



INTIMATE ORGANISMS

OUTER
SPACE

Bianca Tainsh

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Suggested Friend

It is inevitable that someone will tell you that trees communicate with each other. Unless you already know this, then you will be the person who says that "trees communicate with each other". This may happen at a comfortable dinner with a friend. Or a chit chat with a stranger, where a bombshell revelation like this will incite questions like "since when?". Trees stay in touch via the Wood Wide Web, which is a cringe reference to the World Wide Web. This term evokes the wide and complex underground network that trees employ to share nutrients and warn each other of peril. The idea is that trees use fungal filaments to connect with each other and form an expansive network of support under soil. If you do a Google search, you will find several pages comparing it to a social network.

Hmm. This strikes me like PR for social media. But these fungal threads called mycelium do connect trees in mycorrhizal networks. This model gives me social anxiety, as it implies an overwhelming sense of connection that makes ostracisation an easy occurrence (and it's hard to pronounce). The awareness of this feeling is hilarious, as it is a response to social networks, where spectacles of punishment are important assets in an attention economy. On the other hand, thinking about connectedness inspires higher feelings, like a desire to tell my partner "I love you", through a fungal thread. This collection of thoughts may seem clunky, but I'm following the logic of early Facebook: "what's on your mind?".

Bianca Tainsh's exhibition 'Intimate Organisms' is on my mind. She collaborated with a mycologist on her new show 'Intimate Organisms' at Outer Space gallery, to create a "miniature model of the Wood Wide Web". This exhibition has several components that seek to immerse the viewer, including works in sculpture, digital pieces and mixed media works. She situates 'Intimate Organisms' on Lake Weyba, where she gathered fungi spore and microorganisms, on the Sunshine Coast. She positions herself as a collaborator or "ecological steward", someone who guides natural processes, while acknowledging the autonomy of materials. Rather than an authorial voice, she seeks to shape the unwieldiness of natural matter to facilitate an outcome of critical significance. It also implies a relationship with ecology that acknowledges moral obligations: plants may feel, remember and communicate. It is a burdensome possibility, considering that we burn, cut and eat them. It's easier to believe that they are just 'things' around us. Stuff we can chew on. But I'm more interested in the subtle and practical aspects of this relationship, like the difficulties of working with an entity oblivious to its context, indifferent to the white cube.

The series 'Mushroom Circles' illustrates this idea, for it shows petrified mushrooms exceeding the bounds of a circle. These works are highly graphic and deploy simple lines and shapes that represent this slippery moment. We immediately notice the chaotic blackness of mushrooms spilling out in painterly drips and splashes, coming out of circles that fail to contain this turbulence. These shapes are coloured with warm gradients—from red violet to orange—that stand in contrast with the absence of colour in the mushrooms. Thus, 'Mushroom Circles' look like they are trying to communicate negative thoughts and feelings to the viewer. They look like downers—always at odds, always in tension—who exceed the social frameworks imposed upon them. These depressive types often create a productive space for social fracture, where a recession of meaning and defective enthusiasm clarifies the systems they inhabit, by defining them through negation: the circle looks more strongly like a circle, once a material exceeds its circle-ness (the

mushroom is thus the perfect naysayer, showing what a circle isn't by pointing at the faults of its boundary).

The idea of agency is also present in 'Mushroom Circles', where Bianca captured the marks of a spore on a digital print. The pores create the illusion of an eye staring at the viewer, by simulating the cornea and the pupil. The idea of 'gazing back' is powerful of course, invoking an instance of defiance and autonomy. While contemporary art looked down upon (ba da boom tss) eye motifs for a period, this symbol has gained renewed popularity—as they express wider societal concerns, such as surveillance capitalism. Now, please don't confuse me with an arts writer that engages in a goody two shoes discourse to make themselves look virtuous, because I'm reaaaally not. But I will say that they also speak of empathy, which resonates with wider preoccupations of inclusion and social justice. One could follow this line of thought to consider a moral contract with plants. Or not. For we have failed at simpler things. Following the logic of a mycorrhizal network, this suite is one amongst many connected through a soundscape coming from a Fung-terrarium.

The reciprocity of mycorrhizal networks, like the mushroom negating the circle, showcases the limits of our social networks. Often built with centralised power and to benefit one at the cost of the other, our networks are fraught with limitations. This is especially true of social media, which is a barren landscape of advertisements, data mining, morbid scrolling and marketised ideologies. The comparison must be insulting to plants, whose connection is unmodulated by market interests. This makes me wonder what are the kind of messages that trees exchange with each other: like, imagine if they drop sick memes. Climate justice themed, kinda funny but not really. Or thirst traps...because it hasn't rained lately. Ha. Ha.

— Diego Ramírez, 2023

Diego Ramírez is an artist with dreams, a writer with hopes and a facilitator with beliefs. He has shown locally at ACMI in partnership with ACCA, Gertrude Glasshouse, Westspace, Blakdot and internationally at Deslave (Mexico), Human Resources (US), Torrance Art Museum (US), Art Central (HK), and Careof (IT). Ramírez has written locally for Art Gallery of Western Australia, Art and Australia, Disclaimer, MEMO, un Projects and internationally with NECSUS (NL) and BLUE journal (US x FR). As a facilitator, he is the former Director of Seventh Gallery and sits in panels for Creative Victoria, City of Melbourne, and is a peer assessor for Australia Council. He is represented by MARS Gallery.

Bianca Tainsh is an open-disciplinary artist, based on Lake Weyba, Gubbi Gubbi country. Through a hybrid practice of contemporary art, ecofeminism and fluid forms of ecological and documentary activities she explores issues such as the cyber-saturated human's disconnect from the natural world, mass consumerism, and the search for autonomy and spirituality in the epoch of digital culture. In her current work, Neo-animism forms the trope for artefacts and rituals that unveil new forms of coexistence and being. Archives of self-generated, foraged, and cyber-sourced material, saturated with semiotic rhetoric become the provenance for video, digital and traditional media, assemblages and live art.

Bianca is a prize-winning artist, exhibiting in Australia and Germany. As an advocate of Art for Change, she has presented a TEDx talk and webinars. Bianca has a 1st Class Honours from RMIT University, and postgraduate studies in Arts & Community Engagement at the Victorian College of the Arts.