

# **Intertwined Through Time: Andy Goldsworthy and His Masterpieces**

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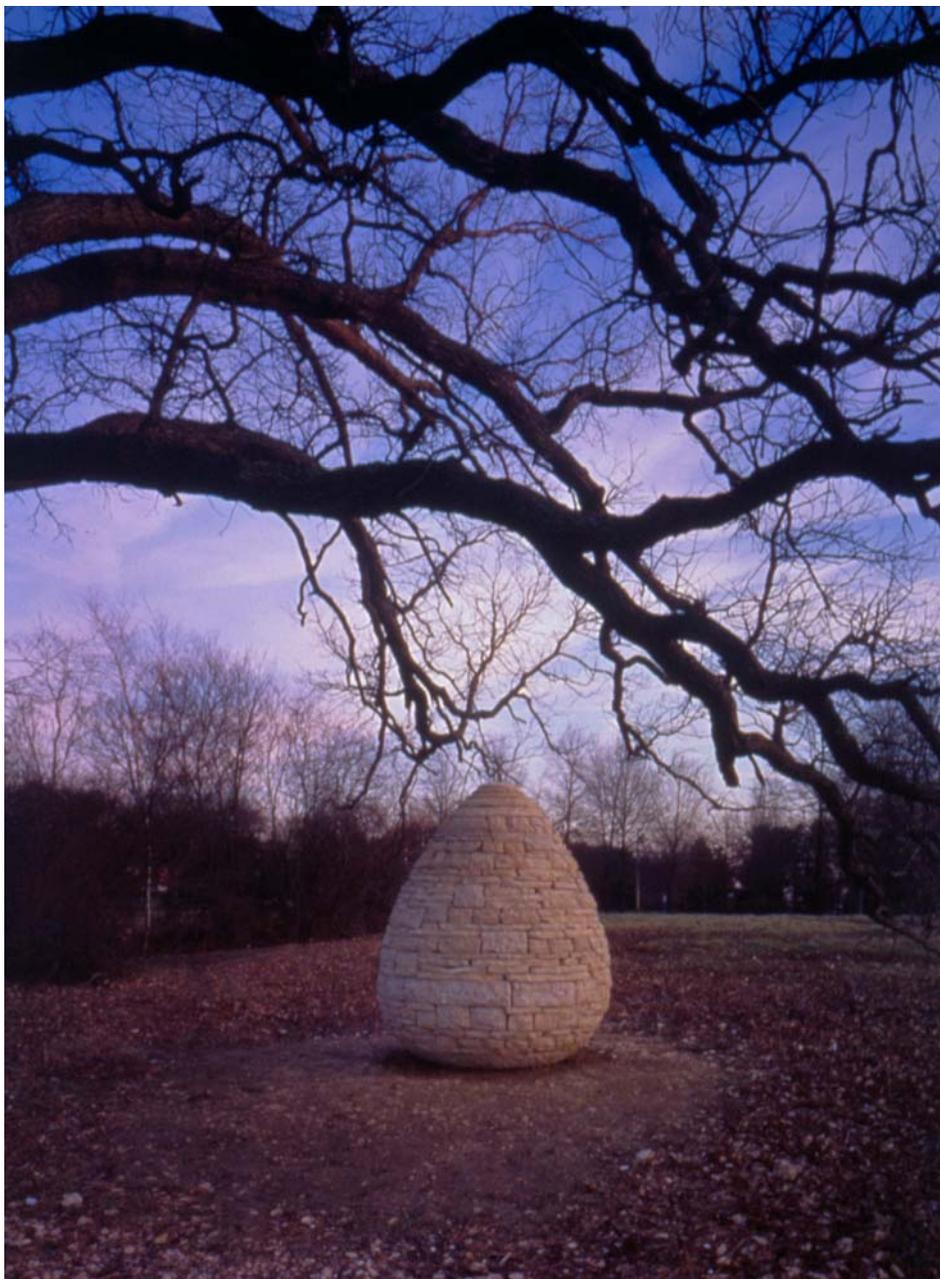
## **Abstract**

Andy Goldsworthy is a renowned land artist from England. His passion for nature and change has made his works stand out brilliantly in the art world. Goldsworthy aims to help people notice nature once again and ponder all of its magical mysteries. By creating sculptures made of all natural materials and constructing them in their original environment, Goldsworthy is able to observe the effects of time in nature. Time and the notion of being temporary are aspects of life that the environment and every human has in common. Time links all life; Goldsworthy's ephemeral sculptures help reinforce the importance of understanding the reality of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

It seems our society is advancing every day, and as we do we travel further away from connecting to the one entity that allows us as a species to exist: the environment. Andy Goldsworthy, a prominent British land artist from Yorkshire, made it his life goal to remind the world just how magical nature still is and the many truths that it openly presents to any willing eye. As stated by Goldsworthy himself, "There is no doubt that the internal space of a rock or a tree is important to me. But when I get beneath the surface of things, these are not moments of mystery; they are moments of extraordinary clarity" (Goldsworthy qtd. in Adams 1). The environment is connected to us, and we are connected to it. Time and the notion of being temporary are aspects of life that the environment and every human have in common. Goldsworthy presents these ideas through the works that he creates around the world (Fig. 1).

Goldsworthy spent most of his childhood working on farms, which coincidentally is where his love and admiration of nature bloomed. He enjoyed the repetitive work of farm hands, much like he now enjoys the repetitive work of sculpture making. Goldsworthy claimed that, "farming is a very sculptural profession, building haystacks or plowing fields, and burning stubble" (Goldsworthy qtd. in Beardsley 50).

At nineteen years, he entered the Preston Polytechnic in northern England as a fine art major. He soon found out that he despised working indoors. The classrooms and studio work were not in his interest. He would escape to Morecambe Bay, where he



**Figure 1: Andy Goldsworthy**  
***Neuberger Cairn*, 2001. Limestone**  
**Height: 8 ft. 6 in. / Circumference: 21 ft. 6 in.**  
**Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College,**  
**State University of New York, Purchase, New York**  
**Photo by Jim Frank**

**© Andy Goldsworthy**  
**Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York**

would build small sculptures that the tide would quickly destroy. Before long, he realized that while his fellow students were representing the landscape on canvases, he was instead “drawing on the landscape itself” (Lubow 1). Many artists struggle with how to convey an occurrence in the real world into a canvas limited by its two-dimensional nature and the specific materials available to them. Goldsworthy skipped to using the real world as the materials and canvas, and in doing so, “he can illustrate aspects of the natural world—its color, mutability, energy—without resorting to mimicry” (Lubow 1), thus helping the rest of the world see the beauty that he already saw in nature.

Goldsworthy’s art is influenced by the changing weather and seasons. As Goldsworthy stated on his 1990 webpage, “Philosophy,” “For me, looking, touching, material, place, and form are all inseparable from the resulting work. It is difficult to say where one stops and another begins. Place is found by walking, direction determined by weather and season” (Goldsworthy 1). Whether it is leaves, stones, ice, or wood, he examines each natural material to create his organic designs. A striking energy is found in nature, and Goldsworthy is a master at using line, color and shape to help magnify its power. He says, “art for me is a form of nourishment” (Goldsworthy qtd. in Von Donop).

Goldsworthy seeks the “energy that is running through, flowing through the landscape” (Goldsworthy qtd. in Von Donop), aiming not at capturing it as much as at participating in it. He “relies on what nature will give him. Goldsworthy ‘feels’ the energy from nature and transcends that energy into an art form. For this, his transient sculptures contradict the permanence of art in its historical pretense” (Witcombe 1). Goldsworthy essentially challenges the meaning of art and traditional views of what art is. Besides creating aesthetically fascinating sculptures, Goldsworthy’s art speaks silently about meanings and symbolisms that are deeply manifested in each work.

All of Goldsworthy’s masterpieces are created with natural items, and most of them are constructed from items in the natural setting. This peculiarity makes his art so powerful. For example, his work entitled *River*<sup>3</sup> is a rock in the middle of a river, on which Goldsworthy placed dozens of icicles pointing straight up like spires. The icicles give off a majestic feeling, showing that nature has a certain power over us, be it noticeable or not. We are nothing without nature; we would not exist as a species without it. One of Goldsworthy’s biggest aims is to just get people to notice nature again; through his extraordinary works, he inspires thoughts of how we interact with the environment and how time affects everyone and everything. He uses these seemingly ordinary objects, and creates magnificent sculptures that, in an instant, grab anyone’s attention. It is all about an emotional response. As Goldsworthy states in his book, *Passage*,

An artist makes things that become a focus for feelings and emotions--some personal, some public, some intended, some not. At best a work of art releases unpredictable energy that is a shock to both the artist and the viewer--I do not mean shock in conventional sense but an emotional tremor that articulates a feeling [that] has been in search of form (69).

This desire for his audience to experience an emotional response from nature has inspired works such as *Sticks Stacked*,<sup>4</sup> in which Goldsworthy stacked sticks in a hole. However, he positioned the sticks in a way that left a hole in the middle--a hole within a hole. This seemingly ironic suggestion leaves the viewer confused enough to look at it and ponder the art in a new way.



**Figure 2: *Dandelions held to river stone with mud, Scaur water, Dumfriesshire, 1993* Andy Goldsworthy  
© Andy Goldsworthy  
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York**

In *Beech Leaves* (see Fig. 2), Goldsworthy layers red, orange, yellow, light green, and dark green leaves on top of a small pool, creating a fluid flow of dynamic natural colors. The astonishingly intense colors snatch the attention of any viewer and make one wonder, for just a moment, how the immensely beautiful scene came to be. Since it is made from natural materials, the viewer pairs the sculpture with nature, but

the uniquely expressed composition produces confusion. Is this really natural? Ultimately, Goldsworthy achieves his goal of helping people notice nature in a way that is different than they did before. His art possesses many deep meanings that he is just waiting for people to explore. Goldsworthy explains that for him, “art has to be more than shock. I would rather subvert things, try to make people look at them differently” (Brunton 2).

Death, renewal, and time are large themes in Goldsworthy’s art. Time is the ultimate link between all beings on earth. Time strings together all of humanity, regardless of ethnicity or culture, and it is a major factor that exists in nature as well. Everything is born from something else, exists, and then dies or is destroyed when it is time. Goldsworthy makes his audience realize this truth by making ephemeral works. His art is short-lived, and he captures every moment of his art’s changing and gradual demise. For all his works he takes a series of pictures that depict their transformations due to the changing world around them. In the case of *River* (see note no.3), as well as all his other works, Goldsworthy takes pictures of the sculptures’ gradual destructions. His subtle obsession with death and rebirth only adds to the deep symbolic meanings of his works and the different ways he wants his viewers to see nature. He explains that, “each work grows, stays, decays--integral parts of a cycle which the photograph shows at its height, marking the moment when the work is most alive. There is an intensity about a work at its peak that I hope is expressed in the image. Process and decay are implicit” (Goldsworthy qtd. in Witcombe 1). Another example of Goldsworthy's documentation of ephemeral change can be seen in his photographs of *Végétal*.<sup>2</sup> This was a performance piece about the significance of change and the fleeting characteristics of time. Goldsworthy collaborated with choreographer Régine Chopinot and her company, Ballet Atlantique, to bring the rhythms of nature and the ideas of movement and time to modern theatre. *Végétal* consists of five parts, in which the dance includes changing sculptures using nothing but natural materials, and the dance moves fluctuate between choreographed and random. Goldsworthy took a series of pictures recording the passage of sticks thrown into the air, so that the “intensity of the gestural act of creation is only apparent momentarily, recorded through processes of generation, regeneration, and decay” (Krug 2).

I respond to dance more than other forms of theatre. Dance is more sculptural. It deals with the stuff of the body, more abstract, the essence of movement. My work is a way of releasing an energy, which is there. Régine releases movement. Appearing as if an external force is making the movement - somehow over-riding the mind of the dance, it makes control. That for me is the essence of movement. (Goldsworthy qtd. in Hiem 1)



**Figure 3: Andy Goldsworthy, *Black Earth / White Clay / Granite Boulder / Martha's Vineyard / 2 August 2005*, 2005**

© Andy Goldsworthy  
 Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York

The works' temporary lives cause the audience to put petty problems into the right perspective. In *Sand Stone* (see Fig. 3), Goldsworthy worked patterns of sand on a rock by the shore. When the tide came in, the pattern was washed away; the artist would then create a new, different sand pattern on the same rock. He did this repeatedly, and took a series of pictures to represent the temporary changes and how everything is created, lives, and is destroyed in a cycle. As his art gently disrupts the normal environment with the addition of a pattern or burst of color that may not naturally happen, in only a few hours or days the art is destroyed by the natural causes around it. *Elm* (See Fig. 4) is another work that shines because of its temporary characteristic. The



**Figure 4: Andy Goldsworthy *Leaves wrapped around several sticks/Joined*, October 12, 1999  
© Andy Goldsworthy  
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York**

last yellow leaves of fall are wrapped around a branch, held only by water, and laid in a line on the brown, leaf-covered ground. Over a period of two weeks, the prominent yellow line of leaves and branches fades into the same brown, leaf-covered background, until it blends in entirely. This ever-changing quality of nature makes one realize the overall ephemeral quality of life. With his works, it is almost as if Goldsworthy feels the need to show us that we are also here for only a short time and that we will someday perish as well. He seems to be reminding us that we need to stop and enjoy the beauty of our lives before it's too late because change is inevitable. As proposed by Goldsworthy in Jori Finkel's article, *Work Stands Out Before It Blends In*, "we're always wanting to hold onto things as they are...but that's not the nature of life or things, is it?" (Goldsworthy in Finkel).

Another assumption that we tend to make can become one of our biggest downfalls as a society. For the most part, especially in our Western society, humans have developed a cultural human-centered assumption, according to which we are invincible and prestigious and the environment is inferior. What brought out these ideas? In all ridiculousness, is it really only because we are the top of the food chain? Goldsworthy offers beauty and understanding through his works that show how people should realize nature's immense impact on our lives. Nature was here first, and although certain parts of it die, they are soon reborn and blossom again. Goldsworthy expresses nature's

potent existence and sturdiness through some of his more permanent works. In *Stone Stack*,<sup>5</sup> Goldsworthy creates a stack of stones over six feet tall on the shore of Carrick Bay. Photographed over several days, the tower of rocks does not fall. Incoming tide after incoming tide, the stack stays strong day and night. This shows that nature is strong and powerful, something that actually cannot be controlled. As Goldsworthy states about his larger, longer-lasting works, “By working large, I am not trying to dominate nature. If people feel small in relation to a work, they should not assume that there is an intention to make nature itself small. If anything, I am giving nature a more powerful presence in the mass of earth, stone, wood that I use. I do not change the underlying processes of growth, and nature's grip is tightened on the site that I have worked” (Goldsworthy qtd. in Krug 2).



**Figure 5: Andy Goldsworthy  
Mid west cairn, 2001. Limestone.  
Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa  
© Andy Goldsworthy  
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York**

Goldsworthy relays this concept in the *Three Cairns* project (Fig. 5) that was constructed in the United States from 2001 to 2002. The Midwest, and its association with the two coasts, fascinated Goldsworthy. He pictured an imaginary line that branched out from the Midwest and cut across the entire continent. At each point, West coast, East coast, and Midwest, he built an Iowa limestone cairn that marked a certain place of significance. Goldsworthy chose to structure cairns for what they have always represented. Cairns are stone structures that identify a place of great importance.

Usually, the stones forming the structures are held together by only their own weight. Goldsworthy first began constructing the *East Coast Cairn* on November 2, 2001. It was built outside of the Neuberger Museum of Art in New York, where neither Goldsworthy nor his assistants were ready for the experience or allegorical influence of the *Three Cairns* (Fig. 5). “Life, death, and regeneration, the underlying principles of Goldsworthy’s art, took on profound and unexpected new meaning with the unimaginable events of September 11, 2001; for Andy the meaning was personal as well, for his father had recently died” (Lubowsky 112). The *West Coast Cairn* was constructed outside of the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art in La Jolla, California. The limestone’s history, though from Iowa, dates back so far that it sustains



**Figure 6: Andy Goldsworthy**  
*Sandstone Cairn / To Mark Growth and Decay / In Bracken / Scaur Water,*  
*Dumfriesshire, April 1999*  
© Andy Goldsworthy  
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York

fossilized remains of oceanic creatures. This connection of life through time intrigued Goldsworthy, especially since the rock was originally excavated in the Midwest, very far from the oceanic scene of California. Lastly, the *Midwest Cairn* was built in Greenwood Park behind the Des Moines Art Center in 2002. The sculpture, being the center of the continent-wide piece, consists of three massive block-like walls positioned to the east, west and south of the middle cairn.

Each wall has a teardrop-shaped cavity, specifically crafted to house one of the cairns in the project. Approaching the work, choosing a wall, and then stepping inside the cavity, one experiences a remarkable sense of the place coming together...the artist's use of spatial and temporal connections to indicate a place that, in contrast to other places, becomes a structural center or home by virtue of the immaterial relations of space and time set up in the work. (Lubowsky 120)

*Three Cairns* became Goldsworthy's largest project in the western hemisphere and successfully linked the continent with the concept of time and space and how the environment impacts our perceptions of "home" and locality.

Goldsworthy's infatuation with cairns did not begin with *Three Cairns*. *Penpont Cairn* (see Fig. 6) is a sculpture that was created in the countryside of Penpont, Dumfriesshire. It consists of hundreds of stones, which Goldsworthy pieced together to resurrect an egg-shaped sculpture. The base of the sculpture was set in 1999 and left to be built upon in 2000. Goldsworthy liked the idea of "one year supporting and giving foundation to the next as an expression of continuity and connection between two centuries" (Goldsworthy qtd in Lubowsky 6). After about a month, the cairn was finished. It stands proudly on the brow of the hill overlooking countryside. This sturdy stone masterpiece remains as a reminder of the power, strength, and importance of nature's impact. It will outlive us, so as a species we could only benefit from learning to appreciate nature and realizing the beauty and pureness of it.

Andy Goldsworthy's art is quite unique in the fact that it is one hundred percent sustainable and made of ordinary materials. David Bourdon said, "Goldsworthy's ingeniously crafted work is immensely appealing to viewers because it reawakens a childlike joy in the unexpected metamorphoses of commonplace materials" (121). He uses his intense passion for nature to relay a sense of understanding about the environment that surrounds us; the one that holds us, nurtures us, and makes our lives possible. His ingenious ability to construct line, color, and shape grabs the viewer's attention and forcefully beckons the viewer to ponder the piece deeply. Life, death, renewal, and time are just some of Goldsworthy's most prevalent themes. In nature, and in life in general, everything is born, lives, and then must expire. This is a cycle that is only bonded by time. Time, in turn, connects all living things. We are forever connected to nature, and nature is infinitely connected to us. Goldsworthy cherishes this philosophy and expresses it to the world through many of his works. The ephemeral

quality of his pieces is what gives his art the immense impact that it has. It forces one to realize that change is inevitable. Life cannot continue without birth, death, and change.

Because we are so deeply bonded to nature, Goldsworthy seems to convey valuable information as to how we should treat the environment that we inhabit. Although this may not be one of his intentional messages, Goldsworthy seems to suggest a mentality that humans could be more respectful to nature and everything it has given us. Much like Goldsworthy's ephemeral designs, we should have the same impact on nature. When we arrive we should live our lives, but after we are gone the world should be able to go back to the way it was before. Time links humans and nature. Without this bond, both would cease to exist. So we could all benefit from noticing the magic of nature and treating it with more appreciation.

Although many of Goldsworthy's works only last a couple of days, if not a couple of hours, the impact of their symbolisms and meanings should be recognized. As Goldsworthy states, "At its most successful, my 'touch' looks into the heart of nature; most days I don't even get close. These things are all part of a transient process that I cannot understand unless my touch is also transient--only in this way can the cycle remain unbroken and the process be complete" (Goldsworthy qtd. in Witcombe 1). Time interconnects all humans to the environment: the magic aspect of it, as expressed through Goldsworthy's art, keeps the artist and the viewers endlessly in awe.

### Note:

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- <sup>1</sup> Sheri Binkly is an Honors Sophomore student at SDSU. The paper's main focus on the visual element, time and how it connects the artist, nature, and humans, represents this student's research contribution to the ARTH 100 Art Appreciation course.
- <sup>2</sup> We wish to express our sincere gratitude to Andy Goldsworthy and Galerie Lelong, for their generous contribution of all the illustrations that accompany this text: in particular, our appreciation to the gallery's archivist, Hannah Adkins, who has extensively assisted us through the process, and to Jill Hollis.
- <sup>3</sup> *River*, 2003, by Andy Goldsworthy is illustrated in *Passage*: pg. 18.
- <sup>4</sup> *Sticks Stacked*, 1992, by Andy Goldsworthy is illustrated in *Passage*: pg. 30.
- <sup>5</sup> *Stone Stack*, 1996, by Andy Goldsworthy is illustrated in *Passage*: pg. 44-47.
- <sup>2</sup> *Végétal*, 1995, originated as a collaboration between the artist Andy Goldsworthy and the choreographer Régine Chopinot and her company Ballet Atlantique. More information about this performance on:  
<http://greenmuseum.org/c/enterchange/artists/ballet/>

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