

Costa da Baía do Lamer em distância de nove legos ao mar. N.º 15 da Capa calhama N.º 16 do Alhucar, N.º 17 da Fortaleza de S.º Cruz. DE Portugal que mostra a Ilha de Mozambique, e a Baía de Moçambique. Tem esta Ilha seis brancas de canavia e de cana e de laranja N.º 18 e a Baía de Moçambique N.º 19.

As Pretas do Rosário. Rede em que se transporta as Americanas para as Ilhas Chacaras, ou Facendas. Preta que leva alente na roupa. Moço dançando e fazendo de Bonda a uma Mulher. (Vozes das Pretas).

**Claudia Mattos Avolesse**  
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EDITORS

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Claudia Mattos Avolesse and  
Roberto Conduru

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# Landscape Painting in the Americas: An Inquiry

Peter John Brownlee  
*Terra Foundation  
for American Art*

Valéria Piccoli  
*Pinacoteca do Estado  
de São Paulo*

Georgiana Uhlyarik  
*Art Gallery of Ontario*

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Artistic representation of human interaction with the land has a long history in the Americas. It spans more than 30,000 years, from the earthworks and pictographs of ancient Indigenous cultures to the land art of the 1960s and 1970s to contemporary photographs of the terrible beauty of environmental destruction. It was during the early years of the nineteenth century, as emerging settler nations that were dispersed across the hemisphere gained and asserted their independence, that landscape painting began to forge a broader vision of the Americas. Artists seeking to respond to and depict distinctive topographies and natural wonders produced unique pictorial representations that nonetheless shared a common ideological and aesthetic orientation to the land, as well as artistic techniques for its depiction.

*Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic* is the first exhibition and publication to examine the evolution of the genre from the early nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century in an inclusive, hemispheric context. The goal has been to broaden the understanding of landscape painting across the Americas by setting aside the confines of national visual traditions and their art histories in order to extend scholarly investigation and discussion beyond territorial boundaries. Expanding the parameters of inquiry to encompass the hemisphere may appear, in retrospect, a simple and self-evident strategy, yet it has proven unprecedented—until now.

Placing artists, their paintings, and the visual cultures of disparate regions and countries in direct conversation, often for the first time, the exhibition's hemispheric perspective and thematic approach have enabled a consideration of the intricately intertwined geographies, cultures, and sociopolitical conditions of the peoples, nations, regions, and diasporas of North and South America. The process has revealed that the highly standardized model of landscape painting borrowed from European precedents produced diverse and singular modes of representation as a result of its necessary adaptation to the depiction of specific local and regional, as well as economic and political, realities. This realization, in turn, frames new questions regarding the nature of landscape painting in the Americas, as well as the status and stakes of its study when set in a broader context.

Traversing an arc of one hundred years of landscape painting in the Americas, our intent in examining such varied traditions in concert is not to claim a new kind of Pan-Americanism, which remains a colonizing undertaking. The project has, instead, deliberately avoided making generalizations and overarching statements. It has resisted the urge to draw simple conclusions from complicated realities. Rather, by bringing artistic traditions together within a hemispheric frame of reference, we have found that complexity and diversity—not simplicity and uniformity—come to the fore. Instead of attempting to provide an exhaustive compendium of various national schools and their dissidents, the project is, at its core, primarily concerned with creating a platform for cross-cultural dialogue that favors a multiplicity of voices and points of view. It is invested in the act of making a meaningful exchange possible, one in which the unique perspectives, cultural assumptions, and specialized knowledge that individuals contribute to the conversation are transformed. In this process, we begin to better understand what people in the Americas share, and what makes them distinct.

The project was conceived to result in three main public manifestations: a touring exhibition at three art museums in Canada, the United States of America, and Brazil with robust public programming at each venue; a publication with editions in English, Spanish, and Portuguese; and a website featuring images, text and audio, in these three languages, as well as French<sup>1</sup>. The thematic sequence of the exhibition also informed the structure of both book and website. Thus, each aspect of the project develops these issues in interrelated yet distinct ways, addressing a range of audiences.

The exhibition's sequence of six thematic sections explores the instrumental role of landscape painting in the investigation and documentation of the natural world and in the articulation of symbolic yet proprietary conceptions of land and the exploitation of its resources, and envisions the land as a space of encounter, contest, and contemplation. The exhibition presents the material in what is primarily an aesthetic, temporal, and spatial experience. As such, the exhibition places the visitor's perspective, experience, and engagement at the center of its conception, offering a broad variety of points of en-



try and accommodating varying levels of interest and scholarly background. At each venue, curators worked with interpretative planners, exhibition designers, and education specialists to develop exhibition-specific interpretative strategies for the presentation of key ideas and primary content. These were tailored at each venue to address the needs and expectations of the exhibition's various audiences.

The period the exhibition considers was one of contentious colonization during which Indigenous peoples, who had thrived in the Americas for thousands of years, were subjected to intense violence and forced assimilation. Many of the landscape paintings featured in the exhibition are devoid of people, furthering the idea of *terra nullius*, which suggests that uncolonized land is an empty and untouched wilderness. Thus, the exhibition also considers landscape paintings as “one of the conceptual and visceral tools of colonization.”<sup>2</sup> To repopulate “empty” landscapes with the presence, and the voices, of the peoples who once inhabited them, the exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario featured video interviews with Indigenous scholars and artists and concluded with a presentation of the original Crown Treaties (1787 and 1805) that ceded the land that is now Toronto to the British Crown. At Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the voice of a scholar from the Cherokee nation was featured throughout the exhibition to provide an Indigenous counterpoint to the narratives conveyed by the paintings in several of the galleries.

While for centuries, landscape painting had functioned in Europe to express the ideological outlook of royalty and, gradually, the landed elite, the prospect of purportedly open and available land in the Americas shifted the demographics of who owned and worked the land, as well as who was displaced or evacuated from it. As a result, the nature of the imagery that came to represent the land evolved significantly. Beliefs and desires were projected onto singular topographies and ancient sites in an effort to order the external world and thus forge homegrown narratives freighted with communal values and nationalistic aspirations.

2 Jolene Rickard, “Arts of Dispossession,” in *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press and co-publishers, 2015), 115.

By the mid-nineteenth century, landscape painting had become a primary medium for articulating largely proprietary conceptions of land in pictures of key topographical sites. Revered for their professed accuracy and aesthetic achievement, these images came to symbolize the evolving identities of emerging nations, as well as the bounty of the Americas. The first four sections of the exhibition address these ideas most explicitly. Over time, however, changing attitudes toward the land and the increasingly international artistic vocabulary of modernism animated and enabled very different ways of picturing the land. The exhibition's last two sections consider the ways in which landscape painting in the early twentieth century was transformed by a newly awakened search for authenticity and pictorial experimentation, and thus tended to articulate notions of cultural identity premised on belonging to a particular place. What once had been an artist's quest for accuracy in the 1800s had transformed into a search for authenticity, a search for self, in the early 1900s.

To articulate this arc, the first and last sections of the exhibition are conceived as a pair. The opening section, *Land Icon Nation*, assembles a careful selection of significant and iconic nineteenth-century paintings by major artists across the Americas, such as Juan Manuel Blanes, Félix-Émile Taunay, José María Velasco, Albert Bierstadt (Fig. 1), and Cornelius Krieghoff. These images depict topographical sites that, through the efforts of artists and writers, became symbolic or culturally indicative of the nations that contained them. Taken together, these works serve to frame the exhibition's hemispheric perspective. The concluding section, *Icon Nation Self*, echoes the first, gathering iconic paintings by artists working in the twentieth century, such as Pedro Figari (Fig. 2), Tarsila do Amaral, Gerardo Murillo (Dr. Atl), Georgia O'Keeffe, and Lawren Harris. These works reveal both the persistence of national icons in the cultural imaginary as well as the fundamental shift in landscape painting that radically altered the manner in which it was represented. The four middle sections investigate the role of landscape painting in the formation of national identities rooted in the natural beauty and symbolic meaning of the land, beginning with *Field to Studio*. This section brings together field sketches and completed paintings by traveler-artists who participated in scientific expeditions to the remotest regions of the Americas. The work of these artists demonstrates the critical influence





1. Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902). Yosemite Valley, 1868. Oil on canvas, 01.44 x 137.16 cm (36 x 54 in.). Collection of the Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, California, United States of America, gift of Miss Marguerite Laird in memory of Mr. and Mrs. P.W. Laird.

of Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt in the development of landscape painting in the Americas. These artists created majestic views of America's unique ecosystems, from the dense interiors of the tropical rainforest to the icy peaks of the Arctic, forming bodies of work that also helped to lend shape to landscape painting traditions in a number of emerging nations. *Land Encounter Territory* positions the land of the Americas as an arena for encounters and conflicts between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and between settler nations eager to establish or expand their territories. Visualized in paintings purportedly concerned with delineating the land's features and attributes, the violent and contested history of territorial expansion is reimagined in many of these works as peaceful encounter, while in others the land itself figures prominently as a character in the development of national myths and symbols.

*Land as Resource* displays the land as a space of both conquest and contemplation. The Americas' abundant riches—fertile soil, timber, and minerals—are the object of paintings of plantations, harvests, and other forms of extraction that glorify the dominion of man over nature and erase the laborers involved in bringing the land under cultivation or the conflict



2. Tarsila do Amaral (1886- 1973). São Paulo, 1924. Oil on canvas, 57 x 90 cm (22.44 x 35.43 in Collection of Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil, purchased by the São Paulo State Government, 1929. Photo by Isabella Matheus.

necessary to wrest land from its Indigenous inhabitants. These often romanticized views are paired with iconic paintings that foreground the beautiful, picturesque, and sublime aspects of natural landscapes, presenting beauty as a significant natural and national resource. But whether for glorification or aesthetic appreciation, these pictures also begin to evince the impact of extraction and the advance of industry.

In the early 1900s, landscape painters searched for a new visual language with which to represent a rapidly changing world. The penultimate section, *Land Transformed*, examines how artists assimilated the simultaneous cultural embrace of both pre-industrial or vernacular practices and industrial forms as signs of their modernity. Artists utilized geometric forms to depict the forces of modernization that animated urban centers, power stations, factories, and busy seaports. Despite this change in style, many landscape paintings continued to emphasize beauty and direct experience of the sites they depicted, natural or otherwise. Forward-looking pictures of progress were counterbalanced by works in which artists reaffirmed the rural



and natural realities of their specific regions. Other painters, in the peripatetic manner of nineteenth-century traveler-artists, sought out the most remote locations for the kinds of solitary experiences that might enable them to achieve a deeper, more authentic or spiritual connection with nature.

*Icon Nation Self*, the exhibition's final section, revisits the iconic sites of the Americas—the ice of the Arctic, the pampas of the South, and the Cordilleras that connect them—but reimagines them in the new visual vocabulary of early twentieth-century modernism. While nature and the beauty of the land remained central for many as they sought to understand their place in the world, artists turned their attention inward, engaging their own subjective impressions, memories, and lived experiences. In so doing, their pictures transcended the immediately observable in the search for the essential truth of being. To know the world, as their paintings would suggest, was to be fully immersed in nature, to be one with it.

As landscape painting remains an animated field of academic inquiry, the exhibition and publication have drawn on an extensive scholarly literature. Studies of landscape painting, artists, patrons, and reception have, however, largely hewn to a nationalist model. Until recently, the study of landscape painting in the Americas has, despite a great diversity of artists and painting styles, remained most attentive to the role painting has played in the formation of national identities. Over the past two decades, however, the field has begun to challenge the ways in which painting participated in the formulation of ideas of the natural world and the representation of geographic spaces in relation to narratives such as those of nationalism, progress, and modernity. Often, though not exclusively, monographic, publications and exhibitions continue to single out artists, frequently placing these artists' work within contexts that tend to observe and maintain national borders. Such studies have also defined the boundaries of scholarly discourse.

Early in our research and discussions, we became aware that landscape painting has been studied unevenly across the Americas. Likewise, art historical methodologies and historiographic traditions vary from south to north, just as the activity of landscape painting itself has been quite varied from nation to nation and from region to region. In Canada and the United States of

America, certainly because of British colonial influence, landscape painting was at the core of artistic production. In countries that developed art academies early on, such as Mexico, Brazil, and Chile, landscape painting was a means through which to convey the elevated aims embodied by the fine art of painting. In the Andean region, as well as in Argentina, however, the practice of painting landscapes was slow to mature, as land was more often than not represented emblematically by a coat of arms or pragmatically as part of intensive and extensive scientific surveys until later in the nineteenth century.

Our inquiry has always been more than an exercise in comparison and contrast. Indeed, past comparative approaches have often been binary in orientation. Yet we have been able to build on important studies that have approached the question of landscape beyond the confines of “nation,” including comparative studies between the art of Brazil and Argentina, or Mexico and the United States (such as *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914–1947*), or Canada and the United States (such as the exhibition and catalogue *Expanding Horizons: Painting and Photography of American and Canadian Landscape, 1860–1918*). We have also drawn on more regional approaches, including but not limited to Dawn Ades’s landmark study, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820–1980*, Katherine Manthorne’s *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America, 1839–1879*, Ana Maria de Moraes Belluzzo’s *The Voyager’s Brazil*, and, more recently, *Caribbean: Art at the Crossroads of the World*, edited by Deborah Cullen and Elvis Fuentes. Multi-artist studies, such as Sharyn Rohlfen Udall’s *Carr, O’Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own* and thematic exhibitions focused on the pampas of the Southern Cone or the western United States during the nineteenth century have deepened our knowledge and opened up new lines of inquiry for the field at large.<sup>3</sup>

3 Thematic exhibitions and comparative studies include *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920* (Smithsonian American Art Museum, then the National Museum of American Art, 1991); Laura MaloSETTI Costa, “Politics, Desire and Memory in the Construction of Landscape in the Argentine Pampas,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 5, no. 1 (2006): 113–125; and Maria Isabel Baldassare, “Los estudios del arte del siglo XIX en América Latina,” in *Caiana: Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)* 3 (2013). Examples of monographic publications on artists working outside their own countries include Pablo Navas Sanz de Santamaría, *The Journey of Frederic Edwin Church through Colombia and Ecuador, April–October 1853* (Bogotá: Villegas Asociados/Universidad los Andes/Thomas Greg & Sons, 2008); Sigrid Achenbach, *Kunst um Humboldt: Reisenstudien aus Mittel- und Südamerika von Rugendas, Bellermann und Hilde* (Berlin: SMB Kupferstichkabinett/Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Munich: Hirmer, 2009); and Pablo Diener, *Johann Moritz Rugendas, 1802–1856* (Augsburg: Wissner, 1998).

Unencumbered by the practical limitations and financial implications of borrowing, for an extended period of time, more than 100 works of art by more than 80 artists from over 60 public and private lenders in nearly 15 countries in Europe and the Americas, the exhibition's publication is in some ways a reflection of the "ideal" exhibition. The book offers in-depth analysis and consideration of the material through thematic overview essays, case studies, and focused analyses of major works and artists by 48 academics and curators from across the Americas. Each section of the book opens with an overview essay that frames key issues followed by two case studies, evenly divided between north and south. These examine the work of a particular artist or a specific group of paintings in greater depth. Each section concludes with a number of object-centered texts that address individual paintings. The combination of these texts offers readers a vast repertoire of images and diverse modes of interpretation while highlighting stylistic and methodological variations in the study of art history across the Americas. The website benefits from an interactive, non-linear, multi-platform, searchable, and free offering, thus making this material available and accessible globally. Collectively, these three offerings extend the reach of our project and inquiry to engage the widest possible audience at a multiplicity of levels.

These days, the notion of national identity is fractured, unrooted, and dispersed. It is also being challenged by a growing Indigenous resurgence across the hemisphere. The deep forests of the Pacific Coast and the Amazon region continue to generate pride and a sense of belonging at the same time as they rapidly and irrevocably disappear. And yet the land persists in being lodged, inextricably, at the core of our cultural identities, which are defined by a collective search to understand where and who we are. In our "taming" of nature, symbolically through painting and literally by harnessing and exploiting its riches, we construct a fantasy of the land as pure, primordial, and immutable, which contrasts sharply with the urban, industrial, and multicultural reality of our times. Landscape painting continues to speak to issues that are still very pertinent to our respective nations: land remains fundamentally about resources, ecology, Indigenous rights, and confrontation, as well as collaboration. These paintings have the capacity to bring us together around such issues, as, after all, we share the land mass that has generated so much wealth, conflict, and cultural meaning over the centuries. It is a place that we all call home.

As issues surrounding the construction of nations and sovereign relations continue to invite new thinking that now tends toward the transnational, the hemispheric, and the global, this project places such questions in a broader context. Importantly, we have benefited from advanced Indigenous studies in academia and museums, which have enriched our understanding of relationships with the land. With a widened scope and an emphasis on cultural dialogue—on the dialogue between paintings and traditions, and between scholars of them—this exhibition and publication offer a much-needed overview of landscape painting in the Americas. For the first time, the scholarly voices of academics and curators from across the hemisphere are presented together in a single volume, published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. In a field that is trending in the direction of exchange and collaboration, we see great value in bringing these texts together.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, much work remains to be done. We hope that our inquiry is the catalyst for many new and productive collaborations.

4 Technology continues to make new lines of inquiry possible and advance collaboration between scholars across the Americas by offering unprecedented access to information, easy communication, and new modes of connectivity. Widespread interest in cross-cultural dialogue and partnerships is supported by organizations such as the Getty Foundation, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.



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**Peter John Brownlee**

PhD, is curator at the Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, United States.

**Valéria Piccoli**

PhD, is chief curator at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil.

**Georgiana Uhlyarik**

Is associate curator of Canadian art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada.

They are curators of the exhibition and editors of the catalogue *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic* (2015).