

Jason deCaires Taylor - Rising Waters

by John K. Grande

Jason DeCaires Taylor's sculptures involve a dramatic re-location of the human presence. As sculptures they migrate to the underwater a place we consider out of bounds, far from the human sphere, and yet they address through their manufacture, their selection as subjects, and eventual entropic change, a new definition for sculpture as a way of facilitating and underwriting inevitability of change. Adjacent to the Houses of Parliament in London, sited in the Thames River, Rising Waters, highlighted the oil industry business and its effects on global warming. The children riding these Clydesdale workhorses recall the industrial age of the 19th century, are a point of hope, of change in this entire scenario. These horses have heads that resemble oil derricks that recall their exploitation as early industrial beasts of burden. On the other hand, the businessmen riding these horses have arrogant facial and bodily stances. They sit atop these horses like conquerors without a memory or sense of context completely oblivious to the rising waters around them. Jason DeCaires Taylor's sculpture piece, originally exhibited in the Thames River, London in September 2015, now has a permanent place off the coast of Lanzarote. Horses has such an ancient connection to humans, as we see in George Stubbs paintings or the modernist Marino Marini's horse and rider sculptures. ... Indeed, it is fitting these sculptures were exhibited in London, for Jason DeCaires Taylor's hybrid horses are hybrid and mechanistic just as Jacob Epstein's famous Rock Drill sculpture was. Both Epstein and DeCaires Taylor have seized on a point of change in society, and commented on its effects on humans by challenged the way innovations in industry can produce dehumanizing effects on the human condition.

And the Canary Islands context of Lanzarote has a Romantic aspect otherworldly character as if in a Jules Verne novel, or a civilization transformed by nature's actions. Taylor's underwater realizations, these people all with their eyes closed, comprise a community of sorts, but equally recall lost civilizations of the Romantics including John Wesley, Lord Byron or the painter John Martin. These sculpted figures and their horses carry with them echoes of our Romantic imagination and inspired Stephane Mallarme to write,

We were the last Romantics – chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
Whatever's written in what poet's name
The book of the people; whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
But all is changes that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.¹

It is this epic level of expression that captured the Romantics imagination, and likewise is part of Jason DeCaires Taylor's envisioning of our relatedness to nature's ecosystems. Taylor is simply providing the matrices for a reinterpretation of our place in nature using people and animals from our time. In so doing he is enabling us to conceive and imagination other worlds, indeed he uses another underwater context to brings his message, one we can all seize, through his artistic processes.

James Lovelock was one of the first of our times to sound the alarm about climate change and our denial that it is actually happening. In an article published in The Independent he commented, " to pass into a morbid fever that may last as long as 100,000 years. I have to tell you, as members of the Earth's family and an intimate part of it, that you and especially civilization are in danger." which are the equivalent of the pathology lab of a hospital, have reported the Earth's physical condition, and the climate specialists see it as seriously ill, and soon The climate centers around the world. ²

Irreversibility is not a concept generally understood in a postmodern era, for we believe all can be manipulated at will. We are the Gods of our own consumption. From being a part of nature, humanity now separates itself from nature, seeking only to withdraw from the economy of nature what humanity believes is rightfully its own. Jason DeCaires Taylor, on the other hand, intervenes, with a future vision, hoping to establish actions that regenerate nature while likewise commenting on the human condition. There are precedents for Taylor's art, notably among land artists whose escape from the orthodoxy of minimalism in New York's galleries led to the land. Dennis Oppenheim joined Peter Hutchinson in Tobago, West Indies where he constructed one underwater piece and others on the beach and sea

surface. Both Dennis' and Peter's work from this trip were exhibited in a two-man show at MOMA in 1969 called Two Ocean Projects. Peter Hutchinson's Threaded Calabash is one of the most memorable examples of an underwater art that "could not be seen". It recalls Claes Oldenbergs burial of a sculpture in a ceremonial act in Central Park New York, or Alberto Giacometti's hiding of a sculpted stone in a glacial area in the Alps are likewise "hidden, invisible artworks".

Even as his sculptures explore a new domain, just as art always has, these new underwater frontiers James DeCaires Taylor is exploring are landscapes where the human imagination acts as if in suspension. Our beliefs are challenged and reconfigured in this other territory.

Taylor is engaging in producing what Goethe referred to as morphology or the science of formation and transformation of organisms... but he does it with a conscience, and a sense of our human legacy. And yet the art, in this case underwater sculptures becomes the agent of change, just as in 1769 the overwhelming black lava flows from Lanzarote volcanoes that occurred near sculpture location were the agent of change. The act of "making" or "creating", for Jason DeCaires Taylor, is a transformative act both in aesthetic and political terms. Perhaps a better way of describing his actions is as a kind of metamorphology. Now the cultural and natural are involved in an intense exchange on our planet as never before due to increased resource use as a result of populations and modes of technology we chose to use. Jason DeCaires Taylor's sculptures are facilitators that produce an intermediary mutation, a dialogue between human culture and nature. They are also freeze-framed reminiscences on the state of contemporary culture. As we can see with the sculpture of a photographer who wanders with his eyes closed, the state of being in contemporary culture is one that can only be called anaesthetic. For we are somehow separated from the physical world we are a part of by the ways we live. The machines have framed us, and the tools and the mindsets they produce, negate the sheer beauty of nature that we are a part of. Indeed the photographer captures images and yet seen here he himself is an image in three dimensions. The great gap between the image and the physical is so pronounced that we actually now have physical environments of advertising and imagery that challenged the traditional fluid natural forms of the world we are a part of. Art can never supplant life, or nature, for that matter. Art can only engage in a temporal dialogue with the world we are in. Art that presupposes it has a "higher" place than life itself, has lost its wisdom, its context, its capacity to be a point of exchange. And so the wisdom of Jason DeCaires Taylor's art is precisely his acceptance of nature's capacity to overcome, to supplant and transform his process, his art works. Likewise Betty Beaumont's Ocean Landmark project (1978-80).....cont;

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