

One to One, 2017, Bik Van der Pol, video, 17 min.

Why do precisely these objects, which we behold make a world?
Precisely these objects make a world.
They reveal the difficulty or even impossibility
of both seeing “precisely these objects”
and saying “I know”

Landscape painting is not a genre but a medium.
To a practice, artistic
to materials, used
to the world, natural
and to spaces, transformed

In the 19th century it was the medium to powerfully express
the great concerns of that period,
of constructing national identity,
of testing imperial boundaries,
of retaining harmony between nature and the divine,

by making the natural world extremely visible,
a dizzying proliferation of botanical specimens.

As a portrait of a property, Eugene von Guérard painted Tower Hill in 1855.
A botanist with the eye of a geologist
depicting in photographic detail all the vegetation
as the Aborigines knew it and just before the Europeans were to ruin it.
A precise record of the details of the vegetation, the landscape,
Volcanic,
how it was before its destruction
its acclimatization.

Most of the trees were taken for fuel
exotic plants and animals, like cattle and grasslands
were introduced to the colonies, to copy the homeland
from a belief that the local fauna was deficient or impoverished;
and from nostalgia and a desire to see familiar species.
Thus accelerating the decline of the landscape
globally.

Tower Hill was destroyed like that.
In 1961, people realized that its value for wildlife would be enhanced
if its native flora was returned.

So a decision was made to replicate pre-European flora as purely as possible.
But
how to know what the original flora and fauna consisted of?
Records were sparse.
The extent and thoroughness of the clearing in and around Tower Hill,
left the planners with a dearth of remnant vegetation,
insufficient to guide them

The pictorial record helped
to restore the site as closely as possible to its original state.
The painting as proof, a model, a map,
a guide.
Mining the canvas as an archive.
Dozens of species
in almost photographic detail.

Staying alive—for every species—requires livable collaborations
Over 250,000 trees and shrubs, herbs, and grasses and rushes
were planted between 1964 and 1984
with the help of hundreds of school children and volunteers.
Native animals were re-introduced.

Why do precisely these objects, which we behold make a world?
Precisely these objects make a world.

“I can make more and better landscapes in this way
than by tampering with canvas and paint in the studio”, wrote Frederic Church, the artist who made
the famous painting *The Heart Of The Andes* in 1859,
four years after Eugene von Guérard painted *Tower Hill*.

And thus, then, therefore,
he stopped painting
and created a one to one, life size landscape of 1 km² at Olana on the Hudson River.
It took him forty years.
He planted thousands of native trees,
created a lake from a swamp,
built a freestanding studio, a summer house,
rustic benches and railings,
and 8 km of carriage drives.
He also strategically acquired adjacent parcels and the top of the hill
thus securing undisturbed views.

A landscape painter should have the eyes of a botanist, geologist, scientist.
Every detail detailed, and refusing to dissolve in paint or effect.
Paint, as material, must be forgotten.
A landscape architect should have the mind of a landscape painter,
painting with the objects themselves.

Moving beyond the limitations of the canvas and the constraints
of pictorial composition,
rethinking scale,
processes
and visual experiences
while engaging with pressing ecological questions,
and working with the spatial and material specificity of the site.
Undertaking a visual defense of the “reality of universals”,
while turning to the physical environment.
No restrictions or framed visions but expansive views.

A retreat from the world and an attempt to create a new one.
To make more and better landscapes now,
revealing the difficulty or even impossibility
of both seeing “precisely these objects”
and saying “I know”

To see in detail is to examine the world.
Seeing details, not wholes nor the shadow of the whole.

To see in detail is to pursue knowledge only to discover, instead, the strangeness of seeing.
Why is this painting so detailed?
Why this dizzying proliferation of botanical specimens?
What does detail mean?
How does seeing in detail take form?
When do details complicate or challenge a larger narrative,
and how do details acquire, or resist, meaning?

‘Detail’ is a specific part of a whole. It calls attention to particulars.
‘Detailed’ describes the overall impression of a specificity.
‘In detail’ connotes the act of looking at parts...
an attempt to acknowledge,
how the different forms of a single term shift
from marking spatial and material borders
to a description of the visual field within these borders,
to the visual process itself.

What are the cultural norms that define ideas of ‘significance’ or ‘insignificance’?
How do details contribute or undermine?
Ignoring the landscape, abstracting it, is dismissing and erasing it.
Is the detail then,
what modernism implicitly and explicitly
acts against?

While painting inspires a fantasy of possession,
landscape is the dream of imperialism,
To see is to own,
with your eyes.
This is property, it says. I own you.

The pictorial detail has a cultural task:
to move the eye from the minute elements of nature
to a larger idea of Nature,
a challenge to harmony versus scientific.

The detail is the minute, the particular, the microscopic
Zoom in, and zoom out...
between the field of the microscope
and the expanded vision from above,
views as wide as heaven’s scope.

Details always point away from themselves to something else.

When something is cropped and reproduced as detail,
we understand: here is a piece,
perhaps even magnified, of something larger.
We also understand: what we see here is not everything.
There is much that we are not seeing.
The detail draws us to a privileged part of specificity
while simultaneously indicating a visual realm
that is beyond its borders.
A detail is a cut.

Moving through the landscape one experiences space
a succession of scenes that constantly change.
The scenery as montage, which connects
apparently discontinuous,
varying,
contrastive elements by means of repetition.
to create an environment that is, in its essence,
the precision of observation.

Sight is an inherent power, seeing an art. Where to look from?

Nature is not a metaphor

A dizzying painted proliferation of botanical specimens
was considered to be too scientific.
Not enough that bushes and trees are recognized by a tropical botanist.

Details as the product of labor implies - as well -
the labor involved in seeing the painting,
of looking closely,
of understanding its visual demands,
and of asking what history may have erased or diminished.

Detailing turns against the possibilities of interpretation.
To say that a landscape painting is too detailed,
too scientific,
too fundamental,
or an expression of ideology,
is running the risk of losing the landscape itself.

See the necessity of restoring the disturbed harmonies of nature,
see reforestation as a critical aspect of this restoration,
see the importance of the labor of observation
in understanding nature and humanity's effect upon it.

Making more and better landscapes is translating observation into a bodily practice,
moving through,
learning how to see, think and feel.
While the painting works to make the spectator forget space and time,
to see, and only see,
the physical landscape is literal.

Not the representation of the landscape, but the making of one.

Planting trees is not only to form and shape pathways and scenery,
but individual objects for contemplation and thought.

The distant mountains provide the background.

The windows, entryways and architectural features...

they frame the landscape.

Roads...

allow for movement in and through the land

and for continuously changing views.

Such landscapes are never finished

constant new creations,

guided by questions of volume, scale and change.

Choosing the trees carefully,

considering them as part of an aesthetic composition,

is restoring the landscape,

and an opportunity for two acts: an act of creation and an act of preservation.

The trees do not just represent something,

they do something.

Combined they form a healthy, diverse forest.

A remaking in terms of sculpture, visualizing aspects of the environment

on the page, on the canvas, in the world: to uncover the complexities of the earth, to protect and preserve, not to destroy.

an observational practice

a system constantly in flux.

Mapping the oceans and landmasses,

distances and boundaries, trees, plants and people,

are processes of calibration.

acts of noticing and naming,

of fixing and describing,

after the observer is done,

he and the machinery of observation move on.

Observations almost immediately mandate eradication.

Where details are lost to a general effect of destruction,
one cannot own, possess, freeze or protect.

Turn back to creating and

the labor of making a one to one map,

return, pay back, resurrect, replant, redo

remake the world in terms of earth sculpture

The world cannot afford to wait until the slow and sure progress
of sciences have taught it a better economy.

A lake is nature's mirror and microscope:

It is earth's eye.

A measure to the landscape and viewer.

A measure to measure
us

Why does precisely this, which we behold make a world?
If man cannot take upon themselves their responsibility,
then perhaps art can and should.
Precisely this makes a world.

One to One, Bik Van der Pol, video 17 min. with a script built on a variety of sources (listed below), reflecting and speculating on what it means to see in detail.

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