

Hairy Nuts Disco and the Communicative Fungus

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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.

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