

Processo alla Natura

*“Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world.
Landscape is a way of seeing the world”**

In 1984 Denis E. Cosgrove published a seminal work for human geography in which landscape is defined mainly as an extremely complex and ideologically defined cultural product.

Cosgrove sought to demonstrate the artificial nature of landscape as an abstraction of the western world, constructed during the Renaissance by a specific social class to legitimise its own position in the world. In a nutshell, a transition occurred due mainly to economic reasons so that at a certain moment in history human beings stopped viewing themselves as part of nature, subject to its rhythms like other living creatures, placing themselves as external to everything else. Cosgrove suggested that this change involved the invention of a form of proto-capitalism which, interestingly, began in Italy with the maritime republics and in Flanders. Here local economies were no longer based mainly on agricultural activities, through which people saw land from a productive perspective, and instead embraced commerce and finance as the main driving forces for development.

From this moment onwards, the concept of landscape became imbued with more intimate, subjective aspects which followed one another over the centuries mainly due to the work of artists and writers, rapidly neglecting its primary meaning as a tool of social advancement.

Processo alla natura (Inquiry into nature) therefore prompts reflections that can be traced back through the whole history of art, placing mankind in a condition of emulation, almost invoking nature to testify to its creative power. Whether this takes place in a relatively pacific or temporary manner, with a critical or reconciliatory intention, there is a clearly strained interpretation towards subjectivity, a rift in the perception of one's own physical and objective presence in the world. However, the discourse is turned on its head in the section devoted to artist's books where, in some cases, the perspective within the landscape reveals artistic practice.

L'evaporazione di un fiume (The evaporation of a river) by Luca Francesconi is a clear statement about the limits of humanity which, through the lyrical gesture of tracing the deviation of the water from the banks, with the variation of climatic conditions, swings decidedly in favour of nature. For once the artist simply proceeds by recording the gentle rhythm of the action that leads to change, imperceptibly but inexorably. In the same way, not even centuries are sufficient to account for the geological transformations of Death Valley, the lowest point in North America where the evaporated lakes have given way in more recent history to mining throughout the area. With his project *What We Want*, Francesco Jodice photographs scenes of apparent calm portraying a violent clash between mankind and nature.

Sergio Vega's powerful series of photographs *Paradise on fire* bears witness to the same epic struggle in which the shadows of trees rise up like solitary heroes before succumbing to the thick blanket of smoke caused by the fires in the Amazonia forests.

However, nature wreaks its revenge when it mixes up the artificial rules of the rationalist cage, deforming the geometric grid in the works of Eugenio Espinoza who acutely identifies the point of no return for the detachment of human beings from their natural habitat in the invention of the vanishing point. It originated as the synthesis of a Renaissance cosmological vision which regarded the universe as being ordered by precise geometric rules. It is an example of artificial creation *par excellence*. The contemporary era leads us to imagine the mystery of the cosmos and the sublime unease in which it leaves us, evoked by Francesca Grilli in her vinyl records on which she etches the traces of the earth's energies.

The shock of experiencing infinity also leads Alberto Di Fabio to molecularise painting, making the true material of an inner world explicit in *Montagne (Mountains)*. This inner world is revealed to Di Fabio by the very essence of which the atoms of the physical world are composed. The connection between the spiritual and the earthly world is reinforced by the works of Satoshi Hirose in reworking the landscapes travelled through by the artist during his journeys between East and West thanks to the harmony and poetic force of the aesthetic object.

Eugenio Tibaldi breaks up the rhythm of this contemplation with the *Cycas* re-evaluated almost as a suburban monument to the capacity of cultural peripheries to mix up imaginary worlds. With his work *ready-made Airbag Growbag*, Mark Hosking seeks to rediscover a new function for the waste material of mass production, creating a hybrid organism. Pedro Neves Marques' study of botanical alterations begins from the fragility of the boundary

between nature and artifice, reflecting on the colonialist implications of multinational food companies, as is clearly indicated in the title *GMOs are a Direct Evolution of Botanical Expeditions to the Colonies Throughout Modern Times*. André Romão's *Scalp* is an immediate reference to predatory behaviour; a cast containing marine living beings is displayed as a trophy on a plexiglass, a modernist wonder like one of the natural wonders (*mirabilia*) in a Renaissance cabinet of curiosities.

Before entering an actual cabinet, where we also find the cutting and de-contextualising footnotes of Marco Raparelli with his wall drawings and a precious site-specific series of artist's books, the exhibition ends with two interesting works: *mementum*, the fake idyllic landscape of Vedovamazzei and the Christmas tree by Jota Castro decorated with barbed wire, almost a warning against this phony human supremacy, the former through an ironic narrative of a political event and the latter through the more serious tone of a social commentary.

Leaving the exhibition space behind, one finally enters the peace of a study, arranged as a place to think where the various ideas discussed during the preparation of the exhibition find space for coexistence and contamination. The picture gallery acts as the backdrop for a collection of artist's books by Maria Calderara and Novelio Furin. The thematic division of the artist's books into display cases considers the stance taken by artists towards the landscape which is explored, recorded, reduced to a symbol and, lastly, taken as a field of research, midway between the history of collectors and the history of the Galleria Umberto Di Marino. The first and the fourth group suggest unexpected similarities about themes regarding the deconstruction of the landscape, such as the rare editions of the exploration of the colours of Californian air by Bruce Nauman and the *Sessanta verdi naturali* by Maurizio Nannucci, or the analysis of colonialism and the production cycle linked to nature such as *Alnus Glutinosa* by Paul Armand Gette or *Angola to Vietnam* by Cristopher Williams.

The two central display cases represent the heart of the collection and lead us towards a conceptual reversal. The books of Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, accompanied by several illustrious digressions (Tremlett, Serra, Penone), constitute a coherent core due to the precise stance adopted by the artists in their experience of nature, in other words from the inside. Anne Moeglin-Delcroix clarifies things with remarkable concision “*The aim is to rediscover a more authentic relationship with nature that is inseparable from promoting experience at the expense of representation. This has led to the abandonment of the idea, which is typical of the western tradition of landscape, of nature or an anthropocentric world, made for the human eye which contemplates it at a distance or for the artist who portrays it from a selected viewpoint.*”** The felicitous definition of “walking artists” was coined as a result of her studies. However, while Long still maintains a subjective attachment to the landscape, Fulton established the walk as a form of artistic practice, starting a highly contemporary strand of research. In *Two sheepdogs cross in and out of the passing shadows. The clouds drift over the hill with a storm*, Long accompanies the images with several lyrical verses in which he seems to be addressing nature, in this sense still projecting his own ego onto his surroundings. This tendency has gradually dissolved, as is demonstrated by *River avon book*, a poetic attempt to record the waves of a river directly on paper, or in the three small collections of leaves, produced several years apart with slight differences between one edition and another. While in this case, or in the photos taken by Gette, photography changes the interpretation of the landscape towards a scientific approach aimed at cataloguing images, Hamish Fulton's work represents a step forward in terms of a formal synthesis towards symbolisation. From *Horizon to horizon*, to *Ajawan* or *The Sweet Grass Hills of Montana – Kutoyisiks – As Seen From the Seen Milk River of Alberta – Kinuk Sisakta*, the artist's intention is to bring together the a posteriori memory of a journey into a unit of time and space that often leads him to favour the continuity of a leporello accordion book. The length of the walk, the distances travelled, the pattern of the horizon, the nomenclature and the position of what is encountered during the journey all contribute to influencing the final outcome. This is achieved without denying the impossibility of actually conveying the experience of crossing the landscape, but by using all the limits of the cognitive sphere as artistic material. Indeed, a few decades later, while simultaneity strongly influences our way of describing the landscape thanks to new forms of data-sharing, the challenge to find continuity between the artist and the world seems increasingly open to further exploration.

Nicoletta Daldanise

*Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Croom Helm Ltd, London 1984

** Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, *Ambulo ergo sum. Nature as Experience in Artists' Books*, Walther Koenig, Koln 2016