



CHANTAL DUPAS & ANDREW JOHN MILNE
OMMATIDIA MURALIS

MARCH 10 - APRIL 16, 2016

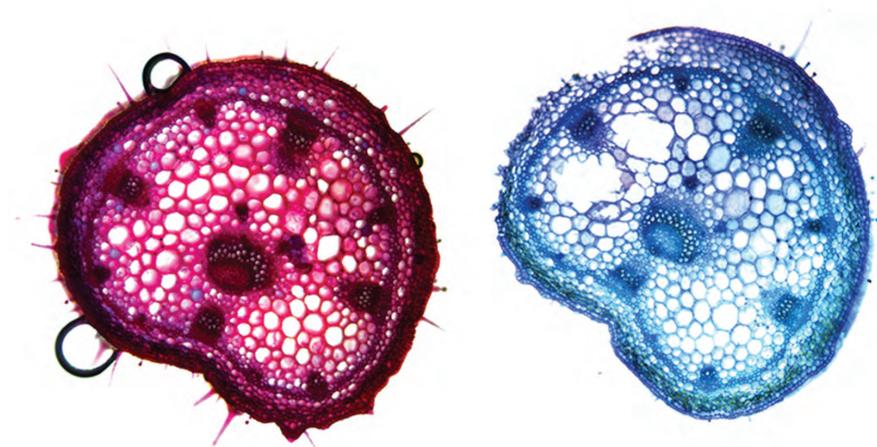
The collaboration between Chantal Dupas and Andrew John Milne might seem an unlikely one, though their rationale makes perfect sense. Despite differences in approach, both examine modes of seeing specific to various disciplines—including science, film and art—to explore how given apparatuses or techniques influence perception. Are there objective and subjective ways of seeing? How does viewership and representation affect knowledge production? Rather than demanding concrete answers, these questions are avenues of inquiry and critique into the power of the image, as well as its lack. It is the process of collaboration that engages not only the problems arising from a given medium, but also those that arise when we attempt to look through someone else's eyes.

To write an exhibition text before the exhibition proper, and in some cases before the work has been completed, is to be a mediator between two ongoing practices. During visits with both artists, a series of parallels and contrasts became apparent. Dupas typically works from her home studio, using plants found in and around her house as her source material. She is also the artist-in-residence at the University of Manitoba's Belamonte Laboratory, where she uses scientific imaging techniques to collapse the boundary between objective knowledge and personal meaning.

Her current collaboration with Milne stems from an earlier body of work in which she painted small, detailed watercolours of weeds pulled from her garden. As the plants shrivelled and changed, so did the drawing, shrinking from its initial outline in testament to the artist's inability to capture time. In *Ommatidia Muralis*—the hybrid Latin title refers, respectively, to the compound eyes of insects and to plants that grow on walls—Dupas presents “microscopic paintings” made from the tinted cross-sections of her houseplant stalks. The viewer must observe these works through a microscope. The layers on the slides form a delicate lacework of imagery that distances the familiar while simultaneously drawing it closer. Her strategy renders scientific modes of looking into intimate aesthetic experiences.

Milne, on the other hand, veers toward the monumental even if his work is not always necessarily large-scale. The artist builds performative, sculptural machines most often in the form of lens-based viewing apparatuses that draw the audience into new, imagined or altered realities. Their intricacy, use of space and imaginative reach can make them seem massive, or even immersive, in scope. His aesthetic is inspired by forgotten technologies of the past: prototype typewriters, early voice machines and other idiosyncratic contraptions discarded on the path to technological progress. His trademark consists of extravagant designs made with the assistance of digital technology even while inspired by obsolescence. Milne maps his inventions on the computer and then manufactures their components by laser-cutting them from wood. Like the defunct mechanisms he bases his work on, his devices rarely fulfill their role; they are characterized by a sense of escapism and play.

As part of this collaborative exhibition, Milne has built devices to view Dupas' tiny layered cross-sections. Using multiple lenses, these “microscopes” fracture her images, render them multiple, and literally explode them into a panoply of perspectives, as if, in the spirit of Cubism, attempting to see from every possible angle.



Dupas welcomes this method, though, as she admits in a studio visit, not without reservation. Her contemplative approach hinges on the subjective intimacy of viewing, while Milne pushes it toward spectacle.

Then there is the question of whether the subjective is, in this case, distinctly gendered. In multiple conversations, both artists express unease at the suggestion, though they admit an awareness of its presence. Dupas' use of watercolours, and plants from her house and garden, form a domestic vocabulary associated with the feminine. In addition to scientific illustration, her poetic images, rendered on warm off-white pages, refer to scrapbooking. As both parallel and contrast, Milne's Rube Goldberg-styled contraptions imply a similar gender bias; toys for boys would be the most glib, if not entirely fair, description. His designs are marked by a technological fetishism that indulges in a sort of DIY bravado. With a mix of sincerity and tongue-in-cheek self-deprecation, he styles himself as an inventor, providing solutions to problems that may or may not exist. Though these tropes can be reductive, they persist and shed a more psychological perspective on the two practices in dialogue here. In this project, each artist becomes a lens through which to view the other.

The collaboration between Milne and Dupas is as aesthetically uneasy as it is conceptually fruitful. Just as they both examine specific ways of seeing, *Ommatidia Muralis* highlights their contrasting subjective and gendered modes of making. Since our bodies and minds form the lens through which we view the world before we even step in front of a microscope, their trace can never be fully erased. Working in contrast with each other, the artists shed light not only on how modes of looking shape knowledge—a relatively well theorized topic—but also on the messier feedback loop between self, apparatus, and collaborator.

Dagmara Genda, 2016

Dagmara Genda is an artist and writer living and working in Winnipeg

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Ommatidia Muralis

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CHANTAL DUPAS is visual artist based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She holds a BFA from the University of Manitoba and has studied at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Yale University and the School of Visual Arts (SVA). Although primarily a painter, her work is never limited to one medium. She has worked with various sculptural materials, from bronze to ceramics, and has recently ventured into video and lab-based new media techniques. Her work has been exhibited across Canada, and is in many collections including TD Bank and the Province of Manitoba. Dupas is represented by Lisa Kehler Art + Projects in Winnipeg.

Artist Statement

My work is rooted in a reflective interest in the cyclical and fragile nature of life. Through my studio practice and research, I have gravitated towards themes such as consumption, death and transformation in various capacities. Often, inspiration for bodies of work begins with analyses of certain experiences within natural environments, whether intentional or coincidental. I am motivated by the discovery of natural occurrences new to me and bring this sense of wonder and awe into the studio, where I begin to question my affinities with and aversions to the world around us. In the past my work has responded to phenomena in places ranging from the Arctic Ocean to the foothills of Connecticut and most recently to my own back yard and the world of botany.

Embracing my compulsion towards fact-based research and organization/categorization, my work enables me to question whether these systems confront fears of mortality and perhaps are ways we deal with and control time. At the core of my practice, I am searching for experiences that remind me that I am within the natural systems I seek to gather information from.

ANDREW JOHN MILNE is a self-taught Winnipeg-based interdisciplinary artist who interweaves new media, film, photography and performance. In his work Milne approaches cutting edge media with obsolesced technologies and materials, constructing anachronistic yet functional devices that pull "mechanism" into a post-cinematic dream space that realizes the future of seeing and knowing.

Andrew is the founder of The Museum of New Ideas, a mobile new media exhibition and studio space, and is a founding member of Bent Light, a post-cinema film collective. His work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally.

Artist Statement

I feel that invention can be described as the arranging of various components, supports, and materials around an invisible form: the function of an apparatus. I am deeply interested in the nature of these invisible structures; What is the source of these unseen operations? Are they expressions, desires, needs, ideas? The apparatus is an embodiment that allows the nature of function to leak into the experience of the viewer; shape, rhythm, limits, outcomes.

Creating a device to both contain and facilitate the work of another has been a learning experience as every decision carries different weight when the loss that is risked is not your own. It has also served to emphasize how much the physicality of an optical mechanism is at odds with its functioning. Is it that optical devices strive for a functional invisibility? or how is it that we, in order to realize the transcendence that they promise, require them to be so?

Images: "Ommatidia Muralis" installation view, Dupas & Milne; and "Untitled" by Chantal Dupas 2015

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