



Arcadia Inc.

Ethical landscape photography for the twenty-first century desktop

Background

Throughout the 200 millenia homo sapiens have spent on Earth, they continuously engaged in shaping their surroundings as a means of leading more prosperous lives. The ever unfolding story of kinship, intersubjective relations and cultural practices has been written in the landscape, mediated by humanity's interaction with nature's forces. As the first agricultural revolution unfolded more than 10,000 years ago, so did the man's desire to conquer, domesticate and dominate nature. Settling down into a less nomadic lifestyle allowed for the development of culture and civilization as we understand them today, giving birth to an idyllic nostalgia for the old way of life – ever on the move, in perfect harmony with nature, uncorrupted by the perverse thought of agricultural, industrial or digital technology.

Pictorial representations of nature have historically brought to life the nostalgia for a better past, often allowing for the accumulation of other ideals within the same frame. Visual depictions of landscape as a pristine, timeless, or untamed spectacle have become part of the Western cultural vocabulary and legacy, built on the shoulders of an expansionist ideology which scenic beauty became a proxy for – a practice whose roots can be traced back to antiquity. Nation building, imperialism or manifest destiny are carried out through labor, but justified through the landscape.

As today's society grapples with the complex social and cultural shifts of the 21st century, it needs a new way of framing nature within the context of capitalism: one which allows for the complete separation of scenic beauty from its geographical and anthropological contexts, without the perils of resurfacing history's mistakes.

In acknowledging the inherent connection between nature and the human psyche, as well as the decades society has been leveraging this connection for commercial purposes, Arcadia Inc. offers the synthetic landscape as an ethical solution to the prevalent need for decontextualizing and repurposing nature imagery.

What we stand for

More than 2000 years ago, Theocritus chose the province of Arcadia as a vessel for manifesting the Greek pastoral ideal, as the region's mountainous character and sparse population fueled the fantasy of a perfect landscape where unspoiled wilderness, uncorrupted shepherds and unattainable pleasures coexist. Arcadians, often portrayed as uneducated yet culturally inclined shepherds, led the simple, spiritually rich lives one could only aspire to. Subject to countless poems, paintings and musings throughout the centuries, Arcadia became a blueprint for turning geography into mythology, opening an ever increasing gap between landscape reality and representation.

Our company, whose name pays respect to the Greek province, acknowledges the poetic potential in idealizing the landscape, and aims to do so without diminishing humanity.

The gap between representation and reality became even more prominent during the emergence of private property as a commercial asset in the 17th and 18th centuries, as painters of the time frequently portrayed romanticized versions of the rural landscape, promoting a timeless ideal of beauty and social order. Often at odds with the exploitative labor relations, poverty or political unrest experienced on the ground, these representations continue to shape our understanding of history and culture. Painting's fascination with scenic beauty went as far as giving birth to an artifact meant to help artists easily achieve the picturesque aesthetic ideal: the Claude glass. A small mirror with a slightly convex surface and a black tint, the Claude glass was popular among travelers, landscape enthusiasts and painters of the 18th century, for its ability to give "the object of nature a soft, mellow tinge", reminiscent of a certain bucolic visual style. Reflected light becomes the primary visual source for the painter, as she turns her back on the landscape – physically and metaphorically – allowing for an enhanced reality to take over the canvas.

In acknowledging this object as an important cultural artifact, Arcadia Inc. is committed to finding new ways of creating beauty, while paying respect to the virtual landscapes it represents.

As the Claude glass renders the landscape as an idealized version of itself in the visual realm, nature conservation movements have often done so discursively. These movements are inextricably tied to nation building, as caring for the land becomes symbolic in justifying the right to inhabit it. This connection can be observed in the constructed notion of “wilderness” in the American West, and the idea that its landscapes, always in such desperate need of protection, should be preserved by their current owners, and therefore free from the human presence which had historically cared for them. Painters and photographers have often carried these ideas forward through visual representation, by stripping the landscape of everything but its beauty.

Arcadia Inc. recognizes the inherent flaws associated with crafting a national identity on the shoulders of nature. In observing the ongoing power shift from nations to members of the private sector, Arcadia Inc. ethically offers the landscape rooted visual support necessary in asserting a strong brand identity.



Core values for the twenty-first century desktop

As the twenty-first century brought to fruition a technological promise of life connected, augmented and convenient, ideology's affinity for landscape found a new vessel in the digital interface. The computer, once a black box accessible only to those familiar enough with its inner workings, was given a face, a voice, and a memory. Stewards of the interface, while fully giving in to their subject's desire of belonging to a material world so abstracted away, enriched it with visual elements such as wallpapers, icons, documents and folders, and an ever-lasting willingness to be at the receiving end of already familiar actions, carried out with an unprecedented ease – cutting, pasting, moving or removing. God made man in His image, and man made the interface in the image of his surroundings. Look no further than the computer desktop for proof.

Like all good things in the world, the desktop was born out of desire. Humanity's continuous search for a sense of belonging, met with an even stronger wish for surpassing boundaries imposed by the material body led to the creation of a space where *the intimacy of a home and the infinity of a storage facility meet*. The desktop holds one's deepest secrets, blended with essential yet simultaneously irrelevant memories, forgotten about images and lone artifacts which otherwise defy categorization. It knows not only what one thinks, but how. By lending out its infinitely deep real estate, it promises to remember everything we forget, and to erase everything we don't want to remember.

Building a utopia of such scale is impossible to achieve by just looking forward. While the storage, actions and organizational structure of the desktop empower and extend one's mind, it is the wallpaper which speaks to the heart. The sublime rugged mountains, exotic beaches or bucolic green hills in the background of one's workspace act as the main pillars of this screen-based fantasy. In their use of natural beauty towards creating a shared canvas between the software creator's ideology and the user's own memory, desktop wallpapers abstract away the realities of the represented land and its people. A mountain stops being a topographical space

where history, ecosystems, beliefs and stories meet, and becomes a symbol waiting to be filled with meaning, under the auspices of software creators. As human presence is carefully erased, the wallpaper becomes *a space for potentiality*.

The value provided by this potentiality is undeniable, yet, the erasure it entails is an unacceptable compromise for any advanced society. As humanity is facing the increasingly complex challenges of the twenty-first century, it needs a new, ethical, post-colonial approach to engaging with representations of nature – on the computer desktop and beyond. At Arcadia Inc., we believe in the power digital culture carries in shaping a future *free of history's mistakes*.

Welcome to Arcadia Inc.

As the first purely digital company to operate in the space of landscape photography, we are focused on ethically creating and sourcing images of nature, suited for a wide variety of needs. Our approach is rooted in simulation. Software enables us to create synthetic landscapes from scratch, control their geological features and foster their ecosystems. Our virtual agents – native to the synthetic landscape, and an integral part of it – survey the land, across space and time, seeking the most aesthetically pleasing moments. A careful selection of their photographs becomes part of our offering, available as desktop wallpapers for personal or corporate use. In creating self-sustaining digital ecosystems which completely revolve around image production, Arcadia Inc. offers the clean landscape as a service: free of history and context, ready to achieve its ideological potential.



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