

**Resource Hungry:
Our Cultured Landscape and its Ecological Impact
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Jessica Morgan, Nathalie de Gunzburg Director of New York's Dia Art Foundation, presents the curatorial direction for the 2020 Verbier Art Summit.

The history of culture has been a history of marking the landscape. From the construction of monuments to virtual mappings, the desire to seek control or signify presence on the surface of the earth has been a constant attribute of the Anthropocene. Resources used (and losses incurred) by ancient civilizations in constructing their testaments to authority are now too distant to be judged. In our time however, such overarching ambition is met with justifiable interrogation—unless our ‘monuments’ have a demonstrable economic rationale.

Is the answer now to withdraw from bold statements and structures, or is there still appetite for these grand cultural incursions into the environment? If so, how do we approach this in a moment of ecological crisis?

An immediate example of the complex relationship between art and resources lies in the narrative of the land art created in the 1960's. The work by artists such as Walter De Maria, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt drew directly from ancient monuments in their scale, geometric forms, geological/celestial orientations, and physical locations. Ultimately, they desired to similarly mark the planet earth, and few of these projects held preservation or sustainability as a principle of production.

Over time, however, many of these sites of land art have come to play a role in determining the development of the land around the works, as viewsheds and access are valued and maintained. How can we envision a way forward as witnesses of these implications on our environment? Is there room only for critique, ephemerality and aesthetics, or can we carry out new bold gestures?

Turning inward towards my own practice as director of a cultural institution, I also see continued disharmony between art and resources. While art primarily occupies space inside the institution today, buildings continue to act according to the apparent need to mark terrain through the construction of contemporary temples to culture. Unimaginable growth of collections, costly conservation needs, a business-model driven necessity to constantly expand, and vastly increased turnover has made for an industry that is both wasteful and resource hungry. Meanwhile, cultural institutions are asked publicly and programmatically to remain on the right side of the environmental debate. What are alternate models for cultural institutions? What hope is there in an environment that values spectacular containers over critical content?

At the 2020 Verbier Art Summit, it seems timely—if not urgent—to confront the human remaking of the environment as acts of claiming authority, and to explore new paths forward in our current societal condition: resource hungry.

*There is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism.
—Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History, 1940*