

# ARTnews

## THE DROWNED WORLD: WATERWORKS

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The sudden increase in environmental awareness has reached the art world and resulted in a resurgence of landscape painting, neo-earth art, and meditations on the interdependence of nature and culture. This recent exhibition, whose title was taken from an apocalyptic novel by J. G. Ballard, was a gathering of water-related works that deal with the symbolic and practical significance of water to our often nature-blind civilization.

Artists dealing in a more symbolic mode included Kristen Jones and Andrew Ginzel, who reconstructed a room-size installation, first exhibited last year at MIT, entitled *Charybdis*. In the manner of their most effective works, this piece presented a magical and subtly shifting total environment. At its center was a pool of water surrounding a constant flame, while the curved crimson wall formed the backdrop to a circle of light that panned slowly across it like a mysterious beacon. Eric Orr's bronze monolith also mixed fire and water. With water cascading evenly down its sides, the sculpture glistened beneath its gently rippling skin. When a line of leaping flames fed by a glass jet burst through a slit in the metal casing, this placid surface was transformed into a roiling, vaporous cloud.

These works were essentially celebratory, suggesting the ancient power of the elements. Andrew Krasnow's *Core Texts of the Mind* had a darker, sci-fi edge. This work consisted of a set of five human-size casks filled with water. When activated, a change in the water level of each cask brought an actual human brain into view.



T. CHARLES ERICKSON

Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel, *Charybdis*, 1988-89, installation. P.S. 1.

While these works had a timeless quality, other pieces in the show reflected more current ecological concerns. Helen and Newton Harrison contributed a device to purify the chemical-saturated water they discovered at the site of one of their installations, while Rebecca Howland provided an image to suggest neglected nature—a long-suffering globe immersed in a tank of brackish water and connected to an IV tube.

Not your usual art exhibition, "The Drowned World" was curated by Tom Finkelpearl, who has taken a particular interest in artworks of a mechanical nature. Poised delicately between myth and pressing ecological necessity, it was a timely reminder that perhaps we haven't transcended nature as much as we might think.

—E. H.