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Introduction: The Physical and Virtual Structures of the Landscapes of Contemporary Art

Explorations, Structures, Observations, Analyses, Canons: Who Can Say That Contemporary Art Is All About Unchecked Freedoms?

The World Needs Forms

“Explorations of Structure”

Interview with Jane Prophet, “Explorations of Structure”

“Visible From Space”

Interview with Paul Catanese, “Visible From Space”

Kasa Gallery Tri-fold Brochure

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Introduction: The Physical and Virtual Structures of the Landscapes of Contemporary Art

As the Editor in Chief of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA) I am pleased to present our first catalog born from a collaboration between LEA, Sabanci University, Kasa Gallery and Goldsmiths, University of London. It’s been almost two years since LEA’s digital media exhibition platform began, thanks to the hard work of Vince Dziekan and Ozden Sahin.

We are thrilled with the reception that the LEA Digital Platform has received. We are thankful for such a large participation that proves that there is an audience interested in being part of contemporary artistic development within the field of art, science and technology.

The LEA Digital Platform has pioneered a space of rigorous curatorship within social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Flickr that appeared to be conceived more for spontaneous and casual interactions than the formal display of images. Our major curatorial challenge was that of using these media for dissemination and interactions rather than the formal display of images. Our major curatorial challenge was that of using these media for dissemination and presentation while at the same time retaining some of the more rigorous structures of a museum display.

The strategy that has paid off for LEA and its online exhibition platform was to not solely engage with the artworks and the artists in a limited process of display and dissemination but to consider the social media presentation while at the same time retaining some of the more rigorous structures of a museum display.

In this process, both LEA and Kasa Gallery foster international collaborations in the fine arts with partners like Mike Stubbs at FACT, Janis Jefferies at Goldsmiths, Peter Rixe at Westminster University, Richard Rinehart at the Samek Art Gallery and Christiane Paul at the New School.

These are just a few of the people that LEA is now working with, while we continue announcing and growing our 2012 program of digital media exhibitions.

Operating across LEA’s social media platforms these online exhibitions have become part of the LEA web archives as well as the background to our exhibitions in the physical space of Kasa Gallery and other international galleries and museums.


This is the first catalog to signal LEA’s renewed activity and presence on the international art world at the intersection of art, science and technology. There are many people to whom I have to say thanks: Vince Dziekan, for his curatorial work; Ozden Sahin, who has worked with me and supported me with LEA’s and Kasa Gallery’s relaunch; and, last but not least, Christiane Paul who has believed in LEA’s relaunch project since its beginnings. It is my hope that LEA will continue to foster the integration of the physical experience of artworks with virtual online exhibitions that, by disseminating artworks through social media platforms, contribute to raising awareness and reshaping the visual aesthetics of the XXI century by finding new ways for engagement and participation.

Lanfranco Aceti
LEA Editor in Chief
Kasa Gallery, Director

am most grateful for their patience and support in this process.

Paul Catanese inaugurated the LEA Online Exhibition Platform with his exhibition Visible from Space in September 2010. The show was designed as a series of ‘digital artworks and sketches,’ almost an artist’s diary and impression of the world as seen from space. Issues related to the landscape, its representation and political structure, mixed with the poetics of its visibility, were combined in an enticing sequence of images. Research and development for ‘Visible from Space’ was supported by a month-long residency in June 2010 at the Goldwell Open Air Museum, located just outside Death Valley.

Together with Paul Catanese, the online exhibition Explorations of Structure by Jane Prophet (originally released in October 2010) is being installed in Kasa Gallery, while I am writing this introduction. In her portfolio of images, Jane Prophet takes previously completed artworks and re-evaluates them as explorations of structure. Prophet uses innovative media combined with traditional aesthetics to address issues related to the use of scientific methods and technologies in creating art. This can be seen in her use of elements derived from fractal mathematics to the design of politics of landscape. She demonstrates through her works, which exist in a variety of forms, the ability to fascinate the audience with innovative aesthetics.

Both online exhibitions and this catalog are accompanied by interviews with the artists by myself and Vince Dziekan.
The current ‘ideological aesthetic conflict’ between David Hockney of two opposite approaches where one focuses on skills formed and Damien Hirst on the modalities of production is a reflection bestowed upon him by Nature.1 because of the rules the relationship between art and genius, the latter is able to create art Genius to Kant it is possible to see that in the philosopher’s analysis of aesthetic forms, structures and skills. By retracing the concept of ‘genius’ of creation and are based on the rejection of previous centuries’ and freedom is an inheritance of romantic ideas that are inspired by the The construct that contemporary art is all about unchecked creativity adopts forms of production in the construction of the poetic that are based on post industrial relationships—the artworks are physically done by someone else and the artist limits his contribution to selection and branding of the chosen pieces with his signature. The exhibition E-scapes: Artistic Explorations of Nature and Science at Kasa Gallery, Istanbul, co-curated by myself and Vince Dziekan, presents the work of Prophet and Catanese in this larger context and analyzes two different approaches that are rooted in an artistic practice that reflects canons, methodologies and approaches typical of skill based aesthetics. The process to set up the exhibition in the physical space of Kasa Gallery has provided the opportunity to further reflect on the nature of the artworks and the creative process of the artists. It still surprises me that many of my students believe that no relation exists between conceptual underpinning, historical references, innovation, originality, skills and the production of the artwork. The work of both Paul Catanese and Jane Prophet being at the intersection of art, science and technology (and technology is perceived by many of my students as new media technology; e.g. smart phones and tablets, nothing older than ten years) should have been immediate and unmediated. The expectation would be that of an instantaneous production with no research and for immediate gratification. The reality is that E-scapes: Artistic Explorations of Nature and Science is an hymn to canons, observation (both scientific and aesthetic), explorations, structures and rules. In my curatorial analysis to justify the artist’s right to complexity and research I looked at the writing of Gerald James Holton’s The Advancement of Science, and its Burdens and Henry Margenau’s Open Vistas. Holton writes about Einstein and the complex relationship that the scientist had with methodological research, observation and analysis. Faced with the difficulty of constructing theories that could be exactly formulated Einstein, as well as Holton, seek a “judgement into which esthetic considerations and other preferences can enter prominently.”2 Holton’s analysis of Einstein’s methodology is not a rejection of observation, analysis, rule and structure, but more of a statement through canons, structures, observation and repetitions while the other adopts forms of production in the construction of the poetic that are based on post industrial relationships—the artworks are physically done by someone else and the artist limits his contribution to selection and branding of the chosen pieces with his signature. 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The reality is that E-scapes: Artistic Explorations of Nature and Science is an hymn to canons, observation (both scientific and aesthetic), explorations, structures and rules.
The artworks of Jane Prophet and Paul Catanese although constructed with rigorous and at times severe attention to the form, also embody the complexity of multiple interpretations and engagements and deliver more than expected. The artworks do not exhaust their fascination in a single journey of discovery, but exist simultaneously through multiple referential paths, despite or perhaps because of the punctilious and scientific structure of their aesthetic. The curatorial approach for the exhibition was structured to showcase the complexity of the artworks—by offering a dissection of the multiplicity of implications and providing a glimpse into the journeys that these two artists have undertaken.

References and Notes
2. David Hockney has denied his critique to be directed at Damien Hirst—but instead to be addressed to contemporary artists who do not skillfully produce their work.

Biography
Lanfranco Aceti is the Director of Kasa Gallery in Istanbul, the Editor in Chief of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac and teaches Contemporary Art and Digital Culture at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabanci University, Istanbul.
The World Needs Forms

Curator’s Essay Introducing LEA Digital Media Exhibition


Leonardo Electronic Almanac’s digital media exhibition platform was inaugurated by a pair of projects developed by two established artists who throughout their respective careers have produced works that respond in highly personalised ways to the interdisciplinary potential afforded by creative technologies. In deciding to present Paul Catanea and Jane Prophet together during the autumn of 2010, LEA’s curatoriate had hoped that some connections might be drawn from their respective artistic projects and that these resulting insights would be more than fortuitous. While the serendipitous relationships that did eventuate cannot be claimed fully by design on the curator’s part, it is wholly welcomed nonetheless.

I find myself writing these initial observations from an exaggerated perspective... At this moment, the trajectory of a flight path is being traced over a small pixilated screen set into the chair-back facing me. This graphic representation is contrasted by the abstraction provided by my aerial vantage, looking out the window to my right, high above Western Australia. While jagged raster lines demarcate territories and trace trajectories, below, the terrain is scored by territories and trace trajectories, below, the terrain is scored by high evaporated) that have coursed across the surface of the land (long evaporated) that have coursed across the surface of the land. The resulting portfolio of images is a portent to further reflective analysis. As the images selected unfolded sequentially throughout October, the rich seams and resilient threads that connect an artist’s creative production over a number of years are retrospectively unearthed.

A quality that is shared by both artists and sustains their different creative practices is their sense of astonishment. In analysing art as a social and perceptual system, Niklas Luhmann (2000) writes how astonishment:

affects not only the observer of art but also the artist. The observer may be struck by the work’s success and then embark on a step-by-step reconstruction of how it came about. But the artist is equally struck by the order that emerges from his own hands in the course of a rapidly changing relationship between provocation and possible response, problem and solution, irritation and escape. This is how order emerges from self-irritation, which, however, requires the prior differentiation of a medium of art to decide that this order differs in its stakes from what occurs elsewhere in reality. (p.146-7)

Two dusty tracks run off side by side towards the horizon. No water, nor even the promise of any down there... While up here, viewed at eye level I through my window there spans a layer of stratospheric haze that in it’s own formless way demarcates the terrestrial from ultra-marine blue sky. When I shift my focus to the surface plane of the airplane’s window, I notice that it is marked by finely etched filaments of condensing ice.

The otherness of the desert below presents itself to me as strangely familiar, reminding me of the ridges run across the palms of my fingertips. As I tap out these words at the speed of 500mph from the abstracted altitude of 36,000ft, my recollection of the works produced by Paul Catanea and Jane Prophet make me think about humaness – theirs as much as mine, and any other viewer of their work - and how the structure of exploration underlies our very being.

Vince Dziekan

Vince Dziekan is Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Art & Design at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. In addition, he is affiliated with the Foundation for Art & Creative Technology (FACT) in Liverpool, UK as a FACT Associate and is Digital Media Curator of The Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA).

References:

LeA International Curatoriate:
Curator: Vince Dziekan, (Monash University and FACT Associate).
Senior Curators: Lanfranco Aceti (Goldsmiths College and Sabanci University) and Christiane Paul (The New School and Whitney Museum of American Art).

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Jane Prophet

Explorations of Structure

Dawn at The Lafarge Exshaw plant, Lac des Arcs, Alberta, Canada. These photographs were taken in November 2002 during a visit to Banff Centre for the Arts, using a 6:17 Fuji panoramic camera.

Elements of these art pieces are derived from fractal mathematics. The ‘blot’ series takes its name from the process of using a ‘blot’ or random instant mark as the source of inspiration. Gordon Selley’s mathematical code makes the trees in these images and generates different 3D forms each time it runs. Prophet responds to the images and the code is altered accordingly to produce different outputs. Small changes to random numbers in mathematical equations result in huge shifts in the final form of the works.

The composition of the final images is a response to the V&A’s British Watercolour Collection. The landscape scenes are of The Lafarge Exshaw plant, Lac des Arcs, Alberta, Canada. These are the first in a series of new works by Prophet exploring locations that combine reflecting pools and natural ‘sublime’ landscapes with icons of the industrial or technological sublime (aggregate works, power stations and other ‘cathedrals’ of industry).
The works were a response to the Victoria & Albert Museum’s British Watercolour Collection. Exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London as part of the ‘Digital Responses’ series curated by Paul Coldwell.

The landscape scenes are of The Lafarge Exshaw plant, Lac des Arcs, Alberta, Canada. Each image is a Lightjet print, 80” x 26.5”, backed with aluminium and front mounted with acrylic. An Edition of 10.
ESCAPES

A screen-based digital work reflecting on the politics of landscape, construction and ownership. Drawing on works by painters such as Gainsborough and Poussin as well as the creations of landscape designers Humphry Repton and “Capability” Brown, Decoy consists of a series of animated digital “paintings”, displayed on plasma-screens, in which subtly evolving fractal landscapes are combined with photographic images of the views of the grounds of various country houses.

This quintessentially English, Arcadian vista has entered the popular imagination as an embodiment of Nature and the Natural, yet it is almost entirely artificial in its construction. By combining these vistas with evolving simulated landscapes, Prophet unearths the artificiality of each landscape’s past, either by returning the setting to a closer approximation of “wild” nature, or by allowing the viewer to project ahead into the future, according to different growth and planting patterns.

English oaks once formed an avenue in the parkland at Blickling Hall. Most were removed to form the characteristic clumps of trees favoured by Capability Brown and Humphry Repton. Using the existing trees as a guide, the avenue is reinstated.
As part of ‘Life is Beautiful’, ‘Decoy’ was double hung with 18th & 19th century watercolours from The Laing Gallery’s permanent collection. In this showing the work drew attention to its relationship to painting.

Test computer rendering of tree form for ‘Decoy’. Based on algorithms by Gordon Selley, this tree was used as the basis for developing data sets that could be used to make Rapid Prototyped trees.
Each of these works addressed ideas of model or ‘ideal’ landscapes. In contrast to her large installations, Prophet created a series of ‘Model Landscapes’ of fictional states which co-exist alongside recognisable landscapes.

Screen component Rapid Prototyped tree piece. Each of these works addressed ideas of model or ‘ideal’ landscapes. In contrast to her large installations, Prophet has created new miniature landscapes viewed on small monitors, drawing the viewer in and demanding close inspection. These small object based vignettes are subject to surveillance by cameras.
Since they were first made in 1898 to commemorate the building of the Eiffel Tower, Snow Globes have been used as mementos to encapsulate key landmarks. They have become the quintessential souvenir object, now slightly outdated and nostalgic themselves. Shaking them brings the scene to life for a brief and artificial moment of suspended disbelief.

This dome is a memento to the English orchard which is fast becoming an endangered species. The apple tree inside died in a commercial orchard, its contorted shape a result of pruning.
Cow parsley (Anthriscus sylvestris). This native British plant is familiar to people living in both rural and urban areas where it can be found on railway banks, in ditches, at woodland edges and on waste ground. In the past children used the hollow, furrowed stems of this plant as peashooters.

Cow parsley is of interest to mathematicians and engineers because it (and other members of its family such as Giant Hog Weed) show geometric consistency over a very wide size range in an order of magnitude ranging from less than 1m high to 7m.

This suggests that, within limits, whatever the size of the structure of ‘(Trans)Plant’ one can predict the sizes, lengths and angles needed to produce a structure of any given size. This geometric consistency also means that the resulting sculpture will look both biological and familiar.

Using the measurements of cow parsley that Professor Vincent has in his extensive database of natural structures, we can predict the design of a structure up to twice the height of the biggest known similar plant (7m).

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Jane Prophet was born in Birmingham. Her father, David, began his career as an apprentice at Birmingham’s Austin Motor works. He was fired for spending too much time working on his racing cars (while someone else clocked on for him) and for insubordination, evidenced by late night welding sessions in the factory workshop that resulted in giant amalgamations of metal work.

The design process and materials of Prophet’s piece '(Trans)Plant' which was made specifically for Birmingham reflect her father’s love of mechanics and his respect for innovative manufacturing.
(Trans)Plant:
1. a type of experiment where an organism is moved from one location to another
2. Different species and varieties react differently to transplanting; for some, it is not recommended.
Avoiding transplant shock—the stress or damage received in the process—is the principal concern.

The kinetic mechanical art work installed for 2 weeks in Birmingham. Shown collapsed and beginning to open.
‘(Trans)Plant’ is equally influenced by her close relationship with Arthur Watkins, her maternal grandfather, from Sparkhill, a metallurgist who entertained her by making objects out of wire and showing her how mercury behaved. Her fascination with plants and their shapes started during her childhood and came from his discussion of plant chemistry and her mother’s life-long passion for horticulture and garden design.
The works were all produced to be installed at Samuel Johnson’s House. Johnson gradually acquired a reputation in the literary world, and in 1746 he was commissioned by a consortium of printers to write a dictionary of the English language. At this time he rented 17, Gough Square, London, which served as both home and workshop for the Dictionary. While working on the Dictionary, he also published a series of essays under the name “The Rambler”, and contributed to “The Adventurer” essays. (He was later to write another series as “The Idler”). The Dictionary of the English Language was eventually published in 1755. It was not (as is often claimed) the first English dictionary, but it was certainly the most important one published up to that date. It went through numerous editions, and was not superseded until the publication in 1928 of the Oxford English Dictionary.

To mark the Tercentenary of the birth of Samuel Johnson there was an exhibition of works by a group of artists from June-September 2009, set within, and in response to, the house where Samuel Johnson compiled one of the first English Dictionaries.

Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784, was widely regarded as the leading literary figure of his time, so much so that it is often referred to as the “Age of Johnson”. He was (amongst other things) a poet, biographer, lexicographer, essayist, editor and reviewer of the English Dictionary. Prophet’s works comprised of a series of laser-cut books, the first of which is shown here, cut through with Samuel Johnson’s profile.

A commemorative Jasperware medallion of Johnson was issued by Wedgwood in 1784. Jane Prophet’s Portrait of Samuel Johnson, a dictionary in which a profile of Samuel Johnson is cut through the pages (produced in an edition of 10) offers a comparable memento.
The old floors of Samuel Johnson’s House slope dramatically at times. The dictionary, open at the page for “wedge” props up the antique display case and keeps it level.


It is well-documented that Samuel Johnson was hard on books, capable of ‘tearing the heart’ out of them and leaving them—as if discarded—on table or floor as soon as they had served his immediate purpose. But these specimens, with their pages so precisely and impressively laser-cut, are clearly not the result of careless treatment.

Prophet is interested in the way familiar objects can be adopted as symbols; for example, the use of the oak tree as shorthand for ‘Englishness’. In this installation she has transformed standard dictionaries by designing computer fonts to facilitate the laser-cutting of shapes of words and objects that evoke ideas of Johnson’s life and work.

Collectively the books symbolize his achievements as the leading literary figure of his time.
JOHNSON'S DEFINITION FOR OATS: A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland appears to support the people.

In the background: DENDROLOGY: The natural history of trees.

COLBERTINE: A kind of lace worn by women.

Displayed amongst objects in the permanent collection.
While 'My Silver Stalking Jubilee' may seem like a departure from the previous works, it is really similar. Not so easy to make, but nevertheless an exploration of structure. The structure of the stalker’s letters, the structure of his mind, the structure of his handwriting.

I have made a font by tracing his handwriting and then written a series of texts with the font.

I wrote a piece at each stage of designing and testing the font.

My rule was to only write about the experience of using the font.

This is Letter No. 6 and a close up of one section of it.

I have been stalked for 25 years. It’s the kind of thing one commemorates privately. Or not. I have received hundreds of letters. For a month in 2000 I kept the letters. They form the starting point of this photographic series.

I selected sentences from them and keywords from these sentences. I typed the words, one at a time, into Google image search.

I then set up an A3 document and wrote the whole sentence from the letters, containing the word, into the document. Next I placed images from the search into the document and worked intuitively, removing images until I had a combination of one image and a line of text from the original letters.

I went back to Google and searched for the exact object that I had an image of, but that was for sale. I bought all the objects and had them shipped to my studio in London. I arranged to do a professional high resolution studio shoot with my friend, the artist, Bill Jackson.

Image: No. 1 Catwoman.


STRUCTURE OF PSYCHOSIS.
This interests me for a number of reasons. Thomas More's notion of utopia as a non-place resonates with thoughts of landscape and utopia. What is a non-place? An impossible goal? Something that exists only in the imagination? A place forever lost? I am also struck by the concept that utopian projects must destroy the old, which smacks of the tired debate about digital media and how they 'must' destroy books, face-to-face communication etc and reminds me of the post-human cryogenic fantasy of a disembodied future (the ultimate de-manifestation of the Cartesian project). The very idea that utopian projects must destroy the old seems utopian indeed.

Stevenson goes on to suggest that there is, "a role for visions, or eutopias, as sets of ideas, in creating social change. And if a preferred vision seeks a future unfettered from the limitations of the status quo, critical thinking is necessary in formulating that vision..." This is the kind of role I hope my visions have, what I aspire to. That on a very small scale the works question and erode the status quo and prompt critical thinking at some level.

Reference: http://www.tonystevenson.org

At this point in the unfolding presentation of your project, the most recently posted image is of an engineering drawing related to your '(Trans)Plant' project. My curiosity was piqued when I recognized that this is the first time in the series that an image of yours has not been accompanied by a descriptive entry. I'm intrigued by what possible significance this blank, pause or breathing space might play in the overall exposition of your work. So, I'm wondering if you might like to bridge that gap by commenting on how your work connects ideas relating to the organic with the mechanical?

Interview with Jane Prophet, “Explorations of Structure” by Lanfranco Aceti and Vince Dziekan

Vince Dziekan (LEA Digital Media Curator)

Firstly, welcome, Jane!

Over the past few weeks we've enjoyed the progressive unfolding of the project you've put together in response to LEA's new digital media exhibition platform. You've titled the project "Explorations of Structure". Having just passed the midway point of the exhibition, it has become quite apparent how your practice is driven by an incredible curiosity. You've successfully shown how your work over a number of years has been underpinned by a wide range of interconnected interests, spanning themes such as the sublime and beauty, natural order and human mediation of the landscape.

To me, your work is constructed as a type of utopian project; and as such, its imaginative excitement can be described as coming from "the recognition that everything inside our heads, and much outside, are human constructs and can be changed" (I'm drawing here from the introduction to 'The Faber Book of Utopias'). I'm wondering if this resonates with how you see your work?

Jane Prophet

My gut reaction was to resist the idea that I am engaged in a utopian project. But then I paused to consider that the notion of utopia is equally a 'construct that can be changed' and so I reluctantly agree. The landscape themes in my work is very much about exposing how 'constructed' so-called utopian or sublime experiences of nature are. I haven't been able to access the Faber introduction that you refer to but take the position that utopian thinking, while problematic, can be used to imagine alternative visions of the future, which is how I would fit works like 'Decoy' into thinking about utopia.

Writing about social change and its relationship to utopia, Tony Stevenson comments on John Carey's Faber and Faber introduction and says, "It is where we store our hopes of happiness. But this commonly held notion of utopia as a good place is probably not what Thomas More had in mind when he coined the word. It simply means nowhere or non-place, devoid of either optimism or pessimism. Whether conveying either desires or fears, Carey sees a dilemma in seeking to create a new world, utopian projects must destroy the old".

Vince Dziekan

At this point in the unfolding presentation of your project, the most recently posted image is of an engineer-
Jane Prophet

Good point. This is a page from engineer, Phil Cash's sketchbook. The image on the left is a still (thanks to Gideon Corby) from an animation that was made to give the engineer a sense of the movement I was hoping to emulate.

Why the ‘blank’? Maybe because it is not ‘my’ image. But also, on reflection, it was an important break-point in the development of the piece. This drawing marks the moment when the graceful and elegant movement in my mind’s eye collided with the stark engineering truth of aluminum and motors.

We got movement which was less smooth than I’d hoped (yet actually closer to how those jointed wooden toys work). The whole sculpture became literally heavier and visually heavier.

During the process of developing and making the work, this image does coincide with me taking a breathing space and taking stock.

We all moved forward and the piece looked much like this when complete.

Philip Cash

Interesting that you highlight grace and elegance here, where as my perspective at the time was much more heavily influenced by the mechanisms of the toy and the idea of the plant structure playing against that toy like theme.

In terms of the sketching and development of the final configuration, this was very heavily influenced by pragmatic considerations such as available materials and complexity. Also the idea of the toy weighted heavily on some of my decisions leading me towards a more chunky design.

Jane Prophet

Yes, Phil, you are correct. The movement of the toy was MORE essential. There was always a tension in this idea between the way those toys move and the elegance of the plant. It was more important to get that movement closer to the toy (which you did, wonderfully).

A number of the works shown as part of this online posting embody similar tensions, as I explore different levels or types of structure in one piece. In most cases choices are made such that one theme dominates in the end, and it’s always sad, but essential, to let go of some interests to hone down and declutter the final work.

When the piece was installed I loved the way it looked so broken, then ‘re-formed’ then broke down.

Jane Prophet

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Paul Catanese

Visible from Space

“Visible from Space” by Paul Catanese. Research and development for “Visible from Space” was supported by a month-long residency in June 2010 at the Goldwell Open Air Museum, just outside of Death Valley.
E-SCAPES

PAUL CATANEO, VISIBLE FROM SPACE, (2010).
Visible from Space

Paul Catanese, Visible from Space, (2010).
PAUL CATANESE, VISIBLE FROM SPACE, (2010).
E - S C A P E S

PAUL CATAINESE, VISIBLE FROM SPACE, (2010).

PAUL CATAINESE, VISIBLE FROM SPACE, (2010).
Simultaneously—I have been thinking about the L’Arbre du Tenere—a lone tree that lived in the Saharan desert in Niger, the last of a stand of ancient acacias desperately isolated in an encroaching hostile landscape. The ancient tree was well known as a caravan route marker and can be found as a single tree marked on maps in the middle of the vast desert. Oddly, this lone and ancient tree which shirked the reality of the desert met with its end after a truck driver ran into it in 1973. That lone tree of the desert, an odd single blip on the map—much like our geosynchronous satellites, occupies less than a pixels resolution worth of expanse when viewed from a distance.

While it is significant that we are able to achieve these feats, modern satellite imaging and a proposal to create a drawing on the Earth so large it that could be seen from the moon are similar in the fact that both actions require a wealth of engineering and a lack of humility. Viewed in this light, the requirements for surrogate vision depend on how we define visible, and where we define space. As I contemplate these requirements, I am reminded of L’Arbre Du Tenere, whose monument: a large metal sculpture of a tree—is not even the corpse of a tree”.

Vince Dziekan
Hi Paul—Firstly congratulations on the project and in being so amenable to participating in this inaugural launch. As such, your work has been a real “test site” for LEA’s new exhibition platform. I’m wondering if you might like to start by giving us a bit of background about the site that you are responding to in this work (namely, Death Valley and in particular the Goldwell Open Air Museum)?

We have just reached the half-way point in the release of Paul Catanese’s “Visible from Space”: the inaugural project of LEA’s new exhibition programme. If you’ve been following the progressive release of Paul’s images across our social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and—of course—Flickr), you will no doubt have been struck by the work’s evolving character. To date, the release of an image-per-day has been accompanied by a very direct textual attribution, which reads as follows:

“Visible from Space” by Paul Catanese. Research and development for “Visible from Space” was supported by a month-long residency in June 2010 at the Goldwell Open Air Museum, just outside of Death Valley.

Over the remainder of the month, we will be using Flickr to host a conversation with Paul to tease out some of the ideas that are being alluded to through his images. Paul has provided the following artist statement—which, as one would expect, reads as intriguingly as his image-making—to initiate this process:

“The desert is a site of remote testing where paraconsistent logics are first considered feasible. Mistakenly construed as the opposite of the ocean, the desert teems with depth—it is also its own mirror.

I am conducting a thought experiment about the phrase ‘visible from space’ which erupted from a fanciful supposition to create drawings on the Earth so large they would be visible from the moon. For such a feat, the stroke width of the line would need to be close to 60 miles wide in order for barely a hairline to be visible from that distance. It is charming to think that the Great Wall of China is visible from space—but this is merely a popular mythology. It is difficult to resolve an image of the Great Wall even from the International Space Station with the naked eye—which orbits about 250 miles above the Earth, let alone from outer space or nearby celestial bodies. Of course, with military and even civilian imaging technologies, much greater resolution can be achieved as evidenced by what are now commonplace tools such as Google Earth.
I learned about my companions; the Silver Cholla and the Desert Mallow, about how delicious the first morning light is on the valley, how my methods of collection and observation via the overhead projector were at home in the harsh environment, and how the exploration of space yields results that are puzzling. Goldwell was most definitely the correct location—at that, I am certain. Needless to say, it was a very good place to work.

You speak of being struck by the incredible depth of darkness and the unexpected dimension of silence. These descriptions beautifully resonate with the opening passage of your artist’s statement, where you mention paraconsistent logics (that being, to attempt to deal with contradictions in a logical and systematic way). I see this reflected in the images you’ve produced.

Yes—building systems is a large part of my work, and definitely a large part about how I approached working on this exhibition for LEA. As soon as I started thinking about the “30-ness” of the series, I wanted to determine what the best structures were that would resonate with the details in the images. In this work, I am exploring multiple open-ended visual narratives and there were questions about whether the 30 in the series would be linear, chronological, or as it ended up, structured in a less-definable manner. I kept thinking about series of 5 and series of 6, or twinned series—a series of 5 running through a series of 6, or perhaps if one was to imagine two rectangles partially intersecting, there might be an area where a series of 3 and a series of 4 could fit into a meta-series of 5, and another that fits into a meta-series of 6.

I was playing games with the alphabet and with altered alphabets to assist me with determining how to arrange time and space. This type of game-playing with structure is creative exercise; it’s a way to assist me in viewing the materials from the desert in new ways. Beyond the meta-structures, what guided me in creating this series of images were a number of considerations regarding the notion of directionality of time, bifurcation, optics and gravity, as well as less determinable concepts such as asemic writing, ceramicity, and Otto’s notion of the numinous.

I am stunned by the natural beauty and vastness of the land. Immediately I noticed the silence, a quietness that I found intensely refreshing that allowed me to truly get into my head and observe the world and my thoughts in it. I often found my eyes stunned by the landscape—how quickly it could change, how dunes could disappear into haze, or mountains seemingly flattened, enupt with great sculptural form and drama under the shadow of clouds. Death Valley itself was much more varied than I anticipated; I began understanding the location less as a singularity, and more as a unique component of a larger system of valleys, of north/south mountain ranges, of rift after rift. In spite of a veneer of desolation, everything seems to have been tread upon, touched, turned, tunneled through.

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Paul Catanese

Thanks, Vince—this is definitely an interesting format; I was very intrigued when approached regarding how a series of 36 (or 28 or 31) images would be released one-a-day, glad to be part of the inaugural launch...

In terms of the site of Death Valley, and the Goldwell Open Air Museum—its an interesting place with a lot of history. Goldwell sits at the head of the Amargosa Valley in western Nevada. Its at about 3000’ in elevation, and the valley is several dozen miles long. From the residency site—a former mining barn—you can watch storms roll in for hours. There’s a sculpture park, and its also the site of a few ghost towns. Rhylite has a number of standing masonry structures and is just behind the barn, and the Barn itself is essentially right on top of the site of the town of Bullfrog (named for a spectacular green mineral all through the area)—the only things left of Bullfrog are half of a jail, 1/8 of an outhouse, and tons of thousands of rusting cans. Just behind the barn are a few very steep mountains, but they’ve all been open-pit mined—to the east and south are huge tailings. It gets incredibly dark—the milky way is clearly visible, and the glow from Vegas, about 50 miles away, is the only urban light pollution you’ll find. Its also important to note that the Nevada Test Site is about 20 miles east (also east, Area 51 about 50 miles as the crow flies), and Death Valley just over the western ridge line—about 6 miles.

I specifically wanted to work out there in the summer, in the hot month of June, when temperatures can soar—and did! What I was perhaps the most stunned by, more than the rugged geography, high temperatures, or vastness of the chemical desert—was the silence. I mean stretches of silence where you might hear a fly buzzing 10 or 12 meters away. For this thought experiment, it was critical to be located where my activities would be no more contradictory than any other activities in a desert—but the silence provided a dimension of retreat that I did not anticipate.

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Vince Dziekan

The desert has an incredibly long tradition as a subject which has lent itself to the widest range of interpretations. Mystical. Sacred. Allegorical. Moral. Romantic. In a sense, the depth, richness and variability of these different interpretations play themselves out in stark relief against the desert’s unforgiving visual emptiness. While the aesthetics are markedly different, I’m drawn to compare your project with America photographer Richard Misrach’s desert ‘cantos’—which also employ rigorous structural principles. Through an ironic counterposing of form and content, the impossibly beautiful mirage-like surface of Misrach’s photographs contemplate the transformation of the desert from sublime into a site that reflects militarism and environmental violence. The desert offers itself as something of a blank canvas, a surface that we—individually or collectively—can project our imagination and fears, desires and paranoia onto. Through your process, I’m wondering what the desert has revealed to you?

Paul Catanese

The Revelation of the Desert. If one were to attribute agency to the land; the will of the desert could be encapsulated in its attempt to harm. The relentlessness of the land itself: the chemical desert, acidic fans, calcium, dust, desiccation, and solitude might first indicate a depth of fatality. But this is only a veneer. Rivers flow underground. Like the ocean, it teems with life; it is a site for contemplating the finite and the infinite. The desert puzzles me. Every moment, the challenge of survival must be considered. It makes immediate the relation to the body, and therefore the mind. Synapses sizzle like ink on a brayer, the nervous system floods the ears with a high pitched whine that modulates the wind. Dust devils travel in packs, roam the valleys, rearranging bric-a-brac. The desert can yawn for a thousand years.

We’ve talked of my experiences, and they remain distilled in me: Dry heat. Silence. Darkness. The Milky Way. Discerning the sound of a fly 30 feet away from me, crystal clear. Sunrise on the valley floor. Toads, rattlesnakes, Hydrating. Long, slow hikes through rubbish. Rabbits. Early Dawns. Rattling roof. Dust devils that chase me up into the barn and throw my supplies in a heap. The lingering odor of helium and latex. Time to think. Drawing for hours and hours until I passed out with my pen in my hand. Getting dizzy and telling myself to get out of the sun. Fighter jets buzzing by a few dozen feet above me as I drove north up the Panamint valley. Trona. Man-made rubies. The wind blowing from every direction at once. Mercury. The white scar on the rocks at the southern end of the valley just south of the Amargosa farming area turnoff towards Shoshone, gleaming from miles away. Searching for seafoam green chips of gravel for hours. Listening.

I appreciate the reference to Misrach; the canto is an appropriate structure to respond to the richness and paradox of the desert, which is hidden. It reminds me of the cowboys and ranchers that I met. Intimately engaged with the land, they do not willingly seek out the taxonomies of science. Desert nomenclature is colloquial; mountains have personalities, with names like Charley or Wayne, who are putting on grey hair when it’s cold, even in the summer; the valley is a familiar who wears a pretty spring dress.

I really like the anecdote about desert colloquialism, so I might seize on this to take us back to the visual personality of the images you’ve crafted. Can you speak some more about their highly poetic vernacular and how asemic writing—which you mentioned earlier—relates to some of the concepts you are exploring in your work?

With regard to asemic writing, on the one hand, it was something I was most specifically thinking about with regard to the unique venue for the release of the image. I decided from the beginning that any of the images should be able to function as a starting point; and though there are certain irreversible concepts present, traversing the multiple visual narratives should be possible whether perusing forwards or backwards. So, partially, the poetics of the image you’re responding to are my approach towards composition, space, and narrative—but also my decision to particularly consider the idea of two twinned series that might occasionally take place simultaneously. Bifurcation followed backwards; ballistics frozen; helium trapped in the membrane of an image. In several cases throughout the series, the images reference events and experiments I conducted during my stay in the desert, working with rockets, helium balloons, windsocks, smoke, dust, mirror, lasers, wireless and
E - S C A P E S

Infrared cameras, as well as found objects: natural and manufactured. Some of these references are pho-
tographs; others are culled directly from my sketches and field notes. There is no division between notes
describing planning, simulation of experiments, or field notes describing results. But perhaps more specifically,
visual synopses of scientific quantification or accumulation such as diagrams, graphs, and charts, detached
detached from the context in which they were produced, begin to nod toward the asemic. These forms of message are a
central feature in much of my work – both in the planning and performance. The rupture between communica-
tion encoded and message received provides a playful disruption in the language of narrative.

The colloquialism of the desert is omnipresent; between the detritus of human encampment, the violence of
tourists, scorpions, and crashed Cessna's, thirsty geologists, bordellos, experimental automotive test
teams, ranchers – nothing is entirely familiar – and that which is recognizable, assumes new meanings, becomes
less of a solid.

Lanfranco Aceti

I would like to actually continue along the line of this topic that you and Vince have been discussing – the
relationship with the landscape as a complex interaction beyond the anthropocentric definition of psycho-
graphic and traditional representations of alterity. I am curious to know how you framed your relationship to
the 'intuitive' and 'aesthetic' colloquialism with the desert... Was it a planned structure – or something that you
just let flourish inspired by the pre-existing discourse and already existing semiotic signs of the landscape?

Paul Catanese

Hi Lanfranco – this is an interesting question. I've been thinking quite a bit about this, especially as I have come
to find that residencies are an important part of my art practice; playing a valuable role; especially in providing
time to insert oneself in a new context. It is often very tempting to plan, or even perhaps over-plan the experi-
ence. That being said, it has continually been the organic development of ideas that indeed flourish within a
given space or location that are the most rewarding for me as an artist.

Paul Catanese

One of the aspects of contemporary art (in new media or other platforms) is that of revealing new concepts
to contemporary artistic practices?

Lanfranco Aceti

My next question is on the importance of the traditional concept of residency and its relationship to space.

Lanfranco Aceti

One of the aspects of contemporary art (in new media or other platforms) is that of revealing new concepts
to contemporary artistic practices?

Hi Lanfranco – this is an interesting question. I've been thinking quite a bit about this, especially as I have come
to find that residencies are an important part of my art practice; playing a valuable role; especially in providing
time to insert oneself in a new context. It is often very tempting to plan, or even perhaps over-plan the experi-
ence. That being said, it has continually been the organic development of ideas that indeed flourish within a
given space or location that are the most rewarding for me as an artist.

Paul Catanese

So, to a certain degree, I did spend a great deal of time planning for my experiments with rockets, balloons,
and at the town where I was staying began to play a pivotal role in providing a more tempered experience. I
was at Goldwell long enough to begin to acclimate to the remoteness of the location. There was a general
store, gas station, a lunch counter, a saloon, and very little else. When the groceries ran out on Monday, you
would have to wait until the truck showed up on Wednesday – or drive ninety miles to the next closest supplies.

Paul Catanese

In attuning to these new rhythms, I began to find that there is a relativism to remoteness. On excursions from
the home base of the residency into the wilderness of the Amargosa, Death and Panamint Valleys, which lie
parallel to one another; the outline of familiar mountains and dunes provided much more than way-finding, but
rather, an unexpected sentiment: comfort.

Paul Catanese

Perhaps it is the immediacy of mortal danger; where preparing for scenarios like a flat tire, or running low on
water, that would otherwise be inconveniences, is what heightens the sense of ease that comes with ap-
proaching the familiar; a particular stand of bushes, riparian glade, or even a bundle of fencing, railings, or shift
from sand to gravel roads. After a while, it seems reasonable to provide these physical features with nicknames
and epithet, since it is appealing to pretend that they are in some manner benevolent.

Lanfranco Aceti

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One of the aspects of contemporary art (in new media or other platforms) is that of revealing new concepts
to contemporary artistic practices?
My residency experiences have focused on a break from the everyday, while simultaneously engaging with new individuals, sites, and technologies. Embodiment of the unfamiliar coupled with a self-induced rupture from routines, and the subsequent reflection on my reaction to the reorganization of my working processes is at the core of what I am seeking from a residency experience. Immersion is key. I want to learn things that I had not planned to learn, and physical relocation intrinsically catalyzes these types of experiences.

I do believe that ‘virtual residencies’ have a role to play and are absolutely capable with regard to challenging assumptions of space and inducing ruptures that encourage meta-reflection. In terms of what frameworks are suitable – I wonder if one pre-requisite could be to invite individuals who are in transit/traveling to simultaneously be in a virtual residency. I’ve often thought it would be interesting to participate in a residency program that funds individuals to travel somewhere and report back on what they find. Perhaps if this were coupled with a virtual residency, the role of the resident shifts. Where the experience of the residency tends to solely be first-person, perhaps it could be used to additionally provide a third-person view for everyone else. Of course, at this point, I’ve essentially re-invented non-virtual residencies to take on virtual components – and it sounds suspiciously like a travelogue.

I find the conversation we’re having contains elements of ‘virtual residency’ that are valuable. Participating in a discussion over an extended period of time with individuals who are in Australia and Turkey, while I’m here in Chicago has been rewarding, and in itself functions as a way of reflecting on the experiences of the desert. Our conversation is more critical and probing, since in the desert, it was mostly about experimentation, drawing, and survival, whereas we are almost entirely focused on the analyzing that experience. The framework reminds me somewhat of what is successful about the asynchronous discussions on Empyre. It could also be interesting to embrace the notion of conversation in dislocated space such as in ‘this spartan life’ or even ‘sleep is death’ – where virtual space functions as a location for conversation. That being said, I’ll admit, I’d prefer if I also were able to walk around Istanbul or Melbourne as part of our conversation, where I might have the feeling of being out of my element, or was able to share a cup of tea with each of you.

Paul Catanese
E -SCAPES

"The desert is a site of remote testing where paracoherent logics are first considered feasible. Mutually consistent as they are, they are not of this world. Deep in the heart of the desert -it is also its own mirror."

Paul Catanese’s ‘Visible from Space’ is a fanciful experiment in artistic imaging on a scale so large they would be visible from the moon. The artwork, never imagined by the artist, is a new and recent notion now the land is the desert landscape of Saharan desert in Niger. The world outside of the desert, an old single view on the map, would lose its geographical context, become less than a patchwork textile of regions where color turns from a distance.

Jane Prophet’s ‘Counterbalance’ is an artwork that uses the metaphor of balance and equilibrium to explore the treatment of politics of landscape in the form of a variety of visual representations, as well as elements derived from fractal mathematics.

"Not There", Public Art Intervention includes artworks by Tamiko Thiel, Sander Veenhof, Mark Skwarek, Will Pappenheimer, John Craig Freeman, Lily & Honglei, John Cleater, and Naoko Tosa.

"The desert is a site of remote testing where paracoherent logics are first considered feasible. Mutually consistent as they are, they are not of this world. Deep in the heart of the desert -it is also its own mirror."

About Paul Catanese
Paul Catanese is a hybrid media artist, Associate Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Arts at Columbia College Chicago and the President of the New Media Caucus, a College Art Association Affiliate Society. His artwork has been exhibited widely including at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, SFMOMA Artist’s Gallery, La Villette-Numerique and Stuttgarter Filmwinter among others. Paul is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including commissions for the creation of new artwork from Turbulence.org and Rhizome.org.

About Jane Prophet
Jane Prophet is Professor of Art and Interdisciplinary Computing at Goldsmiths College. Her research interests span Art, Computer Science, Digital Humanities and Technology. Recent works include The Husbandry of Flowers, a digital artwork for Frieze John’s House (2011), TransPlant, 2008, a kinetic aluminum sculpture based on the structure of a plant, The withdrawing Room, 2009; a light-based installation was created for a public space in Paris, and Souvenir of England, 2007, a preserved apple tree covered in black velvet flocking and displayed in a giant snow dome. She works in London and the US east coast, where she has recently relocated her studio.

E-scapes
Artistic Explorations of Nature and Science
February 1-March 1 2012

KASA GALERİ 2012 / ‘E-SCAPES: ARTISTIC EXPLORATIONS OF NATURE and SCIENCE’ | JANE PROPHET & PAUL CATANESE
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"Not There"
The Manifest.AR Venice Biennale 2011 AR Intervention includes artworks by Tamiko Thiel, Sander Veenhof, Mark Skwarek, Will Pappenheimer, John Craig Freeman, Lily & Honglei, John Cleater, and Naoko Tosa.

Publicity Photo Credit: Stephanie Paine

"From the Venice Biennale to Kasa Gallery, even though the artworks are Not There."

"E-SCAPES: ARTISTIC EXPLORATIONS OF NATURE and SCIENCE’ | JANE PROPHET & PAUL CATANESE
FEBRUARY 1ST-MARCH 1ST 2012

Photo Credit: Stephanie Paine

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Jane Prophet

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JANE PROPHET AND PAUL CATANESE, E-SCAPES, KASA GALLERY, FEBRUARY 1 - MARCH 1, 2012.
(Photographic documentation by Korhan Karaosyal.)
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Jane Prophet and Paul Catanese, E-SCAPES, Kasa Gallery, February 1 - March 1, 2012. (Photographic documentation by Korhan Karaoysal.)
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E-SCAPES

JANE PROPHET AND PAUL CATANESE. E-SCAPES, KASA GALLERY, FEBRUARY 1 - MARCH 1, 2012. (PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION BY KORHAN KARAOYSAL.)