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ANDREW ROGERS

RHYTHMS OF LIFE

A Global Land Art Project

PRESTEL

Munich · London · New York

RHYTHMS OF LIFE

THE LARGEST LAND ART PROJECT
IN THE WORLD

Since the 1980s, more and more spectacular land art projects are being created far away from big cities and for the first time outside of the United States and Europe. Although these art landscapes can normally only be reached with great effort, the synthesis of nature and art obviously fascinates a great many people—artists, visitors, and local residents alike. In the truest sense of the word, working in an open landscape gives artists space to freely think, experiment, and work in new, greater dimensions. They are in a direct and permanent dialogue with the environment, which is itself a work of art whose infinite facets are constantly reinvented in harmony with the time of day and the seasons as well as with the weather. Ideally, art and nature not only enhance each other but ultimately merge to become a new and unique gesamtkunstwerk.

The internationally renowned Australian sculptor Andrew Rogers has succeeded in doing this with *Rhythms of Life*. Since 1999, he has produced fifty-one land art sculptures in sixteen countries, across all seven continents; these stone structures are thematically interrelated. *Rhythms of Life* is Andrew Rogers's life work. The largest

contemporary project of its kind in the world, Rogers has introduced a new dimension into land art—the global work of art.

GEOGLYPHS AS GLOBAL ARTWORK

They are archetypal symbols of civilization in the most extreme topographies—be it the Gobi Desert, the South American Altiplano, the African steppe, or the glacial ice of Antarctica—where the artist makes a mark in the truest sense of the word: he builds them into the open landscape as geoglyphs, gigantic drawings and structures from local rock. Andrew Rogers goes to the limits of what is possible with respect to their dimensions. His sculptures are deliberately arranged in such large proportions so that they are clearly recognizable on satellite images from space. With *Rhythms of Life* Andrew Rogers frames his personal artistic answer to the big questions of our society, which is faced with enormous challenges: globalization with the threat of the loss of collective memory and independent cultural identities, with climate change, new technologies, and increasing commercialization.

THE TOPOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Like Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson, protagonists of the first generation of land art artists in the 1960s, Rogers consciously anchors art in the landscape in a lasting way. Land art only explains itself in a topographical context. Andrew Rogers also wants to provoke, to challenge viewers to reflect on the past in reference to the present and the future and to act responsibly and oriented toward positive values. He therefore creates highly aesthetic sites that invite one to contemplate. "It is about the importance of the perspective that we are caretakers and have responsibilities to those around us and to those who will follow," Rogers explains. "We receive the environmental consequences created by our predecessors. In turn we leave a consequence for our descendants. The present will be reflected in the future. If we have regard for our earth, what should be the criteria we live by?" As an Australian who himself lives in a country in which nature is omnipresent, working with and in nature is a matter of course. Surrounded by the whole gamut of highly diverse,

gigantic, and above all often virgin landscape backdrops of a continent, he feels intimately familiar and connected with all kinds of topographies. Like his bronze sculptures, his land art is there before time and again an expression of his own fascination with the diversity of nature and the place of the individual in relation to it. In this respect, Andrew Rogers's approach is very similar to that of European land art artists such as Andy Goldsworthy and Jacek Tylicki. In the early 1970s they developed a new land art orientation that no longer focused on sociocritical messages but concentrated completely on nature and its aesthetic. Existing structures in nature are identified and placed in an artistic context, an extreme example of which is the British land art artist Andy Goldsworthy, who brings together impermanent natural materials such as leaves or branches to produce ephemeral, fragile installations.

OF ROCKS

Andrew Rogers also works with natural materials. However, he concentrates on massive material, rock in all of its manifestations—from gravel and boulders to large columns of stone that he in part processes. For him, rocks and earth are the fundamental components of the geography of our world. Rocks are also intrinsic to the entire history of humankind. They were of major importance from the beginning of human civilization, be it as caves as the first dwellings or bifaces used as hunting weapons and tools. People continue to have a special relationship with stones to this very day. Fascinated by the natural sciences, in his creative work Andrew Rogers often references forms and structures that, like the Fibonacci sequence, describe growth as a recurring underlying pattern in nature.

THE LEITMOTIF RHYTHMS OF LIFE

With titles such as *Becoming*, *Growth*, *Balance*, or *Gaia*, *Mother Earth*, and *Living*, Rogers concentrated on the creative in his early bronze sculptures—on growth and decay, on matter, on the universe's system of order. It is not for nothing that the selection of his leitmotif *Rhythms of Life* for his land art makes reference to the title of a bronze sculpture, produced in 1996, in which he celebrated the play of forces: a calligraphic zigzag ribbon winds around an ascending line, on which in turn a sphere appears to balance. Rogers describes this dynamic structure as “embodying the changing rhythms of life. These rhythms are reflected in the juxtaposition of shape and line echoing the unpredictable journey through life.” They are forces that can also be felt in music and elicit something like an inner resonance or vibration of the soul in the listener or viewer. This formalist composition of the various elements became his personal signature and the thematic bracket for all of his land art projects within his global mega-project. The *Rhythms of Life* sculpture can therefore be found as an independent built stone drawing in each of his individual land art projects around the globe.

ART TO NATURE

As is the case with Andy Goldsworthy, for Andrew Rogers there is no endpoint or point of culmination, no finished product in his art. On the contrary: he consciously accepts the deterioration of the work of art, the return of art to nature; it is predetermined. In the same way that life is defined by birth and death, art is also ultimately meant to be impermanent. Andrew Rogers therefore makes no claim to eternity or even longevity with his installations and structures made of stone found in the

immediate environment. The artworks are meant to deliberately enter the life cycle of nature. They weather, deteriorate, and disintegrate. This process of development is an inherent part of his land art. Yet unlike Goldsworthy, whose art is rendered visible in the instant of impermanence and in the end leaves behind no traces whatsoever in nature, Andrew Rogers arranges his geoglyphs in nature in such a way that although still ephemeral, they will not disappear for centuries and consequently will lay a long trail of memory and contemplation.

LOCAL PEOPLE

What is completely new in land art is Andrew Rogers's inclusion of local people in the conception and construction of his installations. It is not enough for him to develop art in reference to a specific topography; rather, art, nature, and individuals need one another and also have taken on their respective roles in his artistic work on equal footing. Thus he clearly goes further than his prominent predecessors Smithson and Heizer, who were content with the formal local integration of their works made of earth, or nature artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, who place their focus on the impermanence of the artworks. Andrew Rogers extends the context of the work of art through factors such as history; the environment that influences the rhythm of the lives both of local people and around the world; and the meaning of myths that are passed down over generations and give people their cultural identity. “We define our existence from the interplay of space and time. Nowadays we live in a world where technology is constantly advancing but human nature is not. That is why the old values from the past are so valuable for us today. Our roots are in ancient civilizations and cultures whose legacy we still carry around with us today. That is why I

want to connect the old and the new.” In his land art, Rogers unites art, history, archaeology, religion, and culture as a complex unit—the foundations of our civilization. By rendering them visible he wants to sensitize viewers, challenging them to participate in developing ethical principles and moral responsibility for a future oriented toward sustainability. His choice of topographies for his installations therefore has special meaning. He finds them for the most part in remote regions where urbanization has not yet occurred, where people still live according to tradition and in close touch with nature. The artist's central concern is developing an awareness and appreciation of precisely these things: “I believe that history and culture are something essential for people,” Rogers emphasizes time after time. It is therefore part of his concept that wherever possible he involves the local population in the project from the very beginning. Collectively they seek symbols in their myths, in archives, or local museums that are important for their cultural identity. These include numerous universal archetypes that can be understood the world over: a lion with two bodies as a symbol for strength, or a palm tree as a tree of life. Rogers sees them as “optimistic symbols of life and regeneration—expressive and suggestive of human striving and introspection.” Yet these also stand for the worldwide intercultural dialogue beyond time and space. For weeks at a time, together with the village community he layers stone upon stone, going to the limits of what is possible with the material and the dimension of his installations. It is a gigantic

undertaking until the enormous artworks are completed, often with groups of hundreds of people who assist the artist and only speak the local dialect. A network of communication must be set up with the aid of interpreters; workers have to be organized, sophisticated logistics drawn up, and technical problems have to be solved with the simplest of means. Sometimes it is only construction vehicles, sometimes the Chinese army, other times it is Bolivian farmers or African nomads who form a long human chain for the purpose of bringing stones to the construction site and piling them up according to Andrew Rogers's concepts. At the same time, Rogers places the utmost importance on men and women's being equal, and even paid and treated above the customary level. For it is precisely this social component, working collectively with a total of 7,500 individuals, but also celebrating together according to local traditions and identifying oneself with the works of art as a collective goal that are important factors in his artistic concept.

DRAWINGS ON EARTH

He understands his art as “art created by many people for many people.” Rogers's geoglyphs were inspired by one of the earliest forms of land art: the Nazca Lines near the Andes in Peru, huge images that were carved into the earth with sharp sticks around 800 BC. Archaeologists have interpreted these images as relics of a prehistoric civilization that was rich in mythology and rituals. They could have been sacred sites along pilgrimage routes. Rogers takes up the idea and makes his own

marks in nearly untouched landscapes to connect himself with prehistoric or at least still primordial civilizations that venerate the earth as the most supreme deity, as Mother Earth, a goddess who created everything that is alive. However, unlike the Nazca Lines Rogers does not carve his symbolic motifs into the ground but constructs them in enormous dimensions as stone walls that are meters high. As such, these built images are best recognized from a bird's-eye view—be it from an elevated standpoint in the surroundings or high up in the clouds from a hot-air balloon. Rogers also wanted his geoglyphs to be visible from space. For the first time in the history of contemporary art, an artist had high-resolution satellite images taken from an altitude of between 440 and 770 kilometers (275 and 480 miles) for the purpose of making his land art understandable for viewers as a global work of art.

“I WANT PEOPLE TO TOUCH THE WALLS”

He seeks the interaction of visitors to the sites and above all the local inhabitants. He wants them to be able to experience his installations with all of their senses. “I want people to touch the walls, to run around, to hide in them, to climb them. Our sense of touch can teach us a lot about the relativity of our bodies to the space or objects that surround them. It also helps us understand form and scale. It helps us sense the magnitude of the vista we are in at the time and assists us to understand that spatial experiences affect feelings and thoughts. Tactile qualities affirm our sense of the world and our three-dimensional selves.”