

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition "Crossroads: A Shifting Landscape" on view at the Walsh Gallery from January 17 through February 17, 2012.

All measurements are in inches, height by width.

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# *Crossroads: A Shifting Landscape*

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Carol Chave  
Travis Childers  
Raquel A. Foote  
Richard Gilles  
Mikhail Gubin  
William Hudders  
Nina Jordan  
Suzy Kopf  
Jeremy Rosenstein Kortes  
Franck Lesbros  
Susan Maakestad  
Jason Meyer  
Bruce Pollock  
Daniel Rosenbaum  
Patrick Seufert  
Susan Shaw  
Rachel Sitkin  
Ryan Thompson  
Kati Vilim  
Joe Waks  
Sook Yoo

“Crossroads: A Shifting Landscape” demonstrates how artists are breaking with canons of the landscape genre in their depictions of places and events of the present. In the past, landscapes were traditionally oil on canvas, but artists have taken to introducing new and diverse media as the genre has shifted. Historically, landscape paintings served many different purposes. During the Renaissance, they functioned as a background in portraiture, legitimizing the wealth and status of the depicted individual. Artists during this time also painted landscapes to create an idealized view of the world they inhabited. In the Age of Exploration, landscapes served as documentation of foreign places and distant lands. In 19th century America, many people received their first (and only) glimpse of the Wild West through paintings by Albert Bierstadt and his contemporaries. Wealthy Europeans and Americans participating in the Grand Tour in the 17th to 19th centuries painted as part of their education, but the work also served as a souvenir of their travels. As technology advanced, more creative outlets were possible, such as painting en plein aire, which allowed artists to work outside of the restraints of the studio. In the 20th century, American realist painter Edward Hopper depicted the cities he encountered, flaws and all. The 1960s offered a radical change in society, and in turn, the American attitude towards the human relationship with the land changed as well. Environmental issues such as pollution and urban sprawl were at the forefront of these concerns, and were addressed in the form of earthworks.

As the world around us continues to change, art progresses beyond the boundaries of the art historical narrative, and therefore what it represents must change as well. The genre is in constant flux in order to reflect the transitioning world. Malcolm Andrews, the author of “Landscape and Western Art”<sup>1</sup>, explains the landscape genre as way to comprehend our world by distilling it into an artistic work. As our world grows increasingly complex, landscapes have the ability to turn the chaos of the wilderness, the city, or anywhere in between—into a manageable concept. As landscapes are altered, our definitions of them must be modified as well, and depictions of cities, industrial sites, and suburbia are more commonplace. By questioning our pre-existing notions of what landscape is, we can better comprehend the present.

The taming of the wilderness is one theme that artists have touched upon following the vein of many 1960s earthwork/environmental artists. William Hudders and Rachel Sitkin portray the convergence of human impact with nature. In *Backyard Flowers* and *Two Trees* Hudders captures suburbia and the impact of human settlement. Rachel Sitkin is interested in how humans exploit the land while also co-existing with it, and explores this in *Toy World*. Travis Childers’ *Brickscapes* depict diverse terrains, from sand dunes to ice floes to lush green forests. He shows that while humans enjoy nature, they also have a desire to control their interaction with it. Nature cannot always be contained, however. Daniel Rosenbaum displays how nature can also take its toll on carefully constructed cities though natural disasters such as the earthquake and tsunami that destabilized a Japanese power plant in spring of 2011.

People can also experience the landscape by traveling through it. Travel can remind us either of a crowded city or a vast open terrain. Susan Shaw’s depictions of trucks moving through anonymous highways are blocked out by large geometric planes that consume the composition, leaving only a sliver of the land visible. Landscape has quickly become something we travel through to reach our destination. Sometimes the change in perspective can also be literal, as in the aerial view of the Newark airport in Kati Vilim’s woodblock print, *See Something, Newark Airport*,



while bringing to mind current issues of security and freedom. All of this raises the question, as mobility increases how does this affect our relationship with nature?

The iconic landscape is something that is also rooted in the history of the genre. Ryan Thompson mythologizes the landscape with his installation *Burden of Proof*. The images represent crypto-zoological investigations of the Loch Ness Monster and Bigfoot, with the subjects absent from the well-known photographs of their supposed documentation. Louise Barry imbues the landscape with monumental status through her composites of found images and stone. The rugged landscape becomes an archetype charged with the symbolism of the American west and its great open spaces. Joe Waks also plays upon the picturesque landscape by re-appropriating paintings from yard sales and thrift stores, among other places. The scenes are pastoral and offer no critical commentary on the depicted forms and therefore are out of touch with current times. Waks highlights the element of commodification by adding the ubiquitous McDonald's sign and stamping his website onto each painting. This adds another layer of fictional space to the narrative and the salon-style installation, which is in itself, a discussion of the commercialization of art. On the other end of the spectrum are works that deal with scenes that are far from ideal. The issues of America's development and current economic condition is a situation that many people face daily with foreclosed homes, cheap housing and urban decay as depicted by Raquel A. Foote and Nina Jordan.

Representation in the 21st century also includes expansion of the genre beyond traditional media. Jeremy Rosenstein Kortes follows in Impressionist footsteps by using technology to gain greater freedom with en plein aire painting using an iPad as his canvas and easel; fingertips and a stylus as his brushes. The removal of cumbersome equipment allows greater freedom for the artist. Franck Lesbros uses time-based media in his video of a lightning storm. Employing the physical components of technology, Jason Meyer uses coaxial cable, a material used for transmitting images and ideas, to create a small field of black poppies to represent his ideas on natural resources versus manufactured materials. In a resurgence of craft, Sook Yoo and Carol Chave use organic materials, such as rice paper and wool to create their vision of the natural world.

At present, artists have taken a part in a variety of discourses surrounding our environment. The art represents ideas in the gap between a harmonious landscape and the current issues we face. Moving beyond traditional pastoral scenes we now include industrial and suburban scenery, both positive and negative, in addition to continuing to consider the natural landscape. With an expansion of boundaries of the landscape genre through content and media it is becoming even more possible to recognize the connections between the similarities or differences in various examinations of our surroundings. By taking all of the different artistic viewpoints into consideration it is easy to see that there just as many ways of expressing landscape as there are different places. In their reaction to today's complex world, these artists have drawn a new horizon for the shifting landscape before us.

- Jesse Gordon and Emily Ozga

<sup>1</sup>Malcom Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).