



Nicholas William Johnson - Rapture

19 February - 26 March 2022

Opening reception Saturday 19 February 2022, 3-8pm  
at PvK's NEW SPACE overlooking Deptford High Street in London SE8

RSVP is essential to be included on the guest list

In the faraway future, that is already here, a sound could be heard. At first, it is distant, almost imperceptible. It approaches slowly, descending from high above, where sagacious noctilucent clouds veil the atmosphere tenderly. Gradually, the sound grows in strength, alternating between a low-pitched ring and a hum, until forming a giant tide, whose crystalline sonorities roll confidently towards Earth. The waves come in a repeating syncopated rhythm without crushing into, but delicately reinforcing one another. As they reach the surface of the planet, they gently envelop the enormous coniferous forest in what was used to be called Sierra Juárez in the state of Oaxaca, swishing through the muffled rustling of rotting leaves and sprouting branches with their long sustained breath-like tunes fading in and out, in and out.

The forest hushes, bewildered. Never has Planet Earth, in its 4.6 billion years of existence, heard a sound like that - it is, quite literally, otherworldly.

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Empty of human presence for over 30,000 years, Planet Earth is overflowing with lush greenery and rapturous blooms, as it finally lives up to its Edenic promise. Gaia is stunningly beautiful – even if no satellite captures her glorious image from outer space, so she can catch a glimpse of herself in the mirror of interstellar photography. The song of the kingdom come is sweet and mellifluous, perhaps overly so – evidently missing a few chords of human presence for a truly well-pitched multispecies polyphony (who would've thought!).

Humans would not have recognized many of the creatures now populating their former home: while certain floral and dendritic shapes would look familiar, others would stand out as completely extraordinary and baffling. As flora learned to adapt to new climatic conditions, new morphologies have flourished: triangular leaves, dark green on one side and almost totally white on the other, so a plant could curl its foliage at the hottest time of the day to prevent overheating and uncurl on cloudy days, to conserve heat and prevent severe temperature fluctuations. Petals forming pipes, to direct excess water away from the tender pistils. Tendrils that dance their way towards ever-new heights in the crowded forest. Flowers arranged along non-Euclidean grids.

Colours, too, have transformed. Under the influence of increased radiation and extreme temperatures, new fluorescent hues have blossomed, shiny and translucent, polychromic and abysmal, enigmatic like Holbein's azurite mixing and sampling moonshine reflected off butterflies' wings and the light absorbed by the impenetrable depths of the Mariana trench.

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The sound arrived, announcing its extra-terrestrial presence with a hyperdimensional embrace. Oh, the long-awaited cosmic advent! How humans longed for you, how they feared. The Other did not announce themselves in any other way than the outlandish hum. They were by no means immaterial, but they had no visible body, no form one could see and touch – only hear and perceive. Devoid of spatial extension, their consciousness extended in all directions, travelling as multidimensional waves, according to laws unbeknownst to human science even at the height of the age of quantum and cosmological discoveries. Albeit some scientists, those of a particularly mystical inclination, did know: they intuited the seemingly impossible astrophysical phenomena, but could not prove or demonstrate them empirically. Humans thus left, having their half-baked mathematical equations unresolved, and their greatest theoretical intuitions untranslated into the language of science. While they captured the cosmic microwave background, the radiation from distant galaxies all the way back from the time the universe was born, they could not decipher that some of this radiation was music. And some of it was God.

The Other arrived from the Occam Galaxy, and were thus called Occami. Not one, not many, but multiplicity itself, their sonorous body extending through the curvatures of space-time, running along the edges of deflections and black holes. They did not pose a threat to Earth's nonhuman inhabitants or to the planet itself – but they did have a purpose, one they needed to communicate to Gaia gently, yet resolutely. Occami, who travelled for aeons before reaching the solar system, knew they were too late to meet the human race, but they revelled in singing their prayerful undulating song to the myriads of vegetal beings. They exchanged their astral tune joyously with the flowers of the deserts and lilies of the valleys, with perennial vines and feathery mosses, with all the house plants and all the monocultures set free and re-united once again with their multispecies sisters 30,000 years ago.

At first, the Gaian flora gave off a signal of alarm when sensing the Occami approaching, but the fears were soon relieved, poisonous spikes hidden away, tender leaves unfurled, giving way to a full welcome and a resonant embrace. The Occami did not come to colonise, they came searching for a precious gift, the story of which their long-gone ancestors have passed on to them (while Occami were capable of travelling through space-time, they did not live forever).

Occami knew of special plants that human shamans used in the ancient ceremonies: on full moon, a medicine man ingested herbs specially selected for their healing, consciousness-expanding properties. As the plant entered the body, the healer merged with and thus became the plant. In a state of vegetal immanence, the most magnificent shamans would build a verdant cosmic ladder to travel far and beyond, sometimes as far as Occam. Some of them have stayed out

there and gave birth to a race of selfless super-conscious sonorous beings. Many light years later, children of Occam have come back to reunite with their vegetal mothers.

In gratitude for reunion with the sacred plants, the Occami offered their grand, transcendent, incantatory song, an eternity-long slide into blissful deliquescence, an ecstatic dissolution in all there is. Their offering to Gaia was the gift of divine music – the gift of themselves.

Aliya Say, 2022

The text is loosely inspired by the music of Éliane Radigue.

Nicholas William Johnson (b. 1982, Honolulu, Hawaii) lives and works in London. He studied philosophy before completing an MA in Painting at the Royal College of Art (2014). Selected exhibitions include: 'Rapture', Peter von Kant, London (February 2022); 'They Regard Us As We Regard Them', PLUS-ONE Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium (2021); The Botanical Mind Online project from Camden Art Centre, London (2020). 'ARCADIA', curated by Barbie Chatsworth, Peter von Kant online (2020); 'The Blue Hour', PLUS-ONE Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium (2020); 'Sticky-Like A Summer Night'; House of Egor, Berlin (2019); 'Plant Communication Network', Peter von Kant, London (2018); The John Moores Painting Prize, Liverpool Museums, UK (2018); 'Inns of Molten Blue', Plus-One, Antwerp, Belgium (2017); The Averard Hotel, London (2016); The Catlin Prize, London (2016). 'New Sensations', Saatchi Gallery, London (2015). His work has been covered by Artsy, Elephant Magazine, Nero, Studio International, Apollo Magazine, Dazed, Harper's Bazaar, The Financial Times, and The Times.

Aliya Say is an art writer, strategist and researcher based in London. She is writing her PhD on botanical abstraction in the work of twentieth-century artist-mystics, and the parallels between vegetal ontology and mystical states, at Aarhus University, Denmark. Say's essays and reviews have appeared in numerous publications, to include Artforum, frieze, The White Review, The Art Newspaper. She is assistant editor at the Nordic Journal of Aesthetics, and a recipient of the Novo Nordisk Foundation grant.

For all further information please contact the gallery.

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