

Winner

Corey Byrnes (Northwestern U)

Title

Fixing Landscape: A Techno-Poetic History of China's Three Gorges (Columbia University Press, 2019).

Citation

The Three Gorges "indelibly inscribed the power of the state onto the surface of the earth." Byrnes's reading of this inscription synthesizes the literary and cultural historiography of premodern China with critical approaches derived from geography, landscape studies, postcolonial studies, and art history. The result is an elegant and original model for the study of the refraction of engineering in aesthetic culture and of aesthetic culture in engineering. *Fixing Landscape* transforms our understanding of the role of literature and other arts in mediating between the natural world and social values—two realms in constant flux and co-creation. Heidegger's observations on dams as "standing reserve" come to a head in this convincing retelling of a story both organic and inorganic, equally about contemplation and domination. A sophisticated descriptive study anchored in close reading, the book articulates several of the most influential methodological strains of contemporary criticism while contributing to the elucidation of its riveting object of study.