

Bernard Taylor

Stephanie Reisch

Clarice Yuen

William Leggett

Jared Malton

Underland|2023

Stephanie REISCH | William LEGGETT | Bernard TAYLOR | Clarice YUEN | Jared MALTON

Curated by Stephanie REISCH

Spectrum Project Space

ECU Galleries



Stephanie REISCH Curatorial Statement

*“There is a real horror in nature.
I often forget
We live at its edge.”*

Darby Hudson, 2019, p. 45

To travel under-land is to journey deep into unknown and unfamiliar spaces. Beneath the topsoil is a journey of another time scale; complex fungal networks, brilliant gemstones, ancient aquifers, lost cultural treasures and unique lifeforms quietly subsisting alongside the bones of forgotten souls. Everything that once touched the light eventually returns to this place; *Underland*. For many it remains unseen and unknown, out of sight and out of mind. In ancient times, mother earth was feared and revered, worshipped and prayed to by countless civilisations, yet in the world today, nature is becoming increasingly obsolete.

Old growth forests have given way to freeways that lead to concrete jungles while non-human life forms struggle to survive in habitats they were not born into. The planet's life-giving water bodies continue to be poisoned and pillaged while fertile sites are gutted for precious metals. Occasionally nature will lash out in the form of pestilence, a raging fire or destructive wind, to remind us she is still a force to be reckoned with. The urgency to act and repair our broken relationship with the planet is being felt on a global level yet will nature call upon her non-human inhabitants to fight back and what might that look like?

Underland is a hypothetical supposition that nature will one day turn on humankind and reclaim her rightful place as a superior being. The title does not seek to isolate subterranean realms exclusively but instead, encompasses all that is unseen, unheard, unknown, or understated. For this exhibition, five emerging and established Western Australian artists, William Leggett, Bernard Taylor, Jared Malton, Clarice Yuen, and myself (Stephanie Reisch), were challenged to look beyond the visible world and create new works that disrupt current taxonomic hierarchies and negotiate the tensile thresholds of non-human perception.

Spanning sculpture, drawing, painting and photographic media, each artist has presented an alternative perspective to what is primal and vital, ranging from the macro to micro. Tree roots, insects and garden peas are reframed as dissidents, terrorists, and saboteurs. These artworks are not intended as lamentations or advocate for the seemingly helpless — they are objects of raw beauty, power and purpose that celebrate the dark, sublime, and subversive tactics of complex biological systems. In *Underland*, the tables have turned and nature reigns supreme.

Underland is the second iteration of a curatorial project titled *Crypsis*, which was first exhibited at Gallerysmith Project Space (VIC) in 2015 and featured Western Australian artists, Jon Tarry, Joshua Cobb-Diamond and I, in partnership with international sound artist, Kwaauui, and Western Australian architecture firm, Felix. Touching on similar themes, *Crypsis* was anchored by a collaborative augmented reality sculpture that could be experienced through a smart phone or tablet. *Underland* is an extension and evolution of those nascent ideas, interpreted through fresh eyes and methodologies at a different time and place.

Hudson, D., 2019, *In the Night*, Falling Upwards. Five Islands Press, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria.

Stephanie REISCH

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Biography

Born in Belgium and based in Perth (Boorloo), Stephanie Reisch is an interdisciplinary artist working across painting, sound and installation. Her practice is concerned with the unseen and unknown aspects of the natural world explored through the lens of prehistory, alongside meditations on absence, animism and comparative time scales connecting humans and the cosmos.

Preferring to work large-scale with oils on canvas, she subverts traditional representations of the Australian landscape by capturing not the physical forms of things or places, but rather the energy and traces left behind. Her expansive and luscious abstracts play with depth and form, often borrowing from the colours and textures of the earth to conjure fleeting visions of wild animals and primordial worlds. Her multi-channel sound and sculptural installations are an extension of these painterly surfaces, with many of the recordings documented on site at key times of the day.

Stephanie holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) and Master of Fine Arts from the University of Western Australia and is represented by Linton & Kay Galleries. Recent exhibitions include *Australian Ghosts* at Lost Eden Creative, *Raw Colour* at Holmes á Court Gallery, *All Past Futures Are Now* at Linton & Kay and *Sculpture at Bathers 2022*. Her work is held in private, corporate and public collections nationally including the Town of Victoria Park and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital Art Collection.

Artist's statement

When a Monarch butterfly crosses your path, it is said good luck will follow and signifies a period of change and personal growth. Originally from North America, The Wanderer or Monarch butterflies are sometimes referred to as “flying weeds” because of how quickly they colonised Australia.

Monarch is a series of mixed media paintings that reimagine an ancient butterfly in flight through radical shifts in colour and scale. It is a response to not only its physical form based on macro photography and archival images of butterfly fossils but also reframes its significance as a universal symbol of hope, transformation and rebirth.

In *Monarch*, a winged creature of exquisite, delicate beauty is bastardised and empowered through a darker, more sinister lens. It is a reminder that small, light and seemingly fragile beings can through stealth and strategy, ride the winds and go on to colonise the world.



Image: Reisch, S., 2023, *Monarch* (detail), oil, pumice and wax on canvas, 150cm x 150cm

Clarice YUEN

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Biography

Born in Hong Kong and based in Busselton, Clarice (Cheuk Kwan) Yuen works across painting, drawing, sculptural book making, and installation. Her recent projects explore relationships between humans and plants, as well as scientists and their research, to uncover the hidden aesthetics within. Since 2016 Yuen's fascination with growing peas has spurred new developments in her work.

Yuen holds a Bachelor of Contemporary Visual Arts from Edith Cowan University, a Graduate Certificate in Media Production from Murdoch University, and a Graduate Diploma in Biological Arts from SymbioticA - University of Western Australia. Since graduating she has exhibited extensively throughout WA, was a finalist in the York Botanical Art Prize and recipient of the Animal Biology Davies Prize in Biological Arts 2015. She currently facilitates creative programs in ceramics.

Artist's statement

Clarice Yuen's series of drawings explore themes of defence, manipulation and deception in plant domestication. By observing the growth of her open seed collection of peas in her home garden and surroundings, she discovered hybrid creatures of our time, hidden fungi, and other intricate biological systems, including detrimental pests (pee weevils) and artificial turf. Each drawing magnifies the interaction between human influence and the resilience of the natural world. Expanding on these observations, two drawings reference endosymbiosis theory and a particular engraving from 18th century preformationism to broaden the perspective and offer imaginative insight at the cellular level. The intention is to make us aware of our limited control and the resistance of the complex biological world, even in a small garden bed.

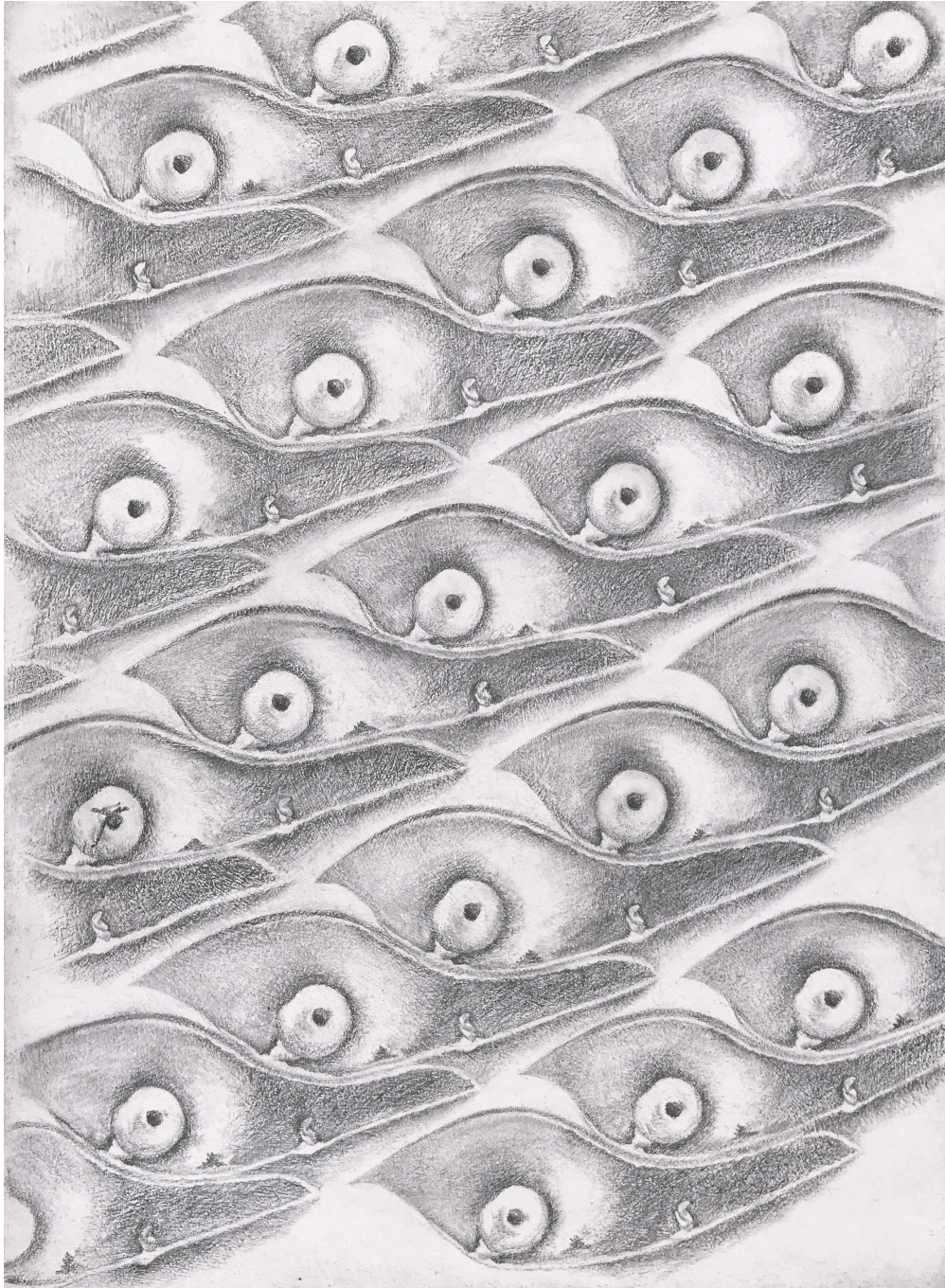


Image: Yuen, C., 2023, *Peas Peas Incubators*, graphite on primed paper, 31cm x 38.5cm

Bernard TAYLOR
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Biography

Bernard Taylor is an award-winning photographic artist, designer and educator based in Perth, Western Australia. With a practice spanning fashion, sound, sculpture and digital media, his work frequently melds elements of contemporary culture within surreal and disjointed contexts.

Drawing from many years spent working in marketing and advertising, his practice leans towards the exploration of messaging saturation and the information processing limitations of the human mind. His work aims to unpack the psychic implications of a communications sphere filled with deftly meaningless symbology.

Recent projects include the Town of Victoria Park's Art Season 2022, Sculpture at Bathers 2022, Sculpture on the Scarp in Darlington, and a residency at the Perth Centre for Photography in 2021. Taylor placed 6th in Australasia's Top Emerging Photographer competition in 2021, was the winner of the Blink Photographic Awards in 2018 and has received a total of 11 Australian Professional Photography Awards.

Taylor studied new media/electronic art at the WA School of Art, Design, and Media, and Edith Cowan University, and holds an MBA and BA in Marketing and Media from Curtin and Murdoch Universities respectively.

Artist's statement

As the story of evolution endlessly speaks itself into new existence, and the blind watchmaker of evolutionary metamorphosis continues his ceaseless tinkering—never pausing for rest or reflection—this one lesson is taught over and again. Life will not be contained. Life breaks through every crevice, crashes through every wall, and always finds a new lever to pull. And just when man thinks he has tamed the world, life will surely show him his folly.

The idea of imagining a new evolutionary branch of life is what has driven this work. In this conception, evolution has seen fit to endow a cow with multiple heads and senses in order to become more alert and cunning than its human pursuer. Many polycephalic (multi-headed) animals have existed in myth and folklore such as the three-headed hound, Cerberus from Greek mythology; thereby entertaining the possibility that the next stage of evolution will involve a deity or legend becoming manifest. Will the next stage of life contain magic or metaphysics...?



Image: Taylor, B., 2023, *Hydra Bos Taurus*, photo-media on lightbox, 130cm x 86cm x 10cm

Jared MALTON

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Biography

Jared Malton is an emerging artist working out of Perth (Boorloo), Western Australia. His work encompasses painting, sculpture and printmaking. His conceptual approach is heavily influenced by Mid-Century American modern art and reflects a contemporary interpretation in the Australian context. He paints a personal reflection of his definition of society today and illustrates a sense of manifested nostalgia in how people utilize technology. His trepidation for the future can be reflected in how he takes inspiration from obsolete devices and projects his own personal thoughts through their physical presence. Jared has exhibited in group and solo shows nationally as well as art prizes and awards. Recent solo exhibitions include Reluctant Obsolescence at Red Gallery (VIC) and 3 Ways to Pass a Gas Pump at Rockingham Arts Centre.

Artist's statement

Blurring the perceptions of repulsion and danger in nature can result in a confronting visual experience. Many organisms display bright, alluring colours, sometimes phosphorescent, to beacon a response of hostility to potential predators. To humans, however, these displays may appear pleasing and harmless.

Mephitic Extol references defensive concepts from the natural world and translates them into an exaggerated man-made utilitarian contraption. A shift from organic to synthetic materials combined with insect attracting lighting shifts the power structure of attraction from human to insect. In the namesake of this piece, the term 'mephitic' describes the toxicity of a natural noxious gas or emittance. The term 'extol' describes the behaviour of enthusiastic praise. The terms together suggest an unhealthy push and pull dynamic.

Other works peer into the macro world of animal behaviour, specifically limpet teeth, which are one of the most tensile organic materials discovered. Limpet behaviour also exhibits highly offensive and aggressive hunting techniques to eliminate prey of a similar size. Through large format printing, the viciousness of limpet teeth has been exaggerated to match the human scale. Raw aluminium framing has been used to figuratively contain the limpet teeth as a form of commentary on its unpredictable nature and humanity's tendency to tame the wild in nature. Warning colours in artificial yellow only further completes the narrative of a truly synthetic human endeavour to enclose and display dangerous natural tendencies.



Image: Malton, J., 2022, *Vicious*, silkscreen print, synthetic polymer, ink, aerosol paint, aluminium, 120cm x 85cm

William LEGGETT

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Biography

William Leggett is a West Australian based visual artist and co-founder of artist collective Studio Payoka. Integrating an education in Environmental Art and Design and Interactive Multimedia, with a career in the mining construction industry, Leggett has established a distinct cross-disciplinary art practice utilising a broad range of tools and processes to address his conceptual enquiries.

His large intricate concrete sculptures have been exhibited extensively locally and have been acquired by a range of private and public collectors including significant commissions for homes designed by the late Bulgarian/Australian architect Iwan Iwanoff. Leggett has previously been the joint recipient of the Fremantle Ports Award, winner of the Castaways Recycled Sculpture Awards in Rockingham and a finalist in the 2022 Joondalup Invitational Art Prize.

Leggett is represented by STALA Contemporary.

Artist's statement

The world we now inhabit is the consequence of interspecies relationships that have evolved over time (Strang, 2021).

Underland sees William Leggett's Arborico Inversus series of eco-fetishist sculptures, manifest our feelings of unease at humanity's current relationships with the earth and its inhabitants.

Themes of domination, submission, sadism and masochism, are bound up within the rubber wrapped roots that appear to be the product of a strange speculative biology. By exploiting the visual tensions imbued in the work, Arborico Inversus reveals the potential of material, process and form to be a vehicle for thought.

Reference

Strang, V. (2021). Gender and Pan-Species Democracy in the Anthropocene. *Religions*, 12(12), 1078. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121078>



Image: Leggett, W., 2022, *Arborico Inversus*, Roots and Rubber, 128cm x 170cm x 120cm

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Spectrum Project Space

Curated by **Stephanie REISCH**

Opening: 5–7pm, 12 April

Exhibition dates: 13 April to 11 May

Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am to 4pm and by appointment

Artists' floor talks: 22 April, 12.30pm to 1:30pm

Curatorial floor talk: 3 May, 12.30pm to 1:30pm

Building 3, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley



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