

UNFINISHED EARTHWORKS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONAL ECOLOGIES:
A STATUS REPORT ON RODEN CRATER, CITY, AND STAR AXIS

by

CASEY B. CURRY

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Casey B. Curry

Title: Unfinished Earthworks and Their Institutional Ecologies: A Status Report on *Roden Crater, City, and Star Axis*

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of History of Art and Architecture by:

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Emily Eliza Scott | Chair |
| Maile Hutterer | Committee Member |
| Christoph Lindner | Committee Member |

and

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Janet Woodruff-Borden | Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School |
|-----------------------|--|

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Casey B. Curry

Master of Art

Department of History of Art and Architecture

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Title: Unfinished Earthworks and Their Institutional Ecologies: A Status Report on *Roden Crater*, *City*, and *Star Axis*

This thesis explores the institutional and financial histories of James Turrell's *Roden Crater* (1974-ongoing), Michael Heizer's *City* (1972-ongoing), and Charles Ross's *Star Axis* (1971-ongoing). It frames these works as second wave earthworks, or those deployed after the first wave of earthworks in 1969 and 1970, which nonetheless percolated from a similar art historical context. It mines published accounts of these projects and recently filed 990 forms to construct financial and institutional narratives that illustrate how these artists capitalize on the social and economic motivations of contemporary art patrons, and simultaneously, how patrons employ these artworks and their institutional structures to advance their own social and economic goals. By reframing these projects through an institutional lens and incorporating information from nonprofit financial documents, this study leverages the history of these projects to extend the history of earthworks and offer an entry point into the history and development of large-scale, contemporary arts funding.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Casey B. Curry

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Northeastern University, Boston

DEGREES AWARDED

Master of Arts, History of Art and Architecture, 2019, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2013, Northeastern University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Global Contemporary Art
Nonprofit Management
American Philanthropy

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, 2018-Present
Professional Development Chair, Art History Student Association, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, 2018-2019
Curatorial Intern, Disjecta Center for Contemporary Art, Portland, OR, 2018
Vice President, Board of Governors, Artmorpheus Inc., Boston, MA, 2016-2018
Program Manager, Gallery 263, Cambridge, MA, 2016-2017
Exhibitions Manager, New Art Center, Newton, MA, 2014-2017
Gallery Instructor, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, 2012-2017
Project Manager, Artmorpheus Inc., Boston, MA, 2013-2014
Visual Arts Programming Intern, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA, 2013
Contemporary Art Department Intern, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, 2012
Research and Scholars Center Intern, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC, 2011

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS

Travel Award, Department of Art History, University of Oregon, 2018

Summa Cum Laude, Northeastern University, 2013

“Huntington 100” outstanding scholars, 2013

Honorable Mention, Hanson Writing Prize, 2012

PUBLICATIONS

Curry, Casey B. (2019). “Neal Moignard.” In Exh. Cat. *University of Oregon Department of Art 2019 MFA Thesis Exhibition*.

“Gisela Colón’s Hope for a Plastic Future.” Researched [artwork] presented in Plastic Entanglements: Ecology, Aesthetics, Materials Organized by the Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State University, on view at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, September 22-December 30, 2018; excerpt of research paper selected for inclusion in JSMA’s exhibition gallery guide.

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“Reflecting on the Burden We Share.” *Big, Red & Shiny*, May 2017.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION: AN EARTHWORKS REVIVAL

I'm not really discontented. I'm just interested in exploring the apparatus I'm being threaded through ... this is an investigation of some kind of space control that's shot through with all kinds of social, economic, political implications. I don't see this as, you know, a complaint or anything ... I think that's all of a piece.

— Robert Smithson¹

In February 2018, billionaire CEO Jeff Bezos unveiled a new venture, *The Clock of the Long Now*: “We are building a 10,000 Year Clock. It's a special Clock, designed to be a symbol, an icon for long-term thinking.”² The monumental device, conceived of in the late 1980s by the inventor and computer scientist Danny Hillis, is currently being installed inside a mountain on Bezos' property in west Texas for a reported cost of forty-two million dollars (Figure 1). Once completed, the clock will tick once every year and “cuckoo” on the millennium. The novelty of the-richest-man-in-the-world's adopted pet project was widely reported by popular media outlets—but no one called the project what it arguably is: an earthwork.³

¹ Bruce Kurtz, “Conversation with Robert Smithson (1972),” in *Robert Smithson, the*

² Jeff Bezos, “Welcome to the 10,000 Year Clock Website,” *10,000 Year Clock*, (Web: Accessed April 20, 2019).

³ The story of Bezos' clock was picked up by *Fortune Magazine*, *The Wire*, and other business/tech-oriented media outlets, as well as *Smithsonian Magazine*, *BBC*, and *NBC*. For one example of how this story was framed, see Alasadir Wilkins, “Why Jeff Bezos's 10,000-Year Clock Project Is a Dream Decades in the Making,” *Inverse Magazine Online*, February 20, 2018, (Web: Accessed April 20, 2019). Regarding Bezos' status as richest man in the world, see *Forbes Magazine*, “Billionaires: The Richest People in the World,” March 5, 2019 (Web: Accessed May 16, 2019).

By earthwork, I am referring specifically to the genre of art that emerged in the late 1960s, largely heralded by American artist and writer, Robert Smithson, and his intrepid gallerist, patron, and friend, Virginia Dwan (Figure 2).⁴ However, as art historian Suzanne Boettger outlines in her book, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, “the phenomenon of Earthworks [is] an outcome of several artists’ thinking, an innovation in the conception of sculpture, in its cultural and political milieus, and critical reception.”⁵ Though no group of artists ever definitively claimed the designation or adopted an aesthetic program around the idea, the landmark exhibition, *Earth Works*, hosted at Dwan’s New York gallery in 1968, brought together ten artists, including Smithson, who helped give shape to the genre’s characteristics and priorities, and who collectively illustrate the definition of earthwork adopted in this study (Figure 3).⁶ All ten artists made direct manipulations of soil and terrain, but they also showed a marked interest in monumentality, in isolated or remote landscapes, and in natural rhythms and geologic time. For several of these artists, the desert served as an effective aesthetic trope capable of containing those interests and signaling that sculpture, having outgrown the

⁴ Artists, critics, curators, and historians have long debated exactly who or what should be attributed the “earthwork” designation. My understanding of the genre is indebted to definitions put forth by the following artists and scholars: Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Virginia Dwan, Suzanne Boettger, John Beardsley, Emily Eliza Scott, Miwon Kwon, Rosalind Krauss, Lucy Lippard, and Michael Kimmelman, among others.

⁵ Suzanne Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 24.

⁶ Boettger associates the ten individual artists in Dwan’s *Earth Works* exhibition with specific influences and precursors of earthworks in this way: “Happenings (Claes Oldenberg), Fluxus (Walter De Maria), Arte Povera (De Maria, Michael Heizer, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson), Minimalist Installation (Carl Andre, Sol Lewitt, Morris), Conceptual Art (LeWitt, Stephen Kaltenbach), architecture, landscape and environmental design (Herbert Bayer), archeological excavations (Heizer), and Smithson’s affinity for states of deterioration.” Boettger, *Earthworks*, 24.

gallery, the market, and even the city, now occupied an expanded field.⁷ In this sense, earthworks outwardly evaded the art world, and yet maintained direct engagement with the discursive concerns of urban intellectual centers.⁸

Largely due to the urban reception of these early earthworks through photos, video, and critical discourse, the genre's formal and conceptual underpinnings are also marked by a particular resonance with the social, political, and cultural ambiguities of the 1960s. In art historian Miwon Kwon and her co-curator Philip Kaiser's introductory essay to the 2012 exhibition catalog, *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, they detail the historically- and culturally-specific undertones that run through these works, situating them as representative objects of a particular moment in world history. Like Boettger, Kaiser and Kwon weave earthworks into America's "New Frontier of the Sixties," discussing the complicated relationships between this type of work and the booming US economy, the Vietnam war, and the growing mass interest in ecology, air and space travel, science fiction, cybernetics, and television, with which the emergence of this genre coincided.⁹

⁷ For a useful theoretical framework for the transformation and expansion of sculpture as an art category during the 1960s, see Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October*, 8 (1979), 31-44.

⁸ The characterization of earthworks as a media art practice that circulates primarily in urban centers is laid out in Philip Kaiser and Miwon Kwon, "Ends of the Earth and Back," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, (Los Angeles, CA: The Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles, 2012). See also: Jane McFadden, "Earthworks, Photoworks and Oz: Walter De Maria's Conceptual Art," *Art Journal*, 68, no. 3 (2009): 68-87, and Tom Holert, "Strudel und Wüsten des Politischen [The Whirlpool and Deserts of the Political]," *Jahresring*, no. 48, (2001): 94-119.

⁹ "The New Frontier of the Sixties" is a phrase first used by John F. Kennedy in his 1960 acceptance speech for the Democratic Party's nomination for president. Boettger discusses the symbolism of this phrase in relation to earthworks in *Earthworks*, 28. For Kaiser and Kwon's discussion of the American historical context of the sixties, see *Ends of the Earth*, 17-36. A central element of Kaiser and Kwon's argument is that interventions in the landscape as a creative

Rather than continuing to bolster the historically situated nature of earthworks, this study begins to extend that history beyond the 1970s. It picks up where Boettger, Kaiser, and Kwon leave off to trace the ongoing development of earthworks in the twenty-first century. While Bezos' *10,000 Year Clock* represents one recent development, this study focuses on three projects that are more directly related to both the materiality and the cultural context of the original earthworks: *Roden Crater* (1974-ongoing) by James Turrell; *City* (1972-ongoing) by Michael Heizer; and *Star Axis* (1971-ongoing) by Charles Ross. Together, these projects make up a discrete set of permanent, monumental-scale earthworks started in the early 1970s that remain under construction to this day.¹⁰ While these characteristics distinguish these works as a unique subset, all three projects are further unified by the fact that they are: 1) sited on private ranchland owned by the artist in the American southwest; 2) created by a white male artist who had a studio in New York between 1968 and 1972; 3) funded in part by Virginia Dwan, the Dia Foundation, or both; and 4) managed by a nonprofit organization incorporated by the

impulse was not unique to the US in the 1960s. Similarly, Emily Eliza Scott criticizes the incessant focus on American earthworks in relation to all other land art practices in her essay: "Decentering Land Art from the Borderland: Through the Repellent Fence," *Art Journal Open*, March 27, 2018, (Web: Accessed April 2, 2019). This study does not directly heed their call to move the conversation beyond American earthworks, but it does work to decentralize the canonical artist within his own practice.

¹⁰ It is important to qualify the use of the term "permanent" in relation to these projects. On the one hand, these works engage with Smithson's discourse on entropy, inviting speculation about geologic time and the inevitable dissolution of all things. Thus, they are in a sense, consciously *not* permanent. However, I argue that the idea of permanence, in the form of a lasting legacy solidified within the landscape, is central to both the artists' visions for these works and the motivations of their supporters. The relative permanence of these projects is also highlighted by their contrast to the ephemeral art practices incorporating social activism, performance, or other time-based media, which gained importance in contemporary art discourse at the same moment that earthworks began to fall out of favor. For a useful framework for considering artists' embrace of ephemerality in the 80s and 90s, see Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay, 1995).

artist in the 1990s or 2000s. As this study will show, the exorbitant costs and long construction period at these sites required all three projects to undergo a process of institutionalization through which their financial and institutional support structures became more transparent and publicly accessible.¹¹ This research incorporates information from these now-legally-required disclosures as a way of extending the history of earthworks beyond previously published accounts, while simultaneously reframing them through an institutional lens. By exploring the institutional structures of these projects through their financial disclosures, this research not only illustrates that the history of earthworks persists, but also argues for the importance of that history as a unique entry point into the development of art funding structures in the US more broadly.

In some ways, this research follows the approach of art critic and writer Lucy Lippard, who has also worked to update or continue the story of earthworks. She, too, approaches the works in a holistic way that attempts to deal with them as living monuments. However, while this study focuses on the *institutional* ecosystems surrounding these projects, Lippard's readings tend to be much more invested in the social and environmental ecosystems of the American Southwest, and the way that

¹¹ As this study will show, the institutional transparency of these projects is not uniform among the case studies presented. The increased transparency that I refer to here is in regards to the minimum required public disclosures mandated by the nonprofit status of these projects. Within these federally required filings, the institutionalized artworks retain some control over what information they release and how. Thus, that mandate is carried out differently from one organization to the next.

earthworks emerged from, and continue to exist within, the terrain, soil, and history of that region.¹²

Similarly, art historians John Beardsley and Brian Wallis have worked to extend the history of earthworks. However, in both of their readings, the reverberations of earthworks are largely framed through the “Greening of Art.”¹³ Both in Beardsley’s anthology *Earthworks and Beyond* and Wallis’s “Survey” in *Land and Environmental Art*, the author begins his narrative with earthworks and concludes with a roster of contemporary land artists primarily concerned with environmental justice and ecological empathy. Beardsley perhaps rightly suggests that a latent environmentalism integral to Smithson’s work was foundational for many of these later eco art projects.¹⁴ However, I argue such environmental concerns, while relevant to Smithson’s practice, are largely absent from the statements and sentiments of earthworks artists more generally, and applying such a framework can be misleading in some cases. For instance, in the context of this study, all three artists tend to present the vision behind their desert-bound magnum opi in primarily formal, perceptual, and aesthetic terms. As this study will show, their stated interests generally do not invite one to read the projects as acts of environmentalism or as contemporary eco art, but suggest, rather, that these artists

¹² See Lucy Lippard, *Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West*, (New York, NY and London, UK: The New Press, 2014); and Lippard, *Overlay* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1983).

¹³ On earthworks and environmental art: John Beardsley, “The Greening of Art,” in *Earthworks and Beyond, 4th Edition* (New York, NY: Abbeville Press, 1998), 159-200. See also Brian Wallis, “Survey,” in *Land & Environmental Art*, (London: Phaidon, 1998), 18-43.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Smithson’s environmentalism, see Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond*, 168-170.

maintain a closer connection to the values and artistic intent of earthwork artists working in the 1960s and early-70s. To emphasize the connection of these case studies to the original earthwork moment, I use the phrase second wave earthworks. I define second wave earthworks as those that were deployed decidedly *after* the initial wave of earthwork monuments (i.e. Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*), but largely percolated from the same cultural discourse and context.¹⁵ To an extent, this study reads second wave earthworks in terms of competitive one-ups-manship; these projects follow on the heels of their predecessors offering ever grander and more expensive interventions into the landscape.¹⁶

Michael Heizer is a unique case because he bridges these two waves, and competes primarily to one-up himself. His iconic desert incursion, *Double Negative* (1969) (Figure 4), was completed slightly before Smithson's masterwork, *Spiral Jetty* (1970) (Figure 5), and quickly became an emblem of the earthwork genre. Given the success of *Double Negative*, and the continued support of Dwan, Heizer quickly began scouting sites for another project of comparable scale. That sophomore project, *City*, would end up shaping the artist's life for several decades. In this sense, Heizer's earthwork projects invite a longitudinal analysis of a specific artist with relatively consistent networks of support encountering divergent historical contexts. As this study will show, the institutional and administrative challenges that *City* has faced as a second

¹⁵ Indeed, Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1974) must be included in any list of early earthworks icons; however, technically both *City* (1972-present) and *Star Axis* (1971-present) were conceived of before Holt's work was completed in 1974, and Heizer completed *Complex I* of his *City* project in the same year Holt finished her project. Nonetheless, *Sun Tunnels* quickly became deeply embedded in the earthworks canon in a way unmatched by any of the works presented here.

wave earthwork, have been fundamentally different from those Heizer faced during the construction of *Double Negative* during the first wave of the movement. Thus, Heizer's career helps give shape to the distinction between these two types of earthworks in a way that sheds light on the cultural and economic systems that have affected progress at Turrell and Ross's projects as well.

Like Heizer, Walter De Maria also bridged the gap between first and second wave earthworks. While his earlier works tended to be somewhat ephemeral experiments with line and form in desert landscapes, he began planning *Lightning Field* (1970-1977) (Figure 6) shortly after the unveiling of *Double Negative* and *Spiral Jetty*. In De Maria's case, the second wave of the earthwork movement provided a platform to expand his scope and complete what is arguably his most iconic work. However, in the case of the second wave projects that carried on longer than De Maria's, this study will show that the artists' escalating ambitions were met with an economic downturn and a perfect storm of political and cultural events that fundamentally changed the professionalization of the visual arts. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to definitively describe these fundamental changes, this research offers three specific narratives that provide insight into the complex and evolving mechanisms of large-scale, contemporary arts funding as well as examples of how those mechanisms can be used and manipulated.

The findings presented here concur with those of other earthworks scholars that the genre peaked and then sharply declined around 1974. However, while work slowed to a crawl at *Roden Crater*, *City*, and *Star Axis* from the late 70s to the late 90s, progress and support never ceased altogether. As of this writing, all three projects remain unfinished and closed to the public, but contributions are growing exponentially and all

three are reportedly nearing completion.¹⁷ Several large donations to *Roden Crater*, in particular, have put that project in the headlines in recent months, but current financial reports on all three projects show steady growth.¹⁸ Further, an influx of new travel guides and educational programs related to the now-iconic first wave earthworks suggests a growing interest in earthworks among contemporary audiences.¹⁹ Given this increasing support and interest, as well as a third wave of new earthwork projects like Bezos', it seems clear that we are in a new era in the history of earthworks. This study explores the nature and circumstance of that new era and asks – why now?

To answer that question, this study assembles funding histories for its three case studies that span from the artists' early careers in the 1960s through to the present. In general, this assembly process consists of three phases. In the first phase, information regarding commissions, grants, awards, sales, and other financial transactions and relationships was culled from newspaper articles, exhibition catalogs, artist writings, and

¹⁷ Data regarding contributions has been culled from the 990s forms filed with the IRS by the institutions that oversee and maintain these earthworks: Skystone Foundation, Land Light Foundation, and Triple Aught Foundation. *Roden Crater* is scheduled to be completed in 2024 and both *Star Axis* and *City* are scheduled to open in 2022; however, published estimations of the completion dates have been incrementally pushed back for decades, and it would not be surprising to see further delays.

¹⁸ In 2019, *Roden Crater* received a ten million dollar donation from rapper Kanye West, as well as a pledge from Arizona State University to help raise two-hundred million dollars over the next two years. See: Kelly Crow, "Kanye West Donates \$10 Million to Art Project," *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 2019, (Web: Accessed April 20, 2019).

¹⁹ For an example of the kinds of first person Land Art travelogues that are being published see Erin Hogan, *Spiral Jetty: A Road Trip through the Land Art of the American West*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Land art educational expeditions have been recently organized by the *Land Arts of the American West* program at Texas State University as well as *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*.

interviews.²⁰ These historical reports, as well as the artists' monographs, were key reference documents used to create an initial sketch of the artists' evolving sources of funding. In the second phase, I compared these timelines, constructed from publications about the individual artists, to the rich body of scholarly literature published on earthworks more generally. In addition to the work of Boettger, Beardsley, Kaiser, Kwon, and Lippard, this research is particularly indebted to the patronage study conducted by art historian Anna C. Chave, which focuses on the Dia Foundation but provides valuable information about the funding for land art in general during this period.²¹ Art critics Michael Kimmelman and Anthony Haden-Guest likewise provide useful accounts, based on long and intimate friendships, of the behind-the-scenes business and drama that characterized this generation of artists and patrons.²² Furthermore, the recent art market documentaries *The Next Big Thing* (2015) and *The Price of Anything* (2017), directed by Frank van den Engel and Nathaniel Kahn respectively, provide collector and dealer accounts and market analysis that serve as useful counterpoints to artists' perspectives.²³

²⁰ Interviews with collectors, dealers, and auctioneers including Virginia Dwan, John Weber, Amy Pappalazzo, and others were culled from a multitude of newspaper articles, video clips, and scholarly essays. These documents and the monographs are cited as relevant in the case studies.

²¹ Anna C. Chave, "Revaluing Minimalism: Patronage, Aura, and Place," *The Art Bulletin*, 90, no. 3, (2008): 466-86.

²² See Michael Kimmelman, "The Dia Generation," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 6, 2003, (Web: Accessed April 22, 2019); and Anthony Haden-Guest, *True Colors: The Real Life of the Art World*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998).

²³ Frank Van Den Engel, *The Next Big Thing*, (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2015), and Nathaniel Kahn, *The Price of Anything*, (Los Angeles, CA; New York, NY: HBO Documentary Films; Hot & Sunny Productions; Anthos Media Productions, 2017).

These funding timelines work to organize previously published accounts of these projects in a new way; however, they are admittedly fragmentary. Much about the personal business dealings of the artists is not publicly available, and to varying extents, all three of these artists are somewhat secretive about the business side of their magnum *opi*. Further, I am conscious of the fact that many of the published reports, particularly artist writings and interviews, are highly mediated and provide only a curated selection of how these artists support themselves and their work. Thus, without access to these artists' personal financial records, this study cannot claim to present an exhaustive funding history.

Nonetheless, this study works to enrich the information currently available about the funding for these projects by incorporating data from nonprofit financial reports filed with the IRS. In particular, this study focuses on the 990 forms filed by the nonprofit private foundations these artists incorporated to oversee fundraising for their second wave earthworks.²⁴ In examining these 990 forms, this study asks what nonprofit finances can add to the story of second wave earthworks, and to this end, it looks beyond the nonprofits incorporated by these artists to consider the financial activity of other nonprofit funders who have financially backed these works. In other words, it looks at organizations that give money *to* these projects, as well as organizations that accept money *for* these projects.

When this financial data is considered alongside the cultural and political narratives that also inform these works, it offers a more complete picture of earthworks

²⁴ Specifically, I examined the 990 filings for Turrell Art Foundation, Skystone Foundation, Triple Aught Foundation, Land Light Foundation, Museum Associates - Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Dia Art Foundation, and the Lannan Foundation.

patronage and the entangled ecology of public art commissions and private art markets through which it is threaded. Within these ecologies, I argue that these artists and their administrative allies have strategically employed these nonprofit organizations to access the privatized wealth of the collecting class; but simultaneously, these organizations are employed by the collecting class as a means of achieving their social, financial, and philanthropic goals. Thus, the nonprofit financial documents contribute new information about how these artists and funders have actively produced, insulated, repositioned, and privatized these works within a changing world.

This new information has serious implications for the study of earthworks. First, it insists that these works no longer be read as single-author artworks. Rather, they demand to be seen as products of a socio-economic class of art patrons and institutional backers. In this sense, the study decentralizes the individual artist and redistributes authorship throughout the social and economic systems that made their work possible. Furthermore, by reframing these earthworks as institutions as well as artworks, this study opens them up to a different kind of criticism. Much like artists who use their platform to systematically examine and critique art institutions from the inside, so too does this study attempt to expose the inner workings of the art world and lay bare its institutional investments and policies. In this regard, this research is indebted to artist Andrea Fraser's project, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, which investigates links between museum administrations and campaign finances in the 2016 presidential election and provides a useful lens through which to interpret the art world dealings of the American superrich.²⁵ Furthermore, Nan Goldin's recent protests of the Sackler Family provide an

²⁵ Andrea Fraser, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics* (San Francisco, CA; Cambridge,

additional framework for considering institutional responsibility, ethical fundraising, and contemporary relationships between patrons and institutions.²⁶

Like the work of Fraser and Goldin, this research looks critically at art institutions and funders, attempting to unpack their multifaceted motivations. Ultimately, I argue that the patrons of earthworks, from Dwan to Bezos, follow in a long line of wealthy capitalists who have thrown their material and cultural weight behind the seemingly unattainable ambitions of visionary thinkers as a means of asserting their socio-economic power and status. The American earthwork movement of the 60s and 70s represents only one such episode in which the impulse to prove one's power by bankrolling artists and making the impossible possible was taken to its logical end. However, the impact of that moment of concentrated cultural investment continues to impact funding structures for large-scale artwork in the US to this day, and often dictates what can be built and by whom.

The pages that follow present three case studies in separate chronological narratives focusing on the sequence of social and financial activities that have actively shaped the institutionalization of these artworks. Chapter five summarizes these narratives and delineates both the similarities between the three projects as well as their striking differences. The final chapter discusses the implications of this research both for the study of earthworks and for financially-oriented art histories more generally.

MA: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts; The MIT Press, 2018).

²⁶ See Christopher Glazek, "Case Study: Nan Goldin and the Sacklers," *Artforum*, April 24, 2019 (Web: Accessed May 20, 2019).

CHAPTER II CASE STUDY: *RODEN CRATER*

I can't say it strongly enough: It's not a question of whether there's money for such a project: There is. The question is, will people decide that's what they want to do with it.

— Michael Govan²⁷

In many ways, James Turrell has had a career as a pilot first and an artist second. His affinity for planes predates his identity as an artist, and flying or refurbishing antique planes has always in some way subsidized his production costs.²⁸ Turrell first became a pilot in 1960 when he graduated high school early and volunteered for alternative service as a contentious objector in the Vietnam War. The distinctive perceptual phenomena he experienced during flight inspired Turrell to study mathematics and perceptual psychology at Pomona College after completing his service, and he graduated with a joint degree in 1965.

After completing his degree, Turrell took a job as a crop-dusting pilot and used his earnings to lease the abandoned Mendota Hotel in Ocean Park, California where he covered the windows in every room and began experimenting with light as an autonomous, physical medium (Figure 7). His experiments would eventually push him to return to school where he earned his MFA at Claremont College in 1972. In total, Turrell

²⁷ Michael Govan as quoted in Adam Nagourney, "Is This Los Angeles's \$600 Million Man?" *The New York Times*, January 18, 2017, (Web: Accessed March 12, 2019).

²⁸ The details of Turrell's early life are taken primarily from: Craig Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Flight and Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Michael Govan et. al, *James Turrell: A Retrospective* (Los Angeles, Munich, New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; DelMonico: Imprint of Prestel, 2013); and Calvin Tomkins, "Flying into the Light," *The New Yorker*, January 13, 2003, (Web: Accessed April 1, 2019).

spent seven years transforming the Mendota into a cornucopic light theatre. During this era, he notoriously refused to sell his artwork—not even photographic documentation—and only allowed his light pieces to be experienced in the hotel’s hyper-controlled environment.²⁹ He supported himself, his education, and his experiments almost entirely by flying and rebuilding planes.

Shortly before graduating, Turrell accepted his first commission from Count Panza di Biumo, an adventurous Italian art collector who wanted his villa in Verese, Italy, to be fitted with several “skyspaces” and site-specific lighting installations (Figure 8).³⁰ The project took two years and just as it was being completed, Turrell received word that developers had purchased his entire Mendota block, and he and several other artists would be evicted. The money from his commission, along with a Guggenheim Fellowship, allowed Turrell to use this ousting as an opportunity to embark on a project of a scale and ambition unmatched by his other works or those of his peers: *Roden Crater*.³¹ According to historian Craig Adcock, Turrell used the Guggenheim grant to pay for airplane fuel and spent seven months flying from Canada to Mexico and from the Pacific to the Rockies looking for the perfect crater or butte for the monumental naked eye observatory he envisioned. Specifically, he was looking for a geologic protrusion that

²⁹ Adcock, *James Turrell*, 13-22.

³⁰ A “skyspace” is an enclosed chamber that focuses attention on a precisely framed view of the sky exposed through an aperture in the roof. That, and the concept of a “naked-eye-observatory,” are discussed in detail on the *Roden Crater Project*’s website: see Roden Crater Project, “About,” (Web: Accessed March 2, 2019).

³¹ Former Guggenheim Award recipients are recorded at: John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, “James A. Turrell,” (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019). It is unclear exactly what projects compelled the Guggenheim Foundation to award Turrell this illustrious fellowship as, at the time, he was relatively unknown outside of California and was only just finishing up his MFA degree.

rose from a surrounding plain to a height of between six hundred and one thousand feet. When he found *Roden Crater* fifty miles northeast of Flagstaff, it met his requirements perfectly (Figure 9).³²

It was 1974 when Turrell received the Guggenheim Fellowship, and it would be another three years before he would officially purchase his crater and break ground on what would become his magnum opus. Since then, plans for the site have developed to include some twenty chambers throughout the cone of the dormant volcano with carefully cut oculi meant to perfectly align with specific celestial events. Highlights include a series of four-hundred-foot underground tunnels as well as the smoothed and leveled crater bowl, designed to precipitate celestial vaulting.³³ Additional plans for the site include a large guesthouse for overnight visitation to the artwork, a “light spa,” and a visitor’s center to house other Turrell installations and educate visitors about his work.³⁴

While *Roden Crater* is primarily an investigation of natural light and the sky, scholars still tend to write about it in the context of the earthworks movement.³⁵ Like first wave earthworks, Turrell’s project entails obtaining and sculpting a geologic mass sited in an American desert landscape, but unlike the other artists presented in this study,

³² For more on the site hunting process Turrell undertook to find *Roden Crater*, see Adcock, *James Turrell*, 101-133.

³³ Celestial vaulting is the visual sensation that the sky is not a vast expanse but rather a domed surface above you. See Peter Noever, “Perceptual Cells,” in *James Turrell: The Other Horizon*, (Vienna, Austria: MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, 1999), 22-29.

³⁴ The most recent accounts of the final plans for the project have been reported in recent news articles regarding Turrell’s recent partnership with Arizona State University. See Mary Beth Faller, “Letting in the Light: ASU, artist James Turrell partner on masterwork in the desert,” *ASUNow*, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

³⁵ See Chave, “Revaluing Minimalism,” 7-10.

Turrell was not a figure in the discourse on earthworks at its height.³⁶ *Roden Crater* was a late addition to that canon and is arguably better understood through the lens of the lesser known California Light and Space Movement. Nonetheless, the financial history of *Roden Crater* suggests the project is indebted to the logic of monumentality popularized by his earthwork predecessors and directly benefits from the consolidated systems of wealth and influence set up to support the earlier iterations of these monumental, desert-bound artworks.

In particular, *Roden Crater* would not have been possible without the emergence of the Dia Foundation. At the same moment that Turrell was flying over the American west, art dealers Heiner Friedrich and Philippa de Menil were incorporating the Dia Foundation, which would become an important investor in Turrell's project.³⁷ Friedrich had previously been a gallerist in the German cities of Munich and Cologne, but had grown tired of the endless cycle of short exhibitions and sales that structured gallery culture. Art critic Michael Kimmelman describes that "seeing the destruction during the Nazi years inspired [Friedrich] to want to create things that would last forever."³⁸ In 1971, hoping to escape the challenges of raising funds for large-scale projects in Germany, he opened his gallery in New York. There he met his wife Philippa de Menil, a wealthy heiress to the Schlumberger oil fortune and the daughter of the highly influential

³⁶ In general, first wave earthworks discourse was dominated by, if not exclusively dedicated to, a relatively short roster of artists including: Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, Nancy Holt, and Charles Ross (to a somewhat lesser degree).

³⁷ Historical information regarding the Dia Foundation is culled primarily from these three sources: Michael Kimmelman, "The Dia Generation," Anthony Haden-Guest, *True Colors*, and Dia Art Foundation, "History," (Web: Accessed April 22, 2019).

³⁸ Kimmelman, "The Dia Generation."

art patrons, Dominique and John de Menil. Together, Friedrich and Menil seemed to have the money, connections, and ambition to create a new art canon of monumental, spiritually charged epics. They co-founded the Dia Foundation in 1974 under the premise of empowering artists to create iconic, permanent, site-specific artworks that might not otherwise be realized because of their ambitious scale or scope.³⁹

A year after opening, the foundation would support Turrell's *Roden Crater* project by matching the funds of an "Art in Public Places" grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).⁴⁰ Ironically, at the time that these first grants were awarded, *Roden Crater* was on private land that was not for sale. Not until 1977 did the landowner, retired railroad magnate Robert Chambers, agree to sell the land, and it was only because he had formed a friendship with the artist during the intervening years.⁴¹ To finance the purchase, Turrell applied for a loan as a cattle rancher.⁴² Though this ranching venture was initially a pragmatic means of acquiring a loan, the Walking Cane Ranch has proved profitable, growing to as large as 3,000 head of prime-grade beef producing cattle.⁴³ While many have applauded Turrell's ingenuity and entrepreneurship, (as one interviewer put it: "You used agriculture to make art!") it is important to consider the

³⁹ Paraphrased from Dia Art Foundation, "History."

⁴⁰ Recipients of the NEA "Art in Public Places" Awards for 1975 are listed here: National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report*, (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1975). Turrell's specific use of these funds is described in Adcock, *James Turrell*, 22.

⁴¹ Adcock, *James Turrell*, 112.

⁴² Turrell tells the story of getting this loan in a 2013 interview with the LA Times. See Jori Finkel, "James Turrell Shapes Perceptions," *LA Times*, May 11, 2013, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

⁴³ Roden Crater Landscape, "Roden Crater and the Walking Cane Ranch," (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

implications of federal arts funding being used as seed money to start a private, for-profit cattle ranch that, over the course of forty-five years, has arguably failed to provide a demonstrable public service.⁴⁴

After acquiring the plot, Turrell would spend at least three years subtly shaping the cone of the volcano and leveling its crater while simultaneously preparing for two solo exhibitions both held in 1980. The exhibitions were both in New York City, one at the influential Leo Castelli Gallery and the other at the Whitney Museum of Art. The Whitney exhibition would prove somewhat disastrous. Twice during the run of the show, a visitor mistook a wall of light for a real wall and plummeted to the ground trying to use it for support. Both sued the museum stating that the disorienting nature of the exhibition had caused their injuries. After the second suit, the Whitney sued Turrell. Though the incident was eventually settled out of court, Turrell has never shown at the Whitney again and it evidently took a financial toll on the artist at the time.⁴⁵ The 80s would only get worse for Turrell. The oil crisis of 1982 caused the Menil's Schlumberger stock to plummet, and Turrell's monthly stipend to cease. Shortly after, Dia would begin selling artworks from their collection as well as many of the site-specific, single-artist museums they had acquired. At one point they considered selling *Roden Crater* as well, though it is

⁴⁴ Quote taken from Christine Y. Kim, "James Turrell: A Life in Art" in Michael Govan, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima Greene, EC Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell, *James Turrell: A Retrospective*, (Los Angeles, CA; Munich, Germany; New York, NY: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; DelMonico Books, Imprint of Prestel, 2013), 273.

⁴⁵ On the Whitney/Turrell law suit, see: Grace Glueck, "Whitney Museum Sued Over 1980 'Light Show'," *The New York Times*, May 4, 1982, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

unclear if they would have had the right to do so.⁴⁶ By 1983, Dominique de Menil would get involved, ousting her son-in-law as director at Dia, and replacing him with a finance-savvy board of directors led by a lawyer from Seattle, Charles Wright.

Dia's financial woes would greatly impact the artists they had been lavishly supporting during the 1970s. Although the foundation eventually recovered, some relationships with artists were irreparably damaged. Turrell recalled his frustration that he was not warned: "I found out about it when the checks stopped."⁴⁷ This betrayal of trust between patrons and their artists was not specific to Dia at this time, nor was it specific to artist-patron funding structures. Public art funding was under fire as well due to the controversy brewing around Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, an eight-year episode in which public outcry eventually led to the removal of the site-specific artwork commissioned by the NEA. Many saw the dismantling of the artwork as an act of censorship, and it played a role in dramatically shifting the structure of federal funding for the arts in the US.⁴⁸

Furthermore, dramatic growth in the contemporary art market and rapidly inflating prices during this period caused artists selling their work in galleries and primary markets to be increasingly suspicious of speculative investing among art collectors.⁴⁹ I use the term speculative investing here as a means of comparing some

⁴⁶ On the oil crisis and Dia's mass sale of artworks and property at this time, see: Haden-Guest, *True Colors*, 49-53, 82-99.

⁴⁷ Tomkins, "Flying into the Light."

⁴⁸ On the *Tilted Arc* incident and the threat it posed to public artists, see: Harriet F. Senie, *The Tilted Arc Controversy*, (Mineapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). This issue is also discussed further in Chapter IV: *Star Axis*.

⁴⁹ I use the term "prospecting" here as a means of comparing some contemporary art collectors in the 1970s to financial prospectors—that is; financial agents and advisors who hunt for underpriced investments in real estate, stocks, or bonds, those are likely to yield a profit upon

contemporary art collectors in the 1970s and 80s to financial speculators—that is, financial agents and advisors who hunt for underpriced investments in real estate, stocks, or bonds, that are likely to yield a profit upon resale. In the contemporary art world, this kind of speculative buying can decrease artists control over how their art is used and marketed and expose them to misrepresentation and misappropriation. Further, by reselling the work, these “flippers” can flood secondary markets with an artist’s work and decrease demand for that work within primary markets, which effectively sidesteps the artist so that he or she no longer profits from or controls the work’s distribution. Thus, for living artists with ongoing careers, selling to this kind of art collector threatened devastating consequences.⁵⁰

Out of this moment when the potential pitfalls of both public and private funding sources for artists became amplified, Turrell and others began incorporating nonprofit organizations of their own, essentially institutionalizing their practices. By many accounts, Donald Judd was the first to actively institutionalize his practice in this way, opening his Marfa, Texas-based Chinati Foundation in 1986.⁵¹ However, Turrell’s

resale. Because the effects of this kind of prospecting in the contemporary art world can decrease an artist’s control over how his/her art is used and marketed, it exposes the works to misrepresentation and misappropriation while simultaneously affecting the demand for the artist’s work within primary markets. For more on the implications for artists in the face of a the rapidly growing contemporary art market of the mid-1970s, see Engel, *The Next Big Thing*.

⁵⁰ For a dealer’s perspective on his responsibility to protect artists from “flippers” during this period, see this interview with former Dwan Gallery Director, John Weber: James McElhinney, “Oral history interview with John Weber, 2006 March 21-April 4,” *Smithsonian Archives of American Art*, (Web: Accessed April 1, 2019). The impact of contemporary art entering secondary markets is further discussed in Chapter IV: *Star Axis*.

⁵¹ See Haden-Guest, *True Colors*, 154-172.

Skystone Foundation is cited by some sources as beginning in 1982.⁵² The organization's nonprofit filings, on the other hand, indicate that it did not earn a 501c3 designation until 1999.⁵³ Though there is no public documentation of the organization's activities prior to its ruling year, the listed "Founding Donors" on the *Roden Crater* website gives a sense of what that inner circle might have looked like between 1982 and 1999.⁵⁴ There are seven donors listed including the Dia Foundation, the NEA, and the Guggenheim Foundation. As previously outlined, the Guggenheim Foundation provided the initial funding for Turrell's scouting process, while the Dia Foundation provided matching funds for an NEA grant, which was eventually used to purchase the ranchland containing *Roden Crater*. Notably, the majority of founding donors, including Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, Martin Bucksbaum, and Nathan Cummings, are all well-known art collectors.

I posit that at this moment in history, contemporary art collectors in particular would have been motivated to support or get involved with private funding bodies like Skystone primarily as a means of social maneuvering. By investing in the construction of an artwork that would take a lifetime to build and seemingly cannot be owned, that collector's reputation among gallerists and dealers as more than just a speculator, as someone willing to invest in an artist, would open doors for the collector, granting them access to better and more sought after work. In this sense, private foundations like

⁵² Tomkins, "Flying into the Light."

⁵³ Skystone's Ruling Year is listed here: Guidestar by Candid, "Skystone Foundation Inc.," (Web: Accessed April 21, 2019).

⁵⁴ Roden Crater Project, "Support," (Web: Accessed March 2, 2019).

Skystone could serve as tools for collectors and other agents of the art world to inflate their status and power within that world as it responded new market realities.

The early years of the Skystone Foundation, before its official 501c3 designation, did not see a great deal of progress on site at *Roden Crater*. Nevertheless, the 80s and 90s were productive years in Turrell's career more generally. As critic Calvin Tomkins describes:

At a certain point [Turrell] found he could charge a fee for installing shows of his light pieces—as much as ten thousand dollars per show. One year, he had sixteen one-man shows in this country, Europe, and Japan, and made a hundred and sixty thousand dollars doing it.⁵⁵

This era of slow progress at *Roden Crater* then, corresponds to a period of heightened activity by the artist elsewhere. Further, this growing global installation practice renewed the artist's visibility in the art world and elicited widespread praise. In 1984, Turrell and his fellow “Light and Space” artist, Robert Irwin, were the first visual artists to receive MacArthur Genius Grants.⁵⁶ Due to this award, the MacArthur Foundation is also listed as a founding donor for the *Roden Crater* project despite the fact that this support came in much later than that from the other founders, and at a time when progress at the site seemed to have lapsed. The MacArthur Grant was awarded to Turrell at the height of Dia's selling frenzy, and likely played a role in keeping *Roden Crater* off the market.

By 1987, Dia had begun to reclaim financial health but its focus had shifted extensively. As art critic Michael Kimmelman summarized in 2003:

⁵⁵ Tomkins, “Flying into the Light.”

⁵⁶ Both Turrell and Irwin were associated with a group of artists in LA in the early 70s that were all exploring the possibilities of light as art and of incorporating art and new technologies. For more on the so-called “LA Light and Space Group,” see: Jan Butterfield, *The Art of Light and Space*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993).

[In the 80s and 90s] Dia's traditional stress on solitary geniuses, great men removed from everyday circulation and freed to pursue big dreams, seemed out of sync in a cultural atmosphere that prized egalitarianism and social engagement. [Dia's director, Charles Wright], now 48, wanting to keep up with the times and endorse the new spirit, ... [publicly] bemoaned the "cult of the individualism of the artist," and ... programmed heavyweight symposiums and exhibitions by politically conscious artists.⁵⁷

In light of these changing priorities within American art institutions, Turrell's inaccessible and seemingly apolitical project appeared, at best, outdated, and at worst, an emblem of patriarchal hubris and entitlement that obviates a glaring disconnect between art and life in the US. The stability provided by Turrell's growing international reputation as well as the support of the Skystone Foundation helped shield *Roden Crater* from the brunt of this shift in public opinion, but progress on the project was nonetheless slow. However, Turrell continued to exhibit photos, diagrams and models of *Roden Crater* in exhibitions around the world and several monographs and exhibition catalogs documenting and mythologizing *Roden Crater* were published during this era.⁵⁸ Thus, perhaps against the odds, interest in and commitment to the project persisted steadily.

The seeds of change were planted, however, in 1994 when the fiscally cautious Charles Wright stepped down from the Dia Foundation and the young, energetic and remarkably experienced and well-connected Michael Govan took his place as the foundation's director.⁵⁹ Govan's arrival inspired hope for a new golden age at the

⁵⁷ Kimmelman, "The Dia Generation."

⁵⁸ For a full list of exhibitions and publications focusing on James Turrell and *Roden Crater*, see: Govan et. al., *James Turrell*, 233-236.

⁵⁹ A note on Govan's biography: As a student at Williams College in the early 1980s, the school's director, Thomas Krens, mentored Govan and together they founded the 100,000 square-foot Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. After serving as its Associate Curator as an undergraduate, Govan moved to California to study under icons of conceptual art like Allan

organization rivaling the original vision of Heiner and Philippa. Immediately after his appointment, he went on a pilgrimage to all of the site-specific works initiated by Dia, including *Roden Crater*, in an attempt to mend bridges with the artists who had been left in a funding gulch a decade earlier. This initial hope of reengagement was squandered, however, by a coup at the foundation on the board level that played out over several years.⁶⁰ In the meantime, *Roden Crater* was in trouble.

In 1996, Turrell and his wife divorced and he was unable to buy out her half of the property around *Roden Crater*. He would have had to sell the land had it not been for the support of the nearby Lannan Foundation located on the other side of the Hopi and Navajo Reservations between *Roden Crater* and Santa Fe.⁶¹ The mission of the Lannan Foundation was and is to make grants to nonprofit organizations in contemporary visual art and literature that support indigenous communities and cultural freedom.⁶² In the years after receiving the Lannan Foundation grant, Turrell began employing people from the nearby reservations and offering space for indigenous artist apprenticeships.⁶³

Kapprow and Joseph Kosuth, and at the age of 25, he accepted a job working with his mentor, Krens, once more – this time at the Guggenheim Foundation. He worked there for ten years overseeing several large-scale projects, including the construction of the Guggenheim Bilbao, before leaving to become Dia’s third Executive Director. For a more detailed description of Govan’s role in Dia’s history, see: Kimmelman, “The Dia Generation.”

⁶⁰ Govan had undertaken a \$12 million fundraising campaign that included an ambitious matching grant from the Mellon Foundation. The board was split: Govan and his followers were adamantly opposed to selling more art and property to raise the money while the chairman and his followers saw no other choice. Govan eventually threatened to quit, and the board members in favor of selling art and property resigned their posts shortly thereafter. For more about this controversy: Paul Lieberman, and Christopher Reynolds, “LACMA May Be Where He Was Going All Along,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 06, 2006, (Web: Accessed April 20, 2019).

⁶¹ See Govan et. al., *James Turrell*, 133-139.

⁶² Lannan Foundation Website, “About” (Web: Accessed May 21, 2019).

Apparently, he was also busy building relationships with the local Coconino County officials. In 1997 they agreed to protect the sky space around the volcano, passing a "dark sky" ordinance that ruled out any upward-directed lighting within thirty-five miles of the site.⁶⁴ Furthermore, officials agreed to amend the building code to allow for a new category called "land art" that effectively gave Turrell permission to construct a perilously steep flight of bronze stairs with no railing in his *East Portal* space (Figure 10). As Tomkins argues, this era in the history of *Roden Crater* is marked by deepening connections with the cultural assets and communities in the region—something that had not been a focus earlier in the project.

By 1998, Govan had regained control of the Dia Foundation and began renovating a Nabisco factory two hours north of Manhattan, eventually transforming it into a museum for permanent, site-specific installations. During this exciting comeback, the foundation once again funded the *Roden Crater* project. However, no public progress reports were made and the same sketches and models of Turrell's plans for the site continued to be exhibited in galleries and museums around the world. Not a single space in the structure had been completed by 2006 when Govan left Dia to become the director at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and simultaneously joined the board of directors for Skystone.⁶⁵

⁶³ See Lannan Foundation, "James Turrell" (Web: Accessed April 20, 2019).

⁶⁴ Tomkins, "Flying into the Light."

⁶⁵ See Lieberman and Reynolds, "LACMA May Be Where He Was Going All Along."

Surprisingly, Dia has not supported *Roden Crater* since Govan’s departure and does not include Turrell in their online archive as of this writing.⁶⁶ However, Govan’s support for the project has only grown. Shortly after his board appointment he began planning a Turrell retrospective at LACMA for the 2013 exhibition season. The exhibition soon grew into a three-museum retrospective with installations of Turrell’s work also going up at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Guggenheim Museum in New York.⁶⁷ In 2009, during the planning for these concurrent blockbusters that spanned the entirety of the country, Turrell and Govan incorporated a second nonprofit, an operating foundation called the Turrell Art Foundation.⁶⁸ In this case, the distinction between an operating foundation and a private foundation like Skystone boils down primarily to one thing—an operating foundation must prove that it has sufficient public support.⁶⁹ Private foundations have no such requirement and often receive the majority of their revenue from a single donor or family. Thus, because the operating foundation relies on public support, it is, in theory, held to higher standard of public service.

⁶⁶ A search for “Turrell” or “Roden” on the Dia Foundation Website yields no results. (Web: Accessed May 21, 2019).

⁶⁷ See Govan et. al., *James Turrell*.

⁶⁸ Turrell Art Foundation’s ruling year is listed here: Guidestar by Candid, “Turrell Art Foundation Inc.” (Web: Accessed April 21, 2019).

⁶⁹ The “public support” test is a ratio required on 990 forms for operating foundations that assesses the degree to which the foundation is funded by one or a handful of donors. A higher percentage means that the foundation has many funders and a low percentage means that contributions are limited to just a few major gifts each year. The minimum required public support ratio is 34%, on average over 5 years. For the public support percentage for Turrell Art Foundation, see: Turrell Art Foundation, U.S. Department of the Treasury, and Internal Revenue Service, (Form 990, 2017) *Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax*, Schedule A, Part II Section C. Computation of Public Support Percentage (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

While it is not uncommon for an operating foundation to be associated with a private foundation, it is not clear why the *Roden Crater* project would benefit from such an organizational structure. One nefarious reason may be to shield public donors from information about how the organization invests its money. The potential for misleading donors becomes apparent in the nonprofits' 2016 filings. 2016 was the first year since the founding of the Turrell Art Foundation that they included a line item in their statement of functional expenses that designated funds for "Program Expenses – Skystone."⁷⁰ In 2016, the annual expense for this category was \$625,000. That same year, the Skystone Foundation invested over \$2 million in corporate bonds from big banks and another \$1.7 million from car manufacturing and oil companies.⁷¹ These purchases express a disregard for recent trends towards impact investing and fossil fuel divestment that have gained popularity among foundations and philanthropic communities over the last decade.⁷² Given the likelihood that public support for a land art project like *Roden Crater* would be negatively affected by public awareness of their investment practices, it makes sense that maintaining a public as well as a more private financial body might be beneficial.⁷³

⁷⁰ See Skystone Foundation, U.S. Department of the Treasury, and Internal Revenue Service, (From 990-PF, 2016) *Return of Private Foundation or Section 4947(a)(1) Trust Treated as Private Foundation* (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019), 10.

⁷¹ See James Turrell Art Foundation, et. al., (Form 990, 2016), "Supplemental Information," and "TY 2016 Investments Corporate Bonds Schedule."

⁷² Note on impact philanthropy

⁷³ Notably, the Skystone Foundation 2017 Form 990, released just a few weeks before the submission of this thesis, reports that all of these corporate bonds have been sold, and at a substantial loss. This suggests that the organization's new executive director saw it as a priority to follow current social movements that call for divestment from fossil fuel industries and other companies associated with potentially harmful products and services.

This potential interest in concealing the financial assets of the project invites speculation about other ways that the *Roden Crater* team might be obscuring some of their administrative policies. For instance, a bizarre incident in 2015 suggests a similar master plan obscured by an unassuming veneer. That year, Skystone Foundation sued the rapper Drake for plagiarizing Turrell's work in his popular music video, *Hot Line Bling* (Figure 11).⁷⁴ In the publicity surrounding the scandal, Turrell's statements, released by his lawyer, present a meek and playful image of the artist. Turrell is quoted saying, "Drake honored my work" and joking that "more people have heard of me through Drake than anything else."⁷⁵ In this instance, his persona as an artist is distanced from his litigious representatives.

Hiring Skystone's first executive director further extended the distance between the artist's persona and the business side of his venture. Just one month after news first broke of Turrell's incident with Drake, Skystone announced Yvette Y. Lee, formerly a program director at the Guggenheim Foundation, as its first executive director and proceeded to capitalize on Turrell's pop media moment.⁷⁶ Later that same year, Lee and the board would invite around sixty donors to experience the site in person for a widely

⁷⁴ Rory Carroll, "James Turrell: 'More people have heard of me through Drake than anything else,'" *The Guardian*, November 11, 2015, (Web: Accessed April 22, 2019).

⁷⁵ For a summary of some of Turrell's responses, see: Elahe Izadi, "Artist James Turrell says Drake 'honored my work,'" *The Washington Post*, October 4, 2016, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

⁷⁶ Robin Sher, "The Skystone Foundation, Which Oversees Turrell's *Roden Crater*, Taps Yvette Y. Lee to Be Director," *Art News*, November 5, 2015, (Web: Accessed November 10, 2018).

publicized ticket price of \$6,500 per person.⁷⁷ Importantly, they also initiated a more substantial web presence for the project and released the first images of completed spaces at the volcano. This release marked the first evidence of progress on the site's construction since at least 2002, and considerable progress at that. Six spaces were represented and the disorienting choreographed images inspired wonder, envy, and confusion (Figure 12).

In the years since Lee was hired, Skystone has grown exponentially. In 2016 it received its largest ever donation, \$10 million from billionaire investor David Booth, which grew its net assets by more than 200%.⁷⁸ While the most recent filings only document through 2017, the organization made headlines in 2019 when the rapper Kanye West donated \$10 million to the project.⁷⁹ Curiously, popular media reports framed this story as an episode in the ongoing public feud between Drake and Kanye as hip-hop rivals. Because Turrell had taken Drake to court years earlier, West's gift was seen by some as being motivated by the social dynamics of contemporary rap celebrity more so than a philanthropic gesture.⁸⁰ On the heels of that story, Arizona State University (ASU) announced that they would help Skystone raise at least \$200 million over the next two years in order to complete construction at *Roden Crater* and build the physical and

⁷⁷ M. H. Miller, "James Turrell Allowing Limited Visitors to *Roden Crater* for \$6,500 a Person," *Art News*, February 19, 2015, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

⁷⁸ Skystone Foundation, et. al., (Form 990-PF, 2016), Part IX, Supplemental Information.

⁷⁹ Eileen Kinsella, "Kanye West Donates \$10 Million to Help Fund James Turrell's Volcanic Land Art Project '*Roden Crater*,'" in *Artnet News*, January 14, 2019, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

⁸⁰ For instance: Matt Moen, "Did Kanye Donate \$10 Million to Get Back at Drake?" *Paper Magazine*, January 15, 2019, (Web: Accessed April 1, 2019).

administrative infrastructure necessary to accommodate visitors to the site.⁸¹ Though this collaboration is still in its planning stages, the goal is to ensure financial support for *Roden Crater* in perpetuity, as well as privileged access for ASU students to learn from the site across disciplines. In a release from ASU, they touted the initiative as “the first significant academic enterprise built around a singular piece of art.”⁸² In a related transaction, the President at ASU recently partnered with Michael Govan at LACMA as well, jointly spearheading an initiative to increase diversity among museum professionals.⁸³ At the time this LACMA initiative was being negotiated, Govan also served as board president of Skystone. These kinds of cross-institutional relationships are not uncommon nor necessarily condemnable, however, the overlapping interests of Govan’s various institutional roles illustrates how blurry lines can be between personal and institutional relationships in the arts.

Due to these recent fundraising developments, and likely other large gifts that have failed to make the headlines, *Roden Crater* is now slated to be complete within the next five years. What that will look like in terms of public access has yet to be seen. Given the structures in place now, it seems likely that the site will remain semi-private, accessible primarily to those who are represented by organizations that have invested in the work like ASU and LACMA.

⁸¹ Details of the partnership were first published by Faller, “Letting in the Light.”

⁸² Faller, “Letting in the Light.”

⁸³ See Arizona State University Art Department, “LACMA-ASU Partnership,” (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

CHAPTER III CASE STUDY: *CITY*

Man will never create anything really large in relation to the earth ... only in relation to himself and his size. The most formidable objects that man has touched are the earth and the moon. The greatest scale he understands is the distance between them, and that is nothing to what he suspects to exist.

— Michael Heizer⁸⁴

John Beardsley, in his 1977 catalog introduction for *Probing the Earth: Contemporary Land Projects* defines earthworks in this way: “Only those projects constructed of earth are properly described as Earthworks; thus the designation implies more limited concerns than those of most artists who work on a large scale in the landscape.”⁸⁵ While historians like Craig Adcock have used this definition to argue that projects like *Roden Crater*, which are more interested in the sky than the earth, are not by definition earthworks, this more limited definition is perfectly suited to Heizer’s magnum opus.⁸⁶ At its core, *City* is essentially a mining operation. Heizer uses mining equipment to extract raw materials from his mile-and-a half long pit to create *City*’s sculptural complexes. In a 1982 interview with *Horizon Magazine*, Heizer declared:

⁸⁴ Michael Heizer, Zdenek Felix, Museum Folkwang Essen, and Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, *Michael Heizer*, (Essen, Germany; Otterlo, Netherlands: Museum Folkwang Essen; Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, 1979), 22.

⁸⁵ John Beardsley, *Probing the Earth: Contemporary Land Art Projects*, (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, 1977), 9.

⁸⁶ See Adcock, 122-125. To be clear, I do not agree with Adcock that Turrell’s interest in the sky excludes *Roden Crater* from the earthwork genre. I mention this argument only to highlight that, relative to *Roden Crater*’s astrological focus, *City*, as a project, is more geologically focused.

I didn't come here for the context. I came here for materials, for gravel and for sand and water, which you need to make concrete, and the land was cheap desert, a flat and totally theatrical space. There is no landscape.⁸⁷

Further, Heizer has constructed much of the work inside the pit, below the horizon line, specifically so that the surrounding landscape is not visible as the viewer moves through its towering forms (Figure 13). In this sense, the artwork is not in the desert or for the desert, but strictly made *of* the desert.

In its completed form, the work will consist of four sculptural “complexes” made up of stone monoliths and minimal, concrete forms that appropriate indigenous American building techniques and structures while simultaneously recalling the widely publicized images of “Primary Structures,” the 1964 exhibition that helped popularize minimalist sculpture in the US (Figure 14).⁸⁸ This mixture of ancient motifs entangled with modern formalist languages has characterized Heizer’s career since its beginning. As many scholars have discussed, Heizer’s father, the renowned archeologist and scholar of pre-Columbian American anthropology, Robert Fleming Heizer, had an enduring influence on the artist’s work.⁸⁹ Similarly, as a Nevada/California native, he is the only one of the three artists included in this study who grew up in the landscape that he later claimed as his sculptural medium. These facts of Heizer’s upbringing, both his privileged access to indigenous modes of making and his authentic connection to the desert, served as

⁸⁷ B. Gabriel, “Works of Earth,” *Horizon Magazine*, January-February, 1982: 48.

⁸⁸ On the relationship between Heizer and so-called primary structures, see: Rainer Crone, “Prime Objects in Art: Scale, Shape, Time: Creations by Michael Heizer in the Deserts of Nevada,” *Yale Architectural Journal*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 14-35.

⁸⁹ See Lippard, *Overlay*, 130.

important markers of the intellectual territory Heizer spent his career fiercely claiming as his own.⁹⁰

Early in his career, Heizer set out to demarcate this intellectual terrain. His earliest works are paintings that obsessively examine the play of positive and negative which make an absence feel present. He exhibited these so-called “Negative Paintings” during his short enrollment at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1964, but left the school after one term and moved to New York.⁹¹ At the time, Manhattan was perhaps the most influential global art center in the world, and certainly an important standard bearer in the West for the newest, most contemporary art of the time.⁹² Throughout the 60s and the early 70s, art-stars-to-be from around the world flocked to the nightclubs, galleries, and warehouse studios of what would later be known as SoHo, congregating in a handful of fabled haunts where art, music, fashion, film, and literary icons formed tight knit cultural networks with wealthy heirs of industrial fortunes and self-made cultural producers. By 1968, Heizer’s NYC network had grown to include artists such as Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, and Walter De Maria among others who often joined him on what have become legendary expeditions and scouting missions that sought space for art outside of

⁹⁰ Facts of Heizer’s biography and his intellectual pursuits during his early career are taken largely from Germano Celant, Michael Heizer, and Fondazione Prada, *Michael Heizer*, (Milan, Italy: Fondazione Prada, 1997).

⁹¹ Celant, et. al., *Michael Heizer*, 525.

⁹² Details on the primacy of New York as a cultural hub during this era gathered from: Celant, et. al., *Michael Heizer*; Minji Kim, "Kansas City: There They Went," *ARTnews*, 109, no. 8, 2010; and R. Kostelanetz, *Soho: The Rise and Fall of an Artists' Colony*, (New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2003).

the gallery.⁹³ Furthermore, he met three patrons during this era who would end up serving as the financial pillars of Heizer's practice for decades to come—Robert Scull, Virginia Dwan, and Heiner Friedrich.

Both Virginia Dwan and Heiner Friedrich were gallery owners at the time and their relationships with the artist grew primarily through the organization of gallery exhibitions and sales. Friedrich, who would go on to co-found the Dia Foundation six years later, became Heizer's first dealer and represented him from his galleries in Germany.⁹⁴ In 1968, he gave Heizer his first solo show and oversaw a series of European commissions of his work. Thus, because of Friedrich, many of Heizer's earliest earthworks are located abroad. Given Friedrich's scope, Dwan's bi-coastal American audience provided a perfect supplement. Though Dwan's New York gallery was less than a year old when she first exhibited Heizer's work, she was already well-known to the city's elite because she had spent the prior six years expertly employing her family's mining and manufacturing fortune to represent promising artists in Los Angeles. She would end up giving Heizer his first New York exhibition in 1969 and would go on to commission his most famous work, *Double Negative* (1969-70). In the early 70s, both Dwan and Friedrich would close their galleries to focus their support on site-specific projects like Heizer's *City*.

⁹³ For further discussion and documentation of these expeditions, see: First Run Features, and Kanopy, *Troublemakers: The Story of Land Art*, (San Francisco, CA: First Run Features, 2016).

⁹⁴ Celant, *Michael Heizer*, 345-360.

Robert Scull's relationship with Heizer was slightly different.⁹⁵ Rather than a gallerist or art dealer, he was the owner of a large-scale taxi enterprise in New York who chose to spend his money on art. Unlike many private collectors, Scull was known for being an eager creative collaborator. He built friendships with the artists whose work he collected and engaged deeply with their ideas, helping to problem solve logistical obstacles to their vision. In 1967, he and Heizer developed a plan for what they conceived of as the largest artwork in the world—a series of ditches dug in various locations across a 520-mile stretch of Nevada. Known as *Nine Nevada Depressions* (Figure 15), the commission process included scouting trips together, logistical oversight of multiple land leases, as well as financial support for all costs, plus a generous artist stipend. In the end, Scull owned the work for the length of the land leases, which eventually terminated and the earth reabsorbed the depressions.⁹⁶

It is important to note that when Scull was collecting work by living artists, there was essentially no secondary market for such works. Contemporary art rarely made it into auction houses, and when it did there was typically one or two pieces among many lots of old masters or antiquities. In this sense, contemporary art was not an asset that one could expect to sell for a profit later on.⁹⁷ Thus, contemporary art collecting in the 60s was fueled by extra-monetary desires. In Scull's case, his motives appear primarily social.

⁹⁵ Details on Heizer's relationship with Scull taken from Celant, *Michael Heizer*, 111-125, and J. Goldman, "'My Sculpture in the Desert': Rober C. Scull and Michael Heizer," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 50(1/2): 62-67.

⁹⁶ Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 157.

⁹⁷ Information on the Scull Sale and birth of a secondary market for contemporary art is taken from Engel, *The Next Big Thing*, and Haden-Guest, *True Colors*, 133-54.

Author Tom Wolfe once described Scull and his wife Ethel as “the folk heroes of every social climber who ever hit New York” to which Scull responded: “It’s all true. I’d rather use art to climb than anything else.”⁹⁸ By the 70s, the Sculls had acquired a preeminent collection of pop and minimalist art by living artists who had become household names in American popular culture. In October of 1973, the couple shocked the art world and brought fifty of their works to auction at Sotheby’s.⁹⁹ It was the first time that an auction house had hosted a single-owner sale featuring contemporary American art and the works sold for many multiples of their purchase prices. For instance, a painting by Cy Twombly that Scull bought for \$750 sold for \$40,000. A Jasper Johns painting, *Double White Map*, went for \$240,000. Scull had bought it for \$10,200. These were record sales for living artists reaching a then unheard of total of \$2.2 million, the equivalent of \$12 million today. The event is often cited as the birth of the contemporary art market, marking a fundamental shift in the professionalization of the visual arts.

The Scull sale was met with mixed reactions from artists. Many were offended and their relationship with Scull suffered. Robert Rauschenberg infamously shoved Scull after the sale in an angry outburst that marked the end of their long artist-patron relationship.¹⁰⁰ As in any secondary market sales, the artists received no part of the profit made on the re-sale of their artwork. Of course some artists, like Andy Warhol, saw that

⁹⁸ Artzine, “How the 1973 Scull Auction Changed the Art Market Forever,” (Web: Accessed April 29,19).

⁹⁹ Sales records as reported in: Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures*, 111-115,

¹⁰⁰ Haden-Guest, *True Colors*,199-203.

he too could now charge more for his work and celebrated the sale.¹⁰¹ Undeniably, the Scull sale put contemporary art on the map as a financial investment. No longer could the auction houses and investment firms overlook the market for this work, and no longer could artists rest easy knowing that their supporters were invested in them and their work and not merely the profitability of the commodities they produced.

The following year, Heizer left his New York painting studio and moved full time to his property in the Nevada desert.¹⁰² At that point, his *City* project had already been brewing for four years. Shortly after completing *Double Negative* in 1970, he began scouting for another site that could accommodate an artwork of a similar scale. After two years, he found a suitable property in a remote region of the Great Basin Desert approximately four hours north of Las Vegas. He purchased the plot with a loan from his friend and dealer Virginia Dwan, and completed *City*'s initial structure, *Complex One* two years later (Figure 16). Thus, initial progress on the site was relatively rapid.¹⁰³

Things continued to look up when Heiner Friedrich and his wife Philippa De Menil founded the Dia Foundation and Heizer joined the fold of artists who the foundation lavishly supported in its heyday. Ironically, the Dia Golden Age was a relatively unproductive era in *City*'s history. For six years, the site functioned less as an artwork and more as a bohemian homestead where Heizer along with Barbara Lipper and Mary Shanahan weathered the elements of the brutal high desert together and lived nearly

¹⁰¹ Haden-Guest, *True Colors*, 222-225.

¹⁰² My understanding of the early history of *City* relies heavily on: Celant et. al., *Michael Heizer*, and Dana Goodyear, "A Monument to Outlast Humanity," *The New Yorker*, August 29, 2018, (Web: Accessed May 1, 2019).

¹⁰³ "Biography" in Celant et.al., *Michael Heizer*, 522-567.

self-sufficiently on what came to be called The Sleep Late Ranch.¹⁰⁴ Both women would marry Heizer at different times; Lipper would marry and divorce him three times in all. But both women were also important collaborators on the artwork. In particular, Shanahan played a crucial role in the design and construction of *City*, and she continues to oversee management efforts at the site to this day. In a recent interview, she described the difficulty of their life on the ranch during this period, including the challenges of the work, the terrain, and the relationships, as well as the pride Heizer took in such hardships.¹⁰⁵

After a six-year hiatus, Heizer got back to work on his monument, announcing in 1980 that *Complexes Two* and *Three* were now under way. However, the first would not be completed until 1988 and the latter until 1999.¹⁰⁶ It is difficult to say for sure what caused these projects to take so much longer than *Complex One*. Of course, Dia's financial downturn in 1982 likely interrupted anticipated funding. Shortly after Friedrich's ousting at Dia in 1983, Heizer returned to New York where he set up a studio once again and began building new relationships with funders. His efforts were apparently successful as the following year he was awarded a large-scale commission at LACMA as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship Award.¹⁰⁷ This windfall helped sustain steady progress through the slow years of the 80s and led to the eventual completion of

¹⁰⁴ The details of the bohemian lifestyle of Heizer, Shanahan, and Lipper has gone relatively unreported throughout the history of the project and is only really discussed in Goodyear's 2016 interview with the artist. See: Goodyear, "A Monument to Outlast Humanity."

¹⁰⁵ Goodyear, "A Monument to Outlast Humanity."

¹⁰⁶ Construction timelines culled from Celant, *Michael Heizer*, 525.

¹⁰⁷ Celant, *Michael Heizer*, 528.

Complex Two in 1988. Though Heizer continued to grow his practice and recruit support for his work through these years, in general, the late 80s and early 90s saw little progress on the physical construction of *City*. This echoes the dip in progress experienced at *Roden Crater* in the 80s and 90s and coincides with both artists' growing international reputations. Thus, in many ways, these years were foundational and necessary for the projects' eventual success.

In Heizer's case, his earthworks continued to circulate globally in museum exhibitions and publications related to the origins and evolution of land art, but he also continued to paint and his work continued to circulate in the art market as well.¹⁰⁸ During this period, Heizer had relationships with several different art dealers, which suggests at least a portion of Heizer's livelihood came from art sales.¹⁰⁹ Due to this market-based component of Heizer's income, I posit that Heizer's object-making and mass moving are likely in a symbiotic relationship: his paintings bring income while his earthworks bring clout—which, in turn, may encourage collectors to pay higher prices. Thus, even while funding for *City* relies heavily on outright gifts from a handful of close and loyal patrons, Heizer's practice more generally also depends on income from the sale of original artworks to collectors who are drawn to his work as a name brand commodity.

However, Heizer's relationship to the market has been somewhat rocky. Throughout his career, he has periodically abandoned painting, even destroyed his own work. But he always returns to the medium, and has been known to recreate the works he

¹⁰⁸ For instance, Beardsley's first edition of *Earthworks and Beyond* was published in 1984 and featured Heizer as a pioneer of the genre. For a full list of exhibitions and publications focusing on the artist during the 80s and early 90s, see: Celant et. al., *Michael Heizer*, 522-536.

¹⁰⁹ Celant, *Michael Heizer*, 244.

destroys.¹¹⁰ This on-again-off-again, long-term relationship reflects a career-long ambivalence about objects.¹¹¹ For instance, in a 1984 interview recounting his early career, Heizer noted: “I didn’t want to make objects. What was interesting was the chance to make something metaphysical.”¹¹² Heizer’s inability to abandoned object-making, despite a stated disinterest, is perhaps partially explained by Heizer’s financial reliance on market-ready artwork to support his desert-bound lifestyle and monumental ambitions. By retaining a connection to the market, it seems likely that Heizer’s paintings provide a direct income that the artist can then reinvested into his desert project.

This dynamic of creating work for the market to support work that cannot be sold could enable Heizer to access the wealth of elite art collectors while maintaining total ownership over *City*. Unlike *Double Negative*, which was sited on land owned by Virginia Dwan and eventually donated to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (LA MOCA), the land containing *City* is the artist’s private property, and plans are to keep it that way.¹¹³ Unflinching in his dominion over the property and his commitment to maintaining a veil of secrecy around the work until it is complete, *City* has not been eligible for or interested in public funding (outside of the tax-free status

¹¹⁰ Celant et. al., *Michael Heizer*, XXXV.

¹¹¹ For further discussion on Heizer’s relationship to object-making, see: J. Brown, “Interview,” in Michael Heizer, Julia Brown, and Barbara Heizer, *Sculpture in Reverse*, (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

¹¹² Heizer et. al. *Sculpture in Reverse*, 8.

¹¹³ Goodyear, “A Monument to Outlast Humanity.”

granted to private foundations) and has had to rely on the support of just a few trusted insiders.¹¹⁴

Among the inner circle of trusted advisors and funders, Dwan has remained a central figure to this day. Dia, though less reliable, renewed its support for the work in the mid-1990s when Michael Govan was hired as the executive director. Within three years of Govan's appointment at Dia, he and Heizer had incorporated the nonprofit Triple Aught Foundation, which included on its board of directors Heizer, Mary Shanahan, Michael Govan, Virginia Dwan, and a Nevada-based realstate developer named Wendy Rudder.¹¹⁵ The organization essentially institutionalized Heizer's inner circle and provided a new structure for the artist to engage with funders without sacrificing control over his work. Soon Govan had declared it his personal mission to complete the artist's plans, and by 1999 *Complex 3* was done.¹¹⁶

Before work could begin on the final complex, however, the foundation recognized the need for restoration on the parts of the work that were now nearly thirty years old.¹¹⁷ This partially explains why, in the twenty years since *Complex 3* was completed, there has been no status report on *Complex 4*. However, Heizer and the team have also been held up by an existential threat to the project.

¹¹⁴ This conclusion is drawn from the fact that the project has never received any funding from the NEA or any regional/municipal arts organizations in Nevada. Rather, over 99% of income to the nonprofit organization that oversees *City* come from private donors giving \$100,000 or more each year. This data is taken from the Triple Aught Foundation's Form 990s from the years 2014, 2015, and 2016.

¹¹⁵ Guidestar by Candid, "Triple Aught Foundation Inc," (Web: Accessed April 21, 2019).

¹¹⁶ See Mostafa Heddaya, "The Long Fight for Michael Heizer's 'City'," in *Blouin Art Info*, April 2, 2015, (Web: Accessed April 22, 2019).

¹¹⁷ Goodyear, "A Monument to Outlast Humanity."

In 2000, the federal government proposed plans to construct a nuclear waste plant at Yucca Mountain, located approximately one hundred miles southwest of Heizer's property (Figure 17). If completed, the project would have included a railroad that would cut through the desert near Heizer's land. Heizer threatened to destroy the work, blow it up, rather than let it be slowly contaminated by nuclear waste, and many other environmental and social activist groups also rose up to fight against the proposal.¹¹⁸ Only after a decade of politically charged organizing and advocacy, both on a local and national level, was the site finally taken off the table as an option for congress to consider.¹¹⁹

In the years that followed, momentum from the activist groups and political alliances that had formed to stop the Yucca Mountain project developed into a movement to declare over 700,000 acres of the Great Basin desert a national monument. In 2015, these efforts were successful—President Obama declared the region surrounding Heizer's *City* as the Basin and Range National Monument.¹²⁰ Along with important prehistoric rock art specimens, fossils, and fragile ecosystems, Obama's official proclamation also cited *City* specifically as a national asset worthy of protection. Strikingly, Heizer's land remains a privately owned enclave within the larger federally designated area, which suggests a somewhat unusual land use agreement was struck between Heizer and the

¹¹⁸ Michael Kimmelman, "Art's Last Lonely Cowboy," *New York Times Magazine*, February 6, 2005, (Web: Accessed May 1, 2019).

¹¹⁹ Richard Harris, "Obama Cuts Funds to Nuclear Waste Repository," *Morning Edition, National Public Radio*, March 9, 2009 (Web: Accessed May 1, 2019). Notably, rumors surfaced soon after the 2016 presidential election that congress would once again be considering the Yucca site, but no actions have been taken to reignite the disposal site's construction as of this writing.

¹²⁰ Barack Obama, "Presidential Proclamation: Establishment of the Basin and Range National Monument," Office of the Press Secretary, July 10, 2015, (Web Accessed May 1, 2019).

federal government, most likely negotiated by the president of Heizer's foundation, Michael Govan.¹²¹

If the project goes on to be managed in a similar fashion to Heizer's earlier project, *Double Negative*, the site will be primarily self-managed by its remoteness and the treacherousness of its approach.¹²² Simply by not paving the roads and not providing lodging or other accommodations, the artist, or more likely LACMA, can effectively limit the number of visitors to the site and help keep conservation costs to a minimum.¹²³ In the end, the fate of *City* will be negotiated and perhaps renegotiated by the artist, his estate, his nonprofit, and the federal bureau of land management to mediate the accessibility of the site to public audiences, but the work will likely require minimal oversight to stand the test of time.

Thus, fundraising at the organization seems to be winding down.¹²⁴ While *Roden Crater's* funding goals become greater and more expansive as the project nears completion, *City* appears to have a more singular goal, one with a clear state of completion. Likewise, its nonprofit funding structure shows an organization that is not meant to last forever. There is no endowment or investment fund to provide steady revenue in the future because once the project is complete, the foundation will no longer be necessary.

¹²¹ Friends of Basin and Range National Monument, "Art," (Web: Accessed 4/21/2019).

¹²² After visiting *Double Negative*, I can attest to the treacherousness of the journey.

¹²³ To clarify, LAMOCA own Heizer's first earthwork, *Double Negative* due to a sale made between the museum of Virginia Dwan. *City* will likely fall under the stewardship of LACMA due to Heizer's relationship with Michael Govan, LACMA's current executive director.

¹²⁴ Based on recent Form 990 filings for the Triple Aught Foundation, the net assets for the Triple Aught Foundation are steadily declining.

CHAPTER IV CASE STUDY: STAR AXIS

This time, I requested a night visit to the north-star viewing chamber. After dinner, Ross, his partner Jill O’Bryan, and I sat in the deepening black of the night ... But the night was covered in clouds and only a faint blur could be guessed at through the opening ... Still, there was the quiet, the fragrance of cooling, young cement and the velvety of the pyramid that enclosed us. There was the intimacy of three people together waiting for something.

—Virginia Dwan¹²⁵

Like *Roden Crater*, Charles Ross’s *Star Axis* does not satisfy the limited scope of “earthworks” laid out by John Beardsley in 1977. Both works are more interested in the sky than the sediment below (Figure 18). Of all three projects examined here, *Star Axis* is by far the smallest and its budget has been much less exorbitant, but it is nonetheless a monumental work of art by any other standard. When completed, the work will be one tenth of a mile wide and consist of six chambers oriented along the axis of an eleven-story staircase leading up the side of a mesa in the high desert region east of Santa Fe (Figure 19).¹²⁶ At the apex of the axis, an oculus in the upper room frames Polaris, the North Star, perfectly encapsulating the extremities of the star’s wobble over a sixteen-thousand-year cycle (Figure 20). This is just one of many perceptual strategies the artist employs at the site in an effort to bring the movement of the stars into human scale.

¹²⁵ Virginia Dwan, “Time Revealed,” in Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 335-336.

¹²⁶ Details about the form and history of *Star Axis* are taken primarily from: Star Axis Project, “About,” (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019); Land Light Foundation, “About,” (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019); and the artist’s monograph: Charles Ross, Klaus Ottmann, Thomas McEvelley, Loïc Malle, Anna Halprin, and Michael Heizer, *Charles Ross: The Substance of Light*, (Santa Fe, NM; New York, NY: Radius Books, D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2012.

Much of the artist's career has been dedicated to this interest in visualizing and materializing natural light cycles and the movement of the stars. But at its core, Ross's work is about mathematics. His art practice took root while he was studying mathematics as an undergraduate at UC Berkeley where he began exploring the symmetry, balance, and rhythms of math through large-scale, welded, environmental sculptures. In 1965, apparently after a vivid dream, he abandoned this practice and dedicated himself to creating transparent prism sculptures. Michael Heizer, who had a studio above Ross in San Francisco at the time, would later publish Ross's "obituary" in a clever acknowledgement of the death and subsequent rebirth of the artist's vision.¹²⁷

During these years of creative transformation, Ross supported himself largely through his active teaching career.¹²⁸ Throughout the 60s he taught sculpture at UC Berkley, Cornell University, the School of Visual Arts, and Lehman College. His frequent travel from California to New York allowed him to build a bi-coastal art practice at the time, but he eventually committed himself to New York.¹²⁹ In 1967, he invested in an artist co-op building at 80 Wooster Street, which, according to the artist's website is "the co-op that launched SoHo."¹³⁰

The next year, he would have his first show at Dwan Gallery, marking the start of a friendship and patronage relationship that continues to this day. Ross and Dwan's

¹²⁷ Michael Heizer, "Obituary" in Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 22-24.

¹²⁸ Details of Ross's early career are taken primarily from Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*.

¹²⁹ Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 233.

¹³⁰ Charles Ross, "Biography," Charles Ross Studio Website, (Web: Accessed April 20, 2019).

chance acquaintance was characteristic of the New York scene at the time and illustrates how the city functioned as a geographically focused nexus of creative energy and investment capital during the late 1960s. The two met at the legendary Max's Kansas City, a nightclub known for its roster of elite cultural producers who held standing table reservations.¹³¹ Max's was open from 1965 through 1981 and attracted regulars from Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Smithson, to William S. Burroughs, David Bowie, and Lou Reed. At Max's, along with a handful of other fabled haunts, New York City's young and cosmopolitan heirs of industrial fortunes held court with artists, celebrities, and social climbers forging relationships around creative ideas and projects.¹³² Dwan was already a prominent figure at Max's when she met Ross there in 1968. She initially brushed him off as "just another artist" but agreed to visit his nearby studio after learning he made prisms (apparently, an interest of hers as well).¹³³

During their first meeting, she purchased two early prism sculptures, and would go on to host three exhibitions of Ross's work in her New York gallery over the next four years (Figure 21). After 1969, Ross used these exhibition opportunities, not to sell work necessarily, but to pitch ideas for commissions on an architectural scale. For instance, in

¹³¹ For more on the legacy of Max's Kansas City, see: Kim, "Kansas City: There they Went."

¹³² For more on Dwan's social status with the nexus of Max's Kansas City, see: Germano Celant, *Virginia Dwan: Dwan Gallery*, (Milan, Italy: Skira Editore, 2016); and Kostelanetz, *SoHo*.

¹³³ Prisms were a personal interest of Dwan's—a fact that Ross's friend Sol LeWitt had made him aware of before introducing him to Dwan. See more about Dwan in: Virginia Dwan, Paige Rozanski, James Sampson Meyer, and National Gallery of Art, *Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959-1971*, (Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; London, UK: National Gallery of Art in Association with the University of Chicago Press, 2016). Quotation: Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 248.

Ross's 1971 exhibition, *Sunlight Dispersion*, he showed a video compilation of his large-scale refracted light works in action (Figure 22). Rather than sales, his hope was that an architect or developer might see the film and reach out to collaborate on a large-scale, site-specific project—something beyond the scope of a gallery exhibition.¹³⁴ In fact, architect Moshe Safdie saw the show and gave Ross his first big commission. Although their ill-fated project was never built, Ross's relationship with Safdie persisted and materialized twenty years later in the Harvard Business School Chapel (Figure 23).

Commissions have remained a priority for Ross since the 1970s. While progress at *Star Axis* has at times seemed to stall out, Ross has consistently completed an average of one public art commission every two years since 1976.¹³⁵ However, *Star Axis* is a different kind of project.

Unlike Ross's commissions, which are typically architectural collaborations within courthouses, museums, universities, and other public or at least semi-public spaces, access to *Star Axis* will remain mediated, restricted, and privatized.¹³⁶ During an onsite interview with the artist's partner and collaborator, Jill O'Bryan, in September 2018, she described that current plans for the visitor experience are modeled in part after De Maria's *Lightning Field* (1977). In the case of *Lightning Field*, the work is closed to the public and accessible only by reserving space for an overnight visit during the open season. A maximum of six visitors can be accommodated at any one time, and

¹³⁴ Charles Ross as quoted in Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 223.

¹³⁵ For a list of all public art commissions, see: Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 334-339.

reservations fill up quickly each year when they reopen. Today, reservation fees for *Lightning Field* amount to \$150-\$225 per person, depending on the time of year.¹³⁷

At *Star Axis*, a similar plan is underway. Through a partnership with the Museum of Outdoor Arts, a guesthouse designed by green architecture firm MOS has already been constructed. Like the cabins at *Lightning Field*, the so-called “Elements House” at *Star Axis* (Figure 23), will house up to six guests and allow those visitors to have a more intimate experience with the work. In the case of *Lightning Field*, the visitor program is maintained by the Dia Foundation and supported by an endowment established by Ray A. Graham III and Lannan Foundation, with additional support from the State of New Mexico, and De Maria's assistant Helen Winkler Fosdick.

Somewhat surprisingly, Ross is not on the roster of artists that Dia supports. However, his foundation has managed to set aside an endowment of approximately one million dollars, which, through responsible investments, can be reasonably expected to provide approximately \$50,000 in annual operating revenue for the project in perpetuity.¹³⁸ While this steady stream of income will help keep *Star Axis* functioning as the artist intends, it will likely take additional support, both from individual donors and other arts institutions, to ensure it stands the test of time. Thus, the greatest hurdle for the project in the coming years will be to build a network of support around *Star Axis* that will not only cover the costs of its construction, but will also provide a revenue structure to sustainably fund it into the future.

¹³⁷ Dia Website, “Visitor Information – Lightning Field,” *Dia Foundation Website*. (Web: Accessed June 10, 2018).

¹³⁸ Calculated using data from Land Light Foundation (Form 990-PF, 2015, 2016, and 2017), Part 1, Analysis of Revenue and Expenses.

While the task of securing the future of *Star Axis* may be a pressing concern now, the project was initially born out of an optimistic and generous funding stream. In 1971, shortly after Virginia Dwan closed her last gallery to focus on the site-specific ambitions of her inner circle, Ross began researching ranchland real estate in the American southwest.¹³⁹ When he initially set out, he had in mind two ideas for ambitious desert-bound works. The first was a collaboration with the inventor Maris Ambats to create a self-contained, solar-powered freezer that could keep a 12x12 foot ice cube frozen under the desert sun. However, they eventually deemed *Solar Ice Cube* unfeasible and unsafe, and Ross focused his energies on the seemingly more manageable project, *Star Axis*.¹⁴⁰ Though he knew the work would be his most ambitious to date, with Dwan's support behind him he was confident it could be completed in just a few years.¹⁴¹

Of the three projects examined in this study, Ross had the hardest time finding a plot of land that could accommodate the artwork he envisioned. This was due largely to the fact that he was unable to effectively assess the land for his specific needs from the air.¹⁴² Thus, his search dragged on for nearly six years. While records regarding the original purchase of the property in 1977 are not publicly available, based on Dwan's

¹³⁹ Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 233.

¹⁴⁰ The technology they were working on would have required a large amount of cyanide to be left unattended in the desert. Ross says "In case of an accident, it would've poisoned half the state of New Mexico ... It wasn't practical, but it was a great idea for an artwork." Loic Malle, "Charles Ross: Interview by Loic Malle, June 2009, New Mexico and March 2011, New York City." in Ross et. al., *Charles Ross: the Substance of Light*, 239.

¹⁴¹ Ross et. al., *Charles Ross: the Substance of Light*, 244.

¹⁴² Ross et. al., *Charles Ross: the Substance of Light*, 26.

arrangement with Heizer, and her similar relationship with Ross, it seems likely that Dwan and Ross reached a similar arrangement regarding the sale. Based on precedent, I speculate that the property purchased for *Star Axis* was most likely financed in Ross's name using a loan from Dwan that was later either paid off or forgiven.¹⁴³ However, according to an interview with John Weber, Dwan's long-time gallery director who went on to represent Ross himself in later years, it was common practice at the time for gallerists to provide artists funding for projects as advances on sales.¹⁴⁴ Thus, loans to Dwan's artists for their un-salable works were not necessarily forgiven, but rather repaid through commissions kept by the gallery from sales. Thus, in some sense, Dwan's support for *Star Axis* was contingent upon steady production of market-ready merchandise.

However, Ross would have been buffered from the influence of fickle commodities markets, both because Dwan was a very generous and passionate art dealer who was loyal to her artists beyond market trends, and also because Ross retained a thriving practice as a commission-based public artist. These two sides of Ross's practice (both his public art commissions and his more commercial paintings, prints, and sculptures) are intimately related because, as art advisor and auctioneer Amy Cappalazzo puts it, contemporary art collectors "buy with their ears and not their eyes."¹⁴⁵ In other words, they are buying based on what advisors and peers tell them rather than buying

¹⁴³ Dwan had set a precedent for this type of arrangement with her artists when she gave Heizer a loan to buy the land for *City* and then later forgave the debt. See: Celant, *Michael Heizer*, 324.

¹⁴⁴ McElhinney, "Oral history interview with John Weber."

¹⁴⁵ Engel et. al., *The Next Big Thing*.

based on their own aesthetic judgments. Thus, an artist's reputation and their accolades serve as badges of honor that professionals can use as evidence of a wise investment opportunity for would-be collectors. Because public art commissions and other competitive awards have the power to instill confidence in potential buyers, such awards have a direct effect on the market.¹⁴⁶

To complicate matters, the leadership at nonprofit organizations that fund art commissions (i.e. board members, directors and donors at museums, educational institutions, and private foundations) often maintain meaningful connections to private art collections outside the institution they work with.¹⁴⁷ On the one hand, this is not surprising—of course those people who are passionate collectors are the same people who want to support artists in other ways through charitable organizations. But the dynamics of the nonprofit arts funding system leave room for collectors to use their influence at nonprofits to funnel money into the careers of artists in their collections. Through their involvement in these organizations, patrons can at times find themselves in a position to advocate for investments from tax-exempt organizations into initiatives and programs that primarily benefit themselves. Though there are some regulations that fine organizations that engage in this type of “self-dealing,” such fees only apply to specific kinds of self-dealing and are not heavily enforced, thus the potential is very real for

¹⁴⁶ On “buying with your ears” and more discussion on the effect of commissions and competitive awards on art markets, see Van Den Engel, *The Next Big Thing*, and Kahn, *The Price of Anything*, (Los Angeles, CA; New York, NY: HBO Documentary Films; Hot & Sunny Productions; Anthos Media Productions, 2017).

¹⁴⁷ This generalization is based off of Google searches of the board members and major donors listed on the Form 990 documents that I examined. In my searches, I looked for the patron's name paired with “art collection” and in most cases, a newspaper article or a published biography made mention of the individual's personal or associated art collection.

patrons to leverage their power within institutions to inflate the cultural capital of their own collection.¹⁴⁸ Certainly these misuses of the nonprofit sector do not characterize all organizations, however, any amount of self-dealing threatens to diminish public benefit by diverting wealth out of the tax system into nonprofit institutions that primarily serve their own leadership.

Though perhaps a benign example, the case of the Warhol Foundation's support for *Star Axis* illustrates how a nonprofit organization's grant making policy might affect the status of an associated collection. In the early 1970s, Andy Warhol acquired several works by Ross and was a supporter of the artist.¹⁴⁹ Today, the Warhol Foundation, which oversees the Warhol Collection, continues to support Ross through grants.¹⁵⁰ In this case, the Warhol collection, as a steward of Ross's work, benefits from Ross's success as an artist, and is simultaneously in a position to provide funding to help ensure such success. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the Warhol Foundation was motivated by self-interest when choosing to fund *Star Axis*, but they offer a documented example of a specific type of conflict of interest that goes largely unregulated in the arts. In most situations, collection holdings remain private, and thus it is often impossible to know for sure the degree to which a chairperson's personal assets are invested in the artists their organization funds.

These kinds of unregulated social mechanisms within the art world have historically fueled fears that public art in America will fall into the hands of the rich and

¹⁴⁸ A note on self-dealing...

¹⁴⁹ Ross et. al., *Charles Ross: the Substance of Light*, 133.

¹⁵⁰ Star Axis Project, "Supporters," (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

serve aristocratic class distinctions rather than democratic purposes.¹⁵¹ These fears came to a head in the 1980s when artists and various publics were swept up in the controversy surrounding Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*. The sculpture in question, a site-specific work installed in Manhattan's Foley Federal Plaza in 1981, became the focal point in a national conversation about the definitions and expectations for publicly funded art.¹⁵² In 1989, the sculpture was taken down after years of protests and attempts at bureaucratic solutions. As a fellow public artist and a friend of Serra's, the decision to effectively revoke a commission would have likely given Ross doubts about the legacy and longevity of his own publicly funded works. Though Ross does not speak on the issue directly in his writings or interviews, it is telling that he received his last NEA grant in 1984, after receiving four of their grants over the course of his career.¹⁵³ Given this break, it is possible that Ross was willing to pass up a semi-reliable source of funding to avoid the possibility of censorship or renegotiated agreements.

The *Tilted Arc* saga would lead to a fundamental shift in philosophy at the NEA. This shift, towards a more risk-averse conservatism, was evident in the policies adopted in the years directly following the debacle. Namely, in 1990, the NEA began routinely vetoing grant candidates based on the subject matter of their work even after they had

¹⁵¹ For further discussion of American philanthropy, see: Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History. Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹⁵² For a detailed account of the controversy, see: Senie, *The Tilted Arc Controversy*.

¹⁵³ Previous NEA grant recipients are recorded in their annual reports. Ross is not listed after the 1984 Annual Report.

passed the peer review process.¹⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, the institution abolished its individual artist grants.¹⁵⁵ At that point, only artists working in direct partnership with an institution could receive any NEA funding. Thus, the federal body was one step further removed from any scandals or controversies involving the artists who ended up with their funding in the end.

Though Ross seemingly became weary of government funding in the 80s, he simultaneously reaped the benefits of the NEA grants he had been awarded in the 1970s. Specifically, the NEA-funded artist residency, where Ross worked with students at Utah State University to draft large-scale *Star Maps* in 1974, would earn him a place in the American pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 1986.¹⁵⁶ Like large-scale public art commissions, biennial exhibitions also have the power to add value to an artist's brand, and the Venice Biennale is arguably the apogee of biennial culture. Thus, just as he was confronted by the limitations of public art, Ross also saw the seeds of his NEA projects come to fruition and bring his work to a new level of global visibility.

Such developments in Ross's career, however, proved to have little effect on the progress at *Star Axis* during the 1980s. But the tides began to turn in 1990 when Ross met

¹⁵⁴ In 1990, Karen Finley, John Fleck, Holly Hughes, and Tim Mille sued the National Endowment for the Arts over this practice after the controversy over Andre Serrano's *Piss Christ* as well as the Robert Rauschenberg exhibitions which were penalized for using NEA funds to support artists whose content was objectionable to some members of the public. The case went to the Supreme Court where the artists won. See more: Neil Patten, "The Politics of Art and the Irony of Politics: How the Supreme Court, Congress, the NEA, and Karen Finley Misunderstand Art and Law in *National Endowment For the Arts v. Finley*." *Houston Law Review*, 37, no. 2, (2000): 559-602.

¹⁵⁵ Patten (2002), 563.

¹⁵⁶ Ross et. al., *Charles Ross: the Substance of Light*, 133.

Loïc Malle.¹⁵⁷ At the time, Malle owned two galleries in Paris and was working with Virginia Dwan on back-to-back exhibitions about the legacy of her gallery. In the process of historicizing Dwan and her artists, Malle formed a friendship with Ross and began to suspect that he had not received his due as a prominent figure in the Dwan gallery saga.

Over the years, Malle worked with Ross to increase the visibility of his practice through exhibitions and publications, and would later serve as the board president of the artist's foundation. In addition to Malle's contributions, Jill O'Bryan, has also played a central role in the institutionalization of Ross's practice and the oversight of his magnum opus. O'Bryan met Ross in 1994, when she came to work for the artist at NYU and later became his wife and an important collaborator in the process of formalizing and documenting *Star Axis*, as well as Ross's career more generally. Where Michael Govan, via both the Dia Foundation and LACMA, stepped in to provide the administrative leadership necessary to bring *Roden Crater* and *City* to the brink of completion, Malle and O'Bryan have similarly brought to *Star Axis* the administrative skills and the will to plan necessary for a structure of this nature.

Energized, perhaps by these new relationships, the 90s were productive years for Ross and *Star Axis*.¹⁵⁸ In 1992, he exhibited *Star Axis* for the first time in the Johnson Gallery at the University of New Mexico, and completed a series of large-scale commissions including the *Harvard Business School Chapel* (1992), *A Year of Solar*

¹⁵⁷ The friendship between Malle and Ross is discussed in Malle's interview with the artist, published in Ross et. al., *Charles Ross: the Substance of Light*, 222.

¹⁵⁸ The following timeline of activities is adapted from the artist's biography published in Ross et. al., *Charles Ross: the Substance of Light*, 321-333.

Burns created in collaboration with Chateau d’Oiron (1993), and the *Dwan Light Sanctuary* (1996) (Figure 24).

In 2005, Ross completed a high profile commission in the new building unveiled on the national mall to serve as the home of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Two years later, Ross, like Turrell and Heizer, incorporated a nonprofit private foundation—Land Light Foundation. The timing here suggests that perhaps Ross’s exposure from the NMAI commission gave him enough visibility as an artist to warrant an organizational structure through which to administer relationships with supporters. Notably, Jill O’Bryan directs the Land Light Foundation, and thus, many of these patronage and support relationships are threaded through her.¹⁵⁹ While O’Bryan leads the foundation, it has remained a tight knit group with officers including only Ross, Malle, and O’Bryan, with Dwan typically providing biannual gifts amounting to over half of the foundation’s total revenue. After Dwan, Ross himself is among the foundation’s largest contributors.

Though small, the organization’s incorporation has had a tremendous effect on the progression of the *Star Axis* project. However, this effect has been indirect. Like Turrell, who unrolled a series of retrospectives that helped to ignite the current momentum at *Roden Crater*, Land Light organized a series of major exhibitions of Ross’ work around the world throughout 2011 and 2012, culminating in a solo exhibition at Gerald Peter’s Gallery in Santa Fe, and the release of the artist’s monograph, *Charles Ross: The Substance of Light*. In Ross’s case, these were not retrospective exhibitions—in fact

¹⁵⁹ O’Bryan clarified her role at the foundation during an onsite interview with the author in September 2018.

many of them were group shows. However, they did include several exhibitions that helped realign the artist with the canonical land artists of the 60s and 70s. For instance, the inclusion of *Star Axis* in the landmark exhibition, *Ends of the Earth: Art of the Land to 1974*, served to stress the project's origin within the exhibition title's chronological scope. Several other exhibitions during this time likewise addressed land art specifically and presented *Star Axis* among earthworks by the so-called "high priests" of the land art movement, effectively weaving Ross into the history of a movement that some believe he was unfairly excluded from.¹⁶⁰

In addition to this initiative to position *Star Axis* as a canonical land art monument, construction has also gained momentum under the stewardship of the Land Light Foundation. During a visit to the site in the summer of 2018, one of the final stone slabs was being placed in the structure's retaining wall, and at least three of the five chambers were operational and affective. After seeing the site, the estimated opening date of 2022 seemed reasonable. Of course, the construction only represents the tip of the iceberg. The real work will be in completing the institutionalization process to govern the fate of the work for future generations.

¹⁶⁰ Dwan is quoted on page 93 of Kaiser and Kwon, *Ends of the Earth*: "Walter De Maria, Michael Heizer, Charles Ross, Robert Smithon. These are the high priests of Land art, the Earthworks artists I supported and exhibited at Virginia Dwan Gallery."

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

Positive social change results mostly from connecting more deeply to the people around you rather than rising above them, from coordinated rather than solo action. Among the virtues that matter are ... listening, respect, patience, negotiation, strategic planning, storytelling. But we like our lone and exceptional heroes, and the drama of violence and the virtue of muscle, or at least that's what we get, over and over, and in the course of getting them we don't get much of a picture of how change happens and what our role in it might be.

—Rebecca Solnit¹⁶¹

As this study has shown, *Roden Crater*, *City*, and *Star Axis* represent a unique subset of earthworks. The features that unify them are both material and conceptual, as well as contextual. Materially, they all claim remote American landscapes as their sculptural medium and strive to manipulate the geography of their site to achieve their aesthetic goals. Conceptually, they are rooted in ideas of mathematical precision, geologic time, cosmology, and monumentality. Perhaps most importantly, these projects spur from the same moment and respond to a similar impetus. All three were deployed after *Spiral Jetty* and *Double Negative* had become icons of the earthworks genre, when patrons like Dwan were already passionately championing this type of work.¹⁶² When proposed, these projects capitalized on the fervor of such wealthy patrons by imagining larger and more ambitious projects than those first permanent, monumental incursions in the desert. Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* also came out of this moment but, unlike

¹⁶¹ Rebecca Solnit, "When the Hero is the Problem: On Robert Mueller, Greta Thunberg, and Finding Strength in Numbers," *Lit Hub*, April 2, 2019, (Web: Accessed May 1, 2019).

¹⁶² A note on Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels: Sun Tunnels* (1974) must be included in any list of earthworks icons; however, technically both *City* (1972-present) and *Star Axis* (1971-present) were conceived of before Holt's work was completed in 1974. Nonetheless, none of the projects presented here broke ground in-situ until after *Sun Tunnels* had become deeply embedded in the earthworks canon.

the projects detailed here, it was completed within a decade of its conception. I argue that these sites, unlike *Lightning Field*, overshot the height of the earthworks movement and failed to come together before public opinion shifted and this type of work fell out of favor. And yet, precisely because of their failure to reach completion, these sites offer a unique lens through which to examine the continued history of earthworks beyond the 1970s.

In all three cases, these projects experienced a lapse in activity beginning in the late 1970s, which I argue was a result of both an economic downturn as well as a shift in public art discourse, which began embracing socially engaged urban art practices over the modern monuments that had constituted public art in the years prior. However, the projects were never abandoned altogether and have recently begun to emerge from this earthworks dark age.

For both *Roden Crater* and *City*, celebrity museum director, Michael Govan, reignited the projects' momentum. At *Star Axis*, this role fell largely to Parisian gallerist Loïc Malle and Ross's partner Jill O'Bryan. The fact that all three of these artworks could not be completed by the artist alone, but required a new kind of collaborator, an administrative collaborator, is telling of the type of work necessary to build artwork of this scale and scope. It demands that these artworks be seen, in part, as business ventures, which require the skills of an administrator in addition to those of an artist. That is to say, in the case of institutionalized artworks like those presented here, the vision behind these works, the artists' conception, in some ways are adopted as the raw material that business-minded art world agents manipulate to garner support. Thus, rather than using

soil to build observatories in the desert, these administrators use ideas to build capital in cities.

In addition to these administrative agents, both *Star Axis* and *City* would not have been possible without the support of the artists' romantic partners. At *City*, Mary Shanahan played a central role in both the design and administration of the project, not to mention the ranching duties.¹⁶³ Similarly, Jill O'Bryan helped incorporate and continues to direct the Land Light Foundation, which oversees *Star Axis*. In Turrell's case, there is little evidence to suggest that he has relied on a partner as a close collaborator on the *Roden Crater* project. Rather, his first wife offered him an ultimatum early on in the project—she and their three young children or the volcano. Turrell chose the volcano.¹⁶⁴ Shanahan similarly left Heizer due partially to his devotion to the work. As Heizer puts it: “Me and my goddamn art and everyone talking about me, me, me—just overpowered her, wrecked her.”¹⁶⁵ This suggests the all-consuming nature of these projects. To live with these artists is essentially to be a partner in the work, to live and breathe their magnum opus, and allow the work to shape one's life, too. And yet, both Shanahan and O'Bryan have largely been omitted from the history of their husbands' art. This omission is partially due to their preference. Shanahan remarked in 2016, “Mike wants me to have credit for helping build ‘City,’ and I appreciate it, but, as an artist myself, I see it as his art work. It's not my vision, it's his. I never needed to be the wife who co-sponsored

¹⁶³ Goodyear, “A Monument to Outlast Humanity.”

¹⁶⁴ Wil S. Hylton, “How James Turrell Knocked the Art World Off Its Feet,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2013, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

¹⁶⁵ Goodyear, “A Monument to Outlast Humanity.”

it.”¹⁶⁶ O’Bryan, also an artist, conveyed a similar perspective during my visit to the site in 2018. Though she lives at the *Star Axis* site half of the year and works with Ross to oversee the project’s completion, her own artwork, primarily drawings made by rubbing the earth or with her own breath, starkly contrasts the harsh linearity, precision, and permanence of *Star Axis* (Figure 24). Thus, the ingenuity and labor of both Shanahan and O’Bryan have made these works possible, but, as artists in their own right, they refuse to be subsumed by that role.

While the projects share many qualities, there are several key differences as well. Perhaps most importantly, the financial structures surrounding these works are distinct. *Star Axis* is the smallest and least expensive project with just over \$1.3 million in net assets and contributions to their foundation falling well under \$100,000 each year. The land containing *Star Axis* is not owned by the foundation, but by Ross himself, thus, the majority of the organization’s assets are invested and produce approximately \$50,000 of operating revenue each year. Over the last three years, none of Land Light’s filings have included a schedule of their investment portfolio, so it is impossible to know how this money is invested. What is known is that it is invested in such a way that it earns approximately 5% interest each year.

Skystone Foundation has also been investing their contributions to build an endowment fund that can fund operating costs at *Roden Crater* into the future. In its 2016 filing, Skystone’s net assets totaled \$23.6 million with annual contributions totaling over twelve million dollars. Of course, this data is somewhat misleading due to the fact that a ten million dollar donation that year caused all of their metrics to jump. In prior years, net

¹⁶⁶ Goodyear, “A Monument to Outlast Humanity.”

assets were closer to twelve million dollars with contributions falling closer to one million. Of these twelve million dollars in assets, approximately eleven million dollars of that was held as land. Thus, cash and securities holdings were comparable to those of the Land Light Foundation.

The rapid jump in contributions at Skystone in 2015 and 2016 corresponds to the hiring of Yvette Lee as the foundation's first executive director, showing, once again, how an administrative ally can change the game. However, the most striking revelation to come from Skystone's filings is not their rapid growth, but the focus within their investment portfolio on extractive industries and big banks. As divestment initiatives and impact philanthropists have argued for the last decade, this means that their investments are essentially earning interest by supporting companies that play a central role in systems of wealth inequality and environmental degradation. Thus, the investment policies for Skystone do not fall in line with recent trends to enhance the impact of philanthropic dollars through ethical investing practice.¹⁶⁷

While Skystone's investment policies raise questions about the organization's philanthropic values and priorities, they are nonetheless more transparent about those policies than Land Light, which does not include a schedule of investments in their filing. However, Heizer's Triple Aught Foundation is by far the most opaque. The filings for Triple Aught often give short answers that provide as little detail as possible. Of the three foundations, they are the only one to use the phrase "available upon request only." Though truncated, and sparse, their filing still gives some information about their

¹⁶⁷ See Theresa Agovino, "This Foundation Wants Its Investments to have a Social Impact," *Crain's New York Business*, December 4, 2017. See also Robert P. Fry, *Nonprofit Investment Policies: Practical Steps for Growing Charitable Funds* (Wiley, 1998).

financial status. For instance, they have reported net assets equaling between \$500,000 and \$800,000 each year between 2014 and 2016. Furthermore, the contributions to this organization were nearly two million dollars in 2014 but fell to \$550,000 by 2016.¹⁶⁸

Unlike Skystone and Land Light who earn revenue from both contributions and investment earnings, Triple Aught relies on contributions as their sole source of revenue. Thus, this sharp decline in contributions signals a sharp decline in all revenue producing activities.

I argue that this sharp decline is intentional and reflects the organizational goal to become obsolete. This is to say, the foundation intends to oversee the completion of *City*, but is not meant to continue overseeing the work after its completion. This theory is supported by the fact that LACMA has claimed managerial oversight of the project and is in a position to add the work to its collection upon its completion.¹⁶⁹ Thus, while both Land Light and Skystone are focused on planning for their own futures as the stewards of permanent artworks, Triple Aught is slowly bowing out.

In addition to variable levels of transparency within their financial documents, these endeavors also project varying levels of transparency and accessibility in their visitor programs. As part of this project, I attempted to visit all three sites under the pretext that the works would be central to my graduate research. *Star Axis* was the only one that granted me access and voiced interest in a study regarding their institutionalization. O'Bryan welcomed me to the site and provided an intimate tour of the work and an open discussion about her role as the foundation's leader. This reception

¹⁶⁸ Triple Aught Foundation, (Form 990, 2014, 2015, 2016).

¹⁶⁹ Goodyear, "A Monument to Outlast Humanity."

was in stark contrast to the email received from Skystone Foundation which stated: “As you probably understand from your studies, Roden Crater is considered an unfinished work of art by Mr. Turrell, but there will be many educational opportunities once the work is complete.” Triple Aught was even less welcoming as they provide no contact information and have no website through which to glean information about visiting. Though I was able to track down the email address of Wendy Rudder, Heizer’s Nevada-based real estate agent and a board member of the Triple Aught Foundation, her reply to my request was brief: “City is still under construction and is closed to the public. We wish you luck on your graduate thesis.” Thus, while none of these sites are open to the public, they vary in the degree to which they are willing to engage with outsiders.

By comparing these three sites to one another, their material, conceptual, and contextual underpinnings highlight their similarities while their financial documents and public facing apparatus help to highlight what makes them each unique. As a group, they are entangled in the relationship between the US economy, public art discourse, and the contemporary art market, but they also share a reliance on administrative allies and the labor and ingenuity of the artists’ partners.

CHAPTER VI CODA

This study has worked to frame previously published reports of these artists' lives and their magnum opi projects through the lens of financial institutionalization while simultaneously enriching those reports by incorporating data culled from nonprofit financial documents. Though the study looked specifically at *Roden Crater*, *City*, and *Star Axis*, the implications of its findings are not limited to these three works. The narratives presented provide insight into the complex and evolving mechanisms of large-scale, contemporary arts funding, as well as examples of how those mechanisms can be used and manipulated. They serve as models for institutional histories of earthworks more broadly. As a model for future earthwork research, this study invites not only the extension of earthwork history into the twenty-first century, but also the decentralization of the artists within these histories. Though the chronological structure of the case studies presented here makes a degree of biography necessary, this study has attempted to broaden the scope of inquiry surrounding earthworks to account for factors and agents beyond the individual artist. In other words, it has worked to disperse authorship and position administrators and funders as equal partners with the artists in the act of creation.

This decentralization of the artist via administrative transparency is unsanctioned, however, and perhaps unwanted by the artists. The stories presented here are starkly different than the stories told by the artists. In this way too, this study further decentralizes the artists and attempts to undermine their control over how these works are perceived. It points to the highly mediated public portrayal of these works and invites those mediations to be further questioned.

To conclude, this study presents the larger funding structures surrounding these works as a means of situating earthworks as cultural productions of a powerful collecting class trained in the social and financial games of the upper echelons of late capitalism. In this sense, it is not surprising that today's superrich, like Kanye West and Jeff Bezos, are once again embracing earthworks as a mode of cultural expression. As the earthworks revival progresses, earthworks scholars have an opportunity to lay bare the cultural and economic processes and mechanisms through which elite art patrons dictate the limits placed on art and for whom. As this study has made clear, a great deal of activity in the art world is unseen, unnoticed, and most importantly, unregulated. Only by investigating the roots causes for how and why new monuments are built can historians tap into a more honest and representative history of art. While money from superrich families may be the lifeblood of the art world, the values of the superrich need not be the only ones remembered. It is up to art historians to qualify the productions of these elite circles and situate them within broader cultural landscapes. By illustrating a more encompassing picture of who is authoring these works, their potency as cultural assets and documents can be better understood.

APPENDIX: FIGURES

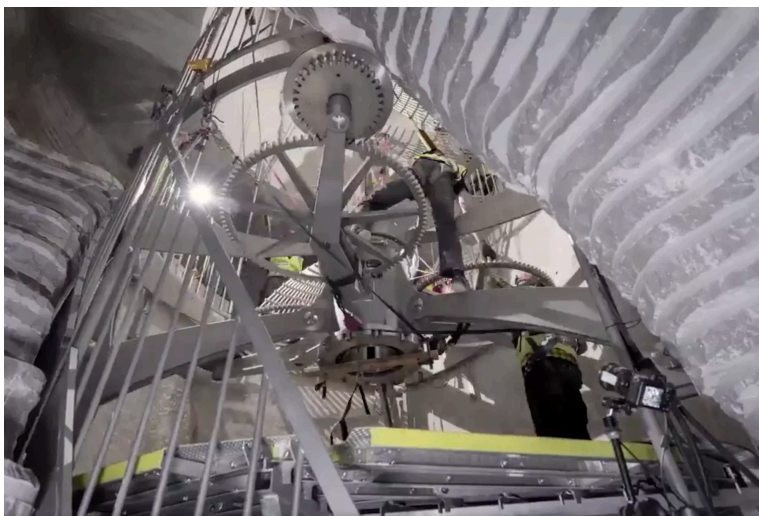


Figure 1. Interior of Danny Hillis, *10,000 Year Clock* (1989-present), under construction in a mountain on Jeff Bezos' west Texas property. Published in: Chaim Gartenberg, "Construction begins on Jeff Bezos' \$42 million 10,000-year clock," *The Verge*, February 20, 2018. <https://www.theverge.com/tldr/2018/2/20/17031836/jeff-bezos-clock-10000-year-cost>. Accessed May 1, 2019.



Figure 2. Virginia Dwan at *Spiral Jetty*, Robert Smithson's landmark work, circa 1970. Credit: Nancy Holt, via Holt. Published in: Blake Gopnik, "Virginia Dwan, a Jet Age Medici, Gets Her Due," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2016.

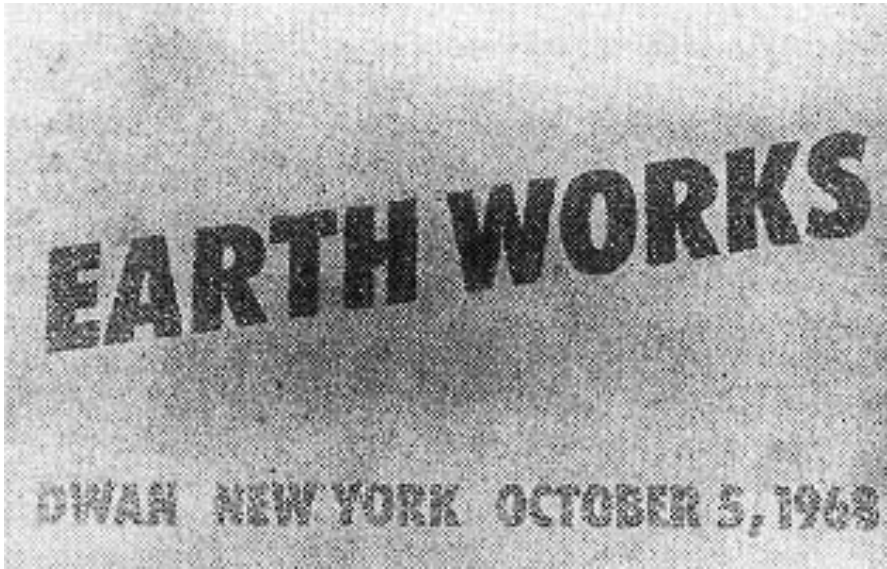


Figure 3. Exhibition announcement card for *Earth Works* at Dwan Gallery, New York, 1968. The exhibition featured Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, Dennis Oppenheim, Stephen Kaltenbach, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, Claes Oldenburg, Carl Andre, and Herbert Bayer. Published in Dwan et. al., *Los Angeles to New York*, 112.



Figure 4. Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969-70. Earthwork located in the Moapa Valley on Mormon Mesa near Overton, Nevada. *Double Negative* was acquired into MOCA's permanent collection in 1985. Published by LAMOCA, <https://www.moca.org/visit/double-negative>, (Web: Accessed November 20, 2018).



Figure 5. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. © Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia Art Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo: George Steinmetz. Published by: Dia Art Foundation, <https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit/robert-smithson-spiral-jetty>, (Web: Accessed May 1, 2019).



Figure 6. Walter De Maria, *Lightning Field*, 1970-1977. Four hundred polished steel poles puncturing a one-mile by one-kilometer rectangular plot in New Mexico, each pole towering at a height of over twenty feet. Published in: Dia Art Foundation, “Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*,” <https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit/walter-de-maria-the-lightning-field>, (Web: Accessed April 30, 2019).

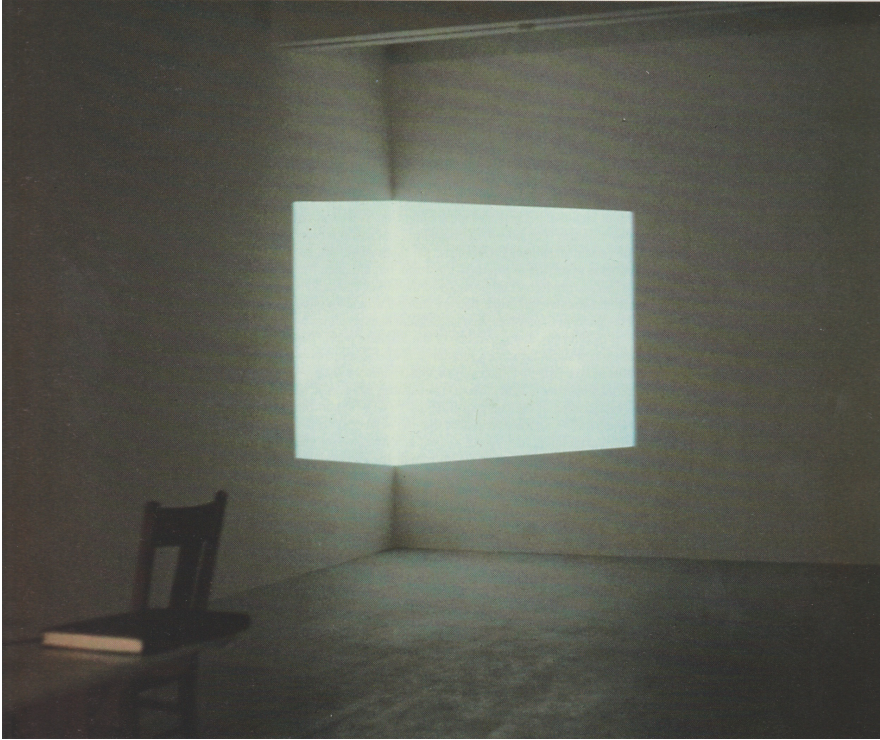


Figure 7. James Turrell, *Cross-Corner Projection Arfum-Proto*, 1966. Quartz-halogen projection, as installed at the Mendota Hotel Studio, Ocean Park California, 1968. Published in Adcock, *James Turrell*, 73.



Figure 8. James Turrell, *Skyspace I*, 1974. Interior fluorescent light and open sky, as installed at Villa Panza, Verese, Italy. Published in Adcock, *James Turrell*, 76.



Figure 9. James Turrell in flight over *Roden Crater*, 2002. Published in Govan et. al., *James Turrell*, 71.



Figure 10. James Turrell, *East Portal Space at Roden Crater*, (1974-2015). Published by *Roden Crater Project*, "Spaces," <http://rodencrater.com/about/>, Accessed March 2, 2019.



Figure 11. Drake, *Hotline Bling* (2015). Video still taken from YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxpDa-c-4Mc>, Accessed April 30, 2019.

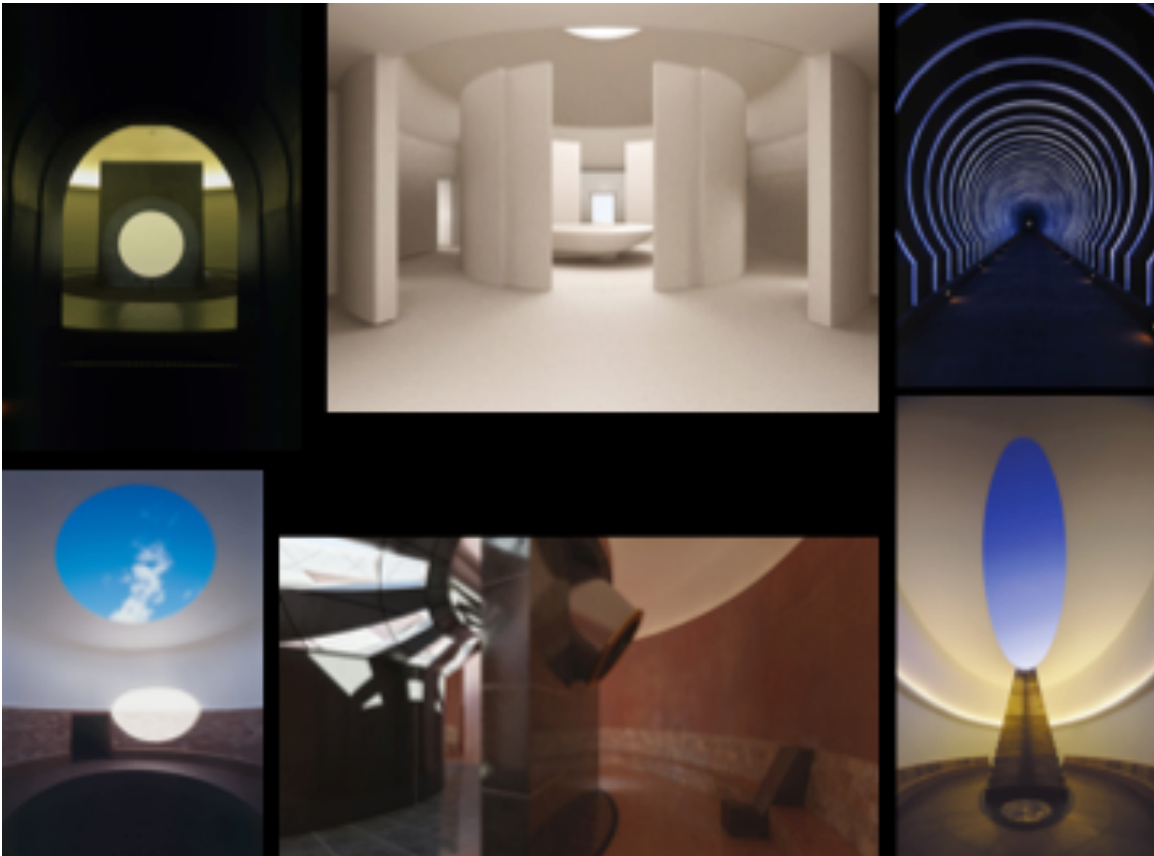


Figure 12. First six completed spaces in *Roden Crater* (1974-2016). Published by *Roden Crater Project*, "Spaces," <http://rodencrater.com/about/>, Accessed March 2, 2019.



Figure 13. Views from Michael Heizer, *City*, 1972-ongoing. Published in Celant et. al., *Michael Heizer*.



Figure 14. *Primary Structures*, installation view, 1966 at the Jewish Museum, New York, NY. Published in: Jens Hoffmann, Joanna Montoya, and Jewish Museum. *Other Primary Structures*, (New York, NY: Jewish Museum, 2014). 34.



Figure 15. Michael Heizer, *Nine Nevada Depressions*, 1967. Published in Celant et. al., *Michael Heizer*, 201.



Figure 16. Michael Heizer, *City (Complex 1)*, 1972-1974. Published in Celant et. al., *Michael Heizer*, 22.



Figure 17. Potential nuclear waste rail lines proposed for the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Plant one hundred miles south of Heizer's City.

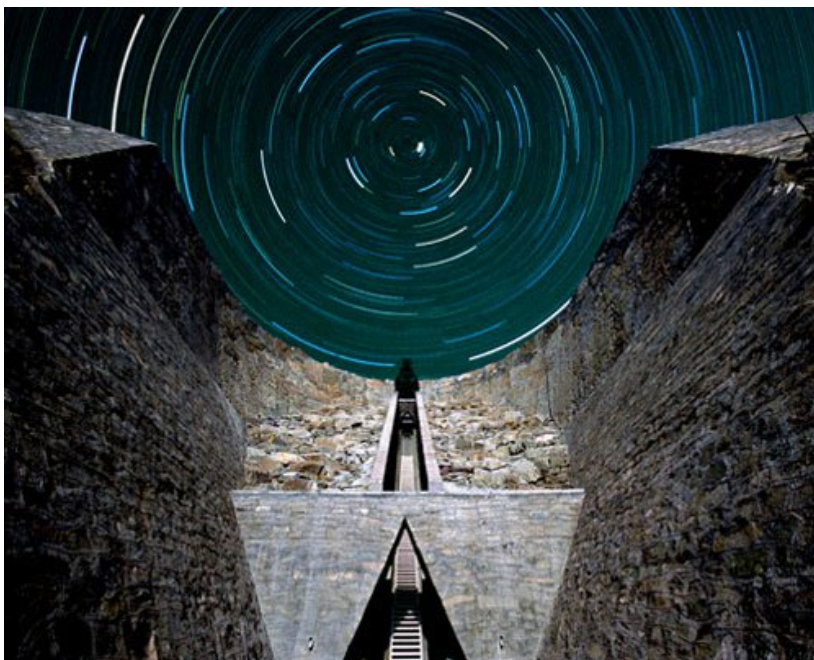


Figure 18. Charles Ross, *Star Axis*, 1971-ongoing. Architectonic sculpture located one hundred miles northeast of Santa Fe, NM. Published by Star Axis Project, Star Axis Project, "About," <https://www.staraxis.org/>, Accessed April 30, 2019.



Figure 19. Charles Ross, *Star Axis*, 1971-ongoing. Architectonic sculpture located one hundred miles northeast of Santa Fe, NM. Published by Star Axis Project, Star Axis Project, "About," <https://www.staraxis.org/>, Accessed April 30, 2019.



Figure 20. Charles Ross, *Star Tunnel at Star Axis*, 1971-ongoing. Architectonic sculpture located one hundred miles northeast of Santa Fe, NM. Published by Star Axis Project, Star Axis Project, "About," <https://www.staraxis.org/>, Accessed April 30, 2019.



Figure 21. Installation view of Charles Ross, *Prism Sculptures*, on display at Dwan Gallery, 1969. Published in Ross et. al., *Charles Ross*, 23.



Figure 22. Charles Ross, video still, *Sunlight Dispersion*, 1971. Video still, refracted light. Published by Charles Ross, *Charles Ross Studio Website*. <https://charlesrossstudio.com/>, Accessed April 20, 2019).



Figure 23. Charles Ross and Moshe Safdie, *Harvard Business School Chapel*, 1992. Published by Charles Ross, *Charles Ross Studio Website*. <https://charlesrossstudio.com/>, Accessed April 20, 2019).



Figure 24. Artist Jill O'Bryan creating "frottage" drawing in the desert landscape of New Mexico. <https://shiftingconnections.com/2013/12/10/in-sightin-mind-jill-obryan/>

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