



EXTRACTED

Mary Mattingly | Otobong Nkanga | Claire Pentecost | David Zink Yi | Marina Zurkow

August 22–December 10, 2016, USF Contemporary Art Museum



above: David Zink Yi, *The Strangers*, 2014. Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth and Johann König, Berlin
cover: Mary Mattingly, *A Week Without Speaking*, 2012. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Megan Voeller

In 2000, Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen set off a chain reaction when he called for our current geological epoch to be labeled “the Anthropocene” as a reflection of changes wrought by humans on the environment. The concept of christening a new epoch during our lifetimes—the most recent, the Holocene, has lasted for 11,700 years since the last ice age—is mind-bending. Rarely is such obscure bureaucratic business freighted with such outsized existential consequence. Appropriately, debate about the concept has been rigorous within the scientific community at large and the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which is expected to issue a proposal on how the term should be used scientifically (namely, whether it should indicate a new epoch or a lesser “age,” and when the period began) in 2016.

In the meantime, the term Anthropocene has been embraced with open arms in cultural circles, where it resonates deeply as shorthand for a variety of anthropogenic processes and impacts—changes in land, sea and sky caused by agriculture, urbanization, colonization, industrialization and global warming. Signs of the time, just a few out of many, include widespread species extinction, atmospheric pollution from fossil fuel combustion, changes in soil chemistry due to commercial fertilizers, and the omnipresence of plastics in the environment. The term “Anthropocene,” with its root *anthropos* or “man,” proffers an opportunity for responsibility taking that might engender political will. We did this. Now what? But some scholars have argued that not all humans have participated equally, proposing alternatives such as Capitalocene (invoked by Jason W. Moore and Donna Haraway) to reflect the proposed epoch’s roots in interrelated systems of humans, nature, power and profit.

The exhibition *Extracted* is motivated by a particular anthropogenic tendency: the extraction and circulation of natural resources around the globe. This reflexive tapping of value can be seen not only in the complex technical processes behind oil drilling, mining or industrial agriculture, for example, but also in the ways in which we understand our relationships to our own labor and to other people. (Recall the department of “human resources.”) Extraction has a well-established place in the evolution of humans’ ability to manipulate their putatively external environment with tools, which in turn shape humankind’s ability to imagine how to interact with that environment. Taking value out, rather than putting value in, is a hard habit to break.

This is where artists come in. “Art, really, is an engagement with the ways our practices, techniques, and technologies

organize us, and it is, finally, a way to understand our organization and, inevitably, to reorganize ourselves,” writes Alva Noë in his book *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature*. In the Anthropocene, we need the strange tools of art more than ever.

In *Extracted*, Mary Mattingly models the perspective of a critical participant in global capitalism. She binds her personal possessions—books, clothing, even electronics and furniture—into sculptural bundles that invite viewers to consider everyday objects, their lives and their entwinement with ours. Mattingly incorporates these sculptures into performances and photographs that draw connections between our belongings and the materials and labor used to produce them. These connections are traced closely in the Internet archive *Own-It*, where Mattingly researches and writes biographical narratives for her possessions, illuminating the often obscure origins of everyday things and their complex journeys from factory to household. Through her practice, she explores the labor of ownership and attachment that consumers are expected to perform with little regard for its impact on others.

Otobong Nkanga’s works examine ideas around land and the value connected to natural resources, particularly in connection to Africa. The video *Remains of the Green Hill* shows a spontaneous performance by Nkanga at the historic Tsumeb mine in Northern Namibia, a vast natural hill of green, oxidized copper ore and dozens of other minerals, depleted by decades of mining. The video is paired with audio of her interview with the last managing director of the mine, which was established in 1907 under German colonial rule and closed in 1996. (The mine has since reopened under the name Ongopolo.) The director’s account of mining activities conjures a picture of advancement and discovery, rather than one of profit and exploitation, illuminating the power of perspective to shape history and landscape.

In the large-scale tapestry *The Weight of Scars*, Nkanga draws a barren, fragmented landscape populated by two figures resembling marionettes. The multiple, multi-colored limbs of the figures suggest an amalgam of generations crossing race and nationality who shape the land. The figures guide a pipeline through the woven landscape, which is punctuated by Nkanga’s black-and-white photographs of a scarred landscape.

David Zink Yi transports viewers underground into the depths of a gold and silver mine in the southern Andes of Peru, near Ayacucho, where laborers endure earsplitting conditions.

His 81-minute, two-channel video installation, *The Strangers*, presents an unsettling juxtaposition of spaces: a dark, subterranean realm of pulverized rock and a silent overhead landscape of otherworldly natural beauty. Learning that the destruction of one ton of rock yields approximately one gram of gold and 23 grams of silver prompts the question, why do we destroy so much for so little? The visceral, physically imposing quality of Zink Yi's installation draws a viewer into this conundrum with full-body empathy.

Marina Zurkow's *Petroleum Manga* invites us to consider the ubiquity of petroleum-based products, from textile fibers to plastic containers, in contemporary life. Her series of digital illustrations, a selection of which are presented on monumental-scale banners inside the museum as well as on its exterior walls, draws inspiration from the *Hokusai Manga*. Produced by Japanese artist Hokusai (1760-1849) as an encyclopedic reference, the fifteen volume *Manga* includes illustrations of human figures, animals, natural objects and everyday scenes. Zurkow adopts the simplified form of Hokusai's drawings to depict items made with specific petrochemicals including PVC, PET, polycarbonate, propylene glycol, polyurethane, ammonia, nylon and paraffin, revealing the flexibility and pervasiveness of such substances in objects ranging from credit cards to food additives.

NeoGeo is a QuickTime capture of animations created by Zurkow in collaboration with Daniel Shiffman, co-creator of a software sketchbook program called Processing. The animations represent the work of an oil drill as it penetrates through an infinite series of geological layers, here composed of tiny bits of hand-drawn rock that are animated by programming code written in accordance with rules of physics and the formation of strata. An oil gush occurs when conditions are right.

Claire Pentecost's multipart project *soil-erg* proposes soil as a unit of currency. The project consists of three parts: a sculptural installation of ingots made from organic compost (soil "gold" bars); a series of money bill drawings that feature under-sung soil heroes including scientists, political activists, philosophers, artists and creatures; and an off-site installation of vertical planters at local community gardens. First exhibited at dOCUMENTA(13) in Kassel, Germany, in 2012, each component of the project was updated or refabricated for *Extracted*. Prior to the exhibition, Pentecost visited the agricultural community of Wimauma in southern Hillsborough County and met with farmworkers at the Good Samaritan and Beth-El missions, incorporating their portraits into the money bill series. The *soil-erg* tasks viewers with imagining an alternative to our present economy, which values the

petroleum-linked dollar above all and devalues the labor of farmworkers and the vitality of soil. A DIY currency that anyone can make, the *soil-erg* advances a vision of equity in the age of Monsanto.

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THANK YOU

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Mary Mattingly, *The Damned Thing (Titian, again)*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

THE WHEEL | POLITICAL ECOLOGIES OF THE PRESENT

Brian Holmes

Years ago (it was a different world then) I saw a short film that burned a pathway in my memory, so that I could not forget and I could not understand.

A man slithers across the ground, dragging his limp body with extended elbows. He comes up to a wooden pail to drink, his tongue darting rapidly into the water. Raising his head, he hisses at his wife and in-laws, who stand horrified on the wooden platform of their village home. The man is a Japanese soldier, Yukichi, who has returned from World War II as a snake. Later, inside the house, we see him asleep on the floor in a kind of round stockade made of roughly hewn tree limbs. Tenderly, his wife feeds him a rice ball; but he bites her hand, she screams, he won't let go. The scene shifts to a temple interior, with great Buddhas seated in meditation. The wife lies outstretched on her back on a light blanket, one knee up, while the man lying beside her lets his hand glide lecherously over her thigh. She wonders aloud why Yukichi returned as a snake, and the man replies that he must have seen horrible things on the mainland. "I hear that a new sort of bomb fell on Hiroshima," he says. "The war will be over soon."

Now we are back in the village house, inside the rough stockade. Yukichi is swallowing a rat, exactly as a serpent would. Its disgusting hind legs and tail are still twitching. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, eating a rat?" cries his wife. "Get out! Get out! Never come back!" He writhes across the floor and over the wooden threshold. Falling heavily onto the earth, dragging his limp legs behind him, he slithers on his elbows along the beaten track that runs behind the village houses toward the forest. As I watched the film again, I remembered. That was it, the pathway, the scene I could never understand.

Commotion in the village: "We've had a hen stolen!" says one. "All our carp have been eaten," says another. "It was Yukichi!" But they recall he was an Imperial soldier who served his country honorably during the war. And so they resolve to find him. As if in a medieval dream, blazing torches gesture in the dark forest. Eyes flash in the night, long sticks probe the fallen leaves. Yukichi is trembling in a damp hollow behind a tree, and then he slips away down the hillside. The flashback begins. We're on the field of battle, the dead strewn on the grass, the final shots booming in the air. Yukichi cowers in a sandy dugout on a green slope, dressed in uniform and military cap. With arms raised in surrender he cries out "Friend! Friend!" to the man staggering toward him, whom he believes will be his captor. Yet it is a wounded Imperial officer who curses him, strikes him, kicks him violently as he falls to the ground. "Are you so keen to return to the world?" the officer asks with scorn. "What does the Holy War mean to you?"

We're back in the forest, under the glow of a harvest moon. Yukichi moves furtively down the slope, slithering toward the riverbank to drink. Bathed in an unreal green light, a real serpent arches upward from its coils, skidding across a steep cliffside, tumbling over the edge. The estranged wife emerges into view on the other side of a boulder. But there is no reconciliation. The man-snake plunges into the swirling river, the coiled serpent lifts its head into the eerie green light, and against a final frame a thundering voice proclaims: "There is no such thing as a Holy War."

The author of this enigmatic short is the famed Japanese New Wave director, Shohei Imamura. The work, his last, forms part of *11'09"01*: eleven short films, each exactly eleven minutes, nine seconds and one frame. All of them are somehow about the attack against the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001. Made at the instigation of a French producer and released in 2002, the omnibus film remains virtually unknown in the United States, where it was considered too anti-American for the box office. The film gathers artistic perspectives from across the planet on the event that redefined the geopolitics of the new millennium. Within this context, Imamura's genius was to eliminate any direct reference to the terrorist attacks, their historical background, or the impending response by the American state. Instead he uses local history to ask about the brutality of all ideologically driven war—whether American, Japanese, or any other—and about the sentiments of shame, disgust and abjection that cling to anyone who seeks to withdraw from such an ideology. To withdraw from the Holy War is to shatter the symbolic order that frames human existence in society. Must we be cowards, outcasts, indeed animals, Imamura asks, to refuse the sacred commandments? If that path is impossible, then how to shed the skin of the societies we live in?

TERRITORY

It's early spring and I travel to the southeastern edge of the megalopolis I call home, Chicago. I'm responding to a call from some community activists to participate in environmental stewardship by uprooting invasive buckthorn bushes from Big Marsh, a new park not yet open to the public. The participants are warm and the work is physically enjoyable: cutting back the woody stems of an imported decorative plant that has overtaken the territory, driving out most of the other species. But the land around us is strange, sparse, often barren. We stack the thorny stalks, I talk with the others, make some new friends. Then we lay down our tools and go off walking toward muddy pools of water.

Here, just a few decades ago, trucks and trains came heavily laden from the now-vanished steel mills. They tipped huge loads of still-molten slag into the marshland, filling it entirely in some



Marina Zurkow, *The Petroleum Manga*,
 Polycarbonate (toy helicopter, scuba goggles, riot shield), 2012
 Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

cases. The fiery detritus released great clouds of ash and plumes of steam, and ultimately solidified into the hardpan on which we now walk. Looking further toward the south, I know there are other sites like this one, where not only slag was dumped. Thousands of barrels of chemical wastes were deliberately punctured, then buried and left to leach into the soil and the water. It's said that environmental officials went out in an inflatable dinghy to inspect the marshes in that area, but the chemicals literally dissolved the fabric of their boat and they had to wade out of the toxic pool. I can't see the chemical dump from where I stand: it just haunts me, I feel the burning in my shoes. Instead I'm looking through binoculars to the perch of a bald eagle. In the foreground, closer to our little group, a red-tailed hawk emerges from its nest, flying through the bare tree limbs and disappearing into the underbrush. Later we will see a white-tailed deer quivering on the trail, just before we reach the construction site where our cars are parked.

I want to fly like a hawk or jump like a deer, but my feet just skid on the hard-packed slag. I want to clasp arms with my new friends, spend this moment more intensely, discover something new; but we can only say our stiff goodbyes. I want to dart like a fish through clear water, but I just get behind the wheel. The dirt turns to asphalt and I drive onward, feeling lost, pausing in places where I've been once before. Slowly, over the last couple years, I've been sending out feelers into this area, the closest thing I've found to both an engaging local community and a "wild land" in the endless city. Slowly I am creating—or rather, being absorbed by—a new territory.

The great psychological insight of Félix Guattari was that like animals, modern industrialized human beings seek places to prowl. Places to run, to forage, to dig, to hunt, to bask in the sun. Places where the rhythm of stillness and movement goes through and beyond the individual, mingling the self with the surround. These sites can also be streets, interiors, empty spaces or ruins. They can be experienced alone, or more frequently, in common with intimate groups. The important thing is not the location, but the way the self and the community lose their bounds, fading over into the environment, vibrating with it. Guattari called these places "existential territories." The intensity of subjective life pulses there.

Kids in the future will find such territories in Big Marsh, whether on their bikes, skidding over the hard-packed slag, or on their feet, running through the weeds and splashing in the water they weren't supposed to touch, or in an intense sexual embrace, consummated on a coat thrown down among the brambles. The territory of human desire can expand to fit the landscape, it can disperse like a flock of birds in flight. It can also shrink—or be shrunken—to the size of a used-car lot, a cubicle in an office block, a darkened room, a prison. But the urge to move outside that frozen place called your self comes in waves, changing like the weather. It draws you forward,

into enticing and terrifying futures. It takes you back, deep into the footsteps of previous generations. It throws you off track, astray amidst the familiar-strange. You can play with its call, change the rhythm, skip the beat—especially when you know that the call has its own powers, that *it* has been playing with *you*.

The wind blows, the stars wheel around in the sky, the seasons change, the smell of damp earth suffuses the foggy air. The animal you, alive to the flush of the skin and all the senses, feels the presences of the towering city, the concrete roar.

ORGANIZATION

Canals, railways, steel mills, refineries, skyscrapers, cellphone towers, airports, freeways: the constructed world is dense and dynamic, it structures our waking existence, maybe even our dreams. No one has planned it, or rather, so many have. You can see it up close, take a look. In Chicago along the shore of the lake and the banks of the river, industry found that profitable place where solid meets liquid. Beyond the muddy marshes there was a low rise, not even a hill, but it's actually the continental divide: the streams beyond it will float you all the way to the mighty Mississippi. Engineers reversed the direction of the river, creating first one canal, then another, then still another. Grain and steel and oil and chemicals began to circulate between Louisiana and the Great Lakes. Huge industrial devices were set in place to articulate and process the flow: ports, warehouses, oil depots, generating stations, factories. These things morph and change with the generations. Yesterday's crumbling ruins give way to today's powerhouses, or tomorrow's blue-sky investments. Here and in many other places, a walk along the riverbank reveals a powerful historical phenomenon: *path dependency*.

Technologies follow each other in succession. Stuff goes where stuff is. The past conditions the future. We are all *patho-dependent*. A birch-bark canoe, a horse-drawn barge, a steam-powered locomotive, a modern freeway, an airport for jet planes, a dry port for computerized globe-spanning logistics: this is the wheel of history that my friends and I rolled through our own lives, just by following the river. We mapped space in time, we practiced cartography with our feet. It is challenging to go beyond one's existential territories, and also outside the known confines of your job or professional field, in order to confront the vast diversity and complexity of the objective, organized world, where history shapes the divided structure of the present. What is the tale of your town, your city, your metropolis? How has it grown to fit the dense and dynamic mesh of global carbon-based technology?

In his book *Strange Tools*, the cognitive scientist and philosopher Alva Noë reveals a fundamental truth about the human brain: it doesn't stop at the limits of the cranium. Thinking happens all

around us, not just in computers, not just in the patterned flows of electricity and radio waves coursing through the walls. We are organized by the dense and structured mesh of technology that surrounds us, including the immense and now electronically omnipresent technology of writing. Our very nervous systems vibrate with the chips, the solenoids, the stamping presses and the sluice gates of the old canals. But the inner workings and the significance of these machines can only be grasped through articles and books and pictures and films—letters of the self outside ourselves. Externalized thought reaches inward and overwhelms us. Subjective experience is stamped and restructured by the concrete historical world with its gears, its circuits and its linguistic signals. "We are organized but are lost in the nesting, massively complicated patterns of our organization," writes Noë. So for better and worse we get behind the wheel. We follow the pathways that have led to the present and onward to the future.

One day alongside the river, a strange black pile of dusty, coal-like material appeared. Then came another, and then another. They grew to the size of huge warehouses, then even larger, dwarfing the modest working-class homes and neighborhoods around them. The wind blew, dark clouds filled the sky, grimy dust settled on windowsills, in tea spoons, behind earlobes, and deep in the lungs. The neighbors who lived next to the piles brought their fears and their outrage to the rest of the city. Reporters, NGOs, scientists, lawyers and even public health officials went into action. Gradually, something which had been vaguely known by all became crystal clear to those who cared to look and listen. The black, dusty, coal-like material, called "petcoke," is a residue of the local oil refineries—yet it has a more distant origin. It is a message from the Canadian tar sands: the most environmentally destructive project on Earth. That's what goes coursing through the motor when we get behind the wheel.

We are organized by forces that have burrowed deep beneath the ground. A technology that drinks from petroleum wells has become our second nature. Rigs are built on the ocean, and damn the spills. Pipelines snake toward the North to suck the frozen ground. Armies travel to the Middle East to fight for control over desert sands. Our common atmosphere is transformed by invisible residues. How to sense what's omnipresent in our lives? Roll naked in the sooty piles. Feel the grit of your social skin. A commanding force is exerted by rigs and refineries, with the luxuries but also the consequences they bring. Oil has become our Holy War, a war against our own selves, against our own world.

IDEAS

In the early 1990s, when the Soviet Union fell and Western capitalism rose triumphant to new heights, the philosopher of science Michel Serres opened his book *The Natural Contract* with

a painting by Francisco Goya. It shows two combatants locked together in struggle: a fight to the death, blow by blow. Only one of them will emerge from this battle. Yet at the same time, what the painting reveals, and what its protagonists do not seem to grasp, is that the two are sinking together into the bog that will swallow them both. That was exactly the situation of world society at the end of the Cold War. “Let’s make a wager,” writes Michel Serres. “You put your stakes on the right; we’ve bet on the left. The fight’s outcome is in doubt simply because there are two combatants, and once one of them wins there will be no more uncertainty. But we can identify a third position, outside their squabble: the marsh into which the struggle is sinking.” The excluded third was the environment, the ecological matrix of all life, which the account-books of modern industry have always treated as a mere “externality.”

Serres understood the bewildering condition of the marsh, where solid and liquid not only meet, but mingle. At the close of the West’s mortal combat with the Soviet Union, and at the moment of the famous Rio Summit on the environment, he hoped that humanity’s collective attention could turn away from its self-generated dramas, toward the trans-species web of relations that extends through living things to the very earth and stones—and crucially, to the atmosphere. Serres’ relational thinking has been pursued to our day by his former student, Bruno Latour, who in his lecture series *Facing Gaia* reflects on the kind of political community that could live *inside* what earth-systems scientists now call “the planetary boundaries.” Latour believes that the present condition of climate change pushes one part of humanity to redefine themselves as a people who are of the Earth and who recognize its limits: *the Earthbound*.

Yet two other ideas dispute the stage, sowing confusion and turmoil. One, which Latour identifies quite clearly, is the quest for eternal expansion, always seeking new machines, new frontiers, new colonies in space, new ways to exploit boundless energy. It is a Faustian drive, permeated by the scientific force of mathematical infinity. But a second idea, which Latour barely mentions, interlocks with the first as a supporting or reinforcing contradiction. It claims the need to restore an ancient symbolic order intertwined with a specific pattern of social and territorial domination: White Supremacy or Islamic Shari’a. This is the idea of racial identity, which battles with capitalist rationality from within and without. Only the force of arms can satisfy its claim. In this way, two new combatants take the stage. The enlightened “international community” with its powerful markets and armies, faces off against the champions of older symbolic orders, the Islamists and White Supremacists; and sometimes they all seem to meet and mingle in the melee of blows. From Bin Laden and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to Anders Behring Breivik, by way of well-dressed bankers, cool corporate CEOs, gun-slinging American

presidents and European proto-fascists, the combatants of the Holy War have returned to the political landscape, crowding out the still embryonic thinking of the Earthbound. We know the oceans are rising, we know we are all sinking into a trap without an exit. How to see more clearly amidst the nationalist drumbeats, the strident calls for security from terrorism and the pervasive fog of war that has begun enveloping the world over the last five years?

Philosophy takes place in your head, and at the same time it partakes of writing. In Alva Noë’s view, it differs from the instrumental letters of civilization when it ceases to be an operational script for the fulfillment of a function or a routine. Instead, thinking becomes philosophy when it begins to reflect on the ways in which we are organized by ideas. Noë sees the self-reflexive writing of philosophy as a chance to *reorganize ourselves*, to find another way to fit into another world. By thinking about the well-worn patterns in which we think, and by realizing that the ecological background is just as important as the human foreground, it may be possible to set another course, to find another pathway.

Now, that’s a momentous claim if you take it seriously. Reflect for a moment on what would be needed for this reorganization to take place on a planetary scale. A multitude of thinkers, in all lands, in all languages, would have to gaze into their crystal balls and see something new: the changing weather patterns of the Earth caused by the current form of industrial organization. Each in their own way would have to formulate the difference in the self that is provoked by this threatening metamorphosis of the environment. Each would have to *respond to the present*. Their thoughts transformed into speech and writing would have to overstep the subtle boundary between the outside world and your mind, or indeed, millions of minds, bringing a new reflexivity into the daily patterns of technological organization. Each thought that does not fit like a cog into what is offers the promise of something new. Minds have hands, so they can get to work on those promises. Following the impulse of ecological thinking, new sciences and new modes of operation would take form. Slowly, with a multitude of thoughts gathering material speed, the wheel would begin to turn in a different direction.

It’s happening – but at the same time, it’s not happening. The political landscape of the present is still the one that was glimpsed by Goya long ago. The combatants still take center stage. Their blows fall, their bombs explode, each flash is seared into our retinas through omnipresent screens. The combat defines normality, from which one would be ashamed to just slither away. How could you turn your back on what is proclaimed to be the struggle between Good and Evil? Why not be courageous, why not stand and fight? Not only in Japan is shame the source of a

powerful social constraint. The drive to *be normal*, and therefore, to accept society’s suicidal course, is omnipresent. Yet thanks to a multitude of thoughts and territorial experiences of perception, the third position described by Michel Serres, the viewpoint of the wounded Earth that includes us all, has come to exist with a nascent legitimacy. We need to embody this new idea.

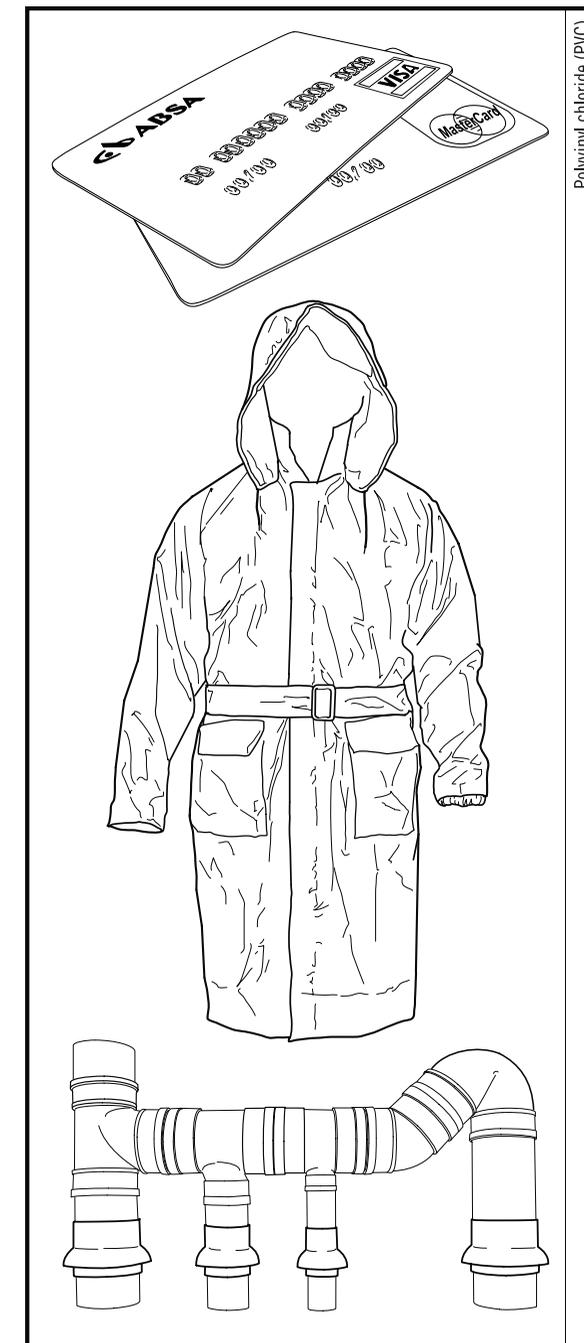
ART

The snake-man hesitates on the riverbank—then plunges into the current. His disappearance into the roiling water seals the enigma of Imamura’s short film. Here, as so often elsewhere, one has to wonder: Why is art so enigmatic? Why does it ask questions for which its wordless or poetic gestures have no answer?

I think back to some piercingly beautiful images by the photographer and ecological activist Subankhar Banerjee, showing caribou migration routes across Alaska: long lines of animals traversing icy streams or following a snowy pathway along a mountain slope. One dark brown foggy photograph from the Utukok River Uplands shows delicate tracks etched over millennia by the Western Arctic herd crossing an exposed vein of bituminous coal. Another series shows native Gwich’in hunters slaughtering a caribou. “The ‘ecocultural’ is a space in which animals and people cohabit and are interdependent,” writes Banerjee. He knows how scandalous the hunting scene can be for environmentalists focused on the protection of animals. Yet the danger does not come from the Gwich’in who have lived with the caribou since time immemorial. The danger comes from transnational energy companies eyeing the prize of the exposed coal. Banerjee quotes the activist philosopher Vandana Shiva:

“When we think of wars in our times, our minds turn to Iraq and Afghanistan. But the bigger war is the war against the planet. This war has its roots in an economy that fails to respect ecological and ethical limits—limits to inequality, limits to injustice, limits to greed and economic concentration.”

Halfway across the world, in Argentina, the group Ala Plástica showed me the spot where they had planted bulrushes on an abandoned beach of the Rio del Plata estuary over twenty years ago. It was a way to meet other inhabitants, to participate in ecosystem restoration, to develop new economies based on natural materials, and finally, to found a new artistic practice. At the time, Argentina was still emerging from the consequences of the dictatorship and the so-called “dirty war” pitting the military government against its own citizens. While movements for social justice gathered strength in the communities around them, the Ala Plástica members adapted their own lives to follow the rhizomatic spread of the bullrushes through littoral environments where land and water intermingle. In



Polyvinyl chloride (PVC)

Marina Zurkow, *The Petroleum Manga*, Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) (credit cards, raincoat, plumbing pipes), 2012. Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

two successive trips they generously guided myself and other North American friends through the La Plata watershed. We were able to meet perhaps a hundred of their collaborators at work in local contexts: a widely scattered eco-cultural fabric sustaining alternative practices along one of South America's great rivers. Territory meshes with new patterns of social organization, informed by critical concepts and suffused with art. These experiences changed me. Now I can at least begin to imagine how to participate in the political ecology of my own region. It was like finding a pathway.

Alva Noë thinks that art is just like philosophy: it opens up a space of self-reflexive questioning about the way that images organize our lives. But art does that wordlessly, or in poetic speech that can't be broken apart and recombined the way that ordinary language can. The reflexivity of art is properly aesthetic, it takes place in the realm of sensation. In those enigmatic images and words we sense a difference from our own selves, and therefore, from our surround. For Félix Guattari, whose writing inspired the four-part division of this essay, the aesthetic realm is a kind of sensing or visioning capacity that allows us to experience "constellations of universes." Whatever the impulse—a song, an image, a poem, a film, a sculpture or simply a pattern traced by hands in space—aesthetic experience gathers differences into a dynamic whole whose site of evanescence is our own bodies. We feel how the differences combine, or how the dissolution of normalized boundaries sets a static self into motion. The aesthetic impulse appears, it vibrates in our consciousness, then disappears again, only to return later in successive memories and re-livings. Its pattern may be densely symbolic or it may be entirely abstract: but the effect of its momentary passage through our kinaesthetic imagination is to lend our steps a rhythm, to knit our own movements into a territory. Art is what allows us to plunge back into the world differently.

Art, territory, organization, ideas: they are like steps along a spiral path whose only return to a space of origin always implies an expansion of the initial field. Patterns within patterns, universes within universes: this is what I call "the wheel." Roll it through your own home environment. From such an intimate experience exceeding the limits of identity, you might even gain the empathy and desire for acts of resistance, revolt and constructive transformation amidst the dangerous political ecologies of the twenty-first century.

For further reading and exploration:

Ala Plástica, "Cuencas Lab" (2014), available at <https://cuencaslab.wordpress.com>; also see the group's new website, <http://alaplastica.wix.com/alaplastica>.

Subhankar Bannerjee, "Photography's Silence of Non-Human Communities" (2012), available at <http://www.subhankarbanerjee.org/PDF/Subhankar-Banerjee-all-our-relations-sydney-biennale.pdf>.

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Brian Holmes is a cultural critic with a taste for foreign languages, known in Europe, the US and Latin America for his essays on art, activism and political economy. For years he has been fascinated with cartography: see his latest at <http://environmentalobservatory.net/Petropolis/map.html>.

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EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

MARY MATTINGLY
The Damned Thing (Titian, again), 2013
chromogenic dye coupler print
30 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

MARY MATTINGLY
Drum, 2014
mixed media
36 x 36 x 20 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

MARY MATTINGLY
Filling Double Negative, 2013
chromogenic dye coupler print
30 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

MARY MATTINGLY
Nine Chains to the Moon, 2013
chromogenic dye coupler print
30 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

MARY MATTINGLY
Own-It, 2013-ongoing
web archive
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

MARY MATTINGLY
Pull, 2013
chromogenic dye coupler print
40 x 40 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

MARY MATTINGLY
Verse and Universe, 2013
chromogenic dye coupler print
30 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

MARY MATTINGLY
A Week Without Speaking, 2012
chromogenic dye coupler print
30 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Robert Mann Gallery, New York, NY

OTOBONG NKANGA
Remains of the Green Hill, 2015
digital video
5:48 min.
Courtesy of the artist and Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands

OTOBONG NKANGA
The Weight of Scars, 2015
tapestry in four panels, with acrylic and inkjet print on 10 laser-cut Forex plates
100 x 240 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands

CLAIRE PENTECOST
soil-erg, 2016
38 drawings
70 soil ingots on gold leaf table
off site: 3 vertical growing systems located at community gardens
Courtesy of the artist

DAVID ZINK YI
The Strangers, 2014
two-channel digital video
81 min.
Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth and Johann König, Berlin

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Anhydrous ammonia (NH3) (crack, hamburger meat, crack), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Butyl rubber (PIB) (rubber chicken), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
168 x 81.9 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Butyl rubber (PIB) (tanning eyecups, rubber-dipped work gloves, ear buds), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
168 x 81.9 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Nylon polymer (parachute, band aids), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Paraffin (votive candle wax), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Polycarbonate Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) (plastic “brass” knuckles, auto hose, comb, exit sign), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
168 x 81.9 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Polycarbonate (toy helicopter, scuba goggles, riot shield), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
168 x 81.9 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) (sail, carboy, false eyelashes), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Poly (methyl methacrylate) (PMMA) (dentures, body filler, acrylic chairs), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Polypropylene (PP) (fly swatter), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
168 x 81.9 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Polyurethane (PU) (condom, work boots, inflatable boat), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) (bouncy castle, bondage mask, meat packaging), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) (credit cards, raincoat, plumbing pipes), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
144 x 70.2 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW
The Petroleum Manga Propylene glycol (toothpaste ingredient, oil spill dispersant ingredient, cake moistener), 2012
solvent ink on vinyl
168 x 81.9 in
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

MARINA ZURKOW & DANIEL SHIFFMAN
NeoGeo, 2012
software, single-channel animation (color-silent), media player, projector
dimensions variable, horizontal orientation
46 min 23 sec, loop
Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York

BIOGRAPHIES

Mary Mattingly creates sculptural ecosystems in urban spaces. She is currently working on a floating food forest called *Swale*. *Swale* is a public platform for fresh, free food that reinterprets New York City’s commons. She recently completed a two-part sculpture *Pull* for the International Havana Biennial with the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana and the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Mary Mattingly’s work has been exhibited at the International Center of Photography, the Seoul Art Center, the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Public Library, deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, and the Palais de Tokyo. With the U.S. Department of State and Bronx Museum of the Arts she participated in the smARTpower project, traveling to Manila. In 2009, Mattingly founded the Waterpod Project, a barge-based public space and self-sufficient habitat that hosted over 200,000 visitors in New York. In 2014, an artist residency called WetLand launched in Philadelphia; it is being utilized by the University of Pennsylvania’s Environmental Humanities program. She has been awarded grants and fellowships from the James L. Knight Foundation, Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology, Yale University School of Art, the Harpo Foundation, NYFA, the Jerome Foundation and the Art Matters Foundation.

Claire Pentecost is an artist and writer whose poetic and inductive drawings, sculpture and installations test and celebrate the conditions that bound and define life itself. Her projects often address the contested boundary between the natural and the artificial, focusing for many years on food, agriculture, bio-engineering and anthropogenic changes in the indivisible living entity that animates our planet. Since 2006, she has worked with Brian Holmes, 16Beaver and many others organizing Continental Drift, a series of seminars to articulate the interlocking scales of our existence in the logic of globalization. Pentecost has exhibited at dOCUMENTA(13), Whitechapel Gallery, the 13th Istanbul Biennial, and the Third Mongolian Land Art Biennial. She is represented by Higher Pictures, New York, and is Professor in the Department of Photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Otobong Nkanga is a visual artist and live performer born in Kano, Nigeria. She currently lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. Nkanga began her art studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and continued at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. She participated in the residency program at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In 2008, she obtained her Masters in the Performing Arts at DasArts, Amsterdam. Recent shows include: *Comot Your Eyes Make I Borrow You Mine*, Kadist, Paris (2015); *Crumbling Through Powdery Air*, Portikus Frankfurt (2015); *Animism*, Extra City Kunsthal and MuHKA Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst,

Antwerp (2010); *Diagonal Views*, Nieuwe Vide, Haarlem, the Netherlands (2009); *Re/presentaciones: Ellas*, Casa Africa, Las Palmas Gran Canaria, Canary Islands (2008); *Flow*, Studio Museum Harlem, New York (2008); *Africa Remix*, toured Paris, Düsseldorf, Tokyo, Johannesburg and Stockholm; *Snap Judgments: New Positions in African Contemporary Photography*, toured New York, Miami, Mexico, Canada and the Netherlands. Over the last five years, she has participated in the Sharjah, Taipei, Dakar, São Paulo and Havana Biennials.

David Zink Yi is a contemporary artist working primarily in video, photography and sculpture. He was born in Lima, Peru, and lives and works in Berlin, where he studied at the Universität der Künste from 1998–2003. Zink Yi’s work often explores embodied experience in environments of intensive sound and performance. Upcoming solo exhibitions include Williams College Museum of Art (2016) and the Mistake Room, Los Angeles (2018). Recent solo exhibitions include Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr University, Vancouver (2015); Kunstverein Braunschweig (2013); Neue Berliner Kunstverein and Museo de Arte de Lima (2012); Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2011); and MAK Museum, Vienna (2010). Group exhibitions include 8th Berlin Biennial (2014); Dublin Contemporary 2011; and 10th Havana Biennial (2009). He is represented by Hauser & Wirth and Johann König, Berlin.

Marina Zurkow is a media artist focused on near-impossible nature and culture intersections, researching “wicked problems” like invasive species, superfund sites and petroleum interdependence. She has used life science, biomaterials, animation, dinners and software technologies to foster intimate connections between people and non-human agents. Her work spans gallery installations and unconventional, participatory public projects. Currently she is working on connecting toxic urban waterways to oceans, and researching the tensions between maritime ecology and the ocean’s primary human use as a capitalist Pangea. Recent solo shows include Chronus Art Center, Shanghai; bitforms gallery, NY; Montclair Museum of Art; and Diverseworks, Houston. Group exhibitions include Sundance New Frontiers; FACT, Liverpool; SFMOMA; Walker Art Center; Smithsonian American Art Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Wave Hill, NY; and the National Museum for Women in the Arts. She has collaborated with social science and humanities scholars at Rice University, New York University and the University of Minnesota. Zurkow was a 2011 Guggenheim fellow and has received grants from NYFA, NYSCA, the Rockefeller Foundation and Creative Capital. She is a full-time faculty member at ITP / Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and is represented by bitforms gallery.

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