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Urbanature – Ross Rudel and Pierre Picot

New Representations of the Natural A six part serial essay and online exhibition focused on the contemporary depiction of landscape in the painting, photographic and sculptural arts.

Essays by Constance Mallinson

ROSS RUDEL

Once a year at the summer solstice, **Ross Rudel** runs naked through Griffith Park late at night. Feeling the warm air, the brush of shrubbery almost erotically touch the skin, reverting to animal instincts as one uses all the senses to safely move through the darkened, potentially dangerous space, affirming our essential and primal bond with the earth—all begin to describe sensations awakened by Rudel's sculpture. Rudel works from a studio next to the L.A. River with which he has developed a profound relationship: the ebbing and flowing, the detritus and pollution, the wildlife such as hawks and ducks that inhabit the region have provided him with imagery and inspiration. *Solisation* was inspired by a confluence of events involving a visit to a **Yoruba spiritual center** where he viewed carvings, sacrificial bowls and rituals, seeing a hawk carrying a pigeon in its talons moments later, then returning home to see five hawks circling his studio, one with a dead pigeon. The resulting piece was a pair of fetishistic human sized claws laboriously carved and polished from manzanita wood and bone obtained from his "spiritual home" in the Dakotas, and set in a fabric lined box. Evidence of Rudel's extremely fine skills as a wood carver, it also discloses his ability to plumb our collective unconscious to remember when objects imbued with natural qualities magically mediated between humans and nature and played an important role in considering our place in the continuum and in understanding the cycles of life and death. Not only esthetically motivated by his encounters with wildlife, like Australian aborigines or Native Americans whose dreams were sacred incursions from the human world into the spirit and nature realms, Rudel creates works based on dreams. These sculptures feel more like empathetic collaborations with nature, rather than detached impressions. *Emissary*, a facsimile of the artist's own head molded from strips of dripping green algae periodically retrieved from the L.A. River, sits atop thick layer of acrylic resin. Appearing as a human/ plant hybrid with semi-transparent, terrifying eyes emerging from a glassy pool of water, it alludes to the myth of the Green Man within whom lurks a wildness—a sliminess and illogicality that opposes our

intellect dominated, antiseptic bodies. It would be hard to deny that the current disregard for the decline in the environment issues from the fear of and disconnectedness from that wildness and from a refusal to acknowledge its legitimacy and importance.

