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SAN FRANCISCO

“Landscape: the virtual, the actual, the possible?”

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts // October 24, 2014–January 25, 2015

AN AMBITIOUS INTERCONTINENTAL collaboration between the YBCA and Kadist Art Foundation in San Francisco and the Guangdong Times Museum in Guangzhou, China, this show broadly examines representations of the physical landscape and its networks in our sociopolitical ecosystem. While “Landscape” is poetically framed around Western philosophical issues of the virtual window in contemporary landscape art, it is latently teeming with images of the insidious social and ecological consequences of the production of technological devices, much of which occurs in the Pearl River Delta region of China, where the exhibition debuted.

“Landscape” is kaleidoscopic, multilayered, and pleasantly packed with contradiction, requiring parsing of contextual data and ideological orienteering. Originating

Robert Zhao Renhui
Expedition #46, from “The Glacier Study Group,” 2012. Digital pigment print, 47¾ x 33½ in.

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at the Guangdong Times Museum, then pruned to fit the YBCA gallery, the show contains works that have been borrowed exclusively from the Kadist collection. Designed with a distinctive full-circle inner partition, the gallery is divided into an inner and an outer ring. Recalling Monet's elliptical Musée de l'Orangerie installation and Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, the placement of works in these zones is carefully considered: The center remains sparsely populated with mainly sculpture and photography, while a denser assortment of time-based work occupies the peripheral ring.

The inner rotunda contains microphones amplifying two melting ice blocks in San Francisco-based artist Paul Kos's prophetic *The Sound of Ice Melting*, 1970; the Austrian artist Lois Weinberger's photograph of a refuse-strewn tree in an alpine landscape echoes the entropic gesture. Elina Brotherus, from Finland, creates a photographic send-up of the Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich's *Rückenfigur*, stripping it of sublimity with a straightforward view of nature. Only Singaporean Robert Zhao Renhui scratches into the social with a photograph of what appears to be a desert in Changi, an area of Singapore that imports



land from sand-rich nations to build such luxury resorts as Marina Bay Sands, an outpost of the Las Vegas Sands casino and the world's second-most-expensive building.

Although the show has been described as more poetic than political or polemical, YBCA curator Betti-Sue Hertz's essay is nonetheless critical of technology's capacity to visualize the world objectively. However, it's also difficult to see in this exhibition the resulting

inequality accompanying the wealth generated by globalization and environmental imperialism as a result of these innovations. Indeed, the blind spot of some works in the show is the stubborn assumption that technology is ideologically neutral.

Excellent, if divergent, essays written independently by each curator reflect the conflicting psychogeographies of both Northern California and the Pearl River Delta region. While the development headquarters for tech giants such as Apple, Facebook, and Google are located in the former, the latter, nicknamed the World's Factory, is the manufacturing center for many of these companies' gadgets. In particular, PCH International, operating from Shenzhen, is one of Apple's main suppliers.

Guangdong Times Museum curator Ruijun Shen's essay pointedly states that the traditional Chinese philosophy of unity with nature has been crushed by factories and globalization. The social consequences of heavy-metal mining are elaborated on by Kadist curator Xiaoyu Weng and echoed by Chen Xiaoyun and Tsang Kin-Wah, whose works are displayed on the periphery of the rotunda. Chen's five-channel video *Vanishing Point*, 2014, cleverly narrates a stream of consciousness through interspersed images and roughly translated Chinese phrases, such as "Please stay away from the damn landscape," "You talks about the hometown landscape that no longer exists," and "Look carefully, feel so close with the nature." Texts are juxtaposed with images of crosscapes, implicating pollution and the industrialization of China for the production of American products. Tsang's elliptical vinyl text, careening from the floor to the gallery's outer windows, offers such politicized diatribes as "They are the evil empire... corrupted untrustful folk \$\$\$." In this exhibition, the Western poetic frame of the virtual and its devices vie for prominence with the social and environmental consequences of their Eastern production. —Greg Lindquist



FROM TOP:
Elina Brotherus
Der Wanderer 3,
2004.
Chromogenic
print,
41¼ x 52¼ in.

Lois Weinberger
Tree celebration,
Stams/Tirol,
July–September
1977.
Photograph,
32 x 28¼ in.