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Happy until
the End
Is Known

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Preface

Think we must. We must think.

— Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret, *Women Who Make a Fuss: The Unfaithful Daughters of Virginia Woolf*, 2011

Revolt! Think we must; we must think. Actually think, not like Eichmann the Thoughtless. Of course, the devil is in the details – how to revolt? How to matter and not just want to matter?

— Donna J. Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene,” 2016

From the middle of 2019 to early 2020, many reports of forest fires got attention in various countries of the world. There were wildfires in the Amazon rainforest, wildfires in California, wildfires in Australia. A bushfire season occurs naturally every year in California and Australia, but the amount of forest destroyed in 2019, and the economic losses caused by the fires, were the most serious in recent years. We might be more surprised by the Amazon: Why did this rainforest burst into such severe fires? In fact they were deliberately set, results of a desire to clear land for agriculture, the strongest part of the Brazilian economy.¹ The Amazon fires, then, may have been a disaster but were not a natural one; they were caused by human beings. The continuous occurrence of large-

scale environmental disasters has made people pay more attention to the climate, and many people immediately think of climate change when they watch the news. In our present moment, the relationship between nature and humanity appears complicated and close, and an increasing number of people are beginning to believe that the destruction of the ecology will have consequences for the future of the human species.

In 2000, the biologist Eugene F. Stoermer and the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen advanced their proposal of the Anthropocene era, providing evidence of the impact of human activities on the global ecosystem and serving as a reminder that “everyone is a participant in

1. See Zoe Sullivan, “The Real Reason the Amazon Is on Fire,” *Time*, August 26, 2019. Available online at <https://time.com/5661162/why-the-amazon-is-on-fire/> (accessed April 10, 2020). According to Sullivan, the Brazilian government, seeing an opportunity in the US–China trade war, is trying to make Brazil the world leader in soybean exports. Flavio Bolsonaro, a senator and the son of the country’s president, has introduced a bill to eliminate an existing requirement that rural properties in the Amazon retain 80 percent of their native vegetation; if the bill is passed, this land would be freed up for the planting of soybeans.

climate change and suffers from its unpredictable consequences.”² The concept of the Anthropocene confirms that environmental disasters around the world may be both natural and unnatural, “man-made.” In California, the *Los Angeles Times* used data to show that the majority of wildfires are caused by humans: “A study published in 2017 found that 84% of U.S. wildfires were caused by human-related activity; the remaining 16% were caused by lightning. About 95% of fires the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection responds to are caused by humans.”³ Although we cannot guarantee that accidents will never happen, if more of us could consciously avoid harming the environment, wouldn’t that horrendous number be lower?

People like to recall the past and to imagine the future, and our actions in both always affect our actions in the present. In the Anthropocene era, we must face the challenge of environmental change, and are haunted by the idea that we are nearing the end of the world. The end of the world in question, though, is the end of a *specific* world, the human-centered one. For Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, that ending has two consequences: “a ‘world without us,’ that is, a world after the end of the human species, and an ‘us without world,’ a humanity bereft of world or environment, a persistence of some form of humanity or subjectivity after the end of the world.”⁴ When nature no longer supports humans, the human can only disappear from the stage. It is impossible to know whether humanity could evolve again after tens of thousands of years. If we

live where we have lost our natural environment, how long will we survive after that? What is certain is that humanity needs nature to survive.

We can try to learn from what has happened, how to avoid the same mistakes in the future, but to use a Chinese saying, people tend to forget about the pain after the scar has healed. If reflection on the past can no longer help us do the right thing, we can try to set goals for the future that may prompt us to reevaluate our behavior. Visions of the future and fear of the end have made us think differently about the environment. If the goal of protecting the environment has fallen into confrontation with the development trends of global society, the concept of ecomodernism may provide a solution: “It refers,” T. J. Demos writes, “to the concept of ‘decoupling’ that claims that humans can use technology to reduce or even remove anthropogenic impacts from the natural world.”⁵ In other words, this environmental philosophy puts forward a concept of sustainable economic development and protection of nature at the same time. A group of authors, including environmental historian Jeremy Caradonna, have argued to the contrary, comprehensively rejecting the ecomodernist scheme: “Ecomodernism violates all we know about ecosystems, energy, population, and natural resources. Moreover, according to ecology and thermodynamics, the development of biology and society is subject to nature, while ecomodernism takes an optimistic approach that deifies humans and claims that it can change the deteriorating climate environment through

2. See Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflection on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2015). eBook Collection, EBSCOhost.

3. Joseph Serna, Rong-Gong Lin li, and James F. Peltz, “How Do Wildfires Start and Spread?,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 2019, available online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-10-29/how-do-wildfires-start (accessed March 20, 2020).

4. Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Is There Any World to Come?,” trans. Rodrigo Nunes, *e-flux journal* no. 65 (July 7, 2015). Available online at <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/is-there-any-world-to-come/> (accessed March 20, 2020).

5. See T. J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017).

social, economic, and scientific forces to protect nature.”⁶ In this view, none of the environmental arguments about capitalism will prove convincing enough to bring about a change in direction because “no population on the planet today is going to willingly trade economic growth for lower carbon emissions, especially since economic power remains the key index of global status.”⁷

When economic development and conservation are in conflict, it is conservation that capitalists and politicians tend to ignore. For Roy Scranton, this means “we have likely already passed the point where we could have done anything about it.”⁸ The end of the human world may actually be coming. The melting of the icecaps, the frequent wildfires, and our helplessness in the face of natural disasters have each become a warning for the Anthropocene. Anticipation of the end gets us thinking about the same question: What should we do now? How should we do it? How do we deal with the posthuman world?

Count No Man Happy until the End Is Known is a space in which to explore the relationship between humans and nature in the Anthropocene era through the work of artists. It invites visitors to think about the relationship between humanity, politics, capitalism, and the ecosystem. The works confront us with our status and identity in the face of ecological and environmental problems that punish both ourselves and the environment. When we’re facing the end of the human world, what choices should we make? The exhibition aims to offer ways of thinking about the Anthropocene

and the posthuman world. In today’s severe situation of climate change and natural disaster all over the world, we must call on people to pay attention to the environmental problems related to human survival.

The title *Count No Man Happy until the End Is Known* is borrowed from a dialogue between the ancient Greek philosopher Solon and Croesus, the famously rich king of Lydia in the sixth century B.C. Having acquired the enormous power and wealth of a king, Croesus couldn’t help but ask Solon whether the philosopher had ever met anyone happier than he. Solon’s answer: “Count no man happy until the end is known.”⁹ Solon’s prediction is both pessimistic and realistic. No one knows what will happen tomorrow, and when we focus on what we have and ignore everything else, disasters can accumulate until they erupt. Only by staying alert and keeping our eyes on the destination can we achieve true happiness.

6. Ibid., 5.

7. Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, 43.

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Solon, quoted in Socrates, “Count no man happy until the end is known,” *Classical Wisdom*, May 16, 2016. Available online at <https://classicalwisdom.com/philosophy/count-no-man-happy-end-known/> (accessed April 11, 2020).

Indelible Marks

Barring a global disaster such as a meteorite impact, Crutzen believes that humans will remain a major environmental force for thousands of years to come. The human impact on the planet has grown enormously since James Watt invented the steam engine in the eighteenth century. Before the industrial revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was under 300 parts per million (ppm); the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere today is over 400 ppm—the highest since the mid-Pliocene period, 3 million years ago.¹⁰ Although climate scientists agree that humans began to influence climate long before the industrial revolution, the Anthropocene is not considered to have begun until 1945, when the United States set off the world's first nuclear device, the “Gadget,” in the New Mexico desert. This experiment, the Trinity Test, formed a rare isotope, plutonium 239, that passed into the geological record and for some scientists marked the start of the Anthropocene.¹¹

Discussion of the Anthropocene inevitably touches on traces of human activity on earth, although

these are often hidden and easily overlooked. A key part of the Anthropocene argument, the world beneath the earth's surface, is also the starting point of artist Guo Cheng's long-term research. Guo's project *A Felicitous Neopast* (2017)—a collaboration with chemist and environmental scientist Heather Leslie, of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam—took place in ADM Amsterdam, an area in northwest Amsterdam that was reclaimed from the sea after World War II. Addressing the long-term impact of human activities on the land, the project is based on in-depth exploration and research in a specific place whose local historical characteristics it takes into account. It is represented in the exhibition by a video, photographs, and an installation. The video and photographs are records of an excavation: an attempt, through a process of sorting, washing, and rinsing, to repair a cubic meter of soil, clearing it of all signs of human activity and restoring it to a state of “No human trace.” The reclamation removed two artifacts in particular from the reclaimed soil: a hardened layer of debris

10. See Nicola Jones, “How the World Passed a Carbon Threshold and Why It Matters,” *Yale Environment360*, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, January 26, 2017. Available online at <https://e360.yale.edu/features/how-the-world-passed-a-carbon-threshold-400ppm-and-why-it-matters> (accessed April 10, 2020).

11. See Lori A. Ziolkowski, *The Geologic Challenge of the Anthropocene*. RCC Perspectives no. 2 (2016): 35-40. Available online at www.jstor.org/stable/26241356 (accessed April 2, 2020). Ziolkowski points out that since plutonium 239 decays, ultimately leaving no trace in the rock record (at least in time as geologists measure it), scientists disagree on whether the Trinity Test is a true marker of the Anthropocene.



GUO Cheng, *Digging Down Until the River Bed*, 2017, photography, giclee on acid-free photo-rag; 18 x 13 cm x 3, courtesy the artist



GUO Cheng, *The New Past / The Past*, 2019, photography, giclee on acid-free photo-rag; 285 × 112 cm × 2, courtesy the artist

from buildings destroyed in World War II, and microscopic particles of plastic adsorbed by the underlying soil. Finally, Guo backfilled the pit with treated soil, leaving geological markers on a piece of land that now contains no “human message.” The project created an intervention in the Anthropocene. The paradox of human-trace-free land in the present era is a crucial aspect of the work; in Guo’s words, “The project is a comment on the entangled relationship among human, environment and other entities on earth from a non-anthropocentric perspective.”¹²

Sun Park is interested in the role of plastic in the Anthropocene. In and after World War II, plastics production exploded along with the petrochemical industrial complex, becoming an indispensable material in contemporary life, with consequences for the environment.¹³ Park’s video and photography installation *Invasion series 1* (2019) shows images of living organisms—flowers, fish, water plants—wrapped in a thick, clear, crystalline liquid that suggests plastic. The mass production of this material, and its indiscriminate use and disposal, have left it in every corner of the

12. Guo Cheng, “A Felicitous Neo-past,” 2017. Available online at www.guo-cheng.net/index.php/project/a-felicitous-neo-past/ (accessed April 11, 2020).

13. See Molly Wallace, “Afterword. Writing ‘The Bomb’: Inheritances in the Anthropocene,” from *Risk Criticism: Precautionary Reading in an Age of Environmental Uncertainty* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016). Available online at www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gk0894.10 (accessed April 11, 2020).

Earth. It is, moreover, a substance that does not degrade in the natural environment for a long time. The animals who eat it often die, but humans won't get away free either because being at the top of the food chain, they eat foods filled with plastic particles. Plastic has conquered the earth, and to use it for convenience's sake, as we do, is to take a deadly chance.

It may be difficult for viewers of Park's images to tell that the fascinating transparent substance in which the plants and animals are immersed is plastic. But the sound of liquid extrusion in the video makes us uncomfortable. And to see a rose wrapped in liquid plastic is to see a living thing brought to the point

of death. The visual pleasure of the work, and its accompanying aural discomfort, produces an experience both addictive and toxic.

The installation also includes two transparent containers, devices in which plastic changes from solid to liquid with changes in temperature. Fish bones symbolize the death of living things, and plants in the water linger in states of life and death. Park's symbolic and metaphorical installation voices our mysterious fear about our environment: an unknown substance may have occupied the planet without our realizing it, and its impact may be irreversible. At the same time, we once again question the apparent beauty of the unknown.

Sun Park, *Invasion Series 1* (both left and right), 2019, installation, photography, courtesy the artist





Urban Dys/Utopia

A major feature of the Anthropocene is the urbanization that has steadily increased the number of people living in towns and cities. This expansion of the built-up areas of the planet has resulted in a corresponding reduction in the size of the original ecological environment. Living in a concrete environment, people in cities are cut off from direct contact with nature.

Volkan Kızıltunc's photography series *Last Boys in the Wood* (2013) is named after *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), a book by the American child-advocacy expert Richard Louv. Through a number of studies, the book shows that a lack of exposure to nature has direct effects on the physical and mental health of children and adults, generating attention disorders, obesity, and depression, a familiar but overlooked condition that Louv calls Nature-Deficit Disorder.¹⁴ Kızıltunc's series presents scenes in the small Latvian village of Pelci. The village lies in the middle of a forest. Unlike city dwellers, the people who live here still interact with the natural environment: children play in a natural pond,

people work in the grass, a boy plays with a dog. At the same time, there is a kind of disharmony between nature and humans and the things related to them—a discarded can on a tree trunk, for example, seems out of step with the environment. A white horse in the forest makes us wonder whether or not it has an owner. Whether we're seeing a woman in a bathing suit walking into a pond with her baby in her arms, or a woman in a green dress standing in a pond looking out into the distance, we question our perception of reality.

In June 2013, Kızıltunc took an active part in protesting the Turkish government's demolition of Gezi Park, in downtown Istanbul. The city has a population of 16 million, but few places that "express" nature; this small park was one, and the last one for the people around it. After half a month of protests, the park was lost. Kızıltunc subsequently came to Pelci to attend a photography workshop with the American photographer Todd Hido. When he saw that children were still able to play in nature, he thought of them as Louv's "last children

14. See Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2008).



Volkan Kiziltunc, *Last Boys in The Wood*, 2013, fine art photography prints, courtesy the artist



Volkan Kiziltunc, *Last Boys in The Wood*, 2013, fine art photography prints, courtesy the artist

15. See Furen Dai, "Green for the Future," 2017. Available online at <https://furendai.squarespace.com/#/green-for-the-future/> (accessed April 11, 2020).

16. Matthias Glaubrecht, "A Future without Forest," in Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin in association with Kirsten Einfeldt and Daniela Wolf, eds., *Reverse Hallucinations in the Archipelago* (Berlin: K. Verlag and Haus der



in the forest.” Trapped among skyscrapers by urban construction, we face a dilemma. The city and nature are gradually divided as binary. Is the ultimate goal of urbanization to build a human utopia? Or does urbanization head in the opposite direction? Finding the balance between city and nature should be the first consideration for city builders, rather than one consideration among others. Pelci’s child is the “last child of the forest” of our generation. How many children will be “the last children of the forest” in a few decades?

Dai offers another speculative vision of the relationship between humans and nature. For her installation *Green for the Future* (2017), a site-specific work made during a residency at Art OMI in upstate New York, she created an imaginary company, set in the year 2050, whose mission is selling trees as luxury products. In 2050, most of the world is devoid of green plants, leaving only the last 50,000 trees. The company sells these remaining trees as luxuries, and is trying to expand its land to plant more kinds of trees. Dai has made a promotional video for the company, showing its land and the trees on it and instructing customers on how to select and purchase them on its website. People can choose the size, color, number of leaves, even the pattern of the trunk. More ironically still, the company offers EB-5 investment visas to wealthy individuals who can afford to travel to the United States to enjoy the last green on earth.¹⁵

It is not just an artist’s fantasy that the humans of the future will live in a world without trees:

almost all of the world’s forests are threatened with extinction. According to the German zoologist Matthias Glaubrecht, “In Africa, the tropical rainforest is disappearing by 0.4 percent annually, while in South America this is happening by 0.5 percent. These numbers are surpassed in the Caribbean and Central America, where annual logging rates reach up to 1.2 percent a year. In the Indo-Malayan region, a mere one percent of such forests are left intact, which are home to an original fauna of large mammals. In Africa, one tenth of the original large forests still remain. In the American tropics, especially in the Amazon region, the loss is up to one third.”¹⁶ This growing loss directly affects the plants and animals that depend on the forest for survival. Three-quarters of all plant and animal species live in the tropical rainforests around the equator; half of the world’s mammals live only in the jungles of Brazil, Madagascar, and Indonesia; the Amazon forest is home to 60 percent of all life on earth.¹⁷ The total area currently available for these creatures may be only about 10 percent of the world’s land area, yet humans are still recklessly destroying the environment for their own benefit. Since 2010, the destruction of the Amazon to make way for soy plantations and cattle farms—an illegal activity—has more than doubled.¹⁸ Brazil’s growing agricultural belt provides a plausible explanation for the recent burst of fires in the Amazon rainforest.

Kulturen der Welt, 2017), 185–203. Available online at https://www.hkw.de/media/texte/pdf/publikationen_2/publikationen_3/intercalations3_reverse_hallucinations_in_the_archipelago.pdf (accessed April 11, 2020).

17. Ibid., 197-98.

18. Ibid., 198.

Human Future and Nonhuman Rights

When it comes to deifying humans and discussing what rights to give to nonhuman species, German anthropologist Volker Sommer provides a controversial argument in his article “Equality beyond Humanity? Legal Rights for Our Next of Kin.” Humans are primates, as are the apes—our “next of kin,” in Sommer’s phrase, are chimpanzees and bonobos. Indeed, genetic data and the fossil record show that chimpanzees and humans have a common ancestor; our relation with chimpanzees and bonobos is even closer than our relation with gorillas and orangutans.¹⁹ The idea that chimpanzees are our relatives is well established in our minds, but few of us think they should have the same rights that we do. Rather, because of their close relationship with human beings, they have been hunted, captured, and even tortured, becoming samples in our scientific experiments. We are by this time accustomed to debating such discriminatory concepts as racism, nationalism, and sexism—but how many of us think about “speciesism,” discrimination based on the identity of a species?²⁰

The most obvious result of the violation of the rights of nonhuman species is the sharp decline or even extinction of many kinds of animals. According to Glaubrecht’s article “A Future without Forests,” “While until 1990, 150,000 orangutans still existed in Borneo, by 2000 their numbers had already shrunk to 55,000; this means it took only two decades to obliterate two thirds of their population. On Sumatra as few as 7,000 of the formerly 200,000 anthropoids survive. According to estimates of the environmental program of the United Nations, over the next ten years these red-haired great apes might have disappeared from the wild entirely.”²¹ Whether it is plants or animals, including even our close relatives the apes, humans have not shown goodwill toward them, even to the point of their extinction. The difference between modern humans and early homo sapiens is not only physical but also intellectual, the accumulation of civilization, morality, and knowledge over eons of time. Observing, thinking, analyzing, and summarizing allows us to imagine the future from our history. What we need to accept is that that

19. See Volker Sommer, “Equality beyond Humanity? Legal Rights for Our Next of Kin,” in *Progress Reader*, ed. Cuauhtémoc Medina and Helena Cháve (Shanghai: Power Station of Art, 2018), 183–208.

20. *Ibid.*, 200.

21. Glaubrecht, “A Future without Forest,” 196.

Vaccinium alpinus

The skin usually had an admixture of various amounts of silver.

Maternity dens were in burrows dug by them or abandoned by other mammals, often in open fields or wooded areas, sometimes under rural buildings, in hollow logs, under stumps, etc. Their diet was primarily nectar from flowers such as the red blossoms of Ocotillo and Paintbrushes. The relationship between nesting and rainfall was significant. Their sense of smell was acute. Sudden rise of sea level lead to severe changes in primary productivity and a loss of habitat.

MADE EXTINCT BY HUMANS: 2276 A.D.

Johannes Helden and Hakan Jonson, *Encyclopedia*, 2015-19 algorithm, index cards; each card 75×125 mm, courtesy the artists

22. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, "Is There Any World to Come?"

23. Donna J. Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene," *e-flux journal* no. 75 (September 2016). Available online at www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/ (accessed April 11, 2020).

future is shared by nonhumans as well as humans, and that the cost of other species' extinction will ultimately be borne by humans themselves. Whether they want to or not, humans are likely to face one of two "human world end[s]": "a 'world without us,' or an 'us without world,'"²² if we indulge in either excessive despair or excessive optimism.²³

How much attention can the extinction of a species call to ecological problems? And how should humans get along with a

new species? Johannes Helden and Hakan Jonson's *Encyclopedia* (2017) is a reflection on the extinction of forgotten species and an alternative interpretation of the relationship between humans, nonhumans, and technology. Artificial intelligence (AI) has gradually evolved to be regarded as a "new species." There are many examples of AI technology in current visions of the future. The sci-fi drama *Westworld*, for example, launched by HBO in 2016, sets AI and human in confrontation, constituting a warning about the use and promotion of AI.



Shuyi Cao, *Peripheral Resurrection*, 2020, details, courtesy the artist

Helden and Jonson have used AI technology not to create humanoid robots but to design a set of algorithms that can synthesize data. Having analyzed the contents of a website called *Encyclopedia of Life* (<http://eol.org>) and other resources, these algorithms randomly combine information (behavior, habitat, appearance, etc.) about species both extinct and extant into new species, which are recorded in the artists' *Encyclopedia* on a card similar to a library catalog card. Each species is fictional and unique. In providing a detailed record of extinct and extant species in a way commonly used by humans, *Encyclopedia* can be seen as a reflection on the forms of species' extinction. At the same time, AI, a technology that increasingly permeates people's lives, is doing its best to replace human activities. If AI can analyze and recombine information to create new species, humans similarly are trying to change existing species and use genetic technology to create new ones, such as golden rice, which contains beta-carotene. Humanity is creating AI, but we cannot fully understand or control it, especially once it has human perception.

In addition to the possibility of creating new species, there are many unsolved problems with biotechnology. Shuyi Cao's installation *Unspecies Ethnography* (2019–20) imagines a biotechnological future within the context of mass extinction, when the natural reproduction of species has become impossible. The installation is set off as a sacred space, a space of sacrifice, to explore the role of worship in human attitudes to the reproduction of species. In Cao's imagined world, the optimal bioproductivity rules among the survivors—synthetic productive bodies are reassembled into eternal surrogates as the ultimate offerings. The show addresses the problematic ethics of exploiting living matter as a spontaneous productive force for the purpose of human research and consumption. Nonhuman species are sacrificed or sold as sacrifices or commodities in human experiments and transactions, raising ethical problems about the distinctions between offering and suffering, sacrifice and surrogate.

The Survivors I/II can be read as a reflection on the instrumental use of plants and animals and their roles in human belief systems. In *The Survivor I* (2019), tree branches and barks, roots, animal bones, rocks, shells as well as synthetic human body parts are recomposed to construct a mystical passage. In seemingly disordered arrangements, the boundaries between species are blurred and a new ecosystem is formed. In *The Survivor II* (2020), transparent glass products set on a concrete slab retain the imprint of a mysterious creature thought to be a hybrid of biological engineering. Like archaeological relics, these hybrids are scattered on the ground, forming an undecipherable language, but it remains clear that they were made and left behind by humans. Today, the relics, the artifacts, the natural objects and the synthetic ones, are deliberately produced and arranged to create fictional field notes on “unspecies ethnography”—a practice of storytelling for the increasingly dissolving boundaries between species. Obscuring the legibility and hierarchy of disparate organisms, the works mark the dislocation of concepts of the human and nonhuman in a context of artificially altered nature and fabricated otherness.

The exhibition also includes *The Eternal Inoculated Mother I/II* (2020), which proposes an amphibian-mammalian hybrid celebrating interspecies fertility. Referring to creatures from frogs used in pregnancy testing to genetically modified female salmon, this unsettling configuration of fragmented human-animal bodies presents as a dystopian version of

the dream of bioproductivity, where synthetic bodies are reassembled into eternal reproductive surrogates. *Peripheral Resurrection* (2020) puts the visual language of product design to the purpose of mourning. The creature to be mourned is a species of ant found in a remote South Pacific Island, whose digital image Cao has downloaded from the Internet and 3D printed. The ant is placed in shrinelike light boxes for viewing and "mourning." What can our relationship be to living beings when they can be reduced to pure data and resurrected remotely? Humans are eager to use technology to create new species and to revive extinct ones, ignoring the many living species that are now close to extinction. Cao asks how the materiality and individuality of biological creatures have been reduced to objects of study, control, manipulation, and capitalization, and subjected to narratives of production and reproduction. No one remains innocent of biopolitics, be it human or animal: who is suffering, who is offering, and who gets to decide?



Shuyi Cao, *The Eternal Inoculated Mother I*, 2020, aqua-resin, acrylic paint, silicone skin of mixed fish and frog species, synthetic nails; 20 x 20 x 26 inches, courtesy the artist



Cry of Place Afar

24. See Fan Shuhong, "China's Hottest TV Show Right Now Is Striving to Provide Space for Mainstream Debate," *Radii*, November 25, 2019. Available online at <https://radiichina.com/chinas-hottest-tv-show-debate/> (accessed March 24, 2020).

25. Huang Chih-chung, in *I Can I BB*, episode 4, season 6, produced by iQiyi (Beijing: Miwei Media, November 2019).

26. Li Dan, in *ibid.*

27. See Lou Sheppard, "Requiem for the Antarctic Coast," 2017. Available online at www.lousheppard.com/work/antarcticcoast (accessed April 11, 2020).

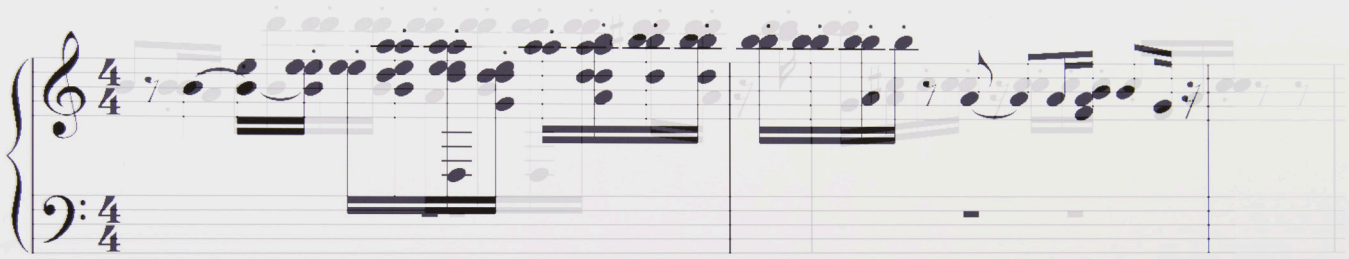
28. *Ibid.*

Shuyi Cao, *The Survivor I* (left), 2019, installation, courtesy the artist

In China, a television debate competition called *I Can I BB* (奇葩说), *Qipa shuo*, literally "Weirdos talk," "BB" being Internet slang meaning "talking crap") often offers controversial propositions for discussion.²⁴ In the fourth episode of the sixth season, screened in November 2019, the debaters discussed the question, When the museum is on fire, should we save the painting or the cat? The question can be answered in many ways, but regardless of which side we choose, in the end, something is lost. It seems impossible to compare historical and cultural values with a life to see which is more "important." From the standpoint of "save the painting," though, a debater called Huang Chih-chung said, "People's awareness has boundaries. To save a famous painting is to expand the boundaries of their empathy, so that they can hear more distant cries. . . . [If] you can only understand the cat's meow, you cannot hear the 'cry of place afar.'"²⁵ His opponent Li Dan, who chose the position of "save the cat," retorted, "What you think is a cry in the distance is just a cry in your imagination."²⁶ Huang's "cry of place afar" makes the

value of culture tangible to future generations, while Li raises another question: should we act for the sake of our imagination?

If the unknown end of the human world is described as the cry of a place afar, Lou Sheppard's works poetize the environment of the Arctic and Antarctic of today. *Requiem for the Antarctic Coast* (2017) is a composition for piano and strings extracted from the shape of the coastline of the Antarctic Peninsula, between Joinville Island, at the tip of the peninsula, and Winter Island, in the Grandidier Channel.²⁷ While listening to the concerto, the audience is shown original drawings by Sheppard that show how he turned the coastline into music. In the drawings, a grid, which references a musical staff, is laid over satellite imagery of the coast. Points are marked on the grid where the contour lines of the satellite image come to a point or shift direction. Sheppard has transcribed this grid into a musical score.²⁸ The composition was first performed on Winter Island on March 21, 2017, and was most recently performed live at



Données sur la masse des glaces de l'Arctique au 1 janvier 1990 (en gris) et au 1 janvier 2019 (en noir)
Arctic Ice Mass Reading for January 1, 1990 (grey) and January 1, 2019 (black)



Données sur la masse des glaces de l'Antarctique* (clé de sol) et de l'Arctique** (clé de fa) au 1 janvier 2019
Antarctic* (treble clef) and Arctic** (bass clef) Ice Mass Reading for January 1, 2019

*Le plus bas niveau enregistré ** En dessous de la moyenne / * The lowest ever recorded ** Below average

Lou Sheppard, *Requiem for the Polar Regions*, 2017-19, internet based audio or visual work to be projected at site, Programmer, Kenny Lozowski, courtesy the artist

the Pushkin Museum in Moscow in 2018.

Another of Sheppard's projects, *Requiem for the Polar Regions* (2017–2019), is an aural record of the shifting masses of sea ice in the Arctic and Antarctic oceans, documenting both the annual melt and reformation of the ice and the long-term decline of ice in these regions. In collaboration with programmer Kenny Lozowski, Sheppard created an automated songwriting program that makes use of data provided by the National Snow and Ice Data Centre in Colorado. The program generates a musical score based on the

perimeters and concentrations of sea ice in the Arctic and Antarctic. It maps the coordinates of the ice imagery to a musical scale, generating a distinct composition each day. Ice that reaches further from the poles sounds as higher notes, while ice that sits closer to the pole sounds lower.

Requiem for the Polar Regions can be viewed at any time as an online installation at www.polarregions.net. On the site, we can choose a date, then hear and download the composition formed by the data on that day (each composition is approximately fifteen minutes long). The program produces scores based

29. Sheppard, "Requiem for the Polar Regions," 2017–19. Available online at www.lousheppard.com/work/polarregions (accessed April 11, 2020).

30. Sheppard, panel text for "Requiem for the Polar Regions," 2017.

on all available daily data from the National Snow and Ice Data Centre, which stretches as far back as 1990. At the beginning of the playback, an animation appears on screen, tracking the outline and density of the sea ice as each note is played. On the right is the outline of the Arctic ice, and on the left is the outline of the Antarctic ice.²⁹

According to Sheppard,

The annual melt and freeze of Arctic and Antarctic sea ice is a record of our shifting climate. Arctic sea ice generally reaches its minimum amounts for the season in September, at the end of the summer melt season, as Antarctic

sea ice reaches its maximum, in the Antarctic winter season. As global temperatures rise, the ice melt is more dramatic each year, and the freeze is less dense. Less sea ice at the poles means that more sunlight is absorbed into the ocean, warming the water and changing ocean levels and salinity. Ocean habitats change, currents shift, and storms intensify. The changes we observe in the oceans around the Atlantic coast are directly related to these changes in the Arctic and Antarctic sea ice. If sea ice is a record, what does it sound like? Can the two circular disks be played like vinyl on a turntable?³⁰

Lou Sheppard, *Requiem for the Antarctic Coast*, 2017, installation, courtesy the artist



We must think. We must act.

The artists Ellie Irons and Anne Percoco started their project *Next Epoch Seed Library* (NESL) in 2015. They organize seed-collection activities in cities, encouraging public participation, collecting data

on the adaptability and resilience of different floras, and finding the ideal choices to plant as pioneers. These pioneer plants can heal the wounds of climate change. NESL also receives seed samples collected

Ellie Irons and Anne Percoco, *Deep Time Seed Futures*, 2018, video still; courtesy the artist



individually by participants, who must follow certain steps specified on the project's website.³¹ Irons and Percoco are trying to introduce diversified ecosystems to communities through workshops and public lectures, discussing such topics as soil stabilization, moisture retention, heat-island reversal, toxic bioaccumulation, and medicinal and nutritional attributes. They believe that reciprocal networks of plants and people can provide a solid foundation for building ecologically just communities.

The pioneer plants that NESL is interested in are usually neglected by people in their daily lives—in other words, they are what many would think of as weeds. These companions for the Anthropocene age were not intentionally planted or maintained, but in the new epoch their environmental resilience is a sign of hope. The workshop *Deep Time Seed Futures* (2018), a cooperative project produced by Irons, Percoco, and the North Troy Art, Technology, and Urban Research in Ecology (NATURE) Lab, a volunteer-led urban ecology education initiative in Troy, New York.³² The project also involved the Sanctuary for Independent Media's Uptown Summer 2018 Youth Program.³³ After discussing seed longevity and resilience, the artists and the participants in the program began to collect wild-plant seeds around an abandoned building at the Sanctuary's Environmental Campus. These seeds have long-term viability, being able to survive in a "hibernation" mode for a long time before germinating under the right conditions. The species include spotted spurge, evening primrose, Virginia pepperweed,

and curly dock.³⁴ Irons and Percoco also discussed how North Troy might change over the coming years as climate change intensifies. Participants wrote down their hopes and fears for North Troy after ten, twenty, or more years and put the papers in vials filled with soil and seeds; they also filled a pair of pyramidal ceramic vessels with a mix of seeds, sealed them with wax, then buried the vials and vessels together three feet deep in the ground. Finally, they marked the spot with a plaque and announced their intention to return and unbury the seeds in 2042, when climate change will be fully upon us here in the northeastern United States.³⁵ Within the exhibition, the video portion of the project *Deep Time Seed Futures* is displayed, which records the collection, burial, excavation and storage of the artists at the practice site. (See nextepochseedlibrary.com for more information about NESL.)

Today's global natural disasters make us wonder what Earth would be like today if we had imagined "crying now" and had acted when we first noticed global warming, rather than continuing to destroy the environment. In this exhibition, the key to exploring this question is listening to the "cry of place afar." What artists can do is not only show the "place afar" that we cannot see, but also foresee the problems that may happen there," proposing possible futures through their work. They are sympathetic observers and activists trying to use their passion against the harsh environmental conditions and human indifference that threaten to lead us into a posthuman world.

31. Ellie Irons and Anne Percoco, "About Next Epoch Seed Library (NESL)," 2017. Available online at <https://nextepochseedlibrary.com/#/about/> (accessed April 11, 2020).

32. NATURE Lab sets up artist/scientist teams to collaborate with the community, sharing knowledge about the local ecosystem and the skills to intervene in creative ways.

33. The Sanctuary for Independent Media is a telecommunications production facility dedicated to community media arts. Located in a historic former church at 3361 6th Avenue in North Troy, New York, the Sanctuary hosts screening, production, and performance facilities and offers training in media production and a meeting space for artists, activists, and independent media-makers of all kinds.

34. Irons and Percoco, "Deep Time Seed Futures," 2017. Available online at <https://nextepochseedlibrary.com/troy/> (accessed April 11, 2020).

35. Ibid.

*At first,
nobody cared about this disaster.
It's just another wildfire,
another drought,
another extinction of species,
another vanishing city.
Until everyone is entwined with this disaster.*

— Frant Gwo, *The Wandering Earth*, 2019

We must think. We must act.

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Artist Checklist

SHUYI CAO

The Eternal Inoculated Mother I, 2020

Aqua-resin, acrylic paint, silicone skin of mixed fish and frog species, synthetic nails; 20 × 20 × 26 inches

The Eternal Inoculated Mother II, 2020

Glass, silicone skin of female human, concreted casted eggs, clam shells; 37 × 13 × 2 inches

Peripheral Resurrection, 2020

Black acrylic light box with laser cut pattern, decellularized leaves, hand-made borosilicate glass, 3d-printed ant of a found species; 12.5 × 18 × 8 inches

The Survivor I, 2019

Trimmed branch, willow sticks, moss, animal and human bones, rocks, roots, metal stand, lab clamps, cement; Dimension variable, 70 × 25 × 75 inches

The Survivor II, 2020

Concrete, hand-blown borosilicate glass, mussel shells; 90 × 14 × 2 inches
Courtesy the artist
<https://www.shuyicao.com/>

FUREN DAI

Green for The Future, 2017

Digital video, sound, color; 4:09 mins
Courtesy the artist
<https://www.furendai.com/>

GUO CHENG

A Felicous Neo-past, 2017

Single channel video, color, sound; 6:41 mins

The New Past / The Past, 2019

Photography, giclee on acid-free photo-rag; 285 × 112 cm × 2

Digging Down Untill the River Bed, 2017

Photography, giclee on acid-free photo-rag; 18 × 13 cm × 3

Under Construction, 2017

Photography, giclee on acid-free photo-rag; 110 × 70 cm

Buckets, 2017

Photography, giclee on acid-free photo-rag; 52 × 38 cm

“Doggy Poop Removing Device”, 2017

Photography, giclee on acid-free photo-rag; 60 × 90 cm
Courtesy the artist
<http://www.guo-cheng.net/>

JOHANNES HELDEN AND HAKAN JONSON

Encyclopedia, 2015-19

Algorithm, index cards; each card 75 × 125 mm
Courtesy the artists
<https://www.johanneshelden.com/>

ELLIE IRONS AND ANNE PERCOCO

Deep Time Seed Futures, 2018

Digital video, sound, color; 4:39 mins
Courtesy the artists
<https://nextepochseedlibrary.com/>
<https://ellieirons.com/>
<https://annepercoco.com/>

VOLKAN KIZILTUNC

Last Boys in The Wood, 2013

Fine art photography prints
Courtesy the artist
<https://www.volkankiziltunc.com/>

SUN PARK

Invasion Series 1, 2019

Photography, video, installation
Courtesy the artist
<https://www.jungsunparkart.com/>

LOU SHEPPARD

Requiem for the Antarctic Coast, 2017

Works on paper, audio recording; 23 drawings between 10”×20” and 10”×40”, 17:07 mins
Courtesy the artist

Requiem for the Polar Regions, 2017-19

Internet based audio or visual work to be projected at site
Programmer, Kenny Lozowski
Courtesy the artist
<https://www.lousheppard.com/>

