



Works

Sorawit Songsataya, *Starling*

- 1. *Lovebirds*
 Digital video with sound, 7:03 minutes
 2018
- 2. *Four Chambers*
 Wool and Polystyrene, variable dimensions
 2018
- 3. *Starling* Research Reel, various sources, 4 hours
- 4. Weave Me In, Workshop Space.

- 5. *non-hyphenated*, Robyn Maree Pickens
- 1/5 *Swarm* (Art News New Zealand)
- 2/5 *Sonnet* (Instagram)
- 4/5 *What Percentage of the World Is* (in gallery)
- 3/5 *Blood* (street poster)
- 5/5 *Henrietta Lacks* (microsite)
- 2018

Starling

February 2 - March 17, 2018

Sorawit Songsataya



Public Programme

- Saturday February 10
Weave Me In
 workshop
- Saturday February 17
Weave Me In
 workshop
- Saturday March 3
 Artist Talk
 Sorawit Songsataya and Robyn Maree Pickens

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Starling

Kinship by birth or blood is the primary means through which an individual understands their place and sense of belonging. Kinship as defined by the family unit – blood as the material of commonality – is a primal medium of connection, one that can symbolically order our earliest notions of relation. However, relying on what is contained by bodies in close containment, these models of kinship restrict notions of belonging. They are closed systems that prioritise linear human-to-human relations above all else.

Starling refigures behaviours found within the human body and more-than-human-worlds to offer an approach to kinship emergent from the collaborative, symbiotic patterns of biological organisms and complex ecologies. *Starling* images a world stripped of human centrality, a world composed of nonlinear relations.

With the blood cell as one principal actor, Songsataya utilises scale as an entry point into this relationality. Animate blood cells position us within a microcosmic view of our own bodily processes. In this positioning, we might become aware of the potential subjecthood of these processes and their actors. They also provide a platform – a language even – which helps to understand our embeddedness within complex, universal processes. It enables us to view ourselves as a set of ‘systems’ within systems, existing in a state of continual commune and collaboration. By picturing the agency of what is most often understood as “not alive” we may begin to access our relational and emerging composition from the perspective of the environment within us, and us within the environment.

The woolly, membranous blood cells around us appear intimately familiar, yet normally only known through the lens of a microscope. Hand-felted ribbon chains are draped over the blood cells, mimicking the language of genetic coding, a twist towards more ancient lines of connectivity, genealogy and the order of humankind in the world. At once enlarging and abstracting biological forms and processes, Songsataya renders affinity with “the stuff of us”, the materials and bodies that are our most immediate collaborators.

Informed by studies of multi-species biological patterns – how living organisms interact as open systems – the exhibition’s structure and collaborative process attempt the qualities of these highly adaptive networks. It looks at such systems as a means of permeating self-understanding and creative processes. Co-authorship, or thinking-making-practicing collectively, is tested in order to tease out the question, “is singularity naturally collaborative?”

non-hyphenated, a non-linear, multi-platform work authored by Robyn Maree Pickens, is partly modelled on Stacy Alaimo’s transcorporeal idea that “‘the environment’ is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves”¹.

The work, a series of writings, explores the innate interconnectivity of all beings. A set of five micro-texts, each published across different mediums (within the pages of *Art News New Zealand*, as street posters, through Instagram, as a specially designed website, and in print within the gallery) staggered throughout the exhibitions length, to be read as a cohesive whole, or in parts.

non-hyphenated is a textual system that allows for the context of each microtext to infect and permeate the others, establishing a collaborative generation of meaning. Similarly positioned is the reader, who – perhaps encountering a microtext in isolation – brings certain gaps and rhythms that can be accounted for by the text’s embrace of the generative.

Set amongst this understanding of self-as-ecology and ecology-as-self, *Starling* works towards imagining a kind of boundless subjecthood composed by collective kinship. Traditional and orienting divisions collapse into a holistic ecology: symbolic to material, subject to object, us to world, it to me to they.

Such holistic conceptions of the world are not new: The artist honours this directly with the work *Lovebirds*, and its reflection on the story of the whale and Kauri tree. Indigenous notions of kinship very often encompass a binding relationship between all organisms; human, animal or otherwise. In this whakatauākī (of which the origin is unknown) the whale and the kauri are placed in a reciprocal relationship. The whale longs for the Kauri to return to the sea, but the Kauri must stay earthbound and guard the forest. They decide to exchange skins, each giving a part

of themselves to form the other, explaining why the Kauri bark is so fleshy, and dense with oily resin. This mutual exchange takes on a variety of forms in *Lovebirds* as it moves through a cast of actors and scenes.

Blood is central to *Starling*, used to suggest the limits of its human lore. In bearing witness to and participating in a network of interacting systems, entities, and materials, the attitude of making kin with the world as a political act emerges through the exhibition: a kinship of love without blood, premised on the fundamental connectivity of the world. This more-than-human image of kinship becomes an ode to ‘love processes’: mundane exchanges of flows, energies, and encounters between every conceivable entity.

Looking to our world as an ecology in which no “material expression of it is hierarchised above another”, gives us the opportunity to re-examine and rewrite the agency of human and nonhuman actants alike, to understand the collective processes making up the world, and to increase our capacity to make kin with the world.

¹ Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the material Self*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010, pg 4.

² Rāketē, Emilie. *Inhuman: Parasites, Posthumanism, and papatūānuku*, 2015.