

FILM REVIEW

# *Rivers and Tides - Treasuring the Shifting Sands of Art*

**Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working with Time**

NYT Critic's Pick

Directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer

Documentary

1h 30m

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Anyone who has built a sand castle by the edge of the sea and paused to observe the rising tide creep in and wash it away, can sink into the contemplative world of the Scottish artist profiled in Thomas Riedelsheimer's film "Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working With Time."

This bearded, soft-spoken 46-year-old dreamer, who shares an old stone house with his wife and four children in a rural village, Penpont, works mostly outdoors, creating mutable sculptures that he calls earthworks. These organic sculptures interact with nature in a way that magically illuminates the cycles of creation, destruction and renewal.

Although some of his work, like a winding stone wall that he built at the Storm King Arts Center in Mountainville, N.Y., has longevity, most of it involves ice, water, leaves, grass, mud and stones and is not built to last: its evanescence is an essential aspect of its beauty. But thanks to photography and to movies like this, it can live on.

Mr. Goldsworthy documents his projects in photographs that are exhibited in galleries and published in art books like "Hand to Earth: Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture 1976-1990" (Harry N. Abrams). But Mr. Riedelsheimer's film lends it an immediacy that still photographs can only begin to suggest.

A typical work, at once ravishingly beautiful and fragile, is a serpentine chain of brightly colored leaves, which this artist carefully floats down a brook or small river, letting the current carry it where it will until it comes to rest. While the chain is snaking downstream, it seems to acquire a luminous life of its own. But since the river currents work to pull it apart, and leaves decompose anyway, the chain's life span is heartbreakingly brief.

A good portion of "Rivers and Tides," which opens today at Film Forum in the South Village, follows Mr. Goldsworthy as he works on the Nova Scotia coast, where the tides are dramatic. In one project he creates an elaborate icicle sculpture on the rocks, attaching pieces of ice to one another to create a sculpture that eventually falls apart. (Soon enough, of course, it will also melt.)

He builds two beehivelike structures of stone, one by the ocean, the other deep in a field. The film chronicles the disappearance of the first hive as the ocean laps over it, and its subsequent re-emergence when the tide recedes. The second one becomes all but invisible when summer arrives and it is swallowed by the surrounding vegetation.

While making his pieces, he often deliberately carries them to the brink of collapse. As we watch an intricate cobweb of sticks extending from the branches of a tree crumble under its own weight, it is impossible not to feel a twinge of sorrow over what seems to have been a wasted effort. But when you think about it, its creation becomes a paradigm of the finiteness of life itself.

As beautiful as many of Mr. Goldsworthy's works are, he takes pains to explain that they are not created to evoke pastoral picture-postcard visions of nature. Touring his village, he comments on the toxicity of the bracken (which he associates with bleeding hands) and of the profound effect that sheepherding has had on the landscape, which has been left nearly barren by the grazing animals. He meticulously grinds an iron-rich stone into a bright red powder, which he deposits into a stream to create a beautiful but disturbing image of the earth bleeding.

As the film's images accumulate, the movie becomes a sustained and ultimately refreshing meditation on surrender to the idea of temporality. So much art is an egotistical attempt to leave behind something that will be contemplated for generations and theoretically for eternity. If Mr. Goldsworthy's humility in the face of change reminds us that all is vanity, his playfulness also reminds us that a fervent engagement in the moment is in its own way infinite.

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