Art Comparative Study

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This comparative study examines three artists’ artworks including Chris Jordan’s “Unsinkable”, Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s “Surrounded Islands” and Andy Goldsworthy’s land art. The main theme explored is the impact of our environment and surroundings.

Artwork Name: Cigarette Butts
Artist Name: Chris Jordan
Year: 2013

Artwork Name: Surrounded Islands
Artist Name: Christo and Jeanne-Claude
Year: 1983

“Untitled” Landscape Art
Artist Name: Andy Goldsworthy
Year: unknown
Analysis of “Cigarette Butts” by Chris Jordan

As an contemporary artist and photographer born in the US, Chris Jordan’s artworks involves a range of art types. Most of them are photographs or digital based montage. They are conceptual artworks that criticize or reflect the environmental and social problems in the US and around the world. In particular, the impact of statistics is what he discuss and focus on. He changes the abstract statistics by visualizing them into artworks, which enhances the impact on the audience.

“Cigarette Butts” is one of Chris Jordan’s project called “Running the Numbers”. This is a digital montage built up of 139,000 cigarette butts prints. The number of cigarette butts prints he uses is equal to the number of cigarette smoked and thrown per 15 seconds in the US. By visualizing the number and using them to create a collage depicting a deep forest, the cigarette butts contrasts with the forest. This juxtaposition creates a strong irony and in the meantime a strong impact to the audience that conveys visually the meaning of how many trees and forests people are taking away to generate more cigarettes that not only consumes the wood source, but also emit green house gases.

Although the cigarette butts are digital images taken by Chris Jordan and the collage is created digitally, if zoom in, there is a series of different cigarette photos that shows different color and shapes. The pattern and color that creates the overall collage is also important in creating a dull and dim tone of the forest, which again emphasizes the theme on criticizing this large amount of cigarette production and consumption in the US. By using this technique, Chris Jordan effectively convey and strengthen his idea by transferring the abstract concept number into concretized actual cigarette in this artwork.
Significance of “Cigarette Butts” by Chris Jordan

The social background of “Cigarette Butts”

As an American artist, Chris Jordan is very aware of the social and environmental issues happened in the US. In his project, “Running the numbers”, he explored different issues and mostly focusing on environmental issues in the US. This cannot be separated from the 21st century that has increase the awareness of environmental impacts human activities have caused. Meanwhile, even though awareness have been raised in news and main stream medias and the abstract statistics about the issues have been so abundant in this time with the development of technology and internet, there is still little change in people’s living style to solve the issues. This is partially because the numbers and facts are seemed too far away from people’s life and it is probably hard for people to really understand the significance of these numbers and facts.

To its audience, this conceptual art can be very impactful as cigarette is a very common thing used in people’s life. But they might not be aware of the amount of cigarette consumed everyday every second, which is so massive that is causing environmental issues, health issues and other potential issues. This artwork also reflect the lack of awareness of the environmental impact of over consumption. This is the reality where people are not fully aware of at the time it is created. This artwork effectively reflect the reality and therefore stimulates the audience with different experiences to understand the reality and make changes to reduce the consumption and waste.
Audience

Audience's World

“Cigarette Butts” is created in 2013. As the world technology and people’s life quality increases, consumption of everyday goods increases massively in the US and also other developed or developing countries. Therefore, this artwork may be interpreted as an artwork revealing the massive consumption of cigarette and the waste comes after in the US.

Artist’s World

Chris Jordan was based in Seattle, Washington. The mass waste produced and consumerism in the US has been increased drastically as the development and industrialization in recent decades caused the change of people’s wasteful living style without thinking about the consequences. Therefore as an US citizen, Jordan is aware of this issue and made the research of the incredible statistics. He wanted to create the impact of these numbers visually to the audience that drives him to create this series of artwork.

Artist

Chris Jordan’s project “Running the Numbers” discusses the social issues in American contemporary culture. Each artwork in the series portrays a specific quantity. In “Cigarette Butts”, he uses 139,000 cigarette butts photos to represent the number of cigarette butts smoked and thrown away every 15 seconds in the US. By creating a digital montage with the cigarette butts, he hopes that artworks like “Cigarette Butts” that visually represents a quantity could be more effective than the abstract and raw numbers found in newspaper and scientific papers. As it is usually hard for audience to connect with and understand the meaning of using 139,000 cigarette butts every 15 seconds.

Jordan’s project visually explored the statistics that measures the US society. His concerns to the environmental issues triggered him to do these series of artworks by assembling photographs into large detailed prints. He does this to raise questions to the audience of our responsibility as an citizen, a human in this overwhelming consumption of resource and energy from the earth.
When only considering the impressive scale of Surrounded Islands, it is already an impactful artwork. Christo and Jeanne-Claude use the natural landscape as their canvas, fabric as their paint to paint their “painting”. The fluorescent pink color of the fabric harmoniously contrasted to the tropical vegetation on the islands, Miami’s turquoise-blue ocean and cerulean blue sky, which linked to Miami’s Latin aesthetic. This installation had lasted for two weeks that can be viewed from the air, ocean and causeway. As Christo & Jeanne-Claude were always working with fabric and the wrapping technique to discuss the effect of revealed or hidden, the bold bright borders of the islands in Miami are used to intensify the islands’ shapes, and reveal the relationship between the islands, their shapes, and their surrounding environment as well. It had lighten up Miami’s coastline at the time when Miami was in its dark ages with economic decline, high crime rate and deteriorating tourism. Christo says that the “Surrounded Islands” was an expression of and a tribute to the ways in which the people of Miami live between land and water. The artistic feature of the installation brings people’s attention to the beauty of the environment they live in. Moreover, the short amount time this installation lasted enhanced its fragility. It is also one of the feature of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s artworks. This temporary nature of their artworks increases their uniqueness and preciousness.
In 1983, Miami was experiencing its dark history where it had a high crime rate and cocaine industry. Due to the lack of public security, it was dangerous for people to live there and therefore Miami also had a decrease in tourism. Therefore to the audience that time, the “Surrounded Islands” was an installation that attracted people’s interest back to Miami and brought them light and enjoyment to the life in Miami.

Christo & Jeanne-Claude is a famous artist duo for their large-scale installations using fabric. They were a married couple and both born in 1935. Christo was born in Bulgaria and had classical art education in Sofia and Vienna. Nevertheless, his unconventional art style was possibly due to influence of the socialist country he lived in as they often requires hundreds to thousands people and high cost to complete the artworks, but still free to the audience. Their unconventional art style is also a way of expressing their unique identity and as they called it “scream of freedom”, their artworks also contributes to artistic freedom in the late nineteenth century.

The “Surrounded Islands” was a large-scale project in Miami. At the time it was completed, this enormous installation mobilized hundreds of news media people from the US and abroad. It almost changed the installation into a media event that attracted lots of people to come to see this installation. The people’s impression for the eleven islands were changed fully that they treated them as one of the representatives of beauty of Miami rather than eleven man-made islands. Moreover, the built of this installation also triggered people’s thinking about their special relationship to land and water.

The “Surrounded Islands” as one of the large-scale installations reflecting this modern artist duo’s “scream of freedom” expressed the artists’ purpose of representing Miami and the way people in Miami lived, between land and water. The use of luminous pink color gives an impression of exotic flowers found in tropical rainforests. It was also an “Latin” color to represent the “Latinity” of Miami to Chris. Moreover, it is a color that is so distinctive from the color of Miami’s blues. Besides, this project emphasizes the beauty generated by the clash of nature and human creatures.
At the time the “Surrounded Islands” was completed in 1983, it was in Miami’s black history due to its high crime rate, drug industry and deterioration in economic. People consider Miami as a very dangerous place to live. However, the completion of “Surrounded Islands” had brought people’s attention back to Miami that thousands of media and television people from US and even outside US went to Miami to look at this massive installation from the helicopter in the sky, the boat on the water or causeway on the land.

This installation is in a way representing Miami with the use of bright pink indicating the flowers in tropical rainforest. Christo also wants to show a link between land and water by extending the outline of the islands with the polypropylene fabric and the pink color to add on the contrast with the blue ocean. Therefore although this temporary installation only lasted for two weeks, it caused positive influence on people living in Miami that made them reconsider the environment they live in.

This installation is an artwork that is made based on the environment. It intensifies the beauty and the large scale of the environment we live in. Moreover, except for the pleasure and positive influence it brought to people’s life, it also clean up the environment around the place during the art making process. During the preparation time, Christo’s team removed 40 tones of garbage including refrigerator doors, tires and an abandoned boat. Hence on another perspective, this installation also reveals the ocean garbage issue started earlier than 1983. The fact that the issue is still not solved and even getting worse over the years is something people should consider about. Therefore it not only raised environmental awareness in a sense of people’s interaction with the environment but also the environmental issues caused by human activities.

In general, this is an artwork that can be interpreted in different ways depending on the perspective people took to see this artwork. Therefore it is a very interactive installation that needed people’s reaction to add value to it.
**Connection to Environment**

As it is a piece of land art, it cannot be complete without its interaction with the environment. By locating on the earth surrounded with falling leaves in a forest, the curved shape of this land art resembles a snake quietly laying on the earth or a stream flowing in the forest. On the other hand, the shape and color of this land art contrast with the surroundings. Although the whole artwork is made by leaves found in the area, the contrast created by Goldsworthy discussed the potential of nature and shows a clash between artificial and natural beauty.

**BACKGROUND**

Andy Goldsworthy is an British environmental artist born in Cheshire in 1956 and raised in Yorkshire. He is one of the most famous artists in the land art movement. Except for artworks on display or exhibition, Goldsworthy have produced a great numbers of land art mainly in the UK. His unconventional land arts, sculptures and installations are mostly made purely by things he found in nature in the area he built the work. Therefore the feature of his land arts is that they are mostly fragile and temporary being exposed in the nature. Although they are created by Goldsworthy as pieces of art different from the nature, from certain aspects it is the interaction between the land art and the environment around creates the art as a whole.

When looking at the artwork separately as shown on the right, the main features of this land art is the use of color pattern and shape. The shape of this land art is an irregular curve. This type of shape is regularly used in Goldsworthy's works, which indicates a flow of life in nature. With the use of the medium leaves to create the first layer of curve, the outline of the curve had an uneven zig-zag pattern, which contrast with the smooth line in the middle as the second layer also created by leaves but was ripped into shapes he wanted. Different from the first layer that seemed to be more natural, the second layer intensifies the sense of artificial artwork that differs from the nature, which makes it more artistic and stand out from the environment around. The color used in this land art is also important in indicating the sense of life. The gradual change in color of the leaves from green to golden yellow represents the change of a leaf’s life across the time. With the opposite gradual color change on the second layer, the color contrasts with the first layer. This forms a circle of color change and indicates the cycle of life in nature that changes and cycles continuously.
Applying McFee King’s Conceptual Framework to Andy Goldsworthy

**Audience**

Andy Goldsworthy’s series of photographs of his land arts raised the public awareness of human connection with nature. The main feature of his artworks, transience, is what affect people thinking of the natural processes. His ever-changing artworks along the passage of time from growing, staying and finally decaying represents the life cycle that applies to not only nature but also human beings living under the law of nature. This simple but impactful land art has demonstrate this process and made people aware of their connection to nature. Andy Goldsworthy as one of the leading artist in this art genre had also influenced other artists in this land art movement.

**Artist’s World**

Andy Goldsworthy was grown up in Yorkshire farm. His farming experiences during the growing of life(crops) and witnessing deaths in the farm had become one of the main inspiration that influence his art. The art college Bradford College of Art he went were located in a remote town in Lancaster, UK, where he learn find art and had more opportunities to work outdoors and develop his own art style in the meantime. These could be the vital reasons that caused him to have special connections to the nature that lead him to create these ephemeral sculptures and land arts.

**Artist**

Like other small temporary land arts and sculptures created by Andy Goldsworthy, this “untitled” land art reflects the mystery and beauty of nature. The falling leaves, decaying, returning back into earth and providing nutrients for new leaves to grow. Although these natural processes is always happening around us, people living in city with dead artificial buildings do not notice them. Goldsworthy wants to raise people’s awareness of nature by utilizing color, shape and other natural features of the materials he found in nature. While Goldsworthy also do large projects that are sometimes displayed indoors, these small land arts are fundamental to his artistic concept.
SIGNIFICANCE OF “UNTITLED” BY ANDY GOLDSWORTHY

In the late 1960s, land art movement emerged in the United States, which can be interpreted as an artistic protest against the “perceived artificiality, plastic aesthetics and ruthless commercialization of art”.

This untitled artwork was created by Andy Goldsworthy at about that time period. This artwork is influenced by the art movement at that time. Since it was formed by leaves found in the area Goldsworthy created the artwork, the feature of this artwork is that it cannot be removed to another place or stay unchanged for a long time period, the land art’s ephemeral nature criticizes the commercialized art market that put sculptures and artworks into galleries and museums for commercial uses. On the other hand, at the time between 1960s and 1980s, western countries like the US and European countries were developing drastically in industries and manufacturing. With the economy prosperity brought by the industrial development and urbanization, people focuses more on the development and thus have less connection and attention to the environment.

Due to Andy Goldsworthy’s experience in farm and rural areas, he were able to have more understanding of the beauty and value of environment. Therefore his land art, is to some extent his understanding of human relation to the nature. This land art raised people’s awareness of the importance of nature and people’s connection to nature, which was also reflected in the increase concern on protection of environment in the 1960s in America.

The aesthetic combination of artificiality and nature in this land art is a relatively new art form at the time in the world. Andy Goldsworthy as the leading artist in the UK in this unconventional art area then become important in the promotion of land art movement world widely where he had created land art in different countries including the US, Japan, Europe, Australia and Canada.

Although his land art is distinctively unnatural and out of order in nature, it is still created in a natural shape. In this untitled land art, the curve, meander and lines can all be found in nature. His art is therefore referring to natural phenomena that it is only the nature background that bring his art alive and unique. This is also one of the reason why it cannot be displayed in concrete artificial buildings.
Land art
Natural Material

Installation

Contrast of color: Turquoise Blue & Bright pink

Use of bright color & Natural shape

Artificial VS Nature

Reflect the role of trees in nature

Human Interaction with environment

Use of artificial material

Large scale

Provoke reconsideration of human relationship with nature

Digital Montage

Abstract Statistic

Cigarette Butts

Surrounded Island

Untitled
The three artworks, “Surrounded islands”, “Cigarette Butts” and the “Untitled” land art all discuss the interrelationships between human and nature.

In terms of artistic feature, the Untitled land art by Andy Goldsworthy and Surrounded Islands by Christo and Jeanne-Claude are similar in the location and medium. They are both created on the base of nature that cannot be moved and transported into a gallery, which are also temporary and fragile. Moreover, both two artworks uses a combination of two colors, light yellow and green, bright pink and blue, which is both artificial and natural.

Whereas Chris Jordan’s Cigarette Butts is more of a conceptual piece, it is closely related to the causes of environmental issues. The use of 139,000 cigarette butts thrown per 15 seconds in the US to build up a digital montage of a forest that links human activity to the cause of impact towards the environment. Moreover, the use of cigarette butts also determined the dark brown color and the dull tone, which emphasized on the negative impact of these cigarette butts towards environment. Therefore similar to the other two artworks, Cigarette Butts uses color to convey its meaning.

In terms of purpose and significance, the “Surrounded Island”, the “Untitled” land art and Cigarette Butts all have an emphasis on people’s interaction with nature. Where Christo and Jeanne-Claude suggests the connection of human inland and ocean in Miami, Andy Goldsworthy shows the relationship between the cycle of life in nature and human life and meanwhile criticizes the fact that people are being further and further away from nature. Chris Jordan also uses this digital montage to criticize environmental impact caused by human activities.
Although three artworks all focus on human relation to environment. Their emphasis are slightly different from one another with different medium used. The land art by Andy Goldsworthy uses things found in nature only, whereas the Surrounded Island and Cigarette butts use artificial fabric, images and technology to create artwork. Therefore from this perspective, the land art has a stronger link to the nature itself, whereas Surrounded Islands are balanced in between with a combination of artificial and natural medium and Cigarette Butts more inclined to be an conceptual piece that has less relation to nature in terms of its medium.

Another main difference among the three is that they are all created in different time period or under different social background. The ‘Untitled’ land art was created in the UK during 1970s, whereas Surrounded Island was created in 1983 in the US and Cigarette Butts was created in 2014 in the US. With different social background, the artists’ purpose and focus on creating these works are different as well as their art forms.

The scale of each artwork is also different. Andy Goldsworthy’s land art is created in a relatively small scale. This is because Andy Goldsworthy love to create these artworks and photograph them as small experiments for him to create large pieces. The scale of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s artworks are usually huge as they are created by wrapping fabric around the landscape to emphasize the landscape of nature or outline of buildings. Different from the first two artworks, Cigarette Butts is a digital artwork that consists 139,000 cigarette butts pictures, its scale is flexible that when zoom in, it allows the audience to see what creates the digital montage. When zoom out, the pictures create a forest that looks like an oil painting.
Significance to the theme

This comparative study focuses on exploring the impact of our environment and surroundings. The choice of these three artworks all have significant relation to this theme.

The “Untitled” land art created by Andy Goldsworthy is one of the leading works that represents the land art movement in the 1970s-1980s, which not only explore the human relation to nature by using pure natural material only, but also had a strong link that reflects the social phenomenon at that time. Due to the fast development, more people leave rural areas and move to urban areas, which leads to a further detachment from the environment. Therefore, this land art not only focus on the natural environment, but also reflects social issues, which is the societal environment.

The “Surrounded Islands” by Christo and Jeanne-Claude is a massive artwork that is created based on the islands in Miami. As the whole artwork is dependent on the natural landscape, the contrasting color of the fabric that stretches out the baseline of the islands emphasizes and enhance the impact of the environment to people in Miami and the world to raise attention on the environment around them.

Although “Cigarette Butts” is an artwork that has least interaction to the environment, the content has a strong relation to it. The 139,000 cigarette butts that are converted into a digital montage of forest strengthen the idea of the huge number of cigarette created and consumed in the US every 15 seconds, which can be linked to the massive consumption of paper and the amount smoke that is released every 15 second. Although cigarettes doesn’t seem to be directly linked to environment, our massive consumption of it can cause a huge negative impact on our environment. Hence the significance of this artwork to the theme is to raise people’s attention on the damage caused by human activities to the environment.
“Cigarette Butts” is a conceptual digital artwork that Chris Jordan made based on the consumption statistics in the US. The transformation of abstract statistics into concrete visual artwork successfully raises people's attention on the mass consumption and waste produced in the US. Therefore inspired by Chris Jordan’s idea and his project on the Pacific Ocean Garbage Patch, I want to raise awareness through my artwork on the impact of ocean garbage to the environment and marine lives. The emphasis on the relationship between environment and human activities is also shown in “Surrounded Island”, which inspired me to create a large scale sculpture to create further impact.

By visualizing the abstract statistics, Chris Jordan forms a forest out of a huge amount of cigarette butts photos. This also creates a duality that links the cigarette butts with the forests, which is what cigarette packages are made out of. Hence I use plastic bottle caps that represents the plastics to create one of the victims of plastic waste in the ocean, Albatross, which is endangered due to this issue. The scale I use is the real life scale of the bird, which is a huge bird. By linking the bottle caps and the albatross and showing the contrast between the huge scale of the bird and the fragility of this sculpture further emphasizes the impact of plastic garbage caused on marine lives.
Significance to my own work

The significance of this land art to my own work on metamorphosis is the shape and the meaning conveyed through this work. The curved pattern created by a gradual change in color of leaves shows the decay of life and the life circle as a rule of nature. This inspires me on my project on metamorphosis, which I interpret it as a change in life. I focus this topic in order to show the overall theme on the human impact on marine lives by showing the transformation of coral reefs from alive to death in the curved shape used in this “Untitled” land art. Through the shape, I can show a flow of change in life of the coral reefs, which links the human activities to the damage of environment as shown in a decrease of coral reefs due to pollution of ocean and climate change. The “Surrounded Island” is also an artwork that creates bonds between human and the ocean. By using contrasting color, the landscape is emphasized and it reflects people’s connection with the ocean. While there is little criticism in this piece, my own artwork focuses more on showing the negative impact of human activities to coral reefs and other marine lives.