

“RECONSTRUCTING EDEN”

A video exhibition curated by Barbara Polla

Together with Paul Ardenne, academic advisor

For THE ART CAPITAL FESTIVAL 2018

@ The ArtMill, SZENTENDRE, HUNGARY

Nature & Pathway – moving images

Within the framework of the **Art Capital Festival**, which is dedicated this year to **Nature and Pathway**, **RECONSTRUCTING EDEN is a video exhibition** centered on and echoing with the themes of nature, ecology, in and out of pathways, moving, driving, diving, walking, biking, flowing, sailing – living.

Whatever the outlook of so-called “eco-art”, the role of the “eco-artist” combines the position of friends of the earth and sounders of alarms. A deep humanism defines “eco-art”, inseparable from a revitalized vision of life and a re-discovered harmony between humanity and its environment. With the mesmeric moving images of nine international artists, “RECONSTRUCTING EDEN” is seeking for such a harmony, which is also vivid between the ghostly and genuine old stones of the ArtMill in Szentendre and the video images of new worlds to come, from “subatlantic” to Planet Mars.

“Walking art” is a form of eco-art that roots in art history long before ecology and has extended towards navigating art (Janet Biggs), biking art (Shaun Gladwell, Ali Kazma), driving art (Frank Smith) and more generally, as “exploring art” (Ursula Biemann, Janet Biggs, Clare Langan, Violaine Lochu, Miguel Angel Rios) as well as floating art (Janet Biggs, Clare Langan, Gianluigi Maria Masucci). As stated by Swiss video artist Ursula Biemann, climate change urges art, artists and us to get involved in dynamic changes and in constructing a common future equally rooted in cultural and natural narratives.

We are urged to imagine a sustainable, beautiful, inviting world: to reconstruct Eden and a post-human way of being in the world.

The pathway through the exhibition starts with *The Film From Outside* by **Frank SMITH**, and questions the ongoing loss of paradises on earth such as Isle Jean Charles, a narrow strip of land on the border of Louisiana, soon to disappear under the combined pressure of coastal erosion, storms, hurricanes and raising waters, together with its ancient Indian community stemming from the *Houma* nation. The twenty-five remaining families, the so-called “first official climate refugees of America”, face the dilemma of continuing to adapt and staying, at risk of disappearing forever, or leaving, and accepting the dispersal of their traditions, religion, language, and culture. We drive along Island Road, on this precarious territory at the edge of abandonment, between azure and tarmac, under a glorious sunlight.

Approach to MUNDI MUNDI (**Shaun GLADWELL**) and *55-41* (**Ali KAZMA**, featuring himself and Paul Ardenne) are two films about the beauty of motor-biking through solitary untouched landscapes, whether in the Australian desert (Gladwell) or through multiple salvage landscapes, from Anatolia to Argentina (Kazma); whether alone, slowly embracing the world from dawn to dusk (Gladwell), or in duo, being in the world, piercing the world and being the world.

Violaine LOCHU, the young French vocal performer, outstanding winner of the 2017 “aware” award, turns to video art with *šaddat* – the title of her video, “šaddat”, meaning “becoming”, “growing”, “turning into”. The artist walks alone, somewhere in Lapland, in a spiritual state of mind and we see through her eyes a succession of flies, toads, trees, barks, birds, fishes, banks, rocks, reindeer, pathways... Eden seems to exist and Lochu, as an Eve of the 2010s, cherishing the apple of knowledge without devouring it, takes us by gaze and hand to her untouched yet evolving paradise of art. We are not alone after all.

Children and adult plays – both proceeding from the same desire for representing life – are at the core of **Miguel Angel RIOS’** video work. In *ATACHO*, mature men recall the kids inside themselves and play echo through their childhood’s mountains – the Andes. The slowly join, take all the same pathways, the same shortcuts, often steep and dangerous, and agitate paddles while walking, still convinced, as they were as kids, that their vibrations could scare their sleeping parents. For Rios, “The main objective was to gather my childhood friends in full provincial siesta to film a children’s game that we all knew... I managed to film the memory of childhood through poetry.” Reconstructing Eden could well occur by

reconstructing childhood. Rios' second video, ***Untitled (the ghost of modernity)***, filmed on a deserted plateau high above a distant town in Saachila Oaxaca Mexico, features a set of outlined cube structures built on site, and a transparent cube that floats through the landscape as if magically suspended – reminiscent of Amy Balkin's *Public Smog*. The transparent cube “dances” amid the structures, to music composed by John Cage in 1947. Eden is undoubtedly surrealistic.

Space Between Fragility Curves, the 2018 iconic video of the New-York-based video artist **Janet BIGGS**, focus artist of RECONSTRUCTING EDEN, combines footage of a Mars simulation mission in the desert of Southern Utah with images of a Yemini refugee camp and music by and images of marimba playing Shimon Robot as he improvises music inspired by Bigg's images. *Space Between Fragility Curves* tells us about the endless persistence of human hope in finding other places, better lives, and inventing new futures.

Worried by some of the most significant aspects of globalization and “ecosophy,” Biggs devoted several recent creations, such as ***Fade to White*** and ***A step to the Sun***, to the realities of current climate and economical crisis. Her most spectacular video on this theme is ***Warning Shot***, with its irrevocable title calling to mind danger, alert, and the necessity of reaction. The artist herself traverses an iced landscape, armed with a gun, shooting distress warnings. We will not survive a dead world.

The human factor, in Biggs' work, is consubstantial to artistic creation: we must talk about ourselves. About our glory? Rather about our fragilities. Biggs' images, as if they were at the edge of a ceremony, take the time necessary to pervade our retina and brain. For RECONSTRUCTING EDEN, *Showing* is not enough: *thinking* is mandatory. The slowness of Biggs' images enhances thoughts.

Two videos by **Clare LANGAN** surround Gianluigi Maria MASUCCI's *Starway to Eden (Fluire)*: ***The Floating World*** and ***Flight from the City***, both of them created in collaboration with Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson. *The Floating world* immerses us in “post-apocalyptic images, shot, edited, and manipulated with technological subtleties to implore the terrible beauty of a world which seems familiar, but not yet encountered. We watch the skyscrapers of Dubai rising higher than clouds, follow a camera as it climbs the stony steps of Skellig Micheal; Mount Olympus trans-located from Greece to this remote place in the eastern Atlantic, a mystical spot once used by Monks in their search for the divine. This imagery suggests what Heidegger and the Greeks called *aletheia*, a place

where truth reveals itself..." (Heinz Peter Schwerfel). From one floating world to another, we move from the fascinating beauty of uncertainty to the emotive poetry of a floating-flying mother-daughter ballet. ***Flight from the City*** is a film about connection, love and transition; shot in the hot spring at *Fludir* in Iceland, it makes a perfect duo with **Gianluigi Maria MASUCCI's *Fluire***, a literal ***Stairway to EDEN***. Through continuous cycles of observation-registration-elaboration-reproduction of the elements – in this case, water – Masucci builds an original rhizomatic pathway to reconnect with nature. *Stairway to EDEN* is a site-specific installation for the space of the ArtMill, composed of a projection that flows-flies above the triangular stairs of the building combining geometrical and numerical elements that evocate the archetype of vertical "Ascesa", as an attempt to transform our impermanence into energy.

On the very back of the ArtMill, ***Safe*** by **Ali KAZMA** stands like a Noah's ark. In the very north of Norway, in the remote Svalbard Archipelago, about 1300 kilometers from North Pole, conservationist Cary Fowler started a global seed vault that contains copies of seeds held in gene banks worldwide. *Safe* (the title of Kazma's video is its own invention) has a storage capacity of 4.5 million seed samples. If things turn bad, and survivors know about *Safe*, they should be able to "reconstruct" biodiversity – at least, vegetal biodiversity. In the purity of Nordic landscapes filmed by Kazma, the wind sweeps hope and doubt.

Ursula BIEMANN's *Subatlantic* comes as the climax to the exhibition: "a visual SiFi poetry about a female scientist on a North Atlantic island who is undertaking instrumental observations in the field, around the time of the last glacial melts 12'000 years ago. She simultaneously inhabits multiple temporalities that span across millennia, slowly crafting a history that harbors a language still to be announced. Spoken in the off from a submerged Atlantic position, the post-glacial, pre-modern narrative reconnects us to infinitely larger, untamable forces that animate extra-historical dimensions, plunging us humans into deep time, into geological and climatic timescales where we have to index ourselves anew. The video *Subatlantic* provides fuel for a reorientation of human-earth relations." We have to imagine ourselves differently, become part of the global mutations and transformation and invent new forms of living.

The best way to predict future is to construct it. May be not exactly Eden, but "Come What May" (Corban Walker).