Title

Post-war Landscapes

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Abstract

This article considers how painterly space was redefined in the work of artists after World War II. Right after the war, when cities were in a state of destruction, the trope of the city in ruins featured prominently in art. A metaphorical approach to ruins can be seen in documentary photographs of devastated Warsaw, the drawings of Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, and the classical paintings of Felicjan Szczęsny Kowarski. Within this spectrum lies a broad range of paintings that portrayed landscape in terms of peril, strangeness, and unrecognizability—landscapes deprived of visual coherence or unity and instead defined by oblivion, fissure, and the abysmal.

This article discusses a group of paintings that transformed the tradition of landscape painting. It analyzes work by Bronisław Wojciech Linke ("Morze przelanej krwi" [Sea of Blood], 1952 and "Ustka–Morze" [Ustka–Sea], 1954), Jadwiga Maziarska ("Bez tytułu" [Untitled], circa 1970), and Jonasz Stern ("Niski horyzont" [Low Horizon], 1960 and Kałusz w roku 1942 [Kalush in 1942], 1988) and identifies new, unique meanings that were nonetheless informed by the legacy of Surrealism. Hailing from multiple decades, these works can also be interpreted by distinguishing post-Holocaust models of painting that redefined space as a basic template for representing and remembering this event. Incongruent portrayals of claustrophobia, the void, or space as a boundless expanse consistently feature iconography associated with the Holocaust in post-war art.

A prominent motif in post-war iconography is the empty, desolate landscape. This trope, seen from various perspectives, evokes the topoi of ruins, destruction and remains, while the landscapes themselves appear to be unformed, amorphous, and emerging from intermingling depths of field. The prevalence of landscape was likely motivated by the urgency to document, remember, voice dissent, indict, and revise the tradition of landscape painting. This theme did not appear out of nowhere, for it coexisted amongst other artistic models and drew from the immediate memory of destruction, the drama of visceral experience, and the projection of a dead, sterilized world. The memory-saturated landscape modelled a particular vision of matter and space, and of the picturesque and the sublime.[1]

This article attempts to read a set of paintings against the tradition and theory of landscape painting. In my analyses, I use the term “landscape” to elucidate specific spatial conditions informing the language of modern art—conditions that diminish the distance between the viewer and their mode of observation of the work’s material components. As the article progresses, I will place the term “landscape”—an assemblage of natural and anthropogenic elements within an intensely scrutinized, circumscribed space—in opposition to the term “paysage.”[2]

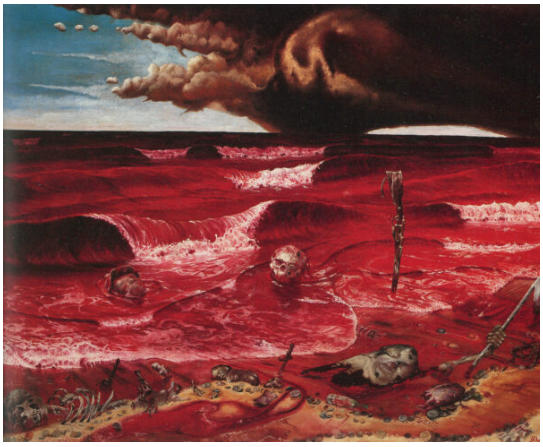
I am interested in forms of artistic expression that correlate to different modes of landscape perception. We can map these variants onto the developmental stages of the modern image. The devastated landscape offered a clean slate for reconceiving the painting tradition and the perception of “paysage.”[3] The experience of the war became an immanent component of “paysage” and, at other times, a historical reference point for artistic experimentation. To varying degrees, reminiscences of “paysage” shaped the post-war output of artists like Bronisław Wojciech Linke, Jadwiga Maziarska, Jonasz Stern and others who showed their work in the years following the war.[4] Developed in tandem with modern painting techniques, their work evoked a model of landscape that was saturated in metaphor, expression and montage and therefore subverted former attributes of observation, mimicry, allusion and invention. The paintings I will discuss here represent different phases in their artists’ careers and are marked by a visceral experience of destruction that demands to be visualized (for Linke), the relentless resurfacing of forgotten images (for Stern), and finally (for Maziarska), the search for a new, organic dimension of abstraction. Work by these artists does not constitute a monolithic corpus. On the contrary, in this array, we see distinct vectors: for Linke, a consistent conception of metaphorical realism, and for Maziarska and Stern, the manifestation of matter and the concreteness of the materials themselves. Taken together, these approaches may help us formulate broader speculations. Made at different stages and representing different moments in the artists’ careers, these unpopulated portraits give concrete form to the scenery of peril. They overturn conventions, collapse distance, and annex the space of the landscape.

Anthropomorphism and the Screen

Bronisław Wojciech Linke made a series of “seaside paysages” while spending time in Ustka in and after 1952. As Irena Jakimowicz has noted, Linke did not approach his sketches of nature with strict intentionality. Rather, the paintings came out of “a state of leisure and rest.”[5] Jakimowicz has also observed that the motifs developed through this practice form a complex visual syntax based on metaphor and anthropomorphism. Linke’s leisurely landscape studies yielded several sketches and two paintings that are laden with complex meaning—*Morze przelanej krwi* [Sea of Blood] (1962), and *Ustka–Morze* [Ustka–Sea] (1954). On a visual level, the paintings extend the repertoire of forms and methods developed in Linke’s earlier work, particularly from the series

Kamienie krzyczą [The Stones Cry Out].[6] For this series, Linke used an exacting technique to bring out details in an image system of anthropomorphic architectural ruins, where connotations of melancholy, endurance and dissent were all embedded in the barren urban "paysage." Linke subverted the poetics of ruins as fragmentary, incomplete or nostalgic. His paintings assert a vision of structured, vibrant figures in a schema of architectural skeletons.

Yet the seaside landscapes ought to be distinguished from the painstaking drawings that continued the commemorative agenda of *Kamienie krzyczą*. Taken as two parts of a whole, *Morze przelanej krwi* and *Ustka–Morze* are a unified system of details, fragments and quotations. Their defining feature may be the remarkable precision and realist level of detail with which they depict fragments and successive pictorial plains, with the sea like a tousled sheet extending into the horizon.



Bronisław Wojciech Linke, "Morze przelanej krwi" [Sea of Blood], 72 × 105 cm, oil on cardboard, 1952, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie [National Museum in Warsaw], illustration for: Bronisław Wojciech Linke, 1906-1962, exh. cat., edited by Irena Jakimowicz, Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 1963.

The formal premise of both paintings lies in juxtaposing an illusory landscape study with unusual set pieces. Building on the tradition of maritime art, the paintings consist of complementary pieces that thematize dynamics of sprawling space and fantastical projection. In *Morze przelanej krwi* the perspective is oriented from the painting's lower left corner, whereas the later painting situates the viewer in the opposite corner. The paintings' sensual intensity stems from their realist attention to detail, fastidious depiction of the contours of waves and vivid simulation of the texture of water seen with varying degrees of transparency. The illusory suggestion of materiality is further enhanced by a narrow frame enclosing waves in the distant horizon under a dark, dense cloud cover (in the 1952 painting), and boundless blue sky (in the later painting).

The contrast between the paintings arises from the artist's manipulation of realist, naturalist and expressionist conventions as evidenced by the usage of metaphorical red paint in *Morze przelanej* *krwi*. Linke approximates the formal qualities of a realist study or even, in the later painting, a coloristic tracing. Isolated sections of the composition serve different functions, for in the first painting, the shoreline is dotted with body parts bobbing aimlessly on the waves and the overturned body of an infant. Completing this macabre image is an outstretched hand and scattered coins and bills. The result is a harrowing scene of a catastrophe as it unfolds and a message about the ephemerality of life. In the second painting, the landscape appears muted and calm, while the anthropomorphic silhouettes of stones on the coast suggest a commemorative note. It is as if the painting captures the very next moment in the sequence of events, suspending us in a quiet, elegiac mood.

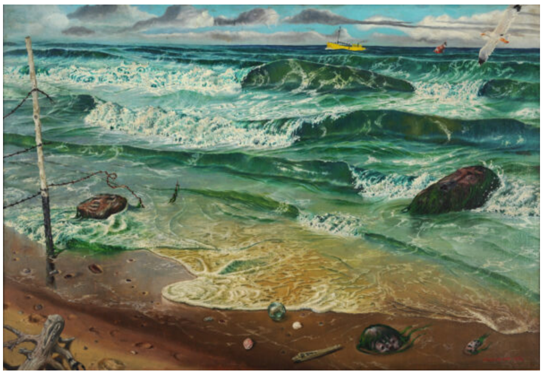
Yet my aim in analyzing this pair of paintings is not to reiterate their respective messages:[7] the universalized apocalyptic red sea of the first painting and the historical grounding of the latter conveyed through intentional signifiers—barbed wire and the symbolic camp stripes. Rather, I mean to demonstrate a specific model for interpreting landscape as a memory-laden space by situating the viewer within the disaster zone. The techniques and conventions of these paintings serve complementary functions: verism and symbolism on the one hand, and imitation and projection on the other. Linke's paintings render these vistas in hyperbole, pushing the limits of the landscape genre to expose the underside of the cheery maritime scene through swirling waves of blood. At the same time, the image resembles a pastiche of a seaside postcard, for the waves are rendered with nearly photographic precision and the expanse of the sea extends into the horizon, where a soaring seagull and yellow ship can be glimpsed. *Ustka–Morze*, which is more subtle in its exaggeration of landscape conventions, translates the aestheticized scene into a metaphorical, surrealist mechanism of projection.

While scholars of Linke's work may have discerned its affinity to the surrealist tradition, they nonetheless gravitate toward a different category to describe his work, namely critical realism.[8] However, this should not prevent us from thinking about Linke's model of "paysage" in terms of spatial dynamics of the image akin to surrealism. Haim Finkelstein has explored similar concepts by identifying two fundamental ways of integrating the unconscious into the painter's formal toolkit.[9] Having drawn an analogy between surrealist imagery and the unconscious, he separates the image into layers, distinguishing between pictorial planes (for instance, in the case of Max Ernst) as visual counterparts to a spatially oriented relation between the conscious and unconscious.

Finkelstein discusses two other complementary visual models in the work of André Breton, which seem more compatible with Linke's program: here, the painting is understood as a window or screen.[10] The painting-window model allows one to juxtapose real and fantastical elements to produce the impression of an open, unbounded space illusively suggested by the painting. The unattainable horizon reinforces the painting-window's metaphorical alignment with an "internal model." The painting materializes a poetic visuality that conjures the sprawling, oneiric, unbounded landscapes of the surrealists—landscapes "just beyond the field of vision." This last phrase, also used by Finkelstein, suggests a border, layer or membrane that restricts access while functioning as a screen for projections of the invisible and unknown. The painting thus becomes a threshold to the unknown, but it is also a circumscribed field in which an "internal model" is realized and made visible, having come into its true properties within the painting. The painting-screen marks the borders within which the unconscious is projected and the "marvelous" becomes manifest.

Regardless of whether Linke intentionally subscribed to surrealist poetics, these two visual models aptly describe his aesthetic program. Linke locates the viewer in expansive landscapes but also crowded among meaningful, agentive details seen from close up. The dialogue between pictorial imitation and subjective projection lures the viewer's eye into boundless space while anchoring it within strict spatial relations. This strategy produces an impression of distance "beyond the field of vision" and, simultaneously, of proximity suggested by scrupulously rendered details. *Morze przelanej krwi* dramatizes the landscape, turning it into a metaphor for the elements. The effects of destruction take the form of scattered body parts and objects absorbed into swirling, devastating waves of blood. The scene conjures an acute sense of the elements' unpredictability and demiurgic, ineffable force. The potent impetus of the wave as it casts bodily remains on the shore locates the viewer in two places: at the painting's lower edge and at the very center of the unrelenting tumult of events.

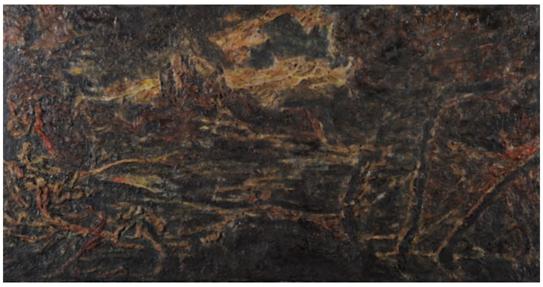
A very different spatial relation can be found in *Ustka–Morze*, for the vector of action seems to bypass the observer, who looks out onto the steady pattern of incoming waves. Boulders on the desolate shore recall the forms of human faces. The painting is less a testimony to the tempest of history than an elegiac meditation on reanimated images of victims of concentration camps and mass murder. The ocean vista becomes a contemplative scene featuring ships sailing into the distance and, in the foreground, humanlike stones who peer off in various directions and splinter the perspective. The visual effect of the stones suggests an irreducibly ambivalent metamorphosis,[11] which forces together two incongruent images: the animation of the stones, and final submission to death. This anthropomorphic gesture is more than a simple restaging of a bygone ritual, nor is it merely a religious token of memory and protection, or a translation of the marine landscape into a gravesite enclosed in barbed wire. Indeed, the anthropomorphic stones activate the pictorial space as a dialogue of perspectives. This casts the landscape as a place of open wounds and reinforces the sea's symbolic kinship with boundless oblivion. The stone faces exceed their function as the painting's set pieces, for they provide a way to interpret the pictorial plane as a screen for projection and metamorphosis. This gentle view of a maritime scene transected by barbed wire orients the viewer within an incongruent visual metaphor whose internal tension comes from the need to see the painting simultaneously on two planes: as a window and as a screen, or as an infinite expanse and in vivid detail. The viewer finds herself among the living dead, ensnared in the paradox of the seductive, open landscape and visceral proximity to trauma. Markers of painterly metamorphosis conjure the hallucinatory effect of gazing upon the soft forms of waves. This generates new images and new meanings, inflecting the scene with the surrealist motif of "convulsive beauty" and linking desire to death.[12]



Bronisław Wojciech Linke, "Ustka–Morze" [Ustka–Sea], 69 × 99 cm, oil on canvas, 1954, Muzeum Okręgowe w Bydgoszczy im. Leona Wyczółkowskiego [The Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz].

Landscape as Formless; Landscape as Matter

To describe the paintings of Jadwiga Maziarska, we must take care to convey their liminal orientation between the optical and the haptic, and between textural continuity and intricate mimicry. The painting *Bez tytułu* [Untitled], found in the Lublin Museum's collection, dates around 1970 and consists of a monolithic plastic mass of stearin and colored pigments.[13] The painting's surface is a heterogeneous and fastidiously rendered textural plane. In the lower section, a monolithic black mass marks the painting's axis, which culminates in a luminescent, semi-circular field in the upper section. The painting's sides, meanwhile, feature rhythmically patterned, winding, elongated forms. The painting is rendered in dark earthen tones with contrasting iridescent hues of yellow and red and colorist flecks that pierce through the otherwise uniform dark coloring. The artist used wax to soften the contours and merge the painting's adjacent sections, thus harmonizing overlapping fragments of varying thickness and blurring the painting's orthogonal edges into a soft spatial contour.



Jadwiga Maziarska, “Bez tytułu” [Untitled], 60 × 100 cm, mixed media, date unknown–around 1970, Muzeum Narodowe w Lublinie [National Museum in Lublin].

What seems to be a monolithic plane turns out to be internally diverse in texture and color. Close examination will reveal a spectacle that hints toward a partial landscape. Intensive forms riddle the painting’s surface outlining an illusive spatial composition. At the painting’s center is the baseline of the dark plastic mass whose counterpart is the pale afterglow of a sun setting in the upper section. This dull glow illuminates sections of the painting, exposing a dry, dead landscape of branches and tendrils. In the distance, a concentrated yellow streak starkly partitions the painting’s upper and lower parts. A pictorial epiphany causes natural forms to emerge from the painting’s textures. The forms orient us within the barren landscape. This operation imitates processes of atrophy, petrification, and freezing over. The world of natural forms emerging from the painterly substance merges with the composition’s surface. The painting is lent a sense of unity by an earthen structure of geological terrain with an emerging horizon suggestive of a landscape.[14]

Due to its fragile structure, Maziarska’s composition is displayed horizontally at the Lublin Museum, where it sits encased in a glazed steel vitrine. This arrangement reorients the painting’s frontal dimension. At the same time, the horizontal placement draws out yet another axis that hints toward Maziarska’s landscape: a piece of land extends into the horizon. Its materiality corresponds to a geological structure seen from above as one visually scans the painting’s motley surface. The indeterminate parched landscape is further elaborated if we see the painting as the ridged surface of a fossil. This imbues the work with symbolic connotations of a sarcophagus or the underground.

Art historians revisiting Maziarska’s work today have noted her paintings’ heterogeneity—the ambiguity or lack of coherence lurking beneath a seemingly monolithic surface. Barbara Piwowarska has written about the artist’s method of using photographic snapshots as outlines. This led her to observe a visual ambivalence in the artist’s oeuvre.[15] She identified contradictory elements that undercut the modernist legacy of the coherent, autonomous image. Andrzej Turowski has stressed how her paintings operate dually through their scabrous texture and biomorphic forms, and through figuration and abstraction. For Turowski, this leaves an opening for transference and direct experience of the Real (understood psychoanalytically).[16] Dorota Jarecka, meanwhile, has focused on the processual as an underlying dynamic of the work expressed through pulsing hints of the corporeal and organic. This, in turn, evokes the surrealist trope of degradation and “vegetative realism” based on a vision of complex genetic strands.[17] According to Anna Markowska, the artist’s photographic musings indicate an impulse to question the original or source as a principle of modernist visuality. She suggests we read Maziarska’s work in terms of reusage, “dispersal,” and hybridization to better grasp how she manipulates photographic templates and the painting process.[18]

These perspectives polemicize earlier, abstract interpretations of Maziarska’s work. Andrzej Kostołowski is among those who analyzed her work in this vein, stressing the tacit or even autonomous way in which the image operated.[19] Kostołowski argued that her work from the 1960s and ‘70s moves away from allusion and the direct correspondence of appearance and representation (in other words, imitation). At the same time, Maziarska’s aesthetic formula revealed the ambiguous status of the image, for while it references nature, it does so not through resemblance but through its construction and constituent materials. It is the confluence of matter that lends Maziarksa’ paintings an impression of energy compounded with natural forms, opening a field for visual metamorphosis. For Kostołowski, the primacy of structure and inherent autonomy aligns Maziarska’s work with a broader context of modernist artists. With this claim, he locates her work in a universalist context of momentous and synthetic creation. This conclusion is polemicized by later readings, which shift emphasis to the corporeal, fragmentary and processual qualities of Mazierska’s work. This revisionist approach reads her work in the spirit of an antimodernist approach to 20th century art aligned with the notion of the “formless.” If we adopt these optics, Maziarska’s work becomes a revision of the modernist paradigm in Polish art history. This arc begins with the impulse to understand the image as a self-sufficient structure and ends with a vision of the image as a signature of decay, rupture, and formlessness.

To reinterpret modernism according to George Bataille’s theoretical program, one indispensable concept is Roger Caillois’ notion of mimesis and mimicry. Caillois’ approach was adopted by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois to describe the trope of entropy in Robert Smithson’s work.[20] The concept also seems relevant as a key to Maziarska’s aesthetics. For Caillois, myth is not a discrete field of cultural relations and meanings so much as it emerges from mimetic adaptation to nature. It is both a component of that adaptation and the product of biological impulse.[21] Mimicry entails blurring the border between the subject and its environment. It expresses a symbiotic longing together with a self-destructive impulse or the drive to return to inanimate, inorganic nature. Caillois, who sees the mythic as a compound of the biological and cultural, suggests that the mimetic mechanism need not aim toward self-preservation. It is an impulsive, spontaneous action that reduces subjectivity in pursuit of the erasure of forms, opening a space for intentional self-destruction.[22]

Critics have felt compelled to read Maziarska's work through the lens of her biography and, in particular, her experience of the war.[23] Perhaps it would be more interesting to use her paintings' unique structure as a starting point for revising the notion of landscape as external space. Maybe landscape is the site of camouflage, where we cover our tracks and blur all boundaries so that organic and nonorganic structures can emerge. Mimesis, as a mechanism for supplanting the individualized, subject-oriented perspective, entails smearing natural forms into their monolithic environment. Maziarska's landscape instigates a cyclical process where new pieces emerge only to have their edges effaced. As soon as the eye discerns plant tendrils in the painting, their edges are smeared by a stearate coating. This cyclical gesture does not reproduce the act of creation, but it does carry portents of inevitable annihilation. The result is a radical vision of landscape as an abyss—the brink of a barely visible underground world from which there is no exit. The mimetic process is not beholden to the rules of imitation, for it is the product of a processual way of studying the image's surface and perceiving landscape as the site where the subject and its object of observation merge. Inching along this scabrous shell, we discern the landscape in bits and pieces that together suggest the outlines of natural forms. The picture that emerges evokes scorched earth, parched vegetation and a setting sun finally ensconced in the gloom, where the distinction between environment and form is indiscernible. In such a landscape, it is no easy task to catch a form in the process of mimetically merging with its surroundings.

Landscape as Place

In the history of landscape painting, we can draw parallels between how landscape is visualized and techniques of observation. As Tim Cresswell has aptly noted, the idea of landscape results from the merging of two features: the material topography of a piece of land and its particular visualization. For Cresswell, landscape is "an intensely visual idea." In his words: "In most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place. Places are very much to things to be inside of. […] Landscape refers to the shape—the material topography—of a piece of land. […] We do not live in landscapes—we look at them."[24] The authors of the volume *Mapping Spaces: Networks of Knowledge in 17th Century Landscape Painting*[25] have shown how academic discourse has aligned the style of Dutch and Flemish painters with a decisive turning point of modernity. In the 17th Century, landscape as a painting subject and illusion as an optical or mathematical experience became bound up with military, scientific and cartographic interests. Peter Weibel has argued that 17th-century realism was a representational system culled from specific cartographic models, which offered a medium for accumulating knowledge of the world through inscription and description.[26] By coordinating details within a system of spatial relations and linking the pictorial view to its cartographic model, Dutch painters created suggestive illusions and constructions of space as key components of their aesthetic program. The image was therefore tasked with describing space, but also conveying the way in which space was conceptualized by signaling the technique of observation.

Expanding on this discussion with her experimental research, Linnea Semmerling has moved beyond digital models to virtually reconstruct the geometry of Pieter Snayers and Jacob von Ruisdael's landscapes. In an experimental study of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of space, Semmerling considers how coordinated geometric networks are contingent on the observer's movement, suggesting an interdependency between body and world. This analysis of landscape informed Semmerling's critique of an abstract theoretical understanding of reality (in situ) by shifting weight to the visuality of landscape and its appearance to the subject (in visu). Her critique reveals the interrelation between viewpoint and the embodied observer. Dutch and Flemish paintings are not only informed by a specific scientific apparatus, for, as Semmerling notes, they also humanize the image by situating the painter-observer within the spatial limits of the landscape.[27]

Semmerling and Cresswell both discuss an emerging notion of landscape painting that was strictly bound to scientific modes of perception and, in turn, contributed to the development of scientific discourse. For Cresswell this perception treated landscape as a set of objectivized relations seen from afar and mediated by optical techniques reconstructed by the artist, while for Semmerling landscape was thus perceived in terms of the participatory, corporeal and locomotive presence of the viewer-artist within the reconstructed space.

This second dynamic is particularly relevant to contemporary humanist geography, which reckons with concepts of place and space. Jeff Malpas has explored philosophies of "place" in the context of hermeneutic and phenomenological discourse.[28] His book *Place and Experience* highlights the persistent and inexorable relation between subjectivity, which is constituted in place and simultaneously expresses place… This philosophy of place has complex implications, for it construes place as a social space that simultaneously generates a dynamic system of social relations between people and places. Emblematic of this dynamic is the figure of the cartographer who works on the ground, simultaneously measuring and portraying what he sees. Topography, understood as the mapping of a piece of land based on attributes reflecting its specific conditions, expresses the experience of being inside and outside landscape at once.[29]

Images of landscape observed and analyzed after and in response to the war reveal distinct artistic strategies that can be mapped across the work of Bronisław Wojciech Linke and Jadwiga Maziarska. These strategies range from realist representation to the perception of landscape as an abstract structure of matter. While the paintings of Linke and Maziarska discussed here hail from different traditions, they both suggest a correlation between the image and the act of observation.

For both artists, the effect of looking is embedded in the compositional strategy, which actualizes the time of observation within complex parameters of visualized space and collapses the gap between the observer and representational field. Linke and Maziarska transposed a universalized, abstract experience of space into a complex optical and haptic structure of place. Their images of landscape deployed several conventions: anthropomorphism, mimicry, and the painting-as-screen. These techniques do not allow the scene to be viewed comprehensively. They foreground incremental ways of seeing, where the viewer is situated within the horizontal field amidst the painting's imagery and matter. The resulting scene exposes the metaphorical and transformative potency of the painterly gesture and the depicted details: stones, waves, trees and ground. These post-war landscapes are destabilized: they are seen in pieces, in a state of vegetal decay. For the viewer inserted into this scene of desolation and destruction, the landscape and its representation do not appear through a distanced scientific gaze. They suggest a harmonious intimacy between place and the subject for whom landscape is an eschatological and apocalyptic experience. Maziarska's decaying tree boughs and iridescent afterglow, and Linke's shore strewn with body parts and gravestones, establish a representation field with the unfixed topography of the abyss—bereft of spatial vectors or points of orientation. This transformed relation of place to space is vividly manifest in the pursuit of an alternative orientation of landscape.

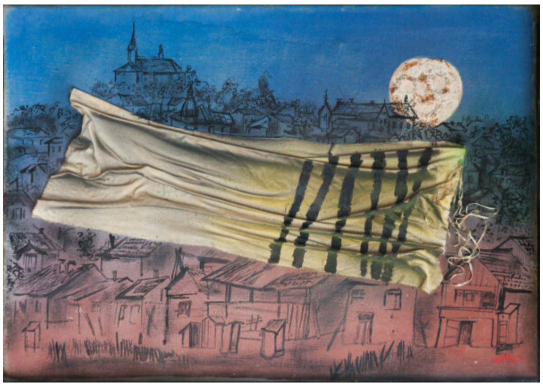
Landscape after the Holocaust"[30]

Jonasz Stern devised a method for fully integrating paintings with their visual structures and concrete materials. Stern's landscapes, made at various points in his career, speak to one another through allusions, common features, and circulations. Using a consistent compositional structure, he externalized individual details. Stern's work can be read as an expressive paradigm for art of the Holocaust. Through its system of recurring motifs, the work also stakes out a field for revising the genre of landscape painting in the wake of this historical event.

Stern's approach to painting incorporates new techniques and visual practices: modern experiments in texture coincide with the persistent return of landscapes and places—memory, photography and the painting process all work in tandem. "In truth, it was a miracle I survived. Even so, I was not saved," he remarked not long before his death. "For it all lingers in my memory, deeply encoded in my being. Just how deep, I did not even realize."[31]

Landscape—in art and in life—was a major reference point for Stern. He often recounted the pleasure he took in spending time in nature. Several times in his work, he returned to the scenery of the ravines by the Janowska concentration camp near Lviv, where mass shootings had taken place.[32] The landscapes recurring in his work are rich with varied material forms and dark nocturnal scenes as seen in *Niski horyzont* [Low Horizon] (1960), *Dół* [The Pit] (1964), *Noc* [Night]

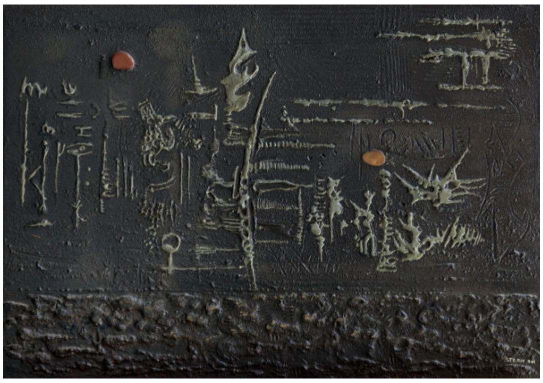
(1974), and *Brzeg* [Coast] (1978). Also relevant are the bright vedutas he made later, such as *Kałusz w roku 1942* [Kalush in 1942] (1988). A uniform motif in this sampling of work is a circumscribed strip of land, neatly trimmed to the breadth of the painting and contrasting with the lighter coloring of the upper section.



Jonasz Stern, “Kałusz w roku 1942” [Kalusz in 1942], 50 × 70 cm, original technique, 1988, private collection, photo R. Sosin.

The trope of painterly materiality begins to emerge in Stern’s work after his visit to Italy in 1959, where he grew interested in Alberto Burri.[33] We can map Stern’s subsequent shift against a series of milestones typical of the “Thaw” and shared by other artists of this moment. In the 1950s, Stern’s paintings were abstract and had irregular, unconstrained spatial structures. After 1960, he gravitated toward natural materials (fabric, sticks, debris). This intensified the work’s sense of desublimation, primitivization, and a longing for basic materials. At the same time, the multidirectional pictorial space merged with the surface of the painting board, while evenly distributed forms defined the pictorial architecture—such as the rhythmically arched ridges set into the gravitational field of *Dół* or, in *Noc,* bones mounted as symmetrical ovals.

Stern’s landscape studies can be summarized by examining his portrait of Kalush alongside the earlier work *Niski horyzont.* Deploying different conventions in each case, he evokes a developed terrain of simple motifs. The outline of *Niski horyzont* becomes the meticulous sketch and reconstructed urban landscape of the later painting. In the plastic mass of *Niski horyzont,* we can draw a line between the rough, unmarked ground and the vertical elements of the upper section, which are dense linear structures and discrete signs dispersed on the plane. The relief complements the smooth surface of the background. With its evenly arranged forms, it seems to mimic writing on a tablet. The scored and perforated surface evokes a flat wall inscribed with sgraffito accents. The narrow pictorial surface does, however, become dimensional, for delicate and irregular forms are suspended in the upper section, opening the painting into cosmic space and hinting toward expansive proportions. Reduced to its basic vertical elements, the painting can be read in several ways: as calligraphy, a landscape of verdant vegetation, or urban buildings seen from afar. At the same time, the mimetic process of resemblance occurs in a disaster zone of decay and decomposition conveyed through a dull brown substance that establishes the setting but makes it impossible to posit stable relations.



Jonasz Stern, “Low Horizon / Niski horyzont”, 50 × 72 cm, oil, original technique, 1961, private collection, photo R. Sosin.

Stern returned to this urban setting later in his career to paint *Kałusz w roku 1942.* The title references the date on which Kalush’s Jewish population was deported to the Bełżec extermination camp. Stern’s urban scene meticulously reconstructs the placement of the buildings, and an urban plan familiar from pre-war views of the city and seen from afar, at the elevation of the church tower next to the town hall and orthodox church. The composition’s lower part consists of a flatly sketched village landscape of wooden buildings rendered in blue and pink and partially obscured by a ritual prayer shawl. The shawl spreads across the painting surface and demarcates the imagined architectural space. The shawl shows how the intuitive sketch of a cityscape known by heart is overlaid with the acute memory of a desolate, depopulated place, as if the scene were somehow dislocated from 1942 and its dramatic tumult of events. The generic profile of this place is thereby linked to the material symbol, and minute details, of a community that has been lost.

These two scenes, separated by nearly thirty years, both materialize the same local topography. The characteristic layout of abstract forms in *Niski horyzont*, and Stern’s earlier abstract landscapes, become legible architectural structures when seen through the lens of *Kałusz*. In this light, the forms resemble ordered writing or an elegiac remembrance of a place that still lingers in the imagination and is visualized in art. Taken as a corpus, Stern’s work can be seen as a rigorous program for reproducing the image that relates to landscape as an abyss—not a space filled with the voices of the wretched, but a desolate, deserted space that relentlessly asserts a landscape with no exit.

*

The landscapes of post-war artists, as seen in these case studies from Stern, Maziarska and Linke, undermine the notion of visual distance and foreground the literal experience of proximity to place. The abyss pictured here has no outline or sense: it is relentlessly present. It is not a transitory place, for it demands return, repetition, and resilience.[34] Images of corroded, underground and destroyed landscapes in post-war art express the longing for a multidimensional, multi-vectored space that is dynamic, unrestricted and always changing. This modernist space rife with meanings in flux was the backdrop for pictorial synthesis, terse composition, and an artistic process that related to the image as a sovereign space unobligated to imitate nature.[35]

The landscapes discussed here condense and draw out the meaning of the autonomous image. Through metamorphosis and dispersal, they situate visuality and distance at the very center of how the image is experienced—a process of observation extended in time and suspended between the literality of matter and de-visualization as different ways of picturing the world after war. These landscapes portray places still marked by peril and stagnation and distanced from the cognitive, rational and subject-oriented tradition of landscape painting.

Translated by Eliza Rose

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1. Widespread ruins were a salient motif of the exhibition *Zaraz po wojnie* [Just after the War], organized at Zachęta - Narodowa Galeria Sztuki [Zacheta - National Gallery of Art] in Warsaw (October 2015–January 2016, curated by Joanna Kordjak and Agnieszka Szewczyk); see: Marta Leśniakowska, "Przed obrazem ruin. Widmowość i melancholia" [Facing the Image of Ruins: Spectrality and Melancholia], in *Zaraz po wojnie*, eds. Joanna Kordjak and Agnieszka Szewczyk (Warsaw: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2015), 72–81; see also: Waldemar Baraniewski's article in this volume, titled "Ruiny, krew i (nie)pamięć" [Ruins, Blood and (Non)Memory], 94–103. ↩
2. See: Tadeusz J. Chmielewski, "Przestrzeń i granice w krajobrazie" [Space and Borders in the Landscape], *Studia i materiały lubelskie*, no. 21 (2019): 25–35. ↩
3. Aleksander Wojciechowski writes about the different variants of modern landscape painting in his untitled text in *Rajmund Ziemski. Malarstwo* [Rajmund Ziemski: Painting] (Warsaw: Galeria Krzywe Koło, 1960). See also: Piotr Majewski, "Dążenie do krzyku. Metaforyczne 'pejzaże' Rajmunda Ziemskiego" [Striving toward Screaming: The Metaphorical 'Landscapes' of Rajmund Ziemski], in *Rajmund Ziemski. Malarstwo,* ed. Joanna Kania (Warsaw: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych, Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2010): 18–24. ↩
4. This list includes those whose work was shown at Wystawa Prac Plastyków Nowoczesnych [Exhibition of Modern Fine Arts] (1947), and I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej [the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art] (1948), see: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej pięćdziesiąt lat później* [Looking Back on the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art], exh. cat. (Cracow: Galeria Starmach, 1998); Piotr Słodkowski, "Wystawa Prac Plastyków Nowoczesnych (1947) wobec Wystawy Sztuki Nowoczesnej (1948/49). Rewizja wizji nowoczesności" [The Exhibition of Modern Artists (1947) and the Exhibition of Modern Art (1948-49): A Revised Vision of Modernity], in *Zaraz po wojnie*, 204–215. ↩
5. Irena Jakimowicz, "Wstęp" [Preface], in *Bronisław Wojciech Linke 1906–1962*, exh. cat. (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 1963): 10. ↩
6. See: Anna Manicka, "Cykl Miasto Linkego" [Linke's City Cycle], *Magazyn Sztuki*, no. 4 (1994): 146-159; and by the same author "Kamienie krzyczą Bronisława Wojciecha Linkego" [Bronisław Wojciech Linke's *The Stones Cry Out*], in *Zaraz po wojnie*, 86–89. ↩
7. See, for instance: Krzysztof Lipowski, "Przekroczyć 'ut pictura poesis': próba nowego odczytania obrazów Bronisława Linkego w oparciu o projekt metodologiczny W.J.T. Mitchella" [Transgressing 'Ut Pictura Poesis': Toward a New Reading of Bronisaw Linke through the Methodology of W. J. T. Mitchell], *Panoptikum*, no. 9 (2010): 233–244. ↩
8. Irena Jakimowicz has a negative perspective on Linke's relation to surrealism. See: "Wstęp" [Preface], in *Bronisław Wojciech Linke*. Tadeusz Nyczek assigns Linke a very different position toward the dominant artistic tendences of his time in "Osobny" [Man Apart], *Sztuka*,

no. 37 (1980): 33–35. ↩

9. Haim Finkelstein, “Screen and Layered Depth. Surrealist Painting and the Conceptualization of Mental Space,” *Anthroplogy and Aesthetics*, no. 51 (2007): 183–201. ↩
10. Finkelstein is referring to Breton’s text *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* from 1925; see also: *Yves Tanguy and surrealism*, ed. Karin von Maur (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2001). ↩
11. Artur Dobosz, “Metamorfoza–metafora–antropomorfizacja–deantropomorfizacja” [Metamorphosis – Metaphor – Anthropomorphism – Deanthropomorphism], *Sofija*, no. 1 (2010): 25–36. ↩
12. See: Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge–London: MIT Press, 1993), 19–54. ↩
13. While this painting is not dated, it belongs to a series of work from the 1960s and ‘70s. These works are united by their usage of stearin and their dark, earthen color scheme. ↩
14. This “mystical combination” is alluded to in the artist’s statements. See: “Energia, materia i sztuka. Z Jadwigą Maziarską rozmawia Zbigniew Taranienko” [Energy, Matter, Art: Jadwiga Maziarska in Conversation with Zbigniew Taranienko], in *Jadwiga Maziarska*, ed. Józef Chrobak (Cracow: Stowarzyszenie Artystyczna Grupa Krakowska, 1991), 53. ↩
15. Barbara Piwowarska, “Inżynier i majsterkowicz. O fotoszkicach Jadwigi Maziarskiej” [Engineer, Tinkerer: On the Photomontages of Jadwiga Maziarska], in *Kolekcjonowanie świata: Jadwiga Maziarska—listy i szkice* [Collecting the World: Jadwiga Maziarska – Letters and Sketches], ed. Barbara Piwowarska (Warsaw: Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, 2005), 7–35. ↩
16. See: Andrzej Turowski, “Paraliżujące spotkanie” [The Paralyzing Encounter], in *Jadwiga Maziarska. Atlas Wyobrażonego* [Jadwiga Maziarska: Atlas of the Imaginary], exh. cat., ed. Barbara Piwowarska (Warsaw: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, 2009), 122–129. ↩
17. Dorota Jarecka, “Od faktografii do faktury” [From Factography to Faktura], in *Jadwiga Maziarska. Atlas Wyobrażonego*, 137–141. ↩
18. Anna Markowska, “Nic nie jest takie, jakie się wydaje” [Nothing is as it Seems], in *Jadwiga Maziarska. Atlas Wyobrażonego*, 142–145. ↩
19. Andrzej Kostołowski, “Uwagi o malarstwie Jadwigi Maziarskiej” [Remarks on the Painting of Jadwiga Maziarska], in *Jadwiga Maziarska*, 3–11. ↩
20. Rosalind E. Krauss, “Entropy,” in *Formless. A User’s Guide*, eds. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 73–78. ↩
21. Rosa Eidelpes, “Roger Caillois’ Biology of Myth and the Myth of Biology,” *Anthropology and Materialism. A Journal of Social Research*, no. 2 (2014):16-44. ↩
22. Eidelpes, 28. ↩
23. See: Turowski, 127; Joanna Kordjak, Agnieszka Szewczyk, “Zaraz po wojnie” [Just After the

War], in *Zaraz po wojnie*, 28. ↩

24. Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 10–11. ↩
25. *Mapping Spaces: Networks of Knowledge in 17th Century Landscape Painting*, eds. Ulrike Gehring and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe–Münich: 2014). This extensive study covers 17th century painting and outlines distinct traditions of the landscape genre on multiple levels. ↩
26. Peter Weibel, "Media, Mapping and Painting," in *Mapping Spaces*, 441–460. ↩
27. Linnea Semmerling, "Living Perspective. A Phenomenological Investigation of Landscape in Painting and Cartography," in *Mapping Spaces*, 473–475. ↩
28. Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience*: *A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). ↩
29. Malpas, 40. ↩
30. This heading refers to an exhibition at the Center for Persecuted Arts at the Solingen Art Museum (curated by Maria Anna Potocka in 2016) and the publication *Jonasz Stern. Krajobraz po Zagładzie* [Jonasz Stern: Landscape after the Holocaust] (Cracow: Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej MOCAK, 2016). ↩
31. Maria Anna Potocka, "Sztuka to manifestacja naszego istnienia. Ostatni wywiad z Jonaszem Sternem, wrzesień 1998" [Art is a Manifestation of our Existence], in *Jonasz Stern. Krajobraz po Zagładzie,* 24–25. ↩
32. Anna Markowska has discussed this ambivalent treatment of nature in *Język Neuera. O twórczości Jonasza Sterna* [Neuer's Tongue: On the Work of Jonasz Stern] (Cieszyn: Uniwersytet Śląski, Filia, 1998), 21–26. ↩
33. Markowska, 73–74. ↩
34. See: Michael Rothberg*, Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 177. ↩
35. See: Tadeusz Kantor, "O aktualnym malarstwie francuskim" [On French Painting Today], *Życie Literackie*, no. 47, 1955, 3. ↩

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