

Ocean Earth Development Corporation was established in 1980, emerging from the New York-based Offices founded by Peter Fend, Colen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince and Robin Winters. It was conceived as an instrument for implementing the goals of the environmental art movement, directly building upon the ideas of artists such as Joseph Beuys, Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark. Through intensive, inter-disciplinary collaborations with scientists, connecting ecological imperatives with future-oriented technology, Ocean Earth has sought to develop a wide range of strategies for improving our relationship to the environment.

At the heart of Ocean Earth's approach is a fundamental re-organisation of geographical information according not to land masses or hemispheres, but to ocean basins. At Arnolfini, Ocean Earth will present Situation Room, an oceanographic display centred around Antarctica, a radical cartography that reconsiders the territories of nation states. The exhibition presents Ocean Earth's current projects which aim to achieve 'climate stability', through 'technology change'. The exhibition will also raise awareness of the effects of some of the world's major architectural landscape developments, such as the Three Gorges Dam in China, that are having catastrophic effects on the ecology of ocean basins.

Ocean Earth address the four responsibilities for architecture asserted by architect Leon Battista Alberti, needed for any inhabited area: clean air, living waters, circulatory space and defence.

As their name implies, Ocean Earth look at the world from the vantage of the sea, grouping territory into saltwater basins. The central axis of the planet is seen as Antarctica and all the main oceans receive waters spinning off from this land-mass. Arnolfini have invited Ocean Earth to set up a base camp called Situation Room to display their site projects and media work within the exhibition space. The space has Antarctica centrally located on the floor, with the four major ocean current 'outplays' on the walls - the Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific, the Eastern Pacific and the Atlantic. Proposals for many of these site projects have been prepared. Critics have said that the projects, while ecologically interesting, were impossible, and even undesirable, for an artist to attempt. Thus is seemed necessary to use a company - Ocean Earth.

In the foyer, Ocean Earth have organised the British Isles and Bristol Channel into physical units, using logic from what art historians have described as the most influential art piece of the 20th Century – Marcel Duchamp's infamous Fountain (1917). The aim is not aesthetic, but practical. In the Bristol Channel especially, the huge bio-productivity and quantities of sediment can be taken up by macro-algae tethered to rope rigs, holding spores self-attached from natural beds. This can permit large culls of marine biomass ready for fermentation to yield, among other industrial products such as methane gas. Ocean Earth also show how water flow can be collected with Poncelet-curve waterwheels inspired by Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel (1913), to yield electricity alongside wind turbines.

Situation Room is a workspace made public. It documents what Ocean Earth has done – has surveyed and telecast – and is contracting to do in specific sites of the planet. Responses to specific policy-question zones are shown with historical backdrop: for China in 1994, to not build giant dams like Three Gorges; for Ukraine in 1989, to recognise the instability of the Chernobyl site and seek hydrological solutions; for the Persian Gulf throughout, now extending into the deepest, most dangerous sediment hole, called ‘the Mother of all Poisons’, with what could be century-long excavation from Indian Ocean into trough, always with biomass, probably of bladder kelp, as the renewable-fuel source developed. In some cases, the models are very timely: will China proceed with building a city on the Yangtze estuary, named Chung Ming, or will it let fish and birds dominate there? Can New Zealand become a major environmental-engineering test-site, finally making good on its undeserved reputation as ‘clean and green’?

Models of earthworks, originated from artists like Dennis Oppenheim and Robert Smithson, are located near proposed sites. Also indicated on the walls are the different types of seaweed located in each of the regions (Elodea, Laminaria, Macrocytstis, Gracilaria, Echlonia, Waterlillies); and the flow of ocean gyres. Satellite imagery can be viewed on Ocean Earth’s emerging world service website www.GlobalFeed.info.

As the organisation of the space shows, Ocean Earth is not engaged with the Copenhagen Conference for Climate Change – they have long expected that the conference would be more of a spectacle than a success. Another world conference in Washington at the same time on a new treaty for Antarctica is considered more important. A body of laws from another country is also regarded useful: the hydrometric-area laws for the organisation of territory into saltwater basins, bay by bay, of Ireland in 1959, coupled with the UN’s Regional Seas Programme, with laws addressing ‘land-based sources of pollution (and riches)’, i.e. ocean basins. As might be expected, Ocean Earth is both in business and in battles: many vested interests (not least of them Exxon) have directly, with air-flown executive interventions, sought to block what Ocean Earth does, with the capitalist-revolutionary zeal of ‘creative destruction’.

Out with the old, in with the entirely new.

The sources of inspiration for Ocean Earth lie deep in 20th Century art movements. They are sparked by the fantasies of the Futurist Movement of electricity from the sea and of a countryside mobilised by wild energy. Using Conceptual Art strategies from the 60s and 70s, they supply the media market rather than the art market; and are a construction company for earthworks, inspired by Michael Heizer and Walter De Maria; a multi-artist site and media venture.

Stakeholders in Ocean Earth are: Peter Fend, Kevin Gannon, Catherine Griffiths, Heidi Mardon and Eve Vaterlaus. Scientists consulting for this Situation Room are Adrienne Livingston (ecologist), Shane Carter and Carl Henderson (fermentation engineers and

biochemists), and Samantha Lavender (satellite oceanography authority). The Situation Room will evolve. So too, we hope, the British Isles.

Discussion

2pm SAT 5 DEC, free

Members of Ocean Earth, including Peter Fend and Catherine Griffiths, will be in conversation with Tom Trevor, Arnolfini Director.