

photo access

5 March - 11 April

Ambient, Aberrant (homecoming edition)

Sonia Mangiapane

Sitting down with Sonia Mangiapane over coffee, she told me that whenever she's away from home, she's drawn to exploring the unknown with a camera. I got a sense of the camera as a kind of organ for experiencing the world around her. Though it's not quite that the camera is an extension of self, it acts as another lens, both literally and figuratively, beyond the sensory lenses, for interpreting places visited. But Sonia doesn't subscribe to the idea that a camera-click alone can capture a moment. For her, a photograph isn't taken, it's made, and through continuing her creative process outside of the parameters of the camera, in the meditative silence of the photographic darkroom, she manages to capture not just the physical realm but the emotional and conceptual realms as well. So, as we sipped to the bottom of our coffee glasses, I felt as if I were getting to the bottom of something else too, and if I could describe Sonia's work in a single word, it would be layered. Yet, throughout our conversation, we did not expose any kind of truth at the bottom of these layers. What we found was subjectivity.

Sonia's solo exhibition at **photo access** features a constellation of artworks from *Ambient, Aberrant* – a body of work created between 2020 and 2022 – together with newer works that reflect her evolving ideas. From the perspective of leisure tourism, Sonia examines the lenses that mediate our experiences of place, specifically Nature. Through abstract photography and cameraless techniques, her work expresses both awe for Nature and a sense of estrangement. The absurdity of 'visiting' or 'sight-seeing' the eco-systems which we, as animals, are a part of, is evoked in tandem with, and in dissonance with, the satisfaction of witnessing such 'wild' beauty. With the idea of 'wilderness' still vital to many of us, we find ourselves called to Nature, but *Ambient, Aberrant* asks us to question the authenticity of our experiences of the so-called natural world.

Consider the self, in a gallery or online, experiencing artworks that depict Nature. How many layers are there between oneself and such Nature? I couldn't find a way to count, but Sonia draws attention to distance through iterating her artworks multiple times before presenting them frameless – an assertion that they are entire objects for consideration, not just images with subject matters. From Nature; to the dominated, tamed, manicured, and re-constructed versions of Nature we access; to the artist's subjective experience, influenced by the gaze of the tourist; to the camera's lens; to the optical modifiers placed in front of this lens, such as prisms or kaleidoscopes, which abstract and distort Nature; to darkroom interventions, like coloured filters, transmissive objects, light sources, and light modifiers, which disrupt the process of exposing a negative image onto photosensitive paper; to the viewer's subjective experience of the artwork, their sensory input perhaps mediated further by a screen; and everything else in between. The effect could be likened to the Claude Mirror, once used by artists and travellers to constrain and transpose landscapes. But, contrary to the Claude Mirror, Sonia's works do not read as simplifications of Nature. By obscuring Nature, Sonia reveals something about the way that it has indeed become obscure to us. Yet also, just maybe, through clouds of colour, through light, and darkness, and intricacy, she also conjures something of wilderness lost.

- Melanie Skyers

Bio

Sonia Mangiapane is a photomedia artist working with processes defined primarily by their interaction with light, as opposed to the exclusive use of the camera. Employing a range of camera-based and cameraless methods her practice takes the form of photographic prints, cameraless or hybrid works on paper, moving image works and other light-based interventions. Themes such as the tourist gaze, Nature and the underlying constructions of the *photographic* are the focus of her work.

The colour darkroom is a core site of her practice. It's a space in which she makes, rather than takes a photograph; pushing the boundaries of the photographic by undertaking conceptual and technical approaches which diverge from the snapshot.

Sonia was born and raised on unceded Bunurong country, lived in the Netherlands from 2012-2024 and is currently based in Naarm/Melbourne.

List of works

from left to right

1.

Sonia Mangiapane

Selfie Spot, 2023

analogue c-print (photograph with darkroom intervention)

127 x 96 cm

edition 1/1 + 1AP

\$2850

2.

Sonia Mangiapane

Living in a Fishbowl, 2021

analogue c-print (photograph with darkroom intervention)

90 x 76 cm

varied edition 2/2

\$1600

3.

Sonia Mangiapane

Off to the Mountains, 2020

analogue c-print (photograph with darkroom intervention)

90 x 76 cm

edition 1/1 (unique)

\$1800

4.

Sonia Mangiapane

Placema(r)ker, 2021

analogue c-print (colour reversal contact print from photograph with darkroom intervention)

89 x 76 cm

edition 1/1 (unique)

\$1800

5.
Sonia Mangiapane
Sliver, 2021
analogue c-print (photograph with darkroom intervention)
90 x 76 cm
edition 1/1 (unique)
\$1800

6.
Sonia Mangiapane
Apocalypso, 2023
analogue c-print (photograph with darkroom intervention)
127 x 102.5 cm
edition 1/1 (unique)
\$4000

7.
Sonia Mangiapane
Sunscreen, 2023
analogue c-print (double exposure photograph with darkroom intervention)
127 x 94 cm
edition 1/1 (unique)
\$3400

8.
Sonia Mangiapane
Trophy (I), 2022
analogue c-print (photograph)
127 x 92 cm
edition 1/1 (unique)
\$3400

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