

# There was earth in them, and they dug.

Miriam Gallery

319 Bedford Ave

Williamsburg Brooklyn, NY 11211

June 10, 2021 - August 8, 2021

Opening June 10, 4-8PM

Colleen Billing, Clare Koury, Alexandra Neuman, Umico Niwa

Science fiction and fantasy are replete with depictions of a sentient earth, with landscapes that share a single biological cycle with the entities that inhabit them: in Stanislaw Lem's 1961 *Solaris*, an alien sea communicates with human space explorers through liquid dioramas; in Orson Scott Card's *Lusitania*, mammal-like creatures undergo a sacrificial process by which they become seedlings in a network of conscious trees; and in Octavia Butler's *Dawn*, the central character's first struggle is to escape the organic and womb-like walls of a living spaceship. Likewise, the artists in this exhibition consider fictions and realities by which humans become seamlessly part of the environment around them, as water passing into the sea.

In the gallery's front room, Umico Niwa's flower-clad *Daphnes*, 2019-2021, scale and flirt around the gallery's architecture. In the aftermath of bilateral orchiectomy surgery and provoked by an ongoing experience of phantom limb, Niwa researched the final site of her own biological waste. Discovering that her organs had been burned and buried on the Miyoshi Mountains in Japan, now acting as the soil among the roots of sapling trees, Niwa created a series of works that reflect the second life of her sexual organs, punctuating the tips of phallic appendages with flower petals and leaves. Likewise skirting the peripheries of the gallery and blending into the existing structures of the space, Clare Koury's *Hopper*, 2019, contains the artist's trash remnants from a period of one month. Confronting the notion of consumption as identity expression, Koury counters that trash is likewise an index of the body; in a 2019 interview, she writes, "the only real difference between putting something in a time capsule and putting it in a landfill is the hope that someone will come back for what you've left behind."

On the gallery's northern wall, Alexandra Neuman's *Infosphere*, 2019, depicts two figures in an arid desert landscape, clad in matching bodysuits that allow them to fade chameleon-like into the background. Connected by small tubes, which pump blue fluid from a basin that rests between them, the figures exchange matter with each other and their surroundings, an act that is also analogy for the unspoken transmission of information between creature and environment. The thesis of Neuman's second work in the exhibition is slightly different. At the far end of the back gallery, Neuman's *An Ecology of Mind*, 2019, captures figures that have been buried up to the neck in earth. For Neuman, the elision of human figure and environment responds to the mind-body problem—presenting a portrait of the body's matter contemplating the sensorial overload of the dirt matter that surrounds it.

The back gallery's periphery is demarcated by a series of baby shoes that Niwa has sculpted from organic waste and cast in copper. While mourning the parenthood that Niwa's gender-affirming procedure has foreclosed, these sculptures playfully point to alternate trajectories, identity expressions, and modes of creation as potato skins become the leather for baby's first stiletto, baby's first combat boot.

If other of the works in the exhibition play on presence and absence, distinct identity or seamless blur into environment, Colleen Billing's activations heighten this, suggesting the room of the gallery as a living, breathing organism. Billing's works emerge from an ongoing science fiction story that the artist is writing surrounding a character Evelyn (or Eve) who mutated alongside a group of other women to become a singular multiplicity with characteristic traits of oyster, plant, and cell phone. This mutant conglomerate enters the gallery's rear room as a vinyl flooring underneath which can be seen the encroaching growth of mycelium foam, as well as in the moist waft of mugwort scent from a wall-based vent.

Slipping between the real world and invented ones, these artists represent a complex landscape of elisions between matter and body, opening avenues for expanded interpretations of the self and a more accountable ecology.

# Programs

**June 10, 2021 at 6PM and 7:45PM: Hardman-Hill no hits music, yanks win 1-0 on the strength of 12 whole tones!**

In conjunction with the opening of *There was earth in them, and they dug.*, Miriam Gallery is pleased to present a newly commissioned composition by Leo Hardman-Hill in response to the prompt "structure/fluidity." The performance will take place in the exhibition space at 6PM and 7:45PM.

Hardman-Hill no hits music, yanks win 1-0 on the strength of 12 whole tones! Using a structure structured in close partnership with fluidity, Hardman-Hill, with methods drawn from his "distracted undistracted period," positively flummoxed music's batters at the plate, whose scouting reports on Hardman-Hill had told them to expect him to "stick to the plan." But stick to the plan he would not, as Hardman-Hill instead changed speeds on them like a young Sandy Koufax, and by the end he had not only stuck to the plan, but unstuck, stuck again, called for help, demanded no help, and finally, in the mess of baseball we call life, bewildered batters with music his teammates could only describe as "off speed."

**June 19, 2021, 2-3PM: Play therapy with Umico Niwa**

Umico Niwa will lead an experimental play therapy session on creating baby shoes from organic material. Continuing from past workshops—during which participants created figural portraits, also from used fruit and vegetal matter—this project invites participants to project and imagine alternate configurations of identity. Niwa writes, "It's a light-hearted way we can trek the infinite variations of ourselves, and the things we embody but do not witness." The fruits of this communal exercise will then be on display in the gallery, alongside Niwa's own copper-casted baby shoes.

All ages are welcome. Participants are encouraged to bring produce, flowers, seeds, or branches that would otherwise go to waste. Additional materials will be provided.

**July 18, 2021, 3-6PM: Book Launch of *radical becoming in the ongoing now* by Alexandra Neuman with Live Tarot Readings by the artist.**

Please join us on July 18, 2021 for the launch of Alexandra Neuman's newly released publication, *radical becoming in the ongoing now* as a part of Brooklyn Art Book Fair's Sidewalk Sale Series at Miriam Gallery. The event will include one-on-one tarot readings given by Neuman using the 32-card oracle deck from which the zine originated. The artist will be available onsite 3-6PM EST, no RSVP necessary. An additional, digital tarot reading event will take place on June 22 from 6-7PM. Join via this zoom link.

# Installation Images

There was earth in them,  
and they dug.

Colleen Billing  
Clare Koury  
Alexandra Neuman  
Umico Niwa

Curated by Nicole Kaack

June 10 - August 8





















