
PRETERNATURAL
CELINA JEFFERY

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Celina Jeffery

In loving memory of Dr. Garth Leon Underwood, 1919-2000
Research Fellow of the Natural History Museum, London

Museum of Nature
St. Brigid's Centre for the Arts
Patrick Mikhail Gallery

Ottawa, Canada, 2011-2012

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PRETERNATURAL

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(produced and presented by)
9th Dec., 2011 to 12th Feb., 2012
Marie-Jeanne Musiol, Mariele Neudecker, Anne Katrine Senstad, Sarah Walko and Andrew Wright

ST. BRIGID'S CENTRE FOR THE ARTS:

Adrian Göllner, 10th-17th Dec., 2011
Avantika Bawa, 7th-19th Jan., 2012
Anne Katrine Senstad, 29th Jan. — 17th Feb. 2012

PATRICK MIKHAIL GALLERY:

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Catalogue Design by Clare Brennan

Front Cover & Figure 20: Still from *The Sugarcane Labyrinth*, A short film about the Agricultural Land Art piece by Anne Katrine Senstad - In collaboration with Triple K and M Farms, Theriot, Louisiana, 2011 © Anne Katrine Senstad

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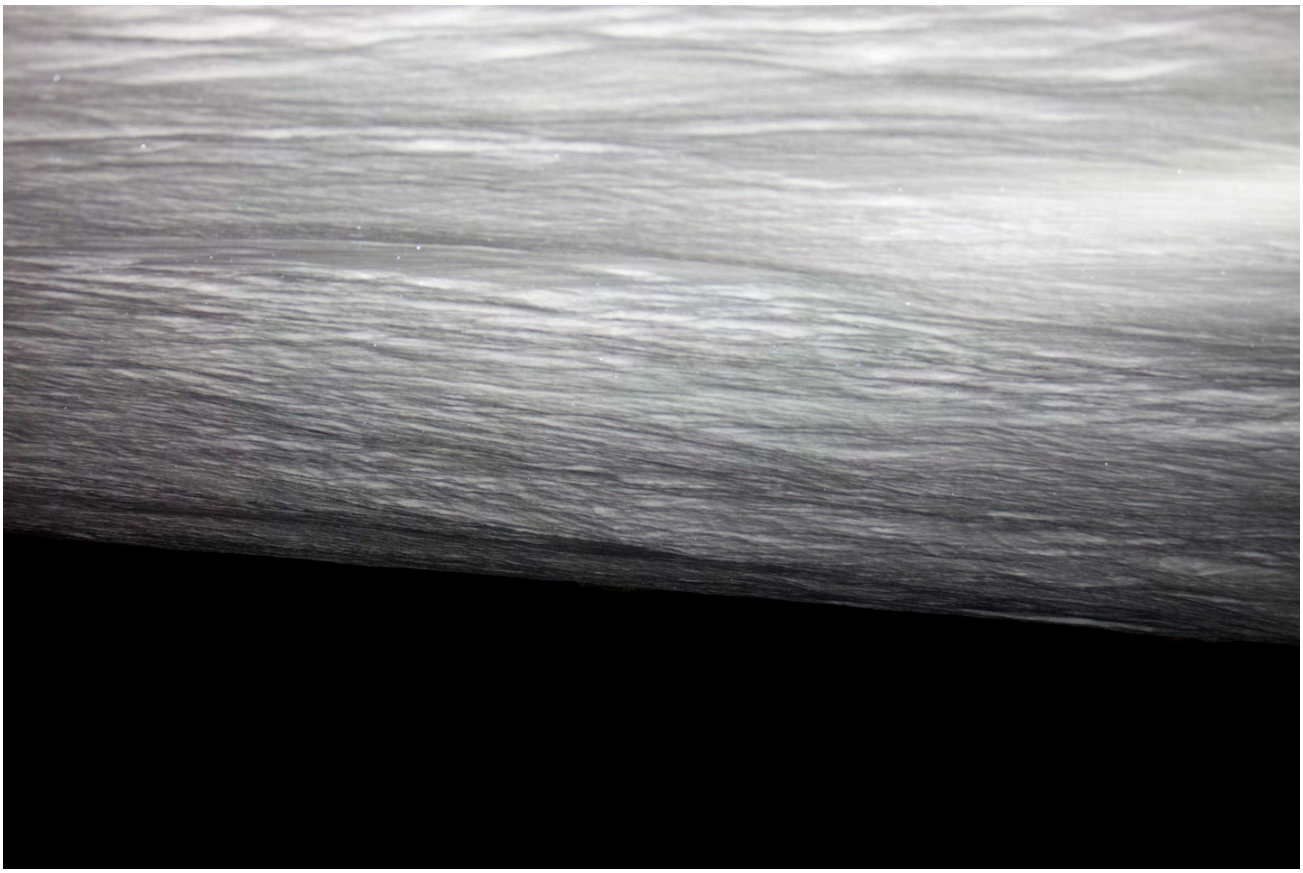

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FOREWORD CELINA JEFFERY

The concept of preternature is more than nature as science, or nature as art — it exceeds the boundaries of these classificatory systems and opens up a space where the species of things conjure wonder and curiosity, as well as fear of the unknowable. This exhibition calls for a rigorous exploration of the habitual ways by which nature is known to us, a questioning that unfolds the limits of the sub-sensible imagination. How does the preternatural allow us to read the unwieldly connections between, in, and through contemporary art and nature?

Preternatural draws from the idea that art itself is a form of preternatural pursuit, in which the artists participating explore the bewildering condition of being in between the mundane and the marvellous in nature. It questions a world that understands itself as accessible, reachable, and 'knowable' and counters it with a consideration of this heterogenous proposition.

At St. Brigid's, a deconsecrated church, Adrian Göllner (Canada), Avantika Bawa (India/USA) and Anne Katrine Senstad (Norway) explore the preternatural as a phenomenological condition through the investigation and exploration of perceptual illusions, the appearance of apparitions, and synaesthetic effects[1]. In Adrian Göllner's site-specific installation, puffs of white smoke appear and then dissipate in time with Handel's *Messiah* from the ornate vaulted ceiling, gesturing at an ethereal presence. Avantika Bawa seeks to subvert, tease and create a play of artifice in an otherwise unique and extraordinary place with her interventions that involve the placement of yellow plastic wrapping along the pews, a yellow ramp on the altar, and the playing of the musical key of 'e' from a 'boom box.' Anne Katrine Senstad further investigates the tradition of mystical melody with *The Kinesthesia of Saint Brigid*, a video projection which frames the organ at the rear of the church.

There is both reverence and mystery in Mariele Neudecker's (UK/Germany) works which capture, invert, and re-make nature. Informing Neudecker's work is the preternatural's ability to subvert the logic of that which is both strange and familiar, a condition which is shared by Andrew Wright (Canada), who addresses the landscape of the Arctic as a heterotopic space that is disorienting, bewildering, and curious. Marie-Jeanne Musiol's (Quebec, Canada) electromagnetic photographic technique is used to create a herbarium, in which spectral images reveal microcosmic concerns through tiny particles of light that emanate through the darkness. Sarah Walko's (USA) *It is least what one ever sees* is a highly intricate installation that comprises many hundreds if not thousands of tiny, disparate sculptural and live objects that seek to exist outside of 'natural' logic. In *The Sugarcane Labyrinth*, a video by Anne Katrine Senstad (Norway), we encounter the making of a labyrinth on a farm in Theriot, Louisiana, USA which engages with local farming strategies in an act of sustainability, recovery, and rejuvenation. Lastly, Shin Il Kim's (Korea/USA) work at the Patrick Mikhail Gallery bridges the spectral inquiry at St. Brigid's and the subversions of the natural world at the Museum of Nature exhibit.

This exhibition retains the preternatural's engagement with prodigies: the exceptional and wonderful in the context of the natural, while acknowledging its critical unravelling of nature as art and art as nature. As such, it accepts the bizarre and incongruous nature of its etymology, in which art, nature, and comprehension collide and asks: what may be the experience of the preternatural in contemporary art?

[1] Jeff Levin and Lea Steele, "The Transcendent Experience: Conceptual, Theoretical and Epidemiologic Perspectives," *Explore* 1.2 (March 2005): 95.

BEYOND NATURE

CELINA JEFFERY

Thomas Aquinas described *praeter naturae* ordinem as an 'awkward' heterogenous phenomenon and associated the term with unusual occurrences and curiosity, as well as a subjective passion of wonder.[1] 'Preternatural' or *Praeter naturam* came to denote that which is 'beyond nature'[2] and its ontology has been dependent on two sister concepts: the supernatural, or *Supra naturam*, signifying that which is 'above nature', and nature, or *natura*, which is defined by the habitual patterns of the world.[3] It is a condition of experience located at several interstices: excluded by both theology and the domain of natural philosophy, and subsequently, its identity has proven ambiguous and fragile as a classificatory system. In this regard, it may be more fitting to understand the preternatural as enunciating itself 'in-between' experience, situated not only between god and nature, but between the 'miraculous' and the 'mundane,' the unknowable and the knowable.[4] When one is suspended by the preternatural's affective realm, we become lured by its love of the strange, rare, particular and all that deviates from both the supernatural and the syllogism of nature's order.[5] The preternatural's attraction to the sub-sensible creates gravitational pulls towards the creative imagination and its collapse of nature into art and vice versa, morphing with the domain of the marvellous.[6]

Figure 1, Adrian Göllner, *Handel's Cloud*, 2011 | Image credit: Andrew Wright

[1] Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 121–26.
[2] Lorraine Daston, "What Can Be a Scientific Object? Reflections on Monsters and Meteors," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 52.2 (Nov.-Dec. 1998): 37 [35–50].
[3] Datson, "What Can Be a Scientific Object?" 40.
[4] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 13–14.
[5] Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry 18.1* (Autumn 1991): 111 [93–124].
[6] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 240.

Mediations between the preternatural's marvel and the supernatural miracle is negotiated in three conceptually driven installations created specifically for St. Brigid's, a highly ornate, de-consecrated Christian church. The works in this exhibition, staged in the context of the ethereal and portentous, create events that both sympathize and playfully engage with the preternatural's love of celestial and other worldly forces.[7]

St. Brigid's was originally built in 1890 to serve the largely Irish Catholic population of the Lowertown area of Ottawa. The architect, James R. Bowes, designed an unusual space with a melange of nineteenth-century revivalism: Romanesque, art nouveau and Tudor features, a style shared by two other spaces in Ottawa: the Rideau Chapel (relocated to the National Gallery of Canada) and the Chapel at the University of Ottawa. Many of the murals were painted over in the 1960s but the building was designated a heritage site in the 1980s and it is currently being renovated. St. Brigid's was de-consecrated in May of 2006 due to declining membership within the congregation and lack of funding for repairs and is now an arts and humanities centre that is used for various cultural and artistic activities, including Irish heritage events, music concerts and plays.

Preternatural invited three contemporary artists to produce site-specific works that engage with the unique character and history of the church. At one time, the church was the one of the greatest patrons of the visual arts, but the nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic decline and shift away from this relationship. Some practices of modernist and contemporary art interventions in Christian spaces continue with the likes of Bill Viola's *The Messenger* commissioned for Durham Cathedral, England and exhibited in 1996, and more recently, Anish Kapoor's *Ascension*, at the Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, 2011, both of which sought revelatory and transcendental spectacles.

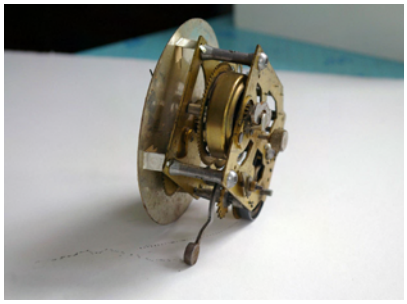


Figure 2, Adrian Göllner, *The Clock Drawings*, 2011

Figure 3, Adrian Göllner, *Recent Drawings by George Gershwin*, 2011

Adrian Göllner's[8] exhibit in *Preternatural* is a highly minimal and ephemeral intervention which uses the Tudor fan vaults of the Western portion of the church. Here, puffs of white smoke appear and then dissipate through the pendants of the vault in time with Handel's *Messiah*. The *Messiah* is not audible, but alluded to by the artist, a concept that must be completed in the mind's of the audience. *Handel's Cloud* (2011) [Figure 1] is in keeping with *The Clock Drawings* [Figure 2] and *Recent Drawings by George Gershwin* [Figure 3] a new series of works by Göllner. Together they make esoteric inquiries into energy systems of things passed; as the artist suggests, "abstract compositions are presented that contain the direct physical energy of people who died a long time ago. Knowing how the images were generated imbues the lines with a reliquary-like presence. With *Handel's Cloud*, the puffs of white smoke set against the white-washed ceiling of St. Brigid's appear as being of the church and, appropriately, the phenomena is rare and indefinable."[9]

[7] Ian Maclean, "Natural and Preternatural in Renaissance Philosophy and Medicine", *Stud. Hist. Phil. Sci.*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2000. 35.

[8] Adrian Göllner is a contemporary conceptual artist working in Ottawa who holds an abiding interest in abstraction and the history of the last century. Over the last decade, Göllner has received more than 15 public art commissions in a number of cities including Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto, and Berlin. Notable among these are an integrated sculpture for the Canadian Embassy in Berlin, and the project entitled 'Boulevard,' in which he designed and created artistic street lighting for the City of Vancouver's presentation of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. Göllner's work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions throughout Canada, the United States, Europe, and New Zealand.

[9] Adrian Göllner, Artist Statement, 2011. Unpublished.

It was during the Renaissance that the marvellous was embraced, leading to an expansion of the preternatural to include celestial and ethereal presences as well as the human imagination.[10] Theorists even began to favour the artist's creative power as a marvel that could imitate and even rival god.[11] It is within this lineage that Göllner situates himself, yet its veracity is all the more compelling because of the artist's witty and playful push and pull of what is real and what is illusion. *Handel's Cloud* is reliant upon both ephemerality and a dialogue with the incomprehensible: is the gently rhythmical smoke a vestige of Handel, the messiah, the church, or the artist? In this situation of elision between what is known and unknown, of what is credulous and fake, we explore the preternatural's disposition for wonder and its myriad ranges of perceptual illusionism. The question of how art queries the sensations of what is unknown and un-experienced are also at work in Anne Katrine Senstad's light projection.

Anne Katrine Senstad's site-specific installation, *Kinesthesia for St. Brigid* (2011), is a large video of slowly changing abstract colour projected over the organ and surrounding architectural details of the upper rear of the space and accompanied by J. G. Thirlwell's sound composition. [Figure 4] Senstad is a Norwegian artist working mainly with light installations and she has produced a body of works revolving around concepts of colour synesthesia — works inspired by the overlapping of the senses, particularly of colour and sound.[12] Some of her previous works have dealt with themes of colour and light flux, internal landscapes, and optical perception of the phenomena of space, time, light, and mass. At St. Brigid's, a video projection emits a striking arrangement of colour sequences: a startling blood red — a vibrant blue — a warm green — a stunning yellow, which transgresses through the space to envelop and seemingly disintegrate its architectural details. [Figure 5] The projection floods the organ in the upper rear of the church, merging with the accompanying composition by Thirwell, whose subtle and delicate sound weaves in and out of the modulating colour creating a wash of mystifying tones throughout the entirety of the church.

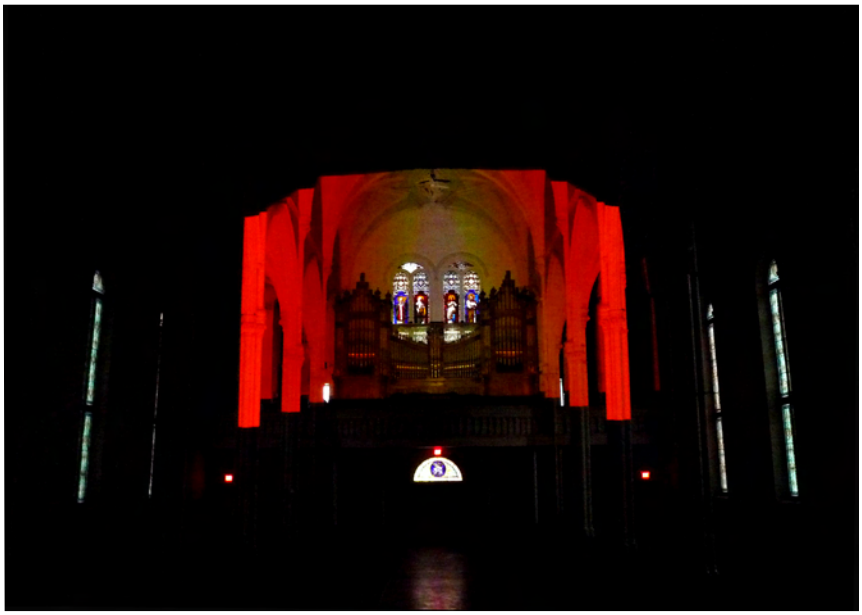


Figure 4, Anne Senstad, Installation as is (1) from *Colour Kinesthesia for Saint Brigid*, 2011

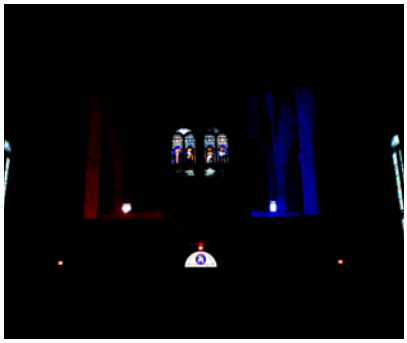


Figure 5, Anne Senstad, Installation as is (3) from *Colour Kinesthesia for Saint Brigid*, 2011

[10] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 161.
[11] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 210.
[12] Anne Katrine Senstad is a multi-disciplinary Norwegian artist living in New York. She holds a BA from Parsons School of Design. Her work examines the perceptive phenomena of light, colour, sound, spatial relations, sensorial and perceptive aesthetics. Her work explores the architecture of space created through light and colour. She works with photography, video, light installations, site and time specific installations and agriculture. Senstad has exhibited widely internationally, including Zendai Moma in Shanghai, Museum da Casa Brasileira in Sao Paulo, The Noorderlicht Institution in The Netherlands, Houston Center for Photography, Gary Snyder Fine Art, Elga Wimmer Gallery, Björn Ressle Gallery in New York, Utsikten Kunstsenter in Norway, and with KK Projects during Prospect 1 in New Orleans. She is currently working on a major public art commission in collaboration with the award-winning Norwegian architecture firm Snøhetta to be completed in fall 2011. Art fairs include Scope Miami, Scope New York, DIVA Paris, Miami Photo, London Book Art Fair/Serpentine Gallery, Paris Photo, Sao Paolo Contemporary Art Fair, HAF Hong Kong, Seoul Art Fair, KIAF Korea International Art Fair, and MiArt Milano Contemporary Art Fair. Senstad's work appears in private, corporate, museum, institutional and gallery collections.

Senstad's work has an intertextual relationship with Wassily Kandinsky's theosophically inspired theories of art, in which the dematerialization of the image and the move towards synesthetically informed abstraction inspires spiritual revolution. Although Senstad is not overtly preoccupied with the avant-garde revolutionary instinct of Kandinsky or his spiritualism, they share the desire to immerse the viewer in a symphony of colour and light, to elevate and stimulate perceptual and aural interrelationships in order to access experiences of a higher order. Unlike Göllner's subtle intervention, Senstad's piece is all engulfing yet equally indefinite and strange, lending itself to a simulated-metaphysical inquiry, bordering on the sublime wherein the spectral presence of St. Brigid's is literally illuminated.

Avantika Bawa[13] has created a series of interventions with bright yellow plastic wrapping and ramps, placed rhythmically throughout the pews and altar of the space to mimic the key of 'E' which is played from a boom-box [Figure 6]. Bawa is known as a site-specific, minimalist sculptor who comments on mass consumption through appropriations of commercial objects and the subtlety of perception in the built sphere. [Figure 7] Her forms are often simple and quietly integrate with the architectural features of the space exhibited, creating witty illusions and subversions.

At St. Brigid's, Bawa was inspired by the aural dynamic of the space between the altar and the organ to create a sculptural equivalent to the musical note of 'E': "By actualizing this ethereal and aural resonance in what may appear to be an overtly 'artificial' manifestation," she argues, "I bring the history, aura and mysticism of the space back to a state that is tangible."[14] The work titled *[..#..#....]* is an elegant intervention of 'blips' and pulses of yellow, the colour closest to the chord of 'E.' The yellow placements lead the eye to a yellow-gold ramp which highlights the convergence of how sound, light and perspective are in a spiritual context. The bright and warm yellow intentionally contrasts with the bleak white and gray of winter, while evoking a kinship with St. Brigid who, in turn, is associated with Spring.

Contemplation of light, imaginings of sun, warmth and effulgence abound, yet the yellow is also plastic and hence, utterly artificial, commercial and disposable in its placement, further contorting our ability to read between that which is authentic or mischievous in its speculations on faith. Neither cynical nor devotional, Bawa's yellow composition unfurls throughout the space, creating a lively intervention: "I am interested in working formally and abstractly. This to me is more powerful, especially when seen in the context of a church, an ornate space that is already loaded with beautiful imagery. My choice of yellow is a reaction to the bleakness of the Northern winter. It was also triggered by a

Figure 6, Avantika Bawa, Installation Sketch for *[..#..#...]*, 2011

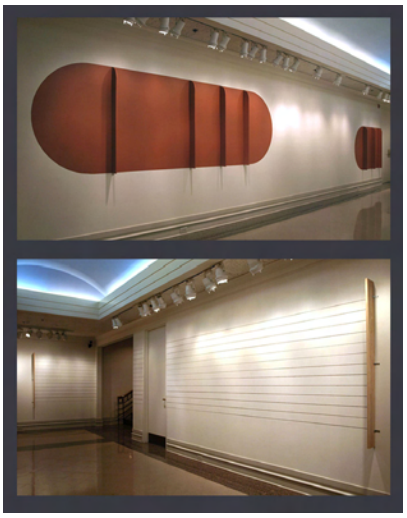


Figure 7, Avantika Bawa

[13] Avantika Bawa is an artist, curator, and academic. She has an MFA in Painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1998) and a BFA in Painting from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India (1995). She was a participant at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2008), the Vermont Studio Center (2009), Milepost 5, Portland, Oregon (2010), and the Jentel Artist Residency Program, Wyoming (2010). Noteworthy exhibits include: The South by East Biennial in Boca Raton, Florida; solos at The Columbus Museum, Columbus, Georgia; Saltworks Gallery and the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, Atlanta, Georgia; Lalit Kala Academy and Nature Morte Gallery, New Delhi, India; Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, India; Disjecta and Portland State University, Portland, Oregon; and juried group shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Georgia, The Drawing Center and Smack Mellon, NY and SAVAC, Canada. Her works have been reviewed in international publications such as the New York Times, Art Papers, Art Lies, Art India, Art Asia Pacific, The Oregonian, and The Times of India, amongst others. Bawa's curatorial work began with a hotel room show during the Art in Chicago fair (1998) and has grown through her studio and gallery, aquaspace – a laboratory for new and multi-media art. In 2004 she was part of a team that launched Drain: A Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture (www.drainmag.com). She is currently Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Washington State University, Vancouver, Washington.

[14] Celina Jeffery, Interview with Avantika Bawa, November 2010.

desire to bring in a golden radiance to the church, in a sort of synthetic way (the yellow gold has a fakeness to it, accented by the shiny vinyl I am using). Plus there is an India-ness to the colour that I relate to."[15] The particular colour of yellow chosen by Bawa is known as 'Indian yellow' or peori, which was originally derived from cow urine fed with mangos. This warm gold-yellow is also seen in Indian miniatures, and throughout Indian culture — from the marigold derived powder used in holi to the sun itself.

Colour is thus the key in both the work of Bawa and Senstad and while neither are explicitly religious, they do galvanize its "mystical potency" as described by Michael Taussig.[16] Taussig's discussion of what makes colour sacred is reliant on an understanding of its subversive nature, its ability to exist beyond the categories of comprehension, to be simultaneously substance and action, both within the world and the imagination: colour, he states, is a magical substance "that floats like the breath of dying sun, a polymorphous substance that is the act and art of seeing."[17]

Figure 8, Mariele Neudecker, *Before You Were Born*, 2001

At the Canadian Museum of Nature, 'inexplicable' events in nature create categorical shifts between art, nature, metaphysics and knowledge. The artists participating in this exhibition — Marie Jeanne Musiol, Mariele Neudecker, Anne Katrine Senstad, Sarah Walko, and Andrew Wright — each explore nature as embedded within the micro: fragments of nature that are isolated, collected, examined and perceived. In turn, their works mimic, invert, entomb, and subvert the natural.

The slippage between art, nature and imagination found an early expression in the fifteenth century and resulted in the *Wunderkammern*: immense collections of rare, natural and artificial objects which were thought to be the product of both human hand and divine making. Largely produced for royalty, these collections, like Besler's *Wunderkammern* (1561-1629), thrived throughout the sixteenth century.

[15] Celina Jeffery, Interview with Avantika Bawa, November 2010.
[16] Michael Taussig, "Into the Image," *What Colour is the Sacred?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 49.
[17] Taussig, "Into the Image," 47.
[18] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 126.

Drawn from art, nature and science, the presentation and experience of wonders were embedded in cosmological and metaphysical systems of inquiry.[18] In the 'cabinets of curiosity' of the seventeenth century, veritable museums of preternatural objects, the boundaries between art and nature were further intentionally hybridized and united under the concept of the marvellous.[19] Questions arose as to whether art could and should 'outdo' nature?[20] With the emergence of natural history in the classical episteme, the idea of nature's continuity and structure became the distinguishing element of natural history: thereafter the Enlightenment sought to discredit the rare and portentous through epistemological explanation. Despite our contemporary acceptance of nature as an unstable category, vestiges of the Enlightenment's desire to analyse, quantify and empirically evaluate nature are still prevalent. Marie-Jeanne Musiol's electromagnetic herbarium, a collection of images which register the energy of plants as light uses a quasi-quantifiable and systematic method, but with a curious, artistic and philosophical aim rather than a scientific one.[21]

In *Preternatural*, Musiol has created a version of the museological herbarium: a term used in botany to describe a collection of preserved plant specimens. Musiol's herbarium is a botanical collection of plants, specifically of the Eastern Forests of Canada, but their taxonomic structure is that of energy. It rehearses the preternatural 'cabinet of curiosities,' with its systematic display of luminescent plants, each consecutively displayed. The notion of a classificatory system is present therefore, but the idea of a botany of energy is speculative, explorative and poetic.

Marie-Jeanne Musiol, who was born in Switzerland and currently lives and works in Quebec, Canada,[22] is most well known for her electromagnetic images of the energy fields of plants.[23] Here, Musiol presents *The Radiant Forest* (*Energy Herbaria*) (2011) [Figure 9], an installation derived from her *Bodies of Light* (1994; ongoing), a series of photographic experiments of light fields which emerge from plants that are detectable via an electromagnetic technique [Figure 10]. Musiol uses electro-photography to probe the material surfaces of leaves, flowers and various plants in order to illuminate energy as it is expressed through different states within the plant. The technique uses both analogue and digital photography: "the light field of the plant is initially captured on a black-and-white negative. Observed through the naked eye or printed on paper, the details

Figure 9, Marie-Jeanne Musiol, *Blackcurrant* (2011) from *The Radiant Forest Energy Herbarium*. Electromagnetic capture. 7 in. x 5 in.

Figure 10, Marie-Jeanne Musiol, *Tricyrtis*. From *Mirrors of the Cosmos*. Video, 2006, 16:46 min.

[19] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 262.
[20] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 262.
[21] Marie-Jeanne Musiol, Public Talk, Ottawa Art Gallery, 30th, January 2011.
[22] Marie-Jeanne Musiol records the luminous imprints of plants revealed in electromagnetic fields. She is presently constituting an energy herbarium variously installed in galleries, museums and outdoor venues. Her recent photographic work probes the light fields surrounding leaves to uncover mirror images of the cosmos enfolded in the light corona. Her presentations of electro-photography in national and international forums focus on magnetic fields as carriers of information and speculate on the holographic nature of the universe (see www.musiol.ca).
[23] Musiol has also worked in Auschwitz: When the Earth Withholds (1996) features images of fields on the outer rim of these camps, whose fully grown trees obscure and envelop the camps, rendering them unrecognizable as specific places of testimony. The series that followed, In the Shadow of the Forest (Auschwitz-Birkenau) (1998), reveals the oblique presence of ash and bone, a presence that subverts the pastoral imagery. A parallel series, a public art installation entitled Silences (1994–2002), also includes images of the periphery of Auschwitz-Birkenau, but these are accompanied by two portraits, one of a young Caucasian man and another of an elderly Vietnamese woman, who actively look out onto the places of destruction represented. Regarding Musiol's most recent Auschwitz series, see Celina Jeffery, "Contemplating the Void: Marie-Jeanne Musiol's Black Holes," Prefix Photo 12.1 (2011): 23.

are not apparent. But once scanned, the same photo negative yields new information stored in the silver layer."[24] The practice allows the imperceptible to be seen: for the effects of pulsating, bright light, which stream from the veins and edges of foliage, are rendered visible to the naked eye.

Musiol's images suggest that plants do have sensitivities: they are extremely fragile, responding to atmospheric weather — heat and cold, the sun and moon, as well as the emotions of human beings surrounding them. Thus, while these energy fields are revealed, their explanation is less well understood, providing more questions than answers: does a leaf have a nervous system? Does it react to direct thoughts? Her objective then is to create a physical manifestation of the processes in which cells communicate through electrical impulses: "Art," she states, "will throw us into new realities before they are understood or fully described."[25] We witness an invisible life of plants: emanations of light energy which are startling in their beauty and yet, all the more curious and enigmatic because these bursting secretions of light are the visualization of the plant's last breaths before dying or the point at which the plant interacts with Musiol's own energy system as momentarily restores [Figure 11].

Figure 12, Marie-Jeanne Musiol, *Silver Maple* (from *The Radiant Forest, Energy Herbarium*), 2011

Figure 11, Marie-Jeanne Musiol, *Mirrors of the Cosmos no. 16* (Fuschia), 2006

The results of Musiol's particular treatment of flora and fauna using this method are entirely spectral in effect. Ghostly and ethereal, they belong to a realm at once familiar and yet of another order. This is especially true of the images that are microcosmic in their concern [Figure 12], wherein minute aspects of the plants are magnetized to reveal a wafting of light which emerges from tiny but vibrant particles of matter. These subatomic units of light, which emanate through the darkness, are deceptive in their ability to double as images of the magnitude and expanse of cosmic matter. Indeed, there is an uncanny similarity between electro-images of plant energy and images of the cosmos taken with the Hubble telescope.[26] Like clusters of exploding stars amidst dark matter, these peculiar bursts of light allude to the infinite potential of both the reality of energy fields and our comprehension of them.

In this sense, the *Radianr Forest* addresses the possibilities of existences beyond the realm of the visible, and as Musiol explains, they are a means of "expressing the nature of energy felt in the apparent world."[27] They are 'transitional' images: neither material nor non-material, neither matter nor void, but a concentrated engagement of the senses that seeks to bring expression to the truly mysterious. There is, then, a metaphysical inquiry at work in these images which acknowledges energy fields that neither belong solely to the 'natural' sphere of visible, universal truths, nor to the domain of the miraculous or unexplainable. Instead, they exist

[24] Marie-Jeanne Musiol, Unpublished Artist Statement, 2010.
[25] Celina Jeffery, Interview with Marie-Jeanne Musiol, March 3, 2011.
[26] Marie-Jeanne Musiol, Public Talk, Ottawa Art Gallery, 30th January 2011.
[27] Marie-Jeanne Musiol, Unpublished Artist Statement, 2010.

in the movement of a classificatory slippage more akin to the preternatural disposition for unveiling a mystery (the mystery of energy as light), only to be instantly shrouded in the uncertainty of knowing and comprehending the image. As such, these luminescent images of plants read as much as vibrations and sensations as they do as representations of energy systems. At once deeply contemplative and rapturous, they create a forum in which energy fields become the realm of beauty, exhilaration, fragility and death.

Mariele Neudecker is a German-born artist who currently lives and works in Bristol (UK).[28] Neudecker works with sculpture, installation, film, and photography in order to examine the concept of nature as both elemental and constructed. Her display-case vitrines of natural scenes in a chemical miasma navigate a path between reality and illusion, the natural and the unnatural, and representation and perception.

The work emerges from the Romantic tradition: in which wonder and the portentous are held in balance. Sometimes there are direct quotations of Romanticism, as in *Stolen Sunsets* (1996), in which she mimics the work of Casper David Friedrich, while in others it is more general. In her tank piece, *Heaven, the Sky* (2008), two large vitrines situated high above eye level and at differing heights, contain a craggy, Alpine model mountain range that is also reminiscent of Friedrich's Alpinescapes, but now suspended and illuminated in liquid. Her motivation for such pieces has as much to do with cartography and time as it is about the marvellous;[29] they 'map' an imagined landscape that exists outside of knowable time and suspends it in a fluid world. The chemical intervention in these landscapes subverts their proposed geology: bubbles accumulate on the creases

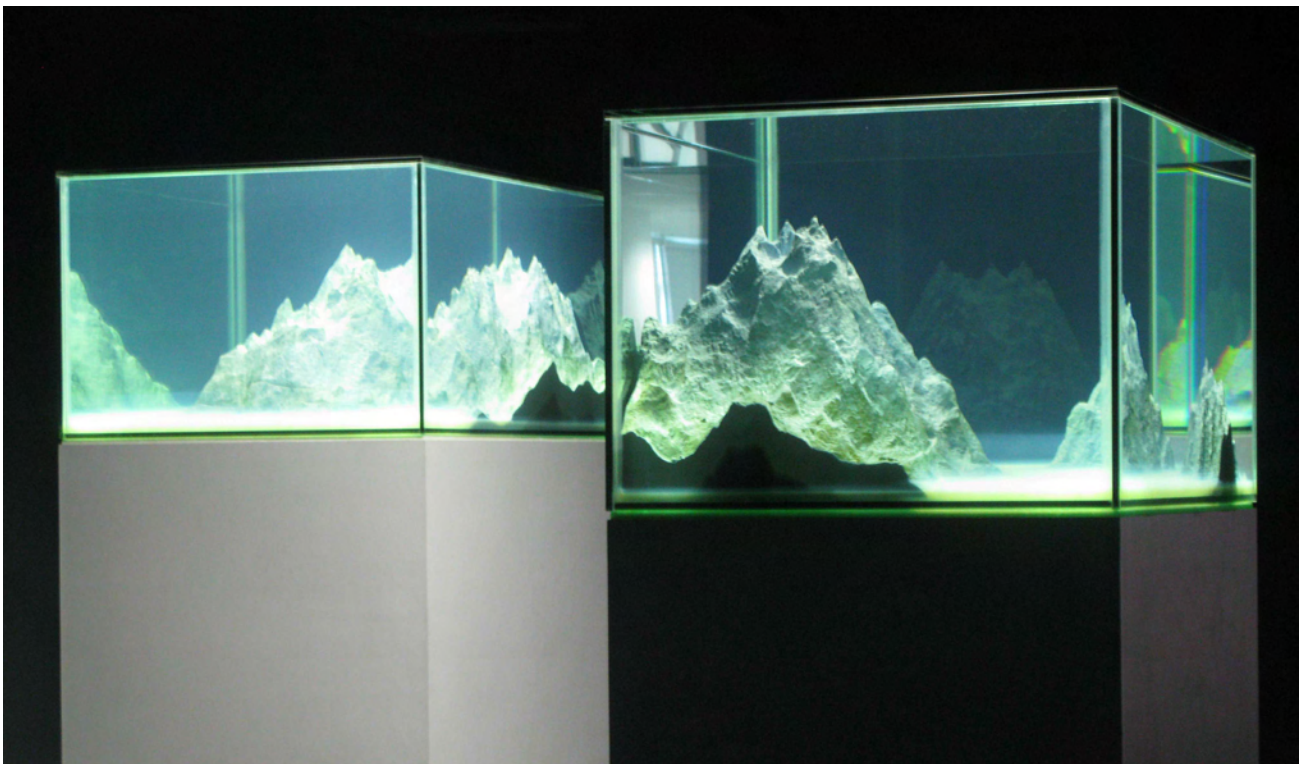


Figure 13, Mariele Neudecker, *Heaven, The Sky*, 2008

[28] Mariele Neudecker (born 1965, Germany) lives and works in Bristol, UK. She uses a broad range of media including sculpture, film and installation, and she works around the notion of the 'Contemporary Sublime.' Neudecker has recently been short-listed for the Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, London, and was the prize-winner at the 11. Triennale Kleinplastik -- Larger Than Life -- Stranger Than Fiction, Fellbach, Germany. In 2011 she showed in three international group exhibitions: Otherworldly: Artist Dioramas and Small Spectacles, MAD Museum, New York; Screaming From The Mountain: Landscapes and Viewpoints , Sörlandets Kunstmuseum, Norway; and Rohkunstbau -- Power, Marquart Castle, Berlin, Germany; and Belvedere. Warum ist Landschaft schön? Why is Landscape Beautiful?, Arp Museum, Bahnhof Rolandseck, Germany. Upcoming in the near future are solo exhibitions at Thomas Rehbein Galerie, Cologne, Germany and at the Kunstmuseum Trondheim, Norway (see www.marieleneudecker. co.uk).

[29] Gemma de Cruz, "Mariele Neudecker" [interview], *Art Review 52* (2000): 57.

Figure 14, Mariele Neudecker, *4.7 km = ~ 3 Miles or ~ 2.5 Nautical Miles*, 2009

of hillsides imitating rain, a thick fog sluggishly rises from the syrupy foot of mounds, while the light-infused tank frames the soaked, watery landscape in distinctly northern, almost glacial contexts.

In *Preternatural*, Neudecker displays another vitrine sculpture called *4.7 km = ~ 3 Miles or ~ 2.5 Nautical Miles* (2009) [Figure 14]. *After 400 Thousand Generations* (2009), it is the second in a series of 'eye-ball' sculptures, its form being a reference to how the human eye perceives in an upside-down manner. Two globes encase models of lighthouses situated on a rock and cliff which are inverted and hung upside-down in a chemically induced atmosphere. For Neudecker, the rapidly changing systems of cartography and the value systems associated with them is a challenge which she confronts in this work: "Automation and the introduction of GPS may have superseded the need for manned lighthouses but the light from a turning beacon remains an important symbol."[30] Although the vitrine-landscape is permanently and undeniably sunken, flooded in liquid, which stimulates our wonder of the worlds represented, they may also be read in a somewhat literal way as a world awash and asunder. Thus this fragile landscape merges the romantic and preternatural: it is ungraspable, untouchable, dead, but playful and curious, too, like an inverted snow globe.

There is no human presence in Neudecker's work, only residues of human intervention: roads, lighthouses, masts, tunnels and so forth. This absence is rendered ambiguous and unsettling through the play of scale: the beacon dominates the cliff as if it is the sole premise of this world and yet is utterly contained and miniaturized too. In this upside down world, we journey through a remote and fragile topography wherein habitability is a lonely prospect. As such, Neudecker is not commenting on the concept of an untouched nature, but 'our relationship to nature, the 'ownership' of it, and our interpretation of the representations of it.'[31]

Neudecker's vitrines contain a saline solution that are tinted with colours and use artificial light to create atmospheric effects of subtly changing light and air in the sky.[32] They are also utterly temporal as the liquid solution creates a localized and ever changing atmospheric weather system, while the viewer who walks around the tank also experiences a constantly shifting landscape of reflections and illusion, wherein the image can extend to an unlimited, infinite expanse. *4.7 km = ~ 3 Miles or ~ 2.5 Nautical Miles* is the epitome of that which is 'beyond nature': its inversions deviate and obscure nature, while rendering the macrocosmic as microcosmic and vice versa. In a sense, it is this 'impossible condition,' improbable cartography and state of being that makes Neudecker's work so captivating.

4.7 km is accompanied by a large photo-print of a tank piece called *Much Was Decided Before You Were Born* (2001) [Figure 9]. It also depicts an inverted landscape, but

[30] Mariele Neudecker, Unpublished Artist Statement, 2011.
[31] Mariele Neudecker, Email to Celina Jeffery, July 28, 2011.
[32] Juan Cruz, "Realising the Virtual," Make: *The Magazine of Women's Art 83* (May 1999): 16–18.

this time it is of a large tree, submerged in thick and murky fog. It similarly speaks of distances, of our inability to comprehend the truth of its scale and inversion, but it also focuses upon the distance of time, of an ancient, primordial geology. This antediluvian landscape does not belong to us: it lives beyond our presence and yet is so majestic and tangible somehow, that it enters into the contemporary realm. Temporality is subverted and instead we are encouraged to contemplate time as not just relative, but as an illusion, a reinvention of the world which is at once wondrous, curious and melancholic too: melancholic for an ungraspable and truly unknowable universe. There are then (at least) two kinds of time and nature at work here: ancient and present, real and illusory, in which the viewer presides over an uncanny and unearthly presence. Here, ethereal landscapes that are at once portents and scientific inquiries dovetails with the preternatural, conjuring an experience which Homi Bhabha identifies as that which resides between rapture (aura) and the everyday or that which is negotiated (agora), "for art, in the unresolvable 'side-by-sideness' of insight and insouciance in that uneasy space and time in between birth and death, opens up a space of survival in the interstices between aura and agora."[33]

Sarah Walko was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and now lives and works in New York City.[34] Walko's work explores the object as a site of memory and preservation. In the spirit of the collector, Walko amasses genealogies of objects that evoke curiosity and wonderment. She is currently working on new sculptures, drawings, sound and multimedia film projects, as well as a book that draw from histories of collecting and particularly, of museums of Natural History. Her site-specific installation for *Preternatural, It is least what one ever sees*, a mixed media sculptural installation with sound, follows this trajectory and incorporates the artist intuitively responding to Natural History collections. The installation comprises custom-made wooden drawers containing hundreds of test tube sculptures, microscope slides, plants, fish, actuators, clock motors, miniature landscapes, sound, and clear gel pods that ascend to the ceiling. The fifty or so small glass vials hung from the ceiling, containing clear gel, create yet another perspective of an upside down world: of seas falling from the sky. These miniature tides suggest the possibility of a journey, in which we stand at the edge of a voyage.

Figure 15: Sarah Walko, *It is least what one ever sees*, detail, 2011]

Walko is a published poet and employs a literary stance to frame the work as is indicated in her lengthy title of this piece. *It is least what one ever sees* is subtitled:

> It is very least what one ever sees
> (all that we share in these drawers)
> (myelin sheath) (birds linking landscapes)
> (and nets hold light and dark clouds, centuries, weather satellites)
> (they seep) (static, silence heresy)

[33] Homi K. Bhaba, "'Aura and Agora': On Negotiating Rapture and Speaking Between," In Sophia Shaw and Richard Francis, eds., *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996). 11

[34] Sarah Walko attained her MFA from Savannah College of Art and Design and her BA from University of Maryland, College Park. She is currently the Executive Director of the Triangle Arts Association, a non-profit arts organization in Brooklyn, New York and a writer for White Whale Review, an online literary journal. She has participated in numerous artists workshops and residency programs and works as an Art Director with the independent film collective Santasombra which has shown at numerous international film festivals, including the International Berlin Film Festival and the Latin American Film Festival. Recently her work has been shown in group exhibitions at the WORK gallery, Brooklyn, New York; The Last Supper Festival, Brooklyn, New York; and the El Museo De Arte in El Salvador.

Figure 16, Sarah Walko, *Glass Orchestra*, 2008

Figure 17, Sarah Walko, *Walking Up a Down Room*, 2008

Furthermore, there are a plethora of references to the written word in Walko's work: she wraps, shards, cuts, and rips words from books. For Susan Stewart, the book is an object of longing which acts as "metaphors of containment, of exteriority and interiority, of surface and depth, of covering and exposure, of taking apart and putting together."[35] Similarly, Walko's works conjure an impulse for other worlds, inversions and ruptures of one reality for another. Here, we are presented with another nature, a nature which, like Neudecker, speaks of the timelessness of time, of the constant tension between life and death, of a world which values and reveals, albeit obliquely, the unknown. As her titles suggest, we are meant to get 'lost' in the meandering, to relish in that which is mysterious to us, to be quiet and curious. Here, I don't speak of 'lost' in the geographic sense, but the situation of losing oneself in a similar manner to the Romanic disposition for wandering, of intentionally losing the self in that which is unknown only to also discover it again. As Rebecca Solnitt argues, "getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing."[36]

Walko's highly intricate installations comprise of many hundreds, if not thousands, of tiny, disparate sculptural and live objects that seek to exist outside of 'natural' logic. Vials, microscope slides, and glass test tubes are key objects in many of her works including *It is least*, *Glass Orchestra* (2008) [Figure 16] and *Walking Up a Down Room* (2008) [Figure 17] all of which explore the heritage of museums of 'Nature.' Vestiges of Victorian collecting practices abound, both revealing and concealing their contents: moss, string, a key, pebbles, and torn text neatly occupy their vials but appear in such abundance that they became nearly impossible to 'read.' In *It is least*, micro landscapes on clock motors gently rotate, while the actuators slowly tap the vials to create a gentle 'ping' sound. In the centre, an ocean is miniaturized within a fish tank, containing fish and the small clear pods which rise and ascend to the ceiling. It is reminiscent of the 'cabinet of curiosities,' yet its mischievous content and lyrical presentation produce a constellation of effects, rather than an exclusively object-based inquiry.

Walko's worlds within worlds comprise of live flora and fauna, text, and other fragments of matter: shells, feathers, and beads amongst them. James Clifford's description of Surrealism as an "aesthetic that values fragments, curios collections, unexpected juxtapositions, that work to provoke the manifestation of extraordinary realities drawn from the domains of the erotic, the exotic and the unconscious," is at play here.[37] Like the work of American Surrealist Joseph Cornell, there is both a mystery and melancholy within the dynamics of Walko's 'collection': torn fragments, texts that

[35] Susan Stewart, "The Miniature," On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 37 [37–69].
[36] Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 22.
[37] James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History 23.4* (Oct. 1981): 540 [539–64].
[38] Stewart, "The Miniature," 46.
[39] Sarah Walko, Unpublishd Artist Statement, 2011.

Figure 18, Anne Katrine Senstad, *The Sugarcane Labyrinth*, 2011

are unread and unreadable, collections of mundane things that are reconsidered as worthy enough to hold on to and redisplay.

The dynamic of the miniature and the gigantic is an important one for Walko, whose works are reliant on the verbose and multiplying significance of that which is tiny and supposedly insignificant.[38] As the artist describes, "These tiny worlds and words fluctuate between micro and macro and simply say, 'You are nowhere else right now but here and this is the invention of questions'."[39] Although some of Walko's works are contained within boxes or framed within the context of stop-motion animation, the majority are installation practices in which the works 'spill' out: falling, climbing, reaching out into the space of the gallery in unwieldy proportions and yet always delicate in sensibility. As in Neudecker's and Musiol's work, there is an interplay of the micro- and macro-cosmic: of matter inverting and receding while simultaneously unfurling and exploding in magnitude.

There is a narrative compulsion at work in the act of collecting: [40] gestures or imaginings as to where these things came from that we try and piece together. The materials are often humble, as in Cornell's work such as *Untitled Pharmacy* (1942), but collected with such enthusiasm and articulated with such care and intricacy that they become as precious as an alchemist's.[41] Like Cornell too, Walko is a collector in the true sense: obsessive almost in the sheer quantity and inclination towards the fragments and fragmentation of things. Likewise, while her method of collecting is systematized, the character of her displays are complicated and elaborate,

Figure 19, Anne Katrine Senstad, *The Sugarcane Labyrinth*, 2011

[40] Peter Schwenger, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 143.
[41] Walter Hopps, "Chests and Cabinets," in *Joseph Cornell: Shadowplay Eterniday*, ed. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan et alia (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 92–93.

somehow cancelling and voiding the categories and semblances of the original meaning of the object. Here, mystery leads to a nostalgia for things past, for the frailty of memory and the ungraspable nature of the natural world.

Walko's nature-objects are familiar, not rare or precious but colloquial: we know them, live with them, and have memories about them, but their assemblage and juxtaposition, their exaggerated presence, disclose a hidden aspect, an untold narrative, play, and story. It is within the perception of the viewer that these stories may be re-animated, but as we struggle to comprehend and to know, we experience longing and, ultimately, loss, so that we can never identify with the object, which results in the dual presence of sadness and sweetness that such melancholy inquiries inspire.[42]

At the Museum of Nature, Anne Katrine Senstad presents a video piece that explores a new kind of nature: one that is recovering from the ravages of ecological and social disaster. Duration and dilapidation of the natural and a built sphere play an important role in Senstad's works that concern post-Katrina, New Orleans. In *The Light House*, created for KK Projects (December 2007 to March 2008), Senstad punctuated the debris of an abandoned and derelict home in the St. Roch neighborhood with industrial office lights. They create unusual formal interactions amidst the chaos, glowing to reveal the nuances of the personal remains: toys and sections of furniture that once 'lived' in the space. As the daylight changes into night, the light becomes the only living presence in the house. In the site-specific earth project, *The Sugarcane Labyrinth* (2009) [Figure

Figure 21, Anne Katrine Senstad, *The Sugarcane Labyrinth*, 2011

[42] Schwenger, *The Tears of Things*, 13.

19] Senstad explores the theme of recovery and reverence by developing a 1.4 acre sugarcane labyrinth on a farm in Theriot, Louisiana. Senstad created the work in 2009 as a 'living sculpture/agricultural' land art project over the course of 6 months. The labyrinth — a continuing earth art project — engages with local farming strategies in an act of sustainability, purifying the excessive salt in the soil that has been caused by erosion. It also signifies a spiritual 'path' in which one is invited to become lost in the landscape. One of the creative facets of the project is a video of the making and experience of the labyrinth. Far from a documentary, the 12-minute video explores the concept of the path central to the labyrinth: its multi-directional lines of movement, which render purposeful navigation futile and enhance the giddy excitement and fear of getting lost. Passages of time are observable [Figure 20]: the changing of the seasons and the growth of the labyrinth, but disorientation and timelessness are both pervasive as we move gently through a space which is as dislocated as the areas obliterated by Hurricane Katrina. As we move through the green undergrowth, a pink ribbon is gently interwoven through the cane walls, articulating the artist's presence and an uncanny artificiality that is playful and whimsical [Figure 21].

Andrew Wright's[43] works may be described as multi-tiered inquiries into the nature of perception, photographic structures and technologies, and the ways we relate to an essentially mediated but primarily visual world. Wright uses the photographic medium but works across disciplines: film, installation, and sculpture amongst them. Of late, Wright has been concerned with ideas of darkness and the void, often with monumental and sublime images of nature's drama, as in the Falling Water series (2010). In *Coronae* (2011) [Figure 23] an effulgent burst of light in blackness has been produced by drilling a minute hole in a canister of film which is then exposed, developed, and re-photographed in digital format. For Wright, black is "both surface and space . . . other spaces and places . . . falling in between these two things."[44] Wright's large scale-photographic installation, *Nox Borealis*, featured in *Preternatural*, continues this inquiry by featuring an Arctic snow scene at night.

Nox Borealis is comprised of twin images, one on top of the other: a large black colour field of total darkness and the other, an inverted image of the Arctic at night, depicting the black sky with a thin film of snow acting as a horizon line [Figures 24a and 24b]. A system of lighting within the exhibition space creates the illusion of a whiteout: a visual blurring

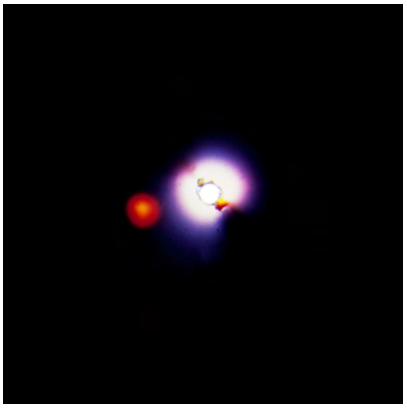


Figure 23, Andrew Wright, *Coronae*, 2011

Figure 24a, Andrew Wright, *Nox Borealis* (Detail), 2011

Figure 24b, Andrew Wright, *Nox Borealis* (Detail), 2011

caused by excessive blustery snow. Here, the pictorial dynamic turns outwards, addressing and inviting the spectator as a participant in a remote and ominous landscape.

The images were taken in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, in 2010-11. The artist was interested in travelling north to experience a sense of scale and time that is totally disorienting and utterly deceptive. The series evolves from Wright's overarching concern for illusionism, wherein the viewer is enticed to participate in a constant perceptual loop: in which

[43] Andrew Wright has exhibited both nationally and internationally, with exhibitions at the University of California, Berkeley, Oakville Galleries, Photo Miami, Roam Contemporary (New York), ARCO '05 (Madrid), Presentation House, Vancouver and the Art Gallery of Calgary. He has also held residencies, including the Banff Centre and Braziers Workshop (UK), and as a 'war artist' with the Canadian Forces Artist Program aboard Canadian warship H.M.C.S. Toronto. He is the founding Artistic Director for Contemporary Art Forum Kitchener and Area (CAFKA). In 2001 Wright won the Ernst & Young Great Canadian Printmaking Competition and in 2007 he was named a semi-finalist for the Sobey Art Award. He has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, The Waterloo Regional Arts Fund, and the Ontario Arts Council. Critical acclaim for his work can be found in publications such as Canadian Art, Border Crossings, and The Globe & Mail.

[44] Michael Hansen, "Opening: Andrew Wright" [interview with Andrew Wright], *Canadian Art Connected*, May 6, 2011: http://www.artsync.ca/opening-andrew-wright/.

we question how we know and see. In this regard, it's important to acknowledge the scale and sculptural dimensionality of his work: there is a reversal of figure and ground on such an expansive scale that it meets the viewer's bodily awareness with immersion. Subject matter slips in and out of the viewer's comprehension as the illusion of nothingness and an inverted snow-scape morph into a moment of immersion for the viewer.

Time is presented as a delusion in the Arctic as our sense of space and bodily relationship to the ground is re-oriented. There is a silence and stillness that results, which feels remote to the frenzied visuality of a media-saturated culture and hence speaks more to the contemplation of an integrative condition of being. As we follow the inverted 'horizon' line through the serialized images we walk in and through the landscape, bringing our attention to the integration of the seen, heard and thought into one panoramic whole.[45]

The contemplation of nature has had a long discourse in the history or art: here it is rendered as sustained observation, reflection upon the interrelatedness of nature which collides with its sublime and terrifying lonely Other. Reminiscent again of Casper David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (1809), the viewer becomes the small and silent figure whose presence is indistinct amidst the enormity of nature's horizon. Mysterious and inexplicable, Friedrich's painting evokes the insignificance of man through the solitude of a figure, a method at play in Wright's vast and remote landscape.[46] It is within the latter thought that we may also consider the mythological resonance of these images: a poetic expression of what is elemental and brutal to the Arctic as both an image and concept. Wright does not seek the picturesque as there is something uncertain and dystopic even in his personal subversion of being 'on top of the world,' which results in images that are far from comfortable and familiar. It is here that we locate the preternatural: in the primeval and even, predatory nature of this desolate scape. We are poised to recognize and accept the powerful forces of nature in direct dialogue with its fragility, the thin snowy line which brings something new: an expression of contemporary anxieties about its disappearance. There is something so remote and incalculable about this place, this other side of the world which most of us will never access, but which is as crucial to our panoramic sense of self.

The Aurora Borealis has been a wonder of the preternatural since the sixteenth century, and here is it re-created as a band of light, a primal gesture of how 'remote' nature can be experienced in the twenty-first century. At times, the image slips in between formless black and the incandescent white on black, in a manner not dissimilar to Marie-Jeanne Musiol. Again, the micro-cosmic and macro-cosmic collide and the reality of 'this' earthly

Figure 25, Shin Il Kim, *Moment to Moment*, 2011

[45] Eleanor Rosch, "If you Depict a Bird, Give It Space to Fly: On Mind, Meditation, and Art," in Jacquelynn Bass and Mary Jane Jacob, eds., *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 39 [37–48].
[46] David Blayney Brown, *Romanticism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2006), 138.

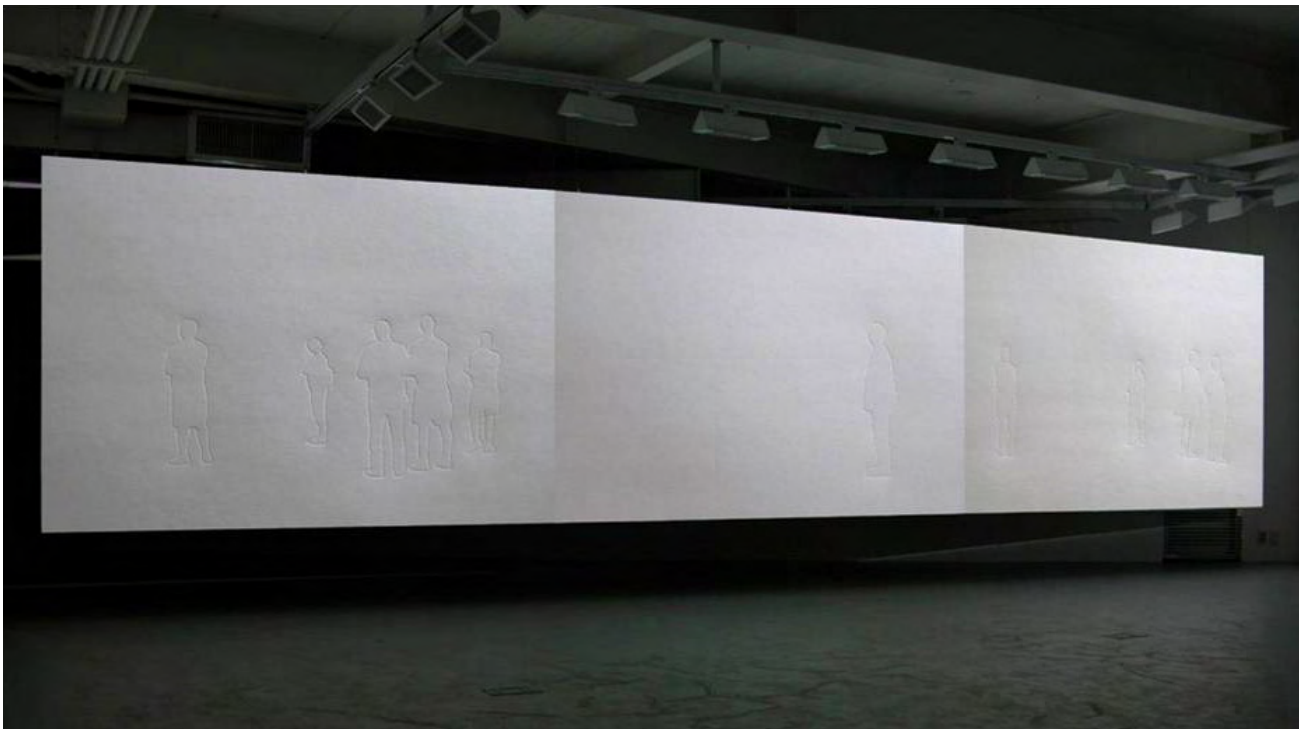


Figure 26, Shin Il Kim, *Invisible Masterpiece*, 2004

world is blurred by the apparition of a landscape that is emblematic of an elementary consciousness, both profound and moving. It is not the object but our experience of the uniquely different landscape that locates them within the preternatural's push and pull between simultaneously grasping and revoking the magnitude of the universe. Expansive in scale and without a framing device, *Nox Borealis* engages the entirety of the image and addresses the viewer as physically embodied but localized. There is adventure at work in this relationship: we enter an unknown void and experience the super-sensible substrates of our imagination.

The work of Shin Il Kim, a Korean artist based in New York City, comprises the third installment of the *Preternatural* exhibit. Kim's works are largely concerned with the act of contemplation: the subtle but concentrated engagement of the senses and the interconnectedness of experience in the immediate 'here and now' as a counterpoint to the frenzied media-saturated world. At the Patrick Mikhail Gallery, Kim displays *Invisible Masterpiece* (2004) (3'08", loop) [Figure 26], a three-channel video which originates from 708 pressed line drawings on paper that then act as a basis for stop-motion animation. The installation comprises three projections side by side, each depicting a scene from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, [Figure 27]. The first is of a group of people in a Modern Art room who essentially stand motionless and with deep consideration, the second is of a person walking back and forth intensely observing a single work, and the third is of a smaller group of individuals who are viewing a room of Van Gogh paintings at close range. Kim only presents the outlines of people viewing art without the actual artworks there, so that they appear to be continuously looking at a void of empty white space.

The three animated scenes recall a Greek frieze, a sculpture in low relief that quietly unfurls a procession of strangers in communion, each bearing witness to the customs and ceremonies associated with the act of experiencing art. Yet, while these characters maybe considered a tribute to Kantian aesthetics of disinterestedness, to dispassionate observation, Kim's intention is to subvert this very logic by evoking the potential of reverie. Thus, the ostensible removal of a focal point (the MET artworks), and hence a subject and narrative, creates an opportunity to mediate upon the conditions of disengagement and receptivity. Kim's process is key as it creates a unique image of subtle, flickering characters, poised between the act of engaging with the artworks (that must now be imagined) and a perpetual state of negation. Kim employs bare spaces — or what might more accurately be described as an aesthetic of reduction — to foster a sense of wonder and profundity. He entices the viewer to focus on what is barely perceptible, the delicate glimmers that create an undulating rhythm throughout the projection, shoring the light into an experience that can only be described as intensely sensory. [Figure 28].

Comprising of three exhibitions at venues across Ottawa: the Museum of Nature, St. Brigid's Centre for the Arts and the Patrick Mikhail Gallery,

Figure 27, Shin Il Kim, *Invisible Masterpiece*, 2004

Preternatural seeks to explore the boundaries of the natural and spaces where the natural and unnatural collide. The preternatural, as explored by these artists, disturb the ontological boundaries of art, nature and meaning. At the Museum of Nature, nature is mediated, inversed and fragmented so as to render it unnatural and exceptional. Here, the confusion between animate and inanimate is a primary concern, a surreality which unites with the preternatural's love for reveling in the mysterious: bizarre fragments, unreadable words, objects of absurd scale, and distortions of the relativity of time and space. The three installations at St. Brigid's explore multiple 'spiritual' conditions: faith; meditation; syncretism; the ineffable, the miraculous; and rapture but from a post-secular perspective. For the viewer, these works create a push and pull between that which maybe grasped and that which is suspended in a state of wonderment. Shin Il Kim's (Korea/USA) animated video projections and drawings at the Patrick Mikhail Gallery

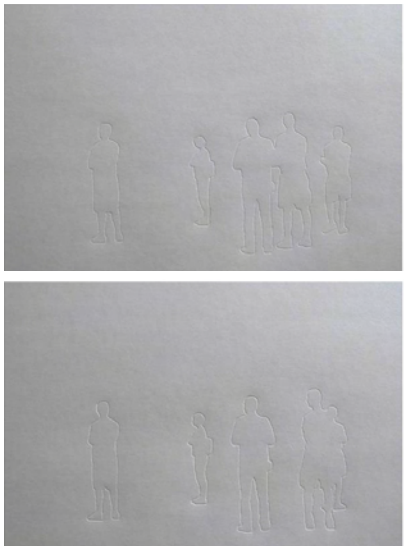


Figure 28, Shin Il Kim, *Invisible Masterpiece*, 2004

bridges the spectral inquiries at St. Brigid's and the subversions of the natural world at the Museum of Nature exhibit. Kim's white figures are so soft and indistinct that they also seem to float in front of the viewer like apparitions, poised for interaction, but suspended in an unknown, ethereal state. Collectively, these works of art exist within the folds of classificatory thresholds: both beyond and between nature and supernature; human and animal; vegetable and mineral; living and dead.

WILDERNESS ONTOLOGY

LEVI R. BRYANT

Perhaps "wilderness" is an adequate name to allude to the being of being. To name the being of being is to allude to that which is common to all existence. It is to name the common being or essence that is supposedly characteristic of all entities and their relations to one another. In this regard, the term "wilderness" is exemplary, for being, existence, is a vast wilderness. Yet what this might mean and how this thesis is to be taken remains to be seen. If I emphasize that the name "wilderness" *alludes* to the being of being, then this is to emphasize that this name is not the only possible name of being, nor is it a conceptually univocal signification that captures the *essence* of the being of being once and for all. Rather, in alluding to the being of being, "wilderness" is hopefully a poetically potent metaphor for intuiting or imagining that which is most characteristic of being as such. As such, other names of being are possible.

However, in having proposed this name for the being of being I must proceed with care. In ordinary language our tendency is to contrast wilderness with civilization. Here wilderness is conceived in topological terms. On the one hand, there is the domain of civilization. Civilization is conceived as consisting of social relations, meaning, moral agency, language, norms, signs, and so on. Civilization is thought as a *place* where people live amongst one another as well as a set of capacities said to be unique to humans (language, moral agency, meaning, etc). On the other hand, wilderness is conceived negatively as that place *outside* of civilization. Wilderness is here conceived as the world of stones, trees, plants, remote islands and forests, and animals where people do not dwell and where the land has not yet been cultivated or exploited. Where civilization is perhaps governed by norms and meaning, the wilderness is thought to be characterized by brute and mechanical causality. In this regard, the wilderness is a place where one goes, usually in a four-wheel drive vehicle, wearing special clothing and carrying a backpack.

Marie-Jeanne Musiol, *The Burning Bush* no. 4. Artist Project, published in *Prefix Photo* (Toronto/Spring, 2007). Captures inside the light field. 22.5 cm. x 42.5 cm.

Insofar as humans and cultural entities are themselves *beings*, it follows that wilderness cannot be something that is other than or that *excludes* humans. If wilderness names the being of being, then it follows that human beings, civilization, and all that comes with civilization are also of the wilderness. Yet if this is the case, then the topological conception of the wilderness must be abandoned. As that which is common to all beings, wilderness, is not a place to which we can *go*, for wherever we are we *already* are in the wilderness. Wilderness is not a place that can be reached, it is not the site of dark Lovecraftian dramas, nor is it a place from which we are alienated. Rather, wilderness is all that is and we are immediately within it even when walking in Times Square in New York City. While in being or wilderness there are certainly places where there are no humans, civilization is nonetheless not something *outside* wilderness. Rather, civilizations are one formation within the wilderness among others. The great storm on Jupiter is another.

Yet if language so ineluctably draws us to think wilderness as something other than and outside of civilization, if it draws us so persistently to think civilization as one *domain* and the wilderness as another *domain*, why choose such a misleading term to name the being of being? If we shift from the register of ordinary language to the register of phenomenological experience, an answer to this question begins to emerge. When we do go to those regions outside the city, suburbs, and countryside, when we hike Glacier National Park or camp along the Appalachian Trail or in Yellowstone National Park, we experience our being in the world and relationship to other beings in a very different way. In the city, for example, we might experience ourselves as sovereigns that have arranged the world for *our* ends. Everything about us is either a tool that we have constructed and that is but a carrier of our intentions, or a screen upon which we project our meanings, or a resource that we draw upon for our aims. Thus, there is nothing about the scalpel that *intrinsically* makes it a scalpel. Rather, the scalpel gets this function through the use we make of it. Jack the Ripper found a very different function for this instrument. Likewise, there is nothing about gold or the dollar bill that *intrinsically* gives it this value, rather it is because we value these things that they take on the value they have. In the city nonhumans are experienced as passive "stuffs" that we arrange for our own ends and upon which we project meaning. We experience ourselves—unconsciously, of course—as absolute masters or sovereigns of a world that is purely passive before our will. Like a king that is transcendent to his subjects, we experience ourselves as transcendent to nonhumans such that we arrange them in terms of our own ends. Within this framework, there is no sense in which other beings are on equal ontological footing with us.

Things are quite different when we visit the wilderness in the ordinary language sense of the term. When I camp at Yellowstone National Park, I no longer experience myself as a *sovereign* of nonhuman beings, but rather as amongst nonhuman beings. I experience myself as a being *amongst* other beings, rather than as a lord of beings. Initially this might sound rather idyllic, as when we speak of "communing with nature," yet this "amongstness" signifies something that has dark or sinister dimensions as well. In the wilderness of Yellowstone National Park, for example, I find myself in circumstances where it is possible for me to be eaten by wolves or mauled by a bear. Where, in civilization, all other things are things that I eat, in the 'wild' I experience the possibility of myself being eaten. In the city I easily escape from the weather by heading indoors, while in the wild the weather becomes a humbling force with which I must contend. In the city everything seems to be posited before my knowing or comprehending gaze and everything seems to be arranged for the sake of my instru-

Andrew Wright, *Standing Wave #6*, Digital C-Prints, 127 x 190cm, 2007

mental gaze. By contrast, in the wilderness I find myself regarded by beings other than humans—the wolves, bears, birds, and so on—and in a field of languages and signs that I scarcely understand. What does the howl I hear off yonder signify? Should I be alarmed by the hoot of that owl? Why did the forest suddenly grow quiet? What caused that branch to snap? Are those approaching clouds a danger or gift? Was this trail created by humans or deer? What are those birds talking about in their songs? In the wilderness I am no longer a sovereign or master, but a being among other beings. In short, in the wilds we encounter other beings as both agencies and as entities with which we must negotiate.

The experience of the wilderness is still too indebted to the ordinary language sense of the term as something opposed to or other than civilization, yet nonetheless it contains a kernel of ontological truth worth preserving. The experience of the wilderness at least has the virtue of dislodging the ontological sovereignty of humans and bringing us before an experience of beings where we are not lords of a world composed of passive nonhumans, but where we are *among* a variety of different agencies with ends very different than our own and where beings are not simply an object of *our* regard or gaze, but where we too are objects of the regard or gaze of others. If we rescue this kernel from the domain of anthropocentric experience and transform it into a *general* ontological concept,

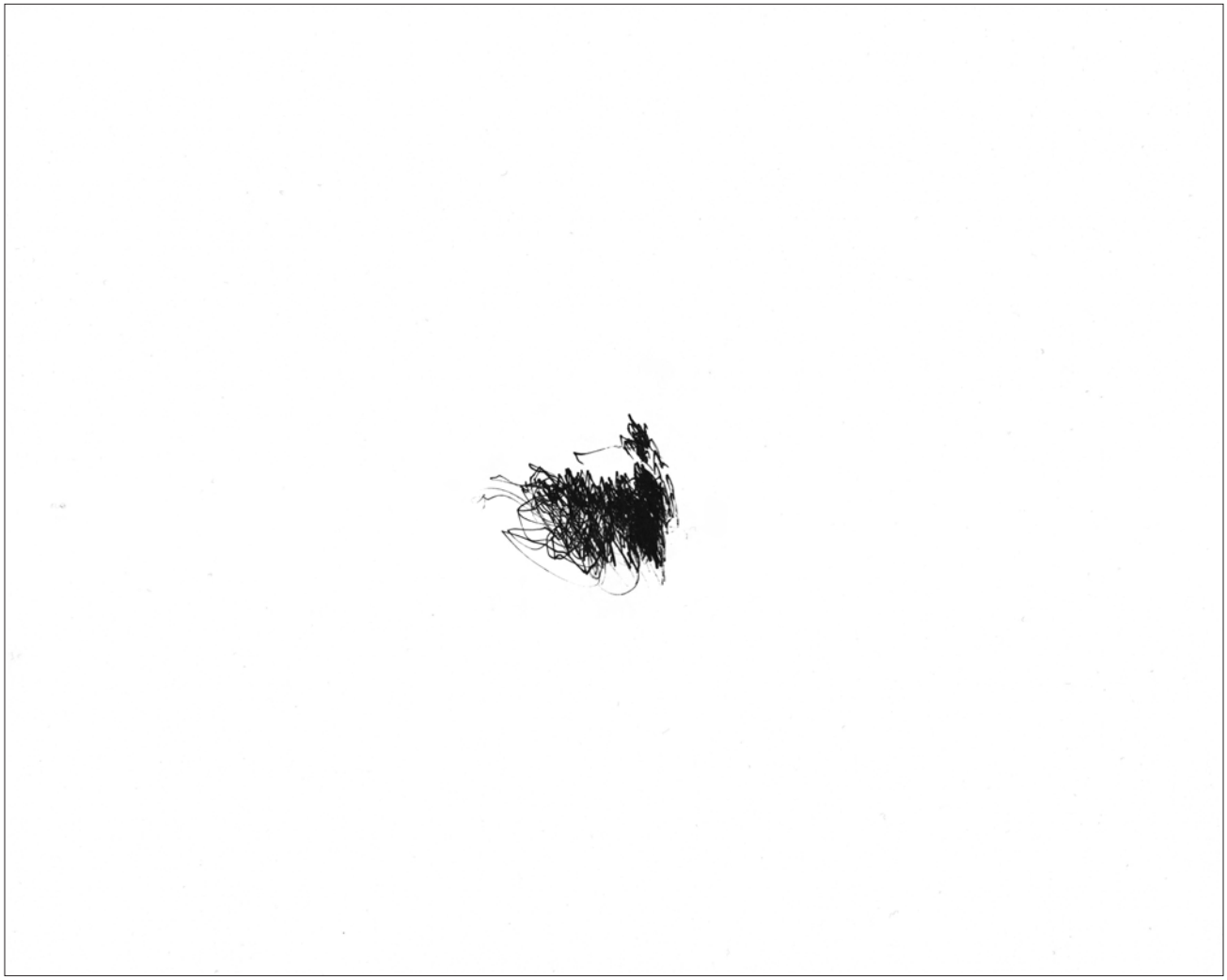
wilderness would signify being as a *plurality* of agencies, without *ontological* hierarchy—one that might refuse any bifurcation of being into nature and culture.

The concept of wilderness as an ontological concept thus has three components. First, wilderness signifies the absence of *ontological* hierarchy in the order of existence. While there are indeed assemblages where some entities are more dominant over other entities than others, there are no lords or sovereigns of being. Humans are but one type of being among others. Second, wilderness signifies the refusal of a binary opposition between nature and culture. While there are certainly natural assemblages that are entirely divorced from human social orders (the planet Neptune, for example), there are no cultural assemblages thoroughly divorced from nonhuman entities. Culture is one more formation in the wilderness among others, not an ontologically unique domain outside of nature. Third, the concept of wilderness emphasizes the distinct agency of the many entities that populate the universe, refusing to locate agency only in humans. Rather than seeing the nonhuman objects of the world as screens upon which we project our human meanings such that these nonhumans are conceived as passive patients of our projections, wilderness ontology invites us to encounter the agency of nonhumans, to adopt *their* point of view, and to encounter these entities not in their identity to our concepts, but rather in their alterity.

Compare the way we think about dollar bills and the wolves of Yellowstone National Park. The value of the dollar bill resides not in its paper, not in its ink, but arises from society and the way in which society projects or confers value onto the dollar bill. The dollar bill is a vehicle or *carrier* of *value*, but there is nothing intrinsic about the materiality of the bill that has value. Were society to be destroyed the paper and ink would remain but the value would disappear from existence. In this regard, from the standpoint of ontology, what is important about the dollar bill is the manner in which it carries *human* intentions or meanings, not anything to do with its materiality. It is for this reason that the value of the dollar bill need not be carnally embodied in paper and ink, but can exist virtually in computer data banks or in bank books. The thingliness of the dollar bill's paper and ink is secondary to the being of its virtual content. Matters are very different with our wolves. Unlike the dollar bill, the features, actions, and behaviors of the wolf cannot be reduced to human intentions, concepts, or meanings. Where there is nothing in the dollar bill that can really surprise us because it already comes from us, we can be and are, by contrast, quite surprised by the wolf as it harbors powers and behaviors that do not issue from us. There is a being here that is irreducible to human intentions and meanings.

Ever since Kant, Hegel, and Feuerbach, the dominant paradigm of critical analysis has consisted in demonstrating that what we take to be features of beings themselves are, in fact, projections of human minds or social constructions as in the case of the value of dollar bills. There are certainly a whole class of beings like dollar bills where this mode of explanation is entirely appropriate. Moreover, this model of critique has been tremendously powerful in fighting racial inequality, gender inequality, and a whole host of other noxious essentialisms by showing how the groundings in "nature" upon which these inequalities are often defended are in fact social constructions *capable of being otherwise*. These are forms of critique that are both tremendously valuable and that ought not be abandoned.

However, this dominant paradigm of analysis has also had the unintended consequence of occluding the thingliness of things, *their* specific contributions, thereby making it difficult for us to discern what things contribute to the world. The dominant paradigm of critical theory tends to reduce the world to



Adrian Göllner, *The movement of George Gershwin's left hand playing Rhapsody in Blue*, Part 1, Ink on paper, 2011

an alienated image of ourselves in a mirror wherein we do not recognize ourselves. The task thus becomes to show that what seems to issue from the mirror in fact issues from us. The world thus becomes our own text, without the other beings of the world contributing anything beyond their function as carriers or vehicles for our alienated meanings. Yet in an age where climate catastrophe increasingly approaches, where technologies seem to behave in ways that cannot be reduced to *our* intended *use*, but rather have a life of their own fraught with all sorts of unintended ecological and social consequences, the limitations of the dominant paradigm of critical theory become increasingly apparent. If we are to think climate change, if we are to think technology, the paradigm of the world as a screen is not enough. Rather, we need to cultivate modes of thinking that help us to become attentive to the alterity of things, the thingliness of things, and the differences that things themselves contribute independent of social construction, human intention, and human meanings.

The analytic philosopher Thomas Nagel infamously asked "what is it like to be a bat?" He concluded that this question cannot be answered because no matter how hard we try, we will still be humans imagining what it's like to be a bat, rather than getting at true and genuine bat experiences. While this may indeed be the case, we can certainly cultivate sensibilities that deterritorialize our own way of experiencing and comprehending the world so as to catch a glimpse of the alterity of bats and of bat ways of being. Beyond human conceptual content and meaning, there is an entire other world of rocks, quarks, wolves, buildings, cities, technologies and

aardvarks. Even money, as Marx taught us, behaves in ways that far exceed the intentions of individual humans and has a strange life of its own in which human beings become entangled in all sorts of miserable ways. Wilderness ontology is an invitation to explore the world of alterity, to adopt the point of view of these other entities, and to explore the intentionality and agency of these entities rather than merely comprehending them in terms of our intentions. It is a profoundly ecological way of approaching being that sees existence as populated by a variety of different agencies rather than something merely posited before one particular type of agency: human beings.

Yet how can we cultivate a sensibility and form of vision that allows us to allude to this alterity and agency independent of human conceptuality and meaning? Are we not condemned, as Adorno suggested in *Negative Dialectics*, to reside in the narcissism of "identity thinking" that only finds its *own* concepts, its own self, as Hegel suggested, in the things of the world? It would seem that art might provide one avenue for an encounter with both the wilderness and the thingliness of things. This might come as a surprise, for in the "folk theoretical" concept of art, the artwork is the carrier of human meaning *par excellence*. Within this paradigm, the work of art is treated as a mere vehicle or carrier that encrypts the intention of the artist, and the task of the art critic and viewer of art is to *decode* the work so as to discover that meaning. In this regard, just as the paper dollar bill is a sort of unnecessary detour such that we can dispense with paper money altogether and just use a debit card that allows exchanges between computer databases, the work of art, the thingliness of a piece of art, is a sort of extraneous detour stranding us between the meaning intended by the artist and our apprehension of that meaning. It seems to follow that once we get at that meaning we can dispense with the work of art.

Yet if you talk to artists themselves, often a very different understanding of art arises. As Melanie Doherty once suggested to me in conversation with respect to her practice of drawing, there is a way in which the subject of the drawing begins to look strange and alien as you draw it. To really see the subject is to see it not as conceptually comprehended, but to see the voids between things in the subject, the spatial organization, and so on. As you draw, what might be called the "object" —where object is here taken as synonymous with a being conceptualized in terms of human meaning and intentions—begins to dissolve and the thing appears in its stead. The meaning of the object for us begins to drop away in the activity of drawing and painting and the thing appears like a phantom in all its alienness. Similarly, in the activity of drawing, painting, and photography, the *context* or of the thing is bracketed, subtracted, and the thing makes its appearance in a decontextualized way.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger famously argued that all entities belong to networks of meaningful relations. For example, hammers refer to nails and boards, and hammers, nails, and boards all refer to the project of building a house to provide shelter. Building on this thesis, in "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger argues that the work of art shows or brings forth a world or this set of meaningful relations. Here he draws on the example of Van Gogh's painting depicting peasant shoes—it's notable that the title of the painting is "A Pair of Shoes," and Van Gogh doesn't mention peasants—arguing that this pair of shoes alludes to or indicates the entire world of the peasant. Yet it seems like something quite different is going on with art. Far from bringing us before the world of meaningful relations, art seems to carry the capacity to break with meaning, to bring the alterity and thinglyness of things to the fore, to allow us to see them both from their point of view and independent of our own mean-

ings and intentions. Art does not *confirm* or *reinforce* our own system of meanings and intentions, but rather *interrupts* the closure of these meanings and intentions, opening us up to the alterity of beings. Here we need only think of the strange, beautiful, and disturbing cinema of Stan Brakhage that is able to bring us before the alterity of even our own bodies as he guides us through an autopsy. Art defamiliarizes the world and allows us to move beyond our human condition and narcissism. The artist is that being that, through their practice and discipline, is able to break with the narcissistic closure of human meaning and concepts.

In short, the work of art does not so much reinforce human meaning, the closure of human meaning in which all entities reflect us, as it *interrupts* human meaning. The frame decontextualizes entities from their horizon of meaning and familiarity. In *What is Philosophy*? Deleuze and Guattari remark that art preserves and is the only thing that preserves. Through paint, stone, metal, and the inscription of words, the work of art creates affects and percepts, ways of sensing and things to be sensed, that are divorced from a context of signification and that can now circulate about the world as their own distinct entities. Through this interruption of the relations of signification or meaning, we become capable of seeing color, hearing sound, seeing form, hearing language, and seeing things for, perhaps, the first time. For the first time, perhaps, we encounter the alterity of things, *their* alterity, and move beyond encountering things as merely vehicles or carriers of our own use and meaning. We encounter ourselves as aliens in an alien world or as those that dwell in the wilderness. And in this way we cultivate a greater sensibility and regard for the things of the world, for the rights of these things.

In her introduction to this catalogue, Celina Jeffery writes, "[t]he concept of preternature is more than nature as science, or nature as art — it exceeds the boundaries of these classificatory systems and opens up a space where the species of things conjure wonder and curiosity, as well as fear of the unknowable." Would it be going too far to say that genuine art is of the order of the preternatural and that it is the preternatural that brings us before the wilderness? This is a hypothesis that would have to be carefully tested, yet it does seem that there is a deep internal link between art, the preternatural, and the wilderness. Neither science nor art, but also science and art, it is the preternatural that exposes us to the alterity of things. As art, the preternatural is that special form of sensibility, that *aiesthesis*, that allows us to discern the thinglyness of things, their being for-themselves, rather than their being as sign, omen, meaning, or use for humans. Here we might think of Andy Warhol's famous Campbell's Soup cans where suddenly, in a flash, we encounter these cans not as commodities, but as strange and foreign entities in their own right. Or again we might think of the realism of Enlightenment art where we suddenly see the beings of nature divorced from human intentions, but as entities in their own right capable of being regarded for their own sake and not for the sake of any meaning or significance they might contain with respect to human projects. Or again we might think of Miro's art that brings us before intensities of color, shape, and lines. In all these cases there's a sense in which our quest for meaning and the sense of the familiar is halted so that we're opened on to another mysterious world of things that fills us with curiosity and wonder, but also fear. Is it any wonder that in all ages art has often been the target of the powers that be? For what is revealed in this *aiesthesis*, this sensibility, is the wilderness and the failure of human meaning to accomplish closure and totalization. Art preserves the preternatural and therefore functions as a perpetual challenge to systems of meaning. Thus, on the other hand, this *aiesthesis* is a condition for any science, whether that science be the more familiar type that seeks to

Sarah Walko, *Tools of Vulnerability/Longhouse* Series, Installation Sketch, 2009, photograph by Christopher Keohane

comprehend nature or that science of existing, that ethics, that seeks to cultivate respect and love for the nonhuman. For in order to discern being it is necessary to halt the system of meaning that discerns nonhuman beings as but symbols, signs, meanings, omens, and uses for humans. Indeed, if we are to encounter humans and civilizations as dwelling in the wilderness alongside other beings, it is necessary to cultivate a sense of human alterity to humans themselves, or the strangeness of both ourselves and civilizations. It is precisely this that preternatural art seeks, it seems to me, to accomplish.

In this regard, art—in both its practice and works—is one avenue opening the way towards an encounter with the wilderness of being. In the work of art a technology, for example, can become de-sutured from its status as a mere tool for a human purpose, but can be encountered in its strange alterity as an animal unleashed on the world that traces its own path and produces its own effects. The work of art allows us to encounter even the familiar things of our everyday life in their independent thingliness, seeing them, perhaps, for the very first time. And it seems that this is what the works collected here in *w*

aspire to. Through the subtraction that takes place in the frame of a photograph, painting, or installation piece, through the variation of perspectives from which these things are encountered, we are brought before the wilderness that is all about us and, to use Jane Bennett's language, the mysterious thing-power that resides in those things that seem so familiar to us.

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