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Ōtepoti Dunedin

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Thirty thousand years ago, humankind began to depict the progression of cyclical change with a series of circles, seed- and legume-like shapes arranged in an elliptic pattern. The diagram, a proto-lunar calendar, was etched on bones and antler fragments for ease of transportation.¹ Across time and space, groups of people with the same calendar could agree to meet on the fourth legume after the small black circle midway on the diagram at a specific location and find themselves together. In 2013, Steve Carr exhibited a seven-channel video installation titled *Dead Time* (2012) for X, the tenth anniversary of Michael Lett's gallery. Embodying its title, each screen showed a stationary apple suspended by a piece of string for almost the entire duration of the work (520 seconds). The apple in this context symbolised immortality and surrealistically evoked the pendulum of a grandfather clock, stilled. Only after the replication of cinematic dead time, in which nothing seems to happen, does a single bullet rip through the flesh of each apple sequentially in perfect slow-motion synchronisation. The rupture of dead time is also the time of dead apples and therefore immortality.

Making Time is the tenth anniversary of *Dead Time* and the artist's tenth exhibition at Michael Lett. Following Carr's summative yet slippery deployment of titles, this exhibition should make time, or complicate the making of time, or thwart the hubristic endeavour entirely. Carr troubles time by triangulating materiality in relation to the conceptual and formal properties of the objects he selects, and thirdly in relation to the processual means of production. In turn, this triangulation is situated within art historical archives, particularly the Duchampian readymade and in reference to Carr's earlier work, including the digital video work *Burn Out* (2009). The culmination of these intersecting vectors is an exhibition of anti-monuments that cannot entirely avoid monument status. The monument does not quite topple. But

if you are the only visitor, it may feel like you have entered an aftermath.

A Pillow with a River Rock (2022) may be the first work you experience. The pillow, as with the basketball work (*A Deflated Basketball with Water*, 2022) in the sky-lit gallery have undergone characteristic transformation from mundane objects to reluctant monuments through material transposition. The soft pillow with its creases and grease stains is carved marble and the indented basketball with pooled water is cast bronze (and water). The original everyday objects overlap in the typology of weight: both are soft and light, but diverge at the typologies of action: the pillow represents stasis, the basketball movement, and location: domestic interior for the pillow and public exterior for the basketball. As reluctant monuments however, the original functions of the pillow and basketball are nevertheless preserved albeit in attenuated forms. The pillow is still a resting place for a head, but the head is a round, heavy river stone collected by the artist (the stone is a stone). Similarly, the deflated basketball is still a resting place for water. However, over the duration of the exhibition, molecules of water will evaporate, and in this metamorphosis the basketball can safely dream of being airborne again.

The elevation of mundane, everyday objects to the status of art commodity, from Marcel Duchamp through Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons and Tracy Emin onwards, is a well-walked path. Rather than exhibit the pillow, basketball, or tyre in their found states, Carr has them painstakingly carved in marble and cast in bronze or plaster respectively. This transformation, from everyday, mass-produced consumer products to unique art objects via the use of enduring sculptural materials (marble and bronze) and specialist labour would seem to manifest the time Carr is making in this exhibition. Unless the aftermath arrives sooner, or the works

1 — I have it tattooed on my right forearm. See Soderman/NLSI Staff, "The Oldest Lunar Calendars." <https://sservi.nasa.gov/articles/oldest-lunar-calendars/> Last accessed 21 April 2022.



Steve Carr
A Pillow with a River Rock
2022
(carved marble and river rock,
435 x 650 x 140mm)



Steve Carr
A Tyre with Glass Sphere
 2022
 (cast plaster, glass
 610 x 610 x 190mm)



Steve Carr
A Deflated Basketball with Water
 2022
 (cast bronze and water,
 215 x 190 x 170mm)

are intentionally destroyed by artist or interloper, the heavy stone head on marble pillow and bronze basketball will outlive almost all humans currently alive at the time of writing (2022). So will Lucio Fontana's bronze ball (*Concetto spaziale, Natura*, 1959-1960) and Wim Delvoye's one second of a video game in marble (*Untitled (Fortnite)*, 2019) and his bronze tyres (*Untitled (Car Tyre)*, 2007). Yet so too will the by-products of manufacturing that produced all the soft pillows and basketballs and rubber tyres manifesting now and in the future as low visibility, rising sea levels, soil salinisation, and stormy vulnerability. This is not to suggest a direct equivalence between the impact of mass-produced consumer goods and Carr's anti-monument monuments to them. But Carr's considered use of recrystallised minerals (rocks) and metal alloys (bronze) is an inevitable invocation of geology, and geology has become a contested discipline in the attempt to fathom socioecological crisis.

For some people, geology became less dusty after traces of white, first world violence, such as nuclear debris and chemical pollutants were detected in the earth's strata. Rather than lament the violence of this geologic registration—controversially known as the Anthropocene, the “time of man,”—it has given rise to a problematic expansion of humankind as embedded in the earth forever. Perhaps the 4.47 billion year half-life of radioactive uranium-238 trapped in a decaying sarcophagus at the Chernobyl nuclear plant recently occupied by Russian invaders is insufficiently permanent. Just before the sun engulfs the earth in 5 billion years, half of the uranium will still exist (somewhere). This temporal-spatial time making is heavier than a river stone on a softly creased marble pillow, and one way to echo Kathryn Yusoff's accurate assertion that, “no geology is neutral.”² Then again, most occurrences and objects, including a car tyre, are not. In this reading of Carr's work, the artist's iterative replications of tyres represent his most compelling interrogations of the ecological implications of the time “we”—a specific, colonial-capitalist “we” (they)—continue to make.

It may be too neat to interpret a replica of a car tyre in white plaster (*A Tyre with Glass Sphere*, 2022) as a “white tyre,” a white commodity fossil, a synecdoche of white extractivism and mining, white invasion and colonisation. Plaster is the principal material of pattern-making

and foundry processes, the preparatory stage for grander operations, like casting bronze. Perhaps the pattern-making properties of plaster only speak in formal tones to the pattern of the tyre tread, and make outward connections with the round microwave cake-moulding container, the plastic patterned lettuce wrangler, multipurpose basket, and patterned glass of the kitchen-stack monument in the filmic work, *A Sculptural Assemblage with Water* (2022). The brain is a pattern-searching organism. Leaping backwards in time, perhaps the toxic white cloud produced by the black ute doing burn outs on a West Auckland street (*Burn Out*, 2009) could be read as a fitting forerunner to whiteness as commodity fossil—as nuclear cloud, as noxious plume, as the eternal return of the commodity as art object. Regrettably, naming can only go so far, as particulate matter still circulates and impacts all bodies — human and more-than-human.

Since *Burn Out*, Carr (who has a car in his name) has removed the tyres from the vehicle. In 2014 he exhibited a tyre carved from blackened walnut (*Nissan Skyline MK1*) and three years later in 2017 he presented a video work of spinning tyres (*Motor Reliefs*). From iterations in rubber and smoke to walnut and pixels, Carr replicated the tyre in bronze for the *In Bloom* series of four public sculptures in Tāmaki (first and last), Ōtautahi, and Ōtepoti (2020-2022). Comprising a stacked grouping of bronze tyres, the incorporation of plants growing and flowering amongst the tyres in the *In Bloom* series represents a departure for the artist. If *Dead Time* eviscerated apples, and the video work *Transpiration* (2014) restricted carnations to gleaning nourishment from coloured dye-water, *In Bloom* invites people to care for living plants. The installation *In Bloom (Dewhirst)*, 2020-2022 in *Making Time* both continues and expands the potential of this series. As with the previous iterations, this version is collaborative—on this occasion with landscape architect Winston Dewhirst—and it is the synergy of this collaboration that invites a new reading of the work.

Dewhirst and Carr's intervention fosters native plants once cleared by settler-colonialists in Titirangi and the Waitākere Ranges. These native plants can be likened to the spurned vegetables Agnes Varda lovingly collects in her film, *The Gleaners and I* (2001). With greater attention, these native plants might receive the same appreciation as ferns and punga. While the installation

2 — Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 108).



Steve Carr
A Sculptural Assemblage with Water
2022
(Olympus i-Speed 3 High-Speed Engineers Camera,
Duration: 2 mins 4 secs)
Edition of 3



Steve Carr
In Bloom (Dewhirst)
2020-2022
(cast bronze and living plants,
dimensions variable)

of *In Bloom (Dewhirst)* in the old bank-vault space of the lower level gallery and away from natural sunlight may seem antithetical to the plants' flourishing, it symbolically references the commodification of the earth and plant life as fungible, the unequal distribution of wealth, and the dispossession of mana whenua. In concert with the works on the ground floor however, and as a speculative provocation, the plants would grow (aided or unaided) up the stairs and over the plaster tyre, the basketball, and the pillow stone on the ground floor. They might then climb the column in composite style—with scrolls and acanthus leaves symbolising enduring time, and grow towards the light emanating from the escape hatches, the ornate octagonal skylights in the gallery. Yet this scenario, engendered by the perfect desolation of anti-monument monuments entails departure, disappearance, and erasure.

As this text has referred to aftermath, it is essential to cite Yusoff's mandate that any lament regarding the end of the world acknowledge "imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms [that] have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence."³

Carr's exhibition prompts an enquiry into the nature and quality of the time we are making. Does our making impinge on the flourishing of others, or can coeval coexistence constitute multiple flourishing? From lunar calendars etched on antlers to carved flora on columns and bronze tyres planted out with native plants we continue to be obsessed with time and who and what we make in and with it.



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Making Time
2022

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