

Remote and stratigraphic landscapes

In 2010 Stefan Peters realised his first landscape paintings based on data from Google Earth. No artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to history, exploring the essence and boundaries of his medium. The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. It is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and makes an artist most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. In that sense Peters proves to be a clever scholar, interpreting the intellectual - but also playful tradition of Petrarch, Nadar or 20th century scientists and astronauts.

With his ascent of the Mont Ventoux on April 26, 1336 by the Italian poet Petrarch claimed to be the first person since antiquity to have climbed a mountain just for the view. This reminds us of Immanuel Kant and his theory on aesthetic judgments: beautiful objects appear to be 'purposive without purpose' (or as 'final without end'). It is part of the experience of beautiful objects, Kant argues, that they should affect us as if they had a purpose, although no particular purpose can be found.

In 19th century, Nadar (Felix Tournachon) was well known as a photographer and with the aid of his balloon (Le Géant) he developed pictures of several urban and rural areas. Nadar hosted the first exhibition of the impressionist painters and in a remarkable way 'remote gaze', machinery and art got connected. Nadar pushed the unexplored view of Earth and nature from Petrarca so to say. And this went on in 1946, not long after the end of World War II and years before the Sputnik satellite opened the space age. In that particular year the first pictures of Earth as seen from space were obtained. The grainy, black-and-white photos were taken by a 35-millimeter motion picture camera riding on a V-2 missile. On December 7, 1972, the famous 'Blue Marble' shot represents the first photograph in which Earth is in full view. The picture was taken as the Apollo 17 crew left Earth's orbit for the moon. With the sun at their backs, the crew had a perfectly lit view of the blue planet.

Since the first photos of our planet were taken from space, an amazing collection of Earth pictures has accumulated. The paintings of Stefan Peters are layered on fantastic science and fueled by remarkable technology and reveal a framed image of our world revealed closely related to its cosmic splendor. The concept of the cosmic brings 'The Garden of Earthly Delights' by the famous 15th century painter Hieronymus Bosch in mind. This is probably the most famous work by the 15th century painter Hieronymus Bosch. The external panels depict Earth as seen from outer space and, on a formal level, are very familiar to Peters' Google Earth Series. Recently Google embarked on a partnership with The Prado (where Bosch' painting is on display) to scan much of their collection (including the 'Garden of Earthly Delights') and these can now be viewed through a custom layer in Google Earth.

In Peters' 'Diaphanous Series', also with a tondo-like shape, the pictorial information relates to the stratigraphic analysis. Stratigraphy refers to geological and archaeological layers that make up an archaeological deposit. Archaeologists use stratigraphy to better understand the processes that created the site. A similar technique is used to reveal the way the paint layers are applied, which can be recorded using microphotography and then compared with UV, IR and X-ray examination. Consequently, they tell us how the artist worked. It provides reliable information on the object's history and artist's technique. Remote gaze and stratigraphic view are united in these series of paintings by Peters using different layers of transparent Mylar. The landscape always is a work of the mind*, another compartment in the cultural baggage we all lug about. The scenery in Peters paintings is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock, shaped by the same rich and complex traditions that frame other aspects of our cultural world. Without the proper context and historical knowledge attached to Stefan Peters artworks we are unable to harvest all the technical, allegorical and metaphorical notes; instead, we would emerge with an impoverished sense of place.

**Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory, 1995.*

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