

NICODIM

Mandy El-Sayegh

Taking Part

November 24 - January 10, 2017



Nicodim Gallery is pleased to present Taking Part, a solo exhibition by London based artist Mandy El-Sayegh (b. 1985). The exhibition will be on view from November 24 through January 10, 2017

In Taking Part, El-Sayegh presents her research-based practice in several formations around the gallery's spaces, each one highlighting a different stage in experimental processes based in material and linguistic exploration. By interrogating the part-to-whole relation, El-Sayegh addresses the breakdown of socio-political, economic and semantic orders, whilst putting these interchangeable, fragmented signs and substances back in play to form new, non-totalizable sums with emergent properties.

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The map of places passes.
The reality of paper tears.
... Holes in maps look through to nowhere.

From The Map of Places, Laura Riding (1901-1991)

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Wurdi Youang – about an hour's drive outside of Melbourne, near the village of Little River in Victoria province. Originally owned by the Wathaurong Aborigines, it became agricultural land after European settlement and colonization led to the destruction of the tribe's culture in 1835. It is thought, however, that Wurdi Youang has been left untouched since then.

In this area of the bush, an egg-shaped formation of 100 or so basalt stones is spread out across a site measuring about 50m in diameter. What may seem a random arrangement is anything but; the three largest stones are placed in the location of the sunset during the summer solstice, the equinox, and the winter solstice. A mapping of the sky and of the seasons, an attempt to understand the celestial whilst grounded on earth, carved into the earth itself.

For many, this site is Australia's Stonehenge, perhaps dating back as much as 25,000 years. This is significant. Not only does this make it one of the world's oldest archaeoastronomical sites; it suggests an understanding of astronomy that pre-dates that of the Greeks, and of European thought in general. As always, there are skeptics; some believe the site may be as young as 200 years old. For others, the idea of an ancient, Aboriginal science is too much to bear. Both opinions find their roots in the events of 1835.

Other Western scholars try to make amends for their biased peers. This is well intentioned, but for some Aborigines such attempts by Western scholars to align Wurdi Youang within a linear concept of time is unnecessary. Their understanding does not pre or post date European thought. It stands in a time outside of time, a dream of sorts, an everywhen without beginning or end.

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Analogies can be useful when thinking difficult concepts, like temporality. Analogies can also be revealing. And a good analogy can always be ruined by modern science.

Trees in a forest were once thought of as being in direct competition with one another, fighting

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for the same resources: sunlight, water, nutrients. But studies have found that if one tree is taken away from the forest habitat, another would become diseased and die, rather than prosper. In one patch of forest, each tree was infected with gas containing traceable isotopes, all measurable by a Geiger counter. Rather than the radioactive particles staying in their original trees, it was discovered that all the trees were sharing their food underground. The soil contained a huge network that was mappable, resembling that of worldwide flight paths.

This network consisted of millions of small fungi, miles of tubes of which could be found in just a small pinch of dirt. The network was based upon a reciprocal relationship between the two; the fungi have something the tree needs, and vice versa. A tree needs minerals from the soil in order to grow; with only carbon, a tree would not grow above the knee. The fungi gets their own food from the trees, a carbon based sugar, which allows them to multiply. Fungi have thus developed a system for mining, secreting acid to dissolve rocks that they come across in the soil, building tunnels to mine packets of minerals inside them. Fungi also play hunter, doing the same to insects such as the springtail; even particles from dead fish appear in trees, fed by the mining fungi.

A diverse system of exchanges, loans and bartering live beneath the forest floor, yet all we see are the trees. Even hierarchical systems cannot escape swarm mentality.

Excerpt from a text written by William Rees in collaboration with Mandy El-Sayegh