Indefinite Toxic Circles: An Art Series Curated by Nicole Shea

This is part of our special feature Facing the Anthropocene.

Art is at the forefront when it comes to amplifying the discussions surrounding environmental issues. This series by artists John Sabraw, Conohar Scott, and Mandy Barker illuminates the dangers confronting our waters, from leaking pipes to discarded plastics, to the long-term impact of these toxic products on our most delicate and vulnerable ecosystems and sites. Given the recent declarations of climate change and environmental issues to be "fake news," projects such as these are crucial in reconnecting humanity and delivering proof that scientific and artistic collaborations can lead to groundbreaking ideas and sustainable solutions.

– Nicole Shea for EuropeNow

John Sabraw

My Chroma series is a romantic yet experimental examination of science, environment, and the painting process in which I use chemical interactions and probability to reveal a surprising aesthetic. Painting materials interact and amalgamate over durations up to several months. The results are complex, luminous, and mysterious paintings that strike a beautiful balance between controlled and organic processes. For the past several years, I have partnered with Ohio University Engineering Professor Dr. Guy Rieer to develop commercially viable paints with pigments extracted from the toxic sludge runoff from abandoned coal mines.

Chroma S1 11, Mixed water based media including pigments from acid mine drainage, on composite aluminum panel. 91×91 cm. 2013

Chroma S1 14, Mixed water based media including pigments from acid mine drainage, on composite aluminum panel. 61×61 cm. 2013

Great Big Story: Turning Toxins Into Art | “That’s Amazing”

Watch the creation of these images on Great Big Story.

John Sabraw was born in Lakenheath, England. An activist and environmentalist, Sabraw’s paintings, drawings and collaborative installations are produced in an eco-conscious manner. His art explores the intersection of science, environment, and human experience.

Bibliography

[References and further reading]

Citizen of the English Language: An Interview with Bahiyyih Nakhjavani

Short Films: Western Promises

The Islands and the Whales

Brexitannia

Euro-Visions: Europe in Contemporary Cinema by Mariana Liz

Announcing the EuropeNow Film Festival

How the Spectre of Yugoslavia Looms Over EU’s Handling of the Refugee Crisis

ReEvolution

Actually, Architecture Can Play Well With Others

Reading Turgenev in a Time of Terror

Three Poems by Zhu Zhu

The Euro and the Bale of Ideas by Markus K. Brunnermeier, Harold James, and Jean-Pierre Landau

From Interinstitutional Competition to Interinstitutional Collaboration

From the Power of Colors to Empowered Communities: Refugee Camp Transformations

http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/27733/1/index.html
manner, and he continually works toward a fully sustainable practice. One of his current collaborations involves creating paint and paintings from iron oxide extracted in the process of remediating polluted streams. Sabraw's art is in numerous collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Honolulu, the Whitney Museum of Art, Columbus, Science Center, Doane College, and Asbury University. Sabraw is a Professor of Art at Ohio University where he chairs the Painting + Drawing program, and Board Advisor at Scribble Art Workshop in New York. He has most recently been featured in Hyperallergic, Science Friday, Frame, New Scientist, London, and TEDx Warwick, UK.

Conohar Sco, Environmental Resistance

Harpur Hill, in Derbyshire, is the location of an abandoned lime quarry just outside of Buxton. Today, due to contact with rainwater the lime continues to leach from the quarry and is suspended in a solution known as limewater (calcium hydroxide). At the top of the hill, a Go Kart track would appear to be the most likely source of the fly tipped tyres, which float suspended in the limewater solution. However, this post-industrial wasteland also serves as a site of scientific interest for the British Geological Survey, who are investigating if limewater has potential as a medium of storage for radioactive wastes, due to the compound's molecular stability.

The title of the work refers to two temporal concepts. Firstly, the notion of ‘shallow time’ is a reference to the present day of industrial production (from the Industrial Revolution to the present day), known as the Anthropocene. Conversely, the concept of ‘deep time’ in this instance refers to Uranium 235, which is used as a fuel source in nuclear power stations, and has a radioactive half-life of 703.8 million years.

"The Shallow and the Deep"
representation of environmental degradation in photography and the application of art as a tool for environmental advocacy. As part of his artistic practice, Conohar founded the collective Environmental Resistance and has partnered with Dr. Will Mayes, a senior lecturer in Environmental Science at the Centre for Environmental and Marine Sciences at the University of Hull, with the purpose to raise awareness of industrial pollution and campaign for environmental remediation.

Mandy Barker

Discarded debris found along the shore and having existed for varying amounts of time in the sea collectively convey a message about the marine environment. The images combine visual beauty with the message of pollution and the time it takes them to biodegrade in the sea.

The series shows a collection of objects as they were presented on the shore, unaltered and uncleaned and arranged to reveal a beauty not otherwise noticed. The form and shape of the objects take on the imaginative appearance of sea creatures, created from the very materials that prove fatal for the creatures themselves. Enveloping black space evokes a deep sea, presenting the emerging objects as creatures from beneath, whilst at the same time serving as a metaphor to the unknown depths of the vast global problem of pollution.

The captions state the number of years it takes each material to decompose, thus creating a narrative in time, and ending with the indeterminate and indefinite material polystyrene.

INDEFINITE – 30 Years

(PVC – Corals are destroyed when discarded fishing equipment, such as nets, lines, gloves, damaged lobster pots and even drag along the ocean floor. Coral reefs provide homes for huge numbers of different species, many of which are also affected).

INDEFINITE – 400 Years

(Plastics – Mixed – Plastic never biodegrades, it merely breaks down into smaller fragments. These micro-plastic particles and fibres are found in the feeding barnacles, lugworms and amphipods which in turn Eaton by larger sea creatures including fish and ultimately eaten by humans).

2010 © Mandy Barker
INDEFINITE – 600 Years

(Monolament & Macrolament Fishing Line – Fishing line affects the viability of aquatic animals, once entangled they struggle to eat, breathe and swim, all of which have fatal results. Discarded fishing nets cast over time by fishermen continue “ghost fishing,” indiscriminately scooping up fish, seals, turtles and whales in their foul web).

© Mandy Barker

PENALTY – Europe

633 marine debris footballs (and pieces of) collected from 23 countries & islands within Europe, from 104 different beaches and by 62 members of the public in just 4 months.

© Mandy Barker

Mandy Barker

(UK, 1964) studied MA Photography at De Montfort University, England. She has received international recognition for her work involving marine plastic debris with her ongoing series, SHOAL, having been published in over 30 countries including, TIME, The Guardian, The British Journal of Photography, National Geographic, The Economist, DIS, and on CNN. This realization for her work is to raise awareness about plastic pollution in the oceans, and the impact this has on our marine environments. In 2010 she was awarded The Royal Photographic Society’s Environmental Award for her ongoing marine projects. In 2013 Barker was selected for Critical Mass Top 50 2014. In November Barker’s recent series, ‘Beyond Drifting: Imperfectly Known Animals’ was shortlisted for the prestigious Prix Pictet 2017, the world’s leading photographic award in sustainability. Barker has been invited by Greenpeace to join the Beluga sailing vessel in June 2017 to document the impact of ocean plastic on some of the most iconic marine conservation areas of the UK.

Nicole Shea

ran CenterArts Gallery in Newburgh from 2009-2012 and later incorporated her arts experience into the leadership training at West Point. In 2015, she founded a large-scale sculpture walk outside the gates of West Point, which she has been curating together with the founding members of Collaborative Concepts in a community effort to revitalize the area via the arts. She is also Executive Editor of EuropeNow and Director of the Council for European Studies.

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Published on May 2, 2017.