

# Art in America

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## The Earth Sublime

by [Sarah S. King](#) 06/12/09

The terms environmental, earth and land art still powerfully conjure Michael Heizer's Double Negative, Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels and other emblematic site-specific works from the '60s and '70s. Since then, the genre has radically evolved in its means and mission, encompassing myriad approaches that integrate esthetically based practices with new technology and scientific fieldwork. The new land art, often expressed in temporal processes rather than monumentally scaled physical interventions, seeks to engender a renewed awareness of the world we inhabit and how we transform it, for better or worse. Since the '90s, "earth art" has encompassed microscopic realms and underground and underwater terrains, and incorporated outer space and cyberspace. Characterized by terms like "psycho-geology," "geo-philosophy," "geo-poetry" and "experimental geography," the work uses such tools as mobile laboratories or performative "walks" to investigate land usage and geological and urban phenomena.



[View Slideshow](#) Poet Lisa Gill doing an on-site recording for Steve Peters's project at the San Ysidro Church in Corrales.; DJ Spooky performing his Terra Nova: Sinfonia Antarctica in Milan, 2008.;

In development for over five years, LAND/ART is a mammoth collaborative endeavor that coincides perfectly with the country's new "green" awareness. A sprawling series of exhibitions and events set to take place June through November at multiple sites in New Mexico, it was coordinated by Suzanne Sbarge, director of the nonprofit art space 516 Arts in Albuquerque, along with Bill Gilbert, founder of the Land Arts of the American West Program at the University of New Mexico (UNM), and independent curator Kathleen Shields, who, among other things, oversees Walter de Maria's *Lightning Field* (1977) for the Dia Art Foundation. Among the more than 18 presenters are, in Albuquerque, 516 Arts, the Albuquerque Museum, the UNM Art Museum and the Harwood Art Center, and, in Santa Fe, the Center for Contemporary Arts and SITE Santa Fe. Many of the projects in LAND/ART look back to ancient cultural models in New Mexico, such as Native American Pueblo petroglyphs, as well as to more recent undertakings like *Lightning Field* and Charles Ross's ongoing 11-story-deep *Star Axis*, begun in 1976.

Though some projects will already be under way in early June, LAND/ART officially kicks off June 27-28

with a symposium at the Albuquerque Museum, which will feature a panel discussion, moderated by Gilbert, with artists Matthew Coolidge, Katie Holten, Lize Mogel and Lea Rekow. It coincides with the opening at the museum of “Experimental Geography” [June 28-Sept. 20], a traveling exhibition curated by Nato Thompson for Independent Curators International. The show features some 20 collaboratives, including the New York-based Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), Raqs Media Collective from New Delhi and Multiplicity, a transnational group that examines how socioeconomic factors and religion dictate border policies between Israel and Palestinian-controlled territories. Individual artists include Trevor Paglen, whose imagistic investigations describe secret CIA incarceration centers, military bases and prisons, and Francis Alÿs, whose 2002 video *When Faith Moves Mountains* (in collaboration with Cuauhtémoc Medina and Rafael Ortega) documents the 4-inch displacement of a giant sand dune by 500 volunteers in Mexico City. Also taking place during the opening weekend will be a bus tour organized by the Center for Land Use Interpretation, which will take passengers through both industrial and relatively untouched landscapes.

In keeping with the new movement’s ethos, most of the outdoor works will be ephemeral (aside from a permanent commission by the City of Albuquerque Public Art Program, to be announced this summer). The majority of works will be sited in and around Albuquerque—the UNM campus, the Bosque forest on the Rio Grande and downtown. Others will be further afield, including those at *The Land*, an outdoor art site in Mountainair, about 40 miles south of Albuquerque. At a farm in the village of Corrales, north of Albuquerque, Jaune Quick-To-See Smith and Neal Ambrose-Smith are creating a 4-acre corn labyrinth inspired by an ancient Indian petroglyph. At nearby Los Poblanos Fields Open Space, Anne Cooper’s project will feature terra-cotta bowls filled with sprouting seeds and laid out in a 9-foot grid; the pots will eventually dissolve, leaving red stains on the ground. Another multi-sited work, receding/reseeding by Basia Irland, will feature a June 28 excursion on the Rio Grande involving the launch of one of her “Ice Books,” large cubes of ice embedded with local seeds. A show of Irland’s ice sculptures and photographs will go on view at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Santa Fe [July 3-31].

Among the other projects that will comprise indoor and outdoor components is Gilbert’s *Matter of Fact: Walk to Work*, a three-day walk from his home in the Galisteo Basin to UNM. His experience, translated into a video and topographical floor map made with materials gathered along his way and displayed at 516 Arts [Aug. 1-Sept. 19], will provide what he describes as “mediations between the physical and virtual definitions of place.” In the same vein, Steve Peters’s sound piece consists of verbal descriptions of New Mexico landscapes by various artists and poets; the passages are woven into a narrative and accompanied by field recordings of, for example, wind and, he says, the “internal resonance of cactuses.” The piece will be presented in a church in Corrales, and will be broadcast on a local radio station.

Karl Hoffmann is working with local high school students to produce a large-scale interpretation of the mountain Grosser Mythen in the Swiss Alps—a common symbol of the sublime in Romantic art—out of scrap wood, cardboard and junk mail. It will go on view at Gold Street Lofts [June 2-July 11]. Nearby, Richard Levy Gallery will present Erika Blumenfeld’s multimedia installation *The Polar Project* [Sept. 4-Oct. 24]. Among the numerous other events scheduled through November are performances by Laurie Anderson (June 10) and Paul D. Miller, a.k.a. DJ Spooky, who will present his multimedia *Terra Nova: Sinfonica Antartica* [Oct. 24], both at KiMo Theatre. And the list goes on. . . . For detailed information on events and exhibitions, go to [www.landartnm.org](http://www.landartnm.org).