

Interview with William Furlong (1984)

The following interview is created from a William Furlong interview with artist Richard Long. It was originally published as an audio tape by *Audio Arts*, London, 1985. The questions below are copied excerpts from *Richard Long: Selected Statement & Interviews*, edited by Ben Tufnell, and the Tate Britain (http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/audioarts/cd2_9_transcript.htm).

William Furlong: Your work seems to divide down into groups. I don't know whether you see the distinctions as being very important?

Adam Farcus: I do, and that divide has been a long standing thing in my work. In my practice there exists work that is destined for controlled and determined settings, such as galleries, and work that happens in the world. The gallery work is often object-based while the intervention works are more ephemeral, performative, and set within some type of context or landscape. This intervention work is important for me because it is a way of addressing people with things on their own terms. People find them in everyday life. In a gallery you expect certain things that are determined before you even see any art. The interventions might be surprising because they are unexpected - I mean, who would expect to go to Menards and see owls staring down at you from toilets on the top shelf?

This isn't to say that there is not any performative act present in my "gallery" objects, but the context is different.

WF: When you go out into the landscape to make a work, to make a piece of sculpture as opposed to a walk...

AF: I actually don't plan either. And, often there is no distinction between the two. A lot of times I make things on walks that aren't documented. Really I like to think of myself as an explorer - I'm walking around, *dériving*, and trying to make new combinations in what I find. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't.

WF: Would you define that moment as being purely a moment determined by chance?

AF: Um, not completely. Change does help, but if I'm not in a free, receptive frame of mind I can't get any work done. If I'm free to explore I can usually find what I need. Like in *Lake Michigan, Sheboygan, WI*, I didn't plan to draw faces on the rocks there, but those were the materials around. And somehow, that act seemed fitting.

WF: Works such as the one you've described could in a sense be seen as the sort of index of your relationship with the location and the factors that you're responding to in the location.

AF: Ya, totally. And in those locations I am looking for the over-looked things. In a store such as Wal*Mart it might be consumer objects that can be *détourné* to become aesthetic objects. In landscapes I am drawn to places where a human presence is shown through absence. To name a few, I find these absent presences in stores, vacant lots, cut-down trees, parking lots, and stuff like that.

WF: I suppose one very fundamental definition of art could be purely the presence of a human being or the evidence of the presence of the human being. I'm talking about the very remote works you make where, as you say, a shepherd may not think it's an artwork but there is some feeling of a presence there or intervention of a human being.

AF: Exactly. I think it is too much to ask these accidental viewers, people who might encounter my work in the world, to view these things as art. Instead I like to think of them as happy moments, or interventions into the monotony of life. My goal with these works is to ask people to consider the everyday in new and magical ways.

WF: Without laboring the point, would it be unacceptable to you to think in terms of one of those remote spots, where you might make a work, being designated as the site of one of your pieces of art?

AF: Yes. I think it would ruin and over-determine the affect of the work if one of my interventions was designated as an artwork for people to come and see. Also, I don't think they would last long enough for people to visit - they're taken down or destroyed fairly quickly.

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WF: Going into the works which depend on words, how do you see the words functioning, how do you approach the use of words?

AF: In the more object-based, or gallery works, I use the title as a place to hinge and inform the content of the work. In the interventions the titles merely serve as a transcription of physical location.

In a few poems I have directly translated walks or dérives into a list of objects and experiences. This type of listing extends to pieces like the *Behr Premium Plus* [2011] series, where I appropriate the names of interior paint colors. In these, the location is at once a hardware store, American homes, and sometimes a third conglomerate location based on the colors. As in *Behr Premium Plus (Neutral)*, at section 550B, a scene is made that places the reader in a large sailing ship on the Pacific Ocean, traveling from Costa Rica to Capri Island.

In other cases I have created more traditional poems - um, with the use of metaphor and imagery, edited craftsmanship, and sincere emotional expression - to document a space or experience, as in *Marymere Falls* [2011].

WF: The words become elements; they become discrete meanings that work against other words.

AF: That's a function of poetry right? To take words that people already know and put them together in a way that creates new meanings - like seeing things through a different lens.

WF: One thing that one notices in a lot of the photo pieces is the very deliberate consideration of how they are photographed and how they are visually organized, which makes you very presumably concerned with perception and taking a fixed viewpoint as opposed to the idea of sculpture being in the round and being seen from any point of view.

AF: Photography is a necessary step. I like to have them for myself, as documentation and record, and for others to see. I choose viewpoints that are as descriptive of the experience as I can. But in the end

they're often failures because I know I cannot encapsulate, with my camera, the whole experience of finding one of my interventions.

WF: So when you use photography, the photograph actually becomes the work?

AF: Ya, but it is much different than the actual thing. It is mediated through the camera, myself, the paper it is printed on, possibly a frame, and finally the space the print is hung in. I prefer the actual interventions.

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WF: One other way in which you have worked is through publication. You have actually been involved in a lot of publications, haven't you? What role do you see this having?

AF: I'm not sure yet. In some cases I am illustrating ideas already present. In others, which seem more productive, my work is used in a sparse way to work toward a larger idea, such as death or outer space - really, when printed, my work functions better as an abstraction. My self-published chapbook was kind of a failure because, like a gallery setting, it was a bit too determined. It seemed kinda dead. I also had to charge for them.

WF: It reminds me, what you're saying, of Australian aboriginal concepts which don't actually include the concept of possession but of place and location and site.

AF: Hm. I like that idea, but I don't think I could do that. For the sake of my soul, I wish all of my work could exist outside the world of commodities, but that seems almost impossible. We live in a consumer culture. And, as example, if sub-cultures like Punk (that was supposed to be anti-commodity) can be packaged and sold at Hot Topic, then we probably won't ever live outside of our commodities. But, that's also an interesting predicament - one that can be messed with.

WF: I suppose when it comes to the natural landscape it is mysterious in the sense that the land is what really gave people sustenance, and their relationship to the land in the past was obviously very positive. In one sense or another there must be some sort of undercurrent of that there. But as well there must be a feeling of civilized society - urban society - conspicuous by its absence, because now we have the means to put buildings and factories everywhere, so the fact that there aren't factories and buildings in a remote spot is based on some conscious decision by people living in an urban society.

AF: For me those urban places are more interesting, because they represent nature that has been effected or ruined by man, progress, or whatever you want to call it. Aboriginals can find enlightenment in remote places, and that's great, but I think that is a narrative that everyone is familiar with. I hope to be showing the chances for enlightenment within our urban commercial mess.

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WF: There's a piece that you made, A LINE MADE BY WALKING (1967), where you seem to be pressing down daisies within a field.

AF: I wasn't even born until 1983.

WF: Up until quite recently you've been fairly reluctant or unwilling to write about your work or talk about it. Do you now feel more confident or do you feel that you should be talking about it?

AF: I think that it might seem like I wasn't willing to talk or write about my work before because, basically, no one cared. No one, other than my teachers, asked me anything. And maybe that's for the better. I needed the past five years, including graduate school, to really create a more mature and thoughtful practice.

WF: And presumably that is really the source of your work, that physical involvement in and with nature.

AF: Um, if nature is human nature, yes.