

**LANDSCAPE.** *[To survey the extensive history of landscape art and aesthetics, this entry comprises four essays:*

Landscape from the Ancients to the Seventeenth Century

Landscape from the Eighteenth Century to the Present

Landscape Architecture

Landscape Assessment

*The first essay explores the dual senses of landscape—as art and as natural setting—in the historical periods leading to modernity. The second essay picks up this same narrative and carries it into the twentieth century. The third essay explores the history and current status of landscape architecture. The final essay focuses on one of the central aesthetic issues in all the above discussions: how to assess or evaluate landscapes in their artistic and natural modes. For related discussion, see Environmental Aesthetics; Gardens; Nature; and Picturesque.]*

### **Landscape from the Eighteenth Century to the Present**

The term *landscape* has two main referents. The first is a territory that the eye can comprehend in a single view, such as those celebrated in the English Lake District. The second is a work of art that, usually, depicts a real-world landscape, such as the paintings of John Constable, or, with the coming of photography, the landscapes of Ansel Adams. At times, landscapes have been imaginary, or even fantastic; and they regularly blend an ideal with the real. Landscape is portrayed in literature, word pictures inviting response. Landscape figures in film, even in song, such as Katherine Lee

Bates's "America the Beautiful." The landscapes of human geography are often rural scenes, with suggestions of indefinitely continuing nature, such as mountains, forests, rivers, or sky, in the background. There are also seascapes, remembered by Winslow Homer.

Landscape blends nature and human response. Hildegard Binder Johnson says:

Landscape per se does not exist; it is amorphous—an indeterminate area of the earth's surface and a chaos of details incomprehensible to the perceptual system. A landscape requires selective viewing and a frame. The "line" of a mountain crest, woods, or prairie silhouetted against the sky is imaginary; it lies in the eye of the beholder. Landscapes need . . . the subjectivation of nature. (1979, p.27)

The "land" exists, but the "scape" comes with human perspective.

**Landscape in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.** Landscape art was much esteemed in the eighteenth century. Thomas Gainsborough, Richard Wilson, and Joseph Wright of Derby are English representatives. In the nineteenth century, interest remained strong, for example, in John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843), praising especially the work of Joseph Mallord William Turner. Turner and Constable flourished at the turn of the centuries. In France, there was Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, followed by Impressionists such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. In Italy, Giuseppe De Nittis, Giuseppe Canella, and Giovanni Fattori flourished. Germany produced Caspar David Friedrich. The Romantic movement underlay much of this continuing interest.

In North America, Thomas Cole interpreted the Catskills. With the opening up of the West (especially prior to photography), Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran captured the imagination of a broad public. In America, interest was as often in wild as in rural landscapes. In the twentieth century, as artists became more interested in non-representational art, landscape art became less common. Since the rise of environmental concerns, however, from the 1960s onward, interest in landscape aesthetics has vigorously returned, although not especially in landscape painting.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a recurrent question was whether art imitates or improves nature. How far is the artist a composer and how far is the artist to present, or re-present, nature? "In the vaunted works of Art, the master-stroke is Nature's part," insisted Ralph Waldo Emerson. Others demurred, thinking artists should be like flower arrangers, using nature but composing in their work. "We find the Works of Nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of Art," wrote Joseph Addison. Joshua Reynolds complained that Gainsborough had not looked at nature with enough of "a poet's eye." The eighteenth century typically favored a pleasing prospect, picturesque and



LANDSCAPE: Eighteenth Century to the Present. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1902-1904), oil on canvas, 27 1/2 X 35 1/4 in.; Philadelphia Museum of Art: George W. Elkins Collection. (Copyright by the Philadelphia Museum of Art; used by permission.)

rural; the Victorian age became more interested in the sublime. Impressionists accentuated color, line, or form to present nature to the viewer, sensitizing the beholder to what was actually there, which beholders might otherwise miss.

The glory of nature is a characteristic theme; the counter theme is the appropriate presence of humans. The perennial in nature versus its ephemeral passing was an issue, as was the role of humans and their artifacts. Why include castle ruins? Tacitly to suggest the transient quality of human achievements? Or because the ruins gave a lingering sense of the pathetic? The balance between the glorious and the somber in nature was always of concern. How the artist used light, darkness, and shadow was important, accentuating and counterbalancing the “gloom and glory” (Nicolson, 1959) in nature.

Artists in these centuries emphasize the patterned shapes made by the various items of a landscape, the spatial relationships, near and far, the relative intensity of differing elements in the scene, the result perhaps of a stronger color or a more commanding shape. Paul Cézanne might oppose two forms—a roof ridge and a vertical tree—bringing the onlooker to focus there, only later to see colors and optical contrasts. Corot will invite the eye to wander along a flow and swing of shapes; the specific forms are more reticent—awareness of them sharpens later at the onlooker's option.

Turner may use a strong juxtaposition of color, almost to alarm the onlooker, for instance, in light and dark, or red clouds in the sky. Many artists use a strongly colored or strikingly formed tree as a starting point, creating an atmosphere of attention and yet tranquility.

Such artists will characteristically have a plan, of which the viewer will not be unduly conscious, designed to lead deeper into the landscape reality. Vincent van Gogh might use a wooden fence line, or a dusty road, to invite looking further, or even a walk. There may be figures traveling, perhaps a cart drawn by horses. A river is a frequent device, suggesting a scene going on and on. Bridges over rivers, or boats create a similar atmosphere. Various features will give depth to the picture, something projecting or receding from the otherwise flat plane of the painting, inviting a kind of entrance, or catching up the onlooker into pursuing inquiry about what is going on, what is present in that place. George Lambert's *Woody Landscape with a Woman and Child Crossing a Bridge* (1757) is representative, as is Gainsborough's *The Harvest Wagon* (1767, and again, 1784-1785).

As travel became more affordable, there was recurrent discussion of its benefits in appreciating the actual landscapes, and the role of art. Country gentlemen in the eighteenth century carried small, amber-tinted lenses, “Claude glasses,” with which to frame the countrysides through

which they rode, making rural nature into art, and then returning to appreciate nature and the human place in it. Another interest was whether nature is a moral tutor. William Wordsworth claimed, "One impulse from a vernal wood, / May teach you more of man, / Of Moral evil and of God, / Than all the sages can." After Charles Darwin, critics held that nature might be glorious but was amoral and taught nothing in ethics. With the turn of the twentieth century, aestheticians were less sure even about the former, and turned their attention to human works of art.

**Landscape and Art.** In 1966, Ronald Hepburn complained that twentieth-century aesthetics had neglected natural beauty. Aesthetics had become synonymous with "philosophy of art." As a result, aesthetics had become impoverished, deprived of an entire dimension of experience appropriate to the discipline. A pivotal claim is that, despite the tradition of landscape painting, nature does not fit into the categories of art. An evident difference is that natural scenes have no frames or pedestals. Nothing has been composed with the design of being beheld. To the contrary, the processes generating the landscape—at least the dominantly geological, meteorological, evolutionary, and ecological processes—are indifferent to the beholder. The natural landscape is "just there," and the human aesthetic contribution more demanding and more evident. Where one is appreciating landscape architecture, or built landscapes, by contrast, the appropriate response differs radically.

Confronting the natural elements, the framing is up to the observer, who must make sense of the mixed order and disorder on an otherwise value-neutral landscape. Is the scenery interrupted or enhanced when mist drifts across the valley or when geese fly over unexpectedly? By shifting position, foreground and background are recomposed; or, if one waits, shadows will fall. Unlike landscape paintings, the beholder must do the arranging, and yet also is challenged to be, more or less, responsible, even "true" to what is beheld. What is one to make, for instance, of human contributions to the landscape—are they interruptions or complementary?

Landscapes, though a scenic whole, can be appreciated at multiple levels. One has binoculars on a bird that lighted nearby, then the eye falls on a patch of wildflowers, and afterward in sweeping gaze the beholder gathers all into one view. Again, with artworks, one can focus on detail, and then stand back, but there multileveled approaches are much more constrained.

**Landscape and Participation.** A frequent theme in art is that the observer needs to be detached from utilitarian needs. Appreciating nature, one needs similar distance, and yet there must be participation as well. The experiencer of landscapes is much less a spectator than the observer of landscape paintings. Genuinely experienced landscapes are those of one's resident environment, or at least of an environment in which the visitor is, for a time, immersed.

Arnold Berleant, in his *Aesthetics of Environment*, refuses to place a "the" before "environment" in the title precisely because he does not wish to suggest too much objective environment, but rather seeks the experience of the self in a vivid way, located in the world: "This is what environment means: a fusion of organic awareness, of meanings both conscious and unaware, of geographical location, of physical presence, personal time, pervasive movement. . . . There are no surroundings separate from my presence in that place" (1992, p. 34). Experience on landscapes is multisensory. Think of watching a gathering storm over the plains, hearing the thunder, feeling the rain, and smelling the wetted grass.

In the United States, the National Park Service builds roadside viewing sites at the best spots. But perhaps this makes a kind of found art object out of a landscape. Serious landscape appreciation eludes those who wish only to capture the scene in the camera viewfinder, producing something like a postcard, and then to drive off. The ecological processes are pervasively present on the landscape. They are on the landscapes left behind at home. The organic unity in a working landscape is not gained by treating it as scenery, though it might be found if one discovered its ecology, or made a living on the landscape. Such landscape experience spirals around two foci—the one that aesthetic experience must be participatory; the other that nature is objective to such beholders.

**Landscape and Human Nature.** Certain landscapes have an archetypal appeal, especially semiwooded savanna-type landscapes, where there is a blending of prospect, open vistas, and refuge, places of retreat and safety, a contrast of the horizontal and the vertical, with interest in both foreground and background. Some claim that these are innate preferences, going back to the environments in which early humans evolved. Statistical studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscape paintings find these features with high frequency. There is a growing body of research analyzing the psychological and health benefits of landscape amenities. There are even therapeutic benefits. Patients recover from surgery more quickly if their hospital rooms have pastoral views, or, failing that, landscape pictures on the walls.

Others are not so sure. David Lowenthal (1978) doubts that innate attractions are significant. If present, they are quite submerged in culturally acquired preferences. Welsh landscapes, he finds, have been variously out of favor, in favor, out of favor, and back in favor again from the 1700s to the present. Landscape appreciation may originate in the human evolutionary past, but that past does not govern all that can now be. Humans appreciate many landscapes that are not "homey," as when drawn to wilderness vistas, or to the taiga, or to tundra. Artists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe, have celebrated the desert Southwest. The Grand Tetons, to which millions are drawn, are not especially livable places.

**Landscape Construction and Constitution.** With rising doubts about realist epistemologies, many critics are claiming that nature is a social construction. When these ideas are pressed, landscape perceptions become almost entirely reflections of culture, and little appreciation of objective nature remains. The landscape becomes cultural symbol. John Rennie Short concludes a study of the “environmental myths” used in American westerns, English novels, and Australian landscape painting: “My aim is simple, to identify and decode the major sets of ideas about the wilderness, country and city in the belief that there is nothing so social as our ideas about the physical environment” (1991, p. xviii).

Social historians at work on the paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries now claim that landscape painters served to project a desired social order. They unearth “the dark side of the landscape” (Barrell, 1980). The poor are shaded or placed in the background, the wealthy in a well-lighted foreground. Landscape attitudes are used to justify the human occupation of some territory by legitimating the prevailing social and political powers, or to idealize some community, leaving out or shading this and celebrating that. Interestingly, by this account, the Romanticism often taken to be a protest against the ills of industrialization and urbanization is interpreted as protecting another form of domination.

**Positive Landscape Aesthetics.** A provocative claim is that natural landscapes in and of themselves are always beautiful. John Muir exclaimed, “None of Nature’s landscapes are ugly so long as they are wild.” After forty years of painting, Constable agreed: “I never saw an ugly thing in my life.” The claim that natural environments are always aesthetically stimulating when appropriately encountered has been reaffirmed by Allen Carlson: “All virgin nature . . . is essentially aesthetically good” (1984, p. 5).

The claim is somewhat surprising because it may simultaneously be held that there is no beauty at all in nature, if humans are absent. *Aesthetic capacities* are found only in beholders although *aesthetic properties* may lie objectively in natural things. There is aesthetic stimulation in the sense of abyss overlooking a canyon, or with the fury of a storm. The experience is in the beholder, but the abyss and the fury (the aesthetic properties) are in nature. The world is beautiful in something like the way it is mathematical. Neither aesthetic nor mathematical experience exist prior to humans. But these inventions succeed because they map form, symmetry, harmony, distribution patterns, causal interrelationships, order, unity, and diversity, discovered to be actually there. Landscapes artists were catching some of this in their composing.

Rather like clouds, which are never ugly, only more or less beautiful, so too with mountains, forests, seashores, grasslands, cliffs, canyons, cascades, and rivers. As an area-level judgment, this claim does not deny that some items in na-

ture are ugly viewed from certain perspectives, only that in a landscape perspective, in locale and ecosystemic perspective, there are only positive qualities—provided one has adequate categories of interpretation. It would seem implausible to say of human works of art that they are never badly done; yet, here the positive thesis claims that virgin landscapes are always (more or less) well formed aesthetically. All landscapes are not of equal aesthetic merit, but the scale runs from zero upward.

**Landscape and Natural History.** Considerable discussion turns on how far landscape appreciation needs natural science, a connection ignored or left implicit in the preceding centuries, when criteria were more formalist. So far as natural science entered, it was largely geology. The current debate features ecology. Yrjö Sepänmaa (1993) asks whether a scenic landscape is to be approached as one might a work of art, with formal criteria, or whether a landscape is to be viewed as a surrounding, living ecosystem; he prefers the second paradigm. Carlson (1984) argues that aesthetic appreciation of nature requires not so much the categories of formal art as relevant scientific knowledge. A drive through the country is not analogous to a walk through a gallery of landscape paintings.

When J. A. Walter (1983), from England, visited the Rocky Mountains, he was disappointed. The sun was too high in the sky, leaving a flattened effect; there were too many trees, all similar conifers, over great expanses, which was rather boring. There was not enough water. There were no cottages, cows, people, often no signs of humans; the scenery lacked balanced elements of form and color. The scale was overblown, the landscape not complex enough. The scenery was nowhere as stimulating as the English countryside. Walter’s critics responded that he was wearing the wrong cultural filter. More appreciation of the American “great open spaces” mentality would help.

Even more, appreciation of the natural history might have educated Walter’s eye. The dominant spruce in the montane zone are evergreen, with needles, and shaped so because they can photosynthesize year round and shed snow. Lodgepole pine replaces itself after a stand replacement fire, hence the many trees about the same age. A Rocky Mountain forest does not lack essences in balance; there life persists by a perpetual dialectic of environmental resistance and conductance, wind and water, hot and cold, life and death. It is a mistake to look for a prospect that pleases, using the English categories; here one seeks insight into wild processes that ignore humans completely. That is what is so aesthetically stimulating, positive, though not picturesque.

Neil Evernden (1983) argues that Americans themselves, unless reared on the prairies, have an insufficient capacity to appreciate prairie landscapes. Again, there is too much sun; now the land is too flat, and there is too much grass; homesteads may be infrequent, and there is too much open space, another boring landscape. There is little of evident

form; again, no balance. Landscape artists seldom painted prairies. The prairie does not fit well into a camera frame, and tourists head toward the Rockies. Evernden responds that the void and the sky, the wind sweeping the grass, the clouds forming and re-forming, daybreak and dusk, the sense of time and space are just what is to be so positively experienced, if only the passerby will submit to the prairie's regimen. May Theilgaard Watts, *Reading the Landscape of America* (1975), exemplifies this blending of natural history with personal multisensory experiences.

Many people have loved landscapes that they inhabited but knew little about scientifically. At the same time, an animistic worldview ("an enchanted world") seems inadequate for appreciating landscapes, despite the multicultural approaches noted later in this essay. American Indians warned John Wesley Powell, the first European to travel the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, that he would draw the god Tavwoats's awful wrath. But Powell saw the canyon geologically. He experienced awe at the erosional forces of time and the river flowing. Millions of visitors now experience the canyon appropriately only if they know some of its geology.

**Landscape Art and Conservation.** A related issue is the relevance of aesthetic appreciation of landscapes to their conservation, both in theory and in practice. Landscape and wildlife artists are, with increasing frequency, claiming that the obligation of an artist is not simply to invite aesthetic appreciation but to move the viewer to act to preserve nature, sustain landscapes, and create a society in harmony with nature. One can no longer afford elitist contemplation. In *Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century* (Friedman, 1994), the contributors find that, though the idyllic landscapes of nineteenth-century painting linger in the modern consciousness, the troubled state of America's landscapes assumes a particular urgency for many contemporary artists.

Landscape is, profoundly, a metaphoric means of eloquently expressing these artists' social, psychological, and technological concerns. Concern for landscape is caring for all life and its processes, as Leopold recognized a half century back. Conservationist journals, such as *Sierra* or *Wilderness*, steadily employ landscape photography in an appeal for saving nature.

**Landscapes, Multiculturalism, and a Global View.** Pluralism characterizes modern times, and postmodern times even more. Coupled with postcolonialism, the rise of Third World states, and the resurgence of Asian nations, there is a decreasing confidence that European and American value systems are as definitive as once claimed. That forces a reconsideration of how landscapes are appreciated in other cultures. The results have been positive, if mixed.

Yuriko Saito (1985), for example, analyzed how the Japanese appreciation of landscapes differs from that of the European and American West. The Japanese prefer a more

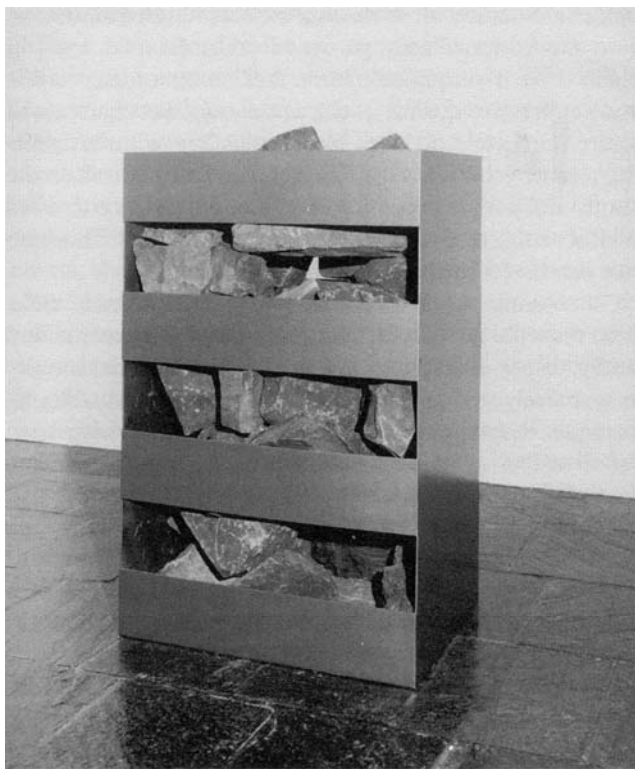
manicured nature, often viewing the surrounding landscape from more immediately gardened or landscaped areas in which there is simplified nature, facilitating a focus on abstract expressive qualities, such as the transient character of nature (the petals of cherry blossoms falling, a butterfly flitting past in a scenic view). The Japanese love to dwell on the beauty and pathos in passing life. They are not so interested in either sublime or wild nature, but in a nature with which they can find a harmonious acceptance.

Other critics have found that Hispanic attitudes differ from those farther north, with more emphasis on land and family, responding to personal place and residential identity on a sparsely settled landscape, than on the scenic, the picturesque, the sublime, or the wild. Still others have been concerned to appreciate Native American and Australian aboriginal perspectives, reflected in their art, arguing that the religious nature of these perspectives, perhaps demythologized, can serve as a corrective to overly secular Western views.

Against the requirement that landscapes be seen in terms of their natural history, some critics protest that the scientific perspective is just the way Westerners currently "constitute" their world. There is no reason to think this the privileged view. Aesthetics is nothing that science can discover on landscapes objectively, independently of persons, as though it were some preexisting characteristic. Landscape is land taken into human scope, and nonscientific cultures can do that quite meaningfully by their own standards. Nature is a smorgasbord of opportunities. No one aesthetic response is more or less correct than any other; what counts is the imaginative play. What is remarkable is nature's richness in launching this play. Claims that humans panculturally have genetically innate dispositions to certain landscapes have to be accommodated to multicultural expressions.

The photographs with more aesthetic impact than any "landscapes" in the twentieth century have been the views of Earth from space: "a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery" (Mitchell, 1996). More than two hundred men and women astronauts from twenty nations unanimously report being earthstruck. Their photographs have been seen by more than half the persons on Earth, who, almost without exception, have found these whole Earth pictures aesthetically stimulating.

**Landscape, the Sublime, and the Sacred.** The experience of the sublime was of much interest in the eighteenth century. Mountains, Wordsworth held, were Earth's supreme example of tranquil sublimity. The most famous analysis is that of Edmund Burke. By the twentieth century, the category was thought to have lapsed before a more secular outlook. That judgment has proved premature, or at least arguable. The sublime is perennial in encounter with nature because wherever persons step to the edge of the fa-



LANDSCAPE: Eighteenth Century to the Present. Robert Smithson, *Non-site (Palisades, Edgewater, New Jersey) plus Map and Description (site)* (1968), main work: painted aluminum, enamel, and stone, map: ink on paper; main work: 56 × 26 × 36 in. (142.2 × 66 × 91.4 cm.), map: 1 1/2 X 2 in. (3.8 X 5.1 cm.), description: 73/8 × 9 3/4 in. (18.7 × 24.8 cm.); Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art (Purchase, with funds from the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc. [69.6a-b]), New York. (Photograph copyright 1997 by the Whitney Museum of American Art; used by permission.)

miliar, everyday world, they risk encounter with grander, more provocative forces that touch heights and depths beyond normal experience, forces that transcend humans both to attract and to threaten. Wild nature is never very modern or postmodern, or even classical or premodern. Aesthetic experience of nature, social construction though it sometimes is, explodes such categories and moves outside culture into fundamental nature.

Almost by definition, the sublime runs off scale. There is vertigo before vastness, antiquity, power, elemental forces austere and fierce, mysterious and enormously beyond human limits. At a forest vista, the trees point upward along the mountain slope, which rises to join the sky, and the scene soars off to heights unknown. One encounters what was aboriginally there in its present incarnation. Viewing the windswept bristlecone pines along a ridge in the Sierras, the aesthetic challenge is conflict and resolution presented on awesome scales. By contrast, fewer persons get goose

bumps indoors, even in art museums. A challenge to landscape artists and photographers is to invite such experience, and landscape art with this capacity has proved enduring.

When beauty transforms into the sublime, the aesthetic can be elevated into the numinous. Natural landscapes invite transcending the human world and experiencing an archetypal realm, about as near to ultimacy as one can come in phenomenal experience, especially in an age doubtful of any ultimates. The wildness in, with, and under cultural landscapes, has an enduring capacity to elicit cosmic questions, differently from art and artifacts. An enthralling creativity characterizes this home planet. At landscape range, or, in those global Earth views, an appropriate aesthetics becomes spiritually demanding.

[See also Japanese Aesthetics.]

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HOLMES ROLSTON III