

Pilosus nuces orbis



# Pilosus nuces orbis

Tony Brown  
Gioj De Marco  
Caryolyn Mason  
Andre Yi

Curated by Caryolyn Mason  
as part of the *Quadrant* Exhibition  
January 22 – March 12, 2022

Torrance Art Museum  
3320 Civic Center Drive  
Torrance, CA 90503  
[torranceartmuseum.com](http://torranceartmuseum.com)





# Curator Statement

Carolyn Mason

Mushrooms operate in surprisingly collaborative ways, communicating underground with tree roots and sharing nutrients that foster a symbiotic relationship. While of course, some fungi have the potential to invade and destroy—this exhibition focuses on the predominantly collaborative potential of mushrooms in nature and how this parallels possibilities within artmaking.

My own work has long been inspired by mushrooms, their organic, fruiting bodies and multitude of spores, so I've relished learning more about the complex life of fungi from the scientific community's research surrounding their processes. The theme for this exhibition arose from my fascination with these processes. In 1885, the German biologist Albert Frank coined the word *symbiosis* while studying fungi, noting the intricate entanglement between fungi and tree roots, and suggesting that the relationship was mutually beneficial. Tree roots share glucose resulting from photosynthesis while fungus share minerals as they have the ability to break down soil. Frank's ideas were attacked at the time as the West could not conceive of a relationship in nature of mutual benefit, only of conflict and parasitism. Fungi's propensity for exploration and communication as they weave intricate and expansive, rhizome-like patterns of underground connection called *mycelium*, can offer artists—and all humans—a map as we create, connect and form community 140 years after the term symbiosis was coined.

Chosen for the breadth of their practice and their affinity for collaboration, the four artists in *Pilosus nuces orbis*, are based in Los Angeles and are object-makers. Each has a penchant for working with themes of regeneration and using natural materials including wood, wool, and clay. Instead of creating works about mushrooms, it was our processes of making that embodied the nature of *mycelium*. We collaborated, shared ideas and materials and found inspiration for our own works from one another's projects. The result was an expansiveness in our respective practices as we explored new media and themes. The resulting connections among the four artists' works are visible, though sometimes subtly, in both their form and content.

The fluid, non-linear, and mutually supportive connections among our works mirror the underground patterns of fungal filaments, where it's impossible to locate a beginning or an end within the connections. After a long period of quarantine, the collaborative project offered a welcome means of artistic engagement and community. Ultimately, we decided to name the exhibition after an orange mushroom with a particularly colorful common name: "Hairy Nuts Disco," which, when translated into Latin, becomes *Pilosus nuces orbis*.





# Hairy Nuts Disco and the Communicative Fungus

Shana Nys Dambrot

The mushroom said to me once,  
'Nature loves courage.'  
— Terence McKenna



When in art we refer to collaboration, it is evocative of makers combining their visions, skills, and mediums into singular works of art expressive of multiple points of view. But in the context of this project, collaboration is considered as more of an esprit de corps, a framework for communication and creative exchange, and a dynamic that expresses discourse and mutuality, rather than compromise. In the course of its curation, conception, and execution all four of the artists in the project had occasion to correspond, exchanging ideas, studio visits, process photographs, and in some cases direct prompts and actual materials. But in the end, each of them contributed work that is unmistakably their own.

In this way, the true subject of the exhibition — even beyond the compelling, empathetic works of eccentric materiality and assertive hand-wrought energetic presence — is the nature of this organic communion itself. And it's something they learned from mushrooms. In her own practice, Carolyn Mason (who also curated the exhibition) has had reason to investigate the rhizomatic connectivity of fungi who share resources through a connective web, living in communicative symbiosis with tree roots and other botanicals in their ecosystems. What, she wondered, can humans learn from this? Specifically, what insights into non-Darwinian, mutually beneficial sharing of liminal and somatic forms of creativity can mushrooms bring into the art discourse?

As object-makers, each of the four is accustomed to wrangling clay, wood, metal, fabric, computer code, and a wide array of found and unconventional materials whose qualities and behaviors are as integral to their work as their own ideas. Left to communicate intuitively and organically as the project progressed, an ecosystem of optical and conceptual resonances developed — loose spaghetti, wormlike tongues, and the parabolas of unraveled yarn; textiles, slabs of felt, and ironing boards; clay, wet earth, and ancient caves; artificial intelligence, human dreams, and ancient history. As Terence McKenna also said, “Matter is not lacking in magic. Matter is magic.”

Tony Brown’s omnivorous affection for found objects and vectors of material contingencies made common cause with the drooping forms and pragmatic accouterments of Mason’s textiles; and certain planar shapes in his sculptural assemblage echo the totemic tower of Andre Yi’s stacked, coy and cozy pyres. Yi permitted his devotion to painted wood as a fractal armature of structure and compression to be interrupted by layers of sturdy felt in an homage to Mason’s materials. Her unraveled, moth-eaten sweater deconstructs comfort into a fractal web that references mycelium, the internet, and the passage of time.

Gioj De Marco, among other things, co-operates the Collective Dreamworld Project — an AI that is learning from human dreams, the better to facilitate a greater sharing of subconscious knowledge. All of the artists contributed dreams, and as De Marco was running the program, folding them each into the hybridized universal, the intelligence had a dream of its own — a dancing woman with a worm emerging from her face, which crucially none of the four had oneirically referenced in their input, and which later manifested as a solid sculptural object after Venus of Willendorf whose wormlike tongue licks at dangling string and spaghetti across the room with an eerie appetite. Nature loves courage, indeed.

Los Angeles, 2022



and a young woman with a sword fish in her hand



Right: Tony Brown  
*You might not remember when we didn't do that but I do*, 2021  
Metal, panel, wire, spaghetti, palm trunk, salt, paint  
144" x 60" x 18"





Above: Gioj De Marco  
*THE FISH GOD IS THE LAST MAN ON EARTH, 2021*  
 Paper clay, resin, inks watercolors and acrylic  
 Main sculptural element is 24" x 48" x 72"

Right: Andre Yi  
*Tent no. 1 and Tent no. 2, 2021*  
 Bamboo, wood, paper, acrylic paint, gouache, thread,  
 recycled wool, found materials  
 96" x 16" x 13" and 76 ½" x 14" x 14"



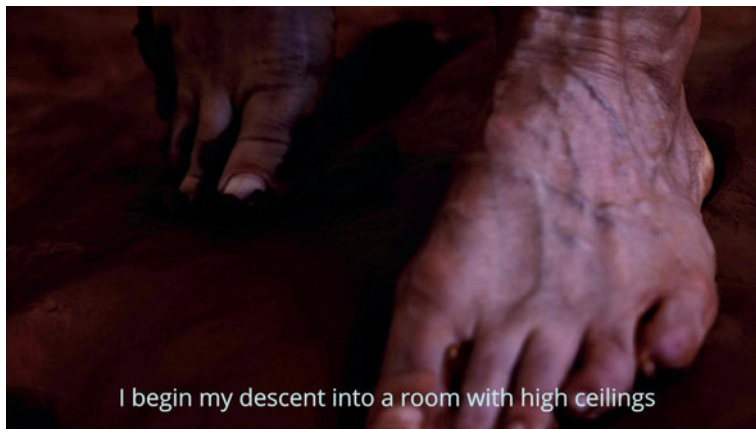


Carolyn Mason  
*Sweatery Web*, 2021  
Felted wool (recycled from moth-eaten  
sweaters), thread, staples  
100" x 62" x 4"

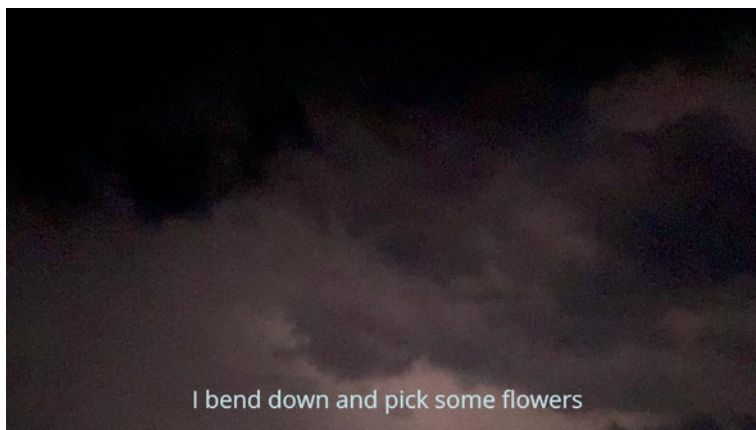




the gold sparkles, its brilliance is blinding



I begin my descent into a room with high ceilings



I bend down and pick some flowers

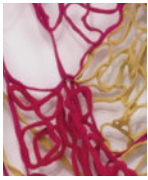
Text from *She is the only human being on the planet*

The gold sparkles, its brilliance is blinding  
I close my eyes for a moment  
when I open them, I'm in a dark, damp cave  
I am covered in a thick layer of dirt  
I look down and see a large hole in the ground  
In it, a doll's wooden hand  
and a foot, as large as my leg  
these belong to a giant, sleeping in a cave  
I see a beautiful woman dancing  
she has a trachea and an esophagus  
I can't see any plants, but I can feel their presence  
I begin my descent into a room with high ceilings  
I hear gurgling sounds  
a fish jumps out of the water and falls on the ground  
there's an old man  
and a young woman with a sword fish in her hand  
she is the only human being on the planet  
I play with a cat the size of a tiger  
I bend down and pick up some flowers  
the flowers are made of skin  
I sit on the ground with pink yarn;  
too long to roll up into a ball  
I suck on it and throw it out of my mouth repeatedly  
I look around and notice the walls of the cavernous room  
the old man speaks and says:  
"I am the Fish God"  
"I am the oldest man on Earth"  
a sound accompanies the transformation of the yarn  
into a large white worm with a glossy back  
the worm is eating the face of the dancing woman  
the room fills with the terrible smell of dead fish  
in my hand, is a chain of blackened, dead flowers

The subtitles in this video are excerpts from the Collective Dreamworld's continuous narrative. The Collective Dreamworld Project is an experiment in shared knowledge (conscious and unconscious) built in collaboration with the GPT-3, OpenAI's large-scale language-generation model.

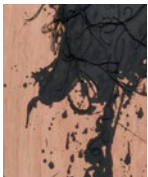
The AI builds the Collective Dreamworld by weaving together dreams, then generates outputs in the first person, reporting on experiences with people, places, and things that populates it. All artists in this Quadrant of the museum have submitted dreams to the project.

Gioj De Marco reviewed, edited, and revised the language to give it a syncopated cadence, reminiscent of how we recall and recount dreams: in bits and pieces. She takes ultimate responsibility for the content of this text and wishes to acknowledge Loris D'Acunto, the engineer co-author of the Collective Dreamworld Project. ([www.collectivedreamworld.com](http://www.collectivedreamworld.com))



**Carolyn Mason** (curator) was born in Walnut Creek, CA and lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. She received her MFA degree in Sculpture from Mills College in 2005. Mason has exhibited at Mt.

St. Mary's University, the Laband Art Gallery at Loyola Marymount University as well as in a solo exhibition at Winslow Garage (all Los Angeles). Mason has been awarded residencies at the Banff Center for the Arts and the Vermont Studio Center, for which she also received a fellowship. Her work has been featured in *Surface Design Journal* and *Fiber Art Now*, among others. *Quadrant: New Voices* at the Torrance Art Museum is her first curatorial project.



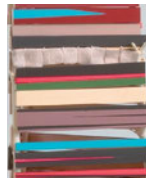
**Tony Brown** was born in Louisiana in 1970 and moved with his parents—a former monk and nun—to Colorado before he was five. Later he moved to Hawaii where he received his Bachelor of Fine Arts

degree at the University of Hawaii. In May 2000 he received his Master of Fine Arts degree with honors from California State University at Long Beach. He currently lives in Los Angeles, CA and exhibits his work in the United States, Europe and Asia. His work has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, among other publications.



**Gioj De Marco** (Italian, born in Luxembourg, lives in Los Angeles, CA) received her MFA degree from the Cranbrook Academy of Arts. She works multidisciplinary, from object making to the pro-

duction of performances and filmed content, all exploring the complex material expression of personal and cultural narratives. In 2020, she established The Collective Dreamworld Project, a project co-authored with Loris D'Acunto, co-founded Prospect Art, a forward-thinking, Los Angeles-based artist-run not-for-profit organization that fosters artists' careers by providing exposure through open dialogues, critical writing, project grants, and exhibitions, and, most recently, co-founded the 4th-Wall, a network of international organizations that promote video works.



**Andre Yi** was born in Los Angeles, CA in 1972. After receiving his BFA from the University of Texas at Austin and his MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, he moved back to Los Angeles. Yi

has exhibited in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Berkeley, Miami, Dallas, Berlin, Amsterdam and Seoul as well as being housed in the collection of the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art. He has been reviewed by the *LA Times*, *Die Welt* as well as numerous other publications.

**Torrance Art Museum** is a program of the cultural services division of the city of Torrance Community Services Division of the City of Torrance Services Department. The Museum encourages all people to develop and increase their understanding and appreciation for modern and contemporary artwork via a variety of exhibitions offered in its two gallery spaces, as well as educational programs, artist talks, lectures, and symposia. Through its emphasis on contemporary artistic expression in Southern California and globally, the Torrance Art Museum brings together visual artists and community members; fosters personal and civic wellbeing by inspiring understanding and appreciation of the visual arts; promotes meaningful experiences in the arts to strengthen creative and critical thinking skills; and builds bridges between the visual arts and other disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

**Torrance Art Museum Advocates (TAMA)** is a non-profit, community-based volunteer organization whose goal is furthering the availability, understanding and appreciation of art through its specific support of the Torrance Art Museum.



Thank you to Max Presneill, Sun-Na Gay, and Hope Ezcurra at the Torrance Art Museum as well as TAM Advocates for your support. Thank you also to Gioj de Marco and her Blowing in the Wind gallery space where, along with Tony Brown and Andre Yi, we did a collaborative project called Makers Anonymous in 2021. The success of that collaboration helped pave the way for *Pilosus nuces orbis*.

—Carolyn Mason

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Robert Wedemeyer  
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