SHREDDING TIME

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“The determination of progress by catalogues and television sets. Only machinery. And blood transfusers” –Cannibal Manifesto, Oswald de Andrade

Human knowledge and the human condition as such, are inextricably associated with the earth. Hannah Arendt wrote in 1957 that the earth is the essence of the human condition, and the human condition itself. The exploration of space, the escape from man’s imprisonment on earth, has brought us into a direct confrontation with questions about the nature of our experiences, and the building blocks of reality. One of the most perplexing conclusions has been that in fact we always observe the past and never the present, and while this observation is associated with light cones – the path of a flash of light – it gives us important information about the now common idea of the contemporary: dislocated, shaping spaces together at a moment in time, the impossibility of geographical certainty.

The present is never available to us either as experience or memory, and the lived instants or what scientists call the events on the hyper-surface of the present, are not available to us except as a suspension, in a struggle between seeing and remembering. Is seeing actually observation or is it already remembrance? A great deal of contemporary art – with notions such as latency, ephemerality, ghosts, traces – has put an emphasis on the processes of time; disappearing, remaining, moving, shuffling, traveling. Perhaps this has to do with the use of new media that by definition depend on temporality as opposed to materiality. Globalization had a lot to do with this: Liquid lives, portable homes, mobile consciousness, and constant migration.

But the trend seems to have been reversed lately because the condition of liquid lives, empowered by global capital, gave rise to a world even more solid than the pre-modern era. The present tense has become an abstract homogenous constant out of which there is no possible escape. We are all trapped in a dense temporality across time zones without rest, and as the process is no longer a metaphor for freedom, artists seek a return to materiality. But this new found materiality is not about finished objects or even objects at all, but about the effect of the different processes of time, movement and direction on objects and by detour, on life itself. Though the modern project’s highest aspiration was building a man-made world, we are still subject to external constraints for survival.

The search for a physical and palpable trace of natural and industrial processes is at the heart of contemporary aesthetics and the emotional value of crass objects as the new civilizational ruins. In his work, artist Emre Hüner has given in to the temptation of collecting the present and the imaginary of the future as if they were relics of a distant past. His two-part exhibition “Aeolian” presents a series of interventions across different media in which the utopian imaginary of planetary life and remnants of ancient civilizations overlap in such a way that the present tense breaks out of its boundaries, creating an event horizon-like environ: It appears infinitely remote, yet this isn’t caused by historical distance from the objects but by the total reality of the assemblage.

In museum-like fashion, his installation “Anthropophagy” – that takes its name from Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade’s “Cannibal Manifesto” – stages an archaeological excavation of the futuristic imaginary, through samples of ceramic objects that are not aesthetically complete, but rather mapping landscapes untouched by anything but man-made forces and left abetted to the mercy of natural forces, shaped by the wind. The futuristic imaginary – and science fiction – has never been about progress and science as

much as it is about disaster, cataclysm and a freeze in time. The engagement with De Andrade's manifesto serves as an enactment of the modernist interest in primitivism which wasn't about the past as much as it was about surrealism: Making reality a subject of study.
Primitivism and futurism occur simultaneously in the search of a trope – volcanic surfaces, geological streaks and the illusion of remoteness. Prior to the space race and the diffusion of images from outer space in popular culture, the planetary imaginary remained more or less unchanged since the Copernican era, and as it was the case with early 20th century science fiction, the findings of spaceships and explorers came to resemble the utopian aesthetics of drawings, etchings and artist renditions of life outside the earth. Hüner's work however is not a closed-off narrative but rather an open-ended archive of the modern imagination constructed as political realities in which the observation of the past is subject to modification by the warp of an ever unreachable present.

The world is represented solely through objects and in the video works "Aeolian Processes #1 & #2", simulating the different ways in which the wind alters objects – just like the present alters the past and not necessarily the other way around – all the elements in the composition perform a secular ritual in stretching time, without human experience or intervention involved. It is a modern consciousness of the present without consciousness, or, asking the question of how would objects present themselves to us without abstraction? While the ceramics are altogether a combination of abstract surfaces and the grand metaphors of progress – flight, spaceship, plane, they are removed from their civilizational narrative and left to stand alone in lost paradises.
Hüner deals with abstraction in a manner unlike modernist art which was seen as a crusade against realism; this realism was never such, but rather, an attempt to distort the human eye into the political reality of the Western world as a total experience. The surfaces found in "Aeolian" resemble more the process at work in pre-historic art at around the time of the Ice Age, in which scientists have dated the birth of the modern mind associated with the development of the pre-frontal cortex of the brain and aesthetic faculties such as imagination, abstraction, composition, perspective and dimension. It was the first time in human history that visual representation could be translated into composite narratives.
As such, the artist aims to re-arrange narratives that could possibly question the idea of progress in a technology-dependent society. And by technology-dependent one does not even mean to say the Industrial revolution or the Internet age, but the mindset of human culture born out of the Ice Age, in which man-made tools became indispensable for survival. This type of consciousness is deployed in his work with a sense of the "uncanny": Primal rather than primitive, remote rather than past, utopian rather than future. In order to get lost, it is necessary to know what one is getting lost from, and in that sense, Hüner's sculptures appear in undisclosed locations, perverting the natural continuity of geography and acting as – sometimes playful – experiments with our temporality.
The architectural rendering of an imaginary world, subsequently collected and displayed, is in itself an assault on the linearity of historical narratives and opens the possibility of re-structuring memories in accordance with criteria larger than the merely visual. The surfaces in the sculptures do not seem to want to occupy specific identities of place, but on the other hand, want to assign a shape to time, bearing testimony to the multi-directional process of the lived instant. Multiple instances of textured iterations release a complex encoded imaginary about man's relationship to nature without specific cultural referents but yet embedded in the tragic aesthetic of the modern illusion about the conquest of nature and space.

Hüner's fictional landscapes – and their eschatological impulse – have existed on earth nonetheless: The atmospheric dust veil in the year 535 that caused the sun to shine only four hours a day for eighteen months, according to a 12th century account of Michel the Syrian that still today perplexes scientists and that caused the ultimate demise of the late ancient world, or the eruption of the Laki in Iceland in 1783, that is said to have indirectly triggered the French Revolution because of the famine and disease that spread all over continental Europe; it was said that the sky was covered with ash for years and that because of the ash the sun shone from a white sky, an apocalypse-like scenario. These natural events became historical turning points for humanity at large.
Ultimately, space is never to be conquered, neither is nature. The conquest of either would signal the end of the human condition as we know it, and that has been already sufficiently diminished by the awareness of our true size in the universe. The results of scientific exploration that tell us we can use a telescope to see a cluster formation standing billions of years behind us in time will only continue to perplex us. Perhaps time is our only property, and because we cannot live and observe at the same time, we're ought to remain at risk. Emre Hüner's work is a subtle reminder of the imbalance inherent to contemporaneity, and the vanishing shreds of a present that though ours can never be identified. The shreds of the lived instant will always remain fleeting, intangible and mysterious.