



HANS DE WIT LONDON

The soundtrack, composed by Gaillard's frequent collaborator Koudlam, serves to further distance us from the images on the video, providing a cushion between us and what is happening—or not happening—on the screen.

Three of the photographs on view are from the *Cairns* series, two photographed in Glasgow—*Cairns* (12 Riverford Road, Pollokshaws, Glasgow, 1967–2008), 2008, and *Cairns* (131 Allan Street, Dalmarnock, Glasgow, 1965–2007), 2007. They are reminiscent of British artist John Latham's 1975 proposal that five derelict "bings"—shale heaps from the early oil industry in Glasgow and Edinburgh—be designated as art works/monuments. Latham's project, done as part of his Artist Placement Group (APG) residency with the Scottish Office, was utopian—a proposal to reconceptualize the current visual landscape. Whereas Latham's designation of monuments came out of a desire to integrate artistic practice into everyday life—APG sought to "embed" artists in industrial sites and government buildings—Gaillard's photographs are neither utopian nor dystopian. As Gaillard told curator Catharina Manchanda, the images of abandoned urban architecture are simply about the landscape and what makes it interesting. In her catalogue essay, Manchanda has compared Gaillard to Robert Smithson, insofar as he too is preoccupied with the idea of site and its eventual decay or destruction. Smithson's (and Latham's) preoccupation with site grew out of the anti-materialist optimism of the 1960s. Gaillard's photographs, by contrast, exist only in the present—a permanent, albeit darkly beautiful, image of urban decay, rather than a performative immersion in that landscape.

—Jennie Klein

Despite all of the apocalyptic gossip that builds up at the end of each decade, Hans de Wit's debut in the UK, *World Without End*, suggests that the world will keep evolving—though its form will not always be completely recognizable, and human fate is not guaranteed [Isis Gallery; January 9–February 20, 2010]. Through two series of charcoal and pastel works on paper, he illustrates a vast, mystic dystopia that stylistically marries the biomechanical organisms of H.R. Giger with the magnificent landscapes of J.M.W. Turner.

Vigorously gestural charcoal marks swarm across each work atop spectral fields of pastel color to create scenes that are aesthetically sublime, romantic, and expressionistic. Meticulous details invite us to step closer and observe the works from an intimate distance. As we stand in front of the four *Arcanum Arcadia*, 2009, panoramic works on paper—which span over eight feet wide—an epic scene that hovers between futuristic and primal, arcadian and apocalyptic, fills our field of vision. The series' title is historical and mythical, suggesting that these drawings are concerned with expressing knowledge of a fantastical place that is concealed from our current reality.

Although de Wit's works maintain an ambiguity, many of the titles in this series refer to allegorical stories. *Ahab*, 2009, displayed on the ground floor, gives a literary reference to *Moby-Dick* and the fate of the Captain Ahab of the ship *Pequod*, who is driven to his own death by his hubristic revenge against the infamous great white whale. De Wit's *Ahab* depicts a recumbent dismembered human figure atop a large beached gonadic form that has been punctured with a multitude of dark harpoons. Littered in the surrounding shallow waters are eggs and fallen birds. In the background, a dramatic dark cloud unfurls across the vivid pastel skyscape. As a single scene from the grand dystopia that de Wit illustrates, *Ahab* is an exemplary account of caution.

Also on display are three smaller works from the artist's *Pencil Poems* series. Though no less impressive

than *Arcanum Arcadia*, these drawings are devoid of narrative references and convey ambient scenes of a more experimental nature. *Pencil Poem #6*, 2009, an exceptionally surreal work, appears set at an ocean seabed. Here, a large dark form in the drawing's upper portion suggests an ocean vessel. Sprouting across the floor, among indistinguishable shells or debris, bizarre life forms feature various bird heads atop curvaceous plant stems.

In each of the seven works on display, the paper's entire surface is screened with tiny pastel markings that create a subtle grid. These marks give the drawings a documentary quality as they allude to de Wit's intensive working process of transferring and enlarging images from preliminary sketches to the finished works.

The enigmatic scenes illustrated throughout *World Without End* follow the modernist artistic tradition of grappling with anxieties about the coexistence of humanity, nature, and technology. Organic aspects of de Wit's works are foreign rather than alien; they are a testament to the evolution of technology as it merges with and transforms biology. At times, these engineered organisms appear better suited to thrive, yet to what ends? De Wit, based in Eindhoven, has exhibited widely throughout the Netherlands, yet rarely abroad. In his previous exhibitions, images including architectural fragments optimistically suggested human inhabitants. Here, as both living human forms and their dwellings are absent, the fate of civilization becomes dubitable.

—Amelia Ishmael

ABOVE: Hans de Wit, *Cicaden*, 2006, pastel and charcoal on paper, 148 x 260 cm (courtesy of the artist and Isis Gallery, London)