

FASHION'S NIGHT OUT A Star-Studded Shopping Celebration

# VOGUE

NOV

## NINE

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# dreaming the landscape

What better time to make art about nature? Dodie Kazanjian asks a dynamic group of artists to turn their hands to a neglected genre. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.





**BROAD HORIZONS**

Taking in the view at Lido Beach, Long Island, abstract and figurative artists (FROM LEFT) Francesco Clemente, Mark Bradford, Julian Lethbridge, Suzanne McClelland, Kristin Baker, Francesco Vezzoli, and Jeff Koons are among those bringing an original eye to a traditional subject. Hair, Duffy for Tommy Guns NY; makeup, Alice Lane at Jed Root, Inc. Sitings Editor: Phyllis Posnick.







The old classic genres in art won't die. Over the last six years, *Vogue* has investigated the continuing vitality of self-portraiture, the nude, and the still life; this time, to complete the series, we asked eleven leading artists to address landscape painting. The genre's great run in European art, from Claude Lorrain and Poussin to Monet and Cézanne, fell victim to the twentieth century's rage for abstract and conceptual visions. Although none of our invited artists refused the challenge, several said it was "really hard," and every one of them came up with something that would have perplexed (and maybe even intrigued) Poussin. Jeff Koons, no surprise, made sex the central motif of his large and opulent image (ABOVE)—although you have to look hard to find the happy coupling. William Wegman, who made his reputation by photographing his Weimaraners in outlandish human dress, claims that landscape painting is "easy," something he does when he's feeling lazy. Elizabeth Peyton, known for her small, jewellike portraits, says, "I kept going outside and feeling like, God, how do people do this?" The painter Suzanne McClelland, whose *A Heap of Greens* was inspired by the late earth artist Robert Smithson, tells me that a lot of the young artists she knows are thinking about "the future of the earth and how we treat the land. They're using the landscape, looking at it, and working together on gardens." Landscape, in other words, has evolved from an aesthetic genre to a way of seeing the world. "Landscape is part of everything," Kristin Baker says. "If anything can be art, can anything be a landscape? I'm interested in that idea." The landscapes on these pages (along with many more by the same artists) will be on view from October 30 through November 15 in the historic rooms at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

Waterfall Couple (Dots) Brown Swirl, 2008; JEFF KOONS, oil on canvas, 148 1/2" x 108 1/2"; JEFF KOONS, Tree (Orn), 2009; ELIZABETH PEYTON, watercolor on paper, 14 1/2" x 10 1/2". Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise.





## JEFF KOONS

*This painting has a sexualized sense of nature. There's reference to nineteenth-century French painting, and Courbet, and to Louis Eilshemius, a twentieth-century American who has absolutely influenced me over the last couple of years. There's also a reflective silver line drawing that's what I think would be Cy Twombly's take on Courbet's Origin of the World—but a little more primal. The image itself comes from a close-up of a couple in the act of making love. It's a penetration. Laid on top of that, with the exact same cropping, is an image of a waterfall. So you have the greens and nature colors, and then, in the center of the waterfall, you have white and also the flesh of the couple. It makes reference to Marcel Duchamp's Étant Donnés. Sexuality is something that overtakes you. The gesture that you end up making in the world happens through instinct and all these desires for procreation. The most beautiful aesthetics, the greatest beauty, is the acceptance of nature and of how things function. When I say beauty, I mean just true reality and openness to everything.*

*Waterfall Couple (Dots) Brown Swirl, 2008*

## ELIZABETH PEYTON

*It was so hard for me to focus on landscape because there were no humans involved. . . . Unfortunately,*

*Cézanne has done everything. It's hard to do a landscape without being totally corny. With landscape, you can get really hung up on details, and then you miss the whole feeling of it. I was painting a tree that I really love. I kept approaching it straight on. But, in nature, what's the side and what's the front? So I went to the side of it and thought, 'Of course. It's just like a person.' You can't draw a person straight on, because their face flattens out. I really wanted to let go and be more abstract, which is something I never seem able to do.*

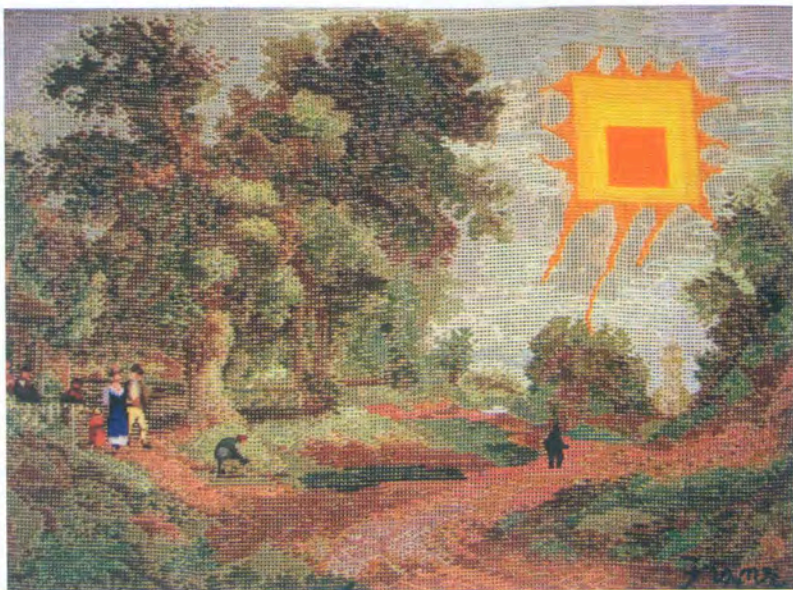
*Before, I felt like my inspiration had to be located in another person or an object that somebody made.*

*This time, I feel like I got to the other side of it.*

*Tree (Orient), 2009*







## FRANCESCO VEZZOLI

*In all honesty, I never thought of landscape. It seemed like an interesting provocation that Vogue was throwing at me. I took it very conceptually. Needlework is a technique that's provocative in the same way. Somebody asks me what I do, and I say, needlework. It's a bit like saying landscape—something obsolete, something old-fashioned, either old-ladies- or old-gentlemen-like. I thought it should be done in the most gentrified way, like a traditional landscape, but conceptualized with a twist—a perverse landscape. It's like taking a beautiful Poussin and sticking a Josef Albers in the blue sky. That's what I did, but I did the whole thing with a needle.*

*A Place in the Sun, 2009*

## AMY SILLMAN

*I'm really interested in Monet, specifically the landscapes where the horizon line doesn't appear.*

*In the water-lily paintings, you're looking at the reflection of the landscape on top of the pond. It's an incredible trick, an amazing play with what's actually being seen. I don't usually paint in a representational way. I concentrate on abstractions where figures are the main protagonists. But since we could think about landscape any which way here, I realized that a landscape doesn't preclude a figure. It just means that the landscape is the space that the figure inhabits. I had been working on this painting for a long time. It wasn't until I spent a day at the beach that I was able to finish it. I came back and painted the head in five minutes. The painting seemed to me like being on the beach and looking at all the other bodies and at the landscape. It's not a picture of the beach, it is the beach.*

*Fatso, 2009*



## KRISTIN BAKER

*In this painting, there are a fair amount of trees. The general structure relates to Cézanne's Bathers. I'm attracted to any type of seascape. . . . I like to think about my paintings as landscapes, but not in relation to the landscape genre and not in relation to a specific place. Something between being in the mind and a real place. I like the idea that a real landscape is the surface of the Earth, and my paintings are very much about the surface. They're a space to play out ideas and actions. They're landscapes or thinking spots, but not something specific.*

*Oculatie Der Boomen, 2009*





**MICKALENE THOMAS** *Landscape becomes more relevant during travel. This year my career has been growing, and I've been traveling a lot and looking at landscape in a different way. I've been particularly interested in the Hudson River School painters because I've been spending a lot of time up the Hudson and thinking about how they captured this landscape and how, more than 100 years later, it hasn't really changed. That's why this painting is called Hudson River on My Mind. This is only my second landscape, but it reinforms my body of work. It's opening up new ways of thinking for my portraiture.*

*Hudson River on My Mind, 2009*



## FRANCESCO CLEMENTE

*To me, the body is a landscape and the landscape a body. I have built my house at an imaginary crossroads of history and geography. When history gets too bloody, and it always does, geography is the way out. The maps (shown here) are an explicit reference to this long-standing theme. The maps are autobiographical and at the same time offer a common narrative, as we all long to return to a place of origin where we haven't been before. The only valid non-decorative landscape has always been the historic landscape. Because our time fears history, it despises landscape. I cannot claim an influence, but I am affected by the landscape of Poussin, where nature is seen as the graveyard of history—a history of human fragility.*

*In Meiner Heimat XIII, 2009*