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WEEKEND BREAK

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Twin Octopus
Duncan Berry
2020

'Twin Octopus'
by Duncan Berry.

MISBEHAVING

Fisherman details climate change's impact

By DUNCAN BERRY

I was talking to the head of research
for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
a while back
I told him I didn't realize someone
was actually administrating the oceans and the weather
how's that going for you?
sounds like that could be
a really big and frustrating job

we were talking
about the effects of climate change
when I noticed his eyes were rimmed in red
like he'd been crying
his face sad as he looked at me
and said
"Duncan, the North Pacific is misbehaving."

he was talking about
the heartbeat of a massive
system that gives us everything
we know of as life
tucked up here in the Northwest corner of the left coast
a heartbeat that has been in a dynamic balance
with its warm and cold cycles
decadal in its oscillation
from time immemorial
dependably ebbing and flowing
bump bump bump bump

until
it started
this atrial flutter
this watery arrhythmia
a year of cold currents out of the north
bringing rich nutrients
"Zooplankton like cheeseburgers," he said
erratically followed by two years of warm currents
out of the south
"Like popcorn," he said
boom and bust years of feed
for our beloved salmon
I remember thinking
no wonder they don't show up
sometimes

and then the fever began
and the blob came to town
and wore out its welcome real quick
refusing to budge
millions of square miles of deep water
are hard to heat up even a single
Fahrenheit degree
but 10?

he tells me that
with these new temperatures
phytoplankton bloom in epic rashes and die
zooplankton head down to lower ranges
deep beneath the surface
where the billions of creatures that depend on them
can't reach



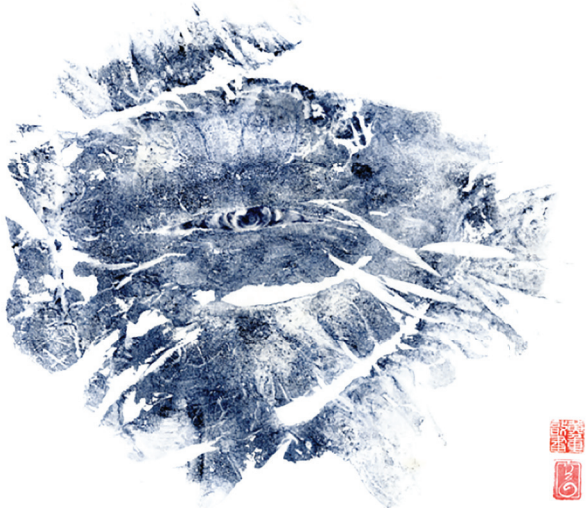
Duncan Berry creates an image in the Japanese style of Gyotaku.

in a déjà vu ... all over again
moment
just like our fisheries sisters and brothers
in northeast waters
we lost the privilege to fish
our cod stocks in the gulf of Alaska
from one year to the next
bam
just like that

and the beach in front of my house
received a message
in the form of a 17-year-old teenage gray whale
that had died of starvation
remember those zooplankton diving?
and was unable to make the trip
back up the hill

and one day last summer we had
28 dorado show up on our docks
in Garibaldi
dorado!
and in the same week two sailfish
and a 90 pound bluefin
with two coho in its stomach
the underwater sonar showing schools of these
southern monsters
traveling our northern waters
like herds of invading buffalo

and I spoke with
another Yoda of the sea
who is a visionary oceanographer
at Oregon State University
he tells me that
carbon absorbed into the sea off of Japan's
heavily industrialized eastern Honshu coastline
travels here underwater
on a slow-moving freight train of a current
that takes over 30 years to arrive



A recent creation of Duncan Berry's.

arrive in the form of hypoxic zones
and increasing ocean acidification
and this at levels
that are so 1990
bigger and heavier
carbon trains
already on the tracks
in the seas
coming at us

we're talking about game changing
foundation of the house stuff here
like if zoo plankton can't make their shells
well then we best be getting out the PB&J
because we are all toast

and I think
what these two men
really want to do
armed with the knowledge they have