

Johanna Strobel: My Heart is not a Clock
At POMPEI, Brooklyn

October 11 – November 1, 2024

15:10

After nearly half a decade, construction has finally been completed. Finalized with luscious frescoes sweeping across expansive ceilings, the Villa is a marvel for all those fortunate enough to visit. At the unveiling ceremony a confused guest asks patron Signore Agostino Chigi: "what will come of the barren trompe l'oeil pedestals lining the surrounding walls? What will the artisans render to fill these voids? The fresco surely cannot be complete." Met with silence, the guest could only conclude that absence creates an insatiable desire, and that this very absence was the intended occupant of the cold, gray pedestals. Can desire expand beyond the confines of one's lifespan? Concerned with gazing, both of the navel and of the stars, Signore Chigi had the Villa's loggia decorated with an elegant astrological constellation displaying planetary positions as they were on November 29th, the patron's date of birth. The planets have continued to orbit, and right now is the oldest the Earth and all of its inhabitants have ever been.

18:45

Far beyond the fields on the perimeter of town, a low dark cloud is rolling swiftly across the horizon. As it approaches, a deafening cacophony can no longer be ignored. This is no cloud – the Passengers have returned en masse, their tessellating bodies shading the ground below like a total eclipse of the sun. Their hunger and sheer numbers have destroyed livelihoods, and their endless, mad search for sustenance and breeding grounds continue to torment local residents, many of whom have ultimately concluded that the species must be destroyed. A campaign to annihilate the Passengers has begun, and everyday citizens have taken to shooting aimlessly into the heavens.

19:14

Martha was the lone Passenger still alive, an endling. Held in captivity for many years, Martha was unable to move much within her restricting cage or to socialize with her otherwise extinct kin. Perhaps these melancholic conditions affected her circulatory system, leading to her eventual death by stroke. Upon her death the taxidermists got to work, expertly preserving her flesh and sinew – Martha was a local celebrity, after all. A ceremony was held in her honor, and a memorial statue erected to commemorate and eternalize the Passengers for generations to come.

20:22

Rising from the ashes, the Italian Renaissance villa slowly assembles itself, only to collapse into dust once more. Interlocking and swirling in unison, Passengers flock to the reincarnated site, only to disappear moments later. What do we choose to monumentalize as an individual, or as a society? Always remember that absence creates desire.

Time is typically understood as linear, yet our most ubiquitous visual representation of it – the circular three-handed clock – defies this very idea. The heart, another clock of sorts, will only beat so many times within a given lifespan. At birth, a slow and endless countdown begins. Martha's clock ran out long ago, yet discussions of de-extinction procedures are currently underway. Scientists question if they can repurpose Martha's dried and dusty skin to revive a new generation of Passengers, over 100 years after their extinction. A Frankensteinian phoenix of this sort has undeniably complex implications, ecological and otherwise, broad and unforeseen. Does Martha's absence merit a desire for the unnatural regeneration of her kind? Reincarnation by human intervention is the act most akin to time travel that mankind is able to perform.

– Moira Sims

A space with a borrowed name from a time long ago exists in the present on a distant continent. Buried and frozen in time, yet resurrected again and again another Pompei lies in Brooklyn. In a small room a virtual world expands. Destruction and rebirth repeat not without cost. Accelerated cycles are running dead in the end. History repeats itself -but life passes. Time is the sensation of memory.

Pompei is excited to present “My Heart is not a Clock” an installation of two ceramic sculptures and a virtual reality video by Johanna Strobel.

The immersive video explores philosophical concepts of circular time and the loss of species through human caused extinction. Situated in a stylized version of the Villa Farnesina in Rome, the voiceover narration follows the example of the passenger pigeon’s extinction in the early 20th century and its possible future de-extinction through cloning throughout the circle of time.

The multiple-part ceramics sculptures contain infrared heat emitters. Over time a cast paraffin wax bird melts into the lower part of the first sculpture, which functions as an egg-shaped mold and so the bird become an egg again. The second sister sculpture reverses this process – the egg melts into a bird shaped mold. With every iteration some of the wax evaporates, so that in the end just fragments of birds and eggs are cast and remelted until all the wax is gone - the cycle accelerates until it stops.

Johanna Strobel holds parallel degrees in Information Science and Mathematics and graduated with honors in Painting and Graphics from the Academy of Fine Arts Munich, Germany. In 2020 she received an MFA in New Genres from Hunter College New York.

Her work was shown in exhibitions in Germany, Italy, Austria, Taiwan, Korea, Canada and the US, including Neues Museum Nuremberg, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Museum Gunzenhauser, Chemnitz, Kunstverein Munich, Institute for Modern Art Nuremberg, Bethanien, Berlin, 205Hudson Gallery, New York, Nada House, New York, and NARS Foundation, Brooklyn. Her work was part of the inaugural Immigrant Artist Biennial, New York, and featured online by Hauser & Wirth.

Johanna received grants and stipends among others by the German Academic Exchange Service, Steiner Foundation, Stiftung Kunstfonds, the State of Bavaria, the German Artist Alliance and the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media of Germany.

She is a fellow of the Program for the Realization of Equal Opportunities for Women in Research and Teaching of the State of Bavaria. Johanna is a member of NEW INC, the New Museum’s cultural incubator (New York), of Mensa International, and a TEDx speaker.

My heart is not a clock (Martha), 2022
360 video, 5.7K, 5:28 min

My Heart is not a Clock (running out) I and II, 2024, ceramics, cotton webbing, plaster, silicone, paraffin wax, fasteners, infrared heat emitter, lamp socket, cable, 56 x 14.5 x 13.5 inches and 60 x 16 x 14 inches

photo credit: Dominik Bindl