

## Man, Metaphysics and Metaphor:

### The Duality of Expression Through Performance in the Landscape

The process of documenting the landscape is one of photography's most prevailing traditions. While the foregrounds presented in *Visceral Landscapes* emerge from this enduring history, artists Amanda Arcuri and Ana Kapodistria shift the paradigms as they work in inherently untraditional modes of practice. This exhibition concentrates on the metaphysical connections that both artists make as they interact with and explore the landscape, reveling in the intuitive connections between man and nature.

Featuring selections from her photographic series "Land and Sky", Arcuri's work consists of orchestrations of silent performances, igniting the imagination as she leaves invisible elemental impressions on her chosen environments; streaks of fire and light embellish the landscapes, mystifying the viewer. Her use of long exposures allows the illuminations to appear as if they dance across the landscape. In fact, they map her intuitively choreographed movements through each space. While ostensibly photographs of natural elements in natural environments, they are constructed images - documents of a landscape that has been created in-camera by the hand and the imagination of the photographer.

It is in this way that her images subvert the very notion of an altered environment – that is to say, our expectations of untouched landscapes are challenged by the process by which she constructs her images. Much like artist Edward Burtynsky's highly aestheticized photographs of landscapes ravaged by commercial industry, her photographs are open to subjective interpretation and may also inspire a dialogue on issues of environmental impact. These compositions call to our attention the binary relationships that exist between what is natural and unnatural and in doing so Arcuri raises the question of our roles as caretakers of these vulnerable spaces. However, Arcuri's approach to the landscape is at once optimistic and celebratory.

From her photographic series "Earth Medley", Ana Kapodistria seeks to answer the unanswerable: how does one go about creating tangible evidence of energy? Kapodistria embarks upon an enigmatic process of discovery through non-linear documentation and representation. Using multiple in-camera exposures and intuitive reactions, she captures the underlying rhythms within the space to create a synthesis of energies. What these investigations have led her to is a series of visually animated and poetically expressive photographs that convey, above all else, an emotional kinship to these environments.

The figures – sometimes barely perceptible, dance through the woods, charged, blithesome, and free. Their performances are fleeting points in time but for the moment captured and transformed by the latent image of the photographer's film. In each instance the muse and the artist engage: interacting with a natural environment and feeding off its energy to construct a dynamic experiment. Through these series of performances, *Earth Medley* elicits esoteric connections to nature. As the figures and landscapes blur and merge, so to do our distinctions of the two – and as viewers, we begin to understand the two as the title suggests.

Arguably, these enigmatic performances follow an ambiguous tradition – that of the Canadian imagination. As Penny Cousineau-Levine theorizes in her book on contemporary Canadian art photography, *Faking Death*, there is a long-standing tradition of working between “two zones of reality” (Cousineau-Levine, Penny. *Faking Death*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. 89.) The duality of expression conveyed both in Cousineau-Levine's text and in *Visceral Landscapes* re-iterates the relationships that exist between the realistic, the metaphysical, and the metaphorical. Both Arcuri and Kapodistria construct for their respective audiences dual zones – the “natural” and the “unnatural”. Furthermore, they push it further by confusing the two, arguable creating a third zone, or venturing into sur-reality.

The encounters staged in the photographic process continue to the gallery wall, as there exists a connection between object and viewer – as critical theorist Walter Benjamin famously coined the concept of “the aura” (Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Frankfurt: Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, 1935.) Benjamin uses this term to refer to a visceral sense one experiences in the physical presence of unique works of art. In fact both bodies of work presented in *Visceral Landscapes* cannot be fully grasped if viewed by any other means than their original printed form – the objects present themselves as fully as do the scenes they represent.

What connects these two bodies of work most notably is the concern of innate connections between energy and environment. By erasing or merging the figures into or from the environments in which they were photographed, both artists assert their claims of cohesion of figure and ground. By engaging in playful ritualistic improvisations with their environments, they reflect on the rhythmic structures created during the interactions. *Visceral Landscapes* suggests, through performance, the convergence of being and space.

By: Jennifer Tiffin