

GEORG KARGL FINE ARTS

PRESS INFORMATION

Unfolded Matters

Nature as Culture, Culture as Nature

Olivia Coeln | Mark Dion | Marcel van Eeden | Peter Fend | Jennifer Gelardo | Barbara Hainz | Jitka Hanzlová | Sanna Kannisto | David Maljkovic | Agnieszka Polska | Robert Smithson | Hannes Zebedin

Opening: June 27, 2019, 6 pm – 9 pm

On view: June 28 – August 31, 2019

Where all things are human, the human is a very different thing.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

„I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.“, climate activist Greta Thunberg said in Davos, January 2019, in an interview for the newspaper *The Guardian*¹. The appeal of the 16-year-old girl goes against the canonical idea of childhood or adolescence as an instance of hope. The strict demand for urgent action pushes the classic question "What to do?" into the category of the past, the obsolete. The time for the discussion on "What should be done" has expired. We humans have already done too much on our own, ignoring that other subjects also have the capacity to act and that they act while we "counter-act".

The first physical effect of panic is paralysis; non-action would then be the precondition of acting to hear what actions other agents have to propose to us. Co-thinking as a condition for participation – but what if our epistemological understanding since the 18th century separates nature from culture and thereby blocks the imagination of common thinking and becoming (in advance)? And again, we fall into the dead end of the rhetorical and non-constructive discussion about the "how".

The exhibition *Unfolded Matters - Nature as Culture and Culture as Nature* draws on this classical distinction between nature and culture and opposes it to another epistemology to discuss issues of artistic approaches to both terms. The Western idea of "human exceptionalism"² – which defines the distinction between nature and culture through its own terms – is contrasted with another, non-Western concept of nature and culture: that of Amerindian perspectivism, which, by assuming the personification of everything being, tends to dissolve this distinction.

¹ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate> 20.06.2019.

² The term "human exceptionalism" is borrowed from Donna Haraway. Donna J. Haraway, *Unruhig bleiben, Die Verwandtschaft der Arten im Chthuluzän*, Übers. Karin Harrasser, Campus verlag Frankfurt/New York, 2018, S. 24.

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The consequence of this inversion is the cross-species extension of the attribute "humanity", whereby the difference between human and non-human can be found in every kind of beings.³

This symmetrical confrontation of the Western and non-Western worldviews is the field of tension in which unfolds the exhibition *Unfolded Matters*. This confrontation forms the starting point for a non-linear negotiation of the diverse artistic positioning and the highlighting of the permeability of the border between difference and similarity, the oscillation and vibration of the "variable ontologies"⁴ of works of art.

Plants are personified in Mark Dion's Nursery - the combination of plants and children's equipment refers to the human ethos of nurturing and disciplining, as well as the paradox of growth and adaptation. Meanwhile, the subject of Agnieszka Polska's poetic work *Your Intestines* considers the collapse of body, economy and culture. Another form of transience is also thematized in the work of Jennifer Gelardo, in which the function of rice paper shifts so much that its fragility is similar to the one-time performativity of an ephemera. Resistances of the living and the constructed express themselves in the tension between roof and plant in David Maljkovic's *Untitled*, 2012. Barbara Hainz explores the material's performativity in the context of its presentation in space: The persistence of wax varies according to the spatial adaptation of the material - adaptability can be a risk and a strength at the same time. In her photographic series, Olivia Coeln creates a taxonomy of natural form. The juxtapositions of excerpts of various natural elements mix similarities and differences of different species and point to a general relationship of forms. In her photographic series, Jitka Hanzlova addresses the relationship between the name and the signified. Scientific terms are subtitles for the portrait style of depicted plants and insects. The depicted creatures, become personified protagonists of images with the generalized and vague title *Untitled*. The subtitles specified in scientific language point to a naming from the outside, which packs the subjectivity of each actor and actor under specific generalization. Sanna Kannisto also uses scientific names for the title of her photos. Only it is not about portraying but about staging: plants and animals are removed from their respective contexts and examined, staged and photographed in stage-like "field studios". The confrontation between science and staging highlights the strangeness of any ecological system. Marcel Van Eeden *Tryptic Untitled*, 2013, parallels image and text, questioning the Western idealization of linearity. The image of a nonlinear landscape together with a strip of text destabilizes (formally and in terms of content) the relationship between image and legend, between background and foreground. In his investigative documentary, Hannes Zebedin investigates the hidden resistance of nature and nature as a suitable place for secret political resistance. In a series of drawings, Peter Fend is experimenting with new graphical representations of the macro and micro worlds: world maps are distorted and new, molecular and atomic relationships reconfigured.

Marc Dion's tile-based work is a critical and ironic narrative about the inequality of the colonial market. The survival of the cruel disproportionality of the exploiters / exploiters is compounded by other images hanging on the wall, which refer to the factual and imaginary, political and natural catastrophes of the Anthropocene. In this context, Robert Smithson's earlier drawings represent a temporal axis of fabulation: the anthropomorphic creatures shown, lead us both

³ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Kannibalische Metaphysiken, Elemente einer post-strukturalen Anthropologie*, Übers. Theresa Mentrup, Merve Verlag Leipzig, 2019, S. 64.

⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, s.a., S. 70.

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into the world of the imaginary, into that age of great discoveries, and into a foreseeable, future, indefinite, post-humanist era.

There is no culture outside of nature and no artwork outside of culture. This circular conclusion implies the creative potential of nature and defines the artwork as a living entity. An entity that, like all living or non-living beings in perspectivism, includes the attribute of "humanity." How can Western works of art be viewed not only from the Western perspective, but also from a different point of view? And what are the implications of this change of perspectives in the dialogue between the viewer and the art? *Unfolded Matters* provides the impetus for experimenting with variable ontologies that could lead us to other types of thinking: co-thinking that distances itself from the epistemological objectification of artworks and, through the recognition of ontological variability, tends to a reciprocal subjectivisation in dialogue with the artworks.