

Jacki McInnes – de Magnete

Jacki's speculations in her new and powerful body of work are on the relationship between the natural and the cultural, in the specific sense of human destruction of the natural environment. This topic is in vogue in many areas of contemporary life. From international agencies, to environmental activists to governments and to the corporations that are ironically responsible for much of the destruction of the natural world in the service of the profit motive, today's discourse is all about rescuing nature from the destruction we as a species have wrought.

Ironies aside, this may not be possible in the way that we wish it to be – the idea of the restoration of a balance between natural and non-natural, or cultural life. Jacki's artist's statement, and the guiding theme of the show, points both to the seemingly immanent force of the earth's magnetic field, discovered by Carl Friedrich Gauss in the early nineteenth century, and to its destruction. It is seemingly immanent because it in fact is subject to gradual decay – an entropic process emblematic of the waste and uselessness caused by human intervention in nature. This results in the very human phenomenon of 'anomie', coined by Durkheim as a kind of sociological correlate of entropic social systems – a system, and a human culture, without useful energy. Perhaps it is fitting in this conceptual regard that Gauss was also responsible for the theory of normal distribution in statistics, a system used ever since to account for everything from population spread to family and kinship systems, and thereby subtly underpin the ideas of normalization which leads to destructive urbanisation, continued industrialisation and consumer culture.

Jacki's riposte to the destructive impasse is a hard-hitting one in the show. The materials are those of the earth themselves – iron, steel blades, soot and grease speaking of the foundational substances of the planet which are organised into galvanic patterns emphasizing their naturalness, despite their patently enculturated forms.

The force fields and patterns evinced in these carefully manipulated sculptural and graphic pieces point to a deeper reorganisation of the earth's forces, mapped out in lead tape in the 'Continental Drift' works. It is one that speaks to a worlds without the human. In JG Ballard's famous novel 'Crash', he imagines such a future, deploying the archetypal pollutant of the detritus of the car crash:

A white convertible approached, the driver flashing his headlamps as I stepped from my car... . At my feet lay a litter of dead leaves, cigarette cartons and glass crystals. These fragments of broken safety glass, brushed to one side by generations of ambulance attendants, lay in a small drift. I stared down at this dusty necklace, the debris of a thousand automobile accidents. Within thirty years, as more and more cars collided here, the glass fragments would form a sizable bar, within fifty years a beach of sharp crystal. A new race of beachcombers might appear, squatting on these heaps of fractured windshields.... Buried beneath this new geological layer laid down by the age of the automobile accident would be my own small death, as anonymous as a vitrified scar in a fossil tree. (1990 [1973]: 48)

Ballard's beach of sharp crystal recalls Jacki's own figurings of beaches in the show, each stained with the 'hazardous objects' of the title – sculpted, of course, in lead, a non-biodegradable, yet naturally occurring, substance.

The lead objects recur in the wonderful 'Neontological Speciation' series, each piece of urban, human detritus coupled with strange and angular, threatening natural objects to gesture to the possibility of a new science – a new biology, tracking and classifying a strange new set of species and genres. And why not? Jacki's message is that we are fundamentally and implacably destroying the natural world. We will need new modes of understanding for the transformations and mutations that result if we cannot reverse the polarities of our interactions with nature. And who is not to say, along with Foucault, in a work of his, like Jacki's show, that also deals with the emergence of strange and threatening new forms, that as part of this mutations, the figure of the human itself will not be wiped from memory, like the footprints in the sand at the edge of the sea?