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NATHAN POHIO

Spyglass Field Recordings Vol 3. Otahuna Love Letter 2012

Framed work on paper

Works courtesy of the artist

left: Scan the Ashes 2013

Digital images on LCD monitor transfer to .mpg2 1 min 10 sec (loop)

right: Landfall of a Spectre 2007-13

Mini DV transfer to .mpg2 on LCD monitor 1 min 50 sec (loop)

Nathan Pohio explores the image in motion. Within these moving image machines we find evidence of the human. Staring into a pool of water, trees invert, apparently hanging from the sky. A distant ship appears forever in motion, never quite hitting the shore, and a lone individual scans the scene before him. The melancholy of his gaze repeats the haunted photographic surface.

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ANN SHELTON

Rhodophyta, A view across the Rangitata River Valley to Erewhon Station, from Mesopotamia Station, Te Wai Pounamu, Aotearoa, New Zealand 2013

Single channel video, Bluray, continuous loop

Works courtesy the artist, Starkwhite and McNamara Gallery

18

Samuel Butler. From the F.B. Butler Collection, Frances and Sereena Burton, Thames, from A Library to Scale Part II 2008

Single channel video, continuous loop

In an attempt to capture a landscape understood to be the middle of nowhere, Ann Shelton returns to the document, and the singularity of a collection. Amidst the stunning collection of scrapbooks by Frederick B. Butler, Shelton finds a collated narrative of Samuel Butler’s time in New Zealand. In another time, Rhodophyta, a red algae found on Sydney beaches in 2012, seems to creep slowly over the landscape of Erewhon.

20

STELLA BRENNAN

Start From Where You Are 2013

VR panorama with sound; tablets, headphones, duration 13 min

CT imaging courtesy David Perry

23

The Middle Landscape 2010

HD video with stereo sound; mixed media 10 min

In Stella Brennan’s *The Middle Landscape* concerns for biosecurity and the picturesque frame an attempt to ‘get back to nature’. Brennan highlights how the romantic desire to preserve nature contributes to a total transformation of the ecology around us. *Start From Where You Are* is a distinctly different work. Trapped within the skull of an unknown stranger, we are privy to their thoughts, dreams, fears and memories. It is a terrifying intimacy made possible by the objective reality of a CT image.

21

SUSAN NORRIE

TRANSIT 2011

Single channel video, 14 min 36 sec

First exhibited at the Yokohama Triennale, STAR VOYAGER, Exploring Space on Screen, ACMI, Melbourne, Ja Natuurlijk - how art saves the world / Stichting Niet Normal and Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

22

SHOT 2009

Single channel video 8 min

First exhibited at the Enlightenments, Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland

Susan Norrie raises the difficult question of environmental responsibility. Climate change places the earth’s ecosystem in a precarious state. As rockets are fired into the atmosphere on an almost daily basis Norrie suggests that we think about the possible impact of this activity on our local geophysical environment. These works seem to document events very far from the South Island, and yet their connections are felt through the ground. The horror of the aftermath of tsunami and earthquake are only too familiar here.

INTRODUCTION

I like to think
(it has to be!)

of a cybernetic ecology
where we are free of our labors
and joined back to nature,
returned to our mammal
brothers and sisters,
and all watched over
by machines of loving grace.¹

In 1858 the British author and satirist Samuel Butler began work as a run-holder in an area of mid-Canterbury, in the South Island of New Zealand, that he named Mesopotamia – the mountainous area surrounding it he called Erewhon. The farm became the setting for a dystopic tale of machinic and societal control. Published in 1872 *Erewhon* turned this Southern landscape into a fictional world that held a mirror up to the hypocrisies of Victorian society. As a young traveller journeys over the mountains, he finds a new society of green pastures where Darwinian evolution is now in the hands of the machines. It is a land where humans are so afraid of what might come next that all machines and all technology, are outlawed. The story resonates with an ecological intensity that foretells of a terrifying shift in the relations of nature to technology. Unsurprisingly, Butler’s observations of machinic ecology resonate in contemporary media art today.

Long before Butler, New Zealand was a land continually recreated in myth and story. And as the opening scenes of *Prince Caspian* or *Lord of the Rings* show, it can still easily be imagined to be elsewhere. In New Zealand there remains an absurd tension between representations of a place where dreams can come true; continued media constructions of a country through a fictitious national identity, 100% pure and full of sheep; and a *carte blanche* upon which fantasies of elsewhere space can be realised. In this context, Erewhon forms a provocation and catalyst for the artists in this exhibition to think through relationships between the individual and the mass, the machine and the ‘natural’ whether biological or ecological, and the traveller and elsewhere.

AMONG THE MACHINES picks up the story of Erewhon in the early twenty-first century, and suggests that it is possible to form new connections between geographical locations, fictions, and fragments of our technological imaginary. Although not all the works in the exhibition use Butler’s satirical take on western society, machines and environment as a starting point, they do all suggest a rethink of our relationships with technology, fiction, land, animals, nature and each other.

Reflecting on the histories of occupation of this land, we find ourselves once again immersed in shifting relations between technology and nature. In an age where the ring of fire can determine geological relationships from the local to the global, and when climate change informs any thoughts about industrialization, modernity and progress, Butler’s text seems ever more pertinent. By focusing our thoughts on the constructions of nature, and our understanding of the role of media in society we are able to think of the environment beyond nature, and begin to re-conceptualize the relationship of technology to place. In the country of the Erewhonians, Butler documented a fear of the immense capacity of machines, AMONG THE MACHINES presents a counter, a different reflection on the future world today. This is a world where we are learning to live with multiple and strange creatures, whether biological or machinic. Situating the long-term concerns of ecology alongside the hopefulness of utopian thought, AMONG THE MACHINES offers a speculative map for the future histories of media, machines and humans.

Su Ballard July 2013

1. Excerpt from Richard Brautigan *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (1967)

creative

nz

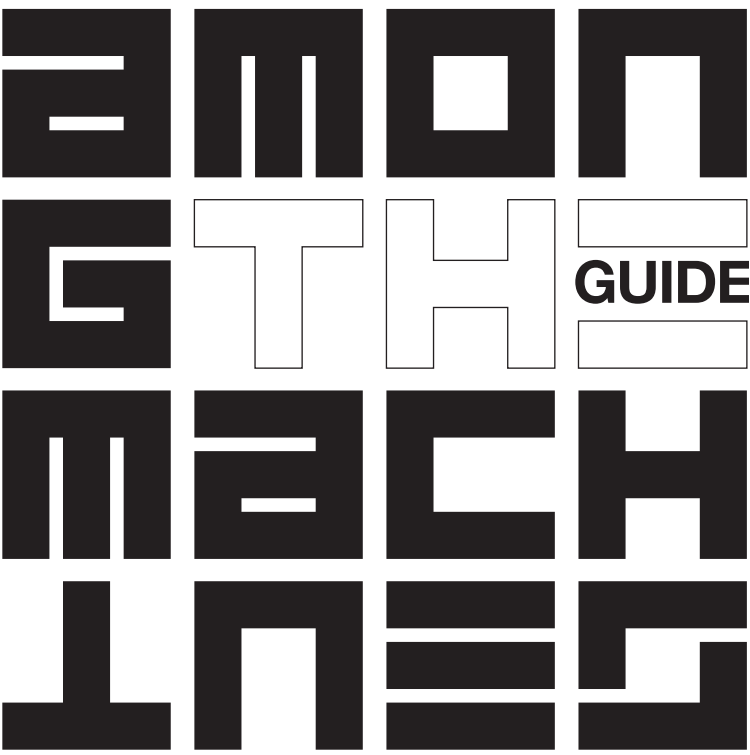
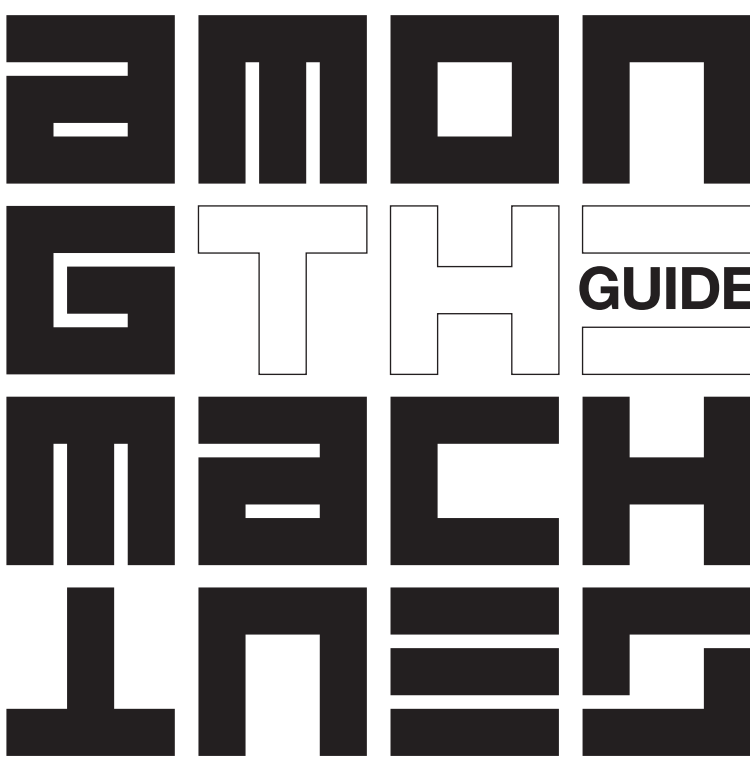
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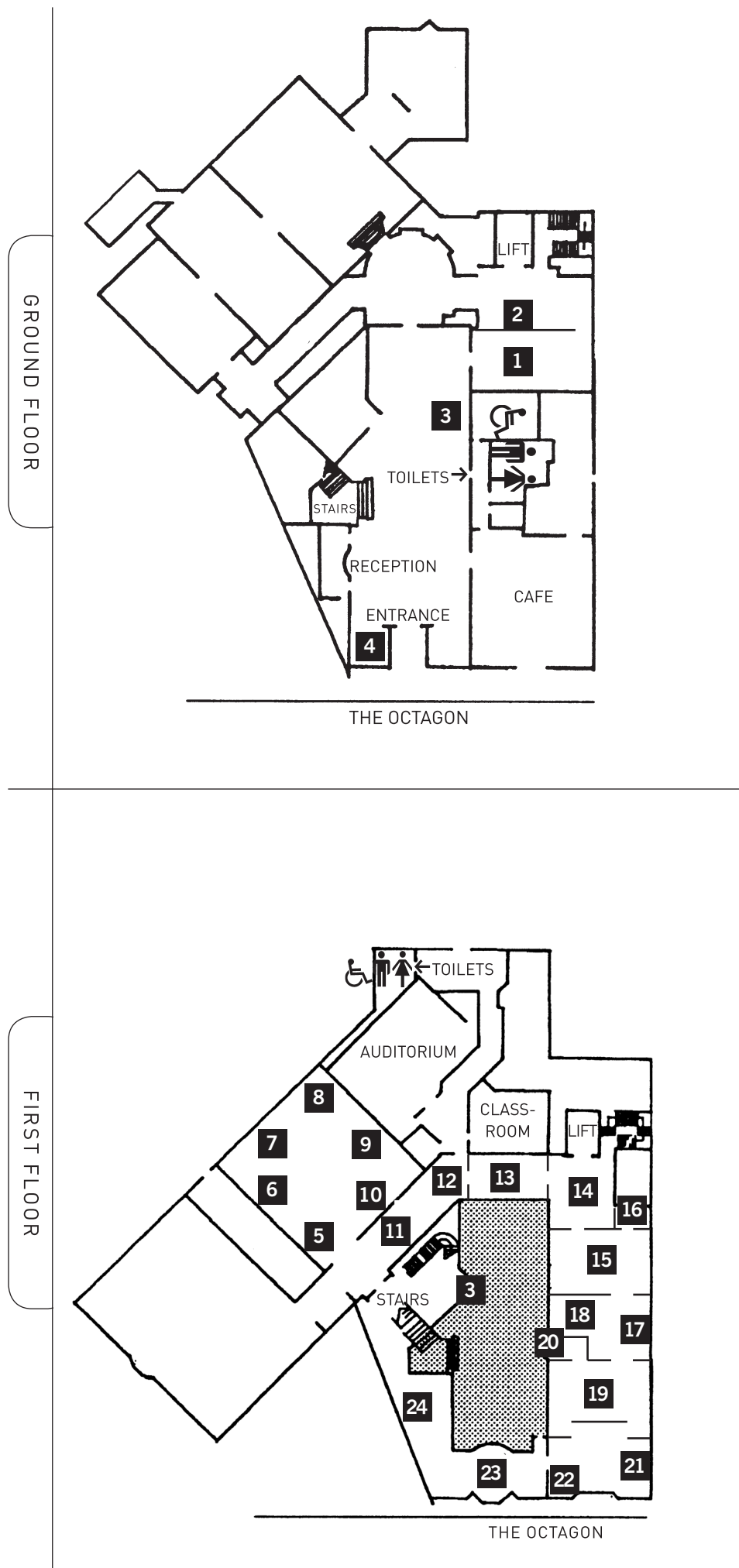
ART

DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY

AMONG THE MACHINES is curated by
Dr Su Ballard and Aaron Kreisler
6 July – 3 November 2013

FREE open: 10am - 5pm daily
30 The Octagon Dunedin New Zealand
www.dunedin.art.museum
A department of the Dunedin City Council





HANNAH AND AARON BEEHRE

- 1** **Toward Mt Terror** 2013
Responsive environment
- 8** **Postcard for Garland Briggs** 2008
Framed sublimation print, LCD, hard drive, sonor sensor, audio sensor

Ecology is key to Hannah and Aaron Beehre’s site specific installation *Toward Mt Terror*. In this space where physical access is compromised we leave a record of our impact on the environment. *Postcard for Garland Briggs* also blurs the line between nature and technology. What seems to be a still photograph is layered with generative data that reflect the eccentricities of animal rather than digital matter. In both works forms are generated in real time and reactive to human presence.

HAYDEN FOWLER

- 2** **Goat Odyssey** 2006
Single channel video, SD digital video, colour, sound 16:9, 15 min 10 sec (loop)
- 19** **New World Order** 2013
Single channel video, HD digital video, colour, sound, 16:9, 15 min 17 sec

Hayden Fowler’s animal totems are signals of the utopianism and perhaps despair of any relationship with nature. Unease and the persistence of romantic desire pervade both *Goat Odyssey* and *New World Order*. Equally indeterminate is any sense of chronological time. Have the chickens taken to the woods to escape the impending apocalypse? Should we follow their lead?

DOUGLAS BAGNALL

- 3** **Cloud Shape Classifier** 2006
Software (C, python, javascript)
- 9** **Recur** 2013
Software (C)

Douglas Bagnall’s listening and watching machines approach the world around them via a solid training in human aesthetics. These artificial neural networks have an uncanny ability to interpret light and movement, translating them back into images that we recognize. If a robot can stare at clouds all day, perhaps not all technology is at odds with the world around us.

BRONWYN HOLLOWAY-SMITH

- 4** **Pioneer City postcards** 2011 [intervention in gallery shop]
Graphic design: Rachel Logie and Matthew Holloway
- 14** **Pioneer City scale model** 2011 (model) 2013 (addition of custom-built convertible shipping crate / display case) Mixed media
Architectural model design: Rachel Logie / Laser cutting: Rachel Logie, Mike Heynes / Model-making assistants: Don Brooker, Lewis Urbahn / Additional thanks to Wendy Neale, Massey University College of Creative Arts, Sophie Jerram and Mark Amery / Model originally commissioned by Letting Space with assistance from Creative New Zealand.
- Pioneer-City.com** Launched 2011 Website
Graphic design, website build and imagineer: Matthew Holloway / Additional thanks to Mark Amery and Sophie Jerram / Website originally commissioned by Letting Space with assistance from Creative New Zealand.
- [with SIMON WARD] **Destination Pioneer City** 2012 Blu-ray 16:9, 6min:22sec
Music by Disasteradio / CGI Assistant: Richard Pilkington / Female voice: Heather O’Carroll / Male voice: Hamish MacEwan / Pioneer City architectural concept: Rachel Logie / Additional thanks to Mike Heynes, Massey University College of Creative Arts, and Melissa Laing / Film originally commissioned by CoLab, AUT University for Air New Zealand’s in-flight entertainment programme, with support from Creative New Zealand.

In *Pioneer City* visitors are offered the opportunity to apply for residency on Mars. Unlike other utopian societies which are bordered and isolated from other social structures, *Pioneer City* suggests the formation of a new kind of networked society. By suggesting we emigrate to off-world spaces Holloway-Smith highlights the possibilities for 21st century colonisation. Is Mars our new Erewhon?

RUTH BUCHANAN

- 5** **Fade In (Head)** 2013
35 mm slide projection on customised screen
Works courtesy the artist and Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland
- 12** **A figure, Some figures** 2010
Audio on headphones and track list, 86 min 35 sec

Ruth Buchanan returns us to the individual as a subject in place. Buchanan asks how subjectivity is formed through the narratives we write of ourselves and how we connect these to a public space of encounter. Focusing on her own speculative place as an artist Buchanan asks how the collective environments around us produce identities. Buchanan’s works consistently interrupt themselves; in one we see a self-portrait at the same time as we see a reflection of ourselves, and in the other audio produces an intimate reflective space.

JAE HOON LEE

- 6** **Sea Of Desire** 2013
Two channel digital video, 16:9 two video projection, 20 min 35 sec
- 7** **Ice Column** 2013
Two channel digital video with sound, 16:9 video projection, 12 min
Works courtesy of the artist, Starkwhite Gallery and Robert Heald Gallery

It is the journey from one place to another that marks our dreams and fears of an elsewhere space. In *Sea of Desire* and *Ice Column* the crossing of an Antarctic space points to the ongoing validity of a concept of the sublime. We find ourselves immersed within nature and culture, here and there, aesthetics and ecology.

RONNIE VAN HOUT

- 10** **Breeding Despair** 2013
Screen printed and painted canvas with video, 5 min 36 sec
- 24** **Bad Ronald** 2013
Sound, speakers, amplifier, cables, audio file, 1 hour 11 min (loop)

Somewhere behind every bedroom wall are monsters. Inside the DPAG’s big wall *Bad Ronald* finds himself trapped within a sequence of unfortunate murders, born from fear and the desire to live happily ever after. In another space, strangers share their worries with anonymous ‘aunts.’ These texts are then re-performed by a Greek chorus rearticulating the machinations of fear; at once private and shared.

FIONA PARDINGTON

- 11** **EREWHON: Left for Dead in The Field of Dreams** 2012
from left to right: **E. Akura, Ngai Tahu Woman / R. Kirsten, Ngai Tahu Woman / E. Fiona, Ngai Tahu Woman / W. Paulette, Ngai Tahu Woman / H. Megan, Ngai Tahu Woman / O. Ripeka, Ngai Tahu Girl / N. Katarina, Ngai Tahu Woman**
pigment inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag

Social and political desires are written on the body in Fiona Pardington’s *Erewhon* series. Seven Ngai Tahu women with individual Moko Kauae, perform a sequence of ceremonial expressions. Seaweed from the South Island, Te Wai Pounamu, surrounds each wahine, representing Tangaroa God of the Sea. Being born into the world, these goddess travellers seem to forever return home.

DANIEL CROOKS

- 13** **Tour #1 (Dunedin)** 2013
Floor vinyl
- 15** **A Garden of Parallel Paths** 2012
Bluray, 1080p24, variable, 2:1 aspect ratio, 9:33 min
Video: Daniel Crooks / Sound: David Franzke, Byron Scullin, Daniel Crooks

Daniel Crooks uses video media to map the *déjà vu* of revisiting multiple temporal spaces. *A Garden of Parallel Paths* takes us on a labyrinthine journey through laneways, at once familiar yet undeniably strange. In the new installation *Tour#1(Dunedin)* media are mapped directly onto the floor of the gallery via a Hamiltonian Path. By structuring our journey through a predefined space the path encourages us to enact a slow computational journey. This motion path disrupts the time that we would usually engage with an otherwise empty space.