

instant of making a line everything is altered, emotionally, creatively, and psychologically for the original artist. One sees this in Cao Xiaoyang (b.1968), who trained as a printmaker, an influence that remains in his work, especially in the tonal depth he achieves. Cao has also drawn inspiration from a long line of classical *shanshui* artists as well as a number of European masters, but his vision of time and space, season and universal energy is uniquely his own.

Cao does not make a true picture of that which is before him in *plein air* or from memory or, perhaps, from his photographic record. He is looking into nature and pulling from it the most vital aspects that are important to his vision, to his interpretation, giving recognizable form to much that appears abstract to the viewer. To bring trees, rocks, sky, and rivers alive in landscape is difficult enough with ink and brush, but in using charcoal, an elemental tool, Cao has to grapple with realizing the subtleties and illusions of his subject matter through drawing, hiding and revealing, breathing energy into multiple aspects of each scene. Using charcoal with which to draw requires that Cao adopt a different action. This action requires him to concentrate the pressure of the charcoal on the paper to achieve lines, shading, physical details, and the realities of positive and negative space in ways that are entirely distinct from ink and brush.

The sheer density of Cao's landscape art is almost visceral, in a way that is similar to the ink art of Liu Dan. It is as if his landscapes reside in his charcoal and are just waiting to be released from its coal black embrace to come to life on the paper. One has a sense of this in works such as *Spring Commences* (2008), *Winter Commences* (2008), and *Insects Awaken* (2010). Here, as in others, there is a feeling that one might just reach out and touch the rock or the tree or the water, be part of the revelatory experience of nature.

However one might interpret, or read, Cao Xiaoyang's art, there is the potent reality that his work is filled with a keen

sense of artistic observation and intellectual knowledge of his subject that is rare among Chinese landscape artists. His art is at once personal and open to all: to understand both the artistic beginnings and the physical reality of landscape, all one has to do is open one's eyes and emotions.

Ian Findlay

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### Edward Burtynsky at Sundaram Tagore Gallery

**W**ith all the modes of recording and communications at our disposal, why isn't more being done to stem the rape and pillage of the earth and its finite resources? Of course, there are myriad individuals and groups, in movies and in print, around the world fighting the long and lonely battle to save more and to let us know just how dire the situation with the earth really is. And then there are individuals like the multi-award winning Canadian photographer and documentarian Edward Burtynsky whose life revolves around the constant pain of coming face to face with destruction.

Burtynsky pulls no punches in his work. His photographs in his recent exhibition in Hong Kong entitled *Water*, from the series that began in 2007 and which is his largest color series to date, and his latest feature documentary entitled *Watermark* speak to earth's anguish around the world with an eloquence and directness that few artists match. His wide-ranging travels to well-known places and places barely on the map inform the content, the color, the aesthetic, and the message of his works, which are often very moving indeed.

We see waste every day. As individuals we add to it in thoughtless ways everyday. If we were more conscious of our blasé consumerist habits, we could help. Looking at it individually is pretty startling. But when one looks at the industrial scale of the waste dumped hither and thither by

corporations and governments with heed for land and people's health, it beggars belief that we are still alive, that the land continues to produce so much, that the water in so many places remains fit to drink. But all this is shrinking as we shrivel as a species.

Burtynsky neither preaches in his art nor does he obviously politicize it for his own ends. He is not at the preacher's pulpit. He is neither indignant with words nor does he harangue us with slogans. His eye is certain. His work is chillingly still. He lets his images speak to the enormous and perilous problem that we have with the waste that poisons our waters, withers our crops, and stunts our children. There are so many places today where the water is so polluted that to drink it means certain infirmity or death.

The commitment to continuing to make such work as a witness to humankind's folly is remarkable. One cannot help but feel humbled by his commitment and deeply moved by the

range of extraordinary images that he has achieved over the years. While so many of his images speak to desolation and destruction, there is an astonishing pictorial aesthetic to many that one is taken by the sheer physical beauty of the earth in turmoil. *Markarfljot River #3, Erosion Control, Iceland* (2012) and *Artemia Salterns, Gulf of California, Sonora, Mexico* (2012) are but two that speak to his remarkable eye.

Looking at Edward Burtynsky's photographs makes one realize that humans are now traveling as strangers in strange lands, where the landscapes are becoming more and more as antagonists than as friends in our struggles to survive. That we need witnesses of the caliber of Edward Burtynsky goes without saying. But we also as individuals need to wake up to the beginning of the end, and the sooner we do so the better the lives of future generations.

Ian Findlay



Edward Burtynsky, *Markarfljót River #3, Erosion Control, Iceland*, 2012, Chromogenic color print, 38 1/8 x 68 inches.



Edward Burtynsky, *Artemia Salterns, Gulf of California, Sonora, Mexico*, 2012, Chromogenic color print, 39 x 52 inches. Images: Courtesy of the Artist and Sundaram Tagore Gallery.