

**Galerie für Gegenwartskunst, E-WERK Freiburg i.Br.**

***In a World of Endless Rainfall***, Nature as Choreography of Becoming  
Ika Huber, Johannes Willi & Daniel Lara, Lucia Schmuck, Pauline v. Angerer, Sylvia Schedelbauer, Tino Sehgal

Curated by Heidi Brunnschweiler

**Sat 12 May–Sun 24 June 2018**

Records are breaking all over the planet: temperatures are rising, rains are endlessly pouring, hurricanes are sweeping across Europe. These ever more extreme weather events are considered as a sign of human destruction of the earth.

This continuing human impact on the dynamics of life is considered unique in Earth history. Geologists observe irreversible environmental change and describe our era therefore as Anthropocene.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the self-inflicted endangerment of our sources of life, environmental philosophers demand that people fundamentally change their way of thinking and acting.

In their eyes, the dominant, exploitative understanding of nature must give way to a choreography of becoming in which all earthly beings interact on equal terms.

Man has to recognize that things, animals and living beings are all instable assemblages that constantly influence each other and demand mutual respect.

The insight that nature leaves man behind when he further destroys his sources of life has been particularly concern to French intellectuals such as Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Catherine Larrère and more recently Emanuele Coccia.<sup>2</sup> Since the 1990s, they have come up with various propositions of how to alter the relationship between man and environment envisioning his survival.

For **Michel Serres** and **Bruno Latour**, man can no longer understand himself as the crown of creation and as the opposite of nature, but must finally realize that he belongs to both worlds, the natural and the cultural.<sup>3</sup> So far, earth history and human history, nature and culture have been separate areas in Western thought. Sometimes culture appeared as an extension of nature, sometimes as its opposition and its mastery. Going back to the philosophy of René Descartes, nature has been understood since the advent of the industrial age as a substance outside man. As the antagonistic other, nature could be dominated by technology, controlled and exploited capitalistically.<sup>4</sup>

For **Michel Serres**, man has become a voracious parasite, destroying the earth as its host through global capitalism. In the interest of human self-preservation, Serres demands a contract with nature that establishes the equal rights of all beings on earth. As a part of nature and not as a technically superior opponent, man should tune his own life forms to the living conditions of non-human life.<sup>5</sup>

For **Bruno Latour**, the occidental separation of culture and nature is responsible for the acute ecological crisis because it establishes an exploitative, dominant relationship to nature. For him, the urgent task of a political ecology is to understand nature no longer as an object

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Adams, *Ecological Crisis, Sustainability and the Psychosocial Subject: Beyond Behaviour Change*, London, Palmgrave 2016, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Emanuele Coccia, *Die Wurzeln der Welt. Eine Philosophie der Pflanzen*. Aus dem Französischen von Elsbeth Ranke, München: Hanser 2018, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Leander Scholz, a.a.O.

<sup>4</sup> Dito.

<sup>5</sup> Serres, Michel, *Der Naturvertrag*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994, 15.

to dominate, but as an animated realm with equal agents.<sup>6</sup> Life on Earth is unstable and must constantly renew itself and its conditions. According to Latour, this continuous renewal can only succeed in a respectful interaction of countless things and living beings.<sup>7</sup>

The French philosopher **Catherine Larrère** outlines an environmental philosophy that seeks to overcome the antagonism of humanism and naturalism. In her view, human beings should renounce the modern mastery of nature, give up their instrumental behavior and will to power. Larrère demands that a "**choreography of becoming**" gives way to a dominant, exploitative understanding of nature. In the form of joint and coordinated movements, she proposes a "choreography of becoming" in which man enters into a reciprocal relationship with nature that allows a new ethic of mutual respect.<sup>8</sup>

**In art**, the separation of nature and culture - held responsible for the imminent ecological collapse - was founded and has been maintained. Since their beginnings in antiquity, depictions of nature have mostly been the expression of polar human conceptions that demonized or idealized nature but did not understand it as equal.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the romantic landscape representation evoked nature as a place of longing and refuge. This artistic approach to nature coincided with the advent of industrialization, when the capitalist exploitation of nature for accelerated growth, consumption and mobility began. Today, it is the hybridization of nature, man and things, brought about by technology and artificial intelligence, which urges to reconsider nature as network of the relationship between beings and things.

The exhibition ***In a World of Endless Rainfall*** presents artistic works that deal with the relationship between man and nature. They question the separation of these areas characteristic of Western thinking by extended forms of their intertwining. A dominant, exploitative understanding of nature gives way to a choreography of becoming, based on exchange and permeability.

**Ika Huber** (Freiburg i Br.) works with vegetal and floral forms. Her painting outlines a dynamic relationship to nature, reminiscent of Asian calligraphy. In contrast to a hierarchical understanding of nature that attempts to control, the artist is committed to a process of allowing and enabling.

Nikolaus Bischoff writes: "Painting is a living process for Ika Huber. In dialogue with the image, in tension between a precise placing and a processual momentum, compositions emerge whose genesis takes place in analogy to natural growth. In ***Fragments, 2018, (2-5)***, the painter combines seemingly unintentionally sets of brush stripes with transparent areas of color that are composed of broad brushstrokes. Color and line in their interaction open a space that remains indefinite. Ika Huber's paintings have nothing solid or final. There is no right or wrong - rather, different forms of possibility are explored. The incompleteness of the form, which manifests itself in the tearing and fraying of the brush strokes, keeps the picture suspended, in a hard to define intermediary state.

With the bronze sculptures ***Roots, 2018, (6-9)***, Ika Huber makes use of nature's formal repertoire. Found root pieces are molded by her with plaster and then cast into bronze. By doing so own interpretations emerge- nature is reinterpreted as a sign, made ready and readable in the context of art."

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<sup>6</sup> Leander Scholz, a.a.O.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Dickel, *Natur in der zeitgenössischen Kunst*. München: Silke Schreiber, 2016, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Philippe Chaimbaretta (Hg.), *Towards an Ethic of Driving Interview with Catherine and Raphael Larrère*, in, *Stream 04, The Paradox of the Living*, Paris: PCA-Stream 2017, 22-27, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Werner Busch (Hg.), *Landschaftsmalerei*, Berlin: Reimer, 1997, 14.

**Lucia Schmuck's** (Nürnberg) paper works **VII, VIII, IX, VI, 2018, (10–13)** stand in the long tradition of plant representation, which emerged from scientific studies and the depiction of vegetative beauty. As mixed forms, they reveal an anatomizing approach as well as a receptive open sensitivity.

For each work, the artist first makes a scientific drawing of a plant. Here she is concerned with a microscopic analysis and meticulous transcript of the texture of the plant.

In the second step, she breaks away from the original motif and works more intuitively: She sets the planes on the large paper formats and looks for the right colors and appropriate lines. With ever new techniques and artistic means of expression the artist produces different surface textures. While carefully paying attention to this finding process, the finished drawing suddenly emerges. It reflects the fragility of a plant as its vivid movement.

**Pauline v. Angerer** (Erlangen) maps her surroundings by collecting blossoms, seeds and fruits from flowers and plants, which she making into necklaces. In the exhibition in Freiburg the artist assembles chains with plants of spring. The fragile objects **Ketten, 2018, (14)** are reminiscent of child's play and a romantic notion of nature that is meant to contrast a depraved cultural world. By alluding to the provenance and history of plants, Angerer's objects refer to nature as a raw material and commodity in the capitalist system.

Typologically, **her chains (14)** refer to herbaria and seed banks as a means of controlling and rescuing nature at the same time. Up to early modern times, Herbaria were herbal medicine books. Later, Carl von Liné (1707-1778) created his systematic plant taxonomy based on the herbaria of other contemporary botanists and thus subjugated nature to a systematic order.

In contrast to seed banks, which are designed for the future breeding of extinct plants or genetic engineering, the seed or kernel of Angerer's chains are destroyed by her processing. In the exhibition in Freiburg, she shows chains with plants of spring, which she found in the supermarket but also in the natural environment. She painstakingly synthesizes flowers, stalks, seeds, suppositories or stems into filigree structures that show the beauty and variety of the plant life, but also their fragility.

In their new site-specific installation **DJ Duft juega con tus sentimientos, 2018, (15)**

**Johannes Willi** (Basel) & **Daniel Lara** (Mexico City) address an animistic world view common with indigenous people. It stands in contrast to the western exploitation of nature. Willi spent fellowship at the Escuela Flora ars + natura in Bogota, Colombia, in 2017. There he explored the relationship nature of the Muisca people, who inhabit the plateaus of the Andes since pre-Columbian times.

Building on this experience, Willi created an artificial forest of Christmas trees for the exhibition in Freiburg. The trees are embedded in specially cast concrete base.

On the walls surrounding the installation, lead casts are hung. Willi has developed their forms from the gold masks of the Muisca. The Muisca offered these masks to their gods. For them, gold had spiritual power and connected them to the deities. The Spanish conquerors, however, desired these gold objects because of their material value. From the accounts of the Muisca's gold offerings, they created the myth of Eldorado, the sunken city that inspired their material greed as a place of longing.

The tin, lead and antimony alloy that Willi uses for his casts is the same as Gutenberg used for his types. Willi's masks thus recall the parallel history of printing and colonial exploitation. In Willi's installation, bass strings are attached, turning the artificial forest into a resonating instrument. On the strings new compositions by Willi and the Mexican sound artist Daniel Lara will be played. The two got to know each other at the Escuela Flora.

Following the animistic practices of indigenous cultures, Willi and Lara explore the healing effects of sound in three workshops. With the Christmas tree, Willi incorporates a relic of western pagan worship, reminiscent of earlier times when our lives interacted with nature.

In *Wishing Well* (2018) **Sylvia Schedelbauer** (Berlin) uses found footage of a nature film from the 1970s and processes it with other film images into a flicker movie. In the simultaneous layering of different images, the destruction of the human habitat is subtly addressed.

The Flicker technique evokes a dissecting relationship to nature and has a disturbing effect caused by the rapidly changing brightness. The maelstrom of images of contaminated and polluted waters creates the impression of a rebelling, apocalyptic nature. The elements – damaged and destroyed – seem to stand up with all their might for on last time.

The child's hand as a leitmotif reminds us of the impact and responsibility of human activity. The pulsating structures we see in this hand look like cracks in dry fields or deposited chemical waste. For Schedelbauer the flicker technique symbolizes the human consciousness, which is fragmented and fragile, which is constantly interrupted and forgets.

*Ann Lee & Marcel* (2016) is a work by **Tino Sehgal**, which deals with the manga character Ann Lee. It was originally a character of a Japanese design company for developing comics, adverts and video games. In 1999, the artists Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe acquired the copy rights and used the character in their works: Parreno in his video animation *Anywhere out of the World*, 2000, and Huyghe incorporated it into *Two Minutes Out of Time*, 2000. This video is on display in Freiburg.

These works helped the formerly insignificant persona without any specific traits to a future life. Afterwards, the Parreno and Huyghe handed the figure on to other artists, who made other artworks, videos, posters and more.

Sehgal brings the manga character in *Ann Lee* (2011) to life. Thereby she leaves her existence as a flat figure in the animated films of the artists Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno and enters the three-dimensional world of human beings. In 2016, Sehgal revisits the figure in *Ann Lee & Marcel* in order to deal with basic issues of human existence today. As a hybrid being that belongs to the natural and cultural world, Ann Lee delineates a choreography of becoming that merges these categories long separate in western thinking.

Heidi Brunnschweiler, May 2018