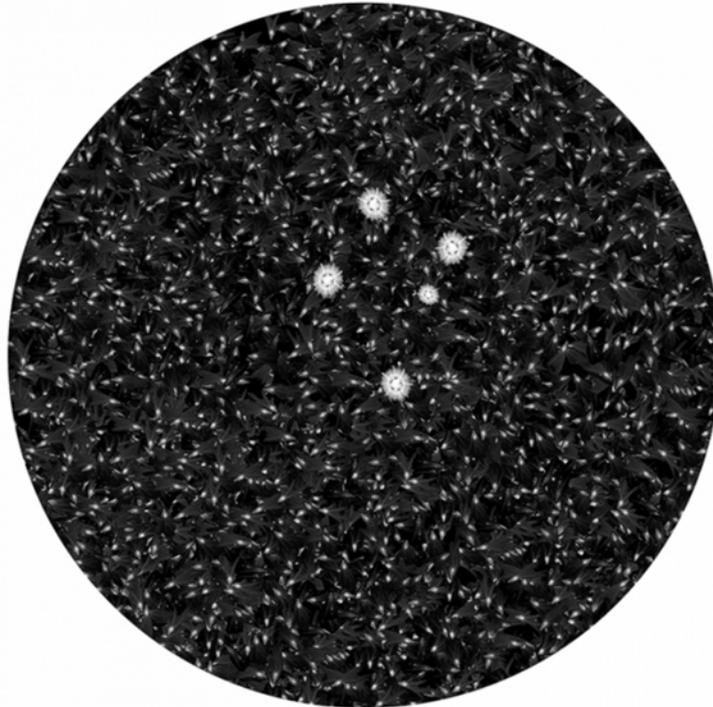


Huw Davies Gallery
3 - 26 March 2017

Planetary Gardening

Curated by Ashley Lumb and Laura McLean



Dornith Doherty, *Finite*, 2014, C type print, 76.2 x 76.2 cm

Ever since practices of cultivating plants for consumption and trade began thousands of years ago, our planet has been shaped by human activity. Through varied applications of photographic processes, the works gathered in *Planetary Gardening* trace recent evidence of this activity, and track ways in which this cultivation compulsion has compounded, complexified, accelerated, and expanded, turning in on itself to encompass the whole earth and generating the 'collective existential mutations' noted by philosopher Felix Guattari, who identifies three ecologies threatened by these mutations - the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity.¹

As a planned city, Canberra presents a unique context for an exhibition exploring 'planetary gardening'. The city's architect, Walter Burley Griffin, was inspired by the garden city movement which aimed to reduce the alienation of humans and society from the natural world. This utopian vision was taken up by Griffin, who proclaimed: 'I have planned an ideal city - a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future. Australia...has no architectural traditions. I think in such a country, untrammelled by traditions, I ought to be able to evolve a very beautiful architectural type.'²

This naive and colonialist claim of a lack of traditions is gently countered in one of the opening works of *Planetary Gardening*, in which indigenous members of the Quandamooka community of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) discuss the medicinal properties of local plants in Renata Buziak's *Medicinal Plant Cycles* (2012-2015). This forms the soundtrack to a video in which the chemical properties of these plants are brought to light through their fusion with photographic emulsions.

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Since the British settled on this continent, it has taken a long time for indigenous science, architecture, and land management, parts of a culture deeply attuned to nature, to be recognised. Arriving in the late 18th century, Europeans brought with them a cultural understanding framed by the paradigms of the Enlightenment, which sought to comprehend universal order in the laws of nature through an understanding of reality in which the mind and body, and nature and culture, are irrevocably split.

Leidenmaster II (2003), by Robyn Stacey, evokes the aesthetics of scientific enquiry during the Enlightenment, through the photographic depiction of herbaria in a still life reminiscent of those painted by the Dutch masters of the 17th century. Like the British, the Dutch were greatly involved in sea-faring trade and colonial exploits, and one can imagine this botanic bounty brought back from afar for study, classification, and cataloguing.

The urge, or in Dornith Doherty's work, the need to stockpile and sort is also addressed in three works drawn from the series *Millennium Seed Bank Research Seedlings and Lochner-Stuppy Test Garden* (2011). This seed bank in England was established to insure against the extinction of plant life from the impact of human activities. Using x-ray equipment, Doherty documented and magnified samples from this collection to reveal the delicate and detailed architecture of these kernels of life.

Janet Laurence's practice has long been concerned with threats posed by our species to the natural world. Her video *Resuscitation Garden (for an ailing planet)* (2011) explores a sculptural tableau delicately composed of botanic specimens and glass laboratory equipment, a quasi-scientific environment where, perhaps, science might save us from the catastrophes it has caused.

As theorist Paul Virilio has noted, with the invention of a new technology, a new form of accident is also invented.³ So it follows, when you invent nuclear power, you invent the nuclear meltdown. In 2010 Marilyn Fairskye visited Chernobyl, a place largely untouched since the disaster of 1986. Her work *Waste Plant (Chernobyl)* (2010), however, depicts a relatively new structure in the area, an unused nuclear waste storage facility built in 2007.

On the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, philosopher Michael Marder wrote: 'We are not at home in the world after Chernobyl... Instead of being the masters of our milieu, we are lost on a planet transformed and mutilated as a consequence of human activity'.⁴ Anaïs Tondeur's series of photograms sit along Marder's reflections on the event in their co-authored book *The Chernobyl Herbarium* (2016). Her prints are created by the direct imprint of radioactive herbarium specimens grown for scientific study in the soil of the exclusion zone onto photosensitive paper. These plants act as 'material witnesses' to an ongoing event of radioactivity, imperceptible to us without sensing technology, but borne on a molecular level by organisms, living and dead.⁵

Following the second biggest nuclear disaster in history, at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in 2011, Twitter user @san_kaido posted a photograph of mutated daisies growing in the region. Though the cause of the mutation was never confirmed, the image has circulated widely online as people seek to understand the consequences of the spread of radioactivity in Japan.

Viewed from above, in an online work by Joe Hamilton, the macro mutations of the earth appear as a collage of satellite imagery, architectural fragments, and organic textures in *Indirect Flights* (2015). Navigated by the viewer on a web platform similar to Google Maps, the shifting landscape reveals engineered landscapes, ageing infrastructure, and solar farms on the surface of a networked planet which today exists as a sphere of data as much as a material entity.

The subjective impact of this conflation of the datasphere and the biosphere, and attempts to heal 'existential mutations'⁶ through the consumption of psychoactive plants are addressed in Suzanne Treister's project *HFT The Gardener* (2014-15) and Melanie Bonajo's film *Night Soil/Fake Paradise* (2014).

Planetary Gardening exhibits works from *HFT The Gardener* by the fictional character Hillel Fischer Traumberg, an algorithmic high-frequency trader (HFT) who, in his experiments with psychoactive drugs, feels himself become part of 'an infinite swirl of data' and consequently turns himself into an 'outsider artist'. Through his explorations and subsequent illustrations of the ethno-pharmacology of psychoactive plants, classified and grouped by inserting their molecular formulae into the codes of his trading algorithms, Traumberg has produced botanical prints, which are exhibited here with a video telling his story.

Fake Paradise is the first in the *Night Soil* trilogy of films by Bonajo, examining the disconnection most Western people feel from nature. It explores how people in cities such as New York have tackled feelings of alienation and fragmentation through urban shamanism and the use of Ayahuasca, a plant-based psychoactive medicine originating in the Amazon. Drawing parallels between cyberspace and psychedelic space – places where the body is transcended – through polyvocal narratives and staged tableaux and sequences, Bonajo questions why Western subjects have begun to re-use psychoactive plants as a mental, physical and spiritual medicine.

Together these works take the viewer on a journey exploring the symbiotic relationships between the

cultural and the chemical, the organic and the technological, and the agency of human and non-human actors, to nurture new subjectivities attentive to the tending of the earth.

Laura McLean, March 2017

¹ Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Continuum, London & New York, 2000

² American Designs Splendid New Capital for Australia', *The New York Times*, Sunday, June 2, 1912

³ Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1999, p. 89

⁴ Michael Marder, with artworks by Anaïs Tondeur, *The Chernobyl Herbarium: Fragments of an Exploded Consciousness*, Open Humanities Press, London, 2016, p. 48

⁵ Marder, *Ibid.*, p. 24

⁶ Guattari, *Ibid.*

About the artists

Suzanne Treister. London-based Suzanne Treister became a pioneer in the digital/new media/web-based field from the beginning of the 1990s. Recent exhibitions include: *Perpetual Uncertainty*, Bildmuseet, Umea (2016); and *HEXEN 2.0*, Fig-2, ICA, London (2015). Treister has shown at Centre Pompidou, Paris; ZKM, Karlsruhe; and SMBA, Amsterdam, among other institutions. She is represented by Annely Juda Fine Art, London, and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York.

Robyn Stacey has been creating sumptuous images since the mid-1980s. Recent exhibitions include: *Magic Object: The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* at the AGSA, Adelaide (2016), and *Robyn Stacey: Cloud Land* at the Museum of Brisbane (2015). Stacey's work is held in Australian public collections including: the NGA, AGNSW, AGWA, NGV, AGSA, and the QAG. She is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney, and Jan Manton, Brisbane.

Merilyn Fairskye is a prominent Sydney-based artist. Her artwork has been shown in museums including the MOMA, New York; Tate Modern, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; MCA, Sydney; and AGNSW, Sydney, and in film festivals including: Videobrasil; Oberhausen Short Film Festival; Kassel Documentary Film Festival; and the Sydney Film Festival. She is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney.

Renata Buziak holds a PhD from Queensland College of Art (2016), and is a Queensland Centre for Photography management board member. Her work has been exhibited at: ANCA Gallery, Canberra; PICA, Perth; Photo LA; and Academy of Fine Art, Warsaw among others, and is held in collections including the National Museum in Wrocław, Poland and QCP, Brisbane.

Dornith Doherty is a Professor at the University of North Texas. Her work has been exhibited and collected by many institutions including Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; the Museum of Photography, Argentina; the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston; and the Museum of Fine Arts in Milwaukee. She is represented by Holly Johnson Gallery, Dallas, Texas and Moody Gallery, Houston, Texas.

Anaïs Tondeur lives in Paris and is a graduate of Central Saint Martin's and the Royal College of Art, London. Recent exhibitions include: *Chernobyl: Impact & Beyond*, Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago (2016); *Flat Hemisphere*, Royal Society, London (2015); and *Distant Fictions*, Jerwood gallery, London (2015). She is represented by GV Art Gallery, London.

Janet Laurence is a leading Australian artist who has been the recipient of Rockefeller, Churchill, and Australia Council Fellowships. Exhibiting extensively both nationally and internationally, past exhibitions include: *Negotiating This World*, NGV, Melbourne (2012), and the 17th (1992) and 9th (2010) Biennales of Sydney. Laurence's work is included in many collections in Australia including the NGA; AGNSW; NGV; QAG; AGSA. She is represented by Arc One Gallery, Melbourne, and Dominik Mersch, Sydney.

@san_kaido lives in Japan and runs a Twitter account 'mainly for the purpose of obtaining information on radioactivity and nuclear power plants issues and disseminating opinions... (however) the current Japan seems to be progressing towards a bigger collapse and the content of the tweets has changed.'

Melanie Bonajo works with videos, performances, photographs and installations. She has exhibited in institutions including: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Moscow Biennale; PPOW Gallery, New York; and Tate Modern, London. Bonajo completed a residency at the ISCP in New York in 2014, and was shortlisted for the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. She is represented by AKINCI, Amsterdam.

Joe Hamilton holds an MA from RMIT (2011). His recent exhibitions include: *Brushes*, New Museum, New York (2015); *Video Contemporary*, Carriageworks, Sydney (2015); *Wasting Time on the Internet 2.0*, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany (2015); *Immaterial Matter*, Photo50, The London Art Fair, London (2014); and *Palazzo Peckham*, 270 Castello, 55th Venice Biennale (2013).

About the curators

Ashley Lumb is a curator based in Sydney. She holds an MA in the History of Photography from the Uni. St. Andrews, and recently worked as a researcher at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. She has also worked at the Macleay Museum, British Museum, and Autograph ABP in a curatorial capacity, and founded Hemera Collective and the London & New York Photography Diaries.

Laura McLean is a curator and writer based in Sydney. A graduate of the MFA in Curating program at Goldsmiths College, Uni. London, she has curated projects for the Maldives Pavilion of the 55th Venice Biennale; UNESCO, Paris; MuseumsQuartier, Vienna; and Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney, among others. She is currently an editor of Runway Australian Experimental Art magazine.

Image List

1. @san_kaido, *Fukushima Daisy*, 2015, C-print, 13.0 x 18.0cm NFS
2. Dornith Doherty, *Millennium Seed Bank Research Seedlings and Lochner-Stuppy Test Garden No. 1, No. 3, & No. 4*, 2011, C type print, each 152.0 x 70.0cm NFS
3. Dornith Doherty, *Finite*, 2014, C type print, 76.2 x 76.2cm NFS
4. Robyn Stacey, *Leidenmaster II*, from *The Collectors Nature* series, 2003, C-print, 95.0 x 150.0cm NFS
5. Renata Buziak, *Medicinal Plant Cycles*, 2012-2015, time-lapse HD video, 16:00 mins, edition of 5 \$8,000
6. Anais Tondeur, *Chernobyl's Herbarium*, 2011-16, Location: Exclusion Zone, Chernobyl, Ukraine; Radiation level: 1.7 Microsieverts per hour. Series of 30 Rayograms / giclee prints on rag paper, 24.0 x 36.0cm each, editions of 10 \$760 each
7. Marilyn Fairskye, *Waste Plant*, from *Plant Life (Chernobyl)* series, 2010, pigment print, 80.0 x 120.0cm NFS
8. Janet Laurence, *Resuscitation Garden (for an ailing plant)*, 2011, HD video, 5:36 mins NFS
9. Suzanne Treister, *HFT The Gardener / Botanical Prints*, 2014-15, series of 20 archival giclee prints on rag paper, 29.7 x 42.0cm each NFS
10. Suzanne Treister, *HFT The Gardener / Video*, 2014-15, HD video, 11:55 mins NFS
11. Melanie Bonajo, *Night Soil / Fake Paradise*, 2014, HD video, 32:09 mins NFS
12. Joe Hamilton, *Indirect Flights*, 2015, website NFS

Public program

Join exhibition curators Ashley Lumb and Laura McLean for a curators talk in the Huw Davies Gallery at 2pm on Sunday 26 March 2017. Free event. All welcome.

The curators would like to thank PhotoAccess and exhibition sponsors Bay Photo, Emergent Designs, Instyle Plant Hire, Hotel Kurrajong, and Civic Pro Frame for their support. Laura would also like to thank Jenna Sutela for the exhibition's inspiration while working with her and her slime mould in Terra Vienna.

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