

*Thinking about land art through an anthropo-non-centric
frame*

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Preface

My practice as an Artist is an aesthetic experimentation of a way of thinking based on a non-hierarchical ontology. Thinking in a dialectical way I acknowledge the opposite or inversion of anthropocentrism, with the aim to arrive at a point of unity beyond 'human and the other'.

Having attended the 'New Tendencies in Land & Environmental Art: Horizontal -Vertical Symposium' in Tenna, Switzerland,¹ in which critical attention was paid to the notion of the reorientation (both literally and metaphorically) of Land Art - I proposed a series of works to be presented and reflected upon during the course of the Land Art Biennial Art Safiental.

I was intrigued by the challenge of trying to bring to life 'anthropononcentric art'² (Figure 1) in the environment of the Swiss Alps, and was particularly interested in attending due to my research into the horizontal and vertical axis both in practice and ontological theory.

Thinking about Land Art

In her presentation during the Symposium, Hanna Hölling discussed the history of the concept of landscape, making a point that inspired the works I ultimately created. As described by her, 'the '-scape' in landscape derives from the old english 'skipe' and is related to the word

¹<https://alpsartacademy.ch/aaa2018/>

²Myvanwy Gibson, An Anthropononcentric art.

‘shape’. The latter word - ‘skipe’ - is used in the physical sense of shaping, which also implies a bodily engagement, as in ‘the people shaped the land.’³

The concept of ‘landscape’ is in fact a man-made construct, the landscape being a thing to be viewed as scenery, setting and painting. If we take ‘landscape’ as a verb then - land, or even nature in general, is always in the passive position and is the object acted upon, or shaped by, man.

Taking a vertical perspective

Thinking in a dialectical way is an important part of my practice. It was through my artistic practice that I was led to discover the concept of the unity of opposites (a central category of Dialectics) - a principle that is both ontological and scientific. As I wrote in the paper ‘Revolution or Evolution?’⁴ - for a different perspective to be obtained an evolutionary movement needs to occur. (A revolution - the progressive motion of a body around an axis remaining on the same plane of symmetry - will return to the same point, but if the central point on the plane becomes a line, an orthogonal motion can occur allowing for a new perspective on the same point).

Taking a perpendicular approach to thinking about land art then, I created three installations with the aim to bring into discussion the perspective of ‘land’.⁵ These works are titled ‘Would Nature Make Art?’ (Figure 2) and evolved as installations in the forests of the Swiss Alps and subsequent photographic documentation.

This series of works intended to invert the thought of ‘people shaping the land’ – placing Nature in the active position and as the subject of the work. It is the land that is acting on man, or more literally, on the man-made substance. The work is representational of the thought ‘land shaping the people’ - and in actuality the process of creation is also reflected in this thought. Artificial plastic substrates painted with man-made pigments are ‘sculpted’ by the natural elements. The natural element being the shaper of the man-made artifact.

During the symposium I was struck by the the power in works that seem to flip the limitations of human perception. In Chris Taylor’s exploration of the expanded frame of land art, he points out that *‘it is easy to speculate how images of Michael Heizer’s work ‘Double Negative’ prompted one of land art’s most familiar critiques - the work as an aggressive scar on the land. For me this critique of land art has a positive side (interesting considering the title of the artists work that prompted it) in that it exposes one of the great limitations in human*

³Dr. Hanna Hölling, ‘The Lands of Art: Thoughts on historical Land Art.’ June 30, 2018

⁴Myvanwy Gibson, The Tautology of Virtual Reality

⁵Chris Taylor, Field to Frame: exhibiting land art.

perception. We seem to not be able to see the ‘nothing’, until its surrounds are subverted into a ‘something’.

This challenging of the limitations of human perception was also highlighted to me via Bill Fox’s presentations of his writings ‘The Invention of the Vertical’⁶ in which he describes Ugo Rondinoni’s work ‘Seven Magic Mountains’. The artist, via colour provocation and increasing the sense of verticality, enables the viewer ‘*to see the desert more clearly because you see the contrast*’.

My choice of a plastic substrate and highly artificial, almost chemical colours in the works aim also to open a way to see nature anew. Rather than acting as frame for the man-made ‘art’ my intention is to allow nature to present itself. Showing itself to be in extreme contrast, not only to the colour and material of the work, but also in essence.

The title of the series ‘Would nature make Art?’ intends to mock somewhat man’s attempts at art - and so if experienced in this way, challenges our idea of art. Is this how land or nature would make art? Just as we tend to anthropomorphise our animals and other elements of nature, this series of works could also be viewed through this lens. As though an art made by nature would be a painting reshaped by its material manifestations - a rock, or tree, or water.

If nature was to make art what would it be? Maybe this question, even in asking, can open the way to a point of view that is less anthropocentric.

Figure 2.

Series: Would Nature Make Art?

Figure 1.

Series: Anthropononcentric Art

This series of works are the result of my research into the creation of an ‘anthropononcentric’ art. In essence they are an illustration of an ongoing three-fold dialectical process - the forces of technology, man and nature come into conflict but instead of simply contradicting one another, they instead become synthesised into something more than the sum of their parts.

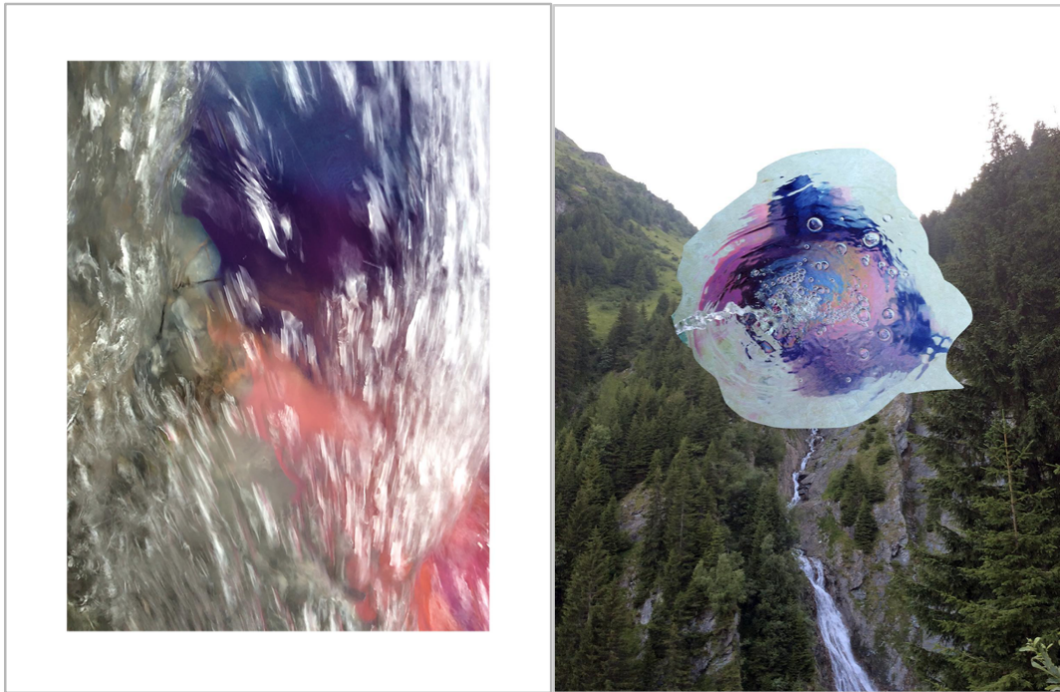
⁶Bill Fox, Invention of the Vertical.



Title: ROCK. Digital Fine Art print on Hahnemühle bamboo matt paper documenting the installation 'rock'. 500mmx600mm Location: Innerberggruti, Schiessstand. Tenna, Switzerland. 46°44'27.6"N 9°19'54.5"E (Swiss Alps)



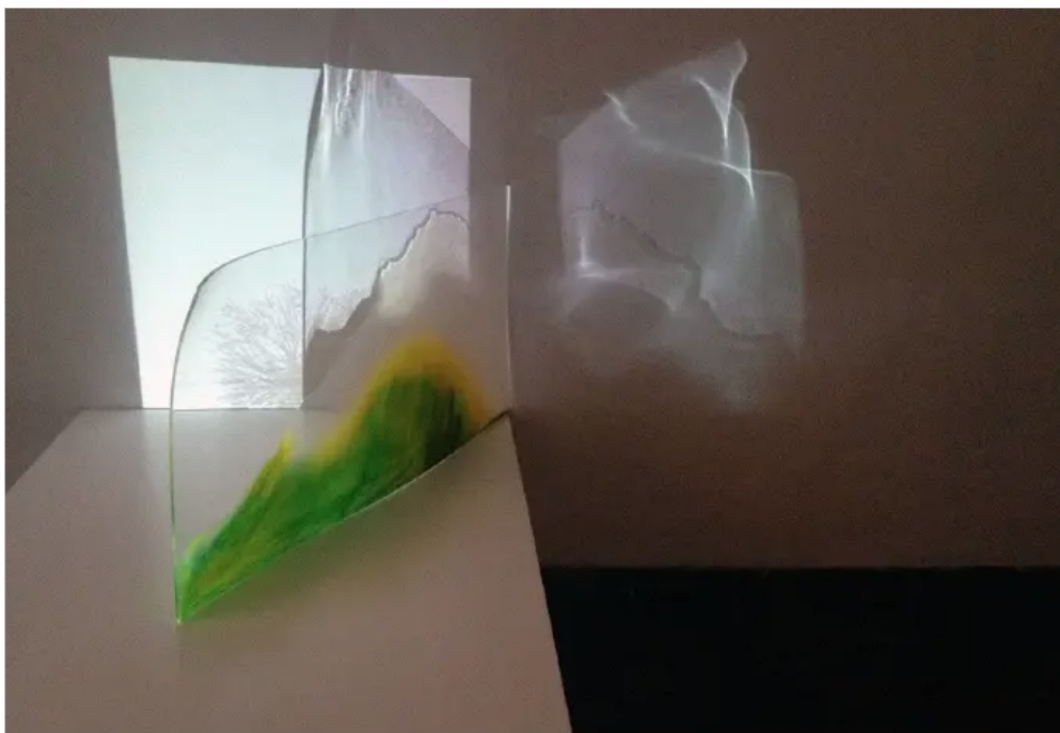
Title: TREE. Digital Fine Art print on Hahnemühle bamboo matt paper documenting the the installation 'Tree'. 500mmx600mm Location: Tenna, Switzerland. 46°44'42.9"N 9°20'43. (Swiss Alps)



Title: WATER. Digital Fine Art print on Hahnemühle bamboo matt paper documenting the installation 'Water'. 500mmx600mm Location: Tenna, Switzerland. 46°41'50,46"N 9°19'27,378" E (Swiss Alps)



Left Title: SHINY BUT DEEP (White lipped Oyster, shell iPod shuffle 4th gen, 1 min audio loop, pigments and enamel on plexiglass) Right Title: A METHYSTOS (22 sec video, Amethyst Geode, iPad Air 1st gen)



Title: NATURA MORTE IN TEMPO REALE. Boxwood Snag, webcam, chromecast, projector, pigment, thermoplastic polymers on plexiglass