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A | D GILES LIMITED
2ND FLOOR
162-164 UPPER RICHMOND ROAD
LONDON, SW15 2SL, UK
T|F | +44 (0)20 8780 5060
M | +44 (0)7971 547155
E | DG@GILESLTD.COM
W | WWW.GILESLTD.COM

- TITLE:** **DAMAGED ROMANTICISM**
A Mirror of Modern Emotion
- AUTHORS:** **Terrie Sultan, David Pagel, Colin Gardner, Nick Flynn, Claudia Schmuckli**
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- ILLUSTRATIONS:** 130 colour and 6 b & w illustrations
- TEXT:** 47,500 words, including Acknowledgements, overview essay by Terrie Sultan, essay on historical context by David Pagel, essay on related themes in film by Colin Gardner, notes and captions, Nick Flynn's June 2007 story *a crystal formed entirely of holes*, Entries on the Artists, Selected Exhibitions and Publications, Notes on the Contributors, Index, and Photography Credits
- MARKET:** Students of art, photography, film, contemporary art and popular culture; artists and museum and art professionals; all those with an interest in modern and contemporary art and popular culture and art history
- SALES POINTS:**
- Publication accompanies a major exhibition at Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston opening in September 2008, and travelling to Grey Art Gallery, New York University, in 2009
 - Features works by internationally acclaimed artists including Richard Billingham (England), Berlinde de Bruykere (Belgium), Edward Burtynsky (Canada), Sophie Calle (France), Petah Coyne (United States), Angelo Filomeno (Italy), Jesper Just (Denmark), Mary McCleary (United States), Florian Maier-Aichen (Germany/United States), Wangechi Mutu (Kenya/United States), Julia Oschatz (Germany), Anneè Olofsson (Sweden), David Schnell (Germany), and Ryan Taber/Cheyenne Weaver (United States)
 - Includes a new work of fiction by Nick Flynn, author of *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City* (2004)

advance information



Fig. 18. In the Plaza is also playing host to an American couple, Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), a recent philosophy graduate from Yale, and her photographer husband John (Jesse Eisenberg), who is visiting Japan to photograph a rock band, like Bob. Charlotte is indulging in identity crisis. She has little or no career direction—she's accompanying John for want of anything better to do and spends her free time engaged in the usual tourist activities, visiting museums and bookstores—and discovers that her marriage is falling. Events reach a critical head when John bumps into his actress friend Kelly (Ariana Fariq), whom Charlotte has just met and is pursuing. In response, John berates Charlotte for being consistently unable to stand Kelly's company. Charlotte spots Bob—they had met earlier following a mutual bout of misadventure—in the Parkhouse Bar and they strike up a conversation. "Can you keep a secret?" asks Bob.

Photo credit: © Elizabeth T. Ryan, History and Illustration in the "Production of Reality"

comparatively. "I'm trying to organize a prison break. I'm looking for, like, an accomplice. We have to first get out of the bar, then the hotel, then the city, and then the country. Are you in or you out?" Charlotte: "I'm in. I'll pass my cell" Bob: "I hope that you're not enough drunk. It's going to take courage."

After John leaves for his photo shoot in Fukushima, it is inevitable, given Charlotte's intelligence, that she will eventually meet Bob's friend, the mercurial karaoke singer, where Bob's strained rendition of Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a-Changin'" reveals a hidden side of Bob's character. Charlotte's intelligence is also evident in her ability to make a quick decision and to accept that she has to leave with the band's lead singer (Charlotte's husband). "Well, she is closer to your age. You could talk about things you have in common. Like, going up to the roof" However, despite their tender physical contact—Charlotte leans her head on Bob's shoulder as they share a cigarette, he gently tucks her under the covers when she falls asleep following a night on the town, and Charlotte has her foot on his after a long conversation about career and marriage—Coppola skillfully steers the couple's relationship into something deeper: that of soul mates.

Indeed, it is obvious that a sexual romance is out of the question. First, both are married, albeit unhappily. Secondly, the age difference, despite Bob's often childlike antics, is overwhelming. Instead of following the usual trope of independent romantic heroes, Coppola allows the couple to develop their relationship in the present tense—they literally learn to live in "the now" by self-consciously making vivid memories to fall back on in the future, almost like creating a past—as a means of putting meaningful life back into their respective marriages once they return to the States. This one level of romance is rooted in the experience of another that is ultimately sacrificed for a greater long-term good. It is an accident that the film is full of memorable moments, like the karaoke sequence or the long scene where Bob and Charlotte talk, fully clothed, on the hotel room bed, because these are also the unique memories that are created by and for the characters themselves. Indeed, Bob seems to sense this when he takes an unkindly interest in Charlotte on his way back from doing a television talk show, and the latter confirms her similar feelings when she later says to Bob: "I wish I never came here again, but it would never be as much as this."

It is this need to refuse the immediacy of memory that explains the film's ambivalent ending. Unhappy as they finally go their separate ways and disoriented by their awkward behavior in the hotel lobby in front of the laughing Sanyo executives, Bob spots Charlotte walking along the street as he makes his way to the airport. He asks the chauffeur to stop, chase her down and finally gives her the embrace and tender kiss the audience has craved all along. However, although both parties have succumbed to their deepest feelings and Bob achieves something unattainable in her ear, it is highly unlikely that he is happy. "I wish I could sleep with the camera and meet me in the airport when I'm really happy" (Bob) suggests have suggested. Indeed, the music counsels—Thelma and Mary (Cher), "Just Like Honey"—tells a more fitting, albeit more sobering story about a man and a woman's commitment to keeping their married marriages alive. "Thinking back to you, is the hardest thing that I can do... it's your plastic toy for you. Laying up the room, is the hardest thing for me to do. Just like honey."

CONTENTS:

Damaged Romanticism features 15 internationally recognized contemporary artists whose work, in painting, sculpture, installations, and photography based media, is thematically linked by their visual representations of how stubborn optimism, rather than utopianism, triumphs in the face of daily adversity. Belonging neither to a style nor a traditional "school", featured works all embody an outlook frequently forged in heartbreaking disappointment, but never resigned to the social conditions that precipitated the initial pain or failure. *Damaged Romanticism* explores contemporary art that stresses emotions without relying on the finality of classic Romanticism; the fantasies of classic Romanticism are mitigated by the clarity of pragmatic realism.

In her opening essay *Damaged Romanticism: a Mirror of Modern Emotion*, Terrie Sultan offers an overview of the concept behind the exhibition and explains how the chosen works capture the complexity of contemporary reality by giving form to ambivalent, even contradictory sentiments of rebellion, disillusionment, and defiance. David Pagel, in *Romanticism's Aftermath*, considers the role of Romanticism and Neoclassicism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how "damaged romanticism" is a reinterpretation of this. The links between art and film are further explored by Colin Gardner in the third essay *From her(e) to eternity*.

Preceding the main catalogue is a short story by Nick Flynn, *a crystal formed entirely of holes*, a new work of fiction written especially for this exhibition.

The volume features works by an international roster of artists, including Richard Billingham (England), Berlinde de Bruykere (Belgium), Edward Burtynsky (Canada), Sophie Calle (France), Petah Coyne (United States), Angelo Filomeno (Italy), Jesper Just (Denmark), Mary McCleary (United States), Florian Maier-Aichen (Germany/United States), Wangechi Mutu (Kenya/United States), Julia Oschatz (Germany), Anneè Olofsson (Sweden), David Schnell (Germany), and Ryan Taber/Cheyenne Weaver (United States). Each artist has an individual catalogue entry written by the contributors, examining their work and placing it in the context of the exhibition, and including full biographical and bibliographical sections.

AUTHORS:

Terrie Sultan, Director and Chief Curator of Blaffer Gallery; **David Pagel**, Assistant Professor of art theory and history at Claremont Graduate University, Los Angeles, CA and Adjunct Curator, Blaffer Gallery; **Colin Gardner**, Associate Professor in critical theory and interdisciplinary media at the University of California, Santa Barbara; **Nick Flynn**, Assistant Professor in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston and author of *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*; **Claudia Schmuckli**, Adjunct Curator, Blaffer Gallery

EDWARD BURTYSNKY



Edward Burtynsky's large-scale photographs depicting the impact that modern civilization has had on the planet even a glorification place in which the most daunting feat of industrial engineering has come to nothing, or worse, a toxic dump of a world, where human scavengers pick over the remnants of things to which they had no access—and glared into banishment from which they were once useful, and promising. The power of Burtynsky's images resides in both the relationship they outline between man and nature, a staple of nineteenth-century Romanticism, and in the even more charged—and malleable—relationship between the diverse and linked corners of the global village, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the threat and the rest.

Not so long ago, nature was conceived as a potentially infinite realm filled with intrinsic forces too vast, grand, and all-encompassing to suffer much at the hand of man. It certainly seemed to stand apart from industry, which was contained in rapidly growing colonial but not yet made much of a mess of the countryside. Throughout the Industrial Revolution—and well into the twentieth century—nature was imagination's springboard, providing poets and painters with a blank slate on which to inscribe their fantasies of sublime beauty, unmitigated splendor, and ethereal cycles of creation—to traverse adventure, redemption, and self-transformation. By depicting nature as a quasi-divine, seemingly omnipotent power that stood over and

above every one of us, this once-dominant outlook simultaneously suggested, or simply assumed, that all humanity formed a unified group—that we were all in it together—joined to our shared indignities to some thing bigger than individual efforts and collective endeavors.

Those days are long gone. The opposition between nature and civilization no longer holds much power over adventuresome imaginations and has little sway over popular consciousness. In the information age, humanity is now commonly conceived as being part of the big messy mix of the global world, with natural and cultural components forming a complicated, multilayered, interactive blend. It no longer makes sense to speak of nature as a pure, God-given realm, untouched by human action and free of social artifice. This is the world that Burtynsky's photographs convey with chilling precision, often giving gorgeous form to the ugly underbelly of international commerce.

Burtynsky's (often haunting) images (to, in effect, all made in Chongqing, Bangladesh, or in natural down to the basics: earth, water, and air—or, more precisely, mud, pollution, and haze. All that remains of the sweeping vistas, barbaric seas, and snow-capped peaks of the lands open farms and meadows in nineteenth-century Romanticism is unattractive fetters, the cease and that of a vast cold glare under a sky equally fattened by even light, lack of clouds, and bright glare, which makes you squint and comes very close to burning

Fig. 1 Edward Burtynsky, *Spanning*, 2011 (Color, Acrylic, 200 x 200 cm)
Fig. 2 Edward Burtynsky, *Spanning*, 2011 (Color, Acrylic, 200 x 200 cm)

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A crystal formed entirely of holes by Nick Flynn

Entries on the Artists:

- Richard Billingham
- Berlinde De Bruyckere
- Edward Burtynsky
- Sophie Calle
- Petah Coyne
- Angelo Filomeno
- Jesper Just
- Mary McCleary
- Florian Maier-Aichen
- Wangechi Mutu
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