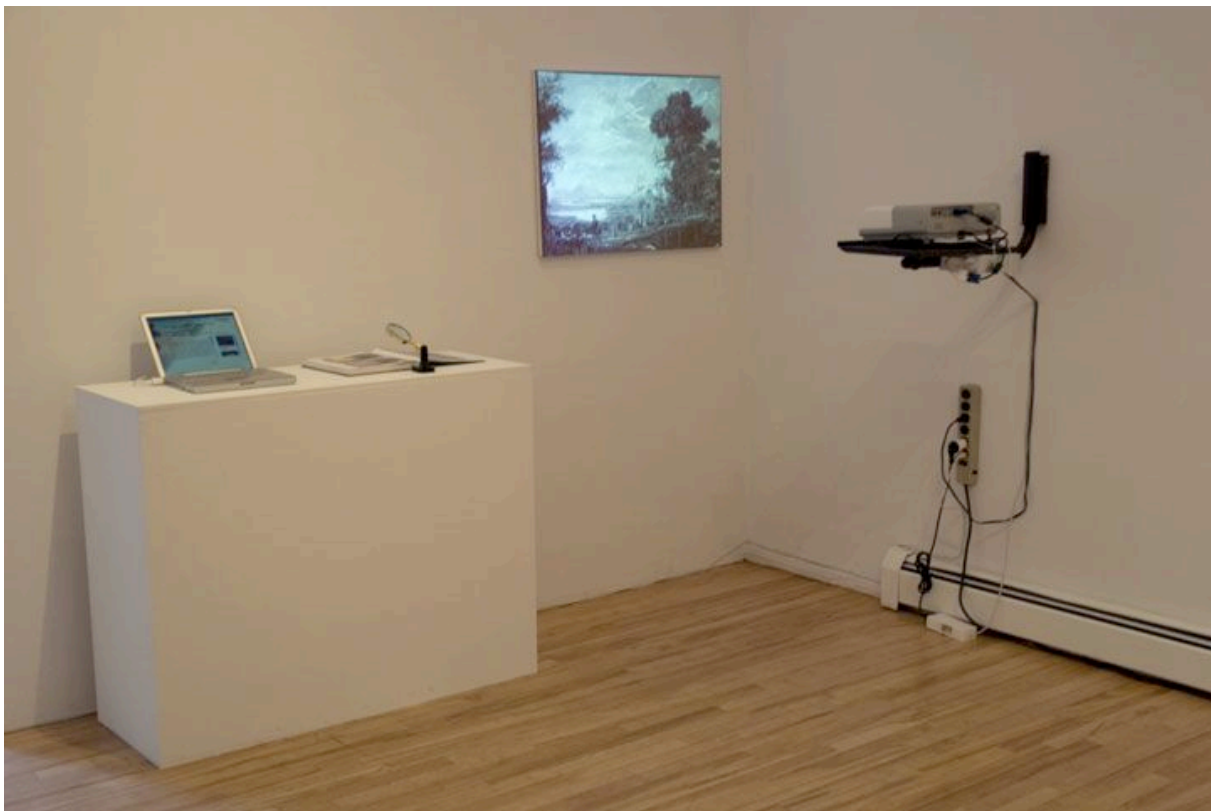


See and Seen – Seeing Landscape through Artistic Practice

Matts Leiderstam



[Fig. 1]

My dissertation was presented in Lund, Sweden, in September 2006 and contained an exhibition, a website and a text. I will present two acts of seeing landscape in my account that became the core of my research project – and then say a few words about how I developed a new way to present my work in space during my doctoral study at Malmö Art Academy.

The starting point for *See and Seen* [Fig 1. Installation shot, *Nameless Science*, Apexart. Image credit: Hugh Watt] was the conventions of the Ideal Landscapes painted in Rome during the 17th century by artists such as Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin. In the 18th century, England was translated into a particular gaze that became the fashion for how, and the parameters within which, the landscape was to be seen and that subsequently gave rise to landscaped parks, poetry and painting, and consequently had a significant role in shaping theories of the Picturesque. These ideas gathered currency outside Europe partly through the pathways opened by British colonialism, which still to a certain extent determine the Western notion of landscape and landscape architecture. This is part of a narrative relating to the <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/leiderstam.html>

popularity of landscape as a subject, that is also embedded in and produced by the discipline of art history, a model I worked with in my art practice from the beginning of the 1990s.

In *See and Seen*, the focus was on studies of landscape and landscape painting, for example through copying a painting by Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), *Landscape with Rebekah Taking Leave of Her Father* (1640-41), and photographing a real view of an existing historical landscape seen from the United States Military Academy at West Point, in the Hudson Valley, New York [Fig. 2. United States Military Academy at West Point, Hudson Valley].



[Fig. 2]

When I saw *Landscape with Rebekah* in the museum, I was looking at an object mediated through generations of art-historical research and exhibition practice – including all misunderstandings, mistakes and manipulations. Aspects of this mediation include the actual change in the appearance of the painting. The picture was re-canvassed in the 18th century – this method involved gluing the canvas to a new one by stretching it under pressure, which had the effect of flattening out some of the brushstrokes on the surface of the painting. This, along with the varnishes applied, the changes to the color pigments over time, multiple washes, restorations and touch-ups, contributes to and affects how it is seen today. It is a different painting to the one that left Lorrain's studio to begin its journey to its first owner.

Since the end of the 1980s, in my own artistic practice, I have returned to pictures by Claude Lorrain. My artistic method has been symptomatic in relation to Lorrain: to emphasize in practice the process of seeing by painting copies/paraphrases (repetition and mimicry.) Through this, a desire emerged to see these pictures again - but also the possibility and necessity of fantasizing about what might take place in these landscapes. In my doctoral study I did this again, however, now with the capability, through my research, to see myself seeing.

While copying, I studied the original at a distance of approximately one meter, sometimes leaning in closer, inspecting as closely as I dared. I was looking at the picture for a longer time than a normal museum visitor would. How close I could get to the painting's surface was decided by the security system. If I worked during the museum's opening hours, I often had onlookers who watched, and who saw a painting and a man who copies at an easel in the

museum. It is a recognizable impression – something a museum visitor would expect and relate to (and so can I), despite the well-known fact that copying is no longer part of an artist's training. Every museum I have worked with had different rules regarding how to deal with copyists. At Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, the rules state that the painting has to differ from the original size by at least 30%; and when the copy is ready, the head conservator stamps the picture on the back of the canvas with the word "Copy". However, I was allowed to make a copy in a 1:1 ratio size.

I decided to call my copy an "After Image". In art-historical terminology the copy is described as being made "after" the original image. "An after image is an optical illusion that is created in our brains when looking away from a direct gaze on an image." My motivation for using this notion for my copy relates to how this delusion reveals itself as a reversal of what is seen. For example, when looking at a green figure, the brain creates a red after image. My after image deals with difference rather than likeness.

In a way, making a copy is doomed to failure if absolute likeness is at the goal, since it relates to acts that have already been performed, and will necessarily miss the target. It is this act of being off-target that I oppose to the expected "eternal truth" of the original.

When working on my after image, I started to think about *Landscape with Rebekah* as a theatrical stage with Lorrain as both its scenographer and illuminator.

My intentions became clearer when I looked at the Nationalmuseum's X-ray of *Landscape with Rebekah*. The X-ray revealed that "inside of the outside" of the painting there was another sun in the sky, right above the two parties of figures populating the painting. This other sunlight hit both parties from behind, while also shedding light on the two men's meeting in the foreground. I then decided that the sun would be painted as it was in the X-ray, with the aim of mimicking Lorrain's initial intention. If this – today – invisible alternative sun had shone on the scene, then Rebekah would have parted from her father a few hours later that morning. The mere act of painting shifts the sun in my after image, turns time into past tense, into past time, from inside of the outside of *Landscape with Rebekah*'s own painting history. By proceeding with this act, time also has jolted forward, for that day, and in that landscape. This act made with a brush and white oil color produces a set of perplexing histories about both the historical time of painting the pictures (mine and Lorrain's), and about the sun's traveling over the sky in both landscapes.

My next decision was to move the sun again, triggered by what the X-ray had revealed to me. I altered the sun's position in several stages from left to right, documenting it at each shift until it had disappeared behind the horizon. Technically, from a painter's point of view, the brush drew a new sun for every repositioning and another painted over the old one. In this way I created a whole set of new suns that remained shining on the inside of my painting. This act bore consequences – it meant that the painting went through a continuous change, gradually becoming darker on the outside and lighter on the inside. By unfixing Lorrain's sun and by the end letting the sun set in the picture, I changed the form and the shapes of trees, figures, cattle, clouds, mountains and the land beyond the horizon, and kept the history of this change throughout my documentation.

It meant that my painting, in the process of being executed, increasingly departed from Lorrain's landscape model. I started to see my after image as distinct from Lorrain's painting

more and more, approaching the condition of becoming a painting in its own right, while I could only fantasize about what kind of landscape would take form on the inside of the outside. Looking back at all the documentation I also understood how, at an earlier stage, by changing the light, I had removed Lorrain from his position in relation to his theater.

As a final act, I took an X-ray photograph of my after image/painting, to reveal “its” light, its “inside of its outside”.

My other project related to seeing landscape - *View* - became a series of works made in relation to, or after, the 18th-century seeing instruments, the Claude Lorrain Mirror and the Claude Lorrain Glasses - invented and first used by 18th- and 19th-century British travelers in search of the Picturesque. [Fig. 3. Detail of installation, *Nameless Science*, Apexart]



[Fig. 3]

The Claude Lorrain Mirror was a convex mirror on black foil with the surface turned towards the landscape by its user. The size of the instrument corresponds roughly to a small paperback book and it was a miniaturized version of the larger convex studio mirror used by painters.

The Claude Lorrain Glasses were round, tinted glass discs with a diameter of approximately 2.5 cm (1 inch), mounted like magnifying glasses in sets of 3 to 8 discs on the arms of a fan-shaped protective frame and usually made of horn. In the past one believed that the landscape should be transformed so as to resemble the paintings of the master, Claude Lorrain. The light golden-brown glass, for example, gave an illusion of dawn light; the dark pink-brown glass created twilight; and the blue one produced a picture of a landscape apparently illuminated by the moon, or a snowy landscape.

Landscape artists and tourists used the Claude Lorrain Glasses and Mirror in a desire to control and fix the view. In a sense, this new kind of spectator traveled through the landscape and “took pictures” in the same way we do today with our digital cameras. The landscape was, in a way, produced, developed and captured through the use of these instruments. What in the eighteenth century was a sophisticated hobby for the upper classes has today become an activity characteristic of the modern-day tourist.

Raymond Williams poses in his book, *The Country and the City*, “A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation.”¹

Williams goes on to say that to turn land into landscape requires a set of socially negotiated ideas, a decision to impose a way of seeing onto a place, and that this is “not a kind of nature but a kind of man”. This framing of land as landscape that Williams points out underscores the significance of addressing the way in which we see landscape, and that our relation to memory, culture and history are main players when forming such a view.

In nineteenth-century Europe, the notion of the Picturesque developed into nostalgia for a recently lost landscape, a desire for the cultivated landscape that was disappearing with industrialization. In spite of this, the Picturesque was to have a great influence on how people were to see landscapes in America. One of the places on which the Europeans and the descendants of European immigrants projected their Lorrain-inflected gaze was the Hudson Valley, and in particular the Hudson Valley Highlands, where the mountains of West Point surround the river passage, all of which was cloaked in memories from the recent War of Independence. At West Point I made a series of photographs that became important for my research.

Working at the United States Military Academy at West Point on April 30, 2003 (the “last day of the Iraq war”, according to George W. Bush’s declaration on May 1st), my job on the site was to unfold the Claude Lorrain Glasses and hold them one by one in front of the large-format camera lens. Kelly, the photographer, controlled the shutter, and our assistant, Jay, recorded the different exposure times and colors and mixtures of filters. The view I observed reminded me of a stage set from classical theater, the mountings like screens framing the stage of the Hudson River. When the round shape of the Claude Lorrain Glass is held in front of the camera lens, the gaze is drawn to the center, as if the form of the glass is placed on top, and makes the penetration into the landscape clearer. I looked at the photographs just taken: I saw the river flow towards me and the shape of the instrument made its movement more vivid. A horizon is clearly there, at times taking on more clarity and at other times more diffuse, depending on the color of the filter: Yellow Dawn, Rose Twilight and Moonlight Blue. While looking, I became aware of eyes that see me and the view in the same moment, the system of surveillance of the Military Academy, the tourists with their cameras dipping in and out of the vista, and all the registering eyes of the satellites high above this beautiful landscape.

My method for *See and Seen* was to research the different historical accounts and the contexts of the representation of landscape. I was not so much interested in the accumulation of knowledge but in how I could put it to work in general to reproduce the landscapes through various artistic techniques and strategies. I adopted different roles when I approached the landscapes through mimicry – the copyist, the tourist and the art historian – used in both projects as routines for seeing.

My artistic method proceeded from two different traditions about how to approach an historical painting, namely the artist’s and the scholar’s. I should point out that it is those conventions that identify and give meaning to the artists and art historians I refer to, for these terms are utilized in my work as two “routines” to consider when approaching painting. The first routine was that of the artist who remakes the picture in a desire to learn about its coming into being; the other was that of the art historian who reveals the subject by analyzing and gathering information about it and its context.

Part of my roadmap of art projects that became important for my research was *Grand Tour*, an exhibition I produced and which toured five art institutions in Europe between 2005-2007. *Grand Tour* broadly related to traveling, seeing landscape and cultural places in Italy, as well as dealing with a gay cruising gaze.

During my research, I did find a way to work with my material as an archive and a kind of machinery for seeing. This involved an attempt to detect a form of complexity within historical representations, through a schematic, clear, lucid presentation in my installations – simultaneously providing me with the possibility of changing the focus and the narrator. With this method, I found that the gay man's gaze paradoxically mimics the amateur's love for paintings in a museum, as well as the art historian's research, all of which intersect in my installations in the exhibition space.

Henri Lefebvre makes a connection between the experience of looking at a painting and a face or façade, saying that the face of the painting always meets the viewer with the same logic - the painting turns in the direction of anyone approaching it. Therefore, the museum gallery is a place like no other, in the sense that we move in this space in relation to this encounter. Despite the seemingly complex relations that create the contexts within a museum, this is a public space as negotiated as a supermarket or a hospital. We know, and our bodies recognize, how to act in these kinds of spaces and we bring our eyes to focus on the subject suggested by the context. To look at paintings in a museum is an active bodily experience.

I created a system to underscore this bodily experience of seeing. I designed tables made for studying books, paintings and other material presented on them. And I placed viewing instruments, like magnifying glasses and field scopes, to propose an installation made for the viewer to explore the act of looking. The installation was oriented in one direction to help the viewer move from viewing point to viewing point. In this system I juxtaposed pairs of images – often a reproduction of a painting and my after images. I tried to create an installation that involves the viewer in the negotiation process that constructs the way we perceive pictures in art history. I use the original paintings as a starting point, since they often relate to an existing canon within the history of, in this case, Western art, i.e. the designated masterpiece as style and norm, a formula that I would like the viewer of my installations to scrutinize.

I would also like to add that the system used in both my *See and Seen* exhibition as well as in *Grand Tour* became a kind of self-portrait; all was established in relation to the embodiment of my gaze: the scale of the objects, the way the objects were spread on the tables, the height of objects in relation to my own height. In fact the supports, such as benches and chairs, are there to help the viewer to see from my vantage point. I know that I can never know what the viewer sees. However, in the exhibition system, I have seen myself seeing, a kind of specter of me appears when the viewers are in my installation, and when I install the work I am also imagining the viewer leaning over my tables, looking into my field scopes. I am, then, there with the unknown.

Response

John Rajchman

Matts' interesting thesis research into notions of landscape in classical and contemporary settings intersects with the work of a number of historians. But in what sense does this research belong to the "nameless science" we are debating today in New York? What in fact is this "nameless science" in which Giorgio Agamben saw a paradigmatic case in Aby Warburg's own long, mad, private research project also concerned with memory of European painting at an earlier time in history? The question I would like to open for discussion thus has to do with the larger framework of this symposium.

One issue is the relationship of "nameless" research not simply with knowledge, but also with changing models of what knowledge is or does. What is the role of images or pictures in knowledge, in the arts and sciences? What are their relationships with one another? In that context, one could imagine analyzing how the aesthetic concepts of landscape vary with corresponding knowledge about what a milieu or environment is in the sciences (as, for example, in Foucault's analyses of bio-power). Of course, it then matters whether landscape is used in a way that contrasts with the city or rather whether one can speak of urban landscapes.

In literature and in cinema, we see many ways of how characters figure in landscapes. For example, with the heightened sensibilities of characters inhabiting strange new disconnected or absent spaces. Looking at Neo-realist cinema, Deleuze analyses the condition of an entirely new relation between cinema and thinking, in-between cinema and research - and also notices peculiar urban landscapes or percepts in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the larger tradition in painting that Matts Leiderstam is looking at, there is an important distinction of this sort to which I would like to draw attention.

In her book *The Art of Describing* (1983), Svetlana Alpers analyses a shift from window to map in Dutch masters of the 17th century. Written under influence of Foucault, the book is one attempt to counter or qualify Panofsky's question about perspective and its relation to knowledge and related ideas about what an image or picture is. In Dutch painting, Alpers observes that the window is replaced by the map. There is a new relationship to knowledge, much less textualist or dependent on the principle of *ut pictura poesis*. That type of analysis differs from how Matts starts from the mythological themes in classical works. Mapping landscapes belongs to an art of describing rather than depicting them as if from a window or through a frame.

Today we might see landscapes as part of a larger series of relations of drawings or pictorial techniques not related to classical perspectival conventions, but rather to architectural plans, even musical scores or theatrical scripts. The problem of map or diagram, as distinct from window or frame, is one which has generated a large volume of literature. For example, in his essay directed against Fredric Jameson in a collection called *Critical Landscapes*, Mark Wigley draws attention to a highly suggestive use of the notion of map or diagram and a sense of being lost in space in Walter Benjamin's autobiographical writings. But it is Gilles Deleuze who perhaps goes the furthest in the development of the notion of map and its critical applications, when he contrasts *carte* and *calque*, mapping and tracing as if from a prior model.

An interesting application in seeing landscape is the notion of moving eyes and the role of the camera in substituting them in cinema. For example, a traveling shot has a different relation to landscape than a panoramic shot. It is suggestive, in this regard, that the Chinese (then Japanese) hand scroll tradition is seen as proto-cinematic since Eisenstein, is also one which departs from the classical idea of the window.

The notion of diagram or of mapping in Deleuze's hands – in relation to non-probabilistic chance in pictorial facts painted or studied by Francis Bacon, for example - involves a kind of research carried out by artists or filmmakers which might be called “nameless” in a peculiar sense. That is a bit different from Aby Warburg's catastrophically disappointed faith in humanist *Wissenschaft* not governed by prior method and at odds with instituted or clichéd ways of seeing and talking.

I stress such distinctions between mapping and depicting landscapes, and the kinds of research they involve, because it seems to me that much contemporary art and architecture has focused on the issue of map or diagram rather than the more classical notions of frame or window. In the research projects presented as part of the last Shanghai Biennial, for example, it seems that the issue of mapping new translocal kinds of urban space (or landscape) was much more central than the tradition of classical window with which Matts is concerned. My question then is this: is Matts' return to an earlier European convention of the window a deliberate attempt to counter this trend? If not, what then is its purpose? What is its relation to nameless research?

¹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Paladin, 1975), p. 120.