

ECOLOGIES – LOST, FOUND AND CONTINUED

Screen City Biennial
Stavanger, Norway
October 17-30, 2019



ABOVE Kristina Öllek, *Nautilus New Era* (2018), installation view.

OPPOSITE Momoko Seto, *Planet ∞* (2018), installation view.

All images courtesy Screen City Biennial.



A cruise ship of at least four stories arises in the middle of the small harbor town of Stavanger. It is higher and wider than any historical building, any other boat can compete with this overwhelming giant. The tourist cruise ship clearly dominates the picture of the city center. Parked right in front of it is the MS Sandnes, a historical post-war ship, which was running the night route between Stavanger and Bergen in the 1950s, and is now protected by the Norwegian heritage authorities. During the Screen City Biennial (SCB) MS Sandnes was converted into one of the exhibition venues and central office of the biennial. Witnessing MS Sandnes in contrast to the cruise ship as the overwhelming incarnation of today's mass tourism and thus an actual ecological threat, confronted me with my torn apart environmental consciousness. Somewhere between eco-activist thoughts and silent recognition that with my lifestyle—as of so many in the art world—I contribute to the causes of global warming, I arrived at the biennial with the title *Ecologies – Lost, Found and Continued*.

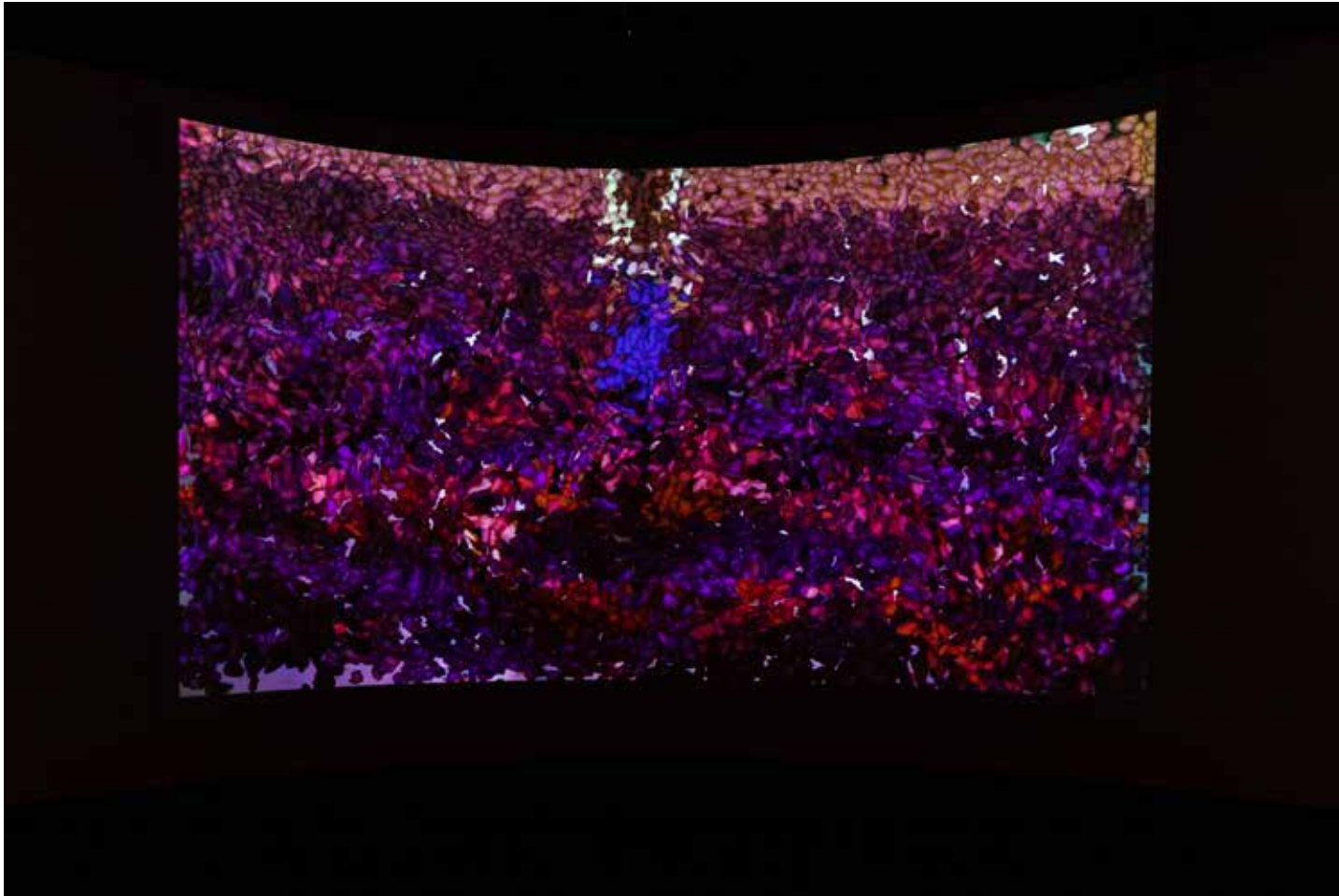
Founded and directed by Daniela Arriado, this year's biennial was the fourth edition of Screen City originally initiated as a festival format dedicated to the expanded moving image now hosting the second edition as biennial. Over the years, as the idea of an international event grew bigger, so did the exhibition venues and the list of invited artists. Together with Arriado, the curator Vanina Saracino has invited 29 artists to contribute with videos, site-specific installations, VR and sound artworks in 14 different venues.

In her curatorial concept Saracino focused on questions around anthropocentric theories acknowledging the urgency of

rethinking the relation between the human and her connection to the surrounding world. We might be familiar with lost ecologies as part of the mass extinction taking place at this present moment, whereas the idea of found and continued ecologies suggests new theoretical directions. The biennial pivoted around ideas of spiritually rooted knowledge as a source for sustainable innovation oscillating with the threats of technological industrial exploitation.

For a city of Stavanger's size and capacity, the list of activities during the two weeks of the biennial was ambitious. An online exhibition was launched with the work series *Everything's Coming Together While Everything's Falling Apart* (2019) by the artist Oliver Ressler, which deals with the fossil-fuel economy. Guest curators Nathanja van Dijk and Gabriel Bogossian organized screenings featuring artists such as Ursula Biemann & Paolo Tavares and Mikhail Karikis, among others. The online *SCB Journal*, edited by Saracino, elaborates on post-anthropocentric worldviews. It includes research papers, interviews, curatorial reflections by renowned scholars and activists such as TJ Demos and Les Knight (founder of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement).

The biennial distributed the works to locations all over the city. In addition to offering the visitor a picturesque walk, the changing exhibition environments, different in their quality—ranging from a museum, to a cathedral, to a ship cabin—highlighted the specificity of each artwork, enhanced the collaboration between the institutions and drew attention to the diversity of the city. At the Petroleum Museum, which hosts an otherwise debatable presentation of the relevance, history and



OPPOSITE, TOP Enrique Ramírez, *Tidal Pulse II* (2019), installation views.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM Andrew Norman Wilson, *Ode to Seekers* (2012), installation view.

ABOVE Oliver Ressler, *Everything's Coming Together While Everything's Falling Apart* (2017), performance still.

consequences of oil extraction, the work *Ode to Seekers 2012* (2016) by Andrew Norman Wilson featured a welcome counterbalance. In the 8-minute long video of computer-generated 3D models and a misused Steadicam footage the artist critically engages with land exploitation. Animating the extraction process once as a mosquito, once as an oil pump or a syringe and underlying it with pop music references, Wilson points to the disturbing aftermath of celebratory approaches toward growth and progress, and threats to mankind in the form of disease transmission, land devastation and drug addiction.

Enrique Ramírez's site-responsive sound performance—a second iteration of the project—*Tidal Pulse II* (2019) was one of the six commissions, and formed the highlight of the biennial. Taking place on a local boat running along the panoramic route on the Norwegian coastline between Harstad and Stavanger, *Tidal Pulse II* is a composition of interviews with local activists, politicians and scientists reflecting on the economic dependency

on fossil-fuel, and live recorded sounds from microphones installed on the boat. In a three-hour ride with wireless headphones listening to the noises and voices of the surrounding area, the fjords slowly transformed into a visual passage mirroring the concerns and unanswered questions regarding the human's role and impact on the ecological systems on the planet.

At the former halls of the International Terminal the artist Kristina Óllek presented a multifaceted installation with the title *Nautilus New Era* (2018) elaborating on the dangers of deep-sea mining—a topic becoming more and more relevant due to the high demand of the rare earth minerals needed for high-tech technologies. Installed in the same building was the video *That Which Is to Come is Just a Promise* (2019), by the artist collective Platform, drawing a dystopian scenario of a future with flooded land due to human caused sea rise that is yet to come. Exploring different formats, Saracino also integrated live projects such as the sound performance by the Band of Weeds. Under the title



LEFT Band of Weeds, *The Greenhouse Phenomenon* (2019), performance still.

OPPOSITE Kristina Ölle, *Nautilus New Era* (2018), installation view.



The Greenhouse Phenomenon (2019) the band explored the life signals of foreign plants that successfully migrated to the area around the Stavanger Art Museum. The band uses a method developed by the Soviet botanist Ivan Gunar, which converts the plants' pulse into the sound range of the human ear. Further sound and live cinema performances by Marjolijn Dijkman with Toril Johannessen, and Michelle-Marie Letelier with Kalma that experimented with real-time visual bacteria recording under a microscope—reflecting on the dynamic crystal growth of salt peter—were staged at the Concert Hall.

Ecologies – Lost, Found and Continued established itself as a satellite—a lighthouse emitting light signals from a distant town. It accepts a current condition in which we are losing the so-far-

known ecologies without giving into a state of being desperately paralyzed. Instead, the exhibition proposes searching for a continuation through environments that, although modified or even contaminated, hold potential for new forms of survival. This medium-sized biennial impressed through its focused presentation, while raising questions about an ambivalence towards what it means to be ecological today. It made clear that ecological awareness is about finding a new space and perspective for the human species, while respecting an interconnected biosphere shared and cohabited by human and non-human actors.

HELENE ROMAKIN

