

THE MISSING MAJORITY

Mercedes Azpilicueta
Aron Demetz
Margarethe Drexel
Arnold Holzkecht
Tonico Lemos Auad
Marinella Senatore

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Thursday - Friday
from 15 to 18 o'clock
and by appointment

In a study of prehistoric material culture, archaeologist Linda Hurcombe shows how everything we know about that historical period is determined by traces that have been handed down to us. However, Hurcombe urges us not to forget the theoretical and technological knowledge associated with organic materials that has not stood the test of time because it is perishable or has been handed down orally. She calls them the 'missing majority', i.e. a system of knowledge related to nature that has been forgotten by so-called high-brow culture, but that is closely related to the ideas, identities and beliefs of a community. Starting from these considerations and through the works of **Mercedes Azpilicueta, Aron Demetz, Margarethe Drexel, Arnold Holzkecht, Tonico Lemos Auad and Marinella Senatore**, *The Missing Majority* explores the interweaving of knowledge related to the vegetable and animal worlds, in an interactive relationship between communities and their habitats. This knowledge is considered alternative, and since it has no place in the mainstream discourse of the dominant culture, is transmitted through non-traditional circuits and often reaches us in a fragmented and partial manner. Rediscovering, rereading and reappropriating this knowledge means questioning who holds the knowledge and reaffirming the central role of a form of knowledge that is:

/rooted, insofar as it is connected to the habitat and the community in which it is developed;
/embodied, insofar as it is present in human, vegetable and animal bodies;
/symbiotic, insofar as when such bodies interact, they contaminate each other's knowledge;
/in movement, insofar as it is shared and transmitted among bodies.

The works of the artists involved in *The Missing Majority* explore various aspects of the relationship between human and nature, and ponder the way in which we inhabit a space at different latitudes, building relationships and interacting with an infinitely larger ecosystem.

/ The cochineal is an insect considered a pest by gardeners, but which several centuries ago was held in high regard by the Aztecs, Mayas and Incas, who dried it to obtain a red dye called carmine. The small beetle arrived in Europe in the 1500s during the era of the conquistadors and soon became a precious commodity in transatlantic trade. In a few years, the cloth-dyeing industry became one of the main sources of income for the Spanish colonies. In *Mama's Casting a Spell*, **Mercedes Azpilicueta** takes scenes from a workshop held by Ana Roquero, a dyer-plant expert based in Madrid, who explains how to produce cochineal dye and obtain various shades of carmine. The interior of the studio is intertwined with scenes from Madrid's Royal Botanical Gardens, where dancers perform mysterious, almost ritualistic gestures. With prostheses made of terracotta, tin or latex – another key material of imperialist trade and indigenous exploitation – the performers come into contact with the leaves, bark and stems of plants, thus creating a continuous flow between human and plant bodies. Starting with the rediscovery of ancient knowledge related to the natural world, Azpilicueta thereby questions the extraction of knowledge and resources at the expense of non-dominant indigenous cultures.

/ In agronomy, grafting is the operation in which two plants of different species or varieties are joined together to create a new specimen. The result will be a plant that is better adapted to climatic or soil conditions, more resistant to disease, that will bear fruit sooner or have a longer life cycle. Grafting is a practice that requires a thorough knowledge not only of the two plants involved but also of the habitat in which they are found, because it will produce considerable changes in the surrounding environment. Reorientation with Consequences is a bronze sculpture by **Aron Demetz** that tells of the relationship between human beings and nature: the branches of two trees of different species are grafted into each other and now face one another. As the title suggests, the reorientation of nature with increased productivity and improved responsiveness has direct consequences on the landscape – from the fauna to community economies – consequences that are magnified if the process does not take place just on a single plant but on a large scale. By reflecting on the domestication of nature, Demetz's work reminds us that the way skills and knowledge are used is never neutral.

/ If you look at the leaves of *Hypericum perforatum* against the light, you will see small holes: legend has it that the devil pierced the plant with needles, which was said to possess powers that might be used against evil spirits. The flowers of St John's wort are picked on 24 June – St John's Day – and can be used to make an ointment against sunburn and an infusion against depression. For these reasons, the plant is also called St John's Blood, Lord's Blood or Witches' Herb. Throughout history, this kind of knowledge, which often blends scientific aspects with religious beliefs, has represented clandestine practices and knowledge that was overlooked – if not expressly obstructed – by the ruling hierarchies, including those of scientific power. **Margarethe Drexel** sets out from the history of the community in which she was born and grew up in order to try to deconstruct those antagonistic power structures that used fear as a form of social control. Hence, the dichotomy between light and shade, between good and evil that pervades religions is recalled by Drexel in the candles, torture wheels, devilish goats and skeletons that serve as memento mori. The artist reappropriates these fear devices and defuses them: the St John's wort oil she collected this year is available to those who may benefit from it. Drexel thus returns to the original dimension of alternative knowledge as a form to be shared with the community.

/ Fascinated by peasant culture and its aesthetic forms, **Arnold Holzkecht** presents a work from the beginning of his career and a pair of works that were made for The Missing Majority, thus ideally embracing the poles of an entire lifetime of artistic research. Holzkecht's curiosity has remained constant and lively over the years, forever observing the way human beings relate to the Earth, bees and nature in order to understand how they interact and influence each other. Thus in the exhibition, we encounter a strange creature comprised of a metal structure reminiscent of a plough, with wooden arms that resemble the antennae of an insect. The two most recent works, in which the artist recreates decorative geometric motifs by modelling old beehives abandoned by the bees, show how our technologies, knowledge and aesthetic canons are so often borrowed from the animal world: they seem to be made of metal, but they are actually very fragile paper veils made from the organic waste material of the bees themselves. Holzkecht observes, interacts, copies and learns, reminding us that living in an ecosystem means being in a continuous flow of exchanges and interaction.

/ Recounting the culture of a community also means showing a non-material dimension that concerns the relationships between members of the group, how they arise and how they change over time. **Marinella Senatore** has made choral and participatory processes the focus of her artistic practice, and over the years she has accumulated numerous experiences that she has photographed, thus creating an archive of people and stories. It is an archive that is alive and growing, that recounts what happens on the street and that – through the use of collage – brings together real and imaginary experiences on the same page. A stage curtain rolled up around itself, a line of poetry, a dancing body, a detail of colour reminiscent of sixteenth-century Italian art or a quotation from a female thinker are just some of the clues – partial, fragmented and disorderly – to a story that tells a more real and embodied version of a community and its web of relationships. The common thread running through Senatore's works is light: central in the history of art, essential for the life of living beings, and which in the artist's practice represents a precious element of exchange between people.

Mercedes Azpilicueta (1981, La Plata, Argentina) lives and works in Amsterdam and Buenos Aires. She showed her work at CAC Brétigny – Brétigny-sur-Orge (2021), Museum Fridericianum, Kassel (2021), Museion, Bolzano (2020), Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2020), NoguerasBlanchard, Madrid (2019-2020), Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (2019).

Aron Demetz (1972 in Val Gardena, Italy) lives and works in South Tyrol. Recently he showed his work at Galleria Doris Ghetta (2019, 2020), Biennale Gherdëina 7, Ortisei (2020), Muzeul de Arta, Cluj Napoca (2019), Galerie Loewen, Chur (2019), MANN - Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (2018), Everard read Gallery, London (2018)

Margarethe Drexel (1982, Ehenbichl, Austria) has shown her work at Neue Galerie, Innsbruck (2020); SOMA and Biquini Wax EPS, Mexico City (2019); Galería Valenzuela Klenner, Bogotá (2018); MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House (2020).

Arnold Holzknicht (1960, Bressanone, Italy) lives and works in Ortisei, Italy. He showed his work at Galleria Doris Ghetta (2017, 2019, 2020), Museion, Bolzano (2020), Galleria Civica Trento (2017), Galerie Albert Baumgarten, Freiburg (2014).

Tonico Lemos Auad (1968, Belém, Brazil) lives and works in London, UK. Recently he showed his work at Pivô, São Paulo (2015), Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo (2013), Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2012-2013).

Marinella Senatore (1977, Cava de'Tirreni, Italy) recently showed her work at Bienal of Sao Paulo, Manifesta 12, Centre Pompidou, Kunsthhaus Zurich; MAXXI Museum, Castello di Rivoli, Palais de Tokyo, Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago, Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation, Serpentine Gallery, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, ICA, Richmond.