

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a dark, wet cobblestone pavement. The stones are irregular in shape and color, ranging from dark grey to black. They are wet, with visible water droplets and reflections. Scattered across the pavement are numerous fallen leaves, mostly in shades of yellow, green, and brown, suggesting autumn. Some leaves are whole, while others are fragmented. The text is centered over this image.

British Art Studies

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Landscape Now

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Landscape Now

Cover image: David Alesworth, *Unter den Linden*, 2010, horticultural intervention, public art project, terminalia arjuna seeds (sterilized) yellow paint.. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth.

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Contents

Introduction, Mark Hallett

Landscape Then and Now, Tim Barringer

Fire-Stick Picturesque:

Landscape Art and Early Colonial Tasmania, Julia Lum

Landscape Now, Alexandra Harris

Gardening the Archive:

A Conversation between David Alesworth and Hammad Nasar, David Alesworth and Hammad Nasar

Paul Nash's Geological Enigma, Anna Reid

Re-Illuminating the Landscape of the Hoo Peninsula through the Medium of Film, Anna Falcini

On Place and Displacement:

Benjamin Henry Latrobe and the Immigrant Landscape, Julia A. Sienkewicz

Liquid Landscape: Southam, Constable, and the Art of the Pond, Stephen Daniels

The Anthroposcentic: Landscape in the Anthropocene, David Matless

Landscaping Islands:

Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland* and Floating Histories in Contemporary British Art, Gill Perry

Outside In: Reflections of British Landscape in the Long Anthropocene, Mark A. Cheetham

Lines in the Landscape:

Ruins and Reveals in Britain, Corinne Silva and Val Williams

The "Connoisseur's Panorama":

Thomas Girtin's *Eidometropolis* (1801-1803) and a New Visual Language for the Modern City, Greg Smith

1973 and the Future of Landscape, Nicholas Alfrey



Introduction

Mark Hallett

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This special issue of *British Art Studies* emerges out of the third of a series of international scholarly conferences that the Paul Mellon Centre has developed in collaboration with the Yale Center for British Art and the Huntington Library and Art Gallery. In devising these events, we have always endeavoured to choose topics that are not only capacious and significant, but also timely. For our first two conferences held in 2015 and 2016, those topics were portraiture—or rather the interactive capacities of portraiture—and the relationship between photography and notions of Britishness.¹ For the most recent of these conferences, which was called *Landscape Now*, and which was held in December 2017, we focused instead on landscape imagery, feeling that this, too, was an area that was not only ripe for reassessment, but already attracting new kinds of art-historical attention.

As was noted in our conference call for *Landscape Now*, the pictorial representation of the British landscape was the subject of sustained scholarly investigation in the 1980s and 1990s. This was a period—let us call it Landscape Then—that saw the emergence both of a social history of art as a vital methodological mode and of an especially brilliant generation of scholars, from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, who focused on the landscape imagery of the Georgian period. Writers such as John Barrell and Anne Bermingham produced powerful and provocative thematic studies on the subject, while scholars such as David Solkin and Michael Rosenthal published seminal texts on individual landscape artists—in their case, the canonical figures of Richard Wilson and John Constable.² These writers' work not only helped transform interpretations of British landscape painting, but also made the study of such imagery seem essential to a proper understanding of British art itself.

Even as the attention of historians of British art has shifted over the last two decades—to the study of, amongst other things, empire, print culture, exhibitions, the iconography of urban life, and the imagery of the Victorian and Modern period—the study of the landscape in adjacent disciplines has continued apace, driven in part by political and environmental imperatives. Cultural geographers such as Stephen Daniels and David Matless have long been offering nuanced investigations of the British landscape in their publications, asking us to think afresh about its relationship to national identity, memory, and post-imperial decline.³ In recent years, furthermore, newly energised categories of “nature writing” and cultural histories that deal engagingly with the British landscape, have gained widespread currency beyond the purely academic arena.⁴ And while many scholars in the humanities, in an age of globalization and deepening ecological concern, have felt compelled to think about landscape on a vastly expanded basis, others have been driven to offer a new and suggestive focus on the local.⁵

The moment thus seemed ripe for a major art-historical reassessment of the imagery of the British landscape—one that took account of these and other emergent concerns; one that drew upon the insights offered by colleagues from a range of other strands in the humanities; and one that looked across periods and media, so that it might just as happily interrogate recent work in film as it might the details of a medieval manuscript. I am pleased to say that the resultant conference did all of these things, and more—so much so, that all those of us involved in organizing the event unanimously agreed that the research and arguments it showcased deserved publication. This special issue of *British Art Studies*, which has been edited by Sarah Turner and Martina Droth, is the result, and we hope you will agree that it offers a fresh, diverse, and stimulating set of approaches to the topic.

This publication forms part of a wider push on our and our fellow organizers' part to promote new scholarship in this and related areas. Thus, following the publication of our online catalogues on the landscape artists Richard Wilson and Francis Towne, we at the PMC have recently commissioned Greg Smith to produce an online catalogue of the works of the great landscape watercolourist Thomas Girtin.⁶ Our recent books include studies of gardens and gardening in early modern England, and a catalogue devoted to the contemporary landscape paintings of George Shaw, published to accompany a major exhibition of the artist's work at the Yale Center for British Art.⁷ Furthermore, we are delighted that Tim Barringer, who delivered a keynote lecture to the *Landscape Now* conference, and who makes a major contribution to this issue, is also going to be giving the Paul Mellon Lectures in London and at Yale in 2019, on the topic of *Global Landscape in the Age of Empire*.⁸

These ventures are only some of the elements of what we envisage as a far broader exploration of landscape imagery at the PMC, at Yale, and no doubt at the Huntington too, over the next few years. We hope that this range of activities will contribute to a new and transformative era of scholarship in the field of British landscape studies—one, indeed, that we can continue to enjoy as *Landscape Now*, even as we look back with fondness and appreciation at the era of *Landscape Then*.

Footnotes

- 1 For which, see <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/whats-on/past/portraiture-interaction> and <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-4/ycba-conference/>.
- 2 See John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1849* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Anne Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987); Michael Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and his Landscape* (London: Yale University Press, 1983); David Solkin, *Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1982).
- 3 See Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993); David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 2nd edn (London: Reaktion Books, 2016 [1998]).

- 4 Distinguished examples of such works are Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015); Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers and Artists under English Skies* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015); and Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk* (London: Grove Press, 2014).
- 5 For a fascinating example of the latter approach, see John Barrell, *Edward Pugh of Ruthin, 1763-1813: "A Native Artist"* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).
- 6 For the Wilson catalogue, see www.richardwilsononline.ac.uk/; for the Towne catalogue, see <http://francistowne.ac.uk/>.
- 7 David Jacques, *Gardens of Court and Country: English Design, 1630-1730* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2017); Jill Francis, *Gardens and Gardening in Early Modern England and Wales* (London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2018); Mark Hallett (ed.), *George Shaw: A Corner of a Foreign Field* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with Yale Center for British Art; Holburne Museum; Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2018).
- 8 For details, see www.nationalgallery.org.uk/whats-on/paul-mellon-lectures.

The image is a painting of a tropical landscape. In the foreground, three figures are visible: two on the left and one on the right. The two figures on the left are standing near a body of water, looking towards the right. The figure on the right is standing and looking towards the left. In the background, there are several palm trees, some with coconuts, and a range of green mountains under a blue sky with some clouds. The overall style is that of a classical or colonial-era painting.

Landscape Then and Now

Tim Barringer

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The aesthetics of landscape have always been finely calibrated in response to prevailing ideological concerns of the day. When eighteenth-century grand tourists embraced the Claudian picturesque—by purchasing old master paintings in Italy, commissioning estate views from Richard Wilson, or sweeping away an English village to accommodate a new ornamental lake for the landscape garden—they engaged with a Whig politics that offered an imagery of stasis and permanence in a world marked by conflict and change. In a fast-secularizing age, Ruskin and the Victorians scanned the botanical minutiae of flora, the geology of mountains, and the meteorology of the skies in pursuit of religious meaning, eventually discovering only the “storm cloud of the nineteenth century”, a “dense manufacturing mist” that provided an allegory of environmental despoliation and moral collapse.¹

Art history, too, stands within rather than above prevailing ideologies. Kenneth Clark’s *Landscape into Art*, published in 1949, breathed a pessimism tinged with patrician regret at the loss of an idyll, destroyed by “all the science and bureaucracy in the world, all the bombs and concentration camps.” A further menace was populism. “Almost every Englishman,” Clark declares, “if asked what he meant by beauty, would begin to describe a landscape.” A combination of this “passive consent of uninformed opinion,” the “extremely specialized and esoteric work” of contemporary artists, and the “new religion” of science left landscape art, essentially, dead, with Clark as the sole mourner at its funeral.² A sense of melancholy also attaches to studies of landscape painting, bolstered by Paul Mellon’s patronage, during the 1950s and 1960s. Ellis Waterhouse, writing in 1953, found in Gainsborough’s *The Harvest Wagon* (ca. 1767) “one of the supreme masterpieces of British painting”, notable for “musical rhythm, kept exquisitely under control”. The “single figures, both of people and horses, combine a genial naturalness and a perfection of grace”, characteristics implicitly lacking in austerity Britain of the early 1950s, and also from the contemporary art of the period (Fig. 1).³ In the same historical moment, but from a different political position, Francis Donald Klingender offered a contrasting socialist vision of landscape imagery from the dawn of modernity, presciently drawing, within the purview of art history, on a broad range of print culture in *Art and the Industrial Revolution*.⁴



Figure 1.

Thomas Gainsborough, *The Harvest Wagon*, ca. 1767, oil on canvas, 120.5 x 144.7 cm. Collection of The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham (46.8). Digital image courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

The study of landscape painting, and more broadly of the landscape itself, experienced a radical renewal towards the end of the Cold War, in the years following the intellectual convulsions of 1968 and the social and economic upheavals of the 1970s. A new historiography was inaugurated by key works such as John Barrell's *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, Ann Bermingham's *Landscape and Ideology* and the essays in *The Iconography of Landscape*, edited by Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove.⁵ Foundational documents of the social history of art, these methodologically eclectic works were broadly Marxian, drawing, respectively, on literary studies, psychoanalytic theory, and human geography. Together, they constituted a breakthrough in the analysis of landscape imagery. The sense of a rising historiographical tide was confirmed by the appearance of authoritative monographic accounts of Richard Wilson by David Solkin and Constable by Michael Rosenthal, a plethora of works on Turner, and Andrew Hemingway's exhaustive study of the Norwich School.⁶ These interventions were formative for future studies, but their focus, as in classic works of social history such as E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, was resolutely national; indeed,

national identity—the Englishness of English art—was a significant subtext of a body of work implicitly challenging the monopoly position hitherto held by scholars of French nineteenth-century painting.⁷

In the Thatcher era of the 1980s, a turn towards the history of consumption, rooted in the work of J.H. Plumb, John Brewer, and Neil McKendrick, shifted interest away from questions of labour and land as a site of production and social experience, but generated a richer understanding of the display, sale, and distribution of landscape paintings as objects in a market, the role of institutions, and new forms of art writing and criticism.⁸ The magisterial exhibition *Art on the Line*, curated by David Solkin, placed landscape at the centre of the spectacle of the art market—“Landscape-o-rama” in Ann Bermingham’s term.⁹ Another exhibition project based on extensive research, *Sensation and Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough’s Cottage Door*, curated by Bermingham, drew together fine art and new popular media, such as de Louthembourg’s *Eidophusikon*, which was an attempt to present a landscape scenario in animated, mechanical display.¹⁰ Related research projects have explored the history of the panorama, invented in Scotland in 1787, but soon adopted as a global technology.¹¹

But what of landscape now? Since the 1990s, the inescapable context of neoliberal economic and political globalization determined that themes of trans-regional exchange in earlier periods would preoccupy art historians—a group also belatedly but enthusiastically grappling with postmodern theory in multifarious forms. Daniels’s pioneering *Fields of Vision* (1991) began to challenge the national paradigm by exploring parallels and relationships between British and American landscape painting and print culture.¹² New Atlanticist perspectives on political and intellectual history opened up the possibility of a “new British history”, whose implications for art historical study have only slowly been realized.

More urgently, the legacy of rethinking of cultural studies by Stuart Hall and the “Birmingham School”, led to an increasing focus on questions of race and representation, on questions of diasporic identity and the cultural legacies of slavery in the Caribbean and Britain. Paul Gilroy’s formulation of the “black Atlantic” was decisive in challenging the primacy of the nation as a unit of analysis, opening up a model of transnational movement that, albeit derived from the unique and incomparable trauma of chattel slavery, nonetheless opened up vivid possibilities for rethinking the history of art more generally.¹³ The national essentialism of post-war scholarship was assailed by concepts of ambivalence and hybridity, developed in post-colonial theory, notably in the work of Homi Bhabha; contact zones and the meeting and intertwining of cultures, analysed first in literary studies and anthropology, took on a new importance, with significant implications for the study of

landscape imagery and for the canon of art history.¹⁴ Representations of landscapes of slavery, in which conventions of the picturesque and the sublime were often deployed in an attempt to present the plantation in the most favourable light, have been the subject of recent attention. Jill Casid's *Sowing Empire* presciently drew attention to the relationship between the organization of the plantation and the conventions of representation; in *Slavery, Sugar and the Culture of Refinement*, Kay Dian Kriz navigated the links between the economics of the slave trade and the polite society, revealing fault lines that saw metropolitan visual satires offering burlesque images of planters in the Caribbean as debased and vulgar; while the elegant lithographs of Joseph Bartholomew Kidd, at the moment of slavery's demise in 1838, attempted to "detoxify" the sugar islands through artful renderings of the plantation landscape. *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica*, an exhibition held at the Yale Center for British Art in 2007, attempted to incorporate landscape imagery into a more general history of representations of slavery, utilizing Joseph Roach's formulation of "circum-Atlantic exchange" as a single "oceanic interculture".¹⁵ From the mid-eighteenth century, the Caribbean was a zone of constant reinvention, a nodal point of global trade, including the trade in human bodies, the site of pioneering, large-scale industrial organization, and a place where forced migration gave birth to new populations and hybrid cultural forms, especially in performance and the visual arts. It also constituted a series of landscapes, both in actuality and in representation.¹⁶

Early indications of the directions landscape scholarship would take in the new millennium were seen in summer 2001, in a conference, *Art and the British Empire*, which brought together scholars from across the world to begin, for the first time, to formulate a larger historical research project about art and empire, in which landscape would play a central role. The premise of the conference, and the collection of essays derived from it, was that the concept of empire (hitherto largely shunned by art historians) "belongs at the centre, rather than in the margins, of the history of British art."¹⁷ William Blake, inevitably, long ago floated a more radical proposition: "Empire follows Art, & not vice versa as Englishmen suppose."¹⁸ Perhaps, then, art belongs at the heart of the history of empire. It was clear to the organizers that this project could only be successful if it embraced a multiplicity of viewpoints from across the former territories of empire rather than asserting a metropolitan narrative. The conference was, after all, supported by Yale University, a quintessential product of the colonies, whose founding donor, Elihu Yale, was an East India Company official in Madras, who had been born in New Haven, Connecticut.¹⁹ And though, in an event deliciously laced with irony, the delegates in 2001 enjoyed a memorable reception in the Durbar Court of the Foreign Office, seemingly re-enacting

the paying of homage by vassal states to the imperial overlord, the conference provided a highly productive meeting of scholars and curators from across the world.

As the twenty-first century dawned, the long-running debates engendered by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the landscape imagery of David Roberts, William Holman Hunt, Edward Lear and, especially, John Frederic Lewis, come to the fore.²⁰ Moreover, the work of British artists in India, hitherto the subject of a connoisseurial literature redolent of colonialist attitudes, became a subject of new literature inflected with a new urgency by the emergence of post-colonial theory.²¹ The most significant response to British landscape aesthetics in colonial India is Romita Ray's *Under the Banyan Tree*, a study alert to the poetics, as well as the politics of representations under colonialism.²² A larger literature has engaged with landscape photography in India from the late 1850s onwards, in which conventions of the picturesque and the panoramic, established earlier and disseminated through print media, play a significant role.²³

New work on landscape painting in Australia, Aotearoa—New Zealand, and South Africa has revealed both the global reach of landscape conventions and formulae, and the impediments offered to the totalizing “colonial picturesque” by local geographies and by what Julia Lum, deploying in relation to landscape painting a concept from the anthropologist Bronwen Douglas, has described as “indigenous countersigns”.²⁴ The British artist John Glover in Tasmania, the artist-ethnographer George French Angas in New Zealand, the painter-explorer Thomas Baines in South Africa, among countless others, encountered limit-cases where topography and culture exerted a powerful counterforce, limiting the controlling power of the imperial landscape idiom, and generating troubling, but historically important and aesthetically powerful landscapes for which new interpretative strategies are demanded. The work of contemporary indigenous artists increasingly offers critical reflections on the continuing power of landscape as a contested space open to multiple interpretations, and as a site of historical and contemporary violence. Lisa Reihana's *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, (2015–2017), on display at the time of publication in the exhibition *Oceania* at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, responds to the historical provocation of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, a scenic coloured wallpaper in twenty panels, created in 1804 by Joseph Dufour on the basis of imagery from the Pacific voyages of James Cook (*Les Voyages du Capitaine Cook* was proposed as an alternative title for the paper) (Fig. 2).²⁵ Reihana's panoramic video spanning 26 metres embraces the “monarch of all I survey” viewpoint of the painted panoramas of the late eighteenth century, but inserts speaking, singing, and moving figures to contest the silent, stereotypical representations of indigenous people in eighteenth- and

nineteenth-century sources. Reihana offers partial insights into indigenous cosmologies that contest the Enlightenment's insistence on global normativities, insisting on the validity of traditional knowledges and the limitations of Western perception. "Both the wallpaper and the video are set in a utopian Tahitian landscape," explains Reihana, "yet while Dufour's work models Enlightenment beliefs of harmony among mankind, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* includes encounters between Europeans and Polynesians which acknowledge the complexities of cultural identities and inter-cultural contact in the age of Empire."²⁶ It is a landscape of misunderstanding, a contact zone of misconception, which is both a landscape of possibility, a space of resistance, and potentially the terrain of terrible violence.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 2.

Lisa Reihana, *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2015–17, ultra HD video, colour, sound, 64 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Film courtesy of Lisa Reihana.

While some recent writers have followed Kenneth Clark in suggesting that there was a "death of landscape" at the end of the nineteenth century, the eclipse of traditional media such as large-scale exhibition paintings of landscape subjects was accompanied by a proliferation of landscape imagery across media, notably photography and, above all, film.²⁷ Continuities abound. The "panning shots" of the motion picture industry—think of the widescreen imagery of the American wilderness ubiquitous in Westerns from John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) to Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992), or the sweeping desert scenes in David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)—derive directly from the painted panorama patented by Robert Barker in 1787, mediated through Turner and American painters such as Frederic Edwin Church and Thomas Moran.

In addition to its presence across popular culture, landscape seems have returned to prominence in the fine arts in Britain at moments of enforced insularity. The neo-Romantic painters of the 1930s—Paul Nash, John Piper, and Graham Sutherland—seem to have moved towards landscape painting as a redemptive haven from totalitarian encroachment, enhanced by layer upon layer of comforting vernacular inscription, from standing stones to Georgian stables. British variants of Abstract Expressionism, such as powerful canvases of Peter Lanyon, always seem to allude to land, sea, and sky; artists inclined towards abstraction gathered at St Ives, for the same reason that earlier colonies had formed at Cullercoats, Staithes, and Newlyn, because of the magnificence of the surrounding scenery.

Land and landscape are once again at the heart of contemporary political debates in the era of Donald Trump's presidency in the United States. As all but a tiny cadre of extractive capitalists now acknowledge, climate change

and global warming are perhaps the most pressing issues facing civilization: landscapes worldwide are visibly changing and the emergence of what might be described as a planetary consciousness—with the exception of the crass and recidivistic leadership of the United States—seems to be taking place on the terrain of landscape. Histories of landscape painting are, increasingly, conscious not only of the trans-regional and the inter- and intra-imperial, but also of the global in a real and immediate sense. In the “anthropocene”, the geological era in which the effects of human life have decisively changed the planet’s environment, climate is a matter of survival with profound consequences for aesthetics (David Matless recently coined the term “Anthroposcenic” to illuminate this conjunction).²⁸ The results of man-made environmental change preoccupy, indeed haunt, the projects of scholars of landscape today, just as increasing numbers of contemporary artists are registering in their work, with mounting horror, the accelerated rate of climate change and despoliation.

This new awareness of landscape as the ground upon which macro-historical forces play out their dramas loops us back historically to the moment of British landscape painting’s triumph in the age of Romanticism. If we can now identify the early nineteenth century as the origin point of the Anthropocene, then this new era in global history was ushered in by the landscapes of J.M.W. Turner and John Martin, whose embrace of the apocalyptic sublime has never seemed more prescient. The landscape painter Thomas Cole, born in the overcrowded, polluted industrial city of Bolton, Lancashire, in 1801, met both Turner and Martin in London in 1829–1830. He wrote to a patron in 1832 to describe a projected cycle of landscape paintings, conceived in London, that he would name *The Course of Empire*. Utilizing terms that resonate with modern ecological thinking, he proposed to paint:

the History of a Natural Scene, as well as an Epitome of Man; showing the natural changes of Landscape, and those effected by Man in his progress from Barbarism to Civilization—to the state of Luxury—to the vicious state or states of Destruction etc.²⁹

The malign effect of humanity on the landscape was the central premise of Cole’s artistic project: he was a pioneering artist of the Anthropocene, proleptic in his melancholy sense of impending catastrophe. An exhibition of his work held in 2018, exactly 200 years after he and his family, economic migrants, landed on the shores of the young United States, revealed Cole to be far from being the provincial, nationalistic American figure—“the father of the Hudson River School”—of the established historiography. Rather, horrified by the emergence of global capitalism and empire, avid in its

advocacy of protection for the American wilderness, predictive of environmental catastrophe, his vision seems, uncannily, to speak of “landscape now” (Fig. 3).³⁰



Figure 3.

Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: Destruction*, 1836, oil on canvas, 99.7 x 161.3 cm. Collection of New-York Historical Society (1858.4). Digital image courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

Footnotes

- 1 John Ruskin, “The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century: Lecture 1”, *Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1908), Vol. 34, 37.
- 2 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, new edn. (London: John Murray, 1976), 230, 241.
- 3 Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530–1790*, 5th edn, edited by Michael Kitson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994 [1953]), 260.
- 4 Francis Donald Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Noel Carrington, 1947).
- 5 John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987); and *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, edited by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 6 David H. Solkin, *Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction* (London: Tate Gallery, 1982); Michael Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and his Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); on artistic identity and landscape with particular reference to Turner, see Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth-Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 7 Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (London: Architectural Press, 1956); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: V. Gollancz, 1963). A sophisticated meditation on this tradition can be found in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt, and Fiona Russell (eds), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past, 1880–1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).
- 8 Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa, 1982). For Plumb’s contribution to art history, see J.H. Plumb, *The Pursuit of Happiness: A View of Life in Georgian England. An Exhibition Selected from the Paul Mellon Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 1977).

- 9 David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001). See, in particular, Ann Bermingham, “Landscape-o-Rama: The Exhibition Landscape at Somerset House and the Rise of Popular Entertainments”, in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 127–144.
- 10 Ann Bermingham (ed.), *Sensation & Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough’s Cottage Door* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
- 11 See Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and Katie Trumpener and Tim Barringer (eds), *On the Viewing Platform: The Panorama from Canvas to Screen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming 2019).
- 12 American landscape painting has been dominated by an exceptionalist approach, articulated through factitious entities such as the “Hudson River School” and “Luminism”. See Tim Barringer, “National Myths and the Historiography of Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting: A European Perspective”, in Peter J. Schneemann and Thomas Schmutz (eds), *Masterplan: Konstruktion und Dokumentation amerikanischer Kunstgeschichten*, Neue Berner Schriften zur Kunst (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 127–154. For a recent attempt to write an alternative narrative, see Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, Sophie Lynford, Jennifer Raab, and Nicholas Robbins, *Picturesque and Sublime: Thomas Cole’s Trans-Atlantic Inheritance* (Catskill, New York: Thomas Cole National Historic Site; New Haven, CT: in association with Yale University Press, 2018).
- 13 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Tim Barringer, “A White Atlantic? The Idea of American Art in Nineteenth-Century Britain”, 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 9, 9 November 2009, doi:10.16995/ntn.507.
- 14 See, for example, Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- 15 Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
- 16 Geoff Quilley, “Pastoral Plantations: The Slave Trade and the Representation of British Colonial Landscape in the Eighteenth Century”, in Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz (eds), *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World, 1660–1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 106–128; and Tim Barringer, “Land, Labor, Landscape: Views of the Plantation in Victorian Jamaica”, in Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest (eds), *Victorian Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 281–321.
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- 18 “William Blake’s Annotations to Reynolds’s *Discourses*”, Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, edited by Robert R. Wark (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 285.
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- 20 See Emily M. Weeks, *Cultures Crossed: John Frederick Lewis and the Art of Orientalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); Wendy M.K. Shaw, “Between the Sublime and the Picturesque: Mourning Modernization and the Production of Orientalist Landscape in Thomas Allom and Reverend Robert Walsh’s Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor (c. 1839)”, in Zeynep Inankur, Mary Roberts, and Reina Lewis (eds), *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010), 95–103. For an important comparative perspective, see, in the same volume, Semra Germaner, “The Interpretation of Pictorial Space in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Landscape Painting”, in Zeynep Inankur, Mary Roberts, and Reina Lewis (eds), *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010).
- 21 The flavour of earlier scholarship may be discerned from Mildred Archer and Ronald Lightbown, *India Observed: India as viewed by British Artists, 1760–1860* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982). Archer and her husband William George Archer were civil servants in the Raj from 1934 to 1948, before taking up positions in, respectively, the India Office Library and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Their scholarship, which remains of fundamental importance to the field, is inevitably inflected by the attitudes of the colonial governing class, even as they shared socialist convictions and a belief in the project of Indian independence. For important works inflected by post-colonial theory *inter alia*, Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Arindam Dutta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of its Global Reproducibility* (Cambridge, MA: CRC Press, 2006); Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765–1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) and *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a “New” Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, 1850–1920* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992) and *Monuments, Objects, Histories [electronic resource]: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- 22 See Romita Ray, *Under the Banyan Tree: Relocating the Picturesque in British India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).
- 23 See, for example, Vidya Dehejia (ed.), *India through the Lens: Photography 1840–1911* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Institution, Smithsonian Institution, 2000); and Maria Antonella Pelizzari, *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900* (Montréal Canadian Centre for Architecture; New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art; Yale University Press, 2003).
- 24 Julia Lum, “Art at the Meeting Places of Britain and Oceania, 1778–1848”, PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2016. See also Julia Lum’s article, “Fire-stick Picturesque: Colonial Landscape Art in Tasmania”, in the current edition of BAS.

- 25 I am grateful to Julia Lum for brining Reihana's work to my attention and offering a compelling reading of it in "Art at the Meeting Places of Britain and Oceania, 1778–1848". See also Peter Brunt, Nicholas Thomas, Noelle Kahanu, Sean Mallon, Emmanuel Kasarhérou, Michael Mel, and Anne Salmond, *Oceania* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2018), 31–3, 256–9, 307–8.
- 26 Rhana Devenport, "An Interview with Lisa Reihana", in *Lisa Reihana: In Pursuit of Venus* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2015), 6.
- 27 Maggie Cao, *The End of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).
- 28 For a recent discussion of this topic, see Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, and François Gemenne, (eds), *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015). Three outstanding papers explored this issue at "Landscape Now" International Conference, 30 November and 1 December 2017, Paul Mellon Centre, London: Rosie Ibbotson, "The Image in the Imperial Anthropocene: Landscape Aesthetics and Environmental Violence in Colonial Aotearoa New Zealand"; David Matless, "The Anthropocenic: Landscape Imagery in Erosion Time"; and Mark A. Cheetham, "Outside In: Reflections of British Landscape in the Long Anthropocene".
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- 30 Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser and Tim Barringer, *Thomas Cole's Journey: Atlantic Crossings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018); and Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, Sophie Lynford, Jennifer Raab, and Nicholas Robbins, *Picturesque and Sublime: Thomas Cole's Trans-Atlantic Inheritance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

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Fire-Stick Picturesque: Landscape Art and Early Colonial Tasmania

Julia Lum

Abstract

Drawing from scholarship in fire ecology and ethnohistory, this paper suggests new approaches to art historical analysis of colonial landscape art. British artists in the colony of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) relied not only on picturesque landscape conventions to codify their new environments, but were also influenced by local vegetation patterns and Indigenous landscape management practices. Describing the meeting ground of two cultural systems in the representation of Tasmania's geography, this paper highlights how British-born artists such as John Glover (1767–1849) and John Skinner Prout (1805–1876) responded to the Tasmanian environment. In drawing attention to artistic developments in the aftermath of frontier violence of the 1830s, and the dispossession of Tasmania's first peoples from their homelands, the paper suggests that colonial landscape imagery was problematically invested in a paradoxical task: of both ordering and of "rewilding" Tasmania's landscape. Woodland, trees, and natural resources—in both material manifestation and iconography—would play a fundamental role in the formation of colonial identity in the wake of the island's violent appropriation.

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In 1835, paintings sent from Van Diemen's Land to London by the artist John Glover (1767–1849) were exhibited on New Bond Street. Glover, the one-time President of the Royal Society of British Artists and formerly styled the "Litchfield Claude", had in 1831, at the age of sixty-four, emigrated to the British colony of Van Diemen's Land (called today Tasmania, an island to the south-east of mainland Australia). ¹ The 1835 exhibition catalogue provides an excess of detail about the artist's new home and its arboreal features: "There is a remarkable *peculiarity* in the Trees in this Country; however, numerous, they rarely prevent your tracing, through them, the whole distant Country." For a work depicting Glover's property at Mill's Plains in Tasmania, the catalogue explains: "This gives a good idea of the thickly wooded part of the Country: it is possible, almost every-where, to drive a carriage as easily as in a park in England" (Fig. 1). ²



Figure 1.

John Glover, View of Mill's Plains, Van Diemen's Land, 1833, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 114.6 cm. Collection of Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (0.1465), Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund 1951. Digital image courtesy of Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

But England, it was not. A reviewer for *The Times* noted that the Glover's landscapes bore "in many respects a resemblance to the views on the lakes of Cumberland," but that Tasmania's landscape was marked by difference:

the hills are more lofty, possess more of a primeval aspect and abound more in forest scenery. The trees are large and branching far and wide but they are neither so delicate nor so umbrageous as the trees of Europe. ³

Scholars have described the ways that the Australian landscape's appearance, particularly its tall twisting eucalyptus trees, created an early colonial dialectic: on the one hand, settlers forged a culture emulative of Britain, and on the other hand, they contended with the distinct and inassimilable features of their new home.⁴ Attempts to resolve this paradox took the form of comparison: areas of open grassland punctuated by trees were immediately likened to English gardens and the carefully constructed grounds of country estates. As Michael Rosenthal has poignantly remarked: "in England Arcadia has to be made; in Australia it is found."⁵

The sparsely wooded, park-like terrain visible in Glover's *View of Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land* was no less the product of human intervention, long managed by Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples, who cultivated and controlled vegetation with regular, small-scale burning regimes (Fig. 2).⁶ In 1823, one observer attributed "the general openness of the forest land in the island, and its usefulness for pasture" to the "practice among the natives of burning the bush in order to circumvent and enclose their prey."⁷



Figure 2.

Thomas Bock, Manalargena, a leader of the north-eastern nations, 1831-35, watercolour, 26.5 x 22.3 cm. Collection of The British Museum (Oc2006,Drg.61). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Figure 3.

Martyman, Map of Tasmanian Tribes at the time of first European contact, based on data from *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* by Lyndall Ryan (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996) and overlaid on a photograph from NASA, 2006. Digital image courtesy of Martyman (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Cultural landscapes, in particular the fertile fire-managed belts of open forest-turned-pasturelands, and the European paintings that depicted them, were critical to Tasmania's early colonial identity.⁸ That a colonial landscape "school" flourished in the 1830s and 1840s can be attributed to two important considerations. First, Glover's arrival in the colony coincides, crucially, with the close of the "Black War", or Tasmanian Aboriginal people's resistance to British colonization, and with the atrocity of their "conciliation" and their exile to Flinders Island in Bass Strait.⁹ A battle for territory and resources between Tasmania's Aboriginal population and the island's invaders, culminating in unspeakable violence and the displacement of Indigenous nations from their homelands, brought about the decimation of the island's original population within a single generation.¹⁰ In the aftermath

of these events, the long-held assumption that Tasmania's first peoples went extinct—a belief, it should be stressed, that has been challenged by present-day Tasmanians of Indigenous heritage—had both immediate and long-lasting effects on the colonial mindset and artistic output (Fig. 3). ¹¹

Scholars such as Tim Bonyhady, David Hansen, and Ian McLean have persuasively argued that this history forms a dark backdrop to Glover's romanticized depictions of Aboriginal peoples in a pre-European landscape. ¹² Yet, rather than revisit aspects of Glover's oeuvre which infamously elegize "the manner [the Tasmanian Aboriginal people] enjoyed themselves before being disturbed by the White People," as the artist described of his painting *Natives at a Corrobory, under the wild woods of the Country*, this paper instead analyses British landscape art's iconographic transformations in colonial Australia. ¹³ I will examine in particular the ways in which paintings and watercolours held in tension the aesthetic aspirations of the land's new occupants and the imprint of Indigenous *countersigns*, a term coined by the Pacific historian Bronwen Douglas. In several scholarly projects, Douglas has investigated European texts and images for the impact of Indigenous action on the developments of racial theories and classification. Indigenous presence, she argues, leaves an "imprint of certain referents on the signifiers used to represent them ... Filtered through distorting screens of presupposition, precedent, perception, and emotion—both ecstasy and phobia—Indigenous presence impinged on outsiders' representations." ¹⁴ Extending Douglas' argument, I suggest that Aboriginal custodianship of the land and its resources made an indelible mark upon early colonial landscape art, and that referents of Indigenous agency were redirected by artists, consciously and unconsciously, into representations that encoded features of the expropriated territories. This paper attends to the moments in which European ways of seeing came face to face with existing Indigenous modifications to land.

This brings us to a second explanation for landscape art's significance in Tasmania. Picturing a land that bore the marks of Indigenous stewardship, the first professional settler artists were of a generation who had witnessed radical changes to the British landscape and who had also participated in the landscape genre's ascent in their native country. Artists such as Glover carried with them ways of seeing that married Claudean landscape ideals of harmonious proportion and balance with features of the "rugged" natural world, thus producing "picturesque" or picture-like, compositions. ¹⁵ Though these ideals had been distilled to a set of conventions by popular guidebooks penned by proponents such as the Rev. William Gilpin, the picturesque and its accompanying politics derived—in Britain, as in its colonies—at the nexus of painting and the physical environment. ¹⁶

What has been called an “ecological history of landscape art” requires consideration of the meeting ground of the representational and the environmental.¹⁷ In an article addressing this subject, Andrea Gaynor and Ian McLean suggest that both art historians and ecologists must reach beyond their disciplinary boundaries to embrace artworks as possible “indices of ecological knowledge”.¹⁸ In the 1830s and 1840s, the collision of two cultural attitudes towards land required a peculiar and insidious transposition of the picturesque in Tasmania, as the settler colony searched to sublimate the genocidal means of the island’s possession. In the immediate aftermath of frontier violence, artists and their contemporaries attempted to find order in the particularities of a newly seized landscape. In the 1840s, the watercolourist John Skinner Prout (1805–1876) became deeply invested in its “rewilding”, his unpeopled forests constituting a haunting double to depictions of Indigenous subsistence in their landscape of exile.

Country Estates

The artistic appropriation of Tasmania’s landscape followed on from its physical appropriation. It is now well established that the English landscape tradition came to prominence during the urgent years of enclosure, unrest, and agricultural industrialization in Britain.¹⁹ Along with a convict labour base and meagre capital investment, those ideological foundations would be transported to Australia, where the ideal of the English estate was mapped onto the estates “discovered” in the landscape. Bill Gammage’s *The Biggest Estate on Earth* suggests that before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous peoples “collectively ... managed Australia as a single estate” by routine patch fires.²⁰

At present, there is scientific debate about the degree to which the landscape was burnt, and such practices are not without their own histories of dynamic change, but fire ecologists generally agree that distinct zones of vegetation were sharpened by the first Tasmanians, who maintained the savannah grasslands that upon their conversion to pasture became known by British settlers as the “Midlands”.²¹ By measuring the surviving native vegetation of the Midlands, ecologists have proposed that three artists in particular—John Glover, John Skinner Prout, and the latter’s sketching companion Francis Simpkinson de Wesselow—most faithfully represent Tasmania’s changing vegetation during the decades of rapid settlement.²²

Tasmania's Aboriginal people used "fire-stick farming" to signal, create pathways, hunt game, regenerate plants, and extend their area of habitable land.²³ The art historian and geographer Greg Lehman (Trawulwuy)²⁴ describes the way in which landscape management was also bound within customary law, and the very identity and origins of his ancestors:

The Palawa [Tasmanian Aboriginal people] considered themselves descended from *Turner*, the kangaroo ... The kangaroo provided meat, skin, sinews, and bone. In turn, the Old People used fire to maintain the expanses of grasslands and to generate fresh, new growth for the kangaroo.²⁵

Aboriginal ancestral landscapes are *Country*, implying a process of *caring* and being cared *for* in a mutually beneficial relationship. The term *Country* encompasses a way of moving through and representing land through social action—both tangible and intangible.²⁶ Moreover, the beguiling eucalypts in early colonial paintings were a valued resource in Tasmanian Aboriginal communities: not only was the bark of trees used for building huts and canoes, but according to some textual accounts, peoples in the Coastal Plains, Central Plateau, and Huon forest practised a mortuary rite that placed the deceased body upright in the hollows of living trees.²⁷

British arrivals also attached certain cultural values to woodland—oak trees especially—as metaphors of ancient family lines and the literal substance of naval might. Trees had been central to the debates over the nature of picturesque landscape convention, which relied on the harmonious distinction of foreground, middle, and background; pathways wending through a sagacious distribution of trees could alternately screen and open up a variety of pleasurable vantage points at each turn.²⁸ Lancelot "Capability" Brown and his successor Humphry Repton had cultivated the aesthetic of vast sweeping lawns for the nobility, Repton in particular advancing practices of "improvement" in landscape architecture, which involved the selective cultivation and removal of trees to reveal variations in ground level (Fig. 4).

ground is apt to be obliterated by trees, which grow taller in the valleys than on the hills; and consequently the surface of a wood, and the surface of the ground on which it grows, are often very different; but at Beaudesert this levelling principle of vegetable growth has actually almost effaced the ravines, where tall ashes in the bottom rise above the oaks on the steep acclivities.

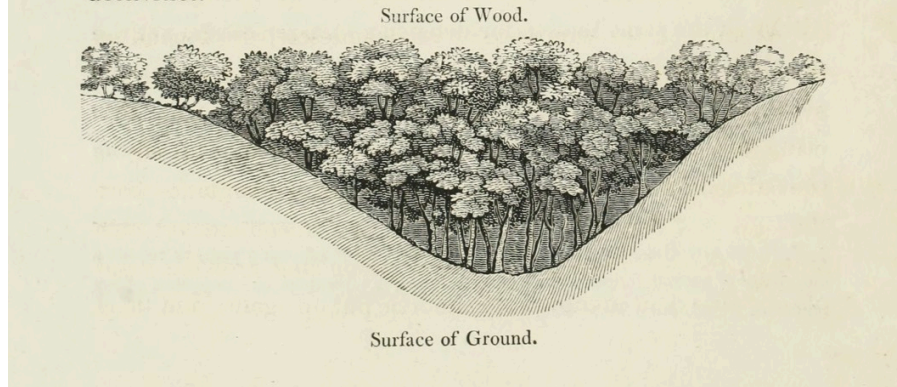


Figure 4.

Humphrey Repton and John Adey Repton, detail from, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, (London: Bensley & Son, 1816), 42., 1816, aquatint. Collection of Getty Research Institute (2912-228). Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program (CC BY-NC-SA).

There are a number of European eyewitness accounts describing Aboriginal landscape management in distinctly aesthetic terms. “Travers[ing] a vast extent of clear country interspersed with clumps or copses intended as a cover for kangaroo,” wrote George Augustus Robinson, “the whole range for miles forming a beautiful picturesque scenery. This has been done by the natives: when burning the under wood they have beat out the fire in order to form these clumps.”²⁹ In gaining possession of the land, invaders were quick to convert evidence of Indigenous land management into emblems of an invented English lineage in the antipodes. One of Tasmania’s most powerful early landowning families, the Archers, found such characteristics already a feature of the Norfolk Plains, south-west of Launceston. Effected by the *Panninher* clan’s care for their Country, the open land was ideal for the raising of 25,000 head of merino sheep.³⁰ The Archers named their properties after estates in their native Hertfordshire. A comparison of engravings depicting two Panshangers—one English and one Tasmanian—produced around the same time, reveal the Archers aspirations to landed status (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6).³¹ Like its English counterpart, the Tasmanian Panshanger Estate is pictured by William Lyttleton, overlooking the verdant open plain, yet this lithograph also makes visible the distinctive and dramatic rise of the Great Western Tiers mountains.³² Whereas Repton’s garden design at Panshanger (England) was based in part on enhancing the

viewing conditions from the estate, some of these aspects were ready for appropriation on the sloping ridge overlooking the Tasmanian landscape, visible today at Woolmers Estate (named after Woolmers Park, Hertfordshire) (Fig. 7, Fig. 8). This landscape offered up the indivisible values of aesthetic and economic capital.



Figure 5.

William Radclyffe after John Preston Neale, Panshanger, *Hertfordshire* in *Views of the Seats, Mansions, Castles, etc. of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England*, Vol. 1 (London: Jones & Co. 1829), 151., 1829, engraving. Collection of Getty Research Institute (6575). Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program (CC BY-NC-SA).



Figure 6.

William Lyttleton, Panshanger, Tasmania, the seat of Joseph Archer, Esquire, 1835, hand-coloured lithograph, 57.5 x 73.3 cm. Collection of National Library of Australia (NK260). Digital image courtesy of National Library of Australia (CC BY).



Figure 7.

Panshanger Park, Hertfordshire, View from former house site overlooking River Mimram, 2017, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Julia Lum.



Figure 8.

View from the Woolmers Estate Towards the Macquarie River and the Distant Great Western Tiers, Tasmania, 2016, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Julia Lum.

John Glover's painting, "*Montacute, Bothwell*," reveals another estate's boundaries carved into a Midlands hillside (Fig. 9).³³ Beyond it, small clumps of copse-like trees are woven through with paths of clearings. Just a few years earlier, these would have been the hunting grounds for the clans of the Big River Nation. By the time Glover arrived in Van Diemen's Land, martial law had been in effect for two years.³⁴ Settlers had expropriated the best Aboriginal hunting grounds for agrarian use but left alone the forests and mountains.³⁵ In Glover's painting, forested foothills such as these would be where the Aboriginal men and women staged their attacks on stock huts and outbuildings as acts of resistance.³⁶ Tracing the line where forest met pastoral appropriation, Glover attends to the edges of martial control.



Figure 9.

John Glover, “Montacute” Bothwell, 1838, oil on canvas, 76 x 114.5 cm. This is an interpretation of Aboriginal visual systems of communication illustrated in a 1870 publication by James Bonwick. Private Collection, Australia.

“Drawings on the Bark of Trees”

In February 1829, Tasmania’s Surveyor General, George Frankland, reported that he saw Aboriginal drawings on trees and inside huts ([Fig. 10](#)). Frankland was not the first European to observe that art existed among Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples,³⁷ however, his realization inspired a proposition to Tasmania’s Governor, George Arthur, for a visual solution to European-Aboriginal hostilities:

Sir, I have lately had an opportunity of ascertaining that the aboriginal Natives of Van Diemen’s Land are in the habit of representing events by drawings on the bark of Trees ... The proposal which I venture to make is that, if your Excellency approves the drawings, they should be multiplied, and being made on more durable materials, should be fastened to Trees in those remote sites where Natives are most likely to see them.³⁸

One hundred “proclamation boards” were produced and mounted to trees in the hope of broaching Indigenous semiotics to communicate the notion that transgressions—either Aboriginal or Settler—of a (non-existent) peace would result in equal punishment (a very different picture from reality, as martial

law had declared that Aboriginal people be driven out of settled districts “by whatever means ... may dictate”)(Fig. 11).³⁹ John Skinner Prout, who arrived in the island’s major settlement of Hobart in 1844, called a board in his possession an example of “the universally understood language of painting”.⁴⁰

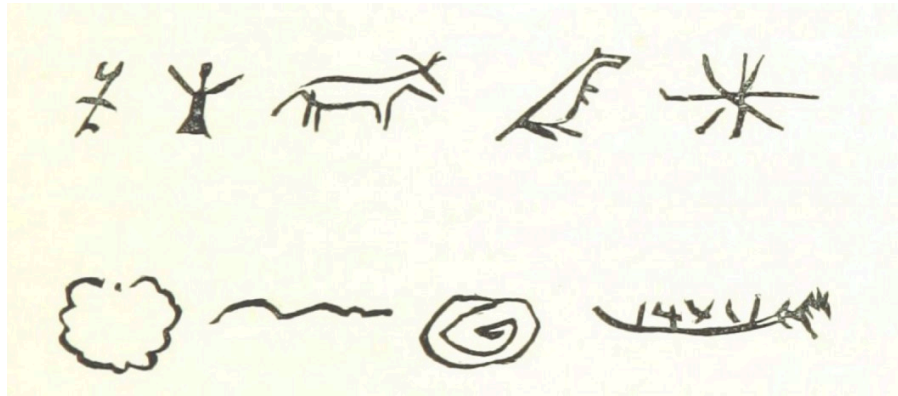


Figure 10.

James Bonwick, detail from, *Daily Life and Origin of the Tasmanians*, (London: Sampson, Low & Son, & Marston, 1870), 47., 1870, illustration. Collection of British Library (General Reference Collection DRT Digital Store 10492.f.11). Digital image courtesy of British Library Board.



Figure 11.

Proclamation Board commissioned by Major-General Sir George Arthur, Tasmania, Australia, Collected by J. Skinner Prout. Purchased by Dr Joseph Barnard Davis, 1829-1830. Collection of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Z 15346). Digital image courtesy of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

In this experiment, proclamation boards extended exhibitionary space into the outdoors, adopting the forest as gallery walls. The uniform designs on huon pine board were “pounced” using a stencil and then painted freehand by anonymous convict artists. Rather than serving as picturesque framing devices, the board’s trees declared a European pictographic justice—the two pictured on the board’s fourth and sixth registers bear the hangman’s noose. The straight trunks drive a vertical line towards the inert bodies of the slain, who lie at their bases. As columns, they secede the privileged social space of British justice (in the form of the men in red coats) from the “lawless” disorder of the bush. While the effectiveness of these picture boards as linguistic tools remains unknown, they are the material remnants of frontier

violence. Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll richly suggests that the “failure to communicate, linguistically and otherwise, resulted in the proclamations’ hybrid forms—part dendroglyph, part legal document, part hieroglyph, part semaphore.” ⁴¹ While Tasmania’s trees may have been the iconographic fodder for the introduction of English landscape conventions, they are here doubled as the visual tropes of the darker side of that landscape’s possession.

Proving once again their double-edged utility as a means for both communication and punitive action, tree branches were again deployed by Governor Arthur in his campaign known as the “Black Line”. In October 1830, the majority of the ticket-of-leave convict and male free settler population formed a large-scale human cordon to sweep the remaining clans into the Forestier Peninsula. ⁴² A memorandum issued by Governor Arthur to each leader of the Division parties included the following instructions:

Where by trunks of trees are lying in a direction parallel to the line of positions they can be taken advantage of by being made the support of a palisade composed of sticks of about two or three inches in diameter ... driven firmly into the ground in rear of the trunks—inclining forwards, so that the ends which will be sharpened to a point ... ⁴³

The rudimentary sketch in a copy of this dispatch shows a tree branch fashioned into both *abbattis* (line of defence) and palisade designed to entangle Tasmanian Aboriginal people “in the artificial obstacles” (Fig. 12). ⁴⁴ This desperate measure was to compensate for the settlers’ inability to combat Indigenous guerrilla tactics and their lack of knowledge about local terrain.

However, the proclamation boards did little to affect the violence, nor did the human cordon subjugate Tasmanian Aboriginal guerrilla tactics and knowledge of country. The government-appointed “Friendly Mission” campaigns of George Augustus Robinson (1829–1834), expeditions that used Indigenous guides to deceive fellow clanspeople into surrendering their country, were the only ways the colonists achieved their “mission”.

The archival traces of trees gesture towards the embeddedness of the very tangible physical landscape, and the violence of its expropriation, in representation. Trees, as the mute witnesses to colonial dispossession, left an indelible impression on Tasmania’s landscape artists. Take, for instance, Glover’s sketchbook pages—filled to every corner with patchworked portraits of trees as the material for what might populate his paintings (Fig. 13).

Glover's Midlands scenes often insert the motif of the fallen tree branch into his foregrounds and middle grounds, breaking up the recession into the distance with a series of visual impediments.⁴⁵ The viewer's eye is forced to wind its way through a landscape littered with the living, felled, and decayed timber of the changing environment, an effect which would have been received on at least three levels: as a naturalistic recording of the eucalypt's life cycle; as an element of "roughness" and irregularity dictated by the picturesque; and as an uncanny reminder of the palisades and *abbattis* of the former Black Line.⁴⁶

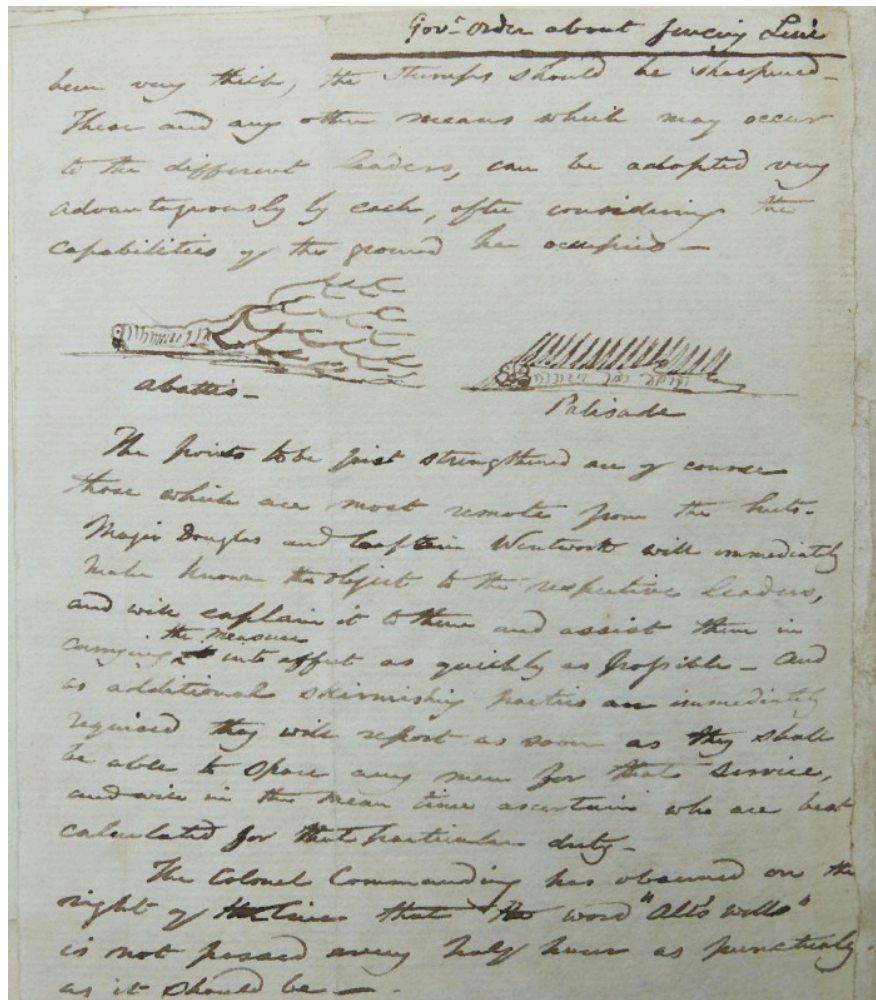


Figure 12.

Manuscript detail showing note on "government order about fencing Line" in , *Native War: Connected with the Campaign after the Natives*, by Thomas Scott, 1830, album manuscript. Collection of State Library of New South Wales (A1055 / 3). Digital image courtesy of State Library of New South Wales (CC BY 4.0).

Searching for Nature

As European settlement encroached on Indigenous hunting territories in the Midlands, a sharper distinction between the “settled territories” and the bush arose. Glover’s *The River Derwent and Hobart Town* (ca. 1831), captures the boundary zone at “Salvator Glen” (Fig. 14).^{47 48} It is an area that remains on the borderlands of Hobart, cut into the foothills of the towering Mount Wellington (*Kunanyi*).⁴⁹ In Glover’s 1831 canvas, fresh, vine-like “epicormic buds” scale the fire-tolerant trunks of taller eucalypts—a process of regeneration after burning had ceased.⁵⁰ The glen’s small affinity to the landscapes of Salvator Rosa was pinned on the hope that its purported wildness could resist the strain of colonial incursion. “And therein lies the great anxiety and neurosis of what Glover was painting,” remarked fire ecologist David Bowman, during a walk through the present-day landscape. “In part an incredibly biodiverse landscape and in part also an artifact.”⁵¹ By the time John Skinner Prout had completed a watercolour of the Salvator Glen, the dusty brown earth suggests deforestation and sandstone mining (Fig. 15).



Figure 13.

John Glover, *The River Derwent and Hobart Town*, ca. 1831, oil on canvas, 51.5 x 71 cm. Collection of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (AG5458). Digital image courtesy of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.



Figure 14.

John Skinner Prout, Salvator Rosa Glen, 1844, watercolour, 22.1 x 32.4 cm. Collection of Art Gallery of New South Wales (8311), purchased 1949. Digital image courtesy of Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Figure 15.

Edward Villiers Rippingille, *Sketching Party in Leigh Woods (detail)*, ca. 1828, graphite and brown wash, 17.5 x 27.5 cm. Collection of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery (K3078/30). Digital image courtesy of Bristol Culture.

In the mid-1840s, the English-born Skinner Prout (nephew of the better known Samuel Prout) led a series of convivial social excursions in search of a more unspoiled nature. He encouraged direct observation and the spontaneous watercolour sketch, techniques modelled after his fellow artists of the “Bristol School” (Fig. 16).⁵² He also welcomed amateur participants—a group of acolytes who attended his lectures at the Hobart Mechanics Institute—to join him on expeditions to what the group called “Fern Tree Valley”.⁵³ A shift in stylistic approach towards the landscape brought a spontaneity that captured trees in new poetic terms—as supposedly pristine, elemental woodland. Yet as Simon Schama has described, while “wilderness” suggests the natural world untouched by human intervention, “the very act of identifying ... the place presupposes our presence.”⁵⁴ Skinner Prout’s approach to landscape would inhabit this paradox. Mirroring developments occurring in England, he would harness such stylistic vocabularies to reinvent the land as a colonial inheritance.



Figure 16.

John Skinner Prout, *In the Valley of the Ferns* Hobarton, Novr. 28, '46, 1846, watercolour, 39.6 x 29.4 cm. Collection of National Library of Australia (NK307). Digital image courtesy of National Library of Australia.

Skinner Prout's pencil and watercolour sketches "from nature" select and frame the lush overgrowth of the forest floor, fallen logs, and decaying leaves. Where Glover's Claudian works celebrated prospect views of clear, sunlit tracts of sparsely forested and semi-pastoral grasslands, Skinner Prout and his circle sought proximity under the canopies of fern trees, whose roots once constituted an important food source for Tasmanian Aboriginal nations. In such environments, eucalypts stretch upwards towards the available light, in turn sheltering the temperate understorey below from wind and heat.⁵⁵ *In the Valley of the Ferns*, represents a eucalyptus tree scarred to the artist's right (Fig. 17).⁵⁶ This permanent mark calls up the Indigenous use of bark for shelters, canoes, and windscreens, a practice that extracts bark while preserving the living tree. Early European travellers observed trees scarred and notched by Tasmanian Aboriginal people, often to mark seasonal access

routes through country.⁵⁷ It is more likely that this tree was blazed—a European explorer's or surveyor's mark (an example illustrated below).⁵⁸ Providing both physical and pictorial evidence of his route within unknown territory, the artist marks his own paper with a brush, adjacent to the tree that has received its own mark, a cut through the veneer of a supposedly unpeopled landscape.⁵⁹

Landscapes of Exile

As Skinner Prout and his sketching parties roamed Mount Wellington's foothills, the clanspeople rounded up during Robinson's travels lived in exile on the remote Flinders Island. What began as 170 Indigenous men, women, and children dwindled to a community of approximately forty-four by the time Skinner Prout and his sketching companion Francis Simpkinson de Wesselow visited the settlement, called *Wybalenna*, in 1845.⁶⁰ During their stay, Skinner Prout and his fellow artist produced dozens of portraits of Indigenous sitters and documented *Wybalenna's* surrounding landscape.⁶¹

Wybalenna's rigid Evangelical geometry appears in the form of a terrace block at the middle distance of the lithograph *The Residence of the Aborigines, Flinders Island* (Fig. 18). In this work, which Skinner Prout included in his series *Tasmania Illustrated*, are a man and woman who gaze neither at the mission settlement nestled into the hill nor at the alien country. Their role as figures in the landscape contrasts with many colonial landscape representations; as staffage, the Indigenous presence thwarts the viewer's entrance into pleasures of identification with the embodied viewing of picturesque scenery. Rather, the composition deflects our gaze onto the elsewhere of the figures' attention, the cordon of fencing running behind them leading the eye off the page rather than towards the horizon.



Figure 17.

John Skinner Prout, *The Residence of the Aborigines, Flinders Island*, 1846, lithograph, 27.8 x 38.6 cm. Collection of National Library of Australia (S1748). Digital image courtesy of National Library of Australia.

Critical details in the foreground of a very similar—and perhaps preparatory—watercolour gesture towards the persistence of Indigenous economies (Fig. 19). Grasses and lilies point to the local source of plant fibre for basket-making, a practice transferred to Flinders Island by individuals like the *Nuenonne* woman, Trucanini. Her baskets constructed from flag iris were noted by the diarist Sarah Mitchell: “Truganinni ... who lives with Mrs Dandridge gave papa a basket and piece of rope, her own make, which came last night too.”⁶² “Mrs. Dandridge” was Skinner Prout’s daughter, who married and remained in the colony after her father’s return to England in 1848. One of the last baskets Trucanini made, supposedly during this period with the Dandridge family, was masterfully constructed with the fibres of the white flag iris (Fig. 20).⁶³ It is an object that speaks to the portability of Indigenous technology and memory, a material manifestation of Trucanini’s connection to Country and her intimate knowledge from her first teachings on Bruny Island—carried with her along journeys with Robinson’s “Friendly Mission”, in exile on islands in the Bass Strait, and to her final lodgings with Skinner Prout’s daughter. At weekly markets on Flinders Island, held between 1836 and 1838, women made and sold baskets, *maireener* shell necklaces and other material goods.⁶⁴ These practices have been revived by contemporary practitioners such as the scholar and elder Patsy Cameron, who gathers local plants near her home at Leengtenner (Tomahawk) to

create baskets in the way of her ancestors (Fig. 21). She splits green leaves down the middle by hand and runs leaf sections over the coals of the fire, which render them ready for twining. ⁶⁵



Figure 18.

John Skinner Prout, Untitled, from *Collection of Views*, 1840-1848, watercolour on mounted board, 53 x 40.5 cm. Collection of Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales (DGD 16). Digital image courtesy of State Library of New South Wales (CC BY 4.0).



Figure 19.

Trucanini, Basket, white flag iris (*Diplarrena moraea*), 1874, basket. Collection of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston (QVM1993:H:151), donated by Miss Sarah EE Mitchell, 1909. Digital image courtesy of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston.



Figure 20.

Patsy Cameron, Maireener temarerar, 2007, Leengtenner (Tomahawk), white flag iris (*Diplarrena moraea*), king maireener shells (*Phasianotrochus eximius*). Collection of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (1415.pc.4). Digital image courtesy of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Skinner Prout's watercolour also hints to men's material culture, framed by a thicket that forms a natural archway, framing two silhouettes, one of which holds a spear (see [Fig. 19](#)). This detail corroborates textual accounts that spears and ochre, though unpermitted in the settlement, were kept and concealed in the bush.⁶⁶ Men made spears on hunting trips, and occasionally performed spear throwing demonstrations for visitors such as the missionary and naturalist James Backhouse, who describes Wybalenna's residents setting out on frequent hunting excursions. Backhouse was also gifted a waddy, or club ([Fig. 22](#)).⁶⁷ Now in the British Museum, the hunting

implement and weapon is perhaps made from the island's tea tree wood—a material trace of an enduring connection to the environment outside the settlement's confines.



Figure 21.

Tasmanian Club, early nineteenth century, wood club, Length: 62.5 cm
Width: 2.2 cm Depth: 2 cm. Collection of The British Museum
(Oc1921,1014.81). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British
Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Beyond the settlement, certain resources furnished Flinders Island residents with a connection to hunting and gathering, activities revealed in a watercolour by Skinner Prout's sketching companion, Francis Simpkinson de Wesselow (Fig. 23). A still life composed of wild game—mutton birds and crayfish—reveals a bounty heaped to the ground. Supplementing the monotony of salted beef rations, the settlement was particularly dependent on Indigenous hunting in its early years. Muttonbirds, or *yolla*, were a staple of the communities formed by the union of sealers and Indigenous women.

⁶⁸ The “Englishness” of Wybalenna’s white terrace houses belied the traditional food sources piled up in their interiors, evidence of which was unearthed in an archaeological dig. ⁶⁹ Simpkinson de Wesselow’s watercolour functions as an allegorical connection between the perceived transience of this resource economy and the endangered population at Flinders Island. Clearly visible in his composition are rabbits, an invasive species brought to the islands in the 1820s. While hunting practices, especially muttonbirding, remain to this day deeply connected to Indigenous communities in the Bass Strait, rabbits continue to compete with local wildlife for resources and pose a threat to native vegetation. ⁷⁰



Figure 22.

Francis Simpkison de Wesselow, *Untitled*, 1845, pencil, watercolour, and Chinese white highlights on paper. Collection of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (AG2200). Digital image courtesy of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Conclusion

In the early British settlement of places in Oceania, artists responded to a landscape exploited and shaped by competing cultural and environmental orders. Countersigns point up the persistence of Indigenous cultural practices and protocols, and the operations of ongoing erasure perpetuated by art and history. As coded emblems, woodland functioned as a redirection of the signs of Indigenous land management and the violent removal of Indigenous peoples from that same land. To maintain and yet disguise this fundamental contradiction, British artists not only deployed but *relied* on the elaborate apparatus of the picturesque.⁷¹ In their refusal to suppress the representation of Indigenous survival, Skinner Prout and Simpkison de Wesselow's Flinders Island pictures transgressed an aesthetic threshold for contemporary audiences (Fig. 24). The exhibitions in Hobart (1845), Sydney (1845), and London (1849; 1851) featured "Fern Tree Valley" subjects, while Skinner Prout's Flinders subjects have rarely been shown.⁷²



[Watch Video](#)

Figure 23.

Julie Gough (video) and Jemma Rea (editing), *The Grounds of Surrender*, 2011, 2 channel 32:9 video projection, colour, sound, 19:17 mins. Digital image courtesy of Julie Gough / Jemma Rea.

Julie Gough, a Hobart-based contemporary artist of *Trawlwoolway* descent, grapples with such historical complexities in her own archival research and video works. In *The Grounds of Surrender* (2011), trees are the spectral substance of the landscape's memory: the refuse of land clearance, some remain survivors of centuries of cultivated burning, witnesses to an ongoing disavowal of Indigenous placescapes.⁷³ Juxtaposed with the archival fragments of colonial dispatches, Gough's trees are countersigns that cannot wring meaning out of a fraught history, but must stand by witnessing its interminable repetition.⁷⁴ That a colonial landscape school was born out of the crucible of violent encounter, the clash of two ways of understanding Country, requires art historical analysis that looks also to ecological, ethnohistorical, and Indigenous place-based epistemologies; for it was colonial art's task to lay claim to the once-burnt landscape, which for millennia had maintained the island's biodiversity. And it is contemporary art's task now, through work such as Gough's, to rekindle a flame.⁷⁵

Footnotes

- 1 The appellation refers to Glover's known affinity for the French seventeenth-century landscape painter, Claude Lorrain. David Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque* (Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2003), 40. Glover (1767–1849) was born in Houghton-on-the Hill near Leicester, England, trained with William Payne and became drawing instructor at Litchfield. He was awarded a gold medal by Louis XVIII for his work *The Bay of Naples*, exhibited at Paris Salon in 1814. John Glover was founder and, in 1826, President of the Royal Society of British Artists. For additional biographical details, see also John A. McPhee, *The Art of John Glover*. Sydney: Macmillan, 1980), 6–11.
- 2 *A catalogue of Pictures Descriptive of the Scenery, and Customs of the Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land [...]*. (1835), reprinted by J. Rogers, 1868. Rare Books and Manuscripts, Yale Center for British Art. Critical response to the 1835 exhibition was mostly positive, as Hansen notes. *The Morning Post* compared the exhibition to "an extensive museum ... the rarest productions of that singular country, all depicted with a fidelity to nature that only a practical geologist, botanist and ornithologist could execute, or perhaps, fully appreciate." As quoted in Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*, 94. Glover's patron Sir Thomas Phillips complained that the introduction of native figures into views was "an objection by many". As quoted in Sharon Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 144.
- 3 Reviewer, *The Times*, 29 June 1835, as quoted in John McPhee, *The Art of John Glover* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1980), 32.
- 4 See Terry Smith, "Land into Landscape: the Setting of Settlement", in *Transformations in Australian Art: The Nineteenth Century—Landscape, Colony and Nation* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002), 44–65. For the impact of eucalyptus trees on early colonial culture, see Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2003), 143.
- 5 Quoted in Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*, 98.
- 6 In my PhD dissertation, from which this essay derives, I use the term *Palawa* to refer to Tasmania's Indigenous inhabitants. This term is no longer widely used. Moreover, as spellings derive from the incomplete orthographic recordings of colonists, Indigenous names and terminology depend on the nature of the source as well as the evolving contemporary interpretations of the roughly dozen different languages spoken in Tasmania before Europeans arrived. Ethnohistorical, archaeological, historical, and linguistic scholarship has so far identified nine nations living on Tasmania at the time of European settlement (1803): The Oyster Bay Nation, the North East Nation, the North Nation, the Big River Nation, the North Midlands Nation, the Ben Lomond Nation, the North West Nation, the South West Nation, and the South East Nation. Lyndall Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History Since 1803* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012), 14–17.
- 7 Quoted in Steve Brown, "Aboriginal Archaeological Resources in South East Tasmania: An Overview of the Nature and Management of Aboriginal Sites", National Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania. Occasional Paper No. 12 (April 1986), 173.
- 8 The editors and contributors of *Landscape Theory* highlight the problems raised by the term "landscape", which, on the one hand, refers to a product of ideological projection, and, on the other, an experience of objects in space (physical features in the land), see James Elkins and Rachel de Lue (eds), *Landscape Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2008). I use "cultural landscape" here to suggest that the term as it is used by geographers might help art historians better understand the relationship between nature and human intervention in art.
- 9 Greg Lehman observes that prior to Glover's arrival in Tasmania (1831), Aboriginal peoples were largely absent from the visual record. Suggesting that this "visual excision ... presaged the physical extermination that began to be practised"; Greg Lehman, "Regarding the Savages", in Tim Bonyhady and Greg Lehman (eds), *The National Picture: The Art of Tasmania's Black War* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2018), 30, 59.
- 10 Patrick Wolfe on the settler's paradox in Tasmania: "On the one hand, settler society required the practical elimination of the natives in order to establish itself on their territory. On the symbolic level, however, settler society subsequently sought to recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference—and, accordingly, its independence—from the mother country. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native", *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (1 December 2006), 389."
- 11 For a reflection on the impact of Tasmania's dark history on its visual culture and politics of visibility, see David Hansen "Seeing Truganini", *Australian Book Review* 321 (May 2010) 45–53. Greg Lehman wrote a critical response to this piece titled "Fearing Truganini", for *ArtLink* magazine, 31, no. 2 (2011): 48–51.
- 12 See Ian McLean, *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and David Hansen, "The Picturesque and the Palawa", in Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham (eds), *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 38–52.
- 13 John Glover to George Augustus Robinson, 16 July 1835, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, microfilm, A7058, CY 1472, slide 329. George Augustus Robinson, a lay missionary and "conciliator" of the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples (see description below), had commissioned Glover to paint this picture for the frontispiece of his book (which was never published).
- 14 Bronwen Douglas, *Science, Voyages, and Encounters in Oceania, 1511–1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 21. For a summary of her methodology, see page 101.

- 15 In his essay "The Australianness of the English Claude: Nation and Empire in the Art of John Glover", Ian McLean argues that Glover's use of the picturesque was precisely the aesthetic vehicle that could accommodate the seemingly contradictory dualities of imperial and national *genius loci*; Ian McLean, "The Australianness of the English Claude: Nation and Empire in the Art of John Glover", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 7, no. 1 (2005): 125-142. William Gilpin first used the term "picturesque" in his 1768 publication, *An Essay on Prints* (London: J. Robson, 1768). See also "Introduction", in Michael Rosenthal, Christiana Payne, and Scott Wilcox (eds), *Prospects for the Nation: Recent Essays in British Landscape, 1750-1880*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 6.
- 16 For a nuanced analysis of the relationship between the picturesque in landscape gardening and in painting, see Stephen Daniels, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 113, 126.
- 17 See Andrea Gaynor and Ian McLean, "The Limits of Art History: Towards An Ecological History of Landscape Art", *Landscape Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 4-14.
- 18 Gaynor and McLean, "The Limits of Art History", 8.
- 19 Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).
- 20 Gammage draws on contemporary photographs as well as examples of colonial landscape art as evidence for the ways Indigenous Australians managed their environments; Bill Gammage, *Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011). Ecologists, too, have referred to paintings as documentary evidence. Given that these scholars have turned to colonial art for descriptions of ecological phenomena, I contend that art history should seek answers outside its own discipline to explore the significance of landscape art in colonial Tasmania.
- 21 While some ecologists argue that there was a natural potential fire regime that Aborigines made use of, others argue that the reinvasion of grasslands by rainforest species shows that vegetation mosaics are not stable, but were altered through human intervention. For a summary of this debate, see Greg Lehman, "Turning back the Clock: Fire, Biodiversity, and Indigenous Community Development in Tasmania", in Elspeth A. Young, Jocelyn Davies, and Richard Munro Baker (eds), *Working on Country: Contemporary Indigenous Management of Australia's Lands and Coastal Regions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 312-315. For another discussion, see J.S. Benson and P.A. Redpath, "The Nature of Pre-European Native Vegetation in South-Eastern Australia", *Cunninghamia* 5, no. 2 (1997): 285-328.
- 22 R.J. Fensham, "The Pre-European Vegetation of the Midlands, Tasmania: A Floristic and Historical Analysis of Vegetation Patterns", *Journal of Biogeography* 16, no. 1 (1989): 29-45.
- 23 Rhys Jones, "Fire-stick Farming", *Australian Natural History* 16, no. 7 (15 September 1969), 226. Jones, the first professional archaeologist to work in Tasmania, also controversially argued that Indigenous Tasmanians were in a state of slow cultural degeneration, a claim that cannot be substantiated by any archaeological evidence. See Rebe Taylor, "Reliable Mr Robinson and the Controversial Dr Jones", in Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls (eds), *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission* (Hobart: Quintus Publishing, 2008), 111.
- 24 The *Trawlwuy* are a clan from the north-east of Tasmania.
- 25 Greg Lehman, "Turning Back the Clock", 209.
- 26 "Country has its own life, its own imperatives, of which humans are only one aspect," writes Deborah Bird Rose in *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996), 10. I do not want to imply that Indigenous conceptions of landscape exist outside of change or social action, or that Indigenous Australian cultures have no way of representing landscape. As Fred Myers argues, places acquire their value in and through social relations and social action; see Fred Myers, "Ways of Placemaking", in Kate Flint and Howard Morphy (eds), *Culture, Landscape, and the Environment: The Linacre Lectures, 1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72-107.
- 27 Patsy Cameron, *Grease and Ochre: The Blending of Two Cultures at the Colonial Sea Frontier* (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 2016), 31. See also Robinson's description of hollow tree burials (20 September 1830; 4, 6, and 8 November 1831), quoted in Richard Cosgrove, *Aboriginal Economy and Settlement in the Central Highlands* (Sandy Bay, TAS: National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1984), 53; and a description of the practice in James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Company, 1843), 105.
- 28 See Stephen Daniels in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 29 George Augustus Robinson, 3 April 1829, N.J.B. Plomley, *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829-1834*, 1st edn (Sandy Bay, TAS: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Kingsgrove, 1966), 54. For an appendix of the European eyewitness descriptions of Indigenous fires and burning, see Brown, "Aboriginal Archaeological Resources in South East Tasmania".
- 30 In addition to livestock, British pastoralists replaced native vegetation (such as kangaroo grass) with annuals, which are killed more easily by fire and drought. See Gammage, *Biggest Estate on Earth*, 33.
- 31 Panshanger was seat of Earl Cowper and was remodelled according to Repton's guidance in 1799. Woolmer Park was the seat of the Earl of Strathmore.
- 32 The amateur artist William Lyttleton (1786-ca.1839) was a soldier and settler in Van Diemen's Land. He, like the Archers, modelled his Norfolk Plains property after an English family estate, Hagley Hall, in Stourbridge, Worcestershire.

- 33 David Hansen suggests it might have been a gift from Glover to the estate's proprietor, Captain William Langdon, for his hospitality; David Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*, 226. William Langdon's father was vicar of the parish where Montacute House (Somerset) was located; Ronald Worthy Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania*, Vol. 1 (London: Methuen & Co, 1928), 317.
- 34 Posts were erected along the boundary of the settled districts, which Tasmanian Aboriginal people were forbidden to pass. See Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania*, 151.
- 35 Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 85.
- 36 Practices of clearing further left settlers and their stock huts exposed to attack.
- 37 Charles Leseur, an artist of the Nicolas Baudin expedition (1801–1803), sketched the decorated bark structures over burial mounds. See Edward Ruhe "The Bark Art of Tasmania", in F. Allan Hanson and Pacific Art Association (eds), *Art and Identity in Oceania* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 133.
- 38 George Frankland quoted in Eustace Fitzsymonds (ed.), *Connoisseurs in Paintings: George Frankland and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: James Dally, 2001), 18–19.
- 39 "Proclamation, by His Excellency Colonel George Arthur [...]", reproduced in *New South Wales: Copies of Instructions Given by His Majesty's Secretary of State for Promoting the moral and religious instruction of the aboriginal inhabitants of New Holland and Van Diemen's Land. Parliamentary Papers 19* (House of Commons, 1831), 7. Frankland's proclamation boards (and various adaptations of its iconography) featured centrally in the 2018 landmark exhibition *The National Picture: The Art of Tasmania's Black War* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2018). Five of the seven known boards in Australia were exhibited together in a re-assessment of the Tasmanian oeuvre of Benjamin Duterrau and the art of the "Black War"; see Tim Bonyhady and Greg Lehman, *The National Picture: The Art of Tasmania's Black War* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2018).
- 40 Second Letter, Skinner Prout to Dr. J.B. Davis, 12 February 1856. Original letters in the British Museum. As quoted in Anthony Brown and Hendrik Kolenberg, *Skinner Prout in Australia, 1840–48* (Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1986), 79. Skinner Prout had scrawled on the back of the picture board, now housed at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the following inscription: "this board was painted to communicate first principles of moral treatment to the Aborigines of Tasmania ... Their language being different, it was found impossible to communicate with them orally." The board's verso is reproduced in Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *Art in the Time of Colony* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 80.
- 41 Carroll, *Art in the Time of Colony*, 84.
- 42 "To do this we have all been obliged to contribute in some way or another," wrote the colony's Auditor G.T.W.B. Boyes. "The Lt. Governor has taken the field with almost all the Military—the Ticket of leave men, Constables and as many assigned Servants as could be spared, have been marshalled, equipped for the field, and distributed like the soldiers along the line, or formed into parties scouring the bush." George Thomas William Blamey Boyes, *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes: 1820–1832*, edited by Peter Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 380. See also N.J.B. Plomley, *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829–1834* (Launceston: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 2008), 31.
- 43 Thomas Scott, "Papers connected with the campaign after the Natives, Sept.–Nov. 1830". Manuscript and pictorial collection, ca.1820–1854, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, A1055.
- 44 Scott, "Papers connected with the campaign after the Natives, Sept.–Nov. 1830".
- 45 As M.A. Staples argues, little fencing was used in the early years of settlement. Piled up branches were often used as makeshift fencing; M.A Staples, "Comparative Landscape, European Settlement, and the Myth of Little England in Tasmania", *Tasmanian Historical Research Association* 49, no. 3, 198.
- 46 The Black Line was the largest military operation in Australia prior to the Second World War, and as such would have left a profound mark on every one of Tasmania's early settlers. See Nick Clements, "Army of Sufferers: the experience of Tasmania's Black Line," *Journal of Australian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2013) 19–33.
- 47 Hansen contends that *The River Derwent and Hobart Town* is based on Gaspard Dughet's *Landscape with Abraham and Isaac*. See Hansen, "The Picturesque and the Palawa", 41.
- 48 In 1837, the Surveyor General Frankland lobbied to protect the glen from quarrying, "possibly the first time a colonist had argued for protection of a particular place on aesthetic grounds"; Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, 7.
- 49 A Tasmanian Aboriginal name for Mount Wellington.
- 50 The settler Robert Knopwood noted the frequent occurrence of fires in the vicinity of Hobart: 1804, 1805, 1806, 1807, and 1818; quoted in Brown, "Aboriginal Archaeological Resources in South East Tasmania, 44.
- 51 David Bowman, personal communication, Hobart, 24 May 2016.
- 52 This connection was first made by the geologist and Prout expert Anthony (Tony) Brown. Together with William James Müller, Francis Danby, and Samuel Jackson, Prout had organized sketching parties to nearby Leigh Woods; see Anthony [Tony] Brown, "John Skinner Prout—his Tasmanian Sojourn 1844–1848", *Art Bulletin of Tasmania* (1984): 20–31; Anthony [Tony] Brown and Gillian A. Winter, *First Views of Lake St. Clair: John Skinner Prout (1845) & Morton Allport (1863)* (Orewa: Pear Tree Press, 2011); and Francis Greenacre and Bristol City Art Gallery, *The Bristol School of Artists: Francis Danby and Painting in Bristol, 1810–1840* (Bristol: City Art Gallery, 1973).

- 53 Simpkinson de Wesselow claimed that the sketchers had “discovered” the future picnic spots of Wellington that included its unspoiled waterfalls, where the source of Hobart’s rivulet could transport them away from an increasingly polluted industrial townscape. See Tony Brown and Marian Jameson, *Hobart Town Rivulet: Artists’ Impressions: A Journey down the Rivulet through the Eyes of the Artist* (Hobart: Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, 2008). A letter dating to 1900 from Simpkinson de Wesselow to the Bishop Montgomery describes these sketching expeditions, as quoted in Max Angus, *Simpkinson de Wesselow: Landscape Painter in Van Diemen’s Land and the Port Phillip district, 1844–48* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1984), 17. For information about the artists affiliated with Skinner Prout’s sketching club, see Rosalyn Haynes, *Tasmanian Visions: Landscapes in Writing, Art and Photography* (Sandy Bay, TAS: Polymath Press, 2006), 122–127.
- 54 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 7. Greg Lehman makes a similar observation when he writes of Tasmania that “an empty wilderness was created, not found—a dark, unknown land where the wind whispers secrets too frightening to hear”; Greg Lehman, “Tasmanian Gothic”, *Griffith Review* 39 (2012), <https://griffithreview.com/articles/tasmanian-gothic>. Accessed 18 February 2017.
- 55 According to David Bowman and M.J. Brown, “mixed forests of eucalypt and rainforest species ... have been shown to be a transitional community,” a sign of eucalypt forest that has gone unburnt; David Bowman and M.J. Brown, “Bushfires in Tasmania: A Botanical Approach to Anthropological Questions”, *Archaeology in Oceania* 21, no. 3 (1986), 167.
- 56 A work titled *The Valley of the Ferns, Hobart Town* was exhibited twice at the Exhibition of the New Society of Painters in Water-Colours London (number 200 in 1849) and (number 302 in 1851), which suggests Skinner Prout exhibited this work, if not a similar subject, in London. See New Society of Painters in Water-Colours, *Exhibition of the New Society of Painters in Water-Colours*. (London: W. Clowes, 1849; 1851). For a discussion of critical reactions to the 1849 exhibition, see Scott Wilcox and Christopher Newall, *Victorian Landscape Watercolors* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1992), 42.
- 57 Robinson observed: “they had seen plenty of natives’ footmarks and had discovered the natives’ road, that there was one regular beaten track like the natives’ paths on the south and west parts of the island, and that they had notched the trees like the white men. I saw where the natives had notched the trees, and also their road, the track of which we had followed. Plomley, *Friendly Mission*, 549. See Steve Brown, “Aboriginal Archaeological Resources in South East Tasmania”, 33.”
- 58 Karl August Lentzner, *Dictionary of the Slang-English of Australia and of Some Mixed Languages* (Halle-Leipzig: E. Karras, 1892), 8.
- 59 Khadija von Zinnenberg Carroll, writing about Gough’s work *Regeneration*, observes that “The skin of the gum is a kind of punctum in the image”; Carroll, *Art in the Time of Colony*, 70.
- 60 Unique in the history of colonial naming practices in Tasmania, the settlement was given an Indigenous name, meaning “black man’s houses”. Patricia F. Ratcliff, *The Story of Wybalenna* (Western Junction: Stancombe, 1975), 31. The dwindling Indigenous population was displaced yet again to Oyster Cove, a former convict station near Hobart, in 1847.
- 61 For more on the portrait works, see Lehman, “Regarding the Savages”, 63–65.
- 62 Sarah Mitchell Diary, 1874, University of Tasmania Library Special and Rare Materials Collection, Australia, <http://eprints.utas.edu.au/7008>. Trucanini was famously hailed as the “last Tasmanian Aborigine”. From 1905 to 1947, her skeleton was on view in Tasmania’s museum, against her stated wishes. Her remains were finally returned to her people in 1976. The Aboriginal Relics Act of 1976 uses the year of Trucanini’s death as a means of determining the authenticity of Indigenous material culture (anything made after is not granted protection). See Margo Neale, Sylvia Kleinert, and Robyne Bancroft (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 722.
- 63 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, “Tayenebe—Stories of Trucanini’s Basket Making and Exchanges”, *Tayenebe: Tasmanian Aboriginal Women’s Fibre Work*, <http://static.tmag.tas.gov.au/tayenebe/exchange/index.html>. Accessed 16 February 2018.
- 64 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, “Tayenebe—Stories of Trucanini’s Basket Making and Exchanges”.
- 65 As for the pith, she remarked: “I’ve found that when that dries, it makes wonderful tinder for lighting fires. And I’ve been wondering if that was the wonderful tinder that’s been described in the dilly bags [described by early explorers].” Patsy Cameron, personal interview, Tomahawk, Tasmania, 31 May 2016.
- 66 Ochre had many uses: for status, ceremony, and protection from the elements. In 1835, Robinson wrote: “The beginning of the week the Governor chief brought me a quantity of spears and red ochre he had collected from the natives in the bush which they had concealed”, 12 March 1835, quoted in N.J.B. Plomley, *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement, with the Flinders Island Journal of George Augustus Robinson, 1835–1839* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1987), 312. Prout’s portrait of *King Alexander (Moomereriner)* shows the use of ochre and charcoal as facial decoration.
- 67 Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, 90.
- 68 Cameron, *Grease and Ochre*, 18, 35, and 99. Robinson’s journal is full of descriptions of hunting parties, chronicling times when large contingents of the settlement community would be away on seasonal excursions. Ceremonial activity was also cited during these periods. Women would dive for crayfish and collect mutton bird eggs. Rabbits proliferated on Prime Seal Island and Rabbit Island. See also Judith Birmingham, *Wybalenna: The Archaeology of Cultural Accommodation in Nineteenth Century Tasmania: A Report of the Historical Archaeological Investigation of the Aboriginal Establishment on Flinders Island* (Sydney: Australian Society of Historical Archaeology, 1992), 151.
- 69 Birmingham, *Wybalenna*, 186.

- 70 Irynej J. Skira, "Tasmanian Aborigines and Muttonbirding: A Historical Examination" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Tasmania, 1993), http://eprints.utas.edu.au/21596/1/whole_SkiralrynejJoseph1995_thesis.pdf. A Terauds. "Introduced Animals on Tasmania's Islands," The Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE), (Hobart: State of Tasmania, 2005), 7.
- 71 Ian MacLean suggests Glover's works fall into either melancholy grotesquerie or picturesque redemption, arguing that Australian artists of this period presented fractured compositions. The tree, he writes, is a "genealogical significance: it serves as a symbol of Glover's inheritance" but Glover's "pastoral arcadias" (see Tim Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting, 1801-1890*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985) are haunted by Aboriginal doubles; Ian MacLean, *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 41.
- 72 In 1845, several of Skinner Prout's pupils exhibited at the Hobart Legislative Council (the first exhibition in the colony) works deriving from sketching trips to "Fern Tree Valley". See *Catalogue of Paintings, Water-Colour Drawings, and Engravings, Exhibited in The Legislative Council Chamber, Hobart Town, in the year 1845* (Hobart Town: William Pratt, 1845). The same year, Skinner Prout's fellow artist and correspondent, John Rae, wrote to him several times from Sydney with requests for views of fern tree subjects: "There will be more than one person gratified by the reception of the drawings you allude to ... for one the Raffles here. Pray is fern tree valley one of the pictures?" John Rae Letter book, 10 October 1845, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 6998. A work titled *The Valley of the Ferns, Hobart Town* was also exhibited twice at the Exhibition of the New Society of Painters in Water-Colours London (number 200 in 1849) and (number 302 in 1851). New Society of Painters in Water-Colours, *Exhibition of the New Society of Painters in Water-Colours* (London: W. Clowes, 1849; 1851).
- 73 Patsy Cameron prefers the term "placescapes" to landscapes. See Patsy Cameron and Linn Miller, "Carne Neemerranner—Telling History on the Ground: One Story from the Van Diemen's Land (Tasmanian) Colonial Frontier", *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 38 (Supplement, 2009): 3-9. Gough's work was exhibited in the 2015 exhibition *Robinson's Cup*: "This exhibition offers alternative perspectives of Tasmanian history. In 1835, the people of Bothwell presented the Cup to George Augustus Robinson in appreciation for establishing a conciliation with the local Aboriginal people. Today the exhibiting artists present their interpretation of the Cup and the stories around it." Damien Quilliam and Greg Lehman, *Robinson's Cup* (Launceston, TAS: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 2015), 3.
- 74 Woretermoeteyenner, the name of Gough's ancestor, means "gum leaf". Speaking on Gough's work *Regeneration*, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll writes: "The skin of the gum is a kind of punctum in the image, evoking a site of wounding." Carroll, *Art in the Time of Colony*, 110.
- 75 In 2018, efforts to investigate Indigenous fire regimes in Tasmania will provide important data on how biodiversity is shaped by patch burns, see Damian McIntyre, "Ancient Aboriginal Patch Burning Helping Understand Fire Impact on Tasmanian Landscape", *ABC News*, 18 April 2018, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-18/aboriginal-fire-techniques-shedding-light-on-tasmanian-biodive/9673118>.

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Landscape Now

Alexandra Harris

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Introduction by

Alexandra Harris, Professorial Fellow in English, University of Birmingham

Nature Writing and Landscape Art

We are in the midst of a new era of place perception in Britain. Questions of what landscapes mean to us, who sees them, and what they are for are all being debated now with an intensity perhaps unmatched since the first great age of domestic tourism, landscape painting, and aesthetic philosophy in the late eighteenth century. Work on the history of landscape art has influential roles to play today more than ever, so please do join this conversation about the place of art and the history of art in national understandings of landscape now.

The surge of interest in writing about nature, place, and environment has been one of the great literary stories of the last twenty years. A wealth of fine contemporary work has been joined on the bookshop front tables by reissues of books, which formerly had slipped quietly out of print. The list of the independent publisher, Little Toller, swells with a harvest of new editions each season, with writing by W.H. Hudson, Edward Thomas, and George Ewart Evans accompanying original monographs by Tim Dee this year on the birdlife of landfill sites, and Fiona Sampson on limestone country. John Stuart Collis is once more back in his wood, jacketed with the red spine of a Vintage Classic, his voice coming from the 1940s to introduce the contrasting pleasures of farm work and forestry. Non-fiction with a strong element of memoir is the defining form here, though to my mind some of the most powerful place-writing has been in fiction. Places are taking readers to books (loved plots, threatened habitats, newly discovered margins); books are showing readers possible new ways of seeing their environments. There are clear lines of connection with other art forms, especially with folk-inspired music, and with film-making. I don't want to make a mixed parliament sound like a monolithic entity, but it seems fair to speak of a cultural phenomenon.

Where are the most fertile connections being made with the landscape tradition in art? Is it possible to think through our most pressing questions in relation to pictures, or is landscape in two dimensions now most widely recognised as the orientation of paper in a photocopier?

In many respects, landscape art is a well-acknowledged source of inspiration and a guiding force in contemporary thinking. Look at the scale of the Tate's Paul Nash exhibition, look at the Royal Academy opening its new doors to Tacita Dean's *Landscape*, and the National Gallery (with Tim Barringer as curator) asking us to think carefully about the colonial dreamlands of Thomas Cole. Read the fine essays on rural eeriness in which Robert Macfarlane

gauges the obscure sense of threat in work by artists from Alan Reynolds to Derek Jarman. I was grateful for Compton Verney's gathering of new work in *Creating the Countryside*, a glimpse of what artists are doing and have done with profoundly visual subjects, but I wanted more.

Are there pictures we might be thinking about more keenly in this vital phase of debate about how we understand and inhabit our surroundings? I'm not (not really) suggesting that artists and art historians release their "nature classics" with new introductions in a big book or exhibition or website. But I do observe that while readers are offered new ideas about landscape writing at every festival (several festivals are devoted to the subject) and with every Amazon click and with each week's *Caught by the River* newsletter, it can be harder to get much purchase on developments in contemporary visual arts and art history. Work by art historians is not always being brought to the common table; few booksellers, for example, would think to promote James Hamilton's biography of Gainsborough (or indeed his *Turner*) among the nature and country books—though an encounter between Gainsborough and George Monbiot might be worth pursuing.

I mention these matters of reach, promotion, curation, and connection because art is one of the most powerful ways human beings possess for exploring complex questions of perspective, beauty, possession, and belonging. There has been much writing on "edgelands", for example, but still, when I try to make up my mind about the value of an edge place (often in fact an in-between place), when I try to get it in focus, to see it, I refer myself to Prunella Clough and then perhaps to George Shaw or Julian Perry and if Bosch appears that is bad news but perhaps Turner's foreground litter will help. Painting allows me to see "here" through other eyes. This is purely anecdotal, but consciously or unconsciously, we are all finding our way by a series of analogous landmarks.

Here's another example—and it may prove a significant one. The owners of the Knepp Castle Estate in West Sussex have been conducting a radical experiment in rewilding for the last fifteen years. In a grippingly argued book on the rationale for the project, Isabella Tree records the heartfelt objections of local people who hated the look of the pig-rootled mud and the scrub encroaching where previously there had been a fine park laid out by Repton. I used to walk there myself and I sympathise. Isabella Tree asks, quite rightly, how it is that an artificially designed and unproductive environment should seem more beautiful than one in which natural processes are thriving (though the debate about what is natural and what is "wild" in any one place is complex and perhaps unresolvable). In the middle of a book about the future of British nature there is discussion of eighteenth-century aesthetics. This is where we need art and an understanding of the history of art—in the middle, in the midst of our dilemmas about how to farm, about where to build houses, about what to keep alive from the past and what to cast into

the long grass. Don't we need Landscape Art 101 to be readily available on the shelves with its closely worked arguments reaching far beyond academic specialists? But immediately this begs the question: which arguments, which kinds of history, and ways of seeing?

Landscape and the Arts of Place

The very term "landscape art" brings difficulties (and many delights) because it separates out work in an established genre with received conventions from the wealth of other visual responses to the land. The geographer Tim Cresswell, in his widely used textbook *Place*, draws a firm distinction between landscape and place: "we do not live in landscapes", he writes, "we look at them". In this account (drawn partly from Raymond Williams, who argued that: "a working country is hardly ever landscape"), the unified view or prospect disappears once we live and move and have our being in it: landscape becomes "place". This tallies with the often-repeated argument that it is only possible to perceive "landscape" when one is at a distance from nature and from the immediate contingencies of work on the land. At its most basic: the labourer sees a hedge with a hole in it and sheep about to get into a clover field; the detached viewer (gentry, tourist, painter) sees the unifying effects of light, the tree as repoussoir framing the hill beyond. Where this leaves myriad artists including Thomas Bewick, John Sell Cotman, and Peter de Wint is still a puzzle to me, though probably not one to be worked out here.

W.J.T. Mitchell (in *Landscape and Power*) valuably questioned the Ruskinian version of events (also espoused by Kenneth Clark) in which a new kind of landscape perception is born from the European renaissance. He proposed alternative histories of landscape that follow the power structures of global imperial politics. Looking for answers closer to home, turning to the resources of local history, I've been trying in my own research to get closer to an understanding of what places have looked like to different kinds of people living in them. I want to find evidence for what "views" have looked like to people, other than the makers and consumers of landscape art. It's hard: I've been reading for two years—parish registers, local histories, antiquarian guides, court proceedings, wills and inventories, tithe maps, a very occasional diary; I've been wondering at the skill and sensitivity of local historians like Margaret Spufford and many who followed her lead—yet still I'm baffled by the difficulty of reaching the landscape feelings of the past. There is work to be done here, I think, by people skilled in the interpretation of historical documents and landscape archaeology in conversation with art historians whose job it is to ask "what did she see?" At any rate, new thinking is needed if we are to fathom the historical relationships between

landscape and place, and if we are to honour the experience of those many people who find that years of life and work on a patch of ground have deepened rather than dispelled their wonder at the landscapes around them.

If we keep talking about landscape painting and perception as necessarily separate from the real life and work of a place, we risk occluding strong ideas of landscape held by those who are deeply familiar with a place in practical as well as contemplative ways. Whether we are reaching back to life before (or without access to) the grammars of Western landscape painting, or looking again at Lambert, Wootton, and Wilson, or thinking about contemporary artists, it may be fruitful to reunite landscape with local knowledge and local people, from the airy prospects to make out local habitations and names.

Turner in his *Liber Studiorum* proposed six categories of landscape art and offered models of each: mountainous, marine, architectural, historical, pastoral, and elevated pastoral. Today we could increase the number of categories tenfold and still not be done. Long after landscape was supposed to be an exhausted genre (Mitchell thought it had pretty much expired by the end of the nineteenth century), artists have been making powerful use of the old conventions to question our viewing of contemporary environments (is this power-plant sublime, is this data farm fit for pastoral?). The old grammars—revised, battered, and revived—give us powerful frameworks for contemporary thought. But also let us stay alert to the shifting position of landscape art within a much broader range of imaginative responses to place, many of which will have little to do with the composition of views or the *shape* of the land. The “views” that gripped Ivon Hitchens, the foremost British landscape painter of the mid-twentieth century, were hardly views at all but sheltered ponds and overgrown woodland tracks. Is the portrait of a tree a landscape painting? What about a semi-abstract response to the colour and containment of my (very small) back garden? And a topographical watercolour of my scuffed hallway rug? Momentous times lie ahead for landscape art and its history, which is after all nothing less than the story of how we have looked about us on this earth.

Response by

Susan Owens, Independent Scholar

“Nature writing” is certainly a publishing phenomenon; so why is writing about visual depictions of the landscape not more fully a part of this? It is, of course, partly down to economics. Art historians know only too well how few publishers will consider taking on a highly illustrated book: the costs are too high. Booksellers hesitate to stack expensive art-books on tables just inside the shop, and as a result art-history sections can feel like rarefied enclaves, the books on their shelves about art, not about life. Which, given the widespread British passion for landscape painting, is regrettable.

But there is a deeper problem here too. “Nature writing” has thrived precisely because it is about life—the most compelling of these books, by writers such as Robert Macfarlane, Helen Macdonald, and Roger Deakin, speak to us about what it is to be human and offer us a fresh and inspiring perspective on our relationship with the natural environment. “Art writing” rarely reaches out to us in this way. One of the problems is art history’s emphasis on establishing beginnings and categories; too much tidiness can be a limiting factor.

The seventeenth-century miniature painter Edward Norgate set the tone in his widely circulated treatise *Miniatura, or the Art of Limning* (1627–1628, rev. 1648), in which he determined what landscape is, and what it is not. He dismissed the use made by Old Masters of landscape backgrounds, for example, as mere “filling up the empty Corners”. Well, it depends on what you mean by landscape. In searching for the origin of a genre that, as far as he was concerned, was “soe new in England, and so lately come a shore, as all the Language in our fower Seas cannot find it a Name, but a borrowed one ...”, Norgate tacitly swept aside thriving native traditions in which depictions of hillsides, trees, rivers, and so on were either central or frequently encountered: book illustrations, maps, bird’s eye views of coastlines made for military purposes or of estates for legal reasons; and the decorative arts including tapestry, needlework, and stained glass. At the grandest end of the spectrum, think of the decorative frieze in the High Great Chamber at Hardwick Hall (completed ca. 1599) depicting a wooded scene, with real saplings nailed on for extra verisimilitude; or at the most modest, consider the “stained cloths” often painted with landscape scenes, ubiquitous from the medieval period to the seventeenth century in all but the humblest homes (now, sadly, all but disappeared) ([Fig. 1](#)).



Figure 1.

Stained cloth hanging, unknown date. Collection of Owlpen Manor, Gloucestershire. Digital image courtesy of Owlpen Manor, Gloucestershire.

Literature and drama can also offer insights into how people thought about landscape. Sir Gawain's journey through the "wyldrenesse of Wyrle" can tell us a lot about how landscape was perceived towards the end of the fourteenth century. If in the first decade of the seventeenth century you saw a production of *As You Like It* or *King Lear*, surely you would have come away with a strong visual sense of the Forest of Arden or Lear's barren heath. How did literature inform visual art, and vice versa? I suspect there are many fruitful connections to be made, if we can only think and write about visual art in a wider cultural context. I cannot say whether or not this is likely to win over more publishing firms, but it might just get us closer to how people, at different times and in different places, have pictured their surroundings.

Response by

Fiona Stafford, Fellow & Tutor in English Literature, Somerville College, University of Oxford

The Thames was whiter than the sky, glistening in the early light and seemingly frozen within London's special geometries: bridge horizontals underlined by wires; parallel towers, with steel cross-hatching and suspended rectangles of dazzling glass; matching stacks of overlapping diamond line graphs. For a moment, the train window framed the perfect symmetries of the scene as cleverly as a Claude glass or camera. Though there was no real land to be seen, I was the classic detached spectator, looking at a defined landscape, spread out but separate, behind a large, grubby pane of reinforced glass. And yet from the next bridge, whether to the east or west, the Thameslink carriage that was carrying me across might have appeared as an integral part of the endlessly moving cityscape, slotting into the horizontals until the next train came along the track. I was on my way from the Midlands to the South coast and so by no means part of this place—but still absorbed momentarily into someone else's morning vista. Perhaps the rest of the carriage load made this crossing everyday? The woman sitting beside me might work in that tall office block and get off at the next stop to make her way into a scene that was already a memory—or mere blank—for her fellow travellers. If it's possible to step in and out of landscapes, perhaps landscape art is not so separate after all? And far from remaining clearly confined and controllable, or indeed, achingly separate, it is endlessly mobile and elusive, brimming with suggestions, hidden stories, and invitations? At its best, landscape art can make the glass dissolve and allow us to be part of a living place—or at least to recognise that others might be.

The invitation into a landscape painting might be a river or a road, a tree in blossom or a sunlit stone, a broken doorway, a rusting truck, a shadow or a dog or a cloud, or it might be a particular arrangement of lines or forms that speak an unexpectedly familiar language. There's no need to have been there to feel someone else's place—a prospect is something anticipated—but landscape art may speak in a different tone to those who remember what's suddenly before their eyes.

Richard Long took his first firm strides into the landscape of the 1960s, bringing out the art inherent in different physical terrains, bringing slate and rock into galleries to challenge conceptions of what landscape art might be. But his new materials were as old as the hills and his radical lines followed those of unknown generations and great predecessors like Turner, who felt his subjects with rain-drenched cheeks and numbed hands. Norman Ackroyd sails into the seas and around the islands he sketches and etches (Fig. 2). His scudding clouds, stark rocks, wind surge, and sea-bird silhouettes taste of

the salt and sound of roaring waters. These are inhabited solitudes, whose life is felt and shared by the sharp eye, skilled hand, and profound sympathy of the artist. Fellow Yorkshireman, David Hockney, has revisioned their native county through media deepened and brightened by London, California, great artists of the past and, perhaps most of all, by powerful feelings of homecoming. Just as Cookham was always there for Stanley Spencer, though utterly transformed by his wartime experience, Hockney's Yorkshire is forever there and yet forever changed and changing. A brilliant yellow watercolour rolls a lifetime of knowledge and experience into its big round bales, while still celebrating the emphatic now-ness of a particular field in 2004. An apparently empty harvest field can be as full of life and action, as generous with its invitations, as any group of figures or conversation piece.



Figure 2.

Norman Ackroyd, Off Herma Nesse - Shetland, 2018, etching, 24 x 38 cm.
Digital image courtesy of Norman Ackroyd .

Landscape art is not often given to shattering, because, at its best, it has the power to dissolve the pane of separation and help us out of the glass cases that keep the world at bay. Whether in installations, etchings, paintings, or sketches, landscapes imagined intensely by great artists are not just there to be seen, but felt. And the viewer is there, too, side by side, and free to step into a world that has suddenly opened up, or to stand, as if barefoot, feeling the ground, and breathing in the special air.

Response by

Rachel Hewitt, Lecturer in Creative Writing and Deputy Director of the Newcastle Centre for Literary Arts, Newcastle University

“An equal, wide survey” is how the historian John Barrell has characterised mid-eighteenth-century British landscape art and poetry’s aesthetics: the vast, almost boundless prospects, with their varied but harmoniously united components, all seen through the eyes of an elevated, detached observer. That pithy phrase, “an equal wide, survey”—taken from James Thomson’s 1735 poem *Liberty*—perfectly enacts how those particular aesthetic decisions have acquired the status of the natural and inevitable. What could be more uncontroversial and rational—less tainted by ideology—than a survey or map?

But maps are really far from unbiased representations. And neither are mid-eighteenth-century landscape aesthetics impartial, inexorable, or, for that matter, “equal”. Barrell has meticulously exposed how those landscapes aggrandised the figure of the “benevolent and retired” landed gentleman as the ideal observer, with his elevated detachment, ownership of fixed property, eye to “public virtue”, and working knowledge of the interdependence of multiple trades. Via landscape painting and poetry, the benevolent, retired gentleman became chief trustee of British territory—God’s land-agent on earth.

Such landscapes were provoking rich creative dissent by the eighteenth century’s end, particularly from political radicals. Landscape art identifies the literal and metaphorical landmarks, values, and shibboleths around which the territory unites. And dissent from the equal, wide survey’s politics could be expressed through disruption of its aesthetics.

Let’s return to the map analogy. Admittedly, there is far from an easy equivalence between cartography and landscape painting. Henry Fuseli was catty about landscapes that failed to transcend “map work”: “tame enumeration of hill and dale, clumps of trees, shrubs, water”. But there are also fruitful convergences, as the “equal, wide survey” descriptor indicates. Owners of landed estates were important patrons of map-making *and* landscape painting, often as parallel endeavours to shore up national identity. Sir John Clerk of Penicuik enthusiastically commissioned landscape painters, including Alexander Runciman, alongside surveyors of national and estate maps. There is scope for much greater excavation of landowners’ role in bolstering post-Union Scottish identity through the patronage of landscape art and cartography. And the map analogy for landscape painting has mileage, too, I think, in encouraging us to consider the barely concealed politics of landscape representations.

A detailed historical map of the County of Allestree, showing numerous towns, rivers, and roads. The map is titled "A Corrected and Revised Map of the County of Allestree from the best Authorities by Thomas Wilkine, M.A. done J. Chamber 1847, with all the Towns of the County and Allestree County in the County of Allestree". The map shows the county's location within the larger region of the County of Allestree, with various towns and villages labeled. The map is oriented with North at the top, and the River of the County of Allestree is shown flowing through the center. The map is a color print, with the title and other text in red ink.

William Blake, *Corrected & Revised Map of the Country of Allestone* (detail), 1806, map. Collection of University of Cambridge Library (Keynes.U.4.10). Digital image courtesy of University of Cambridge Library.

To my mind, the most fascinating and under-researched examples of dissenting landscapes derive from women, kicking against the pricks (as it were); kicking against the white, landed, male observer's supremacy. Women were excluded from the chief contexts of mid-eighteenth-century landscape representation: effectively locked out of land-ownership, the military, the Royal Academy and Royal Society, and the male aristocrat's political experience and power. Women were discouraged from accessing sublime elevated viewpoints, leaving their coaches, or getting their boots muddy.

Edmund Burke surmised that women had a much closer affinity to “beautiful”—not sublime—landscapes, because both were characterised by smallness, fragility, timidity, delicacy, and pallid colours.

Nonetheless, female landscape painters, and even a few female map-makers, persisted. Germaine Greer has described how, debarred from the tradition in which detached elevation aligns with male authority, women landscape artists have sought radical new viewpoints. This might be the intimate proximity of Elizabeth Blackwell’s botanical illustrations in *The Curious Herbal* (1737–1739), or Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s departure from Enlightenment materialism towards the fantastical landscapes of the 1775 “New Map of the Land of Matrimony”; or, more recently, Thérèse Oulton’s disorienting, curtailed, vertiginous landscapes, shown as if from the window of a banking aeroplane (Fig. 4). And this is happening in poetry too. Helen Mort’s poetic landscapes dizzyingly dissolve the distance between observer, page, and land, until “your eyes collect new rain” and “your words are rockfall”. Aptly, the collection in which Mort first came to prominence for her charting of the pioneering, disruptive female observers of landscape was titled *No Map Could Show Them*. Has the equal, wide survey become obsolete?



Figure 4.

Thérèse Oulton, *Untitled No 7*, Digital image courtesy of Thérèse Oulton / Marlborough Fine Art.

Response by

Felicity Myrone,

Alex invites us to join in a conversation about “the place of art, and the history of art, in national understandings of landscape now”. She notes that over the last twenty years there has been an upsurge in interest in writing about nature, place, and environment not seen since the late eighteenth century, and sees connections between nature writing, music, and film. Alex considers the term “mixed parliament” for this variety of genres. Picturing Places, a website launched in 2017 by the British Library, puts this idea into practice. We deliberately bring together a wide range of genres and formats—prints, drawings, printed and manuscript text, maps, objects such as globes, peepshows, and jigsaws, even a cuneiform tablet—with a resulting wide date range that currently stretches from ca. 605 bc to 2008. Over ninety authors from early career to established scholars have contributed to the site, and I hope the result is effective rather than confusing; the plural voices and variety of objects examined should surprise, encourage new ways of seeing, and increase awareness of the art historical, cultural, and institutional barriers that have led to ingrained and inaccurate perceptions of topographical art as a lesser form of landscape art.

Projects like cataloguing the British Library’s King’s Topographical Collection can also heighten our awareness of the power of categorisation and curation. We should actively question acts of selection, organisation, manipulation, and re-presentation, which may be highly personal, will certainly be partial, and are quite possibly transient. There is the institutional context to consider, as well, and the histories of classification, categorization, and exclusion or inclusion that it entails. These histories are largely hidden from sight when the institution in question is functioning effectively—a library or museum user can reasonably expect to locate the things they are looking for today without having to consider the potentially convoluted history of locations it may have had in the past.

At the British Library, large collections of works deemed topographical, including George III’s, have historically been seen as the realm of the map library, and indeed categorised as maps (Fig. 5). Sets of plates which may be held by both the British Museum and British Library will previously have been fully catalogued as prints—which is to say, as art—by the former, but given no more description than “views” or “without letterpress” when recorded by the latter (Fig. 6). It takes a dedicated scholar to appreciate the wealth of the countless prints and drawings at the British Library when the vast majority of catalogue records for the items they are found in make no reference to artist, engraver, medium, title, date, or subject of their contents.



Figure 5.

Michiel van Overbeek, *De Ladinghe In Hey Perck*, ca. 1663–66, pen and ink wash, 10.6 x 20.4 cm. Collection of British Library (Maps K.Top.124 Supp.fol.58). Digital image courtesy of British Library Board.

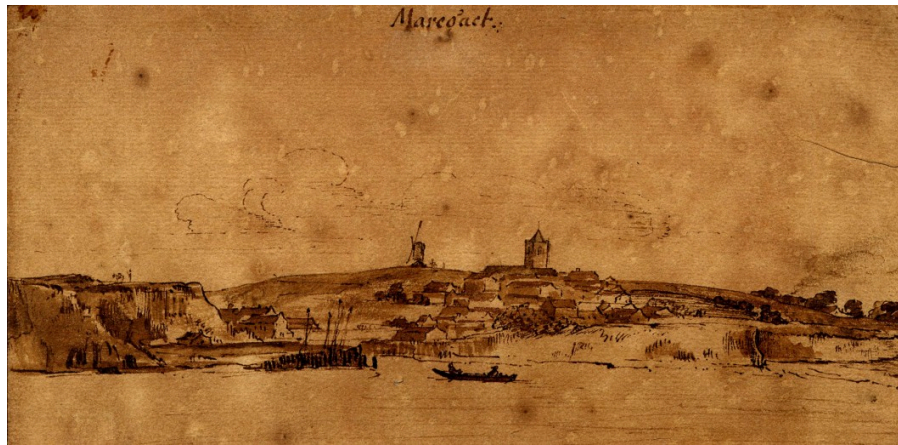


Figure 6.

Michiel van Overbeek, *View of Margate, Kent*, ca. 1663–66, drawing, 10.7 x 21.3 cm. Collection of The British Museum (11929.0511.22). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Tens of thousands of prints and drawings have been rediscovered and fully catalogued for the first time over the last five years, and while George III's collection is only one amongst hundreds at the Library, that should be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. The Library with its myriad voices in manuscript and printed texts alongside the often overlooked but outstanding visual collections is uniquely well equipped for those wanting to research exactly the question Alex poses in her second piece—"what did she see?". Alex writes of momentous times ahead for landscape art and its history, and I hope the collections of the British Library may be seen fertile ground for research on this topic.

This should, I would argue, encourage a greater consciousness of the history of collections, not as a specialised and separate area of historical enquiry but as a means of understanding the objects of our enquiry with greater historical accuracy. Why should four drawings by the same artist and from the same tour be “placed” in three different collections, one as part of the Royal Collection of drawings, two in the King’s Topographical Collection, and one in the British Museum, and what effect does this have on their perception? The historical classification and location of these drawings is a matter of material interest in this conversation about the place of “art”, and the art of “place”.

Response by

Anna Pavord, Writer

Raymond Williams was a hero to my magnificent tutor, Richard Hoggart. So I feel disloyal in disagreeing, profoundly, with Williams's words (in *The Country and the City*, 1973) that: "A working landscape is hardly ever a landscape." That is an extraordinarily proscriptive statement, almost an eighteenth-century one, when the only landscapes that mattered to the first landscape painters and the first landscape tourists were the wildish ones with mountains: the Lakes, of course, North Wales and the Highlands.

A landscape is made initially by geology and weather, but most of the ones we look at now in Britain bear evidence of generations of labour. Inhabiting the landscapes to which I respond most warmly are the ghosts of those who have occupied it and left their marks on it, from the Iron Age people who hacked the chalk of Eggardon Hillfort in West Dorset into its dramatic ramparts and ditches to the shepherds (like the one that William Turner of Oxford painted near Stonehenge), whose animals effectively maintained the great grassy sweeps of country we call downs.

Capability Brown himself said that as landscapers, sheep were rather more important than he was. And the landscapes he created were not only beautiful but also profitable. It was one of the reasons he was so successful. Estate accounts show that the grass of his landscape parks was often let out for grazing because at the time Brown was working, rents from pasture were higher than those for arable land. In late eighteenth-century Norfolk, pasture could be let for at least £3 an acre; arable brought in 50 shillings. And the sheep looked good. "There cannot be more interesting objects of view, in a park, than well-chosen flocks and herds, nor more appropriate to the rural scene, than their voices", wrote John Lawrence in *The Modern Land Steward* (1801).

Different imperatives produce different ways of seeing landscape. But the painter's prospect is not the only one that matters. Lord Ribblesdale, for whom James Ward painted his immense canvas of the sublime, *A Landscape, Gordale Scar, Yorkshire*, was certainly as interested in the provenance and breeding of the great white bull that Ward set so prominently in the foreground of the picture, as he was in the landscape against which it is set.

Raymond Williams went on to say that: "the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation." Observation, of course, because we can't take in, respond to a landscape without looking at it. But separation? No. The superb landscape I look out on every day offers peace, solace, delight. But

also engagement. The genesis of my book *Landskipping* lies in a landscape close to home, a view over a gate, a prospect that welcomes you into rather than separates you from the land.

Before I even contemplated writing this book, I commissioned George Wright, a photographer I have worked with for decades, to photograph this particular landscape over the course of a year ([Fig. 7](#) and [Fig. 8](#)). It was a landscape that always stopped me, was always different, but I wanted to understand why. George's photographs tracked, not only the course of the seasons, which has such a profound effect on the land we look out on, but also the dramatic changes produced by the passage of the sun. Until I laid his pictures out, I'd not fully realized that, because I looked south over the gate, the sun moved from left to right over the scene in front. The shadows of course move with the sun, falling in the morning from left to right, in the evening from right to left. As they move, they highlight a ditch, or a depression where stone has been dug out for a boundary wall, a grassed over track, horizontal lynchets made on the slope, tumuli, burial mounds, disc barrows of the long dead. Work? Yes, a lot of work stitched into this landscape. Separation? No. For me, never.



Figure 7.

George Wright, West Dorset, 8.41 am on the 11 January 2012, photograph.



Figure 8.

George Wright, West Dorset, 8.29 am on the 20 October 2012, photograph.

Response by

Emily Hayes, Research Associate, Humanities and Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University

From Black Boxes to Brexit: The Magic Lantern's Lessons in Perspective

Any question regarding how women and men of diverse socio-political backgrounds or belief systems have looked about themselves on this earth demands an answer encompassing the histories of optics and visual technologies. Dating from the seventeenth century and rapidly repurposed from the philosopher's cabinet for use in popular and commercial shows, the magic lantern is an overlooked instrument as much of natural philosophy as of histories of both art and the environment.

Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the early twentieth century, the lantern and the lantern slides it projected showed what people saw and what they wanted to see; travel and topographical subjects, broadly described as geographical, comprised the most popular forms of enlightening and educational entertainment.

Itinerant pedlars of lantern shows and professional lecturers illuminated a European, even global, stock of landscape images and their collections reveal diverse ways of seeing, knowing, and fashioning European lands. The women and men who staged such shows, and who depended on ticket sales to make their precarious livings, shaped and were shaped by popular tastes and audiences. For those seeking visions of the past, the black boxes of lantern slides and their associated archives and ephemera constitute a rich and barely mined seam of evidence.

Peeping at what and how people saw—from hand-painted scenes to photographic views of British and imperial landscapes from the 1860s onwards—reveals a vibrant and spatially varied tradition of lantern shows across Britain, which illuminated many of the key journeys that fed British geographical imaginations. The Regent Street Royal Polytechnic Institution (RPI) staged shows on the explorer Richard Burton's pilgrimage to Mecca, the expeditionary artist Thomas Baines' travels in Africa, and the Arctic Franklin search party expeditions, among many others. Charles Dickens was a frequent attendee.

From the 1880s up to the 1950s, the Royal Geographical Society's (RGS) lantern lectures moulded the public perception of nature as a distinct entity designed for scientific scrutiny, and notions of humanity's place within it. However, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, RGS audiences of all ages also reported experiences of virtual travel within the space of the

lantern lectures. British landscape literature and travel writing of this era were fashioned in the light of such interactive multimedia performances of place and space. The RGS sustained a tradition of engaging with nature by giving its creators a platform and by nurturing its audiences.

Scenes of imperial and colonised lands attracted huge audiences. Yet images, as we know, are not innocent. Stylistic forms, and interpretations of them, were often imported from across the colonies and beyond. Fashioned as imperialism reached its zenith and as a global consciousness derived from the activities of institutions such as the RGS – as well as the nascent academic discipline of geography – British landscape art and landscape writing may not be so native to these islands after all. Historical geography offers a profoundly ethical approach to their study by demonstrating how the local and the global interpenetrate across the individual-national-global sliding scale of artistic, literary, and intellectual imaginaries. We should therefore be wary of setting up and confirming national traditions in our study of lantern slides and of British engagements with landscape in art and writing more broadly.

In order to map the relations between notionally popular shows and a broader artistic scene, from vignette engravings in books to theatrical backdrops and the fine arts, scholars are investigating the makers of the exquisite hand-painted slides projected at the RPI. At the RGS for over forty years, the clerk by day and lanternist and lantern slide maker by night, Harry Simpson (1864–1940) fashioned worlds, and audience perceptions of them, by remediating photographs and hand-drawn and painted images into slides to illustrate lectures. Though the effects of this process were perhaps subtle, as scholars aver, the act of remediation was not simply replication, but transformation. Activities at both the RGS and the RPI afford glimpses of how notions of landscape were crafted, and then propagated amongst diverse audiences.

In the 1890s, RGS audiences were thrilled by the abstract photographic studies of wave forms by the chemist turned geographer Vaughan Cornish—then a rising star of the RGS. By the 1930s, Cornish's interests had shifted towards eugenics and landscape heritage activism. My work therefore maps the confluences of Cornish's pursuits and their common source in a notionally progressive scientific outlook.

Such concerns resonate today. The various Brexit scenarios blotting our horizon threaten to transform the physical and social geography of what we imagine to be Britain. The bringing of popular landscapes views back from the obscure and into sight offers a timely lesson in perspective.



Figure 9.

Paul Sandby, *The Magic Lantern*, 1763, drawing, 37.2 x 53.8 cm.
Collection of The British Museum (1862,1011.890). Digital image courtesy
of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Response by

Barney Norris, Martin Esslin playwright in residence at Keble College, Oxford

Landscape and Localism

The landscape tradition in art is being most interestingly developed, to my mind, precisely where it tackles the very occlusion Alexandra Harris writes of here, and expresses the strongly felt ideas about landscapes of those who are articulating their home places. It is in the work of artists expressing their own hinterland and backyard that landscape art lives for me in contemporary painting, just as landscape lives most vividly in contemporary writing in the labyrinthine explorations of home and memory in the work of Ciaran Carson.

The curious quality I find in the work of painters whose subject is their own world is that they use painting as a means of making strange the world they intimately know. This struck me forcefully last summer when I encountered the work of Saul Cathcart at the Crypt Gallery in St Ives. Artistically, that town is, of course, a temple to kitsch, but Cathcart's impressionistic, quite jazz-inflected plein-aire paintings were a bold rebuttal to all the blue rectangles on sale elsewhere. Documenting live interactions between the artist and the place he was painting, usually a place within a few miles of his home, they dramatize a meeting place between an inner and an outer landscape, so that what became visible in the gallery was what it had felt like to be in that moment.

Looking at Cathcart's work brought to mind my engagement over the last few years with the work of David Inshaw, another painter whose project is to burnish the views around him and make them strange. Inshaw has become an abiding preoccupation for me in the last few years, because we both gnaw at the same corner of carpet—his work and my work are both excavations of the secret heart of Wiltshire. When I first encountered Inshaw's paintings, I was struck by how very similar his conclusions about the place seemed to be to my own—how Wiltshire helped him, as it had helped me, to perceive that life is a dream, and that all meaning and all magic exists in the geometry of things, the relation of one thing to another and the spaces between, the absences and gaps.



Figure 10.

David Inshaw, *Our days were a joy and our paths through flowers*, 1972, oil on canvas, 135.9 x 212.1 cm. Collection of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (K4142). Digital image courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

What these two very different painters absolutely share is that they are both engaged in saying, “this is what it feels like to be here”. Their act of estranging may be a compelling window into places for tourists, but it is also a means of finding expression in the localities they document, a window for local feeling, local knowledge, to break like first light out into the world.

Landscapes are mute. Hills do not give up the secret of what they mean, water is indifferent to us, and every blade of grass will forget us when we leave it behind—and that strangeness is in every painting; but in the work of people who have spent a long time with the places they paint, the nebulous significance of everywhere can become more richly and densely textured and expressed.

Response by

Caroline Garrett, Historic Landscape Specialist, Nicholas Pearson Partnership LLP

My job is to restore works of art. I do not spend my time dissolving varnish, retouching oil paint, or reframing delicate canvases, but instead I recommend the pruning of trees, the rebuilding of a derelict ha-ha and a review of the grazing regime. Designed landscapes—gardens, landscape parks, urban public parks—are three-dimensional works of landscape art. Unlike most buildings, they do not have a clearly defined function guiding the architect's design. Like many paintings, they were, and are, often created simply to be enjoyed, reflecting the fashions, tastes, and aesthetic movements of the day.

Designed landscapes are, however, a complicated branch of landscape art. They are fragile palimpsests, usually with several layers of design. This makes them difficult to interpret or categorise, and often hard to pin down to a single aesthetic movement or designer. They were often created by amateurs with ample wealth and a large team of gardeners—no longer sustainable in modern times. In some cases, these artworks have become equally, if not more, important for their scientific or archaeological value, especially where parkland trees have been allowed to mature into fine veterans or an eighteenth-century prospect mound turns out to have been constructed in 2400 bc.

Parks and gardens cannot be preserved exactly as originally conceived and finished by their creator, nor can they be accurately restored like a building or converted for a more economically viable modern use. They are constantly changing from season to season and year to year and, if unmanaged, trees grow, lakes silt up, scrub takes over. Often this change is slow but significant, so that a key view will gradually disappear and be forgotten and a lake will evolve into wet woodland, halving its size. There can be much objection from a community when we propose felling trees, until the lost view is revealed and people realise what they have been missing for the past fifty years.

Much of my work involves the rediscovery of unmanaged landscapes and the teasing out of their significant features based on documentary research and site surveys. "Significance" is a key term in all modern conservation management. For each landscape, we have to condense its qualities into a "statement of significance", summarising the values of a site, be they archaeological, cultural, ecological, aesthetic, or communal. This may appear to be a rather blunt instrument: how can one group of individuals with particular tastes, backgrounds, and knowledge begin to assess the multiple

qualities of a place? However, designation or funding has to be justified in some way, and an assessment that identifies the national or local context of a landscape is an essential starting point.

The designation of designed landscapes is a relatively recent development. The twentieth century saw the loss of many gardens and landscape parks, particularly following the demolition of country houses. The decline in surviving examples resulted in the founding of the *Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* in 1983 by English Heritage. The Register now contains over 1,600 sites, including landscape parks, town gardens, public parks, and cemeteries. Like listed buildings, landscapes are graded I, II* or II, based on their significance. The organisation judges the national value of a landscape based on several criteria, including date of construction, association with a nationally important designer or other individual, or group value with other historic buildings or sites. Inclusion on the Register is the most effective way of protecting a landscape from development, but it is non-statutory and is only a material consideration in the planning process. You do not need consent to plough up a Repton park (although you might find yourself in trouble if it is in the curtilage of a listed building).

As well as protection, designation can also be the key to unlocking financial support for conservation. Two of the principal sources of funding are the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Countryside Stewardship, administered by Natural England. Both sources are invaluable in helping to support our landscape heritage, but they have their limitations. The HLF will require a landscape to be publicly accessible and Stewardship, being a scheme to support agricultural land, limits its funding to grazed parkland. Financial support for gardens or pleasure grounds, especially those in private ownership, is limited, and this makes them vulnerable to neglect and decay.

Conserving designed landscapes is a challenge, both financially and practically. There are very few instances where it is possible to comprehensively restore the original work of art and have the resources to maintain it. They are transient compositions that evolve over time, where a creator's scheme can be degraded or enhanced by natural processes, subsequent owners, differently skilled gardeners, or the visions of new designers. Every landscape is unique, but together they play a major role in our national heritage and the environment of contemporary Britain.



Figure 11.

Simon Bonvoisin, View across the lake in Lydiard Park, Swindon, before restoration, 2004.



Figure 12.

Simon Bonvoisin, View across the lake in Lydiard Park, Swindon, following restoration funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, 2006.

Response by

Mark Bills, Director of Gainsborough's House

Gainsborough's House: Landscape and Place, Past and Future



Figure 13.

Gainsborough's House – view of front entrance from Gainsborough's Street, 2010, photograph.

Gainsborough's House is the childhood home of Thomas Gainsborough (1727–88), which was purchased in 1958 through a national fund-raising campaign with artists at its forefront. Its doors opened to the public in 1961 and have remained open ever since. They will be closing in 2019 for the first time in sixty years, to allow the House to reinvigorate itself as a national centre for Gainsborough and to revive the town of its most famous son. The thoughts raised in this conversation piece have particular relevance to us, as engagement with the art of landscape is critical to our future vision.

The country town of Sudbury is filled with echoes of the art of Gainsborough. Here are the ghosts of the material that inspired the burgeoning artist. As Philip Thicknesse, one of Gainsborough's first biographers, recalled,

there was not a Picturesque clump of Trees, nor even a single Tree of beauty, no, nor hedgerow, stone, or post, at the corner of the Lanes, for some miles round about the place of his nativity, that he had not so perfectly in his *mind's eye*, that ... he could have perfectly delineated.

It is a place, one might even argue, that inspired Gainsborough's restless search for a rustic idyll he evoked in his landscapes, a place where you can still see the water meadow and cattle—motifs in many of his paintings. This gives us a rare opportunity to show his art within the physical spaces that formed his creative imagination. The relationships between art, artist, and landscape are complex ones and we need to think about topography, imagination, and the creative process. We believe that the exploration of these relationships offers great opportunities for the future visitor.



Figure 14.

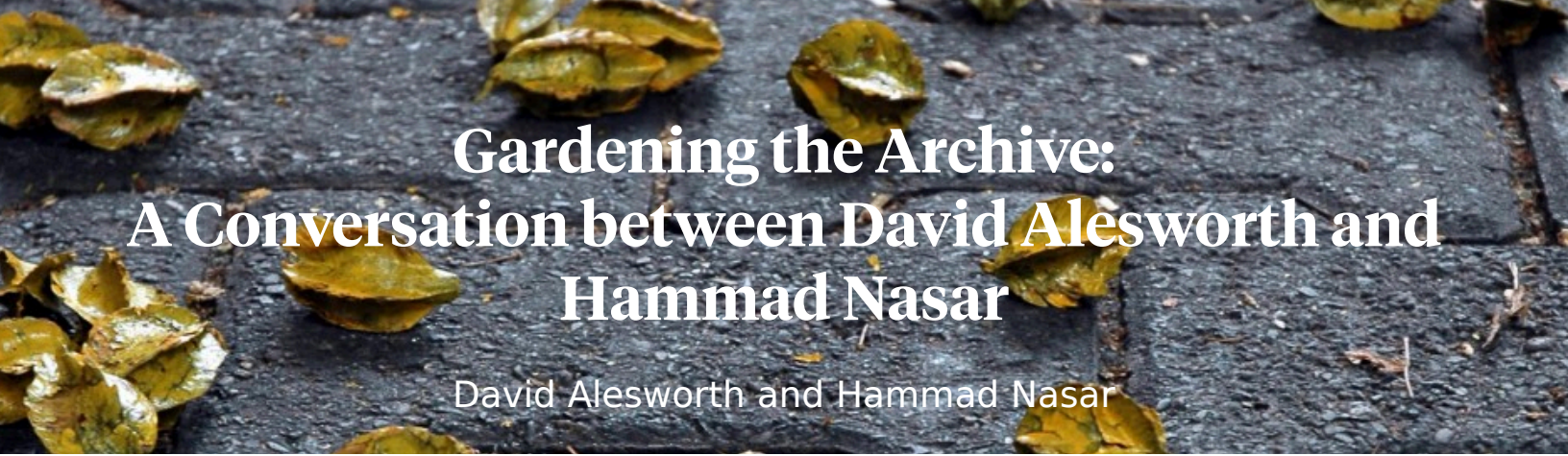
The Water Meadows, Sudbury, 2015. Digital image courtesy of A. Purkiss.

Relevant to this development is the distinctness between the inside and the outside. This is something that we are addressing in a newly constructed Landscape Studio, which is part of the creation of a 500 square metre landmark building designed by ZMMA. On a third level of the new building, which will rest on ground sloping southwards, the Studio will have a panoramic south-facing window looking over the town of Sudbury to the landscape of *Mr and Mrs Andrews*. In this way, we can bring the landscape into the building, giving visitors the opportunity of seeing, through the architecture, the external long view of the landscape as it exists today counterpointed by the eighteenth-century paintings displayed inside the gallery.

The Landscape Studio will also explore other elements of the art of landscape. We discovered that visitors are particularly interested in the creative process, which is often mysterious to them. How do artists take the

three-dimensional reality of what they see physically in front of them and transfigure or reflect it into oil paint on canvas? Using a *camera obscura* and popular eighteenth-century optical devices, we will explore and illustrate this question for visitors.

Starting out from the early conversation pieces in which Gainsborough brings together two aspects of his art with differing emphases, the future Gainsborough's House will offer visitors the chance to be part of a conversation piece themselves and, we hope, to develop their own conversations with landscape and place. The newly refurbished house and new galleries are due to open in Spring 2021.



Gardening the Archive: A Conversation between David Alesworth and Hammad Nasar

David Alesworth and Hammad Nasar

Authors

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For a contemporary artist, David Alesworth (b. 1957) has an unusual relationship with the landscape. For more than twenty-five years, he has maintained parallel professional lives: as an artist and art teacher; and as a landscape designer and horticultural consultant. Returning to live and work in the UK in 2015, after more than three decades in Karachi and Lahore, his geographic, artistic, horticultural, and biographical entanglements are directly reflected in a heterogonous and wide-ranging body of work featured in the Paul Mellon Centre's Landscape Now conference (2017). In our cover collaboration with Alesworth for this special issue of *British Art Studies*, we feature five details from his recent projects that suggest the range of different questions we may pose to landscapes, now.

HN:

The distressed collage-like image transfers of clipped trees in *Global Forest* (2018) reveal a channelled violence ([Fig. 1](#)), and directly reference Diana Beresford-Kroeger's book of the same name that examines how trees chemically affect the environment. Are these distinct but similar trees icons of a dystopic landscape?

DA:

Those ritualistically mutilated trees and their distressed reproductions are intended to speak of our dysfunctional relationship with the non-human world. I see urban trees as a frontline in the perpetual battle of culture with nature: where some are coddled and others are brutalized. Kenneth Helphand's text "Defiant Gardens", which surveys gardens cultivated in brutal wartime conditions, comes to mind. With this holistic perspective, Kroeger also speaks of the "Global Garden" as containing not only all the world's forests, but also the entire biosphere, humanity included. This idea is a useful concept for today, maybe offering a prescription for the ills of the Anthropocene, or as Kroeger might phrase it, a workable Bioplan—an idealistic programme for healing this damaged world. Though, as the Trump administration has conceded, it is already too late; we are soon to be cooked along with much else, unless some planetary-scaled geo-engineering enterprise re-sequesters much of that carbon we have so recently liberated.

The works of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, and their perspectives informed by deep scientific expertise, are still very much among my influences. One of the first things I did on moving to the UK in 2015 was an extended walk on the Jurassic Coast in the company of Exeter University's earth systems scientists, some of whom had been taught by Lovelock himself. It was a sobering experience.



Figure 1.

David Alesworth, *Global Forest*, March 2017, mixed media on paper, 28 x 38 cm. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth.

HN:

The Hyde Park, Kashan 1862 (2011) is one among a series of textile works where you treat the classical gardens of Persian carpets as palimpsests through which to stage conversations across time and space (Fig. 2). You have spoken of these works as heterotopias—where ideas of perfection wrestle with the violence of transforming nature into garden. The forceful driving of large needles through the weft of the carpet is a violent process that easily lends itself to post-colonial readings of the imperial project. What guides your juxtapositions of carpet fragments and the maps they serve as ground for?

DA:

I consider the carpets I co-opt into these works to be cultural signifiers for the broad Islamic world and its ways of life. It was a late encounter with Foucault's theory of the Heterotopia that directly led to the genesis of the carpet works. His tantalizingly brief mention of Oriental gardens as containing "seemingly superimposed meanings", and of Oriental carpets as "reproductions of gardens", came to me at a point when I was looking for ways to complicate and unpack notions of the garden between cultures and to see it as something other than leisure ground or amenity space.¹ In that respect, Lawrence Gardens, or *Bagh-e-Jinnah* as it is known today, in Lahore

continues to be an enormously rich resource for my work (Fig. 3). Maps and tribal carpets have so much in common: the containment of a space both practical and symbolic; a certain density of information; and as indicators of world-views.

I consider all of my working trajectories to be derived directly from my lived experience, and it happens both consciously and sometimes unknowingly. There was a massive Kashan in my childhood. I am still unsure of the stories of its origins within the family. Nor do I know where it went subsequently. It possibly wasn't any bigger than those I work upon now, and it was soft, worn, and muted—much as those I prefer to work with. Tribal rugs hold to core tenets and yet each is unique, much like a garden—with Eden, foundational to all the Abrahamic faiths, serving as the archetypal garden.

It was Alam the then head *mali* (gardener) at Lawrence Gardens (or *Bagh-e-Jinnah*) that set me to research the park's origins. He told me its layout was based upon Kew Gardens in London. In some ways, this is so; I have never found plans for Lawrence Gardens in the Kew Gardens Archives, but I continue to research its history.

Maps and gardens are both parcels of landscape that may be read and are often whole worlds unto themselves. I tend to work with the antiquated plans of gardens rather than from the direct experience of them, though actually knowing those spaces is important to me. In these works, I hope to complicate the garden and reinstate it as a thinking, spiritual space; anything other than the ubiquitous amenity space gardens have become. In the studio, I think about working as an artist, as I might work as a gardener—it's a vague enough thought to allow for all kinds of connections both ancient and new, and other emergent possibilities.



Figure 2.

David Alesworth, Hyde Park Kashan, 1862 (after a Stanford map fragment of 1862), 2011, hand-knotted carpet with dyed-wool embroidery, 350.5 x 238.7 cm. Collection of AMA Foundation, Chile. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth.



Figure 3.

David Alesworth, Lawrence Gardens (Bagh-e-Jinnah), 2014, hand embroidery in dyed sheep's wool and other fibres into an antique Kashan carpet, 366 cm x 305 cm. Collection of Dr Furqaan Ahmed. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth / Dr Furqaan Ahmed.

HN:

The yellow star-shaped pods which you dispersed along the famous Berlin street in *Unter den Linden* (2010) are freighted with meaning—of the globalization of plants and people; of symbols of nationhood, but also of alienation—indeed of the infamous yellow star that literally symbolized “otherness” for Germany’s Jews (Fig. 4). Is this yet another palimpsest? Do landscapes remember?

DA:

I like to think they do; that all are inscribed by the history and traces of the peoples that have lived in them in some psychogeographical way.

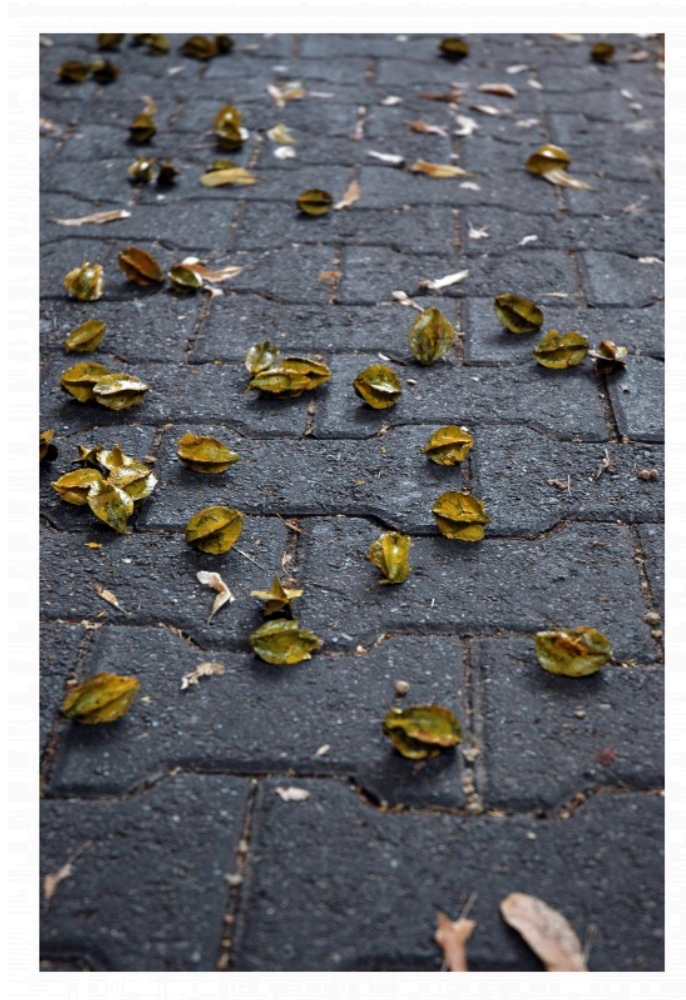


Figure 4.

David Alesworth, *Unter den Linden*, 2010, horticultural intervention, public art project, terminalia arjuna seeds (sterilized) yellow paint. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth.

HN:

The *Drawing in Time* series (2018) of photographs plays with scale; the geographic scale of these land drawings where you used a bulldozer at a cement plant to prepare the limestone dusting for your drawings traced with a stick (Fig. 5). And the geological scale that transforms plant matter into coal—which is a layer revealed underneath the surface by your drawing stick (Fig. 6, Fig. 7, Fig. 8). What attracted you to treat the cement factory as a site from which to consider these questions of depth—in time and space?

DA:

The site of the Pioneer cement factory in Khushab, Pakistan is around 2,000 acres including the on-site quarries, mineral stores, and two kiln runs. Jetlag, no Internet, no cell coverage, and initially no on-site coordination drove me around the site twice daily for much of the first week. These works were brought about on seeing my footprints in the layers of limestone dust over coal, leaving a jet-black transitory inscription upon those mineral histories.

I had come to the residency at the Pioneer cement factory armed with certain ideas that quickly fell away once I had spent time at the site. In the end, the *Drawing in Time* works are actually connected to the textile forms I have been working with over the past decade—they both engage with kinds of crafting.

Craft has been an enduring aspect of my practice throughout the time I have spent in Pakistan, because craft in that context is political. It speaks of ways of making, thinking, and resisting that are before, or *underneath*, the colonial period. The arts of the Bazaar are largely uncontaminated by received notions of art or quality. The carpet works constitute a much higher form of craft practice than my earlier concerns with craft in popular culture and decorated transport in particular, but all share the communality of the *horror vacui*. The Manchester-based Zeigler and Co. were commissioned to address this irritant and to come up with an aesthetic more suited to European tastes. The legacy of which was the more muted and subdued Zeigler carpet that has now become the *Chobi* of today. *Drawing in Time*, with its gentle repetitions, “stitches” these histories, concerns, and thoughts together.



Figure 5.

David Alesworth, Preparation work for “Drawings in Time” series, February 2018, aerial photograph. Digital image courtesy of Pioneer Art Residency (2018) Khushab, in collaboration with Canvas Gallery, Karachi.



Figure 6.

David Alesworth, Drawings in Time (Engineers Carpet), 9 -12 February 2018 at 4.30 pm, series of 4 aerial photograph of site-specific drawing, archival gicleé print on hahnemuhle photo rag paper, 40.5 x 61 cm sheet size. Digital image courtesy of Pioneer Art Residency (2018) Khushab, in collaboration with Canvas Gallery, Karachi.



Figure 7.

David Alesworth, Drawings in Time (EquisetumSpp.), 9 - 12 February 2018 at 4.30 pm, series of 4 aerial photograph of site-specific drawing, archival gicleé print on hahnemuhle photo rag paper, 40.5 x 61 cm sheet size. Digital image courtesy of Pioneer Art Residency (2018) Khushab, in collaboration with Canvas Gallery, Karachi.



Figure 8.

David Alesworth, *Drawings in Time (Ginkgo Spp.)*, 9 – 12 February 2018 at 4.30 pm, series of 4 aerial photograph of site-specific drawing, archival giclée print on hahnemuhle photo rag paper, 40.5 x 61 cm sheet size. Digital image courtesy of Pioneer Art Residency (2018) Khushab, in collaboration with Canvas Gallery, Karachi.

HN:

In the *Gardens of England* series, you collaborate with the Lahore-based miniature painter Shakila Haider, who transforms your photographs into vaguely otherworldly depictions of Bristol's front yard shrubbery and trees (Fig. 9, Fig. 10, Fig. 11). Can we read this hybrid imagery as a reverse "Company School" body of work?



Figure 9.

David Alesworth and Shakila Haider, *The Gardens of England*, Arlington Road, 2017, watercolour on wasli paper, 30 x 33.5 cm. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth and Shakila Haider.



Figure 10.

David Alesworth and Shakila Haider, Gardens of England, Bryant's Hill, 2017, watercolour on wasli paper, 30 x 34 cm. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth and Shakila Haider.



Figure 11.

David Alesworth and Shakila Haider, Gardens of England, Plumbers Hill, 2017, watercolour on wasli paper, 27 x 33.5 cm. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth and Shakila Haider.

DA:



Figure 12.

William Roxburgh, *Tamarindus indica*, tamarind illustrated in *Flora Indica*, hand painted illustration, date unknown. Collection of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Digital image courtesy of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

In the *Gardens of England* series, I am really thinking of Dr Roxburgh and his “Flora indica”, which controversially documented the flora of India for the East India Company by commissioning two miniature painters (Fig. 12). The folios received a mixed response when the Company gifted a set to Kew, the miniature technique producing a somewhat flattened or even “pressed” look to the specimens. But while this reference to Roxburgh was a conscious one, I think that the relationship of Roxburgh and his two miniaturists is very different from my commissioning Haider, with whom I have collaborated closely on other projects. What’s more, contemporary miniature painting in Pakistan is in such high demand now that I needed institutional funding to realize my project.

HN:

Your work rarely depicts people, but its making is often collaborative. In earlier work—for instance, the collaborative project *Arz-e-Mauood* (*Promised Lands*) (1997), with Durriya Kazi—the work itself was an activation of a communal space in a public garden, which in a curious coincidence is also called *Bagh-e-Jinnah*, albeit in Karachi rather than Lahore (Fig. 13, Fig. 14, Fig. 15).² What are we to read into this apparent withdrawal of people from your more recent work?



Figure 13.

David Alesworth and Durrya Kazi, *Arz-e-Mahood / Promised Lands*, installation and performance at Frere Hall Gardens, Karachi, Pakistan, 1997. Supported by Alliance Française, Pakistan. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth and Durrya Kazi.



Figure 14.

David Alesworth and Durrya Kazi, Arz-e-Mahood / Promised Lands, installation and performance at Frere Hall Gardens, Karachi, Pakistan, 1997. Supported by Alliance Française, Pakistan. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth and Durrya Kazi.



Figure 15.

David Alesworth and Durrya Kazi, Arz-e-Mahood / Promised Lands, installation and performance at Frere Hall Gardens, Karachi, Pakistan, 1997. Supported by Alliance Française, Pakistan. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth and Durrya Kazi.

DA:

The imprint of people is always there within my work—written upon the non-human and even the land itself. I grew up in Surrey and was horrified when what I took for natural woodland in the Oxshott woods was one day harvested. We talked plants at home and all had to work in the family garden much to our dismay. Collaborations of all kinds have always seemed natural to me, perhaps the one upside of boarding at a tender age. As a fifteen-year-old, I led a commune of sorts for several years in our school day-room, with shared property—complete with the Little Red Books and Mao posters sent from the Chinese embassy—much to the amusement of our teachers.

[mul]More recently, it has been my research in the Kew Gardens Archives that has brought people into my work. The archive that I went into to find an original garden plan actually brought me to some very distinct people who created and then managed the park in its early years: the Garden Directors, Gardeners and their associates and correspondents. It was the age of letter writing, and these letters are always such a pleasure to encounter. The idea of an audio work based upon Lawrence Gardens as revealed through the collections of “The Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information” held at Kew had been on my mind for over a decade. The recent inaugural Lahore Biennale (2018) provided an opportunity for me to assemble some of this research into an audio-work, involving a number of male Colonial voices surrounding that of a single female Punjabi voice, that of Asma Qadri narrating the poems of Najm Hosain Syed ([Fig. 16](#)).

I say surrounded because that is how I actually modelled the stereo image and the work was hosted in an ancient Camphor tree, one of the oldest in the gardens, one that would have lived through part of the British Raj and is now at the end of its life ([Fig. 17](#)). I consider the work nascent and hope to revisit and refine it yet; this was one part of my joint proposal for the Lahore Biennale. Assembling *The Bulletins of Miscellaneous Information* was very collaborative work, involving particularly the English artist Carol Laidler as a co-writer and editor, a local sound studio, both English and Punjabi voice actors, and an equivalent Lahore based setup. The land at Lawrence is itself a palimpsest, if land might be considered so. Its *genius loci* is derived from a number of elevated mounds surrounded by a depressed ground level, suitable for flood irrigation from *meta nallas*, and it is still flood irrigated in this way. Those mounds are the remains of the Mughal brick kilns, that built old Lahore from the soil of what became Lawrence Gardens and is now *Bagh-e-Jinnah*, a sort of botanical garden of Empire gone adrift. *The Bulletins of Miscellaneous Information* and the *Gardens of England* both speak of the presence of man, as an infliction upon the landscape. Though ultimately, I confess, I do prefer to work with plants. I now aspire to connect to the land and this moment in the UK—and it is such a troubled moment in so many ways.

I work as a gardener (when not in the studio) as part of my re-entry fee to understanding things English. It is a kind of research for me and is certainly teaching me much about the weather.



Figure 16.

David Alesworth, *The Bulletins of Miscellaneous Information*, 2018, audio installation, total duration 43 minutes 30 seconds. Photographic documentation of site-specific work installed within the Bagh-e-Jinnah botanical gardens, Lahore, Pakistan, on the occasion of the Lahore Biennale 2018. Digital image courtesy of David Alesworth / Lahore Biennale Foundation.

Footnotes

- ¹ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", (1967), trans. Jay Miskowiec, <https://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en/>.
- ² See Hammad Nasar, "Karachi Pop: Vernacular Visualities in 1990s Karachi", <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/map/karachi-pop-vernacular-visualities-in-1990s-karachi>.



Paul Nash's Geological Enigma

Anna Reid

Abstract

This essay explores the attunement of Nash's work to pioneering geophysical research in England, connections which have not yet been fully recognized. In a context of the early-to-mid twentieth century, when geophysicists read the startling radioactivity of the land and worked mathematical equations to put a vastly ancient and sensational new age on the rocks of the earth, Nash's landscape works, fraught with mathematical problems, equations, stones and bones, resonated afresh, beyond the confines of the Modern. Through these interests, I argue, Nash channelled and revitalized a British tradition of engagement with the aesthetics of the geological.

Authors

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Anna Reid, "Paul Nash's Geological Enigma", *British Art Studies*, Issue 10, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-10/areid>

Last summer I walked in a field near Avebury where two rough monoliths stand up ... miraculously patterned with black and orange lichen, remnants of the avenue of stones which led to the Great Circle. In the hedge, at hand, the white trumpet of a convolvulus turns from its spiral stem, following the sun. In my art I would solve such an equation (Fig. 1).¹

This essay describes how, when read in the context of geological knowledge, the landscape work of Paul Nash exhibits a prescient realism and evinces experimentation amidst a new era of empirical research.² In this, Nash's landscapes can be perceived as a form of geological material, posing geological problems and enigmata. Nash's affinity with the geological is legible throughout his oeuvre. A range of books contained in the artist's library evidence his interest in natural science and geological process. Nash's work is part of a tradition of engagement with the geological, inherited from John Ruskin and William Blake before him. Considered as such, Nash's aesthetics of the land is brought more sharply into view—its preoccupation with deep history and invisible, dynamic morphologies. This reading does not contradict Nash's spiritual and other interests, but rather reads him as an artist whose experimental work moves between dimensions and domains.

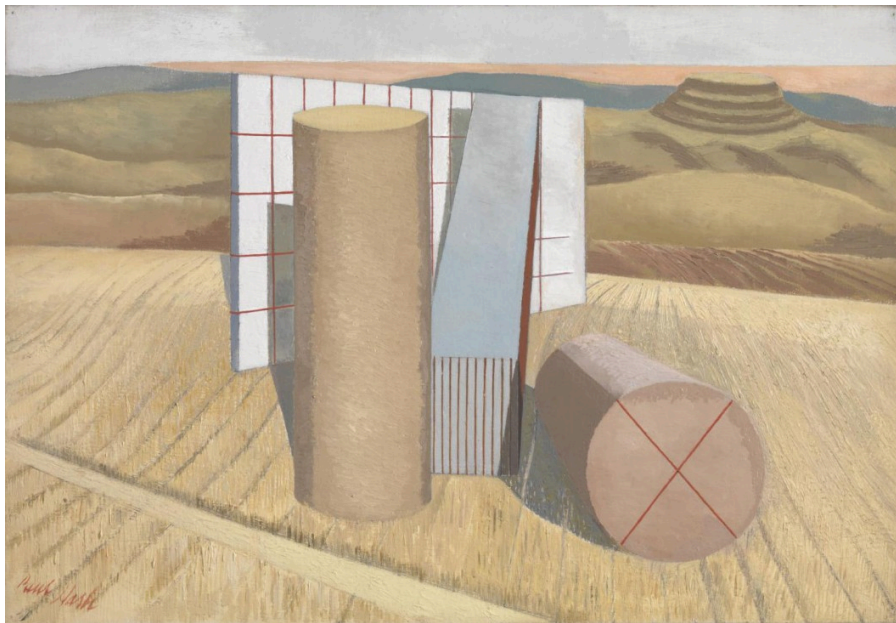


Figure 1.

Paul Nash, *Equivalents for the Megaliths*, 1935, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 66 cm. Collection of Tate (T01251). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).

Nash worked in a context of astounding geological discovery: that of a radioactive earth legible by mathematics—a new geological real. The attunement of Nash's work to this discovery is under-recognized. This is partly owing to the concurrence of his work with the emergence of modernist critical thought in Britain, which exactly rejected the possibility of ontological description and its history in art. Critical thought of modernist origins has now been decentred by the engagement of artists with pressing matters of the geological real. Nash's work, read as intense realism, offers a rich precedent to realisms of the twenty-first century. It guides the eye towards dynamic geological problems and curiosity.

An English Landscape Artist

Nash's work tends to be described first as "English".³ I propose that the English concept of the land at play in the work has to do with universal new insight gained through geological discovery. From the perspective of a modernist critic in England, driven by the imperative to break with the immanent in pursuit of international critical dialogue, Nash's refusal to relinquish the landscape appeared at best insular.⁴ Yet the "English" adjective is invested in a way that does not contradict the modern reverence for the virtuosity of human perception above and beyond the immanent land.

Over the course of Nash's working life, scientists in England were engaged with a startling new geophysical understanding of the earth. Observations by Marie and Pierre Curie, dating from 1898, had pointed to a land alight with radioactive processes previously unknown and entirely unsuspected. Working in England in 1905, the physicist Ernest Rutherford had used the rate at which radium decays into helium to produce estimates of the age of mineral samples. The English geologist and physicist Arthur Holmes then conducted pioneering research into radioactive processes. As a physics undergraduate at Imperial College, London, he had taken a course in geology, which led him to trace the rates of decay of uranium into lead. Holmes had published a resplendent new geological reading of the land in the first (1913) edition of his *The Age of the Earth* (Fig. 2). It detailed mesmerizing earth processes: uranium halos, atoms sparking and bursting like rockets, flashing zinc sulphide, Beta and Gamma Rays, pitchblende glowing with light in the darkness, "Man putteth an end to the darkness and exploreth to the utmost limit the stones of darkness."⁵

THE AGE OF THE EARTH

A New Kind of Radiation. This extraordinary radiation, now familiar to us as the X, or Röntgen rays, revealed itself by its remarkable property of passing through objects which are entirely opaque to ordinary light. It was found, for example, that a photographic plate was not protected from its influence by being wrapped in black paper, but was affected just as though it had been exposed.

This discovery awakened the deepest interest amongst all scientific workers, and the idea arose that phosphorescence and the Röntgen rays might in some way be vitally connected. Certain substances, after being exposed to sunlight, are able to shine in the dark with a phosphorescent light, and it was this radiation which was examined from the new point of view. Working on these lines, with uranium salts, Becquerel found, almost by accident, that they gave out rays which were capable of penetrating black paper and making themselves evident by their effect upon a photographic plate wrapped within it. This observation in 1896 marks the commencement of the harvest of wonderful discoveries which have revolutionised our conception of the structure of matter.

The emission of rays was found to be an inherent property of uranium and entirely independent of the phosphorescence exhibited by certain of its compounds. Physical and chemical changes made no difference; the radioactive properties evidently belonged to the atom itself, for they could be detected under whatever conditions uranium happened to be present. Mme. Curie at once began an exhaustive examination of all the other known elements, and came to the conclusion that thorium

92

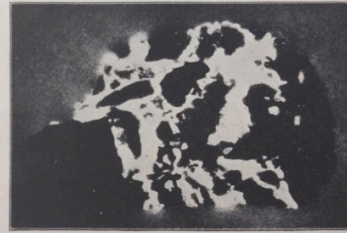


FIG. 12.
Taken in the dark by its own rays.

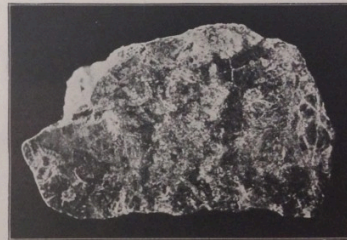


FIG. 13.
Taken in ordinary daylight
PHOTOGRAPHS OF PITCHBLEND.

Figure 2.

The Age of The Earth: An Introduction to Geological Ideas, Arthur Holmes (ed.) (London: Ernest Benn, 1927[1913]), pp. 92-93. Digital image courtesy of Arthur Holmes / Ernst Benn.

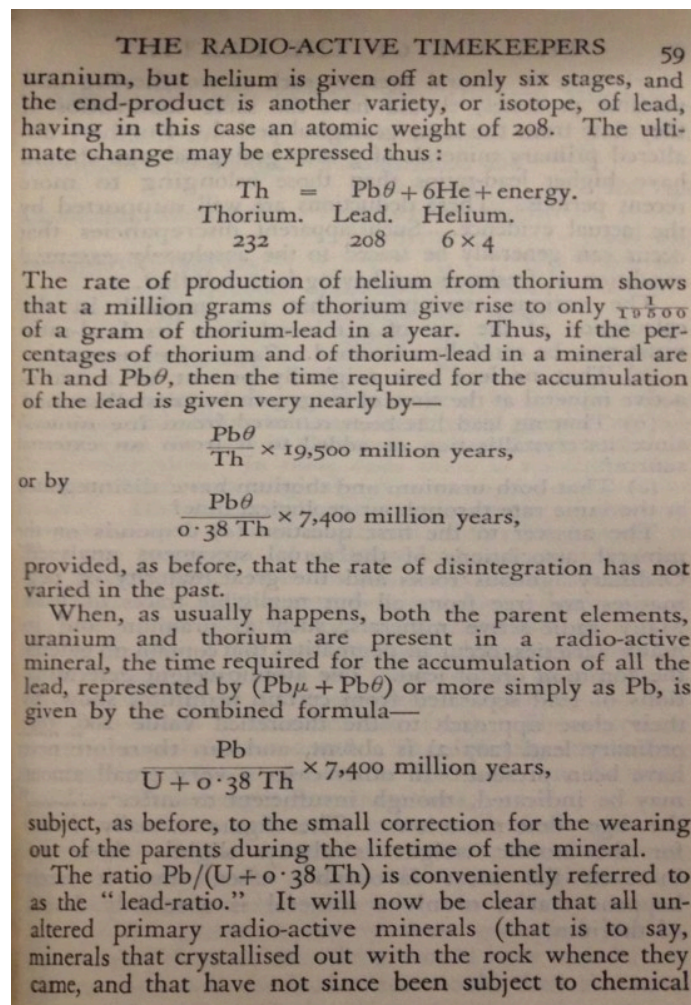


Figure 3.

The Age of The Earth: An Introduction to Geological Ideas, Arthur Holmes (ed.) (London: Ernest Benn, 1927[1913]), pp. 59. Digital image courtesy of Arthur Holmes / Ernst Benn.

Holmes proceeded to work with the physicist Frederick Soddy, who had discovered that elements exist in diverse isotopes. They worked together using mathematics to read complex sequences of radioactive decay from one isotope to another, occurring in diverse rock samples. From these legible sequences arose new “radio-metric” dating (Fig. 3). Holmes worked complex and elegant equations to put an age of 370 million years on a mineral in a Devonian Norwegian rock, astoundingly older than the extant estimated age of the earth at 100 million years.⁶ Three editions of Holmes’s book gave vivid and accessible accounts of this new vision of an abundant land, vast in time. The 1927 edition was part of the *Benn Sixpenny Library*, which was aimed at a general audience. The new research was well known in the public domain. From 1929, the BBC published *The Listener* as a weekly magazine and it covered the new geological breakthroughs (Nash wrote art criticism

and reviews for *The Listener* on a regular basis). The science section of the very first edition featured “Revolutionary Discoveries”, a text describing spontaneous radioactivity:

The very materials with which we are most familiar are found to be in constant flux, and are liable to change from one form to another. The atoms of matter had been thought to be permanent and stable ... unalterable foundation-stones of the material universe ... these atoms were found by brilliant experimenting to be not constant and inalterable at all: neither were they inert.⁷

The artist’s own book collection includes a copy of *The Mysterious Universe*, printed after a 1930 Rede Lecture given at the University of Cambridge by the British astrophysicist Sir James Jeans, and dedicated to “the new world of modern physics”. It details “matter and radiation” and “the diffraction of light and electrons”, and describes “a kaleidoscopic rearrangement of scientific thought”. The work of Rutherford and Soddy is set out: theories of “spontaneous disintegration”, “cosmic radiation”, X-rays, radioactive substances, and the disintegration of the radium atom.⁸

During the inter-war period, the science community was receptive to the concept of the land as being more complex, intricate, and legible than ever imagined—a land replete with new avenues for research. Amidst increasingly precise radiometric estimates at this time arose another equation which was solved: putting an age on the earth of 3 billion years.⁹ A historian of geology, Martin Rudwick, has noted the universal implications, not only for the earth itself but also for the earth in relation to the sun, the solar system, and the cosmos.¹⁰ He cites the geologist William Sollas, who remarked in 1921 that the geologist who before had been “bankrupt” in time, now finds himself suddenly transformed into “a capitalist with more millions in the bank than he knew how to dispose of.”¹¹

This was not the first occasion of geological revelation in the British context. Ruskin’s vision of landscape, which had been cast aside by the modern’s imperative, derives from the first insights of geology as they played out in the nineteenth century. Ruskin’s evangelical torsions tend to obscure his vital original aesthetics, which went hand in hand with the founding insights of geological science. The new science recognized, in the superpositions of the land, an earth that was quite removed from the theological narrative of a young anthropocentric earth of only 6,000 years, created for and simultaneous to man. Ruskin studied with William Buckland, the first reader in geology at Oxford. Buckland was opening a space for the new science at a university that was principally dedicated to the training of clergymen. In his

Modern Painters (1843–1860), Ruskin urged artists to study geology. His interest in Turner was as a painter of vital new geological truth, and of *The Fall of the Tees*, he said: “With this drawing before him the geologist could give a lecture upon the whole system of aqueous erosion” (Fig. 4).¹²



Figure 4.

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Fall of the Tees, Yorkshire*, 1825–26, watercolour over pencil on wove paper, 27.9 x 38 cm. Collection of Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields (1997.141). Digital image courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.

William Blake’s poetic visions are also replete with imagery of British rocks, mountains, and ancient sites. Noah Heringman describes Blake’s orientation towards the primordial matter of the land, his connections to the geologist George Cumberland, and how “Blake’s poetry shares the cosmological interest of geology, both registering and critiquing the wonder provoked by geological forms and processes.”¹³ Going back further, to the seventeenth century, the footwork between poetic and scientific work on the geological landscape in the British context has been explored by the historian Stephen Gould, who foregrounds the role of Thomas Burnet’s 1681 *Sacred Theory of the Earth* in instigating geological thought, to contradict “whiggish” accounts of geological history, which pit rational empiricism against the theological and poetic.¹⁴

Unseen Landscapes

Throughout the British landscape tradition, there is an impetus to devise new strategies to visualize previously unknown or unseen dimensions of the land. This could be described as the geological impetus. Nash certainly took an active interest in mysterious physical phenomena.¹⁵ In his contribution to the book *Unit One: The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture*, which presented the work of the artists' group founded by Nash, he refers to his imaginative research in the "hidden" land.¹⁶ He recalls the hidden land that is gleaned in the work of Turner, Blake's ancient Britain, Albion, and the *renewed* task of the landscape artist. Nash's endeavours have often been read as Blakean, as seeking the spirit of the land or place, the genius loci. In this, and in a recent neo-romantic reading, Nash's hidden land is envisaged as a spiritual sphere and realm of the mind, theological, and connected to Christian Science's "soaring rhetoric of spirit over the material world".¹⁷ A reading with geological context can pull Nash's unseen land back to a material dimension, less emanating spirit of place and more as land that is literally emanating radioactivity.

In 1927, Holmes described a magnificent unseen earth, veined with radioactive minerals from Ceylon to St Ives, Katanga to the Mourne Mountains. He detailed the high-velocity ejections of electrically charged helium atoms that are Alpha "rays", long and intricate patterns of transformations that can be traced, "each accompanied by an explosive liberation of energy".¹⁸ These revolutionary discoveries were described as "the processes going on in a garden".¹⁹ Nash's *Unseen Landscape* too, as he describes in his May 1938 article of the same name for *Country Life* magazine, is a land of "stones, bones, empty fields ... back gardens" alive with new intrigue and offering "endless possibilities of fresh adventure". His is a view of land seething with processes of decay and transformation: petrified forests, bleached objects, blanched springs and branches, "mutilated by shafts of light". It is not a residual landscape, but one with the "terrific animation" of the landscape of the white horse, flickering as the eye moves across it, traversed by the radiance of the sun and the moon, "beating down on glinting white"²⁰ (Fig. 5, Fig. 6, Fig. 7).



Figure 6.

Paul Nash, *Stone Forest*, 1937, pencil, black chalk, and watercolour on paper, 58.7 x 40 cm. Collection of The Whitworth, University of Manchester (D.1950.10). Digital image courtesy of University of Manchester.



Figure 7.

Paul Nash, Study for Landscape of Bleached Objects, 1934, watercolour and pencil on paper, 28.4 x 39.4 cm. Collection of The Daniel Katz Gallery, London. Digital image courtesy of The Daniel Katz Gallery.

This is not a Victorian, theological, unseen land, read and presented as a display of moral insight. Nor is it a lost spiritual origin: a “fallen” materiality, a denuded, romantic land. In the same text, Nash distinguishes his “first” vision of the “wild privacy” of this unseen landscape from its romantic and theological forebears, describing it as “neither moral nor sentimental nor literary” in character. The unseen landscapes that Nash envisages, he reconfirms, “are not part of the unseen in a psychic sense ... They belong to the world that lies, visibly, about us.” They are “The Invisible World(s)” of the type portrayed by the science and geology books that Nash owned: “Cities built of Microscopic Shells”; “The Air and its Corpuscles”; or the electric processes of “The Aurora Borealis seen from the Arctic Sea”.²¹ Nash’s hidden lands are “unseen merely because they are not perceived; only in that way can they be regarded as ‘invisible’.”²² They are a materiality that is not visible to the unaided eye.

In 1926, Holmes described his research, citing Swinburne: “man can see through the years flowing round him, the law lying under the years”²³ (Fig. 8). A crucial observation of the new geological discovery was that radioactive decay takes place in minerals at rates that are constant throughout deep time. The discovery of an Earth emitting radioactivity was also a discovery of intricate and legible sequences and patterns. Holmes describes radium:

Now if an atom of radium loses an atom of helium and part of its hidden store of energy, the atom that remains must be transformed into something different. Close examination revealed the genesis of a new element, as gas known as radium-emanation. This in turn breaks down, and in its place another element, Radium A arises. A long succession of similar transformations can be traced.²⁴

Nash's interest in pattern has recently been described by Inga Fraser as a search for order, and in line with a mediumistic conception of the land as offering "a glimpse of another metaphysical reality".²⁵ Yet Nash's work can also be read as dealing with the literal and immanent geological appearance of order and pattern. It appears to see, for the first time, a land infused with design of an intricacy quite beyond belief—an unseen material land, that in its immanent self radiates transcendence.



Figure 8.

Arthur Holmes, Radium Uncovers New Clues to Earth's Age, published in *The New York Times*, 6 June 1926, Sect IX, pp. 4f.

One of Nash's natural science books, *The Worship of Nature* by James George Frazer, is a volume which from its opening pages contemplates atoms and electrons, "the imperceptible particles of matter", with reference to works by

Soddy and by the physicist William Bragg, whose 1912 *Studies in Radioactivity* preceded his use of X-rays to analyse crystal structure. Nash marked the margin of the text adjacent to an idea that resonates with his exploration of pattern, and the tendency of his work to manifest seamlessness between abstract and material modalities, with no apparent contradiction between these modes: “both theories, the materialistic and the spiritualistic, aim at explaining the reality of a world beyond the immediate data of sense.” ²⁶

Nash made streams of photographs observing and visualizing sequences and patterns made “by design” and otherwise: the ploughed earth, a cobbled road, the rhythms of a dry stonewall, the surface of the sea (Fig. 9, Fig. 10, Fig. 11, Fig. 12). The photographs bestow these overlooked forms of the earth with new intrigue, signalling the discovery of long “invisible” processes. Nash’s preferred medium to capture these patterns is apposite: a chapter in Holmes’ *The Age of the Earth* addressing radioactivity opens by describing the photographic plate and Henri Becquerel’s discovery of emanation. Holmes writes that, “uranium salts and minerals give out invisible rays which are capable of penetrating black paper and of revealing their existence by their effect on a photographic plate wrapped within it.” ²⁷



Figure 9.

Paul Nash, The coast at Kimmeridge, Dorset, ca. 1935-1936, black and white negative, 8.9 x 12 cm. Tate Archive Collection (TGA 7050PH/947). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).



Figure 10.

Paul Nash, Kimmeridge Bay (double exposure), unknown date, black and white negative, 8.2 x 12.1 cm. Tate Archive Collection (TGA 7050PH/950). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).



Figure 11.

Paul Nash, A stone wall, Worth Matravers, unknown date, black and white negative, 8.6 x 12.4 cm. Tate Archive Collection (TGA 7050PH/1234). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).



Figure 12.

Paul Nash, Wave breaking on Chesil Beach, Dorset, 1935, black and white negative, 8 x 12.5 cm. Tate Archive Collection (TGA 7050PH/369). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).

There is a darker aspect here too: in 1938, German scientists split the nucleus of a Uranium atom freeing enormous explosions of energy. The British and American collaboration, *The Manhattan Project*, worked to develop an atomic bomb and the spectre of this invention loomed in the public imagination. A 1939 letter to *The Times* speculated on the threat of “a death ray; some super-atomic bomb”.²⁸ One journalist described how the weapon, used by the enemy, “might destroy the whole world—even Germany!”²⁹ The very same discoveries that had animated the earth were pointing towards a “dreadful miracle” (Nash’s words) to which Nash alludes in his 1945 *Flight of the Magnolia*.³⁰ On 7 August 1945, *The Times* described how scientists were harnessing the “basic power of the universe”, or to use Truman’s phrase, “the force from which the sun draws its power”. Viewed with this contemporary understanding of ubiquitous radiation in mind, a set of Nash’s 1940s landscapes—saturated as they are in colour and viscous rays—seem to evoke the legion processes of the radiating sun and land (Fig. 13, Fig. 14, Fig. 15).



Figure 13.

Paul Nash, *Flight of the Magnolia*, 1944, oil on canvas, 51.1 x 76.2 cm. Collection of Tate (T07552). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).



Figure 14.

Paul Nash, *Sunflower and Sun*, 1942, oil on canvas, 51.1 x 76.5 cm. Collection of Art Gallery of New South Wales (74350). Digital image courtesy of Art Gallery of New South Wales | Photo: Brenton McGeachie.



Figure 15.

Paul Nash, *Solstice of the Sunflower*, 1945, oil on canvas, 71.3 x 91.4 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Canada (5885). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery of Canada.

The Real Object

The artist's engagement with the rediscovered land and earth can be traced in his work with found objects. In 1936, Nash cited and reflected on a review of his sculpture *Found Object Interpreted*, exhibited that year as part of the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London, which it described as, "an awkward object to have knocking around in the unconscious". "From that little remark," Nash retorted in *The Architectural Review*, "anyone might say to himself, oh, so that is what Mr Nash finds in his unconscious; whereas, actually, I found it on the Romney Marsh."³¹ Nash's prosaic response is not only a joke, and I propose that it should be heard in its fullest geological sense: Nash's found object and unconscious thoughts derive not from the individual psyche, but from the geological land.

André Breton described the surrealist object as deriving from dreams or the waking unconscious. He celebrated the capacity of such objects to unleash and vitalize powers of invention, and to "depreciate those objects of 'usefulness' which clutter the so called real world".³² In his 1937 essay, "The Crisis of the Object", Breton describes the disruptive, perturbing potential of surreal objects in the problematic context of modern rationality and its "unprecedented desire to objectify". He alludes to the "marvellous" quality

of such disruption, derived from dream and the unconscious, as distinct from the marvellous impulse of romanticism, which he calls “the urge to coalesce the mind and the tangible world, which led to the inauguration of the rationalist era.”³³ Breton was interested in an experience of the marvellous that is not romantic, theological, and ontological, but rather one that is epistemological, deriving from the psyche and its irrational dimension as described by Freud. The subjective mind is the source of potential, transformation, and revolution as embodied in Breton’s object.

By contrast, Nash’s marvellous objects, his animate bleached stones, illuminated monoliths and minerals, his nests of the phoenix rising, derive from far beyond the limits of the subject and psyche (Fig. 16, Fig. 17). In the mid-1930s, Nash resided in Dorset, on the Jurassic coast of England, over an extended period and his experimental work with objects was exuberant. He collected stone, flint, driftwood, objects foremost derived from the processes of the land, which he handled, studied, posed, and documented. Dorset was a revelation for Nash, as presented in the artist’s 1936 *Dorset: Shell Guide*, one of a series produced for motorists, which closely articulates his sense of the landscape as a geological and surrealist object. In it, he describes seeing “Charlbury at twilight—cut against the afterglow, as to experience an almost unnerving feeling of the latent force of the past.”³⁴



Figure 16.

Paul Nash, *Landscape of Bleached Objects*, 1934, oil on canvas, 62 x 74.7 cm. Collection of Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (M1994/7). Digital image courtesy of Auckland Art Gallery.



Figure 17.

Paul Nash, *Nest of The Phoenix*, 1937-38, oil on canvas, 87.6 x 83.8 cm. Collection of Art Gallery of Western Australia (1977/00P1). Digital image courtesy of Art Gallery of Western Australia.

The guide is a vivid encounter with vast, uncanny time and matter whose scale dwarfs that of the human experience. Its cover and endpapers feature astonishing coastal formations and montages created by Nash of fish fossils lifted from Purbeck Limestone, alongside the fossil of a *Dapedius*, an extinct primitive ray-finned fish, that had been found at Lyme Regis. The images accentuate a marvellous confusion between nature and design. Also featured in the Guide are the patterned head of an adder, the scaled-up form and markings of a pine hawk moth, and a monstrous head of an ichthyosaurus (Fig. 18, Fig. 19, Fig. 20, Fig. 21, Fig. 22, Fig. 23). The *Dorset: Shell Guide* is replete with the fantastic natural forms of the Jurassic coast: the folded limestone strata of Stair Hole, the implausible land formations of Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door, and Chesil bank, which were in his words, “the result of a mystical judgement called the law of compensation”.³⁵

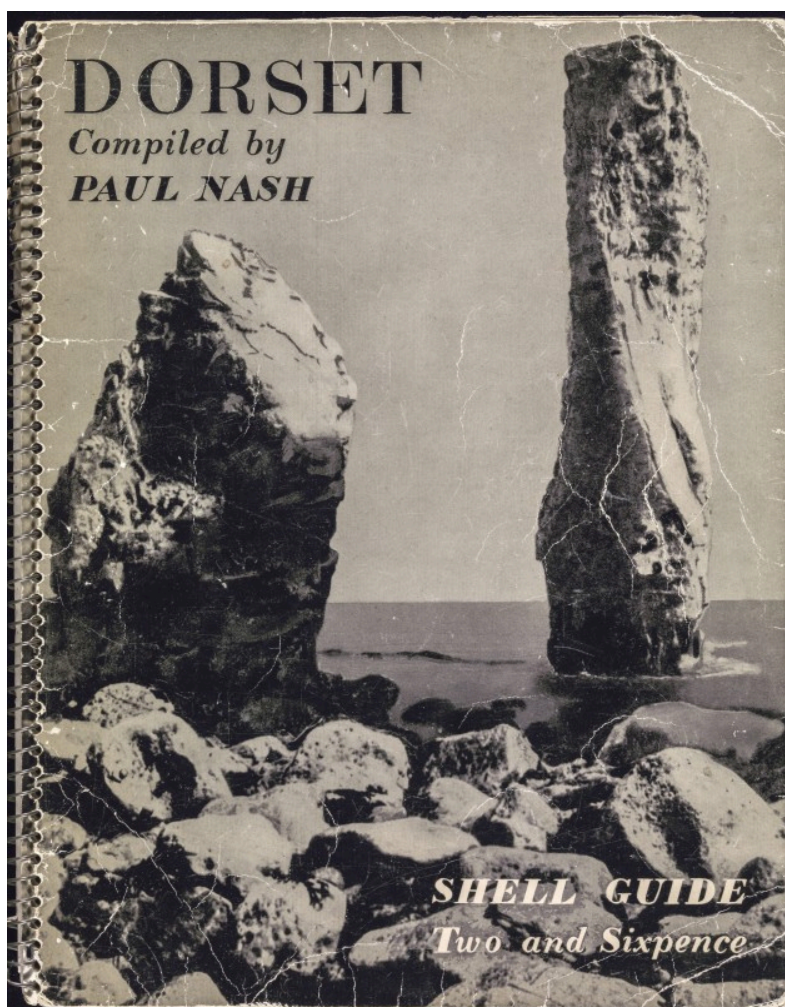


Figure 18.

Paul Nash, Dorset: Shell Guide, front cover, 1936. Tate Archive Collection (TGA/964/1/16).

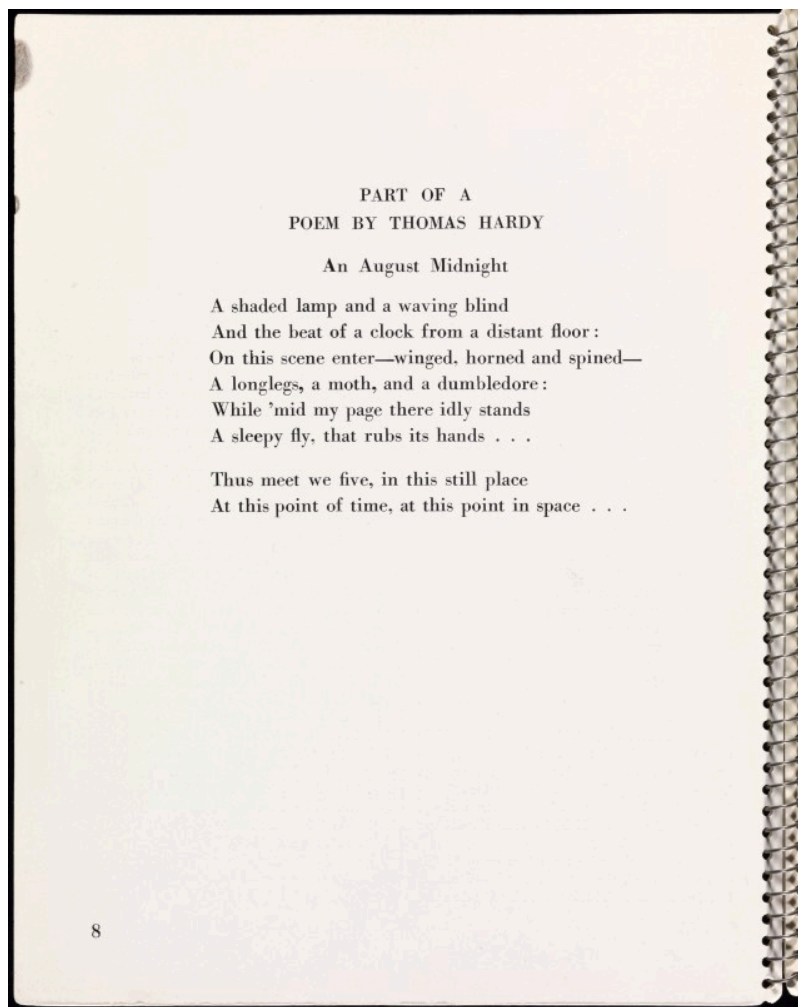


Figure 19.

Paul Nash, Dorset: Shell Guide, p. 8, 1936. Tate Archive Collection (TGA/964/1/16).

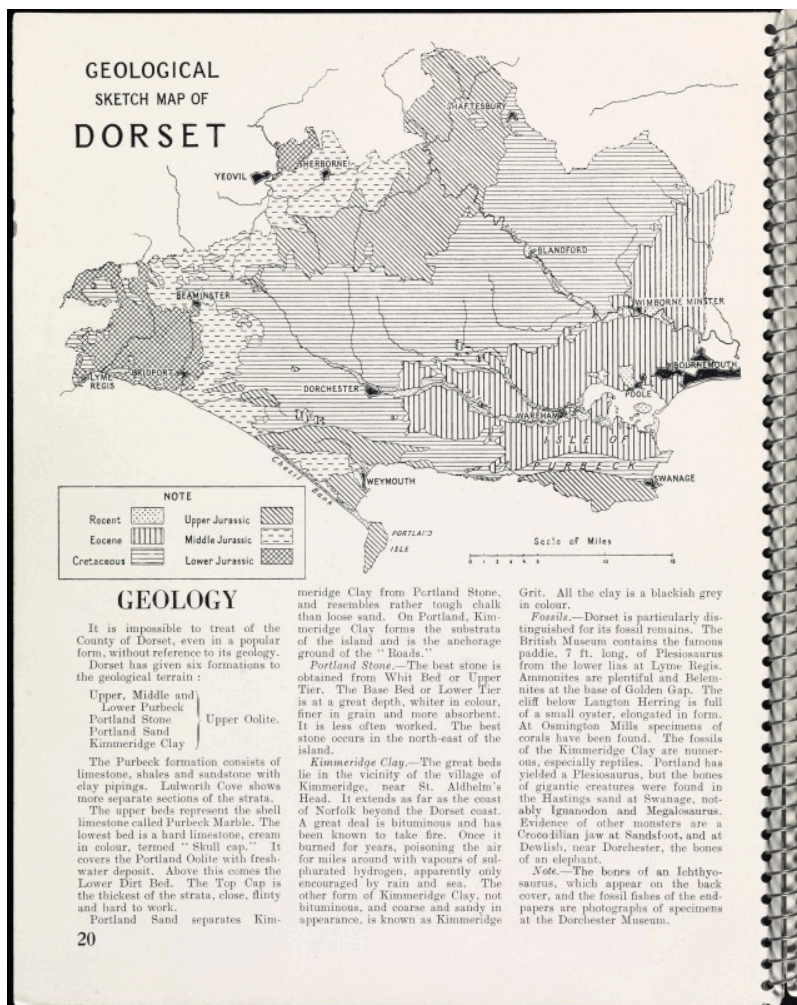


Figure 20.

Paul Nash, Dorset: Shell Guide, p. 20, 1936. Tate Archive Collection (TGA/964/1/16).

wear in youth a livery of black and white of unusual brilliance. There are grass snakes, too, often of some size, and slow-worms, and more than one species of newt and frog and toad, including the natter-jack toad.

Unfamiliar and interesting marine mammals and fishes have been recorded on the Dorset coast. Mr. R. I. Pocock, F.R.S., tells me that he noted lately a pair of killer whales in Lyme Bay. Captures are reported off the Chesil Beach of the fin whale, the blue shark, the thresher shark, the electric ray, the sun fish, the boar fish and the sea devil. Gaudily coloured

wrasse take the angler's bait at St. Aldhelm's Head, where good harvest of edible species may also be had with the line. Bass are caught with rod and line from the rocks. Mackerel and red mullet also frequent the coast. Chapman's Pool is noted for lobsters, and prawns may be captured in Studland Bay. Shell Bay at Studland is famed for the variety and beauty of the shells that are gathered there. In Dorset streams there are salmon and trout in abundance.

Conspicuous among mammals are foxes, which abound in the county, badgers, which are not uncommon at Rempstone and elsewhere, and otters, who are well known as rovers and may be encountered in any suitable locality. There are fallow deer as well as roe deer in fair numbers. In the case of the latter species it is probable that none of these engaging inhabitants of our woodlands are traceable to an aboriginal stock, but derive from individuals known to have been brought from Scotland to Milton Abbas in 1800. The herd of Japanese deer (*Sika nippon*) which haunts the woods around Poole harbour descends from forebears who reached the mainland by swimming from Branksea Island, where they were introduced in the nineteenth century. Among the delights of Dorset must not be omitted that sweetest of all beasts, the red squirrel, who has hitherto escaped extermination by his grey American cousin. A fine breed of horned sheep is peculiar to Dorset.



Above: The head of an *Ichthyosaurus* in the Dorchester Museum.
Opposite: A pine hawk moth from the Russell Collection.

Figure 21.

Paul Nash, Dorset: Shell Guide, p. 37, 1936. Tate Archive Collection (TGA/964/1/16).

figuration and the luminous quality of its painting makes it a creature of exciting loveliness as it alights in sunshine on bramble or buddleia. One of the few remaining haunts of the marsh fritillary (*M. aurinia*) is in the Blandford neighbourhood, where it paradoxically frequents the dry ground of a downland hilltop.

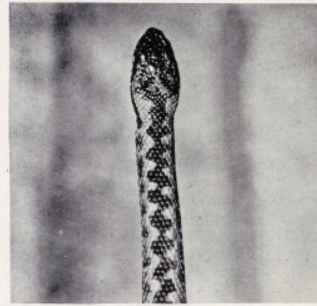
The moth population of Dorset is probably unmatched in this country. Portland, Swanage, Studland, Cranborne Chase are among the richest localities. Glanville's Wootton, too, and Bloxworth are classical names to entomologists. Of two species bearing Dorset names the "Portland Ribbon Wave" (*P. degeneraria*) makes the bleak cliffs of Portland its home. The "Portland Moth" (*A. praeceps*), with its jewelled tints of silvery green with dash of pink, takes its name not from the Isle but from the Duchess of Portland, who first reared it in England. It is met with somewhat rarely on sandhills by the sea. The "Bloxworth Snout" (*H. obitalis*) exists only in two British specimens, one of them taken on that heath.

The "Speckled Footman" (*G. cribrum*) is confined almost exclusively to this county, and there to the heathland round Poole harbour. The presence of the "Reed Leopard" (*P. castanea*), dim, remote and lonely, has but lately become known in Dorset, upon a surviving parcel of primitive fenland. There from time immemorial it has lived, far from its fellows in the fen country, developing in isolation a distinctive race of lesser form. The "Pine Hawk" (*H. pinastri*), too, has but lately been discovered in Dorset, a superbly designed moth with long swift wings striped and dappled in warm monochrome of grey to match the pine trunks. "Bond's Wainscot" (*T. bondi*) occurs hardly elsewhere in this country but on the western coastland of Dorset. The rare "White Speck" (*A. unipuncta*) has been taken at Swanage, also a locality for its scarce kinsmen the "Delicate" (*A. vitellina*) and the "White Spot" (*A. albiguttata*). One of only two known British specimens of *Catocala electa*, of the splendid red underwing family, appeared in a wasp-trap at Corfe Castle. Portland and Swanage are the principal localities for the "Beautiful Gothic" (*H. hispidus*). The "Brindled Ochre" (*D. templi*), the "Feathered Ranunculus" (*E. lichenea*) and the "Feathered Brindle" (*A. australis*) are other interesting moths inhabiting the Dorset coast.

The "Great Green Grasshopper" (*Phasgonura viridissima*), conspicuous for size and emerald translucence, is prevalent in the coastal region. It will often

be seen on the moth collector's sugar, for it has a relish for the moth flesh as well as for the sweetness afforded. It should be handled with care, for it bites sharply and will draw blood. The "Little House Spider" (*Pholcus phalangoides*) thrives only in the south-western portion of this country. It makes Dorset its easterly limit and lives in houses and outhouses there.

The "Dorset Heath" (*Erica ciliaris*) is one of the loveliest as well as one of the rarest of our native plants. Its flowers of delicate coral pink are nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long, and in sheltered places it grows in fine rounded bushes to a height of from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 feet. Its home is in swampy places by the inlets invading the great Dorset heathland from Poole Harbour. A snow-white (albino) variety of great beauty is occasionally met with. The "Marsh Gentian" (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*), with its deep blue flowers striped with green, is a scarce and lovely plant that frequents marshes on the heathland. Purbeck is richer than any other area in the country in species of orchis, some of them of great rarity. Spider and bee orchises are a delight of the downland. Wild tulips are met with at Kimmeridge. "Sea Lavender" and "Sea Asters" may be found respectively on the margin of Poole harbour and on the cliffs. And there is a wealth of commoner plants. A visit to Chapman's Pool in early summer will reveal a sight of singular beauty where the undercliff is radiantly clothed with bluebell and primrose, that strangely contrast with the stern rock wall overhanging.



Head of an adder

Figure 22.

Paul Nash, Dorset: Shell Guide, p. 39, 1936. Tate Archive Collection (TGA/964/1/16).



Figure 23.

Paul Nash, Dorset: Shell Guide, back cover, 1936. Tate Archive Collection (TGA/964/1/16).

A new link, articulated by Sarah Fill, between the *Dorset: Shell Guide* and the materialism of Georges Bataille aids the task of interpreting it in a geological context.³⁶ Bataille, the “debaser” of Surrealism, produced the journal *Documents* from 1929–1930, and pursued an alternate trajectory to Bretonian Surrealism. In his view, Breton’s notion of human irrationality was idealizing and sublimated the base, perverse, and violent—a material irrationality into which he ventured.³⁷ Nash too was interested in this “underside”, a corrective to the bias of Bretonian Surrealism, and he was engaged with *Documents*.³⁸ *Documents* and the *Dorset: Shell Guide* have been described as sharing an anti-humanist sentiment. In the words of Sarah Fill, Nash’s guide made “the nation’s ancestors appear as primitive monsters”.³⁹

Nash's proposed anti-humanism, or rather his venturing beyond the bounds of an anthropocentric surrealist marvellous, might be read in a way that is mindful of the artist's repeated efforts to distinguish his approach from those centred around the Freudian unconscious. The historian Stephen Gould has noted that Freud "in one of history's least modest pronouncements", describes a set of "great outrages" upon the "naïve self-love" of humanity. The first was "the realization that the earth was not the centre of the universe, the second, relegation to a descent from the animal world; the third, Freud's own discovery, the loss of the illusion that we at least possessed rational minds." He points out that this neglects another great outrage—the displacement of the human from the centre of the temporal realm by the discovery of deep time.⁴⁰

Bataille's explorations revel in Freud's theory and its base material extrapolations, yet Nash's encounters with objects are better understood amidst the expanses of deep time and the radioactivity of the material land. To the chance encounter of the surrealist psyche, its coming revolution derived from the fleeting experience of the human unconscious, Nash brings the "sublimated" or rationally marginalized reality of a colossal geological time. The uncanny of the *Dorset: Shell Guide* derives from the accident of encountering a scintillating geological real.

The new land was also understood as an active chronometer with regular and even rhythm—its minerals "timekeepers of the earth'. Nash opens his guide to the animate "face of Dorset" in metre, with an excerpt from Thomas Hardy's *An August Midnight*:

A shaded lamp and a waving blind And the beat of a clock from a distant floor: On this scene enter—winged, horned and spined— A longlegs, a moth, and a Dumbledore: While 'mid my page there idly stands A Sleepy fly, that runs its hands ... Thus meet we five in this still place At this point of time, at this point in space ...

Nash's May 1937 article for *Country Life*, titled "The Life of the Inanimate Object", channels a history of perceiving the pulse of the land, citing the Psalms of David: "The mountains skipped like rams and the little hills like lambs".⁴¹

Mary Ann Doane describes the increasing reification and standardization of time during the early twentieth century, the "temporal demand" of modernity.⁴² As this abstracted demand looms large and the contingency of the surrealist object is but an ephemeral release from it, Nash's found object, alive with the beat of real time, derives from far beyond any such duality.⁴³

It is a vision that does not accord with the anthropocentric time of modernity, and exceeds the chance encounter. Nash's marvellous is not ephemeral, conditioned by the subjective unconscious—it is infinite.

In grappling with this marvellous, Nash's work is ontological enquiry and description, hand in hand with the geologist whose concerns and queries are shared. Nash's *Equivalents for the Megaliths*, when read in relation to questions about the age of the Earth, and geophysical efforts to solve arcane equations that might date primordial rocks, seems to present such stones with the elegance of a solved mathematical problem. This origin painting has none of the drama or turmoil of the nineteenth-century deluge scenes produced by Nash's forebears, at a time of attempts to reconcile the biblical creation narrative of the great flood with the founding insights of geology. In place of catastrophic diluvial forces and unwitting human figures, Nash's painting alludes to the origin as a balanced equation, discerned by virtuoso human perception. It has the "irrational poise" of Nash's "poised objects", in possession of exquisite and improbable design, a quality of balance that teeters on the brink ([Fig. 1](#), [Fig. 24](#)).



Figure 24.

Paul Nash, *Poised Objects*, 1932, pencil, chalk, and watercolour on paper, 55.9 x 37.5 cm. Collection of St Anne's College, Oxford. Digital image courtesy of The Principal and Fellows of St Anne's College, Oxford | Photo: Keith Barnes.

The work indicates a vertiginous shift of dimensions, such that time and space are stretched, enlarged, flattened, transformed. The solid modern monoliths appear here from a high and scaled-back perspective as two-dimensional remains in the land, equivalent to the megaliths amidst a vast new timescale. The scene appears as if from some distant time or space, wherein modern art objects, human remains of mysterious ritual value, stand the land. Herein, the work not only poses as archaeological and geological material, it also hints at its own status being actual geological material; the abstraction of the work of art is construed as part of material geological reality.

What is the position of the human in this encounter? Does the archaeological nature of these megaliths imply a potential future without a human vantage point? The work is a captivating geological problem and mathematical hieroglyph. As does Nash's oeuvre more broadly, it makes a virtue of the curiosity that sustains the adventure of the guessing mind:

Life runs on, not cut and dried like some horrible tobacco the Padre smokes, or locked away in an abstract like a fly in amber. But flowing backwards and forwards and throughout: a complex maze of associations which keep the mind guessing, and imagination hovering. ⁴⁴

The Flightless Bird

To conclude, I aim to solve one rich geological curiosity among many posed by Nash's oeuvre. Nash's *Nest of Wild Stones* and his 1937 written piece of the same name are characteristically evocative of the connections between stones, mathematical harmony, and deep time (Fig. 25). Nash says of the stones in question:

One may find a pair almost side by side. Inseparable compliments, in true relation ... I found them that afternoon on the Sussex Downs, during an attempt to remember whether Edward James lived at East or West Dean. That problem was not then solved, but so soon as my stones came into my hands their equation was solved and they were united forever. ⁴⁵

Another passage, in Nash's "Unseen Landscapes", illuminates the title of the work: he refers to "the nests of giant birds ... scattered groups of fantastic nests ... a sanctuary for Moas." ⁴⁶ The Moa is a giant flightless bird, extinct, that once roamed and dominated the forests of New Zealand.



Figure 25.

Paul Nash, *The Nest of Wild Stones*, 1937, watercolour and pencil on paper, 37.1 x 55 cm. Collection of Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre (AC 30). Digital image courtesy of Arts Council Collection.



Figure 26.

Moa Gizzard Stones, Collection of Thames Mineralogical Museum, Coromandel, New Zealand.

Elsewhere, in William Corliss' *Unknown Earth: A Handbook of Geological Enigmas*, a striking discovery of stones is described, with words from Professor Lee, of the Geological Survey, first published in *Science*, in 1924:

Little heaps of semi-precious stones, scattered over the plains and hills. Nest-like enigmas, which, following investigation are understood to have been collections by extinct birds for use to grind food in the gizzard. Where it lay down to die at last, the pebbles endured after even its bones had disappeared. Hence the little heaps of rounded chalcedony, quartz, chert, jasper and quartzite (Fig. 26).

The extraordinary discovery of the precious stones of the Moa captivated Lee, who remarks on:

the good judgment of these extinct birds in choosing jewel stones for use in their lapidary mills. By judicious selection of material, these first families among diamond cutters handed down lasting memorials to admiring posterity.⁴⁷

Nash's "Nest of Wild Stones" too is marvellous geological enigma, legible stones, deciphered in the field, alive with mathematics and the turn of a conjuror's hand.

In a context where geophysicists read the startling radioactivity of the land and worked mathematical equations to put a vastly ancient and sensational new age on the rocks of the earth, Nash's landscape works, fraught with mathematical problems, equations, stones and bones, resonate afresh, beyond the confines of the Modern. Nash's work poses as a geological problem, implicating the art works as vital geological remains and training the eye of the beholder to marvellous geological mystery. In describing and adventuring in a new geological consciousness, alongside empirical geology, Nash engages with an effable geological reality, channelling and revitalizing a British tradition. Nash's landscapes are prescient of and suggestive to new modes of engagement in the current context of geological discovery, of a geological age of man, and the landscape now.

Footnotes

- 1 Paul Nash, "Contribution to Unit One", in Andrew Causey (ed.), *Paul Nash: Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 107-110.
- 2 I make this argument at greater length in Anna Reid, "The Nest of Wild Stones: Paul Nash's Geological Realism", *Visual Culture in Britain* 19, no. 2 (2018): 189-215.

- 3 Emma Chambers, "Introduction", in Emma Chambers (ed.), *Paul Nash* (London: Tate, 2016), 11.
- 4 Charles Harrison, "England's Climate", in Brian Allen (ed.), *Studies in British Art: Towards a Modern Art World* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 207–223.
- 5 The Book of Job cited in Arthur Holmes, "The Radioactive Timekeepers of the Rocks", in Arthur Holmes (ed.), *The Age of The Earth: An Introduction to Geological Ideas* (London: Ernest Benn, 1927 [1913]), 55–75.
- 6 Martin Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History: How It was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 235–241.
- 7 Oliver Lodge, "Revolutionary Discoveries", *The Listener*, 16 January 1929, Science section, 11.
- 8 James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930).
- 9 The American geochemist, Clair Patterson arrived at 4.5 billion years in 1953—this radiometric date still stands as the most accurate.
- 10 Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, 235–241.
- 11 Words spoken by Sollas and recorded in: J.W.S. Rayleigh, William Sollas, J.W. Gregory, and Harold Jeffreys "The Age of the Earth", *Nature* 108, 13 October 1921, 217–218.
- 12 Rebecca Bedell, "The History of The Earth: Darwin, Geology and Landscape Art", in Diana Donald and Jane Munro (eds), *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Arts* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 49–77.
- 13 Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 94–137.
- 14 Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 4–15.
- 15 For example, of the books collected by Nash, *The Universe* by Félix Archimède Pouchet is an in depth guide to the principles of geology; *The Atmosphere* by Camille Flammarion is an illustrated exploration of such phenomena as sun halos, snow crystals, the refraction of light through raindrops or emanations of phosphoretted hydrogen gas, and an in-depth description of the geomorphic processes of the wind, atmospheric temperature, "water-clouds-rain" and thunderstorms; *The Heavens* by Amédée Guillemin details processes of tides, eclipses, gravity, and meteoric form; Nash arranged, illustrated, and retained a "Sun Calendar" for the year 1920.
- 16 Nash, "Contribution to Unit One".
- 17 David Mellor, "A Spectral Modernity", in Emma Chambers (ed.), *Paul Nash* (London: Tate, 2016), 23–33.
- 18 Holmes, "The Radioactive Timekeepers of the Rocks".
- 19 Lodge, "Revolutionary Discoveries".
- 20 Paul Nash, "Unseen Landscapes", in Herbert Read (ed.), *Outline, an Autobiography and Other Writings* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), 229–231.
- 21 Félix Archimède Pouchet, *The Universe (or the Infinitely Great and the Infinitely Little)* (London: Blackie and Son, 1885), see, for example, 3–38, 502–510, and 537.
- 22 Nash, "Unseen Landscapes".
- 23 Arthur Holmes, "Radium Uncovers New Clues to Earth's Age", *The New York Times*, 6 June 1926.
- 24 Holmes, "The Radioactive Timekeepers of the Rocks".
- 25 Inga Fraser, "'From a Sheet of Paper to the Sky': Pattern in the Work of Paul Nash", in Emma Chambers (ed.), *Paul Nash* (London: Tate, 2016), 59–67.
- 26 James George Frazer, *The Worship of Nature*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co, 1926).
- 27 Holmes, "The Radioactive Timekeepers of the Rocks".
- 28 Anonymous (civilian), "The New Weapon", *The Times*, 28 September 1939.
- 29 "That Dreadful Atom Bomb", *Press and Journal*, 20 August 1943.
- 30 Paul Nash, "Aerial Flowers," in Herbert Read (ed.), *Outline, an Autobiography and Other Writings* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), 258–265.
- 31 Paul Nash, "The Object", *The Architectural Review* (November 1936): 207–208.
- 32 André Breton, "The Crisis of the Object", in Myfanwy Evans (ed.), *The Painter's Object* (London: Gerald Howe, 1937), 275–280.
- 33 Breton, "The Crisis of the Object".
- 34 Paul Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide* (London: Architectural Press, 1936).
- 35 Nash, *Dorset*.
- 36 Sarah Fill, "Paul Nash Surrealism and Prehistoric Dorset", in Emma Chambers (ed.), *Paul Nash* (London: Tate, 2016), 49–57.
- 37 Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (eds), *Undercover Surrealism Georges Bataille and Documents* (London: Haywood Gallery, 2006).

- 38 Sarah Fill describes how Bataille's thought reached Nash via Edward Burra, in Sarah Fill, "Paul Nash Surrealism and Prehistoric Dorset", 51.
- 39 Fill, "Paul Nash Surrealism and Prehistoric Dorset".
- 40 Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*, 1–3.
- 41 Paul Nash, "The Life of the Inanimate Object", in Andrew Causey (ed.), *Paul Nash: Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 137–139.
- 42 Symptomatic is Frederick W. Taylor's subjecting of the human body to temporal management, see Mary Anne Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time, Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 2–11.
- 43 Nash, "Unseen Landscapes".
- 44 Paul Nash, "The Nest of Wild Stones", in Myfanwy Evans (ed.), *The Painter's Object* (London: Gerald Howe, 1937), 38–40.
- 45 Nash, "The Nest of Wild Stones".
- 46 Nash, "Unseen Landscapes".
- 47 William R. Corliss, *Unknown Earth: A Handbook of Geological Enigmas*, (Glen Arm, MD: The Sourcebook Project, 1980), 474.

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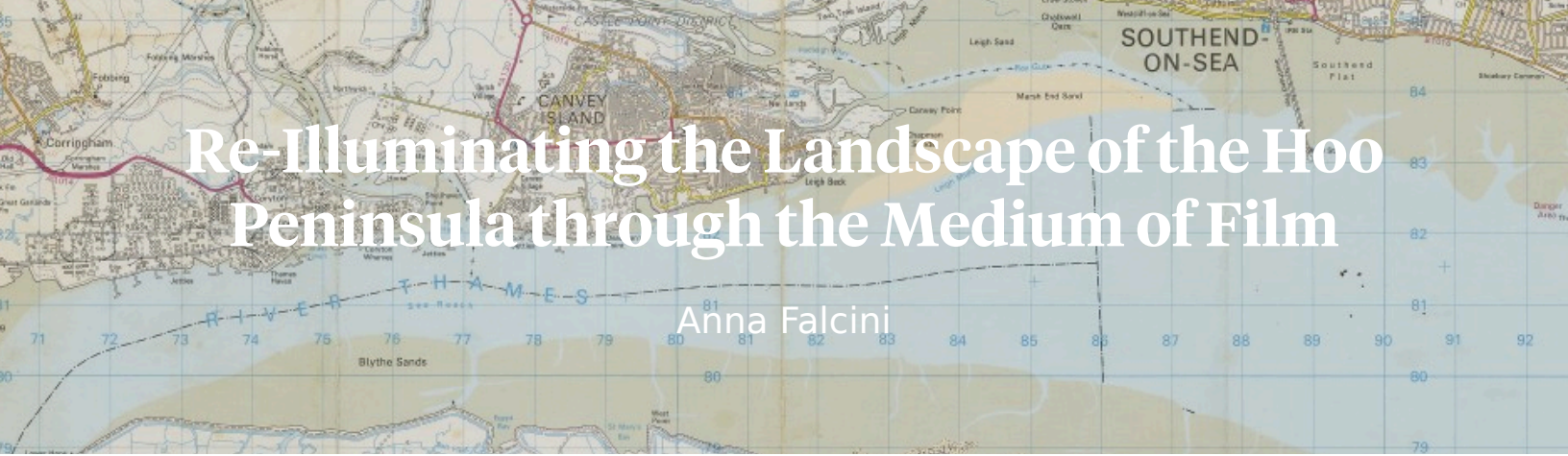
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Re-Illuminating the Landscape of the Hoo Peninsula through the Medium of Film

Anna Falcini

Abstract

This article traces the life of a representationally elusive and stubborn landscape, the Hoo Peninsula in Kent, through various forms of visual culture. Beginning with its invisibility during the great period of landscape painting in England, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it examines how the Hoo Peninsula nevertheless appears multiple times in film during the twentieth century. Drawing on the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Patrick Keiller, and Giuliana Bruno, it explores how the unique qualities of film as a medium have captured the mysterious and unstable nature of the Hoo Peninsula. It similarly shows that the very unpalatability of the marshy and sometimes dangerous landscape, which precluded it as a subject of traditional landscape painting, enshrouded it in a degree of invisibility that film directors later fruitfully exploited in both documentary and fictional film projects.

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Introduction: “The Dark Flat Wilderness”

When eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artists were venturing out “en plein air” with the aim of capturing the sublime on canvas, the Hoo Peninsula in Kent, situated between the Thames and Medway estuaries remained stubbornly invisible ([Fig. 1](#) and [Fig. 2](#)).¹ Yet where this landscape was mute as a source for painting, it later emerged as a subject matter in the medium of film. In different evocative manifestations, it was the opening backdrop in David Lean’s *Great Expectations* (1946) and appeared as a fictitious Vietnam in Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).² It was also the subject of a film made in 1952, called *The Island*, to promote British Petroleum’s new oil refinery in the area.³ This omission of the Hoo Peninsula—with its persistent, “brackish zone” of marshland and estuary waters—from painting, made it, nevertheless, ripe territory for film-makers ([Fig. 3](#)).⁴

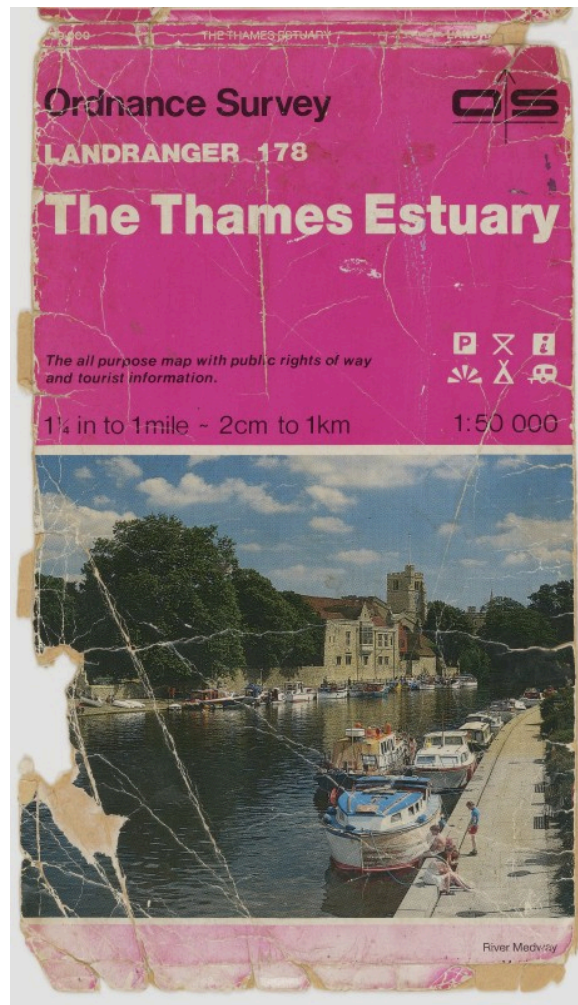


Figure 1.
Ordnance Survey Landranger 178, The Thames Estuary map (cover), 1992, map, 21.8 x 12.8 cm.



Figure 2.
Ordnance Survey Landranger 178 The Thames Estuary map (detail), 1992,
map, 21.8 x 12.8 cm.



Figure 3.
Anna Falcini, View of the Hoo Peninsula, 2016. Digital image courtesy of
Anna Falcini.

In these three films, the camera lens functions as a memory tool, which captures the landscape in a unique synthesis of the real and the imagined. Operating beyond the limitations of painting, the medium of film allowed for the imagined and the real to become fluid and interchangeable. Film, for example, possesses a composited methodology of elements with which to articulate its work. It draws upon movement, light, sound, music, dialogue, costume, and scripts to unfurl its story. Familiar to the human experience, these elements shift between factual evidence and the imaginary with ease.

For the audience, film evaporates whereas painting is present. The mechanics of creating a film are largely hidden; painting, on the other hand, is subject to the tools and techniques of its trade. The materiality of the canvas, paint, and brushstroke are its purpose, focus, and pleasure. A frame around a painting maps the territory of the work and locates its physical presence in the space. It could be argued that a painting is reliant upon a more limited palette of tools and techniques to convey an image, and that whereas a film moves between any number of scenes, a painting must be an enduring image

Where the subject matter of the Hoo Peninsula was too unpalatable in what has been identified as the great period of landscape painting—the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—these qualities (e.g. “the dark flat wilderness” described in a phrase written by Charles Dickens) were readily utilized by film.⁵ If the landscape of the Hoo Peninsula was unattractive to the painters of the period, then its wilfully broad, flat marshland was an asset to the film-maker, who could render its pliable nature into a backdrop for an orphaned boy.

As an artist, I have been working in the Hoo Peninsula for over twenty years, continually drawn there to explore it, through the mediums of film and photography. At the start, the work was a visual exploration of the physical and material characteristics of the place but latterly it has focused on the aura that I experience there, which is unique to the peninsula. Using lens-based media is a means of unfolding the embodied nature of the place and navigating this “diffuse” atmosphere.⁶ A lens presents both a detached and a simultaneously intimate mechanism where I can observe, in close proximity, the detail of the Napoleonic fort’s crumbling wall or position myself in the exposed marsh landscape and film container ships passing to Tilbury, beyond the seawall.

My work as an artist has piqued my interest in the Hoo Peninsula’s absence from landscape painting and its emergence as a site of special interest in mid-twentieth-century film. Following Deleuze’s work on the multifaceted nature of cinema, I argue that the filmic modulation of images through cutting, sequencing, and reorganizing creates a methodology for re-

illuminating the landscape of the Hoo Peninsula. Drawing upon Giuliana Bruno's work, "Light spaces and Screen Surfaces: On the Fabric of Projection", I propose that the screen is the anchor point for the ephemeral experience of viewing the Hoo Peninsula on film. Building on the work of Jacques Rancière, Bruno develops the notion that the cinematic surface "comes into play as a partition that 'mediates' ... [and becomes] ... a form of dwelling in the material world."⁷

A Black Spot: Perceptions of the Hoo Peninsula

The Hoo Peninsula is an area of land in north Kent that is positioned between two river estuaries: the Thames and the Medway. In 2013, English Heritage described it as largely characterized by arable and marshland pasture of a low-lying nature with pockets of large industry. It was the site of prison hulks in the 1800s, a centre for the manufacture of cordite and ammunition in the early 1900s, and more recently, was proposed as a site for a new London airport.⁸

I had stumbled upon the Hoo Peninsula in North Kent in the mid-1990s, whilst living on a Dutch barge with my young family. Rising costs brought us to the cheaper moorings of the River Medway in Rochester, underneath the M2 motorway. One day, we cycled towards a place called Cliffe in the Hoo Peninsula—a village set on the edge of an open expanse of reclaimed marsh, bounded by the seawall in the distance. As we headed towards the seawall, we got hopelessly lost (we had no map) and our route became constantly thwarted by hidden creeks and drainage ditches.

On a summer's day, getting tangled up in the landscape with a bicycle was inconvenient, but never as foolhardy and threatening as it would have been on a winter's day in the 1500s. As early as the sixteenth century, the peninsula was regarded as an "unpleasant and unhealthy place" and the word "unwholesome" was used to describe it by William Lambarde in 1570.⁹ According to the academic Mary Dobson, marsh parishes such as those in the Hoo Peninsula, were "the most notorious black spots during the early modern period" (Fig. 4).¹⁰ These black spots were often the result of malaria, known locally as marsh fever or the ague, as they were a breeding ground for mosquitoes due to the continual flooding of the land that breached ineffective sea defences in the sixteenth century. The fleets and ditches, characteristic of the peninsula, continued to provide perfect conditions for malaria into the present era, with the last case being reported in the 1950s. Even as late as the 1980s, lofts spaces belonging to houses in the Isle of Grain, on the edge of the Hoo Peninsula, were routinely sprayed to eradicate mosquitoes.¹¹

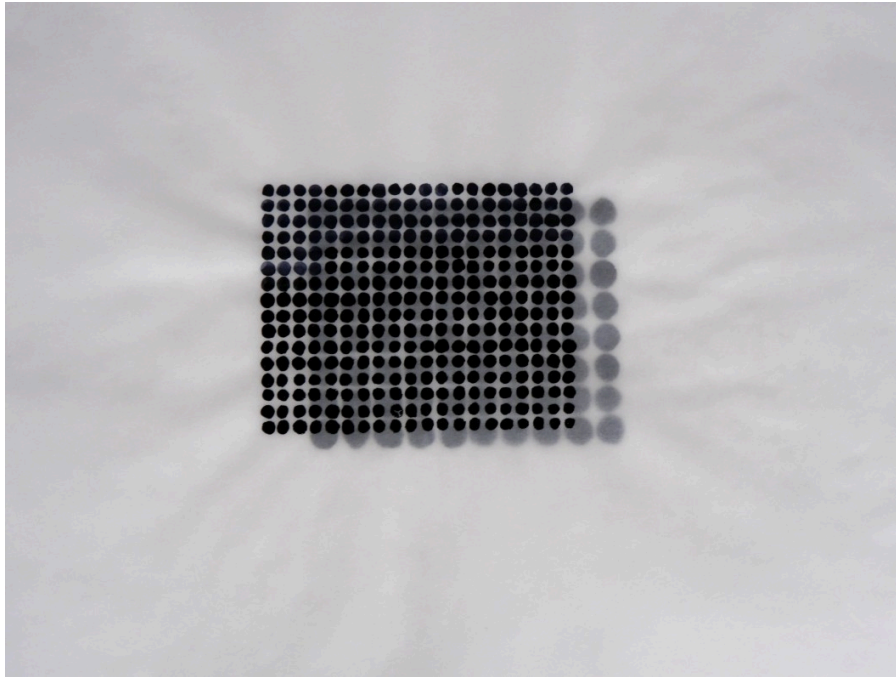


Figure 4.

Anna Falcini, *Black Spots*, 2015, gouache on layers of tracing paper, 42 x 29.5 cm. Digital image courtesy of Anna Falcini.

Within this context of disease and a sense of unpicturesque flatness, we can begin to identify reasons why the landscape of the Hoo Peninsula was omitted from the great period of landscape painting in England. Edward Hasted noted that even vicars would not live in these marsh parishes.¹² It was hardly the picture of pastoral England that might attract the artist. Arguably, apart from its coastal activity, the landscape itself also lacked the features that would attract the painter of the picturesque or the sublime of the period.

Here was also a decided absence of Horace Walpole's "arrant strollers" gallivanting across the peninsula, who might stumble upon an example of William Gilpin's perspectives and prominences.¹³ With the exception of Cliffe (whose name is derived from its "cliff top position" 10m above sea level), and Northward Hill at High Halstow that overlooks Cooling and Halstow marshes, there were few elevated perspectives from which to view the largely flat, marginal landscape.¹⁴

The peninsula appeared void of those features that had come to define a "landscape" under the conditions of the industrial modern. Lacking either charming vistas or pleasant agrarian scenes of farming, it repelled the ideals of landscape as they were developed by artists, poets, novelists, and theorists from the eighteenth century onwards. It was hardly worth getting out a pencil for, never mind the bulky paraphernalia of the painter—or so it

seemed for many. Even its proximity to London did not draw citizens from the city to dwell upon its unpopulated marshes. ¹⁵ The natural philosophy that determined the “aesthetics of nature”: “harmony, order, design and beauty” were evidently amiss in the Hoo Peninsula. As Harman notes in his work *The Culture of Nature in Britain 1680–1860*, the emergence of natural philosophy, a branch of “inquiry into the phenomena of nature and their causes” laid the groundwork for these ideals to emerge and subsequently, as scientific and industrial developments shaped society, the aesthetic values of “the natural world” became more desired. ¹⁶

The Hoo Peninsula, however, was neither a “cultivated landscape of ordered farmland” or Ruskin’s misty eyed “untouched pristine wilderness”, but a “featureless” place. ¹⁷ In a particularly low point for the peninsula, the apothecary Dr Thomas Johnson, who set foot from a boat on the Isle of Grain in 1629, to seek out plant specimens, noted its “inhuman wilderness”, and he and his companions found little to “arouse our fainting spirits to any breath of hope”. ¹⁸ This perspective of a dark and untrustworthy place maintains a currency in the cultural psyche. In his book *Thames: Sacred River* (2008), the writer Peter Ackroyd reflects upon how the Hoo Peninsula “exerts a primitive and still menacing force, all the more eerie and lonely because of its proximity to the great city.” ¹⁹

On the final page, Ackroyd reaches the end of his Thames journey marked by an imposing obelisk, the London Stone ([Fig. 5](#)). It rises out of the mud, at Yantlet Beach between Allhallows and the Isle of Grain. An identical obelisk across the river, the Crow Stone in Essex, provided a boundary across the river, demarcating the edge of the city, asserting “the eastern limit of the city’s jurisdiction from the 12th century to the mid-19th century”. The stone is notoriously hard to access, and at low tide, the London Stone becomes marooned on the mud, its foundation of humble timbers incongruous with the stone obelisk above and its lofty pretensions to Ancient Egypt and Rome. ²⁰



Figure 5.

Anna Falcini, *The London Stone*, 2016. Digital image courtesy of Anna Falcini.

The Island: Memorising the Landscape through Filmic Methodologies

In 1952, British Petroleum (BP) began to construct the Kent Oil Refinery on the Isle of Grain. To allay the fears of the local communities nearby and to promote its construction, BP commissioned a film that would document the refinery's development and subtly embed the message that change was inevitable and that progress for Britain was dependent on oil (Fig. 6).²¹

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 6.

John Ingram and Peter Pickering, *The Island*, 1952, 35 mm black and white film, 25 minutes. Collection of BP Video Library. Digital image courtesy of Film courtesy of John Ingram, Peter Pickering, and BP Video Library.

The film tells the story of the refinery through a tightly scripted narration, using a series of characters including the construction manager, workers, local farm labourers, and the Parish vicar. Directed by John Ingram and Peter Pickering, *The Island* is an artistically constructed film that cleverly manoeuvres the film camera between industrial progress and ancient landscape, persuasively presenting the argument that progress inevitably takes prominence over the irrevocable loss of landscape (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 7.

John Ingram and Peter Pickering, *The Island*, 1952, 35 mm black and white film, 25 minutes. Collection of BP Video Library. Digital image courtesy of Film courtesy of John Ingram, Peter Pickering, and BP Video Library.

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Figure 8.

John Ingram and Peter Pickering, *The Island*, 1952, 35 mm black and white film, 25 minutes. Collection of BP Video Library. Digital image courtesy of Film courtesy of John Ingram, Peter Pickering, and BP Video Library.

Through numerous visits, I had become familiar with entering Grain through the threshold of industry before you could reach the village or coastline. I traced a pathway around the shoreline and came up against a whole section of ancient marsh compressed under concrete. The marsh, that had existed for thousands of years, was superseded by an oil refinery that existed for only thirty years and whose concentric pools of black liquid were reminiscent of the black spots of disease that had earlier been described in Dobson's marsh parishes ([Fig. 9](#)).

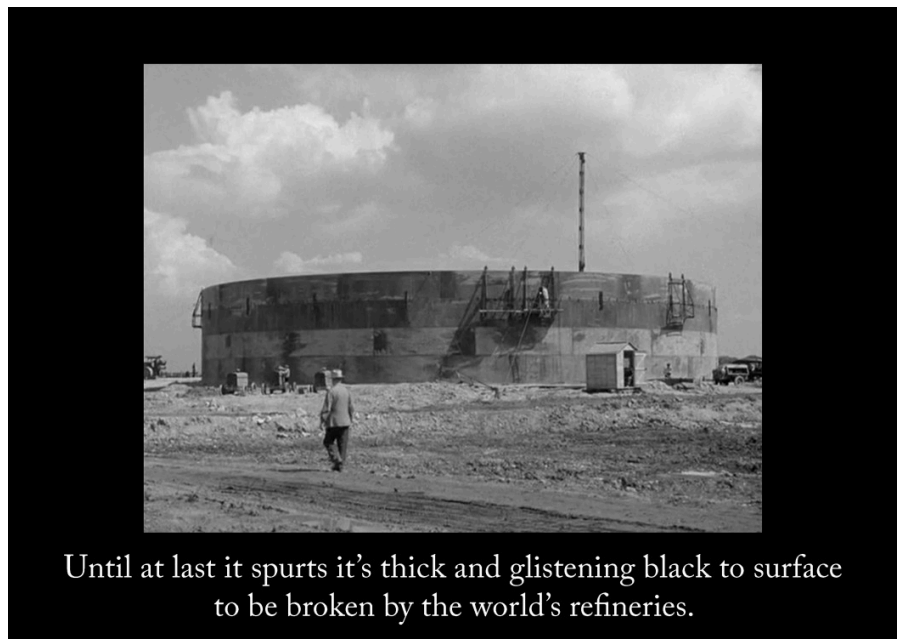


Figure 9.

Anna Falcini, *Glistening Black* featuring still and script from the film "*The Island*" (1952), 2016, film still with text. Digital image courtesy of Anna Falcini.

Initially, *The Island*, inhabits its purpose as a marketing tool for an oil company wanting to smooth the way for this “80-million pound job with 80 million headaches”. ²² The refinery was a huge feat of engineering and a substantial development in the Isle of Grain. It consumed a third of the land and required “the filling in of fleets and channels and the alteration of the coastline”. Roads were moved and the population swelled as 1,000 construction workers arrived in Grain along with heavy machinery. This once remote and cut-off part of the peninsula was radically changed in a short span of time. ²³

Getting beyond its matter-of-fact narration and reasoning as to why an oil refinery should be situated here, which is delivered largely in the clipped 1950s dialogue of male authority, I was strangely captivated by the film: viewing Grain through a camera lens, as a landscape in transition, that was captured at a critical point of change. As the camera recorded the activity, the memory of it became indelibly imprinted onto the celluloid, absorbing the transformation of landscape.

In *The Island*, there is a notable porousness of both past and present, between scenes where the landscape has changed very little in the Isle of Grain, contrasted with scenes where the landscape is mechanically manoeuvred into new geographies. From a position of posterity and time past, the immateriality of film (the act of its projection and viewing), has nevertheless portrayed a landscape that is evocative and provokes the palpable.

In his essay “Film as Spatial Critique”, the artist Patrick Keiller discusses how film “offers possibilities ... to experience spatial qualities no longer encountered in ordinary experience.” “Spaces that no longer exist,” he says, “may still exist physically but not socially or they may no longer exist at all..” ²⁴

Through the medium of film, my encounters with the Isle of Grain were richer and more complex than what Keiller described as “ordinary experience”. ²⁵ I could go beyond what I knew personally into an expanded experience. This multifaceted aspect of the cinematic is at the core of *The Island*, enabling a destabilising and disrupted sequence of events that shifts between the building of the oil refinery and the pastoral scenes of Grain. The viewer is presented with the future (the construction of the oil refinery) and the past (a bird watcher in the marshes or agricultural activities), although every scene was in fact filmed within the same period of time. It creates an altered “possible perception of life”. ²⁶

Entangled in the 26 minutes of irreversible change to Grain, I am suspended into in-betweenness that is a rhizomatic network of memory, of the mis-remembered, of archaeology and of the primary experience. It first manifests itself through a faded industrial *past* (the oil refinery being constructed in the film but now long since closed) and then a *past/past* of the pastoral before industry (landscapes of birdwatchers) set against my more recent time-frame of *light/past* experience in the landscape where changes continue, such as the recent demolition of the Grain Power Station. The effect is to linger (and toil) in this space of that which is experienced through the film, set against the embodied in the landscape and bringing these two things in parallel with each other at a jaunty angle.

The point here is that the scenes in *The Island* are temporally mobile, even if they are visually static. Of the few scenes where the camera is still, the landscape is in motion—even if not visibly so. The film’s mobility, between scenes of disruption to the landscape in both the semi-permanent (the building of the refinery) to the settled and rooted (ploughing of a field) is an encounter through the film camera that pinpoints an anxiety about time. ²⁷

The Peninsula as a Backdrop: Setting the Scene for Dark Episodes

The Hoo Peninsula appears as a setting in the two feature films I have identified: *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Where landscape painting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was excited by the Claudian prospects and panoramas and later, by what Ann Bermingham described as “intimate and occluded views that presented nature as rough, shaggy and humble”, the estuary’s stark, uncompromising, windswept extremity could be put to good use for settings of dark and obdurate narratives. ²⁸

In the novel *Great Expectations*, Dickens builds a vivid visual image of the marshes in the opening chapters of the book, through the climatic phenomenon of fogs, bitter winds, and mists that are familiar motifs of the North Kent marshes. Dickens writes that: “the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and the lower leaden line beyond which the wind was rushing, was the sea.” The few landmarks Dickens describes in this flat place fall to a beacon to guide ships and a gibbet to hang criminals from as an example to others. ²⁹

In 1946, David Lean created a film of the story. ³⁰ In the opening shot, we observe the central character, Pip, running along this “low leaden line” with an aural soundscape of an eerie wind, menacing music, and birdsong (Fig.

10). ³¹ Lean faithfully recreated Dickens' evocative prose in this opening scene and, although I recognize the territory of the marshes, it appears as a disembodied and distinctly constructed image.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 10.

David Lean (dir.), *Great Expectations*, 1949, film, 113 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Film clip courtesy of Cineguild.

Where the real and the imaginary begin to synthesize is in a scene between Pip and Biddy, who comes to run the Gargery house when Pip's sister dies (Fig. 11). Lean has successfully embedded the subtleties and details of the place into the scene that are resonant in the contemporary landscape: the continual wind across the flat marsh, the very particular birdsong that you hear in summer, the light on Pip and Biddy's faces, the large open skies, and the line of reeds behind Pip.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 11.

David Lean (dir.), *Great Expectations*, 1949, film, 113 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Film clip courtesy of Cineguild.

In contrast to *Great Expectations*, where the location is critical to the story, the Hoo Peninsula featured in the film *Full Metal Jacket* as a stand-in for Vietnam. ³² The film director of *Full Metal Jacket*, Stanley Kubrick, was meticulous in his work and finding the right locations was critical. The choice for Kubrick to use Cliffe, a wide-open expanse of marsh in the Hoo Peninsula in one section of the film, seems pertinent. It was an area that he readily transformed into scenes of rural Vietnam and which came close to his original vision to film the authentic landscape of that country. ³³

Cliffe Marshes is an open, expansive part of the Hoo Peninsula, of predominantly agricultural use with the remains of past industries—cement and munitions production—criss-crossed by channels of water. In a sense, it was already a scarred landscape with the physical marks of explosions from the nitro-cotton stoves of the Curtis and Harvey explosives factory active in the early 1900s; one could see the logic of Kubrick's decision to use it in a small number of scenes. ³⁴

In one particular scene, the camera frames three soldiers inside a military helicopter as one of them fires at innocent civilians below running over the terrain (Fig. 12). ³⁵ The scene is one of violence and menace, yet simultaneously, the mysterious landscape below is a counterpoint that Kubrick interweaves into a binary image. The camera shows the landscape at

an alternative viewpoint and angle to its stubborn “flat” rhetoric of old, that might have emerged from painting and which had so irked the Hasteds and Johnsons of the past. The aerial shot from a dummy military helicopter momentarily produces a viewpoint that is a filigree of inlets and creeks, layered with a palette of pinks, greens, oranges, and browns—a rare glimpse only revealed through this bird’s-eye perspective.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 12.

Stanley Kubrick (dir.), *Full Metal Jacket*, 1987, film, 116 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Film clip courtesy of Natant, Stanley Kubrick Productions, and Warner Bros.

The multiple framing—of the camera’s lens, the helicopter door, and of cinema screen—sets the landscape into an ambiguous position. I try to lay my own memory over the image from the screen, to visually register the Cliffe of Kubrick with my own mental images, never quite lining up the register perfectly, creating a double image that blurs at the edges. Kubrick frames the scene as though it is seen through the soft glow of a Claude glass and he achieves what Alexandra Harris, in her book *Weatherland: Writers & Artists Under English Skies*, attributes to the device: “an atmospheric viewing” of Cliffe.³⁶ The Claude glass was surely a filmic device in its infancy, with its many ranges of tinted glass for all different scenes, and viewing strategies that distanced the user from the subject matter and created illusions of landscape.

The Claude glass, the painter’s convex blackened mirror held up to the eye in order to view the landscape behind the user’s head, is an early lens technology that “mediate(d) human perception in a new way”, and chronologically sits somewhere between the invention of the telescope and the film camera.³⁷ All of these lens devices became articulated by the body and situated the viewer in an embodied position.³⁸ The development of the lens technologically produced new experiences of visualizing the world that not only revealed new phenomena previously unseen to the naked eye but also positioned a machine between the body and the object being observed. The lens then becomes an extension of the human eye, creating both an intimacy with the scene being observed and a physical distance through the intervention of a machine.³⁹

In the helicopter scene of Kubrick’s film, I experience this duality of intimacy and distance as the camera becomes what Giuliana Bruno describes as a “filament of visual existence”, as if the camera was a speck of dust inside the helicopter and yet views the scene of Vietnam/Cliffe marshes below its aperture.⁴⁰ Bruno says that, “film literally comes to life as light dancing on a

surface-screen", and she cites Peter Greenaway's words that: "cinema is the business of artificial light ... catching or trapping the light permanently on a surface". ⁴¹ I can play this scene repeatedly and bring alive—through luminosity—this particular section of the Hoo Peninsula. Long after the film is finished, the image still dances on my eyes.

Conclusion

I might conclude that I have, in fact, contracted my own version of marsh fever, or the ague that Mary Dobson identified, because since that first bicycle ride I made, I have returned to the Hoo Peninsula regularly over twenty years, drawn to its awkward, strange, and flat vista. Early experiences of landscape through my grandfather's influence and subsequent Art History studies at A Level schooled me in the archetypal pastoral landscapes of Constable and Turner, not the "sunken levels" of the North Kent marshes; so how has this landscape become so resonant through film and in the broader concerns of this article? Can it be concluded that the Hoo Peninsula has been re-illuminated by film? ⁴²

Working in close proximity with the landscape of the Hoo Peninsula through painting would have presented a number of physical and cultural hurdles to overcome, which an embodied position of the film lens could navigate more fluidly. As a subject matter for painting, the Hoo Peninsula was, for example, too dull, too diseased, too dark, too incomprehensible. But cinema could, in its framing of narrative, embrace these negatives and exploit them for dramatic purpose.

Whilst the Hoo Peninsula has remained on the periphery of painting, its invisibility has created the ideal setting for the works of film discussed in this article. The film-makers could utilize the Hoo Peninsula for their own motives. David Lean could draw upon the open and windswept marshes at dusk, to convey the vulnerability and terror that Pip experiences in the opening sequence of *Great Expectations* (1946). In *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), Kubrick pokes a camera out of a helicopter door and fictionalizes it as Vietnam; and in *The Island* (1952), the peninsula becomes a tool in the propaganda for convincing a small island of the merits of an oil refinery. Its relative obscurity allowed for these film-makers to imprint their individual motives onto the landscape. Furthermore, the very technique of manipulating time, light, and angles of vision, offered the possibilities to "alter the perceptions of life". ⁴³

The three films I have discussed in this article, feature the Hoo Peninsula, in various situations: as a key landscape for the story of a boy, who becomes a gentleman, in *Great Expectations*; as the place where change is inevitable in *The Island*; and as a fictitious Vietnam in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. In each of these examples, the Hoo Peninsula appears as both a backdrop for

fictional stories and as a real place. The camera lens is able to navigate both of these expressions of the landscape convincingly and the qualities of the imagined and the real become fluid and interchangeable.

As an embodied medium, film produces an “instrument-mediated vision” that goes beyond what could be captured in a single moment by the eyes.⁴⁴ Where the naked eye has a fleeting chance to take a snapshot of visual information, the camera has an ability to retain the information, to show things missed by the human eye, and then to replay that information. It can, as Deleuze asserts, use multiple angles, cuts, and construction to create a structured image of a scene.⁴⁵ This is where I am arguing that the camera lens becomes a memory tool and where the synthesis of the real and the imagined can operate.

From my own embodied position, when I work with the camera lens, it has acted as an extension and focal positioning of my gaze.⁴⁶ It is a filter with which to organize the complex material of the landscape, and through this filtered viewpoint, what may be returned back to my own eye is an altered perspective of the scene. It cannot capture, for example, the clamminess of a marsh fog or the smell of the estuary’s salty mud in Egypt Bay, but it can record multiple scenes that can be compressed into a film and then replayed.

Bruno suggests that there is a fascination with the surface that came to prominence in modernity and which resurfaces today. The cinematic surface allows for the landscape of the Hoo Peninsula to be re-illuminated, through filmic play and projection, so that using a variety of visions, perspectives, and treatments, the subject matter emerges through the porousness of not just past and present but fictions and narratives. The treatment of it in these fictions is, at the margins, authentic to its geography and to its memory in cultural terms. Caught in this obscure creek, the Hoo Peninsula remains elusive and ambiguous—a place of Kubrick’s “functional unreality”.⁴⁷

Footnotes

- 1 Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition 1740–1860* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 1–6, 87–105. See also Tate, *Introduction to Plein Air*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/plein-air>. Accessed 3 October 2017.
- 2 David Lean, *Great Expectations* (1946) DVD film, Carlton Visual Entertainment. Stanley Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) DVD film, Warner Bros.
- 3 John Ingram and Peter Pickering, *The Island* (1952) DVD film, from British Film Institute, *In Shadows Of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain 1951–1977* (London: BFI, 2010).
- 4 Peter Ackroyd, *Thames: Sacred River* (London: Vintage, 2008), 395.
- 5 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Ware: Wordsworth Press, 1992 [1868]), 3.
- 6 Gernot Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics”, *Thesis Eleven* 36, no. 1 (1993): 113–126.
- 7 Giuliana Bruno, “Light spaces and Screen Surfaces: On the Fabric of Projection”, in *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 13.

- 8 Edward Carpenter, Sarah Newsome, Fiona Small, and Zoe Hazell, *Hoo Peninsula, Kent: Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape Project* (Eastney: English Heritage, 2013), 9-13.
- 9 Carpenter et al., *Hoo Peninsula, Kent*, 15.
- 10 Mary Dobson, "Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England", in Edward Carpenter et al., *Hoo Peninsula, Kent: Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape* (Eastney: English Heritage, 2013), 15-16.
- 11 This information was gathered from a conversation with a resident in the Isle of Grain, during my exhibition, *Coming Out of That Glistening Past*, 24-25 September 2016 at St James Church, the Isle of Grain, as part of Metal Festival 2016.
- 12 Dobson, "Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England", 16.
- 13 Ann Bermingham, "System, Order, and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795", in W.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 87.
- 14 Rebecca Pullen, Sarah Newsome, Andrew Williams, and Wayne D. Cocroft, *Curtis's and Harvey Ltd Explosives Factory, Cliffe and Cliffe Woods, Medway: Archaeological Survey and Analysis of the Factory Remains*, Vol. 1 (Eastney: English Heritage, 2011), 8. See also *Gravesend and Rochester: Hoo Peninsula* (2015) OS Explorer, Sheet 163, 1:25 000 Scale, Southampton, Ordnance Survey.
- 15 Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*, 182.
- 16 Peter M. Harman, *The Culture of Nature in Britain: 1680-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 4-5.
- 17 Harman, *The Culture of Nature in Britain*, 2-5. Carpenter, *Hoo Peninsula, Kent*, 19.
- 18 J.S.L. Gilmour (ed.), "Thomas Johnson: Journeys into Kent and Hampstead", in Edward Carpenter et al., *Hoo Peninsula, Kent: Hoo Peninsula Historic Landscape* (Eastney: English Heritage: 2013), 18.
- 19 Ackroyd, *Thames*, 396.
- 20 Peter Ackroyd, *Thames*, 400. Edward Carpenter, *The London Stones: Marking the City of London's Jurisdiction over the Thames and Medway* (Eastney: English Heritage, 2014), 1-12.
- 21 BFI Screenonline, *The Island*, directed by John Ingram and Peter Pickering (1952), <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1397294/index.html>. Accessed 7 August 2018.
- 22 Henry Longhurst, *Adventure in Oil: The Story of British Petroleum* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1959), 165.
- 23 Carpenter, *Hoo Peninsula, Kent*, 36.
- 24 Patrick Keiller, "Film as Spatial Critique", in *The View From the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes* (London: Verso, 2013), 147-157.
- 25 Keiller, "Film as Spatial Critique", 149.
- 26 Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 2002), 29-54.
- 27 Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 43-46.
- 28 Bermingham, *System, Order and Abstraction*, 81.
- 29 Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 3-14.
- 30 Lean, *Great Expectations*.
- 31 Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 3
- 32 Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket*.
- 33 In notes and correspondence about the making of *Full Metal Jacket* at the Kubrick Archive at University of the Arts London (ASCC), Kubrick proposes filming this scene in Vietnam and razing farmland to make it authentic to the original scenes of the Vietnam War.
- 34 Pullen et al., *Curtis's and Harvey Ltd Explosives Factory, Cliffe and Cliffe Woods, Medway*, 289.
- 35 In the manuscript for *Full Metal Jacket*, the scene is identified as Scene 41 and begins "Joker and Rafter Man look out of the open door of an S-55 helicopter".
- 36 Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers & Artists Under English Skies* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 192.
- 37 Don Ihde, *Postphenomenology and Technoscience: The Peking University Lectures* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 51.
- 38 Claude Glass, V&A Search the Collections, 2017, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78676/claude-glass-unknown/>. Accessed 4 June 2018.
- 39 Ihde, *Postphenomenology and Technoscience*, 51-52.
- 40 Giuliana Bruno, "Dressing the Surface", *NECSUS* (Autumn 2017) #Dress, <https://necsus-ejms.org/dressing-the-surface/>. Accessed 4 May 2018.
- 41 Bruno, *Surface*, 55.
- 42 My Grandfather was a trained artist who worked in watercolour, often depicting landscapes that harked back to the pre- and post-war period of change and transition in the British countryside.
- 43 Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 31.

- 44 Ihde, *Postphenomenology and Technoscience*, 52.
- 45 Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, 31.
- 46 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1983), 185.
- 47 Jay Cocks, *Full Metal Jacket: Between Good and Evil*, directed by Gary Leva (Finland, Warner Bros, 2007) DVD.

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The background of the top section is a watercolor painting. It depicts a coastal scene with several sailing ships on the left and right sides. In the center, there's a bright, circular sun or moon. The colors are muted, with a lot of blues, greys, and soft yellows.

On Place and Displacement: Benjamin Henry Latrobe and the Immigrant Landscape

Julia A. Sienkewicz

Abstract

This essay approaches British landscape studies through the concept of the immigrant landscape. Studying watercolors from the Virginian residence of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, this feature analyzes the concept of “displacement” as a contribution to landscape studies. Through paired and serial landscape images, Latrobe explored his sense of self in space and place, confronting illusive associations with his homeland, while attempting to understand his new surroundings.

Authors

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Nothing might seem more central to the tradition of landscape painting than the creation of a sense of place. In the traditions of British and American art history, artists such as Thomas Cole and John Constable earned their imposing stature in large part due to their ability to render specific sites effectively, thus provoking deep associations with the cultural imaginaries of their moments. The Grand Tour landscape tradition grew from a fascination with significant sites in Continental Europe that could inspire aesthetic reactions and also serve as points of connection between past and present viewers. Even the arcadian tradition builds its moral and intellectualized fantasies of the past on a specific sense of place, built on allegorized references to the ancient world and specific programmatic relationships of figures and human activities to landscape features.

The landscape watercolors that Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820) produced in the four years after his emigration from London (1795-1799) to the United States, experiment with innovations in visual form that challenge the primacy of a fixed sense of place within the landscape tradition. In these works from his immigrant years, Latrobe makes use of the sensory and bodily experience of landscape scenes in order to probe the jarring contrasts that an immigrant experiences between “place” and “displacement”.¹ This article offers a study of the staged sense of place and displacement through a series of Latrobe’s paired and serial landscapes from these years. The current digital publication platform for this article, which emphasizes close looking and comparison, is appropriate to these works, as the artist produced them over years in which he relied on his own eyes and bodily experience in order to help him to understand the significant qualities of the American versus the British landscape. While examining the contents of Latrobe’s landscape watercolors, the scrutinizing gaze of the viewer is closely akin to Latrobe’s own immigrant vision. At the same time, through the paired and serial nature of his studies, Latrobe moves the viewer as if a body through space, confronting the realities and disjunctures of the immigrant vision. Through these images, the viewer is both confused and enlightened—but also, in Latrobe’s own words, is “undeceived,” countering his tendency to overlay expectations developed in a previous homeland onto the new sites encountered.² Latrobe’s watercolor views were composed primarily in sketchbooks and he worked on the scenes while also reflecting on his experiences in journal entries. Similarly, this article pairs visual analysis with excerpts from Latrobe’s directive commentary on his images, thus deepening the reader’s/viewer’s confrontation with the sensations of place and displacement that Latrobe sought to evoke.

Latrobe’s landscape watercolor views are embodied landscapes—they connect viewers to specific bodily sensations associated with the represented sites, and they also are constructed around a viewing experience that is bodily and spatial, not merely visual. Through the first

person account of Latrobe's own vision, they seek to immerse viewers in understanding particular qualities of landscape sites. True to the artistic traditions of his moment, Latrobe relies on the manipulation of aesthetic modes and their symbolic tropes in order to provoke both bodily and sensory reactions in his viewer (e.g., the sublime thrill of danger, the soothing picturesque qualities of a rural scene). In his landscapes that explore the concept of displacement, Latrobe offers a window into something that is less well known in the artistic tradition—the immigrant's dual sensibility of space and place. Through Latrobe's eyes, we can see the landscape of Britain as both "homeland" and "foreign" or the shores of Virginia as synchronously familiar in their shared qualities with Britain and, yet, jarringly strange. As an individual artist moving through space and across the years of his life, Latrobe quite self-consciously captured the specific bodily and viewing experiences that were tied to his own condition.

For modern scholars, then, these works offer a rich and powerful interpretive challenge, both in terms of reinterpreting Latrobe's artistic practice and in assessing the contours of our art historical fields. While Latrobe has been bracketed from the American landscape tradition as a British watercolorist, and as an amateur with no stakes in the content-driven professional sphere, he has also been heralded as the primogenitor of the architectural profession in the United States with his European origins being a mere backdrop to his American architectural practice.³ Within the scholarship of British art, Latrobe has held no place. His known watercolor work was nearly all produced in the United States and, further, has been characterized as the amateur work of an architect, not the ambitious work of a trained watercolorist.⁴ These landscapes of displacement render the necessity of disrupting the nationalist fields of art history.⁵ Latrobe as an immigrant-artist occupies not only the dual categories of both British and American, but also something that we could understand as a complicated third space of a body-and-mind in motion between these identities. When Latrobe's own complex and multinational biography is taken into account, the British and American categories are even more troubled.⁶ The paradigm of Atlantic world scholarship offers one useful model for understanding the position of these watercolors, especially as Latrobe often positions his views around bodies of water, but it is an imperfect answer to his perspective on Virginia, especially after several years spent in the state distanced him from his transatlantic crossing. These watercolors offer detailed studies of specific landscapes—as such they are careful considerations of the local. At the same time, they are transnational both in content and in the implicit bodily experience of the viewer, often probing conflicting and, perhaps oppositional, understandings of a site or contrasting two sites with which Latrobe was familiar. Through his landscapes of displacement, Latrobe explores the complex ways in which bodies and minds move through places, both real and imagined. While he is

explicit in his technique and content, his works challenge art historians to develop new methodologies of landscape interpretation in order to more fully uncover other such sophisticated traces of artists-in-motion.

The Rupture of Emigration

Two watercolors, *View of the Coast of England at Hastings* and *Moonlight Scene at Hastings, England* (both 1797–99), can introduce the visual techniques that Latrobe utilized in order to convey displacement (Fig. 1, Fig. 2). These views reflect Latrobe's experiences of observing the southern coast of England, while aboard the *Eliza*, an American ship that carried him across the Atlantic. The *Eliza* spent a hapless month wandering lost around the English Channel, due to poor luck and even worse navigation by the crew.⁷ Latrobe left a rich record of images and writing documenting this interval. He repainted these two views, which he likely drew from a lost sketchbook source, in his hand-illustrated manuscript *An Essay on Landscape*, which dates to ca. 1798.⁸



Figure 1.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *View of the Coast of Hastings*, published in *An Essay on Landscape, Explained in Tinted Drawings* (Richmond, Virginia: Library of Virginia, 1798–99), 1797–99, watercolour, 19.1 x 26.1 cm. Digital image courtesy of Library of Virginia.



Figure 2.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Moonlight scene at Hastings, published in *An Essay on Landscape, Explained in Tinted Drawings* (Richmond, Virginia: Library of Virginia, 1798-99), 1797-99, watercolour, 19.1 x 26.1 cm. Digital image courtesy of Library of Virginia.

View of the Coast of Hastings is dominated by the face of a high cliff, its striated surface is bathed in light. Two boats have been pulled onto the shadowy, foreground shore. Beneath the cliff, a carriage progresses on the road and two windmills are prominent in the background. The scene juxtaposes the human hand and that of nature, and Latrobe's text reflects that both nature and humankind have ravaged the landscape, though in this case, the powerful surge of the sea has proven the strongest force. *Moonlight Scene at Hastings, England* presents a sliver of beachfront, which recedes beneath the massive bulk of a cliff. Angled walls of a robust fortress, a bristling array of ship masts, and a single house are all dimly visible. This small inlet of human influence is dwarfed by the cliffs, which rise three times the height of the tallest masts. The right-hand side of the view is an open expanse of gently rippling ocean. The moon hovers above the horizon and casts a clear beam across the rippling water, leading the eye in a straight line along the surface of the water, toward the horizon beyond. A large boat bobs to the right, perhaps resting at anchor overnight at a safe distance from the rocky cliffs.

View of the Coast of England at Hastings and *Moonlight Scene at Hastings, England* are pendants that, when considered as a set, create a significant and complex viewing experience. The two views pivot, as Latrobe notes, from a single point along the shoreline of the coast. *View of the Coast of England* faces toward the west along the English Channel and from there promises the viewer a course out toward the open ocean. *Moonlight Scene at Hastings* turns the viewer toward the east, back along the route already

traveled by the Eliza. In *View of the Coast of England*, the viewer's perspective seems firmly grounded on the sandy beach in the foreground, but having pivoted toward *Moonlight Scene at Hastings*, the thin strip of beach virtually drops the viewer into the ocean. One scene is rooted on the terra firma of homeland; in the other, the viewer is cast to sea. The contrast is further accented by the paired effects across the two views, most notably between day and night, sunlight and moonlight, and the corresponding contrasts of warm and cool pigment. This set of contrasts creates an interesting cycle of sensations. Melancholy and longing seem inherent in the moonlight view, which draws the eye tantalizingly beyond the coast of Hastings back toward the shimmering promise of the moon. *View of the Coast of England*, by contrast, appears peaceful, bathed in the light of a sunny day that Latrobe specifically noted he had created for this warm effect.⁹

Latrobe's accompanying description of the coast further emphasizes the inhospitable nature of this shoreline to the stranger.¹⁰ Once departed from Britain, it is difficult to return. A stranger would be just as likely to crash on the rocky coast as to enjoy its shelter and welcome. *Moonlight Scene at Hastings* conveys anticipation in its stillness and longing in the silver light of the moon, appropriate for the emigrant viewer given its homeward bound orientation. This association is tempered, though, by the fact that the moonlight pulls the viewer out across the open water toward an unseen destination beyond the horizon, seeming to beckon toward distant lands across the water.

Between Two Worlds

Once landed in Virginia, Latrobe employed this technique of pendant landscapes on multiple occasions, though perhaps most strikingly in Richmond, Virginia. In a lengthy diary entry, he described the sensation of visiting cities in the new world that shared names with places he had known in the old. Of all these sites in Virginia, Richmond most captured Latrobe's fancy because, as he remarked, it was only there that he felt himself home again in England. He found the likeness between the twin Richmonds so striking that he mused: "if a man could be imperceptibly and in an instant conveyed from the one side of the Atlantic to the other he might hesitate for some minutes before he could discover the difference."¹¹

Despite the imaginative fancy of this statement, Latrobe sought to describe a real sensation of space and place and he attempted to capture this sensibility in his landscape views. In its placid beauty, *View of Richmond* (1796) presents the landscape characteristics that Latrobe attributed to the British Richmond in his lengthier passage—undulating hills,

carefully coiffed landscape, and brilliant white classicism (Fig. 3). *Sketch of Washington's Island* (1796), by contrast, offers a vista that appears untouched by human hand, save for two African-American boatmen (Fig. 4). The James River flows rapidly across the painting, pushed forward by the force of the falls, and trees and foliage are a scraggly, continuous mass.



Figure 3.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, View of Richmond from South Side of James River showing Capitol from Bushrod, Washington, 1796, watercolour, 17.7 x 26.6 cm. Collection of Maryland Historical Society (1960-108-1-1-36). Digital image courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.



Figure 4.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Sketch of Washington's Island, James River, Virginia, 1796, watercolour, 17.7 x 26.6 cm. Collection of Maryland Historical Society (1960-108-1-1-33). Digital image courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.

Yet if one scene seems British and the other American, they both render Latrobe's new home in Virginia. The views, which are so different in their characterizations of this location, are bound together by the selective, displaced, and disoriented character of the immigrant viewer. This consistent, if conflicted, immigrant experience is inherent in the construction of these works. If we place the views side by side, the viewers exchange gazes across the river, the two scenes highlighting the river's water, like the Atlantic, as the space separating the British from the American. In an instant, the viewer is transported across the Atlantic, even as he realizes the trick—both landscapes are really *American*, though one seems a world apart.

In Virginia, Latrobe developed this technique further through the creation of serial landscape views, which focus on manipulating the viewer's perception across space and time. Importantly, he often signals the relationships among these images through textual cues in his writing—a phenomenon we can study in three views Latrobe created at Norfolk. These breadcrumbs have allowed me to decode the relationships in several of his landscape series—but they are visually challenging to identify.

Latrobe's three views of Norfolk were his first concentrated study of an individual city in the United States, and were located adjacent to one another in his sketchbook. *View on the Elizabeth River, Norfolk Virginia* (1796) presents a majestic scene of water, trees, sky, and sailing vessels (Fig. 5). No sign of a surrounding city is evident, except in the presence of boats on the

river. The subsequent sketchbook sheet, *View of Part of the Ruins of Norfolk* (1796–98), shows the viewer a landscape in ruins (Fig. 6). The subject matter is striking, as it immediately seems to denote Europe for a viewer, yet is clearly labeled as an American scene. The pictured ruins are byproducts of the American Revolution, during which the city was damaged by both sides. Although not central to the discussion here, it is important to mention that this view meditates on the American Revolution as both a Revolution and a Civil War—a concept it explores in tandem with ancient sources concerning the Roman Civil War, and on which it builds within the fraught contemporary context of the French Revolution.¹² Finally, *View of Norfolk from Smith's Point* (1796–98) offers a detailed city view of a thriving port (Fig. 7).



Figure 5.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *View on the Elizabeth River, Virginia*, 1796, watercolour, 17.7 x 26.6 cm. Collection of Maryland Historical Society (1960-108-1-1-26). Digital image courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.



Figure 6.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, View of part of the ruins of Norfolk, Virginia, 1796-98, watercolour, 17.7 x 26.6 cm. Collection of Maryland Historical Society (1960-108-1-1-27). Digital image courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.



Figure 7.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, View of Norfolk from Smith's Point, Virginia, 1796-98, watercolour, 17.7 x 26.6 cm. Collection of Maryland Historical Society (1960-108-1-1-28). Digital image courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.

The differences between these three views are more striking than their similarities—they comprise a pleasant landscape scene of untouched nature, a melancholy study of ruins, and a conventional topographical urban view. Even more surprisingly, a careful reading of Latrobe's annotations reveals that all three scenes were found in close proximity to one another. In *View on the Elizabeth River*, three trees occupy the right-hand side of the image. In his caption to the watercolor, Latrobe notes, "The trees on the right hand are those behind which the brig appears in the next Landscape."¹³ Turning to *View of Part of the Ruins of Norfolk*, the viewer identifies these same trees as the clustered clump of trees abutting the two ruined chimneys along the river's edge. Once this connection is made, it is also apparent that the tall sailing vessel and the smaller ship to its left are in both images. In *View of Norfolk from Smith's Point*, the caption again signals the connection among the images, noting "This View is taken from the point near the 4 Trees behind which the Brig appears in the foregoing sketch." Tied to the visual anchors of a small clump of trees and repeated sailing vessels, these images guide the viewer on a journey, though one confined to only a few steps across a real landscape.

Most literally, the differences among these images derived from the variance between their perspectives. *View on the Elizabeth River* situates the viewer with his back to the ruins, enjoying an unsullied scene of nature. *View of Norfolk from Smith's Point* shifts only a few steps—but the scene is transformed. Standing in front of the cluster of trees and turned slightly toward the left, the viewer admires prosperous civilization. Finally, facing the same direction, but pivoted, the viewer sees both majestic sailboats and the sketchiest hint of the thriving seaport, as the backdrop to a dramatic representation of the city in ruins. In this series, Latrobe achieves a multifaceted study of place by exploiting the viewer's capacity for displacement—only by becoming aware of the space behind his back, or by moving metaphorically across time (past, present, future) or geography (European versus American ruins), can the viewer gain a deeper reflective perspective.

Undeception

A final image can offer a taste of Latrobe's experimentation with landscape in *trompe l'oeil*, again in the service of exploring immigrant sensation. A *Collection of Small Moonlights*, which I have dated to 1797, juxtaposes a textual backdrop with three diminutive landscape vignettes (Fig. 8).¹⁴ This image offers an exceptional opportunity to explore Latrobe's engagement with the social unrest of the Age of Revolutions and his contemplation of the relationship between the United States and Europe, which I explore more fully elsewhere.¹⁵ Here a central moonlit landscape, labeled "Scene at

Hampton, Virginia,” depicts a small, one-room log house, from which a welcoming bright red light shines into the deepening dusk. The house sits next to a body of water, which reflects the moon’s rays in ripples across its surface. A large boat drifts on the horizon. In the foreground, a rowboat bobs gently in a sheltered cove, proffering safe passage to the cabin. The second vignette is a river scene in which shimmering water is flanked by trees and rocks. A full moon hovers on the horizon and shines a strong beam onto the water. At the vanishing point, a large sailing vessel turns a bend of the river. The final vignette appears located on the oceanfront. A fire illuminates the hull of an immense sailing vessel. In the distance, four more ships sail on still ocean water and the moon again hovers on the horizon, casting shimmering light on the water.



Figure 8.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *A Collection of Small Moonlights, Virginia*, 1796-98, watercolour, 17.7 x 26.6 cm. Collection of Maryland Historical Society (1960-108-1-1-16). Digital image courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.

The text beneath the vignettes is a sardonic commentary on reactions to battles between French and Austrian forces.¹⁶ It facetiously suggests that it has been “proved as plain as the Nose on [a] Face” that the current turmoil will lead to peace between England and France and accordingly “religion order and subordination put upon its old proper footing.” Despite the complex international spectrum of concepts with which Latrobe’s image is engaged, the “Scene at Hampton, Virginia” is both the visual center of the image and the lingering focus of the eye. The minutely rendered cabin is at the physical center of the painting and the warm light flooding from its small window offers welcome, anchoring the image in a sea of chaos and

conveying an air of tranquility not reflected in the text. If the vignettes are studied beginning at right and following a clockwise-motion ending with the “Scene at Hampton, Virginia,” they suggest a theme of travel and homecoming. While no explicit geography is given, the flaming bonfire in the right-hand vignette may well be a metaphor for the flames of war burning in Europe, behind which ships and moonlight guide the viewer’s eye suggestively across the water. In the next vignette, the ship has implicitly traveled across the Atlantic and sails toward a large river, still following moonbeams. The final vignette shows the ship on the horizon and moonbeams pointing into the cove. Having traveled a great distance, the passenger can now find his home in this sheltered cove within a literal, even a clichéd, representation of this American home. While war rages in Europe and nations are thrown into upheaval, Latrobe’s image suggests travel across the Atlantic leading to another world.

Yet, this is a *trompe l’oeil*, and a viewer must avoid succumbing too easily to its compelling visual narrative. The stillness and tranquility of the central scene contrasts with both the violent and disillusioned text below and with the insistent circular motion across vignettes. Placed within the larger context of Latrobe’s imagery and writings from this period—and noting his focus on moonlight—the *trompe l’oeil* can be understood as melancholy, rather than celebratory. Overwhelmed by his own sadness and disconnection from Virginian society, Latrobe dreamed of the hermit’s lifestyle—even purchasing property on which to achieve this goal. Although such a lifestyle would be satisfying, he lamented that it would also be a failure—a way of renouncing his hopes for personal and professional achievement in the United States.¹⁷ The isolated retreat at the heart of this image suggests an escape from the world—a flight from failed homelands past and present. *Collection of Small Moonlights* offer the illusion of a compelling vision of American homecoming, while also capturing the preoccupations of the immigrant artist, who obsesses over European news (and American ignorance of current affairs), meditates on transatlantic connections, and seeks escape from displacement through a more permanent and self-conscious ascetic retreat. In his journals of this period, Latrobe described multiple moments in which Virginia and its inhabitants nearly appeared British to him—but each time he would experience a remarkable moment of “undeception” (a term Latrobe himself used, with fascinating correspondence to Wendy Bellion’s recent analysis of the term). This *trompe l’oeil* invites the viewer to experience this jarring circumstance of undeception—lured toward a promising homeland in America, the viewer nonetheless encounters a landscape rocked by an uncertain international context. Instead of a secure homeland, the image proffers the melancholy and stateless life of the hermit.

Accounting for the Immigrant Landscape

What, then, can Latrobe's immigrant landscapes contribute to this feature's focus on the current state of British landscape studies? Here I have discussed landscapes that are peripherally British—through their post-colonial context and/or through the perspective of the European artist-émigré. Latrobe's Virginian watercolors firmly reject any sense of celebratory American nationalism, even as they also reckon with Latrobe's sensibility of displacement. Similarly, these works take account of Latrobe's British subject position, and the former Colonial status of the landscapes he represents, even as they focus on "undeception," spatial journeys, and the immigrant's sensibility of landscape. Finally, in his innovative techniques of landscape painting, including the spatial experimentation and trompe l'oeil, Latrobe suggests ways in which these immigrant images can contribute to our understanding of ambitious landscape painting at the end of the eighteenth century. Far from the documentary images for which they have been mistaken, Latrobe's studies expect philosophical reflection, close visual scrutiny, and a content-driven analysis. As works that fall outside of the traditional boundaries of both British and American landscape studies, Latrobe's immigrant landscapes challenge us to see both place and displacement, perception and deception, through new and more complex lenses of analysis.

Through Latrobe's landscapes of displacement, we can see an artist's interpretation of the lived experience of immigration. Although there is a sudden rupture to immigration, with specific watershed moments that can be identified—boarding the transatlantic vessel, enduring the voyage, disembarking at the destination—Latrobe reminds us that the immigrant landscape is a continuous lived experience. Focused intently on getting to know the landscape of Virginia, Latrobe scrutinizes its sites with great attention and captures this specificity of place in his watercolors. But, he is also caught between two worlds. By rendering displacement, he is able to create a semblance of this continuous dual existence lived between past and present homelands. In seeking to understand artists within the historiographies of American or British art (as examples), we have been too ready to see these categories as absolute. Latrobe's works remind us of the subtleties in perspective and begin to train our eyes to look for such clues of displacement.

Deception and undeception are also important facets of the immigrant perspective that Latrobe explores. As in *A Collection of Small Moonlights*, imagination and reverie play a crucial role in the immigrant-artist's reconciliation of self. This particular piece plays on ideas of homeland, while ultimately building a forceful sensibility of isolation, and cultivating a vision of a philosophical refuge in isolation from the world. Pushed and pulled

across the Atlantic, the viewer confronts the realities of a world connected, while at the same time reckoning with the spatial and cultural divides between Europe and the United States. Whether imagining being “transported at an instant” back home or being temporarily tricked into thinking that an American ruin is a sign of Ancient European civilization, Latrobe allows the viewer to experience the powerful “undeception” of the immigrant who confronts the differences between the world inside his head and the realities of the surrounding landscape. While trompe l’oeil is an obvious medium in which to expect such games of deception/undeception, Latrobe also incorporates the process to good effect into his serial and paired landscapes. Wendy Bellion has demonstrated the significance of undeception to Early National cultures of citizenship in Philadelphia, but Latrobe’s implementation of the process, though also created in the young United States, emphasizes the significance of “undeception” more broadly in the complex international sphere of the 1790s.¹⁸

Landscape painting has long been interpreted as a means of envisioning a shared cultural imaginary for viewers in both Britain and the young United States. Through the space of this shared vision, artists could offer cultural critique, political commentary, probe scientific inquiry, and pursue many other interpretive directions. Latrobe’s landscapes of displacement remind us of an alternative view, in which a landscape may refer to multiple places at once and might also be alienating or deceiving in its contours. In the case of Latrobe’s landscapes, textual documentation allows the artist’s alternative visions to be decoded with reasonable accuracy. This oeuvre presents a significant case study in the complex realities of artists-in-motion, traveling across national boundaries, and associating the sites that they encountered with multiple (sometimes conflicting) sensibilities. The conjoined sensibilities of place and displacement in Latrobe’s watercolors invites (British) landscape studies to think with greater subtlety about the diverse perspectives of rendering and perceiving sites, recognizing that a viewer might be contemporaneously both placed within a view and displaced from it through diverse strategies of framing, fantasy, and reference.

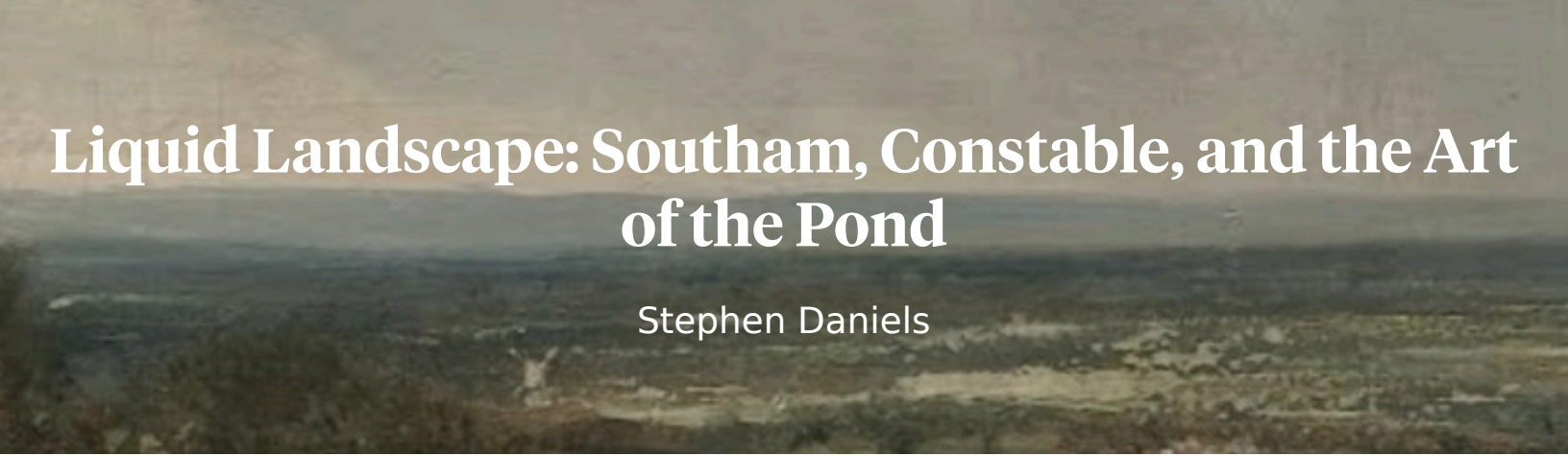
Footnotes

- ¹ The concept of Latrobe’s immigrant years is explained in detail in my forthcoming book *Epic Landscapes: Benjamin Henry Latrobe and the Art of Watercolor* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2019).
- ² See Latrobe’s journal entry of May 17, 1796, which has been reprinted in *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe 1795-1798*. Edited by Edward C. Carter II, with Angeline Polites, Lee W. Formwalt, and John C. Van Horne. Vol. I 1795-1797. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Maryland Historical Society, 1977): 127. Latrobe’s choice of the word “undeceived” is interesting and closely ties his ideas to the concept of “undeception” that is central to Wendy Bellion’s study of visual perception in early national Philadelphia: *Citizen-Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011): esp. 3 and 9.

- 3 In addition to Sienkewicz, *Epic Landscapes*, the principle resources concerning Latrobe's watercolor oeuvre remain *Latrobe's View of America, 1795-1820: Selections from the Watercolors and Sketches*, edited by John C. Van Horne and Charles E. Brownell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for The Maryland Historical Society, 1985); and *The Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, published in three volumes, edited by John C. Van Horne and Lee W. Formwalt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for The Maryland Historical Society, 1981-1987). Significant mentions of his work in watercolor by scholars of American art include: Wendy Bellion, PhD Dissertation, "Likeness and Deception in Early American Art" (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 2001), 169-170; Kathleen A. Foster, *Captain Watson's Travels in America: The Sketchbooks and Diary of Joshua Rowley Watson, 1772-1818* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press for The Barra Foundation, 1997), 268-271. The bibliography concerning Latrobe's architectural practice is too broad to review fully here. Interested readers are encouraged to begin with the following sources: Jeffrey A. Cohen and Charles E. Brownell, *The Architectural Drawings of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Vol. 2, Parts 1 and 2, *The Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Series II: *The Architectural and Engineering Drawings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for The Maryland Historical Society and the American Philosophical Society, 1994); Michael W. Fazio and Patrick A. Snadon, *The Domestic Architecture of Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Talbot Hamlin, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).
- 4 Most of the Latrobe scholarship was written before Greg Smith's excellent work to draw the close connections between architectural rendering and watercolor in late eighteenth-century Britain. See *The Emergence of the Professional Watercolourist: Contentions and Alliances in the Artistic Domain, 1760-1820* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), esp. 74-80.
- 5 My research contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to think across the fields of British and American art, to think across their nationalist categories. Among these recent publications are: Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *Thomas Cole's Journey: Atlantic Crossings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018); Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, and Jennifer Raab, *Picturesque and Sublime: Thomas Cole's Trans-Atlantic Inheritance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); Maurie McInnis, "Cultural Politics, Colonial Crisis, and Ancient Metaphor in John Singleton Copley's 'Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Izard,'" *Winterthur Portfolio* 34, nos 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1999): 85-108; Susan Rather, *The American School: Artists and Status in the Late Colonial and Early National Era* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2016); Susan Rather, "Benjamin West, John Galt, and the Biography of 1816," *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 2 (June 2004): 324-345; Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2014).
- 6 Latrobe's most important identity during his youth was as a member of the Moravian Church. He was raised in residential faith communities and schools in Yorkshire and for his teenage years in Silesia (on the modern-day borders between Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic). He began to separate from the church prior to his return to London ca. 1783 or in early 1784. In terms of heritage, Latrobe's father was Irish, his mother was born in a Moravian community in Pennsylvania, and he claimed more distant French ancestry.
- 7 For an exhaustive record of Latrobe's voyage, see Polites, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe 1795-1798*, Vol. 1. See also Sienkewicz, *Epic Landscapes*, Chapter 1.
- 8 The manuscript was never published in Latrobe's lifetime and was written as a pedagogical tool and gift for his American student in watercolor, Susan Catherine Spotswood. It has received limited scholarly attention since being reprinted with valuable editorial notes in Polites, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe 1795-1798*, Vol. 2, 468-531. For further bibliography and discussion, see Sienkewicz, *Epic Landscapes*, esp. Chapter 5.
- 9 See Benjamin Henry Latrobe, "An Essay on Landscape," in Angeline Polites (ed.) *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe 1795-1798*, Vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Maryland Historical Society, 1977), 485.
- 10 See Latrobe, "An Essay on Landscape," 490.
- 11 Journal entry of April 7, 1796, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe 1795-1798*, Vol. 1, 90.
- 12 See Sienkewicz, "Shattered Landscapes: Revolutionary Ruins in the Virginian Watercolors of Benjamin Henry Latrobe," *Art Inquiries* 17, no. 2 (December 2017): 155-171; and Sienkewicz, *Epic Landscapes*, Chapter 2.
- 13 Latrobe, Sketchbook I, image caption. Reprinted in Van Horne and Brownell, *Latrobe's View of America, 1795-1820*, 64.
- 14 This watercolor was first published in *Latrobe's View of America, 1795-1820* and dated in that text to 1799. For discussion of the corrected date, see Sienkewicz, *Epic Landscapes*, Chapter 8.
- 15 See Sienkewicz, *Epic Landscapes*, Chapter 8.
- 16 These references permit the dating of the image to 1797, as they accurately refer to military figures involved in skirmishes on the Rhine that happened in that year.
- 17 Retreat was a prominent strategy considered by Latrobe during his Virginian years. See Sienkewicz, *Epic Landscapes*, Chapters 3 and 7. See especially Latrobe's letter to Giambattista Scandella, January 24, 1799, reprinted in Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Vol. 1: 1784-1804, edited by John C. Van Horne and Lee W. Formwalt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for The Maryland Historical Society, 1984), 72.
- 18 See Bellion, *Citizen-Spectator*.

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Liquid Landscape: Southam, Constable, and the Art of the Pond

Stephen Daniels

Abstract

Water, in its various forms—from rivers to clouds, and amphibious sites, from marshes to meadows—has long been an integral, perhaps characteristic presence in the landscape arts in Britain. Currently, water is emerging as a key element in a wider art practice and environmental imagination. This paper considers the presence of a particular, if overlooked, water feature, the pond, in the work of two artists: one contemporary and the other a historical English landscape artist, both of whom are attentive to a range of hydrologies. The first part considers the place of water in the “landscape stories” of the contemporary photographer Jem Southam, and the series on the pond at Upton Pyne in Devon. The second part addresses the “natural history” of John Constable’s watery landscapes, and focuses on the place of Branch Hill Pond in his pictures of Hampstead Heath. The works of both artists maybe be located in a long-standing topographical tradition.

Authors

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The Place of Water

Water, in its various forms—from rivers to clouds, and in amphibious sites, from marshes to meadows—has long been an integral, perhaps characteristic, part of the landscape arts in Britain.

Currently, water is emerging as a key element in contemporary art practice, particularly in the extremities of its distribution, from floods to drought, connected with anthropogenic narratives of climate change. Water levels in environmental scholarship, across the humanities and sciences, have been rapidly rising, with studies of hydrologies, in wide-ranging societies and spaces, framing larger cultural issues. A range of topics from modernity to citizenship, once largely inland matters, are now on the waterfront, materially and imaginatively. Liquidity has become a key word, in such phrases as liquid times, liquid history, liquid cities, sometimes with a wider implication of flow, material process, and circulation. Landscape itself appears more liquid as a field of inquiry, with rivers, coasts, and lakes overspilling into a world of wetlands, water worlds, and waterscapes.¹

It is then timely to consider the place of water in the landscape arts of Britain, to consider questions of natural and cultural history in the formation and representation of water features and hydrological regimes, and to address the relations of land and water, at the intersection of epic and everyday histories, of material and mythical worlds. This paper does so by focusing on a commonplace if often academically overlooked water feature, the pond, as it appears in the work of the contemporary photographer Jem Southam and the nineteenth-century painter John Constable. The paper considers the portrayal of ponds, in terms of local ecologies and economies of the sites portrayed, in the wider systems of water management, and in the larger, hydrographic imaginations of the artists. This paper takes its cue from a remark made by Ian Jeffrey in an essay for Southam's 2000 volume: *Rockfalls, Rivermouths Ponds*. Jeffrey notes that the ponds in the volume "look cataclysmic" like meteor impacts or the flooded saps and mines in scarred battlefields of the Great War,

but they are probably just dug out, sometime in the last century by a man with a horse and cart ... like some of those figures you see in John Constable's paintings ... They are the kind of structures which fall almost out of sight below any of history's agreed horizons.²

The Place of the Pond

If ponds fall below the horizons of some of history's grander narratives, they have a key role in locally focused, natural, and topographical histories, both as named places, and as generic forms of water feature. A classic work in this tradition is Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne*, first published in 1789, which has been in print ever since; it is an inspiration to generations of authors and artists, and significantly an influence on both John Constable and Jem Southam.³

Along with particular trees and copses, crossroads and marker stones, ponds of various kinds are key landmarks in the parish of Selborne, named places such as Wolmer Pond and Bean Pond in the author's perambulations. Ponds in the parish have a variety of uses, for fishing and fowling, or watering livestock; they are arenas for observing detailed processes of natural and social history, such as the passage of migrating birds and the growth of aquatic plants which thrive on cattle dung on the bed; and they are places for pondering the relation of geology and scenery, for example, wondering why small ponds on porous chalk hills never fail, and why larger ones in impermeable clay valleys dry out. While emphasising detailed local knowledge, White also framed his parish in terms of a wider world, in prospect views, and systematic geography, mapping an expansive fluvial circulation, for a parish named after a small stream.

The *Selborne* stream makes one branch of the *Wey*; and meeting the *Black-down* stream at *Hedleigh*, and the *Alton* and *Farnham* stream at *Tilford Bridge*, swells into a considerable river, navigable at *Godalming*; from when its passes to *Guildford*, and so into the *Thames* at *Weybridge*; and this to the *Nore* into the German ocean.⁴

As White put it in the Preface, he hoped to induce his readers to "pay a more ready attention to the wonders of Creation, too frequently overlooked as common occurrences ... towards the enlargement of historical and topographical knowledge."⁵ The very first review of the book, in the journal *The Topographer* in 1789, found its attentive observations were made with "the precision of a philosopher ... not only the understanding is informed, but the imagination touched".⁶

Ponds are conspicuous in a twentieth-century genre of landscape history made famous in the work of W.G. Hoskins, notably *The Making of the English Landscape*, as key sites in the origin and perpetuity of settlements, whether permanent or seasonal, or as more temporary features associated with

particular periods. What made ponds visible—whether presently filled with water, passing silted depressions, or past desiccated hollows—was a combination of investigative technologies, current and former Ordnance Survey maps, new aerial photography, as well as motor car journeys, field walking and literary, etymological research. Ponds, in this literature, mark historical and temporal phases of landscape change, from never failing spring ponds as sources of origin, to mill and fish ponds, most dating from the Norman Conquest, to flooded gravel pits and mine workings in industrial districts. In this view, ponds are as much earthworks as waterworks—dug, damned, embanked, shaped, dredged, maintained, filled, and abandoned—linguistically connected to various forms of “pounding”, penning, and enclosing, so as close to fields and village greens, as to pools and streams. Ponds with a rich array of regional names, such as flashes, meres, and mardles, emerge as key habitats and gathering places for all kinds of pond life, including local grazing and gossiping, long-distance wayfaring, and landscape observation.⁷

Jem Southam

The contemporary photographer Jem Southam makes books of his work, a series of volumes characterised by texts as well as photographs, commentaries, and essays authored by Southam himself as well as by a number of other commissioned writers. Southam is a narrative artist, mindful of long-standing literary as well as pictorial traditions of landscape portrayal. Initially influenced by works in the 1975–1976 exhibition *New Topographics* at the International Museum of Photography, in Rochester, New York, which he restaged with Paul Graham in a reduced form at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol in 1981, Southam has subsequently acknowledged an older topographical tradition, in literature as well as photography. This focused more closely on the local detail and livelihood of landscapes, in often familiar places close to his home, patiently documenting subtle changes over time, in what he calls “landscape stories”. Southam is mindful of the traditions of landscape history, including Gilbert White’s local forms of attentive investigation, through repeated perambulations of a place, as well as the wider, regional and national surveys of his fellow Devonian W.G. Hoskins. In part, because of his familiarity with the structure and scenery of south-west England, with its mining history and exposed geology, Southam’s landscapes are often mineral, and if post-industrial, are so in a way which recalls a deep industrial past.⁸

Water is a key presence in Southam’s work, water in its various forms: clouds, seas, rivers and streams, pools, ponds, and puddles. Water is part of a wider sense of flux and fluidity in landscape change—of making and unmaking, formation and dissolution—with a keen sense of how wider histories and geographies are implicated in a particular site. There is strong

current, even a sombre undertow, of mythical as well as material history, of biblical flood, cosmic catastrophe, ruin and redemption, pollution and reclamation. So *Clouds Descending*, the title of his work on the industrial coast of Cumbria, is more than a matter of mountain mists, but is taken from the title of Wesleyan hymn, on the Second Coming, “Lo He comes with Clouds Descending”. Water features as part of short, private stories as well as longer public narratives. A sequence charts the pool maintained by his painter colleague Mike Garton in ancient woodland near Exeter, first created when a tree had fallen, half-blocking a stream, and shown in an increasing state of abandonment after the painter dies, his apparatus of easel, poles, and string disappearing into the fabric of the woods. The kitchen sink in which Southam washes up looking over his family garden is photographed after many years of just looking, “sometimes feel[ing] the weight of the mortgage bearing down on me as I take in the prospect”. ⁹

At the 2010 Art and Environment conference, at Tate Britain, Southam explained the role of large format cameras in charting a narrative field, in relation to a recent picture of the River Exe, on the contact zone between earth and water, a tale of the river bank, or rather a series of stories, revealing seasonal changes over a year and more.

Early on I started using a lens that rendered, even with this system, an exceptional degree of peripheral detail. This led me to pay more forensic attention to the myriad narratives that a view contained. In one photograph, for example, a thin line of ice follows the bank of the river, a large dog has recently made its way onto the soft sand of the bank, the river level has recently receded five or so inches leaving a small “tide” line of fine twigs, and two light stalks are all that remains visible from the profusion of towering and invasive Himalayan Balsam plants that grew here over the summer, while twisted through the lower hanging branches at various levels are clumps of organic material left from the earlier autumn floods, and on the higher branches of the alder trees that lean over the river hundreds of dark dots that are the remains of last year’s fruit. ¹⁰

In his essay on Southam’s book *The River Winter*, the journey along the banks of the Exe from late autumn to spring, Richard Hamblyn positions such local stories in grander global narratives:

We forget that winter is the dry season ... after the freeze comes thaw and flood, as water returns to liquid movement and life.

Freeze thaw, flood: the great climatic cycles that carved the topography of the northern hemisphere, and which continue to shape the idea of winter that lies deep in our cultural imagination.

11

In Southam's anthology *Landscape Stories* (2005), the place and power of water shifts. The book opens with a selection from *The Red River* (1989), a series surveying the valley of a small tinning stream in Cornwall, running just seven miles to the sea, no more than a few yards across, coloured red by the minerals of this tin mining region. What the valley may lack in length, or the stream in width, is made up by the depth of the landscape, at 2,000 feet, Dolcoath Mine was one of the deepest in Europe, with numerous abandoned flooded shafts. The series depicts several valley profiles and sections, taking in many apparently waterless pictures—gardens, fields, buildings, interiors—of hard won habitation, in which the river is there by implication.

The middle selections in *Landscape Stories* are more explicitly hydrological, focusing on physical processes at contact zones of earth and water, in "rockfalls, river mouths, ponds" distributed across the coasts of southern England, from Kent to Cornwall and Somerset, defined by the English and Bristol Channels, opening to the Atlantic. Here is "a land that is unstable and unpredictable, constantly moving through different states and at varying speeds." The series "partly grew from a desire to imagine the Earth engulfed by water" and the rockfalls include tales of physical geographers who spend their lives observing the slow progress of rocks down mountains, "tiny rivulets of particles", opening up "the idea of the Earth as in a permanently fluid state".

The ponds appear at first sight to lie at a tangent to the rockfalls and river mouths that preceded them. Three are dew ponds, inland on dry hills, not connected to wider systems of flow—artificial features made by fabricating an impermeable layer (with materials including clay, soot, and straw) to trap rainfall, or snow melt, and which dry out seasonally and become abandoned as natural looking hollows. The pond at Brampford Speke may look like a dew pond, but actually isn't; and it is closely connected with the river system, one which I learned on a field walk with Southam, is part of the flood plain of the Exe, a depression scoured when the river overflows its banks in spate, which holds water as the river recedes (down a visible channel) and then dries out. It is photographed in five different years, filled with water at different levels, empty and growing with meadowland plants. Perhaps technically speaking, the feature at Brampford Speke is a pool rather than a pond, if, like the seasonal bay of a stream, such pools are used as watering places for

livestock, and it puts the distinction in question, in a highly managed landscape in which it is often hard to separate natural, animal, and human modification.

The pond at Upton Pyne is another type: a flooded quarry of abandoned mine workings. The twenty-eight photographs show changes over five years: some part of diptychs, surveying the water's edge, the banks, surrounding buildings and the track beyond; later ones looking out over the wider landscape. With its focus on habitation, in a former industrial landscape, it connects with the opening sequence of *The Red River*. Also the Upton Pyne sequence is a story of a settlement, told from an anonymous body of water on the edge of the village that for Southam "challenged the idea of what a village pond should look like."

Upton Pyne

Five miles north-west of Exeter, the village of Upton Pyne is now a farming, part commuter settlement, one, like many in rural Devon, with an industrial past. On the edge of the village, the pond is the flooded site of a former manganese mine, opened in 1770. In his book on Devon, W.G. Hoskins notes that this mine, and two smaller ones on the same lode,

supplied the whole country for many years. It was used first in the manufacture of Egyptian ware in the Potteries, and in purifying glass. Its later use in bleaching led to a considerable increase in output, some 2000–3000 tons being shipped annually from Exeter in the early years of the 19th century. ¹²

A visitor in 1810 noted how "the celebrated mine" had boomed from small beginnings, after "the best oxide of manganese that has ever been raised" was accidentally discovered by a person passing along the road to Exeter, its black matter seeping out of the surface of red sandstone gravels.

The estate owners, an old Devon family, the Northcotes, grew rich on the proceeds of leasing the mine to two Exeter merchants (one of whom is commemorated in the village church, along with the monuments to the Northcotes), and richer still as the lease expired and they resold amidst increasing demand. Briefed by the mine owner and supervisor, the "captain", the visitor walked down a winding path cut into a hillside to the foot of a fifty-foot perpendicular rock, and a series of pillars left by opencast excavations forming an archway to two vertical shafts; winched down one another fifty feet, he heard men working further below but declining to go down the further fifty feet as conditions, in a mine not drained by pumps, were "thoroughly wet". The visitor reckoned "this single mine may be capable of

supplying the whole island for a century yet to come”, if it actually closed soon after, perhaps partly because of drainage problems.¹³ On later nineteenth-century maps, it is recorded as an “abandoned quarry”, known locally as The Black Pit, before appearing as a bright blue pond on maps from the 1970s, after it filled with seepage, and run off, down the hill from the village, impounded by the dumping of spoil for new building.

When Southam first came across the pond at Upton Pyne, it was a tip for discarded household and farm waste and choked with fallen trees, and the land around was used to keep pigs and raise vegetables. Cycling past one day, he saw a man working at the edge of the water, one of the householders living by the pond, and stopped to talk and learn of his scheme to improve the place. This encounter prompted a series of works which recall the conventions of landscape art and of writing which was current during the period when the mine was in operation, particularly those based on repeated visits to a place to observe detailed natural and cultural changes, and to envision key moments in a longer-term narrative.

Some photographs have compositional echoes of Constable’s *Haywain*, the whitewashed former mine captain’s house framing one side of the pond, like Willy Lot’s house at Flatford, a boat on the bank echoing that by the ford on the Stour.¹⁴ One view ranges further to include other houses of the village and the tower of the church. Developments on the other side, bordering a farm, are more utilitarian, including sheds with corrugated roofs. The series engages closely with the conventions of landscape design, in which the making of water features—including the refashioning of former horse pools, fish ponds, and flooded quarries—is a central motif. Time specific transformations scenes were central to Repton’s art of landscape gardening, initially neat prospects fashioned from unkempt circumstances, but also records of more uncertain progress, and abandonment of precarious schemes, under pressure from wider social powers in the land and the forces of nature.¹⁵

The first part of *Upton Pyne* surveys a man’s efforts to transform the landscape into an “arcadian realm”, burning and clearing, introducing ducks, geese, woodland glades, and banks of flowers. While his efforts remained unfinished, the task was taken up by others, if again with signs of hard won changes and defeats. As the boat changes position around the banks, so it gradually rots, sheds fall in, vegetation spreads, trees collapse, an orange plastic crate slips into the water (*Fig. 1*). All bear testimony to the attrition involved in such a human venture. However, during the second phase of work, a new energy and a more utilitarian vision did succeed in turning the pond and its surroundings into an extended garden, altogether a more welcoming sight.



Figure 1.

Jem Southam, Upton Pyne (book 1 #6&7 Diptych), January 1997/2004, chromogenic dye coupler prints on Sintra mount t1206c, each 68.6 x 86.4 cm. Collection of Charles Isaacs Photographs Inc. Digital image courtesy of Jem Southam.

The final part of the story pans away from water's edge to place the pond in "a wider geographical perspective". We look from a farm track over the countryside towards the Exe Valley, in the kind of sharp turn which landscape gardeners designed for carriage drives, to reveal a dramatic prospect of the countryside. Hoskins called the view "to the hills of Raddon ... over a countryside of the fertile red sandstones, at any time of the year ... one of the most satisfying views in all Devon".¹⁶ The first picture of the track shows it smooth, newly surfaced, which over succeeding months becomes muddy and potholed, a large puddle forming in the centre (Fig. 2) echoing the pond, the entrance looking progressively more neglected, with a sign saying "Slow Down Please" falling down.



Figure 2.

Jem Southam, Upton Pyne (Epilogue #2), 2004, chromogenic dye coupler prints on Sintra mount t1246c, 68.6 x 86.4 cm. Collection of Charles Isaacs Photographs Inc. Digital image courtesy of Jem Southam.

John Constable

Studies of the art of John Constable can scarcely step out of the water worlds of his landscapes, both in the sites he portrayed and in what he had to say about his art in letters, lectures, and reported conversations. So within Constable's catchment, defined by the rivers and coasts of south-east England, is a world of canals, fords, mill streams, sluices, rain showers, estuaries, breaking waves, and shipping channels, the vaporous atmosphere of clouds and dew, the moistness of pasture, as well as the half-submerged bankside plants and rotting wooden posts. Contributors to the recent Tate *In Focus* feature on *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, throw new light on the picture's hydrologies, the famous thunderstorm and rainbow, and the lesser known infrastructure of the meadows themselves, engineered for irrigation and drainage, and of the planned city itself, crossed by channels, built after it moved from its former site on the desiccated hill of Old Sarum.

17

Constable's approach was framed by ideas from the fields of natural theology, natural philosophy, and natural history, the traditional providential schema of the water cycle, the diagrams of modern meteorology, and the knowledge that comes from close, patient observation. Many texts combined

local and global spheres of investigation, and different registers of natural knowledge. So Thomas Forster's *Researches about Atmospheric Phaenomena*, with its systematic explanations of cloud formation and vision of meteorology as an advanced, worldwide form of knowledge (a passage which Constable marked in his copy), was supplemented by more local, proverbial Calendars of Nature. So that for Walthamstow in February 1812:

16th The Crocus in flower. Snowdrops abundant. I heard the sound of Frogs croaking in a pond by the side of Lea Bridge Road. 22^d A Thundershower with Hail to-day. 26th The proverb of "February fill dyke" is made good today. The marshes of the Lea are quite flooded, and all the ditches stream with water. ¹⁸

Constable's engraver, David Lucas, recalled how the painter "explained to me if I may so call it the natural history" of *Stratford Mill*,

among his remarks were the following, that when water reaches the roots of plants or trees the action of the extremities of their roots is such that they no longer vegetate but die which explains the appearance of the dead tree on the edge of the stream. ¹⁹

In his lectures, Constable was similarly alert to the natural history on display in old master works. Of Poussin's *Winter*—generally known as *The Deluge* ... can there be greater proof of the effective power of landscape than that this portentous event should have been told by landscape alone", observing that the artist "has not allowed his imagination to wander from the Mosaic account which tells us of rain only. Human habitations, rocks, and mountains are gradually disappearing, as the water rises undisturbed by earthquakes or tornadoes." Ruysdael's *Windmill, Winter* "told a story" successfully. "The ground is covered with snow, and the trees are still white," and a mill "indicates a change in the wind." "The clouds are opening in that direction, which appears by the glow in the sky to be the south (the sun's winter habitation in our hemisphere) and this change will produce a thaw before morning." "Ruysdael understood what he was painting ... *We see nothing till we truly understand it.*" ²⁰

The humidity of Constable's art provoked a number of critical comments, for example, Fuseli's remark on seeing *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* that the painter "makes me call for my great coat and umbrella" to the *Literary Gazette's* view that the painting revealed Constable as a "Neptunist", subscribing to the theory that water was the key agent of

geological change.²¹ There was a larger cultural issue here—a European tradition of academic criticism that was suspicious of artistic effect of the damp climate and environment of Britain. Nicholas Alfrey has explored this in the reception of Constable's art in France, to pictures exhibited at The Salon in 1827 now known as the *Haywain* and *View on the Stour*. In the following year, in *Revue des Débats*, the critic Étienne-Jean Delécluze looked back on this landmark display to comment on the effect Constable had had on young French artists then, finding in what were evidently pictures of shallow, well-regulated waterways (forded by a cart, poled by a bargeman), and described as such in the catalogue, images of unruly, watery excess, “les marécages de M. Constable”, Constable's marshlands, perhaps a treacherous terrain for the future of French art.²²

Branch Hill Pond

When Constable moved to Hampstead, he exchanged a familiar lowland hydrology of the eastern and southern coastlands, for that of urbanising, sandstone hills. Branch Hill Pond on Hampstead Heath features as a motif in a long series of Constable's works, exhibition oils and plein-air sketches as well as a print engraved by David Lucas. The series begins when Constable and his growing family took a series of summer lodgings in Hampstead from 1819, initially near the west part of the heath, a few yards downhill from the tree-lined avenue of Judges Walk and views over Branch Hill Pond. The pond occupies different positions in the foregrounds of the pictures, left, right, and dead centre, in angles of view which encompass a range of features on and bordering the heath.

Branch Hill Pond was one of a number of ponds, of various kinds on Hampstead Heath, created at its many springs (at the junction of its cap of porous sandstone and underlying, impermeable clay) excavated for both sand and water supply from the eighteenth century, as part of the metropolitan expansion of London. The map in *Topography and Natural History of Hampstead* (1813, 1818), the first guidebook of the parish, authored by John James Park, picks out the arc of ponds in the watershed of the parish. Branch Hill Pond was fed by another pond higher up, Whitestone Pond, formed from the spring source of the Westbourne, which then flowed down towards London, through Kilburn, Bayswater and into the Thames at Chelsea. To the east, the Hampstead Water Company created a string of ponds from the Vale of Health, as reservoirs, from which water was piped by conduit as far as Tottenham Court Road. The ponds had multiple uses, the shallow ones for watering horses and livestock, the voluminous one at the Vale of Health was used for a main laundry site, although Park's volume warned that these deeper ponds “have been fatal to many incautious bathers, owing to the sudden shelving of their banks”.²³

In the process of pond construction, the marshiness of parts of the heath was drained and the landscape presented a clearer contrast of water and earth, with ponds enclosed from dry sandy soil, if new pits were liable to flood. Sand and gravel were carted out in vast quantities for brick making, path making, and road surfacing (spread as drying agent after heavy rain). There was then nothing archaic or rustic about the ponds in Hampstead; they were an integral part of its modern, metropolitan development, including a spate of new building in the place itself. Some ponds survived further nineteenth-century changes, put to different uses; so the ponds of the Hampstead Water Company became an integral part of the Heath's preservation as an amenity, developed as open air swimming baths, if Branch Hill Pond did not. Eventually filled in in 1889, its banks now form a hollow in a patch of grassed heathland surrounded by large trees and high-story buildings—a site that gives little sense of the spectacular scenes Constable portrayed.

A number of writings and pictures of Hampstead in the early nineteenth century note the raw and disturbed state of the landscape then, “the whole face of the heath is become so mutilated that the prospect of beauty is nearly destroyed”, observed a visitor in 1806. But they also noted what Constable showed in his sketches, that a variety of colourful wild plants quickly colonised diggings, of bright red and yellow sand, and excursionists took to the dry pathways, terraced by excavations on each side, and picnickers to the hollows. Also there were efforts to preserve the trees which feature in many of these sketches, planted a hundred years before, remnants of avenues and groves, esteemed by radicals as well as conservatives as signs of resistance to speculative building. Such trees were landmarks in a new narrative which emphasised the controlled making and management of a polite, family friendly, professional man's suburb, with appropriate cultural amenities, and a great space, for the study of antiquity and natural history, in the minerals and fossils found in excavations, and in the exposed summits opening extensive views ranging over south-east England. ²⁴

Among the reading matter that informed, or confirmed, Constable's studies of the heath was White's *The Natural History of Selborne*, recommended to him by his Salisbury friend John Fisher.

It is a book that would delight you & be highly instructive to you in your art, if you are not already acquainted with it. I am quite earnest & anxious for you to get it, because it is in your own way of close natural observation: & has in it that quality, that, to me, constitutes the great pleasure of your society. ²⁵

Constable ordered a copy immediately, replying that, “the mind & feeling which produced the ‘Selborne’ is such an [sic] one I have always envied”, a “clear and intimate view of nature”, “this book is an addition to my estate”.

²⁶ The edition Constable purchased, and which became the model for the work’s popular success, was that edited by John Aikin, the Unitarian poet, essayist, and publisher, which made the work a more ecumenical text, appealing to a liberal view of landscape. Much of the antiquarian material of the original edition, dealing with manorial and monastic matters is cut, including long transcriptions in Latin, and the material added included a comparative Calendar of Nature, poems, and new illustrations. ²⁷

Constable’s most frequent compositions featuring Branch Hill Pond show the pond embanked against the road, with horses and cattle drinking, in one with bathers on the edge of the water ([Fig. 3](#)). The foreground is a steep sand bank, with a number of versions showing material being dug and carted out, heading for the road. In one, men are filling in depressions which had become waterlogged, a condition of excavation; another takes a view in the other direction, looking from the pond in the Vale of Health with a glimpse of the lower reservoirs descending to Kilburn. Excursionists ply sand tracks by Branch Hill Pond, and some lone spectators are silhouetted on the summit of sand banks. Houses feature beyond the heath, notably the one named as the Salt Box, in the modern title. In the final picture, one of the artist’s last works, of 1837, is a windmill, usually reckoned to be transposed from a sketch of somewhere else, Suffolk or the South Downs, if Park’s map of 1813 marked a windmill to the south, on Holly Bush Hill.



Figure 3.

John Constable, Branch Hill Pond, Hampstead, 1824–25, oil on canvas, 87 x 102.87 cm. Collection of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Collection (49.18.4). Digital image courtesy of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (CC-BY-NC).

The picture space in this view is bisected more or less equally between land and sky, and one of the functions of the pond is to mirror the sky, its particular formations of cloud and sunlight, and in some of the sunset sketches, illuminating the landscape (Fig. 4). The pond also describes the circularity, which is key aspect of this hilltop vantage point, for Constable valued the extensive 360 degree view. In a letter to Fisher, on a walk he took with his wife, he made a circular compass diagram of the “the panorama of this place”, the cardinal points at Windsor and Gravesend, on the Thames, Dorking and St Albans on the chalk hills, adding that it had the “finest foregrounds—in roads, heath, trees, ponds”.²⁸ Like a guide to panoramas in London theatres, he pointed out to one purchaser of a Branch Hill view, entranced by the “fresh greens” in the middle distance, that here were the fields about Harrow and the villages of Hendon and Kilburn, and that the picture ranged further, that Windsor Castle was picked out on the horizon just to the north of a dark cloud and shower of rain.²⁹



Figure 4.

John Constable, Branch Hill Pond, Hampstead, ca. 1821-22, oil sketch, dimensions unknown. Collection of Victoria & Albert Museum, London (125-1888). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum.

Landscape and Place

There are ponds aplenty in British art, if unlike other components of landscape with which they are closely connected, such as trees, cottages, gardens, farms, rivers, and roads, they have seldom been addressed in art historical writing as a motif, either as a functional feature or cultural symbol.

³⁰ Ponds are often overlooked as commonplace—a local, lowly part of pictorial ensembles, hidden in plain sight, below the threshold of significance. For different periods and locations, Southam and Constable bring ponds into artistic focus, with an attention to the manifold particulars of these places, their lived experiences, as well as their detailed structure and surroundings.

The context for comparing their art over two centuries is a tradition of topography, in writing and pictures, that is presently being reclaimed in scholarship as a form of cultural representation. ³¹ Topography has never been a fixed, continuous genre; indeed, it has often been seen as too narrow in scope and too low in cultural esteem, before being periodically renovated, enriched, and transformed into an ambitious form of knowledge, for example, by a work like Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne*. As White positioned Woolmer Pond and Bean Pond as both local landmarks, and sites in larger geographical worlds, so Southam and Constable similarly situate the ponds at Upton Pyne and Branch Hill. In a series of works, they

portray these ponds as arenas of detailed change, landmarks of memory, pivots of extensive panoramas, and places of reflection for wide-ranging, long-lasting questions on the making and meaning of landscape.

Footnotes

- 1 Stephen Daniels, "On the Waterfront", in Francesco Vallerani and Francesco Visentin (eds), *Waterways and the Cultural Landscape* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 19–28.
- 2 Ian Jeffrey, "The Earth and Us", in Jem Southam, *Rockfalls, Rivermouths, Ponds* (Eastbourne: Towner Art Gallery, 2000), n.p.
- 3 For a recent edition, which editorially not only situates White in his own time, but also explores subsequent responses, see Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, edited by Anne Secord (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 4 White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, 8.
- 5 White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, 3.
- 6 Quoted in White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, 242.
- 7 See a key essay influencing Hoskins, titled "Ponds", in O.G.S. Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field* (London: Dent, 1952), 123–131. Ponds are also prominent in the more speculative landscape archaeology of Alfred Watkins, as key sites in extensive ancient trackways. See Watkins' popular text *The Old Straight Track: Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites and Mark Stones* (London: Methuen & Co., 1925); and for a wider discussion, Stephen Daniels, "Lines of Sight: Alfred Watkins, Photography and Topography in Early Twentieth Century Britain". *Tate Papers* (Autumn 2006), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/06/lines-of-sight-alfred-watkins-photography-and-topography-in-early-twentieth-century-britain>. Accessed 1 March 2018.
- 8 Jem Southam in conversation with Andrew Nadolski, "Stories from the Land". *On Landscape*, posted 1 March 2013, <https://www.onlandscape.co.uk/2013/03/jem-southam-interview/>. Author's personal conversations with Jem Southam, notably in October 2017 and October 2018. Coincidentally, in 1992, Hoskins' ashes were scattered in the river meadows at Bramford Speke—the place of one of Southam's pond series, 1996–2000.
- 9 Jem Southam, *Clouds Descending* (Salford: Lowry Press, 2008); Jem Southam, *Landscape Stories* (New York: Blind Spot, 2005), n.p. See also Stephen Daniels, review of Jem Southam's *A Raft of Carrots*, *Creative Camera* 316 (June–July 1992), 35–39.
- 10 Quoted in Nicholas Alfrey, Stephen Daniels, and Joy Sleeman, "To the Ends of the Earth", *Tate Papers* 17 (2010), <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/17/to-the-ends-of-the-earth-art-and-environment>. Accessed 6 June 2018.
- 11 Richard Hamblyn, "Winter", in Jem Southam, *The River Winter* (London: Mack, 2012), n.p.
- 12 W.G. Hoskins, *Devon* (London: Collins, 1954), 140.
- 13 Samuel Parkes, *Chemical Essays, Principally Related to the Arts and Manufactures of the British Dominions*, Vol. 2 (London: Baldwin, Craddock and Joy, 1823), 341–343.
- 14 Nicholas Alfrey, "Romanticism Gets Real", *Tate Etc* 21 (Spring 2011), <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/romanticism-gets-real>. Accessed 6 June 2018.
- 15 Stephen Daniels, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).
- 16 Hoskins, *Devon*, 390.
- 17 See the essays by Amy Concannon, John Thornes, and Charles Watkins, in Tate *In Focus*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/salisbury-cathedral-constable/the-painting>. Accessed 6 June 2018.
- 18 Thomas Forster, *Researches about Atmospheric Phaenomena*, 3rd edn (London: Harding, Mayor and Lepard, 1823), 363. On Constable and Forster, see John E. Thornes, *John Constable's Skies* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999), 68–78.
- 19 Leslie Parris and Conal Shields, *John Constable: Further Documents and Correspondence* (London: Tate Gallery and Suffolk Records Society, 1975), 57.
- 20 R.B. Beckett, *John Constable's Discourses* (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1970), 52, 61, 64.
- 21 C.R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable* (London: Longman, 1845), 109. *Literary Gazette*, 14 May 1831, 315.
- 22 Nicholas Alfrey, "The Marshlands of Constable", *Tate Papers* (forthcoming).
- 23 John James Park, *The Topography and Natural History of Hampstead*, 2nd edn (London: Nicols, Son and Bentley, 1818), 74.
- 24 T.F.T. Baker, Diane K. Bolton, and Patricia E.C. Croot, "Hampstead: Hampstead Heath", in C.R. Elrington (ed.), *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 9, Hampstead, Paddington* (London: British History Online, 1989), 75–81, *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol9/pp75-81>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

- 25 R.B. Beckett, *John Constable's Correspondence VI; The Fishers* (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1968), 64–66.
- 26 Beckett, *John Constable's Correspondence VI; The Fishers*, 64–66.
- 27 Gilbert White, edited John Aikin, *The Works in Natural History of the Late Gilbert White* (London: T. Bensley, 1802). Parris and Shields, *John Constable: Further Documents*, 45. On Aikin, see Stephen Daniels and Paul Elliott, "'Outline Maps of Knowledge' John Aikin's Geographical Imagination", in Felicity James and Ian Inkster (eds), *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbould Circle 1740–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 94–125.
- 28 Beckett, *Constable Correspondence VI; The Fishers*, 81.
- 29 Parris and Fleming Williams, *Constable*, 235–236.
- 30 For art in France, see the suggestive discussion of ponds in Greg M. Thomas, *Art and Ecology in Nineteenth Century France: The Landscapes of Theodore Rousseau* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 23–27.
- 31 See particularly, the project hosted by the British Library, *Picturing Places*, <https://www.bl.uk/picturing-places>.

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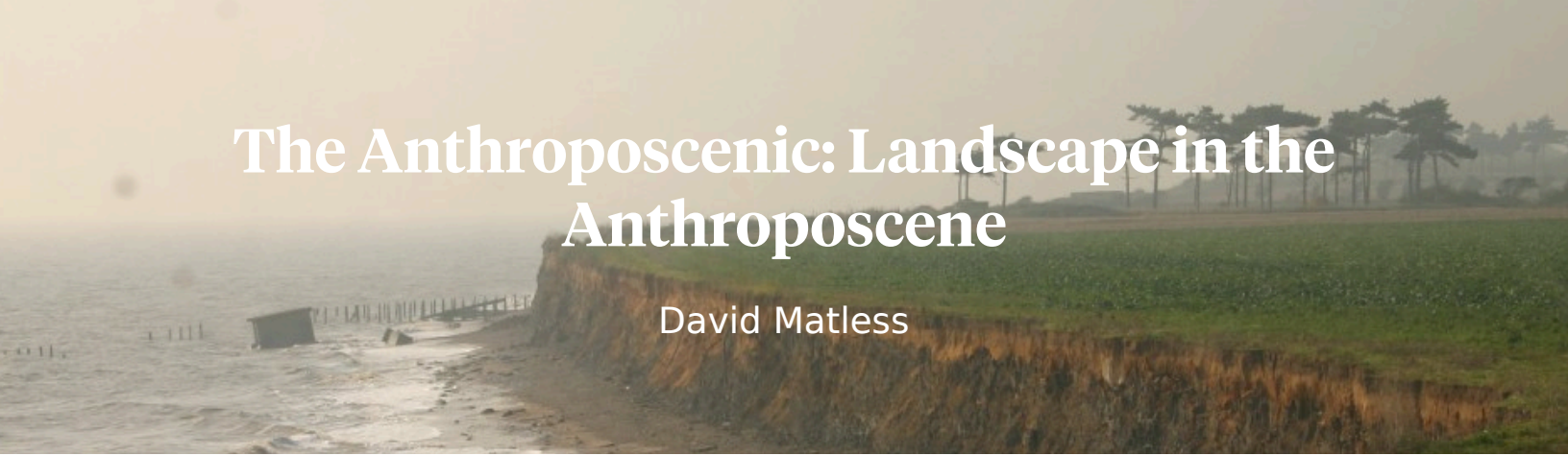
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The Anthroposcenic: Landscape in the Anthropocene

David Matless

Abstract

Through the “Anthroposcenic”, this paper explores how landscape becomes emblematic of processes deemed to mark an Anthropocene epoch, beginning with a detailed discussion of Simon Roberts’ photography of Somerset floods. The Anthropocene, whereby the human species is held to have made a distinctive mark on the geological record, has received extensive scientific and public commentary, and the Anthroposcenic indicates a potential point of correspondence with landscapes, both real and representational. The paper discusses the temporality of the Anthropocene, and forms of image work carried out around it. The paper then examines various forms of contemporary Anthroposcenic landscape imagery concerned with coastal erosion. Recent years have seen a proliferation of coastal art practice, with the meeting point of land and sea being an apt site for reflection on the Anthropocene and climate change. The paper also discusses imagery evoking undersea lost lands, including the North Sea’s former “Doggerland”. The paper sets current art practice alongside the imagery of scientific research, and within a genealogy of narratives of coastal change.

Authors

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A New Deposition

The “now” in “Landscape Now”, the title of this special issue of *British Art Studies*, deserves scrutiny. One emerging definition of “now” is the Anthropocene—a now whose beginning remains open to dispute, but which will linger, if the label takes hold. A geological epoch defined as beginning in the recent past that might even outlast the study of British art.

This essay uses the term “Anthroposcenic” to explore how landscape art might depict a new epoch, beginning with an image of flood. In February 2014, Simon Roberts photographed a family looking from Burrow Mump over a deluged landscape: *Flooding of the Somerset Levels, Burrowbridge* (Fig. 1).



Figure 1.

Simon Roberts, *Flooding of the Somerset Levels, Burrowbridge*, 2014, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Simon Roberts.

The image appears in Roberts’ 2017 collection *Merrie Albion*, a photographic exploration of landscape and identity over a decade, environmental tumult appearing alongside the political turmoil documented elsewhere in the book.

¹ The flooded “Albion” shown here carries its share of national iconography, the Levels bearing historic associations with King Alfred at nearby Athelney, and mythic resonances via Avalon and Glastonbury. Roberts’ viewpoint, Burrow Mump, is a smaller version of Glastonbury Tor, complete with St Michael’s church ruin at its summit, whose tower stands behind the man behind the lens. Burrow Mump was donated to the National Trust in 1946 by

Major Alexander Gould Barrett, a plaque on the tower recording it as a memorial: “that the men and women of Somerset who died serving their country in the Second World War may be remembered here in time to come.”

Roberts’ photograph lays a new landscape narrative over older iconography: new stories of anxiety and value, the temporal and precarious. In Britain, flood management had achieved newly political status in 2014 as a wet winter brought climate change and the future likelihood of extreme events to the fore. The government Environment Agency was accused of effectively abandoning Burrowbridge, and Royal Marines were brought in to reinforce defences; a line of white sandbags appears near the centre of Roberts’ image. The embanked River Parrett flows in the middle distance beyond the A361, and has spilled into the fields to the west. The Quantock Hills are beyond, the river flowing to the right, north to Bridgwater and the sea.

Flood events can be both a disaster and a spectacle, and Roberts photographed the flood on 11 February, choosing the elevated prospect offered by the Mump, in part to register others looking. Roberts gains a perspective on a family’s perspective on altered landscape, his own tripod-mounted large format camera capturing the adult family members moving phones to record events. Muddy foreground turf indicates that others too have been here for the view, though Roberts recalls that during his visit Burrowbridge was “eerily deserted”, save for this one family.² As often in his images, Roberts, who would have been conspicuous on the day, appears to escape the attention of the observed, hiding in plain sight, though the small child peering over the adult’s shoulder does seem to catch Roberts’ camera eye. What is that man doing?

Roberts’ landscape images are marked by careful social observation; we assume this is a family group, and from their dress, situation and lack of baggage, we might assume they are not tourists and are in fact familiar with the place already. Here are working people viewing a working landscape whose normal patterns of labour have been suspended by the weather. Cars are parked behind the industrial buildings below, so indoors things seem to be proceeding, and roads are passable, but field working is out. The family may, like Roberts, have driven here for the view, or walked up from home. This inter-generational picture indicates not only spatial but temporal prospects, viewpoints forward in time as well as outward across the landscape. Will this happen more as the children grow, as the adults age? The flood waters are vividly brown with sediment, signalling erosive disruption, yet also deposition for future fertility. Floods have made this landscape in the past, but will their increased frequency and severity shift the present balance, becoming in human terms destructive rather than constructive, anthropogenic climate change disrupting human habitat? As the world enters a proposed new geological epoch, whereby humanity has

marked the rock record, the flooded River Parrett lays down new deposits. Future geologists on the Levels may find these Anthropocene sediments; future art historians, viewing *Merrie Albion*, might find Roberts' photograph Anthroposcentic.

The Anthroposcentic Now

This essay uses the term “Anthroposcentic” to explore landscape as emblematic of certain processes marking the Anthropocene. Though yet to be formally approved as a new geological epoch, the idea of the Earth entering a time where not only its land surfaces, sea waters, air qualities, and climatic systems, but also its rock records, are irredeemably stamped by human activity, has taken a cultural hold. The Anthropocene is a label that can suggest human culpability and guilt, as well as human capability and power. The very act of labelling the Earth in this way may be for some an indication of human hubris, for others a recognition of blame which might spur remedial action; not that such action could ever quite remove the label, everything becoming Holocene again. Even an Anthropocene made less destructive to humanity (whatever the consequences for other species) would remain an Anthropocene, the remedial action itself signifying the human capacity for Earth effects.

The term “Anthroposcentic” was first proposed in a scientific journal, *Nature Climate Change*, in an attempt to carry a style of reflection more common to arts and humanities research into scientific discourse.³ Anthropocene debates have indeed been marked not only by cultural practitioners using the languages of science, but also by scientists being ready to engage with cultural discourse, to recognise their own narratives as narratives with cultural and political import. The Anthropocene is, like any other geological terminology, a piece of wordplay, and one that has stuck precisely for its provocative conjunction of the human and the geological. In the same vein, the Anthroposcentic is a term through which landscape, in all its cultural complexity—material and imaginary, emotional and financial, immediate and intergenerational—might help visualise and represent a coming epoch.

The “now” of the Anthropocene denotes a complex temporality, which studies of art or visual culture should acknowledge and reflect on, if meaningful engagement with scientific narrative is to proceed. Four key traits of the Anthropocene's treatment of time may be identified here. First, the designation is, unlike any other geological epoch, prospective as well as retrospective. The geological imagination, which in the nineteenth century became a significant cultural and aesthetic force for reflections on human and planetary pasts, evokes in the twenty-first century what might mark the future rock record. A visual culture of future as well as past and present geology therefore emerges. Second, while geologists are seeking a “golden

spike” in the sediment record to mark the stratigraphic beginning of the epoch, with the current favoured proposal being the post-1945 traces left globally by atmospheric nuclear weapons tests, the drive to a precise date sits alongside the fact that the processes initiating the Anthropocene evidently have a much longer history.⁴ Third, scientists have argued for a range of start dates, and this is likely to remain a matter of contention, with arguments made variously for the Anthropocene beginning around 1800, or in the sixteenth century, or in prehistory. In terms of wider cultural debate, the events deemed to open the Anthropocene will shape its formulation: the beginnings of farming, the colonial exploitation of the Americas, the Industrial Revolution, the bomb. Different “Anthro” stories may proceed from different potential Anthropocene origins.

Fourth, one can trace a history of commentary on the human geological presence which prefigures and anticipates the current discussion, and which itself goes back well before the potential post-nuclear “golden spike”. For example, Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* was first published in 1833, significantly shaped the nineteenth-century geological imagination. Lyell’s discussion of coastal regions, areas which are also the subject of this essay, anticipated the Anthropocene emphasis on the “geology of mankind” by stating: “The earth’s crust must be remodelled more than once before all the memorials of man which are continually becoming entombed in the rocks now forming will be destroyed.”⁵ The Anthroposcenic, therefore, finds itself concerned with what Caitlin DeSilvey terms “anticipatory history”, such that “landscape now” and landscapes past converse.⁶ One prediction for the Anthropocene, should it be formally designated, might be that the scientific requirement for precise stratigraphic demarcation will jostle with narratives of the Anthropocene that migrate across such strict temporal lines, indeed artistic engagements, while noting the novelty of Anthropocene circumstance, need not necessarily present a world changed utterly. Should future arts and histories of the Anthropocene treat the epochal beginning as a checkpoint, beyond which lies only Holocene history? This would seem unduly restrictive, and this essay therefore takes a permissive path from the present across the last two centuries, charting instances of Anthroposcenic reflection.

Anthropocene Image Work

Lauren Rickards has suggested that:

Intellectually as well as materially, the Anthropocene is a deeply cultural phenomenon ... all aspects of the Anthropocene, including its underpinning science, reflect the broader, dynamic cultural imaginary that it is part of and that it is now helping to reshape.⁷

For Rickards, the sense of “humans as a geological force” indicates the “novel geographical imaginaries” released by the Anthropocene.⁸ Elisabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse’s 2012 collection *Making the Geologic Now*, which was produced as the term Anthropocene came to public prominence and was in part concerned with its cultural consequences, reflects on the upsurge of geological cultural debate:

Until recently, the word “geologic” conjured meanings and associations that referred simply and directly to the science of geology—the study of the origin, history, and structures of the earth. But that seems to be changing. Something is happening to the ways that people are now taking up “the geologic”.

Contemporary artists, popular culture producers, speculative architects, scientists and philosophers are adding new layers of cultural meaning and aesthetic sensation to the geologic. It is as if recent events and developments are making geologic realities sense-able with new physical intensity and from new angles of thought as a situation that we live within, not simply as something “out there” that we study.⁹

That said, the Anthropocene intrigues in part as a term of cultural debate, which carries geological science with it, still tied to stratigraphic reasoning however widely it migrates over different fields. The Anthropocene’s scientific particulars shape the cultural geologic now.

A variety of image work has come to inform debate about the Anthropocene, concerned with how a geological epoch and its related Earth system processes might be visualised and represented. In his study *Anthropocene Fictions*, Adam Trexler considers representations of climate change in the novel, looking at how events and processes such as sea-level rise and flooding are deemed to mark out new times.¹⁰ Trexler emphasises Anthropocene novelty, positing that: “unprecedented things force unprecedented literary acts”, although the complexities of Anthropocene temporality noted above may indicate more varied possibilities. Roberts’ Burrow Mump image above may thus be starkly contemporary in its picturing

of people picturing landscape via mobile devices, yet it is also conscious of long-standing conventions of prospect views, themselves made in dialogue with earlier mobile devices, back to the portable Claude glass. The Anthroposcenic might mix novel forms for novel times with older perspectives for sidelong insight.

The visualisation of climate change and the global environment combines old and new, connecting with, as Denis Cosgrove has shown, the long-standing tradition of imaging the whole earth from space.¹¹ Photographic images of Spaceship Earth became iconic for environmentalist critiques of modernity, although Thomas Lekan suggests that such whole earth imagery, itself a product of a Cold War world, becomes inadequate to convey “the vertiginous spatiality and inescapable viscosity of the hyperobjects we encounter in the Anthropocene”.¹² Lekan alludes here to Timothy Morton’s sense of hyperobjects as those human legacies which from their scale—climate change—or constitution—radioactive waste, Styrofoam—transcend or outlast the human, thereby challenging comprehension.¹³ The visual cultures of climate change and the Anthropocene also encompass future projection, what Martin Mahony terms “picturing the future-conditional”. Thus photomontages of future flood events, such as the “Postcards from the Future” series produced by Robert Graves and Didier Madoc-Jones for a 2010 Museum of London exhibition, present a London newly tropical.¹⁴ Scientific iconographies stemming from data visualisations such as maps, graphs, and diagrams also concentrate such projections; Mahony discusses the complex “geographies of objectivity” generated around such forms of scientific communication as the International Panel on Climate Change’s controversial 2001 “burning embers” diagram of risks from global temperature change.¹⁵ Anthropocene visual culture thus moves explicitly across—and serves as the meeting point of—artistic and scientific practice.¹⁶

This paper uses the term Anthroposcenic to indicate landscapes emblematic of the Anthropocene.¹⁷ The geographer Stephen Tooth, in his online “glossary for the Anthropocene”, defines the Anthroposcenic as referring to “landscapes that have come to be viewed as picturesque (i.e. ‘scenic’) but that actually are in a far-from-natural, highly-altered state (e.g. the reservoirs in the Elan valley of mid Wales).”¹⁸ This sense of the Anthroposcenic has subsequently been extended by Tooth and colleagues including the geomorphologist and poet Hywel Griffiths in a collaborative discussion of upland mid-Wales, presenting responses to the Anthroposcenes of the Ystwyth and Elan valleys in poetry and prose: “our aims were to engage with the concept of the Anthropocene in a landscape that could be emblematic of the proposed new geological interval.” This “group of poets, writers and geomorphologists” emphasise the ways in which the Anthroposcenic might connote not only associations of loss and erosion but a positive valuation,

even social reverence, of landscape.¹⁹ Such emotional and political complexities echo the approach taken here, and the remainder of this essay examines the English coast, where traumas of present loss mix with fascination for, and even inspiration from, that which has passed. Whether in despair or hope, regret or anticipation, Anthroposcenic landscape may capture an Anthropocene predicament.

Anthropocene Signatures on the English Coast

Sea-level rise associated with anthropogenic climate change has made coastal landscape emblematic of Anthropocene processes. The focus here is on English material, considering recent art practice and the wider visual cultures of coastal change, alongside the ways in which past landscape images, and images of past landscape, may speak to the Anthroposcenic present. Jan Zalasiewicz and others have recently explored the scientific “stratigraphical signature of the Anthropocene in England”, tracing deposits that include pesticide residues, microplastics, and artificial radionuclides, in “an initial sketch of how the Anthropocene might be recognized in England”.

²⁰ This essay considers complementary cultural-historical “signatures” of the Anthropocene with respect to the British coastal landscape, indicating a further potential seam of science-humanities exchange. With the stratigraphical signatures noted by Zalasiewicz et al. as a starting point, future cultural-historical studies might emerge of, say, seashores marked by microplastics, or coastal landfill sites where marine action may expose an archaeology of late twentieth-century consumption. Landfill erosion might give us the plastic human figure, from a precisely dateable Christmas toy craze, tumbling to the beach.

One instance of the English Anthroposcenic is evident from the soft cliffs at East Runton on the north Norfolk coast, just along from Cromer. Caravans look out from the Seaview Caravan Park, some only yards from the cliff edge, towards an unimpeded view ([Fig. 2](#)).²¹



Figure 2.

David Matless, View from Seaview caravan park, East Runton, Norfolk, 2015, photograph.

The attraction of the site is heightened, and shadowed, by its precarity. The beach shows clear evidence of cliff falls, and repeat visitors will bring memories of defences lost, former access steps fallen. If awareness of loss has long accompanied coastal visiting, the view from soft cliffs is now overlain by climate narratives, bringing new senses of change to the view. Out to sea near the north-west horizon is the large Sheringham Shoal wind farm, 88 turbines seeking to mitigate climate change at the same time as storm tides eat into soft coastal sediment. The English seascape alters, carrying new freight.

Art and coastal change, in Norfolk and elsewhere, have met in Julian Perry's paintings. Perry's work addresses a range of environmental concerns, including the place of trees in the landscape, and how the arboreal intersects with changing coastal dynamics, as in his paintings of beached tree stumps in Suffolk.²² In the 2018 piece *5 Meters a Year*, an installation made for the October 2018 charity exhibition *Cure*³, Perry mounted, within a cube, a painting of an uprooted birch tree found on the beach at Benacre, with a painting of a seascape on the reverse of the tree (Fig. 3). A mirror on the back of the cube reflects the seascape, enabling the conjoined images to be viewed simultaneously. The tree is painted against a blue background, in isolation from its beach context; the reflected seascape shows its future place, floating or sunk. The title gives the official rate of erosion and land loss at the site, the tree's future locked to the sea's presence.



Figure 3.

Julian Perry, *5 Metres a Year*, 2018, perspex cube, oil on panel, mirror, 20 x 20 x 20 cm. Digital image courtesy of Julian Perry (julianrperry.info).

In 2010, Perry exhibited *An Extraordinary Prospect: The Coastal Erosion Paintings*, works in oil presenting Norfolk, Suffolk, and Yorkshire coastal scenes, including coastal tree works.²³ The catalogue cover showed *Fanfare 34* (2010), a caravan floating off into mid-air, as dust below indicates a cliff fall (Fig. 4). *Fanfare* is the model of caravan shown, but also perhaps suggests a soundtrack for the humble caravan's dramatic entry into the frame of art. These paintings do not in any sense look down on their objects, which gain elevated status as the ground is pulled from under them; *Fanfare 34* echoes the composition of *Caravan Holiday* (2010), caravans taking a break of sorts (Fig. 5).



Figure 4.

Julian Perry, *Fanfare 34*, 2010, oil on panel, 103 x 122 cm. Digital image courtesy of Julian Perry (julianrpererry.info).



Figure 5.

Julian Perry, *Caravan Holiday*, 2010, oil on panel, 31 x 26 cm. Digital image courtesy of Julian Perry (julianrperry.info).

Perry pictures human dwellings, bungalows as well as caravans, hovering in mid-air, still grounded on grass and topsoil. Elsewhere objects in situ cling on: the breaking white railings in *End of the Road, Skipsea*, the wooden wall remains of a “Yorkshire Barn”, still just part of the eroding region of Holderness. The medium of oil paint, rather than, say, watercolour, allows ordinary objects to retain their substance as they contemplate and make for an extraordinary prospect. Paintings such as *Skipsea Bungalow*, *Coastal House Suffolk*, *Fanfare 34* and *Caravan Holiday*, make for exemplary Anthroposcenes. Paul Gough notes that these floating forms, frozen in air, serve as a kind of “poetic redemption” for the humble structures depicted.²⁴ There is perhaps a parallel here with the close picturing of the ordinary by a painter such as George Shaw. The stilled life of these pictures may stand as a warning of what happens to things on unprotected soft cliffs, yet in their

appreciation of structures they give caravans, chalets, and bungalows an attention and value beyond the dismissal they sometimes receive in landscape commentary. The Caravan Holiday was good, while it lasted.

East Anglian coasts have become prominent in cultural engagements with climate change and the Anthropocene, in part through local artistic and literary networks, but also from proximity to public and commercial institutions in London, and the not unrelated gentrification of coastal areas through second-home ownership, notably in Suffolk and north-west Norfolk. The interpretation of global processes is here, as elsewhere, inflected by local social geographies, which themselves shape geographies of creativity. Art works other than Perry's have tracked erosion, as in 2005 at Bawdsey, Suffolk, where the Dutch artist Bettina Furnee's *Lines of Defence* placed flags in lines stretching back from the cliff edge, spelling out "SUBMISSION IS ADVANCING AT A FRIGHTFUL SPEED". Their subsequent disappearance between installation on 15 January and the fall of the final flag on 16 September 2005 marked "the invading force of the sea" (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). A 30-minute time-lapse film records their toppling—the message is lost as it is confirmed (Fig. 8).²⁵



Figure 6.

Bettina Furnee, *Lines of Defence*, January 2005, photograph of installation. Digital image courtesy of Bettina Furnee.



Figure 7.

Bettina Furnee, *Lines of Defence*, September 2005, photograph of installation. Digital image courtesy of Bettina Furnee.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 8.

Bettina Furnee and Tim Siddel, *Lines of Defence*, 2008, time-lapse film, duration 30 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Bettina Furnee and Tim Siddel.

Perry's *Caravan Holiday* was inspired by clifftop caravans on the eroding coast at Hoppisburgh in Norfolk, a site which demonstrates how past, present, and future representations of landscape may become intertwined in the emerging epoch. Perry's *Hoppisburgh Defences* (2010) and *Cliffs at Hoppisburgh* (2010) show wartime pillboxes eroding into mid-air—a defence never used in wartime receiving no protection now.²⁶ *Hoppisburgh Scene* (2013) shows caravans still on site, yards from the eroding cliff edge, neatly curtained for the view, maintaining decorum in the face of nothingness (Fig. 9).



Figure 9.

Julian Perry, Happisburgh Scene, 2013, oil on panel, 46 x 34 cm. Digital image courtesy of Julian Perry (julianrperry.info).

Happisburgh has been important in arguments about coastal defence, with dispute over the degree to which existing coastal lines should be maintained, or be subject to a managed retreat.²⁷ Erosion following the destruction and non-replacement of defences resulted in the loss of houses on Beach Road, Happisburgh, in the early twenty-first century. As houses and bungalows fell over the cliffs, however, signs of older human life became apparent. East Anglia has been a key site for the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain (AHOB) project, with Happisburgh findings including 800,000-year-old footprints in forest bed deposits exposed by erosion in May 2013, pushing back the story of human life in England.²⁸ Scenes of the anthro past and present meet. The disappearance of Beach Road prompted the provision of a new visitor car park and beach access ramp (itself subsequently eroded), where a display board includes explanations of coastal process, the mobilisation of local response through the Happisburgh Coastal Concern

Action Group, aerial photographs and old postcards, and landscape art. The board shows a photograph of *Cutting Edge* (2010), a work whereby a white outline of scissors and a cutting line representing erosion was marked on Happisburgh beach by the Splinter collective, along with a reproduction of *Black and Red Study II* (2010), a sparse charcoal and pastel drawing by Norwich artist Malca Schotten, which looks along the new embayment created by erosion to the last lingering houses of Beach Road in the distance. ²⁹ “You Are Here”, says the board location map, and looking from the displays to the eroding cliffs you wonder how long this will last; how long here will be here.

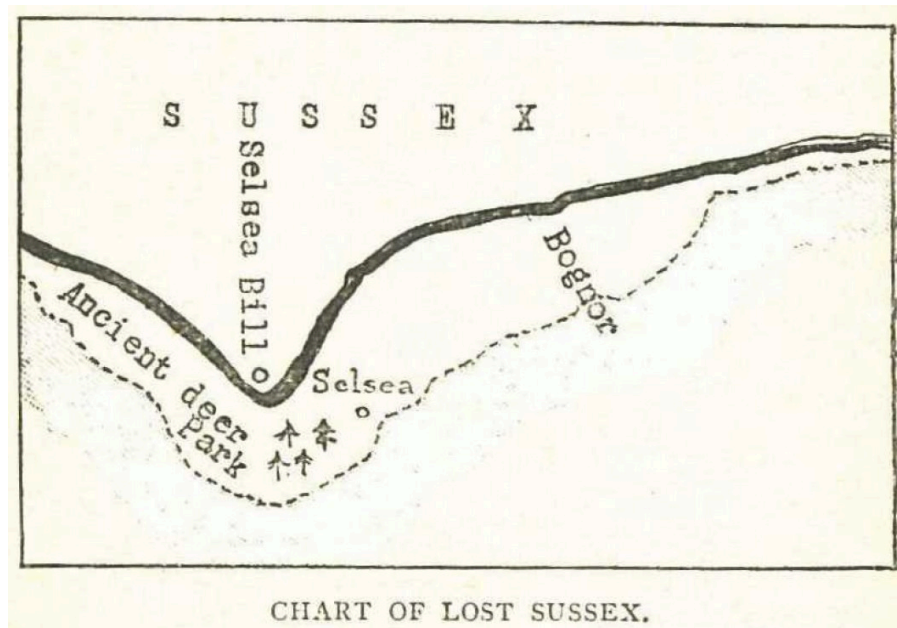


Figure 10.

Chart of Lost Sussex, 1902, illustration in *The Story of Lost England* by Beckles Wilson (London: George Newnes, 1902).

A genealogy of sea-level melancholy becomes part of the anticipatory history of the Anthropocene. Beckles Willson’s 1902 study *The Story of Lost England* indicates how erosion then, as now, becomes caught in the nets of national narrative, in Willson’s case that of a threatened imperial island. At Selsey, a “Chart of Lost Sussex” mapped lost prospects (Fig. 10):

Perhaps no point off the coast of Sussex presents such interest to the student of Lost England as the waste of waters immediately fronting Selsey Bill.

Standing on the verge of that promontory, the visitor to-day, directing his face seaward, may, if he chooses, and his

imagination aiding him, conjecture that in the ruffled expanse of breakers, exactly one mile distant from where he stands, was founded the first monastery in Sussex ... Landward from the Saxon cathedral and the episcopal palace stretched a great wood, known as Selsey Park, containing many thousands of acres, and stocked with choice deer. Here, truly, is a choice and memorable fragment of Lost England. ³⁰

Undersea worlds are described as if preserved in aspic, lending enchantment and value to the lost. Imagination here makes whole that which has been eroded, and the effect is at once cultural and political, lost island homes tapping into anxieties over English futures.

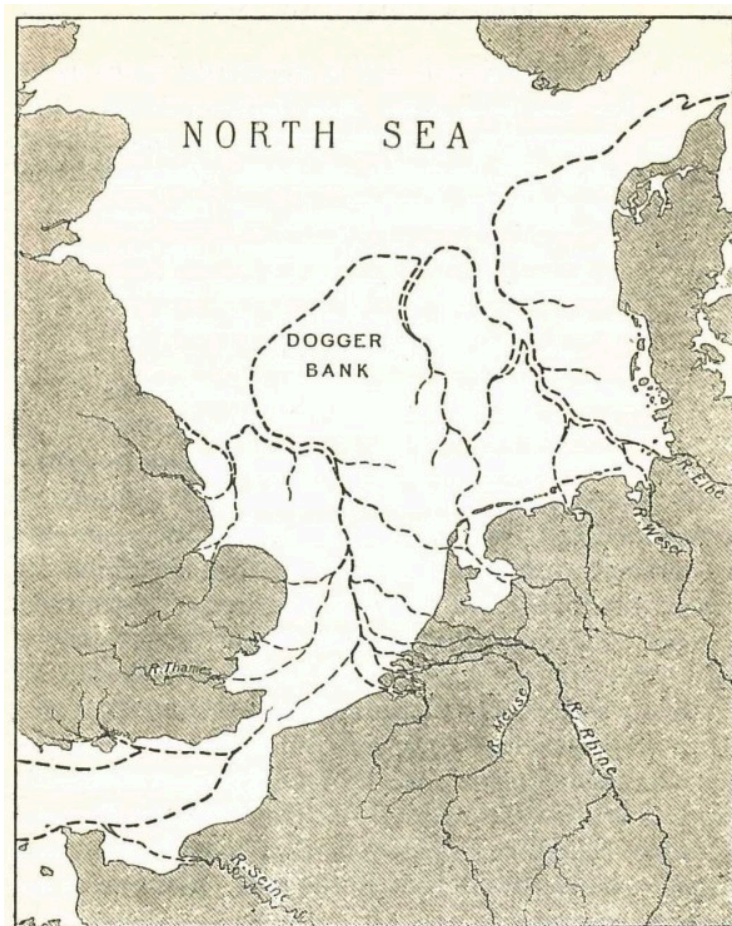


Fig. 4.—Showing approximate Coast-line at the period of the lowest Submerged Forest.

Figure 11.

Map showing approximate coast-line at the period of the lowest Submerged Forest, 1913, map in *Submerged Forests* by Clement Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

Happisburgh, and Willson's Selsey, show landscape history and prehistory speaking to the present, whether in imperial 1902 or Anthropocene 2018. It is striking also how another region, previously unnamed, has arisen from prehistory to speak to today's England. Under the North Sea lies an area now labelled "Doggerland", on which the recent upsurge in commentary is notable.³¹ In a period preoccupied with sea level, and with the British relationship to Europe, here is evidently a landscape for now: a landmass that extended continually from Britain to the north-western coast of Europe. This prehistory chimes variously as a sign of British connection or of insularity, as a warning of how lands have been lost before and might be again if extra care isn't taken, or as a naturalisation of change, confirming that seas have always risen and fallen and that maps will thereby shift. The name Doggerland was coined by the archaeologist Bryony Coles in 1998 in tribute to the geologist Clement Reid (1853–1916); Reid's 1913 book *Submerged Forests* included a chapter on the Dogger Bank, with a map "Showing approximate Coast-line at the period of the lowest Submerged Forest" (Fig. 11).³²

The North Sea becomes former land, and a quick shading in of Reid's outline reconfigures the geography of Britain and Europe. In 1906, Reid wrote:

If what I have said is correct, and since civilised man lived in Britain there has been a rapid change of sea-level, followed by a long rest, what are the prospects of a similar period of rapid change again setting in? ... It is a problem of great importance, for a new rise or fall of the sea-level to the extent of a few feet would have most disastrous effects on all our coasts and harbours, and would seriously interfere with our inland drainage until things were again adjusted. Are we now living in a period of exceptional stability, both of sea-level and climate; or is it, as geology suggests, a mere interlude which may at any time give place to rapid change?³³

Coles' paper, titled "Doggerland: A Speculative Survey", sought to shift the archaeological narrative from ideas emphasising a former land bridge between Britain and continental Europe to imagining Doggerland as itself "a place to be".³⁴ Maps trace submergence, sea rising as ice melts, and familiar shapes emerge (Fig. 12).

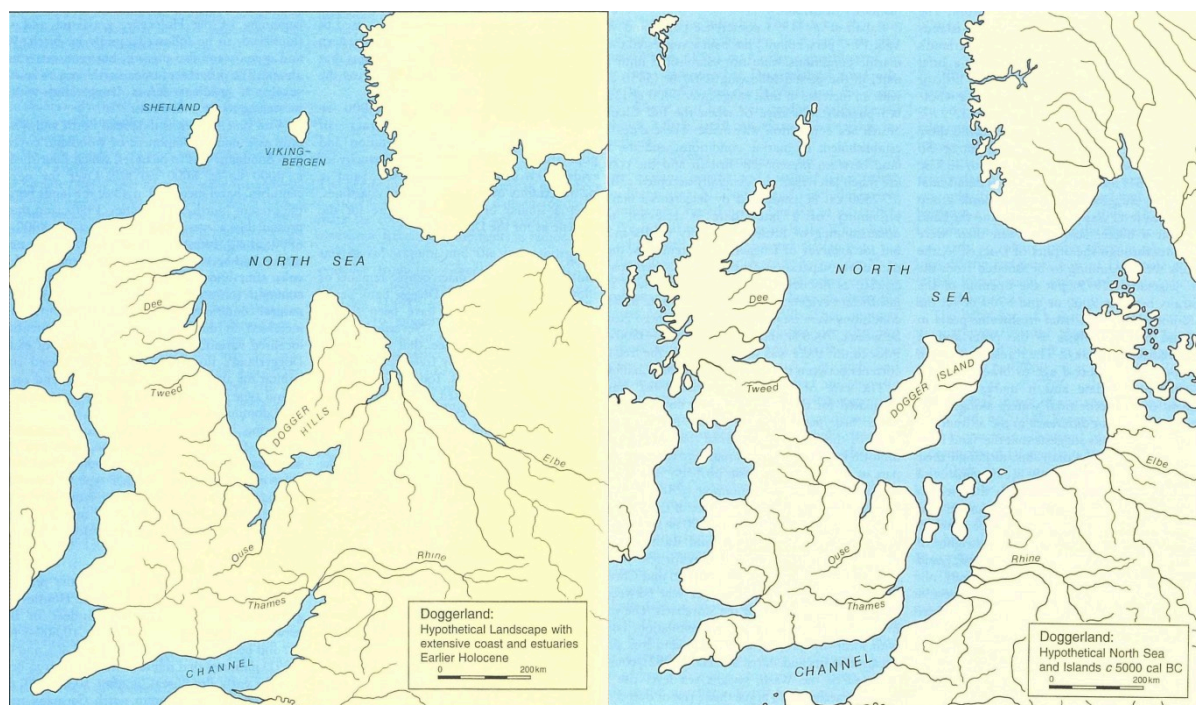


Figure 12a.

Map of Doggerland at 10,000 BP, published 1998, in *Doggerland: a speculative survey* by Bryony Coles (Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society 64: 45-81. 1998), p. 68.

Figure 12b.

Map of Doggerland at 5000 BP, published 1998, in *Doggerland: a speculative survey* by Bryony Coles (Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society 64: 45-81. 1998), p. 64.

13000 years BP, the North Sea was merely an inlet between southern Norway and a northern European coast, but at 10000 BP something like Scotland is clear, and the North Sea extends south to the Dogger Hills; after 5000 BP, Britain and Denmark appear in a form recognisable from present-day maps, the East Anglian coast defined, with Dogger Island stranded. Coles' paper was the departure point for the artist Stephan Takkides's website "Reclaiming Doggerland", which he describes as "an attempt to remap Europe and claim back the lost territories of the North Sea". Blog posts report photographic excursions in Germany, Holland, and England, including Happisburgh, where "the effect of erosion looked almost violent", with abandoned defences wrecked by the sea, and concrete "gradually slipping down on to the beach" (Figs. 13, 14, 15). The post "Adventures in Doggerland: Day Four" records:

On the edge by the car park stood a shack, or at least a sort of holiday chalet, in which people were living—apparently holding on until the ground literally disappeared beneath their feet. They were flying a cross of St George. This could have been for a number of reasons—football, patriotism, nationalism—but it

occurred to me that the claiming of this land as England seemed so pointless. Presumably it would not be long before this would cease to be England, or in fact anywhere. ³⁵



Figure 13.

Stephan Takkides, Coastal Erosion, Happisburgh, Norfolk, from *Reclaiming Doggerland: Day Four, 30 May 2011*, 2011, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Stephan Takkides (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0).



Figure 14.

Stephan Takkides, Coastal Erosion, Happisburgh, Norfolk, from *Reclaiming Doggerland: Day Four, 30 May 2011, 2011*, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Stephan Takkides (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0).



Figure 15.

Stephan Takkides, Coastal Erosion, Happisburgh, Norfolk, from *Reclaiming Doggerland: Day Four, 30 May 2011, 2011*, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Stephan Takkides (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0).

As Takkides's commentary suggests, the prevailing tone of discussion about Doggerland, in England and elsewhere, is counter-nationalist, highlighting what archaeologists Vince Gaffney, Simon Fitch, and David Smith label "Europe's Lost World" off the English east coast. They write: "Doggerland

may well have had a significantly different character, in cultural and environmental terms, in comparison with Britain and possibly all the surrounding countries.”³⁶ There is an irony in finding lost Europe off an English coastal region frequently highlighted in recent political debate as favouring the UK’s departure from the European Union. However, Doggerland might also mark remaining eastern areas as distinctive *within* England, part of a former lowland European territory now lost. Why look out to sea for European Doggerland? Look underfoot in eastern counties instead.

If older geological and archaeological researches appear newly resonant for the Anthropocene, earlier paintings might also turn anticipatory for the present. The edging of land and sea has long offered a territory for complex symbolic and emotional play, as in the work of John Nash, as well as his brother Paul Nash, whose Dymchurch paintings and depictions of coastal defence might gain another complex resonance as Anthroposcenes in advance. Ian Collins’ study of East Anglian art shows a John Nash painting, titled *Norfolk Coast (Waxham to Winterton)*, dated as 1932, a view looking south with Winterton church tower on the inland horizon (Fig. 16).³⁷



Figure 16.

John Nash, *Norfolk Coast (Waxham to Winterton)*, 1932, oil on canvas, 51 x 76 cm. Private Collection.

This is a dune coast, a few miles south of Happisburgh and backed by the low-lying Norfolk Broadland, with no elevation to stop the sea for miles, should it break through. The sea indeed had broken through here on a number of occasions, most recently then in 1897, and it would do so again to catastrophic effect in 1938 at Horsey, half way between Waxham and Winterton, just along the beach in Nash’s painting.³⁸ Just north of Waxham,

at Sea Palling, seven would die in 1953 as the major North Sea floods broke the dunes. Nash pictures the levels of land and sea, the dunes a brief interruption on a single plane. The movement of sea, cloud, and marram grass evokes a breezy present balance, yet one vulnerable should states of sea and atmosphere combine to produce a North Sea storm surge.

Seaview Returns

Moving back north up the Norfolk coast, we return in conclusion to East Runton. Reflections on “landscape now” can emerge not only from academic reading and visual cultural analysis, but also from everyday fieldwork, and spending holidays in a caravan on the top of soft cliffs makes the Anthroposcentic vivid ([Fig. 17](#)).

Looking up from East Runton beach at low tide, the caravan fronts peep over, sea views looking down. Present and future again meet distant pasts, as fossils emerge from the eroding cliffs; indeed this is now promoted as the “Deep History Coast”, its map logo merging the Norfolk coastline with the back of a fossil steppe mammoth, found in the cliff at adjacent West Runton.

³⁹ The diurnal rhythms of a seaside holiday are supplemented by other temporalities, from fossil pasts to the prospective non-fossil future signalled by wind turbines at sea. Family and friends view the breakers from the van, and sea views become entangled with other prospects ([Fig. 18](#)).



Figure 17.

David Matless, Seaview caravan park viewed from East Runton beach at low tide, Norfolk, 2016, photograph.



Figure 18.

David Matless, View from interior of caravan, Seaview caravan park, East Runton, Norfolk, 2015, photograph.

How long will this caravan be here? How far could you book ahead? Does that roaring breezy summer night sound of the sea signal danger? Not that questions about erosion weren't asked on holidays forty years ago, but the prevalent narrative of climate change and sea-level rise, and the designation of a new Anthropocene geological epoch, makes questions of "landscape now" somehow different. As Anthropocene signatures emerge on the shore, sea views turn Anthroposcenic.

Footnotes

- 1 Simon Roberts, *Merrie Albion: Landscape Studies of a Small Island* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2017), 101.
- 2 Simon Roberts, personal communication, April 2018.
- 3 David Matless, "Climate Change Stories and the Anthroposcenic", *Nature Climate Change* 6, no. 2 (2016): 118-119; David Matless, "The Anthroposcenic", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42, no. 3 (2017): 363-376.
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- 5 Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, Vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1866 [1833]), 563; Paul Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind", *Nature* 415 (3 January 2002): 23. Lyell's work on the east coast of England, including the site of a ruined church tower on the shore at Eccles in Norfolk, is considered in David Matless, "Next the Sea: Eccles and the Anthroposcenic", *Journal of Historical Geography* 62 (2018): 71-84.
- 6 Caitlin DeSilvey, "Making Sense of Transience: An Anticipatory History", *Cultural Geographies* 19 (2012): 31-54; Caitlin DeSilvey, Simon Naylor, and Colin Sackett (eds), *Anticipatory History* (Axminster: Uniformbooks, 2011); Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curating Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- 7 Lauren Rickards, "Metaphor and the Anthropocene: Presenting Humans as a Geological Force", *Geographical Research* 53 (2015): 280, 286.
- 8 Rickards, "Metaphor and the Anthropocene", 280, 286.

- 9 Elisabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse (eds), *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life* (New York: Punctum Books, 2012); also available as open access download at www.geologicnow.com; quotation from "Introduction" by Ellsworth and Kruse. Accessed 26 April 2018. See also Kathryn Yusoff, "Anthropogenesis", *Theory, Culture and Society* 33, no. 2 (2016): 3–28.
- 10 Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 74.
- 11 Denis Cosgrove, "Contested Global Visions: One-World, Whole-Earth, and the Apollo Space Photographs", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 84, no. 2 (1994): 270–294; Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
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- 13 Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
- 14 Martin Mahony, "Picturing the Future-Conditional: Montage and the Global Geographies of Climate Change", *Geo: Geography and Environment* 3, no. 2 (2016): 1–18.
- 15 Martin Mahony, "Climate Change and the Geographies of Objectivity: The Case of the IPCC's Burning Embers Diagram", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40, no. 2 (2015): 153–167.
- 16 Libby Robin, Dag Avango, Luke Keogh, Nina Möllers, Bernd Scherer, and Helmuth Trischler, "Three Galleries of the Anthropocene", *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 3 (2014): 207–224.
- 17 Online searches indicate that the word has developed independently in other contexts. In a November 2015 talk, "Into the Anthroposcenic", William L. Fox suggested that the Anthroposcenic might be a broad "cultural corollary" for the Anthropocene: William L. Fox, "Into the Anthroposcenic", National Gallery of Victoria, 15 November 2015, www.ngv.vic.gov.au/program/into-the-anthroposcenic/. Accessed 26 April 2018. A November 2015 talk in Munich by Bernhard Malkmus addressed "anthroposcenic fenlands" in the work of W.G. Sebald and Graham Swift: Bernhard Malkmus, "Diffuse Dwelling: The Anthroposcenic Fenlands in Sebald and Swift", 12 November 2015, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich, www.carsoncenter.uni-muenchen.de/events_conf_seminars/event_history/2015-event-history/2015_lc/lc_malkmus/index.html. Accessed 26 April 2018. In August 2015, short experimental films were screened under the "Anthroposcenic" heading by "Survivalist Cinema", a solar-powered micro-cinema in Vermont; see www.rachelstevens.net/project/survivalist-cinema/. Accessed 26 April 2018.
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- 19 Hywel Griffiths, Gavin Goodwin, Tyler Keevil, Eurig Salisbury, Stephen Tooth and Dewi Roberts, "Searching for an Anthro(s)cene in the Uplands of Mid Wales", *GeoHumanities* 3, no. 2 (2017): 568.
- 20 Jan Zalasiewicz, Colin Waters, Mark Williams, David Aldridge and Ian Wilkinson, "The Stratigraphical Signature of the Anthropocene in England", *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association* (2017), citation p. 2 of online text. Accessed 26 April 2018. doi:[10.1016/j.pgeola.2017.06.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pgeola.2017.06.004).
- 21 This view is considered further in David Matless, "Seaview: The Anthroposcenic", in Tim Dee (ed.), *Ground Work: Writings on Places and People* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), 185–188.
- 22 Perry's tree paintings are considered in Paul Gough, "'Cultivating Dead Trees': The Legacy of Paul Nash as an Artist of Trauma, Wilderness and Recovery", *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 4, no. 3 (2011): 323–340.
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- 24 Paul Gough, "Painting on the Edge", in Julian Perry, *An Extraordinary Prospect: The Coastal Erosion Paintings* (London: Austin/Desmond Fine Art, 2010), 6.
- 25 The film, from a 2005 project called *If Ever You're in the Area*, is at <http://www.ifever.org.uk/camera/>, along with an archive of camera images from throughout the process. See also: <http://bettinafurnee.co.uk/works/if-ever-youre-in-the-area-2005/>. Accessed 26 April 2018.
- 26 Perry, *An Extraordinary Prospect*.
- 27 Tim O'Riordan, Carla Gomes, and Luisa Schmidt, "The Difficulties of Designing Future Coastlines in the Face of Climate Change", *Landscape Research* 39 (2014): 613–630.
- 28 Nick Ashton, Simon Lewis, Isabelle De Groote, Sarah Duffy, Martin Bates, Richard Bates, Peter Hoare, Mark Lewis, Simon Parfitt, Sylvia Peglar, Craig Williams, and Chris Stringer, "Hominin Footprints from Early Pleistocene Deposits at Happisburgh, UK", *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 2 (2014): e88329.
- 29 Schotten's Happisburgh drawings can be viewed at: www.malcaschotten.net/Projects/landscapes.html. Accessed 26 April 2018.
- 30 Beckles Willson, *The Story of Lost England* (London: George Newnes, 1902), 164.
- 31 See, for example, the 2007 Channel 4 "Time Team" archaeological programme on Doggerland, "Britain's Drowned World", beginning with presenter Tony Robinson on the cliffs at Happisburgh, and "Discover Doggerland", a November 2015 event in Halesworth, Suffolk, exploring archaeology and "mythic geography"; details of the latter are given at The Cut, New Cut, Halesworth, Suffolk, at: <http://newcut.org/events/entry/3189>. See also extracts from the day, Waveney & Blyth Arts, Harleston, Norfolk, at: www.waveneyandblytharts.com/.
- 32 Clement Reid, *Submerged Forests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

- 33 Clement Reid, "Coast Erosion", *Geographical Journal* 28 (1906): 491.
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- 36 Vince Gaffney, Simon Fitch, and David Smith, *Europe's Lost World: The Rediscovery of Doggerland* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2009).
- 37 Ian Collins, *Water Marks: Art in East Anglia* (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2010), viii.
- 38 On the 1938 floods, see David Matless, *In the Nature of Landscape: Cultural Geography on the Norfolk Broads* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 199–204. For the representation of the floods in documentary film, see David Matless, "Accents of Landscape in GPO Country: *The Horsey Mail*, 1938", *Twentieth Century British History* 23, no. 1 (2012): 57–79.
- 39 See the "Deep History Coast" website at: www.visitnorfolk.co.uk/things-to-do/Deep-History-Coast.aspx. Accessed 26 April 2018.

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Landscaping Islands: Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland* and Floating Histories in Contemporary British Art

Gill Perry

Abstract

*Drawing on examples of installation, film, photography, and performance, this essay explores the significance of the island theme in contemporary British art. Focusing on Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland*, a floating construction that travelled from the Arctic to the south coast of England during the 2012 Olympics, it considers several recent island projects and how these contribute not only to aesthetic and visual culture, but also to an understanding of wider political and cultural issues. *Nowhereisland* challenged many themes and tropes, not only of nationhood, mobility, and "islandness", but also of the relationship of place to landscape. As a mobile, participatory, and transitory sculpted landscape, Hartley's floating island undermines any sense of landscape being apparently "natural" or fixed. The essay explores both the pre-history of Hartley's floating project and the significance of the creative potential and contemporary relevance of the broader island theme in contemporary multimedia and sculptural practice in Britain, drawing upon works by Katrina Palmer, Lucy Orta, and Rachel Whiteread.*

Authors

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In the summer of 2012, holidaymakers relaxing on beaches along the south coast of England were intrigued to see a strange rocky island approaching from northern waters, towed by a tug ([Fig. 1](#)). It proceeded around the south-west coast, arriving at Weymouth at the end of July, and then continued along the Devon coast, stopping off at various holiday resorts. Conceived by the English artist Alex Hartley, this carefully planned nautical journey coincided with the opening of the Olympic Games in London that summer. The floating construction was called *Nowhereisland*, also pronounced as Now-here-is-land, and partly made up of soil and rocks taken from an island that had appeared in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard in the High Arctic ([Fig. 2](#)). The land was revealed as the result of the retreating Sonklarbreen glacier—a direct effect of global warming. Hartley claimed to have discovered the island in 2004 on the Cape Farewell Arctic expedition, when he found it absent from all existing maps and charts. There followed a lengthy correspondence with the Norwegian authorities and Governor of Svalbard in which Hartley sought to name and claim the island as a secessionist micro-nation with multinational citizens, and its own system of government ([Fig. 3](#), [Fig. 4](#)). ¹



Figure 1.

Alex Hartley, *Nowhereisland* (arctic island), being towed by a tug off the South Coast, 2012. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).



Figure 2.

Alex Hartley, Alex Hartley claiming Nymark (rebuilding the cairn originally made in 2014), 2004. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).



Figure 3.

Alex Hartley, Alex Hartley Claiming Nymark, 2004. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).



Figure 4.

Alex Hartley, Nowhereisland on its journey south (Arctic island and tug boat), 2012. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).



Figure 5.

Alex Hartley, Nymark in the Arctic, expedition team revisiting the island, 2010. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).

This was part of a much longer, drawn-out story in which Hartley made a claim on the island, only to be refused by the Norwegian government. He eventually won permission to remove a small part of *Nymark* (as he named it) and towed it south in 2012. He declared its independence, and established it as an island nation, seeking citizens from around the world. A total of

23,003 people from 135 countries signed up to be citizens of *Nowhereisland* on its website and through its mobile embassy. In the wake of the 2016 Brexit vote to assert the UK's separate island status, reduce immigration, and supposedly "take back control", it is hard to ignore the political and ironic potential of this ambitious project.

Nowhereisland was not just an island, but a floating piece of land. It was perpetually moving its geographical coordinates and its borders were open to all to claim citizenship (Fig. 5). As a mobile, transitory landscape, *Nowhereisland* challenged many tropes not only of nationhood and "islandness", but also of the idea of a stable relationship between landscape and space or place. It undermines any sense of landscape being apparently "natural" or fixed, and as a participatory project, also clouds the boundaries between representation and the real. Moreover, access to *Nowhereisland* is now entirely through photographic and filmed records and materials, reminding us of the problem of what constitutes the "archive".

Metaphors and Legacies

The idea of the island is a much-used metaphor in everyday speech, and has been adopted in many disciplines to connote isolation or uniqueness, and a more complex notion of "islandness".² In an era wrestling with problems of climate change, migration, and globalisation, not to mention post-Brexit fantasies in Britain specifically of "separate island status", the island theme resonates with literal and metaphorical possibilities for many contemporary artists and writers. Its significant literary legacy is also rich in utopian or dystopian possibilities: from Greek mythology (the mythical island of *Atlantis*, or the islands visited in Homer's *Odyssey*) to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611); and encompassing works such as Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1723), the theme has inspired literary, philosophical, and epistemological musings on the nature of humanity.³ Modern writers such as William Golding (*Lord of the Flies*, 1954) and Aldous Huxley (*Island*, 1962), have also engaged with the dystopian possibilities of the theme and its relevance to contemporary culture. While literary history has increasingly explored the idea of the island, in the visual arts there is still some work to be done mapping the artistic uses of the theme and its wider imaginative potential.

As Hartley's project demonstrated, the subcategory of the *floating* island can also carry powerful metaphorical baggage and symbolic resonances, as is revealed in literary history. In 1673, a satirical novel by Richard Head was published under the title of *The Floating Island*, a spoof travel narrative recounting the adventures of its debt-ridden protagonist Captain Robert Owe—much in supposedly distant lands. In fact, the voyage turns out to be a

faintly disguised crossing from the south to the north bank of the Thames and results in a scatological tour of the City of London.⁴ In the nineteenth century, Jules Verne's novel *The Floating Island* of 1896, first published in French as *L'île à hélice* (*Propeller Island*) in 1895, constructs another nautical fantasy in which a French String Quartet is abducted to an immense constructed island reserved for the super wealthy and which travels around the Pacific Ocean.⁵ Verne's original French version contained some overt social commentary deemed critical of the Americans and the British, which was cut by his British publishers. Although separated by centuries, for both Head and Verne, the floating island theme was rich in metaphorical possibilities and observations on—or critiques of—contemporary society.⁶ My interest as an art historian focuses on how such ideas have been imaginatively mediated through recent artistic practice, especially by visual artists, who use the theme to explore issues of critical relevance to contemporary culture, and to transform some traditional notions of landscape. In the introduction to his first edition of *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell wrote that the aim of his book was “to change ‘landscape’ from a noun to a verb”. He argued for the representation of landscape not simply as an object or view to be seen, but more like a process “by which social and subjective identities are formed”.⁷ As I argue, Hartley's floating artwork presents the viewer with a performative project that continually changes and redefines the landscape around it. Making landscape is understood as an active, cultural practice.

Hartley's *Nowhereisland* seeks to combine a natural resource (the Norwegian rocks) and a complex manufactured or sculpted object. In this process, he acknowledges the important legacy of several artists working in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, including the influential American artists Robert Smithson and Andrea Zittel. Smithson is known for his land art and sculptural and photographic projects, and in 2005, his *Floating Island* was launched off the island of Manhattan. Never executed in his lifetime, it was constructed by Balmori Associates from a single sketch drawn in 1970 (he died in 1973) and a few notes. For two weekends in September 2005, a 90-foot barge landscaped with trees, rocks, and shrubs from New York's Central Park was towed around a part of Manhattan Island (Fig. 6). Many of Smithson's preferred sites for his so-called “earth art” projects were those “that had been disrupted by industry, reckless urbanisation or nature's own devastation.”⁸ Although this stretch of the Hudson River hardly represents the devastation of some of his other urban sites, the work did present an artificial and displaced island, a counter to the relative rootedness of Manhattan—which was itself a symbol of ruthless (perhaps also “reckless”) modern urbanisation. As it travelled along the Hudson, it was highly visible to New York's residents and commuters. It drew attention to our tenuous

relationship to land, place, and the natural world. It also reminded its audience that the space of Central Park, from which Smithson took his trees and rocks, was itself a carefully constructed urban landscape.⁹



Figure 6.

Robert Smithson (concept design) and Balmori Associates (construction), Floating Island, Manhattan, New York, designed in 1970, built in 2005, barge landscaped with earth, rocks, and native trees and shrubs, towed by a tugboat, 30 x 90 foot. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Robert Smithson/VAGA, New York/DACS, London 2018. Photo: Nicholas Desbiens.

Some similar effects and aims are evident in *Nowhereisland*, although the rocks that formed the heart of this work were, of course, of entirely natural origins, albeit recently revealed by the effects of climate change. Like Smithson, Hartley also combined sculpture and performance. Both islands were dependent on a messy sculptural process of making and constructing a floating structure. And both involved a performance through time which (it was hoped) would engage local spectators, whose own responses would complete the art work. That said, one cannot be sure that Smithson would have approved of the posthumous public performance and media attention that was involved in his project. It created the kind of spectacle that he usually sought to avoid in his choice of sites (or, as he called them “Non-Sites”). But his works were often full of contradictions and ambiguities.¹⁰

In several respects, *Nowhereisland* went beyond Smithson’s Manhattan project in that it challenged many popular tropes not only of “islandness”, but also of fixed nationhood and national boundaries. But both works share a concern with the relationship of place and space to landscape. As a mobile,

durational project (like Smithson's *Floating Island*) *Nowhereisland* undermines any sense of a landscape being apparently "natural" and fixed. As such, it also reminds us of the problem of what constitutes the "archive". Is the archive made up of the filmed, photographic representations of the work and events? Or are these representational processes, along with the posthumous reconstruction itself, also part of the work? Hartley's landscapes are re-presented to subsequent audiences through filmed and photographic images, many of which are now substitutes for the original performance.¹¹

Some similar questions around space, place, and identity have been raised by the work of the artist Andrea Zittel, who has long been fascinated with the theme of floating islands, and whose influence is acknowledged by Hartley. In the 1990s, she constructed her *A-Z Pocket Property* (1998-1999), a 44-ton concrete island, which she anchored off the coast of Denmark (Fig. 7) and lived on for a month, as an experiment in escapism and isolation.¹² The work was partly an exploration of how we construct our notions of place, and the title (*A-Z Pocket Property*) references a series of housing projects by Zittel, which explore the modern tendency for "pocket" living in small urban spaces.¹³ Ironically, this small-scale, habitable island eventually had to be destroyed as it was too large to be maintained.



Figure 7.

Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Pocket Property*, 1998-1999, floating concrete island anchored off the coast of Denmark, on which the artist lived for one month, 44 tons, 23 x 54 feet. Digital image courtesy of Andrea Zittel | Photo: Thomas Stevenson.

Hartley is clearly indebted to both Smithson and Zittel but there are some interesting differences. Hartley and Smithson self-consciously take fragments (rocks, stones, soil) from their respective sites and transplant them, changing their narrative histories whereas nearly every part of Zittel's island is

constructed—with sprayed concrete. Like her other works on the island theme, it is a self-conscious fabrication that mimics natural landscape. That said, it could be argued that whatever materials are used, all three projects are engaged in some kind of constructed mimicry of natural landscape.

Zittel has created several other floating island projects, including her *Island in 100 acres* in the Virginia B. Fairbanks Art and Nature Park at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2010. This was more obviously artificial in appearance—a rounded pod structure like a dome-shaped igloo, made from polystyrene foam coated with fibreglass resin, and floated on a dock structure. Developing her interests in place and how we construct our dwellings and create identities for them, Zittel invited people to volunteer to become temporary residents of the island in the summer, and to personalise the space. Through this performative, interactive process, the boundaries between art and life were perpetually blurred. In an interview given at the time of this work, she described her interests as follows:

The idea of an island appeals to me as representation of many of the values that we strive for in our 21st-century culture: individualism, independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. Yet at the same time, these are the same desires that isolate us and lessen collective social and political power. I am fascinated at how the things that set us free are also the same things that oppress us; you could say that the concept of the deserted island is both our greatest fantasy and our greatest fear. ¹⁴

Zittel touches on one of the paradoxes at the centre of the island motif and metaphor. It can both liberate us from social or political control, and at the same time, separate us from an enabling collective social process. Her *Indianapolis Island* explored various forms of social and economic exchange and collective dwelling. It became its own fantasy, with perpetually blurred boundaries between art-making, identity, and inhabiting. Similarly, blurred boundaries between ideas of art-making, separateness, and nationhood were explored in Hartley's participatory *Nowhereisland*

Hartley's first trip to the Arctic in 2004, when he "discovered" his island, was documented and that archive was exhibited in 2006 as part of the group show *The Ship: Art & Climate Change* (named after the ship they had travelled in) at the Natural History Museum in London. The show included photographic records and new works inspired by several Cape Farewell expeditions that took artists and writers to the High Arctic. Hartley's installation *Undiscovered Island* was also included in the Liverpool Biennale of that year (Fig. 8). Hartley's installation includes photographs of the discovery and the Cape Farewell expedition, the remote Arctic landscape,

and framed letters to the Norwegian government requesting that they secede the island from the Kingdom of Norway. As the artist intended, these documents used landscape and text to chart what Clare Doherty called “a deliberate act of colonisation”.¹⁵ Several photos of Hartley staking his claim on Nymark are mischievously transgressive and mock the heroics of colonial conquest (Fig. 3; Fig. 4). The Liverpool installation of photographs also provides a vivid example of the archive actually being orchestrated by the artist to become part of the ongoing work.



Figure 8.

Alex Hartley, *Undiscovered Island*, installation exhibited at the Liverpool Biennale as part of *The Art of Climate Change*, a collaborative exhibition by Cape Farewell, the Natural Conservation Center and the Natural History Museum, 2006. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).



Figure 9.

Alex Hartley, *Nowhereisland* with mobile embassy off the Cornish coast (Megavissey), 2012, arctic island. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).

By 2010, Hartley knew that he had been shortlisted for the Artists Taking the Lead Award for the South West, Arts Council England's flagship project for the 2012 Olympics. He won the commission and this helped to finally persuade the Norwegian government to allow him to remove part of the island, sail it out into international waters, and tow it around the south-west coast. In 2010, he set sail to the Svalbard Archipelago with an expedition team of seventeen, retracing the earlier voyage. Instead of the more scientific team of geologists and climate change scientists who accompanied the Cape Farewell trip, people were selected who might form the foundations of a "new nation": these included a human geographer, a psychologist, a linguist, a feminist journalist, an environmental activist, a constitutional lawyer, an educationalist, and a magician. Once they had broken off sections of rock and soil, and installed them on floats, it was towed into international waters. A declaration of independence was made, along with an invitation to citizenship—which could be claimed online or at the mobile embassy, which was opened at each subsequent port of call (Fig. 9). *Nowhereisland* arrived in Weymouth on 25 July 2012, four days before the Olympic sailing races took place at Weymouth Bay. It continued its slow journey around the south-west coast as an open, visiting nation, hosted by Devon and Cornwall's famous ports, towns, and cities (Fig. 10). It ended up in Bristol, leaving the port on 9 September to be broken into pieces, which were sent to each of its 23,003 citizens all over the world.



Figure 10.

Alex Hartley, *Nowhereisland* off Plymouth, 2012. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).

Olympic Landscapes



Figure 11.

Anish Kapoor, *Orbit*, 2012, steel sculpture , 115 meters high. Digital image courtesy of Anish Kapoor, DACS 2018 | Photo: Cmglee (All rights reserved).

Nowhereisland was one of several major art commissions supported by the Arts Council and other funders of the 2012 Olympics. Many of the more centrally sited Olympic commissions were designed to affirm the UK's status as an internationally esteemed creative hub, and London as a site for Olympic (and Olympian) display. Much better known is the monumental tower—or colossus—that is Anish Kapoor's *Orbit* (Fig. 11), which is now graced with the world's longest tunnel slide by the artist Carsten Höller. Claimed to be the tallest sculpture in the UK (114 metres high), it is nearly seven metres taller than the Statue of Liberty. Its £23 million cost was largely financed by the steel magnate Arcelor Mittal. Praised by some as an awe-inspiring feat of modern engineering, and critiqued by others as a hubristic vanity project pursued by Mayor Boris Johnson, it has transformed the East London skyline, reshaping that London landscape as a brazen celebration of its Olympic past, with according to the press release: “unparalleled views of

the entire 250 acres of the Olympic Park and London's skyline from a special viewing platform." ¹⁶ What has since happened to the surrounding Olympic village is, of course, more controversial. ¹⁷

Both *Orbit* and *Nowhereisland* were pursued and developed as part of the UK's Olympic celebrations, as evidence of its thriving creative industries. Yet they could be seen as diametrically opposed commissions in what they sought to—and have been seen to—represent. *Orbit* hubristically rose to the skies like a cathedral, creating and revealing new London landscapes, especially the highly symbolic Olympic skyline. The viewing platform created a new panoramic vista—a celebratory landscape of an expanding capital city, helping to construct new narratives of the London landscape. In contrast, *Nowhereisland* suggested a bleak Arctic topography—barren, rocky, and icy. And this was an anti-nation island, perpetually mobile, against ideas of exclusive national identity, and paradoxically uninhabited, although it did have a mobile embassy following it on land. While *Orbit* twisted and turned as it reached to the skies like a tower of Babel, *Nowhereisland* was bleakly horizontal. ¹⁸ But Hartley's project was also creating new (albeit transitory) landscapes: as it was towed around the south coast, it transformed some of those Devon holiday landscapes (Fig. 12). Beach holidays and postcard views were interrupted and altered with the presence of this strange floating construction.



Figure 12.

Alex Hartley, *Nowhereisland* off the Cornish coast (Newquay), 2012.
Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).

No one was more surprised than Hartley when the Arts Council agreed to sponsor his provocative project. Given some of its underlying themes, it is unlikely that it would have seen the light of day, if he had proposed it in the current political climate.¹⁹ Even then it provoked controversy and in 2011, *The Daily Mail* online included an angry feature:

The Arts Council is spending a staggering £500,000 on floating a huge piece of Arctic rock more than 2,000 miles from Norway to England.

Once in the UK the newly-named Nowhereisland, which is the size of a football pitch and was only “found” because of the partial melting of a glacier, will then be sculpted and toured 500 miles around the south coast.

The project, which forms part of its 2012 Cultural Olympiad, has been hailed by artists as an important and innovative way of looking at the dangers posed by climate change. But critics have branded it a “complete waste of public money”.²⁰

Critics were also divided in some other more left-leaning papers. Rachel Cooke described the project admiringly as a “piece of madness/genius” in *The Guardian* in November 2011, two months after Leo Hickman had expressed his own sense of outrage in the same paper.²¹ He wrote: “It’s not that often that you will find me squaring up in support behind the likes of the *Daily Mail*, the Tax Payers’ Alliance and the more reactionary elements of the Conservative party. But on this particular issue, they have called it correct.”²²

Islands and Citizenship

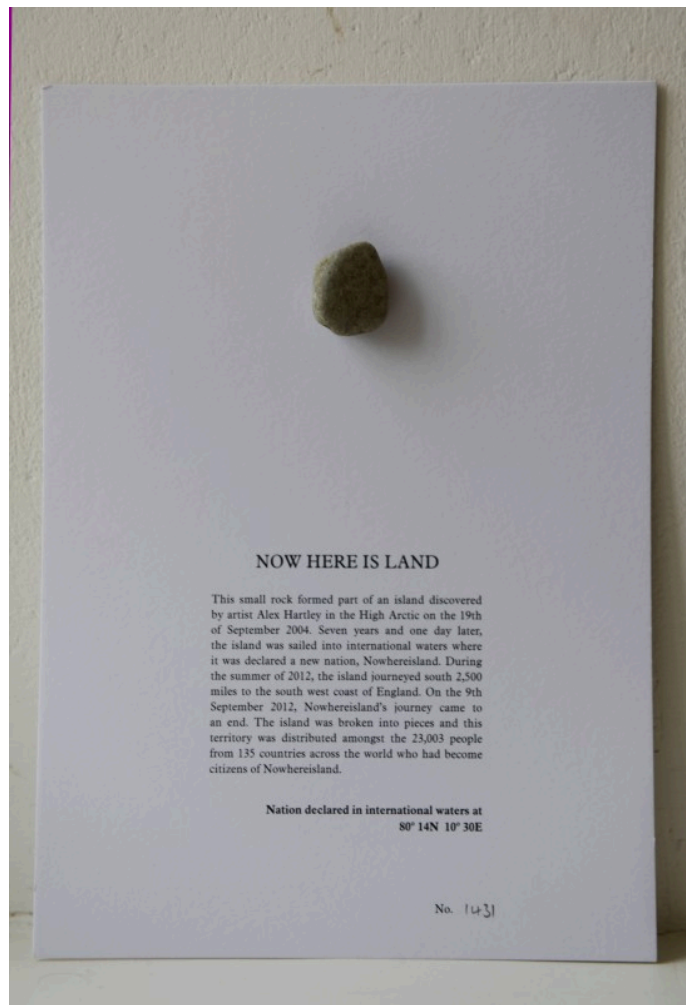


Figure 13.

Alex Hartley, Piece of rock from Nowhereisland, 2012, rock. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).

Claire Doherty has described the evolution of *Nowhereisland* from the artist's studio-based, photographic, and sculptural practice into a socially engaged "post-practice" (which I take to mean an evolving, performative project) with significant political, territorial, and economic implications: "*Nowhereisland* was not simply an island sculpture on the move—but to see it, to really see the work as a whole, you had to engage with the propositions, exchanges, disagreements, desires and demands of the *Nowhereisland* citizens."²³ Through its example, the project both issued a utopian call for open and unrestricted citizenship and promoted open governance. All signed-up citizens were rewarded with a small piece of rock at the end of the project (Fig. 13).²⁴ It also had a constitution of sorts, which was put together though invited contributions from its citizens. Following the Declaration of *Nowhereisland* as a new nation on 20 September 2011, Hartley and the expedition team suggested that the constitution should be an ongoing

collaborative document written by its citizens, using digital technology. They devised an online tool by which propositions of 120 characters (suitable for Twitter) could be proposed for the constitution, and also in turn retweeted or disliked. Through a system of continuous ranking, the less popular proposals sank to the bottom of the list. ²⁵

Noweherisland was never intended to offer a literal political form of “citizenship”—itself a complex and much debated notion. ²⁶ That said, Hartley was using a form of mimicry and metaphor to address a contemporary preoccupation with national identity, so-called “sovereignty”, and what has been called “the resurgence of the nation state”. Of course art, even performance art, always functions as some kind of metaphor for the real, and can encourage us to reflect on our relationship with “the real world”. Inevitably, many contemporary writers and theorists are engaging with the problem of the nation state in rather more complex ways, among them the novelist and essayist Rana Dasgupta. In a recent article exploring issues in his book *After Nations*, ²⁷ he argues forcefully that the nation state is no longer capable of rising to the challenges imposed by an increasingly internationalised world; he claims we need new global conceptions of citizenship, democracy, and financial regulation. ²⁸ To that list, I would add new global environmental regulations beyond those supposedly signed up to. I cite these issues to encourage readings of this artistic practice that take us into areas of quite complex political and economic debate—all of them topical. Given subsequent developments in the wake of the UK’s 2016 Brexit vote, Hartley’s call for open citizenship has a powerful prescience.

Hartley is one of many contemporary artists who have referenced ideas of international citizenship in island projects that deploy multifaceted and multimedia activities. For example, the artists Lucy and Jorge Orta (who work in London and Paris) directly engage with the theme in their ongoing *Antarctica Project*. In 2007, they went on an expedition to the Antarctic (itself a large island), aided by the team of scientists stationed at the Antarctica base on Seymour-Marambio Island (Fig. 14). Here they found a site for their temporary encampment comprised of fifty domed tent dwellings. These were hand-stitched with sections of flags and clothing fragments from countries around the world, designed to symbolise the multiplicity and diversity of peoples, and reminiscent of images of refugee camps. The flags and fragments were emblazoned with silkscreen motifs referencing the UN Declaration for Human Rights freedom of movement. The artists hoped this could represent a physical embodiment of (or at least a metaphor for) a new “Global Village”. Although this project was not staged on a floating island, there was a sense in which this was a *mobile* global village. Tents, of course, are infinitely mobile.



Figure 14.

Lucy + Jorge Orta, *Antarctica Village No Borders*, 2007, installation consisting of 50 dome dwellings, hand stitched nation flags, fragments of clothing, webbing, silkscreen print, dimensions variable. Digital image courtesy of Lucy + Jorge Orta | Photo: Thierry Bal.

The artists conceived this Antarctic Village project as a symbol of the plight of those struggling to cross borders to escape political and social conflict. The project has evolved to include many further Antarctic installations and the issue of so-called “Antarctica World Passports”. The contents of the passport are a kind of manifesto for a borderless form of citizenship, for which Antarctica is seen as a symbolic model.²⁹ In signing up for one of these passports the art viewer is (in theory at least) signing to support their Amendment to Article 1.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reads: “Everyone has the right to move freely and cross frontiers to their chosen territory. No individual should have an inferior status to that of capital, trade, telecommunication, or pollution that traverse all borders.”³⁰ The fact that you could obtain one of these passports for free at another mobile embassy at the London Frieze art fair of 2017, comes with its own ironies and reminds us of the (sometimes difficult) relationship with the market that is often part of contemporary performative art practice. For the artists, this Antarctic landscape is perceived as a mobile and potentially political zone. Mock passports were issued (like Hartley’s invitation to sign up for citizenship) in a bid to encourage art visitors to symbolically transfer their individual national identity into that of a collective world citizen.

Landscape and Place

Nowhereisland has much to contribute to the debates that surround notions of “place”—traditionally a major concern of geographers. Of course place, like home, is a profoundly interdisciplinary concept, and like home has been appropriated, reviewed, and debated by scholars of art history and visual culture. Moreover, the relationship between landscape and place is complex and contested. Landscape is often seen as an intensely visual concept, and as a material topography. The geographer Tim Cresswell (who was part of Hartley’s Arctic expedition) argues that in “most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it”, a quality that differentiates it from place.³¹ Place is seen then, in contrast with landscape, as a lived experience—a social construction around an identifiable neighbourhood or geographical area. Place can be a spatial imaginary tied to a landscape; it is heavily invested with meaning which is social, political, cultural, and so on. But what Hartley’s work suggests is that landscape—that is the visual, artistic project—can be equally unstable. It is both literally and metaphorically a floating signifier, a verb rather than a noun. The aesthetic and political economies of *Nowhereisland* are explicitly linked.³²

It was also a sculptural exploration of place, made from fragments of Norwegian rock and natural debris, which are central to the wider narrative of the project. Rocks, pebbles, walrus bones, and other local objects found on Nymark were displayed in the mobile land-based embassy that followed the floating island around the south coast of England. These included a tiny piece of moon rock found on the island; this constituted a part of both the larger work and the archive (that is, the objects and fragments displayed in the mobile embassy). The artist Tania Kovats, who was part of the expedition, has described the fluid—and even global—function of this archive:

One of the objects in the *Nowhereisland* embassy was a tiny fragment of a lunar meteorite. This object was the smallest item in the archive, yet it added the most to reflections on the nature of mobile territories. Nothing you could touch could bring you closer from something further away.³³

At the same time, these objects can be perceived as evidence of the distinct “islandness” of the project; fragments provide archival evidence of its particular geological characteristics, its presence as part of the bleak, rocky formations of the Arctic Circle. Fragments then constitute further evidence of the deliberate contradictions at the heart of this floating island.

Hartley has also engaged with the island home theme in some of his earlier works, especially a series on and around the Scottish archipelagos, an area of the UK, which has long inspired some British artists.³⁴ For Hartley, motifs of home, northern remoteness, and the seemingly infinite aspects of surrounding water are recurring themes. While working on a series on the Outer Hebrides, he exploited the absurd notion of scaling a simple crofter's cottage in a desolate area of the island of Skye (Fig. 15).³⁵ He is renowned for his practice of so-called "buildering", which often involves a transgressive activity of scaling or climbing—or trespassing in and on buildings, and has climbed many modern buildings. The latter are more often scaled for repair and cleaning in areas of affluent high-rise structures, adding to the absurdity of his performance on a crofter's cottage. Moreover, it could be argued that he was deliberately trespassing on, and damaging, Norwegian territory in *Nowhereisland*, as his initial claim on the island was rejected by the Norwegian government. Hartley's island projects then often involve some kind of mischievously aggressive act that serves to de-romanticise the associations of specific places and landscapes.



Figure 15.

Alex Hartley, *Gnomic.4c.46ft (Kilmuir)*, 2007, C-type colour photograph mounted on aluminium, 83.5 x 99 cm. Digital image courtesy of Alex Hartley (All rights reserved).

Ideas of place and their metaphorical potential inspired another multimedia island project on the south coast of England. Commissioned by the Arts Charity Artangel in 2015, the sculptor Katrina Palmer took the Isle of Portland as her subject matter: the project included an audio walk titled *The Loss Adjusters*, a book *End Matter* (Fig. 16), and a radio broadcast on BBC Radio 4 called *The Quarryman's Daughters*.³⁶ The artist lived on the island for several months while researching, and her project shared Hartley's interest in geological histories and the significance of place and identity in the shaping of local landscapes. Although conceived by a sculptor, her "art works" paradoxically featured the absence of physical matter as a central theme. Portland is a curious island, shaped like a lamb chop or a flamingo's head and joined to the south coast mainland by a famous shingle isthmus, namely, Chesil Beach (Fig. 17). Located on the historic English Jurassic coast, its luminous white stone has been extensively quarried over the centuries and forms part of many of London's best-known landmarks and monuments, including the Tower of London, many Wren churches, Buckingham Palace, the Cenotaph and Broadcasting House in Portland Place. The construction of these buildings, rich with symbolism of Britain's imperial, ecclesiastical, and colonial pasts has contributed to the hollowing out of the Isle of Portland, whose identity has become synonymous with this much coveted pale limestone.

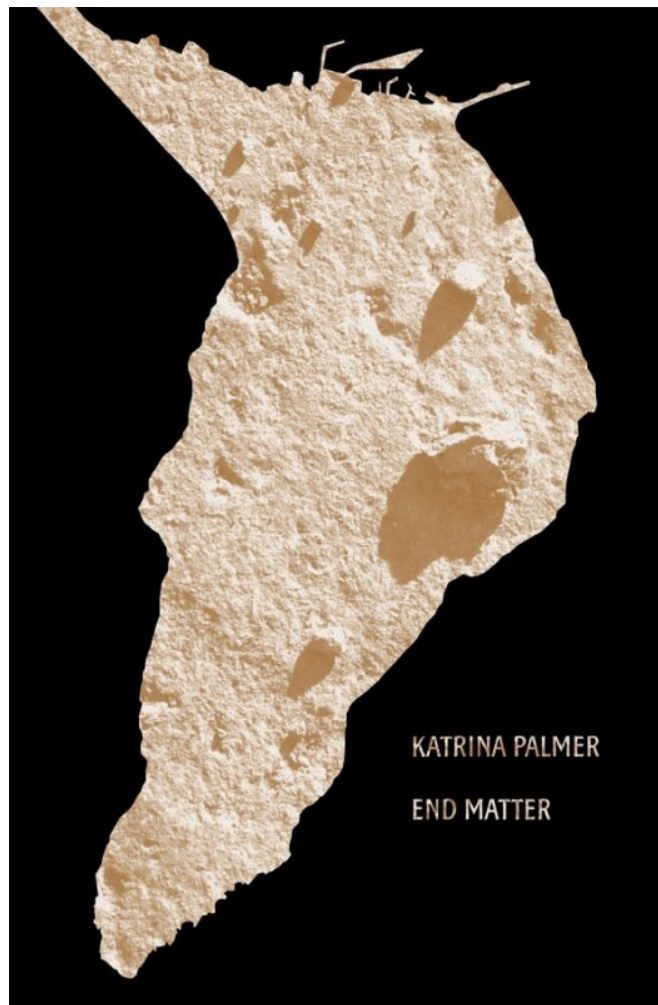


Figure 16.

Katrina Palmer, *End Matter*, book cover (London: Book Works and Artangel, 2015), 12 x 18 cm. Digital image courtesy of Katrina Palmer. Book Works, Artangel | Design: James Langdon.



Figure 17.

Gill Perry, View of Portland Island and causeway, 2018, photograph.
Digital image courtesy of Gill Perry (All rights reserved).

Palmer's conceptual approach to landscape focuses on the loss of this desirable white stone. Portland's many quarries, and more recently underground mines, have progressively emptied out the underbelly of the island. Once defined by Thomas Hardy as "a single stone", ³⁷ Portland becomes an inverted sculpture defined by the absence of the stone of which it is made. Hence, the literal and metaphorical significance of "Loss Adjusters" at the heart of this work.

Other artistic imaginings or reworkings of the island theme by contemporary British artists are often merged with images or representations of "home" or dwelling. Ideas of "islandness", place, and dwelling (or inhabiting) are often enmeshed—in life—as in representation. Rachel Whiteread's recent *Cabin* (2016), on the Hills of the Governors Island, overlooking New York harbour (Fig. 18), references the idea of remote living, divided from—yet within range of (and connected to)—the seething metropolitan mainland. *Cabin* is a negative concrete cast of the interior of a simple cabin. Inside the cabin, Whiteread has strewn discarded objects found on the island such as bottles and cans, echoing Hartley's archival fragments. The solitary nature of this installation—a simple space for introspection—is accentuated by the island site. Cut off from the metropolitan mainland, which is at the same time all too visible on the horizon, Whiteread's *Cabin* invokes the local landscape as a

series of contradictions: a simple, hut-like dwelling space situated on a peaceful island mediates the force and spectacle of the New York City skyline.



Figure 18.

Rachel Whiteread, Cabin on Governor's island, New York, 2016, concrete reverse cast of wooden shed. Digital image courtesy of Rachel Whiteread, DACS 2018. Photo: Sherman Clarke.

Whiteread's work is, of course, much closer to single object sculpture than Hartley's multifaceted, transitory project. Her permanent, concrete cast stands as a monument to past activity on the Governor's Island—a ghostly, material memory. In contrast, Hartley's project lives on through its surviving archival fragments and photographic representations. It was the engaged citizens of *Nowhereisland*, alongside the artist, who also helped to develop the creative illusion through their part in the ongoing performance, following the voyage and its associated events. As Hartley's work demonstrates, representations of the "island" theme have been significantly enriched by developments in the expanded field, enabling participatory and interdisciplinary engagements with artistic material. His project is marked out from some of its utopian predecessors as a durational, floating island, perpetually changing its landscape and its performative history as it travelled from the High Arctic to south-west Britain. Like Palmer's multimedia project on the Isle of Portland, it now leaves little sculptural trace (apart from fragments dispatched to citizens), and depends on photographic and digital archives to provide a visual history. As such, it also reminds us that topographies of landscape are constantly evolving and are enmeshed with our shifting ideas of both place and space. As Doreen Massey has written in a

fitting quote from her “Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains” of 2006: “bearing in mind the movement of the rocks, both space and landscape could be imagined as provisionally intertwined simultaneities of ongoing, unfinished stories.”³⁸ *Nowhereisland* offered its audiences an unfinished story of landscape, rich in imaginative possibilities and ongoing tales of social and cultural collaboration.

Footnotes

- 1 For a full illustrated account of the project, see Alex Hartley, *Nowhereisland*, with Tim Cresswell, Claire Doherty, Jeffrey Kastner, and Tania Kovats (London: Cornerhouse/Victoria Miro, 2015).
- 2 For example, island metaphors have informed anthropological theory, and in biology, the metaphor is often used in descriptions of isolated gene pools and close eco-systems. However, the notion of societies and cultures as closed social and symbolic structures have increasingly been criticised in recent years. See Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “In What Sense do Cultural Islands Exist?”, *Social Anthropology* 1, no. 1B, (1993): 133–147. The study of islands across disciplines is developing within modern scholarship, and “island studies” is now increasingly recognised as a separate discipline, often encompassing anthropology, geography, environmental studies, sociology, cultural studies, etc. The cross-disciplinary *Island Studies Journal* was founded in 2006, <https://www.islandstudies.ca/>. The term “islandness” is sometimes used to denote a sense of a separate contained culture, constantly fearing the threat of incorporation by other larger nations, but definitions of this concept are constantly debated and disputed by island scholars. Some researchers now argue for a more fluid, global notion of “islandness” that also takes account of modern communications, the effects of increased travel, and the different contexts and histories that characterise different islands. These issues are reviewed in an article by Pete Hay, “A Phenomenology of Islands”, *Island Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 19–42.
- 3 *Atlantis* is a fictional island mentioned by Plato within an allegory of the *hubris* of nations in his works *Timaeus* and *Critias*. It represents the naval power that besieges ancient Athens (the embodiment of Plato’s ideal state in *The Republic*), but offends the Gods and is submerged in the Atlantic Ocean. The allegorical significance of *Atlantis* has had a major impact on subsequent literature, including sixteenth-century works such as Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and Thomas Moore’s *Utopia* (both cited above).
- 4 Richard Head, *The Floating Island Whitefish*, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2018 [1695]). The full title begins *The Floating Island: OR A NEW DISCOVERY, RELATING to the strange Adventure on a late VOYAGE FROM LAMBETHANA TO VILLA FRANCA, ALIAS RAMALLA....*
- 5 Jules Verne, *The Floating Island or The Pearl of the Pacific*, first published in English by Donohue Brothers, New York in 1896 (facsimile edition, Milton Keynes: Wildside Books, 2017).
- 6 Of course, the idea of floating islands has not just emerged from cultural fantasies and literary and artistic legacies. Geographers, ethnographers, and biologists have long been studying natural floating islands found in many parts of the world, which usually consist of floating aquatic plants, peat, and mud, and are often found on marshlands and lakes, as in the famous La Rota in Posta Fibreno Lake, Italy. The Uru (or Uros) people of Peru and Bolivia live on over 40 floating islands made of reeds on Lake Titicaca near Puno.
- 7 W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.) *Landscape and Power*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004 [1994]), 1.
- 8 John Haber, “Inside Out and Outside In”, *Haber’s Art Reviews*, 24 September, 2005, www.haberarts.com/smithson.htm. Accessed 12 June 2018.
- 9 Central Park was established in 1857 on 778 acres of land acquired by the city of New York. In 1858, the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and the architect/designer Calvert Vaux won a competition to develop the park, which was opened to the public in 1858.
- 10 Smithson’s concept of “Non-Sites” and some of the contradictions at the heart of his practice are explored in his extensive writings, edited by Jack Flam: *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).
- 11 See discussion below of the installation of *Nowhereisland* photographs at Liverpool in 2006. The photographic archive has since acquired value as part of the (ongoing) work, re-presenting landscapes along the south coast of the UK in 2012 as island vistas. Much has now been written across disciplines on the nature and function of the idea of the archive and its theoretical underpinnings, including what has been described as “the dialectic between storage and retrieval”. This is relevant to modern performance art and its photographic representations, which as some might argue are perpetually reinstated as part of an ongoing work, although separate from the original event. In this sense, the archive becomes a part of the extended original work, and is accorded value. In his book, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Derrida argues from Freudian psychoanalytic theory, that the need to build and keep archives is a product of the repetition compulsion (also described as the “death drive”). A key point (of relevance to this study) made by Derrida is that: “The archivization produces as much as it records the event.” Thus, archiving technology determines “the very institution of the archivable event”. For a useful overview of these issues, see Walker Sampson, “From my Archive: Derrida’s *Archive Fever*”, 10 April 2011, <https://wsampson.blog/2011/04/10/from-my-archives-derridas-archive-fever/>. Accessed 18 May 2018.
- 12 Zittel explains the aims of this project in an interview first published in 2003, and republished in 2011, see “Pocket Property”, *Art 21*, November 2011, <https://art21.org/read/andrea-zittel-pocket-property/>. Accessed 23 March 2018.

- 13 In a series of works from the 1990s and onwards, Zittel has explored minimal self-sufficient dwelling spaces, in which everyday actions such as sleeping, eating, cooking, bathing, and socialising are transformed into acts of art. "A-Z West", for example, is a series of small self-sufficient structures in the Californian desert near Joshua Tree. See Richard Julin, *Andrea Zittel: Lay of My Land* (New York: Prestel, 2011).
- 14 Interview in *Art21 Magazine*, 10 January 2010, <http://magazine.art21.org/2010/01/21/the-island-in-100-acres-an-interview-with-andrea-zittel/#.W0cni9JKjIU>. Accessed 16 January 2018.
- 15 Claire Doherty, in "Foreword" to Hartley, *Nowhereisland* (London: Cornerhouse, 2015), 11.
- 16 The official website for Arcelor Mittal Orbit is <http://arcelormittalorbit.com/>. Accessed 10 October 2017.
- 17 Much has been written on the controversial housing policies that followed the 2012 Olympic Park development. A *Guardian* review of 27 July 2017 was titled "Legacy, What Legacy? Five Years on the London Olympic Park Battle Still Lingers On". The author Tim Burrows argues that the promised "affordable" housing commitment has not taken shape: "Family-friendly utopia or part-privatised nightmare? Revitalised wasteland or monument to social cleansing? The story didn't end once the Games were over." *The Guardian*, 27 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/27/london-olympic-park-success-five-years-depends>. Accessed 20 September, 2017.
- 18 The ideological implications and ambitions of modernist architecture that "reached for the skies" like a Tower of Babel are discussed in Mark Crinson's fascinating book: *Rebuilding Babel: Modern Architecture and Internationalism* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2017).
- 19 As suggested by Hartley in an interview with the artist, July 2017.
- 20 *The Daily Mail online*, 22 September 2011: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2040107/Artist-Alex-Hartley-gets-500k-taxpayers-money-transport-Arctic-rock.html>. Accessed 11 October 2017.
- 21 Rachel Cooke, "Alex Hartley: The World is Still Big", *The Guardian online*, 27 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/nov/27/alex-hartley-nowhereisland-cultural-olympiad>. Accessed 30 October 2018.
- 22 Leo Hickman, "Olympic Arctic Art Project Deserves to Sink", *The Guardian*, 22 September 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2011/sep/22/olympic-arctic-art>. Accessed 11 October 2017.
- 23 Claire Doherty, "The Island as Social Form", in Hartley, *Nowhereisland*, 155.
- 24 The utopian aspects of the project were acknowledged by Hartley, who referenced Thomas Moore's *Utopia* on the website and in lectures given on the subject. As Philip Hoare, among others, has pointed out "Set apart as it is, the island, real or fictional, aspires to Utopia" (from *The Power of Islands* and quoted in Hartley, *Nowhereisland*, 113). Of course, "utopia" is itself a much-debated notion and Moore's *Utopia* an imaginary island society. Moreover, the term "utopia" derives from the Greek terms *ou-topos* (meaning no place or nowhere) and *eu-topos* (meaning a "good place"). Carl Gardner reflects on the problems of defining utopia and what the island should *not* be in his essay "What Constitutes an Island State" in Hartley's *Nowhereisland* publication, 108.
- 25 Hartley, *Nowhereisland*, 156–157.
- 26 Citizenship is, of course, a contested notion. Political theorists, sociologists, and anthropologists are engaged in debates as to what the concept can mean across disciplines. A useful overview of "Concepts of Citizenship" has been published by the Institute of Development Studies: Emma Jones and John Gaventa (eds), *Concepts of Citizenship: A Review* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2002).
- 27 Rana Dasgupta, *After Nations* (London: 2019), forthcoming at the time of writing.
- 28 See "The Demise of the Nation State", *The Guardian*, 5 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/apr/05/demise-of-the-nation-state-rana-dasgupta>. Accessed 5 April 2018.
- 29 The opening page of text of the "Antarctica World Passport" (issued 2017) reads: "The 1959 Antarctic Treaty counts 53 signatory nations who have declared Antarctica a common territory. The Madrid Protocol, ratified in 1991, has frozen mining until 2048 and banned industrial research or exploitation for 50 years. Military activity is similarly prohibited. Antarctica has become a land of peace, scientific research and international cooperation."
- 30 Quoted in the "Antarctica World Passport" (issued 2017).
- 31 Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 17.
- 32 Although beyond the remit of this article, it is worth noting that the metaphor of *floating* identities (and meanings) enmeshed within various art practices has become ubiquitous in some areas of contemporary art. For example, The Lyon Art Biennale of 2016 was called *Mondes Flottantes (Floating Worlds)*, and the 2017 Venice Biennale included many projects that engaged with themes of fluid global identities, perhaps also emphasising the fact that the Venice Biennale takes place on an island or group of islands on the Italian coast.
- 33 Hartley, *Nowhereisland*, 175.
- 34 Other British artists have turned the geography and geology of British Islands into complex aesthetic projects. For example, Alison Turnbull's works on the Scottish Cape Farewell project of 2011–2012 charts the activities of clouds and planets over island maps, as in *North and South*, which shows stars over a map grid of Barra Island.
- 35 See Alex Hartley, *Not Part of Your World* (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2007), 10–11.
- 36 For details of the Artangel project, see <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/end-matter/>. Accessed 21 May 2018.
- 37 "The peninsula carved by time out of a single stone ...", Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved: A Sketch of a Temperament* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), 3.

- 38 Doreen Massey, "Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains", *Journal of Material Culture* 11 (2006): 33. These ideas are also developed in her book *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

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Outside In: Reflections of British Landscape in the Long Anthropocene

Mark A. Cheetham

Abstract

The genre of landscape, earth, and land art from the 1960s and 1970s, and more recent ecological art, are typically separated in the field of art history. While there are good reasons to distinguish these modes in terms of materials and purpose, and to avoid seeing them as superseding one another teleologically, I argue in favour of their comparison and linkage. All are practices of picturing and manipulating the Earth. All are part of the Anthropocene conceived as beginning in the Industrial Revolution. Focusing on the widespread habit of moving landscape—"the outside"—into structures, art galleries, and institutional matrices in work by Chris Drury, Simon Starling, and John Gerrard, I argue that in specific practices and as categories, eco art, land art, and landscape are active and imbricated actants in the Anthropocene.

Authors

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Landscape *versus* Ecological Art

What are the implications of comparing artistic practices on and about “landscape” by British artists over several centuries? The disciplinary norm is instead to draw distinctions between: 1) the landscape tradition in Britain (or any national grouping with such a long history) from the seventeenth century forwards; 2) experiments in land and Earth art in the 1960s and 1970s; and 3) what is now widely referred to as ecological art, which has increased in prominence since its inception alongside land art in the early 1970s.¹ In their catalogue to the exhibition *Uncommon Ground: Land Art in Britain 1966–1979* in 2013, Nicholas Alfrey and Joy Sleeman warn against “questionable assumptions about the continuity and adaptability of a British landscape tradition.” I suggest, however, that a consideration of *both* differences and plausible connections in this extensive artistic engagement with the Earth can expand our understanding of contemporary eco art on the one hand and “landscape now”, considered in terms of both its past and current preoccupations, on the other. To this end, and instead of deploying the habitual art historical periods and considerations of medium that largely underline the divisions between landscape, land art, and eco art, I will adapt aspects of the notion of the Anthropocene as the temporal and thematic frame for this comparison. I will think in terms of connected practices of picturing the Earth and of my examples as unequivocally *of* the Anthropocene. In David Matless’ instructive coinage, they are “Anthroposcenic”, defined as “landscape emblematic of processes marking the Anthropocene.”²

If we allow that there are distinct but also interrelated practices that we call landscape, land art, and eco art, it follows that these aesthetic representations and presentations at the very least coincide temporally and thematically with widely influential descriptions of the Anthropocene—the term introduced by Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen almost twenty years ago to describe the geological epoch following the Holocene.³ Though its origins and causes are widely debated, the Anthropocene is often understood to encompass our time and that of our predecessors for some centuries, a period in which human activity has altered the planet as formerly only “nature” was thought to do.⁴

Competing descriptors such as the “Capitalocene” (Jason W. Moore),⁵ and the “Chthulucene” (Donna Haraway)⁶ underscore the fact that the main cause of global warming and attendant climate disruption continues to be capitalist expansion and industrialization. The same is true for Jussi Parikka’s memorable neologism “*Anthrobscene*”, which stresses the indecency of the wanton disregard for, and humiliation of, the integrity of the Earth, of humans, of non-human animals, and of other organisms and inanimate

materials.⁷ Whatever precisions we might add to the term Anthropocene, most importantly that its characteristic effects have not been caused by all humans equally, as Haraway states, “There’s a need for a word to highlight the urgency of human impact on this planet, such that the effects of our species are literally written into the rocks.”⁸

As creatures of the Anthropocene, when and especially how this epoch began and will end for humans and the planet are increasingly urgent questions. The Industrial Revolution in Britain is an oft-cited starting point for anthropogenic change. As a way to suspend the notion that there is a progression from the genre of landscape to land art to today’s eco art and also to question their separation, then, we may consider all three modes as phenomena of the Anthropocene conceived as beginning during the Industrial Revolution and specifically in Britain. Some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscape paintings in Britain memorably reflected the power and excesses of industrialization, for instance, de Loutherbourg’s *Coalbrookdale by Night* (1801) (Fig. 1). More often, landscapists avoided picturing such anthropogenic effects on the land by vaunting happily cultivated passages of the picturesque. The temporal coincidence of the Anthropocene so conceived with the flourishing of the landscape genre alone justifies their comparison and perhaps linkage, but before I extend this argument, I want to enter a caveat powerfully stated by Zoe Todd about the seemingly magnetic power of the concept of the Anthropocene:

As a Métis scholar, I have an inherent distrust of this term, the Anthropocene, since terms and theories can act as gentrifiers in their own right, and I frequently have to force myself to engage in good faith with it as heuristic. While it may seem ridiculous to distrust a word, it is precisely because the term has colonized and infiltrated many intellectual contexts throughout the academy at the moment that I view it with caution. ... I ask myself: “What other story could be told here? What other language is not being heard? Whose space is this, and who is not here?”⁹

Keeping Todd’s warnings about the Anthropocene as a frame in mind (though without pretending that my argument assuages her concerns), my proposal offers the unorthodox view that landscape, land art, and eco art invite comparison because they are overtly of the Anthropocene and cross-pollinate one another throughout this ongoing time-frame.



Figure 1.

Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg, *Coalbrookdale by Night*, 1801, oil on canvas, 85.5 x 124 cm. Collection of The Science Museum (1952-452)
Digital image courtesy of The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum (Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Suggesting as I am that landscape finds its way into eco art, and that contemporary practices can also revise our views on the earlier work in the landscape genre, has another hazard that can be turned to critical advantage. It summons the spectre of Kenneth Clark's frequently criticized *Landscape into Art*.¹⁰ Just when land art was becoming established in the mid-1970s, Clark's second edition reiterated his pessimism about the future of the landscape genre. In accidental company with land artists themselves, many of whom criticized the habits of earlier landscape painting in Europe and the USA, he excavated an historical and conceptual Ha Ha between then contemporary work with the land and earlier landscape depiction. One objection to Clark's account is that he plots a linear progression through which landscape elements, once simply decorative or stage-setting supplements in religious and historical paintings, achieve independent status in the nineteenth century as "pure" landscape. Accounts of landscape as a category—and as a more general, fluid response to nature in art—since Clark's time similarly suggest, with varying degrees of explicitness, that landscape, land art, and then eco art also follow one from the other chronologically, dialectically, and in some accounts, teleologically. They largely agree, as Clark predicted and as W.J.T. Mitchell polemicized in his "theses of landscape", though for different reasons, that landscape is over. My counter-claim is that these articulations of the Earth coexist—both in the recent past and now.¹¹

I will not rehearse the litany of critiques of the landscape genre by land artists or recount eco artists' various complaints since the 1970s about both landscape and land art. Instead, let us ask what an emphasis on analogies among these practices yields for our understanding of this array of practices. Connections are there to be discussed. For example, the pioneering land artist Nancy Holt recalled in 2013 that it was during a visit to England in 1969 that her interests in landscape depiction and theory solidified. Ditto for those of her husband, Robert Smithson:

It was in England that the roots of that kind of thinking began [she recalled]. I always think of Gilpin. ... we were going back, in terms of our roots, our ancestral roots, and also finding out how the English treated their landscape, how the natural—having it fit into the existing landscape—transformed the formal garden.¹²

Whether or not we can recruit Gilpin's theories as a progenitor, Holt was an innovator in emphasizing land art's relationship to the human body and human reality, a stance also adopted by others at the time and since, including the British artist Chris Drury.

Bringing the Outside In: Chris Drury

Drury describes himself as an environmental artist working at the interface of art and science to make "site specific nature based sculpture".¹³ He also calls himself a land artist, and he frequently refers to landscape. His extensive portfolio is instructive regarding ongoing relationships between eco artists and the previous generation, not least because his practice began with the noted land artist Hamish Fulton in the 1970s. Sympathetic with Fulton and with Richard Long's principle to "take only photographs and leave only footprints" in the landscape, unlike these mentors, Drury nonetheless acknowledges his debt to remotely sited American land art, often criticized in Britain at this time because of its scale and intrusiveness.¹⁴ For Drury, it:

opened up a field of debate and paved the way for much of what has happened in the landscape subsequently—in particular, the process of removing works from the white space of the museum or gallery and allowing them to interact with the world as it is.¹⁵

For him, the camera obscura is the ideal tool with which to explore this gap, to bring nature from the outside into a human structure, and to enact the confluence—or the productive confusion—of inside and outside that exemplifies the principle of ecological interconnectedness.

Drury has been constructing what he calls cloud chambers since 1990, huts that act as camera obscuras, usually sited in nemoral surroundings. He describes his fascination with this ancient technology:

A large preoccupation in my work has been the exploration of what inner and outer nature mean. These cloud chambers are still, silent, meditative and mysterious spaces. Outside, they are discreet objects which sit unobtrusively within the landscape; are in fact made of the material of the landscape. They are often built partially underground, so that in these dark spaces what is outside is brought in and reversed. Clouds drift silently across the floor. ¹⁶

Wave Chamber (1994) was built beside a reservoir in Kielder Water and Forest Park, Northumberland (Fig. 2). The rock structure and its aperture are designed to transmit the sense of water to the interior. Drury suggests that: “The rippling surface of the water is projected on to the pale floor of the chamber, which echoes to the sound of the waves.” ¹⁷ There are precedents that take us back to the eighteenth century and reflect again in the present. Much as in Alexander Pope’s subterranean grotto refuge at his garden in Twickenham and indeed in many examples of contemporary eco art, both vision and sound are important to the sought effect. Pope’s cavern was unusual as a camera obscura in that it was underground. ¹⁸ Drury has created two works that share this feature: *Tyrebagger Cloud Chamber* in 1994 and *Cloud Chamber for the Trees and Sky* in 2003. The moving images that his chambers capture are very much of the Earth. A typical example is *Sky Mountain Chamber* of 2010, made from 150 tons of local limestone and sited in the Trento area of Italy. The materials and beehive shape of the structure pay homage to the Dolomite mountains in this region. An aperture in the side of the camera obscura allows the peaks of these mountains to be projected upside down onto the wall of the interior. We see nature brought indoors for our contemplation but also an unexpected collaboration between a space for art and what is clearly not art—the external world.



Figure 2.

Chris Drury, Wave Chamber, Chris Drury, Wave Chamber, 1996, dry stone beehive hut, 400 cm tall. Collection of Kielder Partnership. Digital image courtesy of Chris Drury (All rights reserved).

A book by the philosopher Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, which was published in 1990, gives one perspective on this outside-in movement. With Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (1989), Serres' book was a prescient, Earth-centred anticipation and analysis of theories of what has come to be called the Anthropocene. It remains a striking indictment of what our technological culture has created. Serres holds that we are combatants in a "world war" that takes the material Earth and all its inhabitants as the target of multiple hostilities, in part because Western technological society is obsessed with data and with words. "We busy ourselves only with our own networks," he claims, to the extent that we have forgotten nature because "the essentials [of our lives] take place indoors and in words, never again outdoors with things." ¹⁹ But here we need to pause, perhaps recalling the camera obscura's talent for bringing the outside in and productively complicating any firm lines we might draw between nature and culture. Serres reiterates a commonplace that sets nature/outside against culture/inside. His broader insights can be revised by looking at how eco artists work expressly across this borderland between the artwork and exhibition spaces as physically and socially "inside" and nature as something beyond their limits. To offer ready paradigms in these terms, then, if eco art *articulates* such a border, land art wanted out of the museum and the city, at least in theory. Even Robert Smithson's site versus non-site dialectic—the epitome of land art in the USA—denied art institutions their former authority and rendered impossible the notion of a simple "outside" or "inside".

Outside-In in the Gallery and Museum Contexts

Conveying nature into an art gallery or cognate institutional setting today is arguably a peculiar symptom of industrialized societies' apparent alienation from the non-human environment. Powerful examples include Olafur Eliasson's Tate Turbine Hall installation *The Weather Project* in 2003, which not only recreated an atmosphere inside but also displaced and disseminated discourses about weather throughout the city via posters in taxi cabs, again complicating the nature of and exchange between outside and inside. Pierre Huyghe's *Untilled: Alive Entities and Inanimate Things, Made and Not Made*, seen at documenta 13 in 2012, was an outdoor, bee-filled garden in the composting area of the documenta site.²⁰ But with its learned homage to Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks* (which was initiated at documenta in 1982) resonating from the carefully placed felled oak tree, the work also functioned within the institutional scaffolding of the gallery and exhibition. There is also a long and growing list of museum-sponsored eco art exhibitions, demonstrating the angst of the Anthropocene and, more hopefully, a widespread will to grapple with its issues in the aesthetic.²¹ Perhaps this move indoors seems somehow unusual, unnatural, but that view depends too much on the understanding of land art as paradigmatically sited remotely—there are many urban examples—and on a too simple binary of inside versus outside. If we think in terms of a longer history, presenting nature indoors via murals, mosaics, tapestries, and of course paintings, has been the norm in the West since well before landscape became a separate genre of art. Contemporary eco art makes us think more critically about this habit.

Simon Starling's *Island for Weeds (Prototype)* of 2003 (Fig. 3) and *One Ton, II* of 2005 (Fig. 4) explore the ins and outs of border crossing to articulate ecological systems and issues. The floating garden that is *Island for Weeds* animated the eighteenth-century importation to Scotland of rhododendrons as well as the plants' subsequent takeover of local flora and recategorization as weeds. Mirroring the plants' original migration from Spain, Starling's island transported them to the Venice Biennale, where he represented Scotland in 2003. While the work echoes Robert Smithson's *Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island* (envisioned in 1970 and well known from drawings; realized posthumously in 2005), but perhaps more significantly, it highlights the long-standing impact of species migration because of human exploration and migration. A prime example of this effect in the Anthropocene is naturalist Joseph Banks, who accompanied James Cook to the south seas in 1768–1771. Banks sought to improve the lot of indigenous peoples by giving them domesticated animals new to their ecosystems. The ecological impact was horrendous. Starling's peripatetic island also raises issues of indigeneity, immigration, involuntary migration precipitated by

climate change, and hybridity that are directly analogous to the concerns of contemporary societies and the ever-migratory players in the international art world.



Figure 3.

Simon Starling, *Island of Weeds (Prototype)*, installation view at The Scottish Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2003. Soil, rhododendrons, water, plastic pipes, metal, self-regulating pressure system, 244 x 610 x 366cm. Collection of The Modern Institute / Toby Webster Ltd. Digital image courtesy of Simon Starling (All Rights Reserved), DACS/Artimage 2018. Image courtesy The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow. Photo: Jeremy Hardman-Jones (All rights reserved).



Figure 4.

Simon Starling, *One Ton, II*, 2005, platinum/palladium prints framed in acrylic boxes, five parts, each framed 75.4 × 94.6 × 5.9 cm. Collection of Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Gift of Gerald S. Elliott, Albert A. Robin by exchange (2014.35.a-e). Digital image courtesy of MCA Chicago (All rights reserved) | Photo: Nathan Keay.

Starling's *One Ton, II* engages such concerns in a more material and less overtly art-historical manner. The title refers to the amount of ore that must be extracted and refined to produce the platinum used to print the five images displayed, photographs that simply show the open-pit mine in Africa that is the source. Both telluric and national boundaries are crossed in the making of this and any image, an ecology that is absurdly expensive in terms of the planet's energy and that Starling makes visible. He is "interested in what it means to make something in a culture in which our connections with making and manufacture are increasingly distant—we have become estranged from the things we use every day."²² What is the cost to the Earth in material and organic terms of printing images in this manner? Starling poses a similar question in *Inventar Nr. 8573 (Man Ray)* (2006). We view a sequential slide projection in which we come closer and closer to a Man Ray photograph until we can see the "geology of its medium", to paraphrase Jussi Parikka—the silver particles that make up the photograph.²³ Starling's approach to eco art is specifically contextual and material in this way. Concerned to explore and display the short- and long-term processes and implications of extraction, fabrication, and the use of art media, his work is mindfully ecological.

Starling's extensive *Project for a Rift Valley Crossing* of 2015–2016 exemplifies not only the practice of complicating relationships between inside and outside through art—those malleable boundaries in museums,

technologies, and the artist's self-placement around institutional structures in the art world—but also Timothy Morton's idea of “the ecological thought” (Fig. 5). As Morton defined the notion in 2010:

The ecological thought is a thought about ecology, but it's also a thinking that is ecological. Thinking the ecological thought is part of an ecological project. The ecological thought doesn't just occur “in the mind”. It's a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings—animal, vegetable, or mineral. Ultimately, this includes thinking about democracy. ²⁴

The full title of Starling's work describes the components that he animates to remind us of the interconnectedness of materials and our lives: *Project for a Rift Valley Crossing. A canoe built to cross the Dead Sea Rift between Israel and Jordan using 90 kg of magnesium produced from 1900 litres of Dead Sea water*. The artist had a functional canoe fabricated from magnesium extracted from Dead Sea water, a particularly rich source of this light and strong mineral. The video component of the project tracks his journey across this body of water. Akin to *One Ton, II*, still photographs document the pumping of water from the sea, the usually unseen source for magnesium. A particularly sensitive strategic site in the Middle East, garnering the necessary permissions to paddle across the Dead Sea is—analogueous to the land art schemes of Christo and Jean Claude, for example, such as *Running Fence* (1976)—perhaps the most significant part of the journey, one that touches on state politics as well as the politics of ecology. As Starling reports in an interview:

The very nature of the place is so determined by what's going around it. Even on a physical level, the environmental changes that are happening in the Dead Sea are fundamentally driven by local politics, and water use, and control of land, and so on. It's palpable when you go there. ²⁵

The “outside” elements of Starling's *Project for a Rift Valley Crossing*—the extraction of water, then magnesium; the trip across the Dead Sea—cross both materially and conceptually with their “inside” art components, the canoe as a sculpture (recently purchased by the Arts Council in Britain) and the seemingly banal photographs of the (unidentified) Dead Sea that picture the (unexplained) pumping apparatus. ²⁶



Figure 5.

Simon Starling, *Project for a Rift Valley Crossing*, 2015-2016, Canoe cast in Dead Sea magnesium, 2 paddles, 2 canvas seats, Dead Sea water, tanks, wooden welding jig, 2 silver gelatin prints, installed dimensions variable. Collection of The Arts Council (ACC28/2016). Digital image courtesy of Simon Starling (All Rights Reserved), DACS/Artimage 2018 and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow.

Let me propose another linkage of “landscapes” across supposed art historical barriers of time and genre, first with works that examine “the commons” in the agrarian past and the digital present. The Irish artist John Gerrard calls his hypnotically artificial virtual-reality simulations of buildings “portraits”, but they are in “landscape” format in all senses and often engage with issues of land use. They demonstrate how land comes into eco art. Given that they exist only as files to be projected in a gallery or viewed on a computer screen, chances are that we will experience them in landscape format too, often indoors and certainly under the auspices of an art institution. Two of Gerrard’s works make oblique reference to paradigmatic land art’s interventions into the agricultural system, specifically those of Dennis Oppenheim in the late 1960s and Agnes Denes in the 1980s. Both *Sow Farm (near Libbey, Oklahoma)* (2009) (Fig. 6) and *Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma)* (2015) (Fig. 7) graphically show what art might do now in the vast spaces of the United States after land art heroically claimed the West, but the works exist only in digital form. Fascinated by what takes place in the Oklahoma landscape, Gerrard returned to produce *Farm (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma)*, in which he went to great lengths to picture one of Google’s “data farms”. While he does not announce a political programme in the way Denes and Oppenheim did in *Wheatfield: A Confrontation*—in Manhattan in

her case or along the US/Canada border in his—it is apparent that reflection on mass consumption, industrialization, and digital surveillance informs these simulations.

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Figure 6.

John Gerrard, *Sow Farm* (Near Libbey, Oklahoma), 2015-2016, realtime 3D projection, single screen, colour still, duration 365 days. Collection of Tate (T14279). Digital image courtesy of Courtesy of John Gerrard (All rights reserved).

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Figure 7.

John Gerrard, *Farm* (Pryor Creek, Oklahoma), 2015, simulation still, installed dimensions variable. Digital image courtesy of Courtesy of John Gerrard (All rights reserved).

Gerrard states: “to me, the landscape—dotted with farms and oil fields—also represents the global trend of unrestrained, mass consumption.”²⁷ *Farm* shows similarly monolithic and characterless buildings from the outside. This time, however, the “crop” is data, a resource extracted, cultivated, stored, analysed, and protected in a Google “server farm”. Accustomed to harvesting images from Google’s various sites at will, Gerrard wanted to visualize the hardware too. Because Google would not allow him access to images of the site, he hired a helicopter and photographer to take the 2,500 photos that were in turn painstakingly rendered into this virtual simulation. Ephemeral in the extreme, the Internet is at once pervasive, invisible, and increasingly under scrutiny for breaches of privacy. Gerrard here brings it down to earth by showing us its materiality, how demanding this network is on Earthly resources—cooling systems are prominent—and therefore how entwined it has to be with other social and economic systems. Just as the term “farm” describes a new form of husbandry, so too “landscape” is repurposed as a concept. Wikipedia claims that: “Data farming is the process of using designed computational experiments to ‘grow’ data, which can then be analyzed using statistical and visualization techniques to obtain insight into complex systems.”²⁸

Is it too much of a stretch to think of Gerrard’s work in terms of much earlier landscape traditions? *Farm* is too commonplace in what it shows to be thought of as sublime or picturesque. But there is another significant aesthetic category from this period that does resonate with Gerrard’s creations. The tedium of the buildings more likely leads to an experience of bathos, that bottoming out or sense of baseness that is thought to be the antithesis of the sublime. As theorized by Pope in “Peri Bathous” of 1727, bathos suggests a fall from ideals, a degeneration, but also a profundity.

Perhaps what we see in Gerrard's animation is the bathos of the ideals of a digital commons. Historically, the commons referred to shared land. Today we hear references to the "digital commons" and the "digital landscape" without making the connection to the privatization of data and communications that Gerrard alludes to in reproducing Google's server farm. Calling this work "a postmodern pastoral", Gerrard claims that he wants the urban,

London public to be more aware of these sites, as it is here [in the city] that we consume their work. In ... *Farm* there is a more ambiguous sense as it is not clear if we consume the products of this Farm or are consumed ourselves.²⁹

In picturing both the infrastructure and the fate of the digital commons, *Farm* stands in contrast to (but in fruitful conversation with) *Cornard Wood* (1748), Thomas Gainsborough's nostalgic portrayal of what remained of the agricultural commons in mid-eighteenth-century rural Suffolk (Fig. 8). As Ian Waites explains, parliamentary legislation that forced "the enclosure of operable fields [by private interests] was largely completed before 1700, but many areas of woodland waste [as shown here] remained in common well into the eighteenth century."³⁰ The locals' commons prerogatives are on display in this painting: they contentedly gather wood, graze animals, and take a drink from a stream. The economy of this landscape is evident too: we may imagine a narrative progression in which labourers take what they have foraged home or to market in the town seen in the distance. Harmony among peasants, animals, and the land prevails. Even the large, dark, and empty swampy part of the landscape shown to the right of the canvas hides no sublime threat, no lurking banditti, as in Salvator Rosa's seventeenth-century images, for example. Yet this mysterious area is perhaps an admonitory image of the unproductive path, of the sin of letting the land simply be rather than actively cultivating it. It is not the route to a prosperous future.³¹ The lively concord presented by Gainsborough on the left, by contrast with what we might describe as the banal zone to the right, is that of a thriving pre-Anthropocene ecosystem, soon to be erased. If the positive path is clear in *Cornard Wood*, what are we to think and do in the face of Gerrard's emotionally flattened landscapes? *Farm* is superficially anodyne, yet in our post-Edward Snowden times, reminders of the mere extent of personal information housed and tilled in this and many other companies' and governments' facilities is chilling to many people. Gerrard's animations present failed yet dominant landscapes.



Figure 8.

Thomas Gainsborough, *Cornard Wood*, near Sudbury, Suffolk, 1748, oil on canvas, 122 x 155 cm. Collection of The National Gallery (NG925). Digital image courtesy of The National Gallery (Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

In *Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas)* (2017), commissioned for Earth Day, he cleverly and evocatively pictures a ragged “flag” created in the air by trails of smoke apparently burning off from oil extraction (Fig. 9). The flag is doubly immaterial, both visually ephemeral and a simulation. It graphically suggests the dilapidation and ebbing away of oil culture, one of the dominant and most negatively impactful of Anthropocene industries from an environmental perspective. While *Western Flag* goes to great lengths to look like a live feed from the Texas site named in its title—one of the most bountiful oil wells ever discovered, the Lucas Gusher, opened in 1901—it is important to know that this oil field is now abandoned, tapped out. While Gerrard and his assistants laboriously mapped this location, were we there, we would see no flag marking the triumphs of early twentieth-century oil exploration. Petroculture is past, he seems to claim, in Texas and globally. Our ongoing dependency on oil leaves an increasing ecological burden on the planet, as we see in *World Flag (Amazon, Danube, Nile, Yangtze)* (2017), which shows a polychrome, banner-like “flag” in the form of a gasoline spill rippling on the rivers named. *Western Flag* was first shown on a huge LED screen in the majestic Fountain Court of William Chambers’ Somerset House in London (Fig. 10). The importance of this siting is not easily overstated when we think of landscape painting and also the history of science and technology of which the oil industry is part. In 1780, the Royal Society located there, as did the Navy

Board in 1789. It was of course also the home of the Royal Academy from 1779–1857 and thus the locale for lessons in and exhibitions of landscape painting, most notably by J.M.W. Turner as both a student and professor. Today, it houses both the Courtauld Institute of Art and the Courtauld Galleries.

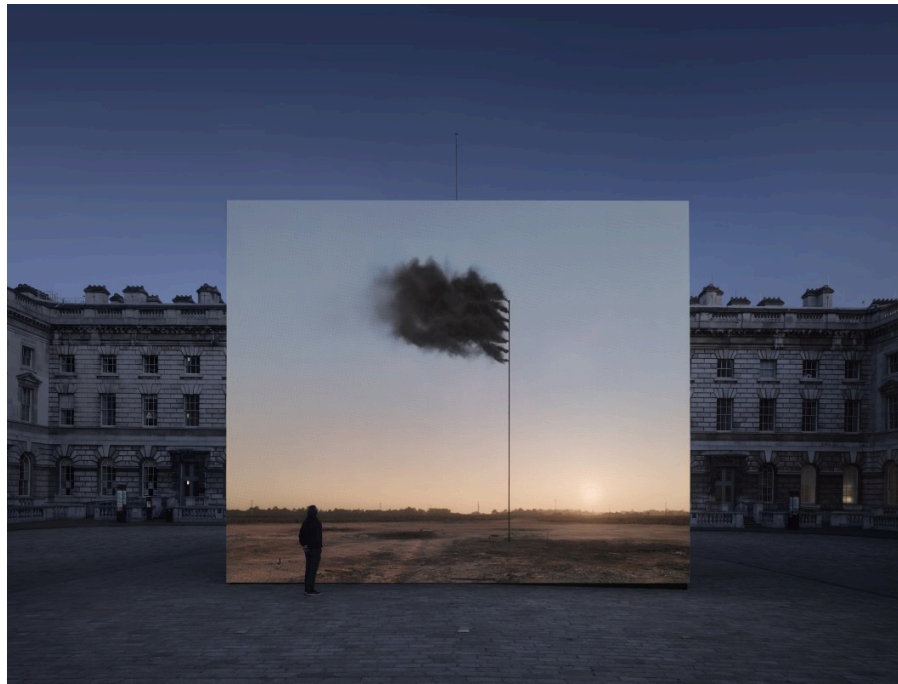


Figure 9.

John Gerrard, *Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas)*, 2017, film, dimensions variable. Installed in the courtyard of Somerset House, London. Digital image courtesy of John Gerrard. DACS/Artimage 2018 and Thomas Dane Gallery, London and Simon Preston Gallery, New York. Photo: Will Pryce.

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Figure 10.

John Gerrard, *Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas)*, realtime simulation, duration 24 hours. Digital image courtesy of Courtesy of John Gerrard (All rights reserved).

Parallel to the connection and distinction between weather as immediate, in contrast to climate conceived as protracted temporally and distributed on a planetary scale, the contemporary artworks discussed here elaborate singular phenomena—Starling’s sourcing of magnesium from the Dead Sea, for example—that have global ecological implications. Chris Drury’s cloud chambers are grounded on their sites, but that locale varies. *Western Flag* and *World Flag* are, like the environmental issues they raise, global in both inception and implication. On the most general plane, then, all landscape, land art, and eco art is of the same Earth. But as the profound resonances of *Western Flag* also suggest, environmental effects and crises are experienced

locally. The fact that *Western Flag* was at its first showing framed by elite British art and art history, past and present, offers an opportunity to ask why and to what advantage we discuss ecological landscape art in terms of a national tradition, a “locality” in this sense. Gerrard’s *Western Flag* was temporarily inscribed in the institutions and practices of British landscape. By loose analogy again, there is a reason for thinking about connections among a national tradition in Britain and both land and eco art projects that in whatever ways arise from these coordinates. I began by asking what the implications—the value—of comparing artistic practices on and about “landscape” by British artists over several centuries might be. One important task for eco art today is to present both specific environmental conditions “on the ground” and their global implications. A long, historical consideration of landscape practices—such as those implied by the specific siting of Gerrard’s *Western Flag*, combined with its allusions to the global networks of the petroleum industry—articulates this expansive view in a way that a focus on past landscape traditions or on contemporary eco art alone cannot.

Footnotes

- 1 For a detailed discussion of the interactions among these three categories, see Mark A. Cheetham, *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature since the '60s* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2018).
- 2 David Matless, “The Anthropocene”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 2017: 363–376. doi:[10.1111/tran.12173](https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12173).
- 3 See Jan Zalaciewicz et al., “The New World of the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Science & Technology* 44, no. 7 (2010): 228–231.
- 4 An exception to this “long” Anthropocene is the view held by Zalaciewicz and other scientists that the nuclear age is the preferred starting point: “Like any geological boundary, it is not a perfect marker—levels of global radiation really rose in the early 1950s, as salvoes of bomb tests took place. But it may be the optimal way to resolve the multiple lines of evidence on human-driven planetary change. Time—and much more discussion—will tell.” See University of Leicester, “Did the Anthropocene Begin with the Nuclear Age?” *ScienceDaily*, 15 January 2015, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/01/150115083044.htm. Accessed 22 March 2018. My argument, however, is not concerned with geologists’ definitive tracking and codification of anthropogenic traces in the Earth’s crust but instead with visual depictions of human effects on the land—a much longer articulation.
- 5 Jason W. Moore (ed.) *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016).
- 6 Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Donna Haraway in Conversation with Martha Kenney”, in Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 255–270.
- 7 Jussi Parikka, *The Anthrobscene* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- 8 Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene”, 259.
- 9 Zoe Todd, “Indigenizing the Anthropocene”, in Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*. London: Open Humanities Press, 244.
- 10 Clark, K. (1976 [1949]) *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 1949; 2nd edn, 1976). Critiques include W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape”, in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5–34.
- 11 Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape”, 5.
- 12 Cited in Joy Sleeman, “Nature, Like a Person, is not One-Sided: Robert Smithson in Search of the Picturesque in England, Wales, and Central Park”, *Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 58 (2012): 211.
- 13 All quotations from the artist are from his website: <http://chrisdrury.co.uk/>.
- 14 Long’s principled methodology is often cited and repeated, for example, see Patrick Barkham, “Interview: Richard Long: ‘I’m Proud of Being the First Person to Cross Dartmoor in a Straight Line’”, *The Guardian*, 16 April 2017, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/apr/16/richard-long-earth-sky-houghton-hall-interview. Accessed 18 March 2018.
- 15 Chris Drury’s website: <http://chrisdrury.co.uk/>.

- 16 <http://chrisdrury.co.uk/>.
- 17 <http://chrisdrury.co.uk/>.
- 18 For a full discussion of this remarkable grotto, see Elizabeth Harvey and Mark A. Cheetham, "Obscure Imaginings: Visual Culture and the Anatomy of Caves", *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 105–126.
- 19 Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*. Translated by Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 29.
- 20 documenta 13 was in Kassel, Germany, 9 June–16 September 2012.
- 21 Attending this type of exhibition is the ongoing controversy about corporate sponsorship of exhibiting institutions by, for example, oil companies. For a full discussion, see Mel Evans, *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).
- 22 Simon Starling, "Clever Objects—Tell-Tale Objects: Simon Starling in Conversation with Christiane Rekade", *Art History* 36, no. 3 (June 2013): 648.
- 23 Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- 24 Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 7.
- 25 Alex Quicho, "Simon Starling in Conversation", *OCULA*, 13 April 2017, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/simon-starling/>. Accessed 18 October 2018 .
- 26 A relevant comparison is Chris Drury's canoe journey in 2009, which inspired his exhibit *Chris Drury: Land, Water and Language* (Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre, Scotland, 2010). My thanks to one of the anonymous readers of this article for this information.
- 27 Cited in Jeff Campagna, "Q and A: Irish Artist John Gerrard", *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 2010, www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/q-and-a-irish-artist-john-gerrard-4543615/. Accessed 22 March 2018.
- 28 See "Data Farming", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data_farming. Accessed 21 March 2018.
- 29 Nicholas Forrest, "Interview: John Gerrard on His 'Slippery' Sims at Thomas Dane Gallery", Blouin Art Info, (United Kingdom), 16 February 2015, <http://uk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1103413/interview-john-gerrard-on-his-slippery-sims-at-thomas-dane#sthash.IdQaD1MC.dpuf>. Accessed 21 March 2018.
- 30 Ian Waites, *Common Land in English Painting* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press), 46.
- 31 My thanks to David Solkin for aspects of this reading.

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Lines in the Landscape: Ruins and Reveals in Britain

Corinne Silva and Val Williams

Abstract

The landscape historian W.G. Hoskins is widely credited as a pioneer of local and landscape history. His 1955 book, The Making of the English Landscape, and the guidebooks and television series he wrote and contributed to, made a historical narrative of the English landscape available to a broad public. Hoskins' work was radical—with so much of England damaged after the Second World War, Hoskins and his collaborator, the photographer F.L. Attenborough, gave ruination a context and insisted on the timelessness and permanence of the English landscape. This article describes the cultural and historical contexts that inform Lines in the Landscape, a new research project by the artist Corinne Silva and the curator/writer Val Williams, which will retrace the footsteps of Hoskins and Attenborough during their collaboration on the 1948 guidebook Touring Leicestershire. It also explores the project's intention to discover the visual embodiments of change in urban and rural landscapes, and to explore the possibilities of interdisciplinarity and partnership in scholarship today.

Authors

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Introduction

The collaborative project, *Lines in the Landscape: Ruins and Reveals in Britain*, is a journey into the British landscape, in which we retrace the steps of the landscape historian William George Hoskins and the academic and photographer Frederick Attenborough (Fig. 1). Our trips so far, carried out in 2018, have taken us to Leicestershire and the hinterlands of south and east London, experimenting with new ways of researching and producing art. The motorists' guidebook, *Touring Leicestershire*, that Hoskins and Attenborough compiled in 1948, and the emerging interest in localness and oral history in 1950s and 1960s Britain are at the core of the project (Fig. 2). Then, as now, the work of both operated as entry points into the landscape, directing visitors to particular locations and informing tastes. This essay is a meditation on the routes we will take following Hoskins and Attenborough. We are setting out ideas at the beginning of the project, rather than waiting for the conclusions at its end, sketching out the paths that our journey together will take and noting where they confer, and differ, with those of Hoskins and Attenborough. In a time of specialist and carefully guarded disciplines—monitored by academia, the art world, the press, and a host of others—we are working to transcend barriers and to understand the nature of collaboration.



Figure 1.

Unknown, W.G. Hoskins (centre) and unknown companion, Cornwall, date unknown, photograph. Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester. Digital image courtesy of Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester.

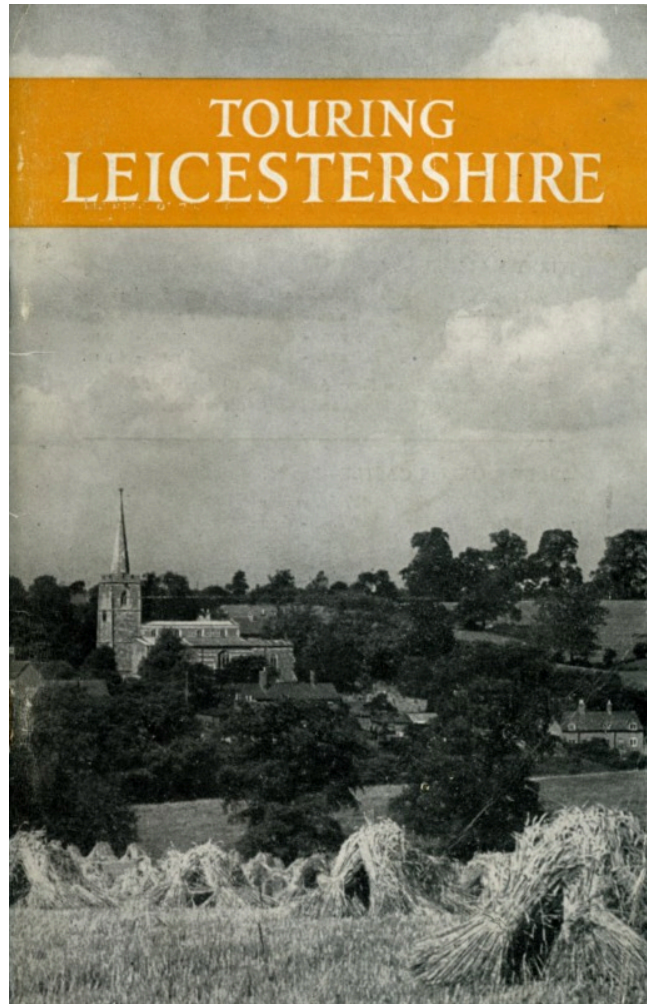


Figure 2.

W.G. Hoskins, *Touring Leicestershire*, 1948, photographs by F.L. Attenborough (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau, 1948). Digital image courtesy of City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau.

Our research on Hoskins and our ideas about the ways in which this speculative research will be made are both in their early stages. We are working in the archives of Leicester University where the Hoskins' papers are preserved, and have begun to explore the photographs made by Attenborough. After having seen Attenborough's photographs previously only as poor reproductions, it has been enlightening to see the original plates and to be able to consider them alongside the colour photographs of the contemporaneous photographers of *Country Life* magazine or the heroic mountainscapes made by William Arthur Poucher (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).



Figure 3.

Country Life, 24 July 1958, featuring photograph titled "On the Way to Snowdon Llyn Peris, Caernarvon" by E.H. Box, date unknown. Digital image courtesy of Country Life Limited.



Figure 4.

Walter Arthur Poucher, Walkers on Hardknott Path, the Lake District , reproduced in *Country Life Picture Book of The Lake District in Colour* (London: Country Life Limited, 1961) no. 11. Digital image courtesy of Country Life Limited.

Hoskins' illustrated book *The Making of the English Landscape* was first published in 1955 and has remained in print ever since (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). In the 1970s, it was required reading, along with Willmott and Young's *Family and Kinship in East London*, Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim*, and Philip Larkin's poems—all giving clues about the paradoxical and transforming post-war country that Britons lived in. The journalist Ray Gosling's radio and television programmes, and re-runs of Ewan MacColl and Charles Parker's experimental documentaries BBC Radio Ballads were equally attractive to a generation who had grown up during post-war austerity, economic and social change in the 1960s, and industrial decline in the 1970s. The urge to develop new narratives around contemporary British history, using the relatively new technologies of recording and televising, as well as the traditional ones of print, became manifest in numerous ways. This was particularly evident in the new independent documentary photography, which had emerged from radical changes in photographic education, a new government-driven regionalism, and the use of state funding for "new" art forms. The photographer Daniel Meadows, making a photographic tour around England in a double-decker bus in the early 1970s, remembers how he was influenced by Gosling's love of the "ordinary" and by his social and cultural archaeology.

¹ Meadows and fellow photographer Martin Parr were inspired to document a Salford street by their shared interest in the ITV television series *Coronation Street*.²

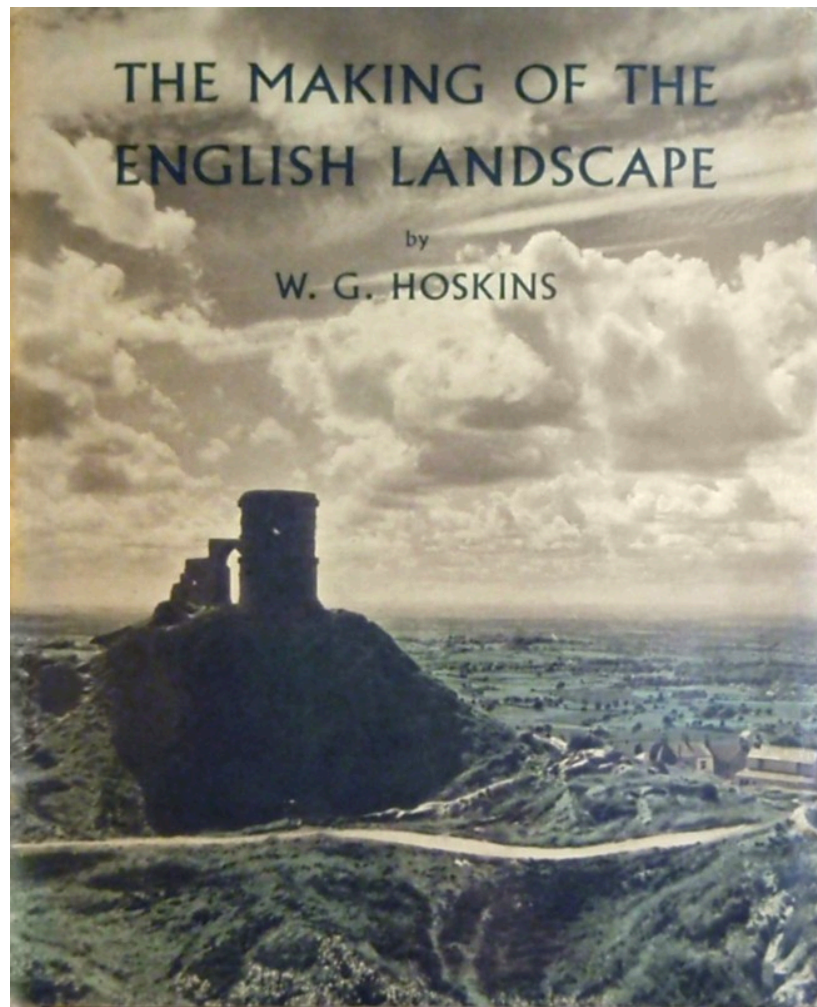


Figure 5.

W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948). Digital image courtesy of Hodder & Stoughton.

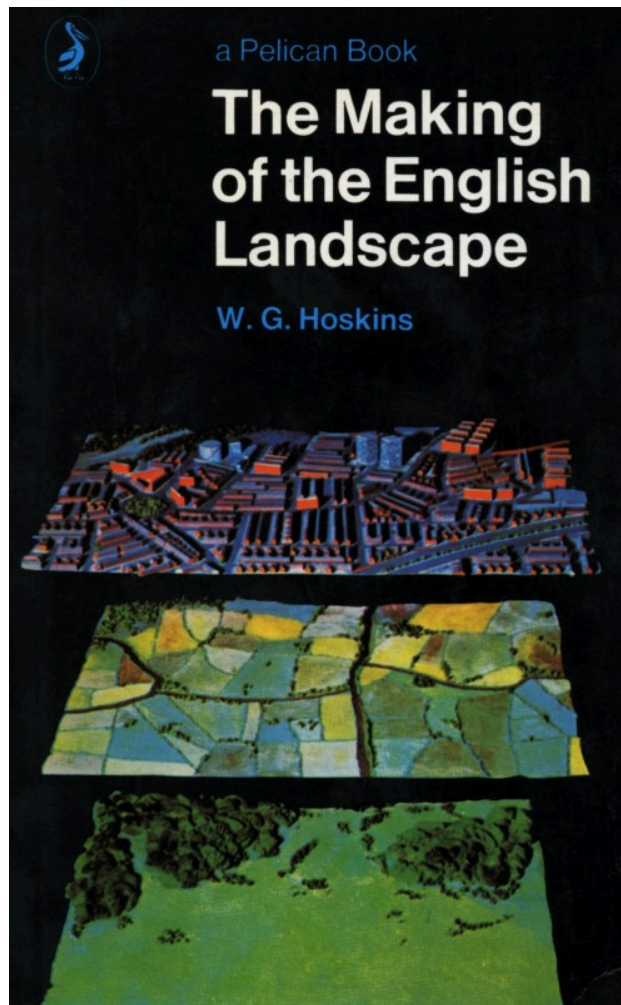


Figure 6.

W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, (London: Penguin Books, 1970). Digital image courtesy of Germano Facetti, Bruce Robertson, and Penguin Books.

Writing, photography, and broadcasting were all part of a growing interest in the “ordinary”, in everyday rituals and hidden lives, which developed in the late 1960s and 1970s. Made manifest across the arts and media, from John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger* establishing the British genre of “Kitchen Sink drama”, to Paul Thompson’s founding of the Oral History Society in 1971 and the later publication of his highly influential work on oral history *The Voice of the Past* (1978), in which he wrote:

through history ordinary people seek to understand the upheavals and changes which they experience in their own lives: wars, social transformations like the changing position of youth, technological changes like the end of steam power, or personal

These new social narratives of the post-war years were often personally motivated and highly opinionated. These were no neutral observations on the history of the British landscape, but were written with a style and tone that carried the force of their authors' often adversarial positions. When Shell reinvigorated its pre-war guidebook series, designed for adventurous, culturally minded motorists, in the late 1950s and 1960s, the publications were infused by the voices of their authors (one of whom was W.G. Hoskins), who frequently decried the ways that both suburbia and the industrial had despoiled their idea of the English landscape. The Shell Guide editor John Betjeman and principal Shell guide photographer (and subsequent editor) John Piper, together with many of the writers and historians engaged to edit the guides, critiqued the modernising forces that were reshaping the British countryside. For Hoskins, industry had ravaged the landscape; this opinion was expressed in his writing for the Shell series and other publications alike. In *From Chilterns to Black Country* (Fig. 7), which was published in 1951 as the fifth in "About Britain", a series of small volumes edited by the passionate conservationist Geoffrey Grigson, to coincide with the Festival of Britain, Hoskins wrote:

The Potteries should not be avoided by anyone who wishes to know Britain. Their ugliness is so demonic that it is fascinating to look upon it from the marginal hills, especially from the ridge that runs just east of Tunstall and Burslem. It is a picture of the uninhibited workings of the Industrial Revolution in its worst period: hundreds of bottle-shaped kilns, black with their own dirt of generations, massed in groups mostly on or near the hidden canal, with square miles of blackened streets of little black houses, and chapels, churches, spires and towers, tall chimneys of iron and steel works steam from innumerable railways lines that thread their way through the incredible tangle of junctions: as a spectacle, it should never be missed.⁴

For the British public, one of the most dramatic and influential manifestations of the new post-war narrative was perhaps theatre director Peter Hall's 1974 reworking of Ronald Blythe's oral history recorded in 1969 as *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village*. Hall's film, *Akenfield*, with music by Michael Tippett, cinematography by Ivan Strasburg, and the parts played by local people using their own improvised dialogue, was an entirely new cinematic experience. Although the cinematography in *Akenfield* is placid and beautiful, the narrative is harsh and shocking—these are no good old days, as villagers remember the trenches of the First World War and the servitude of agricultural labour. *Akenfield* was shown on BBC television in 1975 after

premiering at the London Film Festival the year before, where it had attracted large audiences and contributed to the growing popularity of local and oral histories.

Forms of Collaboration

Hoskins and Attenborough began working together in the late 1940s and their first known collaboration was for *Touring Leicestershire*, published by the City of Leicester in 1948. They had met as academics in Leicester and began a creative partnership that lasted until Attenborough's death in 1973. Though Attenborough worked with other authors, and Hoskins also, from time to time, worked with other photographers, they were friends who also shared professional and familial bonds central to their working practices. Collaborations between writers and photographers—although never clear-cut and substantially under-documented—are interesting in many ways. Our project poses the questions: what is the balance between the visual and the written? Do photographs dictate text or vice versa? Collaborations of interest include those between the photographers and writers Percy Hennell and Geoffrey Grigson, Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell, Walker Evans and James Agee, and Paul Nash and John Betjeman, respectively. In our planned research around the partnership of Hoskins and Attenborough, and others like them, we intend to explore the possibilities of collaboration and interdisciplinary research.

The histories of Hoskins and the Attenborough family are fascinatingly intertwined. They encompass the rise of local history and of both scholarly and popular education. They were intimately involved with the growth of television and non-fiction paperback publishing. Hoskins began his teaching career at the University College, Leicester in 1931, where Attenborough was Principal from 1931–1951. Hoskins also taught evening classes at the Vaughan Working Men's College. He became Reader in English Local History at University College, Leicester in 1938, and in 1948, was appointed Head of Department of the Centre for English Local History. Significantly, Attenborough was also the parent of Richard, David, and John Attenborough. David was to play a central part in Hoskins' later career as a television historian. When *The Making of the English Landscape* was first published, Hoskins had moved to Oxford University, where he was Reader in Economic History, but his connection to Leicester remained strong, becoming Hatton Professor of English History in 1965 and continuing his relationship with the Attenboroughs after F.L.'s death in 1973.

When David Attenborough became Controller of BBC 2 in the 1960s, he was instrumental in the commissioning of Hoskins to make a series of programmes about the landscape, screened in 1976 and 1978 as *Landscapes of England*. They were produced by Peter Jones, who became interested in

the natural world while working at Granada in the 1960s, and who later became a producer of *Horizon*, a successful television series which played an important part in the popularization of science. *Landscapes of England* was, in its time, a radical view of English rural history formed through local history studies and a close reading of the landscape. Twelve films were made, in two series of six. Hoskins' relationship with the Attenborough family, together with the success of *The Making of the English Landscape* undoubtedly accounted for his emergence as a television historian of landscape and local history. Like Hoskins, David Attenborough was a popularizer; early in his career, he presented *Zoo Quest*, and in 1969, he commissioned *Civilization*, Kenneth Clarke's hugely popular series on the History of Art.

While W.G. Hoskins is well known as a historian, Attenborough's achievements as a photographer have remained obscure, perhaps because of his status as an "amateur" photographer, and accentuated by the poor printing of many of his photographs in Hoskins' books. In the first edition of *The Making of the English Landscape*, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1955, Attenborough provided seventeen of the eighty plates, outnumbering any other single contributor ([Fig. 8](#) and [Fig. 9](#)).⁵ Many more photographs were needed for this larger book than Attenborough had made for *Touring Leicestershire*—as an amateur photographer, it was unlikely that he could have provided all the photographs needed for that title. Yet the collaborative bond between Hoskins and Attenborough was strong, and Hoskins does not appear to have worked with any other specific photographer, being content to instead source additional required photographs from agencies and companies. Later, in the 1960s, photographs by John Piper appeared in Hoskins' Shell Guides and we hope to trace correspondence between them as the research proceeds.



Figure 8.

F.L. Attenborough, Cropston Reservoir, reproduced in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau), 44. Digital image courtesy of City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau.



Figure 9.

F.L. Attenborough, Ashby Castle: Lord Hastings' Tower, reproduced in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau), 40. Digital image courtesy of City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau.

Hoskins was known to be a particularly poor photographer, while Attenborough was a highly skilled amateur. Hoskins could not drive, while Attenborough was a keen motorist. Together they made a pragmatic and imaginative team, though we are given very few glimpses of their relationship. We do know that Attenborough and Hoskins sought out the places Hoskins had established as central to his reading of the landscape; Hoskins wanted this intimate connection between text and photography that stock library photographs could not provide. Precise, located photography made in collaboration was important to Hoskins, as it enabled him to use images to illustrate his observations so that readers could more easily recognize the features he was describing. People were used to looking at photographs—wartime magazines such as *Picture Post* had championed the use of good photography, and formed the basis of photojournalism in Britain in the post-war years. When Attenborough made a photograph of three hawthorn trees and a hedge, Hoskins captioned it:

The landscape of parliamentary enclosure in Rutland, on the road from Empingham to Exton. Here oolitic limestone walls take the place of quickset, but hawthorn trees are planted at intervals and are at their best in late May. The photograph also shows the grass verge that is characteristic of by-roads laid out by the enclosure commissioners.⁶

Attenborough's photographs were badly reproduced in the first edition of *The Making of the English Landscape*, and the quality did not improve in the subsequent Pelican paperback editions published from 1971, which were reprinted almost every year for the next decade. As part of our project, we have examined some of the original glass plates, and the quality is high.⁷ This posed a question for us: we used a variety of photographic technologies to record the journeys that we began in October 2018, using the routes described by Hoskins in *Touring Leicestershire*. Our means of recording ranged from a smartphone to sophisticated photography equipment. This led us to think about production, outputs, and the values we place on certain kinds of visual imagery or recorded material. Why are we disseminating our material on Instagram rather than in a scholarly volume? Are some photographs more valuable than others? Moreover, do we write differently depending on the medium we are using? Instagram posts, for example, lend themselves to intimacy. We have no clues about how Attenborough thought about his own photographs, except to know that photography was clearly a serious pursuit for him and that he worked independently of Hoskins on other projects.

When the BBC published Hoskins' *The Making of the English Landscape* in 1973, no Attenborough photographs were used. Instead, included in the selection were seventeen photographs by the distinguished landscape photographer Edwin Smith, whose elegiac photographs of the English landscape as a place of beauty and mystery have continued to engage the English imagination. This contributed to Attenborough's work disappearing from view.

Touring Leicestershire, 1948

Touring Leicestershire is a fifty-two-page stapled book that was published by the City of Leicester in 1948. Eight motor tours of Leicestershire were included, along with a list of bus companies, hotels, and cafés. The landscape that Hoskins describes is, on the one hand, remote and beautiful (in his words, a "milder Dartmoor"), and on the other, as he and Attenborough travelled to the industrialised parts of the county, "ugly, commonplace and ruined". The collision of this denuded landscape, the result of what Hoskins saw as industrial folly, and a landscape of ruins, presented as fascinating and full of clues to the past, was to be a constant tension in Hoskins' work. Attenborough captured this in his photography, as he depicted the remoteness of the Leicestershire Hills and the edge of Rutland, the expanses of heathland, fragmented buildings, and the ridges and furrows of medieval farming (Fig. 10). Hoskins' chronicle of the disintegration of medieval village life is one of disease and intense political change, as villages disappeared during the plague years, and farming changed dramatically after the Enclosures. In *Touring Leicestershire*, there are no indications of Hoskins and Attenborough's politics, but in two *Shell Guides* that Hoskins edited later, on Rutland (in 1963) and Leicestershire (in 1970), Hoskins expresses his anxiety about pylons and increasing traffic, as well as some disdain about the cheap materials used for building new council houses.



Figure 10.

F.L. Attenborough, The pattern of Ridge and Furrow seen from Burrough Hill: A Fossilised Medieval Field System Preserved under Grass, reproduced in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins, photographs by F.L. Attenborough (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau), 12., date unknown. Digital image courtesy of City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau.

In *Touring Leicestershire*, Hoskins divides the county into two distinct halves: the “rural and untouched by industry” and the west “industrialised: hosiery and boot-and-shoe villages and small towns crowd on the landscape”.⁸ He notes that it is one of the wealthiest regions of England, and that the local “buses are everywhere full of prosperous-looking work-people (especially on Saturdays journeying towards the local cinema or market) but the landscape has been ruined in the process.”⁹ Signs of Leicestershire’s historical wealth are everywhere on Hoskins’ routes, from the grand buildings of Leicester itself to the manor houses and mansions of the countryside (Fig. 11). The granite industry provided a significant economic boost to the area around Mountsorrel (and continues to do so); the modern tourist industry was founded in Leicester by Thomas Cook; and the hosiery, boot and shoe, and engineering industries brought prosperity to the region. Leicester still seems to thrive today: its “Golden Mile” of predominantly Asian restaurants and shops has become a destination; the university quarter is leafy and sedate; it hosts the corporate headquarters of the clothing firm NEXT, the household goods retailer Dunelm, Triumph motorcycles, and Walkers crisps. Hoskins had great fondness for Leicester, appreciating its origins as a mediaeval settlement and admiring its nineteenth-century buildings and wide, tree-lined streets.



Figure 11.

F.L. Attenborough, Carlton Curlieu Hall: Seventeenth-Century opulence based on sheep and cattle pastures, reproduced in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins, photographs by F.L. Attenborough (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau), 49., date unknown. Digital image courtesy of City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau.

Hoskins and Attenborough's journeys into the eastern regions for *Touring Leicestershire* were expeditions into a quiet (and seemingly completely unpopulated) landscape of hedgerows, fields, forest, and ruins. Apart from the noise made by Hoskins and Attenborough's motor car, silence must have been near complete. Hoskins is at pains to emphasise the lack of public transport in east Leicestershire "but after all, this is precisely what has kept so much of it quite unspoilt" (Fig. 12).¹⁰ There is an evocative air of mystery around Hoskins and Attenborough's journeys as they happen upon ruins and arrive at deserted villages (Fig. 13). Difficulties, wrong-turnings, and lengthy meanderings are all part of the process of their "touring". In Tour 3, "[Kirby] Hall is difficult to find but will amply reward all the effort of finding it."¹¹ It was approached through the industrial spoil of the Midlands: "The titanic works of Corby are well in view here, and the winding country road runs for some way between the great dumps of waste from the iron ore quarrying, an example of 'robber economy at its worst'."¹² In Tour 5, they seek out Ragdale Old Hall "a melancholy ruin, gutted and broken, but still retaining much of its original beauty". As Hoskins notes in his 1970 *Shell Guide to Leicestershire*, Ragdale Old Hall was demolished some ten years after he visited.¹³



Figure 12.

F.L. Attenborough, Hungerton: The true Leicestershire scene, reproduced in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins, photographs by F.L. Attenborough (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau), 48., date unknown. Digital image courtesy of City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau.



Figure 13.

F.L. Attenborough, The Ruins of Ulverscroft Priory in the Heart of “The Forest”, reproduced in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins, photographs by F.L. Attenborough (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau), 43., date unknown. Digital image courtesy of City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau.

People are entirely missing from Attenborough and Hoskins’ travelogue—there are no interesting locals, no suspicious farmers, no decaying aristocrats. These are eerily empty landscapes. The style of travel writing that depends on random meetings and informative conversations has no place in these journeys across an empty landscape. Like the *Shell Guides* of the 1930s, *Touring Leicestershire* was about atmosphere and mystery, and much of this was created by the mood of Attenborough’s photographs. Very little attention was given to creature comforts, though Hoskins, in one of the *Shell Guides*, went to some lengths to describe the delights of wine drinking on a grassy verge, only pausing to caution drivers against falling asleep. As John Betjeman had learnt during his time at the *Architectural Review* and later, in the early 1930s, as editor of the first *Shell Guides*, photography was much more than illustration—it went to the heart of the place, conjured up mystery, created narrative.

Attenborough’s photographs, even more than Hoskins’ words, are what make *Touring Leicestershire* much more than a guidebook for motorists. The subjects of his images haunt the pages like spectres, ghosts from the past: decaying mansions, deserted hills, ominous trees, silent streams. They offer a post-war vision of ruination and silence, a landscape devoid of life, traumatically still—the Wreak Valley, High Leicestershire, the ruins of

Ragdale and Ashby Castle. Architectural and visual traces of lives past are everywhere in Hoskins and Attenborough's journeys—the ghostly remains of monasteries, deserted medieval villages, the outlines of ancient strip farming—all indicated a harsh and dramatic rural history. Attenborough's photographs were of all that was left, the bare bones of history, and were thoughtful and rich in association and symbol. When John Piper's photographs appeared extensively in Hoskins 1970 edition of the *Shell Guide to Leicestershire*, they resembled Attenborough's in their quiet presence, redolent with secrets.

Road Trips

For Hoskins, understanding rural architecture was a route towards deciphering history. He also knew how to read ditches, heaths, hedgerows, and copses, and his books and television programmes explore what these clues in the urban and rural landscapes revealed about the shaping of the land and its populations. Though later geographers (and as Hoskins himself happily admitted, some of his own students) have critiqued Hoskins work, his status does not seem to have suffered unduly and his work is still in print. We have come together to work on *Lines in the Landscape* in the spirit of this radicalism, but from a contemporary and feminist perspective. Women's voices are notably missing from the radical chorus of the 1950s and 1960s as exemplified by, among others, Hoskins, Gosling, and Thompson.

As described, Hoskins and Attenborough, like many photographers and writers, made road trips, and some of our work will follow that well-trodden route. The women's road trip is not a recent phenomenon. Journey makers include the photographer Margaret Bourke-White, who travelled across the American Dust Bowl in the 1930s. Berenice Abbot's 1954 photographic US Route 1 road trip from Maine to Florida was made a year before Robert Frank's seminal photobook *The Americans*, but was never published. Though *The Americans* remains one of the central pillars of post-war documentary photography, Berenice Abbott is considered a marginal figure. Other women's road trips include Susan Lipper's 1993–1999 photographic road trip, published as *Trip* (Fig. 14); Simone de Beauvoir's 1947 *America Day by Day* (Fig. 15); and Rebecca Solnit's numerous explorations across Ireland and the USA, chronicled in publications such as *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* and *A Book of Migrations: Some Passages in Ireland* (Fig. 16).

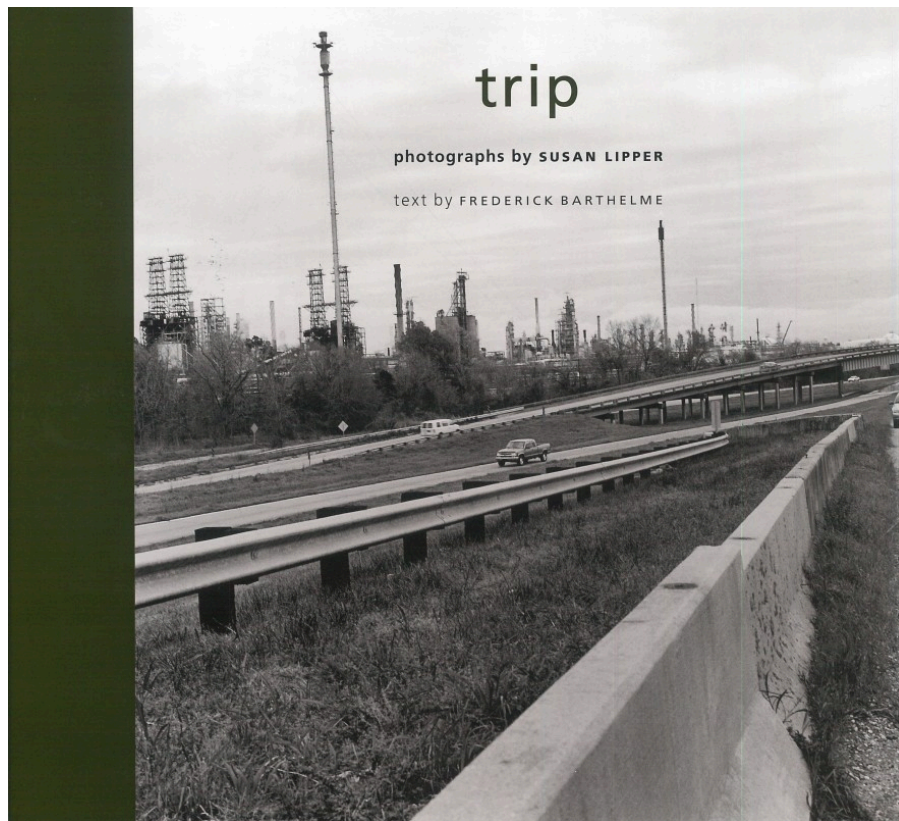


Figure 14.

Susan Lipper and Frederick Barthelme, *Trip*, front cover, photographs by Susan Lipper and text by Frederick Barthelme (New York: powerHouse Books, 1999).

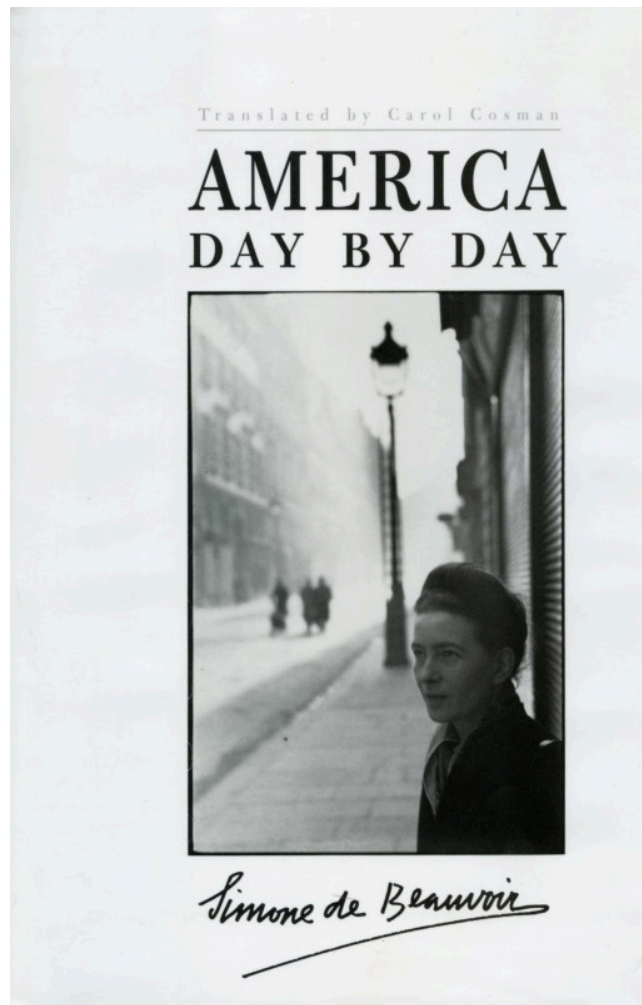


Figure 15.

Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, front cover featuring the photograph "A Portrait of Simone de Beauvoir Taken in the Latin Quarter, Paris, 1944" by Henri Cartier-Bresson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), first published 1954, translated edition published 1999. Ina Clausen and Nicole Hayward (design).



Figure 16.

Rebecca Solnit, *wanderlust: A History of Walking*, designed by Mark Melnick (London: Verso, 2001). Cover featuring photograph "The Long Walk, Windsor" by Roger Fenton, ca. 1858.

The notion of the journey from place to place, from innocence to experience, underlies these lengthy trips just as it does the shorter explorations undertaken by Hoskins and Attenborough in *Touring Leicestershire* or John and Myfanwy Piper motoring around Devon with John Betjeman, preparing *Shell Guides*. Our planned retracing of the Hoskins/Attenborough road trips has, unlike theirs or the Pipers', a very speculative outcome. For Hoskins and Attenborough to ponder on what their journeys meant, as a set of relationships, or of self-discovery and the making of identity, would without a doubt have seemed preposterous to them. For us, it is integral. Hoskins makes no small talk in *Touring Leicestershire*; he visits the sites of antiquity with gravity and a sense of deep allegiance to the past. A ruined church sits in the middle of a field, a decaying Georgian mansion looms at the end of an unmade road in the heart of hunting country, the rolling acres of a country

park were once the home of a short-lived queen. Hoskins' relationship was with the land and with the past, fuelled by the fear of change. For Simone de Beauvoir, her trip to America, at the beginning of 1947—just a year before Hoskins and Attenborough published *Touring Leicestershire*—was “the extraordinary adventure of becoming a different me”. ¹⁴

If Hoskins and Attenborough were mapping territory that they were clearly already familiar with, our first two journeys across Leicestershire, made in October 2018, brought constant surprises. The Georgian house which Hoskins describes so enthusiastically is now decayed and collapsed in parts (Fig. 17). We met the elderly owner and toured the deserted rooms, taking photographs. She talked about hunting and land, and longed for the past. Every morning, we made an Instagram post about our journey of the previous day, and reflected on our project. We talked with a woman walking her neighbour's dog about the incidence of “dogging” at Groby Pool, and how the car park there is mentioned in a guide to gay meeting places in the East Midlands (“particularly busy in the afternoons”). We saw a group of men and women clustered at a gate waiting for the hunt to pass, and like Simone de Beauvoir in post-war New York, we were transported to a different world and were unwillingly entranced by the certainties of these country people. We were out of place, but no one gave us a second look.



Figure 17.

Val Williams, Part-derelict house, described by Hoskins as “a spectacular example of early Georgian architecture”, 2018. Following Tour 1 in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau, 1948). Digital image courtesy of Val Williams.

An ancient abbey high up in the bleak Leicestershire hills had become a Christian retreat and we wandered through the gardens, finding a hut with armchairs and books, and a walled vegetable garden. Everywhere there seemed to be possibilities. Where Hoskins was brisk, we wandered, taking wrong turns, retracing our steps, finding peculiar objects—a scarlet basque at the edge of a field, an ancient dog in a derelict house. Hoskins and Attenborough searched for traces of the past, and we searched for traces of them, tantalizingly out of reach ([Fig. 18](#), [Fig. 19](#), and [Fig. 20](#)). Our road trips were conversational, excited; we had never taken a journey together before. Worked out on paper, the project came alive and the trips help us to establish what terms mean within the scope of our project: landscape, habitat, comradeship.



Figure 18.

Val Williams, Corinne Silva at Launde Abbey, 2018. Following Tour 1 in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau, 1948).



Figure 19.

Corinne Silva, Mountsorrel quarry, 2018. Following Tour 1 in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins, (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau, 1948).



Figure 20.

Corinne Silva, Bradgate Park, once home to Lady Jane Grey, Following Tour 1 in *Touring Leicestershire* by W.G. Hoskins (Leicester: City of Leicester Publicity Department Information Bureau, 1948).

Hoskins liked localness, and even though he travelled the country, his most compelling and passionate work was produced in the Midlands, which played such an important part in his career. Before embarking on the Leicestershire road trips, we explored our own localness. We made excursions around London to look at post-war sites such as South London's newly built Kidbrooke Village, with its "village hall", school, and local amenities ([Fig. 21](#) and [Fig. 22](#)). It had replaced the enormous Ferrers housing estate, made problematic by the social engineering of Greenwich Council and the lack of a bus service, before it was eventually demolished ([Fig. 23](#)). Will these new "villages" one day be deserted and obscured like the ones that Hoskins and Attenborough discovered in the English countryside or will they become strong and effective communities? We realized that localness is a central part of how we understand landscape—we are driven by a desire to map, to have agency, to be legitimate explorers in an already explored landscape. To make new discoveries, we need to bring ourselves into the project; Hoskins and

Attenborough appeared to exclude personality from process, but research will perhaps bring further elucidation on the relationship between the two travellers.



Figure 21.
Val Williams, Kidbrooke Village, 2017.



Figure 22.
Val Williams, Kidbrooke Village Hall, 2016.



Figure 23.

Val Williams, Fragment of Ferrers Estate after demolition, 2016.

Another new London “village” to be explored is Greenwich Millennium Village, built on the site of the former Greenwich gasworks, and part of a millennial development, which included the O2 arena. With its stirring advertising slogan of “The New Settlers” (all-white families in covered wagons), it has, despite the advertising, begun to comfortably mellow in its older parts into a slightly shabby multicultural personalized space. Interspersed with public art, immaculate lawns, and a riotous wild garden and series of lakes, Greenwich Millennium Village is an enigma, as corporateness vies with idiosyncrasy in intriguing ways. And there is the doomed Elephant and Castle with its disappeared Heygate Estate and its soon to be demolished Shopping Centre and Coronet Cinema, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, the Lakeside Centre, and the lakes, towers, and wild environs of Thamesmead as it makes some uneasy but exciting transitions. Sutcliffe Park in Kidbrooke has mutated from a gloomy “rec” ground into an ecological zone, and there is the immovable and idiosyncratic Mudchute Farm, Walthamstow Wetlands, Croydon, and many more essentially localized London spaces.

At the site of the new Kidbrooke Village, vestiges of the old Ferrers Estate cling on—a gateway cloaked by undergrowth, some bits of brutal concrete. But some of the places which informed this research have already re-formed—just beyond Kidbrooke Village, the old featureless municipal and menacing Sutcliffe Park, has, because of flood level work, become an intriguing wetland. Gone is the mysterious secret garden with its pond and apple tree orchard, destroyed by the work beginning on the site of a new IKEA store in Greenwich.

As Hoskins traversed Leicestershire, Rutland, and the Black Country, he found deserted villages and Roman villas, signs of the Black Death, vast heathlands, and the remnants of castles, viewed through a lens of post-war austerity and a fascination with the almost-gone. Hoskins argued that geologists only read one layer of the land, revealing:

only the bones of the landscape, the fundamental structure that gives form and colour to the scene and produces a certain kind of topography and natural vegetation. But the flesh that covers the bones, and the details of the features, are the concern of the historian, whose task it is to show how man has clothed the geographical skeleton. ¹⁵

We are interested in the flesh, the surfaces of things, grass, glass, brick, paving. Architecture and the built environment are the context in which most other material culture is used, placed, and understood. To read architecture is to read its surfaces, its forms, and its materials. Surfaces are neither shallow nor superficial. The body and the earth and all other material substances meet at their surfaces.

Conclusion

Through this collaboration, we are looking for new strategies and methodologies to read and explore these surfaces. We are attempting to dissolve the boundaries between disciplines, skills, and predilections. In 2018, along with our continued explorations of London “villages”, we have begun to retrace the journeys that Hoskins and Attenborough made in Leicestershire by taking road trips by car. Each route must take no longer than a day, and along the way, we have explored the notion of collaboration and published a journal of our trip via social media (Instagram [@ruins_and_reveals](#)). Hoskins and Attenborough’s Leicestershire may have changed, some of it may well remain. Distanced by gender, by time, by class, and by interests, our discoveries will surely be very different from theirs.

Photographs and texts published via Instagram are becoming our homage to *The Making of the English Landscape* and our way of disseminating our work. Less refined perhaps, but capable of reaching audiences globally and disrupting the way that landscape is viewed across systems, networks, and histories. Social media has become a natural home for the visual and the written, and the local has become international. In the spirit of Hoskins, we will use this as a means to connect with a wide audience of observers and participants. Though some high-profile academics use social media to communicate with a larger and more diverse audience, it is surprising how many avoid it.

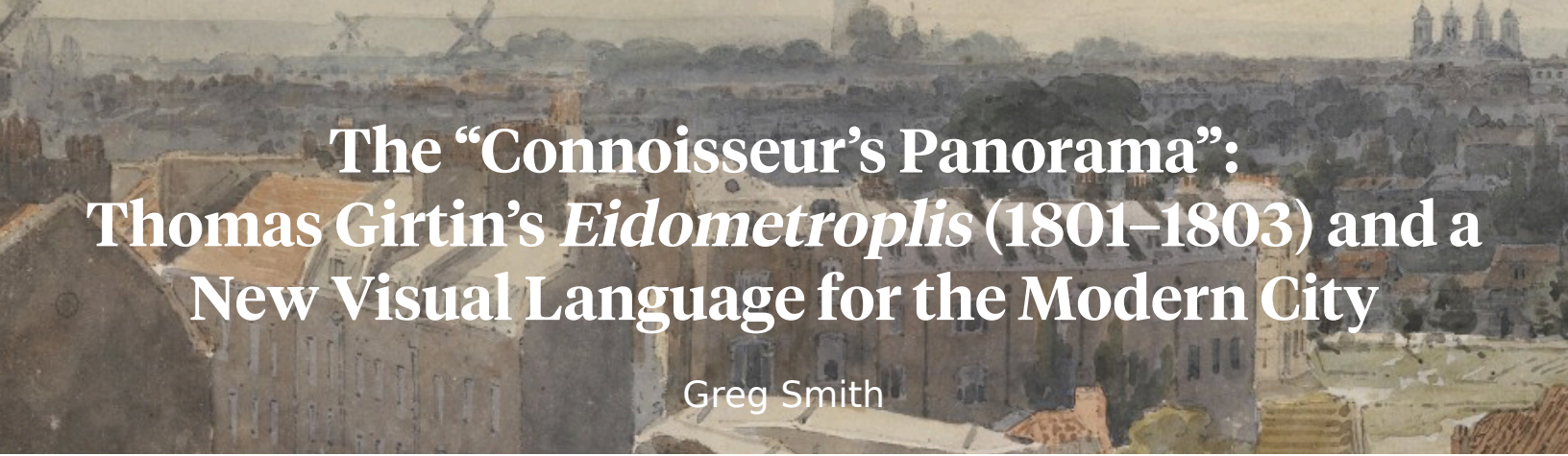
Our intention to use Instagram as a means dissemination has been met with surprise by some in our academic networks, but discussing and illustrating our work via social media gives us the ability to converse with others and to use these conversations to shape the research to come. While we would not claim to be democratizing the project—as we are only too aware that social media networks are as bounded by class and culture as any others—we see this as a positive and fluid way of conversing and networking. Our connection with Hoskins and Attenborough is a tenuous but sincere one; we are intrigued by their combined histories and want to explore how historian and photographer worked together and to find out how we too can discover, or even just imagine, the new ruins of Britain.

Footnotes

- 1 Interview with Alan Dein, British Library Oral History of British Photography.
- 2 Val Williams, *Martin Parr: Photographic Works* (London: Phaidon, 2002).
- 3 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1978]), 2-3.
- 4 W.G. Hoskins, *About Britain No 5: Chilterns to Black Country* (London: Collins, 1951), 28.
- 5 Interestingly, a rare second edition of *Touring Leicestershire*, published in 1971, saw the cover photograph (Attenborough's austere view of church and hills) changed to a young couple consulting a map. Revised by Russell McClelland, the then publicity officer of the city of Leicester, there are a number of occasions where McClelland replaced Attenborough's photographs with his own—attempting perhaps to soften Hoskins and Attenborough's vision of Leicestershire as a gaunt and mysterious landscape.
- 6 W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 155.
- 7 Attenborough's photographic work seems to have pre-dated his collaborations with Hoskins: in 1945, he provided twenty-five photographs of architectural details for Nikolaus Pevsner's King Penguin book *The Leaves of Southwell*. These beautiful photographs were finely printed in photogravure, perhaps the only time that Attenborough's photographs received the reproduction quality that they deserved.
- 8 Hoskins, *Touring Leicestershire*, 7.
- 9 Hoskins, *Touring Leicestershire*, 7.
- 10 Hoskins, *Touring Leicestershire*, 11.
- 11 Hoskins, *Touring Leicestershire*, 24.
- 12 Hoskins, *Touring Leicestershire*, 23.
- 13 Hoskins, *Shell Guide to Leicestershire* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), 90.
- 14 Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998 [1947]), 18.
- 15 Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, 13.

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The “Connoisseur’s Panorama”: Thomas Girtin’s *Eidometropolis* (1801–1803) and a New Visual Language for the Modern City

Greg Smith

Abstract

The London panorama produced by Thomas Girtin in 1801 has long since been lost, but thanks to the surviving preparatory drawings and a wealth of documentary material, we can piece together the project’s progress in unprecedented detail. Newly discovered archival material, in particular, shows it as a highly capitalized commercial project: a collaboration in which Girtin ceded many of the artist’s responsibilities to a business partner and a team of assistants.

Girtin’s working drawings also help to explain how the Eidometropolis, as the panorama was titled, broke new ground in the depiction of the city. Allying fine art landscape effects with the scrupulous topographical veracity required of the panoramist, Girtin succeeded in creating a new way of reflecting the heterogeneous complexity of the modern city in flux. Concentrating on the issue of legibility, the second part of the article consequently examines the way in which the panoramic mode generates a fragmented and occluded image of the city, which Girtin matched with a visual strategy which emphasizes the random and the quotidian.

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Introduction: Girtin Studies Now

The study of the work of Thomas Girtin is set to enter a new era with the forthcoming publication by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art of *Thomas Girtin (1775–1802): An Online Catalogue, Archive and Introduction to the Artist*.¹ Research for the project has revealed a wealth of new information about the artist and his contribution to the art of watercolour. In particular, the catalogue section of the site will feature new evidence in its 1,600 or so entries of Girtin's extensive collaborations with others and of his custom, throughout his career, of copying subjects from other sources, amateur and professional—both practices which are anathema to the pervading model of the watercolourist as a singular romantic genius. Our understanding of Girtin will also be refined by new evidence of the artist's intervention into the complex contemporary art world, quite distinct from the support of wealthy patrons. Publishing his own autograph prints, producing work for sale by a dealer, and, as the culmination of his tragically short career, exhibiting a monumental panorama of London, all saw Girtin embrace a commercial world of art as commodity and spectacle. The latter project can only be represented in the online catalogue by the handful of preparatory drawings that survive, a seemingly poor substitute for the 180 square metres of the painted canvas—and the panorama is surely deserving of greater attention, not least because it also exemplifies the themes of collaboration and replication in ways that have not hitherto been appreciated. The other element of the panorama that has not been properly analysed is Girtin's role in developments in the image of the city in landscape art. The watercolour drawings made by Girtin have been approached primarily as naturalistic representations of landscape effects without their function within the production process of the panorama itself being properly understood. My contention here is that a more detailed examination of the visual and documentary evidence on the panorama and its reception than is possible in the catalogue entries of an online site reveals something which has barely been hinted at in the literature on Girtin. The artist's contribution to the urban panorama was not just a matter of introducing fine art effects into a popular cultural phenomenon; it also amounted to the creation of a new visual language that reflected with unprecedented success the heterogeneous complexity of the modern city in flux.

Thomas Girtin and the Art of Collaboration

My understanding of Thomas Girtin's 360-degree panorama of London taken from near Blackfriars Bridge has changed significantly since I wrote about it for the 2002 bicentenary exhibition of the artist's work at Tate Britain.² In particular, the mass digitisation of texts and images, and, more importantly, their associated search facilities, has revealed a wealth of documentary and

visual material that cannot help but refine, even challenge, our sense of Girtin's contribution to the newly invented cultural phenomenon of the panorama and to the story of landscape art as part of the commercial world of commodities and of public spectacle (Fig. 1).³ Although I attempted to describe the project as a business venture, as well as an artistic endeavour, the lack of documentation, combined with the seductive visual attractions of the preparatory works, meant that I was content to take the opinions of Girtin's contemporaries at face value. Edward Edwards, for instance, claimed that, uniquely, Girtin's panorama was "painted by himself", and one reviewer talked of how the artist, instead of taking the "common way of measuring and reducing the objects trusted to his eye".⁴ In other words, I fell for the artist's own publicity, which promised that this was "GIRTIN's GREAT PANORAMA of LONDON" or, as he subsequently termed it, the *Eidometropolis*.⁵ Meaning the "image of the capital", the learned neologism coined from Greek successfully distinguished what reviewers termed a "connoisseur's panorama" from the standard views produced by scene painters and hack topographers and established from the outset the project's status as the autograph work of a great landscape artist.⁶



Figure 1.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 4: The Thames from Westminster to Somerset House, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 24 x 53.8 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.27). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

My eyes were opened by two online discoveries, neither of which could have been predicted in a pre-digital age. The first came in the form of an advertisement in *The Morning Chronicle* of 15 October 1801, which announced "TO be SOLD by PRIVATE CONTRACT, a large PICTURE, intended to form an Exhibition upon the Plan of the Panorama, representing an extensive VIEW of LONDON" (Fig. 2).⁷ That is nine months before it went on display in London, and at a date when nobody would have thought to search for information on the project. The crucial point follows. The view, it is

claimed, “exhibits the principal objects of beauty, and the surrounding country, in a striking and picturesque point of view” and is made “from Drawings painted by Mr. Thos. Girtin”. Not by Girtin, but “from” his “Drawings”.

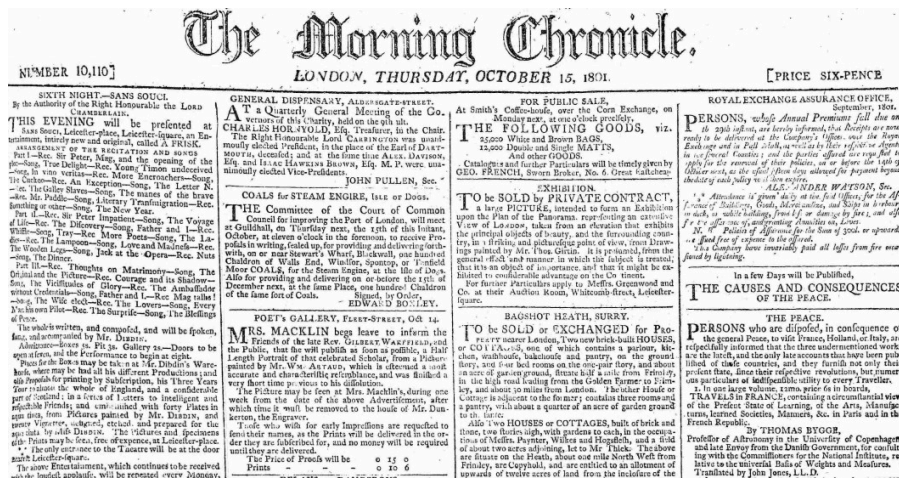


Figure 2.
The Morning Chronicle, 15 October 1801, p.1. Collection of The British Library.

There followed an even more unexpected discovery in the form of a Chancery lawsuit: “Girtin v Girtin. Bill and answer. Plaintiff: Mary Ann Girtin. Defendant: John Girtin”, dated 14 May 1804—eighteen months after the artist’s death (Fig. 3).⁸ Mary Ann was Thomas Girtin’s widow and she petitioned the court stating that she, and not the artist’s brother and business partner John Girtin, was entitled to the income that had accrued from the two projects that dominated the last years of Thomas’ life, the London panorama and the twenty aquatints that formed his *Picturesque Views in Paris*. John Girtin replied at length to the *Bill*, adding a detailed appendix of the expenses he incurred on behalf of Thomas (left column) and the income (right two columns) from the *Eidometropolis* and the Paris prints. This detail records the loans he made in September and November 1801 to Thomas to “pay his men employed in painting the picture of London” (Fig. 4), thus corroborating the advertisement for the sale of the canvas. This amounted to £26 16s., in addition to the £100 4s. that John lent Thomas on 12 November “to go to Paris”, taking with him what we now know would have been a completed canvas. John Girtin goes on to describe how Thomas returned from France after failing to secure permission to show his panorama there, and having worked through the earlier loan agreed that John should now “exhibit the said Picture in London [...] on the account of the said Thomas Girtin and that he [...] should receive the admission money for such Exhibition and should defray all the charges and expenses.”⁹ In other words, not only was Thomas not the author of the *Eidometropolis* in the fullest

[illegible]

Figure 3.

John Girtin's Answer to Mary Ann Girtin's Bill of Complaint (detail), Chancery Proceedings, 14 May 1804. Collection of The National Archives (C 13/40/6 [W1804 G3]). Digital image courtesy of The National Archives (Open Government Licence v2.0).

1801	17 th	D ^o	-	-	-	1.. 1..
	April 4 th	D ^o	to take up a note of M ^r Powells	-	-	2.. 11.. 8..
	Sept 7 th	D ^o	to pay his Men employed in painting the picture of London	-	-	2.. 0..
	8 th	D ^o	- D ^o - D ^o -	-	-	5..
	19 th	D ^o	- D ^o - D ^o -	-	-	12.. 2..
	26 th	D ^o	- D ^o - D ^o -	-	-	9.. 19.. 6
Nov ^r	4 th	D ^o	- D ^o - D ^o -	-	-	10.. 6
	9 th	D ^o	- D ^o - D ^o -	-	-	4.. 4..
	12 th	D ^o	to go to Paris	-	-	100.. 4..
1802	April	J Girtin	for time in looking out for a situation to exhibit the picture of London in attendance on Lord Kimmarid Mr. Trotter Mr. Morland &c &c &c	-	-	10.. 10..
	May 4 th		Left him at the angel when he ret ^d from France	-	-	2.. 3.. 6
	June 1 st	D ^o	- at Lexington	-	-	1..
	July 28 th	M ^r Pritchard	for Matting	-	-	3.. 10..

Figure 4.

John Girtin's Answer to Mary Ann Girtin's Bill of Complaint (detail), Chancery Proceedings, 14 May 1804. Collection of The National Archives (C 13/40/6 [W1804 G3]). Digital image courtesy of The National Archives (Open Government Licence v2.0).

The canvas on which the 360-degree panorama was painted, measuring "1944 square feet" (180 square metres), that is 18 feet high and 109 feet in circumference (ca. 5.5 x 33 metres), has long since been lost. But in seeking to understand the character of the collaboration involved in the project, we are aided by the fact that eleven of Girtin's two sets of seven preparatory drawings survive (Fig. 5).¹⁰ The six outline drawings and five colour studies laid out as a strip illustrate how the seven sections connect together and since at least one drawing covers each we have a complete record of the topographical content of the finished canvas and a good idea of the range of effects the artist introduced. However, arranging the images in this way also gives a false sense of a beginning and an end, and it takes a feat of imagination to convert the seven separate scenes into a circular view with the left and right images joining together as in the completed panorama. Nonetheless, the exercise is a useful one, since in practical terms this is what Girtin's collaborators were employed to do. Moreover, the mental challenge of reconfiguring the seven scenes as a 360-degree view acts as a reminder

that however attractive the studies may be, they are working drawings, part of a complex production process of divided labour, and they are not simply records of the lost panorama.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 5.

Composite image of identified fragments of Thomas Girtin's "Studies for the "Eidometropolis", Clockwise from top left: Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 1: Albion Mills on the eastern side of the approach to Blackfriars Bridge*, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29 x 53 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1991,1109.16); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 2: Great Surrey Street and Christchurch, Southwark*, ca. 1801, graphite, pen and ink and watercolour on wove paper, 28.1 x 50.5 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1977.14.4325); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth*, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 32 x 54 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1991,1109.15); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 5: Thames from the Temple to Blackfriars*, ca. 1801, pencil, pen and ink on wove paper, 16.2 x 44.8 cm. Collection of Roderick D. Zinsser, Jr.; Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 6: Blackfriars Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral*, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 35.2 x 51 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.26); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 7: The Thames from Queenhithe to London Bridge*, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 32 x 51 cm. Collection of The London Metropolitan Archives (q8972599); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 7: The Thames from Queenhithe to London Bridge*, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 20.7 x 44.5 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.28); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 5: The Thames from the Temple to Blackfriars*, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 21.1 x 48.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.25); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 4: The Thames from Westminster to Somerset House*, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 24 x 53.8 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.27); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth*, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29.2 x 52.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.23); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 1: The Albion Mills*, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 32.8 x 53.8 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.24).

The first set of preparatory drawings, in the form of highly detailed outlines (Fig. 6), were almost certainly made by Girtin with the aid of an optical device, probably a frame fitted with a grid of strings corresponding to the grid marked out on the paper. The drawings work to a scale of one square

inch on the sheet to each square foot of canvas.¹¹ Knowing that the circular canvas was produced by others establishes the function of the outlines as a precise matrix for an assistant or assistants to follow. And their first task would therefore have been to mark up the grid on the circular canvas which needed to be stretched on a substantial armature, and then the assistant(s) could begin the laborious task of transferring the detailed outlines, square by square. This was not a case of simply copying Girtin's seven drawings, each with their own single point perspective, but of translating them into a convincing illusion across a monumental canvas. Specifically, this required modifying every straight line in the outline drawings, which would otherwise appear curved if copied directly onto the canvas. That Girtin was not directly involved in this specialized task should have been apparent to earlier writers from the instruction inscribed on the outline for Section Seven: "omit this vessel", it reads ([Fig. 7](#))—an instruction which only makes sense if Girtin delegated this stage of the work.

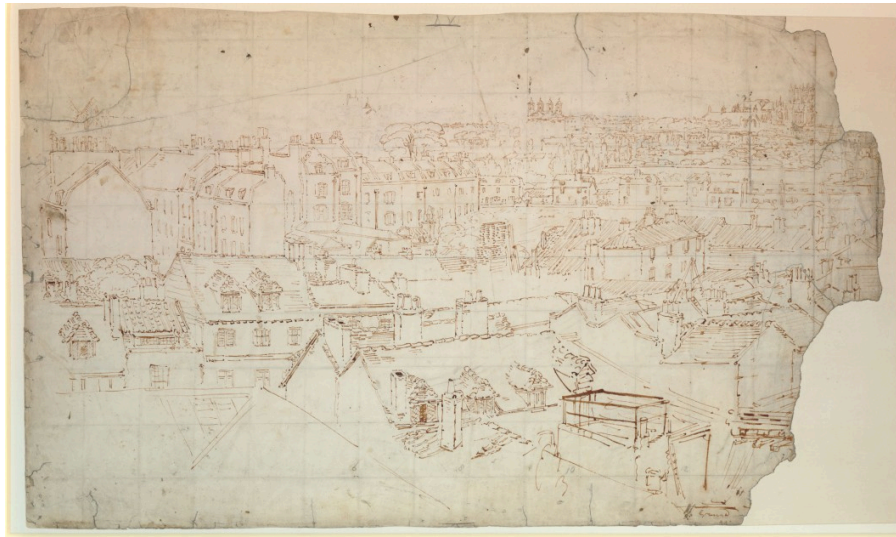


Figure 6.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 32 x 54 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1991,1109.15). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

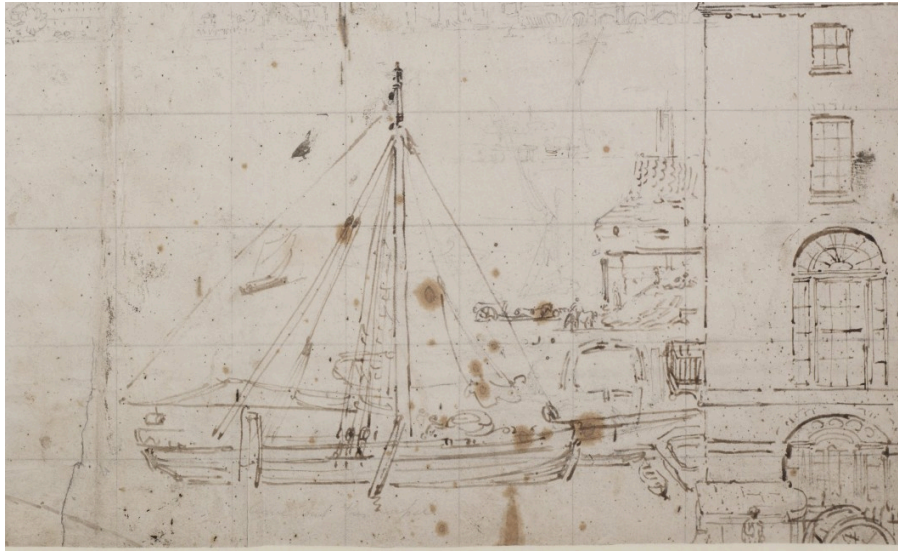


Figure 7.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “Eidometropolis” Section 7: The Thames from Queenhithe to London Bridge (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 32 x 51 cm. Collection of The London Metropolitan Archives (q8972599) Digital image courtesy of City of London Corporation.

The painting of the canvas was an equally specialized skill, and there is some evidence from John Girtin’s accounts that the “men employed” were professional scene painters from the theatre.¹² In this case, the function of the second set of drawings, coloured outlines without a grid, becomes clearer. They were produced as a guide for specialist professionals to add colour to the canvas, though looking at the foregrounds of Sections Three (Fig. 8) and Four, in particular, one is prompted to ask how much information they were actually provided with. The colour is applied quickly, sometimes sloppily and with little regard to the outlines and they surely lack the detail needed for the assistants alone to produce the high finish which ensured the deceptive illusionism the *Eidometropolis* was consistently reported to have achieved by contemporary witnesses.¹³ The buildings in the foreground of this section would have appeared a metre or so high to spectators at a viewing distance of say three metres and, arguably, Girtin’s colour study lacks the information necessary for assistants alone to develop an eye-catching level of illusion. This is impossible to prove, but I suspect that rapidly applied washes of colour in an area where detail is most required equate to an instruction to assistants to block out the overall colour structure and fill in the broader details, with Girtin reserving the final touches for himself. The documentary evidence that the lost panorama canvas was the result of a collaborative endeavour with a complex division of labour, therefore suggests that the interpretation of the dispatch with which the colour studies were produced as evidence that they were made on the spot

to capture ephemeral natural effects was simply wrong.¹⁴ As part of a collaborative production process, the lack of detail in the colour studies makes equal sense as the painstaking accuracy of the outline drawings.



Figure 8.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “Eidometropolis” Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29.2 x 52.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.23). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Laying out the two sets of preparatory drawings as a strip (Fig. 5) also highlights an anomaly that has hitherto not attracted attention and which helps to elucidate the nature of the collaborative process. Namely, that whilst the seven sections complete the 360-degree coverage, the drawings never cover more than half of the height of the canvas. This is because, if we think of the drawings as models for others to follow, what is missing in the watercolours studies might be assumed to be Girtin’s responsibility. These omissions include large areas of the river and the sky, and much of the foregrounds, which, according to two reviewers, included a boxing match. The pugilists caught the attention of a newly discovered notice which suggests that they represent “*Belcher and Burke*”, who attracted large crowds to their fights, albeit not in Southwark, and that Girtin’s view was enlivened by a “truly humoursome ... variety of characters flocking to the battle”.¹⁵ The action is described as taking place at the end of Blackfriars Bridge, but neither the outline drawing for the area in front of the Albion Mills (Fig. 9) nor the coloured drawing contain figures which relate to such a scene (Fig. 23). Indeed, the latter is left uncoloured just in this section, suggesting that Girtin himself executed the radical change of plan. The advertisements that John Girtin inserted in the press and the notices and reviews the

panorama received are so insistent on the *Eidometropolis* as a superior landscape of natural effects that the other reference to the boxing scene was assumed to have resulted from a confusion with Robert and Henry Aston Barker's second London panorama, which also included pugilists.¹⁶ Ironical, therefore, that the one area of the completed canvas that we can be reasonably sure Girtin did paint featured an untypical genre scene of low-life humour, which may have added a carnivalesque element to the depiction of an area of London, Southwark, long associated with transgressive behaviour.

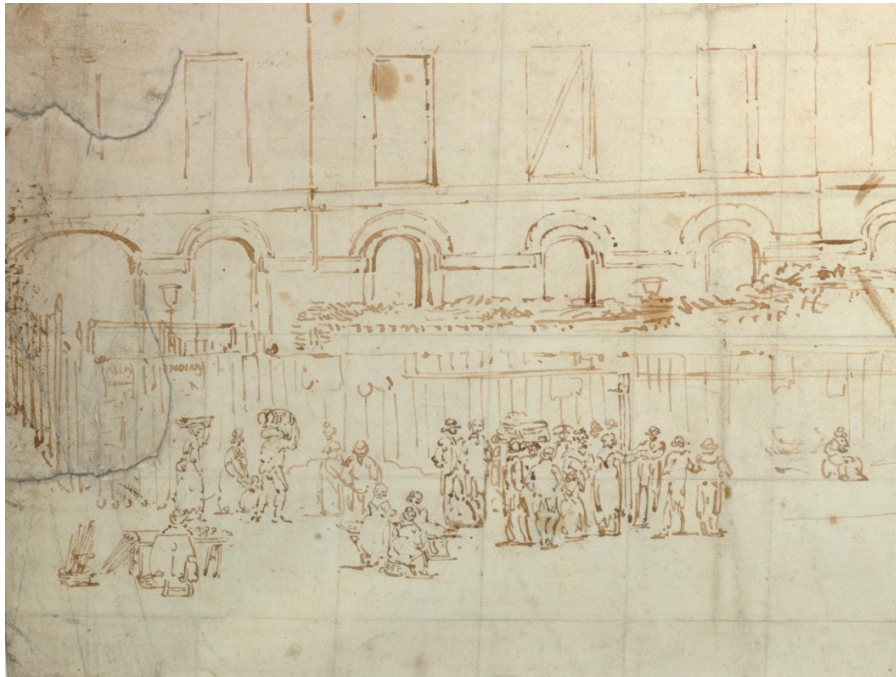


Figure 9.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “*Eidometropolis*” Section 1: The Albion Mills (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29 x 53 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1991,1109.16). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

The Eidometropolis as a Commercial Venture

John Girtin's *Answer* to Mary Ann Girtin's claim to the entry money from the *Eidometropolis* also provides crucial new information about its fate as a commercial enterprise. Keen to establish that his expenses in conducting the project on his brother's behalf outweighed the income, John Girtin recorded the weekly attendance figures, and they make for sorry reading (Fig. 10).¹⁷ In the period from August until the end of November and Thomas' death, when Mary Ann took over the running of the enterprise, the income from the sale of tickets was £101 7s., amounting to 2,020 visitors paying the 1s. admission, at a weekly average of only ninety-two. Back in 2002, I relied on the testimony of *The Monthly Magazine*, which stated that “Mr. Girtin's

Eidometropolis [...] is very well attended” and I characterised the project as Girtin successfully exploiting the appeal of the latest popular spectacle, the just out-of-patent, 360-degree panorama.¹⁸ However, even a cursory look at John Girtin’s figures reveal a chronically undercapitalised scheme, that in business terms, at least, was poorly thought through, even shambolic in its prosecution. Thomas Girtin thus began the project with no idea of where he might display a monumental canvas which required, if not the specialist building constructed for Robert and Henry Aston Barker (Fig. 11), then a complex structure to adapt an existing building, allowing visitors to enter the circular canvas from below and view it from a central platform.¹⁹ An anonymous watercolour shows the home that John Girtin eventually secured for the *Eidometropolis*, Wigley’s Rooms in Spring Gardens (Fig. 12), neatly illustrating how it was unable to compete with the Barkers’ project in terms of scale, but also how it essentially repeated their earlier London view taken from the same Albion Mills featured in Section One. The recent discovery of the details of another, even larger contemporary panorama of London from the south end of Blackfriars Bridge, only underlines the daunting competition that faced John and Thomas Girtin.²⁰

1804

Received from the Exhibition of the
Pictures of London.

Aug. 7 th	1 st	Rece'd	5. 9.
14 th	2 nd	D ^o	6. 17.
21 st	3 rd	D ^o	7. 19.
28 th	4 th	D ^o	6. 1.
Sep. 4 th	5 th	D ^o	6. 18.
11 th	6 th	D ^o	6. 11.
18 th	7 th	D ^o	5. 12.
25 th	8 th	D ^o	6. 10.
Oct. 2 nd	9 th	D ^o	5. 11.
9 th	10 th	D ^o	3. 5.
16 th	11 th	D ^o	4. 10.
23 rd	12 th	D ^o	4. 16.
30 th	13 th	D ^o	3. 16.
Nov. 6 th	14 th	D ^o	3. 15.
9 th	15 th	D ^o	1. 12.
20 th	16 th	D ^o	1. 4.
26 th		Rece'd of Mr. Wright	1. 1.
27 th	17 th	D ^o from the Exhibition	3. 7.
Dec. 4 th	18 th	D ^o — D ^o — D ^o	3. 7.
11 th	19 th	D ^o — D ^o — D ^o	2. 16.
"		D ^o — of Mr. Dupper	2. 2.
13 th		D ^o — of Mr. Wells	3. 8.
18 th	20 th	D ^o — from the Exhibition	4. 3.
24 th	21 st	D ^o — from D ^o	3. ..

Figure 10.

John Girtin's Answer to Mary Ann Girtin's Bill of Complaint, Chancery Proceedings, 14 May 1804 (detail), 1804. Collection of The National Archives (C 13/40/6 [W1804 G3]). Digital image courtesy of The National Archives (Open Government Licence v2.0).

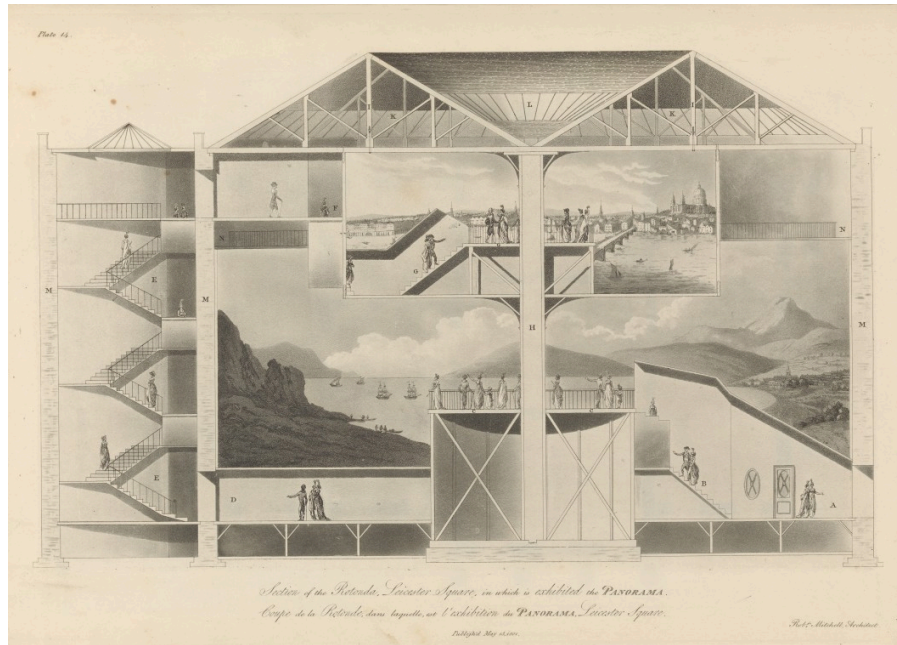


Figure 11.

Cross section of the panorama building constructed for Robert and Henry Aston Barker, showing their London panorama of 1795–96 in situ, 1801, etching and engraving, 53 × 36.7 cm. Reproduced in *Plans, and Views in Perspective, with Descriptions of Buildings Erected in England and Scotland* by Robert Mitchell (London: Oriental Press, 1801). Collection of The Metropolitan Museum (52.519.153). Digital image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum (CC0 1.0).

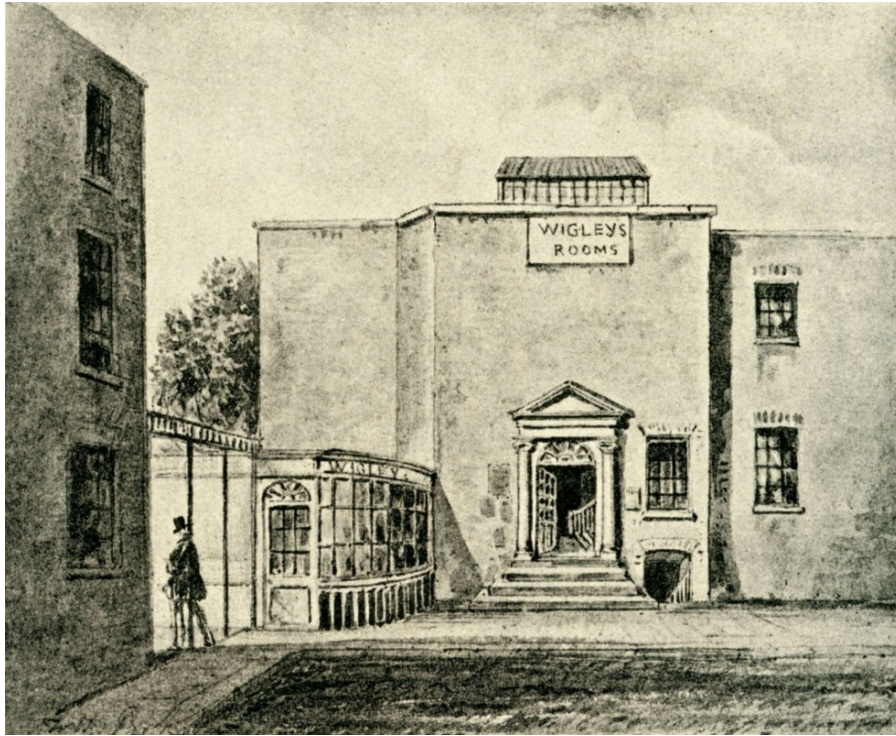


Figure 12.

Exterior of Wigley's Rooms, Spring Gardens, in *Survey of London, Trafalgar Square and Neighbourhood* (Parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Part III, vol. 20, fig. 49b (London County Council, 1940).

Still, contemporary critics and writers characterised the *Eidometropolis* as an artistic triumph, producing a “most picturesque display”, which also gives the most “perfect idea of the sublime”.²¹ For *The Morning Herald*, the *Eidometropolis* was a triumph of “effect” and “variety” within which the “Connoisseur stands enraptured” by the “great commercial city”, glorious proof of British “genius” (Fig 13).²² The evidence of the bottom line, however, highlights a fundamental contradiction in the notion of a “connoisseur’s panorama”. The attendance figures, compared with the 40,000 it has been calculated who visited the Barkers’ panoramas annually, indicate that there were just not enough connoisseurs to return a profit.²³ Indeed there were barely enough visitors to cover the running costs and the capital for the project, initially expended by Thomas Girtin and latterly by John Girtin, could only be covered by the future income from the Paris prints. This was not simply a case of the brothers misjudging the market, but rather as their completely misunderstanding the distinction between the characteristics of a successful popular spectacle and Thomas Girtin’s broader strategy as an artist; namely, the need for the modern landscapist to restrict his appeal to a select audience, the “Connoisseur”, who appreciated his claim to produce an elevated landscape of sentiment and effect beyond the school of topography from which he had emerged.



Figure 13.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 6: Blackfriars Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 35.2 x 51 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.26). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Rethinking the Urban Panorama: Fragmentation, Occlusion, and Obscurity

Archival discoveries aside, the most significant challenge to my thinking about Girtin's London panorama was provided by James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, who titled the introduction to their 2005 collection of essays on the *Romantic Metropolis*, "Engaging the Eidometropolis". Chandler and Gilmartin argue that Girtin's use of the word *Eidometropolis* contains a deliberate echo of Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's *Eidophusikon* and that this was part of an attempt to conflate the mimetic veracity of the Barkers' image of the city and Loutherbourg's theatre of changing effects to create a new image for the Romantic, modern metropolis. The authors specify that it was Girtin's "outstanding naturalism", allied to his elision of the distinction between the landscape and the cityscape, which established his pivotal position in the "story of metropolitan mimesis", though the formal elements deployed by Girtin are not specified.²⁴ The eleven surviving preparatory drawings and the surprisingly full range of contemporary references to the Girtins' panorama of London, mean that re-"Engaging the Eidometropolis", offers rich rewards. The *Eidometropolis* embodies within its topographical template, I suggest, an enhanced visual language for the metropolis: a way of depicting the city that can accommodate the heterogeneous mix of the

modern and the historical (Fig 14), the elevated and the humble, the rural and the industrial, as well as capturing some of the sense of the dynamic flux of the urban experience.²⁵



Figure 14.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “Eidometropolis” Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29.2 x 52.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.23). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

My starting point here is the one serious exception to the generally favourable reaction to the *Eidometropolis*, criticism of the visibility and legibility of the subject, namely, London itself. Thus, as two critics complained of a later display of the canvas in Paris, Girtin’s viewpoint may have been perfect for the “magnificent and famous St Paul’s”, but the ancient buildings of Westminster “can only be seen from a distance and thus not entirely clearly” (Fig 15).²⁶ Indeed, they are “virtually unrecognisable”, and in the opposite direction, the other great focus of the historic fabric of the city and its commercial power, London Bridge and the Pool of London, was even more problematic (Fig. 16). When the Barkers produced their two panoramas from virtually the same viewpoint, as far as we can tell from the prints they published, they adopted an even light which showed off the more distant historic sights to good and equal effect. But Girtin’s complex lighting, which saw a broken sky in the south give way to an impending storm to the north, obscured many of the most important monuments, even more than their distant position required. The issue of legibility was compounded by the arbitrary ways in which the capital’s sites composed, or equally, did not compose themselves from Girtin’s viewpoint. An otherwise supportive writer in *The Monthly Magazine* addressed the issue, complaining that the “two towers of Westminster-abbey appear in one mass, which destroys that lightness and air which constitute a leading beauty in the building” (Fig. 15), adding that, though from:

the point of view in which it is taken it is probably a true representation [...] a license is allowed to painters [...] and where a picturesque effect can be produced, a trifling deviation would [...] be overlooked, or forgiven.²⁷

In this case, the tower of St Margaret's, Westminster, is entangled in the form of the Abbey which appears as an undifferentiated mass and the magnificent structure of Westminster Bridge, such a powerful symbol of civic pride, barely emerges from the small-scale, ad hoc industrial sites of the Surrey bank. In contrast to the Barkers' view of London in which buildings tend to be given their own discrete space so that they read legibly, Girtin accepts the unpicturesque and random alignments that the panorama inevitably generates. So that whilst one viewer of the Barkers' panorama claimed to identify no less than 65 spires, just over half the number are visible in Girtin's circuit, with significant buildings hidden behind others or distorted to the point that they cannot be recognised (Fig. 17).²⁸ Girtin's approach, therefore, allied a complex narrative of changing effects and a fragmented and partial view of the city, which called upon the viewer to reconfigure the whole from its obscured and occluded parts.



Figure 15.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29.2 x 52.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.23). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Figure 16.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 7: The Thames from Queenhithe to London Bridge (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 20.7 x 44.5 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.28). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Figure 17.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 7: The Thames from Queenhithe to London Bridge, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 20.7 x 44.5 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.28). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Pulling back from the detail of Section Three to look at the foreground (Fig. 18), one is struck by the first of many instances where Girtin's viewpoint results, not only in the marginalisation of sites of historical importance, but in a radical reversal of the subject hierarchy of topographical art. Whilst the great state and church monuments of Westminster appear insignificant and distorted in the distance, the newly built Stamford Terrace and the older domestic and industrial buildings of Upper Ground are illuminated by the bright sunlight—at noon on a summer's day. Indeed, across the monumental canvas many of the capital's most important historical buildings are dwarfed by modest domestic dwellings and industry of varying degrees of noisomeness. Repeatedly, the play of light randomly favours the quotidian or humble over the exceptional or important: chimneys and towers rise above grand church steeples (Fig. 19); and wharves stand out in comparison with nearby courts of law (Fig. 20). A later panoramist of London, Thomas Horner, began work at dawn because only then could he see the capital before the smoke from domestic fires and from manufactories obscured the totality of the city, the all-inclusiveness of the image, which was his primary concern.²⁹ Here in Section Four in particular, Girtin took the opposite approach, exploiting the dramatic and sublime potential of an iron foundry at work, the dense smoke of which actually obscures Inigo Jones' Banqueting House in the distance (Fig. 21). And reviewers certainly appreciated the effect, with one advising visitors to "take notice of the smoak floating across the picture from Lukin's Foundry", whilst another praised the view as it "appears through a sort of misty medium, arising from the fires of the forges, manufactories."³⁰ The Girtins' advertisements for the *Eidometropolis* still focused on the promise of providing visitors with the best views of London's premier monuments, however, and it is questionable whether they would have been satisfied by the artist's application of the key principle of the sublime: that obscurity is more effective at conveying the immensity of the modern city than the careful enumeration of visual facts in an even light.³¹



Figure 18.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “Eidometropolis” Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29.2 x 52.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.23). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Figure 19.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “Eidometropolis” Section 4: The Thames from Westminster to Somerset House (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 24 x 53.8 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.27). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Figure 20.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 5: The Thames from the Temple to Blackfriars (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 21.1 x 48.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.25). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Figure 21.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 4: The Thames from Westminister to Somerset House (detail) showing Lukin's Iron Foundry, Nicholson's Timber Yard and Watts' Patent Shot Tower, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 24 x 53.8 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.27). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

London Bridge and the Tower are particularly poorly served by Girtin's viewpoint, reduced to a distant blur as a storm hits the City and the bridge is cut abruptly by the modern façade of the Albion Mills (Fig. 22). Girtin's audience would no doubt have found significance in the way that the burnt out industrial mill, commonly thought to be the victim of an arson attack by workers whose livelihood it had threatened, occludes the distant Tower, and indeed, aligns with the still working picturesque mill at Maid Lane (Fig. 23).³² Such meaningful juxtapositions were, however, primarily driven by chance and Girtin invariably accepted the strict logic of the panoramic mode, which though it provides good angles for some buildings, creates equally incomprehensible ones for others, often cutting into and occluding forms in arbitrary and disorientating ways. Section Two provides the most startling example of this. Girtin's viewpoint from the river-end of the roof of Albion Place Terrace, that is opposite to the Albion Mills, may have provided a fine view of St Paul's, but in the opposite direction the view was dramatically interrupted by an expanse of roof that dwarfed Sir Christopher Wren's great monument. The blank space in the outline drawing highlighted here (Fig. 24), covers the receding length of the roof and four sets of chimneys and this obscures buildings in the vicinity including the Rotunda of the Leverian Museum of Natural Curiosities. The roof was left blank in the drawing because it would not have been possible to paint on the canvas such close objects in an illusory manner and it was almost certainly mocked up instead as a three-dimensional structure, using real tiles and chimneys.³³ This was not simply a question of the artful play of illusion and reality, though. The artist and his team had to meet the practical challenge of producing on the canvas, a few metres away from the viewer, a substantial structure which actually extended into their viewing position on the roof—and, by all accounts, the audience was satisfied with the effect. Writers consistently praised the whole as a "triumph of perspective" and one singled out this section for particular praise, noting that the "person who attends" the *Eidometropolis* had to intervene between two disputing visitors to show that "some earthen chimney-pots", rather than being "three or four feet long ... proved to be no more than six inches!"³⁴

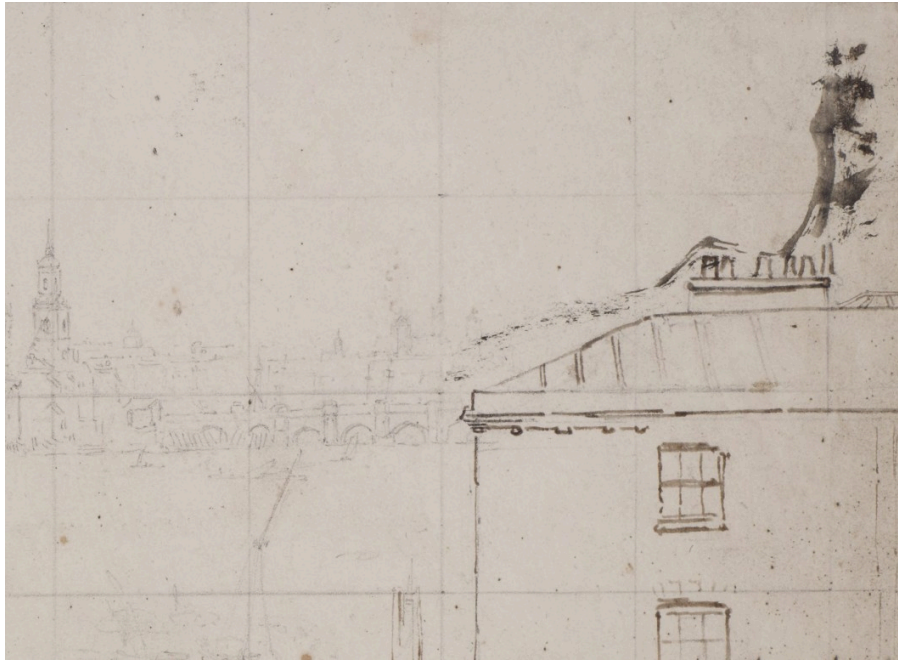


Figure 22.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “Eidometropolis” Section 7: The Thames from Queenhithe to London Bridge (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 32 x 51 cm. Collection of The London Metropolitan Archives (q8972599). Digital image courtesy of City of London Corporation.



Figure 23.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the “Eidometropolis” Section 1: The Albion Mills, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 32.8 x 53.8 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.24). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

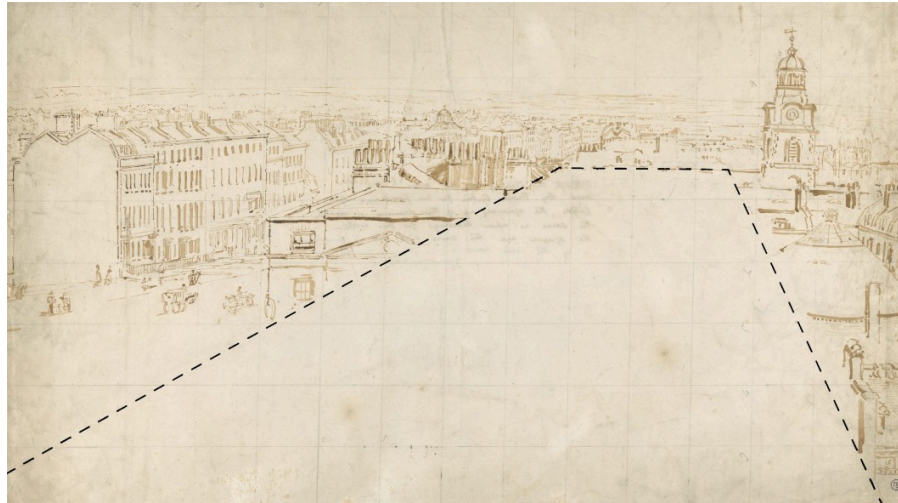


Figure 24.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 2: Great Surrey Street and Christchurch, Southwark, ca. 1801, graphite, pen and ink and watercolour on wove paper, 28.1 x 50.5 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1977.14.4325). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art (Public Domain).

The Modern City in Flux: Depicting "the Vast Increasing Extent of the Metropolis"

The vista south from Albion Place Terrace in Section Two is not the most picturesque, dominated by recently built terraces following the opening of Blackfriars Bridge in 1769 (Fig. 24). However, it is here that we first get a sense of the city as resulting from a dynamic process of growth and generation with the perspective of the new buildings in Great Surrey Street, mirroring the bold angle of Blackfriars Bridge opposite. For one writer, the *Eidometropolis* caught so precisely the city in the act of change that he reasoned that it would be of interest to the "Antiquary" of the future, someone who "would see what London was, and mark the great alterations that are about to take place."³⁵ The author, who also proposed that Girtin's London view might grace a future "National Repository of the Arts", was thinking of the changes proposed for London Bridge, but for other writers it was the rapid expansion of the city into what the Girtins' advertisements characterised as the "surrounding Country" that arrested attention.³⁶ London seen "from an exalted situation", claimed one, "commands admiration equal to the astonishment of strangers in perambulating the vast increasing extent of the metropolis."³⁷ The key to understanding how the panorama might express these developments in such positive terms as "admiration" and "astonishment" is the way that a bold diagonal cuts through the heart of the 360-degrees view (Fig. 25). This links the most recent bridge to span the Thames, Blackfriars, the Albion Mills as the

epitome of industrial progress, and the Great Surrey Road, marking the expansion of the city into the countryside and, tellingly, it was only in these sections that Girtin included figures. Thus, in contrast to the Barkers' view, which was taken from a few metres away and where Blackfriars Bridge draws people into the city, here all is dynamic expansion outwards.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 25.

Composite image of identified fragments of Thomas Girtin's "Studies for the "Eidometropolis", From left: Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 6: Blackfriars Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral*, ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 35.2 x 51 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.26); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section1: The Albion Mills*, ca. 1801, graphite and watercolour on laid paper, 32.8 x 53.8 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.24); Thomas Girtin, *Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 2: Great Surrey Street and Christchurch, Southwark*, ca. 1801, graphite, pen and ink and watercolour on wove paper, 28.1 x 50.5 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1977.14.4325).

It is Section Three (Fig. 26), however, which most effectively projects a sense of the city in flux, and it does so whilst also displaying the most vivid and complex representation of the heterogeneous mix of land uses in the capital: of old and new, urban and rural, domestic and industrial. Specifically, it is the contrast between the older picturesque buildings of Broad Wall, in the foreground, and the newly built terrace in Stamford Street, which cuts across and into a grassy area to the right, which introduces us to one of the key developments transforming the capital at this date. Richard Horwood's great London map of 1799 (Fig. 27) indicates that this was one of the last remnants of the tenter grounds of the soon-to-disappear Lambeth cloth manufactories. These open spaces were used to dry newly manufactured cloth and Girtin left

small areas of his colour study untouched, showing white against the green grass, to indicate the survival of an urban industry that needed a semi-rural context. However, such was the rate of building, particularly of speculative housing, that even in the time that it took for Girtin and his assistants to produce the *Eidometropolis*, the terrace at Stamford Street shown here was extended westwards and the green space had disappeared by the date the panorama closed in the early summer of 1803.³⁸ Prior to the opening of Waterloo Bridge in 1817, Lambeth was still predominantly rural in character and Girtin's view includes evidence of this in the form of bands of trees and distant windmills, even though the new terrace blocks out views of the area's surviving market gardens. Nonetheless, the angle of the brightly lit new terrace cutting into a green space associated with a declining industry must have indicated to contemporary viewers that the urban encroachment into Lambeth continued apace.



Figure 26.

Thomas Girtin, Study for the "Eidometropolis" Section 3: Westminster and Lambeth (detail), ca. 1801, graphite and pen and ink on wove paper, 29.2 x 52.5. Collection of The British Museum (1855,0214.23). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

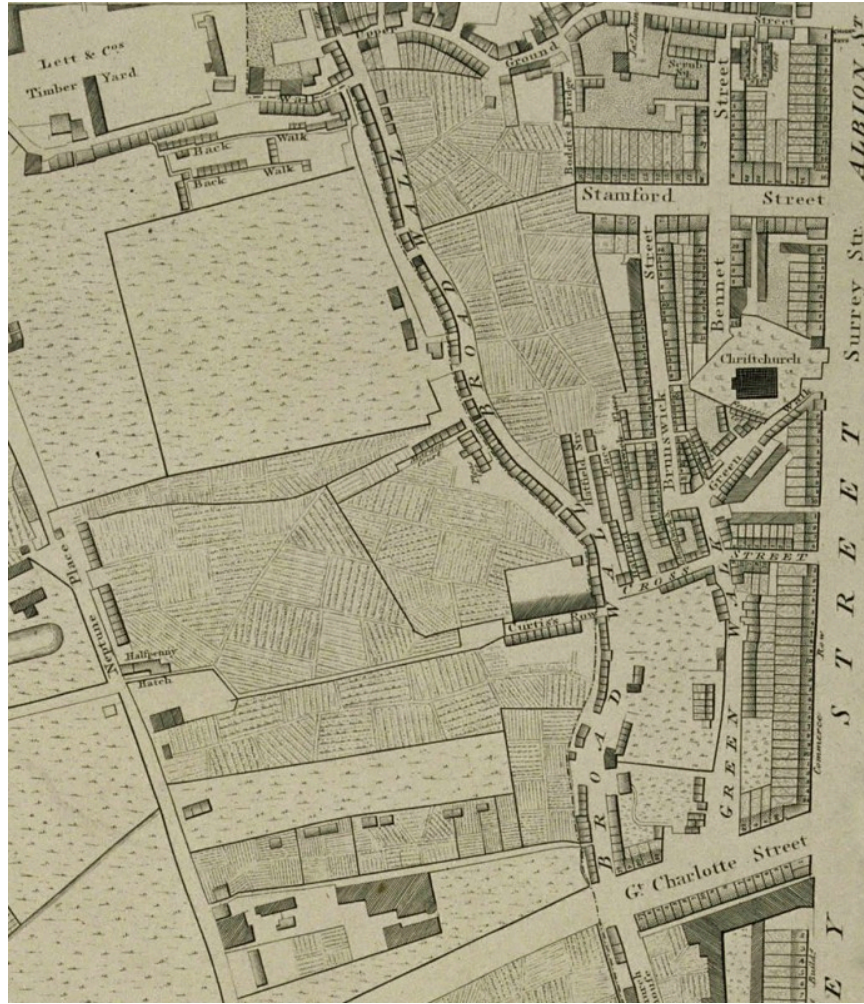


Figure 27.

Richard Horwood, A Map of London and Westminster, detail showing the area to the west of Blackfriars Bridge, 1799, engraving, 58 cm long. Collection of The London Metropolitan Archives (q8972949). Digital image courtesy of City of London Corporation.

The bright daylight that picks out the new terraces and their slate roofs is just one example of where modern, frankly utilitarian buildings are highlighted to an unprecedented degree for the period. Early in his career, Girtin depicted the burnt out shell of the Albion Mills as a sublime spectacle of twisted metal and massive walls, but from his viewpoint in 1801, the façade appears more like an architectural elevation (Fig. 23).³⁹ And returning to Section Three, one is struck by the extraordinary way in which the artist confers the same pictorial interest on a new build as the picturesque jumble of older unplanned buildings in the foreground (Fig. 26). Girtin renders precisely the characteristic features of the standard London terrace, which, following the 1774 Building Act, saw a very unpicturesque standardisation of construction designed to reduce the risk of fire. The new three-story terraces of London stock brick and shiny slate tiles, with their

mansard roofs and dormers, are divided by prominent interior party walls, which stand proud above. The windows are also recessed as part of efforts to improve fire safety and this feature can be deduced from the slim shadows which appear around them. Fire regulations do not ordinarily result in good art, but Girtin rendered the utilitarian and the modern in a visually interesting way through his use of light and colour. Writing about this period of landscape painting, Andrew Hemingway has argued in his outstanding and persuasive book, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, that “the more the image was conceived as a ‘picturesque view’, the more evidence of modernity had to be relegated to the background or simply omitted.” ⁴⁰ Girtin did not just bring the modern to the fore, he successfully incorporated a key element of the city and its dynamic development into the artistic domain.

The modern is not necessarily synonymous with the contemporary, however. The boxing contest in Section Two may refer to the recent bouts between Belcher and Burke, but commentators have sought in vain for a sign that the canvas was executed during a more urgent conflict—the ongoing war with revolutionary France. It was particularly gratifying therefore to discover, whilst trying to identify the buildings shown by Girtin within his 360-degree view with the aid of Horwood’s 1799 map, a hitherto unnoticed sign of Britain at war (Fig. 27). Knowing to within a metre where Girtin sat to make his drawings, it was possible to identify two distant vertical smudges of colour adjacent to Watts’ Patent Shot Tower as the telegraph which had been erected a few years earlier on the Admiralty Office at Charing Cross (Fig. 21). The signalling system consisted of two frames with six shutters, which could be opened and closed to form the code for each of the letters of the alphabet, and in this way messages could be sent to the coast and to the fleet engaged in the defence of the nation. An insignificant detail in the watercolour, but blown up on a monumental canvas, it would have attracted some attention at least.

Establishing the identity of two indefinite smudges in the watercolour, just as significantly also confirms a broader point. Using Horwood’s map in tandem with Girtin’s drawings establishes that the numerous buildings that can be identified are invariably in the correct place, and such a consistent positional accuracy confirms that Girtin must have employed a viewing frame. Whatever artistic effects Girtin introduced into the *Eidometropolis*, however much chance fragmented or occluded important structures, indeed, notwithstanding the way the viewpoint opposite the Albion Mills flagrantly inverted the visual hierarchy, his panorama was built on a topographically exact structure. Girtin and his team observed the fundamental rule of the panorama, therefore: everything is included in its rightful place and from the correct angle. Girtin may not have been able to omit or add the topographical facts generated by his adopted viewpoint, but he could still

choose to obscure or highlight a building, and in that sense, he retained a sense of agency. Here, in this section, Girtin exercised his prerogative as an artist in a highly telling way, using the smoke from Lukin's Foundry to hide Inigo Jones' distinguished classical Banqueting House, whilst leaving visible signs of industry and war in the form of the Shot Tower and the telegraph towers (Fig. 21). Creating a visual language that might reflect the complexities and dynamism of the modern expanding city was not just a matter of allying fine art effects with the topographical exactitude required by the panorama, however. It also required a radical shift in attitude whereby Girtin could begin to replicate the urban experience by allowing a random signification to the landscape effects he employed. Sunlight could illuminate a humble terrace or smoke might hide an architectural masterpiece, but equally the effects and their signification might be reversed elsewhere in the 360-degree circuit. Girtin was able to forge an effective visual language for the modern city, I suggest, because he was able to find an equivalent in the deployment of his array of naturalistic effects to the random displacements and strange unmediated occlusions generated by pursuing the remorseless logic of the panoramic mode of vision.

Conclusion: Girtin and the Effacement of the Topographical Subject

At the outset of this examination of Girtin's contribution to the urban panorama, I suggested that the forthcoming online catalogue might not be best place to analyse broader changes in landscape practice. This may be true, but it must also be admitted that looking at the panorama in isolation from the rest of the artist's practice is not ideal either. In particular, it is easy to underestimate the way in which the *Eidometropolis* simply extended some of the innovations that already marked Girtin's work as a landscape watercolourist. The fact that an area of the working drawing for Section Four of the panorama can only now be identified as representing a wartime telegraph system actually exemplifies a trend that fundamentally shaped his work as an artist after 1797: a determined strategy to displace and obscure the ostensible topographical subject of his watercolours. This view of an outlying part of Bamburgh Castle was for a long time misidentified as *The Rocking Stone, Cornwall* (Fig. 28). An entirely understandable mistake if one compares it with the more conventional depiction that Girtin made earlier in his career for the antiquarian market (Fig. 29). A picturesque scene of a castle gives way to a fragmented composition stripped of any clear topographical identity by some of the same random qualities seen in the panorama drawings. Another watercolour dating from before the *Eidometropolis*, and which again eluded identification until recently, shows *Appledore, from Instow Sands* (Fig. 30). It is typical of the numerous unconventional compositions that will feature in the Girtin online catalogue, lacking a conventional framing device or a clear and recognizable focus of interest. Year on year, the proportions of Girtin's landscapes became wider

with the frequent effect, as here, that they appear panoramic, though not a panorama in the proper original sense. The point here is that if we look at the artist's career as a whole, it is clear that it was his earlier critical engagement with the panorama, presumably as a consumer, that fundamentally changed his approach to landscape composition, and the production of the *Eidometropolis* in 1801 only confirmed a shift in his practice. ⁴¹



Figure 28.

Thomas Girtin, Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland, 1799-1800, graphite, watercolour and bodycolour on laid paper, 32.8 x 53.8 cm. Collection of Tate, London (N04409). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).



Figure 29.

Thomas Girtin, after James Moore, Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland, 1792–1793, graphite, watercolour and bodycolour on wove paper, 16.9 x 21.8 cm. Collection of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford (WA1934.119.1). Digital image courtesy of Ashmolean Museum.



Figure 30.

Thomas Girtin, View of Appledore, North Devon, from Instow Sands, ca. 1789–1801, graphite, brown ink and watercolour on laid paper, 24.5 x 47.2 cm. Collection of The Courtauld Gallery, London (D.1952.RW.846). Digital image courtesy of The Samuel Courtauld Trust.

Footnotes

- 1 The site is due to go online sometime in 2021–2022.

- 2 Greg Smith, *Thomas Girtin: The Art of Watercolour* (London: Tate, 2002).
- 3 These findings are discussed in greater detail in: Greg Smith, "Girtin v Girtin: New Information on a Panorama of London by Thomas Girtin (1775–1802); and his *Picturesque Views in Paris*", *The British Art Journal* 18, no. 3 (2017/2018): 28–47; and Greg Smith, A "Connoisseur's Panorama": *Thomas Girtin's "Eidometropolis" and Other London Views, c. 1796–1802* (London: The London Topographical Society, no. 180, 2018).
- 4 Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters Who Have Resided or Been Born in England* (London: Luke Hansard and Sons, 1808), 280; "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *The Monthly Magazine, or, British Register* 14, Part 2 (October 1802): 255.
- 5 *The Morning Post and Gazetteer*, no. 10,586, 8 September 1802, 1.
- 6 "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *Monthly Magazine* 14, Part 2 (October 1802): 255.
- 7 *The Morning Chronicle*, no. 10,109, 14 October 1801, 1.
- 8 The National Archives, Prob. 6/179 f.616. The document is published in full in Smith, "Girtin v Girtin" and the quotes here are taken from that article.
- 9 Smith, "Girtin v Girtin", 30.
- 10 These are reproduced in Smith, A "Connoisseur's Panorama", Figs 1–11, including a newly discovered outline for Section Five.
- 11 The best guide to the practical details of the production and display of the panorama remains the original patent taken out by Robert Barker in 1790 and which was reprinted in *The Repertory of Arts and Manufactures* (4, 1796: 165–167). There is no reason to believe that Girtin departed significantly from the detailed prescriptions laid out by Barker, including the use of an optical frame.
- 12 Smith, A "Connoisseur's Panorama", 36.
- 13 One visitor was recorded as spending two hours laid out "on the platform viewing this matchless production of art"; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, no. 342, 31 October 1802, 349.
- 14 Thomas Girtin and David Loshak, *The Art of Thomas Girtin* (London: A. and C. Black, 1952), 105. Challenging the simplistic interpretation of dispatch as a signifier of painting on the spot is a recurrent theme of the forthcoming *Thomas Girtin (1775–1802): An Online Catalogue*.
- 15 *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, no. 341, 24 October 1802, 341. For the significance of this change in plan, see Smith, A "Connoisseur's Panorama", 38–40.
- 16 "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *Monthly Magazine* 14, Part 2 (October 1802): 254–255. The detail features in the plan the Barkers' produced for the Paris showing of their London panorama, see Smith, A "Connoisseur's Panorama", 39.
- 17 The costs and income generated by the *Eidometropolis* are discussed in Smith, "Girtin v Girtin", 30–32.
- 18 "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *The Monthly Magazine* 14, Part 2 (October 1802), 254.
- 19 As with all details on the Barkers' panorama, I have relied on Ralph Hyde and Peter Jackson, *London from the Roof of the Albion Mills: A Facsimile of Robert and Henry Aston Barker's Panorama of 1792–3* (London: London Topographical Society no. 139, in association with the Guildhall Library, 1988).
- 20 Smith, A "Connoisseur's Panorama", 42. The touring panorama measured an impressive 3,500 square feet.
- 21 "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts," *Monthly Magazine* 14, Part 2 (October 1802), 255; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, no. 331, 15 August 1802, 262.
- 22 *The Morning Herald*, no. 6523, 6 December 1802, 5. The review, published after Girtin's death, details how Girtin's great depiction of his "native place, glory of the world" might be erected as his monument, a memorial to a "national loss".
- 23 Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 6.
- 24 James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (eds), *Romantic Metropolis. The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.
- 25 My understanding of the London panorama has been aided by Oleksijczuk's detailed analysis of the Barkers' first urban panoramas (*The First Panoramas*, 23–65) and by Markham Ellis, "'Spectacles within Doors': Panoramas of London in the 1790s", *Romanticism* 14, no. 2: 133–148.
- 26 "Panorama von London zu Paris: Abbé Sicard mit Seinen Weiblichen Taubstummen-Zöglingen Besucht es", *London und Paris* 14 (1804): 52; "Ueber die Panorama's von London und Boulogne in Paris", *London und Paris* 19 (1807): 332.
- 27 "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *Monthly Magazine* 14, Part 2 (October 1802), 255.
- 28 William MacRitchie, *Diary of a Tour Through Great Britain in 1795* (London: Elliot Stock, 1897), 83.
- 29 Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania! The Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing" View* (London: Trefoil, 1988), 79–85.
- 30 *The Morning Herald*, no. 6523, 6 December 1802, 5; "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *Monthly Magazine* 14, Part 2 (October 1802), 255.
- 31 The impact of the sublime on the urban panorama is discussed in John Brewer, "Sensibility and the Urban Panorama", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (June 2007), 237.

- 32 See "Conflagration! The Burning of the Albion Mill, Southwark, in 1791", in B.E. Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints 1790–1870*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 27–52.
- 33 As with a number of aspects regarding the installation of the *Eidometropolis*, there is no direct evidence that the roof was mocked up from real elements, but other panoramas of the date certainly did, including the Barkers' later London view, and there is no other explanation for leaving a blank in an otherwise very detailed drawing.
- 34 "Additions and Corrections in Former Obituaries", *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 73, Part 1 (February 1803), 187; "Monthly Retrospect of the Fine Arts", *Monthly Magazine* 14, Part 2 (October 1802), 255.
- 35 *The Morning Herald*, no. 6523, 6 December 1802, 5.
- 36 *The Observer*, no. 554, 8 August 1802, 3.
- 37 *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, no. 331, 15 August 1802, 262.
- 38 Ida Darlington, *Survey of London: Volume 22, Bankside (The Parishes of St. Saviour and Christchurch, Southwark)* (London: London County Council, 1950), 122–124.
- 39 See Smith, A "Connoisseur's Panorama", 46–48.
- 40 Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 167.
- 41 Surprisingly, the story of how the newly invented panorama influenced landscape artists in this period has yet to be written. If, or when it is, I suspect that Girtin will feature prominently, but not exclusively, in the discussion.

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1973 and the Future of Landscape

Nicholas Alfrey

Abstract

This essay is an exercise in exhibition history, focused on Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850 held at the Tate Gallery in the winter of 1973, in which curators Conal Shields and Leslie Parris set out to question received ideas about the rise of landscape painting in Britain, and to widen the range of materials for investigation. Drawing on correspondence and the designer's plans in the Tate Archives, aspects of the concept, installation, reception, and legacy of the exhibition are considered. The exhibition is seen in the context of a wider reappraisal of landscape as a field of study, but also in relation to the renewal of landscape as an arena for contemporary art practice. The discussion is bracketed by that of two further exhibitions, Constable: The Art of Nature at the Tate in 1971 and an ambitious sequel in 1983, in which a survey of the next one hundred years of landscape art in Britain was attempted.

Authors

Acknowledgements

Stephen Daniels has made a significant contribution to this essay. The experience of the Tate exhibition in 1973 has had a lasting effect on us both, and it was initially his suggestion that it would make an appropriate subject for the *Landscape Now* conference, from which this essay has been developed. Special thanks are due also to Joy Sleeman and Ben Tufnell, to Chris Bastock at the Tate Library and Archive, and to Imogen Maxwell at the Hayward Gallery Art Library.

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Although exhibition history has become a burgeoning field in art-historical studies in recent years, exhibitions dealing with the theme of landscape have received relatively little attention. There has been a tendency to privilege “landmark exhibitions”, carrying with it a risk of distorting the broader picture, to say nothing of its corollary, the aggrandizing of the curator as cultural producer.¹ But there is a case to be made for the exhibition *Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850*, held at the Tate Gallery in 1973, as particularly significant. “It opened up the issue of landscape art in this period as a complicated form of knowledge”, as Stephen Daniels has noted, and in so doing made innovative use of the exhibition format as a vehicle for questioning received assumptions and proposing new connections.²

Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850, which opened at the Tate Gallery on 20 November 1973 and ran until 3 February 1974, was conceived as the third in a series of winter exhibitions at the Tate Gallery, following surveys of Elizabethan and Jacobean painting and the age of Charles I; it also served to set the scene for the imminent bicentenary celebrations of Turner and Constable.³ The exhibition was a collaboration between two curators, Leslie Parris, Assistant Keeper at the Tate Gallery, and Conal Shields of the Camberwell School of Art. In the opening lines of his catalogue introduction, Shields set out their position: that the rise of landscape painting in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a remarkable phenomenon “for which, so far, no convincing account can be given”.⁴ To redress this, they sought to show the countryside as an arena of social and economic change, and to demonstrate how new imagery, processes, and techniques for landscape emerged in this period. They also sought to indicate the conditions of the art world with which this new landscape art had to contend.

There were a number of precedents for this reappraisal of landscape. In academic enquiry, John Barrell’s study of John Clare, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place* had appeared in 1972, taking the years 1730 to 1840 as its field of investigation.⁵ In broadcasting, *Ways of Seeing*, written by John Berger with Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Jean Mohr, and Richard Hollis and directed by Michael Dibb, first shown in January 1972, offered a provocative interpretation of Gainsborough’s *Mr and Mrs Andrews*.⁶ In exhibition-making, *A Decade of English Naturalism 1810–1820* had been curated by John Gage for the Norwich Castle Museum in 1969, and shown in the following year at the V&A. It was described by Peter Lasko in his Preface to the catalogue as “a kind of lecture illustrated by original works of art instead of slides”, bringing out the strongly didactic character of the project.⁷ A diagram of Cornelius Varley’s Graphic Telescope, patented in 1811, appeared on the cover of the catalogue, signalling the exhibition’s concern with new ways of looking, with new apparatus.

The Art of Nature

One exhibition in particular can be seen as a rehearsal for *Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850. Constable: The Art of Nature*, also curated by Parris and Shields, had been planned for the Aldeburgh Festival, and was adopted by the Tate Gallery only after an adverse police report on the security of the original venue.⁸ It is interesting to note, though, that this further initiative to reconsider the terms of landscape also came out of East Anglia. The exhibition ran for just under a month, opening at the Tate in early June 1971.

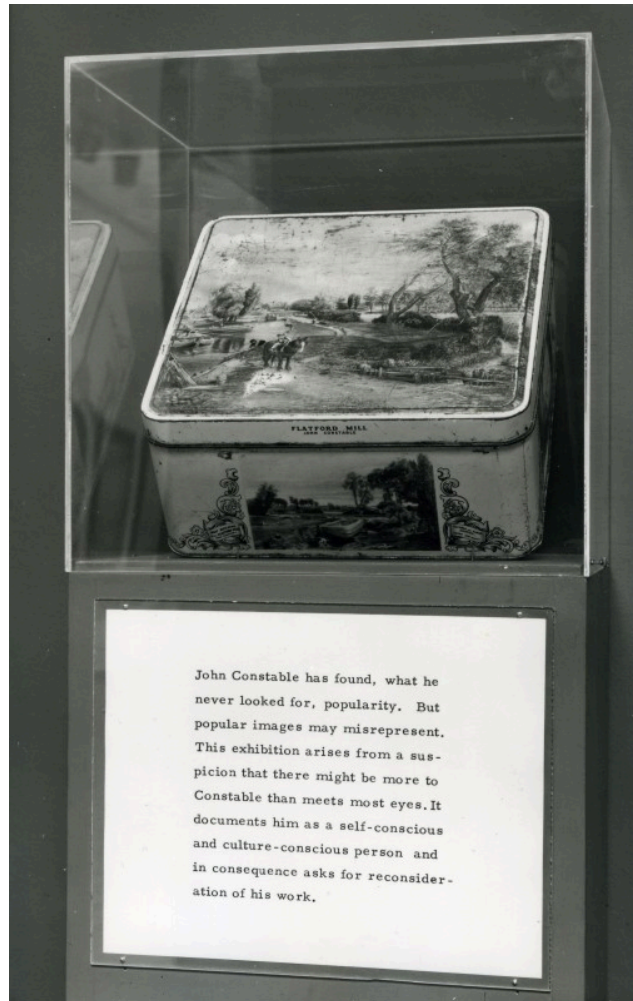


Figure 1.

Installation photograph showing the introductory display and text to the exhibition "Constable: The Art of Nature" at the Tate Gallery, 1971, photograph. Tate Photographic Archive Collection (Tate Exhibitions and Displays List No 11, 8). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

The opening line of the first section of the catalogue sets the tone: “The English countryside, commonly seen (at least by historians of landscape painting) as a place of eternal calm and contentment, in Constable’s day underwent considerable change.”⁹ And at the entrance to the exhibition itself, the campaign was opened up on another front: beneath the display of a biscuit tin, garishly decorated with reproductions of *Flatford Mill* (*‘Scene on a Navigable River’*), *Boat-Building near Flatford Mill* and other images of Constable Country (Fig. 1), a text declared: “John Constable has found, what he never looked for, popularity. But popular images may misrepresent. This exhibition arises from a suspicion that there may be more to Constable than meets most eyes.”¹⁰ The exhibition included works from a number of public and private collections, but fully half of the 115 items came from the Constable family archive, lent by Colonel John H. Constable, the artist’s great grandson, and his wife. The Constable family loans included three oil paintings, one watercolour, and three drawings: the rest was made up of archive materials, including letters, manuscripts, and volumes from the artist’s library. The exhibition was therefore as much a display of documents—letters, notes, diagrams, published books, and also studio apparatus—as it was a conventional showing of paintings, drawings and prints. It was, as Colonel Constable expressed in a letter to the gallery’s director Norman Reid, “as was intended, a conversation between books, letters and pictures”.¹¹ The extensive use of black and white photographic reproductions of Constable’s paintings for comparative purposes in the display must have further served to blur the distinction between art and documentation. This was an exhibition in which processes and ideas counted for as much as the works of art themselves.

The catalogue, designed by Iain Bain and admirably succinct, was an indispensable aid to navigating the exhibition (most exhibits were accompanied by a number only, and there were few captions). The exhibits were divided into seven sections dealing with the art world, including copying and collecting, art theory, poetry, science, studio practice, and apparatus, the relationship between art and nature, and Constable’s activities as printmaker and lecturer. There was, inevitably, some degree of separation between this textual and didactic framing and the actual work on display. Almost half the exhibits related to the section on art and nature, and from the list of works shown it is difficult to see how the opening section on the art world could have made good on the curators’ claim to “indicate the complications of country life during the first half of the nineteenth century”.¹² Overall, though, the exhibition adhered convincingly to the aim, as set out by Parris in his letter to lenders: “to examine the habitual idea of Constable as a ‘natural painter’ and to suggest the limitations of this view”.¹³

Constable: The Art of Nature drew on R.B. Beckett's edition of Constable's correspondence to build up its picture of "a self-conscious and culture-conscious" artist as opposed to the uncomplicated nature lover of popular imagination.¹⁴ Beckett had died the previous December, but Parris and Shields had access to the materials he had gathered, and were able to include some of the items he had used in their display. But for all its substance, their exhibition was conducted on a relatively modest scale and could easily be overlooked.

Landscape in Britain c.1750–1850

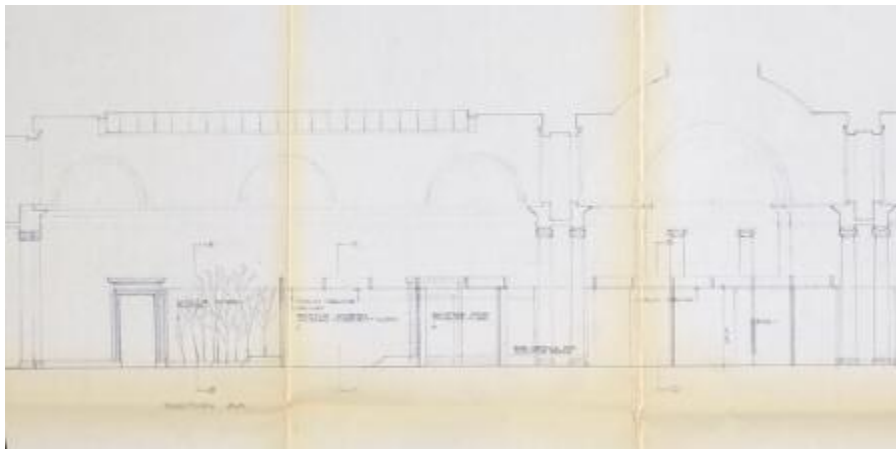
The Tate Gallery's winter exhibition for 1973, however, was planned on an altogether more ambitious scale. It gave the same curators the opportunity to open out from a monographic focus and to develop their ideas into a wide-ranging investigation into the practices of landscape extending across several generations. Their new exhibition was informed by the same distinctive strategy as before, based on the proposition that landscape painting could only be understood in terms of an expanded field of ideas, processes, and mediums. Parris and Shields brought out complex, shifting relationships between images and texts, painting and printmaking, artists and their market, and between observation, fieldwork, and theory.

Works by sixty-three artists were included, with almost twenty more in a retrospective section on Old Masters and landscape artists working in Britain before the mid-eighteenth century. The selection gave undeniable prominence to oil painting, but watercolour and engraving were both strongly represented. There were sections on "Antiquities, Travel and the Picturesque" and "The Literature of Landscape" which emphasised the significance of texts and documents of various kinds, and not just as "background", and another on optical instruments, from the Claude glass to the Calotype camera. Two further sections focused on specific sites, the designed landscapes of Stourhead and Hafod.

In order to bring all this disparate material together, the curators had to stretch the conventions of exhibition-making, at least as regards exhibitions of historical art, and to test the limit of what could be done in this format, that is, with the display of a set of physical objects. This presented a particular challenge to the exhibition's designer, Christopher Dean of Castle Park Dean and Hook Architects.

The space allocated was the full extent of the Duveen Galleries, at this period the Tate Gallery's main space for temporary exhibitions. The intimidating classical grandeur of the architecture, originally designed for sculpture, was largely concealed by an elaborate temporary construction, with changes of level, ramps, platforms, and steps (Fig. 2).¹⁵ The exhibition

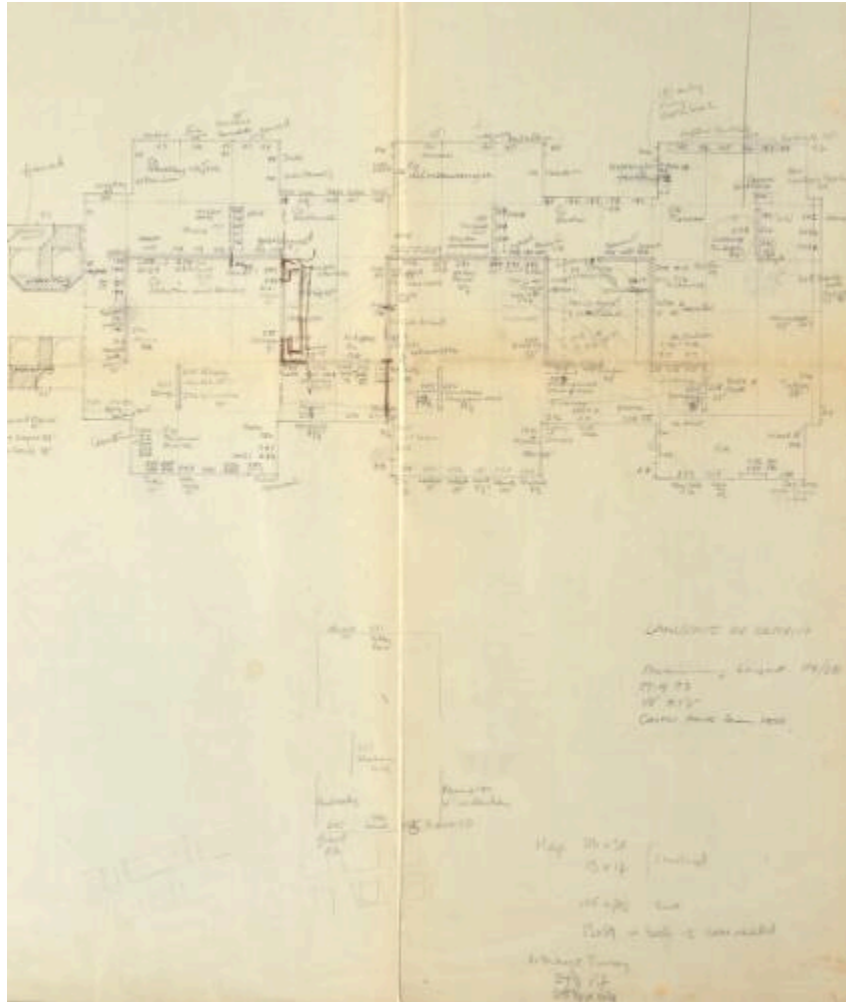
spaces were covered over by a muslin ceiling at a height of about 15 feet, keeping the austere barrel vault overhead out of sight. The designer created an ingenious warren of spaces of various sizes, with partitions, panels, free-standing screens, showcases, and cabinets to accommodate the exhibits (321 in all), with their challenging diversity of scale and medium, and the often conflicting requirements of display and lighting conditions (Fig 3). All this necessitated the creation of an extraordinarily complex environment, but it did not please everyone: “Such a meaningless intricacy of ugly little spaces” one lender wrote testily to the gallery’s Director, though admittedly he was exasperated because the work his institution had agreed to lend had been damaged by a visitor.¹⁶ Edward Lucie-Smith complained in a broadcast discussion on BBC Radio 3 that he found something “disturbingly contemptuous about the display”, particularly in the opening retrospect section where the design was at its most intricate, adding that he thought no great work of art should be shown just for its documentary interest.¹⁷ He went on to concede, however, that in the later sections “there’s been a great deal of thinking going on”.



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Figure 2.

Christopher Dean, Design drawing for the exhibition “Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850”, detail of sheet 101 showing left hand side elevation, 1973, drawing. Tate Photographic Archive Collection (TG 92/265/ Box 4). Digital image courtesy of Tate.



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Figure 3.

Christopher Dean, Design drawing for the exhibition "Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850", detail of sheet 119/05 showing location of all the exhibits, 1973, drawing. Tate Photographic Archive Collection (TG 92/265/ Box 4). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

The lighting, too, was the subject of some visitors' complaints: too dark to see properly, said one correspondent, while Denys Sutton, reviewing the show, complained about too much light, casting shadows on some pictures, obscuring others in the glare.¹⁸ But the organisers were facing unforeseen difficulties: the exhibition opened at a time of a mounting fuel crisis, and national restrictions on energy consumption had been introduced. In a letter, Ruth Rattenbury, Assistant Keeper in the Department of Exhibitions and Education, observed that despite curtailing the opening hours, "the cuts in electricity we have made were still not sufficient to conform to current regulations".¹⁹ The exhibition was throwing out too much light, in times that were literally getting darker—in December, the three-day working week had been announced, together with a programme of power cuts.²⁰

These technical and organisational problems did little to compromise the effectiveness of the exhibition, as many of those who saw it would attest. Commenting on the influence of the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue, Stephen Daniels has observed that it “remains a landmark event and text, a source which fed a new stream in the social history of the landscape arts, enriching the field of enquiry with materials and questions which still remain to be fully examined.”²¹ It made apparent how little this most revered genre had been understood, and how much more was still to be done.

Here my account will inevitably be inflected by personal memories. The exhibition made a vivid impression on repeated visits during the Christmas vacation of 1973: looking back on it now, it feels like the beginning of a journey. All the same, to look at the installation photographs in the Tate archive is a disconcerting experience.²² They brought back no memories of my visits: it was almost as if I was looking at the record of another exhibition entirely. I certainly don’t remember the trees, but there they are in the photographs, and they were clearly an integral part of the designer’s concept, carefully placed around the entrance and again at the halfway point, around the Duveen Gallery’s octagon ([Fig. 4](#)). The trees had been requested from the Parks Depot at Regents Park “to help create an appropriate atmosphere”, and were looked after for the duration of the exhibition by the Tate Gallery’s part-time gardener.²³ There were about thirty in all, some of considerable height; they were evidently broad-leaved evergreens, but seen in the photographs, they strike a wintry note, a tracery of naked branches or a spray of dark leaves silhouetted against the painted landscapes, mostly representations of other seasons ([Fig. 5](#)).



Figure 4.

Landscape in Britain c.1750-1850, installation photograph, 1973. Tate Photographic Archive Collection (TG 92/265/ Box 4). Digital image courtesy of Tate.



Figure 5.

Landscape in Britain c.1750-1850, installation photograph, 1973.
Tate Photographic Archive Collection (TG 92/265/ Box 4). Digital
image courtesy of Tate.

These photographs underline one of the difficulties encountered in the study of exhibition history. Installation photographs provide crucial evidence of how exhibitions looked, but the camera has a tendency to fix precisely those things that are fairly marginal to a visitor's experience—the gaps between exhibits, incidental clutter, the dated fads of exhibition design (Fig. 6). This gives little sense of an exhibition's capacity to transform perception through the juxtaposition of the familiar with the overlooked, or to suggest new relationships between works of art, or between works of art, objects, and texts. The efficacy of *Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850* lay in its capacity to set up these kinds of dynamic exchanges. The diagrams of the layout are particularly valuable here. They provide a more effective way of seeing how these relationships in space were set up. Even so, the full extent of the interplay between works of art, texts, and documents is not apparent from the layout diagrams.



Figure 6.

Landscape in Britain c.1750-1850, installation photograph, 1973. Tate Photographic Archive Collection (TG 92/265/ Box 4). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

There is another reason why the primary experience of the exhibition is so difficult to recover. The catalogue, exemplary in its own way, was an essential accompaniment to it, and in the years since then has remained an indispensable contribution to the literature of landscape.²⁴ The effect has been to fold the publication over the exhibition itself, while the intersection of sensory, spatial, and intellectual stimuli that made it so work as a transformative experience becomes gradually lost to memory.

Some critics quibbled about the selection of artists—Richard Parkes Bonington's absence in particular was noted, an objection that seems to take no account of the curators' stated intention to only show works done in this country, with a few exceptions (the basis of those exceptions was admittedly rather ambiguously defined). The inclusion of so many unfamiliar names was also widely commented on. If one image was given currency by the exhibition more than any other, it was surely George Robert Lewis' *Hereford, Dynedon and Malvern Hills from the Haywood Lodge, Harvest Scene, Afternoon* (Fig. 7). It was positioned in the same space as work by Constable and John Linnell, along with small oils painted directly from nature by William Delamotte, William Havell, and others. A detail with the group of figures was reproduced on the poster and featured on the cover of the catalogue, and it illustrated several of the broadsheet reviews (Fig. 8). The painting had been

in the Tate Gallery's collection since 1904 but only at that moment seems to have come into its own: a picture of harvesting in the summer of 1815 became an icon for Britain in the winter of 1973.



Figure 7.

George Robert Lewis, Hereford, Dynedor and Malvern Hills from the Haywood Lodge, Harvest Scene, Afternoon (detail), 1815, oil on canvas, 41.6 x 59.7 cm. Collection of Tate (N02961). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).

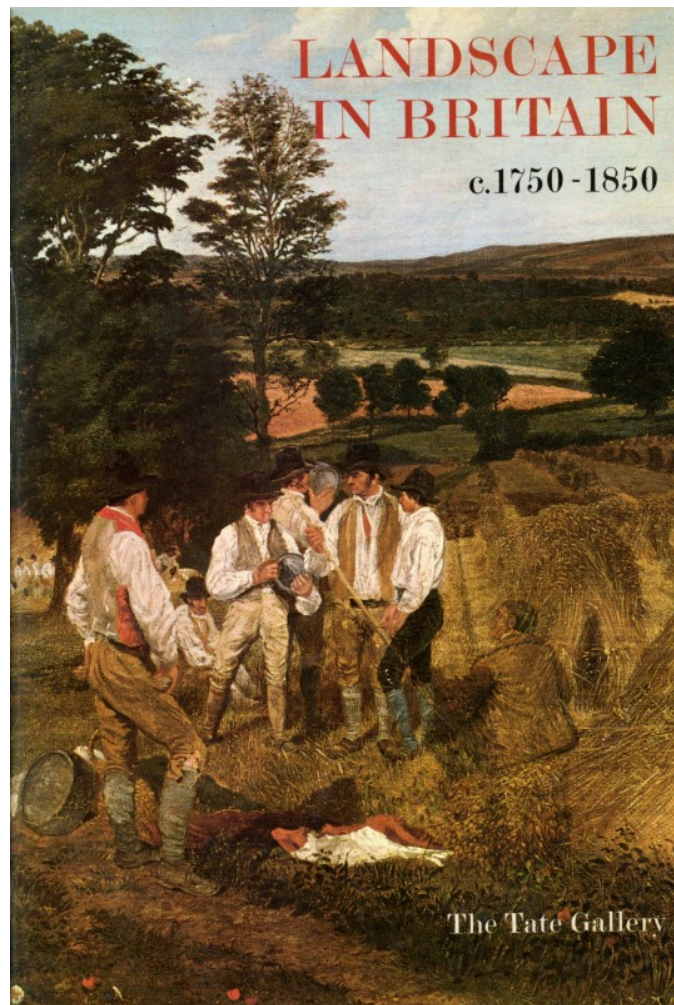


Figure 8.

Landscape in Britain c.1750-1850, cover of exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1973). Digital image courtesy of Tate.

As Christiana Payne has noted, Lewis may have made alterations to his figures before exhibiting the picture in 1816—a year of unrest in the countryside—in order to avoid any suggestion of confrontation between the group of harvesters and the seated figure of the bailiff or overseer, the latter now seen ghosting back through the painted surface.²⁵ In his catalogue entry, Parris made no reference to these turbulent circumstances, and that interpretation would presumably not be available to an exhibition visitor. But in the winter of 1973–1974, this image of harvesters in the Herefordshire countryside can only have seemed reassuring by comparison with the grim economic realities and political uncertainty of the present, with the three-day week beginning and a looming wave of strikes.²⁶

The New Art of Landscape

There is another context in which some of the curatorial strategies evident in the conception and presentation of *Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850* might be thought about: the renewal of landscape painting in the field of contemporary art.²⁷ These strategies included an emphasis on process as well as on the production of a finished work of art, an acknowledgement of the close relationship between text and image in the making and understanding of landscape, an interest in the interdependence of document and artwork, and above all an awareness of the limits of purely optical experience. In the previous year, Lawrence Gowing had coined the phrase “the visible meaning of a good picture” in an indignant refutation of John Berger’s analysis of Gainsborough’s *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, a phrase duly incorporated by Berger in the book version of *Ways of Seeing* as a way of turning the argument back against him.²⁸ The curators of *Landscape in Britain* showed themselves to be similarly sceptical about the idea that meaning in a picture could be so transparent. Their central business remained the making of landscape pictures, but they were fully attentive to the chain of transactions that had to take place between the outdoor experience and the final destination of a work, whether that was the exhibition room or the printed page.

In contemporary art, landscape painting might well have seemed a redundant genre by the late 1960s and early 1970s. But a young generation of artists was increasingly turning to landscape, if not to painting. Some of the results were seen at *The New Art* at the Hayward Gallery in 1972—the year before *Landscape in Britain*. This is generally reckoned as the first exhibition of Conceptual Art in London on a large scale in a public gallery, but a surprising number of the artists involved, including Richard Long, Gilbert and George, and Hamish Fulton were engaged with landscape in one form or another.²⁹ These artists turned to landscape not in order to reclaim territory lost to traditionalists but because it offered an expanded field in which to work: a way of getting away from the constraints of the studio, formalist criticism, and the commodification of the art object. In doing so they were adopting new processes, mediums, tools, and frameworks, and if they seemed to acknowledge the idea that landscape might be a recurring concern in British art, they also showed a determination to interrogate that tradition critically.

The Tate Gallery had itself given a platform to this new art. *Seven Exhibitions*, a series of seven brief sequential solo shows held early in 1972, set out to show “the scope of the crystallising Conceptual and performance art”, anticipating the Arts Council’s *The New Art* by several months.³⁰ Landscape was included in the sequence through the participation of Hamish

Fulton; the intention was not to suggest the continuity of the traditional category but a radical extension of it, a questioning of what it might mean now to make art out of doors. Of course it is hardly to be expected that this kind of manifestation would appeal to the same audience as were attracted to the Tate Gallery's strand of historical landscape exhibitions: in the years leading up to *Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850*, the gallery had presented exhibitions of John Crome; *The Shock of Recognition*, on the relationship between Dutch and British landscape painting; Constable (the small exhibition discussed above); and Caspar David Friedrich.³¹ The new art of landscape, not yet quite settled under the contested label of Land art, and these shows of historical landscape painting were addressed to different constituencies: there can have been very little overlapping of their audiences. In retrospect, however, *Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850* can be seen as repositioning landscape as a field of study, just as it was being revalidated in contemporary art practice. In both fields of activity, new questions were being posed, and new methods adopted.

In 1973, though, the past and present of landscape were not likely to be understood as being interconnected. We can infer this from a lengthy review by Tim Hilton of *Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850* in *Studio International*, then in its most innovative phase and regularly giving space to new forms of landscape art. Hilton was entirely blind to the radical agenda of the Tate's exhibition: for him British landscape was, by definition, a zone of no conceivable relevance.³² He derided the efforts of "a whole sizzling New Generation of watercolour scholars" (meaning Shields and Parris, as well as John Gage), poured scorn on Shield's contention that the rise of landscape painting in Britain is "amongst the most remarkable episodes of cultural history", and asserted that landscape in England was "deprived of the muscle of intellectual content". He objected to the curators' use of texts ("pictures are not made out of words"), and declared that unlike Romantic poetry, landscape painting was "nowhere on the thoughtful side". Hilton, perversely iconoclastic, ends up taking the same view as Denys Sutton, another reviewer who dismissed British landscape as provincial, and who concluded that the Tate Gallery's exhibition "raises questions as to whether the English are such masters of landscape as is usually stated."³³

It is disappointing that such a review should have appeared in *Studio International*, a journal so open to developments in landscape, and which two years earlier had produced an issue that doubled as the catalogue for Charles Harrison's exhibition *The British Avant-Garde*, with a landscape image on the cover, an arrangement of stones by Richard Long on a slope beneath a crag on Skye.³⁴ Shields and Parris were too much the scrupulous historians to misuse the term "avant-garde" to describe what was happening in landscape, even towards the end of their period. Perhaps it was inevitable that there was no dialogue between landscape historians and advocates of

the new landscape practices. But the Tate Gallery exhibition addressed the issue of landscape in new ways, and if the innovative strategies it deployed were lost on some critics, it made a vital contribution to a renewal of interest in landscape in the early 1970s, whether in the making or in the search for meaning.

After the Golden Age: 1983

The time-frame of *Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850* covered what could be conventionally taken as a “golden age” of landscape in this country, from Richard Wilson to the death of Turner, though the organisers felt no need to resort to any such concept. In practice, they extended their period through the 1850s to encompass the Pre-Raphaelites: they included William Dyce’s *Pegwell Bay, Kent—A Recollection of October 5th 1858*, painted in 1859–1860, and Rosa Brett’s small panel of a turnip field from a private collection was dated “after 1863”. (As Parris wrote in a letter of thanks to its lender, the Brett “as you may have noted from the press, made an impression out of all proportion to its size”).³⁵ The year 1973 was also the year in which Allen Staley’s ground-breaking monograph *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* appeared: there would have been no consensus that the Pre-Raphaelites were part of the golden age of British landscape even a few years previously.³⁶ But if the curators did not trade on the myth of a golden age, the 1850 cut-off point served, even if inadvertently, to reinforce the idea that after this date landscape would no longer have the same significance in British art, and that a vital episode in the culture was over. The implication is that the history of landscape art over the next one hundred years is an altogether less compelling subject, one for which a coherent critical framework would be difficult to devise.

As if in response to this implied challenge, a sequel was attempted ten years later. *Landscape in Britain 1850–1950* was developed by a different organization, the Arts Council, with two new curators, Frances Spalding and Ian Jeffrey. It had originally been conceived as a touring exhibition, drawing attention to the depth and unfamiliarity of regional collections, and was only scheduled for the Hayward Gallery when an unexpected gap opened up in the programme. The exhibition was put together in just twelve months, and opened in February 1983 at the Hayward Gallery, before touring to Bristol, Stoke-on-Trent, and Sheffield.

The exhibition picked up from where its predecessor had left off, now defined as the end of an era, the passing of Romanticism, marked by the deaths of Wordsworth in 1850 and Turner in 1851. Its opening section was somewhat hobbled by the fact that the 1973 exhibition extended beyond the notional 1850 end point to include some of the key works of Pre-Raphaelite landscape, as noted above. One consequence of this was that the Tate

Gallery refused to lend major pictures such as Dyce's *Pegwell Bay*—its absence was widely regretted in the critical coverage of the new survey.³⁷ Indeed, a prevailing view among critics was that the selectors had been unable, in many cases, to get the loans they wanted, and had to settle for second best.

The model established in 1973 was followed by the selectors to a point, in their highlighting unfamiliar names and reputations, and in acknowledging that painting was not the only medium for the art of landscape. Again, oil paintings constituted the majority of exhibits, but photographs, posters, designs for book jackets, and illustrations were also included, pointing to the fact that there was now a popular and commercial culture around landscape to be taken into consideration, as well as the traditional modes of watercolour and printmaking. There had been two photographs by Fox Talbot in the 1973 exhibition, together with items of the equipment he used. Photography had become ever more central to the representation of landscape in the next hundred years, and while the work of a number of photographers from the Victorian period was included, the medium was given only a token presence in the coverage of the first half of the twentieth century—an indication of the difficulty of finding suitable criteria for selection in what was now an unmanageably huge mass of potential examples. The earlier exhibition had found effective ways to suggest how landscape imagery migrated across media, from drawing to print, from poetry to painting, from landscaping and “improvement” on the ground to pictures for public exhibition and private consumption. But for the period 1850–1950, the scale and pace of these sorts of migration, the proliferation of new mediums, technologies, circuits, and markets made for a field which was now very difficult to navigate.

Landscape in Britain 1850–1950 was a remarkable enterprise in its way, particularly as regards the unprejudiced attitude that informed the selectors' choices (so Alfred Munnings and Rowland Hilder, as well as Spencer Gore and Peter Lanyon), and their reluctance to accept the idea of a “modern tradition” as an adequate way of framing landscape practices after 1850. In an interview, Ian Jeffrey said that they had aimed to represent the full range of what was going on in landscape in the period, to include things because they were popular as well as art of the highest quality.³⁸ In pursuit of this objective, they brought a bewildering wealth of new material to light, but declined any attempt to forge it into a coherent overall narrative.

The Hayward Gallery had not hitherto been associated with historical exhibitions of British landscape, and its assertive, brutalist architecture was not the most obvious setting for a display of the genre.³⁹ *Landscape in Britain 1850–1950* was installed in the galleries on the lower levels (there were two further exhibitions upstairs). In his review for *The Observer*, William

Feaver, invoking the vocabulary of the Picturesque, likened the spaces to “grots and caverns shagged with horrid shades”, accentuating the contrast of galleries where daylight never penetrates with the display of so much work devoted to “memories of the open air”.⁴⁰ In practice, the pictures were shown against white walls, and widely spaced—a conservative hang apparently designed to offset any suggestion of medley (Fig. 9). The railway and London transport posters, book jackets, and illustrations were mostly grouped together at the end, reiterating a distinction between the fine arts and the wider visual culture of landscape which seems at odds with the curatorial intention (Fig. 10).



Figure 9.

Landscape in Britain, 1850-1950, 1983, installation photograph, Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre. Digital image courtesy of Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre | Photo: John Webb.

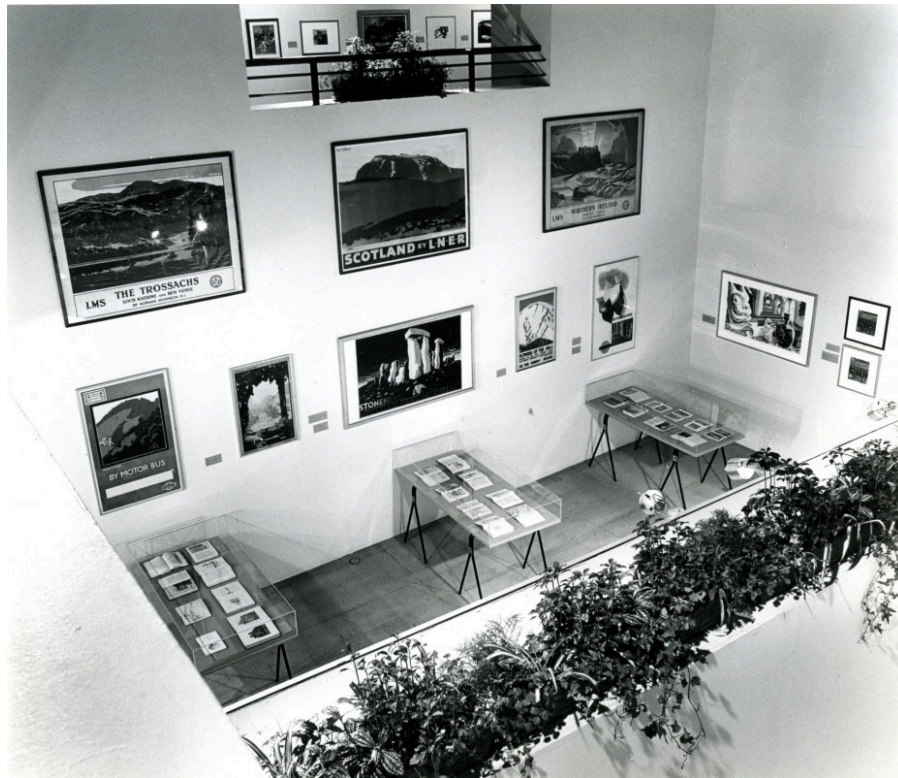


Figure 10.

Landscape in Britain, 1850-1950, 1983, installation photograph, Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre. Digital image courtesy of Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre | Photo: John Webb.

The exhibition had extensive press coverage, due to its platform at the Hayward Gallery, but critical response was divided. Peter Fuller, recalling the Tate Gallery show of a decade earlier, thought the new survey chronicled the faltering of a once confident vision of landscape, showing “its transformation, fragmentation and finally its disintegration”, while John McEwen, in a piece for *The Spectator* tersely headed “Downhill”, wrote it off as “a melancholy story of decline”, an indiscriminating spectacle aiming at mere popular approval.⁴¹ The idea that the real appeal of the exhibition would be to lovers of nature and the countryside had considerable currency, and was noted sometimes in positive terms. William Packer in *The Financial Times* described it as “somewhat lightweight, refreshingly un-academic and thoroughly enjoyable”, while Michael Shepherd for *The Sunday Telegraph* thought it “one of the most beautiful, undemanding and thoroughly national exhibitions” ever to have been seen at the Hayward Gallery.⁴² These responses pick up on something of the bold revisionist approach of the curators, but they also go some way to explaining why *Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850* did not have a critical legacy and scholarly afterlife comparable to that of the Tate Gallery’s exhibition of 1973.

In 1973, the curators set out to question and complicate received ideas of what was involved in the art of landscape. They had canonical names to work with (Wilson, Gainsborough, Turner, Constable, Palmer), but also recovered many other artists who had been lost to view. The organisers of the 1983 exhibition, on the other hand, had nothing to dismantle. There was nothing comparable at stake, since landscape in the later period did not have the same prestige, and much less had been invested in it. Furthermore, its history had never been written, however schematically. Theirs was the first attempt at an overview, but their survey was guided by no clear thesis.

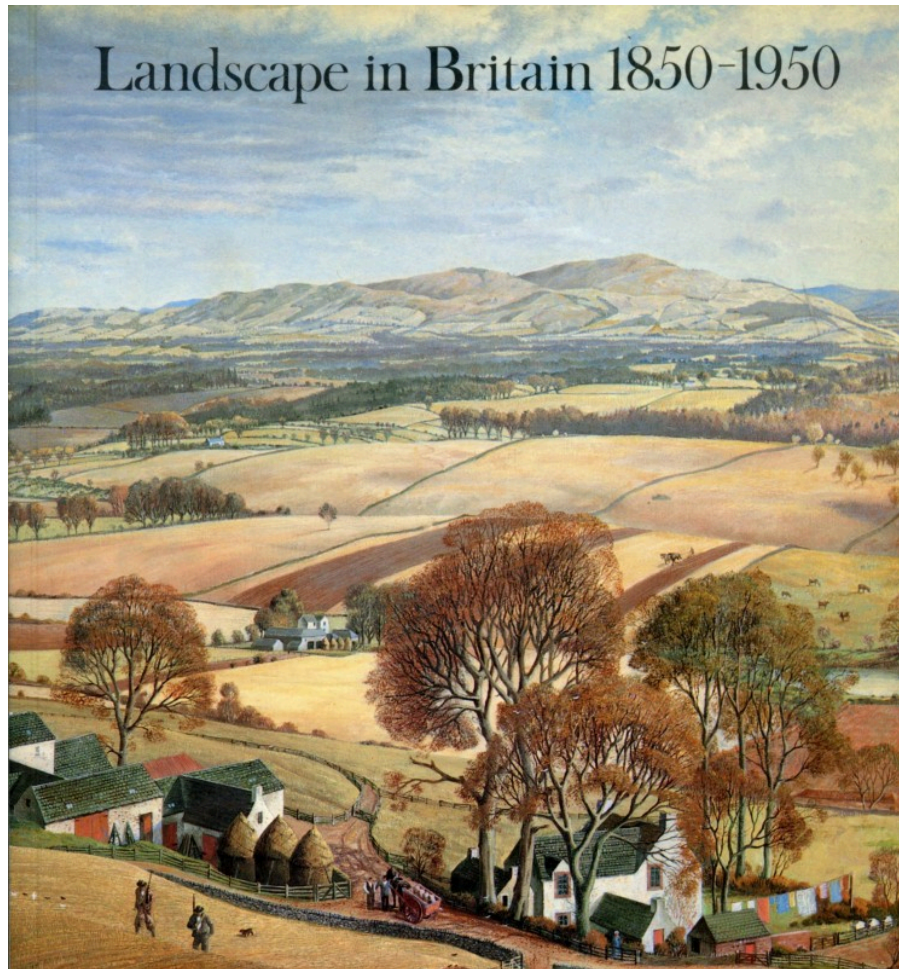


Figure 11.

Landscape in Britain 1850-1950, cover of the exhibition catalogue, 1983. Cover depicts detail of *Autumn, Kinnordy* by James McIntosh Patrick, Dundee Art Galleries and Museums Collection (25-1946). Digital image courtesy of Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre / estate of James McIntosh Patrick.

The accompanying publication did not follow the template of that from 1973 (Fig. 11).⁴³ The two curators each wrote an essay, and the poet Donald Davie contributed a third on the theme of industrial landscape in British literature. There was a detailed decade-by-decade chronology of social and

artistic events; the rest of the publication was given over to entries on the artists, over 200 of them, arranged in order of date of birth, from David Cox (born 1783) to Ken Bennetts (born 1933)—the lack of equivalence here is indicative of the curators' open approach. Biographical notes were given for each artist, resulting in a veritable Dictionary of National Biography of landscape artists of the period—the entries a mine of fascinating information. There was no commentary on any of the exhibited works, however, and therefore no argument was built around them. They remained, frustratingly, at the level of illustration to the biographies.⁴⁴

But there is also, between 1973 and 1983, a broader distinction to be perceived. Ideas that were first given currency in the early 1970s, and articulated in *Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850*, continued to work their way productively through the academic scholarship on landscape in the 1980s, resulting in a series of significant publications, but elsewhere the subject of landscape seemed altogether less compelling.⁴⁵ In contemporary art, for example, in Britain at least, Land art had lost the radical, questioning edge it once had, and more reassuring ideas of nature as material, as resource, began to gain ground, evident in the work of Andy Goldsworthy and David Nash. Two years before their big survey of landscape from 1850–1950, the Arts Council organised a touring exhibition titled *Romanticism Continued*, which included the practice of some of the 1960s and 1970s radicals, such as Hamish Fulton and Barry Flanagan, and accommodated them comfortably to the idea of a British landscape tradition.⁴⁶ Such an accommodation could not have been reached in the previous decade, when, in the fields both of historical enquiry and contemporary practice, the idea of a tradition of landscape was interrogated with so much scepticism and energy. In 1973, matters had not looked so easily settled.

Footnotes

- 1 On landmark exhibitions, see Bruce Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Vol. I, 1863–1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008); and Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Vol. II, 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2011). For a history of “Old Master” exhibitions, see Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).
- 2 Stephen Daniels, “What Landscape Means to Me”, *Landscapes* 12, no. 2 (2011): 91.
- 3 *The Elizabethan Image: Elizabethan and Jacobean Painting in England, 1540–1620* (28 November 1969–8 February 1970); *The Age of Charles I: Painting in England, 1620–1649* (15 November 1972–14 January 1973).
- 4 Conal Shields, “Introduction”, in Tate Gallery, *Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1973), 9.
- 5 John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730–1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
- 6 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 106–108. In the broadcast version, Michael Dibb had added a sign reading “Trespassers Keep Out” to Gainsborough’s picture.
- 7 Peter Lasko, “Foreword”, in John Gage, *A Decade of English Naturalism 1810–1820*, exhibition catalogue (Norwich: Norwich Castle Museum, 1969), 1.
- 8 Leslie Parris letter to lenders, dated 18 March 1971 in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/237/Box 1.
- 9 Tate Gallery, *Constable: The Art of Nature*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1971), 11.

- 10 The text panel and display are recorded in an installation photograph: Tate Gallery Photography Collection, List No. 11, p. 8. The full text of the introductory panel reads: "John Constable has found, what he never looked for, popularity. But popular images may misrepresent. This exhibition arises from a suspicion that there might be more to Constable than meets most eyes. It documents him as a self-conscious and culture-conscious person and in consequence asks for reconsideration of his work."
- 11 Letter from Colonel J.H. Constable to Norman Reid, dated 9 June 1971 in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions TG 92/237/Box 1.
- 12 Tate Gallery, *Constable: The Art of Nature*, 12.
- 13 Leslie Parris letter to lenders, dated 18 March 1971 in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/237/Box 1.
- 14 R.B. Beckett's edition of *John Constable's Correspondence* was published in six volumes between 1962 and 1968.
- 15 Christopher Dean's designs are in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/265/Box 4. Sheet 119/05 is a preliminary layout plan indicating the placing of all the exhibits.
- 16 Letter from Michael Jaffé to Norman Reid, dated 4 March 1974 in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/265/Box 1.
- 17 From a transcript of the discussion between Edwin Mullins and Edward Lucie-Smith, which was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 23 November 1971, in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/265/Box 1.
- 18 Denys Sutton, *The Financial Times*, 8 January 1974.
- 19 Letter from Ruth Rattenbury to Miss O. Auty, dated 4 February 1974 in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/265/Box 1.
- 20 For an account of the fuel crisis and the national emergency of January and February 1974, see Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 125-156.
- 21 Daniels, "What Landscape Means to Me", 91.
- 22 Twenty-four installation photographs in Tate Gallery Photography Collection List No. 11, p. 12.
- 23 Letter from Ruth Rattenbury to R.A. Stephenson, dated 17 September 1971 in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/265/Box 1.
- 24 Tate Gallery, *Landscape in Britain, c.1750-1850*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1973). Conal Shields contributed the introduction while Leslie Parris was responsible for the selection and catalogue entries. In his Preface, Parris thanked Shields "for help with many other parts of the catalogue, including the sections dealing with the literature of landscape and the Pre-Raphaelites". In this essay, I have taken the exhibition as a fully collaborative project, and have not attempted to distinguish two authorial voices.
- 25 Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England, 1780-1890*, exhibition catalogue (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 96.
- 26 Lewis' picture, it should be said, has more often been understood in terms of a Georgic ideal—an image of prosperity, peace, and dignity. See John Barrell, *The Dark Side of Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 115-117; and Hugh Prince, "Art and Agrarian Change, 1710-1815", in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds), *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 112-114. For the dire straits in which Britain found itself in the early 1970s, on the other hand, see Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*; and Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were, Britain 1970-1974* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), especially Chapter 15 "The Last Days of Pompeii", 376-612.
- 27 For a discussion of the parallels between exhibitions of historical landscape and contemporary landscape practice, see Nicholas Alfrey and Joy Sleeman, "Framing the Outdoors: Landscape and Land Art in Britain, 1973-1977", *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 29, nos 1-2 (2009): 83-94.
- 28 Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 107; see also John A. Walker, *Arts TV: A History of Arts Television in Britain* (London: John Libbey, 1993), 97.
- 29 Joy Sleeman, "The New Art, Hayward Gallery, London 1972: New as Compromise, or When What Happens Around the Exhibition is as Interesting as What Happens in the Exhibition", *Sculpture Journal* 21, no. 2 (2012), 63-64; and Nicholas Alfrey, Joy Sleeman, and Ben Tufnell, *Uncommon Ground: Land Art in Britain, 1966-1979*, exhibition catalogue (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013), 11, 109.
- 30 Michael Compton, the curator of *Seven Exhibitions*, quoted in Jo Melvin, "The New Climate, 1969-72", in Andrew Wilson (ed.), *Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 123.
- 31 *John Crome, Paintings and Drawings* (12 October-1 December 1968); *The Shock of Recognition: The Landscape of English Romanticism and the Dutch 17th Century School* (23 January-28 February 1971); and *Caspar David Friedrich: Romantic Landscape Painting in Dresden* (6 September-15 October 1972).
- 32 Tim Hilton, *Studio International* 187, no. 963 (February 1974), 88-89. In the mid-1970s, Hilton's own chief interest was in Ruskin.
- 33 Sutton, *The Financial Times*, 8 January 1974.
- 34 *Studio International* 181, no. 933 (May, 1971).
- 35 Letter from Leslie Parris to Professor David Pye in Tate Gallery Public Records: Tate Exhibitions, TG 92/265/Box 1.
- 36 Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

- 37 The Tate Gallery lent nine of the 266 exhibits in the Hayward exhibition. In 1973, nearly forty of the exhibits came from the Tate's own collection—a significant proportion of the whole.
- 38 Ian Jeffrey interviewed for *Kaleidoscope*, broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 9 February 1983.
- 39 The Hayward Gallery had been the venue for *The New Art* in 1972, and although this had a strong landscape component, as already noted, the connection with landscape was not made explicit at the time. For the Arts Council's role in the promotion of Land art, see Alfrey, Sleeman and Tufnell, *Uncommon Ground*, 108–109.
- 40 William Feaver, "The British Landscape", *The Observer*, 20 February 1983.
- 41 Peter Fuller, "Mother Nature", *New Society*, 17 February 1983; John McEwen, "Downhill", *The Spectator*, 5 March 1983.
- 42 William Packer, *The Financial Times*, 19 February 1983; Michael Shepherd, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1983.
- 43 Arts Council, *Landscape in Britain 1850–1950*, exhibition catalogue (London: Arts Council, 1983).
- 44 Ian Jeffrey returned to an aspect of the subject in the following year in his book *The British Landscape 1920–1950* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), essentially a pictorial anthology, organised around the themes of "Dreaming", "The Working Landscape", and "Epic Scenery".
- 45 Between 1980 and the early 1990s, the study of landscape in Britain ca. 1740 to ca. 1860 was carried forward in books and exhibition catalogues by John Barrell, David Solkin, Michael Rosenthal, Ann Bermingham, Stephen Daniels, and Andrew Hemingway, among others, working within a framework already indicated by the 1973 Tate Gallery exhibition.
- 46 Arts Council, *Romanticism Continued*, 1981, a touring exhibition devised by Ian Jeffrey and Brendan Prenderville.

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