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Toward an Ecocritical History of Early Modern Art

This article outlines a methodological framework for the ecocritical practice of early modern art history. First, we describe an emerging field of ecocritical studies in early modern art history and contextualize that development within recent ecocritical turns in other disciplines of early modern studies and periods of art historical research. Then, through a quartet of case studies, we demonstrate four ecocritical approaches to practicing early modern art history. We thereby offer novel perspectives on how ecocritical methods can both transform the study of early modern art history and provide essential historical insights amidst our contemporary eco-crisis.

Keywords: early modern art; ecocriticism; ecology; methodology; tree felling

Around 1497, Albrecht Dürer (1471 – 1528) painted an image now known as *Landscape with Woodland Pond* (fig. 1), a composition that depicts a modest body of water between two groups of trees, its horizon bending delicately at the edge of a clouded sky. Scholars have almost exclusively treated the watercolor as an image of nature and of human relationships to the natural world.[1] At least one has established that the artist took pains to depict the grasses on the pond's banks with fidelity to botanical forms. Some argue that the ground's and pond's colors and the location of the pond on the edge of a pine forest portray a fictive environment;[2] others contend that the image evokes the Weißensee in the Erlenstegen Forest near Nuremberg.[3] It has also been said that *Landscape with Woodland Pond*'s crownless tree trunks, heavy clouds, and the distant character of its horizon all register the effects of a storm or a spring flood.[4] Above all, scholars have recognized the composition's motivic autonomy, technical skill, and the apparent immediacy of its depiction of nature as artistic and humanistic innovations that qualify the work as an incunable of landscape art in Europe and the continent's history of empirically-informed naturalism.[5]

A latent affirmation of the watercolor's novel modes of representing the natural world, if not an explicit enthusiasm for the modernity of its approach to nature, undergirds all such interpretations. At the same time, the narratives of artistic and humanistic progress that dominate discussions of *Landscape with Woodland Pond* have obscured how the image and its empirical qualities also participate in an early modern

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1 Albrecht Dürer, *Landscape with Woodland Pond*, ca. 1495 – 1500, watercolor and body color on paper, 26.2 × 36.5 cm. London, The British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, inv. no. SL,5218.167

culture of putatively rationalized exploration and objectifying appropriation of the earthly environment.[6] In other words, discourse on Dürer's watercolor illustrates how "nature" has been the focus of intensive research on early modern art while its ecological dimensions stay out of focus, and while ecocritical questions remain unresolved or even unposed. Throughout the last decades, scholars have probed the roles of the era's visual artefacts in developing, differentiating, and implementing changing understandings of nature by drawing from areas such as the history of science, material studies, the history of collecting, studies of the First Global Age and other fields—but more rarely from ecocritical theory.

Relating Dürer with "ecology," a term invented by natural historian, biologist, and eugenicist Ernst Haeckel (1834 – 1919), seems at first glance to be anachronistic, if not suggestive of a latently activist impetus. But it is not. The term "ecology" describes interrelationships of living and non-living beings that have existed before Haeckel's lifetime and have been the subjects of everyday practices and sophisticated observations around the globe.[7] All art—as Timothy Morton has emphasized—is ecological in the sense that it is embedded in a terrestrial mesh, being a product and agent in the processes of its related ecosystems.[8] Thus, "ecology" can act as a useful heuristic for accentuating embeddedness, interconnectedness, and, more generally, systemic thinking that includes subjective and social dimensions.[9] Meanwhile, when we refer to "ecocriticism" or "the ecocritical," we do not

mean just any contribution that engages with themes of what is commonly called "the environment." Rather—building on authors such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Émilie Hache, Bruno Latour, Val Plumwood and others—we are describing thought that operates on a meta-level relative to nature, namely, reflections on what we might mean by "nature," and on potential conditions of being-in-nature—human or otherwise.[10]

Foregrounding ecological perspectives on early modern art need not require historians to emphasize how objects such as Dürer's landscape seek to possess or master nature, or to regard them as origin points of our current ecological crisis. For instance, one could instead ponder how Dürer's image thematizes the human fabrication of landscapes and the inextricable intertwining of culture and nature.[11] The gathered conifers, all the same apparent age and penetrated by a deep, straight clearing, suggest a human-planted forest with a path leading into it. The trees on the left may have fallen in a storm, but their crowns can only have been taken from the scene by humans. The steep cliff on one side of the pond and the gentle gradient on the other moreover suggest the traces of a quarry cut into the rocky ground, from which workers dragged stone before abandoning the site to flooding.[12] Once one notices such ecological dimensions, it is difficult to assess the play of colors and sunlight in *Landscape with Woodland Pond* only as painterly effects. Its ethereal charge, an effect rare in Dürer's landscape watercolors, lends a metaphoric and possibly Christianizing valence to the picture, in which the complexity of nature and its relationships to the human acquire an awe-inspiring, supernatural force.[13]

Moreover, as in many early modern objects, ecological elements are evident not just in what is represented, but in how representation comes into existence and operates. For instance, Dürer's *Landscape with Woodland Pond* displays varying degrees of finish that expose the different temporal qualities and scales of the object's facture.[14] This foregrounding of technique has the effect—perhaps unintended—of relating the heterogeneous temporalities of artistic procedures with those of natural life cycles. The work's temporal multiplicity exposes the painted landscape as an environment of projection and reception, a site of participatory processes that stimulate the imagination while diffusing the boundaries between image and depicted world. Here we do not confront a visually ordered and creatively dominated terrain. Rather, Dürer's *Landscape with Woodland Pond* invites us to reconfigure human relationships to and within the natural environment, thereby suggesting ways of designing an alternative ecology of terrestrial reality.

What one can discern in the foregoing, ecocritical reinterpretation of Dürer's canonical landscape is the opportunity to confront ecological questions in and through early modern art studies. That this opportunity exists should come as no surprise. On the one hand, numerous studies from the histories of science, philosophy, literature, etc. have established that "early modernity"—as problematic a term for the period as it is[15]—occupies an exceptional position within the world history of the environment.[16] As we will explain in greater detail below, descriptions of the ecological valences of early modern art can draw upon such writings. On the other hand, the proliferation of ecocritical research on modern and contemporary art, indicative of a green turn in the discipline, has impressively reclaimed "the visual *ecologically*" and given "art history […] its place as a meaningful and engaged discipline set" within the growing field of ecocritical studies—a field that is in dialogue with posthumanist, post-colonial, new materialist, gender and queer theory, human-animal studies, plant studies, etc., and which frames ecology as a site of non-hierarchical relationalities.[17] In examining the ecological ramifications of early modern art on their own terms, scholars have begun to inflect the narratives of fluidity,

hybridity, and connectedness that have already emerged in studies of the terrestrial and planetary conditions of art in modernity.[18] Yet, even if we observe a growing number of publications in early modern art history that address ecological issues, Rebecca Zorach's appeal a few years ago —"I don't think we are doing enough"—has lost none of its validity.[19]

In the spirit of responding to Zorach's admonition, the aim of the following essay is to further our shared ambitions for a disciplinary re-orientation toward ecocritical perspectives. What ensues can be understood as an attempt to provide a methodological compass for ecocritical art histories of the early modern period. In contrast to Andrew Patrizio, to whom we owe the most comprehensive methodology of art historical ecocriticism to date, we will not be concerned with describing the genesis of ecocritical art history or locating it in a network of allied theories and methods.[20] Rather, the question of what contribution the history of early modern art can make to the urgent ecological challenges of the present serves as our compass needle. Here we align with Allan C. Braddock, who, in his *Ecocritical Dictionary for Art History*, has described art as "a form of ecological practice that helps to navigate environments" and—refusing with his dictionary's ten terms to develop a structured methodology or abstract theoretical templates—has advocated for "ecocritical paths, dictated by curiosity, evidence, and an ethical impulse."[21] Our aim is not to bend historical facts to current problems with presentist furor or to evaluate them with the wagging forefinger of present-day morality. On the contrary: unlike Braddock, whose dictionary takes its ten key terms as starting points for a transhistorical analysis, our concern is to use the historically specific qualities and contexts of early modern objects as our epistemic anchor points and to operate with the well-established instruments of traditional art historical practice (like iconography, visual hermeneutics, reception theory, formal analysis, and technical art history, etc.). Such approaches might not merely realize a new dimension of interpretive potential for the entire field of early modern art history or recalibrate the very concept of "early modern art." Far more, reframing early modern art in ecological terms can provide distinctive insights on the origins of today's global ecological crisis, help us to analyze the contradicting ambivalences of current ecological practices and ideals, rediscover historical models of ecological awareness, and offer idiosyncratic tools for imagining and enacting alternative ways of being on the planet.

In what follows, we draw on our experiences as scholars of art in early modern Europe to outline four approaches to writing ecocritically-oriented histories of art in and of early modern Europe through a corresponding set of case studies.[22] We understand this quartet of approaches as a preliminary heuristic that may be limited to histories of images, objects, and spaces in Europe and its (colonial) contact zones.[23] Nevertheless, it is in dialogue with and inspired by scholars of art made outside of Europe,[24] is intended to stimulate reflection on the ecocritical objectives of early modern art studies writ large, and remains open to expansion, correction, or refutation by experts on the art of world regions outside of Europe.

One approach involves querying the early modern origins of the current ecological catastrophe within art, for instance, the roles of objects and images in depicting and spurring the ecologically fatal dichotomy of nature and culture. A second approach foregrounds the ecological ambiguities, conflicts, and contradictions that early modern images and objects have represented or actively constructed. A third approach seeks to rediscover the objects, people, and narratives that can be discussed as models or even innovators of ecological thought in early modern art, many of which have thus far remained unrecognized or unnoticed. A final approach reveals within early modern art alternatives to the modern nature/culture binaries that

enduringly frustrate our ability to form a more nuanced view of nature and a more effective response to our world's current ecological crisis.

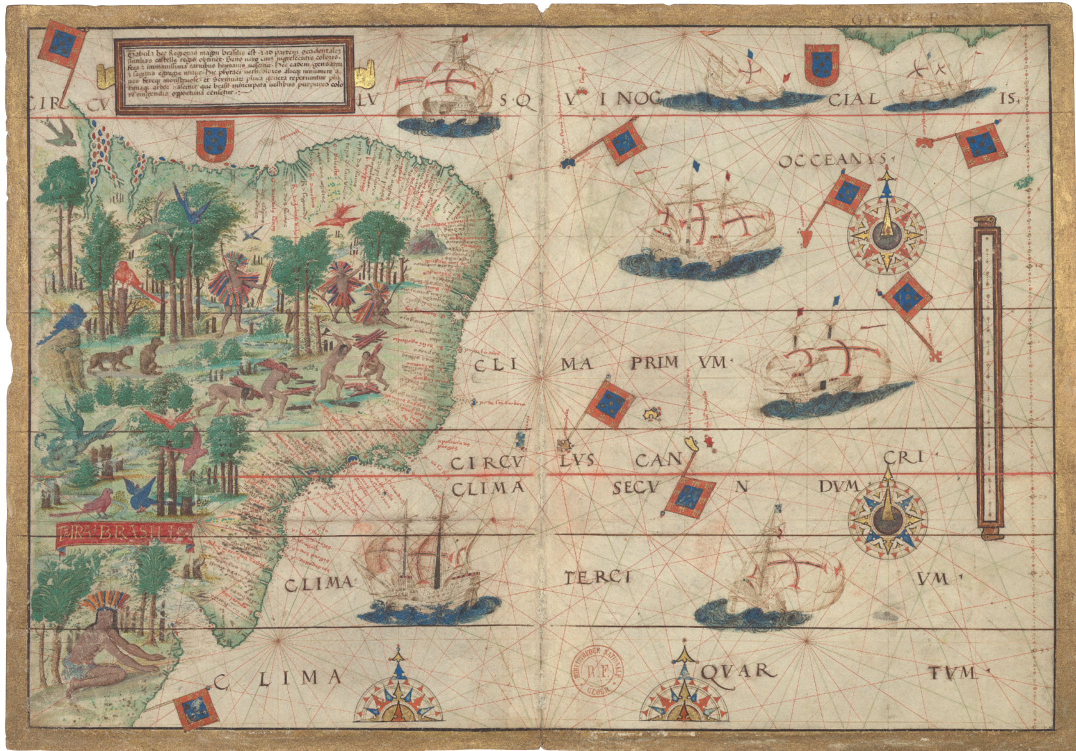
These four approaches (understanding roots, reflecting ambiguities, documenting models, imagining alternatives) are not exhaustive. They are not mutually exclusive, have no internal hierarchy, nor are they to be understood as a sequence. Rather, they are four trails that run through the same forest, some on more solid paths that lead to more predictable results, others along more speculative cliffs that make the outcome a little more uncertain (and, consequently, perhaps more worthwhile). The paths may touch and intersect, but they do not all end in one large clearing, i.e. they do not all lead to a singular understanding of ecocritical practice for early modern art history. Above all, these trails should encourage readers to discover further paths for themselves.

1. Understanding the Early Modern Roots of the Eco-Crisis

In the wake of Clarence J. Glacken, Lynn White, Jr., and others, a rich and decade-spanning tradition of environmental and ecocritical writings has established that early modernity can be described as a time of upheaval in which many of the developments that are known to have formed today's ecological crisis have their origin: technical and scientific revolutions, media and informational acceleration, colonialism and globalization, capitalism, etc.[25] As a key stage of such developments, the early modern period is the decisive phase of the Anthropocene, in which the foundations of our present eco-catastrophe and overexploitation of the planet were laid in terms of mentality, politics, economy, and science. For this reason alone, the early modern period is of central importance for ecocritical research.

While scholars have begun to assess the problematic ecological consequences of the visual culture of the early modern period to reveal the "roots of the ecological crisis" of our time, as Ruth and Dieter Groh put it, there is still much to be done.[26] For instance, researchers have often appreciated the early modern art-theoretical imperative to equal or even surpass or dominate nature as a sign of innovation and modernity as well as a meta-commentary on art-making as such, but have scarcely problematized that phenomenon ecologically. Art historical studies have for decades foregrounded such instances of the self-thematization of early modern art *à la* Victor Stoichiță et alii, emphasizing the material, technological, physical, and practical contributions of art to the historical formation of modern understandings of nature.[27] Such studies have analyzed morally problematic narratives of the naturalization of gender,[28] class,[29] race,[30] and other (often binary) hierarchies.[31] Cutting across that work are insights into the history of early modern art/nature dichotomies that often supplied the rationales for the aforementioned hierarchies.[32] If scholars examine the formation of these art/nature dichotomies from an ecocritical perspective, this could bear wide-ranging ramifications for the histories of colonialism, classism, sexism, and other social phenomena from early modernity to the present.

That early modern art both registered and helped catalyze aspects of our current ecological crisis is apparent in a map, *Terra Brasilis* (fig. 2), attributed to the cartographers Jorge (ca. 1502 – after 1575) and Pedro Reinel (fl. 1485 – 1540) from the so-called "Miller Atlas" of ca. 1519, with imagery that instantiates the origins of mass deforestation in Brazil, an environmental catastrophe and socio-political challenge that continues to this day.[33] Together with the other six parchment leaves in the Miller Atlas, *Terra Brasilis* depicts the global scope of Portuguese territorial possessions as of the second decade of the sixteenth century.[34] The contents of the Atlas were commissioned by João III of Portugal (r. 1521 – 1557) and presented as a diplomatic gift to King



2 Jorge Reinel and Pedro Reinel, *Terra Brasilis*, fol. 5r in Lopo Homem and Jorge and Pedro Reinel, *Nautical Atlas of the World, called the Miller Atlas*, 1519, 42 × 59 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ref. GE DD 683 (5 RES)

Francis I of France (r. 1515 – 1547), presumably to establish Portuguese territorial claims in the face of Spanish competition.[35] *Terra Brasilis* depicts, from left to right, the northeastern coast of what is now Brazil, tropical and equatorial zones of the Atlantic Ocean, and, in the upper right corner of the sheet, what is now the Ivory Coast.

The Reinels portrayed Brazil, which Portugal had already begun to conquer in the early decades of the sixteenth century, in exacting detail, with a fringe of small bays and inlets, many marked with tributaries of rivers that fade into the artist's green wash. Parallel inscriptions in a fine hand indicate the names of the inlets, points, and other sites that formed the Brazilian coastline as known to, and (to be) colonized by, the Portuguese, by circa 1519.[36] The northernmost and southernmost reaches of the coast appear in less precise detail and do not bear any place names, indicating regions the Portuguese had not yet mapped in extensive detail. Indeed, the Brazil of the Reinels—a place in transition—is not overtly a European possession, and is still replete with indigenous plants and animals as well as Indigenous people. For Portuguese viewers, the map may well have conjured a "green world"—a heterotopic space in which the image of nature constructs an existence apart from the everyday.[37]

The mapmakers concentrated much energy on depicting the natural resources that enticed Portuguese colonizers.[38] The inland regions of Brazil host numerous groups of trees, nearly all combining seemingly intact specimens with stumps. That we are witnessing deforestation is apparent from the four unclothed individuals with brown

skin, one of whom wields an axe to cut a log before him, while the others gather cut logs. The reddish tinge of the logs evokes the color of Brazilwood, the wood of *Paubrasilia echinata* that became a commodity that Portuguese colonizers extracted through the labor of Indigenous people and traded internationally.[39]

Meanwhile, another group of three individuals, clad in feather headdresses and skirts genericized to a degree that defies efforts to pinpoint their tribal identities, stand above the tree-cutters. They bear spears as well as a bow and arrow, appearing to observe the group of Brazilwood workers, whom, as Bárbara Polo Martín notes, the clothed figures have perhaps enslaved.[40] The divergence between these two groups as well as their hierarchical placement within the composition evokes multiple forms of difference—not only the contrast between pre-conquest forms of interacting with the forest through activities such as hunting, and post-conquest deforestation, but also the divisions between different Indigenous peoples and even within Indigenous societies whereby the new economy of colonial-era deforestation operated.[41]

Significantly, while the map instantiates a Portuguese presence through the inscribed place names, ships, flags, and other technologies of maritime navigation, colonial possession, and trade, no Portuguese bodies visibly occupy Brazilian territory. The colonizers' ecological impact is instead implied by the pervasive extraction of Brazil's arboreal riches at the hands of Indigenous agents. Here, the absence of Portuguese bodies and the portrayal of Indigenous people as enthusiastic participants in a colonial system of resource extraction is significant. This absence foreshadows how modern agents of economic imperialism have often dissimulated how our environmental crisis originated in European global colonization, as well as the ongoing implication of Indigenous groups in systems of resource extraction that feed external, neo-imperial interests. In other words, this is an image of colonial resource extraction, in which European colonialism, pressures on Indigenous peoples, and the exploitation of the natural world operate in tandem to produce conditions of the present-day ecological crisis.

Within this map, Brazil is also far from isolated on the world stage. Strewn across the ocean are seven caravels with sails full of wind, emblazoned with Christian crosses. Three sail westward, toward Brazil, while the remaining four move eastward, toward the west coast of the African continent somewhere beyond the right edge of the sheet. The bidirectional courses of these vessels suggest the European-coerced movement of people and goods between Brazil and West Africa that was, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, becoming an important element of Portuguese colonial and global trade strategy. The presence of the Ivory Coast and the Gulf of Guinea, the third most active area of the Portuguese enslavement of Africans forcibly transported to Brazil between 1500 and 1600, seems no accident.[42] Rafael Moreira has hypothesized that the mapmaker Pedro Reinel and his son Jorge claimed descent from forebears in what is now Sierra Leone, northwest of the land depicted in the map, a result of Portuguese incursions into West Africa and the appropriation and training of artists of West African lineage at the Portuguese court during the closing decades of the fifteenth century.[43] Pedro voyaged to Sierra Leone, and his cartographic knowledge was in part based on that experience.[44] By depicting the Gulf of Guinea and the Ivory Coast in *Terra Brasilis*, the Reinels appear to acknowledge West Africa's role in Portuguese colonial ambitions. The map not only arose from Portugal's operations in West Africa but suggests the links between those incursions and Portugal's activities in Brazil.

Indeed, numerous elements mark the sheet as a product of sophisticated technologies of geospatial navigation and measurement, upon which Portugal's exploitation of Brazil and West

Africa relied. A long, vertical scale bordered in gold near the right edge of the sheet indicates the scale at which the land and sea are depicted. The map also bears a series of black horizontals, indicating significant parallels. A red line at the top of the sheet meanwhile marks the Equator, while another red horizontal indicates the Tropic of Capricorn. Networks of thinner red lines radiate from various points throughout the Atlantic ocean, four anchored by intricate compass roses embellished with red and blue ink as well as gold leaf—marks typical of portolan charts, used in the sixteenth century to indicate the wind currents and seaways.[45] In addition to such technical elements, the map's high level of figural and narrative detail, rich chromaticism, and gold leaf all affirm that the work operated more as a cartographic showpiece than a functioning portolan chart.[46]

Created between the early sixteenth-century prohibition on colonial cartographic production beyond Portuguese crown commissions and the voyage of Magellan, the Miller Atlas counts among the oldest surviving instances of Portuguese global cartography, and represents the epitome of Portuguese navigational knowledge at the time of its production.[47] Indeed, scholars have established that the map was made based on the voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral (1467–1520) in 1500.[48] The map's participation in the visual culture of navigation situates it within intersecting traditions of scientific and mathematical inquiry as well as European colonialism, all in the service of territorial conquest and natural resource extraction. Its embeddedness in such global, ecological developments reminds us that, just as land and the cultural categories of landscape and maps have shaped the history of art, made objects have informed how land is viewed and manipulated by humans.[49]

In sum, by adapting perspectives from the history of cartography, art-science studies, postcolonial critique, and what is called "global art history," we can affirm that the image not only depicts colonial resource extraction but also operated as one of the instruments that enabled European exploitation of people and the natural world in the service of the era's emerging global trade networks. We suspect that the multivalent nature of this object's ecological dimensions—as both a representation of an ecological condition and an instrument of ecological developments—re-appears in many other works of early modern art. *Terra Brasilis* moreover serves as a potent reminder that the current eco-crisis is planetary and that further dialogue will hopefully enrich both the various regional and the global ecocritical histories of early modern art—though, as we note above, such research may look different from the European case studies we develop here.[50]

2. Documenting Ecological Ambiguities in Early Modern Art

Using ecocritical early modern art history to reveal the historical processes that produced our current ecological condition—an implicitly moralizing endeavor—risks oversimplifying the complexity of pre-modern issues. Early modern people did not always understand their actions in accordance with theological, philosophical, scientific, technical, or other well-researched concepts that scholars now often position in opposition to nature. Rather, artists documented, reflected, and shaped human activity within superordinate ecological contexts. There is reason to believe that their audiences, in turn, valued visual artifacts for their power to pose problems, paradoxes, and uncertainties, as well as their ability to embody relationships between similar, competing, or supposedly detached layers of meaning and discourses.[51] Building on the wealth of research on themes of ambivalence, ambiguity, and variance in early modern art,[52] a second approach to an ecocritical history of early modern art can focus upon the incerti-

3 Antwerp, sixteenth century (possibly Matthys Cock), *The Martyrdom of St. Catherine*, ca. 1540, oil on plywood transferred from panel, 62 × 118 cm. Washington, D.C., The National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection, acc. no. 1952.2.18

tude, fluidity, and openness of objects from this era, documenting the contradictions, conflicts, and liminalities that characterize the ecological dimensions of early modern material and visual culture. One way to uncover the ecological complexities of early modern art is to sketch the ecological debates that art visualized and even fuelled, many of which relate to issues, such as water management or strip mining, that still stir controversy today. Unpacking such conflicts can clarify how artworks used ambivalent and polyvalent meanings to reflect nuanced early modern understandings of nature.

The potential rewards of scrutinizing the ecological ambiguities and specifically conflicts of early modern art are evident in *The Martyrdom of St. Catherine* from The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (fig. 3). The painting is reservedly attributed to Matthys Cock (ca. 1510 – before 1548) due to its intermediate position between Joachim Patinir's (ca. 1480 – before 1524) world landscapes and Pieter Bruegel the Elder's (ca. 1525 – 1569) landscape paintings.[53] Two diagonals leading into the depths dominate the composition. In the left portion of the background, St. Catherine prays. God assists her with a thunderstorm that shadows large parts of the picture, threatening several ships and incinerating the torture wheels, killing her would-be executioners. The tumult frightens the surrounding unbelievers, as fire on a fortified rock beyond them seems to commemorate the previous martyrdom of the fifty philosophers Catherine converted. The right half of the picture meanwhile boasts a clear sky. Favorable winds lead vessels into the busy harbor of a fortified city at the mouth of a wide river spanned by a bridge and graced with a busy shipyard—presumably, Alexandria. This scene, in its display of the order of earthly creation, resembles Patinir's *Wheel Miracle of St. Catherine* in Vienna (fig. 4), which also shows panicking people, a rocky coastline, and a harbor or shipyard.[54] But unlike the Vienna panel, the Washington painting (see fig. 3)

4 Joachim Patinir, *The Wheel Miracle of St. Catherine*, ca. 1515, oil on oak panel, 27.8 × 44.8 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. GG 1002

includes prominent figures in the foreground. A man holding an axe, highlighted by red clothing and apparently at work chopping down a tree, leads our gaze into the picture and appears so prominent as to require explanation.

The Christian iconography of tree felling is not well-researched. However, the theme's semantically open integration arouses two particular and opposing associations. On the one hand, the presence of a woodcutter felling a tree makes the suffering of St. Catherine tangible and characterizes her experience as an episode of *imitatio Christi*, insofar as writers have connected the incarnate Son of God with the wood of the cross and conceptualized him as a tree, which "was cut down from the edge of the wood, / ripped up by [its] roots."[55] Particularly in contemporary depictions of St. Jerome, whose name the *Legenda aurea* translates as "holy wood,"[56] one frequently observes tree stumps evocative of Christ's sacrificial death, further emphasized through the type's stereotypical, mounted crucifix.[57] In this sense, the woodcutter's raised axe may also allude to the later beheading of St. Catherine, which is foreshadowed in Patinir's Viennese painting by a sword floating in the air above the martyr. On the other hand, the motif of the woodcutter also recalls John the Baptist's warning that "the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" that produce no "good fruit."[58] In depictions of Christ's baptism, fruitful or dead and cut trees frequently appear; occasionally, so does an axe.[59] One could therefore understand the felling of the tree in the foreground of the Washington image both as a warning reference to the end of the "false prophets" or pagan religion, and as an instructive paraphrase of the Christian path of virtue and the wood of Christ from which the nave of the church is built.[60]

However, such theological connotations do not fully explain the woodcutter and his wood. Their integration into the painting's larger economic and ecological contexts is too pervasive for that. For instance, the painter has carefully described the different cutting and sawing tools used in the timber industry and differentiates their yields. To the left of the red-clothed woodcutter, medium-sized sticks lay together, some of which a second woodcutter carries toward the city, along with a bundle of brushwood. Planks already sawn to size lie on that woodcutter's back. The different groups of cut wood refer to the disparate forms of wood-powered labor in the distant shipyard, where workers install large beams and planks while a caulking fire, several chimneys, and a tar kiln burn smaller sticks. As a building material and source of energy, wood was essential to the prosperity of early modern cities, producing an almost insatiable need for this raw material. Thus, the lack of forests in the left half of the picture, the site of St. Catherine's projected martyrdom, can be understood as a reflection of the deforested landscape around Cock's Antwerp and many other European cities during the middle of the sixteenth century.[61] The bareness of the darkened foreground likewise suggests the increasing and globally seldom matched shortage of wood in various parts of sixteenth-century Europe.[62] On its left side, one spies a last, gnarled tree that has become a dumping site with dead branches, exposed roots, and a hollowed-out trunk, and will perhaps only stand until the woodcutter sleeping next to it

awakens.[63] On the right, a row of last tree stumps rises like a mournful memorial.

It may not be a coincidence that the tree against which the woodcutter swings his axe exhibits a frayed, vertical split down the middle of its trunk at an elevated point. The pattern of damage suggests either that the tree initially fell due to a natural phenomenon called "windsnap"—an event that is usually fatal for trees and which seldom occurs in the absence of structural flaws, often due to disease and rot—or that the woodcutter does not know how to properly level a tree.[64] In other words, the painter leaves ambiguous whether we are witnessing an episode of destruction due to humans, or a destructive process involving natural forces that a human merely completes. Or, more precisely, even if we assume that a windsnap is responsible for the tree's fall, that demise might have a human cause, for a tree that stands in an area that otherwise lacks trees—a clearing perhaps made by humans—is more likely succumb to the elements than a tree that stands amidst an untouched grove. By the same token, the human importation of non-native trees can bring the kinds of fungal diseases that make trees susceptible to windsnap. Thus, windsnap may be seen as a natural, second-order consequence of human actions, and the frayed stump in this painting as an expression of the enmeshed, mutually implicated effects of farming or forestry and natural forces. In sum, the tree embodies the slippery boundaries between human and non-human as well as the ambiguities of human relationships to the non-human.

As in current discussions about the complex needs that forests serve, the motive for the felling of the trees in the Washington landscape is thus ambivalent: in theological terms, it can be seen both *in bono* as God's just punishment and *in malo* as violence against Christ or St. Catherine. The painter likewise presents deforestation's secular dimension as double-edged, that is, as both a source of Alexandria's prosperity and a potentially unsustainable practice that threatens the city's wellbeing. The painting's aesthetic mode of shaping and presenting nature meanwhile conveys further ambivalence: On the one hand, one can understand the world landscape that extends into the distance on the right as a means for admiring divine creation and drawing closer to God, which St. Catherine recommended to the unbelieving Emperor Maxentius.[65] On the other hand, the painting contradicts the utilitarian, anthropocentric view of earthly creation inscribed in such interpretations, insofar as the ship sails and other details (such as the tree behind the nearby farm) hint that thunderstorms will soon darken the entire landscape, suggesting the coming Last Judgment and the end of the scarcity-ridden, post-lapsarian world. It is through ambiguity, then, that this and, we suspect, many other works of early modern art can engage ecological themes. And, if the foregoing case study has combined formal analysis, iconography, and visual hermeneutics, as well as intersecting knowledge of cultural, economic, environmental, and forestry history, we likewise suspect that the ecological ambiguities of early modern art can be recovered by many other means.

3. Uncovering Models of Ecological Thought in Early Modern Art

If we can understand the complicity of early modern art in contemporary ecological issues and document the ecological ambivalence of early modern art, drawing productive insights from pre-modern art history presents a more demanding task. We are challenged not to settle accounts with the values of historical art objects or to describe their complexity in a reserved way, at arm's length. Rather, inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's distinction between paranoid and reparative readings, we intend to uncover the ecological value and the ongoing topicality

of the ideas embodied and formed through early modern art.[66] Two strategies of such a post-critical art history stand out to us in particular: on the one hand, to focus on historical models; and, on the other, to use early modern art as a platform for imagining alternative ecologies, that is, ecologies unlike those that dominate present-day imaginaries. The approach presented in the present section involves exploring the artistic dimensions of the cultural history of ecological awareness and evaluating evidence of early modern sensitivity to ecological contexts, whether expressed in visual, material, architectural, or performative explorations of the connection between humans and their environments.[67] In other words, we describe a way of assessing how early modern art instantiates frameworks of ecological thought.

This approach strikes us as promising not least because the early modern period is characterized by a high level of ecological awareness. There is no lack of visual and textual sources from that era that bemoan, for example, the destructive extraction of raw materials, profit-oriented overexploitation, or the suffering that humans cause animals.[68] However, such forms of early modern ecological awareness operated with parameters, basic assumptions, and ideas of the planetary and cosmic that implicate other or less pointed nature/culture dichotomies than those that are common today (and that we have inherited from the Enlightenment and later developments). For instance, early moderns possessed complex and contradictory attitudes toward organic nature that did not strictly distinguish between the social and natural spheres, as many twentieth- and twenty-first-century thinkers have.[69] Early moderns also harbored an ecological understanding of the body, and tended to conceptualize human beings less in isolation than as integral parts of a complex network of mutual influences.[70] In addition, while scholars have read the absence of "ecology" and similar terms in early modern sources as an implicit sign of a lack of ecological awareness, it may well register the absence of the deep disruption between culture and nature that suffuses ("Western") modernity. Moreover, the "Western" history of political, philosophical, artistic or other commitments to preserving our shared existence begins in early modernity. If we are looking for the beginnings of a sustainable understanding of ecology, which, in the sense of post-humanism, new materialism, eco-feminism, and other similar positions, is based on the integration of people, their fellow creatures, and the planet, the epoch before the marriage of subjectivism and modern individualism during the Romantic period appears highly attractive.[71]

One early modern model of ecological thought manifests in a majolica plate (fig. 5), probably painted by Francesco Urbini (fl. 1537) in 1533. The plate's warning against excessive greed, ruthless overexploitation, and ultimate self-destruction echoes today's slogans in the climate policy struggle over trees and forests. It depicts a scene from the myth, largely told by Ovid (43 BCE – 17/18 CE), of the Thessalian king Erysichthon, who felled a huge oak tree that was considered a sanctuary to Ceres.[72] In a clearing, amidst lush vegetation, we see on the left one of Erysichthon's followers—a group that had refused to disturb the grove. In the middle of the plate, Erysichthon swings his axe, creating a red notch at the foot of the tree, where he strikes. The blood that flowed from the wounded bark caused another follower to intervene, but this only led the leader to behead him.[73] With his foot triumphantly placed on the buttocks of the slain man, Erysichthon continues his crime against the tree, whereupon the nymph, who embodies the tree on the right, predicts his end. On Ceres's orders, Erysichthon is overcome by an insatiable hunger, for which he not only sacrifices his fortune, but also sells his daughter, and finally devours himself.

Greek and Roman mythology feature various cases in which sacred trees are felled or nearly cut down, to the anger of the gods.[74] Lucan (39 – 65) relays an ambiguous report about

5 Francesco Urbini (attributed to), *Plate Depicting Erysichthon Felling an Oak in the Sacred Grove of Ceres*, 1533, tin-glazed earthenware, 23.5 cm (diameter). London, Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. no. 1706-1855

Julius Caesar (100 – 44 BCE), who had a Druid grove razed near Massilia—a tale which perhaps provided the template for the descriptions of Charlemagne (r. 768 – 814) and St. Boniface (ca. 672/675 – 754), who felled the pagan Irminsul and Donar oak to Christianize the Saxons.[75] Erysichthon, on the other hand, is a negative example, whose actual crime, as Ovid emphasized, is disrespecting the gods. In the *Ovidio Methamorphoseos vulgare*, we read that Erysichthon "despised all the gods, and especially the goddess Ceres," while for Ludovico Dolce (1508 – 1568) he was "such a mocker of the gods" that "he did not honor anyone."[76] In this sense, the majolica plate strives to frame the scene as a moral warning. While the opposing movement of hair and tunic illustrates the strength with which Erysichthon goes to work, neither the defenseless tree and its worried-looking nymph nor the unarmed, slain follower and his closed eyes excuse the crime. Rather, the attitude of the figure on the left warns Erysichthon to stop and evokes horror at his ungodly act of violence.

Sixteenth-century observers would have blamed Erysichthon's greed for his offense against the sacred oak and his contempt for the goddess Ceres.[77] As early as the ancient Greek poet Callimachus (fl. 2nd half of 5th century BCE), whose *Hymn to Demeter* was probably Ovid's model, the felled oak was said to have been used to build a festive dining room.[78] But especially since the medieval scholar Petrus Berchorius's (ca. 1290 – 1362) Christian interpretation, the myth was seen as a warning against the deadly sin of *avaritia* and as a teaching that the "opulence of [people's] possessions makes them more desirous, for an increase in their property enflames the hunger of avarice proportionally."[79] The *Bible des poëtes* invokes the "axes of cruelty" for the stingy usurers who, "no matter how much they have of the goods of this world," still "set house to house and one field to another."[80] For the Nuremberg Meistersinger Hans Sachs (1494 – 1576), Erysichthon's entire ambition is to "win great fortune […]. And miserly hunger consumes him. He flogs, scrapes, profits, and lives luxuriously without shame."[81] This monetary justification for the crime also resonates in the *Mythologiae* (1568), a summa of popular attitudes toward classical material by the Italian mythographer Natale Conti (1520 – 1582), who draws the lesson from Erysichthon's fate that, besides piety (*pietas*) and prudence (*prudentia*), thrift (*parimonia*) is "highly necessary for a good man."[82] As the Italian humanist Gioseppe Horologgi (1520 – 1576) states in the Ovid translation of his compatriot, the Renaissance poet Giovanni Andrea dall'Anguillara (1517 – 1572): "The godless Erysichthon, mocker of the power of the gods […], what can we say other than that it is greed?"[83] Against the backdrop of such economic interpretations, it is not surprising that the English poet Michael Drayton (1563 – 1631), referencing a forestry conflict that had simmered since the middle of the sixteenth century, used Erysichthon to criticize deforestation for short-term profits. The feminized Wyre Forest, he writes, "unto the Fornace sold […] / of *Erisichthon's* end begins her to bethinke, / […]. / You Driades, that are said with Oakes to live and die, / Wherefore in our distress doe you our dwellings flie; / Upon this monstrous Age and not revenge our wrong?"[84]

Drayton diverges substantially from today's tree-protectors. His forest is not an empirically recorded ecosystem, but a place of poetry animated by dryads and nature spirits, through which the author conveys a deeply sympathetic understanding of the natural world.[85] And despite all the popularity of the Erysichthon myth in recent eco-literature,[86] the majolica plate is neither a climate-political call for forest protection nor an eco-feminist lesson. It cannot be ruled out that the motif, painted on an object that could be used to present food, functioned as a sophisticated warning against excessive consumption. But it is precisely in this respect that the plate has lost none of its relevance and can perhaps be considered a model of ecologi-

cal thought, at least if we, like Félix Guattari, assume a concept of ecology that includes subjective and social dimensions.[87] Part of the current eco-catastrophe is a radicalized individualism and a voracious capitalist system built on the accelerating consumption of natural resources, embodied by Karel van Mander's (1548 – 1606) "insatiable Erysichthon," insofar as he can be compared "to the stingy, greedy person who has no other god […] known than the gold and wealth of this world."[88]

The majolica plate highlights Erysichthon's greedy unscrupulousness by conflating homicide with arborcide, and by "soaking" the entire scene in the brown-red pigment that connects the notch on the fatal iron with the streams of blood from the head and torso of the slain man. What's more, the same color can also be found in other parts of the picture, where it is applied—as in other works of Francesco Urbini—with partly eruptive, partly fluid brushstrokes, suggesting that armor, ground, trees and even the sky are silent witnesses, if not compassionate victims, of the bloody deed, which thus becomes a crime against the whole world. In contrast to older and contemporary representations of the myth, the majolica plate does not isolate the Ceres oak, but rather uses the trees and bushes to depict the life-giving lushness of the grove, also described in various literary adaptations of the myth. What is striking is that the vegetation behind Erysichthon appears to wrap his upper body in a green cloak, which makes it clear that the king, despite all his contempt for the nature goddess Ceres, still forms part of the natural world against which he raises his axe. Here, as in many other objects made during early modernity, we discern how visual and material elements form a nuanced ecological statement—which, in the foregoing case study of a *Kunstkammer* object, we have mainly addressed by means of iconology and by combining written and visual evidence (in order to study the afterlife of a classical tradition).

4. Imagining Alternative Ecological Conditions

The early modern period shows an astonishing number of parallels to our own present. Indeed, if the early modern era stood at the beginning of the so-called "modern age," we may stand at its end. Many developments that have been celebrated as achievements at the beginning of the twentieth century and, in some cases, touted as roots of our present conditions, either originated or noticeably intensified during the early modern period or experienced deep crises during that time: subjectivism, anthropocentrism/humanism, rationalism, etc.[89] Scientific and social developments have also given many pre-modern concepts of nature, which have been dismissed as magical and naive since the Enlightenment at the latest, a new plausibility.[90]

At the same time, the early modern past is also a context fundamentally different from our own present in terms of the many alternative models of ecological thought it fostered. Consequently, there is no lack of theoretical and practical frameworks from the early modern period that we might use to rethink and shape togetherness on this planet today. In our opinion, there are many "ecologies of the other,"[91] as the anthropologist Philippe Descola has formulated it, to be discovered in the visual culture and artistic texts of the early modern era.[92] Formal, motivic, and material properties of early modern artworks represent ecologies that run counter to the binary hierarchies in circulation today. Hubert Zapf, a specialist in American studies, who has advocated for an analysis of texts as "cultural ecosystems," suggests that art history has compelling possibilities for uncovering such properties.[93] Indeed, as Allan C. Braddock already predicted in his ground-breaking essay, "Ecocritical Art History" (2009), historically-oriented ecocriticism "may bring attention to neglected evidence of past ecological and proto-ecological sensibility or it may cast canonical works and

6 Hercules Segers, *Mountain Landscape with a Crest and a Forked Tree*, first version, ca. 1610 – 1638, mixed media on paper, 12 × 19.5 cm. London, The British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, inv. no. Sheepshanks.5516

figures in a new light by revealing previously unnoticed complexity regarding environmental concerns."[94] Yet in the art history of early modern Europe, the prospect of uncovering such alternative ecologies has so far remained a largely unrealized promise.

A fourth ecocritical approach to examining the history of early modern art that might fulfill that potential is to survey the variety of images, objects, and spaces that illustrate perspectives on people and their surroundings beyond contemporary positions such as today's familiar nature/culture dichotomies. Our task is to understand the internal ecological structures of early modern artworks and to determine how we can view images, objects, and built environments as ecosystems that instantiate sometimes surprisingly de-hierarchical and fluid relationships between social and other horizons. Let us consider, then, a final example that illustrates how early modern images conjure alternative ecologies—materially, experientially, symbolically, and otherwise.

Sometime between 1610 and 1638, Hercules Segers (1589/1590 – before 1638) completed a work now called *Mountain Landscape with a Crest and a Forked Tree*, which depicts a ridge ceding to a valley dominated by two distant peaks (fig. 6). As much as the landscape, with its entrancing textures and vaporous qualities, seems like a record of a direct experience with nature, Segers likely gathered the sheet's varied topographies from unidentifiable Netherlandish terrains and mountainous sites in prints and paintings.[95] Yet while Segers's *Mountain Landscape* constitutes a fantasy world that strives for plausibility and immediacy, in contrast to older traditions of landscape painting embodied by Patinir or Cock, who prized motivic legibility (see, e.g., figs. 3 and 4), it also displays a remarkable degree of underdetermination. A path traversed by a lone travel-

ler leads to a small village extending down the far side of the ridge, accompanied in the valley to the left by what could be a convent or a ruin. To the left of this structure, at the crest of the closest ridge in the middle ground, one can read a dark, upright line with a blunt terminus, in conjunction with the nearby vertical marks, as possible evidence of tree-felling. In hesitating to confirm the location of the landscape, the functions of the architecture, or even the existence of a felled tree, Segers sows ambiguity within the image's ways of figuring nature as a possible subject of human intervention. Instead of objectifying and visually appropriating nature, Segers uses forms of dissimulation to open paths to a different ecology and an alternative experience of terrestrial coexistence.[96]

One key way in which Segers's *Mountain Landscape* achieves such dissimulation is its mingling of various media techniques. Whether physical or notional, dialogues between media typified the graphic productions of Segers. The artist often engaged painterly *topoi* and styles as well as materials such as fabric substrates, prepared the grounds of his prints with colored washes, and tweaked individual impressions with chromatic adjustments such that each endures as a formally unique image.[97] According to the British Museum's online catalog, *Mountain Landscape* is an "etching and drypoint, printed in light-blue ink on ochre-tinted paper, brushed with grey-blue pigment, touched with greenish-brown watercolour."[98] Segers brought these various techniques into a multifaceted interplay that in certain places creates a coherent narrative, but in many cases proves contradictory, ambiguous, and perplexing. These effects begin with the treatment of line. The artist composed *Mountain Landscape* with a cacophony of active, volatile lines, which crackle and pop before subsiding again into sinuous lineaments of ink. The jagged peak that defines the skyline of the right half of the work is covered in what can only be described as a marbleized web, creating a texture that resembles the irregular surface of bubbling sea foam and can read as naked rock, a brush-covered terrain, or a mixture of both. The confusion between organic and inorganic, still-fuzzy gradients of the seventeenth-century *scala naturae*,[99] echoes in the ambiguous status of the broad plain below the mountain, comprised of many horizontal lines that run in parallel, occasionally interrupted by circular blobs suggestive of trees or bushes. Are we observing a brush-covered expanse marked by layers of horizontal gradients, or a cultivated field, whose horizontals evidence terracing or tilling? Or, alternatively, vivid marks of Segers's own artistic prowess? The lines will not say.

A different mode of medial dissimulation—that is, a hesitancy to disclose the very identities of the various media that form the image—appears in the left margin, where black ink stains cover the landscape. These spots appear so diffuse as to resemble paint, and seem to register foul biting or a similar, acidic manipulation of the plate. Together, they form a nebula of ink that pushes itself forward and all but dislocates the border of the image. We could have the feeling that the sheet loses its representational quality here, if the blots did not at the same time adhere precisely to the topography of the scene and contribute to its atmospheric mood.[100] The painterliness of these marks appears all the starker when compared to the diagonal hatching of the bottom right foreground, where the printmaker's gestures resemble drawing and thereby engage a longstanding rapport between etching and the art of drawing.[101] In sum, the print not only refuses to divulge precisely which media we are pondering, but how they work together to achieve figuration.

Segers's interest in medial dissimulation lastly manifests in the watercolor sections, which seem to work against representation as such. The light gray-blue pigment, which touches parts of the sky and above all highlights parts in the foreground and middle ground, contributes to

the image's apparent spatiality. Meanwhile, it remains unclear whether we should read the darker passages of wash as shadows, or as entities materially different and topographically distinct from the neighboring lighter passages. The same can be said of the brown coloring, which uniformly stains the valley on the left and the plain and mountain on the right, thus connecting them compositionally, and, at the same time, pushing the narrow strip of landscape on the horizon into the distance. The brown wash that forms a backdrop to mountain on the right—which could suggest a cloud or another mountain, were the same color not painted out to the left of the mountain peak toward the center of the picture—exists almost beyond mimetic legibility. In any case, the painterly interplay around the mountain finds its counterpart in the dark color arrangements that run along the contour of the left mountain peak and dissipate in cloud-like patches toward the center, contributing to the image's compositional coherence, if not its legibility. With all these episodes of medial dissimulation, Segers foregrounds the innate and unrehearsed behaviors of his own artistic materials as mutually dependent players in a complex web of action and reaction, actors who together navigate a spontaneous coexistence within the image-world.

The self-reflexive qualities of Segers's mixed media technique in *Mountain Landscape* imply the roles of visual media in human experience. The foregrounding of visual media as shapers of human experience is particularly apropos for Segers's subject, landscape, which has recently been reconceptualized, in scholarship on premodern European art, as a way of seeing.[102]

Compositionally, the picture poises between the retreating *macchia* on the left and the plastically tangible tree on the right, textures that evoke for the viewer the links between tactile and visual sensation, the anticipation of touch via sight, or of appearance through feeling. Between these edges, a dense network of graphic and colorful correspondences and connections unfolds, which our organizing gaze can only with difficulty transfer into the tight corset of veristic conventions of representation and reception. The result of Seger's deft mixing of media is that everything seems connected to everything else, at least potentially.

Crucially, the under-determinacy and deliberate blurring of visual and material strategies that generate mimetic objectivity—greatly served by Segers's mixing of media—open a space of interpretation and imagination that does not place us viewers in the position of all-knowing and all-understanding sovereigns over this landscape.[103] Rather, the effect embeds us in a churning sea of ambiguities and relational possibilities. The church tower in the middle of the picture provides a decentered, fixed point, but without dominating the scenery, as it is integrated into the net of the picture ground by the watercolor. We may feel like the human silhouette in the picture, which merges colorfully and graphically into this landscape rather than measuring it with rigid steps. Anything but the semantic node of the image, this human figure offers itself as a perceptual vehicle and alter ego that does not stand before or above this world but is one with it. And, in a further decentering of the human, Segers's characteristically wide, deep, and uneven etching marks and volatile strokes of brush revel in artistic processes subject not to human mastery, but to the agency of materials and indeed chance—such as the artist's signature, prolonged exposure of the plate to the chemical corrosion of nitric acid and the freedom with which he allowed his washes to stain his paper substrate.[104] We can see Segers's rhizomatic image itself as an ecology that involves us as observers within a complex mesh of processes and relationships. In other words, Segers's interweaving of artistic techniques and materials calls for the cognitive exploration of the world not to be imagined as a simple subject-object relation, but rather as an incomplete, contradictory, multi-layered, and multipolar process that foils preconceived distinctions between per-

ceived subject and the not-easily-objectifiable environment.

Segers's intermedial printmaking represents an exceptional performance within a much broader tradition of mixed-media graphic art in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. There is reason to believe that mixed-media printmaking of the kind Segers pursued here was regarded, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as evidence of artistic genius and a means to sell his works. At least, this is the narrative that has dominated the literature on the subject in the last decades.[105] From an ecocritical perspective, those readings adopt an excessively anthropocentric stance that forecloses, to a degree, the elements of interrelation between subject and object clearly at play in *Mountain Landscape*. What if we were to understand the push-and-pull between etching, drypoint, and watercolor not only as evidence of Segers's artistic *bravura*, but as a performance of relationality between disparate elements that echoes the give-and-take between the coexisting elements of nature figured through those artistic techniques? In other words, what if the mixing of media in this work instantiates a medial ecosystem, one whose inner workings echoes the mingling of natural elements within the depicted landscape? In such a scenario, the intermedial qualities of Segers's print join the work's interweaving of points, lines, planes, lights, and shadows to evoke the interconnectedness and complexity of the natural world as system and experience, a living and lived ambience in which humans are merely a single group among many other types of actors.[106]

Here Segers doubtless retains some role as a demiurgic creator-figure, the first mover who materializes the work's implied ways of sensing and molding that world. At the same time, the messiness, indeterminacy, and contingent nature of the natural materials and processes that Segers used to form this image—a performance of forces not entirely subject to his artistic control—also reserve, in line with a longstanding early modern trope of nature-as-artist, a place for nature as the author of this work.[107] Thus, the print accommodates both the artist-as-god-like-creator and an alternative to that model, wherein the human is but one element within a complex web of material and non-material agents and forces. From a methodological perspective, such an expansion upon more anthropocentric interpretations demonstrates how an object-oriented, technical, formalistic, and phenomenological study of art history (which in recent times has been used to make claims about the status of art or of artists in early modernity) can also accommodate assertions about the status of the terrestrial world and the artist-in-nature—and specifically, to imagine an alternative ecology in and through images.

Conclusion

The foregoing case studies affirm that research on the visual and material cultures of early modernity can distinctively enrich ecocritical discourse in art history and other disciplines on several fronts. As the "green world" of *Terra Brasilis* suggests, we can probe how encounters with the visual and material presented early modern people with vivid and often multisensorial ways of experiencing and imagining human and more-than-human existence on this planet. This map, along with the *Martyrdom of St. Catherine* and the Erysichthon plate, also confirms that we can seek to understand the early modern era as a period of pivotal change in the histories of vision and visuality and their roles in constructing a human/nature dichotomy, generative forms of ecosophical ambiguity, and models of ecological thought. Finally, as we have seen with Segers's *Mountain Landscape*, we can constructively attend to the inherently material qualities of early modern art to imagine alternative ways of being in the world and its changing conditions.

We would reiterate that what we have sketched above is by no means a comprehensive set of approaches to studying early modern art history from an ecocritical perspective or a complete outline of the types of evidence available for such research. Our selection of case studies has inevitably required a degree of focus that should not be interpreted as a limitation on other possible manifestations of the methods we have tested above. To expose some of the surprising ramifications of our proposal for the most conservative forms of early modern (European) art history—ramifications we will discuss presently—we have foregrounded the very two-dimensional images that early modern art studies have often problematically privileged. We hypothesize that the most robust ecocritical histories of early modern art will account for manifold other forms of making, from sculpture to architecture, urbanism, and engineering, a potential we leave unrealized in the limited space of this essay. In variously analyzing two-dimensional images of tree-felling, we have aspired to make differences and similarities between the four outlined approaches more obvious, while also inviting readers to add to our preliminary quartet.

What will have been apparent from the very start of this position paper and its re-reading of a canonical Dürer landscape is that an "activist" stance is all but unavoidable in the ecocritical practice of early modern art history. We do not deny that an ecological agenda informs our interest in developing and sharing a methodology for that purpose. We also cannot deny that the dire ecological situation of our present motivates our call to engage with the art of the early modern past on ecological terms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, we see evidence of a widespread impression among certain art historians that those who incorporate ecocritical perspectives into analyses of early modern art operate with a presentist mindset as well as a theoretical and even avant-garde methodological orientation.[108]

And yet an ecocritical stance does not necessarily run counter to more conservative and source-oriented modes of early modern art history or entail an ultimately presentist ethos: Our understanding of *Terra Brasilis* as a record and instrument of colonial resource extraction arises not only from postcolonial criticality, but the technical history of mapmaking. Our consideration of the ecological ambiguities of the St. Catherine painting relies on knowledge of scripture and cultural history. Humanistic learning enables the reading of the Erysichthon majolica as a model of ecological thought. Both the St. Catherine and Erysichthon readings likewise depend upon decades-old practices of iconology, visual hermeneutics, and, *à la* Erwin Panofsky, their intersections with literary studies and textual exegesis. Both our interpretations of map and plate are informed by reception aesthetics and historical practices of handling objects. Finally, as our treatment of Segers's *Mountain Landscape* shows, formal analysis and technical art history, along with long-familiar phenomenological approaches, can offer surprising avenues toward decentering the human in the face of early modern art history's markedly anthropocentric dispositions, all in the service of imagining an alternative ecological condition. In short, to effectively understand the origins of our ecological crisis in early modern images, to unpack their ecological ambiguities, to discern their models of ecological thought, and to use them as platforms for imagining alternatives to our ecological present, one must hew closely to early modern sources while avoiding the prejudices of modern viewpoints. As acute as our current ecological crisis may be, we suspect that it is long-term thinking, not presentism, that must undergird an ecocritical revision of the history of early modern art. Thus, our hope is that ecocritical methods of early modern art history continue to develop in a way that proves capacious for virtually all practitioners of our art.

We therefore conclude with a final reflection on the potential benefits of an ecocritical re-orientation in the study of early modern art. First, established methods of art history, such as iconological studies, formalism, or technical art history, might, if approached from an ecocritical position, experience an unexpected renewal. Second, ecocritical perspectives can impart the entire tradition of art-nature studies within early modern art history with a novel dimension, one that foregrounds the connectedness of terrestrial elements and forces as well as the embeddedness of human and more-than human life in a fluid meshwork of interdependencies. Third, studies of early modern art putatively devoted to other topics—say, political, colonial, material, gender, media, and other modes of art history—can, through ecological considerations, likewise acquire a new way to deepen and expand their arguments. And lastly, the possible rewards of an ecocritical methodology of early modern art history do not end with art history as such. We have contended that the history of early modern art has a distinctive potential to accommodate ecocritical perspectives. In much the same vein, we discern that the history of early modern art has an exceptional capacity to project ecological models of thought that differ from those of our own times—paradigms that enrich our understanding of the past while mapping a path to an alternative future.

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All translations are the authors' except where otherwise noted.

1 For an historiographical overview and analysis, see Margit Stadlober, *Der Wald in der Malerei und der Graphik des Donaustils*, Vienna 2006, 81–88.
2 On the specific species represented, see, for example, ibid., 85; for the argument that the watercolor shows a fictional place, ibid., 81 – 83.
3 *Albrecht Dürer: Ein Künstler in seiner Stadt* (exh. cat. Nuremberg, Stadtmuseum Fembohaus), ed. by Matthias Mende, Nuremberg 2000, 26 – 27; on the topographical specificity of Dürer's watercolors in general, see Kristina Herrmann-Fiore, Dürers neue Kunst der Landschaftsaquarelle, in: *Albrecht Dürer* (exh. cat. Vienna, Albertina), ed. by Klaus A. Schröder and Maria L. Sternath, Ostfildern-Ruit 2003, 26 – 43.
4 Stadlober 2006 (as in note 1), 83; see, in addition, Christopher S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, 2nd ed., London 2014, 128 (outlining the significance of the clouds in Dürer's "impromptu [composition] out of the natural material").
5 On the humanistic aspiration, see, for instance, Hermann Leber, *Albrecht Dürers Landschaftsaquarelle: Topographie und Genese*, Hildesheim et al. 1988, 170 – 193; exh. cat. *Albrecht Dürer* 2003 (as in note 3), 206 – 207, cat. no. 41 (Matthias Mende); Johann Konrad

Eberlein, Dürer und Franken: Fränkische Vorbilder in Dürers Druckgraphik, in: Liana Zettl and Carlo Jahn (eds.), *Der Rasen wird 500, 1503 – 2003: Beiträge zu Albrecht Dürer und seinem Rasenstück*, Nuremberg 2003, 43 – 49, here 48.

6 On the connections between empirically oriented modes of artistic naturalism and both the rationalized exploration and objectifying appropriation of nature under, for instance, European global colonialism, see, for example, Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment*, Chicago and London 2012.

7 On the history of the concept of ecology, see i.a. Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1994; and Frank N. Egerton's "History of Ecological Sciences" published in the *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* between 2001 and 2022.

8 Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*, Cambridge, MA 2018, 135 – 157; see, in addition, Alan C. Braddock, *Implication: An Ecocritical Dictionary for Art History*, New Haven, CT 2023, esp. 8 – 23.

9 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, London and New Brunswick, NJ 2000.

10 See, for instance, Bruno Latour, *Politiques de la nature: Comment faire entrer les sciences en démocratie*, Paris 1999; Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London and New York 1993; Émilie Hache, *Ce à quoi nous tenons: Propositions pour une écologie pragmatique*, Paris 2011; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, Chicago and London 2021.

11 Cf. in contrast Stadlober 2006 (as in note 1), 81, which argues that the image contains no hint of human activity.

12 For Dürer's interest in quarries and geological formations, see Kristina Herrmann-Fiore, *Dürers Landschaftsaquarelle: Ihre kunstgeschichtliche Stellung und Eigenart als farbige Landschaftsbilder*, Frankfurt et al. 1972, 31 – 36, and Christopher P. Heuer, Evaporating Dürer, in: *Grey Room* 2021, no. 85, 40 – 69, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/grey_a_00331 (last access 12 December 2024).

13 The importance of the sky is also reflected in the watercolor on the back of the sheet, which can be read as a play of colors under heavy clouds.

14 Daniel Hess, Nature as Art's Supreme Guide: Dürer's Nature and Landscape Studies, trans. by Catherine Framm, in: *The Early Dürer* (exh. cat. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum), ed. by idem and Thomas Eser, Nuremberg 2012, 117 – 131, here 130–131.

15 We reservedly use "early modern" as a shorthand for the period 1400 – 1800 because it usefully implies how this time served as the crucible for the modern eco-crisis, including through the entangled, global processes of European colonization, natural resource extraction, and socio-political exploitation. We nevertheless suspect the more speculative approaches to ecocritical early modern art history outlined below will ultimately upset Western-centric narratives while highlighting the differences between our own time and the period 1400 – 1800, as well as that epoch's commonalities with earlier eras, thus destabilizing "early modern" as a term. On the concept of modernity as a product of coloniality, see i.a. Aníbal Quijano, Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad, in: *Perú Indígena* 13, 1992, no. 29, 11 – 20.

16 For overviews of ecocritical studies of the early modern period from areas of history other than the history of art, see: Karen Raber, Recent Ecocritical Studies of Renaissance Literature, in: *English Literary Renaissance* 37, 2007, no. 1, 151 – 171; and i.a., Zümre Gizem Yılmaz, Bibliography for Work in Ecocriticism, in: *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16, 2014, no. 4, DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2553 (last access 8 December 2023); Gwilym Jones, Environmental Renaissance Studies, in: *Literature Compass* 14, 2017, no. 10, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12407 (last access 8 December 2023); and Todd A. Borlik, Renaissance Literature and the Environment, in: *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 20 June 2022, URL: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1311 (last access 8 December 2023).

17 Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History*, Manchester 2019, 3 (for the quotes) and for further reading 29 – 44 ("The evolution of ecocritical art history"). In addition, see the overview of important streams of thought in this movement in Olga Smith, review of Karl Kusserow (ed.), *Picture Ecology: Art and Ecocriticism in Planetary Perspective*, in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual* 3, 2022, no. 3, 709 – 714, DOI: https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2022.3.90397 (last access 12 August 2024). As an example of the green turn in modern and contemporary art history, see Peter J. Schneemann, Der ökologische Imperativ als Paradigma einer engagierten Kunstgeschichte, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 85, 2022, no. 4, 433 – 439, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/ZKG-2022-4002 (last access 12 August 2024).

18 Some representative examples of recent work in this vein include Barbara Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City*, Austin 2015; Millie Gimmel, An Ecocritical Evaluation of Book XI of the Florentine Codex, in: Thomas Hallock, Ivo Kamps, and Karen L. Raber (eds.), *Early Modern Ecostudies: From the Florentine Codex to Shakespeare*, New York 2008, 167 – 180; Sooa Im McCormick, Re-Reading Imagery of Tilling and Weaving in the Context of

the Little Ice Age, in: De-nin D. Lee (ed.), *Eco-Art History in East and Southeast Asia,* Newcastle upon Tyne 2019, 1 – 46; Sugata Ray, *Climate Change and the Art of Devotion: Geoaesthetics in the Land of Krishna, 1550 – 1850*, Seattle 2019; Dipti Khera, *The Place of Many Moods: Udaipur's Painted Lands and India's Eighteenth Century*, Princeton, NJ 2020; Anne-Sophie Tribot et al., Multi-Secular and Regional Trends of Aquatic Biodiversity in European Early Modern Paintings: Toward an Ecological and Historical Significance, in: *Ecology and Society* 26, 2021, no. 4, DOI: https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12740-260426 (last access 12 August 2024); James Pilgrim, Jacopo Bassano and the Flood of Feltre, in: *The Art Bulletin* 105, 2023, no. 3, 115 – 137; the essays in Christine Göttler and Mia M. Mochizuki (eds.), *Landscape and Earth in Early Modernity: Picturing Unruly Nature*, Amsterdam 2023; and Jesús Muñoz Morcillo, *Renaissance der Ekphrasis – Ekphrasis der Renaissance: Transformationen einer einflussreichen ästhetischen Kategorie in Kunst, Literatur und Wissenschaft*, Berlin and Boston 2024, 109 – 156.

19 Rebecca Zorach, What Future?, in: *I Tatti Studies* 22, 2019, no. 2, 421 – 428, here 422.

20 Andrew Patrizio relates ecocritical art history to feminist and queer theory, social political theory (especially anarchism), new materialism, posthumanism and animal studies; on the "evolution of ecocritical art history," see Patrizio 2019 (as in note 17), 29 – 44. For an important earlier attempt to address the visual ecologically, see James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Boston 1979.

21 Braddock 2023 (as in note 8), 8 and 20; for a similar position, see Esme Garlake, Towards an Ecocritical Art History, in: *Environmental History Now*, 4 May 2023, URL: https://envhistnow.com/2023/05/04/towards-an-ecocritical-art-history/ (last access 5 August 2024).

22 In the interest of thematic coherence, all four case studies address the felling of trees; many other themes would have been equally appropriate. Among the vast literature on trees and forests in the early modern period, we would like to highlight the most recent art history books: Leopoldine Prosperetti, *Woodland Imagery in Northern Art, c. 1500 – 1800: Poetry and Ecology*, London 2022; Daniela Bohde and Astrid Zenkert (eds.), *Der Wald in der Frühen Neuzeit zwischen Erfahrung und Erfindung: Naturästhetik und Naturnutzung in interdisziplinärer Perspektive*, Cologne 2023.

23 On the problematic role of Europe in the genesis of the culture/nature dichotomy that ecocritical theory has identified as a main cause of today's global ecocrisis, see note 10 and i.a. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA and London 2007; and Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. by Janet Lloyd, Chicago and London 2013.

24 Our thinking has benefited from experts such as Dipti Khera, Barbara Mundy, and Sugata Ray, all cited in note 18 above.

25 See Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, Berkeley, CA 1967; Lynn White, Jr., The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis, in: *Science* N.S. 155, 1967, no. 3767 1203 – 1207. For later cornerstone publications see, for instance, Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900 – 1900*, Cambridge 1986; Ruth Groh and Dieter Groh, *Zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur*, 2 vols., Frankfurt 1991 – 1996; Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600 – 1860*, Cambridge 1995. For more recent publications, see note 16.

26 Groh and Groh 1991 – 1996 (as in note 25), vol. 1, 11 et passim. For studies that assess the roles of early modern images and artmaking as catalysts of the present ecological crisis, see, for instance, Christopher P. Heuer, *Into the White: The Renaissance Arctic and the End of the Image*, New York 2019; Annick Benavides, Spiritual Mining: Augustinian Images of Extraction in Colonial Peru, in: *The Art Bulletin* 104, 2022, no. 4, 46 – 69; Mónica Domínguez Torres, *Pearls for the Crown: Art, Nature, and Race in the Age of Spanish Expansion*, University Park, PA 2024; Maurice Saß, The Predatory Core: Peter Paul Rubens and the Hunt, in: *The Art Bulletin* 106, 2024, no. 4, 6 – 32.

27 See Victor I. Stoichiţă, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. by Anne-Marie Glasheen, Cambridge and New York 1997.

28 See, i.a., *Hot Dry Men, Cold Wet Women: The Theory of Humors in Western European Art, 1575 – 1700* (exh. cat. Omaha, Joslyn Art Museum; Little Rock, Arkansas Art Center; Sarasota, John and Marble Ringling Museum), ed. by Zirka Z. Filipczak, New York 1997; *Mutter Erde: Vorstellungen von Natur und Weiblichkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit* (exh. cat. Göttingen, Kunstsammlung der Universität et al.), ed. by Maurice Saß and Iris Wenderholm, Petersberg 2017.

29 See, i.a., Jörge Bellin and Ulrich Pfisterer (eds.), *Körperbilder der Macht, 1300 – 1800: Beiträge zu einer Ikonographie des Politischen in Aktion*, Berlin and Boston 2022.

30 See, i.a., Pamela A. Patton (ed.), *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, Leiden and Boston 2016.

31 See, i.a., Eric Jorink, Joanna Woodall, and Edward H. Wouk (eds.), *Humans and Other Animals* (Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art, vol. 71), Leiden and Boston 2021.

32 For the problematics of the nature/culture dichotomy, see notes 10 and 23.
33 The Miller Atlas is a composite document containing a world map by the Portuguese cartographer Lopo Homem as well as Reinel maps, including *Terra Brasilis*; see F. Albert Kammerer, The Lopo Homem Map Once More, in: *The Geographical Journal* 91, 1938, no. 5, 450 – 453. The map's status as perhaps the first representation of colonial-era Brazilian deforestation was first recognized by Isa Adonias (*Mapa: Imagens de Formação Territorial Brasileira*, trans. by Gloria Rodriguez and H. Sabrina Gledhill, Rio de Janeiro 1993) and has been recently discussed by Shelley Karen Perlove, Precious Hardwoods of Colonial America: Grueling Production and Material Splendor (paper presented at the College Art Association 112th Annual Conference, New York, February 2023), and Erin Wrightson, Forest Mappings: Brazilwood Extraction and Indigenous Knowledge in 16th-century Brazil (paper presented at the 36th Congress of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art, Lyon, June 2024).
34 Marcel Destombes, Lopo Homem's Atlas of 1519, in: *The Geographical Journal* 90, 1937, no. 5, 460 – 464, here 462.
35 Jörn Seeman, Texto e Contexto em Mapas do "Descobrimento": Uma Leitura "entre as linhas" do *Terra Brasilis* (1519), in: *Maquinações (UEL)* 1, 2007, 1 – 4, here 2 – 3.
36 On the dating of the Miller Atlas charts, see Armando F. Zuzarte Cortesão with Avelino Teixera da Mota, *Portvgaliae Monumenta Cartographica*, 6 vols., Lisbon 1960, vol. 1, 61.
37 The heterotopia of green worlds in early modern art, including maps and city views, is described in Jodi Cranston, *Green Worlds of Renaissance Venice*, University Park, PA 2021, esp. 111 – 138.
38 See Ricardo Duarte Filho, Land/Body, in: Jens Andermann, Gabriel Giorgi, and Victoria Saramago (eds.), *Handbook of Latin American Environmental Aesthetics*, Berlin and Boston 2023, 257 – 269, esp. 257 – 259.
39 Ibid., 258. On the cartographic representation of Brazilwood in this period, see Yuri T. Rocha, Andrea Presotto, and Felisberto Cavalheiro, The Representation of Caesalpinia Echinata (Brazilwood) in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Maps, in: *Earth Sciences: Anais da Academia Brasiliera de Ciências* 79, 2007, no. 4, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1590/S0001-37652007000400014 (last access 8 December 2023).
40 See Bárbara Polo Martín, El reflejo de la esclavitud en la cartografía del siglo XVI: La carta del Lopo Homem, in: Elena Acosta Guerrero (ed.), *XXI Coloquio de Historia Canario-Americana*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 2016, URL: https://revistas.grancanaria.com/index.php/CHCA/article/view/9500/8999 (last access 2 October 2025), 1 – 9, here 7.
41 See ibid., 5 and 7.
42 On the Gulf of Guinea as a site of the Portuguese enslavement of Africans, see, for instance, Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, The Profits of the Portuguese-Brazilian Transatlantic Slave Trade: Challenges and Possibilities, in: Tamira Combrink and Matthias van Rossum (eds.), *Europe and Slavery: Revisiting the Impact of Slave-Based Activities on European Economies, 1500 – 1850*, in: *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 42, 2021, no. 1, 77 – 104, here 79.
43 Rafael Moreira, Pedro e Jorge Reinel (at.1504-60): Dois cartógrafos negros na côrte de d. Manuel de Portugal (1495 – 1521), in: *Terra Brasilis: Revista da Rede Brasileira de História da Geografia e Geografica Histórica* 4, 2015, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/terrabrasilis.1209 (last access 8 December 2023), 1 – 14.
44 Ibid.
45 For a useful introduction to sixteenth-century European cartography, see, for instance, David Woodward (ed.), *The History of Cartography*, vols. 3.1 – 2, *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, Chicago and London 2007.
46 On the formal characteristics of the Miller Atlas, see, for example, Kammerer 1938 (as in note 33). On such representational map cycles, see Francesca Fiorani, *The Marvel of Maps: Art, Cartography and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven and London 2005.
47 Destombes 1937 (as in note 34), 464.
48 On the role of Cabral, see, for instance, Seeman 2007 (as in note 35), 2.
49 On art's ways of forming human understandings of land and landscape, see, for example, Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Shaping Roman Landscape: Ecocritical Approaches to Architecture and Wall Painting*, Los Angeles 2023, 25.
50 On the planetary dimensions of the present ecological catastrophe, see Chakrabarty 2021 (as in note 10), esp. 1 – 20.
51 See, for instance, Susanna Berger, *The Art of Philosophy: Visual Thinking in Europe from the Late Renaissance to the Early Enlightenment*, Princeton, NJ 2017.
52 See already James Elkins, On Monstrously Ambiguous Paintings, in: *History and Theory* 32, 1993, no. 3, 227 – 247; and i.a. Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford 2007; Jennifer Nelson, *Disharmony of the Spheres: The Europe of Holbein's* Ambassadors, University Park, PA 2019; Hillard von Thiessen, *Das Zeitalter der Ambiguität: Vom Umgang mit Werten und Normen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Cologne 2021.
53 See *Die flämische Landschaft, 1520 – 1700* (exh. cat. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), Lingen 2003, 102 – 103, cat. no. 31 (Alexander Wied).
54 See ibid., 48 – 49, cat. no. 2 (idem).
55 For wood and tree as Christian symbols, see, for instance, Sara Ritchey, Spiritual Arborescence: Trees in the Medieval Christian Imagination, in: *Spiritus: A*

Journal of Christian Spirituality 8, 2008, no. 1, 64 – 82; Gregory C. Bryda, *The Trees of the Cross: Wood as Subject and Medium in the Art of Late Medieval Germany*, New Haven and London 2023. For the quote, see "The Dream of the Rood," in: *Old and Middle English c. 890 – c. 1400: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. and trans. by Elaine Treharne, Oxford 2003, 108 – 115, here line 29 – 30.

56 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, or, Lives of the Saints*, trans. by William Caxton, 7 vols., London 1900, vol. 5, 199.

57 For tree trunks (and rarely woodcutters) in depictions of the saint, see Susan Donahue Kuretsky, Rembrandt's Tree Stump: An Iconographic Attribute of St. Jerome, in: *The Art Bulletin* 56, 1974, no. 4, 571 – 580; April Oettinger, Anthropomorphic Trees and Animated Nature in Lorenzo Lotto's 1509 *St. Jerome*, in: eadem, Karen H. Goodchild, and Leopoldine Prosperetti (eds.), *Green Worlds in Early Modern Italy: Art and the Verdant Earth*, Amsterdam 2019, 49 – 67.

58 Mt 3,10 and Lk 3,9 (KJV); and, in addition, Mt 7,19.

59 Besides the many medieval examples, see, for instance, Jacopo del Sellaio, *Saint John the Baptist*, ca. 1485, tempera on canvas, 157 × 80 cm, Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 5957; Hans Kemmer, *The Baptism of Christ* (The Wittinghof epitaph), 1552, oil on panel, 126 × 82 cm, Lübeck, St. Annen-Museum, inv. no. 122; El Greco, *The Baptism of Christ*, 1597 – 1600, oil on canvas, 350 × 144 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. no. P000821.

60 A similar analogy of a Christian martyrdom with the felling of tree can be found in depictions of the legend of Peter Martyr. In contrast, the felling of pagan trees could be a means of Christianization (see note 75).

61 For an overview of this depletion, see Jed O. Kaplan, Kristen M. Krumhardt, and Niklaus Zimmermann, The Prehistoric and Preindustrial Deforestation of Europe, in: *Quaternary Science Reviews* 28, 2009, nos. 27–28, 3016 – 3034.

62 Joachim Radkau, *Wood: A History*, trans. by Patrick Camiller, Cambridge 2012, 24. In addition, see Karl Appuhn, *A Forest on the Sea: Environmental Expertise in Renaissance Venice*, Baltimore 2009.

63 The defecating figure is a reference to Patinir, who van Mander attests to having used it as his trademark. See Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, Haarlem 1604, fol. 219r.

64 On windsnap, see, for example, Tristan Gooley, *How to Read a Tree*, London 2023, 76.

65 Jacobus de Voragine 1900 (as in note 56), vol. 7, 17 – 18.

66 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You, in: eadem (ed.), *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, Durham, NC and London 1997, 1 – 37.

67 See, for instance, Melissa Lane, *Eco-Republic: Ancient Thinking for a Green Age*, Oxford 2011; Annette Kehnel, *Wir konnten auch anders: Eine kurze Geschichte der Nachhaltigkeit*, Munich 2021.

68 On destructive extraction, see, for instance, Horst Bredekamp, Der Mensch als Mörder der Natur: Das *Iudicium Iovis* von Paulus Niavis und die Leibmetaphorik, in: Heimo Reinitzer (ed.), *All Geschöpf ist Zung' und Mund: Beiträge aus dem Grenzbereich von Naturkunde und Theologie*, Hamburg 1984, 261 – 283; on overexploitation, see notes 61, 62, and 85; on animals, see e.g. Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Cry of Nature: Art and the Making of Animal Rights*, London 2013, 60 – 109.

69 See i.a. Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism*, London and New York 2006, 3 – 4 and 32 – 33; Todd A. Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature: Green Pastures*, New York and London 2011, 13 – 14.

70 Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (eds.), *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, Basingstoke and New York 2007.

71 See Elizabeth D. Gruber, *The Eco-Self in Early Modern English Literature*, Amsterdam 2023, as well as Erin Drew and John Sitter, Ecocriticism and Eighteenth-Century English Studies, in: *Literature Compass* 8, 2011, no. 5, 227 – 239.

72 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII.725 – 878. On the literary tradition, see Rita degl'Innocenti Pierini, *Tra Ovidio e Seneca*, Bologna 1990, 37 – 102; for the iconography of the rarely-depicted myth, see i.a. Stefan Bartilla, Erysichthon fällt die Ceres-Eiche: Ein Gemälde von Jakob Grimmer und Gillis Mostaert und seine Deutung, in: *Umění* 51, 2003, 362 – 369.

73 For a comparable bleeding of a plant or tree, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX.344 – 345 and Virgil, *Aeneid* III.28.

74 Consider, for instance, the mythical figures Paraibios and Halirhotius or Anagyrous; Arkas and Rhoikos, on the other hand, are said to have saved a sacred tree; in addition, see Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 6.2.27 and, as a particularly valuable historical source, see the inscription from Spoleto, which forbids the violation of a sacred grove. See Robert S. Santucci, Eating up Time in Ovid's Erysichthon Episode (*Metamorphoses* 8.738 – 878), in: Esther Eidinow and Lisa Maurizio (eds.), *Narratives of Time and Gender in Antiquity*, London and New York 2020, 136 – 149, here 138.

75 Lucan, *De bello civili* III.399 – 452; see i.a. Antony Augoustakis, Cutting Down the Grove in Lucan, Valerius Maximus and Dio Cassius, in: *The Classical Quarterly* 56, 2006, no. 2, 634 – 638. On Charlemagne, see Bernard S. Bachrach, *Charlemagne's Early Campaigns (768 – 777): A Diplomatic and Military Analysis*, Leiden and Boston 2013, 237 – 239; on St. Boniface, see Ken Dowden, *European Paganism: The Realities of*

Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Abingdon and New York 2000, 70 – 72.

76 *Ovidio Methamorphoseos vulgare*, Venice 1497, fol. 70r (“Questo Crasiton fuo pessimo homo. Tanto che tuti li dei spregiava & specialmente la dea Ceres”); Ludovico Dolce, *Le trasformationi*, Venice 1553, 186 (“Sprezzator de gl’Iddii fu Erisittone / Tal, che d’honor non ne degnava alcuno”). See, in addition, K. Sarah-Jane Murray and Matthieu Boyd (eds.), *The Medieval French* Ovide moralisé*: An English Translation*, Cambridge 2023, 610 – 626.

77 See Max Denzler, Erysichthon, in: Otto Schmidt (ed.), *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 5, Stuttgart 1966, col. 1391 – 1405.

78 Callimachus, *The Hymns* VI.55 – 56.

79 William D. Reynolds, *The* Ovidius Moralizatus *of Petrus Berchorius: An Introduction and Translation*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana 1971, 319.

80 For the original French quote and a German translation of the whole passage, see Bartilla 2003 (as in note 72), 365 and 368 – 369.

81 Adelbert von Keller et al. (eds.), *Hans Sachs*, 26 vols., Stuttgart 1870 – 1908, vol. 17, 495: “Allein groß gut zu gwinnen tracht | Das der geitzhunger ihn besitzt: | Er schind, schabt, finantzt und popitzt | Ohn scham […].”

82 Natale Conti, *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri decem*, Venice 1567, fol. 160r (“Quare, ut summantim dicam, & pietas in Deos immortales, & in rebus agendis prudentia, & in praesentibus bonis conservandis parsimonia maxime viro bono est necessaria, quod per Erisichthonis fabulam indicabatur”).

83 Gioseppe Horologgi in Giovanni Andrea dall’Anguillara, *Le metamorfosi di Ovidio*, Venice 1582, fol. 129v (“L’empio Eresittone spreggiatore della potentia de gli Dei, che fa taliare la quercia sacra a Cerere, che diremo che sia altro che l’avaritia?”).

84 Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion*, London 1613, 107; for a similar reference by Pierre de Ronsard, see Louisa MacKenzie, *The Poetry of Place: Lyric, Landscape, and Ideology in Renaissance France*, Toronto and London 2010, 135.

85 See Andrew McRae, Tree-Felling in Early Modern England: Michael Drayton’s Environmentalism, in: *The Review of English Studies* 63, 2012, no. 260, 410 – 430.

86 See i.a. Robert S. Santucci, Erysichthon Gets Fed: A Menu in Mary Zimmerman’s ‘Metamorphoses’, in: *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 28, 2021, no. 4, 502 – 509.

87 Guattari 2000 (as in note 9).

88 Van Mander 1604 (as in note 63), fol. 72v (Wtlegghingh): “By desen Godt-verachtenden gulsen Erisichthon, is te vergelijcken den vrecken gierigen Mensch / die geen ander Godt / oft Godlijcke macht en kent / dan het goudt en den rijckdom deser Weerelt.”

89 See remarks in notes 10, 16, and 68.

90 For instance, the recent and much-discussed Gaia theory and the early modern cosmological idea of a *catena aurea* overlap in notable ways; see Borlik 2011 (as in note 69), 24 – 74.

91 Descola 2013 (as in note 23), esp. 391 – 406, and Philippe Descola, *The Ecology of Others,* trans. by Geneviève Godbout and Benjamin P. Luley, Chicago 2013.

92 See, for instance, Maurice Saß, Without Nature: Rubens’s Wet Landscapes: From *oikeiosis* to ecomimesis, in: *Netherlands Yearbook of Art History* 73, 2023, 87 – 117.

93 Hubert Zapf, *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts*, London 2016, 4 et passim.

94 Alan C. Braddock, Ecocritical Art History, in: *American Art* 23, 2009, no. 2, 24 – 28, here 26. For two case studies on such evidence, see Braddock 2023 (as in note 8), 87 – 121 and 128 – 152.

95 On the relative fantasy and realism of the landscapes in Segers’s oeuvre, see, for example, Egbert Haverkamp Begemann, *Hercules Seghers*, Amsterdam 1968, 9 – 10.

96 On the ethos of dissolution in Segers’s printed oeuvre and its resonances with forms of destruction in nature, see Christopher P. Heuer, Entropic Segers, in: *Art History* 35, 2012, no. 5, 934 – 957, here 944.

97 Huigen Leeflang, For He Also Printed Paintings: Hercules Segers’s Painterly Prints, in: *Hercules Segers: Painter, Etcher* (exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; New York, The Metropolitan Museum), ed. by idem and Pieter Roelofs, 2 vols., Amsterdam 2017, vol. 1, 39 – 73, here 39.

98 See the entry in the online catalog of The British Museum at URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Sheepshanks-5516 (last access 8 December 2023).

99 See Borlik 2011 (as in note 69), 24 – 74.

100 On the aniconic, iconoclastic tendencies of Segers’s prints, see Amy Knight Powell, Segers’ Iconoclastic Vernacular, in: *Oxford Art Journal* 38, 2015, no. 3, 343 – 364.

101 On that relationship, see Madeleine Viljoen, Etching and Drawing in Early Modern Europe, in: *The Early Modern Painter-Etcher* (exh. cat. Philadelphia, Arthur Ross Gallery et al.), ed. by Michael Cole, University Park, PA 2006, 52 – 73.

102 See, for example, Gerd Blum, *Fenestra prospectiva: Architektonisch inszenierte Ausblicke. Alberti, Palladio, Agucchi*, Berlin and Boston 2015; and Zarmakoupi 2023 (as in note 49).

103 On the refusal of landscape images to place viewers in an omniscient and omnipotent position, see Saß 2023 (as in note 92), 97 – 107.

104 On Segers's use of chance in printmaking, see Barbara Pirthauer, *Zum Radierwerk des Hercules Segers: Studien zur Drucktechnik*, M.A. thesis, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich 1993, 120 – 123. In addition, see on the ecologies of early modern workshop practices Iris Brahms, Ecologies of Blue Paper: Dürer and Beyond, in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual* 4, 2023, no. 4, 603 – 638, DOI: https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.4.100736 (last access 30 November 2024); Marta Ajmar, Reciprocal Design in Italian Renaissance Wood Intarsia: Patterns, Parasites, and Human/More-than-Human Making, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 87, 2024, no. 1, 25 – 47.

105 See, for instance, Christopher P. Heuer, *The City Rehearsed: Object, Architecture, and Print in the Worlds of Hans Vredeman de Vries*, London and New York 2009, 36.

106 On the notion of such an ambient poetics, see Morton 2007 (as in note 23), 32 – 35.

107 Here, we draw upon Rebecca Zorach's research on the early modern trope of nature as artist: Rebecca Zorach, "The Designs of Nature: Form, Matter, and the Making of Art in Early Modern Europe," Bettie Alison Rand Lectures in Art History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 22 March 2021, 30 March 2021, 7 April 2021, and 15 April 2021.

108 On this suspicion of anachronism, see the comments in Maurice Saß and Hui Luan Tran in conversation with Gregor Wedekind, Ökologien frühneuzeitlicher Kunst: Neue Perspektiven und alte Fragen, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 87, 2024, no. 2, 153 – 165, here 153–154, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/zkg-2024-2002 (last access 12 August 2024).

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