

Proposal for Site-specific Installation: "Igneous Ligneous Inosculation"

Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. SMK Fridays: Green (15 June 2018)

Paul Harris (Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles)

pharris@lmu.edu

This work is part of a larger project entitled *Stone is the New Green*, which questions a clear separation between stone and life by exploring how rocks and living things interact with and affect one another. "Igneous Ligneous Inosculation" evokes an embrace of stones and wood: igneous referring to rock formed of cooled magma; ligneous meaning composed of or related to wood; inosculation being the entwining of trees or branches together, from the Latin *osculare*, to provide with a mouth or outlet—inosculation is arboreal kissing. Intimate relations between stone and wood occur naturally in forms such as petrified wood, in which a tree is fossilized through permineralization, or the stones one sees entwined in the roots of fallen trees. In this work, stones are placed between the branches of trees; as the tree grows up and gravity pulls the rocks down, they will ultimately merge together into a hybrid form.

One might well ask: Why place stones in trees? What does the installation mean? It is important that this is an open question, without a definitive answer. Picking up rocks and putting them in the crotches of tree limbs is a gesture, a basic action. Humans picking up stones and doing things with them is a rudimentary, ancient element in cultural evolution. The gesture is pre-linguistic and non-rational; it could be left to 'speak' for itself.

The idea for this work dates to 2009, when I placed several coastal sandstones in the forking branches of a Lodgepole Pine tree in my rock garden (The Petriverse of Pierre Jardin). I don't remember why I decided to do this—I collect rocks and display them in the garden; putting some stones in the branches of the tree somehow seemed to be a 'natural' thing to do. For fun, I made a sign that said "CAUTION: Rock Climbers in Tree." The installation has become interesting over time: the heavy stones have sunk into the branches, while the 80-year old tree continues to grow. Due to organic weathering, some of the stones are cracking; none can be extracted from the tree without cutting the wood or breaking the rock.



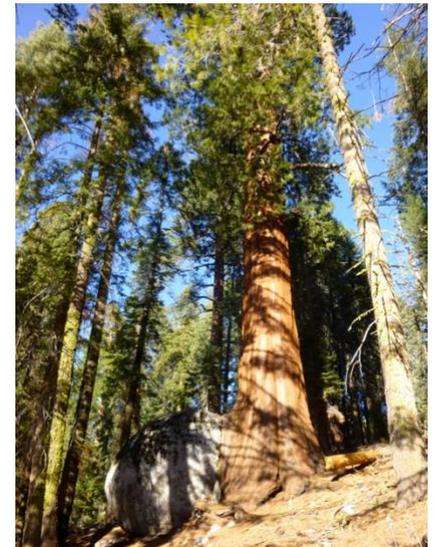
It turns out that well-known environmental artists have created works of stones in trees. At JupiterArtland outside Edinburgh, Andy Goldsworthy's *Stone Coppice* features suspended large dark stone boulders in groups of slender tree trunks. Goldsworthy states that "*Stone Coppice* is a living, growing changing sculpture in which people and wood play equally important roles. The relationship between stone and tree will become stronger both physically and visually through time as the trunks grow around the stones. Ultimately the work will be an expression of the strength and power of trees and their impact on stone."



Giuseppe Penone, a prominent figure in the Arte Povera movement, uses stones and trees to question the boundary between art and nature, while probing the role of time in both human construction and natural processes. In works called *Ideas of Stone*, Penone mounts granite rocks lodged in the branches of trees that are actually bronze castings. Here, art and nature interact in provocative ways: While the works are often mistaken for a real tree found in nature, the tree is man-made, whereas the rocks that create an uncanny effect and that serve as the cue to the work's status as a piece of art are the most natural part of the entire sculpture.



The scale and purpose of "Igneous Ligneous Inosculation" differ from the works of Goldsworthy and Penone. They are designed to bring natural elements into contact and let them grow into one another over time: the stones will not damage the trees; the trees will enfold the stones, incorporating them into their growth. This installation is less an artistic intervention in nature than an imitation and iteration of natural processes. Trees and stones embrace one another in different ways. Trees grow on or around boulders in remarkable ways, such as this giant sequoia growing around a glacial erratic boulder in King's Canyon in California.



There is something playful or incongruous about rocks placed in trees; they don't belong, yet blend in. It's as if the installation asks, do stones grow on trees? This question plays into the conceptual context of this installation: the view of rocks and the lithosphere generally as animate or animating, complicating a clear dichotomy between dead rock and life. Robert Hazen's theory of mineral evolution posits that "rock begets life, life begets rock," and a general 'geologic turn' in Environmental Humanities and Eco-Theory views the earth as a living system where humans and nature, life and rock, can no longer be clearly separated. *Igneous Ligneous Inosculation* expresses the idea that "Stone is the New Green."

I feel fortunate for the opportunity to participate in DMK Fridays and to leave the stones to grow into the trees in Østre Anlæg park. The installation might be related to Land Art, Earth Art, Environmental Art, or Outsider Art. I prefer to call it "Outside Art"—first, it is literally outside or outdoors art; secondly, in this case it is "outside art" in the sense that it is related to but outside of the museum. This distance from the museum suggests that, as a rudimentary gesture, an act of arbitrary play, is it also an open question whether the installation is indeed 'art' or whether it resides outside the realm of art altogether. This issue is left for viewers to consider; in doing so, one confronts the fundamental question, what is (and is not) art?

For more information:

<https://petriverse.wordpress.com>

<http://faculty.lmu.edu/pharris/>

Stone is the New Green

Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen
SMK Fridays: Green (15 June 2018)
Installations presented in Østre Anlæg park

Stoned Tree (2018) Pierre Jardin

This beautiful tree has an ancient quality and an aura of hospitality. The circle of boulders around it demarcate a space under its canopy, a place of reassuring strength and peace, where children can play around its trunk. The niches in roots and branches offer shelter to stones, which are welcomed as ancestral visitors, and adorn the tree with aeonic matter and energy.

The four schoolboys who helped me with this installation said, “Before, the tree was just a tree. Now, it is a magic tree!”



The rocks represent a great deal of Denmark’s complex geologic history. The granite, gneiss, basalt, and porphyry pebbles are 1 – 2 billion years old, and the sandstone was formed at least 600 millions ago, when this land was south of the equator. These are “Outside Art” stones: they were collected on the beach below The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, renowned for being among the first museums to integrate art into the outdoors in its stunning sculpture park.



“Stoned Tree” opens a dialogue between the museums, as it poses the question, what is art? Do the rocks transform from nature into art, by virtue of being moved and recontextualized, becoming part of an assemblage in a park outside a museum? Or, should we consider these colorful cobbles to be works of earth-art, products of telluric powers and processes? Pour water on them and watch as they pop into a palette any painter would approve!



The Tree of Lithic Life (2018)

Pierre Jardin

This installation explores a cusp it creates between rocks and life. While modern Euro-American cultures draw a clear distinction between inanimate, inert matter (stone) and animate, living things (life), many cultures conflate the two in more complex ways. In ancient Andean cultures, mountains and rocks were numinous presences, living spirits. The Ojibwa (Native American tribe) language distinguishes animate from inanimate things; stones are designated as animate. The Daoist cosmology posits a universe composed of qi (ch'i), breath-energy in constant transformation; rocks and mountains are “the bones of the earth,” embodying intensive concentrations of this energy.



The stones in this work were collected at Stevns Klint, one of Denmark’s most famous geologic features, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2014. The chalk cliff offers a striking exposure of the K/T (Cretaceous-Tertiary) Boundary, a spectacular mass extinction event 65 million years ago when an asteroid impact caused the demise of the dinosaurs and more than half of living species at the time. Because the chalk cliffs and limestone contain an amazing array of fossils, in 1825 Danish geologist Johan Georg Forchammer called this feature Fiskeler (“Fish Clay”). The theory that an asteroid impact caused the K/T extinction was formulated by Walter and Luis Alvarez, who found that this thin layer in the rock record contained a high concentration of Iridium that only exists in meteorites. The fascinating story of their discoveries is recounted in the wonderfully-titled book *T-Rex and the Crater of Doom*.



“The Tree of Lithic Life” confuses the boundaries between dead and living, rocks and life. The decomposing, termite-eaten wood of the dead tree trunk provides fertile ground for plants to grow. The Stevns Klint limestone harbors lithic life in the form of fossils; limestone is itself a kind of fossil, a sedimentary rock composed of skeletal bits of marine organisms. The calcium-rich, water-soluble limestone erodes easily into fantastic forms displaying suggestive features, such as the rock placed in the hollow in the middle of a branch stump that resembles a ghostly animal or human face. The large black basalt rock with white limestone traces

in its striking striations provides a strong color contrast that will be enhanced in the rain and snow, which will brighten the white and black to shiny surfaces. These well-weathered rocks are all-weather stones, well-suited to the local climate.



The Third Eye (2018) Pierre Jardin

The inosculation where a horizontal bridge connects two branches high up in this beautiful tree creates a suggestive niche to site a stone. The rock will sink down into the tree, as the branches continue to grow upward, evolving a tight embrace exemplifying igneous ligneous inosculation, the entwining of rock and wood into a hybrid assemblage.



The upright triangular black basalt rock with its striking white limestone disc, sited between the eye-like knots where branches have been cut, evokes the archetypal image of a third eye. The stone floats high above the ground, hidden in plain sight to people who come to enjoy the park. When someone spots the ocular rock, the shock of surprise may be intensified by the feeling that an omnipresent eye is watching them. Perhaps seeing the stone eye will encourage a viewer to see the tree's eyes as well, eliciting a visceral sense of natural elements as active agents in the world.



The third eye denotes spiritual wisdom and heightened insight. The igneous ligneous inosculation of rock and tree evokes an eco-philosophical, earth-centered grounding in the world, where stones and trees are animating forces in a living planet we all share.

Pierre Jardin is a rock collector, stone whisperer, and garden designer based in Long Beach, California. Under the pseudonym Paul Harris, he is professor of English at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.