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SOME SOUTH AFRICAN LANDSCAPES

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Study : South African Landscapes

Histor of Art 3B
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Om Mishary af Luanda capes

In the art of the West the Landscape made its first appearance on the altars as a background for the saints who at first lived in the mystical world indicated only by the golden ground of the altar piece. With the progress of time we observe how the landscape became more common and with the Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1485 - 1524) the saints are seen placed in the landscape and not only before a background of grass, trees and mountains. Finally, the European artist and the public came to regard the Landscape as a subject in its own right -- the figure of the landscape became a person.

The glorious Landscapes of the 17th century Holland were composed from memory, supported only by sketches drawn on the spot. We also find views of landscapes: painted from the artist's window. In the 19th century the impressionist painters observed that the colours of light and shades in the concentrated light indoors differed fundamentally from those outdoors, but diffused light in the free air. Indoors the light is warmer and lights are darker, outdoors, outside shades are cold but the lights are warm.

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The impressionist J.M.W. Turner, Cezanne, Gauguin, Renoir began to carry their work into the Landscape. The old painters had worked with underpainting and thin glaze, a technique which took a long time since the paint had to dry before the glazes could be applied. The impressionists, trying to put the final colour on at once on the canvas, essential in bucking the tradition up from differently coloured pigments. Their rich and clear colour and the sparkle of their light was the outcome of experience gained in the soft light of the moist air of Holland, France and England. essential part of the composition of

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Chhowels poclaayec) agar ees
Landgcaapes. They prevented an empty blue fie
standing aver ai detailed bit of land which f
hoktam af the adrnkinge thedr mavement camp leted the
eyetem af diaganal, horizontal and vertical Lines which
organiged the whale paichure and plane and prevented the
picture fram falling inte 2 discanneated parts. Mare
important getidi: thedr clark gehadaws alternating with
ghripes of (and briddliantiy datoup by the sun were well
uged curing the 7th century. Olouds cqave the landsoaape
depth, structured and character .

In &.A&. the painters working im the old traditdan af
Eurape found themgelvesr canfranted with new porobleme .
Faced with Jandsoapes of overwhelming lemuby ane tragic
grandeur they found that the European method af padmtng
eeuld nedther render the typical light of S.A. nar the
gremter disgtance of the dandsaape, which was digcernah le

in the dry air of the country.

The South African sky is higher than that of many parts of Europe, the horizons much higher, than consequently her perspective differs because of the wider angle of view. Though at first sight the untitled and seems to lack colour, more exact observations shows that it was many colours but with finer colour differences. The shadows are much sharper and darker but in the wide landscape glowing under the harsh sun they are usually more concentrated and small areas than those of Europe.

South African clouds seem firmer than the distance between individual summer clouds forming a pattern in the sky are usually greater than those in Europe. The shadows of clouds moving on a summer day over the landscape are consequently thinly spread over the whole wide veld that they cannot be used to organize a landscape picture as the Dutch painters did with the alternating stripes of light and shadowed land.

Abraham Volechek, the first South African landscape painter, built up his canvases too anxiously. With cold and madly local colours, avoiding strong contrasts and trying to show light effects more than colour. Painters like Tinus De Jongh developed crude colour contrasts with yellow highlights in the foregrounds and purple mountains in the backgrounds. Painstakingly drawn and padded with great technical skill. This skill does not distinguish between technical ability (virtuosity) and an artist's power of interpretation between a common place composition of a lovely brook flanked by lovely mountains and landscape which shows the spirit of the country.

In this study we will discuss various different landscapes and how they differ from each other. Traditional versus non traditional. Orthodox versus unorthodox. The landscape has always been a major theme in the visual arts in S.A., country with some very dramatic natural scenery. The earliest artists however still sought to portray scenes

similar to the ones in Europe eg. to Baines and Goodwin, the cosy farm house nestling in the framework of hills and mountains and a stream leading us into the picture.

More of the South African light and air being to appear in the landscapes of Hugo Naude and Strat Caldecott, consisting mainly of a broad horizontal area across the foreground, and a strip of mountains as a backdrop. The early works of Erik Laubseher and some serigraphs of Fred Sehdimmel are rather two-dimensional in their reduction of the landscape to some horizontal colour bands or areas. Contrasting with these, are atmospheric depictions of landscape in which the particular scene is less important than the effect it creates.

DOCUMENTATION

A. Karoo Watering

Canvas

geann or

120 x 104 cm

Karoo Watering
John Meyer

Panofsky &

Wiles, W.G.

The Sasol Art

Ikonologie, themaâ\200\231s en
Symboliek,
Spectrum, Utrecht, 1970.

Art â\200\224 its Spiritual Meaning,
an Antidote to Modernism,

Haum, Jhb, 1939-

Collection, RAU

Itodse probably ta be expected fram the dry harehness af
much af South African Lancdsampo, that many rencdictieans

would rely om texture, and even to ga large extent cangiet
mainly of ". Texture can be evoked an meany way

1. Through the padnterly appdlicahion af padnk Ceg: Adaltf
Jertsoh, Loioanedl Abrams, Andrew Vereter> ar by,

The objeats uged CAarmanda Badkdine liad ar,

3. CG rowgherndng technique applied over a geometric has
(Kenneth Bakker>d> 5 or

4. Et can be dimplied by the padnting af many gmali, rough
objeats CNiea Rao) .

However, interest again reverted to the creation af space
inte the picture. Interestingly this new hightened

BRIER T GET? af gspace was cremated ky depiating abjeats an a
very intense way as O-dimensgional forms @exigking in space,
Ceg: Lithographs of Jules Van Der Vijver, works af Helmet
Stareke, and the recent landscapes loy Eric lLaukeoher? .

B. Landscape

Canvas : 60 x 45 cm
geann or : Landscape

L-S-Nhlangwini â\200\23486

Lit : Bouman, &-C : Kuns in Suidâ\200\224Africa
Cape Town , Haum , 1935.

Roworth , & : Landscape Art in S.A
The Studia, London, 1917

RAU : The Sasol Collection
1988

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Fram the horizontal level ta the top point af the

Gordon Vorster makes use of improvisation. He integrates the key elements, animals and land creating a vague inter- flowing unity that creates the illusion, of Life, energy, earthiness and spiritualness. He too could have been influenced by Cezanne and his use of shades, vague non defined outlines in order to create a landscape - Vorster does not use idealized modulated forms. Colour plays an important role. It emphasizes the texture and atmosphere of the composition. Vorster deviates from the Classicism and Neo - classicalism of the 17th and 18th century respectively by portraying an everyday, contemporary wild life theme. Unlike Pieterneef and Meyer who depicted monumental mountains in their compositions. Vorster's style creates a multidimensional movement and activity in his composition. This is lacking in Meyer's composition. Meyer's composition contains definite outlines and arched forms. There does not seem to be any interaction between Land, animals and sky. Meyer's painting is a direct unqualified observation of a landscape.

Nhlangwini's painting is a romantic, stylized, yet child like simplification of a landscape. The path that moves from within the painting to the viewer, immediately recuses Van der Merwe's idea". Yet, Nhlangwini's work

impresses. Kaurence is describing a matured ; 1. from his own point of view. He associates nature with romantic, child like beauty and this is reflected in his composition.

not

MCAT TER.

Not one of the above paintings contain evidence of human figures. Paintings A, D, and E contain animal figures. Gordon Vorster does not portray animals in fine realistic detail, yet the species can be recognized. They are partially stylized. In this specific painting, "Zebras and Black Gnu" they dominate the animals that is the composition. He does not isolate them, but shows them as they are seen in the grassy plains of Africa:

In groups, in herds, in stripes spread across the landscape. The animals form integral part of the landscape. He creates a picture of how it was before man intruded with his use of animals in the landscape. Jan Meyer depicts the images of the sheep in a realistic, almost plastic manner. He employs detail and the she real. Pieterneef's aim of animals is to depict that

images. They cannot be identified. Yet they seem large and dominate part of the horizontal landscape -

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anc Typology

Pieterneef is among other things, known today for his geometric representation of the South African landscape, eg. "Rock Cliff with Tree". The natural motifs are presented in a more orderly fashion than is found in organic nature. Pieterneef does not just copy the images and motifs of nature - he has tried to develop a formal description of it. He searches for "Wetmatigheid" and tries to bring it to its simplified general being. He

schematisizes forms in a subtle manner and divides colour according to these schematisgizes forms eg: The Tree in painting D.

Hig works are systematic and geametrica. The Tree in D. has just become Â« decaration, and ga has the mourkadin. Evers the clouds in (, are composed of geametrica shapes Â« that eventually becomes more important element of hig work, than hi Tvl landgseapes). In painting C., there is evidence af the ektructuring and organization af space inte finvigible â\200\231 cubes. Pierneefâ\200\231s rendering recalls a Long classioiet traditian : tohcding back ta Od Egypt and archaic Greece, the @arly middie yes, the Toth century Renaigganoe, anc Baroque Classics in the 7th and 18th century France. Nearer to our time, Paul Clara 2 aarie C1839-1906) he systematically tried ta subject mature ko geamnetry. Van Koni jenburg tan, reinferced Pierneefls ideas when he visited the Netherlands .

conographical nterpretatian
iIntri ic i

Before the 1900s, the paintings were illustrative.
Geographical descriptions of the environment. Today, the
situation is reversed and symbolism is ranked high by many
of the South African "Landscapes Artists. According to the
literature concerned with the art of S.A. Landscapes, &
notions exist:

1. Pre-European view,
2. Wied, wilderness as a man illustrated by Landscapes ,
3. And, the habitat theory, (the search for security) -

In paintings

O, 8, D and E, space, Light, heaven & the Land
are integrated. & certain relationship exists between the
sky and light. This may illustrate that the artist
considers the heavenly and earthly elements to be equally
important and could be a reference to the relationship
between God and man. Painting A is dominated by the
heavenly space and Light. Pieterse emphasizes the
spiritualism of man. Allowing him to dominate the
horizontal female horizon. The implication being that
space (freedom) and God (Spiritual belief), are more
important than the female elements and her earthly
Fertility, love and protection she offers. Although these
characteristics are not denied. The prominence of Light
in paintings A, B, D and E is evident and the Light becomes
material and not only has an organic quality, but could
also be a reference to the transcendental and spiritual.

In paintings A, B, D and E, the landscapes are not
threatening. They provide a home, food and security for
man and animals. Although the monumental mountain of
Pieterse's Rook Cliff with Tree, has a tendency to become
a threatening feature. Yet, it more like provides
protection and cover in the wild. The cliff, the tree and
even the animals are large in size. Immediacy that man
is small and insignificant when compared to nature: its
size, beauty, habitat function and destructive qualities
eg: fire, earthquakes, volcanoes and hurricanes. What
softens these features of nature in painting OC, the cliff
and tree, in the romantics use of colour which softens

the silhouette of the features. This softening of the
Landscape allows nature to provide coverage and protection
rather than to be threatening.

John Meyer's landscape is totally serene and inviting. The
use of semi-domestic animals reinforces the man
threatening aspect of a landscape. The blue of the clear
sky and drinking water of the animals, is intense. The
light, space and atmospheric elements and composition
elements is reflected in the drinking water. It is brought

closer to the earth and becomes one with the Earth. And

integration between man and God is hinted at. Man is not
isolated from God. Through Figs and other creations He will
proceed man.

Reinforcing the
food and encircling care. The sheep are 'Farming

The female horizontal feature is common.

qualities - that of love, protection,
warmth,
and 'independence'.

maybe a real one
and its sheep farming industry. Or, the sheep could be as
symbol of South Africa's growing manufacturing industry
sheep provide wool. S.A. exports wool, but also uses
clothes and other such articles. This activity
foreign capital - allowing her to

This reinforces the idea that the landscape
composition of the specific is: the Karoo

title:

to make
provides: OG. A. with
Prosper.

Lawrence's painting
nature. Although the two groups of trees in the
the thick bush or strip of trees and distant
reflect the harshness and threatening

suggests a soft, feminine and romantic

appeal of
foreground,
Moun had Tariq's
aspect of nature. Yet, similarly, they can provide
protection and safety. The landscape successfully creates an
interaction between the horizontal and vertical elements
by the bushes and the horizontal of

eg: the fence, the trees

mown tadin ranges

The above illustration allows a certain insight into the
complex interaction between man and woman. It also indicates

that both sexes are striving to or for a higher level of existence. The path that leads from the distant strip of trees, to the fence, implies that there is an Tacha

constantly between man and nature so man constantly comes

and goes. The alternative being that man is leaving his

natural home and distancing himself from it. This is possibly reinforced by Lawrence's 200/231 as a romantic interpretation of the landscape. As an African, who has left the country for the city, he can only recall what a landscape looks like and how fulfilled he was there.

Gordon Vargter depicts a landscape filled with animals. He reveals how dark we before man intruded. His composition integrates land, space, sky and animals (making them dominant) evenly. He creates a certain natural unforced harmony between them. He too uses an almost dark blue for his sky. Gordon Voreter, like Njhalangwind and Pierneef use visible clouds which tends to be a manifestation of the supreme being - a reference to the spiritual.

CONCLUSION

Landscapes today, rely on atmosphere, motifs, artists' feelings and ideas, rather than the typical landscape present in the landscape motif as we see it, rather as we do and experience it. While sometimes never

change, add the animals and plants illustrate the

traditional fertility and recurring growth cycles of our cosmos. When

indirectly especially in Vermeer's painting of the "White Cow" may be a reference to the cycle of

Jeers, boys

birth, Life, death and resurrection. Landscapes are root.

just landscapes. Landscapes depict an entire history.

C. Wit Wolke oor nâ\200\231Landskap

Canvas >: 44 x 43 cm

geann or >: Wit Wolke oor nâ\200\231 Landskap
J.-H Pierneef

Bouman, A.C : Painters of S.A
Haun, Cape Town, 1949

Frasen, H : Brie Eeue,kuns in S.A
Haun, Cape Town, 1952

Grasskopf, dJ-F-W : Pierneef â\200\224 The Man and his
work,

Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1947

D. Rock Cliff with Tree

Canvas

geann or

Lit

60 x 40 cm

Rock Cliff with Tree

J-H Pierneef

See C.

RAU The Sasol Collection

1988

E . Zebras and Black Gnu

Canvas

geann or

Lit

82 x 154 cm

Zebras and
G. Vorster

Batiss,

RAU

RAU

ui -

Black Gnu

New Art and Old in South
Africa
Balkemma, Cape Town, 1952

: Artist of the Textures .-
1987

: The Sasol Collection
1988

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