

# Beauty and the brand

*Both in its making, and in its wide-ranging appeal, Andy Goldsworthy's work is a challenge to radical relativism*

## Part Two of an interview essay

In the comments book to Andy Goldsworthy's *Time* exhibition at the Barbican in the high summer of 2000, one visitor had written that Goldsworthy's work 'has a beautiful meditation to it.' Repeatedly it is this word 'beautiful' which is associated in the public mind with what Goldsworthy makes. In other quarters, including some of the art-world fraternity, the aesthetic category of 'beauty' has long been suspect; and partially in consequence, one suspects, because his audience relates to the work as 'beautiful', Goldsworthy has come unstuck with some in the theory and book-led knockabout of art criticism. Unsurprisingly, he neither repudiates beauty, nor sees it as irrelevant to the present day.

'Nature is intensely beautiful,' he says, 'and at the same time very unnerving, and at times deeply frightening. You feel it if you've ever stood in a wood that has been blown down after a strong wind, a volcano, or any of these incredible acts of nature. You feel it as soon as you go out to the land, where everywhere you go things are dead, decaying, fallen down, growing, alive. There's this incredible vigour and energy and life. And it's sometimes very difficult to deal with. I would hope that I don't have a kind of romantic view of nature. I do feel the beauty of it, for sure. But it's a beauty that's underwritten by extreme feelings.'

'There is a feeling at times that people want me to represent something for them, that part of themselves they associate with nature and with beauty. They get quite upset if I go outside those parameters. Of the reactions to the melted stones in the *Time* exhibition at the Barbican (see FDR6), some people found it too violent. People are often looking for fairly superficial ways of understanding the work. For instance, I was about to give a lecture and, while I was waiting, there were two people behind me talking. One was trying to describe to the other what it is I do and he was saying, "He uses 100% natural materials, and never uses any tools." And I thought, "Oh, Christ!" Yes, I do use the land, but I also use tools ... and there are reasons for that. It's not some

Andy Goldsworthy's work is known across the developed world for its delicate rendering of the ephemeral in nature, brought to an enthusiastic public via stunningly photographed picture books. This second section of the interview essay, begun in issue 6, explores the paradoxes of working with beauty in a world of branding, and concludes *Fourth Door's* contribution to some of the wider issues, elements and contexts of Goldsworthy's work.



Untitled

sort of rule for the sake of a rule. The reason I don't use tools for a lot of the works is the freedom it gives me – the sensation of touch, and I need that. I need that shock. The hand with ice or stone. But I've also made sculptures with huge machinery, and I've made large earthworks. And I'm very happy to do so in the right circumstances. Usually in my lectures, I put in an image of a JCB doing one of my sculptures and you can hear the "Oh dear!" in the audience.'

David Nash describes Goldsworthy as a bridge between the public and the art world's more astringent

practitioners, Donald Judd, Richard Serra and, looking further back, the tender sculpturings of Constantin Brancusi. But he is also a bridge between environmental art and the big art world. Despite his forerunners, he is not represented in that hanger cathedral to late twentieth-century modernism, the Tate Modern. This is an absence that has bewildered many, though Goldsworthy himself says he isn't bothered by it. In addition, the perception of Land Art as radically at odds with the collision between theory-heavy post-modernism and the Thatcherite fashion-frenzy of the