

Zac Langdon-Pole

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Zac Langdon-Pole
Passport (Argonauta) (v) (front and side view)
2018
paper nautilus shell, Sericho meteorite (iron pallasite, landsite: Sericho,
Kenya) 107 x 33 x 56mm
ZL5210



Zac Langdon-Pole
Residuals (c)
2018
Installation view,
Between Bridges, Berlin
February 2018





Zac Langdon-Pole
Ars Viva 2017/18
Installation view
S.M.A.K., Ghent
February 2018



Zac Langdon-Pole
Ars Viva 2017/18
Installation view
S.M.A.K., Ghent
February 2018



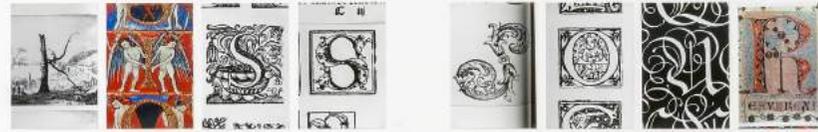
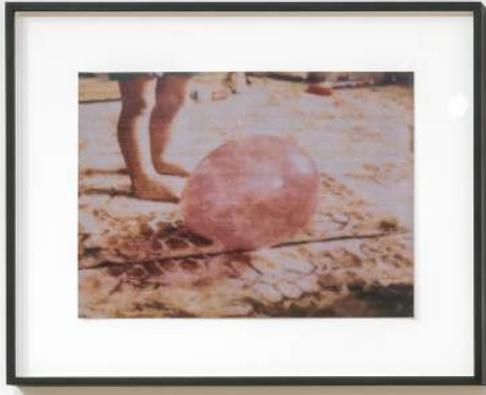


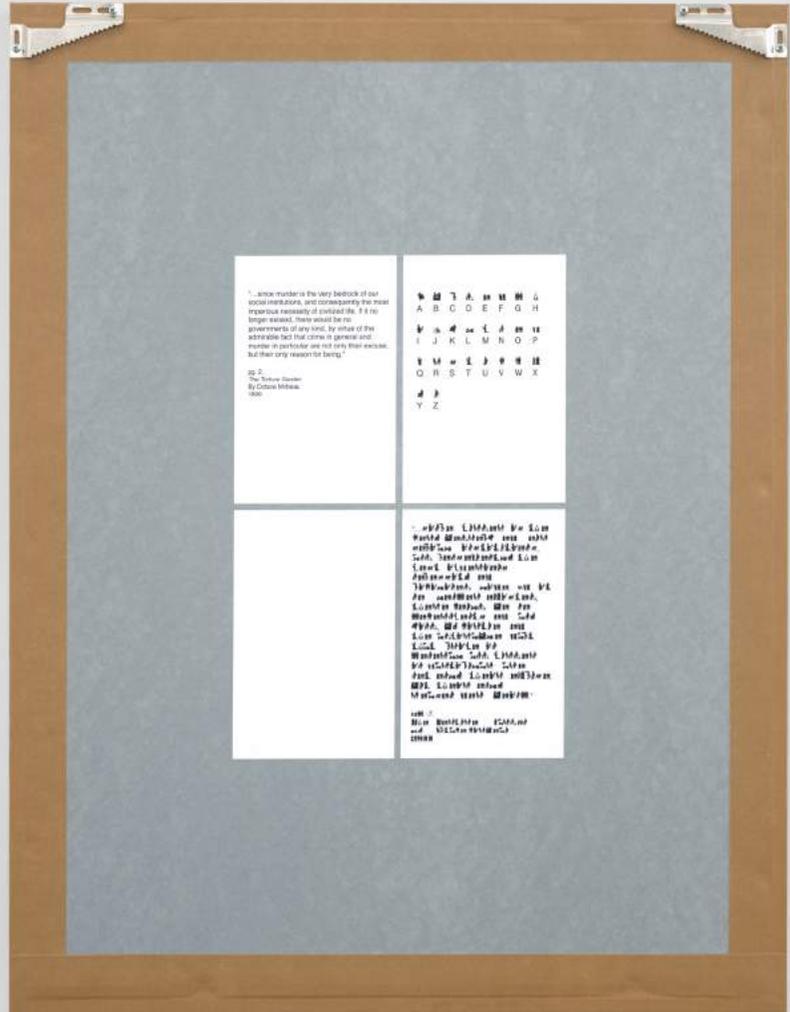
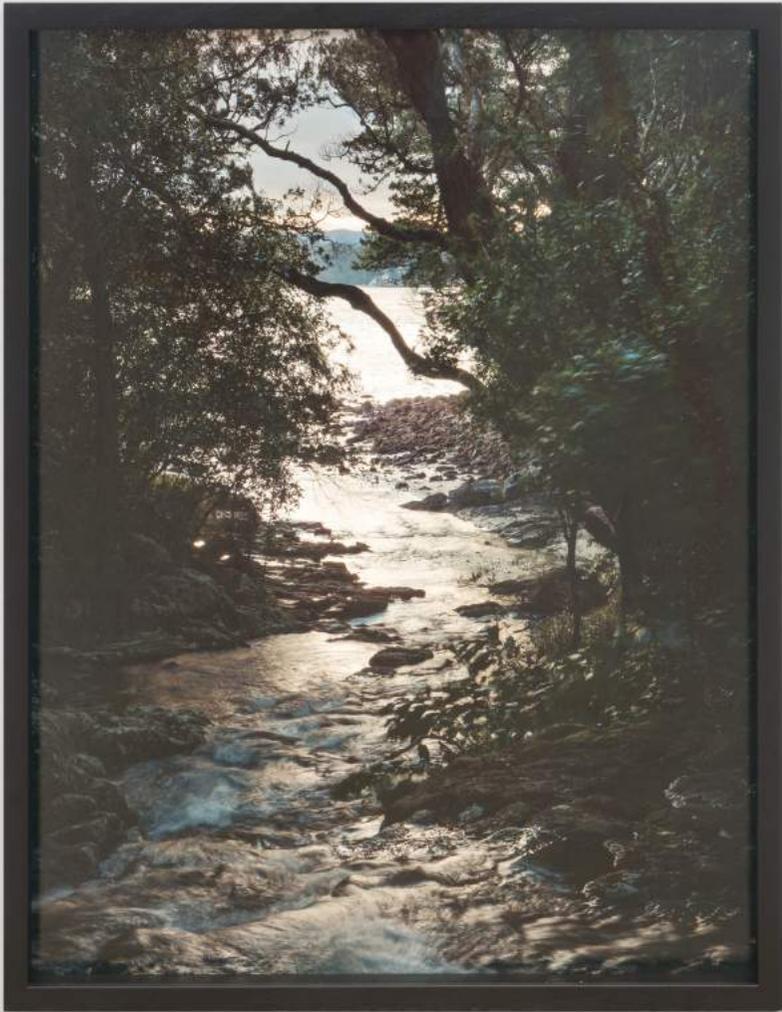
Zac Langdon-Pole
Ars Viva 2017/18
Installation view
S.M.A.K., Ghent
February 2018



Zac Langdon-Pole
Oratory Index
Installation view
Michael Lett, Auckland
December 2016







Zac Langdon-Pole
The Torture Garden
2016
framed digital print
620 x 490mm
ZL4656



Zac Langdon-Pole

Born 1988

Lives and works in Darmstadt and Berlin, Germany

2015

Meisterschüler, Städelschule, Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste. Prof. Willem de Rooij

2010

Bachelor of Fine Arts (First Class Honors), Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand

AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

2018

Fogo Island Artist Residency, New Foundland, CN (forthcoming)

2017

Ars Viva-Prize 2018, Germany

2016-18

Charlotte Prinz Haus Award / Stipendium, Darmstadt, DE

2016

Artist in Residence, NTU Center for Contemporary Art, Singapore

2013

National Contemporary Art Award, Waikato Art Museum, Hamilton, NZ (Merit award)
Judged by Jon Bywater

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2018

Ars Viva 2018, S.M.A.K, Ghent, Belgium (group)
emic etic, Between Bridges, Berlin, Germany (group)
Art Basel 'Discoveries', Hong Kong [presented by Michael Lett] (solo)
Sleeping Arrangements, The Dowse, Wellington, New Zealand (group)
Kunsthalle Darmstadt, Darmstadt, Germany (solo)

2017

Ars Viva 2018, Kunstverein München, Munich, Germany (group)
Station, Melbourne, Australia (solo)
Vanished and Delft, Pah Homestead, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

2016

La Biennale de Montréal, Canada (group)
Oratory Index, Michael Lett, Auckland, NZ (solo)
FOOD - Ecologies of the Everyday, Triennale Kleinplastik, Fellbach, DE (group)
On the Shoulders of Giants, Kunsthalle Mainz, DE (group)
grammars, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, NZ (group)
Fabrik, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, AU (group)
Four Practices, Center for Contemporary Art, Singapore (solo)

2015

Meine Bilder, The Physics Room, Christchurch, NZ (solo)
Windows Hung With Shutters, Raeber von Stenglin, Zurich, CH (group)
Städelschule Graduate Exhibition, Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, DE (group)
Pestilent Underground; Epidemic Openness, Station Gallery, Melbourne, AU (group)

2014

[sic] Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin (solo)
Spring 1883, The Windsor (Michael Lett Booth), Melbourne, AU (group)
Spaces, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, NZ (group)

2013

Skeins, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, AU (solo) Pale Ideas, Michael Lett, Auckland, NZ (solo)
Soft Quick Thoughts, Window, Auckland, NZ (solo)
Man Made, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, NZ (group)
Architecture of the Heart, Hawkes Bay Museum, Napier, NZ (group)
National Contemporary Art Award (Merit Award Winner), Waikato Art Museum, Hamilton, NZ (group)
Pale Ideas, Micheal Lett, Auckland (solo)

2012

Nothing by Itself. Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
Letter from Alice May Williams, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)
The New Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Melbourne (group)

2011

than. Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)

Standing Like Spears. split/fountain, Auckland (solo)

In Any Case. Curated by Window, Ostrale'011, Dresden DE (group)

2009

Magazine. Gambia Castle, Auckland (group)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2017

Ars Viva 2018 (Exhibition Catalogue), Gregory Kan, Hans Ulrich Obrist. Published by Sternberg Press, Germany

2016

Fabrik: conceptual, minimalist and performative approaches to textile. Jane O'Neill.

Published by Emblem Books, Australia

Food. 13th Fellbach Small Sculpture Triennial. Sebastian Schneider. Published by Kerber, Germany

Where Our Bodies Begin and End, The Pantograph Punch (Jan 2016), Georgina Langdon-Pole

<http://pantograph-punch.com/post/where-our-bodies-begin-and-end-brendan-pole-my-body>

2014

What remains, or [sic] and so thus it was written. Lynley Edmeades. Blue Oyster Exhibitions Catalogue, 2014

2012

A Common Thread. Art New Zealand (Spring, 2012). David Lyndon Brown

2011

Notes on a Hypothetical Room. Accompanying text to the show Standing Like Spears at split/fountain by Alex Davidson

Elam Graduate Catalogue 2010

2010

Directions of a Room (Artist Book)

**Zac Langdon Pole's *Passport (Argonauta)*
by Vera Mey**

Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.
- Walter Benjamin

In the task of archaeological excavation, it is not uncommon to find the banal and the detritus of a life which once existed. Far from scintillating material seen in more popular cult representations of the adventure in archaeology, what remains is often the decay of existence. Bones, shells, broken pots, dirt and dust. It is from such material we begin to understand the time and the length of civilisation and speculate our place within it.

Like a natural history museum gone awry, Zac Langdon-Pole's *Passport (Argonauta)* (all works: 2018) allow exploration of deep-time through the pairing of two oddly disparate materials. The first of these are iron meteorites. Billions of years in the making and predating the formation of the earth itself, meteorites are unlike any material found upon it. Their age and scarcity has been crucial to scientists in assembling an understanding of the formation of our universe. They are the detritus of the cosmos, the broken pots of archaeological digs, and a measure of time we cannot comprehend. We can know how they arrive, breaking through the earth's atmosphere, but never will we know where they originate and what they have seen. Science uses taxonomy and naming to establish meteorites in the human realm of culture; they become known for their date and place of landing – in human terms, human time. Like the registering of bodies across borders, these categories fail to hold up to their legacies.

The second material of these works are extremely fragile paper nautilus shells. Paper nautilus are often found washed up on shorelines, a by-product of fertilisation from female octopodes known as Argonauts. Argonauts are sea creatures recognised for carrying what psychologists deem "embodied cognition" whereby knowledge and feeling are transmitted not only through the brain but also through the physicality of the body itself through sensory receptors in tentacles. Their spiral shells were once the inspiration for the Fibonacci sequence or golden ratio, which dominated the Renaissance era as an emblem of balanced proportion and beauty. The name 'Argonaut' to Greek mythology is the philosophical problem known as Theseus's Ship. This proposition asks, if the components of a ship are progressively replaced while its form remains the same, can it still be identified as the same ship?

In *Passport (Argonauta)*, nine unique meteorites (1.) have been handcrafted to fit precisely into the mouth of each shell. Naming these delicate objects "passports" conjures associations with both the boundaries and limitlessness of time and movement. The shells reincarnate, serving as hosts for the meteorites that precede and will succeed human existence. Reading the materials as a communion of two different bodies, the works also resemble organs like listening ears of a new being.

The materials of these artworks know a fluidity of movement unfathomable in our human and modern construction of territorialisation. This only emphasises the treachery of our imagined desire for nationhood tied to a descriptor of our being. We inscribe memory through the essentialising practice of naming. This alone as a descriptor is insufficient. Viewing the remains of an Argonaut's shell is like a close encounter with remnants of an intelligent extra-terrestrial. The octopede body and brain are already fundamentally different to ours to an extent where communication between our species is already minimal. We do not share a capacity to speak or even comprehend each other. Inherited through DNA, intuitive knowledge is increasingly recognised as the highest form of intelligence, a language beyond words. The action of relating becomes even more abstract and visceral, symbolic even.

Through a collapsing of worlds and distances, a synthesis of hard and fragile, opacity and translucence, the coalescence of these disparate objects forms an acute meditation on belonging and identification.

(1.) Meteorite Index: For each work in the series, Langdon-Pole has used a unique meteorite, each from a different landsite across the planet.

Canyon Diablo (coarse octahedrite) or "Devil Canyon" in Spanish, recorded as found in 1891 in Arizona, USA. Fall date approximately 49,000 years ago.

Campo del Cielo (coarse octahedrite) or "Field of Heaven" or "Field of the Sky", recorded found 1571, Chaco / Santiago del Estero, Argentina. Fall date approximately 4,000 - 6,000 years ago. The name was given by indigenous groups who knew of the meteorite field long before the Spanish arrived and allegedly discovered it.

Uruaçu (coarse octahedrite), found 1992 in Goias, Brazil after several masses were found by cattlemen. An 18kg mass was found by miners prospecting for gold.

Gibeon (fine octahedrite), recorded as found in 1838. However, the existence of this meteorite has been recognised by the locals of Great Namaqualand, Namibia for much longer with this knowledge often omitted from "official" records.

Sericho (iron pallasite), found recently in 2016 in Sericho, Kenya. Two brothers, searching for their camels, came across several large, dense stones. As there are no rocks in this area, they hypothesised they were meteorites. After scientific testing this was confirmed; however these masses had already been known to camel-herders for decades.

Muonionalusta (fine octahedrite) recorded as found in 1906 in Norrbotten, Sweden. Fall date estimate to 1 million years BCE. Likely one of the oldest meteorites known, 4.5653 billion years old itself.

Nantan (IAB) fall date (possibly) 1516, found 1958, Nantan, People's Republic of China. Falling from the northwest in May of 1516, it entered during the reign of Chinese emperor Zhendge. Falling with stars as bright as lightning described in motions that "waved like snakes & dragons" before disappearing in a few seconds. Centuries passed with no further record until 1958 during the severe steel shortage of chairman Mao Tse Tung's "Great Leap Forward", where even cooking pots were melted down to produce steel. Some Cantonese farmers thus discovered that these heavy iron-rich rocks that would not smelt. Government investigators arrived and determined the "iron ore" to be meteorites.

Sikhote Alin (coarse octahedrite) witnessed fall on the exact date of February 12, 1947, in the Sikhote Alin Mountains, Russia. A fall of this magnitude of had never been observed before, with a scaled size of 90,000kg. A Soviet artist, P. I. Medvedev, was one of the witnesses, and his depiction was later reproduced on a commemorative postal stamp ten years after the fall. In this painting, the meteorite's arrival looks like a giant torch pointing up and lighting a beam into the sky.

Seymchan (iron pallasite), recorded found 1967, Siberia, Russia. Initially found lying amongst the stones of a river bed during a survey by geologist F. A. Mednikov. Subsequently it was turned over for study to the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.



Assimilation Study, 2017

Right wing Mallard Duck, Left human Scapula model, Left wing Ringneck Parrot, Right human Scapula model, Right wing Pigeon, Left human Scapula model, Left wing Mallard Duck, Right human Scapula model, Right wing Ring-neck Parrot, Left human Scapula model, Left wing Pigeon, Right human Scapula model
dimensions variable.

"The severed wings of a Mallard duck, a Ringneck Parrot, and a Pigeon are placed in proximity to casts of the human scapula – an exercise in anatomical comparison and contrast. Installed in a single row, but positioned so that the human shoulder blades and the ornithological specimens alternate, the artist invokes a sort of interspecies interchange or impure amalgamation. Offered as a study in difference and repetition, the work also points to issues related to locality by selecting species endemic and non-native to Europe, and mobility, where the transcontinental flight patterns of birds might be compared to the migrations of people across the world."

(Installation views and text from ARS VIVA 2018 @ Kunstverein Munich)





***Punctatum (longcase clock)*, 2017**

Anobium Punctatum (woodworm) ridden longcase clock from New Zealand, restored with 24ct. gold, 217 x 33 x 30.4 cm.

***Punctatum (music shelf)*, 2017**

Anobium Punctatum (woodworm) ridden music shelf from New Zealand, restored with 24ct. gold, 90 x 52.5 x 51.9 cm.

***Punctatum, (letter desk)*, 2017**

Anobium Punctatum (woodworm) ridden letter desk from New Zealand, restored with 24ct. gold, 104 x 75.1 x 36 cm.

“Three wooden furniture items have been shipped from Langdon-Pole’s family home in New Zealand. For decades the items have been infested by the larvae of woodboring beetles, Anobium Punctatum or ‘borer beetles’ as they are commonly known in New Zealand, were originally introduced to the islands having stowed away within the furniture and wood-ware brought there by European colonists. Fumigating the objects, then filling the numerous tunnels left by the bugs with gold, the artist treats the damage and presence of the invasive species as part of the history of the objects, rather than something to disguise. Their restoration illuminates the complex interstices of ecological, ideological and personal diasporas.”

(Installation views and text from ARS VIVA 2018 @ Kunstverein Munich)



***Paradise Blueprint*, 2017**

wallpaper based on a cyanotype photogram of the removed legs of a bird of paradise

"When Europeans first brought back stuffed specimens of Birds of Paradise from Papua New Guinea, the tradeskins were prepared without feet or wings, leading to the misconception within Europe that the birds were like flying serpents that never touched the earth until they died. *Paradise Blueprint*, stems from a previous project in which Langdon-Pole removed the legs of a taxidermied Bird of Paradise to re-prepare it in accordance with the initial forms of encounter and trade between the two cultures. Here Langdon-Pole has used the cut-off legs themselves as the basis for a wallpaper. After making cyanotype photograms of these avian legs, Langdon-Pole then transferred them into an infinite pattern to produce a wallpaper. Historically, cyanotypes were used by the 19th century botanist Anna Atkins in her classification studies, and more widely in the 20th Century as 'blueprints' to reproduce architectural floorplans. Having wallpapered the entire transitional space of the mezzanine in this repeating pattern, these bird legs become like negative shapes in a blue sky, some - where between falling and flight, whereby the presence of the cut legs is at once documented and rendered absent."

(Installation views and text from ARS VIVA 2018 @ Kunstverein Munich)





Petalled Corpus (i), 2017
cast iron calf weaner; spike replaced with hand-carved and etched iron meteorite (Campo del Cielo, Chaco/Santiago del Estero, Argentina)



Petalled Corpus (ii), 2017
cast iron calf weaner; spike replaced with hand-carved and etched iron meteorite (Canyon Diablo, Arizona, USA)



Petalled Corpus (iii), 2017
cast iron calf weaner; spike replaced with hand-carved and etched iron meteorite (Canyon Diablo, Arizona, USA)

(LEFT):

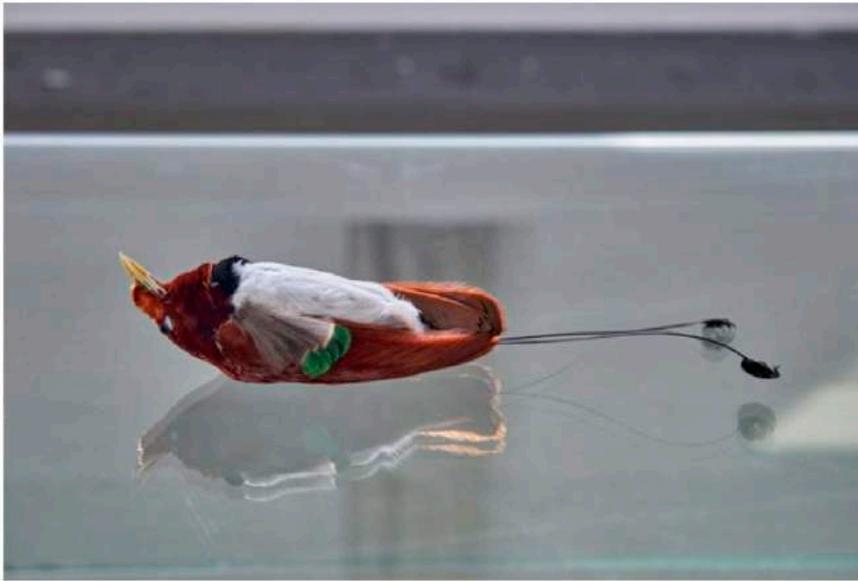
During the 19th Century the industrialisation of farming practices coincided with the expansion of colonial territories across the globe. Calf weaner's were a tool developed during this period to stop young cows feeding from their mothers milk so that the calf could be sold on faster and more milk could be harvested from the mother. The tool would be affixed to the nose of a calf causing it to prick the mother whenever it would go to feed, generating a violent separation both physically and psychologically. Variations of these tools are still used in farming today. With *Petalled Corpus* (i-iii) Langdon-Pole has replaced single spikes of three different calf weaner's with new spikes, fastidiously shaped and polished from meteorites. Formed from the heart of a dying star, meteorites travel across unfathomable distances and borders, predating the formation of the Earth and are therefore unlike any material found upon it. Two different meteorites have been used in these works: a Canyon Diablo meteorite (Spanish for "Devil Canyon") from Arizona, USA and a Campo del Cielo meteorite (Spanish for "Field of Heaven") from Chaco/Santiago del Estero, Argentina.

(OPPOSITE):

Argonaut (Arrested Star), 2017
iron barbwire fence stretching tool, part replaced with Seymchan meteorite (iron pallasite, found: Seymchan, Russia)
82.5 x 95 x 10 cm.

If an object has had all of its parts progressively replaced one by one, could it still be regarded as fundamentally the same object? This is the paradoxical thought experiment referred to as Theseus' Ship, or the Argos, a ship on which the Argonauts sailed in Greek mythology. For *Argonaut (Arrested Star)* Langdon-Pole has handcarved a meteorite to replace an integral part of a barbwire fence stretching tool. Previously the fence stretcher was commonly used in rural areas to divide territories, animals and to demarcate property during colonisation in the USA. The meteorite, formed from a dying star, has travelled across unfathomable distances and borders and predates the Earth as we know it. With both parts chemically made mostly of iron yet emerging from vastly different backgrounds, this hybrid object emphasises procedures of relation over the certainty for originality or origins.





Triennale Kleinplastik, Fellbach, Germany 2016 (Curated by Susanne Gaensheimer and Anna Goertz)

King Bird of Paradise (Apoda), 2016
Re-prepared taxidermy bird of paradise

This project centres upon the history of cultural exchange and mythology surrounding the so-called 'Bird's of Paradise' from Papua New Guinea. These birds first reached Europe in 16th Century as trade skins that had as part of a local tradition, been prepared with their feet removed, triggering many exaggerated speculations as to exactly why these birds had no feet. One such projection was that the birds lived in an imagined 'world of paradise' and that they never touched the ground until their death because they were perpetually held aloft by their elaborate plumes. Upon acquiring an antique taxidermy Greater Bird of Paradise from Papua New Guinea, or as it was named in 1758, *Paradisaea Apoda* (Latin for "legless bird of paradise"), I then worked with a taxidermist of the Natural History Museum in Wiesbaden to re-prepare the bird with its feet removed, to repropose it as an image-object of historical misconception and mythology.



Pieces of 8, 2015

single channel HD digital film
5min 17sec (6 minute loop)

The film 'Pieces of 8', depicts a yellow canary bird in a cage. It references the historical usage of canaries in mining, where they would accompany miners in a small cage, their death serving as a warning signal if conditions became unsafe. This can be extrapolated to consider broader notions of danger or anxiety. In a formal logic that deals with the very mechanics of film itself and our perception of moving images, Langdon-Pole has in postproduction synced the frame rate of the film to the heart rate of the bird. While the average resting heart-rate of a canary sits at around 1000 beats per-minute, when broken down to beats per second (16.6) this is approximate to the least number of frames per-second that the human eye can recognise as a smooth and continuous moving image. Throughout the film we see the frame rate fluctuate as the bird shows increasing signs of 'distress'.

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"HERE'S Cap'n Flint—I call my parrot Cap'n Flint after the famous buccaneer—here's Cap'n Flint predicting success to our voyage. Weren't you, Cap'n?"

And the parrot would say, with great rapidity "Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!" till you wondered it was not out of breath, or till John threw his handkerchief over the cage.

"Now that bird," he would say, "is, maybe, two hundred years old, Hawkins—they lives forever, mostly; and if anybody's seen more wickedness it must be the devil himself. She's sailed with England, the great Captain England, the pirate. She's been at Madagascar, and at Malabar, and Surinam, and Providence and Portobello. She was at the fishing up of the wrecked Plate ships. It's there she learnt 'Pieces of eight,' and little wonder; three hundred and fifty thousand of 'em, Hawkins! She was at the boarding of the Viceroy of the Indies out of Goa, she was, and to 100k at her you would think she was a baby. But you smelt powder, didn't you, Cap'n?"

"Stand by to go about," the parrot would scream.

- (pg. 81)Treasure Island, R.L. Stevenson

~

Noun[edit]

miner's canary (plural miner's canaries)

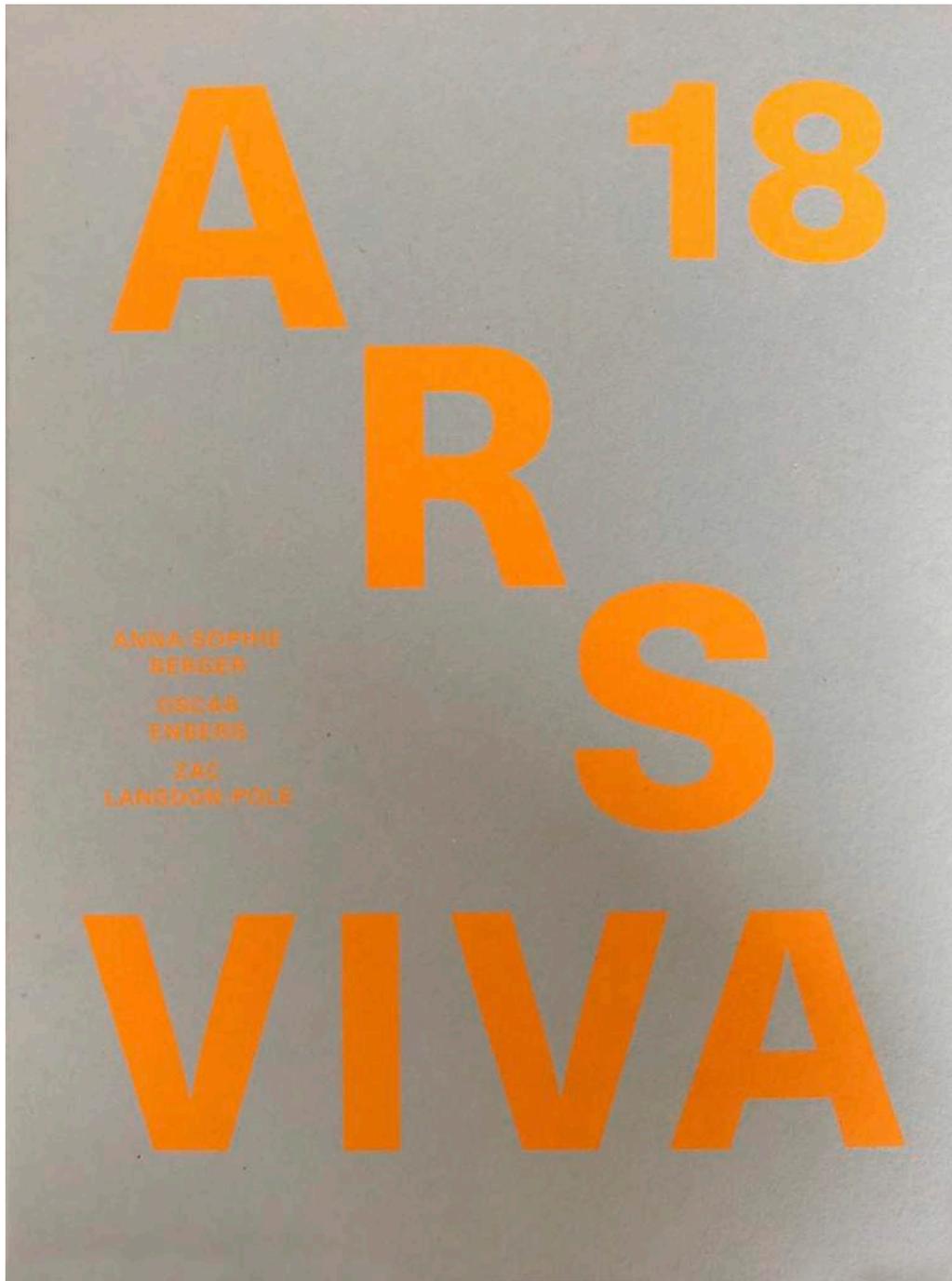
1 A caged bird kept caged in mines because its demise provided a warning of dangerous levels of toxic gases.

2 (idiomatic) Any thing, especially an organism, whose demise or distress provides an early warning of danger.



(Installation film stills)

Pieces of 8, 2015
single channel HD digital film
5min 17sec (6 minute loop)



Ever ars viva

Hans Ulrich Obrist

[The] quasi-object is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject.¹

The never-ending feedback loop of object-relation/relation-object, which the philosopher Michel Serres expresses through his term, the "quasi-object," is a fitting description for the ever-shifting way in which we understand the world through physical matter. Instability, volatility, and fragmentation might also be apt descriptors of the objects made by Anna-Sophie Berger, Oscar Enberg, and Zac Langdon-Pole, the winners of this year's prestigious *ars viva* Prize for Fine Art. Since its inception in 1953, *ars viva* has become an important indication of new directions and shifts within contemporary art practice. Not only distinguished by the rigor of their respective approaches, artists selected for the prize offer original and challenging perspectives on forms of making. Central to the work of this year's prize winners is the question of how we might navigate the complex set of relations between humans and objects. In the work of each artist, we can trace a subtle unravelling and disruption of sculptural traditions, a playing with both physical and immaterial content, and a conscious confusion of familiar signs, symbols, and narrative frameworks that brings a unique poetics of objecthood to the forefront.

What is so particular about Serres's quasi-object is its reliance on a living subject in order to activate it. He gives the example of the ball, whose significance lies in the fact that it is fundamentally a relational object, as opposed to having its own distinct ontological status:

Around the ball, the team fluctuates quick as a flame, around it, through it, it keeps a nucleus of organisation. The ball is the sun of the system and the force passing among its elements, it is a centre that is off-centred, off-side, outstripped.²

The key to the quasi-object, then, is the relational network that constellates around it; around the material fact of the ball dances an ever-expanding network of social relations, exchanges, signs, and symbols. As Steven Connors notes:

Most modes of inter-subjectivity involve the static configuration of nodes and connections: sociality as circuit-board or wiring-diagram. In such models, subjects may interlock with other subjects, or move round positions, like chess-pieces on a board, or other invariant ground [...] what lies between the elements of the system is itself volatile, and the whole is held together by what agitates it or keeps it apart and back together.³

Like a game where the rules are constantly changing, Serres's notion of the quasi-object bears significantly on our understanding of contemporary sculptural practice. Fluid and flexible networks of meaning, which are continuously negotiated through objects, crystallize in the works of Berger, Enberg, and Langdon-Pole; as speculative object-orchestrators they each challenge our preconceived structures of viewing, and in doing so propose alternative networks of subject-object relation. Disparate and unique in their processes, techniques, and modes of presentation, each of this year's selected artists present us with a series of objects and images that are unstable and ever-shifting. If Serres's proclamation is true, that indeed "we live only by relations," then Berger, Enberg, and Langdon-Pole are taking us in new and exciting directions.

¹ Michel Serres, *The Parasite* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 225.

² Michel Serres, *Genetics* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 87-88.

³ Steven Connors, "Quasi-Object," *Forensic Architecture*, accessed June 30, 2017, <http://archive.forensic-architecture.org/text/icon/quasi-object-steven-connors-on-michel-serres/>.

The Open: Man, Animal,
and Material in the Work of
Zac Langdon-Pole

New Zealand born artist Zac Langdon-Pole is doubtful of the position of man as the center of the world. Rather than continuing the dominant narrative of anthropocentrism, he seeks reference points that are beyond the human subject and man's supposed exceptionalism. To this end, he creates a dense network of relationships between animals, materials, and people. Langdon-Pole explores their heterogeneous interactions primarily in the fields of economy (the interaction between goods and people) and ecology (the interaction between living things and the environment). Especially significant are the approaches to thinking and working defined and materialized in his most recent works: *Tomb(e)* (ongoing since 2015), *Pieces of 8* (2015), and *Au Hasard (Borer Cabinet)* (2016).

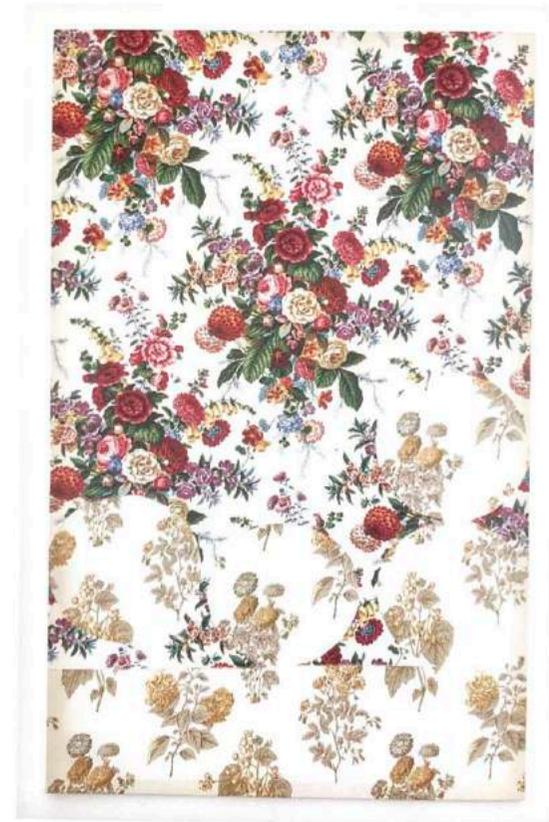
Langdon-Pole begins with seemingly simple arrangements. As though they have fallen from the sky, birds of paradise lie on the floor of exhibition rooms. In 2015, he presented the so-called greater bird of paradise on the floor of a McKinsey office room in Frankfurt am Main. Lying on its back, it was no larger than a crow. From the middle of the chestnut brown feathering sprung elongated, bright yellow flank plumes. The king bird of paradise was similarly presented in 2016 at the gallery Michael Lett in Auckland. Its plumage is made up of red back feathers and a velvety white underbelly. With its long, spiral-formed tail feathers the king bird of paradise creates an illusion of magnificence. Both bird specimens come from the lowlands of Papua New Guinea. At the request of the artist, a taxidermist removed their legs and claws.

The imaginative, zoologically classifying appropriation of European ornithologists of the early modern period documents the human potential for the creation of myths, yet hardly the reality of the life of a bird of paradise. The exoticism of this bird begins with its arrival in Europe in the sixteenth century, and is ignited by stories of their bodies being formed without feet and legs,

Gürsoy Doğtaş

and on rare occasions even without wings. The explorers, with whom European expansion and colonialism had begun, presented the birds to European royal courts as precious items with the hopes of delivering proof of the splendor of the newly accessible worlds. The belief in a divine plan of creation and the scientific patterns of classification of the time quickly transported the bird of paradise into the realm of the supernatural.¹ For Jan van Linschoten, the merchant and explorer who named the bird, the bird of paradise lived only in the air.² In the early modern period, it was largely agreed that it would touch the ground once and only once—when it fell dead from the sky.

The artist picks up this curious concept with the great bird of paradise and the king bird of paradise. In the title of his ongoing project *Tomb(e)*—a title lifted from a book of the same name by Hélène Cixous—, he layers three meanings: “tomb,” one’s final resting place, “tombé,” fallen, or a fall as performed by a ballet dancer, and “tome,” a body of collected texts. The massive body of discourse about birds of paradise—their dismantled specimens show visible traces of a discursive transformation—is related to the actual small body of the bird. In this way, human ambitions for domination and world conquest become evident. Rigid and brutal colonial policy represents a dark chapter of these ambitions. At this time, the bird of paradise served as a kind of currency between the colonizers and indigenous Papuans. They were first mythologized by ornithologists, then abstracted into a means of payment, and later raised to the level of commodity. Their feathers were worn on women’s hats in the nineteenth century, a practice that soon threatened the existence of the species. However, it can be speculated that Langdon-Pole’s birds, actually their bodies, are more than a surface for the projection of our imaginative achievements of construction. There is a certain power of action inherent in materials like feathers, beak, and eyes, but also the preserves and fillers of the body of



the bird. Various chemical and physical reactions take place between these elements. The surface texture and the pigments of the feathers, consisting of limbs, secondary limbs, and quills, create an intra-action¹ with the surrounding air or the epidermis that contains them. Their dynamic agency comes into effect independently from the existence of men in power.

In the film *Pieces of 8* Langdon-Pole gives a bird the principal role. For about five minutes, he films a canary in a brightly lit birdcage. The entire format of the image is filled with the cage, whose white metal lattice forms a barrier between the public and the canary. The cadmium yellow bird rests or flutters between the four symmetrically placed perches. Sometimes, he softly sings a single syllable. Langdon-Pole has synchronized the image frame rate of the film—the number of images visible per second—with the heart rate of the canary. The two frequencies achieve a particularly dramatic effect when the bird attempts to accelerate his flight and bounces against the bars of the cage. Both the frame-rate and heart rate frequencies gradually slow to a halt, as a still image depicts the bird lying on its back, as if dead. After some moments the frame rate speeds up again and the bird flutters back to life. We later learn that in reality the heart rate of the bird has not been altered (nor has any harm to the bird been imposed) and this only appears so since the bird has been trained to “play dead.”² Through this use of synchronization, the work suggests a symbiosis between the apparatus of the film and the life of a small organism. Seen from a cultural point of view, this symbiosis represents a euphemism for the dramatic disparity in the power of the canary and humans. Piece of eight is one of the English names for a Spanish silver coin from the sixteenth century. Thus, the equivalent value of this currency is expressed as a real (the real de plata was a Spanish unit of currency). At that time, in many parts of the world, this coin enabled a general exchange of money and was the predecessor

of the dollar. The silver used for the coins was mainly unearthed from the silver mines of the Bolivian city of Potosí.³ In these mines, animals, especially canaries, were used as biological warning devices. Canaries are more sensitive than humans to acute oxygen deficiencies—their death would trigger an evacuation of the mine, thereby saving human lives. In the English-speaking world, the term miner’s canary is used as an idiomatic expression—a designation for an early warning system. Economy and ecology, whose identical prefix refers to the ancient Greek word for house—*oikos*—invokes the principle of domestication in two opposing fields. Both the canaries and the miners appear powerless against their own economic exploitation. They are misplaced in the claustrophobic mines, alienated from their habitat, and subjected to the murderous apparatus of capitalism.

Economics and ecology are not equal variables. In comparison to the wisdom of ecology, which has developed over billions of years, the one-sided intentions of economy tend to fade. More importantly, economic systems are irreversibly destroying ecological systems. Human influence on planet earth is so immense that research speaks of the Anthropocene—a new geological age caused by mankind. In addition to influencing the climate and environment, the flow of goods and migration patterns, as well as the transportation of people, all ensure an unprecedented global spread of animal and insect species—among other things.⁴ With *Au Hasard (Borer Cabinet)* Langdon-Pole follows the invasive species of the common furniture beetle (*Anobium punctatum*), which was imported into New Zealand by the colonizers. These beetles bore every form of wood at random (French: *au hasard*), compromising the balance of biotopes. They also bored through a small cabinet on wheels made from rimu wood (a tree in the *podocarpaceae* family native to New Zealand), which came from the artist’s family. Langdon-Pole has filled the countless holes made by the wood beetle with twenty-four carat

gold. Thus, he insists on the immense intelligence of ecology. The cabinet itself is transformed into a separate, hybrid biosphere. Multidimensional connections between beetles, wood, glass, gold, display cases, used objects, and artifacts can be found in the work. *Au Hasard (Borer Cabinet)* becomes a multivalent field of activity in which natural and artificial processes meet. The history and usage of the cabinet as an object from the artist’s family can be seen in the scratches on the surface area of the furniture. But the wood is not a passive material that is only validated and vitalized through human process—rather, it has its own, self-organizing potential. That which was previously a habitat for the beetle is now encased with gold fillings, which, depending on humidity and temperature, will shift between being hard and soft. There is a constant chemical communication taking place between the wood and the insect, through which they negotiate their rearrangement.

Through seemingly simple constellations between man, animal, and material, Langdon-Pole generates a space for heterogeneous discourses. Within them, man doesn’t maintain a special role, even if the artist specifically names and historicizes interpersonal power struggles, among them, colonialism and territorial battles for raw materials. Man, who is decentralized by Langdon-Pole, finds himself placed in relationship to systems which he has neither created nor controls, but which determine his survival. Only when human exceptionalism is suspended, can wondrous and willful arenas for inter- and intra-action open between man, animal, and material. Langdon-Pole leads us to these arenas, introducing us to participants that we do not seem to understand, but which we cannot ignore.

- 1 Christian Freigang, “Margaretes Paradiesvogel: Vereinnahmungen des Fremden und Wunderbaren aus der Neuen Welt im frühneuzeitlichen Kunstdiskurs,” in *Wochenzeitung: Wähernehmung der Religionen im Spätmittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit, Teil 1*, ed. Ludger Grenzmann et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 73–99.
- 2 Konrad Renger and Claudia Denk, *Flemische Malerei des Barock in der Alten Pinakothek* (Cologne, Munich: DuMont, 2002), 241.
- 3 With the concept intra-action, theorist Karen Barad describes the action between matter. Their processes and meanings cannot be delimited as with an interaction, rather, they develop in an unpredictable way. Karen Barad, *Agential Realism: Über die Bedeutung materiell-diskursiver Praktiken* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 18ff.
- 4 One evolutionary adaptation of canaries is their ability to “play dead” when sensing apparent threat or danger. To achieve this performance, Langdon-Pole worked with a canary breeder in Frankfurt am Main to capture a brief sequence of images of the canary lying on its back. This sequence was later stitched together in post-production to provide the illusion of a chronological dramaturgy of death in the film.
- 5 Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer, and Andreas Siekmann, *Das Potosi-Prinzip: Wie können wir das Lied des Herrn im fremden Land singen? Koloniale Bildproduktion in der globalen Ökonomie* (Cologne: Walther König, 2010).
- 6 Jane Bennet, “Bilder von Ökonomie und die Ränder der Wahrnehmung,” in *Das Anthropozän. Zum Stand der Dinge*, ed. Jürgen Renn and Bernd Scherzer (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2015), 47–66.

The Uncertain Act of Observing

Zac Langdon-Pole tells me about the process of *My body...* (Brendan Pole) (2015) over Skype. Brendan Pole is Zac's late uncle. According to Zac, different family members bore different ideas of who Brendan was. A child of Samoan heritage, adopted by a white family, Brendan managed to "hold open" the many identities his family projected onto him—he resisted any final determination or reduction of his identity. Unable to find any written traces of his uncle, Zac engaged his mother. She recited a poem from memory that Brendan read to her. Traces of traces, endless deferral—we know of death only through what the dead have left us. Distance divides and connects at the same time, giving us what we can get, the only way we can get it.

The very act of looking itself is at stake in *My body...* (Brendan Pole). This act of processing and interpreting reduces a multitude of possibilities to one. Presented with only a few oral traces of Brendan Pole, and many versions of his uncle's truth, Zac writes over and through the distance and uncertainty. In an act of echoing and ventriloquism, Zac, following Brendan, resists any notion of finality. He augments the meager remnants of his uncle's words with his own, effectively re-digesting and multiplying them. This linguistic accumulation across time interrogates the conditions of biography. Here, one disappears, to reappear, in many places at once.

my body a clot
of inscriptions
flayed by
nothing that's enough for me
all year it has been five or ten years
I sink home
through the burning
fantastic gardens
roses running toward
the nervous mouth of infinity
blue massacre sky

Gregory Kan

I want a place from which to speak
a place from which to look at other people
while also being seen
where we eat
our shadows
the surfaces of concealed life
I can see for miles
luckily paths everywhere
through the long grass
through the burnt grass

A topology of holey, porous space emerges between two of Zac's works, *My body...* (Brendan Pole) and *Au Hasard (Borer Cabinet)* (2016). The latter features an old family cabinet that had been eaten away and tunneled through by the borer beetle. The borer is an infamously pernicious creature that has pervaded New Zealand homes and furniture since its introduction to the country by European settlers. Zac fumigated the cabinet, and further inlaid the borer tunnels with gold. This is a space or entity that has been endlessly eaten and tunneled through, yet resists complete destruction. Such a subverted and desecrated whole eludes any meaningful distinction between surface and depth, inside and outside, presence and absence. Our narrativizing, symbolic systems continually, even desperately, attempt to draw a straight line through our world and each of the entities within it—a line that ideally would stretch from an origin, through a center, and finally to a terminus. But it is never clear where something begins or ends, and the center is simply a vanishing point. The more one digs into something, the more one is led outside of it.

Given the resistance of the material world to totalizing and unifying interpretations, the "act of looking" is not an exhaustively colonizing force, but a constructive and additive one. "Looking" here simply stands in for any mode of subjective processing and production and, in Zac's case, the multiplication of possibilities within it: resurrection from the oral traces of a late uncle's poetry; re-presenting

absent wood with gold. Zac pushes again to resist and exceed closure in *The Pearl Diver* (2015). Having acquired another New Zealand artist's work—Dan Arps's *Alien Sex Robot* (2010)—Zac resituates and doubles it. He dismantled the work from the wall and hung it from the ceiling with a chain. Another face was then added to the back of the object, signified by a gold human tongue. This effigy can be read as a tribute to Janus, two-faced god of the incomplete and the in-between. Loosened from the constraints of absolute knowledge, subjective production may simultaneously grieve and celebrate the incompleteness by which entities can be seen, and by which entities (like us human subjects) can "see" at all. The power to both reduce and multiply possibilities properly belongs to finite beings and is always a kind of elegy.

I will revive you as a voice
you will be eternal
resurrected
an entangled mass of trunks
branches
leaves
this dirt this unbelievable air
you lost your way on that river
as you would in a desert
and undid
the lie
songs will not contain
such blessed
movement
those who come out here
should have no entrails
I want to seem to you the very same thing
I seem to myself
and I want to seem to myself
the very same thing that I am
but nothing is honest enough
this language in which
nothing is decided

The dynamic interaction between finite beings persists in Zac's *Tomb(e)* (2016). He writes:

[Specimens of the bird of paradise] first reached Europe in the sixteenth century as trade skins that had—as part of a local tradition—been prepared with their feet removed. Devoid of their original context, this triggered many exaggerated speculations by European naturalists as to exactly why these birds had no feet. One such projection was that the birds lived in an imagined 'world of paradise' and that they never touched the ground until their death because their elaborate plumes perpetually held them aloft.³

In *Tomb(e)* (2016) and in the other variants of this work, *Paradisaea Apoda* (2015) and *King Bird of Paradise (Apoda)* (2016), a taxidermy bird was re-prepared and presented with its feet removed. By restoring some of the conditions that produced the historical scientific falsehoods and mythology around the bird of paradise, Zac continues the processual tendency of multiplying and reopening possibilities. On the descriptive level, there is a strong suggestion that entities are not constituted by some true interior, or pure essence, which knowledge may uncover with the right set of drills and precision blades. Instead, entities seem to be constituted by the myriad interactions they have with others: they emerge through the network of their ongoing relationships.

On a more prescriptive level, these works resist closure. They reject the reduction of possibilities as the only mode in the act of looking. Zac's works interrogate the division of labor between artist and materials. More specifically, he dismisses the asymmetry of a top-down form of command, in which an artist holds divine power over inert materials. Materials are autonomous. They possess their own particular tendencies, limits, and capacities. And this autonomy contaminates and disrupts the artwork regardless of the artist's wishes

and intentions—even if those wishes are precisely to be “open to” material autonomy.

An artist may choose to be open to autonomous materials. But that choice is always exceeded by what s/he is consequently opened by. “Being-open-to” is simply the intent of an artist, and that artist’s organization of the conditions for openness—but not the consequences of such openness. In “being-opened-by,” a plot develops between the artist and the materials that the artist is unaware of, but that s/he is wholly enveloped by. This does not merely imply uncertain or unexpected outcomes, but something over which the artist has no power at all, and that continues to conspire against him, despite his best gestures towards both openness and closure. The act of looking into an obsidian mirror.

it changes our sense of scale
 to know we can disintegrate
 the walls that grow around our leaving
 to where I don’t know
 every step an attempt to elude
 my own capture
 and yours
 by the light
 of the knife
 in my secret life
 I am with you
 I am holding hands with you down a steep hill
 Brendan Pole
 I’m still here inside something
 I’m still out there in the open
 the branches of your life are corridors
 I dress and undress
 until the corridor appears again

Micro and macro views
The exhibition for the ars-viva prize

REVIEW
November 1, 2017 • Text by Anna-Kathrin Nikolakou

The linguistic play with the living art, the present one, which is supposed to excite, was already written this year at the Venice Biennale. In Munich, three contemporary positions are shown that one would have wished for in Venice.



Zac Langdon-Pole: Paradise Blueprint (2017), © The artists and Kunstverein München eV

"Viva Arte Viva" was the title of this year's Biennial, which, with Anne Imhoff and Co., celebrated vibrant authorship and active collaboration in dealing with pressing issues of our time. It is exactly these questions that the awardees of this year's ars-viva Prize Anna-Sophie Berger, Oscar Enberg and Zac Langdon-Pole are up to. Her individual approach to her and her dealings with her are currently shown in the Kunstverein München.

Already in the stairwell one encounters a work of the New Zealand artist Zac Langdon-Pole: A royal blue wallpaper, interspersed with the light prints of small bird legs, dresses the vault that leads to the actual exhibition space. The basis of this work are the first examples of stuffed birds of paradise that brought Europeans in the 16th Century from their trips to Papua New Guinea. Since the preparations often lacked legs and claws, it was thought in Europe, these beings lived in the air and fell only to die on the ground. Langdon-Pole puts these missing legs in the center of his work "Paradise Blueprint" and with them the discourse about colonization, exoticism and Eurocentrism.



Exhibition view: ARS VIVA 2018, Kunstverein München © The artists and Kunstverein München eV

In the series "Punctatum" another animal plays the main role: the wood beetle. He, too, has traveled the same journey as the bird of paradise, but only in the opposite direction. European settlers once brought the pest to New Zealand, where they then ate through the wooden furniture in the artist's parental living room. Deep aisles and turns arose, which are externally recognizable only by small dots or scratches. Langdon-Pole filled these passages with gold and makes clear – though only at second glance – the story of the beetle, who has literally inscribed it on the furniture. It is neither didactic nor judgmental that Langdon-Pole conveys to the viewer; it is a wise and subtle approach to the themes of migration and identity that opens up a whole world of associations.



Anna-Sophie Berger: Keeping Things (2017), © The artists and Kunstverein München eV

Anna-Sophie Berger's work "Keeping Things" is prominent in the first room. Two big iron soccer goals, put together and linked together. From the elements of happy play in public space becomes a large, locked cage in the White Cube. Here, alienated and aesthetically charged, the gates, which after the exhibition returns to a Salzburg park, become a medium that raises the questions of where art becomes art and what it means for the art market, if that is the case stylized object after the exhibition dissolves again and assumes its actual function. At the same time, Berger evokes the question of social participation by blocking the play in the park and turning the gates into a hermetically sealed room.

Berger also takes up the motif of the play in the two photographs "the well" and "a rock". Her pictures show the well-known instructions for the construction of Playmobil landscapes. Accurate notes, provided with arrows that indicate the movement sequence when mating and show magnification views in smaller-scale sequences. What ultimately emerges is the imitation of reality on a miniature. Thus, under accurate guidance, small worlds evolve, which differ only minimally from nursery to nursery. Berger sets out the discrepancy between supposedly individual creation and prefabricated thoughts of reproduction.



Oscar Enberg: table d'hôte or Saldier with Whore (2017), © The artists and Kunstverein München eV

Oscar Enberg's works at the Kunstverein are linked by a bizarre protagonist: Crocodile Harry, first as a miner, then opal miner and ultimately owner of a hotel for sex tourists in the Australian Coober Pedy. Coober Pedy is home to the world's largest opal mines yet sells imported opals, which are of great importance to Umoona Aboriginals and attract onlookers and filmmakers alike. In his video and installation work, Enberg focuses on the people and the place, which reciprocally influence each other. By no means, however, positive. In a downward spiral - a crocodile-toothed corkscrew in the exhibition wall suggests - both are approaching the abyss, which means the economic, physical and moral collapse.

The work of the three winners stand alone and yet draw a global picture of current issues, which inevitably intersect and react to each other. The three groups of works initially allow a very associative approach through their materiality, which then consolidates itself theoretically in the examination of the underlying concepts (at this point the compact and clever accompanying booklet is recommended) and whose narratives create a thoroughly successful whole.

WHEN: The exhibition can be seen until 19 November.

Following on from the Kunstverein München, the exhibition will continue to visit the SMAK in Ghent and Fogo Island.

WO: Kunstverein München eV, Galeriestraße 4, 80539 Munich.

ZAC LANGDON- POLE

Zac Langdon-Pole

*1988 in Auckland, Neuseeland.

Lebt und arbeitet in Frankfurt am Main.

King Bird of Paradise (Apoda), 2016

Paradisaea Apoda, 2015

Im Zentrum von Zac Langdon-Poles künstlerischer Arbeit steht die Auseinandersetzung mit Geschichten, die sowohl auf individueller als auch auf gesellschaftlicher Ebene bedeutsam sein können. Den Künstler interessiert, wie sich Wissen, Machtstrukturen und Werturteile in historische Narrative einschreiben und wie diese weitergegeben, umgedeutet oder für bestimmte Zwecke instrumentalisiert werden. Langdon-Poles Werke materialisieren sich in unterschiedlichen medialen Formen, die von Malerei über Fotografie bis hin zu Poesie reichen können. Oft unterlaufen seine Arbeiten gewohnte Rezeptionsmuster, etwa wenn gerahmte Fotografien von einem Strand in Neuseeland von der Wand genommen werden müssten, um die auf der Rückseite der Bilder montierten Gegenstände betrachten zu können, oder wenn das Werk unsichtbar als reine Erzählung im Raum existiert.

Bei dem Werk *My Body... (Brendan Pole)* (2015) handelt es sich um ein Gedicht, das aus 297 Fotografien einzelner Buchstaben zusammengesetzt ist. Das Gedicht stammt von Langdon-Poles Onkel Brendan Pole, der 1991 an AIDS starb. Dieser trug das Gedicht kurz vor seinem Tod seiner Schwester und der Mutter des Künstlers vor. Im Bewusstsein des bevorstehenden Todes ist das Gedicht gezeichnet von dem Moment der Selbstreflexion, der Auseinandersetzung mit der eigenen Identität, dem Begehren und dem Ringen um Antworten auf ungeklärte Fragen. *My Body... (Brendan Pole)* ist die einzige Verschriftlichung des Textes, der bisher nur in der Erinnerung von Langdon-Poles Mutter existierte. Die verschriftlichte Fassung des Gedichts steht am Ende eines intensiven Austauschs zwischen Langdon-

Pole und seiner Mutter, die gemeinsam an der Rekonstruktion des Erinnerungstextes arbeiteten und sich in diesem Prozess mit der Familiengeschichte und dem Verlust von Familienangehörigen beschäftigten. Die Komplexität der Arbeit wird dadurch gesteigert, dass sich die einzelnen Buchstaben ausschließlich in einer Ausstellungssituation zu einem kohärenten Text zusammenfügen. Erwirbt man das Werk, erhält man eine lose Sammlung einzelner Buchstaben.

Mit seiner Arbeit für die Triennale in Fellbach *Paradisaea Apoda* knüpft Langdon-Pole an seine Beschäftigung mit mündlich übertragenen Geschichten, den „oral histories“, an. Ausgehend von seiner Auseinandersetzung mit der Kolonialzeit, in der Waren und Wissen erstmalig in globalem Maßstab ausgetauscht wurden, beschäftigte sich Langdon-Pole mit dabei entstandenen Fehlinterpretationen und deren Eingang in die Wissenschaft und ins Alltagsdenken. Ausgangspunkt für die Arbeit ist seine Recherche zu den sogenannten Paradiesvögeln, die ab dem 16. Jahrhundert aus Australien und Papua-Neuguinea als Tierpräparate nach Europa kamen. Weil den Tieren die Füße fehlten, entstand der Mythos, dass die Vögel zeitlebens von Winden in der Luft gehalten wurden und sich „vom Dunst der Wolken und dem Nektar paradiesischer Gärten“ ernähren würden. Erst wenn sie tot vom Himmel fielen, würden sie zum ersten Mal den Boden berühren.

Langdon-Poles Arbeit stellt das Vogelpräparat als Medium der Geschichte infrage – im Ausstellungsraum zirkuliert eine Erzählung, die als gesprochenes Wort im Dialog stets neu erschlossen, erweitert und verändert wird. Dabei zeigt sich, wie stark unser eigener Erfahrungsschatz, unser Intellekt und unsere Überzeugungen Erzählungen formen und von deren Weitergabe beeinflusst werden.

SS

Zac Langdon-Pole

b. 1988 in Auckland, New Zealand

Lives and works in Frankfurt a. M., Germany

King Bird of Paradise (Apoda), 2016

Paradisaea Apoda, 2015

Central to Zac Langdon-Pole's practice of art is his engagement with histories that can be significant at both individual and societal levels. The artist explores the ways in which knowledge, power structures and value judgments are inscribed in historical narratives and how these are transmitted, reinterpreted or instrumentalized for particular purposes. Langdon-Pole works with a variety of media ranging from painting and photography to poetry. His works often undermine familiar patterns of reception – as for instance when you have to take framed photographs of a New Zealand beach off the wall to view the objects mounted on the backs of the pictures; or when the work is invisible, existing in the exhibition space purely as narrative.

The work *My Body ... (Brendan Pole)* (2015) is a poem consisting of 297 photographs of individual letters. The poem is by Langdon-Pole's uncle, Brendan Pole, who died of AIDS in 1991. Shortly before his death, Brendan Pole read the poem to the artist's sister and mother. Written in the awareness of approaching death, the poem contains self-reflection, thoughts on the poet's own identity, desire, and a wrestling for answers to unsolved questions. *My Body ... (Brendan Pole)* is the sole existing written version of a text hitherto stored only as a recollection in the memory of Langdon-Pole's mother. The written version is the product of extensive exchange between the artist and his mother in which they reconstructed the memory material, a process that also involved looking at family history and the loss of family members. The complexity of the work is enhanced by the fact that the individual letters cohere as a text only in the exhibition – anyone buying the work will receive nothing but unarranged letters.

Apoda, Langdon-Pole's work for the Triennial, draws on the artist's interest in orally transmitted

histories. On the basis of his work on the colonial period, when goods and knowledge were first exchanged on a global scale, the artist examined misinterpretations that have occurred and entered the sciences and everyday thinking. The starting point of the work is his research into the so-called birds of paradise, stuffed specimens of which from Australia and Papua New Guinea began reaching Europe in the sixteenth century. Since the stuffed birds lacked feet, the myth sprang up that they spent their entire lives on the air, borne aloft by winds, and that they 'nourished themselves on the vapour of clouds and nectar from paradisaical gardens'; they never touched earth, except when they fell dead from the sky.

Langdon-Pole's work calls into question the stuffed bird as a medium of history – a narrative circulates in the exhibition space, a spoken dialogue that is constantly being opened up, extended, revised. It shows just how powerfully our own wealth of experience, intellect and convictions are formed by narratives and shaped by their transmission.

SS

THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

Zac Langdon-Pole 'My Body... (Brendan Pole)' in *Meine Bilder* at The Physics Room

Catherine Dale

There are two works in Zac Langdon-Pole's show *Meine Bilder*: "Pieces of Eight," a film and "My Body... (Brendon Pole)," a text work. The latter, which is the focus here, is a re-inscription and adaptation of a poem by the artist's deceased uncle, whose name makes up part of the title.¹ The poem's five stanzas are pasted across the walls in 297 photographs, one for each individual letter.

In her essay, 'Where Our Bodies Begin and End', Langdon-Pole's sister Georgina Pole discusses her brother's artwork and recounts the life of their uncle. Pole also describes the poem's genealogy and its influence, "by speaking at length with our mother [Cathy Pole] about Brendan's life, his identity, struggles living with HIV and AIDS, and his death, Zac's subsequent reconstruction and re-authoring of the poem tests the limits of intergenerational memory".² Shortly before he died in 1991, Brendon Pole recited his poem to Cathy Pole, who relayed it to her son Langdon-Pole, who revisions, (re)inscribes, and installs it as a series of almost 300 photographs of elaborate medieval fonts.

While Langdon-Pole's work is 'of' a poem and even functions momentarily as a poem, it is not only, or even really, a poem. When you take the work home you will not find a poem but a collection of 297 photographs, each 100mm x 150mm. The poem becomes a pile of images to be put up, packed away, and put up somewhere else. This formal disappearance of the poem into a stack of photographs also reflects the artist's wider practice of 'montage, transposition, [time] travelling, testimony, reinterpretation, collaboration and appropriation [...]'.³ Not only has the poem time-travelled, it has also been reinterpreted, appropriated, collaborated with via testimony, and then 're-membered,' and so made into something else.

Cathy Pole said her brother Brendon was afraid he would not be remembered.⁴ He was right to worry. In less than a hundred years most of the adults you know will be forgotten, or remembered only in fragments that are passed on by people who are themselves aging, changing, and forgetting. This year on my mother's birthday, I wondered who else remembered that it's been eighteen months since she died. Although we leave behind objects, pictures, and poems, the surplus of family

photographs that appear in auction houses and charity shops demonstrates what happens if no one is interested in the objects that remain, that is, if there is no one (left) to be interested in us.

The letters are in medieval manuscript, and Langdon-Pole uses mostly the decorative and pictorial ones, the kind used to start a new passage of scripture.⁵ Georgina Pole describes the way these letters portray the 'seductive and alluring details' of Christian typography, and she points to Langdon-Pole's use of them to convey a non-heterosexual life and desire that the scripts' religion condemns. While they may seduce, the ornamental and difficult-to-read letters also invoke the distance and displacement that language produces as well as its tacit promise to make experience proximate. The medieval font is irregular because the artist has taken from different styles from across the centuries. The poem is dominated by these letters and they jostle for attention. This means you cannot see the whole picture or read the text without stepping back once or twice. We are not used to reading poetry like this, but then again, this is not a poem.

In this way, the text work highlights the automatic process of reading, of simultaneously looking at letters and reading them. In front of the text, and unsure of what to concentrate on, I become lost in interpretation. I imagine there is a secret in the words, which I want to glean, and an aesthetic to the letters that I want to appreciate. When I step even farther back I see something else, too. Some of the stanzas might form letters of their own. Is that a 'W' and is that an 'E'? I am reminded of Paul Auster's *City of Glass* in which a deranged detective storywriter follows an elderly man around the city. Tracing the man's daily walks into his notebook, the fiction writer observes the formation of large scale letters. He expects that the old man's steps will eventually reveal a secret message. Similarly, in the poem on the wall I see shapes that I fancy bear a concealed message. By stepping back to read around these words and lines, I am also trying to read between them.

Looking at the work I have a strong desire for extra meaning, perhaps this is because the poem is about dying and disappearing. So, I search for hidden formulae that might tell me how to live. The title of the work 'My Body (Brendon Pole)' contains the first two words of the poem and then an ellipsis '...'. I follow the dots (the points) that connect the artist and the poet. I follow the inhale and exhale of the poet (as I have followed the breath of every person I have watched die). I trace the dots from title to poem to work to story. I step across them carefully because there is also always the danger of falling through, and of missing the point. Of falling, I would like to be less afraid.

In much of the poetry I have read, like the art I have viewed, substance is not given head on, or given at all. If something substantial is suggested it is invariably off to the side by which I mean I can feel its presence only by its absence. This something which evades a poem or an artwork is conceivably a second life, a life that is private even from ourselves. The philosopher Jean-François Lyotard writes about a second life, which he describes by way of what he calls “the general line.”^{vi}

The “general line” is not the line of life in general, of life “such as it is.” The second existence is nonetheless sweet in relation to “the life everyone sees.” It dwells within it from time to time and sweeps it away, but without one knowing anything about it. The second existence does not really wrong the first one; it opens parentheses within it.^{vii}

Perhaps it is these brackets that hold Brendon Pole in ‘My Body (Brendon Pole).’ Lyotard explains,

You grant your hours of solitude to that existence because you have a need not to know more. That’s how it is that you can encounter what you are unaware of. However, you wait for it. And you can try to make it come. You read, you drink, you love, you make music, you give yourself over to the ritual of your little obsessions, you write.^{viii}

Disappearance. Appearance.

An account of one of Brendon Pole’s last days also serves as a description of how we resist and then negotiate disappearance by expressing it in the very moments that we and it are disappearing. In their beaten-up old van, Cathy Pole and her husband drive twenty-eight-year old Brendon to Auckland’s west coast. He is physically weak so they put a mattress in the back. They reverse the van to look over the water from a cliff. There’s Brendon looking out at the sea, which is framed by the rusty sides of the van’s back door. It’s here that Brendon delivers his poem. Georgina Pole writes, “[i]n his journey towards death, language seemed to become a space where he could resist what had been enacted upon him.”^{ix} When I picture this scene there is a fierce wind that carries his words ‘writ large’ out toward the roaring surf. Into the van, out to sea.

. . .

Langdon-Pole’s work, both at The Physics Room and elsewhere, makes something of disappearance, and so keeps disappearance in mind, alive, and in play.^x

The poem and the work are also acts of mourning. Brendon Pole mourns his future, his body, his life while Zac Langdon-Pole mourns his uncle, his uncle’s past, his uncle’s life. ‘My Body . . . (Brendon Pole)’ retraces our links with one another, with objects, and with language. Near the end of “Where Our Bodies Begin and End,” Georgina Pole asks, ‘How can the living resound stories suppressed and untold?’

How do we become companions of the dead?’ Langdon-Pole’s ‘My Body . . . (Brendon Pole)’ is a perfect answer.

ⁱ Georgina Pole, “Where Our Bodies Begin and End,” *The Pantograph Punch* (2016), accessed April 21st, 2016.

<http://pantograph-punch.com/post/where-our-bodies-begin-and-end-brendan-pole-my-body>

ⁱⁱ Georgina Pole, “Where Our Bodies Begin and End,” *The Pantograph Punch* (2016), accessed April 21st, 2016.

<http://pantograph-punch.com/post/where-our-bodies-begin-and-end-brendan-pole-my-body>

ⁱⁱⁱ “Artist-in-Residence,” NTU Center for Contemporary Art Singapore, accessed May 1, 2016.

<http://ntu.coasingsapore.org/residencies/zac-langdon-pole/>

^{iv} Georgina Pole, “Where Our Bodies Begin and End,” *The Pantograph Punch* (2016), accessed April 21st, 2016.

<http://pantograph-punch.com/post/where-our-bodies-begin-and-end-brendan-pole-my-body>

^v Langdon-Pole’s work is not unknown to decoration. In 2012, he exhibited works of floral patterned fabric that Cathy Pole had made into clothes. John Hurrell, “Patterned Paintings from Textile Offcuts,” review of *Nothing By Itself*, by Zac Langdon-Pole at Michael Lett 18 May-23rd June 2012, *Eyecontact*,

<http://www.eyecontactste.com/2012/06/patterned-paintings-using-textile-offcuts?external=true>

^{vi} Jean-Francois Lyotard “The General Line” *Postmodern Fables* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

115-122.

^{vii} Jean-Francois Lyotard “The General Line” *Postmodern Fables* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

118.

^{viii} Jeremy Luke Hill, “Lyotard and the Secret Self,” *From Word to Word*, April 11, 2008.

<https://jeremylukehill.wordpress.com/2008/04/11/lyotard-and-the-secret-self/>

^{ix} Georgina Pole, “Where Our Bodies Begin and End,” *The Pantograph Punch* (2016), accessed April 21st, 2016.

<http://pantograph-punch.com/post/where-our-bodies-begin-and-end-brendan-pole-my-body>

^x The objects and processes that Langdon-Pole employs sometimes end up taking over his works. The idea of

making a work that is only partly your own and of sharing the making of work with others appears in Langdon-Pole’s

‘*Sic!*’, a show at The Blue Oyster Art Space 22 January – 22 February, 2014. The artist arranged for the removal of

all the lights, fixtures, and other light-generating devices from the household of an unknown author’s house and used

them to light the gallery. As with the words from his uncle’s story, the lights are transferred from their home to light

the gallery. <http://www.blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/zac-langdon-pole/> accessed April 20th, 2016. Additionally, in *Pale*

Ideas shown at Michael Lett 29 May – 11 August, 2013, sun-faded curtain fabric is stretched over frames. Just as he

has Brendon Pole do the work of the poem, here Langdon-Pole lets the sun do some of the work. During the gradual

process of drawing colour from fabric, the sun makes dark and light stripes adding something new to the

disappearing colour. <http://michaelllett.com/exhibition/zac-langdon-pole-pale-ideas/> accessed May 15, 2016.

Cultural

News 10.06.2016

New Zealander Zac Langdon-Pole lives and works in Darmstadt for two years



Zac Langdon-Pole is the new Charlotte Prinz Fellow of Darmstadt. The picture shows him in the Arheiligen Haus, which the Prinz scholarship holders can live in for free for two years. Photo: Guido Schiek

By Annette Krämer-Ailig

DARMSTADT - "No one is an island, but always in exchange", Zac Langdon-Pole formulates the leitmotif for his work, regardless of whether it is painting, sculpture, film, photography, poetry or installations. During the interview, the new Charlotte Prinz Fellow has just completed his first days in Arheilgen, and it is still empty in the house: The young artist was once again on the road to prepare an exhibition, this time in Canada.

The New Zealander, born in 1988, has also exhibited in his own homeland, where he has a gallery owner for many years, or in Singapore, where he lived during a residency scholarship, or in London, where he graduated from the Art Academy in 2011 Auckland spent a few months - just to name a few stations and exhibition venues.

CHARLOTTE-PRINCE SCHOLARSHIP

The Charlotte Prinz scholarship of the city of Darmstadt is awarded to **graduates of Hessian art academies**. It covers over two years of free living and 1100 euros per month for subsistence. The scholarship also includes a final exhibition in the Kunsthalle or the Museum Künstlerkolonie.

It goes back to a **donation from** the painter Charlotte Prinz, who died in 1993, who owned the house in Arheilgen, where the artists can now live.

Darmstadt's cultural lecturer Professor Ludger Hünnekens, Philipp Gutbrod (Director of the Mathildenhöhe Institute), Léon Krempel (Director of the Kunsthalle Darmstadt) and the Darmstadt-based artist Daniela Ginten

Langdon-Pole's early success seems as polyglot as he is. Now he wants to use the two years in which he can live and work in the tranquility of the Darmstädter Fellows' House to complete what he has just begun and to develop new works. One example is a project for the Montreal Biennale, which begins in October.

The artist is familiar with the region: in 2014 he came to the Städelschule in Frankfurt as a master student of Willem de Rooij, and last October he made his final degree at an art academy with this shooting star of the international art scene. "I had heard a lot about the Städelschule and knew about de Rooij's work, so since I wanted to work overseas anyway after completing my first studies, I accepted his offer for a job interview," says Langdon-Pole. He was accepted and sums up today: "My time in Frankfurt has been incredibly influential, the

were among the **award jury of the scholarship**. (aka)

opportunities that have been offered to me, and the people with whom I've been trusted have changed my life." That's another reason why the scholarship makes him happy: "Now I have another two years here."

When looking at the laptop, where he documents his projects, it soon becomes clear how complex Zac Langdon-Pole's projects are - but all the while "they revolve around people and their stories," he says. To do so, he removes old boundaries between image and action, but above all between visual art and language - and at the same time interfaces intellectual levels.

Based on the premise that "I experience myself through others and vice versa," Langdon-Pole always proceeds from the possibility of different interpretations of one and the same situation. For example, in Singapore he has designed an installation that combines poetic and beautiful dead birds of paradise, natural ideology, colonialism, Western science and worlds of prejudice.

Why the birds of paradise have no feet

For in Papua New Guinea, where the birds of paradise live, the natives pay homage to them from an old age by drying their skins after death and by cutting their feet. In this state, the European traders got to know the animals (in demand as rare commodity) in the 16th century. Their scientists invented the theory, and then came the theory, the appropriate name: The birds were born without feet, it was explained. They are in the air all their lives and thus close to paradise. "I worked with an expert in Wiesbaden to decipher these speculations," says the artist.

The installation also includes a modern counterweight: Bruce Bagemihl wrote in 1999 in his book "Biological Exuberance" against traditions of biology, because he describes homosexual and bisexual behavior as normal even among animals. Bagemihl has provoked, and Langdon-Pole points out by citing him, as if by the way, to another, discriminating meaning level of the "bird of paradise" in German.

According to Duden, this is someone who stands out because of "unadjusted ways of life or unusual clothing" - such as the homosexual tunes known as "birds of paradise", whose lives include the wearing of shrill women's clothing.



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[Art](#)

06.01.2016

Where Our Bodies Begin And End

By Georgina Langdon-Pole

As I entered the lounge, I was greeted by a looming figure in an antiquated frame. A Māori man adorned in colonial attire, the paint stained a blackish-yellow by years of cigarette smoke. For a moment, he gave it the air of a military service, of something like a ritual. Underneath the dusky painting, the floor splayed, cleared of its chattels. Colourful mats tessellated around an open coffin. Inside a man's body lay vulnerable, immalleable. Cocooned in a stiff wedding suit, a pink flower cresting from the chest pocket and animating the stillness.

My family huddled around the casket - wailing, moaning, and collapsing at the edge. Now - my turn. "Touch his head", said my mother. We lurched forward together, her hand guiding mine. I recoiled quickly, perturbed by the touch of his translucent, icy brow. I waited. Poised, for his chest to heave or his eyelids to flicker. The moment pressed on. Still nothing. "Where is he?" I probed. My mother offered me an explanation involving angels, spirits and other such effigies. I liked the sound of this. She was convincing, but I knew the circumstances leading to that moment couldn't be undone.

By touching his forehead; feeling where his body ended and mine began, I straddled an ulterior line between life and death. Amid all the escalating

possibilities of childhood, I was suddenly carried to life's very periphery. Somewhere in that space between something and nothing, the world unfolded before me.

In her book *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Hélène Cixous writes that the dead are our first masters. The man in the casket was my mother's brother, Brendan Pole, who died of AIDS-related complications in 1991, when I was 7 years old. In many ways, his death gave me the world as I know it now, in all its lucent complexity.

During his illness, HIV was relatively new in New Zealand. The first recorded case was in 1984, a 30-year old gay man who had been living in Sydney and was transferred to New Plymouth to spend his final days with his family. Though community members had been working hard to raise awareness about HIV for some time, it was still veiled in misunderstanding, consternation and shame.

As children my brother Zac and I were impacted by the confronting experience of Brendan's death. We also learnt about his struggles living with HIV and AIDS, and his journey coming to terms with dying. Stories recalled by our mother revealed elusive dimensions of the human condition we were each too young to have ever seen unfold: revealing intersections of identity, belonging and isolation. Of secrecy, pain and hope. Through his life and death, Brendan became our most ethereal teacher.

24 years later, Zac has illuminated Brendan's journey in an artwork, *My Body...* (Brendan Pole) (2015). The work is currently being exhibited as part of a solo exhibition, *Meine Bilder*, at the Physics Room in Christchurch. It is comprised of a poem written by Zac, as informed by the testimony of our mother. It's adapted from Brendan's original, a poem he recited to her by heart shortly before he died. She recalls how the poem seemed a site of both refuge and resistance for Brendan; a coded response to his struggle with HIV and AIDS, and all that remained unresolved in his life until the end.

My Body... (Brendan Pole) evolved through two processes. Firstly, in the reconstruction and rewriting of the poem by Zac (which to his knowledge, was never written down). The second was the manifestation and display of the poem in relation to Brendan's life. The poem has been presented using photographs of letters from Alison Harding's *Ornamental Alphabets and Initials* (Thames and Hudson, 1984). Harding's work, now long out-of-print, is a visual and historical overview of ornamental typographies from largely Christian religious texts spanning over 800 years.



The piece oscillates between the past and present, the personal and the political. The poem is a deeply intimate reflection of Brendan's life and his struggle, a loss (like any loss) that feels current when we trace the shape it left behind. But it also grapples with the complex histories and elapsed moments which fundamentally shaped Brendan's identity - diverse expressions of the self, battling with repression as an internal and external process.

Brendan was adopted into our family from the echoing, polished rooms of the St Vincent's Home of Compassion in Herne Bay in the early 1960s. Busy Catholic nuns in stiff cotton headpieces click-clacked the corridors in functional black shoes, tending to unmarried mothers and their babies from ward to ward. There, in a room ordered by rows of discrete white cots, Brendan rocked back and forth obsessively - as if in fast-forward prayer, as if his repeated swoops would carve out a route back out of the light and cold, back to his mother.

It was a time when having a child outside of wedlock was frowned upon. Adoption was commonplace, and the prevailing ideology was that it should be a complete break between biological parent and child, enabled by state legislation. Veiled in secrecy, pregnant women were garnered into institutions and encouraged to put their past behind them. This was, for many, an alternative to the stigma and hardship that came with overstepping social taboos. For reasons that remain opaque, Brendan was adopted from both his birth family and his culture, crossing ethnic borders from a Samoan to a Pākeha family.

What we do know is that while she was a volunteer at the Home of Compassion, our grandmother formed a strong bond with four month old Brendan during her days of service. A decision was soon made that he would become a part of their large and expanding family. Brendan was brought up and schooled in the Catholic faith, and a number of challenging times in his life, he continued to seek the support and guidance of the Church. But he also found a strong affiliation with Māori - he trained with a Māori organisation when he left home, and then he met and married a Māori woman.

"Perhaps it was the focus on identity and whakapapa," my mother surmises now. "Something he himself was broken from, and always wanted to uncover. Or maybe it was the welcomeness he found in the people, a sense of belonging he often struggled with. Whatever it was, it touched him deeply."

It was perplexing for some that having crossed borders once, he should seek comfort in a different culture again. But it was that balancing of different lives and identities which made him who he was. Brendan reconnected with his birth mother not long before he died - something he'd always ached to do. Having done this, he faced his death the way he lived - balancing complex ways of believing, communicating and being.

We all face that complex balance, even if we're used to negotiating it from years of practice. All sorts of forms and customs have been used to communicate beyond the limitations of our time and place. More than any development before or since, the expression of stories and ideas in Christian and Western histories remains dominated by the advent of written text. Its everyday use exploded with the invention of mechanical movable type printing by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440. This sparked the printing revolution, heralding the rise of mass reproducible communication.

The reproduction of written text occurs with ease on a mass scale. It is by nature externalised and produced outside the human body, and now co-exists with traditions of oral recital and inter-generational storytelling, which have and continue to play a fundamental role in cultures for which the written word was a late, colonial arrival. In these contexts stories are carried through the body, and are often used to illuminate the inseparability from one generation to the next; the oneness of the living and the dead. They have impacted not only the way in which information is carried in these cultures, but also on the way people organise their lives and create meaning in the world.

In this sense, *My Body's* central concern is a 25-year-old act or performance, embedded in the memory of our mother. By speaking at length with our mother about Brendan's life, his identity, struggles living with HIV and AIDS, and his death, Zac's subsequent reconstruction and re-authoring of the poem tests the limits of intergenerational memory. The use of spoken word resounds Brendan's beginning, and of the Samoan oral culture he was torn away from - a culture that relies on acknowledgement of the past, as a means to live in the present.

In our present, the poem's displayed in illuminated, elaborate typographies. In this sense, it's tying itself to early Western written culture, and in particular those texts which held a didactic purpose in the history of Christianity. The seductive and luring detail of the letters, often made in gold leaf, were used to place emphasis on the sacred nature of religious texts, and to amplify their importance.

Zac's repurposing of this form becomes in itself a transgression of the belief systems and boundaries which presided in Brendan's life. The very systems of belief these letters were created to proselytise obfuscated his identity time and again - now, they're used to tell stories and convey meaning they once hid.

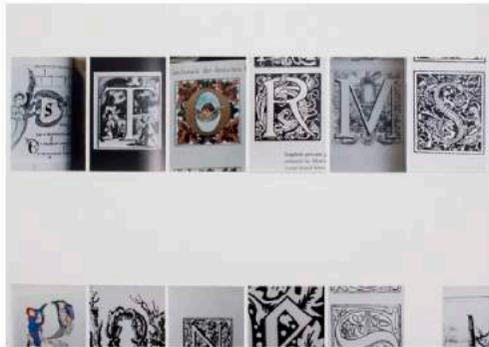
The period from 1985 to 1995 marked the rise of the HIV epidemic in New Zealand. Early on, little was known about how HIV was transmitted. There was no known cure, and a lot of panic. This resulted in cycles of misinformation and fear around its transmission.

Because HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse, the narrative around the new disease fed into dominant values and discourses around what were deemed 'deviant' forms of sexuality and behaviour. Homosexuality, bisexuality, promiscuity (particularly among women), and even sex out of marriage were already condemned by mainstream society, and so narratives that the infections were the result of personal irresponsibility and thus a form of punishment, thrived during the first and worst outbreak of the epidemic.

Inevitably, the level of imputation and shame involved sanctioned a veil of secrecy around HIV prevention and treatment. The compounded discrimination and stigmatisation of those who were HIV positive (or simply profiled as being HIV positive) put people off getting tested and accessing appropriate care and support. When Brendan got sick, even the officials asked our grandparents to keep up the charade, as our mother recalls.

"When we first found out that Brendan had HIV, the doctors advised Mum and Dad to tell their friends and community that he had cancer," she tells me. "Not only were they facing the loss of their son, but the thought of having to lie about his death was daunting. I think the secrecy around it was deeply hurtful for Mum and Dad. Society didn't accept it, so how could they find the space to come to terms with it? I'm not sure they ever did."

The challenges Brendan and other HIV positive New Zealanders faced in telling their stories reverberate in My Body's camouflaged display of texts. The letters of the poem are intricate and detailed. The letter O is flanked by decorative bursts of red flowers and encircles a tiny cherub angel at its centre. The letter M is constituted by the muscular legs of a man, splayed open and vulnerable.



The text and poem become a puzzle the viewer has to decipher. The viewer's experience in the duration of the work; the time it takes to read the poem and to locate the words, echoes our struggle as human beings to tell the truth through language. Finding the words has always been an effort.

The work's ongoing reconstruction of Brendan's story and re-appropriation of language, places emphasis not only on the capacity of language to silence, but conversely, the power it also holds to transform the way we live in the here and now. At a pōwhiri, Māori recite their whakapapa to acknowledge the series of people and moments which led up to the present. It is through this utterance; an acknowledgement of the past and a marking of difference, that one can activate the present. This idea is embedded in what philosophy of language calls "performative utterances". These are used to describe forms of language which are not simply describing reality,

but also charging and moulding the social reality they are defining.

Through a series of legal fictions and verbal euphemisms, swathes of Brendan's short life were a reality constructed without his input. The Adoption Act 1955 stated that he was our grandparents' child "as if born to that parent in lawful wedlock" - another past, another genealogy voided. But in facing his death, Brendan began to unravel his identity on his terms, by meeting his birth mother, immersing himself in tikanga. Through this journey, the languages and rules of law and religion, which had always been so definitive in his life, loosened their grip. In his journey towards death, language seemed to become a space where he could resist what had been enacted upon him.

Many artists have explored the idea that we all inhabit, in some way or form, a secret life. A space where we can exist beyond the confines of 'true' or 'false'. But also, beyond what we might be able to grasp or understand. For many, language and art are sanctuaries where we can live out our secret lives. Where we find truths and meaning, which are stilled and repressed. The poet, Anne Sexton, thinks of form as a kind of magic for discovering the truth. She explains: "I'm hunting for the truth. It might be a kind of poetic truth, and not just a factual one, because behind everything that happens to you, every act, there is another truth, a secret life." With days to live, Brendan spoke that content of his secret life to my mother.

He was fed up with the monotony of his bed and the four enclosing walls of his bedroom, and so our parents clambered him into their van and drove west to Māori Bay. He was emaciated and exhausted, and struggled to move his body. They took everything out of the back of the van and put a mattress in for him instead. Resting on the makeshift bed and framed by a rusting metal wagon, my parents backed up the van onto the cliff top. Craning their necks, they glimpsed out over the surging West Coast swell and pale grey sky. Brendan recited his poem.

That gap, of conjectured moments left incomplete, that constant currency of loss and grief, is why there is nothing more plaintive than the death of a young person. Brendan died when he was only 28 years old. He, like so many others, was silenced in life and in death. Perhaps the most elemental premise of Zac's work, and indeed as I write this, is to ask what we - the living - can do for people who died in the face of seemingly insurmountable pain. How can the living resound stories suppressed and untold? How do we become companions of the dead?



Brendan was scared that he wouldn't be remembered. Language gifted him, at that moment, the means to carve out a space of resistance and acceptance. His act, his utterance, urges us to consider how we can manifest something out of nothing; how we can carve space for hope amid

great suffering.

In exploring language as a site of refuge and resistance, Zac's work inevitably becomes the very hope it explicates. Straddling a line between something and nothing, the work becomes that 'something': a memory, a tribute, an act of solidarity. Brendan's poem propels stories and meaning beyond the confines of what might be accepted or denied. Beyond the limits of the living and the dead. Of where our bodies begin and end. In this way, Brendan has taught us how to live. In doing so, he has gifted all of us, the world.

My body
A clot
Of inscriptions
Flayed by
Sacred hunger
Cinching nothing

Where paradise
Storms
Bones kiss
Sour air
And undo
The folded lie

This dirt
These trinkets
Hollow siren songs
Will not contain
Such blessed
movement

This language
Of virus
Oh heap
And thrust
Nothing is decided
But is told

By the light
Of the axe

In my secret life

I am
with him

Brendan Pole

My Body (Brendan Pole) is showing as part of *Meine Bilder* at The Physics Room, 209 Tuam Street, Christchurch, from 19 January to 30 January 2016.



17