

# HALL

ART FOUNDATION

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## REVIEW: *Vermont*

### LANDSCAPES AFTER RUSKIN: REDEFINING THE SUBLIME

Hall Art Foundation • Reading, VT • [hallartfoundation.org](http://hallartfoundation.org) • Through November 27, 2016

The 19th-century English artist and philosopher John Ruskin believed nature should be portrayed in its awe-inspiring totality, as people experienced it. That meant its beauty but also its overwhelming, and sometimes, terrifying aspects.

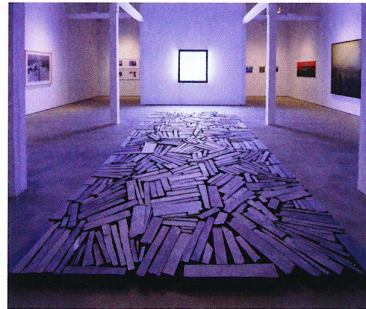
*Landscapes after Ruskin: Redefining the Sublime* at the Hall Art Foundation in Reading, VT takes Ruskin's idea and applies it to the present. These 68 pieces (sculpture, painting, photography, and video from the late 20th and early 21st centuries), culled from the Hall Collection, explore, often obliquely, how contemporary artists depict the environment.

*Landscapes After Ruskin* challenges our usual notion of "sublime," which Merriam-Webster defines as "to exalt, especially in dignity and honor." Rather, we are asked to rethink landscape to consider mankind's encroachment upon it, in this age of climate change, scarcity of resources, over-population, and despoiled water.

Joel Sternfeld, a large-format photographer

who documents the American landscape, curated the show. Among the standouts (the Hall Collection is especially strong in contemporary German artists) is Anselm Kiefer's *Velimir Chlebnikov*, a large (75 x 130") mixed media turbulent seascape evoking the aftermath of nautical warfare; Georg Baselitz's affecting etching with drypoint, *Birken*, of upside down birch trees, implying a disordered world; and Gerhard Richter's *Townscape*—an aerial view of an unnamed city, possibly Dresden, broken up into its gray and white abstract components, as it might be seen on a night-time bombing mission.

Possibly the most overtly political work in the show is Ai Weiwei's installation, *Oil Spills*, made up of black, blobish "disks" covering the floor. Ai



Installation view, *Landscapes After Ruskin: Redefining the Sublime*, curated by Joel Sternfeld, Hall Art Foundation, 2016. Photo: Jeffrey Nintzel. Courtesy Hall Art Foundation.

crafted these porcelain oil spills when he did his residency at Jingdezhen—the heart of historic imperial Chinese porcelain production.

Tony Matelli's painted bronze weeds growing out of the floor cracks, and Christoph Draeger's aerial photographs crafted into jigsaw puzzles of the disasters *Hurricane Andrew* and *Pan Am 103* are impressive statements.

Despite the subject matter, by virtue of the attention poured into these works, *Landscapes after Ruskin* is not a depressing show. The artists are sounding the alarm, but there also seems to be a determination to find beauty in their worlds.

—Arlene Distler