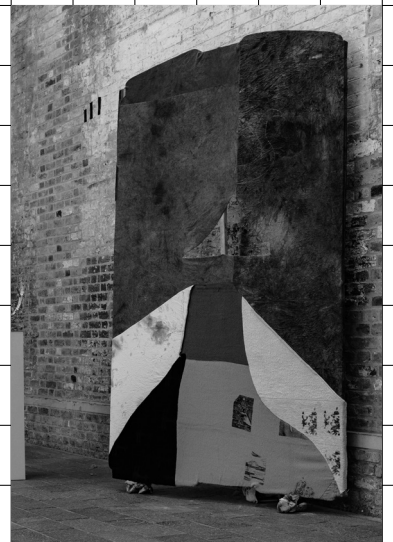
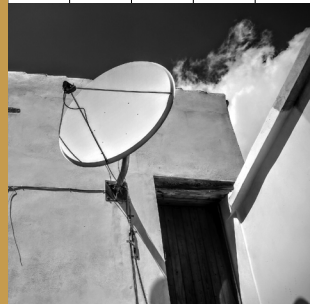
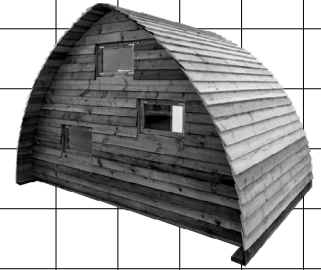
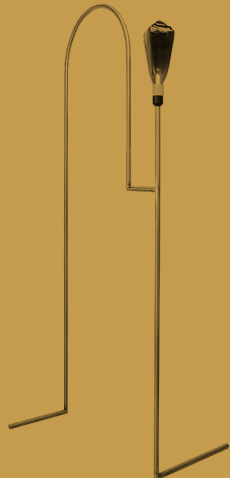


ART FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



ART FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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FOREWORD

CAMILLA PALESTRA

For centuries nature has been a great inspiration for artists. Admiration, wonder and respect have been for long at the core of artistic practices looking at nature to comprehend its sublime beauty.

Since the 1960s, however, with an increasing degradation of the natural environment, and a growing evidence of the consequences that human action had on climate change, artists' approach and response to nature have radically shifted.

As we now scientifically know, the anthropogenic activities are responsible for a relentless destruction of our environment¹, pushing us towards a potentially catastrophic scenario. Not only this scenario would affect (or indeed is affecting) the natural environment, but also our social structure. As art historian and cultural critic T.J. Demos writes, we can no longer separate climate change, social justice and politics as 'the way we regard nature carry deep implications and often unacknowledged ramifications for how we organise society, assign responsibility for environmental change, and assess social impact'².

Drawn on this assumption, Art for the Environment International Artist Residency Programme was launched in 2015 at UAL University of the Arts London, building on the emerging need to provide early career artists with a space for research and reflection, to explore concerns that define the 21st century - environmental sustainability and social justice, and their interconnection.

In partnership with a network of international renowned institutions, including Yorkshire Sculpture Park (UK), Fondazione Zegna (Italy), Joya: arte + ecología (Spain), Berengo Studio (Italy), Hauser & Wirth Somerset (UK), LABVERDE (Brazil), Khoj (India), Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Canada), Domain de Boisbuchet (France), Associazione Culturale dello Scompiglio (Italy), resident artists are supported to develop thoughts and ideas to envision a world of tomorrow.

The exhibition *Art for the Environment* at Nunnery Gallery, Bow Arts in east London brings together some of these thoughts and ideas, addressing social and environmental questions through distinct voices and approaches.

¹ Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities.
Source: www.climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus

² T.J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature. Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2016.

ARTISTIC TRACES FOR A NEW FUTURE

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Never before in history have human actions had a greater impact on the planet. Glaciers have shrunk, seas have dried up, islands have been submerged, plants are flowering earlier and animals are migrating in erratic patterns. In this new era that has been termed the Anthropocene¹, world efforts to reduce carbon emissions and control global warming have not been achieved, since the first United Nations Earth Summit discussions in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Sixteen of the seventeen warmest years since scientists began recording data have all occurred since 2001². The temperature is now set to rise above 2 °C and we can no longer ignore that human activity is irreversibly modifying the future well-being of generations to come and that our planet will become something very different to what it is today, before the turn of the 22nd century.

Scientists have proved over and over again the devastating effects of a carbon dependent economy. Nevertheless this downward spiralling degradation of industrial production that is creating the greenhouse gases that, as a result, are warming up the seas and the earth seems far too overwhelming for us meagre individuals to effect, on a scale that our planet requires. Yet, we must not forget that as we are inextricably linked to one and other and to the environment that surrounds us, no matter how small our actions, their effects can resonate far beyond our personal sphere. Simple daily actions like turning

off the tap, eating less meat and avoiding plastic consumption do make a difference. And, if we were to multiply these over and over from family, to friends, to neighbours, across villages, towns and cities, the irrational equation '1+1=millions' would become a rational evidence.

So, let's say that we can modify our physical actions; what else could we do to change how future generations may perceive and live in and with their new planet?

An activity that, I believe, has the power to incite others to invent, to create new futures on a larger transformative scale belongs to the realm of the emotional action. Art and design have a special role to play in the Anthropocene because they belong to the realm of the imagination, and to that of emotion. Artistic activity, no matter how abstract or removed from rational activity, leaves intriguing and thought provoking clues that need an emotional energy to decipher and reinterpret. The more artistic traces that are left, the more they are likely to stimulate curiosity and creativity in others, who in turn may take up action to reinvent.

When I was appointed Chair of Art and the Environment at the University of the Arts London in 2013, I instigated a number of projects to stimulate the graduate community to question the status quo and their role in this changing world,

- 1 P.J. Crutzen and E.F. Stoermer, 'The "Anthropocene"', *Global Change Newsletter*, Vol. 41 (May 2000), pp. 17-18.
- 2 Nasa. Global Climate Change <https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/global-temperature/>

and take up action through creative activity. The Art for the Environment International Artist Residency Programme became the legacy of this post, providing young artists and designers with dedicated time and a space to think and experiment new relationships with very diverse changing social and natural environments. For their experiences to be as varied as possible, it was important that the residency locations illustrate this diversity of our habitats and resources available; from the rain forest in Amazonia, the desert of Almeria, the bustling city of New Delhi, a biosphere in Zegna Oasis Trivero, the landscaped parkland of Yorkshire Sculpture Park, the Canadian Rocky Mountains at Banff, a historical glass-blowing furnace in Murano, and a farmstead at Hauser & Wirth in Somerset have all been sample locations where designers and artists have experimented and created work in close relationship with the places, the people and the materials they encounter in situ.

What we see presented in this very first *Art for the Environment* exhibition at the Nunnery Gallery are the results of some of the residencies that have taken place over the last two-years. In the exhibition we will encounter the traces of the artists' physical and emotional activity in each location, and it is our hope that this in turn will stimulate others to reflect on, and in time take up action to reinvent new futures.

ART AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE AGE OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

We are living in the Anthropocene, a new geological time unit brought into being to reflect the extensive human impact on our planet—or so it is argued by its proponents in the Earth system sciences. The Anthropocene is a charismatic idea. Its merits are now a matter for widespread debate, not just in the natural sciences but also in the social sciences, as well as in the arts.

What does the concept denote, how does the Anthropocene manifest itself and, in particular, when did it begin? These questions have been taken up in diverse ways, partly because the proposition of the Anthropocene reflects contemporary, rather than historic, geological change. The Anthropocene is happening now. Critiques of the supposed epoch-scale transition inherent in the concept question both the role attributed to the human and the dualistic human-nature relation it invokes. The term has come to represent an epoch of thought, in which human co-habitation with the Earth, signs of disturbance in its system, as well as scales and distribution of environmental change in relation to human histories are debated afresh. While stratigraphers seek evidence to make the formal case for a new unit in the geological timescale, the Anthropocene narrative fuels wider debates on the succession and distribution of products and by-products of

consumption: forms of minerals, such as glasses and plastics, as well as ‘rock types’, such as concrete, bricks or heterogeneous conglomerates of waste products. The by-products of changing resource uses are environmental phenomena such as climate change, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss and species migration.

Different disciplines have their own methodologies for observing environmental changes and for recording them, whether through empirical descriptions, data analysis, computational modelling or the tracing of historical relations between humans and the environment. However, contemporary artists have created their own methodologies for the investigation of the Anthropocene. They work at the intersections between the natural sciences and the social sciences in order to make the Anthropocene visible, tangible and palpable. In this essay, I explore contemporary art practices as part of a process of constructing and transforming knowledge about the world—a world in which we are immersed and which we seek to represent. I am specifically interested in exploring how the Anthropocene proposition can function as a lens through which we can read and understand contemporary artists’ practices.

BERGIT ARENDS

Considering the Anthropocene and art together provides a rich field of enquiry to ask new questions about our relationship with nature through the work of environmentally engaged artists, collaborations, curatorial processes, exhibitions and public formats. In broad terms, art projects focusing on the environment using specific methods have their origins in the environmental art of the 1960s and 1970s. Ecological and environmental works can take a wide variety of forms, reflecting diverse approaches to nature and society. Such forms encompass spatially oriented and site-specific projects using natural materials as in the land and environmental art movements, and owe much to conceptual artistic practice — e.g. the dematerialization of the art object and the interest in methods and systems — much of which is reprised in current contemporary artworks. Currently many art projects draw on subjective and collaborative practices to visualise, to perform, to embody and to materialise observations of environmental change. Artistic engagements with the environment often create a sense of complexity through an emphasis on scale, the material qualities of place and subjective experience.

The age of the Anthropocene is in this essay understood as a field of debate initiated by the arguments about global environmental change and the need for sustainable environmental management advocated in the early millennium by atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer. Many histories of ecology and of environmental ideas over the last two decades have revealed that environmental concepts and practices themselves are entangled with wider

social and political matters, including imperial politics. For example in Southern Africa the conservation of nature in the early 20th century was linked to creating distinct settler identities. The preservation of landscapes as national parks became equated with the preservation of a national identity by the Dutch or English. The white settlers identified with the land, but not with the people who had dwelt on the land before their arrival. Wildlife conservation served to consolidate white domination over the black majority population.¹

Equally, the studies of ecology and the environment also concede that in the modern era human influence on nature is so pervasive that a distinction between the non-human and the human world now appears unrealistic. The natural environment around us has become an emergent product of human organisation. Thus in the Anthropocene literature, nature emerges as shaped and moulded both by intentional and unintentional human interventions — it is an essential part of human history.

The scientific debate on the Anthropocene in the Earth sciences places humans centre stage within the Earth system. But there are at least two Anthropocenes: one in the sciences, one in the humanities. I am focusing here on two themes of the Anthropocene that originate in the humanities: the cultural problem of human-environmental and secondly, the problem of human-to-non-human species relations. The first problem on human-environment relations is the vast historical perspective of the Anthropocene, bringing together the long timeframe of evolution in natural history and human history. How can humans perceive how these histories are

¹ R. Guha, *Environmentalism: a global history*, New York, Harlow: Longman, 2000.

intertwined? Human observers cannot easily perceive the gradual erosion of a mountain, but we can detect the fall of a rock. Technology can support us in observing gradual, long-term changes. Humans can remember species that are now extinct. One example of a species that has become extinct within living memory is the Passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*). The death of the last of its kind, Martha, is recorded as being around 1pm on 1 September 1914. Humans hunted the species to extinction. In reference to species extinction, for example, social scientist Bruno Latour asks, ‘How can we simultaneously be part of such a long history and yet be so late in realizing what has happened?’² This narrative calls for a consideration of evidence and historical perspective. The implication of the Anthropocene is to consider natural history and human history together, but now with an explicit awareness of human agency causing change.

Some of the phenomena of environmental change associated with the age of the Anthropocene are invisible, difficult to detect for the human observer or, as historian Dipesh Chakrabarty expresses it, are at the limits of history, so that we might only experience the effects but not the whole phenomenon.³ Nature writer Robert Macfarlane echoes this by saying: ‘If the Anthropocene can be said to “take place”, it does so across huge scales of space and vast spans of time, from nanometers to planets, and from picoseconds to aeons. . . . Its energies are interactive, its properties emergent and its structures withdrawn’.⁴ Artistic practices can enquire into the history and magnitude of human impacts upon landscapes and ecosystems, by adopting planetary-scale methodologies and by making locally-based studies. A key trope of the Anthropocene is to offer a reading of our present time that is a complex layering of historic events, be these in biological, geological or indeed human time. This layering can be observed in the

- 2 Bruno Latour cited in Y. Orr, J. S. Lansing and M. R. Dove, ‘Environmental anthropology: systemic perspectives’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 44(1), 2015, pp. 153–168.
- 3 D. Chakrabarty, ‘The climate of history: four theses’, *Critical Inquiry*, 35(2), 2009, pp. 197–222.
- 4 R. Macfarlane, ‘Generation Anthropocene: how humans have altered the planet for ever’, *The Guardian*, 1 April 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-or-ever>
- 5 H. Raffles, *In Amazonia: a natural history*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 7.
- 6 See for example works by Ursula Biemann and Elizabeth Ogilvie who worked with Inuit people in Ilulissat, North West Greenland or the visual artists working in urban settings in Lagos, Nigeria as part of the fourth platform in the 2002 Documenta 11 curated by Okwui Enwezor.
- 7 T. Morton, *Ecology without nature: rethinking environmental aesthetics*, Cambridge, Mass, London, Harvard University Press, 2007.

environments we inhabit. In his 2002 book about the Amazon regions, the richness of its different peoples, its great diversity of animal and plant species, anthropologist Hugh Raffles describes nature as dynamic and heterogeneous, constantly shaped by cultural, historical, biological, geographical, political, physical, aesthetic and social factors. Such nature, he writes, ‘calls for a natural history, an articulation of natures and histories that work across and against spatial and temporal scale to bring people, places, and the non-human into “our space” of the present’.⁵ The role of the human in relation to the environment is understood in Raffles’ work not just as an actual or potential agent of change, but also in emotional and ethical terms. This approach connects anthropological methodologies to those of ecosystem science. In parallel ways, anthropological scholars have created relational methodologies to study the human within its environment. Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank in her 2005 study *Do glaciers listen?* reminds us that nature is a tangible, physical world in which there is reciprocity between humans and landscape. As the landscape shapes social relations, nature itself is a category of social analysis entangled with class, race and gender.

Anthropologists’ empirical work uses local, often indigenous, affective accounts of the environment and its agency. Many artists now emulate such anthropological methods and work with indigenous peoples within their environments.⁶ Often these artists cast themselves as archivists and defenders of a disappearing world. The concept of the Anthropocene and global environmental change is closely allied to other concepts of the future and prediction from the sciences, economy or futures studies and it links our sense of the now to the current planetary crisis. The scenarios imagined by artists have come to play a role in how we understand and perceive risk, and how these might affect us

by inhabiting moods of anxiety, catastrophe and concerns about the life our planet sustains. The second problem is the question: What is nature? Central to Western European thought is the idea of nature as simultaneously an ontological backdrop for human activity, a stage, and also as a resource to be exploited economically. The idea of modernity is often defined in opposition to nature or, more specifically, as the beginning of controlling nature. Across many humanities disciplines, nature is thought of as more or less an ‘arbitrary rhetorical construct’, as Timothy Morton would put it.⁷ Narrative forms, representations, belief systems and systems of natural knowledge, it is often argued, have much less to do with nature than with human discourses about nature, how to study and how to represent it.

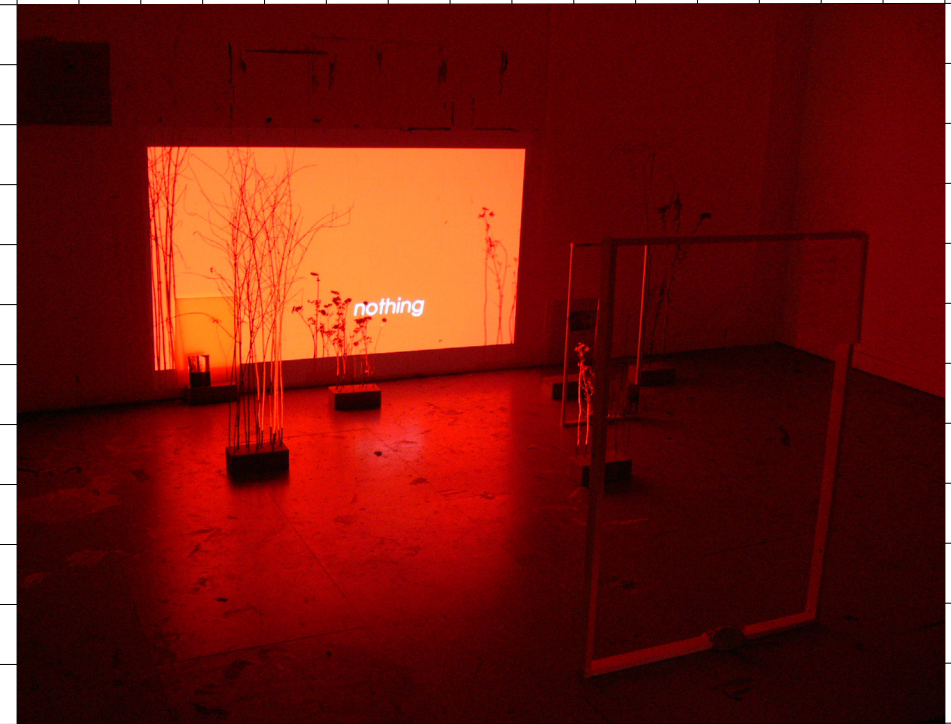
Thus this key problem, developed by a range of thinkers, shapes the Anthropocene concept as a ‘post-nature’ narrative, attempting a new spirit of modernity, based on hybridist, relational and connectionist categories. Cultural historian Donna Haraway talks of the ‘co-becoming’ for us to re-think and re-imagine species relations and human-nature relations in which the human is not an exceptional species. The proposition of the Anthropocene expresses shared concerns around which the sciences, the arts and humanities converge. In addressing a shared environmental concern, such as climate change or biodiversity loss, cross-disciplinary work can give rise to new forms of aesthetic, material and political practices that enable experimentation and sites of encounter and collaboration. Exhibitions of artists’ works can prompt a re-thinking of species relations and can make us better attuned to the life worlds of other species. The sites of encounter for such transformation can be found in the environment itself — like the forest where human histories are entangled with trees — or in the spaces of the laboratory or an archive.

ANNABEL DUGGLEBY



Annabel Duggleby's practice employs film, installation and sculpture to address issues of landscape and power, engaging with the politics of mobility and how the regulation of space, movement and natural resources affects all of our lives.

Through her work *Ex Nihilo*, Annabel explores the commodification and objectification of nature, looking at two historical narratives: that of Victorian plant hunters, who travelled the world to find exotic plants for Britain's burgeoning nurseries; alongside the more modern practice of seed patenting used by large agricultural companies to protect the intellectual property rights of their genetically modified seed varieties. The work comprises of a video piece combining original and found footage, still images and writing, installed amongst real plants and wooden constructions inspired by the Oudolf Field at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, where the artist undertook a residency in 2017.



Ex Nihilo, 2017-18
Video with sound and mixed
media installation



Tree Radio, 2015
Mixed media

Whispering trees, 2016
Radiophonic installation



MAGZ HALL



Magz Hall is a sound, radio artist and co-founder of Radio Arts, exploring the artistic potential of radio and its use outside of conventional settings. Magz's work re-engages with a sense of technological enchantment so intrinsic to the early radio experiments that make up part of her research interests.

Whispering Trees is an interactive trail of radio transmissions, originally designed for Bedgebury National Forest as part of research and development for Jerwood Open Forest, where members of the public would record dreams to be broadcast from the trees in a wooden hideaway. *Dream Space 2* creates an intimate space used to listen to and record the dreams of visitors around the themes of earth, air, fire and water.

NANA MAIOLINI

Working across multiple media including film, performance and sound, Nana Maiolini's practice investigates the non-consensual perception of territories which are obscured by hegemonic images, memories and discourses.

During her residency at Joya: arte + ecología, Nana witnessed the severe process of desertification in the Sierra de María-Los Vélez Natural Park and was inspired by the dried natural objects such as roots, flowers, and leaves 'frozen' into sculptural shapes. Back to her studio, the artist crushed these lifeless sculptures until the point they lost their original form. The sharp sound of this reverse process, called by Nana 'des-sculpturing', is used as her subtle sonic intervention within the landscape, where the sound of dryness resembles both fire and rain. These small acts of destruction were performed both as a protest against unsustainable activities that lead to natural disasters and as an act of hope for humankind's resilience in the face of climate change.



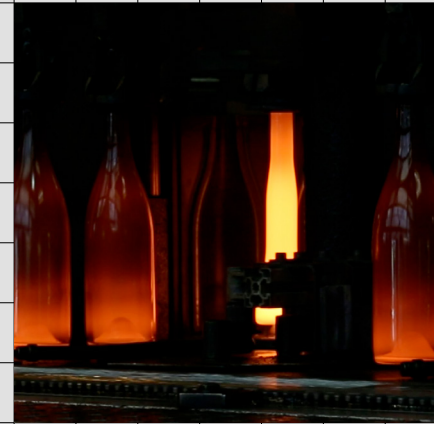
Steal Life, 2018
Video installation on
loop with sound

NOEMI NIEDERHAUSER

Developed during her residency at Berengo Glass Studio in Murano, Italy, *Melting for you* aims to amplify the idea of cycles through which every man-made created object and element goes, a continuous process of: transformation/transition/dissolution/evolution. It involves the creation of lamps out of overlooked materials: empty glass bottles sourced from the city of Venice that were re-blown into new shapes and adorned with some metal structures. The video traces the journey, history and ecology of glass as a material from sand to manufactured objects and back again into a recycling process.

Special thanks to Vetropack S.A, St.Prex CH, Blitz Savoye S.A, Sion CH, Berengo Studio, Murano Italy

Noemi Niederhauser's projects are concerned with transcribing and reassembling cultural artefacts in order to create disruptive narratives. Noemi's work encompasses ethnographic, historical and archeological discourses. Her site-specific installations aim to challenge historical and scientific narratives – proposing new systems of exchange and modes of interpretation.



Melting for you, 2017
Video with sound, 13'6" and
blown glass, stainless steel,
170 x 110 x 70 cm



MATT PARKER



Matt Parker is an audiovisual composer and sound artist working with, and producing archives that amplify hidden connections between every-day technology and the environment. His work is influenced by the sonosphere, unsound, ecology, the economy of noise, critical media infrastructures and sonic ontologies of the Anthropocene.



Electrostatic Borderlands, 2017
Stereo sound on loop
(research images)



His sound piece *Electrostatic Borderlands* is a long durational soundscape recording based on material the artist collected during his residency at Joya: arte + ecología in Spain. The 'natural' sound is combined with the interference sounds caused by a phone searching for signal, creating a dystopian environment, inspired by the artist's reference to the science fiction novel *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel.

MATTEO VALERIO

Matteo Valerio is interested in investigating the boundaries between the artisan and the artist. In his practice, the relationship between each material and process resonates the tension between traditional artisan practices and the frenetic pace of contemporary production.

The new body of works, including *In Out from a Bore Possibility* and *Nomadic Desire of a Cochineal*, was initiated during the artist's residency at Fondazione Zegna in Italy. Immersed in the natural environment of the Italian Alps, Matteo experimented with the use of locally sourced natural elements, while inspired by the historical textile archive at Zegna.

With his work, the artist seeks to relate fine art with craft and design in a dialogue between environmental issues and contemporary lifestyles, using natural dyes and raw materials.



In Out from a Bore Possibility, 2017
Doors, windows, beds, alpaca wool, printed cotton, onion and red beetroot dyes. Frame made using recycled wood from the streets of London
211 x 121 cm

Nomadic Desire of a Cochineal, 2017
Cochineal, wood and turmeric natural dyes on hand printed alpaca and cotton.
Supports in clay and fabrics. Frame made using recycled wood from council houses across London
281 x 166 cm

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