

Making Kin

**Melanie Bonajo
Madison Bycroft
Anne Duk Hee Jordan**

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The acute impact of climate change and the related drastic predictions on environmental issues are not just on the current agenda of policy makers and economists, but have mobilized a young generation around the globe to engage in radical activism demanding prompt climate protection measures. Humans have so massively interfered with biological, geological and atmospheric processes that an entire geological era is marked by the effects. Consequently, we are in the midst of an ecological crisis, the extent and end of which is unforeseeable. We are experiencing an irreversible mutation of the global climate that endangers the inhabitability of our planet. Through the destruction of habitats, it also plays a part in the extinction of species worldwide.

Especially against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic, it is necessary “to stay with the trouble” and deal with kinship systems among various species. The exhibition Making Kin at the Kunsthaus Hamburg assembles three artists with a wide-ranging agenda for art and cultural policy and asks: How do we want to live in the future? How can the given diversity of existences and their modes of life establish and maintain connections with one another and what kind of symbiotic relations can emerge from this?*

In a combination of various media such as video, installation, performance and painting, Melanie Bonajo, Madison Bycroft and Anne Duk Hee Jordan devote themselves to the ecological challenges of our time and examine the connections between ecosystems and human influence. They explore concepts of community that, rather than adopting an anthropocentric view, underscore equality within species diversity.

*„Making Kin”, the phrase that gave the show its title, is a maxim coined by the philosopher of science and pioneer cyborg feminist Donna Haraway who calls for an interspecies symbiosis. Her texts are teeming with all kinds of different creatures. To ensure a liveable future for the following generations, we, as mortal “critters”** need to link up with multiple configurations of places, times, matters and meanings so that new life can be “composted” from the planet-destroying Homo sapiens.*

The artists scrutinize established terms like nature, culture and technology, including their definitional boundaries. They are interested in the hybrid network between humans and their environment. In a humorous and playful manner, they draw up experimental and future-oriented scenarios that challenge our customary lifestyles and likewise make new models of community both imaginable and apprehensible. New works were created for the exhibition that inspire us to reflect upon an overall ecological principle of connectivity.

** Haraway, Donna: Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, 2016.*

*** An American term for "all kinds of creatures", used by Haraway for microbes, plants, animals, humans, non-humans and machines.*

Curated by Anna Nowak

In her work consisting of videos, performances, photographs and installations, **Melanie Bonajo** analyses the idea of an all-embracing animism, in which everything deriving from nature is seen as possessing a personal soul or distinct spirit. Fascinated by religious concepts of the divine, she inquires into the spiritual emptiness of her generation.

For the exhibition at the Kunsthaus the artist is presenting two videos from her trilogy *Night Soil* (2014-2016) in the scope of an immersive, spatially expansive installation. The featured experimental documentaries address the human's alienation from their natural and social environment, while opening up alternative modes of life beyond the established capitalist system. The focus lies on humans' quest for identity, their role within the ecosystem and their approach to concepts of belonging and gender or their attitude toward ethical and socio-political values.

In *Night Soil: Fake Paradise* (2014) Bonajo explores which effects altered states of consciousness have on a society within a religious, political and social context. The video examines people's longing to regain a natural relationship with their environment. Based on the resurging popularity of the plant extract *Ayahuasca* in Western societies, the artist investigates how this mental, physical and spiritual medicine fits with our contemporary lifestyle. The psychedelic brew made up of various plant ingredients was originally used in religious ceremonies by the indigenous peoples of the Amazon region, among others by healers capable of accessing higher spheres and making contact with other beings. Wondering whether *Ayahuasca* could possibly be of similar significance to us today, Bonajo draws a parallel with LSD. The hallucinogenic contributed to the rise of a counterculture in the 1960s that had resulted in new models of thought, sexual freedom, feminism, alternative economic systems, the acceptability of different forms of relationship among humans and the communal ethos of the early computer industry. Against the backdrop of an ongoing technological progress, *Fake Paradise* also creates an analogy between cyberspace and the psychedelic realm and examines how we transcend our bodies in such spaces.

The third part, *Night Soil: Nocturnal Gardening* (2016) introduces self-sufficient organizations. The video portrays various female environmental activists who attune their energy to the ecosystem around them with an enhanced sensibility and experiment with new ways of togetherness with other communities, plants and animals. Whether living in spiritual anarchy as solitary figures in the wilderness or as members of a social community, the women have acquired extensive knowledge on land use and plant cultivation in order to become self-sufficient. In this work, the resources that nourish us, become a vital source for reflection, "food for thought", as it were. The origin of food, who

harvests and prepares it, how far it travels before it reaches us – all this tells us much about a global system of interdependency. The film *Nocturnal Gardening* challenges the conventional capitalist economy and likewise expands our own sensibility – to encompass our agency and decision-making capacity with regard to ecology and interdependent values, but also in terms of caring for ourselves, our neighbours and our earth.

Melanie Bonajo (b. 1978, Heerlen, NL) lives and works in Amsterdam and New York. She studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and completed residencies at the “Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunst” in Amsterdam (2009-10) and at “ISCP” in New York (2014). Melanie Bonajo will represent The Netherlands at the 59th Venice Biennale, 2021.

Current and past exhibitions include Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam (2019/20); Pori Museum (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019); Guangzhou Triennial (2018/19); Kunsthalle Lingen (2019); Design Museum Ghent (2019); Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle (2018/19); Museum Marta Herford (2018); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2018); Manifesta 12, Palermo (2018), Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (2018).

Using different media such as video, performance and sculpture, **Madison Bycroft** explores the forms, language, and affect of an animated and trembling world. Under the influence of natural science in conjunction with accelerating technological developments, since the nineteenth century the European worldview has been founded on a distinct division of subject and object. Interpretations of the world that fail to draw clear dividing lines between culture and nature, life and non-life were increasingly marginalised. In the context of natural and social ecology, the artist seeks to create acceptance for new forms of thinking and perception in response to our current problems. In their view, we need to abandon our claim to be arbiters of definition and engage in a relationship of open exchange. In lieu of categorical and colonising thinking, Bycroft is interested in relational affiliations; they reflect on what it means to be a human being, on how we understand other beings and the kinds of connections we might build. Their works experimentally explore the practice of empathy and processes of change.

For the Kunsthaus Hamburg the artist has created a scenographic, audiovisual installation. One side of the work is devoted to an underwater environment. The large-format drawing shows an unnamed species on coral reefs and symbiotic ocean dwellers. The scenario extends into the room with sculptural organisms as “aquamorphous” hybrid creatures, such as crab claws holding their breath. By incorporating into the sculptures parts of the human body like faces and feet, the boundaries between human, animal and object, between living and inanimate matter, and within hierarchical systems begin to blur. This artistic cosmos is brought to life by sound, a spatial, acoustic fabric woven from poems, music, song and quotations that Bycroft produced and sampled

specifically for the piece. Against the backdrop of the acute threat posed to coral reefs, one of the world's largest and most species-rich ecosystems, by over-fishing and ocean pollution, as well as by climate change, Bycroft's work also voices an urgent warning in view of this drastic destruction.

The second part of the work on the reverse side of this installation opens up a futuristic vision. In front of a sparse, pink volcanic landscape, a drumming sloth and a farting baboon have gathered to do "monkey business". Colloquially, the term describes unnecessary commotion. Historically, a babuinerie designated ribald images of monkeys, snails, nuns and knights – doing monkey business – decorating the margins of medieval manuscripts; the German word for monkey business is „Affentheater“ (Simian theatre), which derived from touring animal shows that were forerunners of zoological gardens and quite a common public spectacle and form of entertainment in the nineteenth century. Such a display of animals also resembles a zoo, which as an architectural construct was traditionally staged at the interface of nature and culture, human and animal, civilisation and the wild. Bycroft brings these established categories under scrutiny and calls for their dismissal. At the same time, the sloth is also a costume they have worn for mises-en-scène in performances. Bycroft reflects on a world of clearly defined identities by pitting marginal anti-identities against them. The use of a trombone and other sounds in the scene suggests an eschatological experience in which animals mount a boisterous and vociferous performance in an endeavour to reclaim the world.

Madison Bycroft (b. 1987, Adelaide/Kaurna Yarta, Australia) is an artist currently based between Marseille and Adelaide. Bycroft is a graduate from the MFA program at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam, NL (2016), and is co-founder of facilitative platform, 'GHOST'.

Current and past exhibitions include: "Feedback Loops", Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2020); "Futur, Ancien, Fugitif", Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2020); "Okto-lab", University of Tasmania, Hobart (2020); Future Generation Art Prize, Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev - exhibition for the 58th Venice Biennale (2019); "À Cris Ouverts", Rennes Biennale, Les Ateliers de Rennes (2018) "Almende", Second Triennale of Beeststerzwag, Netherlands (2018).

In her edible landscapes, motorized sculptures and videos, **Anne Duk Hee Jordan** focusses on climate change and its acute impacts on land and sea. Among the global effects of environmental destruction are the depletion of the ozone layer, the devastation of the rain forests, the extinction of species and the pollution of the oceans. Jordan, who completed a training as rescue and apnea diver, picks up on these issues in her work to create a multi-media universe full of strangeness, mutation and adaptation. For the exhibition at the Kunsthaus Hamburg the artist has developed a spatially expansive installation into which she is integrating already existing

works. Based on an increased gender fluidity and inspired by Haraway's propositions on relational systems, she creates a futuristic, post-human scenario. One of the featured works is the video *Staying With The Trouble* (2019) compiled from found footage material and her own shots from Costa Rica, which – as an integral part of her set design at the Kunsthhaus – is projected onto the surface of a pond. The work represents a playful and humorous approach to exploring new forms of coexistence among the most different species. Somewhat like a kaleidoscope, she shows us a colourful sequence of transformations between amphibians, bacteria, cannibalism, compost, landscapes, mushrooms and mating insects. By visualizing biological processes through various forms of adaptation, Jordan calls our attention to the fact that the human being does not rank first in the order of creation but simply is one creature among many within a great diversity of species.

In the series *Artificial Stupidity* (ongoing since 2016) the artist transforms organic and dead material into “romantic” machines and thus confronts “robot consciousness” with the organic, cyclic process of life's disintegration. The artist's intention behind this series is to make way for failure as an option in the domain of robotics and to also create a space for non-intelligent technologies. *Water Crab* (2017) for example, conceived as a dysfunctional cleansing robot, makes every effort to collect waste. In the exhibition the small machine is in constant operation on the projection surface of the pond. Through the crab's movements on the water, the video sequences are equally agitated. If one sees this motorized sculpture as an allegory for the impossibility to solve all the problems arising from our detrimental actions through ever more intelligent machines, e. g. the pollution of the oceans, then the installation surely can be understood in Haraway's sense as a call to “stay with the trouble”.

The interactive play between knowledge, theory and science fiction is continued in the space by the family of capricious, genderless *Critters* (ongoing series since 2018), which are also important components of *Artificial Stupidity*. The amorphous, mobile sculptures move about looking for companions. Their strangely unique texture does not hint at their origin or nature. Reminiscent of deep-sea creatures, they seem to be there to remind use of how little we actually know about the marine world. The dancing critter *Teapot* (2019) is a large teapot made of aluminium that symbolizes climate change. The acoustic atmosphere coming from this robot refers to wind and storms, to thunder and smoke; beginning with a soft breeze, it escalates to attain the loud clapping of a raging tempest.

The installation is complemented by Jordan's drawings, which pick up on scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or, then again, will address topics like the Corona virus or the species extinction and vividly demonstrate that, based on

our actions, we as humans are making ourselves obsolete.

Anne Duk Hee Jordan (b. 1978 in Korea) lives and works in Berlin. She studied at the Weißensee Academy of Art, Berlin and continued with a Master in Fine Arts at the Institut für Raumexperimente, Berlin under Olafur Eliasson. Recently, Anne Duk Hee Jordan was nominated for the Kunstpreis der Böttcherstraße in Bremen 2020.

Current and past solo exhibitions, group shows and performances include "A Handful of Dust" with Viron Erol Vert, Ehrenhalle Neukölln, Berlin (2020); "Into the Wild", festival "Unter Beobachtung. Kunst des Rückzugs", in collaboration with Dr. Hauschka / Wala, KulturRegion Stuttgart (2020); "Forces Times Distance - On Labour and its Sonic Ecologies", Sonsbeek (2020); "Ziggy goes Wild", Kunstverein Arnsberg (2019); "Staying with the Trouble" from Donna Haraway, Zitadelle Spandau (2019); "Ziggy on the Land of Drunken Trees", Galerie Wedding, Berlin (2018); Beaufort Triennial, Ostend (2018); Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (2018).



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Öffnungszeiten / *opening hours*:

Di - So von 11 - 18 Uhr / *Tue - Sun 11 am - 6 pm*

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