This exhibition is curated by Olga Doležal with support from Art Bridges Foundation.

The Katonah Museum of Art is supported in part by ArtsWestchester with support from the Westchester County Government, the New York State Council on the Arts with support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.
The Modernists: Landscape in the 20th Century

The land has been an independent subject for painting since the Renaissance, yet it was not until the late 19th century that the genre was transformed, removing it from its lowly pedestal in the hierarchy of the academies and elevating it to a worthy theme in its own right. As the Industrial Revolution altered the traditions of rural life and artists focused on painting outdoors – a practice known as painting en plein air – the landscape genre evolved from its roots through conventional painting techniques as well as change the way that we perceive our natural surroundings.

By the early 20th century, American artists approached the landscape with a variety of strategies, initially influenced by European art movements such as Impressionism, Fauvism and Expressionism. American artists absorbed the radical approaches to depicting light and color established by the European avant-gardes, but they also internalized their experience of European art, finding inspiration in the distinctive vernacular of the American geography and topography. Many of them worked outdoors and responded to their local countryside with works that expressed the emotive power of their surroundings rather than merely representing the verisimilitude of the landscape itself.

In the early 21st century the concept of landscape had expanded to include urban and industrial environments. Contemporary artists continue to revisit the genre and often engage with it differently than their forebears. They combine the artificial with the natural, sometimes giving us a tactile as well as a visual experience that doesn’t necessarily correlate to what we see in nature. Working from memory in the studio, they combine their recollection of location with an emotional and analytical response to what they have previously experienced. For other artists, landscapes alsoconsumes the clouds that are absorbed into the fierce blue sky. (Fig. 3) For Hartley and Marin, the rugged seascapes of Maine become a powerful force of nature. In 1912 captures most successfully the heightened use of color for expressive purposes, using a new visual language of bold line and color that she had learned from her time in France and from her world travels. (Cover). The same subjective interpretation of color is used by Marin in his almost abstract view of the Westhaven Pines in Back Shore (Westhaven, New Jersey, 1916. (Fig. 5)

Stimulated by the Fauves such as Henri Matisse, Maurice Vlaminck and André Derain, the American modernists did not shy away from using color expressively and artificially to articulate mood and emotion. Alfred Maurer’s Landscape (Autumn), 1909 is an early example of a Fauve landscape in which a stand of conical cypress trees stands against pink and yellow undulating hills, a bright blue sky and vividly colored vegetation that was probably painted directly from nature. (Fig. 6) Perhaps Zarach’s painting Rolfe Beach, 1912 captures most successfully the heightened use of color for expressive purposes, using a new visual language of bold line and color that she had learned from her time in France and from her world travels. (Cover). The same subjective interpretation of color is used by Marin in his almost abstract view of the Westhaven Pines in Back Shore (Westhaven, New Jersey, 1916. (Fig. 5)

For most of the contemporary artists in this exhibition, plein-air painting is no longer a motivating factor in their work. Many like Richard Mayhew (born 1924) and Ryan Nord Kitchen (born 1988), take inspiration from an actual location but transform their memories into works of art that site the landscape but are not a faithful portrayal of it. Mayhew’s Landscape, 2014 evokes more about the spirit of a place than factual representation and reflects the spirituality of his Native American and African American heritage. (Fig. 7) Nord Kitchen’s Sky over Coast, 2018, as he notes, “is a reflection about a summer spent in Bonita, NY. It is the result of look experienced through the lens of painting, history and questions the way in which one frames perception and memory.” (Inside cover) For other artists, landscapes also become mindscapes that are often executed on an imposing scale. In Sun and Storm, 2006, April Gamblin (born 1953) observes reality to create an intense image in which the sun consumes the clouds that are absorbed into the fierce blue sky. (Fig. 8) Like Mayhew’s Oil Painting this work exudes an awe-inspiring power that verges on the spiritual. Vera Ilason’s (born 1975) manipulates the landscape to create works of art that have a narrative and autobiographical content. In The Land of Plenty, 2017 she places the artificial alongside the natural and works this way from a research-based studio and describes an undefinable locale that has psychological meaning for the artist. (Fig. 9)

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New Visions of the Landscape from the Early 20th and 21st Centuries

March 17 - June 16, 2019

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