

Jones, Jonathan. "Olympics 2012: Richard Long's cycling art shows British landscape at its best." *The Guardian*. July 30, 2012.

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Olympics 2012: Richard Long's cycling art shows British landscape at its best

The UK artist's 'river' of paint along the road-cycling track in Surrey pays tribute to the beauty of the Olympics' British setting



Land-mark ... a cyclist passes Richard Long's artwork Box Hill Road River, in Surrey. Photograph: Brian Cleckner/National Trust

If you enjoyed the Olympic cycling road races at the weekend and cheered Britain's first silver medal for Lizzie Armitstead, you may have noticed a curious graffiti painted on one stretch of the road. It is, in fact, a permanent work of art that will serve as a landscape legacy of one the first sports in this year's Olympics. It is called Box Hill Road River and was created by the British artist Richard Long.

In the middle of the night, Long poured paint in a continual squiggly line for 100 metres along the road. You can see him doing it here. Usually, Long paints with mud, but here he has used road paint, making a continuous, rolling, flowing gesture – a "river" of paint, as the title calls it.

Long's art is all about landscape, the human body and movement, so cycling is a natural sport for him to ornament. The epic journey of the road-race cyclists out of London and around Box Hill

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is similar to Long's walking artworks. Since the 1960s, he has embarked on walks through landscapes, from forbidding mountains to English valleys, making non-obstrusive artworks (such as arrangements of sticks) along the way, and documenting each walk in photographs and texts. Painting with mostly natural materials is another side of his reflection on the human place in the landscape. His Olympic road painting in Surrey is a primeval marking, akin to the chalk figures carved on British hillsides in its quiet mystery.

Box Hill is itself a marker of landscape, a land-mark. In the 18th century, when people were just starting to see Britain as "picturesque", it was thought to be quite a mountain. One of the earliest British landscape paintings is called *A View of Box Hill, Surrey*. It was painted by George Lambert in 1733 and is in the Tate collection. In this picture, Box Hill is a mighty mass rising above a golden countryside against a luminous sky. The most famous portrayal of this landmark is, however, literary – a disastrous day out on Box Hill in Jane Austen's 1815 novel *Emma*.

All very British, and the cycle races this weekend served, like Long's art, to make us see the landscape. It looked great, didn't it? In the summer rain, Surrey was deep green. As Olympic events take place against British landmarks, we are getting a great view of our land.