

**Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists**  
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**Lecture - 15**  
**Outdoor Sculpture & Public Art**

Welcome viewers to MOOC's online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art. This is the last lecture of the third week dedicated to the study of modern sculpture. And in this lecture today we will be looking at the phenomenon of outdoor sculpture and public art.

Now, outdoor sculpture or having sculpture outside a building or a gallery it is nothing very new. We have seen that happening in the ancient period; we have seen that happening in the medieval period, in gothic period, in renaissance period. So, what is new about having sculpture outside in the modern art? That is what we are going to see today. First of all public sculpture or outdoor sculpture in the traditional art with usually more often than not happen to be commissioned art they were commissioned by the patron, either by the church authority or by a rich person who wanted to have what we call a statue.

So, usually in ancient times in medieval time or generally speaking in the traditional art, outdoor sculpture got equated with the statue or the idea of a monument, but I think the first sculpture to have ever thought of having, installing a sculpture completely outside any building or gallery right in the heart of nature was Henry Moore.

In fact, some of the sculptures by Rodin can also be seen installed outside. But it is not so site specific; I mean Rodin's huge outdoor sculptures could be placed in another location as well. They can be moved to some other place, without really disturbing the essence of that sculpture. But in case of Henry Moore, if Henry Moore has decided to install his famous sculpture called the king and the queen on a small hillock, somewhere in north England. In a beautiful natural setup, I am sure that he had that setting in his mind, not only when he was making the sculpture, but also when he was conceptualizing this sculpture.

In that sense a new idea came into being in the history of modern sculpture, to give a new character to the outdoor sculpture and that idea is called site specific outdoor sculpture. Apart from that there are quite a few variations evident from the whole practice of outdoor sculpture and public art.

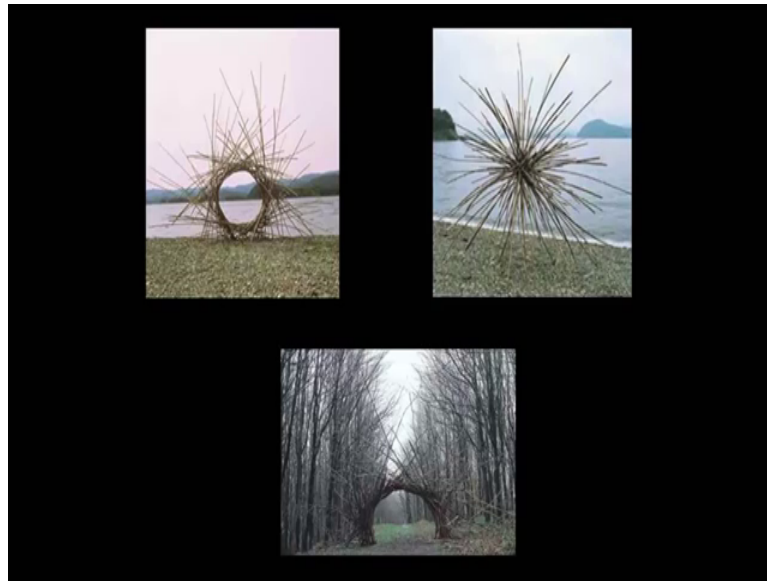
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For example if people like Rodin or Henry Moore. They have always thought about this sculpture in terms of a very permanent and durable material.

We also have something like this not only that the location is itself nature very raw and almost primordial nature, but look at the material with which this particular construction has been made, the material itself has been derived from nature like 2 eggs or tree branches, and hence the durability of the work is in question.

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It is quite favorite practice now even to the amongst many sculptors all over the world to create a work of art out of the materials available in nature and leave the work in nature. So, it is not only about impermanence of the material, it is also about this whole idea that the work itself may disappear after sometime. The work itself is subject to decay, and the work is certainly having an expiry date of it is own. But what is important apart from this temporariness of these works is the fact that these artists in contrast to constructivist and all or minimalist, these artists who are working outdoor making outdoor sculptures with natural materials, they are opposed to any material that is either prefabricated or a byproduct of industrial growth.

So, you have the work in nature you leave the work in nature, and you have make the work with materials collected from nature.

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Like this one as well or this one.

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Now, throughout the world if you look at the contemporary art scenario, not only of Europe or America, but if you look at the global art scenario, because of the recent consciousness regarding environment and nature, because of this very urgent idea to make art ecofriendly and nature friendly. Many artists all over the world now have stopped using industrial materials, and exploring the possibilities of making art works, they do not even call or use the term sculpture. They are calling it art works.

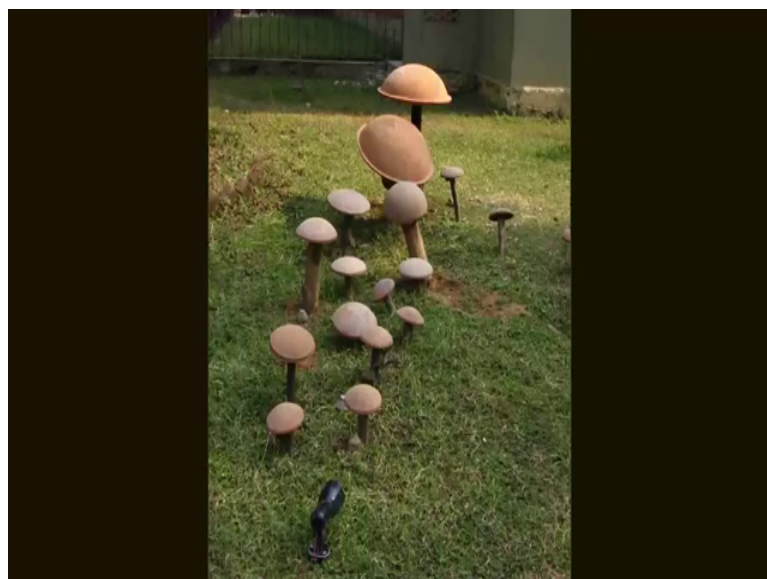
So, they are looking at the possibilities of making art works out of natural materials, without destroying the nature, without inflicting any damage on the nature.

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And then you also have this very user friendly kind of sculptures, but located in nature or maybe in a park. Where once again like Alexander Calder's works this sculptures do not have any serious or overloading conceptual or physical and philosophical content. They are light hearted, but at the same time they are also a kind of statement about how one released once if with nature through a work of art like this or like this.

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These are; obviously, not real mushrooms, they are like images of mushrooms created with again earth the materials like clay, and installed in a way that the work, almost submits itself to the nature to the ground. And please note that works of this kind do not have a rather do not need to have any pedestal. That is also very interesting they are directly rooted or installed in the ground. And when you have a huge kind of art work right on the earth itself, that kind of work is not only sites specific it is also called land art.

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Look at this one; somebody has simply collected pebbles of various kinds of various shapes, and arranged the pebbles in a way that they create a visual or visually delightful form. And if you look at the tail portion of the construction, you will see how the density of the arrangement of the pebbles is getting reduced, to the extent that it evokes a feeling that you are letting the pebbles go back to the nature from where it came from.

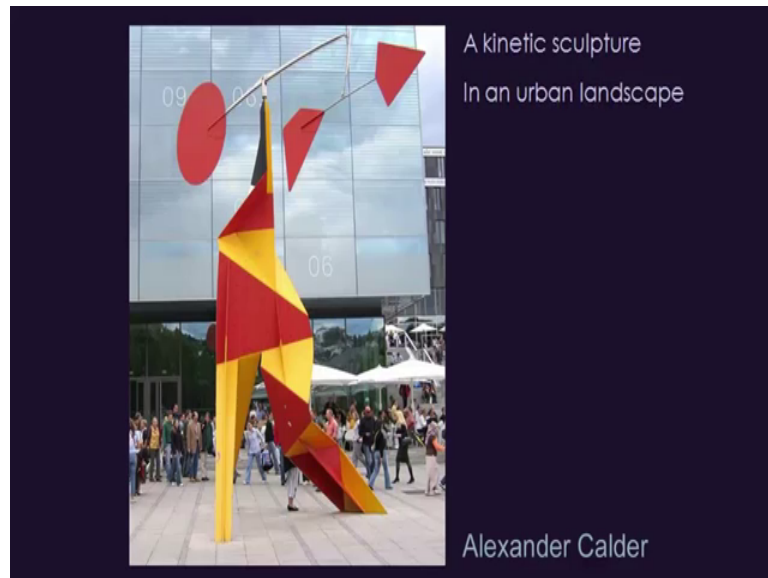
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So, there is a continuous attempt at relating the outdoor sculptures located in nature with the nature itself. In that sense in modern art and contemporary art artists who are working in nature they are not using nature only as a context, but they are trying to give back the work to the nature.

Now on the other hand we have a wonderful practice in outdoor sculptures in an urban situation, in the context of a city space. Like this and of course, Alexander Calder should be remembered once again for having installed some most beautiful outdoor sculptures in an urban space, like this one.

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So, Alexander Calder's works one feels is very suitable in a given situation like this in an urban space, it could be also looking very wonderful in the natural space, but going by the present day kind of approach to art works in nature, any kind of use of industrial materials would come under severe criticism.

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You also have this kind of outdoor sculptures which are simply huge enlargements of extremely ordinary and common objects like a clip or a feather cock. But once that hugely enlarged and magnified in scale and installed in a particular place they assume

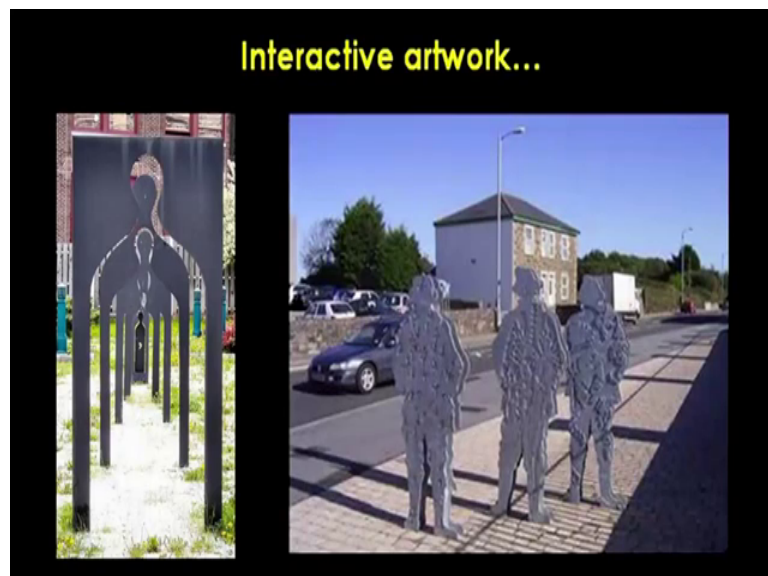
neither the status of a sculptural not the status of a monument, but an art work which is delightful. Delightful not in the derogatory sense not in a superficial sense, but significantly the sense of delight in sculpture, was something that many early 20th century modern artists were not interested in.

If you look at the works by Giacometti once again definitely his works are not delightful, his works are supposed to evoke a sense of anxiety, but these works are supposed to evoke a sense of delight and fun like this one.

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As well some of these outdoors sculptures our art works are meant to be interactive, I mean it is not just to be seen, but these works are to be interacted with in terms of either walking through the sculpture, or passing by or touching or maybe even using the sculptures as functional objects like furnitures or benches to sit on, and this is how in the public space Like in a city square, or in a railway platform or in front of a shopping mall.

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Sculptures and particularly figurative sculptures becomes the companions, your friends a human companion. And this once again extends the functional value of sculpture, when you see them in the public space.

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So, outdoor works and public arts they have some functions some values which are beyond their immediate aesthetic acting. And particularly when you think of that how common people and public get engaged with a sculptural like this. Then of course, we realize that how the whole definition of sculpture is getting expanded is having different layers of usability, and at the same time it is becoming more and more appealing to a large number of people, irrespective of whether you are framed in looking at art or not.

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So, a sculpture of this kind, in a city square we not have a deep and intense conceptual content, but it can be a simply a delightful structure a delightful object to look at and thereby enhancing the visual environment of and otherwise dull and monotonous cityscape.

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Look at how with 100s of umbrellas hanging on the top can change the environment below of a pathway in a city.

So, already we have seen how the idea of sculpture has expanded itself, how the idea of sculpture has redefined itself, not only by adding an experimenting with new materials, but also by allowing a new concept of sculpture which cannot be called the sculpture anymore, but it is so fluid in terms of its original content, that we do not call it a sculpture, but we do not feel hesitant to call it an art work.

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Alexander Calder once again one more; now this is an interesting what where the work seems to have got integrated with nature, despite the fact that this parts in this work in

this sculpture are made out of steel or industrial product. Yet visually it does not really disturb the natural environment so that is again a possibility.

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Then somebody like crystal made this famously known as valley curtain in Colorado USA in 1972 literally hanging a huge curtain across a valley.

So, the point now is not to debate on whether it can be called a sculpture or not, the point is whether you can accept it is as a work of art or not. If you can not you should have your argument why it is not, if you can you still you have to say why you think it could be considered as a work of art and why history of art has accepted Christos works like this.

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This valley curtain or christo and raw Claude it is a collaborative work between them christo with raw Claude with a huge installation of 100s of umbrellas in California tejon ranch in they made this in 1991 and it was a huge project and once again of course, you are looking at it if you are trying to think of this work and discussing this work from the point of view of the traditional notion of what is sculpture should be, in this work they are certainly not going to satisfy you, but along with the history of modern art, if we are able to make ourselves and our perceptual ability as flexible as the art work itself.

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If we are to if we are able to kind of redefine our own expectations from an art work, I am sure a work like this by christo will surely not only satisfy us, but will enable us to enjoy more different kinds of art works, which are absolutely different from the typical art works that we see inside a gallery or inside a traditional building.

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So, conceptually speaking and of course, materially sculpture or the idea of a work of art has gone through some radical changes in mid 20th century. For example, when christo wraps up this whole building called Reichstag in Berlin, it is this wrapping of a building

this old traditional building which is a center of the power German power. It still became a work of art for a few days or a few weeks as long as it was there, and 100s and 1000s of people came to see also because it was a spectacular site.

And definitely when somebody wraps up, a whole huge government and official building with synthetic cloth and then of course, we can not say that he is creating a sculpture, but definitely he is creating a work of art. And if you still not happy with this word artwork, let us say christo is creating a new visual statement. And definitely it is contextual, and definitely it created a huge visual impact on the viewers who came to see that spectacular.

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#### Outdoor sculptures one or many of the following features:

1. Permanently installed in a specific site. (Also known as site-specific sculptures)
2. Integrally related with nature and earth; and hence this kind of sculptures are subject to the changes in nature. (Also known as Land Art)
3. Temporary works for a limited period of time. Non-permanent mediums are used intentionally to ensure its short life.
4. Deliberately made non-permanent. Sculptures thus made are left to decay, disintegrate and disappear eventually.
5. Interactive, playfull and light-hearted to engage the public without any conceptual baggage.

Now, outdoor sculptures how will have usually one or many of these following features. Number one, they might be permanently installed in a specific site also known as site specific sculpture. Outdoor sculptures may be integrally related with nature and earth, and hence these kinds of sculptures are subject to the changes in nature. In fact, they are also known as land art, third temporary works for a limited period of time. When to a such works are happening now all over the world in outdoor or in public space, where a certain work of art or a sculpture is kept only for a few days.

Once it is removed not only the context, but even the relevance of that work of art is lost. In that case we cannot call them a sculpture or cannot also have them a very general term

like art work, we use a different terminology for that kind of work and it is called installation work.

So, the temporary works for a limited period of time, where non permanent mediums are used intentionally to ensure it is short life. There are many public art and outdoor works, which are deliberately made nonpermanent. Sculptures thus made a left to decay disintegrate and disappear eventually. Fifth there are lot of outdoor works which are made interactive, where playfulness and a light hearted quality is the strong character of this works, mainly to engage the public freely without any conceptual or physical baggage.

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So, you can see a sculpture like this where the inner form is basically made out of maybe clay or earth or stone, but what is important here is that the artist allow the artist allows the moss to grow over the sculpture. And this is when nature takes over, because you can not control that. And the artists would not like to control the growth and spread of the moss on this sculpture.

So, if your course sculpture is permanent and fixed, then what is happening over this sculpture is unpredictable, is nonpermanent, it is changeable and it will provide new look to this sculptured with the changes in season.

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And lastly we may look at a wonderful attempt at which has become very famous and a very recent work which happened just 3 years back in Birmingham, where a Brazilian sculptor Nele Azevedo arranged 5000 little ice figurines on the steps of Chamberlain Square in Birmingham, England, to remember the men and women lost during World War 1, including the civilians. The melting, ghostly figures placed by volunteers created a truly haunting image, and they were crowned by a red figure that seemed to drip a trail of blood down the steps.

So, first of all the very idea to use ice as your medium for sculpture is extremely significant in the context of this work; not that ice sculpted is something new, for many years ice sculpture and competitions of ice sculpture is happening in many places in the world like China and other places. There are artists all over the world who are extremely kind of skillful in doing ice sculpture, but for the once again ice is visually very different medium to work with creating a very different translucent and a transparent effect.

So, it is basically a technical and visual aspect of ice that appeals many sculptors, but what Nele Azevedo the Brazilian sculptor is doing here is she is exploring the very quality of ice the tendency of ice to melt away, once it is left in normal temperature.

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And that is what began to happen with her ice figurines. The sculptures began to melt away, the way 100s and 1000s of soldiers and civilians simply disappeared from this earth due to world war and generally speaking human violence and brutality.

So, this is a very interesting piece of work, where not only the context is public, but also the medium is ephemeral. Also it is almost like a performance that it happens over a period of time, and once all the figures get melted away the sculpture is over like this.

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And before it gets completely over what you see here are mutilated, deformed and decaying bodies.

Thank you.