



Video Journée: Nature

in Latin American Video Art
Nature

29 November 2020
18 - 20 h CET
via Zoom

Q&A
Agencia de Borde

Foto: Constanza Alarcón
Tennen, *The Witnesses*

University of Zurich
UZH

Lateinamerika
Zentrum Zürich

more information on
mapa-art.org

MAPA
Lateinamerikanische
Kunst in der Schweiz

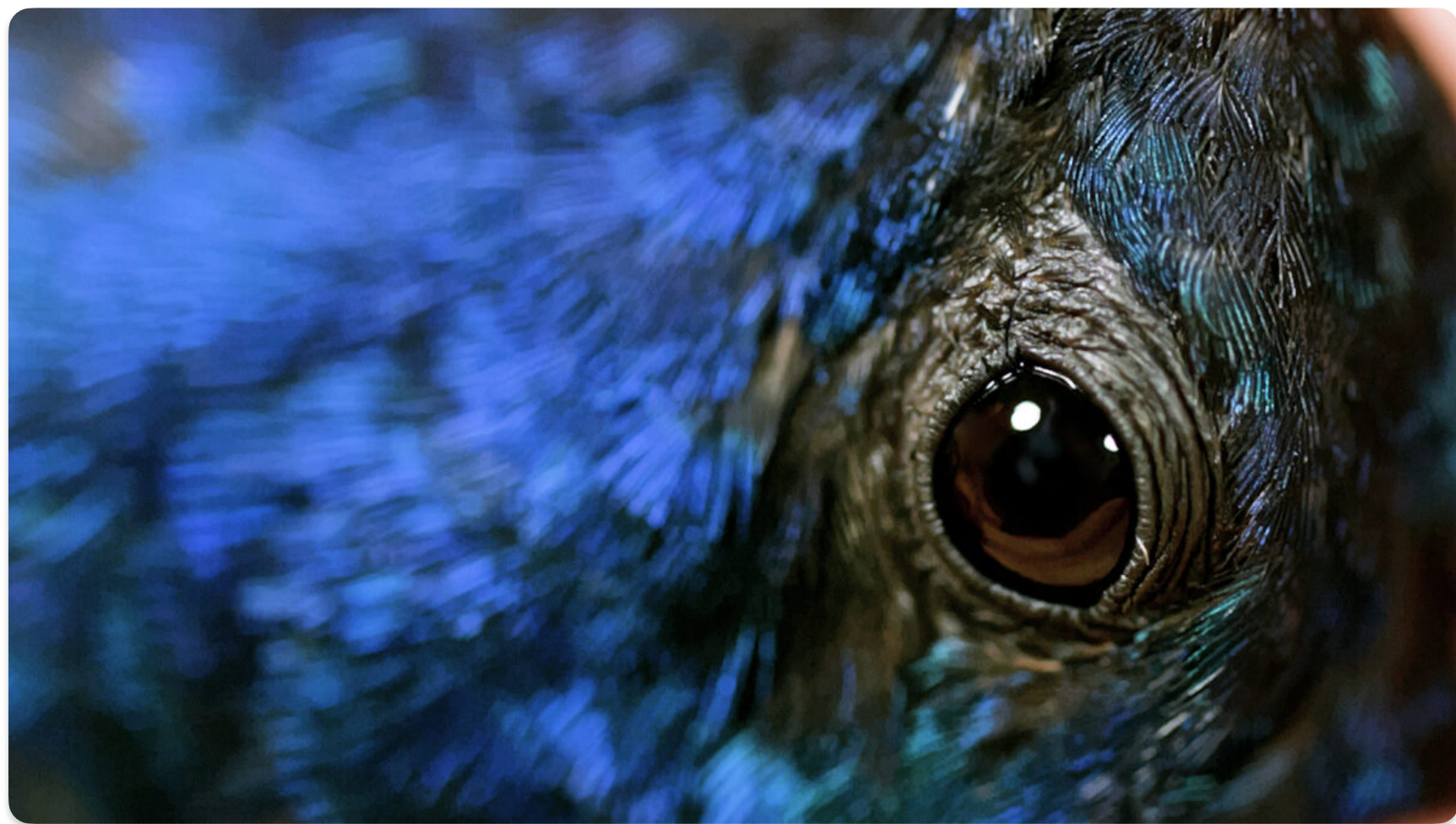
After Alexander von Humboldt, landscape is largely understood as a space of interactions and relations between humans and nature. This thought builds up on a division of these two entities, a Cartesian distinction between body and mind, flesh and thought, the earthly and the divine. It also presupposes the idea of the purity of nature, a sense of untouchedness, and an ideal pre-human state. Many debates and arguments on climate change are based on the comparison of our current situation with pre-industrial CO2 levels, temperature charts, and biodiversity. The main lesson of the anthropocene, however, is precisely the awareness that humans and nature are not two separate entities, but one big interdependent system.

We have fathomed ourselves in nature on the basis of our current epistemic tools, such as science and art. Both have developed their own discourses, often with abstract representations of natural phenomena. In order to reinsert ourselves again into the concrete reality of nature, new approaches from both fields are necessary. One way is to comprehend our existence as part of nature on a planetary basis (as in ecology), and another is to learn about this relation through our senses, how we actually perceive the world as against the safe distance that the notion of landscape has created.

The journée "Nature in Latin American Video Art" presents works that address our immediate relation to nature. The screening includes contributions that describe the material interdependence between us and our environment, and others that offer audiovisual moments to directly perceive it. The medium-specificity of the works is not a hindrance to this experience. As Jens Andermann describes in his 2018 book *Tierras en trance*, any life is always already infused with technology, there is no way to distinguish a natural and a technicized condition. Therefore, in order to redefine the borders of the disciplines and expand our epistemological framework, we must recognize new ways to sensorially connect to nature. The videos of the journée are part of this effort. They have a critical stance to the topic, but at the same time stimulate our senses to be receptive of our environment. This personal, bodily impression mediated through art is as important in the process of finding our place in this world as understanding the physical ramifications of a global ecology. In this sense, art and technology enable each other—and us—to build a new relationship with nature.

Artists: [Ana Vaz](#), [Donna Conlon](#), [Constanza Alarcón Tennen](#), [Andrés Vial](#), [Marianne Hoffmeister](#).

The screening is followed by a Q&A between the curator of MAPA, Matthias Pfaller, and the Chilean artist collective [Agencia de Borde](#) (Rosario Montero, Paula Salas, Sebastián Melo).



Still from *From the Ashes*
Donna Conlon (US/Panama)
Natural refuge shows a hand lifting pieces of garbage from the ground, revealing the animals living underneath. Insects, such as ants, build their homes around the waste which has become a natural infrastructure for them. Rather than looking at trash as something otherworldly due to its human creation and peripheral attention, we must recognize its impact it is already having in our world. Animals live with it, while we have yet to face its role in our environment.
From the Ashes is a close up video of a hummingbird in a human hand. The inert being at first appears dead. Yet, as the camera shows different parts of the body, we perceive faint movements of breathing. Suddenly, the animal blinks and flies away in slow motion. The intricate details of the feathers, eyes, and claws are as amazing and astonishing as its sudden rise. The beauty and yet fragility of the bird are directly connected to our own existence, of which we become aware by realizing our relationship with our fellow beings in this world.
<https://www.donnaconlon.com/>

Natural Refuge (Refugio natural), 2003, SD video with sound, 2:57 min.
From the Ashes (De las cenizas), 2019, HD video with sound, 8:43 min. Sound design: Ingmar Herrera; Sound recording: Ingmar Herrera | Carlos Urriola; Director of photography: Alex Alba; Camera: Oscar Jiménez (Voltage Productions); Ornithology: Jorge Medina, Pedro Castillo, Jay Falk, Brent Burt; Color correction: Tania Alvarado.



Still from *A Film, Reclaimed*
Ana Vaz and Tristan Bera (Brazil, France)
A Film, Reclaimed is a visual exposé of the crises of the anthropocene. The lack of responsibility of Western industries and politics is threatening the livelihood of billions of people and animals on earth. In a sobering account of our present situation, the artists state: "We are nature. We are the catastrophe." Our economic system and our political thinking defending the status quo are creating a state of uncertainty which determines our present and future. In a collage of popular movies, members of the North Atlantic first "discover" the Other, both people and nature considered resources. Then, the sequences bring together visions of the apocalypse in a highly technicized West. In a third part, the artists present ways out of the impending doom, demanding rights for indigenous communities and the cohabitation of species, following a new logic based on "reciprocity rather than domination." Just as racial and gender inequality were naturalized parts of Western life imposed on the world, but turned into a crisis by civil rights and feminist movements, climate change, too, needs to be tackled as a catastrophe. The video contributes to the awareness of the interdependency of all life on our planet and points out ways to overcome the crisis.
<https://lightcone.org/en/filmmaker-2489-ana-vaz>

A Film, Reclaimed. 2015. HD Video. Color, sound. 19:36 min.



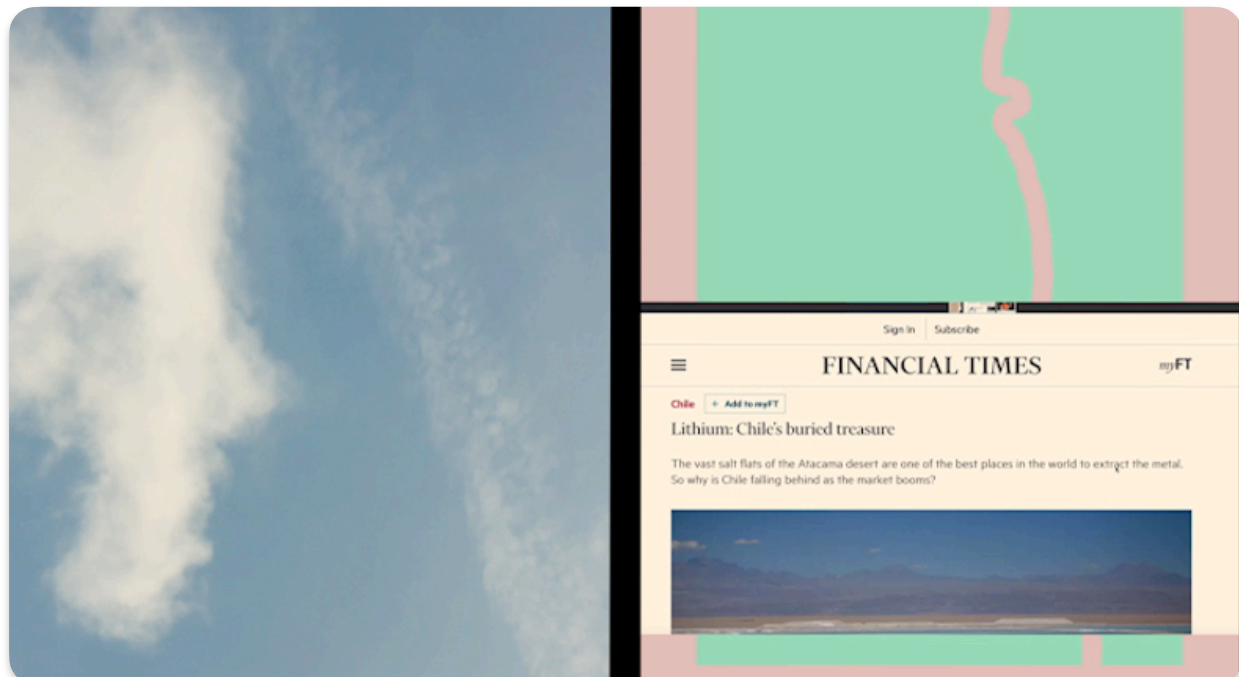
Still from *The Witnesses*
Constanza Alarcón Tennen (Chile)
The Witnesses reports from mysterious geologic activities across many decades. A catastrophe is about to come, announced by burning mountains and sonic vibrations in the earth. The constant roaring of a volcano is echoed by a poet and amplified by a singer's enchanting voice. The sounds synchronize and invade the lives of the inhabitants. Finally, ashes rain down on the world, but the people are no longer afraid. The work is a fictitious construction of history, a compound of emotions and real life events into a non-linear and non-causal narrative about the Iranian poet Ahmad Shamlou and the Chilean musician Víctor Jara. The video lyrically merges the human relation to nature, the tact of the earth, politics, and song in the inexplicable vibrations pervading every molecule of every being in the world.
<https://www.alarcon-tennen.com/video#/the-witnesses/>

The Witnesses. 2016. Video. Color, sound. 8:01 min.



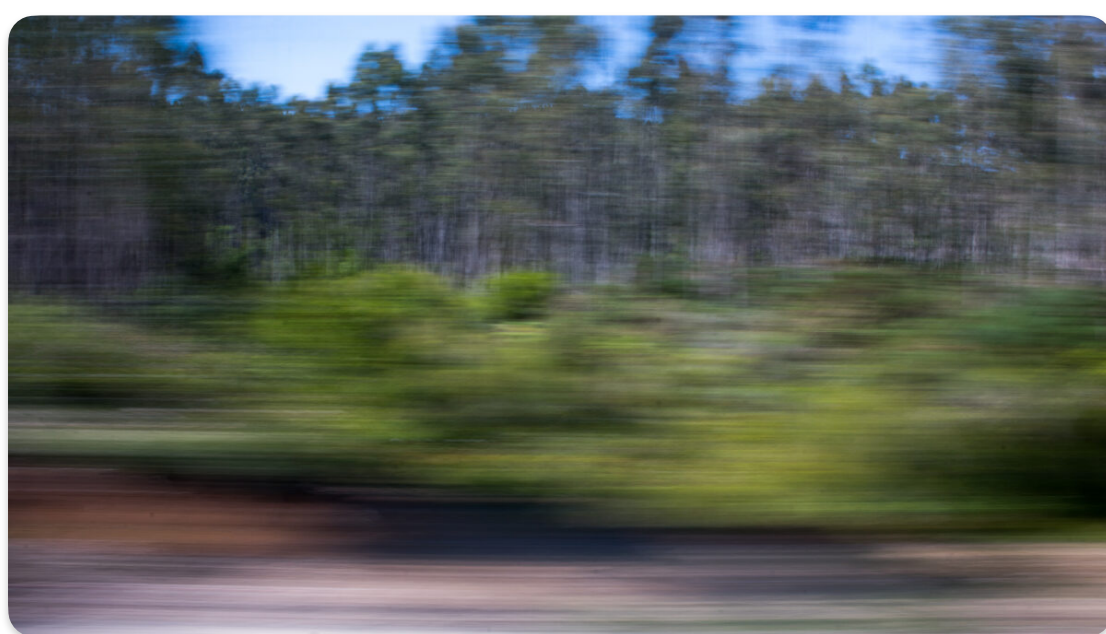
Still from *The Scheme of the Clouds, Hazy Milk, Sea of Mist*
Marianne Hoffmeister (Chile)
In her work she investigates the play (and dilemma) between the concepts of landscape and nature. She emphasizes the cultural and political transformation of the notion of nature into landscape through the projection of our desires onto our environment and non-human beings. Letting animals and elements speak in her videos, she reverses the power of agency and puts us in a listening position. Ultimately, however, this turn is revealed again as a human fiction, underlining the difficult process of affording nature its own voice, without us intervening. Nevertheless, the exercise of admitting a change in perspective fosters our sensibility toward our environment.
<https://mariannehoffmeister.com/>

La Trama de las Nubes (The Scheme of the Clouds). Video. 3:06 min. Color, sound.
Leche Espesa, Mar de Niebla (Hazy Milk, Sea of Mist). Video. 2:56 min. Color, sound. Both St. Anton, Switzerland.C



Still from *Bipolarity*
Andrés Vial (Chile)
At first sight, Vial's juxtaposition of a meditation guide and news about lithium extraction in Northern Chile exemplifies the separation of human and machinic needs. However, the mind and a mobile phone's battery both require lithium salts, as evidenced in the treatment of bipolarity with this element and hinted at by the soothing voice accompanying the left part of the screen. This connection raises thoughts about how similarly or differently our brain works to how we design machines to function, for instance, in terms of how we store and recall situations in our memory or externally on computers. Lithium being a finite resource, it is also a symbol for how extractivist economic politics not only affect ecosystems, but also our mental health.
<http://andresvial.info/>

Bipolarity. Video. 11:20 min. Color, sound.



Still from *El Bosque*
Agencia de borde (Rosario Montero, Paula Salas, Sebastián Melo, Chile)
The work of the artist collective revolves around the interactions, negotiations and dialogues between places and inhabitants which form a landscape. By testing the limits of the idea of the territory, the artists lay bare the power structures that determine life in a given place. Basing their work on interdisciplinary methods, such as artistic intervention and anthropology, they expand the possibilities of conceiving space. In this practice, nature is not a passive agent, but an actively developing entity. In their recent project "El bosque," for instance, they trace the history of the Eucalyptus tree in Chile, which is as much a technology as it is an organic structure.
<http://borderagency.net/>

This event is kindly supported by



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