

So, What Do They Look Like?

As if suddenly, on March 31, 2010, the Obama administration proposed a plan to open up the United State coastal waters for additional offshore drilling. Areas in the proposed stretches of water from Delaware to the middle of Florida on the Atlantic Coast, a small swatch of open water to the west of Florida, and the Northern coastal waters of Alaska at the Chukchi Beaufor Seas. The purpose of this energy bill is to reduce the United States' dependence on foreign oil and to generate revenue from oil exports.

The primary ambition of my Steedman Fellowship study will be to document the yet undrilled coastal areas of planned drill zones. Where will oil and gas from these rigs first go? How will these landscapes change?

To answer these questions, the study will be composed in 2 parts. The first part will examine existing cities that already service off-shore energy rigs for the purpose of studying the relationship between energy extraction and urbanism. The second part of the study will be to document coastal cities and areas where future off-shore oil rigs are being planned.

The timing of this proposal by the Obama administration and the opportunity to conduct this study through the Steedman Fellowship proposal is very important. Drilling will only begin after geological study, which is also followed by the designation of acceptable areas of ocean for drilling, and a bid process by oil and gas companies for their share of the open water. We can expect to see the first off-shore facilities up and running in 4-5 years.

The importance of this study is paramount. Our coastal edge will be subject to drastic changes and this study will serve as a visual record of what I anticipate will disappear in the next decade. It is scientifically known that coastal drilling leads to damaged coastlines, fisheries, beaches and wildlife. Although, while oil rigs are planned to be no less than 125 miles from shore, and therefore out of view, their physical effect will be felt over time due to the use of water in the extraction process the by-product of which is called 'produced formation water' (PFW) which contains trace amounts of petroleum.

The second ambition of this study is to research the architecture and engineering design of offshore rigs. Designed to be self-sustaining islands either standing in or floating on the ocean, these megastructures are free standing cities and efficient machines. When wells have been drained of their energy, the rigs are dismantled; but studies are now showing that they can be retained as artificial habitats. Whether occupied or abandoned, these structures serve as important examples of efficient design.

And, How Do They Work?

Travel will begin at the end of January 2011 and will conclude in November 2011. Pre-travel plans will include interviews with oil companies planning to establish new off-shore rigs in order to understand where they plan to build and where the site of my surveillance will be located. In addition, planned visits to existing rigs as architectural sites to be studied and examined critically.

Sites to visit-

Existing offshore rigs:

Petronius Oil Platform - Gulf of Mexico, 210 km southeast of New Orleans
Hibernia Oil Platform - St. Johns, Newfoundland, Canada
Troll A Platform - 80 miles Northwest of Bergen, Norway
Brent Oil Fields - Northern UK coast
Erb-West Complex - Malaysia
LeDong Platform, Hainan Island, China
Stena Tay - Vittoria Brazil

Cities:

New Orleans, USA
St. John Newfoundland, Canada,
Bergen, Norway
California Coast, USA
Sabah, Malaysia
Hainan Island, China
Vittoria, Brazil

New coastal areas:

Barrow, Alaska
Lagoons along the Alaskan coast near Ivvavik National Park
Eastern coasts of Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

Documentation will be in the form of a daily internet log of sites seen, things learned, and thoughts from travel and will consist of on-site sketches, photographs and notes. To conclude the travelling fellowship, the ambition is to curate an exhibition of these drawings, photographs and texts in order to critically address the architecture of off-shore rigs and their potential environmental impact