

Taking a (Repeat) Peek at the Ecovention Movement

« No Place like Her »
Feminist Caucus Committee's 30th Anniversary Panel
14 August 2020 (Diwali)

First indication of the problem for (‘me’ and) philosophy.

“The **author** does not mention that ‘many of these hundreds of ecological experiments’ conducted in the name of art have been criticized either as defacing natural landscapes or creating ecological havoc. Smithson’s spiral jetty comes foremost to mind. There follows a lengthy discussion of how science lags behind the discoveries of eco-artists and how ecologists and eco-artists collaborate without a single citation to any corroborating literature. The **author** ends the paragraph with these triumphant claims: ‘The ecovention movement thus offers stakeholders a fast-track for getting up to speed in the field of Ecology. Moreover, the movement has energized the field of Ecology, as these artworks have publicized heretofore unknown ecological possibilities beyond the science world to the public!’ And finally we know why the **author**’s paper is devoid of any reference to the relevant literature: ‘It’s far easier to glean this science by relying on artists involved in the ecovention movement than it is to glean it from science journals....’”

–Anonymous reviewer for *JAAC*’s
« green » issue (2018).

Genres vs. Movements

Spaid, SEP 2015 and ASA 2016

top-down categories

*enduring (historical)

genres evolve

ongoing

global

*stable across media

die or lie dormant

*broadly accessible

*useful

bottom-up/groundswell

of artistic activities

spontaneous/reacting

against earlier practices

improvised/emergent

properties

precise duration

usually begin locally

can spread to other localities

short-lived/generational

may evolve into a genre, style

or even “pastiche”

* Catharine Abell (2014), « Genre, Interpretation and Evaluation », Aristotelian Society

Four Parallel Art Movements

Minimal Art (1962–1968) 9 exh.+1 book= $27/417 = 6.5\%$ female

Jo Baer, Chryssa, Judy Gerowitz, **Patricia Johanson**, Agnes Martin, Georgia O'Keefe, Yvonne Rainer and Anne Truitt

Conceptual Art (1966–1972) 9 exh.&3 books= $85/553 = 15\%$ female

Eleanor Antin, Alice Aycock, Hilla Becher, Ingrid Baxter, Monika Baumgarti, Rosemarie Castoro, Hanne Darboven, **Agnes Denes**, Madeline Gins, Eva Hesse, Nancy Kienholz, Christine Kozlov, Lee Lozano, Adrian Piper, Charlotte Posenske, Dorothea Rockburne, Athena Tacha Spear, Marjorie Strider, Hanna Weiner, Martha Wilson and **Mierle Laderman Ukeles**

Earthworks (1960–1977) 5 exh. +39 proj= $10/159 = 5.6\%$ female

Hanne Darboven (1971), Ellen Edinoff (1971), Nancy Holt (1973–1976), **Patricia Johanson** (1966/present, 1968 and 1970–71 /present), Gina Pane (1968 1969 and 1970) and Joyce Wieland (1971).

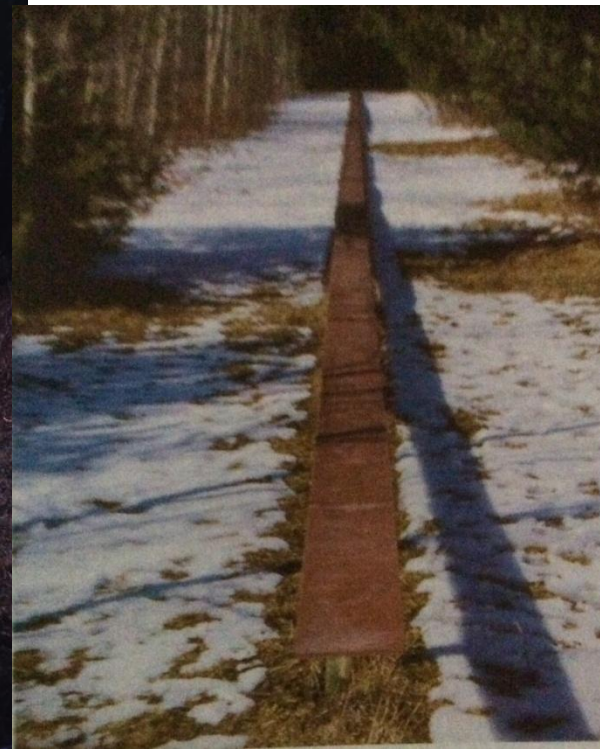
NOTE: **Pane** and **Johanson** before Richard Long, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson and Alan Sonfist, yet **only Johanson** and Holt included in Phaidon's *Land and Environmental Art* (1998)

Feminist Art (US) (1969–1979) 0 museum exhibitions, no book

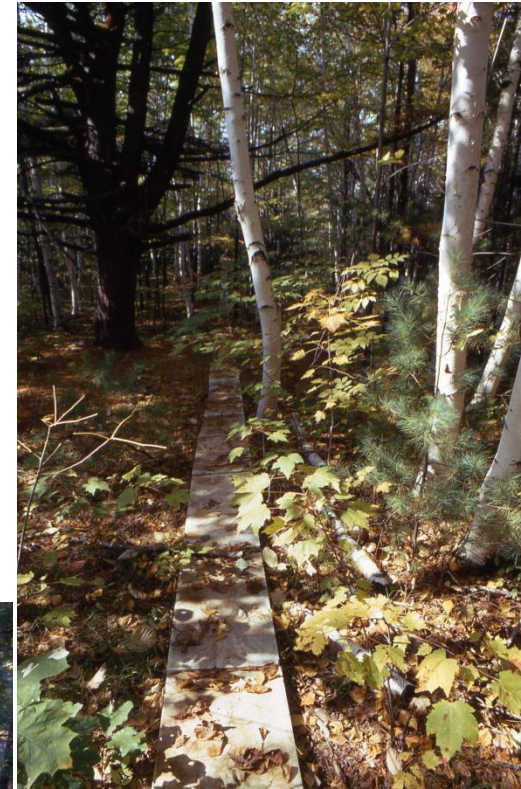
100% female



Patricia Johanson's
minimalist move!
Minor Keith, 1967
Stephen Long, 1968
William Rush, 1966/present
 (summer/winter)



Patricia Johanson, cont. *Cyrus Field* (1970–1971 / present) (red wood, concrete and marble)



Early Earthworks–Nancy Holt *Sun Tunnels* (1973–1976) & Gina Pane *Terre Protégée III* (1970) & *Terre Protégée I* (1968)

‘Seeing a pile of stones, between 0.15 and 0.2 metres exposed to the north, covered in moss and set into the damp earth made me realise that they **never perceived a single sunray**, never a ray of warmth. I decided to **move them** by taking them one after the other and putting them in an open, southern-facing place’ (Pierre déplacées). It was with this ‘**first in vivo act**’, this spontaneous **drive to ‘right a wrong’**, that Pane became conscious of the limit of her pictorial and sculptural works.



Mini (US) Feminist Art History 1969–1979

Art Worker's Coalition (1969–1971) multi-cultural group presented 13 demands for MoMA to change. **10. The Museum should exhibit experimental works requiring unique environmental conditions at locations outside the Museum.** (sounds like *land art* plea).

Women Artists in Revolution (WAR)(1969–1972)

Women's Interart Center (1971–?) founded by WAR participants
+ Feminists in the Arts

A.I.R. Gallery (1972–present) Founded by 20 artists– Susan Williams, Barbara Zucker + Dottie Attie, Maude Boltz, Mary Grigoriadis, Nancy Spero, Rachael bas-Cohain, Judith Bernstein, Blythe Bohnen, **Agnes Denes**, Darla Dorosh, Loretta Dunkelman, Harmony Hammond, Laurace James, Louise Kramer, Anne Healy, Rosemary Mayer, Patsy Norvell and Howardena Pindell, and Nancy Wilson-Pajic.

"Womanhouse" (1972), Los Angeles (Cal Arts student exhibition organized by Judy Chicago (née Gerowitz) and Miriam Schapiro)

Soho20 Gallery (1973–2019) founded by several WAR participants found

Feminist Studio Workshop (1973–1991), Los Angeles (→ Woman's Building)

"Women Artists: 1550–1950" (1976), LACMA, curated by art historians Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris (no contemporary art)

Judy Chicago, *Dinner Table* (1974–1979) One of the world's first blockbuster exhibitions, viewed by 15 million (16 venues in 6 countries on 3 continents)

Power of Feminist Art (1994) first coffee table book without an exhibition... **"Sexual Politics"** (1996)

ESCFA @BMA and "Wack"! (both 2007)

Feminist Art & Earthworks → Ecoventions

To create ecoventions, artists have had to 1) embrace novel “art” **technologies** from back-hoe driving to mapping and computer software, 2) expand the parameters of **social sculpture** whereby artists recruit and engage diverse collaborators from scientists to architects, engineers, politicians, community members, and stakeholders who would remain the ecovention’s stewards long after the artists left, 3) learn the basics of **gardening and horticulture** to create living sculptures, and 4) create activities that inspire and enrich volunteers and paid workers alike (the **forerunner of participatory art**).

ecology+invention=ecovention (Spaid, 2002)

« An ecovention is an artist-initiated practical action with ecological intent. » (Spaid, 2017)

Since the ecovention movement has yet to become a genre, it is perhaps the most enduring ever, having survived 50+ years as a global movement. Despite the huge popularity of ecological issues and 10+ related panels at CAA 2021, art historians rarely publish on this field!

Burgeoning Movement (1971–1989)

1971 **Joseph Beuys** performs *Bog Action* and *Forest Action*
Bonnie Sherk, *Public Lunch*, San Francisco Zoo, CA
Merle Laderman Ukeles, *Maintenance Art Manifesto*, NY

1971–1974 **Nicolás García Urriburu** greens 7 waterways

1973 **Joseph Beuys**, “Twelve hour lecture,” Melville College, Edinburgh, UK

1973–1974 **Patricia Johanson** links school, woods and park space, Columbus, IN

1973–1976 **Merle Laderman Ukeles** performs 17 *Maintenance Performances*, UK, US, and IS

1974–1980 **Bonnie Sherk** transforms barren site into local educational farm, San Francisco, CA

1974 **Teresa Murak**, *Sculpture for the Earth*, Ubbesboda, SE
Teresa Murak, *Procesja* (Procession)
Nicolás García Urriburu plants Ombú tree, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano, Maldonado, UR
Joseph Beuys lectures during “Black and White Oil Conference,” Edinburgh Arts Festival, UK
Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, NYC, NY

1975 **Alan Sonfist**, *Pool of Earth*, Art Park, Lewiston, NY
Alan Sonfist creates *Gene Banks*, a collection of relics from a virgin hemlock forest

1976 **John Latham**, *Derelict Land Art* (preservation of 5 Scottish spoils piles), Livingston, UK
Joseph Beuys, *Tram Stop*, bore hole in floor to lagoon, Deutscher Pavillon, La Biennale di Venezia, IT 1977
Lois Weinberger, *Baumfest* (Tree Celebration), Stams, AT
Agnes Denes plants half acre of white rice that mutates into “red”, Art Park, Lewiston, NY
Betty Beaumont buries cable to hasten grass growth, Macomb, IL

1976 **Merle Laderman Ukeles** becomes New York Sanitation cont. Department’s Artist-in Residence, NYC

1977–1978 **Harrison Studio**’s spoils pile blossoms into a meadow, Art Park, Lewiston, NY

1965–1978/present **Alan Sonfist** plants *Time Landscape*, NYC

1978 **herman de vries**, earth museum opens, Eschenau, DE
Buster Simpson installs *Downspout-Plant Life Monitoring System*, Seattle, WA
Buster Simpson places concrete plates in Hudson River to demonstrate toxicity

1978–1980 **Betty Beaumont** submerges 150 feet artificial reef 50 miles off Atlantic Coast.

1979–1981 **Merle Laderman Ukeles** shakes hands with 8,500 sanitation workers.

1981 **Joseph Beuys** & **Nicolás García Urriburu** bottle green Rhine water

1982 **Agnes Denes** harvests 1000 pounds of wheat, Battery Park Landfill, NYC

1981–1986 **Patricia Johanson** works with scientists to restore Fair Park Lagoon, Dallas, TX

1982–1987 **Joseph Beuys** and hundreds of volunteers plant 7000 trees, Kassel, DE

1983 **Lynne Hull** carves water collecting hydroglyph, Wyoming
Viet Ngo creates his first wastewater treatment plant that uses lemna.
Buster Simpson performs *Hudson River Purge* (River Rolands)

1985 **Harriet Feigenbaum** rings coal-dust runoff pond with 60 willows, Scranton, PA

1988 **Buster Simpson** invents a compost toilet
Ocean Earth publishes satellite imagery proving algal bloom off coast of Denmark.

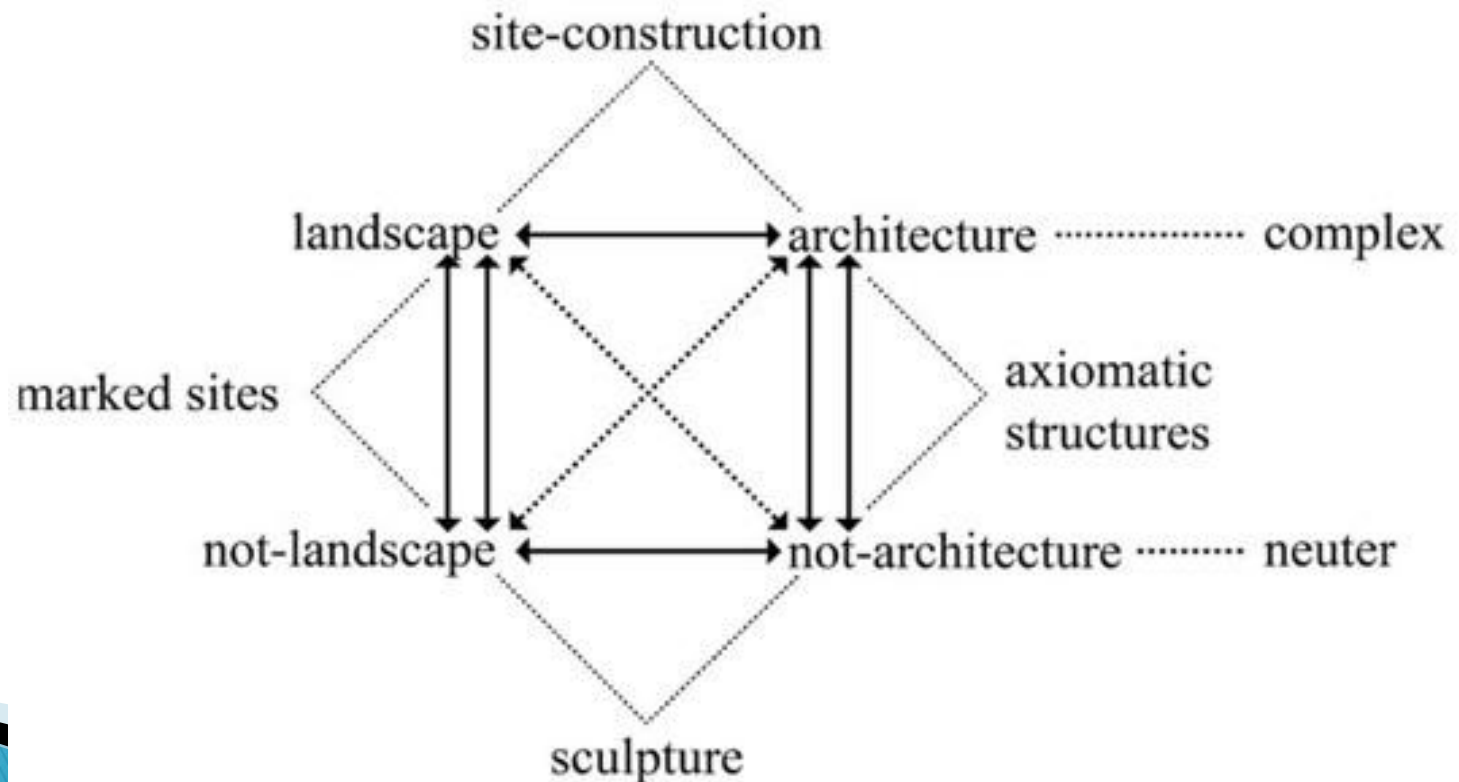
1989 **Lynne Hull** builds her first floating island, WY.
Georg Dietzler develops system to conserve acorn germination for Beuys.

1990 **Betsy Damon** founds Keepers of the Water, Brooklyn, NY
Lynne Hull installs *Lightning Raptor Roost*, Red Desert, WY

1988–1991 **Agnes Denes** conceives responsive oasis, atop 97-acre landfill, San Francisco, CA

1987–1996 **Patricia Johanson** creates *Endangered Garden*, San Francisco, CA

Rosalind Krauss' 1979 seminal diagram in « Sculpture in the Expanded Field » (1979) addressed time-stable entropic works ($3/11=27\%$) (Alice Aycock, Nancy Holt and Mary Miss), yet excluded time-based experiential artworks such as ecoventions and environmental art. « No doubt, the ongoing omission of living sculptures from art history reflects their not having found a comfortable position on Krauss's 'diamond of opposition'. ...Had she characterized her 'landscape' and 'not landscape' as medium-specific, rather than place-oriented, as in 'made with the landscape' rather than 'sited in the landscape', I imagine art history would have turned out differently. » Spaid, 2017



Hostility to Living Sculptures

Guggenheim director cancels [Hans Haacke](#)'s show mid-installation 1971. Since Haacke actually fixed the director's « Shapolsky real estate concern, » perhaps dirt and bugs were actually to blame. Such works, including *Grass Grows* (1967/1969/2019), grew out of his 1965 manifesto, which called for a changing, indeterminate, living-in-time, non-stable work of art the viewer could handle.



Hostility to Women

With the exception of
Hilla Becher,
collaborators typically
remained **unnamed**
(**uncredited**), even Ingrid
Baxter (N.E. Thing Co),
Jeanne-Claude, Helen,
Harrison, Nancy Kienholz,
& Patty Mucha.

The Feast.

Material: 1. Fried catfish. 200 required. prepare as follows:
Ingredients: eggs, milk, flour, cornmeal, salt and pepper.
Mix eggs ~~by volume~~ and milk in a bowl using twice as much
milk as eggs by volume. Mix dry ingredients in a separate
bowl, using as much flour as cornmeal plus a little salt and
pepper. Blend thoroughly and transfer to large paper bag.
Dip catfish one at a time in milk and egg mixture, making
sure that the inside of the fish gets coated as well as the outside.
Place fish in dry mixture and shake the bag until fish is
completely coated. Deep fry in 425° oil.

Note: Catfish ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. each) are to be drawn from harvest pasture
(for harvesting procedure see pasture No. 2 from fingerlings to
harvest.

2. At least one professional deep fish fryer

3. Hush Puppies. 1000 required. prepare as follows_

13 cups milk
60 cups ~~cornmeal~~
60 cups water
40 tablespoons vegetable oil
80 teaspoons grated onion
80 eggs - beaten
40 cups flour
120 teaspoons baking powder
80 teaspoons salt.
Cook cornmeal in water, stirring until stiff and beginning to
roll into a ball, about 6 min. Remove from heat. Add milk
oil and onion. Stir until smooth. Gradually stir into beaten eggs.
Measure flour by dip level pour method or by sifting. Blend
dry ingredients. Add to cornmeal batter. Blend thoroughly
Heat cooking oil to 375°F. Drop batter by teaspoon into hot oil.
Fry 6 t 7 min. Drain.

Note: The above recipe may be reduced by a factor of 20 to facilitate mixing.

11 Los Angeles Artists

Hayward Gallery

September 30 - November

selected for the Arts Council by Maurice Tuchman and Jane Livingston
of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

We have tended to equate American art with New York art. Americans
are aware that their west coast has a different artistic climate and
Los Angeles is a great art centre, rivalling New York in the level
of its art activity. This is the first major exhibition of Los Angeles
art in Europe.

Maurice Tuchman is senior curator of modern art, and Jane Livingston
associate curator, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. They
selected a broad exhibition that includes older artists (Diebenkorn
McLaughlin) as well as new names in international art (such as
Nauman and Wegman), and ranges from abstract and realistic paintings
videotapes and live fish:

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| John Altoon | ink and wash drawings about art, sex and |
| Larry Bell | glass sculptures |
| Richard Diebenkorn | recent abstract paintings (Diebenkorn was the finest abstract-expressionists in the then turned to figure and landscape painting) |
| Newton Harrison | "Portable Fish Farm"; pools of catfish shrimps and crabs, forming an ecosystem can be harvested |
| Maxwell Hendler | small, intense realistic paintings |
| Robert Irwin | extempore installation in a space selected the artist (Irwin will not contribute if he cannot find a suitable space) |
| John McLaughlin | recent paintings by a pioneer of "hard abstraction |
| Bruce Nauman | two constructed spaces, one to be looked the other penetrable, offering different perceptual and environmental experiences |
| Kenneth Price | paintings and ceramic sculptures |
| Ed Ruscha | drawings in various media and techniques |
| William Wegman | videotapes |

Liverpool Post October 15th

[illegible]

Despite its slow, controversial beginnings...

By 1971, the ecovention movement was emerging, yet its distinction from Earthworks remained largely unremarked until 1999. They were sometimes described as either environmental art or eco-art. But to my lights ecoventions differ in kind from those two forms. Environmental art is sculpture made from natural materials, whereas eco-art is typically photo-text, more like conceptual art. Neither category captures the genuinely practical nature of ecoventions.

Mini « Ecological» Exhibition History (1971–1990)

12 exh **21/211**, 0 books but **22/43** proj= **17%**

- 1971 “Eleven Los Angeles” artists travels from Hayward London to BOZAR, Brussels, BE
Helen Harrison’s participatory *Feast* stirs controversy, but she’s **never named**.
Hans Haacke’s Guggenheim show is cancelled mid-installation due to x.
- 1972 Hans Haacke exhibits *Water Purification Plant* and *Gerichtetes Wachstum*,
Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, DE
- 1974 Guggenheim cancels Newton and **Helen Harrison**’s show due to weight limits.
- 1975 “A Response to the Environment” Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
- 1977 Grizedale Forest Park opens, Ambleside, UK
- 1978 “From Nature to Art, From Art to Nature,” La Biennale di Venezia, IT **4/142**
(Carla Accardi, Alice Aycock, **Agnes Denes**, and Agnes Martin)
“Nature ⇔ Art,” Nederlands Paviljoen, La Biennale di Venezia, IT
- 1979 “Dialogues/discourse/research,” Santa Barbara Art Museum, **3/6** (Eleanor Antin,
Helen Harrison and Barbara Strasen)
“Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture,” Seattle Art Museum, WA
2/7 (Beverly Pepper and Mary Miss)
- 1981 “Artists’ Gardens and Parks,” MCA, Chicago, IL
- 1982 “documenta 7,” Joseph Beuys launches *7000 Eichen* (1982–1987)
- 1987 “International Show to End World Hunger,” MAI, (**Agnes Denes**) (13 nat., 4 cont.)
- 1988 “La Nature de l’Art,” Cité des Sciences et de l’Industrie/Goethe Institute, Paris, FR
2/12 (Lili Fischer and Tonia Kudrass)
- 1990 “Revered Earth,” CAM, Houston, TX (travels 2 years) **8/20** (**Betsy Damon**,
Helen Harrison, Eve Laramée, Ana Mendieta, Madeline O’Connor,
Michelle Stuart, Lenore Tawney & Regina Vater)

Why no Sticking Power...?????

- 1) These artists mostly work directly with communities to resolve particular problems, independent of artworld systems (galleries, museums, critics, academia).
- 2) Very few art historians have written dissertations on land art, let alone ecoventions or eco-art.
- 3) Art historians typically focus on symbolic/metaphorical contents, not ecological problems or scientific benefits.
- 4) Most protagonists are women. Only Agnes Denes and Mierle Laderman Ukeles have had museum surveys. My Patricia Johanson survey has a book, but no exhibition.
- 5) Decentralization of artworld, yet centralization of power/influence. Many more places to exhibit, but there's little incentive/resources to identify trends.
- 6) Exhibiting ecoventions requires urban museums to partner with outdoor venues and/or polluted sites, for artists to work their magic.

Personal Anecdotes

In reality, “This kind of art is a nightmare for institutions”– Spaid 2017

Although this is the most « inclusive » art movement ever (environmental justice), it was initiated by female artists and its main advocates are female curators (Emma Enderby, Barbara Matilsky, Amy Lipton, Patricia Phillips, Stefanie Smith, Sue Spaid & Patricia Watts) and art writers (Marga Bijvoet, Sylvia Gausset, Emily Liza Scott, Sue Spaid (5) & Kersten Swenson).

There is no mass-market book like Phaidon’s *Land Art and Environmental Art* (25/112) or *Art & Place: Site-Specific Art of the Americas*.

In 2005, I introduced ecoventions at CAA and spoke about the need for more scholarship to publicize the movement. In 2021, I will be a CAA discussant, giving me access to 10+ scheduled panels.

In 2014, I presented Johanson’s work at FAHC, which led to an exhibition and catalogue. There is real interest there, of course.

Two bizarre Patricia Johanson Cases– Tibor de Nagy and Utah MOCA

Museum curators typically depend on gallerists for information, funding and access to extant works. To work with these artists, the curator must hunt down the artists, conduct their own research, and then guide them to decide what/how to show their art.

Jackie Brookner, *Veden Taika*, 2007–2009/present, Salo, FI

Patricia Johanson, *The Draw at Sugar House*, Sugar House Park, Salt Lake City, 2003–2019/present



Merci/Denk je wel/Danke schön

Agnes Denes (c/w)

Wheatfield-A Confrontation

(1981), *Tree Mountain*

(1996/present) and

Rice Field

(1977–1979).



Green Rice Field
Rice/Oryza Sativa, Project, 1978-1979
Landscape, Laramie, New York
© Agnes Denes

