



Fossil

a slow acting violence

curated by Felicity Spear

The artists in ***Fossil – a slow acting violence*** speculate on the nature of the fossil and the different and unexpected ways this might enter our thinking. Through diverse perspectives and working methods they tease out the ways in which the notion of the fossil is connected to time and place, life and death and the inevitability of change. Over many millennia often violent changes have taken place on Earth. These have gradually been revealed through the fossil record helping us to build a connected story of the past. In the industrialised world modern day fossils could be regarded as forms of redundant technology which are frequently the result of runaway consumerism and wastefulness at the high end of the food chain. What will the fossil record reveal in the future about the changes to the Earth's biodiversity? What will the fossil record reveal about the accelerating impacts of climate change which will drive increasingly severe humanitarian crises, political instability and conflict, the consequences of which may never be undone? Through the trope of the fossil the images in this exhibition remind us that while we may be seduced by nature's intensely seductive surfaces, thinly exposed beneath them is a deep pathos embedded in the destructive power of nature, including 'human nature'.

Debbie Symons' work utilises environmental data to investigate and interrogate the inextricable links between environmental degradation and free market capitalism; exploring humankind's ecological conundrum. Her video work, ***Limacina Helicina Antarctica – The Butterfly Effect 2017***, presents a double entendre. It references both the theoretical concept of Edward Lorenz's *Butterfly Effect*, (which proposes the idea that small things can have large and perhaps chaotic and unpredictable consequences), as well as the plight, due to the effects of ocean acidification, of the *Thecosome pteropods*, (small, delicate swimming snails which coincidentally look like butterflies). These snails play a critical role in pelagic ecosystems and much marine life is dependent on their abundance. So if the wings of this beautiful and languid sea butterfly stopped flapping altogether, as predicted for 2050, it could be accompanied by significant global socio-economic and environmental impacts.

Through complex digital modelling, rendering and physics computation **Simon Finn** freezes single moments in time before extrapolating them to intricate charcoal drawings and synthetic sculptures. His work ***False Flag, 2017***, explores the decay and virtual degradation of an icon synonymous with a declaration of *ruse de guerre*, (ruse of war). A solitary flag blowing in the wind, through history a political symbol of the struggle for nationhood, appears tattered and disrupted as if in the process of degradation and collapse. It is entombed in the layers of deception that play out repeatedly through history in human behaviour, the internecine battles between nature and man, and the violation of cultures in both calculated and destructive ways over time.

(Simon Finn courtesy of Mars Gallery).

Harry Nankin's work ***Ekkyklêma (Mount Buffalo), 2014–16***, acts as an elegy realised through 'fossil technology'. It is a multi-piece mosaic of camera-less toned gelatin silver 'shadowgram' images on film. It was recorded on location in the Victorian Alps and is individually mounted on a pane of starphire glass. Historically an *Ekkyklêma* was a platform used in ancient Greek tragic performances to display the *pharmakos* or abject body of the human victim to an audience. The imagery in this *Ekkyklêma* comprises the shadows cast by flash on film, without a camera, of live Bogong moths *Agrotis infusa*, gathered in the field atop Mount Buffalo. The tropes of physical touch, cast shadows and invertebrate abjection allude to the disdain for the non-human world which has helped enable global ecological tragedy to unfold.

The notion of fossil and fossil technology is also embedded in the creation of **Anne Scott Wilson's** digital print ***Witness, 2017***, captured with a pinhole camera. All living things have receptors which respond to the presence of light. It is our medium of contact with the world. Through the capture of light photography could be regarded as an aide-memoire and a forensic tool, exposing or reconstructing past actions through process and image in order to talk about other permutations of time and space. Working with the pin-hole camera, an early form of image capture, requires long exposures which transcend the limitations of the moment and deal with chance and the emanation and manipulation of light. In the creation of this image light flows through pin-holes in order to map a horizon in a seemingly limitless space, where time is captured by the movement of the body perceiving space yet rendering it also as timeless. The last witness in a disappearing world?

(Anne Scott Wilson courtesy of Arc One Gallery).

Felicity Spear's art practice is engaged with history, optical phenomena, mapping and abstraction. She focuses on the way we observe the physical world in order to generate models which emphasise its value and complexity. Her series ***Vanitas, 2017***, consisting of paintings and digital prints, refers to 17th century Dutch still life painting in which there are frequent artistic or symbolic reminders of mortality and the destructive potential in human nature. Referencing a machine produced visibility she focuses on changes to the oceans at a *micro* and *macro* level which we are witnessing through human induced climate change. The painting ***Albatross***, part of a triptych of skull paintings, refers to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1798 poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which emphasises the connection between the natural and spiritual worlds. The mariner's killing of the albatross metaphorically imposes a psychological burden which begins to feel like a curse as he comes to realise his connection with all life in the universe.

Fossil

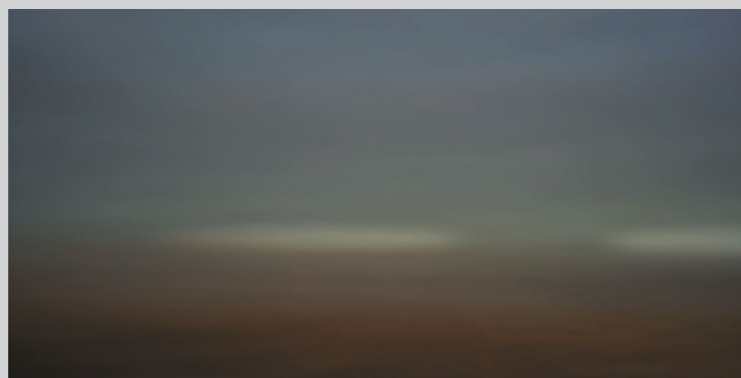
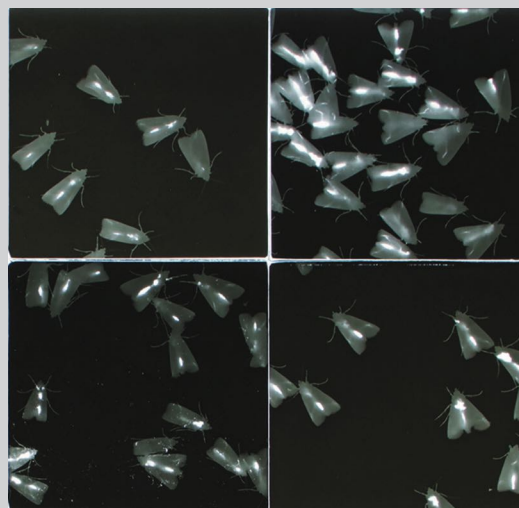
a slow acting violence

Simon Finn
Harry Nankin
Anne Scott Wilson
Felicity Spear
Debbie Symons

August 2–19
Twentyseventeen

Stephen McLaughlan Gallery
Room 816-37 Swanston Street
On the corner of Flinders Lane
Nicholas Building Melbourne

STEPHEN
McL
GALLERY



above left:
Harry Nankin
Ekkylléma (Mount Buffalo) 2014–16
multi-piece mosaic of camera-less,
toned, gelatin silver 'shadowgram'
images on film on light box

above right:
Felicity Spear
Vanitas Series 2017
digital print (detail)

<left
Simon Finn
False Flag 2017
charcoal drawing on paper
(digitally modelled and rendered
image)

>> over:
Debbie Symons
Limacina Helicina Antarctica
The Butterfly Effect 2017
video on light box

<left
Anne Scott Wilson
Witness 2017
digital print on paper (created from
pinhole photographs)