

## The Shape of Things to Come

I have no fear here, in the world of trees, weeds—and growing things. This was the world I was born into—a world of wild things.

bell hooks, "Free Spirits: A Legacy of Wildness"

When bell hooks states that she belongs to a landscape, a place, and an experience in childhood of wild things, she is speaking of landscape as a physical area, infused by memory, and shared by a multitude of ethnicities and people. hooks' understanding of landscape is not easily transferred to a photographic landscape—although they share many qualities—as the photographic landscape occupies a place manipulated, a place where physical, cultural, personal, and aesthetic values are fused. Still, there is a point where the photographic landscape perfectly coincides with the ideas of bell hooks in "A Legacy of Wildness," when she states that: "Their 'Appalachian values,' imprinted on my consciousness as core truths I must live by, provide and provided me with the tools I needed and need to survive whole in a postmodern world."<sup>1</sup> This statement from hooks aligns with the photographic landscape in the sense that its landscape does not belong somewhere, but belongs to someone.

When Eugène Atget photographed Paris in the late 19th and early 20th century, he photographed, and manipulated the landscape into something that was his, very much personal, but simultaneously dependent on a concrete in-the-world landscape. As Walter Benjamin notes on the photographs of Atget in the essay "Little History of Photography," "He looked for what was unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift. And thus such pictures, too, work against the exotic, romantically sonorous names of the cities; they suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship."<sup>2</sup> Benjamin goes on to explain the concept of "aura" in relation to photography as that which is a "strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be."<sup>3</sup> Benjamin's definition of aura reveals another connection to landscape photography, especially for the projects by Adam Jeppesen, Linn Pedersen, Inka & Niclas, Luca Tombolini, Kasia Klimpel, Mårten Lange, and Jim Mangan presented in the third edition of *The Plantation*; that is, the bringing-closer and reclaiming of a contemporary and personal landscape that creates a cross section between the physical world and one's own subjective understanding of it. As Benjamin explains in *Little History of Photography*, "Every day the need to possess the object in close-up in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative."<sup>4</sup> Then, what connects the projects in the third volume of *The Plantation* is just this; a simultaneous investigation of the landscape through photography and a refusal of its pure physical form.

The title for this volume of *The Plantation* is "Sculptural Landscape," and when you sculpt, you manipulate a material, manipulate it to something recognizable to your own eye, and to the world around the material at hand. And as you sculpt clay, stone, and metal these artists sculpt the

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, "Free Spirits: A Legacy of Wildness", *Appalachian Heritage*, Volume 36, Number 3, Summer 2008, 39

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography", in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, part 2, 1931-1934. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005. 518.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 519.

landscape through the medium of photography. Moreover, sculpting demands action, it demands an active force directed towards a medium of some kind. In the projects in *The Plantation: Sculptural Landscape* the force is not directed towards the medium of photography as such, but towards the physical landscape the artists are in. Through this action, the projects presented here become landscapes that disappear and reappear in different forms, they become continuing mediations of landscapes that are both familiar and unfamiliar to us. This action towards the landscape manifests itself through different techniques in the projects; through abstraction, juxtaposing the near and the distant, infusing tactility, and a "going-out" to landscapes that to them, as well as us, are unknown and sculpt—or manipulate—them into landscapes that are personal, cultural, aesthetic, and physical.

As Atget, these artists shape and redefine their surrounding physical landscape, but more importantly they do it mirroring our contemporary moment. The world is a different place than the one Atget walked the streets of Paris in, manipulating with each step he took, so in turn these contemporary artists relate to a different world, a globalized world, and they create landscapes reflecting this fact. The physical places they photograph are not their homes or backyards, but can be places and journeys on the other side of the world. For our time, it is imperative to find a tool for understanding the landscape, how one can make a world of one's own, a world of vastness and unending possibility. By this, I don't suggest that the projects are all commenting on a certain sense of globalization, but rather that they are existing within a globalized world, and thus the landscapes in it must also be understood through a globalized reality. These projects also exists far from concepts like "utopia" and "Arcadia," and rather show an immense understanding of what it means to perceive a landscape, be in a landscape, and finally what it means to represent a landscape that can fathom the complexities of contemporary society.

What you hold in your hands are landscapes mediated through photography, an active sculpting from the raw material of their surroundings, these artists show us a landscape yet to come, a landscape that is private and subjective, cultural and objective, physical and ephemeral, all at once.