

TAIPEI

Taipei Biennial 2014: The Great Acceleration

Taipei Fine Arts Museum //
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LAZING IN A HAMMOCK that is part of Brazilian collective Opavivará's installation *Formosa Decelerator* (all works 2014, unless otherwise noted), Nicolas Bourriaud greeted journalists to the 9th Taipei Biennial looking like a participant in social-practice art. But the French curator, whose aphoristic 1998 manifesto *Relational Aesthetics* defined a genre premised on performative exchange, proposes a bleaker view of humanity here. Subtitled "Art in the Age of the Anthropocene," the exhibition aims to trace the ways that mankind has eclipsed natural conditions in terms of devastating planetary impact. Indeed, the subject of the anthropocene is the dark inverse of the concerns Bourriaud pursued 20 years ago. If 1990s relational art hearkened back to traditions of consciousness raising dating from the '60s and '70s, the works on view focus largely on the prehistoric and post-human eras, where digital avatars and mute stones stand in for humans.

Appropriately, many of the 52 artists and collectives featured in "The Great Acceleration" have emerged over the past two decades. Although Bourriaud states that he wanted to avoid the grand historical sweep of recent biennials (Venice comes to mind), the show offers some important, and geographically divergent, historical anchors. The Japanese multimedia artist Tetsumi Kudo is represented with a few small midcentury works that offer a glimpse into his Technicolor science fiction–inspired universe. From Latin America, Bourriaud selects Argentine artist Nicolás Uriburu, whose *Green Manifesto Portfolio* of 1973 includes prints of his genitals and bodies of water colored green to, in the artist's words, "oppose a distinction between humans and nature." And a new version appears of the formidable American Joan Jonas's recent multimedia installation *Reanimation*, which tackles themes from melting glaciers to genetic engineering.

Though Bourriaud is also quick to distance himself from the biennial trope of site-specificity, he nonetheless selects work that speaks to the conditions of contemporary Taipei. Taiwan, along with mainland China, is one of the most important producers of mass-manufactured consumer goods, and several artists make use of cutting-edge technology and materials. Alisa Baremboym's "mangled conveyor belt" sculptures, with slightly menacing

Haegue Yang
Medicine Man-Indiscreet Other World, 2010.
Clothing rack, casters, lightbulbs, cable, cord, watercolor, lacquer, metal ring, metal chain, Mylar, aluminum reflector, 70¾ x 35½ x 43½ in.

parodic titles like *Fluidiax Systems*, manipulate substances such as ceramic and gelled emollient to create unexpected skinlike textures. Roger Hiorns's striking atomized aircraft looks like a pile of sparkly dust stretching a few meters in each direction, yet it attests to the awesome and destructive power of scientific innovation. On the first floor in twinned spaces, the Taiwanese artists Po-Chih Huang and Hung-Chih Peng contribute installations speaking to labor's performativity. Huang's *Production Line—Made in China and Made in Taiwan* was created for both this biennial and the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennial in China, and its in-progress denim shirts trace a narrative about his mother's migration and clothing production in the two cities. Peng will create a 3-D printed model of a rotating Noah's Ark on-site during the show's run.

The exhibition also impressively eschews the binary between Western post-studio Conceptual practice and the figuration still favored by many Asian contemporary artists. Connections can be drawn among projects like Taiwanese artist Chun Teng Chu's morbidly reconfigured bat skeletons, Frankensteined together with bones from other animals, and New York-based Anicka Yi's scented, biodome-like installation of glycerine forms—a sort of bacterial laboratory. Another set of parallel practices can be found in the material tricksterism of

Jr-Shin Luo's lighthearted terrariums, where plants like lucky bamboo and moss masquerade as pineapples and volleyballs, and Marlie Mul's resin-based puddles look like imported oil spills.

As the biennial looks forward to a post-human world (Ian Cheng's algorithmically generated real-time video-game collage *Droning Like an Ur*; Ola Pehrson's *Yucca Invest Trading Plant*, 1999, which is "fed" by a computer in increments measured by the stock market), some of the more compelling works look back. Los Angeles-based Nathaniel Mellors's *The Sophisticated Neanderthal Interview*, 2012–13, depicts a Geico spokesman-like character musing on the artistic merit of stones and his place in a spaceship. The duo Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe also traffic in stoner wisdom, creating a dreamy video in homage to '70s subcultures and the Rube Goldberg machine, along with a suite of rooms that puncture the museum's non-exhibition spaces.

Some artists renew interest in human subjects, from Tala Madani's impasto figurative paintings to Shezad Dawood's *Planet of the Apes*—inspired film that imagines Moroccan postcolonial subjects



as aliens on a deserted beach. What does not stand the test of time is yesterday's relational aesthetics. The shamanistic tea ritual inside Opavivará's hammock installation is lost to the too-shy participant; Chien-Ying Wu's quasi-ethnographic installation of drawings by a French child is just plain lost. At its best, Bourriaud's edition of the Taipei Biennial reactivates dialogues of the '80s and '90s about ethics and identity as it proposes hybrid forms of coactivity between animals, vegetables, and minerals. It fails, however, to sufficiently consider how contemporary social practice (and live performance, with the exception of Jonas and Brazilian Hudinilson Jr's self-portraits made by pressing his body on a copy machine) fit in. —Wendy Vogel

FROM TOP:
Shezad Dawood
Still from
Towards the Possible, 2014. HD and Super 16 mm transferred to HD, 20 min.

Chuan-Lun Wu
Installation view of *Coast Mining*, 2014. Found coastal petrochemical objects, sand, and photo on Plexiglas.

