

## Restoring Beauty

On the beach, in the grass, or propped against a rock, something catches the photographer's eye: an odd spot of white, a strange fixity in the flux of the waves, a stiff, weirdly positioned leg.

Like a bird of prey, he moves in, circling around the horrific thing, finding through the frame of his lens the angle that reveals the pattern of a new unity, in which the fragments of bone and fur become one with the landscape, dissolving into the soil, sand, and sea. A tangle of feathers, a delicate skeleton floating beneath the surf, a seal with empty eye sockets: each of these elegiac images occupies the precipice between being and nonbeing, forms molded by violence and decay.

Each figure is framed centrally against the ground, flat, like a Byzantine icon. Enough remains that we can identify the bird in the feather, the sheep in the collapsed hide. Portrayed as a mere essence of what once lived, these fleshly vestiges point to absence as a resonating presence. They speak of the resurgent life that gathered around the body and consumed it, signs of which can be seen in the nebulae of tiny foot prints on the sand.

In Okx's view, morbidity lies not in death and decay, but in the Photoshopped images of perfect faces and bodies plastered on billboards and replicated in magazines, expressing an ideal of eternal youth, steeped in artificiality. As an alternative, Okx would like to display his images in fashion boutiques, redefining beauty as a dead sheep posed on the grass, with stark, protruding bones, or a bit of bone and feather reconstituted into an abstract pattern on the sand. Okx's discombobulated bodies reveal decay as part of the life process, reordered by nature into new forms. Not the corpse, but its metamorphosis is the subject. Hence each image suggests a continuum, a life beyond the frame.

Death is presented as simple fact, stripped of ritual and sentiment. Because we share with animals the fate of mortality, we are not completely objective observers. Our sympathy is aroused, and we imbue the images with pathos. Yet they are not really of us; abandoned to the elements, they are marginal creatures representing a disappearing tribe, held hostage to the forces of industrialization and catastrophic climate change. At Lascaux, man painted the leaping, vigorous bison that he worshiped and depended on; thousands of years later, Okx's decaying wasters signify a profound estrangement and neglect.

The camera itself is a product of that alienation. The photographs are about metamorphosis, but only by implication: in fact they halt the natural process by freezing time, isolating a moment.

Yet the artist is more than a scavenger of remains, forever trapped in the timeless space of the film. He is also a seer. His meticulous eye, his feeling for beauty, is transformative. Every feather, pebble and clump of fur is an eloquent gesture. The intricately textured ground is a realm of rich, variegated beauty—lichen-spotted, shell-flecked, or finely granular. The soft, clear light seems to signify the dawning of creation itself.

Eventually the figures in Okx's photographs will lose their disturbing power, become mere powder of bone, and vanish. In the meantime, they mark the earth with an uncanny grace, insignias of pain, specters made flesh.

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