

## NEW ROMANTICISM IN CONTEMPORARY ART

How are Current Debates of  
Contemporary Society Portrayed in the  
Visual Arts?

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history there have been various if not numerous artistic movements to have originated as a reaction or as a consequence of the social situation of each epoch. For instance, Renaissance, one of the most prominent cultural movements in art history, originated as a popular reaction against the church and the state, consequently rescinding the early hierarchies that had presided over the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment, another significant movement, aroused as a consequence of the need of people to escape from the old political and social order of the *ancien régime*, placing reason, science and rationality as the essential prerogatives for human beings. Although all artistic movements have gratefully and in their own unique way reflected the thoughts and beliefs representative to the social situation of each epoch, there has been none more persistent and continual as the Romantic movement. Originating as a reaction to the set of values supported by the Enlightenment and pushed forward by the French Revolution, Romanticism generated profound changes in the attitudes towards art and life in general influencing the Western thoughts and beliefs to the present day.

In fact, the Romantic project seems to be unfinished even today as a new generation of artists skilfully revive in their work the Romantic spirit and consequently “reanimate the classical image of the artist” as a creative individual. Similarly to Romantic artists, these young artists develop in their work positive and creative counter-worlds that stand against the harsh and disillusioned reality of contemporary society and offer individuals a utopian haven as a privileged path along which they can connect and rediscover themselves.

I am referring to a particular artistic project, namely, *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art*, which in my perspective reflects the social situation of contemporary life and develops as such, new provocative and poetic

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counter-worlds in which individuals can retrieve and “leave the quotidian life behind them”. This artistic project not only redefines the relationship between individuals and nature so characteristic of the Romantic period, but also takes up the “[...] yearning for a paradisiacal, beautiful, and fairytale-like state; without, however, forgetting the abysmal, the uncanny, and the mysterious that is always lurking behind such idylls” (Hollein & Weinhart, 2005, p.17).

The Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art project was carried out independently by various artists from Scotland and abroad, to be specific thirteen artists, from which David Altmejd, Herman Bas, Peter Doig, Kaye Donachie, Uwe Henneken, Karen Kilimnik, Justine Kurland, Chaterine Opie, Christopher Orr, Laura Owens, Simon Periton, David Thorpe and Christina Wald. This artistic project consists of a great variety of paintings, photography and installations, created with the intention of “[...] transcending the quotidian, the openness of fragmentary visual narrative, which lies among dream, hallucination, manifestation, and theatricality [...]” (Hollein & Weinhart, 2005, p.35). What is intriguing about this project is the manner in which these artists make use of Romantic topoi and motives as a means of not only redefining the lost relationship between individuals and nature but also as means of re-establishing the long lost position of the Romantic artist.

In this essay I plan to further explore this project, however, with the intention of discussing and analysing various relevant issues of art and culture, and apply or mirror these issues to this artistic project. As such, I have selected three main and equally important topics, namely, Globalization, Post-Fordism and the Death of the Author, topics that have given place to various debates in past years, and are effectively represented in this project. The final objective of this discussion being that of portraying how today’s visual arts represent and respond to the social situation of our contemporary society.

The essay consists of three main chapters in which I discuss each of the above mentioned themes and use the Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art project as a case study to show how these artists mirror in their work the current social situation and react against it by making use of Romantic topoi and consequently creating an escapist art. In the first chapter, The Landscapes of Romantic Art, I offer a short historical overview of the Romantic movement

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placing additional emphasis on the Romantic landscape paintings. This chapter will help situate and determine the main features characteristic to the Romantic landscape paintings, features which in fact constitute an essential element in the Ideal Worlds project. In the second chapter The Globalized Society I discuss about various social changes that have been experienced within our globalized society and explain the need that people have for an escapist art. In the last chapter, The Role of the Artist, I discuss about the role of the artist in the Post-Fordist society and argue against the Modernist and Postmodernist belief about the Death of the Author. In this chapter, I will present this artistic project as a means through which this new generation of young artists are able to reposition and re-establish the Romantic position of the artist as a genius.

## THE LANDSCAPES OF ROMANTIC ART

Romanticism is a complex artistic, intellectual and literary movement having its roots in the last decade of the eighteenth century. The Romantic movement originated as a reaction to the Enlightenment and was pushed forward by the French Revolution. During Romanticism new set of values were introduced and the Enlightenment ideals were put to the test and proved to be inappropriate with the new model of thinking. These new values introduced the artist's creativity, the uniqueness of an artwork and the importance of expression and representation. Romantic artists no longer trusted the optimism of the Enlightenment and its faith in reason, science and rationality as the essential prerogatives for human beings. While previously artists searched for rules governing nature and human beings, Romantics went out in a quest for a direct communication between individuals and nature. (Honour & Fleming, 2005)

Defining Romanticism as an artistic movement is no easy task as there is no single or universal style in the visual arts. In fact, Hugh Honour, one of the leading art historians of the twentieth century argued that "There is no great paradigmatic Romantic masterpiece" that is to say, "no single work of art which exemplifies the aims and ideals of the Romantics as does, for example, David's

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Oath of the Horatii for those of Neoclassical painters.” (Honour, 1981, p.15). Because of the complex and versatile nature of the motives used in Romantic artworks, there is no specific style and no single work of art able to encapsulate the aims and ideas of Romanticism. Therefore, I will only focus on a particular aspect of Romanticism, namely, on the distinctive interest and passion of Romantic artists for landscape paintings. Interest and passion that continues to persist in contemporary art through the work of numerous artists that eagerly embrace the essential nature of the Romantic landscape paintings.

One important feature of Romantic landscape paintings is the presence of natural environments. Nature was considered to be the mediator through which individuals could grasp and comprehend the laws of God and consequently connect with their inner thoughts and feelings. As a means of obtaining a deeper understanding of the lessons learned from nature, romantic artists rejected the rational thought and the intellect and embraced the subjective experience and the appeal to their emotions.

John Constable, a prevalent Romantic landscaper, was able to capture in his landscapes, feelings of tranquillity and peace, a kind of divine harmony between the physical world and the spiritual condition of individuals. In his paintings he captured the innocence of his childhood and portrayed it from a mature perspective. Similarly, the landscapes of William Turner indicate a sense of maturity and personal feelings, although in a more ambiguous way. Turner's landscapes depict the helplessness of man in front of the overwhelming immensity of natural events. When comparing the landscape paintings of Constable and Turner, Hugh Honour explains that while “Constable's landscapes seem to reflect both the anguish and exaltation of intense private prayer, Turner's are more like the product of passionate physical intercourse with his medium, often akin to love-making and sometimes to rape” (Honour, p.95).

Romantic landscape paintings gained significance and became one of the most representative forms of Romantic art due to the artwork of one of the most proficient landscapers of Romanticism, namely, Gaspar David Friedrich. In his landscape paintings Friedrich incorporates a dual aesthetic category which moves between beauty and sublimity. Therefore, his landscapes depict both the beauty of nature so characteristic to Constable's work and the overpowering

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image of nature from Turner's paintings. While the beautiful aspect of nature is represented by the presence of solitary figures in a process of contemplating nature, the sublimity of nature is emphasized by the contrast between the magnitude of nature and the insignificant size of the human being.

The end product of his landscapes standing as the result of an arduous and solitary examination. Friedrich maintained the inner conviction that nature could only be interpreted through the private judgement of an individual, as such, his work expresses emotions and thoughts that could only come to life through a process of solitary confinement.

Friedrich's landscapes have stood the test of time and continue to inspire the work of numerous contemporary artists. In fact, Gerhard Richter argued in *The Daily Practice of Painting* that "A painting by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past. What is of the past is only the set of circumstances that allowed it to be painted [...] It is therefore quite possible to paint like Caspar David Friedrich today" (Richter, 1995, p.81). Richter's argument gains significance through the *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art* project as these artists embrace the Romantic ideals without, however, disregarding the influences of contemporary art and society.

## THE GLOBALIZED SOCIETY

If Romantic artists were faced with the rise of the Industrial Revolution that brought about a rapid increase of population, a drift from the county to the city, the spread of industrial production, the emerge of an urban proletariat and the growth of new social structures, likewise, contemporary artists are faced with the "rise of the network society" and globalization that bring about an increasingly and sophisticated information technology, global capitalism, the rise of nation state corporations, shifting conditions of unemployment and personal responsibilities, as well as a loss of personal identity.

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In this world of fast globalization and within a society that has been unsettled by rapid restructuring of social networks and growing mobility, people have the increasing desire and need to search for heavens of safety and intimacy, consequently running from the global community and retrieving to local costumes, past traditions and natural environments as means of rediscovering their individuality and their almost lost identity.

In fact, the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, one of 'the most prominent and influential theorist and analyst of modern communications and network age'<sup>1</sup>, argues about this clash between the global and the local community. In his book *The Rise of the Network Society*, Castells maintains that "[...] few people in the world feel identified with the global, cosmopolitan culture that populates the global networks [...] in contrast most people feel a strong regional or local identity [...]" (Castells, 2009, p.xxxiv). Furthermore, "Our world and our lives are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity", for Castells, the primary opposition to the power of globalization lying in "the widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization [...] on behalf of cultural singularity and people's control over their lives and environment" (Castells, 1997, p.2). Identity being considered by Castells as the rising power of local culture that offers resistance to the centrifugal force of capitalist globalization.

This resistance to the rapid globalization of our society is illustrated by the need that people have to escape from their quotidian life. At times these escape routes being so extreme that people screen themselves from reality in parallel universes such as *Second Life*<sup>2</sup>. In the midst of this globalized world, individuals start searching for an escapist art, for evocations of distant times, distant lands, for an idealized world with happy country folks and natural environments, or at least for images that could suggest that. This social situation is also reflected in today's' visual art and the artistic project I was previously referring to, namely, *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art*, does just that – offers

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Castells was hailed by the Financial Times as "the most prominent and influential theorist and analyst of modern communications and network age"

<sup>2</sup> *Second Life* – 3D virtual World developed by Linden Lab (23 June 2003) - in which users can customize their avatar , socialize, make friends, have businesses, etc. – create and model a personalized virtual life

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people an escapist route through which individuals are able to leave the globalized society behind them and penetrate into new and provocative counter-worlds in which they can reshape their relationship with nature and consequently redefine their individuality. Therefore, this artistic project is not only standing as a resistance against the capitalist globalization but is also a bridge between the global and the individual identity.

This internal discontent with the current social situation and the necessity that people have to once again restore the primordial relationship between individuals and nature is accurately portrayed in Christopher Orr's painting *All We Need Is the Air We Breathe*<sup>3</sup>. The title of the painting already communicates on the behalf of the two anonymous subjects that "all they need is the air they bread" aphorism that already makes reference to the indispensable need of natural elements. Comparable to many Romantic paintings populated by individuals in natural landscapes, Orr's painting seems to stem from the same tradition, one that identifies the figures immerse in natural environments and articulates their intense desire to discover their inner selves.

Just as the subjects of Friedrich's painting *Kreidefelsen auf Rügen*<sup>4</sup> in which three figures are depicted in an act of contemplating the depth of the infinite abyss in front of them, Orr's painting depicts an almost similar situation, although in a more controversial way. If Friedrich's painting replicates the way people look at the world, Orr's painting addresses the craving that people have for a relationship with nature that seems to be almost impossible in today's globalized society.

The two central subjects of Orr's painting appear to be disconnected from reality, although being surrounded by an overwhelming panorama they fail to bind with the sublime that surrounds them, as if they have been deprived of experiencing profound sensations. In his description of Orr's painting, Francesco Manacorda postulates that Orr's paintings present a "degenerated version of the Romantic *Sehnsucht* that turns desire into indifference" the psychological states of these two subjects being "completely and pathologically unresponsive

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Orr – *All We Need is the Air We Breathe* – Appendix Figure 2 – art work part of the artistic project *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art*

<sup>4</sup> Caspar David Friedrich - *Kreidefelsen auf Rügen* – Appendix Figure 3

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to the potential devastating situation in which they are immersed” (Manacorda, 2005, p.219). It seems as if their social condition has affected their capacity to process the threat of natural situations.

Similarly to the prisoners of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, the subjects of this painting have to overcome various obstacles. If the prisoners of Plato’s allegory who have lived their entire life chained in a cave while watching shadows of real objects being projected on the wall, once freed from the cave and confronted with nature, need time to understand the real reality, Orr’s subjects present a similar anomaly. Once freed from the globalized community and confronted with natural environments, need time to recall and understand the primordial relation between individuals and nature.

The urban look of these subjects and their slightly out-of-date clothes underlines their metaphorical condition as estranged individuals that do not belong to that natural setting. Their position on the top of a cliff that seems to be detached from the rest of the natural surroundings symbolizes our relationship with nature - as removed, uninvolved and only maintaining a minimal intervention with nature. The sense of curiosity portrayed by the hesitant interaction of the subjects with the natural surrounding creates a sensation of fusion between the two individuals and nature. This interaction with nature gives hope and indicates the self determination that these two individuals have in order to escape from their current social condition and gradually recognize the extraordinary potential for spiritual rebirth and individual transfiguration in the proximity of nature.

Manuel Castells’s argument that “Our world and our lives are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity”<sup>5</sup>, gains true validity through this artistic project, and especially through Orr’s painting *All We Need Is the Air We Breathe*. This existing conflict between globalization and identity is enhanced through the presence of anonymous subjects that feel the need to retrieve in natural environment as a way of escaping the rapid development of our contemporary society and regain a sense of identity and individuality.

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<sup>5</sup> Manuel Castells - *The Power of Identity - The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. (1997: p.2)

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## THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

In the previous chapter, *The Globalized Society*, I have discussed about the manner in which this creative and innovative project *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art*, deals with contemporary issues such as globalization by creating counter-worlds through which individuals can escape the rapid restructuring of social networks and become acquainted once again (though a process of contemplating nature) with their almost lost identity in the global community.

Apart from dealing with issues of globalization, contemporary artists are faced with the difficulties of being an artist in Post-Fordist times. However, before indicating the manner through which this artistic project deals with the issues put forward by our Post-Fordist society, it seems appropriate to briefly discuss what is Post-Fordism.

The name, Fordism, comes from Henry Ford and his Ford factory in which labour was situated within a strong hierarchy and extreme functional specialization, that is to say, during an entire day workers were required to repeatedly perform one single task. Apart from this serial labour and specialization of the working personnel, Fordism led as well to the standardization of consumer goods.

During the 1970, the Fordist world transformed into a Post-Fordist society in which workers are appreciated for their “[...] autonomy, self-determination and authenticity, but also creativity and idiosyncrasy [...] – values that “[...] had been part of the artistic ethic since the nineteenth century – its protagonist being the Bohemian artist [...] The artist being the model employee for the new work ethic” (Gielen & Bruyne, 2009, p.8).

Within this creative economy, we are experiencing a “tsunami of renewal, extension and change” that affects and almost eradicates the meaning of art as

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“defined in a romantic, modernist and postmodernist high art tradition”. According to this “new dominant ideology the word (art) has come to mean something very broad and vague, interchangeable with culture, creativity, artsy skills [...]” (Gielen & Bruyne, 2009, p.147). In fact, in one of his interviews, Paolo Virno affirms that “[...] in our times art has dissolved in society like an effervescent tablet in a glass of water. It has become a substantial part of Post-Fordist production processes and has largely lost its autonomy” (Gielen & Bruyne, 2009, p.12). As such, artists are being confronted with a rampant artistic blossoming of new creative industries that harm the creative and artistic position of the artist in society. Within this economic and social situation so characteristic of the Post-Fordist era, artists are faced with the need of redefining their artistic autonomy and their classical position of the artist as a genius.

In fact, Modernist and Postmodernist writers, such as, Ronald Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and others, already predicted the death of the author, and if transferred this concept to the field of visual arts, it will then signify the loss of the artist’s autonomy. The Romantic notion of the artist as the creator par excellence has been deeply questioned since the publication of Ronald Barthes’s essay *The Death of the Author*. In this essay Barthes proclaims the free interpretation of an artwork independently from the author’s (artist’s) intentions, therefore, criticizing the traditional belief of bearing in mind the author’s intentions when examining his work, arguing that the author is merely the vehicle through which a story is developed. In his view “The author is a modern figure, a product of our society” and once removed “the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile”, that is to say, “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (Barthes, 1977).

In a similar way, Michel Foucault argued in his essay *What is an Author?* that authors are an ideological creation of society and exist only as part of the structure of their work. Consequently, in *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida, demonstrated that authors are unable to determine the meaning of their work, as such meaning is beyond their ability to control.

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Without a doubt this announcement, of the death of the “artists” and the free interpretation of an work of art independently for the artist’s intentions, has been an announcemet long expected by art critics and apparently put into practice in the midst of these Post-Fordist times as artists are continuously confronted with the need of redefining their artistic autonomy.

In consonance with this current social situation of the artist, Rudi Laermans argues in his essay *Artistic Autonomy as Value and Practice*, that in the Post-Fordist society, “[...] a valid way to affirm artistic autonomy results in the paradox that a conformist contemporary artist must produce artworks that do not conform to any existing aesthetic standards [...] Paraphrasing other artists or quoting past stylistic conventions is a sin within contemporary art worlds because it is the visible negation of the ideal of the artistic autonomy” (Gielen & Bruyne, 2009, p.133,134). Following this line of thought we can argue that in these Post-Fordist times artists are confronted with an existing conflict between, on the one hand, the lost of the ideal of artistic autonomy, and, on the other hand, with the need to redefine this artistic autonomy without however conforming to any existing aesthetic standards.

Baring in mind the current situation of the Post-Fordist artist, we can now return to our *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art* project and pose two relevant questions, namely, How is the autonomy of the artist established through this artistic project? and secondly, if in these Post-Fordist times the autonomy of the artists is given to the extent to which artists are able to avoid “paraphrasing other artists or quoting past stylistic conventions”, How is the *Ideal Worlds* project able to do just that if these artists make use of Romantic topoi in the process of creating their artwork? Referring to the first question it could be said that the autonomy of the artist is established in this project through the physical and emotional dedication that these artists have during the entire process of creation. These artists carry out the spirit of Romanticism in their mind and soul and “[...] present a positive creative project beyond our everyday lives - and it includes the deliberate provocation that one can again employ beauty as an argument in art and regain the status of creative processes, and thus propagate the reanimation of the classical image of the artist” (Hollein & Weinhart, p.18).

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At this point I would like to make a short comparison between one of Peter Doig's paintings, *Figure in Mountain Landscape*<sup>6</sup> and one of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, namely, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*<sup>7</sup>, as I believe that this comparison will help clarify on the one hand, the relation of this project to the Romantic landscape painting, and, on the other hand, determine the manner through which this project establishes the autonomy of the artist in these Post-Fordist times.

As observed in the previous chapter, this artistic project makes use of Romantic motives and topoi in order to create an escapist route from the globalized society and involve individuals in natural environments in which they can rediscover their identity. Apart from offering an escape route, these natural environments fulfil as well a secondary purpose, that of guiding the artists themselves through a process of inner-fulfilment. This secondary purpose, so characteristic to Romantic landscape paintings, is very good portrayed in Peter Doig's painting *Figure in Mountain Landscape*.

Similarly to Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, in *Figure in Mountain Landscape*, Doig portrays himself in a quest for self-discovery and spiritual fulfilment through a process of contemplating nature. Both artists represent in their paintings the desire for a spiritual surrender of the self in which their individual autonomy gets dissolved in the overwhelming infinity of nature. If Friedrich's paintings present a dual aesthetic category that moves between beauty and sublimity, Orr's painting cannot be separated from both sides of this aesthetic divide. The aesthetic category of beauty is portrayed in both paintings by the effortless pleasure that both subjects seem to have in nature's vicinity and by the apparent correspondence between the artists and nature. The sublimity of these paintings is represented by the contrast between the small dimension of the human figure and the infinite dimension of nature which creates a feeling of helplessness and fragility of the human being in front of such infinite power of nature.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Doig – *Figure in Mountain Landscape* – painting part of the artistic project *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art*. Appendix - Figure 1

<sup>7</sup> Caspar David Friedrich – *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* - Appendix Figure 3

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In fact, both Friedrich and Orr seem to undergo through two phases of the sublimity of nature. A disjunctive phase which is emphasized by an agonizing experience of an immense gap between the power of nature and the fragility of the human being, and, a transcendent phase in which the subjects recuperate themselves and are able to connect and contemplate nature at a secondary level of reflection. The first phase of the sublimity of nature is portrayed by such images as, deep abysms, unattainable horizons and mountain peaks, infinite extension of natural surroundings and excessive size, spectacular panorama that awakes the mind and spirit of the individual. The transcendental phase is a self-discovery phase, a metaphase in which the subjects are able to achieve a higher theorising level and overcome their alienations.

The landscape of these two paintings is transformed into an aesthetic and self-discovery experience in which the human senses are overpowered by the massive size of nature, although, at the same time awakening our mental activity, and "[...] thanks to the activity of reason, it is possible to rise up from this state of being overpowered, to capture what one sees in concepts, and in this activity of intellectual ability to get a sense of oneself as a rational and thus higher being" (Hollein & Weinhart, 2005, p.77).

If we consider the previous analysis and return again to our initial issue, namely, the necessity that artists have to reaffirm their artistic autonomy in this Post-Fordist society, and ask all over the question How is the autonomy of the artist established through this artistic project?, we can then argue that these artists affirm their artistic autonomy by being physically and emotionally present in their artwork – as it happens in Doig's painting in which the feelings, emotions and thoughts of the artist himself become the central theme of the painting. These artists do not only affirm their autonomy, but re-establish the Romantic perception of the artist as the creator per excellence and consequently defy the Modernist and the Post-modernist prediction of the Death of the 'Artist'.

As far as it concerns the second question, namely, if in these Post–Fordist times the autonomy of the artists is given to the extent to which artists are able to "avoid paraphrasing other artists or quoting past stylistic conventions" – How is the Ideal Worlds project able to do just that if these artists make use of Romantic topoi in the process of creating their artworks? I would like to refer to

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one of Jorge Luis Borges's philosophical narrative as I believe that it will help clarify the issue under discussion. The story I am referring to is Pierre Menard – Autor del Don Quijote, which is a short philosophical narrative in which Borges gives the example of a contemporary author, named, Pierre Menard, who wants to rewrite in the twentieth century two chapters of Miguel de Cervantes's novel Don Quijote.

Borges describes the efforts of Pierre Menard as going beyond a mere translation of the Quijote, his intention being that of recreating the story in the original seventeenth century Spanish. Borges explains in the story that Menard "did not want to compos another Quixote, but to write the Quixote itself. Needless to mention, he never studied a mechanical transcription of the original as he did not want to copy it. His ambition was that of creating some pages which were capable of coinciding, word for word and line by line, with those of Miguel de Cervantes" (Borges, 1984, p.90)<sup>8</sup>. At the end of the story Borges argues that although Menard succeeded to reproduce two of the Don Quijote chapters, his story was only verbally identical to the original version, the meaning behind his story being completely different from that of Cervantes's novel. In fact, the end product of Menard's writings being considered as a better and improved version of the original story as it was enriched and transformed by the contemporary context in which Pierre Menard was writing.

If we consider Borges's argument in this philosophical narrative then we could say that although the artists from the Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art project make use of Romantic motives, topoi and ideals, they are still able to maintain their autonomy as their artwork is enriched and transformed by the contemporary context in which it being created. Thus, this artistic project is being able to generate in contemporary art a kind of romanticism equipped with modern tools - capable of superimposing the differences and similarities of both worlds. Therefore, although these artists "paraphrase and quote past stylistic conventions" they are able to maintain their artistic autonomy in this Post-Fordist society by creating an improved version of Romanticism, a contemporary "Romanticism" that has changed in meaning and representation.

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<sup>8</sup> - Personal Translation from Spanish version.

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## Conclusion

In this essay I have analysed from different perspectives the artistic project *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art*. The main purpose being that of portraying the way in which current issues in art, culture and society are mirrored or encountered in this artistic project. As such, I decided to discuss three main themes that have given place to various debates in past years, and associate these themes to this artistic project. The themes under discussion were related to issues of Globalization, The Role of the Artist in the Post-Fordist Society, and the Death of the Author.

Given the inseparable relation of this project to the Romantic landscape paintings, I have made a short introduction to the Romantic Landscape paintings and consequently describe the way in which Romantic motives, ideals and topoi are used by these artists in order to portray and react against the current social situation of our contemporary society. Just as previous artistic movements that have reacted against the social situation of each epoch, this artistic project reacts against the harsh and disillusioned reality of contemporary society, and therefore, offers individuals a utopian haven as a privileged path along which they can connect and rediscover their identity in the midst of our globalized world.

Accordingly, I have analysed and portrayed the means through which these artists respond to the current clash between globalization and identity by taking as an example one of the paintings part of this artistic project, namely, Orr's painting *All We Need Is the Air We Breathe*. In the analysis we have seen that at first sight the subjects of this painting appear to be disconnected from reality, failing to bind with the sublimity of nature surrounding them, this apparent anomaly being a given consequence of their urban precedence. The sense of interaction between these subjects and the natural environment surrounding them depicts the initial intention of this artistic project, that of reconnecting and recovering individuals from their social condition and gradually guiding them through a path in which they can regain their individuality.

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Moreover, I have argued that, apart from issues brought forward by globalization, artists are faced with a necessary need to affirm their artistic autonomy in the present Post-Fordist society. At the moment, contemporary artists are threatened to lose their autonomy - announcement long predicted by Modernist and Postmodernist writers, such as, Barthes, Foucault and Derrida. In this view, I have tried to illustrate the way in which this artistic project is able to reaffirm the autonomy of the artist without, however reproducing past traditions and artistic movements.

As such, I have argued that this artistic project reaffirms the artistic autonomy of the artist to the extent to which these artists are capable of directly involving themselves in the entire process of creation of the artworks. Using Peter Doig's painting, *Figure in Mountain Landscape* as an example, I have explicitly determined the level of artistic participation in this project. Due to their intense physical and emotional participation in the process of creation, these artists are able to re-establish through this artistic project the Romantic perception of the artist as a genius and consequently reposition their status as creator per excellence.

Furthermore, following Borges's argument in his philosophical narrative, *Pierre Menard, Autor del Don Quijote*, I have considered this artistic project to be a better and improved version of the Romantic ideals, as such, preserving the best of tradition without eradicating the influence of contemporary society.

To finalise, this artistic project can be considered as an artistic reaction against the current social situation, but also a wakeup call that makes individuals aware of their social and ideological position. Moreover, it creates as well an appropriate setting for contemporary artists to position themselves beyond the Post-Fordist creative industry in which art "dissolves itself in society like an effervescent tablet in a glass of water", therefore, helping them to affirm their autonomy.

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## Appendix

Peter Doig

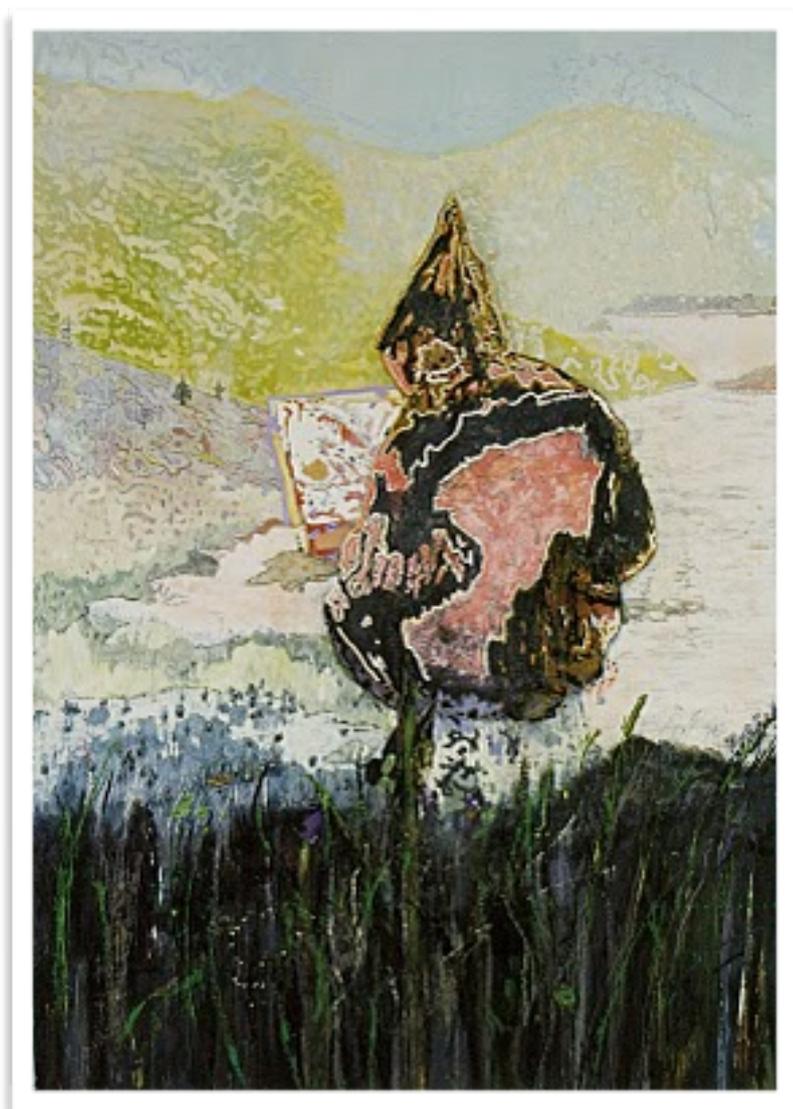


Figure 1

Figure in Mountain Landscape

Peter Doig

1999

Oil on Canvas – 267 x 195,5 cm

Collection of Dean Valentine  
and Amy Adelson, Los Angeles

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## Christopher Orr



Figure 2

All We Need Is the Air We Breathe

Christopher Orr

2004

Oil on Canvas – 17 x 11,6 cm

Magnus Edensvärd

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# Caspar David Friedrich

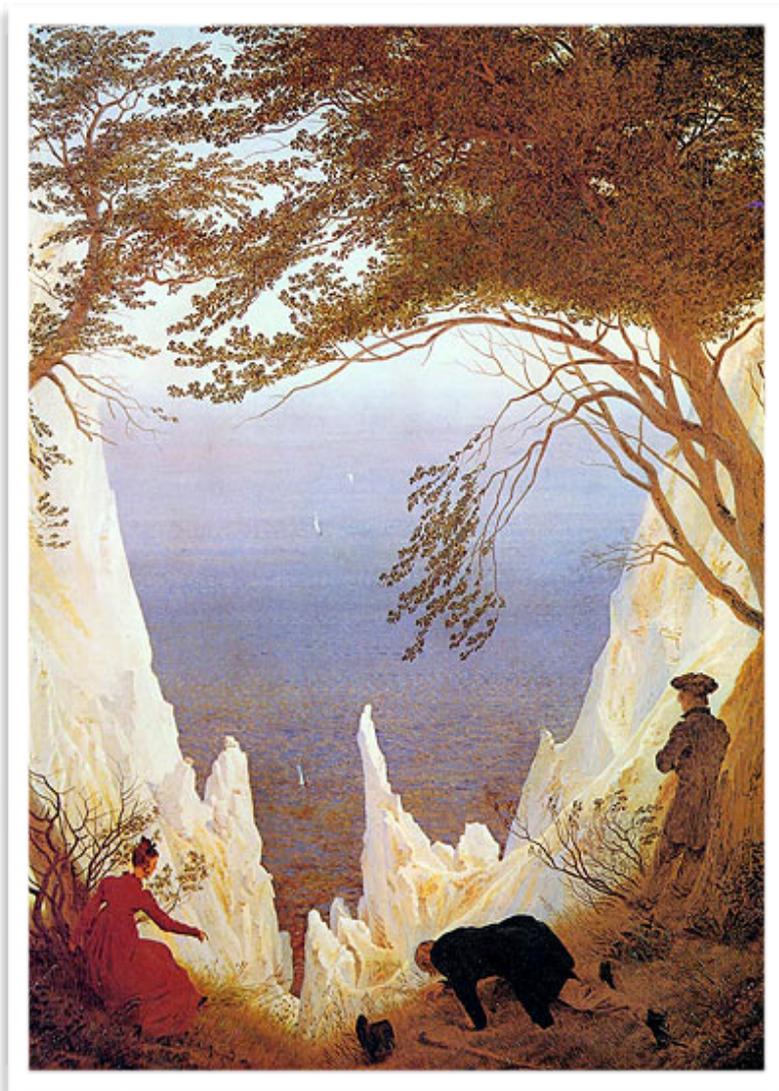


Figure 3

Kreidefelsen auf Rügen

Caspar David Friedrich

1818

Oil on Canvas – 90'5 x 71 cm

Museum Oskar Reinhart, Stadtgarten



Figure 4

Wanderer above the Sea of Fog

Caspar David Friedrich

1818

Oil on Canvas – 98,4 x 74,8 cm

Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg