

ON SHOW
POLARITIES: PSYCHOLOGY
AND POLITICS OF BEING
ECOLOGICAL

OPENING
FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER
FROM 20.00

VISITING ADDRESS
TORENALLEE 40-06
5617 BD EINDHOVEN

Editor's note
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PERIOD
29 NOV 2019 – 1 MAR 2020

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PRESS RELEASE

POLARITIES PSYCHOLOGY AND POLITICS OF BEING ECOLOGICAL

Propelled by science and emancipation we free ourselves physically, emotionally, politically and philosophically from a binary vision of life: nature/technique, individual/society, body/mind, matter/energy and so many other opposites are losing their meaning. The fact that this is happening (and not without a struggle) in the middle of a big ecological crisis makes it even harder to determine our position. How do we cope with the changes and the threat? In Polarities, from 29 November 2019 to 1 March 2020, MU reflects on the extremities of our time, and the way they shift as a result of our decisions and actions.

Over a railway underpass in the city, someone wrote 'boy' in the left corner and 'girl' to the right; in the middle it says 'I'. In its conciseness the statement matches the poetry and expressivity in the work of BAD Award winner Jonathan Ho, who shows hermaphrodite freshwater snails as a metaphor for gender fluidity in *Sex Shells: Gender fluidity in the modern age*. The collaboration with Joris Koene of VU University Amsterdam, department of Animal ecology, points beyond the snails' versatile sex life to the ever-expanding opportunities we humans have to shape our own identities.

About MU

MU is an adventurous and curious guide to an international network of creatives who investigate together what art can be. MU places art and design at the heart of everyday life. We always strive to connect art with topical developments in society, from digital culture to urban transformation, without ever losing sight of the artists and designers' capacity for radical rethinking.

MU is located in a former Philips factory at Strijp-S in Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

If it were up to Charlotte Jarvis, gender polarity might well become a thing of the past. Together with Susana Chuva de Sousa Lopes of Leiden University Medical Center she is conducting experiments to develop 'female' semen from



her own stem cells. The work, *In Posse*, in which anything seems possible, takes the form of a contemporary reimagining and re-enactment of the ancient Greek festival of Thesmophoria – a fertility ceremony in honour of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone

According to the underlying myth, Persephone was abducted by Hades, who made her stay with him in the underworld for six months a year. Each spring she returns from the realm of the dead to spend the other six months with her mother. The story is reminiscent of several works in *Polarities* that connect us to species and loved ones we've lost.

Resurrecting the Sublime, a collaborative work by Christina Agapakis, Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg and Sissel Tolaas with support from Ginkgo Bioworks and IFF Inc. , approximates the smell once emitted by the flowers of plants that have become extinct. From DNA contained in dried specimens, they isolated genetic frequencies that might have coded for fragrance-producing enzymes. Taking these as a reference, they recreate the perfume of the lost flowers as closely as possible. We can smell them in an installation that evokes the landscape as well; at the same time it resembles a natural-historic presentation, in which we briefly participate.

Jakob Kudsk Steensen leads us into a virtual landscape, inspired by the mountain slopes on Hawaii where the Kaua'i 'ō'ō bird once lived. In *Re-Animated* we hear its mating call, recorded in 1975, a few years before the species disappeared; a crystal-clear, intensely nostalgic sound. In VR we encounter the Kaua'i 'ō'ō again – monstrously-scaled – amidst a flourishing digital ecosystem.

As if resurrecting extinct species isn't hallucinating enough, Heather Dewey-Hagborg attempts to connect us physically and spiritually with a lost loved one. Together with artist and botanist Phillip Andrew Lewis she is working on a procedure to insert human DNA into psycho-active plants. If they succeed, *Spirit Molecule* would offer an opportunity to share one final journey with someone who was dear to us in life.

You would think that all this loss would cause a terrible rage, but in the exhibition, and in society, it stays largely beneath the surface. At some point it becomes almost tangible in the video *As Above, So Below* by Mark IJzerman. He researched the loss of biodiversity in Chili using satellite and drone footage that show the replacement of natural forest by pine and eucalyptus mono-cultures. Distortions in the image and the ominous soundtrack by Sébastien Robert (based on the rumbling of subterranean geysers), simultaneously evoke the drastic changes in the landscape and the increasingly violent protests of the indigenous Machupe against the large companies that caused them.

It hasn't come to this yet in Narsaq, Greenland, where Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway portray a small community, but suppressed emotions are running high in their *Kuannersuit / Kvanefjeld* documentary. The inhabitants are faced with an impossible choice: to watch their town wither away from a lack of opportunities, or to give in to the international mining companies who would love to exploit the nearby mountain that contains one of the largest

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uranium deposits in the world, and an abundance of rare earth minerals. The profits would make them (economically) independent from Denmark – but at what costs?

Even larger economic and geo-political interests are at stake further up north, in the Arctic circle. With the polar ice melting at accelerating speed, the surrounding countries try to chart the sea bed with as much detail as they possibly can in order to support their own territorial claims. Shipping routes as well as gas and oil supplies are the main causes for an imminent conflict that is visualised in Irene Stracuzzi's *The Legal Status of Ice*, with the different spheres of influence projected on a large 3D model of the Arctic area.

The North Pole also plays a significant part in *Navigating Polarities*, an immersive work by Marjolijn Dijkman that reaches far beyond the north-south duality. While a long sequence of images explores magnetism and polarity from the quantum level to cosmological proportions, a woman's voice analyses our binary world view. Across from up/down, male/female, good/bad and so forth, we find a universe that is never balanced, where everything moves and transforms, unpredictably, instable.

A similar desire to deconstruct existing opposites runs through the work of designer Minji Choi, that dissolves the distinction between natural and artificial, between good and bad, individual and ecosystem. *Prunus serotina* – also known as forest pest – is central to the installation *(NON)Native*. Once planted between the pines in the Brabantine forests to improve the forest soil and insulate the trees from fire and insects, this large shrub was later vilified as an exotic species that had to be exterminated at all costs. After several decennia and millions of Euros, forest managers are now finally looking for a *modus vivendi* with their former biggest enemy.

Such a pragmatic way of dealing with unavoidable ecological problems, of 'staying with the trouble' as Donna Haraway calls it, characterises the work of Emma van der Leest and Aneta Schaap-Oziemlak. They received a BAD Award for *Fungkee | Fungal Supercoatings*, a research in collaboration with Paul Verweij and Sybren de Hoog from the Center of Expertise in Mycology, Radboudumc/Canisius Wilhelmina Ziekenhuis. To put an end to killing animals for their skin, they want to enhance the practical use of cellulose-based bio-leather by making it waterproof with a spray derived from fungi that would damage our health in their every-day form.

In ten years, Emma van der Leest dreams of repurposing all the oil storage tanks in the Port of Rotterdam as enormous fermentation vessels where micro-organisms transform residual waists streams into food and all kinds of useful materials. The third BAD Award winner Michael Sedbon doesn't work on such a scale, but he does link several bio-reactors filled with photosynthetic bacteria that can trade the oxygen they produce for light, that enables them to grow and produce more oxygen. *CMD: Experiments in Bio-Algorithmic-Politics*, that he developed with Raoul Frese, assistant professor Biophysics of Photosynthesis and director of the Hybrid Forms ArtScience media lab of VU University Amsterdam, uses self-learning algorithms that test different market strategies of competition and collaboration to see which relations of production allows the bacterial cultures to thrive in the long run.

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CMD is anticipating a future where humans too are directed by diffuse digital networks that have become so interwoven with the world that they govern entire ecosystems and societies. And who knows, if we allow ourselves to be paralysed by fear and insecurity, if we follow the delusions of the day... But it doesn't have to be this way. Amidst all the confusion we can always take bearing from an inner compass that infallibly points towards what is truly valuable. Because we are all ecological, come what may.

Participating artists:

- Christina Agapakis, Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg, & Sissel Tolaas with support from Ginkgo Bioworks & IFF Inc.
- Charlotte Jarvis
- Emma van der Leest & Aneta Schaap-Oziemlak (BAD Award), Paul Verweij & Sybren De Hoog (Radboudumc / CWZ)
- Heather Dewey-Hagborg & Phillip Andrew Lewis
- Irene Stracuzzi
- Jakob Kudsk Steensen
- Jonathan Ho (BAD Award) & Joris Koene (VU)
- Lise Autogena & Joshua Portway
- Marjolijn Dijkman
- Mark IJzerman & Sébastien Robert
- Michael Sedbon (BAD Award) & Raoul Frese (VU)
- Minji Choi

The exhibition is curated by Angelique Spaninks & Xandra van der Eijk.

The Bio Art & Design Award is a product of collaboration between ZonMW (Medical Research Council, The Hague), MU Artspace (Eindhoven) and BioArt Laboratories (Eindhoven).

