

Discourses on Earth and Maps in Contemporary Art from Female Artists

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Abstract

Since the end of World War II, the Earth's environment has become an important subjects in art. The Earth and its representation, such as maps, have also been reconsidered and reinterpreted. Although a large number of artworks have been produced on these themes, academic analytical studies remain limited. Furthermore, there has been almost no research distinguishing works created by male and female artists, despite the fact that such issues are highly significant in the contemporary art world. This article aims to analyze the works of three female artists who focus on these issues. The study applies a method of "Discourse Analysis" within a "framework of knowledge," following the approach of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. The findings reveal that these female artists construct discourses that encourage viewers to recognize "Binary Oppositions" related to the reinterpretation of the Earth, land, and maps from their own historical, social, and cultural perspectives. The three case studies highlight important issues presented as the following oppositions: 1. The opposition between digging deep into the Earth's surface to reveal the history of existence and viewing the world as complete in itself in Michelle Stuart's case. 2. The opposition between maps that are fragile and deteriorating, carrying specific cultural meanings, and maps that are generally considered permanent and enduring in Mona Hatoum's case. 3. The opposition between cutting deeply into the Earth's ground for viewers' personal moments in time and vertically elevating forms into the air in a timeless manner in Maya Lin's case. Beyond its potential for in-depth analysis of gender differences through a philosophical framework, this research also contributes an alternative approach to the analysis of visual art on the issues.

Keywords: Earth, Land, Maps, Surface and depth, Decay, Discourse, Binary opposition

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, although traditional themes that had long served as subjects in artistic creation such as humanity, the body, religion, and abstraction have continued to exist, it is evident that artistic presentations have increasingly emphasized critical perspectives rather than the pursuit of idealism. Artistic content and issues that had not been widely studied in the early twentieth century, such as the natural environment, the city, and the world, gradually became important subjects in art after the end of World War II. One possible reason is that the two World Wars caused severe destruction to the natural environment. In addition, movements opposing the commercialization of art led to the emergence of a group of artworks known

as Land Art. This form of art differed from the art of the first half of the twentieth century in terms of scale, materials, and meaning. This movement focused on large-scale works created in real outdoor locations outside museums or galleries. These works were not intended to be bought, sold, or collected, but instead functioned as a critique of the commercialization of art and a redefinition of artistic practice in relation to physical space and the natural environment. However, studies of Land Art up to the present have largely lacked evaluation from a gender perspective. Male and female artists working within this approach demonstrate different modes of expression that can only be recognized through specific analytical methods. This

research therefore aims to clarify these distinctions. The three artists selected for this study represent different generations in terms of their years of birth. Moreover, their completed works differ significantly in form: one artist produces works resembling painting, another employs contemporary media, and another creates large-scale architectural and environmental constructions. Nevertheless, all three artists share common concerns relevant to the issues examined in this study.

Objective

This research article aims to review the role of female artists in the creative process concerning issues of the Earth, land, and maps in the works of three artists and designers: Michelle Stuart, Mona Hatoum, and Maya Lin. The study is based on the hypothesis that the selected artworks present discourses that differ from other contemporary discourses related to art about the issues.

This research applies the concepts of frameworks of knowledge and discourse analysis in order to examine the distinctive characteristics of these works in terms of form, meaning, and the specific qualities associated with female artists. As will be demonstrated, female artists tend to investigate the internal dimensions of these issues rather than emphasize external expression in the manner more commonly presented by male artists. The analysis therefore aims to clarify these distinctions more explicitly.

Literature review

After the end of World War II, philosophers, writers, and artists concerned with humanity began to reconsider the ideals of Western society in response to the irrational violence and destruction carried out without humanitarian consciousness. In Western art, artistic practice shifted from the pursuit of idealism toward a stronger critique of human ideals, society, and technology. It may therefore be argued that criticism itself became one of the principal missions of art during this period. Land Art also emerged from this attitude. One of the important intentions of Land Art was the creation of artworks that could neither be collected nor permanently possessed, thereby resisting ownership and even opposing the commodification and appropriation of art itself. These works directly addressed the

relationship between humanity and the environment. (Fortenberry, 2017:402).

Although global environmental awareness became especially prominent from the 1990s onward, the Earth, land and maps had attracted artistic attention long before that period. The movement known as Land Art explored these themes extensively. Artists working within these movements intervened directly in the landscape by constructing forms on the Earth's surface, creating marks on the soil, or employing natural materials such as earth, water, and stone. These works were often site-specific, large in scale, and monumental in character. While some were intentionally impermanent, they nonetheless produced a powerful visual and spatial impact.

Equally significant is the map as a representation of the Earth's surface. Scholars and artists alike have questioned the nature of cartography and its claim to represent reality. Maps function as authoritative tools for defining and legitimizing territorial possession. Why do colored lines signify rivers? Why do black lines indicate roads or political borders? More importantly, why are such representations widely accepted as neutral and factual, despite their historical role in generating conflicts at both personal and national levels? These critical questions have been central to artistic engagement with cartographic imagery. Examples include the influential critique presented in the book "How to Lie with Maps" by Mark Monmonier, First published in 1991. as well as artworks by artists who engage with the binary opposition between the objective and the subjective of maps, such as the Argentine artist Guillermo Kuitca. (Bunbhob, 2017: 2021-2038).

From this perspective, the Earth, land, and maps have become new territories for artistic exploration. As a material, the Earth is a domain that can be conceptually examined without limits, and its vast scale offers endless creative possibilities. Although it can be observed that a number of female artists have also engaged critically with these issues, as well as their male counterparts. This article therefore aims to examine the perspectives, methods, and outcomes of works created by female artists from the 1970s onward.

It is widely recognized that since that period, female artists have produced works that differ from those of male artists in many aspects. The ability to select materials without limitation has allowed female

artists to expand the scope of artistic production. Some artistic issues and media had previously existed in other contexts, such as knitting, handicrafts, and sewing. In addition, the physical body of women that once functioned merely as a “model” as well as personal spaces such as one’s own body, have become subject matter and means of expression, since these areas are not accessible to artists of other genders in the same way. While artistic production in this field became increasingly active and generated new artistic tendencies, scholarly studies seeking to identify the distinctive characteristics of works created by female artists in relation to Land Art have remained relatively unclear. Nevertheless, there are important examples of studies emphasizing gender differences in late nineteenth-century painting, some of which provide useful comparative frameworks for the present research, as discussed below.

Differences in artistic expression resulting from distinct male and female perspectives were already studied in the context of the late nineteenth century. Linda Nochlin, a prominent art historian, compared paintings by two contemporary artists: Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) and Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). She argued that the gender difference between the two artists is of prime importance in interpreting the salient characteristics of their work: “This gender difference seems to me of prime importance in the interpretation of the salient characteristics of their work.” (Nochlin, 2002: 299). This is particularly evident when comparing works with similar or identical themes, such as landscape painting: “Max Schmitt in a Single Scull” (1871) by Eakins and “The Boating Party” (1893-94) by Cassatt.

“Max Schmitt in a Single Scull” is composed in a wide panoramic view. The painting portrays Max Schmitt, an important rower of his time. The position of the main figure in relation to the broad view of the bridge suggests symbolic meanings of conquering nature. The sport of rowing is presented as an expression of the American male ideal struggling against vast nature through human strength and intelligence. The viewer’s position is clearly separated from the scene, observing it from a distance.

In contrast, Cassatt’s “The Boating Party” presents a close and intimate view of a woman holding her child. The viewer’s position is so near that it feels as if one is

in the same boat as the figures in the painting. The male rower appears only partially, with only a small part of his face visible. The woman’s face, as she holds her child, appears calm and content in the soft sunlight that shines on both of them. The surrounding environment or landscape is fragmented and partially cut off by the figures in the foreground (Nochlin, 2002: 305).

The key issue lies in Cassatt’s interest in a mode of expression on canvas that differed significantly from that of her contemporary artists. As a result, this painting was re-examined in the second half of the twentieth century as a significant example of painting created by a female artist.

Nochlin’s study confirms that, although both works belong to the long tradition of Western landscape painting, they present very different perspectives on space and on the interpretation of the surrounding world. These differences may be understood as binary oppositions, as follows:

From the analysis of late nineteenth-century paintings, it is evident that although the two works were produced in the same period, they present significantly different discourses, to the extent that they can be understood as binary oppositions. It can be observed that Linda Nochlin’s method of analysis, when considered through discourses concerning artworks created by male and female artists, produces an entirely different perspective. Cassatt’s work offers a sense of intimacy and warmth that corresponds closely with the meaning of the image itself, characteristics that were generally neglected in paintings produced by male artists. Inspired by Nochlin’s approach, this research is therefore interested in whether discourse analysis within a framework of knowledge can also be applied to the study of Land Art created by female artists, and what distinctive characteristics may emerge when these works are compared with those created by male artists. The study is based on the hypothesis that male artists tend to produce works within frameworks of knowledge and discourses shaped by masculine perspectives, whereas female artists may construct their own distinctive frameworks of knowledge and discursive approaches.

The three artists selected as case studies in this research have already been evaluated in various dimensions. Michelle Stuart (born in 1933)’s Sayreville Strata Quartet (first created in 1976), which was

exhibited alongside works by other artists in the exhibition *Minimal* at the Pinault Collection, Bourse de Commerce, during 8 October 2025- 19 January 2026, was described in the exhibition text as follows:

“This work marked a pivotal moment in Michelle Stuart’s practice, when she began to focus on the imprinting of earth onto paper to register time, place, and process. Here, four large sheets, arranged from light to dark, reflect the colors and textures of a disused brick quarry in Sayreville, New Jersey. They reveal the tonal variation of the site’s strata and its layered sedimentary history. To create this work, which combines drawing and sculpture, Michelle Stuart unearthed four layers of red earth from the quarry and pressed the soil directly onto large sheets laid out on site. Her monochromatic rubbings from the 1970s challenge the esthetic of minimalist painting and its industrial materials, as well as the relationship between drawing and the artist’s hand.”

In this exhibition, her work was categorized within Minimalism and described in terms of medium as both drawing and sculpture. It was summarized as a challenge to minimalist aesthetics and industrial production processes. When compared with other works in the exhibition, Stuart’s piece stands out for the simplicity of its process. However, the meaning of that process and the implications of its outcome were not discussed in detail. Although Stuart’s work can be compared or grouped with Minimalism, especially in relation to materials that reveal their inherent qualities, this research argues that its discursive dimension requires further examination.

Mona Hatoum (born in 1952)’s *Present Tense* (1996, 2011) has often been interpreted primarily as a political work because it directly addresses the issue of Palestine and Israel. The distinctive use of soap blocks has been examined in depth. Most studies also focus on Hatoum’s identity as a displaced person. As a Palestinian who moved to Lebanon and later could not return home after traveling to the United Kingdom, she

eventually changed her residence and obtained British citizenship. Due to the intense political context of the region, her work has largely been considered within a political framework.

Maya Lin (born in 1959)’s *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982) has been studied mainly in relation to her innovative approach to arranging the names of the deceased. Instead of listing them alphabetically, as is common practice, Lin proposed organizing them according to the date of death, introducing a new perspective. Less frequently discussed is her conceptual proposal of cutting into the earth and presenting an internal space (Morrill, 2019: 246; Nochlin, 2021: 156-162). This aspect carries significant meaning when compared with other approaches to public monuments.

Previous studies have tended to emphasize artistic processes and expressive content rather than direct analysis of the medium itself. As a result, important issues may have been overlooked. Linda Nochlin previously stated:

“Lin’s Yale project, like her Vietnam memorial, establishes a very different relationship to the environment and to the meaning and function of the public monument than Serra’s aggressive confrontation with public space. I am not coming out for a ‘feminine’ versus a ‘masculine’ style of public monument with this comparison. I am merely returning to the theme of this session and suggesting that now, as in the 19th century, although in very different circumstances, women may have and wish to construct a very different experience of public space and the monument that engages with it than their male counterparts.” (Nochlin, 2021: 94)

Although the three artists use different methods and artistic media, their works share a common characteristic: an emphasis on inner perception and internalized viewpoints, which creates stronger emotional engagement between the artwork and the viewer. Analyzing the discourses constructed by these works and examining their binary oppositions may therefore reveal how such specific qualities are formed.



Figure 1 Thomas Eakins, Max Schmitt in a Single Scull, 1871, oil on canvas, 81.9 × 117.5 cm.

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Met Collection Online.



Figure 2 Mary Cassatt, The Boating Party, 1893-1894, oil on canvas, 90 × 117.3 cm.

Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Collection Online.

Table 1 Presents a comparative analysis of compositional approaches in the paintings of Thomas Eakins and Mary Cassatt

Analytical Aspect.	Mary Cassatt.	Binary Opposition by Thomas Eakins.
Art Composition.	Close-up perspective from the viewpoint of someone inside the boat, as if the viewer is sitting together with the figures.	Wide panoramic view; the viewer is separated and positioned at a distance from the scene.
Presentation of Figures.	- The figures are shown partially or in fragments. - This compositional choice limits full visibility.	- The figures are presented fully and clearly. - The complete visibility of the body emphasizes physical presence.
Main Concept of the Image.	- The painting conveys small moments of happiness within a limited and intimate space. - The focus is on everyday emotional experience rather than on grand or heroic themes.	- The painting represents the vastness of nature and the idea of human conquest. - The concept emphasizes strength, achievement.
Characteristics of Space and Time.	- The painting presents a specific and brief moment in time. - The space feels personal. - Focusing on an intimate situation that occurs within a short duration.	- The painting suggests an extended and continuous sense of time. - The space appears open and expansive, creating the impression of a moment that stretches outward and seems almost endless.
Position of the Viewer.	- The viewer feels close to the scene, as if sitting in the same space or even in the same boat as the figures. - This position creates a sense of direct involvement and shared experience.	-The viewer is positioned at a distance, like a remote observer. - The viewer does not appear to be directly involved with the content of the image.
Emotional Effect on the Viewer.	- The painting creates a feeling of warmth and intimacy. - The viewer experiences a sense of closeness and emotional connection with the figures.	- The painting evokes feelings of excitement and determination. - The viewer senses energy, strength, and a spirit of challenge.

Research methods

This study applies the concepts of Michel Foucault, particularly his ideas of *épistémè* (framework of knowledge) and discourse, as the main theoretical approach. Regarding the concept of *épistémè*, Nopporn Prachakul explains that it refers to the framework that governs networks of knowledge, beliefs, ways of thinking, and ways of understanding in a particular historical period. It functions as a structure that shapes spoken and written expressions circulating in society, known as discourse, and serves as a reference through which people assign meaning and value to things in that era. During the Renaissance, the framework of knowledge was based on the perception of resemblance between things; for example, the sky was seen as

resembling the human face, with the sun and the moon as its eyes. However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new framework emerged that emphasized distinguishing differences among things through measurement, calculation, and classification according to specific qualities. Identity and difference could be represented through language, which was believed to reflect reality transparently. By the nineteenth century, when Western society entered modernity, the framework of knowledge shifted toward causality. The central concern was no longer what resembled or differed from what, but rather what determined what (Prachakul, 2015: 9-10).

According to this perspective, the production of knowledge in any specific context relies on particular

discourses grounded in a broader framework of knowledge. For instance, a framework concerning land ownership generates discourses related to legal procedures, land titles, and land prices. At a larger scale, such as the national level, discourses about territorial boundaries and modern maps are connected to various events, including legal struggles over national sovereignty, wars, and cultural productions such as patriotic novels and songs. Foucault's historical frameworks of knowledge therefore remain relevant for examining whether visual art or design constructs new discourses or produces alternative ones.

Furthermore, another important issue concerning discourse should be considered. In each historical period, discourse on particular subjects often originates from groups that society believes to have access to truth, making their statements more credible. In pre-modern societies, such as medieval Europe, these groups may have been clergy or feudal authorities. From the eighteenth century onward, in the modern period, such authority shifted to specialists and experts. From this point of origin, discourse circulates widely and is appropriated by various forms of power and by many individuals, eventually becoming an anonymous object that functions as a public reference, constituting the framework of truth in that era (Prachakul, 2015: 12). In addition, this study does not overlook the nature of

visual art itself, which communicates through form, meaning, and the effects produced upon viewers. Nochlin's study provides an important example in this regard. Although she did not explicitly state that her analysis was based on the ideas of Michel Foucault, it is evident that her analytical process relied strongly upon the concept of discourse.

For this research, the concepts of frameworks of knowledge and discourse will be examined through six subsidiary aspects before being synthesized into a binary opposition of: 1. Art composition 2. Presentation of figures 3. Main concept of the work 4. Characteristics of space and time 5. Position of the viewer 6. Emotional effect on the viewer.

Therefore, studying the discourse produced by a particular artwork may reveal communicative processes beyond general formal analysis. In addition, this research analyzes the three artworks based on the hypothesis that among artworks created after 1970, some have constructed their own discourses by revealing their binary oppositions. Although this research does not attempt to establish binary oppositions between male and female artists, it appears that many female artists have developed distinctive discourses. Analyzing these binary oppositions allows the essential characteristics and achievements of the works to be more clearly understood.



Figure 3 Sayreville Strata Quartet, 1976. Installation view. Dia Art Foundation. Exhibited in Minimal exhibition at Pinault Collection, Bourse de Commerce, Paris.

Source: Photograph by the author (2025).

Research results

This section applies Foucault's concepts of discourse to analyze the works of female artists who engage with the themes of the Earth, land, and maps. The analysis focuses on large-scale outdoor artworks and designs, as well as works that use the representation of the world through maps as their primary content.

1. Sayreville Strata Quartet (1976) by Michelle Stuart

Michelle Stuart is a professional archaeologist who has also developed an artistic practice. Although soil is now widely used as a material in contemporary art, Stuart was among the first artists to explore it seriously. Her interest derives from both her professional background and her personal awareness of the deep relationship between humans and the Earth. Soil, as part of the Earth, holds strong psychological and cultural connections to human life, from habitation to settlement. Through her archaeological work, Stuart became aware of the traces of human existence accumulated over long periods of time, gradually forming layers of soil with different colors and textures.

Stuart uses natural materials such as soil, stone, and minerals extracted from the earth. She grinds these materials into fine particles and presses them directly onto four large sheets of paper. She has produced several series based on this concept and process, often naming the works after the excavation sites. The example examined in this research is Sayreville Strata Quartet from the Dia Art Foundation (first created in 1976), which was exhibited in the Minimal exhibition at the Pinault Collection, Bourse de Commerce, Paris, in 2025. The distinctive feature of this work consists of four large sheets of paper in four tones of yellowish-brown, suspended vertically from the ceiling. Each sheet corresponds to soil taken from four levels, pressed directly onto the paper. These layers symbolically refer to traces of human habitation, from the oldest remains found at the deepest level to the more recent layers closer to the present surface.

Michelle Stuart is interested in constructing a discourse of the Earth from the "inside," emphasizing its depth and interior layers. Each stratum reveals histories that have occurred over time, as well as traces of living and non-living matter accumulated and

compressed into sediment. The method of presenting this internal content is equally significant. By pressing soil directly onto paper, Stuart preserves the color and texture of the earth itself without creating representational forms.

This focus on the "interior" of place shares meaningful similarities with Nobuo Sekine's Phase/Earth, associated with the Mono-ha movement (Kido et al., 2023: 181-206). The important difference is that Sekine's work addresses the Earth and soil as abstract elements that express form and spatial void. Therefore, it may be said that Sekine's excavation could take place anywhere in the world while retaining the same conceptual meaning.

In contrast, in Stuart's work, viewers encounter the interiority of a specific place through the physical traces of excavated soil. The moment of excavation is metaphorically suspended through the act of recording it on the surface of the paper. The particular characteristics of a specific site are expressed through the color and texture of the four sheets, which function as recording objects and are further reinforced by the title of the work, which refers directly to the specific locale and time.

From the table above, it can be concluded that the binary opposition constructed by Stuart's work in relation to Sekine's lies in the specificity of space and time. Stuart emphasizes a site that is particular and historically layered, revealing depth in both spatial and temporal dimensions. This stands in contrast to abstract space and time, which are not tied to a specific location or historical moment.

2. Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) by Maya Lin

Maya Lin was born to Chinese immigrant parents and studied art and architecture at Yale University. Her first major work was created while she was still a student, after she won first prize in the design competition for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The memorial consists of two straight lines cut into the earth that meet at an angle, forming a V-shape. The depth of the excavation gradually descends from ground level to its lowest point, which is more than three meters below the surface. The excavated earth was reshaped into a sloping pathway, and the walls

are clad in black granite engraved with the names of approximately 58,000 American soldiers and civilians who died in the Vietnam War. The names are arranged chronologically, beginning with the early years of the conflict (1955-1975), reaching the period of greatest loss at the deepest point of the site, and then gradually ascending toward ground level, corresponding to the time when the United States withdrew from the war. The total length of the memorial is approximately 1,150 meters. When this minimal and formally simple

structure was completed, it received both strong praise and criticism. Unlike conventional monuments, which often feature figurative sculptures or vertical abstract forms, this memorial is horizontal in orientation. Furthermore, it is constructed by cutting into the earth’s surface rather than rising prominently above the ground. Over time, public appreciation increased significantly. Today, it is considered one of the most successful memorials in the United States and continues to attract a large number of visitors.

Table 2 Discourses analysis of Sayreville Strata Quartet (1976) by Michelle Stuart Stuart’s work reveals a series of binary oppositions that can be summarized as follows:

Analytical Aspect	Michelle Stuart	Binary Opposition by Nobuo Sekine’s Phase/Earth
Art Composition.	The work consists of four large suspended sheets arranged vertically from light to dark tones. The composition is simple, serial, and process-based. There is no illusionistic depth; instead, depth is conceptually suggested through stratification.	Sculpture like cylindrical form and space standing together and interact to each other as abstract entity.
Presentation of Figures.	The material itself soil functions as the primary subject and content.	Modern abstract form and space. Form is more important than material.
Main Concept of the Work.	The work emphasizes geological history, accumulation, and the interior layers of the Earth. It presents the Earth not as a landscape to be viewed, but as a body containing time and memory.	The interaction between cylindrical form and cylindrical space with identical diameter and height.
Characteristics of Space and Time.	Space is understood as interior depth rather than external extension. The locale and time are embedded in the material through sedimentation and stratification, representing long-term accumulation.	Earth that was abstract and the artwork could be made anywhere with the same meaning.
Position of the Viewer.	The viewer stands in front of the suspended sheets but is invited to contemplate the invisible depth beneath the surface. Interpretation depends on the viewer’s awareness of geological and historical processes.	The viewer engages primarily with visible surface imagery and fixed spatial composition. Even moving viewpoints have the same effect.
Emotional Effect on the Viewer.	The work evokes contemplation, introspection, and a sense of connection to deep time. It may create awareness of human fragility within geological history.	The work evoke contemplation on form and space within its abstract idea.

The central issue of this work lies in both its process of construction and the experience it offers to viewers. Lin proposed that the names of the deceased soldiers be inscribed in chronological order according to

the date of death, rather than alphabetically, which is the conventional method that would have made it easier for visitors to locate specific names. However, through this new approach, relatives of the deceased are required to

walk along the memorial in order to find the names of their loved ones. Conceptually, this method is significant because it inscribes the time of death onto the site itself. When examining the original design, it becomes clear that the discourse Lin proposes involves cutting into the earth to create depth at the memorial's location. This gesture not only establishes a direct relationship between the work and the land but also serves as a metaphor for the pain of war, in contrast to traditional vertical monuments that rise above the ground (Morrill, 2019: 246). The memorial thus records the time of loss at both the national and personal levels. Lin's emphasis on space as a representation of both the world and humanity is rooted in her long-standing interest in the natural environment since childhood. The discourse of the monument is reinterpreted from a structure erected in the air to a form created by cutting deeply into the ground, which represents the Earth itself. By making time a central element of the site, the memorial expresses a historical condition of collective trauma. The time spent by visitors walking along the wall in search of names intensifies emotional engagement and becomes part of the memorial's meaning. Other established discourses of monuments, such as the celebration of heroism, individual bravery,

and sacrifice, become secondary. Instead, the work emphasizes the physical pain endured by soldiers and the emotional suffering of parents, partners, relatives, and friends.

Lin described this metaphorical act of cutting into the Earth as follows:

"I imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth, opening it up, an initial violence and pain that in time would heal. The grass would grow back, but the initial cut would remain a pure flat surface in the earth with a polished mirrored surface... The need for the names to be on the memorial would become the memorial; there was no need to embellish the design further. The people and their names would allow everyone to respond and remember." (Nochlin, 2021: 93)

The resulting binary opposition emerges between the act of cutting and excavating into the Earth and the traditional monument that rises vertically into the air in the form of human figures, animals, or abstract shapes. In addition, another binary opposition is established between the "time of loss," which is inscribed and experienced through the memorial, and loss understood merely as a static or generalized event.

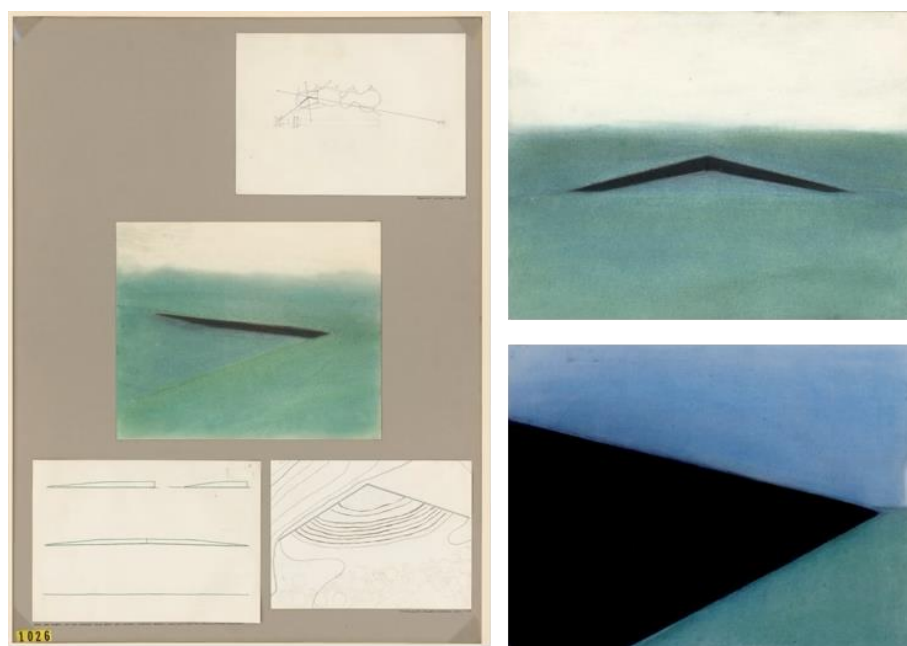


Figure 4 Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, (sketches) 1982. Memorial site, Washington, D.C., United States.
Source: Maya Lin Studio (n.d.) Online.



Figure 5 Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982. Memorial site, Washington, D.C., United States.
Source: Maya Lin Studio (n.d.) Online.

Table 3 Discourses analysis of Vietnam Veterans Memorial, (1982) by Maya Lin

Analytical Aspect	Maya Lin	Binary Opposition by conventional monuments
Art Composition.	The composition consists of two straight lines meeting at an angle to form a V-shape, descending into the ground in a horizontal orientation.	Conventional monuments rise vertically into the air, often featuring prominent and symbolic forms that emphasize grandeur.
Presentation of Figures.	There are no sculpted human figures or representational forms. The engraved names function as a substitute for the physical presence of the deceased.	Conventional monuments use figurative sculptures of soldiers or abstract symbolic forms to represent heroism.
Main Concept of the Work.	The work focuses on loss, time, and the process of mourning rather than on the celebration of victory.	The emphasis is on honor, heroism, bravery, and national pride.
Characteristics of Space and Time.	Time is central to the design. The names are arranged chronologically, and the space reflects a continuous historical process.	Time is abstract or unspecified; the monument represents a fixed and symbolic moment.
Position of the Viewer.	The viewer must move physically along the wall, experiencing the memorial through embodied participation.	The viewer stands in a fixed position and observes from the outside.
Emotional Effect on the Viewer.	The memorial evokes sorrow, reflection, and personal connection to the names.	The monument evokes pride, collective strength, and national unity.

From the table above, it can be concluded that the binary opposition constructed by Vietnam Veterans Memorial in comparison with conventional monuments lies in its rejection of figurative representation. Rather than presenting human figures or symbolic sculptural forms, Lin inscribes the names of the deceased, allowing the names to function as substitutes for the physical bodies of those who have passed away. The viewer is required to move physically along the wall, following the chronological sequence of deaths, and the experience emerges through embodied participation. The memorial thus becomes a space of memory and human loss, reconstructing the meaning of the monument within a new epistemic framework concerning the Earth and space/time.

3. Present Tense (1996, 2011) by Mona Hatoum

Considering her generation, Mona Hatoum began her artistic practice in the 1970s and 1980s, a period when many prominent female artists were actively developing distinct artistic voices. During that time, numerous women artists focused strongly on issues of gender difference, often using the female body and sexual identity as primary subject matter. Hatoum's approach differs in that her work engages more directly with geography, displacement, and global conflict, reflecting her own personal background.

Hatoum is Palestinian by origin and was raised in Lebanon. In 1975, she traveled to the United Kingdom but was unable to return home due to the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon. As a result, she remained in Britain and later decided to pursue her education there and eventually obtained British citizenship.

As Hatoum explains:

"I always try to make the work in such a way that it can include you and your experience as well as mine. If I'm trying to convey a feeling of instability, I'm not doing it in a kind of documentary sense. I'm creating a work that you can experience physically it's not necessarily an illustration of a specific event." (Sbitti, 2018)

Her work *Present Tense* (1996, 2011) consists of 2,200 standard-sized bars of soap arranged together to form a large rectangular installation that nearly fills the exhibition space. The soap is made from locally produced Palestinian olive oil, manufactured in the city

of Nablus in the northern West Bank, near Jerusalem. On the surface of the soap bars, small red glass beads are pressed into the material to form a linear map. This map represents the territories that Palestinians were to regain from Israel according to the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord, an agreement negotiated between Israel and Palestine with the United States acting as mediator. The agreement was signed at the White House by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian representative Yasser Arafat, with U.S. President Bill Clinton serving as witness. The discourse embedded in this work concerns the promise of stable and lasting peace, constructed through official agreements and authoritative documents. The map functions as a symbol of negotiated truth an image that appears to represent a mutually accepted and fixed reality.

However, subsequent historical events have demonstrated that the discourse represented by the map and the peace agreement was ultimately unstable and intangible. Hatoum created this work as a direct critique of that condition. Upon entering the exhibition space, viewers encounter not only the rows of soap bars covering almost the entire floor and the map formed by red beads pressed into their surfaces, but also the strong scent of the soap itself.

For general viewers who do not share the historical experience of the Palestinian people, the smell of the soap may resemble or differ from the soap they use in daily life. In contrast, Palestinian visitors immediately recognize it as olive oil soap with a distinctive scent, evoking memories of homeland, streets, and neighborhoods in Palestine (Sbitti, 2018). Olive oil and soap production are part of a shared cultural heritage among diverse ethnic groups in the region, continuing from ancient times to the present and likely into the future. This dimension introduces a deeper historical layer to the work.

Hatoum herself stated:

"The piece is called *Present Tense*; it's about the situation as it was then. The Palestinians who came to the gallery recognized the smell and the material immediately. I saw that particular soap as a symbol of resistance. It is one of those traditional Palestinian productions that have carried on despite drastic changes in the area. If you go to one of the factories in Nablus, the city north of Jerusalem, which specializes in its

production, you feel you have stepped into the last century... I also used it because of its transient nature. In fact, one visitor asked, ‘Did you draw the map on soap because when it dissolves, we won’t have any of these stupid borders?’ (Sbitti, 2018)

It is also widely acknowledged that soap, as an organic material, is subject to decay and dissolution. This impermanent quality is a shared concern for both artists. However, Hatoum’s conceptual focus differs significantly. She approaches soap as a cultural signifier that connotes instability, transience, and impermanence. The dissolving nature of soap metaphorically reflects the fragile and contested territory of Palestine, particularly following the establishment of the state of Israel.

The discourse proposed by Hatoum concerns a specific territory shaped by human existence and transformed into cultural practice amid ongoing conflict. Her discourse moves beyond questions of right and wrong. Instead, it addresses the instability and impermanence of cartographic discourse itself and the realities that maps claim to represent.

Hatoum’s work demonstrates that this female artist approaches geography through the lens of personal

memory. This perspective is expressed through the instability of the medium used to represent factual reality, namely, the map. In *Present Tense*, both the soap and the beaded map reveal the fragility of political agreements and territorial claims. Similarly, in other works such as *Hot Spot III* (2009), with its flickering neon map, and *Suspended* (2011), featuring suspended and swinging elements, Hatoum continues to question the reliability and authority of cartographic representation. These works emphasize the uncertainty and instability of maps, highlighting the problematic nature of human reliance on such systems in making decisions, even those that lead to war.

An additional point for consideration concerns the development process of *Present Tense*. In its early stage, Hatoum initially used nails pierced into the soap to form lines of dots. However, she later considered the nails too “violent” and replaced them with small red beads. Even the specific characteristics of the materials she selected carry a gendered discourse. Without overgeneralizing, beads are often associated with ornamentation and craft, traditionally linked to femininity. The deliberate search for a “non-violent” material thus becomes an important discourse within the creation of this work.



Figure 6 Mona Hatoum, *Present Tense*, 1996/2011. Installation. Olive oil soap blocks and red glass beads.
Source: MANJM (n.d.). Online.



Figure 7 Mona Hatoum, *Present Tense* (1996). Installation. Soap and glass beads.
Source: Tate Britain (n.d.). Online.

Table 4 Discourses analysis of *Present Tense*, (1996/2011) by Mona Hatoum

Analytical Aspect	Mona Hatoum	Binary Opposition from conventional maps
Art Composition.	The work is fragmented and provisional, defined by contested borders.	Traditional cartographic presenting it as stable and authoritative.
Presentation of Figures.	The territory itself becomes the “body,” and the soap functions as a material substitute for lived experience and cultural identity.	Conventional maps with coding system works scientifically.
Main Concept of the Image.	The work questions the stability of political agreements and the authority of maps. It emphasizes fragility, impermanence, and the instability of territorial boundaries.	Maps are typically presented as fixed representations of truth, sovereignty, and political certainty.
Characteristics of Space and Time.	Space transitional, suggested through the organic material that may decay or dissolve.	Conventional maps suggest permanence, continuity, and historical stability.
Position of the Viewer.	The viewer moves around the installation and experiences it through sight and smell. Interpretation varies according to personal and cultural background.	Traditional works often assume a single, fixed viewing position and a unified interpretation.
Emotional Effect on the Viewer.	The work evokes unease, reflection, nostalgia, and awareness of displacement. For Palestinian viewers, it may trigger memory and longing; for others, it may provoke critical thought about borders and politics.	Conventional monuments aim to produce a unified emotional response, such as pride, authority, or national solidarity.

From the table above, it can be concluded that the binary opposition constructed in Present Tense in relation to conventional maps lies in Hatoum's dismantling of the belief in the map as a neutral and stable instrument. Instead, she reconfigures the map as a fragile, perishable medium intertwined with memory, lived experience, and political conflict. In doing so, the work establishes a clear counter-discourse to traditional cartography.

Conclusion and discussion

The analysis of these three works demonstrates that the discourses they propose are difficult to convey through written texts or other conventional media alone. Each artist employs a distinct artistic medium: the first uses soil presented in rectangular pictorial form; the second creates a large-scale memorial design; and the third uses soap bars in a gallery-based installation. Despite these formal differences, clear binary oppositions emerge. The results of this research provide new conclusions for the analysis of Land Art as follows.

First, in the case of Michelle Stuart, there is the opposition between excavating into the Earth's surface to reveal layers of historical existence and the notion of the world as abstract, complete, and self-contained.

Second, in Maya Lin's memorial, the opposition appears between cutting deeply into the Earth to inscribe specific moments of personal and historical time and the traditional monument that rises into the air as a timeless vertical structure.

Third, in Mona Hatoum's work, the opposition lies between a map that is fragile, dissolvable, and culturally specific and the conventional understanding of maps as permanent, authoritative, and stable representations.

The principal finding that this research seeks to emphasize is that frameworks of knowledge shaped through female perspectives generate discourses filled with emotional, historical, and experiential dimensions. All of these discourses emerge through the creative processes of female artists.

Within the epistemic framework concerning the Earth and the maps, in all three cases, the artists do not approach the world as an abstract, vast, and monumental entity. Instead, they focus on the world as a specific site embedded with meaning, connected to particular moments in time, and shaped by individual and cultural

experience. The temporality in each work is presented in a concrete and situated manner, revealing vulnerability and pain through personal experience. This may be understood as a counter-discourse to conventional art concerning the same issue. In the future, male artists may also become increasingly interested in such modes of expression. However, as this analysis demonstrates, until the 1990s these forms of expression largely remained within the domain of female artists.

The analysis of artworks through frameworks of knowledge and discourse under the concepts of Michel Foucault allows us to better understand the situation of visual art from the post-World War II period through the 1990s. This situation may be comparable to the way Linda Nochlin analyzed Western paintings in the late nineteenth century. Two important questions should therefore be explored in future research. First, why did the period from the end of World War II through the 1990s enable female artists to present these particular issues in such distinctive ways? Second, after the transition into the twenty-first century, do Land Art created by female artists continue to present these characteristics, or have significant transformations emerged?

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This article forms part of a broader study of contemporary art as an expression of connected and exchange-based spaces. The research aims to demonstrate analytical approaches to creative works that employ historically grounded and sustainable natural materials, particularly in relation to themes of the Earth and maps from the perspective of contemporary female artists.

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used only for grammar checking. All research content and conclusions are the sole responsibility of the author.

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