

Where Are We Now?

In January 2013 Carll Goodpasture opened an exhibition at Fotografiens Hus in Oslo. The works presented in the exhibition "Where Are We Now?" was an extract of one of his oeuvres main motifs – the Norwegian shore.

Many artists has paved the way for Goodpastures project. Depicting landscapes has a long tradition, also in Norwegian art history.

What is clear is that by the mid-nineteenth century, Nature and nature-related imagery were recognized as a "totemic" possession of all Norwegians. "The mountains are, in the last instance, our best Norwegians", proclaimed Henrik Wergeland, Norway's greatest romantic poet.¹

Depicting landscapes in art is a tradition that goes far beyond the nineteenth century. During the hellenistic period in Greece, in the first century AD, artists painted landscapes directly on the walls of the villas of rich people. These paintings did not depict a specific place, but rather combined elements to create an idyllic and enchanting scene. Landscapes as a motif were also important in Chinese art history. In 1100-1200 Chinese artists started painting water and mountains for meditation and contemplation. Buddhist monks meditated over different elements in nature. In 1444 the Swiss painter Konrad Witz made possibly the first painting that showed a specific landscape, namely the Genfer lake in Geneva, to tell the story of when Peter first met Christ after the resurrection. In the 1600s many artists started studying and painting landscapes, and thus opening people's eyes for nature's beauty. The French painter Claude Lorraine painted such beautiful landscapes that rich Englishmen actually shaped their gardens after his paintings.

This short outline of landscapes as motif in art history is meant to point out the significance of the connection between the real landscape and the picture of a landscape. These examples are of course from the history of *painting*. The relationship between a landscape and a photograph of that same landscape are of course much more constant and indisputable, but in the case of Goodpasture's works it is actually not that important to know where these photographs were taken. These works are to make us conscious and are to be viewed as environmentally engaged art.

¹ Nina Witoszek, *The Origins of the "Regime of Goodness" Remapping the Cultural History of Norway*, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2011), 32.

The photographs and the photography

Goodpasture is a biologist and a photographer that also works with photography as a craft. He does not own a digital camera, so all his works are by film. This is not the way most photographers work today. All of Goodpastures negatives are scanned and printed inkjet. The norwegian shore portfolio comprise of three kinds of camera works: large format, pinhole and digital montage that together become a sample of work moving from traditional document to alternative process to digital picture expression.

These different techniques open up for different photographic processes for Goodpasture. To use a large format view camera is slow and deliberate. It is the traditional process of finding the compositional motif and waiting for the light to get the shot. Pinhole in contrast leaves a lot to chance. Goodpasture describes that he sets up the camera and hopes. Without a viewfinder, he must feel, as opposed to think his way to the view. Exposure times are very long and since he only has a vague idea of what the film will record, he is often surprised by his own photographs. Even a light leak can be a lucky accident.

Goodpastures digital montages are quite different from the usual “straight photograph”. Once a motif is selected, his camera remains in place for a period of several hours to several days to record the changing light. Goodpasture takes at least two pictures; the first in black and white using a large format view camera. Then he switches to roll film and takes a series of color film exposures.

Sources of Inspiration

Today an artist is never the first to do something new. Every artist is more or less consciously inspired by previous artistic expressions. On the wall in Goodpastures home hangs a picture which means a lot to him – the lithograph *Piken med grammofonen* (The girl by the gramophone) by Kaare Espolin Johnson. The Norwegian artist is a great inspiration to Goodpasture partly because Espolin Johnson also depicted the shore in his works, and partly because his works are black and white lithographs that use chiaroscuro.

The artist Aslaug Juliussen writes about her first encounter with Espolin Johnsons works as a child in the book *Å låne øyne å se med. Kaare Espolin Johnsons kunstnerskap*. She says that

there is something dreamlike about the pictures *Gutten med konkylien* and *Piken med grammofonen*, and Espolin Johnsons illustrations in *Den siste viking* by Johan Bojer – a very meaningful book to Goodpasture that helped him understand the culture he moved to.

Kaare Espolin Johnsons works balance between the external and the internal. Some pictures are like a dream – like Chagall – but then they become something concrete: the boats on their way to sea. Yet there is something dreamlike about these images. He encourages you to invent a story about the picture. His works draw my attention to sensory experiences and dreams.²

Aslaug Juliussen

Goodpasture sees Espolin Johnson as a spiritual man who saw a rock he happened to pick up as a symbol of how heavy life is in his hands, and tried to put that feeling into his works.

Not everyone sees the spiritual landscape in a painting or a photograph. I try to get my subconscious feelings to consciousness. My first encounter with Espolin Johnson was his black and white drawings with dramatic chiaroscuro effect in Johan Bojers' *Den Siste Viking*, the saga of Norwegian sea faring culture. How many days have I spent lost in my imagination, day dreaming about how life along the shore must have been for the Norwegians of that time and place?

Carll Goodpasture

It is important for Goodpasture to convey that we still inhabit our immediate ancestors *place* even though we are not in the same *time*. Moving from California to Norway Goodpasture searched for something familiar in his lifes new place, but most importantly he wanted to follow in the footsteps of The Norwegians.

Thus I think of myself as searching for where Terje Vigen's boat might have foundered and trying to find the same places that Bojer wrote about and Johnson went to make sketches. Other than that, I go to the sea and look out to see like many other local folk just to experience it. And sometimes to get a picture as well.

Carll Goodpasture

Meaning and significance

A great picture is not just what it seems. It has to be about something and everything. Carll Goodpasture photographs because it's his passion. He does it to bring peace to himself and to

² Aaslaug Vaa, *Å låne øyne å se med. Kaare Espolin Johnsons kunstnerskap* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2007), 121.

promote feelings of wonder. With the result that social critic Chellis Glendinning calls “a visual embrace of pre-modern mind/soul with the natural world.”

But who in today’s postmodern world cares about “wonder”? Or, for that matter, takes the time it takes to do it. The question is critical because wonder is required to guide humanity toward planetary survival. Thus I see my work as environmentally engaged – with photos, books, and teaching as a sort of soft activism.

Carll Goodpasture

Conclusion

In the first half of the nineteenth century painters of landscapes were either viewed as painting poets, like Caspar David Friedrich, whose paintings is to promote feelings and “awe”. On the other side were painters like John Constable, that wanted to paint what they saw in the visible world. It was in this same period landscape painting became an independent genre that photography was invented. Goodpasture’s works are divided between these two approaches to depicting landscapes; he wants people to wonder while seeing his works, but since these works are photographs, they also represent a piece of the visible world.

Peace, beauty and tranquility are three words to describe Goodpasture’s works. Like the landscape paintings of John Constable and Caspar David Friedrich, something that seems calm is not necessarily without conflict. It is natural to understand life by way of dichotomies, so when something is calm and peaceful you often tend to think about the opposite. Silence before the storm. Goodpasture’s pictures express a feeling of something infinite and perpetual by way of the beautiful Norwegian shore. But the thing is that these views are changing fast.

(...)we all know that a photograph can never reproduce what the eye records. The point is, what you see isn’t what you get. The viewer has to think to extract a meaning. (...) In my work I am trying to create a visualization of how I perceive the natural world relevant to or “expressive of” my time on the planet. To an environmentalist, the shore portfolio depicts the life and death of the world and the Norwegian shore as we know it.

Carll Goodpasture

Goodpasture sees his works as a contribution to a revisionary Norwegian National Romantic cultural tradition. His expression is characterized by honesty, but also magic - at the same time beautiful, tranquil, unexplainable, moving, enchanting and real - photographed on nature’s own terms, facilitated by an understanding of the Scandinavian concept of “friluftsliv” which he hopes will contribute to a rising national consciousness.

Cecilie Tyri Holt