

125 NEWBURY

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**MAX HOOPER
SCHNEIDER**

SCAVENGER

FREE PRESS

THE TEXTURE OF THE AFTERMATH

Arne Glimcher

Driving from Beverly Hills to Culver City, I pass Max Hooper Schneider's studio twice before realizing that the anonymous, unmarked storefront, a vacated upholstery shop, is where this frenetic scientist/object-maker/artist works. In the shadow of the Inglewood oil fields, he thrives amid glowing uranium mushrooms, electric aquarium specimens, neighborhoods of post-apocalyptic dollhouses and tortured *ikebana*. This is how I'm greeted, in the faint light of a neon sign throbbing "SUICIDE," and these are the works that I take pride in presenting as Max Hooper Schneider's first New York solo exhibition.

Hooper Schneider is a wizard, directing a visual symphony that fuses the poetics of assemblage and material technology in an examination of social systems. Trained in both art and science, the artist brings order out of chaos in sculptures pushed to the edge of a new definition of satiety. The work explores the evolutionary dynamics of hybridity, decay, and succession. The texture of the aftermath.

Over the last two years, I made several trips to LA to see the progress of this nocturnal forest of trash and discarded objects as it transformed into a landscape of almost painful opulence and beauty. Like natural history displays, the works evoke a time after human existence.

A "set of conditions without a plot," is how the artist describes his exhibition at 125 Newbury. He likens it to "an anthropology museum set in the distant future," a show of horrors and wonders. He weaves together both new and pre-existing elements in an investigation of loss, the passage of time, and most of all, breaking down the binary between nature and culture, life and death.



SUICIDE, 2025. Vintage rubber toys and cookie jars, burned acrylic box, custom neon sign. 13" x 21½" x 12¾"

Humans are not exceptional matter, but a specific mode of nature naturing—as are starfish, telephones, ideas, viruses, etc. The human is one ecological engineer among many.



Jasper Archipelago Pleroma, 2025. Custom acrylic vitrine, green jasper, hand-blown UV borosilicate glass mushrooms, lab-grown copper dendrites and smelted copper formations, cast uranium glass, rough and iridized quartz crystals, miscellaneous gemstones and curios, sea urchin spines, dried coral, plastic flora, silicone, epoxy resin, crushed copper and aquarium gravel substrate, chrome powder coated aluminum hood lamp armature. 12½" x 13" x 10½"

All matter acts, including matter conventionally considered dead, abiotic, inorganic—rocks, minerals, corpses, robots; or immaterial and transcendent—ideas, minds, beliefs, data, words, concepts, ghosts, spirits.



Nightmare Machine, 2025. Programmed LCD screens, LED lights, modeled canyon and mine habitat, miniature human bodies and scaled cars, glitter, pearlescent powder, modeled grim reapers, raccoon, deer, cat, shark and human teeth, yakisugi table. 40" x 68" x 86"

Any biome will provide useful lessons for humans for understanding what it is now an extreme necessity to understand: the symbiotic, radically interconnected existences of all beings



Dendrite Bonsai (Cactus and Avocado), 2024. Copper electroplated cacti, fruits, vegetables and wood assemblage. 39½" × 27½" × 23½"

Ecotones invoke transition space, borderlands where materials meet and commingle. Ecorhythms suggest the temporalities of materials, changes that are metabolic, semiochemical, suggestive of decay and regeneration. Matters and energies are exchanged, my DNA is deposited on the materials as sweat and blood, the materials slick my hands with oils and resins, we engage in the choreography of mutual morphogenesis.



Frozen Tears of the Ammonite Rain Upon the Impure, 2025. Custom acrylic vitrine, ammonite fossils, hand-blown UV borosilicate glass mushrooms, lab-grown copper dendrites and smelted copper formations, prosthetic eyeball, cast uranium glass, rough and iridized quartz crystals, miscellaneous gemstones and curios, dried coral, silicone, epoxy resin, pearlescent dye, crushed copper substrate, chrome powder coated aluminum hood lamp armature. 12½" x 12½" x 10½"

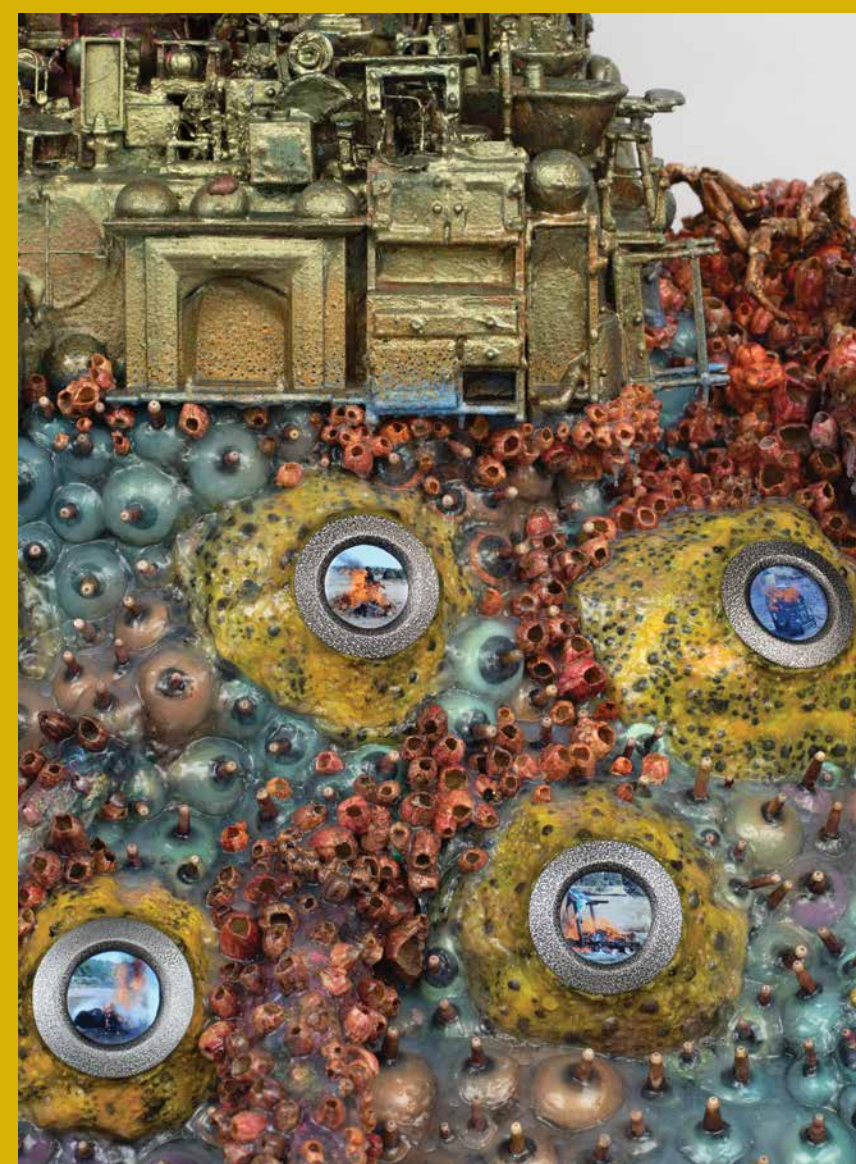
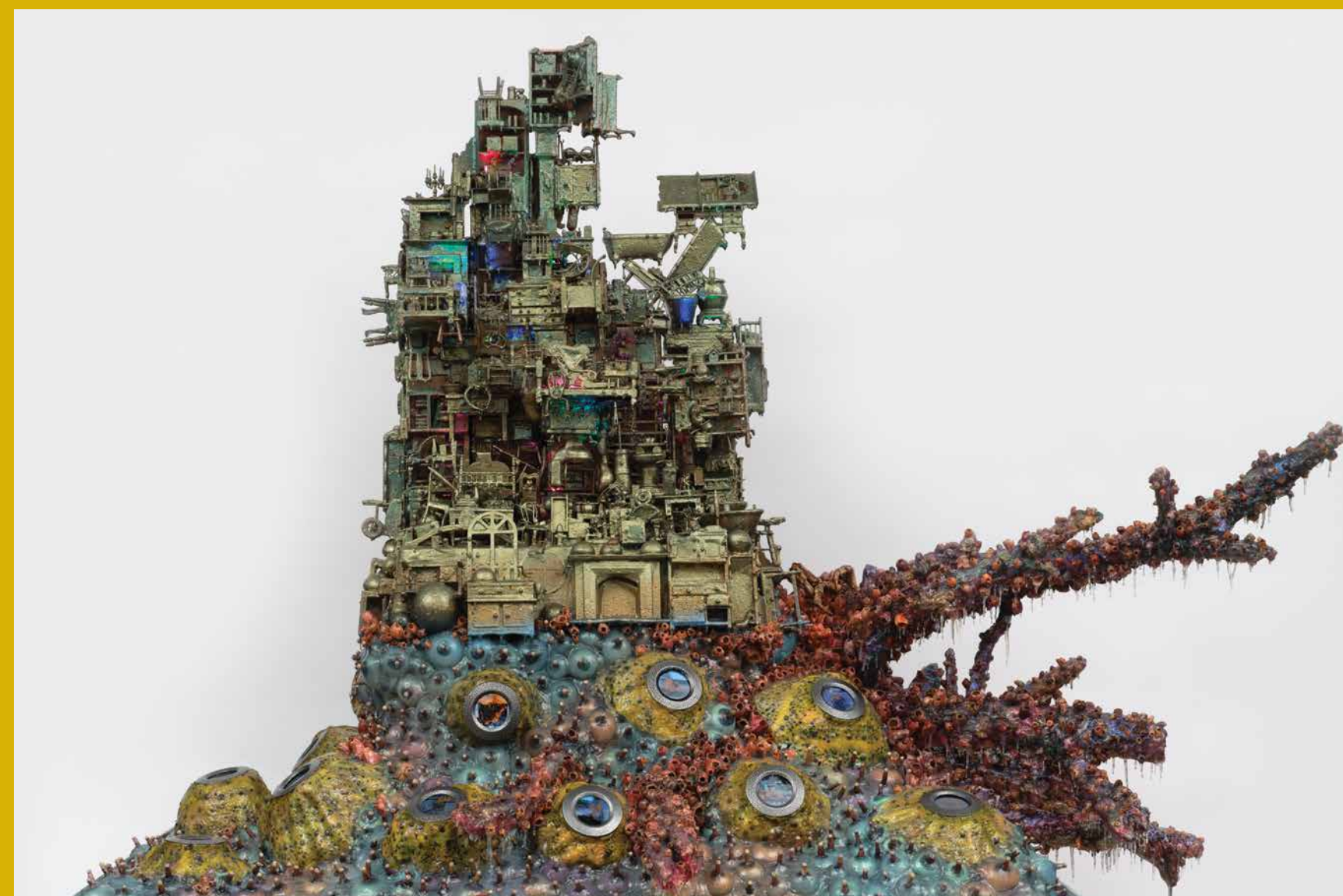
What is created via this exchange are worlds or cosmoi, autopoietic holobionts or “Trans-Habitats” composed of disparate matters, aggregated into new configurations so that their formerly distant fates are intertwined in ways that are simultaneously parasitic, mutualistic, biotrophic, saprotrophic, necrotrophic.



Disinterred Electrolyte Xeriscape, 2025. Burned aquarium, cacti, plastic decor, copper electroplating. 28" x 34" x 17"



The “Trans-Habitat” does not imitate, represent or model nature. Each of its constituent elements—vitrine, milieu, elements of the biome in which it is located, neon, crystals, crabs and fish and snails, pig’s blood and resin, bullet casings and nails, plastic potatoes and flowers and fruits, iridescent condoms, sequins and boots and discarded gloves and lingerie, the artist himself—are nature in the act of naturing.



Fungal Furniture Outcropping Amid Intertidal Arroyo, 2025. Dollhouse furniture, polyurethane foam, juniper branches, barnacles, preserved decapod, sea urchin spines, bullet casings, programmed LCD screens, LED lights, silicone, epoxy resin, pearlescent pigment, multi-leg powder coated aluminum stand. 42" x 73" x 89"

There are no autonomous bodies or species. There is species and body permeability rather than strict boundaries... everything is hybrid, everything is a mutation of an imagined purity or singularity.



Shrine To Naught, 2025. Custom acrylic vitrine, iron pyrite, copper nitrate, hand-blown UV borosilicate glass mushrooms, lab-grown copper dendrites and smelted copper formations, cast uranium glass, rough and iridized quartz crystals, miscellaneous gemstones and curios, silicone, epoxy resin, crushed uranium glass substrate, chrome powder coated aluminum hood lamp armature. 13½" x 11½" x 10½"

Artificial plants and plastic flowers, objects of mass consumption such as junk jewelry, are not to be understood as dead or artificial or inorganic. Rather they are bodies naturing in a plastic or mineral mode.



Fluorite Bulb Perched Atop Bacteria Gorge, 2025. Custom acrylic vitrine, fluorite specimen, hand-blown UV borosilicate glass mushrooms, lab-grown copper dendrites and smelted copper formations, cast uranium glass, green jasper, lucite egg, rough and iridized quartz crystals, miscellaneous gemstones and curios, sea urchin spines, dried coral, plastic flora, silicone, epoxy resin, fluorescent urethane substrate, chrome powder coated aluminum hood lamp armature. 15¼" × 15½" × 9¾"

All creative processes are material and immanent. The same creative processes that occur in nature occur in art. Molecules bond, rocks fold, a boot rots, a sculptor sculpts, a thought occurs: all instances of nature naturing.



Dendrite Bonsai (Coral and Orchid), 2024. Copper electroplated corals and flowers and shrub assemblage. 27½" × 19¾" × 21¼"

INTERVIEW WITH MAX HOOPER SCHNEIDER

by Jérôme Sans

JS: How would you define the concept of nature today, when the boundaries between the living and the abiotic, the human and the non-human, are being reconsidered?

MHS: My view of nature is largely Spinozan: nature is a process of ceaseless morphogenic modulation, a relentless onslaught in which bodies, as formed matter, are continuously created, transformed, and destroyed: not as solo performances or autonomous events, but in interaction with one another. This foundational positioning is correlated with what I have termed an “aesthetics of succession”—i.e., an aesthetics of the event, a kinesthesia in which each work produced is understood as being continuously worked upon by the relentless depredations of time and space, actions which are for the most part outside the artist’s control. Works are created and live, but also die a perpetual death of transformation.

From the above are derived several principles significant to my production of art. First, that humans are not exceptional matters within nature. They are a specific mode of nature naturing, as are starfish, telephones, ideas, viruses, etc. The human is one ecological engineer among many. Second, all matter acts, including matter conventionally considered dead, abiotic, inorganic—e.g., rocks, minerals, corpses, robots; and immaterial or transcendent—e.g., ideas, minds, beliefs, data, words, concepts, ghosts, spirits.

Third, all creative processes are material and immanent. The same creative processes that occur in nature also occur in art. Molecules bond, rocks fold, a boot rots, a sculptor sculpts, a thought occurs: all are instances of nature naturing.

Lastly, creative processes are inherently symbiotic. There are no autonomous actors or events. There are no borders between bodies that are absolute. All bodies are permeable, including the human body whose skin serves as an illusory border separating her/him from all other bodies. The borders between living and abiotic, human and non-human, organic and inorganic, like all classificatory and taxonomical schema, are epistemological, conceptual, and ideological, not real. Nothing endures, everything is succeeded.

JS: What is your concept of a “trans-habitat”?

MHS: The “Trans-Habitat” is both a concept and a practice. The “Trans-Habitat” endeavors to make readily perceptible the “aesthetics of succession,” as an interactive kinesthesia in which each artwork, its constituent elements, and its spatiotemporal milieu (gallery, museum, forest, ocean) are understood as mutually morphogenic, undergoing the ceaseless death and re-creation of transformation. There is no stasis.

Works pioneered as “Trans-Habitats” include drawings; large outdoor works (projects I’ve done in Denmark, Mongolia, and the High Line in New York City); vitrine sculptures of varying composition and size populated by a multitudinous profusion of light, color, sound, flora and fauna, electricity, water and oil, mechanical movements, and the random movements of molecules and microbes, all altered by encounters with one another and their environments, including the machinations of spectators.

The “Trans-Habitat” is a holobiont and/or autopoietic machine, designed to perform nature as a synergistic production between human and non-human bodies. The “Trans-Habitat” does not imitate, represent or model nature, rather each of its constituent elements—vitrine, milieu, elements of the biome in which it is located, neon, crystals, crabs and fish and snails, pig’s blood and resin, bullet casings and nails, plastic potatoes and flowers and fruits, iridescent condoms, sequins and boots and discarded gloves and lingerie, the artist—is nature in the act of naturing.

JS: How would you define your work?

MHS: A frog leaping between lily pads of research and impulse in a glistening landscape of beautiful rot inside the cosmos of a 16-hour work day. While the specificities of my methods vary, there are particular recurrent practices, technologies, sites and beginnings I tend to rely upon: the dioramic stage, the aquarium and/or the vitrine, the scaled architectural model, the constructed biome, rogue fieldwork, beach combing, specimens hoarding, experiments in preservation, the collection and storage of vast quantities of “non-functional” materials, the science lab, the pet shop, the craft store, dump sites, brown fields, suburbs, exurbs, the desert, simply driving around Los

Angeles observing the city’s ten-ebrific permutations.

The result is never lacking in heterogeneity and my work never lords one creative mode over the other—sometimes the idea hits first, sometimes the material’s whim. The process of creating a work is in all instances a collaboration between my hands, my intentions (continuously altered by obstacles and detours), technical/laboratory dictates, and the materials—which have an authority and agency that cannot be controlled.

I work with my own performed ecotones and ecorhythms. Ecotones invoke transition space, the borderlands where materials meet and commingle, while ecorhythms suggest the temporalities of materials, changes that are metabolic, semiochemical, and suggestive of decay and regeneration. Matters and energies are exchanged, my DNA is deposited on the materials as sweat and blood, the materials slick my hands with oils and resins, we engage in the choreography of mutual morphogenesis. What is created via this exchange is worlds or *cosmoi*. I conceptualize these worlds as autopoietic holobionts or “Trans-Habitats” created of disparate matters which are aggregated into new configurations so that their formerly distant fates are intertwined in ways that are parasitic, mutualistic, biotrophic, saprotrophic, necrotrophic. The completed works are then sent into the world as instances of nature naturing to do what they will: to act and to be acted upon. I am one ecological engineer among countless others.

There is a well-known incident between surrealists Roger Caillois and André Breton concerning an encounter with a Mexican jumping bean. Caillois wanted to break open the bean to discover what made it jump while Breton wanted to leave it intact, allowing its mystery to prevail. I possess both of these impulses. Hopefully the works I produce invite viewers to indulge their own proclivities vis-à-vis dissection versus enigma.

JS: With particular attention to the changing relationship between philosophy and nature, your work defies any hegemonic classification system. Is it an attempt to bring out new types of unexplored and non-anthropocentric knowledge?

MHS: I reject all classificatory systems that are allied with thinking in the mode of the Great Chain of Being, advancing, with more or less explicitness, a totalitarian view of nature that is strictly hierarchical

with categories of beings ranked from higher to lower, with amoeba and devils at the bottom and humans and gods at the top. To the extent that my work succeeds, it will challenge anthropocentric and Cartesian interpretations of art and nature so that the works will be seen as simply nature naturing. Quite often I play with the absurdity and demonstrated failures of the languages of “mastered nature”—e.g., a vitrine is not a vacuum sealed enclosure but a fragile opening. Much like our own bodies, a vitrine is a catchment for pollution.

JS: When did you start using living organisms as a medium and why?

MHS: I grew up with tide pools on the Pacific Coast and the grey markets of the Southern California aquarium trade, knowing both as vectors of human rapacity but also as the loci of ineffable enchantment. This apparent contradiction lives in my work with marine organisms, joy and horror intermingling.

However, I do not make strong distinctions between living and non-living. No matter the scale or molecular composition, I work with the holobiont, “Trans-Habitat”, or autopoietic colony. The champagne glass at a gala, the plastic island, the child’s scalp, the still-life painting: all are nature naturing in differing modes. In 2021, I opened an exhibition that incorporated dust and dust mites as a technique for defining the holobiontic plane that we, as a species, are inextricably part of. In past works, the most important thing about using a crab or a snail alongside a boot or a piece of lingerie, is that it opens the question of what is alive and hopefully catalyzes reflection on other anthropocentric prejudices and hypocrisies regarding non-human life forms: e.g., why is it that animals with larger eyes or fur are somehow more “alive” than nematodes or leeches? Why are “sea monkeys” allowed to be kept as pets while brine shrimp are fed to our tropical fishes?

JS: To represent a nature which is in your work alive, luxuriant and baroque, you often use artificial plants, plastic flowers, objects of mass consumption. Why do you make this choice of materials, rather than organic ones? Why do you combine the artificial and the natural in an almost theatrical and immersive way?

MHS: This question allows me to clarify what is frequently misunderstood: i.e., that I use “artificial” plants as substitutes for, or representations of, “real” or “natural” plants to produce some sort of replica or

imitation of a natural environment. The materials you name, artificial plants and plastic flowers, objects of mass consumption such as junk jewelry, are not to be understood as dead or artificial or inorganic. Rather they are bodies naturing in a plastic or mineral mode. As for luxuriant and baroque, I prefer to think that I deploy worlds that are layered, congested, and timelessly dense to achieve something eerie and unmasterable. I employ tenets and patterns of the ecologies of the worlds I imagine, I stratify and subsume, offering fleeting vistas of ongoing growth.

JS: Your background encompasses a wide range of disciplines: marine biology, landscape architecture, design, entomology and social science. How would you define yourself?

MHS: I don’t define myself—or my art—in terms of a specific discipline. I am neither a pedagogue nor a scientist. I am an artist with diverse and kaleidoscopic interests. The knowledges I possess have been accumulated by following curiosities as they emerge, and by engagement with materials and techniques. What is common to the disciplines you cite is their strong materiality and their foregrounding of living systems. Their emphasis on making means that each has taught me something important about being an artist—at least the kind of artist I am. Marine worlds, however, have been my passion and pursuit for as long as I can remember.

There was a time when art and science, theory and practice, and differing areas of thought, were not considered unrelated endeavors. I am more comfortable with this “undisciplined” mode of thinking.

JS: Your recent sculptures of mutant figures, such as Female Odobenid, blend human and marine-mammal forms. How do you explain this tendency toward hybrid bodies and the fusion of interspecies realms in your work?

MHS: In my view of nature, there are no autonomous bodies or species. There is species and body permeability rather than strict boundaries. The Female Odobenid performs this reality: everything is hybrid, everything is a mutation of an imagined purity or singularity.

The word “monster” was a medieval synonym for impurity and hybridity—inspired by an enduring fascination with permeable and mutable bodies, including

their combination and recombination: the chimeras of ancient Greece—the centaur and griffin; hermaphrodites; Dr. Frankenstein’s not-quite-human man; the human-monkey embryos and hybrid organs created recently by scientists; the glowing rabbits engineered by Eduardo Kac by combining rabbit DNA with the genes of bioluminescent jellyfish; the interspecies babies produced by Ai Hasegawa in which humans give birth to their own food. In the video *I Wanna Deliver a Dolphin*, a woman gestates a dolphin then eats it. Or in the monstrous paintings by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, where fruits, vegetables, and other material objects form the human anatomy.

JS: According to you, what is the meaning of both “life” and “artificial life” in our digital age?

MHS: A sea urchin wearing a miniature cowboy hat is life, a digitalized sea urchin wearing the same cowboy hat is an artificial reproduction or imitation of life. This is not a pipe. I recognize digital expressions have transformed art, architecture, media, and social mores, but I see the actual urchin wearing the actual miniature cowboy hat and the digitalized sea urchin as two very different modes of nature naturing.

JS: Does living in Los Angeles, a metropolis with an extremely spread out urban fabric, and the realm of the film industry influence your own artistic practice?

MHS: Gaston Bachelard wrote in *The Poetics of Space*: “We bring our lairs with us,” which is another way of saying that place invades one’s body. Los Angeles entered me in the manner of *Blade Runner* or *Chinatown*, the La Brea Tar Pits, entrée sized salads, diamond dust smoothies, or gym clothes worn all day as an accepted sartorial mode. A place of recurrent catastrophic events—fires, toxic tides and earthquakes; segregation, corruption, police brutality—Los Angeles is a Frankensteinian tissue of asbestos and lead, housing tracts and opulent cloistered botanical estates. It is a generative chaos and a dissolution of the borders between real and feigned, natural and artificial, the lavish and derelict, some of the hardest working people and some of the laziest, infernal orange-magenta sunsets, thirsty bougainvillea, rusted taco trucks, roadside lime-drizzled fruit salads mixed with the acrid notes of airborne phthalates, particles of neglect and abandonment kissed by the exhaust of the leaf blowers.

More generally, the entire city feels like a laboratory or an urban peristalsis. It works at night while I sleep, delivers trash and sea creatures to my doorstep, feeds me with tales of transience and impermanence, of graffitied chaparral ruins and drag racing speedways emerging like insect colonies out of cement factories. There are seagulls, raccoons, bikers, headbangers, hucksters, street gangs, Japanese malls, flea markets, ad hoc agoras; puppies and gum for sale at the border with Mexico. It is an industrial paradise with glamour found everywhere except Hollywood. You must have a certain sense of humor to live here, a noirish wit, more precisely, or it's not going to bode well.

JS: You have worked in your studio in New Mexico and some of your recent works deal with desertification. Has this environment inspired your thoughts on this subject?

MHS: New Mexico provides a space for experimentation and production as well as specific inspirational entities and sites—arroyos, bones, rocks, cacti, the archipelagos of weathered marginalia comprising the monumental *Transfer Station* for the Hammer Museum in 2019, washboard roads, products characteristic of the American West—saddles, guns, barbed wire fencing—the teachings and support of my mother and our dogs.

As for desertification, California dominates my thinking more than New Mexico. For decades, California's desertification has been obscured by the theft and wanton consumption of water from the north and the Colorado River. Cities, and to a lesser extent adjacent exurban developments, mask the conditions of desertification: land is covered by concrete and asphalt, water still flows, palms and bougainvillea still bloom. Warnings sounded decades ago were dire but unheeded.

JS: How did growing up in the age of Google impact you as an artist?

MHS: I still consider myself calibrated to a pre-Internet, '90s milieu—communing with the streets, walking up to strangers, driving around aimlessly, responding to the analog signals of a world off-screen. Online commerce is wonderful for material acquisition though.

JS: What have you learned from your intensive and prolonged research on marine biology that could help us to shape more desirable futures and better understand the world?

MHS: Any biome will provide useful lessons for humans for understanding what it is now an extreme

necessity to understand: the symbiotic, radically interconnected existences of all beings. If it is not already too late, and if the political will can be catalyzed. But my earliest childhood fascination was with the tide pools along the Pacific Coast Highway, from Santa Monica and Malibu northward to Big Sur, Point Lobos, Point Reyes, Mendocino, and Trinidad. Any tidepool is a world that is part of the vastness of the ocean yet can be comprehended as a world-in-itself. Here, one can witness the multidimensional work of nature naturing: habitat creation and destruction, mutualistic partnerships, disastrous sieges of elemental forces, devastation and death by invading plastics and other pollutants and at the same time enter a phantasmagorical landscape of tube feet, stinging tentacles, and regenerated limbs.

The tidepool's shimmering slurry of single-celled ooze, calcium, and synaptic blobs, combined with a teeming overabundance of sea plants and animals, is held within a perfect vitrine of kelp-slicked outcroppings of rock, crushed shell, and flotsam. These experiences were the beginning of my study of marine worlds that I have continued as an autodidact. Marine ecologies are not only an enduring source of inspiration and enchantment, they are the lens through which I prefer to see the world. In my work they provide allegories of important themes: interdependence, mutual transformation, the predominance of non-human beings, empiricism, genesis, succession, chaos, fantasy, and so forth.

JS: Why are you so interested in reef ecology?

MHS: Coral reefs are wondrously complex and offer the perfect site for investigating holobiontic phenomena. They also occupy a critical place in the planetary biosphere. As the tropical rain forests of the sea, they exhibit an astonishing biodiversity, supporting more species per unit area than any other marine environment. At the level of phyla, the diversity of coral reefs exceeds that of any other habitat on earth by a large margin. More than a collection of coral colonies, reefs encompass thousands of different species that interact symbiotically in intricate and complex ways, both dependent upon their surrounding environment and acting to modify it. As dynamic living systems they produce four hundred to two thousand tons of limestone per hectare per year and about half of the calcium that enters

the sea each year, from the North to the South Pole, is taken up and bound by coral reefs. Thus, coral reefs profoundly influence the chemical balance of the earth's oceans. As one of the earth's most critically important life support systems, they function as first responders, issuing warnings about ongoing planetary degradation.

Until the nineteenth century, no one knew what corals were: mineral, plant, petrified fountains, "charming underwater genii eager to marry human beings." We now know that corals are neither rocks nor genii but animals: polyps whose exoskeletons with other marine groups form limestone reefs. Reef rock is biogenic—formed by biological processes—and one of the few ecosystems in the world to produce its own substrate. The exuded reefs are vast. Entire nations are made of coral reefs and archipelagos of hundreds of atolls have been formed by coral. Approximately half of the world's coastlines are located in the tropics. One-third of all tropical coastlines are made of reefs. Reefs provide the opportunity to observe not only marine life but humans in their most destructive mode.

JS: Why do you produce works in aquariums, as autonomous marine worlds, as visions of microcosms? Aquarium is a particular scientific device of encapsulation that is also linked to the history of art, of landscape painting, to other forms of visibility. What does this medium and scientific device mean to you and why do you use it?

MHS: I am attracted to the vitrine as an ideal site for producing a world. There are two perceptual difficulties that are recurrent and perhaps impossible to overcome. The first is the illusion of enclosure and completion. The produced world appears as a discrete and finished entity, autonomous, static, and artificial rather than a dynamic performance of nature naturing that is never complete. But time will continue to do its work, and the vitrine world will live on in changing form even if it is disposed of in a landfill as trash. The acrylic or glass walls appear to differentiate and separate the naturing of the vitrine from the naturing proceeding outside and around it—e.g., in the gallery, the forest, the museum, the ocean, those who visit the vitrine. In fact, there are no autonomous bodies, all bodies are permeable, and between bodies there are interactions that are continuously transformative.

The second illusion is the perception of the vitrine as the solo production of the artist. The exhibition of the vitrines as objects in a gallery, for instance, performs another kind of caging and enclosure, and the attribution of the work to a single name minimizes the contributions of the materials and the reality of collaborative production.

JS: What about Section of Intertidal Landscape (Hair Metastasis), a recent sculpture commissioned by High Line Art, the High Line's public art program? What is the meaning of this work?

MHS: It was a large-scale device that told a story of a polluted intertidal zone colonized by cultures of natural and synthetic human hair. Viewers could watch the plant-like braids and flowy strands undulate in the waves of a turbid tide. I like to think it was alien yet familiar. Like rotting kelp in a harbor or a child's hair in a dirty bathtub.

JS: How do you position your work in relation to ideas on utopia and dystopia?

MHS: Whether the planetary future will be dystopic or utopic depends entirely on perspective. From the point of view of humans, if the present trend continues, there is no doubt of a dystopian future in which life as it is presently known will have been exterminated by our own actions. If the future is the sole domain of extremophiles, however, then from their point of view, they inhabit a utopian paradise created precisely by the ruinous actions of humans.

JS: Do you believe that the human species will become extinct or do you think that man is doomed to mutate to survive?

MHS: What if we deposed the human being from its ideological position of sovereignty over the earth, and the correlated faith in a human ability to impose its will and triumph over all of the problems humans have created? Humans who are presently worried about their survival tend to see their extinction as more catastrophic than that of any other species. What they are failing to understand, among other things, is the interconnectedness of their own existences with that of the Amazonian forest or coral reefs or bat caves in which exotic zoonotic pathogens breed. I cannot see this changing. Moreover, I do not see the disappearance of humans from the

planet as the most critical species-event to come. In fact, I can imagine a more flourishing planet without us.

JS: Ecologies are concerned with our conceptions of existence, of ways of being and modes of sensations as they relate to the condition of Earth, the "Anthropocene." As an artist, do you feel that we are living in a time of rupture or revolution from Cartesian Science, Humanism symptomatic of the Anthropocene to a more naturalist and non-anthropocentric perspective of coexistence?

MHS: Humans periodically reconstruct their ontologies, epistemologies, and worldviews. Paradigms and epistemes shift. In some quarters, Cartesian science and humanism, major components of anthropocentric and anthropomorphic thought, are undergoing critique. However, the fundamental tenets of an anthropocentric and Cartesian view of nature still predominate.

JS: What is the new role of an artist after the pandemic?

MHS: Covid and its variants are, to some extent, defining the present age in the same way the Black Plague defined the Middle Ages, producing a general crisis that has changed political, economic, and demographic configurations. Medieval people thought the plague was God's punishment for excessive sin and, because they believed in permeable bodies, lived in fear and horror that they would be infected not only by the corpses piling up in streets and charnel houses, but by the sins of others.

The contemporary pandemic has catalyzed a plague of thinking that is founded in the opposite view: vaccine deniers are also deniers of holobiontic interconnectedness including an apparent disbelief in permeable bodies. Millions of American anti-vaxxers, who act as if they have no concern that global health is dependent upon collective as well as individual well-being, value their apparently autonomous and impenetrable existences over the common good, their personal liberty over their potential to shoot deadly pathogens into innocent others simply by breathing. Meanwhile the virus continues to mutate and spread. If I were a muralist, I would paint that.

JS: Do you consider art as a force for changing the world?

MHS: Some artists critique the notion that their practice has the potential

to change existing social systems and structures. Others celebrate this potential. I have an ecological view—interconnections, interdependence, mutual transformation. I embrace not only joy and energized engagement but the horror, pain, and uncharismatic undercurrents of the planetary metabolism. I offer experiments, speculations, and fictionalized realities as exhibitions of a particular ontology of nature that I believe in, but are never presented as, authoritative or moralistic declarations.

JS: How do you imagine the future?

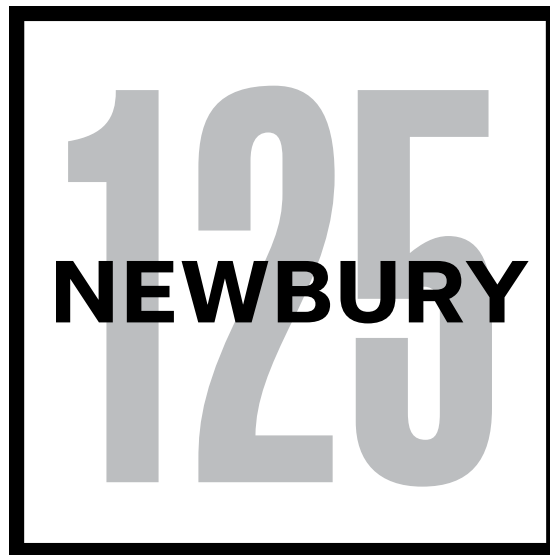
MHS: Fixed time schedules tend to make me nervous. Summer camp and its routines made me nervous. The metrics of epochs and milieus conjure for me a melancholy of nostalgia and loss, and thus I tend to avoid imagining any particular personal future with its inevitable absences. In short, I feel the future is an emotion more than anything.

There is also the problem of bounded time: when does "the future" begin? At what point does it become the present? Or the past?

We know nature is fecund and often surprising. There may be hope for the planet's survival in the generative power of non-human nature. While for the moment, the fates of human and non-human species are inextricably intertwined, the power of humans is waning. We arrived late on the planet and are likely to exit early.

JS: What is your next dream?

MHS: I imagine that I'm comatose in an anonymous place in some shopworn hospital on life support and everything that unfolds in my little insignificant life is the dream. Another fantasy is to see whales return to land, quadrupedal behemoths, equipped with four working legs and covered in dense luxuriant fur. Perhaps I will find a way to acquire an abandoned mall and curate its neglect and over time, with the help of other artists and colleagues, allowing a forest of autochthonous flora and fauna to volunteer itself amidst the derelict hardscape. It will only begin to be established at the end of my lifetime. Like a "botanical garden," a verdant beacon of the age of the pandemic.



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Cover:

Frozen Tears of the Ammonite Rain Upon the Impure, 2025. Custom acrylic vitrine, ammonite fossils, hand-blown UV borosilicate glass mushrooms, lab-grown copper dendrites and smelted copper formations, prosthetic eyeball, cast uranium glass, rough and iridized quartz crystals, miscellaneous gemstones and curios, dried coral, silicone, epoxy resin, pearlescent dye, crushed copper substrate, chrome powder coated aluminum hood lamp armature.

12½" × 12½" × 10½"

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