

An Island as a Sculpture

By Lorenzo Benedetti

It is generally understood that Dutch culture is firmly connected to the concept of 'landscape'. The genre, that in the course of the XVII century became a conventional cultural aesthetic to depict man's control over nature, was not only generated in the Netherlands, but it did become one of this country's most specific cultural identities. A relationship which evolved further through the development of the Netherlands into an important site for artists, cartographers, architects, and engineers.

The work of Jeroen Doorenweerd fits perfectly in this particularly Dutch framework. Moreover, many of his projects remind me, as an Italian, of how, in France at beginning of the XIV Century, an attempt was being made to form a "new vision" of the world. The man doing so was Francesco Petrarca, and the aesthetic experience he was trying to achieve was the climbing of Mont Ventoux on the 26th of April, 1336. The date is important because this is the first time that someone attempts to climb a mountain, not for a practical or strategic reason, but for the mere experience of the unique view which the mountaintop has to offer. In doing so, Petrarca was "creating" a landscape that, until that moment, existed only within his aesthetic and metaphoric vision. The recreation of this aesthetic landscape is a recurring theme in Jeroen Doorenweerd's oeuvre.

In "An island", a proposal from 2011, the production of the landscape is based on a one to one relationship with the subject. Doorenweerd reconstructed a landscape in the form of a massive sculpture on the surface of the water. Reminiscent of a proto-romantic painting by Salomon van Ruysdael, the ideal reproduction is proposed on a real scale – the pleasure of seeing a mountain and of seeing the landscape from the mountain itself – this double dimension of the landscape is the reference. The transformation into painting is reversed back into a landscape and the fictional image becomes a reality.

Indeed, this is one of the most important inventions of the landscape in art: the possibility of allowing a place to relocate. A displacement that creates the basis for the culture of commercialism in a land such as the Netherlands, and one which preceded the era of mechanised transport at a time before the possibility of travelling with ease, enabled one to see the landscape.

In the project "Let it flow", Jeroen Doorenweerd creates a metaphor for the condition of the artist. Like the climbing of Mont Ventoux, the artist has chosen a dangerous path toward achieving his goal. There is a similarity between the artist and the explorer in that there is a risk in regards to the outcome. Like the unknown regions that the explorer has to discover, the artist's aim is to find "new territories" in the landscape of contemporary art. This research is complicated because, according to Agamben, the contemporary is shrouded in darkness. We can feel it, but it is not visible, only with the perspective of time and distance do things become more clear and evident. Distance is a principal element in the landscape – things become a landscape at the moment that they become small and merge into one another forming a single image.

The relationship between the artist and the explorer lends an important aspect to the concept of the artist – not only as someone who creates artworks, but as someone who creates new perspectives. Just as the explorer provides new possibilities of discovering things which already exist, the artist too is a producer of new visions. The risk in attempting to accomplish this task, is that nobody knows beforehand what will possibly be found. In this way, the geography of the unknown becomes the vast terrain to be discovered by the artist, who undertakes the exploration at the risk of getting lost.

Published in 'flow and drift and perform and sit (random but in order), onomatopée 74