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Encountering the Elements Horizon, Materiality and Temporal Perspectives in Contemporary Landscape Representations

Zoltán Somhegyi*

ABSTRACT
In this paper I am curious of the aesthetic investigation of some of the most elemental and essential constituents of landscape representations, that are, at the same time, also among the basic coordinates in our existence in the world. More precisely, I would like to survey some aspects of the artistic explorations of the horizon, material(ity) and time, through four contemporary artists' pieces, those by Hiroshi Sugimoto, Taiji Matsue, Levente Baranyai and Torben Eskerod. As it will be clear, their series of artworks can be considered as aesthetically captivating investigations – not only artistic but philosophical investigations – into space, matter and time. The pieces are thus meditations on the perception of some of the fundamental elements of human condition, and the creative survey of these by the contemporary artists provide the observer with particular insights that can be gained only through works, and that would have otherwise been, most likely, undiscovered.

KEYWORDS
landscape, horizon, materiality, time, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Taiji Matsue, Levente Baranyai, Torben Eskerod

What are the essential components of a landscape and of a landscape representation? Can we identify the indispensable constituents of a landscape – or at least some of them? Something without which a landscape and/or its artistic representation cannot be considered as a proper landscape? In other words, what would be that immediately come to our mind as crucial elements in a landscape? Some basic geographical and geological formations like mountains, rivers or seashores? Or rather the natural elements in or on these formations like trees, bushes, rocks, snow or sand? Or the meteorological circumstances of the scene, whether mild and pleasant like sunshine or challenging and nevertheless captivating like a storm that thus may have sublime qualities? Or perhaps some would say that for them the essence of the "real" landscape is that it has a complete *lack* of any references to humans and their intervention

* somhegyi.zoltan.gyorgy@szte.hu; University of Szeged

in the pristine land, like the omission of indication of roads, buildings and of figures too? Or is the essence of the landscape and its representation something less tangible, like the emotional relation to the observed land, or some kind of "message" or "meaning" that the representation of the natural scenery emanates?

Needless to say, all these – and many others – are possible and strong candidates of being essential constituents and defining features of landscapes, but at the same time these are also all subject to differences in cultures and time periods. The features and characteristics of a landscape that are essential for Chinese painter of the Tang-dynasty (618-907) are obviously completely different than the ones that are important for a 17th century Italian or a 19th century Scandinavian artist. And so is of course also different what and how they would represent in their landscape painting. Rules, habits and traditions of art, dominating stylistic approaches are just as essential as personal vision in the creation. What's more, this latter, the creative vision, whatever innovative, does have its own limits within the range of possible manifestations, as we can learn it from the highly influential 19-20th century art historian Heinrich Wölfflin's research, investigating "the schema and visual and creative possibilities within which art remained" (Wölfflin 1950, p. 226).

To all this we also have to add that seen from a broader perspective, some formal features that might seem truly basic may not at all be so fundamental – just think of how "obvious" it is, from a Western point of view, to have a landscape in a "landscape format", i.e. as a horizontal picture. However, in the Far Eastern tradition vertical formats are just as common, especially in the form of "hanging scrolls" (Suhfen 2023). These paintings show the same natural elements, captivating mountains, riverscapes, forests, cloudy valley and misty lands, without the automatic instinct that all this should be represented in a "horizontal" display. A similar feature that may be surprising if one observes the *global* history of the landscape painting is its status as compared to other genres. In the Western tradition it had been, for a really long time, considered as a "lower" category. Landscape painting got (relatively) independent over the 17th-18th centuries, still, in the academic classification of painterly forms it was not ranked on the same level as the most highly appreciated genres like paintings with religious, mythological and historical subjects. This has changed only in and after the Romanticism and in the 19th century when, as it is well known form the history of Western art, the whole value hierarchy of painterly classification turned practically upside down: genres that had been appreciated the most gradually lost their primacy, while un-

der-estimated forms like landscape and still-life painting got in the limelight. As part of the rebellion against the ossified academic structure and the values and canon of art that it promoted, artists deliberately turned to the (formerly) depreciated genres and motifs. This is why in the oeuvre of progressive artists of the second half of the 19th century and of the classical avant-garde in the first half of the 20th century we rarely find historical, religious or mythological topics, but a great number of still-life paintings and landscapes.

As we can thus understand from the above brief considerations, the elements and features of landscapes perception and especially of landscape representation change over the centuries and differ in the various cultural and artistic traditions. Nevertheless, as we will see in the following, we can still identify a few very inspiring and, at the same time highly complex elements or constituents that seem to be very essential in landscapes and in their representation in general. These will be *horizon*, *materiality* and the *temporal aspects*. In the following I want to investigate these three with a "combined" methodology and through an interdisciplinary approach, joining the forces of art historical and aesthetic (as well as aesthetic historical) research. I believe such a double perspective and combined methodology can only be beneficial, also because it is also an approach of research of which application we can observe in the oeuvre classical figures in our disciplines too, as I demonstrated in an earlier text (Somhegyi 2023).

Before analysing these however, we need to shed some further light on a few other aspects and issues that are connected to the above main question regarding the essential elements in landscapes and their representation.

One of these questions growing out of the considerations regarding the encounter of these elements is the relation between landscape and landscape representation. The two are obviously not the same, and scrutinising their connection definitely helps understanding better the features of this artistic form. Regarding this problem, we can remember Malcolm Andrews' precise analyses, in which he claims that – unlike the earlier presiding ideas, promoted by Kenneth Clark – the conversion is a two-step process, or, in his words: "The process, might, therefore, be formulated as twofold: land into landscape and landscape into art." (Andrews 1999, p. 3).

Another important question connected to the survey of the identification and study of the essential elements in a landscape and landscape representation is rather methodological: can we at all take a constituent element out of the view and examine it separately? Will it not harm that particular unity that is one of

the most basic characteristics of a landscape? Here we need to recall Georg Simmel's claim regarding this unity that is rightly often quoted in the discourse on landscapes and their representation. As he wrote in the beginning of his renowned essay on the subject:

> But just because we pay closer attention to one particular item or bring together in one glance a variety of differing ones, this does not amount to our being conscious of perceiving a 'landscape'. For that to occur, our attention may not be captured by just one item within our field of vision. For there to be a landscape, our consciousness has to acquire a wholeness, a unity, over and above its component elements, without being tied to their specificity or mechanistically composed of them. If I am not mistaken, we are rarely aware that a landscape is not formed out of an ensemble of all kinds of things spread out side-by-side over a piece of ground and which are viewed in their immediacy. (Simmel 2007, p. 21)

This will obviously lead to the almost paradoxical situation I hinted at above: if there is something that we label as "landscape", and its key feature is the unity of its elements, then can we take one out of it to investigate it separately? As we will soon see, it does seem possible, at least when surveying the works of the chosen artists: it is precisely this that stimulates their creative process. Their solution to this paradox is constantly and consciously maintain the duality: to examine an element or elemental constituent while not only knowing but also emphasising the fact that it comes from a complex context, one that establishes the element's meaning and significance within the system itself. The task – or we can even say: the responsibility – of the artists will thus be to investigate the question from this dual perspective.

Before discussing the artistic projects on encountering the elements however, there is a third aspect that requires some clarification, and this concerns the concept and/or phenomenon of "element" itself. Here it can be understood with a double reference. First, it really refers to an actual element or constituent of the landscape and its presentation. However, its second reference is equally important, that indicates that these "elements" are also *elemental*, basic and defining phenomena in our own existence too. Therefore, these elements, horizon, materiality and the temporal aspects are not merely constituents of Nature or of a natural setting – that can then become a landscape and landscape representation – but they are also essential elements or coordinates in our life, in our orientation in the world. This is why through the artistic survey of these elements there is much more at stake than a mere formal aspect of a composition. It is more about how we perceive our world and give sense to it, i.e. how we interpret some physical

factors of our existence. These important aspects also explain why, in this paper, I refer to both of the above explained meanings and references of the term.

Keeping these aspects and questions in mind, in the following I would like to further scrutinise some features from the aesthetic examination of these three aforementioned elements in and through the works of four contemporary artist, however I will also show that these elements were in the focus of interest of several earlier creators too, whose works are thus either implicitly connected to the later ones' pieces, or occasionally can even be observed as explicit forerunners to the newer ones'. This is why, naturally, I do not claim that it is the first time only in contemporary art that the artistic survey of the horizon, of materiality or of the temporal aspects appear as a topic of investigation. But what we can nevertheless see is that they can become more central, more directly and explicitly analysed in contemporary representations, compared to the more classical ones. In earlier landscape painting of, let's say, two-three centuries ago these elements did appear and got a certain function too, in the totality of the work, in its effect and obviously they added important further layers in the interpretation of the pieces of art, but could not really become as central as in the more recent and contemporary art production. Let's thus see some actual examples to see these differences more clearly, with respect to the encountering of the three element, represented through older and contemporary works of art.

From the earlier periods of painting, one of the best-known examples of adding a strong focus on both the representation and the function of the horizon is Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* from 1809. In this often-reproduced work, that is considered as an iconic (and also enigmatic) work of Romanticism we can practically see only four motifs: a narrow segment of a seashore, above (i.e. behind) an equally narrow part of the sea itself, the cloudy sky and a solitary figure, standing with his back towards the observer of the painting, thus facing the sea. With this emphasised renouncing of representing any additional further elements or motifs the painter Friedrich invites the viewer to fully immerse in the observation of the majestic powers and scale of the natural phenomena – just like the figure does in the foreground of the work, hence the viewer of the painting can practically identify oneself with the monk.

From the numerous fascinating features of this work however, there are further two that has relevance for our present discussion here. One of these concerns the sublimity, or the evocation of the sublime powers of Nature in the painting. It is worth for example

observing the large proportion of sky above the human figure. This is, of course, achieved by the very low placement of the horizon, a pictorial solution that Friedrich had learnt from the painters of the 17th century Dutch paintings. Still, it is not merely a tribute to the otherwise great forerunners of the Romantic painter, more like a solution to indicate how this sky overwhelms, or literally dwarfs the figure. The other feature that is definitely noteworthy for the present analyses is regarding the horizon itself. What is immediately noticeable on the painting, even at a superficial glance, that nothing is "blocking" or covering, even minimally, the line of the horizon. But not only in the sense that in the middle of the painting there is nothing that would "cross" it (like a boat in the sea, of which mast could cut through the horizon, or a trunk of tree could go over the line of the horizon), but not even on the left and right extreme sides of the painting there is nothing that closes the view. In classical landscape painting normally there are elements that guide the eyes' movement to discover the entire painting, and that also arrange the composition into a closed unity. Here however, the edges of the work do not properly close the sight: if there was no physical frame of the painting itself, the view could continue beyond the actual limits, in both directions. The "horizontality" thus dominates, and it is again a feature that is put in the service of referring to, or even evoking the sublime powers of Nature, especially its infinity. What's more, it is referring to two types of infinity: temporal and physical. The sky (and universe) above the figure, the sea, sand are all indicating an archaic temporal distance, they are practically eternal, especially when compared to the shortness human life. But we also have physical infinity, represented by the vast sky above us, the endless sea in front of us – or, if you prefer, in front of the monk – and the undisrupted horizon around us. Through these compositional solutions the painter really forces us to encounter the elements, to inevitably face our smallness against Nature – a typical idea in Romantic philosophy and philosophy of art. We cannot avoid or escape this duty of engaging with the sublimity, this is why it is so precise what Heinrich von Kleist wrote in his 1810 review of the painting, namely that it "the viewer feels as though his eyelids had been cut off" (quoted in Miller 1974, p. 207). With this he wanted to refer to that there is no way to evade or stay away from the sight and thus the (visual) encounter.

It is worth comparing this approach of encountering the horizon with the series of one of the most compelling contemporary photographers, the Japanese-origin, USA-based Hiroshi Sugimoto. Here I am especially referring to his series titled *Seascapes*, on which he

had been working for decades. The works are quite similar in format: black-and-white, horizontal pieces, each showing a segment of a sea. What is the same in all the pieces is the absolute centrality of the horizon, running in the exact middle axis of the picture. Another unifying characteristic between all pieces is the absolute reduction of the motifs. Here we see even less elements than in the otherwise already quite "minimalistic" work of Caspar David Friedrich two centuries ago. More precisely, only two: the sea and the sky – no seashore, and no human figures; and of course nothing that refers to any human presence or intervention in the view, hence no boats, piers or oil drilling platforms.

Hiroshi Sugimoto: *Caribbean Sea, Jamaica*, 1980
Credit: © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco and Lisson Gallery

One would think that if the pieces are so uniform as of their composition and minimally reduced subject-matter then the images must be very similar. However, just the contrary, there is a huge variety in their appearance. Some of the pictures show a sea-segment with almost perfectly parallel small waves. Other images show "uneven" structures on the surface of the water, i.e. some parts

completely smooth and some areas stirred by streams. In a few works the sea becomes a homogenous, slightly blurred majestic conglomeration. And again in other works the mass of water becomes almost inseparable from the sky over it. In this regard some pieces from this series may remind us of Francesco Guardi's masterpiece from the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan titled *Gondolas on the Lagoon* (ca. 1765), in which the Venetian master shows the vast, solemn, and tranquil greatness of the location in a masterfully balanced composition – even if some researchers suppose that the present state of the work might have been cut from a larger piece (Poldi Pezzoli, website). But even the possible reduction of the painting does not change the aesthetic effect of the piece, in which Guardi successfully attempted to demonstrate the imposing vastness and "almost-emptiness" of the lagoon of the space by using the almost exactly same colours to depict the lagoon and the sky, hence if there were no buildings in the distance, we could hardly define the horizon (see more on the art historical parallels of this "almost emptiness" in my previous paper: Somhegyi 2021). This close-to-dissolved horizon is what appears in a few of Sugimoto's pieces too, however it never becomes completely untraceable – and not because we know that in this series the horizon is always composed to the middle of the photograph.

All this variety in Sugimoto's work – despite the fact the works are black-and-white – is also thanks to the amazing variety of tonality and hues of the greys. This also ensures not only the formal or "phenomenological" but also emotional difference of the pieces. Some are more calm, others more sinister, while few may be meditative, others can trigger stronger emotional or sentimental reactions.

But despite these differences, all pieces of the series bring us back to some sort of departure point, an archaic elemental reference. It is worth quoting the statement that the artist wrote of the pieces on his website:

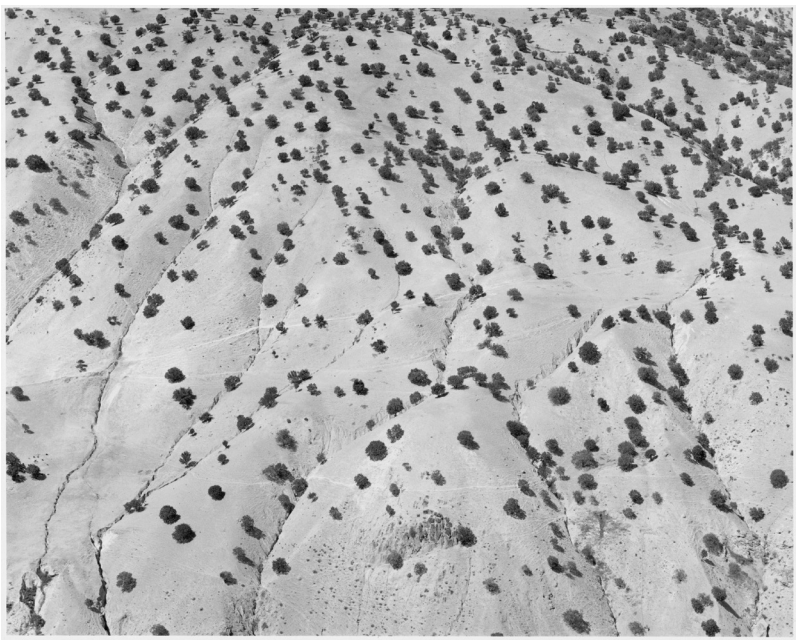
> Water and air. So very commonplace are these substances, they hardly attract attention – and yet they vouchsafe our very existence. The beginnings of life are shrouded in myth: Let there (be) water and air. Living phenomena spontaneously generated from water and air in the presence of light, though that could just as easily suggest random coincidence as a Deity. Let's just say that there happened to be a planet with water and air in our solar system, and moreover at precisely the right distance from the sun for the temperatures required to coax forth life. While hardly inconceivable that at least one such planet should exist in the vast reaches of universe, we search in vain for another similar example. Mystery of mysteries, water and air are right there before us in the sea. Every time I view the sea, I feel a calming sense of security, as if visiting my ancestral home; I embark on a voyage of seeing. (Sugimoto, website).

This statement explains much of the ideas that stimulated the artist to start working on the series. What is especially interesting for us here however is perhaps the last half sentence: "I embark on a voyage of seeing". This is one of the most precise definitions of the horizon that we could imagine. The meeting point, the endless line where earth and sky (or, in our present case: water and air) meet. However, it will only be something for the sight. We can never properly reach it or touch it. But it does not mean that it does not exist. And it is precisely this that Sugimoto emphasises through this series: we not only see the horizon, but feel its absolute presence. This will thus be a mesmerizing paradox in the works: the most intangible landscape phenomenon is what becomes the most actual and concrete element in the pictures. By putting it in the centre of the photograph, both physically and metaphorically, the artist is granting it a fascinating definiteness thus emphasising its relevance for better understanding the ambiguity of our physical limits as a given spatial condition of our existence. In this way it will really become a complex element: as Albrecht Koschorke described in his informative work on the history of horizon, it is not a "real" object within the limits of knowledge, but a basic foundation that makes the comprehension and consciousness of our empirical reality possible. This is why the interpretation of the horizon develops in parallel with epistemology (Koschorke 1990, p. 7-8).

At this point is very useful to compare these works to the pieces of another Japanese photographer, those by Taiji Matsue. The reason for this is that he has a completely different, or, better to say, opposite approach in his landscape representations. When representing different territories from all over the world in his aerial photographs, he deliberately omits showing the horizon. The angle of the camera is thus pointed on the surface of an area, hence the shown terrain entirely fills the pictorial space, not letting any part of the sky to enter the picture and this also provides an obstacle to have even a minimal "section" of the horizon. With this solution we get very enthralling landscape formations reproduced through the photographs. The area will appear like on a map – perhaps it seems just as a mere coincidence, but we need to mention that the artist originally graduated at the University of Tokyo with a major in geology (Taro Naso Gallery, website).

The works show a great variety of subjects: sometimes we see pristine landscapes without any human interference, details of forests, segments of glaciers, the close-ups of mountains that thus appear as curtains. In other cases however we see just the

contrary: large cities' sections, urban and industrial areas from above. Again in other cases we see their intersection: cultivated lands, large territories in the service of agriculture. Whatever the subject-matter is however, what should interest us here is exactly this conscious elimination of the horizon. It is not simply a choice regarding the "content" of the pieces, much more a decision that influences the final effect of the pieces. Namely that when there is no horizon, we do not really have spatial depth either. All will be in the same distance from the observer, the surface will appear as flat, indifferently of what it represents, hence even if there are high trees or skyscrapers appearing in the picture. This flatness is further emphasised by the solution that the artist normally takes the photographs when the sunshine arrives vertically and the lights are the strongest. In this way he can minimise the appearance of shadows that are traditionally the most basic artistic tools for the indication of three-dimensionality of an object.



Taiji Matsue: IRAN 1998 #12, 2015, Archival pigment print, ©TAIJI MATSUE, Courtesy of TARO NASU

By focusing on the surface of a chosen territory, Taiji Matsue's photographs will render this very surface central though unattainable and immaterial. They often also appear quite "neutral", distanced of scientific. He does not show any preference for certain type of geographical formations, does not prioritize one natural or artificial landscape over the other: anything and everything can be equally interesting or important in this encyclopaedic collection. As I wrote in an earlier essay: "…he (Matsue) does not establish a hierarchy of famous and less-known, "interesting" and less inspiring spots: for him everything can have importance with the role of documentations of the surface of our planet." (Somhegyi 2014a, 54). Without any particular emotional involvement, the motifs of (or on) the photographs become mere elements that will create geometric forms, rhythms and patterns, thus creating an abstract geometry on the surface. This is why we can agree with Midori Matsui's observation:

> With homogeneous intensity, each dot or line calls for special attention, breaking down a hierarchy between center and periphery. At the same time, the repetition of similar forms creates an evocative rhythm. (…) Shot from the air, the new photos capture the flow of geometrical forms latent in nature and in the functional environment, to suggest a feeling of commanding at once a microscopic perception of phenomena and a macroscopic grasp of a hidden pattern in geography. (Matsui 2006, 371)

In this way the actual presence of the elements of natural and artificial environments are converted in quasi-abstract patterns, documented in such a way that they become homogenous and immaterial. This is thus a very thought-provoking and unique approach by the artist to show not only the variety in what we have on the surface of our globe, but that these can all be important to understand our present condition and the state of our civilisation.

As we saw, the question of the horizon was crucial in the work of the two photographers analysed above. While Sugimoto put it in the centre of his works, in both senses of the word centre, Matsue spectacularly omitted its representation or appearance on the works, thus creating immaterial, or de-materialised renderings. The third artist to be surveyed here is interestingly connecting to these questions and approaches. The Hungarian painter Levente Baranyai depicts landscapes seen from high above, often based on satellite images, hence again from an aerial perspective. Just like Matsue, in his pieces we cannot see the horizon either, and have rather map-like images. But through these he describes not merely the surface of our world, but also what is "happening" beyond and beneath. As János Kurdy-Fehér wrote about the artist:

"They (*i.e. the pictures*) represent the surface of the Earth. Their reality is in plane, but they deceive viewers. From a bird's-eye view, they show not only earthly landscapes of a vibrant visuality, but also the consequences of processes not seen in the pictures, such as the cultural destruction committed by history, politics, climate change, the technical means and systems of expanding and extending human capabilities, as well as the related desires and notions." (Kurdy-Fehér 2006, p. 40)

However, there are further curiosities in these paintings. Besides showing the appearance of the land and the effects of human activity on the face of the Earth, there is also a strong interest by the painter of surveying material and materiality through the pieces. And this is thanks to Baranyai's particular style and painting technique that involves the mode of applying very thick strata of oil paint in an almost sensuous way, thus we can say he is practically "modelling" with the paint. The pictures with several centimetres thick layers of paint thus appear as high-relief maps, i.e. as the old educational tools known for the older generations from their geography classes. But we can also add that this can be interpreted as a conscious cross-over in media through the technique: the "paintings" are getting very close to (relief) sculpture too, thus creating a special and new category. Nevertheless, this is not the only important consequence of the artist's technique.

Levente Baranyai: Flashlandscape I. 2007, oil on canvas, 155 x 152 cm, Courtesy of the Artist.

The aforementioned sensuality is often even further emphasised through the title of the series, for example when he calls them "Fleshlandscapes". This is thus the point when, despite the many formal similarities, we can see a huge difference compared to the works of Matsue investigated above: Baranyai's pieces become extremely material, i.e. investigating the matter and materiality as constituents of the land, landscape and of landscape representation. This is again an aspect of which we can quote several examples from older art. From the previous instances, we can remember for example the Romantic painters' fascination with stones, rock-formations, caves and vulcanology (see for example Busch 2009 and Somhegyi 2014b). What's even more important from our present point of view is that in several instances we can see signs that these earlier artists started to give a certainly more definite role of the analyses of these natural elements in their works. For example Johann Christian Reinhart made drawings of close-ups of rock formations, but – and this is important – not as a study sketch, but as a composition for its own worth: "Reinhart, a resident of Rome, made drawings of this type as finished compositions, in preparation for prints, or on order." – as we can read in a catalogue dedicated to the era (Felbinger 2002, p. 24). Similar approach can be identified in the drawings of Friedrich Preller, in whose oeuvre we often find drawings of rocky mountains and gorges. (Felbinger 2002, p. 78). Or again Caspar David Friedrich, for example his drawing of a quarry from 1813, that, especially due to the highly elaborated and defined mode, was conceived as a proper work of art, not as a preparatory sketch ("Die sorgfältige Umrahmung durch Linien und hellgrüne Aquarellierung legt es nahe, daß Friedrich das Blatt *als fertiges Bild*, sicherlich als Geschenk, ausgeführt hat" – Riemann 1994, 34; italics mine – Z. S.).

Hence we can see that the interest in the pictorial investigation of earth, matter and materiality was born well before our present days, but in the contemporary approaches it can grow beyond being a mere represented subject-matter: it can really transform the matter of painting itself. In other words we can say that for example in the pieces by Levente Baranyai the subject-matter of the painting, the represented landscape formation almost becomes perfunctory and subordinate, compared to the display of the rich materiality that imitates the real matter of which the original is constructed. It will be the elemental, archaic force that the pure material incorporates what will enthral the painter and stimulate him in finding new forms, visual motifs and patterns to not only represent it, but practically to make it tangible. The works invite

full emersion, touching, smelling of the matter, of diving into it. The observer is constantly triggered and tempted to not only think about the material conditions, opportunities, challenges and limits of our existence, but also to discover them in a holistic way, as somatic experience provided by the means of painting.

Torben Eskerod: Marselis #9741-02, Archival Inkjet Print, Courtesy of the Artist.

Materiality is, however also strongly connected to time and temporality. Matter has time, it has its time and also its own life-span. During this it can remain in certain conditions, or get slowly or even quickly transformed. It can also fade, weaken, wither – or expire. And this last phenomenon is what stimulated the fourth artist whose pieces I would like to quote here, the Danish photographer Torben Eskerod's works. In his series titled *Marselis I*

and *Marselis II*, he created analogue photographs of a woodland by using expired films. The results are unnatural-looking but very captivating images of the natural setting that fascinate the viewer with their particular aesthetics, in which the poetic qualities of the space are shown in the works. Despite all the temporal and technical-technological differences, here we again find some references to the arts of the Romanticism. As we can read in a brief statement on the artist's website:

> The outdated films have made the photographs turn out exaggerated and unrealistic in their colors, giving them a spiritual and almost metaphysical touch. These beautiful landscapes follow the art historical tradition of the romantic landscape, where nature is depicted with overstated beauty. But unlike romantic landscape painting, the exaggerated beauty of these photographs is rooted in technical mishaps, leaving the photographic medium itself a as a co-creator or capturer of this special "something" that Eskerod himself finds in this place. (Eskerod, website)

Through this artistic approach then, Eskerod creates landscapes of which appearance are between reality and sur-reality. The place does exist, a forest near Aarhus in Denmark, the trees and the sea are real, but the colours are un-real, unnatural – nevertheless really captivating. And this is thanks to the acknowledgement of the temporal limits of the material, hence to the fact that it cannot last forever. This is why such artistic use of the expired film will bear an important reference to materiality and its fading, emphasising the inevitable power of decay that affects all that we have on earth (including our own bodies), thus bringing the aspects of temporality in the forefront.

A curious paradox that the works appear really a-temporal, eternal, since they are absolutely lacking any visual signs that normally helps us understanding their time, age or state. We cannot decide – due to the unrealistic colour scheme – in which time of the day we are – or even in which season, especially in the sea-series of *Marselis II*. However – and this is the paradox – it will be exactly this a-temporal or eternal aspect that will direct our attention to the importance of the perception of temporality, including its limits. We need to perceive the passing of time to locate the temporal coordinates of our existence, and what else could "visualise" it for us better than a series of our otherwise beautiful environment, created with expired films.

It is also important that this very series embraces all the discourse in my present essay too, as it includes the examination of, or reference to, the other two basic elements too that I investigated through the work of the other three artists. The horizon, that

was placed in the forefront in Hiroshi Sugimoto's pieces becomes invisible in Eskerod's *Marselis* series, but not because it is intentionally omitted, like in Taiji Matsue's or Levente Baranyai's works, but because it dissolves completely, just like other elements in the background of the homogenous colour field, due to the peculiar state of the medium, and its temporal limits. Material, on the other hand, of which perception was minimised in Taiji Matsue's pieces and excessively shown in Levente Baranyai's paintings is referenced through the temporality of the medium in Torben Eskerod's series.

This is why we can claim, as a conclusion, that these four artistic series can be considered as aesthetically captivating investigations – not only artistic but philosophical investigations – on space, matter and time. A closer reading of these series as well as of some of the earlier, classical representations from previous art periods, to which they are more directly or less explicitly connected, and through a combined approach and methodology of art history and aesthetics turned to be really beneficial. Through this we could understand that the works are meditations on the perception of some of the most fundamental elements of human condition, and the creative survey of these by the contemporary artists provide the observer of the pieces with insights that can be gained only through works, and that would have otherwise been, most likely, undiscovered.

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