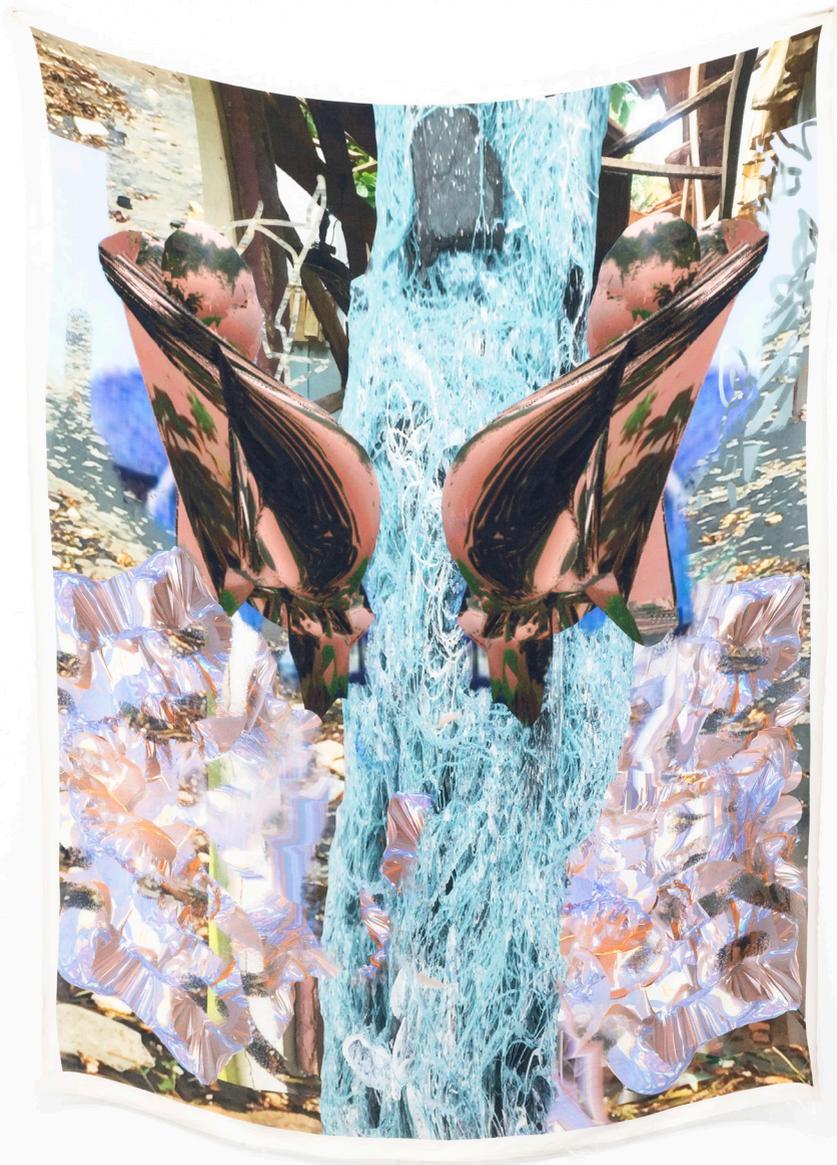


# SEDIMENT

Charity Edwards and Amelia Hine, Leela Schauble, Marian Tubbs,  
and Samuel Tupou | Curated by Simone Hine and Kyle Weise



Metro Arts, 8-30 May 2021

*Sediment* brings together the work of five contemporary artists who utilise collage as an aesthetic through which to consider the human transformation of the environment. Laboratories, sea life, plastics, virtual organisms, micro-organisms, gold, oil, and fibre-optic cables merge and collide, with the ocean as conduit. Suggesting evolving networks, this restless flow of images look toward possible futures, both human and non-human.

## SEDIMENT

Within a scientific context, sediment refers to a material that is classified, not by its chemical compound, but according to its particle size. The particle size of sediment is determined by the ongoing process of weathering. In other words, sediment is not defined by any inherent material quality that can be mapped onto a periodic table, but is instead a physical object whose current state is determined by the past and ongoing conditions that act upon it. As such, the term sediment refers to a material's current state, as part of continuous, fluctuating processes that extend beyond the present, into the past and future.

Sediment, as a free-flowing particle derived from the breakdown of materials that were once a congruous whole, has metaphorical resonance with images cut from magazines, videos, and webpages. In this metaphor, collage can be likened to the process of sedimentation, where these free-flowing particles become fixed in a new composition. Sediment builds to create a record of different physical environments as they have been reconfigured through time. Likewise, collage acts as a record of the reconfiguration of human

culture. The physical environment and human culture have always been intertwined, but the degree to which human activity is reconfiguring the physical environment, and vice versa, is increasing at an accelerated rate.

Geological stratification has a particular resonance in the contemporary moment, via the concept of the Anthropocene: the name given to the current geological epoch, and describing this as being determined and constructed by human activity. Yet the term is not unproblematic, for it suggests a shared responsibility among humanity, when the major contributors to climate change are an elite minority of the world's population.<sup>1</sup> The term also subtly ignores the many human cultures that have not contributed to climate change, mass species extinction nor ecological devastation. As an alternative, the term 'Capitalocene' has been suggested. This term explicitly links climate change to the relationships between humans, nature and resources that have been constructed by capitalism, and the industrialisation of extraction, production, consumption and waste connected to this.<sup>2</sup> As T.J Demos notes, our era should at least be called the "petro-capitalist Anthropocene".<sup>3</sup>

Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser similarly emphasise that it is fossil fuel dependant capitalism, specifically, that has caused climate change: "It was not 'humanity' in general but *capital* that extracted carbonised deposits formed over hundreds of millions of years beneath the crust of the earth; and it was *capital* that consumed them in the blink of an eye with total disregard for replenishment or the impacts of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Subsequent shifts, first from coal to oil, and then to fracking and natural gas, have only ramped up carbon emissions, while disproportionately offloading the 'externalities' onto poor communities, often communities of colour, in the global North and global South."<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the term Anthropocene suggests a separation between human society and nature, in which nature is something 'out there' on which humans act. This approach to ecological thought is reflected in mid-twentieth century environmentalism and the advocacy for the conservation and preservation of the natural world. Artworks of the time reflected this idea, aiming to repair and restore 'natural' environments.<sup>5</sup> Demos is particularly critical of this 'restorative'

conservationist approach in its contemporary manifestations, as is evident when he praises Tue Greenfort's *Diffuse Einträge* (2007) for bringing attention "to the ridiculousness of restorationist aesthetics when they address the mere local effects of environmental damage but ignore the structural and often global causes."<sup>6</sup> The undoing of the nature/culture binary and the recognition of the structural causes of climate change are intertwined concepts. As Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore argue, the construction of a distinction between society and nature, rooted in the development of the mechanisms capitalism in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, has enabled colonial plunder and the commodification and destruction of the environment, and is essential to the ongoing expansion of capitalism. Against this dichotomy, Patel and Moore suggest a 'world-ecology' that understands humans within nature, offering "a way of seeing how humans make environments and environments make humans through the long sweep of modern history."<sup>7</sup> An artistic approach sympathetic to this philosophy can be found in Demos's identification of contemporary artworks that adopt a 'political ecology', and recognise nature as inseparable from the bundle

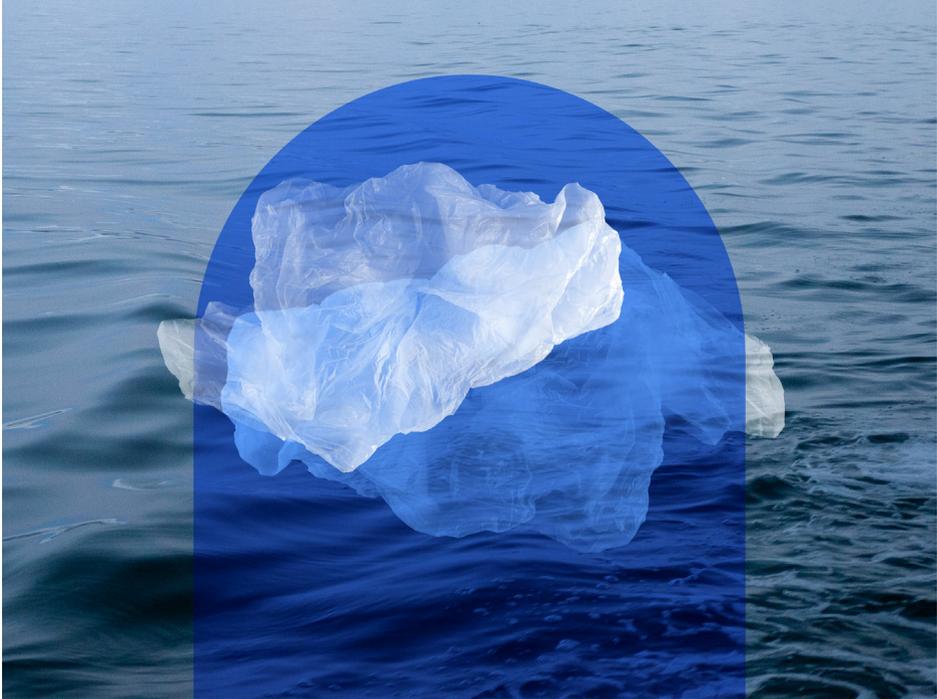
of financial, legal and scientific discourses in which our physical environments are entangled.<sup>8</sup>

Patel and Moore's historical survey is essential to their argument, which emphasises the inevitability of environmental destruction from the structures of capitalism with its endless reach for new frontiers of profit. This is evident in their consideration of 15<sup>th</sup> century examples, such as the devastation of the forests of Madeira for the production of sugar, and the European boom in silver, which saw common lands essentially privatised for the extraction of silver, and the poisoning and destruction of forests on which peasants relied for food and water.<sup>9</sup> Yet, as J.R McNeill and Peter Engelke convincingly argue, the transformation of the environment has undergone a particular acceleration since the mid-twentieth century.

Deforestation, to lead from Patel and Moore's aforementioned examples, has been seen since ancient times but the era since 1945 has seen a significant and unprecedented global increase in deforestation.<sup>10</sup> While the recognition of the long history of the structures and guiding concepts of capitalism is crucial, McNeill and Engelke emphasise the significance of the past 70 years in the material transformation

of the planet, particularly in the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Deforestation, of course, is one part of this, but energy use and the burning of fossil fuels is the most significant factor. Tracking the astonishing growth of the Earth's population in the second-half of the twentieth century, McNeill and Engelke argue that this is less significant than the integration of this population into high growth consumerist lifestyles.<sup>11</sup> The world has become increasingly awash in *stuff*, with the expansion of consumer goods: manufactured, transported, used and discarded. Indeed, such is the expansion of stuff that discarded objects, waste, is not only an enormous industry, but has also become an emerging resource frontier for capitalist expansion: mined for its buried resources and transformed into new products.<sup>12</sup>

As this world of stuff emerged, so too it was incorporated into the production of art. The moment in 1912 when Georges Braque pasted a piece of faux woodgrain wallpaper onto a drawing, set in motion a history of collage that was by most accounts understood as a process by which lived experience was able to enter contemporary art, via the inclusion of objects drawn directly from life; a life increasingly



filled with objects.<sup>13</sup> Writing from the staunchly formalist position for which he became infamous, and ignoring the political gesture of repurposing images, Clement Greenberg articulated a specific problem with this historical understanding of collage: faux woodgrain wallpaper is an imitation of the same order as that of mimetic representation.<sup>14</sup> In other words, collage undermines any distinction between the 'authentic' and 'imitation'. While this may seem like a glib point that is bound by the arbitrary logic of Modernism, it does turn discussion toward the "appearance" of collage. The appearance being the haphazard collision of competing forces within a single composition. A system of layering competing elements was the content as well as method and form of collage. In the spirit of collage, we can repurpose Greenberg's argument, slice it from its formalist context and place it within the current discussion of the Anthropocene where binary distinctions, such as that between nature and culture, authentic and imitative, are increasingly difficult to maintain.

Stephanie Hessler, in her interdisciplinary analysis of deep-sea mining, argues that, "modernist divides between nature and culture also infer divides between the 'real'

thing and its representations. We need to find ways to challenge such assumptions."<sup>15</sup> Inadvertently, Greenberg's modernist analysis of collage provides insights through which we can develop this challenge.

The incorporation of faux woodgrain and newspapers in Cubist collage suggests the emerging world of industrialisation, throw-away consumerism, ubiquitous media and advertising. But more so, it is the *jumble itself* of collage that connects to the world of consumer capitalism, and its constant circulation of images and stuff, and the inseparability of these. Indeed, the distinction between representation and life seems increasingly difficult to maintain as images gleaned from the internet collide, layer and merge in perpetual motion across the screens which are our constant companion, and part of our everyday gestures and tasks. Layering tabs, sharing images, clicking through a checkout while we track the arrival of our bus; this stream of images is not a representation but a part of life, another layer of the everyday.

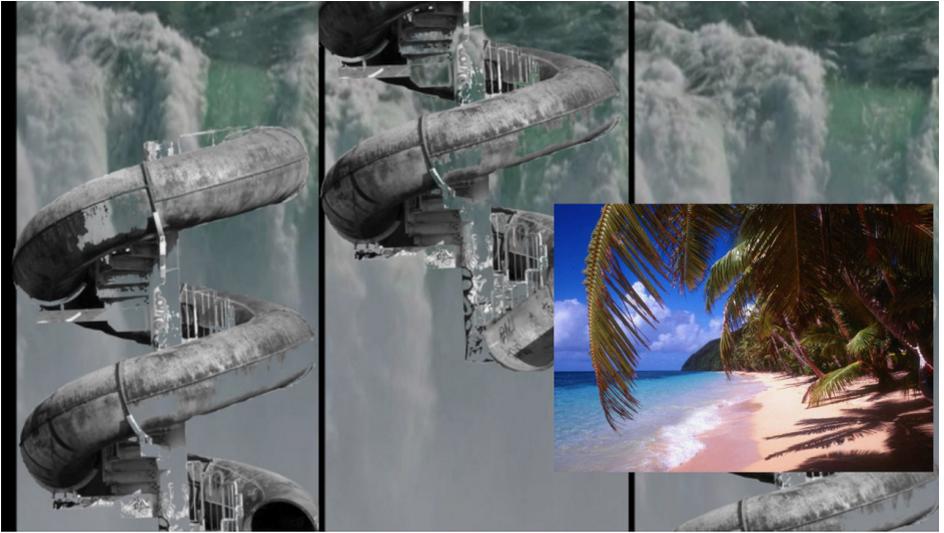
Fredric Jameson's analysis of late-twentieth century installation art suggests that all art has in some way become media art: self-consciously aware of its role as *media* within a

media system. Within this context, the significance of works that combine various media is not the creation of a 'supra' media that would provide an authoritative cohesion, but in the relationship between the media. It is the *mix* itself which is significant.<sup>16</sup> A collage reflects the everyday, not because it uses elements drawn from life but because its process, its mix of colliding media and referents, is the experience of the everyday. As Richard Flood writes, "Everything is whacked together in fragments that temporarily cohere but cannot holdfast. The density of information becomes puzzlingly abstract while understanding takes a backseat to the aesthetic arrangement."<sup>17</sup>

Understood for its reliance on detritus and for its processes of assembly and layering, rather than its coherence, contemporary collage seems to encapsulate Amanda Boetzkes's contrast between modern and postmodern art: "To critique modernist aesthetics, the ideal of stylistic progress, heritage, continuity, and artistic expressivity, postmodern art enacted its own ruination and degradation. In its radical break from the ideal of unified form and content, postmodern art is always already constituted through acts of collecting and accumulating historical sediment."<sup>18</sup> Within this

context, collage can be broken apart from the modernist context in which it arose, to be understood as a reaction against neat, unified narratives. In form and process, collage both encapsulates and exploits the contemporary experience of consumption and waste, and its tumble of clutter. The discarded remnants of a world of throwaway images and stuff are the material of collage. Long at the forefront of waste as resource frontier, the techniques of reuse in collage both critique and parallel the contemporary forms of capitalism in which it is entangled.

Writing on the work of Marian Tubbs, Hamish Sawyer emphasises Tubbs's use of found materials, her assemblage of detritus, both as sculpture and image. Moving between and intricately linking the physical and the virtual, Sawyer writes, "Tubbs draws equivalence between the discarded materials she scavenges from the street and the ripped images and footage she pulls from the internet for her digital assemblages."<sup>19</sup> In this context, it is unsurprising that the ocean figures strongly in her practice. Philosophically, water, in its flows and movements, offers a way of thinking that links dispersed ideas and forms. This is specifically relevant



for “acknowledging that climate change, disasters and critiques are not simply located in single sites [...], but the configuration of things and processes that bring them about are constituted through entanglements, that draw together geographically, and also digitally, dispersed flows, objects and ideologies.”<sup>20</sup> In more pragmatic material terms, the ocean is a significant site of waste and debris, with Tubbs involved in research into plastic waste in the ocean.<sup>21</sup> More than this, however, the ocean, in its capacity as transport route and as path for global communication cables, is central to the global networks of both stuff and digital communication which Tubbs’s work engages, and which are the foundations of capitalism and climate change.

The research group Avalanche note that “humans embrace the sea as their largest global infrastructure.” The ocean is a transportation infrastructure that enables the movements of containers and goods. The ocean’s appeal is such that humans transform the earth to expand its flows, as exemplified by the construction and expansion of the Panama and Suez canals.<sup>22</sup> Building on this logic, we could argue that humans are further expanding the ocean as infrastructure via climate

change and the concomitant rising sea levels. Indeed, as Nicole Starosielski notes, the transformation of the Arctic through climate change has become an opportunity to find new paths for undersea communication cables, which would further increase the capacity of the networks that are contributing to the melting of Arctic sea ice and the expansion of the liquid ocean.<sup>23</sup>

Although the internet tends to be understood via discourses of ‘dematerialisation’, it is reliant on vast physical infrastructures. If digital communication seems frictionless, and without borders, Starosielski’s study of undersea cable networks emphasises that it is in fact reliant on enormous abrasive materialities. Undersea networks are defined by complex territorial, legal and financial arrangements, alongside their direct physical impact on local communities and environments.<sup>24</sup> Starosielski’s analysis of network infrastructure is part of a broader movement towards an increasingly materialist understanding of media.<sup>25</sup> Jussi Parikka, for example, expands this to consider media both before it is media and after it ceases to function as media. That is, Parikka, informed by a refusal of the nature/culture binary, considers the deep time of media: from the formation of

the mineral components used in their construction to discarded media as toxic future fossils.<sup>26</sup>

For example, Parikka's analysis of media extends to the microparticles of aluminium dust created when the surfaces of iPhones are polished during their production. The creation of the fetishized, gleaming surfaces of iPhones, reliant on an array of metals, is rooted in centuries of colonisation and resource extraction. Moreover, the aluminium dust created to achieve this glimmer becomes a part of the global ecosystem, settling in soils and in the lungs of factory workers. In dust, Parikka finds a conceptual inspiration. Dust troubles our notions of matter, slipping between the immaterial and the material, it spreads across the planet and through the environment as a complex assemblage and, in the case of aluminium dust, is inseparable from capitalist forms of exploitative labour relations and semiotic seduction.<sup>27</sup> Dust, in its many materials, is everywhere. Dust sprawls and accumulates and is a marker of the complex intersections of human and geologic temporality: "Dust forms geological strata. Dust marks the temporality of matter, a processual materiality of piling up, sedimenting, and – through its own million-year

process – transformations of solids to ephemeral and back. It swarms and overwhelms, exhausts and clouds."<sup>28</sup> The sedimentary formation of layers of dust informs Parikka's study which slowly peels back layers of materiality and meaning, and is inspired by Robert Smithson's writing on sediment as text, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's post-linguistic philosophy: "Notions of strata, sedimentations, double articulations, and an alternative to the signifier-signified-model are introduced as a way for a postanthropocentric theory."<sup>29</sup>

While our digital technologies are reliant on a staggering array of rare earth metals and global infrastructures, perhaps their most significant materiality is in the energy used in their production and use, sourced mainly from fossil fuels. Most of the energy used in the lifecycle of a computer, for example, is expended during its production, and the source of the majority of this energy is fossil fuel.<sup>30</sup> The extraction of fossil fuels returns us to colonialist histories of uneven development. Through persistent oil spills and exploration specific places have been devastated. Such places are described by McNeill and Engelke as, "sacrifice zones, where the cost of energy extraction included

pervasive ecological degradation. Among local species, only oil-eating bacteria benefited from the fouling of soils and waters of these regions. But people far away also benefited, in the form of cheap oil for consumers, tidy profit for the companies involved and luxurious revenue streams for state officials."<sup>31</sup>

Any consideration of fossil fuels returns us to the ocean. The ocean as infrastructure is inseparable from fossil fuels. Half of all maritime cargo, by tonnage, is oil.<sup>32</sup> The ocean also acts as a carbon dioxide sink for the emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, storing up to one-third of the output of carbon dioxide since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>33</sup> While it invisibly soaks waste from fossil fuel-powered machinery, the ocean has also been the site of oil pollution via spills. Some of these spills have been highly visible via their enormous scale, the largest being the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010.<sup>34</sup> While media coverage of this was extensive, Demos argues that over time the media ultimately aided false claims around the clean-up. The media's emphasis on visibility and images, rather than data, allows for little attention to the structural causes or long-term effects of the spill. Demos argues that media coverage enabled and supported BP's false

narrative of the success of the clean-up. BP, focused on containing the 'image' of the spill, and leveraging the media's reliance on visibility, partly hid the extent of the disaster by dumping two million gallons of 'Corexit' into the ocean, a chemical that caused the floating oil to sink.<sup>35</sup>

Regardless of this, the intense visibility of the initial 2010 spill lingers in the imagination. The protagonist and narrator of Tom McCarthy's novel *Satin Island*, 'U', is fixated on images of the spill. Sitting in an airport as the story of the spill emerges, he is unable to look away. As the media coverage slowly moves to the next story, he continues to watch it, for hours on end, on his laptop. These images invade his consciousness and, dreamlike, he sees oil everywhere, recognising that his world of contemporary technology, air travel and the atmosphere of his existence is drenched in it: "[...] watching the crippled platform listing, the broken pipe gushing, the birds milling around, the oil-flower unfurling its petals, the dark water swelling and cresting, over and over again. I watched, as I said, for hour after hour [...]. When I had finally got airborne, and found my head slumped flat against the window as I slipped into flecked and grainy sleep, oil seemed to lie

around the very cloud patches the wing-lights were illuminating: to lurk within and boost their volume, as though absorbed by them, and to seep out from them as well, in blobs and globules that hovered on their ledges, sat about their folds and crevasses, like so many blackened cherubs."<sup>36</sup>

Oil spreads through the ocean as a result of constant accidents and spills and, systematically, via the dumping of plastic waste into waterways: ten percent of all oil, Amanda Boetzkes notes, is used in the production of plastic.<sup>37</sup> McNeill and Engelke pinpoint the Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl as initially bringing the scale of plastic pollution in the ocean to wider public awareness in the early 1970s.<sup>38</sup> Kate O'Neill notes that, more recently, public attention towards plastic in the ocean skyrocketed in 2017-2018. As numerous academic and journalistic reports on ocean plastic were being published, this was also the period in which China effectively stopped accepting plastic waste for recycling. This policy left millions of tonnes of plastic stranded on ships and ports globally, giving a brief, newsworthy visibility to plastic waste.<sup>39</sup> No doubt, the public concern was also partly a result of alarming and widely viewed videos and images, such as one of

a straw being graphically removed from a turtle's nose. Analysing this video, Elspeth Probyn finds within this spectacular visibility an essentially limited conception of the structural and continuous transformation of waterways via recent human activity, of which single use-straws are a negligible component.<sup>40</sup>

In a manner that can be likened to aluminium dust traveling through the air, becoming inseparable from 'nature', so microplastics, outside of visibility, are dispersed through the ecosystem via waterways and oceans. This includes microscopic plastics in the form of dust from car tires and fibres entering the waterways from the laundering of synthetic clothes.<sup>41</sup> Analysing the work of Tejal Shah, Boetzkes sees the inclusion of found footage of a tiny fish spewing plastic, in one of Shah's videos, as a hinge through which to interpret the crux of the artist's work. Boetzkes writes that, in Shah's work, as embodied in this image, garbage, pollution and waste can be understood as a part of both humans and the planet, incorporated into and inseparable from life: *"noxious debris is the intimate fabric of our habitat; it passes through, and against the body, conditioning it and giving it form."*<sup>42</sup> Oceans and waterways figure prominently in



recognitions of a world-ecology that, in Patel and Moore's sense of the word, undermines the separation of nature and culture and links materialities across geographies and lifeforms. An example of this is the artwork of Lauren Burrows, which considers the effect of pharmaceuticals, expelled through wastewater, on fish.<sup>43</sup> Oceans are key sites for the 'externalities', the human and environmental costs of extractive industries. The effects of such externalities are often hidden from visibility due to either the invisible form of the pollution, such as microplastic dust or radioactivity, or because of the remoteness of the activities, as in deep-sea mining.<sup>44</sup> The ocean is a physical site central to the Capitalocene. Yet, in its amorphous flows and its linkage of disparate discourses and materialities, the ocean is also a metaphorical and philosophical site, with potential for enabling a world-ecology perspective.

Oceans figure prominently in the work of Leela Schauble, Marian Tubbs and Samuel Tupou in this exhibition. Here, oceans, within the web-of-life, are inseparable from plastics, oil, communication networks, and cultures, and present an opportunity to imagine post-human futures. The oceans' flows,

like collage, can present unexpected connections that reveal world-ecologies and undo distinctions between nature and culture. An example of this begins with illegal and artisanal gold mining, occurring mainly in the world's poorest nations which have long been subject to colonial exploitation. Here, at great personal risk, miners use mercury as part of the extractive process in refining gold. From this, gold mining accounts for over one-third of global mercury pollution. Entering waterways, the mercury moves through the ecosystem and via biomagnification it increases in toxicity as it moves along the food chain. Eventually, the mercury finds its way into the diet of Scandinavians, creating a measurable effect on the neurology of this population.<sup>45</sup> While not specifically concerned with this process, Charity Edwards and Amelia Hine's work, *Death Metal*, ostensibly about gold, presents the tangled connections of this element across scales of life, technology and finance. The connection of the post-colonial extraction of gold to the oceanic flows of mercury and the brain functioning of Scandinavians is merely one more layer we could add to Edwards's and Hine's formulation of gold, as actor, morphing across aeons and

intersecting with human life for a fleeting moment amidst distant pasts and futures.

Gold is everywhere, from our phones to trace elements in human biology. Edwards and Hine are specifically interested in gold, not just for its material ubiquity, but also for its role as a tradeable commodity, where its value sits at the interstice of the real and the virtual. Gold's market value is tied not just to its physical use, to supply and demand, but also to its role as a financial instrument, and this value tends to increase as violent or catastrophic events occur. As speculative commodity, gold's lustre becomes a harbinger of the apocalypse.

A consideration of gold's 'value' leads us from Wall St to garbage dumps. With gold intricately enmeshed in the electronics industry, it is inevitably also part of cycles of waste and constitutes part of the mountains of technology discarded each day. The recently released Apple+ television series, *The Mosquito Coast* (2021), centres on Allie Fox, a confident, yet fatally flawed, self-styled anti-capitalist. Leading his son through towering hills of garbage, Allie notes the gold stored there in the detritus of electronic consumption: "Go west,

young man.' That's what they used to say. 'There's gold in them thar hills'. Now where do we go to get our gold? The fucking dump."<sup>46</sup> That *The Mosquito Coast* is produced and distributed by one of the leading contributors to electronic obsolescence, Apple, emphasises our everyday acceptance of eco-catastrophe, in which our desire for gold is matched only by our willingness to discard it, as we write our post-human futures.<sup>47</sup>

Samuel Tupou's work *Future Lands (Old World Rituals)* (2017), featured in *Sediment*, is part of a series of works that imagine distant futures. The layering of planes within the work combines diverse sources and inspiration, including patterns inspired by traditional 'tapa' cloth, alongside a palette and stylistic elements that suggests the pixels of videogames and the luminescence of screens. Against the backdrop of a leaking drum, perhaps filled with oil or toxic waste, a figure resembling a human-esque Tiki sculpture emerges; transformed and adapted, the figure rises to create a new story out of this detritus. Here, the subject and the process of the work coalesces, each reflected in the other, as Tupou states, "Through the re-invention and repetition of these discarded remnants, I am attempting



to create new narratives, which portray both personal and shared histories.”<sup>48</sup> Against the residue of the fossil-fuel industry, life and culture are transformed, waiting to be reconfigured for alternative futures. Climate change is particularly urgent in the Pacific, where the globally uneven effects of fossil-fuel use are manifested and low-lying islands are already being adversely affected by rising waters.<sup>49</sup>

Leela Schauble’s *Synthetic Species Motion Study* (2012-2015) similarly imagines an oil-drenched future. The work animates images of discarded plastic bags to create new species, imagining the evolution of our plastic-filled oceans. Schauble’s more recent print works included here, *YInMn, Plastic Island #1-#4* (2021), again engage with discarded plastic. Here, single-use plastic bags float over images of the ocean, resembling icebergs, the distinction between nature and culture visually unravels in these portraits of oceanic futures. The works connect directly to Leela’s other recent series *The Ocean Isn’t Blue* (2019), which presents the ocean wrapped in soft plastic. These works visually resemble Alberto Burri’s work from the 1960s, in which plastic was stretched over a frame and burnt. Burri’s work draws attention to the disposability

of plastic and was a reaction against the smooth, shiny and seductive world of plastic products that was beginning to take hold. Works such as Burri’s *Combustione Plastica* (1964) violently connect plastic to combustion, to the burning of fuel, and can be retroactively interpreted for their overtones of environmental apocalypse, which we also find in Schauble’s eerily calm work.<sup>50</sup> The title of the series presented here, *YInMn*, refers to a new synthetic blue pigment that has been recently commercialised, and which is produced using rare-earth metals. This seductive, radiant blue is intimately connected to processes of extraction and waste that are transforming the planet.<sup>51</sup>

Marian Tubbs’s *my internet and ocean twin* (2017) is a collaged image printed onto silk. Here, amorphous and ambiguous plastic forms entangle and overlap each other. The form and title suggest the merging of the ocean and the internet as both metaphorical and physical sites for our networks of communication, infrastructure and debris. Tubbs’s *the sun will eat itself (where Gs go to paradise)* (2021) is similarly elusive, but its mix of images is more explicitly connected by the ocean and waterways: images of undersea cables and





ocean islands mix with Minecraft-style underwater environments, cascading waterfalls and abandoned waterparks. The images slide between the natural and the synthetic, ultimately undermining this distinction. Traversing the imagery, a shiny, animated virtual creature moves through the work and gestures towards a posthuman future of bio-synthetic evolution, in a manner similar to the creatures in Schauble's *Synthetic Species*.

In Schauble's and Tubbs's work, the ocean is both a physical and metaphorical site for the dissolving of modernist dichotomies. The ocean and its tumultuous flows, challenge boundaries and life and nonlife are inextricably interwoven. as Hessler writes: "seawater infringes the modernist paradigm of the retinal, the distant from the body, immersing us in the transversal nexus of particles, compounds and processes of changing aggregates. It is prone to overflow, it trickles through our hands, it evaporates. It is full of living organisms, a messy reality that is impossible to separate, garden, groom. If air is filled with bacteria, water with its connective materiality, its stickiness, and its electrical conductivity, overflows categorizations of life and nonlife. They dissolve and become one."<sup>52</sup>

This essay loops across collage, waste, oil, plastic, oceans and climate change, suggesting overlapping, accumulating contexts that intersect with the works in *Sediment*, and the futures they imag(in)e. Together, the works undo the strict separation of nature and culture, life and nonlife, and representation and reality. Demos, perhaps the most visible contemporary historian of ecologically-themed art, criticises apocalyptic imagery of posthuman futures for shutting down the imagination of alternative futures.<sup>53</sup> The artists exhibiting in *Sediment* share in gestures towards such posthuman futures and apocalyptic sentiments, yet their use of collage, of worlds being constructed and remade, also suggests that these elements can be assembled alternatively, in a future yet to be written.

Simone Hine and Kyle Weise





## Endnotes

**1** See, for example: T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), p.18-21.

**2** On this, see, for example: Stephanie Hessler, *Prospecting Ocean* (Vienna: Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), p.40-41; Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature and the Future of the Planet* (London: Verso, 2018), p.2-3; Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*, p.54, 60, 96-7.

**3** Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*, p.47.

**4** *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019), p.47. Demos looks at the work of Richard Misrach as an example of contemporary art practice that considers the disproportionate effect of oil's 'externalities' on poor communities, though Misrach's work is limited to a North American context (*Against the Anthropocene*, p.78).

**5** See: T.J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), p.38-45. Demos analyses the work of Alan Sonfist as an example of this. Though it is politically opposite, we could view the preservationist approach as an extension and modification of the historically preceding structure of Western environmental awareness which, as J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke note, "before 1950 was an issue mainly for aristocrats and blue bloods anxious about birds, game animals, and property rights, and typically called 'conservation.'" (*The Great Acceleration:*

*An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), p.204).

**6** Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, p.58.

**7** Patel and Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, p.24-25, 38-40, 44-63.

**8** Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, p.52-62, 116-20. For an example of a contemporary artist who combines elements of restoration and preservation alongside a political ecology approach that recognises these entanglements, see Amanda Boetzkes's discussion of Mel Chin's *Revival Field* (1991-ongoing). While having a connection to the aesthetics of preservation art, Chin's work intertwines itself with financial and scientific discourses in its speculative attempt to develop a plant that can extract metal from contaminated soil, and then be cultivated for its ore. See: *Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), p.84-93. The critique of the separation of human and the environment has become a constant of recent art history with ecological concerns. See, for example, Larissa Hjorth, Sarah Pink, Kristen Sharp, and Linda Williams, *Screen Ecologies: Art, Media and the Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), p.24-25, 54, 128-29.

**9** Patel and Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, p.14-18, 73-74

**10** McNeill and Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, p.58-60, 66, 88-90.

**11** *Ibid*, p.117, 141-51.

**12** Kate O'Neill, *Waste* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019). See, for example, p. 18-19,

53, 96, 176.

**13** Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p.70, 74.

**14** Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Have: Yale University Press, 1998), p.8; Lisa Florman, "The Flattening of 'Collage'" *October* 102 (2002), p.59.

**15** Hessler, *Prospecting Ocean*, p.27-28.

**16** Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. *Post-Contemporary Interventions*. (Durham: Duke university Press, 1991), p.160-172.

**17** Richard Flood, "Tear Me Apart, One Letter at a Time." *Collage: The Unmonumental Picture* (London: Merrell; New York: New Museum: 2007), p.8.

**18** Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p.57.

**19** Hamish Sawyer, "we need privacy guys here too," in Marian Tubbs, *we need privacy guys here too*. Ed. Dana Kopel (South Yarra: Art Ink, 2020): 41-51. p.47.

**20** Hjorth, Pink, Sharp and Williams, *Screen Ecologies*, p.129.

**21** Ibid, p.42-45.

**22** Avalanche, "Liquid Earth," *Migrant 3* (2017): 100-105.

**23** Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network*. *Signs, Storage, Transmission* (Durham: Duke university Press, 2015). p.16.

**24** Ibid.

**25** Hjorth, Pink, Sharp and Williams also note this trend (*Screen Ecologies*, p.28). These authors' analysis of media art within this context notes the irony of the artistic use of environmentally damaging technology, and particularly screen technology, in work addressing climate change (see, for example, p.8-9, 174). This irony is also

evident in this exhibition, *Sediment*.

**26** Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media*. *Electronic Mediations 46* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

**27** Ibid, p.83-108.

**28** Ibid, p.85-86.

**29** Ibid, p.21.

**30** Ibid, p. 99-100. Coal, in particular, is crucial to the production of computers and the maintenance of data servers, as Parikka, in his typically succinct yet evocative style, notes: "New media, archaic power." (p. 123).

**31** McNeill and Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, p.19. The authors are writing specifically about Oriente and the Niger Delta here. The global South and the Arctic have become the bearers of much of the 'externalities' of resource extraction. "Sacrifice Zones" are discussed in a number of contexts throughout McNeill and Engelke's study, such as in relation to nuclear weapons testing (p.165).

**32** Ibid, p.19-20.

**33** Elspeth Probyn, "Wasting Seas: Oceanic Time and Temporalities," *The Temporalities of Waste: Out of Sight, Out of Time*. Eds. Fiona Allon, Ruth Barcan and Karma Eddison-Cogan. *Routledge Environmental Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2021): 179-91. p.184.

**34** McNeill and Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, p.15.

**35** Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*, p.32-37.

**36** Tom McCarthy, *Satin Island* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), p.12. The spill is not named, but the description leaves little doubt it is Deepwater Horizon.

**37** Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p.184. It has been suggested that due to the combi-

nation of over-fishing and plastic pollution, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050. Both O'Neill (*Waste*, p.149) and Patel and Moore (*History*, p.23) cite this alarming hypothesis. Such is the ubiquity of plastic that another suggested alternative term to our geologic era, instead of Anthropocene, is Plasticene (see Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*, p.95).

**38** McNeill and Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, p.137-38.

**39** O'Neill details both the expanded public awareness of ocean plastic and China's policy changes towards scrap plastic; see: *Waste*, p.143, 154-161.

**40** Probyn, "Wasting Seas", 179-80. Probyn's analysis is similar to Demos's aforementioned critique of the coverage of the BP spill. In contrast to Probyn, O'Neill notes that while straws represent a tiny fraction of plastic waste in the ocean, by volume, the sheer number of straws poses enormous challenges to marine life (*Waste*, p.148).

**41** O'Neill, *Waste*, p.149.

**42** Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p.123-25. The footage used by Shah is from David Attenborough's *Planet Earth* series. The literalisation of this intimacy between the organic and synthetic can be found in recent research around mealworms that can digest plastic, see for example: Tom Page, "Could Unlocking the Mystery of the Mealworm's Gut Help Solve Our Plastic Crisis?" *CNN*, Sept. 10, 2020. <<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/10/world/mealworms-bacteria-plastic-waste-c2e-spc-intl/index.html>>.

**43** On this work, see: Helen Hughes, "Lauren Burrow." *Artforum* (Summer 2019):

314.

**44** On the recklessness of nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific, see: McNeill and Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, p.162-63 and Hessler, *Prospecting Ocean*, p.199-204. On the new frontiers of deep-sea mining, see Hessler, *Prospecting Ocean*. Hessler also notes that while plastic floating in the ocean offers a highly visible and widely circulated image, invisible threats, including radioactivity and toxins, "capture our imaginations and manifest their temporally and spatially distributed effects" (*Prospecting Ocean*, p.44). Throughout *Decolonizing Nature*, Demos is particularly concerned with the 'externalities' of extractive industries, the true costs of which are never properly reconciled or considered (e.g. p.131, 146, 170, 177, 205).

**45** Probyn, "Wasting Seas," p.188-86.

**46** *The Mosquito Coast*, Episode 1, 'Light Out' (2021).

**47** Relevant here is Sara Cwynar's *Rose Gold* (2017) work which, inspired by Apple's Rose Gold iPhone, considers the way such objects are coded with desires that inevitably fade. Cwynar's work is also shaped by a collage aesthetic. See, <https://saracwynar.com/works/rose-gold-exhibition>.

**48** Samuel Tupou, Artist Statement. In, *Site Seer* catalogue (Brisbane: Onespace, 2017), p.4. <<https://onespacegallery.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Samuel-Tupou-SITE-SEER-Room-Brochure-compressed-1.pdf>>.

**49** Angela Tiatia has produced a number of powerful video works that consider the effect of climate change on Pacific islands,

including *Holding On* (2015) and *Tuvalu* (2016).

**50** On Burri's *Combustione Plastica* work, see: Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p.68-70. For further details on Burri's *Combustione Plastica* (1964), see: <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/ressources/oeuvre/cByXao>. Schauble's *The Ocean Isn't Blue* (2019) works are documented on her website: <https://www.leelaschauble.com/the-ocean-isnt-blue>.

**51** Notably, blue is a colour emphasised in marketing due to its apparent ability to attract human attention and thus to facilitate the evocation of consumerist desire. This was explored in Jessica Curry's exhibition *Don't look for too long lest you see the gloss* (Kuiper Projects, Brisbane, 2018).

**52** Hessler, *Prospecting Ocean*, p.217.

**53** Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, p.245. Demos is drawing directly on the writing of Naomi Klein in this assertion.

## Images

**Cover:** Marian Tubbs, *my internet and ocean twin*, 2017. Pigment print on silk, 100 x 75 cm. Installation View, Metro Arts. Courtesy the artist and STATION.

**Page 4:** Leela Schauble, *YInMn Ocean, Plastic Island #3*, 2021. Inkjet print on smooth pearl. 30cm x 40cm. Ed. of 15.

**Page 7:** Marian Tubbs, *the sun will eat itself (where Gs go to paradise)*, 2021, Video Stills. Courtesy the artist and STATION.

**Page 12:** Charity Edwards and Amelia Hine, *Death Metal*, HD Video, 3min35sec. Video Still, Detail.

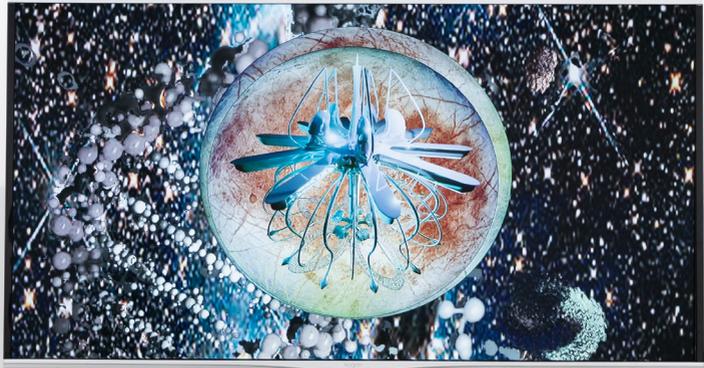
**Page 15:** Samuel Tupou, *Future Lands (Old World Rituals)*, 2017. Acrylic and serigraph on board. 86cm x 86cm. Installation View, Metro Arts. Courtesy the artist and Onespace Gallery.

**Page 17:** Leela Schauble, *Synthetic Species Motion Study*, 2012-2015. HD Video, 8min5sec. Video Still.

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## List of Works

Clockwise left to right from gallery entrance:

Marian Tubbs, *the sun will eat itself (where Gs go to paradise)*, 2021. Digital video with sound, 6min 1 sec. Edition of 3 + 2AP. Courtesy the artist and STATION.

Charity Edwards and Amelia Hine, *Death Metal*, HD Video, 3min35sec.

Marian Tubbs, *my internet and ocean twin*, 2017. Pigment print on silk, 100 x 75 cm. Courtesy the artist and STATION.

Leela Schauble, *YInMn Ocean, Plastic Island #1*, 2021. Inkjet print on smooth pearl. 30cm x 40cm. Ed. of 15.

Leela Schauble, *YInMn Ocean, Plastic Island #2*, 2021. Inkjet print on smooth pearl. 30cm x 40cm. Ed. of 15.

Leela Schauble, *YInMn Ocean, Plastic Island #3*, 2021. Inkjet print on smooth pearl. 30cm x 40cm. Ed. of 15.

Leela Schauble, *YInMn Ocean, Plastic Island #4*, 2021. Inkjet print on smooth pearl. 30cm x 40cm. Ed. of 15.

Leela Schauble, *Synthetic Species Motion Study*, 2012-2015. HD Video, 8min5sec.

Samuel Tupou, *Future Lands (Old World Rituals)*, 2017. Acrylic and serigraph on board. 86cm x 86cm. Courtesy the artist and Onespace Gallery.

# Metro Arts

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Metro Arts and the artist acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal peoples, as the custodians of this land, recognising their connection to land, waters and community. We honour the story-telling and art-making at the heart of First Nations' cultures, and the enrichment it gives to the lives of all Australians.



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