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,” 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
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.