

A Message to the World:  
Edward Clark 2011

A very successful show at Buyers Market of American Craft brought this artist an accidental catastrophe. The wall of my neighbor's booth fell upon my work, demolishing 3 months of love and labor and shattering my heart and soul like so many piles of broken glass and shards. The shock of such a loss could have devastated me, left me dejected and without hope, but my promises to gallery owners, the support of my current collectors, and the trust of other buyers who had purchased my work just the previous week. Time stands still in moments like this. I felt frozen in time as much as I was frozen by the Philadelphia winter. I felt alone and lost, stock still with my entire world destroyed around me.

I felt as if it were too late. My work, the labors of my life, my entire world were destroyed in a split second and by events beyond my control. It was a feeling I had felt before. It is a feeling I feel whenever I begin to think about the planet. It was the way that I felt when I heard news of the earthquake in Christchurch, NZ and feared for my family's safety there amongst the rubble of the Earth's stolid destruction. It made me feel as if the very forces of Nature had robbed me of my work and of my dreams, just as it had robbed New Zealanders of their homes. As my mind sought the safety of distraction, my eyes obsessed over my bloody fingers picking up broken glass shards, a piece of broken fish here or a shattered coral there, and then it occurred to me.

People will continue living in Christchurch. They will rebuild and pick up the pieces of their previous life in order to build a new one, perhaps a better one.

Memories of a recent snorkel off Oahu slowly infiltrated the horror show images of loss, replacing them with pictures of fragmented and broken coral rolling in the sand after a recent storm. These symbols of death, relocation, and instant evolution do not just represent destruction. I thought of how broken coral can become a new reef on its own, how fragments of a great organism so apparently wiped out can be reborn in the right setting. The *Acropora valida* fragment so painfully rendered in glass that I held in my hand was the very same species of coral that had been rolling in the sea. A Tinkers Butterfly peered out of the wreckage at me like its skittish counterpart in life. I remembered the message of Tinker, the scientist who had identified that butterfly fish, a species which at one time had thousands of fish but which now is so overfished for the aquarium trade that they are rare to see even in pairs. Tinker thought forward. He fought to turn our environmental destruction into environmental creation, leading the United States to create marine preserves in which the natural world might recreate what was lost.

As I slowly picked through the remains of my glass coral reef, destroyed too by chance and the unthinking actions of mankind, I distracted myself with further thoughts of the coral reef and its struggles in this world. What would the reef do? The fragments of coral would be washed around the currents and sand until they locked a foothold in the reef. There, a new colony of coral would be born. With this, I had a vision of what I must do. I must follow the way of the reef.

My work will reflect the survival strategies of this life form: rebuild, reuse, recycle, and recreate. These educational sculptures that I create may serve a higher ideal than simple aesthetics. All can learn about the marvels of the reef, its resilience, and the hope that lies within. As an artist, as a scientist, and as a human being, I know it is my duty to remind the world about the fragility of the environment and the importance of cherishing the wonders of our world before they are gone forever.

As I work to return these sculptures to their previous glory, I am mindful of the organic play of Nature as it deconstructs and reconstructs coral reefs. I let Nature flow through the reconstruction like the gentle pull of the tide, reorienting, restructuring, and regenerating my art. I only hope that my work continues to teach the fragility of our environment before we too are left picking up the pieces.