

NON-SITE (Robert Smithson, 1938-1973)

At a simple level:

'In 1967 Smithson began exploring industrial areas around New Jersey and was fascinated by the sight of dumper trucks excavating tons of earth and rock that he described in an essay as the equivalents of the monuments of antiquity. This resulted in the series of 'Non-sites' in which earth and rocks collected from a specific area are installed in the gallery as sculptures, often combined with mirrors or glass.'

http://encyclopedia.lockergnome.com/s/b/Robert_Smithson (Accessed, May, 2005)

(see also robertsmithson.com)

'Smithson's Non-sites were presented as crib-like minimalist containers of painted or galvanized steel that contained raw material – rocks, gravels, salt – salvaged from distant mines, excavations or quarries. Crucial to these Non-sites were the maps that were exhibited with the more sculptural containers, since the maps both directed the viewer to the original site and established the 'dialectic' between site and non-site. This relational aspect, this in-betweenness, not only destabilized the site itself but also foregrounded the whole concept of process or performance. The passage between the two locations, even if simply implied, threw new emphasis on time, duration, physical participation and a whole range of spatial practices. ... [T]he key to Non-site is the concept of displacement, how the meaning of an object is changed by removal to another site. But ... the Non-site retains a connection to its original site (through the negative impression it leaves as well as the documentation that accompanies it), thereby setting up a dialogue about context, removal and recombination ... As Smithson noted in his own comparison of site and Non-site, a site is about scattered information ('The site is a place you can visit and it involves travel as an aspect too'), a Non-site is about contained information, 'Instead of putting something on the landscape, I decided it would be interesting to transfer the land indoors, to the Non-site, which is an abstract container.'¹ (Kastner and Wallis, 1998: 31)

See, also, Kaye, 2000: 92-99.

¹ Robert Smithson quoted in 'Symposium' in *Earth Art*, ed. Nina Jager, Andrew Dickson White, Museum of Art, Ithaca, New York, 1970.