Land-art: An Ingrandes Sur Loire Case Study

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Abstract: - Since post-World War II, environmental land art has gained in significance and popularity. In our cast study, we present seven examples of land art by American students from Michigan State University and French students from Agrocampus Ouest (formerly INH-Paysage) constructed in 2005. The study area was the primary river terrace of the Loire River, near Ingrandes sur Loire, France.

Key-Words: - Landscape architecture, environmental design, earthworks, temporary art

1 Introduction

Land-art has existed for millennia and is not necessarily a new phenomena. For example the great Ha-ha at Stowe is an example of an earthworks boundary art (Figure 1). And the grand canal at Versailles is another example (Figure 2). Or much earlier, the Neolithic stones of Carnac (Figure 3), in Portugal (Figure 4), and the United Kindgon (Figure 5) all can be considered a form of land art. However, land-art is currently being practiced by numerous artists, landscape architects, and land owners [1, 2, 3]. The beginning of the modern era of land art is often associated with the un-built playground designed by Isamu Noguchi, titled Play Mountain.

Figure 1. The Ha-ha at Stowe, England (copyright © 2007 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 2. Grand Canal at Versailles, France (copyright © 2007 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 3. Stones at Carnac, France (copyright © 2007 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).
2 Study Area and Methodology

The study area is along the Loire River in France. The Loire is a major river in France and empties into the Atlantic Ocean in the west of France. It is known as Europe’s last wild river [6]. Much of the river has sandy terraces and fluctuating flow. Along this river is the town of Ingrandes sur Loire. The town was once the border between Brittany and Anjou and is located between Nantes (downstream) and Angers (upstream). Ingrandes sur Loire is on the north side of the river and a park-like setting is on the south side of the river. A series of river groins direct flow in the south side of the river towards a channel adjacent to the town.

The students were allowed to select sites on either side of the river, downstream from the bridge at Ingrandes sur Loire. Students had to form teams of French and American students (eight members maximum). The French students were first year masters students in landscape architecture from INH Paysage, Angers, France (now Agrocampus Ouest). The American students were fourth year landscape architecture student from Michigan State University. The study was conducted in the spring of 2005.

Many of these land art designs have spatial design concepts, expressing ideas about the environment [4, 5]. Therefore, students studying the arts and landscape architecture are often very interested in the opportunities to explore land art as outdoor studio projects to express conceptual design ideas. We present a case study of land art from a studio project in 2005 between American and French landscape architecture students.

Prior to selecting the sites, the students were presented lectures on the history of land art. In the studio they built study models of land art for a hypothetical site [Figures 6 and 7]. Styro-foam was a key modeling material in these models. The
models were critiqued for the ability to express and ideas/concepts. A second series of models were made in the classroom. This time the models were to consider creating land art along the Loire River. Finally the students were introduced to the site in a fieldtrip. Materials such as cloth, sticks, wire, and earth were the primary materials for the exercise. Upon completion of the project, the land art would be dismantled, leaving no trace within the city and only land-form on the sandy terrace. The students had 4 days to construct the land art and a morning to dismantle the exhibition.

Figure 7. Model making in the studio at INH Paysage (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

3 Results and Discussion
The students prepared a wide variety of conceptual models (Figures 8, 9). The models were assessed based upon the ability of the model to express an idea. For most students this was a relatively easy exercise. The American students presented primarily models that were free-form, like sculptural elements. The French students presented models often tied to a space or site.

The studio models related to riverine land art often attempted to explore the interaction of river water and land, creating a constantly changing land art image (Figures 10, 11). The designs were less tied to a specific expressive concept than the first studio models.

Figures 12, 13, and 14 present the physical context for the placement of the installations. The river was rising and quite active during this event. There were seven works of land art produced in the Loire River. The participants primarily chose to work with the non-urban portion of the study area because of the opportunities to work with landform. The urban portion of the study area can pose a more challenging intervention opportunity.

Figure 8. A model by an American student representing the “explosion of ideas” (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 9. Model by a French student representing the doors and windows in the “experience of life” (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 10. Model utilizing contours and the circular landforms in conjunction with rising water (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).
Figure 11. A riverine model utilizing landforms to interact with flowing water (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 12. An image of the Loire River at Ingrandes sur Loire during the study period (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 13. An image of the bridge over the Loire River at Ingrandes sur Loire during the study period (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 14. An example of a potential study area within the town Ingrandes sur Loire. In the background is the left bank of the river containing the non-urban site to make an installation (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 15 presents an installation by seven participants featuring cards of memories. When the water rises, the memories are faded and hidden. When the water drops, the memories are revealed and remembered.

Figure 15. Memory land art (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).
The second group (6 participants) developed a land fence/wall with the material changing across the structure representing changes in society and possibilities for the future (Figures 16 and 17).

![Figure 16. Early construction of the land/fence wall (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).](image)

The third group (6 participants) developed a form based upon spirals (Figure 18). When the group visited the study area, the swirling spirals of the fast moving river water made an impression upon them. Therefore they decided to create spiraling forms. The fourth group was also inspired by the spiraling water and utilized dark material to contrast with the sand to form spirals with a somewhat rectangular/square pattern (Figure 19).

![Figure 17. West end of the land/fence wall illustrating the progression of society and the future (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).](image)

![Figure 18. Spiral forms in the river (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).](image)

![Figure 19. More spiral inspired forms in the river sand (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).](image)

The fifth group (6 participants) desired to connect the town with the undeveloped side of the river. Therefore, their design was composed to two parts visually linked through visual frames (Figures 20 and 21).

![Figure 20. The visual frame of the city-side portion of the design (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).](image)
The sixth group (7 participants) chose as their concept, “bringing people together,” and was the third group to employ the spiral form (Figure 22).

The seventh group (6 participants) selected “balance” as their design concept. To represent this idea they chose crescent shapes (Figure 22). The rising river water facilitated expressing their idea.

Upon completion of the project, non-earthen materials were removed. Only the landforms remained as the river rose in elevation.

4 Conclusion
We believed the project was successful on several levels. First it brought French and American students together to advance ideas concerning international cooperation and understanding. Second, students rarely have the opportunity to completely implement their designs at full scale in an actual/real situation. These series of exercises led to full scale interventions. Third, the series of exercises related conceptual model studies with actual implementation and demonstrated the link between the two. In addition, the full scale models allowed the participants to experience adjusting their design ideas to actual site conditions, illustrating how a design evolves, even during the construction phase.

We would urge other programs in landscape architecture and land art to explore opportunities in their area to initiate studies related to land art. We found the experience very rewarding.

References: