

The Clark Art Institute Turns Its 140-Acre Meadow into an Exhibition Site

After many architects left their traces on the museum's buildings, public sculptures by six contemporary artists add poetic gestures to the land.

by Osman Can Yerebakan

November 6, 2020

Since opening in 1955, the Clark Art Institute has been blossoming across the sprawling acres of Williamstown, Massachusetts. After the initial Daniel Deverell Perry–designed Museum Building came Pietro Belluschi and The Architects Collaborative's construction of the Manton Research Center in 1973. It was, however, Tadao Ando's Lunder Center at Stone Hill (opened in 2008), his 42,600-square-foot Clark Center, and Selldorf Architects' renovation of the Manton Research Center in 2014 that turned the museum's face to its 140-acre meadow.

Cambridge-based landscape architecture practice Reed Hilderbrand's vision for the hilly meadow helped the Institute earn LEED Gold Certification in 2016. Now the Clark's first outdoor exhibition, *Ground/work*, showcases six site-specific sculptures created to inspire artful interactions between public and landscape. The exhibition includes work by artists Haegue Yang, Eva LeWitt, Jennie C. Jones, Analia Saban, Kelly Akashi, and Nairy Baghramian.

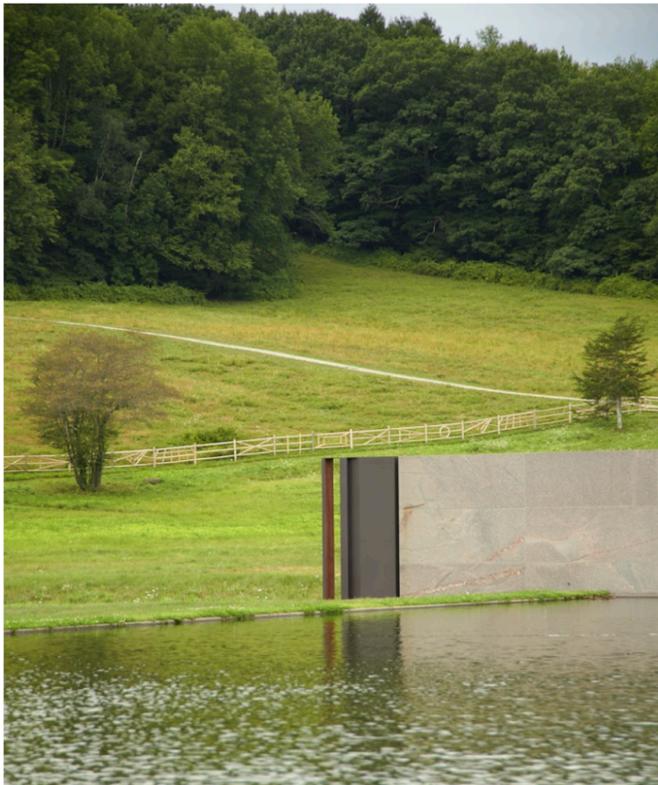
"These projects brought attention, not only to the museum and its over 9,000-artwork collection but to why the Clarks chose this location and the opportunities here," says curator Abigail Ross Goodman. When museum director Olivier Meslay invited Goodman and her partner, Molly Epstein, to organize an outdoor sculpture exhibition on the vast campus, "it was in part to honor this site," she adds.

The exhibition, which opened to the public on October 6, brings to the fore both the artists' signature themes and the area's natural and architectural particularities. The curators use the meadow's dramatic texture—a fluctuating terrain full of winding vistas and trails—to strategically place the artworks at surprising points of encounter. The exhibition's year-long run promises a visual experience that shifts with the color palette of the changing seasons. The works foster dialogue between

the immersive natural backdrop, architectural materiality, and the museum's western art collection which is heavy with Dürer, Degas, and Gauguin.

"Each artist takes the surrounding nature as a subject, object, and raw material," explains the curator, pointing out Jennie C. Jones's sculpture of an aeolian harp which stands inches from Ando's building. *These (Mournful) Shores* rises in the form of a minimalist musical instrument as tall as the architecture. Aside from occasional melodies played by the wind, the work silently touches upon issues typical to Jones's practice, such as displacement, histories of racial oppression, and overlooked architectural possibilities. Transferred to three-dimensional grandiosity, the "visual economy," according to Goodman, in the artist's abstract drawings is not compromised, but magnified.

Overall, the sculptures in *Ground/work* harmonize with the Clark's meadow. For a year, they will be as resolute as architecture touching upon the landscape, but they will also remain in a transformation, absorbing and reflecting the surrounding colors, forms, and people who help complete them.



Jennie C. Jones (b. Cincinnati, 1968; lives and works in Hudson, NY), *These (Mournful) Shores*, 2020. Powder-coated aluminum, wood, harp strings, 197 1/16 x 72 x 18 in. (500.5 x 182.9 x 45.7). Courtesy of the artist and PATRON Gallery, Chicago. and Alexander Gray Associates, New York. Photo: Thomas Clark