



FERAL FETISH

Solo Exhibition by

Studio ThinkingHand

Politikens Forhal

2021

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Solo exhibition by Studio ThinkingHand at Politikens Forhal, 2021

“As terms such as rewilding and climate crisis gain a foothold in our consciousness, the Danish-Australian artist duo Studio ThinkingHand challenges our narratives about nature in the exhibition Feral Fetish. The word feral refers to ecosystems created in the meeting of humans and nature. As an agricultural country, Denmark is one of the most feral countries in the world with almost no primeval nature and low biodiversity. Yet we fetishize cornfields, cherry blossoms and beech plantations as pure nature, even though they are planted by, and for humans.

In the middle of the ‘urban forest’ at the Copenhagen city hall square, are three ornate round surfaces placed as a hint that a forest contains more than just beautiful trees. Fungal spores, yeast and bacteria are set to live in the engravings of the circles that represent patterns from subterranean fungal hyphae, brain nerve pathways, and cosmic tissue from outer space. In this way, they emphasize microbial structures and enormous systems that we cannot see with the human eye, but of which plants in the forest are all a part of.

A symbiotic culture of yeast and bacteria plays the main role in a video installation created in collaboration with danish film director Mathias Broe. We follow its encounters with, among others, a BDSM dominatrix, a little boy and a non-binary couple in feral natural areas. In the contrasts between the culture of yeast and bacteria, the sheared lawns and the sentient beings, the question arises, what is natural? On closer inspection, nature is as fluid and synthetic as the human gender and way of life in the video.

Facing the window section of the exhibition space are two glass installations. Shaped like hanging brains, one shows the essential role of one microbe in the development of our mind, body and environment. All the while, the other consists of breathing silicone robots rising from a layer of silicon. 650 million years ago, diatoms filled our atmosphere with oxygen. Today, they form a basic element in silicone, glass and microchips. Together, the two installations make us sense our intradependence on other life on earth. By giving us insight into different intelligences, microbial perspectives and the impure entanglements of nature, Studio ThinkingHand offers new ways of understanding our role in the future of the planet.”

- Ida Schyum, Art Historian.



SCALA NATURAE

Glass, silicone, iron, diatomaceous earth, computers, tubes, acrylic boxes, pumps, valves and reflective curtain.

160(h) x 260(w) x 140(d) cm

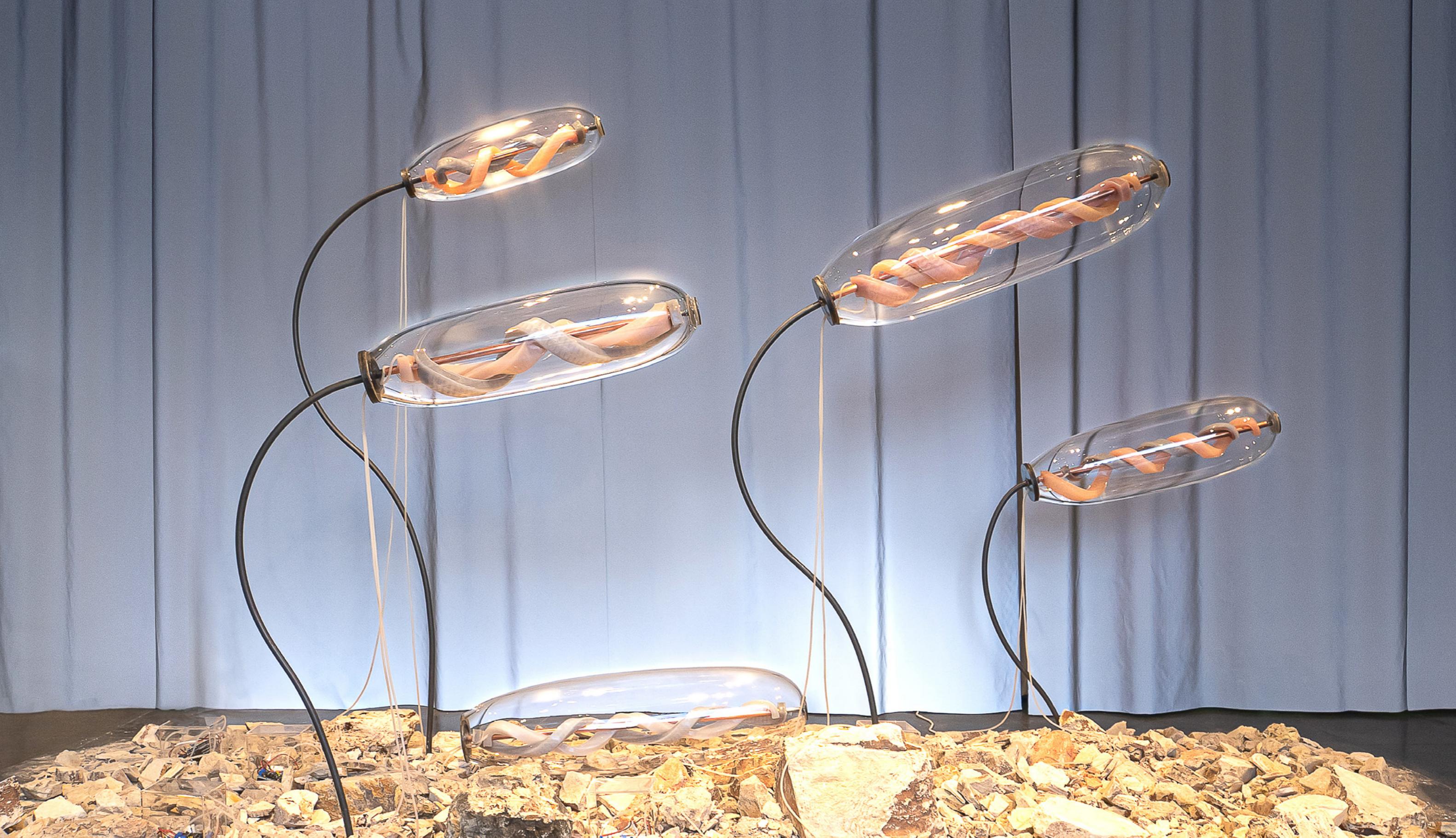
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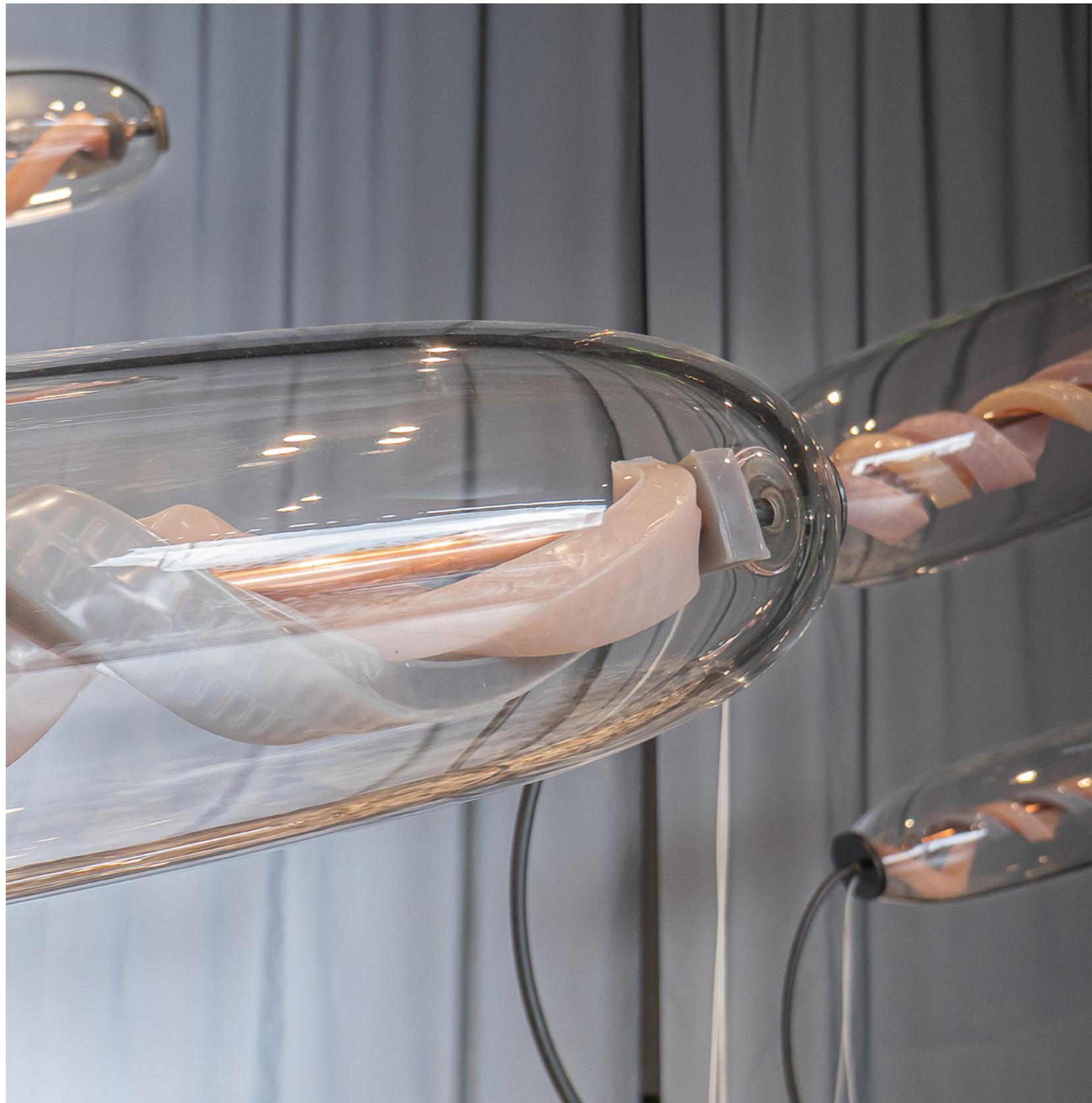
Scala Naturae consists of five glass pods on stalks that rise from a layer of diatomaceous earth. Inside the glass are soft robots breathing and moving in helix like forms from computer units connected to pumps and valves. Glas, silicone rubber, computer chips and diatomaceous earth all derive from the same element: Silicium, which is closely related to carbon, the foundation element for biological life as we are taught.

During the Cambrian explosion 650 million years ago, one of the planet's largest ecological shifts occurred when diatoms, which are a form of algae, took over the world's oceans and began to fill the troposphere with oxygen that was not there before. So much oxygen that the planet's metabolism was set in motion, creating the possibility that life as we know it can exist, that fire can burn and that soil and metal can oxidize. What is toxic to one lifeform might be life giving to another. Therefore, what is the normative narrative of the past and the expected future? How does the pursuit of purity hold back ecological reforms?

The title Scala Naturae is latin for 'The Ladder of Nature' and points towards the aristotelian idea of hierarchy, the order of life and causality in the narrative of nature that we still reproduce today. However, does this heirachy still have relevance or do it's limitations call for a new way of thinking life's multi directional relatings, co-evolutions and diverse intelligences of equal importance? Blurring the lines between organic and synthetic agency, Scala Naturae is a sculpture that explores constant evolutions and relations in the in-between-zones of machines and organisms, technology and biology - all as an extension of life.









MYCOGENESIS

Fungi, yeast, bacteria, agar, glass, resin, iron, acrylic sheet and lights

Hanging sculpture. 280(h) x 300(w) x 200(d) cm

2021

We find ourselves in times where power structures and hierarchies which place Humans above and separated from Nature no longer suffice, opening up to possibilities of re-negotiating our relationship to Nature.

Mycogenesis is a living installation co-created by fungi, yeasts and bacteria that highlights nature's intelligence and the role of microbiomes in our co-evolution. Glass sculptures of different brains, seeds and organs are host to microbes from biotech laboratories and the local environment that grow as hyphae into rhizome mycelial networks as if they were nerve endings or synapses. The glass brains are hung in metal rods from the ceiling as some insects would hang their eggs.

The work questions what intelligence is and where it is located beyond the human perspective of reason, rationality and the mind towards sensuous, embodied, relational knowledge and asks us to reflect on the other species and microbiomes we share our bodies and existence with in holobiont relationships such as in the gut brain axis. Fungi are one of the most evolved, diverse, relational and adaptable species that we are yet to fully comprehend. They seek diversity for mating beyond binary genders and reproductive roles, they communicate via electrical impulses and chemical reactions as a decentralised entity beyond defined borders of an individual towards a collective body and they are integral for various symbiotic relations. Like some spiders in which their brain comprises 80% of their body or sea squirts that dispose of their brain once they have settled, Nature challenges our binary limitations of the notion and pursuit of continuous linear progress. Rather than a tree as a symbol for life and evolution with dead ends and a central passageway, could the future be inspired by the philosophy of fungal networks and intelligence? Can fungi guide us towards a new beginning of decentered, entangled, queer, relational co-evolved polyphonic futures with other than human species? Can fungi help to bring us out of Humanist ideologies into affirmative speculative futures of the unknown?









FERAL FETISH

Single Channel video work

7 chapters of various durations. Full duration: 32:31 mins.

Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast. 2021

Artists and Concept: Studio ThinkingHand

Film Director: Mathias Broe

Editor: Mathias Broe, Natalia Anna Ciepiel

Director of Photography: Maggie Olkuska

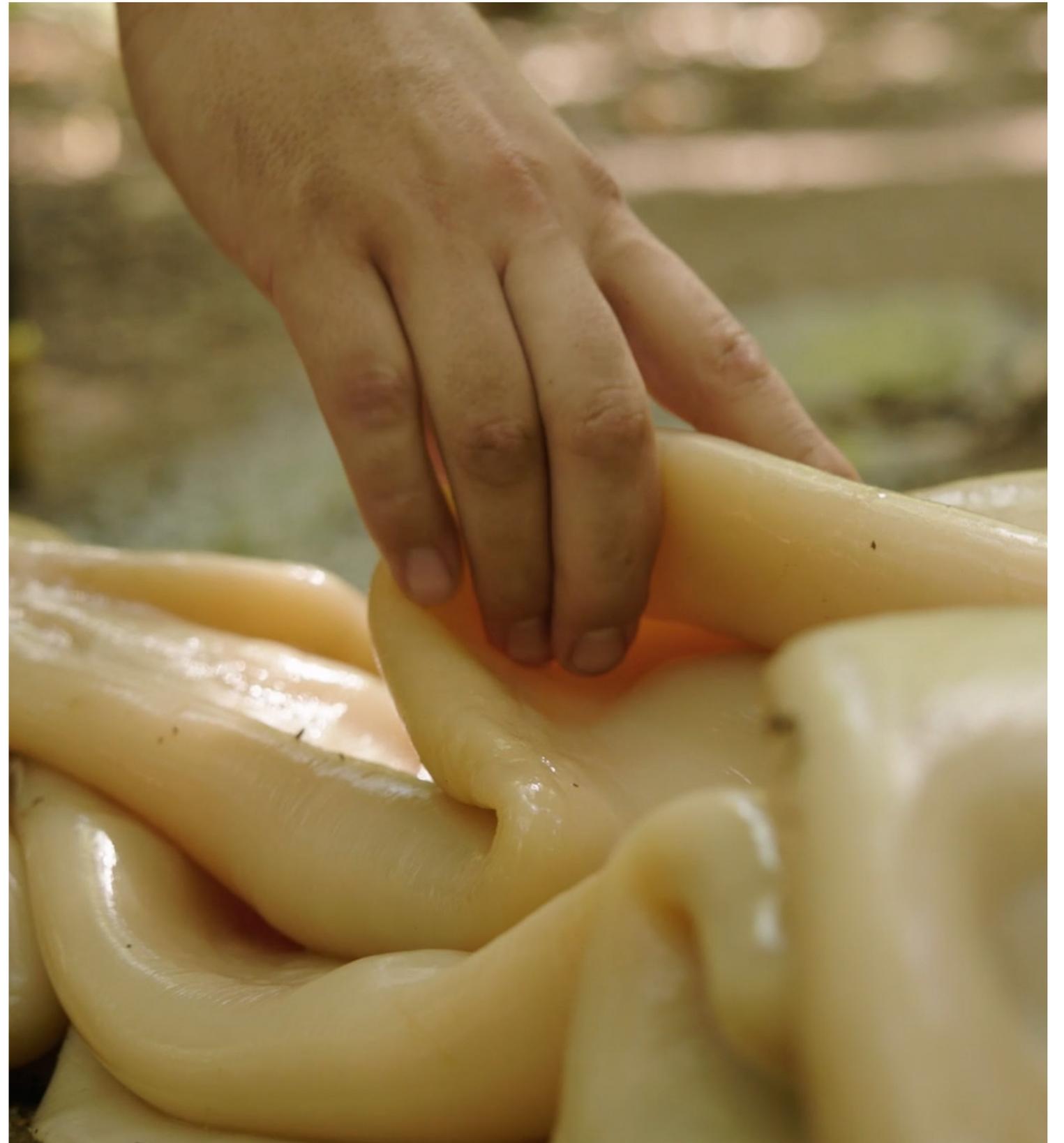
Sound Designers: Catrine Le Dous, Morten Søndergaard Andersen, Matilde Böcher

Colorist: Maggie Olkuska

Cast: Miss Cherry Velour, Bunni and Levi, Anna-Bob Fredslund, Ernst Napier Havsteen-Nørballe, Benjamin Sønderborg Lucas, Jeppe Emil Dahlin Bojesen, Chickens from Hegnsholt, Delta

The term Feral describes the area between nature and culture; the nature that has arisen in connection with humans. Feral landscapes point towards ecosystems co-evolved between humans and other than human species whilst commodity fetishism points towards placing economic value on goods themselves rather than the interpersonal relations that produce the commodity and evolve its value. As an agricultural country, Denmark is one of the most feral countries in the world with no wild nature left and little biodiversity. Rather, nature is controlled, manipulated, terra formed, redirected and built up. Culturally however, we fetishise nature, with traditions of landscape painting, romanticised images of the countryside with large fields of agriculture and a notion of 'the good life' escaping to nature's purity. However, there seems to be a dissonance between the romanticisation and fetishization of nature that rather represents violent industry that commodifies natural resources.

Feral Fetish is a film that challenges our relationship to Nature and our concepts of what is 'Natural' and what is 'Normal'. The main character of the film is a Symbiotic Culture Of Bacteria and Yeast (SCOBY), that represents a fluid, transcorporeal future and exists in various landscapes that are normally perceived as pure and natural. In these fetishized landscapes, the SCOBY encounters different people, bodies and animals, documenting their reactions, meetings and relations to the SCOBY. Through these interactions, the film seeks to lift the veil of the romanticised narrative we tell ourselves of pure nature and asks; What is more strange, the uncanny membrane of bacteria and yeast and the dominatrix or the straight linear trees of a plantation or a mono crop field and humans constant pursuit to control and steer nature for industry? How do we deeply grapple with our impact on other than human species in order to affirmatively participate in world building?















ARCHETYPE

Polycarbonate, agar, fungi, bacteria, resin and iron

Series of three sculptures. 2021

Fungi and bacteria are instrumental to the fact that life on earth has developed into what we know today: They have been vital for plants to evolve on land and algae to blossom in the sea, they are creating symbiosis between various different ecosystems and are having a myriad of vital functions around us and within us. We are more connected to them than we have previously known. The fungi we see in the forest floor are the mere spore-bearing fruit of a much larger network of fungal hyphae, which are found all year round underground. The hyphae spread in small tube-like structures which branch off and bind the forest floor together in large rhizomatic networks called mycelium.

The intricate structure of mycelium can be regarded as the neurological network of nature, as a form for biological internet relaying enormous amounts of data. The rhizome connection forms are perfect for communication, transportation and relationality serving the community rather than individuals.

The sculptures consist of three circles of polycarbonate that take the form of different rhizomatic structures: fungal hyphae underground, Astrocyte nerve cells in the brain and cosmic web tissue in outer space - the archetypal rhizome structure which is repeated on all scales of life from the smallest imaginable to the largest observable. Soil samples from the urban forest itself, containing fungi, yeast and bacteria that are allowed to grow inside the patterns, to give a microbiotic picture of the biodiversity in the urban forest. The three circles are fixed in resin and installed in iron stands.







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ARCHETYPE: HYPHAE

Fungi, Yeasts, and bacteria from Novozymes, polycarbonate, agar resin and iron
210(h) x 110 (w) x 5(d) cm



ARCHETYPE: ASTROCYTE

Fungi, Yeasts, and bacteria from soil samples collected at Copenhagen City Hall square, polycarbonate, agar resin and iron

210(h) x 110 (w) x 5(d) cm



ARCHETYPE: COSMIC WEB

Fungi, Yeasts, and bacteria from Novozymes, polycarbonate, agar resin and iron
210(h) x 110 (w) x 5(d) cm

STUDIO THINKINGHAND

Studio Thinkinghand is an art duo formed by Rhoda Ting (b. 1985, AUS) and Mikkel Dahlin Bojesen (b. 1988, DK) currently based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Their works focus on methods of listening, relating and co-creating with other than human species such as fungi, bacteria and ecosystems as well as, synthetic life such as soft robotics, making visible stories, intelligences, and life beyond the human gaze. Bringing together science, technology and industry, their work investigates speculative futures, and explores philosophies that can move us collectively and affirmatively beyond the anthropocene. Drawing inspiration from contemporary disciplines such as queer ecology, posthumanism and vitalist materialism, they seek to apply and revise ways in which humans participate in a dynamic web of planetary interconnectedness. They imagine a future of co-evolution, queer futurity and adaptability in which we look towards borderzones and relationality, challenging human exceptionalism and reductive notions of binary categorisations between Nature and Culture, the organic and the synthetic and the pure and feral.



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