

## 10. THE NATURAL WORLD

### Introduction

Some of the earliest works of art are renderings of the natural world— attempts by individuals to document the flora and fauna of the world around them.<sup>1</sup> Documentary images began to appear in the Paleolithic era. Likenesses of animals painted and carved on cave walls caves in Altamira, Spain, include a bison (ca. 15,000-10,000 BCE), rendered without legs, denoting it is immobile on the ground. In contrast, the bison, deer, horses, and cattle on the walls of a cave in Lascaux, France, (ca. 15,000-10,000 BCE), shown in Figures 1-3 (pgs. 314-315), appear in motion, indicating such images were possibly related to hunting practices. Carved images from this period are very detailed, suggesting that the practice of creating such figurines was part of a long tradition of crafting small, hand-held items. Two of

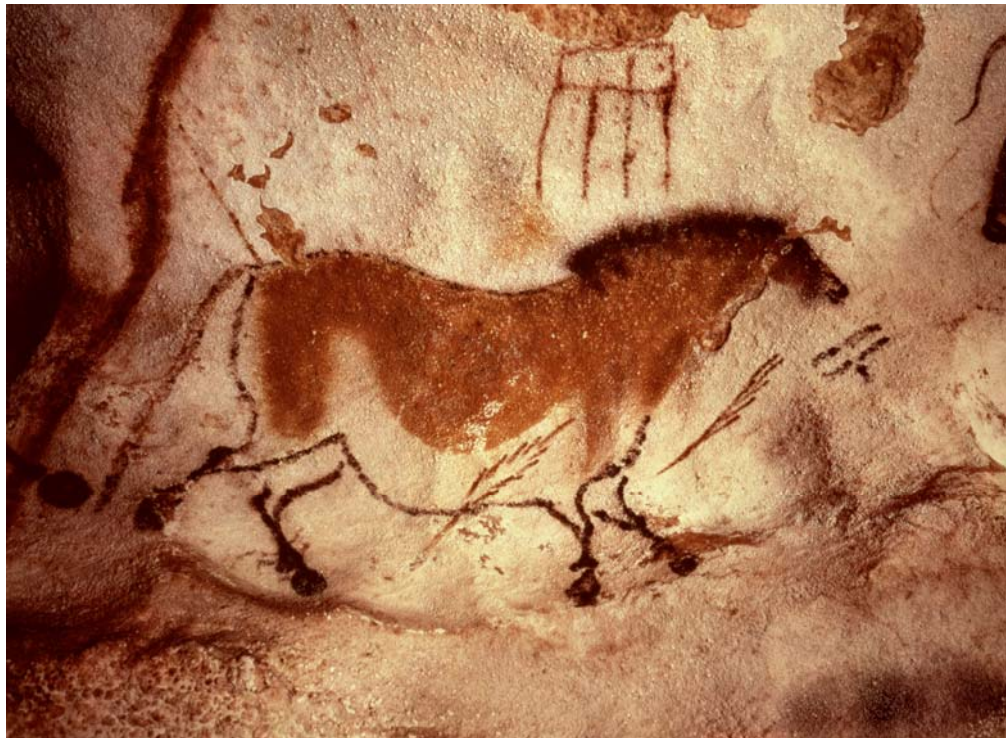


Figure 1. *Horse*; cave painting; ca.15,000-10,000 BCE; Caves of Lascaux, Dordogne, France. Photograph © The Gallery Collection/Corbis.





Figure 2. *Bison*; cave painting; ca.15,000-10,000 BCE; Caves of Lascaux, Dordogne, France. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

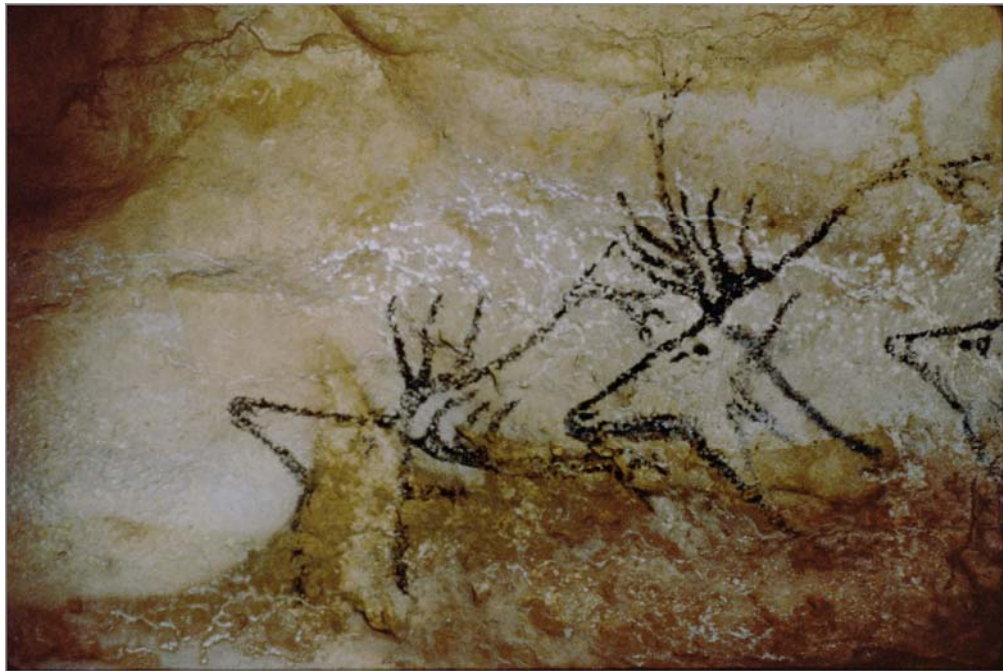


Figure 3. *Deer*; cave painting; ca.15,000-10,000 BCE; Caves of Lascaux, Dordogne, France. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

the oldest pieces include an ivory horse from Vogelherd (ca.32,000 BCE)<sup>2</sup> and a detailed image of a bison from La Madeleine (ca. 15,000-10,000 BCE).<sup>3</sup> While the exact intent of the artists who created these images is unknown, the desire to render the natural world around them is apparent. Throughout human history, the natural world has been a source of inspiration.

### Using Materials from Nature

Nature is the source for a wide variety of art-making materials. Pigments were made from elements in the environment. Black would be found in charcoal, reds and yellows in mineral oxides, and white in clays such as kaolin or gypsum, or conch and oyster shells. Painting mediums were created by mixing these materials with water, vegetable gum, or blended with animal fat.<sup>4</sup> Natural elements used for the carving of objects included wood, bone, shells, and stone. Individuals used clay from the earth to create pottery, dyed plant fibers or animal hair for textiles, and various types of grasses woven to form baskets. Paper was made by soaking plant fibers together, pounding and spreading them to form a thin layer, and allowing them to dry on frames.<sup>5</sup>

The Ashanti people of Ghana are known for the weaving of Kente cloth, originally considered a royal fabric to be worn only by those of the highest status. Colorfully dyed raffia fibers were woven into intricate geometric designs until the introduction of locally grown cotton replaced the raffia. Eventually, silk threads were dyed and incorporated to make the bold colors of the cloth. The Kente cloth colors hold symbolic meaning, such as gold for royalty, green for newness and fertility, or blue for love and tenderness.<sup>6</sup>

The Shipibo-Conibo people of Eastern Amazonian Peru create pottery from clay, red and black pigments derived from boiling the bark of various trees, and resin glazes made from sap. Storage vessels, or *chomo*, are made individually by hand using a coil method, and then hardened in large outdoor fires, resulting in soft and lightweight pottery. Vessels like the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century example shown in Figure 4 (pg. 317) are typically decorated with the geometric “cross and serpent” pattern that, when repeated, resembles a coiled snake. Shipibo-Conibo pottery is used for serving meals, ceremonial rituals, and the preservation of food. *Masato chomo* are used to store and ferment the ceremonial beverage called *masato*.





Figure 4. Shipibo-Conibo artist (Peru); Clay Pot Storage Vessel (*Masato chomo*); clay, sempa protium (interior resin), yomoshon (exterior resin), mineral pigments; mid-20<sup>th</sup> century; H: 16 ½ in. (42 cm.); D: 23 5/8 in. (60 cm.). Photograph © Adam Mekler and the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

### Creating Zoomorphic Imagery

Depictions of animals appear in much art of ancient Egypt. Animals of the Nile Valley appear not only as documentary images of the environment but as embodiments of gods. The cat, first domesticated by the Egyptians to hunt vermin, represented the goddess Bastet. Cats were so revered that some were mummified and buried with their wealthy owners.<sup>7</sup> Other images of gods appear as animal heads on human bodies. Sakhmet, the goddess of war, appears with the head of a lioness on the body of a woman. Anubis, the god of embalming and the protector of mummies, was often portrayed as a human with the head of a jackal. One of the most powerful images in Egyptian art is that of the sphinx, portrayed with the head of a human and the body of a lion. Lions were often associated with kingship; consequently, the sphinx was the visual embodiment of royalty, the face often resembling a specific king or ruler.<sup>8</sup>

In ancient cultures of the Americas, early deities were given zoomorphic forms connected to powers associated with birds, fish, monkeys, frogs,

serpents, and felines in the form of jaguars and pumas. By the late Valdivia period (4000-1700 BCE), in coastal Ecuador and northern Peru, ritual objects were formed to resemble these animals. In particular, images of the jaguar, viewed as the most powerful animal symbol of spirituality, adorned stone mortars used for grinding the hallucinogenic substances used by shamans during transformation ceremonies.<sup>9</sup> The Chavin (900-200 BCE) in Peru and the Olmecs (1200-400 BCE) of southern Mexico and Guatemala were among the first to introduce the jaguar image into stone carvings.<sup>10</sup> Around 100-200, cultures such as the Moche in north coastal Peru produced ceramic stirrup vessels combining animal and human forms, and the Colima of west central Mexico produced numerous clay animal figures, of which the most common were *techichi*, or the hairless dogs used for food and symbolic of death.<sup>11</sup>

Burial art from various cultures featured animals, sometimes rendered with realistic detail. Early Mexican civilizations produced small burial figurines of animals and birds dating from 500 BCE.<sup>12</sup> The Chorrera culture (ca.800-100 BCE) of Ecuador produced ceramic effigy vessels that merge the form of the animal and the bottle.<sup>13</sup> In many Andean civilizations in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Colombia, animals appear as part of grave objects and markers,<sup>14</sup> such as tiny gold llama figurines, sacred symbols to the Inka (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century) that were sometimes wrapped in woven textiles and buried with the dead.

Some cultures incorporate various features from animals into ceremonial regalia and dress. The Wee (or Wè) people of Liberia and the Ivory Coast create masks to embody forest spirits. Covered with horns, hairs, teeth, and cowrie shells, the imposing *gela* mask, seen in Figure 5 (pg. 319), is used during dance performances and rituals. Known as “The Ancient One,” the 20<sup>th</sup>-century mask combines animal and human features—horns, tusks, teeth, beard—to create an image of feral strength and power.<sup>15</sup> During the performance the Wee believe the *gela* can gather up ill will plaguing the community and bring it into the forest. By showing a counterexample, the *gela* encourages those gathered to embrace order and civilization.

Each year before planting, the Bamana people in Mali hold a special performance featuring two dancers wearing headdresses resembling an antelope. Accompanied by drumming and singing, the performers retell the legend of an antelope that leapt to plow the land with its hooves. The performance encourages the village farmers to work hard for a successful year.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 5. Wee artist (Liberia/Cote d'Ivoire); *Gela Mask* ("The Ancient One"); wood, raffia, cloth, teeth, feathers, hair, fiber cord, cowrie shells, mud, and pigment; 20<sup>th</sup> century; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA. Photograph courtesy of the Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Katherine White and the Boeing Company/Photo by Pamela McCluskey.





Figure 6. Unknown artist(s) (Roman); *Frescoed Wall from the House of Livia*; mural; ca. 1st century BCE; L:19 ft. (5.90 m.); Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme), Rome, Italy. Photograph courtesy of SCALA/Art Resource, NY/Photo by Liciano Romano.

## Documenting Flora and Fauna

For centuries, individuals have been documenting the animal and plant life in their environment through art. In the first century BCE, Romans painted idyllic natural scenes on the walls of their urban villas.<sup>17</sup> The frescoed wall from the house of Livia in Figure 6 depicts an idealized version of all the plants from this country villa's extensive external gardens, which appear to be blooming all at once. Botanists have listed over 24 different plant types, including the strawberry tree, the pomegranate, the opium poppy, the date palm, the cabbage rose, the Italian cypress, and the stinking chamomile. Such depictions of nature were intended to bring urban Romans into contact with the idyllic countryside, helping them escape the annoyances of city life.<sup>18</sup>

The urge by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) to understand scientific phenomena led him to create hundreds of detailed sketches of the natural world. The images included animals, plants, and rock formations that revealed geological processes. Although the drawings were created as preparation for paintings and sculptures, they served as a scientific record that chronicles the arrival of several species of plants in Europe.<sup>19</sup>

During the Mughal reign in India, Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) explored both scientific and aesthetic aspects of the natural world, with particular interest in gardens, animals, rare birds or trees, flowers, and fruit. He requested that his artists capture these images in vibrant miniature paintings and included them in a work called *Jahangirnama*—a memoir that offered detailed descriptions of flora and fauna encountered on his travels. Jahangir also kept an aviary and menagerie, where he could observe these plants and animals firsthand.<sup>20</sup>

Nearly a century later, artists of India recorded the unique plants and animals of their country for works commissioned by Englishmen living in India with their families. Relocated as employees of the British East India Company, these middle- to upper-class individuals were fascinated with the exotic landscape of their new home and hired Mughal-trained artists to capture these surroundings. The artists modified traditional local painting techniques to accommodate British tastes, developing a new artistic style that became known as “Company Painting.” The images in Figures 7 and 8 (pgs. 321-322) exemplify this style, replacing miniature images with larger works on European paper, and vibrant colors with muted watercolor tones and washes.



Figure 7. Company School (Indian); *Study of a Watermelon*; gouache and gum Arabic; late 18<sup>th</sup> century; private collection. Photograph © Bonhams, London, UK / the Bridgeman Art Library.





Figure 8. Unknown artist (Indian, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh); *Black Stork in a Landscape*; watercolor on European paper; ca. 1780; H: 29  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (75.6 cm.), W: 21  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (54.6 cm.); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Louis E. and Theresa S. Seley Purchase Fund for Islamic Art and Rogers Fund.

One of the most famous documenters of birds was French artist John James Audubon (1785-1851). His detailed drawings depicted North American birds seen at eye level. The birds were always portrayed in action—attacking prey, feeding their young, flying, and swimming. Audubon's folios, issued between 1827 and 1838, contained 435 color plates under the title *The Birds of America*. During his lifetime, Audubon recorded almost 500 of the 700 or so regularly occurring bird species of North America.<sup>21</sup>

German photographer Karl Blossfeldt (1865-1932) recorded the natural world through the systematic documentation of plant samples. Blossfeldt stated that "the plant must be valued as a totally artistic and architectural structure." His photographic enlargements of leaves, seeds, stems, and other plant parts are documentary as well as almost architectural in nature. His 1928 publication of 96 black-and-white works became associated with New Objectivity, the movement of the late 1920s and '30s emphasizing straight photography, clarity of form, and structure in the imagery.<sup>22</sup>

## Painting the Landscape

Through landscape painting, many artists from different cultures and eras have explored the relationship of humans to the natural world.<sup>23</sup> The Chinese word for landscape is *shan-shui*, which means "mountain and water," the two essential elements believed to make up all things in nature.<sup>24</sup> Chinese landscapes were often connected to notions of spirituality because natural places, such as mountains, were considered beyond the realm of ordinary life—a region where higher powers could exist.

As early as the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127),<sup>25</sup> monumental landscape paintings in China were layered with meaning and imbued with spiritual notions.<sup>26</sup> Although images were loosely based upon Chinese topography, the actual views depicted were imaginary, idealized places rather than literal scenes. Guo Xi's *Early Spring* (1072), shown in Figure 9 (pg. 324) is considered one of the great masterpieces from this period.

Chinese landscape paintings were usually composed from many points of view. In *Early Spring*, the viewer is invited to "enter" the painting on the lower left side beneath one of the artist's characteristic claw-shaped branches. From here one's eyes travel upward through the trees, clouds, and mountain peaks, following back downward to the cascading waterfall that flows to a place on the river with men and boats. Meant to be rolled up, stored, and opened only for private "readings" by one or two persons, scroll paintings like this were intended to reflect the mental process of a traveler journeying through a landscape.<sup>27</sup>



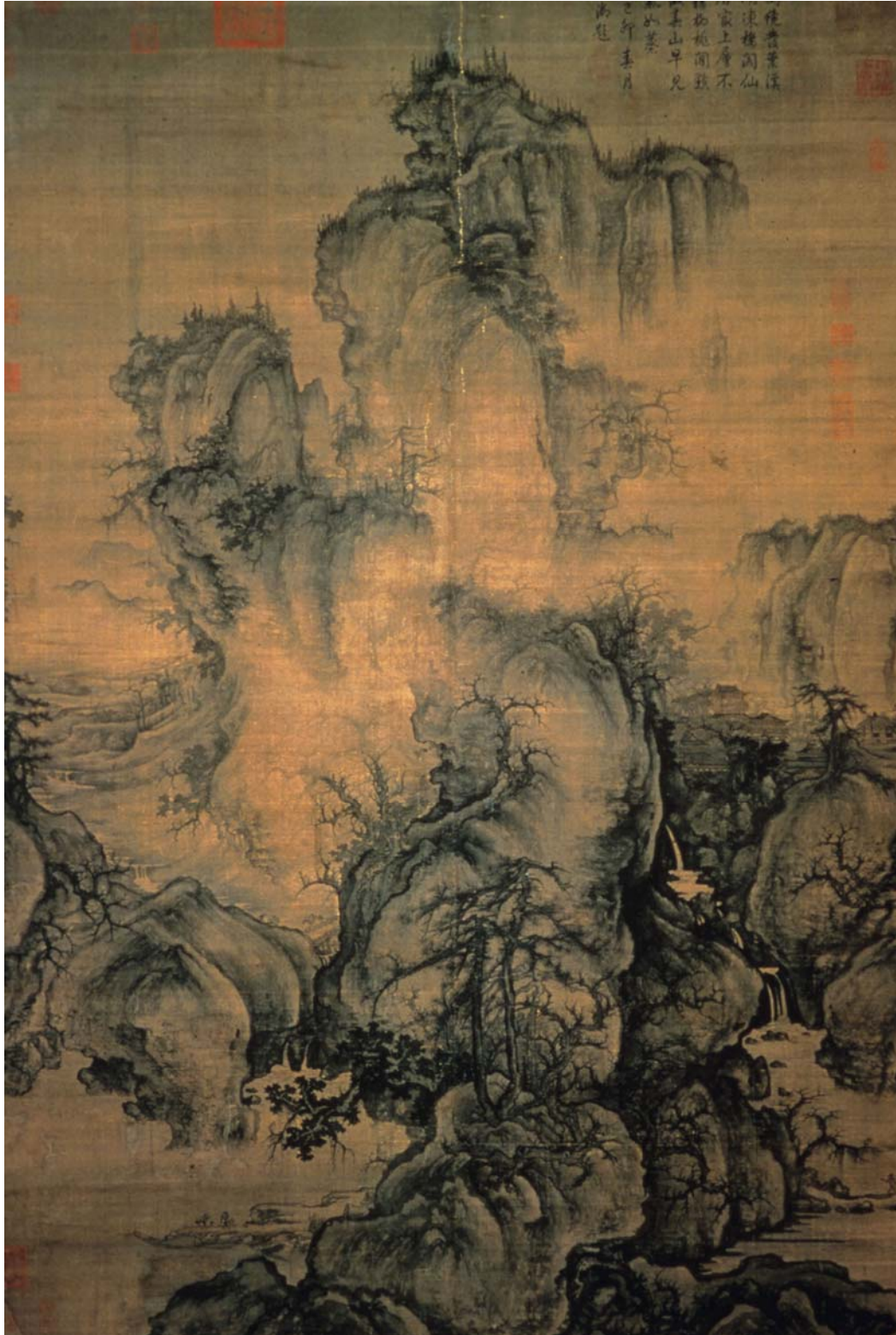


Figure 9. Guo Xi (Kuo Hsi) (Chinese, ca.1000-1090); *Early Spring*; hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; 1072; H: 62 ¼ in. (158.3 cm.), W: 42 5/8 in. (108.1 cm.); National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan. Photograph courtesy of Lee & Lee Communications/Art Resource, NY.



In Western art, the landscape also has been associated with spirituality. In Northern Renaissance painting, artists working in the Netherlands and Flanders incorporated landscape views into the background in images of saints or scenes from the Bible.

Flemish artist Joachim Patinir (active ca. 1515-1524) presents nature as the wonder of God's creation, with people and animals in a subordinate role. The incorporation of diverse topographical elements into a single frame creates an expansive view of the horizon. Sometimes referred to as a "world landscape," the view is not modeled on reality, but presents a microcosm of natural elements in the larger world.



Figure 10. Joachim Patinir (Flemish, d.1524); *The Penitence of St. Jerome* (triptych); oil on wood; ca. 1518; (central panel) H: 46  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (117.5 cm.), W: 32 in. (81.3 cm.) (overall, with engaged frame); (each wing) H: 47  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (120.7 cm.), W:14 in. (35.6 cm.) (overall, with engaged frame); the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund.

As evident in the triptych, *The Penitence of St. Jerome* (ca.1518), shown in Figure 10, Patinir uses a three-tone system to create a sense of receding space as colors lose saturation. Green is predominant in the foreground, blue is in the middle ground, and gray is in the background. Objects closer to the viewer are rendered with greater detail than those in the distance, which are smaller. The left panel, depicting *The Baptism of Christ*, uses the river to draw

the visitor's eye upward through the painting, eventually resting in the sky toward the light of God. The right panel, *The Penitence of St. Jerome*, begins in the ethereal space atop a mountain, eventually leading back to an earthly space below. The central panel, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, uses a path of trees to draw the viewer from figures in the foreground toward the coastal waters.<sup>28</sup> It has been suggested that by luring the viewer into the landscape in this way, the triptych may encourage a simulated journey of a pilgrim searching for spiritual truth.

In *St. George and the Dragon* (1510), shown in Figure 11 (pg. 327), German painter Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538) portrays the uncultivated landscape as overwhelming the narrative elements. The forest seems almost impassable. The Saint appears in the lower central portion of the image, hidden by the dense foliage. Outfitted in black armor, Saint George sits atop a white horse, his lance poised downward. The red mouth, chest, and haunches of the dragon, crouched low to the ground, are barely visible.<sup>29</sup>

The many representations of the saint's defeat of the dragon throughout art history have served as a metaphor for the triumph of the Christian spirit over the forces of evil. In Altdorfer's depiction, the forest seems to be a factor—a primeval testing ground for the saint. In the decade following his completion of *Saint George*, Altdorfer painted some of the first “true” landscapes, without any human figures, in Northern Europe, such as *Danube Landscape with Castle* (ca.1520) shown in Figure 12 (pg. 328).

The Greek artist Doménikos Theotokópoulos, better known as El Greco (1541-1614), used elements of nature in his compositions to dramatic effect. He is often associated with late Mannerism, a movement that included the last part of the High Renaissance in Italy (ca.1520) through the Baroque period (ca. 1600).<sup>30</sup> El Greco altered the actual settings of his images for dramatic impact. In his *View of Toledo* (1597-1599), the landscape is not topographically accurate but, rather, rearranged with energetic twists and turns. The buildings, roads, and bridge over the river all appear to lead to the cathedral's spire, which seems to conduct an electrical charge. The white glow reflected on the facades of the buildings is believed to represent El Greco's mystical vision of God's light shining through the storm, a visual connection between nature and spirituality.<sup>31</sup>





Figure 11. Albrecht Altdorfer (German, 1480-1538); *Saint George and the Dragon*; oil on parchment attached to a limewood panel; 1510; H: 11 1/16 in. (28.2 cm.), W: 8 7/8 in. (22.5 cm.); Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Germany. Photograph courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.





Figure 12. Albrecht Altdorfer (German, 1480-1538); *Danube Landscape with Castle*; oil on wood and parchment; H: 12 in. (30.5 cm.), W: 8.7 in. (22.2 cm.); Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Germany. Photograph courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

While some artists have turned to landscapes to express emotion, inspiration, or ideas about God, other artists have drawn a connection between people and their homeland. Seventeenth-century Dutch landscape paintings evoked a sense of national pride for the people of the Netherlands. The emergence of the new mercantile class led to an increased number of art purchasers looking to bring pleasant scenes of the outdoors into their homes.<sup>32</sup> Almost everyone owned and displayed landscape images.

Dutch painter Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/9-1682) painted landscapes that looked as if they had been directly copied from nature, but were actually created in his studio. In *Bleaching Ground in the Countryside near Haarlem* (1670), shown in Figure 13 (pg. 330), Ruisdael depicts a harmonious relationship between people and their land, through which natural resources are put to good use, providing a source of economic prosperity.<sup>33</sup> The critical role of land cultivated through labor is evident in Ruisdael's painting, as is a sense of local identification with the landscape. Adjacent to a swampy area on a section of dry ground, strips of linen are laid out for bleaching, which was an important industry in Haarlem. The image reflects Dutch pride in their land, which they wrested from Spanish control in a century-long struggle, and laboriously reclaimed from under water with dikes, windmills, pumps, and containing walls.

English artist John Constable (1776-1837) believed his landscape paintings should be based on observable facts, though he sometimes changed the appearance of the sky, light, and atmosphere. By contrast, fellow Englishman Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) linked his images to literary themes, beginning with sketches of mountains, sea, or sites of historical events. Sometimes his final images altered the landscape and light so much that they barely resembled the preparatory sketches. Although the approaches of the two artists were quite different, both produced images of earth and sky that reflected and inspired awe.<sup>34</sup>

Nineteenth-century artists of the Hudson River School endeavored to paint sweeping vistas of New York's Hudson River Valley, the Berkshires, the Adirondacks, and the White Mountains that they thought were uniquely American. Although the artists sketched from nature in the outdoors, the majority of them, like their European counterparts, returned to their studios to create their paintings, which became idealized depictions of the places they sketched.<sup>35</sup>





Figure 13. Jacob Isaacksz. van Ruisdael (Dutch, 1628/9-82); *Bleaching Ground in the Countryside Near Haarlem*; Oil on canvas; ca. 1670; H: 24 5/8 in. (62.5 cm.), W: 21 3/4 in. (55.2 cm.); Kunsthau, Zurich, Switzerland. Photograph courtesy of Giraudon/the Bridgeman Art Library.



Thomas Cole (1801-1848) painted *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow* (Figure 14) in 1836. Cole illustrates the uniqueness of the American landscape, with its dramatic contrast between wilderness and settled areas, which suggests the country's great potential.<sup>36</sup> The British aesthetic of the sublime, or fearsome, in nature influenced Cole's use of dramatic forms.<sup>37</sup> The artist includes a tiny depiction of himself painting in the lower center of the composition, uniting the work of the American artist with the American landscape.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 14. Thomas Cole (American, 1801-1848); *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*; oil on canvas; 1836; H: 51 ½ in. (130.8 cm.), W: 76 in. (193 cm.); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1908. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

Although his discovery of Thomas Cole's work inspired engraver Asher Durand to take up landscape painting, Durand came to regard the plein-air naturalism of John Constable as the standard.<sup>39</sup> *The Beeches* (1845), shown in Figure 15 (pg. 332), reflects influences from both artists. The painting is free of the allegory and narrative that characterize Cole's work and uses a vertical format and pastoral character similar to that in the work of Constable. But Durand's treatment of the warm light infusing the scene is similar to that in paintings by Cole.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 15. Asher B. Durand (American, 1796–1886); *The Beeches*; oil on canvas; 1845; H: 60 3/8 in. (153.4 cm.), W: 48 3/8 in. (122.2 cm); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, Bequest of Maria DeWitt Jesup, from the collection of her husband, Morris K. Jesup, 1914. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.



While paintings in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century celebrated the wilderness of the East, the shift to exploration of the West later in the century brought new opportunities for discovery and a new sense of pride. Embracing the concept of Manifest Destiny--the divine “right” of the nation to expand settlements from coast to coast--artists created epic imagery of the American West. American artist Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) was one of several artist-explorers who traveled West in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. He compared these spaces to the European Alps, stating during his 1859 expedition with Frederick Lander, “The color of the mountains and of the plains, and indeed that of the entire country, reminds one of the color of Italy; in fact, we have here the Italy of America in primitive condition.”<sup>41</sup> The large canvases he created de-emphasized human beings, instead focusing on the vast splendors of nature awaiting settlers in the frontier lands.



Figure 16. Albert Bierstadt (American, born Germany, 1830-1902); *Yosemite Valley, Glacier Point Trail*; oil on canvas; 1834; H: 54 in. (137.2 cm.), W: 84 ¾ in. (215.3 cm); Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT. Photograph courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mrs. Vincenzo Ardenghi.

*Yosemite Valley, Glacier Point Trail* (1873), shown in Figure 16, depicts the awe-inspiring grandeur and unspoiled natural beauty of the area that would become Yosemite National Park. This romantic vision of the forests and mountains above the Merced River is a sweeping panorama, seen from an overlook above California’s Yosemite Valley. Bathed in the warm glow of the setting sun, light reflects gently on the river, softly illuminating the vast mountains and valleys. Figures on horseback are dwarfed by the expansive scale of their surroundings. Bierstadt’s work draws the viewer into the



grandeur and beauty of the wilderness beyond, instilling in viewers both reverence for the tranquility of nature and a sense of national pride.

With the invention of photography, a new medium became available to document the American West. Photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904), who emigrated to the U.S. from Britain, documented the pristine beauty of the American landscape in such works as the *Falls of the Yosemite* (1872-1873), shown in Figure 17, taken from Glacier Point. A solitary figure overlooks the rim of the panoramic Yosemite Valley.



Figure 17. Eadweard Muybridge (British, emigrated to the U.S., 1830-1904); *Falls of the Yosemite*; albumen print; 1872-1873; H: 21  $\frac{1}{4}$  (54 cm.), W: 16  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (42.5 cm.); Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT. Photograph courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Harrison A. Augur.

In the distance, the triangular white shape of the cascading falls appears in the center of the image, while seemingly endless tree-topped mountains lie beyond. The efforts of photographers like Muybridge and his contemporary, Carleton Watkins (1829-1916), in documenting the beauty of the Yosemite Valley helped make possible the 1864 founding of Yosemite as California's first state park and its eventual designation as a National Park in 1890.<sup>42</sup>

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in France, a number of artists moved to the village of Barbizon, outside of Paris, to paint from nature. Jean-François Millet (1814-1875) became associated with scenes of rural life, while Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899), one of the most famous woman artists of her time, was known for her realistic images of animals within the French landscape. Camille Corot (1796-1875), linked with the Barbizon school but not an official member, was said to create paintings “on the spot,” within an hour or two, capturing “the truth of the moment.”<sup>43</sup>

Building on the work of the Barbizon painters, the Impressionists left their studios to work outdoors, or *en plein air*, which allowed them to look carefully at changes in light and atmosphere. The name of this group of artists was coined in 1874 when a work entitled *Impression, Sunrise* by French painter Claude Monet (1840-1926) was assailed by critics of the time. Monet, one of the major figures of the movement, painted the same scene multiple times to depict varied light and atmospheric conditions.<sup>44</sup>

Figure 18 (pg. 336), completed in 1899, shows a bridge, pond, and water lilies that Monet painted numerous times. This work reflects the influence of the Japanese artist Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige, who created the print *Footbridge over River with Wisteria in Foreground in Full Bloom*, shown in Figure 19 (pg. 337).

Hiroshige was part of a movement in nineteenth-century Japan, in which landscapes emerged as a major focus of prints known as *ukiyo-e*, or “pictures of the floating world,” when Edo—present-day Tokyo—underwent rapid growth. *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (1856-1858) is a series of 118 prints by Hiroshige.<sup>45</sup> In *Suijin Shrine and Massaki on Sumida River* (1856), Figure 20 (pg. 338), Hiroshige's landscape is divided into three sections—earth, river, and sky. Mount Tsukuba is at the center of the scene, framed by the flowering branches of a cherry tree. The cheap cost of prints like this made them accessible to residents of Edo, tourists, and individuals who could not afford a trip to visit the sights.

Hiroshige's work also influenced Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), who owned Hiroshige's print *Cherry Blossom*, shown in Figure 21 (pg. 339), and imitated it in *The Tree* (Figure 22), on page 340.





Figure 18. Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926); *Bridge over a Pond of Water Lilies*; oil on canvas; 1899; H: 36 ½ in. (92.7 cm.), W: 29 in. (73.7 cm); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.





Figure 19. Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797-1858); *Footbridge over River with Wisteria in Foreground in Full Bloom*; color woodblock print; British Library, London, UK. Photograph © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved / the Bridgeman Art Library.





Figure 20. Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797-1858); *Suijin Shrine and Massaki on Sumida River* from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*; woodblock print; Edo Period, 1856; H: 13 3/8 in. (34 cm.), W: 9 in. (22.8 cm); Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK. Photograph © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, UK/Bridgeman Art Library.





Figure 21. Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797-1858); *Plum Estate, Kameido (Kameido Umeyashiki)* from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*; woodblock print; 1857; H: 13.4 in. (34 cm.), W: 9 in. (22.8 cm.); Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY, Gift of Anna Ferris. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.





Figure 21. Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890); *The Tree*, copy after a print by Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige; oil on canvas; 1886-1888; H: 21.7 in. (55 cm.), W: 18.1 in. (46 cm.); Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Photograph courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

In 1888, van Gogh left Paris for Arles, Provence, in the south of France, seeking more intense sunlight. He noted that “looking at nature under a bright sky might give us a better idea of the Japanese way of feeling and drawing.”<sup>46</sup> His landscapes, which included local features such as buildings, canals, and bridges, are personal and emotional visions of nature. His 1889 painting, *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, was painted while van Gogh was a voluntary patient at an asylum outside the town of Saint-Rémy, where beyond the grounds of the hospital, he found inspiration in the landscape. The wheat field and its continual cycle of sowing and harvesting may be seen as a metaphor for the cycle of life. The cypress trees, often associated with funerals and cemeteries, may indicate van Gogh’s preoccupation with death. The entire image appears to be moving, from the rolling clouds in the sky to the wheat, trees, and bushes that seem to sway in the wind. Painted in a technique called impasto, in which the brushstrokes remain visible when thick layers of textured paint are applied on the canvas, the result is a swirling effect that infuses the landscape with intense emotional energy.<sup>47</sup>

Artists from a variety of cultures have reflected their national identities in works depicting their homelands. Mexican painter Gerald Murillo (1875-1964), who signed his works as Dr. Atl, created epic paintings of his native country that combine art with geologic study, ushering in a new era of modern Mexican landscape painting.<sup>48</sup> Rafael Troya (1845-1920) depicted scenes of the rivers and lush vegetation in the Ecuadorian jungle. Considered to be one of the most important 19<sup>th</sup>-century landscape painters in Latin America, Troya composed idealized visions of “unexplored” regions in an age when travel was difficult and costly.



Figure 22. Kay WalkingStick (American, Cherokee, b. 1935); *Wallowa Mountains Memory*, oil and gold leaf on wood; 2004; H: 36 in. (91.44 cm.), W: 72 in. (182.88 cm.); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Born to a Cherokee father and Scottish American mother, Kay WalkingStick (b.1935) explores issues of mixed ancestry through her diptychs. Images such as *Wallowa Mountains Memory* (2004), shown in Figure 22 (pg. 341), illustrate her style of juxtaposing images--one realistic, the other abstract or symbolic. In this work, she depicts mountains naturalistically on the left and as a flat silhouette overlaid with a cross and diamond pattern, which Nez Perce women used on their rawhide bags. The gold sky connecting the two diptychs represents the aspect of nature and the cosmos that is, in WalkingStick's eyes, both sacred and unknowable. WalkingStick is paying homage to the Nez Perce resistance, led by Chief Joseph, in Oregon's Wallowa Valley during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the U.S. government forced the tribe to move onto reservations.<sup>49</sup>

Australian indigenous people present what appear to be abstract depictions of the landscape in paintings of The Dreaming or *Tjukurrpa*. Stories encoded in these works have been told for thousands of years, passing on important knowledge, cultural values, and belief systems from generation to generation. The stories tell of ancestral beings who moved across the land, creating life and significant geographic features on the earth. These stories were recounted verbally through song and dance, and more recently, have been depicted in acrylic paintings<sup>50</sup> that have historical, cultural, spiritual, and personal significance.<sup>51</sup>

Anatjari (Yanyatjarri) Tjakamarra (ca. 1938-1992), an Aboriginal artist born in the southern Pintupi region, painted *Possum Ancestors* (Figure 23, pg. 343) in 1975. As with other Dreaming narratives, this image explains the emergence of features in the physical landscape. The elopement of half-human, half-possum ancestors led to fighting that shaped the land, eventually giving rise to mulga trees and stone formations. Traditional icons based in geometry, such as circles representing watering holes and diagonal lines representing dry sand hills, tell the story.



Figure 23. Anatjari (Yanyatjarri) Tjakamarra (Australian, Pintupi language group, ca. 1938-1992); *Possum Ancestors*; acrylic; 1975; private collection. Photograph courtesy of Fred Myers.



## Shaping the Landscape

While some individuals paint landscapes, others shape it. One of the earliest examples is *Stonehenge*, located on Salisbury Plain, outside of Wiltshire, England (ca. 3000-1600 BCE), shown in Figure 24.<sup>52</sup> The structure originally was composed of massive, evenly spaced, upright slabs of stone in a circular formation. Because the stones are oriented toward the point where the sun rises on the day of the summer solstice, some believe that it was the site for sun-worshipping rituals.<sup>53</sup>



Figure 24. *Aerial View of Stonehenge*; ca. 3000-1600 BCE (photographed ca. 2000-2002); Wiltshire, England, UK. Photograph © Jason Hawkes/Corbis.

Equally mysterious are the effigy mounds of North America dating from approximately 2000 BCE. There are hundreds of these mounds spread across parts of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois. The Great Serpent Mound, shown in Figure 25, on page 345, in Adams County, Ohio, looks like a snake, approximately 1,400 feet long, with the head marked by piles of stones heaped at the highest point. Some archaeologists have noted that the direction of the serpent appears to align with the summer solstice.<sup>54</sup> The mounds provided inspiration for contemporary creators of Earthworks almost 4,000 years later.





Figure 25. *Overview of Serpent Mound*; ca. 1000–1200; Peebles, Ohio. Photograph © Richard A. Cooke/Corbis.



Many cultures have cultivated gardens as an idealized space for contemplation. Japanese gardens of the Nara Period (710-784) reflected the upper class lifestyle. The Kyuseki, an 8<sup>th</sup>- century stream garden, or *yarimizu*, was found at the site of the former imperial palace in Nara. Its design may have been connected to the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese tradition of *kyokusai no en*, a “stream banquet,” during which guests set cups of wine floating upstream and tried to spontaneously create original poems before their cups floated back downstream.<sup>55</sup> Although few examples of garden designs of this early period remain intact, it is believed that they contained rocks, lakes, ancient trees, and other natural elements worshipped in Shinto practice, as well as mountains and islands, which may have come from Hindu-Buddhist or Taoist traditions.

One of the Japanese words for garden—*nwa*—came to mean a place that had been purified for the arrival of *kami*, the deified spirits of Shinto. During the Heian Period (794-1185), an 11<sup>th</sup>- century treatise on garden design, the *Sakuteiki* (*The Classic of Garden Making*), outlined several principles for Japanese designs. Among these were that Japanese gardens should capture the spirit of nature, conform to the existing natural landscape, and adhere to Chinese principles of directional symbolism and propitious placement, called *feng shui*.<sup>56</sup>



Figure 26. Henry Hoare II (1705-1785) and Henry Flitcroft (1687-1768) (designers); *View of the gardens at Stourhead Estate*; 1741–1765; 2,650 acres (estate grounds); Stourton, Wiltshire, England. Photograph © Art on File/Corbis.

The formal gardens at the Palace of Versailles in France were designed by André Le Nôtre (1613-1700), and were considered an extension of the palace architecture.<sup>57</sup> The spaces were meticulously shaped to create balance and harmony through the juxtaposition of elements, including primary and secondary walks, shady groves, tree-covered archways, winding side paths, statues, and topiaries.<sup>58</sup>

By contrast, from 1730 to 1830, English gardens incorporated a wilder aesthetic known as the “picturesque,” characterized by asymmetry, roughness, and variety. The gardens at Stourhead Estate seen in Figure 26 (pg. 346) reflect these principles. Designed by Henry Hoare II (1705-1785) and Henry Flitcroft (1687-1768), the gardens were noted for spectacularly constructed vistas that combined natural and fabricated elements.

Modern and contemporary gardens often combine various cultural influences. Japanese- American artist Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), began his career as a sculptor and moved towards landscape architecture. His 1958 UNESCO Garden in Paris layers aspects of a traditional Japanese garden with modern elements. For example, while traditional Japanese gardens are meant to be experienced gradually and not all at once, the UNESCO garden can be seen in its entirety from the *butai*, or upper garden, a platform built by Noguchi specifically for this purpose. The artist’s use of asphalt as a sculptural element is another non-traditional feature.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 27. Robert Smithson (American, 1938-1973); *Spiral Jetty*; mud, precipitated salt crystals, rocks, and water; 1970; L: 1500 ft. (457.2 m.), W: 15 ft. (4.57 m.); Rozel Point, Great Lake City, UT. Estate of Robert Smithson/UAGO, New York/Corbis.



The work of earth, land, and eco Artists involves transforming a landscape that, like the effigy mounds, can stretch over large spaces—in some cases, miles. *Spiral Jetty* (1970), shown in Figure 27 on page 347, by American artist Robert Smithson (1938-1973) is one of the first and most celebrated modern Earthworks. Smithson created a spiral formation of rocks that juts into the Great Salt Lake—pink from algae—in northern Utah. With the passing of time, the 1,500-foot-long and 15-foot-wide formation will change and erode. Smithson has documented the work through photography, film, and text, ensuring that a record will be preserved, although the formation may eventually disintegrate completely.



Figure 28. Turenscape with the Graduate School of Landscape Architecture, Peking University. Kongjian Yu (Chinese, b. 1963) (principal designer); *The Red Ribbon*; fiber steel; designed July 2005-May 2006, completed July 2006; L: 1, 640 ft. (500 m.), H: 23 ½ in. (60 cm.), W: 11 ¾-59 in. (30-150 cm.); Tanghe River Park, Qinhuangdao City, Hebei Province, China. Photograph courtesy of the designer.

The projects of Kongjian Yu (b. 1963)—known as Eco Works--involve landscape architecture, urban planning for sustainable cities, and ecological planning. With the design firm Turenscape in Beijing, China, Yu transformed an inaccessible and insecure former dumping site in Tanghe River Park, with deserted slums and irrigation facilities, into a public space that reflects the contemporary spirit of sustainability and community. *The Red Ribbon* project (2006), seen in Figure 28, has an elegantly minimal design and was completed on a modest budget. *The Red Ribbon* is a curving fiber steel structure and boardwalk that spans 500 meters. Its design preserves much of the natural ecology of the site while providing a space for Tanghe residents to

meet, relax, exercise, and learn about the environment.<sup>60</sup> The project reflects the artists' vision of a way in which individuals and nature can coexist harmoniously.

Shaping the landscape is a contemporary artistic practice with roots dating back to the construction of Stonehenge, ca. 3000-1600 BCE. Since the earliest times, there has been a link between art and nature. In addition to providing materials for art making, the natural world has inspired artists to document the flora and fauna in their environment. Through landscape painting, artists have explored the relationship of humans to the natural world – in works that convey spirituality and/or nationalism. Nature is a tie that binds; many cultures around the world have expressed their awe, reverence, and dependence on it through works of art.

## Endnotes

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<sup>16</sup> "Antelope Headdress," in *The Power of the Body: Objects from the African Art Collection of the Neuberger Museum of Art, Family Guide* (Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2009).

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