

Robert Smithson *Spiral Jetty*, 1970

Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, located at Rozel Point on the northeastern shore of Great Salt Lake in Utah, is one of the most remarkable examples of Land art. In 1970, assisted by a crew operating dump trucks, a tractor, and a front loader, Smithson displaced some 6,000 tons of black basalt rock and earth from the adjacent shore to form a coil 1,500 feet long and approximately 15 feet wide, winding counterclockwise into the lake. Created at a time when water levels were particularly low, *Spiral Jetty* was submerged in 1972. Droughts caused the lake to recede in 2002, and the sculpture has remained visible ever since.

"I like landscapes that suggest prehistory,"¹ Smithson once observed. The site of *Spiral Jetty* was chosen by the artist for the lake's unusual ecological and geological properties. The reddish coloration of the water, caused by the high presence of microbes, initially attracted Smithson to the north arm of the lake. The spiral shape alludes to the molecular lattice of the salt-crystal deposits found throughout the lake's expanse, and in forming the work, he chose to use basalt boulders of hardened lava found along the peninsula, scattered remnants of the now extinct volcanos in the area.

The fractured landscape, fluctuating water levels, and the water's salinity also speak of the artist's preoccupation with the concept of entropy. Smithson envisioned an artwork in a state of constant transformation whose form is never fixed and undergoes decay from the moment of its creation. His thinking was equally shaped by his understanding of the third law of thermodynamics as well as a fascination in science fiction and popular science.

As a path for walking and looking, *Spiral Jetty* is a sculpture to be experienced. The act of traversing the earthwork is a prominent image in the eponymous film completed months after Smithson built the sculpture. Along with aerial shots of *Spiral Jetty* is a sequence of images of the artist running on the sculpture. Reaching the innermost point, Smithson gazes out at the spiral path, lake, and mountains. *Spiral Jetty* serves as a site from which to view the surroundings—the prehistoric environment that Smithson selected for it.

notes

¹ Robert Smithson, "Conversation in Salt Lake City (1972)," in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 298.

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Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah

Black basalt rock, salt crystals, earth, and water
1,500 feet long and approximately 15 feet wide

Robert Smithson was born in Passaic, New Jersey, in 1938. He died in Amarillo, Texas, in 1973.

Dia Art Foundation

Spiral Jetty entered the collection of Dia Art Foundation through the generosity of Nancy Holt and the estate of the artist in 1999. Founded in 1974, Dia is committed to advancing, realizing, and preserving the vision of artists. Dia fulfills its mission by commissioning single artist projects, organizing exhibitions, realizing site-specific installations, and collecting in-depth the work of a focused group of artists of the 1960s and 1970s. For more information, visit www.diaart.org.

Partnerships

Dia collaborates with two organizations in Utah—Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster College (GSLI) and the Utah Museum of Fine Arts at the University of Utah (UMFA)—who have been deeply involved in the advocacy of *Spiral Jetty*.

Great Salt Lake Institute, Westminster College

Great Salt Lake Institute advises on environmental issues, site maintenance, and accessibility pertaining to *Spiral Jetty*. For more information, visit www.greatsaltlakeinstitute.org.

Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah

The Utah Museum of Fine Arts helps to ensure that *Spiral Jetty's* cultural reputation is upheld locally and promotes the exceptional significance of the artwork within Utah. For more information, visit www.umfa.utah.edu.

Affiliation

Utah Department of Natural Resources

The Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands within the Utah Department of Natural Resources oversees the lakebed where *Spiral Jetty* is located. For more information, visit www.naturalresources.utah.gov.

Directions to Spiral Jetty

Spiral Jetty is an approximate 2.5-hour drive from Salt Lake City.

- From Salt Lake City, take I-15 north for 65 miles.
- Take Exit 365. Turn right onto UT Route 13 (toward Corrine). Last gas station is in Corinne.
- Continue west for 18 miles (UT Route 13 becomes Highway 83). Follow signs to the Golden Spike National Historic Site (GSNHS) Visitor Center.
- Turn left onto Golden Spike Road and continue 7.7 miles to the GSNHS Visitor Center. Last bathrooms are at the visitor center. Cell phone reception ends.
- From the visitor center, drive 5.6 miles west on the main gravel road (N Golden Spike Loop). At the fork in the road, continue left (west). There are signs directing you to *Spiral Jetty*.
- Drive 1.4 miles. At the fork in the road, turn right (southwest).
- Continue driving for approximately 9 miles. The road will curve north around Rozel Point.
- The road ends at a cul-de-sac parking lot directly above *Spiral Jetty*.

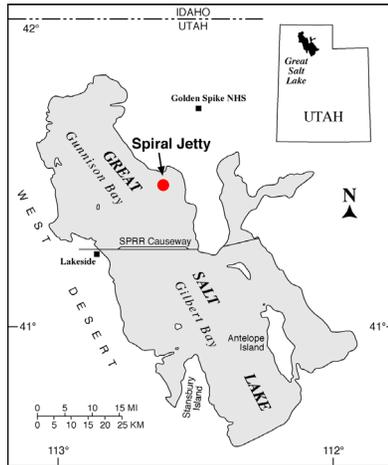
Tips for your visit

Guests are advised to bring water, food, and waterproof boots, along with weather-appropriate clothing. The lake's levels vary several feet from year to year and from season to season.

Visitors are required to "leave no trace" by carrying out anything that they bring with them. Please leave the natural environment exactly as you found it. Do not paint rocks, make fire pits, or stamp on vegetation.

Dia Art Foundation

535 West 22nd Street New York City 10011



Courtesy Utah Geological Survey

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Great Salt Lake at Rozel Point
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