

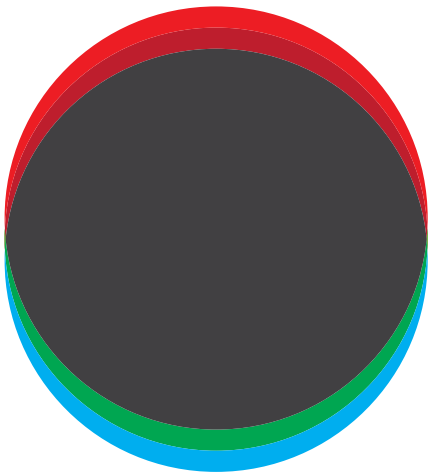


Ritson, Amanda (2020) Observe Experiment Archive. 15 Nov 2019 - 05 Jan 2020, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens.

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**Observe
Experiment
Archive**

Observe Experiment Archive
Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens
15 November 2019 – 5 January 2020

The photographic artists in *Observe Experiment Archive* delve into the age-old sense of wonder we feel when faced with the complexities of our ever-changing world. Curiosity about the world around us is central to the photographic observations and creative experimentation of their work. Some of the artists in the exhibition seek to reimagine our natural world as it is transformed through human intervention and through the processes of photographic seeing itself. Others are fascinated by the contemporary allure of the unknown or by global challenges that demand new forms of human inventiveness.

Observe Experiment Archive is not a comprehensive survey. Instead, it offers a selected and partial view of the ways in which contemporary photography uniquely reflects scientific concerns, both modern and through an historical lens. Liza Dracup's new work *Light Matter* was commissioned by NEPN. It seeks to celebrate the manifold ways in which photography itself emerged from the creative innovations and networks of knowledge pioneered by nineteenth century scientists, including Sunderland's own Joseph Swan. Best known as the inventor of the electric light bulb, Swan was also a photographic pioneer: his many innovations in the field testify to

the enmeshing of creative, scientific and artistic impulses at the time.

In *Light Matter*, Dracup revisits this sense of creative enquiry and wonder, transforming our experience of the world through lens and light. *Light Matter* captures natural forms illuminated by artificial light. Everyday botanical specimens collected from her garden and Northern landscape are altered through her photographic process and fluid forms are imbued with an other-worldly sense of uncertainty and flux.

Similarly testing our assumptions and expectations of the natural world, the exhibition also features the UK premiere of *A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World* by Singaporean visual artist Robert Zhao Renhui. Zhao's practice investigates man's relationship with nature, interweaving the real and the fictional and invoking doubt in viewers about the objectivity of the image before them. His installation also includes new works made in response to objects in the collection of Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens.

In contrast to such works that explore the ambiguities and paradoxes of photography, other exhibits demonstrate an impulse to make visible the invisible, drawing on long periods of creative collaboration and inter-disciplinary

exchange. Maria McKinney's large-scale photographs of pedigree bulls, reminiscent of 18th and 19th century livestock paintings, explore selective breeding and the impact of genetic research in contemporary cattle farming. The animals in *Sire* are pictured wearing sculptural harnesses fabricated from brightly coloured plastic semen straws used in the artificial insemination process. Woven together using traditional handcrafting techniques, these very modern materials are transformed into structures that recall pagan fertility symbols.

Mandy Barker uses her photography to reflect on one of the extraordinary global challenges that affect all of us. *SOUP* is an extract from a series of powerful images of plastics gathered from beaches around the world and suspended in the oceans. Her work with marine objects over the past ten years has received global recognition and, working with scientists, aims to raise awareness about plastic pollution in the world's oceans whilst highlighting the harmful effects on marine life and ultimately ourselves.

Similarly concerned with how the environment is shaped by human activity, Tessa Bunney's *The Flower Fields*, commissioned by NEPN, focuses on artisan, traditional mixed rotation family farms and large-scale commercial flower growers in the UK, many of whom are transforming productivity through pioneering use of new technologies including hydroponics and optical graders.

Sophie Ingleby's project *SEED* offers an insight into the experience of

undergoing fertility treatment, through a series of portraits and clinical imagery created at Newcastle Fertility Centre at Life. Developed over three years, *SEED* aims to increase awareness and understanding of IVF, to visualize what is commonly an unseen process and to offer a proof of sorts for participants going through the process.

Two of the artists make work in response to the enduring quest to understand the universe on the part of professional astronomers and citizen star-gazers alike. Helen McGhie has spent the last few years photographing at Kielder Observatory in the heart of Northumberland's Dark Sky Park. Commissioned for this exhibition, the works include *Dark Adaptation*, a performative landscape exploring the process of an observer's adjustment to night-time vision and *Anatomy of a Northern Astronomer* - a playful photographic collection that reflects the personal motivations and everyday challenges faced by astronomers working in such a remote location.

New York based Penelope Umbrico, on the other hand, collects and recombines images of the full moon that are freely circulating online. Made and shared by countless numbers of amateur photographers, Umbrico's work draws our attention again to our shared desire to see, record and know worlds beyond.

Finally, at Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, an overview of the work of Marjolaine Ryley is presented (15 November 2019 – 03 February 2020).

Marjolaine provides a poetic exploration of how we live now and the challenges we face from an auto-biographical perspective. Bringing together photography, text and archival materials, Marjolaine's practice is part family-album and part social document.

Practices of observation, experimentation and archiving are central to the explorations of all the artists brought together here. Such approaches are imaginative mirrors of scientific methodologies. Scientific method often begins with an observation – something that captures the scientist's attention and provokes his or her curiosity to know more. Experiments are then used to test a scientific hypothesis about phenomena in the world, while archiving is the process through which scientific research data is stored for future use. The artists in this exhibition, like scientists, are all keen and curious observers of the world around us. Experimentation occurs as part of their creative process, as they test, reiterate and refine the photographic outcomes. The impulse to archive is reflected in the new photographic collections that they have created, as well as in the inspiration that many take from existing archival holdings, whether digital repositories or museum collections.

Observe Experiment Archive is curated by NEPN and produced in partnership with Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens. Marjolaine Ryley's exhibition is curated by Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art in partnership with NEPN. Both are supported by Sunderland Culture.



Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art

Artist presentations supported by:



Mandy Barker



Mandy Barker is a photographer from the UK whose work investigates marine plastic debris. Collaborating with scientists, Barker aims to raise awareness around plastic pollution in the world's oceans and highlight current research studying the effects this has on marine life and ultimately ourselves.

Barker's work has been published in over 40 countries and has featured in: National Geographic, TIME Magazine, Smithsonian, The New Scientist, UNESCO and The British Journal of Photography. Her work has been exhibited internationally including: United Nations Headquarters, Aperture Foundation in New York, Victoria & Albert Museum and The Photographers' Gallery, London.

Barker was shortlisted for the Prix Pictet Award SPACE 2017, the world's leading photography award for sustainability and was a recipient of the 2018 National Geographic Society Grant for Research and Exploration. Her first book 'Beyond Drifting: Imperfectly Known Animals' was selected as one of the Ten Best Photography Books of 2017, by Smithsonian.

Tessa Bunney



Tessa Bunney is a photographer based in the north of England. Her practice is concerned with documenting the changing nature of rural life, often exploring the landscape and how it is shaped by human activity. In recent years she has collaborated with North Yorkshire hill farmers, Icelandic puffin hunters, Finnish ice swimmers and Romanian nomadic shepherds.

Her project *Home Work*, explores the lives of female home workers in the suburbs and villages in and around Hanoi, Vietnam in the face of increasing urbanisation. The work was published by Dewi Lewis in 2010 and exhibited at the Noorderlicht Festival in The Netherlands.

Between 2012 and 2016 Bunney was based in Laos, where she was working on her long-term project *The Corridor of Opportunity* which was supported by Arts Council England. Her series *The Women of UCT* documents an all-female UXO (unexploded ordinance) clearance team in Laos and was exhibited at The Northern Eye Festival in Colwyn Bay (2019). Her exhibition *FarmerFlorist* is currently touring the UK.

Liza Dracup



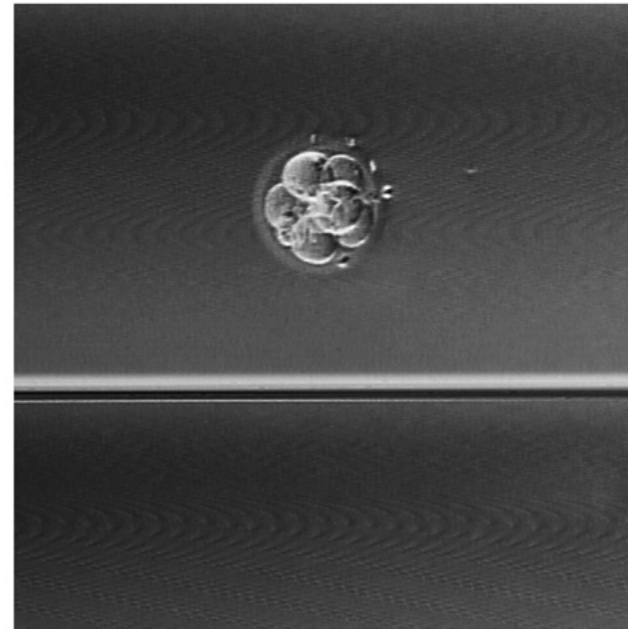
Liza Dracup is a photographer based in the north of England. Making work by unconventional photographic means, her experimental practice extends beyond the hours of daylight, drawing her into a world lit by artificial light. She is in pursuit of an alternative vision, one that de-familiarizes the once familiar. Her photographs reveal details, sensations and simplified forms, which were once invisible or concealed. Placing emphasis on the extraordinary properties of the ordinary, her work creates an enriched idea of the northern landscape and its natural history.

Dracup's wider research extends to re-positioning a wide-range of historical collections-based

research material across photographic, artistic and scientific disciplines, which also underpinned her PhD at the University of Sunderland (2017). Dracup is best known for *Sharpe's' Wood* (Impressions Gallery, 2007), an innovative series of large-scale colour landscape photographs made between dusk and dawn.

Major recent commissions including *Chasing the Gloaming* (2011), *Re:Collections* (2013) and *Landmarks* (2016). Dracup's work was nominated for the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2012) and the Prix Pictet (Earth) Photography Award (2009).

Sophie Ingleby



HER FIRST PORTRAIT

Sophie Ingleby is a photographic artist based in the North East of England. Her recent work *Seed* explores human fertility treatments through a combination of portraiture, documentary and conceptual photography. *Seed* has been presented at *Fertility 2017*, (the fertility industry's annual conference) *Fertility Fest* (2017 & 2018) and *The Great Exhibition of the North* (2019). Ingleby was selected for the NEPN DEVELOP Award in 2016 and received the *Royal Photographic Society Peter Hansell Scholarship* in 2017.

Ingleby studied MA Photography at University of Sunderland and her project *Known/Unknown* was exhibited at Aberdeen Art Gallery in 2010. She was also selected as an *Emerging British Photographer* by the Canadian Publisher Magenta in 2011.

Helen McGhie



Dark Adaptation, Helen McGhie, 2019.

Helen McGhie is a visual artist based in Salford (UK). Her practice explores the empirical nature of darkness through photography and the moving image. She is currently investigating the act of astronomical observation at Kielder Observatory in Northumberland for her practice-led PhD, *Stargazing at the 'Invisible': Photography and the Power of Obscured Light – A Research Partnership with Kielder Observatory*, which she is undertaking at University of Sunderland.

McGhie graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2014 and has exhibited nationally and internationally. Her awards include: *Winner, Format Festival's International Portfolio Reviewers*

Choice Award (2018), *AHRC / National Productivity Investment Fund PhD Studentship* (2017). Selected exhibitions: *209 Women*, Portcullis House, London (2018-19), *<The Scrap>*, Culture Station Seoul, Seoul (2018) and *Hello Future! Talent's Archive*, Onassis Cultural Centre, Athens (2015). Her work has also featured in various publications, including: *Madam and Eve: Women Portraying Women*, Laurence King Publishing (2014), *Graphic Design School*, Thames and Hudson (2017) and *Science and Fiction*, Black Dog Publishing (2014).

Maria McKinney



Reproduction/Chromosome, Templemichael Zebso (FRP2279), from Sire, Maria McKinney, 2016.

Maria McKinney is a visual artist from Ireland. She makes work through a range of media including: sculpture, installation, photography and video. Her recent projects, such as *Sire*, examine the relationship between human and bovine species, and involves collaboration with cattle breeders and genetic scientists.

McKinney has made a number of solo exhibitions including the RHA, Dublin, Ireland (2016) *Lokaal 01*, Antwerp, Belgium (2016) *La Permanence*, Clermont- Ferrand, France (2015), the MAC, Belfast, UK (2012) *the Lab*, Dublin, Ireland (2010) and the *Context Gallery*, Derry, UK (2008). Her work is part of the collections of *Europol*, *Arts Council*

of Northern Ireland, *Office of Public Works* and *Bank of Ireland*.

Sire was featured in the group exhibition *Somewhere in Between* at the Wellcome Collection, London (2018) and has also been exhibited at the *Museum of English Rural Life*, Reading, UK; *Gregg Museum* and *North Carolina State University*, USA.

Robert Zhao Renhui

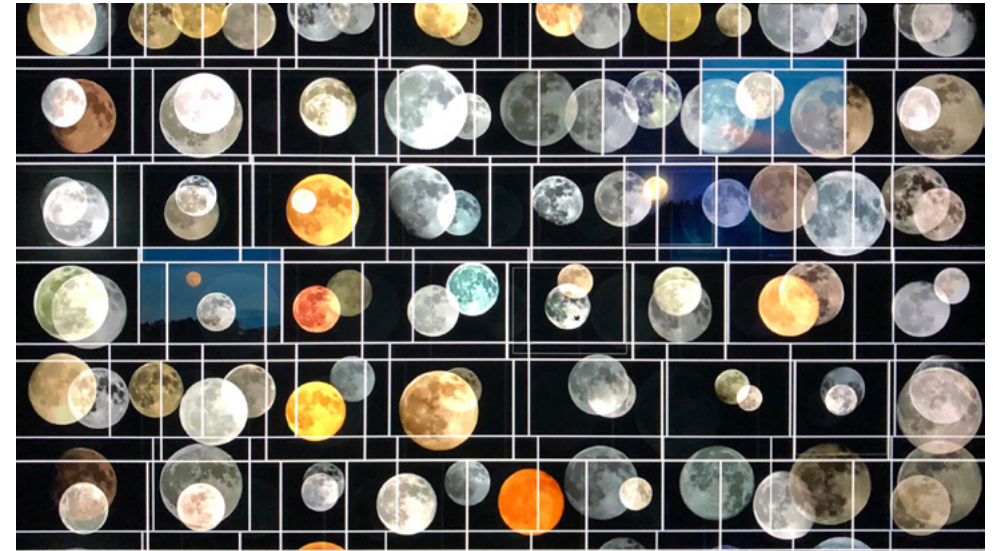


World Goldfish Queen, from the series A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the World, Robert Zhao Renhui, 2013.

Robert Zhao Renhui is a multidisciplinary artist from Singapore. His artistic practice addresses the relationship between humans and nature, challenging accepted parameters of objectivity and scientific modes of classifications. Over the years, Zhao has appropriated codes and conventions of documentary photography and museum display to compose compelling narratives which question our relationship with nature.

Zhao's work has been exhibited in numerous international exhibitions including: Jakarta Biennale (2017); 7th Moscow Biennale (2017); and 20th Sydney Biennale (2016). He received the *National Arts Council's Young Artist Award* (2010) and was a finalist for the *Hugo Boss Asia Art Award for Emerging Asian Artists* (2017).

Penelope Umbrico



Everyone's Moon 2015-11-04 14:22:59 (video still), Penelope Umbrico, 2015.

Penelope Umbrico is a New York based artist whose installations, video, and digital media works utilize photo-sharing and consumer-to-consumer websites as an expansive archive to explore the production and consumption of images. Her work navigates between producer and consumer, local and global, the individual and the collective, with attention to the technologies that are produced by (and produce) these forces.

Umbrico's work has been exhibited at Museum of Modern Art and MoMA PS1, NY; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; MassMoCA, MA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Milwaukee Art Museum, WI; LACMA, CA; Art Museum Gosta,

Finland; Foto Colectania, Barcelona, Spain; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Daegu Photography Biennale, Korea; Guangzhou Image Triennial, China; Kunstverein Ludwigshafen, Germany; Rencontres d'Arles, France; Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane Australia; among many others, and is represented in museum collections around the world.

Umbrico has received numerous awards and has monographs published by Aperture NYC and RVB Books Paris.

Courtesy the artist and Bruce Silverstein Gallery.

Marjolaine Ryley
Exhibited at Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art

The Sleeping Child, Marjolaine Ryley, 2018.



Marjolaine Ryley is an artist based in Newcastle upon Tyne. Her practice incorporates photography, moving image, text, and objects to explore memory, history, familial relationships, and archival narratives, linking personal experiences with broader social and political issues.

Ryley's work has been published nationally and internationally and her work is held in several major collections including the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and the Serralves Museum, Porto. Publications include: *Villa Mana – A Proper Kind of House* (Trace Editions 2006); *Field Study 7: Residence Astral* (published to coincide with the artist's visiting fellowship at the Photography

and the Archive Research Centre, 2008) and *Growing up in the New Age* (Daylight USA, 2013) which explores the alternative world of 'the counterculture', from communes in the South of France, squatting in South London and 'free school' education. Since 2017, Ryley has been exploring our relationship to the land and flora resulting in a new body of work 'A Gardener's Daughter,' produced through residencies with NT Wallington and Dilston Physic Garden. Ryley lectures part-time in Photography and Video Art at the University of Sunderland.



NEPN is a development agency for photography that uniquely works across HE and creative industry sectors to create a critically engaged context of photographic activity. Now in its 10th year, NEPN has commissioned over 30 lens-based projects, delivered innovative professional development programmes, curated a programme of critical dialogues around photography and developed national and international partnerships for the presentation of new works.

NEPN's project of 2018/19, *Observe Experiment Archive* was designed to create contexts for photography-science dialogue, develop interdisciplinary partnerships and generate new photographic work, engaging the public in ways which are accessible and relevant. NEPN is based in the Northern Centre of Photography, University of Sunderland and is part of the University's Arts and Creative Industries Research Institute.

www.northeastphoto.net