

Text on Practice: Glimmers of Transience

Nosh Neneh



'The Scaly-foot Snail', part of 'Living Monuments of the Deep' (2023)

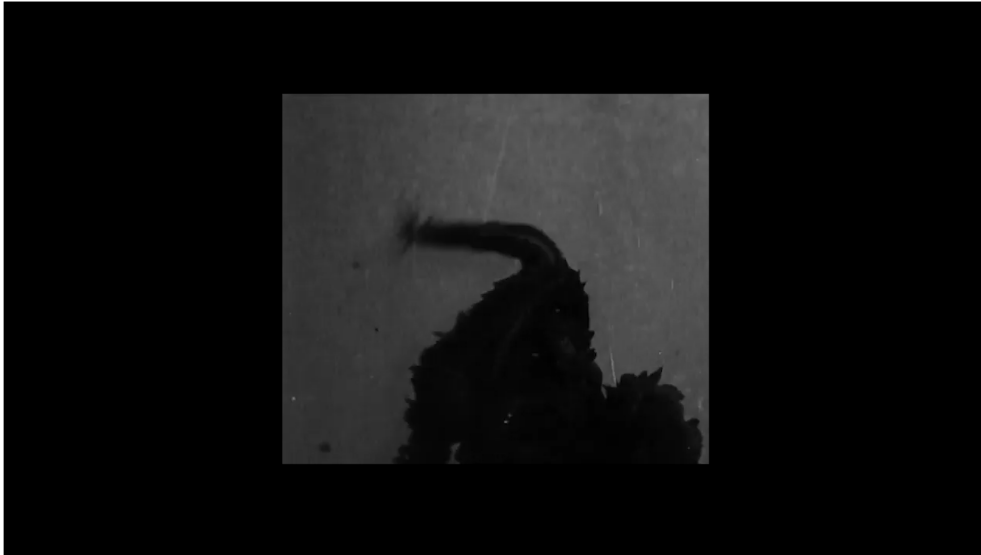
I define myself as a visual artist who works at the intersection of ecology, art and activism. Through my work, I strive to foster a dialogue between viewers and the environment, bridging the gap between our modern existence and the fragile ecosystems that surround us. I am constantly challenged to find innovative ways to represent ecological issues.

Tentacles of the Deep

I'm fascinated by oceanic ecosystems and the storytelling aspects tied to the oceanic and aquatic realms. Therefore, one of the projects I worked on during the first semester was the short film *Tentacles of a Glacier*. *Tentacles of a Glacier* is a short film that invite us to 'dive' into the first-ever moving images footage captured underwater. The juxtaposition of the serene and ominous underwater scenes with the jarring sounds of climate destruction serves as a reminder of the fragility of our planet's ecosystems.

For this project, I spent several days conducting research in the archives of the EYE Filmmuseum. At the Eye Collection Centre I was granted access to a large number of

films dating from 1910s to the 1930s, in search for the first underwater film scenes. From these 'antique' visuals, I wove together a short film called *Tentacles of a Glacier*. I intertwined this footage with a symphony of climate change, incorporating numerous sounds that I personally recorded in Iceland two years ago. One sound that stood out prominently was the audio of the melting glacier known as Vatnajokull. The integration of archival material with my own collection is something I want to continue.



Filmstills 'Tentacles of the Deep' (2023)

Neon Warning

Alongside this film project, I remained focused on exploring the phenomenon of neon coral bleaching and discovering new ways to represent it visually. Neon bleaching occurs when environmental stressors such as rising water temperatures cause corals to expel

the colorful algae that live within their tissues. While some corals turn ghostly white when they bleach, others can instead turn a bright range of neon colors in a final effort to survive. The corals' neon manifestation seems to be an urgent call for help. By zooming in on this neon bleaching, I try to show its paradoxical spectacle – at once captivating in its surreal appeal and intensely alarming as a harbinger of ecological collapse.



'Neon Warning', Springboard Art Fair, Werkspoorkathedraal 8-11 juni 2023

In this project, I utilize photographs captured by me in Burger's Zoo's artificial reef, along with archival photographs sourced from the 'Ocean Image Bank', which is part of The Ocean Agency. I specifically sought out archived material documenting the neon bleaching event in Okinawa, Japan, which occurred during the massive bleaching event in 2016, widely recognized as one of the largest bleaching events triggered by El Niño. For the display of these photographs, I employed eco latex, chosen for its transient nature and elasticity. Latex has its ability to evolve over time, primarily in terms of color, while maintaining an inherent tension because of its elasticity. In many ways, the changing colors and elasticity, is for me a reminiscent of the coral reefs, which are also under constant strain.



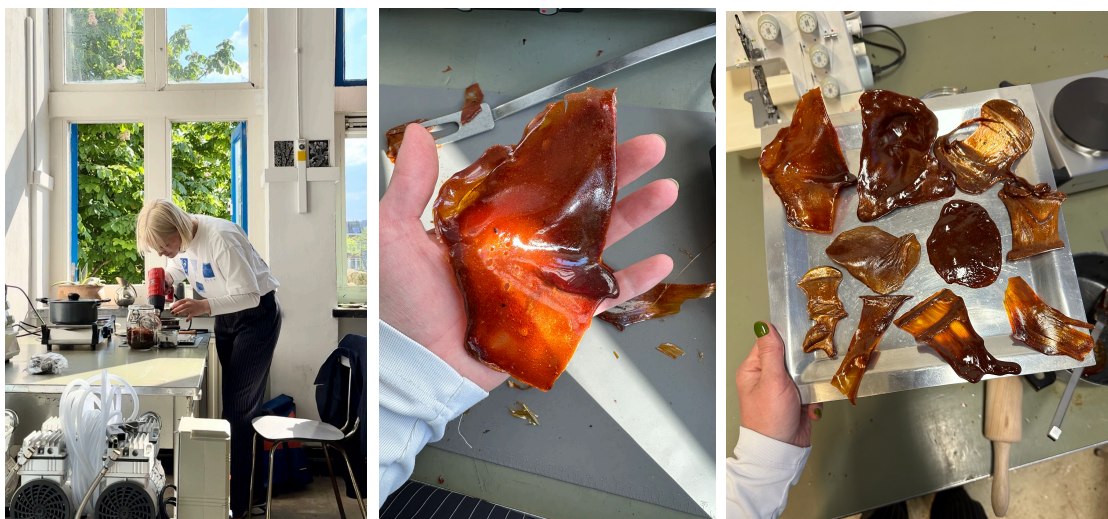
'Neon Warning', Springboard Art Fair, Werkspoorkathedraal 8-11 juni 2023

While eco latex is considered an environmentally friendly option, I found out during this project that the production of latex can have negative consequences for the environment. Latex is derived from rubber trees, and the deforestation and damage to natural ecosystems caused by the logging of these trees can be a significant issue. Additionally, the chemicals used in latex processing, such as solvents and preservatives, can contribute to environmental pollution if not handled properly. It is important to take these negative aspects into consideration and strive for alternatives that are socially and environmentally beneficial.



*'Neon Warning', Springboard Art Fair,
Werkspoorkathedraal 8-11 juni 2023*

This is the very reason why I am currently exploring more alternative biodegradable materials that can replicate similar effects, both in terms of color alteration and elasticity. Thus, as part of my research, I have been actively experimenting with alternative materials including bioplastics, kombucha, and shellac. Amongst the materials I have explored the last weeks, 'shellac' stands out as the most compelling for me to investigate further. Shellac, a natural resin secreted by the female lac bug, is a bioadhesive polymer that shares chemical similarities with synthetic polymers, making it a natural form of plastic. It exhibits thermoplastic properties and can be molded under heat and pressure, showcasing its natural elasticity. The materials research requires a longer period of time, and it will be one of my primary focuses in the coming months.



Experimenting with shellac, studio PB3

Living Monuments of the Deep

The project I will be working on in the upcoming period is 'Living Monuments of the Deep'. I started this project a year and a half ago, but now I aim to take it to the next stage. The word monument derived from the Latin word monumentum “that which remembers” from the verb monere “to remember”. A monument helps to give an important event, person or animal a place in our collective memory, for now and the future. There are no monuments of creatures that have been living on our planet for millions of years, this project aims to think into what these monuments might look like and how they can help us.

For this project, I researched ocean species on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red list, which is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity. How do we relate to a species on the edge of extinction? How do we honor a species? I selected creatures playing key roles in the ocean's- chemistry and ecosystem, and which have varying causes for extinction. I created sculptural costumes which I photographed and filmed. The endangered ocean species are the fundamentals of these sculptures costumes.



Filmstill 'Living Monuments of the Deep' (2023)

As the project was only shot three weeks ago in Lanzarote, I'm now in the early phase. The film footage consists of various short performances by eight endangered marine animals. The question now is whether these individual short performances should stand alone or be combined into one short film. The first step I will take is to merge the different performances into a single short film.

This approach allows me to evaluate the effectiveness of different scenes and determine whether any scenes or endangered marine creatures need to be re-made or re-captured. A location that captures the ambiance of Stratified City, a place in Lanzarote where a significant part of the film was filmed, is the ENCI quarry. The ENCI quarry is a limestone quarry located on the Maas side of the Sint-Pietersberg in Maastricht. Consequently, I will also shoot additional footage there in the upcoming period.



Filmstills 'Living Monuments of the Deep' (2023)

In the film, absurd hybrid creatures deconstruct boundaries between humans and animals. The setting is an uncanny, deserted ocean in which only a few creatures are left wandering and searching. The project draws inspiration from various art theories and thinkers who have contemplated humanity's relationship with the natural world. The writings of Donna Haraway, particularly her concept of the "Chthulucene," resonate deeply with this work. Haraway urges us to reimagine our connections with other species and embrace a multispecies approach to existence. By creating hybrid creatures and blurring the boundaries between humans and animals, I aim to provoke reflection and challenge conventional notions of species hierarchy.

Through my visual and performative exploration, I invite viewers to engage in a dialogue about the ecological crisis and the imperative to recognize our interdependence with other species. By presenting sculptural costumes in a filmic context, I seek to generate a transformative experience that fosters empathy, prompting viewers to contemplate the impact of human activities on the delicate balance of the ocean ecosystem.

Ultimately, this project reminds us of the importance of protecting species and biodiversity. By creating monuments for ancient creatures, I question the idea of permanence and confront the fact that life on Earth is fragile. Through my work, I hope to make people think, feel empathy, and take action, encouraging them to understand the value of each species and work together to preserve our natural heritage. By combining scientific knowledge and artistic expression, I strive to ignite a sense of urgency and responsibility towards the preservation of our oceans and their diverse inhabitants.

Referenties

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