Finding Nature: Landscapes in Art, Western Society, and the Natural World

Victoria Gadson

Southwestern University

2015

This honors thesis is dedicated to God. Without Him and his majestic, created world, I would have no inspiration for my paintings of nature. He has graciously gifted me with an artistic talent that I hope and pray will remain with me throughout my life. Thank you. Everything I am and will be is because of you.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my honors committee, Professor Victoria Star Varner, Professor Kimberly Smith, Professor Patrick Veerkamp, and Professor Melissa Johnson for giving their time, support, effort, and mentorship to make this project possible. Thank you for sharing your thoughts, opinions, and knowledge throughout this process and granting me the opportunity to produce an honors thesis and an accompanying body of paintings. I could not have done any of this without your dedication, generosity, expertise, and encouragement.

I would also like to thank the Southwestern University Library and staff for making available the extensive collection of books and other resources that contributed to my ability to conduct research and find the information I was looking for. In addition, I would like to thank my parents, Eric and Sherry Gadson, for supporting me every step of the way and making it possible for me to attend Southwestern University. Thank you to my grandparents, William and Nettie Lemon and my wonderful brothers, Matthew and Andrew. You have all helped shape me into the person and the artist I am today through your support, love, and care. Lastly, I would like to thank my dog, Pepper, who graciously put up with the loss of attention due to my long hours spent conducting research, reading, writing, and painting.

Victoria Gadson

Table of Contents

I Introduction

II Nature's Duality: Experience and Representation

III Historical Viewpoints on Eighteenth through Nineteenth Century Landscape

IV Nature in Art: The Twentieth Century

V Contemporary Nature: My Work in the Twenty-First Century

VI Appendix

I Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Coastal Landscape in a Storm*, 1776
II John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821
III Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859
IV Henri Matisse, *View of Saint-Tropez*, 1904
V Henri Matisse, *By the Sea (Gulf of Saint-Tropez)*, 1904
VI André Derain, *Return of the Fishing Boats*, 1905
VII Ernst Kirchner, *Four Bathers*, 1910
VIII Ernst Kirchner, *Bathers at Moritzburg*, 1909
IX Ernst Kirchner, *Winter Landscape in Moonlight*, 1919
X Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970
XI Harriet Feigenbaum, *Willow Rings*, 1985
XII Zaria Forman, *The Maldives*, 2013-2014
XIII John Pfahl, *Métamorphoses de la Terre*, 2010
XIV Guy Laramée, *The Great Wall*, n.d.
XV The Boyle Family, *Study of Brown Mudtracks with Tyre Tracks and Coal Dust, Portishead*, 2006
XVI Alexis Rockman, *South*, 2008
XVII Melissa Brown, *Pond Scum*, 2007
XVIII Melissa Brown, *Niagara at Dawn*, 2005
XIX Yutaka Sone, *Highway Junctions*, 2002

My Work

XX Victoria Gadson, *Beyond the Sea*, 2013
XXI Victoria Gadson, *East to West*, 2014
XXII Victoria Gadson, *This Land*, 2014
XXIII Victoria Gadson, *Nature's Autonomy*, 2014
XXIV Victoria Gadson, *Ablaze (Rise)*, 2014
XXV Victoria Gadson, *Cloud Studies*, 2014
XXVI Victoria Gadson, *Realm*, 2014
XXVII Victoria Gadson, *Aurora*, 2015
XXVIII Victoria Gadson, *In Nature*, 2015

VII Bibliography

I

Introduction

Since the eighteenth century, when landscape painting reached a new level of significance and popularity in art, nature has continued to be a source of deep interest in Western civilization. Nature is an important part of Western society's history and culture. It exists beyond the bounds of complete comprehension, and in Western thought, has nurtured a desire to possess an intimate knowledge of the natural world. Changes in society's relationship with and understanding of the natural world have affected the West's views of nature over time. Many of the shifts in attitude towards nature are seen throughout the history of landscape painting.

In the Western art tradition, many artists have attempted to characterize nature and represent it in various ways, particularly in the genre of landscape painting. Artists are one of many groups that have sought to make sense of the human connection to the natural world by observing, interpreting, and representing nature. This has resulted in works of art that combine objective reality with the artists' subjective portrayals and interpretations of the natural world. Painters of landscape represent nature in ways that reflect their experiences with and the preconceived ideas about nature that have been constructed by society as well as the physical reality of the natural world's existence and appearance. This creates a sense of tension and an interesting dynamic in depictions of nature between the physical qualities of the natural world and the culturally mediated, social construction of landscape.

This essay analyzes the ways in which Western society's changing views of the natural world have influenced the treatment of nature and its portrayal in painted landscapes. My analysis begins in the eighteenth century, when landscape painting was firmly established as an important genre in painting. The history of landscape painting is a dense and rich topic that

crosses cultural boundaries. My honors project focuses on landscape painting specifically in the Western art tradition. I define nature as the natural, non-human part of the physical world in which we live, (meaning forests, trees, plants, mountains, bodies of water, the sky, etc.), with landscape functioning as a term for the socially constructed view of nature that has developed over the course of history. Alongside my research, I have developed a body of paintings to explore the practice and theory of landscape painting. These works embody my personal views of nature, set in the context of Western society's present and historical viewpoints on the subject.

Landscape is painted in a wide variety of styles and art movements. The examples, movements, and aesthetic theories cited are those most relevant to my discussion of Western society's relationship with nature. This essay does not contain a complete overview of the history of landscape painting, but it does touch upon several major aspects of the genre. Through analyzing the history of landscape painting from the eighteenth century forward, I find and examine the intersection between society's ideas of what landscape is versus the physical realities of the natural world.

II

Nature's Duality: Experience and Representation

Noel Castree, a British geographer and author of several books on the concept of nature, wrote, "Without it, [nature], we could not live, and we would (quite literally) have no past, present or future."[1] He was not simply referring to the material needs and resources nature provides for the purpose of daily life and survival.[2] He was referring to something much deeper than that: A connection to the natural world that is stronger than one simply forged by necessity. In Western society, nature has become more than just a means to facilitate survival. It is part of what defines our culture. Nature helps to form the groundwork for how we understand and relate to the physical world in which we live. It is a source of recreation, study, and meaning for us as well as the foundation of so many of the things we produce. Without it, many of the things that have become fundamental to the functionality, well-being, and cultural norms of Western society might not exist.

Landscape painting is a medium that is evocative of the natural world. In part, it is a social construction in that it often presents a view of nature that is based largely upon a given society's view of it. Such works are by-products of the relationships people have developed with the natural world. Even so, the socially constructed views of nature that the West has crafted over many centuries and presented in the form of landscape paintings are still inspired by and grounded in nature itself. Nature's continued presence in the larger world, whether on the edges of society in the form of a national park or as a plant outside someone's window, provides us with visual examples as inspiration. Because of this, we are able to maintain a connection with nature and continue to contemplate and analyze its significance. Landscape painting is one

1. Noel Castree, *Making Sense of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.
2. Ibid.

manifestation or example of the process of interpreting and investigating nature. Many of the things derived from the natural world take forms that do not directly represent or evoke its appearance. Landscape painting is one of the few examples that can and often does.

Edward S. Casey, philosopher and author of *Representing Place: Landscape Painting & Maps*, questions why people choose to depict nature in art, writing, "Why take the trouble to represent what we already possess—what we now see with our eyes and now feel under our feet?"[3] He questions the significance of landscape representations in a world in which nature itself exists in a physical, touchable form. Casey also makes the point that " … the experience of landscape … ," of being out in nature, on its own is enough to satisfy most people.[4] He goes on to say that despite this fact, landscape requires a " … represented being as part of its very identity."[5] He argues that in order to fully experience nature, one has to go out and look at an actual landscape and also produce or view a representation of it. This argument is problematic for several reasons, namely because it suggests that landscape representations are only significant because they enhance the experience of nature. It also fails to address the larger connotations behind the creation of landscape as an art form. Lastly, it does not acknowledge the fact that landscape representations are not fundamentally a part of the experience of nature. In reality, they function as evocative images that are a bridge to seeing and understanding the natural world, not as replacements or extensions of it. While I agree that it is right to question and explore the significance behind representations of the natural world, I propose that the creation of such depictions stems from the human desire to make sense of, assign meaning to, and connect with the world in which we live and of which nature is an essential part.

3. Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting & Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., xiv.

Nature is a part of the larger world in which we live. It " … is part and parcel of human activity, experience, and discourse."[6] Because nature is an essential part of humankind's very existence, there appears to reside within many of us, particularly in Western cultures, a deeply ingrained need to signify its role in our lives. This is evidenced by our desire to represent or evoke the look and feel of the natural environment in and through art. Representing the natural world in art is one way of grasping at the significance behind the human relationship with nature. As quoted by Castree, the philosopher Michael Shapiro once wrote, "Representations do not [just] 'imitate' reality but are the practices through which things take-on meaning and value … "[7] The ways in which the West sees and understands the natural world are largely subject to the contexts of how nature fits within Western society and its viewpoints at any given time in history. This makes the practice of representing nature the process through which we attempt to internalize its importance and the impact of its presence in our lives. In art, "landscape painting marks the stages in our conception of nature."[8] However, while we in part represent nature based on how it fits with the context of our lives and society, the last century has seen a marked increase in the number of cases of people seeking out nature for the purpose of having a nature experience. This suggests a longing to reconnect with the land on a deeper, more personal level.

The West's interest in nature goes far beyond just representing it in order to understand and explain. As postulated from Casey's argument, there is something deeper behind the experience of being in nature and viewing it that continues to compel individuals, particularly those in Western cultures, to seek, study, and even pursue nature. William Cronon, an environmental historian wrote, "As we gaze into the mirror it, [nature], holds up for us, we too

6. Rachael Ziady DeLue, "Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds," in *Landscape Theory*, eds. Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2008), 11.
7. Castree, *Making Sense of Nature*, 47.
8. Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 1.

easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires."[9] Those longings reflect a human desire to forge a connection with the land that is deeper and more profound than simply analyzing nature based on where it fits in our world. This too manifests itself in landscape painting, as many artists seek out nature with the goal to depict their own personal experience and view of it. They strive to understand and convey the natural world on a more personal level than would be possible if they only viewed it through the lens of society. Beyond the social construction of nature, there is a growing desire in Western culture to get back to nature, as it exists beyond the bounds of how it is contextualized by society and culture.

In his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness," Cronon writes, "Each of us who has spent time there, [out in nature], can conjure images and sensations that seem all the more hauntingly real for having engraved themselves so indelibly on our memories."[10] These memories, he notes, are not just our own. When recounted, others recognize these encounters with nature, because the experience of nature is familiar on a universally cultural level, ironically in part because society has provided us with so much mediated landscape imagery.[11] When viewing a landscape painting, one is unconsciously aware of and engaging culturally derived images of nature while at the same time reflecting on the fact that there are aspects of nature that are not created by culture. Cronon challenges his readers in his writings about landscape and experiencing nature, saying, "Remember the feelings of such moments [in nature], and you will know as well as I do that you were in the presence of something irreducibly nonhuman, something profoundly Other

9. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 69-70.
10. Ibid., 70.
11. Ibid.

than yourself. Wilderness is made of that…"[12] It is this feeling and experience that many people seem to crave and seek out when they go out into nature. This same seeking underlies the drive of those who choose to represent the natural world in art.

Done well, effective landscape art captures the essence and impact of its subject by evoking the feelings associated with experiencing nature. In the history of landscape painting, we clearly see that shift from viewing nature in terms of its role in human society to viewing it as something to be experienced and represented in its natural state. Cronon makes note of the divergent paths in our relationship with nature, writing, "Go back 250 years in American and European history, and you do not find nearly so many people wandering around remote corners of the planet looking for what today we would call 'the wilderness experience.'"[13] Working to capture the experience of nature or objectively represent it in a truthful manner in a painting is part of the artist attempting to find or show the deeper meaning in nature that is found outside of the context of society's construction of landscape. It could be said that landscape painting is part of the discourse between mediated landscape imagery and nature.

Socially constructed views of landscape have had a large impact not only how we see nature, but also on how it has been depicted in art. Nature as it is seen in art " … is, [in part], a profoundly human construction. This is not to say that the nonhuman world is somehow unreal or a mere figment of our imaginations—far from it. But the way we describe and understand that world is so entangled with our own values and assumptions that [it sometimes seems as if] the two can never be fully be separated."[14] Art historian Rachael Ziady DeLue says this is "because

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. William Cronon, "Introduction: In Search of Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 25.

landscape is both our subject and the thing within which we exist."[15] Even when we try to capture the true essence of nature in art, rather than interpreting what it symbolizes to us in regards to our culture, it is difficult to look at nature in a completely objective manner. We struggle to overcome the subjective mindset towards nature that has developed culturally in Western history. The very act of representing nature as landscape in painting is significant, because it signifies the cognitive act of converting nature from a larger environment into a single scene that can be captured in a painting, and this mental practice has characterized the West's relationship with nature.[16] Whether an artist is choosing to paint directly from nature or to paint nature as a symbol of something, in Western thought, it has become the norm to frame nature into a series of landscape scenes. This act serves as evidence that in many ways, nature is already characterized in the mind before it is depicted. This sets up a tension between what we know and see of nature versus how society teaches us to view it.

In Western art, nature becomes landscape, " … mediated land, land that has been aesthetically processed. It is land that has arranged itself, or has been arranged by the artistic vision, so that it is ready to sit for its portrait."[17] The Western world's presentation of nature in art is highly influenced by this mindset. As a result, in the genre of landscape painting, there emerges a kind of duality in the way in which nature is represented. In one aspect, landscape painting reflects the crucial role that nature plays in our lives and how we define it in the context of Western society. This view presents nature in the form of a landscape that is interpreted as symbolic of something. In contrast, many artists try to present nature as objectively as possible. At times, both types of representation are present and in the same painting. Even when an artist attempts see nature in an objective manner, they are still subject to preconceived notions about

15. DeLue, "Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds," 10.
16. Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 1.
17. Ibid., 7.

landscape, because "a 'landscape', cultivated or wild, is already artifice before it has become the subject of a work of art. Even when we simply *look* we are already shaping and interpreting."[18]

18. Ibid., 1.

III

Historical Viewpoints on Eighteenth through Nineteenth Century Landscape

In Western civilization's history, nature has played an important role in society. Still, there has not always been a consistent contemplation of and appreciation for the natural world. In many ways, the history of landscape painting in Western art has paralleled, even followed, the history of the West's relationship with nature. Prior to the eighteenth century, landscape in painting was primarily used in these contexts: to depict a setting for figurative works, which were often religious paintings; to show an idealized, pastoral lifestyle grounded in classical ideas; to symbolize the land possessed by an individual; and to show generalized, world views of a large region of land. These contexts reflect a less personal connection with nature. In the past, land was often viewed as more of a commodity or a means to an end rather than something to be valued and appreciated simply on the merits of its aesthetic qualities.

From the eighteenth century forward, the West's view of nature started to shift. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, landscape painting achieved a new level of significance in Western art, as a "back to nature" cultural direction began to emerge.[19] During this time, many artists began to break away from producing paintings in which nature served as a backdrop for other subjects rather than making it the primary subject of the work. This change, which renewed and strengthened interest in landscape, was partially driven by industrialization. The emerging, newfound appreciation for the aesthetic qualities of nature was in part made possible by eighteenth century improvements in transportation. The resulting increase in travel meant people began visiting scenic locations that they were unable to in the past.[20] Visual images such as landscape paintings would continue to promote this appreciation, and many of them were

19. Nils Büttner, *Landscape Painting: A History* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2000), 223.
20. Mark Roskill, "The Developing Appeal of Landscape, 1750-1830," in *The Languages of Landscape* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 91.

grounded in the aesthetic theories of the time. The paintings discussed in this essay reflect the interaction between the culturally mediated view of landscape and nature's inherent characteristics.

During the eighteenth century, the picturesque emerged as a popular aesthetic ideal. The picturesque, accompanied by the act of picturesque tourism to seek out nature, was one manifestation of the social construction of the idea of landscape. William Gilpin, one of the major contributors to the theory, encouraged travelers to specifically look for landscapes that contained qualities deemed fit for a painting.[21] The picturesque ideal in art presents a docile, subdued view of nature, and it was modeled after the work of seventeenth century artists like Claude Lorrain rather than directly from nature itself.[22] Because of this, the picturesque aesthetic only served to capture one side of nature, a side that adhered to the socially promoted artistic ideals of the time.

The picturesque ideal's reliance on landscape paintings of the previous century is precisely what DeLue was referring to when she described landscape as confused or the subject of an identity crisis, particularly in the way society views it. She states that it is this way " … because we, ourselves cannot properly see it, [nature or landscape], … [as] we have seen way too much of it already … "[23] She uses Nathaniel Hawthorne as an example, citing his first personal encounter with Niagara Falls, during which he came to the conclusion that " … he had been made as if blind to the falls by previous and countless encounters with representations of Niagara … "[24] The picturesque embodies this, because both artists and travelers seeking picturesque

21. William Gilpin, "Essay on Picturesque Beauty (1792)," in *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, ed. Joshua C. Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 47.
22. Andrew Ballantyne, "The Picturesque and its Development," in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 117.
23. DeLue, "Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds, 10.
24. Ibid., 4.

views in nature were looking for the nature that they had already seen represented in art, effectively blinding them to the other parts of nature they were actively seeing with their own eyes. They were so consumed with the culturally derived, picturesque view of nature that they found little interest in anything unlike it.

The sublime was another major pictorial ideal that emerged in landscape painting in the eighteenth century. The works of Claude-Joseph Vernet and Joseph Mallord William Turner, French and English artists respectively, embody both this aesthetic and landscape painting's reflection of Western society's attempt to reconcile its relationship with nature in the face of human progress. The sublime, as defined in the context of landscape painting, is an aesthetic ideal in which nature evokes in the viewer a sense of overwhelming reverence for the awe-inspiring beauty of nature and sometimes even fear of the majesty and overwhelming power of the natural world.[25] In his painting *Coastal Landscape in a Storm*, Vernet depicts a group of people contending with the merciless forces of nature on the edge of a stormy sea, effectively evoking thought of the complex and sometimes difficult relationship between nature and humanity.[26] Although some imagination went into the production of this particular work, there was a considerable amount of observation of the natural world involved as well, speaking to the fact that there was an underlying interest in truthful depictions of nature. More so than the other aesthetic categories of the time, the sublime accounted for many landscape paintings in which the forces of nature became the primary subject of the artist. This was a sign that Western society was beginning to look more to nature itself to help inform landscape paintings.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Romanticism emerged. This art movement, which continued into the nineteenth century, had a profound impact on landscape painting. In

25. Büttner, *Landscape Painting: A History*, 226.
26. See Appendix I.

England, there were still lingering attitudes that suggested a continued lack of interest in realistic depictions of nature for some individuals. Buyers were disinterested in the works of landscape painters like John Constable, because they did not depict their own landholdings.[27] Constable's works, such as *The Hay Wain*, were both a study of his native land and of nature itself.[28] He studied and sketched from life outdoors before making his final paintings, taking an almost scientific approach to representing nature in a realistic manner.[29] This practice reflected a newfound interest, at least on the part of artists, in representing nature in a more objective manner. In Germany, some artists struggled with striking a balance between aestheticizing nature and depicting it in a more truthful manner,[30] suggesting that no matter how hard a person tries to be objective when depicting the natural world, landscape paintings based directly on viewing nature are still subject to the fact that "representations must, [and do], carry some trace of their authors' habits, preferences, desires or values."[31]

In the United States, landscapes were romanticized in a nationalistic manner. In this age of industrial progress, "the enterprising, expansionist culture of America was more receptive to landscape art, especially as its national identity was predicated in large part on the myth of the North American wilderness and its prospective settlement."[32] During this time, the Hudson River Valley landscape painters emerged. Thomas Cole led this group of artists. His paintings and those of the other Hudson River Valley members embodied the American vision of their nation's landscape as a kind of "'Promised Land,' a national landscape of Christian fulfillment" in which

27. Büttner, *Landscape Painting: A History*, 247.
28. See Appendix II.
29. Büttner, *Landscape Painting: A History*, 250.
30. Ibid., 266.
31. Castree, *Making Sense of Nature*, 51.
32. Brian Lukacher, "Landscape Art and Romantic Nationalism in Germany and America," in *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 1994), 152.

they put their hopes and dreams.[33] Cole's student and eventual successor, Frederic Edwin Church, " … specialized in epic, exhibition-scale landscapes that were calculated to represent the inexorable bond between nation and nature in America."[34] However, Cole and Church were not just using nature as a symbol of American progress and expansion into untouched land. In their works, a deeper significance is found. For Cole, Church, and many other landscape painters of the time, nature represented God's great, created world.[35] This belief suggests that the West was beginning to recognize nature's value as something more than land to be cultivated and controlled.

Although a romanticized vision of nature had grown out of the seemingly endless land available in America, Americans were becoming wistful, longing for the wilderness they were beginning to lose as a result of an increasingly industrialized Western world.[36] Some landscape painters chose to depict images that evoked the pre-Industrial Revolution harmony with nature that society had once maintained.[37] The industrialization of America seemed to be the force behind the fact that "after about 1825, Americans wanted images of the land itself," free from symbolic meaning and symbols hidden within the works.[38] Many patrons began requesting scenes of majestic, untouched nature, which were sometimes underscored by an interest in the depiction of lands beyond America.

After painting American landscapes, Church traveled to South America and used his detailed sketches done from nature to paint *The Heart of the Andes* in 1859.[39] This large panoramic landscape painting, characterized by an exquisite attention to the detail of the natural

33. Ibid., 153.
34. Ibid., 159.
35. Büttner, *Landscape Painting: A History*, 280.
36. Wayne Craven, "Painting: Landscape, 1825-70," in *American Art: History and Culture* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994), 198.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 199.
39. See Appendix III.

world, gives viewers the experience of nature through painted representation. The painting was a breakthrough in landscape painting, because more than many works that came before it, it reflects the turn towards increased objectively in the portrayal of nature. However, the American interest in foreign lands in landscape paintings is also suggestive of an underlying imperialist attitude as well. While Church himself may have been interested in capturing the truthful essence and majesty of nature, American society was in the midst of a balancing act between the appreciation of nature and the desire for progress and control over territory, including foreign lands. This likely influenced their interest in paintings showing scenes of nature from other places.

Although Church's work reflected society's desire to connect with a seemingly untouched version of nature and his own religious beliefs, "a culture of landscape" had emerged, seen in the rampant tourism at places like Niagara Falls.[40] Church's own representation of this natural wonder was deliberately painted without the abundance of tourists present in the work, showing his conscious perpetuation of the myth of nature as untainted by the presence of humans. Niagara's state, as altered by tourism, and the Yellowstone paintings done by Thomas Moran, Church's contemporary and fellow Hudson River School painter, helped jumpstart the nation's emergence of a conservationist attitude, which would eventually lead to the creation of national parks.[41] Following the end of the nineteenth century, landscape painting would continue to be subject to the influence of society and culture.

40. Gail S. Davidson, "Landscape Icons, Tourism, and Land Development in the Northeast," in *Frederic Church, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Moran: Tourism and the American Landscape* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006), 3.
41. Ibid., 19.

IV

Nature in Art: The Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century, Western society's view and portrayal of nature in art shifted once more. Many painters of landscape turned away from the elevation of nature as an aesthetically pleasing environment or something beautiful and majestic to revel in. Nils Büttner, author of *Landscape Painting: A History*, states that in the twentieth century, some artists felt like " … landscapes were simply considered to be [a] convenient subject matter for experiments with the medium of painting itself."[42] However, while certain art movements strongly emphasized various elements of art, such as color, many of them were still explored within the bounds of the landscape genre. Many twentieth century artists continued the tradition of exploring the relationship between humanity and nature in the context of their culture and experiences. Landscape paintings produced in the twentieth century were still strongly influenced by the social and cultural climate of their time, reflecting the continued cultural mediation of landscape imagery in art.

Landscape was a subject important to both the Fauvism and German Expressionism movements of the twentieth century. Many of the Fauves spent their summers on the beaches of France painting seascapes in small towns, especially in the south at the Mediterranean coast.[43] Out of all the landscape paintings produced by the Fauves in this region of France, the works of Henri Matisse and André Derain in particular reflected a new way of seeing nature in France: "Almost without exception, Matisse's and Derain's paintings from the south present a vision of town and landscape harmoniously intertwined."[44] This visual dynamic, aided by their use of

42. Büttner, *Landscape Painting: A History*, 357.
43. James D. Herbert, *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 82.
44. Ibid., 83.

color, was reflective of French society at the time and its relationship with the natural world. Matisse and Derain not only painted the very landscapes that the people of France traveled to in their paintings, they also evoked the essence of the French tourist-nature dynamic that was beginning to emerge.

In twentieth century France, French tourists flocked to Saint-Tropez and Collioure, which at the time were small, quaint towns located by the sea in the south of France.[45] Unlike the previous generation, "the new breed of tourists discarded the habits of urbanity that visitors to the [English] Channel had brought with them from Paris and attempted instead to integrate themselves into [these] seemingly untouched fishing ports and the surrounding countryside."[46] In other words, they chose to forgo modern city life and all of the luxuries it afforded in order to spend time immersing themselves in a piece of nature that was still harmoniously entwined with the lives of the small town locals. This affinity for embracing a "back to nature" mentality, even for a short period of time, suggests that in certain parts of Europe, like in the United States, the lack of the more intimate relationship with nature of the past due to industrialization and progress was starting to be acknowledged on a larger scale. Not only were people in France seeking out nature, they sought nature and humanity together, not at odds, but at peace with one another.

Matisse's painting, *View of Saint-Tropez,* embodies the type of relationship with nature that urban Parisians and people living in the cities of France desired.[47] In the painting, a small seaside village sits nestled between the sea on one side and a collection of hills on the other. At first glance, it seems as though the town is surrounded by nature, "yet nature here never

45. Ibid., 82.
46. Ibid.
47. See Appendix IV.

overwhelms Saint-Tropez nor renders human presence superfluous."[48] Town and nature are rendered as one. Matisse makes this very apparent by making use of a variety of oranges and browns in both the buildings and the landscape. This serves to make them appear as cohesive elements of an environment that belong together. In addition to painting images of landscape and human settlement together, Matisse also painted from the perspective of a tourist, directly evoking the type of experiences with nature that visitors to the south of France would have had in their quest for a nature experience.

In his landscape paintings of the south of France, Matisse appropriated the perspective of the French tourist. His paintings make it appear as though he is a tourist rather than the painter. In *By the Sea (Gulf of Saint-Tropez)*,[49] Matisse not only depicts the water and the surrounding hills, he also situates his own wife and son within the painting.[50] Using the same color palette seen in the painting's landscape, Matisse thoroughly immerses the two figures into the setting, as they appear to be a part of nature itself. They function as symbols of the sense of oneness with nature that French tourists sought in such seaside locations. Matisse himself is implied in the painting, both as the painter of the scene and as the touristic father and husband who stands watching his family enjoy the sights and sounds of nature.

Like Matisse, Derain also assumed a role other than artist in his paintings of the French countryside. In *Return of the Fishing Boats*,[51] he is not the artist, but rather appears to be one of the local fishermen, men who would have felt quite comfortable living by the sea and earning their livelihood from it.[52] The perspective of the painting, which shows a close-up of a dock and a group of men in their boats returning from sea, suggests that "to paint this work, Derain must

48. Herbert, *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics*, 83.
49. See Appendix V.
50. Herbert, *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics*, 86.
51. See Appendix VI.
52. Herbert, *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics*, 86.

have stood on one of Collioure's two sandy beaches where the local fishermen moored their craft."[53] It is as if Derain had become a local, or at the very least, one of the tourists looking to experience the life of the native people for the duration of their visit. Like the other Fauve painters, Matisse and Derain maintained a deep interest in color, but their works also epitomized French society and the emerging culture of seeking out nature as well as the reemergence of maintaining a connection with the natural world. As with Fauvism, artists working within the German Expressionism movement also maintained an interest in painting nature.

Within the German Expressionist movement, there was a group of artists know as Die Brücke that felt landscape was still an important subject in art.[54] The landscape paintings produced by the Brücke artists were strongly linked to the group's beliefs and the culture in which they lived and worked. The general consensus among the founding members of Die Brücke, Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel, Ernst Kirchner, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, was " … that only life should provide inspiration and that the artist should subordinate himself to direct experience."[55] This sentiment coincided with their foundational belief in discarding the artistic traditions of the past.[56] The Brücke artists pushed back against the effects of industrialization in order to reclaim the lost sense of community.[57] The result was that in addition to working in a communal studio setting, they took trips together to the Moritzburg Lakes for three consecutive summers.[58] These trips resulted in their paintings of nude figures bathing in the surrounding landscape.

53. Ibid.
54. Büttner, *Landscape Painting: A History*, 375.
55. Victor H. Miesel, ed., *Voices of German Expressionism* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 15.
56. Reinhold Heller, "Brücke in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913," in *Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913*, ed. Reinhold Heller (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 14.
57. Shulamith Behr, *Movements in Modern Art: Expressionism* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 19.
58. Ibid., 28.

During the Brücke trips out into nature, culturally, there was an " … emphasis on a renewed engagement with nature [that] was engendered by the pace of urbanization … "[59] While this might have influenced the Brücke interest in nature to some extent, the nude figure landscapes produced by these artists infused nature with meaning by evoking aspects of modern life. These figurative landscapes referenced ideas and discussions about living outside and nude bathing.[60] In addition, they would come to symbolize the birth of Brücke " … ideas about sexual freedom and anti-bourgeoisie life styles … ," which were reflective of the cultural environment of the Moritzburg Lakes and the areas outside of the city of Dresden.[61] As one can clearly see from paintings like Kirchner's *Four Bathers*, a painting that depicts four women unashamedly bathing while standing in a lake with no clothes on or nearby, the Brücke artists were strongly committed to using their art to engage and comment on the social trends of their time.[62]

The Moritzburg nature paintings also contained elements of the primitive, "… an imaginary concept rather than a reality, used to debate and to define by antithesis Western notions of civilization and modernity."[63] The primitive was characterized by the idea that less developed cultures were closer to nature. Kirchner was likely inspired by such ideas after seeing an African village and villagers on display in a Dresden zoological garden. The setting and description of the show as exotic would have helped equate less advanced cultures with nature.[64] In addition, Kirchner also viewed the work of Paul Gauguin, whose primitive works depicted the cultures termed as primitive in a sexualized manner.[65] These influences can be seen in Kirchner's painting *Bathers at Moritzburg*, in which nude male and female bathers encounter each other in a

59. Ibid., 19.
60. Ibid., 20.
61. Ibid., 29.
62. See Appendix VII.
63. Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 102.
64. Ibid., 30.
65. Ibid., 26.

sexualized context.[66] In the wake of primitivism's rise in art during the time period in which the Die Brücke artists worked, nature, for them, became a symbol not just of a communal, freer lifestyle, but was also equated with the problematic practice of associating non-Western cultures with ideas about sexuality and an alleged lack of civilizing progress. Although Kirchner was not working directly from subjects from non-Western cultures in *Bathers at Moritzburg*, it is clear that some of his work was influenced by the primitive ideas of the time.

Among the Brücke artists, Kirchner is known to have delved much deeper into the study of nature than his counterparts. He continued painting landscapes long after the disbandment of Die Brücke in 1913. In part, these later works were a reaction against the devastating effects of World War I on Germany. He experienced them firsthand, having served in the war, and he suffered an emotional breakdown in 1917, after which he retreated to Switzerland.[67] Once there, he immersed himself in the depiction of the local landscape. For Kirchner, Switzerland and its landscape signified an escape from post war Germany. It was a place to heal his damaged mind and his hope for a new life.[68] One landscape in particular grabbed his attention and became the subject of multiple works. Kirchner " … singled out the Tinsenhorn as 'the holy mountain' of Davos, [Switzerland] that exemplified his ability to transform experience expressively without any loss of 'truth to nature.'"[69] For Kirchner, depicting the landscape was a very personal experience.

Kirchner's Switzerland landscapes were visual responses to the various emotions he saw evoked in nature.[70] One painting in particular, *Winter Landscape in Moonlight*, captured the

66. See Appendix VIII.
67. Victor H. Miesel, "Alpine Imagery and Kirchner's 'Winter Landscape in Moonlight,'" *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 66, no. 4 (1991), http://www.jstor.org/stable/41504852.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.

emotionally expressive aspects of nature that Kirchner aimed to depict.[71] While producing such works might have been cathartic for Kirchner, the blazing red of the sky against the coldness of the stark, jagged blue mountains evoked in some viewers a sense of the apocalyptic. Such interpretations stemmed from the sentiment of the German people in the years following World War I that Armageddon was a real possibility.[72] The German people had not only suffered from the war, but afterwards, they grappled with violent unrest in the streets of Berlin and a massive amount of casualties.[73] In this way, Kirchner not only communed with nature in his landscapes following his move to Switzerland, he also touched upon the experiences of the German people in modern society. Like his earlier works, his later landscape art was in keeping with the Brücke ideal of letting go of the past and producing work that engaged the realities of the present day.

During the twentieth century, the interest in nature also found expression in areas of art other than painting. One of the most significant among these was the Land Art movement. This movement emerged in the 1960s in the United States. It was characterized by the fact that the artists' canvas was nature, a fact that was in part "symptomatic of the countercultural impulses of that decade, [when] artists rejected the gallery as a frame and economic system."[74] One characteristic of the Land Art movement was that the art it produced was either fleeting, existing only for a brief period of time in nature, or it was a permanent installation.[75] In many ways, Land Art was conceptual and allowed the artists to tackle the social, cultural, and political issues of their time. Land Art allowed artists who were not interested in producing commodities and

71. See Appendix IX.
72. Miesel, "Alpine Imagery and Kirchner's 'Winter Landscape in Moonlight.'"
73. Ibid.
74. Jeffrey Kastner, ed., *Land and Environmental Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), n.p.
75. William Malpas, *Land Art: A Complete Guide to Landscape, Environmental, Earthworks, Nature, Sculpture and Installation Art* (Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2007), 88.

contributing to the consumerist atmosphere that often accompanied traditional works of art, like paintings, a way to engage with nature without creating something that could be bought.

Around the time of the Land Art movement's emergence, American society was at the point where the negative consequences of industrialization were becoming more readily apparent.[76] As a result, nature was at the forefront of many people's minds, and many of the movement's artists found themselves drawn to working with post-industrial land or large, open spaces in desert and mountain areas.[77] The Land Art movement was significant in not only the history of art, but also in the history of landscape art in that it drew people's attention back to the land itself rather than to a representational image of it. Running parallel to this movement was the ecological movement, and both the artists and ecologists sought to refocus attention to not only the land, but also to society's relationship with nature.[78]

There are multiple themes that can divide up the Land Art movement, but the one constant that holds all of them together is their sense of an underlying commentary on the relationship between humans and nature. Robert Smithson, one of the pioneers of the movement, emphasized this relationship with his 1970 outdoor sculpture *Spiral Jetty*.[79] Its location, Great Salt Lake in Utah, captured Smithson's attention due to its past association with an abandoned oil operation, the remnants of which remained. For Smithson, "a great pleasure arose from seeing all those incoherent structures. This site gave evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes."[80] Smithson was drawn to the site because it was a landscape that contained evidence of human presence and stood as a symbol of a failed attempt at

76. John Beardsley, "Earthworks: The Landscape after Modernism," in *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 110.
77. Kastner, ed., *Land and Environmental Art*, n.p.
78. Ibid., 24.
79. See Appendix X.
80. Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty [1972]," in *Land and Environmental Art,* ed. Jeffrey Kastner (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), 215.

industrializing nature. Such a site calls into question our relationship with the natural world and reflects the push and pull struggle in which humanity has found itself in with nature at times. While the oil operation may have failed, Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* still exists at the site today, and as it is "subsequently submerged underwater [periodically], this monumental structure is a hollow testimonial to man's dominance of the landscape…"[81] *Spiral Jetty* is both a reflection of human interference in nature and an acknowledgement of the autonomy of nature and its elements.

While Smithson touched upon the somewhat contentious relationship between humans and nature in his land art, others working within the movement took a different route. In her work, Harriet Feigenbaum focused on land reclamation. In the nineteenth century, the paintings of the artist Thomas Moran and the efforts of others dedicated to conservation contributed to the creation of the first national park in the United States. Feigenbaum's work was not only a continuation of the push for more conservation efforts, but also an attempt to bring attention to the fact that parts of nature that were damaged by industrialization could be "reclaimed" and restored to a state that helped the environment. In 1985, Feigenbaum created *Willow Rings*.[82] Using a 6-hectare piece of land that had been damaged by strip-mining, she surrounded a pond resulting from coal-dust run-off with planted trees and turned the site into a wetland wildlife preserve.[83] By turning this land into a usable habitat once more, Feigenbaum showcased that humans and nature could live in harmony, as the site bordered a location used by the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce. She also showed how the damaging effects of industrialization

81. Kastner, ed., *Land and Environmental Art*, 58.
82. See Appendix XI.
83. Kastner, ed., *Land and Environmental Art*, 149.

on the environment could be reversed or improved.[84] The efforts of Feigenbaum and many other land reclamation artists working within the Land Art movement were evidence of not only a continued human interest in nature, but also of a larger societal effort to ensure the longevity and long-term health of the natural environment.

Fauvism, German Expressionism, and Land Art are not the only art movements in twentieth century art that maintained and reflected an interest in nature. However, they are among the most significant in that they show Western society's growing desire to connect with nature on a more personal level and an increased level of participation in efforts to preserve the natural world. More so than in previous centuries, artists and Western society in general were starting to acknowledge the fact that nature and humanity are, and always have been, connected on many levels.

84. Harriet Feigenbaum, "Reclamation Art [1986]," in *Land and Environmental Art,* ed. Jeffrey Kastner (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), 266.

V

Contemporary Nature: My Work in the Twenty-First Century

Landscape art has changed considerably from the eighteenth century. Today, in the twenty-first century, traditional landscape painting is increasingly being turned away from in favor of other mediums in the contemporary art world. Still, contemporary artists, whether they are working with paint or other materials, have continued the practice of addressing current issues in their work in order to be seen as relevant in the ever-shifting world of art and artistic practice. Soft pastel artist Zaria Forman engages the ongoing issue of climate change and rising sea levels.[85] Her series *The Maldives*,[86] a collection of large drawings, depicts the ocean waves surrounding Maldives, the lowest and flattest country in the world, documenting it as it appears now before it is potentially engulfed by water in the coming years.[87] In his *Métamorphoses de la Terre* photographs,[88] John Pfahl takes images of the land and turns them into representations of "accelerated geological forces of nature."[89] Guy Laramée explores the erosion of traditional culture in modern society by carving landscapes[90] out of books.[91] These are only a few of the artists working today that reflect the ongoing trend in art to make one's work significant in the context of contemporary culture while still focusing largely on the subject of nature itself.

In 2008, curator Denise Markonish organized an exhibition entitled *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape* at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. This exhibition explored several major themes in landscape art from the late twentieth century through current times. The artworks included reference not only the " … art historic lineage [of landscape], but

85. Zaria Forman, "A Brief Bio…," http://www.zariaforman.com/#!about/c10fk (accessed March 17, 2015).
86. See Appendix XII.
87. Zaria Forman, "The Maldives," http://www.zariaforman.com/#!the-maldives/c8a1 (accessed March 17, 2015).
88. See Appendix XIII.
89. John Pfahl, "Métamorphoses de la Terre," http://johnpfahl.com/pages/extras/ArtStatement.html#metamorphosis (accessed March 17, 2015).
90. See Appendix XIV.
91. Guy Laramée, "Artist Statement," http://www.guylaramee.com/index.php/intro/ (accessed March 17, 2015).

also [serve] as a document of the current ecological crisis and how, as a culture, we are dealing with the decline of our natural environment."[92] Through their work, the artists look at and address contemporary trends in landscape art today. The themes explored include recontextualizing historical landscape depictions, searching for humanity's place in the natural world, environmental issues, and the continued aestheticization of nature.[93]

One of the exhibition's contributors, a group of related artists known as The Boyle Family, call attention to the physical materiality of the natural world. They go further than many of the Land Art movement's artists, because not only do they work with the land, they actually document small sections of the natural world.[94] After taking pieces of the earth from various sites in the form of stones, dirt, and other materials, they combine them with paint and resins into the form of painting-sculptures.[95] Another of the artists, Alexis Rockman, did something similar to Forman when he traveled to Antarctica to paint the world's melting glaciers. Using his photographs as references, he painted *South*,[96] a series of panels depicting the endangered ice world of the arctic.[97] He does not need to paint dramatic scenes of the effects of modern-day pollution on the natural world. The stark, silent stillness of Rockman's paintings speak to the sense that one is viewing an environment that is slowly disappearing. They seem to be a hollow tribute to what was once a stately, pristine place unaffected by the larger world and human progress. Like Forman's drawings of Maldives, the work of these artists serves as a documentation of nature as it appeared at the time the pieces were made. Their work takes its place in the line of contemporary landscape art in that it subverts the historical trend of idealizing

92. Denise Markonish, ed., *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 13.
93. Ibid., 14.
94. See Appendix XV.
95. Markonish, *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, 52.
96. See Appendix XVI.
97. Markonish, *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, 19.

the natural world and instead attempts to show it as it looks today as well as comment on the slow process of its gradual decline.

For her work in the *Badlands* exhibition, Melissa Brown took a different approach. Rather than representing parts of nature that may be at risk of destruction yet currently remain largely unspoiled, she flashes forward, creating imaginary images of apocalyptic landscapes heavily affected by pollution.[98] In her work, she aims to evoke an appreciation for nature as it is today by showing an extreme version of what could potentially happen to it years from now if we continue to damage the environment.[99] In *Pond Scum*, a 2007 piece, we see thick, oozing globs of green liquid moving across the surface of the water.[100] The clouds above barely cast a reflection on the surface of the polluted pond, demonstrating its severely altered state. In *Niagara at Dawn*, viewers see an eerie pink and green light cast on the popular tourist attraction, giving the sense of an impending disaster.[101] Yutaka Sone's work for *Badlands* stands out among the others. His installation pieces, *Highway Junctions*,[102] show carved depictions of Los Angeles surrounded by the types of plants and trees typically found throughout the city.[103] The large plants overwhelm the small carvings, reversing the relationship between humanity and nature. As viewers walk through the space, Sone wants them to feel that nature is encroaching upon the human world in much the same way that we expand into it.[104]

Badlands is one exhibition among many in the twenty-first century that look at new and contemporary trends in landscape art. All of the works of art featured in the show exemplify the ways in which artists working today are exploring different ways to comprehend and analyze the

98. Ibid., 132.
99. Ibid.
100. See Appendix XVII.
101. See Appendix XVIII.
102. See Appendix XIX.
103. Markonish, *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, 170.
104. Ibid.

natural world in an objective manner while commenting on our relationship with nature. While some of the artists involved continue the practice of depicting more traditional views of nature, others choose to use newer and different types of mediums outside of painting. Regardless of the ways in which they choose to approach the subject of nature in their work, many contemporary artists of the twenty-first century have shifted the direction of landscape art by focusing on the realities facing natural environments and society's influence on them. They are less interested in contextualizing nature's role in society and are more concerned with capturing an objective view of nature's current state and status on a larger scale.

In comparison to the work of many other contemporary landscape artists, my paintings appear to be more traditional and evoke the look and feel of historical examples, such as the work of Cole, Church, and Moran, who reveled in nature's beauty and majesty. Some of my paintings also reference the sublime aesthetic seen in the works of Turner in that they depict views of nature that demand the acknowledgement of nature's sometimes overwhelming power. My use of photographs as a starting point for some of my work calls upon the picturesque tradition, because they suggest that I am composing my paintings based on views of nature that are carefully composed and fit for a picture. Despite these similarities, which do serve as a starting point for understanding my work in the context of the history of landscape painting, my work diverges from the path of these historical examples in several ways. One major difference is that while historical landscape paintings often acknowledged and provided commentary on the growing human presence in the land as well as the shifting relationship between humanity and nature, my paintings do not. Instead, I choose to depict landscapes that are free from a significant level of state-altering human influence and presence as a way to explore the human experience of the natural world in an unspoiled state.

Many people regard the idea of unspoiled nature as a myth that no longer exists in the world, often citing the misguided assumption that the wilderness that remains consists only of environments that humans have specifically chosen to preserve. To contemporary art critics, my work might be seen as highly referential, lacking in contemporary theory and significance, and nostalgic for a view of nature that has been deemed by many as lost to human progress. It is true that even remote areas of nature, like the Amazon and Congo rainforests, have lost their virgin status. Evidence of prehistoric human activity in these areas has been uncovered, and modern exploration expansion into these remote areas continues.[105] It is an undeniable fact that "humans have so tamed nature that few locations in the world remain without [any form of] human influence, [seen or unseen]."[106] In 1995, "only 17% of the world's land area had escaped direct influence by humans … "[107] However, my paintings are not an attempt to make the claim that nature is completely untouched by humans. Through my work, I aim to show that the contemporary cultural relevance of landscape paintings depicting unspoiled nature is not lessened simply because nature is no longer as pure as it once was.

Like Forman, The Boyle Family, and Rockman, I consider my paintings, particularly the ones based on photographic references, to be documentations of the natural world's current state. Rather than addressing the issue of climate change and other environmental issues, I use my paintings to represent the parts of nature that remain as untouched, unspoiled, and pristine as possible. Through such works, I can explore the human experience of a side of nature that could one day be completely lost. My series of paintings examines the natural world and how people relate to it. When I paint a landscape, I examine my own relationship with the natural world and

105. Peter Kareiva and others, "Domesticated Nature: Shaping Landscapes and Ecosystems for Human Welfare," *Science, New Series* 316, no. 5833 (June 2007), http://www.jstor.org/stable/20036578.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.

the ways in which I view and choose to portray nature. Like the landscape painters who came before me, I must reconcile society's cultural mediation of my view of natural environments with my own estimation of them.

Western culture has helped to establish many of my opinions about the natural world. Ironically, it was television that first introduced me to images of nature in which it is largely separate from humans. Over the years, I've been exposed to countless images depicting the natural world as a series of majestic, awe-inspiringly sublime, and autonomous environments largely unaffected by people and industrial progress. Nature documentaries like *Planet Earth*, a series that showcases some of the world's most remote, breathtaking landscapes and ecosystems, have shown me nature in an uncontrolled, autonomous state. The experience of viewing these images of nature has influenced and shaped my direction as an artist. Viewers of my paintings may approach them with many of the same culturally mediated ideas about nature.

Although culture directly influences views about the natural world, I have found that the act of looking at and viewing a landscape, whether in the form of a painted representation or in person, is as much a personal experience that is specific to the individual as it is collectively universal within a given society and culture. While we can all relate to nature itself or a painted representation of it on the basis of culturally derived, preconceived notions of what nature is, how each of us responds to a specific landscape is also filtered through the lens of a person's own experiences and encounters with the natural world. I do not know how someone will react to my paintings, but through my work, I can evoke the sense of being in nature. The interplay between the cultural mediation of landscape imagery versus the personal experience of nature divides my work into two main categories.

The first group of work in my series consists of paintings that are based on photographs and are strongly grounded in the sense of place. They are tied to specific landscape locations and find their basis in the photographic documentation of each location depicted. In this way, these works recall the Land Art movement, whose artists often chose the locations of their works based on their significance and meaning when placed within the context of the artist's goals. While Smithson and Feigenbaum chose altered or damaged sites that reflected the tumultuous side of humanity's relationship with nature, for my work, I choose photos of the natural world that specifically depict unspoiled environments.

Place is important to the act of viewing a landscape painting, because it has the potential to tap into the viewer's familiarity with society's propagated view of nature. This is in part due to the fact that many of the images of unspoiled nature promoted by Western society are associated either with a specific location, like a national park or one of the many nature reserves pictured in popular nature shows, or they visually resemble them. The photographs I choose to turn into paintings are similar to these types of images, because they most resemble the views of nature to which I have been exposed. In addition, like many of the Hudson River Valley painters, I see nature as a part of God's creation. This has also led me towards choosing to depict majestic landscapes. In this way, my photo-based paintings represent both the culturally mediated landscape, the unspoiled, preserved parts of nature that still exist in the world, and my own personal view of nature. By virtue of their appearance and association, these paintings have the ability to evoke in the viewer the sense of not just being in nature, but of being in a specific landscape.

The first of my representational, location-based paintings, *Beyond the Sea*, depicts the coastline of Big Sur, California.[108] This painting coincides with my culturally derived view of nature as majestically beautiful and unspoiled by humanity in that it shows a remote, pristine portion of coastline. The viewer looks down from a slightly elevated position and out at a landscape populated by jagged rocks, steep cliffs, distant hills, an assortment of plant life, and translucent waves rolling forward towards the beach below. I emphasized the separation between humanity and nature by adding more foliage in the foreground. Rather than being a landscape that one could easily enter, it is viewable and experienced from a distance. The experiential effect of the work is found in the fact that everything is brought into sharper focus and given more detail despite the recession of space. I put more detail into certain elements of the landscape that the photograph deemphasized. I lightened the blue of the water from a dark, opaque mass to a semi-translucent aqua blue color to achieve the liquid rolling effect of ocean waves that the photograph failed to capture. The water reflects the colors of the sunset to show the reflective qualities of water that are not always apparent in a photographed landscape. The misty horizon joins with the ocean, leaving it uncertain what is beyond to give the suggestion of nature's vastness.

After *Beyond the Sea*, I painted several more photograph-based works. Though still grounded with specific places as their foundation, these works gradually start to move towards creating imagined views of nature. For example, in *East to West*, I chose to invent the sky rather than adhere to the reference photo's depiction of it.[109] I experimented with different types of cloud formations, colors, and atmospheric effects while still trying to make them appear naturalistic. I demonstrated the vastness of the land by combining the panoramic format of the

108. See Appendix XX.
109. See Appendix XXI.

painting with a long band of clouds passing over the distant mountains. In this painting, the viewer looks directly out on the landscape, as if he or she is standing before a broad expanse of space. From the foreground to the background, trees transition into hills, which move back into more hills before the land turns into distant pools of water, eventually stopping at the mountains. I suggest the continuation of space beyond the mountains through the warm light that emanates from behind them as the sun begins to set in the distant west. I leave it to the imagination of the viewer to suggest what lands might be beyond. The painting is no longer completely tied to its source in that my interpretation of the sky dramatically changes how the landscape reads. It is no longer just a depiction of California's Joshua Tree National Park. Instead, it offers a glimpse into the larger expanse of the natural world.

East to West is followed by *This Land*, in which I once again combined a photographed landscape with an invented sky.[110] Discarding the generic, light blue sky of the source photograph once more, I invented a sky that echoes the same colors seen in the landscape below. In doing so, I created a sense of cohesiveness between the two that shows how paintings can sometimes offer the illusion of a more authentic experience of landscape than nature itself does in a photograph. In the source photo, the standard blue sky looks slightly out of place with the colorful landscape below. In *This Land*, I make the sky and land appear more related to one another by putting some of the same blues and hints of brown seen in the water and rocks into the sky. In my place-based landscapes, I strived to show that they represent actual physical environments. We are meant to look, to see, and experience through imagining what it would be like to step into these particular landscapes.

My second group of paintings approaches the experience of viewing nature in a less representational, place driven manner. Like Brown, in these works, I create imagined

110. See Appendix XXII.

representations of the natural world that are not directly based in reality. Instead, they are more general, abstract evocations of the natural world that utilize atmospheric effects and various landscape elements to suggest the feeling of being in nature. However, these paintings differ from Brown's work and that of many other landscape artists working today in that they have a more positive outlook for nature's future. At the risk of having them critiqued as nostalgic or outdated, I imbue them with the sense that nature is timeless and capable of withstanding the damage done to it. They maintain the historical appearance of nature in a majestic, sublime, and autonomous state. Because they do not depict specific locations, they allow the viewer to think more of their own experiences with nature rather than call upon ideas derived from culturally mediated landscape imagery. In looking at these works, viewers are not threatened by impending doom and a future filled with a damaged world of apocalyptic environments. Instead, they will see a resilient, defiant side of nature that refuses to be silenced by humanity's lack of faith in its ability to prevail in the face of human encroachment, pollution, and other issues facing the environment. Several of these paintings are part of one of landscape's sub-genres, cloudscapes. After working exclusively with clouds for a period of time, I reintroduced more traditional landscape scenes back into my work.

The first two paintings in this second group of work are *Nature's Autonomy*[111] and *Ablaze (Rise)*.[112] I composed both works from my imagination and close observations of actual cloud formations. Before starting these larger cloudscape paintings, I painted several smaller studies from life in addition to doing a composition and color study[113] for *Nature's Autonomy*, which depicts a dramatic interpretation of a cloud filled sky. In this painting, the clouds are painted with an eerie, yellow-orange color over strokes of greenish blues and deep purples. Viewers of the

111. See Appendix XXIII.
112. See Appendix XXIV.
113. See Appendix XXV.

painting have described the resulting appearance as volcanic and threatening, suggesting that it evokes an emotional response. In reality, the sky does not resemble any commonly seen cloud formations and colors. Viewers approach paintings with their own ideas. This suggests that the experience of nature exists both in the mind as well as in physical encounters with the natural world.

Ablaze (Rise) leans more towards being a naturalistic depiction of the sky. The painting's vertical orientation and illusion of the clouds moving upwards leaves the painting open to many interpretations. This ambiguous quality is something I strived for in this work and subsequent paintings. The lack of a concrete knowledge of whether one is viewing actual clouds, rising smoke, or some other atmospheric body allows viewers to engage with the work more through their own experience of nature than they could with some of my previous works, which give concrete views of nature. One person has described the feeling of watching clouds pass by overhead while on their back when viewing this piece. Others have expressed the sentiment that the clouds are moving up in the sky. Despite the ambiguous feel of the work, I maintain its naturalistic appearance by allowing portions of blue sky to show through the thick opacity of the clouds.

After painting several more cloudscapes, I once again started to paint more traditional landscapes in that they contain both the sky and the land. These paintings rely on the suggestion of form and atmospheric effects instead of overt detail. My first work of this kind, *Realm*, is a painting in which I experiment with the boundaries between the sky and the land.[114] *Realm* is composed on a vertical canvas. The sky takes up over half of the painting, giving the overwhelming sense of a massive storm cloud approaching. I applied the paint with moderate thinness, allowing the underpainting to show through slightly and increase the depth of pictorial

114. See Appendix XXVI.

space. My method of blending the colors resulted in a subtle shimmering effect that enhances the atmospheric qualities of the work. It gives the cloud an undulating effect. The rolling hills below reflect some of the pale light cast down from the sky above, and the neutral, muddy green causes many viewers to interpret the hills as water instead of land. They describe it as an image that captures the tumultuous waves of a stormy sea. For them, this painting represents the palpable experience of witnessing the unpredictable and atmospheric appearance of a stormy, restless sea.

By far the most atmospheric of all my landscape paintings, *Aurora* was a real breakthrough for me in my quest to make an experiential painting without relying on fine details and source photographs.[115] With this painting, I worked to portray a scene that suggests immersion in an ethereal, atmospheric environment. Although the air cannot be seen, I aimed to make it appear visible and touchable, yet at the same time misty and airy instead of solid. I enhanced these effects by making it appear as though the transparent haze of the atmosphere has enveloped the landscape at the bottom of the painting. Although expansive and vast, like many of my paintings, this one has an intimate, personal quality to it due to its rich colors and subtle flattening of pictorial space.

The last painting of this kind in my series of landscapes is *In Nature*.[116] Of all my works, this one could be deemed the most traditional, because at first glance, it appears to suggest nostalgia for historical landscape paintings in which humans and nature are often depicted as having a harmonious relationship, as in the works of Constable. A small house sits nestled in a shallow valley surrounded by large hills. The house and surrounding landscape show no sign of recent human activity or presence, and there is an underlying sense of deliberate calm and isolation. The grass out front is overgrown and the house has a decidedly run down appearance.

115. See Appendix XXVII.
116. See Appendix XXVIII.

My aim was not to create the feeling of nostalgia for a closer relationship to the natural world, nor did I want to show or suggest nature's sublime domination by placing a small structure in a monumental landscape. The house is meant to be a physical reminder of the experience of being in nature. Viewers are invited to project their own interpretations of nature in this particular scene upon the landscape. My goal with my second group of paintings was to show that because the idea of landscape is so universally ingrained in Western thought, I only needed to evoke the look and feel of nature rather than its realistic appearance in order to create an experiential perspective of it.

Collectively, my series of paintings serve as a bridge between humanity and nature, evoking the experience of viewing the natural world. In Western society, nature is as much of an idea in the mind as it is a physical reality with certain clearly denoted characteristics. The American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature."[117] He goes on to describe how adults, unlike children, only see nature in a superficial manner, saying, "The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child."[118] Emerson's larger point is that adults, who have experienced more of life than a child and have been subjected to society's viewpoints of the natural world, no longer have the ability to completely see nature for what it truly is outside of the context of culture. Through my work, I hope to draw the viewer back to that innocent, untainted, and childlike way of looking at the natural world despite the influence of cultural mediation.

Nature has the ability to leave a lasting impression on its viewer, but so does a painting. By evoking the look and sense of the natural world in a painting, I draw attention to the continued relevance of nature in contemporary Western culture and society. I want to encourage

117. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), 10.
118. Ibid.

not only appreciation for the unspoiled natural environments that still exist today, but also hope to cultivate and nurture an interest in going out and viewing them with one's own eyes rather than only looking at a represented image. The process of making these paintings has taught me that art can function as a parallel reality to the natural world. Though they are painted representations of the natural world, they have the power to touch upon the evocative qualities of nature itself. With these paintings and future works, I will continue to explore different ways of documenting and depicting nature while at the same time addressing the ways in which society, culture, art, mediated images, and personal experience have taught me how to view the natural world.

Appendix

I Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Coastal Landscape in a Storm*, 1776

II John Constable*, The Hay Wain*, 1821

III Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859

IV Henri Matisse, *View of Saint-Tropez*, 1904

V Henri Matisse, *By the Sea (Gulf of Saint-Tropez)*, 1904

VI André Derain, *Return of the Fishing Boats*, 1905

VII Ernst Kirchner, *Four Bathers*, 1910

VIII Ernst Kirchner, *Bathers at Moritzburg*, 1909

IX Ernst Kirchner, *Winter Landscape in Moonlight*, 1919

X Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970

XI Harriet Feigenbaum, *Willow Rings*, 1985

XII Zaria Forman, *The Maldives*, 2013-2014

XIII John Pfahl, *Métamorphoses de la Terre*, 2010

XIV Guy Laramée, *The Great Wall*, n.d.

XV The Boyle Family, *Study of Brown Mudtracks with Tyre Tracks and Coal Dust, Portishead*, 2006

XVI Alexis Rockman, *South*, 2008

XVII Melissa Brown, *Pond Scum*, 2007

XVIII Melissa Brown, *Niagara at Dawn*, 2005

XIX Yutaka Sone, *Highway Junctions*, 2002

My Work

XX Victoria Gadson, *Beyond the Sea*, 2013

XXI Victoria Gadson, *East to West*, 2014

XXII Victoria Gadson, *This Land*, 2014

XXIII Victoria Gadson, *Nature's Autonomy*, 2014

XXIV Victoria Gadson, *Ablaze (Rise)*, 2014

XXV Victoria Gadson, *Cloud Studies*, 2014

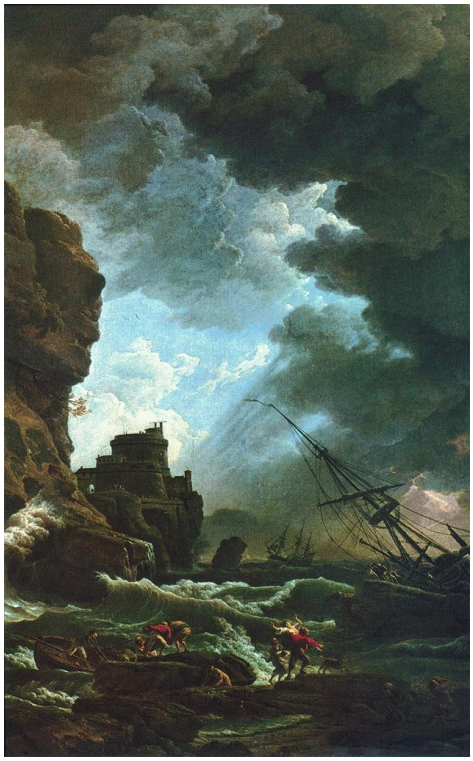
XXVI Victoria Gadson, *Realm*, 2014

XXVII Victoria Gadson, *Aurora*, 2015

XXVIII Victoria Gadson, *In Nature*, 2015

Appendix I

Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Coastal Landscape in a Storm*, 1776, oil on canvas, 120½ x 103½ inches, Musée Calvet, Avignon, France. Artstor. http://www.artstor.org. (accessed April 5, 2015)



Appendix II

John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821, oil on canvas, 51¼ x 73 inches, The National Gallery, London. Artstor. http://www.artstor.org. (accessed April 5, 2015)



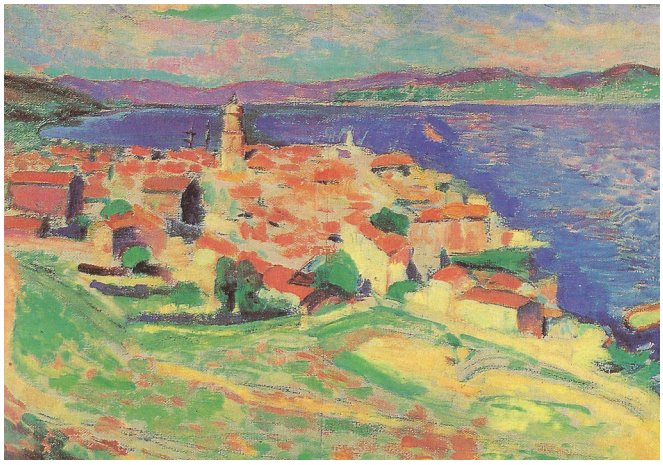
Appendix III

Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859, oil on canvas, 66 1/8 x 119¼ inches, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artstor. http://www.artstor.org. (accessed April 5, 2015)



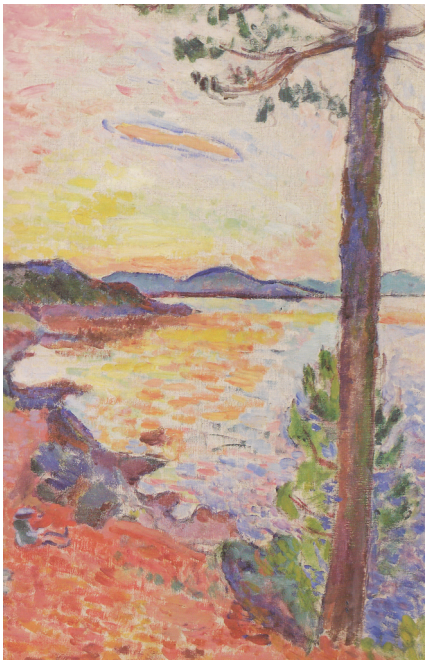
Appendix IV

Henri Matisse, *View of Saint-Tropez*, 1904, Musée de Bagnols-sur-Cèze, Bagnols-sur-Cèze, France. In *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics*, by James D. Herbert. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pg. 83.



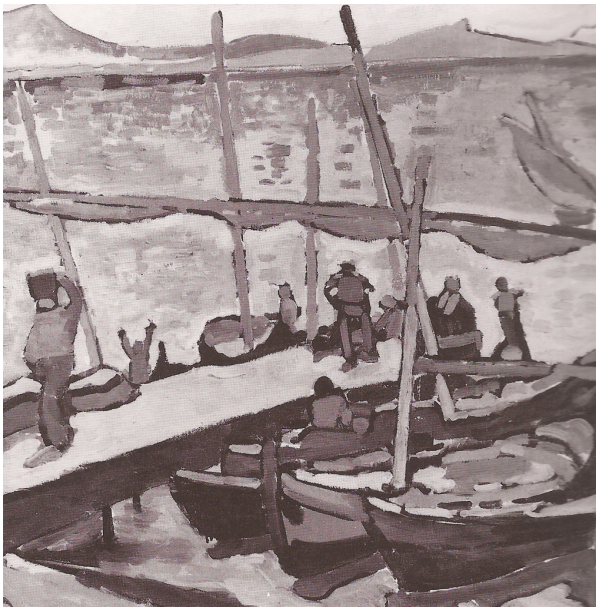
Appendix V

Henri Matisse, *By the Sea (Gulf of Saint-Tropez)*, 1904, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany. In *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics*, by James D. Herbert. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pg. 85.



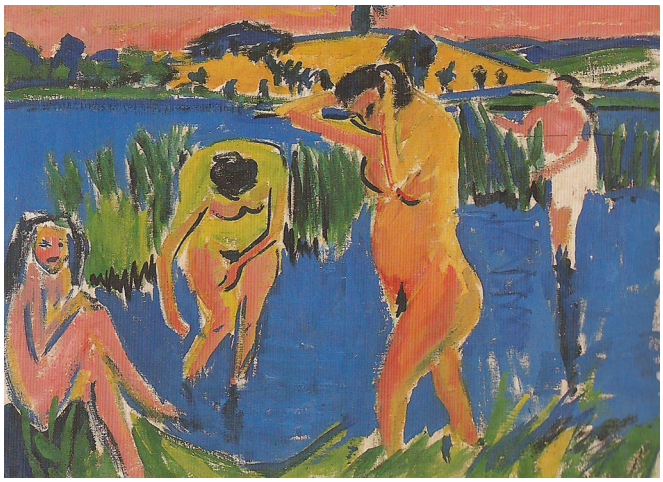
Appendix VI

André Derain, *Return of the Fishing Boats* - detail, 1905, private collection, Paris, France. In *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics*, by James D. Herbert. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pg. 86.



Appendix VII

Ernst Kirchner, *Four Bathers*, 1910, oil on canvas, 29½ x 39¾ inches, Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, Germany. In *Movements in Modern Art: Expressionism*, by Shulamith Behr. London: Tate Publishing, 2006, pg. 28.



Appendix VIII

Ernst Kirchner, *Bathers at Moritzburg*, 1909, oil on canvas, 74.9 x 199.7 centimeters, Tate Gallery, London. Artstor. http://www.artstor.org. (accessed April 6, 2015)



Appendix IX

Ernst Kirchner, *Winter Landscape in Moonlight*, 1919, oil on canvas, 47½ x 47½ inches, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. The Detroit Institute of Arts. http://www.dia.org. (accessed April 6, 2015)



Appendix X

Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, land art, Great Salt Lake, Utah. Artstor. http://www.artstor.org. (accessed April 6, 2015)



Appendix XI

Harriet Feigenbaum, *Willow Rings* - detail, 1985, land art, 6 hectares, Scranton, Pennsylvania. In *Land and Environmental Art*, ed. Jeffrey Kastner. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998, pg. 149.



Appendix XII

Zaria Forman, *Maldives #10*, 2014, soft pastel on paper, 45 x 75 inches. Zaria Forman. http://www.zariaforman.com. (accessed April 6, 2015)



Appendix XIII

John Pfahl, *Métamorphoses de la Terre: Above the Clouds*, 2010. John Pfahl. http://www.johnpfahl.com. (accessed April 6, 2015).



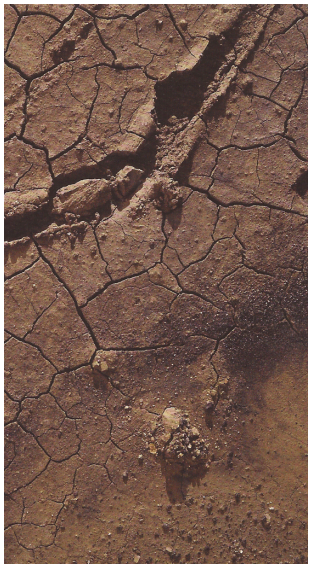
Appendix XIV

Guy Laramée, *The Great Wall*, n.d. Guy Laramée. http://www.guylaramee.com. (accessed April 6, 2015)



Appendix XV

The Boyle Family, *Study of Mudtracks with Tyre Tracks and Coal Dust, Portishead* - detail, 2006. In *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, ed. Denise Markonish. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008, pg. 53.



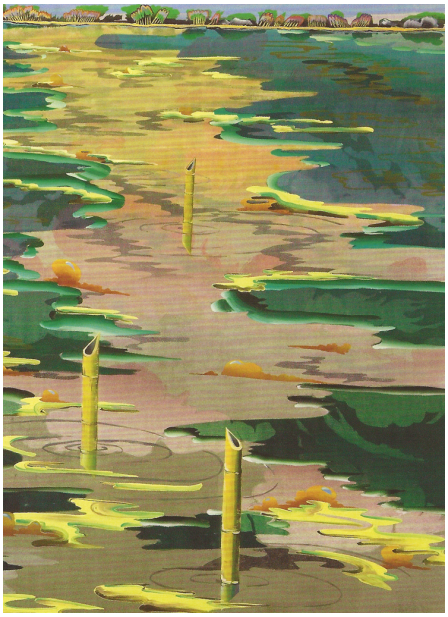
Appendix XVI

Alexis Rockman, *South*, 2008, oil and wax on gessoed paper, 75 x 358.75 inches. Alexis Rockman. http://www.alexisrockman.net. (accessed April 6, 2015)



Appendix XVII

Melissa Brown, *Pond Scum* - detail, 2007. In *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, ed. Denise Markonish. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008, pg. 133.



Appendix XVIII

Melissa Brown, *Niagara at Dawn* - detail, 2005. In *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, ed. Denise Markonish. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008, pg. 135.



Appendix XIX

Yutaka Sone, *Highway Junction 110-10*, 2002. In *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*, ed. Denise Markonish. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008, pg. 172-173.



My Work

Appendix XX

Victoria Gadson, *Beyond the Sea*, 2013



Appendix XXI

Victoria Gadson, *East to West*, 2014



Appendix XXII

Victoria Gadson, *This Land*, 2014



Appendix XXIII

Victoria Gadson, *Nature's Autonomy*, 2014



Appendix XXIV

Victoria Gadson, *Ablaze (Rise)*, 2014

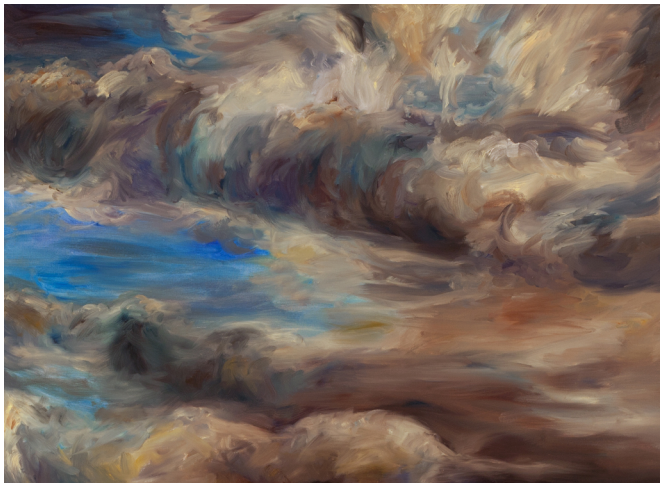


Appendix XXV

Victoria Gadson, *Cloud Studies*, 2014









Appendix XXVI

Victoria Gadson, *Realm*, 2014



Appendix XXVII

Victoria Gadson, *Aurora*, 2015



Appendix XXVIII

Victoria Gadson, *In Nature*, 2015



VII

Bibliography

Andrews, Malcolm. *Landscape and Western Art*. New York: University of Oxford Press Inc., 1999.

Ballantyne, Andrew. "The Picturesque and its Development." In *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde, 116-124. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002.

Beardsley, John. "Earthworks: The Landscape after Modernism." In *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams, 110-117. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994.

Behr, Shulamith. *Movements in Modern Art: Expressionism*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006.

Büttner, Nils. *Landscape Painting: A History*. New York: Abbeville Press, 2000.

Casey, Edward S. *Representing Place: Landscape Painting & Maps*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Castree, Noel. *Making Sense of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Clark, Kenneth. *Landscape into Art*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976.

Craven, Wayne. "Painting: Landscape, 1825-70." In *American Art: History and Culture*, 198-220. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994.

Cronon, William. "Introduction: In Search of Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon, 23-56. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.

—. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon, 69-90. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.

Davidson, Gail S. "Landscape Icons, Tourism, and Land Development in the Northeast." In *Frederic Church, Winslow Homer, Thomas Moran: Tourism and the American Landscape*, 3-73. New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006.

DeLue, Rachael Ziady. "Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds." In *Landscape Theory*, eds. Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins, 3-14. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature." In *Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, 5-49. New York:

Literary Classics of the United States, 1983.

Feigenbaum, Harriet, "Reclamation Art [1986]." In *Land and Environmental Art*, ed. Jeffrey Kastner, 266. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998.

Forman, Zaria. "A Brief Bio…." http://www.zariaforman.com/#!about/c10fk (accessed March 17, 2015).

—. "The Maldives." http://www.zariaforman.com/#!the-maldives/c8a1 (accessed March 17, 2015).

Gilpin, William. "Essay on Picturesque Beauty (1792)." In *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, ed. Joshua C. Taylor, 47-61. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Heller, Reinhold. "Brücke in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913." In *Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913*, ed. Reinhold Heller, 13-57. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009.

Herbert, James D. *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Kareiva, Peter, Sean Watts, Robert McDonald, and Tim Boucher. "Domesticated Nature: Shaping Landscapes and Ecosystems for Human Welfare." *Science, New Series* 316, no. 5833 (June 2007), http://www.jstor.org/stable/20036578.

Kastner, Jeffrey, ed. *Land and Environmental Art*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998.

Laramée, Guy. "Artist statement." http://www.guylaramee.com/index.php/intro/ (accessed March 17, 2015).

Lloyd, Jill. *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

Lukacher, Brian. "Landscape Art and Romantic Nationalism in Germany and America." In *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, 143-159. New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 1994.

Malpas, William. *Land Art: A Complete Guide to Landscape, Environmental, Earthworks, Nature, Sculpture and Installation Art*. Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2007.

Markonish, Denise ed. *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.

Miesel, Victor H. "Alpine Imagery and Kirchner's 'Winter Landscape in Moonlight.'"

Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts 66, no. 4 (1991), http://www.jstor.org/stable/41504852.

—, ed. *Voices of German Expressionism*. London: Tate Publishing, 2003.

Pfahl, John. "Métamorphoses de la Terre." http://johnpfahl.com/pages/extras/ArtStatement.html#metamorphosis (accessed March 17, 2015).

Roskill, Mark. "The Developing Appeal of Landscape, 1750-1830." In *The Languages of Landscape*, 91-120. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Smithson, Robert. "The Spiral Jetty [1972]." In *Land and Environmental Art*, ed. Jeffrey Kastner, 215-218. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998.