

About The Cover

The Tiger Lily Talks

Megan E. Walsh and Peter Daszak

EcoHealth Alliance, New York, NY

‘O Tiger-lily,’ said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, ‘I wish you could talk! “We can talk,” said the Tiger-lily...As well as you can...And a great deal louder.’
—Lewis Carroll *Alice Through the Looking Glass*

Jesse Olwen’s *Tiger 2* wouldn’t look out of place in a Park Avenue office in New York or a gallery in São Paulo, but the statement that this issue’s cover makes depends wholly on the environment that surrounds it—a symbiosis that transforms both the piece and the place. In *Tiger 2*, the finished flower captured in perfection is juxtaposed with discarded household items and a tangle of wires in a street scene in Incheon, South Korea. The dull gray and dirty greens of a broken pavement intensify the color of the painting and see to create movement. The flower opens to the discarded remnants of city life accepting and reclaiming the concrete and steel.

For those of us in the richer countries of the developed world, dropping trash on the street is something that would lead to comments from passers-by, anger, and perhaps a quick fine. Since the 1970s, we’ve been repeatedly lectured about the cost of clean-up, the health hazards that discarded tires bring, and the need to look after our commons. For us, the images Olwen heightens are hard to understand. Can’t the local community come together and just clean-up this trash? Surely they realize that with a few hours’ work

their lives would be improved? Why doesn’t the local council fix this?

We have the luxury of wealth and freedom from other pressures that allow us to think about our built environment as a place of health. Research shows that urban settings devoid of flora or fauna are detrimental to mental and physical health. Prisoners whose cells face farmland or trees have a 24% lower frequency of sick cell visits than those who face concrete (Moore 1981). Hospitals and nursing homes with healing gardens, greenhouses, and atriums have more relaxed patients, reduced behavioral issues, and lower staff absenteeism (Pretty 2004). Urban green spaces foster a sense of community wellbeing, provide educational opportunities, and the building of self-esteem and social skills in our youth.

Olwen’s uncommissioned street art installation (public art that’s not funded by the public) challenges us. The faux-abstraction of the flower’s shape evokes a sense of graffiti and political commentary. In the same way that vandalism, for practical reasons, is common on derelict buildings, this art is part of an artistic movement drawing attention to public space that is lying fallow, neglected, and under utilized.

It’s a piece of street theater and one of subtlety and beauty. He calls his work a ‘gentle way’ to raise serious questions about nature and pollution.

So we return to Alice’s question. How can a tiger lily talk? By using the familiar format of graffiti, Olwen coaxes us out of complacency: his tiger lily shouts out to us that beauty could exist in this trash-filled street. It goads us and confronts us with a harsh reality—systemic failure of public



health and community. Therein lies its strength; this message that may be lost on the young child playing in this street, or on the cyclist off to work, but by contrasting a possible future with an unfortunate present, it reaches a community, a government, and presents the possibility of change.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jesse Olwen is a Canadian artist living and working in Incheon, South Korea. While earning his Bachelor of Fine Arts at Concordia University, Montreal, the artist worked in a stained glass studio. Olwen created the Galerie JAV ART in Montreal as a space for emerging artists to display their works in a public setting. Along with his art, Olwen is passionate about animals and is an active volunteer for the Urban Animal Advocates Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center in Montreal, having most recently created the

center's main website. More information about the artist's life and archived works are available at his website: www.jesseolwen.com.

ON THE COVER

Tiger 2 (2012) by Jesse Olwen. Digital Photograph of acrylic on wood (cut shape) 116 cm × 109 cm. This artwork was the second place winner of the 2012 *EcoHealth* Journal Cover Art Competition.

REFERENCES

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- Pretty J (2004) How nature contributes to mental and physical health. *Spirituality and Health International* 5(2):68–78