

Creative Writing and Visual Art Section

Isabel Hoving: Editor's Introduction

The futuristic cover image shows one of the intriguing art works of Belgian sculptor Jef Faes (9-keto-trans-2, Unit.01, 2009, courtesy Verbeke Gallery, Antwerp). This installation began as a geometrical form, that was then hollowed out. As a next step, Faes had honeybees help him develop the complex structure, that, in his words, “embrace(s) emptiness and make(s) it visible.” Thus, the installation becomes a “metaphor of self-organisation, life, and death.” As the website has it: “Faes' sculptures at the same time stand for emptiness and matter, for both micro- and macrocosmos.” As an artwork created by the interplay of technology, man, and honeybees, and as an exploration of the different scales of life, it is a wonderful comment on the issues that ecocriticism aims at exploring – such as the question who, or what, invents the future¹.

The other works in this issue's Creative Writing and Visual Art Sections also offer their own colourful, wayward response to the unusual theme of this special issue: the invention of eco-futures. We first present three poems by Terry Gifford, that do more than ponder the future. All three of them, set in rural regions in Spain, play with time by interweaving evocations of the past and present state of the landscape, thus suggesting a new way to perceive it – and perhaps open a space to invent its future too. The presence of Gifford's imaginative work in this issue is not restricted to the Creative Section. British poet Gifford, who lives part of the year in Spain and is *profesor honorifico* at the University of Alicante, is also visiting Professor at the Centre for Writing and Environment, Bath Spa University, and the author of several well-received and influential studies on literature and the environment. A review of the new, revised edition of his *Green Voices*, a study of contemporary British nature poetry, can be found in the Review Section.

Gifford's first poem concerns Segóbriga, an important Roman archaeological site in Castile-La Mancha, which has once been a mining city. The poem uses the site to reflect on the many forms of energy produced here in past and present, with the help of wood, oil and other minerals, watermills, ancient and modern windmills, sunflowers, and solar panels. Instead of a nostalgic musing, however, the text suddenly and shockingly jumps to our still violent present, inviting us to reflect on the nature of modern civilisation.

The Visual Art section can be seen as a response to this poetic exploration of layered, laboured landscapes. It consists of a set of subtle landscape paintings by the Spanish painter José Albelda, member of the Research Center in Art and Environment at the Polytechnic University of Valencia, where he received a PhD in Fine Arts. Albelda,

¹ See http://www.verbekefoundation.com/Jef_Faes.html; <http://9-keto-trans-2.blogspot.com/>

too, like Gifford, is intrigued by the effects of mining on a landscape, and offers his personal imagination of wounded and burning landscapes – by mining, or otherwise. His series "Life of the Mountains", represented by three paintings, is composed of a number of drawings and paintings where scenes of aggression to nature are depicted by means of some metaphorical wounds, and also through sceneographies of restoration and regeneration. The most recent work, *Peat Burning I* (2012), stresses again the idea of indirect damage. In this case, the painting depicts a spontaneous fire in Tablas de Damiel National Park, namely, a Spanish wetland whose combustion began spontaneously due to the lack of water as a result of the overexploitation of the aquifers that feed it.

The theme of energy is taken up again in the last long contribution to the Creative Writing section, a story by cultural theorist Catherine Mary Lord, who works at the Culture and Media Department of the University of Amsterdam, and is also a creative writer and performer. She describes her story, which is one in a book of stories on climate change, planetary ecology, and media that she is preparing, as "a darkly comic tale of Shakespeare and survival in a time of global warming and beyond the boundaries of peak oil." What we love especially is the link suggested here between Shakespeare's abundance on the one hand, and ecological exuberance on the other. Sardonicly, Lord adds: "Enjoy your apocalypse." Also because the other writer and artist in these sections adopt a darker mood, we are not sure that the creative sections will indeed lead to an enjoyable view of what lies ahead, in terms of ecology. But we do hope that this small collection of poems, pictures and prose accomplishes a titillating interaction with the scholarly contributions in this issue, and perhaps even enriches it.