

Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen: Daughter of Dog

Mostyn Llandudno 23 March to 30 June

Over the years, Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen have assembled a meticulous body of works that intervene in and poetically short-circuit existing planetary networks: from industrial assembly lines and global supply chains to bioengineering labs and gambling halls. Whether reverse-engineering the manufacture of electronic devices back to their raw components, introducing glitches in global trade routes or breeding their own species of sterile goldfish, the artist duo seeks to interrupt and reroute these abstract and impersonal systems while shining a light onto their complex bio and geopolitical entanglements. The pair's current exhibition, 'Daughter of Dog', comprises ciphers and motifs familiar from their previous work, yet pushes them into new territory. Here it's not impersonal systems that are taken apart and reassembled, but personal experiences of loss and grief, particularly the aggressive responses triggered by the severance of affective bonds with humans and non-humans alike.

The focal point of the exhibition is the titular single-channel film, *Daughter of Dog*, 2024. Built on a lyrical script in six acts written by Cohen, the film largely comprises terse subtitles. The elliptical elegy conjures signs of danger and foreboding, coping mechanisms and violent eruptions, endocrine waves of aggression and unsettling war metaphors, alongside scraps of

memories and ancient rituals. Similar to found poems, some lines (including the film's title) are Cohen's own loose translations of swear words and curses from Jewish Iraqi, an Arabic dialect spoken by the artist's family and now on the brink of extinction. While these ancient spells sound threatening and ominous, they are intended as a protective shield against the evil eye. Within a personal 'family lexicon' they might even be used as terms of endearment and affection, yet they are also haunted by a palpable sense of violence and impending doom not unrelated to the disappearance of the language itself as part of the erasure of Arab-Jewish heritage, which has its corollary in the persistent destruction of Palestinian life and culture.

This uneasy oscillation between care and harm, affection and aggression, is echoed in the film's associative image-track. Interspersed with and permeated by flashes of yellow, a series of intertwined scenes depicts various situations verging between beauty and violence. An atlas moth is shot in extreme close-up, its patterned wings magnified to the extent that they appear like the skin of a snake. A peaceful field of mustard flowers is undercut with footage of yellow flares, the billowing smoke menacingly reminiscent of mustard gas, a now outlawed chemical weapon. The seductive beauty of carnivorous plants becomes a trap of slow death for insects lured into their cavities or onto gluey hairs, also shown in extreme close-ups. Black German Shepherds painted like skeletons are juxtaposed with a Boston Dynamic robot dog which is repeatedly kicked around – this being the standard method of training and testing the

robot's abilities, literally embedding hostility into machine learning. The film culminates in a choreographed sequence of performers re-enacting the combative, warlike moves of a pogo dance tutorial in an empty studio. Without the clashing of bodies typical of the mosh pit, their gestures appear eerily stylised, deconstructed into an almost cathartic discharge of pent-up violence. As the images build to a crescendo, so does the soundtrack composed by Van Balen combining recorded live drumbeats and AI-generated string arrangements. Using 'emptiness' as a prompt for the machine-learning model, Van Balen has pushed it to the point where it slightly cracks, revealing the seams of its manufacture.

In the adjacent gallery, elements and creatures mentioned or featured in the film manifest materially in sets of small sculptures alongside various types of carnivorous plants. Made out of rebar and taxidermy casts, and studded with Atlas moth eggs, snakes dangle from the ceiling or are draped over plinths; others are evoked in the shape of concrete spacers (whose suggestive brand-name is 'snakes with knuckles'). Dog parts are abstracted in casts combining taxidermy forms and precious minerals, or literally summoned with a single dog tooth. On the walls, large aluminium sheets act as a kind of funerary memorial to another animal species: thoroughbred racehorses. The panels are coated with a bespoke powder that was produced with the horses' ashes through a two-phase industrial process developed by the artists. A product of human design, laboured to the point of exhaustion and death, the body of the thoroughbred

seems to find a place of rest in the stilled abstraction of these metallic paintings. If there is one thread connecting all the works in 'Daughter of Dog', it is a commitment to continually care for a world which is made and remade through violence, even when it might be difficult to disentangle care from its opposite.

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