

Margo Maeckelberghe

Extended Landscape

Spring 2008

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Notes for Teachers

Information and practical ideas for groups
Written by Angie MacDonald

In Gallery 1 you will find an exhibition of the paintings of Margo Maeckleberghe. The selection includes work from throughout her career, but focuses on the landscapes and seascapes made during the 1970s in West Cornwall.

Work in focus

Margo Maeckleberghe
Extended Landscape 1969
Oil on canvas, 61 x 121.5 cm
Artist's Collection
© The Artist



For discussion

- Take your eyes on a journey around this painting. Describe what you can see?
- What time of year is it? How can you tell?
- What type of weather is it?
- Look closely at the brushwork. Describe the way Maeckelberghe paints?
- Can you see the small building on the horizon in the dip? What do you think it would be like to live there?
- Why do you think this painting is called 'extended landscape'?
- Now look at other paintings by Maeckelberghe. What do they all have in common?
- Compare Maeckelberghe's works with Rose Hilton's landscape paintings in Lower Gallery 2.

Things to think about

Extended landscape. Maeckelberghe is primarily a landscape painter, but her paintings are characterised by an extraordinary expressive approach to landscape. In her paintings the land, sea and sky spill over the edges, sweeping us up and into them with dizzying force. They are boundless. She paints the 'edge and high places' where land, sea and sky meet. These are paintings that extend and 'abstract' from the landscape.

Desolation. These expansive landscapes have a desolate and unsettling quality to them. Martin Clark, Tate St Ives Artistic Director, defines this as 'sublime'. Maeckelberghe's paintings convey the barren and wild landscape of the moors of West Cornwall. They also convey the power of the storms - of the wind and rain that ravages this coastal landscape.

Sweeping energy. These paintings are characterised by dynamic compositions, full of energy and turbulence. Her compositions have been described as 'powerful and unorthodox'. Notice how she often uses the device of placing land and rocks around the pictures edges to create startling viewpoints.

Brooding colour. Maeckelberghe's paintings are characterised by a brooding sense of colour and light. She tends to use a wide range of tones, but a narrow palette of colours. She relishes the contrasts between the browns, blacks and terracotta of the land and rocks with the translucent sea blues and weightless white clouds.

Technique and brushwork. Maeckelberghe's paintings are characterised by an extraordinarily fluent painting technique that combines sweeping (often horizontal) brush-strokes with strong lines and marks. She combines dense paint with thin washes, building up layers, contrasting undulating planes with sharply modelled rocks and cliffs. She often works 'wet on wet' as well as using tools to scrape paint and draw sharp lines. She says she tends to work 'hard and fast' once she has started a painting.

Maeckelberghe does like to draw and she describes her sketches as 'the bones of the landscape'. These drawings become aids and references (not studies) for her paintings. She paints on canvas and board and in both oil and gouache but she does not use acrylic.

Sense of place. These paintings convey a strong sense of place and history. Maeckelberghe is inspired by the stark dramatic landscape west of St Ives with its ancient geological structures and bleak moorland, devoid of trees and human habitation. She has a particularly strong identity with the area around her studio near Zennor, Carne Cottage, and many of her paintings take the place names of this area as their titles. It is as if her paintings 'extract' the essence of the place – the sense of timelessness and the endless erosion of rock and land.

Maeckelberghe is one of a number of artists who have explored the underlying elemental structures of what Barbara Hepworth described as 'the remarkable pagan landscape which lies between St Ives, Penzance and Land's End'. You might like to compare her work to artists such as Peter Lanyon, Karl Weschke, Mary Jewels or Jack Pender.

Climate. Her paintings explore climatic conditions and capture the fleeting effects of weather and light. She is fascinated by the drama and power of storms, observed from the Carne high on the moors. Her paintings capture these dramatic changes in light as the storms move over the land and sea. Her dynamic compositions and fluent brushwork lead the eye across the painting just as if the storm was passing over. These paintings do not offer us the tourist image of the Cornish 'Riviera' but rather they are the dark, bleached colours of winter wind and rain.

Gender, landscape & myth. Maeckelberghe's landscapes have been discussed in terms of gender by Nedira Yakir, the author of the broadsheet accompanying the show, not only because she is a women artist, but more particularly because she has identified the female form with the landscape in a number of works. For example the shape of the reclining female figure can be seen in works such as *Reclining Landscape* 1970. Her *Atlanta Series*, which she has worked on since the 1960s, refers to the local myth that linked the Scilly Isles with the lost land of Atlanta. As a tidal wave engulfed the land, the story talks of the marooned heroine who is taken by a friendly dolphin to a distant shore where the Gods transform her into the landscape.

St Ives artists. For many years Maeckelberghe has been an active member of the artistic community of West Cornwall. Her friends have included Peter Lanyon, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, John Wells, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Terry Frost and Roger Hilton. Many of these artists have been exhibited at Tate St Ives in recent years and you might like to make comparisons. In particular, a visit to the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Garden would offer the opportunity to compare Maeckelberghe's paintings with the work of a sculptor with whom she has much in common.

Links. Maeckelberghe talks particularly of the influence of William Scott who taught her at Corsham College. Her brushwork has been compared with the American Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning, an artist she admires. Her interest in skies and seas also link her to artists such as JMW Turner.

Practical Ideas

Quick/ simple activities

1. **Quick landscape/seascape sketches.** Experiment with 'extended' landscape and portrait formats.
2. **Unusual viewpoints.** Quick sketches using unusual viewpoint such as a 'tipped up coastline'.
3. **Listening to the landscape.** Explore landscape paintings using all our senses. What would you hear? How would you feel? Develop simple writing activities based on this idea.

Extended projects

1. **A sense of place.** Maeckelberghe identifies strongly with her own Cornish sense of place. Whether you live in Cornwall or not what is your sense of place? Do you also have a national, international and global sense of place? Students could develop a range of work based around this theme.
2. **Timeless landscapes.** What sorts of things affect and change the landscape? Contrast long and short term changes. Contrast geographical and man made elements. Why is the north and south coast of Cornwall so different? Maeckelberghe's paintings have been described as timeless. Invite students to record a landscape in different ways (such as drawing, painting, digital images) and then ask them to edit out those details that link it to a specific time.
3. **Abstracting from the landscape.** Develop a series of drawings and/or paintings that gradually 'abstract' from the landscape. Encourage students to experiment with both colour and line. Look at other artists such as JMW Turner, Peter Lanyon and Barbara Hepworth.
4. **Landscape myths.** Explore, for example, the myths of Atlanta or Europa. Do students know of other myths from around the world? Develop artwork based on these myths. Explore also the idea of **metamorphosis** – of a figure transforming into the landscape and vice versa.

Further Research

Margo Maeckelberghe (born 1932) was born in Cornwall and studied at Penzance Art School and the Bath Academy, Corsham. As a student she was awarded a travel scholarship to Europe. After graduating she moved to London, married Dr Willy Maeckelberghe and taught art at secondary school. In 1956 Margo moved to Gibraltar where her husband was serving as an army medic. In 1958, by this time with two children, the family moved back to Penzance. Margo had her first solo exhibition in Ostend in 1964 and in 1967 at Plymouth Art Gallery. She is a member of the Newlyn Society of Artists and since 1997 has been chair of the Penwith Society of Artists. In 1999 she was made a Cornish Bard. Today Margo works from her studios near Penzance and at a cottage known as 'The Carne' near Zennor.

Margo Maeckelberghe

Margo Maeckelberghe Extended Landscape, Essay by Nedira Yakir, Tate St Ives, 2008