
Landscape Art In a Comprehensive and Descriptive Way

This essay aims to explore landscape art in a comprehensive and descriptive way. Firstly, this essay will provide a comprehensive description as well as comparison of No 1 Crown Mines by Moses Tladi, as well as Mabuhlebehe, Mubuhlebehe, Mmuhlebehe by Dineo Bopape. Secondly, this essay will discuss the materiality in both of these works in the context of conventional landscape art. Moreover, this essay will explore the notions of the sublime, spirituality and religion according to conventional landscape art. Finally, this essay will provide an in-depth analysis of landscape art being a political practice through the use of a quote by Mohl.

Moses Tladi was the first black artist known for working within the western tradition of landscape art. The oil painting titled No 1 Crown Mines depicts what appears to be a mine dump, encased by oversized mountains in Kensington Johannesburg, and a few smaller houses which materialize at uneven distances around the large building with a red roof which stands before a milky-blue sky. This painting contains a balance as the red roof of the double-story building complements the green pigment of the foliage surrounding it. However, the pinkish trail which leans more toward the left in this tranquil scene breaks up this harmonious balance of an unbalanced foreground. On a connotative level, this work speaks to the voices of those young black men, in that time period, were conscripted into working in the mines. The red roof, while complementing the foliage, contrasts the violence of man-made objects to the serenity of nature. Furthermore, the pink footpath which breaks up the harmony of this natural landscape further shows how man imposes himself onto nature and often defaces it.

However, whilst still a landscape work, this piece by Dineo Bopape differs greatly in its visual composition in comparison to Tladi's oil painting. Mabuhlebehe, Mubuhlebehe, Mmuhlebehe depicts a photograph of what appears to be a medieval-styled dining or sitting area, evident by the grand concrete-looking fireplace as well as five brass-candelabras. However, in place of a table or seats, Bopape has placed grand mounds of compacted soil arranged in a three-dimensional rectangular shape with items such as: locally sourced soils, feathers, brass uterus forms, clay pieces moulded by a clenched fist, 18 carat gold leaf, loose soil and healing herbs. Each of these objects represents a different aspect of her ideals in working: Bopape is interested in the gendered aspects of art and thus uses metal shapes which refer to African indigenous writing scripts. The use of clay in clenched fists can be seen as a black power symbol, as well as a symbol of resistance as the clay will harden and become a rock. Moreover, the use of gold leaf, which is precious and beautiful, is used to contrast the earthiness of the compressed soil. Bopape also creates a sacred space out of any space, such as a dining or living area, through the use of burning traditional herbs and incense. Unlike Tladi's use of oil paint on a canvas, which creates a flat, two-dimensional depiction of a mine dump he most probably had direct access to, Bopape creates an immersive experience for the viewers, as all of the senses are being enlightened and used through her choice of material.

in the gardens and surrounding landscapes on which he worked. He was a gardener in Johannesburg, which became a large influence in his art. He made use of a very traditional way of painting: oil on canvas. Because he did not have the money to pay for art supplies, he would often use sticks sharpened and left-over paint found in tins. He would have either just painted with these sharpened sticks or would have wrapped it in old rags to make the end appear

wider. Moses Tladi's artwork No 1 Crown Mines upholds but also disassembles many conventions of traditional landscape art.

Firstly his artwork can be considered very traditional because oil paint is a very common medium used when painting landscapes, thus upholding the convention of landscapes mostly being produced in oil paint. The image is also of a natural setting but still has manmade objects, both upholding and overturning the convention of landscape images depicting a natural image with no human presence. Moses Tladi often took a very big interest in mostly realistic landscape art and never really looked at anything else influencing him to do a realistic landscape painting like No 1 Crown Mines, which helps to uphold the convention of realism and also the convention of horizontal orientation in this image. By using oil paint, he was able to capture more naturalistic colours instead of expressionistic.

Unlike Moses Tladi's artwork, Dineo Seshee Bopape's artwork *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu* is not a traditional take on landscape art but it is rather seen as an immersive installation. Installations allow for an artist to have an unlimited amount of media and tools with which to explore the soil in a social, ecological and political way. Dineo Bopape's art goes against many conventions of landscape art for starters the convention of using oil paint as the medium, like Moses Tladi uses, Bopape uses an empty room that has compacted soil along with other items mentioned above. Dineo Bopape's work also takes a different approach to the convention of these objects being mainly natural without the presence of humans or manmade objects. Her art is made up of mostly natural elements but it is placed in a manmade structure with people constantly moving in and around her artwork. Therefore one can argue that it both upholds the convention by it being mostly natural but also overturns it because of the people and the manmade structure which is similar to Tladi's work. The fact that Moses' artwork is a flat image on canvas can be contrasted to Bopape's use of a 3 dimensional work, thus going against the conventional way landscapes are done. Unlike Tladi's work, Bopape's artwork allows for people to become a part of the artwork and not be separate to it, overturning the convention which Tladi upholds. The installation like many others introduces dimensions of space, time and sensory experience that go beyond the traditional. (Feller, Landa, Toland & Wessoek, 2015) Bopape's artwork does not only appeal to the sense of sight like Tladi's work but also to the sense of smell, as people walking through the installation can smell the soil and herbs. It therefore overturns the convention by allowing the viewers to have an active engagement in the artwork where Tladi's work only demands the engagement of sight. (Feller, Landa, Toland & Wessoek, 2015)

Dineo Seshee Bopape's piece *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu* and Moses Tladi's piece *No 1 Crown Mines* both explore the idea of the sublime, spirituality and religion through their uses of the conventions of landscape art. Bopape's piece *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu* relies heavily on the influence of spirituality and the importance of the soil. Bopape personifies the earth, as she believes that it is "far more than a material substance" (Carrigan, 2017). This spiritual connection she holds with the soil comes through in the conventions of landscape within her pieces. Bopape's work does not follow the normal conventions of landscape art, however she still translates aspects into her installation works. *Mabu, Mubu, Mmu* rejects the conventions of landscape art through its medium, the intervention of man-made objects and the lack of a barrier between viewer and the work. However the piece creates a temporal space emphasising the idea that Bopape has; that the earth has the "capacity for both giving and taking life" (Carrigan, 2017). The compacted earth further acts as a reminder that our time on earth is limited. It also reminds us of the sublime in a sense of how powerful the earth is and how we are connected to it instead of just

owning and using it.

Unlike Bopape, Moses Tladi's work No 1 Crown Mines deals with the sublime and religion in a more conventional way. His picturesque paintings use realistic natural colours to emphasise the beauty of the land. Similarly to Mohl, Tladi's peer, Tladi believed that God "created beautiful landscapes for Africans to admire and paint" (Mzolo, 2017). They emphasise the vastness of the African landscape with little interference by people. The only time Tladi goes against the convention of landscape using human occupation within his works is to emphasise the sublime vastness of the land created by god for him to admire and paint. Large houses end up looking small and insignificant in comparison to the land surrounding it. Tladi believes that the earth is a signifier of Gods power unlike Bopape who believes the earth and soil is the thing that holds the power. Both works serve as signifiers of what they believe, their religious and spiritual beliefs.

"But I am African, and when God made Africa, He also created beautiful landscapes for Africans to admire and paint." This statement by Mohl was said in response to admirer's advice to Mohl to place his focus on something other than landscape art, as it has been perfected by white people a long time ago (Mzolo 2017:2).

Mohl's statement is indicative of the connection between identity and space that is talked about in Mofokeng (2008:1). Nationality gives us a little taste of it where Mohl states that he is African and merely wants to admire and paint Africa, his home. An African's identity will in some measure be tied to Africa.

The public's reaction to Mohl, as well as Tladi's work was genuine surprise at the artistic sense of natives as they were known (Mzolo 2017:2). This response is as a result of the dehumanization of on black people in Apartheid, where they were wrongly perceived as less than. Bringing race into that statement and referring to Africa gives a quite clear indication of landscape art and how it is completely intertwined with politics.

Landscape art is charged with land as the focus. Land has a rich history as it is a resource that we, as humans, are able to utilize. It is in short supply and that the class struggle is inscribed in space (Elden 2007:106). Lefebvre rightly argued that space is the locus and vehicle of struggle and is therefore a vitally important political issue (Elden 2007:107).

In history, immense injustice was committed concerning the use of land. One example in Brazil shows land that supported thousands of people was given exclusively to one family (Monbiot 1994:3). As the land is distributed, so is power. Landowners make rules and with the common grounds becoming private, communities no longer make their own rules, but live under the reign of their landlord (Monbiot 1994:6). The Enclosure Acts demonstrate how skewed the power is in the land ownership. With the redistribution of land, people in power used their power selfishly (McElroy 2012:2). The rich got richer and the poor became utterly destitute. In South Africa, the Land act of 1913 dictated that Africans become 'squatters' in their ancestral land (Mzolo 2017:2).

Landscape also exists as a construct of memory, with layers that can be likened to the layers of rock that form it (Mofokeng, 2008:2). This implies that there is feeling attached to a landscape. It can also be understood as not merely memories of the perceiver's minds constructing the landscape but also the 'memory' of the actual landscape, all the events that has taken place in a certain space changes the landscape and so it has a 'memory' of its own. In Santu

Mofokeng's (2008:2) reading he goes on to say that landscape appreciation is informed by many factors including personal experience, ideology, indoctrination, prejudice and myth (Mofokeng, 2008:3).

Therefore it can be said that this essay has explored landscape art in a comprehensive and descriptive way. This essay has provided a sample description of No 1 Crown Mines by Moses Tladi, as well as Mabu, Mubu, Mmu by Dineo Bopape. Furthermore, this essay has discussed the materiality in both of these works in the context of conventional landscape art. Additionally, the notion of the sublime, spirituality and religion according to conventional landscape art has been explored. Finally an in-depth analysis of landscape art being a political practice through the use of a quote by Mohl has been considered.

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