

In the long now – curated by aemi
Commissioned text by Gwen Burlington

Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we?

– N. K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*

The moving image works that collectively make up aemi's 2022 touring programme 'In the long now' can be understood in response to the superstorms of recent years, and how, in turn, the distant future has become more remote and hard to imagine. Our experience of time has become more immediate, urgent even. These films reduce our focus on the current moment and help us settle into a more expansive time. They propose to recalibrate our nowness as a necessary step towards modulating conditions of the present, extending the possibility of more tenable futures beyond the non-human, the living and the seen. Together, they give form to the ways in which we can compose liveable present(s), each one as different as the next. In doing so, the programme traces a life cycle, a life cycle however that does not end at the final stage of death but moves beyond it.

The suggestion of an alternative temporality is most directly felt in the pacing of each film, the rhythms of which oscillate between frenzied and meditative. Free falling into visual and sonic intensity, **Alee Peoples** begins the programme with *Standing Forward Full*, mimicking the dizzying downward spiral of a helter-skelter. Shot on 16mm, the film races forward with a literal thumping sense of rhythm as a repetitive synth-heavy soundtrack accompanies the film. Each shot is defined by motion with a word appearing through everyday objects, as well as delightful quotidian acts – biting into a watermelon, blowing leaves, or lighting a match. These acts make you acutely aware of the present, and how it is always moving forward. Peoples playfully celebrates the immediacy of sensuous experience creating a collage of hedonism, embracing small yet delicious pleasures.

This momentum is brought to an abrupt halt by **Eavan Aiken's** *White Hole*. Aiken's film lingers in a single fixed frame of the same shot of passing cattle, while meditatively, abstractly, considering cosmic possibilities; 'networked wormholes that fold space' and 'limonoid zones.' With this transposition we are taken out of the joyful every-day and into a cerebral reverie. As the accompanying music climaxes, so too does the breadth of these ideas, juxtaposed with the craggy coastline and the isolated raucous noises of passing birds. It could be prefiguring a depopulated world.

Jeamin Cha's *Ellie's Eye* takes us out of the speculative and grounds us steadfastly in scientific research. Cha considers the dangers of a techno-driven future and questions the tendency towards automated ways of understanding how we see. We are presented with the white sterile space of medical research and the practice of dog ophthalmology. Cha looks at looking itself, highlighting moral and ethical concerns around the technology of AI therapists. The film raises questions around human automation if we continue on the path of technologising the human (or vice versa), and if that is where our focus should lie.

Sandy Kennedy's *The Incorporal Body of a Shadow Soul* shifts us from the scientific into the spiritual; from future possibilities to a haunting, and from mind to body. It focuses us on an en fleshed female as inscribed with unheard voices or echoes from the past. Barely audible whispers and murmurs from a spectral form allude to past horrors. Residues – tumbling laundry, and child noises – make clear references to the repressive treatment of pregnant, unmarried women in Irish history. Kennedy's film could be an incantation, a curse, a blessing, or an omen, with a spectre that can play host to multiple allegories. But most importantly, by taking as its subject women's stories that have been left untold for too long, it revives memory and history into our collective consciousness.

Segueing from historical phantoms of the body into trance-like states of the mind, Sylvia Schedelbauer's *Labor of Love* centres on the affective space of *now*. By entangling viewers in the heady and intoxicating experience of love, Schedelbauer grounds the viewer in the sensory temporality of connection and kinship, drawing us into the liminal space of an existence outside flesh-based forms, perhaps a dream or bardo state. The film builds in intensity, effectively capturing cyclical valences of feeling.

The programme closes with Patrick Hough's *The Black River of Herself*, pivoting the viewer to the mythic within the primaeval boglands of Offaly. Hough brings the leathered remains of a female body – mummified over 2,000 years – to life in a conversation with the archaeologist tasked with her excavation. Adhering to the extractive logic of geology, the bog woman is a portent of ecological demise, and Daisy Hildyard's poetical script warns of this, "From here I've seen the glaciers retreat. These rapidly warming days." Twinned with humbling landscapes, Hough provocatively captures what's at stake if we continue on capitalism's ecologically suicidal course.

The lyrical texture of the programme is brought to bear in its poetry from Hough's film (its title taken from Seamus Heaney's *The Graubelle Man*), to Kennedy's film poem, and Schedelbauer's visual description of a feeling. The image of an eye's iris, and its likeness to planets, develops as a motif throughout – most directly in Cha's *Ellie's Eye* but also in

the cyclicity of Schedelbauer's coloured portal. Within the sweeping scale of each film's purview, the symmetries throughout the programme include time/ space, life/ death, science/ art. Reparative, cautionary, and celebratory tales, they rearticulate our relationship with temporalities of great amplitude from prehistorical pasts; confronting a charged present to undetermined futures.

The heft of long-term responsibility is palpable, in the face of climate and seismic uncertainty, and in atoning for past events. The works dwell in a kind of world-making; adventures of landscape that celebrate both the human and non-human. Sci-fi author China Miéville described the importance of visualising utopias at an Earth Day address by comparing them to Rorschach inkblot tests:

What utopias are are new Rorschachs. We pour our concerns and ideas out, and then in dreaming we fold the paper to open it again and reveal startling patterns. We may pour with a degree of intent, but what we make is beyond precise planning. Our utopias are to be enjoyed and admired: they are made of our concerns and they tell us about our now, about our pre-utopian selves. They are to be interpreted. And so are those of our enemies.¹

Miéville makes the case for the importance of artistic imaginings of the future. 'In the long now' boldly stares into the present moment to address urgent concerns around what kind of world we want to live in, and ultimately save. As with N. K. Jemisin's beginning at the end, viewing time as a non-linear cycle, or rather spiral, creates continuous and infinite possibilities.

¹ China Miéville, "The Limits of Utopia," *Salvage* 1, no.1 (August 2015), <https://salvage.zone/the-limits-of-utopia/>

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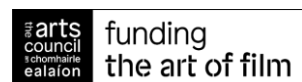
'In the long now', aemi's 2022 Tour, continues at The Model until Saturday 24 September



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