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An Introduction

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The *Mise en Art* of Mountain Areas: Territorial Actors, Processes and Transformations

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

With thanks to Fabien Cerbelaud, cartographic engineer at the GEOLAB research centre (UMR 6042 CNRS), for the cartography.

The *mise en art* of mountain areas: contexts and issues

- 1 This special issue of the JAR/RGA focuses on actors and their intentionalities in order to explore the relationships between *mise en art* and mountain areas from the perspective of social and political geography.
- 2 *Mise en art* (Guyot, 2015) is not merely the placement of an artistic project in a mountain setting. Literally “putting/making into art”, it is a spatial and temporal process that confers on artists, their works and their potential commissioners the power to intentionally interact with and transform territorial representations and dynamics. *Mise en art* is preferentially interested in art forms (sculpture, installation, performance, shows, land art etc.) that are situated, conceived and exhibited outdoors, specifically for their sites. Depending on the kind of artistic production, *mise en art* may be ephemeral, seasonal or permanent, provided that it leaves (material, immaterial, discursive or other) traces that can transform the particular mountain area into a desirable place. In this regard, permanent site-specific artistic projects are on par with

certain seasonal environmental or land art festivals. *Mise en art* goes beyond the artialisation process, as defined by Roger (1997), to propose the transformation of mountain areas through a tripartite process of mediation / remediation / media coverage, focusing on relations between artists, those commissioning work, the public and residents.

- 3 Although the connections between art and geography and those between art, nature, the environment and landscape have inspired considerable reflection among specialists in the social sciences, art history and aesthetics (see selected bibliography below), the study of *mise en art* as a factor of territorial transformation and legitimation opens new academic perspectives for geography and development. This special issue is intended to define and interpret the processes underlying *mise en art* in the mountains (in the Alps, and by extension the mountains of the world).
- 4 This issue contains seven research articles (see Table 1 and map, below) and two artistic proposals published in parallel in the section of the journal entitled “Mountains in Fiction” (see Table 2). The sites presented by the contributors to this special issue are part of – or will be joining – a developing database whose main sites can be seen in the following map and box.¹

Map 1: The *mise en art* of mountains around the world, the sites being entered into the ADONA database and the locations of the sites discussed in this issue.

Some emblematic site-specific art projects (source: Guyot, 2015)

The Alps, Pyrenees and Massif Central:

- VIAPAC in the Franco-Italian Alps:
<http://www.viapac.eu/>
- Artistic gatherings in Chaillol, in the Champsaur:

<http://www.cc-champsaur.fr/Rencontres-artistiques-de-Chaillol/32/>

- Vassivière in the mountains of the Limousin:

<http://www.ciapiledevassiviere.com/>

- Hélicoop in the Vosges Mountains:

<http://www.sentier-des-passeurs.fr/>

- The Lauzes trail in the mountains of the Ardèche:

<http://www.surlesentierdeslauzes.fr/>

Mountains elsewhere in the world: the Americas & Africa:

- Djerassi in the mountains of California:

<http://www.djerassi.org/>

- Eco-shrine in South Africa's Amatola Mountains:

<http://www.ecoshrine.co.za/VIAPAC>

- 5 The interrelations of *mise en art* and mountains reveal the contemporary worldwide dynamic of aestheticising global peripheries (see photographs 1 and 2 below). We hypothesise that *mise en art* renews conceptions about and representations of mountain areas and is used by a variety of actors as a way to transform geographical areas (environmental NGOs, elected officials, the tourism sector, residents and others).

Photograph 1: On the site-specific *Refuge d'art* trail by Andy Goldsworthy, in the backcountry of Digne-les-Bains (France): *Sentinel*, Vallée du Vançon (Authon), 2000

"I can't entirely explain why the cairn takes upon itself the role of the sentinel. It's something that I just know. Perhaps it's the way it sits with its quiet, compressed energy." (Andy Goldsworthy)

PHOTOGRAPH BY SYLVAIN GUYOT, 2011.

Photographs 2a and 2b: The *Snake Eagle* geoglyph, by Anni Snyman, Great Karoo, South Africa, between local mediation (tourism development and environmental education with local guide Ebrahim Adams) and international media coverage (captured on Google Earth)

PHOTOGRAPHS: 2A - SYLVAIN GUYOT AND JULIEN DELLIER; 2B - ANNI SNYMAN.

- 6 This special issue aims to critically probe *mise en art*'s territorial, political, economic and social functions and outcomes in mountain areas.
- 7 The articles in this thematic issue are devoted to fuelling the emergent *mise en art* process on the basis of a critical analysis of the artists' initiatives, the economic, political or other rationales of those who might commission their work and the reception of the works by various audiences (tourists, residents etc.).

Intentionalities and impacts of *mise en art* on mountain regions and landscapes

- 8 Reading the seven articles and two artistic proposals together reveals certain commonalities and allows a classification of the intentionalities underlying the *mise en art* of mountains (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: The interpretations of the research articles

Author(s)	Article	Intentionality in the <i>mise en art</i> of mountains	Impacts
Antille, B.	Sculpture parks (Valais, Switzerland)	Landscape artwashing	Artificialisation
Férérol, M.-E.	<i>Horizons: "Arts-Nature"</i> (Sancy, France)	Artistic conquest of the mountain landscape	Environmental integration and mediation
Guyot, S. & Saumon, G.	<i>Sculpting the Wild</i> (Montana, United States)	Artistic conquest of the mountain landscape	Socio-environmental integration and mediation
Husson, J.-P.	The artialised Vosges (France)	Artistic conquest of the mountain landscape	Re-appropriation
Portal, C.	Artificial mountains (worldwide)	Production of artefacts	Architectural scene-setting
Sechi, G.	<i>Arte Sella</i> (Trentino, Italy)	Artistic conquest of the mountain landscape	Environmental integration and mediation
Xiang W. <i>et al.</i>	The Mount Tianmen show (Zhangjiajie, China)	Landscape artwashing	Architectural scene-setting

- 9 There are two main interpretive keys to understanding the intentionalities of those responsible for commissioning² *mise en art* in mountain areas: landscape artwashing and the artistic conquest of the mountain landscape.
- 10 The first process, landscape artwashing, uses a mountain landscape to exhibit and promote artistic works or performances for territorial marketing purposes. Such artistic productions are much closer to the logics of the art and sightseeing markets than they are site-specific creation processes that cannot be relocated or transposed elsewhere. The mountain landscape thus becomes a medium for exhibiting and setting the scene in order to foster particular economic rationales in a given area, rather than serving as inspiration for an aesthetic reflection on the mountain landscape. Benoît Antille's article on the canton of Valais in Switzerland dissects and skilfully demonstrates these generally mediocre interconnections between the art market, localised artistic projects and neo-liberal territorial marketing. He shows how some works artificialise natural mountain settings without exploring the territory's real

issues. In another register that defies comparison but is equally fascinating, the offering by Wei Xiang et al. presents the use of a live performance against a mountain backdrop to promote a sort of faux-authentic show that is intended to reconcile Chinese tourists with their country's ethno-cultural diversity. The mountain is both stage and scenery.

- 11 The second process, artistic conquest of the mountain landscape, uses artistic creation and production to transform the representations, rationales and territorial dynamics of mountain areas struggling with rural abandonment and a poor image. Thus, the *mise en art* takes place close to the mountains and is guided by strong landscape and ecological integration rationales. The articles by Giovanni Sechi, Marie-Eve Férérol, and Sylvain Guyot and Gabrielle Saumon are comparable in this regard, concerning artistic proposals tasked with reconciling mountain areas with their images, histories and population(s) in the service of effective tourism development. The article by M.E. Férérol presents the specific case of *Horizons: "Arts-Nature"* in Auvergne (France). The author shows that contemporary art should be taken into account in local economic and tourism development. By promoting the natural and immaterial heritage of the massif of Sancy, this land art festival has over the past 10 years become a factor in raising the area's attractiveness and competitiveness, as well as a powerful tool to change its image. The article also highlights the need to associate the population with this kind of event to ensure its future. The case study of *Arte Sella* in Italy, explored by G. Sechi, also illustrates how site-specific art has been able to assert itself as a genuine territorial resource, although its appropriation by residents appears to be neither immediate nor guaranteed, thus requiring good coordination among the various actors involved. In the United States, in the state of Montana, it is precisely such a collaboration among residents with very different backgrounds (artists, tradesmen, gentrifiers, workers) that made the *Sculpting the Wild* project a success, although it remains fragile given the current American political orientation favouring the resumption of mining. Site-specific art is also used for environmental and social mediation, as demonstrated by the detailed descriptions of the many examples of works in these three articles. Jean-Pierre Husson's reflections in his article on the Vosges concern an earlier phase of the process. He argues that massifs like the Vosges (France) would benefit from such initiatives, as long as a broader interpretation of the artialisation process is chosen.
- 12 One more article is not directly related to these processes: Claire Portal's contribution paves the way to thinking of mountains as artefacts, where the artificial mountain is itself the outcome of *mise en art*, which defines the mountain-object as an artistic and architectural production in its own right.
- 13 The supplementary artistic proposals (in the "Mountains in Fiction" section) will foster a better understanding of artists' intentionalities, which are sometimes limited by issues and strategies imposed by those commissioning the work (in the various articles in a body of work, for example), be they elected officials or economic actors. They will help readers to better understand certain artistic endeavours that are underway deep in the mountain areas.

Table 2: The interpretations of the artistic proposals

Artistic proposal	Artists or commissioner	Mountain area	Intentionality
Cerro Gallinero	Carlos de Gredos	Sierra de Gredos (Spain)	Poetic osmosis between art and mountain landscape
Harmonic Trail	Albert Mayr	Rittner Horn (Sarntal Alps, Italy)	Harmonic practice of mountains

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NOTES

1. The ADONA (Aesthetic dominations of nature: a political ecology of site-specific art in global peripheries) research programme will be funded by the IUF (Institut Universitaire de France) from October 2017 through September 2022.
2. Works are usually commissioned by non-profit organisations, tourist offices, cultural institutions or governmental administrations of various levels.

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