
EARTHWORKS

Artist Hans Haacke, born in Germany in 1936, moved to the U.S. in the 1960s and settled in Manhattan on the Bowery, the same street as the New Museum's current home. In his 2019 New Museum retrospective, "All Connected," Haacke exhibited 60 years of artworks, including "earthworks" and kinetic sculptures from mundane materials, initially created in the 1960s and re-created for the New Museum. While Haacke does not think of his works as occupying one style or aesthetic, his works relate with systems. In early works, Haacke builds networks of manmade and/or natural materials, which together create novel systems. In *Green Grass*, Haacke transforms a familiar natural element, grass, into a sculpture. Starting with seeds planted in a mound of soil, the piece evolves through a full life cycle from seed to buds to green grass to yellow, dried out and dying.

"The other day I looked into the dictionary and looked into Wikipedia and so forth and whatever I read there about aesthetics seemed to be a world that I did not understand. And often I'm asked, 'Well, what is the aesthetic part of this? Well, you're political and so forth, but what is the aesthetics?' And I have to shrug my shoulder because I do not know what it is, the so-called aesthetics. I really don't know. I follow my instinct what looks right, what feels right, and so forth, but there is no, nothing that I could apply."

– Hans Haacke, 2013 interview with Irving Sandler in 200 "Hans Haacke: All Connected" Audio Guide: Introduction

To learn more about Haacke's transformation of mundane and natural materials, you can [watch a video](#) or [listen to an interview](#).

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

- **aesthetic:** a set of visual criteria and/or principles in the work of an artist or artistic movement; the signature "look" of an artist's works
- **earthwork:** a type of art emerging in the 1960s in which artists made large-scale, outdoor installations or sculptures with found, natural materials. Earthworks are also made by bringing natural materials into galleries and museums, creating temporary or ephemeral pieces lasting the life-cycle of the plants and other natural components
- **network:** a group of materials, elements and/or components working

together to create something new through their interrelationships

- **life cycle:** the series of changes or evolutions of a living creature (animal, plant, human) from birth to death
- **ephemeral:** lasting for a short time; impermanent

START WITH ART: HANS HAACKE



- What is the artwork in this image made out of?
- What shape is the grass — is it flat like a field?
- Even though this piece is made out of grass and soil, can it be considered a sculpture?
- How do you think this artwork will change over time?
- Do you think the grass will stay green?

How might this piece relate to Haacke's interest in **networks**, the **life cycle** and **earthworks**?

In the Artist's Words:

"Perhaps I can quote Lenin. Everything is connected to everything else. The human is part of nature, and affects nature, as nature as we have learned recently with Sandy, affects us."

– Hans Haacke, 2013 public conversation with Irving Sandler at the New Museum

LOOK AROUND

- How do you experience, view or interact with nature (plants, flowers, grass, trees, animals) in your daily life?
- Do you spend time outdoors gardening, walking past grass, trees or flowers, or visiting parks and green spaces?
- Do you take care of an animal or pet at home?
- What do you notice about the ways nature changes with the seasons? What types of changes have you noticed in the past few weeks?
- How do seasonal changes affect the color of the sky, and the color of trees and grasses? Do you notice fewer flowers or different types of plants and flowers?
- How might we use natural materials to make a sculpture or earthwork, like Hans Haacke, either outside in the landscape or inside our homes?

MAKE ART

Let's create our own **earthwork** from natural materials we collect outside or even find inside our home.

Materials

- Natural materials from outside, possibly twigs, stones, leaves, branches, acorns or flowers that we find on the ground
- Natural materials we collect from inside, possibly plants, seeds, beans, fruit
- Soil and/or sand if available
- Pits, seeds or stones from fruit you've eaten, like an avocado pit or tomato seeds, if available
- A container or surface area for planting that can withstand water, if available
- Glue (optional)

Making

1. Start by thinking about whether you want to work with materials you find inside or outside your home.
2. Consider the texture, size, color and shape of the materials you are collecting. Do you want to mix rough and smooth surfaces, like smooth stones and bumpy tree bark? Can you find flowers or leaves in different colors? Consider how the season might affect what you can find outside.
3. Once you find materials, you can choose to bring them home or arrange them where you found them. You can stack stones, leaves, bark and other materials, stick branches in the ground, or place them against a tree or other surface to make a temporary installation.
4. Thinking about change and life cycles, you might want to photograph your sculpture or installation, visit it in a few days or weeks, photograph it again, and compare the two photographs to examine how time and natural forces have changed it.
5. You might also bring your materials home and arrange them inside, gluing them together to make a more permanent sculpture. If you're collecting

materials inside, including seeds, beans and/or soil, think about how and where to arrange them.

6. Thinking about Haacke's *Grass Grows* and the way the piece demonstrates a whole life cycle from seed to grass to dying grass, consider if you'd like to plant seeds or beans and experience their life cycle.

If you're planting seeds or beans:

1. Consider whether you want to plant them in a container, or sculpt soil into a shape, like the mound in *Grass Grows*, and then plant the seeds. Make sure to find a waterproof surface for the soil, and to keep the soil moist by watering it every couple of days. You might also need to moisten the soil to shape it.
2. You might want to research your seeds and find out if they like to be kept in dark or light to help them germinate or sprout. Once the seeds sprout, they will need light and will continue to need water.
3. **This video** shares what happens if you plant grass seeds in sand, soil, in direct sunlight, in the dark, if you add water and if you don't water your seeds at all. You might want to record the changes you see each day or every 2-3 days. Create a seed journal where you take notes, make drawings, or add photographs to record your plant's life cycle.

REFLECTION

- If you chose to make an outdoor sculpture or installation, how did you select the site for your artwork?
- If you were able to visit your outdoor sculpture several times since you installed it, how has it changed? Do you think wind, rain, and weather changed it? Do you think an animal or human intervened?
- If you chose to plant seeds, did you sculpt or shape the soil, or put it inside a container? How long did it take for your seeds to grow?
- Earthworks can be **ephemeral** and temporary. In addition to exhibiting earthworks, Haacke exhibits photographs of earthworks. Photographs and videos allow us to see different phases in the life cycle of earthworks. How will you document the life cycle of your seeds and plants? How can your documentation become part of the artwork or even stand alone as separate artwork? If you kept a seed journal, did you consider the journal part of your artwork? Did you include drawings and handwritten notes, using it like a sketchbook?

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MUSEUM

IMAGES:

Hans Haacke, *Grass Grows*, 1967–69. Earth and grass. Installation view: “Earth Art,” Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 1969. © Hans Haacke / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

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