

LANDSCAPES Nature seen as mirror of present and past

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In *The Mohammed Mountain Question: An Extended Drawing*, Allan Harding MacKay also portrays the landscape with out irony. In fact, he rejects irony and questions its usefulness in this more than metre-long drawing that wrap a around the pillars in the centre of the gallery.

The phrase "irony gathering rust" runs around the edges of the drawing, framing it in a contemporary context. Like Tanabe, MacKay uses photographic sources - his own landscape slides and slides of reproductions of paintings from books - as the basis of his images. But he does so in full recognition of the many references we bring to any landscape image.



Personal and autobiographical, MacKay's references are to the Swiss Alps, where he has lived for the past four years, and to the Canadian Rockies, where he had a studio in the Banff Centre's Leighton Artists Colony last year. Images from his own photographs are interspersed with others that refer the landscape paintings of the Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler and the Canadian Group of Seven.

MacKay's richly worked mountains consciously recall the history of romantic landscape; painting in Western Art as well as the scroll paintings of the East. Looking at the work, we are aware of how our experience of art colors our experience of nature and vice versa. Take this one step further and *The Mohammed Mountain Question* concerns the intimate relationship of art and life.

The poetic, philosophical text running through the centre of the drawing - which in this installation forms the inner and outer walls of a room contains the line: "That which moved Mohammed to the mountain was not the mountain, it was the mountain within Mohammed."

Through his text and the array of romantic landscape references, MacKay suggests that nature remains a powerful mirror of the projections of the human spirit, despite the 20thcentury tarnish on this 19thcentury ideal. Both he and Tanabe resurrect only the 'barest essentials of grand manner painting. But both bodies of work attest to the lasting power of the landscape image, even when reduced to the reflection of a ghost.

{text edited from original article}