The Grand Canyon is a prime example of mid-century “Great Pictures” of the American West. “Great Pictures” were large-scale paintings exhibited publicly. They were inspired by popular theatrical entertainments such as the moving panorama. Viewers would pay admission to see the classically inspired terrains, which were intricately rendered using perspectival illusionism. The paintings were generally presented in darkened rooms with special lighting to enhance the optical impact. Many artists and critics of the period, as well as contemporary scholars, have linked the massive scale of these pictures to the national agenda of expansionism known as Manifest Destiny. The nation’s greatness was to be witnessed through its fantastic geographical features and resources, seemingly never before surveyed or exploited by humans. Effectively, the painting is a kind of a deed for the land, affirming it belongs to the settlers.

Notably absent from these pictures was evidence of ongoing Indigenous disenfranchisement, as well as the ecological damage caused by European settlement and resource extraction.

Exit is a panoramic display of data from 2008-2009, derived from a variety of sources. It tracks global human migrations due to various environmental, economic, and political forces. The original version consisted of a forty-five minute, six-channel projection on a wall of a darkened circular gallery. This lesson makes use of a shortened and updated version (2015:22 min), downloaded from the creators’ website, which surrounds viewers with maps, figures, texts, and sounds such as burning fires and flowing streams. The presentation is divided into narratives concerning population shifts, remittances, political refugees, natural disaster, and sea level rise. Datasets are unrolled; pixels of color turn into maps or graphs and then dissolve into the next dataset. There are no pictures of land per se; yet there is a picturing process involved, as well as an immersive experience. The video makes visible through pixels and data what Moran’s painting eradicates or ignores: the human impact on the environment and human displacement and dispossession.