

Totemism: Climate Altered Species|2021

Tori BENZ | Jarrad MARTYN | Anna NAZZARI |
Ryan NAZZARI | Mike SINGE | Marzena TOPKA

Totemism: Climate Altered Species is an exhibition exploring the nuances of Totemism in a climate altered world. In this reality, plants and animals, affected by technology or human ingenuity are revered, ritualised or glorified in unexpected ways.

Curated by Dr **Anna NAZZARI**
Officially opened by Dr **Susanna CASTLEDEN**

Spectrum Project Space

Opening: 27 May 2021 5pm - 7pm
Exhibition dates: 28 May - 17 Jun 2021
Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am - 4pm
Building 3, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

For all sale enquiries of works please contact the curator directly via
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ECU Galleries



Curator's Statement

In Australia, rising temperatures, caused by increased human activity, are generating longer periods of intense heat, which in turn, are creating transformations in the natural environment. These changes are evident in the modified growth and distribution of plants, animals and insects; the irregular movements/breeding patterns of marine species; the endless wave of coral bleaching and frequency of droughts and bushfires.

Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, founder of the Potsdam Climate Institute, has cautioned that if humans don't act in the next 18 months, a "hothouse earth" is likely to destroy the structure of oceans and forests and, lead to the mass extinction of millions of species (Sheridan 2018).

For decades, Australian governments' action on climate change has been weak or ineffective. This failure to act has ensured that the radical action required now, within a shrinking timeline, is both terrifying and seemingly unachievable. As such, rather than reduce emissions, the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison's latest political approach is to condemn terms like "climate emergency" or "climate crisis" and instead zone in on phrases such as "Technology over taxation" (Karp and Morton 2020), which suggest human ingenuity and technological innovation will save the day.

Without a plan or the time left to implement one, it seems probable that mass extinctions will occur. Thus, the exhibition, **Totemism: Climate Altered Species** imagines a world in which mass extinction has occurred and where the impacts of human ingenuity and technological innovation are celebrated in the deficits and enhancements of the remaining plant and animal species.

Totemism is a belief system, in which humans are said to have an affinity or supernatural relationship with a spirit being, such as an animal or plant. The entity or totem is thought to interact with a clan or individual and function as their emblem or symbol. In some cases, it is believed family groups adopt animals or plants, or the features/traits they possess as a means of enhancing their own human abilities (Haekel 2020).

This exhibition is thus an examination of Totemism in a climate altered world, in which plants and animals, affected by technology or human ingenuity are revered, ritualised or glorified in unexpected ways.

Dr **Anna NAZZARI**

Haekel, Joseph. 2020. "Totemism". Britannica May 12, 2021 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/totemism-religion>

Karp, Paul and Adam Morton. 2020. "Government to Take Technology Over Tax Approach to Climate Change". The Guardian, February 18, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/18/government-to-take-technology-over-taxation-approach-to-climate-change>

Sheridan, Kerry. 2018. "Earth Risks Tipping into Hothouse State: Study." PhysOrg August 6, 2018 <https://phys.org/news/2018-08-earth-hothouse-state.html>

Tori BENZ

Biography

Tori Benz lives and works in Perth, W.A. She completed her undergraduate degree in Fine Arts at Curtin University of Technology in 2000, returning in 2002 to complete Honours.

By working from a collection of inherited family films and photography, and her own experiences with motherhood, Benz's works create paused moments that tease out the everyday tensions and possibilities that domestic relationships can evoke.

Benz's works are intended to exploit the tactility of traditional drawing and painting materials and techniques. Cultivating a tentative viewpoint, she employs these materials in a manner so that meaning and material can simultaneously reference completeness and trace, absence and presence, whilst teasing out various aspects of the ubiquitous nature of her subject matter. In doing this she hopes to explore motherhood beyond commodified and simplistic pictorial representations.

Benz is a Sessional Academic and Technical Officer in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Enquiry at Curtin University.

Statement

The series 'The Inheritors' imagines portraits in a climate altered world. In doing so, it considers how generations to come would depict power, fertility and wealth, and how this might be represented in their relationships with the animals that inhabit this new reality. Benz has intentionally positioned her subjects with a sense of ease or detachment, even authority about the situation they are in. Questions are raised concerning the relationship with animal genetic mutation, and species modification to cope with demands on survival in a climate altered world.

Symbolically these animals are specifically chosen to speak of a new world power, divine offerings or coverage. Each modified animal totem allows for multiple readings regarding control, sacrifice & protection.

The 'Mayfly Mother' drawings speak of the life cycle of the mayfly, whose purpose is to ensure the genetic continuation of the species. Reflected in the role of the mother, these drawings consider a place for human evolution & adaption to ensure the imperative of reproduction & the ongoing existence of the species.

The mother figures are rendered in a state of unravelling, or at the moment of being devoured to ensure the multiplication or formation of the next generation. The refined traditional gesso & delicate graphite lines reflect the fragility of this relationship within the grotesque & disturbing reality of the Mayfly Mother's existence.

Jarrad MARTYN

Biography

Jarrad Martyn is an Australian artist based between Perth and Melbourne whose practice explores humanity's relationship with the natural environment. Through painting and drawing Martyn employs the principle of bricolage, something

constructed from a diverse range of things, to collate academic research and its associated imagery to create an alternate conversation. The contrasting motifs are used to explore the relationship between industry and the environment, species hierarchy, as well as the conservation function of zoos. Conversely, some works also tell a universal story that aims to unite humanity, while also suggesting what (if anything) the act of painting can offer to environmental conversation, and the current political and social climates.

Martyn's work is held in a number of public and private collections including the City of Perth, University of Western Australia, St John of God Health Care Art Collection, Edith Cowan University, Shire of Mundaring, and Curtin University, amongst others. In 2018 he won the John Stringer Art Prize, and in 2017 he won the City of Joondalup Community Invitation Art Award Overall Acquisitive Award.

Statement

The works I have produced for the exhibition respond to the close relationship between animals and humans, a quality that epitomises totemism. Often, an animal is elevated to emblematic status when time is spent cohabitating the natural environment, especially while hunting, protecting, and in companionship.

Night Shift and Wayfinder both explore this direct relationship between humans and animals as food sources, through the practice of using drop-nets to catch Marron in South-West Western Australia.

Night Shift and Wayfinder aim to demonstrate our reliance on capitalism for access to basic resources, especially access to food, and the way in which our understanding of the food chain has become warped.

Wayfinder features a snorkeller, high in the composition, dictating species hierarchy. Snorkelling is considered a hobby for many in the Western world, however versions of this activity have been used for many years for hunting and gathering purposes, once again dictating the changing nature of our relationship with animals.

Anna NAZZARI

Biography

Anna Nazzari is a Perth-based artist and writer. Her art practice examines the human othering of animals through sci-fi, horror and supernatural themes. Her artwork is multi-faceted and can include sculpture, video, drawing and photography. In recent collaborations with Erin Coates, Nazzari has explored the Oceanic Gothic through a reimagining of Western Australia's coastal waters and the marine flora and fauna which inhabit them. She has exhibited both locally and interstate, most recently at Monster Theatres as part of the Adelaide Biennial and, her collaborative and non-collaborative screen-based works have been shown at numerous International film festivals. In 2011, she completed a Doctorate of Philosophy (Art), which analysed the absurd fate of gender ambiguous narratives. She currently works as a Lecturer at Curtin University's School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry, via the OUA Art Studies program.

Statement

The 20th century inventor, Richard Buckminster Fuller, whose ideas and inventions often looked like they had been lifted out of the pages of a science fiction novel, asserted that human ingenuity would solve the most difficult of world problems. Essentially, he believed that technology would save us from ourselves but denied other tenets of modern science such as evolution (Kolbert 2008). In one such statement, he declared that “humans had spread not from Africa but from Polynesia and that dolphins were descended from these early, seafaring earthlings” (Kolbert 2008, 5).

Fuller’s thinking may be flawed but as far as dolphins are concerned, not entirely unique. Humans have long classified them as superior to other animals. The size of the dolphin brain in ratio to their body has played a role in this, although brain size as a marker of intelligence, is still disputed (Grimm and Miller 2010). The brilliance of dolphins has repeatedly been expressed in movies and TV shows, where the dolphin has been portrayed as a hero who can save humanity through its remarkable exploits. Biochemists have also recently discovered that dolphins and humans share the same genome. They believe identifying the proteins that help make dolphins function will benefit human health. If blood doesn’t flow to a human organ, it can result in stroke, organ failure or death. Conversely, when dolphins descend into the deep, they shut blood off to specific organs, yet survive. Understanding this could advance biomedicine (NIST 2017) and potentially lead to other breakthroughs such as breathing underwater for extended periods. Thus, in *Totemism: Climate Altered Species*, my work depicts a future in which dolphins advance through human preference and are celebrated for their capacity to survive. In doing so, it poses the question, what technological or other interventions might humanity employ to save a species in a climate apocalypse and, is this for the benefit of humanity or the dolphin?

Grimm, David and Greg Miller. 2010. “Is a Dolphin a Person” *ScienceMag* February 21, 2010. <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2010/02/dolphin-person>

Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2008. “Dymaxion Man: The Visions of Buckminster Fuller” *The New Yorker*, *Annals of Innovation* <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/06/09/dymaxion-man>

“Diving Deep into the Dolphin Genome Could Benefit Human Health” 2017. *NIST*, February 22, 2017 <https://www.nist.gov/news-events/news/2017/02/diving-deep-dolphin-genome-could-benefit-human-health>

Ryan NAZZARI

Biography

Ryan Nazzari is a Western Australian mid-career artist who lives and works in Perth. He has shown his work both locally and interstate and also uses social media as a gallery.

The artist primarily creates watercolour drawings and paintings, however, he has worked with multiple medias since graduating Curtin University in 2004.

Central to the artist’s practice is the constant and prolific making of images that chart the subjective realities of his every day and imagined experiences.

Statement

Inevitable survivors of a climate catastrophe, feral cats invade the domestic space. Like a stain that can't be erased, they become animal replicants for humans starved of a pet connection. An Australian raven, a messenger bird, watches on. It slips in and out of representation and dissolves into loose puddles of colour. A curious survivor, staring at us from a smouldering landscape. How long will it be before the increased abilities of the replicant takes it down?

Mike SINGE

Biography

Born in Perth Western Australia, Mike Singe received a Bachelor of Fine Art from Curtin University in 1990 and established a profile within the Perth art community before moving to Tasmania in 2009. His work is represented in major institutions including the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Murdoch University, Curtin University and the Kerry Stokes Collection. Singe has also been the recipient of multiple development grants through ArtsWA.

In 2009 he was awarded an Australian Postgraduate Award to undertake a Master of Fine Arts at the Tasmanian School of Art. The focus of this research, completed in 2011, into the shifting human behaviour and cultural systems in response to the climate change debate continues to inform his practice.

Statement

Despite his interest in the subject of climate change Singe considers any attempt to label his art practice as environmentally responsible to be disingenuous. Rather than drawing inspiration from the field of legitimate climate science, his work is informed by the evolving culture and language that has developed in response to this looming environmental disaster. He is particularly fascinated by the DIY eco inventions that pervade the internet, the seemingly endless websites and YouTube videos that feature backyard environmental warriors espousing their low cost, labour intensive and inevitably inefficient climate change solutions. While these dubious inventions fail to provide practical environmental solutions, they offer their creators a flawed outlet for relieving the guilt of their ongoing global warming complicity.

For Totemism, Climate Altered Species Singe presents new works from an ongoing series of environmentally dubious carbon capture and storage drawings. Made by applying candle soot onto the drawing surface, capturing carbon that would otherwise combine with oxygen in the combustion process to form carbon dioxide, the works in this exhibition highlight the fallacy of industrial carbon fixation by linking it to Singe's own impotent attempts to overcome the environmental impact of his art practice.

Singe's works in this exhibition depict various species of water bird nesting on inflatable devices initially intended for human use. In what kind of future climate altered world would these kitsch liferafts become a viable breeding environment? Is this a display of opportunistic adaption or have these inflatable nesting sites been distributed by remorseful humans as a surreal replacement for lost habitat?

Marzena TOPKA

Biography

Marzena Topka resides and works in Perth, WA as an Associate Lecturer at the Curtin University, School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry, Open Universities Art Studies. She arrived in Australia in 1983 and studied art history at the University of Western Australia, graduating with a BA (Fine Art) (first-class honours) in 1992. Since then, she completed Advanced Diploma at Central Tafe (2003), BA (Art) (first-class honours) (2005) and Master of Creative Arts in 2011 at Curtin University. In her practice, Topka works across various media, including sculpture, textiles, drawing and film, taking inspiration from the irrationality of systems and their fallibility. She had a solo exhibition at Fremantle Arts Centre Boundaries of Beige in 2014 and she participated in numerous group shows, including Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery Here&Now19. Her works are part of many private collections.

Statement

“When my life slows down, I walk. Around me, mostly green ecosystems. Under my feet, decaying matter: beautiful, complex, intricate. What was once a living system is now dry, brittle and expired. There is an impulse to pick it up, to hold it and preserve what is left.”

In Nervous Systems, Marzena Topka, works with dead plant matter entangled in life support systems that can neither nourish nor revive them. Approaching the theme of mass extinction from an imagined future, Topka, presents the plants outside of their natural cycle of decay and regeneration.

- 1 Ryan Nazzari. **Appetiser**. 2021. 25cm diameter circle. Acrylic paint on MDF board. \$150
- 2 Ryan Nazzari. **Ginger Tom**. 2021. 30.5 x 31.5cm. Acrylic paint on plywood. \$180
- 3 Ryan Nazzari. **Still Here**. 2021. 25cm diameter circle. Acrylic paint on MDF board. \$150
- 4 Tori Benz. **The Mayfly Mother I**. 2021. 30 x 20 x 4.7cm. Graphite on gesso on marine ply. NFS
- 5 Tori Benz. **The Mayfly Mother II**, 2021, 30 x 20 x 4.7cm, graphite on gesso on marine ply. NFS
- 6 Tori Benz. **The Inheritors I**, 2021, 51 x 40.7 x 3.5cm, oil on board. NFS
- 7 Tori Benz. **The Inheritors II**, 2021, 51 x 40.7 x 3.5cm, oil on board. NFS
- 8 Tori Benz. **The Inheritors III**, 2021, 51 x 40.7 x 3.5cm, oil on board. NFS

- 9 Jarrad Martyn. **Night Shift**. 2020. 69 x 86cm. Oil on canvas. \$2000
- 10 Jarrad Martyn. **Goliath**. 2020. 30 x 24cm. Oil on canvas. \$600
- 11 Jarrad Martyn. **Dusk**. 2021. 48 x 60cm (framed). Graphite on paper. \$750
- 12 Marzena Topka. **Martwa Natura/Still Life**. 2021. 115 x 52 x 28cm. Cotton, wax, plant matter. \$750
- 13 Marzena Topka. **Life Support**. 2014 - 2021. 12 x 15 x 9cm. Cotton, wax, plant matter. \$350
- 14 Marzena Topka. **Life Support**. 2021. 25 x 46 x 25cm. Cotton, wax, plant matter. \$550
- 15 Marzena Topka. **Nervous Systems**. 2021. Dimensions variable. 100 mL volumetric flask, tubing, filament, wax, gores, plant matter, water. \$550
- 16 Marzena Topka. **Nervous Systems**. 2021. Dimensions variable. 600 mL beaker, tubing, filament, cotton, wax, gores, plant matter, water. \$750
- 17 Marzena Topka. **Nervous Systems**. 2021. 33 x 18 x 6cm. Gores, wax, plant matter. \$350
- 18 Marzena Topka. **Membranes**. 2021. Dimensions variable. Paper, wax, plant matter. \$500
- 19 Marzena Topka. **Nervous Systems**. 2021. Dimensions variable. 500 mL filter flask, tubing, wax, plant matter, water. \$750
- 20 Ryan Nazzari. **Survivor I**. 2021. 29.5 x 41.5cm. Watercolour on paper. \$150
- 21 Ryan Nazzari. **Survivor II**. 2021. 29.5 x 41.5cm. Watercolour on paper. \$150
- 22 Ryan Nazzari. **Stain I**. 2021. 38 x 63cm. Texta on sheet. NFS
- 23 Ryan Nazzari. **Stain II**. 2021. 48 x 81cm. Texta on sheet. NFS
- 24 Ryan Nazzari. **Stain III**. 2021. 83 x 64cm. Texta on sheet. NFS
- 25 Anna Nazzari. **Lie Catcher I**. 2021. 14.8 x 16.5 cm. Watercolour on paper. \$250
- 26 Anna Nazzari. **Lie Catcher II**. 2021. 14.8 x 16.5 cm. Watercolour on paper. \$250
- 27 Anna Nazzari. **Dolphin Dreams**, 2021, 28.9 x 20.8cm. Watercolour on paper. \$520
- 28 Anna Nazzari. **Lie Catcher III**. 2021. 14.8 x 16.5 cm. Watercolour on paper. \$250

- 29 Anna Nazzari. **Clone Class I**. 2021. 42.5 x 44.5cm. Watercolour on paper. \$590
- 30 Anna Nazzari. **Living Monument**, 2021, 50 x 58.5cm, Graphite and coloured pencil on paper. \$1200
- 31 Anna Nazzari. **Siamese Dolphins**, 2021, 50 x 39.5cm, Graphite on paper. \$620
- 32 Anna Nazzari. **Implant**, 2021, 49.5 x 60.5cm. Graphite and watercolour on paper. \$1200
- 33 Anna Nazzari. **Cannulation Nation**. 2021, 62 x 50.5cm. Graphite and watercolour on paper. \$1250
- 34 Anna Nazzari. **Clone Class II**. 2021. 42.5 x 44.5cm. Watercolour on paper. \$590
- 35 Mike Singe. **Recreation Fisher (37 Minute Carbon Fixation)**, 2020, 30 x 30cm. Soot, varnish on acrylic. \$1300
- 36 Mike Singe. **Recreation Fisher (40 Minute Carbon Fixation)**, 2020, 35 x 30cm./ Soot, varnish on acrylic. \$1400
- 37 Mike Singe. **Recreation Fisher (51 Minute Carbon Fixation)**, 2020, 40 x 40cm. Soot, varnish on acrylic. \$1500
- 38 Mike Singe. **Recreation Fisher (39 Minute Carbon Fixation)**, 2020, 52 x 35cm./ Ssoot, varnish on acrylic. \$1700
- 39 Mike Singe. **Recreation Fisher (38 Minute Carbon Fixation)**, 2020, 46 x 26cm. Soot, varnish on acrylic. \$1400
- 40 Mike Singe. **Recreation Fisher (47 Minute Carbon Fixation)**, 2020, 30 x 30cm. Soot, varnish on acrylic. \$1400
- 41 Jarrad Martyn. **Wayfinder**. 2021. 70 x 57cm. Oil on canvas. \$1750

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ann24mar@hotmail.com