

MOSAIC OF PUBLIC SPACE

by Jeroen van Westen

The arts can be seen as picking up the shards and building a new landscape, and, in writing 'landscape' I mean it as the genre invented by the art in The Netherlands in the late Middle Ages. What comes to mind are the miniatures as in the "Tres riches heures du Duc de Berry", the prayer book illuminated by the Limburg brothers. Elements representing the relationship with the land are juxtaposed such that a certain coherence comes to live around a horizon within a (rectangular) frame. We are able to travel in the image, in time and distance. Ruysdael cut and pasted his new landscapes in the 17th century, kept together by his pictorial abilities. His compositions suggest reality but certain elements are definitely Italian and objects like a dead tree, the shape of a stream, the light from different directions, the weight of clouds, the position of a church tower: everything is charged with symbolic meanings. Compare his work to that of Hans Aarsman, who creates photographs of very recognizable Dutch landscapes in which nothing is happening that would seem to justify taking a photo. Yet they intrigue, they reveal that a landscape that never tells just one story. Take Anselm Kiefer's work. Kiefer painted and constructed literally with shreds of look-a-like images from Dürer, comments on German history, thoughts by Plato, and straw from the fields around the castle where he has his studio. His giant landscapes are images burned on my retina, and in my nose. Works like "The Observatory" by Robert Morris in the Dutch new land, and "Sun Tunnels" by Nancy Holt on a landfill, both attempt to draw our attention to a possible meaning in the cosmos. At the same time they show in a distressing way how disintegrated the world is. The world can be seen as a chaotic mess, or it can be seen as a mosaic.

Zoopraxiscope, the name of one of Julian Scaff's websites, refers to a silent observer, the filmmaker who analyzes everything he sees, image by image, back to the essence of that one image of the twenty five making one second. It is in the last part of the name 'scope' (= a magnifier of images) one can create a link to the artist Julian Scaff, who is, just like Bob Recon, originally from the Sonora desert (or is it Palo Alto, California?) One is never sure if one is speaking to Julian Scaff, for he is also the elusive Bob Recon who knows more about art, architecture, music and film than is good for him. Bob is a traveler, a cosmopolitan finding sounds nobody else hears, studying the vernacular, just sitting and watching, listening. In his Renaissance mind these observations and thoughts condensate in an almost natural flow of

composing and storytelling, his new ideas culminating in long radio shows broadcast in London, Paris, and on the internet. It is these fluent transitions of separate realities which are significant. Recon filmed a documentary on Julian Scaff, and if you watch this, one realizes it is not only about the intertwining of different realities, but also of identities.

Both Bob and Julian lived in the tropical rain forest of Belize, Olympia on Puget Sound, in Scotland, and now in The Netherlands. They feel: "as an exiled outsider, my days are always broken" and that is the idiosyncrasy of a landscape artist. It is by understanding loss of 'home', of continuity, that questions emerge of what is essential for a landscape: the sense of place is sharpened by a feeling of not being in the right place. The artist starts looking for how people live, work, move from one place to another, how the animals live, he smells the wind, discovers lost memories. What, who? Which reality and what identity? Julian is fascinated by the roads and paths people and animals take in a landscape, he documents these, and designs routes by which in his work the sign (a route) and the signed (the landscape) form a unison: the work of art. He claims that "A path could be seen as the most basic form of architecture", backing up his claim with a quote from Francesco Careri: "a path is the most stable sign in the void ... the sinuous line drawn by points in motion." Julian continues: "Architecture deals with motion indeed, the movement of people through space. Exactly this motion and the interaction between people and the world around them, define space." These quotes taken from a text with his design 'Water Trees Path Cranes', and reminded me of what Mariska van den Berg wrote about Stanley Brouwn in 'Landschapskunst in het ruilverkavelingsgebied Weerselo Dulder': "Stanley Brouwn considers reality to be a work of art that has to be experienced as such: like a tiny being man finds himself a way through infinite space and is rarely conscious about this. It is Stanley Brouwn's purpose to consciously experience space, time and motion." In Julian's work these experiences are facilitated by his paths, and in the materials used for the paths. He expresses his expectation that reused lumber will possibly evoke memories to other places, other landscapes, perhaps to other objects and structures that it was once part of: materials with a soul. A boardwalk of re-used lumber; guiding bats with curved sheets of recycled plastics; the combination of a wind turbine park with a museum for ecology; it seems as if it is not only about using material with a soul, the works are not on their own, not autonomous at all. They are fully aware of their living surroundings from which they use the scarce raw produce. These are works carrying a responsibility in them, they take responsibility and they research responsibility: the artist dares to raise his head above the field and to ask directive questions

while at the same time shaping the commissioners program. Is this the prototype of the 'new' artist who builds along at a mosaic of public space, of landscape, or will the artist working in this method be expelled to the 19th century split off of landscape architecture by the high priests of art history and art criticism?

Bob Recon is one of these high priests of art history, yet, because he is from the desert he knows that what matters in the end is about what contains force of life, not about theoretical models but life-'resistant' questions. In that respect Julian Scaff is a great partner for Bob, because he knows the desert and the pastures in the polder, the tropical rain forest and the Pacific, and he wants to build new landscapes, fitting pieces together from all landscapes and the world of ideas. In their symbiotic work one can wander with all senses alert, sparks jumping to your intellectual appreciation addressing amazement about new science, small references to futurism, some absurdist elements to tickle your sense of humor. Together they pick up the pieces and fit them together intelligently, for directive and intuitively, selected on color and material, with a good sense of the past telling a new story. What may have looked like a possible entanglement of persona which are derived from the originator/creator, appears not to be about mystification, not about hiding behind each other, but to make clear it is a multiple reality that invokes art. Julian acknowledges the gap between art history and art in public space, and like a real architect provides us by means of his symbiotic other with a constructive design to bridge that gap. There is a point of departure and an invitation included. Reality is a work of art and by intensifying this pluriformity in a small area, a different view is made possible.