
Analyzing Alan Sonfist's Claims For Conservation And Cutting Down Trees In The Landscape Of His Greenwich Village

Deforestation due to urbanization and industrialization is not a new phenomenon; since the beginning of human settlement, there has been ample building to try and accommodate for the wants and needs of the people settling. Over time, from the Industrial Revolution to the present day, the human wants for expansion has pushed construction into almost every nook and cranny of the globe. Unfortunately, this means that many terrestrial and oceanic environments that may be home to plant and animal life were destroyed trying to make room for human expansion. Environmentalists fighting to save the scant greenery across the globe have sometimes been coined as “tree huggers” or “eco terrorists”; artists like Alan Sonfist utilize eco art to depict environmentalist claims. Sonfist, an artist-environmentalist, created the photographic artwork he named Greenwich Village Time Landscape in 1965. Greenwich Village Time Landscape, although made fifty-one years ago, is still extremely relevant to today's societal issues of building more and higher, but devastating ecosystems in the process. It is shocking to see Sonfist's work and the important ecological issue that it undertakes.

Greenwich Village Time Landscape is a piece of photographic art. Made from of mixed media, Alan Sonfist's Greenwich Village Time Landscape juxtaposes three four-foot by four-foot panels in a straight horizontal line. Each separate panel shows a Manhattan, New York park where Sonfist had planted a rectangular green space to showcase greenery in between large buildings and installations in the city, one of the most built-up cities in the United States. Moreover, through each separate panel, you can see the trees Sonfist had planted in the green area grow and get larger through the progression of the artwork. The progression of the greenery was meant to symbolize how the area looked previously before construction of the city had taken place. The city surrounding the green space is called Greenwich Village, hence the artwork being named Greenwich Village Time Landscape. Alan Sonfist's Greenwich Village Time Landscape is an ecological artwork made from photographic art which shows greenery progressing through time in a New York suburb.

Alan Sonfist, as an artist, has described himself as “a visual and ecological archaeologist”. It is not difficult to understand why he would give himself such a title. Through his many works including Greenwich Village Time Landscape, Sonfist has strived for accuracy in depicting historical situations. In order to create Greenwich Village Time Landscape, Alan Sonfist used the eco approaches of “preservation” and “urban ecology”. It is evident that Sonfist has included “preservation” because he is trying to preserve the historical aspects of pre-human inhabitation New York, “urban ecology” is seen in that the ecological area that he is trying to show is that of an urban area. Furthermore, the strategies employed by artist Alan Sonfist are “instruct”, “intervene”, and “celebrate”. For Greenwich Village Time Landscape, Alan Sonfist made sure to study and re-plant trees and shrubbery that once inhabited the village down to science; he even made sure that they topsoil was environmentally similar. When interviewed about his work, and how it was different from the minimalists of his time such as Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson, Sonfist proclaimed that when he was a child growing up in the gang-ridden sections of the Bronx, the Bronx River separating the two gangs was his idea of a

“forest”, where he could escape from the violence and just be himself . Clearly, his childhood led him to be the artist that he is and that growing up in New York most likely made him passionate about the old forests that use to inhabit the area instead of the concrete jungle that New York is known for being.

Greenwich Village Time Landscape is essentially Alan Sonfist's interpretation of how to show the ecology of the environment of New York before humans settled there and began to build on the site. By placing a green space in between large buildings, Sonfist tries to show how the construction has overridden the gorgeous green land that used to be under all of the buildings and concrete. Furthermore, the issue undertaken by Sonfist is about preservation and deforestation. On one hand, Sonfist is trying to urge people to preserve the green areas that we already have and to protect them from being built upon. On the other hand, Sonfist is trying to raise awareness for deforestation in urban areas. The geographic areas of New York City and Manhattan are known for being some of the most built-upon, concrete cities in the United States, so placing the green space in such an area is also extremely significant to the cause of deforestation. It is obvious that Alan Sonfist was trying to raise awareness for the ecological issues of preservation of green spaces and deforestation of green areas for human use through his ecological artwork, Greenwich Village Time Landscape.

Alan Sonfist's ecological artwork, Greenwich Village Time Landscape, most definitely deserves merit. Through the publicity and availability to the public that Greenwich Village Time Landscape possesses, it is extremely easy to reach the public and have them understand the artwork. Once people can see the effect that building upon grass and trees have in their own communities, it is much easier to relate to. After viewing Greenwich Village Time Landscape, it would be difficult for someone to discount Sonfist's claims for preservation and deforestation. Furthermore, although Sonfist created Greenwich Village Time Landscape in the 1960s, the work is still relevant to society today and will most likely be relevant in the centuries following the twenty-first century, provoking thought in future generations of preservationists. Conclusively, Greenwich Village Time Landscape by Alan Sonfist is an ecological artwork that is more than capable of effecting environmental change spanning across centuries of future humans.