

Landscape imagery is common among the subjects of art. Chances are high that within homes displaying any artwork on the walls—whether original works or reproductions—landscapes make an appearance. It is no wonder, since landscapes are based in the ancient traditions of western culture. Though the works in this exhibition are more recent—primarily from the later 20th century—their forms are tied directly to the landscape traditions of the past.

The first extant examples of landscapes come from classical antiquity—from the civilizations of Greece and Rome. There are relatively few examples from these cultures since the paintings have often been ravaged by time. Frescoes (paintings made in wet plaster) from the Aegean island of Thera and the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum have been preserved because they were covered in ash from volcanic eruptions. These early examples exhibit divergent tendencies toward both mimesis and abstraction. Examples of such stunning realism appear in this exhibition in works including the lithographs of Stephen McMillan, while more nonrepresentational imagery can be found in the works of both Gabor Peterdi and Ruth Rodman.

Historically, western art took a hiatus from representations of landscape after the fall of the Roman empire. The more spiritual aims of Byzantine work from this era reflected a golden, heavenly realm instead of the terrestrial sphere. These tendencies flowed right through into the Medieval period. Yet there was a resurgence in landscape imagery with the dawn of the Renaissance. Painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti not only painted a “portrait” of the city of Siena, Italy in his *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, but an equally exacting image of the landscape surrounding that city.

The Renaissance was also the age of the experiential sciences when artists were employing scientific and mathematical principles in their works to produce believable, illusionistic spaces on two dimensional surfaces. These interests caused artists to look more deeply at their surroundings. Artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer produced intensely detailed sketches and studies of plant and animal life in order to better understand the intricacies of the landscape setting. The results show up in their paintings. This thorough investigation of the landscape appears in works in this show, too, like Keith Rasmussen's *Dungeness Fountain*, which describes a specific scene reminiscent of a Florida landscape.

Other northern European artists of the Renaissance produced scenes that were new to the genre of landscape—the snowscape. The illuminated manuscript paintings of the Limbourg brothers depict the various seasons and months, along with activities specific to each. The painting for the month of February is likely the first snowscape in western art. Pieter Breughel the elder produced a similar series of paintings depicting the seasons, including his own snowy landscape. Interest in this subject has not dwindled considering the presence of several snow filled images in this exhibition, including those by Deborah Clearman, Oliviero Masi, and Francis St. Clair-Miller.

In many early landscapes the element of the surrounding land was subordinate to the content of the painting as a whole. A story was often being told that focused on either the gods or