

VISIÓN | doble

REVISTA DE CRÍTICA E HISTORIA DEL ARTE

Título: Petrofósil: réquiem por nuestra civilización petrolífera
Title: Petro-fossil: Requiem for Our Fossil Fuel Civilization

Autor / Author: Hiromi Shiba
Caribbean University

Resumen: La amenaza que el petróleo y sus productos suponen para el medio ambiente es peligrosa y alarmante. En Petrofósil, Javier y Jaime Suárez exponen las consecuencias de su uso desmedido, creando unas piezas tan líricas como siniestras. Originalmente publicado en español en septiembre de 2016, y traducido por el Programa Graduado de Traducción de la UPRRP.

Abstract: Oil and its products are a dangerous and alarming threat to the environment. Javier and Jaime Suárezs exhibition, Petrofósil, set out the consequences of an excessive use of oil, creating artworks that are both lyrical and sinister. Originally published in Spanish in September 2016, and translated by the Graduate Program in Traslation, UPRRP.

Palabras clave: Galería de Arte de la Universidad del Sagrado Corazón, Jaime Suárez, Javier Suárez, Ecología, Petróleo, Hiromi Shiba

Keywords: Art Gallery Universidad del Sagrado Corazón, Jaime Suárez, Javier Suárez, Ecology, Oil, Hiromi Shiba

Sección: Inglés / **Section:** English

Publicación: 15 de octubre de 2016

Cita recomendada: Shiba, Hiromi. "Petro-fossil: Requiem for Our Fossil Fuel Civilization", *Visión Doble: Revista de Crítica e Historia del Arte*, 15 de octubre de 2016, humanidades.uprrp.edu/visiondoble

Visión Doble: Revista de Crítica e Historia del Arte
Programa de Historia del Arte, Facultad de Humanidades
Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras
13 Ave. Universidad Ste. 1301
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00925-2533

+1 (787) 764-0000, extensión 89596
vision.doble@upr.edu
<http://humanidades.uprrp.edu/visiondoble>
<https://revistas.upr.edu>



Petrofósil: Requiem for Our Fossil Fuel Civilization

Hiromi Shiba

Caribbean University

The explosive impact of our fossil-fuel civilization has already become untenable in the present.

–Jaime and Javier Suárez, 2016



Javier y Jaime Suárez, Exhibición: *Petrofósil*, 2016. Galería de Arte de la USC.

Through the sinister landscapes on display at the exhibition *Petrofósil*, currently at the Sagrado Corazón University Art Gallery, artists Jaime and Javier Suárez assail the ways in which our “oil-based” civilization has become a threat to global survival. Inevitably, we have condemned ourselves to idly stand by as we witness the destruction of our environment.

The works exhibited here are composed of elements such as charred plants, fish bones, and other forms of detritus, all of which are coated with a layer with nearly pitch-black tar, which prevents us from immediately recognizing the hidden details of each piece, thus intensifying a sensation of profound silence and timelessness. This experience is what makes the show so unique. These artists have succeeded in creating an aesthetic space, both minimalist and strangely serene, which contrasts with the otherwise apocalyptic theme of this series. Through these works, Jaime and Javier Suárez disparage our excessive fuel consumption, the massive production of plastic products, the toxic gases released into the atmosphere, and the use of pesticides that threaten biodiversity, among other factors that continually put our very existence at risk. Fossils are presented in these pieces as a timeless metaphor and as a vehicle for the memory of our origins, which can be traced back prehistorically to oil itself.



Javier y Jaime Suárez, Exhibición: *Petrofósil*, 2016. Galería de Arte de la USC.

The extraordinary manipulation of dark space through the use of grays, browns and blacks, gives the gallery the feel of a Zen Buddhist temple, a microcosm representing timeless universal consciousness. Drawing from Zen philosophy, the distinctive Wabi aesthetic permeates the room, allowing energy to flow between the works, and serving as a platform through which the artists develop their eulogy for our fossil-fuel civilization.

The main installation piece titled *Petrofósil* (2016) immediately confronts visitors with a charred mangrove landscape. Amidst the absolute silence of this ominous scene, bizarre seared plants of surreal beauty come to life. At the base of the piece, we find the ashes of discarded objects from our daily lives, which serve ironically as fertilizer for these monstrous organisms. At times they seem to resemble microbes growing on the surface of an abandoned landfill. We realize that we are viewing a powerful, apocalyptic image or, as the artists assert, a mummification of our civilization (Cat. *Petrofósil*, Art Gallery, USC, 2016).



Javier y Jaime Suárez, Exhibición: *Petrofósil*, 2016. Galería de Arte de la USC.

The other eight wall pieces that comprise the exhibition also seem to be shrouded in silence, absorbing any lamentations we may have for our fading civilization. Marked by intolerance, wars, and massive destruction, the illusions of human progress and economic prosperity have only served to drive the world to its very end. The materials employed—which include coconut fiber, fish bones, bamboo, and the partly burnt remains of academic papers from their time at the Mayagüez campus of the University of Puerto Rico—are coated in a thin layer of pitch, thus making their only claim to eternal existence by simulating fossils.

When we approach each work, and begin to discern the distinctive details of the drawings, we find that the representations—for example, fish bones—are, in fact, made from both manufactured and organic materials. The artists mourn the disappearance of a life that was once authentic and sacred, and that now we fail to recognize as such. These pieces create a perfect metaphor for the representation of our world, its history and its present and for the contrast between what is organic and what is synthetic, which ultimately leads to confusion about what is real and what is pure illusion.

The Suárez twins are tremendously imaginative artists who have succeeded in creating prophetic works that serve as a requiem for our civilization. If we continue down this path, we will soon be little more than fossils amidst the pitch, a tragic testimony for future millennia.

Javier and Jaime Suárez's *Petrofósil* is on display at the University of Sagrado Corazón Art Gallery in San Juan through October 15, 2016.

Translation by: Translation Center, Graduate Program in Translation, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus.