

Tanya Chaly
Complex Contingencies,
McCarthy Art Gallery, St Michael's College, VT
November 9th-December 10th 2016

The works in this exhibition bring together drawings and drawing installations that reflect and examine systems of order and disorder within the natural world. Themes of balance and imbalance, the upsetting of the natural order and what mechanisms and systems underscore or threaten both ecosystem and species survival are explored.

With 80 per cent of the earth's land mass given over to agriculture and the world's population having tripled in the last century, it is undeniable that the rapid increase in human industrial and agricultural activity throughout the 20th century has had a massive impact on the environment and has redefined our conception of the natural world, the meaning of wilderness, and our connection to it as a species. In recent years, scientists have documented various effects on animal populations, including species mutation, behavioral changes and population explosions and die-offs, many of which result from agricultural, commercial and industrial run-off, deforestation and other environmental degradations. Bats, amphibians, insects and birds are especially susceptible to these destabilizing influences.

In "Complex Contingencies" Tanya Chaly presents us with a clinical representation of biodiversity in which the human element is conspicuously absent or, at the very least, only indirectly referenced. In the selection and presentation of her subject matter, she draws upon the Victorian predilection for scientific curiosity, a desire to compress the marvels and curiosities of the natural world into the confines of a display case enmeshed with a scientific urge to classify and enumerate. But, far from eulogizing this obsession of another era with nature in the abstract, Chaly uses this format to draw our attention to more contemporary concerns as she traces the adverse effect of human consumer waste on certain species, and documents the pathologies and viral strains that might become prevalent as a result of human's abnormal interactions with other species. Through her layered practice of charcoal, graphite and pigment renderings of biological specimens and punctured drawings overlaying parasites, spores and other pathogens with the very species that carry them, Chaly's scientifically rendered drawings blend the textbook aesthetic with a commentary on biological transitions amongst species. More generally in her work, she questions how civilization infiltrates ecosystems exploiting natural resources and wildlife as well as impacting the biological cycle.

Her insect renderings, which make up the work "Inhaling the Spore", represent the overall tension of our co-habitation with these creatures. At once repellent and beautiful, inherently macabre and somewhat alien to us, they are the key to ecosystem function. They are in the words of biologist E. O. Wilson "the little things that run the world". Chaly's puncture series too are created with symbolic gesture of infestation - the paper's impaled surface eclipses the reverse drawing suggestive of the germination of bacteria spores like *Paenibacillus dendritiformis*. The latter are themselves a fascinating example, on a microscopic level, of the many self-regulating processes built into the natural world. As populations of these bacteria explode they control their own growth through cannibalism. Through her forensic suites of detailed and individually framed

drawings - a “swarm” of insects, a “colony” of bats – she presents a scientifically assembled display of biodiversity. On closer inspection these works betray more complex and unsettling themes. Amidst the drawing suites the viewer will discover pathologies and disease, parasitic infestations and mutations. With the bats that colonize “Reservoir”, it might be a number of naturally occurring viruses - lyssa, hendra, ebola - lurking within their populations and ready to spillover into human populations as we expand into their habitats.

In this exhibition Tanya Chaly focuses on natural history and the history of scientific enquiry from Victorian times to present, how modes of classification and organization of species, documentation and display, all inform our understanding, and how our understanding of pathologies, diseases, viruses and parasites blur the concepts of the natural and unnatural, the normal and abnormal.

“We need not marvel at extinction; if we must marvel, let it be at our presumption in imagining for a moment that we understand the many complex contingencies, on which the existence of each species depends” (Darwin, 1859, p. 202).

Tanya Chaly was born in Sydney Australia where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts and completed Post Graduate studies at the University of New South Wales College of Fine Arts. She has exhibited widely in both group and solo shows and has been the recipient of a number of awards and prizes. Recent exhibitions include, The Explorers Club NY, Alvernia University, PA, UConn Stamford, La Guardia, CUNY, and Buffalo State University, NY. Most recently in 2014 she received the New York Explorer's Club Artist-in-Exploration Award, a \$25,000 prize given to an artist to produce a body of work out in the field. Other grants and awards include a 2017 Fellowship Vermont Studio Center Residency, The Art of Science Residency, The Ligo Project, 2016, and a Fellowship Residency The Saltonstall Arts Colony in Ithaca, NY in 2014.

Her work can be found in the public collections of: The Explorers Club, New York, The Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, NSW, Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery, Queensland, Nortel Australia, Crown Casino, Melbourne and other private and corporate collections in Australia, the UK and the United States.