

Carbon Synthesis

The works in this exhibition offer an entry into the fragile and wonderful ecologies of nonhuman species in a world that is going off the rails. Perhaps the blatant power games around narcissistic geopolitics will eventually become too much, and lead us to find smarter, decent ways of being with the hurting critters and cultures of the planet.

Aligning with the hope of a rising ecological smartness is a cross-disciplinary interest in articulating spaces where human and nonhuman are indistinguishable. This is of interest among philosophers, environmentalists, ecological art historians and others. It is artists like those in this exhibition, who confront and manifest ideas of extinction, emotion and climate transformation. They make generative works that speculate ways of thinking differently and moving forward.

Donna Franklin's film carries through the concern of her creative practice with other-than-human entities that connect intimately to her. The still image of a shrew having a Viking-like send off on Lake Kilpisjärvi is a gesture respecting a creature that, for a moment, formed part of her sub-Arctic experience. So too, we can understand her care of wet life housed in the gallery, her petri dish growing, xenobots, bacteria, reindeer moss, and blood, pike bone, and human hair. The sentience attached to the regard given to this synthesis seeks to frame cultural practices distant from the western mindset. An action performed on the border of Norway, Finland and Sweden, where the artists undertook the residency that informs this exhibition. A micro-performance film and living sculpture by invited artist Valerie Schneider questions whether human cells and diatoms can coexist. Diatoms, a measure of ecological health, are often overlooked.

Tracy Hill's works offer a poignant way into vast micro worlds and invisible energies. We cannot see these energies given our limited eyesight, but through her process of manipulating digital technology her prints often become large, endless landscapes. Through quiet observation her work arises from walking across the land, dowsing and field recording. From these unique perspectives Tracy creates reimagined micro landscapes, giving vitality to invisible bacterial forms that connect human and nonhuman worlds.

The task of making work that excises the anthropocentric ego from the visual is difficult for a self-centred species. There is something hopeful therefore about Sarah's empty body suit floating on the Lake. It carries the notion of removing the human from the centre of the picture. This is the body suit Sarah wore during her project residency. She discards the material in the end, and this gives the work a nod to science fiction, as if the occupant has vaporised.

In this sub-Arctic vanishing, Sarah references a lesser-known novel by John Wyndam 'Trouble with Lichen'. The ominous science of his fiction echoes in the body suit; there is the sense of the artist pretending to be a scientist. And then letting it go.

Sarah's lichen images respect Sami culture, while a large graphite drawing references Rembrandt or Soutine. Even here, the western canon has cultural resonance. In her large reindeer skin drawing, she regards the reality of climate change, which is impacting on reindeer behaviour and therefore touching on Sami cultural practices. The drawing has a raw beauty, that links the tactile skill of the artist with her materials, and the confronting reality of the skinned animal.

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