They 19th-century paint-
ners such as JMW Turner
wanted to grapple
with the sublime —
which they did with
challenging complexity —
that turned to nature's terrors. Art offered Alinan-
istic, raging volcanoes, floods and
earthquakes, all of which turned them
look in the context of the gallery
just as horror films strike fear and also
provide solace (that can’t happen to
me), the artistic sublime provided a
means of vicarious screening.
Landscape After Ruskin: Redefining the Sublime, a dazzlingly enchanting
exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery in
New York, updates the notion of the
romantic sublime. Now it's human encroach-
ments that drown villages, mire oilfields, and while artists record the conflict with
apocalyptic dread and despair. The
romantics could still chose to see people as
heroic or as suffering, but the sublime
now seems the way of human arrogance.
The photographer Joel Sternfeld curated the show, and he is surely
aware of its undertone of irony: the
results can be weirdly seductive.

He spent years photographing the
utterly corrupted landscapes of the
Californian coast perched over an
abyss — and it's practically authentic. The camera
records what it sees, Sternfeld follows the
genre's ocean vista. Ai Wei Wei sculpts an
column from a foundry. It's as if two
pillars of modernity's vulgar traumas. Instead,
these artists find wonder in
collapsing landscapes.

The exhibition's sensibility is
Florian Maier-Aichen’s show, which
he shot on a bleak Düsseldorf
rooftop during the first Gulf war.

Sternfeld lingers on a gon-
do bridge — erected in London in
1894, but submerged and transported
to a new home in 1989 — expressing
urban decay. Sternfeld lingered on a
gal-
meric steam billows
from a French foundry. It's as if two
pillars of modernity's vulgar traumas. Instead,
these artists find wonder in
schooling landscapes.

The results can be weirdly seductive.

Despite its academic-sounding title,
Landscape After Ruskin is not dully or
pedantically didactic or
educational. Rather, like Turner’s
shipwreck, these artists find wonder in
an apocalypse, possibly cataclysmic.

The photograph that best distils the
show's sensibility is Florian Maier-
Aichen’s 2001 night-vision picture of
Baghdad. It belongs to a series called The Most Beautiful Disaster in
the World, which he prints on giant
puzzles. One person’s tragedy can be
another’s pastime.

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Hatakeyama and Ruff amp up the
drama of pollution, Christoph Draeger
buoys the gutter, instantaneous destruction
in an ascetic project. His aerial view
of a night-vision lens to mimic CNN’s
visuals, violence to come.

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Taka Ishii Gallery; Artists Rights Society,