



On becoming-with Amelia Wallin

Dirts (materials)

A neighbour's bounty of olives imprints fleshy residue upon the cotton cloth of one of Jahanne Pasco-White's paintings. The heavy yellow pollen of the wattle flower stains another, the pale mauve flesh of a Lilly-pilly, or Wanduin in Gunaikurnai language, smear the fabric of others. Some of the cloth surfaces are dyed with the skins of onions and avocados, the fibres intermixed with synthetic pigments. On the lands of the Kulin Nation, where Pasco-White currently lives and works, it is Poorneet (Tadpole Season), or early spring, and the suburban gardens are abundant. Like fallen fruit driven into concrete footpaths under feet, juice, seeds, pulp, flesh, dust and pollen stain the paintings and matter, material and surface entangle.

'Dirt', stated the poet Anne Carson (2001, 202), 'is matter out of place.' Defined by its context alone, dirt confounds categories, occupies where it shouldn't, and mixes up forms. Western distrust of dirt and fear of contamination has prevailed since antiquity. Ancient Greek mythology posits women as distrust worthy by virtue of their ability to transform and deform. 'That, of course,' writes Donna Haraway (1989, 39), 'is why women have had so much trouble counting as individuals in modern Western discourses. Their personal, bounded

individuality is compromised by their bodies' troubling talent for making other bodies, whose individuality can take precedence over their own, even while the little bodies are fully contained.'

Pregnancy can be understood as a process of intermingling genomes and cellular transfer between foetus and gestating body, but in fact all bodies are composites, host to parasites and bacteria. Somewhere between one to two kilograms of human microbiota colonize our skin, lungs, nose, and gut. We have more bacteria than cells, which is it, then, that defines us?

Entanglements (processes)

Pasco-White's (2019a) earlier exhibition, *messmates*, examined her experience of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, and the associated heightened awareness that her body was not entirely her own, nor was it ever. What Pasco-White terms 'the bacterial companions *in and of* the body' have always been there, acquired in the processes of birth, via the vaginal birthing canal, or through touch, colostrum, milk, and later food. Haraway's phrase 'becoming with' lends itself to the title of this exhibition. For Pasco-White (2019b), it emphasises our indivisibility from the world around us; from the

chemicals found in our blood and breastmilk to the messmates with whom we share our bodies.

In her studio, Pasco-White's paintings encroach upon themselves, laid one upon another on the ground, and hanging from the ceiling, the cloth still tacky with substance. The composition of the paintings occurs collectively as Pasco-White works on multiple canvases as one. Throughout her practice materials are reused, paintings are cut, glued and repurposed. The effect is such that colours, patterns, marks or stains transfer from one painting to another, sustaining motion between them. Assembled to form soft passageways through the gallery, the hanging system recreates the limitations of Pasco-White's studio, wherein the body of work far surpasses the wall and floor space. Here, the body of the viewer is drawn into intimate proximity to brush up against or bear witness to the matter and the material in detail.

Our current understanding of dirt, contamination and immunity, particularly in relation to birth, has transformed. Amniotic fluid and vernix caseosa were routinely washed off babies directly after birth but are now understood to contain a spectrum of bioactivity that can offer protection against common bacterial and fungal pathogens. For Haraway, the notion of 'becoming-with' is to be worldly. The way we enter the world and our first encounters of touch, provide us with our first microbes, our lifelong companions. From the moment we are born, we begin to come to terms with the condition of becoming with. Pasco-White's paintings exist in symbiosis with each other and their environment, an expanded state of becoming-with.

References

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