

Perfect Stones

by Deborah Elliott Deutschman

The artist found the stones on the beach -- a famous stone beach on the ancient sea, now so polluted, in the south of the relatively small country that considered itself the most civilized and beautiful in the world, where the artist had lived as a child

The artist had been walking in the dreamlike light of the summer dusk, walking barefoot (though one couldn't really walk, but rather hobble) on the stone beach because the person the artist was with had suggested it, and the artist, being quite smitten with this particular person at the time, would have, most likely, gone along with almost anything the person would have proposed; it was rather painful (for the feet). But then, the whole summer, in general, was a rather painful experience.

But in that ethereal gold and gray dusk the artist had picked up a number of smooth, polished, perfect stones -- small stones and not so small, as found sculpture. Nature's limited editions; small replicas of magical, transcendent, mystical, mysterious -- and perplexing sculpture. (Not unlike the artist's agitated emotional state that summer.)

The artist kept picking up -- finding -- these small perfect works of art on the beach during the duration of this (painful) sunset exercise. Until the artist couldn't carry any more. It being summer, pockets were limited (clothing minimal).

Later that evening, when the stones were examined, they were deemed even more extraordinary than originally perceived.

When the artist went home, to the great, vast country far removed from where the idyll had occurred, the artist placed the stones on a large, beautiful old wood table, and they became part of a distinctly mixed (personal) media still life with other objects unexpectedly assembled together -- part of many original still lives in the artist's work space.

But one day, the artist, picking up a few of the stones and thinking of that summer, felt their tactile properties in an even more heightened manner and started to polish them, file them, smooth them down.

Every day the artist worked a bit more on these stones, perfecting them even more. Months passed, and the artist was still smoothing down the stones, sandpapering, chiseling, buffing. (The artist would sometimes just look at them, go into the studio, just to admire them.)

Years went by.

The artist kept working on the collection of stones, perfecting them.

Until, finally, they were so worn away (not by the sea or salt air, or by time) that there was no stone left, only small wafer-thin slips.

Still, the artist managed to keep working on them. With jeweler's instruments, then improvising smaller and smaller scale tools; polishing them -- they were almost perfect. The artist knew it was only a question of a few more (final) touches.

The artist kept working, until they simply disintegrated into powder: small mounds of variegated shades of gray, and white, and tan (et cetera) powder.

The artist realized the work was finally finished; there was nothing more to be done. Perfect Stones, the artist thought, were, finally, just that -- perfect, transformed to the pure essence of perfection.

The artist placed each different tiny mound inside a small plexiglas case. The artist gave each one a number -- each case was labeled: Perfect Stone #1, Perfect Stone #2, Perfect Stone #3, Perfect Stone #4... and on. There were quite a few, until all the cases had their affixed labels and numbers.

The artist was particularly pleased with the whole series of Perfect Stones, and decided, not only to definitely include the whole series in the next exhibit, planned for next season, but that Perfect Stones would be the dominating theme -- and title.

The artist was (almost) truly satisfied, and the vague, gnawing, perennial sense of restlessness and disorder abated.

For the time being.