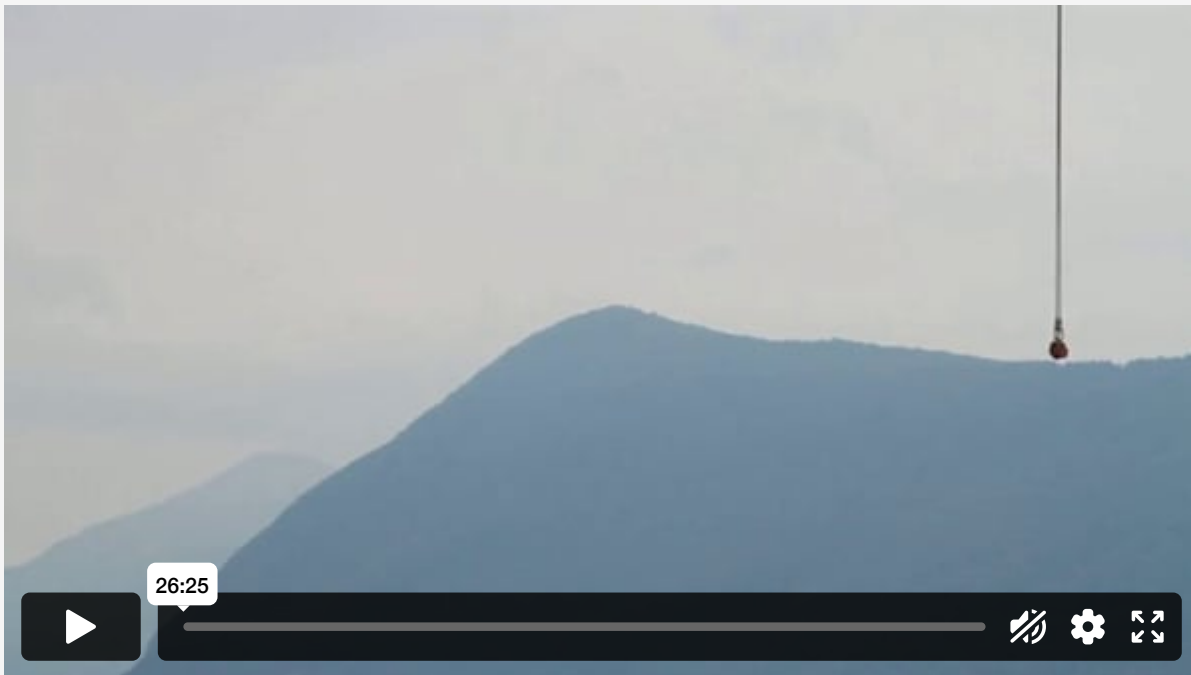


## Louis Sterrett: Blog

### Marco G. Ferrari and Humanity in Landscapes



On Friday May 24th, I went over to UChicago's Logan Art Center to check out the [final installment](#) of this shows for the DoVA MFA program, this last one being named "Sway". I got to the event in time to catch a screening of Marco G. Ferrari's short film, "Parabola" (embedded above).

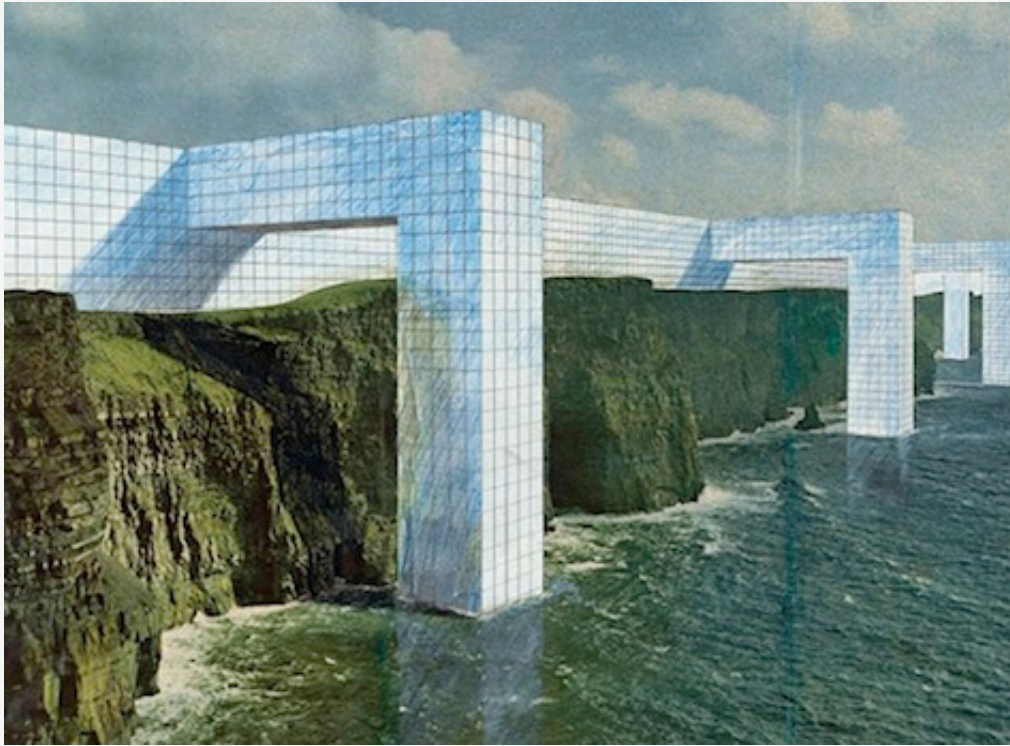


Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Ogden, Utah* (1874).

Given the mountainous terrain of the site where Ferrari is shooting, and the way in which objects are framed in the foreground while great landmasses and spaces loom in the distance, there's a sense of reference to the paintings and photographs of the American west of the early 19th century in the United States. This can be seen then as a gesture towards the Transcendental Art movement of that time period, with at least one noteworthy exception, however—that being that the undertone of Enlightenment progress still lingering in Transcendentalism seems to be missing—its inclusion in the piece would be short-sighted in a time of global capitalism. Ferrari's use of digitally zooming into the image reminds us that we're no longer looking at 19th century photography.

Of course the intellectuals of the 19th century weren't blindly optimistic either. Just as O'Sullivan's photograph above is able to evoke a sense of humanity's overcoming of nature it also reveals a menacing grandeur in the landscape. About this oddity of O'Sullivan's photographs, Joel Snyder writes in his essay "Territorial Photography" in W. J. T. Mitchell's *Landscape and Power*, "They work against popular conceptions of nature and the natural by defamiliarizing nature, by refusing to formulate the land of the Great Basin in the accessible and reassuring terms of the picturesque" (197). On the use of O'Sullivan's photography for the sake of educating future expedition leaders, Snyder shows that O'Sullivan emphasizes the massive and seemingly impossible undertaking of mastering these landscapes: "O'Sullivan's representation of the West is an awed stare into a landscape that is unmarked, unmeasured, and wild, a place in which man is not yet—and not without an immense future effort—the measure of all things" (196). Is the West

ours now? Is the world ours now?



Superstudio's *Il Monumento Continuo*, photo-collage, 1969

Just as I seem to be implying that the world's lands have now been dominated, I should reverse such a declaration by pointing out what we've yet to achieve technologically, geographically, and architecturally. Ferrari's film shows that in the 21st century, the landscapes still tower over us, both literally and figuratively. I'm reminded of daydream sketchings of megastructures by architectural firms like [Superstudio](#). There are great things yet to do.

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