

## ***Robert Smithson. The Invention of Landscape Broken Circle/Spiral Hill & Film***

*4<sup>th</sup> March to 28<sup>th</sup> May 2012*



Breaking Ground: Broken Circle/Spiral Hill 1971–2011, video still



Spiral Hill - Broken Circle [colour photograph 4], 1971



Spiral Hill - Broken Circle [colour photograph 2], 1971



Spiral Hill - Broken Circle [colour photograph 1], 1971

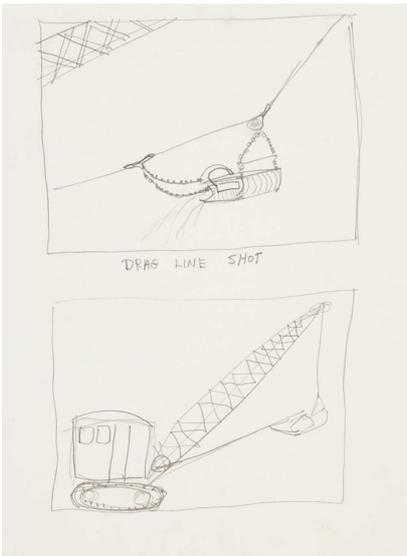
***“As soon as an artist gets over the notion that art is merely a matter of shipping objects around, or putting paintings on walls, he will discover whole new areas of investigation, that involve questions of sit, nature, politics, and value. As long as artists are outside the dialectics of nature, art will be abstract currency.”***  
(Robert Smithson)

**The Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen is now devoting the first solo exhibition in Germany since 1989 to legendary artist Robert Smithson. “Robert Smithson. The Invention of Landscape. Broken Circle/Spiral Hill & Film” focuses on his landscape work created in Holland in 1971, which is not particularly well-known but extremely complex. As a whole, the exhibition offers an insight into almost every artistic medium that Smithson used. It will be possible to see 4 films, 30 drawings, photographs and additional source material, as well as an installation.**

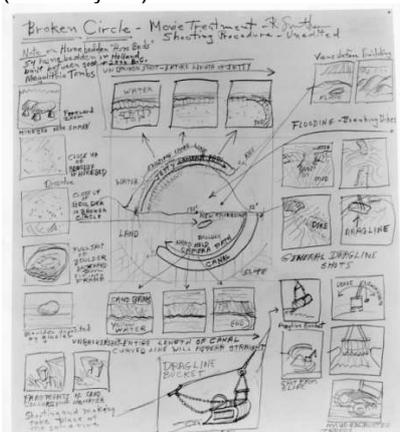
From the 1960s onwards, Robert Smithson was one of the most interesting artists to try out new, institutionally critical art forms and present visionary ideas. Smithson’s most famous work is probably his monumental earthwork realised in the Great Salt Lake in Utah, “Spiral Jetty”, which is etched into the memory of the art world as an American icon. The only Land Art project to be realised in Europe dates from 1971, created in the context of the exhibition “Sonsbeek buiten de perken”, which included space-consuming art projects distributed throughout the Netherlands.

After a long search, Smithson found a suitable site near Emmen, which – by contrast to the rest of Holland – did not appear cultivated and idyllic but rather raw and unworked. He made sketches of various sculptural interventions into a still operating sand pit belonging to the De Boer family; among these, finally the two-part concept of “Broken Circle/Spiral Hill” proved possible to realise.

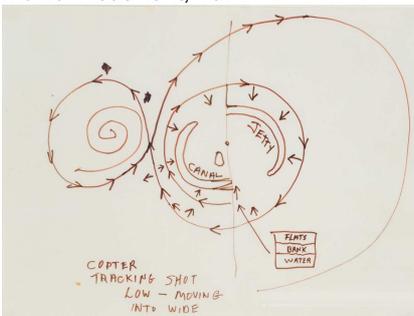
An existing plateau of sand in the pit was removed stage by stage to produce a broken circle formation, divided into a jetty and a canal. On the sand bank that forms in a semicircle around the canal there is – almost at the centre of the work – a huge erratic boulder. At first, its presence



Drag Line Shot, Emmen Holland  
(without year)



Broken Circle, Shooting Procedure,  
Movie Treatment, 1971



Shooting Procedure, 1973

**Picture credits:**

© 2012 Estate of Robert Smithson / VAGA, New York / VG BILD-KUNST, Bonn / courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai

**To download printable files, please click on the image required.** In connection with the exhibition, use of all press photos for press purposes is permitted free of charge.

disturbed the artist immensely.

A hill was banked up some metres from the shore, and a spiral-shaped path winds up to its top. The genesis of the work alone provides some insight into the complexity of the ideas driving Smithson at the time. The broken circle, for example, was created mainly as a result of flooding – a reference to the Dutch flood catastrophe of 1953. In its turn, the erratic boulder touches on the geological situation of the sand pit, which is located on the edge of an end moraine dating from the Ice Age. For Smithson, relations of place, time and space were evident in the course of his artistic deliberations.

Parallel to the planning process of the earth work, he produced sketches and notes for a continuation of the idea using the film medium. The drawings entitled “Shooting Procedure/Movie Treatment” give a good impression of how precisely Smithson had planned individual takes and camera work. The first recordings were made in 1971. However, due to the artist’s sudden death in a plane crash in 1973, he was unable to complete the film personally. It has now been made by Nancy Holt, Smithson’s widow and herself an artist, working with curator Theo Tegelaers and additional Dutch support. Aided by Smithson’s sketches and her knowledge of the narrative structure of the film on “Spiral Jetty”, she has succeeded in realising the project as a film *by* and simultaneously *about* Smithson. It now bears the extended title “Breaking Ground: Broken Circle/Spiral Hill 1971–2011”.

In the Museum für Gegenwartskunst “Breaking Ground: Broken Circle/Spiral Hill” will be embedded into the context of photographs, 30 drawings, and other source material. The drawings in particular, which Smithson made at every stage, clarify the way that the geological process, the artistic work and our perceptions interlock. The finite and infinite play a major part as different levels of temporal meaning; they can be sensed in the mobile camerawork, and in analogies and interrelations which the film opens up.

“Broken Circle/Spiral Hill” is the only one of Smithson’s Land Art projects to have been implemented in an industrially shaped landscape. His visionary concept of “Land Reclamation”, which aimed to enable an aesthetic experience of post-industrial landscapes like slag heaps or mining regions, generally met with disinterest from the mining industry. Concrete projects about which agreement had already been reached were never realised due to his early accidental death. The exhibition in Siegen aims to heighten this awareness of landscape as an element of identity-creation. In the Siegerland area in particular, with its special character based on iron ore excavation and mining, the surrounding landscape bears omnipresent traces of its history and the links between geology and the

**Films shown in the exhibition:****Nancy Holt, Theo Tegelaers**  
***Breaking Ground: Broken***  
***Circle/Spiral Hill 1971–2011***

2011, 20:45 Min. / colour, sound, 16 mm on video (1971) und Digibeta (2011), produced by: LAND ART CONTEMPORARY and SKOR | Foundation for Art and Public Domain

**Nancy Holt, Robert Smithson**  
***Mono Lake***

1968–2004, 19:54 Min. / colour, sound, Super 8 on video  
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

**Robert Smithson**  
***Spiral Jetty***

1970, 35 Min. / colour, sound, 16 mm on Video, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

**Nancy Holt, Robert Smithson**  
***Swamp***

1971, 6 Min. / colour, sound, 16 mm on video, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

world of work.

Subsequently, the exhibition will move to Iceland, where – located in a completely different, fantastic landscape – it will be shown in a slightly altered form at the Art Museum Reykjavik. A bilingual, richly-illustrated exhibition catalogue (German/English) with a foreword by Eva Schmidt has been published by Snoeck Verlag, Cologne. It includes texts by Theo Tegelaers, Roel Arkesteijn, Kai Vöckler and Marc Glöde as well as an interview with Robert Smithson dating from 1971.

We look forward to seeing you!

Best regards

Judith Frey, Press and PR / Art Education and Activities

**Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen**  
**Unteres Schloss 1**  
**57072 Siegen**

[www.mgk-siegen.de](http://www.mgk-siegen.de)  
[frey@mgk-siegen.de](mailto:frey@mgk-siegen.de)

Tel: 0271-405 77-13  
Fax: 0271-405 77-32

**“Museum of the Year 2011”**

Awarded by the German section  
of the International Association of Art Critics

