



View of "The Broken Pitcher," 2022–23. Photo: Alexandra Ivanciu.

actual offers, the disastrous intersection of geopolitical and interpersonal turmoil that saddled a woman with her ex-husband's debt, and the bank personnel's point-blank admission, "We are not here to find a solution." Though it was likewise not outcome oriented, "The Broken Pitcher" conveyed a willingness to grapple with the situation in contrast with the bank's refusal to do so. One thing art can do is to be generous enough to pay attention—and, in this case, to amplify the geopolitical echoes inextricable from a seemingly individual story. At the exhibition's stop in Leipzig (after public screenings throughout Cyprus and an iteration at the Beirut Art Center), Germany's complicity was brought to the fore, as the de facto EU leader ultimately benefited from the stringent austerity conditions—including foreclosures—of its bailout of Southern European nations after the 2012 financial crisis. A wall-size installation in the resource room traced the historical leveraging of debt as an exploitative tool: Enlarged documents from the family's case were layered atop late nineteenth-century treaties with the Ottoman Empire that outlined the British occupation of Cyprus as a guarantee for military loans. By pairing such research with more abstract and associative artistic responses, "The Broken Pitcher" embodied a move beyond witnessing and toward a compelling manifestation of involved and collaborative engagement as a means of navigating oppressive systems. And it carved out a fissure of hope that such an approach might open new ways ahead.

—Camila McHugh

## STOCKHOLM

### Dana-Fiona Armour ANDRÉHN-SCHIPTJENKO

A pair of long, delicately colored tubes lay in parallel on top of a low plinth in the gallery's entrance. One end of each elongated form bent itself off the edge of the traditional pedestal, like a creature curious about what was beyond the plinth, but did not connect to anything—not to the ground, not even to its companion. *Pneumatophore* #2 and #4 (all works 2022), resemble oversized water-snake toys—hollow forms made of latex or rubber and filled with liquid, designed as fidget devices to train motor control and concentration. But Dana-Fiona Armour's sculptures are

made of blown glass tinted rose pink and deep violet with melanin, oxides, and metallic salts. Their title refers to a type of aerial root structure some plants develop to obtain oxygen in waterlogged habitats.

Armour's recent exhibition "A Tale of Symbiogenesis" extended a research project she has undertaken with the French biopharmaceutical company Cellectis, which specializes in genome-editing technologies. Under the guidance of several biogeneticists, Armour isolated the human MC1R gene, reproduced it synthetically, and then rigged a virus to insert the gene into the DNA of the *Nicotiana benthamiana*, a tobacco plant commonly used for tests in biotech labs. The MC1R gene, when activated, triggers the production of melanin, the amino acid that allows human skin to tan when exposed to the sun. Armour's artistic research demonstrated that a human molecular structure could be made to exist in that of a plant.

The video *Scan Micro CT Nicotiana Benthamiana – Pre Transgenesis ACT II* shows a digital rendering of the vein structure of the tobacco plant's leaves before its genes were modified. The simulation, rendered in tones of matte grayish pink, traverses the model's intricate exterior before entering the hollow passage of its spine. With all visual noise digitally eliminated, the video mimics the medical imagery used to develop biological products. Three vividly colored microscopic photographs of the same subject, *Vue microscopique numéro 4, 5, and 6* (Microscopic View Number 4, 5, and 6), use the same science-based formal vocabulary. Ubiquitous and opaque, Armour's representations of the molecular world are indistinguishable from the biotech industry's corporate imaginary. They do not express any of the ethical complexity involved in forcing a plant to host a bit of humanness. The assumption here is that humans may transgress the genetic integrity of nonhumans for the sake of aesthetics.

To construct three wall-mounted cast-glass pieces, *Nervures secondaires 1, 2, and 3* (Secondary Veins 1, 2, and 3), Armour combined crystal, opaline, and colored glass to make bony structures inspired by



View of "Dana-Fiona Armour," 2023. Wall: *Vue microscopique numéro 6 (nicotiana benthamiana transgénique)*, 2022. Pedestal, from left: *Pneumatophore #4, 2022*; *Pneumatophore #2, 2022*. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Béranger.

REVIEWS



Maija Blåfield, *Scenic View* (detail), 2023, four-channel 4K video installation, color, sound, 15 minutes.

tobacco-plant leaves she had genetically modified. These works came the closest to visualizing the exhibition's title and framework, the notion of symbiogenesis—the process by which two organisms merge to form another that is genetically distinct and more complex. Yet these haunting quasi skeletons retain a precious quality, as art objects categorically uninvolved with biological processes such as putrefaction.

In a text about Armour's work commissioned for her first exhibition at Andréhn-Schiptjenko, in 2021, curator Nicolas Bourriaud asked, "Is art, as a whole, in itself a dead element inserted into the life of human society? This is a profound question, which Armour attempts to answer by emphasizing calcification or crystallization as a tool for producing forms." Perhaps the cynicism implicit in Bourriaud's question about the death of art derives from the inert quality in Armour's work, the formal lifelessness with which she renders symbiogenesis. Rather than address the deadness of art critically, Armour produces a simulacrum that ignores the difference between, on the one hand, invading other beings for the sole purpose of implanting ourselves in them and, on the other, developing resilient hybrid life-forms capable of surviving the man-made catastrophe at hand.

—Natasba marie Llorens

HELSINKI

**Maija Blåfield**

HELSINGIN TAIDEHALLI

Climbing up the stairs to the exhibition halls of Helsingin Taidehalli, I could already hear Maija Blåfield's voice. Blåfield not only writes, directs, shoots, and edits her films, she also narrates them. Although I was used to her soft and calm tone, guiding the viewer in a patient and inviting manner, there was something perplexing about it: I couldn't decide whether or not she is a reliable narrator. For instance, in her most recent work, *Scenic View*, 2023, is she adopting the role of documentary commentator, or is she recounting a fairy tale?

Blåfield is particularly interested in the mundane and how, even in the most ordinary circumstances, reality can be deceiving. Often, our own eyes lead us astray. In her film *Kulta-aika* (Golden Age), 2015, she tells a story in which, while traveling in a war zone, she sees a burned-out house and notices a pair of men's long underwear that has been hung out from one of the balconies to dry. She takes a photograph of the scene and travels home, telling everyone a moving story of bravery and care in the middle of devastation, symbolized by the image of the underwear. It is only later, after developing the photograph, Blåfield realizes what she'd seen was really a shredded piece of the building itself, hanging from the torn facade.

Misinterpretations, and documentary cast as fantasy (or vice versa), hold Blåfield's oeuvre together. She is not only concerned with human perception, but with the nature of the camera and how it transmits stories. For example, in her film *The Fantastic*, 2020, she interviewed people from North Korea about how Western movies smuggled into the country framed their understanding of the outside world. How could they have known whether depictions of space travel or cell phones were plausible?

This exhibition, "*Tarinoita tienpienareelta*" (Roadside Narratives), followed the twenty-year arc of Blåfield's career from her student work to the present. The large series of photographs from 2022 that lent its title to the show encompasses a travelogue-like collection of snapshots with small written captions for each image. However, as the exhibition showed, Blåfield is above all a filmmaker. Among the six moving-image works presented in the show—along with *The Fantastic*, *Kulta-aika*, and *Scenic View*—is *Tuboutumisesta ja säilyttämisestä* (On Destruction and Preservation), 2017, in which she combines documentary film techniques and essayistic narration. Again, she tells us incredible stories, from that of a suitcase lying on the bottom of the ocean to an eel living 150 years alone in a dark well.

In the four-channel installation *Scenic View* we see a brown bear in the borderland between Finland and Russia, a calm enough area in which to film, without disruption by humans. Here, in the middle of nowhere, Blåfield pans her camera across the landscape and then