Exhibition Guide

Ocean Earth
Situation Room: Technology Change/Climate Stability

Sat 21 Nov 2009 - Sun 17 Jan 2010

The Ocean Earth Development Corporation endeavours to turn ideas from art into media and architectural proposals. Established in 1980 as a legally-incorporated successor to The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters,* an artists' attempt to reach non-art clients, Ocean Earth build an architectural practice from what it believes to be entirely-new forms of architecture: earth art, installation art, performance art, conceptual art and time-based art. Early backers were Joseph Beuys and structuralist film-maker Paul Sharits.

As their name implies, Ocean Earth look at the world from the vantage of the sea. It groups territory into saltwater basins. Viewing the planet, the central axis is seen as Antarctica. 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 floor, with the four major ocean current 'outsplays' 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 recognised that the projects, while ecologically worthy, are impossible for any artist to build. Thus Ocean Earth feel a company is required.

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, 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 along with wind turbines.

Sitation Room is a workspace made public. One sees here 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 inacurate reputation as "clean and green".

Satellite imagery from its emerging world service website, called *Global Feed*, are presented on the centre pillar. Models of earthworks, often originated from artists like Dennis Oppenheim and Robert Smithson, are located near proposed sites.

The sources of inspiration for Ocean Earth lie deep in the 20th century. They are sparked by the fantasies of the Futurists movement of electricity from the sea and of a countryside mobilised by wild energy. Ocean Earth get down to business using Conceptual Art strategies from the 60s and 70s. They are a construction company for earthworks, as set up by Michael Heizer and Walter De Maria; a multi-artist site and media venture, as attempted by Willoughby Sharp, organiser of the Earth Art Show; supplying the media market rather than the art market. They realised that they addresses the four responsibilities for Architecture asserted by architect Leon Battista Alberti, which look to provide for any inhabited area: clean air, living waters, circulatory space and defense.

As the organisation of the space shows, Ocean Earth is not engaged with Copenhagen Conference for Climate Change. It has long expected that the conference would be more of a spectacle than a success. Another world conference at the same time, on a new treaty for Antarctica, is considered more important. Also, another body of laws, from another country, is regarded as useful: the hydrometric-areas laws for organisation of territory into saltwater basins, bay by bay, of Ireland, also in 1959, coupled with the Regional Seas Programme of the United Nations Environment 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 it does, with the capitalist-revolutionary zeal of "creative destruction". Out with the old, in with the entirely new.

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.

*Yes, two of the names are of the now well-known: Jenny Holzer and Richard Prince.