

# Okto -Lab

As a reflection of this institution's recognition of the deep history and culture of this island, the University of Tasmania wishes to acknowledge the muwinina and palawa peoples, the traditional owners and custodians of the land upon which this campus was built; and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging.

13 December 2019 – 25 January 2020

Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania

Madison Bycroft, mOwson&M0wson, Rachel Bailey,  
Neozoon, Hörner/Antlfinger, Peter Godfrey-Smith,  
Burton-Nitta, Mike Singe, Pony Express, Erin Hortle,  
Natalie Ryan, Jayson Semmens

Curated by Yvette Watt, Toby Juliff, André Krebber,  
Maike Riedinger & Anne Hölck

# OktoLab19

## FOREWARD

### THE EVOLUTION OF OKTOLAB19

Yvette Watt, Toby Juliff, André Krebber &  
Maïke Riedinger

Octopuses are complex and curious creatures – and by curious we mean they are both fascinating, as well as being renowned for their inquisitive nature. As Peter Godfrey-Smith notes in his essay in this catalogue, the octopus' evolutionary path diverged from humans many millions of years ago, and yet these extraordinary molluscs, with their multiple hearts, blue blood and decentralised brain demonstrate the kind of intelligence and problem-solving behaviours more commonly associated with mammals and birds. And while the alien appearance of octopuses has intrigued and troubled humans throughout history and across cultures, from ancient Greece to modern Hollywood, in recent years, octopuses have been receiving increased attention as conscious others, with individual personalities who return our gaze. Being such remarkable as well as highly aesthetic creatures, it is hardly surprising that octopuses have also attracted the interest of artists. Key to the Okto-Lab project, of which this exhibition is a part, is the potential for the creative arts to contribute to an interdisciplinary knowledge space as well as open up new, strange and unexpected perspectives on octopuses,

inspired by these animals' long and ambiguous presence in art and cultural history.

The Okto-Lab project originated with conversations in 2016 between Yvette Watt and André Krebber at the University of Kassel, Germany, while Yvette was a visiting scholar. After success with a funding application to the Australia-Germany Joint Research Cooperation Scheme the curatorial team was expanded to include Maïke Riedinger, Toby Juliff, and Anne Hölck. From the beginning the team was interested in the octopus as both primary subject-matter and as a model for interdisciplinary research. Octopuses have served us well in this respect, with the octopodian nature of the project evident in the bringing together of artists, writers and scientists from around the world to contribute to twin exhibitions; *OktoLab19* at the Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania in Hobart, Australia, and a further exhibition at the GLASMOOG Gallery at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, Germany in May & June 2020.

The exhibitions' guiding principle is to consider octopuses as sentient subjects while disrupting and reordering human-

centred concepts of subjectivity. The responses to this curatorial brief by *OktoLab19* participants are as complex, fascinating, diverse and wonderful as the eight-armed animals that have been their inspiration. Anglo-Japanese duo, Burton Nitta have created a 3D virtual experience based on Peter Godfrey-Smith's writings on octopuses, prompting us to imagine how an octopus experiences the world. Another artist couple, Hörner/Antlfinger, are also interested in imagining the world from an octopus' perspective, but in this case they are concerned with the experiences of captive octopuses in aquaria. Natalie Ryan is also interested in the display of cephalopods, but she concerns herself with dead specimens and mourns the lack of empathy evident in the presentation of these animals in death. mOwson&MOwson have taken octopus motherhood as the subject of their work, responding to the poignant beauty of the mother octopus tending to her eggs, eschewing all food, only to die not long after her eggs hatch. Zooming out from such individual perspectives, Pony Express takes the octopus' form as a model for a non-hierarchical social structure and new alternative world order. Madison Bycroft, with their long-term interest in cephalopods, also looks to octopuses as models for considering alternative ways of understanding or ordering the world arounds us; the unknowability of these animals becomes a proposition for engaging empathy without requiring understanding. Mike Singe imagines octopuses in a

more humorous provocation evolving to the point where they take issue with the human exploitation of their form for commercial rewards; just type the term "octopus" into an Amazon.com search! Neozoon, another duo, also tackle the messy tangle of octopus representations whereby they simultaneously occupy a space of respectful fascination, humorous objectification and as "seafood", with a video work that depicts human-animal hybrids telling octopus jokes while consuming themselves.

But *OktoLab19* is more than just an exhibition, it is a meeting of minds and a sharing of knowledge. The overall project includes symposia and further publications, and aims to contribute to an understanding and conceptualizing of octopuses, both in respect to their being-in-the-world and our perception of them. A clear demarcation of scientific, artistic and cultural approaches to octopuses is deliberately disrupted, allowing the possibility of questioning our understanding of the (non)human world and opening a space to challenge our ways of perceiving our environment in these environmentally troubled times. Apart from the artworks in the exhibition, this project includes commissioned texts from romance writer and creative arts PhD candidate Rachel Bailey, and from philosopher Peter Godfrey-Smith, author of *Other Minds: The Octopus, The Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*. Rachel took up the challenge to respond to the 1814 woodcut by Katsushika Hokusai, popularly known as "The Dream of the Fisherman's

Wife" in a story that links the historical artwork with revenge porn, entwining the oppression of women and animals under patriarchy. Peter contributed an essay and two of his photographs based on his personal experiences diving with octopuses at two sites in Jervis Bay, some 100 miles south of Sydney, where octopuses congregate in groups, while reflecting on evolution as a process with unknown and often unexpected outcomes. We are also delighted to be able to include Erin Hortle's short story, *The Octopus and the Eyes*, which tells of a young girl's curiously intimidating encounter with an octopus as recalled by her older self. In addition to the contributions by artists and writers we are grateful to Professor Jayson Semmens, a UTAS marine biologist and cephalopod expert, for allowing us to include his collection of cephalopod paraphernalia that accompanies him in his office. Jayson tells us that such collections are common amongst cephalopod researchers, and each item in his collection has its own story – one can't help but wonder about an exhibition based solely on such collections!

*OktoLab19* would not have been possible without the generous support of numerous funding bodies, with initial project development funding received from the Australia-Germany Joint Research Cooperation Scheme (DAAD/Universities Australia). Exhibition funding was received from the Australia Council for the Arts, The Regional Arts Fund Tasmania, as well as

substantial financial and in-kind support from the University of Tasmania and the University of Kassel. We are also grateful to the UTAS Marine, Antarctic and Maritime Theme Area, and the Environment, Resources and Sustainability Theme Area for funding assistance for the two symposia at UTAS in October 2018 and January 2020.

Thanks must go to Courtney Simpson and Amelia Digney, curators of *The 9th Arm* student exhibition at Entrepôt Gallery, Hobart, that accompanied *OktoLab19*, and think you also to all of the exhibition participants.

We also acknowledge the incredible support of Plimsoll Gallery Coordinator, Jane Barlow, whose professional expertise and project management skills made the task of bringing together the unwieldy beast that is *OktoLab19* so much easier than it would have been without having Jane on board.

Without a doubt the biggest thank you must go to all *OktoLab19* participants, who responded with such enthusiasm to the invitation to be a part of the exhibition, and whose creative energies have delivered such a wonderful exhibition—there would be no exhibition without them. And finally, we must pay special acknowledgment to the octopuses of the world who have inspired everyone involved in Okto-Lab, and who we hope will inspire you to consider octopuses as sentient creatures deserving of your respect and admiration.







**Katsushika Hokusai**

*Kinoe no komatsu (Pine Seedlings on the First Rat Day (or Old True Sophisticates of the Club of Delightful Skills))* 1814

Woodblock print

18.9 x 26.6 cm

Popularly known as

*The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*

Courtesy The British Museum

**WHAT LIES AT THE HEART**

Rachel Bailey

Chiyo stood at the water's edge, small waves lapping at her feet, a light breeze lifting her hair, and her heart dying in her chest. She'd heard yesterday of the monstrosity that was on display in the village—a woodcut depicting her engaging in unspeakable acts. But worse, far worse than the public humiliation, had been her husband's reaction. She glanced over her shoulder at the village. Although she could not see them, the prickling along her skin told her that people watched.

Drawing a deep breath, she pulled herself to her full height and stepped into the water, letting the cool silk of it engulf her feet. The sea was the only place she'd found solace, found joy, since she'd moved here as a new bride. Her husband had not been the man she'd expected him to be. He'd kept her isolated, ensuring the townsfolk remained at a distance. And so when the Emperor's man had demanded her attendance while her husband was away on the boats, she'd had no friend to accompany her. Had she known he would ask for more than her presence, she may have tried harder to avoid him, yet what option would she have had? Despite her adamant refusal of his advances, it had only

been her insistence that she was married that saved her. "Married?" he'd jeered. "To a *fisherman*?" But her husband was tall and strong, and uncertainty had crept into the man's eyes. She'd managed to escape that day; nonetheless, he'd taken his revenge in the end.

Deep enough now, she pushed off and swam with strong strokes, heading for a pile of jumbled rocks that jutted out of the sea. Her rendezvous point to the side of the rocks was waist-deep and protected from the greater part of the disturbance made by the waves.

Ichi was first—she always was—her fluid body darting from a nook. The little octopus reached out two tentacles the colour of the dark rocks in greeting. Chiyo took a piece of fish from a small bag tied to her wrist and passed it across.

"Hello, little sister," she said. "I am sorry I did not come earlier." Determined to avoid giving her husband another reason to be angry, she had spent extra time on her chores.

Ichi scurried away, hiding the fish in her nook, and then reappeared.

"Did you miss me, little one?"

Ichi wrapped a tentacle around her finger and squeezed. The trust of the tiny creature brought tears to Chiyo's eyes, and resolve to her heart. When her husband had seen the woodcut yesterday, he'd threatened to kill her for the dishonour she'd brought him. No matter how desperately she'd tried to explain, he would not listen. Then he'd hit upon a crueller punishment. He would kill her little friends. The entire village knew she visited the octopuses at these rocks each day, and often made jokes at her expense. She did not mind; their mockery could not hurt her. The deaths of Ichi and the others, however, would be unbearable.

It had been in the dark of night when her husband had made his threats, and he'd set off this morning with the other men before dawn on the fishing boats. The sun was starting to sink in the sky now, casting shadows over the surface of the water. The boats would return soon, and she had no doubt he would remember his promise, and still she had no plan.

Tsuru came gliding over the sand towards her, causing Ichi to scurry back to her nook to defend her fish. Tsuru ignored her rival, instead focused on Chiyo, dancing and undulating as she floated closer, her tentacles rising and falling in synchronised rhythm, creating swirls in the water. A tiny spark of joy lit in Chiyo's chest, fighting off the darkness, and she smiled.

"That beautiful display deserves a reward, little sister." She retrieved a piece of fish and held it out to Tsuru. The elegant, pale-skinned octopus lingered as she took it, as if enjoying their connection, then flitted away.

How could she protect them? Her friends deserved no part of the peril in which Chiyo was now entangled, yet, what could be done?

Movement at the edge of her vision caught her attention. A figure in the water, heading towards her. Chiyo's heartbeat skipped then ran too fast. No one had ever followed her into the water before. It was not her husband, but if this person also wished to harm her or her friends, what could she do? Instinctively, she scuffed her feet, throwing sand up into the water, clouding it, providing a visual shield for the octopuses from whatever was to come.

As the figure drew near, she recognised Matsu, an older, respected woman of the village. She stopped several arm-lengths away. In lieu of a greeting Matsu bowed her head slightly and said, "I hope I do not intrude."

Chiyo watched for signs of danger. A woman, one who'd never paid her attention in the past, followed her the day after the hateful woodcut appeared. It could be no coincidence.

"You are welcome to join me in sea bathing if you wish," she said carefully.

Matsu nodded. "Thank you for your hospitality."

There was more movement on the shoreline and a second woman entered the water. From this distance, she could not tell who it was, but a shiver ran down her spine. If these women wished her ill, she would be outnumbered, with nowhere to hide. Butterflies took flight in her belly. Was this to be her fate? Perhaps her husband's intention was to have his desire carried out by others? The second woman stopped close enough to touch, and Chiyo curled her toes into the heavy sand. She had seen these women use their sharp knives to slit open oyster shells and harvest swathes of seaweed.

The smooth slide of a tentacle wrapped around her ankle. She glanced down. The sand had cleared and her skittish friend Ichi was visible. Her body had camouflaged to the colour of the golden sand, yet her movement betrayed her location to the women. Chiyo's skin went cold. She may not survive the day, but she would do whatever she could to protect her friends.

She raised her chin and met the older woman's gaze. "Why have you come?"

The second woman bowed her head and Chiyo noticed there were two, no three more women in the water, headed for them.

"I overheard your husband speak to mine this morning," Matsu said, her expression flat. "He plans to harm you and your sea friends before the day is over. This cowardly act has opened my eyes, and I wish to apologise."

Chiyo frowned. "Why would you apologise? None of this was your doing."

"For not befriending you as I should have done."

The second woman stepped forward. "I too wish to apologise. You deserved a hand extended in friendship, yet I allowed myself to be swayed by the words of a man who had done nothing to earn such loyalty."

Chiyo opened her mouth to reply, but her throat had thickened, making it difficult to speak. They had come to offer support. She was not alone.

She swallowed hard until her voice came again. "I am humbled and more grateful than I can say for your kindness."

Chiyo looked down at Ichi and Tsuru. Both the Emperor's man and her husband had tried to use her connection with these creatures against her. One to humiliate; the other to punish. And they had failed. Others now stood with her. Their allegiance may not be enough to save her, but it was priceless all the same.

The three new women reached the rocks and more still had entered the water. One of the new women handed her some small pieces of fish. "For your friends," she said simply.

Chiyo accepted the offering. Her voice trembled as she said, "Thank you."

Emotion flooded her chest and then overflowed to fill her body, and it was too



much. To give herself space she drew in a deep breath and dove into the water. She held a piece of fish to Ichi, who wrapped it in the tip of her tentacle and dashed back to her nook.

Tsuru had been lurking, but she was more timid with strangers nearby, so Chiyo swam the short distance and offered her a piece. With a rhythmic rippling of her tentacles, she took it.

Another small octopus appeared, hovering close. This little one had only interacted with her occasionally in the past, so Chiyo was pleased to see her. She passed her the remaining piece of fish, which her new friend accepted and then darted away.

As her lungs started to protest the lack of air, she surfaced and swam back to where she'd been standing.

Six women stood in a loose formation, with more closing in. Could it make a difference to her fate? To her friends' fates?

Matsu raised a hand to shield her eyes from the sun as she looked to the horizon. "The fishing boats are returning."

Chiyo's knees wobbled. Her husband was coming.

A woman stood beside her, linking their arms. "Do not fear him. We stand with you."

Another woman came to her other side

and took her hand. "And we stand with your friends."

Chiyo looked from one to the other. "I cannot ask it of you. He may hurt—" she said, but was interrupted by Matsu. "He cannot. Not to all of us, if we are together."

The remaining women hooked elbows with each other, forming a line. A wall.

A tear crept down Chiyo's face and she swiped it away—now was not the time for crying. Instead she nodded and whispered, "Thank you." She glanced through the gently moving water at Ichi, who hovered a safe distance away. Her heart tripped, as it often did, at the little octopus's sublime beauty. Then she pushed her shoulders back and stood tall beside the other women of the village.

**Burton Nitta**

(Michael Burton and Michiko Nitta)

*Altered Ways of Being*, 2019

Digital media, 360 film, VR

Dimensions variable



Artworks ask fundamental questions of 'who are we' and 'where are we heading' when transformed by technological and scientific developments. Responses to these questions manifest in speculative evolutionary changes to us and the wider world. Visions, objects, films and experiences explore the human-animal and offer an opportunity to taste alternative worlds and humanness.

In response to the work of the Okto-Lab and philosopher Peter Godfrey-Smith, we create a piece called *Altered Ways of Being*. The work begins as a mirror presented to us through the contrasting nature of the octopus.

See with the skin, smell with suckers, change skin colour in response to your thoughts and sense the world with a brain distributed across the body. These abilities possessed by an octopus shape a mind that is possibly one of the most different non-human forms of intelligence to our own. *Altered Ways of Being* takes inspiration from the octopus to reveal links between our own human body and mind. The systems created in the work adapt our bodies to ask: by attempting to feel and experience the octopus, can we gain insights into our mind? How do minds

and matter relate to each other? If we change our body with technology or the consequences of our actions, how might our mind also change?



**Madison Bycroft**

*Rises and refusals (Thetis)*, 2019

Single channel digital video, colour, sound, 23:25





Working in performance, video and sculpture, Bycroft explores the idea of 'pathos' - the activity and / or passivity of affect. What kind of poetics can help us side-step state-sanctioned sense and legibility? Bycroft is interested in negative forms of expression as a loitering tactic of refusal or deviation. The deadpan performance of a clam, the disguise of a mimic octopus, or the impersonations performed by some cuttlefish, for example, might refuse systems of legibility and thus invite a different relation through a negativity that doesn't capture, define or limit things to normalised modes of understanding.

Mimicry, unknowability, shape shifting and ambivalent edges, floating, and the performance of gender are all middle voiced - active and passive at once. Could they form a grammar of a poulpe poetics? Being effected by an environment whilst actively reproducing it, both expressing it, and being expressed by it, fleeing a binary where this is this and that is that?

Bycroft practices an associative methodology, where solidarities or empathies can work across material, theoretical, sonic or intuited beyond easily articulated relationships. This is especially important when working with Non-

human animal. How can we develop a form of empathy without domesticating or corralling difference into something that fits and is easily digestible.

What kind of empathy would yield to its subject - what kind of empathy is intransitive?







## OCTO AS LAB

Peter Godfrey-Smith  
University of Sydney

Evolutionary change is sometimes described as experimentation – the experiment of growing feathers, the experiment of forming flowers, the experiment of living on land. As evolution is a combination of unguided variation and natural selection, every tiny step can be seen as an experiment in this sense. In each species, new mutations continually arise, tiny pushes into the unknown. Most are fruitless, but a few turn out to help organisms survive and reproduce. If those are also inherited, they may become more common, then entirely prevalent, and then become the basis for a new round of innovation as the population changes again. Even the most well-established parts of our bodies arose as a series of tentative forays of this kind. Evolution is a "tinkerer", as the French biologist François Jacob once put it, continually messing around.

Sometimes, though, a series of evolutionary changes looks like an experiment in a more concerted sense. A species, or a group of them, go down a path that seems quite implausible, off the beaten track, away from the tried and true. If they survive, these creatures show us something unexpected

about what is possible. The octopus is surely an animal of this kind.

In the octopus we find a very large nervous system, acute senses, and complex behavior in an amorphous body with almost no hard parts, a body that can take on a huge variety of forms. In most animals that can act in complex ways, those actions are scaffolded by a skeleton, either outside or inside, framing bodily motion. In an octopus, that framing is replaced by freedom of an unprecedented kind.

This protean body is the setting for further experiments. An octopus can change its entire color in less than a second, and can fold its skin into spires, turrets, and contours. And though an octopus has a nervous system on roughly the scale of a vertebrate animal, it is configured entirely differently. Over half the neurons are spread through the arms, not centralized in the brain. The result is a still-unknown combination of local and central control. At least in the octopus species I know well, *Australia's Octopus tetricus*, if you come across an animal who is neither busy with some urgent demand nor

entirely at rest, quite often the arms and arm-tips seem to wander about on their own, and probe the arm's local environs. (The first and second pairs of arms are usually the most active, though others may roam, too.) In an octopus, whatever an arm touches is also tasted. Further sensory experiments are slowly being uncovered in these animals, including skin that can detect light. What is it like to experience life with a body whose parts take its own semi-divergent paths in this way, and do so while tasting everything that the self-propelled arms may touch?

For any such evolutionary experiment to occur, whether in an animal, a plant, or another organism, a segment of the genealogical "tree of life" must set off independently of others, and take its own path. That population will acquire its own quirks, each building on others as time passes. The very shape of the octopus body is an icon of evolution's disparate experiments. When allowed to roam, each arm is an experimenter, like a segment of life's tree, feeling forward through time.

The octopus experiment is in no sense completed. This message is epitomized by a pair of field sites, the Octopolis and Octlantis sites, in Booderee National Park on the east coast of Australia. These are places where octopuses gather in unusual densities. Octopuses of most

species seem fairly solitary animals. An earlier stereotype of the octopus as entirely asocial has turned out to be exaggerated, with a growing list of exceptions, but octopuses are generally not social in anything like the way seen in many other animals – in many fish and birds, for example. In most octopus species, life is probably a rather self-contained affair, with the important and sometimes fraught exception of mating. Unusual circumstances at these two field sites, however, bring octopuses, with all their complexity, into more regular and intense interaction with others of their species.

The area in which these sites are found is one with almost unlimited food, but few safe den sites and many predators. Two small sites seem to provide safety. They do this largely part because of the cumulative effects of earlier octopus behavior. Generations of octopuses have left thousands of shells at the site. These shells provide material for constructing fine, stable, shaft-shaped dens that otherwise could not be built.

Octopuses have become used to living in close proximity at these sites, often in numbers of around a dozen. There, each octopus must deal with the multi-armed complexity of other octopuses, others like them, with acute senses and obscure agendas. Watching them over

the years, we have seen at these sites a range of behaviors that appear rare or absent elsewhere – arm-touches, throws of debris, and a number of apparent displays. As we try to make sense of these behaviors, a question often arises: are these ordinary behaviors for the species, behaviors that happen not to have been noticed before now because of the limited scope for octopus-on-octopus interaction in other environments? Or are we seeing new behaviors, improvised for the setting, products of the unusual circumstances that these octopuses have found themselves in, made possible by their large brains? The situation is probably a mix of these two. But I suspect it is a mix with a good deal of the latter. I suspect that these high-density sites, places where octopuses must deal with the complex environment of other octopuses, are themselves an experiment, a site of novelty, a lab.



*Octopus tetricus*, Jervis Bay  
Photo: Peter Godfrey-Smith





"Why look at Animals?" John Berger asked in his famous essay from 1977, in which he analysed the estrangement of humans and animals in the culture of capitalism. His criticism of the zoo as a place in which non-human animals are reduced to exhibition objects is still read and shared today. Interestingly, aquariums were, for a long time, exempt from this criticism. Even the early aquarists criticised zoos as prisons, but were at the same time convinced that the aquarium was something completely different—namely a part of the sea.

Glass and its illusionistic characteristics play a central role in the power of this narrative. "In that the glassy medium presents a sectional cut through the water space, it creates (...) an 'eye-to-eye' perspective, 'where a human observer sees marine life from within – that is, as if he were underwater with the creatures depicted, and therefore watching them at their own level!'"<sup>1</sup>

In our contribution to *Okto-Lab* we enter into contact with individual octopods that live in environments designed and controlled by humans. In the sense of a multi-species ethnography we chronicle two interwoven narratives. Firstly, our own perception of

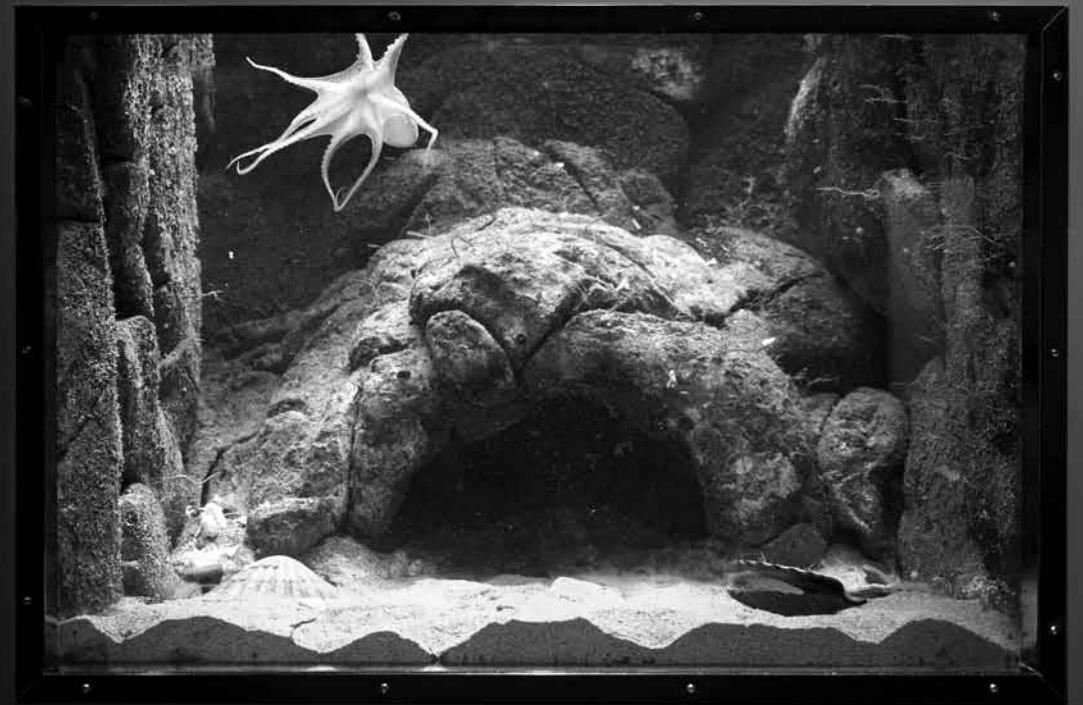
the situation: the different actors, such as, for example, the glass mentioned before, the architecture, the visitors. Secondly we attempt a change of perspective, by seeing the world through the eyes of the octopods. For this we experiment with methods of obtaining insight that create a connectedness; in particular we work with mental techniques of empathy such as those used by shamans or animal communicators.

1. Mareike Vennen, *Das Aquarium*, 2018

*Océanopolis, aquarium building*  
30 x 42 cm



*Océanopolis, aquarium of the octopus*  
70 x 100 cm



Poulpe commun  
Common octopus  
*Octopus vulgaris*

## THE OCTOPUS AND THE EYES

Erin Hortle

As children, my brother, sister and I were warned to avoid the tiny, startlingly beautiful, blue-ringed octopuses native to the rock pools that pepper the Australian coastline. “If you so much as brush your skin against them, they’ll kill you-like *that*,” my father told us, snapping his fingers for dramatic effect.

Truth be told, my father’s warning was not entirely scientifically accurate. In fact, one has to be bitten by a blue-ringed octopus to be envenomed. That being said, they *are* deadly: each octopus contains enough venom to kill twenty-six adult humans. Once bitten, motor paralysis and respiratory arrest take effect within minutes, usually resulting in death. But in any case, his warning had the desired effect upon our malleable, kindergarten psyches: we were terrified.

This piece of advice was delivered at a point in my life when basic arithmetic skills, like counting, were still a mysterious, rote-learned class-room activity that had no bearing on my day-to-day life; I couldn’t instinctively tell the difference between, say, a creature with five legs and a creature with eight. Also, being colour-blind, I don’t move through the world confidently distinguishing one thing from another on

the basis of its colour, particularly when my life could be at stake. As such, one result of my father’s warning was that, for a period of my childhood, whenever I was frolicking in a rock pool and I spotted a benign, *five*-limbed, *orange* starfish basking, I would halt in a state of abject terror, and slowly back away, fretting that it could be the death of me.

You can imagine my shock when, years later, I was lolling in a rock pool on Tasmania’s east coast and was confronted by an actual octopus—not a blue-ringed octopus but an orange monster. Trapped in a confined space, it was erratic, curling and unfurling in every direction at once; it was unanchored, and it was *big* – nothing like the stationary starfish with which I had confused it.

There was a large swell that day, and my wetsuit-clad siblings, cousins and I were pretending to be posh ladies reclining in a Jacuzzi. Every time a wave washed through our rock pool we would brace ourselves against its currents, raise our pretend champagne glasses and yabber, like posh ladies, “Yars, yars, oh yar? Oh real-ay? Isn’t this ja-coo-zi just dee-*vine*? Yars, yars, yars,” to one another while the white water bubbled and foamed around us.

The first wave of an especially large set rolled through, inciting many joyous 'yars'. But as the turbulence subsided, we realised we were no longer alone; a mess of orange limbs was undulating in the space between us. We squealed and flew from the rock pool as the next wave washed in and frothed the water opaque. We perched like cormorants on the granite boulders that framed the rock pool and waited impatiently to see the monster below. But, to our disappointment, when the water became clear once more, we saw the pool was empty. The octopus had hitched a ride on the next wave back out into the surf.

If I could bellow words through the tunnel of time, I would shout to my child-self: "STAY IN THE ROCK POOL!" I would urge her, in whatever way I could, to take this opportunity to meet an octopus.

Maybe if she hadn't scrambled, shrieking from the water, it would have lingered to watch her. The filmy surface of the water would have circled her middle like the waistline of the crystal and silk gown that she had been luxuriating in as a pretend-posh-lady just moments before. And she would gaze at it, just as it was gazing at her. It would have retreated to the other side of the pool, where it would have lurked for a moment or two, before swarming towards her. She would have let out a little gasp but she would have stood firm. It would have stopped a metre shy of her and gathered itself into a pulsing knot. Then, slowly, it would have loosened itself and unfurled

one of its arms towards her. It would have touched her lightly—scraping its suckers on her neoprene thigh to test her—to see what she was. Octopuses are notoriously curious. (Or some are. Others are notoriously paranoid.)

If I could bend words back to her, I would reassure her that this creature is not a monster, but a distant cousin—different, and yet not so different. If I could, I would inform her that her ancestors, and the octopus's ancestors, were both primitive, tube-shaped creatures which had neither brains nor eyes. I would explain to her that, more than half a billion years ago, the lineage that would lead to octopuses and the lineage that resulted in humans had separated.

"*And yet,*" I would tell her (taking care to emphasise my words, to encourage her to grasp just how fascinating this fact is), "despite our divergent evolutionary paths, both humans and octopuses have evolved independently to develop eyelids. Look at the octopus," I would urge her. "See if you can spy them."

"You said it wrong," she would accuse. "It's not *octopuses*; it's *octopi*." "Well, actually," I would tell her, "the etymologically correct plural isn't *octopi*, because, technically, you shouldn't add a Latin suffix to a word derived from Greek, and the word octopus comes from the Greek word *oktōpous*." I butcher the pronunciation—perhaps this is why she's frowning. She opens her mouth to say

something more but we're getting off topic, so I cut her off. "Go on," I urge her again. "See if you can spot its eyelids."

She peers down to the arm still winding around her leg and traces her eyes along to where the soft fruit of its head floats, and she notices that indeed, it does have eyelids. She also notices that unlike her pupils, which are like black little full stops, its pupils are dashes.

"I'm so pleased you observed this!" I exclaim. I tell her that if the octopus had pupils like hers—pupils that focus light through a narrow pinhole—it would have been colour-blind, just like her. But because it has these dash-like pupils, it can distinguish colours in a completely unique way.

"Cephalopods are completely unique in this!" I repeat. "They're unlike any other creatures on earth—or unlike any other creatures that we know of. What happens is, their unusual-shaped pupils act like prisms, scattering light in all directions."

She looks a little confused by this, so I explain: "Kind of like a kaleidoscope. And once the light has been sorted into its component wavelengths, octopuses do things like change the depth of their eyeballs, or alter the distance between their lens and retina, in order to focus different wavelengths of light individually and as such, distinguish different colours."

She still looks confused, but she's clearly thinking about what I've just said.

"So, if I had pupils like this octopus," she says slowly, still gazing intently at the octopus, "I would be able to see colour like a normal person and so be able to tell whether a banana is ripe or not?"

"Yep," I say. "Except you wouldn't really be seeing colour like a normal person, would you? You'd be seeing it like a normal octopus."

I then explain that while their pupils are indeed different shapes, she and this creature both have eyes with lens-based focusing and transparent corneas, irises that regulate light, and retinas in the back of the eye to convert light to neutral signals that can be processed in the brain. Again, I tell her, this is a remarkable coincidence given their independent evolutionary path.

"Scientists call this convergent evolution," I say. But as I say it, I notice I've lost her a little. More than a little, actually: I've lost her a lot. Her attention has wandered to the surfers who are paddling lazily to hold their position at the head of the rip that's coursing along the edge of the rocky point and teasing the kelp into streamers. I follow her gaze and notice the way the rip is sitting the waves up into steep ledges as they hit the sandbank, causing them to curl into thick-rimmed cylinders as they break. There hasn't been a bank like this at this beach in years.

But enough. There will be plenty of time for surfing when she's older.			
"Brush your hand against the octopus's arm," I urge her, in an attempt to regain her attention.	is completely absorbed in the octopus and I realise what is happening: this brand of information I'm feeding her in is nudging her down a path that will lead her to a career in marine biology, and where will this leave me?		
She hesitates, and then reaches down and gently strokes a finger along the orange arm that is still coiling about her legs. The octopus stills a little to let her, and it almost seems to butt up into her touch, much like a cat arching its back against its human's hand.	As if on cue, my entire presence flickers. This version is about to become obsolete. "What does this make you think?" I blurt, desperately. "The octopus is looking at you. What does this make you think?"		
"Guess what? The octopus just touched, tasted and saw you in that moment of contact. Scientists in the future have just discovered that octopuses can also see with their skin—or do something very similar to what we regard as seeing." (I go easy on the physiological particulars here; I don't want to lose her again.)	She looks at me, confused.		
She looks from me—because in case you hadn't noticed, the present, adult-me is now some kind of ghost from the future—to the octopus, and back to me, and her eyes and mouth turn to "o"s in awe (at the octopus, not at the ghost-adult-me; the child-me is suddenly very good at staying on topic).	So, I tell her: "A famous philosopher once said, 'An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence?'"		
She strokes it again, and grins widely as it turns its arm so that she can run her fingers along its suckers.	She looks at me, confused.		
It is then that I observe my hand flicker. I peer down at it, and watch as it ghosts in, then out, of being. I look from it, to her. She	I flicker.		
	"He emerged naked from the shower and his cat looked at him and he didn't know what to make of it," I continue.		
	She looks at me, confused.		
	I'm fading, fading.		
	"When you touched it, the octopus looked at you with its skin. <i>What do you think of this sentence?</i> " I cry.		
	But her colour-blind eyes—with their lens-based focusing and transparent corneas, irises that regulate light, and retinas in the back of the eye to convert light to neutral		
	signals that can be processed in the brain—glaze. This tack isn't working. She's too young, too under-read in the fields of poststructuralism and critical animal studies. I'm fading. I am nothing but a half-thought of a life that will never be lived.		
	And then I have a crafty idea. She doesn't know it yet, but her colour-blindness means that she will never have a career as a visual artist. But if she nurtures her kernel of creativity by dabbling in different mediums, she might one day turn into the writer she's already dreaming of becoming. The creative arts move and act analogously. Art's commonality, as Elizabeth Grosz writes, drawing upon Gilles Deleuze, is in the way it "produces sensations, affects, intensities" which can be understood as compositions of materiality; while sciences is in the way it seeks to chart and contain materiality in order to dissect it and thus come to know it through a knowledge of its composite parts. By art, Grosz means 'all forms of creativity or production', including, amongst others, painting and creative writing. So, if my child-self were to, say, get busy with some paints and brushes, she would be taking half a step towards a life of creative writing, which would mean I could exist as I am today.		
	Slyly, I suggest to her: "Why don't you go home and paint a picture of the octopus?" She smiles at the idea, and suddenly my own clarity is so sharp I'm nearly palpable. "Make sure you include its eyelids," I call after her, as she climbs from the rock pool and trots off to find her paints and brushes.		
	The octopus and I are left in the rock pool, blinking at one another.		
	"The Octopus and the Eyes" was first published in <i>The Lifted Brow</i> , 18 April 2018 ( <a href="https://www.theliftedbrow.com/liftedbrow/2018/4/18/the-octopus-and-the-eyes-by-erin-hortle">https://www.theliftedbrow.com/liftedbrow/2018/4/18/the-octopus-and-the-eyes-by-erin-hortle</a> ). Reproduced here with the author's permission.		





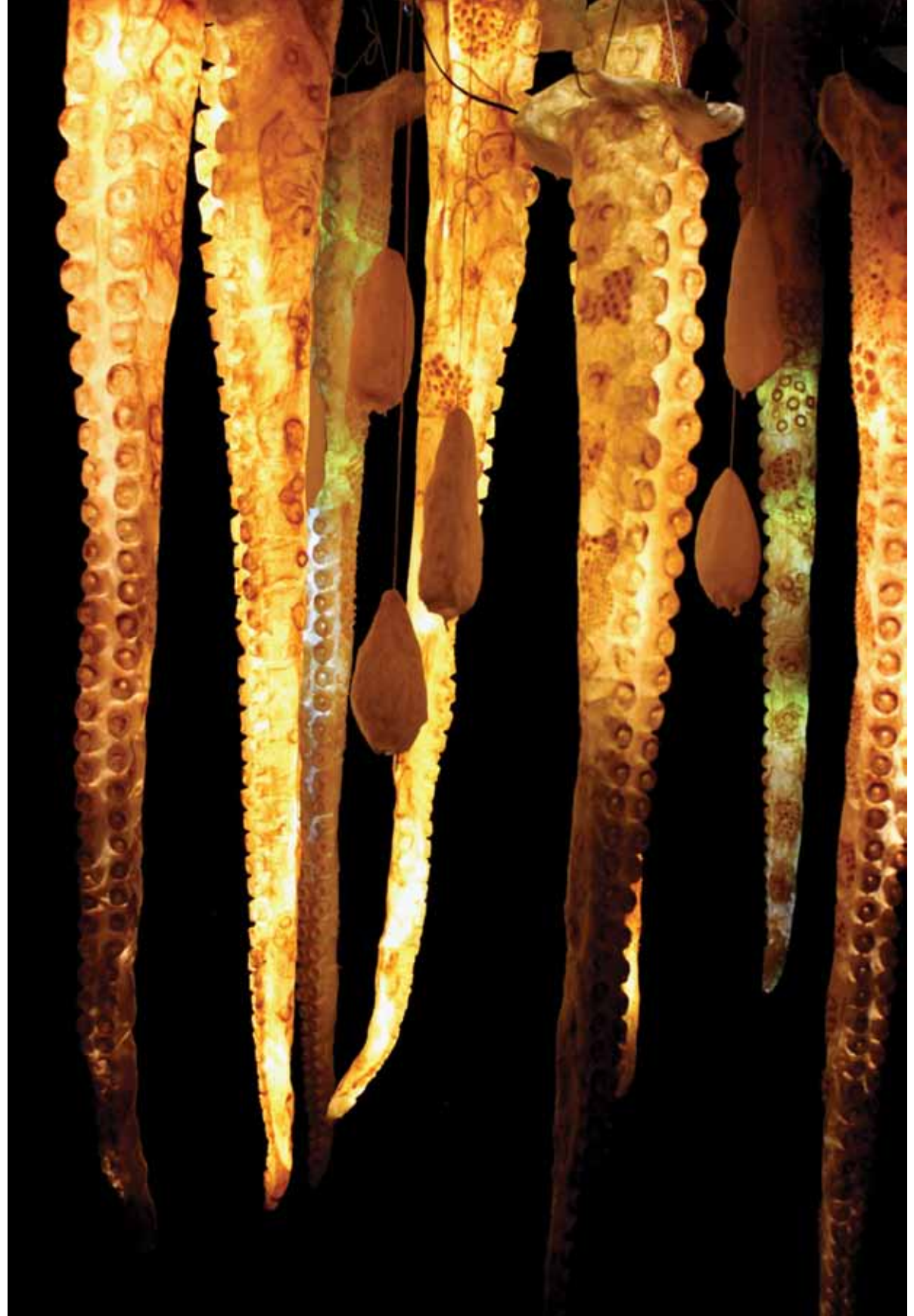
*Octopus tetricus*, Nelson Bay  
Photo: Peter Godfrey-Smith

**mOwson&MOwson**

*feeler*, 2019

Latex, string, hangers, LED light strips, electronics

3 x 3 meters





After mating, the female Octopus carries her eggs inside her, sometimes for months, and when the conditions are right, she will expel the eggs. She then gathers the eggs into groups, sometimes stitching them into braids before adhering them to a surface. While she might eat for a few days after laying her eggs, she then enters a period of fasting while she stays with the eggs: protecting, touching, fanning and grooming. This period of care can be lengthy - the longest documented to date is over four and a half years. During this time the changes to her body are visible, her skin loses colour and definition, and she will die shortly after the eggs hatch. While octopuses are currently raised for food from hatchlings and by-catches of the fishing industry, research is underway to fully intensify octopus farming - from mating to meat.





**NEOZOOM**

*Cephalization*, 2019 – 2020

Video installation

Dimensions variable



*Cephalization*

Tell me, O Octopus, I begs  
Is those things arms, or is they legs?  
I marvel at thee, Octopus;  
If I were thou, I'd call me Us.  
(Ogden Nash)



**Pony Express**

*Tentacular Embassy, 2019*

Printed objects, knife display, customized  
life vests

Dimensions variable



*Tentacular Embassy* is a collection of propaganda generated by Pony Express's speculation into the possibility of tentacular thinking as a form of governance. These works developed through several experiments, including the 2017 performance *Tentaculum*, in which Pony Express unleashed eight human bodies and one octopus body to occupy a working marine science laboratory as a merged entity. What are the possibilities and limits of 9 brains working in non-hierarchical concert together? What are the sovereign principles of life in Octlantis? Through this work, Pony Express offer several key tenants borne from their experiences in cephalopod diplomacy. To survive in the chthulucene, you place your life in many hands. Concept developed in consultation with Dr. Beth Fulton through the program *Welcome to the Anthropocene*, CONSTANCE ARI.





*[WE DO NOT ACCEPT THE IDEA  
THAT THE HOLOCENE IS OVER.]*



**Natalie Ryan**

*Giant Squid (blue velvet)*, 2019

Gypsum-based acrylic resin, prosthetic  
eyes, fibres

190 x 40 x 18 cm

This work references the way in which we collect, preserve and display nature. The Giant Squid is often a prize specimen in many Natural History Museums around the world. Only ever really seen in death, either washed up on shorelines or within the Museum, the spectacle of the giant squid is one associated with awe and mystery - lending itself to well known narratives such as the monster from the deep. These narratives also allow the viewer a certain element of detachment and a less empathetic engagement with this animal. In this work the body of the squid is laid out on a black plinth reminiscent of display methods within the museum but more importantly those of a tomb. Unlike the pale colouring and formalin housing seen within the museum specimen, this work has a bright blue finish to reference bioluminescent communication methods used by these animals. The colouring and tactile velvet finish of the uncontained work hopes to attract the viewer and speak to the life and beauty of this animal even in death.



**JAYSON SEMMENS** is a marine biologist/ecologist at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania. For nearly 30 years he has been researching cephalopods (octopus, squid and cuttlefish). He is interested in how they can eat so much, grow so fast and die so young. They also fascinate him. They are very intelligent, curious and never cease to amaze. He has spent many an hour just watching them and they have often watched him back. Out of this fascination grew this collection of 'artefacts', often discovered on holidays overseas or given as gifts to him or his family by friends and colleagues. Each one has a story and as he looks at them on his desk or at home, they remind him of the various stages of his career and his love and fascination for the group called head (ceph) foot (poda).

Photo: Gerrad Dixon

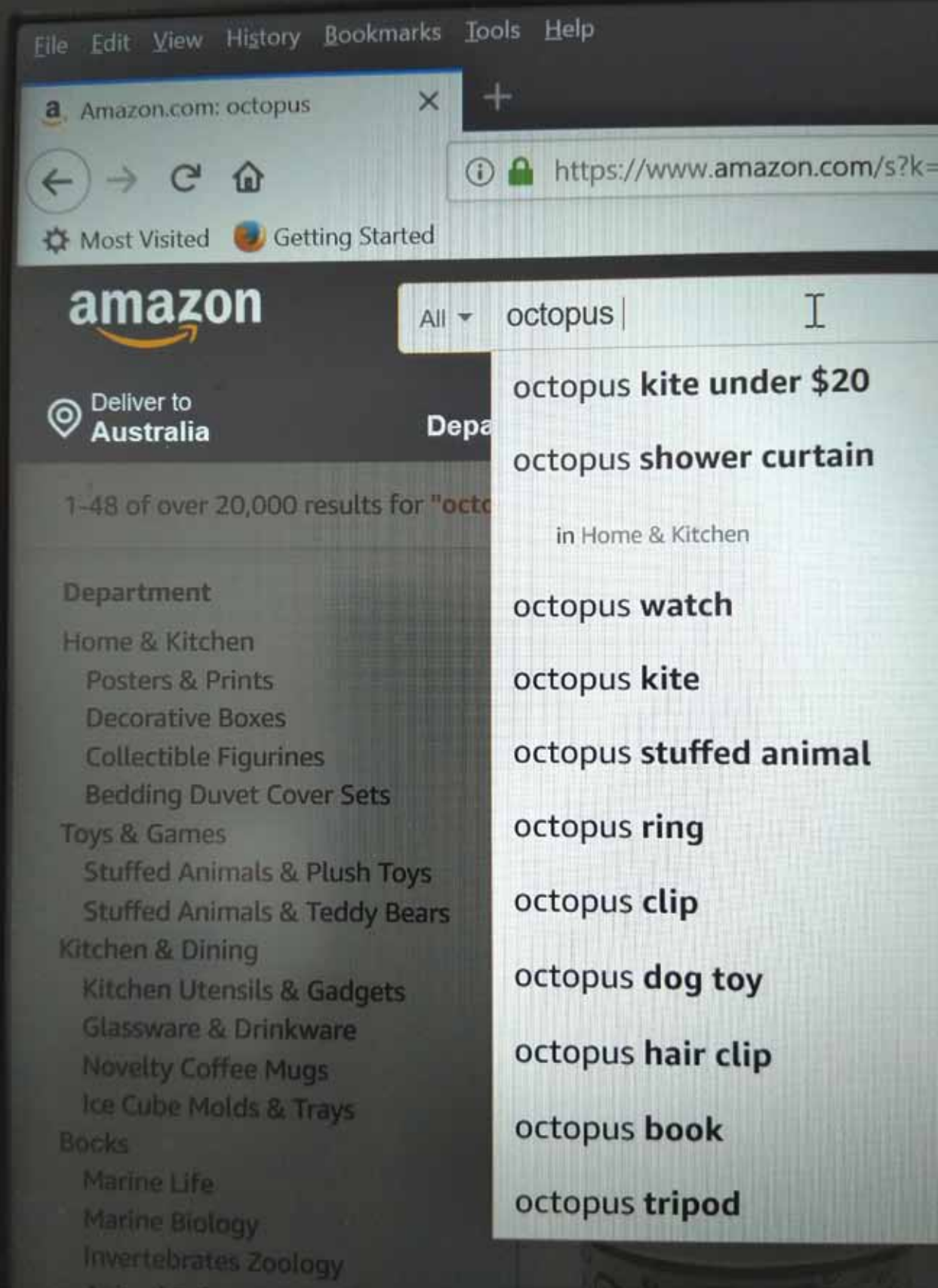




Mike Singe

*Searching for Octopus in the Amazon*, 2019

Digital video, 11 minutes



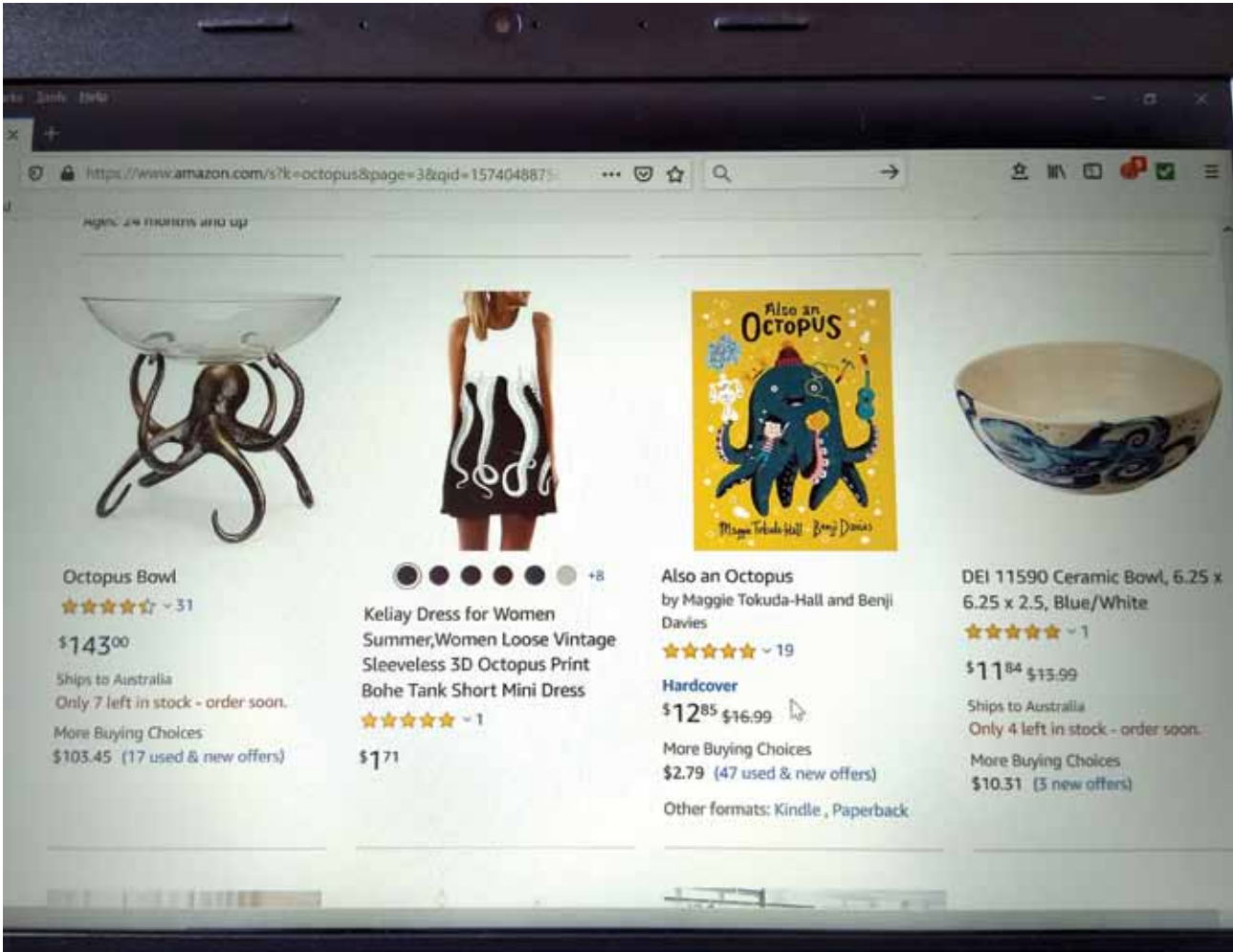


Octopus have evolved to possess some impressive defence mechanisms, unparalleled camouflage and diversionary ink expulsion being two of their more distinctive. Given their unquestionable intelligence and impressive evolutionary track record could they develop the ultimate defence mechanism; the ability to retain the services of a lawyer.

Admittedly this would require octopus to overcome the significant hurdle of developing a language simple enough for humans to recognise and understand. If this were possible then the progression towards successful litigation, aided by ambitious members of the legal fraternity with an eye for glory and the potential for unimaginable financial returns, would be assured. Hard won cases for individual octopus rights would establish legal precedents. Companies would soon be left vulnerable to class actions seeking compensation for a variety of indiscretions. Civil lawsuits for breaches of copyright, intellectual property theft and other unpaid entitlements would inevitably give rise to criminal cases, ranging from sexual harassment (yes octopus porn is a thing), unlawful detainment and even murder.

Society would be changed forever as opportunistic octopus hired out their services as intermediaries between human and non-human animals. Ironically it would be a human invention, litigation, that would bring an end to the assumed right of humans to make decisions without consideration to the rights of all animals.

I admit that I probably read too much science fiction and I may have gotten a little carried away here. However, if you find yourself searching Amazon for your next cephalopod related purchase perhaps you should ask yourself if octopus would approve and if you know the name of a good lawyer.





## BIOGRAPHIES

### CURATORIAL TEAM

**DR YVETTE WATT** is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Creative Arts & Media, University of Tasmania. She was a founding member of the Australasian Animal Studies Association and is a current committee member of Minding Animals International.

Yvette's artwork and academic research is heavily informed by her background as an activist, and reflects an interest in the relationship between how nonhuman animals are used and depicted in the visual arts and what this might have to say about how these animals are thought about and treated. Related to this is an interest in the role that art can play in engaging the viewer with social and/or political issues. Yvette has curated a number of exhibitions including *Reconstructing the Animal* for the 2011 Ten Days on the Island arts festival.

Watt is a co-editor of and contributor to *Considering Animals* (Ashgate, 2011). Other publications include "Duck Lake: art meets activism in an anti-hide, anti-bloke, antidote to duck shooting." In *Animaladies*, Fiona Probyn-Rapsey & Lori Gruen (2018), "Down on the Farm: Why do Artists Avoid Farm Animals as Subject Matter?", in *Meat Cultures*, Annie Potts (2016); 'Animal Factories: Exposing Sites of Capture', in *Captured: Animals Within Culture*, Melissa Boyd (2014).

**TOBY JULIFF** is a lecturer in Critical Practices and coordinator of the Fine Art Honours program at the University of Tasmania. From 2012 to 2017 he was lecturer in Critical and Theoretical Studies at the University of Melbourne. Graduating from the art history program at the University of Leeds (UK), his work examines a broad range of critical histories of modern and contemporary art. A curator, historian and artist, Toby has published widely on modern sculpture, contemporary video and heritage studies. Recent essays include the histories of British Art in New York (ANZJA), confessional video art (*Journal of Visual Practices*) and the interface of participatory art and cultural heritage (*Emotion, Affective Practices and the Past in the Present*). Recent curated exhibitions include *Gothic pathologies, quarantines, and creative explorations of fear and transmission* (Plimsoll Gallery). He lives and works in Hobart.

**ANDRÉ KREBBER** is a lecturer at the University of Kassel, where he teaches history, philosophy and human-animal studies. His research explores ontologies of nature and how they interfere with lived relationships to our environment and notions of the subject, with a special focus on animals. He is particularly interested in the differences between scientific and artistic perspectives and aesthetics as a genuine approach to knowing nature. He is currently finishing a monograph under the title *The Forgotten Animal: Remembering Nature in Enlightenment Science*. His new project focuses on the possible role of desires in a dialectical

materialist theory of nonhuman agency. He is a co-editor of *Animal Biography: Re-framing Animal Lives* (2018) and also co-editor of a new *Handbook for Historical Animal Studies*, by DeGruyter. (forthcoming).

**MAIKE RIEDINGER** is a doctoral student in social and cultural history/Human-Animal Studies at the University of Kassel, Germany working on a thesis on the German-language discourse of animal psychology around 1900. Her research aims to understand the negotiation of different scientific approaches to the animal mind and the impact these had on the understanding of animals. Maike graduated in social work, sociology and psychoanalysis at Goethe University, Germany, studying the social construction of deviance as presented in labeling theory and psychoanalytic theories derived from Freudian Psychoanalysis. Besides her academic work she regularly holds workshops on animals in agriculture and their wider embedding in ecology and economy in schools.

**ANNE HÖLCK** is a Berlin-based independent scenographer, curator and researcher. Her theatre works have been shown at numerous theatres in Germany, Switzerland and France. In the field of Human-Animal Studies she curates exhibition projects, holds workshops and lectures, and publishes essays in her ongoing critical research on the design of zoo enclosures. She is co-editor of the anthology „Tiere Bilder Ökonomien. Aktuelle Forschungsfragen der Human Animal

Studies“ by Chimaira AK published in 2013; Recent exhibitions: »we, animals« 2014/15 (Meinblau project space Berlin), "Animal Lovers" 2016 (nGbK Berlin) "Fur Agency/ Bearly Legal" 2017 and "Swinger" 2018 (Bärenzwinger Berlin). [www.hoelcka.de](http://www.hoelcka.de)

## EXHIBITION COORIDNATOR

### JANE BARLOW

With over 18 years' experience, Jane has an extensive background in the museum and gallery sector, including developing and touring exhibitions, registration, collections management, administration, exhibition management and curatorial responsibilities. Jane has held positions at University of Tasmania, Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmanian Museum and Arts Gallery, National Touring Exhibitions Support, Victoria and the City of Melbourne, Arts and Heritage Collection, Victoria.

In 2015, Jane was selected as a Team Leader for the Venice Biennale at the Australia Pavilion. Recently Jane has expanded her personal and professional experience towards social, political and artistic environments by supporting people in marginalised areas, such as members of the LGBIT+ arts community, Indigenous Australians and people living with disabilities. This includes, workshops with Ally Network Training (Allies to the LGBTIQ community), Lateral Violence Training, which aims to educate the community around the impact of negative and bullying behaviour

in Indigenous Cultures and finally, Unconscious Bias Training.

Jane currently is currently a member of the Equity, Inclusion and Diversity committee, College of Arts, Law and Education, University of Tasmania, Contemporary Arts Tasmania touring committee and is on the Cultural and Creative Industries Expert Register for Arts Tasmania and Australia Council.

## PARTICIPANTS

### RACHEL BAILEY

Despite spending most of her life trying to scam more time to read, Rachel has written books that have hit bestseller lists, are published in over 26 countries, and have been translated into 16 Languages. She is primarily published in contemporary romance and romantic comedy, but is interested in the broad scope of genre fiction. She has completed degrees in both psychology and social work, and is currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Tasmania. Her research sits at the intersection of popular romance studies and literary animal studies, with a particular focus on dog characters in romance novels. Rachel is a past president of the Romance Writers of Australia, and lives with her own personal hero and six rescue dogs on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland.

**BURTON NITTA**, founded by Anglo-Japanese duo, Michael Burton and Michiko Nitta, is a transdisciplinary collaborative art practice. The studio was initiated in 2009

after Burton and Nitta met at the Royal College of Art, London. Their works have received international awards and press coverage.

Previous projects such as *Algaculture*, *The Algae Opera*, *Republic of Salvation* and Instruments of the *Afterlife* are published and exhibited internationally from MoMA, New York to the V&A Museum, London.

*Landscape Within*, supported by a Wellcome Arts Award, was launched at the V&A in September 2016. It was made in collaboration with Dr Louise Horsfall and the Horsfall Lab at the University of Edinburgh and Dr Susan Hodgson from Imperial College London, to use synthetic biology tools and new epidemiology health science.

*New Organs of Creation*, made in 2019 in collaboration with Prof Lucy Di-Silvio and Dr Trevor Coward at Kings College London, made a prototype larynx organ grown using tissue engineering. The organ was designed to create low frequencies enabling the voice to speak directly to the body's cells. A debut performance of a new composition for the voice by Matt Rogers was performed by Louise Ashcroft (mezzo-soprano) and David Sheppard (sound designer) to a full house at Science Gallery London. The project was supported by Arts Council England.

**MADISON BYCROFT**, b. 1987, Adelaide/ Kaurua Yarta, Australia, is an artist currently based between Marseille and Rotterdam. Bycroft is a graduate from the MFA program at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam, NL

(2016), and is a co-founder of facilitative platform, 'GHOST'.

International presentations include participation in 2019 *Future Generation Art Prize* at both the Pinchuk Art Centre in Kiev and satellite exhibition to the *58th Venice Biennale*, Palais De Tokyo, (Paris, France), Rennes Biennale (Les Ateliers de Rennes, France), *Second Triennale of Beetsterzwag* (Netherlands), *Liveworks Performance Act Award* (Trento, Italy), *Sharjah Biennale*, (Beirut, Lebanon), The Institute of Contemporary Art, (Singapore), *CAC Brétigny*, (Paris, France), *Westfälischer Kunstverein* (Münster, Germany) *Yellow Brick*, (Athens, Greece) and *The ISCP* (Brooklyn, New York). Bycroft's Australian exhibitions have included Greenaway Gallery, The Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney (Primavera 2014), The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne, and The Australian Experimental Art Foundation. Notable residencies include Triangle France, ISCP in NYC, 18th Street Art Centre in Los Angeles, and Cité Internationale Des Arts.

**PETER GODFREY-SMITH** has taught at Stanford, Harvard, and the CUNY Graduate center, and is currently professor of history and philosophy of science at the University of Sydney (AUS). He is the author of *Other Minds: The Octopus, The Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness* (2016, Farrar, Straus and Giroux) and four other books. He also collaborates extensively with biologists, pursuing empirical work on the octopus and a range of projects on evolutionary processes.

## HÖRNER/ANTLFINGER

Ute Hörner and Mathias Antlfinger have been Professors of "Transmedial Spaces/ Media Art" at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne since 2009. Their installations, videos and sculptures deal with the relationship between humans, animals and machines and the utopian vision of fair terms of interaction between these parties. Following their exploration of the social constructs that dictate human-animal relationships, their current focus is on how these constructs can be changed. Two protagonists who advised them on this question are the grey parrots Clara and Karl with whom they have carried out the interspecies collaboration CMUK since 2014.

Their works have been shown at international exhibitions and festivals including Museum Ludwig Cologne, ZKM Karlsruhe, Shedhalle Zürich, National Museum of Fine Arts in Taiwan, Ars Electronica in Linz, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Werkleitz Biennale Halle, Kadirga Art Center (European Capital of Culture) Istanbul, Transmediale Berlin, NGBK Berlin, CCA Center for Contemporary Art, Tbilisi. Awards and grants include: Project Funding Kunststiftung NRW (2015), Honorary Mention, Prix Ars Electronica, Linz (2012), Project Funding from the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Arts, Oldenburg (2010), 5. Marler Video-Installation-Award (2008), Project Funding Kunststiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, 7th Werkleitz-Biennale (2006), ars viva 00/01 – award for visual arts, Kulturkreis

der deutschen Wirtschaft im BDI (2001) and Kunststiftung NRW (1998).

Hörner/Antlfinger have presented at numerous conferences and symposia on both human-animal studies and media art. Since 2016 they are members of the Minding Animals Network.

**ERIN HORTLE** is a Tasmanian-based writer of fiction and essay. Her writing explores the relationship between the human and more-than-human world. It has been published in a range of Tasmanian and Australian publications, and in 2017 she won the Young Writer's Fellowship as a part of the Tasmanian Premier's Literary Prizes. Her debut novel, *The Octopus and I*, is an eco-feminist literary work that tells the story of a breast cancer survivor's fascination with the octopuses at Eaglehawk Neck. It will be published by Allen & Unwin in 2020.

**mOwson&MOwson** comprises of the sculptor Lynn Mowson and sound/installation artist Bruce Mowson. This is their second project together, their first project *speaking meat* was initially shown at the exhibition 'Why Listen to Animals?' in Melbourne in 2016, and remains a work in progress. *speaking meat* presented three 'cuts of meat', modelled in wax, that produced three different bovine voices/ personalities in conversation.

Lynn Mowson is a sculptor whose practice is driven by the entangled relationships between human and non-human animals in particular agricultural animals and those

animals we consume. Her sculptural research is featured in *Animaladies*, Bloomsbury Press, 2018, *The Animal Studies Journal*, 2018, *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, 2018 and *The Art of the Animal*, Lantern Books, 2015. Lynn is currently vice-chair of The Australasian Animal Studies Association.

Bruce Mowson's practices are founded on the experiences of sound and the body. Participation and the experience of the audience have been important to his explorations and research. In 2018 he created the participatory music experiment *Three Twilights into Darkness*, and in 2016 he produced a collaborative performance for *Polyphonic Social* and series of performative assemblages for the Festival of Live Art.

**NEOZOON**, founded in 2009, is an anonymous collective of female artists based in Berlin and Paris. Human-animal relations are at the center of their artistic work, which is based on the principle of collage and examines sociological questions dealing with speciesism in the anthropocene. The group became known for their street art in public spaces in which, amongst others, worn out fur coats appeared as the silhouettes of animals on house walls. Recycling found footage is also a recurring element in their work, where the group often employs amateur videos from YouTube. Their cinematic work deals with contradictions in our daily contact with animals in language, practise and with the representational medialization of these interfaces.

NEOZOON poses contemporary and underrepresented questions and demonstrates perspectives that, contrary to conservative left-wing positions, are interested in the emancipation of all population groups and species, such as how agitational aesthetics can be brought into position against dominant worldviews and to what extent feminist art practice can be combined with anti-speciesist, anti-capitalist art practice.

Their work has been shown at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the HKW in Berlin, the Internationale Kurzfilmtage in Oberhausen, the ZKM in Karlsruhe and at the IFFR in Rotterdam.

**PONY EXPRESS** is a collaborative duo led by performance maker Ian Sinclair and transdisciplinary artist Loren Kronemyer. Through their pandrogynous collaborative process, Pony Express work across platforms of media art, live art, video, and transdisciplinary research to create immersive alternate realities, presented across a diverse array of venues. Their work reflects themes of environment, apocalypse, and the future.

Pony Express work by embedding themselves in the language and culture of emerging social movements, re-presenting them as spaces where audiences can explore and engage with possible speculative realities. Their focus on queer futurism and nonhuman politics has led them to create worlds that trouble the ethical landscape of the present day.

Their artwork *Ecosexual Bathhouse* premiered at Next Wave Festival 2016 and continues to tour nationally and internationally. This work is a multi-chamber walk-through labyrinth that plunges participants into the realm of inter-species sexual signaling, probing the limits of evolution and inhibition. Their current project *Epoch Wars* is bringing together an alternative geological council to debate the naming of Earth's coming era.

**NATALIE RYAN'S** practice explores themes that surround the aesthetic representation of the cadaver and natural sciences throughout history and their inclusion in contemporary art. Drawing from existing methodologies used for displaying these elements, she is interested in the process of imaging the natural world and the exchange between science and art that has allowed this. Ryan has worked with anatomical collections held in the Veterinary Department at the University of Melbourne, undertaken a medical residency at Monash University Gippsland and lectured in Anatomical Drawing working with human cadavers at Monash University. Ryan holds a PhD at Monash University *Imaging the Dead: The Cadaver in Western Culture and Contemporary Art*.

Recent exhibitions include *Imaging the Dead* at Linden New Arts, *Curious and Curiouser* at Bathurst Regional Gallery, *Second Nature* presented with Blackartprojects at Second Space Projects, *Shifting Skin* at China Heights Sydney, *Mortem in Imagine* curated by Michael Brennan at LUMA and the VAC

Bendigo, *MAF Platform Pop Up: Cutler and Co* curated by Barry Keldoulis at Melbourne Art Fair, *Imaging the Dead* at MADA Gallery, Lorne Sculpture Biennale 2016, *Unnatural Selection*, curated by Simon Gregg at Gippsland Art Gallery and *Pretty in Pink* at Linden New Art. Recent residencies and grants include, *ArtStart* Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria VICARTS GRANTS, Artist in Residence at The University of Melbourne Veterinary Department, Bundanon Studio Residency, Linden Studio Residency Program, Medical and Art Residency at Monash University Gippsland, APA - PhD at Monash University Caulfield and The Pratt Family Scholarship Award. Media and publications include *Artist Profile* Style No Chaser Magazine NYC, *My Learned Object: Collections and Curiosities* Ian Potter Museum of Art, *Art Nation*, ABC National Australian Television, *New Romantics: Darkness and Light in Australian Art* by Simon Gregg and *Trunk Books Volume 1: Hair* by Suzanne Boccalatte and Meredith Jones.

**JAYSON SEMMENS** is a marine biologist/ecologist at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania. For nearly 30 years he has been researching cephalopods (octopus, squid and cuttlefish). He is interested in how they can eat so much, grow so fast and die so young. They also fascinate him. They are very intelligent, curious and never cease to amaze. He has spent many an hour just watching them and they have often watched him back. Out of this fascination grew this collection of 'artefacts', often discovered on holidays overseas or

given as gifts to him or his family by friends and colleagues. Each one has a story and as he looks at them on his desk or at home, they remind him of the various stages of his career and his love and fascination for the group called head (ceph) foot (poda).

**MIKE SINGE**

Born in Perth Western Australia, Mike Singe received a Bachelor of Fine Art from Curtin University in 1990 and established a profile within the Perth art community before moving to Tasmania in 2009. His work is represented in major institutions including the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Murdoch University, Curtin University and the Kerry Stokes Collection. Singe has also been the recipient of multiple development grants through ArtsWA.

In 2009 he was awarded an Australian Postgraduate Award to undertake a Master of Fine Arts at the Tasmanian School of Art. The focus of this research, completed in 2011, into the shifting human behaviour and cultural systems in response to the climate change debate continues to inform his practice. Singe's recent work expands upon this research through a focus on air as a material for investigation, particularly air in relation to human (animal) respiration. Every breath we take increases by 100 fold the carbon dioxide concentration of inhaled air. This represents an almost perfect metaphor for man made climate change and an opportunity to pervert the guilt inducing notion of "think global act local".





*Silver litra coin, Syracuse, 5th century BCE.*  
Image courtesy of the John Elliott Classics  
Museum, University of Tasmania



U N I K A S S E L  
V E R S I T Ä T

DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
German Academic Exchange Service



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Okto-Lab project and *OktoLab19* would not have been possible without the support of the following organisations:

University of Tasmania

University of Kassel

Australia-Germany Joint Research  
Cooperation Scheme (DAAD/Universities  
Australia)

Australia Council for the Arts

Arts Tasmania and the Regional Arts Fund

UTAS Marine, Antarctic and Maritime  
Research Theme Area

UTAS Environment. Resources and  
Sustainability Research Theme Area

We are also grateful for the support of the  
following individuals:

Jane Barlow, Plimsoll Gallery Manager  
and Community Engagement Officer

The fabulous install team Anna Eden,  
Josh Prouse, Dave Nelson, Jose Vicente  
Garcia Cesar, and a special thanks to  
Mike Singe

Phil Blacklow and Murray Antill for the  
construction of the lightboxes

Aaron Horsley for assisting with recording  
and editing the spoken word pieces

Jane Woollard for her reading of Rachel  
Bailey's text

Asher Warren for his reading of Peter  
Godfrey-Smith's text

Lucia Usmiani for help booking travel and  
accommodation for *OktoLab19* participants

Neil Apted, Keeper, John Elliott Classics  
Museum, University of Tasmania

Selena De Carvalho for the development  
of public programs and school holiday  
workshops

Thanks to Prof. Jayson Semmens for the loan  
of his cephalopod collection, and for giving  
the exhibition opening address

The participants: Rachel Bailey, Burton-  
Nitta, Madison Bycroft, Peter Godfrey-Smith,  
Hörner/Antlfinger, Erin Hortle, Pony Express,  
mOwson& MOwson, Neozoon, Natalie Ryan,  
Jason Semmens, Mike Singe

## CATALOGUE DESIGN

Cath Robinson

## PRINTING

Mercury Walch Pty Ltd

## COPYRIGHT

Plimsoll Gallery, the University of Tasmania,  
artists and authors

## ISBNs

Print 978-1-922352-07-1

Electronic 978-1-922352-08-8

