

About the Author

Damjan Popelar's work belongs to land art, a distinct form of conceptual art originating in the sixties and as such being in a way an offspring of alternative movements, new ecological consciousness, holistic worldview and emancipation from institutional bonds. While the first period of the American earth art was characterized by an almost macho attitude to landscape, the second line of the contemporary, mostly European, land art cultivates a non-aggressive, more dialogical relationship with landscape and its places. Also, the materials it uses are generally taken from what the places themselves provide. This narrower frame is where the work of Damjan Popelar should be placed.

Not only is each of Popelar's installations a reaction to a certain and specific place, thus meeting one of the key criteria of this contextual version of land art (i. e. site specificity), it is also designed as an intimate answer to his being addressed by the place. That is why every one of his interventions is unique and cannot be repeated anywhere else. Popelar's Stone Spiral in a sinkhole at the Otlica Window (Otliško okno) is, admittedly, similar in shape to Smithson's Spiral Jetty, and yet, regarding its attitude to the place, it reflects something entirely different: if Smithson's idea was to create an abstract geometrical form which could be placed anywhere along the Salt Lake shore, Popelar's spiral came about as a phenomenologically logical reaction to a specific sinkhole on the Gora Plateau. It is a demonstration of man's need for idealization and upgrading of the natural form to a rational, geometrically clean image.

The use of natural material "as found" on site associates Popelar with the tradition of nature art. Conceptually, he deals with a variety of materials, while contextually he adapts to their characteristics: He stacks up cordwood in a circular form, building a shelter in the woods in the Dolenjska Region. In winter, he constructs a cone compiled of ice discs on a frozen pond; and in the autumn dresses naked beech trunks in golden leaves. For the spiral on the Gora Plateau he logically uses the stones that have been thrown to the bottom of a sinkhole by farmers; and he wraps willows in baskets woven of their own twigs. Many of Popelar's installations are meant to be temporary, some are even distinctly performative in character. Although the spiral and the tower on the Gora Plateau are built solidly and of sturdy material, they are nevertheless exposed to the forces of nature, subjected to the process of change through time, from the moment of their completion onwards. The aspect of time, change, development and metamorphosis of man's work in nature setting is expressed even more markedly in Popelar's Enwoven Willows, which each season dresses in different clothes.

An important element of Popelar's work is social interaction with the local people at the site of the artistic intervention, which is not a feature commonly found in European land art (in this respect he is closest to the early actions of Hannsjörg Voth). The work on the Stone Spiral on the Gora Plateau gave rise to a multifaceted cooperation with the local community. Constructing such a large object is bound to become a socially cohesive event encompassing the entire village. The collective endeavour and engagement of the locals therefore additionally anchors the artistic installation in the landscape, to which Popelar is intensely connected through his intimate dialogues with it. The Enwoven Willows can already be characterized as establishing collective poetic consciousness and therefore raising awareness of everyday living space.

Popelar's artistic production is not inflationary. Every one of his interventions in the landscape is well thought out and deeply felt, taking its time to mature and deepen. This dialogical approach is distinguished by long-term staying/living in the place itself and the artist's own engagement in physical work. This aspect is especially prominent in the Stone Spiral on the Gora Plateau; a site to which Damjan Popelar keeps returning persistently, indeed, amorously, to continue his conversation with the place. Despite the intensity and time demands of this approach he managed to cover in a surprisingly short period of time a noticeable portion of this segment of land art, which develops artistic concepts in intimate dialogue with chosen places. Herein he developed a special sensitivity, inventiveness and multiplicity of meaning which is exceptional and original even in comparison with renowned and recognized names on the international scene. A distinguishing feature of his artistic address is, to my mind, the remarkable poetic note and narrativity of his installations – each tells a story of the place and the landscape, opening our eyes to hitherto unsuspected, new dimensions.