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Soledad Gutiérrez Rodríguez in conversation with Himali Singh Soin and David Soin Tappeser

The Memory of Ice

Soledad Gutiérrez Rodríguez (SGR): We just opened your exhibition ‘The Third Pole’ at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza organized by TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. The exhibition is a space where everyone is invited to search for their own adventure and with this you challenge the basic notion of the museum as a truth provider. Also, you radically alter the idea of memory, detaching it from its only-human condition and opening it to other beings, human and nonhuman alike. In fact, if we look at the series we are opposite like that, the main character is ice, which stores the memory of time. How did you start working with ice?

Himali Singh Soin (HSS): The book we are opposite like that is dedicated to ice. It begins: ‘To Ice. Our elder, our sage, our astrologer, our shaman, our timekeeper, our politician, our philosopher, our teacher, our protector, our folly. We tell your story.’

Ice is literally a chronicle, a preserver of everything. When I reached the very fragile landscape of the Arctic and realized that this vast—and deep—archive would soon lose all its stories, I felt the imperative to become a kind of librarian and recover what I could. I embarked on this journey with my magical tool for navigating the world: language. Philosopher and magician David Abram says we are not only restoring the land, but re-story-ing the land. I love that.

SGR: Restoring as a form of storytelling, like the way music plays a central role in the exhibition. How do you work with the memory of ice as a musical form?

David Soin Tappeser (DST): I think a lot about landscapes and what they sound like, how a landscape embodies a particular musicality. How do I evoke a memory through the music that transports the listener to that landscape—even if they may have never physically been there? It is a challenging, multi-staged process rooted in my personal experiences with nature, research and—in the case of we are opposite like that—Himali’s memories, descriptions, and recordings of the landscape. I transformed these various impressions into sound—not as a literal transcription but as a transcription of mood, of coded memory. For instance, I took the first recorded temperature measurements in the Arctic and mapped these against the temperature measurements from Himali’s fieldwork. The differences reflect a rhythm of climate change and I let this govern the tempo of the different segments of the music.

SGR: These works operate in the frame of deep time and therefore the main characters inhabit multiple temporalities. Doing so, they relate to the ghosts of a prejudiced past while dreaming up heterotopic futures. How does the series live within this tension?
which cannot be reached through the rational
these memories, to these ghosts of the past,
language, music, and poetry of these memories are inscribed in a landscape
our predecessors might have witnessed. Many
necessarily related to something we have
past and monsters from the future, but in fact,
perhaps we are already living in the haunting
of the ghosts of the future and the monsters
are opposite like that uses this tension and keeps turning it on its head.
It becomes like a tarot deck, changing your
fortune depending on the way you look at it. In
fact, the word catastrophe comes from disaster,
which is rooted in “astro,” an unfavourable star.
The individual suddenly becomes a planetary
being, or the planet itself is thrown out of
the relatively micro scale of human time.

**HSS:** The book *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, edited by Anna Tsing and others, was a pivotal influence on we are opposite like that.
It’s titiled ghosts on one side and monsters on the other. Impledly that ghosts come from the
past and monsters from the future, but in fact,
perhaps we are already living in the haunting
of the ghosts of the future and the monsters
of our pasts. we are opposite like that that
feels like art can begin to embody some of those infrastructures of
care that it loves to theorize. If we can support
other communities through our commissions, such as
our collaboration with Live to Love, who are
raising funds for the empowerment and happiness
of communities across the Himalayas, then the work
feels like it can become more than us.

About more-than-humans: sometimes I wonder
if the birds are our audience, or the ice itself is
witnessing us back. Ancestors of the Blue Moon
is a collection of deities, but hardly any of them
are human. They are meteorites, serpents, mountains,
or beams of energy. And they have things to say,
and they don’t protest too much for us to listen
back to them.

**SGR:** the exhibition considers “the third” as a
way of challenging the idea of duality as well as
becoming an entangled collectivity, of togetherness
and how that could transform the whole world.

**HSS:** A polyphony of voices, disciplines, ways of
being, both as content within the work as well as
a form of collective labor. And then it feels like art
can begin to embody some of those infrastructures of
care that it loves to theorize. If we can support
other communities through our commissions, such as
our collaboration with Live to Love, who are
raising funds for the empowerment and happiness
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feels like it can become more than us.