

antennae

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vegetal
entanglements

Raksha Patel: Air Heads

This series of works explore ideas of renewal and decay. We are presented with oval shaped paintings; works that mirror the size of our faces, whilst challenging the traditions of portraiture. Heads are replaced with a variety of leaves, each bearing antromorphic qualities. These images have been inspired through looking at historic ceiling paintings that draw our attention to activity taking place in the heavens, however in this series grandeur is brought back to Earth with a bump. The paintings depict the ordinariness of our everyday; species of plant have been re-titled, using names that we are familiar with. Collectively they question notions of contemporary culture, consumerism and ideas of climate change.

text and images by **Raksha Patel**

Time. There is never enough of it. We all think about time, find ways to short-cut it, strategies to gain it, attempt to buy ourselves more in a bid to defy it. Like the white rabbit in Alice, we can find ourselves in a complex warren of tangible and intangible spaces that challenge us and in turn slow us down.

This series of paintings make notes of time. Fleeting moments are painted in high definition-technicolor, nature magnified, making what is humanly impossible to see by the naked eye, possible. These glorified fragments of trees capture moments frozen in time, a still, life that has stopped momentarily, like the pause button on a film allowing us to glimpse the flurry of leaves that rush by us in a whirlwind.

Stop, look and see... at what is being said...

and pause to reflect upon oval-shaped paintings that mirror the size of our faces, that reveal what we might not want to see in ourselves. We see the intricately painted, colourful details of leaves that fold, curl, and shy away from us. Paradoxically they stand proud, with wisdom coursing through their tiny veins, knowledge accrued over a season. What have these leaves experienced? Was it the warmth of the rising sun? Or the stories that they have heard spoken by parakeets? Leaves know more than we do.

Myrtle! The starry-eyed flower of love...

This leaf is not Myrtle, but what's in a name anyway? Smothered in age-defying anti-wrinkle cream Myrtle proudly glistens in the imperial evening light, the purplish hue surrounding her frail grey ghostly body. She tippi-toes across wispy flames, passing by our faces as we think about what we might eat for dinner. Who was Myrtle? Did she know who she was herself? The light imbues the extremities of this leaf; whilst its centrality appears chocolaty solid and seemingly permanent like an evergreen. The season trundles past as the evenings draw in close, limiting the light that we have at this time.

Those Gemini twins Edward and Edgar should wait for us, they move way too



Raksha Patel

Edward and Edgar,
Acrylic on canvas, 2014
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p. 66
Ya-Te-Veo, Acrylic on canvas,
2015 © Raksha Patel

p.67
The Party Pooper,
Acrylic on canvas, 2015
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fast. Rustling through the sky as they move, babbling and chattering to each other in their crinkly language that is so hard to decipher. Have plants always spoken a different language to us? What are they saying (or praying) as they twist and vine their way up to the heavens? The twins are unruly, like two loose cannons, they do as they please, letting the flow of the wind guide their skeletal bodies as they ecologically travel the skies. We will never know what conversations they had, but at a guess, I reckon that they argued about the truth of blue skies and the fact that sometimes, unbeknown to plants, it is tinged with a sulphuric yellow. You can never hide a painful smile.

Plants and flowers grow everywhere we only need to look. We open our eyes to see the sprawling mass of glass and concrete structures pervading the small green spaces of the city, filling up every patch of the picnic area. Yet plants and flowers don't complain, they establish their roots making these giant monstrosities their homes. Perhaps we too should live more like plants do, move towards the light, rise, and just get on with things.

That said, I am not sure that we should liken *all* plant nature to the way that we live as human beings. Definitely, not in the case of Ya-Te-Veo, the carnivorous plant that consumes the flesh of man or whoever has had the misfortune to cross its path. This plant has love. It also loves to eat, and its desire is abundant, just like living in a world where the feeling of satisfaction is discouraged, and we are enticed to devour more and more. The warm glow of the palette in this painting reflects upon desire, as well as a fire that continues to burn with fuel that is added to it. The two leaves are entwined at the hips in an embrace. Caught in a web, their love becomes an obsession; they consume each other's identities whilst becoming fictions of their true selves.

The anthropomorphic quality of these paintings encourages us to draw parallels between the human body and plants. They have been inspired by historic ceiling paintings that draw our attention to activity taking place in the heavens, bringing grandeur back to Earth with a bump. They question the traditions of portraiture by replacing heads with leaves. Exploring notions of time, decay and renewal may appear melancholic, removing our importance as humans, separating us from the world of plants. However, the paintings also are a celebration of the free spirit found in nature. The leaves have been painted in a manner that isn't prettified in order to satisfy us aesthetically, but for us to question our place in the environment taking us out of pots of thinking that we might be rooted in.

Time-based trees: A sequel to animated aesthetics

*In Cyprian Gaillard's (*1980) 3D film Nightlife (2015) trees play the leading role. Especially in the context of video art, trees are not sculptures, because they grow and are no immobilized dead artefacts. In this paper I argue regarding the agency of the trees, that they perform an animated aesthetics. Anticipating the popularity of trees in Western philosophy the Hollywood Junipers' dancing undermines that tradition. Instead of being displayed as entities representing hierarchic structures with a crown, a trunk, and roots, the delicate waving of the twisted shoots with their needle-like leaves tells a different story.*

words by **Martin Bartelmus**

images by **Cyprian Gaillard**

In Cyprian Gaillard's 3D film *Nightlife* (2015) plants play the leading role. This video work's outstanding characteristic is the combination of 3D visuality like cutting edge imaging techniques and drones as well as auditory echo and reverberation effects. Filmed over the course of two years in Cleveland, Los Angeles and Berlin, the film was shown at Gaillard's exhibition *Where Nature Runs Riot*. The title refers to the artists interest in the obstinacy of objects and nonhuman entities, in the destruction and deconstruction of architecture and the re-conquest of cultural habitats by nonhuman agents like plants. The Film consists of four parts. This essay focuses the second part. In the second Part an extraordinary tree is the significant agent. Therefore, follows a short summary of the three remaining parts.

In the first part of the time-based media art piece August Rodin's sculpture *Thinker* at the Cleveland Museum in the United States is the center of attention. The sculpture was damaged in the 1970s by the leftist underground organization The Weatherman as a protest against the Vietnam war.¹ The camera shows a close up of the destroyed sculpture. By retreating, the camera slowly gives a full view on the statue. The third part shows a firework over Berlin's *Olympiastadion* as a fascinating and colorful outburst. Those fireworks belong to the festival *Pyronale* where the fireworks industry shows their new products. An absurd ecological and economical symbol for the capitalist society burning down and celebrating their new "developments". But this happens in the Nazi-architecture of the *Olympiastadion* "designed by Werner March for Adolf Hitler's 1936 XIth Olympic Games."² The last part stars an oak tree, which was given Jesse Owens by the German Olympic Committee for winning at the Olympic Games mentioned above. "As a *natural monument* to resilience"³ trees seem to be a special interest in Gaillard's work. Hence, in many artworks, trees become the leading agents of subverting politics and ideology, economic and social contradictions.

The second part on which this essay is focused, shows the Hollywood Juniper in urban and industrial sites in Los Angeles. A little over two minutes into the film, the camera moves up to give view to two trees flanking a barred gate. The trees sway in the wind and seem to protect what is behind the gate. The viewer sees them in a close up, as if the film meant to introduce them. After three and a half minutes, an abandoned tree is filmed in front of a small wall with barbed wire on top. After six minutes, we see trees swaying wildly against a fence in a close up supported by a stroboscopic effect and booming music. The

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Selected exhibitions include: *Stellatus Re-Visited*, Site Gallery (2019) *The Summer Exhibition*, The Royal Academy of Arts (2019) *Florilegium*, The Royal College of Physicians (2018) *Uproot*, The South London Botanical Institute (2018) *Inside Job*, Tate Modern (2018) *Painting Now*, Studio One Gallery, London (2017) *Lives, Loves and Loss*, Traces at National Trust, Fenton House (2016) *The Trouble with Painting Today*, Pump House Gallery (2015) *Forget-Me-Knot*, Pitzhanger Manor Gallery (2013), *We were Trying to Make Sense*, 1 Shantiroad, Bangalore (2013) *Jerwood Drawing Prize*, Jerwood Gallery (2011) *The Mausoleum of Lost Objects*, inIVA - Rivington Space (2008) *The Redemptive Beauty of Life After Death*, The Bonnington Gallery (2007) *Visions in the Nunnery*, The Nunnery Gallery (2006) and *Creative Connections*, Whitechapel Gallery (2005). She works as an artist-educator/lecturer at Tate Modern and Camberwell College of Arts.

