

The Not So Bad Extinction of the Creepy

by Nika Sandler



We mourn the disappearance of the dazzling, the majestic—the things that look like they surely have a purpose in life. They fill our hearts and our frames, even when they are long gone. The last panda. The final song of a colorful bird. The eyes of a baby seal. These stay with us. But what about the creatures that were never beautiful, but something else? What about the ones that made our skin crawl? The ones that slithered and pulsed strangely under alien seas, below our feet? The ones that are... sly and unseen. The ones that, if you're honest, you might be relieved to hear are gone? Nika Sandler's project *The Ancient Depths* doesn't let us turn away so easily this time. It invites us into the strange seas and the uncomfortable corners of extinction. The ones we don't talk about when we talk about grief.

The Not So Bad Extinction of the Creepy by Niki Sandler



There's This Feeling

As Nika tells it:

“I have always been drawn to life forms that are not attractive in the conventional sense. I think discomfort acts as a filter. People want to remember what they find beautiful. Everything else fades into the background or disappears altogether.”

The Not So Bad Extinction of the Creepy by Niki Sandler

In *The Ancient Depths*, long-extinct marine creatures return—not in flesh and blood but as codes, put together from scraps of fossil memory and of human imagination. They are not particularly friendly-looking, and they surely wouldn't get a high budget conservation program if they were here. But they were here. And we feel... what exactly?

A shiver?
A push? A chemical reaction?
A quiet gratitude that the world has one less spiny character floating in its depths?

The Not So Bad Extinction of the Creepy by Niki Sandler



Let's face it, extinction is a beauty contest. We have to like what we lose first. When the brilliant parrots vanish, headlines mourn. And photographs are taken to keep the last breath in a frame. Even when no one really cares what a parrot does in ecological terms as opposed to an ichthyosaur (air-breathing sea creatures looked similar to dolphins, but has less friendly teeth),

When the awkward, slimy, armored things vanish? There's an approval. We don't fight it, we want it.

The Not So Bad Extinction of the Creepy by Niki Sandler



Loveless Times

The Ancient Depths doesn't allow easy answers. It sits between our messy, unresolved conservation with creepy animals—where fear, wonder, and guilt still find each other in the dark. And maybe that's exactly where we need to be. In the dark. At the end of the day light is invented, and maybe a little overrated.

The Not So Bad Extinction of the Creepy by Niki Sandler

Because until we can grieve not just the beautiful and shiny but the strange—until we can love not just the familiar but the alien—until we can look the "creepy" in the eye and say You too mattered, and you too were here—we haven't really understood what extinction means or how to prevent it. And worse part: we haven't understood what being alive truly means. If we can define that in the midst of our current extinction, we never will, going silently into the night with murder in our eyes.

The Not So Bad Extinction of the Creepy by Niki Sandler