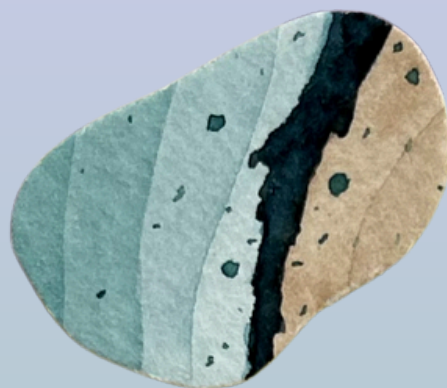


Gestation

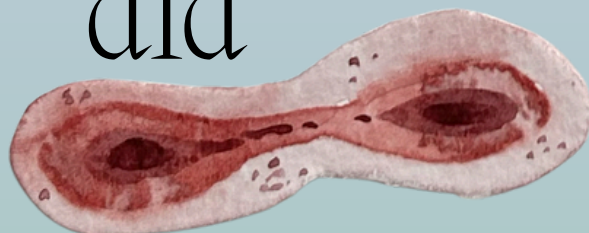
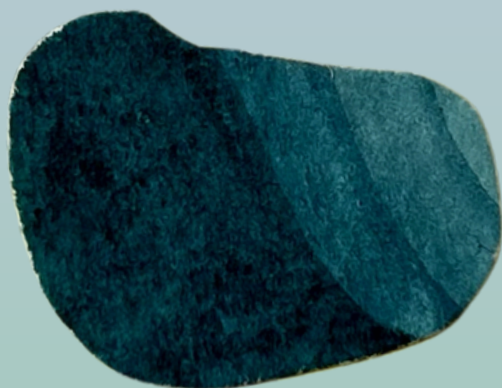


or



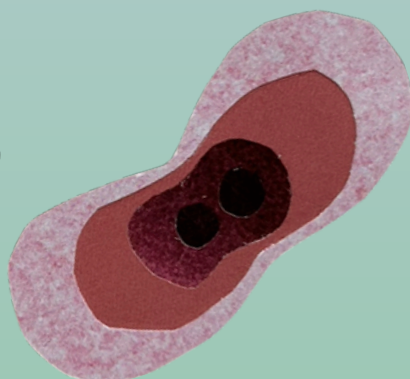
Newton

did



not

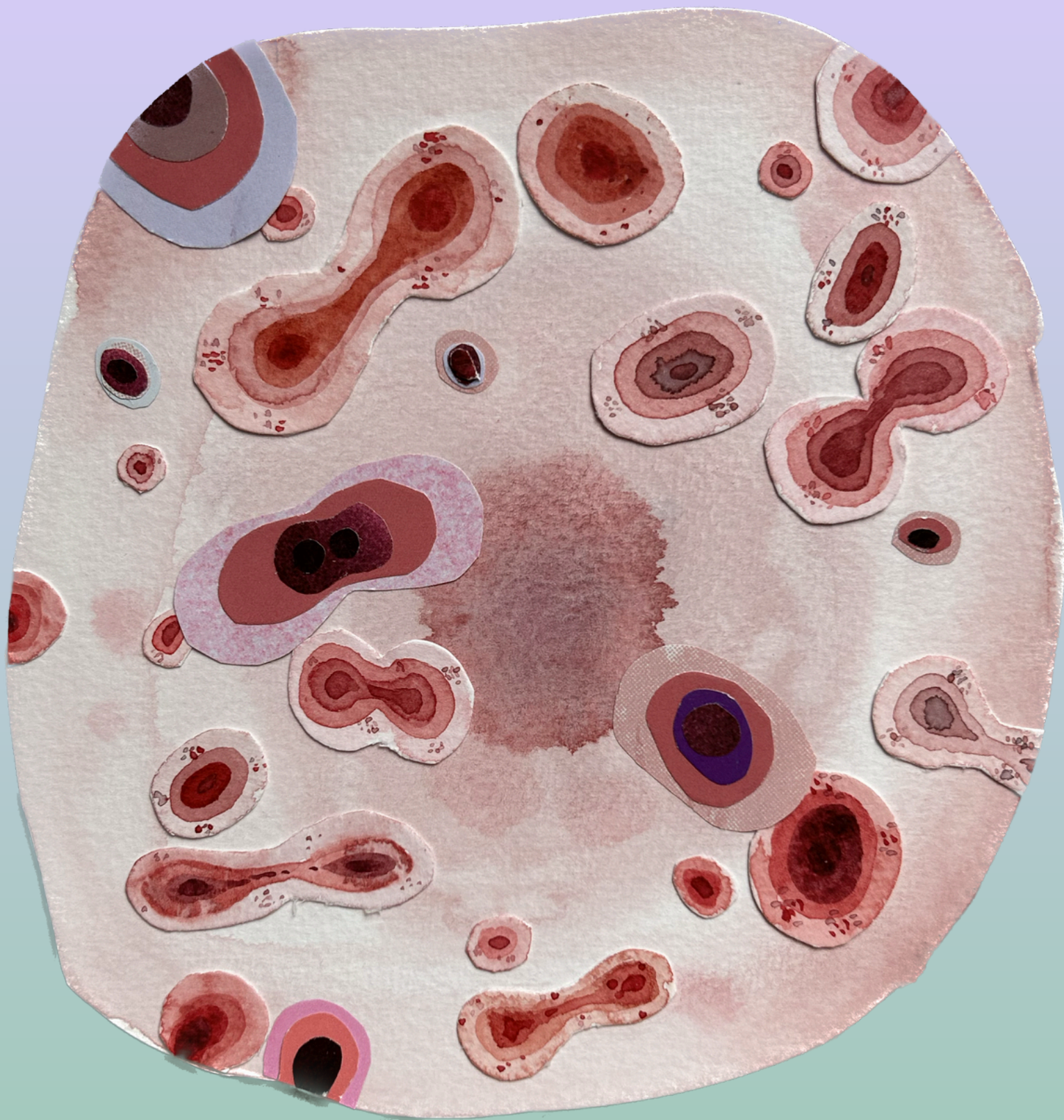
sleep



here



Whether the term “gestation” is used to describe “the carrying of young in the uterus” or “the process or period of time when an idea, plan, or piece of work develops” it seems to encourage an outdated and misleading view of both the childbearing and the creative process. Though these definitions are culturally sensitive and very much linked to the Western mainstream vocabulary they reflect the prevalent sentiment related to such generative interactions (or rather intra-actions). The reasons the traditional understanding of gestation is still what it is can be traced back to widespread religious and economic notions. In the case of biological gestation, the beginning of life as an adamantly one-of-a-kind moment according to mainly Christian ideologies; in the case of artistic creation the myths of the “genius” and the “masterpiece”, also frequently tied to economic advantages. Commercial galleries tend to favor and support artists whose works can be easily sold, cataloged, packed, and conserved. The ideal artwork doesn’t necessarily need a physical form, but a sellable form at the very least. Thus, such artworks are pushed and the artists that make them can advance in their careers and maybe even maintain themselves while others can’t; one might call it the artificial selection of the art world. I would then argue for “gestation” as a development of continuous transformation and metamorphosis as opposed to one of creation ex nihilo, within the field of biology and sociology as well as in artistic practices. In lieu of focusing on the final product (the Artwork) or the exceptionality of motherhood and birth, the acceptance of the complexity of gestation leads to more realistic and accurate representations of existence and relations. This concept can be exemplified by alternative narratives surrounding relationships and fluid forms of creativity. Is creation perhaps a movement, a transformative process, instead of a fated stroke?



Several artists and thinkers have expressed a more varied and mutually generative view of childbearing, kinship, and life in general. Water is frequently identified as a channel for human and more-than-human relations, not only in correlation to amniotic liquid. Human beings are made of mostly water and are immersed in a mostly aquatic environment or, as Astrida Neimanis phrased it, we are “bodies of water in a watery world. ” Our bodies are potentially always in need of “holding water and becoming literal gestational milieu for the other ”, not only in reproduction and childbearing but in every manifestation of co-existence. Posthuman gestationality allows for the holding of other beings and complex relations thanks to the abandonment of the illusion of individuality and human exceptionalism. Discussing amniotechnics, Sophie Lewis argues that all “bodies are always leaky, parasit₄ed and non-unitary: as the vital and varied flora of bacteria in every body, not just gestating ones, demonstrates. ” Organisms and their entanglements are often invisible to us, but they are living nonetheless in our bodies, or rather constitute our bodies; arbitrary separations seem now ingenuous. The imagery of “The Inmost cell” (2020) by Eva L’Hoest evokes a similar intermingling of presence. Technologies, nature, and human memory melt into each other and into water. Recollecting the stories and myths about the Latvian river Daugava and shaping them into submarine architectures leads to recognizing rivers as carriers of narrations and human experience. Ultimately people are revealed as bodies of water that are shaped by and in turn shape other bodies of water.



After all, the depths of the sea were the cradle of life on this planet; probably even more so than it was believed until recently. Some theories postulate the formation of cells in alkaline hydrothermal vents at the bottom of the sea. Cells (essentially spheres of solution with membranes around them) seem to have acquired their structure from the vents of the same shape, originated in turn from the erosion caused by extreme heat from inside Earth's crust. In other words, the primordial soup needed some structure to go from amino acids to fully formed cells, and these hydrothermal systems might have provided just that. A fascinating parallel can then be drawn between the gestational process of cellular formation in the womb of the earth, the cells as primordial life components, and the way beings are nestled and constantly generated in more than human intra-actions. Similar gestations seem to be echoing since archaic times. The artist Julie Monot can guide us in moving further in this timeline. The notion that unicellular life marked a crucial turn in the evolution of life on Earth has left a mark in her practice, for instance in works like "Before it was water" (2019); a sort of kimono embroidered with figures that resemble unicellular organisms. After learning at a young age that the carpets she would lie on were full of microscopic beings sharing the same air, the same world as her, she developed an interest in ecological questions that arise through her oeuvre. Are we separate individuals? Or are we holding beings and being held inexhaustibly, without beginning nor end, whether we are gestating in the traditional sense or not?



There's a case to be made for similar inquiries to be applied to artistic practices. Is an artwork a one-and-done creation? Or is any artistic activity a process that involves more agents in continual intra-action beyond the singular moment of presentation? I am not referring here exclusively to artistic practices based on the explicit interaction of the public with the objects or activity presented. Marcel Duchamp himself considered the contribution of the spectator essential to the mere nature of art. He called the transformation that had to occur for the embodied intention of the artist to become art transubstantiation⁶; a term used to indicate the substantial transformation that Catholics believe occurs to bread and blood during the mass. In fact, such a concept predates not only Duchamp's reasoning but a great deal of Western art theory; the Sanskrit word *rasa* denotes the essence of an artwork, which is present not in the object itself but as a particular sensitivity in the person who is experiencing it⁷. The boundaries of object and subject are diluted and the artistic action transcends the categories of artist and public; there is no need for an extraordinarily gifted genius or a sealing baptism. Both definitions, although contextually distant, seem to imply at least a collaborative effort in the conception of any artistic endeavor. However, the underlining relationships can outstrip the field of art and bound into other realms. Nicolas Bourriaud would call it transitivity, "tangible property of the artwork. Without it the work is nothing other than a dead object crash by contemplation."⁸ It is precisely through interactions though, that the artwork also acquires commercial value. The accessibility the artwork offers to the audience allows it and its maker to fulfill their commercial duties. Some artists might struggle because of the economic logic of galleries and museums that often require a done art piece.



The gestation of the artwork as it's commonly understood ends when the work is displayed or performed in the gallery, while the economic function of the work finishes when it's bought. The object can of course continue to be useful as an investment and can renew its utility with each successive acquisition. Therefore a new idea of gestation should be imagined for two main reasons: 1) the creation of artwork is clearly only at its beginning while in the studio and 2) the practice of some artists is a constant transformation, and only small fragments of the whole can be shown in each displaying occasion. Every outing of a fragment of the oeuvre can reshape its scope and goals, influencing the whole practice. The single artworks go out in the world and collect impressions and the impact of other agents, while in turn having an effect on the surrounding environment. Like outreaching roots or tentacles, they test the ground and exchange with the world, bringing new information to the central concept, that changes in consequence. In the case of Laurie-Anne Jaubert, each experimentation is born from the previous one, in a perpetually regenerative process. "La Lumitérale", a performance and installation presented in one iteration in "(un)common grounds" at iMAL in Brussels in May 2022, was possible because of the lessons learned through "CUBE (Méditation Géométrisante)", installed in Aix-en-Provence in 2021, which was in turn triggered by past experiences. During "(un)common grounds", the holographic shapes projected and the accompanying soundscape acquire a distinctive character and are altered in their presentation in response to the outside world. The audience can see the change happen and the artist working on it, witnessing directly their mutual influences reflected in the artwork. Jaubert's practice is an example of malleable, uninterrupted gestation.



The micro theater built around the projection allows the public to discover the meditative dimension of the work, a window to the core concept, a slit that lets us peek into the complex gestation of her poetics. Employing unconventional presentations like this one, “(un)common grounds” invited the audience to experience the oeuvre of the nine participating artists through brief samples and fluid appearances, allowing an appreciation of the extent and fluency of the overall corpus. The show is articulated into three grounds, testing ground, virtual ground, and ground of presence, which cover diverse modes of interaction and highlight the everchanging nature of art. The artists also use different strategies to induce synesthesia or a sort of metamorphosis of perception; visible degradation, concealment of moving parts of machines, and responsive technologies to name a few. Nothing is static and nothing is complete without reactions and successive mutations. The gestation is apparent and you are part of it.



Further attempts could be made; efforts to privilege aqueous practices, worth showing precisely because they are so hard to capture. Ursula K. Le Guin in her carrier bag theory of fiction describes how new interpretations are crucial to deconstructing stale narrations and repositioning certain agents within histories. Incidentally, gestation comes from the Latin word *gestare*, translatable as “to carry”, “to hold”, the same holding bodies of water do. The structure that keeps the universe together, “this womb of things”, is more of a verb than a noun. There is so much potential in seeing the cosmos as a poietic gestation; so many fantasies in the endless becoming of beings. Marguerite Humeau’s oeuvre is a great example of research moving in that direction. Within her creations she created a parallel history of the world using pseudo-scientific strategies and sci-fi speculation. In the different iterations of immersive ambience called “Birth Canal” (in New York) or “Oscillations” (in Bolzano) the public is invited to imagine female shamans at the primordial age of Mitochondrial Eve ingesting animal brains and birthing timeless archetypes, translated into sculptures. As prophets, the women also foresee the extinction of humans, insignificant against the immensity of cosmic time. To enrich the atmosphere the space is filled with a smell supposed to replicate the body odors associated with birth. So, here we have them: these histories can birth themselves and duplicate reality, skewing traditional anthropocentric views and proposing prolific alternatives. That’s the understanding of gestation that I argue should be assimilated into curators’ practices. When applying this philosophy of gestation the chronological limits blur, exhibition-making can become fluid, and curatorial endeavors can be non-events that leave space and attention for intertwining creational processes.

Notes

1. Karen Barad (2007)
2. Neimanis, A. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. page 65.
3. Ibid., page 122
4. Teets, J. *Electric Brine*. Archive Books, 2021. Page 72
5. Sojo V, Herschy B, Whicher A, Camprubi E, Lane N. *Astrobiology*. 16(2): 181-197; 2016.
6. From a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 19, 1961.
7. Baas, Jacquelynn, Jacob, Mary J., *Buddha mind in Contemporary Art*, University of California Press, 2004, page 20
8. Bourriaud, N., *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Les presses du réel, 1998, page 26
9. Ursula K. Le Guin (1986)

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