

Fashion and its sense of place



Fashion and its Sense of Place Landscape was the first photographic genre, but how influential is it in contemporary fashion? Photographic genres are forever blurring and more than ever we are seeing photographs from fashion shoots ending up in prestigious galleries. My own work is heavily influenced by the use of people within the landscape, and while I am starting to experiment with fashion within different landscapes. This essay gives me the chance to explore the history of people within landscapes and contemporary practitioners using the landscape to convey different meanings.

In the early 17th century Anthony van Dyck was one of the leading artists in England, having been commissioned by royalty. His portraits included King Charles I and his family. He would work either out of his own studio or a studio on location. Van Dyck's paintings of Charles on horseback emphasised the grandeur of the King, but in his portrait of Charles dismounted, Levey explains how the use of the landscape is more effective. Charles is given a totally natural look of instinctive sovereignty, in a deliberately informal setting where he strolls so negligently that that he seems at first glance nature's gentleman rather than England's King' (Levey 1971, pp 128) Antoon van Dyck, 1635. Louvre. [painting] Available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File: Charles_I_of_England. jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Charles_I_of_England.jpg) [Accessed 10/03/11] So, by using the landscape van Dyck has created a sense that the King is not much different from any other gentleman.

However, there are still subtle differences that could still be interpreted to signify royalty; the white horse with the gold flowing mane, the servants looking after the horse and carrying clothing. This could also be perceived as a fashion statement; the clothing stands out from the surroundings and it

seems that the focus is on the garments. It is hard to decide if this was in fact painted at this location or in the studio, as van Dyck was known to have created a few landscape paintings. Thomas Gainsborough was one of two (the other being Sir Joshua Reynolds) leading portrait painters in England during the late 18th Century.

Gainsborough often painted conversation pieces; a group painting where the group seem to be engaged in some sort of conversation or activity, often outdoors. 'The emphasis on the landscape here allows Gainsborough to display his skills as a painter of convincingly changing weather and naturalistic scenery' (The National Portrait Gallery, Anon, n. d) Thomas Gainsborough, 1750. Mr and Mrs Andrews [painting] Available at: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/thomas-gainsborough-mr-and-mrs-andrews> [Accessed 21/03/11] Gainsborough has been able to romanticise the landscape.

With painting and sufficient skill there is a possibility to emphasise certain things. Gainsborough has chosen to emphasise the landscape, filling more than half of the frame with it. This could be a statement of ownership, wealth or even fashion. The large flowing blue dress draped over the elaborate wooden bench draws the eye and contrasts the moody clouds beyond. Again, as with van Dyck's 'Louvre', Gainsborough has chosen a relaxed pose for the man, almost provoking ideas that he is "laid back". Power is a strong theme within this painting.

The gun is probably the most obvious, but if we look closer, the dog is at the 'Master's' knees looking up and obeying him. He is also standing over the

woman. She is looking very stiff, as if she doesn't want to anger him. The romantic era began in the second half of the 18th century; the visual arts, music and literature were all celebrated. Caspar David Friedrich was generally considered the most influential German romantic artist. He conveys a subjective emotional response to the natural world; he is best known for his paintings of contemplative silhouetted figures against night skies, morning mists and barren trees.

Friedrich's paintings commonly employed the Ruckenfigur—a person seen from behind, contemplating the view. Caspar David Friedrich, 1818. The wanderer above the sea of fog [painting] Available at: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5b/Caspar_David_Friedrich_032.jpg/471px-Caspar_David_Friedrich_032.jpg [Accessed 21/03/11] 'The message conveyed by the painting is one of Kantian self-reflection, expressed through the wanderer's gazing into the murkiness of the sea of fog' (Gorra, 2004) Gorra's explanation of this painting is that the wanderer is reflecting upon the landscape. The viewer is encouraged to place himself in the position of the Ruckenfigur, which means he experiences the sublime potential of nature, understanding that the scene is as perceived and is idealised by a human. Dembo agrees and adds: 'Wanderer presents a metaphor for the unknown future' (Dembo, 2001) This implies that the wide-open landscape could symbolise an open future and many paths to choose. The whole painting is about this figure, but who is he?

Not being able to see his face allows the viewer to identify with him. During the 1970s there were two photographers who stood above the rest as contemporary colour fine art photographers; William Eggleston and Stephen <https://assignbuster.com/fashion-and-its-sense-of-place/>

Shore. Both of these photographers are a great inspiration for my own work. Colour had not yet been accepted into art photography; these two photographers pioneered the change. Shore and Eggleston used colour to explore not the exotic, but the familiar. Shore highlights colour's ordinariness, its everyday presence in mundane situations.

Shore's love of the 'norm' drives him; he wants the viewer to experience his photographs, to recognise these landscapes without necessarily having visited the place. Stephen Shore, Available at: http://www.billcharles.com/catalog/stephen_shore [Accessed 22/03/11] On the left we have a photograph from Stephen Shore's series 'Uncommon Places' and on the right a shot for Urban Outfitters Fall look-book 2010. It is very clear that he can use his style both in a commercial fashion context and within a fine art project. Recently Shore has undertaken a lot of fashion photography.

With a large part of his portfolio being fashion, he is also experimenting with digital cameras and advertising photography. 'I take a picture and instantly forget about it' (Eggleston 2007, Pg24) This insight into the way William Eggleston works can help us understand his photography. What would seem to be just snapshots of everyday things and places are actually photographs about the aesthetical potential of the ordinary place. His photographs are not about colour (although they would not have worked in black and white). The strong colours complement but take backseat to the subject matter. William Eggleston, Available at: <http://www.ouruse.org/journal/2008/10/william-eggleston/> [Accessed 22/03/11] Looking at these two photographs by Eggleston you can instantaneously imagine them in a fashion context. The photo on the left is a typical style taken by Top Shop, and the image on the <https://assignbuster.com/fashion-and-its-sense-of-place/>

right could be anything from Chanel to Dior. Eggleston is a photographer who doesn't stop to talk; he takes a photo and moves on, no time for a second frame, no time to think about what he has just shot.

Within both of these practitioners' work the urban landscape is heavily used. All but some of the photographs have some sort of human interaction with the landscape; they have traces of human-beings. Both the urban and rural landscapes are heavily used within contemporary fashion, but does one exceed the other? Branding and season seem to be the two key things that affect which is used. Cass Bird 2010. Urban Outfitters Winter " 010 [photo] Available at: <http://www.sunrainey.com/urban-outfitters-winter-2010-catalogue.html> [Accessed 22/03/11]

This is a page from the Urban Outfitters Winter look-book. Although Urban Outfitters stock many different brands they still keep to a Boho-Chic style which is complemented by a rural landscape. However, as we have seen earlier, Urban Outfitters have also applied the look photographed in an Urban Landscape by Stephen Shore. Different landscapes evoke different feelings. In the photograph for Urban Outfitters by Stephen Shore you could believe that the model is going to work, just by seeing the buildings and the car behind him. In the photograph by Cass Bird it looks as if the model is on holiday.

So these two totally different ideas can easily be impressed upon the viewer just by the surrounding landscape. Is fashion art? A question asked by many people. Jill Medvedow explains in the book Chic Clicks that what is now published in fashion magazines, would once have been considered fine art

photography. She goes on to say: ' The boundaries between what constitutes art and fashion have therefore now become curious obstacles that can be, if not entirely ignored for professional reasons' (Medvedow, 2002)

Photographers do not limit themselves to these boundaries of genres for producing work.

Photographic categories are always blurring. More and more fine art photographers are excepting to work within a commercial context, even fashion, whether they like to admit it or not. ' Every photographic genre having been employed by fashion photography as a hybrid scenario' (Lipovetsky. 2002) Fashion is influenced by every photographic genre; it feeds from what is fashionable at the time. Does this make popular landscape photography fashion? When we see fashion look-books with photographs that don't even contain clothes, the landscape starts to become as important as the clothing.

We are being sold a lifestyle not just clothing. Gilles Lipovetsky explains: ' The centre of attention is no longer the clothing but the photograph and what it symbolizes. What we see here is a process in which the fashion photograph is becoming independent of the logic of clothing design disseminating themes and designs of its own' (Lipovetsky, 2002) We ourselves have to imagine how it feels to be in the landscape, the sun on our shoulders or the wind at our back, and how it feels to wear the clothes.

The beginning of the deadpan style can be traced back decades, and is linked to photographers such as Diane Arbus, Candida Hofer, and Bernd and Hilla Becher. From landscapes and portraits to more obscure images of

rooms and neighbourhoods, it is an aesthetic style that can certainly cross genre, and has been harnessed for a wide variety of subject matter.

Charlotte Cotton has this to say in her chapter on Deadpan in her book: ‘ The photographer who has come to stand as the figurehead of contemporary deadpan photography is Andreas Gursky. ’ (Cotton 2004, pp. 3) Gursky’s work isn’t focused on the people within his images; it’s more about the scale of the landscape. But when we think of deadpan we think of a person’s face not a landscape. So how can a landscape evoke emotion (or lack emotion). ‘ Gursky often places us so far away from his subjects that we are not part of the action at all but detached, critical viewers. ’ (Cotton 2004, pp. 84) We can only determine emotion from the whole image; Gursky does not create projects, so we have to look at his images as the final product, the whole photo. To say that Deadpan deals with no emotion would be wrong.

It can deal with very intense and emotive subject matter. Deadpan is about keeping the neutrality of the photograph intact; non Biased. Street photography, a favourite framework for deadpan images (often because the subject doesn’t have time to react to the camera), offers an interesting set of circumstances for photographers to explore. Deadpan is also about the overall aesthetics of the photograph and the things it could imply. A photograph with a smiling person evokes signs of happiness, whereas a person showing no emotion (deadpan) closes the gap between the viewers and subject.

Why give anything away? Of course, deadpan isn’t just kept within the boundaries of fine art photography. Fashion photography has taken deadpan and sold clothes with it. If we look at these two pages from British Vogue we

can easily see the inspiration from photographers such as Rineke Dijkstra and Alec Soth. The models that Dijkstra's chooses are interesting and beg for us to learn more about them, they perform for the camera in the most minimalistic way. The use of deadpan is still very much alive in contemporary fashion, and so is fashion's inspiration from art.

Landscapes play a vital role in creating a world for the clothes to be sold within; we kid ourselves into believing that a certain outfit will create a lifestyle for us. A landscape can be used to juxtapose or complement, strengthen or weaken an idea. Fashion images are being showed throughout the world in fine art galleries as well as in magazines, and the line between the two is being tested each day.. Bibliography Quotes 1. Michael Levey, *Painting at Court*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1971, pp 128 2. The National Portrait Gallery. Available at: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/thomas-gainsborough-mr-and-mrs-andrews> [Accessed 21/03/11] 3. Gorra, Michael Edward (2004). *The Bells in Their Silence*. Princeton University Press 4. Dembo, Ron S. ; Andrew Freeman (2001). *The Rules of Risk*. John Wiley and Sons. p. 10 5. Pg 24 Jaeger, A. C. *Image Makers Image Takers*. London: Thames ; Hudson 6. Lipovetsky, G. et al. , 2002. *Chic Clicks*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Publishers 7. Lipovetsky, G. et al. , 2002. *Chic Clicks*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Publishers 8. Lipovetsky, G. et al. , 2002. *Chic Clicks*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Publishers 9. Cotton, C. (2004). *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*.

London, Thames ; Hudson 10. Cotton, C. (2004). *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*. London, Thames ; Hudson Images Antoon van Dyck, 1635. Louvre. [painting] Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:https://assignbuster.com/fashion-and-its-sense-of-place/>

Charles_I_of_England. jpg [Accessed 10/03/11] Thomas Gainsborough, 1750.
Mr and Mrs Andrews [painting] Available at: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/thomas-gainsborough-mr-and-mrs-andrews> [Accessed 21/03/11]
Caspar David Friedrich, 1818. The wanderer above the sea of fog [painting]
Available at: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5b/Caspar_David_Friedrich_032.jpg/471px-Caspar_David_Friedrich_032.jpg [Accessed 21/03/11] Stephen Shore,
Available at: http://www.billcharles.com/catalog/stephen_shore [Accessed 22/03/11] William Eggleston, Available at: <http://www.ouruse.org/journal/2008/10/william-eggleston/> [Accessed 22/03/11] Cass Bird 2010.
Urban Outfitters Winter " 010 [photo] Available at: <http://www.sunrainey.com/urban-outfitters-winter-2010-catalogue.html> [Accessed 22/03/11] ID
Issue No. 312 [Magazine] Rineke Dijkstra 2002 Available at: <http://www.vincentborrelli.com/cgi-bin/vbb/101174> [Accessed 25/03/11]