



As Eve Said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender, and Art

Rebecca Solnit

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To Rebecca Solnit, the word "landscape" implies not only literal places, but also the ground on which we invent our lives and confront our innermost troubles and desires. The organic world, to Solnit, gives rise to the social, political, and philosophical landscapes we inhabit. *As Eve Said to the Serpent* skillfully weaves the natural world with the realm of art--its history, techniques, and criticism--to offer a remarkable compendium of Solnit's research and ruminations. The nineteen pieces in this book range from the intellectual formality of traditional art criticism to highly personal, lyrical meditations. All are distinguished by Solnit's vivid, original style that blends imaginative associations with penetrating insights. These thoughts produce quirky, intelligent, and wryly humorous content as Solnit ranges across disciplines to explore nuclear test sites, the meaning of national borders, deserts, clouds, and caves--as well as ideas of the feminine and the sublime as they relate to our physical and psychological terrains.

Sixty images throughout the book display the work of the contemporary artists under discussion, including landscape photographers, performance artists, sculptors, and installation artists. Alongside her text, Solnit's gallery of images provides a vivid excursion into new ways of perceiving landscape, bodies, and art. Animals and the human body appear together with space and terra firma as Solnit reconfigures the blurred lines that define nature.

As Eve Said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender, and Art Details

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Sam says

Rebecca Solnit has a talent for linking disparate ideas in ways that make sense. This is the second book of hers that I've read and I would recommend them both. In this book, I especially enjoy her analysis of calendars (of women and nature). This particular example is both common and noteworthy; there are few places where the connection of these two constructs are more apparent.

Kate Savage says

Propitiously, the Reading List Algorithm Gods decided I'd read this book alongside Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*. So alongside McCarthy's manly men manning their way through their blood-soaked fantasies of the border, I get to float down the Rio Grand with the open and loving mind of Rebecca Solnit.

It's like walking out of a stuffy frat boy's room full of dudes playing Call of Duty or something, and into a breezy field of wildflowers and weeds.

There is some repetition about the nature/culture and gender divide, but in general this is a wonderful engagement with wild art and wild places and good ideas.

Nathan Albright says

One of the more intriguing aspects of reading material from Rebecca Solnit is that one knows that it will be reliably rubbish [1]. It hardly matters whether she is writing about her travels, or the West, or the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, or any other number of subjects, what she says will be ridiculous and untrue. One gets the distinct feeling from reading this book that the author fancies herself far cleverer and far more insightful than she in fact is. In fact, this book is a good book to hateread, an unfortunate habit of mine I suppose, in that I can tell whether or not someone's opinion will be worth listening to based on how they feel about this book. If they think this book is amazing, I probably will not respect or agree with much about what they say. And the reverse is likely to be true as well. The author and I are simply with opposite worldviews and disagree on fundamentally everything that she talks about in this book. One has to be a particular sort of person to read a book like this unless you happen to believe in ecofeminism and view leftist tech companies as being too right-wing, and I would not consider that a good thing.

The author at least speaks about a wide variety of subjects. She begins with a bird's eye view of the west and her tastes in literature. After that there is a discussion on the damage done to various areas, like Nevada's great basin, due to the bomb. Then there are some laughable ideas for a new landscape. The author talks about the desert and her ideas about what kind of people appreciate them (I happen to myself, but I don't think this makes me particularly special). The author enjoys the thought of unsettling the west through photography, encourages various new landscapes, and has some scaremongering thoughts about technology being too conservative in its approach. The author has some rubbish thoughts about immigration--apparently

failing to recognize that even the Garden of Eden had an angel with a flaming sword to bar the way. There are discussions about Noah's alphabet, dirt, some art gallery show outside of San Francisco, the landscapes of emergency, caves, perspective, and even the aesthetics of nature calendars and some comments about aesthetics and how it relates to gender.

As a reader of this book, I was disappointed that I couldn't even appreciate much of the photography because so much of it dealt with heretical ideas about the sacred feminine. When an author has offensive religious views, political views, and views about aesthetics, there is very little to appreciate. The author's praise of the remote and the wilderness appears to have a high degree of hostility towards humanity in general, especially men, and a desire to be a recluse in a wilderness with only herself and those of like mind to spend time with. Quite frankly, any world she viewed as a utopia would likely be viewed by most other people as a hell, and most worlds without her would probably be better than this one. For most people who do not like to read books they know they will despise because the author has nothing of value to say about any topic, this book (or any other one she is involved with) will be easy enough to avoid, but I suppose I can spare some pity for those who do think her worth reading.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2018...>

Allison says

It has its moments, but fails to come together. I'm always impressed with her style, but this one was not my favorite.

Mills College Library says

704.9436 S688 2001

Jana says

An excellent collection of essays on feminism as it relates to built and natural environments. Somewhere along the way, I lost / sold / exchanged this book as I do with so many... only, this is one I'd soon like to buy back. Every time I read or re-read one of her essays, I was inspired in my own work.

Janie says

"... if environmental problems are really cultural problems -- about the nature of our desires and our perceptions -- then a crucial territory to explore or transform is the territory of the mind." Sounds simple, right?

This is a comprehensive analysis of our evolving relationship with the landscape and how it plays out in our experience as artists. The book begins with the story of Eden and the fall of man and continues forward in

time, exploring the influence of the early radical thinkers of the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon, Descartes, and Newton; of Oppenheimer's atom bomb and how his choice of Los Alamos symbolized the grandeur of his vision; to other people and events that helped shape our relationship to the land in profound ways. Solnit examines how artists have respond to the idea of manifest destiny and challenge the mythologies of land and gender.

It's slow reading for me, not because it's dryly written or plodding, but because it's packed with so much important information. Fascinating read. I'll be renewing this book several times over to finish it.
