

RIOT MATERIAL

ART. WORD. THOUGHT.

HOME

RIOT MATERIAL MAGAZINE

ART

BOOKS

FILM

RECORDS

RIOT SOUNDS

CINEMA DISORDINAIRE

Search Site

The Sublime Enormity, And Indifference, Of Nature

SEPTEMBER 3, 2017 BY [RIOT MATERIAL](#) — 1 COMMENT

David Molesky

at Deedee Shattuck, Westport MA

Reviewed by Robin Scher

Somewhere along the lines humanity divorced itself from nature. Fueled by industrialization, ours became a path beholden to the indomitable force of “progress.” That was at least the way things stood until—like an unrelenting alarm clock—we woke up to the consequences wrought by this modern god. Now with words like ‘Anthropocene’ entering our common lexicon, the line between humanity and her surroundings has once again begun to blur.

What exactly is the ‘Anthropocene’? According to a recent [declaration](#) by a group of international scientists, it’s the current geological epoch within which we find ourselves. Dating back to around 1950, this era is by its very etymological root a designation of the period in which humans have come to play a defining role in shaping the planet.

Back in days of yore when men wore tunics and Plato told it how it is, ‘nature’ was considered something inseparable from us; the universal thread that bound all of existence. This worldview,

however, didn't quite vibe with the empiricists of the Enlightenment. By their accounts, nature was something to be controlled, or if you were more into the work of the Romantics, idealized.

I don't paint nature. I am nature.

–David Molesky

Philosopher Timothy Morton argues that we need to return to a more Platonic way of thinking. In his book, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Morton makes a case for removing this artificial barrier we've come to construct around nature, calling for an existential state of being that Vince Carducci compares on [Pop Matters](#) to that of the philosopher Theodor Adorno's concept of "nonidentity."

"The idea of art as a form of autonomous individual expression (as opposed to craftwork performed on behalf of a patron be it king or church) emerged around the same time as the Romantic notion of nature," writes Carducci, reflecting on the critical component art came to play in the detachment from our physical surrounds. But surely if art was able to help elevate our collective sense of self, could it not today equally help to remind us of our innate interconnectedness too?



Almost a decade ago, New York-based artist David Molesky began thinking through this question by meticulously painting oceanic wave forms. During a recent talk as part of his involvement in a group show at the Deedee Shattuck Gallery in Westport, Massachusetts, Molesky reflected on what he'd come to discover through that process.

"I don't paint nature. I am nature," said Molesky, quoting Jackson Pollock whose words first set him off on his course. At first, Molesky explained, it was through the kinetic frenzy of action painting that he could "use the force of chaos and order" to create work that connected with Pollock's embodiment of nature. Some time later, though, during a walk along a pier he noticed a similar tension at play on the crashing waves below.

Hundreds of hours spent staring intently at the minutiae of waves later, what did Molesky discover? Well, for one thing, "When you're looking at a cloud or rock form, you're often seeing faces and figures." These projected patterns lead Molesky down the rabbit hole that would connect him to the [Platonic](#)

ideal and what he describes as the “sublime enormity of nature and its indifference.”

Molesky is of course not alone in this sort of revelation. As social constructs continue to dissolve, we are all starting to rediscover the sort of existential revelations embodied in Adorno and Morton’s philosophy of the “nonidentity.” Unsettling? Maybe. Or, rather a chance to embrace “true nature in all of its terrifying, inanimate and resolute otherness,”

writes Carducci. “In accepting this truth and working with it,” he continues, “ [our] hope for the future lies, if there’s to be any at all.”



~

A New York-based South African writer, Robin Scher is also a graduate of the Cultural Reporting and Criticism program at NYU.

FILED UNDER: [THE LINE](#)

Comments



KIM KEEVER says

SEPTEMBER 7, 2017 AT 8:27 AM

David Molesky is making excellent work with a deep philosophical view to the subject.

[Reply](#)