



Mike Blazek & Scott Taylor



The Landscape in Flux

March 12, 2021- May 22, 2021

Artists: Mike Blazek & Scott Taylor
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List of Works

Mike Blazek

Reality Check, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Imagine, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Re-Connected, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Sky High, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Bits and Pieces, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Kaleidoscope, 2021. Projected digital photographs

Scott Taylor

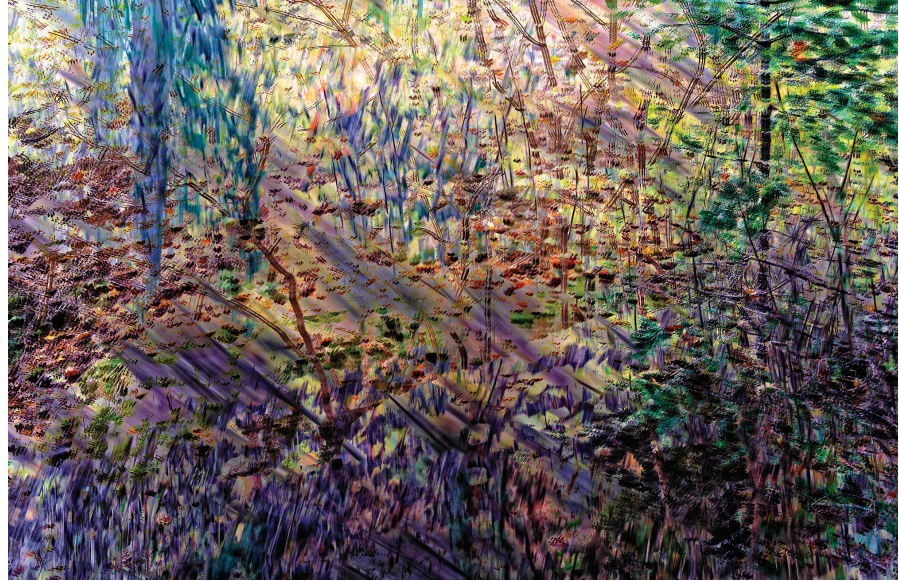
Rondeau Boardwalk #1, 2018. (Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Lake Erie Driftwood #1, 2018. (Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Lake Erie Driftwood #3, 2018. (Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Lake Erie Driftwood #4, 2018. (Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Lake Erie Driftwood #6, 2018. (Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Martin #1, 2019. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Swallow #1, 2019. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Swallow #2, 2019. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Storm Cloud over Erieau Lighthouse, 2020. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 60.96 cm x 91.44 cm
Twisted Trees #1, 2016. (Patterson Lake, SK). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Twisted Trees #2, 2016. (Patterson Lake, SK). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Twisted Trees #6, 2016. (Patterson Lake, SK). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Twisted Trees #7, 2016. (Patterson Lake, SK). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Twisted Trees #8, 2016. (Patterson Lake, SK). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Twisted Trees #10, 2016. (Patterson Lake, SK). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
CM Wilson Pond and Treeline, 2020. (CM Wilson Conservation Area, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 40.64 cm x 60.96 cm
Beach Day, 2016. (Erie Beach, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Reflections of Continental Can, 2018. (Chatham, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Collisions, 2019. (Erie Beach, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Steel Jetty #2, 2019. (Erie Beach, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Steel Jetty #4, 2019. (Erie Beach, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Erieau Pier, 2020. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Erieau Lighthouse #1, 2019. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm
Mouth of the Thames Panorama in Black and White, 2020. (Lighthouse Cove, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper (triptych). 182.88 cm x 55.88 cm
Calm before the Storm, 2020. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper. 50.8 cm x 76.2 cm



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“Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery, like the idle curved tunnels of leaf miners on the face of a leaf. We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what’s going on here. Then we can at least wail the right question into the swaddling band of darkness, or, if it comes to that, choir the proper praise.”

Annie Dillard – Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

The Landscape in Flux

To wonder, to question and to praise. The photographs of Scott Taylor and Mike Blazek pursue these paths through the forests, waterways and beachfronts of Chatham-Kent, following them onwards into the memory and imagination of our evolving Canadian identity.

While Canadian culture remains steeped in the dualisms of Western civilization, the categorical divisions espoused by such traditions are gradually eroding. Challenges posed by environmentalists and land rights activists increasingly reveal the unsustainability of adhering to belief systems that cease to represent the world around us adequately. Resources are not boundless. We do not own the land or the ecosystems that sustain it. Consequently, there is no clear or simple formulation for the landscape, no picturesque aesthetic to contain or capture its nuances. To imagine the landscape “as a whole” is to imagine a landscape alive and in flux.

To think about the landscape is to think about the inevitable appearance of something even more unknowable: Nature itself. At its core, the landscape genre is a set of markers that allows our minds to grapple with infinities. Nature extends well beyond anything our senses can isolate or comprehend with certainty and for no less a reason than that we are always and already immersed within it. At its best, the landscape is Nature’s occasional topography. Like the tip of the iceberg rising above the waterline, it is an indicator of the power that lays well hidden, sublime and resistant to our ability to chart it.

It is this matter of immersion, quiet observation, and attachment to mystery that binds these two photographers’ work together. Though distinct in their approach, each of these gifted artists pursues new pathways by which we can arrive at a richer sense of our place in the world.

Mike Blazek

Walking into a gallery filled with Mike Blazek’s photography, one is struck by the luminosity of these inviting images. The room is dark. The white walls soften and recede into shadow as they accept the brightly coloured images projecting across them. Warm yellows and reds, earthy browns and greens infuse the architecture with light. These are the colors of Nature amplified, shifting and moving through time in programs of images that slowly dissolve, merge, and come back into focus, creating a kaleidoscope of colour and form. Anyone who has walked along the trails of our Canadian woodlands will recognize something of this passage. Blazek presents us with a feeling of enclosure punctuated briefly by vistas, shadows and dappled sunshine, a sense that we exist on some unknowable continuum stretching from the expanse of the skies above to the precipice of microscopic worlds living beneath our feet. Enclosure and displacement co-exist in the remarkable space the artist presents.

The “give and take” of this experience is not relegated to Romantic displacements alone, however. The artist has placed common 4 x 8 panels of construction material into the scene, reinforcing the gallery’s architectural presence and our link to the material world wherever we may be. The interruption of the mundane gets swept up into a play of visual transcendence alternating between here and there, cast shadows and images. Doorways. Windows. Here these ciphers of pictorial entry tilt and lean, at some times frustrating desire and, at others, amplifying the passage into something approaching hallucinatory and unseen realms of visual energy.

To accentuate this process further, Mike Blazek utilizes a photographic process called “stacking,” a technique that pushes photography’s technical boundaries on-site and in-camera. Remarkably, none of the works on display in the gallery is altered post-production. The artist layers image upon image, opening the lens and moving the camera in time with his eye’s movements. The effects he generates blur, stretch, compress and amplify the colour and the forms around him. It is a process not unlike the lexicon of gestures and motions a painter might develop to apply pigment to a canvas – but for Blazek, the paint he uses is light itself.

Scott Taylor

It seems fitting that a landscape photographer should have begun his working life as a cartographer. Scott Taylor honed his artistic practice mapping remote places like the Canadian Arctic and West Africa. As such, Taylor sets out to accurately describe the lay of the land, identifying geophysical changes and charting topographical courses for later reference. Whether for navigational purposes or study, cartography has played an essential role in developing our relationship with the land. This influence is evident throughout Taylor’s work, even if it often exists as a screen through which he peers.

In images like “Twisted Trees,” taken from the birds’-eye perspective of a helicopter while the artist was on assignment, we can see

Taylor’s fascination with ascribing a less precise and measured understanding of the natural world. An aberration from the objective and descriptive functions of cartography, these images suggest something ineffable and mysterious, rooted in materiality and foreshadowing an interest in balance that has preoccupied the photographer throughout his artistic practice.

While not true of all of his imagery, the artist often focusses his camera on a singular or static object and then extends the length of his exposure time just enough to throw the movement of its surroundings into a soft and ethereal mist. Images like “Lake Erie Driftwood” and “Collisions” are captured at rest and seemingly static even as the world around them continues to move, often violently. Waves roll and crash, slowly eroding and reforming the shape of the trees and limbs they once were. In this sense, the photographer captures the passage of time as we perceive it on the one hand, and, on the other, time as it silently shapes the world in which we live. A material world that is always in flux, whether evolving or eroding, appears to be strangely insurgent in these photographs.

The same technique shows water’s fluid and persistent influence on the “Steel Jetty Erie Beach” images. This ironwork is no less impervious to the effects of the weather and time’s passage. If anything, its imposing physical presence accentuates the material world’s constant state of change in which we are all immersed, highlighting the precarious and fragile state of all attempts to deny it.

The world is in flux, and Nature moves along undaunted. It continues to surprise us with its ever-changing beauty, all the while questioning our ability to insulate ourselves from the caprice and power of its influence over us. Unlike Blazek’s focus on the sheltering interior of the forest floor, Taylor’s eye turns towards the margins, and onwards along the horizon. In these works, Nature exhibits moments of uncontained power and an underlying desire for serenity within the embrace of its indifference.

Despite technology’s ascendance and its promise to reshape the world according to our wishes, humanity remains immersed in matter and time. Time and flux quietly do their work in the striking and cinematic images of these artists.

Phil Vanderwall, TAG Director/Curator

Cover Images:
Mike Blazek; *Reality Check*, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Scott Taylor; *Rondeau Boardwalk #1*, 2018. (Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper
Inside Cover Images:
Installation view of *The Landscape in Flux* (Thames Art Gallery, 2021)
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Top Row Images Mike Blazek:
Imagize, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Reality Check, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Imagize, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Re-Connected, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Re-Connected, 2021. Projected digital photographs
Bottom Row Images Scott Taylor:
Twisted Trees #0, 2016. (Patterson Lake, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper
Lake Erie Driftwood #1, 2018. (Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper
Storm Cloud over Erieau Lighthouse, 2020. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper
Steel Jetty #4, 2019. (Erie Beach, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper
Erieau Pier, 2020. (Erieau, ON). Digital photograph on Hahnemühle Hemp paper

