



Darren Almond, *Bearing*, single channel HD video with audio, 2007

Darren Almond: Nail to Nail

David Patton Gallery, 932 Chung King Road, Los Angeles

Newborn babies can't compute the misery of the world. They don't yet know what their place in the world will be, and whether or not their riches will be harvested at the expense of the poor. How poor? As Bernard Shaw put it, "As little as he can be starved into accepting." Darren Almond's video, *Bearing*, explores this sentiment.

This thirty-five minute, single-channel HD video projection in the main gallery offers a solitary viewpoint of an open-air Indonesian sulfur mine in East Java, on the shores of a turquoise-colored acid lake cradled by the Ijen volcano. Almond hung a Steadicam on one of the miners to record one of the two daily Christ-like burdens each shoulders, with his baskets full of an on-average 187-pound yellow bounty, between the rugged mining site and the sugar refinery's weigh station twelve miles below. This fixed camera position, trained on the miner's face and not the figuratively and literally breathtaking landscape, revisits our infancy when we gazed incessantly at our mother's shining, benevolent face as she gently carried us in her arms. In our helpless beginning, morality was a vapor apart; today, in Indonesia, clouds of sulfur dioxide mix with ambient oxygen and the water present in the miner's eyes, nose, and mouth to produce sulfuric acid — a slow, painful, and guaranteed death sentence for the impoverished laborer earning an average \$6 a day. White sugar never tasted so bitter.

And like refined sugar, art itself is a luxury item with a newfound bitter-sweet taste: like Michael Moore's social activist documentaries, or like so many photojournalistic war images, one is entertained and horrified to the point of chronic, hysterical ambivalence. Somehow, Almond's exhibition title, *Nail to Nail* (also an art object — a carved wooden plaque outside the projection room), rings true.

— Darrin Little

Gail Potocki: Opened Apples

Billy Shire Fine Art, 5790 Washington Boulevard, Culver City

Concentrating on the severe predicament of our ailing planet, painter Gail Potocki employs dreamlike symbolism to communicate her concern with overconsumption, pollution, and the increasing depletion of earth's natural resources. A fusion of classical technique and emotional fervor, Potocki's work is hauntingly beautiful and emotionally devastating.

Potocki's is a unique voice in the call for a more eco-conscious world, embodying her environmental concerns in luscious landscapes and feminine forms. The paintings Potocki creates are so visually seductive that we barely have time to catch our breath before we are pulled under by the tide and crushed upon the cliffs.

Trained as a symbolist painter, Potocki's technical aptitude is awe-inspiring. With the precision of a master, she sets her scenes on desolate planes of fire and ice, frightening in their austerity and indicative of a barren world yet to come. The solitary figure symbolizes humanity in all its forms and acts as the translator between each environment and the reality of the viewer. As in *Thaw*, the female figure frequently personifies the suffering environment, melting away like the polar icecaps on which she lies marooned. In other paintings, such as her show's title piece *Opened Apples*, the human subject plays a more instrumental role in the environment's demise. Cleverly encompassing this dual symbolism, humanity acts as both perpetrator and victim, thus identifying the current quandary: the carbon trail we follow is our destiny. The earth and the human race are not separate from one another, and Potocki's hope is that we hear the siren song before we hit the rocks.

— Vanessa Villegas



Gail Potocki, *Brought Forth from the Sea*, oil on canvas, 46" x 34", 2008