

Heather Morison – report on Arts & Ecology discussion June 2007

For the talk you asked me to consider the roles and responsibilities of artists in relation to environmental issues and concerns, and Ivan and I found that the idea of having a role or a responsibility sounded too much like having a job. We can't work within someone else's constraints and the only responsibility we have is to make really good art, whatever that is. However we certainly feel a personal responsibility. But, art can bring a real understanding to environmental issues in some amazing exceptional works such as Joseph Beuys 7000 oaks.

The film work we are showing at the Venice Biennale, Dark Star, 2007 shows images from Slab City, in California. This is a desert community that swells during the winter months with transient communities and travellers trying to escape from society. In the sky floats and spins a large crystal form, modelled from a piece of pyrite or fools gold. It looks like a meteorite or alien form, and suggests an impending doom or something untoward. Maybe some kind of disaster has happened or is about to.

We have been influenced by Brian Aldiss book 'Hothaus', which is a cautionary tale of global warming and J G Ballard's four books that look at what would happen to the earth if there were a drought, a flood, a constant hurricane or if nature began to crystallize. It is this post disaster world, and the human struggle to contain and control it that that interests us in terms of our engagement with environmental issues and concerns. We like to ask what is right and wrong in nature? Are humans just scared of change? Are we just battling nature, and won't it win in the end?

The structure/sculpture Pleasure Island, 2007 in Venice and its sister Fantasy Island, 2007 located in our wood in North Wales, are large wooden pieces made from felled trees in our wood. They are both based on pieces of pyrite from Quartzsite in Arizona. They look alien, both beautiful and disturbing. We find that considering the world as if we were aliens allows us a certain dispassion, and an ability to observe from a far therefore seeing things without all the emotional baggage that comes with being human.