

ORDINANCE

presents

A Crack in the Cosmic Egg

Julien Audebert, Nicholas Burridge,
Viola Nazario and Rachel Schenberg



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Sometimes, in the beginning there was an egg. There are tales of the time before Life, in which there was a mythological deity, the birthing by whom of an egg gave rise to creation. In others, there was no deity—it was instead the egg itself that formed the whole of being, and from which, we came to be. Either way, both scenarios see the egg fracture, and something happens—a portal opens, and something seeps out.

Bernhard Siegert highlights the door as a form of media, locating it as an “operation of the symbolic separation between nature and culture, inside and outside, sacred and profane, and other binary distinctions that structure our daily life”, something that puts the “inside and outside into special relation” (*Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2015, 13-14).. We take this and run with it, seeing the door as a portal, as a portent, as a distinction, and most importantly, as the fracture in the egg that holds the world. In selecting the works for A Crack in the Cosmic Egg, drawn from artists Julien Audebert, Nicholas Burridge, Viola Nazario and Rachel Schenberg, we seek out some act of becoming that unites them, some harmony in shared material relations, but also the layers of resonance and discordance across and between each contribution. It is something—as Jussi Parikka says—if not magical, at least alchemical (“The alchemic digital, the planetary elemental”, *Subcommunity: Diabolical Togetherness beyond Contemporary Art: E-Flux Journal*, 2017, 341). There is a unificatory act of slippage that enables these works to run together, to foment into one potent whole.

To name Rachel Schenberg’s work in the flow of an exhibition text necessitates a breaking of the page.

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an orange (2019-2022) sees two copper framed screens presenting language as a transformative, material, communicable subject of inquiry, represented (or rather, enacted) by hands in performance of movements with matter. These movements see an orange, or rings, shifted by hands within the boundaries of the screen. If interpreted as ritualistic gestures, these movements might be recorded choreographically, a documentation of an ordered set of behaviours in response to formal patterns, steps, or schools of tradition and thought. However, in continuing upon a thread of inquiry much closer to alchemy, material associations within Rachel’s own world of practice steers close to the transformative power of association—a similarly weighted

perhaps even translation, flickers across the screens. Here, the weighted materiality of the work shifts from the transmission of the image (and also the matter of the image’s transmission — see: wires, fibres, and cables), perhaps toward the capacity of the hands within. And with this thought, it might be that this weighted materiality of the work sits within a cradle of time and language understood as something that shifts and reforms over the course of its existence and use.

In glimpsing the intimate movements within these two copper edged videos (intimate as a descriptor of both their scale and their nature), currents of material connectivity and communicability are sensed. Julien Audebert’s painting, *Obsidianales (Gèranium des près)* 2019-2020, deals quite explicitly with the transmission of matter. Represented in swift, soft strokes of oil on copper is the Meadow crane’s bill, or the meadow geranium, a purple-blue sprig blooming against a nondescript darkness.

The obsidionales from which the series draws its title are known as ‘flowers of war’; species populating former corridors of passage, having been transplanted throughout Europe during World War I through the movement of beings. Carried across and between places as seeds, hooked onto hides, or wedged into the tread of a boot, the flowers that appear within the series (and too, across the landscapes of a broad continent) contain within them memories of conflict, as much as they become markers of very real transformations of ecology and place by industries, militaries, and politics. The heavy shelling of WWI left the fields of rural France, Belgium and Germany burdened with high concentrations of copper, a metallic trace of conflict leaching into soils, and literally becoming-with in the root space of the transiting flowers—a taxonomy of war in both name and nature. In this context, the heat of armaments becomes the literal Big Bang through which a new ecology is borne out, something that is sensible through the overlay of oil onto a medium of weaponry.

As a conductor, copper naturally invites associations with transmission and movement, much like the geranium mapped across place. In Viola Nazario’s paintings onto copper, transmission and movement is rendered with less taxonomic specificity, but rather, through a gauzy, oneiric register. Slivers of copper peek through the oil painted surface of Viola’s intimate works, read as landscapes through the consistency of a horizon-line, their lustre peeking through becoming the light animating the worlds represented upon the surface. Inasmuch as these paintings

appear as landscapes, light is their subject; animated gestures, radiating with bristling lines, arcing across these works in vibrant and wilful movement. Perhaps an errant firework, a glancing spark, the streak of a comet, a star falling to earth, or a journeying flare—if Julien’s painting shows us the possibility of life after conflict, Viola’s gives us a glimpse into the moment before impact.

The looped text transmissions that appear within the worlds of these paintings hover in the space between in/congruity with their subjects. Not overtly tied to the world of the painting, their intimacy resonates across and within the field of the work, a conspiracy of Viola’s making—as ties to some personal place, event or state of feeling, some tether that Viola speaks to as a “sentence or statement I was holding in myself at the time.” In this holding and release of language, there is an invocation of the cradle of language and time that we’ve seeded above, shifting and transforming. But here, the cradle shifts and transforms with a situational necessity that emerges from Viola’s relationship with painting as stream of consciousness, as dream-like, as associative—an openness correlated with the cracks appearing in our world egg.

Almost as an invitation to deepen these cracks, if not for their luminous material fragility, Nicholas Burridge’s *Glass Artefact (hammer)* and *Glass Artefact (chisel)* 2023 speak to the breaking open and remaking of the world undertaken in the name of industry, capital and power. Shifting his focus from the disrupted to the disruptor, the flows of a molten and material liquidity have become fixed and cast into the shape of the tools used for their undoing. In doing so, Nicholas has affixed these objects to a space outside of time—divorced from the stratigraphic locatedness of stone tools, and the luminous counterpart to the hardened metal of extractive tools, these ghostly forms have traded their mechanical strength for chemical stability.

Time flows through the hammer and the chisel in complicated interrelation. Geologic time is disrupted by human intervention, sitting within molten time of liquidity and materiality. The curvature of the planetary is refracted and bent as it passes through the milky glass of the tools. Fractured and remade through processes of terraforming, these works hold a tension between the natural and the built, and the way they shape each other—equalities of balance in the equation of power between such forms. In the associative material complexity of these tools we arrive again at the question of alchemical transformation, the possibilities of becoming that emerge through the power

of many-layered association. Whilst undercurrents of language and quotation stream through the channels of Rachel’s *or an / an orange*, equivalent questions of quotation and weight manifest in Nicholas’ objects in their many layered materialities. Imagining the weight and movement of the glass tools in the hand, their heft belies their communicative capacity, the fragility of their material rendering them mute and immutable witnesses to the processes, forms and powers which shape and reshape the world.

What is round begins where it ends. What might not be so simple is the recognition that the round, the circle (or to some, the egg) encloses the inside from the outside, something in which everything is connected to everything else by virtue of being inside, being outside, or being in itself. If our circle, or our egg, was to break, a small fracture giving way to a larger, more defiant and potentially cartoonish, crack, what leaks through is a luminous possibility of enmeshment and relation. Uniting the works in A Crack in the Cosmic Egg are tendrils of time and matter, light and becoming, and their deployment as mediums of connection and communication. We apprehend the alchemical and associative nature of these works as a sign or symptom of their location within the crack, this slipperiness as an evasion of fixity. Within the space of the exhibition, our crack is doubled, being the titular fracture but too, the door into Ordinance—a point of egress through time, across language, into matter, from place and with person.

A Crack in the Cosmic Egg runs from 21 September to 18 October, 2024, at Ordinance.

Cover Image

A witch, raising her arm above a flaming cauldron, recites a spell; a young woman kneels in front of the cauldron. Mezzotint by J. Dixon after J.H. Mortimer, 1773. Wellcome Collection. Source: Wellcome Collection.