

Review of *IC-98: Drawn into Tomorrow* (Dundee Contemporary Arts, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2015 – 14<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

Hand-drawn animation is a unique medium, one that Finnish artistic duo Patrik Söderlund and Visa Suonpää (known together as **IC-98**) have been adeptly exploiting for years. *Drawn into Tomorrow* at Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA) is the largest exhibition in Britain to date of work by the long-time collaborators (who represented their country at the 2015 Venice Biennale), with the show presenting four large-scale animated tableaux alongside another, smaller piece.

Given that the imagery in these highly detailed and hauntingly ominous works is so rich and layered, it seems strange to learn that **IC-98** were first known as **Iconoclast**. Indeed, the animations exhibited at DCA demonstrate such attention to the craft of drawing – and to meticulously constructing a scene – that iconoclasm, with its destructive connotations, feels far removed from what viewers are invited to contend with here. What these images express beyond the level of creative technique, however, is much more consonant with a spirit of iconoclasm – of the breaking down of a given iconology (in this case, the persistence and legacy of modern civilisation on Earth). For the dominant theme that recurs in these works is one of absence (of human life) and of the decadent trace humanity leaves upon both landscape and environment.

A concern with the often-harmful effects upon nature produced by our increasingly technological culture has long preoccupied the pair. In an interview last year, the artists stated that their work is “post-historical, it is set in a distant future after the age of man. It’s about nature, which still has to deal with the consequences of the human era. It’s not natural nature but a twisted one.”<sup>1</sup> This idea of a twisted nature comes through strongly in *Abendland (Hours, Years, Aeons)* (2015), arguably the most elegiacally beautiful but simultaneously menacing work in the exhibition (it was also shown at the Biennale). Set apart from the other animations, in a darkened room with black walls and floor, it plunges viewers into an ageless realm. To a soundtrack of discordant electronica, an ethereal tree creaks and groans in the wind. Mists rise, fish dart about in the stream in the foreground. Slowly, the wraithlike tree turns from silky white to ashen black. Monstrous growls of strange instruments begin to encroach on the scene. Overwhelmingly, our sense is of an environment under threat (though that threat is never given obvious form) and, despite waiting for a moment of liberating transformation, there is only decay: cancerous smog engulfs the tree. It is a powerful comment on the bleak inheritance of Finland’s forests – the source of the country’s primary natural resource – in the

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Inka Juslin, founder and editor of the contemporary art blog *Firstindigo&lifestyle*. Accessed at <https://firstindigoandlifestyle.com/2015/11/04/ic-98-art-duo-from-finland/>

ages to come, captured harrowingly but mesmerisingly in this deft display of narrative-over-time about a narrative over time.

Time is undeniably crucial to the construction of these images and the way they ask to be viewed. They seem to exist beyond its limits but remain inextricable from it. We struggle to locate them in a concrete moment of past, present, or future, but our experience of them necessitates time and an understanding of its passage. This is particularly true of *A View from the Other Side*, which, at seventy minutes, is the longest animation in the exhibition. Its subject is an adapted version of a 19<sup>th</sup> century building of neo-classical design in the artists' hometown of Turku. It lay derelict for years after undergoing many transformations of usage and was then bought by a private company and remodelled as a commercial hub in 2011 (the year of this work's production). The columned Greco-style structure sits centrally within the frame and offers the perfect canvas on which to chart the gradual, almost imperceptible process of decay and nature's resulting reclamation of the built environment after its dereliction by humankind. It is a quiet but incisive meditation on the Anthropocene – the topical notion that we live in a geological epoch characterised by the negative legacy that industry, technology, and mechanisation are bequeathing to this planet's environment and ecosystems.

In the same room as *A View from the Other Side* are the two other large-scale works, both from 2013: a dual narrative consisting of *Arkhipelagos (Navigating the Tides of Time)* and its epilogue, *Arkhipelagos (Ebb)*. The immersive nature of IC-98's animations is nowhere more obvious than in the former, where we find ourselves literally at sea, amidst rolling waves, where a handful of rafts fashioned from debris are buffeted towards and away from each other. This nausea-inducing scene, full of movement but lacking hope, is then succeeded by 'Ebb' – a post-apocalyptic landscape resembling a battlefield, punctuated by grounded masts that look like abandoned battle standards. Again, the absence of human life is significant and sets up a clever interplay with the intrusion of viewers into the scene: trying to get a closer look, they accidentally breach the field of the projector and suddenly appear as ghostly apparitions in this otherwise unpeopled environment.

If there is one dissonant aspect to *Drawn into Tomorrow*, it is *Theses on the Body Politic* (2008). Couched in a tiny room off the main exhibition space, it argues with the other works in both scale and subject. There is no land/seascape here, only a strange, pulsating ring of light redolent of drug-induced hallucination. Set to a heady beat blaring through headphones, it makes for a dissociative whole, jarring with the viewers' surrounding environment. Rather than excelling through understatement, this is sensory overload and it detracts from the success of the other works, which make their statement forcefully but subtly. As is particularly obvious from this work's title, IC-98's artistic output is politically aware and

consciously so. The interpretive information in the exhibition leaflet makes much of this fact and it is reinforced by the inclusion of some of their artistic publications in cabinets outside the gallery rooms. However, the strength of this show is that – without prior knowledge of politics, economics, or philosophy – viewers can still appreciate these works and acknowledge the imprint that our collective actions will leave on the world as it is drawn into endless tomorrows.

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