

NEW WORLDS

NEW ART

*Landscape painting
in all the Americas,
a touring exhibition
and an inquiry*

*By Peter John Brownlee, Valéria
Piccoli, and Georgiana Uhlyarik*

Artistic representation of human interaction with the land has a long history in the Americas. It spans more than thirty thousand years, from the earthworks and pictographs of ancient indigenous cultures to the land art of the 1960s and 1970s to contemporary photographs of the terrible beauty of environmental destruction. It was during the early years of the nineteenth century, as emerging settler nations across the hemisphere gained and asserted their independence, that landscape painting began to forge a broader vision of the Americas. Artists seeking to respond to and depict distinctive topographies and natural wonders produced unique pictorial representations that nonetheless shared an ideological and aesthetic orientation to the land, as well as artistic techniques for depicting it.

Fig. 1. *Grounded Icebergs (Disco Bay)* by Lawren S. Harris (1885–1970) c. 1931. Oil on canvas, 31½ by 40 inches. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the Estate of R. Fraser Elliott; © Estate of Lawren S. Harris.

Fig. 2. *Two Hummingbirds with an Orchid* by Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904), 1875. Oil on canvas, 17½ by 27½ inches. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, purchase, David, Helen, and Marian Woodward Fund.

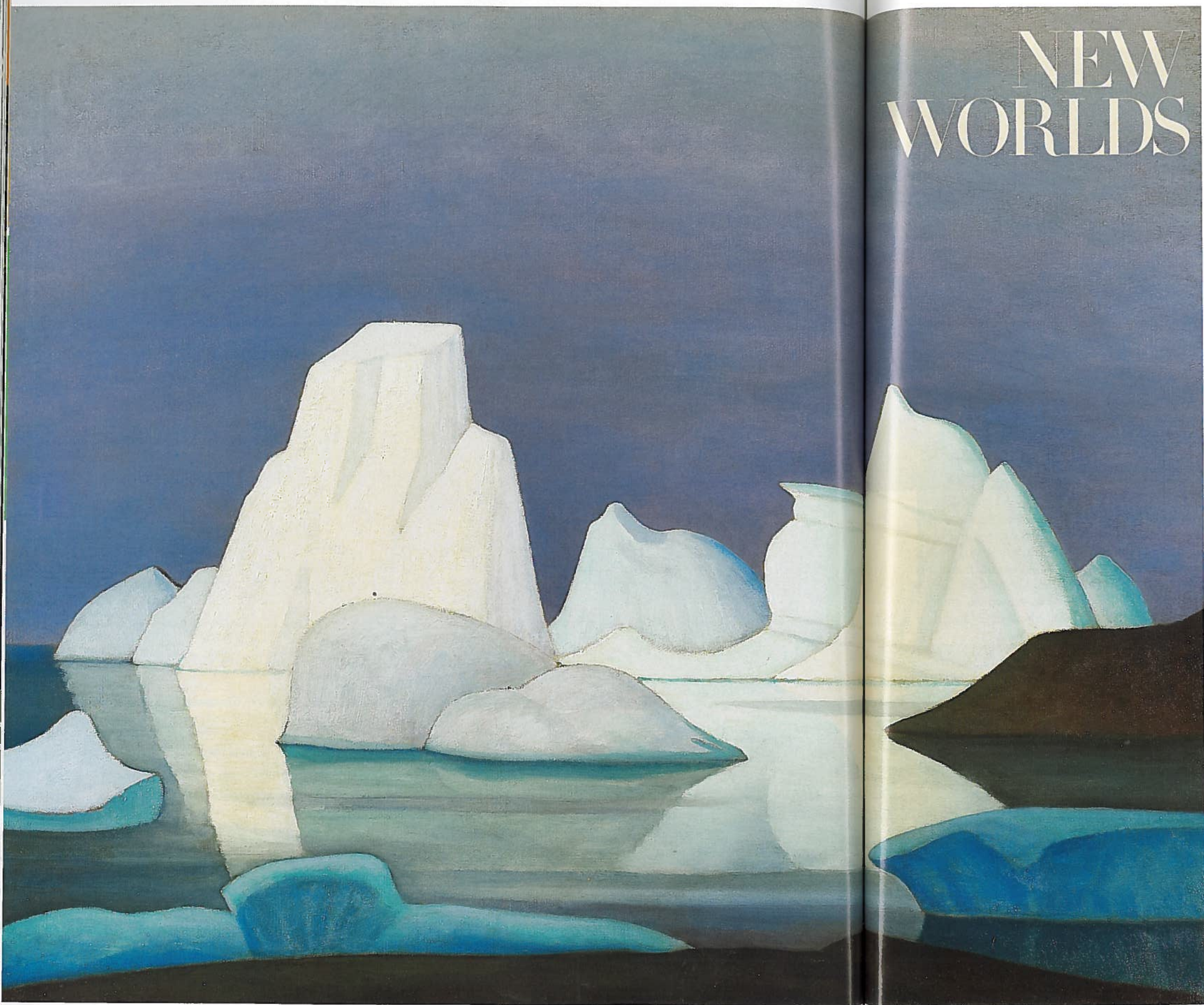




Fig. 3. *Baía de Guanabara Vista da Ilha das Cobras (Guanabara Bay Seen from Snake Island)* by Félix-Émile Taunay (1795–1881), 1828. Oil on canvas, 26 3/4 by 53 1/2 inches. *Acervo do Instituto Ricardo Brennand, Recife, Brazil; photograph by Sérgio Schneider.*

Fig. 4. *Cartão postal (Postcard)* by Tarsila do Amaral (1886–1973), 1929. Signed and dated “Tarsila 1929” at lower right. Oil on canvas, 50 1/8 by 56 1/8 inches. *Private collection; photograph by Romulo Fialdini.*

Fig. 5. *Cotopaxi* by Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900), 1855. Signed and dated “F. E. Church/—55” at lower right. Oil on canvas, 30 by 46 1/2 inches. *Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, purchase with funds provided by the Hogg Brothers Collection, gift of Ima Hogg, by exchange.*

Combining aesthetic principles of the picturesque, beautiful, and sublime, the techniques of topographical drawing, scientific illustration, sketching and painting en plein air, and the expanding fields of botany and geology, landscape painting emerged in the Americas with the rise of newly independent nations. Though they often shared a pictorial vocabulary, landscape paintings conveyed different meanings and fulfilled different purposes, but all articulated notions of national identity as grounded in the chief topographical features of the land itself.

Take for instance the busy port of Rio de Janeiro’s Guanabara Bay, framed by the area’s characteristic sloping rock formations and palm trees in Félix-Émile Taunay’s painting *Baía de Guanabara Vista da Ilha das Cobras (Guanabara Bay Seen from Snake Island)* of 1828 (Fig. 3). It exemplifies such early expressions of national culture in pictures of natural scenery. Taunay, director of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and private tutor to Emperor Pedro II, was instrumental in setting the course for landscape painting in Brazil. At the time he made this view, Rio de Janeiro had emerged as the seat of Brazilian politics and culture. Informed equally by aesthetics, science,



and commerce, scenes like this would proliferate over the next century, eventually becoming icons of the nation. About one hundred years later, Tarsila do Amaral of São Paulo would revisit this iconic setting in her thoroughly modern *Cartão Postal (Postcard)* of 1929 (Fig. 4), which, notably, also features the famed Pão de Açúcar (Sugarloaf

Mountain) and palm trees characteristic of the region. The jackfruit tree and monkeys also signify Brazil in this very personal take on a national subject.

Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic is the first exhibition to examine the evolution of the genre from the early nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century in a hemispheric context. It seeks to broaden the understanding of landscape painting across the Americas by setting aside the confines of national visual traditions and their art histories in order to extend scholarly investigation and discussion beyond territorial boundaries. Expanding the parameters of this inquiry to encompass the hemisphere may appear, in retrospect, a simple and self-evident strategy. Yet it has proven unprecedented in the field, until now.

The hemispheric perspective framed by this exhibition and its publication places artists, their paintings, and the visual cultures of disparate regions and countries in direct conversation, often for the first time. This approach has enabled a consideration of the intricately intertwined geographies, cultures, and sociopolitical conditions of the peoples, na-

tions, regions, and diasporas of North and South America. The inquiry has revealed how the model of landscape painting borrowed from European precedents produced diverse and singular modes of representation in the Americas as artists responded to specific local and regional, as well as economic and political, realities.

While European landscape painting had, for centuries, expressed the ideological outlook of royalty and, gradually, the landed elite, the prospect of purportedly open and available land in the Americas shifted the demographics of who owned and worked the land, as well as who was displaced or evacuated from it. As a result, the nature of the imagery that came to represent the land evolved significantly. By the mid-nineteenth

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Fig. 6. *La Cueva del Guácharo* by Ferdinand Bellermann (1814–1889), 1874. Signed and dated "Ferd Bellermann 1874" at lower left. Oil on canvas, 46 3/4 by 61 3/4 inches. Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.

Fig. 7. *Hunter Mountain, Twilight* by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823–1880), 1866. Signed and dated "S. R. Gifford 1866" at lower right. Oil on canvas, 30 3/8 by 54 1/8 inches. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection; photograph © Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago.

Fig. 8. *Cataratas del Iguazú (Iguazu Falls)* by Pedro Blanes Viale (1878–1926), 1916. Signed "P. Blanes Viale" at lower right. Oil on canvas, 40 1/8 by 97 1/4 inches. Private collection; photograph courtesy of Galeria Sur, Punta del Este, Uruguay.

Fig. 9. *Citlaltépetl, Cañada de Metlac* by José María Velasco (1840–1912), 1897. Signed and dated "José M^e Velasco/Mexico 1897" at lower right. Oil on canvas, 41 by 63 1/8 inches. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City; © D.R. Museo Nacional de Arte / Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura.

century in Europe, landscape painting had become a site for the expression of art's autonomy, while, in the Americas, images of the land, revered for their professed accuracy and aesthetic achievement, nevertheless came to symbolize the evolving identities of emerging nations.

A sense of national ownership pervades Ecuadorian artist Rafael Troya's *Cotopaxi (Vista de la Cordillera Oriental desde Tiopullo)* (View of the Oriental Mountain Range from Tiopullo). In the sweep of its

panoramic breadth, viewers are invited to identify with the towering volcano at rest. But historically, this identification was slow in coming in Ecuador and in Peru: the mountains were often identified with the indigenous peoples who populated them, and thus considered unsuitable for art. Moreover, and perhaps as one result, landscape painting traditions in the region did not coalesce until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Troya's painting was the culmination of the artist's study of Ecuador's many volcanoes with geologists Alphonse Stübel and Wilhelm Reiss from 1871 to 1874. Like so many painters working in the Americas, Troya's work was guided by both aesthetic theories and scientific principles.

Scientific inquiry and a desire to depict grand, awe-inspiring views of the remotest regions of the Americas led artists to join expeditions of discovery. Several were inspired by the publications of the Prussian naturalist Alexander Von Humboldt, whose famed travels to South America, Mexico, and the United States (1799–1804) provided the source material for his many influential books. According to Humboldt, landscape painters should be able, on one hand, to recognize a location's particular flora and fauna and depict them accurately, and, on the other, to synthesize the aesthetic impressions of the scene. Rather than making a "mimetic" image of a location, the artist's aim is to produce an "exemplary"

one, the result of a connection between artistic sensibility and scientific knowledge. Traveler-artists Ferdinand Bellermann (see Fig. 6) and Johann Moritz Rugendas of Germany and Frederic Edwin Church of the United States (see Fig. 5) retraced Humboldt's path through South America, painting in exquisite, and exacting, scientific detail synthetic views of the topographical wonders of Venezuela, Chile, and Ecuador, respectively. Along with Canadians Paul Kane and William George Richardson Hind, among others, these scientifically minded artists created majestic views of the Americas' unique ecosystems, which range from the dense interiors of the tropical rainforest to the icy peaks of the Arctic.

Landscape painting in the United States (see Fig. 11), Canada's Joseph Légaré, and Brazil's José Maria de Medeiros reimagine the violent and contested history of territorial expansion as romanticized encounter. In their images, the land itself figures prominently as a character in the development of national myths and symbols; they allude to, but do not fully confront, the expropriation of land from indigenous peoples involved in the establishment and expansion of territorial boundaries. Even grand paintings of waterfalls such as those of Niagara Falls in the North and Iguazu Falls in the South, as painted by Pedro Blanes Viale (Fig. 8) of Uruguay, capture the sublime power of these natural wonders—sacred

spaces for both indigenous peoples, settlers, and tourists alike—while also delineating national borders.

Centuries of extraction—of fur, timber, fish, precious metals and minerals, rubber, guano, and an array of staple agricultural crops such as tobacco, sugar, coffee, cotton, and cacao—had by the opening decades of the nineteenth century





Fig. 10. *Cliffs of Green River* by Thomas Moran (1837–1926), 1874. Signed and dated “TM[conjoined] oran 1874” at lower right. Oil on canvas, 25 ½ by 45 ¾ inches. Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas.

Fig. 11. *Landscape with Figures: A Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans”* by Thomas Cole (1801–1848), 1826. Signed and dated “T. Cole./1826” at bottom center. Oil on panel, 26 ¼ by 43 ¼ inches. Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection.

left their mark on the physical landscape of the Americas, but had not exhausted the continents’ vast resources. Paintings depicting lush forests, cultivated fields, rivers and streams, and plains populated by herds of cattle and sheep vividly document the natural beauty of spaces of extraction and production while emphasizing balance, abundance, and future potential. Framed by European conceptions of land use and ownership and nourished by the pictorial lessons of painters Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa, as well as by the aesthetic categories of the picturesque, the beautiful, and the sublime, landscape painting in the Americas glorified and helped to facilitate the extraction of natural resources in pictures that accorded with the aesthetic tastes and the entrepreneurial spirit of the landowning classes. But as seen in Sanford Robinson Gifford’s elegiac *Hunter Mountain, Twilight* (Fig. 7) there was also a growing recognition of the ecological impact of timbering and other forms of extraction.

By the turn of the century industry’s encroachment on the land became a new subject within landscape painting. José María Velasco’s *Citlaltépetl, Cañada de Metlac* (*Citlaltépetl, the Metlac Ravine*) (Fig. 9) celebrates the famed railway that linked Mexico City with the port city of Veracruz. Over time, however, the increasingly international artistic vocabulary of modernism animated and enabled very different ways of picturing the land. As industrialization transformed the landscape, painters effectively dismantled nineteenth-century aesthetic and pictorial conventions in the pursuit of a new modernist idiom, to capture the dynamism of technological and social change. Charles Sheeler’s *Classic Landscape* (Fig. 15), one of a series of works commissioned to document the Ford Motor Company’s famed River Rouge plant, depicts a space devoid of nature but continues to rely on the pictorial codes of landscape painting in its precisionist approach.



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Landscape painting in the early twentieth century was transformed by a newly awakened search for authenticity and pictorial experimentation and thus tended to articulate notions of cultural identity premised on belonging to a particular place. This new communion with nature transformed landscape painting. For artists such as Lawren Harris in Canada, Georgia O’Keeffe in the United States, or Uruguay’s Pedro Figari, it was still critical to experience firsthand, spend considerable time observing, and understand and depict the uniqueness of a place. Yet each of these activities was fundamentally altered. Beginning in the first

decades of the twentieth century, artists deliberately chose sites determined by their own circumstances and deeply held interests, locations often deemed marginal until they were painted into the national imagination. Intensely local, yet thoroughly national in implication O’Keeffe’s *Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico/Out Back of Marie’s II* of 1930 (Fig. 14) and Figari’s *Potros en la Pampa* (*Colts on the Pampa*) (Fig. 13) of the same year exemplify this tendency. Often, these places became the artists’ homes. Alternatively, symbolic sites such as the coast of Rio de Janeiro, the volcanoes of the Valley of Mexico (Fig. 12), and Arctic icebergs

(Fig. 1) were radically reimagined through bold color and striking composition in paintings by Tarsila do Amaral, Gerardo Murillo ("Dr. Atl"), and Lawren Harris, respectively. Indeed, while nature and the beauty of the land remained central for many as they sought to understand their places, artists turned their attention inward, drawing on memories and other modes of experience to transcend the observable in the search for the essential truth of being. To know the world was to be fully immersed in nature, to be one with it.

As issues surrounding the construction of nations and sovereign relations continue to invite new thinking that now tends toward the transnational, the hemispheric, and the global,

generate pride and a sense of belonging at the same time as they rapidly and irrevocably disappear. And yet the land persists in being lodged, inextricably, at the core of our cultural identities, which are defined by a collective search to understand where and who we are. In our "taming" of nature, symbolically through painting and literally by harnessing and exploiting its riches, we construct a fantasy of the land as pure, primordial, and immutable, which contrasts sharply with the urban, industrial, and multicultural reality of our times. Landscape painting continues to speak to issues that are still very pertinent to our respective nations: land remains fundamentally about resources, ecology, and indigenous rights and confrontation, as well as collabora-



Fig. 12. *La Sombra del Popo (The Shadow of Popo)* by Gerardo Murillo ("Dr. Atl") (1875–1964), 1942. Atl color on celotex, 31 1/2 by 47 1/4 inches. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City; © D.R. Museo Nacional de Artes y Literatura.



Fig. 13. *Potros en la Pampa (Colts on the Pampa)* by Pedro Figari (1861–1938), c. 1930. Signed "Pedro Figari" at lower right. Oil on cardboard, 24 3/8 by 31 7/8 inches. Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Fundación Costantini, Buenos Aires.

this project places such questions in a broader context. Importantly, scholarship has benefited from advanced indigenous studies in academia and museums, which have enriched and complicated our understanding of divergent relationships with the land. With a widened scope and an emphasis on cultural dialogue—on the dialogue between paintings and traditions, and between scholars of them—this exhibition and publication offer a much-needed overview of landscape painting in the Americas. We hope that our inquiry is the catalyst for many new and productive collaborations.

These days, the notion of national identity is fractured, unrooted, and dispersed. It is also being challenged by a growing indigenous resurgence across the hemisphere. The deep forests of the Pacific Coast and the Amazon region continue to

tion. These paintings have the capacity to bring us together around such issues, as, after all, we share the land mass that has generated so much wealth, conflict, and cultural meaning over the centuries. It is a place that we all call home.

Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic is on view at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, to January 18, 2016, and at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in Brazil from February 27 to May 29, 2016.

PETER JOHN BROWNLEE, VALÉRIA PICCOLI, and GEORGIANA UHLYARIK are the co-curators of *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic* and the editors of the exhibition's catalogue, published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese editions.

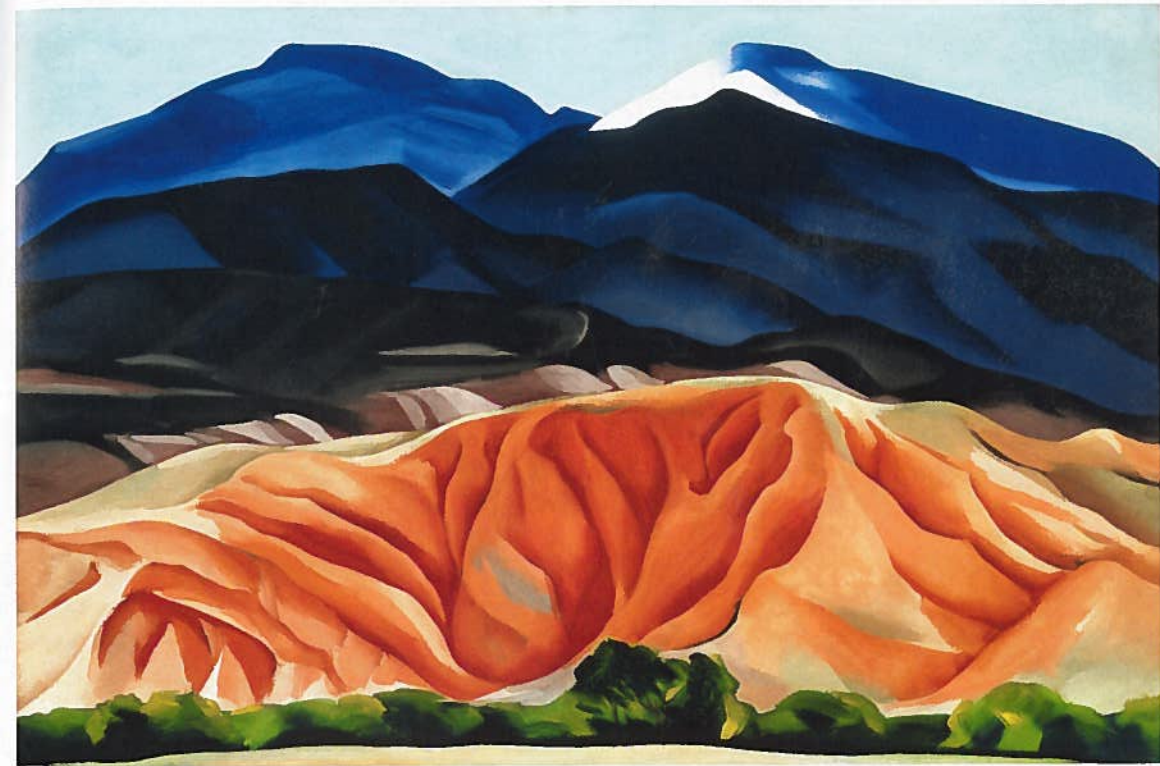


Fig. 14. *Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico/Out Back of Marie's II* by Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), 1930. Oil on canvas mounted to board, 24 1/4 by 36 1/4 inches. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, gift of the Burnett Foundation; photograph by Malcolm Varon © ARS, New York, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe/Art Resources, New York.



Fig. 15. *Classic Landscape* by Charles Sheeler (1883–1965), 1931. Signed and dated "Sheeler-1931" at lower right. Oil on canvas, 25 by 32 1/4 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., collection of Barney A. Ebsworth.