



www.welcometolace.org

Gallery Hours: Wednesday - Sunday 12PM-6PM

## **A NonHuman Horizon**

*Andrea Chung, Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, Jenny Yurshansky, and the Harrison Studio*

June 29, 2019 - September 1, 2019

A NonHuman Horizon aims at holding human empathy and ecology together as objects of contemplation through artworks that use natural imagery to meditate on racial difference. Its curatorial decisions reflect an interest in whether the effects of racial categorical thinking might be instructive to environmentalism. On exhibit are artworks that represent a range of media using nature to reflect on the markers of identity their authors inhabit. Andrea Chung's dry sink sculpture, *Pure* (2017), utilizes water and soap to respond to stigmas of dirtiness around midwifery within her Afro-Caribbean community. Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio's *MaSeCa* (2019), a cast of a California oak tree interwoven with ephemera retrieved from its surroundings, evinces the strained socio-economic ties that bind Central American communities to the United States. Jenny Yurshansky's hand-cut index of California's invasive plant species, collected in *Herbarium* (2015), is intimately informed by her family's experience as Jewish refugees from Soviet-era Moldova. And The Harrison Studio's *She Was An Everyday Empath* (*Meditations on the Gabrieliño*) (1976, 2019), reconstructs the ideals of an earlier period of environmentalism prior to the identity-oriented concerns of the present. Overall, these works highlight material and emotional injuries that iniquities of power produce; however, through their shared ecological orientation, they also create a surplus of meaning.

Despite their differences, these artists use imagery of seemingly insensate life – organisms whose inner lives are completely opaque to humans – in attempts to impart insight into ethnic and gendered experience in a fashion that resists mere anthropomorphism. Therefore, these artworks exhibit a latent concern of bringing opaque life within the horizon of what individuals can empathize with. They skirt with a limit of what is describable about the non-human world in human terms. This commonality reveals how empathetic reasoning as a vehicle for moral persuasion – i.e., how compassion for the environment is fostered – is often unexamined in eco-critical art. The eco-critical tendencies on display inadvertently call attention to the limits of empathic persuasion on the abstraction of ecological systems. But racial difference is instructive here, and these artists' focus reminds us that empathic projection is historically and culturally malleable. Why might that matter?

What alternative public narratives about ecological collapse might arise if a language could be imagined that places opaque life on an equal footing with human propriety while remaining faithful to its impenetrability? This question may seem fanciful but a congruent logic has been underway for some time among animal rights advocates who liken speciesism to traditional racism in their campaigns. They poignantly ask why some non-human animal species enjoy more compassion than others in order to draw attention to speciesism's parallels with culturally transmitted forms of discriminatory behavior. Other advocates research animal communication, as a way to broaden human's capacity to identify with other species. And recently environmentalist scholars have begun theorizing what it might mean to build a language of mourning for ecological collapse as a strategy to further collective responsibility. The art exhibited in *A NonHuman Horizon*, therefore, invites viewers to contemplate the joint logics of dehumanization and non-human ethical obligations.

As the curator of this exhibition, I would like to conclude with an observation I made while conducting research for this project. All of the artists participating in this exhibition expressed to me in some fashion or another that they consider environmental justice to be inextricably linked to social inequity. Put simply, the social is irreducibly an ecological question. I wish to add my own qualification that the social is irreducibly a question of human propriety. What that means for ecology I invite viewers to contemplate. The participating artists provide opportunities to imagine the urgent conceptual transformations I list above. Most importantly, their work allows us to initiate a conversation about empathy within ecological struggle. This concern connects Chung, Aparicio, Yurshansky, and the Harrisons across seemingly impassable limits of identity and generation.

Andrew McNeely

Curator

Kim Zumpfe

Exhibition Designer

*Support for this exhibition is provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation and Pasadena Art Alliance.*