



Dustin Yellin, *10 Parts*, 2015–16, glass, collage, acrylic paint, 3' 11 1/2" x 20' 4 3/4" x 1' 4 3/4".

Dustin Yellin

GRIMM | VAN BAERLESTRAAT

Opening during Amsterdam's busy annual Art Weekend in November, Dustin Yellin's marvelous exhibition "10 Parts" seemed to draw the biggest crowd. Swarms of happy viewers spent hours pressing their noses to the glass surfaces of Yellin's aquarium-like sculptures, reminding me of kids staring dreamily into an Apple-store window. Buried within each massive, light-filled, transparent block—a fat sandwich of thirty-one sheets of half-inch-thick glass—were thousands of tiny pictures extracted from encyclopedias, science manuals, magazines. These cutout images are typically one-half to two inches tall, and most depict living or moving things: jellyfish, hot-air balloons, birds (geese, blue jays, cranes, hawks), skiers, pool toys, foot soldiers, tigers, blizzards, computer screens. There are Lilliputian surfers, bears (grizzly and polar), Greek gods and goddesses, Canadian Mounties, monks, mushrooms, mollusks. The title work, *10 Parts*, 2015–16, was a twenty-foot-long sequence of ten of these multilayered glass blocks arranged in a row, on metal supports. Together they form a long, flowing, foaming wave that finally cascades into a tumultuous, splashing waterfall, the whole shrouded in a sparkling mist skillfully painted across the layers of glass. The rushing "water" is filled with countless fantastic, miniature vignettes: sea monsters attacked by kamikaze planes; pirate ships sailing through clouds of acrobatic dollar bills; minuscule bathing beauties tumbling in a whirlpool of iridescent fish and military personnel.

It felt biblical, like a Great Flood sweeping through every medium—from collage to photography, readymade to animation. The work is unmistakably painterly: Tiny flecks of acrylic add detail to the intricate scenes, and Yellin's interest in the eroticized figure groups populating Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1490–1500, was palpable. Yet the overall effect of the blocks—each weighing about half a ton—was powerfully sculptural. And the everyday labor of their making must have entailed untold hours of effort, as many assistants with X-Acto knives patiently traced the outlines of each itty-bitty paper picture as if drawing it. They then meticulously set in place each infinitesimal fragment with tweezers before gluing the whole into this magical three-dimensional eternity, like insects fossilized in amber. While admiring Yellin's limitless imagination and technical wizardry, I also began to think that the artist, having orchestrated this colossal collaborative feat nearly two years in the making, must be one of the world's great managers. For Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1957), the miniature world is a dominated world. Perhaps driving the crowd's openmouthed fascination with Yellin's art was the latent pleasure of control over so many small things: the ability to occupy a divine vantage point while enjoying an overwhelming sense of discovery and wonder.

Coinciding with "10 Parts" was the Stedelijk Museum's presentation of Jordan Wolfson's extraordinary *Colored Sculpture*, 2016—weirdly also about control, if on opposite terms. Wolfson's supersize animatronic puppet is manipulated via an elaborate structure of computer-programmed pulleys, scaffolds, and chains. We watch in silent dread as this grimacing figure is dragged, flung, and repeatedly slammed to the floor—relentlessly at the mercy of cruel gravity. In contrast, Yellin's universe seems gravityless: a floating Eden abounding in pleasure. Yellin's fixed world is silent, vastly populated, and impossible to absorb all at once, while Wolfson's Pinocchio-like dummy is isolated in every way: an emaciated giant forced into a joyless, earsplitting dance. Both exhibitions were unforgettable, but Yellin's crowd was smiling.

—Gilda Williams