

Being Embedded in Ulterior Layers

Marie Civikov
Iver Uhre Dahl
Karla Paredes
Fedrik Vaessen
Noa Zuidervaart

Text by Àngels Miralda

one large men's black plastic work glove
one dense mat of oak pollen
one unblemished dead rat
one white plastic bottle cap
one smooth stick of wood

Being embedded in ulterior layers

In the opening chapter of Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, she describes the contents of a storm drain in Chesapeake Bay¹. Gathered together in liquid currents, object-assemblages oscillate between debris and a thing-in-itself composed of various conglomerate components. The possibility of the autonomy of objects is put into question, as it was defined by modernism and the object of Modern Art². In denying this possibility, the contemporary frames a new paradigm in which a stage acknowledges correlation. Context, proximity, and trace define an entangled landscape made of multiplicities and closely tied to Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory.³

Being Embedded in Ulterior Layers brings together the work of 5 artists who use the exhibition space like archeologists, magicians, foragers, and material poets. The space is conceptually aligned with geological strata - a landscape that can quickly tell an expert eye about millenia of the region's tellurian history. The visitor is first confronted by a panorama as a thing in itself, but like the curious eye of the archeologist, details reveal their own stories, connections, and keys to the narrative.

The structural element of the exhibition are leftover bricks from the garden surrounding Odapark - remnants from past projects that are reassembled into new forms. The concept of cyclical assemblage runs through the bricks as well as the artist's work in which objects, elements of old works, and materials from the studio can be reused, altered, and reformulated into new ephemeral art objects. This material philosophy breaks concepts of linearity that ascribe a timeline to artworks and their inviolability in favour of a more flexible circular return of the object and the artwork in organic cycles of life.

1 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 2010. Duke University Press. Pg 4.

2 Modernist theorist and critic Clement Greenberg described the autonomous artwork as turning away from representation in order to focus solely on the issue of painting and painterly material. This, he argued, might have been a reaction to working in times of catastrophe and despair when the artist had to find a way to keep working in isolation from disaster. The frame also served as an apparatus to separate the surface from the outside world. Open University, "Greenberg and Autonomy" (<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/art-and-visual-culture-medieval-modern/content-section-3.1.1>)

3 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 2005. Oxford University Press.

This is the latest step in a journey of exhibitions in which the artists have dismantled established forms of authorship in group settings in favour of more fluid constellations, yet materialities and aesthetics still distinguish one from the other. Marie Civikov's sculptural paintings drape from ceilings like banners or shields and narrate a complex family history entangled with the Netherlands' histories of migration and colonialism. Iver Uhre Dahl's wood-carved sculptures oscillate between figuration and abstraction, representing folk stories, myths, and techniques of assemblage. Karla Paredes creates drawings, sculptures, and ceramic objects based off of research into gardening, archeology, and non-human collaborations through the lens of writers such as Rosi Braidotti or Donna Haraway. Fedrik Vaessen presents us with a world of science-fiction where human and non-human combine in imaginative creatures that reference a deep future and deep past. Noa Zuidervaat's ceramics emerge from the landscape in squiggly wyrm-like uncanny contortions, where sea-shells appear like ancient creatures that have always been in the living, breathing, landscape.

Glossary

Acanthus Pattern

The acanthus leaf is native to the Mediterranean where it became the basis for the ornaments on Ancient Greek corinthian columns. This pattern appears in the woodcut work of **Iver Uhre Dahl** whose assembled wall-based sculpture takes the form of a fragment, or an embellished Arcimboldo fertility goddess. The organic material returns the acanthus pattern to the realm of the vegetal in living material.

Actant

A term used by Bruno Latour to de-anthropocentrise the catalyst of action. Actor-network-theory was developed by Latour to explain the world as a series of relationships in constant shift, where human as well as non-human actors influence the course of the present. These non-human actors can include vegetable, animal, mineral, and other components.

Animism

The attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena. The belief in a supernatural power that organises and animates the material universe.



Anthropomorphism

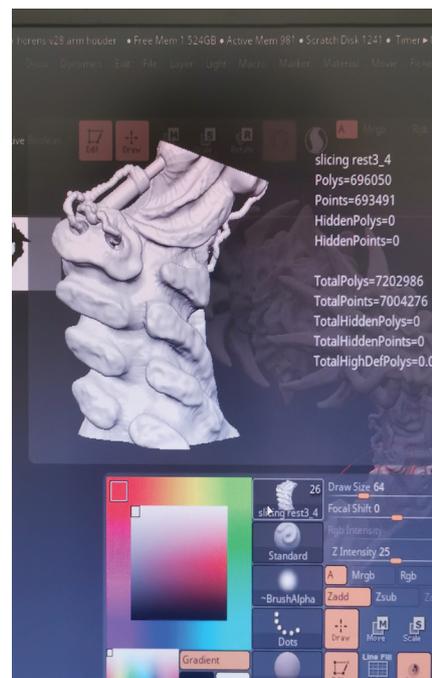
The attribution of human characteristics or behaviour to non-human entities. This practice has a long history from ancient myths to folktales, children's fables, literature, and our everyday use of language. It is a technique to understand the world and to produce empathy towards the non-human, but can also be detrimental to understanding other ways of being and thinking outside of the boundaries of human-centric discourse.

Ayam Ketawa

Is a breed of chicken originating in Indonesia. The name translates to “laughing chicken” due to its long crows that sound like human laughter. This type of chicken is seen as a symbol of courage and heroism. One of them is depicted on a painting by **Marie Civikov** and represents a family story from the Indonesian freedom fight for independence. Her grandmother Bertha recounted a story in Dutch which was translated to English by her great-aunt Marie: “The three-day war had started. We closed all of the shutters and windows and the front door. We figured the bullets would first have to penetrate those before they hit us. We put mattresses on the floor and during the shootings we would lie on those. There was plenty of food in the storage as well as a few free-range roosters and chickens. During breaks in the shootings we would prepare simple meals. On the second day, two armed guards entered the house - they were looking for men and arms. Grandfather Franz had gone to stay elsewhere, but they searched the shelves. We stood by to make sure they would not steal our food as we needed this to sell and stay alive from the proceeds. They took one chicken and told us “this is your contribution to the freedom fight.” After that, Tante Mien sacrificed the rest of the chickens in case they came back to take more, at least we would have eaten them. We ate rice and fried chicken for the remaining days of war.”

Biomechanical

The study of biomechanics implies that organic structures already contain the mechanical within them. It is the study of systems and structures that have been developed by nature itself that can compliment and inform human engineering. The human body has many mechanisms that help to heal and repair itself, such ideas are being implemented by engineers into non-living and inorganic matter that can be manufactured to contain self-repairing chemical compositions and regenerate from stress over time. In the work of **Fedrik Vaessen**, he imagines a world in which creatures combine like prosthetics or cyborg entities into hybrid characters both organic and inorganic, questioning the extent to which this distinction can even be made.



Bocca della Verità

Is an ancient roman sculpture that depicts the visage of the pagan god Oceanus in bas-relief. The flat, cylindrical piece shows his hair twisting in heavy curls around his face with distinct eyes, nose, and a gaping mouth. The slit of the mouth is believed to bite off the hand of any liar who places their fingers in the opening. Similarities can be found with the ceramic frieze of **Noa Zuidervart** depicting plaque-like stylized human face.

Brick

Bricks have been used in human constructions for thousands of years. They are made of clay and other materials and then dried either by the sun or fired. Bricks are a type of artificial stone and are some of the longest lasting traditional building materials. In countries such as the Netherlands, where stone must be brought from far away and Deltic conditions provide ample clay deposits, bricks are an integral material of traditional constructions up to this day.

In the Netherlands, one traditional brick variety is called ijsselsteen since it comes from the banks of the river de IJssel. It became a material for export due to its quality and durability and has built important structures internationally such as Trinity College in Dublin and constructions in Dutch colonies such as the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town. The general word for bricks is baksteen, and can be seen all over the country. Traditional Dutch canal houses show the striking variety of form and designs that bricks afford. They came into disrepute during the Modernist period when concrete and glass were championed as progressive materials, but came back in time of need during the post-war reconstruction of the 1950's.

At Odapark, several piles of bricks were leftover from previous projects. Whether artworks or architectural ambitions, these building blocks have been recovered for the present project and reassembled into a podium and landscape for the presentation. They are arranged in twisting vertical columns and a shelf-like interior/exterior wall. The various constructions show the versatility and craft of bricklaying as a nearly universal logic of gridded patterns and resilient strength. Even in the condition of leftovers, they are both ruinous detritus and new constructions. Bricks are a returning material, both modern and ancient, a quotidian material that surrounds us in our contemporary homes and offices which also lies in the ancient foundations of the city of Jericho since 7,000 BCE.

Cyclical Assembly

Is a philosophy of a material eternal return. As a central idea of production and art-making in this exhibition, it is the belief that an artwork exists as-such in the moment of its presentation, frozen momentarily and crystalized in form. When the exhibition ends, its identity is reformulated and its materials re-enter the vocabulary of the studio where it can be changed, rearranged, and reprocessed into a new artwork, compilation, or collage that is non-linear, atemporal, and in a political state of constant flux. This process aligns the artists with theories of hauntology in which the past is ever-present in recurring and repeating ways. An exhibition is always a phantom of a former self, and the impetus for a future world.

Élan Vital

This term was first used by French philosopher Henri Bergson in 1907. This concept belongs to the philosophical tradition of “vitalism” developed initially by scientists such as Francis Glisson and Alessandro Volta who imagined a spiritual fluid or metaphysical element as a non-mechanical force behind physical phenomena. It is typically translated into English as vital force and describes the tendency of all things to develop into increasingly complex forms. Bergson imagined life force in the form of evolution to be a creative process rather than a mechanical drive, striving for new proposals and reformulations. This concept was later developed by Gilles Deleuze in his 1988 book *Bergsonism* where it further connects with the concept of emergence and becoming.

The Event

An event can be an occurrence that shatters ordinary life, a radical political rupture, a transformation of reality, a religious belief, the rise of a new art form, or an intense experience such as falling in love. In Badiou’s *Being and Event*, the original word is always in the plural (événement) which testifies to the fluid nature of becoming. Nevertheless, the event is a recognition of a turning-point or an intervention.



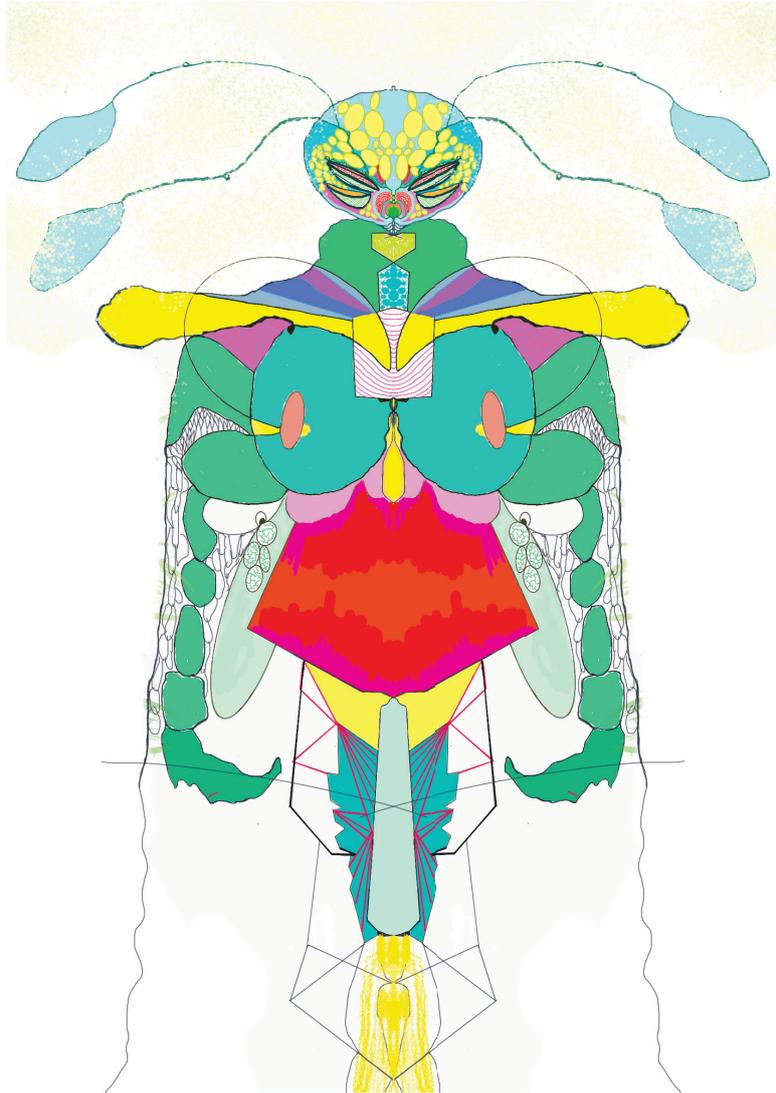
Folly

In architecture, a folly is used in landscaping and gardening to represent a romanticised structure without serving that purpose. They rose to popularity in English and French gardens in the 16th and 17th century, when small-scale or incomplete structures were constructed to resemble Roman temples or Egyptian pyramids. In some cases they are built only with a single façade, in others they are newly opened in an already ruined condition. The folly is one case study through which we can look at the process of ruination through architectural theory. The truth of the ruin is a contrast to romantic accounts that originally defined the discourse. Important here are approaches that redefine the ruin as more than just a site or object, but also a set of processes that reflect our relationships to material culture and the built environment. Therefore the assertion to a necessity to reconfigure the way we define ruins in light of the contemporary moment.

Hybrid Entities

Organism of mixed origin or a structure that incorporates diverse elements. Hybrids appear in many ancient mythologies around the world, from the Palaeolithic to Ancient Egypt, Ancient Middle East, Mediterranean, as well as ancient indigenous cultures. Hybrids, in the mythical realm, are creatures that combine the features and body parts of more than one real species. These hybrids can be classified as partly human hybrids (such as mermaids or centaurs) or non-human hybrids combining two or more non-human animal species (such as the gryphon or the chimaera). Hybrids often originate as zoomorphic deities who, over time, are given an anthropomorphic aspect. Remains similar to those of mythological hybrids have been found in burial sites discovered by archaeologists. Known combinations include horse-cows, sheep-cows, and a six-legged sheep. The skeletons were formed by ancient peoples who joined together body parts from animal carcasses of different species. Many of the drawings of **Karla Paredes** reference the tradition of hybrids in mythology and speculative futures.

“Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building” (Rosi Braidotti)



Inherited Memory

In psychology, inherited memory is a theory that has been discredited by biologists, and yet can still serve as a useful indicator to interest in specific memories that may have been overlooked by dominant mega-narratives. The field of family history allows individual access to personal perspectives of historical events. In the work of **Marie Civikov**, her grandmother is the source of many stories and inspiration. She was born to a mixed colonial family in Indonesia and has passed down stories of her Indonesian mother, who was able to learn some Dutch while spending time in a Catholic convent despite her Muslim religion, and who eventually married a Belgian officer in the service of the Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger (KNIL). Her stories help to weave nets of complexity around colonial relations and the conditions in which local inhabitants lived before the revolution for independence.

Janus

A double-faced god who symbolises beginnings, transitions, passages, and time. His faces look simultaneously back into the past as towards the future. He is the symbol of all changes such as the stages of life, conception, and birth, but also of architectural passages such as thresholds and gates that separate one realm from another. It is said that he resides at the limits of earth, and the extremity of heaven.

Keepers (The)

This name potentially describes the creatures assembled by **Karla Paredes**. The Keepers are an allusion to the act of guarding, caring, conserving, and protecting. Like the halls of ancient castles guarded by the armour of knights, they are an allusion to human presence through material assemblage. Thresholds, entrances, and openings have often been guarded by human or non-human entities such as sitting lions in both Roman and Chinese cultures. The doors to the afterlife in ancient Egypt were protected by the sphinx at the foot of the pyramids and the city of the dead.



Linden Tree

Most of the works of **Iver Uhré Dahl** are carved out of wood from the Linden Tree. This wood is evenly layered and soft, making it good material for carving and sculpture but unsuitable for construction or furniture. In Tilburg, a city where the group made a recent exhibition, a Linden tree stood in the central square De Heuvel from the 16th century until 1994. It is speculated that the city is named after the species Latin name Tilia. When the tree died of old age the wood was removed, but new sprouts were found growing within the hollowed-out interior. The tree became a symbol for rebirth and regeneration. The descendents of the original Linden tree have been planted around the square.

Mummy (Paracas)

The Paracas culture thrived in the Andes between 800 BCE and 100 CE. Most of the information about their society has been preserved in their large cemeteries full of individual mummies wrapped in elegant textile bundles. The mummies were conserved in the foetal position, placed inside a basket, dressed in lavish clothing and jewels, and then gently wrapped in layers of cloth until a pear-shaped bundle was formed. The last outer covering of the mummy was always made of coarse cloth to protect the interior layers and sewn shut. The textiles are delicate embroideries that represent cosmological beliefs including depictions of animals, humans, plants, and tools. These ancient burial forms are the main formal reference for **Karla Paredes'** keepers whose remains keep a ghostly watch over the exhibition.

Orifice

Is any sort of entrance, threshold, or hole that separates an inside from the outside. It is a term typically associated with the body such as the mouth, nostril, or anus, but can also be a pipe, vent, or socket in mechanical constructions. These openings also occur inside the body between different organs such as heart valves, or in the "syphons" of sea creatures. The works of **Fedrik Vaessen** are constructed with sockets and holes that connect different objects to each other, complexifying the structure as single or multiple supporting forms.



Ouroboros

Is an ancient symbol that depicts a serpent eating its own tail. It is a symbol for the never ending cycle of destruction and rebirth.

Phantom Fossil

Is a type of fossilised remain produced by the imprint and absence of an organic body. None of the original matter of the being remains, but its imprint is conserved in hardened material such as petrified clay or soft calcareous or sandy stone. It can sometimes appear like a bas-relief, the sculptural method employed in the works of **Noa Zuidervaat**. Sandstone is often made from the compression of the sea-floor, leaving traces of shells

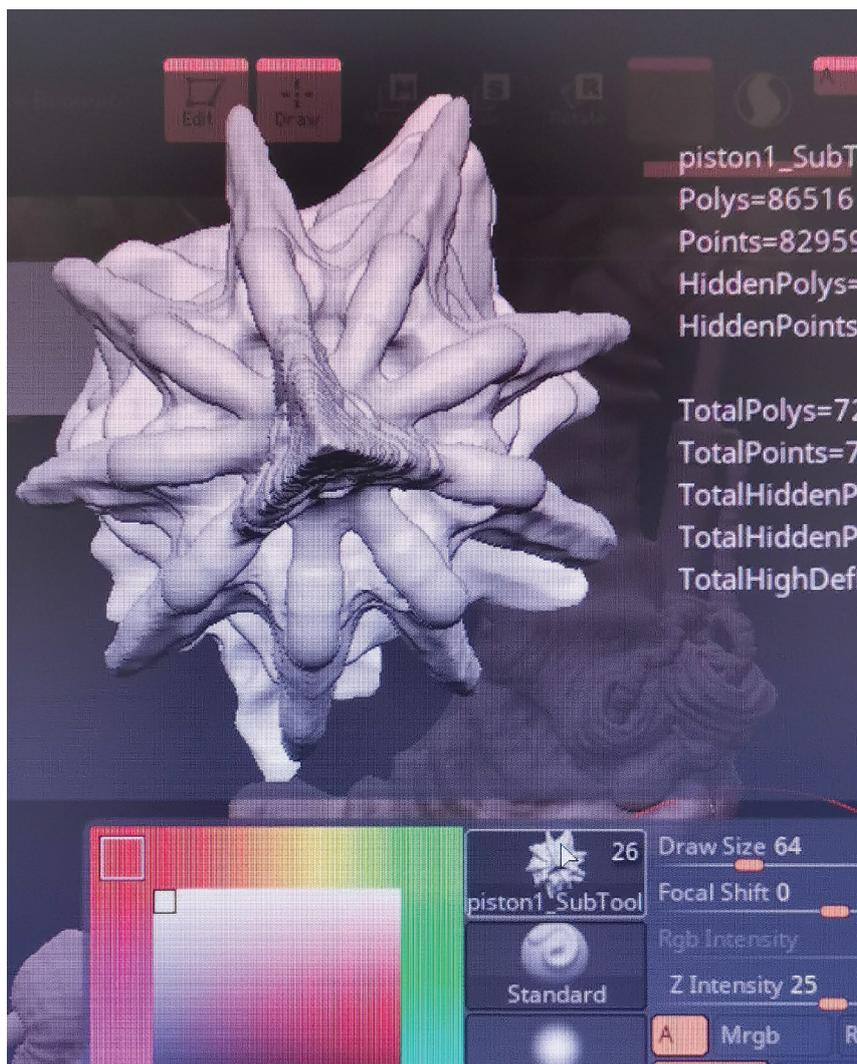


Primordial soup

The theory of the primordial soup is a scientific hypothesis that seeks to explain the origins of life on Earth. It proposes that life began in a “soup” of organic molecules and compounds that formed spontaneously in the early oceans. This theory is closely associated with the concept of abiogenesis, which suggests that life can arise from nonliving matter under the right conditions.

Reliquary

Reliquaries are ornate containers for sacred objects paraphernalia. They are common in Orthodox and Catholic practices and usually ornate gold or silver plated protective casings. They are usually portable for use in processions or pilgrimages. Inside they contain objects such as bone fragments of saints, textiles worn by religious figures, and even heads. In the work of **Fedrik Vaessen** and **Karla Paredes** materials both organic and inorganic combine into one, often referencing bone structures, spinal cords, or rib cages. These figures combine with other materials and transcend into an imagined and spiritual realm.

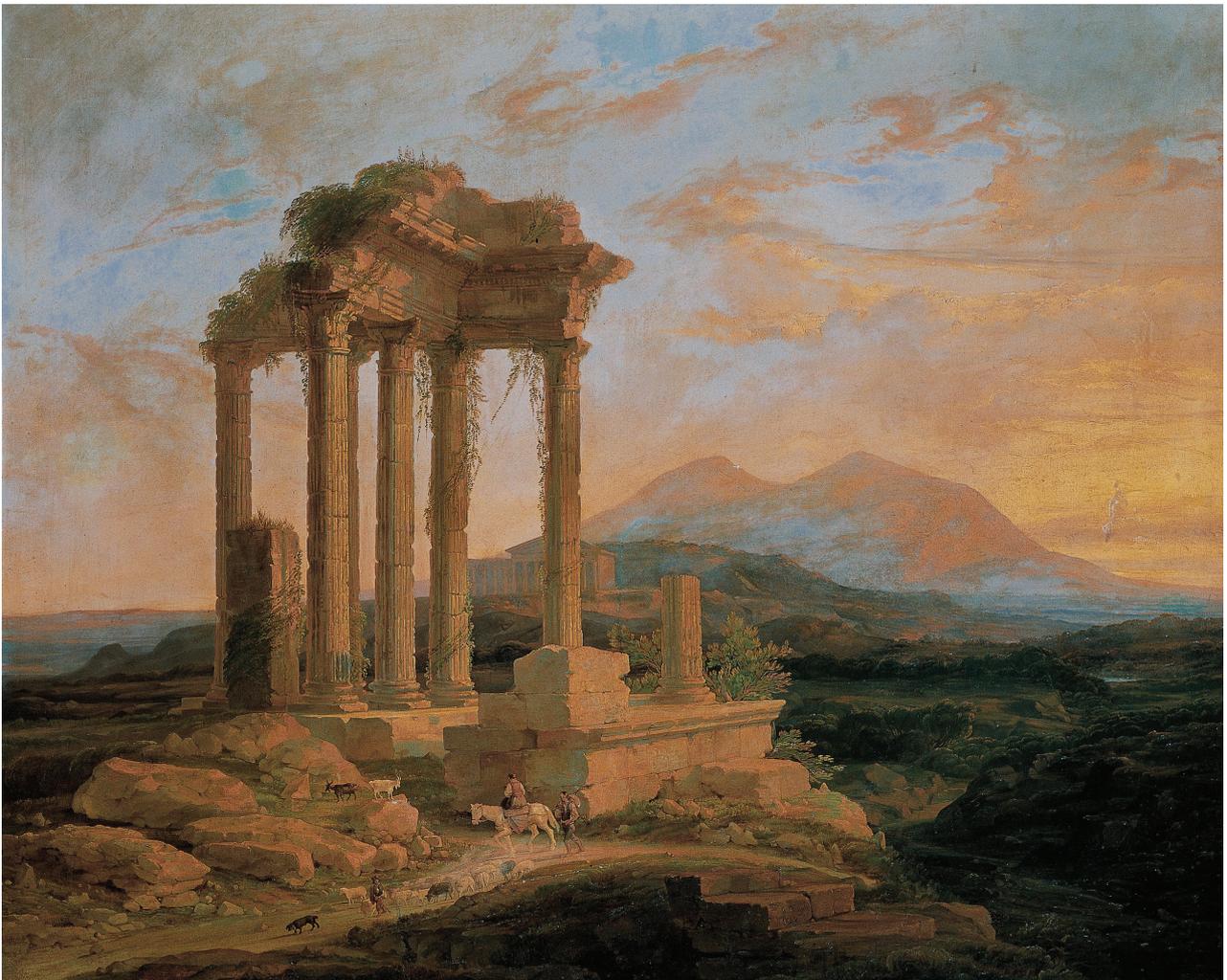


Remnant

A part or quantity that is left after the greater part has been used, removed or destroyed. It signals towards the existence of a greater whole and suggests completion to the imagination. In this way, it twists temporality to the past as well as to the future by anchoring possibility in previously laid foundations.

Romanticism

The Romantics were a group of artists and architects in the late 18th century who developed an evolving view of the ruin as a manifestation of longing, memory, trauma, and identity into a cohesive aesthetic movement. The need to explore ruins was a symbolic reference enhancing the meaning of anachronism to generate bridges of reflection between past and present. They are an allegory for the multiple layers of time and a critical tool which would later give rise to ideas such as historical materialism. To see the ruin as a part or half of a building acknowledges the destructive effects of time, and consequently, of representations of history itself.



Tree Rings

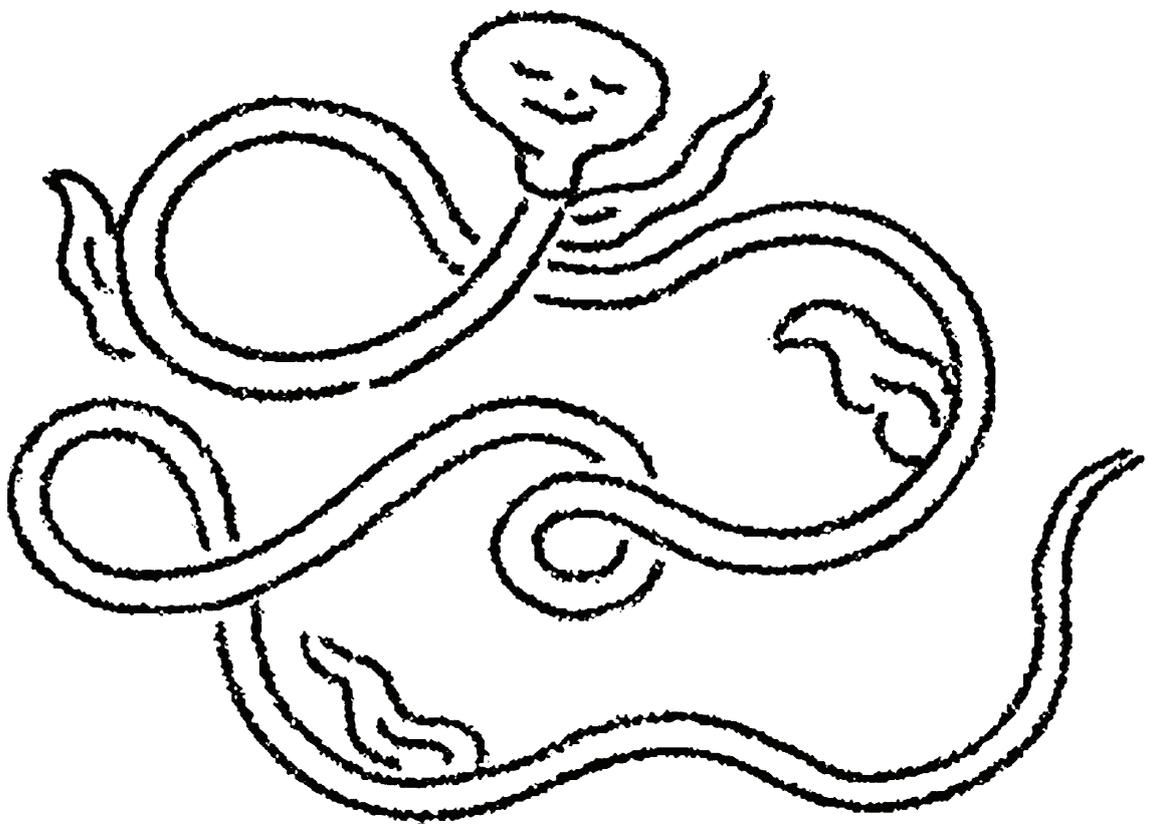
Trees are naturally occurring environmental archives. The practice of using tree-rings as a scientific measure is called Dendrochronology and continues to be informative for geologists and environmental scientists to this day. Each ring of a tree represents one year and conditions of water levels, toxins, and other external factors are recorded in each ring by various identifiable factors such as variations in thickness, colour, and dimples in the circular pattern indicating branch loss.

Vajra

The Vajra is a holy weapon that appears in Hindu mythology and Buddhism. It is sometimes translated as a “diamond sceptre” representing unyielding power and indestructibility. The Vajra is topped with a ribbed spherical head adorned with several sharp points for stabbing. The weapon is described in the Puranas of Hindu legends and lore as an all-powerful weapon created from the spine of the sage Dadhichi. The sage agreed to sacrifice his life so that his bones would create a sacred weapon, but only after he was allowed to pilgrimage to all the holy rivers and bring their waters together in the Naimisha Forest. Once he completed his quest, he gave up his life by practising yoga, after which his bones were used by Indra to create the weapon. A current of body-horror and ancient mythology runs through this narrative, and the detailed ribbed organ-like weapon can be seen included in the biomechanical entities of **Fedrik Vaessen**.

Worlding

Worlding is a term coined by Donna Haraway, biologist, philosopher and science historian, for whom the term means that the world and its creatures should not be seen as separate stories, but as each other's context in which all are constantly developing with each other. It is a generative process that blends the material with the semiotic, removing the boundaries between the subject and its environment.



Wyrm

The wyrm (i.e. worm, serpent, reptile or dragon) is a literary character and allegorical motif for putrefaction – the earthy origins from which new life emerges, as well as the diseases and poisons that cause things to return to that state. In Northern and Central European folklore, serpentine creatures were associated with meres and marshes, which were characterised by rotting vegetation and sourness, serving as metaphors for death itself. The presence of tiny worms, eels, and other wriggling creatures in these swampy areas provided evidence of the connection between serpentine symbolism, decay, and potent sources of chthonic fertility and regeneration. Their traces can be seen in the ceramic works of **Noa Zuidervaart**.

image credits

images by the artists, except:

Animism.jpeg

Illustration from 'Reineke Fuchs' by Wilhelm von Kaulbach, 1846

Phantom Fossil.jpg

Illustration from 'Géologie et paléontologie du bassin houiller du Gard' by François Cyrille Grand'Eury, 1890

Romanticism.jpg

'Landscape with Ruins' by Lluís Rigalt, 1848

