

ANITA TRAVERSO GALLERY

Without a Shadow of a Dao

26 November – 20 December 2014

Featuring: George ANGELOVSKI, Gabrielle COURTENAY, Anna FAIRBANK
Stefan GEVERS, Mandy GUNN, Debbie HILL, Ted LINCOLN [USA]
Nicholas MELLEFONT, Gordon MONRO Ryan PONSFORD
Janita RYAN, James TAPSCOTT, Hana VASAK

Without a Shadow of Dao unites thirteen artists in an exploration of ancient Dao (or Tao) philosophies on the relationship between humans and Mother Nature. Starting from the most basic of Dao principals: the idea of Oneness, whereby all beings within the earth's environment were originally one and understood each other through innate metaphysical bonds. Issues of global warming, extinction of animal life and the changing landscape of the environment which humans inhabit are considered from various conceptual points of view.

The writing of modern day theorist Timothy Morton contributes to the understanding of these ancient ideas through contemporary philosophical theories. His deliberation on *hyperobjects*, frame some of the more abstract notions of ecological awareness, delving into the "innumerable interrelationships among life forms and between life and non-life."¹

In this exhibition artists investigate these notions by employing aspects of science and technology, traditional approaches to landscape, the role of the body within nature, and through considerations on the impact of urban growth. *Without a Shadow of a Dao* seeks to reconcile the chasm that humanity and 'progress' has created within the environment by touching, not only on that which is present in our daily news and conversations, but by also making an allowance for that which may exist outside our immediate physical perceptions.

The exhibition features a photograph by **GEORGE ANGELOVSKI**, from the series *Fog Will Lift*. This piece makes a solemn comment; a pensive consideration of the current state of urban growth, highlighting its significant environmental impact. An image composed of real places in a constructed setting creates a dystopian world where nature and 'progress' are pinned against each other leaving the human figure teetering on the edge of survival. Juxtaposed against this is **GORDON MONRO's** generative art print titled *The Limits to Growth*. Reminiscent of a Fabergé egg, this piece stems from a 1972 report at MIT whereby an international group of scholars, employing a first of its kind computer model, track the outcome of exponential growth of population and resource extraction. The results, frighteningly but not surprisingly, highlight that there exist limits to Earth's resources, and the plundering of these will ultimately result in the demise of human life. As the beautiful organism is seen to be spreading into the blackness, it begins to overlap onto itself into what could be assumed as organic growth, or nature reclaiming its space, equally within a limit set by the artist, both alluding to hope for nature and demise for humans.

¹ Timothy Morton, "Poisoned Ground: Art and Philosophy in the time of Hyperobjects" in *Sympoke* 2013 vol21 nos.1-2, p.42

The photography of **JAMES TAPSCOTT** utilises the ephemeral and ‘flowing’ nature of light to render otherwise dismal man-made environments beautiful once again, simultaneously illuminating not only the impact of man but also the absence of a truly natural world. **Tapscott’s** employ of the light’s physical properties, such as its capacity to pass through the smallest gap, or take shape of any form in its path is not unlike the Daoist philosophy of following ‘the way’ or working with the natural order of things.²

The works of painter **NICHOLAS MELLEFONT** and emerging artist **HANA VASAK** introduce the human figure to the dialogue, exploring both the human presence and absence in nature. As each approaches the body through their respective practices of painting and sculpture, the viewer is asked to consider their own within the current environment.

MANDY GUNN, RYAN PONSFORD, DEBBIE HILL, and JANITA RYAN reflect on the animal kingdom within the scope of the exhibition brief, each work reiterating the disconnection between humans and other creatures. **Gunn’s** quill compositions from the *Unnatural History* series, along with 3D drawings from Hill’s *What We Carry With Us* series, signal to a potentially grim future where specimens of animal life are kept in museum-type containment for the sole purpose of reference.

Ponsford’s sublime photographic series *Birds* echoes this sentiment, refocusing these issues closer to home with his piece *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, a richly saturated image of dead bat – a recent resident in Melbourne’s own Botanic Gardens. Meanwhile **Ryan’s** site-specific installation gives an impression that whimsical polar bears are playfully residing in the scene, with twinkling of fairy lights and a pastel colour palate one could be mistaken that this is a promising scenario. Upon closer inspection deeper concerns for these wild beasts, forced to cohabit with human waste such as plastics, becomes evident.

GABRIELLE COURTENAY, ANNA FAIRBANK and STEFAN GEVERS explore further the metaphysical bonds proposed by Daoist philosophers especially Morton; in his deliberations on the ecological crisis he states “this is the

² Jarcq Terra, *The book of the way and its way* 2007, p12

moment at which massive non human, non sentient entities make decisive contact with humans ending various human concepts such as 'world', horizon, nature and even environment.³

Courtenay, whose painting and sculpture can be viewed as a universe of parallel existence unites several ideas and symbols under one narrative. *The Ephemerals*, brought to life by the artist through the process of carving, reveal certain metaphorical truths about identity, humanity and a connection between beings.

Gevers, with his delicate watercolour pieces, titled *Blue Circles* and *Pink Circles*, suggest leaf shaped objects floating within an organised oval pattern, not unlike those created by high wind and best seen in autumn with the deposit of leaves. The circular movement is highly energetic, symbolic of the connectivity existing not only within the confines of Earth but also beyond it. These works reference all that is defined through the circular or oval shape, from the smallest atom to the solar system in which we haphazardly float.

Between **Gevers** and **Courtenay** is the site-specific installation and the photo/resin work of **Fairbank**. Her temporary vinyl piece titled *Rhizome Map* correlates the artist's projects and collaborations around the world. By reducing the destinations to these simple lines Fairbank reconceptualises the meaning of our world, much in consensus with the philosophies of Morton.

TED LINCOLN's *Glimpses* hark back to the traditional eastern approaches in painting but also in representing the environment and nature, so familiar to art practitioners. As they reference the long tradition of Chinese artists and writers taking inspiration from the Daodejing within the context of this exhibition their sublime representation of the landscape refocuses the innate affection we have for the Earth.

Knowingly or unknowingly we cannot help but consider the world we live in as beautiful, necessary and awe inspiring.

Irina Asriian 2014

³ Timothy Morton, "Poisoned Ground: Art and Philosophy in the time of Hyperobjects" in *Sympoke* 2013 vol 21 nos.1-2, p.39