

That somehow the vibrant ecosystem that has developed on these steel giants is lesser because it bears the shameful touch of humanity. But there's nothing sinful about humans and nothing pure about nature. We are merely an expression of both its horror and its beauty. Just like the sublime.

in order of appearance:

- Draugen oil platform, Norway
- Troll A platform, Norway
- Berkut oil rig, Russia



decommissioned oil rig running aground off the coast of the Isle of Lewis

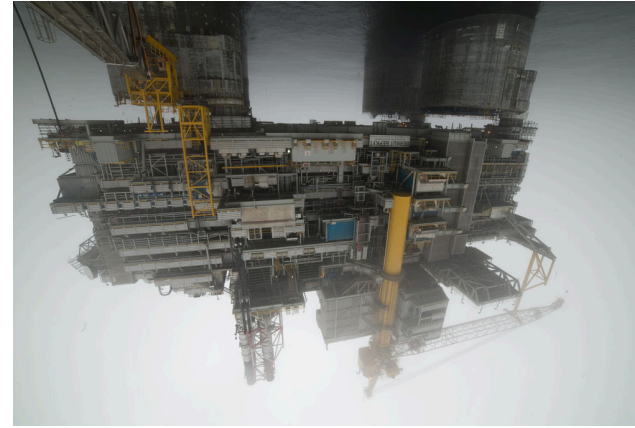
When oil platforms go out of operation, its underwater structure becomes an ecosystem of marine life. Coral reefs and fish make the steel their new homes. When campaigners want decommissioned rigs to be removed completely, they don't seem to care that life has found a way to reclaim the waste of human civilisation. They want a nature that's pure - untouched, to be rid of all sinful human influence. The insistence on removing these structures strikes me as an inability to confront guilt, that any and all reference to oil rigs need to be removed because they confront us with the reality of industrial society and our complicity in it.

there's nothing pure about nature

there's something sublime



about an oil rig



The oil rig is a collection of contradictions, appearing to us as something at once impossible and threatening; a life-giving, life-destroying, brutalist sea monster. Its power is immense both in appearance and functioning. Its threat is real in a creeping, invisible way, like radiation, a silent death that spreads over centuries.

The sublime

The sublime is typically experienced as something evoking both awe and fear, uniting attracting and repelling forces. A sublime object displays excessive and unconstrained qualities. It's often characterised by a sense of hostility, a place where one cannot imagine human life to flourish. Yet it is exactly the sublime object's unconstrained power that attracts our fascination. It is the experience of confronting something inhuman, indifferent, uncompromising. One may feel small and insignificant in its shadow, this may be experienced as a sense of relief. At the same time one may feel threatened and overpowered by the object, but this experience is pleasurably admired rather than feared.



The offshore oil rig

A giant human-made structure in the cold isolation of the sea, miles from any civilisation that nourishes human life, exposed to the violent elements of its surroundings. Excessive both in its resource use and in the labour power it took to design, build, transport, let alone keep it in operation. Hostile to life and yet powering the entirety of industrial society. Awe-inspiring in its display of power both as a miracle of engineering and as a structure of forces of the earth. Horrifying in its slow poisoning of our atmosphere, in its direct implication in the violence of global capitalism, in the sheer hubris of trying to lay claim to the ancient fossils buried deep beneath the surface.