

Para Antonio Manuel Lastres Espejo,
Eva Montalvo del Valle,
y los Lastreses de mi familia en Espana

Art can be easily looked down to in a prejudiced society. Unfortunately, bias does have a point. The output of art is generally not proportional to its cost, years of training and practising could easily result in null when the artist lacks appreciation; it is unfeasible to standardise the procedure for evaluating artworks or assign them with material value. Instead of scenarios in which valid outcomes can be revealed immediately that require scientific or engineering skills, the instability of the efficiency of artworks output substantially narrowed art to research theories relatively more abstract.

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Una Mirada a Andalucía

El Renio entre Olivares

Presented by Ce Chen

In the dry weather of August, olive fruits swung with branches and the breathing of the fields.

I pushed the window open, the odour of soil in the breezing air brought me a touch of pleasant coolness. The temperature was not high, azury sky matches the green and lush field of Andalucía. The refreshing scene cannot last long; heat of the day would quickly grill everything brown, then decorate its work with little glitters of gold.

Surrounded by white cottages, shadows in blue-grey were gently projected on stone paths. I leant on the windowsill, sketching absently with a pencil. The effort didn't last long, I was soon attracted by fluttering bees in clusters of jasmine.

Everything was exuding a sweet smell, just as the taste that summer should have.

Ladies were talking, carrying baskets of freshly baked bread and packs of ham; men were often commanded to do sweaty labour under the sun, which is regularly scorching in a Spanish summer. They drove to vegetable fields in groups, weeding spices, harvesting tomatoes and moving scarecrows around. Some of them walked straightly into olive groves to hunt rabbits. The screams of children's sports have not yet sounded, it pleased figs on low branches a lot. Everything went on smoothly and peacefully as if such scene only exists in theatre and literature.

I took a jasmine flower from the white porcelain placed on the bedside table, and clipped it into my sketchbook.

The village is enclosed by hills with only a looping road knifes through. It has several excellent watching platforms for experiencing the breath-taking mountain view. On one side, the depth of the canyon was covered with various trees that shelter birds in the Southern summer; on the other, vast groves, of course, expanding to the horizon with two other towns located within. The highway meanders through the Andalusian plain with barely a fork. Cordoba is in the North, and Granada is in the South. Sometimes there was a tiny spot moving alongside the road, that might just be a farmer heading nowhere. The farmer rode on a horse, the scene was occasionally blocked by olives trees. And eventually, he rode in the woods, disappeared.

A lot of time has been spent on travelling this day. It can hardly be judged that I used them in a productive way. Mostly, the driver would caught me staring outside the window, watching endless fields flew by. Their shapes were always gentle, curving like the body of a lovely lady. But hills have presented themselves by breaking into the composition several times; they were usually covered with what Spanish called Cardo Borriquero, a plant similar to Milk Thistle, but considerably exceeds its size with serried thorns. If there was a castle on the hill, a settlement would be likely to appear around the establishment.

Rarely can I see other vehicles on the highway, which has brought me great convenience in examining the fields. Sometimes I found it challenging to appreciate human figures or artificial objects in landscapes. They always appeared in a manner which severely damaged the composition. Contradictorily, if the absence of human maintained for a considerable length, I would surely miss the companion of another. Being annexed by loneliness is undoubtedly going to hurt the efficiency of my work.

The height of the sun gradually heated up the environment. As I suffered the absence of the moisture as well as the wind, I realised the importance of be sheltered in a house. The heat fixed the movement of clouds on the blue canvas, and silent birds that have been singing in the olive grove. Under the scorch which other parts of Europe can hardly experience, every movement was seized. Andalusians usually choose to stay indoors from noon to dusk. It is also a reasonable Spanish characteristic: If you cannot solve the problem immediately, merely dropping the task until it can be done is smarter than waiting in anxiety. The regional feature would often leave people an exaggeration regarding the laziness in Spanish culture.

More than once, small cottages on wheat fields broke into my observation. Clouds cast massive shadows around them, reflecting the vastness of the plain. Hills rolling like smooth folds on a velvet. These farmhouses frequently located at the centre of the picture. I enjoyed imagining living in one. Surrounding by charming landscapes, owning a farm that I can grow anything as I please, and the most important thing is, living without disturbance. When I feel like to connect with the world, the highway then looks strangely close.

People are always on their way of seeking, while not every one of them has an objective; even though it takes an eternity to clarify what they are actually looking for, they just cannot stop the obsession.

The heavy raincloud with overwhelming thickness stayed still, while our car drove underneath. The sun was blocked, but seldom a lessening of light; little by little, the whole sight started dimming. The last bit of sky between the horizon and the inky cloud was dyed into the purest blue due to the high contrast. A river loomed behind layers of canopies, reflecting lights to an unbelievable level as if it was luminous.

The storm interrupted the music from the radio. I had been expecting the rain, but its density was beyond my imagination. The tempest formed a curtain of water, making it difficult for me to judge whether it was a mountain or an enormous rock that was being rendered in the distant field. Our planet has a magical power and by which things can be twisted into illusions. Even a natural scene can be processed into something weirdly unnatural, substantially exceeding all imagination. We often say worldview decides how artists shape their works, through water carpets of mysteries, artists never hesitate to go for the essence of things; or conversely, they create their own filters to express radical ideas that failed to be presented nakedly. If I were born upon this field, what would my art look like? What people have aware is a foreign understanding of Andalusian field reproduced on selected mediums with an exotic style. On thin layers of watercolour paint, the observable Iberian peninsula was arguably photographically-realistic. However, if there is another landscape that long ago shaped the painter's worldview exists underneath? Or perhaps these Spanish landscapes were entirely shaped and polished by a distinctive world view?

To my point of view, our world only exists through word of mouth. As observers, we use various media to shape and to spread unique archives of observations that established on different perspectives. Every out-putter would have a distinctive worldview, angle and observation duration; and infinite versions of cognitions will be produced. Through exchange of informations based on the observable world, an unconsciously manipulated world has been established. Yet Unobserved moments exist objectively, unawareness has been blocking it to be the hatchery from which ideas can be extracted and developed.

Being unobserved is a concept quite subjectively. An immersion experience which lasts sufficiently long would result in selective blindness. It can be developed by people who have been living in the same environment for a considerable amount of time. Through talks and interviews about my confusion regards how locals failed to see the beauty of surrounding landscapes that people like me cannot attend but only rely on a precious opportunity. I have develop interest in this pattern and responded with my creations. I aimed to project a frame of a specific point-in-time on every piece of painting, combing personal cognition and objective reality. I stimulate reevaluation of fixed cognition or a specific environment for locals, and expand observable world for people who currently have no capability to attend.

I would consider myself work like an archivist in the most insignificant area of a library, faithfully recording my observations. It may take a long time for someone to be attracted, wiping the dust off the cover, and read the content so that my work can stand a chance to contribute to Art and Humanity. May these work encourage my audiences to develop a universal fraternity to a totally strange individual when they understand they both in love with a same element; and may they can encourage people to walk outside, to see the beautiful people cultivated by different landscapes. Talk to each other, putting aside bias and arrogance.

*Now understand me well,
it is provided in the essence of things
that from any fruition of success,
no matter what,
shall come forth something to make a greater struggle
necessary.*

Walt Wittmann, The Song of Open Road.

Apart from wheat and olive, vast sunflower cropland is also a scenic pleasant on the field of Cordoba too. Although I imagine I would have seen miles of vibrant sunflowers as they were pictured by Van Gogh's, brown branches dried out by the scorching is what I have seen the most. It is also why I joked with my friend that the flag of Andalucía should be brown-white-brown instead of matching white with vivid green. I rarely saw farmers harvesting these mummified plants as if they overly trust the summer weather of Iberian Peninsula. When driving underneath the rainclouds, I felt a little concerned for the left-over sunflowers. Moisture did not water crops gently but struck them instead, cannot to bring them back to life. A torrential storm is capable to flood the plain, lodging plants then cover them with thick mud. On second thoughts — at least high temperature and dryness should not make decay a big problem.

The south of a barren mountain which appeared in front of us as a sudden introduced a steeper terrain. The town is nothing similar to those settlements shaped like a splash in the rural area of Cordoba. Retails and diners were built alongside the highway while residence area was arranged in the high ground with relatively inconvenient transportation. Traffic merged together from forks, heading north towards Cordoba, or moving south to Granada.

Driving through the border of Granada felt like an endless uphill. Streets were narrowed that we had to squeeze through crowds of cars. Buildings oppressed the atmosphere significantly with their increasing heights and density. It was almost breathless queuing in small lanes while calculating if enough space was left for trams. The street view improved as we struggled further. Soon the road was widened, greenery returned as decorations; pavements with public benches and fancy sculptures were built in the middle of the road. Overgrown street trees even hooded some paths into avenues.

Finally, at the foot of a hill full of white houses, I showered in the odour of bitter orange and pomegranate.

Stone flooring around the Albaicín has been polished by years of tourism. I have to walk extremely careful to prevent slipping on the smoothness. Shadows of architectures carried a refreshing, dusty smell in the afternoon. As long as you walk in shades, sunburnt and the temperature would not be a concern. I bought a can of local beer as a decent snack, lit a Fortuna cigarette, started to climb the hill. Granada is magical; whenever a coolness breezes through alleys between buildings, the joy may unload your depression, and you can't help to smile, to dance a circle rhythmically with the music in your brain. I wandered through the maze of ancient residence. From time to time I have to bow through waterfalls of Bougainvillea. Every new height I reached would seduce me a looking back to the city. When visiting Granada, if you stand high enough, you will find the town established in the middle of a broad plain that guarded by mountains. Entrances of the urban area are gaps between hills, made this city a fortress in ancient time. My eyes were attracted by the spires of the Cathedral. Used it as a reference, I have found the hotel where I live. Then I tried hard to recollect the route towards Cordoba just for entertainment although it soon turned serious. By which road did I come? And before that, where I came from?

The sun often appeared right in front of me while I climb. The light shines mightily that I can barely open my eyes. It is hard to maintain strength in such circumstance. I picked a bush of jasmine which was hanging to the ground and sat behind its curtain. A cat approached me with a pleasant humming.

She nibbling slightly on my socks, swiftly rubbed my leg, then settled beside my backpack. I patted her, tickling her jaw while trying to figure out which path should I take next. Maybe I am lost, I cannot recall the trail I took previously. Where exactly, La Alhambra smiled at me from above?

Once, the furthest place I walked seemed to be the very end of the land. In many cases, life pushed me in the opposite direction, betray my belief and trust. In those darkest moments, these views were treated as the only candle in the darkness, which brings strength and warmth. With a single bit of light, I will never be afraid. I know all my effort will support a reunion to the beauty; they have already become a part of me, paying back my love with their everlasting inspiration. I work as an archiver, aimed for document love and hope for everyone walked within these landscapes, or dreamers that will eventually reach there.

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Memory always fades with time. The scene projected in our minds is often our most private understanding of a landscape, as an archive of time.

As I opened the gate at the border of the meadow, walked to the other side of the marsh, I thought white cliffs were left behind. But at another perspective, they are always ahead, calling to me.

I walked back to the wetland where cliffs were divided into two, graceful waves were blown on the looping river of Cuckmere. Fishes, even their scales were visible through the clear water. Wigeon quickly dived into the water, after a while a time butt with shaking feathers floated up, accompanied with two petite flippers. A golden retriever stuck out its tongue, gratefully enjoying its outdoor time.

Snowy clouds outlined the boundary to the sea, and water with a border would be a lake. A sealed scenery, a glasshouse of natural beauty. Sails were hoisted, heading to the foot of snow-capped mountains opposite white cliffs, shortly they have merged into whiteness. Suddenly countless canvas was lifted above a floating sea of clouds as if snow strikes a wildland bloomed with chrysanthemums.

When I started learning watercolour, my tutor told me a rather complicated word, which refers to the fog that rising from the sea surface. The instruct came from his observation to one of my painting of Cuckmere Valley years ago, thus essentially it is also an explanation of my observation. I did enjoy watching storms approach across the channel, mist engulfing the coastal horizon. When clouds were so low that you can nearly feel its coldness with your fingertip, it stacked to a certain thickness that a gentle wind could easily move it. A cloud of white was filtered out of the dimness, like the snowy top on boundless mountains I saw in Bayanbulak. Landscapes suddenly share familiarity. They somehow were overlayed with sealed memories, landscapes I missed, scenarios that I would give in anything to live once more.

I often follow the animal's trail to find an effortless downhill path. It has a similar view to the cliffs on the left, except there is a moderate area of trees that twisted by the wind. Their trunks are mostly covered with a kind of gold-grown moss that very common in England. Tiny red fruits fall beaches between narrow leaves and spikes, feasting wood pigeons. Cattle idle within the forest, sleepily wagging tails, driving away insects that probably not exist.

However, most livestock doesn't seem to bother. From time to time, I saw sheep wander passes me, bleating, then disappeared into a sea of pale yellow flowers.

Red fescue grass habitats in small valleys between peaks of cliffs. They undulate dramatically as wind breezes through the valley. When deep trails were stepped out, the vegetation tends to cover them with its growth. Mother Nature is like a kind and patient grandmother, quietly wiping graffiti of her children off the wall. There are several parts of the valleys where the grass seems have been trimmed, leaving patterns similar to harvesting wheat. The fence next to me reminded me that this is a private territory. I dare not to trespass for views deep in the field.

It is irresponsible to entirely explain the work of Regionalism paintings from a political perspective. Especially comments of critics who are keen to link regional paintings to political propaganda, such behaviour sometimes can be very irritating. These honest painters are similar to Hudson River School but more obsessed with landscapes that can be seen from their porches. They try to project their love into medium based graphically, with a hint of personal understanding of the scene. Otherwise, according to those radical logic circuits, does that mean I chose to throw my background into a complete denial simply because the creative direction had not been determined until I found my second hometown? All my pieces, landscape paintings, in particular, are expressing the equality to love: every individual will have the right to love the same object, or a theme equally; every foreigner can be judged that they love and respect a culture that is their own.

I travelled half of the continent, I set foot to on these cliffs bedded for flora and grass. At the moment, my ancestor chose not to give in obtaining heat, it was destined. This travel in my gene, as well as the trace of love for the fields of Sussex, is pure and without maliciousness. After countless efforts I have put, I have returned to the land, where the four best years of my age were spent, under the guardianship of cliffs. White cliffs dotted with creamy yellow flowers have been indicating the direction of home for many sails, and this time, for me as well. The love towards this landscape finally earned me to be with such charm again.

*Those who dance are considered insane
by those who can't hear the music.*

Friedrich Nietzsche

Prejudice does not exist in human when they present within the connection with nature. They stepped out paths that point the direction of distance.

I have not yet walked to the end of the Seven Sisters; usually, I return at the third or fourth peak. Here all kinds of people could be found. They head in my direction, to Birling Gap, which locates at the east end of white cliffs; or to the opposite direction, walk right back to the swamp in the valley. They will also sit on the ground, take a little break; outlook the edge of the cliff, throw rocks into the sea. They are often friendly and willing to greet strangers. We all are here because of a pure fondness to landscapes and nature, and the idyllic scenarios of the English countryside.

Exploring into the distance is always a nature of human. Fernweh, or as a writer once wrote, "Sehnsucht nach der Ferne". Human beings long for seeing the scenery that not yet be seen by others. They tend to feel strange lands, learn from them, being supported by their experiences on them. When there is a direction or a tiny bit of hope, the human will march. They may not advance in a straightly or without hesitation, but after all, they moved forward.

Debris of weathered limestones spread over every corner of the grassland on cliffs, like when an energetic kid would throw confetti overhead. They pile in collapsed dens, stairs formed by footsteps and traces of streams. Sometimes they attracted tourist to pick up, and placed in various attractive patterns. Debris is light, a strong wind could easily blow them away, until they are picked up, then being scattered by the breeze again.

Until turning around, and to give a proper gaze at rolling cliffs ahead.

On a gloomy day, when the clouds are grey but reflected by the sea, brightness filtered by the rain clouds would blend the colour of clouds and the sea into ivory white as well. A little faded, however with precisely decorated highlights, the all within the field of sight — cliffs, water and sky, just like reliefs carved on an exquisite Greek column.

To rephrase it romantically, it is a pursuit to the beauty of landscapes that breaks physical restrictions. Looking down, the most challenging part of this walk has already passed. The shore which widens hundreds of metres lies quietly in the guardianship of white cliffs. Everyone who would step on them cannot help to turn back at different heights for different views, and each of the new heights will break their estimation of the magnificence of the Cuckmere Valley.

Two sinuous paths grow from the beach to the first peak of Seven Sister Cliff. As if the cliffs are watching for what is behind the coastline, some writers review the scene as a reflection of heroism. The top of the first hill is where the sight can pass Seaford into the wild of South Downs. Fields that surround Newhaven are separated into different geometric figures by the unique English hedges. I can feel an urge from the scenery that pushes me to blend in nature, perhaps that is also one of the reasons that make this landmark being mostly considered for suicides.

Cobblestone beach is have traditionally been a feature of East Sussex county. Sometimes I wonder, if pebbles gradually transit to sand somewhere, or it just suddenly transits to a sandy shore while forming a clear boundary between each other? Regardless, so wide this cobble beach is! It is already one hour's drive from Brighton, it is still cold shingles on Cuckmere Haven. Some old, artificial channels reforged by timbers are still struggling to survive weathering; dark moss has been growing on wooden piles during the invasion of the waves. I am afraid the only role of Cuckmere Haven is to divide the way to the cliffs for both sides, but one on can step out a path on it. On its left end is a steep cliff that is tens of meters high, overlooking the shore from the top; on its right end, the terrain os slightly gentle, which is easier to climb. This is a detail which cannot be observed from a distance, and it often influences tourists to reevaluate the plan they have made on the bus. I chose the left side like I always do. Even if this is the fifth year of my living in England, I still have not stepped on Cuckmere's western cliffs. But it is trivial. It's like something I will never choose to, but somehow decided it will be done eventually.

It is hard for a salt marsh to be vegetated, not to mention plants need to drilling out pebbles that oppress the land. But there are still an abundant amount of sea kales with lovely white blossoms scattered on the coastline. They are slightly sparse at the middle of the pebble beach, then gradually merge with the grass that covering the cliffs. The meadow is somewhat below sea level, which means the beach barriers the wind for vegetations in the marsh.

I Walked through clusters of olive green thrones and their berries, then opened the gate by which sheep are hedged, a path formed with mud and little chalks replaces the concrete walk. A signpost at their cross indicates the direction to the coast and the way return. Sheep hid in nearby shades in groups, chewing weeds and staring at tourists blankly.

Sometimes I would complain about the concrete road, which was roughly built separates people from the earth. The thought seized when I saw elder couples holding hands, slowly walked to the direction where birds are nesting. Indeed, they have the rights to enjoy the view as they are not physically inconvenient. Without them, Cuckmere Valley could be an undiscovered and unpopulated wild land, just like those unknown moments but known to God himself, that made up 98% of our world.

Hedge heights two-people can be seen continuously along Peacehaven to Cuckmere Valley. Its consistency, however, becomes intermittent at the bound of Seaford. The bus passed the Cuckmere inn, rubbed some flowers off a blooming tree. At the moment the last tiny hill of Seaford town was climbed, ivory white cliffs sheen within the sunshine in the distance. Cuckmere River crosses the landscape with several curves while forming a very iconic marsh of South Downs. This little wetland divides chalk cliffs into two parts. Cliff on the righthand side begins on cottages of coastguards, reaching the direction towards Newhaven. Its edge is clearly observable from Brighton Marina in ideal weather. On the opposite, there are Seven Sisters, a natural wonder formed by seven beautiful cliffs in a roll. Wild ducks and seagulls usually sport on water ponds of the swamp between this magnificence. Sometimes there are hares, jumping out of collapsing pits, quickly quivering their noses, then drilling into bushes, vanished.

For seconds, upon the breeze that rustling grass I gaze, the bus driver hastened me to walk and then shut the door. Nothing on the grassland of East Sussex would leave the audience a sense of obtrusive. It is like a roll of William Morris's tenture, a flowery field stitched with rose and thistle, stretching to the end of the eyesight.

White Cliffs
A Walk into Cuckmere

Presented by Ce Chen

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For those days past,
and for those days to come.