

HIDDEN SECRETS OF BEAUTIFUL PLACES: ARTS IN LANDSCAPES OF PAST TRAGEDIES

Professor Einar Svansson

Bifröst University, **Iceland**

ABSTRACT

The paradox of places that are beautiful but have been the background of negative events and sorrowful tragedies have intrigued artists through the ages. The author wants to reflect on his experience as a professor working on a research project in Iceland using photography and filming with drones. The setting is the beautiful south-coast of Iceland where many tragic disasters have happened in the 17th to 19th centuries when seamen drowned in open boats rowing to fish.

There are famous examples of this dialectic nature of places that are full of tranquillity when visitors arrive in good weather. But their history hides horrors in abundance that often shakes the nerves of the gazing modern day tourist. The documentary *Night and Fog* by the French filmmaker Alain Resnais goes back and forth in time to show the horrors of the Holocaust. He uses black and white scenes in the past with both photographs and film that makes the past events very realistic. Picasso uses the same black & white grayscale with dead bodies in his magnificent *Guernica* painting. The Australian photographer Trent Parke is in line with this theme and known for his emotional black & white surreal photography of human experience. Like in his famous book “*The Seventh Wave: Photographs of Australian Beaches*” that was inspired by unusual number of drownings in the summer of 1999.

The author uses similar technique in the Icelandic project. By collecting black & white photographs and aerial shots with drones for a book that is focused on fatal ocean related accidents. There is often much visual difference comparing the beautiful site of the tragic event today with the old dark history of these places. The difference is even stronger using colour photos taken recently to compare with the black & white images of the past.

The author is also a published poet on top of being an enthusiastic photographer and university professor by profession. Perhaps the next development is to mix these strong images with poetry.

This paper examines how visual art can bridge past and present, allowing tragic landscapes to be understood as both places of beauty and sites of memory.

Keywords: tragedies, beauty, landscape, photography, visual art

BACKGROUND OF AUTHOR

My parents loved nature and subscribed to *National Geographic*, which I read extensively, looking at the beautiful photographs of landscapes, mountains, and faraway seas. I was fortunate to have opportunities at school to nurture my artistic interests in literature and photography. In my second career, I attended university, earned degrees,