

MASTER'S THESIS

Romantic traditions in eco-art?

Nature and landscape in the work of Claudy Jongstra

Oechtering, AMM

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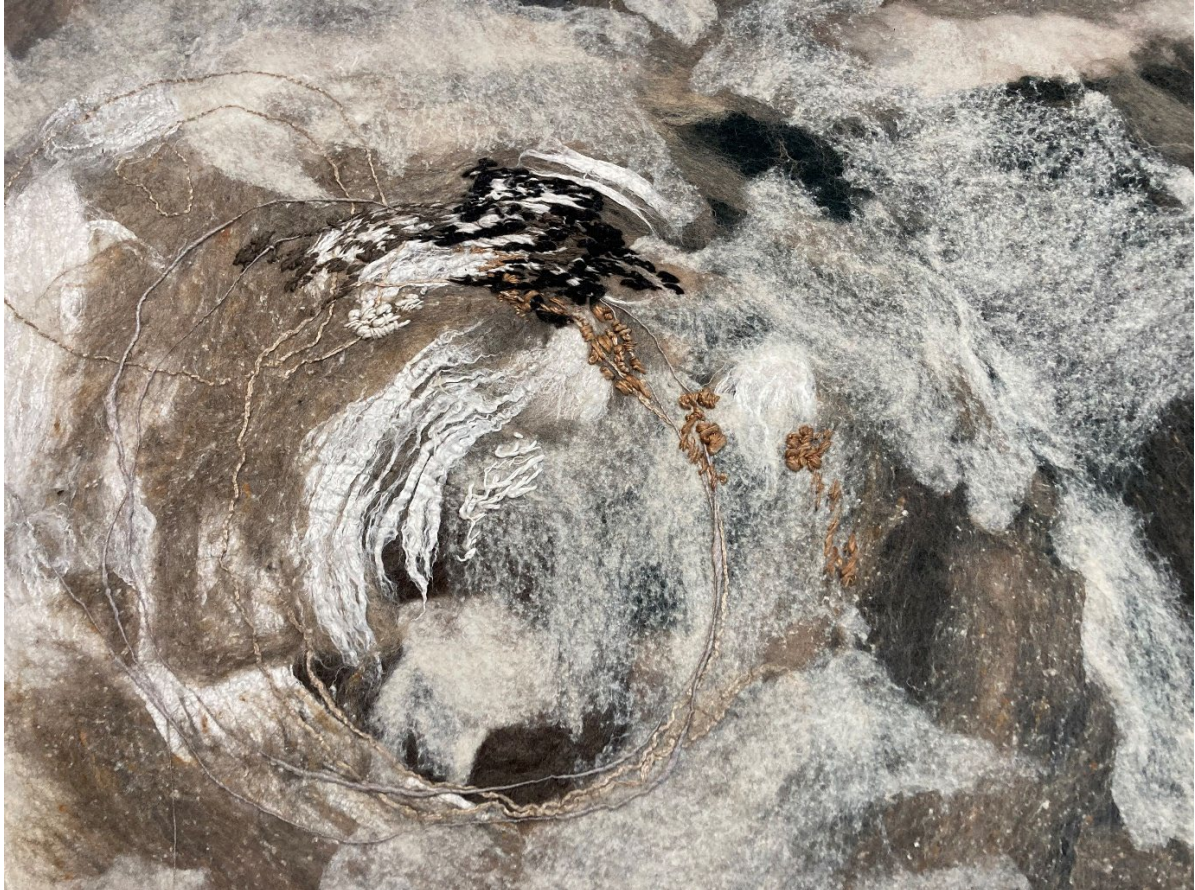
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Ill. 1: Claudy Jongstra (1963-), Detail of *Guernica de la Ecología* (2021-). Felted wool and silk, 360 x 790 cm. Museum Kranenburg, Bergen, Netherlands (23 April- 17 September, 2023). Photography ©Anne Oechtering.

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1. Introduction

The climate crisis and the rapid disappearance of biodiversity are major challenges of the 21st century. This ecological crisis is receiving increasing attention from various perspectives, including art and art criticism. Art that deals with ecological concerns is often referred to as eco-art or eco-critical art.¹ Eco-art approaches ecological questions from different perspectives, from making observations about humanity's position in and influence on the environment, often calling for radical changes of perspective, to art that proposes concrete remedies for further loss of biodiversity.² The beginnings of eco-art in the 1970s logically coincided with the increasingly visible damage to the environment as documented in the report *The Limits to Growth: a global challenge by the Club of Rome* (1972). Famous examples of early eco-art are American land art and conceptual installations such as Hans Haacke's *Rhinewater Water Purification Plant* (1972).

One of the internationally most renowned eco-artists is Claudy Jongstra (Roermond, 6 February 1963). Having started her career as a textile designer in the 1990s, she soon left the field of applied arts and started creating textile works in large format. The materials and dyes used in her art are all organic in nature and are grown, harvested and processed by farms and Jongstra's workshop in or near the Frisian town of Húns. Jongstra positions herself as an eco-artist, and her stated goal is to increase ecological awareness.³

Jongstra's art is usually viewed and interpreted from an ecocritical perspective, focusing mainly on her use of materials, the application of circular agriculture for the production of her work, and on her 'artistic research' around color and materials.⁴ In my research, though, I intend to investigate her art from a different, new angle: I want to explore whether Jongstra's art and art-making stand in the tradition of Romantic art theory and practice, and if so, how the detection

¹ In *Landscape into eco-art*, Mark A. Cheetham proposes the following definition: 'A short form for ecological art, it embraces a range of contemporary practices that investigate the interconnected environmental, aesthetic, social, and political relationships between human and nonhuman animals as well as inanimate material through the visual arts.' Mark A. Cheetham, *Landscape into Eco Art. Articulations of Nature since the '60s* (Philadelphia 2017) 1.

² Julie Reiss, 'Art and climate change' in: *Grove Art Online*. Published online: 10 September 2021. Retrieved 19 Dec. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oao/9781884446054.013.90000369384>

³ Claudy Jongstra: '[W]hat I eventually want in my work [is]: to appeal to people's ecological awareness.' In: Linda Vlassenrood ed., *Tangible traces. Dutch architecture and design in the making* (Rotterdam 2009) 124.

⁴ See I.a. Ingeborg de Roode, 'Claudy Jongstra. Vilt voor mode, interieur en architectuur', *Kunstlicht* 26 (2005) 3/4, 82-90; Toon Lauwen ed., *Claudy Jongstra. Matter and meaning* (Amsterdam 2005); Ine Gevers e.a., *Ja natuurlijk. Hoe kunst de wereld redt* (Amsterdam 2013); Philip Fimmano ed., *Earth matters* (Paris 2015); Rebecca Dalzell, 'Claudy Jongstra interweaves a passion for the environment in her wool-felt artworks', *Interior Design*, 15 November 2019. <https://interiordesign.net/designwire/claudy-jongstra-interweaves-a-passion-for-the-environment-in-her-wool-felt-artwork/>, retrieved 29 July 2023; Marit Geluk, 'Achter de schermen bij Claudy Jongstra. 'Wie weet nog iets van een plantaardige kleur?'' Documentaire, 6 November 2020. Retrieved 16 November 2020. <https://youtu.be/iG53Zlqwkfk>

of Romantic ideas and motifs in her art enriches our understanding of her art in particular, and of eco-critical art in general. The first specific questions that I aim to answer, is: What relationship between humans and nature emerges in Jongstra's art, and how does that compare to the Romantic ideas of the relationship between humans and nature? The second question I will engage with is: to what extent does Jongstra offer a perspective for the current environmental crisis with her art, and is this related to a Romantic view of art and the world?

Romanticism became the dominant art movement in the late 18th/early 19th century. Where in the 1970s the environmental concerns became urgent, triggering artistic responses, the age of Romanticism is seen as the period in which our modern ideas about nature and art took shape.⁵ The Romantics experienced a divide between subject and object, human and nature. By emphasizing the importance of subjective experience and creativity, they demonstrated the limitations of reason. Through art, they wanted to create an alternative, complementary reality with which they hoped to bridge the gap between the rational and the natural.⁶

In recent years, the link between eco-art and Romanticism has increasingly been made. According to art historian Mark A. Cheetham (*Landscape into eco art*, 2017), Romanticism directly or indirectly has significance for eco-art. He calls for a thorough investigation of the Romantic influence in order to arrive at a better understanding of eco-art itself.⁷

In the literature about Jongstra, she has not explicitly been linked to Romanticism, yet, although curator Nicole Roepers strikes a Romantic chord in the exhibition catalog accompanying Jongstra's retrospective in the Lakenhal in Leiden (2020): 'Jongstra's aim is to restore the connection between man and nature, knowledge and material.'⁸ Inspired by this association of Jongstra with Romanticism, I will use Cheetham's methodology as a starting point for my investigation, and my aim is to contribute to his model of interpretation of eco-art. My expectation is that this will lead to a clearer understanding of Jongstra's art, and that it might also broaden and deepen our understanding of eco-art in general.

⁵ See a.o. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without nature* (Cambridge, MA 2007); Keren Gorodeisky, '19th century Romantic aesthetics', in: Edward N. Zalta ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/aesthetics-19th-Romantic/>, retrieved 29 July 2023; Mark A. Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art* (Philadelphia 2017); Roland Borgards e.a. ed., *Texts, animals, environments. Zoopoetics and ecopoetics* (Freiburg i. Br. 2019).

⁶ Silvio Vietta, *Die literarische Moderne* (Stuttgart 1992) 72.

⁷ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 8: 'To forget or dismiss landscape's history is to cut off resources for and recourse to currently relevant practices and theories. We understand less about both landscape and eco art by considering them separately. [...] the future of artistic engagements with the earth has been and remains tied to [...] landscape in two principle ways: First, [...] contemporary eco artists interact with the landscape genre more significantly than is commonly allowed. Second, landscape, land art, and eco art mutually inform one another, beyond these documented historical interactions, in a manner that becomes visible with hindsight.'

⁸ Nicole Roepers, *Voorwoord* in: Nicole Ex ed., *Claudy Jongstra*, ex.cat. Museum De Lakenhal (Leiden 2020) n.pag.

1.2 Context and Status Quaestionis

My personal starting point and motivation for this research is the question of whether art can help us deal with the ecological crisis - hence my interest in eco-art and ecocritical cultural analysis. While our way of living depends heavily on rational science and technology, we continue to exploit and destroy the natural basis for our existence, proving that we are not purely rational beings after all. I subscribe to the ecocritical position that our view of being segregated from and superior to nature is culturally formed. Exploring how this view was shaped and expressed by art in the past, and how art today might offer us new perspectives for looking at and being in nature, is what motivates me to explore the tension between Romanticism and eco-art. While I do assume that eco-art does add an original, valuable and necessary perspective, I believe in the importance of being conscious of historical perceptions and implicit motives that are present in today's eco-art.

The definition of eco-art is quite broad, focusing on subject matter rather than technique or medium. Mark A. Cheetham defines eco-art in *Landscape into eco art* (2017) as follows: 'A short form for ecological art, it embraces a range of contemporary practices that investigate the interconnected environmental, aesthetic, social, and political relationships between human and nonhuman animals as well as inanimate material through the visual arts.'⁹ Amy Lipton and Patricia Watts present an even broader definition of eco-art in their contribution to Heike Strelow's book *Ecological Aesthetics* (2004): 'When an artist chooses to address the natural world through either a purely aesthetic lens or by scientific examination, his work can be considered as ecoart.'¹⁰ The common denominator in Lipton's and Watt's view then is the artistic focus on the natural world.

Eco-art's primary concern is nature rather than aesthetics, which according to Lipton and Watts leads to a paradigm shift in the definition of the nature of art: in eco-art, artworks are no longer bound to traditions of art production and art institutions, but reach into the 'larger context of human and non-human natural communities.'¹¹ This definition of eco-art includes earth-works from the 60s and 70s, but also a temporary community garden project such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation* (1979-80).¹² According to Lipton and Watts, the focus on humanity's relationship with and dependence on the larger ecosystem is new in the realm of art, and it is definitely a stance that is taken in Jongstra's art as well, making her indeed a typical proponent of eco-art.

Keeping with these definitions of eco-art, it is consequential that in the literature about Jongstra, her art has so far mainly been placed within this movement. The unconventional materials

⁹ Mark A. Cheetham, *Landscape into eco-art*, 1.

¹⁰ Amy Lipton and Patricia Watts, 'Ecoart: ecological art', in: Heike Strelow e.a. ed., *Ecological Aesthetics. Art in Environmental Design: Theory and Practice* (Basle and Boston 2004) 90-95, 91.

¹¹ Lipton and Watts, 'Ecoart: ecological art', 94.

¹² Samantha Clark, 'Contemporary Art and Environmental Aesthetics', *Environmental Values* 19 (August 2010) 3, 351-371, 361. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25764255>

of her installations, especially her use of felt, are compared and connected to the modernist art of Joseph Beuys and Robert Morris.¹³ Attention is also being paid to her art methodology of 'artistic research', such as her research project into the woad plant in collaboration with the Hortus Leiden.¹⁴

In recent years, the interest in Romanticism has reawakened from an environmental and ecocritical point of view, resulting in a growing body of research on the legacy of Romantic theory and art. In addition to the aforementioned contribution by art historian Mark A. Cheetham (*Landscape into eco art*, 2017), also cultural historian Timothy Morton (*Ecology without nature*, 2007) and philosopher Keren Gorodeisky ('19th century Romantic aesthetics', 2016) have presented positions worthy of closer examination. Morton's *Ecology without nature* (2007) elicited much response due to his very fatalistic view on both Romantic and eco-art. Like Cheetham, Morton sees Romanticism and eco-art as intricately connected, but without providing a detailed analysis.

According to Morton, Romantic 'nature' is an invention, a human construct that places nature outside the 'I', in opposition to humans. This binary conception of 'human' versus 'nature' still determines how we look at and interact with the environment. Morton considers today's eco-artists as still trapped in this binary notion. Therefore, current eco-art does not contribute to solving our environmental and climate problem. It is rather, so Morton, 'another version of Romanticism's rage against the machine.'¹⁵ - an art that exhausts itself in expressing unease with the capitalist, extractivist and anthropocentric system, but without offering a new perspective. Morton concludes that art based on the Romantic concept of nature cannot offer solutions – on the contrary: it will reinforce the existing system.¹⁶

Like Morton and Cheetham, Keren Gorodeisky sees Romantic ideas and aesthetics permeating our way of thinking. She even considers our age as 'yet another phase in the age of Romanticism'¹⁷ – but in a more benevolent way than Morton allows for. Gorodeisky credits the Romantics with an important contribution to ecological thinking: They created an organic image of nature and thus presented a kind of proto-ecological world view.¹⁸ Besides being crucial for the

¹³ See Linda Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces. Dutch architecture and design in the making* (Rotterdam 2009), and Ingeborg de Roode, 'Claudy Jongstra. Vilt voor mode, interieur en architectuur', *Kunstlicht* 26 (2005) 3/4, 82-90.

¹⁴ Ex, *Claudy Jongstra*, 2020.

¹⁵ Morton, *Ecology without nature*, 122.

¹⁶ Morton, *Ecology without nature*, 22.

¹⁷ Gorodeisky, '19th Century Romantic Aesthetics'.

¹⁸ The idea of the Romantic view of nature as a proto-ecological worldview is first named and described by Karl Kroeber in *Ecological literary criticism* (1994) 5: 'The Romantics, in contrast, made pleasure fundamental to human accomplishments because they believed that humankind belonged in, could and should be at home within, the world of natural processes. This is the foundation of what I shall call their proto-ecological views.', in: Karl Kroeber, *Ecological literary criticism. Romantic imagining and the biology of mind* (New York 1994) 5. <https://doi-org.access.authkb.kb.nl/10.7312/kroe90940>

development of ecology, Gorodeisky argues that the Romantics also laid the foundation for our current understanding of art. The early Romantics in particular saw beauty and art as fundamental to the human existence, representing an early attempt to democratize art, while having high expectations of art's potential. Gorodeisky concludes that the organic concept of nature the Romantics presented in their art and writings and the Romantic concept of art still influence natural sciences and art in general.¹⁹

Art historian Mark A. Cheetham also assumes the still present influence of Romanticism. According to Cheetham, we can better understand both ecocritical art and Romantic art if the relationships between these movements are examined in more detail. In *Landscape into eco art* (2017), Cheetham sets out to uncover connections that have hitherto escaped attention: '[...] landscape, land art, and eco art mutually inform one another, beyond these documented historical interactions, in a manner that becomes visible with hindsight.'²⁰ Cheetham's method is to compare current art works, such as Olafur Eliasson's installation *The weather project* (Tate Modern 2003) with examples from Romantic philosophy and art. Doing so, he identifies Romantic art practices that can be described as precursors to the contemporary method of 'artistic research'. Besides that, he confirms Gorodeisky's position by exposing proto-ecological practices in Romantic art, practices that show an ecological awareness among Romantics before the concept of ecology was fully formed and named as such.

By rediscovering and repositioning certain ways of thinking and creating in the Romantic tradition, both Gorodeisky and Cheetham are able to provide a broader perspective on Romanticism, and revalue Romanticism from an ecological point of view. This comparative approach of Gorodeisky and Cheetham, which simultaneously recognizes and connects the historical and cultural specificities of Romanticism and eco-art, offers new possibilities for understanding both eco-art and Romanticism. Their studies therefore serve as the basis for my research into the Romantic traditions in Jongstra's eco-art.

¹⁹ Gorodeisky, '19th Century Romantic Aesthetics': '[...] Romantic aesthetics is not of merely historical interest. [...] Its tremendous impact on generations to come all the way up to the present day is one explanation of the difficulty of precisely delimiting when the age of Romanticism begins and when it ends. Indeed, rather than a post-Romantic age, our age may be yet another phase in the age of Romanticism.'

²⁰ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 8: 'To forget or dismiss landscape's history is to cut off resources for and recourse to currently relevant practices and theories. We understand less about both landscape and eco art by considering them separately. [...] 'I argue that the future of artistic engagements with the earth has been and remains tied to the specifics of the past of landscape in two principle ways: First, both land artists and contemporary eco artists interact with the landscape genre more significantly than is commonly allowed. Second, landscape, land art, and eco art mutually inform one another, beyond these documented historical interactions, in a manner that becomes visible with hindsight.'

1.2 Methodology

For this paper, I will look at both Jongstra's art and Romantic art from an ecocritical perspective, thereby applying an 'earth-conscious mode of analysis' to both Romanticism and Jongstra's art.²¹ In their influential study *A keener perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (2009), Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher define ecocriticism as the

'effort to reorient and expand cultural studies by emphasizing the particular ways in which human creativity - regardless of form [...] or time period (ancient, modern, postmodern) - unfolds within a specific environment or set of environments, whether urban, rural, or suburban'.²²

Irmscher and Braddock call for an 'environmental turn' in Cultural Studies in order to not only enrich scholarship but to also contribute to environmentalism.

Ecocriticism is defined by its focus on 'issues of cultural-environmental concern', not by the application of a certain method of cultural analysis. Ecocritical theory is still evolving, without a dominant 'single figure' dominating the discussion.²³ Therefore, I will base my own analysis on Mark A. Cheetham who compared Romantic and eco-art from an ecocritical perspective. I will try to discover 'hinges' between Romanticism and Jongstra's eco-art, borrowing an expression by Cheetham. With 'hinges' Cheetham signifies the continuities or links that he detects between both movements.²⁴ Where Cheetham focused on connections between Western landscape painting and eco-art in general, I will apply his method to Romantic art and philosophy and Jongstra's eco-art.

I will start with a chapter on Romantic theory and art, focusing on the Romantic view of nature and Romantic legacy in eco-art. That chapter will provide the theoretical background and basis for the analysis of Jongstra's art in chapter three. Jongstra's art will be analyzed for formal language, and especially for use of color and materials. Her creative process will also be part of the analysis. In the following chapter, Jongstra's treatment of landscape will be considered, comparing her use of landscape with that of Romantic landscape art.

While touching on a wide range of art works by Jongstra, the following works will be investigated in more detail: The permanent installation *Golden Guipure* (2007) at the Amsterdam Public Library OBA; the temporary installation *NINE* (2020), which was part of Jongstra's exhibition at Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden in 2020/2021; and the travelling installation *Guernica de la Ecología* (2021-), a work that is still being altered in the course of travelling. The chosen works are representative for Jongstra's way of creating; at the same time, they highlight different aspects of and shifts in her art-making.

²¹ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 3.

²² Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher ed., *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (Tuscaloosa 2009) 2 and 3.

²³ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (2nd ed.; Manchester and New York 2002) 172.

²⁴ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 8.

2. Romanticism and Romantic legacy

In this chapter I will illuminate the Romantic conception of nature. I will start with a brief description of the philosophical-theoretical foundation of Romanticism, using Novalis' novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the writings of Carl Gustav Carus, and the works of the artists Caspar David Friedrich and William Turner as illustrative examples. This will provide the background and basis for the comparison with Jongstra in the following chapters, specifically the concept and role of nature in Jongstra's art.

Like eco-artists today, Romanticism was a reaction to a perceived crisis: Violence and war in the wake of the French Revolution shook the Enlightenment belief in humanity's ability to create a world based on rational principles; the industrial revolution led to rapid urbanization and to the demise of agrarian communities; knowledge was rapidly expanding and individual freedom was on the rise. This was accompanied by a progressive secularization and rationalization of life. Driven by a desire to offer an alternative viewpoint on reality, the Romantics sought to create a new perspective, as the reality presented to them failed to fulfill their need for unity and harmony.²⁵

Breaking with the classical tradition, Romanticism looked towards the European Middle Ages as the 'Golden age' for humanity. The Middle Ages were perceived as the time when society still lived in communion and harmony with nature, in a 'natural' state, before being corrupted by industrialization and rationalism. This idea was most prominently promoted by Swiss-French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).²⁶ By looking back to the Middle Ages and by rediscovering and even inventing traditions, the Romantics sought to bring back a supposedly lost stability and harmony in society and to establish a new cultural identity. This led to a revival of the Gothic in architecture and painting, a revival of Catholicism and of monastic communities, and it gave a boost to the development of the vernacular languages of Europe. The development of new academic subjects such as folklore studies ('Volkskunde') followed, and researchers like the Brothers Grimm went out to collect, preserve and study folk tales and regional mythology. The study of local traditions was perceived as an investment in values that were supposed to become the basis for a more pure and 'natural' existence - thereby creating a cultural heritage that still shapes our national cultural identities today.²⁷

²⁵ Horst Fritz, 'Symbolismus', in: Dieter Borchmeyer and Viktor Žmegač ed., *Moderne Literatur in Grundbegriffen* (Frankfurt a.M. 1987) 363-369, 368.

²⁶ William Vaughan, 'Romanticism', in: *Grove Dictionary of Art* (2003). Retrieved 29 July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T073207>

²⁷ Allison Palmer Lee, *Historical Dictionary of Romantic Art and Architecture* (London 2019) 4.

This ideal of a 'natural state' led to a re-evaluation and evolution of landscape painting.²⁸ British, German and American landscape painters documented rural landscapes that seemed untouched by industrialization and urbanization, thereby propagating nature as a timeless, eternal entity, as exemplified in Albert Bierstadt's (1830-1902) painting *Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (1866) [Ill. 2].



Ill. 2: Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), *Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (1866). Oil on canvas, 210,8 x 361,3 cm. Brooklyn Museum, inv. nr. 76.79.

The enormous size of the canvas (210.8 × 361.3 cm) is overwhelming – like the landscape that is being depicted. Nature is presented here as an overpowering force that evokes awe. The landscape itself seems to be untouched by humans, but in the foreground a group of Native American hunters on horseback can be detected. The Native Americans are representatives of Rousseau's ideal naïve state of being, not yet corrupted like modern society, and in harmony with their surroundings.

These Romantic presentations of ideal landscapes had and still have a strong influence on our view of nature and the environment, having led to the conservatory movement and the establishment of National parks and nature preserves, first in the Western world, then worldwide.

²⁸ William Vaughan, 'Romanticism'.

2.1 Romantic philosophy

The Romantics challenged the rationalist ideals of the 18th century Enlightenment.²⁹ While this presented a contrast and counter-reaction to the Enlightenment, it was not *anti*-Enlightenment. Romantics viewed the rationalization as a form of impoverishment, a *depoeticization* of life. Romanticism therefore attempted to ‘synthesize reason and sensibility’³⁰ by moving ‘away from classical values towards the indigenous, the emotional and the irrational’³¹ and by complementing rationality with faith, sensation, unconstrained feeling and intuition.

The philosophical framework of Romanticism was built around the ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and was developed by a group of theologians, philosophers, and poets who shared their ideas in the journal *Athenaeum* (1798-1800). Based on Kant’s realization that we cannot know whether what we perceive is truly the case, Fichte proposed the possibility that the world as it appears to us is the product of our cognitive abilities.³² This encouraged and empowered Romantic artists in two new ways: First, if the world is a product of our perception, then the world of imagination and creation is equal to the sensually experienced alleged reality. And second, if art can create an alternative reality, then this reality could compensate for and overcome the restrictions of apparent reality.³³

Consequentially, the Romantics prioritized subjective imagination over perceived reality. This led to greater artistic freedom in both formal aspects and subject choice. The emphasis on subjectivity in art was paramount, since the object of art was not a given but instead was born out of the creative mind of the artist.³⁴ Friedrich Schlegel's demand for artistic autonomy was a logical consequence of this realization, stipulating that Romantic art is eternal and free, recognizing ‘as its first law’ that the poet suffers no law above itself.³⁵

The Romantics believed in and were driven by the search for a common truth, a desire for an utopian harmony between subject and object, humans and nature. Since art was not bound by objective truth or reasoning, it was expected to move beyond the limitations of science and

²⁹ Palmer, *Historical Dictionary of Romantic Art and Architecture*, 10/11.

³⁰ Gorodeisky, ‘19th Century Romantic Aesthetics’.

³¹ William Vaughan, *German Romantic painting* (New Haven 1980) 3-4.

³² Wilhelm Grosse and Ludwig Grenzmann, *Klassik. Romantik* (Stuttgart 1983) 93.

³³ See Lothar Pikulik, *Frühromantik. Epoche - Werke - Wirkung* (Munich 1992) 52f.; Also see Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik* (Berlin 1992) 16.

³⁴ Novalis, *Schriften*. Vol. 2 (Darmstadt 1965) 573: ‘das Schöne, der Gegenstand der Kunst uns nicht gegeben wird oder in den Erscheinungen schon fertig liegt.’

³⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, ‘116. Fragment’, in: *Athenäum. Eine Zeitschrift*. Ed. by A.W. and F. Schlegel. Vol. 1, Erstes und Zweites Stück, 1798..., 206: ‘Sie [die romantische Dichtkunst] allein ist unendlich, wie sie allein frey ist, und das als ihr erstes Gesetz anerkennt, daß die Willkühr des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide.’

philosophy: 'Wo die Philosophie aufhört, muß die Poesie anfangen'.³⁶ And while the Romantics considered art to be superior to philosophy and science in approaching this utopian harmony, they at the same time were aware that the desired reconciliation between subject and object, human and nature could never be achieved.³⁷ This awareness and acceptance of the ultimate unattainability of Romantic utopia is called Romantic irony, and it forms a constitutive element of Romantic theory.³⁸

An important duty of Romantic poetry is the search itself: Just like Novalis who is looking for a *Weltseele* in all manifestations of inner and outer reality, the late Romantic (*spätromantischer*) poet Joseph von Eichendorff also hopes to find the 'magic word' (*Zauberwort*) that will bring to fruition the inner harmony of the world.³⁹ This longing and searching for a hidden ideal, for a formula that can be the ground for reestablishing a presumably lost harmony, is the driving force behind all Romantic literature and art. Where in Enlightenment and Romanticism it was presumed that there was a shared origin and an ideal image of everything (nature, language, art), that belief no longer exists.

At the core of the Romantic idea is 'the primacy of the aesthetic', i.e. the commitment to the idea that art and beauty are fundamental to our existence and that our engagement with them should shape all aspects of human life.⁴⁰ In the *116th Atheneum fragment*, Schlegel outlines the limitless and universal ambition of Romantic poetry, which is to unify all genres of art, to relate art to philosophy and language, incorporate natural sciences, and to finally poeticize and enrich life and society in general.⁴¹ The Romantic view of the power of art in shaping perception, behavior and therefore reality has echoed through the centuries and has become essential for eco-art as well.

³⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, 'Ideen [Fragmente]' in: Hans Eichner ed., *KFSA II: Charakteristiken und Kritiken I. 1796-1801* (München, Paderborn, Wien 1967) 256-273, 261.

³⁷ Friedrich Schelling concedes that this ultimate truth will never be found: 'Jeder ist von Natur getrieben, ein Absolutes zu suchen.[.] Aber indem er es fixieren will, verschwindet es ihm.' Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling: *Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie [1802]* in: Karl Friedrich August Schelling ed., *Sämtliche Werke Vols. 1/4: 1800-1802* (Stuttgart 1859) 333-510, 357.

³⁸ Vietta, *Die literarische Moderne*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 43.

⁴⁰ Gorodeisky, '19th Century Romantic Aesthetics'.

⁴¹ Friedrich Schlegel, '116. Fragment', 204: 'alle getrennte Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen, und die Poesie mit der Philosophie, und Rhetorik in Berührung zu setzen. Sie will, und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie, und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig, und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen, den Witz poetisieren, und die Formen der Kunst mit gediegnem Bildungsstoff jeder Art ausfüllen und sättigen, und durch die Schwingungen des Humors beseelen. Sie umfaßt alles, was nur poetisch ist [...].'

2.2 Romanticism and nature

Since the time of René Descartes (1596-1650), nature had been viewed as an ‘inanimate, mechanistic domain of dead and meaningless matter’ – a domain whose secrets could entirely be revealed and understood by and through science.⁴² The Romantics opposed this view strongly. They believed that nature was a living entity, an organic whole that was harmonious and purposively organized – but whose purpose and exact workings lay beyond human understanding.⁴³ Therefore, the Romantics called for a conscious re-enchantment of nature. As Novalis put it: ‘Die Welt muß romantisiert werden. So findet man den urspr[ünglichen] Sinn wieder.’⁴⁴ This re-enchantment, the ‘romanticizing’ of nature, was to express the irrational and subjective side of the human experience.

The Romantics understood that humans were part of nature, and in order to overcome the Cartesian dualism, the divide between subject and object and humans and nature, they promoted a return to a more ‘natural’ state, as Rousseau had propagated. The return to nature in Romanticism remained in the state of an ideal, to be expressed in art, since the realization of this ideal was thought impossible.⁴⁵

The Romantics saw art and nature as the two universal languages that give us access to the transcendental nature of our existence.⁴⁶ Both languages were seen as analogous but separate from one another. As Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–1798) writes in *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*: ‘Wir wissen nicht, was ein Baum ist; nicht, was eine Wiese, nicht, was ein Felsen ist; wir können nicht in unserer Sprache mit ihnen reden; wir verstehen nur uns untereinander.’⁴⁷ Although communicating and real understanding was deemed impossible, analogies between humans and nature were assumed. In the effort to make the analogies visible and the invisible purpose of nature and of our own existence palpable, the Romantics set out to emulate the language of nature in art, not by copying nature but by trying to experience its inner workings.

⁴² Gorodeisky, ‘19th Century Romantic Aesthetics’.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Gerhard Schulz ed., *Novalis Werke* (München 2001) 384.

⁴⁵ Kevin Hutchings, ‘Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies’, *Literature Compass* 4 (2007) 1, 172-202, 178. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2006.00417.x>

⁴⁶ See Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik*, 146.

⁴⁷ Silvio Vietta and Richard Littlejohns ed., *Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe (Heidelberg 1991) vol. 1, 97. In my own translation [AO]: ‘We don't know what a tree is; not what a meadow is, not what a rock is; we can't talk to them [i.e. nature] in our language; we can only communicate among ourselves.’

Although nature could not be fully understood and not be communicated with, it was viewed as a projection or mirror of the inside world, turning nature into a vehicle for self-knowledge. An example for this is the frequent motif of the wanderer in Romantic art.⁴⁸ The wanderer leaves the familiar home and ventures into unknown territories, symbolizing the subconscious. These territories are usually remote and hard-to-reach places, such as mountain valleys that seem to be happened upon by chance and that always hold unexpected natural treasures or fateful encounters. By letting the main character be drawn into these unknown places, he finds his true self. Another Romantic analogy connected to the natural world is the mining metaphor, as found in Tieck's *Runenberg* and in Novalis' *Ofterdingen*. The work of the miner, who ventures into the interior of the earth, is equal to that of an explorer of the soul. The miner uncovers treasures hidden within man that can only be brought to light with skill and care.⁴⁹ In essence, whatever venture into nature is being described in Romantic writing, the goal is the enhancement of self-knowledge rather than learning about nature itself, thereby turning nature into a canvas or projection of human experience.

In Romanticism, 'natural beauty' was seen as the highest aesthetic aspiration: 'Schön ist was uns an die Natur erinnert [...]. Die Natur ist organisch, und die höchste Schönheit daher ewig und immer vegetabilisch, und das gleiche gilt auch von der Moral und der Liebe', explains Friedrich Schlegel in *Athenäum*.⁵⁰ Schlegel likens the unity and universality of nature to human feelings of morality and love. Art therefore was supposed to speak to our emotions, not by simply copying nature, but by presenting and emulating its transcendental essence.⁵¹

Two new concepts of nature experience emerged as part of this aesthetic operation: nature as 'the sublime', i.e. inhospitable and awe-inspiring nature, and nature as 'pastoral' or 'picturesque'. Caspar David Friedrich's (1774-1840) painting *Wanderer above a sea of mist* (1818) confronts the viewer with a hostile landscape of rocks, cliffs and impenetrable fog [Ill. 3]. The wanderer, who stands on the top of the cliff, seems very much out of place. He is confronted with a landscape in which he can go no further without danger. This painting by Friedrich is an example of the sublime image of nature. Edmund Burke (1729-1797) developed the idea of the sublime in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), presenting the confrontation with untamed and overwhelming forces of nature as thrilling, beautiful and humbling at the same time.

⁴⁸ Examples would be Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Tieck's *Runenberg*, Joseph von Eichendorff's *Taugenichts* or E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Elixiere des Teufels*.

⁴⁹ Grosse and Grenzmann, *Klassik. Romantik*, 103.

⁵⁰ Idee Nr. 86. In: Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragmente, Lyceums-Fragmente, Ideen*. 1800. Reprint (Berlin 2016) 123.

⁵¹ Diana Behler, 'Carl Gustav Carus: Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei und die frühromantische Theorie', *Athenäum. Jahrbuch für Romantik* 3 (1993), 107-139, 108-109.



Ill. 3: Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (ca. 1817). Oil on canvas, 94.8 × 74.8 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, inv. nr. HK-5161.

The second category of Romantic nature is that of the *picturesque* or the *pastoral*, featuring prominently in Romantic painting as well. The pastoral or picturesque landscape was supposed to evoke the idea of timelessness, of eternity and tradition. This nature is welcoming and benign for humans. It invites contemplation of our cooperation and connection with nature and our environment.⁵² *The big enclosure* (1831) by Friedrich can be viewed as a pastoral landscape [Ill. 4]. It shows a river landscape from a bird's eye view with a perspective so wide that the curvature of the

⁵² Vaughan, 'Romanticism'.

earth seems visible. This gives the viewer the notion of being removed and in control at the same time. The park-like landscape emanates harmony, peace and quiet, with a wide sky and a setting sun above it, reminding us also of the circularity of nature.



Ill. 4: Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *Das große Gehege bei Dresden* (1832). Oil on canvas, 73,5 x 103 cm. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv. nr. 2197 A.

To summarize: the Romantics were the first to acknowledge the organic and universal essence of nature, thereby laying the ground for the science of ecology. They were convinced that nature was more than a mechanistic object with economic exploitation as its sole purpose. At the same time, while the Romantics realized that humans are part of nature, nature in Romantic art is never the agent, but always an aesthetic object whose function is to serve a purpose for humans: to evoke awe, inspiration, and introspection. The re-mystification and presentation of nature as a separate, ideal and eternal concept, as ‘Nature with a capital N’, is seen by many ecocritics today as actually having contributed to our alienation from nature and thereby indirectly as having contributed to the ecological crisis.⁵³

⁵³ Clive Cazeaux, ‘Aesthetics as ecology, or the question of the form of eco-art’, in: Peter Barry and William Welstead ed., *Extending Ecocriticism: Crisis, Collaboration and Challenges in the Environmental Humanities* (Manchester 2017) 149-169, 154.

2.3 Romantic Science: unlocking the essence of nature

The method of 'artistic research', the application of scientific research methods in art by combining materials, instruments and technologies of science together with art methodologies, is often applied by contemporary artists and by Claudy Jongstra in particular.⁵⁴ Artists who apply artistic research put the focus on the process of art making and on the systemic dependencies of its ingredients, rather than on the finished product itself. This asks for scientific approaches and subject knowledge, which is often achieved by collaborating with researchers. Cheetham argues in *Landscape into eco art* (2017) that applying scientific method in and for art was an invention of Romanticism and that it is one of the 'hinges' between Romantic art and eco-art.⁵⁵

Friedrich Schlegel expressed in the 586th *Athenäum Fragment* the idea that art, nature and science are intertwined: 'All Natur und Wissenschaft soll Kunst werden - Kunst soll Natur werden und Wissenschaft.' Schlegel even calls for art to become the combining factor between the natural world and science.⁵⁶ Many Romantic artists followed suit. In contrast to the classical method of copying past works of art, Romantic artists such as Caspar David Friedrich and William Turner went to great lengths to explore the character of nature first-hand and basing their art on their subjective experiences. Friedrich ventured out on hikes around Rügen, Bohemia and the Harz Mountains and documented his observations in hundreds of drawings.⁵⁷ William Turner also employed subjective, experiential methods: He claims that fishermen tied him up to the mast of a fishing boat so that he could feel the elements of nature with his whole body and all senses before translating this experience into art. This deliberately sought out experience served as inspiration for Turner's *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842) [Ill. 5].⁵⁸

⁵⁴ For this definition, see Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel, 'Science and contemporary art', in: *Grove Dictionary of Art* (Published 16 Sept. 2010). <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T2088866>

⁵⁵ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 58: 'I return to the early 19th century in German art, specifically the increasingly "scientific" landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich and his close associate, the amateur painter and acclaimed physician Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), whose theory of *Erdlebenbildkunst* (earth-life pictures), I argue, in many ways previews contemporary eco art.'

⁵⁶ See Annika Bartsch, *Romantik um 2000. Zur Reaktualisierung eines Modells in deutschsprachigen Romanen der Gegenwart*. Jenaer germanistische Forschungen. Neue Folge 44 (2019) 1 (Heidelberg 2019) 100., and also Gorodeisky, '19th Century Romantic Aesthetics'.

⁵⁷ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the subject of landscape* (2nd, exp. ed.; London 2009) 122.

⁵⁸ Cheetham, , *Landscape into eco art*, 65.



Ill. 5: Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842). Oil on canvas, 91 cm × 122 cm. Tate Gallery, London, inv. nr. WGA23178.

One of the associates of Friedrich, the painter and physician Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), went a step further and demanded for artists to receive scientific training in order to understand the relation between the outward appearance and the inner working of the earth. In his 'Neun Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei' (1827), Carus developed this theory of *Erdlebenkunst* (translated by Cheetham as 'earth-life pictures'⁵⁹) further, calling for the scientific study of geological earth layers before giving an artistic interpretation of landscape. For Carus, then, art was the means to unlock the essence of nature, but science was to be art's partner in achieving this.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 58.

⁶⁰ Behler, 'Carl Gustav Carus', 132.

2.4 Romantic legacy and eco-art

Romantic art evolved against its own specific background, trying to give answers to questions and needs that arose in its own time.⁶¹ Our time is confronted with its own crises, eliciting different artistic responses than the age of Romanticism. Eco-art therefore has to be interpreted against this contemporary background, with each artist approaching ecological concerns in their own way. Rather than being based on a shared philosophy like Romanticism, eco-art is used as a container term for a wide range of environmentally and ecologically focused art practices.⁶² This makes it difficult to voice general ideas about eco-art that go beyond the shared focus on nature.

As illustrated above, the legacy of Romanticism is present and evident on several levels, spanning from Western ideas of artistic autonomy to our perception of nature. Walter Benjamin pointed out that Romanticism was the first art movement that posited art as a medium of reflection and thus as an epistemological medium.⁶³ Art continues to be seen as a medium that reflects on our world in its own way and in its own right, with the artist as an autonomous, creative agent. Today, eco-artists and ecocritics challenge the ideal of artistic autonomy. Where Schelling had claimed that the artistic genius 'suffers no law above itself',⁶⁴ today's ecocritics and eco-artists question the idea of the subject-object dichotomy and see the interconnectedness of humans (and artists) with natural, social and economic ecosystems as the basis of all human existence, experience and of art itself.⁶⁵

One of the major criticisms of Romanticism from an ecocritical perspective is the human-centered conception and interpretation of nature. Some ecocritics such as Timothy Morton claim that nature in the Romantic sense is an invention, a cultural construct that is still embraced today but that is in need of serious reconsideration.⁶⁶ While admitting that 'nature' is always in a culturally way constructed, Kevin Hutchings advocates to reconcile this tension by giving the Romantics credit for renewing our cultural interest in nature in a way that goes beyond the merely economic interest that was dominant since the Enlightenment.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Bartsch, *Romantik um 2000*, 75.

⁶² Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 4.

⁶³ See Bartsch, *Romantik um 2000*, 95.

⁶⁴ Schlegel, *116. Fragment*, 206.

⁶⁵ Lipton and Watts, 'Ecoart: ecological art', 90. See also Pietje Tegenbosch: 'In the current neoliberal political climate, the traditional romantic notion of the artist and the status of the artist are under great pressure. [...]. 'The myth of the artist', linked with the romantic notion of the artist and romantic views of on autonomy, is eroding. Nowadays artists increasingly comply with the market and with industry, developing a hybrid practice which is often the inevitable result of economic circumstances.' Pietje Tegenbosch, 'Metaphors on connection. About the work of Claudy Jongstra', in: Marietta de Vries and Suzanna de Sitter ed., *Claudy Jongstra* (Rotterdam 2017) 166-167, 166.

⁶⁶ Hutchings, 'Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies', 191.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 192.

In contrast to Romanticism, some eco-artists aim for a non-human-centric perspective on nature and try to give a voice to non-human species who are impacted by climate change and habitat degradation.⁶⁸ This kind of eco-art tries to decenter the human gaze by giving attention to ecosystems that function outside of or in symbiosis with humans, thereby teaching humans about their role and responsibility in relation to all species. Other than nature being a projection of the inside world or being the unattainable other, nature here is introduced as the foundation of human society, including and going beyond the human experience. It could be said that eco-art therefore is trying to overcome the human-centered, Romantic view of nature and is trying to establish a new paradigm of perception, and with that a new way of experiencing and being in the world that is moving beyond the subject-object dichotomy.

⁶⁸ Reiss, 'Art and climate change'.

3. Jongstra's art and art practice

In this chapter, Jongstra's art making will be explored and examined in detail and compared with Romantic traditions. After a formal analysis of her choice of materials, her use of color and shape, the processes that she applies in the creation of her art will also be considered in depth. The main focus will be on the installation *Golden Guipure* at the Public Library in Amsterdam (2007), while other, more recent works of hers such as *NINE* (2020) will also be analyzed.

In 2007, Claudy Jongstra created a set of textile murals titled *Golden Guipure* for the entrance hall of the new main library of Amsterdam Public Library OBA [Ill. 6].⁶⁹ The installation was part of OBA's commitment to incorporate art and culture into its space. *Guipure* is a large-scale textile installation that aims to enhance the sensory experience of the library visitors. The commission for the OBA artwork was one of Jongstra's first commissions that were not restricted to being an interior design item but intended as a piece of art in its own right.⁷⁰ Jongstra used natural fibers and dyes to create an immersive environment where visitors can explore the intersection of art, literature, and nature. The textile installation softens the gigantic, modernist, stark white entrance hall to the newly built library.⁷¹

The textile installation covers several walls, with two walls to the left of the entrance and down the staircase fully covered by a monochrome yellow textile and with a large wall installation behind the security desk that covers the entire wall up to the ceiling of the third floor. This installation is white but accented by several irregular, horizontal stripes in the same yellow as the monochrome walls. The material is a combination of wool and silk, and it is not woven but felted. Parts of the fabric are left in their natural white color, but part of it is dyed in a monochrome greenish-yellow-gold color, a tint that was achieved by using the natural dye from the weld plant. The wool was further left untreated, with the smell of the wool still being noticeable. As the wool was also not spun but instead compacted by felting, the natural curls of the wool were partially left intact, giving the textile a three-dimensional appearance.

The location of the installation in the building, next to the entrance and down the staircase, invites visitors of the library to touch it and interact with it in an immediate and spontaneous way.⁷²

⁶⁹ De Vries (ed.), *Claudy Jongstra*, 175.

⁷⁰ De Roode, 'Claudy Jongstra. Vilt voor mode, interieur en architectuur', 88/89.

⁷¹ Pauline Bijster, 'Om te huilen zo mooi. Claudy Jongstra maakt mensen wakker met viltkunst', *Volzin* (2013) 20-24, 20: 'Er is één bijzondere muur in de Openbare Bibliotheek in Amsterdam. In de gigantische, futuristische hal van het door Jo Coenen ontworpen gebouw bevindt zich een okerkleurige, zachte muur. Het is vilt: zo aibaar dat je voelt dat je het kunt aanraken, of knuffelen. Alsof er tussen het rechte en industriële karakter van het gebouw ook nog een beetje natuur zit.'

⁷² Lidewij Edelkoort, 'The sheep with five legs', in: Marietta de Vries and Suzanna de Sitter ed., *Claudy Jongstra* (Rotterdam 2017) 4-5, 4.

Visitors even alter the work by braiding the longer pieces of wool that are extending out of the felted fabric. Having reservations at first whether visitors would be careful enough with her work and not damage it, Jongstra describes her experience with the wall hangings in the OBA as very positive, even encouraging and enjoying the interaction she observes. Due to the alterations, the work itself does not stay static but changes over time, making it a dynamic and interactive part of the visitors' experience at the OBA.



III. 6: Claudy Jongstra, *Golden Guipure* (2007). Felted wool and silk. Permanent installation at OBA's Oosterdokseiland library, Amsterdam, NL. Photography ©Studio Claudy Jongstra 2019.

3.1 Material

Eco-artists reflect on the ecological responsibility of the artist and thus on the material character of art itself. The careful use of materials is common practice in eco-art, in order to avoid further depletion of resources and pollution, but also to raise awareness of consumerist structures and of better practices of how humans should treat our limited natural resources.⁷³ Jongstra's approach is to explore the characteristics and history of her materials in depth and to grow them herself, sometimes over years, without wasting resources.

As in most of her artworks, Jongstra used felted wool for *Golden Guipure*, in this case Drenthe Heath wool, Wensleydale wool and Merino wool, in combination with raw organic silk and chiffon. Using these different types of felted wool, Jongstra applied the hand-knotted Guipure technique (a bobbin lace-technique from the 18th century) to create a relief landscape with the textile. Asked about her choice to use wool for the OBA installation, Jongstra replied: 'wool is a connector, wool was always everywhere, we all have an archaic image of the shepherd and his flock'.⁷⁴ Wool for Jongstra serves as a mnemonic devise that alludes to shelter as well as to archaic, timeless landscapes where humans, animals and plants formed a harmonious ecosystem.

In order to gain a full understanding of the material wool, Jongstra took up the archaic tradition of keeping a flock of sheep: 'If you're serious about a material, you need to understand its connection to the environment.'⁷⁵ This is typical for Jongstra's process: Materials are not only researched in theory, but also in more experimental ways as part of the art making process – this practice of artistic research can be compared to the Romantic tradition of exploring nature and of exposing oneself to subjective experiences in order to create art that is more in tune with nature.

The breed Jongstra chose for her flock is the nearly extinct Drenthe Heath sheep, the oldest breed of Europe and native to the North-East of the Netherlands. The sheep do not only provide Jongstra's workshop with wool for art-making, they are also essential in keeping the moorland ecosystem intact. Keeping the sheep becomes a 'preservationist act, which inheres the wool with a certain integrity that is carried into the works'.⁷⁶ Compared to the Romantic idea of a past society that used to live in harmony with nature, Jongstra's practice of sustaining the sheep and preserving a traditional landscape does not only allude to an utopian point in time, but actually (re)creates it.

⁷³ Reiss, 'Art and climate change'.

⁷⁴ Louwrien Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', in: Marietta de Vries and Suzanna de Sitter ed., *Claudy Jongstra* (Rotterdam 2017), 160.

⁷⁵ Jongstra in an interview with Dalzell, 'Claudy Jongstra interweaves a passion for the environment in her wool-felt artworks', 144.

⁷⁶ Laura M. Richard, 'Of wool and murals. The art of Claudy Jongstra', in: Marietta de Vries and Suzanna de Sitter ed., *Claudy Jongstra* (Rotterdam 2017) 6-7, 6.

For *Golden Guipure*, Jongstra felted wool together with silk.⁷⁷ Felting results in a non-woven textile, probably the first kind of textile ever fabricated by mankind.⁷⁸ It is a time-consuming process that uses wool, water, soap and manual labor. By taking felt out of the ‘hippie tree-hugger context’ and placing felt in the context of abstract art, Jongstra plays with the viewer’s expectations and prejudices and challenges us to view felt from a fresh perspective. As she puts it: ‘The material is fantastic, it’s nature; especially when used in conjunction with plant dyes, wool felt is a creative item that only needs to be placed in context in our day and age. The question is, how do you work felt to be contemporary?’⁷⁹ For Jongstra, felt is synonymous with nature – and by covering the concrete walls of the OBA with felt, nature reclaims a bit of the urban space.⁸⁰

Jongstra is not unique in using felt in contemporary art. Josef Beuys and Robert Morris both used felt as a material for their conceptual art pieces in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸¹ Both used the industrial, grey variant of felt, with Beuys referring to the military context and presenting felt as a second skin for humans who need to heal from violent trauma’s; Morris inspected felt for its formal qualities by taking it out of its industrial context. Jongstra however uses felt in order to make a conscious connection to indigenous traditions, to lost cultural heritage and to nature, thereby adding a Romantic impetus to her art.

In Romanticism, the rediscovery and revival of local and indigenous traditions was instrumental in shaping a new cultural identity. Jongstra has similar aspirations: She confronts the visitors with a natural and archaic material in order to remind them of a forgotten connection to nature and the earth, which in her view is ingrained in the craft and material of felt.⁸² By confronting the visitors with wool in felted form, Jongstra aim is to invoke a forgotten history and a connection to the natural source of this material, ultimately resulting in an enhanced ecological awareness.⁸³ In the words of Jongstra: ‘Sustainability implies not only a craftsmanlike way of working but above all also working with materials direct from the ground, which are down-to-earth

⁷⁷ In general, Jongstra experiments with a broad variety of wool from various animal species for her felts, and she mixes wool with materials such as dried plants, silk and even metals and minerals. See Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces*, 103.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 107.

⁷⁹ Beatrijs Sterk, ‘Claudy Jongstra. A refreshing encounter’, *TextileForum* (2010) 1, 27-29, 27.

⁸⁰ See Pauline Bijster: ‘Alsof er tussen het rechte en industriële karakter van het gebouw ook nog een beetje natuur zit.’ Pauline Bijster, ‘Om te huilen zo mooi’, 20.

⁸¹ Ingeborg de Roode, ‘Claudy Jongstra. Vilt voor mode, interieur en architectuur’, 85.

⁸² Quote Jongstra in Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces*, 124: ‘felt is often a confusing experience, because people no longer know what untreated wool feels like’.

⁸³ Nikkie Herberigs, ‘1980-2010: Ambacht en kunst’, in: Margriet van Seumeren-Haerkens ed., *Een mooi ding. Ambacht, vormgeving, kunst 1890-2010* (Wormer 2010) 93-137, 131.

in the most direct sense of the word. If you do that, people will start to become concerned about the earth as well.’⁸⁴

3.2 Color

For Jongstra, not only the material and the texture of the OBA installation connects the viewers to nature, but the colors of the artwork do so as well. Parts of the installations at the OBA are left in their natural-white color; the yellow-golden-green shade is achieved by using one of the oldest known dyes in Northern Europe, the natural dye sourced from the weld plant.⁸⁵ As all colors outside of nature are exclusively synthetic these days, viewers are not used to seeing natural colors in man-made environments anymore. Jongstra consciously applies natural colors and dyes for the OBA installation, thereby confronting and reacquainting the viewer with colors from nature. This is part of Jongstra attempt to connect viewers with nature and to preserve natural *and* cultural heritage.

According to Jongstra, natural dyes are not only better to work with, as they do not bleed into other parts of the textile; they also produce more pleasing colors, since they ‘carry the quality of nature’ in them.⁸⁶ As a consequence, Jongstra has been working with natural dye stuffs exclusively, sourcing the ingredients herself.⁸⁷ Since 2008, she has started several botanical gardens and collaborations with farmers and research institutions, thereby researching, reviving and using indigenous plants from local organic gardens.

By engaging in partnerships with local growers and employing organic methodologies, Jongstra demonstrates a commitment to the comprehensive, sustainable and circular production process of her artworks. Through these collaborative efforts, she ensures that the ingredients for her art are cultivated in economically and ecologically sound conditions.⁸⁸ Jongstra’s conscientious approach to dye production highlights her belief that the creation of art carries moral obligations, which entails the responsibility for overseeing the entirety of the artistic process. This responsibility extends beyond artistic considerations and working conditions to encompass the preservation of the environment and the land where her art and the ingredients for her art are produced.⁸⁹

With the disappearance of local crop-growing traditions not only the agricultural knowledge has died out, but the plants themselves as well, leading to a changed and diminished bio-diversity. One of the aims of Jongstra’s work with colors and plants is the reconstruction of this lost

⁸⁴ Quote Jongstra in Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces*, 124.

⁸⁵ Wijers, ‘Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview’, 160

⁸⁶ Jongstra in an interview with Theo Paaijmans, ‘Ze dragen de kwaliteit van de natuur in zich’, in: Ex ed., *Claudy Jongstra*, 34-41, 34.

⁸⁷ See Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces*, 116, and Wijers, ‘Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview’, 17.

⁸⁸ Sterk, ‘Claudy Jongstra. A refreshing encounter’, 27.

⁸⁹ See Jongstra interview with Wijers, ‘Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview’, 16.

biodiversity. By bringing these plants back and growing them organically, Jongstra's art making has a symbiotic effect on the land around her farm, leading to an explosion of insect and bird life. In stark contrast with the surrounding industrial agriculture that uses pesticides and herbicides, her plant gardens attract huge amounts of pollinators that had all but disappeared from the region, including very rare species such as the black bee. By caring about and for the seeds, the soil, the plants which are then transformed into color and integrated into her art, Jongstra transports the importance of environmental preservation into her art works.⁹⁰

Jongstra applies a scientific curiosity to the growing of the dye crops, reaching from the study of historical recipes for herbal remedies to collaborations with the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden. For *NINE*, a central work in her 2020/2021 retrospective at the Lakenhal in Leiden, Jongstra focused on the woad plant. Woad used to be very common in the Netherlands and North-Western Europe in general and was used as a source for intensive blue. Just like many other crops, woad was not cultivated anymore when synthetic dyes took over.⁹¹ Jongstra experimented with different environments for growing woad from a singular batch of seeds. This resulted in a vast variety of shades of blue, thereby demonstrating that each region, change in climate, and variety of soil composition results in a different and specific variety of blue.⁹² In this, Jongstra could be considered a true disciple of Carus' *Erdlebenkunst*, as she unlocks the complexity of nature through science and makes the essence of nature visible in art.⁹³

The choice of color is aesthetically significant for each art piece. Jongstra indicates that each natural color is charged with separate historical meanings, associations and powers, with which she is trying to reconnect the viewer.⁹⁴ The installation at the OBA with its monochromatic yellow-golden-green does conjure up the brightness and warmth of the sun and also connects us to the earliest dye used in Northern Europe. For a more golden-brown, earth-like tone for a commission in San Francisco, Jongstra used onions skins and local earth minerals to color her work, thereby referencing the gold-digging tradition in the San Francisco area. In Jongstra's view, it is not gold that represents the real treasures of the earth, but rather the onion, a plant that renews itself and bears fruit.⁹⁵ For a triptych at Bennington College in Vermont, Jongstra chose the color blue that she

⁹⁰ See also Suzanne Oxenaar about Jongstra in *Achter de schermen bij Claudy Jongstra. 'Wie weet nog iets van een plantaardige kleur'*. Een film van Marit Geluk (20-11-2020).

⁹¹ Sarah Knigge, 'Het diepste zwart', in: Ex ed., *Claudy Jongstra*, 42-59, 43; See also: Theo Paaijmans, 'Ze dragen de kwaliteit van de natuur in zich', 34.

⁹² See for a description of this artistic research project Theo Paaijmans, *ibidem*, 34.

⁹³ See Behler, 'Carl Gustav Carus', 132; as well as Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 58.

⁹⁴ See Daan Heerma van Voss, 'Claudy Jongstra. Een strijd tegen veronachtzaming', in: Ex ed., *Claudy Jongstra*, 10-19, 11-12: 'Ook de kleuren die zijn gebruikt zijn lokaal en volkomen natuurlijk. [...] Helaas zijn wij die kennis verloren, en is onze verbinding met die oorspronkelijke kleuren verbroken geraakt. Het leven op deze boerderij kun je zien als een eigenzinnige poging die verbinding te herstellen.'

⁹⁵ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 8.

derived from woad. The college setting is supposed to encourage wisdom – a quality that Goethe, according to Jongstra, associates with the color blue ('Blue is enlightened darkness'⁹⁶).

Jongstra believes that colors, like medicinal plants, can conjure up strong physical and emotional reactions: 'It is an appeal to something you are carrying inside, but which you have covered up in daily life'.⁹⁷ In a sense, Jongstra seems to share the Romantic idea of the analogy of inner essence with nature, and she seems to echo the Romantic belief that finding the right 'zauberwort' or – in Jongstra's art – a fitting natural shade can bring to life hidden meaning.

By carefully choosing from a natural, carefully crafted color palette that is charged with natural and cultural meaning and by letting a select set of colors be dominant in each piece, Jongstra aims to trigger emotional and subconscious reactions that supposedly fit within the purpose of the art work in general. This Romantic aesthetic idea carries through all of Jongstra's writings and interviews. Beyond this, Jongstra also tries to reconnect the viewer to a (nearly) lost cultural and natural heritage – a heritage that she brings to life beyond the art work, by collaborating with farmers, botanical gardens and scientists and by cultivating sections of land with plants and pollinators.

3.3 Form

In contrast to the monumentality of *Golden Guipure*, the composition of the work is minimalistic.⁹⁸ By confining the color palette to a limited range of monochromatic shades, the focal point is redirected towards the material character of the piece. The restricted color scheme of white and yellow effectively unifies the diverse materials utilized in the textile, including various types of wool, silk, and chiffon, with a subtle, harmonious and soft overall appearance as a result.

Jongstra's pieces are often commissioned for a specific space, thereby pre-determining the scale of the art work. *Golden Guipure* is a site-specific work, making it appear as part of the architecture of the building. But although *Golden Guipure* covers two-dimensional walls, the work appears to be three-dimensional, even sculptural in parts. The felting process combines different sorts of wool in different states of rawness with other materials. Flat parts of canvas alternate with thicker parts, where longer strings of curly wool are sticking out. This results in a differing thickness of the textile, creating light reflections and shadows and adding body to the canvasses.

In recent years, Jongstra has ventured from the restrictions of the architecture. Her works are leaving the periphery and enter center stage. With *NINE* (2020), an installation of 5x15 meters, Jongstra has chosen to cover the floor of one of the exhibit halls at Jongstra's retrospective at the

⁹⁶ Ibidem, 159.

⁹⁷ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 18.

⁹⁸ Laura M. Richard, 'Of wool and murals. The art of Claudy Jongstra', 6.

Lakenhal (2020/2021), forcing the visitor to walk around the installation [Ill. 7]. *NINE* consists of felted strips that are interwoven, frazzled and sticking out at the edges and into the walkway, thereby making the borders of the artwork undefined. The viewer cannot easily circle around and access the work, but instead has to carefully walk around the extending stripes of cloth.



Ill. 7: Claudy Jongstra, *NINE* and *Cosmic Cry* (2020). Felted and woven wool, 500 x 1500 cm. Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden (30 October 2020 - 28 February 2021). Photography ©Ronald Tilleman/Studio Claudy Jongstra.

The frazzled borders of *NINE* with extending strips of felt gives it an intentional unfinishedness. The absence of clear borders between the art work and the surrounding space makes *NINE* appear as an unfinished fragment. The fragment is also the ideal artistic form in Romantic art. Schlegel's 116th *Atheneum* fragment speaks of the 'progressiveness' of the Romantic reality which is described as always being in a state of becoming and never completed. In being open-ended, the fragment is the ideal presentation of the progressiveness of art; it also stimulates the reader's/viewer's imagination and promotes subjective sense-making: 'Der Leser muß der erweiterte Autor sein' (*Blüthenstaub-Fragment* 125).⁹⁹ This fragment character is therefore not only characteristic of Romantic art but of recent works by Jongstra as well, as is demonstrated by *NINE*.

⁹⁹ Novalis Werke, *Blüthenstaub-Fragment* 125, 352; See also: Silvio Vietta, *Die literarische Moderne* (1992), 238.

Golden Guipure's form is not static, but interacts and changes with its environment. Jongstra allows for active altercations, like braiding the wool, but the work itself also absorbs sounds and smells from its surroundings, while exuding its own smell of unwashed wool into the space. Over the past years, Jongstra has increasingly stressed the sculptural independence of her works by hanging the works in front of the wall instead of *on* the wall. As a result, the organic fibers of the works expand and contract with temperature and climate and the textiles have the freedom to move with the drafts from passersby. These natural qualities of the materials and her new approach to installing them bring the artworks to life, adding an element of surprise and uncontrollability that is also very much partial to nature in general.¹⁰⁰

The connection and interaction between art work and surroundings is very much a Romantic ambition as well. Art was supposed to extent and thereby change the apparent reality.¹⁰¹ Novalis declared poetic reality even to be the 'ultimate reality'¹⁰², attributing transformative power to art: 'Die Welt muß romantisiert werden. So findet man den urspr[ünglichen] Sinn wieder' [*The world needs to be romanticized. This is how one finds the original meaning again*].¹⁰³ By placing her works in public buildings and by allowing her works to interact with and change their surroundings, Jongstra also subscribes to the Romantic belief that art is the means to alter reality.¹⁰⁴

3.4 Process

Working with a felted textile gives an enormous freedom to Jongstra's composition. Unlike woven textiles, a felted piece like *Golden Guipure* is not bound to originate from a single line, whether vertical or horizontal, progressing in a specific direction. Felted works can grow from any point or even simultaneously from multiple points. Additionally, akin to the layering process in painting, layers can freely be added. This aspect is also reflected in the artwork's title, *Guipure*, which alludes to the technique of incorporating lace elements onto a textile foundation. Furthermore, felted pieces can keep growing, without ever needing clearly defined edges or limits. This absence of a defined starting and end point, alongside the unrestrained directions and limitless potential for growth distinguishes felted artworks from other forms of artistic expression.

¹⁰⁰ Interview Jongstra with Wijers about the Lincoln Center installation, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 159; see also Laura M. Richard's discussion of form and sculptural independence in Jongstra, 'Of wool and murals. The art of Claudy Jongstra', 7.

¹⁰¹ See Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik*, 16.

¹⁰² Vaughan, *German romantic painting*, 10/11.

¹⁰³ Gerhard Schulz ed., *Novalis Werke* (München 2001), 384.

¹⁰⁴ Pauline Bijster, 'Om te huilen zo mooi', 24: 'Behalve voor onderwijs-, kunst- en politieke instellingen, maakt Jongstra graag werk voor ziekenhuizen. "Het valt onder *healing architecture*. Natuurlijke stoffen hebben een bewezen positief effect op genezingsprocessen."

‘The work has no ego’, was once said about one of Jongstra’s works. This is true in two ways: Each work is supposed to enter into a strong connection to the space itself, giving it a task within this space, such as is the case with *Golden Guipure* which softens the Public Library’s modernist white entrance hall.¹⁰⁵ Each work is made with a clear purpose that reaches beyond the aesthetic appearance. The works are to provide shelter, soften, and heal, as in the commission for the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek hospital¹⁰⁶ or to inspire learning, understanding and wisdom, as with the commission for the university library in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁷ Not surprisingly, Jongstra expresses a clear preference for commissions in communal buildings, places of learning, hospitals – locations where her art can be experienced by many people and where it can serve its purpose of ‘social practice’ and ‘social impact’.¹⁰⁸

The second way in which Jongstra’s work could be considered ego-less is the collaborative way in which the artworks develop: While Jongstra is in control of the design and the creative process, she allows for the handwriting of others in her works: ‘Er zit ook heel veel variatie in het knippen. Want Ffion die knipt heel anders dan Rien bijvoorbeeld’ [*There also is a lot of variation in cutting. Because Ffion cuts very differently than Rien for example*].¹⁰⁹ Experimentation, chance, accidents, individual handwritings and a certain amount of serendipity are part of her way of working and become part of the finished pieces. Consciously stripped of ego, Jongstra’s works are the result of a collaborative effort by *Studio Claudy Jongstra* whose members bring their own skills, traditions and questions to the work.

The work itself happens by hand, which is tedious and laborious – but which is also a process that according to Jongstra is communal and spiritual: ‘Spinning and weaving used to be something done by priests, when you go back to old cultures.’¹¹⁰ Jongstra believes that this spiritual legacy survives in the textiles and can be transmitted when touching a hand-made textile. Inspiration is part of the spiritual act of making, coming from both nature and culture. In the case of *Golden Guipure*, Jongstra translated the experiences of a pastoral landscape into the work.¹¹¹ For a commission at the Barnes foundation, she took inspiration from dance, laying out the colors and movements while dancing across the felted base of the work.¹¹² In short, the process of creation at *Studio Claudy*

¹⁰⁵ Tegenbosch, ‘Metaphors on connection’, 167.

¹⁰⁶ Jongstra in an interview with Louwrien Wijers about her commission for the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek hospital, ‘Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview’, 159.

¹⁰⁷ Tegenbosch, ‘Metaphors on connection’, 167.

¹⁰⁸ Monika Auch, ‘Woven skin - shelter of color’, *Surface Design Journal* 42 (Summer 2018) 2, 58-60, 58.

¹⁰⁹ Jongstra in ‘Achter de schermen bij Claudy Jongstra. ‘Wie weet nog iets van een plantaardige kleur’: een film van Marit Geluk (20-11-2020), Jongstra, 11:20. ‘Ffion’ is the (Celtic/Irish) name of one of her interns.

¹¹⁰ Wijers, ‘Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview’, 161.

¹¹¹ Video ‘Achter de schermen bij Claudy Jongstra. ‘Wie weet nog iets van een plantaardige kleur’: een film van Marit Geluk (20-11-2020), Jongstra, 4:06.

¹¹² Wijers, ‘Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview’, 161.

Jongstra can be described as a team effort, but with Jongstra as the subjective and individual power behind the creations.

Time is another highly influential factor for Jongstra's way of working, dictated by the duration of natural processes: It sometimes takes years for an ingredient to develop, such as the Rembrandt inspired red that she extracts from the root of the madder plant: 'Het duurt vijf jaar voordat de meekrapwortel dit rood geeft, het rood van Rembrandt, vijf jaar [*It takes five years for madder root to produce this red, the red of Rembrandt, five years*].'¹¹³ The process and the amount of work, knowledge and time necessary for the production of a single artwork might not be apparent to most viewers of Jongstra's art, but they are invisibly embedded in the artworks themselves.

3.5 Community

The size of the works and the artistic choice to grow the ingredients and to craft the works by hand makes it necessary to apply many hands in the making process. All of Jongstra's works are produced by *Studio Claudy Jongstra*, her workshop in Húns and Spannum which consists of a small steady team and a selection of international students and interns who join the team on a temporary basis. Not only the work in Húns and Spannum is shared, but so are the meals, with most of the food also being grown and sourced locally and sustainably. This way of working, which Jongstra describes as communal and spiritual, is holding a striking resemblance to that of medieval agrarian or monastic communities.¹¹⁴

One of Jongstra's pronounced inspirations is the medieval abbess and mystic Hildegard von Bingen (1091-1179) whose writings on medicinal plants Jongstra studies.¹¹⁵ Besides the interest in the healing powers of plants and the documentation of plants, both women stand at the helm of economically independent communities that consist of (mostly) women. Von Bingen was considered a polymath, being not only knowledgeable about plants, but also publishing about cosmology, ethics, and religious matters. Besides being a researcher and practitioners of medicine, Von Bingen was also an artist, designing and executing manuscript illustrations together with her workshop and composing and performing music – choir chants – that have survived until today. Like Von Bingen, Jongstra also relies on the community to support her artistic experimentation and to realize her creative visions. Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider the medieval abbess as an inspiration in more than one aspect.

¹¹³ Jongstra in een interview with Marit Geluk, *Achter de schermen bij Claudy Jongstra*. 'Wie weet nog iets van een plantaardige kleur'. Een film van Marit Geluk (20-11-2020).

¹¹⁴ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 161.

¹¹⁵ Jongstra in 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview part 2', 16-25, 19.

Medieval monasticism was also a major inspiration in Romantic literature and art. *Die Elixiere des Teufels* [The Devil's Elixirs], a 1815 novel by E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) is a well-known example. Also, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-1798) and Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) used the perspective of a monk in a late-medieval setting to develop their theory of Romantic art in *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1796). The famous example from the visual arts is Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (1808-1810), depicting the singular figure of a monk facing the sea [Ill. 8]. One of the reasons for prevalence of medieval monasticism in Romantic art was the idea of a simpler, aesthetic life that is focused on the contemplation of beauty. This culminated in the establishment of quasi-monastic communes such as the *Lukasbund*, a community of German artists that went to Rome to revive the medieval artists' Guild of Saint Luke, and who tried to bring the ideas of simple communal life for the sake of spiritual art and beauty into reality.¹¹⁶

The Romantics shared a dissatisfaction with the perceived reality, and from this arose the need for a life as an artist and the compulsion to be in opposition to the bourgeois pursuit of financial and social security.¹¹⁷ Rousseau's call to return to nature provided a welcome alternative model and served the Romantics as the example for an utopian past state in which society supposedly lived in harmony with nature.¹¹⁸ Creating distance from the societal reality and propagating an utopian alternative in their art also freed up space for the Romantic artists for experimental artistic creation and for more artistic freedom.¹¹⁹

Jongstra's community also could be seen as an ecological utopia based on practices from the past, similar to a living museum. Jongstra herself names the circular and sustainable agrarian communities from the Middle Ages that were based on Charlemagne's *Capitulare de Villis* as the example and model she is trying to emulate.¹²⁰ Being asked about the viability of this alternative life style, Jongstra argues that the way of life of her farm and workshop *should* actually be the norm, as it is 'oorspronkelijk' [original in the sense of *primeval*] and 'normal' [according to the norms

¹¹⁶ See William Vaughan's description of the Nazarene artists group *Guild of St Luke*, in: Vaughan, *German Romantic Painting*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Title of Lothar Pikulik's work on Romanticism: *Romantik als Ungenügen an der Normalität* (Frankfurt/M. 1979).

¹¹⁸ Vaughan, 'Romanticism': 'Some favoured retreat, clutching at past traditions and evoking the 'good old days' of the Middle Ages. Others turned to worlds beyond the reach of civilization, to the contemplation of the 'primitive' in the natural world [...]. [W]hile Romanticism began as a movement concerned with personal experience and enrichment, it ended in most cases with the reinforcement of traditional culture and nationalism.'

¹¹⁹ See Hugo Friedrich, *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik. Von der Mitte des 19. bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (5th, exp. ed; Hamburg 1973) 20.

¹²⁰ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 9.

explicated by Jongstra].¹²¹ Her utopian community is therefore meant as a conscious alternative to the reality of consumerism, industrialized agriculture and globalized production methods.

Simply regarding Jongstra's community as utopian or as an example for aesthetic separation would not paint the full picture. Setting up this community was not driven by utopian ideas in the Romantic sense, it rather was a consequence of Jongstra's artistic choice to use locally, sustainably grown materials for her arts, to apply labor-intensive crafts in the creative process, and to stay close to the entire process of growth and production. In addition, her community also actively revives and sustains an ecosystem that is host to a biodiversity lost elsewhere in the surrounding landscape. At the same time, the art produced by the workshop and the activities employed sustain the community economically, proving that their way of live is at least on the small scale not utopian but an economically viable alternative that is possible and functional within Jongstra's frame of practice.

3.6 Artistic Research

Artistic research is a final, but important aspect for the process of Jongstra's art-making, as it informs all aspects of Jongstra's art making. In her workshop and on the farm, Jongstra immerses herself in her materials by growing them and tending to them herself. Intuition and accidents in experiments lead to new discoveries that are carefully documented. Jongstra also works together with craftspeople, historians, botanists and other scientists to enhance her own understanding of the materials and how they are connected to the ecosystem.¹²²

For *NINE*, Jongstra collaborated with the Botanical Garden in Leiden to study the influence of soil composition and climate conditions on the coloring of the dye from the woad plant. To learn more about traditional medicinal plants, Jongstra immersed herself in historical recipes by the medieval abbess and mystic Hildegard von Bingen. Jongstra even established the *Community Seed Bank for Colour* in 2018, an international collaboration for the preservation of local natural heritage and biodiversity, to raise awareness of the scarcity of natural and locally sourced seeds. The results

¹²¹ Jongstra in Heerma van Voss, 'Claudy Jongstra. Een strijd tegen veronachtzaming', 14: 'Als ik naar de wereld kijk, zie ik een verregeande IKEA-isering. We klikken, bestellen, sturen terug. Je kunt deze plek, deze boerderij, paradijselijk noemen, maar eigenlijk is dat de wereld op zijn kop: dit leven is oorspronkelijk, normaal.'

¹²² Corinne Julius, 'Making her presence felt. Claudy Jongstra's political cloth', *Selvedge* 84 (2017), 26-29, 26: 'Her studio is constantly researching what and how plants can be used for dyeing, referencing historical techniques. 'I want to preserve the nearly forgotten dye plants and techniques, and to stimulate bio-diversity.' New recipes [...] are [...] faithfully recorded in her library of recipes and samples of each colour the studio produces. She is currently working with the University of Utrecht's *Artechne* project to find a scientific way of recording and disseminating non-verbal information on her dyeing, on which there will be an exhibition in Belgium in 2019.'

of her investigations inform her art, but also serve as a way to preserve knowledge and natural resources, while also engaging the scientific community and communities of practice.¹²³

In applying artistic research, Jongstra is indebted to Romanticism which according to Cheetham started the tradition of artistic research.¹²⁴ Cheetham has demonstrated in *Landscape into Eco Art* how Carus' theory of *Erdlebenkunst* is relevant to contemporary art positions. Carus' call for a collaboration between science and artists in order to arrive at an ecological understanding of the earth is an originally Romantic idea.¹²⁵ Carus bases his theory on Friedrich Schlegel who expressed the belief that art, the natural world and science are intertwined, with art being destined to combine them all, by adding subjective experience and imagination.¹²⁶ Cheetham sees Carus' theory of *Erdlebenkunst* that he explicated in his *Neun Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei* (1827) [*Nine letters about landscape painting*] as prophetic for contemporary art:

'[Carus's] ideas have new resonance from the perspective of today's eco art. The time for Carus's ideas is now. Carus's work is of the Anthropocene in the sense that, not unlike his contemporaries Turner and Ruskin, [...] he construed human history and the history of the earth as intertwined.'¹²⁷

According to Cheetham, artistic research as one of the so-called *hinges*¹²⁸ between Romanticism and eco-art that apparently also play out in Jongstra.¹²⁹ Jongstra's application of artistic research serves the Romantic purpose Carus had pleaded for: Her research with the Botanical Garden on soil deepens our understanding of soil not by measuring its chemical composition but by making the differences in soil visible in the different shades of blue. By using

¹²³ Theo Paaijmans, 'Ze dragen de kwaliteit van de natuur in zich', 34: 'Tegenwoordig is zaadgoed voor natuurlijke kleurengewassen schaars en soms niet eens voorhanden. Om die reden richtte Claudy Jongstra het project *Community Seed Bank for Colour* op. [...] Ook wil ze de oude kennis en ambachtelijke vaardigheden onder boeren revitaliseren, zodat ze niet meer afhankelijk zijn van genetisch gemodificeerd zaaigoed.'

¹²⁴ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 58: 'I return to the early 19th century in German art, specifically the increasingly "scientific" landscapes of Casper David Friedrich and his close associate, the amateur painter and acclaimed physician Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), whose theory of *Erdlebenbildkunst* (earth-life pictures), I argue, in many ways previews contemporary eco art.'

¹²⁵ Ibidem, 63: 'Taken out of its nineteenth-century context, Carus's *Nine Letters* reads like a late twentieth-century environmentalist statement, thanks to his emphasis on educating not only artists to see and render the earth's life, but also the museum-going and art-buying public to receive enlightenment through landscape paintings that are truly new.'

¹²⁶ See Bartsch, *Romantik um 2000*, 100.; and Gorodeisky, '19th Century Romantic Aesthetics'.

¹²⁷ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 64.

¹²⁸ Regarding Cheetham's idea of the *hinges*, see ibidem, 7: 'I reexamine what I call the "hinges" between landscape and land art, between land art and eco art, and also between landscape and eco art, the eco art that is more involved with landscape than with land art.'

¹²⁹ Ibidem, 64: 'I want to suggest, however, that [Carus's] ideas have new resonance from the perspective of today's eco art. The time for Carus's ideas is now. Carus's work is of the Anthropocene in the sense that, not unlike his contemporaries Turner and Ruskin, [...] he construed human history and the history of the earth as intertwined. It is in this sense that the earth's history is the most important subject of history painting, one that he prophetically dedicated to the future of the genre.'

imagination and creativity and by applying a non-utilitarian view to scientific methods and making the results visible, her art bridges human experience *and* science and enriches our knowledge of and respect for nature in new and innovative ways.

3.8 Jongstra's aesthetic philosophy

Jongstra's works and art making result from a concrete and pragmatic approach to and application of material, color, form and process. Having started as an environmentally conscious textile designer in the 1990's, craft for her has become a means and not an end.¹³⁰ For Jongstra, the application of careful craftsmanship is the prerequisite for being an ecologically conscious artist, as the collaborative process of producing the ingredients for the art and of making the artwork itself is part of the ecosystem that Jongstra tries to support in a wholesome and sustainable way.¹³¹ As an extension of her art, and for Jongstra inherently connected to her art-making, she takes responsibility for a social community of farmers and crafts people and for ecological preservation of land, plants and animals.

The consequence with which Jongstra translates her personal values not only into artistic choices but into the creation of community and actions is strongly reminiscent of the Romantic concept of 'Universalpoesie', the ambition to turn art into life and to unify life and art:

*'Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie. Ihre Bestimmung ist nicht bloß, alle getrennten Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen und die Poesie mit der Philosophie und Rhetorik in Berührung zu setzen. Sie will und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen.'*¹³²

Romantic art is supposed to envelop and permeate all aspects of life, and the other way around. But where in Romanticism the ideal of *universalpoesie* unfolds within the artwork itself, such as in Novalis' novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Jongstra is more radical and actually brings the idea of *universalpoesie* into practice. For Jongstra, 'there is little division between personal values and artistic production'¹³³ – she translates her ethical values and her feeling of responsibility into a way of working and living that combines art making with ecological stewardship and community building. In that sense, there is no delineation between art and life: her social practice and preservationist practice can be considered art and her art as an act of social practice and environmental activism.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Citaat Jongstra in Herberigs, '1980-2010: Ambacht en kunst', 126: 'Ambacht is een middel en geen doel'.

¹³¹ Jongstra in Heerma van Voss, 'Claudy Jongstra. Een strijd tegen veronachtzaming', 17.

¹³² Friedrich Schlegel, 116th Athenäum Fragment, in: Ernst Behler e.a. ed., *Kritische Ausgabe*, (Paderborn 1967), vol. 2, 182. I attempt a loose translation [AO]: 'Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. Its purpose is not merely to reunite all the separate genres of poetry and to bring poetry into contact with philosophy and rhetoric. It also attempts to melt together and mix poetry and prose, genius and criticism, art poetry and nature poetry, thus making poetry alive and social, and making life and society poetic.'

¹³³ Laura M. Richard, 'Of wool and murals. The art of Claudy Jongstra', 7.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, 7.

The Romantic belief in art as a means to permeate and change society is echoed in Jongstra's idea of art: Just like craft and tradition are a means to create art, aesthetics for Jongstra are a means to a more conscious, responsible and better society. Her explicit driving force as an artist is an anti-consumerist and anti-extractivist attitude, coupled with a strong desire to foster 'care and wellbeing' by 'planting seeds'.¹³⁵ For Jongstra, social issues and mental and physical health are inherently connected with ecological well-being. Consequently, 'planting seeds' is something she does literally, both by maintaining her gardens and by creating art in collaboration with others, thereby planting seeds of awareness in whoever engages with her art and creative process.

3.9 Summary

Jongstra's artistic practice is the logical consequence of her anti-consumerist, ecologically conscious, and community-oriented convictions. Jongstra's approach therefore is steeped in eco-artistic principles, as her art and art making focusses on ecological responsibility, sustainable practices and resource conservation. By growing her own materials, she connects herself to her environment and its history, thereby reviving a nearly extinct ecosystem and traditional landscape. Her exploration of materials, processes, and historical sources informs her art and also enhances ecological knowledge in general.

The analysis of Claudy Jongstra's choice for materials and techniques also reveals parallels and differences between her practice and Romantic traditions. Her choice of material and colors connect her art to archaic landscapes, and to medieval and indigenous practices, mirroring Romanticism's fascination with the past and with 'traditional' culture. Jongstra's workshop, resembling a communal medieval community, aligns with Romantic notions of returning to nature. Her artistic research mirrors Romantic ideals, bridging subjective experience and scientific understanding, thereby exemplifying the Romantic idea of combining art, science, and nature.

Jongstra's work serves to foster a deeper connection between art, nature, and society, echoing the Romantic ambition to bridge the nature - culture divide. Jongstra's activist and holistic approach also resonates with the Romantic ideals of 'universalpoesie', of art's mission to permeate and change society. But her artistic practice goes far beyond the boundaries of Romantic art; she actively alters physical reality with her artistic practices, building and sustaining a community and preserving biodiversity and ecosystems. In her way of working and in her art works, as well, nature is more than a source for inspiration or a mirror for reflection; it plays an active role, as an organic element of her art that changes with its environment and that invites active interaction.

¹³⁵ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 163.

4. Landscape in Jongstra's art

Wim Pijbes once said about Jongstra: 'Haar werk laat niet alleen het landschap zien - het *is* het landschap.' [*Her work not only shows the landscape – it is the landscape*].¹³⁶ In Romanticism, landscape art was the preferred genre in the visual arts.¹³⁷ In Jongstra's art, landscape also is a central theme, with several critics and Jongstra herself claiming that her non-figurative works should be read as 'landscapes'.¹³⁸

Landscape art has always reflected on how humans define their relation to nature.¹³⁹ With the ecologic crisis, our view of landscape has changed – it is burdened with the realization of self-inflicted loss and guilt.¹⁴⁰ The realization that this signifies a loss larger than diminished biodiversity alone becomes obvious when we look at the history of landscape appreciation through landscape art, including contemporary eco-art.

Jongstra herself refers to landscape on several levels: Not only does she consider some of her works as landscapes, she also cites landscape as a source of inspiration, and she wants to reconnect the viewer of her art with landscape: 'My work fosters an emotional connection to indigenous craft, cultural heritage, and the landscape.'¹⁴¹ The meaning of landscape for and in Jongstra's art will be considered based on the following works: *Golden Guipure* (2007), *NINE* (2020), and the more recent work, *Guernica de la Ecología* (2021-).

¹³⁶ Wim Pijbes: 'Haar werk laat niet alleen het landschap zien, het is het landschap.' In: Panorama Pijbes, aflevering 'Achter de dijk' [television broadcast]. NTR, 29 maart 2017. https://ntr.nl/Panorama-Pijbes/242/detail/Achter-de-Dijk/VPWON_1293215

¹³⁷ William Vaughan, 'Romanticism'.

¹³⁸ See the title of Theo Paaijmans' article 'Geweven landschap', in: Ex ed., *Claudy Jongstra*, 60-77, 60; Marietta de Vries and Suzanna de Sitter call Jongstra's works 'visceral landscapes', internal landscapes that find expression in the art works. Marietta de Vries and Suzanna de Sitter ed., *Claudy Jongstra* (Rotterdam 2017), Voorwoord, s.p.

¹³⁹ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western art*. Oxford History of Art Series (London 1999) 223: 'For the last 500 years western landscape art has been like a barometer of anxieties over the balance of power between nature and culture.'

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, 223.

¹⁴¹ Jongstra in Dalzell, 'Claudy Jongstra interweaves a passion for the environment in her wool-felt artworks', 145.

4.1 From Romantic landscape art to abstraction

Jongstra does not depict literal landscapes in her art. Instead, she crafts large-scale abstract compositions from raw and natural colors and materials that she refers to as 'landscapes'. Like the Romantics, Jongstra also attempts to transport a spiritual experience of nature through art, thereby trying to reconnect the audience with internal images of ideal landscape.¹⁴² This situates Jongstra in the tradition of landscape art that started with Romanticism and continues until today.

In *Modern painting and the Northern Romantic tradition*¹⁴³, Robert Rosenblum claimed that landscape art laid the foundation for the development of abstract art. According to Rosenblum, Northern landscape artists such as Caspar David Friedrich and William Turner were at the helm of an evolution that eventually led to Barrett Newman's and Marc Rothko's spiritual abstract expressionism. Romanticism, Rosenblum argues, instigated this shift by presenting overwhelming nature as the new place for sacred and mystical experience that falls outside the realm of Christian dogma and Christian iconography.¹⁴⁴



Ill. 8: Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), *Der Mönch am Meer* [The Monk by the Sea] (1808-10). Oil on canvas, 110 x 171.5 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany, inv. nr. NG 9/85.

¹⁴² Jongstra about Golden Guipure in 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 160: 'wool is a connector [to the] archaic image of the shepherd and his flock.'

¹⁴³ Robert Rosenblum, *Modern painting and the Northern Romantic tradition. Friedrich to Rothko* (London 1975).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 26, 35 and 70.

For Rosenblum, Friedrich's painting *Monk by the Sea* (1808-10) is a striking example of this new iconography, as it tries to convey mythical truths through nature representation [Ill. 8].

He describes the painting as

'daringly empty, devoid of objects, devoid of the narrative incident that might perhaps qualify it as genre painting, devoid of everything but the lonely confrontation of a single figure, a Capuchin monk, with the hypnotic simplicity of a completely unbroken horizon line and above it no less primal and potentially infinite extension of gloomy, hazy sky.'¹⁴⁵

The monk, according to Rosenblum, stands for the individual that 'is pitted against, or confronted by the overwhelming, incomprehensible immensity of the universe, as if the mysteries of religion [...] had been relocated in the natural world.'¹⁴⁶ The diminutive human in a visually and virtually overpowering landscape presents a humbling and awe-inspiring experience; it also shows a respect for forces of nature that lie beyond our understanding or control.

Rosenblum draws a line from the depictions of nature experience in Friedrich and Turner to the abstract paintings of Kandinsky and Mondrian, both artists who according to Rosenblum try to convey spiritual meaning with their increasingly abstract landscapes, a development that culminates in the abstract expressionist art of Rosenblum's contemporaries Rothko and Newman.¹⁴⁷ Allan Ruff and Mark A. Cheetham suggest that eco-artists are the pallbearers of this tradition. Eco-artists such as Olafur Eliasson keep the Romantic ambition alive to convey a spiritual truth with their art – an ambition that goes beyond ecological science or science in general, thereby following the example of Turner, Friedrich and Carus.¹⁴⁸

Without naming Romanticism as her influence, Jongstra quotes abstract painters Hilma af Klint and Mark Rothko and eco-artist Olafur Eliasson as her role models and inspiration for her art.¹⁴⁹ Jongstra also fits within this abstract-expressionist tradition, as her landscapes also are not abstract in the minimalist sense. By crafting her abstract compositions from raw, natural materials, nature becomes the concrete object *and* the subject of her works at once.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem, 195.

¹⁴⁸ Allan R. Ruff, *Arcadian Visions. Pastoral Influences on Poetry, Painting and the Design of Landscape* (Oxford 2015), 246; also Mark A. Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 60.

¹⁴⁹ Claudy Jongstra ed., *See All This: For the Love of Art 6* (Winter 2021/22) 24, 82 and 100 respectively. Jongstra was guest-editor of this issue. In the section 'People who make a difference' Hilma af Klint, Olafur Eliasson and Mark Rothko are mentioned, among others.

4.2 Landscape in the cultural imagination

In the Netherlands, industrialization, population growth and globalization have led to increased urban sprawl and industrial agriculture, diminishing the amount of 'traditional landscape'. These developments have caused a loss of biodiversity and habitat degradation. This becomes most visible in the landscape which is depleted of once characteristic elements such as farm animals, bushes, trees, wild flowers, insects, birds and wild mammals and is now dominated by monoculture and industrial infrastructure.

The confrontation with this new reality causes a painful feeling of loss and nostalgia, for which in the Netherlands new terms have been invented such as 'Zombienatuur'¹⁵⁰ [*zombie nature*], a nature that looks green but is essentially dead, and 'landschapspijn'¹⁵¹ [*landscape pain*], expressing the painful realization of a landscape lost.

In interviews, Jongstra frequently shares the emotional sentiment of self-inflicted *landschapspijn*:

'Kijk eens vlak voorbij onze vijver, daar begint de eindeloze monocultuur van het moderne boerenland al. Efficiëntie en eenvormigheid zijn de toverwoorden. Dezelfde gewassen, dezelfde smaken, dezelfde kleuren.' [Look just beyond our pond, that is where the endless monoculture of modern farmland begins. Efficiency and uniformity are the magic words. The same crops, the same flavors, the same colors.]¹⁵²

Jongstra's discontent with today's visual landscape is primarily connected with her environmental concerns, but her discontent with regard to landscape also has an emotional dimension in her view: The visual confrontation with a unkempt and diverse landscape that is not straightened by machines has a pleasing effect on humans. Jongstra bemoans that this aesthetic pleasure cannot be experienced anymore, at least not in the modern agricultural landscape of the Netherlands.¹⁵³

The word *landscape* is a borrowing from Dutch and a contraction of 'land schapen' [*shaping or creating land*] which implies that landscape is always the result of human creation or

¹⁵⁰ This expression was coined by Jelle Reumer, former director of the Museum of Natural History in Rotterdam, in an interview with Emiel Hakkenes: "Jelle Reumer heeft een nieuw woord verzonnen. [...] 'Zombienatuur [...] zou ik de natuur op het platteland in Nederland willen noemen. Een zombie lijkt te leven, maar is dood. Als je het mij vraagt, geldt hetzelfde voor de Nederlandse natuur.'" Emiel Hakkenes, 'Volgens bioloog Jelle Reumer zijn dieren helemaal niet lief', *Trouw*, 19 mei 2017.

¹⁵¹ 'Landschapspijn' is an expression coined by ecologist Theunis Piersma: Theunis Piersma, 'Voorwoord', in: Peter de Ruyter, *Vloeiend landschap. Over de toekomst van het Friese landschap* (Gorredijk 2015) 6-7, 7.

¹⁵² Heerma van Voss, 'Claudy Jongstra. Een strijd tegen veronachtzaming', 16-17.

¹⁵³ Quote Jongstra: 'Ja, [de biodiversiteit] is helemaal weg. Als ik naar buiten kijk, in Friesland, waar ik werk en waar ik woon, dat is wel echt intens triest, en het landschap is dood, het is echt helemaal uitgewoond, en dat vind ik wel heel erg, want de weidjes met de boterbloemen, en de klaprozen, en alle inheemse planten en kruiden [...], ja die, dat is gewoon helemaal weg. [...] De burens hebben alles laser-geëgaliseerd, daar zit geen glooiing meer in het landschap, dus dat doet natuurlijk ook iets met de mens, als je daarna kijkt. Van een bollig weidje, daar krijg je toch een soort van zacht gevoel over je heen.' Pieter van der Wielen [host], NPO podcast *Nooit meer slapen*, 15 December 2021; minute 19:40. <https://podcast.npo.nl/feed/nooit-meer-slapen.xml>

manipulation.¹⁵⁴ Landscape visually carries the history of our interaction with the land, it is a cultural canvas on which we document our interaction with nature.¹⁵⁵ This is especially pertinent for the Netherlands, as Dutch landscape is a telling example for the alterability and fluidity of landscape. The idea of ‘traditional’ landscape is therefore a disputable concept, as landscape is and has constantly been subjected to change.

The same fluidity is true for the concept of what a ‘beautiful’ landscape is. This evolution can be traced in the history of landscape art: In the Netherlands, landscape art became a popular genre in the 17th century, the so-called ‘Dutch Golden Age’. This was a time of radical change in the Netherlands – not only for Dutch society but for the Dutch landscape as well: Wetlands, moors and lakes were drained and tamed on an unprecedented scale by mills, ditches and dikes, thereby doubling the amount of arable land.¹⁵⁶ The wetlands and moors were transformed into the regulated and checkered pattern of ditches, dikes and agrarian land, creating the polder landscape that we still recognize as typical Dutch. This massive cultivation project also created the landscape that provides the background for Jongstra’s workshops in Húns and Spannum.

While the polders were created and Dutch landscape was being transformed, this new, man-made landscape did not figure in Dutch landscape art. Instead, 17th-century Dutch landscape artists depicted the few ‘natural’ landscapes that were left, such as the sand dunes along the coast. According to Irene Klaver, this was a conscious choice: “[...] these so-called Dutch ‘realists’ rarely painted polders, windmills, canals, or peat digging. They clearly painted with their backs to the changes in the landscape described above.”¹⁵⁷ Klaver surmises that these landscapes provided a point of rest from busy urban lives, a nostalgic escape to a past, and a basis for a ‘communal identity to an increasingly differentiated population that sought to come to terms with a plethora of radical changes in a relatively short period of time.’¹⁵⁸

Only 200 years later, the frame of reference had shifted and Dutch 19th-century landscape art embraced the polder as the quintessential Dutch landscape. The now familiar polders with cows and windmills were already under pressure and increasingly disappearing due to urbanization and industrialization. Therefore, the appreciation of a landscape that had only been created a few generations earlier, was fueled by nostalgia and a national sentiment for the

¹⁵⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “landscape, n., Etymology”, July 2023. [https://doi-org.access.authkb.kb.nl/10.1093/OED/5762802089](https://doi.org.access.authkb.kb.nl/10.1093/OED/5762802089)

¹⁵⁵ See for deeper exploration of landscape as visual history: Kent C. Ryden, ‘Why your world looks the way it does and why it matters: Cultural landscape as visual culture’, *Visual Arts Research* 32 (2004) 2, 73-75.

¹⁵⁶ Irene J. Klaver, ‘Landscapes at Large: Dutch Globalization and Environmental Imagination’, *SubStance* 41 (2012) 1, 92-108, 101.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 97.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 99-100 and 102.

'beauty of our country'.¹⁵⁹ These shifts in landscape appreciation demonstrate how fluid the concept of a beautiful landscape is. It also demonstrates that the 'natural' or 'traditional' landscape – as the example of the polder illustrates – does not necessarily have to be a natural landscape at all, just the one we grew up in and discover to appreciate when it is threatened.¹⁶⁰

In the search for alternative approaches to nature, the science of ecology is serving as an inspiration for artists, as we can see in the example of Jongstra.¹⁶¹ Nature has changed from a separate entity into the victim of capitalist exploitation. This turns nature and by extension traditional landscape into a scarce and vulnerable resource that continues to suffer from capitalist exploitation.¹⁶² Jongstra combines her concern about the destruction of landscape with her ecological concern regarding biodiversity and depletion of soil. For her, both are intrinsically linked with each other.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem, 102.

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem, 102.

¹⁶¹ Ruff, *Arcadian Visions*, 246.

¹⁶² Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum, *Anthropology of landscape. The extraordinary in the ordinary* (London 2017) 10.

4.3 The role of landscape in *Golden Guipure*, *NINE* and *Guernica de la Ecología*

In Romantic art, nature is supposed to appear as aesthetically pleasing in order to successfully speak to our emotions, be it in form of sublime or picturesque landscape; landscape in Romantic art also is an object of reflection, not interaction. In contrast to Romanticism, landscape in Jongstra's art is not purely an aesthetic concept or an object; it is also a very concrete place where the interaction between humans and nature takes place. Furthermore, I would argue that between *Golden Guipure* and *NINE* a shift takes place in Jongstra's approach to landscape that is reflected in these works.

The earliest of these three works, *Golden Guipure*, was created for the Public Library in Amsterdam in 2007. The inspiration for this work is taken from an archaic landscape, an image that Jongstra wants to conjure up in the audience, as well.¹⁶³ The raw patches of wool that are extending from the composition are supposed to invoke images of a pastoral landscape – a landscape that according to Jongstra is universal in the human imagination.¹⁶⁴ The warm and bright yellow of the art work is supposed to reflect the sun that is part of this landscape, thereby exuding warmth into the space and lightening up the mood of the library visitors.¹⁶⁵ Both elements, the wool and the color, can be read as a reference to a timeless, possibly Mediterranean landscape, implicating the quintessential archaic landscape.

By contrasting the reality with the abstraction of an ideal, utopian landscape, Jongstra opens up an unusual experience for her audience while also reminding us of the absence of traditional landscape in our environment. With *Golden Guipure*, Jongstra offers a respite from urban reality, a respite that is fueled by her feeling of grief over the disappearance of traditional landscape and nature. Nature in Romanticism is also charged with spiritual and mystical meaning, just like *Golden Guipure*; and Romantic landscape also serves as an escape from the rational and from reality, leading the audience to inner meaning and healing. Looking at the early work *Golden Guipure*, Jongstra stays close to the Romantic approach, as the works attempts to connect the viewer with natural and cultural heritage and with mythical, non-rational forces that for Jongstra are present in nature.¹⁶⁶

More recently, Jongstra's source of inspiration with respect to landscape has noticeably shifted: If *Golden Guipure* is inspired by pastoral landscape, then her more recent work *NINE* (2020) is a reflection on a very different landscape, namely the monotonous and industrial

¹⁶³ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 160.

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem, 160.

¹⁶⁵ Lidewij Edelkoort, 'The sheep with five legs', 4.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem, 4: 'As a contemporary shaman she is transmitting the energy of the earth, communicating another unknown aesthetic in the process.'

landscape that is the result of the agro-industrial monoculture of our time and which is also the local landscape of Jongstra's workshops in Friesland.¹⁶⁷



Ill. 9: Claudy Jongstra, *NINE* (2020). Felted and woven wool, 500 x 1500 cm. Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden (30 October 2020 - 28 February 2021). Photography ©Ronald Tilleman/Studio Claudy Jongstra.

NINE is composed of machine-produced felted strips that are woven together, resulting in a checkered landscape reminiscent of regulated and sectioned farmland. Each strip has a distinct but monotonous color, mirroring the monotony of today's agricultural fields which are devoid of flowers and weeds. The work of nearly 100 m² is laid out on the floor, flat like the Dutch countryside. In one half of the work the strips are bunched up and look unruly – the other half of the work is totally flat, just like land that is corrected and flattened by machines to make it ready for agricultural machinery [Ill. 8]. Strips loosely hang out of the artwork, without a harmonious connection to the surrounding space. Other strips are rolled up at the extending end like rolls of agricultural plastic or strips of rolled turf that can be transplanted onto the underlying ground. The strips of felt are machine-made and uniform. The sharply cut edges of the strips stand in stark contrast to the surrounding space and are symbolic for the sharp segregations that we encounter

¹⁶⁷ Quote by Jongstra: '[I]n all its abstraction, *Nine* is a landscape: it refers to ancient landscapes, but also to the endless monoculture of modern farmland and meadows filled with solar panels.' Label for *NINE*, Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, 6 December 2020.

in modern day landscape, where there are no soft transitions between farmland and surrounding spaces anymore – just like Jongstra bemoans in an interview, describing her farm’s surroundings:

‘als een dier in de sloot valt, de oevers zijn heel erg afgehakt, zo een beestje maakt gewoon geen kans; het is allemaal heel erg op efficiency.’ [*if an animal falls into the ditch, the banks are steeply cut, such a small animal just doesn't stand a chance; it's all very much about efficiency*]¹⁶⁸

In *NINE*, Jongstra visibly incorporates her own surroundings, a concrete, contemporary, non-nostalgic agro-industrial landscape, into her art making, turning this inspiration into an aesthetic experience. Compared to *Golden Guipure*, *NINE* presents a different aesthetic category of landscape in Jongstra’s art – a category not to be encountered in Romanticism, as recently altered landscapes were excluded from Romantic landscape art.¹⁶⁹ *NINE* therefore serves as an example of art about a landscape that is not sublime and not picturesque, but instead crudely altered by machines that do not take into account the needs of nature. It is an artwork about a landscape that is ‘burdened with guilt.’¹⁷⁰ It could be read as a new category of landscape, as a ‘new sublime’, that is not awe-inspiring but rather inducing horror, guilt and regret.

Ironically, the strong natural colors and soft texture of the material stand in contrast to the referenced landscape. The wool and the dyes that are used for creating the artwork are not the results of and would not exist in today’s industrial agriculture, they are grown and developed by Jongstra as an activist act. The colors and materials serve as a protest and conscious dissent from today’s industrial agriculture, thereby echoing our more respectful collaboration with nature in the past.

NINE also serves as a demonstration or proof of concept for Jongstra’s experiments that she conducted in collaboration with the Botanical Garden in Leiden. The artwork is accompanied by an educational panel, informing the visitor about the source of the dye, the woad plant. All tints of blue and purple come from the same patch of seeds that was sewn out and raised in different soils. The difference in color in the artwork therefore teaches us about the quality of nature, the importance of soil and the importance of a varied landscape.¹⁷¹ Artistic research here makes theoretical knowledge visible and turns it into an experience, very much in accordance with the ideas that were voiced in Carus’ *Nine Letters*.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Quote Jongstra, NPO Podast *Nooit meer slapen*, 15 December 2021, 22:05.

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of the purposeful exclusion of modern landscape from Romantic art, especially from Dutch landscape art, see the highly informative article by Irene J. Klaver, ‘Landscapes at Large: Dutch Globalization and Environmental Imagination’, *SubStance* 41 (2012) 1, 92-108.

¹⁷⁰ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western art*. Oxford History of Art Series (London 1999) 223: ‘When it is not offering us dreams of green spaces as utopian as ever the most artificial pastoral managed to be, landscape art in our time comes burdened with guilt.’

¹⁷¹ Theo Paaijmans, ‘Ze dragen de kwaliteit van de natuur in zich’, in: Ex (ed.), *Claudy Jongstra*, 34-41, 34.

¹⁷² I could not elicit why Jongstra called her work *NINE*. It is however tempting to assume a connection to Carus’ *Neun Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei* (1827) – but that connection is unfortunately wildly speculative.

In the third work to be considered in the context of landscape, *Guernica de la Ecología* (2021-), the (color-)depleted and exploited landscape of our present time is the explicit focus of the work [Ill. 10]. Boldly referencing Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), the title implies that the destruction of biodiversity is equal to the bombing of Guernica and thus comparable to consciously committed crimes against humanity. The title demonstrates the increased urgency of Jongstra's ecological mission. *Guernica de la Ecología* not only references Picasso's *Guernica* in name, it also – like Picasso's *Guernica* – is travelling around the world to 'sound the alarm and act as a rallying cry' to make us realize how we are destroying our planet ecologically. And like Picasso's, Jongstra's *Guernica* is meant to spark conversation and change.¹⁷³



Ill. 10: Claudy Jongstra, *Guernica de la Ecología* (2021-). Felted wool and silk, 360 x 790 cm. Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen, Netherlands (23 April- 17 September, 2023). Photography ©Ron van den Berg.

The measurements of the felted textile (360 x 790 cm) are nearly identical to Picasso's *Guernica* (350 x 780 cm); The color palette is restricted to muted white, brown, black and grey, also echoing the colors of *Guernica*.¹⁷⁴ According to Jongstra, it was the woven tapestry version of

¹⁷³ Nicole Ex, 'Guernica de la Ecología', *See All This: For the Love of Art*, 6 (Winter 2021/22) 24, 27-75, 31.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 41.

Picasso's *Guernica* that inspired her own *Guernica de la Ecología*. The 'extinction of light' with a near absence of color as a result, reminded her of the disappearance of natural colors that we experience today because of the disappearance of plants and flowers from our environment.¹⁷⁵ Ironically, the seeming colorlessness and dark palette of Jongstra's *Guernica de la Ecología* is achieved by dyeing the wool several times with an multitude of vibrant colors that are sourced from walnut, onion skins, woad, madder and weld:¹⁷⁶ '[D]ense black is the result of mixing all the colours of the rainbow!'¹⁷⁷

If *Guernica de la Ecología* is supposed to represent a landscape, it could be resembling roiling waters or a landscape of clouds, or a mixture of foam and mud. The swirls of white wool indicate movement, presenting parallel vortexes or maelstroms [Ill. 1, title page]. The material used is a mixture of Drenthe heath sheep wool and silk, with several thin, hand-spun threads placed on the felted canvas.¹⁷⁸ Like the colors, which appear dark and mute but which are the result of mixing vibrant, natural colors, the material of *Guernica* is also soft and cuddly, seemingly defying the gloomy message that Jongstra is trying to convey.

At Museum Kranenburgh, the textile is loosely mounted on a set of easels and set in front of a wall, giving it the appearance of a theatrical backdrop rather than a fixed installation. This is intentional, as *Guernica de la Ecología* is meant to function as a setting for live discussion and interaction. The presentation of the artwork on its venture to museums and conferences will be accompanied by a program of speakers and podium discussions.¹⁷⁹ The artwork is not finished, yet, as audiences will be asked to actively engage with it and add threads of spun wool to the artwork itself, thereby altering the work and changing its appearance over time.¹⁸⁰ At the same time, at each stop of the travelling exhibit, the local ecological situation will be explored and local people will be tasked with coming up with concrete solutions to ecological problem, in order to introduce sustainable change with respect to the community and the landscape:

'Het doek moet niet een gast zijn voor een tijdje op een plek, maar wil heel graag daar zich verbinden aan of het landschap, of de gemeenschap' [*The canvas should not be a guest for a short period in a location, rather it very much wants to form a connection there with either the landscape, or the community*].¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Nicole Ex, 'Guernice de la Ecología', 41.

¹⁷⁶ Wall label for *Guernica de la Ecología*, Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen, 12 August 2023.

¹⁷⁷ Jongstra in an interview with Nicole Ex, 'Guernica de la Ecología', 41.

¹⁷⁸ Wall label for *Guernica de la Ecología*, Museum Kranenburgh, Bergen, 12 August 2023.

¹⁷⁹ See website Claudy Jongstra, <https://claudyjongstra.com/archive/guernica-de-la-ecologia/293>

¹⁸⁰ Quote Jongstra: 'projecten met gemeenschappen [...] die gaan draden spinnen van inheemse wol, en die gaan dan over het kunstwerk heen, in die twee drie jaar dat *Guernica* gaat reizen zal die overal waar die stopt, zullen mensen letterlijk draden maken, verbindingen maken, aan het werk gaan en op die manier ook een bijdrage leveren aan het werk.' NPO podcast *Nooit meer slapen*, minute 24:35.

¹⁸¹ Quote Jongstra, NPO podcast *Nooit meer slapen*, minute 27:00.

Guernica de la Ecología, like *Golden Guipure*, is supposed to work as a connector between landscape and audience; it is to actively influence and mobilizes change, thereby leaving behind a trace even after it has moved on to the following location.

Where in Romantic art, 'ideal' nature is being presented, be it sublime or pastoral, Jongstra in recent years is moving away from idyllic landscape. Current reality - or 'new landscape'¹⁸² as she calls it - has a growing presence in her art, such as the 'endless monoculture of modern farmland and meadows filled with solar panels'¹⁸³ that serves as the inspiration for *NINE*. With *Guernica de la Ecología* Jongstra takes this a step further, not only referencing a depleted and bleak landscape in the work itself but actively engaging with and trying to ecologically improve local landscapes that the travelling installation is visiting: 'Kunnen we landbouwgrond revilatiseren? [...] overal probeer ik - ja - een soort sediment af te zetten.' [*Can we revitalize farmland? [...] everywhere I am trying - yes - to deposit some kind of sediment.*]¹⁸⁴

In this quote, Jongstra indirectly refers to the definition of the Anthropocene, the unofficial geologic age we are currently living in and which supposedly began when human activity created a detectable layer, a sediment of carbon and radioactive particles, on the earth. Jongstra's aim is to add a new layer, a new 'sediment', onto this layer, in order to mitigate this development and instigate a change towards a sustainable use of natural resources.

Looking at Romanticism, it was Novalis who took Fichte's idea to heart and believed that reality could be enhanced *and* changed through art.¹⁸⁵ The development from *Golden Guipure* to *Guernica de la Ecología* makes it apparent that Jongstra shares this belief. At the same time, her art increasingly includes the active engagement with the apparent reality, thereby going beyond the restrictions of Romantic art theory and practice. Romantic irony, an essential aspect of Romantic art is not at play in Jongstra's art.

¹⁸² Quote by Jongstra on the label for *NINE*, Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, 6 December 2020.

¹⁸³ Quote by Jongstra on the label for *NINE*, Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, 6 December 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Quote Jongstra, NPO podcast *Nooit meer slapen*, minute 24:35.

¹⁸⁵ See Lothar Pikulik, *Frühromantik. Epoche – Werke – Wirkung*. München 1992, 52f.; Also compare Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik*. Berlin 1992, 16.

4.4 Local landscape

Another apparent commonality between Romanticism and Jongstra's art is Jongstra's focus on the local, both in terms of local landscape but also traditional local agriculture and crafts. In Romanticism, the emphasis on local heritage was supposed to establish the basis for a new national identity. Jongstra decided to set up her workshop and move to a rural location in Friesland where she also preserves local traditions as well as natural habitats that used to be typical for that region in the Netherlands. This myopic focus on one's own surroundings could be interpreted as reactionary in a time of globalization and mass-migration.¹⁸⁶ One reading of Jongstra's focus on the local is to 'regain[...] a certain unique cultural identity in a world in which everything is growing more and more uniform'.¹⁸⁷ Another critic interprets Jongstra's art as 'site-specific, conceptual tapestry maps which are not only rooted sui generis, but are literally and physically died-in-the-wool Dutch.'¹⁸⁸

This 'Dutch' reading of Jongstra is contradicted by Linda Vlassenrood: In her view, Jongstra's application of local craftsmanship is intended to create a conscious distance to modern modes of production, not to enhance a local identity. Vlassenrood explains that Jongstra applies traditional craft in an original way, resulting in art, not in a traditional piece of craft. Jongstra's art also is decidedly not historicizing or typical Dutch, even if the sourcing is local: her art is rather created in and for an international context and audience, addressing a global problem. In Vlassenrood's view, then, the emphasis on locality, rediscovery of local skills and techniques, preservation of local flora, fauna and landscape should therefore not be read as a reactionary retreat into the local but instead as a political comment on economic developments that are causing harm globally, not only locally.¹⁸⁹

In following Vlassenrood, I suggest a reading that ventures away from the focus on the local towards Jongstra's interest in *rootedness*, the interconnectedness of nature and place within a specific habitat: 'Sustainability implies not only a craftsmanlike way of working but above all also working with materials direct from the ground, which are down-to-earth in the most direct sense of the word', according to Jongstra.¹⁹⁰ For Jongstra, being consciously rooted in a certain location and taking responsibility for that habitat is in line with her anti-consumerist position. This is supported by *Guernica de la Ecología*, which is intended to create change at a local level, but in several places. Therefore, I would argue, that Jongstra's focus on a local habitat and ecosystem in the Netherlands functions as a placeholder and as an example for the stewardship of ecosystems in general.

¹⁸⁶ Tilley and Cameron-Daum, *Anthropology of landscape*, 10.

¹⁸⁷ Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces*, 17.

¹⁸⁸ Laura M. Richard, 'Of wool and murals. The art of Claudy Jongstra', 6.

¹⁸⁹ Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces*, 17.

¹⁹⁰ Vlassenrood, *Tangible traces*, 124.

4.5 Landscape as art

The Romantics experienced a divide between subject and object, human and nature. The experience of nature and art both were supposed to bridge the perceived gap between the human ratio and the physical and natural realm.¹⁹¹ However, for the Romantics, ventures into nature were in the first place supposed to increase self-knowledge rather than knowledge about nature in general. A real understanding of nature was in their view unattainable, nature on a canvas was expressively a projection of human experience. Landscape in art therefore served as an aesthetic object for reflection rather than a presentation of real landscape.

The ecological crisis makes it apparent that a revision of our relationship with nature is urgent, something that according to Cheetham eco-artists attempt to do.¹⁹² Differing from Romantic landscape art where landscape was supposed to be a mirror to be used for self-reflection, landscape in Jongstra's art and art making is the place where humans actively interact with nature and where the consequences of these interactions become visible. Jongstra lets the local traditional flora and fauna and the local soil and climate determine the materials and colors that are available for her art works, thereby defying our consumerist habits and globalized capitalist structures.¹⁹³ By making nature an active driving force and even a co-author to her work, Jongstra decenters the human and sets landscape – the place where humans and nature interact – center-stage.¹⁹⁴

This holistic approach to landscape, which includes taking responsibility for one's surroundings and also creating work opportunity for humans, is for Jongstra the logical consequence of our moral responsibility for nature.¹⁹⁵ Jongstra herself quotes Charlemagne's *Capitulare de Villis* as the example and model she is trying to emulate.¹⁹⁶ Charlemagne's decree *Capitulare de Villis* determined that landowners had to be responsible stewards of the land, ensuring that soil remained fertile and plants and crops pollinated. The decree also calls for sharing the land with a community of craftspeople, thereby making sure that a self-sustaining existence was possible. Jongstra's community is emulating this example successfully, having not only found a way to survive economically, but in symbiosis with a local ecosystem that her community is reviving, albeit at a very local scale.

¹⁹¹ Vietta, *Die literarische Moderne*, 72.

¹⁹² Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 158.

¹⁹³ Tilley and Cameron-Daum, *Anthropology of landscape*, 11.

¹⁹⁴ Reiss, 'Art and climate change'.

¹⁹⁵ Jongstra in an interview with Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 17: 'You have so much respect when you open a beehive for what is inside. It is the most holy place. I have the most respect for a bee, I think.'

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 9.

For Jongstra, ‘there is little division between personal values and artistic production’¹⁹⁷ – she translates her ethical values into a way of working and living that combines art making with ecological stewardship and community building. In that sense, there is no delineation between art and life: her social practice and ecological preservationist practice can be considered art, and her art can be considered social practice and environmental activism.¹⁹⁸ Landscape then for Jongstra has a fourth dimension: It is the existential cadre within which she creates her art and within which she can bring her vision of sustainable and responsible existence into practice. Wim Pijbes’ statement that Jongstra’s work is not just a representation of the landscape but is the landscape itself, proves to be true: Landscape is indeed the physical expression and extension of her artistic practice, forming an elongation and constitutive element of her art.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Laura M. Richard, ‘Of wool and murals. The art of Claudy Jongstra’, 7.

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, 7.

¹⁹⁹ Wim Pijbes: ‘Haar werk laat niet alleen het landschap zien, het is het landschap.’ In: Panorama Pijbes, aflevering ‘Achter de dijk’ [television broadcast]. NTR, 29 maart 2017. https://ntr.nl/Panorama-Pijbes/242/detail/Achter-de-Dijk/VPWON_1293215

4.6 Summary

If landscape art historically reflects humanity's relationship with nature, then Jongstra's art demonstrates that landscape art has evolved against the background of the ecological crisis, thereby making the landscape genre relevant for our time. For Jongstra, landscape acts as inspiration in its ideal form and in its current form, as we have seen in *Golden Guipure* and *NINE*; it is the abstract and concrete subject of her work; it is the focus of her activism, as *Guernica de la Ecología* demonstrates. And it is the extension of her art as the place where her creative practice takes place.

Jongstra's art is inspired by and evokes landscapes on multiple levels. In and with her art, she expresses environmental concerns and fosters physical, emotional and rational connections to disappearing landscapes. To achieve this, she combines the concrete encounter with nature in her artworks with the emotion of *landschapspijn* and the results of artistic research.

The use of landscape also is a barometer for Jongstra's own artistic evolution over the past 15 years, demonstrating a shift from referencing archaic landscapes to including current agri-industrial landscapes in her art and activism. *Golden Guipure* was meant to evoke pastoral landscapes and idealized nature, similar to the Romantic landscape tradition. *NINE* reflects the industrial and monotonous landscapes of modern agriculture, making a direct connection to current landscape, albeit contrasting this landscape with materials and natural colors derived from animals and plants that would be extinct in the modern landscape. With *Guernica de la Ecología*, Jongstra's art reaches beyond the physical artwork to encompass local community action, with the intention of leaving a lasting mark on local landscapes and finding solutions for local ecological issues.

Guernica de la Ecología also shows that Jongstra's art goes beyond reflection on nature and landscape, as would Romantic art, and instead actively engages with reality. This active engagement permeates her art-making practices, altering real landscape and creating a community in the process. Jongstra's works encourage active participation and dialogue about ecological issues. Her focus on local landscape and crafts is not reactionary but instead an artistic statement and proof of concept for sustainability, actively supporting responsible stewardship of ecosystems and communities.

And last, landscape for Jongstra is transformative: Her work with nature, within the landscape is necessitated by her aesthetic and ecological convictions. Being a respectful steward of landscape means letting the landscape be a co-author of one's work. Jongstra's landscape art therefore transgresses the artwork on display, encompassing real landscape and community, thereby bringing into reality the Romantic concept of 'Universalpoesie'.

5. The connection between humans and nature

According to Cheetham, Romanticism and eco-art both engage with nature in their own specific artistic and theoretical ways, while still being dialectically linked. Comparing both movements can enhance our understanding of both.²⁰⁰ As evidenced by the analysis of Jongstra's works in the previous chapters, there are many commonalities but also differences between Romanticism and Jongstra's ambition, works and processes. The questions that are left to answer are: What relationship between humans and nature emerges in Jongstra's art, and how does that compare to the Romantic ideas of the relationship between humans and nature? And the second question is: As eco-art defines itself against the background of the environmental crisis, to what extent does Jongstra's art offer a perspective for the current environmental crisis, and does that relate to a Romantic view of nature?.

5.1 The importance of nature for society

The relation between humans and nature is a concern in both Romanticism and eco-art. The main distinction between the two, I would argue, lies in how nature is considered important for society in general. Here, eco-art in general and Jongstra in particular have quite different positions in comparison to Romanticism.

Romantic art theory revolves around the notion of a perceived divide between humans and nature. This divide needs to be bridged, with art serving as a mediator. Jongstra places particular emphasis on the concept of 'connecting': Through her artistic practice of growing plants, raising livestock and felting and weaving, she establishes connections among nature, community, and culture. Her art serves to establish a connection between the audience and the realms of nature and cultural history.²⁰¹ This perspective also implies an initial disconnect between nature, culture, and community, a disconnect that Jongstra views as the root cause of various societal and ecological issues, including consumer culture, extractivism and loss of biodiversity.²⁰² 'Connecting' for Jongstra means immersing oneself in nature as well as experiencing nature by proxy of art. These steps are deemed necessary by Jongstra to bridge the perceived gap between humanity and nature.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 5.

²⁰¹ Jongstra in Dalzell, 'Claudy Jongstra interweaves a passion for the environment in her wool-felt artworks', 145: 'My work fosters an emotional connection to indigenous craft, cultural heritage, and the landscape.'

²⁰² Jongstra in Nikkie Herberigs, '1980-2010: Ambacht en kunst', 132: 'Ik verkoop je een materiaal voor de rest van je leven – ook omdat er een tijdloosheid in het ontwerp zit, met historische, natuurlijke kleuren en structuren die je terug leiden naar de vergeten historie van onze cultuur.'

²⁰³ Jongstra in interview with Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 12-13: 'Je kunt de natuur niet echt begrijpen zonder er deel van te worden [...]. Je moet je verbinden. [...] Hoe leg je dat in woorden uit?' [You can't really understand nature without becoming part of it [...]. You have to connect. [...] How do you explain that in words?']

Nature in Romantic art also has the purpose to serve as a means to overcome rational boundaries. In this, Jongstra stays close to the Romantic view of nature. The materials and colors of her works are supposed to connect the audience with the non-rational albeit in Jongstra view existing healing powers of nature.²⁰⁴ The inspiration is taken from archaic pastoral landscape, from medieval sources and from indigenous knowledge.²⁰⁵ With her works, Jongstra creates a distance and respite from rationality. By bringing natural materials into an urban, enclosed space, Jongstra confronts the audience with unusual materials and colors and offers a multisensual and physical experience, thereby creating a distance and respite from rationality.²⁰⁶

The crucial difference between Romanticism and Jongstra's view of nature is the positioning of humans towards nature. As her treatment of materials and her stewardship of landscape demonstrate, Jongstra does not see humans and nature as opposites - instead she positions humans within nature and embraces the contingent responsibilities that come with that. Our dependence on and responsibility for healthy ecosystems is the basis for Jongstra's art making and her core message. By letting the local conditions and the natural heritage of her surroundings determine the materials and colors available for her art making, she shows how we depend on the local ecosystem - if we want to live sustainably, that is. In this sense, Jongstra is sharing the authorship of her artwork with nature, thereby de-centering the human and indicating the importance of nature for art and life in general.

From the beginning, Jongstra has been welcoming visitors and interns from all over the world into her community of practice. Thus for Jongstra, demonstrating the regenerative powers of nature in the field itself complements the presentation of her artworks; it is another channel through which she shares her message of dependency, sustainability and respectful interaction with nature. In recent years, an even stronger shift to community activism and political activism is noticeable: Jongstra actively shares her knowledge of plants and circular agriculture with international farm communities and she employs initiatives in underprivileged urban areas, such as *Gift of Colour Zuidoost*, a community garden in Amsterdam Zuidoost. By organizing workshops, education and job trainings around agriculture and traditional skills in several locations and with partners from outside the art sector, Jongstra demonstrates the awareness that art is not accessible to everyone, even when displayed in public buildings. It also shows that for Jongstra societal well-being is connected to ecological well-being and the other way around.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Edelkoort, 'The sheep with five legs', 4.

²⁰⁵ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 160.

²⁰⁶ Paaijmans, 'Geweven landschap', 61: "'We zijn geneigd om de dingen cerebraal te benaderen. Maar op het moment dat je wol in je handen houdt, worden andere lagen in je persoonlijkheid aangesproken. Door die tactiele ervaring opent Claudy een deur naar een ander soort bewustzijn,'" vertelt Meta Knol [...].'

²⁰⁷ Wijers, 'Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview', 163.

5.2 Jongstra's perspective for the environmental crisis

In contrast to the era of Romanticism, where the urgency for ecological consciousness and responsibility was largely absent, the ecological crisis is the primary context in which eco-artists operate.²⁰⁸ This prompts the exploration of the individual artist's perspective on this crisis and whether the artist propagates possible solutions. Cheetham outlines three paradigms - direct action, aesthetic separation, and articulation – according to which eco-artists respond to the ecological crisis.²⁰⁹ This analysis aims to ascertain where Claudy Jongstra fits within these paradigms, and to what extent she offers a perspective for the current environmental crisis.

Jongstra does not address climate change or the environmental crisis at large. Instead, she focusses on and spells out specific societal and environmental problems: consumerism and extractivism; loss of nature-related experience, knowledge and skills; and the demise of biodiversity. Jongstra's approach to address these issues appears to be threefold: aesthetic education, community development, and the active preservation of biodiversity and natural and cultural history.

Like the Romantics, Jongstra aims for societal change through aesthetic education. For Jongstra, art and nature both have healing powers that can mitigate our societal problems and change our utilitarian view nature. Also comparable to the Romantics who experienced Enlightenment's focus on rationality as restrictive, Jongstra appeals to humans' non-rational, emotional side by letting the audience interact with her artworks. Her artworks and her production processes serve as 'connectors' and 'activators', aiming to foster a deeper relationship with nature and emphasizing mutual dependency and responsibility over mere rational investigation or reflection.²¹⁰ She proposes a more intense relationship with nature, through her artworks or by working with nature in her workshop, that leads to a new understanding and respect.

Like the Romantics, Jongstra subscribes to the idea that art, nature and science are intertwined, with art serving as the bridge between these three. This leads her to collaborations with scientists and historians, who help her discover more about the ecological circumstances and the materials she is working with. Jongstra discovered a scarcity of local plant seeds, which motivated her to establish the *Community Seed Bank for Colour* in 2018.²¹¹ The aim of this project is to reintroduce natural dyes and to revitalize historical knowledge and skills among local farmers. By documenting and sharing her processes and discoveries, and by helping to revitalize sustainable

²⁰⁸ Ruff, *Arcadian visions*, 110.

²⁰⁹ Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 13: 'The three paradigms of eco art [...] – direct action, aesthetic separation and withdrawal, and articulation – can be specified through Collin's and Boetzkes's interpretations of Hans Haacke's pioneering eco work Rhine water purification plant (1972) and condensation box (1965).'

²¹⁰ Nicole Ex, 'Guernica de la Ecologia', *See All This: For the Love of Art*, 6 (Winter 2021/22) 24, 27-75, 66.

²¹¹ Paaijmans, 'Ze dragen de kwaliteit van de natuur in zich', 34.

methods of production, Jongstra moves beyond traditional boundaries of artistic inquiry – an approach that is common among eco-artists.²¹² At the same time, Jongstra’s scientific activism is rooted in her art-making, it is an extension of her own quest for a sustainable way of working.

When looking at the categories that Cheetham proposes: direct action, aesthetic separation and articulation, Jongstra’s community activism and her collaborative research both qualify for the first and last. It gets more complicated when we look at the community that she has established around her farms and workshop in the Frisian villages of Húns and Spannum.

Romanticism had proposed the idea of man’s return to nature, modelled on the agrarian communities of the Middle Ages. The idea of an utopian past as a time in which society supposedly lived in harmony with nature and with itself led to the reinforcement of supposedly traditional culture and impacted the development of national identity.²¹³ It also led to a renaissance of medieval piety and the establishment of quasi-monastic communes in which the ideas of simple communal life were translated into reality.²¹⁴

Jongstra’s community in Húns and Spannum also could be seen as an ecological utopia based on practices from the past, similar to a living museum, thereby fitting Cheetham’s paradigm of aesthetic separation. Jongstra herself names the circular and sustainable agrarian communities from the Middle Ages that were based on Charlemagne’s *Capitulare de Villis* as the example and model she is trying to emulate.²¹⁵ Jongstra sees the communal preservation of landscape as an activist act, an action that in her view has become urgent and necessary because of the apparent degradation and loss of natural diversity and knowledge of nature. Nonetheless, Jongstra’s community is not a viable alternative for everyone, and therefore cannot serve as a common path for the future. Jongstra however would like for us to look at it differently: for her, the way of life of her farm and workshop *should* be the norm, and not the industrialized agriculture and globalized production methods that are necessitated by our way of life.²¹⁶ Her community is a proof of concept and living example for a way to exist in symbiosis with a local ecosystem and at the same time thrive

²¹² Cheetham, *Landscape into eco art*, 3: More than most contemporary art practices, eco art also transcends conventional borders of inquiry. As many examples throughout this book show, it often incorporates scientific and technological evaluations of environmental concerns.’

²¹³ Vaughan, ‘Romanticism’: ‘Some favoured retreat, clutching at past traditions and evoking the ‘good old days’ of the Middle Ages. Others turned to worlds beyond the reach of civilization, to the contemplation of the ‘primitive’ in the natural world [...]. [W]hile Romanticism began as a movement concerned with personal experience and enrichment, it ended in most cases with the reinforcement of traditional culture and nationalism.’

²¹⁴ See William Vaughan’s description of the Nazarene artists group *Guild of St Luke*, in: Vaughan, *German Romantic Painting*, 2.

²¹⁵ Wijers, ‘Claudy Jongstra talks to Louwrien Wijers. Marathon interview’, 9.

²¹⁶ Jongstra in Heerma van Voss, ‘Claudy Jongstra. Een strijd tegen veronachtzaming’, 14: ‘Als ik naar de wereld kijk, zie ik een verregaande IKEA-isering. We klikken, bestellen, sturen terug. Je kunt deze plek, deze boerderij, paradijselijk noemen, maar eigenlijk is dat de wereld op zijn kop: dit leven is oorspronkelijk, normaal.’

economically. The work of her community provides a positive example, proving that ecosystems can be revived and sustained sustainably, even reestablishing a biodiversity that is lost elsewhere in the surrounding landscape. This can be considered as an activist act in itself, providing hope in the face of an otherwise overwhelming and potentially demoralizing ecological crisis.

Jongstra has started to venture beyond her scientific collaborations and local production, and now collaborates with farmers outside of the Netherlands in order to proof the advantages of local plants and circular agriculture.²¹⁷ The travelling artwork *Guernica de la Ecología* (2021) is not only accompanied by a program of speakers and podium discussions focusing on unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.²¹⁸ With *Guernica de la Ecología*, Jongstra attempts to achieve change on the local level in several locations at once, by spreading practices from her own workshop and farm to other locations and countries. This is an investment in change on microlevel in several places at once, and an investment in an international community network.

To conclude: In truly eco-artistic fashion, Jongstra tirelessly engages with what Bruno Latour calls the ‘fruitful cacophony’ of discussion, trying to initiate change on several levels at once.²¹⁹ She encourages a shift towards more sustainable and respectful interaction with nature, thereby fostering awareness and responsible behavior. By demonstrating the natural boundaries and also the immense qualities of nature, she attempts to move her audience closer to a possible paradigm shift that values local ecosystems and biodiversity; she actively engages extends her art to encompass real nature, thereby reinvigorating ecosystems and landscapes; and last but not least, she emphasizes the responsible stewardship of nature as our moral responsibility for the survival of nature and the ecosystems that sustain us.

²¹⁷ Sippie Miedema, ‘Een kunstzinnig pleidooi van Claudy Jongstra voor meer biodiversiteit’, *Friesch Dagblad*, 30 October 2020. <https://frieschdagblad.nl/cultuur/Een-kunstzinnig-pleidooi-van-Claudy-Jongstra-voor-meer-biodiversiteit-26802295.html>

²¹⁸ See website Claudy Jongstra, <https://claudyjongstra.com/archive/guernica-de-la-ecologia/293>

²¹⁹ Bruno Latour, ‘Anti-Zoom’, in: Michael Tavel Clarke and David Wittenberg ed., *Scale in Literature and Culture. Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* (Cham 2017), 93–101, 97. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64242-0_4

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore Claudy Jongstra's art in relation to the Romantic tradition. Jongstra's art addresses current and urgent matters such as the loss of biodiversity, consumer-culture, and our careless attitude towards nature and natural history in general. The ecological crisis is of importance for our civilization as a whole and triggers responses from various disciplines, including art. Therefore, how perspectives on and propositions for addressing this crisis are formed, is a relevant question.

While Jongstra's art is commonly interpreted within the context of eco-art, her exploration of nature and landscape, as well as her embrace of traditional and indigenous practices and craftsmanship suggest an affinity with Romanticism. The proposition of this thesis was that drawing parallels between Jongstra's art with Romantic theory, themes, motifs, and practices could offer valuable insights into not only her work but also for the broader domain of eco-art. The theoretical groundwork for this inquiry was established through Mark A. Cheetham's *Landscape into eco art* (2017) wherein Cheetham states that multiple Romantic traditions and concepts persist within eco-art, yet these connections have not been thoroughly examined.

The investigation of Claudy Jongstra's art and its relationship to the Romantic tradition in this thesis has led to a deeper understanding of Jongstra's work, clearly determining parallels but also highlighting crucial differences with respect to Romanticism.

The most obvious parallels are the conscious re-enchantment of nature and the emphasis on personal and subjective experience of nature. The Romantics were instrumental in renewing the interest in nature, regarding it as an organic force that was more than an object for economic exploitation. They criticized the overemphasis on rational thinking and instead brought back a sense of wonder and mystery to nature through their art. In consonance with Romantic ideology, Jongstra also presents nature as a force that cannot be understood purely on a rational level. She employs art as a means to reestablish a connection between the audience and nature's imbedded qualities. She accomplishes this by drawing on archaic images of landscape in her art and by using colors and materials that she believes to have profound significance, thereby infusing nature with deep symbolic meaning.

Another main parallel lies in the conviction of art's ability to connect science, nature and society. Jongstra's application of artistic research echoes Schlegel's call for art to bridge science and nature and brings Carus' idea of *Erdlebenkunst* into practice. In extension, a third parallel becomes apparent: the shared belief that art has transformative powers that can change reality, as outlined in Schlegel's *116th Atheneum fragment*. The limitless and universal ambition of Romantic poetry (and art in general), which Schlegel calls 'Universalpoesie', certainly resonates

with Jongstra's ambition and practice. But whereas in Romanticism 'Universalpoesie' remains a theoretic idea within the realm of art, Jongstra exceeds the boundaries of 'traditional' genres and transforming nature and landscape as integral parts of her art.

Jongstra clearly diverges from Romantic ideas in how she views the relationship between humans and nature. Her approach aligns with eco-artistic and ecocritical principles, firmly placing humans *within* nature, thereby acknowledging our interdependence and our shared responsibility for functioning ecosystems. Unlike the Romantics who perceived nature as a parallel universe, that was used in art as an object for aesthetic contemplation and introspection, Jongstra actively engages with her surrounding landscape and community. She integrates her artistic work into the ecosystem, collaborating with nature itself. This transforms nature into an active participant in her creative process, shifting the focus away from the human-centered perspective that was prevalent in Romanticism and that is how we still look at nature today.

Jongstra's focus on the local and on historic traditions of agriculture and craft seem to overlap with the Romantic desire for a return to nature and a past natural state. Closer inspection shows that for Jongstra, the emphasis on local flora and fauna and on traditional crafts is necessitated by her search for environmentally sustainable methods of production that are respectful of nature, and by her pledge for the preservation of biodiversity. Her local practice mirrors this ambition and is a proof of concept for sustainable practices as well as for nature's capacity to regenerate. Her local practice is also connected to her understanding of art as a shared creative process. She challenges Romanticism's idea as the artist as an autonomous agent by letting the local ecosystem determine the choice of materials and colors, and thereby making nature a co-creator of her art.

Jongstra's landscapes can be placed in the tradition of Romantic landscape art, tied to Romanticism by proxy of abstract expressionism. They also align with Cheetham's interpretation of landscape art as historical depictions of the Earth, with eco-art conveying landscapes in a state of crisis. With her artworks as well as with the physical landscapes that she revives, Jongstra reinvents the Romantic tradition of landscape art against the background of the ecological crisis, making the landscape genre relevant again for our age.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that Claudy Jongstra's art and art-making stands in the tradition of Romantic art theory and practice, but that her views and practices are certainly not limited to that. Looking at the premises from the introduction, can we then conclude that our time is 'yet another phase in the age of Romanticism', as Keren Gorodeisky claims?²²⁰ Probably yes, when we look at society's approach to landscape as 'token nature', as a recreational

²²⁰ Gorodeisky, '19th Century Romantic Aesthetics'.

space outside of everyday life that we visit to escape and recharge. Probably yes, when we look at how climate change and the demise of biodiversity remain abstract concepts that are of minute consequence for our own practices and behavior. And is Jongstra's art then, as Timothy Morton claims for eco-art in general, indeed just 'another version of Romanticism's rage against the machine'?²²¹ Based on the findings of this thesis, the answer is no.

Contrary to Morton's assertion regarding Romanticism and eco-art, Jongstra is not stuck in the idea of the nature-culture dichotomy. Similar to Morton, Jongstra sees the need for systemic change in the face of the ecological crisis, a change that she tries to achieve by shifting our perception of nature first. Therefore, while Jongstra wholeheartedly embraces the Romantic conviction that art is an essential and necessary catalyst for change, Jongstra does present a differing approach to both nature *and* art – in Jongstra's approach, art itself must understand itself as part of nature, as much as it allows nature to be the co-author of art.

²²¹ Morton, *Ecology without nature*, 122.

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