

« Do not throw trash into the pond »  
Hamish Pearch

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“A paper-thin layer” around a sphere of nitrogen, hydrogen and oceans; just a membrane surrounding a sphere in the middle of nothingness – it is with this image that the astronaut Ron Garan describes the atmosphere of the Earth, observed from space. Created upon returning from an expedition carried out in 2008, his blog *Fragile Oasis* testifies to what has been called “the overview effect”: an emotional and cognitive disorder that affects astronauts at the sight of their planet, an interstellar Stendhal syndrome in which the immensity of the void makes them realize the smallness of everything else.

There is something of this clash in scale, of a visual and affective disruption, in the work of Hamish Pearch. His “overview affect” is not that of an orbital capture at 360°, but of a relativization in which the infinitesimal is felt as much as the cosmos. In playing with size, his works attempt to capture portions of infinity. In bins, in bags, in Siamese cups with centripetal forces – so many containers where scientific schemas meet the grammar of dreams. Pearch disrupts logical discourse with a lexicography of images made up of unexpected twinning and fortuitous equations. He measures the gaps and equivalences between a thing, its double, and its quadruple miniature, as in his image of a brain held in place by bits of chewing gum that offer a disturbing resemblance. “Mapping out the world with diagram and objects,” reads the subtitle of one of Pearch’s pamphlets. It is from this logic that his assemblages arise. They aim to trace the world in terms of its materials, to organize it in terms of what we chew and what we pick up, to scratch the bottom of bags to see what we find there.

There is a reconstruction of the universe via bricolage, wherein the azure of an oxidized mushroom imitates a planet and integrates into a system at once solar, cellular, and economic. Pearch piles up all three systems, tearing out the pages of astronomy textbooks and covering them with medical imaging or invoices, or with opaque molecules in the form of paperweights. Elements resist gravity here; they affect each other and press against each other, like a leaf plucked from in front of the atelier, fossilized in bronze, and held further in place by another of these paperweight marbles. It’s because everything still risks levitating, being rendered weightless, like in a space shuttle.

The exhibition itself mimics takeoff: the gallery entrance reenacts the ritual of the airport security check, with a large counter for unzipping suitcases. *Do not throw trash into the pond* takes up the tone of signage. The title rings out in warning: do not throw anything into the pond, keep everything in your pockets; empty them into bins transformed into display cases, sealed with a pane, with wire, cut with the precision of a jigsaw. Pearch literally empties his bag, like a confession, a portrait en creux composed of what he has kept. Tell me what you’re carrying, I’ll tell you who you are – or “What’s in your handbag?” to cite *Vogue*’s celebrity questionnaire. A Chanel backpack? You are pragmatic; unstoppable, you can’t stay still! (Margot Robbie). An Isabelle Marant clutch, inside a Prada bag? You are foresighted, ready to brave the unexpected (Gigi Hadid).

Pearch revisits the *intrecciato* typical of Italian leather goods to his own ends. Made in a Milanese artisanal foundry, a bag’s basket intertwined with flowers camouflages only a toad, for which it serves as a nest. Neither makeup, nor passport, none of the accoutrements of travel that ratify or reshape identity – just this amphibian. It underlines Pearch’s attraction to mutation, of which the toad who dreams of being a prince is a time-honored symbol. Of this transformation for which a kiss would suffice, Pearch has kept only the tongue: during one of our conversations, he mentions the toad-licking practiced by certain visitors to the Sonoran desert, who are eager to lick the *incilius alvarius*, a frog whose skin is said to contain psychotropic secretions. What if metamorphosis has only ever been the effect of tripping?

Pearch plays on the polysemy of the word in English. Here the journey is one in which perception changes with altitude – to the point of seeing in a peanut the possibility of a precious stone; of contemplating the Milky Way in a tartan fabric studded with chewing gum; of transforming an envelope of pustules into a translucent surface. From a ship to a taxi of which only the receipt remains, *Do not throw trash into the pond* is a matter of transport, baggage, and moltings. Pearch turns over clothing fabrics, looks under the epidermis, enlarges cells to see maps. The exposure goes to the edges of the eye to stretch the mucous membrane. It’s about letting deformations happen, being moved by our memories, by this trash lost at the bottom of pockets and among the cliffs. Then the smallest thing can shine like a star. It is an intoxication and an inversion comparable, the author Daphné B. tells us, to that provoked by the overview effect:

"[...] From space, we can even see the scars that run across the surface of the Earth [...], the erosion of its lands, the borders traced on its gridded flesh. Plunged into a euphoric state, the overwhelmed astronauts are filled with love, empathy and care for [the Earth]. The spectacle of fragility is hypnotizing. It is also said that it is the favorite activity of astronauts on missions, staring down at the Earth and getting drunk on its flaws."(1)

*Salomé Burstein*

(1) *Daphné B., Maquillée. Essai sur le monde et ses fards, Paris, Grasset, 2021, p. 55.*

*Hamish Pearch (b. 1993, London, UK) earned his BFA from Camberwell College of Arts (UAL) in 2015 and received a Postgraduate Diploma from the Royal Academy Schools, London, 2019.*

*Selected solo exhibitions include 'Smoky, Moth and Mike', Ginny on Frederick, London (2023); 'If things were different', Galeria Mascota, Mexico City (2022); 'Happy Birthday, Dear Speed', Quench, Margate (2022); 'Amygdala lost and found', Sans titre, Paris (2021); 'Thames Mud', Front, Brussels (2021); 'Head Above Water', Belsunce Projects | Manifesta 13, Marseille (2020); 'Nights', Soft Opening, London (2019) and 'On a day like this', Sans titre, Paris (2018).*

*Curated and selected group exhibitions include the Drawing Biennial, London (2024); 'Dispatches', Sans titre, Paris (2024); 'Reading Stones', LINDSEED, Shanghai (2023); 'Day by Day, Good Day', Union Pacific, London (2023); 'Cheirometa (Things Made by Hand)', Sperling, Munich (2023); 'Je suis la chaise', Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris (2022); 'The Art of Mushrooms', Park Serralves Foundation, Porto (2022-2023); 'Civil Twilight', Ginny on Frederick, London (2022); 'All season sanctuary', Mendes Wood DM at Retranchement (2022); 'Glitch: The City as Palimpsest', Cooke Latham, London (2022); 'La Psychologie des Serrures', CAN - Centre d'Art de Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2021); 5th Edition, Contemporary Sculpture Fulmer, London (2021); 'Mushrooms', Somerset House, London (2020); 'Schools Show', Royal Academy of Art, London (2019); Ana Prata and Hamish Pearch curated by Kiki Mazzucchelli at Kupfer, London (2018); 'Go', Soft Opening, London (2018); 'New Relics', Thames-side Studios, London, (2018); 'Premiums', Royal Academy of Arts, London, (2018); 'Addams Outtakes', Roaming Projects, London, (2017); 'Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavour' (co-curated and exhibited in with William Rees) at J Hammond Projects, London (2017); 'Le Laboratoire', Sans titre, Marseille, (2017); Bloomberg New Contemporaries at Primary, Nottingham and ICA, London (2015).*

*Hamish Pearch's exhibition at Belsunce Projects won a grant from Fluxus Art Projects and the artist was a finalist for the XL Caitlin Prize in 2016. In 2024, he took part in the residency program of the Fonderia Artistica Battaglia in Milan and at Launch Pad LaB in 2020. Later this year in July 2024, the artist will take part in the summer residency program at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, selected by Frances Morris.*