

JUSTYNA PROFASKA

VIRTUALITY OF LANDSCAPE
ATLAS OF ARTISTIC MANIFESTATIONS FROM REAL
TO IMAGINARY

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Abstract

Academic debates concerning landscape convey a number of different definitions, varying by the discipline in which the term is used. This dissertation attempts to shed light on the understanding of what encompasses landscape in artistic projects.

Using the notion of virtuality as an alteration to what has been established so far, the research will open the debate on what architects and designers can learn from artists and their way of thinking.

Through the analysis of literature from the fields of art history, philosophy, sociology, and architecture, the research focuses on examining artistic practice in relation to landscape. This shift in perspective enriches the design process and is, at the same time, complementary to the study process of architects and designers. Virtuality, as potentiality transcending

its technological aspect, is an idea borrowed from the field of philosophy—deriving from the theories of Gilles Deleuze—that appears as part of the problematics within the theories of emergence. Landscape, as a social construct, is analysed from the perspective of Henri Lefebvre's theory of *The Production of Space*, along with the perceptual theories of Lucius Burckhardt and John Berger, which will be applied here to comprehend the phenomenon of nature as seen by the artist.

The research endeavors to challenge existing paradigms and explore alternative narratives of the relationships between humans and nature, which are subsequently mirrored in selected case studies of contemporary art. In this context, virtuality functions as a catalyst for transformation, creating a platform for diverse perspectives—a phenomenon of seeing certain things

differently. This process supports a deeper focus on the artistic understanding of landscape and how it resonates with society at large in times marked by climate change, systemic risk, uncertainty, and its attendant apparatuses of power in the contemporary world.

To grasp the multiplicities of today's landscape, there is a need to examine the volatile context of the 21st century, where technology and digitalisation establish the knowledge-based economy system to which we have access. Landscape, scientifically, is considered an objectified perspective on territory that is, at any time, under threat of turning into a product of capitalism and power. These issues are present in contemporary art, which often serves as a reference. The sciences, with their various forms of representation, encompass landscape in different ways—from cartography through representation to descriptive

definitions.

The goal of this research is to show the possibilities that arise from learning from all of these perspectives. As a product of artistic manifestation, landscape can take forms borrowing from all of these disciplines, testing concepts to bring new ideas into being.

Introduction

“The role of science, like that of art, is to blend exact imagery with more distant meaning, the parts we already understand with those given as new into larger patterns that are coherent enough to be acceptable as truth.”

Edward O. Wilson,
Biophilia, 1984

Given the materials and bibliography drawn from the fields of philosophy, art history, sociology, architecture, and landscape studies, the theory of space as a social construct will be applied to landscape. Through a critical comparative analysis of these theories, it has become clear that landscape is a concept created and based on society's perception. Particularly in the 21st century, a time marked by technological progress, which shifts social dynamics through the ubiquitous changes in all spheres of life via the internet as the medium of information and connectivity. This fact has prompted reflection and a need to explore the topic of landscape within this context.

The research pursued has been a constant dialectical journey, drawing on resources and assistance from different fields. It began as an exploration of contemporary artistic manifestations, which are seen as a progressive and competitive method for understanding landscape through that lens. The Atlas helps in understanding landscape as a space

shaped by social dynamics, which is often explored by contemporary artists. The exchange between the disciplines of project design and the arts is notable, and the process of developing a project—whether it is landscape, architecture, or urban space—often draws on references from artistic projects, which are later translated into the process of creating a complex and comprehensive design.

Therefore, this book is divided into two parts: first, a theoretical section, where landscape is navigated historically and formally as a social construct, showcasing its virtual aspect as the potentiality of the things it conveys; and second, a section that consolidates research findings, presenting the atlas of contemporary artistic manifestations. This section highlights the most significant examples of visual artworks and artists engaged with the theme of nature, practising, representing, and imagining landscapes within the collective consciousness. It serves as a database for further mental landscape production and an exploration of issues worth considering when undertaking architectural or landscape practice.

During the development of this dissertation's framework, several key research questions emerged:

Firstly, how does virtuality mediate the relationship between nature and humanity, and how does its notion manifest in contemporary artistic projects? This question led me to deepen the concept of virtuality as a philosophical idea, extending beyond the digital realm and focusing my research on artistic projects.

Secondly, in what ways does landscape, as an artistic subject, mediate between imagination and reality, and how do artists navigate the tension between the virtual and the natural? Defining landscape as a central topic was crucial for analysing it as a cultural and social construct that artists embrace and use as a conceptual agent.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the design discipline: what can architects and landscape designers learn from exploring artistic projects through the lens of virtuality?

Research methodology

The dissertation is divided into **two parts: the first part, a theoretical section** comprising **three chapters**, and the **second part: the Atlas**.

The first chapter focuses on defining the term 'virtual' and its interpretations in the contemporary world through the lens of philosophy. Since the dissertation examines the relationship between humans and nature through this notion, the etymology and origins of the term will be explored to establish its connection to the topic of landscape. The bibliography for this chapter largely comprises sources from philosophy, literature, history, sociology, and the history of visual art—disciplines frequently referenced in artistic studies.

The research begins with the paragraph 'Virtualis,' where I provide an explanation of the etymology of the word 'virtual' and its possible translations. Through an in-depth discussion of the philosophical concept, I present literature that connects it to philosophy (Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi, Jean Baudrillard), architecture and spatial studies (Elisabeth Grosz), and visual arts (Whitney Davis), discussing its potential impact on landscape perception. This analysis explores how landscape functions as a social construct through the writings on *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre and examines its application to landscape and art.

I then discuss how landscape, as an artistic topic, is perceived from both cultural and scientific perspectives, and how these boundaries are blurred. Art, therefore, serves as a mediator between the natural environment and humanity, leading to the question of what we, as designers, can learn from artistic projects and how this is mediated through the notion of virtuality.

The second chapter delves into questions of imagination and the perception of reality in the context of landscape, a frequent subject of artistic inquiry. The three subchapters address key theories on perception as applied in the visual arts and landscape theory, including *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger and *Mind's Eye* by Lucius Burckhardt. Through these texts, the chapter explores the production of landscape imagery and how landscape is perceived both individually and societally.

Further in the chapter, cultural transitions related to landscape are examined, specifically how artists and society have navigated the complex, evolving relationship with nature. This section investigates landscape perception and the relationship with nature through selected case studies of artworks, architecture, and critical theories, from modernist and postmodernist movements to the present.

A case study of the American West landscape is then discussed, examining how it has been socially constructed through artistic representation, cinema, and popular culture, and acquiring globally recognised cult imagery. Trapped between the stereotype and reality, it virtually transformed into a symbol of cultural identity.

The third chapter continues the discourse on landscape through the lens of virtuality, exploring ways landscape has been systematised, collected, and exhibited. Exhibiting nature in museums, wunderkammern, and exposition cabinets supports the idea that art and nature possess a strong connection to power; as an artistic subject, landscape has historically conveyed a variety of worldviews and symbolically charged messages, referencing Michel Foucault.

Moving into contemporary times, the paragraph *Learning from Exhibitions: From Landscape to Display* defines the current state of contemporary art, from the late 20th century to the 21st century, and the ideas it communicates.

Toward the end, a virtual tool for juxtaposing nature—an introduction to the concept of an atlas—is discussed as a knowledge-producing device. This tool embodies virtuality by creating new connections and ideas through juxtaposition, a concept that should be integrated into architectural and landscape design practices.

The conclusions, which closes the first theoretical section of the dissertation, holistically integrates the case studies in art, architecture, philosophy, and social studies, reinforcing the connections between artistic and architectural practices in landscape design. *Virtuality as a Dispositif* offers further expansion on the topic and serves as an invitation to explore the second part of the thesis: an *Atlas* intended to gather contemporary artworks with potential for further development.

The second part of the dissertation—an atlas—serves as an appendix. It is divided, as highlighted in conclusion, into three subsequent categories defined by virtuality and found in both artistic and architectural projects. These categories gather contemporary artworks related to three topics: palimpsest, action, and utopia.

The selected artworks offer new perspectives and innovations to the fields of architecture and landscape design, introducing an in-depth exploration of the various facets of virtuality, from the topics of memory and ephemerality to potentiality. While their impact on designers is still unknown, they invite exploration into a topic that has long interacted with design: viewing the landscape as an artist would, prompting exploration of the landscape through contemporary art.

CHAPTER 1

ETYMOLOGIES OF VIRTUALITY AND LANDSCAPE

VIRTUALITY

Grosz, E. A. (2001). *Architecture from the outside: Essays on virtual and real space*. MIT Press.

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Etymology of *virtual* from dictionaries

- *surprise*
- *promise of something different*
- *possible condition of technology*
- *cultural imaginary*
- *self-representation*
- *the immanent in the real*
- *a series of enabling transforming possibilities*
- *deflect and transformed while being transformed in the process*
- *versus its actual relative*
- *space of emergence of the new*
- *the unthought*
- *the unrealized*
- *acquirer of identity (Lacan)*
- *saturation*
- *new way of seeing space*
- *new way of designing space*
- *new way of inhabiting space*
- *augmentation*
- *supplementation*
- *transformation*
- *usage of spaces outside of their conventional functions*
- *the possibility to be otherwise*
- *in-betweenness*
- *undecidability*
- *difference, repetition, iteration*
- *force that is yet to come or perhaps will never be.*
- *coexistence of all of the past in the presence*
- *the past that has not exhausted itself*
- *productivity*
- *capacity of generating innovation*
- *promise*

1.1. Virtualis

The etymology of the word *virtual* derives from the Latin *virtus*, which denotes strength but also encompasses notions of morality and masculinity. In Medieval Latin, *virtualis* came to mean "effective," referring to the state of having the effect on something without necessarily bearing physical appearances. It signifies the presentation of a possibility that has yet to become real.

Various dictionaries and encyclopedias, depending on the language, describe "virtuality" as a transitional state that directs towards the idea of potentiality within certain philosophies of emergence. For example, Encyclopedia Treccani defines virtuality as something existing in power but not in reality, emphasising its intangible nature. Duden German Dictionary describes it as "inherent power," highlighting its latent capabilities, while the Oxford English Dictionary refers to it as "a virtual (as opposed to an actual) thing, quality, (...) something unrealised, a potentiality, a possibility."¹

Despite linguistic differences, a recurring theme is that virtuality represents a state of potentiality and transformation. It is not something fully realised or concrete but rather exists as a latent force—a possibility waiting to be actualised. This idea of virtuality ties into the concept of

openness and the existence of multiple outcomes or meanings, particularly in fields such as art, architecture, or philosophy, where potential and possibility are explored rather than fixed conclusions. The virtual, in this sense, becomes an essential framework for understanding processes, states, and entities that are dynamic and fluid, shaped by their capacity for transition and becoming.

It is important to note that the term *virtual* not only extends beyond the computer-constructed environment but also predates electronic media, which did not define the term *virtuality*, but rather illustrated it in graphical and visual form.² Research on this theory has been pursued by various scholars with the intention to clarify terms that have different meanings in spatial contexts. The concept of *virtuality*, (discussed in this dissertation in relation to landscape) is drawn from the works of philosophers and theorist such as Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi, and Quentin Meillessoux, and extensively explored in the fields of architecture, art theory, and spatial design by Elizabeth Grosz, Whitney Davis and Frank Popper.

In the text of Gilles Deleuze, the term *virtual* refers to "the cloud surrounding the actual"³, and it is said to constitute a complementary aspect of reality.⁴ Defined as a mirror of the actual⁵ —might suggest a manifestation of possibilities of the project offered in its intangible form, based on human memory as an agent of virtual image, complementary to the actual state.⁶ The concept of virtuality in relation to space has been discussed extensively by Elisabeth Grosz in the context of architectural space. In the book *Architecture from the outside: Essays on virtual and real space* (2001), Grosz emphasizes the internal relationship between space and thought through the imaginary, referring to it directly: "Fantasies about the future are always, at least in part, projections, images, hopes, and horrors extrapolated from the present... from its cultural imaginary, its self-representations, and its own latencies or virtualities."⁷ *Virtuality* therefore, renders itself as a sequence of possibilities, a provider of conceptual outlet, which ultimately leads to the transformation of the future.⁸

Grosz is convinced of the usefulness of applying virtuality as operational mode when thinking about space and architecture. "The occupation of any space contains the virtual whole of a spatiality, which is to say, the infinite possibilities of my action"⁹, which suggests, that in order to experience the *virtuality* of a certain place, it takes a person to render its potential— an action to be taken, or imagined.

Virtuality and Landscape

The the eponymous *landscape*, second part of the title, when deconstructed as a singular term, carries different meanings depending on the perspective of an architect, gardener, peasant, art historian, philosopher, or artist. To address this diversity of interpretations, it is essential to establish a framework that includes a detailed examination of the terminology and etymologies of these terms. This careful investigation will be used throughout the thesis to navigate the varied meanings associated with both "virtual" and "landscape."

According to the *European Landscape Convention*, "Landscape" refers to an area, as perceived by people, whose character emerges from the interaction of natural and/or human factors.¹⁰ While the task of universalising of this term, born from a pluralism of translations, remains ongoing, the opening words of the definition leave no ambiguity: it is, across all fields, a product of human perception. The latent outcomes—whether scientific, analytical, creative, or artistic—are the result of the receiver's interpretation. The landscape itself does not exist. It is the human gaze, the engagement, and the reflective intervention that give it shape.

The virtuality of the landscape presents two equivocal concepts combined in a way that sheds new light on architectural design processes, spatial studies, and social studies, discussed through the filter of selected critical theories and analyses of contemporary art projects. Virtuality, therefore, serves as a tool for investigation, and narration, uncovering what occurs within the liminal spaces of the

concept, ultimately leading to the creation of a project.

The juxtaposition of these terms with other definitions and understandings, while exploring their complexities and potentialities, reveals how the landscape is practiced, represented, and self-represented through the lens of virtuality. This examination offers new insights into its capacities, with the potential to expand and enrich the field of spatial design at large.

The ever-changing nature of the landscape extends far beyond a static image that can be defined solely by data. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard's ideas, British cultural geographer Denis E. Cosgrove proposed new terminology to more precisely articulate what "virtual landscapes" embody, suggesting that: "virtual landscapes represent the furthest extension so far of the idea of landscape as a distanced way of seeing developed (...) moving beyond even symbolic landscape, in some representations to landscape simulacra."¹¹ The term originates from Jean Baudrillard's 1981 book *Simulacra and Simulation*. When translating the landscape into Baudrillard's terms, the connection between its visual representation and the actions performed within it is so intertwined that, if severed, it could lead to a stage of hyperreality, resulting in an image that no longer bears any relation to reality. For Baudrillard, one of the key dimensions of "virtuality" is its association with the highest stage of simulation, an ultimate system.¹²

Cosgrove, in his 1998 book *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, explored further the concept of *virtual landscape*. In his texts, the term appears as a rather radical idea, representing a symbolic extreme, a form of arts.¹³ Contrary to reducing it to merely a social layer, Cosgrove argues that the term embodies various, equally valid meanings that transcend the analysis provided by any single discipline:

"The disconnection of landscape from productive social relations with the material earth implied by treating landscape symbolically - as image, text or theatre, for example - and taken to its extreme

in the idea of ‘virtual landscape’ has attracted criticism from a number of writers (...). A dominant concern among them has been to sustain the sense of landscape as a material, geographical object, encompassing both human agency and the material environment, acknowledging its symbolic attributes without reducing it to a mere social construction”¹⁴

The concept of virtual landscapes is intended here as an open-ended term with a transpositional meaning. Following these theories, it resonates with one of the theses of W. J. T. Mitchell, stating that “landscape is not a genre of art but a medium”¹⁵, which suggests a regression from its form of a passive noun, to an active verb, that contains action, enhancing its transitory significance, and rendering it virtual again.

Representation is a consequence of perception, shaped by our knowledge and beliefs, and ultimately influences our behaviours and responses. Artists and designers consciously engage with imagination, developing and expanding concepts and representations—a process that builds upon the inherent responsibilities of their professions. As they expand the virtual layers imposed on our surroundings, the original meanings evolve into further, often unexpressed notions (extending, enhancing, augmenting). These layers span various dimensions, from historical to political, technological to imaginary. The aim here is to unravel the significance of rendering these layers within the context of landscape and to explore the images and projected expectations they invoke. **How do people engage with the landscape, and which potential lies in the invisible and intangible? How does artistic creation negotiate between the human and the environment, and how virtuality might be involved in that process?**

Virtuality, by definition, is a realm of potential—a constructed world that exists within the collective consciousness of society at large. It holds the power to shape our thinking and perception of a place, exerting a tangible impact on our experiences and interactions.

Cultural Virtualization

Can the perception of nature exist outside the cultural prism? Cosgrove and Mitchell argue that it cannot, asserting that the ideological dimension of landscape is integral to its imagery. As Cosgrove observes, “Landscape as a geographical concept cannot be free of the ideological overlays of its history as a visual concept unless it subjects landscape to historical interrogation.”¹⁶ In the contemporary era of the internet—a vast universe of images—globalization, culture, technology, politics, and migration have undergone profound transformations. Considering the perspectives of these scholars, how should we interpret the depictions of landscapes circulating online? The current dilemma lies in understanding how this cloud of image-based information connects to the broader picture and how technology, politics, and society converge to create new meanings and knowledge.

Landscape, as the focus of these explorations, resonates with this duality, being present in every human life both consciously and subconsciously. The visual world, with its natural wonders and sublime beauty, is far more tangible than humanity’s attempts to impose meaning upon it. Through associations, analysis, and interpretations, we create an overlay on nature, striving to make sense of it. By isolating its elements—the clouds, the sun, the sky, the fauna, and flora—we attribute metaphysical significance to the environment, imbuing it with cultural and semiotic meanings that extend beyond the purely realistic and material level.

Virtuality as a reflexive and meta-analytical tool to better comprehend the interplay between the past, present, and potential future. When translated into other fields, it might serve as a reflexive commentary on contemporary developments, whether in science or art. It represents a multitude of narratives, carrying the potential for becoming within its current, present state. It embodies various states, including uncertainty, suggesting a constantly evolving nature. These states of change reach their climax

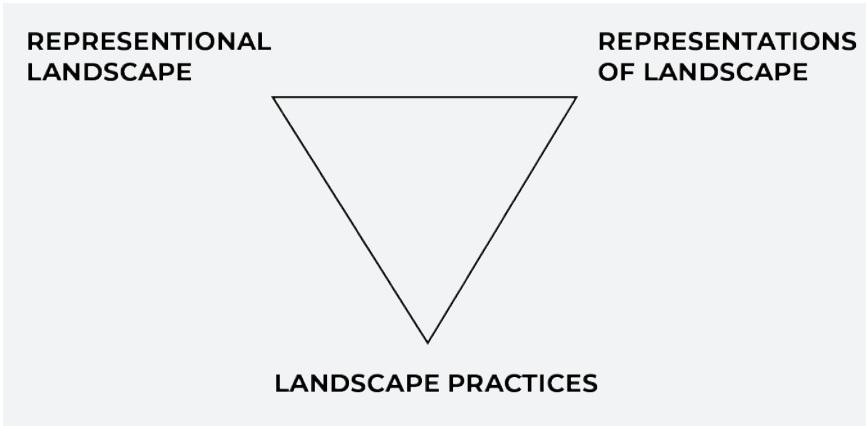
in the artistic context, offering a unique, non-normative perspective for designers, architects, and landscapers. This perspective encourages a fresh view of landscapes through the lens of artistic disciplines, which vividly intersect with architecture, landscape, and spatial studies. Visual arts, language, architecture, and cultural production at large serve as tools to expand upon the concept of landscape rather than constrain it, especially in the current age of reproduction and diffusion of information through contemporary media. Referring to W.J.T. Mitchell, landscape should, in fact, be considered a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other.¹⁷

The lack of consensus among scholars, theorists, and artists highlights the kaleidoscopic complexity of what a virtual landscape might mean. This dissertation proposes not to impose boundaries on the meaning of virtual landscapes, but seeks to explore what the virtuality of landscapes might suggest within an extended context.

The Production of Space

This perspective aligns seamlessly with Henri Lefebvre's idea that the realm of human understanding is a negotiation process embedded in a social context. In 1974, when Lefebvre published *The Production of Space*, his inquiry culminated in the *Spatial Triad*, which defined space as primarily a social construct situated within the interplay of social, physical, and mental modes of organization. This concept bears similarities to the notion of virtuality, which, as a state of emergence, stimulates the evolution of human imagination, functioning primarily within the mental space.

Translating Lefebvre's Spatial Triad into the concept of landscape provides a framework that can help understand contemporary perceptions of this phenomenon and organize categories of artistic interest related to it. To understand landscape as a virtually rendered product of social interplay, one must consider the act of ongoing space production as a fundamental experience of the world,¹⁸ which is inherent to each and every human being. Previous records of space



simultaneously alter and influence this experience. Beyond mere formal representation, and incorporating internal subjective imperatives, Lefebvre insists that the activities pursued within the landscape must be taken as a whole.¹⁹ However, dissecting its pillars might provide an additional knowledge to the subject.

Diagram interpreting Henri Lefebvre Production of Landscape: credits: author, based on Henri Lefebvre's theory 2024

Representations of landscape relate to the symbolic and iconographic depiction of what is perceived. This involves recording the abstract and codified representations, that are capturing the essence of the landscape.

Representational landscape refers to a lived experience through associated, coded, often hidden images embedded in society's imagination. It functions as the space that imagination seeks to change and appropriate, overlaying physical space with cultural and symbolic meanings.

Landscape practices involve behaviors and interactions within a given environment, "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation"²⁰ has written Lefebvre. These practices reflect both individual and societal engagement with certain places, creating a personal connection and fostering a sense of community linkage.

The reception of *The Production of Space* predominantly permeated the fields of geographical, urban, and architectural studies, yet in philosophy and political studies, it did not gain wide recognition.²¹ Lefebvre himself suggests

applying his theory to a multitude of spaces: within buildings, monuments, works of art, and as "a tool for the analysis of society."²²

Lefebvre's theory on the science of space connects its materialistic aspects with intangible ideas, exploring how the creation of space is governed by social preconceptions. **Narrowing Lefebvre's theory to the specific phenomenon of landscape provides a way to more meticulously reflect the intentions of artists working with this subject and explicitly outline a field of artistic inquiry.** Whether it is a still or moving image, a concept, a performance, a sound, or a record on the subject of landscape, its production stems from an artist's perception of space shaped by the *Spatial Triad*.

In what ways are Lefebvre's theories relevant and timely? First of all, they provide an opportunity to spatially embrace the phenomenon of people, spaces, and cultures without the constant dichotomy between representation and action embedded in the landscape. In 2010, Mieke Bal expanded on this distinction in her essay *Timely Remains*:

"Instead of resting on a distinction between nature and culture, landscape evidences the impossibility of making such a distinction. The term indicates an arrangement of the environment by the human gaze, whether this arrangement leads to the landscaping of nature or to its representation in painting. And instead of enabling humans to bypass representation, the idea of landscape catches humans within a web of representational strategies and the resulting events."²³

The resulting strategies in the theory of arts are varied: from ecofeminism, which spatially reinterprets the landscape as a non-hierarchical and holistic phenomenon; Yi-Fu Tuan's theory of *Topophilia* (1974), which considers the perception of space as the result of emotional engagement; to Arturo Escobar's *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes* (2008), where landscape is explored through politics and culture, with ecological issues framed by neoli-

beral economies that shape our land and reality. Lefebvre's theory provided an opportunity for further development due to the universality of *Spatial Triad* and its striking relevance. It remains contemporary in its attitude and can be revisited and reinterpreted in the context of technological, social, and ecological changes. This theory offers inspiration for rethinking the topic of landscape and its meaning in an ever-evolving world.

The most important unanswered question about the overlap is whether virtuality can serve as a vehicle for a broader understanding of landscape, and if so, how it will manifest. The key focus of this dissertation is to unpack artistic production as the virtual dimension that overlaps with landscape. Artistic production thus becomes a tool to examine the topic from diverse perspectives, embodying the qualities inherent in the virtual dimension. Landscape is analyzed from this viewpoint because it is a construct deeply embedded within the arts—ranging from moving and still images to recorded actions. These references will be examined in the second part of the dissertation, *Atlas*, which will uncover the ever-changing and transformative paradigm of landscape. The collection of case studies from contemporary art will illustrate how art-making is intrinsically linked to the mediation between humans and nature, and what new connections and relationships emerge

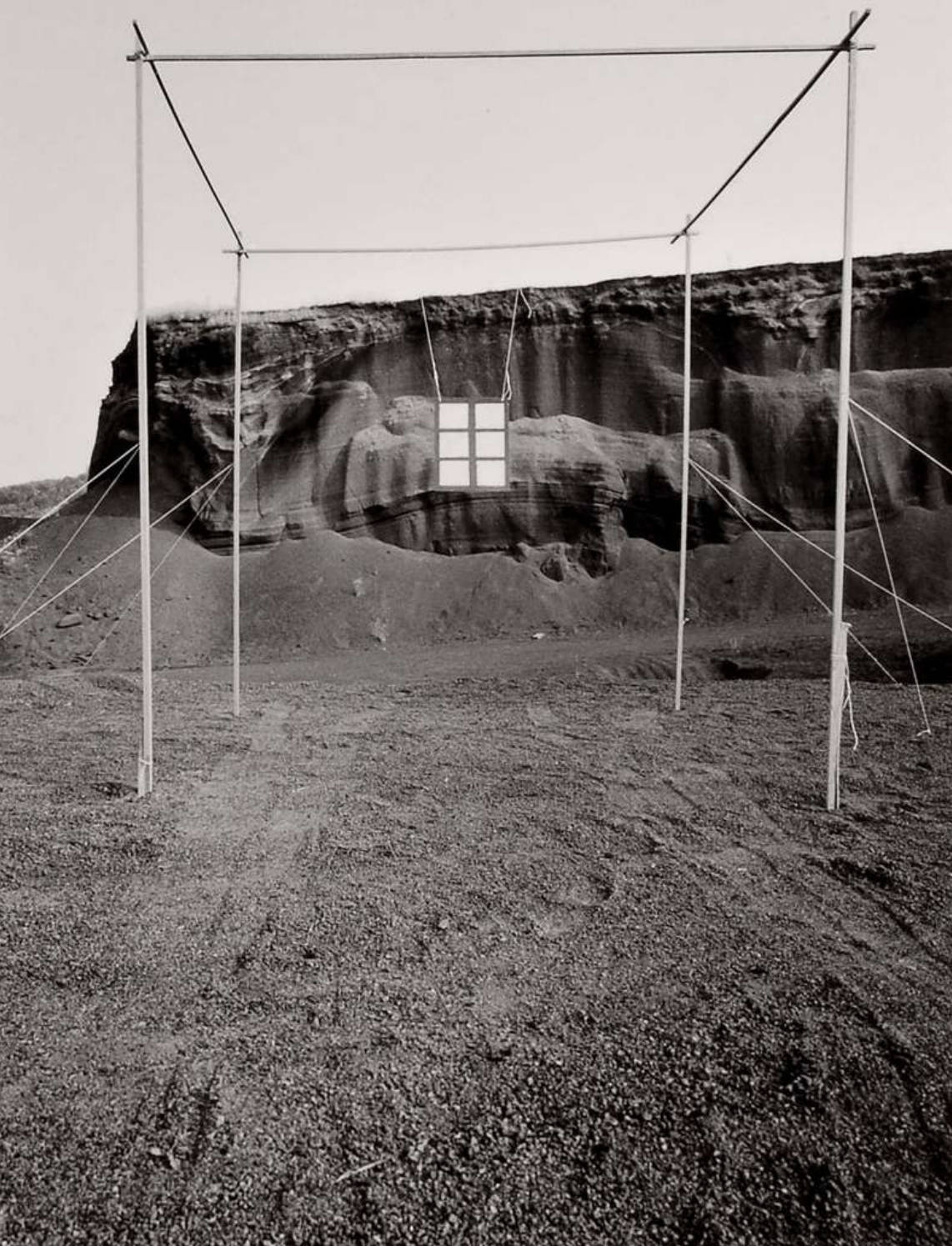
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right:
 Bas Jan Ader,
Broken fall (organic),
 film still,
 1971-1994





1.2. Technology: Contemporary Medium

"The virtual encompasses much more than the technological: indeed, it is the condition of the possibility of technology. "

Elisabeth Grosz
Architecture from the Outside:
Essays on Virtual and Real Space (2001)

"The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness," wrote Giorgio Agamben in his seminal work *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Those words encourage to be present and careful, while observing the world changing in synchronization with the development of the double edged sword of our times: technology.

In his 1954 work *The Question Concerning Technology*, Martin Heidegger explores the relationship between humans and technology from an ontological perspective. Heidegger argues that technology is not merely a means to an end but is fundamentally intertwined with human existence. He emphasizes that the Greek term *techne*, which refers to craft or skill, reflects technology's deeper role in revealing and shaping our understanding of reality.

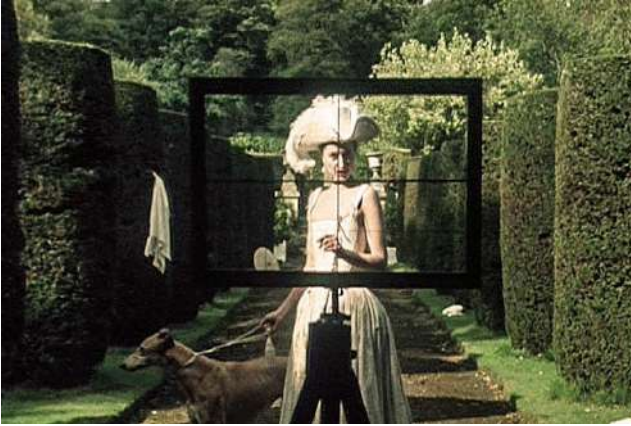
left:
Ettore Sottsass,
Architettura Virtuale,
photograph,
1973

Contrasting it with the conventional notion of technology as way of crafting and using specific tool, Heidegger underlines how technology interacts with our bodies and senses, augmenting and extending our reality, to the certain point of integration, we are chained to, whether we want it or not.¹ Philosophers have long recognised technology as an apparatus that enables humans to engage with and extend their intentions towards potentiality. Heidegger, however, delves into the essence of technology, arguing that its true nature lies not in its material or instrumental aspects but in its capacity to reveal and encompass reality. In his view, technology is a form of *aletheia*—a process through which what is hidden is brought into presence and revealed.²

According to Heidegger, the essence of technology lies in the concept of *Enframing* (Gestell).³ Human perception operates similarly to such an instrument, transforming the environment into a landscape. Enframing acts as a setting that turns nature into a resource for efficient use, much like the frame of a photograph extracts and defines the meaning of a landscape within the image.

For architects, landscape architects, and designers, the most pressing concern is the difficulty of thinking outside the technological framework. The immense capabilities, but also the limitations, of computer programs dictate a specific *modus operandi*, whereas pencil drawing once allowed different freedom of expression. While both media—when viewed through Heidegger's lens—qualify as technologies, one is undoubtedly more predetermined than the other. To work with sensitivity and an authentic way of being means embracing diverse practices, remaining open to otherness, and cultivating a conscious relationship with technology. This approach seeks to expand possibilities by simultaneously looking towards the past and the future, rather than confining oneself within the boundaries of prevailing, available machines.

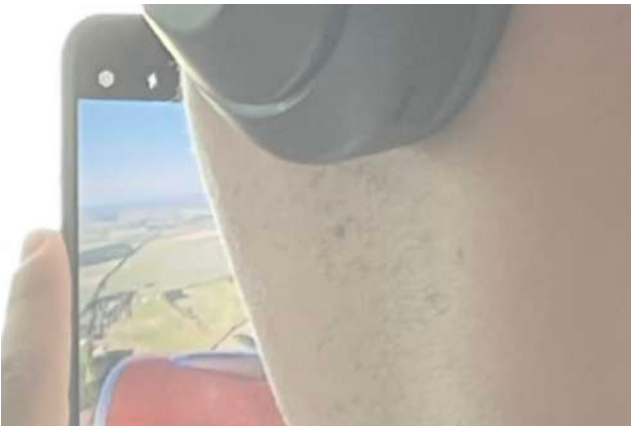
Perspective on technology is proposed by philosopher Bruno Latour, who suggests understanding technology as an expansive force, extending beyond mere utilitarianism.



left:
dir. Peter Greenaway
*Draughtsman
Contract*,
film still,
1982



left:
Alexandra Leykauf,
12 Landscapes stills,
video,
2016



left:
Photograph of a man
capturing landscape
with a smartphone
from the plane,
photo of the author,
2023

Similarly, he mentions: "technologies belong to the human world in a modality other than that of instrumentality, efficiency, or materiality."⁴ Latour suggests that technology transcends these conventional aspects, influencing various layers of human life. Indeed, contemporary technologies have profound implications for societal behaviour and art production. In today's society, where technologies such as the internet, smartphones, and social media are central to daily life, communication, and commerce, widespread connectivity and rapid information exchange have become the norm. This transformation significantly impacts privacy, security, access to information, and interpersonal interactions. Developments in communication and information technologies over the past two decades have also profoundly altered the ways in which geopolitical issues are addressed.

To comprehend how landscapes are produced, perceived, and consumed today, it is essential to consider the media that permeate 21st-century society. This media landscape continuously evolves, both reflecting and shaping societal changes. In this interconnected present, engaging with technology involves navigating various temporalities and layers of time. This constantly evolving dynamic will be explored in this thesis through case studies of contemporary art that highlight the omnipresence of technology as a factor with far-reaching societal consequences. These artworks, while seemingly remote, are deeply embedded in networks of all kinds, exemplifying the intricate interplay between technology and art. Landscape itself emerges as a network—a complex assemblage of objects, terms, and definitions.

Following up on the 'contemporary', as the cross-reference, that is a commentator of the changing events, —a description of something occurring in the present of time. On the other hand, Roland Barthes is suggesting a dialectical approach to the experience of presence, proposing that the contemporary is perpetually one step behind and intricately connected to the past. "The contemporary is the untimely"⁵ a relationship, that can exist only through certain rapture and inconsistency, concluded in his studies on the literature of Nietzsche, showing the dialectical approach towards

the experience of the presence, that is always one step behind and holds a strong, intricate relation to the past. For Agamben the contemporary is a moment of perplexity and dissonance, a perplexity of situating in time and space: 'Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it, through a disjunction and an anachronism.'¹⁶

Anachronisms will be defined through an analysis of virtuality, spatial notions and its relationship with 'anachronic' or 'historical' case studies from modern and contemporary art. This includes artworks from the 20th century shaped by the ideas of modernist and postmodernist movements. The aim is to understand how these artists, exhibitions, and artworks have influenced the perception, imagination, and creative potential of contemporary artists engaging with landscapes today.

"Comrades of Time" by Boris Groys

In popular culture, 'contemporary' often denotes recent achievements or developments across fields such as art, architecture, and landscape. Boris Groys attempts to answer the question 'What is contemporary art?', by contextualising it in the world of today. Groys defines its qualities as being immediately present, arguing that art is truly contemporary and authentic if it embodies 'the presence of the present in a way that is radically uncorrupted by past traditions or strategies aimed at success in the future.'¹⁷ This perspective stands in contrast to Giorgio Agamben's view, which suggests that contemporary art should not sever its connection with the past but instead engage with it in a continuum of overlapping contexts.

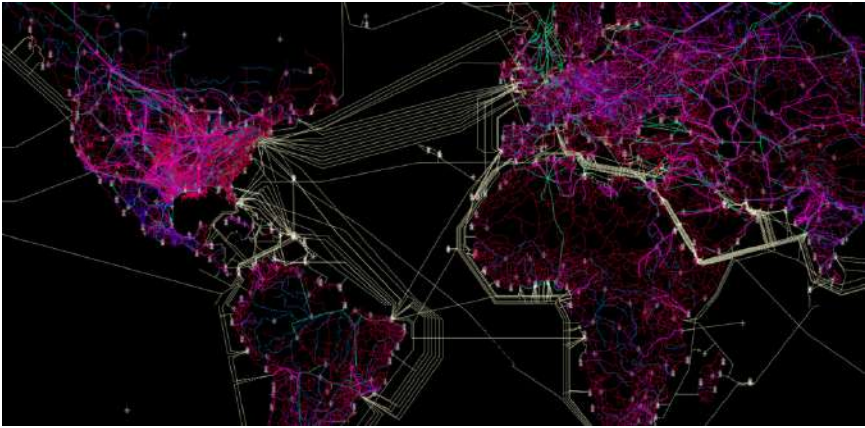
According to Joseph Paul Hodin, a Czechoslovak art critic and historian, creating contemporary definitions of certain terms should proceed through the examination of previous definitions in a critical terms and with defined concept in mind, to determine which parts of the definition

will remain, and which should give space to new elements.⁸ The idea to critically examine the works of contemporary arts in the landscape through the lens of virtuality might work as a medium to understand nature in broader context and provide direction to today's designers, which element needs reexamination, and which issues needs emphasis. There is a need for *presence* to decide what should stay, or what should be let go.

Exploring potentiality in relation to time, Groys suggests examining the disjunction between the past and the future as a definition of the present. He states, "Present is initially something that hinders us in our realization of everyday (or non-everyday) projects, something that prevents our smooth transition from the past to the future."⁹ This perspective allows the seamless entry of innovation, without the doubt of preserving the old, and includes the ubiquitous technology and socio-cultural impact of the Internet, which have changed the accessibility of knowledge and the distribution of imagery. In this dissertation, I will focus specifically on the artistic production of landscape, nature, and environment, and the artists who are at the forefront, conceptually marking and referring to the prevailing issues.

The approach here is based on redefining theories within their specific disciplines and applying them in a cross-disciplinary manner. By altering their meanings and adapting them to the field of this research, we can better understand the representation of nature as both a cultural practice in art and an expression of a broader social context. Here, I would like to highlight two interconnected facts that coexist simultaneously.

Firstly, contemporary Western society is inextricably immersed in the Information Age. According to available data 5,52 billion people on the planet, are using internet as of October 2024,¹⁰ which is equal to 67,5% of world's population. The reality of the 21st century, in an interconnected world, finds itself under the hegemony of technological advancement, irrespective of our consent. The state of virtuality in this context is even more complex because it is



constantly shaped by our exposure to technological developments. These advancements are intuitively used and creatively adapted as they emerge. The overlap between technology, connectivity, and geography was discussed by Parag Khanna in his book *Connectography* (2016) :

Aleks Buczkowski,
Connectivity Atlas,
2016.
Retrieved from:
Geo Awesome.
In yellow line shown
the physical geography
of the interconnected
world - through
internet cables.

“Mega-infrastructures overcome the hurdles of both natural and political geography...In this new era, the de jure world of political borders is giving way to the de facto world of functional connections. Borders tell us who is divided from whom by political geography. Infrastructure tells us who is connected to whom via functional geography. As the lines that connect us supersede the borders that divide us, functional geography is becoming more important than political geography...”¹¹

Consequently, the interplay between the human and the artificial is closely connected to geographical terms and surveillance. Technology has so seamlessly permeated society that immediate connectivity somehow blurs the constantly ongoing modifications. This renders the invisible layer of technological impact even harder to distinguish. Yet certain artists are making an effort to shed light on ambiguous topics, such as Trevor Paglen, whose artistic practice focuses on critiquing and commenting on the global presence of technology intertwined with society and nature. Informa-



tion transmitters in the landscape are shaping not only its material aspect but also becoming a metaphor for the changing environment. Pristine landscapes with mega-satellite dishes, electric grids, and radomes represent the extension of what technology ultimately signifies: a transformation in society, surveillance, and on geopolitics.

left:
Trevor Paglen
89 Landscapes,
video stills
2015

Secondly, landscape, as a topic of contemporary artistic inquiry, focuses on the practice of constant observation and attention to ongoing changes in the cultural and social spheres, rather than blindly adopting technological development as an impulse for change. The etymology of the word "development" in German, *Entwicklung*, comes from the word *wickeln*—to unwind. The suggestion of unwinding is quite symbolic here and connects to the earlier discussion of the contemporary. Similarly, a thread of the present unwinds, becoming clear through the notion of development, emerging from a not fully understood tangle of the past. This suggests that development not only maintains continuity with the past but also simplifies complex problems. In other words, it is "unwrapping" the future to clarify and organize it anew, anchored as an unexplained mystery in the past, with numerous implications.

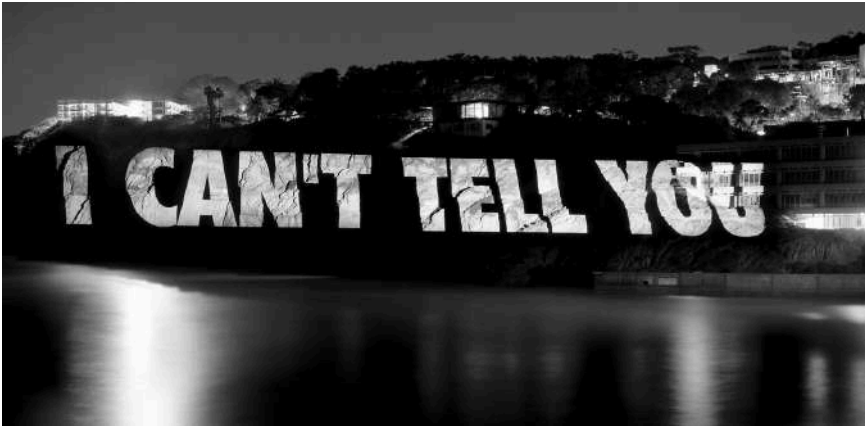
The question remains: how can virtuality bring this life-form to the landscape and reveal its potentiality? Through the interconnectedness of the world, the process of creating an artwork extends beyond a static subject, with the landscape offering many forms of imagination and creation. It refers to the unthought, the unrealized, and new ways of perceiving and utilizing spaces with conventional functions. *Virtuality* manifests itself in the creative process as a space for the continuous cultivation of culture in diverse forms, enriched by a multitude of thoughts and associated yet unrealized ideas. From artistic to design projects, the element of change and transformation must be present to fully grasp the essence of the creative process, both in art and design.

The Internet. Information Landscape

The challenges of the 21st century continuously present new problems and questions, many of which were previously neglected. Issues such as climate change, excessive urban growth, water crises, migration, and wars are increasingly affecting the landscape, gaining momentum through the rapid dissemination of information via the World Wide Web.

Nicholas Negroponte's 1995 prediction that digital living would eliminate geographical constraints, such as ubiquitous telepresence, has proven partially inaccurate. Instead of diminishing, space has become more complex and intertwined with its digital aspects. While digital networking has facilitated communication and information transfer across distances, effectively collapsing physical space, it has also rendered physical location less crucial. This shift has introduced a new, abstract digital space that expands our understanding of spatial limits. With the pervasive influence of technology permeating every aspect of our lives, society now faces a blurred division between what is technologically driven and what is considered 'natural' or 'artificial.' These concepts increasingly overlap and contaminate each other within this intricate geography of relations. The spirit of the 1990s was enthusiastic about technological development, yet the reality aligns more closely with Heidegger's thoughts on technology as an enframing of reality.

The science fiction boom of the 20th century emerged as a response to the rapid scientific advancements following the 19th century. It explored and expanded our understanding of the human relationship with technology, providing a speculative imagination and futurist approaches, that allowed for the contemplation of both ideal and dystopian futures. These speculative narratives often predicted profound shifts in society, envisioning entirely new realities. The 21st century witnessed a revival of virtual environments—computer-generated, artificial, and digital spaces—as tools to experiment, with the aid of what machines and technology can visualise for us. Yet, even while encapsulating the essence of evolution and simulating or augmenting reality



towards the realm of fantasy and fiction, the basis of human perception remains the same: rooted in senses, imagination, and cultural presumptions. The concept called "landscape" as perceived by each human being, is essentially an internal interpretation of reality—a subjective encounter of human perceptiveness with the environment at large. The virtuality of such an encounter, is necessarily mediated and shaped by the subject's specific cultural conditioning, knowledge, memory and intentions.

up:
Jenny Holzer,
*Jenny Holzer: I feel you,
I ask you, I don't ask, I
don't wait, I won't ask
you, I can't tell you, I lie,*
video,
2007

In the novel *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), Robert D. Putnam describes how the growth of American cities leads to the dispersal of social capital. The resulting urban sprawl forces people to live further from the city center and from habitual social interactions, changing the landscape of the city and social interactions.¹² According to Putnam, this trend would eventually result in individuals being confined to their homes, using virtual reality helmets to escape into another dimension, thereby contributing to the decay of social capital. This illustrates how technology can permeate culture to such an extent that distinguishing between reality and virtuality becomes increasingly difficult.

Similarly, the discourse on the environment, landscape, and spatial design has been deeply influenced by technological advancements. Nicolas Negroponte, in 1995 book *Being*

Digital, observed that digital culture profoundly affects individual, highlighting how digital environments reshape our understanding of space and interaction, further blurring the lines between the physical and the virtual.¹³ In this spirit, 2012 video installation *Domestic Mountain* of Andreas Angelidakis literally posits a landscape as a mix of natural and artificial environment, spotlighting the idea of "modern home" of today - being made of packaging of goods ordered online - a landscape shaped by logistical flows and currents.

Today's experience of landscape is deeply rooted in the common imagination of Western society, shaped by established canons, genres and conventions, that is transferred through the internet. In parallel, technology accentuates the characteristic features of contemporary society, offering new modes of operation. As we delve into these new technological landscapes, we understand that there is no longer a division between lived experience, and the "untruth" of virtual experience.

Technology offers more than using imagination without moving the body, but it position the body in a different ways and for different purposes, alike in a 2007 video of Jenny Holzer¹⁴, where the use of technology over the existing environment, though did not physically impacting it, the monumentality of the visual experience of projecting simple phrases on the landscape proved subversive, virtually changing its notion.

Today, the internet plays a crucial role in research, art, architecture, and landscape design. Boris Groys highlights its significance, stating:

“At first sight, the Internet seems to be as cool, if not cooler, than television, because it activates users, seducing, or even forcing them into active participation. However, sitting in front of the computer and using the Internet, you are alone—and extremely focused. If the Internet is participatory, it is so in the same sense that literary space is. Here and there, anything that enters these spaces is noticed by other

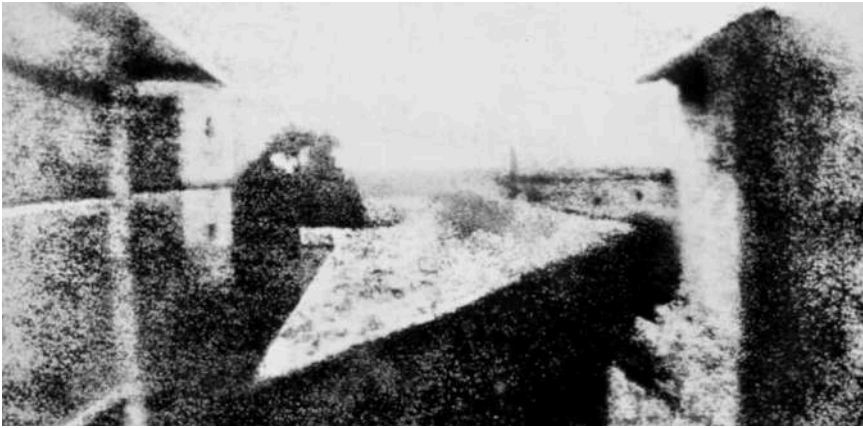
participants, provoking reactions from them, which in turn provoke further reactions, and so forth. However, this active participation takes place solely within the user's imagination, leaving his or her body unmoved.¹⁵

The internet has brought the imaginary and abstract into the realm of the real, allowing for unprecedented connectiveness and the immediate accessibility of distant references that were previously unreachable due to social or geopolitical constraints. The impact of these media continues to be studied, as the distinction between the real and the virtual, in sense of potential of being simultaneously exposed to the certain amount of information coming from the internet as an agent of the visual and cultural distributor.

"no particular medium of expression has a monopoly on the virtual. Every medium, however "low" technologically, really produces its own virtuality (yes, even painting). "Digital art" is in no way synonymous with "virtual reality.". That matters is the "how" of the expression, not the "What" of the medium, and especially not the simple abstractness of the elements that the medium allows to be combined".¹⁶

The question of the medium and how it changed the way visual information is spread remains pivotal. In this context and under these circumstances, contemporary art has emerged in response to these volatile conditions, addressing society's present concerns, becoming the subject of scholarly investigation, and shaping the perception of space and landscape production through museum exhibitions and related pedagogy.

The internet, and the way it impacted and added a layer of ambiguity to these problems, demonstrates how the representation of landscapes might be prone to manipulation. This manipulation, in turn, affects the meaning of information perceived and impacts the real world. Referring again to the famous work of Jenny Holzer, through its monumentality and widespread impact on the internet in the first



up:
Joseph Nicéphore
Niépce
"View from the
Window at Le Gras,"
reproduction,
considered the world's
first photograph,
ca 1826

decade of the 21st century, she became a world-recognised artist able to channel people's attention. This is deeply intertwined and adheres to all creative sectors, including architecture and landscape architecture, where designers often strive to respond to topics significant to public debate—debates that are frequently at the core of artistic projects.

Global Image Circulation

"View from the Window at Le Gras" by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 is considered the first photograph ever taken and marks the beginning of the large-scale circulation of images. This early photographic experiment set the stage for the development of mass media. Moving forward in history, the radio, invented by Marconi in 1895, can be considered the first mass medium in the true sense of the word, transmitting content in real time and directly to receivers over a distance. This wireless technology allowed the dissemination of information through sound over the ether, proving to be an efficient means of informing the public about current events and describing reality through spoken language.

In 1927, John Logie Baird revolutionised telecommunications by demonstrating the first television broadcast, which combined moving images and sound. The appeal of moving images and sound quickly reshaped how society received and consumed information on a grand scale, expo-



sing audiences to landscapes and events they might never have witnessed otherwise. Architect and educator Alfredo Thierman notes: “The construction of the media-saturated environments we inhabit began more than 100 years ago, when radio started to populate the ether, when television entered the domestic space, and up to the present day, when the internet seems to cover every single aspect of our daily lives.”¹⁷

up:
Charles O’Rear,
“The Bliss,”
1996.
Default wallpaper of
the operating system
of Microsoft’s Windows
XP

To emphasise the scale of the phenomenon that marked the beginning of the millennium, it is important to mention what is widely regarded as one of the most recognisable landscapes in the world. *The Bliss*, a photograph taken by former National Geographic photographer Charles O’Rear in 1996 in Napa Valley, California, became iconic as the default wallpaper for Windows XP, launched by Microsoft in October 2001. Seen by nearly a billion people, it represents not just a photograph but an image that has permeated our global consciousness, transcending cultures and geographies. The experience of being contemporary, mediated by personal computers and widespread digital dissemination, is epitomised within this landscape photograph.

The significance of the photograph lies in its ability to evoke emotional responses through virtual portrayal, at the brink of historical change, which is what looking at the photograph on the computer essentially meant. It embodied the

longing of an entire generation, visualising a window to a new world and new ways of being, working, and living. At the verge of the new millennium, with high hopes for the democratisation of technology, there was little discussion of the threat of monopolisation by technological companies. The serene, lush, and idyllic landscape in the photograph came to symbolise a broader, more globalised outlook. As personal computers became common in Western households—and soon globally—followed by smartphones at the turn of the millennium, *The Bliss* also marked a stage of change. Its signifier as a simple, tranquil landscape transformed into a symbol of the technological domestication of society, and the rapid spread of the digital realm became a shadow and inseparable counterpart, supplanting the physical 'first' reality and rendering it de facto secondary.

It is unsurprising that the internet has taken over as the primary provider and source of information about the world, whether real or fabricated, blurring the distinction between these two states of being and becoming the provider of images from all around the world. It has incorporated and integrated contemporary mediums that were once separate, uniting them. Simultaneously, it has deeply penetrated the fields of art, architecture, landscape design, and research, merging still and moving images—both recorded and generated—as well as sound and text information. If we consider personal experiences mediated through the internet, they carry real occurrences with tangible consequences. A child bullied on Instagram feels real pain; a Zoom call with family members serves as a genuine family gathering; trading bitcoins results in actual gains or losses.¹⁸

It has transformed the strategies designers use to access references and secure commissions that support the design process. This new reality enables architects to follow and respond to cultural trends taking place on the other side of the world. Websites such as ArchDaily, Dezeen, and Designboom announce newly constructed projects and global competition opportunities. As Paul Virilio noted, "With the new means of transportation and transmission, the new virtual tools, it is humanity that gives itself wildly extravagant

dimensions, and the earth that reveals its limits."¹⁹

The internet has influenced the creative design process by providing accessible art references and a vast quantity of images. The advent of digital media has transformed how landscapes are experienced and represented, placing an infinite number of images within reach in a fraction of a second. While viewing photographs and videos on a screen cannot replicate the physical sensation of being there, these digital representations greatly enrich visual knowledge and contribute to mental imagery. Likewise, designers now have the ability to create remotely, using internet maps and three-dimensional models to assess sites.

The internet's interconnectedness also highlights the damaging impact of human activities on the planet: images of burning forests, melting glaciers, and floods are visualised through open-access photos, Google Maps' three-dimensional views, and real-time photos shared on social platforms. This convergence of digital media creates a virtual space that shapes societal behaviors, reflecting the influence of these environmental realities on our collective consciousness. The World Wide Web's impact lies not only in its role as a medium—whether photography, painting, video, television, or radio—but in its power to alter how we think about place through its expansive potential for distribution. There is no doubt that the internet influences society's daily responses to reality. Reports shared online can encourage or discourage travellers from visiting certain areas, and images of climate change presented to a wider audience reinforce the perception of it as a real and immediate threat. Real-time information shapes conscious or unconscious decisions about engaging with or avoiding specific places. This interconnected system of potentialities fosters new interpretations of the world, selectively incorporating the vast influx of available information.

In the creative design process, it is crucial to incorporate information beyond the fields of architecture and landscape. The internet, as a meta-medium, has proven to be a blend of data and references, spanning from sacred to everyday the-

mes, from academic knowledge to colloquial insights, and from newly created content to classical texts. Serving as a primary source of orientation, it provides initial information and visual data essential to the creative process.

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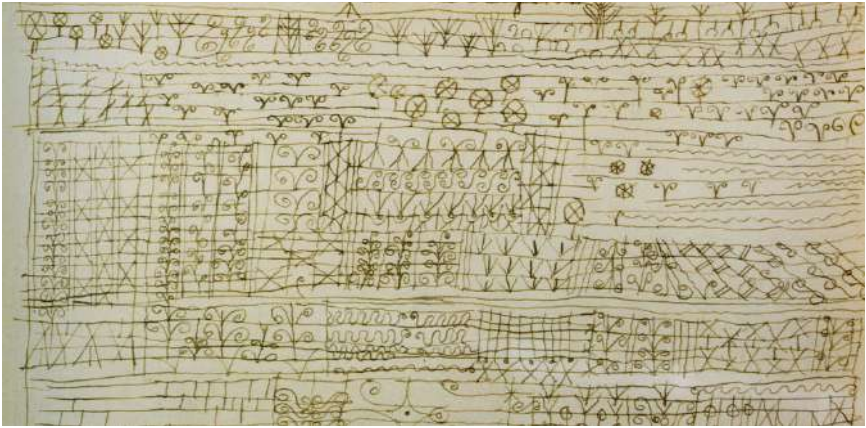
1.3 Landscape as Artistic, Scientific and Cultural Subject

"One's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to Place, without which the universe would become insignificant and would scarcely exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers. And in this light technology is less dangerous than the spirits [génies] of the Place."

Emanuel Levinas 1961
Heidegger, Gagarin and Us

How do artistic manifestations transform our understanding of contemporary landscapes and redefine the conventional notions of landscape? Artistic representations of landscape are found at the nexus of fields such as art history, geography, literature, philosophy, politics, and sociology. As Boris Groys wrote in 2024:

“Van Gogh wandered through fields in search of motifs for his paintings; Heidegger lived in a village. Both Van Gogh and Heidegger shared with the peasant woman the same work of the cultivation of the earth—and thus belonged to the same culture. It is this culture, this life-form, that is, according to Heidegger, the origin of the work of art. It also constitutes an artwork in itself. When we are living inside



a certain culture it means that we are living inside an artwork. A painting, like Van Gogh's painting, reveals this life-form that otherwise would remain hidden from our view."¹

up:
"Horticulture"
1925
author: Paul Klee
Pen on paper mounted
on card

The question here arises: how this life-form turns into the landscape and reveal its potentiality? Landscape offers many forms of imagination and creation, a place of **continuous cultivation of culture** in many different forms, thinking, writing and other expressions of artistic creation.

As noted in *Landscape Theory* by DeLue and Elkins, there is no master narrative or historiographic genealogy that can frame interpretations universally.² The existing complexity and plurality inherent in interpreting artistic depictions of landscape vary from solely aesthetic to ideological. A landscape might signify the surroundings of a geographical location. It might suggest territory, and, beyond this term, power. Artistic depictions of landscape have historically had different meanings, suggestively formulating certain worldviews, from maps to landscape paintings. Landscape has often been seen as a human construct arising from the interplay between humans and nature, through positioning of the observer.

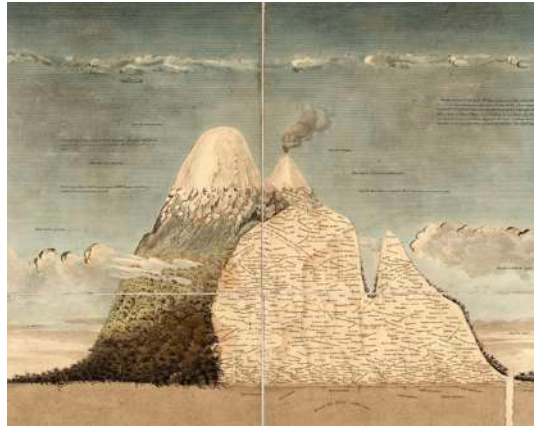
Denis Cosgrove further emphasizes the ideological dimension of landscape, highlighting the historical and cul-

tural overlays that shape our understanding of the surrounding environment. This perspective engages deeply with the dialogue of artistic expression, presenting landscape as a product of cultural and societal zeitgeist. In retrospective text included in *Landscape Theory*, Cosgrove reflects that his main aim was to shift landscape studies away from the dominant fields of geography and design, which prevailed in 1984, towards critical historiography, as well as social and cultural studies. Landscape thus became a way of seeing, a means of positioning a person within history, a social group, or in relation to the surrounding land.³

Other scholars, like Jay Appleton and W. J. T. Mitchell, have proposed that instead of perceiving landscape as a genre of art, we should view it as a medium that reflects the perceptual, experiential, and epistemic systems through which individuals project their subjective interpretations onto the environment. The emphasis is placed on landscape's transgressive qualities, particularly regarding its physical and material appearance. At the same time Jay Appleton has referred to landscape as "a kind of backcloth to the whole stage of human activity."⁴ which brings to mind an almost theatrical set up. Yet withing this idea there is a recurring motif of a play, an action to be pursued towards and within.

The difference among scholars was not whether to bring the landscape into focus, but how far to move it from the object of painting on the wall, or a backdrop to human activity, to the dynamic, in-situ creation of mind and relations of visual, cultural, social, and natural interactions. What Lefebvre continued to support was that space does not exist on its own; rather, it is *produced* by a human agent.

Although landscapes often result in visual representations, they are formed through perceptual, experiential, and epistemic systems—subjective projections of individuals onto the environment, and vice versa. This theory, supported by Cosgrove, who primarily understands landscape as: "a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring, or symbolizing surroundings."⁵ It is the constant exchange of information and negotiation between



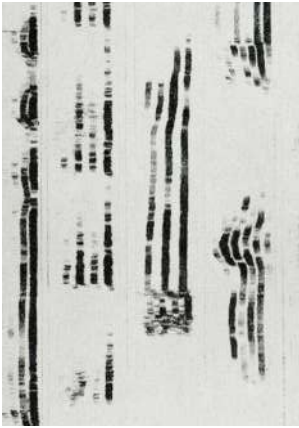
human, nature, and culture, creating in a certain way a complementary system.

Art serves as a mediator between the natural environment and humanity, contextualising both the present and the past, and often acting as an agent of experience or a mode of redemption. In this form, the landscape becomes a testimony of time. It is an expression of geopolitical manifestation and a phenomenon that encompasses a variety of social inequalities, climate crisis threats, expressions of societal vulnerability, identities, and imaginaries. Paul Valéry, primarily a poet and essayist, believed that language is a method to organise the world and defined art criticism as “a type of literature that either condenses or expands upon, highlights or organizes, or endeavors to reconcile all the thoughts that arise when one encounters the artwork,” a view emphasizing the active endeavour of humanity, to bring order to the chaos of elements, to describe and visualise systems that are describing the world.

In this sense, science, art, and critical description were synthesised in the 19th century. Let's take an example of Alexander von Humboldt, who compulsively mixed his geographical discoveries with language and representation, mixing visual art, science and literature. As a natural scientist with a humanist ethos, Humboldt detached the notion of landscape from its purely visual interpretation and tran-

up left :
Horace-Bénédict de
Saussure,
Cyanometer,
device measuring the
blueness of the sky,
1789

up right:
Alexander von
Humboldts,
*Tableau physique des
Andes et pays voisins*,
1807



up right and left:
György Kepes
"The New Landscape in
Art and Science" (1956)

formed it into a concept rooted in ecology and environmentalism. Art, for him, was a medium to illuminate the human relationship to the planet. From his *Naturgemälde der Anden* to the eager use of the cyanometer, which helped measure the blueness of the sky during his South American voyages, that can be mistaken as an art object itself, his holistic approach to the description of nature can be easily compared to the approach of contemporary artists. This system would form the complementary whole, combined with words, species, descriptions, and measurements, into the ideal visual representation. Art became a tool for understanding the abstract scientific landscape, a descriptive medium.

A similar endeavour was undertaken by György Kepes, an artist, who tried to find a bridge between art, science, and technology. His book *The New Landscape in Art and Science* (1956) encourages thinking about new narratives and otherness, stating that "Abstraction is the basis of conceptual thinking,"⁶ inviting the possibility of incoherence or other human traits when reflecting on nature. Landscape cannot exist without its metaphysical meaning because it is constituted from the assemblage of existing, and to a certain extent, abstract images. These elements continue to form in an individual's mind, a life-generating assemblage emerges, and simultaneously, the construct that extends beyond reality also emerges. Immanuel Kant touched upon this mass



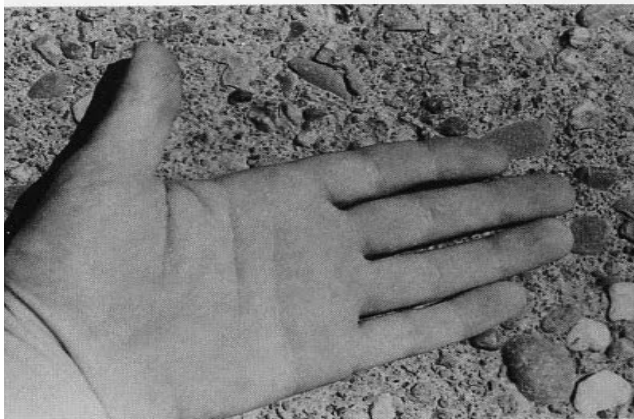
experience of the environment through his notion of the sublime. His formulation sought to explain the emotional confusion encountered in natural phenomena, beyond mere appreciation of beauty. In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant differentiates between the beautiful and the 'sublime' using the example of a volcanic landscape, which evokes a palette of feelings—from respect and fear to adoration—of certain power in the face of nature, and the starry night sky as the landscape experience of mathematical immensity. The description of such a magnitude signifies that such landscapes, the actual 'sublime,' function in Kantian terms as a liberating force, empowering the mind.⁷

Mary Miss's Battery
Park Landfill , 1973
Credits: Mary Miss
Studio.

Humboldt, like Kant, saw in nature something beyond environment under scientific dictum. Guided by intuition, they seemed to search for the answer of expressing their thoughts in artistic form, whether graphical or linguistic. If landscapes are the topic such an interrogation, the notion of the virtual corresponds here to intuitive flows such as experiences, dreams, and memories, which essentially mediate our understanding of nature per se.

"What can an artist do in the world of today?"⁸ reflects Albert Camus on the importance of authentic artistic creation as a gift to society and the future. Confronting this statement with the reality of today, seventy years later, we see that the most important role of artists is to reflect and pre-

left:
Dennis Oppenheim.
Rocket Hand.
1970.
Dennis Oppenheim
Estate



right:
Dennis Oppenheim
*Parallel stress - A 10
minutes performance
piece*,
1970
Foto: Federico Di
Cosmo
Dennis Oppenheim
Estate





Parallel Stress - A 10 minute performance piece - May 1970

Photo taken at greatest stress position prior to collapse

Location: Masonry-block wall and collapsed concrete pier between
Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges

Bottom Photo: Stress position reassumed.

Location: Abandoned sump. Long Island

Photos: Robert K. McElroy

Ana Mendieta, *Untitled: Silueta Series*, twelve color coupler prints, 1973-1977.



sent their unique perspectives on the world. Artists offer radical and unconventional viewpoints that challenge societal norms, showing the world as they see it. This "otherwise-ness" is, in many ways, their primary and most significant quality, especially when compared to more science-based professions, such as architecture.

In the context of recent postmodern culture, there has been a resurgence of interest in landscape as a subject of artistic exploration, as noted by Peter Fuller. Art often serves as a contemporary social commentary on global events. Artistic manifestations in the seventies thus became speculative reflections on human relationships with the environment and technology, revealing insights into the contemporary context.

Projects by land artists such as Ana Mendieta, Dennis Oppenheim, Christo and Jeanne-Claude tended to reconnect with the landscape on their own terms. Merging the conceptual and performance aspects, as Ana Mendieta did, focusing on tension and transition, as Dennis Oppenheim did, imagining the unrealised as Christo and Jeanne-Claude did, or even showing resistance as Beverly Buchanan did, the list of examples of how virtuality emerges in artistic projects does not end but rather expands. Even works of art that represent the clichéd notion of paysage, such as romantic painting on the wall, hold virtual complexity and extend beyond it.



Beverly Buchanan,
Marsh Ruins,
tabby concrete
sculptures,
1981.

The tangled concept of landscape, whether physical or conceptual, is a multidimensional topic that perfectly lends itself to organising, highlighting, or expanding upon the many thoughts and responses it evokes, as it goes beyond formal or contextual analysis. This process of analysis and interpretation through art transforms disparate observations into a structured understanding, fostering a richer and more nuanced engagement. Artistic projects unfold this intricate process. Artists embody certain ideas, thoughts, and actions in their works as responses to problems within the environmental context.

Paul Valéry defined art as "the way of doing," referring to the process of assembling the 'act' (doing) that follows the initial concept.⁹ This definition portrays art as an action emerging from what the mind conceives, manifesting in various forms—both abstract and scientific. Artistic manifestations, therefore, become speculative and conceptual reflections on human relationships with the environment and technology.

Cosgrove, like many other scholars, established and supported the division between the physical and ideological dimensions of landscape¹⁰ which is mirrored in contemporary conceptual art practice through various layers, piling upon its current definition. The ambiguity of landscape as a phenomenon arises from its simultaneous ancient

and contemporary nature, existing in modern times while continually being reshaped by daily innovations that reveal concepts and explain historical events, yet may never reach a consensus. Nonetheless, the dialogue of artistic expressions reveals a multiplicity of solutions and possibilities for these definitions. Presenting landscape as a product of cultural and societal zeitgeist, art serves as a contemporary social commentary on global events while simultaneously functioning as a poetic exegesis. The relationship between the land and the people is present in its virtual efficiency and its transformation as an artistic subject. The creation that comes from within works in favour of understanding our environment, sometimes differently—therefore expansively—and is graspable only for a ephemeral moment in a cloud of images and words, in constant kaleidoscopic motion.

Notes list:

1. Diversity and its shadow. (n.d.). E-Flux. Retrieved from <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/609374/diversity-and-its-shadow>
2. DeLue, R. Z., & Elkins, J. (2008). *Landscape theory*. Routledge.
3. DeLue, R. Z., & Elkins, J. (2008). *Landscape theory* (p. 20). Routledge.
4. Appleton, J. (1975). *The experience of landscape*. John Wiley and Sons.
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right:
Joel Sternfeld,
Rome after Rome,
1989.



CHAPTER 2

IMAGINATION, REALITY AND LANDSCAPE AS EMERGENCE

2.1 Perception and Imagination

“Landscapes are not just physical spaces, they are imaginative spaces, and the imaginative space can be just as real”

Jem Southam

The concept of landscape and space as a figment of the imagination has been a subject of contemplation and debate for centuries in the cultural traditions worldwide. The determinant of its form are designated by the phenomenological experiences. This has been illustrated through the metaphorical Buddhist text *Tridjnana-sutra: The Blind Men and the Elephant*. In the parable, a king invites four blind men to describe an elephant by touch alone. Each man experiences a different part of the animal: one feels the leg and likens it to a column, another grasps the trunk and thinks of a pipe, a third touches the ear and compares it to a fan, and the last holds the tail and imagines a brush. Each description is ultimately truth, from the individual's perspective, illustrating how subjective experiences shape one's understanding of reality.¹

This parable entered Western discourse through John Godfrey Saxe's 1872 poem *The Blind Men and the Elephant* and served as a metaphor for the limitations of human perception and the challenges of comprehending complex



phenomena. The Chinese word *Xiàng* means both "elephant" and "imagination", since historically, an elephant was a rare animal and was seen seldom in nature, and what gave evidence to the shape and form of this animal, was its skeleton. That's why in Chinese, the word *imagining* means, at the same time, an *elephant*.²

up:
Ohara Donshu,
*Blind Men Appraising
an Elephant*,
Edo Period (early 19th
century),
Brooklyn Museum New
York

Imagination is a crucial tool helping to interpret the world, particularly when confronting phenomena that elude comprehension out of human scale, including the idea of landscape with its kaleidoscopic range of meanings. Despite advancements in technology and the accessibility of information through the contemporary media, human capacity to fully comprehend the complexity of the world remains limited. In recent environmental theories, this topic was re-examined by Timothy Morton in his book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), where he described phenomena that exceed human understanding due to their vast scale and complexity, posing examples of global warming and the internet as the phenomena essentially impossible to grasp by human mind.³ Morton named them *hyperobjects*, and described their impact in the broader context of the contemporary landscape perception, on one hand presenting transgressive values, beyond human mind's, on the other leaving us, as a species perplexed with our available perceptual means.

In other words of Edward O. Wilson, during the debate in 2009 at the Harvard Museum of Natural History in Cambridge, Massachusetts: "The real problem of humanity is the following: we have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and god-like technology."⁴ Although the technological development is in dynamic grow, human ways of seeing and perceiving the world did not make such a radical progress, and through the point of view of biological evolution, human is still driven by primordial impulses, alike our ancestors.

At the same time we should not diminish the role of intellectual development, that shaped our culture in the recent few centuries, and which are having an impact on our imagery collective consciousness. That is why, existing at the intersection of reality and potentiality, landscape continues to leave one a choice what to see, and what to overlook. As an open-ended case study, it embodies perceptual multiplicity and socio-natural contingency. Virtuality—intended here as a means to see the world differently—might serve as a lens to dismantle its scale and complexity, which are beyond human comprehension, thus offering a way to decipher Morton's hyperobjects. The later structure of this dissertation aims to juxtapose them within the atlas categories. As noted by Didi-Huberman, the atlas serves as a conceptual tool to interpret reality and, through the faculty of imagination, to construct new connections and bridges between seemingly disparate elements. The wider the gap between these elements, the greater the imaginative effort required.⁵

Diving into perceptive and imaginative capacities of human being, I will analyse a 1972 book John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* influential book on arts and the forms of subjectivity and collectivity forming that experience, and through Lucius Burckhardt's texts on design and philosophy at large: *Why is Landscape Beautiful?*, *Minimal Intervention*, through the elns of his coined concept of *mind's eye*, as the design principle and inherent apparatus to understand the world. The chapter will dissect the concept of landscape from the architectural and perceptual point of view, relating it to the notion of virtuality.

"Ways of Seeing" of John Berger

"An image is a sight that has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance or set of appearances that has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved" - writes John Berger - "Every image embodies a way of seeing"⁶ The indistinctness of landscape, the way it alternates for each person, embodying the various responses, lies in human perception and the capacity of imagination. As Berger suggests: "When we 'see' the landscape, we situate ourselves in it".⁷

Placing ourselves within a landscape, for Berger, means to create an image of a landscape phenomenon involves a sensual correspondence with the environment and a connection developed by the observer with the observed scene. Seeing the landscape, therefore, becomes a conflux of coordinates in the external world with the internal worldviews characteristic of the individual. Similar thoughts were later explored in the seminal book by Gianfranco Baruchello and Henry Martin, *How to Imagine: A Narrative on Art and Agriculture* (1984)⁸, Using his life on the Agricola Cornelia farm as a case study, Baruchello analysed the connection between an image of nature in its various forms—from artistic to highly productive—through the lens of agriculture, where he examined the human spectrum in its entirety, from being an artist to being a farmer.

Sensibility, convictions, beliefs, and memories are not inherent elements of the perceptive process; rather, they are acquired over time through experience. Simultaneously, they constitute a fluctuating cognitive system that continuously evolves and transforms. They function like a capillary network, mediating between reality and one's comprehension of the surrounding environment, generating both an imaginary and a virtual site of exchange. The imaginative power of an artwork emerges from the artist's experience, enriching their interpretation of the visual world. "An image is a sight that has been recreated or reproduced,"⁹ claims Berger, presenting substantial differences between what one might perceive, while looking at the particular artwork



up:
Vincent van Gogh
Wheatfield with crows
July 1890 - 1890

with or without information. In his essays, he provides the example of looking at Van Gogh's masterpiece *Wheatfields with Crows* (1890), highlighting its significance as an iconic landscape painting. On the following page, however, the painting is accompanied by a note stating that it was allegedly Van Gogh's final work before his suicide. This additional context alters our perception of the painting, compelling us to discern its symbolic meaning, explore the narrative behind it, or attempt to empathise with the artist's inner struggles—therefore augmenting the possibility of understanding an artwork.

Artists often seek to confront the audience, inviting them to see and experience the world through their eyes, with art serving as a speaker and receiver of self-expression. Art represents new ways of seeing and understanding the environment around us, which is a vessel for human histories. Just as ways of seeing evolve, landscape might transform into a way of demonstrating, a medium for transmitting those personal stories, collective societal experiences, or historical interpretations. This is exemplified in Bas Jan Ader's photographs *Untitled (Swedish Fall)* (1971), in which the first image depicts the artist standing upright, while the second shows his figure lying in the forest undergrowth. Juxtaposed, Ader's photographs pay tribute to his father, who was murdered by Nazi Germans in 1944 while helping to save Jews during the Holocaust. His choice of landsca-



pe evokes a scene that suggests the imagined continuity of events Ader himself could never witness. Although absent from the execution, he carried the event within him in the form of generational trauma. In his artwork, he envisioned a subsequent sequence, creating images that he performed himself: a body in a hostile environment, transitioning from life to presumed death—the body standing, and the body lying in the woods. For millions of other Jewish families murdered during the Holocaust, a similar setting—the coniferous forest—became a recurring backdrop of tragedy and loss.

up.
Bas Jan Ader,
Untitled (Swedish Fall),
1971

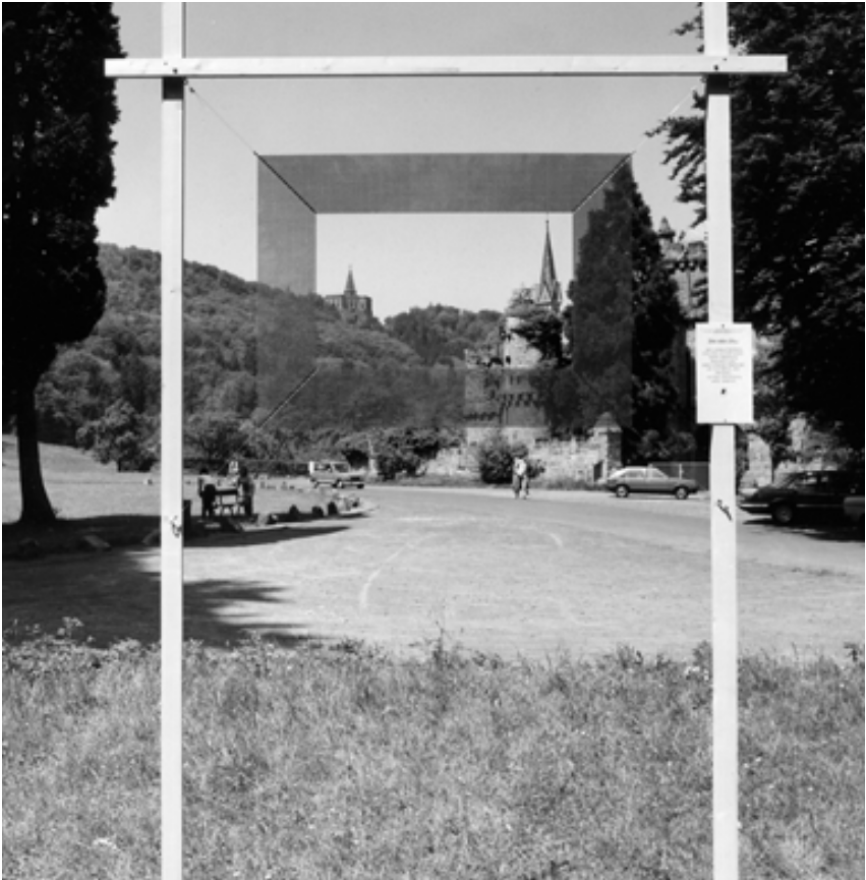
This takes us to the role of imagination in inventing an image and transforming it into visual message. The difference between an "image" and "picture" was pointed out by Whitney Davis, that followed the distinction, that an "image" is "generation of a visual space" and "picture" is an artifact in visual space that extend it into a *virtual space*.¹⁰ Davis suggest therefore, that a real virtual space, as an extension of the real world is a combination of imagination, that is generating new space, supported with visualisations—therefore pictures. Understanding landscapes in this sense requires embracing virtual narratives, acknowledging interconnected perspectives, and considering historical contexts. The subjective nature of interpreting landscapes is shaped by individual origins, backgrounds, beliefs, and personal memories that persist in the form of

lived experiences. Where does the boundary lie between oneself and the environment? If we consider landscape not solely as the environment but as an interplay of perception, interpretation, and expression, it becomes profoundly influenced by both personal and collective experiences. This perspective brings us back to W.J.T. Mitchell's thesis and his notion of landscape as a *medium*, in the fullest sense of the word.

In contrast to scientific professions, which often prioritise empirical data and quantitative over qualitative outcomes, artists tend to engage with a topic of nature through the lens of creativity and subjectivity. **In comparison to architecture and design solutions, artistic project is not conceived to solving problems, but rather aims to exploration of a given issue.** Therefore implementing these *new ways of seeing*, embodied through the notion of *virtuality* gives space to something that have not yet been juxtapose. *Virtuality* as potential, otherwise, multinarrative understanding of the complexities of human existence is necessary when there is a need for the empathy and embracing the worlds of the others. Artistic project is encouraging to question settled assumptions and consider alternative perspectives. The process of seeing, imagining, and visualizing allows artists to render the landscape anew, once again analyse and understand the environments we inhabit. As technology and globalization reshape our lives, artists provide a necessary counterbalance, reminding us of the enduring power of imagination and creativity. Bridging the familiar and the unknown, a sight, that turns into an image, that ultimately turn into a *creation* of landscape.

"Mind's eye" of Lucius Burckhardt

Perception of landscape was a key topic of research made by Lucius Burckhardt, a key figure in architecture and landscape theory. Born in 1925 in Davos, Burckhardt's research focused on the landscape from the perspective of a sociologist and cultural thinker, yet having a strong impact on generations of architects, since his teaching at ETH Polytechnic in Zurich, Kassel University, and serving as dean of the Design Faculty at the Bauhaus University in Weimar



from 1992 to 1994. His almost obsessive inquiry to grasp the origins of landscape was sustained by observations from various fields: sociology, anthropology, architecture, design, and art history, to further apply them in design studies at large.

Löwenburg in Kassel,
Photo credits: Monika
Nikolic

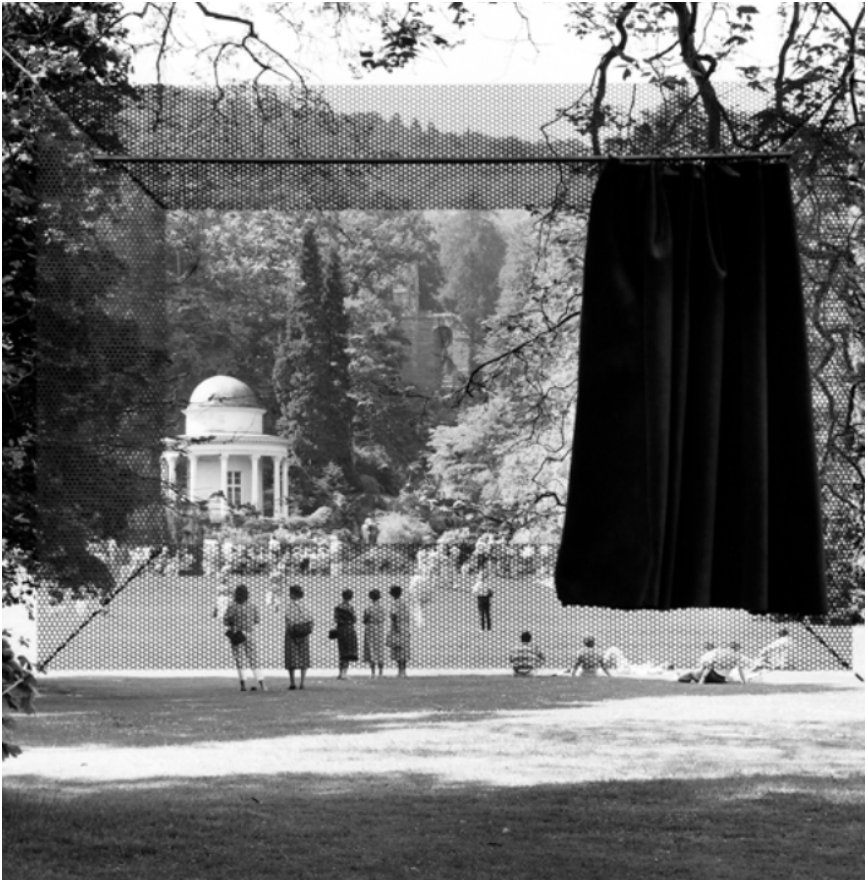
In various lectures throughout his career, he dissected and explained the ungraspable through classification of the visual vocabulary on nature and environment. Question posed in the eponymous book *Why Is Landscape Beautiful?* was the essence of his endeavors focused on understanding the essential concept of landscape as it is seen, perceived, and understood. His extensive writings delve into pheno-

menological experiences, dissected and framed in an epistemological manner, making him a leading figure in natural sciences, as well as ecology and aesthetics. Burckhardt dissolved the boundaries between the world of objects, persons and environment and adopted the term mind's eye within landscape and urban studies and sociology, which suggested a strong individual dimension in how we imagine, see, and experience the world. Anegdotically, the term first appeared in William Shakespeare's 17th-century classic *Hamlet*, when the protagonist uses it to describe his mental visualisation of a phantom¹¹

Burckhardt revised this concept within urban planning discourse and landscape design more broadly, emphasising the subjective lens through which individuals perceive and interpret spatial surroundings. This encompasses not only physical attributes but also social, cultural, and emotional dimensions, capturing the intricate interplay between individual perception and the landscape. Burckhardt argued that a profound understanding of the mind's eye is imperative for designers, planners, architects, and artists, as it informs the creation of spaces that resonate with the audience's desires on multiple levels.

Burckhardt considered art to be both an origin and an analytical tool for landscape comprehension. "Meanings are of use only to those who can interpret them,"¹² a suggestion that supports the hypothesis that the mind's eye is not a passive tool of perception or an epistemological term, but rather a highly biased instrument forged in the collision of external factors with bodily modes of apprehension. Burckhardt's inquiries encapsulated landscape semiotics as produced by the arts, literature, and photography, where the natural landscape becomes a code that humans internally decipher in accordance with their knowledge. He argues:

"To think of landscape in this—geographic—sense requires some to-and-fro between its aesthetics and scientific description. The roots of the landscape lie in the arts, first in poetry, and then in painting. The landscape is a construct, an image in the mind's



eye, which enables us to make sense of the countless impressions we have of our environment (...)”¹³

By acknowledging the diverse perspectives and experiences encapsulated within the mind's eye, practitioners can craft environments that foster connectivity, well-being, and a sense of belonging. This concept challenges conventional urban planning paradigms, urging a shift towards more inclusive and human-centric approaches to design. A design, that considers the subjective experiences, cultural contexts and shape how people perceive and interact with their environment.

Lucius Burckhardt,
Picture frame, once the
drape was removed
from it, revealed a
landscape of antiquity.
Photo credits:
Monika Nikolic

Understanding the mind's eye as a tool that influences landscape perception has been inextricably connected to phases of architectural and artistic projects. This set the cornerstone of Burckhardt's lifelong manifesto. His writings to this day encourage designers and planners to embrace the complex interplay of cultural, social, and personal factors in creating spaces that resonate with and reflect the diverse experiences of those who inhabit them. Consequently, his concepts, to this day, challenge conventional urban planning paradigms, urging a transition in design through strategies that involve meticulous social studies, education in the arts, and in-situ practices.¹⁴

Landscape Development and the Structure of Society was a lecture from 1977, where Burckhardt identifies the term landscape as an umbrella term that conveys a vast amount of information, from geographical place to socially produced concept. He urges the necessity to "trace how the landscape enters popular consciousness, and thus to somehow express the social meaning of the 'language' of landscape," to its investigation focusing on the semiotics of nature. Interpretation of symbols is integrated in human modus operandi, almost instantly imposing certain preconceptions over anything one perceives. The meaning changes and develops, influenced by our beliefs and knowledge. Burckhardt asserts that "'landscape' [ideological dimension] is to be found not in the nature of things, but in our mind's eye. It is a construct that serves as a means of perception for any society that no longer lives directly from the land."¹⁵

"If we consider landscape as a semiotic system," Burckhardt claims, "it is because we seek to understand the message it conveys through the cultural prism."¹⁶ Seeing then has a strong cultural saturation, and this way of seeing landscape was used in literature, poetry, and paintings, but also, sadly, in broader mass media: kitsch brochures or tacky reproductions in hotel rooms.¹⁷ *Why Is Landscape Beautiful?* gradually reveals terms and definitions regarding which parts of the environment are incorporated into the landscape and which ones, though visible, are excluded or create ambiguity. Burckhardt suggested an explicit example:



"The Landscape Trap" (1986) was a limited edition Lucius Burckhardt produced for the Galerie Eisenbahnstrasse in Berlin. At the opening, he spoke on a nearby bombsite on the theme of "Landscape Exists in the Mind's Eye." We fall into a trap when we confuse landscape with nature.

"The cow pats in Vrin belong to the landscape, while tin cans tossed aside by a tourist do not,"¹⁸ suggesting that the mode of conceiving and embracing the landscape is rooted in critical thought as a tool of assessment. He divided the perception of landscape into subsequent layers: Of colors, of productive-technological contexts, of social aspects and of a layer conveying its temporal dimension¹⁹.

Lucius Burckhardt
"The Landscape Trap"
1986

Burckhardt noticed that no one is capable of seeing the landscape through someone else's eyes because one hasn't been surrounded by the same references during their development process, such as books, references, or recollections, taking them as starting points of interpretations of the surrounding world. However, there is a culturally identified common ground of what is objectively considered a "beautiful landscape" (mountains, lakes, seas). This serves as evidence of a certain collective consciousness, or collective aesthetics, that functions as a general statement acknowledged by society, which might guide designers in their projects.

Lucius Burckhardt's theories works has been rediscovered in the past decade and continues to inspire designers, planners, and artists to consider the miscellaneous nature of landscape, with a more perceptive understanding of its real impact on human experience, which holds life beneath it, and associate the ways we see it, with actual creation—gi-

right:
Paul Armand Gette
„Danger“, Paris,
Courtesy of Galerie
Yvon Lambert,
Photo Emilia Eggers /
Artvisions

ving name, and order to the space itself.

The negotiation between the sensory process of ‘seeing’ and the intellectual analysis of what is ‘seen,’ as Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, “might be called ‘aspects of organization.’”²⁰ When an aspect of a certain kind is noticed, other parts of the item that create a visual entity seem to come together in harmony, even if they did not before. The organization of references and systematization of recollections can help designers conceive architecture and landscape in a more conscious way. Whether it is a puzzle-picture or, conversely, the various angles of the observer’s perspective, the materiality of the environment does not change, but rather visual impression shifts. A recorded image is rearranged, creating a kaleidoscopic panorama of aspects of seeing nature, ultimately forming the landscape.

Embracing Wittgenstein’s theory means receiving the plurality of ‘aspects’ that do not exclude other versions of seeing the world despite its self-referential quality. Instead, it multiplies perspectives. *Philosophical Investigations* was published in 1953 and is considered one of the cornerstones of 20th-century philosophy.²¹ Its interpretations of the visual world tie in with the notion of virtuality, helping to understand the landscape from visual, imaginary, and symbolic perspectives. This, in a certain way, enhances its potential by presenting a variety of aspects, creating for each person a construct of their own illusion based on their reflective criteria.

Historians and theorists like Simon Schama and Sébastien Marot have convincingly argued that memory has always played an essential role in landscape culture.²² Discussing the landscape as a product of human perception and identity leads us to consider the role of memory as a source of conscious apprehension—a crucial aspect that comes into play when interpreting the world. For Schama, memory’s relationship to understanding landscape is akin to layers of rock building a scene, as the landscape itself is a work of the mind. The layered structure of nature, consisting of rock formations accumulated over time, metaphorically resembles the structure of layered experien-



P. A. G. 2007



La femme d'Altona!

P. A. G. 2007

ces. In this sense, the landscape almost always appears as an intertwined, complex plexus of reality and fragments of memory, continually re-written like a palimpsest. This non-linearity between the coded images that reach the eye and what simultaneously forms in the mind as a space of fantasy demonstrates the notion of virtuality, with all its unexpectancy. By making new connections between objects and natural elements, creating new mental paths, we allow new landscapes to emerge and come into being each time we look at them anew.

Notes list:

1. Minakata, K. (1928). Notes and queries, Japan.
2. This etymological overlap was explained by a philosopher Kan-pi (ob. 233 B.C.), who described this paradox: that back in the time, seeing a living elephant was rare, so what people could see were the bones of an animal. It could only be imagined through tracing the bones and getting an image through its skeleton. This is where this etymological overlap covers linguistically, bridging an image of an animal through imagination.
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9. Berger, J. (2008). *Ways of seeing*. Penguin
10. Davis, W. (2017). *Visuality and virtuality: Images and pictures from prehistory to perspective*. Princeton university press. p. 6
11. "In my mind's eye, Horatio, I saw him [the ghost of

King Hamlet]."" Shakespeare, W., Mowat, B. A., & Werstine, P. (2012). *The tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (Updated edition. Simon&Schuster paperback edition). Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.

12. Burckhardt, L., Ritter, M., & Schmitz, M. (2022). *The minimal intervention*. Birkhäuser.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Burckhardt, L., Ritter, M., Schmitz, M., & Burckhardt, L. (2015). *Why is Landscape Beautiful? The Science of Strollology*. Birkhäuser.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Wittgenstein, L., & Anscombe, G. E. M. (2003). *Philosophical investigations: The German text, with a revised English translation* (3rd ed.). Blackwell Pub.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Schama, S. (1996). *Landscape and memory* (1. Vintage Books ed). Vintage Books.

2.2 History of Nature and Artistic Imagination

“It is a great pleasure to look down on the countryside from the mountain, for the view seems to be a painted scene of unusual beauty rather than a real landscape...”

Pliny the Younger Letters, 96-108 CE

In the 2nd century AD, Pliny the Elder records a myth in his work *Naturalis Historia*—a parable about moral and artistic mastery. The story of Zeuxis and Parrhasius recounts a competition between two renowned painters, each striving to prove their superiority over the other. Zeuxis chose to demonstrate his skill by painting a young girl holding a bunch of grapes, rendered with such precision that birds, deceived by the artist's brush, mistook the grapes for real. Upon seeing the painting, they repeatedly tried to fly toward the canvas to peck at them. Proud of his own mastery, Zeuxis turned to Parrhasius, eager to see his rival's work. Once he saw what appeared to be a painting behind a curtain, Zeuxis approached it, intending to uncover what lay beneath. But as he reached out, the air slipping through his fingers revealed the shattering truth: the curtain itself was the painting. While Zeuxis had managed to trick the birds, Parrhasius had outwitted the master himself and was declared the winner.¹



There is, however, an alternative version of this story, emphasising radically different conclusions towards the definition of mastery in arts. In this telling, when the birds attacked Zeuxis's realistic painting, the audience criticised it claiming, that the birds are pecking the grapes without fear, because they did not recognize the girl, that is why the painting is bad. Zeuxis in his humble approach promised to improve the work. When he returned, he revealed only the figure of the girl, with the grapes brushed over with paint.

"The grapes were poorly painted because they deceived the birds," he explained, "but the girl is true art because the birds did not recognize her." - The myth takes on suddenly a contemporary relevance. It suggests that art is not merely a reproduction of the visible world, but an interpretation of symbolism and meaning when dealing with abstraction, meant to convey a message to those who can discern it. The fruits were painted with such a clarity, that even animals were fooled. But the figure of young woman was painted from the point of view of artistic eye, that art connoisseurs alone were able to appreciate.² This courts us toward the abstract reality of landscape, where its fundamental role lies not in replication or aesthetic quality but in its capacity to invoke contextualised thoughts and emotions, provoke discussions on political issues, and shift perception, that people can share with one another.

up:
Zeuxis painting the
portrait of Juno from
the features of five
different women;
(below) Parrhasius
deceives onlookers
with a painting of a veil
over a painting, and
birds with a painting of
grapes. Etching by J.J.
von Sandrart
author: Sandrart,
Joachim von, 1606-1688

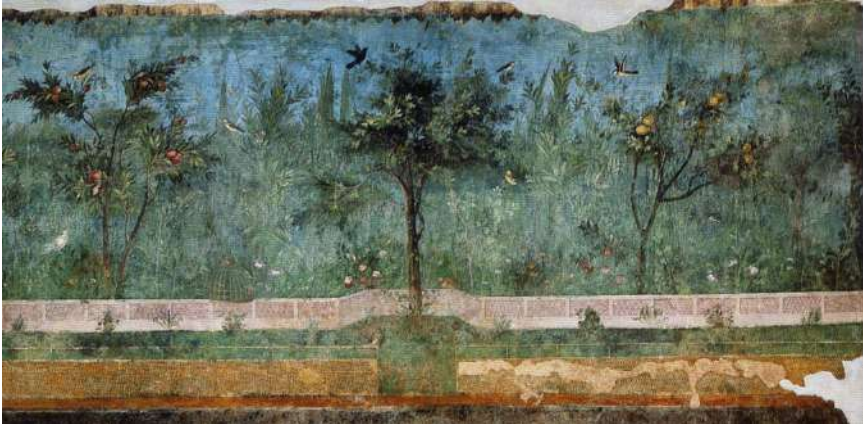
right:
Jonas Mekas
photographed by
Antanas Sutkus in
Semeniškiiai, Lithuania,
1971. © Artist Rights
Society (ARS), New York
/ LATGA-A, Vilnius

In the context of contemporary media, art remained a force that influences society both formally and metaphysically. Images possess an intuitive knowledge, that surpasses the constraints of language. "*Memories are past, but images are here...Images are real*"³ says Jonas Mekas with seemingly cheerful voice over his movie, suggesting, that the visual indeed has a power over the present.⁴ Visual, either objects, messages of transcripts can transform the viewer's understanding of the world. Considering landscape in contemporary art, it presents a versatile role, as subject, field of action or medium, anchored in collective past.

Let's look back at the process of the imaginary, and how it constructed the reality in arts. What is the historical meaning of the real, and how did artists embed reality in their artworks? In *The Rustle of Language* (1969) Roland Barthes delved into these speculations, coining the term "Reality Effect."⁵ He describes it as the technique used in the arts to create reality in fiction, or, in other words, how to express truth within illusion. Barthes investigated the meaning of realism in our culture, enabling readers to critically analyze how reality is represented in literature. Juxtaposed with Burckhardt and his theories of the kaleidoscopic imagery of the landscape—where its detailed nature provides information about what the landscape signifies in the mind's eye—this explains how a photograph of nature carries such emotional weight and has taken over the archival role of documenting it. The details in photographs, or their descriptions, and the act of naming particular elements, ensure the materialization of reality in the imagination. This can be compared to the emergence of a "landscape" from the surrounding world.

Representation is often considered an extension of artistic mastery and the mind, raising the question: what constitutes reality in landscape representation? One of the ideas Barthes proposed is that the verisimilitude of literary and artistic work lies in its referentiality and meticulous description, which deepen its sense of reality. In other words, the more detailed and embedded an artwork is, or the more notations and references it includes, the more





Viridarium of Villa Livia,
fresco
30-20 BC,
Palazzo Massimo,
Rome.

convincingly it conveys realism to its audience. The perfection and precision in describing a landscape can, in theory, become infinite.

Meanwhile Roland Barthes described the ‘reality effect’ in 1968 as the kaleidoscopic panorama of details and references, in 1981, Jean Baudrillard explored what is created when the description goes beyond realism, taking a distorted form of hyperreality⁶. Post-modernism brought critical thought towards the culture of excess, which lead to simulacrum, as Baudrillard famously observed in contemporary American landscapes.⁷ Excessive referentiality and detail in the description of the imaginary, when overused, result in the total commodification of imagination and its infinite redefinition until it loses meaning, becoming, in the sense of Baudrillard, a pure simulacrum, as exemplified by Disneyland.⁸

In which way of capturing the reality expand nature depiction? How did virtuality and this multitude perspectives alter the meaning of nature, and its significance? Realistic depiction in visual arts has particularly long been an indicator of the level of artistic mastery, alike in the of Zeuxis and Parrhasius. For instance, the ancient Roman Villa of Livia, where a room's walls were decorated with a painting of an eternal garden, creating a viridarium. From the formal point of view mural portrays a garden in me-

ticulous, vivid form and intentional botanical detailness. Painted between 30 and 20 B.C, the work was conceived as a decoration of the Roman *triclinium* - a dining room located partially underground, offering refuge from the summer heat, at the same time serving as a room of augmented, natural reality.

The wall painting did more than merely represent a garden; it captured an eternal spring with a level of detail and realism that left little room for abstraction, bringing into the enclosed space a spectacle of natural impossibility and blossoming infinite endurance. This illusion of timelessness was achieved using *trompe l'œil*, deceiving the eye into believing in the reality of the depicted scene. Rather than gazing upon the actual gardens of the villa, observers were invited to contemplate a secluded artistic vision of a world beyond, alluring the senses. The painting, or a painted stage, is challenging the temporal reality itself, suggesting a virtual possibility of a room that would endure in eternal spring. Remarkably, it not only withstood the fall of the Roman Empire but continues to exist today in its own deceiving form and aesthetics.

Personal artistic ways of looking at the world reached the peak with the first inventions of Daguerrotypes in the first half of 19th century⁹ influenced later movements, particularly the Impressionists. Before, this emphasis on the artist perspective in the landscape paintings of the late Romantic era, such as those by the British painter John Constable. Constable's novel and poetic approach to landscape painting sought to express nature as it truly appeared, capturing the changing weather, light, and atmosphere with its real colors. "I should paint my own places best."¹⁰ Constable famously declared, reflecting his belief in the importance of capturing the true essence of a landscape as only the artist could perceive it. Known for what some describe as a "dry" approach to his work, Constable emphasised the significance of depicting the atmosphere of a place as it was truly felt by the observer. This commitment to painting directly from nature, rather than in the confines of a studio, was a fundamental aspect of his artistry conveying more



John Constable,
Wivenhoe Park, Essex,
1916, oil on canvas,
Courtesy of Widener
Collection

conscious understanding of the world, that was at the verge of transformation by the mass medium of photography. Art historian Ernst Gombrich summarised this by saying:

“Constable’s painting of Wivenhoe Park looks so natural and obvious that we are inclined to overlook its daring and its success. We accept it as simply a faithful record of what the artist actually saw in front of him—‘a mere transcript of nature,’ as paintings of this kind are sometimes described, an approximation at least to that photographic accuracy against which modern artists have rebelled.”¹¹

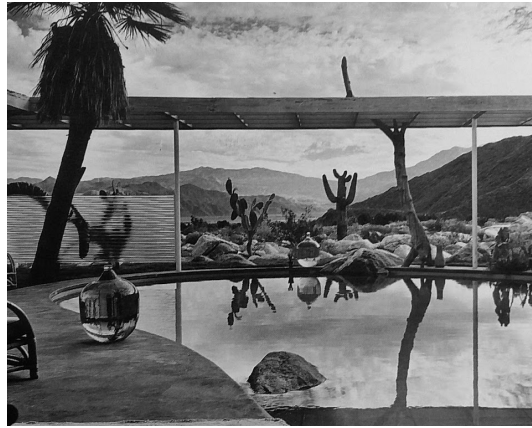
Notably, a decade after Constable’s work, as mentioned earlier, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce captured the view from Le Gras’s window, marking the beginning of a new era in which photography began to alter the functional role of landscape painting. Soon, photography emerged as a primary medium for capturing nature, shifting the artist’s role as a mediator of the landscape toward a more conceptual approach. Photography became a tool for reproduction and record-keeping, rearranging the space for artistic expression and paving the way for the development of Impressionism, Expressionism, and other significant art movements of the 19th century.

FROM MODERN TO POST-MODERN NATURE

By the end of the 19th century, art began to diverge from traditional representations of nature, moving away from compulsive replication and repetition. Due to general secularisation, "the meaning, which had been divorced from nature,"¹², influenced art through the disintegration of belief in the divine. At the dawn of the 20th century, modernism emerged as a movement that emphasised subjective experience and abstraction, challenging the artistic value of works that merely attempted to replicate nature. For modernists, the act of replication signified a failure to convey deeper truths. Instead, the focus shifted towards expression through the imagination, transforming the representation of nature into an abstract concept..

As mentioned earlier, this coincided with the rise of photography, which further compelled artists and philosophers to reconsider the role of art and the artist in society. As art was increasingly seen as a distinct entity, it was no longer viewed as a mere imitation of life, but rather as a living form in its own right. This gave landscape art a new significance, transitioning from a passive subject of study to a dynamic field for abstract exploration and experimentation. This evolution can be observed not only in the visual arts but also in architecture, where modernist ideals were prominently manifested.

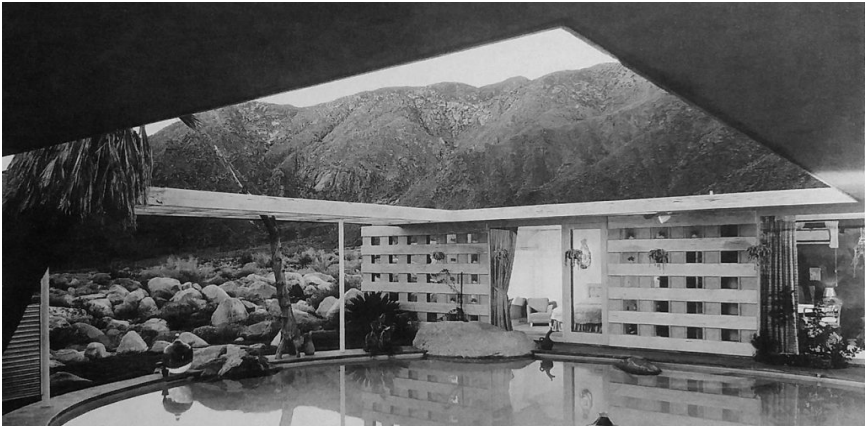
The modernist movement of the 1930s fruited with emergence of villas, one family houses and other structures that epitomized global trends and became somehow a hallmark of an era. Buildings with their smooth white surfaces, created a stark contrast with the surrounding wilderness, reducing landscape to a visual context rather than appreciating its full complexity. Architecture became a lens through which the outer world was viewed from within, transforming the natural environment into a virtual, pictorial object. The strong, clean lines of modernist architecture established a hierarchical relationship, prioritizing the architectural object and relegating the landscape to a secondary role.



up right and left:
Author: Albert Frey
Location: United States
(Palm Springs, CA)
Year: 1946

A prime example of this approach is Raymond Loewy's house in Palm Springs, built between 1946 and 1947 by Swiss architect Albert Frey. Situated in the desert, the house uses the barren landscape of the Southern California desert as a picturesque frame, fetishising it as a hostile external world distinct from the carefully designed interior. Even with the inclusion of stones and plants in the courtyard, the division between inside and outside is sharply defined by a canopy, reinforcing the perception of the landscape as mere scenery. This marked a regression in the exploration of the landscape's potential, instead reducing it to a distant background, serving merely as ornament.

The desert of Palm Springs, however, is far more complex than a simple backdrop. It embodies a fraught and violent history, marked by tension between Native Americans and American settlers, with power struggles over the territory deeply ingrained in the cultural perception of the landscape. If we read this desert as a symbol of virtual significance, we must discuss its architecture in political terms and rethink the approaches and practices necessary to build within a context of consciousness and respect. The multi-layered narrative of the Palm Springs Desert, which inevitably touches on the struggles of indigenous peoples, is an omitted narrative that modernist architecture deliberately tried to overlook.



Modern architecture was intended as an antidote to the chaos and confusion of the post-war world. In the context of California, with its expansive modus operandi of wiping out the old and replacing it with the new, it became, in some ways, an agent of progressive colonialism. There was no intention to blend the building techniques or aesthetics of indigenous tribes, but rather to establish a new type of architecture that served as a flagship of hegemonic relationships. For modernists, the landscape became a commodity, a picture framed by architectural space, a bohemian attraction rather than a reflection of the historical and environmental complexities of the region. The walls became boundaries, separating "us" from "them," epitomizing the sentiments of capitalist society, which was more willing to enjoy the view of the landscape carelessly, rather than confronting the consequences of the future repatriation of natural property.

The desert of Palm Springs, thus becoming a living backdrop, holds its precarious environmental conditions: extreme temperatures and inhospitable terrain. Air conditioning, HVAC systems, and swimming pools made it possible to create a sterile uniformity that embodied the modernist ambition to "tame nature." Exclusion from the hostile environment limited the modernist villas in California to "golden cages," mortifying the experience of the landscape. This clinical view of the landscape was synthesized in the form of the cover of flashy magazines with impeccable

up:
Author: Albert Frey
Location: United States
(Palm Springs, CA)
Year: 1946
Architecture framing
the hostile landscape
in form of the picture



BRUNO ZEVI - SPINAZZO 1967
"NATIVE LAKES CONNECTION"

photographs, often featuring a distant scenic background observed from the edge of a swimming pool.

This approach to landscape and architecture was later critiqued in the 1970s by Superstudio in their project *Continuous Monument*, which envisioned a worldwide confinement that warned against the unification and desensitization inherent in modernist design. Their collages highlighted the dangers of such a detached and uniform treatment of the landscape, advocating instead for a more integrated and sensitive approach to the relationship between humans and their environment. The provocative images created by Superstudio established the possibility of a counter-approach: an architectural critique of modernist attempts to dominate and frame nature within rigid technological structures. Their set of visionary collages, depicting landscapes trapped in the cold grip of infinite and impersonal architecture, were both a representation of futuristic ambitions and a repetitive visual warning.

Skepticism prevailing in the images of Superstudio was a reaction against the dominant belief, that prevailed in the realm of architecture and arts of that time which centered on modernist techno-enthusiasm. They acted as an oracle of the general loss of locality, as the world seemed to revolve around blind faith in technological development, suggesting that this could strip humans of their identity and reduce the perception of nature to a commodity under the regime of prefabricated structures. This loss was also visually represented in the form of the grid, which, as a symbol of the time, played a crucial role in identification. The reference to the ubiquitous application of the grid structure, which spatially separates humans from the environment, was also noted in the arts and recognized as an almost spiritual shift in reality:

“There are two ways in which the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art. One is spatial; the other is temporal. In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, an-

left:
Superstudio,
*The Continuous
Monument: Alpine
Lakes*,
collage project
(Perspective)
1969

Ettore Sottsass,
Barbara Radice,
Disegno di un
pavimento in cui i tuoi
passi saranno incerti,
1973



timimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature. In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface."¹³

What turned Superstudio's collages into a political statement was the irony of perceiving landscapes through a modernist lens that prioritized the intellectual abstraction of the grid over genuine interaction with nature. To paraphrase Krauss's thought, modernist architecture not only "turned its back on nature," flattening and domesticating an image into a "picture" framed by architecture, but also used the grid as a pictorial tool, with the landscape becoming a permutation of the two. Critical approach of Superstudio reached a momentum in the transition from modernist thought, which often commodified landscapes, to postmodernism, which emphasized actual engagement with and within the landscape. Postmodernism, characterized by a revival of artists, thinkers, and architects who sought to create works that existed "out there" in the world, giving the rise to the land art movement.

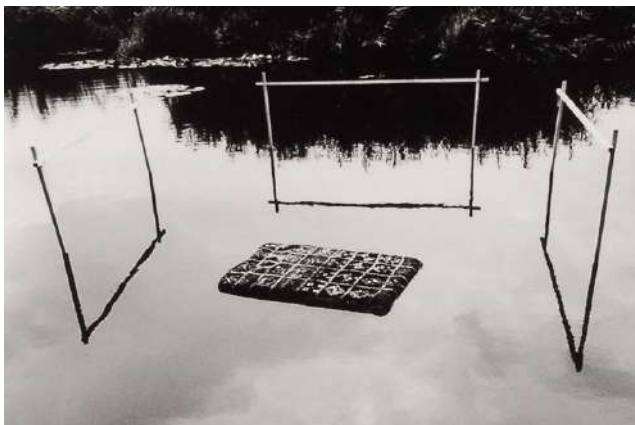
For example, this approach of this kind was displayed formally in works of Ettore Sottsass, in his interventions series "Metaphores."¹⁴ Photographs taken between 1972 and 1979 capture Sottsass's exploration as an architect and artist seeking alternative solutions to the materiality of construction. Geometric shapes are superimposed onto the wilderness, creating a dialogue between human-made and natural forms. Together with Barbara Radice, Sottsass aimed to redefine the relationship between humans and both built and natural environments, often addressing established models with irony. Their architectural gestures, expressed as art, serve to control, embrace, and transform the landscape into a playground for imagination.

Sottsass's work resembles the gestures of a painter, yet his canvas is the wilderness itself—a process that diverges from conventional architecture, which typically emphasises materiality. Through the addition of subtle elements, his

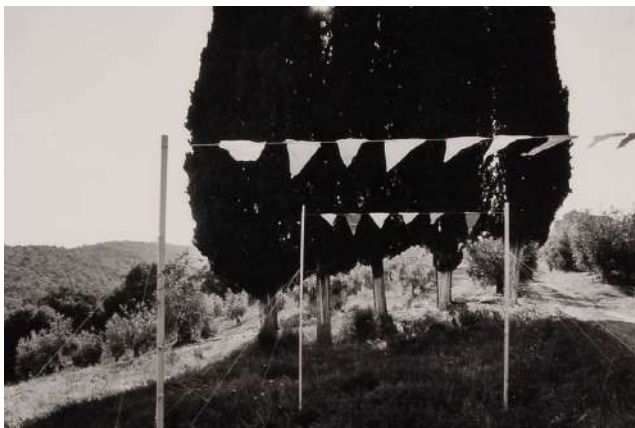
*Ettore Sottsass
C'è sempre una porta
attraverso la quale
incontri il tuo amore,
1976*



*Ettore Sottsass
Disegno di una delle
mille sale d'aspetto
dove consumerai la
tua vita,
1976*



*Ettore Sottsass
Non tutti possono
disegnare la vita come
une festa,
1976*



works, such as *Disegno di un pavimento su cui i tuoi passi saranno incerti*, silently embrace entropy. The grid woven into the landscape is precarious and designed to decay, just as the skeletal architectural structures are intended to be swept away by the wind—a gentle reminder that everything in the landscape has its own temporality, and human time is far shorter than earthly time. What remains is the memory captured in photographs, an ephemeral sketch.

Nature, in the artistic project, is either used as the canvas, a tool, or a place for action. As Peter Fuller observed in the opening essay for *The Iconography of the Landscape* (1988), it was post-modern culture that sparked a revival in the artistic exploration of landscapes.¹⁵ Land art movement became a way to challenge the old-fashioned concept of "landscape" and engage with the emerging, and more resonating idea of the "environment." The most iconic land art works emerged from this break with modernist conventions, embodying a philosophy that emphasized immersion in nature rather than its domination or commodification.

Unlike landscapes viewed from a modernist perspective, which were based on control measures, the Land Art movement chose to take the opposite approach. In this spirit, the environment regained its mystery, inviting immersion and interaction. Artists and architects returned to treating nature as a living force with transformative qualities, rather than as a passive backdrop. This shift also redefined the role of the artist, who was no longer just a creator of objects and artifacts but a mediator between the natural environment and the creation of an experience that allowed one to perceive the unthought dimensions of the landscape.

Operazione Vesuvio, 1972

Around the same time, in Naples, a series of posters with a peculiar manifesto began appearing across the city. Pierre Restany, a renowned French curator and art critic (1930–2003), with the help of Gianni Pisani, invited artists to propose an intervention on one of the most iconic and ancient landscapes in Western culture: Mount Vesuvius.

The news about this peculiar exhibition spread throughout Italy, largely due to an article published in the May 1972 issue of *Domus* (Issue 511). The article detailed how Restany, through his provocative posters, aimed to raise public awareness about the cultural and symbolic significance of Vesuvius, and, in full spirit of the Land Art movement, proposed its conversion into a "Parco Culturale Internazionale" (International Cultural Park), as an open project for artists from all around the world.

In the manifesto proclaimed on May 5 1972, Restany called on artists to join him in "Operazione Vesuvio,"¹⁶ aiming at reinterpretation of engagement with the landscape of the infamous volcano through "the generalised transfer of object to the idea of environmental form through the work of gesture" ("ad un transfer generalizzato dell'oggetto all'idea della forma ambientale, dell'opera al gesto")¹⁷ - as Restany stated. The idea was to transform the peak of Vesuvius into a project site, organised by structural, environmental, conceptual, and ecological elements in situ. The project proposals were expected to be presented in the form of architectural plans, photomontages, and descriptive notes until the idea was sufficiently visualised.¹⁸

The call for Pierre Restany's project was answered by Alina Szapocznikow, a Polish artist living in Paris. The artist was already familiar with Italy's rich landscape through her multiple visits and works on the sculpture series *Grandes Ventres* belly-shaped sculptures carved in Carrara marble. Szapocznikow's response to Restany's open call was both imaginative and poignant. Her proposal consisted of creating an ice rink at the summit of Mount Vesuvius. Her vision included an artificial, festive rink where a figure skater would perform to the sound of an old Russian waltz, *On the Hills of Manchuria*. In her proposal, Szapocznikow explained the significance of this gesture:

"It seems to me a capital idea from two points of view. Firstly, this human gesture, by challenging nature, tames and bewitches it, according to its caprice. Secondly, the futility and playfulness of this gesture

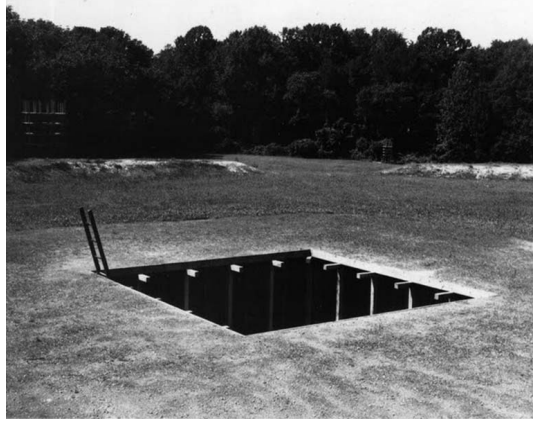
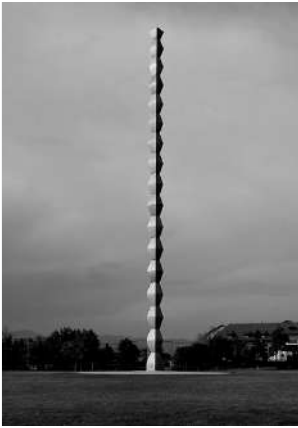
reminds a striking commentary on how landscape can work as a medium of artistic gesture, a virtual meditative site of an artistic personal narrative, and a shouting rejection of reality.

Szapocznikow's intervention, which remains in the form of a description, is a symbol of the brevity of human life contrasted with the backdrop of the enduring and sublime landscape. Her concept was a philosophical and aesthetic dialogue that continued a tradition of Land Art, acknowledging the ephemeral nature of human existence while engaging with the landscape in a way that is both imaginative and transformative. Though unrealised, the artistic project stands as a testament to the potential of art to reflect on the relationship between humanity and nature, and the inevitable forces of unknown demise, much like Sottsass's *Metaphors*, ephemeral actions, or sketches in the landscape as forms of the domestication of the inevitable. The co-existence all the past in the present²⁰ is a virtual mode that characterizes various conceptual artistic projects. It offers a lesson for designers, to use their own sensibility and personal experience in creating poetic spaces, and to intervene in nature with human sensibility.

1979: "Landscape" in the expanded field

In 1979, Rosalind Krauss published her influential essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*—an endeavour to systematise the terms and definitions related to landscape, art, and architecture.²¹ The essay discusses, whether modernist approach to art, particularly in the context of sculpture and Land Art, began to give way to more complex and nuanced interpretations, blurring the line between architecture, object, and nature. Krauss transformed these terms from groups into the aerial, a matrix of possibilities and spectral shades, instead of analysing their belonging to a particular realm, which in a sense might be compared to a postmodern attempt to define a multi-narrative field of virtuality.

Krauss tried to situate an artistic object manifestation created by humans in the context of landscape, while simul-

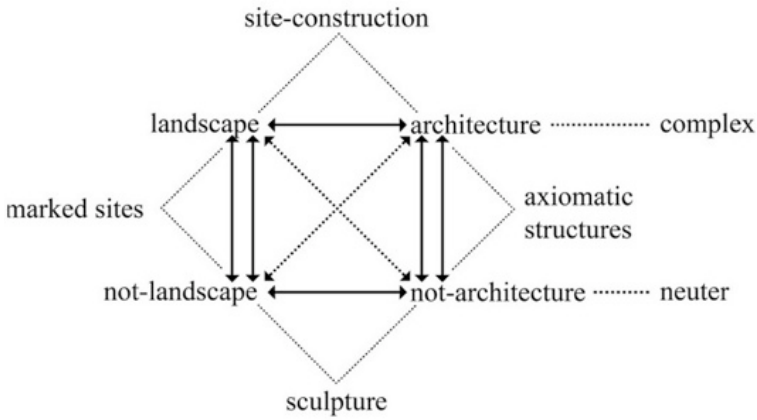


taneously challenging the traditional methods of categorising art forms into distinct groups. Instead of focusing on dividing and separating terms, the emphasis is put on how they function together in a relational and dynamic manner. Krauss introduced the concept of being immersed in the matrix of possibilities, where art forms such as sculpture, landscape, and architecture interact in various configurations, creating what can be seen as an early postmodern attempt to define a multi-narrative field of virtuality. This approach moves beyond the rigid, binary distinctions that characterised modernist thought, opening up a broader perspective on how art can engage with physical sites and environments. To illustrate her argument, Krauss contrasts two very different sculptures: Mary Miss's *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* (1978-1979) and Constantin Brâncuși's *Endless Column* (first version in 1918). Mary Miss's work exemplifies the postmodern approach, where the sculpture is not merely an isolated object but a synthesis of environmental experience. Miss's installation invites the public to engage with the site, blurring the boundaries between what is man-made and what is natural. The work's interactive and site-specific nature challenges traditional notions of sculpture as a static, autonomous object.

In contrast, Krauss presents Brâncuși's *Endless Column* as a quintessential modernist sculpture and its relation to the landscape. The column, with its abstract, repetitive

LEFT:
Constantin Brancusi
Endless Column
1938

right:
Mary Miss
*Perimeters/Pavilions/
Decoys*
1977-1978



up:
Rosalind E. Krauss's
*Sculpture in the
Expanded Field*,
diagram,
1978

form, stands as a self-contained object within the landscape. It embodies the modernist ideal of formal purity and autonomy, absorbing its pedestal and asserting its presence as an independent object. However, despite being contextualised within a landscape, *Endless Column* remains distinct and separate from its surroundings, representing a modernist approach that prioritises the sculpture's form over its relationship to its environment. Krauss's comparison of these works underscores the shift from modern to postmodern approaches in art. While Brâncuși's work represents the modernist focus on the sculpture as an autonomous entity—"reaches downward to absorb the pedestal into itself,"²²—Miss's installation exemplifies the postmodern integration of art with its site, offering a relational and contextual understanding of sculpture. This shift reflects a broader cultural movement towards recognising the interconnectiveness of art forms and their environments, moving away from the isolated, object-focused approach of modernism, towards more relational integration.

The diagram provided a critical framework for understanding the evolution of an artwork and implications of the shift in relationships between art, landscape, and architecture. By rethinking how these terms function together, Krauss offers new possibilities for art allowing for a rich and complex engagement of the figure of an artist in the landscape, embedded in the environment, describing artistic

practice beyond an abstract, separated object in the landscape, and therefore presenting a shift in conceptual approach between of modernist and post-modern artist.

Brâncuși's column, as a self-standing entity and an object within the landscape, possesses an extraordinary aesthetic quality yet remains anonymous in form. For viewers, it offers a perspective on the potential for infinite expansion of a man-made object within nature while still maintaining its identity as a separate, 'classical' sculpture. This work paved the way for a shift in approach by land artists and architects, who began to reject this model and instead integrate artwork more subtly within the contextual site. This approach allows the artwork to become more embedded in its surroundings, offering observers a greater range of subjective or even pastiche interpretations. If we view Krauss's diagram from a different perspective, it reveals that landscape is not an isolated construct. Rather, it is embedded within a network of connections and variables, functioning as a hybrid of art, architecture, materiality, and concept. At the intersection of landscape, architecture, not-landscape, and not-architecture, as well as sculpture and site-construction, there is a space to conceive a project existing in a virtual area, opening up contemporary discourse around the understanding of art immersed in cultural and societal contexts.

Taking this thought further, the field of possibilities formed between landscape, architecture, non-landscape, non-architecture, sculpture, and site-construction presents itself as a *virtual area*. The artistic project has always aimed to be understood within broader cultural and societal contexts, expanding our thinking about space, place, and the interactions between human perception and the physical world. By framing landscape as a field of relations, she reveals the complex interplay between elements like landscape, architecture, and human perception. Krauss sought to dismantle rigid categories, challenging the conventional definitions of artistic practice prevalent in the 1980s. Her approach promoted interdisciplinary practices that often existed without specific purposes, contrasting sharply with

the modernist “means to an end” ideology.

Krauss’s expanded field represents a conceptual space of potentiality, where virtual aspects manifest in the spatial relationship between artwork and landscape. Emphasis here is put on the approach how the addition or subtraction of concepts and materiality can redefine the role of the object (or our design) within this expanded field. From another perspective, Krauss’s diagram reveals that “landscape” is not a detached construct but is embedded within networks of connections and variables. It becomes a hybrid, integrating elements of art, architecture, materiality, and concept. Even what is traditionally considered a “natural” landscape fits within this category; once perceived by humans, it is shaped by subjective understanding, losing its pristine, untouched state. Continuous positioning of oneself in the network of unified systems makes it impossible to draw clear boundaries between them, and virtuality is used here as a dispositive, applied to translations of the endless shifts in definitions and categorisation. This virtuality, a state emerging from interconnectedness, is marked by the infinite meanings and possibilities that arise within the field shaped by these elements.

Fin de siècle and artistic decommodification of nature

At the end of the 20th century, we observed a convergence of approaches once considered contradictory. In 1995, Gilles Clément introduced his design for Parc Henri Matisse in Lille, called *Derborance Island*, merging the distinct traditions of modern and postmodern sculpture, landscape, and architecture into a unified landscape experience—virtual both from within and from without. Clément’s concept involved raising a section of land within the park to create a self-contained island. By elevating this landmass skyward, he transformed it into a visible yet inaccessible monument, embodying his *third landscape* theory.²³ Its main focus advocates for preserving nature by deliberately limiting human access, challenging the conventional focus on accessibility and usability. In doing so, the human-cente-



red perspective was intentionally set aside. Clément's work merged the traditions of sculpture and landscape to create a piece of land made by humans but paradoxically not intended for human use. *Derborance Island* is unique both formally and conceptually, resembling a supernatural landslide, with a meditative function that positions it between the human and the natural, rather than serving a utilitarian purpose. Unlike Mary Miss's *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, which invited the audience to explore it with its symbolic ladder, Clément's design imposed strict constraints on human access, reflecting his anti-capitalist sentiment at the turn of the century. The absence of elements like stairs signified a deliberate distancing of nature for its own sake, leaving it untouched and inaccessible. *Derborance Island* is an example of artistic project embodying a critique of commodification.

Gilles Clément
Derborance Island
1995

This approach evokes a sense of seclusion, recalling the original idea of paradise as a utopian beauty "behind closed walls." It represents a retreat from the commodified world and a call for positive change. The name *Derborance Island* refers to a pristine forest fragment in the Swiss Alps near Lac de Derborance, renowned for its rich biodiversity due to its difficult and remote location. This symbol of untouched nature became a metaphor for Clément's work, which mirrored the broader societal turn of the 1990s toward seeking refuge from the pressures of urban life.



Robert Smithson,
Floating Island
designed 1970,
built in
2005.
Courtesy of The Estate
of Robert Smithson.

As mentioned before, Clément coined the term "third landscape" to guide societal awareness toward protecting areas untouched by human cultivation, advocating for their preservation²⁴. This stance directly opposed the prevailing trend of commodifying every piece of land, a mindset that had come to dominate design thinking in Europe by the end of the 20th century. Clément's *Derborance Island* stands as a critique of this commodification, elevating nature as something to be preserved for its intrinsic value rather than for human use or economic gain. Despite the critics' opinions, naming it visual intrusion, conflicting with traditional notions of classical public spaces, *Derborance Island* was a testament to innovative ecological preservation, an attempt to nature's decommodification in the consequently changing world.

Alike Robert Smithson's 1970 project *Floating Island*, and its eventual realization in 2005²⁵ represents a critical withdrawal from the capitalist tendency to treat nature as a mere backdrop or context for human action. In *Floating Island*, nature is elevated to something sacred and detached. This project also redefined the artist's/architect role as a servant and protector of nature, emphasising a boundary between the artwork and the audience—a boundary that should never be crossed. Smithson's act of liberating a piece of land and allowing it to drift freely in the Hudson River carried significant performative and conceptual weight. The



literal floating of land without any utilitarian purpose became a gesture against the capitalism, ironically juxtaposed in-situ with the spectacular urban landscape of Manhattan. The structure—where a fragment of nature was towed by a ship—acted therefore as a poetic and conceptual land reclamation. The realisation of Smithson’s work happened posthumously in 2005, which made it appear even more provocative, contrasting floating island and the wealthiest city in the world prompted reflection on whether life and nature still have a place in such cultural and economic symbolic places of capitalism. The drifting piece of land became a critical statement, taking on its own life and significance, forcing us to reconsider the space it occupies in our world.

Daniel Libeskind,
Garden of Exile
Berlin,
1999

The separation of a natural site can also serve as a form of memory preservation. In 1999, architect Daniel Libeskind used a sculptural form of landscape to protect the memory of the Holocaust. His work *Garden of Exile*, located in Berlin, is a concrete sculpture featuring olive trees planted in massive concrete boxes, one of which contains soil from Jerusalem. The sculpture is deliberately tilted, creating a sense of instability that evokes the fading memory of the Holocaust. Here, the landscape is safeguarded by architectural elements, reflecting a mistrust in the ephemeral nature of memory. This approach fosters reverence for the seclusion of nature, rendering it virtually inviolable and transforming it into a sacred, untouchable dimension.

Romanticised globalisation

Fin de siècle anxieties culminated in the emergence of manifestos and movements that grappled with the rising significance of the intangible, technological world. As the internet became entering average household, materiality and direct access were increasingly replaced by ephemerality and connectedness, often mediated by computer screens. In response, German artist Martin Kippenberger developed a conceptual artistic critique of this rapidly changing landscape through his seminal *Metro-Net* artworks (1993). Kippenberger's installations involved digging into the earth and constructing metro stations in remote locations, leading to dead ends. These works critically engaged with the virtual, interconnected world, epitomised by a series of metro entrances that appeared in isolated parts of the globe. These entrances symbolized blind, imaginary portals—connections that led nowhere.

For Documenta X in 1997, Kippenberger proposed installing a Metro-Net entrance in the middle of a river—a project that, due to safety regulations, was never realised. However, digitally altered images of this entrance surrounded by water are still available online. This artwork is especially significant for its exploration of the relationship between technology, landscape, and society. It exemplifies what scholar Kai Hammermeister has termed *romantic globalization*²⁶ arguing that Kippenberger's works contribute to the discourse on placelessness and dispersion in the contemporary world, both through the real and the imaginary. Through the creation of these utopian non-places, they highlight how the threat of globalization can lead us to a dead end.

Kippenberger's artistic project superseded the idea of globalisation as solely a computer-generated phenomenon, instead giving it a physical and plastic form through artistic expression. By using—or, in fact, denying—the notion of place, materiality, and cultural connectivity (symbolised by the metro), *Metro-Net* criticises the aesthetics of globalisation in the landscape. Kippenberger's humorous yet pro-



found work, rooted in the dadaist tradition, raises important questions about the meaning of connection in a world where the local loses its fixity, or grounding²⁷ reflecting societal anxieties, skepticism and fear regarding uncertain future.

Metro-Net as an artwork incorporated the tradition of reproduction, seemingly anticipating the arrival of the internet, offering a commentary on something yet to come. This attitude of Kippenberger—his utopian vision, purpose, and deconstruction of the artwork within the landscape—romanticizes globalization, producing a sensation of virtuality as a reversed hope. It evokes an uncanny feeling of abandonment, yet within a gentle landscape, daring us to immerse ourselves in the promise of the future. This possibility is intuitively grasped by looking at something as rational and ordinary as a subway staircase, set in an irrational place—a wilderness at the end of the millennium.

The techno-aesthetics of 21st artistic project

Postmodern influences in the 21st century continued to produce numerous works characterised by irony, pastiche, and deconstruction. Particularly in the context of landscape portrayal and representation, the global perspective has shifted towards navigating the world through the internet and the traffic of ideas, enabling artists to immediately research on their perspectives and engage in various cultural

left:
Martin Kippenberger
– *Metro-Net*,
Transportabler U-Bahn
Eingang (Transportable
subway entrance),
Documenta X, Kassel,
1997,
photo: paddle8.com

right:
Martin Kippenberger
– *Metro-Net*, Syros,
Greece, 1993, courtesy:
Museo Reina Sofia

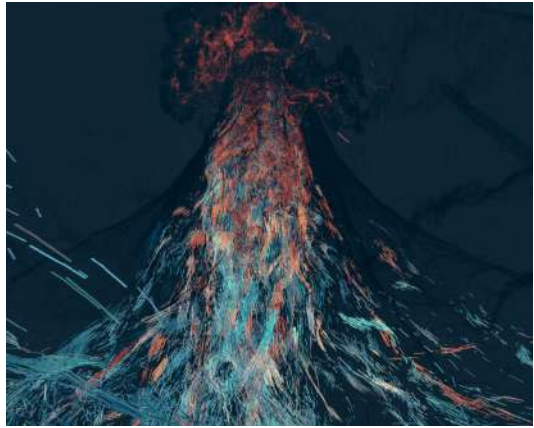
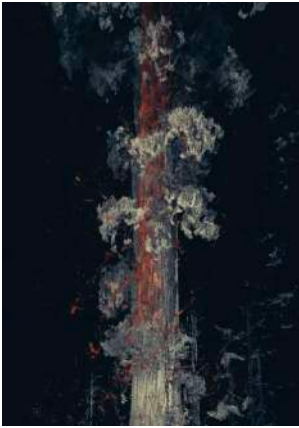


Jakob Steen Kudesk
Berl-Berl
stills from the
immersive installation,
2021



exchanges. This has also led to a more universal approach to art production, where global connectivity and access to diverse visual sources from different cultures, spaces and times provide artists with an array of references. This is where immersive environments has challenged traditional notions of landscape, manifesting in the exploration of augmented and computer-generated artistic practices. These practices have demonstrated the potential of digital technologies in different understanding of landscape art and to construction of the artistic project.

Example of this approach is Jakob Kudsk Steensen, an artist working with environmental storytelling²⁸. His artistic project *Berl-Berl*, curated by Emma Enderby and commissioned by the LAS Foundation in 2021, involved a collaboration between the artist, the Natural History Museum in Berlin, the LAS Foundation, and the singer Arca. The video presents a digital simulation of fauna and flora, that prehistorically have been covering the areas of nowadays Brandenburg area, oscillating between the scientific and the imaginary, offering an artistic response to the question of what ancient nature might have looked like before human intervention led to the construction of cities. This work merges computer technologies with historical exploration, simultaneously bringing into the present the narratives of forgotten mythologies. It is questioning the status of what is real or artificial, destabilising the notion of "truth" about historical



landscape as solely a geological formation. The virtuality, in this form, lies even more in the possibility of blending historical pasts, which enter the present and reality through contemporary technological tools.

To create this work, artist used scans of local specimens merging them with computer technology, creating a surrealistic effect that immerse the viewer in ancient wetlands. Generated by gaming program *Unreal Engine*²⁹, a real-time, 3D computer engine, used to creation of images, the artwork combines extinct species stored in the Museum of Natural History's repository with the artist's imagination of what the world might have been like 10,000 years ago. The result is a series of moving, abstract images that blur the line between reality and fiction, transporting the audience to a parallel world—a primordial geography that existed long before Berlin. This immersive experience was exhibited at Berghain Panorama Bar, an industrial space in East Berlin known for its secluded character, allowing the audience to experience the environmental eerie.

Few years before, similar idea got recognition, when in 2016, the art collective Marshmallow Laser Feast launched the mixed-media VR video *Treehugger: Wawona*.³⁰ The film won a prize at the VR Arles Festival in 2018, becoming a landmark case study in landscape art through the use of various contemporary techniques, from immersive environ-

Marshmallow Laser Feast.
Treehugger: Wawona, multisensory mixed-reality installation, stills excerpt from the experience, 2016

ments to point cloud technology, commonly employed in architecture to store data on buildings or terrains. The video takes us on a journey, demonstrating the inside structure of a 3,000-year-old sequoia tree, its internal water flows and their further distribution throughout the ancient plant. It also reveals the tree's connection to surrounding environment, emphasising its place in a vast natural system that lies beyond ordinary perception.

The video was created using point cloud technology, a technique for recording the coordinates of points in space within a computer program. The generated visuals have become a popular means of artistically navigating space and landscape, offering a fresh perspective on nature. This technique has not only entered the mainstream canon of contemporary art but has also become a staple in architectural representation. Technological tools like these provide visual clarity grounded in scientific data, offering insights into environmental issues such as climate change and human-caused ecological damage. Point cloud technology, for instance, delivers precise spatial coordinates, transforming data into a 3D model of actual reality.

Computer-generated art of the 21st century has introduced new aesthetics and enabled artists to integrate scientific data into their work through digital media. However, virtuality is not solely tied to technology, aesthetics, or production methods; instead, it resides in the power and novelty of the message conveyed through these artworks, altering reality. Emerging technology is creating a new Enframing, in Heidegger's terms, for interpreting the world. The artistic project represents a transition from one discipline to another, not by adhering to the full set of rules of a single discipline, but by focusing on the effects it may bring. The virtuality of an artistic project is conveyed through the interplay of ephemerality, ambiguity, and disobedience towards certain rules as part of its concept. To learn from an artistic project would mean for an architect or designer embracing the possibility of a surprise: the uncertainty of the outcome in the process, opening up to the idea of getting lost and to the nonconformist experiences that can

bring novelty or rediscover forgotten paths.

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2.3 Landscape: Identity to Stereotype

The evolution of landscape in the common imagination has undergone numerous stages of transformation, principally shaped by the visual saturation that prevails in our culture today. The vast access to the internet allows individuals to encounter an infinite number of images, creating a cultural presumption of places based on widely shared visual references. The symbol of the landscape constantly mutates in culture, taking on new forms and meanings as it is reflected in how its artistic representation fluctuates in media.¹

One of those natural landscapes saturated with cultural significance is the *American West*, which serves as a generic social construct, created on the pursuit of identity of American tradition.² Idea of the *American landscape* also permeated the consciousness of different cultures worldwide. Despite the geographical variety of the new continent, the term evokes a particular image, shaped by popular culture. In the 21st century, typing the phrase "American landscape" into a search engine like Google reveals that the established canon of images is dominated by towering mountains, serene rivers, and vast expanses commonly associated with U.S. national parks.

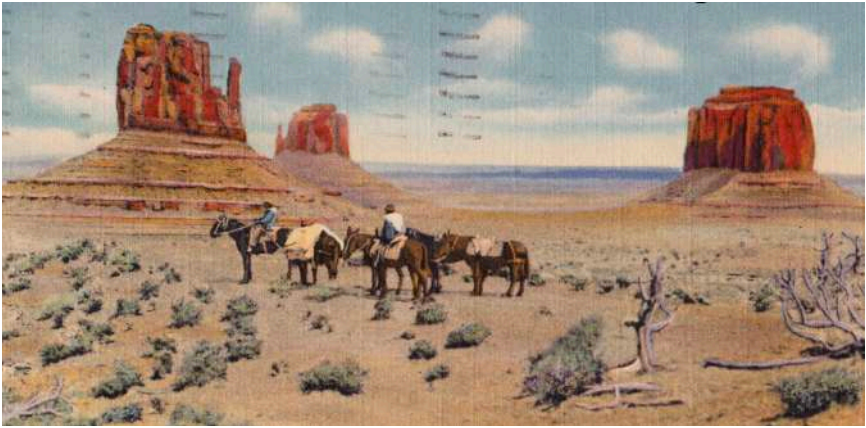
This imagery of the American landscape is vast, yet

there is a prevailing cultural imagery that seems to stand out above the rest. The Western United States, with its geographical characteristics, is on the verge of becoming iconic and stereotypical. Representing the newly born idea of cultural freedom, the landscape became an agent transmitting various notions, from wilderness and undiscovered possibilities to the evocative thrill of the untamed. As a symbol, it has continuously evolved with changing media, from analogue to technological, responding to societal values. As visual culture continued to expand and evolve, the landscape as a symbol will likely continue to adapt, reflecting new layers of meaning in an increasingly connected world.³

Monument Valley, an iconic part of the Navajo Tribal Park, might be an example of how countless artistic representations of the landscape, are shaping the common cultural identity of a place, as well how they are transforming in accordance with societal zeitgeist. A characteristic vista has been commodified by contemporary culture with its vast horizons and towering rock formations, imbued with a meaning far beyond their physical beauty, and became a tool of support of American identity. Using the words of J.W.T Mitchell, and referring to his idea of the landscape concept, that the landscape is somehow:

"the 'dreamwork' of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalences and unsuppressed resistance"⁴

Its symbolic significance, metamorphosing through various media and artistic reiterations, has been used as a tool for constructing narratives. Its entry into popular culture was supported by the media of film and television, common tools for spreading ideology, where it served as a backdrop for Western movies, symbolizing ruggedness and untamed nature. Its horizon line has come to represent a boundary between civilization and wilderness, a place



up:
The Mittens,
postcard

where the viewer's imagination ventures into the unknown. As a result, *Monument Valley's* imagery is repeatedly virtualised, altered and reinterpreted, shifting from a physical location to cultural construct and "*folding back to itself*". Its depiction in advertisements, films, arts and other digital media contributes to its status as a cultural icon, which reflects broader themes such as exploration, freedom, and even isolation. This transformation of the landscape into simulacra⁵ —a Baudrillard's idea of representation of something that loses its original meaning—demonstrates how contemporary culture impact natural spaces, turning them into symbols with layered meanings far from their original, unmediated existence.

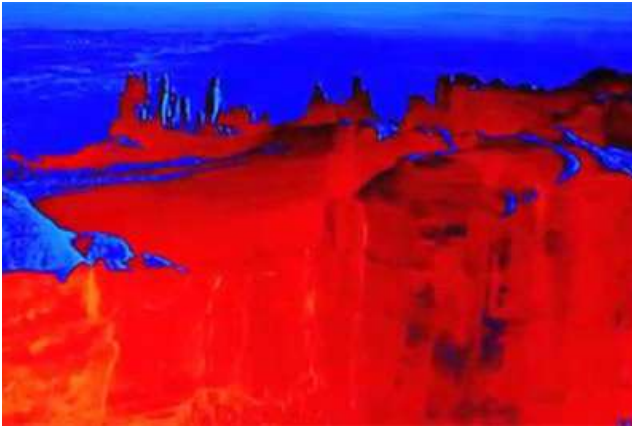
Down:
dir. John Ford
Stagecoach,
1939



The fluctuation in how Monument Valley is recognised can be traced chronologically by dissecting the cultural references found in various formats, including linguistic descriptions. In the Navajo language, the place is called *Tsé Bii' Ndzisgaii*, which translates to "rock(s)—within—white-streaks-around, or thereabout."⁶ This name is deeply intertwined with indigenous tribal practices and perceives location as the "surrounding," offering a more explicit and descriptive account of the geographical site than the common English abbreviation, *The Mittens*, which refers to the shape of the rocky formations. The depiction of the landscape as a silent spectator, where language and artistic production have played a significant role, contributes to remembering and preserving its form and meaning.

In popular culture, through the spread of Western movies *American West* has been somehow associated with this symbol: vast lowlands, mountains, geological formations and distant horizon. This landscape became a symbol of freedom, and the steep, isolated geological formations became an ambient. From *Stagecoach* (1939), a John Ford classic Western movie, to surreal representations containing picturesque, abstract interpretations and modifications of the landscape, Stanley Kubrick experimented with these ideas by using *Monument Valley* to create an otherworldly vision during the shooting of his 1968 science fiction masterpiece, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Here, the landscape is distorted in blazing colours, and although maintaining familiarity, it iterates its features to convey an eerie sense of estrangement. Kubrick used this landscape as a visual reference for an alien planet, demonstrating how a known place could be reimagined to evoke a sense of the unfamiliar and extraterrestrial. The use of *American West* in somehow distorted version, stands for its versatility as a symbol, capable of representing the earthly and the otherworldly, the old and the new at the same time.

American West became a subject of artistic manifestation of Georgia O'Keeffe, a modernist painter, gave the it a new identity through her iconic and captivating series of landscape paintings. Drawing inspiration from the rugged



dir. Stanley Kubrick,
2001: *Space Odyssey*,
film,
1968



Georgia O'Keeffe,
My Backyard,
painting
1937



Christo and Jean
Claude
Valley Curtain,
environmental artwork
1970-1972

beauty surrounding her home at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico, O'Keeffe moved away from the urban environment of New York following the death of her husband, Alfred Stieglitz. Her work, characterised by its bold shapes and vibrant colours, transformed the vast, arid landscapes of the American Southwest into symbols of personal and artistic expression, inviting to alter the way of seeing a landscape, that we share in common.

In 1972, in Colorado, the artist duo Christo and Jeanne-Claude completed their project *Valley Curtain*, one of the hallmark achievements of the Land Art movement. Taking 28 months to construct⁷, the project involved suspending 23,000 square meters of fabric between two mountains, in the landscape. This monumental work, which briefly adorned the natural landscape, pushed the boundaries of what seemed achievable, blending art and environment in an unprecedented way. The process itself, as much as the final installation, was a testament to the artists' ambition, balancing on the edge of fantasy and aiming for the impossible. The result was not only a visual spectacle but a deeply evocative gesture that resonated with a spectacle in nature, a human presence in ephemeral form, changing the clichéd, stereotypical image back into living organism.

Similarly, in Wim Wenders' 1984 film *Paris Texas*, the opening scene depicts the main character Travis wandering in confusion through the deserted West Texas. He seems out of place, a surplus element in hostile and uncanny environment, but after following his movements, leading to no direction, we realise that there is an uncanny connection between the emptiness of the landscape and Travis's frenzy caused by abandonment. The landscape becomes a mirror and metaphore of the range of human expression, from sadness to emptiness, that is epitomised in the tension between the human and the natural.

In this case, *virtuality* is emerging as a tool for new ways of seeing space. Interventions in the landscape function as an agent, which can affirmate or fade certain stereotypes, as in the case of the *Curtain Valley*, rendering

the environment anew, or as in *Paris, Texas*, restructuring emotional response to the given scenery. At the same, the liaison between the human and natural is offering an artist freedom in choice of modes of those interventions. To see the landscape anew requires the juxtaposition with scenic depictions, imagery and cultural symbolics. Landscape, in virtual terms, is a natural acquirer of identity for a society, alike architecture is defining the identity of a city. Through this constant trade, as a designer one can choose to intervene within its structure to change its relationship to humans, or reframe its new forms of relations.

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Paris, Texas,
dir. Wim Wenders.
Opening scene,
Travis lost in the
deserted landscape,
1984





CHAPTER 3

EXHIBITING LANDSCAPE

3.1 The System of Nature

When Carl Linnaeus published *Systema Naturae* in 1744, he revolutionised how the natural world was examined, putting a systematic taxonomy to fauna and flora. His work positioned organisms in structured categories within the previously entangled natural environment. This systematic division marked a significant historical breakthrough, ending the intellectual ambiguity that had previously surrounded the natural world. Linnaeus' system allowed researchers and scientists to trace the genealogy and provenance of living organisms in a scientific and ordered manner, providing a foundational framework upon which greater systems of knowledge were built.

Few years later, Sir Hans Sloane, a collector of objects from around the world, in his last will bequeathed his collection to King George II, under the condition of creating a public museum¹ In 1753 an Act of Parliament is establishing the British Museum. Sloane's gift to the nation, his vast collection of artifacts, natural specimens, artificial curiosities, from ancient objects to dried plants, collection established a cornerstone of the collection of British Museum, Natural History Museum, and British Library, and became donated to the nation.

CAROLI LINNAEI

EQVITIS DE STELLA POLARI,
ARCHIATRI REGII, MED. ET BOTAN. PROFESS. VPSAL.
ACAD. VPSAL. HOLMENS. PETROPOL. BEROL. IMPER.
LOND. MONSPEL. TOLOS. FLORENT. SOC.

SYSTEMA
NATVRAE

PER
REGNA TRIA NATVRAE,
SECVNDVM
CLASSES, ORDINES,
GENERA, SPECIES,
CVM
CHARACTERIBVS, DIFFERENTIIS, SYNONYMIS, LOCIS.
TOMVS I.

PRAEFATVS EST
IOANNES IOACHIMVS LANGIVS
MATH. PROF. PVBL. ORD. HALENS. ACAD. IMP. ET BORVSS. COLLEGA.

Numeros et Nomina



AD EDITIONEM DECIMAM REFORMATAM HOLMIENSEM.

HALAE MAGDEBVRGICAE
TYPIS ET SVMTIBVS IO. IAC. CVRT. MDCCLX

This act marked a new stage in the process of demonstrating objects for public view, what essentially would become the modern concept of a museum. Aligned with the spirit of the Enlightenment, prioritising the values of scientific research, critical observation, and open debate, the collection presented nature in a highly rational form, through the taxonomical network of systems conceived by Linnaeus, placing the flora and fauna in the realm of human understanding.

In the 19th century, the British Museum acquired its iconic neoclassical façade, designed by architect Robert Smirke, which remains a symbol of the institution to this day. Smirke was renowned for his impeccable craftsmanship; as James Fergusson noted in 1849, "He was a first-class builder architect (...) no building of his ever showed a flaw or failing (...) he was often called upon to remedy the defects of his brother artists."² This highlights the prevailing tension between the roles of architect and artist, a dynamic that continues to resonate today.

In 1850, the façade was adorned with a sculpture by Richard Westmacott titled *The Progress of Civilization*, featuring a group of figures that included a representation of Britannia. This mature woman, embodying enlightenment, served as a guardian of the treasures housed within the museum and, by extension, the imperial territories from which many of those treasures were extracted. Britannia personified British imperial power and enlightenment. Her presence on the tympanum was intended to signal a union between science, art, and culture under the overarching influence of the British Empire. This installation transformed the façade into not just an architectural statement but also a political one, blending art with the imperial narrative of British global dominance.

Under Britannia's watchful gaze, the British Museum became a potent emblem of empire, reinforcing the notion that science, art, and culture were safeguarded by the British state. Through this imperial lens, the colonies were viewed not only as territories to be governed but as land-



scapes to be harvested for their cultural and natural resources, analysed through Western systems of knowledge, and exhibited to audiences as extensions of the British Empire.

This process turned colonial territories into satellite landscapes of the empire, and gathered artifacts and curiosities contributed to a particular cultural imagery, often reinforcing stereotypes. The museum, as a scientific and cultural institution, also became an agent of imperial control; its display frequently presented spoils of colonization in ways that manipulated perception. The transformation of colonized lands into sources of knowledge and curiosities reflected a broader imperial dynamic, where the colonies were simultaneously exploited and exoticised. The treasures of distant lands—flora, fauna, and cultural artifacts—were interpreted through Western frameworks and displayed under Britannia's gaze, symbolizing British supremacy over nature, culture, and territory

Wunderkammern: collecting nature

Collecting and gathering items from the outer world is a fundamental psychological tendency of human behaviour. Before the establishment of the first museums, the closest semblance to such institutions in early modern Europe was the cabinets of wonders, or *Wunderkammern*. Curated by nobles, affluent merchants, and scholars, this phenomenon

Westmacott's presentation drawing of the group of sculptures, probably dating to 1851, when the work was installed (see Bryant, 327, n.20). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Source: "Drawing."

emerged during a period when Europe was expanding its exploration into previously unknown continents and cultures, attempting to systematize and provide provenance for a variety of natural species, curiosities, and artifacts.

Wunderkammern served as spaces for collecting, interpreting, and exhibiting the diverse riches of the world while researching their genealogy and provenance. Some took the form of literal cabinets with compartments and drawers, while others were entire rooms filled with stuffed animals, minerals, plants, and artistic marvels, all intended to be exposed and admired. Contemporary artists are still exploring this topic, such as American conceptual artist Mark Dion, who reflected on this concept reiterating the idea of collecting elements from nature. Through his work, he allows audiences to perceive landscape differently, viewing it as a collection of elements organized into meticulously categorized information.

In 1997 interview, Dion noted: “Nature is one of the most sophisticated arenas for the production of ideology. Once I realised that, the walls between my two worlds (art and science) dissolved”³ recognising the inherent power of artistic display. Dion introduced the *Wunderkammern* concept to contemporary culture, transforming them into art pieces that explore landscape.

His piece *Landfill* showcases a collection of garbage, recreating a generic seaside landscape. In *Cabinet of Marine Debris*, he presents meticulously segregated pieces of trash found in the ocean, displayed for contemplation. Similarly, the 2006 work *Neukom Vivarium* features a micro-landscape—a fallen tree transported to a greenhouse, where it continues to evolve and transform its ecosystem. Dion often uses interpretations of nature, employing science, nomenclature, and classification as artistic tools and methods of interpretation. His works speculatively dissect the relationship between nature and the artificial, deliberately blurring the boundaries between the natural and artificial, as well as the scientific and artistic. This approach builds upon our understanding of landscape, echoing the early displays in



Mark Dion,
Cabinet of Marine Debris,
cabinet; wood, glass,
metal, paint assorted
marine debris; plastic,
rope,
2014



Mark Dion.
Neukom Vivarium,
Mixed-media
installation,
greenhouse structure:
80 feet long.
Installation view:
Olympic Sculpture
Park, Seattle
Courtesy of the Seattle
Art Museum.
2006



Mark Dion, *Landfill*,
1999-2000, mixed
media, 71 1/2 x 147 1/2 x
64 inches (181.6 x 374.7
x 162.6 cm). Museum
of Contemporary
Art San Diego,
Museum purchase,
Contemporary
Collectors Fund,
2000.4. Photo by Pablo
Mason. © Mark Dion

the British Museum and Natural History Museum.

Dion's work refers to the ideological impact of Linnaeus's systems in new forms, going beyond established norms and objective scrutiny. The distortions and transformations he employs serve as artistic expressions that support his strategy to recreate the novelty of a display, inherently containing a virtual element. Exhibiting various elements, as Dion does in his cabinets, can trigger new connections between them, rendering and visualizing certain ideas in alternative ways. *The Cabinet of Marine Debris* consists of contemporary landscape elements, much like Sloane's collection, which included plants he brought from his voyages to Madeira, Barbados, Nevis, and Jamaica. These collections can be seen as rifted landscapes, revealing a split between elements. After reorganization, they convey messages and ideologies, whether drawing attention to environmental marine pollution or the colonial plantations of Jamaica.

Landscape as the representation of a world view : heterotopias and power.

Described by Michel Foucault concept of heterotopia referred to the places, that are embodying the 'other' dimension, functioning outside of the normal conventions.⁴ They often juxtapose multiple, often contradictory element, which he described 1967 lecture *Des Espaces Autres (Of Other Spaces)*, such as cultural and societal functions, different time and space temporalities. He gave an example of museums, libraries, cementaries, ships, but one of the oldest examples of heterotopia as the contradictory site he named an artificial and natural construct: the garden.⁵

Foucault uses the metaphor of the garden to explain its heterotopic feature, highlighting how its suspension in reality allows it to combine collected elements. Through this lens, the garden reflects an idealized form of nature, curated or designed as a human aesthetic or recreational construct. He also discusses the uncanny sacrality of gardens across cultures, using the example of the Persian garden, which was originally conceived to encompass the four parts of the



Detail of Safavid chahar bagh carpet, Kerman, south Persia, late 16th or early 17th century.

world within its rectangular shape.⁶ The traditional layout of this garden is known as chaharbagh, meaning "four gardens" in Persian. This design is characterised by a geometrical layout divided by two main waterway axes, usually crossing at the center and emphasized with a fountain. The water flows in four directions are reflecting metaphorically the flows of power, alike in Western culture example of Bernini's fountain in the Piazza Navona in Rome, which forms the impossible nexus of four continental rivers: the Amazon, Danube, Ganges, and Nile, symbolizing the Pope's claim to universal dominion over the world.⁷

Those gardens also inspired the design of Persian rugs, which serve as a symbolic representation, and by extension, of the world itself. In his view, the rug is a smaller, symbolic, or "virtual" representation of the entire world, aligning with his concept of *heterotopias*—spaces or objects that contain and represent transitional concepts, above which, in the case of a carpet, is obtained through its portable features. In his discussion, Foucault refers to the idea of Persian rugs metaphorically, going beyond their aesthetic features, as an agent that can transform gardens from a static location to a crossable space as a portable representation.⁸

Gardens in the Ottoman Empire encapsulated the metaphor of the entire world, as they depicted the objects that could be found within them. Wealthy merchants collected

objects brought from their travels, and the places where they later stored them were private gardens. The depiction on the carpet, therefore, played the role of an agent, symbolically representing the collection found in a merchant's garden. In the transportable form of a rug, the depiction of the wonders found in these gardens lasted longer, could be easily transported, and demonstrated to others.

Historical studies trace Iranian gardens and carpets to the first millennium BC⁹. This connection between art and nature represents a virtual superimposition of imagination and reality. The Baharestan Carpet, known as *The Spring of Khosrow*, is one of the most famous royal carpets from the Sassanian period, embroidered with silk, gold, and precious stones.¹⁰ It is said to depict a map of a garden filled with flowers and plants, measuring an impressive 27 x 27 meters.¹¹ A carpet of this size served during bad weather, and with its real size, it could imitate the garden in eternal full bloom. It symbolically represented the king's power, superior to nature and the seasons, while the monarch would unfold the rug on any winter day. With its designs, patterns, and symbols, it was an abstract yet meaningful representation of paradise, a contemplative space embodying the concept frozen in time—a perpetual spring.

For Foucault, both the garden and the carpet, as representational garden, fall within his broader context of heterotopias. These other spaces—locations that must exist within society yet remain simultaneously separate—simultaneously embody an idealised version of the world in a constant state of change. Similarly, the rug becomes a heterotopic object; it condenses the entire world or the ideal of place in a flat, symbolic surface, striving to fulfil humanity's desire for control over time and the changes that accompany it. This metaphorically illustrates how an art object, in this case, a rug, serves as a representation of broader, more complex realities, emblems of human power and domination over nature. The rug, holding the representation of a garden through its varied motifs, becomes a virtual representation of the world—a conceptual alternative that may never fully materialise but exists in the form of its symbolic

perfection.¹²

In the quest to overcome entropy and make sense of the organised world, humans reach a consensus to accept the volatile conditions of their surroundings and the uncertain future. In the field of contemporary arts, these expressions are found in their virtual forms—exhibitions, books, and, more recently, the internet. These platforms essentially continue the endeavor of embracing the world as an intellectual challenge ripe for interpretation. They serve to virtualise and potentialise multiple connections, allowing for alternative outcomes of narratives yet to be invented.

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7. DeLue, R. Z., & Elkins, J. (2008). *Landscape theory*. Routledge. (p. 36)
8. Foucault, M. (1986). *Heterotopias*. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 24–26.(p.26), precisely: “The garden is a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space.”
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3.2 Learning From Exhibitions

La Ville, Le Jardin, Le Mémoire (The City, the Garden, the Memory), group show, French Academy in Rome, 1998,1999,2000

The set of exhibitions that marked the beginning of the 21st century, focusing on the intersection of nature and memory, were held at the French Academy in Rome, Villa Medici, and titled *La Ville, Le Jardin, Le Mémoire* (The City, the Garden, the Memory), consecutively in years 1998, 1999 and 2000.¹ Curated by Carolyn Christov-Bargiev, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Laurence Bossé, shows brought together renowned artists and scholars of the time to explore the intersections between urban spaces, nature, and memory through the perspectives of both a physical and mental journey.

This setting—Villa Medici, a historical enclave of art and learning in Rome—was itself emblematic of the themes explored. The curators wanted to engage with the rich layers of history, culture, and natural beauty that surrounded the French Academy. The interplay between these elements became a central focus of the exhibition, encouraging reflections on how the past is retained, transformed, and reinterpreted in modern artistic practice.

right:
Daniel Burren,
*Cabane éclatée à
l'obélisque*,
work in situ,
Villa Médici,
French Academy in
Rome,
2000

In an interview conducted to coincide and accompany the exhibition's opening, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Hans Ulrich Obrist discussed the unique context of the Villa Medici and its relevance to the exhibition's themes. They remarked on the complexity of perceiving and engaging with the city, nature, and the human experience, noting how the intersection of these domains generates rich, multifaceted interpretations. The exhibition emphasised not only the external beauty of landscapes and cities but also the internal landscape of memory and imagination, linking nature to the cognitive and emotional processes that shape human perception of space and time. Carolyn Christov Bakargiev refers to this in the following words:

“The metropolis as a constantly changing image of contemporary reality, as a tangible, yet virtual place where different communities’ identities are shaped and modified by its crossings and the creation of paths; memory as the ability to create new routes, both vertical and horizontal through time and history; the garden as a stage or scene of memory; as a utopia embracing nature within its city ‘walls’; as a place of sensory pleasures, a refuge, a place of encounter with the biological reality of life subjected to slower pace, and sense of time where thought has space. These are the themes that will be explored throughout the three years of the event. Can different layers of time co-exist, as some recent scientific research suggest? (...)”²

Its central themes—the relationship between nature, as embodied in the famous gardens of Villa Medici, and the city, and also from its exploration of memory and human perception, time, conclude into several narratives, such as careful observance of passing time. Situation here was unique due to the duration and possibility to develop the exhibition as one functioning project within a three years span.

At the same time, the duration of the project wasn't insignificant. The way individuals relate to landscapes through their experiences, memories, and cultural immer-





Peter Fischli
David Weiss,
Blumenprojektion,
Herbst, Flower
Projection,
two-channel slide
installation, projected
in the room, Villa
Médici, Académie de
France, Rome,
1998

sion, blending the natural and the constructed worlds in a deeply symbolic space, changing within time or seasons causing a certain shift in perceived reality. The exhibition's focus on human positioning within nature and time was mirrored in the work of Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Flower Projection* (1998), which, in a poetic way, showed the virtual superimposition of lush nature in late summer. In a sense, it referenced the impossible perpetuity of the frescoes gardens of Villa Livia or the eternal bloom of Persian garden carpets.

The abundance of time, space and images, especially in such a historically charged environment, brought attention to how landscapes can exist simultaneously in both physical and mental dimension. Through the juxtaposition with art it can be manipulated, stretched, augmented, and offers an emergence of something unthought. In this sense, the exhibition highlighted the notion that landscapes are imbued with virtuality—potential spaces shaped by human memory and perception.

Giulia Bruno, in her book *Atlas of Emotions*, referred to the exhibition as an emotional journey through the garden³. Her experience of the exhibition described the importance of engaging in the exhibition, that not only featured the prominent artists of the late 20th century, but went beyond visual presentation, turning to the experiential.



Experiments were conducted by many, but the particular case of the works of Janet Cardiff and Lucius Burckhardt triggered novelty and active engagement from the audience. Cardiff's work involved walks through gardens, focusing on haptic and sensory experiences, engaging participants on a personal and immersive level. In alignment with his concept of strollology, Lucius Burckhardt offered tours during the exhibition to the everyday off-sites of Rome, highlighting the act of walking as both an experience and an art form in itself. The virtuality of these approaches demonstrated the multiplicity of possible encounters with the Eternal City. Time, space, and memory are the components of immersion within the context of nature or urban environments. The artworks were an attempt to question the context through different acts: the act of seeing, the act of walking, and the act of listening, emphasising that the city's landscapes, however perceived, are essentially constructed through collective human experience and need a receiver to exist.

Janet Cardiff Walk,
Villa Medici Walk
Villa Médici, Académie
de France, Rome,
1998

*The weather project, Studio Olafur Eliasson
Tate Modern, London, 2003*

A different approach was pursued by Olafur Eliasson in his artistic project, which seemed designed to alert viewers to a change in its visual saturation and public prominence. In 2003, the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in London hosted



THE WEATHER WILL AFFECT
THE ATTENDANCE OF
THIS RECEPTION BY 27%

Olafur Eliasson,
The Weather Project
Invitation for the
Exhibition,
2003

an exhibition that challenged perceptions of landscape and the environment in profound ways. *The Weather Project*, by Olafur Eliasson, was an immersive installation that transformed the hall into a mesmerising space filled with artificial mist and a vast, glowing sphere mimicking the sun, made of LED lights. This strikingly simple yet powerful work invited viewers to reconsider the role of the weather, not merely as a backdrop or atmospheric condition, but as an integral part of the landscape and human experience.

The installation created a surreal, dream-like atmosphere that captivated visitors, encouraging them to reflect on the weather as a dynamic and transitional phenomenon, one that deeply influences how we perceive and interact with our surroundings. Eliasson's use of light, mist, and scale blurred the line between natural and artificial, forcing the audience to confront the fragility and fluidity of the environment itself.

The invitation to the exhibition carried a playful yet thought-provoking : "The weather will affect the attendance of this reception by 27%." on the yellow postcard.⁴ emerging here as the factor for the reception of the message. The weather presents the virtual, ephemeral, ever changing, and constantly in transition part of the environment. It often becomes the subject of casual conversation, yet it is rarely acknowledged as a fundamental part of the landscape, de-



spite its crucial role. Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* installation raised therefore questions on how about if we experience landscape through an artwork. And indeed, the immersive quality of the installation captivated many and prompted a reflection on weather not merely as atmospheric conditions but as an integral aspect of the landscape, seen and felt, yet hard to grasp.

Olafur Eliasson,
Photo: Olafur Eliasson,
Exhibition "The
Weather Project",
2003

As Arnold Berleant notes, "arts can contribute to an intimate, engaged experience of landscape, and this process can itself be construed as an art."⁵ Eliasson's installation exemplified this idea by transforming the viewer's encounter with weather into an artistic experience, that is ambiguously poignant and extatic, likaly to invoke a deeper reflexion on the environmental change. Berleant further argues that "experiencing landscape through the arts and as an art, the art of environmental appreciation, offers a clearer understanding of landscape, of environment, and of art, as well as what it is to 'know' in the context of environmental experience"⁶ suggesting an invitation to let in the grayscale of emotions and actively engage with the natural world, using the artwork as the emotional and sensory outlet, thereby deepening our connection to the environment.

Eliasson's perfectly designed installation reconfigured the peculiarities of the landscape and went beyond its traditional understanding, engaging the audience in a



up left:
Vivian Suter,
paintings,
exhibition view of
*Everybody Talks About
the Weather*,
2023
Fondazione Prada,
Venice,
photo: Marco
Cappelletti



up right:
Exhibition view of
"Everybody Talks About
the Weather",
2023
Fondazione Prada,
Venice,
photo: Marco
Cappelletti

spectacle made out of an artificial sun, LED light, mist, and mirrors. The temporal nature of this artwork had an impact that has never been seen before, and paved the way for contemporary art to refocus on the environment with all its complexities and challenges.

Everyone Talks About the Weather, group show, Fondazione Prada, Venezia, 2023

Similar problem has been revisited in 2023 through a research-based art exhibition titled *Everyone Talks About the Weather*, curated by Dieter Roelstraete at Fondazione Prada in Venice. This exhibition offered a unique perspective from both a curatorial standpoint and a social landscape perception, addressing how people interact with an inevitably changing world. It featured contemporary artists alongside historical works, exploring society's response to global climate crises and meteorological changes in the landscape, and reflecting on lessons we can learn from these issues.

The exhibition's title referenced the 1968 slogan of the Socialist German Student Union, "Alle reden vom Wetter. Wir nicht" (Everyone talks about the weather. We don't). This slogan was a critique of politicians discussing trivial topics instead of addressing more pressing issues, with Marx, Lenin, and Engels featured on the poster. In 2019,

Anne-Christine Klarman updated the slogan for her poster featuring Greta Thunberg, Carola Rackete, and Judith Ellens, changing it to “Alle reden vom Wetter. Wir auch” (Everyone talks about the weather. So do we”). This updated slogan highlights the surprising invisibility of climate change in cultural and contemporary art projects despite it being one of the greatest threat that’s ahead.⁷

Curator Roelstraete pointed out that the exhibition aims to spotlight the discourse on weather and climate change, urging through exhibitions, research, and artistic works, to discuss and address this critical topic to avert future crises, and search for it along historical timeline. The exhibition juxtaposes contemporary art with replicas of works by old masters such as Caspar David Friedrich, John Constable, and Claude Monet. This blend of paintings from different epochs exposed observers to the scientific dissemination of changing landscape and weather conditions through art history. The artworks range from neutral to apocalyptic, explicit to implicit, minimal to visually abundant, and perceptible to imperceptible sensations. They collectively narrate the story of the landscape as it was and as it is evolving, demonstrating how the concept of virtuality can act as an iteration force of change and how climate change has become a global media target. Through such exhibitions, contemporary landscape issues can be expressed and revisited, potentially leading to the creation of a better future.

Although virtuality wasn’t directly cited in the exhibition, it dealt with the volatile context of contemporary technological change through a juxtaposition of various artworks. This created new value and attached symbolism to today’s shifting atmosphere.

Eternal Medium: Seeing the World in Stone, group show, LACMA, Los Angeles, 2024

Exhibiting landscape can also be approached from a non-human, recourse perspective, as demonstrated in the inductive exhibition *Eternal Medium: Seeing the World in Stone* at the Los Angeles County Museum in 2024. The



up right: Castrucci Workshop, Prague
Cabinet with landscapes, mosaic of hard stones set in an ebony and ebonised wood cabinet, c. 1610–20)

up left: Richard Blow, *Untitled (Landscape)* Montici, Italy, hand-cut hardstone c. 1960



exhibition centralised on the concept of rock as a representational medium, used as both a curatorial tool and thematic focus. From the perspective of designers, material is usually seen as having functional and aesthetic qualities. However, in this exhibition, material is elevated to a conceptual function. By juxtaposing artworks that focus on rock as a medium, the exhibition presents nature as a diverse subject of artistic expression. Observing landscape through the perspective of stone and how it is used in artworks from various time periods provides new meanings to the perception of landscape material. Stone is commodified, crafted, and assembled to represent certain icons, often depicting landscapes.

Through this artistic craftsmanship, landscape is transformed into a Baudrillardian simulacrum. This is exemplified in Richard Blow's work *Untitled (Landscape)* from 1960, an artwork made from *pietra paesina*—a “landscape stone.” Blow's work, created in the Montici workshop, reflects a contemporary focus on craftsmanship and invites attention to the material's role in artistic and landscape representation. The effect is disorienting, resulting in a loss of the explicit meaning of a stone, serving on one hand as the material extracted from the earth, and on the other as a subject of a meticulously shaped artistic vision representing an abstract landscape. An additional compelling example from the exhibition is the 1610–1620 *Cabinet*

with *Landscapes*, a furniture artistic piece embellished with pietre dure, where natural elements are rendered as independent pictorial subjects.

In this context, the virtuality of the landscape transcends traditional formal representations, emphasizing a narrative that conveys both physical and symbolic meanings. The exhibition explores the intersections of diverse perspectives and temporalities through the lens of an abstract protagonist—the Stone. This material, central to the visual and pictorial landscape, possesses a geological and structural significance that extends beyond human temporality and comprehension. Stones have been appropriated by artists, reproduced, and reinterpreted, while being esteemed for their inherent beauty and material properties. These properties have historically ranged from architectural building materials to decorative or symbolic representations of wealth. The LACMA exhibition juxtaposed representations of landscapes and stones from various historical periods, in a way akin to Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. This curatorial approach synthesised the iconography of natural materials, thereby transforming them into a complex plurality of meanings.

Basel Social Club 2024, group show, Basel, 2024

A different mode of exhibition that offers a novel perspective on the relationship between nature and art is the immersion of artworks within the landscape, treating the natural environment as an integral part of the artistic discourse. This approach occurred at the satellite fair to the annual international art fair *Art Basel*. The *Basel Social Club* held its third edition in June 2024, in a new outdoor location on farmland near Bruderholz, spanning 50 hectares across the landscape of Baseland. This year's event features an exhibition by local and international artists, along with performances and diverse culinary experiences. Artistic interventions were intended to integrate into the landscape, with installations and performances placed in fields, barns, and trees. The 2024 edition emphasized eco-



up left:
Margaret Raspé,
*Der Sadist schlägt das
eindeutig Unschuldige*
(*The Sadist Beats
the Unquestionably
Innocent*), 1971,
installation view at
Basel Social Club 2024.,



up right:
Iza Tarasewicz,
Revelations of Powers,
Basel Social Club,
2024

logy with emphasis on the themes of landscape, agriculture, and farm animals.⁸

Farmers from the host site actively participated in the event, blending art with agricultural life. This initiative provided an innovative platform for artists, galleries, and cultural institutions from around the globe to engage with the landscape as both a subject of inquiry and a contextual framework for artistic expression. The group show featured a program of site-specific interventions, performances, and even culinary sessions, wherein the landscape functioned not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in the production of contemporary art narratives. By incorporating the natural environment into the creative process, the initiative blurred the boundaries between art and nature, offering new *modus operandi* of the interaction between artist and the audience. It presented artists such as Margaret Raspé, Renee Levi, Kilian Rüthermann and Iza Tarasewicz, that are using landscape as a key element of their works, fostering a dialogue between the environment a concept of inclusion in an action. Landscape therefore, changed its meaning from the topic, to becoming a platform for interaction and a dynamic component of the works themselves, encouraging viewers to experience the environment as part of the art, rather than as a passive or secondary element.



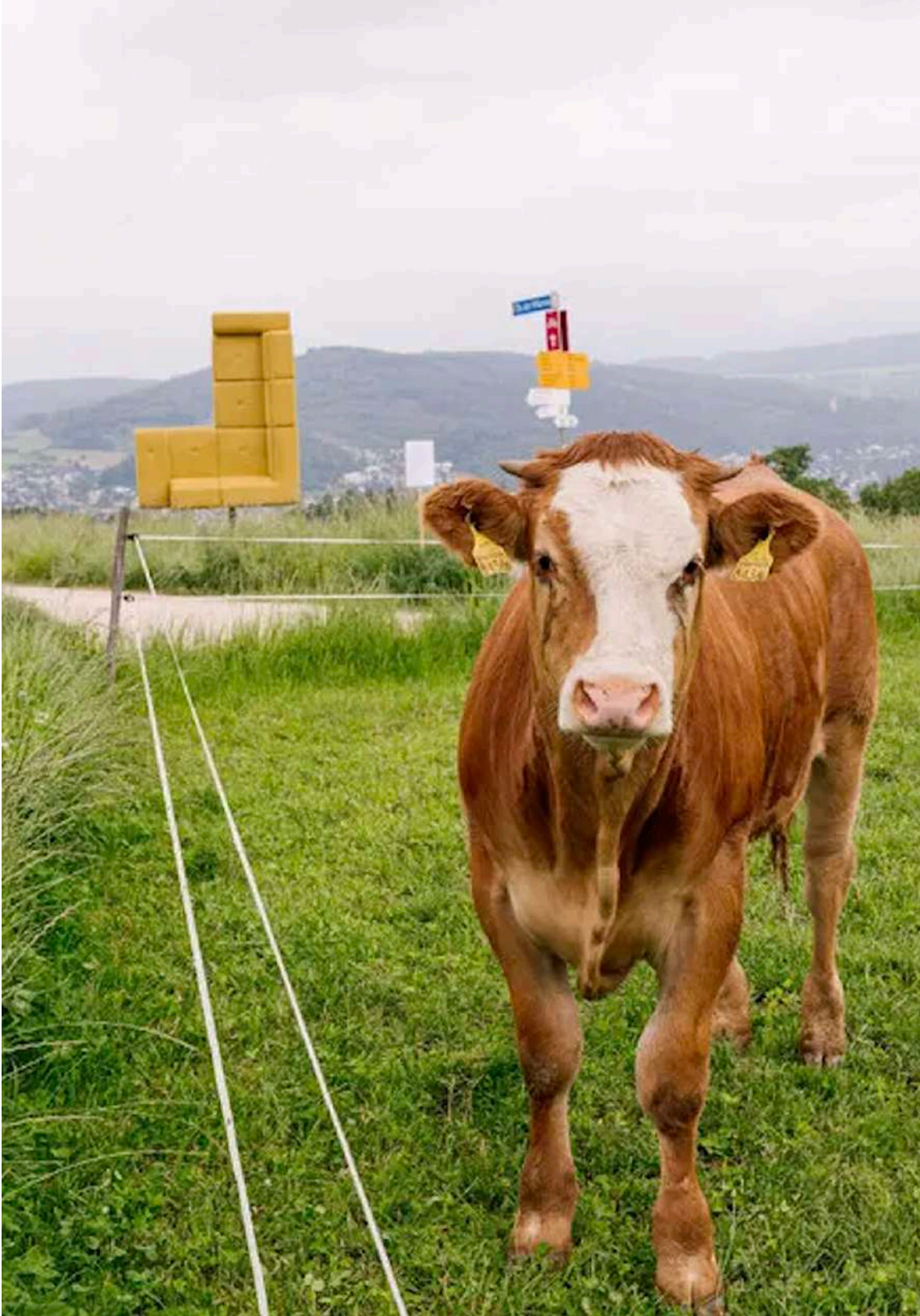
This approach offers an insights for designers, when it omes to initiating a dialogue between art, people and the landscape. In this context, the overlay of the exhibition is virtually stimulating, because it enriches the site by treating it not solely as a subject of an artwork, but also gripping agent of an idea and platform, that forges new correspondences. By engaging with nature as an active collaborator rather than a mere setting, designers can cultivate a holistic perspective on the interplay between space, form, and environment. This conceptual integration might cause responsive design solutions, as they begin to treat the landscape not only as a site but as a source of exchange and collaboration. The consequence is general growth: of creativity, human capital, reinforcing the community. The values, that one need to activate and maintain with consciousness to remain eponymously '*Social*'.

up:
René Levi,
paintings in a
landscape, installation
view at Basel Social
Club.

right:
Markus Müller,
*Seasons of
Compensation
(Spring)*,
A steel couch by the
artist from his series,
2024

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3.3 Atlas: Introduction

The choice of an atlas as the method for further development was made to bring together diverse perspectives and attitudes towards the state of the art. Through the gathered database of artworks, one can reference the attitude of an artistic process and cite the artwork in the initial stage of the design project, addressing the problem. Just as virtuality is defined in opposition to actuality, opening up a space of possibilities, the atlas offers a multiplicity of solutions to the interpretations of landscape. By presenting the research of contemporary art case studies in the form of an atlas, the intention is to offer the reader an overview and confrontation with the construct of landscape from various standpoints, juxtaposing different approaches, and exploring paradoxes, doubts, and aporias.

Through this gesture, a collection of diverse artistic expressions is starting to work for itself and becoming a cross-reference to the project, showing how new knowledge might emerge through intersection with different disciplines. Georges Didi-Huberman has extensively discussed the atlas as an essential tool that can be read in a dialectical way: containing both denotative and connotative meanings. The atlas, with the aid of imagination, helps us grasp the world around us. Didi-Huberman highlights the notion of the atlas as the combination of visual and written knowledge:

"reading the world" is too fundamental an act to be left solely to its explanatory function or confined to books (as in written words).¹

This form allows for an augmented, imaginative engagement with reality through the superimposition of virtuality. Artistic *modus operandi* in the landscape turns out to be a conceptual collection, serving as a source and interpretative case study for architects and landscape designers. Indeed, an atlas itself serves as a conceptual tool to read reality and, through the faculty of imagination, construct new connections and bridges between seemingly disparate elements. The wider the gap between these elements, the greater the imaginative effort required. In some cases, the comprehension of certain artistic phenomena necessitates unlearning rather than the accumulation of additional knowledge. An atlas of landscapes, given its virtual other, becomes a particularly compelling device due to its structural capacity to shape a narrative and stimulate intellectual development. Walter Benjamin's dictum, "was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen", - "to read what was never written,"² captures the essence of this method, allowing us to discern the unarticulated or the out-of-sight within our world.

Design practice is essentially bringing to life the idea of something non-existing before. The capacity to read in the visual and the ephemeral together. The landscape, as a subject of study, often conveys its complexity more vividly through visual representation rather than linguistic description. There is an inherent universality in the act of interpreting landscapes; they are understood across cultures and geographies, transcending linguistic boundaries. The landscape, as a construct, surpasses language itself, and its apprehension is a heuristic process, inviting each individual to engage with it in a distinct and personal manner.

The following essays critically examine the potency of the landscape, structured dialectically. On one hand, they merge concepts drawn from architecture, landscape design, and visual arts—intersecting with notions of palimpsest, action, and utopia. On the other hand, these essays selecti-

vely present these ideas, highlighting their symbolic role in the representation of dealing with the past, the present, and unrealised or yet-to come future. This compilation of virtual landscapes serves as a reinterpretation of juxtaposition, grounded in historical artistic practices, transformed by contemporary technological mediation.

The atlas, as a visual form of knowledge production, operates at the intersection of two paradigms: aesthetic and epistemological. The global circulation of land art and landscape imagery engenders novel processes for acquiring knowledge by positioning multiple constellations within a shared field of vision. The curatorial juxtaposition of images opens new "spaces of knowledge," much as Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* did, creating pathways for the cross-cultural transmission of collective memory. In this way, the atlas form not only preserves historical narratives but also offers a dynamic medium for exploring future possibilities.

In this context, the atlas emerges as a visual form of scientific inquiry, integrating both aesthetic and epistemological paradigms. As the circulation of land art and landscape imagery expands globally, new opportunities arise for acquiring knowledge through the juxtaposition of multiple cultural and temporal constellations. Through curatorial processes, these juxtapositions create new "spaces of knowledge" alike Warburg in *Mnemosyne*, open pathways to cross-cultural "collective memory."³ By combining imagery from different epochs and geographies, the atlas becomes a tool for navigating the complexities of landscape as a social construct, facilitating a broader understanding artistic project's conceptual framework across time, through which deepen the context of the relationship between nature and society.

The depiction of landscape in art, particularly within the context of Land Art, was mostly documented through photography, collages, or sketches. Many iconic works of Land Art would have remained unknown without the artistic photographic documentation, which put those ephemeral or remote interventions into circulation. The camera

lens, then, serves as a critical extension, ensuring that these works are preserved and disseminated. Today, this process has evolved with the digital age, where individuals curate their own "imaginary museums," in Malraux's terms, storing images digitally on their phones, in online galleries, or in the vast, lacunary cloud of the internet. This fragmented yet expansive archive becomes a repository for landscapes, memories, and art. As Krauss notes in her analysis contrast between frame and grid creates a sense of fragmentation, as if the landscape continues beyond the limits of what can be seen.⁴ This notion is echoed in photography and painting alike, where the viewer expects the landscape to extend beyond the borders of the image. Framing—a process used in architecture, photography, or even the simple act of viewing through a phone camera—sets boundaries on our perception but does not eliminate the possibility of further narrative. In fact, it often encourages curiosity, casting the observer into a role of interpreting what lies beyond the frame.

The tradition of framing landscapes for distribution can be traced back to postcards, which served as some of the first portable landscapes. These early forms of communication conveyed the essence of a place, offering recipients a visual piece of a distant world. In recent decades, this practice has shifted from postcards to digital images sent via phones and shared instantaneously. Despite the change in medium, the underlying impulse remains: to share landscapes with others. The photograph, while often seen as a technological tool, is also a profound artistic phenomenon, rooted in human perception and creativity.

When individuals capture landscapes through their phone cameras, they desire to engage in an act of artistic expression, one that is facilitated by technology but fundamentally driven by human sensibility. This act of framing is more than just documentation—it reflects how we construct the world around us, shaping and sharing our perspective with others. Whether shared through social media or in personal communication, the act of framing and disseminating landscapes builds upon collective consciousness, contributing

to an evolving dialogue about how we perceive, experience, and understand the world at large. The process of selecting, framing, and sharing these images continues the tradition of personal curation, and extends it to new, digital realm.

In this way, the juxtaposition of artistic works, the framing of landscapes, and the proliferation of images through various media all point to the dynamic, yet incomplete, nature of our engagement with the world. Through these acts of selection and presentation, we continually build upon a fragmented, yet ever-expanding knowledge, which determine both artistic and non-artistic imagination and expression, individual, as well as contributing to the shape of collective visual memory.⁵ An image in an atlas functions reciprocally, determining both the effect and the reception of the image and, therefore, having a direct influence on the design process, from intentional to subconscious decisions undertaken by a designer. How do these analyses influence the processes of contemporary designers, landscape architects, and architects while engaging in the design process? I want to stress that the design process begins with an orientation towards how the landscape is perceived and what knowledge can be created through the juxtaposition, comparison, and analysis of contemporary artworks. This intellectual journey should, essentially, be the starting point of every design process.

Notes list:

right:
Barbara Kozłowska,
*Making the
Boarderline*,
photograph
private archive,
1970

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3. Halbwachs, M. (1967). *Das kollektive Gedächtnis*. Stuttgart: Enke Verlag. (Original work published 1950)

4. Krauss, R. E. (1985). *The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths* (12th ed.). The MIT Press.

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CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Virtuality as *Dispositif*

This dissertation explores how a transversal approach within the fields of landscape theory, art, and architecture has the potential to shed new light on the process of conceiving the design project today. For a researcher in architecture, pursuing a PhD in Landscape and Environment, cross-disciplinary research was a method to help overcome the reservations associated with crossing the boundary of one's discipline and take advantage of the various sources of knowledge.

The endeavor to analyse works from the artistic perspective and direct my research toward the contemporary art field emerged from the constant exchange of references, ideas, and opinions with architects, artists, theorists, and curators, which followed me either during my architecture education or in my architecture practice. The main aim is to show how artists, as the protagonists of this research, manifest different perspectives and how designers and architects might learn from artistic projects, as well as the form, meaning, concept, context, and conditions of their production.¹

Architecture and Landscape design comply with manifold rules and are thus subjected to verifiability. There are factors impossible to evade, such as economic constraints, or specific requirements of architecture and design commissions. The pragmatic, material-technical aspects of the construction might result in tendency toward repetitive or pre-determined solutions that limit the creativity and complexity of the design process itself. The distinction I see between artistic and architectural projects has to do with the functional and utilitarian requirements of an architectural commission; an artistic project can point out

and elucidate a problem, while an architectural project is typically meant to resolve one.

There have been artistic examples of counter-ideas against the prevailing economy-driven model of architecture production, aimed at built architecture pursuing abstraction of “quality” and embodied in the figure of the so-called star architects. To find an alternative approach, we could turn to the notion of “anarchitecture,” a critical praxis aimed at understanding of architecture’s social and political function, conceived from the field of artistic critique. Figures such as Gianni Piretti (b.1940) and Gordon Matta Clark (1943-1978), both architects by education, kept working with form, concept, and space artistically, rather than architectonically, to articulate their understanding of both natural and built environment. Expanding and exploding the professional and political constraints of the architectural field, such approaches remain an exception. Yet, it is important to see this exceptionality as crucial in redefining the received terms of architectural practice, learning from what is usually dismissed as not properly applicable and what is outside of the architect’s profession.

Virtuality, as the eponymous part of this dissertation, works as a device – a *dispositif*,² traversing the concept of Foucault and Agamben (*Apparatus*), that structurally expands on the multiplicity of practices, and procedures, – with which analyse and understand the values, concepts, and qualities that are present in artistic projects, and might be an advantage in the creative, open-ended design process. A recent significant shift in this field is caused by the dynamic rise of digital media used in the artistic interpretations of landscape. This medium, or rather the entire *dispositif* of the digital realm, its technologies, forms of distribution, and its outreach, becomes an important tool for

artists working with the subject and matter of the landscape from both formal aesthetic and socio-political, economic, and ideological points of view. Its use also demonstrates a valuable insight into the relationship between humans and non-human actors in the contemporary world, where nature has been fully subjugated and turned into resource and representation.

The virtual relationship between humans and nature has been present since times immemorial and has been manifested in art, in parallel to architecture. Drawing from the discourse of the modernity, which constantly change the narrative of landscape interpretation, it's important to reflect on how contemporary art deals with the topic of the landscape, at the same time transversally connecting the most important theories and debates that emerged in the discourse of the postwar period.

Works of art tend to develop on their own as statements, manifestos, stratagems, or political concepts, while architecture and landscape design often remain in the utilitarian zone. Today so overused word “sustainability” was once the reaction to the unstoppable exponential growth of the built environment, which has gradually turned architects and constructors towards rethinking the speed and aims of this expansion, in view of the damage resulting from the constant redesign of the planet. Currently, the building and construction sector is responsible for 37% of global emissions.³ Scientists, political activists, and artists are groups that have an impact on society, and through the public dimension of their actions, statements, and manifestos they are supporting the common goal to influence the construction industry and architecture sector, which is developing new models for zero emissions from the built environment in a foreseeable future.

This dissertation is exploratory research on how to encourage the designers at large to learn from the artistic processes. I suggest therefore that virtual landscape should remain an open term that spans through all its definitions found in the philosophy of emergence. Found in concepts of Gilles Deleuze's "actual object that is being surrounded by the cloud of virtual images,"⁴ and Elisabeth Grosz's "virtuality as a series of enabling and transforming possibilities,"⁵ the philosophy of emergence offers a new way to understand landscape, being immersed in a constant exchange between artistic production and response of the society. This dynamic understanding as site of constant interaction, negotiation and transformation (instead of conventional ideas of landscape as immutable picture that can be easily decoded) turns the landscape from the passive object of gaze into the site of action and *medium*, as detailed by W.J.T. Mitchell.⁶

These theories should encourage architecture and landscape designers to enrich their practice by introducing a context-specific approach. Bringing the awareness of the process beyond the parameters defined at the outset as "goals" to be achieved, sharpening sensibility, and increasing openness to the parameters that change during the process, and towards other human beings and non-human actors.

The act of bringing other disciplines to the field of architecture and landscape design is a key to allowing a sense of the potentiality to emerge in the present moment. Our increasingly technologically advanced, and at the same time increasingly untransparent world will require a greater permeability between the disciplines hitherto separated by their specific *métiers* and corresponding power relationships—in order to become legible and livable again, in a future to come.



Precarity, though perhaps not directly referred to in the texts and literature on the topic, is proposed here as coextensive with virtuality. The selection of artworks in the subsequent atlas shows the faces of these volatile states of being that might one day become the point of reference for a design project, shaping the outcome and preventing it from ossifying into an ideologically stable, timeless monument.

Artists have always been at the forefront of what would be later recuperated by the architecture and design field. In the avant-garde period of the modern movement, to take examples such as Russian Constructivism and Productivism, and Bauhaus, disciplines were brought together in programs of schools, workshops and studio, to produce a qualitative leap in both philosophy and practical outcome of design process as part of a larger societal change. In our century of individualization and isolation, supported by a simplified notion of the virtuality of experience as a withdrawal into a digital realm of social media (and even more so since the time of the Covid pandemic that enabled mechanisms of social control on an unprecedented scale), it is difficult to name any aspiration to a broader, more holistic movement. As the pragmatics of “design solutions” in the early 21st Century were soon to take the upper hand, the disciplines polarised and narrowed down towards refining as singular elements of a single discipline.

Against the model eliminating difference in the larger pattern of neoliberal market fed by seeming instant accessibility, it’s worth it to learn from the moments of indeterminacy and openness that form the artistic process. In the reading of an artwork, virtuality allows one to incorporate the ephemeral, the unrealized, and the new ways of seeing in the design process. These ideas would appear to go against the established dog-

left:
Gianni Petteña,
Ice House I,
installation,
Minneapolis, ,
1971
courtesy of the artist
and Salle Principale



mas in architecture. They may appear useless in terms of function, yet conceptually reveal the inherent qualities of the living space in the context of landscape, like Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) – a full-size cast of a house that could not be lived or accessed, denying all parameters of domesticity in one move, Gianni Petteña's *Ice House II* (1972) – a proposal that involved freezing a small house in the suburbs of Minneapolis or *Wrappings* (1968) by Christo and Jean Claude, which were concealed and defamiliarised existing buildings and landscapes alike.

Since the 1960s global Conceptual Art movement, artist often intend to respond to the changing conditions of the world through immediate critical response to injustice, historical blind spots, and reactionary politics. Artistic themes involve subversion and resistance against climate change, pitfalls of globalization, and social inequalities, and intend to alter the future with a different scenario. Instead of asking after Albert Camus "What an artist can do for society today?" I would ask the revised question: "What a society can learn from the artist today?"

Providing a provisional answer to this question, the research conducted in this dissertation is a contribution to the academic field of design through the construction of an atlas that forges an interconnection between the diverse fields and practices. Historically, each Atlas promised to contain the ultimate knowledge at the time of its conception; I would, however, insist on the open-endedness of the one included in my dissertation; its role is to provide a structuring device without a pretense of completeness, as a tool to think architecture and landscape design in a different way.

Using the tool of an atlas, one can forge new passages of knowledge, a footpath to the new desi-

Left:
Rachel Whiteread,
House,
Photo Courtesy of the
artist,
1993



gn-in-the-making. To learn from different points of view requires delving into the number of interpretations, without the fear of making mistakes while moving through diverse fields. It encourages empathy with the figure of an artist and involve with an artwork on the intellectual level. The juxtaposition of the artworks also plays a significant role in the structure of the dissertation. In a sense, they resemble a curatorial process that accompanies displaying artworks in groups, to provoke an extension of the context.

In the works, that have been gathered, determined the notion of virtuality as seen through three interrelated categories, that are providing the appendix for the further development. These categories, present in artistic projects, are found simultaneously in architecture and landscape design.

Palimpsest / Mapping category is dedicated to the virtual notion of re-writing the territory, or in other words, virtuality manifesting itself in precarity of existence and ephemerality, while at the same time being a scientifically supported way to measure and chart the world, used in disciplines such as history, geography, political science and architecture, at the same time remaining a human representation, a record, an instrument that enables its users to keep the record of the landscape, transform it while exercising power on the land and its peoples.

Action! / Construction category addresses the virtual notion of the in-situ investigations artists and architects undertake, while they conceive and implement their projects in the natural (and culturally charged) environment. Virtuality here presents itself as the transformative force that, through human activity, is changing the meaning of a landscape, represented and thus turned into a signifier - an image and its multi-

left:
Christo and Jeanne
Claude,
Shrouded Coast,
Little Bay,
Australia,
Courtesy Christo,
1968

layered content having an impact on the designers or the artists that can "read it". Analyses of the notions of action and construction in artistic concepts and realized projects provide new ways of seeing, inhabiting, and designing.

Utopia / Unrealised category is proposed here as another macro category of virtuality that emancipates in artistic projects as a concept- that what is yet to come, perhaps or most likely will never become reality. The greatest value of these projects is the promise and the capacity to generate innovation through suspension in the state of unrealized, yet specific ideas. This includes the humanisation of technology and embracing the artworks, that display the topic of landscape as an act of constant emergence, either using technological mediums. This includes embracing the future perspective, that the society will face in currently developing world: the technological *Umwelts*, non-human perspectives and problems with existence on the human-modified planet.

The role of atlast is to provide the structuring device without the pretense of completing, but rather expanding. In our contemporary world, thinking in terms of purity and exclusiveness of any discipline is tacitly perceived as obsolete. Architects and designers of the landscape are actively taking part in the exchange of ideas with artists. This approach works reciprocally, as the book suggests, as artists often employ architectural techniques and architects are embracing artistic methodologies. These migrations blur established disciplinary categories and challenge their institutional and professional norms, introducing novelty and constructive ambiguity to the practice.

Notes list:

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PART 2 : ATLAS

LANDSCAPE MANIFESTATIONS IN ARTISTIC PROJECTS

PALIMPSEST

Palimpsest / Mapping address to the virtual notion of re-writing the territory, or, in other words, virtuality manifesting itself in precarious, ephemeral, and overlapping ways. Maps usually refer to scientifically supported means of measuring and charting the world. The representation of maps, often perceived as an objective truths, conceal cultural interpretations, and adhere to conventional representations of a globe on a flat surface, and reflects current political agreements.

Alfred Korzybski's concept, "The map is not the territory," emphasises the distinction between belief and reality. This idea can be compared to the representation of human skin on canvas, which becomes a reality of its own yet reveals little about its factual status. As illustrated in Borges' fable *On Exactitude in Science* (1946), the impossibility of achieving objectivity in re-writing the territory is inevitable. Even when used in disciplines such as history, geography, political science, and architecture, maps remain distorted human representations—a living, self-rewriting record and an instrument that enables their creators and users to track the landscape while exercising power over the land and the people within its borders. Artistic interpretations that aim to preserve memories of the landscape are often perceived as virtual fabrications.

Through the constant repetition of artistic practice, knowledge production, and creative reinterpretations of landscape, certain information accumulates, while other aspects seem consigned to oblivion. Artistic projects often explore this transformative trait of landscape perception. Various artists seek to revive the forgotten and lost, rewriting the story of a territory repeatedly until they restore narratives significant to their practice—a landscape true to themselves.

Writing down memories and mapping the landscape will be presented here in an interpretative way: through paintings, sculptures, books, films, and objects. These mediums build upon the given reality, continually adding to the structure of symbols and meanings, tracing early thoughts yet rendering them anew through artistic imagination.

right up:
Nisyros 2016,
seventeen canvases,
installation view

right bottom:
*Above the crater
Stephano end of
October*,
2016

Courtesy: documenta
14 Website.

Vivian Suter

Title: Nisyros. Above the crater Stephano end of October

Date: 2016

Technique: oil, volcanic material, earth, botanical matter, and microorganisms on canvas

Installation view at Filopappou Hill, Pikionis Paths and Pavilion, Athens,

Installation view at documenta 14

Photos: Stathis Mamalakis

Vivian Suter is an Argentinian-Swiss artist whose work is deeply intertwined with the natural environment of Panajachel, Guatemala, where she has lived and worked for over three decades. The shores of Lake Atitlán, where she decided to settle is a landscape that would significantly shape her practice. Suter's paintings are typically created on unstretched canvases and are notable for their vibrant use of color, gestural abstraction, and integration of the natural elements of her surroundings. Often displayed layered, unfurled, or draped, her works evoke a sense of raw immediacy and interaction with the physical space they inhabit. Her creative process embraces the forces of nature, with many pieces bearing the physical imprints of the tropical climate, including traces of floods, mud, and hurricanes. This openness to the elements highlights Suter's experimental approach and her willingness to collaborate with the environment as a co-creator. The result is an art that engages with time and decay, forming a dialogue between human intention and natural processes. Suter's work reflects a broader political and ecological consciousness, as it emphasizes the transformative power of landscape and the unpredictable interplay of creation and destruction.¹

1 link: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13544/vivian-suter>



right up:
Trevor Nicolson, the
head Gardener at
Harewood house

right bottom:
Detail of the sculpture
Courtesy Lucia Pizzani
Website

Lucia Pizzani

Title: *Cultivo y memoria (Corp and memory)*

Date: 2024

Technique: site-specific installation with live plants

Installation view at The Harewood Biennial

Photos: Lucia Pizzani

Cultivo y Memoria (Crop and Memory) is a site-specific commission by Venezuelan artist Lucia Pizzani, consisting of five outdoor living sculptures installed in the Walled Vegetable Garden at Harewood House. Created in collaboration with the estate's head gardener, Trevor Nicolson, the sculptures integrate fallen arboreal fragments, live plants, and handcrafted ceramic elements. This installation emphasises the relationship between nature, art, and spirituality, exploring themes of growth, memory, and regeneration within the natural world. The constant regeneration is also one of the signature marking a palimpsest. It never exhausts itself, rather it keeps regrowing, alike nature and plants. The sculptures draw inspiration from the Mesoamerican agricultural practice of the "three sisters," where corn, beans, and squash are planted together to support each other's growth in a symbiotic process. Pizzani's work echoes this collaborative, ancestral knowledge, reflecting on how natural systems intertwine with human cultivation and care. By combining living plants with sculptural forms, *Cultivo y Memoria* addresses the cycles of life and decay, as well as the spiritual and ecological connections between humans and the vegetal world.¹

¹ link: <https://www.luciapizzani.com/cultivo-y-memoria-harewood-biennial>



right up and bottom:
Precious Okoyomon,
*the sun eats her
children*,
2023. Courtesy of the
artist and Sant'Andrea
de Scaphis.

Precious Okoyomon

Title: *the sun eats her children*

Date: 2023

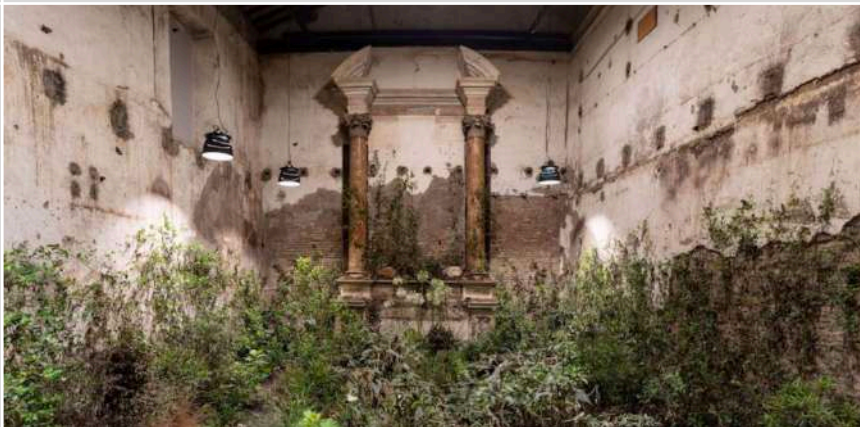
Technique: mixed media installation

Installation view at Sant'Andrea de Scaphis

Photos: Daniele Malojoli

Within the deconsecrated church in the Trastevere, historical district of Rome, natural sounds such as bird-song, insect drones, and the subtle crunch of soil underfoot blend into a dense, mysterious atmosphere. Plants such as Jimson weed, Lantana, Bitter nightshade, and Stinging nettle, all selected by the artist Okoyomon, are drawn to the sun's light, united by their shared property of producing poison. Okoyomon refers here to Georges Bataille's book *The Language of Flowers*, far from embodying purity, and rather revealing fragility and failure. In this context, Okoyomon criticise the conventional view of nature as passive and vulnerable, presenting plants as tenacious, virulent, and resistant. It is build alike palimpsest - a new surface, charged with multiple meanings. The installation's complexity deepened with a live colony of black butterflies that lived, reproduced, and died within the space, a feature titled *The Sky Is Always Black, Fort Mose (2022)*. This work references an 18th-century settlement of formerly enslaved Black people who fled the American South to Fort Mose in Spanish Florida. The butterflies' constant flight becomes a metaphor for the fugitive existence of enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals, intertwining themes of nature, history, and survival.¹

¹ Sant'Andrea de Scarhis, link: <https://www.santandreadescaphis.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Precious-Okoyomon-the-sun-eats-her-children.pdf>



right up:
*Nangesey Creek
With Deer*
right bottom:
*Lenape Wigwam in
Clearing*

Courtesy Gallery Lord
Ludd

Curtis Talwst Santiago

Title: *Tiny Worlds of Pleasure and Pain*

Date: 2016

Technique: mixed media diorama in reclaimed jewelry box

Installation view at Lord Ludd Gallery

Photos: Gallery Lord Ludd

In the early 19th century, Luis Jaques Deguerre presented his pioneering invention in Paris: the diorama, which was an interesting turn to the two-dimensional modes of representation. The term diorama originates from the Greek word *dioráō*, meaning 'through that which is seen.' This artistic medium gained many enthusiasts, including Canadian-Trinidadian artist and musician Curtis Talwst Santiago, who interpreted the creation of landscape in form of pocket-sized scenes. Artistic replicas function here as the analogue immersive environments, a symbolic agreement on what constitutes for reality, and what does not.

Themes in his dioramas explore the notions of home, diasporic identity, and memory. His *Infinity Series*¹, initiated in 2008, is a collection of tiny, carefully constructed scenes housed within jewelry boxes, each rich with narrative layer. These dioramas often depict environments filled with lush vegetation, architectural elements, and figures frozen in time, drawing attention to both personal and collective histories. In recent years, he expanded his practice to reflect on his own childhood and family life. The landscapes become the entourage of memories and social dynamics, that hides the mysteries and dozens of narratives. Through the creation of these micro, virtual environments, that are imitating reality, it encourages us to take a closer look into the sceneries happening everyday in front of our eyes.

¹ <https://www.curtissantiago.art/>



right up and bottom:
Mike Nelson
Tripple Bluff Canyon
(*The woodshed*),
2004
Courtesy the artist and
the Hayward Gallery.

Mike Nelson

Title: *Tripple Bluff Canyon (The woodshed)*

Date: 2004/ 2023

Technique: installation, various materials

Installation view at Hayward Gallery

Photos: Gallery Lord Ludd

In 2023 the Hayward Gallery decided to feature the installation *Tripple Bluff Canyon (The woodshed)* (2004). Mike Nelson is renowned for his large-scale installations, which consist of interconnected rooms that blur the line between real and imagined spaces. These immersive environments invite visitors to become active participants in a layered narrative that mixes reality with fiction. Nelson's work often feels disorienting, with shifts in perspective that challenge our understanding of truth and reality. His installations draw inspiration from the literary works of William Burroughs, Jorge Luis Borges, the Strugatsky Brothers, and Stanislaw Lem, infusing his spaces with elements of speculative fiction and fragmented storytelling. In this installation, he dissects the imagery of desert landscape. His works often touch upon the themes of survival, desertion, and the lives of stateless or subversive persons. His installations are not merely physical spaces but narrative constructs that require viewers to piece together their own interpretations of the unfolding story. Nelson's work immerses visitors in a disjointed, cinematic experience that reflects the complexities of both fictional and real-world scenarios. His approach highlights how reality can be fractured into multiple, coexisting perspectives.¹

¹ <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/triple-bluff-canyon-mike-nelson/HgHhZ8fDWWNI3g?hl=en>



Alexandra Leykauf

Title: *Sunset Harbor at Rio (Martin Johnson Heade) on my desk*

Date: 2015

Technique: Photography

Installation view: Alexandra Leykauf artist's book

Photos: Artist's website

Leykauf's work, 'Sunset Harbor at Rio,' consist of foleded paper, at the horizon with printed on landscape painting from the book along the horizon, creating a sensation of immersing oneself in the landscape - firstly painted, then copied into the book. This mixture suddenly opens up possibilities for an unexpected three-dimensional representation, that in a trickster way recalls also an open laptop. This playful idea of immersing into the flat surface, yet iterated, has been a leitmotif for artists working with a topic of landscape, exploring its representation in different forms. There is a certain inherent lack when it comes to representation of a nature in form of an image, rendering it somehow insufficient. A concept that should be physically explored, experienced from within, and where one can position oneself cannot be flattened to a mere representation. Historically, the landscape painting has been ruled by perspective, which essentially established a division between a subject and the object looking at the painting¹, artist mention in an interview. That led to transformation of nature into landscape painting as being a passive, visual manifestation, instead of taking part in it. However the focus of LEykauf's workshop is different, and focus on recreation of a sense of intimacy, between the landscape representation and an observer, using various, digital and analogue contemporary media, forming a certain type of landscape matrioshka.

1 <https://thequietus.com/culture/art/alexandra-leykauf-interview/>



right up :
Requiem, stills

right bottom:
Requiem, stills

Courtesy of Cura
Website, Francesco
Urbano Ragazzi

Jonas Mekas

Title: Requiem

Date: 2019/ 2024

Technique: video installation with sound

Installation view at Societa Dante Alighieri during the 60th Venice Biennale.

Photo: stills from the movie

The posthumous work of artist Jonas Mekas, titled *Requiem*, video projected on two screens at Società Dante Alighieri during the 60th Venice Art Biennale, was a compilation of footage recorded over the last thirty years of Mekas's life. It is an ode to nature in a purest sense, a farewell from an artist who loved recording the landscape. Mekas captured flowers and trees with near-botanical precision, displaying the childlike excitement and love with which he observed them. His personal footages were juxtaposed with various ecological tragedies—television shots of tsunamis and other dramatic atrocities—forming a complete and dialectical work. Mekas often filmed landscapes familiar to his native Lithuania, constructing them with great sense of sensitivity and melancholy. For him, recording was a virtual way of remembering. His recordings of New York echoed the environment where he had grown up: meadows, swaying trees, and snowy landscapes typical of the Baltic region—a palimpsest of overlapping memories. Capturing nature was an attempt to reconcile with the experience of exile and estrangement, and filming brought him comfort, reflecting his memories in form of a poetic, subjective journey that connected his life with the landscapes of his past. “A landscape is always the suspension of a passage or passing on” has written Jean Luc Nancy “A landscape is always a landscape of time.”¹

1 Nancy, J.-L. (2005). *The ground of the image*. Fordham University Press.



up right and down:
Installation view of
Solitude exhibition,
Courtesy of Bernheim
Gallery

Miriam Cahn

Title: FLEISCHTAL (DAS IST MEINE HAUT)

Date: 2015

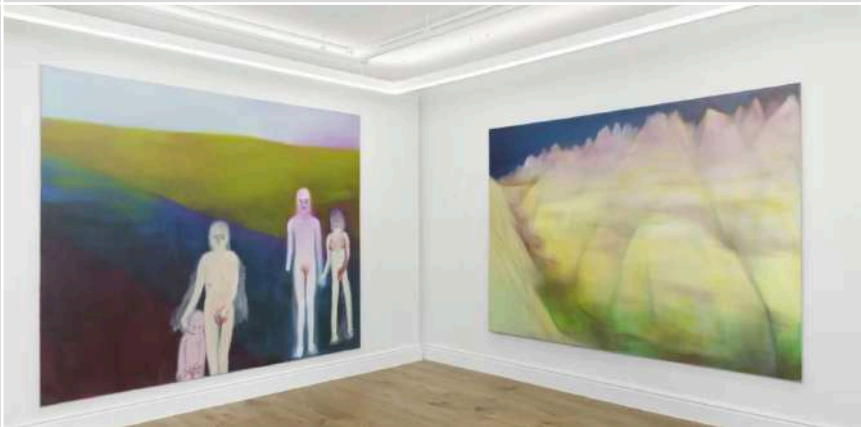
Technique: oil on canvas

Installation view at Bernheim Gallery London
2024 during *Solitude* exhibition

Photos: Charles Duprat

Miriam Cahn's *Solitude* exhibition at Bernheim's London Gallery marks a significant return of the artist to the British art scene after decades of absence and seclusion. Known for her raw, emotionally charged works rooted in feminist thinking and activism, the exhibition presents a series of provocative paintings—ranging from attraction to repulsion, awe to anger, through the use of color, brush and explicit themes. Cahn's works depict brutal scenes of women being punched, migrants drowning, and war, which, though created since the 1980s, resonate deeply with today's societal issues. Her works are not didactic, but showing uncomfortable truths about human suffering, isolation, and survival. Cahn's art spans various mediums, treating them with equal significance, reflecting life as it is often ignored. In this Her ability to convey anger and solitude mirrors contemporary emotions of societal alienation.¹ The work *Fleischtal (Das ist meine Haut)* captures raw, unfiltered emotions through the depiction of a poignant landscape. As the title suggests, it evokes a valley made of skin and flesh, which, in her painting, seems to bring to mind the lost, naked bodies of human figures. The artist, employing a technicolour and garish palette, symbolically questions the notion of landscape as static and still, imbuing it rather with a sincere sense of transformation. Here, the landscape evolves into a subject of living matter, almost taking on a human-like form.

¹ <https://www.bernheimgallery.com/exhibitions/80-solitude-miriam-cahn/>



ACTION!

Action! / Construction address the virtual notion of the in-situ investigations artists and architects undertake (physical or imaginary), while they conceive and implement their projects in the natural (and culturally charged) environment. Virtuality here presents itself as the transformative force that, through human activity, is changing the meaning of a landscape, represented and thus turned into a signifier - an image and its multilayered content having an impact on the designers or the artists that can "read it".

Analyses of the notions of action and construction in artistic concepts and realized projects provide new ways of seeing, inhabiting, and designing. Through the action made in the landscape, artist like Olafur Eliasson gained worldwide recognition because of the emphasis of 21st century issues. This work established his role as an artist advocating for nature and highlighting art's role as a participatory force that can reveal neglected, diminished, or previously unseen elements through immersive experiences. The exhibition, which engaged viewers' senses, was well received and drew attention to climate change, fostering a closer relationship between the public and this critical issue.

Through his synchronisation with the landscape and embodiment of its potential, Eliasson offered viewers a chance to redefine their perceptions of the environment. Captivated audience is willing to engage with topic, globally. This shift

in perception paved the way for a new generation of contemporary artists, who now plan diverse actions and construct narratives framed within conceptual journeys. The degree of engagement or passivity towards landscapes can vary, whether artistic action presents a powerful tool to shift public reception.

By emphasising potentialities and provoking responses on a visual and experiential level, art exists to reexamine ideas that science may have already addressed. Through symbolic imagery and metaphors, art can build connections to landscapes that realise their full potential. This, in turn, diversifies our thoughts, helping to notice, what was previously overlooked or neglected.

right up:
*I am Afraid I Must Ask
You To Leave*, behind-
the-scenes, 2018 (video
still)

right bottom:
*Canyonlands, We
Must Ask You to Leave*
(vertical viewpoint),
2018

Courtesy: Julius von
Bismarck website

Julian Charrier & Julius von Bismarck

Title: *I Am Afraid I Must Ask You to Leave*

Date: 2018

Technique: digital photographs and videos.

Installation view at Sies + Höke, Dusseldorf,
2019

Photos: Julius von Bismarck and Julian Charrier

Some natural sites are culturally regarded as more precious or valuable (i.e. UNESCO, World Heritage sites or national parks). These values are not inherent, instead are given by human. In the project *I Am Afraid I Must Ask You to Leave*, artists Julius von Bismarck and Julian Charrière explore what happens when one of these culturally significant natural symbols is arbitrarily destroyed. The artists staged the destruction of an arched rock formation, presenting it in media as an act of eco-terrorism. The video, intentionally blurred and shot on a mobile phone, shows masked individuals fleeing the scene, giving the illusion that the explosion occurred in Utah's Arches National Park and destroyed geological formations. However, the destruction actually took place in Zacatecas, Mexico, where the artist with production team recreated natural monument. These staged explosions evoke the visual language of ISIS propaganda videos, such as those depicting Palmyra. Once the video was released without clarification, it sparked discussions on social media and was broadcast on U.S. television, raising concerns about real eco-terrorism. Do really some landscapes are better than others? The public reaction underscored the deeply ingrained perception of nature as an untouchable, almost sacred entity, once old, and of a less importance once recent, and causing public outrage.¹

¹ Website of an artist Julius von Bismarck, link: <https://juliusvonbismarck.com/bank/index.php/projects/im-afraid-i-must-ask-you-to-leave/>



right up:
Nanganesey Creek
With Deer
right bottom:
Lenape Wigwam in
Clearing

Courtesy Gallery Lord
Ludd

Julius von Bismarck

Title: *Bäume ohne Grenzen* (*Trees Without Borders*)

Date: 2022

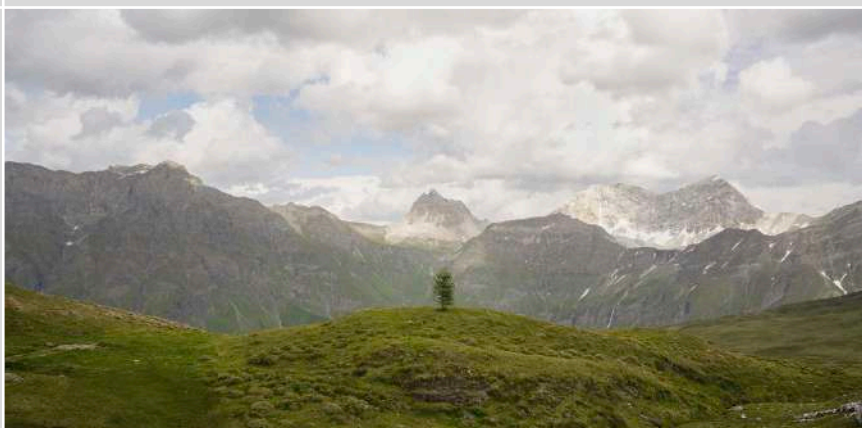
Technique: digital photograph

Installation view at Safiental Schweiz (in-situ)

Photos: Julius von Bismarck

In the performative artwork *Bäume ohne Grenzen* (a cynical title translating to *Trees Without Borders*), Julius von Bismarck transplants a larch tree native to Safiental in Switzerland above the natural tree line in the Swiss Alps—a zone where trees previously could not grow due to climatic conditions. By relocating it, von Bismarck focuses our attention on nature's slow, yet inevitable response to climate change. Larch tree not only survived the transplantation in previously hostile environment, but will initiate a new expansion into areas once deemed uninhabitable due to high altitude and intolerable conditions. Beyond this scientific fact, or a curiosity, the performance can be read in both ways: as a symbol of the start of a new era or, simultaneously, as a brutal warning about the future of melting Alps. This intervention, documented by von Bismarck himself, reverses the dogmas of traditional efforts to preserve the natural environments of the past. It is a monument to the continuously evolving landscape, where the artist ask whether we should merely be stunned by reality of the unexpected, or instead assimilate to the current crisis. The larch in the depiction is isolated, but soon will be surrounded by others. The picture stands as a testament to how climate change reshape ecosystems, forcing a critical reflection on the fluidity of nature and the shifting boundaries imposed by environmental changes.¹

¹ Julius von Bismarck Website,, link: <https://juliusvonbismarck.com/bank/index.php/projects/baeume-ohne-grenzen/>



right up:
Sculptured in
Darkness,
installation view Centro
De Arte Moderna
Gulbenkian

right bottom:
Installation Manifesta
15 Barcelona
Metropolitana

Courtesy Centro
De Arte Moderna
Gulbenkian.

Hugo Canoilas

Title: *Sculptured in Darkness*

Date: 2022

Technique: digital photographs and videos.

Installation view Centro De Arte Moderna Gulbenkian

Photos: Pedro Pina

Hugo Canoilas' installation offers an immersive and sensory exploration of the ocean and the seabed, one of Earth's most mysterious territories. The project, which continues Canoilas' investigations from 2020, examines the limits of human knowledge and the complex relationship between Western culture and nature. The darkened gallery space, where artwork was exhibited, reminds us of the ocean depths, where sight becomes secondary, forcing focused action and the activation of other senses. The installation's floor features layers of sculptures made from glass, acrylic resin, textiles, and tactile objects, evoking sedimentary strata and interconnected ecosystems. Objects blend and lose their individual identity, reflecting the interdependence of life in natural environments. Canoilas' artistic process mimics nature by rejecting moulds and allowing natural fixation methods, embracing unpredictability and material qualities. The exhibition's title refers to Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us* (1950), specifically the chapter *The Gray Begginnings*, which poetically recounts the ocean's formation as the cradle of life. The exhibition catalogue includes this text, a curatorial essay, and photographs by Daniel Malhão, offering further insights into Canoilas' exploration of nature's complexity and our evolving understanding of it.¹

¹ Website of an artis Julius von Bismarck, link: <https://juliusvonbismarck.com/bank/index.php/projects/im-afraid-i-must-ask-you-to-leave/>



right up and bottom:
Installation view in-situ.
Courtesy John Grade
Studio

John Grade

Title: Reservoir (Ascesa)

Date: 2018

Technique: in-situ installation, heat-formed plastic, cedar, netting, cables, wood

Installation view: Arte Sella Sculpture Park, Borgo Valsugana, Trento, Italy

Photos: John Grade Studio

Reservoir is a suspended installation made of 5,000 clear droplets, each individually heat-formed and framed in steam-bent wood, hanging above a pine grove clearing. These droplets are attached to two filament nets supported by nearby tree trunks, creating the sculpture, that virtually "lives" with the changing conditions; as rain or snow accumulates in the droplets, the nets lower, and as the water evaporates, they rise again. Springs beneath pulleys control the sculpture's movement, ensuring it stays at least ten feet above the ground. Light rain creates noticeable downward shifts, while heavy rainfall can increase the sculpture's weight from around 30 to over 360 kilograms. Viewers can observe the dynamic sculpture from different perspectives, either directly underneath or from a distance across its mid-line. Periodically, the sculpture interacts with dancers, enhancing its engagement with the environment.¹ Fixed in the forested space, it somehow resembles indigenous practices, virtually encouraging humans to think of a different kind of trace one might leave in the environment—leaving, as the aftermath of action a splay of beauty instead destruction.

¹ <https://www.johngrade.com/projects/reservoir-ascesa>



right up and bottom:
Margaret Raspé,
Rain Drums
Courtesy Gallery Molitor

Margaret Raspé

Title: Rain Drums

Date: 1988/ 2023

Technique: cotton fabric, beeswax, hazelnut branches, nylon thread.

Installation view at Basel Social Club

Photos: Stefan Burger

Raspé's work exhibited an early awareness of ecological issues, highlighting the interconnectedness between humans and their environment long before climate concerns became widespread. It was installed again in 2024 during the Basel Social Club 2024, together with the work of other contemporary artist. Her artistic efforts reflected this symbiosis, urging viewers to actively contemplate the human-nature relationship. Nature had here virtually parallel meaning, serving as both the subject and the backdrop of her pieces. In the late 1980s and 1990s, she organized collaborative garden exhibitions, blending her own transient installations and performances with the work of other artists, in a collective experience. Her home and garden became a creative center for artists, writers, and intellectuals, including members of the *Vienna Actionists* and *Wiener Gruppe*. These exhibitions shared a community of ecological and artistic values. Raspé's ethos aligns strongly with contemporary concerns about sustainability and collective action in the arts. Her work reflects a performance of transience in blending art with the natural environment. This ecological consciousness resonated with the themes of the Basel Social Club in 2024, located on farmland near Basel. The setting mirrors Raspé's fusion of art, community, and nature, where the work was displayed once again, contributing to the latest discourse.¹

1 link: <https://www.galeriemolitor.com/exhibitions/basel-social-club-2024/>



right up:
back of the paintings.
photo of the author.

right bottom:
Exhibition view,
Courtesy Foksal Gallery
Foundation

Piotr Uklanski

Title: *Les Fleurs du Mal*

Date: 2024

Technique: oil on canvas

Installation view at Foksal Gallery Foundation
2024

Photos: Marek Gardulski

"What make a flower evil?" asks Piotr Uklanski in his second solo show in Foksal Gallery Foundation in Warsaw. At first sight, the still-life paintings represent some abstract, colorful flowers, fruits and objects in the landscape. In fact, source of their description might be found in the *Calague of Wartime Losses*, a list of looted and plundered by the Nazis during the WWII.¹ The artist recreated landscape paintings based solely on formal descriptions of missing artworks, without access to original photographs or visualizations. On the verso of each work, the reference captions of looted pieces are painted with a brush, confronting viewers with what we perceive on the front. Often irrational and abstract, these reimagined landscapes and their alleged reinterpretations confront us with the stark truth: their origins are lost, looted as a result of cruelty and moral depravity. Repainting becomes, in a sense, an act of reparation—though it puts in question, whether such reparation will ever truly possible, and if our imagination is able, with such an ease, to recreate, what was destroyed. The landscape, traditionally an artisti motif of pastoral beauty is a signifier of one of the most embedded, unresolved generational traumas of the 20th century. Through this process, the artist rewrites and recreates the environments of the plundered past, stained with loss, with an attempt to resurrect memories that were condemned to oblivion.

¹ <https://foksalgalleryfoundation.com/exhibition/piotr-uklanski-les-fleurs-du-mal>

'LOOTED (LANDSCAPE,
COUNTRYSIDE, AUTUMNAL
HARVEST, SKY INDICATED
ONLY BY A FEW WIDE,
BRUSHSTROKES)
2024

Rot



right up and bottom:
Life,
installation view,
Courtesy Fondation
Beyeler,
2021

Olafur Eliasson

Title: *Life*

Date: 2021

Technique: in-situ installation, plants, water

Installation view: Fondation Beyeler

Photos: Mark Niedermann

Life, a site-specific artwork by Olafur Eliasson, was installed in 2021 at Fondation Beyeler near Basel, Switzerland. Eliasson transformed the museum by removing its façade, extending the outdoor pond into the gallery, and creating a wooden walkway which allowed visitors to explore the space at any time, day or night. The artwork invited both human and non-human visitors, blending nature and architecture in an immersive experience, of what really means to create *Life*. Eliasson, in this exhibition produced a total imaginary landscape and built it from scratches, on his own terms. In conjunction with the exhibition, cognitive scientist Katrin Heimann from Aarhus University collaborated with Eliasson's studio to conduct micro-phenomenological interviews. These interviews, held with specially invited visitors, including museum staff, local school students, and friends of the studio, aimed to explore the visitors' personal and sensory experiences of the artwork. Eliasson went further than the creation of an artificial landscape, adding the interaction with audience as extension to it. Components such as emotions, expectations, and memories that visitors bring to the space, and through which *Life* evolved. Visitors' experiences remained recorded on the website experiencing-life.net, offering an expanded understanding of Eliasson's creation. ¹

¹ <https://experiencing-life.net/>



right up and bottom:
Life class and still life
photographs,
Courtesy of Foksal
Gallery Foundation

Artur Żmijewski

Title: Life class and still life

Date: 2024

Technique: digitally manipulated photographs

Installation view: Foksal Gallery Foundation

Photos: Marek Gardulski

In the exhibition for the Foksal Gallery Foundation in May 2024, Artur Żmijewski presented the photographs of digitally manipulated cemetery flowers. The background is dark, and photos of flowers are in colour, suggesting cheerful, yet uncanny approach to the context. The focus on flowers, one of the most appealing elements of nature, being immersed in the void, suggest focus on the a symbol of memory, typically associated with cemetery aesthetics. Therefore, on the photographs flowers are artificial or dried up. They are not a living visual element that constitutes the landscape, but this focality serves a different purpose: enhancing the sensibility of meaning in what constitutes the symbolism of places close to our lives—sites of memory. The artist uses the natural element as a conceptual form of attention. In an ironic way, he asks what we can contemporarily find in landscapes associated with death. It is a study of human grief, loss, and the way culture transforms them. Żmijewski observes these actions, turning them into a method of representation of nature, which in this case is artificial and washed out, going beyond visual perception to explore the significance of flowers in the cemetery landscape, where death is the ruling motif.¹

1 <https://foksalgalleryfoundation.com/exhibition/artur-zmijewski-life-class-and-still-life>



UTOPIA

Utopia / Unrealised proposes another macro category of virtuality that emancipates in artistic projects as a concept—that what is yet to come, perhaps or most likely will never become the reality. The greatest value of these projects is the promise and the capacity to generate innovation through suspension in the state of unrealised, yet specific ideas. This includes the humanization of technology and embracing the artworks, that display the topic of landscape as an act of constant emergence, either using technological mediums. This includes embracing the future perspective, that the society will face in currently developing world: the technological *Umwelts*, non-human perspectives and problems with existence on the human-modified planet.

By delving into the genealogy of modern-day virtual utopias imagined by artists and "promised land" ideals, striving for the unattainable while creating a paradoxical effect. In 1516, Sir Thomas More published his book *De optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*, describing the fictional island of Utopia. In this utopian society, More envisions ideals such as democracy, separation of powers, the pursuit of knowledge, and humanity. Over time, the term "utopia" has become synonymous with a positive vision of the future. This historical reference serves as a foundational point for understanding the enduring fascination with Utopias as virtual landscapes and their role in shaping our collective imagination. How their potential is expressed in artistic

project? As mentioned before, one of the concepts connected to Utopia, present in artistic projects is the *Umwelt*—or “environment”—originated from Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944), who proposed that each living creature experiences the world in its own unique way. His theory highlights that while landscapes can be represented through language and art, our understanding remains limited and fragmented. Uexküll’s concept emphasizes the challenge of truly grasping other beings’ *Umwelts*, underscoring the mystery and partial understanding inherent in our exploration of internal and external worlds. Utopia, present as an internal state of virtual potential, that will never be realized, yet somehow, simultaneously is being imagined as an alternative parareality.

right up and bottom:
stills from the film
Camata 2024

Courtesy: Pierre
Huyghe, Camata, 2024,
Courtesy the artist
and Galerie Chantal
Crousel, Marian
Goodman Gallery,
Hauser & Wirth, Esther
Schipper, and TARO
NASU © Pierre Huyghe,
by SIAE 2023

Pierre Huyghe

Title: Camata 2024

Date: 2024

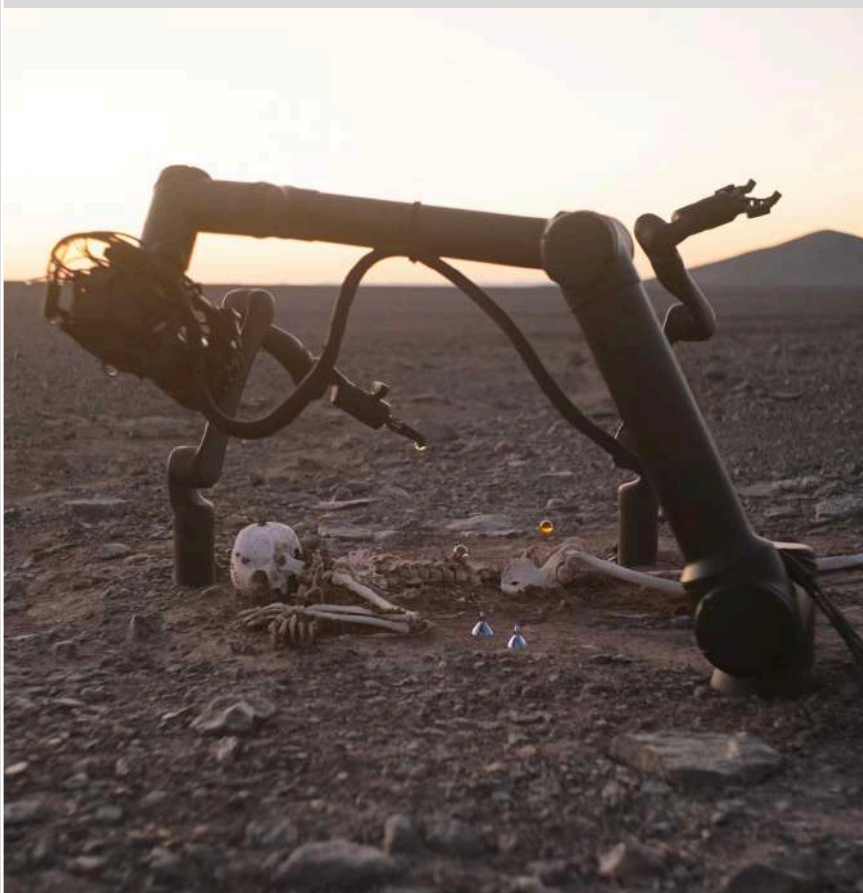
Technique: Robotics driven by machine learning; self-directed film, edited in real time by artificial intelligence; sound, sensors

Installation view: Palazzo Grassi, Punta della Dogana, Pinault Collection

Photos: Pierre Huyghe

Camata (2024) is a film in which robotic cameras, driven by machine learning, survey a human skeleton in a desert, evoking a future where AI examines human remains as fossils. Shot in the Atacama Desert, the film continues to be edited by AI in real-time, creating a dynamic, evolving narrative in the hostile landscape. Huyghe's photograph, taken at sunset during the film's production, captures the site where the skeleton was found, forming the conceptual core of the project. The artist's fascination with the skeleton highlights the historical and elemental forces at play. The found skeleton is likely the remains of a miner from the early 20th century. As a subject, it perhaps virtually represents the transition from human into what is left behind, becoming a liminal object that remains part of the landscape or transforms into the landscape itself. Huyghe constructed AI-controlled robotic arms that interact with the remains by placing and removing objects. Three cameras capture the scene from different perspectives, creating multiple layers of observation. A moving heliostat, choreographed by AI, further enhances the sense of artificial choreography. The work explores themes of observation, time, and the increasingly blurred boundaries between human and machine.¹ From the dystopian point of view, it poses the thought of transient moment of life on earth, to then circulate back to the environment, while robots will remain.

¹ link: <https://www.estherschipper.com/artists/41-pierre-huyghe/works/32643/>



right up and bottom:
stills from *forest mind*,
sync 2-channel video
installation.

Ursula Biemann

Title: *forest mind*

Date: 2021

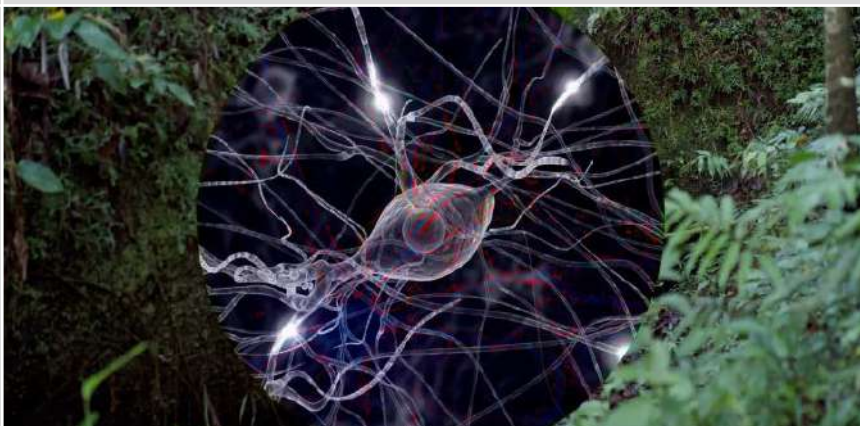
Technique: sync 2-channel video installation

Installation view and première: Kunsthaus Zurich

Camera: Richard Décaillet and Yann Décaumont

Forest mind by Ursula Biemann a video project set in the Amazonian forests of Colombia, exploring the metaphysics of plants, plant-human relationships, and the way life stores information. The project brings together scientific and shamanic perspectives, examining both the mechanistic view of modern science and indigenous cosmologies that see nature as spiritually animate. It aims to decolonise indigenous knowledge by situating it alongside scientific fields such as plant neurobiology, quantum biology, ethnobotany, and the philosophy of plants. *Forest mind* bridges Western and indigenous worldviews, to develop new visual and scientific methodologies. These include the encoding of digital files into DNA sequences, stored in microscopic glass pearls, creating an enduring archive that requires minimal resources. The project reflects on DNA as a unifying principle of life, common to all species and landscapes. While science measures biophotons emitted by DNA, shamans access this information through altered states of consciousness, interpreting it as intelligence of nature.¹ The artwork demonstrates the landscape of Amazonian forest, in relation to science and indigenous spiritual practices, demonstrating a dialogue between the digital, biological, and ecological world, to explore and rethink new possibilities for artistic storage and representation.

1 <https://geobodies.org/art-and-videos/forest-mind/>



right up :
We Were All Naked
(Red Elephant Ear)

right bottom:
We were All naked
(Traveller's Tree)

Courtesy Julius von
Bismarck

Julius von Bismarck

Title: *We Were All Naked*

Date: 2023

Technique: digital photograph, archival pigment print

Installation view: Sies + Höke Galerie

Photo: Julius Von Bismarck

The photo series *We Were All Naked* by Julius von Bismarck resemble alien landscapes through machine-milled aluminum frames, evoking the view from a spaceship window.¹ The photographs depict various themes circulating around plastic: pieces of land covered in plastic, depriving the terrain of air and plants in plastic foil. Plastic film stretches over stones and trees like a spider's web, transforming the scene into a depopulated, unrecognisable environment, perhaps a supermarket product. The photographs present the uncanny paradox: the reality of plants, needing to adapt to rapidly changing, human-modified conditions. The works were produced in Madagascar, a biodiversity hotspot, contrast with the vacuum-packed red plastic to highlight environmental destruction our species is threatening to the planet. Deprived from air, symbolising how human interventions of any kind result in inevitable death for most living organisms. These preserved, yet dying plants is a reflexion on the society's isolation from nature and inability to safeguard the environment, capable only to interact with it through another vacuum-sealed object. The shiny plastic film is a dystopian filter, through which one can see the world, to protect the ecosystems essential for life on Earth.

¹ [link:https://juliusvonbismarck.com/bank/index.php/projects/in-the-beginning/](https://juliusvonbismarck.com/bank/index.php/projects/in-the-beginning/)



right up and bottom:
Performers at the Art
Biennial 2019,
Courtesy of Andrej
Vasilenko

**Lina Lapelyte, Vaiva Grainyte and Rugile
Barzdiukaite**
Title: *Sun & Sea (Marina)*

Date: 2019

Technique: installation of sand, 24 performers

Installation view: 58th Venice Biennale of Arts

Photos: Andrej Vasilenko

Sun and Sea was the winning opera-performance at the 2019 Venice Biennale, which received the Golden Lion while representing the pavilion of Lithuania.¹ Set on an indoor, artificial beach installed at the Venice Arsenale venue, the work featured around 24 performers engaged in ordinary beach activities: lounging, eating, and playing, while simultaneously singing solo arias and group harmonies addressing climate change and its impacts—a theatre of the absurd *par excellence*. This staging, with 30 tonnes of imported sand, is a literal replication of a familiar beach scene. However, the performers' songs focus on environmental degradation, such as ocean pollution, the bleaching of coral reefs, and unseasonal weather patterns—ineed poignant themes for a careless day on the beach. The leisurely and mundane actions of the performers contrast with the cheerful tones of the libretto, mirroring the disconnection between everyday life and the planet's ongoing ecological crisis, a discrepancy that has persisted for years. The pendulum of emotions swings from relax to panic, constituting the wholeness of the experience of living on planet Earth in the 21st Century. It is tempting to position *Sun and Sea* as the parable of human carelessness while leisure, and our inability to engage with the landscape, grasp the consequences of the future while living solely—and literally—inside the confines of our comfort zones.

1 link: <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2019/national-participations/lithuania>



right up and bottom :
Still from *Listening All
Night To The Rain*,
Commissioned By
The British Council,
Courtesy Of Lisson
Gallery And Smoking
Dogs Films

John Akomfrah

Title: *Listening All Night To The Rain*

Date: 2024

Technique: video installations with sound

Installation view at the British Pavillion, 60th
Venice Art Biennale.

Photo: Jack Hems, copyright British Council

John Akomfrah's commission for the 2024 Venice Biennale, *Listening All Night to the Rain*, continues his exploration of memory, migration, racial injustice, and climate change. The installation, comprising eight interlocking screens, emphasises the concept of acoustemology—understanding the world through sound—what Akomfrah calls “listening as activism in the mind.” Like his earlier work *Arcadia*, this piece uses a non-linear format to connect different eras and geographies, revealing the layered complexities of human history and contemporary issues. The installation serves as a visual and auditory exploration of both the beauty and struggles inherent in our world, immersed in the imagined landscape, with a particular focus on the contested nature of British identity and colonial history. By weaving together themes of ecocide, memory, and migration, Akomfrah invites viewers to reflect on the current global crises, positioning sound and listening as powerful tools for understanding and activism. The work's sonic dimension enhances its immersive nature, encouraging deeper engagement with the emotional and political landscapes it portrays. Akomfrah probes the fundamental nature of human drama, and engages our connection to the world around us through the imaginary landscape formed out of collective memories.¹

1 link: <https://venicebiennale.britishcouncil.org/listening-all-night-to-the-rain>



right up and bottom:
Installation view at
Serpentine Gallery,
photos: Courtesy of
readsreads.info.

Hito Steyerl

Title: Power Plants

Date: 2019

Technique: installation, 3D data visualisation

Installation view at Serpentine North Gallery

Photos: readsreads.info

The exhibition focused on the theme of power in its many forms, from digital technology to ecological forces and social structures, with a strong connection to the surrounding landscape. Central to the show were three interconnected projects: *Actual Realityos*, *Power Walks*, and *Power Plants*, each exploring different facets of power. *Actual Realityos* was an augmented reality app that visualised data on social inequality in the surrounding area, using virtual models to represent local research findings on social housing and austerity. *Power Plants* featured video installations generated by neural networks predicting the future, where digital plants grew 0.04 seconds ahead of time, symbolising technology's potential to shape different temporal realities. The exhibition design was inspired by a ruderal garden, representing plants that grow in disrupted environments, a dystopic potential of nature and technology, that somehow coexist in unexpected ways. *The Power Walks* videos documented research and conversations with local activists, amplifying the voices of community members involved in these projects. By combining technology, community engagement, and environmental reflection, Steyerl questioned the promises of technological advancement, especially in its impact on the future landscape of the natural world and its hidden futures.¹

¹ link: <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/hito-steyerl-power-plants/>



right up and bottom:
Courtesy University
of Reading, Ed
Hawkins, graphic
possible to generate
on the website: [https://
showyourstripes.info/](https://showyourstripes.info/)

Ed Hawkins

Title: *Climate Stripes*

Date: 2017

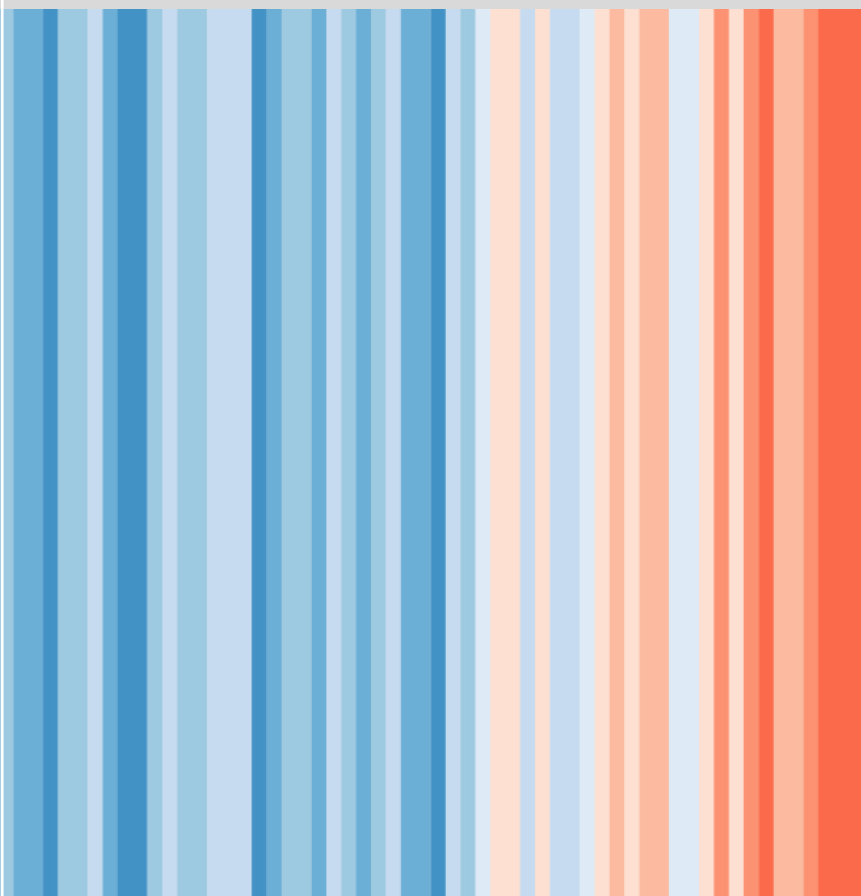
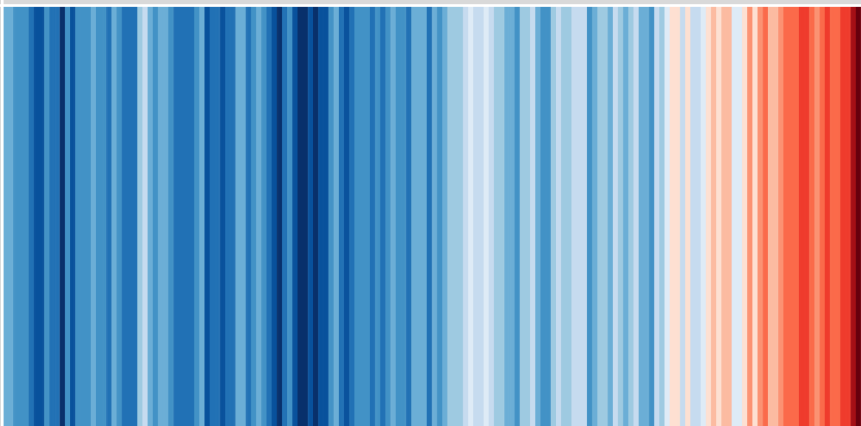
Technique: graphic

View at the: <https://showyourstripes.info/>

Photos: computer-generated

The first edition of the *Climate Stripes* were created in 2017 and presented climate data for the *Hay-on-Wye Festival* in 2018, in a form of artistic graphic. Professor Ed Hawkins, invited to share his research alongside poet and author Nicola Davies as part of an art-science series focused on environmental issues. The stripes were a simple way to visualise local climate data up to that year, yet they constituted a worldwide artistic phenomena. A few days before the festival, Hawkins tweeted the image of the stripes. It quickly gained attention when American meteorologist and CBS weather presenter Jeff Berardelli printed the stripes on a tie and encouraged fellow broadcasters to wear clothing featuring the design as part of the #metsunite initiative on June 21, 2018. The campaign took off, transforming into the annual #showyourstripes event on the Summer Solstice, highlighting the power of visual representation of the scientific data as dynamic tool for climate education.¹ Even if we consider it a residual product of a much larger scientific operation, a viral impact of this landscape representation ignited strong societal response. The diagram was not meant to turn into artwork; however, on a wave of populism, it did and can be considered conceptual representation of the weather change, impacting the future of the world to come.

¹ [https://collections.reading.ac.uk/art-collections/explore/online-exhibitions/
climate-stripes/](https://collections.reading.ac.uk/art-collections/explore/online-exhibitions/climate-stripes/)



right up:
Courtesy of Taddeus
Ropac Gallery

right bottom:
Ocean 14, 2024,
Courtesy of Alex Katz

Alex Katz

Title: *Claire, Grass and Water*

Date: 2022

Technique: oil on canvas

Installation view: Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2024

Photos: Charles Duprat

Alex Katz, who emerged as an artist in 1950s New York during the dominance of Abstract Expressionism, developed a distinctive approach to representational painting that would later define his career. While many of his peers focused on abstraction, Katz turned his attention to large-scale landscape paintings, which he referred to as *environmental*. This style evolved into the closely cropped, expansive landscapes and waterscapes featured in his recent work. Katz asserts that these close-up compositions lend his paintings a new energy and power, allowing his realistic depictions to compete with the intensity of artists like de Kooning and Pollock.¹ In the interview with Andy Battaglia, the artist was asked about the reason for the impressive scale of his paintings, and relation it has with the way of seeing the landscape through the painting. Katz responded: "The idea of the landscape paintings was to make paintings that wrap around you like you are in the landscape, rather than looking at a landscape from a distance through holes in the wall. I felt I had to have that much size to get the effect I wanted. And they really worked out."² Virtuality of the painting lies in its abstract scale, as artist said, that sets the illusion of what is contained in the canvas .

1 link: <https://ropac.net/online-exhibitions/153-alex-katz-claire-grass-and-water/>

2 link: <https://ropac.net/online-exhibitions/153-alex-katz-claire-grass-and-water/>



right up and bottom:
*The habitat for The
Book of the Ten
Thousand Things.,
documenta fifteen*

La Intermundial Holobiente

Title: *The Book of Ten Thousand Things*

Date: 2022

Technique: Feral ecosystem, soil, Bauwagen, rural trailer, scaffolding planks, oil drums, wooden and glass table, theatre gauze, helium balloons, chalk.

Installation view Documenta fifteen, Kassel

Photos: Erica Bohm

The initial task was to select a habitat for the book's nonhuman author: the Theaterschlag in Karlsruhe Park. The artsits approached this site as if it were a legible, non-human archive open to inquiry, and so we invited several residents of Kassel to “read” the space through their senses. The first nonhuman presences began to emerge: tropical grass that feeds elephants but is viewed as a weed; the sound of a crow’s wings; mud covering our feet; xylophagous fungi; squirrels, bats, and Egyptian geese; the path of exotic seeds from the Siebenbergen botanical garden; the Aue, remembered as a lost wetland; a young elephant once chained in the park after serving as set decoration in the Kassel opera; the landscape as both presence and representation; peat, used in the pigment color “Cassel earth”; the supernova observed by Wilhelm IV in 1572; a mushroom that turns to ink after two days; the embryonic cell of a dog within compost containing worlds; the span between the park and distant planets.¹ The virtual creation forms itself from words, mater, images and engagement of the collective, and singular participants of the landscape journey.

¹ <https://claudiafontes.com/project/the-book-of-the-ten-thousand-things/>



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Virtualis, Cultural Virtualisation, Production of Space

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PART 2

ATLAS

Manifestations of Landscape in Artistic Projects

PALIMPSEST

ACTION!

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