

Agnieszka Polska
The Book of Flowers
06 March - 10 April 2025

The Book of Flowers, 2023, HD video, 9 min. 38 sec

“The world as you know it - where males aren’t devoured by plants, where tiny flowers serve as food and where a couple doesn’t need a spore to have a child - is new and still changing.”

Agnieszka Polska, *The Book of Flowers*, 2023

In Agnieszka Polska’s ecological history of humankind, we discover a new ancestry rooted in human-flora symbiosis. In this world, plant nectar flows through our veins alongside blood, blood is spilt in service of plants, and flower cups serve as incubators of love; they are the setting for procreation and pollination which culminates in the death of the male human lover. Instead, it is the expecting mothers which are rewarded through their mythical status, for the toil of their reproductive labour.

This is a story which has been buried beneath others for centuries, such as those told by the men who eventually overcame the carnivorous plants which once consumed them, or those told by modernity, which separated nature from what we understand as the ‘human’. After all, stories are powerful, and they structure knowledge and self-understanding. Polska has uncovered one which brings into question all that we know and all that we have been told. Told through the assured voice

of actor Tina Greatrex, this narrative accompanies imagery generated by the synthesis of early time-lapse plant videos and Artificial Intelligence; found footage without any original framing. In this film, nature, human, and now *technology* bleed into each other, and from their union, our contemporary world is born.

Though Polska’s poetic retelling of the origins of humanity (and plant life) might initially seem fantastical, it brings our global cybernetic consciousness— a particular fixation of the artist’s work— into focus. After all, have humans and plants not depended on each other for millenia? Have humans not sought to overcome this reliant relationship in our domination of all? In our technological stories of ‘progress’, we have forgotten the destruction and oppression (of others and nature) which underline much of the modern world. Polska provides an alternative. Beneath the colossal petals of prehistoric flower cups, glossed in sticky nectar and bodily fluids, and sung to the backdrop of Charles-Marie Widor’s *Symphony No. 5 Toccata for Organ*, she questions the kinships and divisions we construct, and exposes them for what they are: stories we tell ourselves.

Text by Ella Slater