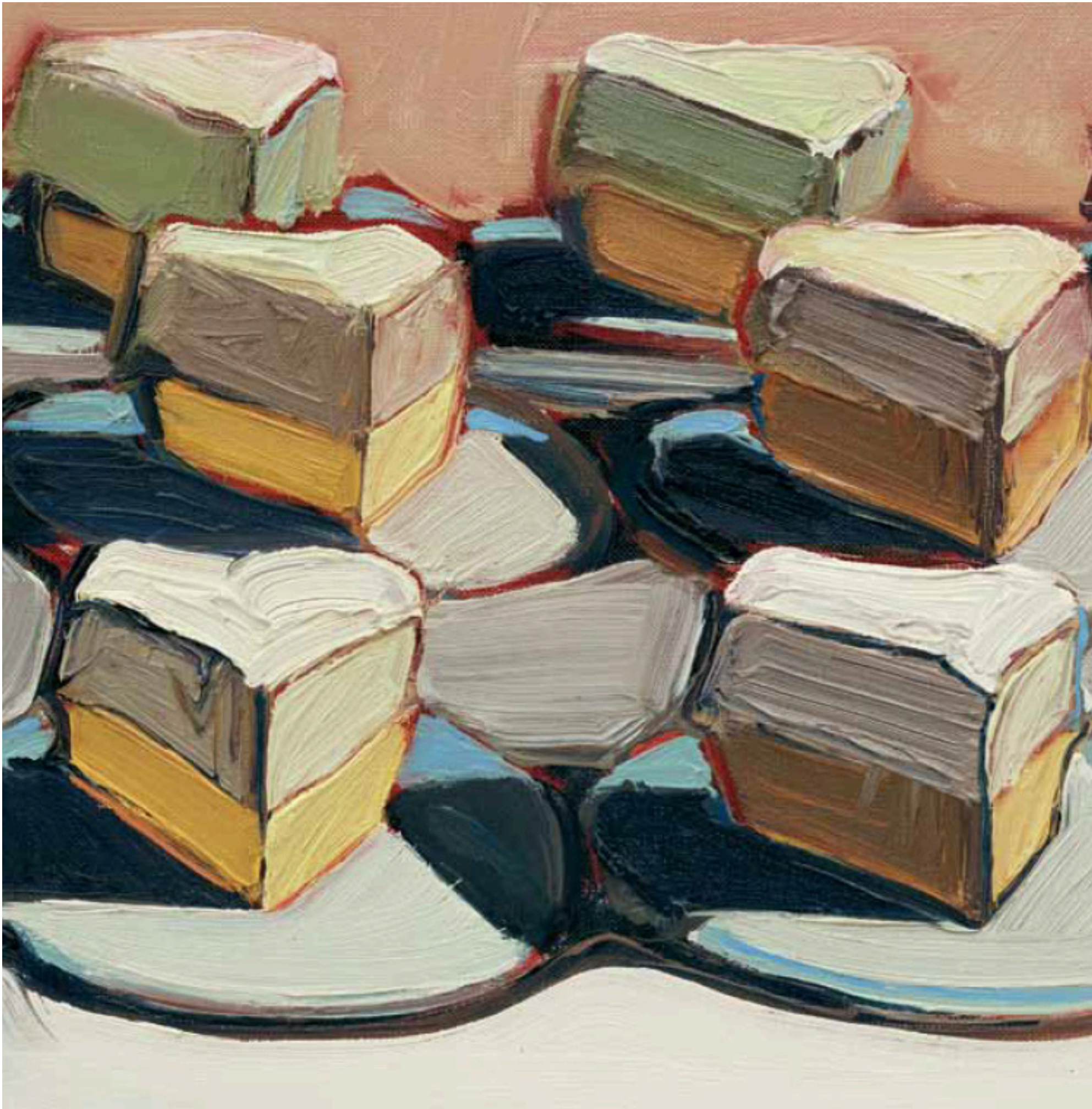




Van Gogh, Dalí

AND BEYOND THE WORLD REIMAGINED





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Samantha Friedman

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Front cover: Vincent van Gogh, The Olive Trees(-detail), June – July 1889 (plate 1). Salvador Dalí, Illumined Pleasures (detail), 1929 (plate 15). Back cover: Gerhard Richter, Self-Portrait (detail), 1996 (plate 132). Back flap: Giorgio Morandi, Still Life (detail), 1949 (plate 59). Page 2: Wayne Thiebaud, Cut Meringues (detail), 1961 (plate 60). Page 8: Paul Cézanne, Château Noir (detail), 1903 – 4 (plate 2). Page 144: František Kupka, Mme Kupka among Verticals (detail), 1910 – 11 (plate 92). Page 146, top: Vincent van Gogh, The Olive Trees (detail), June – July 1889 (plate 1).

Page 146, bottom: JoAnn Verburg, Olive Trees after the Heat(detail), 1998 (plate 39).

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DIRECTORS' FOREWORD

Van Gogh, Dalí, and Beyond: The World Reimagined is the third exhibition in a dynamic, multiyear partnership between The Museum of Modern Art and the Art Gallery of Western Australia. To date, AGWA's audience has had the opportunity to immerse itself in the individual achievements of modern art's pioneers, with Picasso to Warhol: Fourteen Modern Masters, and to explore the energy of New York through photographs, in Picturing New York: Photographs from The Museum of Modern Art. Exhibitions still to come will investigate design in the domestic sphere, offer encounters with cutting-edge contemporary art, and highlight Post-Impressionist masterpieces. Encompassing a range of periods, mediums, and approaches, this program reflects not only the breadth of MoMA's unparalleled collection but the diversity of modern art itself.

Prepared exclusively for presentation in Perth, Van Gogh, Dalí, and Beyond: The World Reimagined will allow viewers to observe how over ninety artists have reinvented landscape, still life, and portraiture from the late nineteenth century to the present day. By adopting these traditional genres, modern artists have gestured toward art historical precedents even as they have invented radical new languages to describe the people, places, and things of their own times.

From Vincent van Gogh's twisted olive trees to Lawrence Weiner's seascape in words, we see the definition of a landscape expand to include not only the representation of a site but our own experience of it. If Paul Cézanne's faceted oranges were revolutionary at the dawn of the twentieth century, Urs Fischer's hybrid of a real apple and pear shows us what a still life can

be at the dawn of the twenty-first. The solidity of Auguste Rodin's portrait of Honoré de Balzac sculpted in the 1890s gives way to Gerhard Richter's self-portrait in the 1990s, in which the subject dissolves in a blur of paint. Together, the 134 paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, prints, and media works gathered here reflect shifting conceptions of the world, documenting ever-changing relationships to nature, objects, ourselves, and each other.

The partnership between The Museum of Modern Art and the ArtGallery of Western Australia has continued to strengthen with each exhibition. Hardworking members of nearly every department in both museums — from Conservation and Registration to Education and Communications — have contributed to the success of this ambitious project. A core team steered the effort forward with commitment and camaraderie: Samantha Friedman, Assistant Curator, Department of Drawings at MoMA, organized the exhibition in collaboration with Gary Dufour, Chief Curator | Deputy Director, and Glenn Iseger-Pilkington, Associate Curator of Indigenous Objects and Photography, at AGWA. The efforts of Brian Stewart, Deputy Director Chief Operating Officer; Lynne Hargreaves, General Manager, Collections and Exhibitions; Di Yarrall, General Manager, Community Relations; Jude Savage, Registrar of Collections; and Sharyn Beor, Marketing and Promotions Manager, all at AGWA, were indispensable in bringing this exhibition to fruition. We are equally grateful to Ramona Bronkar Bannayan, Senior Deputy Director for Exhibitions, Collections, and Programs; Maria DeMarco Beardsley, formerly

Coordinator, Exhibition Programs; and Jodi Hauptman, Curator, Department of Drawings, all at MoMA, who expertly managed the manifold aspects of both this particular exhibition and the overall collaboration.

Such an ambitious project requires significant resources beyond our two institutions. We would like to acknowledge the commitment of the State Government of Western Australia and the Department of Treasury and Finance for their continuous support of a program that contributes to the long-term cultural enrichment of Perth and Western Australia. Warm thanks go to AGWA's Chair of the Board, Fiona Kalaf, and to the entire Board, who have been enthusiastic in leading the strategies behind such an important project. We would also like to thank the Government Funding Partner, Eventscorp, and the Principal Series Sponsor, Ernst & Young, for their key support of the Great Collections of the World series from the outset, and Creative Agency Sponsor, 303LOWE, for its passion in developing wonderfully original platforms for the series.

Stefano Carboni
Director, Art Gallery of Western Australia

Glenn D. Lowry
Director, The Museum of Modern Arts



1 Vincent van Gogh. *The Olive Trees*.
Saint Remy, June – July 1889. Oil on canvas,
28 5/8 x 36 in. (72.6 x 91.4 cm)

LANDSCAPE

“People will tell me that mountains are not like that . . .”

In September of 1889, Vincent van Gogh sent several paintings to his brother Theo from the asylum in Saint-Remy-de-Provence, where he had been living since May of that year. In the accompanying letter, van Gogh describes the ways in which he embellished certain aspects of the landscape, moving beyond a faithful record of nature. “The olive trees with white cloud and background of mountains, as well as the Moonrise and the Night effect — These are exaggerations from the point of view of the arrangement,” he wrote, referring first to *The Olive Trees* (plate 1) and then to two related canvases.¹ He goes on, however, to communicate a concurrent desire to capture particular details of the specific setting. “The olive trees are more in character . . . and I’ve tried to express the time of day when one sees the green beetles and the cicadas flying in the heat.”² Thus, even though he altered or invented certain elements for compositional or expressive ends, other aspects of these canvases accurately reflect recognizable

attributes of the landscape surrounding Saint Remy. Van Gogh was actively preoccupied at this moment with these alternatives at either end of the spectrum of landscape painting: free invention and truthful documentation. Disagreement with Paul Gauguin over which approach to take was one of the conflicts that had brought an end to the artists’ shared “Studio of the South” in Arles the previous year.³ Van Gogh maintained the importance of painting *sur le motif*, or directly from reality, but Gauguin championed painting *de tête*, from imagination or memory. In a letter to .mile Bernard at the end of 1889, van Gogh implores his colleague to “look for the possible, the logical, the true” and counsels against the “artificial” and the “affected” in favor of “immersing oneself in reality again.”⁴ He reports to Bernard that he has grounded his own painting with simple, concrete subjects from nature: “My ambition is truly limited to a few clods of earth, some sprouting wheat. An olive grove. A cypress.”



This commitment to reality may seem unexpected for an artist who is most often celebrated now for passionately subjective depictions of nature, but van Gogh's "exaggerations" are always rooted in observation. If, as he admits, mountains are not wholly the way he paints them, this is because, in *The Olive Trees* for example, they are rendered in shades of deep blue and outlined in undulating black lines that resemble the tracery of stained glass. Nonetheless, the Alpilles mountains that surround Saint Remy are easily identifiable (fig. 1); visible at the top left of the painting are the distinctive "two holes" of the range's Rocher des Deux Troues. What the artist's letter to Bernard denounces is not, then, the coloring of reality with emotion, for this is central to van Gogh's practice. Rather, he is rejecting subjects adopted from myth or religion — from which the genre of landscape painting had only recently become independent and in which Gauguin was still indulging (see fig. 2).

Until the Barbizon School popularized plein air painting in the mid-nineteenth century, artists often used religious, historical, or mythological episodes as pretexts for representing nature. The academic Salon placed such themes at the top of its hierarchy of genres, while pure landscapes unsupported by narrative were considered relatively lowly subjects, superior only to animal scenes and still lifes.⁷ The year before van Gogh painted *The Olive Trees*, while still in Arles, he had twice attempted to portray the biblical story of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, or the Garden of Olives. Both times, he scraped off the figures, uncomfortable with their lack of connection to reality. In the first instance, he concluded that "it's wrong to do figures of that importance without a model"; the second time, he reported to Theo that he didn't need to paint a symbolic

Fig. 1. *Mont Gaussier, in the Alpilles mountains, 1986*

Garden of Olives "because here I see real olive trees."⁸ Van Gogh's letter to Bernard includes advice that provides insight into his own objectives: "In order to give an impression of anxiety," he wrote, "you can try to do it without heading straight for the historical garden of Gethsemane."⁹ If a painting like *The Olive Trees* does not pretend to conjure the agony of Christ praying in the garden before his death, it does strive to instill the directly observed landscape with intense emotion. In the roiling movement of the earth, the gnarled twisting of the tree trunks and the agitated energy of their leaves, and the animate pulse of the cloud overhead, we sense the state of the artist's own psyche.¹⁰ Applying these sensations to the landscape, van Gogh created an intimate association between exterior and interior realms, between nature and his own humanity. While landscape painting has always been defined by an implicit human presence,¹¹ modern landscape painting relies on an interaction with nature that is direct, personal, and rooted in reality, even if that reality is exaggerated.

Nowhere is the identification between the modern individual and the landscape more evident than in Surrealism, where internal tumult is often envisioned as an external phenomenon. The fact that many Surrealists were committed to grounding their visions with realistic detail may initially seem as unexpected as the Expressionist van Gogh's debt to observation, until we remember that the name of the movement refers not to the unreal but to the hyperreal.¹² In *Illumined Pleasures* (plate 15), Salvador Dalí projects the contents of his subconscious against a Catalonian plain with such precision that the fantasies seem perfectly plausible. By incorporating long shadows into the scene, Dalí

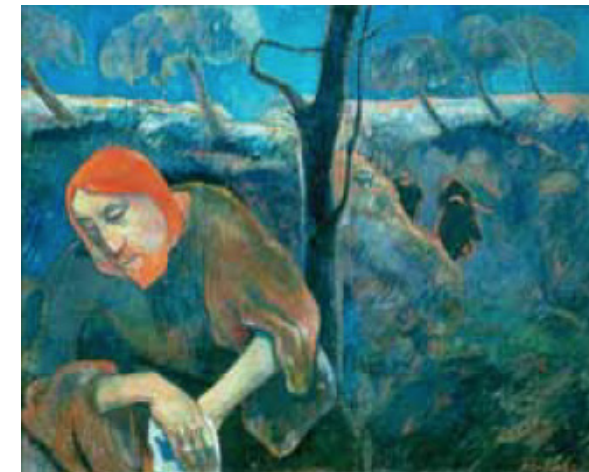


Fig. 2. **Paul Gauguin** (French, 1848 – 1903). *Christ in the Garden of Olives*. 1889. Oil on canvas, 28 1/2 x 36 in. (72.4 x 91.4 cm). Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach. Gift of Elizabeth C. Norton

shows that earthly logic applies to this psychological terrain. One of the landscapes-within-the-landscape — a colonnade in the leftmost of the painting's three theater-like boxes — is a collage element pasted into the composition, a photomechanically reproduced fragment of reality dropped into a dream world.

The Chilean-born artist Roberto Matta was adopted into the Surrealist circle in the 1930s, thanks in part to what the movement's leader, André Breton, would later describe as a "repercussion of the psychic on the physical"¹³ in his work. Matta referred to his often horizonless but nonetheless environmental compositions as "psychological morphologies" or "inscapes" — names that testify to his belief in a connection between interior life and the natural world. Painted during a trip to Mexico in 1941, *Listen to Living* (plate 17) captures the geological drama of an erupting volcano, even as its otherworldly forms and hallucinatory palette transcend terrestrial physicality. In this and other paintings, Matta zooms in to an atomic scale, taking inspiration from the amoeboid forms of microscopic plant and animal life. When asked in the 1960s what Surrealism had meant to him, Matta answered that it was his way of "looking for more reality."

As the boundaries of art stretched to include installation-based and conceptual practices in the 1970s, the possibilities of representing a landscape widened too. Yet an emphasis on the individual's relationship to his environment, and a commitment to accessing something real in nature, continued to define these expansions of the genre. The work of British land artist Richard Long, which comes out of his walks in the countryside, extends the notion of *sur le motif* creation to its logical conclusion. "Out there is my studio,"¹⁵ Long has said, referring to the topographies that he traverses and ever so lightly alters. Sometimes he inserts his presence into the landscape, as in *A Line Made by Walking* (fig. 3), in which Long trod a mark into a grassy field, then documented the intervention with a photograph. In other works, such as *Cornish Stone Circle* (plate 36), he removes materials from their setting and introduces them into the gallery. By collapsing the distinction between indoors and outdoors, and by arranging stones or other materials into geometric configurations that evoke ancient ritual, Long addresses an essential connection between nature and the individual.

If Long makes the museum into a landscape by bringing in actual rocks, the Conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner similarly transforms the gallery space with language



that describes elements of nature. Though *Rocks Upon the Beach Sand Upon the Rocks* (plate 38) consists of painted letters that spell out the words of its title, Weiner specifies the work's medium as "language + the materials referred to."¹⁶ This suggests that the work encompasses real rocks and sand as well as the linguistic signs that reference them. And though, as Weiner surely intended to point out, these referents may be arbitrary, the large scale and resolute horizontality with which they are conveyed evoke the physical qualities of a shoreline.

The viewer's experience of reading Weiner's work is one that necessarily takes place in time, much like an individual's walk on an actual beach. Long's work is similarly phenomenological; the artist may have executed the initial ramble to gather materials, but anyone who perambulates the Cornish Stone Circle takes a second nature walk of his own. If van Gogh saw in the Provençal landscape a reflection of his own agony, rather than Christ's, these works by Long and Weiner invite viewers to identify with the landscape. When we look at *The Olive Trees*, we see van Gogh's mind reflected in the twisted trees, but when we take in Weiner's text, the rocks and sand take shape in our own minds.

Richard Long. *A Line Made by Walking*. 1967.

Photograph and pencil on board,
321/2 x 441/8 in. (82.5 x 112.5 cm).
Tate Gallery, London

Epilogue:

- Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Saint-Remy-de-Provence, on or about Friday, September 20, 1889, Vincent van Gogh: The Letters [electronic resource] (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; Huygens Institute KNAW, 2009 –), no. 805.
1. Ibid. "Moonrise" refers to *Wheatfields with Sheaves and Rising Moon*, May 1889, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands; "Night effect," to *The Starry Night*, June 1889, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
 2. Ibid.
 3. For a discussion of their diverging aesthetic priorities, see Gottfried Boehm, "Vision and Emotion: Van Gogh's Landscapes," in Vincent van Gogh: *Between Heaven and Earth*, The Landscapes (Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel; Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2009), p. 43. For a more complete account of the break, see "Denouement," in Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago; New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), pp. 244 – 61.
 4. Vincent van Gogh to .mile Bernard, Saint-Remy-de-Provence, on or about Tuesday, November 26, 1889, Vincent van Gogh: The Letters, no. 822.
 5. Ibid.
 6. For an account of the increasing autonomy of landscape painting in France during the second half of the nineteenth century, see Magdalena Dabrowski, introduction to *French Landscape: The Modern Vision, 1880 – 1920* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art; distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1999), p. 13.
 7. For more on the Academy's hierarchy of genres, see the introduction to this volume, pp. 9 – 10.
 8. Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, Sunday or Monday, July 8 or 9, 1888, Vincent van Gogh: The Letters, no. 637. Ibid., Friday, September 21, 1888, no. 685.
 9. Van Gogh to Bernard, Vincent van Gogh: The Letters, no. 822.
 10. The affliction for which van Gogh was sent to the asylum in Saint Remy, often mythologized as madness, is thought to have been "temporal lobe epilepsy or a genetic disorder." See "Biography," in Vincent van Gogh: *Between Heaven and Earth*, p. 299.
 11. For an extended look at how the relationship between humans and nature becomes manifest in the idea of landscape, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
 12. In his program note to the 1917 premiere of the Ballets Russes's *Parade*, the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire sees in the ballet "a kind of super-realism ['sur-réalisme]." See Deborah Menaker Rothschild, appendix to Picasso's "Parade": *From Street to Stage* (London: Sotheby's Publications, in association with the Drawing Center, New York, 1991), p. 276.
 13. Andr. Breton, "Genèse et perspective artistiques du surréalisme," 1941, in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture, suivi de la genèse et perspective artistiques du surréalisme et de fragments inédits* (New York: Brentano's, 1945), p. 103. Quoted, in translation, in J. H. Matthews, *Eight Painters: The Surrealist Context* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 107.
 14. Matta, quoted in F. C. Toussaint, "Entretien avec Matta sur le surréalisme et la révolution," *Les Lettres françaises*, June 1966; quoted, in translation, in Matthews, *Eight Painters*, p. 113.
 15. Long, quoted in Sean O'Hagan, "One Step Beyond," *The Observer*, May 9, 2009, p. 12.
 16. Lawrence Weiner, artist questionnaire for *Rocks Upon the Beach Sand Upon the Rocks*, August 19, 2005, Museum Collection file, Department of Painting and



2. **Paul Cézanne.** *Château Noir.* 1903 – 4.
Oil on canvas, 29 x 36. in. (73.6 x 93.2 cm)



3. **Georges Braque.** *Road near L'Estaque.*
L'Estaque, late summer 1908.
Oil on canvas, 23. x 19. in. (60.3 x 50.2 cm)



4. Andr. Derain. *L'Estaque*. 1906.
Oil on canvas, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17. in. (35.3 x 45.1 cm)



5. Maurice de Vlaminck. *Autumn Landscape*.
c.1905. 18. x 21. in. (46.2 x 55.2 cm)



6. **Odilon Redon.** *Underwater Vision.* c. 1910.
Oil on canvas, 36. x 29. in. (93.3 x 74.3 cm)



7. **Gustav Klimt.** *The Park.* 1910 or earlier.
Oil on canvas, 43. x 43. in. (110.4 x 110.4 cm)



8. Vasily Kandinsky. *Church at Murnau*. 1909.
Oil on board, 19 1/8 x 27. in. (48.6 x 69.8 cm)



9. Jean Metzinger. *Landscape*. 1912 – 14
Oil on canvas, 28. x 36. in. (73 x 92.1 cm)

