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Examining the Mutual Interaction between Art and the Environment

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, successive movements in the history of art have witnessed the departure of art from the confined spaces of galleries into the outdoors and nature. New art forms such as environmental art, land art, ecological art, and similar expressions emerged, establishing a direct connection with nature and the environment. From then on, the environment and the persistent call for restoration and preservation became central themes of diverse artistic endeavors across various fields. In this research, efforts have been made to demonstrate how art influences the environment and to explore new forms of artistic creation aimed at nature. The study addresses key questions: 1) How can art contribute to preserving the environment? and 2) How do environmental threats manifest in artistic works? By observing and examining artistic examples domestically and internationally, we conclude that artists can act as agents of environmental messaging by creating art in nature or using materials derived from nature. Furthermore, utilizing various forms of artistic expression, art is a more powerful medium to depict humanity's impact on the environment than speeches, books, or verbal recommendations. The findings suggest that art, like dynamic thought, can ease life's path, promote health, and ensure sustainable living. The research employs an analytical-applied methodology, and information has been gathered through library and field studies and from credible online sources.

Keywords: Nature, Environment, Plastic, Art.

1 | Introduction

Given the general and multifaceted nature of the research topic, it was necessary to establish a shared understanding of the key concepts within each section and approach the subjects through the lens of the author's perspective. The first section explores the concept of art through its historical evolution, revealing that art has undergone numerous definitions over time. Today, art has transcended traditional frameworks; it is no longer something merely to observe, hold, or carry. Contemporary art engages the mind and soul of its

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audience, reflecting a profound interaction between the artist, the artwork, and the viewer. In some cases, the audience may influence the trajectory of the artistic creation, blurring the lines between creative production and social activism. Consequently, an artwork is no longer a mere product.

In the second section, the concept of the environment and the various perspectives on it are examined. This includes definitions of environment and life, as well as contrasting viewpoints. The critical point, aligned with the research objective, is to define the scope of the environment. Restricting the concept of the environment solely to nature is a misconception. Instead, the environment should encompass urban settings, social transformations, and their impact on artists and audiences, even to the extent of influencing the direction of artistic works. In this sense, nature is a subset of the broader concept of the environment.

The third section addresses the interaction between art and the environment throughout history, focusing on periods when art and environmental concerns were most closely aligned. For example, the Impressionists, following the Realists who portrayed bitter realities with heightened starkness, sought a closer connection with nature, emphasizing light and movement with exceptional precision. Similarly, during the industrial and technological eras, some artists critiqued the glamor and materialism of their time by incorporating its symbols and trends into their works, thus reflecting or protesting the conditions of their era.

These artists, known as Pop Art practitioners, emerged alongside others who abandoned galleries for the outdoors, giving rise to land art and environmental art. Some artists also used creativity to repurpose manufactured or discarded materials such as plastic or metal waste, underscoring the potential of art to contribute to environmental preservation, sustainability, and development. These works, often taking years to create and enduring for centuries, transcend ownership and serve humanity and other living beings.

Finally, by analyzing artists' works, this research aims to identify new artistic approaches to preserving, restoring, and developing the environment. It also seeks to address key research questions, how do natural threats manifest in artistic works? To what extent can art aid in environmental preservation and development? The research employs an analytical-applied methodology, using the library, field studies, and credible online sources for data collection.

2 | Background

Studying art and the environment in Iran is relatively new and is emerging as a novel subject for artists and environmental activists. Efforts to explore the connection and interaction between art and the environment often focus on new artistic styles or practical applications. Examples include research such as the role of environmental art in addressing environmental issues in Iran, the impact of environmental art on the audience with an emphasis on interactive methods [1].

These works, as their titles suggest, focus predominantly on specific artistic styles, exploring what environmental art is and how it addresses ecological concerns through its forms of expression. Additionally, there has been research on environmental signs and elements in cultural promotion and artistic works, such as *Environmental Themes in Outdoor Advertising and Their Cultural Impacts* and *The Role of Environmental Graphics in Establishing Effective Communication for Environmental Protection* [3]. However, no research was explicitly found examining the interaction between art and the environment, emphasizing plastic waste.

Existing studies are limited to defining environmental art and its history and analyzing selected works within this genre. Other research has focused on the effects of various forms of graphic art, urban beautification, and advertisements in urban and natural environments with an emphasis on environmental elements. Since this research topic is innovative, independent books on the environment and plastic were also reviewed, discussing each in detail. Examples include *plastics and the environment* [2], *the climate and the environment* [5] *contemporary trends in visual arts* [6], *Environmental Art: Reflections on Meaning-Making Elements in Landscape and Sculpture* [7], and *environmental pollution*[8].

These resources provide in-depth and specialized insights into environmental features, human impacts, and associated risks. Artistic resources have similarly studied various styles and new forms of artistic expression that demonstrate a direct connection with the environment. These materials serve as foundational references for understanding the interplay of art and ecological concerns in this research.

3 | Definition of Art

Art is often equated with aesthetics, and discussions about art are frequently considered the same as discussions about aesthetics. Sometimes, art is understood as the beautiful, and at other times, the beautiful is seen as art. Some theorists, however, consider art to have a separate definition and history. The traditional view, which attempted to define art up until the 19th century, typically emphasized intrinsic features. However, with the advancement of science and technology, it is now possible to find works that lack these intrinsic characteristics. At the same time, some actions possess these features but are not considered art.

In the late 20th century, two groups of thinkers emerged, dividing into functionalists and process theorists in their approach to defining art. Functionalists argue that something can only be called a work of art if it fulfills a particular purpose. Although there is no consensus on the nature of this purpose, at the very least, art should create a pleasurable aesthetic experience. On the other hand, process theorists contend that something is considered art solely if created based on an appropriate process or formula, regardless of whether it achieves a specific goal.

One of the earliest definitions from a process theorist, George Dickie [9], is as follows:

- I. The artist is someone who creates a work of art.
- II. A work of art is an artificial object created to be displayed to the public by the art community.
- III. The art community consists of people with the relative ability to understand a work of art.
- IV. The art world is a comprehensive and inclusive system of all the art systems.
- V. Finally, the system of the art world is the framework within which the artist presents their work to the public [3].

General art, like humanity, has passed through three stages. Before the industrial revolution and modernity, art was controlled and dominated by a select group of individuals, and the power dynamics of that time directly influenced it. The authority of art was largely in the hands of specific people or groups. During the modern era, art reached a position where, although it may not have completely freed itself from authoritative influence, it was increasingly shaped by economic and political judgments.

To some extent, art remained in the hands of the intellectual elite. However, in the contemporary era, this control over art and artworks disappears, and the freedom is granted for any object to experience an artistic and poetic state in its abstract existence. This is where art enters the domain of pure abstraction. This abstraction differs from surrealist expression, as surrealists ultimately served the formalism that referred to external reality.

On the other hand, the contemporary approach refuses to conform to any particular form and reaches pure and absolute ideas. Pure idea means sheer power and existence in any form, with any message, or without any message at all. The end of human existence is art, and art is humanity. Art has become ubiquitous (from commercial images to ready-made works of Marcel Duchamp).

4 | Definition of environment

To provide a comprehensive definition of the environment, it is helpful to fully understand the meanings of the terms environment and life individually. The word environment is of Arabic origin, meaning surrounding, engaging, or encompassing (Dehkhoda Dictionary). It refers to the area surrounding a surface or where humans live, including the country, city, community, and family (Mo'in Dictionary).

Life in the Mo'in and Dehkhoda dictionaries means existence and vitality. Therefore, based on these definitions, the environment is the space where life exists. In other words, life surrounds it. The environment is a connected chain where all components and beings are interconnected. So, if one part is harmed, it will affect the others. For example, cutting down trees reduces oxygen, which in turn increases pollution, leading to the destruction of many species and putting human life at risk. Thus, the environment is the space where humans live alongside other beings, and its significance lies in their interaction. This interaction makes the environment a space where the actions of any being affect both each other and the shape of the environment itself.

The earth's surface is divided into four parts: the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere. Each of these creates its ecosystems, which have existed for millennia and continue to thrive, adapting to climatic changes. According to the 2001 report by the organization for economic cooperation and development, nearly all factors that make up the environment have been impacted by human activities.

Among the most critical factors are soil erosion and desertification, the depletion of water resources, surface and groundwater pollution, air pollution from greenhouse gases, and the destruction of healthy ecosystems due to overpopulation and excessive construction. There are two main approaches to environmentalism: environmentalism and ecosystemism, each offering solutions.

Environmentalism involves nations trying to reduce the harmful effects of human activities on the environment through agreements like the Paris Agreement, set to be implemented in 2020, focusing on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It also includes official national laws protecting nature and animals, like the Iranian environmental protection organization. Ecosystemism, on the other hand, presents itself as an ideology distinct from environmentalism.

It acknowledges that the non-human world, including all-natural elements, has inherent importance, regardless of its utility for humans. Ecosystemism opposes any anthropocentric view that seeks to conquer nature. It rejects the notion that political, economic, and social functions can resolve environmental crises. It also advocates for a post-industrial future that contrasts sharply with conventional visions of growth, technology, and material satisfaction.

Ecosystems emphasize that the finite nature of earth's resources must be recognized and suggests that the solution to environmental issues lies in reducing consumption, controlling population growth, and ensuring sustainable activities. For example, recycling plastic waste and turning it into other products requires technology that consumes resources, potentially leading to further environmental damage. This creates a vicious cycle of pollution production. Throughout history, the concept of the environment has evolved. Life was deeply connected to nature at one point, with humans considering nature central to their art and architecture.

Over time, with the rise of technology, humans began to create artificial environments, and art became a form of protest or a suggestion for preserving the environment. Urban life, a clear example of living in artificial surroundings, contrasts sharply with earlier, nature-centered lifestyles. Today, art's relationship with the environment has become more complex.

Artists consider natural and artificial environments in their works, and the environment has become a space for creating and presenting art. By studying art history, we realize that art, like any other discipline, can have theories and practical projects that benefit the environment. The environment consists of natural and artificial elements; reducing it to just nature is a narrow view.

In the past, humans lived within nature, interacting directly with other animals, plants, and the earth. However, today, urban environments rarely include plants and animals except for ornamental or decorative purposes. This shift represents a fundamental change in how humans interact with the environment, and as a result, art and creativity have also evolved, reflecting these changes. A deeper look at art history reveals how artists' focus on the environment has shifted. For instance, during the Impressionist period, Cézanne focused on representing nature through his perception.

Today, the environment is a subject of art and a space where art is created. Examining different historical periods and their relationship with the environment reveals how artists' concerns with nature and ecology have evolved. This review shows how art and the environment have interacted through different periods, illustrating a shift from direct engagement with nature to more abstract and conceptual approaches in contemporary art.

Based on the definitions provided for art and the environment, it can be said that everything around us is part of our environment, and reducing the environment only to nature is a narrow-minded view. Today, we can identify two types of environments: the artificial environment and the natural environment. In the past, human beings lived within nature, in direct interaction with other creatures, plants, and the land. However, in today's human environment, there is little presence of flowers, plants, or other living beings, as these now serve as decorative elements or symbols in urban life. These fundamental changes in human interaction with the environment have also led to significant changes in art and artistic processes.

Art today differs significantly from the past, and these differences can be observed through the history of art. In this study, particular attention has been paid to historical periods most closely connected to the social environment of artists. Thus, not only are their temporal divisions but there is also a coexistence of artworks in various styles influenced by environmental and social changes. In this process, it is clear that art in every historical period has responded differently to environmental and social changes.

For example, artists from different periods, such as the Romantic or Impressionist eras, used nature to inspire their works. With the rise of environmental art, art has become a tool for responding to environmental crises in the modern and contemporary periods. As a result, the interaction between art and the environment is a complex and multifaceted issue. As history progresses, social and environmental changes have opened new paths for art and the creation of artistic works. These paths connect art to environmental issues and transform art into a means of criticizing and reforming human attitudes and behaviors toward nature.

5 | Impressionists

This group of artists relied on their immediate impressions of nature to convey a more authentic sense of the reality of their environmental surroundings. Does the painting or image created depend on the artist's point of view? The answer to this question can be found in both the technique and content of the Impressionist works. Impressionists posed the question: is the reality of objects fixed, or does it transform due to light? Does how we see things matter? The Impressionists accepted the Realists' view that the purpose of art should be to capture parts of nature and life through a scientific spirit, free from personal emotions. Based on this, Impressionism can be seen as the logical continuation of nineteenth-century Realism [4].

As seen in this engraving (*Fig. 1*), the artist has painted exactly what they saw, using all their skill to make the scene appear real. The crime occurred at a specific time and place as if a photograph had been taken at the scene. The harsh and intense reality speaks for itself; the artist feels no need to interpret it for us. The significance of this engraving lies in its authenticity; here, the artist chooses truth as both the subject and the visual representation of truth as their method. Their technique is rough and spontaneous, emphasizing exaggeration and attacking the style of caricaturists, which is part of its striking power. Thus, Daumier, while staying true to life in terms of content, has a unique and unparalleled style [5].



Fig. 1. Honoré Daumier, Rue Transnonain, Engraving, 1834, 45 x 30 cm¹.

Édouard Manet, one of the pioneers of Impressionism, focused on the visual moment and portrayed it as he saw it. According to his belief, light is the main actor in painting. What light reveals is accidental. Therefore, the artist stands neutrally before the frame and depicts whatever he sees without judgment, as shown in his painting *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Fig. 2), where he depicts a woman in a bar. His objective is not the woman herself, but rather, like the bottles, he views her without any personal feelings and portrays her amidst the light reflections in a straightforward manner, without alteration. He merely speaks of his visual experience of this light pattern. This painting has no story, moral lesson, or even a bitter reality suggesting an incident [5]. Impressionism is an urban art form, not just because it uncovers the quality of the cityscape and brings painting from the countryside back to the city, but because it views the world through the eyes of the urbanite and responds to external perceptions with the fatigued nerves of modern technology.

While the Impressionist painter goes outdoors, he does not embrace life in the lap of nature. Instead, he paints the weekend leisure activities of city dwellers [4]. In the late 19th century, artists are not alone in emphasizing the authentic emotional reality of perceiving nature or the world. Scientists, philosophers, and many psychologists emphasized that reality is based on feelings or that logical knowledge can only be grounded in analyzing our sensations. In other words, Austrian physicist Ernst Mach declared that sensation is the only reality, and all the laws and principles of physics are merely a condensed expression of the complex connections between the information our senses gather. Experimental psychology also begins by measuring sensory experience [5]. The sensitivity to color and the fleeting effects of light and motion can be considered the connecting factor among Impressionist artists.



Fig. 2. Bar at the Folies-Bergère, Édouard Manet, 1882, oil on canvas.

¹ www.mahsafarhadikia.com

6 | Popart

Ghodrazi quotes Andy Warhol, Pop art does nothing but take the outside and put it inside, and take the inside and put it outside, bringing ordinary objects into the home. Pop art is for everyone. Pop art, a popular art movement that gathers its information from popular culture and can quickly return to and merge with it, has undoubtedly played a significant role in democratizing art, just as the rise in the standard of living of the middle classes and advancements in education have done [7]. These artists emphasized the urban culture of the masses and introduced a form of universal aesthetics in art [4]. They rejected the conventional aesthetic standards. Pop art is a diverse movement in form and highly complex in structure. The origin of pop art is tied to the art world's response to the dominance of abstract art in the art scene. Moreover, it can be seen as a movement to return to objects in their simplest and most mundane forms, which the artist attempts to bring into the world of art alongside modern living environments, advertisements (from which many image-making techniques are later borrowed), cinema and television, fashion, and design, which gradually and profoundly change the face of cities. It should be noted that this movement is filled with sarcasm and mockery, often provocative. Thus, since pop art recalls the Dada movement in the minds of many, it has also been referred to as Neo-Dadaism Pop [13].

When Duchamp uses a urinal and a snow shovel, he points out there is no reason not to use any other object from industrial products in artworks. In the works of pop artists, especially second-generation artists like Warhol and the works of New Realists, this idea is also visible, and many of these objects deserve to be placed next to a painting or a classical sculpture in a museum. César, amid mountains of scrap metal, chooses the ones he finds most beautiful and expressive. Warhol agrees with one point: that department stores are a type of museum, and he believes in it so much that comparative terms might be inverted. I like Rome because it's a type of museum, like the big Bloomingdale's store [7]. Warhol became a master at manipulating mass media to display a public image, revealing his persona wrapped in another guise. These themes are concentrated and gathered in his famous Gold Marilyn Monroe (*Fig. 3*). Warhol conveys such a melancholy feeling to the viewer that one sees beyond the attractive appearance of this star [6].



Fig. 3. Golden Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, 1962, Silkscreen print¹.

¹ www.kingandmcgaw.com

Here, there are two messages: one is that modern art should not be feared, and the other is that we should not be ashamed of loving modern life with its plastic containers and colorful advertising posters. Rauschenberg stated that he would like to be positioned between art and life, a phrase that followed its course. According to Warhol, the issues are more complex: I can't explain what pop art is; it's very complicated. Pop art only does one thing: it takes the outside and puts it inside, and takes the inside and puts it outside, bringing ordinary objects into the home. Pop art is for everyone. Art is not for the elite; art should be for the general public in America, who, after all, usually accept it (ibid).

7 | Contemporary Art

There is widespread agreement that contemporary art's birth occurred between 1960 and 1969. In the 1960s, several movements and styles took root, Pop Art, Popular Art, New Realism, Actionism, Op Art, Visual Art, Kinetic Art, Minimalism, and Color Field Painting. The Fluxus movement scattered, and the Incident Art movement developed; by the end of the decade, Conceptual Art, Anti-form, Arte Povera, Earth Art, Body Art, Base Art, and others emerged. These all represent forms of art that resort to all kinds of heterogeneous materials, including manufactured objects, natural and ephemeral materials, and even the artist's own body [7].

All styles were allowed, including the most misleading, provocative, and unattainable methods, where artists either trapped their audiences or, conversely, fled from the public to create their pieces in remote desert landscapes. Audiences oscillated between works that invoked their primal reactions and others that forced them to follow intricate theoretical arguments. They encountered works that occupied space but required them to imagine other spaces—completely invisible or poorly constructed, in their purest disorganization. Robert Morris's 1970 exhibition at the Whitney Museum, which included a piece consisting of beams and concrete blocks measuring 29.65 by 3.5 by 1.2 meters, required the labor of thirty to forty people for ten days to move the materials to the third floor of the museum, which had been previously emptied (ibid.) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Robert Morris, 1970¹.

Pioneers in the pivotal years of the 1960s and 1970s, who used all kinds of materials, including those found on the sidewalk, and even the bodies of those who came to watch, sought to create an interaction between people and the artwork, making it an imposition. Ephemeral works intensify that brief moment, which a small group of spectators shares; open works exist only because viewers have touched and penetrated them. Those who were stunned by the steel wall erected by Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 1962 on Visconti Street in Paris, or the many more spectators who crossed the wrapped Pont Neuf in 1985, undoubtedly retain a much more

¹ <https://whitney.org/collection/works>

vivid memory than what one might feel when viewing photographs of the same events. Their memory holds these works' legacy; when they disappear, something essential will vanish forever.

8 | Land or Earth Art

At the beginning of the 20th century, Europe experienced a return to the natural world. Indigenous and pure art from the Middle East, China, and India was reassessed and valued again as a solution to the issue of people's alienation from nature. With the comprehensive industrial progress in the late 1900s and 1970s, environmental issues gained importance in the discourse of Western societies, which led to the development of an environmental perspective for the protection of nature. As a result, artists increasingly fought to change the relationship between humans and nature. This shift in perspective emerged in the criticism of artists toward the closed society and industry of the time. After World War II, the landscape of art in the United States was influenced by abstract concepts and the widespread use of artistic media, which emphasized inner emotions, pop art—art specific to everyday culture—and mass consumerism.

Due to the wars and threats of this turbulent century, attention to political art also increased. The awareness that every individual could have the power to bring about change in society led many artists, such as Joseph Beuys and others, to embrace political activism. A few years after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which politicized the environmental movement in the U.S. and many organizations outside the country, the first Earth Day celebration was held in 1970. During this event, environmental activists paid tribute to the earth, raising global environmental issues related to peace.

A vast international audience also participated in this event, declaring their awareness and support for the movement [7]. The earth is the best material for environmental sculpture, as it frees the artist from any limitations related to human scale and provides complete freedom. Some of the early designers of structures turned to using earth for strong and logical reasons, creating projects that were carried out across several square kilometers. During the 1990s, Land Art evolved in the United States due to access to vast geographical spaces [6]. This issue can be considered as a movement in the visual arts that deals with geographical and natural spaces in all their dimensions, including activities such as earth-based art on the surface, excavation, embankment, and planting vegetation in various patterns, landscapes, and the creation of biodegradable sculptures.

Brian Wallis views the emergence of Land Art as part of broader actions related to space, combining the shift from a purely physical perspective of art with the concept of economic decentralization and geography (*Fig. 5*). Artists began experimenting with new art forms, moving beyond traditional media and the limitations of these forms by establishing galleries and cultural activities. They were pioneers of conceptual and performance art. According to Lusy Smith [15], works of art should be viewed as thought patterns to create unity between politics and action rather than visual events aimed at producing consumer goods. Ultimately, in 1998, Robert Smithson's groundbreaking exhibition titled *Earth Works* at the Downtown Gallery in New York became a venue for showcasing the works of Land Artists and their efforts.

After this event, attention to political and environmental issues emerged as a concern for creative minds. For the first time, an art exhibition was held outdoors, highlighting the changing relationship between humans and the earth. Artists used urban sites, other artificial spaces, and abandoned natural areas such as deserts or mountains as their performance spaces and aesthetic symbols (*Fig. 5*). Traditionally, these landscapes were depicted by artists, but now this relationship has shifted, meaning that artists go into nature and create their symbols and works there.

Many of these activities use specific materials directly sourced from the natural environment or brought in as new and unnatural works to create contrasts with the backdrop and provide new perceptions. In many cases, photographs only represent the remnants of changes and decay in Land Art, often created with the collaboration of teachers, scientists, and local people, and are frequently exposed to weather conditions and

erosion. A single visit to the location of these artworks can demonstrate how time and natural forces shape processes and objects, claiming them or destroying them [16].



Fig. 5. Robert Smithson's Broken Circle 1971¹

At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, artists chose public spaces and urban landscapes as locations for displaying their artworks. Joseph Beuys planted around 700 oaks around Kassel, and Allen Saphirst created *The Landscape of Time* in New York, which followed the method of preserving living collections. This choice directly brought art into the human living environment, raising awareness among the public (*Figs. 6-8*). As a result of confronting trends and cultural assaults, changes occurred in civil society. Not only did environmental landscapes thrive, but other movements also emerged, which leaned towards alternative lifestyles. Grassroots movements and non-governmental organizations appeared, and a lifestyle approach focused on nature began to spread. During this process, Land Art evolved into a movement that, in some cases, addressed gender issues and examined social differences while also initiating creative works that engaged in interdisciplinary exchanges with natural sciences, history, social sciences, and more [16].



Fig. 6. Planting 7000 Oaks in Newcastle, Joseph Beuys.

Environmental art is a term used to describe three-dimensional works that allow the viewer to enter their space and feel immersed in the created environment [4]. With an interdisciplinary approach, environmental artists work to raise awareness of sustainability issues and the alignment of human lifestyles with other living beings and ecological systems. During the 1990s, the division of the world into the rich North and the poor South began, and artists and intellectuals started critiquing the center and Western Europe in their art and thoughts. The blending of art with innovation and technologies was presented on various scales in art media for significant purposes. Since eco-art is indistinguishable from engineering, gardening, agriculture, research, education, and more, it can be transformed with the hypothesis that art engages the human spirit. The artist's

¹ www.holtsmithsonfoundation.org

role has evolved and continues to grow in the present century, and their cultural construction methods and critical approaches have adapted to the times [16].



Fig. 7. Harrison, 1974, Full Farm¹.

In the past, Land artists suffered from the reality that the massive changes and the remnants left in the natural environment resulted from their artwork. However, today, Eco-artists are aware of their impact on nature and strive to minimize their environmental footprint as much as possible. Their works also aim to raise awareness of human impact on environmental destruction. Nils Udo, one of the key figures in environmental art, has been creating environmental artworks for several decades. One of his famous works is the design for Peter Gabriel's *Ovo* album. He gained fame for creating beautiful utopias in nature, which he attempts to prove are real. He says, even if my work is parallel to nature and done with care as much as possible, a fundamental contradiction remains. A contradiction that cannot escape the death caused by the very existence of humankind. By touching nature, humans cause its suffering and destroy its untouched state. Utopias are real, and I make them visible (*Fig. 8*)



Fig. 8. The Nest, Udo Nils, 1978².

Today, global access and the dominance over the landscapes of various nations worldwide have expanded the concept that we have left the Holocene, the most recent recognized geological period, and entered the proposed Anthropocene era. This marks the beginning of a new age where human activities have had a major impact on ecosystems and the geological structure of the planet, with humans playing a more significant role in geological changes than nature itself. Artists from various backgrounds have entered the scene to develop

¹ <https://www.theharrisonstudio.net/>

² www.nils-udo.com

environmental art internationally. They dedicate their efforts to themes often derived from their surroundings, addressing the problems and injustices created within them [16].

9 | Recycled Art

Around 1912, Picasso (1881-1973) invented a process in art called collage. He glued pieces of newspapers, paper, photographs, and even small objects or created images and sculptures using discarded metal, wood, and cardboard. This use of discarded materials marked the beginning of what is now called recycled art (*Fig. 9*). Years later, Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), one of the most renowned and influential artists of the contemporary era, is considered by many critics and art experts as the first artist to create works from discarded items and ready-made objects, sparking a revolution in the world of art [10].



Fig. 9. Bull's Head, Picasso.

Ready-made objects are items made for different purposes and used differently, but through changes in their structure and how the artist presents them, they are transformed into works of art. Duchamp typically selected components of his artwork randomly from an object, or a part of an object, or a mass-produced item that was recognizable to everyone, and by welding or arranging these parts together, he created an artwork. This approach initially faced significant opposition from artists, galleries, and art critics (*Fig. 9*) [15]. His ready-made works, presented as art with an unconventional, deconstructive structure, became a prime example of a non-traditional definition that went against the stylistic elements of art. In an era when ready-made materials quickly gained a place in the art world, and such works rapidly became the standard thought in the art world, many stylistic and aesthetic criteria were questioned, raising many questions for critics and artists. This approach to art, which focused on the content and the artist's thinking rather than the form, appeared more convincingly non-authoritarian, democratic, and non-hierarchical. It was based on the premise that explaining a work is, to some extent, like evaluating it, and vice versa [15].

10 | The Impact of Recycling Art on the Environment

By recycling plastics, we can prevent the loss of \$6,462,690,000 in annual capital in landfills. It can also help prevent approximately 8% of waste from entering landfills, which has highly harmful environmental effects and cannot naturally decompose. According to available statistics, the country's average per capita waste production is about 650 grams per day. With a population of 4 million in the country, this results in a 5-3% waste production rate. The country's daily production of dry waste is approximately 1,365-2,275 tons, with around 25% of that consisting of plastic materials and waste paper. Therefore, the amount of paper and plastic waste is 450-750 tons daily. This amount is expected to increase 4-5 times over the next 20 years due to population growth, the continuous expansion of cities, and changes in consumption patterns [17]. Recycling art can play a cultural and awareness-raising role in addressing environmental issues. It aims to

reduce waste and protect the planet by raising awareness about waste management culture and environmental threats. In recycling art, waste is used as the primary material for creation. In addition to raising the audience's awareness of waste management and the environmental issues threatening it, this art seeks to educate people and encourage them to protect natural ecosystems, thereby influencing society's culture. Promoting correct consumption culture, critiquing the excessive use of certain materials, and creating art using waste materials are some of the primary objectives of artists.

Jürgen-Hans Schult, a German artist, is well-known in conceptual and action art [18]. One of Schult's most influential projects is the creation of trash sculptures, which may serve as a metaphor for refugees in consumer societies. These sculptures are traveling to twenty countries worldwide, decorating the streets of many cities with their silence and encouraging the residents of those cities to think. Over 19 years, these trash sculptures have visited many cities, from the parks of New York to the Great Wall of China. This global project started in 1996 by creating sculptures made from various materials like crushed cans, electronic waste, and discarded items from daily life.

It took Schult and 30 assistants six months to complete these strange and extraordinary sculptures. After completing this massive army of trash sculptures, the artist sent them on a journey worldwide. These recycled sculptures have since been displayed in several famous locations, including Moscow's Red Square in 1999, the Great Wall of China in 2001, the Pyramids of Egypt in 2002, and the Aztec Temple in Peru in 2008. Schult's army of sculptures, inspired by the terracotta soldiers in China, raises awareness about the threat of waste and its potential to endanger the earth's future. The sculptures are symbolic of modern humanity. Each of us produces a large amount of waste daily, and if the current trend continues, we, too, may eventually become part of the waste.

11 | Conclusion

A brief review of the history of humanity reveals that human interaction with the surrounding environment can be divided into three phases:

- I. The era of nature's dominance over humanity,
- II. The era of humanity's dominance over nature, and
- III. The era of interaction and convergence between humans and nature.

The first period corresponds to an age when humans were entirely at the mercy of nature and could not interfere with it. In this period, which began with humanity's emergence, any minor intervention by humans in nature or their environment did not cause harm, as nature could easily absorb, compensate for, and regenerate those interventions. The environment remained pristine and untouched in this phase.

In contrast, the second period of human history can be considered the era of human control over the environment. This was the age of industrial civilizations. With the advent of the mechanical industry and the establishment of small and large factories, humans transformed their relationship with nature. To increase production, they exploited more resources, causing more significant harm to nature and leading to environmental degradation. During this period, humans disrupted the ecological balance of nature through excessive exploitation, causing environmental destruction and pollution. Their behavior was such that they considered themselves owners of the earth, not merely inhabitants of it. Hence, they viewed their progress as a victory, even if it destroyed parts of the environment and nature.

A look at the events of the last century more clearly reveals the depth of this catastrophe. Although technological advancements have made life easier, the misuse and overuse of these technologies have resulted in deadly consequences. The discovery of new elements to combat diseases and pests and the widespread use of plastics have led to their entry into the human food chain, causing diseases and unforeseen complications. This period also witnessed the rampant discovery and extraction of natural resources, such as fossil fuels, which, besides endangering future generations' rights, caused significant water, soil, air, and sea pollution.

This has resulted in an environmental disaster that has shrouded the future of the only habitable planet in uncertainty. The third period we are entering is the era of awareness, interaction, and coexistence with nature and the environment. The increase in environmental pollution has led to efforts in some advanced and industrialized countries, and eventually worldwide, to curb environmental pollution and preserve the environment.

Based on this, the 1970s and 1990s must be regarded as periods of awakening and awareness concerning the environment [19]. During this time, humanity became aware of the threats to life and realized that the destruction of life on earth no longer required military conflicts or the use of destructive, unconventional weapons with wide-reaching consequences. Instead, if lifestyle choices and methods of production and consumption were not altered, the consequences could be just as severe or even more significant. In response, in addition to the actions taken by governments to curb the spread of environmental crises, international cooperation was also pursued. Similarly, grassroots movements and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) became active in Western countries, sounding the alarm about the impending environmental destruction. The focus on environmental issues during this period was so significant that in 1972 alone, around 300 books on environmental topics were published in the United States. This began a shift towards forming new relationships with nature and the environment. The foundation of this idea is that the natural resources utilized by humans are not infinite, and the waste produced by the reckless exploitation of nature can jeopardize the survival of both the present and future generations. Therefore, if we are to exploit nature, this exploitation must be conducted so that it does not lead to the depletion of natural resources but ensures their preservation for future generations.

In these spaces, outdated thought patterns are replaced by fresh experiences that provide a new understanding of the urban landscape, our relationship with plants and animals, the history of earth's knowledge, and the transformation of socio-economic relations. This creates a unique opportunity for a different perspective. In this context, art emerges as a form of knowledge with a potential action that can surpass any other discipline. (The examples from the works of Agnes Denes and Joyce Boys confirm this notion.) Environmental artists have taken on direct roles in nature—living in it, experiencing it, and interacting with it—not merely displaying it. As a result, the real interest of these individuals lies in the process of artistic creation itself, not just in the finished product. Their goal in working with the natural environment is to shape conceptual ideas, personal experiences, and a deep, internal understanding of life and its ecosystem. This expanded vision should now replace the conventional view that only values the visual display and the outcome of the artwork.

These artists share not just the subject matter, materials, or methods but also their passion and commitment to a broader perspective of artistic creation. Through this approach, they seek to change humanity's environmental outlook and contribute to a deeper environmental awareness.

This research demonstrates the interdependence and correlation between art and the environment. Like other components of the environment, art is a living entity that grows and develops as if engaged in a continuous dialogue with its surroundings. The environment, along with social, political, and ecological events, enters the mind and soul of the artist in various ways, finding an outlet in the most personal expressions of art. It can be acknowledged that art, without consideration of its environment, is meaningless and cannot continue to exist. Conversely, the environment—whether natural or artificial—feeds off art, and throughout different periods, we have seen how the environment requires artistic expression.

Ultimately, this research has gone beyond the original hypothesis. Since the creations of artists not only convey environmental messages but can also actively engage in action. Through the examination of three domestic festivals, the role and impact of artists in this domain can be observed. Moreover, this research has achieved its objectives in preserving and restoring the environment through artistic expression in innovative forms, aiming to maintain the authenticity and identity of nature. By reviewing examples from global artists, we have witnessed how natural threats are represented in artistic works.

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