READING THE LANDSCAPE

Understanding the landscape, the processes that formed it and how it presents itself

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This lecture will introduce the idea of interpreting a landscape through observing and drawing the features that make it what it is as well as by mapping. You will have a go at sketching a local landscape for practice.
The landscape is “... an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
READING THE LANDSCAPE

• Understanding the landscape, the processes that formed it and the pressures for change is an important step before landscape planning or design, especially at a large scale.

• It includes more than a geographical understanding – the visual and experiential aspects must be included.
CLIMATIC PROCESSES OVER TIME HAVE MODIFIED
GEORGICAL FORMATIONS

WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR CURRENT
TOPOGRAPHY

WHICH HAS DETERMINED
DRAINAGE

WHICH HAS INFLUENCED
DISTRIBUTION OF SOILS

AND ASSOCIATED
PLANTS AND ANIMALS

WHICH HAVE BEEN MODIFIED BY
MAN'S ACTIVITIES
READING THE LANDSCAPE

• Layers to consider:
• Climatic context
• Geology, geomorphology, hydrology, soils;
• Ecology and vegetation types
• Land use, settlement types, communications, building types, cultural elements;
• Visual/experiential aspects;
READING THE LANDSCAPE

• Visual and experiential aspects can be considered from the point of view of the perceiver – in the landscape, as it is seen from various viewpoints.
• Other sensory aspects can be noted while out there making analytical sketches.
Aim of sketching as part of understanding the landscape

• The aim of landscape sketching is to capture the key elements that make the landscape what it is
• Artistic composition and aesthetic quality are secondary to the analytical function.
• Economy and speed are important when sketching.
Aim of sketching

• While it is possible to make sketches from photographs, when done this way you do not really look at and see the landscape!

• By drawing it on site, the act of sketching means you have to look at it and interpret how it is assembled

• The pencil becomes an extension of the brain
MATERIALS

• A4 Sketch pad
• Range of pencils- HB to 6B
• Oil bar and graphite pencil
• Pencil sharpener or sharp knife
• Eraser? NO!!
• Clear polythene bag (in case of wet weather)
Examples of sketches

- The following examples were made by a student at ECA a course called “Reading the Landscape”.
- They show a personal style
- They are very economical
- They use many annotations and comments to build up the understanding of the landscape.
Woodland seen as silhouette in distance.

Bird covered Island.

Belnaveen Bay

Very steep cliff side eroded by sea.

Grassy top of the cliff.
During ice age, whole area covered by ice. Next, neolithic farmers farmed here, human impact on landscape.

Salisbury Crags formed around 320 million years ago. Hills mostly old volcanoes/volcanic.

Archaeological sites.

Ice age erosion deepened valleys and rounded over hills tops.

Blackford Hill formed 4.10 million years ago.

This area used to be covered with limes and more rock which was eroded away.

Blackford hill 4/5/11
Technique 1

• The following sequence shows a step-by-step approach for making a pencil sketch of a scene.
• Materials – sketch paper, pencils (range of hardness/softness)
A view over a lake with forest in the background
Step 1: establish the edge of the lake and the skyline as the main lines
Step 2: establish the lesser forms and add texture to the lines in a softer pencil
Step 2: add some more detail of tree shapes and add simple shading to emphasise darker areas or shadow areas.
It often helps to put a frame around the sketch to help to focus on the main section
Step 4: add some description about the main compositional aspects of the landscape.
Step 5: add some annotations to the sketch to bring out the key points about the scene.

A reed fringed lake surrounded by pine, spruce x birch forest. Strong play of light x shade with forest edges catching the light. Small scale, enclosed landscape with coarse textures. Flat, calm plume of the lake gives contrast to forest. Rounded, small hills and overlapping layers provide distinct character and strong sense of Genius loci.
Technique 2

- Use oil bar and graphite pencil in addition to pencil
- This can be quick and as effective as pencil sketches
- The oil bar means that dark areas can be scraped off to reveal white areas beneath.
Step 1: cover the area with oil from the oil bar, then sketch the basic structural lines as for pencil, with the graphite pencil
Step 2: roughly shade the area with graphite pencil
Step 3: smudge the graphite pencil over the oiled area to create a softer effect
Step 4: draw more features using graphite pencil or normal pencil and add extra shading where necessary
Step 5: add more shade and detail as needed. Scrape away the graphite from the oil bar to reveal light areas, perhaps for birch trunks, for example.
An enclosed, small scale lake landscape. Breezes play on the water, ever changing the light. Dark conifers and contrasting birk on rounded hills, coarse textures and a range of greens dominate. Strong sense of unity and genius loci.

Step 6: add text comments as for the previous example.
Features of sketching

- Sketching involves selection and interpretation which a photo does not.
- We often exaggerate the height of hills when we make sketches and this reflects some aspects of our perception.
- We remember a landscape much more when we sketch it than if we photograph it.