

KW

Nicholas Mangan

2 June – 13 August 17

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Limits to Growth

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Opening: 1 June 17, 7 pm

The exhibition *Limits to Growth* marks the first major survey exhibition by Australian artist Nicholas Mangan in Europe. Nicholas Mangan (born 1979 in Geelong, AU) has been persistently creating subtle narrations around crucial global issues of our time through an in-depth look on phenomena distinctive to Mangan's own region—the Asian Pacific. The exhibition occupies the third and the fourth floor of KW Institute for Contemporary Art and is composed of four large-scale installations: *Nauru—Notes from a Cretaceous World*, *A World Undone*, *Progress in Action*, and a new commission, *Limits to Growth*, combining sculptural settings with moving-images developed between the years 2009 and 2017.



Nicholas Mangan, *Nauru—Notes from a Cretaceous World*, 2010, video still

Limits to Growth introduces the audience to multiple scenarios that are engaging objects and film in an equally essayistic manner to excavate stories in which Australia played a decisive role. Over the past decades, the continent has been involved in wide-ranging struggles, including entanglements in territorial occupation, resulting in the environmental damage, economic exploitation and destabilization of its neighbouring countries. Through an intricate interweaving of symbolism and documentary, Mangan employs an artistic language, which exposes the broader dependencies between mankind, technology, the environment and economic systems. Each of the presented works is set around occurrences in recent supra-regional history from which Mangan dissects quintessential aspects that he uses for his narrations. "I work with the artefacts that result from the historical account or the anecdote in question—be that images, video footage, or physical matter that is somehow imbued with a resonance of the specific event", the artist states.

Three of the large-scale installations are presented on the third floor of KW. *Nauru—Notes From a Cretaceous World* and *Dowiyogo's Ancient Coral Coffee Table* are part of a work complex that references the overlapping

narratives related to the island state Nauru, which is part of Micronesia. The small island came to sudden wealth in the 1970s becoming the second richest state world wide due to the deposits of phosphates in the limestone landscape that consists of decomposed marine life and guano (accumulated excrement of seabirds). Both substances have been compressed over millions of years and became significant for the island's appearance. In the 1920s the British Phosphate Commission initiated the first mining of phosphate, selling it to Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, where it was used as fertilizer to enrich agricultural soils. Upon gaining independence the Nauruan government continued mining at such a rate that the island became enormously wealthy and in 1977 the Nauruan government initiated the erection of what was at that time the highest skyscraper in the business district of Melbourne, demonstrating their rapid economic and political expansion. Three large limestone pinnacles were transported from Nauru and installed in front of the tower, functioning as symbols of the nation's success. However, by the early 2000s the deposits of phosphate were depleted. Due to the mismanagement the Nauruan government was left corrupt, forced to take on numerous loans and eventually declared bankrupt. Alternative forms of profit-making were explored, such as ecotourism, offshore banking and even, the curious idea of Bernard Dowiyogo, the president at that time, turning the remaining coral limestone into coffee tables to be sold to the US—meaning actually selling what remained of the island. Mangan weaves the various legacies of Nauru into a multifaceted installation, culminating in its current state as an asylum-seeker detention center.

For the new commission, *Limits to Growth*, Mangan juxtaposes the conceptual implications of two monetary systems: the ancient currency of 'Rai' of the Micronesian island of Yap and the 21st century virtual currency 'Bitcoin'. The ancient stone currency, consists of circular discs with an equal circular hole carved out of their centre. The value of the stones is linked not only to the craftsmanship and effort in making them, but in some cases to the lives lost in their precarious transportation from the neighboring island of Palau 400 km away, where they were mined. If lost at sea,

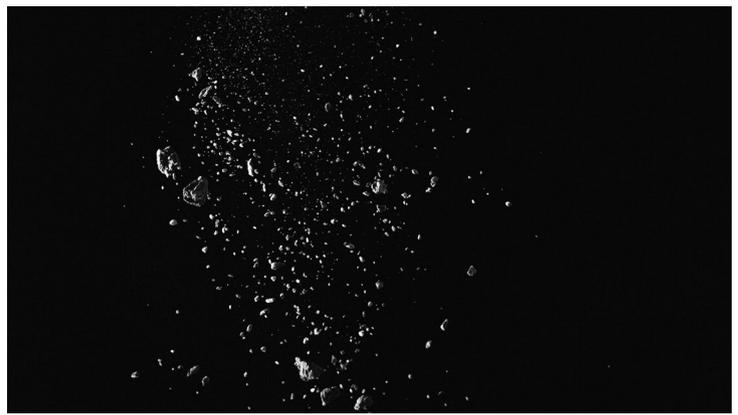


Nicholas Mangan, *Limits to Growth*, 2016/17, video still

the Rai maintained their value, thereby anticipating the virtual status of value and exchange as it is common today. The newest addition to this project, produced this year, draws on the function and history of the Rai stone and the story of Irish American Captain David O'Keefe, who landed on the island in 1871 to trade with locals with foreign currency and new world trinkets in exchange for their valuable copra (coconut meat). As a means of inserting himself into the local, O'Keefe introduced new manufacturing technologies that expatiated the process of producing and transporting the stone money back to Yap, which consequently resulted in inflation and the subsequent devaluation of the Yapese stone money currency. The photographs accumulating in the exhibition space daily, printed by a digital printer in the space, have an indexical relationship to the value created and energy consumed by the Bitcoin mining taking place in Melbourne, where the project began in 2016. *Limits to Growth* responds to the behaviour of the Bitcoin currency and references the oversupply of the O'Keefe stones. The printed images will continue to amass over the exhibition's duration as the Bitcoin rig continues to mine offsite. Each image is inscribed with the time, date, Bitcoin value at the time of production, and energy consumed to permit the reproduction of each image.

World Undone is a film shot with a slow motion, high definition, digital camera revealing a 12 minute sequence of swirling Zircon particles—a 4,4 billion year old material, commonly used in uranium dating. The film captures crushed rock particles in airborne flux. The Zircon crystals are geological evidence of the time, when the Earth began to ossify and aggregate into tectonic plates, forming a hardened shell around a molten core. The event marked a significant point in the planet's transformation from the residual gasses and matter of the Big Bang into a solid entity. Mangan here sets up a parallel between geological time and filmic time, connecting the macro cosmos of the Earth's geological development with the micro cosmos of our experience of time in film. By approaching the matter in a poetic way and through revealing the essentiality of the material, the work brings to mind the sheer depth and magnitude of space, and the incomprehensible notion of how we are situated within it.

The entire fourth floor of the KW is dedicated to *Progress in Action*, a complex installation that takes as its reference point the civil war on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea in 1989. In the 1970s the Australian company Conzinc Rio Tinto established a copper mine on the island—at that time the largest open pit-mine worldwide. The company started mining without consulting the island's indigenous population, a common practice at the time. The practices of the mining company left the people of Bougainville increasingly desperate. Environmental and economic damage on top of abusive labor politics left the islanders excluded from the huge profits made



Nicholas Mangan, *A World Undone*, 2011, video still, HD Video, Colour



Nicholas Mangan, *Progress in Action*, 2013, video still, HD Video, Colour, 4:18 minutes (Loop)

from the exploitation of their land. Eventually, a group of inhabitants, who would become known as the Bougainville Resistance Army (BRA), revolted, blew up the mine's power station and created a blockade preventing Conzinc Rio Tinto from gaining access to the mine. As a result, the mainland of Papua New Guinea—which was receiving a large percentage of mining royalties—forced the islanders into exile on their own island, by creating an embargo that denied them food, fuel, and medicines. In their despair the inhabitants of Bougainville reverted to using the locally abundant coconut resources for food and fuel through refining the coconut oil into a bio fuel. Coconuts became the material agent for their resistance. Mangan's multifarious installation re-stages the workshop of the improvised oil refinery implemented by the BRA and symbolically repurposes the energy generating facilities of the modified generator that runs on coconut oil to power a projector that presents a filmic montage of found-footage from the conflict around the mine, which Mangan sourced predominantly through the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the Australian National Film and Sound archives.

Nicholas Mangan continues to create unnerving scenarios in his work that draw from his continuous engagement with the processes of forming meaning from objects, culture, and natural phenomena.

Notwithstanding that Mangan's artistic practice is primarily structured around his research focused on the specific history, landscape and social conditions of the Asian Pacific, his work continues to reveal fundamental reflections on matters relevant to today's globalized world at large, such as the complex networks of global economy, resource extraction, wealth distribution and labour politics.

All images: Courtesy the artist, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland, and LABOR, Mexico City, D.F.

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Opening Hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed on Tuesday

Admission

8 €, reduced 6 €
Annual Ticket – KW Lover* 50 €, reduced 35 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 €, reduced 8 €
Admission free on Thursday evening from 6–9 pm

Guided Tours

KW offers free guided tours through the exhibitions during regular opening hours. For further information on tours for large groups (over 10 people), please contact Katja Zeidler at kaz@kw-berlin.de or +49 30 243459-41.

Colophon

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