The Dream
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All my philosophical concepts seem to culminate and come to life in my environmental/sculptural works. They are meant to begin their existence in the world when completed as works of art, and come to full realization as they grow and evolve with the changing needs and perspectives of mankind.

The issues touched on in my work range between individual creation and social consciousness. We have entered an age of alienation brought on by specialization, a by-product of the Information Age. This is an age of complexity, when knowledge and ideas are coming in faster than can be assimilated, while disciplines become progressively alienated from each other through specialization. The hard-won knowledge accumulates undigested, blocking meaningful communication. Clearly defined direction for mankind is lacking. The turn of the century and the next millennium will usher in a troubled environment and a troubled psyche.

Making art today is synonymous with assuming responsibility for our fellow man. I am concerned with the fact that we have taken evolution into our own hands. We are the first species that has the ability to consciously alter its evolution, modify itself at will, even put an end to its existence. We have gotten hold of our destiny and our impact on earth is astounding. Because of our tremendous success we are overrunning the planet, squandering its resources. We are young as a species, even younger as a civilization, and like reckless children initiate processes we cannot control. We tend to overproduce, overuse, and quickly tire of things. We also overreact, panic, and self-correct in hindsight.
The pluralistic nature of things creates too many variables, confusing the goals to be achieved. Sustained interest and effective action are diminished with the alienation of the individual who feels little potential to interact or identify effectively with society as a whole. Overview for mankind is lacking and as the momentum increases human values tend to decline.

In the meantime, for the first time in human history, the whole earth is becoming one interdependent society with our interests, needs, and problems intertwined and interfering. The threads of existence have become so tightly interwoven that one pull in any direction can distort the whole fabric, affecting millions of threads. A new type of analytical attitude is called for, a clear overview, or a summing up.

I believe that the new role of the artist is to create an art that is more than decoration, commodity, or political tool. It is an art that questions the status quo and the direction life has taken, the endless contradictions we accept and approve of. It elicits and initiates thinking processes. My concern is with the creation of a language of perception that allows the flow of information among alien systems and disciplines, eliminating the boundaries of art in order to make new associations and valid analogies possible. My ideas are unorthodox compared to those usually dealt with in the art arena. I incorporate science and philosophy into my work and allow the concept to dictate the mode of realization. The materials I work with are as diverse as the concepts that dictate them. By allowing this flow of information to infiltrate the art arena, art can rise above being just another self-styled, elitist system busy with its own functions. Art is a specialization that need not feed upon itself. It is capable of imbibing key elements from other systems and unifying them into a unique, coherent vision. Art need not be restricted by the limitations inherent in the other systems or disciplines.

An art dealing with these issues has the power to make statements with universal validity and thus benefit mankind. When the creative mind is aimed at global communication and concerns, the door is open to a new form of art that goes beyond the self and the ego without being selfless. This art must assume the difficult task of maintaining a delicate balance between thinking globally and acting individualis-

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Agnes Denes has had over 250 solo and group exhibitions on four continents since 1965. She has participated in such major international exhibitions as Project '74, Cologne; the 1976 Biennale of Sydney, Australia; Documenta 6 in Kassel, Germany; and the Venice Biennales of 1978 and 1980. In 1989, she received her fourth National Endowment Individual Artist Fellowship. She has published four books, including The Book of Dust—The Beginning and the End of Time and Thereafter (1986).
tically. For the ego must remain intact in order for the self to act fearlessly, with certainty and confidence, yet one must be able to relinquish the ego in order to think universally.

In this sense I see the importance of art emerging beyond a personal style, trend, or region, pointing to new ways of seeing and knowing that enhance perception and awareness and forming new insights and new methods of reasoning. This is the essence I often refer to in my writings, the sum of an analytical process that has the potential to reach beyond itself and become the thermometer or gauge of its time—the summing up needed for the missing overview.

I created my first environmental work in 1968 with these concerns in mind, and I have been developing these concepts ever since.

Art in public spaces has the potential to play an important role in our society. It can offer meaningful collaboration and the integration of disciplines. It can bring people together in meaningful and provocative ways while it can enhance and unite environments. These valuable opportunities are often overlooked in the mad rush of its exploitation. Public art has become the newest game, a new phase in our overproduction and somewhat indiscriminate cluttering of our environments. In the light of our tendencies toward quick consumption, depletion, and reaching saturation points, especially when the results are not exactly satisfactory, public art may become extinct before we have had a chance to see its best examples.

Many recent complaints focus on assertive ego art, which may be strong but obstructs common ground, or on art that lacks merit, which may be weak but gains the consensus of votes needed for commissioning. If the meaning and ultimate goals of public art were better understood, these problems would not arise. Perhaps we ought to question whether public values are different from private ones and examine the kind of quality possible in public art under present conditions and practices. Should public art be judged differently since it is a blend of design, landscaping, architecture, and urban planning, in addition to being art? Who is at fault when something does not reach its highest potential? Without pointing fingers, we must reach for a clear assessment of issues and ask for new directions.

Today it is nearly impossible for art to avoid being commercialized. It is either a collective object in the marketplace, or it must conform to demands to be functional, cost-effective, and unobjectionable when it enters the public domain. The entire process must be reexamined when quantitative issues become the criteria for the commissioning process at the sacrifice of qualitative concerns. When well-meaning but often incompatible groups of people come together from diverse backgrounds with varying degrees of expertise and commitment, perhaps with conflicting goals and totally different results in mind, what is possible gives way to what is at hand. This does not happen all the time,
because some very good work is being done, but it happens often enough.

The players in this game or drama are the art advisory committees, jurors, coordinators, city officials, art consultants, developers, corporations, architects, designers, contractors, and, bringing up the rear, the communities and the artists. Their aims and sensibilities could not be further apart. Having deadlines, budget constraints, politics, and each other to deal with, compromise is inevitable. Once this process begins, there is no turning back. How can meaningful art get produced under these conditions? How many of these works done today will pass the test of time and the changing needs of people and the environment? How much will it cost to remove the ones no one wants? Hence the importance of selecting works with a strong vision. They never become obsolete.

Public art, like any other art, must have an immediate and a lasting effect. The difference is that public art invades areas where people live and work as opposed to museums or galleries where they go by choice. This alone ought to create a responsibility to the public whose common ground is thereby invaded. And this is where the dream comes in (or disappears). It is difficult to visualize a dream collectively, especially with strange bedfellows. And we know what happens when ideas are forced into a mold. Public art is important for our communities and for artistic expression, but it will fail if we cannot come to terms with its complexities and potentials. It is essential that art remain free to renew itself through the assessment of a world whose issues it reflects and analyzes. Art in the public domain loses its preciousness, but it gains in strength by becoming a social phenomenon, sharing itself with others willingly and effectively. The artists' vocabulary is limited only by the depth and clarity of their vision and their ability to create true syntheses well expressed. This art sees reality but never gives up the dream.
Map Projections: The Snail. Proposal for environmental work. Paving stones and plantings. 80' × 120'. © 1987 by Agnes Denes.

Teardrop—Monument to Being Earthbound

The sculpture consists of a circular base and a teardrop-shaped top, which levitates above the center of the base, held afloat on an elastic cushion of magnetic flux. The top is gently and mysteriously moved about by air currents but held in place by superconductive elements. When lit, the teardrop resembles the flame of a candle.

Teardrop—Monument to Being Earthbound (teardrop free-floating). Ink on mylar. 46" × 80". © 1984 by Agnes Denes.

Text © 1985 by Agnes Denes.
Wheatfield—A Confrontation

The Philosophy

My decision to plant a wheatfield in Manhattan instead of doing just another public sculpture grew out of a long-standing concern and need to call attention to our misplaced priorities and deteriorating human values.

Manhattan is the richest, most professional, most congested, and, without a doubt, the most fascinating island in the world. To attempt to plant, sustain, and harvest two acres of wheat here, wasting valuable precious real estate, obstructing the machinery by going against the system, was an effrontery that made it the powerful paradox I had sought for the calling to account.

It was insane. It was impossible. But it would call people's attention to having to rethink their priorities and realize that unless human values were reassessed, the precious quality of life, even life itself, was perhaps in danger. Placing it at the foot of the World Trade Center, a block from Wall Street, facing the Statue of Liberty, was to be a careful reminder of what this land had stood for and hopefully still does.

My work usually reaches beyond the boundaries of the art arena to deal with controversial global issues, questioning the status quo and the endless contradictions we seem to accept into our lives. Namely, our ability to see so much and understand so little; to have achieved technological miracles while remaining emotionally unstable; our great advances, desirable, even necessary, for survival that have interfered with evolution and the world's ecosystems; alienation in togetherness; illusions of freedom and the inescapability of the system, or, for that matter, the individual human dilemma, struggle and pride versus the whole human predicament.

Wheatfield was a symbol, a universal concept. It represented food, energy, commerce, world trade, economics. It referred to mismanagement and world hunger. It was an intrusion into the Citadel, a confrontation of High Civilization. Then again, it was also Shangri-la, a small paradise, one's childhood, a hot summer afternoon in the country, peace. Forgotten values, simple pleasures.

The idea of a wheatfield is quite simple. One penetrates the soil, places one's seed of concept, and allows it to grow, expand, and bear fruit. That is what creation and life is all about. It's all so simple, yet we tend to forget basic processes. What was different about this wheatfield was that the soil was not rich loam but dirty landfill full of rusty pipes, boulders, old tires, and overcoats. It was not farmland but landfill, an extension of the congested downtown of a metropolis where dangerous crosswinds blew, traffic snarled and every inch was precious realty. The absurdity of it all, the risks we took and the hardships we endured were all part of the basic concept. Digging deep is what art is all about.
Introduce a leisurely wheatfield into an island of achievement-craze, culture, and decadence. Confront a highly efficient, rich complex where time is money and money rules. Pit the congestion of the city of competence, sophistication, and crime against the open fields and unspoiled farmlands. The peaceful and content against the achiever. The everlasting against the forever changing. Culture against grass roots. Progress versus an existence without stress. The stone city against soft rural land. Simplicity versus shrewd knowing. What we already know against all that we have yet to learn.

Wheatfield affected many lives and the ripples are extending. Some suggested that I put my wheat up on the wheat exchange and sell it to the highest bidder, or else apply to the government for a farmer's subsidy to prevent me from planting the next year. Reactions ranged from disbelief to astonishment, from ridicule to being moved to tears. A lot of people wrote to thank me for creating Wheatfield.

After my harvest the two-acre area facing New York harbor was returned to construction to make room for a billion-dollar luxury-complex. Manhattan closed itself once again to become a fortress, corrupt yet vulnerable. But I think this magnificent metropolis will remember a majestic, amber field. Vulnerability and staying power, the power of a paradox.

The Act

Early in the morning on the first of May, 1982, we began to plant a two-acre wheatfield in lower Manhattan, two blocks from Wall Street and the World Trade Center, facing the Statue of Liberty.

The planting consisted of digging 285 furrows by hand, clearing off rocks and garbage, then placing the seed by hand and covering the furrows with soil. Each furrow took two to three hours.

Since March, over two hundred truckloads of dirty landfill had been dumped on the site consisting of rubble, dirt, rusty pipes, automobile tires, old clothing, and other garbage. Tractors flattened the area and eighty more truckloads of dirt were dumped and spread to constitute one inch of topsoil needed for planting.

We maintained the field for four months, set up an irrigation system, weeded, cleared out wheat smut (a disease that had affected the entire field and wheat everywhere in the country). We put down fertilizers, cleared off rocks, boulders, and wires by hand and sprayed against mildew fungus.

"We" refers to my two faithful assistants and a varying number of volunteers, ranging from one or two to six or seven on a good day.

We harvested the crop on August 16 on a hot, muggy Sunday. The air was stifling and the city stood still. All those Manhattanites who had been watching the field grow from green to golden amber, the stock-
brokers and the economists, office workers, tourists, and others attracted by all the media coverage, stood around in sad silence. Some cried. TV crews were everywhere but they too spoke little and then in a hushed voice.

We harvested almost 1000 pounds of healthy, golden wheat.


Text © 1982 by Agnes Denes.
Tree Mountain

*Tree Mountain* is a collaborative, environmental project that touches on global, ecological, social, and cultural issues. It questions our finitude and transcendence, individuality versus teamwork, and measures the value and evolution of a work of art once it enters the environment. *Tree Mountain* is designed to unite the human intellect with the majesty of nature.

Ten thousand trees are planted by the same number of people according to an intricate pattern derived from a mathematical formula. The mathematical expansion changes with one's view and movement around and above the mountain, thus revealing hidden curves and spirals in the design. If seen from space, the human intellect at work over natural formation becomes evident, yet they blend harmoniously.

Projected size of *Tree Mountain* is one to one-and-a-half miles in length, one-tenth to one-half of a mile in width, and oval in shape. Height is site specific and depends on the incline. Both shape and size can be adapted to areas of land reclamation and the preservation of forests.

For the model of *Tree Mountain* I chose silver fir because these trees are dying out, and it would be important to preserve them. Otherwise, any tree can make up the forest as long as it can live three to four hundred years. The trees must outlive the present era and, by surviving, carry our concepts into an unknown time in the future. If our civilization, as we know it, ends or as changes occur, there will be a reminder in the form of a strange forest for our descendants to ponder.

*Tree Mountain* is a collaborative work in all its aspects from its intricate landscaping and forestry to funding and contractual agreements for its strange, unheard-of land use of three to four centuries. The collaboration expands as ten thousand people come together to plant the trees that will bear their names and remain their property through succeeding generations. People can leave their tree to their heirs, be buried under it, and sell it at auction or by other means. The trees can change ownership, but *Tree Mountain* itself can never be owned or sold, nor can the trees be moved from the forest. *Tree Mountain* represents the concept, the soul of the art, while the trees are a manifestation of it. They are salable, collectible works of art, inheritable commodities, gaining stature, fame, and value as they grow and age as trees. But in the meantime they remain part of a larger whole, the forest. They are individual segments of a single, limited edition. The trees are unique patterns in the design of their universe.

And the trees live on through the centuries—stable and majestic, outliving their owners who created the patterns and the philosophy, but not the tree. There is a strange paradox in this.
Tree Mountain begins its existence when it is completed as a work of art. As the trees grow and wildlife takes over, as decades and centuries pass, Tree Mountain becomes the most interesting example of how the passing of time affects a work of art. It can be a thermometer, so to speak, of the evolution of art. Through changing fashions and beliefs, Tree Mountain can pass from being a curiosity to being a shrine, from being the possible remnants of a decadent era to being one of the monuments of a great civilization.

Tree Mountain is a living time capsule.

Detail of Tree Mountain.
Tree Mountain. Study for environmental work. 10,000 trees. Metallic ink and gouache on mylar. 34¼" × 96¼". © 1983 by Agnes Denes.
Stelae—Messages from Another Time—
Discoveries of Minds and People

Important excavation from ancient Genova of the Liguria Province, country Italy, European continent, late twentieth century.

A major and unique find, extremely well preserved and restored to near original condition. The inscriptions have been deciphered and appear in translation below bearing the date 1986 A.D.

By studying the meaning of the symbols one arrives at a better understanding of the people who lived toward the end of the second millennium: a fairly advanced technological age in which major scientific discoveries were made that, as we know, had such an enormous effect on later centuries. A significant aspect of these tables is that they include practically all major scientific breakthroughs for this period.

It is appropriate to note here that the very site of this exhibit was a church and monastery at the time, named Santa Maria di Castello, which had been built in an even earlier period, perhaps the thirteenth century.

Vandonia, 6000 A.D.

Transliteration:

1a. b. Energy and mass in Special Relativity
2. Field equations in General Relativity
3. Principle of Least Action (basis of classical mechanics)
4a. Expansion of the universe (the Hubble Law)
4b. The ultimate fate of the universe determined by $\Omega$, the density parameter
5. Energy of photon, the particlelike behavior of waves
6. Fusion of hydrogen into helium (sun’s source of energy—hydrogen burning into helium)
7. Photosynthesis—plants storing energy
8. The bases of DNA and RNA as they encode genetic information in chromosomes
9. Maxwell’s equation for electromagnetism
10. Nuclear fission reaction in bombs and power plants
11. Thermonuclear fusion in an H-bomb
12a. Schrödinger’s wave equation, quantum mechanics, showing wave nature of matter
12b. Uncertainty Principle (uncertainty built into quantum mechanics [Heisenberg])
13a. c. d. Circuit diagram, symbol, and truth table of NAND gate—basic building block of computers
13b. Particle interactions in quantum field theory (Feynman diagram)

14. Wave function of the universe using relativity and quantum mechanics to describe the first moment of the universe

1986 A.D.
Pascal's Perfect Probability Pyramid of the Paradox—
The Crystal Pyramid

*Crystal Pyramid* is a one-of-a-kind superstructure that represents our era as the pyramids of Egypt defined, for all time to come, the Egyptians. It is to be constructed from over 100,000 solid glass blocks for total light transmission and refraction with inverted half vaults shaping the crystal walls adapted to relativity theory and the probability curve. Access to the pyramid is from the ground below through a tunnel that opens into the large interior where myriads of crystalline reflections create the effect of infinity. The pyramid is surrounded by a reflecting pool, which inverts its oblique form.

*Crystal Pyramid* is a total contradiction to the Egyptian pyramids and their opaque, straight-lined, heavy mass. Its rhythmic form, iridescence, and apparent weightlessness set *Crystal Pyramid* apart from them to represent our era and symbolize our civilization. It is a paradox in concept and design, a temple for meditation, dedicated to the human spirit and skill. It is at this point that *Crystal Pyramid* joins its Egyptian counterparts in combining logic, science, and poetry with engineering skill and architectural tour-de-force to address itself to issues that are timeless.
The Reflection. Study for *Crystal Pyramid* in reflecting pool. Ink on vellum. 36" × 24". © 1982 by Agnes Denes.