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“...eons of evolution, during which humans constantly and intimately interacted with nature, have imbued *Homo sapiens* with a deep genetically based emotional need to affiliate with the rest of the living world. Meeting this need, according to what is called the biophilia hypothesis, may be as important to human well-being as forming close personal relationships.”

from: “want a Room With a View?...,” *The New York Times*, November 30, 1993

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Science is constantly proving the obvious. Of course we're all bred-in-the-bone biophiliacs, some of us more besotted than the rest. Why else would artists like Daniel Ranalli carry on their conversations with the wind and tide? And why would we find his photographs of such a whimsical discourse so vicariously fulfilling? Modern day *Homo sapiens* have simply repressed the nature-loving imperative with an overgrown intellect, constituting a conflicted love triangle of sorts. Our hyper-consciousness of nature's imponderables - the fragile earth with its vast scale; the even vaster more incomprehensible universe; the beginning of time; the ending of life - tends to simultaneously place us just beyond the reach of nature's seductions and even more in awe of them.

Ranalli's work evolves from earth art born of the 1960's confluence of similarly contradictory conceptual art and environmental concerns. Michael Heizer's rampaging bulldozers, Walter DeMaria's and Robert Smithson's more poetic, but still grandiose actions, were primarily investigations in scale and space beyond the picture plane and gallery floor, and they were typically American in their high-spectacle, interventionary intensity. Latter day earth artists tend to take a less arrogant, more hybrid approach. Ranalli particularly interweaves sensibilities culled from a simultaneously rising consciousness of other cultures. His sensitive, ephemeral work integrates bits of the British “walkers” Richard Long and Amish Fulton, the British artist Andy Goldsworthy's delicate site constructions, native American reverence for natural objects, Zen-like collaborations with natural forces, and John Cage's riffs on randomness. Underlying these elements is a solid appreciation for accessible formal constructs, still the portal through which most viewers most readily pass. The photographs of Ranalli's solitary pursuits on the beach are truly late 20th century glimpses out over the aeonic gulf between primal, genetically encoded yearnings and our ever-expanding collective instinct.

Though Ranalli has drawn his line in the sand to bridge, rather than confront the classic split between

mind and body, the solutions he offers are still more easily felt than verbalized. His *Shell Line #2, 1992-93*, a wobbly, underwater trail of clam shells stretching into the horizon's depths epitomizes linguistic (intellectual) futility. Wryly he shows us how hubris contends with cosmic forces. Here is visual proof that our conscious knowledge and physical achievements are literally pretty shallow, eventually engulfed. But even at high tide, the fading line has a strangely beckoning magic, rather like footprints leading off into the unknown.

Ranalli's work has grown both more complex and spare over the past few years. Commentary on the art world may be slipping in. The delightful *Sum of My Ambition, 1993*, for example, plays elegantly on minimalist themes with a *double entendre* image. The photograph of a large, tide-washed circle/zero of limp seaweed on the sand, its photographic mount of sleek aluminum, and Ranalli's existential bit of text, evoke a range of contradictory allusions. *Mollusk Drawings, 1993*, slyly recalls Brice Marden, Terry Winters and Vija Clemens, but there is more here than just clever parody. What beachcomber hasn't been entranced with tracings like these and wished somehow to preserve them? Ranalli assembles his mollusk montage with a knowing, but sincere, appreciation. His handsome presentation of the *Daily Artifacts* series signals appreciation as well. But this time the extra-nuances lead out to the present day consumer and backward to the 19th century birth of modern science and the preciousness of its collection cabinets.

Ranalli's work is getting smarter as it gets more beautiful as it continues to plumb the unfathomable. His is an integration of telluric passion, keen intellect and esthetics that gives biophiliacs reason to hope.

December 1993

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