

NATURE
MORTE
NATURE
VIVANTE



Formafantasma, Charcoal, Glass bottle, 2012 © photo Luisa Zanzani

Press release

Nature morte/Nature vivante

Curated by Veerle Wenes, assisted by Françoise Foulon
and Ralph Collier

24.11.19 → 08.03.20

What we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning, and to this extent man only encounters himself.

Werner Heisenberg

Since the late 17th century, the French expression *nature morte* (literally 'dead nature') has been used to refer to still life, the field of painting that approaches nature from a sensual perspective and explicitly alludes to its fragility and ephemerality, and indirectly also to the vanity of human intervention on its composite elements.

Over time, the term has extended to include any arrangement of inanimate objects organised in a certain fashion with a symbolic intention, which is meant to induce a poetic emotion.

In our so-called "anthropocene" age, man's unwarranted action is contributing to the impermanence of nature, or even its annihilation. With this sombre outlook, the term *nature morte* takes on even greater relevance.

Yet nature has a formidable capacity for regeneration. Works by numerous creative minds question, provoke or encourage mechanisms that nature uses to underpin its intensity, reproduction and durability. In reality, each state of matter is a snapshot in a long, slow, evolutionary process of transformation, aggregation, assimilation and decomposition... Nature is very much alive!

In this exhibition organised at the CID (centre for innovation and design), designers, architects and artists present intensive, practical or experimental research that questions the relationship between man and nature, calling in equal measure on ecology, science, our moral conscience and artistic creation.

Nature morte/Nature vivante reveals how much man's ambiguous relationship with nature can be both perverse and inspiring.

LE TEMPS DE LA NATURE

FRANÇOISE FOULON

We have entered a new era, the Anthropocene, characterised by mankind's ever-deeper impact on nature. It has resulted in an unprecedented ecological crisis, which calls into question humanity's relationship with its environment and reveals the catastrophic impasse of consumerism.

Consciences are nevertheless awakening to the invention of another relationship between humans and plant life, which until now had been relegated to the background in the hierarchy of human priorities. According to the anthropologist Natasha Myers, we are currently witnessing the "recent swerve in attention to the fascinating lives of plants among philosophers, anthropologists and popular science writers".

Certain artists have turned this interest in the plant world into the focal point of their practices. Back in 1982, the German artist Joseph Beuys pioneered the field by presenting a project called *7000 Oaks, Urban Forestation instead of Urban Administration*. Assisted by an army of volunteers, he planted and distributed 7,000 trees throughout the city. Some 40 years later, the work survived its creator and continues to evolve, as the lifetime of an oak tree largely exceeds that of a human being.

Works which incorporate living organisms are dependent upon the latter's development and imply a sort of loss of control, inasmuch as the results can not be foreseen. They contribute to establishing a physical connection with the spectator, deepening his knowledge of the biological processes specific to these organisms and releasing him from any unwelcome anthropocentrism. Certain botanical experts, including Stefano Mancuso, do not hold back nowadays from referring to the "sensitive intelligence" of plants.

In a similar vein, the Austrian artist Lois Weinberger, whose work is also found in this exhibition, metaphorically emphasises the political role of plants by using weeds, their ability to grow and proliferate, to remind us of human communities and the searingly topical phenomena of migration.

Another artist whose work appears in the exhibition, Michel Blazy, has taken an interest in all lifeforms from the outset of his career. He uses an extraordinary variety of materials for his sculptures: plants, dog biscuits, hydrophilic cotton, toilet paper, etc., to experiment with living beings as a model of growth and development, a perpetually renewed system, whose evolution is experienced in real time. Thus for example, an element that is in the process of rotting (e.g. an orange rind) will never be the same from one moment to the next, or from one spectator to another, as the living aspect—in this case the micro-organisms, bacteria or fungi—have in the meantime been accomplishing their incessant transformation work. The living being thus develops a random form which is not preconfigured by the artist, which even demands not to be controlled, so that in his own words, it "allows the material, the lifeforms and time to do their own thing."

RECREATION, CO-CREATION

Until recently, artists, designers and architects were used to working with inert, non-living materials. Nowadays, they have new, biological products which technology has made easily, if not infinitely reproducible. As long as the stages of production are respected, they now have new materials at their disposal. Among these, mycelium [the vegetative mechanism of fungi] still has great potential that is yet to be discovered.

In the digital age, the transformation of living material is slowly but surely finding its way into the realms of creation. The potential approaches of what is now called biodesign are manifold. Working with living organisms such as yeasts, bacteria or mycelium inevitably leads to a more ecological, responsible vision of our future societies.

Until now reserved to the fields of medicine or biology, exploring invisible lifeforms and hidden processes has recently attracted the interest of artists. It is now possible to 3D-print living tissues using stem cells and create simulacra of living objects.

A new, shared territory between art, innovation and science, biotechnologies are now used as a medium for creation, or more accurately the co-creation of original artefacts.

THE NATURE OF TIME

Art is a step from nature toward the infinite.

Khalil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*

The exhibition also addresses *Still life*, which implies the presence of inanimate elements arranged in a certain way, with a symbolic intention to provoke a poetic emotion.

Traditionally, still life is often synonymous with vanity, aiming to remind us of the derisory nature of human gesticulations, the ephemeral nature of our existence on earth and the inevitability of death. Fruit and flowers are omnipresent, providing symbolic meaning and biblical references: the apple refers to Adam, the carnation to Christ's incarnation... and other categories of objects in turn evoke the corruption of all matter [decaying fruit], the fleeing of time [the clock], the fragility of life [faded flowers] or the vanity of worldly possessions [broken spectacles], etc.

In the exhibition, we find works revealing:

- a utopian beauty, that of the minuscule, the invisible and evanescent;
- a scientific type of approach, based on recent research and "planned nature";
- living works, which evolve throughout the duration of the exhibition;
- the strange charm of artificial, hyper-realist or imaginary plants;
- artistic devices created *in situ*.

The whole show is governed by a coherence based on semantic affinities and is presented in an eminently sober scenography. It speaks of the state of the world, asking fundamental questions about life, transformation, decomposition and death... in short, it is about the work of time.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- Alexi Williams – Walles
- Andrea Branzi – Italy
- Ani Liu – United States
- Anne Ausloos – Belgium
- Ariel Schlesinger – Israel
- Arvid & Marie – Netherlands/France
- Babs Decruyenaere – Belgium
- Bas Smets & Wannes Peremans – Belgium
- Benjamin Verdonck – Belgium
- Diana Scherer – Germany
- Eline Willemarck – Belgium
- Elissa Lacoste – France
- Erez Nevi Pana – Israel
- Erine Wyckmans – Belgium
- Gabriel Rico – Mexico
- Formafantasma – Italy
- Hilde De decker – Belgium
- Hongjie Yang – China
- Jean-Philippe Tromme – Belgium
- Lieve Van Stappen – Netherlands
- Lilla Tabasso – Italy
- Lois Weinberger – Austria
- Maarten Van den Eynde – Belgium
- Marlène Huissoud – France
- Michel Blazy – France
- Nel Verbeke – Belgium
- Nurit Bar-Shai – Israel
- Octave Vandeweghe – Belgium
- Roland Persson – Sweden
- Scholten & Baijings – Netherlands
- Studio Klarenbeek & Dros – Netherlands
- Studio Nienke Hoogvliet – Netherlands
- Studio Wieki Somers – Netherlands
- Tania De Bruycker – Belgium
- Tony Matelli – United States
- Various Artists – Belgium
- Vincent Egon Verschueren – Belgium
- Xandra Van Der Eijk – Netherlands

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Press visuals can be downloaded without access
code on WWW.CARACASCOM.COM

Tony Matelli

Weed, 2019



Scholten & Baijings

Vegetables, 2009

© photo Scheltens & Abbenes



Octave Vandeweghe

Cosmic gestures #17

© photo An Onghena



Lols Weinberger

Garten, 1997 - 2003

© photo Dirk Pauwels



Elissa Lacoste

Dolomies, 2019

© photo Elissa Lacoste



PARTNERS



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- . As part of the 100th anniversary of cultural policy in Hainaut

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OPENING TIMES

Every day from 10 AM until 6 PM, except Mondays.

The Grand-Hornu is closed on 24, 25, 31st December and 1st January.

The office can be reached during weekdays from 8 AM to 4.30 PM.

ADMISSION FEE

- Combined ticket for the Grand-Hornu site / CID / MAC's: €10
- Discount: €2 or €6
- Group rates (minimum 15 ppl.): €6
- School groups: €2
- Free for children under 6
- Free entry on the first sunday of the month
- Free guided tour from Tuesday to Friday at 15.30, Saturday at 11.00 and 15.30, Sunday at 15.00 and 16.30
- Audio-guides for the historic site: €2 (FR / DUTCH / GERMAN / ENGL / IT / SP)

BOOKING NUMBER

Advance reservation required for guided tours (by appointment) of exhibitions and/or historic site (FR / DUTCH / GERMAN / ENGL).

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reservations@grand-hornu.be

CATERING

Rizom is the sixth project of Chef **Sang Hoon Degeimbre**.

This restaurant, located in the heart of the Grand-Hornu, offers a cuisine that melts different cultures together. In addition, Rizom also provides a new fast food service in the cafeteria that was recently transformed by designer Benoît Deneufbourg.

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