

A Biography of Daphne
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
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Guest Curator: Mihnea Mircan

Digital labels

Antonie 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

Antonie 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 'Apollo and Daphne' by Bernini

photographed from different angles 2021

pencil on paper

132.0 x 99.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and Galeria Plan B, Berlin

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

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 reproductions 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. Mureşan'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.

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 – lies on a workbench that bears the trace of the mannequin's previous position, the ruptured place where object and support had been attached through coral growth and plaster reinforcement. The scene is situated between the abstraction of a fractured metabolism and the representation of a series of vital connections between environments and their symbiotic dwellers – rendered as funereal markers, as inert signs in a landscape without figures.

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

10.5 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.

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.

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.

Roe Rosen

born 1963, Rehovot; based in Tel Aviv

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 x 14.5 cm

The Stained Portfolio 13, 25, 34, 44-46, 49, 50, 71 1927

gouache and pencil on paper

33.0 x 38.0 cm (each)

Physiognomies 04 1928

gouache on paper

35.5 x 50.0 cm

Frankomas 1930

oil on canvas

90.0 x 60.0 cm

Frank's Guild 1933

oil on canvas

100.0 x 100.0 cm

All works courtesy the artist and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv

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.

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's monumental photographic essay surveys the growth of a particularly resilient plant. *Paulownia Tomentosa* flourishes in the cracks in the sidewalk near the artist's former studio in Bercy, Paris, the neighbourhood of the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Employment and many other administrative buildings. Considered a weed and an invasive species in that urban context, *Paulownia* – also named princess tree or fox-glove tree – has a formidable growth rate, able to reach a height of five metres in one year, and is often harvested for timber.

The images reveal a changing landscape of urban gestures and traces, incorporating evidence of children's play alongside that of the Vigipirate national security system; an anti-terrorist system implemented in the late 1970s and repeatedly enhanced following terrorist attacks in France and abroad. The plant's manifold infiltrations of the urban landscape interweave with pictures of the barricades, turnstiles, stanchions and bollards installed to secure the area and its political symbols. A reciprocal gaze appears at times to unite the two screens, comparing the plant's tenacity in a hostile environment and a regime of heightened political attention, calibrated to detect and annihilate a potential threat.

Jean-Luc Moulène

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

Fixed fountain 2021

concrete

170.0 x 115.0 x 70.0 cm

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

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.

Not unlike the paradoxical performance of Daphne – whose triumph over her aggressor comes at an enormous cost – the concrete statues seek a point of accord within dissonance, an armistice where a loss of integrity sets into motion a mimetic rapport. Suggesting resemblance and fusion within imbalance and divergence, *Fixed fountain* permits another 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.

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.

Sanja Iveković

born 1949, Zagreb; lives and works in Zagreb

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

When Sanja Iveković was invited to participate in the 1988 edition of the Manifesta biennial in Luxembourg, she proposed a civic intervention, titled *Pregnant Memory*, that would have involved removing the gilded, neoclassical figure of Victory from the war memorial known as the *Golden Lady*, designed in 1923 in memory of the volunteers who fought with the Allies in World War I. The statue would have been taken from the top of its obelisk in Constitution Square and installed on the premises of a shelter for abused women. Invited to rethink her initial proposal (deemed too controversial) in 2001, she created a full-scale replica of the *Golden Lady*, installed within walking distance of 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 Luxemburg and an address to the anonymous women the original statue disregarded – and confronted with its counter-monumental double.

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

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; 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.

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.

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.



Heinrich Leutemann

Road surveying interrupted in Singapore c. 1865

wood engraving

Courtesy National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board

Erik Büngrer

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 Büngrer channels a response to Koko’s gestures – and their translation into words in the subtitles of the original footage – 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

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 conversation about the future embodied by the ageless gumnut babies, a future to be defended from the children's antagonists.

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, 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 resting, oblivious child.

A further component of the installation – a video that functions like an extended wall label – discusses representations of indigeneity and race in May Gibbs' work. While Jones argues that Gibbs' project is premised on imagining another, fanciful indigeneity and that identifying specific figurations of racial violence in it is therefore a perpetually incomplete endeavour, his engagement with the Banksia men compounds the racial stereotype with considerations of class (the Banksia men narrate their kidnapping plots in Cockney rhyming slang) and sexuality. Discussed in the context of Gibbs' biography, the menace embodied by the Banksia Men extends across these distinct paradigms, as an intersectional image of the social and political outcast, as the negative figure in the biopolitics at the heart of Gibbs' fairytales.

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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 – sleeping, bound, held hostage to the future – in the foreground.

A video by the artist that can be accessed via the QR code below further discusses the representation of the Banksia men in May Gibbs' work and their role in Mathew Jones' proposition.



Agostino de 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.