

**Westfälischer
Kunstverein**

**„Creatures of the
Mud“**

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/English

IMPRINT

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Bycroft (p. 13), Liza Dieckwisch
(p. 22), Gabó Bartha (pp. 24-25)

EXHIBITION

“Creatures of the Mud”
Gabó Bartha, Madison Bycroft,
Liza Dieckwisch, Tue Greenfort,
Mehreen Murtaza
21 May-3 July 2016
Westfälischer Kunstverein

Curator: Lena Johanna Reisner, guest
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at Westfälischer Kunstverein would
like to thank:

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University of Münster for its loans.

“Creatures of the Mud” is part of the
INTERREG VA project *plugin*, based at
Schloss Ringenberg (schloss-ringen-
berg.de). Schloss Ringenberg offers
stipends for artists and curators from
Germany and The Netherlands in connec-
tion with German and Dutch art insti-
tutions. The Westfälischer Kunstverein
is one of this year’s project part-
ners.

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artists

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The group show “Creatures of the Mud” is the product of a
collaboration between Westfälischer Kunstverein and Schloss
Ringenberg, a studio and exhibition centre in Hamminkeln that
offers residency stipends to artists and curators. Two curators
from North Rhine-Westphalia and the Netherlands reside for six
months in the castle and work on two different exhibition proj-
ects. One exhibition takes place in the castle, and the other
is staged on the premises of a partner institution within North
Rhine-Westphalia or the Netherlands. The Westfälischer Kunst-
verein happens to be one of the partners this year and is stag-
ing an exhibition entitled “Creatures of the Mud” featuring the
work of the stipend holder, Lena Johanna Reisner (b. 1987, D)
and which focuses upon the means of communication and inter-
action between various species. Her colleague, Joram Kraai-
jeveld (b. 1984, NL) stages his show “Race to the Bottom” at
Schloss Ringenberg.

A Schloss Ringenberg stipend not only offers a well-equipped
place in which to work and refuge for young curators, but it
also endeavours, via the liaison with art institutions in the
surrounding area, to give them an intensive insight into the
practical side of things. Thus, during the past few weeks and
months, we have accompanied Lena Johanna Reisner’s prepara-
tions for her show with us, opening a few doors whenever neces-
sary and introducing her to a number of interesting residents
of Münster, such as Dr. Eckhard Kluth, the curator for the art
collection at the University of Münster (WWU), Mr Herbert
Voigt, the technical director of the Botanical Gardens at the
WWU and Dr. Markus Bertling, director of the Museum for Geology
and Paelontology. They are all deserving of our heart-felt
thanks for their openness, for their willingness to take part
in many discussions and their expertise in their respective
fields.

Naturally, we should all like to thank Lena Johanna Reisner for
this exhibition which focuses upon a theme that has been in the
air for some time now and which, in this instance, has found a
truly beautiful, associative and poetic form.

Kristina Scepanski

“Creatures of the Mud”

The phrase “Creatures of the Mud” has something monstrous about it, indeed, there is nothing especially cuddly about the ‘ecological thought’ as Timothy Morton describes it: “The ecological thought imagines interconnectedness which I call the mesh.”¹ This “mesh” is nothing less than the interconnectedness of absolutely all living and non-living entities on Planet Earth and much, much further afield. It is a powerful construct without a clear beginning or end, devoid of linearity or clusters of sub-groups in line with an evolutionary scheme. The logic of the mesh decrees that each point is equally at the centre and the periphery of a system.

“I’m a creature of the mud, not the sky.”²

This statement by the biologist and historian of science, Donna J. Haraway, contains a number of aspects that could be considered paradigmatic for an ecological or worldly philosophy. The orientation towards “mud” at once affirms the viscerality and materiality of individual existence, as well as situating human existence within the context of Earth as a whole and the inter-actions and intra-actions with other species. At the same time, this reference is a liberation from a tradition in European philosophy in which – according to René Descartes – the dualisms of body and spirit, self and the world are thought of as separate entities. “To be one is always to become with many,”³ effectively means that subjectivity, identity and, even more fundamentally, vitality do not arise in opposition to one another, but in a process of ongoing, renewed mutual becoming. The fact that mud or viscerality isn’t a simple figure as such, but a highly complex reality, emerges from Haraway’s analysis and her fascination for genomes, bacteria, fungi, symbionts and all manner of species with whom we share this world.

The works of the artists featured in the exhibition “Creatures of the Mud” resonate with these ideas and probe the consequences of this insight in a variety of ways. For example, our relationships with other species are approached on an extremely direct level as well as the forms of interdependence that arise from such interconnectedness and the responsibilities it implies. Far from being that mysterious Other, the ‘monstrous’ turns out to be a simply incomprehensible constellation of being of which we are part and which demands both our subjectivity as well as our sensibility.

One of the exhibition’s important themes centres on the way in which we generate and preserve knowledge by means of scientific, speculative, mythical, aesthetic, research-based and discursive processes. In her treatise on *Agential Realism*, theoretical physicist Karen Barad proposes the close interconnectedness of being and knowledge. The production of knowledge doesn’t merely generate facts; the practices of knowledge production should rather be understood as “material entanglements” that cooperate in the permanent configuration and reconfiguration of the world.⁴ Thinking, theorising and observing are thus less modes of description and more forms of intra-action in the midst of and as part of the world.⁵ Against this backdrop, the question regarding our responsibilities for our agencies operates on a wholly new level. It opens up a vista upon a terrain of possibility and opportunity geared towards re-situating ourselves in this extraordinarily dynamic and lively network which “we” undoubtedly share with other agents.

The arrangement of the artistic elements in “Creatures of the Mud” is motivated by the idea of an ecology and interaction in the exhibition space, in which the narratives being related and the sensibilities they generate, form a mutual cosmos. The space is thus populated by all manner of entities, such as fictional figures, mythical forms, bacteria, marine organisms, synthetic materials, insects, vegetables, as well as living individuals in the truest sense of the word.

1 Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 15.

2 Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, 2008), p. 3.

3 Ibid., p. 90.

4 Cf. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (London 2007), p. 91.

5 Ibid. p. 90.



MEHREEN MURTAZA, ... how will you
conduct yourself in the
company of trees, 2015-16,
TUE GREENFORT, Aasee Water
Filtration, 2007



MEHREEN MURTAZA
(b. 1986, PK)

For her installation “... how will you conduct yourself in the company of trees”, Mehreen Murtaza has made use of the amply-lit foyer in which she has placed plants from the University of Münster’s Botanical Garden. Ivy, cacti, palm trees, oleanders and other shrubs have been hooked up to a computer by a series of leads as though part of a scientific experiment. The apparatus is a simple construction for measuring low voltage electrical activity on a cellular level.

For a long time, the limited ability for plants to move or to react to stimuli was associated with an overall deficit in sensory perception. Touch me nots, vines and carnivorous plants - so-called sensitive, reactive plants - were considered to be exceptions to the rule. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, these plants began to arouse interest among a growing number of scientists. Experiments conducted upon plants of this kind showed that electro-physiological signal processing not only takes place in animal cells, but in plant cells, too. Not until the nineteen sixties did it become clear that ordinary plants also showed action-potential thereby fundamentally casting doubt on the received assumptions regarding sensory perception in plant life per se.

Plant neurobiology as a separate discipline has been gathering momentum since the beginning of this century and is predicated upon further analogies between plant life and animals, for example, the connection between nerve-like structures in plants. The possibility of a form of intelligence has also been investigated, though the subject continues to be controversial among plant physiologists. During the nineteen sixties, experiments investigating electro-physiological signal processing and reactivity were at times also interpreted as parapsychological phenomena and gave rise to speculation about cellular awareness that connects all living organisms. Although experiments of this kind have stimulated increased curiosity and openness about, as well as respect for living organisms in general, they have also meant that plant neurobiology has been burdened with the stigma of esotericism.

“... how will you conduct yourself in the company of trees” tells a story of living matter and also the relationship between so-called qualified and unqualified scientific knowledge. Furthermore, its narrative encompasses science when it engages with that very space in which thinking about our world can only occur as a kind of speculation. Nevertheless, the function of “... how will you conduct yourself in the company of

MEHREEN MURTAZA, ... how will you conduct yourself in the company of trees, 2015-16

trees” is not merely metaphorical; inasmuch as the measurement of electrical impulses and activity is not expressed as actual values but is interpreted musically instead, a different form of aesthetic experience is made possible. It is not so much about the intellectual feat of abstraction in interpreting the values themselves but more about an immediate form of communication via acoustic signals, as well as how we behave when plants respond to our presence and actions with sounds and music.



MEHREEN MURTAZA, ... how will you
conduct yourself in the
company of trees, 2015-16
(Detail)

MADISON BYCROFT
(b. 1987, AU)

Madison Bycroft's "Rag of Cloth: Ode to the Vampire Squid" is inspired by H. P. Lovecraft's short story "The Call of Cthulhu" which was written in 1928. The story is narrated by the great nephew of a recently deceased emeritus professor of Semitic languages; in his role as his great uncle's heir and executor, the young and diligent anthropologist examines the late professor's papers and pieces together the whole horrifying truth of the myth surrounding the *Cthulhu*, an extraterrestrial entity venerated by a few widely dispersed groups and secret cults. Not unlike the *Cthulhu*, Madison Bycroft's "Vampire Squid" is a fictional figure, despite being modelled on the eponymous vampire squid, a species of deep-sea cephalopod. Embodied and performed by the artist, the vampire squid feeds on words; the kind of words we use to try to describe the monstrous, to structure our world, to differentiate and to create hierarchies. "Chthonic" means "in, under or beneath the earth" but also "subterranean". Madison Bycroft's "Chthonig@gigoo" operates with this lexical root and presents artefacts which are to be understood as suggestions or theories.

In one arrangement of objects Madison Bycroft cites the *Bunyip*, a creature referenced by many Indigenous Australian peoples, that dwelled in swamps, billabongs, riverbeds, creeks and water holes. When British settlers began to describe and classify the flora and fauna of Australia they followed a standardised and scientific procedure that privileged only what they saw. Singular, white, colonial vision and epistemologies formed the basis of a knowledge with an ontological hierarchy that discredited anything outside of that. How might we imagine or decolonise our imaginary in regards to the unsaid, unseen creature? Using her "Taxonomy Table" the artist attempts a different form of classification. Fragments of text have been written in chalk on a black, stage-like platform. Sculptural elements made from clay sit on and around the platform and are connected diversely by ropes, tubes, rods, pipes and ducts provoking thoughts about an overarching ecological principle of the interconnectedness of all being. Ultimately, Madison Bycroft's "Proposal for the Ineffable" lends the *Bunyip* and the indescribable in general one of many possible countenances.

A series of sculptures, some of which are mobile, invite one to move them around in the gallery space. "Lines" can be understood as a philosophical and at the same time a performative, spatial exercise geared towards describing boundaries and, quite literally, the drawing of lines. Based on Karen Barad's ideas, they presuppose a dynamic world in which differentia-



MADISON BYCROFT,
Chthonig@gigoo, 2016 (Detail)

tions always ever exist as a possibility. Furthermore, “Fulcrum” contemplates the condition of being wrapped in and by something. An oyster, for example, forms a pearl by coating a microscopic foreign body that has inadvertently entered the organism in layers of nacre.



MADISON BYCROFT, Rag of Cloth:
Ode to the Vampire Squid,
2014-16 (Installation view)



MADISON BYCROFT, Lines, 2016,
LIZA DIECKWISCH, Silikon, PVC
Folie, Latex, Acryl, Glitter,
Acrylglas, Kordel, 2016



MADISON BYCROFT, Fulcrum, 2016,
LIZA DIECKWISCH, Digitaldruck,
2016



MADISON BYCROFT, Taxonomy Table and Proposal for the Ineffable, 2016

LIZA DIECKWISCH, Paillettenstoff, Stoff, Kunstleder, Stecknadel, 2016



LIZA DIECKWISCH
(b. 1989, D)

Liza Dieckwisch's works for "Creatures of the Mud" are more closely aligned to the mud in the exhibition's title than to the creatures. Material in origin, they suggest a synthetic organic life form in their structure and arrangement. Liza Dieckwisch's compositions seem to feed upon a shared body out of which clear pictures emerge from time to time, only to be reabsorbed and fashioned into something new. This takes place in the form of an object resembling compost, in which fragments of sketch-like experiments and relics from earlier works embark upon a further phase of their cycle.

Alongside her activities as a visual artist, Dieckwisch experiments with terse lyrical statements. Her large-format work in the main hall is linked to a poem dealing with a possibility for conserving jellyfish. During this process, the fluid is removed from these water-filled cnidarians and replaced with synthetic material. The expansive work comprising different silicons conveys a sense or feeling of this material, taking on the appearance of an ambivalent and in parts, shimmering mass of slime.

The sequined material provides a similarly ambivalent surface with a capacity to reflect light. A photograph of some bread dough conceals its true identity at first. Endowed with interstellar or planetary associations, the billowing dough with its bulging amplitude reveals itself by virtue of its characteristic adhesive property, in this instance by sticking to a glass bowl.

LIZA DIECKWISCH, Silikon, PVC
Folie, Latex, Acryl, Glitter,
Acrylglas, Kordel, 2016



LIZA DIECKWISCH, Digitaldruck,
2016

tomorrow

my mother used to study jelly fish
and yes, she even tried to conserve them

you can't can clouds

and yes, it's possible to drain the water from jellyfish
but swap their bodily fluids for synthetic stuff?

who are you without a pancreas?

soon enough, quantum physics will cease to be a modern thing-
that goes for you, too!

we're still here though, pickled in the future.

LIZA DIECKWISCH, tomorrow, 2012

GABÓ BARTHA
(b. 1969, HU)

Gabó Bartha's contribution likewise introduces an earthy and 'earthing' dimension to the exhibition. As an art historian and a biodiversity activist, Gabó Bartha has been organising events and actions that intersect with visual art for a considerable time. A series of photographs from her archive depict food-stuffs from the wine region Tokaj in Hungary. Almost like a series of notes, the photographs on show document a conference on the topic of seeds, as well as pictures of artisan markets, seed-swap events, photographs of different and partly old varieties of fruit and vegetables. An important topic in the selection of the photographs is a garden in Mád, Tokaj, that Bartha set up in 2011 as a kitchen garden for the ostensible purpose of self-sufficiency. Irrespective of their utility value, the plants in this garden were allowed to live through all the phases of their cycle. In this deregulated scheme of things, the existence and coexistence of the plants seemed to be more dignified than in other imaginable contexts. Large numbers of photographs document the encounter with diverse life forms in this garden and are clearly motivated by curiosity and wonderment, as well as by an interest in research and an aesthetic impulse.

Gabó Bartha often presents her photographs when giving talks. Each image represents an individual story about political and social entanglements, about biodiversity, as well as a gardening practice residing somewhere between permaculture, biodynamic and organic farming. The loose sequence of images projected in the exhibition space take on a poetic dimension which, in turn, guarantees an insight into a way of living and unceasing research into our relationship to food and its production.



GABÓ BARTHA, Untitled
(excerpts of an archive), 2010-16
(Frame)



GABÓ BARTHA, Untitled
(excerpts of an archive), 2010-16
(Frame)



GABÓ BARTHA, Untitled
(excerpts of an archive), 2010-16
(Installation view)

TUE GREENFORT
(b. 1973, DK)

In a similar way to Gabó Bartha's work, Tue Greenfort's "Aasee Water Filtration" focuses upon a local phenomenon and at the same time it situates the exhibition in the context of the city. "Aasee Water Filtration" is one of the annual editions issued by the Westfälischer Kunstverein from 2007 deriving from Greenfort's participation in the fourth edition of the Sculpture Projects that year. In the context of the exhibition, Greenfort focused on the pollution of the Aasee due to the growth of blue algae. The bacteria produce poisonous cytotoxins that can cause allergic reactions in humans and if swallowed, can be extremely harmful to internal organs. The spread and proliferation of blue algae is promoted by a raised concentration of nutrients in the water. It is recognised that phosphates and nitrates used in intensively fertilized arable farming on an industrial scale run off into freshwater ecosystems. The thrust of the artist's critique was as follows: in order to reduce the number of phosphates, EU-subsidised meat production and the highly intensified and industrialised agricultural production in the Münsterland region needed to be regulated. However, the causes of the problem weren't addressed; instead, a cosmetic solution of sorts was arrived at by adding a substance called Iron (III)-Chloride to bind free phosphates chemically in the river and restrict the growth of the algae. The sculptural implementation of his investigations and his open critique of political processes involved in decision-making were accompanied by an edition with an almost painterly perspective. "Aasee Water Filtration" are paper filters bearing the traces of blue algae following the filtration process. They pose question of the current state of play ahead of the next Sculpture Projects Münster 2017.



TUE GREENFORT, Aasee Water Filtration, 2007

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

CONVERSATION WITH MADISON
BYCROFT

- Saturday, 21 May at 11am

GUIDED TOURS WITH
LENA JOHANNA REISNER

- Thursday, 2 June at 6pm
- Sunday, 3 July at 2pm

Additional guided tours in
German or English on request.

LATE FRIDAY

- 10 June, open from 11am
to 10pm, admission free

The exhibition „Creatures of
the Mud“ serves as an opportu-
nity to reflect upon the finan-
cial realities of art between
public subsidisation, art
market and interested public.
On two dates relevant, topical
texts are being discussed
in the context of a reading
group with guest curator
Lena Johanna Reisner and
Max Wigger.

By this means questions are
being raised concerning the
value creation of visual art
unattached of speculation and
the art market. On another
date in June philosopher and
art historian Dr. Philipp
Kleinmichel picks up on the
same discourse.

PLUGIN READING GROUP WITH LENA
JOHANNA REISNER AND

MAX WIGGER

„Über die finanziellen
Realitäten der Kunst“ (On the
financial realities of art)

- Wednesday, 1 June at 5pm
- Wednesday, 15 June at 5pm

Texts:

Stefan Heidenreich: Free-
portism as Style and Ideology:
Post-Internet and Speculative
Realism, Part 1 (e-flux Maga-
zine, March 2016)

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen: Das
Ende der ökonomischen Blase
der zeitgenössischen Kunst
(Texte zur Kunst, December
2012, issue 88)

Please register via e-mail
plugin@westfaelischer-
kunstverein.de

The texts will be send to you
after registration.

PLUGIN TALK WITH MIT
DR. PHILIPP KLEINMICHEL
(BERLIN)

„Banalität und Offenbarung der
finanziellen Realität der
Kunst“ (Banality and revela-
tion of the financial reality
of art)

- Wednesday, 22 June 7pm
- In a lecture and subsequent
conversation the philosopher
and art historian Dr. Philipp
Kleinmichel discusses art as a
commodity in contrast to its
aesthetic and symbolic form.

LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS

GABÓ BARTHA

01: Untitled (excerpts of an archive), 2010-16
163 digital photos,
projector

MADISON BYCROFT

02: Lines, 2016

Steel, foam
Four elements
Dimensions variable

03: Fulcrum, 2016

Trolley, steel, fabric,
copper, wood, paint
three elements
Dimensions variable

04: Chthonig@gigoo, 2016

Print on silk, acoustic
isolation for floor co-
vering, steel, concrete,
plastic, paint, fabric,
font by Viktor Timotheus
Dimensions variable

05: Taxonomy Table, 2016

Wood, paint, chalk, fired
and unfired stoneware,
plaster, concrete, steel,
plastic tube, rope
Dimensions variable

06: Proposal for the Ineffable, 2016

Wire, unfired stoneware,
perspex, wood, fabric,
paint
Dimensions variable

07: Rag of Cloth: Ode to the Vampire Squid, 2014-16

HD-video, 6:03 min.,
colour and sound

LIZA DIECKWISCH

08: Acryl, Latex, Silikon, Lametta, Plastikfolie, 2012-16

Acrylic, latex, silicone,
tinsel, plastic film
50x12x25 cm

09: Silikon, PVC Folie, Latex, Acryl, Glitter, Acrylglas, Kordel, 2016

Silicone, PVC foil, la-
tex, acrylic, glitter,
acrylic glass, cord
730x370 cm

10: Digitaldruck, 2016

Digital print
81,5x105,5 cm

11: Paillettenstoff, Stoff, Kunstleder, Stecknadel, 2016

Sequin fabric, fabric,
imitation leather, pin
250x180 cm

TUE GREENFORT

12: Aasee Water Filtration,
no. 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11
and 12 of 12, 2007

Filterpaper, cyano-
bacteria
Diameter: 17 cm
Edition Westfälischer
Kunstverein, 2007

MEHREEN MURTAZA

13: ...how will you conduct yourself in the company of trees, 2015-16

Soundinstallation with
plants of the Botanical
Garden of the University
of Münster, microphone
cable, arduino, crocodile
clips, crimp pins, compu-
ter, monitor, pallets,
sheet steel tubs, bricks
Dimensions variable

PLUGIN PLATTFORM, (2016-19)

14: As part of the exhibition
"Creatures of the Mud"
various editions by
alumni of the artist
residency programme at
Schloss Ringenberg

(plugin-project.com) are on offer at the Westfälischer Kunstverein and in various other locations and shops in Münster, Enschede, Kleve, Nijmegen, Düsseldorf, Arnhem and Hamminkeln. Among the artists are: Sebastian Bartel, Mattijs Brede-wold, Rita Kanne, Susanne Koheil & Günter Wintgens, Tamara Lorenz, Sebastian Ludwig, Ralph Merschmann, Christian Odzuck, David Scheidler, Gijs Verhoofstad und Christoph Westermeier. The small-format editions are intended for a wider audience to provide access to artworks and thereby promote a different form of collecting. The project prompts questions regarding the value creation of visual art, independent of speculation and the art market. They will be addressed in a public programme featuring a talk and discussion with Dr. Philipp Kleinmichel (Philosopher and art historian, Berlin) and a preparatory reading group.

Courtesy the artists

