

Deakin University

Patrick West

Sand castles are immaculate childhood; or, form ever follows function

Biographical note:

Associate Professor Patrick West is a widely published fiction writer, essayist, and public intellectual. He is also one of the Higher Degree Research Coordinators in Deakin's School of Communication and Creative Arts, and in 2016 initiated the one-year PhD by Prior Publications in the Creative Arts for artist-scholars with outstanding national or international reputations. As a teacher, Patrick has a special interest and expertise in developing real-world writing opportunities for young, marginalized, and emerging writers.

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Sand castles are immaculate childhood,
The thought and the act,
Of unimaginable
Building
Coinciding—word-less—in creation.

For ourselves, ad interim, drawn to this beach by function and fate,
City-exiled—superannuated—our souls at the speed of light,
Beachcombing for what nobody could ever give a name to,
Ours is an architecture which dribbles between the toes,
By form un-held—sea slushing—
Of water and light, of grains (infinitely, immaculately) and devastation.

Meanwhile, out past the breakers—seething hair-line of the wrinkled, face-less ocean—
Creatures devoid of every function and fate,
Disport themselves—fabulously form-less—
Or rather, eruptions of speculative existence, permanent midwifery,
Of all that is known
Of function, form and fate.

The very thing that drew us here!
Form and flesh and function notwithstanding,
Hungering for that lost season where children (and grandchildren yet to be created out of the
living ribs, frail scaffolding, of sandcastle-creating children)
Are eternally making of their own life whatever they will.

Which makes us all the more like children, if that's the way to put it, when we come across
A lump of driftwood, coal-black, like a death mask of a cherub or sedate sea nymph,
With holes where the eyes would once have been, and even,
As if the ocean itself were humourous—full of humours—
Allegorical,

A worm, like those of the grave, emerging through one nostril.

All the same, we remain, by this particular ocean (this ocean most particular),
Holding hands, love-struck, even as something of deathly architecture
Creeps up between the toes, reptilian yet un-creatured,
Some form without form, excessively
In search of,
(Formed or form-less) flesh and function and fate.