bought (or stolen) and sold.

Nonetheless, throughout all of this we retained the tendency of our ancient ancestors to find meaning in the processes and products of the natural world – and to reflect that fact in our art. *Vanitas* paintings, *memento mori*, *trompe-l'oeil* and *bodegones* were among the forms of modern still life that used metaphor and symbolism to ascribe moral significance to the growth and decomposition of natural objects. And from the Renaissance onward, representations of the land were read as allegories of everything from good government to the torments of the mind and the passions of the flesh.

In the Romantic period in Europe, which coincided with the growing industrialization of life, depictions of the natural world in both poetry and paint were emblematic of some exalted higher order beyond the physical realm – the Sublime. In the face of the horrifying onslaught of human industry, scenes from nature demonstrated its capacity to inspire awe, reverence, emotion or terror as a result of its great beauty, vast expanse or powerful force. And while contemporary philosophers and poets each had a different interpretation of the Sublime, all believed that it was a symbol of inner realities, thoughts and conflicts. According to this view, Man saw his own potential in the infinity of nature, and transformed its physical grandeur into a spiritual majesty. Many of these ideas persist to this day and, consciously or not, provide a philosophical, moral and emotional underpinning to much of the artistic work in the following pages.

Meanwhile, in the United States, nineteenth-century artists such as Thomas Cole, Frederic Edwin Church and Albert Bierstadt were painting the American landscape as a visual expression of their religious conviction and as a demonstration of the principles of Manifest Destiny – the widely held belief that American settlers, guided by a divine hand, were destined to conquer the entire continent. These painters depicted the natural environment both as tangible manifestation of the existence of God and as idealized pastoral setting where humans and nature could coexist in harmony – the pictorial equivalents of Henry David Thoreau's celebrated book *Walden* (1854), which emphasized the importance of closeness to nature as an antidote to society's burgeoning materialistic attitudes. The epic scale of the artists' canvases reminded their compatriots of the swathes of magnificent untapped wilderness that stretched across the country, thereby contributing to the philosophies of both expansionist attempts to settle the West and conservationist efforts to create national and city parks. Photography, too, played its part. Abraham Lincoln is said to have been persuaded to name Yosemite Valley the first US national park in 1864 after seeing photos of its beautiful carved landscape.

The nascent conservationism that developed in the United States, Britain, Germany and other European countries in the second half of the nineteenth century helped foster an awareness that steadily grew in the next. The images of photographers such as Ansel Adams helped spread knowledge of environmental issues more widely and encouraged the recruitment of new members to the cause.

By the mid-1960s, a new eco-consciousness had firmly taken root in sections of Western society. But if one single event can claim credit for giving a wider voice to the environmentalist movement it is the publication in 1962 of *Silent Spring* by biologist Rachel Carson. This book, which highlighted the impact on the environment of the indiscriminate use of pesticides, put ecological issues before the American public as never before. It galvanized a younger generation in the United States and beyond, prompted grassroots activism on an unprecedented scale, resulted in the formation of numerous pressure groups, and ultimately led to the establishment of the US Environment Protection Agency in 1970. Its influence continues: several of the artists featured in this book cite it as a key inspiration.

#### FROM 'EARTH WORKS' TO EARTH'S WORKERS

The somewhat rarefied realm of late 1960s' vanguard art was not immune from these developments. Indeed, some of the most radical artists of the day saw engagement with the natural world as a defining tenet of their practice. In October 1968, the group exhibition 'Earth Works' at the Dwan Gallery in New York was the first manifestation of a loose trend that soon became known by one of various monikers: the eponymous 'earthworks', or 'earth art' or 'land art'. This seminal show included many of the figures now identified with the defiantly groundbreaking mode of making art, such as Robert Smithson, Walter De Maria, Dennis Oppenheim and Michael Heizer, who presented work alongside that of the former Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer, creator of some of the earliest environmental sculptures and a father-figure for some in the group. These and other individuals, notably Nancy Holt and James Turrell, went on to produce some of the best-known works of land art, shifting enormous quantities of earth, rock, minerals and human-made objects to fashion monumental site-specific forms in the deserts of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada and elsewhere. While the primary impulse for many was to flee the 'white cube' of modernism, both literally and figuratively, it was also a desire to 'get back to nature' that drove these artists out of doors and into the landscape, often in response to the environmental concerns of the day.

From our perspective today, we may question the ecological ethics of these artists and their use of heavy earth-moving equipment to displace tons of natural materials and permanently scar the face of the Earth in the name of art. But they were leading the charge of a new avant-garde that would alter radically the way artists viewed and engaged with natural



Dennis Oppenheim, *Whirlpool (Eye of the Storm)*, 1973. El Mirage Dry Lake, Southern California. One of the early American artists to move out of the gallery and into the landscape, Oppenheim took a subtle, fleeting and ephemeral approach to creating earth art, as with this piece in which an aeroplane discharged white smoke over the California desert.



Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969, Overton, Nevada. In contrast to Dennis Oppenheim's *Whirlpool*, Heizer's celebrated work involved displacing 240,000 tons of rock and earth to leave a 1,500-foot-long, 30-foot-wide and 50-foot-deep trench in the Moapa Valley, Nevada.



Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, Great Salt Lake, Utah. One of the iconic works of land art, Smithson's jetty is a 1,500-foot-long counterclockwise spiral of mud, salt crystals, basalt rocks and water. The level of the lake varies over time, concealing and revealing the structure as the water rises and falls.

## INTRODUCTION



Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, 1973–6, Great Basin Desert, Utah. Holt's four concrete tunnels frame the sunrises and sunsets on the solstices.



Giuseppe Penone, *Pelle di foglie – sguardo al cielo*, 2005. One of the younger figures of Arte Povera, Penone has since the late 1960s produced sculptures that explore the connections and different ascribed values between natural and cultural forms. The tree is a central element in his work.

objects and processes. These pioneers showed not only that art could be placed within the environment and be made from it, but also that the art could change that environment for ever.

The year 1968 was an intoxicating time. Revolution was in the air across the globe and these artists were not alone in wanting to shake up the art world. Postminimalist and process artists such as Carl Andre, Eva Hesse, Lynda Benglis, Robert Morris and Richard Serra, some of whom featured in the 'Earth Works' show, all shared an interest in employing natural forces – growth and decay, gravity and weather, energy and entropy, chance and serendipity – in the fabrication (or often the enactment) of their works. In Italy at the same time, the Arte Povera artists were also exploring and exploiting the properties of organic and inorganic matter and tracing the dynamism of nature through its physical and chemical transformation.

At the other end of the material spectrum, early performance, Fluxus and conceptual artists were creating art from, well, nothing (that is, no thing). They were, in Lucy Lippard's words, 'dematerializing the art object', divorcing the creative act from any lasting physical trace, at least in the conventional sense. Instead, they based their respective forms of art on the organization and experience of actions; the establishment and observance of rules or 'event scores'; and the expression and realization of ideas. Conceptualists in particular employed documenting, analysing and archiving as essential modes of practice. Systems, structures and signs of all kinds – not least language – were among their favourite objects of study. In more ways than one, they crossed over from pure art into the realms of literary theory, philosophy and the social sciences.

It was perhaps inevitable that their investigative methods would be turned inward and focused on the art world itself. By the 1970s, institutional critique had emerged as a distinct strand within conceptual art. Key figures such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke and Daniel Buren now used the tools of systematic enquiry to investigate, map and reveal the hidden workings and assumptions of cultural institutions. It was a small conceptual step from their critique and disarticulation of the institution of art to the claim of Joseph Beuys that 'everyone is an artist'. This statement developed from Beuys's own highly influential idea of 'social sculpture', in which society as a whole was seen to be one great work of art to which everyone could contribute creatively. At the heart of his project was the desire to effect both social and environmental change.

The early eco-works of the late 1960s and 1970s emerged out of this heady artistic and theoretical mix and combined with the concerns of an increasingly powerful environmentalist movement. Younger artists extended radical art's newfound interest in the land as material and site towards a deeper engagement with ecological and social issues. One of the

youngest to do so was the American Alan Sonfist. In 1965 he proposed a large-scale environmental sculpture in lower Manhattan consisting of plants that were native to the area in pre-colonial times. This forest not only presented a living vision of what existed before the urbanization of the city, but also stood as a constant reminder of the value of the land's historical past and the fragility of our environment. The work, *Time Landscape*, was eventually commissioned and, after ten years of planning, was unveiled on the corner of La Guardia Place and West Houston Street in 1978.

In the intervening decade, nature-focused work had become a fixture of the international scene. The Argentinian artist Nicolás García Urriburu was the first to announce its arrival on the world stage in 1968 when for the prestigious Venice Biennale of that year he dyed the Grand Canal using fluorescein, a pigment that turns bright green when synthesized by microorganisms in the water. Since that initial manifestation, he has repeated the action in cities across the world. He has also allowed unlimited photographic reproduction of the works to raise awareness of the problem of water pollution. Thirty years later, in an echo of Urriburu's intervention, Olafur Eliasson turned the river in the German city of Bremen green with synthetic dye (he, too, has repeated the work in several locations since).

A couple of years after Urriburu's comment on our use of the Earth's resources, the Harrisons initiated the first of what became a lifelong series of works proposing alternatives to conventional methods of agriculture, aquaculture and horticulture. *Portable Fish Farm: Survival Piece #3* is one example that was produced for an exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery in 1971. The part installation/part performance involved the creation of a catfish farm in the gallery and the ritualistic electrocution, skinning and filleting of the fish. The controversial work created outrage across Britain, with the government threatening to cut the gallery's public funding as a result. Undeterred, the artist couple continue to this day to produce imaginative and elaborate proposals to solve environmental problems, while also creating work that researches and highlights the impact of global warming and other ecological phenomena.

How we make use of the planet's resources and process the resulting waste also lay behind Mierle Laderman Ukeles's eleven-month action *Touch Sanitation* (1979–80), in which she crisscrossed New York City to shake hands with and thank each one of more than 8,500 sanitation workers for keeping the city 'alive'. She documented her activities on a map, meticulously recording her conversations with the workers. The work not only adopted the methods and objectives of conceptualists such as Douglas Huebler, who proposed photographing everyone alive, but also paralleled the contemporaneous duration pieces of performance artists such as Tehching Hsieh. It did so, however,



Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape*, 1965, New York City



Nicolás García Urriburu, *Verte Venise*, 1970



Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, *Portable Fish Farm: Survival Piece #3*, 1971



## INTRODUCTION



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Touch Sanitation*  
Performance: Fresh Kills Landfill, 1977-80



Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield - A Confrontation: Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan* (with Denes standing in the field), 1982



herman de vries, *Perlgras*, 2005

with a clear environmentalist agenda that the art of these other practitioners lacked, and which Ukeles continued in subsequent works such as *Flow City* (1983-present), an early example of eco-art that links social, political and environmental issues, involves scientists, ecologists, artists and others in its creation, and engages community members to educate them about the consequences of their lifestyle on creating a healthy environment in the future.

A magnet for pioneering artists of all kinds, New York continued to host many seminal environmental-art projects into the early 1980s. In May 1982, after months of preparation, Agnes Denes planted *Wheatfield - A Confrontation*, a two-acre field of golden wheat on rubble-strewn landfill near Wall Street and the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, 'confronting' some of the most expensive real estate in the world with one of the Earth's most basic crops. According to the artist, the work 'represented food, energy, commerce, world trade, and economics. It referred to mismanagement, waste, world hunger, and ecological concerns. It called attention to our misplaced priorities. The harvested grain traveled to twenty-eight cities around the world in an exhibition called "The International Art Show for the End of World Hunger", organized by the Minnesota Museum of Art (1987-90). The seeds were carried away by people who planted them in many parts of the globe.'

Meanwhile in Europe, there was a growing trend of artists utilizing natural objects in their work - and to a variety of ends. Practitioners such as herman de vries, Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy all engaged directly with the environment, either by building structures from organic and inorganic matter as traces of human intervention in the landscape or by collecting materials from nature - leaves and branches, mud and stone - in order to fashion sculptures or collages or to catalogue the Earth's natural forms. In many respects, the work of these individuals represented a sort of retreat from modern life, an embrace of nature as refuge from society and its ills.

Other environmental artists of the 1980s, however, wished to tackle the growing ecological and social problems caused by global capitalism and mass consumerism head on. They did so in a way that reflected the influence of contemporary agit-prop collectives such as Gran Fury and the Guerrilla Girls, who used artistic means to further political ends in the realms of AIDS prevention and women's rights, respectively. The direct action of these and other activist groups provided a template for later eco-artists who wished to have a real, tangible impact, either on human behaviour or on the environment itself.

For example, when Patricia Johanson was commissioned to redesign Fair Park Lagoon (an abandoned swamp in Dallas, Texas) in 1981, she decided to create an entirely new functioning ecosystem and thereby return plant, animal and

human life back to the environmentally degraded location. Johanson, along with Mel Chin, Lynne Hull and Kathryn Miller, was one of the first so-called 'remediationist' artists, who set out to 'heal' the planet through projects that cure polluted areas, eliminate invasive species, or dismantle sites that endanger the environment or public health. They share a belief that art is more than an object to look at or to think about – that it can also extend into the realm of public service and have a positive remedial impact on the Earth. As Hull puts it, 'I believe that the creativity of artists can be applied to real-world problems and can have an effect on urgent social and environmental issues. My sculpture and installations provide shelter, food, water or space for wildlife, as eco-atonement for their loss of habitat to human encroachment.'

#### A SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT

We may discern from the few examples of early nature-related art mentioned above a range of approaches that stretch from objective observer to active interventionist, a spectrum of artistic engagement with nature that forms the structure and rationale of this book. In the chapters that follow, we move from artists who use conventional aesthetic means to make us look and look again at the way we treat the planet – in the hope that we may see things differently – to those who create art that by its very enactment or experience has a positive effect on the environment and our behaviour.

This structure is not meant to imply that an artist at one end of the spectrum is any less or more committed to ecological issues than an individual at the other end of the scale, only that their mode of working represents a particular level of engagement with the physical world itself. I could have taken any number of other ways of organizing the material in these pages: chronological, alphabetical, by medium, by place, by natural element, and so on. All of these means of organization and others were considered. By focusing on the artist's approach, I hope to have provided a clear taxonomy – a conceptual system created so that we can classify and understand the natural world – that helps the reader make sense of the rich diversity of practices and works that one can encounter today. At the same time, I do not intend to pigeonhole any single artist in any one category. Many of the individuals included in the book have produced other works that would have meant they appeared in a different chapter or chapters had I selected those projects. The point is that artists, like all of us, are complex, shifting and often contradictory. Several of the featured practitioners have moved backwards and forwards along this spectrum of engagement over the course of their careers.

The field of environmental art has grown rapidly over the last few decades and is now vast. Many more individuals and projects were worthy of inclusion, but sadly space limitations have dictated otherwise. Let us think of the trees.



Patricia Johanson, *Fair Park Lagoon*, Dallas, Texas, 1981–6



Mel Chin, *Revival Field*, 1991–ongoing. This conceptual art work by eco-artist and activist Chin is a collaborative project that had the explicit intention of reclaiming and reviving a hazardous landfill site in St Paul, Minnesota.



Kathryn Miller, *Seed Bombing Raytheon back lot*, Goleta, California, 1992. As a small-scale, guerrilla act of urban intervention, Miller designed portable seed bombs that could be thrown into degraded areas that were in need of vegetation.