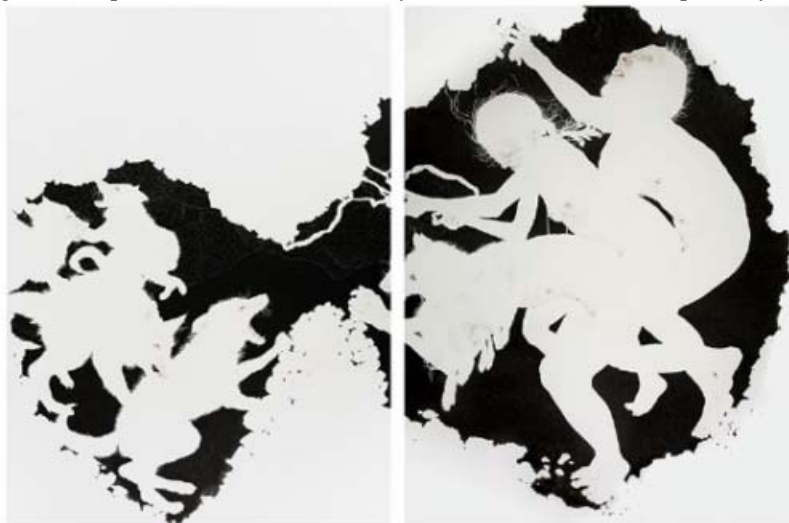


Perish Twice

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Somewhere along the line, the pressure cooker of living with the knowledge that at any moment civilization could be wiped clean off the face of the Earth with a button press reached the point where it needed some kind of release. That release came, helped along by generous portions of wishful thinking, in the form of the post-apocalypse adventure tale, where the rugged inhabitants of the future restored mankind's rightful place after an unfortunate interregnum caused by a hailstorm of Nuclear warhead-bearing ICBMs.

Josephine Taylor is game, but the narrative instead goes a little like this: supposing all mammalian life weren't rendered into infertile gelatin. Deprived of the need and ability to create Roombas, we'd probably start acting more recognizably like, you know, animals.



Like those previously mentioned atomic fantasies, Taylor is really just using the premise as entry point. By wiping the slate clean so to speak, she can explore more fully what might be distinctly human about our species. What we get is wild: sharp toothed weasels battling with naked intruders for their den. Or are they? That needle-filled gaping jaw bears the characteristic look of alarm common to mustelids, but given that the humans could be seen as copulating and one seems in the throes of a shamanistic ecstasy, it's just as likely that the neighbors are merely telling them to keep it down. There are all kinds of inter-species communications and interactions going on here from the cross-dressing bomb survivors clad in furs to the weaning offspring, four-legged variety included, sharing a human mother. The bomb has exploded history and at the opposite ends of the spectrum are Romulus and Remus and other mythic characters raised by animals while on Taylor's extreme, perhaps it is we who serve as the surrogate parents. Again, the conceit of an irradiated world is the jumping off point. Whereas in the pulps it was merely to set the stage for a journey into a strange land, here it is relationships between people that Taylor is exploring with unflinching curiosity.

Taylor's materials add wonderful complementary echoes to the works. Some are listed, accurately but unexpectedly, as "Light on paper." Many of the pieces are rendered in Sumi ink, traditionally used in Chinese, Japanese and Korean ink painting. While we are all comfortable with the synthetic aspect of modern materials, Sumi ink still carries pleasing natural associations, created as it is of pine soot and applied with bamboo brushes of animal hair. It is used to great dramatic effect: there are works of the blackest background against which the figures in white stand out in sharp relief. It is like a flash of lightning that reminds of the fatal payload delivery, that reminds us of the real human beings at Hiroshima burnt into the landscape, as if their shadows had been glued to the spot. The features are drawn in delicately, nearly invisible from afar. Seldom do the survivors' eyes meet.

1 Response to "Perish Twice"

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