



“Lady Musgrave Reef” *and others.*

The work of Petra Maitz.

When ever I’m back home I like to pass by some of the public art venues that are more abundant these days and accommodating to especially politically responsive projects and Broadway Windows at 10th and Broadway would be one of them. Not all the works appearing in this street corner window location have the arresting staying power to keep me from Gonzalez-Gonzalez if I’m heading south from the Strand. In fact in the last 10 years or so that I’ve been spying out this venue only one presentation kept me intrigued and baffled long enough for me to miss my happy hour binge and that was the “*Hyperbolic Crochet Coral Reef*” installation initiated by the Institute For Figuring which operates out of L.A.

The window installation was absolutely both gripping and provoking and displayed some of the most delicate and deft handling of materials I’ve seen in too long a time for which there is no excuse if you consider that this is New York, the Mecca for so many artists to flock and show off.

The dichotomy of the crocheted coral of the “Hyperbolic” reef within the urban framework of steel, glass and concrete almost appeared elementary in its effectiveness though no less significant. It was as if the elements of the city immediately outside of the glass “aquarium” were the cause for the creepy and uncanny sinister presence they imbued. The coral reef and the vanishing of the world’s other natural resources don’t really come to mind on that corner unless you’re day dreaming about a Cancun vacation with brightly colored drinks with plastic toys protruding from them, never the less this re contextualization of hand made “gothic” toned coral topped with bright orange stopped me in my tracks and served to magnify the crisis with its somber delivery.

The installation evoked an almost identical work I saw more than a year ago in the exhibition “*Lady Musgrave Reef*”, at the Neue Galerie in Graz, “Hall of Mirrors”, in 2007 by the Austrian artist Petra Maitz. Working independently from the IFF and only aware of the group after her project was in full drive, Ms Maitz implemented a more comprehensive handling of the ecological issues by outsourcing the fabrication of the project to 12 women in India producing 1700 pieces of coral.

In the opulent “Hall of Mirrors”, refurbished in the late barouche period with its vaulted ceilings and gold gilded molding encircling its windows, doors and of course mirrors, a vast assortment of coral made from crocheted wool, silk and other natural and synthetic fibers proudly reverberated its Technicolor aura. The site of their immeasurable number and their explosive hues of pink, chartreuse, fungus greens, electric blues and the obligatory but appropriately apportioned whites and other neutral tones was startling. Not because the work seemed out of place (as if fighting with its majestic host because as an invited guest it forgot to tone it down and leave the boa and feathers for the “Love Parade”), but because these supple amorphisms with their prickly tentacles and appendages seemed poised on a large pad from which this “cache of psychedelic fire works” were to be launched. The location was a

suspiciously well chosen accomplice with all the ornate trim, balustrades and intricately patterned wall décor of the chamber room itself not to mention the bellowing chandeliers glistening from above ready to light the fuse.

What could have come off as the “800 pound guerilla” wearing lipstick in a ball room usually reserved for magistrates and dignitaries displaying a peculiarly similar conceit, instead resonated with a precarious balance of poignancy and sarcastic eloquence.

Back on Broadway the L.A. contingent held loyal to the form of what coral really look like yet the colors applied were even more sober and critical in their shadowy tones and articulated a blunter but no less poignant message. And on the other end of the spectrum the Maitz factory produced a nearly ironically vibrant festive interpretation of the demise of such rich assets.

Both camps presented an ambitious geologically conscience mission working with the same subject matter, materials and using various traditional techniques of crochet while unacquainted with each other. The uniqueness however was in their obvious visual dissimilarities that exposed a discrepancy in how the objective could be handled in the attempt to raise awareness to the erosion of some the world’s most beautiful natural resources due to our increasing need for fossil fuel. Not to mention the impact it had on someone having the unexpected opportunity to experience both projects incidentally in two very different countries without the tempering of the others’ agenda.

For months I wondered if this was coincidence or collaboration and if it really was an issue at all. What mattered in the end was to have come upon this installation in NYC having had met its unknowing sister in arms in Europe by a different artist sometime before, perhaps as a reminder that authenticity and exclusivity is irrelevant in a town so big on itself regardless whether or not “it” was made by the author or by proxy.

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