Images of Time and Place: Contemporary Views of Landscape



Sally Apfelbaum, L.C. Armstrong, Hugo Bastidas, Lawrence Beck, José Bedia, Dozier Bell, Louise Belcourt, Vija Celmins, Christo, Susan Crile, Rob de Mar, Peter Edlund, Elger Esser, Guy Hundere, Nade Haley, Susan Hartnett, April Gornik.

Alfredo Jaar, John Kalymnios, Nadav Kander, Kim Keever, Cynthia Knott, Justine Kurland, Mitche Kunzman, Sally Mann,

Felicia D. Megginson, Ellen Phelan, Leah Oates, Lesley Punton, Andrea Robbins and Max Becher, Alexis Rockman, <u>May Stevens, Adam Straus, Tomás Sánchez</u>, Joni Sternbach, Jorge Tacla, Tom Uttech, Wim Wenders, and Wayne White

Images of Time and Place: Contemporary Views of Landscape examines a broad range of artists who are working with the concept of landscape–both as the primary content as well as in a supporting role. This exhibition explores the landscape imagery of forty contemporary artists whose work extends or reinvents this traditional genre. The landscape tradition–a thousand years old in China and centuries old in Europe and America–has, in many ways, shaped the context and conventions for looking at nature in works of art and many of the artists in this exhibition reference the work of their historical predecessors. The work–paintings, drawings, prints, photography, installations, sculpture, and video–offers a range of approaches from lyrical representations of nature to abstraction.



Elger Esser, Ruaud, France, 1998



LC Armstrong, Sunset Salute, 2001



April Gornik, Field and Storm, 2003

Trained at the Dusseldorf Kunstakademie, Elger Esser's large-scale photographs record the European landscape in muted tones that suggest the atmosphere and light captured by painters such as Caneletto and Vermeer. In *Ruaud, France*, the horizon is low. Sky, land and water are barely differentiated and compositionally minimalist. Tree branches on a flood plain catch wisps of vegetation. Monochromatic and devoid of people, there is a silence to this place. Esser has referred to the connections between photography and memory as a source of its emotional resonance. This scene is subliminally familiar.

Tomás Sánchez's *Orilla*, is part of an extended meditation on the Latin American landscape. Using white conte crayon on black paper, Sánchez creates an exquisitely detailed rendition of a dense tropical jungle at night. Reflected in the motionless water of a lagoon, the jungle seems preternaturally still. The image has the hallucinatory intensity of a dream. The dark between the trees is pure black. Sky and

water, subtly modulated shades of grey, look much as sky and water do at night, but the vegetation is an unearthly gleaming white. Sánchez works from memory. More real than reality, the drawing is a distillation of the archetypal places that inform the artist's imagination.



Tom Uttech Darky Lake Net, 1987

Tom Uttech's fantasy landscapes, inspired by the northern woodlands of Wisconsin and the American prairie, are also developed from memory. In Darky Lake Net, an animal sits by a dark pond at the edge of a dense pine forest. Flowers grow along a moss bank. It is a dark and mysterious place. A painted frame extends the landscape and serves as a decorative border. Uttech's subjects are often developed while camping and hiking. He makes no sketches or photographs and creates the imagery later when he is back in the studio.

An ominous light suffuses April Gornik's landscape. In Field and Storm she captures the precise moment before a gathering storm, when colors glow with a peculiar intensity, as though storing the sun's last rays. Soft, fat brush strokes convey the sense of specific grasses and scrub, already tilted by the rising wind. The structure of the composition is classically balanced, resembling many we have seen before: a curving path leading the eye into the distance across a field framed by a mass of trees extending from the left, and range of hills further away on the right. The violent contrast between the resonant teal-black of the darkening sky and the harsh yellows and greens of the vegetation subverts our expectations. The dissonance between the

traditional composition and the highly dramatic color intensifies the sense of menace inherent in her subject.

The simple format of Cynthia Knott's marine paintings-sky over sea-the horizon a straight edge dividing them, comprises infinitely subtle modulations of color, space and light. Working outdoors at first and then in the studio, she applies thin layers of oil and translucent encaustic, and metallic pigments, scraping them down, sanding them, refining until she achieves an ethereal atmospheric effect. At first glance, Victory looks like a late Rothko, but dramatic masses of cloud glow from within, recalling Turner or American Luminist painting, combining the abstract and the Romantic Sublime. Her paintings originate with a specific view at a particular moment, but they become an almost metaphysical meditation on the grandeur and mutability of nature.

Ellen Phelan also renews the conventions of earlier landscape painting. In White Cedar Woods, a grove of trees stands motionless in a mist of filtered light. Seemingly a dream or a distant memory, Ellen Phelan's painting White Cedar Woods, is based on close observation and on the artist's photographs of trees on her property in the Adirondacks. Using a restrained palette of dusty browns and greens, she applies thin paint, smearing, scumbling and incorporating accidental drips and visible brush strokes to create a sensuous, near-abstract surface. The tree trunks, firmly drawn in accurate perspective, are veiled by a light brown wash, unifying the composition, and blurring the distinction between observed reality and romantic imagination.

L.C. Armstrong's sunset over a beach with crashing waves references both the landscape tradition and pop culture. In the 1970s she earned her way through school customizing vans with airbrushed vistas. Large flowers, like fireworks over the beach, fill the foreground and have the vivacity and invention of Odilon Redon's floral compositions. Passion flowers, iris, columbines, and lady slippers are shown along with invented species. In Sunset Salute two of the latter have diminutive humans for stamen. Spiky cactus-like stems are the result of lighted bomb fuses that leave wisps of carbon. The surface is built in intentional acts of painting and chance occurrences of the burning fuses. This paradise, hermetically sealed in a thick layer of resin, is both dazzling and disturbing.

Alexis Rockman's work, a combination of natural science and fantasy, has long examined the precarious and predatory relationships within the plant and animal kingdoms and between man and nature generally. Man Eating Plant, 2000, grew out of a camping trip to the rainforests of Guyana that Rockman took with friends in 1999. This work contains a self-portrait-he is the protagonist in the center about to be eaten by the plant. The jungle, painted in acid greens, is dense and teeming with flora and fauna. Playing off the tradition of tropical travel iconographies, the style looks something like an illustration for a boy's adventure story. He also pokes fun at his role as an eco-tourist. Rockman's works are meticulously researched and his sources range from the Bronx Zoo to the Museum of Natural History. He has worked as an illustrator and columnist for Natural History Magazine. It is often noted that his paintings resemble the dioramas found at the Museum of Natural History-where his mother worked as an archeologist while he was growing up.



Alexis Rockman, Man-Eating Plant, 2000

Rob de Mar's small sculpture *Stroll*, offers an ecosystem in miniature. Meandering supports appear as pathways that connect pine-covered mountains. There is also a tropical island with a palm tree and cactus. These biomorphic forms, softened with flocking, seem like some sort of child's toy and offer a whimsical view of the land.

Guy Hundere's tiny digital video, *Impasse*, looks like an ordinary rural landscape seen through the window of a speeding car. But the red farmhouse in the distance remains motionless, while identical strips of clouds, fields, and roadside pass by over and over again, each at a different speed. At first the artist's use of digitally manipulated still photographs is merely fascinating and disconcerting. Eventually it produces a nightmarish sense of dislocation.

Artifice and the representation of nature is examined in the rich, color saturated landscapes of Kim Keever. A World Before seems to capture a glimpse of the primordial. Dramatic vistas, back-lighted mountains with streams flowing through them, and swirling clouds provide the basic elements of Keever's romantic landscapes that seem to epitomize the 19th century sublime. Keever's C-prints of preternatural locations leave one wondering where such places might be found. They are, in fact, manufactured with plaster models, gels, lighting, and dyes inside a 150-gallon tank.

Conversely, the mysterious and dramatic scene in Susan Crile's painting is based on personal experience and photographic documentation of a specific episode in recent history. Burning Lake is an image from the first Gulf War and recalls its consequences to the environment. Over 700 wells in the oil fields of Kuwait were set on fire by retreating Iraqi troops in 1991. They burned for nine months. In Crile's images oil lakes, contaminate the ground water, blaze out of control. Fire and smoke illuminate the dessert sky that is dark as the night. It is a view that is both apocalyptic and literal.



Peter Edlund Another America: When Rivers Turn to Fire (After F. Church), 2001

Peter Edlund's *Another America: When Rivers Turn to Fire (After Church)*, explores the myths and idealism of 19th American imagery through the idiom of the Hudson River School. For the past seven years Edlund has used the landscapes of artists such as Cole, Church, Bierstadt, and Durand to comment on the social, political, and historical realities of the 19th century, and by extension, contemporary society. In *Another America* Edlund has reworked one of Frederic Church's best known paintings, *Niagara* (1857; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) and has painted it in the same dimensions as the original. Here the colors are lurid reds and oranges and the landscape looks volcanic. For Edlund it recalls the debates around slavery that were taking place at the time that the more placid version was created.

Alfredo Jaar works with photography from a political perspective. His work in this exhibition from the Rwanda Project, features three lightboxes with landscapes that are both beautiful and provocative. In 1994 Alfredo Jaar visited Rwanda where 800,000 people, mostly Tutsi, were murdered in the third largest genocide of the 20th century. These images are understated and only the titles give a sense of their meaning: *Landscape (Floating bodies); Landscape (One thousand hills), and Landscape (Land mines)*. The first is a picturesque lake where 100,000 bodies were dumped. The second refers to tourist brochure descriptions of the country and the third shows a country road that is planted with mines. The images are incongruous- like the flawless beauty of September 11. The Rwandan landscape will always bear this history despite its beauty.



Alfredo Jarr, Landscape (Land mines), 1999; Landscape (One thousand hills), 1999; Landscape (Floating bodies), 1999



Sally Mann Untitled (Deep South #30), 1998

Sally Mann's large-scale photograph *Untitled* (*Deep South #30*) is a part of a larger series in which she explores the Southern landscape. Mann also approaches the imagery in this series as a location and context in which events took place. For Mann the deep South is a region layered in mythologies and its history of slavery, the Civil War, and the civil rights era. In *Deep South #30* gnarled roots rise out of a miasmal cypress swamp. Mist and fog surround the scene that is both mysterious and romanticized. Working with the collodion process with wet plate glass negatives, Mann replicates the techniques of Civil War photographers like Matthew Brady, Timothy O'Sullivan, and Alexander Gardiner. Damaged lenses and tea staining further recreated the look of 19th century photography.

Wim Wenders, a celebrated European film-maker, is perhaps best known here as the director of *Wings of Desire* and *The Buena Vista Social Club*. He has been honored by the Catholic Church for the spiritual content of his films. Trained as a visual artist, he has been active as a photographer for many years. The monumental scale of Wenders' photograph of Jerusalem as seen from the *Mount of Olives* is accentuated by cropping, implying a huge vista that opens mentally onto a sacred and politically charged

landscape. The Mount of Olives, scene of numerous episodes in the Gospels is a place filled with Christian associations. In the distance we see The Dome of The Rock on Temple Mount, a Muslim shrine built to shelter an ancient stone sacred to both Muslims and Jews. The site of the Temple of Solomon, it is traditionally the rock from which Mohammed ascended to heaven. In the foreground, a modern garbage dump emphatically expresses the materialism and alienation of our times, suggesting as well the chaos and waste of the present in the Holy Land.

In Dozier Bell's Surface II appears to be about a specific event but is left ambiguous. A dark sea and a night sky filled with billowing smoke. Five distinct explosions illuminate the horizon. A telescope viewfinder in the foreground frames a portion of the landscape. Someone is watching and has targeted this scene in its sights. The location and event are unidentified but we can easily develop a narrative. In the painting Dozier Bell focuses on landscape as a stage for surveillance, siege, and destruction.



Jorge Tacla focuses on components of nature rather than the vista in *Mass of Vapor*. At first the painting appears to be a Constable-like cloud study, executed on a rough-textured woven jute surface. These transient forms verge Dozier Bell, Surface II, 1998 on abstraction and are played against an eerie blue sky. For many years Tacla's work has focused on architecture

and cityscapes that suggest civilizations in decline or in ruins. Mass of Vapor is from a new series created in the aftermath of September 11 in which Tacla focuses on cement and cloud forms, mixing his ongoing imagery with the specific structures and atmosphere of New York City. The series conveys a sense of urban anxiety in the age of global terrorism.



Mitche Kunzman Your Hills Belong to No One, Sarajevo, 1998

Mitche Kunzman's meditation on the landscape of war, Your Hills Belong to No One, Sarajevo, consists of three narrow horizontal panoramas-three dark mountains in the same mountain range. The mountains, based on photographs but not directly copied from them, are almost monochromatic, with crumbling stone walls, tree trunks and bushes indicated by flicks of white paint. Latin phrases are inscribed on the harsh blue sky-res nullius, belonging to no one; locus neminis, the place of no one; *nemo*, no one. The translucent rectangular overlays suggest the imposition of a human intellectual presence upon nature and the destructive urge to create boundaries on the continuity of a unified landscape. Kunzman received both a BFA and an MA from Lehman College.

Written language is also a part of the imagery in May Stevens' Lagoon, Fort Cronkhite, Marin Headlands, Sausalito, CA. In which barely legible words in a silver script, shimmer across the surface of the water and on the shore. They are drawn from oral histories made by the soldiers posted at Fort Cronkhite, a military installation formerly on the site. This large-scale, unstretched painting meshes a view of the land-across the Golden Gate Bridge near San Francisco-with the ghostly voices of the men who once served there. A strip attached to the bottom captures the daily banter of camp life-target practice anecdotes and advice in the mess hall. Veils of acrylic wash add to the mystery of this hillside and lagoon. In other works in the Rivers and Other Bodies of Water series, Stevens borrows texts from authors ranging from Virginia Woolf to Violetta Parra.



Wayne White, Mini Mall, 2002

Language is a significant element of the landscape in the work of Wayne White who paints directly on mass-produced lithographs. These sentimental rural scenes were found in a thrift shop. Each image in the four-part work Mini Mall is dominated by a word that references a product or service familiar from the signage on countless strip malls. The painted words, visually integrated with their printed backgrounds by discreet touching up, seem monstrous intrusions on their natural settings. The type is hard edged, modern looking, seductively iridescent, suggesting that contemporary consumerism is destroying a sweeter, gentler, rural way of life. But the landscapes themselves are commercial products, selling an idealized conception of a non-existent past.

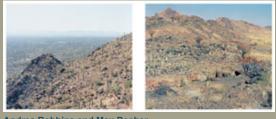
Adam Strauss approaches painting with irony and humor and uses the conventions of landscape painting to play with our aesthetic and perceptual expectations. In *Man Pointing to Something Outside the Painting*, a lone figure stands on the crest of a ridge overlooking the ocean. We are foiled in our attempt to see the object of his attention, which lies outside the frame. It is a work that relies on our understanding of what a painting is and how it tells a story. It then sets up a situation in which it does not deliver.

With irony and deadpan realism Hugo Bastidas uses landscape imagery to weave narratives that focus on the mental stress and environment disruption of modern life. In *Iceberg*, he offers an improbable scene in a photographic, grisaille palette. A group of people in shirtsleeves stands on a tropical island while a massive iceberg floats nearby. Perhaps it is the result of the melting of the polar ice cap. Their indifference to a situation that should cause alarm suggests ecological complacence and denial.

The primary focus of Andrea Robbins and Max Becher's work is what they call the transportation of place–situations in which one isolated place strongly resembles a distant one. *Arizona and Namibia* is a case in point. A casual glance suggests that the two framed photographs are two segments of the same geological formation. Closer inspection reveals that all the details are different. The view of Arizona, significantly, includes distant roads and industrial buildings. The air is hazier than in Namibia: the colors softer, the plants familiar cactus. In Africa, the desert blooms with spiky red blossoms and yellow wild-flowers under a clear blue sky. Hills and rocks extend to the frame of the photo suggesting a true wilderness. The ostensibly dispassionate documentation of similarities contains a subtext of ecological critique.



Hugo Bastidas, Iceberg, 2002



Andrea Robbins and Max Becher Co-Landscapes, Arizona and Namibia, 2002

Lawrence Beck's photograph is meticulous and

detailed: a close - up view rather than a panoramic vista. The scene is an arid landscape: several different kinds of cactus, narrow leafed succulents, a few bushes, a bare tree under a bright blue sky. But there are too many different kinds of plants too close together. The presence of steel girders and a chain link fence identify the location as part of a Botanical Garden. Lawrence Beck's photograph is meticulously clear and detailed. Every spine is visible on the Golden Barrel Cactus bursting with vitality beside a primly didactic identification label. The climbing plant next to it, simultaneously bearing both blossoms and fruit is already putting forth rosy new shoots. In spite of, or perhaps because of their containment within manmade boundaries, these plants convey a sense of almost comical exuberance .

Nadav Kander's *Field II* is from a series that explores the Mid-western landscape from the perspective of an outsider–Kander lives in London. The photograph, taken at night, offers a roadside view of a field in winter with its broken cornstalks blanketed in snow. Stark artificial lights shine in the foreground . The velvet blacks of night, only found outside the ambient lights of cities, are in dramatic contrast. There is a pervasive stillness to this classic American landscape.

In Joni Sternbach's 02.07.10 #8 from the series *Sea/Sky*, a vast soft gray sky, light to dark, left to right, looks more like a drawing than a photograph. The crisp white of the surf and the absolute black of the miniscule figures in the water display the full range of tonality available to black and white photography. The tiny anonymous figures of surfers, busy as ants, are dwarfed by their surroundings. They seem oblivious to the their insignificance in the natural world.

Paradura 3 by Leah Oates is one of a series of photographs, installations, and sculptures that explore the way people remember landscape. "Paradura", an invented word, is a fusion of "paradise," or nature, and "duration". The back lit curve in a two-lane country road is set in a circular lens like aperture. It is the kind of road you see through the windshield on summer vacations or country errands. The circle is in fact the body of a second lens inserted in the camera and photographed simultaneously with the landscape it frames. According to the artist, "the circle implies an eye peeking from inside an opening a viewer can move through be situated in an imaginary landscape that is suspended in time." The compressed fragment of road suggests both speed and duration, while at the same time evoking a larger, less tightly focused landscape, a personal association in each viewer's mind.

For Felicia Megginson, the forest is the locus of ancestral origins. Using an in-camera double exposure, she situates an image of her face within an image of nature. The woodlands seem both to surround her and to emanate from her in *Permutation* #2. Landscape becomes a metaphor for self. While her photographs recreate the emotional impression of time spent in the woods, they are also, she says, "part of a larger query regarding ideas of the self, issues of representation, and the place of African-American women in today's visual culture."

Justine Kurland's *Summer of Love* is a staged photograph with figures in various amorous groupings scattered on beach dunes. In this formal composition only the dog at the center of this tableau seems aware of the observer. Kurland's work often explores utopian fantasies, with communities and individuals in communion with nature. It is, in a sense, a contemporary sharp-focus view of Eden.



Nade Haley, Raveling, 2003

Nade Haley's installation *Raveling*, a DVD projection with sandblasted glass, is about place, time, and the sense of things coming apart. The word raveling has multiple and seemingly contradictory meanings: to unravel, to clarify by separating the aspects of, and to tangle or complicate. In Haley's DVD a canoe passes through reeds at the water's edge. Light reflects on the surface of the lake catching glimpses of blue sky and rocks beneath its translucent surface. The DVD, comprised of four sections, is projected onto four pieces of sandblasted plate glass each with a still image from one of the sections. The constant movement, slowed by fifty percent, and the lack of a horizon line cause a disorientation. One is lost in a hypnotic sequence of patterns. The effect is mesmerizing. The DVD was filmed at Lake Ainsley in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

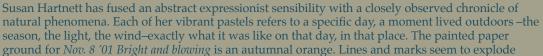
John Kalymnios' kinetic work, *Seascape VI*, also relies on actual motion and horizonless fragments of the landscape. Large photographic transparencies of waves move back and forth in layers. It is as if we have a small window onto a vast body of water. Lighted from behind, the waves are luminous and a color saturated blue. Decidedly low-tech with its creaking gears and simple mechanism, the work is in essence an "ocean machine", transporting viewers to a place controlled by the tides and the wind.

Vija Celmins also focuses on isolated details of nature without reference to horizon line or ponts of orientation–waves on the ocean, the night sky, the desert sands. Her paintings are meticulously worked from photographs, her own and those taken by others. In *Night Sky* (*Reversed*), the field of stars is photo-based. The photograph is a negative, making the night sky as light as day.

In Sally Apfelbaum's work the landscape is approached conceptually. *Untitled (Giverny)*, photographed in Claude Monet's garden in Giverny, France, references the Impressionist tradition and presents a flowerbed with a history. Deconstructing the garden into cardinal points, Apfelbaum produces an image that is a composite of views to the north, south, east and west. The photograph with multiple exposures on one negative produces a cohesive image and a subtle sense that it is not entirely naturalistic.

Lesley Punton works in an unusual hybrid of painting and drawing. On first viewing *Forrest #6*, the canvas presents a sensuous white surface. Closer inspection reveals a web of finely drawn graphite lines on the smooth paint: spiky loops and scratches that sketch in faint images of underbrush and trees. Extending vertically and horizontally across the surface, they are specific segments of a boundaryless wilderness. Simultaneously dense and minimal, Punton's work dwells on the mysterious fullness and uniformity of the forest, and the exquisitely varied detail it contains.

Abstraction is integral to the landscapes of Louise Belcourt. The monumental green shapes in *Middle Cedar* #7 resemble giant furniture. Friendly presences, they are in fact images of clipped hedges in a place by the sea in Nova Scotia that she has been visiting for many years. Painting outdoors, Belcourt captures the sense of air, light and space in the landscape, but the paintings are finished in her studio. For Belcourt, representation and abstraction are equally fundamental impulses. Using the tension between the image and the paintings physical presence, she achieves a sense of vastness that is visceral and also psychological.





Louise Belcourt, Middle Cedar #7 , 2003

across the surface, bobbing and weaving in a shallow space. They evoke beach grasses, twigs stripped of leaves, last berries on branches swaying frantically in the autumn wind. We infer this from the title. A distilled notation of a specific sensory experience, the composition remains transcendently abstract, its strenuous energy a metaphor for the vitality of the natural world.

Abstraction and symbolism mark the landscape imagery of José Bedia. Bedia, a practitioner of Palo Monte, an Afro-Cuban religion, draws frequently from its symbols and imagery as well as from Native American sources. The landscape in this exhibition, *Mato Paha*, 1995, literally Bear Mountain, is a location in where shamen are initiated. A photograph of a man smoking a sacred pipe is applied to the surface of the canvas in two places. Two stylized mountains repeat his outline and in essence are the figure. Lines within describe the skeleton and internal organs and connect the figures, the hills and the earth. The lines are incised with fingers dragged through the paint, direct and emotionally charged. A lone figure strides between the two hills as a stylized horse ascends. Other figures are hidden in the landscape. Bedia's style has been described as "primalist," working with spiritually derived symbols. Bedia studied, as an apprentice, with a Lakota shaman on the Rosebud Reservation in 1985.

For this exhibition the definition of landscape is intentionally broad and a study for Christos and Jeanne-Claude's *The Gates, Central Park,* is included as an aesthetic intervention in the urban landscape of New York City. In February 2005, *The Gates, Central Park,* a project first conceived by the artist team Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 1979, will finally come to life. Thousands of panels of saffron colored fabric will be suspended from slender post and lintel portals crossing twenty three miles of the walkways in Central Park at intervals of 10 to 15 feet. For sixteen days, the Christo *Gates* will interact with Olmstead's landscape, briefly creating a new and magical environment. According to the artists, pedestrians will experience *The Gates* as a golden ceiling casting warm shadow. From the buildings surrounding the park they will seem like a golden river appearing through the bare branches of the trees and highlighting the shape of the footpaths. The working drawing in this exhibition is filled with technical information. The left-hand panel is the placement of the portals, outlining the shape and the scope of the project. The larger panel incorporates fabric samples, photography and writing to give the feel for the appearance of the piece and precise information about materials and structural techniques. Like the project itself the drawing combines technical and visual elements to produce an esthetic whole.

Like all of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's outdoor installations, including *Valley Curtain, Running Fence, Surrounded Islands* and *Wrapped Reichstag, The Gates* represents the culmination of years of political negotiation to obtain permits, environmental impact surveys, and engineering studies. All these works are temporary. No public funds are ever used. From start to finish, including the task of restoring the site to its original condition, they are funded by the sale of Christo's drawings.



Christo

The Gates, Project for Central Park, New York City, 2002