

## 8. SoilArt: Introducing a Genre

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### Abstract:

The project "Art and Soil" is interested in urban soil as a natural and cultural asset. Urban soils are placed in the centre of the perception and the artistic work. The material that our life is based on, that we wipe as dirt from our shoes, that we build our houses and grow our food on and that we usually hardly notice is made the object of contemplation, the motif of artistic analysis, the substrate of our work.

Urban soils offer a view into nature's past and cultural history. Bygone times are preserved within the horizons and layers, and fragments expose things concealed and forgotten and make the past come alive. Soil is a witness that carries its own past within and reveals it to those that listen to the sound of the earth and understand the signs of the soils. It is not surprising that when we mention soil art, or talk about interdisciplinary collaborations between artists and soil scientists, a frequent response is an immediate association with 'Earthworks'. While most of the early Land Art and Earthworks were mainly concerned with various perceptions of space, artistic context, and historical meanings of landscape, soil art, in contrast, deals with the geophysical materiality and biochemical processes of the earth. It addresses the pluralistic roles and functions of soil as habitat, growth medium for plants, substrate for architectural structures, archeological archives, and as the basis of cultural identity. It explores the aesthetics of soil as a complex mineral and organic body, with infinite combinations of colors, textures, formations and interpretive meanings.

In light of the historical frameworks described above, we therefore define 'soil art' as art consciously and specifically about, in, or with soil as such or soil conservation issues created by artists, scientists, educators or collaborative efforts thereof. Furthermore, soil art comprises a wide range of artistic disciplines beyond painting and sculpture, to include installation, performance, photography, video and cinema, animation, landscape architecture, environmental remediation, and the Internet. As the field of soil science belongs to the environmental sciences, we identify soil art as a subfield of environmental art. In addition to the artists and groups mentioned above, we will highlight the following artists and their works as prominent examples in the advancement of soil art. These artists move beyond environmental art audiences and symbolic uses of 'earth' to offer creative new insight on soil classification, documentation, and evaluation methods. The soil tells stories that 'Art and Soil' converts into pictures. Looking into the soil increases our awareness for time and perpetual change. The continually new forming turns into the constantly transitory, the colors of time become apparent. The works of the project group 'Art and Soil' are as diverse as the soil itself. The soil is the substrate and the object of the works. Soil samples of sand, silt and clay from all over the world are processed and used for paintings (i.e. ceramics). The project group 'Art and Soil' wants to show with their work that an artistic portrayal of the soil is more than just a mere illustration of the urban material. It is rather an attempt to fill the picture of the soil with metaphors and meaning.

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