

XXL

FRONT COVER: Stuart Murdoch, *Pimm's Deckchair*, see p. 38 f.

BACK COVER: Daniel Firman, *Würsa 18,000 km above the Earth*, see p. 122 f.; Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag*, see p. 62 f.; Florentijn Hofman, *Rubber Duck*, see p. 74 f.; Mehmet Ali Uysal, *Skin 2*, see p. 44 f.

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XXXL

**WHEN ARTISTS
THINK BIG**

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This book proposes to examine the great names in modern and contemporary art by looking at them from an unusual angle: their size. Although the subject is not new, it is one largely unexplored by art historians, despite the fact that every epoch has had its sculptures, paintings and frescos of imposing dimensions.

The monumental works which first saw the light of day in previous centuries were created with other aims than those of today. In former times, art on a gigantic scale was reserved exclusively for the gods and those in power. The Leshan Giant Buddha (8th century), 71 metres high, the Nazca Lines (created over a period of one thousand years, beginning in 500 BC), with figures spanning up to 275 metres, or the Gothic Minster in Ulm (begun in the 14th century), with its 150-metre steeple, are some of the largest historical religious monuments. People are fascinated by works on such a magnificent scale, and particularly by their spectacular visual impact. Antiquity already defined the Seven Wonders of the World, and all of them, from

the Colossus of Rhodes to the Great Pyramid of Giza and the Lighthouse of Alexandria, are of colossal dimensions.

What drives artists to create gigantic works of art today? In most cases, they are not prompted by religious motives or admiration for those in power, but by the desire to offer a new aesthetic experience. Whether the aim is to increase the visibility of the work, to prove technical prowess or to convey a message, monumental art is never anodyne. In a world over-saturated with images, works in XXL format are a sure way to grab attention.

It is surprising that so many of these works are temporary installations, rendered immortal only by preliminary sketches, photographs or videos.

More than any other form of art, monumental art prompts a dialogue with space, whether it is installed in the countryside, in the streets of our cities or within the confines of museums. The spectator, suddenly rendered minuscule, finds his perception of the world altered.

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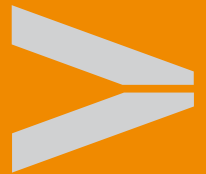


enerally, art (from the Latin *ars*, “craft, technical skill,” from which the words “artisan” and “artifice” are derived), is seen as the opposite of nature, as innate creation existing without human intervention. At first, fascinated by the perfection of life, man attempted to imitate it in works of art. But in the late 1960s, a new development took place: the desire to break out of the confines of the art market led artists to leave the hallowed space of the museums and galleries and install their art in a natural environment. Robert Smithson (see pages 28–29), pioneer of *land art*, expressed his dissatisfaction with the paralysing effect of institutions: “The museum undermines one’s confidence in sense data. [...] Art settles into a stupendous inertia [...], things flatten and fade.” Numerous artists, seduced by this new vision, which altered the relationship between art and nature, followed in his footsteps. Thus, the landscape itself became part of the ultimate form of the work: art *in situ* was born. The movements were given names such as *land art*, *earth art* or *environmental art*, and their proponents—artists like Dennis Oppenheim, Nancy Holt, Robert Morris, Walter De Maria ...—used natural materials to create ephemeral works of art which survived only in the form of photographs or videos.

The *land art* movement often produced works of monumental scale. By taking nature as their canvas, artists were able to play with volume, mass and space in a way which would never have been possible within the confines of a museum or in an urban setting. Ravines, mountains, a strange, pink-coloured lake ... The following chapter will show that these grandiose elements of nature served both as a canvas and setting for artists in search of the exceptional.

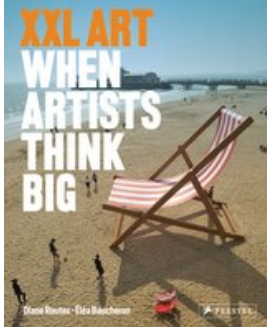
Other artists used the countryside as a backdrop for works of art which were not made from natural materials. For example, Jean Dubuffet (see pages 16–19) left the urban environment, not in order to work on and with nature but in order to find the necessary space to create and exhibit their artworks, the dimensions of which could not be accommodated within the walls of a museum or gallery.

But nature can not only contribute to the beauty of a work of art and provide access to vast open spaces; it can also serve to democratise art, to make it freely accessible and visible to all. The sand sculptures created by Jim Denevan (see pages 40–43) or the *Serpent d'océan* by Huang Yong Ping (see pages 36–37) will never be hung on the walls of a museum.



Pages 12–13:
Anish Kapoor (see pages 158–161)
Dismemberment Site I, 2009,
25 × 85 m, stainless steel and PVC, Gibbs Farm, New Zealand

Pages 14–15:
Jim Denevan (see pages 40–43)
Untitled, 2010, Lake Baikal, Russia



Diane Routex, Éléa Baucheron

XXL Art

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