TITLE INFORMATION
Tel: +44 (0) 1394 389950
Email: uksales@accartbooks.com
Web: https://www.accartbooks.com/uk



Faux Mountains

Michael Jakob

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- A fascinating and almost unknown history which helps us to understand a visible form that became invisible
- The project culminated in an exhibition Michael Jakob curated at the GSD, Harvard (*Mountains and the Rise of Landscape*, with a section on faux mountains, January to March 2019)
- The book is, given its material, highly interdisciplinary; it is a contribution to both history in general and to the history of art, to aesthetics, to the history and theory of architecture and, last but not least, to the history and theory of landscape

Artificial mountains are a worldwide reality. Their presence influenced the history of urbanism, architecture, and landscape architecture. Burial sites use, very frequently, the intimidating shape of the man-made mountain. Incense burners in ancient China evoked the Five Sacred Mountains. Mount Parnassus in Greece became an important element in European garden history and a symbol of the Renaissance. In the Baroque Rome of the 17th century the most important artists worked on the constructions of huge ephemeral mounds in order to express more or less codified messages. The model of the artificial mountain was used as well during the French Revolution: the famous celebration of the Supreme Being took place on a gigantic faux mountain. The history of landscape architecture is characterized by the construction of architectural mounds, often built by using local excavation material.
The industrial revolution acted as another source for the rise of an anthropic topography, creating forms, which we do not recognise anymore as totally artificial. Architects have found in the form of mountains a model and a gestalt with which to play in an ironic way. In twentieth-century art, mountains are ubiquitous, culminating in Robert Smithson's masterful exploration of reversed, displaced, and rebuilt mountains. Michael Jakob's study is the first one to address this fascinating worldwide phenomenon stretching from Antiquity to our days

Michael Jakob teaches History and Theory of Landscape at hepia, Geneva, and aesthetics of design at HEAD, Geneva. He is a visiting professor at Politecnico di Milano, at the Accademia di Architettura in Mendrisio and at the GSD (Harvard). His teaching and research focus on landscape theory, aesthetics, the history of vertigo, contemporary theories of perception and the poetics of architecture.







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