

## Cover Essay

# Our Collective Vomit

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*EcoHealth Alliance, New York*

This issue's cover art features *Gyre*, 2014 by Fred Tomaselli, a masterful and intricate mixed media piece depicting a fish leaping out of the swelling waters, expelling the contents of its stomach out to the air. Tomaselli's early work was influenced by the "Light and Space" art movement of 1960s Southern California—one of minimalism and abstract expressionism, characterized by large installations of light, volume, and space. This piece is part of Tomaselli's later, important body of work that reflects his passion for nature, his experimentation with recreational drugs, and his elaborately detailed technique that draws us in from a distance to lose us within the detail. The pieces he creates are beautiful and bizarre paintings, tapestries mosaics, and quilts. They are finely crafted, dazzling depictions of nature composed of bought and found objects, famously including, in some cases street drugs, controlled substances and natural hallucinogenic drugs built into the body of the work. These elaborate collages have photographic and printed elements, hand-painted details, and layers of clear resin that recreate the hallucinatory experience by layering detail upon detail like an unending fractal. Each layer, every single element exists as itself, and as an equal partner in the final dramatic scene.

His pre-modernist undertones mimic Eastern and Western traditional decorative art with post-modern elements. In this piece, Gustav Klimt's gold paneling adorns the fish scales. The Turkish blue of his swirling waves would be at home on the wall of the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, yet directly conjure Vincent Van Gogh's clouds. At the same time, a piece of

packaging, a syringe, a candy wrapper brings us firmly back to present day. These surreal, juxtaposed styles create gateways at different scales and windows into different periods to flip our senses and pull us into an art-induced hallucination.

Fred Tomaselli wants us to lose ourselves in the complexity of his work, to seduce us into it, and escape inside the world of his art. In this way he does reflect nature, at least as most *EcoHealth* readers likely feel. A forest, an ocean, a moorland. Each a place of incredible depth, beauty, and joy, yet within each are layers of complexity that reveal shocking violence, horror, and decay. As in Tomaselli's art, each scale of a landscape is distinct, and each component critical, yet each completely engaged with the other. In nature, this relationship becomes one of mutual sustenance, not just of aesthetic equity.

In *Gyre*, Tomaselli has, perhaps, found his perfect subject. A reference to the anthropogenic pollution of the North Pacific Gyre, which is now a vortex of garbage, fragments of discarded plastic, and other detritus from our unprecedented consumption. In *Gyre* the piece, our garbage is part of the form—a spiral of trash that spews forth to invite us on an art-induced trip. In *Gyre* the place, the hallucinogenic trip has drawn us in perhaps too far. As it slowly grows in size, and as plastic fragments decay to microscopic dimensions, our own industrial vomit enters the food chain and we are merged into the wilderness.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Fred Tomaselli was born in Santa Monica, California in 1956. He attended California State University in Fullerton,

CA where he received his BA in Art in 1981. Tomaselli's early work was influenced by his interest in the Light and Space art movement that originated in the 1960s in Southern California. This loosely affiliated artistic movement was characterized by focuses on light, volume, and other perceptual phenomena. Tomaselli's more recent artistic influences has expanded and reflected upon his newer personal passions in nature, bird watching, and gardening. He has had numerous solo exhibitions and his work can be found in the public collections of the Museum of Modern Art, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art; the Brooklyn Museum; Albright Knox Gallery; and the Mu-

seum of Contemporary Art, LA. He currently resides in Brooklyn, New York, and is represented by the James Cohan Gallery. <http://www.jamescohan.com/artists/fred-tomaselli>.

## ON THE COVER

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Gyre (2014) by Fred Tomaselli. Photo-collage, leaves, acrylic, and resin on wood panel 84 x 60 in. Copyright Fred Tomaselli. Courtesy of James Cohan of New York and sponsored by the generous support of EcoHealth Alliance.