

LandEscape

A R T R E V I E W

November 2014

Special Issue

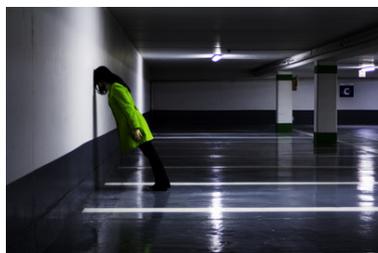
**WESSEL MIDDELBOS
SARAH STOLAR
BILLIE RAE BUSBY
BRICE BOURDET
ANNIKETYNI MADIAN
NAZ SHAHROKH
MARC LEE
DAMIR MATIJEVIČ**

Settee, 2011, detail

Photo by *Damir Matijevic*

Our net review presents a selection of artists whose works shows the invisible connection between inner landscapes and actual places. Apart from stylistic differences and individual approaches to the art process, all of them share the vision that art is a slice of the world to be shared. An artwork doesn't communicate anything: it simply creates a mental space. Language, gestures, or rather a masterly brush-stroke of a painter are nothing but ways to invite us to explore our inner landscapes". Thirty years have passed since this Borgesean deep and at the same time provocative statement has been written by the fine Italian writer Giorgio Manganelli.

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An approximate 45° incline

Brice Bourdet

(France)

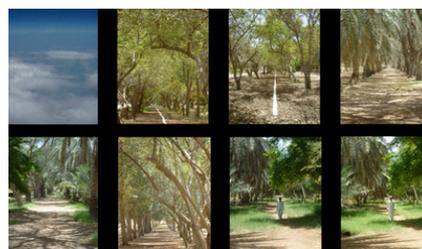
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" Ritualized and common locations where man has ceased to evolve, a deconstruction of a sham and seamless social illusion in which people roam aimlessly but also protect themselves from each other by means of consumerism, material goods and comfort. "

20 Naz Shahrokh

(UAE / USA)

" I strive to reference a harmonious meditative visual experience. Along with the use of detritus often, either synthetic or organic or the mélange of the two, I attempt to transform the typically disregarded and commonplace materials into something less ordinary. "



Windows

Sarah Stolar

(USA)

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" My drawings are a record of emotive internal events. They are a map to navigate my internal psyche and a witness to my subconscious. These landscapes, while familiar in composition, feel uncharted, dreamlike, and ethereal, evoking a visceral experience of exposing an inner truth. "

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The work by Marc Lee makes us think about the properties of the digital realm and what happens to the data that is generated by people all over the globe. We can't tell yet, what the consequences of archiving these often personal and emotional posts are in the long run.

Marc Lee

(Switzerland)



dawn, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 cm, 2013

Wessel Middelbos

(The Netherlands)

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" In my work I use my fascination for transformations of landscapes. The essence of contemporary landscape I think is movement and change. The landscapes I paint are a translation and stacking of various processes in the landscape which are connected with each other. "

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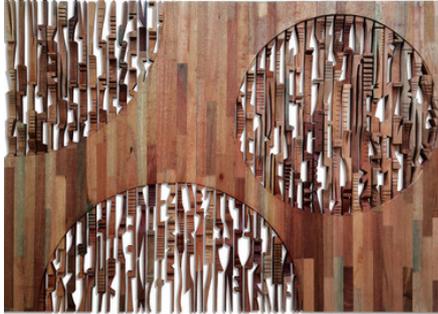
Damir Matijević

(Germany/Croatia)

"For me, Photography is a melody of light and soul. It is evidence of a singular moment in time and space, where we find our own reflections. Often, in contemplation of my surroundings, I find myself seeking a deeper meaning."



from Job Interview



Bali Belulai V, 5ft x 7ft, 2013, woods

Anniketyni Madian

(Malasya)

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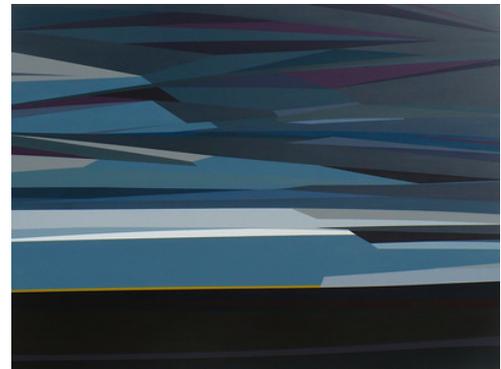
Drawing inspiration from the Pua Kumbu textiles of native Sarawak, the contemporizes tradition to create pieces that, despite their precise linear detailing and inert medium, flow in an effortlessly organic manner. A ceremonial cotton cloth woven by Dayak women in Sarawak, the colourful patterned Pua Kumbu textiles are considered sacred.

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Billie Rae Busby

(Canada)

"I am not a traditional landscape artist. I experience a paradoxical attraction for both rural and urban scapes. I am stirred by the sharp, significant lines that construct both places. My quest is to find balance in the void of the solitude prairies and the visual complexity of the modern city. I paint hard, crisp edges by masking off areas and adding smooth layers with a palette knife through control and precision."



The Outlook

Thomas S. Ladd

(USA)

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Los Paramos

The camera has lead me to understand that the surface of things are endlessly beautiful; that slow and careful observations of the external world will lead one to deep introspection; that the tension between the photograph and the 'real' world will never cease to engage peoples' imagination; that photography is a form of thinking; that, nothing is ever what it seems to be; and that, one's intentions

Wessel Middelbos

(The Netherlands)

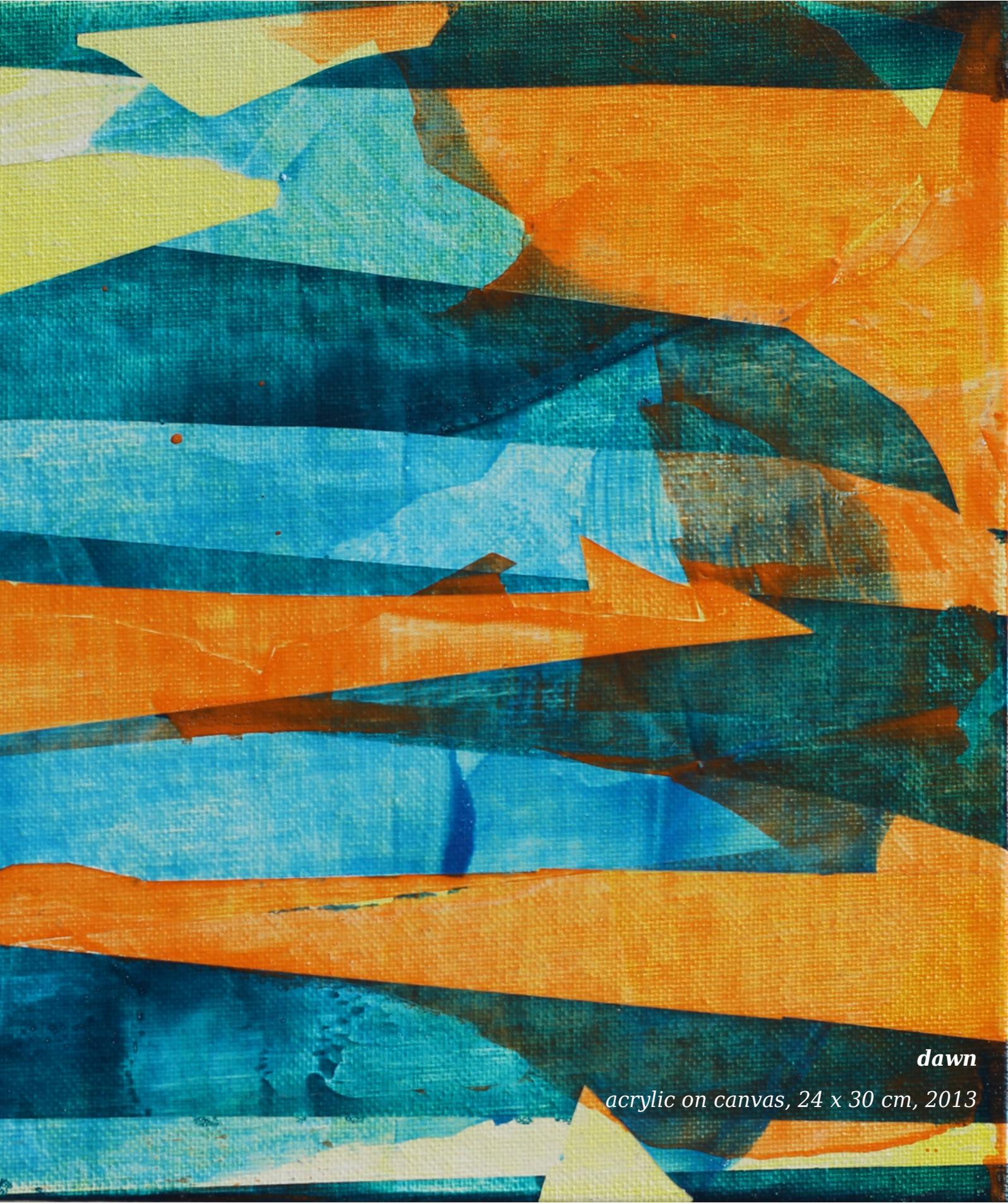
An artist's statement

In my work I use my fascination for transformations of landscapes. The essence of contemporary landscape I think is movement and change. The landscapes I paint are a translation and stacking of various processes in the landscape which are connected with each other. The painting is a universe of its own but it gets its feeding from the world around him, tastes from it, chews on it and distills a new world.

In my paintings various pieces of time and space are mixed up and make a composed landscape. This brings in the possibility to create multiple distances and perspectives in one image. Furthermore, the abstracted character does not indicate a specific landscape, but the processes moving within, shifting and pushing it forward; a landscape very liquid, changing, drifting, on a journey.

Wessel Middelbos





dawn

acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 cm, 2013

An interview with

Wessel Middelbos

Hello Wessel, and a warm welcome to LandEscape. I would start this interview with my usual introductory question: what does in your opinion define a work of Art? By the way, what could be in your opinion the features that mark an artworks as a piece of Contemporary Art? Do you think that there's a dichotomy between tradition and contemporariness?

Now that is always a difficult question. There is a quote of a Dutch poet of the 19th century, Willem Kloos, who stated that *'art is the most individual expression of the most individual emotion'*.

I can very much relate to that. Everyone's emotions are highly individual I believe. So if you analyse your emotions, you can recognize and define your interests, your fields of fascinations in this world and combine that with the technical skills you have, you may get quite far. So an artist is someone who makes things to show what he thinks, experience, see or feels. But no one can be sure of it I believe, I mean if it's art or not. It cannot be defined like matters in science or mathematics. No laws of nature. But that is what makes it fun in the fields of art. It's a playground. And everything can be used to play with. I think contemporary art somehow catches the Zeitgeist.

But you know, opinions may vary of course in labeling art or artists. I think it has nothing to do with time. It's not that art made today is right away contemporary art. Lots of artists still work in Modernism or Postmodernism. I don't believe in cultural progress in time and space, but contemporary art can use out of tradition what it needs to make images with the illusion of progress.





Would you like to tell us something about your background? You have formal training and you have studied at the Academie Minerva in Groningen, where you are currently based... How has this experience impacted on your development as an artist and on the way you currently produce your artworks?

My training at academie Minerva was a period of learning and exploring. The couple of years working and studying there gave me time to develop. Time to grow. To find out what my interests are considering techniques, philosophies, and attitude as an artist.

During my study I became very interested in fundamental painting. This school, this movement, investigates the basic principles of painting. Things like form, color, structure, texture, sizes of the canvas, ways of applying paint. It was really good for me to operate for a while in such a severe manner. But after a few years I was fed up with it. It felt like a prison. And then I broke out and the sky was open. It's good to be limited for a while to appreciate the freedom you feel later. What I mostly gained from that period is my wish and aim to let the material, the paint, play an important role. Rather than to let it act as a clear figuration.

Before starting to elaborate about your production, would you like to tell to our readers something about your process and set up for making your artworks? In particular, what technical aspects do you mainly focus on your work? And how much preparation and time do you put in before and during the process of creating a piece?

For the last couple of years I always work at several paintings at the same time. At this moment I work on fifteen canvases simultaneously. And they're all at different stages of completion. I do this to avoid the idea of a final product while I'm working.

Then the pressure is off of making a good piece. From the fifteen pieces I am working on now, later in the proces it will turn out wich ones are good and wich ones are not. The choice on wich paintings to work on each day is taken mostly randomly. Sometimes I know what pieces I will handle that day, but most of the time I choose in the moment. I walk around in my studio and I look at the paintings and for wich ones I have ideas for at that moment; those I will work on. So it's a very organic process. Besides that it's a more practical matter. I don't work wet-in-wet, cause the image will get blurry. So every layer has to dry before adding another. The preparation for the actual paintingsession takes far longer than applying paint itself. It could be an hour preperation for 5 minutes of painting. I stretch and prepare my own canvases for instance. Choosing the colors takes time. Taping the areas that I will cover. And of course a lot of viewing and chewing on possibilities.

It happens that I make a work in a small period of time. Let's say it consists of two or three layers, painted in a few days. And that is very surprising since often it isn't so. Mostly it's slogging. And when to decide something is finished? At a certain moment I create something and it surprises me. Something happened. And I don't have the idea that I did it. I made it of course. With my hands, my tools, my head, but it's not deliberately towards a point. I don't work like James Rosenquist, an artist who I greatly admire. He makes the sketch and then executes it at a large scale. I can't work like that anymore. I used to. But at a point I realized that the planning took out the spirit and energy in my work. Also a couple of years ago my interest of the planned out landscape of contemporary landscape, especially in the Netherlands, was shifting towards a landscape that is on the move, in transition. So I wanted a more painterly image of a landscape in motion.

Now let's focus on your artworks: I would start from Dawn and Between that our readers have



Wessel Middelbos

already started to admire in the introductory pages of this article: and I would suggest to visit your website directly at <http://www.wesselmiddelbos.nl> in order to get a wider idea of your current artistic production. In the meanwhile, would you tell us something about the genesis of these projects? What was your initial inspiration?

The genesis of my work is always the vague image in my head of a landscape in motion. A landscape changing. Whether it is changing by human interference or the elements of nature. Currently my interest of the changing landscape has its focus on the forces of nature ; water , fire, earth, air. These are eternal processes. But of course, in the background is the idea of contemporary events . Human effects on nature



waystation winter acrylic on canvas 25 x 25 cm 2014



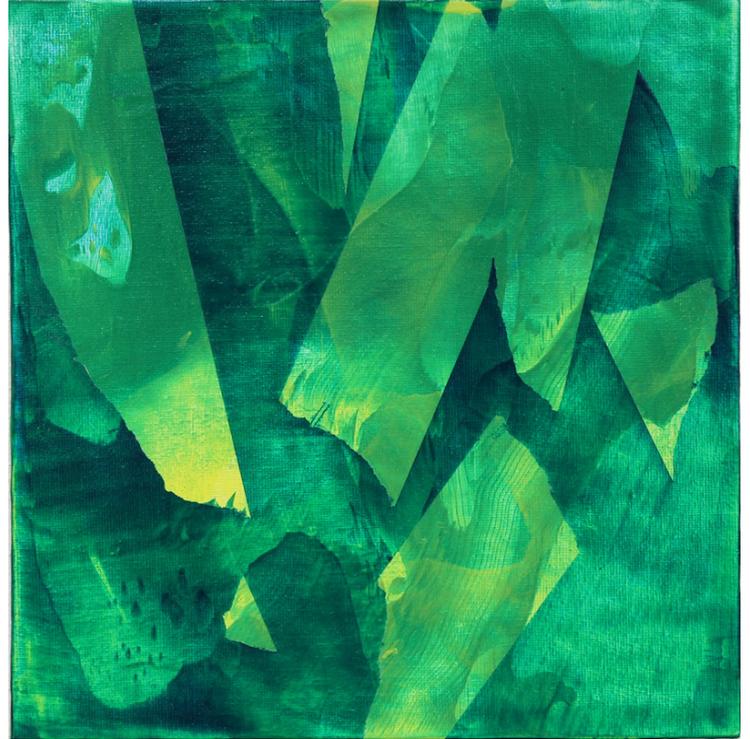
water light body 50 x 150 cm acrylic on cotton 2013

wich cause things like rising water, floods, forestfires, expanding deserts, etc. Here in the region of Groningen where I live, gasexploitation causes earthquakes. So, if you look at my work you can associate it with nowadays events, but you can also relate it to a more timeless frame. I leave that up tot the viewer.

While admiring Water light body and Waystation winter I thought that through these works you aimed to express the idea of transition, and I would go as far as to state that this highlights the different aspects of the relationship between public landscape and natural environment... and I daresay that your work in a certain sense explores the cultural disconnect that lies between understanding our relationship with the natural environment:

although I'm aware that this might sound a bit naif, I have to admit that I'm sort of convinced that Art -especially nowadays- could play an effective role in sociopolitical questions: not only just by offering to people a generic platform for expression... I would go as far as to state that Art could even steer people's behaviour... what's your point about this? Does it sound a bit exaggerated? Caption

With 'Water light body', I wanted to get a mood of water, sea, wind, maybe pieces of ice, the light changing the colors and shapes, etc. A whirl of elements. Same goes for 'Waystation Winter'. And yes, the ideas of transition and transformation I tried to put in and I think they can be read. And what's most important; they got energy. That's one of the main things I'm trying



between acrylic on canvasboard 25 x 25 cm 2013

to accomplish in an image; a sense of energy that gives the image it's own face, so to say.

To make art only and completely a tool to get other aims done, I would do art wrong, I think. First and foremost there is the image (of the painting); an ordering of color, lines, tones, etc. And the image wants to get itself across, for the sake of itself. Art is not advertisement. Art is not illustration. Art is not decoration. What if I ask myself; why do I paint? Is it to get my worries about the natural environment across? Is it to feed people's minds about a certain political view? No. I'm not an activist. I paint because I like images. And because I love paint. It's magical building material. I want to explore this stuff. Get to know the possibilities and limits of it. Painting is magical. The moment I apply paint on the

canvas and I know just before I touch the canvas, the sweep I'm about to make can be good form or an empty spot.

But of course, art is a part of this common world we live in and gets influenced by it and comments back on it. So I'm interested in making images and I'm also occupied with contemporary landscape. And I bring that into my painting. But the painting is not and will never be a vehicle for my moral views. There must be room for people to bring their view into. Also, the paintings are never 'fixed' for me either. They all have an open end to me. And that's good. I can view them and never be done with them. Like a song you can hear a thousand times over and over again. In my work I use my awareness of changes happening in contemporary landscape but I also know it's an



from the inside or in other faces acrylic on canvas 24 x 30 cm 2014

epitome of eternal forces like conflict, decay, birth, death. But you know, I do like to make people look better. Sharpen their view. But they got to make their own choices, in a direct or more unconscious way.

Another couple of interesting pieces on which I would like to spend some words are entitled From the inside or in other faces and Turn

catch great small: one of the features of these works that have mostly impacted on me is the effective mix between white background and the intense tone of red, which creates such a dialogue rather than a contrast: it seems to reveal such a struggle, a deep tension and intense emotions... I can recognize such interesting feature also in oh no it is just another journey I graze air rock soil and



turn catch great small acrylic on canvas 30 x 40 cm 2014

steel...By the way, any comments on your choice of "palette" and how it has changed over time?

The titles I choose are always related to things like change, movement, transition. 'From the inside or in other faces', is a quote out of the film Seraphine (2008). The film tells the story of French painter Seraphine de Senlis. About the

love she lost, she was asked; 'Did you ever see him again?'. And she answered; 'From the inside or in other faces...'

Wich reminded me of things loved an lost, but also of the transformation of things. Things fade away and come back in other forms. To me there is a little comfort in the fact we're made of stardust.



oh no it is just another journey I graze air rock soil and steel acrylic on canvas 30 x 40 cm 2014

Thank you for appreciating 'Turn catch great small'. I need contrast to create a dialogue. A dialogue between the colors, the shapes, the different grades of transparency, the texture of the paint, etc. I work just as often from dark to light as from light to dark. I use a lot of color, except for the so-called earth colors, mainly because they lack energy and freshness. But who knows, maybe

in the future I'll add them. Around the time I graduated I mainly used dark tones. Around 2003/2004 the colors got brighter. From 2005 through 2010 colors were dimmed, pastel shade. The last couple of years colors are getting brighter again. Which suits better the transparent shapes and sharpen them more. The spatial effect gets clearer. So the palette changes over time and



look ahead acrylic on cotton 40 x 80 cm 2013

may very well continue to change to evoke discoveries.

As you have stated once, the landscapes you paint are a translation and stacking of various processes in the landscape which are connected with each other... this has reminded me the well-known Picasso's quote "Everything you can imagine is real" I would like to ask you if in your opinion personal experience from real world is an absolutely indispensable part of a creative process... Do you think that a creative process could be disconnected from direct experience?

For me, I can't imagine a creative process that's disconnected from direct experience. Because I get my feedings, my fuel for my paintings from the things I pick up in the world. Everything can be material for input. From items that show up in

newspapers, internet, novels, artbooks, to experiences like a walk in the fields, or a drive in the car through new environments; sensorial experiences. The waterlike part on the right from 'Split field sun' points to the the sun glittering on the water of a lake I daily pass by on my way to the studio. And also 'Look ahead' has that echo of water, of liquid substance, changing for ever.

And I couldn't do without mentioning Collecting Endings and Running Episodes, which is one of my favourite pieces of yours. By the way, many contemporary landscape artists have some form of environmental or political message in their works: do you consider that your images are political in this way or do you seek to maintain a neutral approach?

Like I statet before, I don't like my paintings to be







running episodes acrylic on canvas 30 x 60 cm 2014

an illustration of an idea. The painting must exist for it's own sake. The image is the image. Willem de Kooning said that content is a glimpse. And I think he's right. Like my paintings the content is very liquid. And I hope the content is not fixed. Although I have my ideas during the process of making them. And I have my associations with them. But I don't want to read aloud because I want people to read themselves.

Since 2004 you have exhibited your artworks in many occasions:and I think it's important to remark that you have been awarded as well... Could you tell us something about the impressions that you have received in these occasions? By the way, how much important is for you the feedback of your audience? Do you ever think to whom will enjoy your Art when you conceive your pieces?

Criticism of other people on what you do is part of the game. I don't mind criticism, whether it is positive or negative, as long as it is well substantiated. It's good to hear positiv reply of course. But also negative critic can do your work

some good, evenso if it contains arguments that can be used to improve the work in the future. While I'm working in my studio the outside world is far away. At that time I can't let the outside world and their opinions get in the way of my thoughts and the paintings. It just wouldn't be right.

Thanks a lot for your time and your thoughts, Wessel. My last question deals with your future plans: what's next for you? Anything coming up for you professionally that you would like readers to be aware of?

Gradually I'm also working on a larger scale canvases now (again). For a few years I worked mainly on small to medium size canvases. But I feel now it's time to open up new areas and discover new horizons and new landscapes. There are a few shows coming up I take part in. The first one opens in a few weeks in CBK Groningen. (www.cbkgroningen.nl) You can also follow me on facebook or check my website www.wesselmiddelbos.nl

