

Heading into the forest, never to walk back again

A show with Michelle Chang Qin and Mickey Yang

Curated by Sergi Rusca

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In J. G. Ballard's novel *The Crystal World* (1966), doctor Edward Sanders begins a journey through a Cameroonian forest to reach a leprosy facility to pay a visit to his friends. With time, he becomes aware of a strange phenomenon occurring in the forest: the nature, animals, and even humans that live in it are progressively crystallising, becoming suspended in time and in life in morbidly mesmerising crystals. Despite the horrible prospect, a mysterious allure refrains people from leaving the forest, as if spellbound by the beautiful yet threatening surroundings.

There is a double codification of the crystallisation in Ballard's novel: on the one hand, the crystals offer glimpses of mutation and growth, and petrification and death on the other. As Sanders studies the forest further, he is subject to an increasing material and psychological mimicry with the changing environment. Even though the crystallisation is dangerous, there is a certain promise of life, an emergence of a new form of existence in which the boundary between the organic and inorganic becomes indistinct, just like discernment between mental and environmental, living and non-living. Despite Sanders' scientific explanations for the phenomenon as the story unfolds, Ballard's characters become less prone to hard facts and reasoning and more embracing to intuitive responses. For them, the physical journey into the forest is parallel to an introspective journey into their psyche, wherein a regression to a distinct, subjective human individuality morphs into an ambiguous negotiation between the organic and the inorganic.

This show is an exploration of Ballard's science fiction through the artistic practices of Michelle Chang Qin and Mickey Yang. What stands out in the author's style of SF is that it does not strive to reach a solution to chaos or a restoration of human order. Instead, ecological decay is assimilated, and the characters slowly become one with it, eschewing the division between human and nature. There is also beauty in decay, as the same decadent and ominous landscape is one of amazement and wonder.

As a response to Ballard's ambiguous forest – a paradise and a coffin at once – both artists create sensory thresholds that call for a reflection and embracement of our natural, socio-political, and personal ecologies and the critical state in which they are found presently. In Michelle and Mickey's practices there is a constant renegotiation with objects, their materialities, and their origins. Interested in the formation of synthetic spaces for artistic experimentation, both artists probe into deconstructing and rebuilding our material culture while blurring the lines between image and illusion. It is precisely their speculative visual language and their contribution to holistic knowledges that create the framework of this show: upon the realisation that we are decaying together with our surroundings, what kinds of coexistences can be enunciated thereafter?

Michelle Chang Qin (b. 1996, Chongqing, China) is interested in the opacity of how materials assemble to construct sites of inhabitancy, memory, literature and fantasy. Threads, for example, can be woven densely or sparsely to create fabrics of caring, ornament, filtration, or trapping and disguise. The movement of the thread is informative of the weaver's intention, while the repetition becomes an irreducible singularity incubated with proverbs and poetry. Coming from pauses and repetitions, her objects and installations reconstruct slices of perception that slip through linguistic metrics and inhabit the silence. Michelle is currently a resident at De Ateliers, Amsterdam. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Trade Gold for Stone*, 14a, Hamburg, Germany, 2022; *Double Helix Promenade*, AVG Space, Chengdu, China, 2021; *Swamp Hut*, Organhaus, Chongqing, China, 2021; *Leaf Mosaic*, the Galaxy Museum of Contemporary Art, Chongqing, China, 2020.

Mickey Yang (b. 1988) is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in The Hague who creates immersive multimedia installations consisting of objects, videos and performances. Her practice explores image representation, astonishment, mass culture, the subjective experience of our collective memory and the search for material culture and (traditional) craftsmanship. Yang plays with stereotypical notions of what art should look like, challenging that almost religious veneration for a finished piece. Her practice is underscored by a philosophy and approach towards materials, processes and learning that is not oriented towards western culture alone. The daughter of Singaporean-Chinese immigrants, her split cultural identity often informs her work. Most recently, she has turned towards her Asian heritage and delved into Asian philosophies and spiritual practices, as well as the origin of Chinese characters. She graduated from Fine Arts at KABK, The Hague, and was a resident at Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht, between 2020 and 2021. Recent exhibitions include: KM21, Den Haag (2022), Kunsthalle Osnabrück (2021), P/////akt, Amsterdam (2019).