



50 Years

Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*

The Utah Museum of Fine Arts is honored to work in collaboration with Dia Art Foundation, Holt/Smithson Foundation, and Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College to preserve, maintain, and advocate for this masterpiece of late twentieth-century art and acclaimed Utah landmark. Dia Art Foundation is the owner of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), and leases the lake bed where the earthwork is located from the State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands.

Support for this collection of essays was provided in part by the Marriner S. Eccles Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

50 Years

Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*

In 1970, Robert Smithson visited Utah and created the iconic earthwork *Spiral Jetty*, a 15-foot-wide spiral of black basalt rocks and earth coiling more than 1,500 feet into Great Salt Lake. It is a masterpiece of late twentieth-century art, drawing visitors from around the world. But because it is uniquely positioned within Utah's landscape, it has a particularly rich relationship with our community. Over the past fifty years, we Utahns have been deeply entwined with this work. Not only does the earthwork gain meaning and significance with each of our intimate experiences with it, but our state's land and water use policies deeply affect its changing environmental context. What do the past fifty years of *Spiral Jetty* tell us about ourselves? How will this earthwork, and our relationship with it, change over the next fifty years?

On the occasion of *Spiral Jetty's* fiftieth year, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts invited four brilliant Utahns to share their perspectives on *Spiral Jetty*. The following essays are included in this commemorative booklet.

Smithson Is Elsewhere: Robert Smithson at the University of Utah

Annie Burbidge Ream, *Assistant Director of Learning and Engagement and Curator of Education, Utah Museum of Fine Arts*

VIOL

Craig Dworkin, *Professor of English, University of Utah*

***Spiral Jetty* as a Witness to Change**

Jaimi K. Butler and Bonnie K. Baxter, Ph.D.,
Coordinator and Director, Great Salt Lake Institute, Westminster College

Smithson Is Elsewhere: Robert Smithson at the University of Utah

Annie Burbidge Ream

*Assistant Director of Learning and Engagement
and Curator of Education, Utah Museum of
Fine Arts*

“This is sort of the door. At first you notice right at the back that it’s green, right? There’s not really much you can say about it, I mean it’s just a green door. We’ve all seen green doors at one time in our lives. It gives out a sense of universality that way, a sense of kind of global cohesion. The door probably opens to nowhere and closes on nowhere so that we leave the Hotel Palenque with this closed door and return to the University of Utah.”

– Robert Smithson, Hotel Palenque, January 24, 1972
Fine Arts Auditorium, University of Utah

Robert Smithson is best known for *Spiral Jetty*, his 1,500-foot-long, 15-foot-wide earthwork of basalt rocks that extends out into Utah’s Great Salt Lake at Rozel Point. However, the large earthwork is not the only evidence of Smithson in Utah. The Utah Museum of Fine Arts’ permanent collection has several works of art by Smithson including photographs, paintings, collages, drawings and an original 1970 copy of the film *Spiral Jetty* that was recently rediscovered in the archives of the University of Utah’s Marriott Library. Lesser-known is that in 1972 Robert Smithson was appointed Visiting Professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of Utah.

In 1970, the chair of the University of Utah’s Department of Architecture Robert Bliss (1921–2018) and artist and architect Anna Campbell Bliss (1925 – 2015) were among some of the first to see

Spiral Jetty. Bliss and Smithson had a mutual friend, Jan van der Marck, then curator of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, who brought the Blisses to *Spiral Jetty* and eventually Smithson to the University of Utah. A year later, in the fall of 1971, Bliss was introduced to Virginia Dwan, Smithson’s gallery representation, at a social function at *Spiral Jetty*. Dwan approached him about the possibility of Smithson spending some time at the University of Utah in a teaching capacity. By November of 1971 much of the paperwork was already in progress to appoint Smithson as a visiting professor. Initial conversations between Bliss and Dwan detail how Smithson would be on campus for several lectures and to teach some graduate level workshops, as well as to plan a major work. In his initial letter proposing the appointment to Edward Maryon, the Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Bliss lists four important benefits in accepting Virginia Dwan’s proposal to appoint Smithson to the position [fig. 1]:

“1) we enhance the prestige of the department by having Smithson connected with it; 2) we hope to convince Miss Dwan to fund a “chair” or at least support other artists in a similar manner; 3) Smithson can make a good contribution to the College in lecturing and meeting with art and architecture students; and 4) we do gain some income for our development fund.”



THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

SALT LAKE CITY 84112

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

November 17, 1971

Dean Edward Maryon
College of Fine Arts
Campus

Dear Ed:

We enclose material for the appointment of Robert Smithson as Visiting Professor of Architecture for the calendar year 1972.

Mr. Smithson is a noted sculptor now working in large scale land forms (Spiral Jetty in northern Salt Lake and the Quarry piece in Holland). The size of his work becomes architecture, or landscape architecture, and is the reason for his desire for a connection with our department.

Through Miss Virginia Dwan, of the Dwan Gallery in New York, twenty thousand dollars will be given to the department to pay Smithson while he completes another major work. He will be on Campus for several lectures. Whether his next work will be in Utah or not is undecided. The funds will be placed in the Architectural Development Fund, draw interest (to the benefit of our department) and be disbursed to Smithson on a monthly payment system.

We find several benefits in our accepting the proposal of Miss Dwan: 1) we enhance the prestige of the department by having Smithson connected with it; 2) we hope to convince Miss Dwan to fund a "chair" or at least support other artists in a similar manner; 3) Smithson can make a good contribution to the College in lecturing and meeting with art and architecture students; and 4) we do gain some income for our development fund.

We are pleased to recommend temporary appointment of Robert Smithson as Visiting Professor of Architecture for the calendar year 1972.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read "RLB".

Robert L. Bliss
Professor and Chairman

RL B/bk

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
OFFICIAL FACULTY RECORD

DATA FOR PERSONNEL FILE

NAME: SURNAME SMITHSON FIRST NAME ROBERT MIDDLE NAME IRVING U.S. Citizen (M) F

WHEN BORN: JAN 2 1937 WHERE BORN: PASSIC PASSIC NEW JERSEY U.S.A.

MARITAL STATUS (circle one) Single Married Widow Widower Divorced

NAMES AND BIRTHDATES OF ANY CHILDREN:

NAME OF SPOUSE: NANCY HOLT SMITHSON
 NAME OF PARENTS: IRVING & SUSAN SMITHSON
 NAME OF SPOUSE'S PARENTS: DECEASED
 NAMES AND RELATIONSHIP OF ANY EMPLOYEE IN THE UNIVERSITY: _____

APPOINTMENT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH EFFECTIVE:
Jan 1 1972-Dec 31 1972 Date Position: Visiting Professor Department: Architecture

POSITIONS HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
 (This record will be kept up to date in the office of the Academic Vice President)

Year	Position	Year	Position

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
ARCHIVES
Acc. 526

December 14, 1971

Mr. Robert Smithson
 Department of Architecture
 AAC
 Campus

Dear Mr. Smithson:

It is a pleasure for me to inform you that the University's Institutional Council has approved your appointment as Visiting Professor of Architecture, effective January 1, 1972 to December 31, 1972.

We certainly hope that you will enjoy your work at the University of Utah.

Sincerely,

President

Above left to right, fig. 2 and fig. 3 | Next page, fig. 4

On December 14, 1971 Robert Smithson was officially approved and appointed to the position of Visiting Professor of Architecture for the calendar year of 1972 [fig. 2 and 3]. In spite of the excitement and sense of possibility evident from the long trail of paperwork connected to Smithson's appointment, his presence on campus was fleeting, comprising of only two events, a lecture titled Hotel Palenque and a screening of his film, *Spiral Jetty*.

On January 24th, 1972, standing on the stage of the Fine Arts Auditorium at the University of Utah, Smithson presented Hotel Palenque to an audience of approximately 250 students, faculty, and community members. In his talk, Smithson showed slides of an old, crumbling roadside hotel in the Chiapas region of Mexico, which he had

visited with his wife, artist Nancy Holt, and gallery owner, Virginia Dwan in 1969. In a 42-minute slide presentation, Smithson who, according to Robert Bliss, was accompanied by a glass of Scotch, narrated 31 photographs he'd taken of the hotel in the manner of a family vacation slideshow, flipping from one slide to another, analyzing the buildings and the grounds in a deadpan manner.

"Here we have some bricks piled up with sticks sort of horizontally resting on these bricks. And they signify something, I never figured it out while I was there but it seemed to suggest some kind of impermanence. Something was about to take place. We were just kind of grabbed by it."

His meandering observations snake around the periphery and range from the illuminating, to

university of utah museum of fine arts



exhibitions

16 APRIL - 14 MAY
REBERT SMITHSON
The artist of contemporary meaning is concerned to keep reminding the world of what he has done. The artist of the 1970s, Robert Smithson, is the artist of the 1970s.

It has been reported by Robert Smithson that the artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s.

a party

It may be the time to see for the first time, the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s.

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16 APRIL - 14 MAY

JAMES EARL RAY
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17 MAY - 11 JUNE

FRANCIS BACON
The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s. The artist of the 1970s is the artist of the 1970s.

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lectures

THURSDAY, 30 MARCH 8:00pm
ROBERT SMITHSON
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concerts

THURSDAY, 30 MARCH 8:00pm
ROBERT SMITHSON
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spring quarter

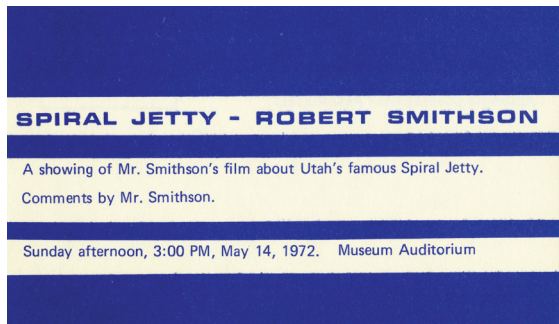
ROBERT SMITHSON

The best-known work of contemporary art in Utah is the much-publicized *Spiral Jetty* of Robert Smithson in the Great Salt Lake. There has been a constant stream of articles and references to this work since it was constructed in the Summer of 1970. The population and non-art journals have been as interested in the Jetty as the art magazines. The *New Yorker* (February 1972) and *Esquire* (May 1971) gave broad coverage to the work. Few Utahns know much about it, but this situation can be remedied when a film about the Jetty and a lecture by Mr. Smithson will be presented in the Museum this Spring. Dates will be announced in a separate mailing.

the humorous, to the boring, simultaneously straddling understanding and complete nonsense. "You should be getting the point that I am trying to make, which is no point actually," comments Smithson. Yet, Hotel Palenque is consistent with the artist's interest in entropy, human vs. geological timescales, and human impact on the landscape in that it elevates the mundane spaces of the decaying hotel as places of importance, focusing special attention to details of cast-off bricks, un-built walls and empty swimming pools. Rarely has so much thought been put into a run-down building! Moreover, Smithson pointedly disregards Palenque's famous Mayan ruins, mentioning them only once: "If you could see actually back there you might remotely be able to pick up a fragment of the Palenque ruins, the temples.. the things we actually went there to see, but you won't see any of those temples in this lecture." Disrupting the audience's expectations, this chaotic yet acute study of a dilapidated building must have been quite an interesting encounter for the students and professors of architecture.

In his lecture, Smithson reminds us how careful and creative consideration of peripheral places can illuminate our time and how ultimately they can be the most telling documents of who we are. Smithson's tour through Hotel Palenque is not a discovery of great conclusions, but rather it highlights the enjoyment in discovering the overlooked. More than a site and historical record, the Hotel Palenque lecture has morphed from a strange happening to a work of art now part of the permanent collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Unknown at the time, this lecture is now the primary trace of Smithson's little-known appointment at the University of Utah.

Information about Smithson's second engagement on campus is well documented on paper, but



Above, fig. 5

absent in collective memory. Archival records for his screening of the film *Spiral Jetty* (1970) include scribbled notes "leave for Utah" and "movie 3:00" in Smithson's personal calendar on May 13 and 14, 1972; as well as two small advertisements: a poster calendar and a postcard marketing the event. However, it remains a mystery if the film screening actually happened. Robert Bliss had no recollection of the event, and there doesn't seem to be anyone who remembers attending. (***If someone reading this knows anything, please contact me!**)

According to the calendar highlighting events for the museum (at the time named The University of Utah Museum of Fine Arts, today the Utah Museum of Fine Arts), "Few Utahns know much about it [*Spiral Jetty*], but this situation can be remedied when a film about the Jetty and a lecture by Mr. Smithson will be presented in the Museum this spring. Dates will be announced in a separate mailing" [fig. 4]. The separate mailing is a blue and white striped postcard that details "A showing of Mr. Smithson's film about Utah's famous Spiral Jetty. Comments by Mr. Smithson on Sunday afternoon, 3:00 PM, May 14, 1972. Museum Auditorium" [fig. 5]. These two marketing pieces seem so appropriate in their not-so-telling record of an event that maybe occurred and maybe didn't, an anti-climactic end to Robert Smithson's time at the University of Utah.

Smithson's appointment at the University of Utah concluded with many of its initial expectations unrealized. The Hotel Palenque lecture and a scheduled film screening came in place of an appointment that was initially anticipated to involve multiple lectures, the planning of a new work, and teaching. The lack of collective memory about the *Spiral Jetty* film screening and "comments by Mr. Smithson" leaves one tantalized with the possibilities of the unknown. With so much documentation of Smithson through his prolific

writing, sketches and film documentation, missing even the smallest record of the May 14, 1972 film screening leaves a heavy absence. Was the film shown, was Smithson there, how many people attended, and what were their reactions to the film? What new understandings into the cut-short world of Smithson could have been revealed? Why did an appointment that held so much promise evaporate into such a small contribution? While the traces of Smithson at the University of Utah are indeed ghostly, there is something keenly intriguing about his persistent absence. His appointment, in the end, remains largely a phantom, resulting in few events and leaving even fewer traces. Yet, even if one could see through the murky haze of history, it is uncertain that anything would be there. Smithson was elsewhere.

This essay is an excerpt from Burbidge Ream's Master of Arts thesis of the same name through the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Utah detailing original research of Robert Smithson at the University of Utah including an oral interview with Robert Bliss, in which some of his comments were summarized here.

Serving as Assistant Director of Learning and Engagement and Curator of Education at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Annie Burbidge Ream oversees the administration of K-12 School and Teacher Programs, including planning, statistics, and reporting; curricular development; and manages the Education Collection. In addition, Annie utilizes UMFA objects and resources to create hands-on, question-based experiences for teachers and students across the state of Utah, as well as docent trainings emphasizing the importance of experiential learning. Annie approaches her work with the philosophy that art is for everyone and with goals to assist in the development of visual literacy and cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and curiosity. Annie has a deep love for American Art after 1960, especially Land art, and can be found exploring sites across the West. Annie received the 2016 Utah Museum Educator of the Year by the Utah Art Education Association as well as the 2016 Pacific Region Museum Education Art Educator Award from the National Art Education Association.

VIOL

Craig Dworkin

Professor of English, University of Utah

The gull swerves shoreward, her single wing's skin swept back by the wind, curving to a thin ellipse . . . lips kissing out in puffing pouts, billowing swells distending, then concaving in a sudden exhalation and impulsive retreat, with the pistoned pant of pneumatic bellows rounded out in punching bouts — the heaving beat of slung booms sung with canvas slaps and snapping sheets — as the prowling prow ploughs the turfed surface of tilled surf, a newly tilted cant briskly pitching to the bank, with high-skewed angles of yaw and little sign of damping, taking flight beneath the porous spume confused and calcinated white like fluid tufa; ranked rows advancing toward the scaw, across the sunken causeway, refraining in hydrographic canticles chanted like a choir of angels over yawning caverns in a chaos of cataclasmic chasms; reaching, zephyr impended, stressed pinions stretched before each sudden collapse, the surface soon smooths iron flat, as if by the passing of some floating screed, then just as quick distressed, discrete — quills stalled in squalls of aqueous, scrawled calligraphs scripted by degrees like the ligatured arabesques of some furious caliph's impetuous, pent, tempestuous scrid decreed — flapped in fraught semaphores of repeated dilation and fleet diastolic release.

The boat, in short, floated upon the troubled waters.

Its iron hog-chain, taut, maintained (so shallow-hulled, the structure arched without a cinch to stay the sagging of the ark), despite the strain. Lacing trceries of salt brine wove over waves on which they rose and fell in gliding float, slickly slipping, assuming thin synaptic threads of froth before

assimilating smaller nodes, and then distending, purging in dispersion — the process cycling over again in turn from ebbs attenuating in their drift to amalgamates subsuming; the surging spume in wroth, now rousing, spurged. Annealed by the unctuous slaver of the spindrift, the cambered hull, by nature punctual, was laved.

Following the mesoscale's sostenuto series of demotic *avisos furiosos*, in its isosmotic pressure, sailors sent lassos lashed as hawsers to provisos, the moorings anchored in desmotic, isosceles restraints, so soon cut through with Phrygian precision up to the ricassos by the wuthered flaying of sustained fletched laminae against untenable tensile detrusion — slack lashings frayed to glossoscopic symptoms as the ship's set sossling to the subsequent stillness of the silted, calm substratum of capsizal's newly ceilinged, quagged Sargasso Sea, which, were there some auditor, seems to be sospiring only with a basso's soss in full remorse, while no salvatic band of virtuosos — or even any lone, late sospitator, redeeming, arising — accedes.

The sailors' signals of extreme distress, morsed in morphing and repeated, urgent appeals, went, in brief, unheeded.

Brigham Young's pride and joy, the *Timely Gull* — the largest craft of any consequence to venture on the waters of the Great Salt Lake in the decade since the middle of the century, when Stansbury launched the *Salicornia*, itself a first-rate frigate, consorted by a skiff, trafficking with stately dignity upon the bosom of those solitary



Finial scroll of a viol

waters, circumnavigating, to make his mensural mensuration of its bleak and naked blood-red shores, without even a single tree to relieve the eye as he surveyed the lacustrine topography that framed the desolation's stillness of the grave below the distant peaks — had been of a sudden gale-ripped from its moorings at Black Rock and, in the heavy winter winds that rose in February's fury, tossed upon the petrose shore above the scuttling waves, in splinters, staved. Piled by the stormwinds' hostile pummel, the riven timbers would stay hidden by the self-same waters that had made its construction a necessity when they submerged the spit that had bridged a herd-path track to Antelope Island, until celebrating its sesquicentennial by raising up its beams above the brack again, in a palisade of paling stanchions driven in the sand. The deoculted pickets would appear to local shrimpers like the broken spears of some defiant phalanx sparing with the sky.

Before Young fitted up his ship with grommeted garments of flaxen canvas waxed as sailing cloth, allowing the breath of god to speed it towards its purpose, two carthorses, martingaled like the dolphin-striker of *The Gull* herself, with tackle harnessed to a treadmill, in turn connected to a stern wheel, propelled the ship; the pair of equine trekkers walked upon the water, hyaline eyes fixed in the distance on the reflectance of a blinding luminescent destination — ever receding and never attained. As they ambulate, clouds of midges, risen by the morning warmth, swarm and clamber; brine flies glaze the shoreline; the margin of the lake, in haze, conflates the horizon's halation with its minimal hypsographic measure. The horse-marines plod on across the halcyon waters of the salinated inland sea.

Young's cattle-barge had been designed and piloted by pioneer Dan Jones, a Welshman out

of Halkyn, who had captained steamships on the Mississippi, navigating converts by the hundreds in pilgrimage up river to Nauvoo. Freightened in its day with flagstone, cedarwood, and salt, *The Gull* was meant to carry livestock, ferrying Young's herds in seasonal rotation from periodic pastures on the long-grassed Lake isles and, against the impendent threat of Ute attack on shore, deliver them with swift elusion to the sanctuary of some saline keep, secure beyond defile, dangling at its scrap-iron anchor, long stay apeek, in tantalizing appropinquity, just out of earshot of the rancorous chorus of the battle-cries and war-whoops, even for the keen-eared quadrupeds. The skittish phobic bovine, though, would soon lapse back, amnesiac, settled in their placid taciturnity: impassively at ease, indifferent to the spectacle of distant hoof-stirred dust that shrouded raided ranching plats, immune in their abeyance, preoccupied only with the tranquil rustle of the breeze amid gramineæ.

Assuming that the average dairy cow extends to a length of around one-hundred inches, and that they boarded arkwise, two-by-two, in double ranks upon the barge's tarred and mitred planks, and that the carlin of the *Gull* spanned a full forty-five feet, as widely reputed, it could have carried a score of cattle at a time in full continual transport. Supposing that the coil of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* were the scroll finial of a seventeenth-century viola da gamba, the strings of that mighty instrument would stretch to two-thousand, one-hundred-and-seventy-six feet, almost thirteen times the length of the intestine obtained from a prodigious specimen of a full-grown ox or steer, locally prized for the high collagen of its *submucosa* and *externa*. With the *peritoneum* soaked and serosa scraped and the surface steeped for days in a potash of potassium hydroxide, the tight-wound entrails can sound a dulcet timbre, almost vocal, when strung as strings, amber hued and rosinous, attached from box to bridge. The

lowest of those catgut cords would call for the sacrifice of roughly 184,320 animals, which would entail nine-thousand two-hundred and sixteen voyages, accordingly, of the barge to deliver (and discounting the thousands calved in the interval so as not to leave the island vacant). Cruising at two horsepower, ship stowed to bale-cube capacity at twenty register tonnes, it would have taken Dan Jones a decade and three full months of steady sailing, in continuous loops from shore to shore without pause, to accomplish the conveyance. In order to maintain a baroque-era pitch, in even-temperament tuning, the D string of that gigantic jetty bass viol would require a tension of almost fourteen billion Newtons. The force would thus be four-thousand times the winds — deafening in themselves, coursing the shore and raking the sands — that once careened the great and mighty hull of the devastated *Timely Gull* in that fatal winter gale of 1858.

Craig Dworkin is the author of over a half-dozen books of poetry, including, most recently: *The Pine-Woods Notebook* (Kenning Editions, 2019); *DEF (Information As Material)*, 2017); *12 Erroneous Displacements and a Fact (Information As Material)*, 2016); *Alkali* (Counterpath, 2015); and *Chapter XXIV* (Red Butte Press, 2013). He teaches literary history and theory in the Department of English at the University of Utah and serves as Founding Editor to the Eclipse archive <eclipsearchive.org>.

NOTES

- hog-chain*: Peter G. Van Allen: "Sail and Steam: Great Salt Lake's Boats and Boatbuilders, 1847-1901," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 63: 3 (Summer, 1995): 201.
- extreme distress and repeated urgent appeals*: The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): sv. "S.O.S."
- pride and joy*: Annie Call Carr, Editor, for The Daughters of Utah Pioneers: *East of Antelope Island* (Kaysville: Davis County Company, 1948): 29.
- consequence*: Simon F. Kimball: "Early-Day Recollections of Antelope Island," *Improvement Era* Vol. X, No. 5 (March, 1907): 336.
- frigate*: Howard Stansbury: *An Expedition to the Valley of the Great Sale Lake of Utah: Including A Description of its Geography, Natural History, And Minerals, and an Analysis of Its Waters: With an Authentic Account of the Mormon Settlement* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852): 11. Stansbury overstates the class considerably; a more modest yawl or dorie would have been more accurate [see Gary Topping: *Great Salt Lake: An Anthology* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002): 224].
- Salicornia et seq.*: Stansbury, *op. cit.*
- Black Rock*: "Low Water of Great Salt Lake Reveals Ghosts of the Past," *Salt Lake Tribune* (18 August, 2014).
- submerging the spit*: Topping, *op. cit.*, 208; cf. Marlin Stum: *Visions of Antelope Island and Great Salt Lake* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999): 125.
- spears*: Brian Mullahy: "Great Salt Lake Gives Up 'Mysteries' as Water Drops," KUTV (5 November, 2014).
- sailing cloth, et seq.*: see President Young's journal of 30 January, 1854: "I christened her the Timely Gull. She is forty-five feet long and designed for a stern wheel to be propelled by horses working a treadmill, and to be used mainly to transport stock between the city and Antelope Island." Other accounts describe the gull "fitted-up as a sailing boat" [*Journal History of the Church* (25 June 1856), LDS Archives]; see also Stum, *op. cit.*, 127.
- flagstone, cedarwood and salt*: Andrew Jensen: *Latter Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Vol. II (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jensen History Company, 1920): 660; cf. David E. Miller: "Great Salt Lake: A Historical Sketch," *Utah Geological and Mineral Society Bulletin* 116 (June, 1980): 12.
- Lake isles*: Bill Durham: "Sailors of the Briny Shallows," *Westways* 49 [Los Angeles: Automobile Club of Southern California (March, 1957)]: 52.
- attack*: see Thomas G. Alexander: *Brigham Young and the Expansion of the Mormon Faith* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019): 292; Richard Tomas Ackley: "Across the Plains in 1858," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, ed. J. Cecil Alter Vol. IX (1941); Peter Gottfredson (Editor): *History of Indian Depredations in Utah* (Salt Lake City: Skelton, 1919): *passim*.
- scrap-iron*: Topping, *op. cit.*, 205.
- scroll finial*: see Ephraim Segerman: "The Sizes of English Viols and Talbot's Measurements," *Galpin Society Journal* 48 (March, 1995): 33-45.
- prodigious specimen*: see *Black's Veterinary Dictionary*, ed. Edward Boden, 19th Edition (Lanham: Barnes & Noble, 1998): 282.
- collagen*: Voichita Bucur: *Handbook of Materials for String Musical Instruments* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016): 482-486.
- potash*: Bettina Hoffman: *The Viola de Gamba*, trans. Paul Ferguson (London: Routledge, 2018): 43.
- amber*: *ibidem*, 45.
- lowest*: Atthanasio Kircher: *Musurgia universalis sive ars magna consoni et dissoni in X. libros digesta*, Lib. V (Roma: Corbelletti, 1650): 440.
- 14,400*: Sadly, this is almost fifty times the head available to Young from his historic herd and an order of magnitude larger than the common Church holdings at the time.
- baroque-era pitch*: Bruce Haynes: *A History of Performing Pitch: The Story of "A"* (Oxford: Scarecrow, 2002).
- tension*: the absolute *mensur* of a D string, in actuality, cannot practically exceed 79cm given that its breaking point is a tone lower at 88.7 cm, calculated from the limit of approximately 260Hz per metre, a value independent of diameter [see Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, 41].
- fatal winter*: William Mulder: [untitled review of Norman F. Furniss: *The Mormon Conflict: 1850-1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960)], *History News* 16 : 12 (November 1960 – October, 1961): 145.

***Spiral Jetty* as a Witness to Change**

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Great Salt Lake tells a story about change over time. A salty lake such as this modern one has existed in the bottom of the Bonneville Basin for the better part of a million years. Occasionally waters rose, held in by glaciers, such as enormous Lake Bonneville during the last Ice Age. But when the Earth was warmer, only a shallow salty puddle remained, like Great Salt Lake. The modern lake has experienced the interventions of humans on its shores, damming and segmenting its brine for their purposes. One human, Robert Smithson, intervened by creating artwork on the lakebed to inspire others. His *Spiral Jetty*, likewise, comments on change over time.

Smithson used scientific and mathematical language when he planned and executed *Spiral Jetty*, built into the pink water of Great Salt Lake¹. *Equation. Coordinates. Desiccation. Variable. Entropy. Bacteria. Matrix. Cubic. Scale.* In fact, he had researched physical parameters of the site in thinking about aesthetics. Inspiration came from science, but how much did he understand about this analytical system of knowing? Did he know that terminal lakes vacillate in elevation? Was he aware that rivers feeding the lake bring small amounts of minerals that concentrate in the terminal lake over time? Did he comprehend the coloration of the water would change seasonally as the microorganisms were affected by temperature and salinity? Could he have predicted the impacts of humans in the form of climatic

¹ Smithson, P., & Smithson, R. (1996). Robert Smithson: the collected writings. Univ of California Press.

change and water diversions? Perhaps his artwork understands the answers to these questions in a way that the artist could not through its experiences of Great Salt Lake over 50 years.

We would love to ask *Spiral Jetty* about its observations of environmental change. For example, it is perplexing that Smithson never commented on a frequent occurrence, noted by today's visitors to the artwork, of American White Pelicans soaring in the skies above the Spiral Jetty. These birds migrate to Utah from their overwintering grounds in Mexico to breed on the nearby, remote, and solitary Gunnison Island. Pelicans now arrive in March to begin their annual breeding, yet as Smithson toiled on this earthwork in April, he never wrote about these majestic birds. We wonder if the pelicans now arrive earlier in the season, a signature of climate change.

Over the last 50 years, Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* has witnessed dramatic changes to the lake landscape as an increasing human population began draining the watershed. While the land art hid beneath the flooded brine in the 1980s, reemerging almost 20 years later, the next 50 years will likely hold something very different. Climate studies on the southwestern United States suggest that *Spiral Jetty* will see an increase in temperature that will impact our water supply. Coupled with projected increases in population, Great Salt Lake has little hope of recovery. As the lake shrinks, and more shorelines are exposed, extensive dust will affect the air quality. *Spiral Jetty* will sit on a dry lakebed and remember when water used to lap the whirling basalt.

The pelicans are victims of this change. This downward trajectory of this shallow lake has connected the island to land, resulting in the encroachment of predators to what was a safe haven. Also, water availability has decreased in nearby feeding grounds, making fish scarce.

The pelicans' demise is obvious at the site of the artwork where you may find carcasses of baby pelicans that cannot fly far enough to catch food for themselves. Smithson noted that the *Spiral Jetty* was "intimately involved with those climate changes and natural disturbances."

As climate change progresses, and science suggests interventions, we should be moved to activism. Once art advocates did what scientists alone could not; in 2008, through an initiative taken up by Smithson's widow, Nancy Holt, thousands of *Spiral Jetty* admirers wrote letters to the state of Utah to prevent an oil drilling operation on Great Salt Lake. Perhaps this land art can once again call forward stewards of the landscape who can advocate for climate change solutions for the human residents of the valley, the pelicans of Gunnison Island, and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*.



Above, PELIcam Image courtesy Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Baxter and Butler have spent a combined four decades studying the biology of Great Salt Lake and much of it at Smithson's Spiral Jetty. While Butler explores the birds and bugs, Baxter researches the foundational microbiology. Rozel Bay hosts this land art, but it also is a site of the authors' astrobiology studies with NASA, paleontological explorations in the tar seeps, and art-science teacher development. Butler and Baxter refer to themselves as 'Salty Sirens' as they call unsuspecting folks into the lake. Together they co-founded the Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College to facilitate research on the lake and provide outreach opportunities for science education. They freely admit to using Smithson's Spiral Jetty as a water gauge upon occasion.

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COVER | Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty* (1970). Great Salt Lake, Utah.
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