

MATÈRIA

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ON
LANDSCAPE
PROJECT

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ON LANDSCAPE #2

Essay by Francesca Orsi

On Landscape Project, founded by Minna Kantonen, Dafna Talmor and Emma Wieslander, examines contemporary representations of landscape through extensive visual and conceptual research. In addition to the traditional reading of landscape embedded in notions of 'truth' and reality, the project visually embodies the current renewal of landscape traditions leaving space for the realm of the imaginary, thus triggering a continuous dialogue between the real, the fictional, the symbolic and the everyday.

The project, now in its second edition, will serve as Matèria gallery's inaugural exhibition. **On Landscape Project** consists of a model that, in line with the first edition*, features its founders, a guest artist - in the specific case of the Roman exhibition, Marco Strappato - and 44 selected artist books relating to the project ethos. In all its forms of expression, *On Landscape #2* embraces a conception of landscape that reflects the need to represent 'other places', spaces that draw in part from human interiority, utopian and idyllic landscapes, which find their strength in the fine line between reality and fiction, between the artificial and the natural.

Rooted in reality, *Constructed Landscapes* by **Dafna Talmor** focuses specifically on creating imaginary spaces in a representational and meta-linguistical manner that makes photography itself the subject of her investigation. The work of the London-based Israeli artist is a craft that sees her produce landscapes with strong Pictorialist references, created by combining cut out negatives, resulting in a purposed image printed in the darkroom. Pieced together from photographs shot in close succession of landscapes initially documented across the world, the negatives are subsequently manipulated and decontextualized from their original yield. Creating seemingly imaginary scenarios, embedded in a decomposed reality, the images are unhinged and rearranged to become something 'other'. Photographed with an embedded personal charge and political connotations - after the reconstruction process - Talmor's images are abstracted in a profoundly archetypal sense. There is an oneiric abundance of visual experimentation in *Constructed Landscapes*, a conflation that makes Dafna Talmor's work a highly invested contemporary representation of landscape.

What is more romantic than a sunset? How many of us have not stopped to admire the reddening sky and the sun disappearing below the horizon line? As the image of the sun setting forms such an integral part of the collective imagination, what effect has this repetition had over time through its cultural mediation? Swedish artist **Emma Wieslander's** *Wish You Were Here* constructs her 'landscape' through a perceptive and evocative game. As the artist suggests, her practice is informed by the interrelations between 'the perceived, the represented and the described'. In this

project, using the enquiry on landscape as a vehicle that deals with the relationship between the represented and the imaginary, what seems to be is often not. Once the illusion is discovered and the dirty floor, a skirting board and a light bulb suspended by a cord become apparent, is it then possible to go back to the initial idyllic feeling generated by the sentiment and its cultural mediation? Following this collusion, Wieslander's images leverage the aforementioned duality between fiction and reality - in space and time that extends without dimension - feeding on their contradictory values, coexisting within a single image.

In contrast, the series *Urban Vistas* by **Minna Kantonen** proposes a more traditional landscape aesthetic, one that is decidedly less abstract than Talmor and Wieslander's approach. The London-based Finnish photographer's practice investigates nature within urban environments, whereby green sites coexist with bricks and concrete. From Alvar Aalto to Eliel Saarinen, the Nordic thought has strived for structural harmony through a synthesis of opposing elements, giving architecture a more humane essence, sensitive to individual requirements. In *Urban Vistas*, trees find their home on paved hills instead of soil, marked by the incessant signs of urbanisation. In one photograph in particular, a sumptuous and luxuriously leaved tree is faced with its artificial counterpart, drawn on a cold vertical concrete façade, inhabiting parallel worlds. Kantonen intersperses the representation of the city's concrete apparatus with shining natural oasis, which in the visual equilibrium of her work, acts as a rupture of the traditional urban landscape, with its cold and rational geometries.

For the second edition of the On Landscape Project exhibition, London-based Italian guest artist **Marco Strappato** is similarly invested in extrapolating from his visual research focused on landscape and its representation. Working with installation, Strappato makes use of photographs, collages and digital techniques to delve deeper into the subject matter by using images belonging to consumer culture as his starting point. Driven by the process of manipulation and re-elaboration that places the final results within the panorama of contemporary aesthetics, Strappato draws inspiration from the cauldron of images that - through magazines, television and newspapers - bombard our daily view. These images are then reused to engage in a silent yet critical discussion with the viewer about his perception of the world, potentially buffered from the texts imposed by society. The artist plays with a precarious imagination, inducing a disorientating visual world in those who experience his work. There is no perceptive certainty in Strappato's work, a practice characterised by a consistently evolving aesthetic and the search for a contemplative unveiling.

Mirroring the first exhibition, the second edition of On Landscape Project features a selection of 44 self-published and short run artist books providing diverse engagements with landscape. The open call, aimed at international artists, offers a bird's eye view of the project ethos, stripping the representation of landscape from connotations of nationalism. The publications propose varied facets of landscape, from a more intimate and personal interpretation to a subtly ironic one, from one that is linked to cultural modes of production such as cinema and painting, to the representation without images up to the documentary and the political.

On Landscape Project is created with the intention of raising questions that deal with the perception of contemporary landscape, yet the responses gleaned from the exhibition at Matèria remain subjective, leaving room for personal interpretation.

Francesca Orsi

*The first edition of On Landscape Project -On Landscape #1 - took place in March 2014 at Guest Projects (London) as part of a one-month residency programme.