

LANDSCAPE AND PHOTOGRAPHY — REPRESENTATION, FIGURATION, ABSTRACTION

Arch 285, Spring term, 2018

Tuesdays 2pm-5pm — School of Architecture, Room 2026 or alternate meeting space.

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Office hours: by appointment via email only.



"Before an unbounded nature, before the images of its countless particulars represented in our mind (from trees and torrents to fields of sunflowers and rolling hills), before nature's "spiritual physiognomy" that corresponds to the full spectrum of our most intimate feelings, then, we are convinced that something exists that transcends this vast, extremely rich panorama of disparate elements. To our conscious minds, that something takes the form of all-enveloping, diffused totality, like an uninterrupted flow of emotions and perceptual data, an affective irradiation. That something is the landscape. It is more than the sum of the parts, of the individual fragments of our perception scattered along the temporal continuum of our sensibility. It is more than the attraction of psychic processes. It is the spirit of an infinite and magical connectedness of forms. The idea of the landscape develops in history, but also in the individual, through the effects of time and space joined together in the rhythm of lines and surfaces that human beings know how to compose almost instinctively." — *Raffaele Milani*

Course Description and Topics Overview

Our experience of the world is always mediated and shaped by positions and constructs. In this course we are using photography as an exploratory artistic medium of research to examine material and ephemeral cultural factors involved in our understanding of landscape. We take an interdisciplinary approach by mixing lectures, workshops, student presentations, discussions, and field exercises. The emphasis is not technological, and you do not require a DSLR. A phone camera is fine as long as the resolution is high enough for you to print photos. If you have or can borrow one, a tripod of some kind may come in useful.

On the surface level, this course is concerned with landscape and photography, including film photography, which have frequently been used to disseminate to audiences works too large to be traditional artifacts. Yet the deeper aims are to attune us to taking a critical view on representation, and how we fathom and inhabit our environment with meaning. We aim to sensitize ourselves, to deeply perceive the underlying conditions and communicate what we find by poetic means. Through this approach to our work, we speculate on how the arts create knowledge.

In our time, as in the 1970s, there is growing awareness of the ways in which our environment is at risk. We live in an age dominated by visual media, and careful explorations will help us to understand how and what productive knowledge about the environment can be created and communicated via photographic techniques. We start with the notion that the site is full, rather than empty.

Geographer Donald Meinig (1976) described landscape as the union of the physical and the psychological: "composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads." Thus the landscape is an entity that is defined by our senses and interpreted by our intellect. It reflects prior experience as well as prevailing cultural, social, and economic values. Landscapes express, in addition to their own biophysical makeup, the character of a society as it has evolved over an extended period of time. When fully understood, the landscape may be comprehended as more than just a physical condition and more than just an emotional response to perception, but also as one of the most accurate reflections of a society, its values, its technology, and its aspirations.

— Michael Murphy, *Landscape Architecture Theory: An Ecological Approach*, p.10-11

In the lectures and readings, I'm referencing earth art and land art from the 1970s era, which followed closely on the rise of ecological consciousness in society. I encourage everyone to keep in mind various ideas including time, history and movement (human and natural) as well as the concept of ecology. Ecology would refer to natural systems and the understanding of landscape as well as to grasping a whole complex sensory configuration (not just visual) that is dynamically, responsively interconnected, greater than its component elements and details, in an artistic sense of looking.

Note: In Week 4, UW has May 22 using a Monday schedule. So we don't have Arch 285 that day.

Week	Date		Topics / Readings / Films	Photography prompt/challenge
Week 01	May 1	INTRODUCTION	Readings are emailed to you. Films screened in class.	
Week 02	May 8		Robert Smithson: "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey"	VISUAL METAPHOR
Week 03	May 15	Terrain Vague	Ignacio de Sola-Morales, "Terrain Vague"	TENSION / CONFLICT
Week 04	May 22	No class, UW using Monday schedule	Assignment: read Haiku poems characterizing landscape and write one (or more) on your site.	POETRY / ATTENTION
Week 05	May 29	Form vs Formlessness	Andrej Tarkovsky, <i>Stalker</i>	NARRATIVE
Week 06	Jun 5	Symbolic Landscape and Shifting Ground	Michel de Montaigne, "On Cannibals"	GROUND
Week 07	Jun 12	Iconic and Aniconic; Abstraction and Figuration	Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, Eames Demetrios	CLUES AND TRACES
Week 08	Jun 19	Time, History, Perspective	Richard Serra "Shift"	GHOSTS — MULTIPLES (12) or TIME LAPSE
Week 09	Jun 26	Wilderness vs Civilization	Screening of the film <i>Deliverance</i> , John Boorman	WILDERNESS
Week 10	Jul 3	The Sacred: Invisibles made visible	Mythology	DREAM VISION
Week 11	Jul 10	Material	Symbolism	LANDSCAPE AS SELF-PORTRAIT
Week 12	Jul 17	Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter	Landscape and Painting	X MARKS THE SPOT — A SENSE OF PLACE
Week 13	Jul 24	Horizon, Ground, Clearing	Philosophy	HORIZON
	Jul 31	Exhibition	Dates may shift pending alignment with other courses and events.	
	Aug 7	Submit work		

Project

Beginning right away, identify and choose a landscape site within walking or cycling distance, that will serve as the focus of your own project for the assignment. I recommend that you get or make a dedicated journal or sketchbook, a minimum of 4' x 6" and preferably larger, that you will use to make notes on your observations, sketch, collage in photographs, to keep a running record of your work. You can also make a numbered loose leaf folio.

Time for working is dedicated to get everyone to their landscape for intensive photographic study. Following the project outline, take (and later edit and print) a connected series of landscape photos. In class each following week, we will analyze and "critique" work that is pinned up, not from a technical viewpoint, but rather looking analytically at what ideas and information are embedded in each image individually and in your sequence or field of images.

You will have short weekly photo prompts or challenges for the following week's class.

Your project: sustained research by photography. At end of term, you submit a critical journal / portfolio including a written or oral component from your notes during the term. In it you reference concepts and ideas from readings and lectures that were pertinent to your exploration, analyzing in what ways you most successfully honed your ability to perceive meaning in the landscape. You will additionally be commenting on a separate page on what you learned through this different mode of working. We also mount an exhibition, co-ordinated as a group effort.

The photographic project due at the end of the class may be worked on collaboratively or individually. The project should contain at least 12 images per person in a consistent format (8 ½"x11" landscape orientation, consistent border or no border) that form a coherent body of research. Your work, informed by the readings, films, conceptual vocabulary, and class discussions should be personally meaningful, communicative, and visually compelling. Presentation enhances how your work is read, and you should present your work in a portfolio or book / journal format, including your text.

NOTE: if you edit or filter your photos on a phone, avoid using apps that reduce file size and thus the resolution and clarity for when you print.

Options: You don't have to make 'typical' photographs, but you must make your project a sustained artistic research, and in some way be able to bring in your work to show the class. Each project is a personal sustained study, so keep me in the loop if you are testing out different ideas. You might decide to build a camera obscura, pinhole camera, a beehive, walk or mark a hiking trail, create a video, olfactory, or audio piece, even find other means of recording, including the use of transmedia (using more than one "channel" of media). If you do intervene in the landscape, be sure that what you do is "almost nothing"; legal, and sensitive to local ecology. You can construe your landscape as you wish, it does not have to be unadulterated nature, can include people. It can be "third nature" or even urban landscape.

Possible field trip: to visit artwork SHIFT by Richard Serra embedded in a farm landscape near King City.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Acquiring awareness of different ways of looking and seeing and the implications for our practice, Critical thinking, building up a nuanced conceptual vocabulary, practice of constructive critique, refinement of visual literacy, enhancing visual communication, practice of transmedia storytelling, framing and editing, translation of ideas, environmental awareness and stewardship, appreciation of the character of landscape, research methodology, personal growth, local culture, professional competency, attunement.

Evaluations

Attendance, initiative, class participation (including comments on others' photos) — 20% of your grade.

Photo journal kept during term re-submitted in the End of Term Portfolio — 50% of your grade.

End of Term Public Exhibition (group curation): — 30% of your grade.

The course has a visual as well as a written or oral component. Post prints in Room 2026 by pinning them up (between 1-2 pm) BEFORE CLASS STARTS at 2 pm, with your name clearly printed in capitals on the back of each of your images, and digital files online to Flickr or Facebook by 11 pm Tuesdays.

To get an A+ range (90+) : Do a great job on everything; put extra passion and effort into your work. Take initiatives in group work. Participate in discussions; constructively comment on your colleagues's photos; ask questions, raise ideas, do all the readings, look up artworks.

To get a A range (80+) : Do a solid good job on all aspects mentioned above. Be present in every class and work on your photos with commitment.

To get a lower grade: Do less.

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Academic integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check the Office of Academic Integrity for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. [Check the Office of Academic Integrity for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline. For typical penalties, check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72, Student Appeals.

Note for students with disabilities: AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Turnitin.com: Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin in this course.

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit alternate assignment.