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18.04 2024 15.06 2024

Futur antérieur. Missing What Will Be Missed

↘ Opening on **April 18** at 6 pm

↘ The gallery is open from Tuesday to Saturday from noon to 5 pm

Marte Aas, Zheng Bo, Maja Ray Borg, Katya Buchatska, Enar de Dios Rodríguez, Duke & Battersby, Masako Miyazaki, OK Pedersen, Karine Savard

The feeling is already palpable. In the near future, we'll miss what we've missed: what we've neglected will take shape as the desire to recover what now belongs to the past. The anticipation of this future, or the drive towards it, writes the past into the present, infusing the present with nostalgia. This nostalgia, for both the past and the future, involves projecting a constructed image upon another: an image cultivated from the romantic hope of refinding a bygone era.

Futur antérieur. Missing What Will Be Missed, brings together works by ten local, Canadian, and international artists to address notions of futurity concerning the ecological crisis—or, perhaps more precisely, faced with the evidence that everything is interconnected, the paradox of being as much haunted by a presumably failed future as we are by our past.

This exhibition differentiates itself from many others by exploring how artists might represent such ideas without

aestheticizing collected information, documentation, or appropriated scientific methods. Rather, incidences where concepts of representation and romanticization merge or, conversely, clash, are examined. Stretched between realism and idealism, questions are raised about how to project ourselves into the future when the present—and, of course, the past—are beyond us.

Marte Aas, *What I Miss About People, and What I Don't Miss About People* (2017)

This video work depicts a future where there are no longer any humans. Amidst a landscape of industrial ruin, a lone dog roams as she contemplates the world that used to be, prosaically listing that which she misses and that which she does not.

How ought a domesticated animal, once subjugated and now wild, judge the reign and collapse of humankind? Perhaps accusatorily? Or, maybe



© Zheng Bo, *The Political Life of Plants 1 & 2* (2020-2023). Courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue.

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forlornly? Nostalgic yet unromantic, the dog's banal observations on human life are surprisingly detached: demoting the animal's best friend from protagonist to supporting character. Such suggests that the Anthropocene was a relatively unremarkable phase in the planet's history, and ultimately encourages a shift in perspective as to the hierarchy of all things—living or otherwise. Incisively, the work reminds us that absence imparts us with the importance of beings and things. That is, depending on whether or not we miss them.

Courtesy of Filmform.

Zheng Bo, *The Political Life of Plants 1 & 2* (2020-2023)

The work frames a portrait of Grumsin, an ancient beech forest in Brandenburg, Germany, which is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Barely visible amidst the trees, the artist converses with two scientists, first with Matthias Rillig, specializing in biodiversity and soil ecology, then Roosa Laitinen, who investigates plant adaptation. Contemplating how the adaptation and symbiosis exhibited in plant behavior can be considered political, the artist speculates that in the face of climate crises, humans might look to plant intelligence for solutions. Whereas science seeks to extrapolate causality by isolating factors, plants can integrate complex relationships with their environment. Whereas human innovations favor short-term effects and rapidity, plants develop systems over unfathomably long and slow periods.

This conversation is captured at a distance so that the two humans are miniscule within the greatness of the forest. They stroll across the frame with a slowness that steps in time with plant life. In between conversations, the camera zooms in on

the forest plants, capturing tensions through a play of perspective and accumulation of intensities. In some ways, these images dramatize the plants' movement to an anthropomorphic effect, felt, however, as empathetic rather than voyeuristic, more equal than extractive. The artist's experimental approach is likewise an extension of his thought exercise. Even if the behavior of plants is not necessarily political, Zheng Bo's rhizomatic questioning addresses ontologies considered utterly fundamental. Even survival—the impetus through which plant and human evolution are understood—is questioned. What if there were something entirely Other driving life?

Maja Ray Borg, *Ottica Zero* (2007)

At the moment her professional success started, Italian actress Nadya Cazan disappeared from the public eye. Movie offers were flooding in but she couldn't bring herself to participate in a system that would make her into a product. Maja Ray Borg's *Ottica Zero* follows Nadya in her endeavor to find an alternative way of living, a way that would bring her closer to humanity and herself. Through this quest, she meets a 91-year-old futurist and inventor named Jacques Fresco. Nadya and Fresco's primary critique is of the monetary system and how it prevents people from advancing and sharing ideas. As technology moves into the future, social ideas do not.

Their story ignites an intrigue with what it means to think outside of the logic dictated by society and history: the test of character and intellectual leap required to see the possibility of a future that is utterly different than the present. While the film feels fictive, it's not. Steeped in a visual ambience of nostalgia, retrofuturist archives and Super 8 images portray their idealist

views as though from another time—and yet they are contemporary. In this way, the characters’ ideas seem to inhabit the thin slice of reality that can paradoxically only exist within fictive or utopic constructions.

Courtesy of Filmform.

Katya Buchatska, *This World is Recording* (2023)

In her video essay, the artist reflects on how land remembers tragedy and violence, referring specifically to her home country, Ukraine. Her analysis follows a camera as it surveys a devastated landscape, perforated with craters left by bombings, then moving into a dense chaos of bushes before emerging onto a 3D rendering of farmland and a forest—a future, possibly? Wondering what kinds of remembering and forgetting might best serve the future, she proposes that a tree be planted in each crater and that this might serve as a living memorial.

When we think of the connection between war and land, the latter is usually considered in geopolitical terms rather than ecological terms, and yet ecosystems, soil, and harvests are all afflicted. In turn, political ecology impacts history. If, as the artist suggests, there is no language for atrocity, and memorials fail to safeguard against the repetition of violence, then a food garden might at least serve as something concrete to lose.

Enar de Dios Rodríguez, *Ecotone* (2022)

Throughout six chapters—or six phone calls—an ambiguous speaker traces history, reciting examples of the planned disappearance of land, people, and species. It’s uncertain whether this narrator has dialed in from the future or if their voice is contemporaneous. A stream

of shifting visual materials observes the infrastructures onto which images of land are grafted. Dissecting images into categories in the way that lands are reduced to unembodied cartographies, it becomes transparent how different forms of separation and removal are deployed by biocapitalism and surveillance capitalism. In a regimen where “for culture to begin, nature needs to end,” the camera does not, for example, capture blackened stick bugs camouflaged amid charred earth. Nor does an aerial view of the Amazon, chart the people who once lived and labored on that land.

Emily Vey Duke & Cooper Battersby, *Civil Twilight at the Vernal Equinox* (2021)

The artists imagine a future in which teenage scientists have discovered how to harvest environmentally friendly energy from emotion—a process optimized through exposure to cuteness. Their discoveries are trolled by an opponent who wishes to invalidate the premise of their findings, denying the possibility of a science where “consumption and extraction are linked by delight.”

The artists extract such emotion from the viewers by activating an endocrinal experience mirroring the one they describe, deploying a series of irresistible images of kittens coupled with catchy, uplifting music. Time-lapse, a particularly emotionally triggering way to treat images, is used to capture a kind of life-cycle of *nature morte* compositions: frozen twigs and flowers, animal body parts, and curious slimes all growing, wilting, decaying, and all bound to one another as in real-life ecosystems. Here, melting ice hints at the not-so-futuristic disappearance of the planet’s ice caps, creating tension between the alluring depictions of nature’s beauty and the emergence of eco-anxiety as a development in that visual language. Hovering, likewise, throughout the work is a questioning of presumed connections between morality and nature.

**Masako Miyazaki, *A Piece of Stone*
(2019-2022)**

This artist pieces together a story through a series of photographs documenting Tōno, a rural town in northern Japan to which she has returned several times. The story is inspired by one of the town's many legends about a mysterious half-man, half-monkey named Futtachi. In her version, Miyazaki attaches the disappearance of a real-life monkey named Muku to the disappearance of a friend, here named Y. While Muku is assumed to have been stranded on the mainland after a typhoon sunk a sand passage, Y is said to have disappeared to the forest in Tōno after being threatened by the company for whom he worked. These anecdotes are linked by themes of power and hierarchy, bound to mourning, labour, and land.

Told from the points of view of Muku, a stone, and a tornado, the story does not adhere to human-centered logic or linearity. Many pieces in the story are missing, especially with the abbreviated selection of the series shown in the present exhibition. Nevertheless, those gaps and their mystery evoke the affects that bring them together, and that ultimately describe the complexities of eco-anxiety; that is, anger, recovered by fleeting hope but tail-ended by grief, whether past or anticipated.

OK Pedersen, *La salle d'attente [The Waiting Room]* (2024)

In this fictional documentary, present-day Nation borders have collapsed into vast privatized housing complexes. Epitomizing advanced capitalism's financialization and incarceration, the citizens of "Condo World" live in a so-called dream where it's illegal and punishable to leave. The "real" outside is uninhabitable—likely due to ecological devastation—and curiously, unseeable. Both

incarceration and holiday travel entail the same virtual escape into a world where nothing can be acted upon. On the occasion of such a virtual holiday, the narrator loses her sister—or, possibly, the sister loses herself.

Folding together loneliness and inaction, Pedersen implies a certain ineptitude of seeing, suggesting that "even in dreams, it is easier to describe what we saw than what we did." A barrage of found TV clips, cell phone videos, and Super 8 footage conjugate temporalities, saying so much but perhaps still too little—as in, too little, too late.

**Karine Savard, *Sauvegarde [Backup]*
(2024)**

In the 1970s, feminist activists brought attention to the unpaid labor of domestic work and tasks related to care, protesting that this mostly gendered workforce deserved to be valued and recognized for its indispensable role in the health and education of society and by extension, the economy. Still today, even when paid, care work often entails poor conditions including low salaries and excessively long hours.

In *Sauvegarde*, Savard employs the billboard as a medium to reflect on such social movement campaigns and to bring attention to present-day digital labor, which is to similar degrees, domestic, invisible, under-considered, and unpaid. For example, crowdsourced tasks, sometimes called "artificial artificial intelligence", involve executing a kind of parenting or cleanup of digital environments. Even simple clicks or uploads on any Internet platform are monetized, under the guise that such tasks are voluntary, recreational, self-expressive, and social.

Sauvegarde questions what has been lost between the optimism of the web's beginnings, which promised democratic spaces managed by communities, and today's reality where corporations monopolize control. The work's materiality, embodied by layers of paper, is also a reminder that despite its apparent dematerialization, digital activity generates concrete mental and ecological pollution, altering precious human faculties while discreetly contributing to the climate crisis.

Bios of the artists on [our website](#).

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An exhibition prepared for Dazibao by France Choinière with the collaboration of Emma-Kate Guimond and the participation of Saskia Morgan. Dazibao thanks the artists and Filmform for their generous collaboration as well as its advisory programming committee for its support.

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Dazibao acknowledges that it is located on the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation and that Tiohtiá:ke / Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations, and today, is home to a diverse population of Indigenous as well as other peoples. Guided by ethics of respect, listening, and awareness, Dazibao commits to a continued reflection regarding the deep-rooted and systemic challenges tied to accessibility and inclusivity in the arts and beyond, and endeavors to apply such reflections to all aspects of its activities and governance.