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## Disputed Landscape

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Opening: Thursday, 12. 3. 2015  
Duration: 13. 3. – 6. 9. 2015

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An exhibition series in cooperation with the Universalmuseum Joanneum

Contemporary photographic projects since the nineteen-sixties and seventies have dealt with iconographic and aesthetic modes of representing landscape from an increasingly analytical and critical perspective. One example is the now legendary exhibition “New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape” (1975), which made reference to the novel, suburban manifestations of landscape in the United States of the post-war period and took a stand against the continuing idealisation of the landscape—also by the medium of photography—as part of a fundamental rhetoric of the American nation itself. For contemporary photography, landscape came into sharp focus as a political landscape at the latest with this exhibition project.

Camera Austria’s contribution to the exhibition project on notions of landscape planned in cooperation with the Universalmuseum Joanneum would like to build on this critical perspective: in presenting photographic strategies and positions that represent the innumerable—ethical, social, cultural, political, economic—in-scriptions, markings and modifications of landscape, focusing on a politics of landscape and/or landscape as politics, and “responding” to this with a politics of representation.

“Disputed Landscape / Umstrittene Landschaft”—whereby the title is orientated towards a work by Anthony Haughey, “Disputed Territory”—takes the view that it is nearly impossible to comprehend landscape as something natural or original or contrasting with culture and politics, since it is situated almost entirely in a space of conflicting interests and visual strategies.

Three consecutive exhibitions present exemplary artistic positions dedicated to visual paradigms of landscape, uncovering landscape as history and ways in which landscape is enacted and produced.

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## The Visual Paradigm

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Opening: Thursday, 12. 3. 2015  
Duration: 13. 3. – 10. 5. 2015

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With

**Stephanie Kiwitt** (DE/BE)

**Christian Mayer** (AT)

**Nicole Six & Paul Petritsch** (AT)

**Ricarda Roggan** (DE)

In 1949, an expedition by the “National Geographic Society” explored the area of what is today “Kodachrome Basin State Park” in Utah. In an article published in *National Geographic* magazine the same year, Jack Breed called this area “Kodachrome Flat”, naming it after Kodak’s Kodachrome slide film: “It was a beautiful and fantastic country. A mile to the left near the base of the cliff I could see red pinnacles thrust up from the valley floor. The few natives who had been here called this area ‘Thorny Pasture’, but we renamed it ‘Kodachrome Flat’ because of the astonishing variety of contrasting colours in the formations.” Kodak discontinued developing the film at the end of 2010—the landscape itself continues to bear this name.

Christian Mayer (born in Sigmaringen in 1976, lives in Vienna) addresses this history in an interrelated series from 2011, in which one work—“Escalante Expedition Named This Glowing Valley ‘Kodachrome Flat’”—makes explicit reference to this naming of a landscape based on a film material. What Christian Mayer elucidates with this is the fact that how landscape is perceived in the modern period has become a question of the cultural technologies for recording, representing, distributing and archiving it. The spread of the regime of visibility to previously inaccessible and unknown regions brings forth something that was not initially part of social discourse and first enters into it as an *image*. In this sense, landscape denotes above all a showplace for the struggle for social hegemony, a struggle that ultimately also pervades the images themselves.

In her project “Wondelgemse Meersen” (2012), Stephanie Kiwitt (born in Bonn in 1972, lives in Brussels) documents a wasteland in the north of the Belgian city of Ghent in minute detail. This 100-hectare-large marshland is situated nearby the old docks and was originally a flood plain. Meticulously and in countless images—mostly reproduced in a grid and only occasionally as full-page images in the book of the same name—Stephanie Kiwitt documents this semi-urban area and captures countless details, however without ever providing an overall view of the landscape itself. It gives the impression of being a visual sampling, probing, exploring—in the detail-like images, culture and nature collide, various uses are suggested, but only fragmentarily and without context; the area itself remains inaccessible and unknown, through which the artist impressively documents a limit inherent in the documentary itself.

Since 2007, Ricarda Roggan (born in Dresden in 1972, lives in Berlin) has increasingly headed out into nature and dedicated herself to the genre of landscape representations in a way that is characteristic of her work. In the series “Sedimente” (2008), it is rock formations, vestiges of man-made stone quarries, which confront viewers as nearly abstract, hard surfaces and allow no escape. In the “Baumstücken” (2009), the artist herself leaves traces in the supposed nature and adjusts the pictorial motif for the shoot until all

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superfluous underbrush or foliage has been eliminated. Contrasting approaches such as documentation and construction, reality and model that become recognisable in her work also suspend the alleged images of nature in an undecided realm between nature and culture, thus underscoring the definitive power of the visual in the perceiving of landscape.

In many of their series, Nicole Six und Paul Petritsch (born in Vöcklabruck in 1971 and in Friesach in 1968, live in Vienna) employ the modernistic paradigm of surveying, the conquest of territories and landscapes—for instance by expeditions to the poles of the Earth—and transfer the spatial aspects of these conquests to specific forms of representation that often come close to abstraction. In the series “Innere Grenze” (2008), they follow the former border between Austria and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, which until 1920 asserted a claim to parts of what is today Austria, according to a specific cartographic grid. In “Meer der Stille” (2014), in contrast, they retrace on a meadow the tracks left behind by the members of the first successful moon landing. In both series, landscape becomes the foil for the spatial inscriptions of different regimes of domination and conquest, the visual cipher for the continuous expansion of the ideology of modernity, defined by normative systems for organizing space, landscape and resources.

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## Uncovering History

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Opening: Friday, 15. 5. 2015

Duration: 16. 5. – 5. 7. 2015

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With

**Tatiana Lecomte** (AT)

**Anthony Haughey** (IR)

**Jo Ractliffe** (SA)

**Ahlam Shibli** (PS)

**Efrat Shvili** (IS)

The artists in this second exhibition contribution to the project “Disputed Landscape” all deal with questions connected with the possibilities for visualising political and military conflicts in specific geographic areas, whereby landscape itself becomes a form of representation for these conflicts. Although these traces are themselves often nearly invisible, they have nonetheless shaped the appearance of the landscape. Hence, they become bearers of meaning for history, identity and memory, and have long since lost their “innocence”.

Ahlam Shibli orbits the Palestinian village of Arab el-Shibli in pictures, the site itself and the landscape that surrounds it, and that does not actually exist, since the village itself does not appear on official Israeli maps. The results are unspectacular pictures of normality that evade the spectacle quality of the conflict, but nonetheless bear witness to it. These traces are nevertheless deeply embedded in everyday life and hardly perceptible. As in other series, in “The Valley” (created in 2007), through the documentation of her exploring gaze Ahlam Shibli also works on making visible something that is concealed by politics, ideology, social forces and tradition—the landscape itself thus also becomes enmeshed in a “game” between visibility and invisibility.

In her series “As Terras do Fim do Mundo” (The Lands of the End of the World) (2009–2010), Jo Ractliffe captures the eerie silence of

the traces of the border war between South Africa and Angola in the nineteen-seventies, a war of which largely little to nothing at all can be seen. Her ghostly images explore the idea of “landscape as pathology” in the sense of how past violence manifests—indelibly and ephemerally, visibly and invisibly—in the present, both forensically and symbolically. This pathology, traced through the history of the present, compels us to engage with those locations that are allegedly subjugated to our mandate.

Anthony Haughey lived for some years close to the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; although this area was one of the most monitored and militarised zones outside of the East Bloc at the height of the so-called “conflict of Northern Ireland”, this demarcation line remained more or less invisible. Haughey’s images in his series “Disputed Territory” (2006) depict not only these surroundings and landscapes, but also how they were perceived by the two countries in different ways—the significance of many of the markings, objects and symbols are nearly impossible to identify and necessitate a precise and complex reading that politicises landscape as territory. Forgetting or remembering this way of reading and the significance of the territories are by no means neutral or innocent acts—in this sense, the images show that the unease in memory and history corresponds to a politically charged situation that refuses to disappear.

In “100 Years” (2007), Efrat Shvili documents a forest that girdles Jerusalem to the west and was planted one hundred years ago by the Jewish National Fund with trees not indigenous in Israel at the time. What today looks like an original forest was planted on a formerly Palestinian area in order to force out this population. The beauty and texture of the images suggests a naturalness that contradicts the political “nature” of this forest. The images become metaphors for a strategy of oppression and of making history invisible and hence a political metaphor.

Finally, Tatiana Lecomte in her work “Die El Alamein-Stellung” (2012) brings together slides from a private archive that she found in the rubbish, showing a woman in erotic poses at different locations over decades—also including on the beach of El Alamein in Egypt, which was a scene of fierce battles between German and Allied troops during the Second World War—with historical images of events during the war itself. Since it is not possible to distinguish the different image sources, world history becomes combined with personal history, whereby the beach of El Alamein as a landscape becomes a foil for the extremely diverse projections, destabilising the power to interpret history as well as landscape.

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## Enacting Landscape

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Opening: Freitag, 10. 7. 2015  
Duration: 10. 7. – 6. 9. 2015

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With

**Philip Gaißer** (DE)

**Michael Höpfner** (AT)

**An-My Lê** (VN / US)

**Sharon Ya'ari** (IS)

In the third part of the exhibition series, there is a blurring of the lines between documenting and presenting landscape, i.e. between representing and producing it by means of and with the aid of photographic acts—landscape as something that can plainly be seen and landscape as something that first becomes perceivable and imaginable as a result of a type of “use”, a process of visualising, and is enacted through a photographic project.

This is shown in an exemplary manner in Michael Höpfner's (born in Krems in 1972, lives in Vienna and Berlin) project series “Outpost of Progress” (2009–2010), the result of an eight-week walking tour over the high plateau of the Chang Tang in western Tibet—a region that is home to some five thousand people living a nomadic life according to age-old tradition. As an area to which tourists and foreigners have no free access, it is amongst the most unknown territories in the world. Hence, it is first in the course of Höpfner's exploration of Chang Tang that it turns out to be a place of organised labour camps, strongholds of territorial conquest, endless motorways as well as large-scale destruction of architecture and great damage to the environment. Far removed from any ideal of unspoiled nature, the region of Tibet that Höpfner documented seems, quite the contrary, to be an outpost for industrialised society's destruction of the environment. “Outpost of Progress” is not the outcome of documentary or investigative work; landscape instead first emerges in the process of being walked through and/or translated into the photographs created in the process: reality and imagination collide and give rise to a hybrid and unexpected image of landscape.

In Philip Gaißer's works, landscape also seems to be linked to diverse contexts and histories, which are themselves of both a scholarly as well as an artistic nature. In addition to landscapes, architecture or precisely illuminated photographs in the style of studio photographs, there are also snapshots and quasi-theatrical compositions. He therefore plants moments of construction within the apparent authenticity of the image, resulting in the creation of a moment of invisibility and ambivalence in these images, crisscrossed by ascriptions as natural or constructed, found or fabricated. Landscapes and architectures are generated in the register of visual production and first become perceivable as such as a result.

The artist An-My Lê's (born in Vietnam in 1960, lives in New York) series “Small Wars” (1999–2002) documents the regularly occurring re-enactments of the Vietnam War in a forested area in Virginia. These war games have complex backgrounds, ranging from the therapeutic motives of veterans to an expected passion for everything military. The landscape of Virginia becomes the foil for the projection of a war that was traumatic for American society, a war that, on its part, was deeply influenced by the jungle landscape of Vietnam. At the same time, both the historic failure and the arti-

ficiality of simulating the war are reflected in the difference and the contrast of the two landscapes.

Sharon Ya'ari (born in Israel in 1966, lives in Tel Aviv) is interested above all in how history is visibly inscribed in locations. In Israel, this history primarily has to do with the annexation of land, with its reclamation and subjugation, with the utopias of nature and landscape that brought the many waves of immigrants to the country, who then attempted to realise them there—against all common sense. Ya'ari visited numerous landscapes at intervals of a couple of years in order to document the—in part almost uncanny—combination of stasis and decline, care and neglect, nature and culture, remembering and forgetting. These photographs seem to be less documentation than a questioning of these locations and landscapes with respect to their significance for the production of identity and a sense of belonging. In them, the moment of having been fabricated and the artificiality of the landscape surroundings, its oscillating between a resistant opponent and its total appropriation, becomes palpable.