

CONTEMPORARY
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EVERY CHILD IS A MIRROR OF DEATH

ARTISTS

AGATA LANKAMER

WIKTOR GAŁKA

ANDRZEJ STANIEK

MIA MILGROM

INSIDE JOB

(ULA LUCIŃSKA
& MICHAŁ KNYCHAUS)

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CURATOR

ŁUKASZ KROPIOWSKI

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

WHAT'S ON DISPLAY? 5

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These are the most exciting and momentous years in all of history. We cannot say with confidence what life will be like after the Singularity.

RAY KURZWEIL

For progress there is no cure...

JOHN VON NEUMANN

In one of their “futuristic” crime novels, the Strugatsky brothers recount the story of Tojvo Glumov, a counter-intelligence officer within the Department of Extraordinary Events. Fearless and resolute, Glumov dedicates his skills to tracking agents of an alien super-civilization¹. These enigmatic figures have supposedly reached Earth to subtly influence human history, though their ultimate motives remain shrouded in mystery. His investigation eventually leads him to the Institute for Metapsychological Research – popularly known as the “Institute of Oddballs” – where he discovers that these alleged visitors are not extraterrestrial at all. Instead, they represent a new, peaceful branch of human evolution itself. With unwavering conviction – and a hint of xenophobia – Glumow pledges to oppose the “ludens”, whose physical and intellectual prowess far exceeds that of their human predecessors. However, his resolve is shaken when he discovers that he, too, harbours the genetic potential to ascend to this higher evolutionary plane. Terror takes hold as he realizes he is unwilling to surrender his humanity, even in exchange for the immortality and hyper-intelligence that define this superior form of existence.

The sentiment expressed by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky feels increasingly poignant as we listen to futurologists who contend that we are “the last generation of the old civilization and the first of the new.” We are acutely aware of both the extraordinary opportunities unfolding before humanity and the existential threats that accompany them. As our scientific and technological civilization attains a level of power unprecedented in history, it simultaneously reveals a profound fragility and a haunting susceptibility to self-destruction. The prospect of humanity bioengineering its way beyond the constraints of its own nature is as captivating as it is terrifying. Ultimately, Ulrich Beck’s assertion that uncertainty defines the modern age has never felt more accurate.

Today’s citizen of Beck’s “risk society” finds themselves caught between two extremes: the utopian, techno-futurist visions of longevity, superintelligence, and boundless prosperity, and the eco-dystopian pessimism that foresees an impending planetary catastrophe. This spectrum of hope and dread has reached an unprecedented peak. While biogerontologist Aubrey de Grey

¹ Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *The Waves Extinguish the Wind*.

enthusiastically claims that the first person to live to a thousand years has already been born, the reality remains grim elsewhere. In January 2026, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to a chilling 85 seconds to midnight – the closest humanity has ever come to civilizational collapse since the clock’s inception in 1947.

Many optimistic scientists place their faith in technological convergence, believing that the merging of previously distinct fields – computer science, cybernetics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, cognitive science, and genetics – will trigger exponential trends leading to a wholesale transformation of society. Ray Kurzweil, a leading proponent of this theory, argues that we have entered the final phase of this metamorphosis: “the transition from biological entities to transcendent beings”². By expanding the neocortex through nano-engineering and integrating it with artificial intelligence, we may soon possess computing power millions of times greater than our own. Such an expansion of consciousness would be so fundamental that its ultimate consequences remain nearly impossible to fathom. Techno-futurists argue that as intelligence expands, we will witness a commensurate rise in empathy, freedom, and the rule of law. They further predict that advances in 3D printing will enable objects to be manufactured with atomic precision, radically lowering costs and potentially eradicating poverty. Coupled with the development of virtual reality, this could lead to the decentralisation of production and greater aesthetic individualisation, shifting consumer habits from a culture of ownership to one of access. Finally, breakthroughs in materials science promise to maximise solar energy efficiency, providing a virtually inexhaustible and zero-emission source of power. Meanwhile, advances in tissue engineering will pave the way for cellular agriculture – the laboratory production of plant and animal products – which promises to eliminate global hunger and animal suffering. There is also the burgeoning prospect of electronic immortality and liberation from the physical body in favour of a post-biological existence within a digital reality; indeed, the concept of mind uploading is being given serious consideration. Looking further ahead, a new era of intellectual development is anticipated, in which human intelligence “will spread throughout the universe, transforming ordinary matter into ,computronium’, i.e. matter organised to achieve the highest possible computational density”³.

Unfortunately, the number of sceptics regarding the future is at least matched by the number of prophets envisioning a radiant tomorrow. René Girard tempers this optimism, noting that “violence has been unleashed on a global scale, leading to what apocalyptic texts predicted: the blurring of the distinction between natural and man-made disasters (...) global warming and rising sea levels are no longer mere metaphors today”⁴. Nick Bostrom, Director of the Future of Humanity Institute at the University of Oxford, echoes this pessimistic sentiment with his ‘vulnerable world’ hypothesis. In his view, attaining a specific level of technological advancement – one that empowers almost anyone to deploy weapons of mass destruction and turns civilisational infrastructure into a tool for terror – makes existential risk a tangible possibility. In such a climate,

the resurgence of great-power politics, militarism, and fundamentalism provides little room for optimism. Bostrom reluctantly suggests that the only way to stabilise this threatened world may be through “extreme, continuous, and ubiquitous surveillance combined with the capacity for rapid intervention”⁵. The implementation of such a security model would, inevitably, render dreams of freedom and the rule of law obsolete. We need not peer far into the future to see that Foucault’s panopticon – a prison where the guard sees everyone while remaining invisible himself – has been reborn in a far more efficient digital guise. This is a reality we navigate daily as internet users and owners of ‘smart’ devices who constantly surrender our data. Furthermore, much research casts doubt on the notion that exponential intellectual growth will foster community-building empathy. Instead, information chaos – a deluge of fake news, unverifiable reports designed for manipulation, and algorithms that trap users in ideological bubbles – is leading to the infantilisation of public discourse, widespread disinformation, and a total breakdown in the credibility of the infosphere. Media-shaped perspectives are increasingly grounded in ideological dogmas rather than genuine experience or knowledge. This trend frequently gives rise to anti-democratic populism, fanaticism, and even flagrantly anti-scientific conspiracy theories that now go so far as to challenge the Copernican revolution itself. Similarly, the prospects for alternative food and energy sources are being called into question. In their aptly titled book, *The Collapse of Western Civilisation*, Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway predict that resistance to political and economic change, coupled with “market fundamentalism”, will effectively stifle progress in these sectors. Rather than a vision of prosperity, they foresee an Anthropocene ,twilight era’—a period of climate catastrophe where flooding and desertification trigger mass migration and widespread famine. Furthermore, grim forecasts suggest that advancements in nanomedicine and artificial intelligence will usher in an “era of the elderly and the unemployed”. Most unsettling are the voices prophesying the ,grey goo’ scenario, in which the uncontrolled self-replication of nanomachines transforms all carbon-based matter into copies of themselves, ultimately reducing the planet’s biomass to a sea of self-replicating nano-mud.

We find ourselves, therefore, within a broad spectrum of possibilities – suspended somewhere between the promise of computronium and the horror of grey goo. The common thread running through both optimistic and apocalyptic visions of the future is the conviction that radical change is imminent. Max Tegmark, a cosmologist and artificial intelligence researcher, begins his predictions regarding human development with fundamental questions about what it means to be human and what distinguishes us from machines or other forms of life. He argues that, regardless of our current answers, ongoing technological progress will soon fundamentally transform them⁶. Within the context of this thesis, it is evident that even the most encouraging predictions often trigger a form of futurological anxiety. Indeed, one might argue that the more wildly optimistic the scenario, the deeper the unease it provokes. Visions of superintelligence, the trans-physical nature of cyborg entities blending biology with technology, the promise of eternal cybernetic paradises, and philosophical shifts that strip humanity of its ‘uniqueness’ all contribute to a condition that could be termed ‘Glumow’s syndrome’. Much like the agent from

2 R. Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Nearer: When We Merge with AI*, New York, 2024, Viking, p. 21.

3 Ibidem, pp. 18–19.

4 R. Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, Michigan State University Press, 2010, p. 17.

5 Sam Harris, *Making Sense: Conversations on Consciousness, Morality, and the Future of Humanity*, Bantam Press, UK, 2020, p. 409.
6 M. Tegmark, *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, Allen Lane, London 2017.

the Department of Extraordinary Events, we begin to fear the disintegration of ‘human nature’ and the possibility that our lives will cease to be recognisably human. Yet, is this phobia justified? Katherine Hayles contends that ‘we have always been posthumans’. Remarkably, forty years ago – the same year Glumow’s story was published – Donna Haraway famously declared that we are already cyborgs. We now perceive our biological nature, cultural identity, and relationships with non-human beings in a new light. According to the author, we have liberated ourselves from the constraints of binary thinking, suggesting that constant transgression may be inherent to the very essence of humanity. “Every child is a mirror of death” – the words of Jean-Paul Sartre that provide the title for this exhibition – is not an expression of defeatism. Rather, it conveys the inevitability of change and the fragility of established orders, both of which are subject to the accelerating reconfigurations driven by successive generations. Alvin Toffler, ever confident in the success of the civilisational project, reminds us: ‘it is precisely in decay and disintegration that one can find signs of birth and life’⁷.

We know the future origins of the post-human, yet even the boldest futurologists hesitate to define ‘who’ they will be. Likewise, the artists in this exhibition do not attempt to explain or ‘illustrate’ the future, nor do they seek to prescribe a specific path for humanity. Reflecting Timothy Morton’s notion that ‘art is a thought that cannot be thought clearly in the present’, the works presented here shy away from coherent narratives, offering fragments and clues instead of panoramic certainties. Nonetheless, they serve as manifestations of the predictions, anxieties, and expectations born from the tangible signs of progress – whether those signs inspire optimism or dread. These multi-perspective approaches weave together science, technology, nature, information theory, and socio-cultural constructs. Irrespective of how the cognitive perspective of each work is calibrated, the artists eschew ‘taming’ the new in favour of forms that evoke an aesthetic “singularity” – unsettlingly hybrid and resistant to simple classification. In this, they mirror the conviction of the Strugatsky brothers, who scathingly critiqued sanitised scenarios of change, likening them to a wild forest paved over into a “tarmac car park”. In their view, there is only one certainty regarding the future: ‘it bears no resemblance whatsoever to any of our imaginings of it’, and the coming world ‘will, above all, be alien to us’⁸.

7 A. Toffler, *The Third Wave*, Bantam Books, London 1980, p. 27
 8 A. and B. Strugatsky, at: *Noon Universe*, Chicago Review Press, 2023, pp. 843–4.

WHAT’S ON DISPLAY?

1 and 10—14 Wiktor Gałka

1. *Hemeroscopium*, acrylic on canvas, 3D print, 2024
10. *720° view*, acrylic on canvas, 2025
11. *Unlock at lvl 50*, acrylic on canvas, 2024
12. *Admin account*, acrylic on canvas, 3D print, 2026
13. *Preorder Exclusive*, acrylic on canvas, 3D print, 2023
14. *Domo Paradisso*, acrylic on canvas, 2025

Ray Kurzweil posits that by the 2030s, virtual and augmented reality will be accessible through direct neural interfaces. The researcher suggests that in such a future, the boundaries of space will be constrained only by the limits of human imagination. This concept finds a parallel in the works of Wiktor Gałka, where the lines between “reality” and “virtuality” are so deeply intertwined that they become entirely indistinguishable. The artist explores the concept of “embodied virtuality” with a mixture of fascination and apprehension – a paradigm in which digital technology transcends its role as a distinct “cybersphere” to become an integral part of the physical environment, shaping our bodies, gestures, and daily routines. The painter strives to “recreate the sensation of being immersed in a stream of images: pleasant, disorienting, and slightly numbing”, whilst maintaining a critical distance from the vision of a “totally designed world” where controlling algorithms and digital surveillance are inevitable. An individual navigating an increasingly technologized environment is shaped by the dynamic interplay of physiology, technology, and culture. Bartosz Kłoda-Staniecko defines “cyber-identity” as the existential state of the cybernetic human (*homo cyberneticus*) – an entity born of both genes and bits, perpetually connected to other subjects and objects through an incessant exchange of data and information. Within this framework, the “self” emerges from the convergence of stimuli arriving simultaneously from multiple directions. This technological symbiosis facilitates novel modes of understanding, offering a multi-perspective view of reality, diverse forms of work and leisure, and even a partial liberation from biological constraints. At the same time, however, it narrows the scope of our experience by rendering it dependent on media and digital transmission; reality is increasingly supplanted by simulations – multiplied signs, images, and representations that no longer refer to any inherent “authenticity”. As the artist observes, “whilst we can construct our digital identities by transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, the data that increasingly shapes our perspective arises not from active exploration, but from content suggested to us in an endless scroll.”

2 INSIDE JOB

2. *Get down, get down little Henry Lee and stay all night with me*, aluminium, steel, digital print on silk, electric cables, LED light, 2019

The duo Inside Job, comprising Ula Lucińska and Michał Knychaus, draws upon the concept of “xenofuturism” – an approach to the future that embraces a multitude of possibilities and perspectives while valuing neglected, strange, and non-human realms. In the face of rapid and inevitable civilisational change, their works serve as a space for questioning conventional notions of ‘development’. They represent a point of convergence between the future—perspectives that transcend contemporary outlooks and are perceived as “foreign” (xeno) – and the past, encompassing former ideas of technological or social progress that the duo regards as ‘an inseparable, dynamic, and active element of time’.

A significant portion of Ula Lucińska and Michał Knychaus’s oeuvre explores the concept of ‘lost futures’ – unrealised scenarios that resurface as cultural ‘spectres’ of bygone aspirations. The coexistence of numerous alternative possibilities is manifested in their work through the synthesis of forms and motifs derived from disparate systems, sources, and epochs.

The twin portals of the installation *Get down, get down little Henry Lee and stay all night with me*, function as aesthetic hybrids, merging the laboratory-like sterility of steel with the organic delicacy of fabric. These works draw upon speculative visions of the future and potential historical trajectories. As Inside Job observes: ‘The starting point for this project is the conviction that beneath the surface of what is stable and familiar, there exist gaps, shifts, and areas of ambiguity – spaces that may lead to parallel, phantasmagorical, or subconscious worlds.’

3—6 Andrzej Staniek

3. *Wild Type*, silicone, pigment, 2026

4. *Trial Body No. 1*, silicone, pigment, 2026

5. *Trial Body No. 2*, silicone, pigment, 2026

6. *Buccal Engine*, silicone, pigment, 2025

In his work, Andrzej Staniek explores the concept of identity within a world where biology, technology, and capitalism are increasingly intertwined. His practice originates from a fascination with evolution, mutation, and the body, while also manifesting an interest in the unfamiliar. However—although his sculptures possess qualities of xenobiological engineering, a field concerned with designing non-natural biological systems and studying life based on foundations other than Earth-bound DNA/RNA or amino acids – the “alien” here does not necessarily denote something external. As the artist states in one of his works: ‘The aliens are inside. The aliens are you.’ Alieness thus emerges as an internal condition – residing within our drives, microbiomes, and neurochemistry, or within the “artificial” matter and synthetic entities of our own creation.

Staniek perceives evolution not as a harmonious process of refinement, but rather as a series of experiments, errors, and deformations. Within his practice, the organism is presented as an unstable system in a state of perpetual flux, susceptible to both external and internal influences. While the biomorphic forms of his sculptures may evoke the aesthetics of body horror, they do not concern the ‘horror of the flesh’ so much as the realisation that biology itself is inherently unsettling and radically creative. Consequently, Staniek’s work constitutes a reflection on the development of life, understood as a ceaseless process of conditioned becoming.

7—9 Jennetta Petch & Szymon Kula

7. *Harvest Moon (Spindler)*, copper, charred wood, ceramics, 2024

8. *Harvest Moon (Sower)*, copper, charred wood, ceramics, 2024

9. *Drive your cart and plough over the bones of the dead (Cart)*, steel, charred wood, 2021

Jennetta Petch and Szymon Kula predicate their practice upon functional forms. They utilise natural materials, such as wood, metal, and leather, alongside traditional manufacturing methods, juxtaposing these with elements indicative of modern technologies crafted from ‘synthetic’ materials, including glass, carbon fibres, and polyester. The aesthetic of their objects, which balances traditional craftsmanship with industrial production, bridges disparate cultural and civilisational frameworks. The duo appears to present an alternative developmental scenario in which—whether prompted by necessity or the adoption of differing principles—the technologies of the industrialised world intersect with a “post-civilisational” return to nature and handiwork.

Petch and Kula’s work reveals a discernible interest in movements that resist the accelerating pace of technological change, such as anarcho-primitivism and its rejection of techno-capitalist reality. However, this civilizational “criticality” does not translate into a straightforward aversion to machines; rather, it functions as a reflection on contemporary production mechanisms that strip individuals of agency, subject them to automation, erode community spirit, and exacerbate inequality. Their practice echoes the initiatives of technology historian Jean Gimpel, who combined fundamental mechanical principles with contemporary design to develop tools for non-industrialized regions. Gimpel viewed traditional objects not as “primitive”, but as intelligent, affordable, localized, and repairable solutions. Similarly, the artists offer visions of ‘small-scale technology’—aesthetically unique and deeply rooted in social contexts.

Petch and Kula’s ambiguous works can thus be interpreted as a reflection on the socio-cultural impact of machinery, a narrative on the violence exerted by technological civilization upon the non-human world, and a projection of a future that necessitates a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between humans, tools, and the environment.

15—17

Agata Lankamer

15. *Pacifero Dragonero*, sugar, metal, 2026

16. *Lunamore Pissatore*, sugar, metal, 2026

17. *Bum Bum Crocodrum*, sugar, metal, 2026

In her recent works, Agata Lankamer endeavours to capture a reality defined by technological acceleration and algorithmic automation. The artist explores the potential trajectories of a world saturated with imagery and misinformation, which fosters an environment vulnerable to diverse forms of psychological violence and behavioural control.

Two theories elucidating the logic of an accelerated world provide critical frameworks here: Jean Baudrillard's "fatal strategies" and accelerationism. Baudrillard posited that, in the contemporary era, our perception of reality has been obfuscated by an abundance of meaning and information, culminating in a state of "disinformation". Individuals are increasingly subjected to a proliferation of "objects" – including media, technologies, messages, and signs. Within this conceptual framework, resistance consists not in direct opposition to the system, but in exacerbating its logic to the point of collapse under its own weight. Accelerationism adopts a comparable tactic, predicated on the notion that transforming the current order necessitates the continuous acceleration of contemporary socio-economic organisation, thereby exposing the system's inherent contradictions and precipitating its destabilisation.

Lankamer, drawing on the aesthetics of absurd memes – characterised by chaotic overstimulation, repetition, and the conventions of internal jokes (frequently termed brainrot) – practises "cute accelerationism", which exposes the nexus between systemic violence and the infantilisation of digital culture. In this context, sugar emerges as a central material in her work—a substance historically associated with colonialism and slavery, and today with addictive consumption and the dopamine-driven economy of pleasure. Complemented by a 'cute' aesthetic, sugar manifests an oppressiveness that is as "charming" as it is toxic; it acts as a mechanism of psychological pressure that undermines critical thinking, operating with greater efficacy the more attractive, amusing, and harmless it appears.

18—19

Mia Milgrom

18. *Sensing Free Fall 1*, aluminium cast, glass, wood, 2026

19. *Sensing Free Fall 2*, aluminium cast, glass, wood, 2026

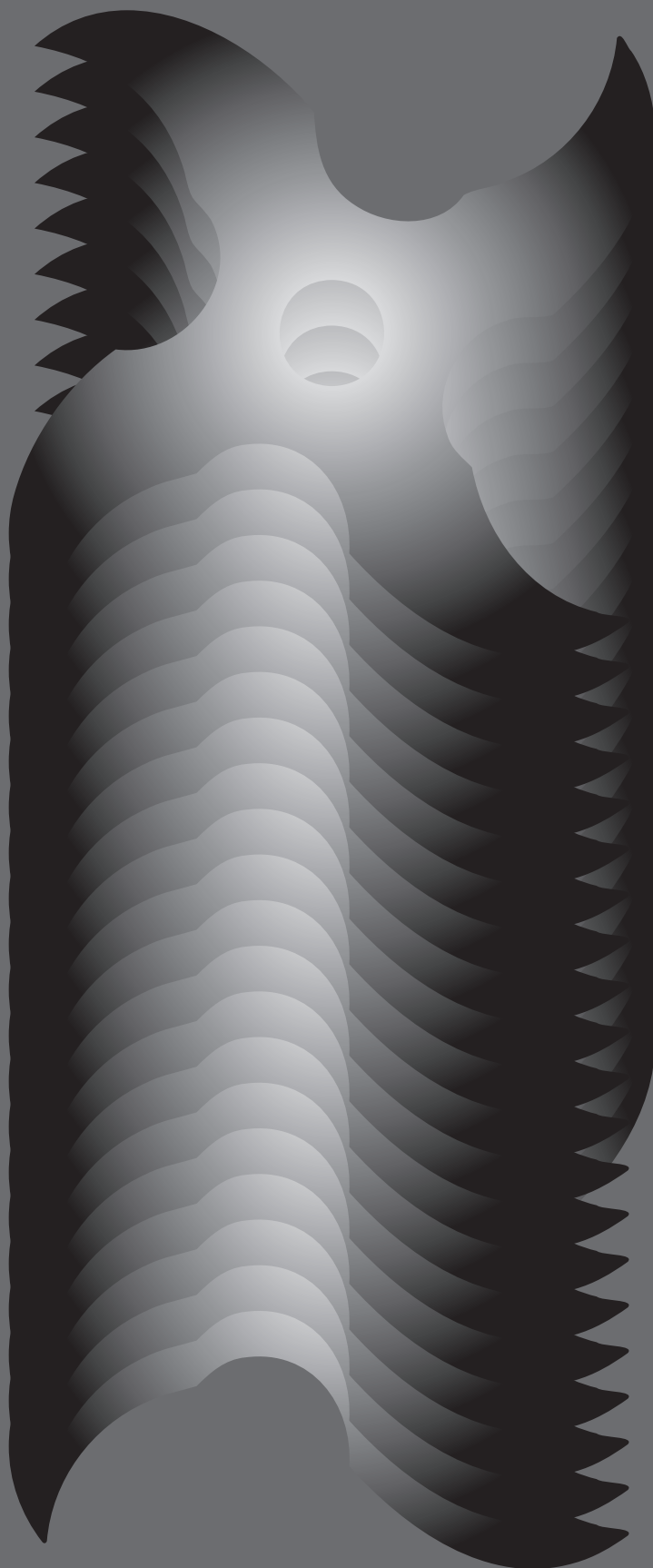
In her recent works, Mia Milgrom explores various forms of infrastructure – the overlooked or invisible systems of support, flow, and distribution that underpin both social existence and the functioning of the natural world. The artist examines ecosystems and civilisational constructs as living organisms vulnerable to degradation. Employing casting techniques to work directly with the ground, she creates "maps" of hybrid interdependencies between humanity, technological civilisation, and the environment. Milgrom interweaves diverse scales, ranging from organic microstructures to industrial complexes, specifically highlighting elements that are unstable, contaminated, or deemed impractical.

Mia Milgrom invokes the concept of "deep-time materiality", referring to formations shaped by extensive geological and biological processes. This framework allows for a broader perspective on humanity. In the Anthropocene epoch – an era in which human activity has emerged as a primary force shaping the climate, ecosystems, and the chemical composition of soil and oceans – planetary time and human history are becoming increasingly intertwined. Given that the "management" of the Earth has resulted in ecological failure, manifesting in mass species extinction and climate destabilisation, it is perhaps inevitable that we are adopting a perspective in which humankind is no longer the measure of all things. The artist thus elucidates a logic of world organisation that diverges from human-centric models, treating materials and organisms as active participants in reality rather than mere 'raw materials'. By addressing the themes of symbiosis and inter-being relationships, she highlights, on one hand, the fluidity of boundaries between traditional dichotomies—culture/nature, living/non-living, and individuality/collectivity – while, on the other, indicating a potential alternative to the trajectory of ecological catastrophe. Environmental networks, especially those that are marginal, wild, and have emerged 'in the wake of humanity' within post-industrial landscapes, demonstrate an extraordinary capacity for survival and regeneration. Rather than subjecting these systems to control, the artist proposes viewing them as vital eco-infrastructures that could serve as models for future, more harmonious modes of organising the spaces we inhabit.

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