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Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (3)

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MESSAGES TO THE ABOVE: LOOKING AT ART FROM THE SKY

**Abstract**

This article wants to provide a short introduction on how aerial photography and satellite imagery have changed our way of looking at the Earth, inspiring art movements and allowing for the discovery and appreciation of ancient and more recent artworks.

Aerial photography unveiled to the public a new iconography, inspiring a number of photographers, cineastes, painters and architects to experiment with the possibilities offered by the bird's-eye view perspective. Moreover, progresses in aerial photography also represented a precious tool for human sciences, notably in the field of archaeology.

At the end of the 1960s, the pictures made available by aerial archaeology influenced the artists of the Land Art movement. Aiming at extending the reach of arts to the topographic space, this movement included the creation of very large artistic works, embedded in the surrounding landscape. The only way for the public to appreciate such artworks in their entirety was often through an aerial photography showcased in a gallery.

Technological developments in the space sector have also brought a new look on reality, taking perspective to a new level. In addition to revealing the astonishing beauty of our planet, the first clear images of the Earth taken from the sky in the late Sixties changed for good the Eurocentric and anthropocentric paradigm that had characterised the Renaissance artistic model.

More recently, satellites have become innovative and fascinating tools for creative arts, notably in the field of photography, leading to what we can call today "satellite photographic art". Of course, behind the satellite there is no longer a human eye, but this does not mean that satellite images do not constitute a new frontier of photography, which is now also capable of capturing much more than shapes and colours, but (thanks to sensors) of "seeing beyond the eye".

Satellites are able to capture contemporary Land Art. If the quality of the images is not comparable with that of aerial pictures, the fact that such artworks can be seen from space carries an undeniable fascination. Indeed, watching at something from above requires an effort on the part of the observer, in order to reconstruct the subject and the context of the image.

Like the steam engine and the locomotive in the past, satellites have the potential of upheaving our perception of the world and of inducing echoes that will inspire new forms of art, combining science, poetry and politics.