

**Museo Villa dei Cedri**  
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***Memoria del sublime. Landscape in the 21st Century***  
**Museo Villa dei Cedri, Bellinzona**  
23rd March – 4th August 2019

**BACKGROUND**

**The Museum and its park**

The Museo Villa dei Cedri is housed in a building of the suburban villa kind, constructed in the neoclassical style in 1870–1890. It owes its present appearance to the remodelling of the original construction according to Palladian principles, in 1920–1930. The Villa is named after the majestic conifers that once protected the entrance gate and today spread out across the public park that surrounds the building. It took the name Villa dei Cedri in 1931, the year in which the garden was laid out as a Romantic, or English-style, landscaped park.

Villa dei Cedri and its park make up one of the few estates in Bellinzona to have been spared by urban development and the erosion of green spaces it entails.

In recent years, the city authorities and the museum's administration have collaborated on a project to refurbish the park. They have set out not only to restore the ornamental spirit that infused its conception but also to create a dialogue between the villa and the park, the artistic programme and its environment.

**The collection and the artistic programme**

Nature is a theme that pervades the museum's identity. During the 30 years the institution has been active, a desire to expand the representation of landscape art ranging between realism and symbolism in particular has loomed large in its exhibition programmes, acquisitions policy and proposed donations. This may be seen, for instance, in the most recent major donations to the museum: Andrea Gabutti (Lugano, 1961), Francine Mury (Montreux, 1947) and Alexandre Hollan (Budapest, 1933).

The museum's founding collection reveals the taste and the cultural choices of a local collector interested in the so-called Italian “regional schools” of the late 19th Century, with a manifest inclination for naturalism and the themes of genre and landscape painting, with artists such as Adolfo Feragutti Visconti (Pura, 1850 – Milan, 1924), Cesare Tallone (Savona, 1853 – Milan, 1919), Vittore Grubicy de Dragon (Milan, 1851 – 1920), Luigi Rossi

(Cassarate, 1852 – Tesserete, 1923), Pietro Chiesa (Sagno, 1876 – Sorengo, 1959) and Edoardo Berta (Giubiasco, 1867 – Lugano, 1931).

Two ambitious group exhibitions have marked the history of the museum and its affinity with landscape, as well as many retrospectives dedicated to individual painters whose works are part of the collection.

In 1997, the exhibition *Viaggio verso le Alpi* allowed the public to discover various aspects of landscape painting, especially that of mountain scenery – where fear alternates with fascination and the approach is halfway between a scientific and a philosophical one – since the end of the 18th Century. The exhibition illustrated the discovery of nature from the time of Caspar Wolf (Muri, 1735 – Heidelberg, Germany, 1783) up until the Romantics and the Symbolists, by reading features of the landscape.

In 2007, *arte&natura* explored the special relationship with nature constructed by contemporary artists on a sort of voyage between earth and heaven. All of the works chosen by the curator, Matteo Bianchi, were linked to the construction of an original and primeval feeling towards nature. For instance, Geneviève Asse (Vannes, France, 1923), Olivier Debré (Paris, 1920–1999), Massimo Cavalli (Locarno, 1930 – Massagno, 2017), Pierre Tal-Coat (Clohars-Carnoët, Finistère, France, 1905 – Saint-Pierre-de-Bailleul, France, 1985), Wilfrid Moser (Zurich, 1914–1997) and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (Lisbon, 1908 – Paris, 1992) use natural features as a pretext for structuring their images. Michael Biberstein (Solothurn, 1948 – Alandroal, Portugal, 2013), meanwhile, is intent on breaking up the atmosphere, unlike Günther Förg (Füssen, Germany, 1952 – Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, 2013), who recomposes the motif in colored signs. The delicate images of Gérard de Palézieux (Vevey, 1919 – Veyras, 2012), like the worlds of Alexandre Hollan (Budapest, 1933) and Farhad Ostovani (Lahijan, Iran, 1950), suggest an intimist reading of the landscape. Ercan Richter (Erzurum, Turkey, 1961) and Stephan Spicher (Basel, 1950) move in a more expressive and decorative direction, while Gianfredo Camesi (Cevio, 1940) and Bernhard Lüthi (Bern, 1938) translate the motif into conceptual terms. Finally, Hsiao Chin (Shanghai, China, 1935) suggests an astral vision of natural phenomena.

## THE PROJECT

The history of landscape is one that is both individual and collective, constructed slowly in a twin movement of appropriation and expropriation. Each landscape work is rooted, on the one hand, in external reality and, on the other, in an inner world. It is thus the point at which historical, social and political dimensions intersect with personal reality, reality as it is perceived. The urgency that environmental issues have assumed in the media and in politics means that the Romantic perception of nature and, to some extent, the sense of the sublime, have returned as central topics of discussion. Such a poetics is common to all of the artists and works chosen, a form of *innamoramento* with the world around us, accompanied by an awareness of its fragility. The artists featured here are not intent on decrying the state of the environment; they wish far more to remind us of where our existence begins, of nature in all its beauty and vigour, and perhaps to express an occasional nostalgic reminiscence.

Many works today evoke the Romantic conception of landscape, one in which the sublime takes the form of terror-stricken obsessions and sudden exaltation.

One of the themes the exhibition explores is this encounter between nature and man's inner self, the works being presented as the expressive interiorization of the experience of landscape or nature – as we see, for example, in the pieces by Andrea Gabutti, Alain Huck and Janaina Tschäpe.

Landscape is a human construction as is the vision of landscape in art: in contemporary art, landscape explores and implicates technological discovery and science. If in the Romantic period landscape was a subjective, personal experience, as illustrated by *Le Voyageur contemplant une mer de nuages* (1818), the iconic work by the German painter Caspar David Friedrich, the collective dimension and the notion of time occupy a central position in landscape today. The works of Mariele Neudecker, Frédéric Clot, Julian Charrière and Didier Rittener in particular underline this specifically contemporary dimension.

The exhibition is located at the point where nature and human nature intersect, ranges over both individual and collective experience and utilizes both the sublime and artifice in its construction.

The trilingual catalogue (Italian, French, German), printed by Edizioni Sottoscala Bellinzona, will comprehend the following texts:

1. On the ancient notions of the sublime and on the persistence (or not) of these notions in art history up to the end of the 20th Century by Professor Jan Blanc, University of Geneva.
2. On the question of landscapes in contemporary art (not only on the notion of sublime, but also on the questions of artificiality, of emergency and denunciation, etc.) by Dr. Reinhard Spieler, director, Sprengel Museum, Hannover.
3. On the link between contemporary landscape and the notion of the sublime, through a journey through the exhibited art works, by our director-curator Carole Haensler Huguet.

The catalogue will also include the pictures of the works taken *in situ* as well as a biography/artistic profile of the artists (see the list here below).

## THE ARTISTS

Darren Almond (\*1971, Appley Bridge, GB)  
Christiane Baumgartner (\*1967, Lipsia, DE)  
Stefania Beretta (\*1957, Vacallo, TI)  
Alan Bogana (\*1979, Faido, TI)  
Julian Charrière (\*1987, Morges, VD)  
Frédéric Clot (\*1973, Saint-Loup, VD)  
Andrea Gabutti (\*1961, Manno, TI)  
Alain Huck (\*1957, Vevey, VD)  
Axel Hütte (\*1951, Essen, DE)  
Monica Ursina Jäger (\* 1974, Thalwil, ZH)  
Claudio Moser (\* 1959, Aarau, AG)



MUSEO  
VILLA  
DEI CEDRI

Mariele Neudecker (\*1965, Düsseldorf, DE)  
Didier Rittener (\*1969, Losanna, VD)  
Marco Scorti (\*1987, Lugano, TI)  
Annalies Štrba (\*1947, Zugo, ZG)  
Janaina Tschäpe (\*1973, Monaco di Baviera, DE)  
Ester Vonplon (\*1980, Schlieren, ZH)