

I am looking at Marco Bruzzone's recent work at a time of intensified personal interest in climate change and climate-driven global crisis – more specifically, given my profession, the frustrating riddle of the art world's underwhelming response to this crisis as a valid conceptual concern as well as an ethico-political cause. (That some of these responses are not just underwhelming but also curiously undiplomatic has certainly been proven in recent weeks by the ham-fisted reply of a global cohort of major museum directors to the perceived scourge of fossil-fuel protests taking the shape of telegenic pseudo-vandalism aimed at some of the world's best-known "oil" paintings.) Indeed, although the spectral reality of climate change is without a doubt the single greatest existential challenge faced by all of humankind in its 100,000-year history, it remains a subject that is oddly absent from the broad sweep of mainstream art world attention, and one could make the case that the climate crisis has yet to spawn its first generation of truly great, critically acclaimed masterpieces, whether in the realm of visual art, literature or cinema. Obviously, this enduring blindness is a function of a relative (and perfectly understandable) sense of powerlessness paralyzing the contemporary art world when coming face to face with the sheer enormity of the challenge at hand – but does the (perfectly legitimate) feeling of being utterly ill-equipped to address this crisis in any constructive way relieve us from the duty of caring, if only for the sake of show? No.

Marco Bruzzone's recent paintings are the result of a series of "underwater protests" staged in the maritime depths around Bergen, among other places. They resemble sign paintings squarely planted in the long tradition of protest art, but also allude to the comparably long history of marine iconography in painting – a world of mystery as much as knowing. (In a conversation about these works, the artist enthusiastically told me that according to fairly unified scientific opinion, only five percent of the world's oceans have been properly explored and charted to date.) Above all, however, they offer, quite literally, a muted glimpse of the future – or of what much of today's art might look like in the not-too-distant future: part of a "waterworld". (The much-maligned Kevin Costner action blockbuster of that name – set in a post-apocalyptic world of endless oceanic expanses following the complete melting of the polar ice caps – hasn't aged quite as badly as we think.) The sea has historically long been the place where we have made things disappear – where we send someone or something to "sleep with the fishes" – but it is also increasingly our destiny, and the submersion of everything we hold dear in it an unavoidable fate, which is precisely what Bruzzone is so keen on depicting. "Sink or swim": this much must also be true of art.

Marco Bruzzone is fond of invoking a much-loved mantra of the late, great Paul Thek: "get over yourself" – a phrase that first pops up in Thek's diaries of the early 1970s alongside his signature paintings of divers ("Diver" was the visionary title of a retrospective devoted to Thek's work in 2010), and which would acquire a more tragic charge in the years leading up to his premature death of AIDS in 1988. We must all get over ourselves, as well as out of our selves; we must face the music and dance – and wet our feet in the process. The future is art's to show.

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