

Colin Lyons – Oceanex Avalon

“Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction.” -Pablo Picasso

The recent discovery of the HMS Investigator, found 155 years after getting stuck in ice while trying to clear the Northwest Passage, made me think of Colin Lyons’ print-meets sculpture investigations, resulting in works that evoke objects lost at sea for years and years. Much like the allegory present in Lyons’ works, shipwrecks testify to the cyclical nature of industry.

Trained as a printmaker, Lyons spends a great deal of energy working hard against the very spirit of that process. He contradicts his medium’s methodology by welding the plates into sculptures of the very images they represent. He then pushes the alchemy further by plunging the structures in acid baths to transform them into masses of gnarly metal that seem to have spent centuries at the bottom of the sea.

For *Oceanex Avalon*, Lyons created his own versions of the namesake cargo ship that makes a weekly run between St. John’s and Montreal out of copper etching plates (you can track the ship’s real-time location at marinetraffic.com). One sits in a bath of etching acid, waiting to cast off, loaded with the remnants of its own industrial past. This ship isn’t going anywhere, however. As it slowly shifts and sinks, eaten away by the ferric chloride solution, a mist gathers, as if a mourning was taking place.

From its beginning, the industrial age has sown the seeds of its own demise through flagrant disregard for ecology or conservation. Lyons’ process mimics that of industry, essentially destroying itself through its own means of production, illustrating the shallowness of a way of life that leads not to prosperity, but decay. Eventually, the shapeless mounds themselves become aestheticized objects, worthy of speculation, admiration and wonder. Lyons’ pieces carry as much fascination and contradiction as the banal object long lost at the bottom of the sea floor, found anew and held aloft, laden with history and significance.

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