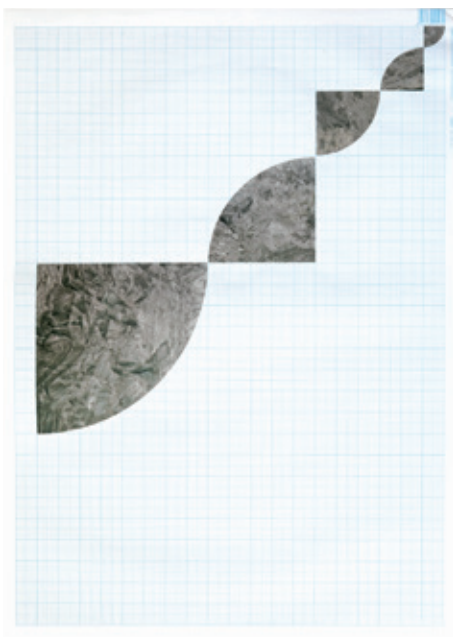
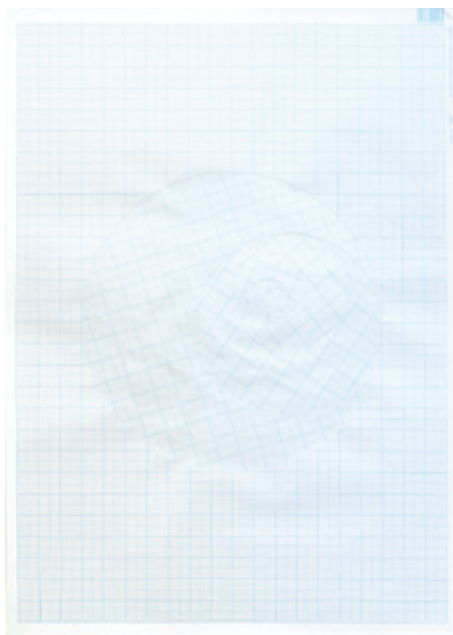




IZABELA PLUTA  
BLUE DISTANCE







## Space Opera

At the beginning of Iain M. Banks's novel *Excession* the reader is presented with a majestic landscape: a lighthouse built from crumbling stone and wood stands atop the craggy edge of a 2,000-metre high cliff face that runs north and south as far as the eye can see. A rolling oceanscape filled with whales and wheeling sea birds stretches over the horizon as a woman dressed in black braces herself against the fierce wind to regard the totality of this immense scene.

Banks's opening chapter features a mixture of sublime elements that are familiar to us from the visual lexicon of 19<sup>th</sup> century painters such as JMW

Turner, John Martin and Thomas Cole and, although the scene is amplified and expanded by a science fiction maximalism, its individual components are oddly familiar. That the scene is revealed to be a manufactured but non-virtual interior environment that is subsequently swallowed whole back into the workings of an even larger spaceship that contains it, this is a kind of space opera that speaks to our experience of the world.

In an age when social interaction can be wholly removed from the experience of real space, the natural landscape too takes on a ghostly non-presence in our imaginations. It becomes a thing of fiction, something that is not an environment, not nature, so much



as a *setting* in which something might happen. The limits of that event – what it is and what it might mean – are circumscribed by a litany of cultural tendencies and biases. The tradition of the sublime is now so ingrained in our imaginations that its code is second nature to us. When it appears absurdly inflated in literary fiction or in cinema, we simply understand what it is being said.

Yet our day-to-day experience of the landscape is usually far from dramatic. In the managed spaces of the city or in the hinterlands of industry and agriculture the classical sublime eludes us. What we find there instead are its faint echoes in unexpected coincidences: a fallen tree amongst a plantation of

standing trees, an ambiguous metal structure shaped like a house among tall weeds, the faux texture of a *tromp l'oeil* image of a stone wall. These are the images that Izabela Pluta presents for our consideration.

Removed from the grandeur of Edmund Burke's list of features of the typical sublime spectacle, the contemporary and realist nature of Pluta's work puts the viewer both within the image and *outside it*. The familiarity of these scenes and experiences seem poignantly recognisable – we could easily walk around these places and see these things. But it is because of that documentary aesthetic that we also feel so estranged from these moments. We hunger for the exceptional moment to

## List of works

cover:

*After The Pleasure of Ruins 1952/1977*  
(detail), 2014  
acrylic photo silk-screen on off-set print  
19 x 25 cm

previous page from left:

*Fibonacci collage #1–4*, 2014  
chromogenic prints on graph paper  
56 x 40 cm

*Uprooted tree*, 2014  
latex-based inkjet print  
280 x 360 cm

left:

*Structure*, 2014  
latex-based inkjet print  
280 x 360 cm

overleaf:

*Folly*, 2014 (detail)  
latex-based inkjet print  
1205 x 300 cm

back cover:

*Every odd page from a nineteenth century*  
*photo album*, 2014 (#17 & 18)  
pigment prints on photo rag  
series of 21, 28.5 x 36 cm each

put the quotidian experience into sharp relief, simultaneously entertained by the scope of the exotic yet comforted by a return to normality. Pluta's images offer no such escape – this is how it is. The artist's suite of collages and prints make this process even plainer – we overlay geometry, history and art on to the world to make sense of our place within it, yet when we see that process reflected back at us it seems incredibly strange.

There is an idea of landscape beyond the one we know. It is free of ideology and history, devoid of nature and culture, of stories and religion. It simply *is*. We have become weighed down by a set of ideas and philosophies that, like most fictions,

is a projection of our culture into the void. Yet it's a fiction that can also liberate us and allow us to imagine a more playful and engaging way of being in the world. Pluta's vision into the blue distance gives us a glimpse of what that place might look like.

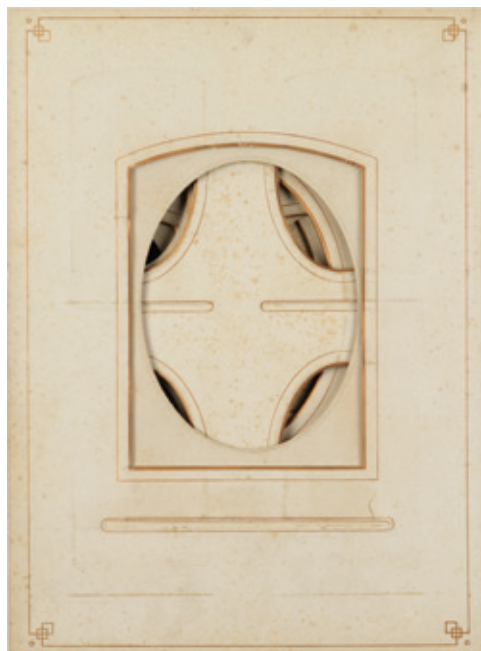
**Andrew Frost**











Izabela Pluta  
*Blue Distance*  
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