



The artist travels to quarries across Italy and Zimbabwe to find these raw materials. Adopting the age-old practice of stone carving, he chisels, refines and polishes the rock to create solid forms with lusciously smooth and shiny surfaces. For *Monument 22* (2018), Blank employs the natural milky shade of the original block to enhance a sculpture of a white shirt, while shallow incisions around the collar, buttons and pocket encourage viewers to look closer.

Blank's *Still Life* (2018) – which depicts a skull placed next to a plastic bottle and bin liners – gestures towards the ephemeral nature of everyday things, like contemporary updates of Dutch golden-age *vanitas* and Spanish *bodegones* of the 17th century. Compared with Parada Kim – who draws on Eastern and Western art-historical traditions that confront impermanence and transcendence – Blank plays on the contradiction between the fragility of life and manmade objects that will inevitably outlive us, despite our transient interactions with them. There is something whimsical and astute about insignificant and trivial objects being elevated beyond the ordinary.

Yujin Min

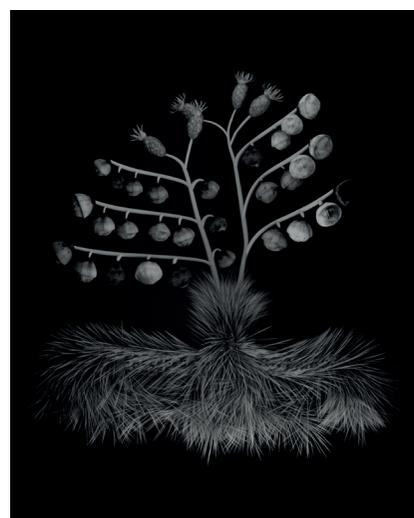
## NATURE GONE ASTRAY

### Edouard Malingue

#### Gallery, Shanghai, China

'Nature Gone Astray', a group show at Edouard Malingue Gallery in Shanghai, circles around a set of tales that seem to ask: what happens when nature goes off track? A range of loosely connected works – each occupying its own intellectually consistent and coherent world – engage with botanical histories and nonhuman futures.

Long fascinated by wild plants and weeds – and their roles as political symbols across history – artist and scholar Zheng Bo proposes an 'eco-queer' aesthetics in his recent work, drawing together queer bodies, laboratory plants and botanical manuscripts. Zheng's 17-minute film *Pteridophyllia I* (2016) deploys a new term coined by the artist: a reference to affection – or, in the classical Greek sense, 'brotherly love' – for pteridophyta plants (a now invalid taxon for a species that reproduces via spores rather than flowers or seeds). In Zheng's film, these ferns, which engage in concealed asexual reproduction, are foregrounded as protagonists. Drenched in eroticism, *Pteridophyllia I* follows a group of naked Taiwanese male performers as they lose themselves in a forest of ferns at



the Yangmingshan National Park near Taipei. Either individually or collectively, they begin to scratch and masturbate with the ferns. There's a sense of primitivism but, predominantly, a vitalism in the blend of blazing sunlight, human bodies and plants. Zheng's film serves as a subtle critique of anthropocentrism, in its production of an environmental theatre filled with nonhuman desire.

Miljohn Ruperto and Ulrik Heltoft's 'Voynich Botanical Studies' photographic series (2013–ongoing) re-imagines the mysterious 15th-century Voynich manuscript, which is filled with a mass of illustrations of unidentifiable plants alongside cosmic symbols and as-yet undeciphered text. The manuscript has been an ongoing mystery since it was purchased in 1912 by the Polish book dealer Wilfrid Voynich, with each attempt to decode it (most recently using artificial intelligence) doomed to failure. Employing digital-imaging software, the artists have used three-dimensional modeling to render an image of each of the manuscript's plants. These digital files have, in turn, been converted into negatives and, finally, into a series of silver gelatin prints. The artists were greatly influenced by German photographer Karl Blossfeldt's detailed images of plants and animals from the 1920s.

Meanwhile, Beijing-based artist Liu Xinyi offers a spatial and olfactory intervention throughout the exhibition. Liu's *Guerrilla Squad* (2018) consists of seven line-marking wooden trucks, each carrying a single commodity (curry powder, coffee, salt, sesame seeds, Sichuan peppercorn, chilli powder or loose tea). Each vehicle becomes a marker of the 'territorial difference' between China and one of seven other nation states, and bilateral trade between these countries today. (The words for 'boundary' are printed in Chinese, Hindi, Russian and other languages across each car). Soon, the gallery is filled with the pungent scent of these spices. Alongside these works, Liu presents a series of fake airline posters ('Next Stops', 2018). Reflecting the artist's wry humour, the posters advertise the hamlet of China in upstate New York, or the municipality of Lachine in Quebec – which bear only nominal similarities to 'China'. But those looking for a more serious punchline behind Liu's superficial wit will be disappointed. Whether viewing nature through an eco-queer lens, or as a cosmic, alien force, any critical perspective on the human-nonhuman binary in 'Nature Gone Astray' remains ambivalent.

Xin Zhou