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Lost in the Moment: Ephemeral Art as a Creative Strategy to Explore the Anthropocene

Abstract: In relation to the wider theme of this journal, this paper explores how ephemeral arts investigate basic ecocritical questions around experience, presence, and loss, through a literal language of fragility and disappearance. Ephemeral art is used here to define a category of artworks which physically exist within a limited timeframe and for which this fixed duration clearly frames the work. Through creating landscape interventions, the three artworks discussed, explore the relationship with what is manmade and artificial, and the physical environment in which they are placed. The conversation the works enable is both with and about our relationship to our physical surrounding. It is an exploration of place and (be)longing through the temporary materialization of an uncertain presence which jarringly subverts the expectation of what fits and what lasts. Specifically, the argument is put forward that ephemeral art through its staging of limited material duration is a coping tool within the Anthropocene which both expresses and confronts the human condition.

Keywords: ephemeral art, coping, ecocriticism, Anthropocene, loss, human condition.

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The world is on fire. This is nothing new. In fact, there is ample historic precedent. However, in the age of the Anthropocene – a category demarking human agency and impact on the earth – it is perhaps clearer than ever how the current state of the planet is the consequence of both capitalism and patriarchy and a culture of greed and social neglect. The Anthropocene denotes the point at which people become influencers – orchestrating change, impacting, and structuring the earth. The Anthropocene in the context of this paper is used to discuss how artists may engage with

the manmade and the man impacted present and contemplate the impact of both upon each other and across time – extrapolating and projecting a question mark into the future. This now. But what next? This was. But not anymore. The three ephemeral artworks which are put forward as case studies highlight how they frame an uncertainty which is made palpable. As Julie Reiss puts forward in *Art, Theory and Practice in the Anthropocene*, artists address the environment through a multitude of ways and by successfully framing the relationship between people as agents and their immediate environment as space. This is precisely the role of the works discussed, namely, to put forward experiences through an embodied interaction with and framing of the natural landscape.

Chakrabarty's four theses can be used according to Robert S. Emmett as a framework to consider "the Anthropocene as a cultural category, one that describes a collective, if unintended, human project whose implications extend far beyond geological inquiries about stratigraphic dating." (7) From this framework, a number of discussions and questions are elicited, considering human impact and responsibility. I bring forward the argument that the arts, and in particular ephemeral and experience driven art, are a lens through which to creatively investigate these same questions of human action, reaction, and purpose. I propose that ephemeral artworks serve as creative strategies and ecocritical agents to explore questions of human agency and experience. I will provide a contextual backdrop clarifying where ephemeral art practice emerges from, which will clarify its historical and political nature as well as how it has been a hyper embodied means of critique. It will become apparent that ephemeral artworks play with our understanding of presence and absence and become completed through their literal unmaking. These paradoxes form a kind of intermedial exploration.

I further personally engage with and apply the theme of intermediality through my own interconnectedness with the case studies woven through this argument, which have ceased to exist in their original material form and instead can only be known through secondary sensory means, such as through this writing. This article, I propose, could be viewed as a different medial modality for interacting with these works that are now gone. It is a further play on the sensorial dislocation that these ephemeral works promote. As these case studies are put forward, their contextualisation within this argument, and how they relate to me, and indeed you the reader, brings to heart the crux of ephemeral art practices and how they embody a commentary on time, experience, and duration, which posits us, however and whenever we might encounter these works, as witnesses. And with this witnessing, we are left with a responsibility, a moral question which lies at the very heart of ecocriticism, namely, to consider, what to do with this responsibility? The artworks discussed do not provide answers, but rather live the questions and pass them on to us. Witnessing these works reveals our situation in a kind of Heideggerian take on phenomenology. This is to say that ephemeral artworks relate to our being and reveal our relationship to the world through their physical enactment and inevitable disappearance.

With support of three case studies, I illustrate how artists can harness material loss as a tool to create artworks that contribute to the discussion of how we can consider our human interactions with our environment and offer us insights into the human condition. What does not last, as these experience driven works highlight, still lingers, long after it is physically gone. Impact continues to reverberate and ripple. The case studies are selected because they are all in essence a form of manmade material intervention within the natural landscape. However, as will be discussed, they initially provide different sensorial ways of engaging with and negotiating this intervention.

As Ballard and Linden put forward, “[...] art and its accompanying creative modes of writing should be taken seriously as major commentators, indicators, and active participants in the crafting of future understandings of the Anthropocene.” (142) In this world of panic, there is the opportunity enacted through artistic practice to consider human impact through action and consequence. As succinctly stated by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, “[t]he Anthropocene is a term that beckons environmental justice thinking, asking what worlds we are intentionally and inadvertently creating, and what worlds we are foreclosing while living within an increasingly diminished present.” (6) Specifically, this notion of intentionally and diminished presence is a potent theme in the works I shall discuss. The three case studies selected are all ephemeral works which engage with durational landscape interventions that subvert the audience’s expectation of what they might find, by installing manmade elements into the natural landscape.

Ephemerality develops and popularizes within art practices across the twentieth century. Through the both figurative and in some cases literal dematerialization of the art object across the twentieth century, the arts have increasingly become a political and a creative social critical means of communicating and exploring themes such as action, experience, and response. As Boettger notes, “categorical imperatives – between agency and materiality, actant and environment, art and politics – have dissolved.” (678) It is to recognize that nothing occurs in a vacuum, and that we are in fact continually both reactor and reactant within a wide sphere.

Ephemeral artworks have evolved from the legacy of the modern artworks of the twentieth century. This points to a time where pivotal changes were taking place in art practices, laying the foundations for this framework of artistic practice. Notably, these shifts often came as a response to a socio-political context. Art practices do not exist in a vacuum, but rather respond to the context and times in which they occur. The twentieth century represents the beginnings of what is now a relatively young history of durational ambiguity in Western art. The landscape of material use and possibility in art diversified, starting with the inclusion of found objects in Dada as well as collage and cardboard by other vanguard movements, and increased use of the human body. The diversification of art served as an exploration of how to shape, and what to present, as art, while challenging traditional and

established views. In exploring how to use new materials, artists were more interested in what artist and critic Robert Storr refers to as an ‘immediacy’ than in thinking about the durability of their work.(35) This immediacy was often achieved through focusing on the present moment and experimenting with process. As Storr elaborates:

Freshness of ideas or procedural attitudes often results in the premature physical deterioration of the object that embodies those ideas and attitudes. The creative misuse of traditional materials is an inescapable necessity for many artists, as is the experimentation with novel or untested materials. (35)

The most interesting and important questions relating to the development of ephemeral artworks are the early questions asked in the twentieth century around the object of art, and the role of the art object within the artwork, together with this interest in immediacy. The significance of all of these creative inquiries lies in the implied questioning of the behaviour and practices of institutions, escaping what Carol Duncan describes as ‘the sacred space of the museum’ or indeed what Arthur Danto referred to as ‘the artworld’ – the framework of the stakeholders and context that make up the art industry. (571) Artists began to examine how these institutions interacted with their practice, exploring themes of inclusion/exclusion and continued to question the object of art, and the nature of the artwork itself. This led to the development of the practice of institutional critique – the critical and creative inquiry into the structures which housed art, such as galleries and museums, and a further questioning of the social function and concept of art.

Starting in the late 1960s, institutional critique further questioned the power structures and ideologies around art that the early avant-garde movements of the twentieth century had found problematic. The focus was again, in a very Duchampian manner, not on the art object, or material, but rather on the framing of art and an investigation into the political, institutional, and social context, playing upon traditional expectations and upending them.

The creative act of questioning the artwork as material object was pushed to its furthest extreme by the historical development of what Lucy Lippard and David Chandler discussed as the dematerialization of art, notably focussing on artworks produced between 1966 and 1972. (42) Lippard and Chandler used the term to discuss the shift in importance from art material and object to an artwork’s idea, changing the course of art production to an art of not making. As critically noted by Lippard and Chandler, “[w]hen works of art, like words, are signs that convey ideas, they are not things in themselves but symbols or representatives of things. Such a work is a medium rather than an end in itself or ‘art-as-art’.” (49) The dematerialized artwork, in short, was conceived as more than a physical artefact, but rather an overarching concept. The 1960s saw a further establishment of ephemeral art production, where artists “demonstrated a diminishing interest in the longevity of artefacts, entrusting the artistic message to the idea.”

Within the 1960s movements, and notably their focus on presence, experience, and creating works which could not endure and were difficult to commodify arose some of the first artworks which clearly fit into the framework of ephemeral artworks: physical works of an intentional limited duration. The themes present in movements of this time enabled artists to create works without focussing on, and sometimes even consciously opposing, the creation of a stable, fixed, and permanent objects. Through highlighting and bringing to light a tension of presence and absence and underscoring the issue of endurance, these works are what multimedia conservator and art historian Dr Brian Castriota would refer to as “queer artworks” – as they challenge previously upheld structures and demand a shift in thinking and practice.¹ The challenges that these works bring with them include the very practical difficulty of trying to sustain these works for future audiences. It is not straightforward to collect or care for the ephemeral in the long-term and requires thought and sensitivity around what is brought forward and what is lost.

I am interested in the tension created by loss specifically and artists who consciously create works which court a swansong process. What does it mean to “let it go?” And how do we shift from despair to catharsis? With support of three case studies, I will illustrate how certain artists harness impending material loss as a tool highlighting what Severin Fowles discusses as “the carnality of absence”. A clarification of what is missing assists in sustaining what I develop and describe as a “performance of loss”, a critical part of the lives of these works. In line with archivist Katrina Windon, I argue that artworks which intentionally disappear require a new ethic, namely one of letting go. I develop and put forward the claim that the experience of loss is intrinsically part of what forces the viewer into the present. In turn, this challenges us to consider our interactions with our environment and offers us insights into the human condition. Ephemeral artworks become a kind of inner exile, a refusal or in the very least a challenge, to capitalist structures of commodity and ownership. And perhaps even more so than merely refusing commodification, they represent a hopefulness, and point towards a direction that is other – perhaps there is another way. Things could be different. They are an invitation to look closer and embrace the questions. As Rainer Maria Rilke boldly put forward, we should live the questions. The works discussed in this paper do just that, they ask of us: engage with the challenge.

The works selected to review this argument, by artists Guneriussen, Greenberg, and duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude, are all temporal interventions that engage with creating works that serve as temporal interventions that juxtapose the manmade in the natural environment and use duration as part of the language of the artwork. How the artwork is understood both short-term and long-term is inevitably affected by its limited duration. The three works discussed all fall within Camilo Gomides’s operational definition of ecocriticism, namely they serve as artworks that are modes of enquiry into moral questions about human interactions with nature.

All three works engage with the natural landscape, expectation, and duration, by creating structures as temporary encounters – putting into place what Guy Debord would refer to as “the construction of situations”. The audience, the work, and its time and context together make up an electrifying ‘situation’ in which the whole becomes a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of sorts which relies on the tension of finitude. What is witnessed is something which cannot last for the primary audience, or, for the non-primary audience, something which did not last. This brings us to the first case study.

Consider the following: a green woodland scene, dusky and dark, with a bright string of lights across it. The string of lights is fashioned from old table lamps strung together to form a kind of fantastical deranged bunting in an otherwise calm green landscape. Something man-made is depicted, interrupting, or at the very least, in conversation with nature. The work is entitled *A grid of physical entities* (2012) and was created by artist Rune Guneriussen. It is an installation engaging with its environment.

I have never actually witnessed the original scene, nor could I have. Guneriussen’s oeuvre is comparable in brevity to many ephemeral artworks in their limited time frame. However, Guneriussen’s works are arguably even more intimate as the artist is their sole primary witness. The artist uses everyday man-made objects such as lamps, books, and telephones to create elaborate and whimsical outdoor installations, which he then photographs, after which the installations are dismantled. The artist’s photographs are the only means through which the work is presented to the audience who, should they try to find the work depicted in the images, can look only for the site that once housed it. After the artist makes, experiences, photographs, and disposes of the physical work, it continues to exist only in photographic documentation and possible narration. Thus, the audience can have only a second-hand experience of *A grid of physical entities* (2012), as mediated by Guneriussen’s first-hand documentation, which acknowledges and accounts for the artwork in question.

The significance of Guneriussen’s process is that it uncovers a layering of narratives of human interaction. These whimsical installations are magical in part because they seem out of place. The artist uses man-made objects whose artificiality becomes highlighted through their placement in natural landscapes. The structures are playful and surprising. And, they are also private, as we only witness the work after it is gone. This additional knowledge of the temporary interruption, the intervention that did not last, is a further invitation to explore ideas around both what was, and what could be. As Kelly notes, “[...] the Anthropocene is not simply an intellectual category for describing the environment. It is also a lived phenomenon that human experience on a variety of scales.” (13) This subjectivity should not be held against artistic exploration but is of course a necessary consideration. Artworks are not factfinding or confirming machines, but rather tools for creative exploration and ecocriticism. Guneriussen unlocks and presents ideas around how we are active agents in the world around us and ways in which we can communicate, and reverse, our impact.

Temporary structures can be a successful means of elegantly exploring the human experience and its relationship towards the environment. Butler specifically points towards art as being a sustainable means to bring about awareness and transformation. (184) There is an inevitable subjectivity to this, which only seems appropriate.

The experience of an ephemeral artwork is in part shaped by the impending fracture created by the knowledge of the inevitable loss of the work. The ephemeral artwork is completed through its impending absence, and the viewer must consolidate this simultaneous being and not being as part of their experience. There is a foreboding knowing of what is to come, in the ephemeral moment triggered by bearing witness to the work and its inevitable disappearance. In these instances, the artist establishes a connection and a response from the viewer to the work through the work's various evident career stages, including the impending material unmaking. The essence of the work lies in this unmaking, and after the material work is gone, the knowledge of this unmaking comes to lie with the viewer.

As the art audience cannot develop a primary relationship to the physical construction, this complicates what we might understand the artwork to be – whether it is the initial physical installation witnessed only by the artist, or the later photograph that documents the work. If it is the first, the photograph can in this instance be understood to be a type of memento of the work which has ended. Guneriussen has clarified the relationship between the photograph and installation, stating the following: “the work is made solely on site, and the photographs represent the reality of the installation itself.” (Guneriusen) This highlights the significance of Guneriussen's work as existing *in situ* and suggests that the photograph is not the actual artwork, but rather a framing of the work and a means of presenting it. This means that the artwork is the installation and the photograph serves as a type of curated view of the work. *A grid of physical entities* (2012) could therefore be considered an ephemeral artwork, in which photography frames a limited view and reality of the work and serves this up afterwards to a wider audience. The audience therefore is always distanced and can never quite reach out or fully interact and immerse itself with the installation. They only come to know the artwork as something that once was – it therefore always exists outside their reach.

Despite having clarified that the photograph is not the artwork, Guneriussen's statement posits that what could be considered the ‘aura’ of the artwork is faithfully captured in the photograph. The concept of the ‘aura’ references theorist Walter Benjamin's 1936 conceptualisation that the aesthetic presence of art is grounded in the experience that it elicits. Benjamin vehemently argued that the artwork's aura – its essence – cannot be found in replication. Although an artwork is in principle always reproducible in some form, what is at stake, and what Benjamin proposed a reproduction lacks, is its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. Although not capturing the full history of an artwork, a document such as Guneriussen's photograph does capture a moment, a fragment of this history, and, if presented as such, is able to depict what the artist

– the author – deems to be ‘the reality’ of the artwork. I would like to propose that the absence of the physical artwork, which is highlighted by the document, can indeed still be faithful to the ‘aura’ of the artwork, while not possessing the actual ‘aura’. If the document is used to clarify the absence of the artwork, i.e. it serves as proof of something which was there, but no longer is, and makes public a work that is gone, it can still elicit the experience that Benjamin discusses. However, rather than elicit the experience through the presence of the artwork, it does so through its absence. A non-primary experience of an ephemeral artwork, such as through the discussion in this paper, is an experience of the absence of the material artwork. This notion of experiencing things through their absence is pertinent to ephemeral artworks, in particular as they are broached in this essay. The missing material work serves as an ecocritical commentary on durational engagement, and the forced mediated experience further elucidates and frames questions around experience, presence, and loss.

In relation to Guneriussen’s work, this means that the photograph of *A grid of physical entities* (2012), and the discussion of this work here, become a means of eliciting experience through exploring the ‘aura’ of the artwork without the physical artwork. Both document, and discussion of the absent work, reference the ‘aura’ and the absence of the ‘real thing’. The second-hand experience automatically refers to the irretrievable: a work which once was, but will never be again. The reality of an ephemeral artwork is vested in this. The art object, which becomes a non-object and continues to exist only in documentation and memory, stays alive through this web of transformation. It stays relevant and continues to relate as it undergoes not only physical change but is furthermore also transformed through those who learn of the work long after it is physically gone – a collective of unintentional archivists holding stock in a piece of heritage that transforms continually. It is a kind of active coexistence.

As Serenello Iovino and Serpil Oppermann put forward, material ecocriticism becomes a particularly poignant means of exploring the collaborative possibility between human agents co-existing and co-acting with their environments. (84) In a sense it subverts total human autonomy and instead returns some of it to the natural world and order, making us smaller, stripping some of our power. This in turn denotes the intermediality, the manifestation and articulation of a time and situation. Things are not created in vacuums, but rather both responses and catalysts to context in which they are enveloped. The medium comes forth from the culture, but also in turn impacts and shapes the culture. This points towards a kind of hyper immersive creativity in which we arise from our surroundings, while also impacting our surroundings and the authorship therefore rests both in environment and individual. It is a collaboration. As Jarkko Toikkanen cleverly puts forward, we are living in what is in essence a time of total immersion, where “media are what this environment is.” (33)

Similar to Guneriussen’s photograph of *A grid of physical entities* (2012), I would like to present the following encounter. When I was a child there was a picture hanging up in my

mother's kitchen just above the big chalkboard. Every now and then it would catch my eye, a faded green valley bisected by a red orange stream of flowers. It wasn't until I was much older, and with this, also much taller, that I eventually realized that the image was not of a bright line of flowers cutting across the valley, but indeed, an arrangement of traffic markers. A little reminder to look closer and that things are not always what they at first appear to be. But without context and focus, it was difficult for me to question my expectations of the image. I needed to see the work and spot the irregularity between my expectation and the natural landscape before I could become curious and ask questions. This was the turning point for me to question the image. The photo was of a now long gone work by my mother, the artist Barbara Greenberg.

While completing an artist in residency post at Stanford University in the early 80s, Greenberg had the opportunity to make work that didn't have to be sold. The Carl Djerassi stipend, which funded this post, provided a living wage – which was creatively liberating. When she talks about the work she created during this time, she notes that the 80s prices for artworks began to rise steeply and fast; although art had long been considered an investment, in the 80s prices were such that art became a place where the newly rich could park their wealth, and the prices were so high for works by some artists that it seemed as if the work was valued more at what someone had paid for it than for its worth as something to help people focus on something the artist wanted to call attention to. As she explained, “I was really repelled by this whole

mechanism; it seemed so perverse, and so much beside the point – when I got the chair at Stanford, I had both the resources and opportunity to make things that could not be used as investments.” With regards to the traffic cone installation, she discussed this work as follows:

The installation on the hill behind the Djerassi artist’s house was made of plastic highway markers which I’d seen in a garage in NY. Although not normally drawn to plastic, I thought those tubes were really intriguing, and I kept them in mind as a material until I saw the hill and realized that it would be a perfect canvas for an installation of the markers. I rented 300 of them for a weekend in April and made the arrangement. I liked the idea of bringing the natural lines of the landscape into focus.

When you see images of the work, it is not immediately clear what you are looking at, but the construction draws out the beauty of what is already there. This work which contrasts the bright human objects against the natural backdrop forms a dialogue of the human, nonhuman, and environment. The juxtaposition of the bright markers against the organic hills plays on themes of expectation and belonging. As a standalone work it completely encapsulates Greenberg’s oeuvre of the time: an exploration and criticism of the purpose of art and unsustainability of the art market. As Allan C. Braddock notes, “[b]riefly defined, ecocriticism emphasizes issues of environmental interconnectedness, sustainability, and justice in cultural interpretation.” (26) Through using things that are part of daily life, and making work outwith the museum, Greenberg’s practice democratized what art can be, and for who it is, affording experiences to people by curating something anyone might encounter in their daily life. The weekend installation was open to all, one just had to come across it. The installation is an aesthetic means of challenging our relationship to nature and the world at large and where these dynamics possibly intersect.

There is a vulnerability and risk which is radical and anti-capitalist in the refusal to produce works which can easily be stabilized and encompassed by the financial market and institutions such as museums. And arguably these types of works also serves as critiques of traditional systems of art collectability and care strategies. Note this does not mean that the ephemeral does not find its ways into collections, but the piecemeal debris clarifies

the struggle for the temporary to translate into the long-term. Things are bluntly and poignantly – lost in the moment. They are instead left to be remembered and encountered happenstance, by those who were there, and curious eyes in kitchens, or indeed those reading this paper. This translation from installation to document, memory and anecdote, is further interesting, as it distances the work from the audience. As the material artwork is transferred to an intangible state, later audiences are only able to experience the work in a mediated and fragmented form. The work is experienced and continues to exist in its absence. This embodies the issue of how we live and are surrounded by things which cannot last.

Impermanence is compelling and all around us. Ephemeral artworks capitalize on this transience, both in their material manifestation, and their inevitable material unmaking. This sensorial loss is further highlighted by the final case study for this paper, Floating Piers (2016) by artist duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Summer 2016, I worked on Christo and Jeanne-Claude's Floating Piers on Lake Iseo in Italy. The work – a temporary site-specific work – which was installed for two weeks, consisted of, a walkable surface made of 70,000 square meters of dahlia yellow-orange fabric, carried on a modular floating dock system connecting Sulzano, Monte Isola and San Paolo. The walkway created a striking golden geometric that cut through the landscape, bringing closer attention to the environment through this surprising juxtaposition of the unexpected in situ.

Initially, the installation was meant to be open to the public 24 hours for the whole course of the two weeks. However, due to logistical issues and the size of the crowd, ultimately

the work was only open for a full 24 hours for one night out of the two-week period. I was monitoring the work that single evening. I stood on the Piers from 8 pm till 8 am. Surrounded by the North Italian mountains, floating on the middle of the lake, a very pregnant full moon casting its glow over the first start of my shift I watched the light change across the water and fabric structure.

It was intimate and strange, to see the work change as well as those who came to see it at different pockets of time. What people who did not come to see the work often do not realize is that the Piers moved. Gently. The artist described it as wanting to create the feeling of walking across a whale's back. As I stood watch, it felt as if the work was breathing. Alive and animated. None of this life remains, just fabric scraps, drawings, photos, little constructions which give an outline and estimation of something which was here for a limited time only. And of course, my memory. The swan song still plays in my head. And so, though the installation no longer cuts through Lake Iseo, and the movement of the Piers is deadened, it still lives on, but splintered across the impressions of first hand crew, visitors, and the subsequent encounters of new audiences. The immersive magnitude of the work gone as it is physically displaced, but the contemplation remains just as poignant: here is the outline of something that was.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's installations are concepts and interactions made fleetingly tangible. They discussed their installations as having to be experienced in real-time and *in situ*. The physical installation, which cannot last, creates an 'enigmatic relationship' which plays upon "the work's actuality and its sublimity". (Gargoian, 19) The installations were self-funded by the artists, who create documentation, including video, models, drawings and collage which are what is left to both remember and record the work, as well as produced smaller saleable works such as drawings and collages of the pending larger installations, which helped pay for the actualization. Notably, the drawings and collages are sold as artworks in their own right. However, the objects are not so much the artwork as a medium to enable people to engage. As Christo has stated, there is a courage needed in creating works that are erased. I would go so far as to say that it is radical and goes against the very human urge to leave one's mark. And it is also possibly the greatest criticism around what is important, trinkets and transcripts, or rather the looming structures of the here and now which are built not to last. The impermanence of the material object, and that it cannot be remade, shapes

an experience and presence and later absence, and creates a tension which makes the work more precious. As the artist duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude note, “non-permanent art will be missed”. (Kolmstetter) Ephemeral artworks are shaped by their very loss. Their power is in part in their transience. The act of consciously engaging with erasure is a tool to unpack and reflect upon, lending the audience the opportunity to consider. Arguably, the works become increasingly poignant as they are physically lost and only known in mediated form, as with this essay.

In the wake of the world as we know it and continue to shape it, radical transience continues to be a powerful mode through which artists choose to explore relationships of the body and its autonomy and fragility within the literal landscape of time and place. The creativity and poetry of material selection and movement brings to light tension and narrative through a literal language and performance of loss. Guneriusen, Greenberg, and Christo & Jeanne Claude all create works which draw out the relationship between what is man-made and the natural landscape, playfully creating a dialogue between human and environment. They offer an exploration of our relationship within the world and a consideration of what belongs. And they also present us with works which are inevitably lost.

The initial audience and sensorial presentation is different for each of the three artworks. Guneriusen’s work is viewed after the fact. The audience’s experience is always mediated. Greenberg’s work is viewed by some in its initial material installation – there will have been audience members that walked through the work, though most will have encountered the work through documentation and anecdote. As for Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s Floating Piers, the work will, like Greenberg’s, have been witnessed *in situ*, where the audience will have been able to walk upon the work – an additional experiential layer, but again, most will have come to know the work through documentation and anecdote. The three case studies are interesting together as they each have had a different primary audience run. Guneriusen and his installation crew were the only *in situ* witnesses of his work, Greenberg and a handful of invitees and perhaps some accidental stragglers were the sole primary witnesses of her work, and for Christo and Jeanne-Claude, due to publicity there were despite the limited time frame an audience well within the thousands. Moreover, each work offers different sensorial attributes. Guneriusen’s work is viewed after the fact, always only as a record. Greenberg’s work can be walked amongst, and Christo’s work can be walked on. However again, all three works, as experienced through this article, are encountered in a mediated fashion, and after their material fact. They are witnessed in their absence.

The world is in transition. But the arts provide a lens through which to explore the change occurring all around us. As we see across the range of works discussed here, the temporary interventions they create provide unexpected beautiful, and sometimes also whimsical breaks in the landscape, and an opportunity to stand still and ponder what was, what is, and what will be. The works presented find a way of describing the human, and indeed global condition,

by visualizing and mimicking this, illustrating patterns and possibilities and how we coexist with the planet. As such, these creative strategies offer perspective, potentially sounding off like the proverbial canary in the coalmine, alerting us that something is off. Ephemeral art practices in particular, become a poignant means, through their material unmaking and our later mediated experience of them, to criticize the state of the world and provide ecocritical commentary on crisis. The literal material break in the natural landscape, followed by the mediated experience of the absent work, bring to life the ecocritical questioning of the relationships between the human, nonhuman, and environment. Ephemeral artworks, as we see through the three case studies brought forward, engage with the painful and radical act of exploring presence and indeed loss. As each of the three works is presented, they are discussed in their material absence. Guneriusen's festive string of lights is long gone from its woodland habitat by the time that we bear witness to it. Greenberg's traffic marker conga line broke through the hills for a misty weekend only but continues to stop our gaze long after the work has ceased to exit. Christo & Jeanne-Claude's Floating Piers cutting a golden dahlia geometric across the lake for two weeks, and now existing as curious architectural installation plans and fabric scraps become maps to something that cannot be found. The way in which the three works could initially be encountered is different – they initially offer different sensorial possibilities. However, as they physically disappear, later audiences, which include you, the reader, encounter the work similarly. It is a narrowing of the sensorial experience, while at the same time an intermedial layering of the meeting. All these works echo a similar ecocritical commentary and serve as coping tools within the Anthropocene by both expressing and confronting the human condition. This too shall pass. It cannot last. But it is warm here by the fire which gives off a terrible and exciting burning light. As we engage with the world around us, the arts, and in particular ephemeral experience driven works, offer us platforms to stand upon and explore how we too might become lost in the moment.

End Notes

1. Castriota, B. 2017. *Personal Interview*, May 29.

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