

LET'S TALK ABOUT NATURE



Broersen & Lukács, *Point Cloud Old Growth* (lightbox), 63 x 109 x 9 cm

What is natural? How do we perceive nature and what is our relationship to nature as human beings of the 21st Century? There are so many questions evolving from thoughts about nature and the essence of the natural. Do we create 'surrogates' to understand nature and are works of art probably the best bridge for understanding? The invited artists Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács (Netherlands), Ruby Swinney (South Africa), Inge Meijer (Netherlands) and Melanie Bonajo (Netherlands) contribute in this show with their observations, concepts and visions.

In the work of the artist couple **Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács** (1974 and 1973) nature functions as a mirror for human perception: as a sublime background decor, as a political tool or as a concept for understanding historical and cultural impact. Broersen & Lukács took thousands of photographs in the Bialoweza Forest in Poland, Europe's last primeval forest, which is now under threat. By using 3D photography, Broersen & Lukács created a virtual replica of parts of this rapidly shrinking wilderness. The main protagonist of a series of works is 'The Fallen', a massive tree trunk, which we can see from all possible angles as though a digital camera inhabits the large roots and the broken remainder of the trunk. The camera eye goes around it and follows the texture of wood, moss and other co-existing vegetation on its surface. The 'Fallen' has become a symbol of the pre-human world, but also reaches out to an uncertain future of nature. With their work Broersen & Lukács give expression to their most important concern: how our imagination is corrupted and is being used as a commodity that simulates our deepest longing for a pristine nature.

Cape Town-based young artist **Ruby Swinney** (1992) who has just graduated from Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art, and whose immersive body of works are acquired and shown in the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) right now, is known for her sensitive oil paintings on tracing paper. She transports the viewer into a totally unknown world full of mysterious apparitions – almost into a 'parallel universe'. The semi-recognisable and timeless landscapes she depicts are inhabited by peculiar figures who seem to encapsulate – what? The fragility of our existence? The ethereal nature of her paintings expresses a state of uncertainty and longing for the natural world, one that is slowly vanishing. Swinney's semi-recognisable and timeless landscapes and lush alleys are inhabited by peculiar figures with elongated heads or long shadows.

In her work, Swinney is inspired by the Romantic movement as well as by archetypes of Ancient Greek mythology, but also by Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical ideas on the etheric realm and the human soul. Her use of a monochrome palette further expresses this concept, effectively casting each scene in a haze of nostalgia that longs for a time that could have been. In her own words:

'I think I have certain responses to the present technological revolution that echo the Romantics earlier responses to industrialisation. They reacted by embracing ideas of the sublime in the natural and spiritual or mythical world... In my work I'm trying to evoke this painful longing and uncertainty of what it is to be human, as we fearfully peer out at a shifting world that is becoming dark and unfamiliar.'

Inge Meijer (Beverwijk, NL 1986) finished her residency at the Rijksakademie Amsterdam in 2017 with great acclaim for her work and had her first gallery solo exhibition at AKINCI this year. At the core of her young oeuvre stands the uneasy and hypocritical relationship between human beings and their natural surroundings. In her films and photographs Meijer tells us in iconic images how humans continuously try to bend nature to their own will. Humans are constantly arranging, cultivating and shaping their habitat. Meijer's films and photographs touch upon the often hysterically affective relation we maintain with plants and animals, however, pointing at our self-entitlement to manipulate and use them – always by forcing nature to fit our own needs and interest.

In the video work Meijer has created for *Let's talk about Nature*, she narrates through a single film shot of an abandoned paddleboat in the form of a dolphin the tragic story of Peter who had been used in the Hollywood production *Filpper* in the 60ies and was later part of the Dr. John Lilly experiments on interspecies communication. Peter had an intimate relationship with his trainer, but when funding ran out and the experiments were stopped, Peter was relocated. Peter subsequently took his own life.

It seems that one cannot think about nature without the nostalgic feeling of its disappearance. However, is there a way to live with nature in a harmonious way? During the course of four years, **Melanie Bonajo** (1978) has worked on her *Night Soil Trilogy*, an experimental documentary in three parts in which she encounters alternative communities and ways to overcome the huge disconnection most Western people feel to nature. The central characters in her videos are in search of new rituals and a different relationship with nature. In the third part of the *Night Soil Trilogy*, Bonajo investigated ways of alternative crop-winning for daily food, without obeying capitalist rules of consumerism. Bonajo portrays a group of women living by alternative norms and who have each, on their own, established communities. The women stand for sensitivity, connection, and communication with other communities, plants, animals and elements. They attune their energy to the ecosystem around them with an enhanced sensibility. They are friends with the Earth and dependent members of the community of Nature.

In a recent interview Bonajo comments: 'I want to be really careful how I relate to consumption because it's so dominant and overwhelming. Morally, it's not the place I usually align with, and yet still depend on for needs like food.' And she continues 'I allow plants to be my teachers, they take me to a place of silence and I access portals that are usually only opening with an intensely deep, probably monastery meditation practice.' And hinting at the biggest madness of our society, called our identity-related consumerism, Bonajo concludes 'There is no direct connection between economy and a sense of wellbeing and to take more than we need is a phallusy'.