

8. Conclusions, reflection, evaluation, and extension

8.1. Towards an overall conclusion

As we have seen throughout, the term landscape is capable of several meanings and may be defined in a variety of ways.¹ The word *Landscape*, first recorded in 1598, was borrowed as a painters' term from Dutch during the 16th century, when Dutch artists were pioneering the landscape genre. [Dutch **landschap**, from Middle Dutch **landscap**, region : **land**, land + **-scap**, state, condition (collective suff.).] The Dutch word *landschap* had earlier meant simply *region, tract of land* but had acquired the artistic sense, which it brought over into English, of *a picture depicting scenery on land*.

8.1.1. Landscape in visual art.

In 1972 writing about the Idea of landscape and the sense of place, Barrell reiterates the origin of the word landscape

"... it was introduced from the Dutch in the sixteenth century to describe a pictorial representation of countryside, either as the subject itself of a picture, or as the by-work in a portrait, the background of scenery behind the main subject. Later the word came to include within its meaning both this sense, of countryside represented in a picture, and another, more loose, of a piece of countryside considered as a visual phenomenon."

but he then adds:

"Both these senses of the word landscape had this in common, that they referred to a tract of land, or its representation in painting, which lay in prospect - that is to say, which could be seen all at one glance, from a fixed point of view; and in this respect both senses referred to particular locations."
(Barrell 1972)

However, according to Olwig it was also used, as in English, to refer to the appearance of a land as we perceive it,

"the section of the earth surface and sky that lies in our field of vision as seen in perspective from a particular point. This aesthetic usage of the term enabled users to shift from the landscape as sensation to the objects that produce that sensation." (Olwig 1996)

¹ some definitions (from various sources) of the word "landscape" :

- an expanse of scenery that can be seen in a single view: *a desert landscape*.
- a picture depicting an expanse of scenery.
- the branch of art dealing with the representation of natural scenery.
- the aspect of the land characteristic of a particular region: *a bleak New England winter landscape*.
- an extensive mental view; an interior prospect: *"They occupy the whole landscape of my thought"* (James Thurber).
- of or relating to a landscape or landscapes: *landscape painting*.
- that portion of the earth's surface which the eye can take in at a glance.
- grounds that have been landscaped: *liked the house especially for its landscape*.
- of or relating to landscaping: *a nursery offering landscape services*.
- to adorn or improve (a section of ground) by contouring and by planting flowers, shrubs, or trees.
- to arrange grounds artistically as a profession.
- of or relating to the orientation of a page such that the shorter side runs from top to bottom

From these definitions and quotations two observations are particularly pertinent here.

- first, landscape is that portion of the earth's surface which the eye can take in at a glance, it is in prospect, observed and experienced from a fixed point of view or particular locality.
- secondly, in this sense all landscapes can be conceived of as being viewed from and being of particular places.

However, landscape as a subject for works of art was ranked very low in the academic hierarchy of types of painting (the genres). This hierarchy, was formalised during the Renaissance and ranked genre in the following order:

[history painting](#);

[portrait art](#);

[genre painting](#) - *meaning, scenes from everyday life*;

landscape;

[still life](#).

These rankings were definitively set out in 1669 by Andre Felibien, the secretary to the French Academy, in his Preface to a series of published lectures which he delivered to the Academy . In consequence the art establishment including its patrons, teachers as well as artists did not take landscape painting seriously, and attributed greater value to historical works, portraits and genre pictures. In addition, the Renaissance (and later 'neo-classical' and academic schools) followed Greek art traditions in giving primacy to figure drawing and figure painting of the human body, especially the nude. In comparison, landscape was of little importance.

8.1.2. *Emerging conclusions*

The first conclusion that has to be drawn from this project is that this artistic / aesthetic concept of landscape and of a strictly defined genre is no longer tenable at the start of the twenty first century. Indeed it ceased to be dominant much earlier. There has been a vast advance in our understanding of landscape since the introduction of the term in the sixteenth century. Research and scholarship across a range of disciplines has raised the notion of the landscape to the level of a *meta-theory*, or better, an overarching *paradigm*. The relevance and utility of study at the landscape scale in all of its manifestations is now widely understood. These developments and the complexity that has accreted around the notion of landscape has, of course, posed problems for the visual arts. The main difficulty, particularly for landscape painting *sensu lato* is the issue of **form** and **function**.

As has been witnessed throughout this project and emphasised in the conclusions to individual Sections, demonstrated in the examples of artists work and evidenced by the original work (see Catalogue) artists have found ways of moving beyond the traditional prospect interpretation of landscape in art. They have adopted alternative viewpoints played with perspective and movement, employed multiple perspectives, avoided perspective by embracing the vertical and they have moved to varying degrees along the continuum between representation and abstraction.

Nonetheless, they have retained a connection with landscape **form** (including its *essence*) that is still discernable in the work.

8.1.3. Explanation and depicting the how and the why.

When we turn to **function** and landscape as a dynamic entity landscape art, especially landscape painting has been less successful. Function of course implies the operation of processes that bring about change. More often than not these are cyclic changes maintaining some steady condition or state, passing through a series of transient states before returning to an initial state. The seasons and the cycle of ploughing, sowing and harvesting, both widely represented in landscape art addressing the rural scene conform to this model. Sometimes processes have a direction, effecting permanent and long term change on the landscape, whether the processes are natural or anthropogenic in their origins. The notion of landscape as palimpsest (Section 7) is relevant here, for whilst cyclic change tends to repeatedly eliminate the transitory record in the landscape of intermediate states as the cycle begins again, directional change tends to leave vestiges of earlier transient states now overwritten by later effects of change.

It is true that landscape art has found ways to record the *effects* of such process at work on the landscape, but they remain just that, static synoptic views of the effects of dynamic processes. Most romantic or picturesque paintings of the rural countryside address a particular season whether it is Constable's summer idyll of the Haywain, or Hockney's monumental work of leafless winter trees in East Yorkshire. Rarely is any attempt made to embrace the entire cycle, let alone to express how it relates to the spin of the Earth on its axis, or its varying tilt about this axis relative to the sun.

Equally the pattern of long term landscape change through time may be successfully represented in painting by ingenious and contrasting approaches to capturing the environmental and historical narratives recorded on and in the landscape. However, the artist's ability to read aloud this narrative from the landscape *text* or *document* is limited to the *representation* of the current page with all of its scribbles, erasures and overwriting. Of course, what remains is a reflection of processes that operated in the past, but what they were and how and why they operated in the way they did can only be inferred. Depth of explanation is lacking!

8.1.4. Other solutions, other art, other books.

In order to address the dynamic nature of the landscape and to engage with the how and why of landscape change artists may need to have utilise other media such as film, video, performance. These approaches, already fertile fields, are beyond the remit of this project. However, in the resolution of this project recourse has been made to an increasingly important medium that in some way combines the graphic, painterly skills of landscape art with the written word and its ability to

convey an explanatory narrative. This medium is the *artist's book* and six books were mapped out for production each addressing a particular explanatory narrative viz:

Book Title	Agenda
The Burning	To address the reality and experience of clearance and eviction
The Tilling	To explain through an instruction book the process of creating one of the principal elements in landscape pattern in the Highlands and Islands, namely <i>feanagan</i> , or lazy beds
The Meaning	To create a challenging dictionary of pertinent words juxtaposed with often unnerving images provoking reassessment in the reader (after Joseph Kosuth)
The Flitting	To address the narrative of the Highland diaspora and their imagined histories
The Naming	To starkly confront original names for places in the indigenous but subaltern <i>gaelic</i> with their anglicised equivalent that held sway for so long. This is a vehicle for addressing internal colonisation and the postcolonial legacy
The Margin	A book of maps exposing the changing historical understanding of spatial marginality as the centre of power shift geographically from the iron age and Norse period to later medieval and Victorian periods

In the event only four were completed and three exhibited (see Catalogue). The artist's book has been used by several artists working in, for example northwest Sutherland. Two will be mentioned here. First Joanne Kaar², whose interweaving of significant local materials and local historical narratives is engaging and reminiscent of Catalogue Concept 2. & 3. In this project. Secondly Lotte Glob³ who as a ceramist creates *books of stone* that nevertheless subsume the landscape the sea and the sky.

8.2. Critique and evaluation of the project

² Joanne Karr's work **Journeys**, 2006, one-off collection of 16 books in book boxes. This project was supported by the National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council and by partnership funding from Highland Year of Culture 2007; handmade papers, mixed media, digital photography; The display case is made from an old canoe found in Balnakeil village, it stands at just under 6ft tall. **Kelp papers** is one of the books from the **Journeys** collection, 2006, these papers are made from kelp collected on *Burragaig* beach, mixed with linen rag and then embossed. Kelp was traditionally collected from two areas in Durness Parish, the stony beaches of *Geodha Brat* and *Burragaig*. Kelpers worked on these shores from the 1760's to the 1940's. Kelp was dried, then burnt before being sold. Burnt kelp was an ingredient for making glass and soap. Kelpers wages were between £1 and £3 per ton; each page is 100cm x 10cm and all placed unbound and flat, inside a book box with linen covers and driftwood toggle. **Peat papers**, 2006, multi-section books; handmade papers from peat, waste linen rag from the Scalpay weaving shed and linen half-stuff, books photographed in a peat stack; chunky A6 and A5 books.

³ Lotte maintains that the spirit of the highland landscape, gathered on long walks, is brought back to be fused in the kiln under high heat - transformed into **sculptured books** which challenge our perception of the book - viewed as artefact from the future or fossilised tomes from a distant past - the intangible and ephemeral. Her petrified ceramic books recall her fellow German, Anselm Kiefer's vitrified library works that sit in a very different context

In seeking to explore all of the research questions outlined in Section 1 through a series of theoretical discourses, through an empirical analysis of the practice of others, and through the author's own research and practice has been arguably both too ambitious and not ambitious enough!

Too ambitious, in the sense that the project engaged with a potentially huge canvas, perhaps too huge for a masters programme. Not ambitious enough, in that the focus of the project forced very selective engagement with the full diversity of the genre of landscape art and failed to fully engage with the biographical narratives of exponents of the genre. Further, it is legitimate to argue that by regarding the original work completed for the project as primary sources, produced in accord with an experimental design, limited free creativity and restricted the development of practice. However, this ambition is not seen as being realised solely through the work formally submitted for the award of a MA degree in fine art. The body of work submitted, of necessity, had to be more narrowly focused and probably incomplete. Rather the project is envisaged as continuing to inform practice beyond the completion of this course, widening its remit as it does so.

8.2.1. Unrealised aspirations and unresolved issues

There are two types of regrets worthy of repeating here. First, the author is acutely aware that the programme and the project have provided opportunities to engage with kinds of art practice that were both challenging departures and rewarding experiences. Certainly both awareness and competence as a practitioner have been extended, but perhaps not as far as one would have wished. In particular, there remains scope for significant development and exploration of technique, especially the full range of possibilities presented by printing and the broad field of the artist's book.

In the same vein the potential of physical objects, particularly soil peels as environmental object art is yet to be properly explored and realised. The visual qualities of the soil peels associated with the machair, with runrig are too subdued to make interesting arresting images and though produced in the field in the summer of 2009, were not exhibited as originally intended.

The second regret is about place, specifically Iceland as the other location through which it was originally intended to address the research questions and pursue the notion of marginality. Although some work was produced it proved impossible to incorporate into the project for purely logistic reasons. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that societal marginality again originally part of the project brief, where groups are marginalised not by distance or by environmental constraints, but by socio-economic and political circumstances within societies would be a very fertile ground on which to continue the quest for meaningful image making.

8.2.2. Proposals for development

If successful at masters level, the prospect of continuing academic research and art practice to doctoral level is a serious possibility.

8.3. A last word

In their review of the romantic spirit in British art, Simon Martin, Martin Butlin and Robert Meyrick (2007) compare the qualities of *classicism* and *romanticism* in art:

Classicism	Romanticism
objectivity	emotion
reason	spirit
rationality	imagination

Landscape art and landscape painting in particular continues to confront challenges that relate strongly to this dichotomy of qualities.

On the one hand is the challenge of applying reason to reading and deconstructing the landscape in order to accurately, objectively and rationally bear witness to the narratives encoded there and to seek ways of explaining the processes involved in these narratives.

On the other, as we saw with the application of phenomenology to the concept of place, landscapes like places possess a depth of meaning, an intentionality and essence, that goes beyond their physical and sensory properties. We also observed in Section 2. that it is to literature and the arts that people turn to express this depth of meaning and the spirit of landscape. The second challenge to the landscape artist is to accept this responsibility to produce work that is a conduit for the emotions, the imagination and the spirit, whilst remaining true to the reality of the landscape and avoiding the pitfalls of the overly romantic and picturesque in art of the past.

Furthermore, this agenda on two fronts aligns with the current aesthetic debate with cognitive and environmental aesthetics providing the framework for the objective engagement with landscape and non-cognitive aesthetics a context within which to consider the spirit of landscape.