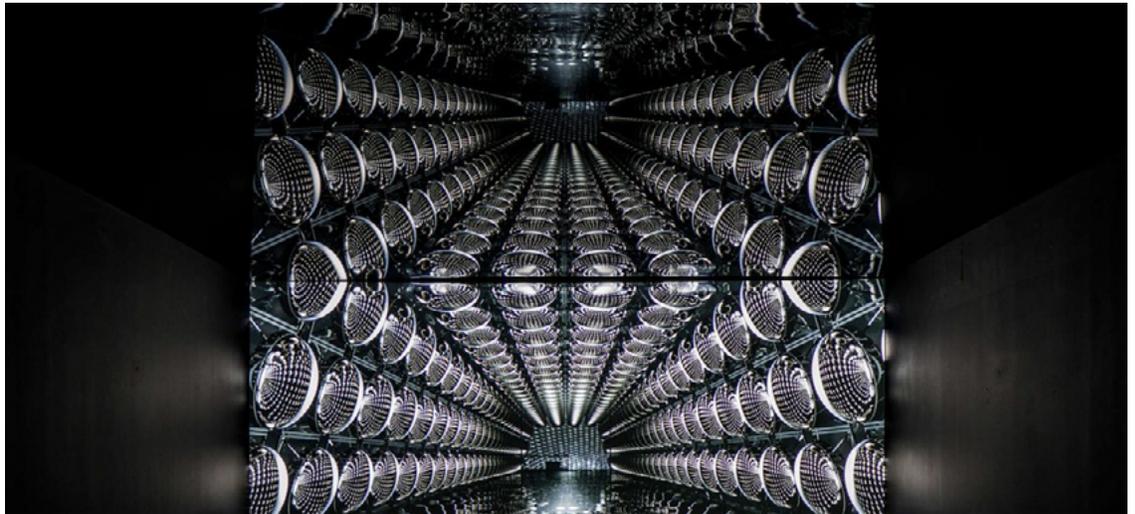


HYPEROBJECTS ON THE SIDE OF THE ABYSS

By Frank Bauchard – October 15, 2018



*How to take hold of what is beyond us? How to represent and act on what contains us? This questioning is the starting point of *Hyperobjects*, an exhibition co-organized in Marfa, a small town in western Texas, by the British philosopher Timothy Morton, a professor at Rice University in Houston, and Laura Copelin, director of the Center. Ballroom of Marfa. Inspired in particular by the reflection developed by Morton around the vertiginous scale of the elements invoked in the current ecological crisis, it brings together, under this rather singular theme, a dozen monumental installations, as well as a set of 'smaller scale works' * and objects lent by research centers and various local institutions. Games of scale, aesthetic discoveries and sensory experiments are all ways offered to the public to try to apprehend the notion of "hyperobject" and, more broadly, to situate themselves, as a human being, over time, space and in this biosphere of which we are only an actor (to be made accountable) among others and not the center.*

If we are no longer in the nineteenth century, join the Wild West remains an adventure. To get to Marfa from Buffalo, you have to change plane several times, land at El Paso, a city on the border with Mexico, and drive for about four hours through the desert stretches of Trans Pecos. It is in this town, known in the world of contemporary art since Donald Judd has established his residence and installed his works, that is held at the Ballroom Marfa, *Hyperobjects*, an

exhibition concocted by Timothy Morton in collaboration with Laura Copelin, the director of the art center, who strives to defend contemporary creation with the concern of dealing with the major issues of our time. The question of climate change, or rather global warming, is certainly one of the most decisive, particularly in a country that has suddenly withdrawn from the Paris agreements and is in the process of eliminating everything that comes under



Untitled (Plastic Cups), Tara
Donovan, 2006-2018.

the protection of the environment. nature in the interest of certain economic lobbies.

While we have been watching for a while the proliferation of exhibitions dealing with ecological issues, *Hyperobjects* stands out for its starting point: the concept of "hyperobject" invented by Timothy Morton in an eponymous book. From the resounding *Ecology without Nature* to the recent *Dark Ecology*, to the famous *Hyperobject*, now translated into French, the philosopher strives to develop a radical thought aimed at both tearing us away from secular thought patterns, which led to climate change, to bring out a new ecological awareness. Morton's writings stand out in a unique tone that combines philosophical meditations, from Hume, Kant and Heidegger reinterpreted by the current of speculative realism, and quasi-literary writing where the poetic contribution of English romantics rubs shoulders with multiple references. of contemporary creation. The use of music is also common, leaving imagine



*The Intimate Earthquake
Archive*, Sissel Marie Tonn,
with Jonathan Reus, 2016-
2018 (work in progress).

a soundtrack where drones of Sonic Youth would succeed the guitar riffs of My Bloody Valentine and the rhythms of Orbital. From volume to volume, the work gains tension, density and provocation, to become the driving force of another way of seeing the world. It torpedo all forms of indifference and explodes the routines of our fatal strategies to aim to cause an electroshock. It must be said that it is urgent to open our eyes. Because it is no longer a question of anticipating a future global warming but rather of learning to live with it. That is, to coexist with a drama: the sixth mass extinction, the ongoing eradication of fifty percent of living species. Either the end of a world. Morton proposes a paradoxical ecology that rejects old overly-used notions of nature and environment to promote a multiplicity of relationships to unusual entities, planes, spatial and temporal scales. We coexist with bacteria and stars, plants and octopuses, metals and fungi. Everything intertwines, interacts, circulates, creating infinite ramifications. It is in this perspective that is born the hyperobject, conceptual creation of Morton and pivotal notion of his work whose objective is to apprehend the entities both massive and intangible around us. The author draws our attention to man-made materials such as plastics, glyphosate or nuclear radiation, whose longevity and thus nuisance capacity can reach tens, even hundreds, of thousands of years. So many monsters that push the philosopher to open us to an ecological consciousness awake to hyperobjects, subject of the exhibition of the Ballroom.

In Marfa, a storm is raging. The agitated particles in the air magnify the sun, which suddenly takes on a heavy and disturbing aspect. The conditions seem perfect to apprehend the conceptual and sensory vortex of the hyperobjects. There is no need to be familiar with Morton's thinking, to understand at first glance that the exhibition shifts the conventional formats of contemporary art and induces a particular type of visit. Fossils and rocks of Trans Pecos rub shoulders with plastic works, scientific instruments



Rayo Verde, Ivan Navarro, 2018.



Repositioned Core, David Brooks, 2014-2018.

of laboratories or observatories, videos, installations, a herbarium ... The hanging is mainly on the ground in a gallery to become immersive in another. Everything seems to echo and be related, but stealthily, shifted or implied. The cartels deliver a minimum of information. The visitor is first invited to go directly to the works, to experiment them sensitively. Wear a pair of ear cups and a sort of knit rib, here, navigate a facility there or dive into two-way headphones with an accomplice or fix a blurred image a little further. You have to take your time, going back and forth between the works, between them and the objects, between the interior and the courtyard where a huge hole has been dug, until discerning strata, patterns, circulations, and accents distinct from one space to another. The exhibition does not develop in a linear way but asserts itself as a concentric medium where the inside and the outside communicate and exchange their place. She is a medium where materials, energies, and works of art intersect. It seems to suggest that we are at the Ballroom, but also in the Trans

Pecos, in the Chihuahua Desert where the storm is raging, in Texas, on planet Earth, in the universe. It operates an explosion of context to generate the ecological consciousness that Morton calls for.

The entrance to the exhibition takes place through the geological and paleontological stratum. The eye is first caught by a white mountain. Surgie at the end of the space, it is made up of thousands of plastic cups (100,000 precisely learned on the cartel). Tara Donovan is famous for her sculptures in everyday materials shaped by repetitive gestures. This is a condensation of the increasingly established idea of Anthropocene that humanity has a geological impact on the Earth. Whether it be plastic, polystyrene or nuclear radiation, stratigraphy makes the survey of the human presence as that of an indelible geological layer.

In the South Gallery, the hyperobjects evoked are as much time scales as materials. The collected works invite us to grasp the deep time, the excessive time scales of geological time. Presented by David Brooks, a carrot, illustrating 9 million years of sediments taken from a Texas oil basin, a dialogue with Permian fossils, which disappeared about 250 million years ago 85% of species alive. Further on, the Mexican-born artist Rafa Esparza has placed adobe slabs that have kept track of animal footprints and grossly affirm in the white cube the sensory presence of the earth. Entitled *The Five Kingdoms*, an engraving by Candice Lin, with medieval naivety but informed of the latest developments in biology and exchanges between the ecosystems of the biosphere, represents in a wheel the interactions between animals, plants, bacteria, mushrooms and protists. The weather is cyclical.

The geological motif continues in the Center Gallery. The Center for Land Use Interpretation, which conducts an exemplary investigation of the uses of the territories in the American West, presents a database of aerial photographs of industrial and agricul-



Solaris, Oscar Santillan.

tural sites in Western Texas completely remodeling the landscape. Objects exhumed during the making of a trench in the yard - a nail, a tin, etc. - are presented by Nance Klehm next to a wallet buried for five years by artist Paul Johnson who already looks like a strange fossil. Even more interesting is Oscar Santillan's breathtaking work of a lens and a photo. The Ecuadorian artist made the lens from the sand of the Atacama desert before taking a photo of it, greenish and fuzzy, as if by a strange loop the landscape could photograph itself. Can the earth become aware of itself? Can one imagine forms of non-human intelligence, radically different? So many questions asked by the artist whose work is named *Solaris* in tribute to Stanislas Lem. Further, wait for *The Intimate Earthquake Archive*. To experiment with this piece by the Danish artist Sissel Marie Tonn, it is necessary to put on a combination that translates in the form of sound and tactile vibrations the statement of earthquakes caused by gas drilling in the Netherlands. Astonishing.

In the South Gallery, unfolds an imaginary related to the electromagnetic spectrum and cosmic energies. A photograph of the Andromeda galaxy taken by the nearby astronomy observatory is followed by an imposing spectrograph, whose purpose is to detect dark energy, and images of gas emissions by thermography taken by Sharon Wilson. In these spaces with labyrinthine accents, three works impose their disturbing presence. Conceived by Megan May

Daalder, *Mirrorbox* invites us to exchange a look with a volunteer partner whose face will mingle with our. Seen from close up, the familiar things are volatilized to become strange ... The neon sculpture of the Chilean artist Ivan Navarro suggests a series of doors opening on a row of spaces leading into darkness. But the most striking work is undoubtedly the extraordinary video of the Lithuanian artist Emilija Škarnulytė. The spectator follows the evolution of a siren. Part of the waters of a nuclear power plant, it sneaks into a tunnel to lead to the foot of a glacier in the Arctic and continue its course to the sea. Filmed partly in a Nato base in Norway, accompanied by a dark soundtrack and anxiety, *Sirenomelia* (our opening photo) mixes a documentary approach, sumptuous catches, fabulous to map almost post-human landscapes.

The loss of bearings, disorientation, are certainly among the modes of writing of this exhibition out of the ordinary. From this point of view, it takes the opposite of *Reset Modernity*, presented in 2016 by Bruno Latour at ZKM on similar issues and whose objective was to identify sensors and procedures to understand the transformations at work in the world. On the flank of the abyss, *Hyperobjects* stands out as a dark medium - a real network of interferences and actions at a distance between human and non-human - and dizzying, whose meshes with oblique presences are woven on a succession of plans and spatiotemporal scales. The exhibition acts and becomes medium of the transformation of an ecological consciousness which is also consciousness of the dissolution of our world.

** The pieces presented in the exhibition are by Megan May Daalder, Tara Donovan, Nance Klehm, Postcommodity Collective, Emilija Škarnulytė, Sissel Marie Tonn, Rafa Esparza, Raviv Ganchrow, Paul Johnson, Candice Lin, Ivan Navarro, David Brooks, Oscar Santillán, from Center for Land Use Interpretation (California), Center for Big Bend Studies (Texas), Long Now Foundation (California), Rio Grande Research*



Mirrorbox, Megan Day
Daalder, 2014-2018.

*Center (Texas) and A. Michael Powell Herbarium
(Texas).*

Link: [Hyperobjects on the Side of the Abyss](#)