

Creative Writing and Arts Section Editorial

Isabel Hoving
University of Leiden

Sometimes it is painfully clear that a digital journal fails to do justice to the art work it presents. To appreciate Michael Markwick's paintings and drawings, such as *Dark Water*, our cover image, one should be able to face them up front. They are immense. Most of the paintings measure almost 2,5 by almost 3 meters. The overwhelming charcoal drawing (*Blackened Earth*) even measures 195 x 700 cm. Imagine walking into a gallery, and bumping into one of these huge, strong canvases: their raw materiality will take your breath away, much more than *Ecozon@*'s modest screens can ever do. But even in digital circumstances, the force of these images is tangible.

Markwick's works shock us into experiencing nature's materiality. His interpretation of the natural environment is huge and domineering. As the works lack horizons, the viewer finds no outside vantage point that would allow for an overview: one is fully immersed. But this uncompromising evocation of rampant growth, destruction, and decay does not cater for the romantic yearning for immersion in a healing, beneficial nature. In this respect, this art connects to the dark ecology theorized by ecocritic Timothy Morton, who argues that the desire to become one with nature is futile, as nature has already been destroyed. Markwick's art conveys that same sense of violence and destruction, but, in spite of its post-apocalyptic mood, it also highlights the environment's uncontrollable lust for growth. This growth is not necessarily pleasing to the eye, or reassuring; in this sense, it is not *meaningful*: it does not tell an optimistic tale of a new spring.

The tension between the search for, and the refusal of, meaning is one of the most intriguing aspects in this work. While its affinity with (abstract) expressionism hampers a merely figurative reading, the viewer does discern broken trees, roots, trenches, and black pools nevertheless. The titles even encourage such a figurative, perhaps apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic reading. Moreover, the remarkable centralized organization of the paintings sometimes seems to refer to the human anatomy: *Trench* suggests a skeleton's backbone and the remnant of a ribcage, and this reference can be seen to return in most of these works. However, the very materiality of the paint, the uncompromising dark blots and voids, and the seemingly unintentional patterns of strokes and scratches work strongly against such closure. Markwick works in the heart of the issue that environmental art is engaged with, nowadays, and that may best be described with the help of dark ecology. While insisting on the need to mourn the destroyed environment, dark ecology rather urges us to acknowledge the *meaninglessness* of the trauma of ecological crisis. This can only be done when one refrains from understanding the crisis either through stories of eternal regeneration, or apocalyptic narratives. Markwick's strategy consists of drawing in his viewers by sheer size, by offering the shapelessness and chaos they recognize from their own outdoor experiences, and simultaneously refusing a facile projection of meaning. It succeeds very well in making us feel the full scope of nature's (and our) predicament.

The poetry this issue offers you speaks in three completely different voices, but all agree that the natural environment is entangled with human society. In Brian Glaser's poems, we find a struggle with meaning that has some affinities with Markwick's work, but takes a very different path. Glaser's first text ponders the desire to know as a way to relate to finitude, and in this it comes close to the acknowledgment of the centrality of death in the environment that we also find in the paintings. But Glaser's tone is much more tentative, modest, quiet, and analytical. "The Wooden Floor" conveys the subtle hope that, in spite of social and environmental problems (such as water shortage), there are still possibilities for change. The poem searches these in a patient, caring observation of his surroundings, as it reflects on the transformative power of thought and writing. This poetry highlights the potentials of multilingualism, that is as much an opening up of possibilities, as a modest invitation for interaction – that is, the willingness to respond to the other, and be open to change.

Florian Auerochs' "Soliloquy of a Former Harpy" harks back to a mythological time when human beings and mythological beasts were still one. Apart from its lively evocation of the violent vitality of those days, the poem is a reflection on the ambivalent role of discourse in the process of othering (animals, women).

Matthew Griffiths' poems picture the wild, weird natural environment as continuously intervening in contemporary urban life: either as wind, rain, or as weird noises and fragrances. Both man-made technological artefacts and nature (sea, morning) are acting on their own behalf, driven by their own desires, while they are often happily – but disturbingly – interacting with humans. The environment is not just acting on the fringes of the city, nor is it merely the hidden dimension of society; these poems suggest that it can take over any minute. This uncontrollable force even comes to life in the light-hearted exuberance of the poetic language itself.

Michael Markwick was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan U.S., and he grew up on the edge of Michigan wetlands, marshes, and woods. He now lives and works in Berlin, Germany, and The Hague, the Netherlands, not far from the wetlands of the Hollandse Biesbosch. His work has been exhibited numerous times, often in Germany, the Netherlands, and the U.S. www.michaelmarkwick.com

Brian Glaser teaches at Chapman University in Orange, California. His poems were published in *Ploughshares*, *Literary Imagination*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Five Fingers Review*, *Rapidfeed*, *North American Review*, *MARY*. His essays appeared in *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, *College Literature*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, *Wallace Stevens Journal*, and the *William Carlos Williams Review*.

Florian Auerochs is currently studying German Literature and History of Art (B.A.) at Otto-Friedrich-University of Bamberg. Second Winner of the 2011 Feki.de-Literaturwettbewerb (Bamberg), he published short prose in the *anthology Bamberger Federführer* and in the students' university magazine *Ottfried*. Both in his academic research and in his literary writing he is concerned with feminist literary criticism, animal studies and psychoanalysis.

Matthew Griffiths is in the final stages of a PhD on climate change and modernist poetics at Durham University in the UK. His first pamphlet, *How to be Late*, has recently been published by Red Squirrel Press, and a science fiction novel, *The Weather on Versimmon* by Big Finish in 2012.