

[entropy intensifies]

Performance and Process in Adam Tylicki's work.

Adam Tylicki flirts with unreality for his new installation at Baert Gallery. *20 Atmospheres* is the (by)product of a journey that Tylicki began to undertake many years ago — when the idea came to him to manufacture sculptures designed to implode under water.

After various attempts at realizing his vision, Tylicki finally launched his polished sculptures overboard, sending them to the bottom of the Atlantic. During their twenty minute journey, the pieces gradually implode under the weight of many atmospheres. These stainless steel sculptures — that Tylicki refers to as “shapes” — are contained inside cages doubling as camera rigs used to document their transformation from polished geometric primaries into shiny crumpled metal.

The reflections they exhibit as they distort, cast the objects into the “uncanny valley” — the moment when a computer generated image makes the viewer uneasy, questioning their senses. *Is this real? Or do my eyes deceive me?* This quasi-realism is the requirement for CGI effects in mainstream film, the digital material must pass a perceptive Turing test: appear real under the standards of photorealism or otherwise be discarded as unreal i.e. bad. Tylicki's images perform the reverse: he stages very physical processes, that we have no frame of reference for, and hence can only interpret as unreal - that is *synthetic*.

And yet, Tylicki's immersive effects required many, very practical considerations. Out of necessity, he taught himself how to weld in order to fabricate the cage-like rig that serves as a diving bell for the buoyant bodies. Great care went into sealing the objects so that they may keep the water out until they inevitably fold in on themselves and eventually burst at the seams, letting the water in. In an era when machine learning (so-called AI) produces synthetic imagery faster than any art director could keep up with, Tylicki designs decidedly slow and labour intensive physical processes, that finally touch upon the digital sublime.

In the show's central, cinema-scale video, we are invited to watch as the trapped sculptures descend (later ascend) from boat to ocean floor, eagerly awaiting their transformation, in turn terrified by sudden, irreversible changes, or delighted by slow, pressure-induced distortions. The caged sculptures eventually make their dramatic landing on the pristine ocean floor — like probes landing in a alien world. Some of them bounce, like unstable anchors, others peacefully showcase their arrival with graceful billows of sand — until they are hoisted up from darkness and back into daylight.

The sculptures short dramatic journey appears to mainly serve the purpose to document their own transformation, the video narrates nothing more than the “shapes” own hypnotic descent into the abyss, an image of a camera filming itself, distorting it's own reflection. The sculptures are retrieved before the flora and fauna could be tempted to interact with them and before a team of scuba divers looking for the wreckages of ship could happen upon them. Neither nascent corral reef or ancient treasure the pieces get hoisted back up definitionally unchanged, only having buckled under the load of hydrostatic pressure.

Long before the project's inception, Tylicki lived on a boat which he had sailed from London to North Africa and back, unmoored. What started a cheap way to live as a art and photography student became a seven-year journey. As he mentioned, throwing a storm drogue, a parachute like-anchor can help a boat stay its course in a storm so that the waves will not hit the ship's hull on its side. Indeed, back on the surface, the submerged objects have a navigational effect, on the boat and it's driver — they serve as hybrid between anchor and drogue. Perhaps this is what Tylicki's process hints at, the pure pursuit of the work as an existential balast, the rudder to steer one through unpredictable tides.

In their physical incarnation, the works refuse the two maritime definitions, that of flotsam — the remains of a ship which are the property of the ship owner and jetsam, — anything intentionally hoisted over board and claimable by anyone

BAERT GALLERY

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Text by Jasmin Blasco

who may happens upon it. The sculptures are simply *present* — testifying to their physical existence. Indeed they must prove themselves to be *real*, undistorted by the wide angle lens of the camera — like props from a movie. Their presentation validates our interpretation of the *image*: it is in fact the offspring of the union between camera and object, not of database and neural network. Relief: a human brought this into being.

Tylicki's scenography showcases another byproduct of the sculptures' Atlantic baptism. Once retrieved, the formerly submerged artifacts now reflect light in curious ways — delivering chaotic golden spirals patterns onto their black island-shaped plinth — an unintended photogenic side-effect to a photographic process.

– Jasmin Blasco. Los Angeles. Feb.2023

"Without, the wild world worlds, as it will..."
— John Banville, "The Singularities"

Adam Tylicki launched the preparatory work for what would eventually become *20 Atmospheres* in 2018. Did it take him five years to finish the composite artwork that is the final piece on display at the gallery? It is more accurate to describe *20 Atmospheres'* total duration as 4 years, 3 month, and 11 days. It is, as such, less an instance of either a sculptural practice or land art (both of which it nevertheless manifestly and unambiguously is) than a performance piece whose progression is borne within the very formal plastic parameters of the resultant work proper.

The course of actions that lead to the creation of *20 Atmospheres* commenced with the manufacture of seven polished stainless steel sculptural pieces whose faultlessly even surfaces, metallic sheen, and cleanly symmetrical geometrical shapes are distinctly reminiscent of Minimalism's erstwhile "specific objects". Tylicki began the process by building a custom English Wheel metalworking tool to allow for the creation of precise curvature conceived for the sculptures. The artist then proceeded to fabricate his own stainless-steel panels that were consequently precision-welded using tungsten inert gas (TIG) welding equipment to ensure the complete air-tightness and impermeability of the final pieces. Tylicki later minutely grounded away the consequent welds, rewelded the shapes, then re-grounded them again, over and over, until perfectly sharp and smooth edges without the slightest possibility of porosity were achieved. The sculptures were finished with several stages of polishing, providing for an unblemished mirror-like reflective surface veneer.

Once the pieces were manufactured, Tylicki encased them in the specially designed and constructed (as with everything else, by the artist's own efforts) metal cages and took them offshore near the coast of Faro, Portugal. There, equipping the cages with waterproof and highly shock-resistant camera rigs has allowed Tylicki to capture the phantasmagorical-seeming action of the underwater gravitational force—that's the titular *20 Atmospheres*, denoting the number of units of sea level pressure (approximately 292 pounds per square inch of surface) at the depth of roughly 660 feet—and the violence of its blunt potency's indifferent bashing of the steel sculptures' perfectly polished surfaces. In the resultant footage, the underwater gravitational force makes an abrupt, as if cannily timed for a jump scare, appearance, with a jagged cadence of a Monster horror movie sequence.

Nature's indifference to the vanity of human perfection is what the work enacts, and re-enacts over, and over, and over not only in the looping video projection on view but, more importantly, in the mangled shapes of the steel figures on display in the adjoining gallery—as in the organic daily flow of the two living forces' forever un-dialogic co-existence—through the "operation" of their final plastic form.

What Tylicki places on show is the natural world's placidly apathetic existence *outside* the living beings who imagine themselves to be at its center, beyond the contingent capacities of man's observation, or even the reach of his imagination. The ontological puzzle of paradoxical [im-]possibility of thinking such a state is referred to in, and around, the philosophy of Speculative Realism variously as "correlationism", "being in the world", "active-vs.-passive nihilism", or all the way back with Kant, the "antinomies of reason"—while the act of accessing it is what the philosopher Eugene Thacker has once pinpointed as the quintessential feature of Horror as an artistic device. Thacker distinguishes between the notions of the *World*, the *Earth*, and the *Planet*. The *World* is our daily sphere of existing and interacting with each other, the objects of our use and surrounding, and our material environment. The *Earth* is what comes to our attention when the temperature records become averages and the erstwhile highs become a rare respite; when the Fire Season becomes an ambient State of Preparedness; or when volcano eruptions ground planes and disrupt plans. The *Planet*, then, is all that exists outside of the two spheres abutting the human existence or thought, the beside and beyond so profoundly unconcerned with notions of vitality in any form as to be indifferent to its complete cessation. It has existed for billions of years before us, before any life as we define it, and may continue existing for millennia after—that is the quintessential terror that is enacted in *20 Atmospheres*. The wild world worlds, as it will.

The aesthetic parameters of Tylicki's sculptures amplify the conceptual import of *20 Atmospheres*. Their most readily available stylistic affinities are Robert Morris and Donald Judd, the icons of High Minimalism. It isn't coincidental that that most phenomenologically oriented of artistic paradigms should work as a foil to Tylicki's deconstruction of the narcissistic solipsism of human industriousness. Requiring a viewer's presence and personal affective input to "complete" the piece, Minimalism's clean shapes once elevated the audience's complacency to a gratifying status of an irreplaceably integral part of the work itself.

By allowing the unblemished doubles of its reflective steel angles to be left mangled into bashed asymmetry by planetary forces, Tylicki dismantles these comforting notions of anthropocentricity. What may be seen as a mute and fully concluded sculptural object reroutes its viewers' understanding away from the egotistical readings of pure emotional affect toward an understanding of the complete piece as an unceasing performance.

— Valerie Mindlin

Adam Tylicki holds a BA of Fine Art Photography from the Academy of Fine Arts of Gdansk in Poland and a Master Degree of Fine Art from Central Saint Martins in London. The artist works in a wide range of media, including performance, installation, sound, video and painting.

The artist spent seven years of his life living on a boat, and the intimate proximity to the aquatic forces afforded by that experience profoundly influenced the direction of his practice, grounded in the direct knowledge of, and a dialectical response to, the vagaries of environmental co-existence.

20 Atmospheres is the first in the continuing series of artistic experimentations that inquire into the metaphysics of climate and oceanic life.