EXTRACTED
Mary Mattingly | Otobong Nkanga | Claire Pentecost | David Zink Yi | Marina Zurkow

August 22–December 10, 2016, USF Contemporary Art Museum
In 2000, Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen set off a chain reaction when he called for our current geological epoch to be labeled “the Anthropocene” as a reflection of changes wrought by humans on the environment. The concept of choosing a new epoch during our lifetimes—the most recent, the Holocene, has lasted for 11,700 years since the last ice age—is mind-bending. Rarely is such obscure bureaucratic business freighted with such outsized existential consequence. Appropriately, debate about the concept has been rigorous within the scientific community at large and the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, which is expected to issue a proposal on how the term should be used scientifically (namely, whether it should indicate a new epoch or a lesser “age,” and when the period began) in 2016.

In the meantime, the term Anthropocene has been embraced with open arms in cultural circles, where it resonates deeply as shorthand for a variety of anthropogenic processes and impacts—changes in land, sea and sky caused by agriculture, urbanization, colonization, industrialization and global warming. Signs of the time, just a few out of many, include widespread species extinction, atmospheric pollution from fossil fuel combustion, changes in soil chemistry due to commercial fertilizers, and the omnipresence of plastics in the environment. The term “Anthropocene,” with its root anthropos or “man,” proffers an opportunity for responsibility taking that might engender political will. We did this. Now what? But some scholars have argued that not all humans have participated equally, proposing alternatives such as Capitalocene (invoked by Jason W. Moore and Donna Haraway) to reflect the proposed epoch’s roots in interrelated systems of humans, nature, power and profit.

The exhibition Extracted is motivated by a particular anthropogenic tendency: the extraction and circulation of natural resources around the globe. This reflexive tapping of value can be seen not only in the complex technical processes behind oil drilling, mining or industrial agriculture, for example, but also in the ways in which we understand our relationships to our own labor and to other people. Recall the department of “human resources.”) Extraction has a well-established place in the evolution of humans’ ability to manipulate their putatively external environment with tools, which turn shape humankind’s ability to imagine how to interact with that environment. Taking value out, rather than putting value in, is a hard habit to break.

This is where artists come in. “Art, really, is an engagement with the ways our practices, techniques, and technologies organize us, and it is, finally, a way to understand our organization and, inevitably, to reorganize ourselves,” writes Alva Noë in his book Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature. In the Anthropocene, we need the strange tools of art more than ever.

In Extracted, Mary Mattingly models the perspective of a critical participant in global capitalism. She binds her personal possessions—books, clothing, even electronics and furniture—into sculptural bundles that invite viewers to consider everyday objects, their lives and their entwinement with ours. Mattingly incorporates these sculptures into performances and photographs that draw connections between our belongings and the materials and labor used to produce them. These connections are traced closely in the Internet archive Own-It, where Mattingly researches and writes biographical narratives for her possessions, illuminating the often obscure origins of everyday things and their complex journeys from factory to household. Through her practice, she explores the labor of ownership and attachment that consumers are expected to perform with little regard for its impact on others.

Otobong Nkanga’s works examine ideas around land and the value connected to natural resources, particularly in connection to Africa. The video Remains of the Green Hill shows a spontaneous performance by Nkanga at the historic Tsumeb mine in Northern Namibia, a vast natural hill of green, oxidized copper ore and dozens of other minerals, depleted by decades of mining. The video is paired with audio of her interview with the last managing director of the mine, which was established in 1907 under German colonial rule and closed in 1996. (The mine has since reopened under the name Ongopolo.) The director’s account of mining activities conjures a picture of advancement and discovery, rather than one of profit and exploitation, illuminating the power of perspective to shape history and landscape.

In the large-scale tapestry The Weight of Scars, Nkanga draws a barren, fragmented landscape populated by two figures resembling marionettes. The multiple, multi-colored limbs of the figures suggest an amalgam of generations crossing race and nationality who shape the land. The figures guide a pipeline through the woven landscape, which is punctuated by Nkanga’s black-and-white photographs of a scorched landscape.

David Zink Yi transports viewers underground into the depths of a gold and silver mine in the southern Andes of Peru, near Ayacucho, where laborers endure ear-splitting conditions.
His 81-minute, two-channel video installation, The Strangers, presents an unsettling juxtaposition of spaces: a dark, subterranean realm of pulverized rock and a silent overhead landscape of otherworldly natural beauty. Learning that the destruction of one ton of rock yields approximately one gram of gold and 23 grams of silver prompts the question, why do we destroy so much for so little? The visceral, physically imposing quality of Zink Yi’s installation draws a viewer into this conundrum with full-body empathy.

Marina Zurkow’s Petroleum Manga invites us to consider the ubiquity of petroleum-based products, from textile fibers to plastic containers, in contemporary life. Her series of digital illustrations, a selection of which are presented on monumental-scale banners inside the museum as well as on its exterior walls, draws inspiration from the Hokusaï Manga. Produced by Japanese artist Hokusaï (1760-1849) as an encyclopedic reference, the fifteen volume Manga includes illustrations of human figures, animals, natural objects and everyday scenes. Zurkow adopts the simplified form of Hokusai’s drawings to depict items made with specific petrochemicals including PVC, PET, polycarbonate, propylene glycol, polyurethane, ammonia, nylon and paraffin, revealing the flexibility and pervasiveness of such substances in objects ranging from credit cards to food additives.

Neogeo is a QuickTime capture of animations created by Zurkow in collaboration with Daniel Shiffman, co-creator of a software sketchbook program called Processing. The animations represent the work of an oil drill as it penetrates through an infinite series of geological layers, here composed of tiny bits of hand-drawn rock that are animated by programming code written in accordance with rules of physics and the formation of strata. An oil gush occurs when conditions are right.

Claire Pentecost’s multipart project soil-erg proposes soil as a unit of currency. The project consists of three parts: a sculptural installation of ingots made from organic compost (soil “gold” bars); a series of money bill drawings that feature under-sung soil heroes including scientists, political activists, philosophers, artists and creatures; and an off-site installation of vertical planters at local community gardens. First exhibited at dOCUMENTA(13) in Kassel, Germany, in 2012, each component of the project was updated or refabricated for Extracted. Prior to the exhibition, Pentecost visited the agricultural community of Wimauma in southern Hillsborough County and met with farmworkers at the Good Samaritan and Beth-El missions, incorporating their portraits into the money bill series. The soil-erg tasks viewers with imagining an alternative to our present economy, which values the petroleum-linked dollar above all and devalues the labor of farmworkers and the vitality of soil. A DIY currency that anyone can make, the soil-erg advances a vision of equity in the age of Monsanto.

THANK YOU

The remarkable staff of USFCAM facilitated every aspect of the exhibition Extracted. Realizing such a project would not be possible without their skillful support and creative contributions, time and again. Curatorial interns Ashley Muraszewski and Marlena Antonucci, students from USF’s School of Art and Art History, completed key research and developed the exhibition tour, respectively. Claire Pentecost’s participation is supported by USFCAM Art for Community Engagement (ACE) Fund Patrons: Allison and Robbie Adams, Francesca and Richard Forsyth, Courtney and Jason Kuhn, Sharmila and Vivek Seth, the Stanton Street Embrace The Arts Foundation and the Franke E. Duckwall Foundation. David Zink Yi’s visit is supported by USF World. Lenders to the exhibition include galleries bitforms, Hauser & Wirth and Johann König, Lumen Travo and Robert Mann. My deepest thanks and gratitude go to the artists of Extracted, who generously committed to sharing their work with the audiences of USFCAM. Thank you.
Years ago (it was a different world then) I saw a short film that burned a pathway in my memory, so that I could not forget and I could not understand.

A man slithers across the ground, dragging his limp body with extended elbows. He comes up to a wooden pail to drink, his tongue darting rapidly into the water. Raising his head, he hisses at his wife and in-laws, who stand horrified on the wooden platform of their village home. The man is a Japanese soldier, Yukichi, who has returned from World War II as a snake. Later, inside the house, we see him asleep on the floor in a kind of round stockade made of roughly hewn tree limbs. Tenderly, his wife feeds him a rice ball; but he bites her hand, she screams, and he won’t let go. The scene shifts to a temple interior, with great Buddhas seated in meditation. The wife lies outstretched on her back on a light blanket, one knee up, while the man lying beside her lets his hand glide lurcherously over her thigh. She wonders aloud why Yukichi returned as a snake, and the man replies that he must have seen horrible things on the mainland. “I hear that a new sort of bomb fell on Hiroshima,” he says. “The war will be over soon.”

The author of this enigmatic short is the famed Japanese New Wave director, Shohei Imamura. The work, his last, forms part of 11’0 9: eleven short films, each exactly eleven minutes, nine seconds and one frame. All of them are somehow about the attack against the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001. Made at the instigation of a French producer and released in 2002, the omnibus film remains virtually unknown in the United States, where it was considered too anti-American for the box office. The film gathers artistic perspectives from across the planet on the event that redefined the geopolitics of the new millennium. Within this context, Imamura’s genius was to eliminate any direct reference to the terrorist attacks, their historical background, or the impending response by the American state. Instead he uses local history to ask about the brutality of all ideologically driven war—whether American, Japanese, or any other—and about the sentiments of shame, disgust and abjection that cling to anyone who seeks to withdraw from such an ideology. To withdraw from the Holy War is to shatter the symbolic order that frames human existence in society. Must we be cowards, outcasts, indeed animals, asks Imamura, to refuse the sacred commandments? If that path is impossible, then how to shed the skin of the societies we live in?

TERRITORY

It’s early spring and I travel to the southeastern edge of the megalopolis I call home, Chicago. I’m responding to a call from some community activists to participate in environmental stewardship by uprooting invasive buckthorn bushes from Big Marsh, a new park not yet open to the public. The participants are warm and the work is physically enjoyable: cutting back the woody stems of an imported decorative plant that has overtaken the territory, driving out most of the other species. But the land around us is strange, sparse, often barren. We stack the thorny stalks, I talk with the others, make some new friends. Then we lay down our tools and go off walking toward muddy pools of water.

Here, just a few decades ago, trucks and trains came heavily laden from the now-vanished steel mills. They tipped huge loads of still-molten slag into the marshland, filling it entirely in some
cases. The fiery detritus released great clouds of ash and plumes of smoke that concealed the festivities for several days. These small clouds,或许地向南，where they might deposit themselves, 雨水可使它们重新着色，and the area was left with a blanket of ash and soot. It was a period of dark and gloomy days, and the air was filled with a pungent, choking smell. The residents of the town were left to deal with the aftermath, as they cleaned up the debris and tried to return to their normal lives.

The great psychological insight of Félix Guattari was that like animals, modern industrialized human beings seek places to prowl. The rhythm of stillness and movement goes through and beyond the individual, mingling the self with the surround. These places can also be streets, interiors, empty spaces or ruins. They can be experienced alone, or more frequently, in common with another, not too far away, but actually in a continuum: a fish through clear water, but just get behind the wheel. The dirt turns to asphalt and I drive onward, feeling lost, pausing in places where I’ve been once before. Slowly, over the last couple years, I’ve been sending out feelers into this area, the closest thing I’ve found to both an engaging local community and a “wild land” in the endless city. Slowly I am creating—or rather, being absorbed by—a new territory.

The technologies follow each other in succession. Stuff goes where stuff is. The past conditions the future. We are all pathologically dependent. A birch-bark canoe, a horse-drawn barge, a steam-powered locomotive, a modern freeway, an airport for jet planes. We are organized by forces that have burrowed deep beneath the surface of the earth to form crustal plates, while the rhythm of stillness and movement goes through and beyond the individual, mingling the self with the surround. These sites can also be streets, interiors, empty spaces or ruins. They can be experienced alone, or more frequently, in common with another, not too far away, but actually in a continuum: a fish through clear water, but just get behind the wheel. The dirt turns to asphalt and I drive onward, feeling lost, pausing in places where I’ve been once before. Slowly, over the last couple years, I’ve been sending out feelers into this area, the closest thing I’ve found to both an engaging local community and a “wild land” in the endless city. Slowly I am creating—or rather, being absorbed by—a new territory.

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A painting by Francisco Goya. It shows two combatants locked together, one in turned suicide: a figure with deep, blood-shot eyes and bloody facial expression. Only one of them will emerge from this battle. Yet at the same time, what the painting reveals, and what its protagonists do not seem to understand, is that the two are seen as a single entity, their forms merging as they fall into each other's arms. They are entwined, their bodies twisted together, their heads pressed against each other, the straps of their clothing interlocking. The only thing left of the individual identities is a sense of entanglement and entrapment. The image reflects the way in which the political landscape of the present is still the one that was glimpsed in the self-reflexive writing of philosophy as a chance to reorganize our thinking and to reflect on the ways in which we are organized by ideas. Noë sees the operatic instrumental letters of civilization when it ceases to be an operational script for the fulfillment of a function or a routine. In the last five years? The pervasive fog of war that has begun enveloping the world over the past two decades, the drumbeats, the strident calls for security from terrorism and the power to displace others that fails to respect ecological and ethical limits—limits that do not fit like a cog into what is offers the promise of something new. Minds have hands, so they can get to work on those promises. Following the impulse of ecological thinking, new sciences and new modes of operation would take form. Each thought that does not fit like a cog into what is offers the promise of something new. Minds have hands, so they can get to work on those promises. Following the impulse of ecological thinking, new sciences and new modes of operation would take form. Each thought that does not fit like a cog into what is offers the promise of something new. Minds have hands, so they can get to work on those promises. Following the impulse of ecological thinking, new sciences and new modes of operation would take form. Each thought that does not fit like a cog into what is offers the promise of something new. Minds have hands, so they can get to work on those promises. Following the impulse of ecological thinking, new sciences and new modes of operation would take form. Each thought that does not fit like a cog into what is offers the promise of something new. Minds have hands, so they can get to work on those promises. Following the impulse of ecological thinking, new sciences and new modes of operation would take form.
two successive trips they generously guided myself and other North American friends through the La Plata watershed. We were able to meet perhaps a hundred of their collaborators at work in local contexts: a widely scattered eco-cultural fabric sustaining alternative practices along one of South America’s great rivers. Territory meshes with new patterns of social organization, informed by critical concepts and suffused with art. These experiences changed me. Now I can at least begin to imagine how to participate in the political ecology of my own region. It was like finding a pathway.

Alva Noë thinks that art is just like philosophy: it opens up a space of self-reflexive questioning about the way that images organize our lives. But art does that wordlessly, or in poetic speech that can’t be broken apart and recombined the way that ordinary language can. The reflexivity of art is properly aesthetic, it takes place in the realm of sensation. In those enigmatic images and words we sense a difference from our own selves, and therefore, from our surround. For Félix Guattari, whose writing inspired the four-part division of this essay, the aesthetic realm is a kind of sensing or visioning capacity that allows us to experience “constellations of universes.” Whatever the impulse—a song, an image, a poem, a film, a sculpture or simply a pattern traced by hands in space—aesthetic experience gathers differences into a dynamic whole whose site of evanescence is our own bodies. We feel how the differences combine, or how the dissolution of normalized boundaries sets a static self into motion. The aesthetic impulse appears, it vibrates in our consciousness, then disappears again, only to return later in successive memories and re-livings. Its pattern may be densely symbolic or it may be entirely abstract: but the effect of its momentary passage through our kinaesthetic imagination is to lend our steps a rhythm, to knit our own movements into a territory. Art is what allows us to plunge back into the world differently.

Art, territory, organization, ideas: they are like steps along a spiral path whose only return to a space of origin always implies an expansion of the initial field. Patterns within patterns, universes within universes: this is what I call “the wheel.” Roll it through your own home environment. From such an intimate experience exceeding the limits of identity, you might even gain the empathy and desire for acts of resistance, revolt and constructive transformation amidst the dangerous political ecologies of the twenty-first century.

For further reading and exploration:
- Brian Holmes is a cultural critic with a taste for foreign languages, known in Europe, the US and Latin America for his essays on art, activism and political economy. For years he has been fascinated with cartography: see his latest at http://environmentalobservatory.net/Petropolis/map.html.
Mary Mattingly creates sculptural ecosystems in urban spaces. She is currently working on a floating food forest called Swale. Swale is a public platform for fresh, free food that reinterprets New York City’s commons. She recently completed two participatory projects in the Himalayas, explicitly constructed in collaboration with the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana and the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Mattingly’s work has been exhibited in large-scale installations and shows of photography, the Soul Art Center, the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Public Library, deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, and the Palais de Tokyo. With the U.S. Department of State and Bronx Museum of the Arts she participated in the smARTpower project, traveling and working in Berkeley Waterpod Project, a large-scale public space and self-sufficient habitat that hosted over 200,000 visitors in New York. In 2014, an artist residency called WetLand launched in Philadelphia; it is being utilized by the University of Pennsylvania’s Environmental Humanities program. Mattingly is the recipient of grants from the James L. Knight Foundation, Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology, Yale University School of Art, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation (NYA), the Jerome Foundation and the Art Matters Foundation.

Claire Pentecost is an artist and writer whose poetic and inductive drawings, sculpture and installations test and articulate the interlocking scales of our existence in the logic of globalization. Pentecost has exhibited at dOCUMENTA(13), Kunsthalle Wien, New York, Berlin, Berlin, Vienna, Houston, Tokyo, Johannesburg and Stockholm; Snap Judgments: New Positions in African Contemporary Photography, toured New York, Miami, Mexico, Canada and the Netherlands. Between 2000 and 2003, she took part in the Sharjah, Taipei, Dakar, São Paulo and Havana Biennials. David Zink Yi is a contemporary artist working primarily in video, photography and sculpture. He was born in Lima, Peru in 1974. Zink Yi has exhibited in Lima, Paris, Warsaw and Milan; he has taught at the Universität der Künste from 1998–2003. Zink Yi’s work often explores embodied experiences in environments of intensive sound and performance. Over the last five years, he has participated in the Williams College Museum of Art (2016) and the MFAK in New York. Recent group exhibitions include: Chang & H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr University, Vancouver (2015); Kunstverein Braunschweig (2013); Neue Berliner Kunstverein und Museum de Arte de Leopoldo Porto Carrero, Trujillo, Peru (2013); and MÅK Museum, Vienna (2010). Group exhibitions include: 8th Berlin Biennale (2014); Dublin Contemporary 2011; and 10th Havana Biennale (2009). He is represented by Hauser & Wirth and Johann König, Berlin.

Marina Zurkow is a media artist focused on near-impossible nature and culture interactions, researching “wicked problems” like invasive species, superfund sites and petroleum interdependence. She has used life science, biomaterials, animation, dinners and software technologies to foster intimate connections between human and non-human agents. Her work spans gallery installations and unconventional, participatory public projects. Currently she is working on connecting toxic urban watersheds to oceans, and researching the tensions between maritime ecology and the ocean’s primary human use as a capitalist Pangea. Recent solo shows include Chronus Art Center, Shanghai; bitforms gallery, NY. Montclair Museum of Art; and Diverseworks, Houston. Group exhibitions include Sundance Film Festival: Future of Fifteen (2010); SOMA; Walker Art Center; Smithsonian American Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Wave Hill, NY; and the National Museum for Women in the Arts. She has been featured in publications ranging from the Atlantic and the Atlantic Monthly to the Hindu, the Times of India, Artforum, Frieze, and Flash Art. She is a media arts faculty member at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and is represented by bitforms gallery.
Claire Pentecost’s participation supported by USFCAM Art for Community Engagement (ACE) Fund. David Zink Yi’s travel provided by USF World. The Contemporary Art Museum is recognized by the State of Florida as a major cultural institution and receives funding through the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Council on Arts and Culture, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Arts Council of Hillsborough County, Board of County Commissioners. The USF Contemporary Art Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.