

Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language

Volume 4
Issue 2 *Sustainabilia*

Article 35

January 2011

A Marine Biologist Goes to Work

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Recommended Citation

Stocker, L. (2011). A Marine Biologist Goes to Work. *Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language*, 4(2).

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A Marine Biologist Goes to Work *by* Laura Stocker

Tiny tin dinghy tied to the buoy
SCUBA gear on
Gear-bag full of tools
Backwards flip:
I am
Off to work

I see
10 m below
my study site
whole and beautiful
In proper physical relation
to me.

Complete installation
sea, rocks, light
measure, shape, order
perfect harmony
gently fluid
artist's impression
My mind
contributes to form.

Dropping down the buoy rope:
I am
home, alone.

Sandstone boulders
large and small
alone or in groups
Lie on smooth greywacke bedrock
uplifted, eroded
dissected with sand-filled gutters:
The basement medium.

A clear day:
Waves of light
piercing waves of water
oscillating in and out of synchrony
luminous unstable nets

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Landscapes ISSN 1448-0778

are artefacts of my seeing eye.

Terrain, sunlight
movements of sea
Comprise
formal beauty
slopes angles curves

And create
parameters of life
food shelter light
substance of life
colours textures
activity of life
dramas resolutions.

Life creates form
Form creates life
habitats structural and substantive.

Boulders and bedrock
fringed by brown seaweed,
muffling rocky edges
sieving sunlight
dissipating water's energy:
complexities
Are crypts for secret lives

In shadowy crevices
boulder sides and grottos
on each other
ascidians and sponges dwell;
my *Pseudodistoma*
gelatinous groups of lolly orange mushrooms
from an LSD trip
a 70s record label.

But wait:
knots and voids
disrupt form

On a murky day
Hands invisible
Distances between boulders

expand melodramatically.

Leaving one boulder
I push off into the unknown
to find the next boulder
3 m away
not seeing it;
artist's impression
in my mind's eye
not mapping onto
physical terrain.

Bumping groping brail-searching
Lost.
Swell rises:
Kelp plants snap back
and forth and
small rocks roll drunk

Fish pushed by swells;
whipped out of territories;
meals punctuated by
regular
and unplanned
side-trips.

Surge shoves me
Here, at spot of choice
There, tumbling
10 metres away.

My buddy a
dark flash a
snort of bubbles.

Losing my direction.
Losing gear.
Losing sense.

Against reason:
panic strikes
in cold dark murk.

Forms of my innermost mind

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tyrannise sense of place.
Nightmares, childhood fears:
lost in a shadowy submarine world
of looming black beasts
Metaphor and reality
feed each other
Damned and doomed,
I will drown in a few violent minutes.

Fighting instinct
to drop my weight-belt;
to rocket upwards.
I flipper:
to the surface
 against the gravitas of the deep.

Return
 to the boat.
Breathe in breathe out breathe in breathe out
Go
back down the buoy rope.
Start again.

Fish accept storm surges
with more equanimity and grace.