

# A Decade of Land-art: Ingrandes Sur Loire Case Studies

Vincent Bouvier, Muriel Bouvier, and Jon Bryan Burley

**Abstract**— Since post-World War II, environmental land art has gained in significance and popularity. In our case studies, we present seven examples of land art by American students from Michigan State University and French students from Agrocampus Ouest (formerly INH-Paysage) constructed in 2005. In addition, we present selected projects from other years (2004-2009) within the last decade by French students participating in the workshop. The study area was the primary river terrace of the Loire River, near Ingrandes sur Loire, France. The projects facilitate transforming theory and paper designs into full scale interventions. This type of educational activity can be implemented by artists, environmental designers, and landscape architects at other academic settings.

**Keywords**—Landscape architecture, environmental design, earthworks, temporary art.

## I. INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. The Ha-ha at Stowe, England (copyright © 2007 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Land-art has existed for millennia and is not necessarily a new phenomena. For example the great Ha-ha at Stowe is an example of an earthworks boundary art (Figures 1). And the grand canal at Versailles is another example (Figure 2). Or much earlier, the Neolithic stones of Carnac (Figure 3), in Portugal (Figure 4), and the United Kingdom (Figure 5) all

can be considered a form of land art. However, land-art is currently being practiced by numerous artists, landscape architects, and land owners [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. The beginning of the modern era of land art is often associated with the un-built playground designed by Isamu Noguchi, titled Play Mountain.

Many of these land art designs have spatial design concepts, expressing ideas about the environment [7, 8, 9]. Therefore, students studying the arts and landscape architecture are often very interested in the opportunities to explore land art as outdoor studio projects to express conceptual design ideas. We present a case study of land art from a studio project in 2005 between American and French landscape architecture students.



Figure 2. Grand Canal at Versailles, France (copyright © 2007 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 3. Stones at Carnac, France (copyright © 2007 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

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Figure 4. Neolithic stone complex near Portugal (copyright © 2003 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 5. Stonehenge, Wiltshire, United Kingdom (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Young designers are often inspired by the work of land art designers such as Maya Lin (Figures 6 and 7). Land art exhibitions and installations can be viewed around the world. There are numerous opportunities for students and professionals to engage in creating land art and art projects with earth and green materials (Figure 8).



Figure 6. The Vietnam Memorial in the background (a famous land art project) in Washington, DC, USA with a more traditional memorial sculpture in the foreground. (copyright © 2007 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 7. A view of the 11 Minute Line, by Maya Lin, Wanås Konst, Sweden. (copyright © 2008 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 8. An installation by Patrick Dougherty at Chaumont sur Loire, France, using green materials. (copyright © 2012 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

## II. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The study area is along the Loire River in France. The Loire is a major river in France and empties into the Atlantic Ocean in the west of France. It is known as Europe's last wild river [10]. Much of the river has sandy terraces and fluctuating flow. Along this river is the town of Ingrandes sur Loire. The town was once the border between Brittany and Anjou and is located between Nantes (downstream) and Angers (upstream). Ingrandes sur Loire is on the north side of the river and a park-like setting is on the south side of the river. A series of river groins direct flow in the south side of the river towards a channel adjacent to the town.

The students were allowed to select sites on either side of the river, downstream from the bridge at Ingrandes sur Loire. Students had to form teams of French and American students (eight members maximum). The French students were first year masters students in landscape architecture from INH Paysage, Angers, France (now Agrocampus Ouest). The American students were fourth year landscape architecture student from Michigan State University. The study was conducted in the spring of 2005.

The 2005 study is presented in detail, illustrating each phase of the exercise and each of the final full scale interventions. Interesting examples from other years are also presented. These interventions were conducted by French students and international Erasmus students enrolled in the course. The exercise was initially begun as a spring exercise, but was moved in the curriculum to the fall of the year.



Figure 9. Model making in the studio at INH Paysage (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Prior to selecting the sites, the students were presented lectures on the history of land art. For 2005, in the studio students built study models of land art for a hypothetical site [Figures 9 and 10]. Styro-foam was a key modeling material in these models. The models were critiqued for the ability to express and ideas/concepts. A second series of models were made in the classroom. This time the models were to consider creating land art along the Loire River. Finally the students were introduced to the site in a fieldtrip. Materials such as cloth, sticks, wire, and earth were the primary materials for the exercise. Upon completion of the project, the land art would be dismantled, leaving no trace within the city and only land-form on the sandy terrace. The students had 4 days to construct the land art and a morning to dismantle the exhibition. In other years, the students would follow variations of this process.

Our assessment of the projects was primarily heuristic and descriptive in the tradition of Joliet *et al.* and case study approaches Loures *et al.* [11, 12].



Figure 10. Model making in the studio at INH Paysage (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. 2004

The students prepared a wide variety of conceptual models (Figures 11, 12). The models were assessed based upon the ability of the model to express an idea. For most students this was a relatively easy exercise. The American students presented primarily models that were free-form, like sculptural elements. The French students presented models often tied to a space or site.

The studio models related to riverine land art often attempted to explore the interaction of river water and land, creating a constantly changing land art image (Figures 13, 14). The designs were less tied to a specific expressive concept than the first studio models.

Figures 15, 16, and 17 present the physical context for the placement of the installations. The river was rising and quite active during this event. There were seven works of land art produced in the Loire River. The participants primarily chose to work with the non-urban portion of the study area because of the opportunities to work with landform. The urban portion of the study area can pose a more challenging intervention opportunity.





Figure 11. A model by an American student representing the "explosion of ideas" (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

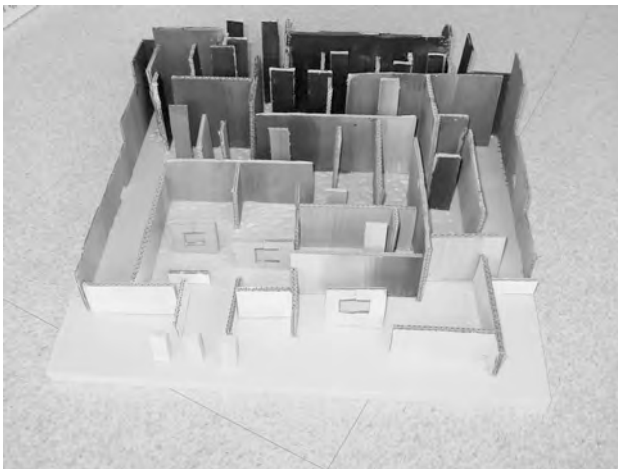


Figure 12. Model by a French student representing the doors and windows in the "experience of life" (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 13. Model utilizing contours and the circular landforms in conjunction with rising water (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 14. A riverine model utilizing landforms to interact with flowing water (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 15. An image of the Loire River at Ingrandes sur Loire during the study period (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 16. An image of the bridge over the Loire River at Ingrandes sur Loire during the study period (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 17. An example of a potential study area within the town Ingrandes sur Loire. In the background is the left bank of the river containing the non-urban site to make an installation (copyright © 2005 Jon Bryan Burley, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Figure 18 presents an installation by seven participants featuring cards of memories. When the water rises, the memories are faded and hidden. When the water drops, the memories are revealed and remembered.



Figure 18. Memory land art (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The second group (6 participants) developed a land fence/wall with the material changing across the structure representing changes in society and possibilities for the future (Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 19. Early construction of the land/fence wall (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 20. West end of the land/fence wall illustrating the progression of society and the future (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 21. Spiral forms in the river (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The third group (6 participants) developed a form based upon spirals (Figure 21). When the group visited the study area, the swirling spirals of the fast moving river water made an impression upon them. Therefore they decided to create spiraling forms. The fourth group was also inspired by the spiraling water and utilized dark material to contrast with the sand to form spirals with a somewhat rectangular/square pattern (Figure 22).



Figure 22. More spiral inspired forms in the river sand (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The fifth group (6 participants) desired to connect the town with the undeveloped side of the river. Therefore, their design was composed to two parts visually linked through visual frames (Figures 23 and 24).



Figure 23. The visual frame of the city-side portion of the design (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 24. The visual frame from the undeveloped side of the site looking towards the town. The Loire River is rising in the picture, as construction initially started with the river over 30 meters away from the installation (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The sixth group (7 participants) chose as their concept, “bringing people together,” and was the third group to employ the spiral form (Figure 25).



Figure 25. The spiral land form for the sixth group (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The seventh group (6 participants) selected “balance” as their design concept. To represent this idea they chose crescent shapes (Figure 26). The rising river water facilitated expressing their idea.

Upon completion of the project, non-earthen materials were removed. Only the landforms remained as the river rose in elevation.



Figure 26. The crescent shaped landforms of the seventh group (copyright © 2005 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

### B. Other Years

Several other notable projects were developed in other years. For example, one team desired to express the presence of the wind in the contact of the river (Figure 27). Suspended from the bridge across the river, ribbons give the intervention a tremendous mobile and short-lived silhouette.

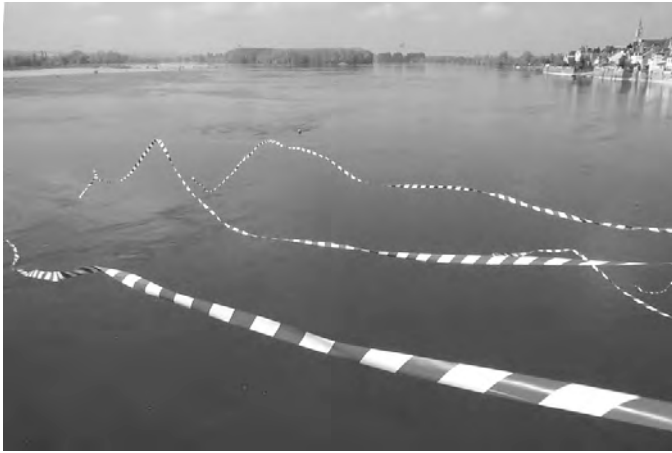


Figure 27. A design which utilized the wind. (Copyright © 2004 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

In 2004, another project utilized light with translucent fabric (Figure 28). The project was installed on the city side of the study area.



Figure 28. Layers of fabric and light interact in this 2004 intervention. (Copyright © 2004 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 29. An installation which captures the essence of the nearby town across the river. (Copyright © 2004 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Another notable design from 2004 emulated the skyline across the river (Figure 29). The intervention illustrates the uniqueness of both nearby cities with a horizontal dark object, symbolizing the slate rooftops of the buildings with the vertical objects representing the two church bell towers. The two towns on the Anjou/Brittany border were rivals. Contrary to the history, the intervention illustrates a unified front with coherence and landscaped continuity.

A project in 2006 attempted to highlight the relationships maintained between the immediate local residents and the Loire. The intervention connected to the city to the river, symbolizing a road of water passing over the riverbank towards the riverbed (Figure 30). The flow of water is represented by a mirror in the intervention. Thus in the installation, man can become a part of the river and the connection between the town and river..



Figure 30. This design attempts to connect the residents and the river. (Copyright © 2006 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

A 2007 project was affiliated with the wind, highlighting the morphological and chromatic opposition between an urbanized riverbank and a large and long exposure of sand (Figure 31). The proposal consists of representing sand



supporting an accumulation of white sticks (the clear facades of the structures) and the prolonged by black flags (roofs slate).



Figure 31. A composition of black flags on white bamboo poles over sand. (Copyright © 2007 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

This project (Figure 32) utilizes a specific point of view along the river on the urban side (left bank) in an alley looking towards the sand, a less anthropisée (human association) object. It is the hydraulic dynamics of the river, particularly the movements in whirlwind of the current that is symbolized by this succession of visual filters. The 3-dimensional effect is stressed by the presence of the various screens in the depth of the alley with the alternation of lines white and dark form the shape of the spiral.



Figure 32. A whirlwind symbolizing the eddies along the river. (Copyright © 2007 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).



Figure 33. The large dark ball (man) and nature (the sand). (Copyright © 2008 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The intervention in Figure 33 symbolizes the representation of the relationship maintained between man and the nature. This project is surrounded by a generous area of sand intended to maximize the dynamic and plastic effect of the proposal. The sphere (representing man) is in contact with nature (the sand) and engendering a more or less beneficial effect upon the environment, as indicated by the circular waves. A more literal and alternate interpretation suggests the evidence of shock waves by humans across the environment.

Figure 34 is a project titled "Escape". The presence of the bridge crossing the river is the source of inspiration of this intervention. Without claiming to answer the use or value of a wavy object, the design is associated with a footbridge symbolizing the wanderings of the river along its sinuous bed. An alternate interpretation is that the intervention appears to be a large lawn chair overlooking the river.



Figure 34. Escape. (Copyright © 2008 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The image presented in Figure 35 is from a project titled "Alley on the Loire". The intervention resides on a sand bank and consists of transposing the geometry of the alleys across the river and providing a way to access the river and to notice the urban landscape across the river. An ornamental pond cut



into the sand stresses the reflection the verticality and the 3-dimensional effect.



Figure 35. Alley on the Loire. (Copyright © 2009 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

The last intervention (Figure 36) featured in this article is titled "Bustle". The micro-relief, indicated by nearby hydro-electric power lines, pay tribute to the morphological power of the river. The depressions behind the weirs/groins along the river become the visual support of this proposal. To glorify these discreet morphological and plastic components, vegetation accumulations like sediments are arranged in hollows according to a chromatic gradient along a weir.



Figure 36. Bustle. (Copyright © 2009 Vincent Bouvier and Muriel Bouvier, all rights reserved, used by permission).

Through these various realizations from other years in which the exercise has been conducted, the perception of the students shows a certain constancy in the plastic analysis of the site. The most perceptible variations of which are mainly associated with the water level of the river and the energy of the current, the quality of the light and the climatic variances. A strong contrast appears between the very constructed right bank, structured by piers and built facades, and the left bank presenting a very vast areas of sand interrupted with weirs/groins and decorated with vegetation along the weirs/groins. The proposals sometimes focus upon a chosen

landscaped component, and sometimes look for a relationship between both banks.

The concepts of the interventions represent two predominant ideas:

- The relationship man / nature: contrast between anthropogenic regular forms, and the natural, mainly irregular forms, plus both man's and natures' beneficial or harmful action in the environment, substantial and unpredictable;
- The landscape of the river: micro-topography of the sand, forms of the water and the current, the works associated to the river (such as the weirs/groins), the bridge, the alleys, the materials transported by the current (such as floating wood), and wind energy.

#### 4 Conclusion

We believed the project was successful on several levels. First it brought French and American students together to advance ideas concerning international cooperation and understanding. Second, students rarely have the opportunity to completely implement their designs at full scale in an actual/real situation. These series of exercises led to full scale interventions. Third, the series of exercises related conceptual model studies with actual implementation and demonstrated the link between the two. Fourth, this original approach made students rely upon several pedagogical factors. They learn by doing, they have to adapt their project according duration of work, and they have to give meaning and defend to their realizations, ideas, concepts. It's also a training experience for students to gain insight to the sense of place and the appropriateness of the interventions. Fifth, even though this approach is ephemeral (only 5 days do discover the site, to invent ideas, to built and uninstall) and no systematic maps and quantitative information (only plastic and sensitive impressions of landscape in the study), the questions raised are symbolic of the process of designing a landscape project. The students have to develop a command of the site, analyze (to be like a "sponge"), prepare diagnostics, make propositions/conceptions, build realizations, evaluate and adapt. In addition, we can understand how very important photographs become and creating a memory about the work, because the projects must be removed/uninstalled. For some of the students, the brief nature of the projects brings sadness, but their memory through pictures is reassuring.

We would urge other programs in landscape architecture and land art to explore opportunities in their area/region to initiate studies related to land art. We found the experience very rewarding. It would be interesting to see the commonalities and differences between various sites and students from other academic programs.

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