

My Observations, My Anxieties and My Art

David Russell

Ever since my childhood, I have been aware of the vital function of trees in binding and securing the soil. If too many trees are uprooted, there will be soil erosion, and vast tracts of land will be reduced to desert. I believe some of this happened with what is now the Sahara. Another example is the consumer excess of the Mayan civilization in Central America. In my 20s I was deeply influenced by a book called *Soil and Civilisation*, which graphically portrayed this relationship. As time progressed, I became aware of masses of trees being destroyed to make paper, which I feel now has become a pollutant in our society. One blessing of the Internet is that now many records can be kept without it. Subsequently, I became painfully aware of the incineration of vast areas of forest, worldwide, especially in the Amazon Basin, for purposes of stock-raising, to glut the greedy with an excess of meat. The image in the video of Michael Jackson's *Earth Song*, with Native Brazilians looking desperately at crashing, burning forests, is a powerful leitmotif for me. I feel that my accident with home photography in a way captured the essence of this abuse. I would add that I live just around the corner from a view of the infamous Grenfell Tower. The hideous image of that scarred, cindered building echoed, paralleled our environmental ravages.

How does this relate to the other picture? In a way, we are ravaging the world as a malignant disease ravages a body. We are behaving like bacteria, infecting the eco-body. We now live in an age where microscopy can give us a full magnification of bacteria in action. In terms of medical science, we now can often see overhead camera videos of the workings of our interiors as an operation proceeds. This fact has been given literary recognition in Günter Grass's *Local Anaesthetic*. My blotches echo diseased skins and polluted bloodstreams.

I am a long-term supporter of Greenpeace. I believe that the world is now perilously near crisis point. We can utterly wreck it if we do not put the brakes on quite rapidly. I hope that my artwork and my poetry will disturb, will convey danger, and generate a sense of urgency. I am happy to be one of the many protesting voices in this crucial area.

The first picture (left) I call *Development*. In fact, it is the result of an abortive attempt I made to develop my own photo negatives. The result is a blending of two photos which, in my mind, evoke the chaotic state of a threatened ecosphere - some suggestion of rainforest being burned down.

The second picture (right) I call *Blotches*. This, to me, evokes microscope viewings of the bloodstream, with lots of bacteria and potential infection.

David Russell is an artist from London, UK.

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