

## All that glitters is not gold at EAF15 in New York

Fifteen years ago Socrates Sculpture Park inaugurated the Emerging Artist Fellowship (EAF) Exhibition and launched what would become an annual exhibition of “artists to watch.” This year’s Emerging Artist Fellows were selected through a highly competitive process that attracted over 350 applications, a record number for the program, by the park’s 2015 Curatorial Advisors, Gary Carrion-Murayari (Curator, New Museum) and Nora Lawrence (Curator, Storm King Art Center).

José Carlos Casado: 'TRADE' 2015, installation view

Courtesy the artist



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Socrates is recorded by Plato in *The Republic* as describing the interior world of the artist as one who knows of ignorance, and instead pursues knowledge. The true artist, he decries, cannot simply imitate, for to imitate is to be without the greater pursuit of knowledge, an unending objective to “know what you do not know”.

If struggling under the false pretence of imitative representation is considered ignorant, may we consider José Carlos Casado’s practice as squared against such literal pursuits. In Casado’s work, a rainbow is not simply a delight, high voltage colour spectrum not vain decoration; rather Casado thrusts this bliss at us to reveal in ourselves the small fool who is entranced by the surface of things. His work is immediately seductive as in his joyously writhing 3D dancer animation “SACRIFICE” (2013), and his hypercolored-metallic, pseudo-gem sculptures as in “TRADE” (2015); but behind this, is an inner world that seeks to divine a kind of mind map of the horrors of mankind. These colour spectrums for Casado more accurately represent the aura of brain electricity as synapses fire contemplating terrorism, war and environmental destruction.

Casado’s “TRADE” is currently on display at the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, New York as a part of the 2015 Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition on display until March 2016. “TRADE” is a changeable sculpture with infinite configurations composed of head-sized folded metal forms mimicking the randomness of nature. Their surfaces shimmer through a matte glaze, the texture and design an expansion upon his brilliantly colored animations from the same series. The patterns are like a fantasy of corals and galaxies, bright, shining and deliciously undulating. Each piece is hand folded according to the individual resistance of the object. They cascade over one another creating height and dimension, bolstered from the

public by a pen-like enclosure, exalting them as luxurious, but also as trapped and encased.

On a residency in 2014 Casado travelled to the archipelago of Svalbard in the Arctic Circle. Just before he embarked on the 15-hour boat ride to his final destination, Casado had learned of a new wave of beheadings by Isis and was deeply disturbed. The seduction of the Kantian sublime landscape writhed and twisted with beauty as the ice ascended and fell around him but he could not shake his self professed “bad mood” and it was this tension between beauty and a kind of frustrated melancholia that brought about this body of work.

Casado’s quest for knowledge drew him into a deeper investigation of how climate change was affecting the Arctic. With water levels receding and major climactic shifts occurring, enterprise moved in back in the mid nineties to fleece the land of its natural resources since they were now able to dig through the weakened ice. These natural resources being capitalized upon in the Canadian Arctic Circle are namely diamonds, and the principal players De Beers and Rio Tinto. The activity is significantly impacting upon the migration of the caribou, the displacement of fish through annihilated rivers and non-vetted return-on-investment schemas set up by the government with less-than-adequate treaties in place with the Aboriginal people of the regions to name a few. For every 3 tonne of ore removed, 3 carats of diamonds are the peak statistic for loot. 8 million carats come out of the mines annually so the environmental disturbance is monumental and the impact unknowable to its full extent for generations to come. Whatever financial compensations are in place for the indigenous people are practically irrelevant since their way of life is to live off the land: “We’re trappers who live off the land. And people live in the bush and trap. And all of a sudden this mining company comes in. We didn’t know anything about mines. We didn’t know how to negotiate with them” (Community leader quoted in “Dealing Full Force” 2006 by V. Weizner). Whatever the financial negotiation, the simplest prospect is clear: You can’t eat money.

This destruction and chaos has spilled into the community at a local level where federal funds and regulated returns are not reaching. Drug-related crime is on the rise and companies do not pay municipal taxes. Social problems are reaching crescendos and impacting small communities beyond just the grand impact in the Aboriginal people.

The rapaciousness of the diamond industry is a particular area of interest for Casado. “TRADE” is presented in a form analogous to the very issues Casado is fascinated with. The objects themselves are beautiful, and yet their story, their nature is dark. Casado used technology for building and painting cars to create these pieces, which in itself is a loaded process connected with the very global warming crisis that begot the circumstances to melt the caps to access the diamonds. Everything is connected. The synapses fire with awe in pursuing knowledge of how to begin to understand the issues we face and create. This infinity is a part of the multi-dimensionality of the images Casado has printed on each piece. His intense digital investigation explores the role beauty and technology plays in influencing how we interpret the world around us. Presentation is key in guiding us toward the suspension of disbelief. The beauty he creates carries the viewer in this cocoon, and then shatters our bliss, once we scratch below the surface. His

representation of precious stones links to the exploitation of natural resources, a kind of human brutality, and creates disconcerting connections to climate change, terrorism, and war.

On a recent studio visit I had with Casado, what struck me most about him was his softness and decorum. He investigates such horror and feels so much. His work is electric and wild in color and yet he is shy and deliberate in everything he does. His kindness and humility in the face of investigating human brutality, climate change and terrorism have driven him to philanthropic pursuits. Casado founded NY/Anantapur in 2010, a foundation to raise funds to build schools in India. Two schools have been built so far and are used by more than 500 children and adults, as primary schools and civic centers.

Perception versus knowledge are key for Casado, and an invitation to delve below the glistening surface is open to all who encounter his work.

EAF 2015 is on display until March 15, 2016 at Socrates Sculpture Park 32-01 Vernon Boulevard in Long Island City, Queens at the intersection of Broadway. The park is accessible by the Long Island City Art Bus, a FREE shuttle service that transports riders between Socrates, The Noguchi Museum, SculptureCenter, and MoMA PS1.

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*José Carlos Casado is a multimedia artist from Spain. A MFA graduate of the School of Visual Arts, he has been based in New York for 15 years.*

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