LANDSCAPE AND VIDEOART: THE NEW LANDSCAPE OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

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ABSTRACT
We live in a new era -the Anthropocene-. And in a new society with its corresponding mentality and consciousness. But, we keep representing and interpreting the landscape, mainly, through the codes inherited from the Romanticism. This research will address artistic proposals that unite videoart and landscape.

After reviewing the wide actual art panorama, we have identified a new type of landscape in the Contemporary Art. A landscape that does represent our society through its typical formal and conceptual codes, and that projects the vision and mentality of the Anthropocene’s society. We have identified a group of practices that by using the new technologies, the concerns of the 21st Century’s society and the new languages that characterize the technological era, such as the audiovisual, are creating a new landscape tradition. Resources like the moving imaging, the immersion feeling, the sensoriality or the audiovisual language are intrinsic to the society of the technological era.

On other hand, we truly believe that this resurgence of Landscape in the Postmodernity is related to the environmental crisis that we are living. We have noticed that throughout the ages, after periods of big technoscientific development, humans have always gone back to Nature. Actually, Landscape have experienced its most golden periods after epochs of big development, like the 17th Century with the first recognised landscape paintings by Jacob van Ruysdael and Claude de Lorraine, or in the 19th Century with the romantic Landscape. We do not think that this is chance and for this reason, we will also study these landscapes from an anthropological perspective, a point of view that art historians have always ignorated so far1.

Keywords: Landscape, Videoart, Art, Anthropocene, Contemporary.

1. INTRODUCTION
Speaking about Landscape implies to speak about culture, History, tradition, Literature, religious beliefs, Philology, Perception, Science, Philosophy, Poetry, Fine Arts, and, especially, about the History of Painting, but, also, about photography, amongst many other disciplines. The Landscape was born within Fine Arts. And it is an intersection where an endless

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number of disciplines converge. It results in a perceptive effort, which, at the same time, is determined by the socioeconomic condition of the individual and his cultural background.

The problematic that motivated this research was the concern about seeing how in the last decades the existence of the Landscape as a geographic reality has been assumed, referring to it as «natural landscape» or «physic landscape». And what is still more worrying is the frequency with which we find this kind of premises in the discipline of History of Art. Because, unlike what is frequently assumed, landscape cannot be something “natural” because it does not exist per se [1]. Therefore, it is important to clarify that Landscape is a construct created throughout the cultural tradition and developed throughout history. But, nowadays, the meaning of the term has been blurred and encompasses disparate fields such as Ecology, Urbanism, Sociology, Tourism or Sustainability [2], forgetting that Landscape was born in the Art. Another problematic that we found is the existence of a new contemporary landscape that is being ignored.

Landscape is not the result of the human action but something created out of the intellectual reflection [2]. It is an equation formed with, on one side, nature and the human being, and, on the other side, the feeling, the subjectivity and the perception. It is the result of the subjectivation of the territory. But to achieve this, we need to build a thought process by using tools such as Philosophy, Religion, Literature or Art. The Dr. J. Maderuelo defends that to exist, Landscape claims an interpretation, an aesthetic judgement and a sensitivity. Landscape developed through the technological progress until arriving to its peak in Romanticism [1].

We are aware that talking about such a classic concept as “genre” within the Contemporary Art can look disempowering, but by rescuing the Landscape in the context of the videoart’s genres we do not pretend to reconstruct a sectarian discourse in the same vein than the academicism of the 19th Century, but to review - from an open point of view- the actual artistic scene. From the consanguinity that characterizes the arts in the transmedia era, we propose to study these new works from their own identity and their individual characteristics. By reviewing the scene, we will try to identify the problematics in order to guaranty their right conservation. Despite the hybridization of themes and formats, all the new mediums -photography, videoart, digital art or cinema- have inherited the characteristics from the classic genres, but the most interesting for us is how many artists have also questioned and transformed them. We do not consider this as a hermetic classification, but as a way to classify such a wide field.

2. METHODOLOGY
This work results of identifying a wide group of practices which have not been studied together. After realizing that there were many artists working on landscape and videoart, we noticed that there is a new contemporary landscape tradition that nobody had identified so far. The process of study along these years has been hard and long, due to the fact that these practices have not being contrasted or studied together before. We have reviewed long
lists of artists, galleries, exhibitions, videoart fairs or festivals in order to localize little by little those artists who currently are working with landscape and videoart. We barely found access to a specific bibliography. Because, even though these practices are recognized by the art industry (galleries, art fairs, museums, etc.), they have not been studied from the Art History so far.

3. RESULTS

3.1. An anthropological perspective.

Due to the fact that Landscape spreads out of the Art limits, and because it is a cultural construction and, at the same time, a cultural constructor, and in turn, creator of cultural identity, then, it has also to be studied from the anthropological perspective; something that art historians have let it pass by. This work defends that there is a link that goes beyond the limits of Art and that is rooted in the Anthropology, tying humans and Nature in the most pristine way.

Culture is not something that we inherit through DNA. It is an ensemble of traditions, beliefs, rules or myths learnt in a group of human beings that live in community. Culture is transcultural. And that is why it is possible that different societies appreciate Art from other cultural traditions, because there is an instinct that is transversal: Chopin is admired in Korea, Spanish people collect Japanese engravings, Cervantes is read in Chicago and Chinese people love Shakespeare [3].

Having this in count, why is it interesting to study the Landscape from an anthropological perspective? It cannot be incidental that, throughout history, humans have always gone back to Nature, and, therefore, to Landscape, always after periods of big technoscientific developments: it happened in Rome during the 1st Century, also in the Quattrocento, later, again, in the 17th Century, and, once again, after the Industrial Revolution, in the 19th Century. Nowadays, after another period of big technological and scientific advances, but also pushed by the awareness of the Anthropocene and the environmental crisis, we are living a new return to Nature. It looks like the human beings need to go back and reconnect with nature periodically. Human beings, from their most intrinsic nature and primitive state, feel the need to always reencounter or reconnect to what one might call their most pristine condition, and or form of life. More precisely, humans have always been drowned to mother nature, and felt the need to reunite with it whenever they deemed they had ventured to far from it. These sorts of cyclical returns cannot contingent because they are repeated in time and in space. It is an intrinsic feeling to human beings.

Even more, one can say that the fascination inspired by nature is not bound by time and space and that it is a transcultural phenomenon. From the beginning of our recorded or studied history or to be more precise Prehistory, humans have given to Nature a much deeper sense and or meaning than a mere place where humans live. Although, it has not always been the case as monotheisms, generally, annul this dimension which they centralize in the figure of an omnipotent god. Consequently, in the European Middle Age or the Islamic societies there are no representations of the landscape. In spite of that, however, one must wonder, why do societies separated by thousands of years and/or kilometers have given to the cosmos supernatural attributes? It cannot
be a chance, or a succession of accident that Nature is given a supernatural meaning also transculturally. Human beings have continuously looked in the universe for answers to questions that would give a sense to existence. Art, and particularly, the Landscape, is shaped as an equation of elements that we have treated as a “container” where we bring together all these historic circumstances and concerns. That is why we claim the necessity, which has gone unseen so far, for incorporating an anthropological perspective to the study of Landscape.

The anthropologist Marvin Harris explains that the art, the religion and the magic satisfy similar psychological necessities in the human beings. They are ways to express feelings and emotions that are not easily manifested in ordinary life. They transmit a sense of power or communion with unpredictable events and mysterious or invisible powers. They impose meanings and human values to a different and unknown world, to a world that has a lack of meanings or understandable values for the human intelligence [4]. Nature, which morphs into Landscape in the attempt to turn into art, has the particularity that itself can hold to be natural and supernatural. And Landscape materializes all the folds happening in the pairing of human beings and Nature—as if the Landscape would guard the “magic soul” that make Nature supernatural.

“Man is the most insane species. He worships an invisible God and destroys a visible Nature. Unaware that this Nature he’s destroying is this God he’s worshipping”.

- Hubert Reeves.

3.2. New landscapes

Our research has been focused on classifying these new landscapes principally from its content. But in this paper, we will focus our interest on the formal aspects: What kind of new landscapes do we have today as a result of the technological progress? The typical idea of a landscape painted following the classical painting composition is already an old-fashioned concept. But the truth is that these new landscapes are still very unknown by most people. And people still think of Landscape through the aesthetical codes inherited from Romanticism.

The most wanted painting and The most unwanted paintings realized by the Russian artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, between 1993 and 1997, was materialized in the book Painting by Numbers: Komar & Melamid’s Scientific Guide to Art (1997). People’s Choice project that later was repeated in the music field with “The most wanted song” and “The most unwanted song”- consisted on analyzing the aesthetic preferences of eleven nationalities (such as US, China, France or Kenya) and to create with the results every country’s “ideal landscape” following every nationality’s interests. Depending on the preferences of every country, some parameters changed, but, generally, it was disclosed that people from very diverse cultures tend to appreciate a certain typology of pictorial representation: a landscape with trees, a blue sky, open fields, with water and human figures and animals; us, humans, we tend to prefer uniform landscapes [5].

Although the proposal may seem, at first sight, interesting and convincing, from a global artistic perspective, this project presents a very reductionist
and sectarian vision of the History of Landscape, overlooking a lot of required criteria that we must make count in any transcultural analysis—a kitsch pastiche, a cliché image. But it speaks out about the current problematic about Landscape in the Visual Art’s field. These sorts of pieces reinforce this research’s justification. The History of Landscape—especially the contemporary tradition—does not reduce to a 19th Century view. Taking these kinds of works as globally representative is a tremendous mistake, since it is necessary to understand that, although the materialization of Nature in Landscape is transcultural, it is not the way on which every culture does it. Every culture’s construction is very diverse. For instance, a representative Chinese landscape would never have such appearance, in the first place, would present a vertical format. By accepting these sorts of clichés, we ignore that they do exist new landscapes with the formal codes and narratives languages representing our era. These address their interests to the genuinely contemporary concerns that worry our society.

Based on the most characteristic resources used nowadays, we will briefly introduce the new contemporary landscape tradition. Since that Landscape spread out of the painting’s limits, resources as the feeling of immersion, the perception, the time-lapse, the feeling of augmented reality, the moving imagen, the time, the audiovisual as the new sorts of views have delimited the new landscapes. So, we will introduce some works made by using these new resources.

1. The immersion.

The work of Charly Nijensohn (Argentina, 1966) gathers most of the resources we are discussing here. It is difficult to choose only one of his works, but maybe “El naufragio de los hombres” (2008) (Fig. 1) is the one that represents better the ensemble of formal aspects that these new videolandsapes can offer as a result of the technological progress. This piece is a videostallation of three channels, an immersive videostallation where we find ourselves in a dark room surrounded by moving images of very big dimensions. Which are audiovisual images too and the sound has also been strategically worked by the artist. This immersive feeling is emphasized by the aesthetic of the represented images which make us feel lost in the middle of a nowhere land. The artist brings us to the Bolivian altiplano, to the Salar de Uyuni, during the wet season. A place where the values of light alter any perception due to the reflection of the salt, the temperatures and the height [6]. A white desert that makes you feel lost in the middle of nowhere. And in case the technical and aesthetical characteristics were not enough to immerse us and make our minds fly through the sensorial resources, Nijensohn utilizes the conceptual dimension to take us to a metaphysics reflection about our existence. Nijensohn’s style is to suggest a scenario, and without much narrative and through the sensorial and emotional stimulation, to stir people’s consciences and take them to reflect.

2. The augmented reality.

Another of the resources that undoubtedly is present in many of the daily experiences that technology provides us is the augmented reality. Our 21st minds are configurated in a 3D -or 4D- vision, leaving very far away the two-dimensional mind of our ancestors. And as this resource is installed in our daily life, it cannot miss in the contemporary art practices. Because,
as we know, art is the mirror of its society. Sonja Hinrichsen made The Three Gorges (2011) as a way to make a sharp criticism against the Chinese government because of the environmental destruction that authorities did in order to make a profit. The artist tries to make us reflect on the consequences of the human action on Nature. Hinrichsen creates an -also immersive- four channels videoinstallation. And place in the middle of the dark room a small boat that simulates one of the touristic ships that have taken over the area nowadays. The dimensions of the screens are as big as the view we would have if we were there. It is a very empiric piece. And the artist accurately recreates the real situation of the place inside of a gallery. Every screen represents one of the four rivers in the area. And they simulate the view we would have while sailing down the Yangzi river.

3. New techniques.

The Canadian artist Dan Hudson (Canada, 1959) uses the technologic and scientific progress as much as he can: in the content, the technique and the edition. His work explores the relationship between the contemporary culture and the natural world. Exploring other concerns such as the passing of the time -from a metaphysic dimension- or the contemplation of the natural phenomenons. His works do not have much narrative or a strong conceptual message. For instance, Barrier Lake: fragments of a year (2014) (Fig. 2) is a one channel piece, with a classical landscape painting composition but made using the time lapse and the collage techniques; genuinely contemporary techniques. Related to the studio of the time, Hudson is interested on the cycles: the passing of the days, the seasons, the years, the life or the death... And the time lapse is a technique that allows some very appropriate peculiarities to explore his interest for the passing of the time and contemplation.

The dynamism of every little image that form the collage has been individually treated. All of them create together the general dynamism of the overall composition. Throughout the general motion we observe the beauty of how the passing of time changes the way Nature looks during the different seasons. The idea was inspired by the way quantum physics describes subatomic particles as
existing in a state of probability. This work imagines how the visible world might look if it behaved the same as quantum physics describes subatomic world [7].

4. Time.

One of the main and most characteristic resources that the video provides to videoartists is time. Time as a tool to transmit the interest of every artist. Time as a tool to control the spectator. Gianfranco Foschino (Chili, 1983) thinks that the contemporary individuals are completely lost and consider that the best way to reconnect with ourselves is to understand the rhythms of Nature. Foschino’s praxis revolves around the desire for understanding the Earth and for the fascination with the natural phenomenons that are unperceived by human beings that live enclosed in the cities. He defends that the knowledge of Nature and its phenomenons is the best way to achieve self-knowledge. His work is a reflection on Nature, about the importance to preserve it and learn from it. He utilizes the time of his artworks as a way to take the spectator to pause, take time, contemplate and reflect as the frenetic contemporary society does not let us do anymore. Because our eyes are so contaminated and our lives are so frenetic that we have forgotten the most pristine wonder that surround us; and, which at the same time, means everything’s origin: the natural rhythms and changes. The most interesting thing about his work is how his pieces pictorialize the movement, by contrast of what art had done so far trying to represent the movement in the painting. He gets to do this mainly by the use of time -but also with the help of others video’s resources such as the silence or the permanent point of view-. Foschino also uses these resources as tools to emphasize the reconciliation he looks for between the spectator and the passing of time and Nature’s rhythms. Most of his works are born from this fascination with the phenomenons that drive the world
and the universe, such as “Sierra Nevada” (2015) or “Fluxus” (2010), where the simple contemplation is the works’ motive.

5. The post production of the image.

Although all the images that we are analyzing are post-produced, Nicolas Rupcich (Chili, 1981) focuses his work on the treatment of image itself. Mainly, on the post-production and the digital treatment, but there is also an important influence of the science-fiction on his work. His intention is to create anti-commercial landscapes, as he explains— landscapes that entail the antithesis of the traditional concept of landscape. Rupcich is against the hyperreality and the image’s high standards’ definition, because he claims that in spite of being unreal, post-produced and deeply worked images, are presented to the world under an idea of reality.

The current standards resolution have taken to the extreme the manipulation of images to achieve an ideal, but unreal, aesthetic. For Nicolas Rupcich, Nature’s digitalization is a totally exemplary phenomenon of these matters because, through the digital process, Nature has been transformed in a “fictional space”, gaining in the collective imaginary, an identity that has been stolen by its digital representation’s [8]. Some of his works are, for instance, “EDF” (2013), “Chepu” (2018) or “H1” (2014). In “H1”, for example, Rupcich uses the ISO levels of the digital camera -which are considered as an error on the field- to explore the possibilities of the image. Or “EDF”, which is based on the problem of digital representation, in the context of what some people calls the “post-photography era”, where the images are no longer a representation of reality, but a way of reality itself [9].


The scientific progress has given us new technologies such as planes, drones, submarine technological systems or rockets to go explore space. They have let us discover new realities that before the 20th Century were unimaginable. And by consequence, the idea of landscape has spread out far from the idealistic idea of a valley with a river and a mountain in the horizon.

The history of pictorial representation has always developed concurrently to the technical and scientific development. The human being’s vision has always enlarged depending on the technical possibilities of his epoch. For instance, the discovering of the laws of perspective in the Italian Renaissance by artists as Brunelleschi or Masaccio let the humankind pass from a two-dimensional world to a one three-dimensional, according with the reality that the eye perceives. Emphasizing the impact that this brings to the corresponding epoch’s consciousness. In the same way, our epoch has enlarged the vision to realities that have been ignored by the human’s eye so far.

a) Aerial Views. In many of his recent works Lukas Marx uses drones, and base them on aerial views. Even though we know that photography started to introduce these kinds of views in the 19th Century with photographers as Nadar, the truth is that these sorts of aerial landscapes are part of the contemporary landscape imaginary (independently if the artistic format is
video or photography). Some of these works based of these aerial perspectives are, for instance, *Imperial Valley* (2017) or *Captive Horizon* (2014). They are pieces which general aesthetic breaks with all the representation codes that have characterized the History of Landscape. The geometric and abstract forms that the aerial point of view let us have take a main role. In aesthetical terms, the geometric forms have a leading role on this piece: horizontal and vertical lines, circles, semicircles, crosses, squares or triangles, creating out of them an aesthetic beauty.

b) Spacial Landscapes. It is true that the astrology has been known from millennials. Whether looking at Babylonian or Aztec or Mayan civilizations, their knowledge about the cosmos is undeniable. Having said that, the reality, however, is that generally, these are representations of Nature that have been unperceived by the artists. It is true that in Painting we can find some isolated example, for instance “Nuit’ etoilée” (1909) by Wenzel Hablik, but it is also true that these are unreal spacial landscapes; imaginary landscapes because they are landscapes created from the observation of the sky that we can have from the Earth’s surface’s perspective. Whereas, since the beginning of the Space Race in the 60’s we have incorporated a new whole imaginary to our minds. Views that -even if today they are completely familiar to us- were not fifty years ago. Dan Hudson made *Illusion of the Sun going Down* (2015) comparing a classical veduta of a sunset in Venice -as many we have seen, such as Canaletto’s *vedute*, for instance- with another very different point of view of the sun. On the right side, we can observe the sun registered in the same day and at the same time than on the left side, but using images taken by the NASA’s telescope *Solar Dynamics Observatory* creating a real spacial landscape.

c) Submarine Landscapes. After centuries representing the Nature over the surface, finally we have submarine technologies that let us represent the life hidden at the bottom of the oceans. Gianfranco Foschino went to Galápagos Islands to record his piece *La Edad de la Tierra* (2016) (Fig. 3). Foschino, who is interested in Geology, makes an ode to the origin of life. According to the idea that any living organism on this earth comes from unicellular organisms created out of the electromagnetism
resulted out of contact between the water and the magma. The life under the water is the beginning of any life. As it is the element that keep the rhythm of earth’s life going through natural process. Undoubtedly, these submarine landscapes contribute to create a new contemporary landscape tradition not only through the techniques employed, but also through their contents.

CONCLUSIONS

We started this research with the hypothesis of the existence of a new landscape tradition that had not been studied so far. The results found prove that it does exist a wide group of practices that by using the new technologies, the languages and formal codes of this society and themes that worry this anthropocenic era are creating new contemporary landscapes.

These landscapes have a different aesthetic and distinct interests than the landscape painting tradition. So, we do believe that we can confirm the existence of a contemporary landscape, as the emergence of «videolandscapes».

We are aware that a substantial amount of work remains to be done, but we hope that this work will help inform people about the existence of these new practices as it will set the base for us as well as other colleagues to build up on.

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