

A Biography of Daphne



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Becky Beasley
Erik Bünger
Lauren Burrow
Fabien Giraud & Raphaël Siboni
Gabrielle Goliath
Ho Tzu Nyen
Sanja Iveković
Mathew Jones
Candice Lin & P. Staff
Steve McQueen
Jill Magid
Nicholas Mangan
Inge Meijer
Jean-Luc Moulène
Ciprian Mureşan
Agostino dei Musi
Jean Painlevé
Roe Rosen
Wingu Tingima
Mona Vătămanu & Florin Tudor
Anthonie Waterloo
Katie West

Guest Curator:
Mihnea Mircan

Australian Centre
for Contemporary Art
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A Biography of Daphne
Mihnea Mircan

A Biography of Daphne revisits the Classical myth of Daphne as the starting point for an investigation of trauma and metamorphosis, symbiosis and entanglement in contemporary art. Daphne, the nymph who turned into a tree to evade the assault of the god Apollo, is recast as a thinking model for the ruptures between the ‘figures’ and ‘grounds’ of today’s visual, social, political and ecological environments. Daphne also serves as a dynamic template for the cyclical timelines of myth and their intersections with technological contexts that frame a contemporary understanding of transformation, personal or collective. From these related perspectives, *A Biography of Daphne* explores the integrity and vulnerability of bodies, their performative or prosthetic enhancements, and the alliances they enter – across species or registers of representation – that open identity to the possibility of a radical othering.

Daphne’s earliest surviving representations, from the Hellenistic Age in the 5th century BCE, predate the first canonical narration of the myth, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: an opus in fifteen books about transformations in Greek and Roman mythologies, written – like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – in dactylic hexameter, and completed in 8 CE, during Ovid’s exile at Tomis (currently Constanța, in Romania), at the Eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. The poem integrates 250 myths in a complete history of the world, from its creation to the apotheosis of Julius Caesar. Ovid’s is a shape-shifting universe, where all beings share a primal substrate of matter: one form turning into another is an exposition of their fundamental affinity, of their co-implication in a cosmos where no entity precedes the sets of relations that it brings into being.

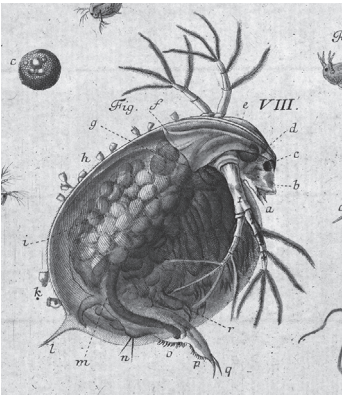
Ovid’s poem is an uninterrupted cycle of dis- and re-embodiments, a vortex of mutable shapes that unites gods, demi-gods and mortals as they transform into plants or animals, rivers and stones as temporary personifications of passion and defencelessness, violence and endurance, change and its permanence. Illustrating the competition between chaos and form that animates the cosmos, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* includes Daphne’s myth in its first book, where her story is used to explain one of Apollo’s attributes: the laurel crown. Following a contest with Apollo, Cupid

demonstrates his power by shooting the myth’s protagonists with two arrows: the god of the sun is consumed by desire for Daphne, while she – having resolved to remain a virgin – flees Apollo in horror. At the moment of imminent capture, Daphne pleads with her father, the river god Peneus, to be saved and is transformed into the tree that bears her name, the laurel. Defeated, Apollo claims the tree as his emblem and – as part of the rituals of prognostication at his temples – fashions his crown, the crown worn by all ‘laureates’ since, from a branch of Daphne’s new body, which still recoils from his touch.

While the earliest images of Daphne – in Greek art and in Pompeii frescoes, Coptic wood carvings and Gallo-Roman art – draw on older fables around the laurel tree and the ancient cults of trees (‘the first temples of the gods’ according to Pliny the Elder), the most significant segment in her iconographic history begins when Ovid is rediscovered by European theology in the 13th century, and representations of his myths begin to multiply in manuscripts. Ovidian figures are either co-opted as emblems of Christian virtues, or as characters in the epoch’s narratives of the monstrous form, in bestiaries that catalogue heterodox and transgressive becomings. Medieval illuminations of Daphne’s metamorphosis, reimagined as an example of chastity, set into motion one of Western European art’s most significant and enduring tropes: an extended allegory of body and place, adversity and triumph, subjection and agency.

Daphne’s representations proliferate in the Renaissance as a cryptoanatomy that intersperses the human and the vegetal, and as an enigmatic apparition arising at the threshold between figure and landscape. Baroque artists compose an inventory of almost serial permutations of exposure and repulsion, visibility and camouflage around Daphne, whose transformation is the occasion for myriad variations of the dramatic *contrappostos* that bind pursuer and prey, anguished flight and paralysis, as roots stem from the feet of the running nymph.

Modern art – most explicitly through Salvador Dalí, Paul Delvaux and Ossip Zadkine, although the motif reverberates through the practice of many Surrealist artists and their successors – recuperates Daphne as a figure in and of crisis, whose coherence disaggregates and recomposes in the push and pull between the dark forces of the psyche and the onslaught of the external world. Beyond a preoccupation with the plasticity and spectacle of metamorphosis, what unites these



otherwise distinct examples of engagement with the myth is a chronological operation: a repeated update of the myth, often placed against a contemporaneous backdrop, an act of visual translation where the transformation is reconfigured in relation to new mindsets or ideas. In other words, artists gravitate to Daphne's paradoxes at times when her convulsively interlocked bodies seem able to respond to shifts in each epoch's imagination, to the interplay between crisis and survival, personhood and anonymity, the centripetal tensions that structure the self and its centrifugal dispersal in a perilous world. Like Ovid's telescopic passage from genesis to the present, and like the long sequence of revisions the myth undergoes in art history – via which it is always in the process of becoming contemporary – this exhibition likewise aims to create an expanded contemporary landscape around Daphne's becoming, teasing out a dialogue between her 'biography' and some of the narratives that shape present-day notions of transformation and identity.

From the rich visual posterity of Ovid's myth, the exhibition includes two examples of Daphnean representations: Anthonie Waterloo's seventeenth-century etching of the nymph's flight from Apollo, and Agostino dei Musi's sixteenth-century engraving of the moment of transformation. These two images, presented respectively at the entrance to and exit from the exhibition, introduce key moments in the narrative and ground the conversation between the myth and its extrapolations, between Daphne and her avatars, that this project proposes. They also serve to bookend the exhibition chronologically, suggesting that the timescape of *A Biography of Daphne*, constituted by the temporalities that unfold in the works, is compressed between those brackets. Instantaneous or immemorial, museological or environmental, following the emergence of new myths or accelerating into the fraught futures of the Anthropocene, the timelines which interweave in the exhibition occupy the split second of agony between the scenes described in those historical images, elongated to include Daphne's genealogies and contemporary echoes of her metamorphosis.

At a different level, the exhibition is structured by two arcs, asymmetrically disposed in relation to one another: these originate in scenes whose violence registers optically, hindering a body's ability to inscribe itself coherently in the world, and end with panoramic shots of visual or informational overload, freeze frames of a vertigo that seems to exceed the representational frame. One perspectival axis runs from the forest, dancing violently around

Daphne as she flees Apollo in the Waterloo etching, to the thematisation of a continuity between canvas and country, edgeless image and geographical expanse, ways of making pictures and modes of inhabitation, in the work by Katie West. The other arc connects Steve McQueen's reworking of the Surrealist trope of the violated eye and Mathew Jones' oblique engagement with the temporality and politics of May Gibbs' *Snugglypot and Cuddlepig*, a warped relation between present and future expressed in a clandestine, veiled figure. These perspective lines extend from blindspots or obstruction to scenes of visual drift, from seeing almost nothing to the excessing of the frame. Such juxtapositions in the exhibition aim to replicate Daphne's own figural drama – the ways in which a metamorphosis becomes an image, by rotating the axes of orientation of the transformed body from 'portrait' to 'landscape': from the blurs of movement where identities – godly and human, human and vegetal – are in competition with one another to a camouflaged survival where the figure is engulfed by its ground.

Of particular significance among the themes explored in the show is a reflection on the sexual violence that precipitates Daphne's metamorphosis, and – with the myth as a lens trained on the contemporary – the enduring prevalence of misogyny and aggressions towards women that continue to mark our present moment. A quartet of works included in the exhibition, by Gabrielle Goliath, Wingu Tingima, Jill Magid and Sanja Iveković, respond from different perspectives to the cycles of violence that diminish and oppress vulnerable identities, female in particular. Goliath amplifies in her work an interjection of pain into a practice of mourning, which wrests the victims it commemorates from the anonymity of statistics of sexual violence, and from the brutality of the social paradigms that frame them as expendable. Wingu Tingima's painting illustrates the myth of Seven Sisters, a narrative of violation and metamorphosis that overlaps with Daphne's but also serves to introduce a different temporal dimension to the project. Sanja Iveković responds in monumental form to the exclusion of women from historical representations of heroicism, while exploring the distance between the language of monumental remembrance and present, ongoing traumas. Jill Magid's emphatically incomplete work maps the incremental transformations via which an artistic biography might veer away from the frameworks of art-historical valuation, complicating and delaying the reciprocal clarification assumed to exist between the artistic object and the identity of its maker.

The exhibition responds to the violence that precedes the metamorphosis as the brute fact of an attack, but also as a symptom within a larger matrix of aggression and fragility to do with life under late capitalism, and the cycles of extinction and reanimation of the Anthropocene. Crucially, throughout these propositions Daphne is not reduced to the condition of a victim, but portrayed as a dialectical figure that short-circuits and illuminates colossal power differentials, that embodies and spatialises a resistance to unconstrained dominance. Demarcating a place that is outside the reach of its theoretical limitlessness, transformed by and triumphing over its violence and toxicity to equal extents, Daphne is recast here as a myth from a new cosmogony, telling of metamorphosed relations – with and in the world – that structure identity and the natural or symbolic biotopes with which it co-evolves.

Among various projects in the exhibition that consider notions of metabolism and symbiosis, *Hormonal Fog* by Candice Lin and P. Staff is a hacked fog machine that diffuses into the gallery tinctures made from plants that are known to stimulate the production of oestrogen or to lower testosterone levels in the human body. Thinking of the ways in which the contours of objects dissolve in fog, the vapour that emanates from the machine might be said to cloud and soften the separation between the place of the myth and the here-and-now of the exhibition, proximity and dislocation. The infinitesimal transformation that *Hormonal Fog* triggers, affecting ever so slightly the chemical balance via which bodies respond to environments, is premised on a kinship between human and vegetal anatomies, between skin and bark, social and photosynthetic ways of being in the world. The phyto-oestrogens and plant-derived anti-androgens that the machine disperses into the space are the indexes of a shared corporeal template, marking the space of permutations where transitions from body to tree and vice-versa become imaginable. Artist and theorist Špela Petrič notes that hormones are primordial messenger molecules, stemming from a common evolutionary parent of plants, animals and microbes. Their nature is both material – the chemical structure which confers their ability to interact with molecules such as receptors – and semiotic, involved in processes of meaning-making. Hormones are an interface in social compositions of reciprocal effects and adaptation, as much as they are a material access to the others' worlds. Traversing the fog is thus inhabiting the interval at the center of metamorphosis, the interstice

between two bodies, pulsating with variations and symmetries: it is being traversed, conversely, by the world. Lin and Staff's work visualises and performs the permeability to change that overcomes prescribed schemas of identity, and fashions new forms and behaviours from the spaces between what we have been told we are, that with which we identify, and what we might become.

List of Works



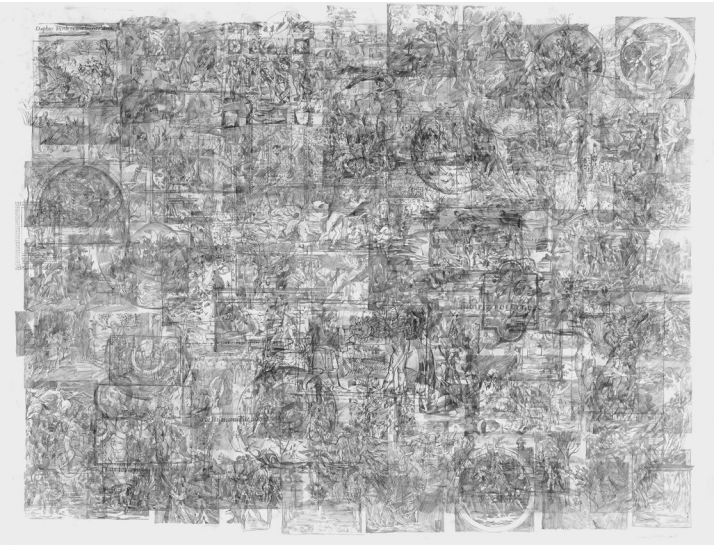
Anthonie Waterloo
born 1609, Lille, France; died 1690, Amsterdam

Apollo and Daphne (1650s); published (1784–88)
etching
29.5 x 24.6 cm (image and plate);
29.9 x 24.9 cm (sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,
gift of Sir Lionel Lindsay 1954

Anthonie Waterloo's etching of *Apollo and Daphne* is a highly unusual representation of the myth, depicting the moment prior to the nymph's metamorphosis into a laurel tree. Daphne is still autonomous here, fleeing her unwanted suitor. However, the inevitable denouement is perhaps

presaged in the figuration of her movement, which is tangled with the forest that the nymph is both running away from and toward, prefiguring the moment of capture, of becoming a tree and thus disappearing within the landscape.

The work is part of a series of etchings which place mythological or pastoral scenes at the centre of richly rendered sylvan landscapes. Fusing myth and the cycles of peasant or monastic life, the series weaves together those temporalities and versions of humanity: images of work, piety or passion scaled down to foreground the vegetal environment.



Ciprian Mureșan
born 1977, Dej, Romania; lives and works in Cluj, Romania

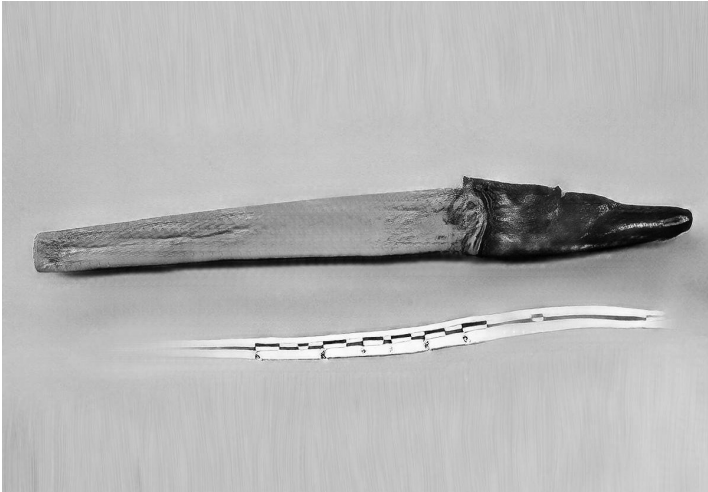
Drawing after a selection of representations of Daphne from the archive of the Warburg Institute 2021
pencil on paper
114.0 x 150.0 cm

Drawing after ‘Apollo and Daphne’ by Bernini photographed from different angles 2021
pencil on paper
132.0 x 99.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Plan B Gallery, Berlin

Ciprian Mureșan’s drawings belong to a cycle of works that the artist initiated in 2011, reflecting on the blind-spots and imaginative potentials of his own education. Mureșan studied art and art history in a ‘peripheral’ context – in a post-communist country, before the advent of the internet and the liberalisation of travel – with canonical works only accessible as reproductions that were in various ways unfaithful to the scale, colour

or museological context of the original. The different drawings in this cycle meticulously reproduce by hand and aggregate all the images from the catalogues of a diverse cast of artists, from Antonello da Messina to Elaine Sturtevant, among many others. These works convey the removal, distortion or obfuscation of the original as a hypnotic density of lines and shapes where drawings partly obscure other drawings and are superposed into a quasi-volume that reframes the experience of art-historical and geographical distance as a tactile, performative space of apparitions and erasures. One of the drawings presented here juxtaposes about 130 representations – from the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and the Baroque – of Daphne’s metamorphosis from the online archive of the Warburg Institute in London. This drawing differs from previous examples in the series as it reproduces the temporality of hyperlinks, rather than that of rifling through the pages of a book, but more significantly because of the nature of the images condensed or entwined here, which all depict essentially the same tangled bodies and the same gestures of desire and repulsion, eschewal and transformation. Made instantaneous and hallucinatory, Daphne’s biography branches out between the historical epochs to which the copied images belong, as it unfolds between areas of opacity and transparency in the build-ups of graphite, like a many-limbed, transhistorical entity that emerges from a forest of images.

If the drawing after the Warburg archive functions as a negative analogue of the nymph plate in Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*, the accompanying work accentuates the vortex-like effect of the ‘collection’ it draws upon: photographs from different angles of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s *Apollo and Daphne* 1625, a life-size Baroque marble sculpture made for the Borghese Gallery in Rome. Mureșan’s drawing incorporates the experience of moving around Bernini’s sculpture as a spiralling superposition of discontinuous views, segmenting the sculpture into a series of scans and composing a faceless, frantic totality which obliquely reaffirms its three-dimensionality.



Fabien Giraud
born 1980, Paris; lives and works in Paris
Raphaël Siboni
born 1981, Paris; lives and works in Paris

The Unmanned, Season 1, episode 3: 1953 – The Outlawed 2018
high definition digital video
13:00 mins
Courtesy the artists

This is an episode from the first season of *The Unmanned*, a history of computation that extends from the myth of the technological singularity, describing a future when human psyche and intelligent machines fuse, to the cosmology of the Ohlone, the population that was violently displaced in the colonisation of California. *The Outlawed* centres on the last years in the life of Alan Turing, the inventor of the Automatic Computing Engine and cryptanalyst who cracked the code of Enigma, the machine used by Germany for military communication in World War II.

Tried for homosexuality in 1952, Turing was made to choose between imprisonment and a hormonal treatment. In 1953, he travelled to Greece to study morphological regularity in nature, while his body was being altered by the devastating consequences of chemical castration. The first half of the film sees Turing, played by actor Aurore Broutin donning a silicone mask, afloat on a simulator for the swell of ocean waves, and surrounded by objects that indicate the breadth of a research that extended from adaptive characteristics in organisms to processes of mineral crystallisation. His actions are inscrutable: he oscillates between listlessness and alertness; he emits strident sounds, emphatically directed to the camera. In the climactic second act, the implant that drips oestrogen into Turing’s thigh is excised and discarded in a small aquarium, its contents permeating the water and ingested by the fish, who are then preyed upon by the seagulls whose croak Turing had been mimicking.

Fabien Giraud
born 1980, Paris; lives and works in Paris
Raphaël Siboni
born 1981, Paris; lives and works in Paris

The Axiom – Prologue to The Unmanned, Season 3, The Form of Not 2018-ongoing
real-time high definition video produced with a Generative Adversarial Neural Network (GAN) – neurography: Mario Klingemann
Courtesy the artists

From the third season of their series *The Unmanned*, *The Axiom* is part of Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni’s more recent incursion into histories of capitalism. This project exists as a series of sculptures and as a ‘cut’ from a process of infinite computation: an algorithm calculates and continuously re-traces the shape of ‘the first blade’. While the sculptural component of the project isolates a series of stills from the process of visualisation generated by the artificial intelligence, the latter takes as point of departure a vast visual database of archaeological blades and spades, most of which come from the collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, in the United Kingdom. The founder of this institution, Augustus Pitt Rivers, is the author of a series of diagrams that seek to identify the principles of evolution in the fabrication and efficiency of prehistoric blades: these apply a Darwinist outlook to these artefacts, illuminating the ‘natural progression’ of that incipient technology.

In their use of the diagrams, Giraud and Siboni look, chronologically, in the opposite direction: they draw premises from conclusions. The work studies and imagines the morphology of the blade as an involution that falls in time to approximate, over and over, the outlines of the very first blade, and the contour of the very first cut. As the algorithm calculates backwards, the reversed technological timeline intersects the time of myth at the spectral point where there is no separation, but a perfect continuity between self and place.



Wingu Tingima
Pitjantjatjara
born c.1935, Nyumum, Western Australia; died
2010, Wingellina, Western Australia

Kawun 2005
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
201.0 x 136.0 cm
Collection of Arthur Roe, Melbourne

Wingu Tingima was born near Kuru Ala, a significant site intimately associated with the geographically expansive jukurpa (Dreaming narrative) of the Kungarrakalpa (Seven Sisters). In this jukurpa, the Seven Sisters continuously flee the relentless pursuit of Nyiru, a lecherous old man who, against customary law, wishes to take one of them as his wife. Specific to the artist's telling of this jukurpa, while travelling across the desert, the Sisters stop at Kuru Ala, where Nyiru transforms himself into a quandong tree. Picking the fruit to eat, they realise Nyiru's deception and hide in a cave. Eventually, after many other near encounters, the Sisters escape Nyiru's advances by ascending into the sky and becoming the constellation known to Western astronomers as The Pleiades, followed eternally by the hunter Orion.

Wingu Tingima was a senior custodian of the Seven Sisters Dreaming, the main subject of her practice. The warm colours of the painting echo the Country where the scene occurs while its textured blooms convey the cosmic energy of the Sisters' eventual transformation into stars. Connecting with Daphne's myth through a reflection on sexual violence against women and on metamorphosis as a last defence against men's lawlessness, the painting introduces an ampler temporal scale in the exhibition.



Nicholas Mangan
born 1979, Geelong, Victoria; lives and works
in Melbourne

Core-coralations 2021
coral, aragonite, gypsum
115.0 x 62.0 x 62.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

Core-coralations is the first iteration of Nicholas Mangan's research project engaging with coral as an organism that exists across the boundaries between biological phyla and states of matter: at once animal, plant and stone, coral twines animation and petrification. It serves as an index for climate change, nowhere more evident than in the degradation of the Great Barrier Reef, linked to rising ocean temperatures and acidification, as well as to the effluvia of pesticides used in sugar cane agriculture. Coral is also a mythological motif linked to Medusa's monstrous powers, appearing when the Gorgon's head is thrown into the sea and her blood drips on seaweed. In Mangan's work, these trajectories converge into a metaphor for breath, where endangered coral colonies correspond to a collective sense of asphyxiation, and where an analogy forms between the arborescence of coral and the anatomy of the bronchial system, branching out to oxygenate the lungs.

Mangan's sculpture is fabricated from fragments of coral jewellery or decoration, crushed and combined with a plaster mix to give it the appearance of terrazzo. Modelled on a necklace dummy, an abstract torso - whose smooth surface is pierced by branches of coral suggesting obstructed trachea, organs protruding out of the body they had sustained - stands on a workbench fabricated through the same process of pulverization and re-composition, suggesting an identity of substance between the 'figure' and the 'landscape'. The scene is situated between the abstraction of a fractured, discontinuous metabolism and the representation of a series of vital connections between environments and their symbiotic dwellers - rendered as funereal markers, as inert signs.



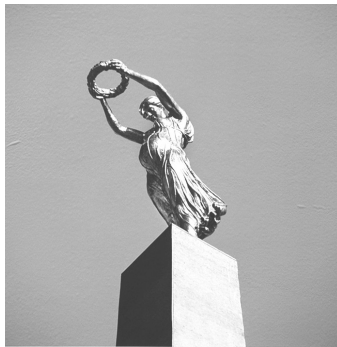
Jean-Luc Moulène
born 1955, Reims, France; lives and works
Saint-Langis-lès-Mortagne, France

La vigie [The lookout] 2004-10
high definition digital projection of 299
synchronised images
25:00 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

Jean-Luc Moulène
born 1955, Reims, France; lives and works
Saint-Langis-lès-Mortagne, France

Jean-Luc Moulène's *Fixed fountain* is a sculptural assemblage which pits two garden sculptures against one another, in a process of reciprocal erosion. In a possible project for a fountain – an allegorical representation of fertility or nature's bounty – the water urns carried by the figures are realigned, while on a different level the turning of the pottery wheel that would have produced those vessels permeates and dynamically structures the ensemble. Gyrating and spiralling in relation to one another, the two figures enter a relationship whose tensions and resolution, beginning and end, ratios of attrition and consolidation, cannot be specified once and for all.

Suggesting resemblance and fusion within imbalance and divergence, *Fixed fountain* permits a further comparison to the becoming-another that unites Daphne's two bodies: her human form beginning to resemble a tree, her tree beginning to resemble a human body. The work hinges the two senses of panoramic movement – an object rotating on its own axis to obtain a view of its environs and a gaze revolving around an object to apprehend all its angles. The two figures spiral together in a shared groundlessness, or function as each other's ground.



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Lady Rosa of Luxembourg 2001
photographs, archival documents and printed
newspaper
151.0 x 98.5 cm (each)
Courtesy the artist and 1 Mira Gallery, Madrid
[Image reproduced is a detail of the overall
installation]

the original. The new monument was dedicated to the Marxist philosopher and activist Rosa Luxemburg, executed in Germany in 1919 for her radical political ideas; the allegory of Victory was turned into a visibly pregnant woman; and the original commemorative plaque honouring male heroism was replaced with inscriptions that indicate the critical stakes of a project, its double operation where a monumental template is both updated - to include the memory of Rosa Luxembourg and an address to the anonymous women the original statue disregarded - and confronted with its counter-monumental double



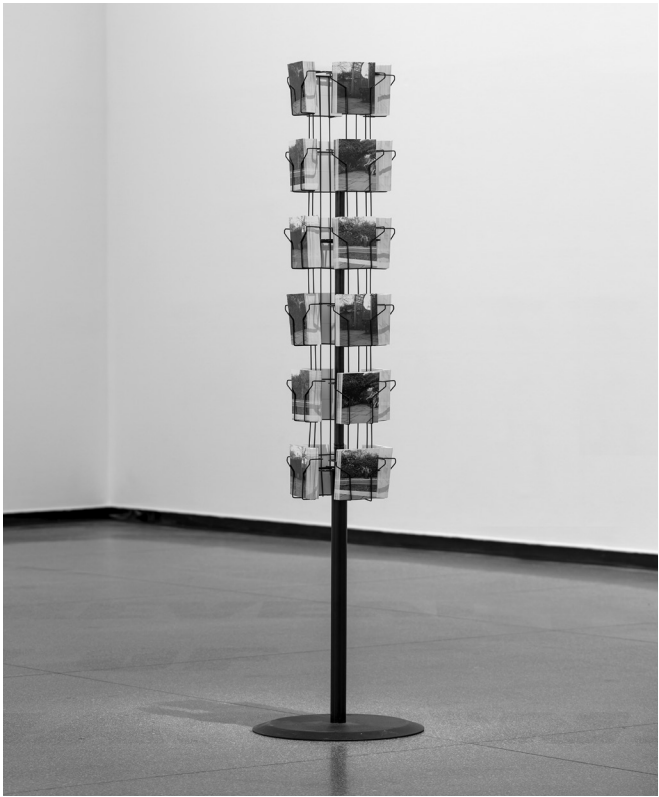
The Stained Portfolio 13, 25, 34, 44-46, 49,
50, 71 1927
gouache and pencil on paper
33.0 x 38.0 cm (each)

Frank's photographs, Anonymous photographer,
Paris ca. 1928
c-type print
27.0 x 20.0 cm

Frank's photographs, Anonymous photographer
ca. 1933
c-type print
16.0 x14.5 cm

The artist Justine Frank is a fictitious character, the multi-faceted creation of artist Roee Rosen. Frank is a complex allegory that indirectly explores - via her tumultuous biography - some of the cultural and political histories of the first half of the twentieth century, and - via her artistic practice, hybridising intense eroticism and Jewish motifs - an expansive, unique conception of metamorphosis. Born in Antwerp in 1900, Frank immigrated to Paris in the 1920s and mingled with the Surrealists, who rejected her work as an anomaly or discarded it as satire. The Surrealist revolution did not allocate a significant place to women artists, while its representatives understood emancipatory blasphemy as limited to a criticism of the Catholic church. As Frank's relationship with philosopher and writer Georges Bataille deteriorated, and as antisemitic rhetoric grew in Europe, Frank emigrated to Palestine in 1934, settling in Tel Aviv. Her opposition to the ideology of Zionism soon turned her into a pariah, while her amalgamation of erotica and Judaic tropes was in stark contrast to the puritanical precepts of the day. After a violent encounter with artist Marcel Janco, another recent immigrant who - Frank believed - parlayed the radicality of the avant-garde for nationalist conformity, Frank disappeared in 1943.

The presentation includes works from Frank's *Stained Portfolio* 1927-28 and examples of later paintings. These articulate a sequence of transgressive transformations, from male artist to female alter ego and from Justine Frank to Frankomas (an homage to Fantômas, a criminal genius and master of disguise beloved by the Surrealists), to rabi and to Medusa, devil and monster, slave and master, Rorschach test or amorphous stain. This body of work introduces a proliferation of fictional selves that echoes both the ravages of history and an unbridled imagination of becoming.



Becky Beasley
born 1975, London; lives and works Hastings,
United Kingdom

P.A.N.O.R.A.M.A. 2010
photographic postcards and revolving
postcard stand
10.6 x 14.8 cm (each)
Courtesy the artist

Pursuing an interest in the practice of pioneering photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904), Becky Beasley attempted to trace the origin of a myth about the artist's last, unfinished work. At the time of his death, Muybridge is said to have been building a scale model of the American Great Lakes, as a sequence of ponds in the garden of his Kingston house. Less preoccupied with the apparatuses Muybridge devised for the photographic capture of motion, Beasley's research was focused on his work with panoramas, of which the miniature Great Lakes were to be a part, the most prominent example of which is Muybridge's 360-degree *Panorama of San Francisco*, photographed in 1878.

Not meant to be viewed in the round, this panorama was printed as a folded book, its circular continuity to be resolved in the reader's imagination. Beasley photographed Muybridge's garden in twelve shots that match

the orientation and titles of the twelve panels that compose the panorama of San Francisco. Printed as postcards, the images are installed in a revolving postcard holder, which reverses the spatial relations and reorganises the mental projections elicited by panoramas. The photographer of a panorama inhabits a vacant point at the centre of the surveyed landscape, while the visitor to a panorama – natural or constructed – experiences a sense of immersion in the scene. Those modalities are recast here as subtraction and removal: the circularity of the segmented landscape that unspools with each revolution of the postcard holder becomes external to the observer. An expulsion, the sense of an inside-out ground without a figure, replaces the absorption in a panorama.



Gabrielle Goliath
born 1983, Kimberley, South Africa; lives and
works in Johannesburg

Elegy 2015-ongoing
performance documentation, digital video;
eulogy dedicated to Kagiso Maema
55:00 mins; eulogy printed on A4 paper in
endless supply
Courtesy the artist

Gabrielle Goliath situates her practice within contexts marked by the unreconciled traumas of apartheid and patriarchal power in South Africa. The affective and relational encounters staged in her works seek to resist the violence that black, brown, feminine or queer bodies are faced with, and to transform the paradigms of their representation. Existing as a series of performances and as a video installation, *Elegy* is a long-term project of commemoration: each performance is dedicated to a victim of gendered violence in South Africa's recent history, which Goliath describes in terms of a pervasive 'rape culture' whose perpetrators are routinely exonerated.

The performance presented here is in remembrance of Kagiso Maema, a trans woman from Rustenburg in the North West Province, who was murdered in January 2018. In the performance, a group of sopranos queue in front of a starkly lit, small wooden plinth, and take turns to intone a sound – a continuous 'sung cry' that the artist describes as the 'sustained irresolution' of mourning. Each performance is accompanied by a eulogy, written by a member of the victim's family – Kagiso's mother in the present case – and meant to portray a loved one, to wrest them from the anonymity of statistics of violence.

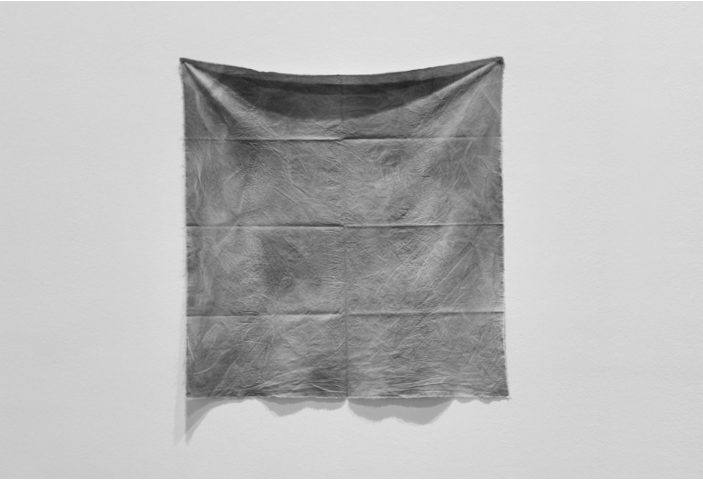


Florin Tudor
born 1974, Geneva, Switzerland; lives and works
in Bucharest
Mona Vătămanu
born 1968, Constanța, Romania; lives and works
in Bucharest

Rite of spring 2010
Super 8 film transferred to digital
7:51 mins
Courtesy the artists

The ambiguous action recorded in Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor's film *Rite of spring* happens in fluff season, when female poplar trees produce large quantities of seeds, billowy pale drifts that blanket the streets and are blown by the wind as they seek a fertile terrain to germinate. The action happens in Bucharest, Romania, a city whose recent history is indirectly portrayed by the choice of location, allowing the camera to register the fraught juxtapositions between an older part of the city and the violent insertions of communist architecture and urbanism which proclaimed a 'golden epoch' by razing large swaths of the existing urban fabric.

The protagonists of the film, children we know nothing about, burn the highly combustible mounds of poplar fluff using cigarette lighters, and the instant incineration reveals the underlying grass or concrete with an almost interjectional force. The camera tracks the progress of the fire which consumes the cotton-like accumulation of seeds in hybrid images where destruction meshes with rejuvenation, and disappearance with emergence. Thinking of the flammable fluff as a conjunctive tissue between historical abstractions or sociological notions lends the film an intensely, mutedly allegorical quality: like a metaphor persistently looking for its dormant referent, attempting to spark it into presence.



Katie West
Yindjibarndi
born 1988, Boorloo/Perth; lives and works on
Noongar Ballardong Boodja, in York,
Western Australia

Warna/Ground 2018
calico dyed with eucalyptus and puffball
100.0 x 100.0 cm

Hold 2018
calico dyed with eucalyptus and puffball
110.0 x 50.0 cm

Keeping pieces 2018
calico dyed with eucalyptus and puffball
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

The sizes of Katie West’s three canvases are variations on the cartographic standard of one square metre, critically thematising the technologies – and their political underpinnings – which render country into ‘blank portions of property’. West writes: ‘through the fabric’s cotton fibres and the plant dye carried in these fibres, the canvases are a continuation of country. These works have no edges.’ The geometric objectivity that the unit of measurement promises is disrupted in the different configurations of folds and support structures the works rely on, as well as through the vegetal pigments that adhere to the fabric. These elements transform the canvas sheets into abstract contact images of actual landscapes and modes of habitation that are sensitive to the particularities of those places: demarcations without boundaries, impressions of passage rather than rectilinear enclosures.

Edgeless, co-extensive with the places where they were made, and in relation to which they function as fragments, rather than indexes, the canvases compress a panoramic effect, a difference between scales and orders of magnitude. This scalar instability translates in the slight chromatic variations that suggest mountainous landscapes or cloud formations, and in the plays of light and shadow, weight and imponderability, flow and stillness that the works orchestrate.



Candice Lin
born 1979, Concord, United States of America;
lives and works in Los Angeles
P. Staff
born 1987, Bognor Regis, United Kingdom; lives
and works in Los Angeles

Hormonal fog 2016-ongoing
hacked fog machine, dried herbs, herbal
tincture, wood, plastic, miscellaneous hardware
Installation dimensions variable
Courtesy the artists, François Ghebaly Gallery,
and Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles

Hormonal fog produces a faint cloud that is diffused in the gallery, functioning as a visual equaliser, in the same way that objects engulfed in fog partly lose their contours, but also as a medium for an infinitesimal metamorphosis that visitors to the exhibition undergo, a slight inflection in the hormonal balance of their bodies. Ingredients are extracted as tinctures from plants known in traditional medicine contexts to increase oestrogen production or to lower testosterone levels; these are then mixed and vaporized by a fog machine.

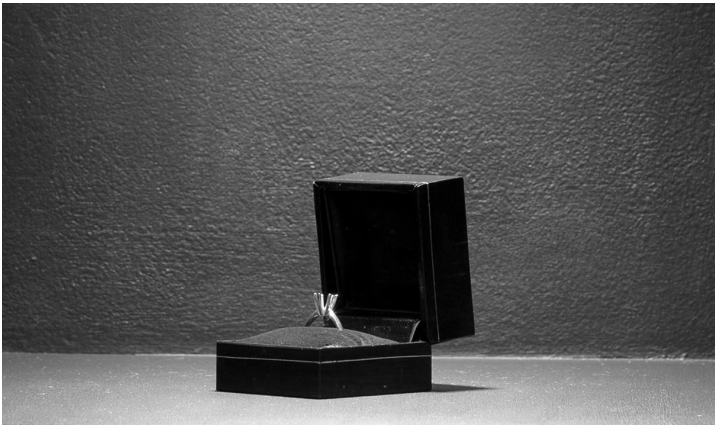
In the haze carrying these stimulants and suppressants, the distance between the here-and-now of the exhibition and nowhere-and-everywhere of Daphne’s becoming might temporarily diminish; while its amorphous spread becomes the correlate of a question, posed by the artists, about the porosity of bodies, their availability to change and adaptation. The artists contrast the notion of a fixed self, of a central and immutable core of personhood, with experiences of transformation that can be joyous and affirmative, or, alternatively, traumatic consequences of exposure to environmental fluctuations. Formed in their relation to and in the world, as synergies and revisions, the transitive biographies and biotopes imagined here unfold one through the other: bodies through the world and the world through bodies that are never intact.

Inge Meijer
born 1986, Beverwijk, The Netherlands; lives
and works in Amsterdam

Plant collection 2016-ongoing
wallpaper
420.0 x 1,380.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
[Image reproduced is a detail of the overall
installation]

Inge Meijer’s wallpaper is a new iteration of the artist’s research project *The Plant Collection*, examining an idiosyncratic aspect of Willem Sandberg’s directorship of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, from 1945 to 1983. Beginning with the Piet Mondriaan exhibition he curated in 1946 as a newly appointed director of the municipal museum of modern art, where he paired the *Boogie Woogie* paintings with a *Monstera deliciosa*, a Swiss cheese plant, Sandberg developed a plant collection at the museum and frequently juxtaposed vegetal life and the metaphorical élan of modern and contemporary art. This expressed his militant goal to reframe the museum as a place of social interaction – a ‘home’ for art that would have a domestic, familiar feel – rather than an enclave of hushed decorum and art-historical pedantry, as well as his proposition that, like nature, art had the power to continually renew itself.

Meijer’s project considers a collection of thirty-nine species of plants which were placed amongst the works of Mark Rothko, Niki de Saint Phalle, Christo and many others, drawing from documents and photographs of exhibitions found in various archives. The resulting chronology of this evolving visual symbiosis between the distinct collections of the museum – a practice that current norms of conservation would exclude, wary of possible contaminations and other unwanted effects that plant life might have on the endurance of artistic heritage – is presented site-specifically as a wallpaper that produces the *trompe l’oeil* effect of an endless décor where vegetal and artistic forms are interspersed.



Jill Magid
born 1973, Bridgeport, United States of
America; lives and works in New York

Auto portrait pending 2005
gold ring with empty setting, ring box,
vitrines, corporate and private contracts
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Labor, Mexico City

Jill Magid’s *Auto portrait pending* consists of a ring with an empty setting and a contract between the artist and Lifegem Corporation, specifying that the artist’s cremated remains are to be turned into a 1-carat diamond upon her death. *Auto portrait pending* thus thematises its own incompleteness and recasts the artist’s biography as a sequence of incremental transformations towards her metamorphosis into a diamond. Different temporal axes intersect in this vanishing point of the work’s ultimate realisation, meshing the biological with the art-historical – as the ‘life of the artist’ would crystallise as both an artistic trajectory and a gem – and pitting the current value of the work against its future worth, the arcane criteria of Magid’s future ‘collectability’.

The terminus of the various processes set into motion here is also a radical reversal of the relation between artistic self and work, between the tropes, valuations and transactions that a central assumption – that the ‘figure of the artist’ can be deciphered in their work – is premised on. When completed, *Auto portrait pending* will be a converse of the artist’s self, a translucent relic that is purged of the traits of personhood: the quasi-abstraction of a body reduced to a geometry of captured carbon.

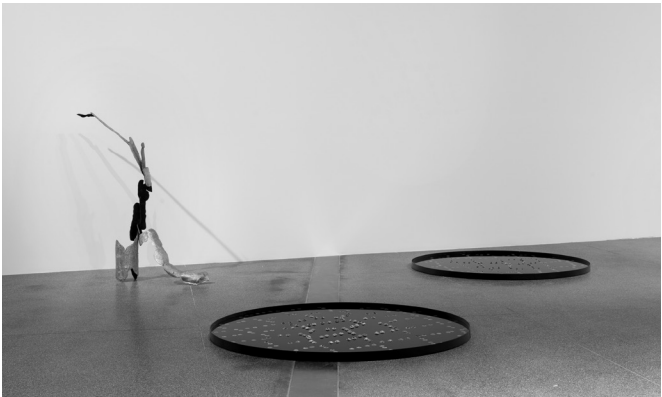


Steve McQueen
born 1969, London; lives and works in London
and Amsterdam

Charlotte 2004
16mm colour film, silent
5:42 mins
Courtesy the artist, Thomas Dane Gallery,
London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York
and Paris

In Steve McQueen's film *Charlotte*, we see the eye of British actor Charlotte Rampling in extreme close-up while McQueen's finger moves around it, poking and caressing it, pulling at the tender skin of her eyelid and briefly brushing the eyeball. Rampling's eye readjusts to the different intensities of McQueen's ocular violence, much as the camera lens refocuses on the scene, to grasp the image of an act of aggression that blinds its victim, unable to see either the attack or the apparatus that records it.

Reminiscent of the eye-slashing scene at the beginning of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's 1929 film *Un chien andalou* (*An Andalusian dog*) – one of the defining images of Surrealism – *Charlotte* does not emulate the dream-logic correspondences between micro- and macrocosms that organise the scenes in its illustrious precedent, where the vitreous humour that spills out of the cut eye is equated to a cloud passing over the night sky. The film maps its choreography of violence and registration between physical gesture and camera, and maybe between the temporality of cinema and that of photography. Bathed in an intensely red light, the scene might be thought to occur in a photographic dark room, where a filmic or biographical narrative is segmented into instantaneous, still images and then recomposed in their montage.



Lauren Burrow
born 1992, Larrakia Country, Darwin; lives and
works in Melbourne

A stick developing eyes 2020-21
powder-coated aluminium trays, water, plastic
crocodile eyes made from bio-glitter of
eucalyptus derivative and epoxy resin
150.0 cm diameter
centrifugally cast aluminium with black patina
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

'The roll was a centrifuge of boiling blackness that lasted for an eternity, beyond endurance; but when I seemed all but finished, the rolling suddenly stopped'. Thus describes philosopher Val Plumwood, in her essay *Becoming Prey*, the attack by a saltwater crocodile she survived in Kakadu in 1984. This violent encounter, as artist Lauren Burrow notes, catalysed much of Plumwood's subsequent work and produced a shift in her interests, from analytic philosophy to environmental themes, and a radical critique of anthropocentrism, the discourse of human supremacy over the nonhuman world. Plumwood further notes: 'I glimpsed a shockingly indifferent world in which I had no more significance than any other edible being'.

Thinking from a position of vulnerability and entanglement with the other beings that compete for sustenance in nature, and engaged in a long-term conversation with Gagadju Elder Bill Neidjie, Plumwood renamed herself, from Val Routley, after the trees that surrounded her new home in a forest of New South Wales – her metamorphosis embodying her vision of ecological co-dependency and care. If Lauren Burrows' trays with crocodile eyes evoke the stillness that precedes the attack, the tripod-like sculpture – assembled from centrifugally-cast impressions of bark – references the growth of the plumwood tree by developing sucker stems close to their root, as much as it suggests the inception of a technology capable of taking 'pictures' which tangle the vegetal, the optical and the mechanical.

Ho Tzu Nyen
born 1976, Singapore; lives and works in
Singapore

2 or 3 tigers 2015
synchronised two-channel high definition
digital projection; 8.2-channel sound
18:46 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong

2 or 3 tigers is a fragment from a long-term project by Ho Tzu Nyen exploring histories of the tiger in the Malay world and tracing its role – as co-species, mythical symbol and ghost – in a radically transformed cosmos. The video installation takes its cue from the lithographic print *Road survey interrupted in Singapore* c.1865 by German illustrator Heinrich Leutemann. The lithograph shows George Coleman, Land Surveyor of Singapore for the British Empire, at work in the jungle with a group of convicts: one of the primal scenes of colonial history, the taming of 'wilderness' by cartography. But the expedition is attacked by a tiger, which does not leap towards Coleman or the convicts, who recoil in terror, but strikes at the theodolite, the tool used for the land survey.

The tiger seems to proceed metaphorically, identifying the measurement of space as that which is properly alien, as the first instrument in a chain of abstractions through which regimes of property will impinge upon its territory. The theodolite is also a distant precursor of the computer used to generate the visual and spatial permutations in the video installation, to reimagine one of the founding myths of the colonial enterprise as a vertiginous encounter between Coleman and the tiger,

conversing in a primordial abyss. Speaking of mythical weretigers and other transformed entities, the interlocutors drift in a cosmic penumbra and exist in a metamorphic continuum whose transitions – from animal to human to star to hallucination and to digital prop – punctuate a time unfolding both before and after their historical encounter depicted in the lithograph.





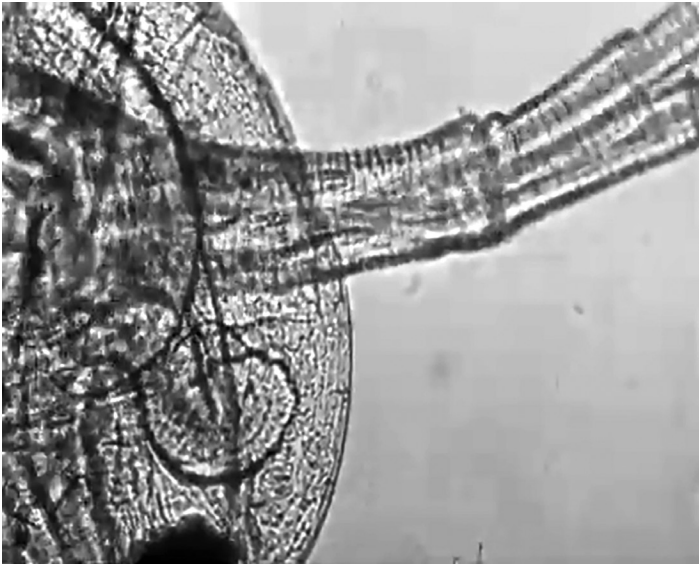
Erik Bün­ger
born in 1976 in Växjö, Sweden; lives and works
in Berlin

Nature see you 2021
video
18:56 mins
Courtesy the artist

In November 2015, on the eve of the UN climate change conference in Paris, a video was uploaded to the website of the Gorilla Foundation in California, an organisation established in the 1970s by pioneering primatologist Francine Patterson to pursue her experimental work with Koko – ‘the world’s most famous gorilla’, known for her artistic propensities, her ability to communicate in American Sign Language, and her maternal care for orphans of other animal species. In the video *Koko’s Last Message to Humanity*, the gorilla addresses the world leaders gathered in Paris directly, using American Sign Language. She chastises humanity’s greed and calls for action to protect the natural environment.

In his video essay, Erik Bün­ger channels a response to Koko’s gestures and subtitle translation through a sign-language app avatar. He reflects on the problematic ways in which Koko’s sign language is translated into

purposefully incorrect English, to suggest that Koko’s proximity to the very spirit of nature renders grammar a negligible aspect of her communication. An interpretive impasse arises in the conversation between gorilla and avatar through their shared ventriloquism, as the text performed by the avatar reformulates the impossible position which Koko finds herself in as a spokesperson for nature: to communicate her message to us she has to use words, yet in order for this message to remain true to nature she has to remain wordless. Koko’s signs might be approached as a code for the difficulty of addressing climate change: Koko’s position – within and without language – becomes an index for the topographic and linguistic predicaments of the Anthropocene, for our own position in a devastated environment – *within* an expanding perimeter of destruction – even if we do not yet experience its effects first-hand.



Jean Painlevé
born 1902, Paris; died 1989, Neuilly-sur-Seine,
France

The Daphnia 1928
film
9:29 mins
Courtesy Les Documents Cinématographiques,
Paris

In 1775, the Danish naturalist and scientific illustrator Otto Friedrich Müller noted the visual analogy between the branches of Daphne’s laurel tree and the antennae that the tiny crustaceans popularly known as water fleas use to smell and move around in the water. He baptised them the Daphnia and proceeded to classify the many subspecies in this family of aquatic life.

Jean Painlevé is considered one of the inventors of the nature film, thanks to a prodigious body of work, most of which resulted from his experiments in a Paris basement – part machine shop, part menagerie – called the Institute of Scientific Cinema. Painlevé’s filmic explorations of nonhuman life, especially underwater fauna, were influenced by a Surrealist aesthetic, pairing science and fiction and looking for human traits – and for the comical, erotic or savage – in the behaviour of sea horses, vampire bats and skeleton shrimps.

The Daphnia are highly responsive to their environments, adapting to rapid fluctuations of their habitats. Although most Daphnia populations are typically made up of females, in times of environmental change they will give birth to males and reproduce sexually. They also display dramatic predator-induced adaptations, growing defensive helmets, neck teeth, or tail spines when exposed to chemicals released by nearby predators. Their remarkable sensitivity turns them into a sentinel species, biosensors of toxicity levels that monitor the health of waterways.

Mathew Jones
born 1961, Melbourne; lives and works in
Melbourne and London

Hostage to the future •after May Gibbs• 2021
ink, synthetic polymer paint, etching and block
ink, and inkjet on Fabriano paper and
cotton duck
267.0 x 915.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
[Image reproduced is a detail of the overall
installation]

Mathew Jones’ recent research focuses on the work of May Gibbs, author of *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie*, a series of books launched in 1918 which recounts the adventures of the titular characters – homunculi modelled on young Eucalyptus nuts – in a world that is equally social and natural, timeless and contemporaneous, bucolic and brutal, Australian and siteless. Cited as an example of the pervasiveness of the racial stereotypes in her epoch and described as ‘queerly contemporary’ for the ambivalences that structure the social relations it imagines around her protagonists, Gibbs’ opus becomes in Jones’ work the locus of multiple anachronisms, weaving a complex conversation about the future embodied by the ageless gumnut babies.

The motto ‘Children are the future’ is central to Gibbs’ project, and the oblique focus of the work presented here, which identifies with the Banksia Men, the villains in the story and



the antagonists of the gumnut babies, from whose inept plans of abduction Snugglepot and Cuddlepie are always saved. Lying in wait and camouflaged in a leafy backdrop, the Banksia men embody for Jones the question of queer temporality that must invent its genealogical extension into the future, its legacy, without recourse to bloodlines and notions of inheritance. In the work, the Banksia figures seem captive in a suspended time whose delayed arrival is reflected in the broad range of means by which they are portrayed: drawing, printing and stencilling their barely detectable appearance on overlaid and torn sheets of paper as different, converging attempts to figure the Banksia men’s wayward temporal paths, at the margins of the present personified by the child in the foreground – sleeping, bound, held hostage to the future.



Agostino dei Musi
born Italy, c.1490; died Italy after 1536
Apollo and Daphne 1515
engraving
23.0 x 17.0 cm (image); 23.4 x 17.3 cm (sheet)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
purchased 1937

In tandem with the accompanying etching by Anthonie Waterloo at the outset, this engraving by Agostino dei Musi delimits the temporal horizon of the exhibition, placing the scenes of transformation that appear in other works on show within the interregnum of crisis between Daphne's flight and metamorphosis, within the convulsed split second that separates these two moments in the narrative of the myth.

Dei Musi represents Daphne apprehended by Apollo, but also eluding him in her transformation: branches sprout from her fingers, roots stemming from her feet are planted into the ground, her skin is encroached by bark. As is frequently the case with Renaissance portrayals of Ovidian myths, the architectural forms in the background – a Roman triumphal arch and countryside villas – suggest an 'update' of the story, functioning as segues between the time and place of myth and landmarks that may have been identifiable for Agostino dei Musi's contemporaries.

A Biography of Daphne

Curated by
Mihnea Mircan

26 June–5 Sept 2021

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