

Beauty Passing Through Us: Natural History and Art as Intervention An Exhibit in Support of Extraction, Art on the Edge of the Abyss

Online at Natural History Institute, Prescott, Arizona:

<https://naturalhistoryinstitute.org/art-exhibition/>

Project founders Edwin Dobbs and Peter Koch describe *Extraction: Art on the Edge of the Abyss* as “a year-long global coalition of artists and creators committed to shining a light on the effects of extractive industry in all its myriad forms, from mining and drilling to the reckless plundering and exploitation of water, soil, trees, marine life and other natural resources across the globe.”

The extractive industry’s headless exploitation is one corrosive symptom of an underlying cultural sickness: the emotional, physical, and spiritual disconnect from our generous living world. So, “Extraction” is not only the actual plundering of the earth, but it is a mindset: that the world is there for our plundering. We have normalized the corrosive twin assumptions that resource utility is of more value than beauty and that humans stand above the creation, rather than being an integrated part of it all.

At the Natural History Institute, we root all of our work in the careful, loving, and joyous attention we give to the more-than-human world and we work within a belief in the world-changing power of our respect, and of our humility, and in living in reciprocity, rather than dominance.

Thus, we understand artistic intervention to the extractive mindset to include expressions of celebration, joy, beauty, and revealed detail, in addition to the human reactions of pain, grief, and anger felt by all of us who are paying attention.

It is easy for an artist to wonder what their role is in this time of environmental and global crisis. Are we just fiddling on the deck of the Titanic? Or is there some other reason what we do is important.

Extraction Project originator Peter Koch stated: "I believe artists are morally and ethically called to imagine alternative ways and worlds that, with as much persistence and innovation that we can bring to the job, will effect change. How we see the world is how we treat the world. Artists should always be seeing and making the world they want to inhabit. Nothing else can pass as art."

Who will see a pebble the same way after spending time with a sculpture like *Black Rock Diamond* by environmental artists Roger Asay and Rebecca Davis; or see a flower as a simple thing after spending time with Diane Gilbert's delicate rendering, *Cloud Forest*? Who will pass by the roots of a fallen Ponderosa Pine without a second thought if you have studied Julie Comnick's drawings *Uproot 1* and *2* ?

Taylor McKinnon's photographs and Joe McShane's *St. Peabody's Relic: A Fragment of the True Coal*, achieve Marcel Duchamp's classic artist's directive, to "Make the invisible visible." Deborah Springstead Ford's archival pigment photographs and Jordan Ford's blown and wheel engraved glass take visibility to a different level, inviting us to see the planet from a perspective that is both revealingly distant and microscopically intimate.

We find hope and resilience along with the willow as seen in Kestrel Dillon's *Keeper of the Creekside Neckpiece*, or in the exuberant beauty of Louise Grunewald's monoprints, and Adele Seronde's paintings. The work of Walt Anderson, Curt Pfeffer, and Edie Dillon bids us appreciate, with tenderness and respect, the specifics of the animals, plants, and minerals that share our beloved places.

And, finally, we see the terrible peril of our current trajectory through Klee Benally's *Dark Mark of Manifest Destiny*, Ken Gorczyca's *Polar Bears in Joshua Tree Forest*, and the profound condemnation in Shawn Skabelund's *Overburden: Stripping away the Mountains and their People*, 2015.

The path to a different future can start at the place where we stop and look, truly look, at our world. If we really saw the miracles that surround us, how could we continue the brutal rampage?

The title of our exhibition, *Beauty Passing Through Us: Natural History and Art and Intervention*, was inspired by Jane Hirshfield's poem, *The Supple Deer* (you can hear Jane reading this piece during our recorded opening):

The quiet opening
between fence strands
perhaps eighteen inches.
Antlers to hind hooves,
four feet off the ground,
the deer poured through.
No tuft of the coarse white belly hair left behind.
I don't know how a stag turns
into a stream, an arc of water.
I have never felt such accurate envy.
Not of the deer:
To be that porous, to have such largeness pass through me.

We invite you to enjoy how these artists have brought beauty through them to provide a counterbalance to the mindset of Extraction.

Edie Dillon
Mogollon Highlands, Arizona
June, 2021