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Curation Statement

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Environmentally Challenged

Landscape can be seen as a mask for the struggles its inhabitants endure. “An environment can only exist in relation to a form of life that inhabits it” (Thornes 395), and currently this environment’s inhabitants are in crisis with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Each artist who chooses to work with concepts surrounding our environment and its struggles will ultimately have unique interpretations of the environment based on their personal experiences.

Environmental art takes the shape of artist-specific representations and uses varying amounts of natural materials. Many contemporary artists use these representations to portray their interpretations of what environmental art is. With recent events heightening our awareness of environment, space, and other living beings, this curatorial project highlights the ongoing relationship between humans and our environment. During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are learning to take time to reflect and consider how we value the environment and our place within it.

Focusing on the concept of personal reflection within environmental spaces, we see that landscape paintings of the nineteenth century show the earliest signs of a shift in attitude and awareness toward the environment (The Art Story). Since then artists moved toward the rise of



Fig. 1 - Marco Evaristi Strokkur geyser site-specific installation

conceptual art and eventually earth art. During the 1960s Environmental Art began to intertwine with social and political issues, changing the viewer's perspective of nature. During this time, people became more aware of how they were polluting the

environment. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) caused new emphasis on environmental degradation as well as its relationship to human health. The results were an intensified call for the government to more closely regulate industry, as well as a stronger awareness of our relationship between environmental problems and society (University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh). This rise in environmental awareness affected environmental artists who were altering the landscapes around them. Artist Marco Evaristi has since been accused of altering the environment by dyeing the Strokkur geyser with non-toxic pink pigment (Fig. 1). Artists are shifting their technical approach to environmental art, including Michael Heizer who aims to spread awareness of environmental issues through installation works such as *Levitated Mass*. This massive boulder placed over a public trail was designed to comment on negative or positive relationships with the environment (Fig. 2). As site-specific art risked causing damage to the environment, artists shifted their focus toward creating more sustainable works as well as environmental art that would change and spread awareness for environmental issues.



Fig. 2 - Michael Heizer *Levitated Mass*, 2012, large-scale site-specific sculpture

Adam Eddy, a painter currently shifting into experimental media, seeks to challenge the line human beings draw between ourselves and our surroundings, using his paintings as a means of borrowing structure from the everyday and using them as proxies for the human body. Eddy's pieces in this exhibition "imagines a hypothetical museum for remembering the natural world after humans have left" (Eddy). He wants us to consider how we will remember our roots and lives on earth by presenting a memorial of the everyday. Mixed media artist Kellie Bornhoft uses her video installation *Sediment* to create a

full sensory experience for her viewers, allowing them to see the beauty in rocks and how even though they are supposedly static objects, they hold decades of ancestral energy. Ron Lambert claims our environments remind us of our lives (Lambert). In this exhibition, he utilizes sculpture to combine nature with constructed elements to foster a dialog about human efforts to make sense of as well as control our environment. These three artists are producing work that fully embodies the overall theme of this exhibition.

Each of these artists is individually commenting on this ever-changing relationship between human beings and our environment. With the increasing risks of climate change, as well as the shifting environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing the works of these artists

together to form a visual commentary on their studies couldn't be more appropriate. This exhibition will serve as an opportunity for viewers to look at each of these artworks and develop a personal relationship with them. It allows us to take a step back and think about how much we value the environment, to encourage and foster a better understanding of our role within this natural relationship.

While the global effects of COVID-19 influenced the theme, artists, and works chosen for this exhibition it will not be shifting how the exhibition is viewed. Since the main focus of this exhibition is to comment on the relationships between human beings and our environment, it would be best to experience this exhibition personally and intimately.