From the beginning of human history, and in every culture, nature has played a vital role in creative expression. This is seen in the earliest known cave paintings of animals that are at least 35,000 years old. ‘Force of Nature’, aims to examine the way contemporary artists have been inspired not only by nature but also its processes - evolution, birth, growth, ageing, decay, change. Taking inspiration from nature’s inherent forces, their acute observations and individual approaches can result in works that are site-specific, monumental or ephemeral. Nature is constantly in a state of change and the artists’ awareness and sensitivity to this change is crucial to the creation of their work that can be representational, conceptual, abstract, and sometimes otherworldly.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Land art was part of the wider conceptual art movement exemplified by the site-specific work of Robert Smithson (1938-1973), His monumental intervention with nature, ‘Spiral Jetty’ at the Great Salt Lake near Utah, was created entirely out of mud, salt, rocks, earth, and water. Around the same time, the celebrated British Land artist, Richard Long, created his first works while still a student. He has used the medium of walking, time and distance as subjects for his work. This sometimes involves walking in wilderness regions all over the world for many days and he documents his walks through photography, maps and texts.

Nature’s main motifs - trees, rivers, stones and leaves suggest growth, fluidity, permanence and ephemerality and therefore allude to time and the delicate tension that exists between the duality of its creative and destructive forces. Many contemporary artists use photography and video as their primary mediums for an ongoing enquiry into the separation and connectedness with the natural world. Others use a diverse range of media including organic materials, exploring new ways to redefine our relationship with nature and their work can be provocative in conveying an urgent environmental message.

Although it may seem that we’re growing ever distant from nature, we instinctively retain a penchant for its forms and materials that are destined to co-exist with humanity. There is a common misconception that nature is an autonomous entity that exists independent from the human race but we are very much part of nature. It must be significant that there is a congruency between the appearance of tree roots, branches and river networks and the configuration of our human arteries and lung passages. The artist’s observation and understanding of the force of nature also relates to the human condition within nature. Despite mankind’s ongoing advances in technology we can never cease to marvel at nature’s own inherent creativeness.

James Putnam

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