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ART 383  
Landscape in China  
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## Summary of Malcolm Andrews' *Landscape and Western Art: Land into Landscape*

What makes a landscape? Landscape according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary is defined as “a: a picture representing a view of natural inland scenery and b: <sup>1</sup>the art of depicting such scenery.”<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Andrews’ leads off the first chapter of *Landscape and Western Art* with the statement “A ‘landscape’, cultivated or wild, is already artifice before it has become the subject of a work of art. Even when we simply *look* we are already shaping and interpreting.”<sup>2</sup> Landscape is often viewed as the “raw material waiting to be processed by an artist.”<sup>3</sup> However, Andrews takes it one step further saying land is the raw form, so the process of creating a painting or photograph featuring a landscape involves the conversion of “land into landscape; landscape into art.”<sup>4</sup> Viewing land as landscape is a “process of discrimination”<sup>5</sup> according to Andrews, this transformation of land into landscape; landscape into art is the “shaping and interpreting” addressed in the opening statement.

One of the first steps in the process of defining what makes a specific tract landscape is to choose where the boundaries of our reference frame lies. Frames are discussed as being integral to the definition of landscape; it breaks the entire wilderness into smaller pieces, into several landscapes rather than one whole landscape. Once the area of land is framed, as viewers we begin to pick out the elements we favor promoting

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<sup>1-5</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 1-23.

those features of the vista and downplaying or even ignoring others. This sorting process allows us to see only those things that are pleasurable, Andrews makes the conjecture that,

“A landscape, then, is what the viewer has selected from the land, edited and modified in accordance with certain conventional ideas about what<sup>2</sup> constitutes a ‘good view’. It is land organized and reduced to the point where the human eye can comprehend its breadth and depth within one frame or short scan.”<sup>6</sup>

This quote not only sums up how the viewer transforms land into landscape, but also introduces the existence of outside influences on what in the viewers mind makes a landscape.

What we are told is a “landscape” affects our perceptions of landscapes in art and nature. Everyone is capable of full appreciation of landscape, it is an “instinctive human response that cultural influences may colour and modify but not originate.”<sup>7</sup> From an early age we are shaped by the culture in which we are being raised, everything we view we perceive in relation to standards, which tell us how to view particular things. Different cultures have vastly different views of what makes a beautiful landscape, for some it is wild uncultivated nature that is favored for others it is the neatly manicured carefully tended natural world that is preferred. Everyone however delights in the beauty of nature, Andrews quotes another writer, Kenneth Clark, who said, “With the exception of love, there is perhaps nothing else by which people of all kinds are more united than by their

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<sup>6-8</sup> Ibid. 1-23

pleasure in a good view.”<sup>8</sup> Our level of appreciation of that view changes as we age. A<sup>3</sup> child when questioned about a landscape may talk about the colors, the different plants,<sup>4</sup> and hills or streams. The answer given by an adult may focus on the physical attributes of the landscape but may also delve into the emotions or philosophical questions that the landscape raises. Based on William Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” Andrews formulated a “developmental model of the changing appreciation of natural scenery”<sup>9</sup> that helps describe the changes in our perception of the natural landscape from a rough and unrefined liking to a more sophisticated, highly evolved appreciation.

In art, landscape has evolved from being the parergon or “accessory element”<sup>10</sup> to being the argument, the central theme. As the bulk of the population in Europe moved from rural areas to urban metropolises, the need for landscape in art, as well as the element of nature in the middle of the cities, grew. Small parks and artistic representations of good views allow people living in cities to enjoy the wide-open spaces of the countryside even though a concrete jungle surrounds them. Andrews says, “A single framed view of countryside offers the opportunity for an apparently totalizing view of wide space, an experience no longer possible within the city.”<sup>11</sup> Andrews goes on to compare the chaotic, topsy-turvy representation of New York City done by Joel Meyerowitz’s with Monet’s *Meadow with Poplars* which is “spacious, coherent, and easy to read.”<sup>12</sup> Andrews refers to the cityscape and cities as the “new wilderness” in that a city is the opposite of the wilderness normally thought of, devoid of signs of human

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<sup>9-12</sup> Ibid. 1-23

presence or influence. The city is instead wholly man made and congested with people and things not of the natural world. Andrews says at one point, “Landscape in art tells us, or asks us to think about where we belong.”<sup>13</sup> One theory is that we instinctively appreciate landscape because of our past as hunter-gatherers, although our survival is no longer dependent on finding land with advantageous characteristics, our recognition of these elements has not changed. Other theories include the idea that there may be genetic reasons behind our appreciation of landscape. It is also suggested that although the appreciation of landscape transcends cultural and geographical divides, those whose lives center around the land, the insiders, don’t view land as landscape, but relate to it in a different way because they are dependent on the land, it holds for them special meaning but often not the aesthetic value seen by the outsiders. An outsider viewing a tract of land that is inhabited does not see the hard life the inhabitants might lead, the beauty of the landscape masks any struggles.

Andrews closes this chapter with the idea that landscape in art has been a “elegiac record of humanity’s sense of alienation from its original in an irrecoverable, pre-capitalist world.”<sup>14</sup> As mankind’s dependency on the land has become increasingly apparent, we have all become insiders. As insiders aware of the interdependency we share with the natural world, landscape in art serves only as a reminder of the changes we have made in the move from living as one with nature to apart from nature and how those<sup>6</sup> changes have led to the slow decline of nature and the scarcity of what once seemed to be endless supplies of natural resources. Perhaps the best way to sum up the chapter is with the trio of assertions made by WJT Mitchell,

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<sup>13-14</sup> Ibid. 1-23

“Landscape is not a genre of art but a medium.

Landscape is a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other. As such, it is like money: good for nothing in itself, but expressive of a potentially limitless reserve of value.

Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 1-23