

Views of Nature

by

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- naturally!

What is “Nature”?

- Definitions?
- Etymology, different languages, history?
- Current use of the word/concept?

We are using the word and concept of “Nature” in many different ways – and they change over time – radically (meaning: from roots to top)!

“Is the earth round or flat?”

This question may seem quite simple, straight forward and easy to answer – to you and me today.

But in Medieval times it may not have been so. Not because they would then have answered “flat” – which we today consider wrong and stupid – but because the question made little sense, seemed stupid, or even a blasphemy.

“Round or flat?”: presupposes a certain conception of “earth” as an object or thing (that can be round or flat) – But that is not meaningful if “earth” means something like “home” or “a divine revelation”.

As my old philosophy professor told us: “Don’t talk about a Goddess as round or flat - that’s not nice”.

Visual Nature / Views of Nature

- Nature as a home
- Nature as divine and holy (as a whole or in parts, animated)
- Humans are created (divinely, perhaps from natural material, but then transcends nature)/ humans evolved gradually from nature (Darwinist).
- Nature = sex and instincts /culture, moral and reason = not nature
- Nature as an object to be measured (science) and controlled (industry)
- Nature as an aesthetic experience (romantic view, painting, porcelain)
- Nature as Gaia (one living, self restoring organism)
- Nature as fragile, endangered, to be protected
- Nature serving humans – or vice versa? Animal rights?

Philosophy of the beauty of nature

Kant about “the nature of beauty, and the beauty of nature” (rather formal in his aesthetics (Kritik der Urteilskraft): “harmonious interplay” – sorry, it takes a long explanation)

Kant about the sublime (mathematical and dynamic) – an ambivalent experience of great nature and small humans – but we have reason and morality on our side!

Hegel about the “Spirit” – and a boy throws a stone in the water and reflects upon the ripples! (we see ourselves in nature)

Adorno: a wound, the blackbird singing after rain, no beauty without historical horizons, a promise – paintings are already “ein Bild” (see his book *Ästhetische Theorie*, rather tough and pessimistic, and then again, perhaps a bit like Leonard Cohen: “There is a crack in everything – and that is where the light comes in....”?)

HJ and friends: “Nature is best on TV”, “Today Nature is something that comes in rectangles”. “Humans strive to rise above nature, and then they enjoy to look (down) at it”. “We build houses to escape from wild nature – and then invite images of nature back in as decorations on wallpaper, porcelain and furniture – and as commercials in media. “Nature” is a historical and cultural construct - on the move!

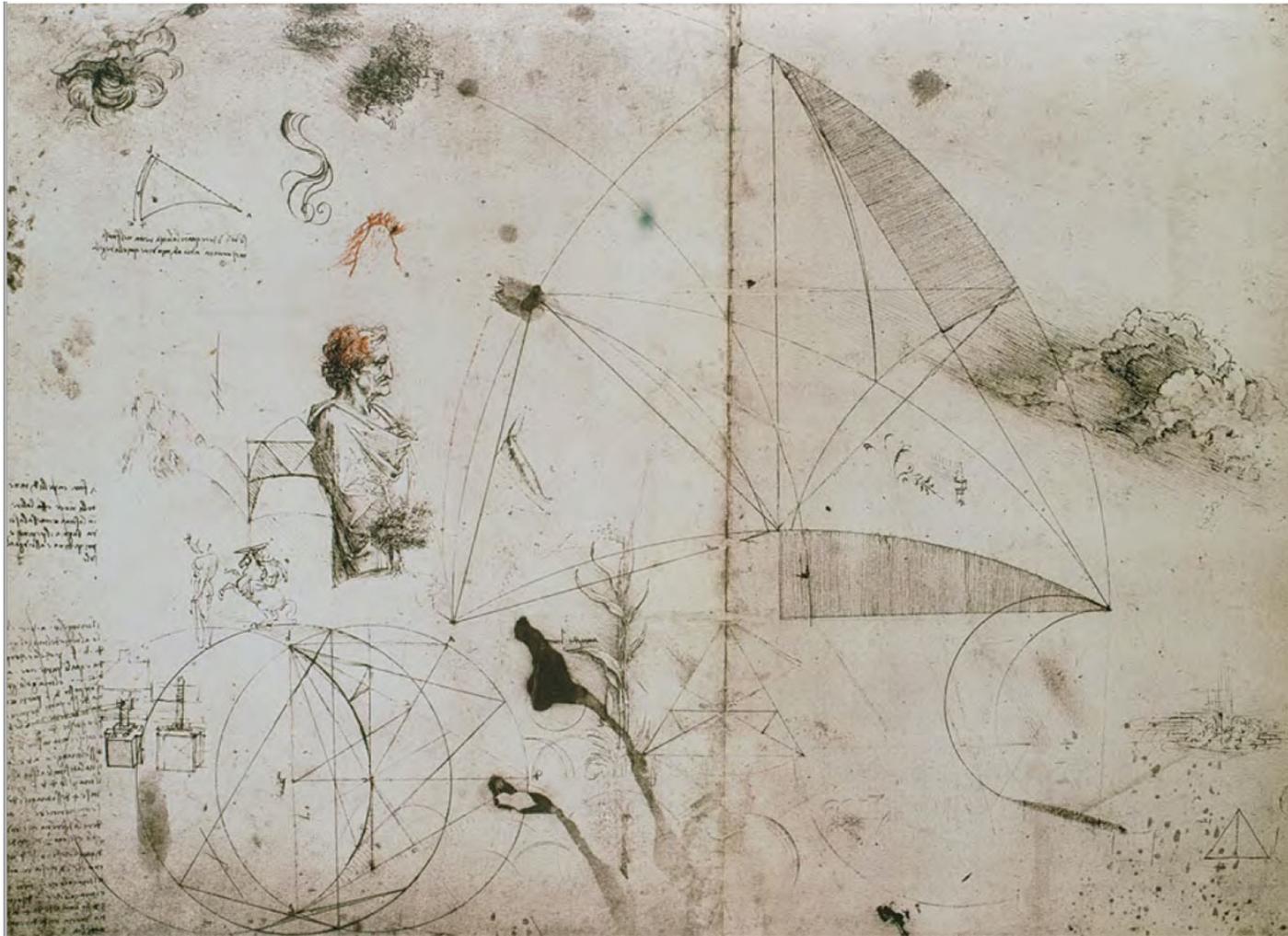


Prehistoric cave paintings: What is “the meaning” of this today to us? To those back then: was it about magic or about showing what an ox looks like? Was the painter proud of the artistic work? Was it part of a religious or sexual rite? Was it part of a campaign: “animals are beautiful, don’t kill them, don’t eat them, go vegan now!” ???



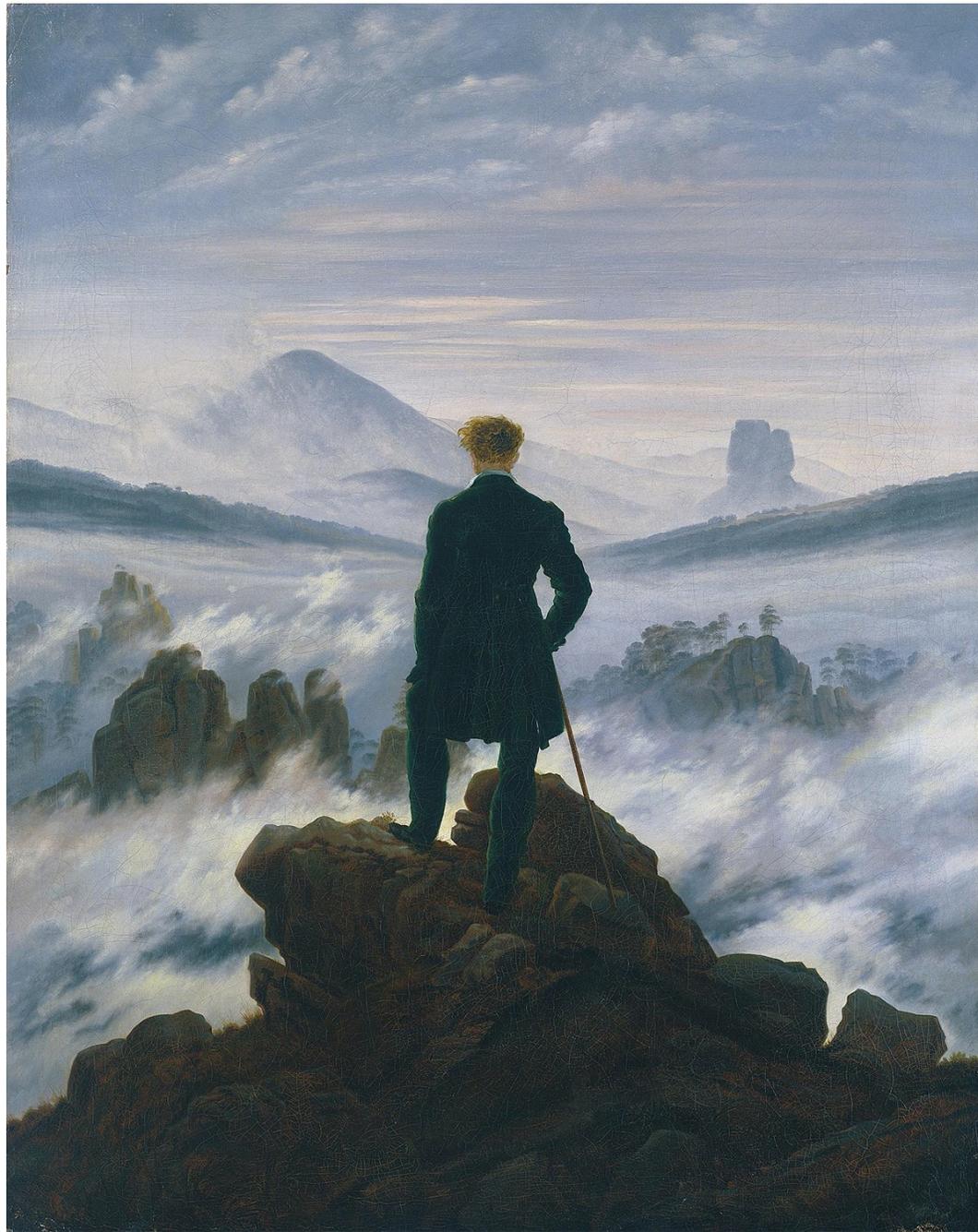
A tapestry depicting The Noble Life cycle from the Musée du Cluny (south Netherlands, around 1500)

This is not really “naturalistic” in style, but what is then the role of nature (flowers, plants) and are the persons a part of nature or not in this type of images /medieval art work.?



Leonardo da Vinci ca 1500.

“Drawing from nature” is often said about da Vinci- who saw himself not as an artist (no such concept at the time) but as *more* than a manual worker or just a specialized artisan. Rather he would like to be seen as a mathematician and as studying nature. Did it play a role that paper suited for drawing outdoors was now available? (consult Arnold Hauser: *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, 1951)



A "Romantic" view of nature
– but note that this does not
always mean "idyllic"

Casper David Friedrich
Ca 1818



Ca 1825. Casper David Friedrich again!



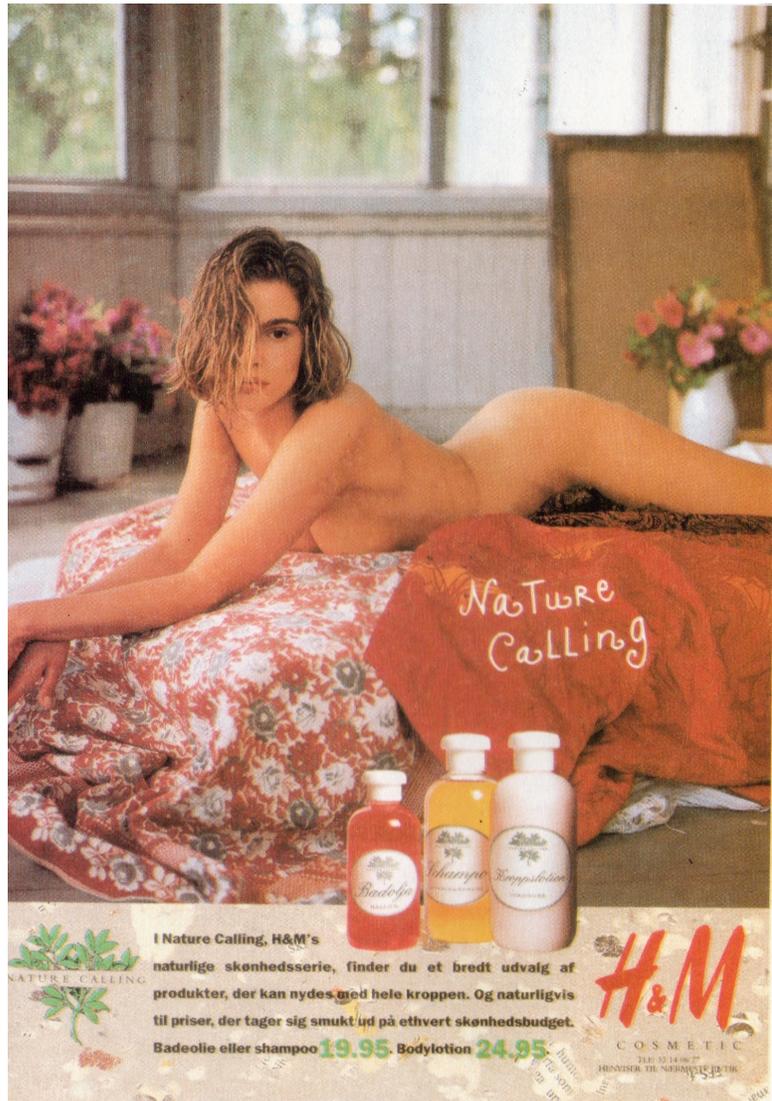
Paul Cézanne
1895-1900

“Nature morte” images have a long history – and it is not always just a school exercise in trying to make it look like real apples – anyway, there is something slightly rotten about these fruits here.

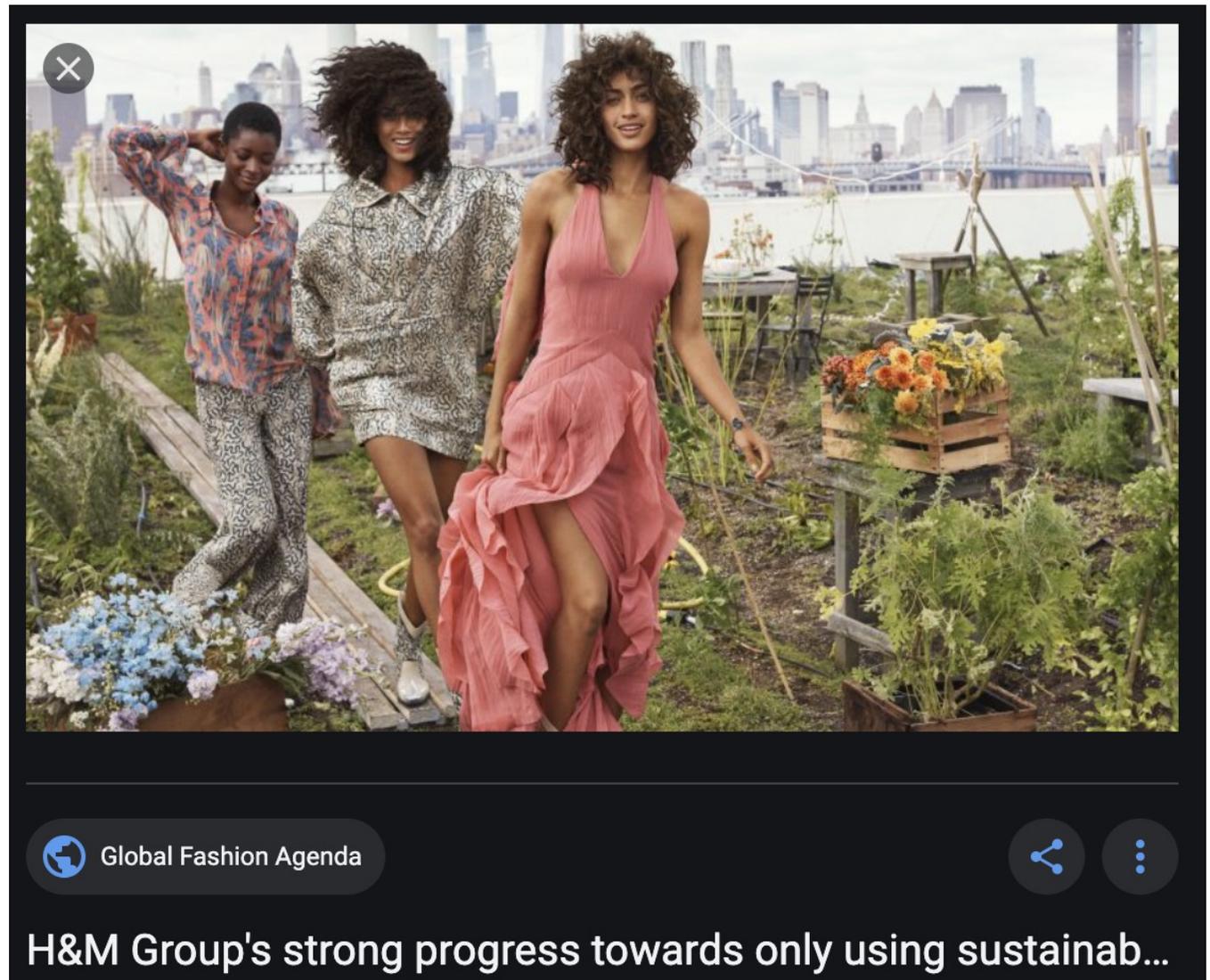


Rococo art can perhaps be interpreted as the preferred idyllic and sentimental art of the nobility losing power and status in the upcoming bourgeois and industrial age

Antoine Watteau, The Embarkation for Cythera 1717.



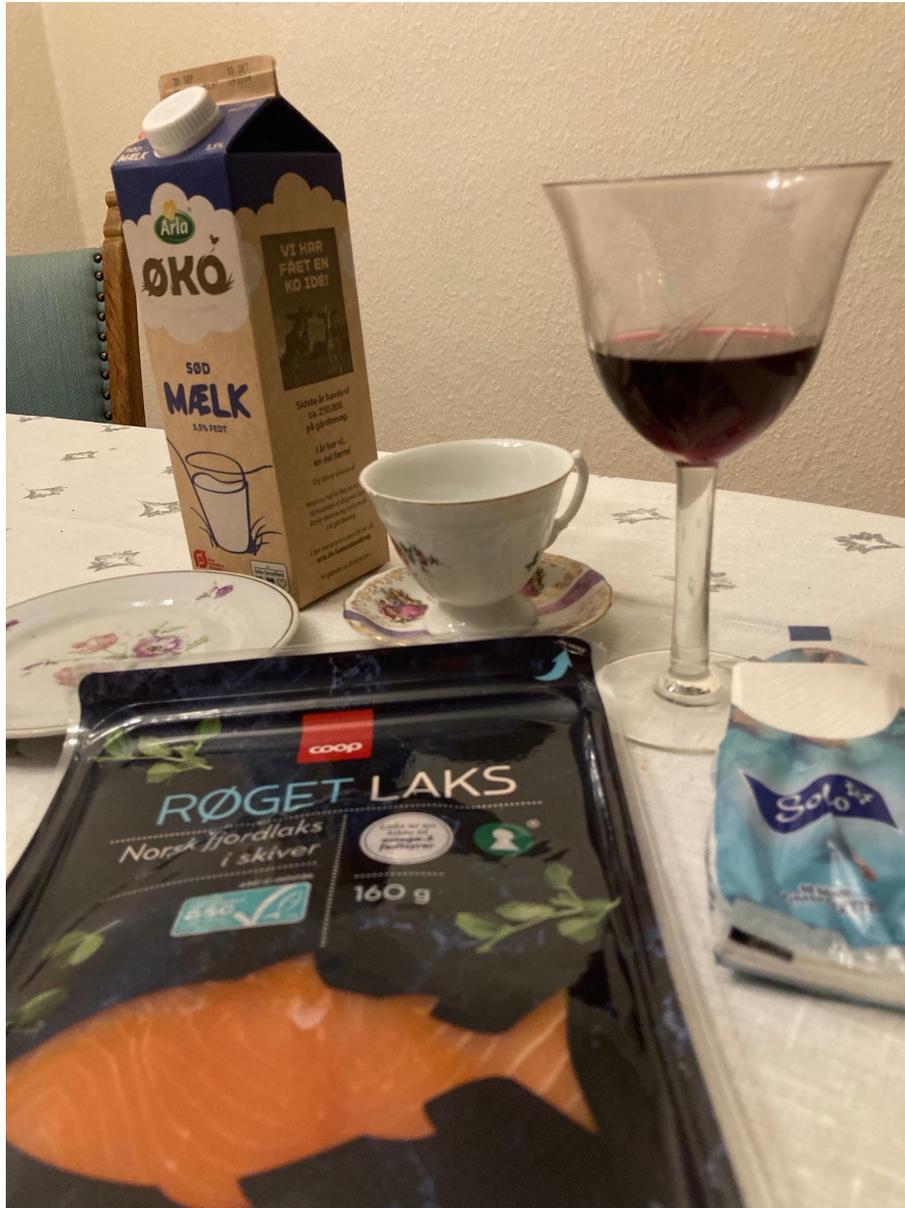
Calling all customers wanting to be, or to buy, or to look like/at nature – or ? Poster is from around 1987, I think....



And a few years later, this is from 2019



Nature – the good old days (now framed and in my living room), or was it originally an image celebrating the progress of civilization and effective agriculture (to the right) up against wild, untamed and unproductive nature (to the left)?



“Nature” is depicted in all sorts of daily products and décor – from my kitchen table Fall of 2020



Just half way down a glass of wine I begin to see nature everywhere (naturally the wine here is “bio” or “eco”, and, yes, I promise to recycle the bottle or the box... everything!).



Earthrise is a photograph of Earth and some of **the** Moon's surface that was taken from lunar orbit by astronaut William Anders on December 24, 1968, during **the** Apollo 8 mission. Nature photographer Galen Rowell declared it "**the** most influential environmental photograph ever taken".



Compare
this with the
next slide

Kerstin Langenberger
www.arctic-dreams.com



No, I don't think it is the same polar bear, but it could be used in a campaign: "*Before and after* humans came around with their global warming!" But then the color grading should be fixed – the last picture should look warmer than the first:



Before:
The good
old days
when ice
was ice and
cold enough
to bear a
bear!

Kerstin Langenberger
www.arctic-dreams.com



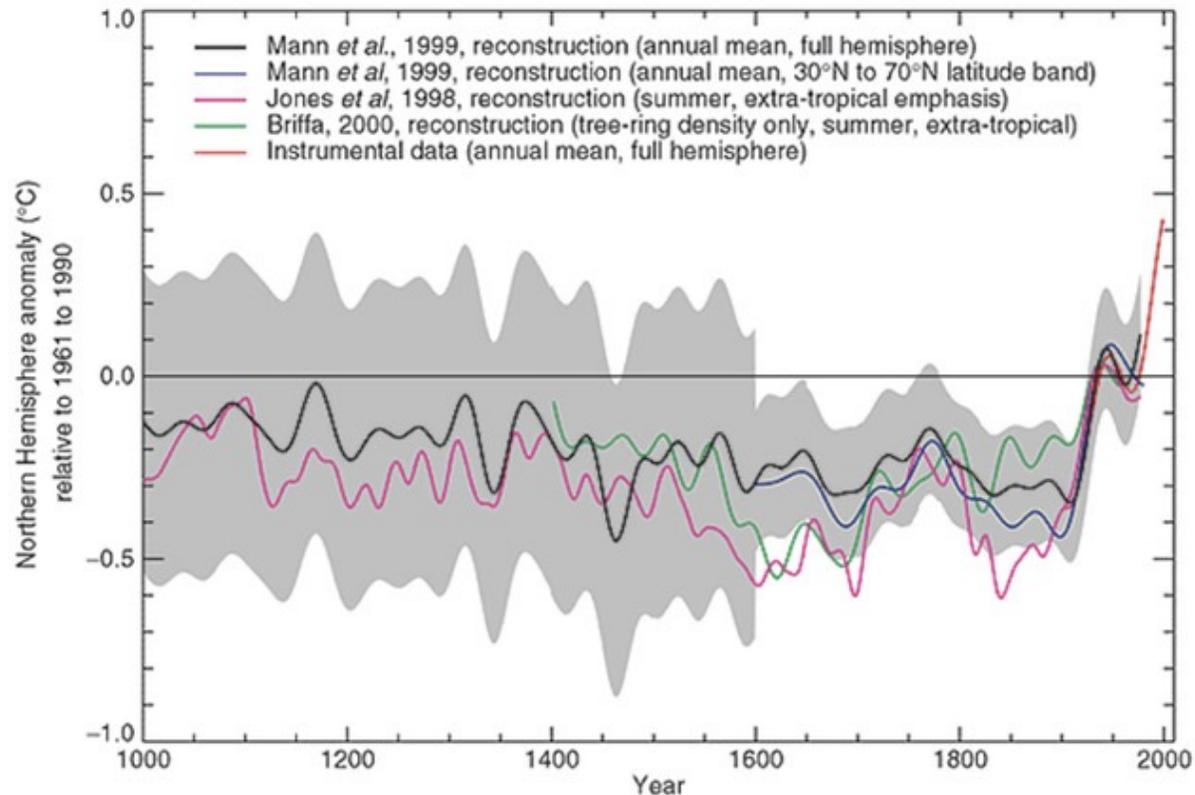
And this is
“*after*” –
that means
today, when
humans have
caused global
warming and
climate change.

The bear might
look warmer,
but it’s not so
happy about it!

Hockey Stick

What's the story? What's the "rhetoric"? What's "visualization" here"?

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/05/the-hockey-stick-the-most-controversial-chart-in-science-explained/275753/>



IPCC Third Assessment Report/Wikipedia

Back in [1998, a little known climate scientist named Michael Mann and two colleagues published a paper](#) that sought to reconstruct the planet's past temperatures going back half a millennium before the era of thermometers...

More portfolio ideas/exercise/draft (for a chapter about Visual Nature)

- Find one or two recent pictures, short videos, or well-illustrated articles/posts on social media concerning:
 - Nature, or Climate Change, or Pollution, or Animal Welfare.
 - Try to find something that really impresses/moves you – and that has (maybe) a very broad (universal?) appeal.
 - Describe(identify) the material, your first impressions.
 - Analyze the material in terms of its visual communication, what is it trying to “say”, or how is it trying to influence the viewer? Why are you (personally) strongly affected by this?
 - Consider the context, and the materials influence (“communicative power”): why many followers/viewers, why influential in present debate etc.? Why does it have a broad (universal?) appeal?
- See more on www.henrikjuel.dk

Film/video examples – could be played in class, but demands explanation

- Lion Hunt at Elleore, 1907, Ole Olsen
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTu8TRQJ1fA>

- Nanook of the North, 1922, Robert Flaherty
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IAcRjBq93Y>
- (58:20 seal, 109:20 snowland)

- White Wilderness, 1958, Disney
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txl3D1waMfU>

- Dances with Wolves, 1990, Kevin Costner
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVXHFIkpZuM>
- Monster bug wars (SHORT)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOY-xUT0PUk>

- Shooting of the Danish Wolf, August 2018.

Sorry the original link does not work – maybe it can be found?