



**virocode**

In a sense,  
It is only right  
When things  
go wrong.

**life was never what it used to be**

**molecular mischief & information pathologies 1987 – 2023**

# **virocode**

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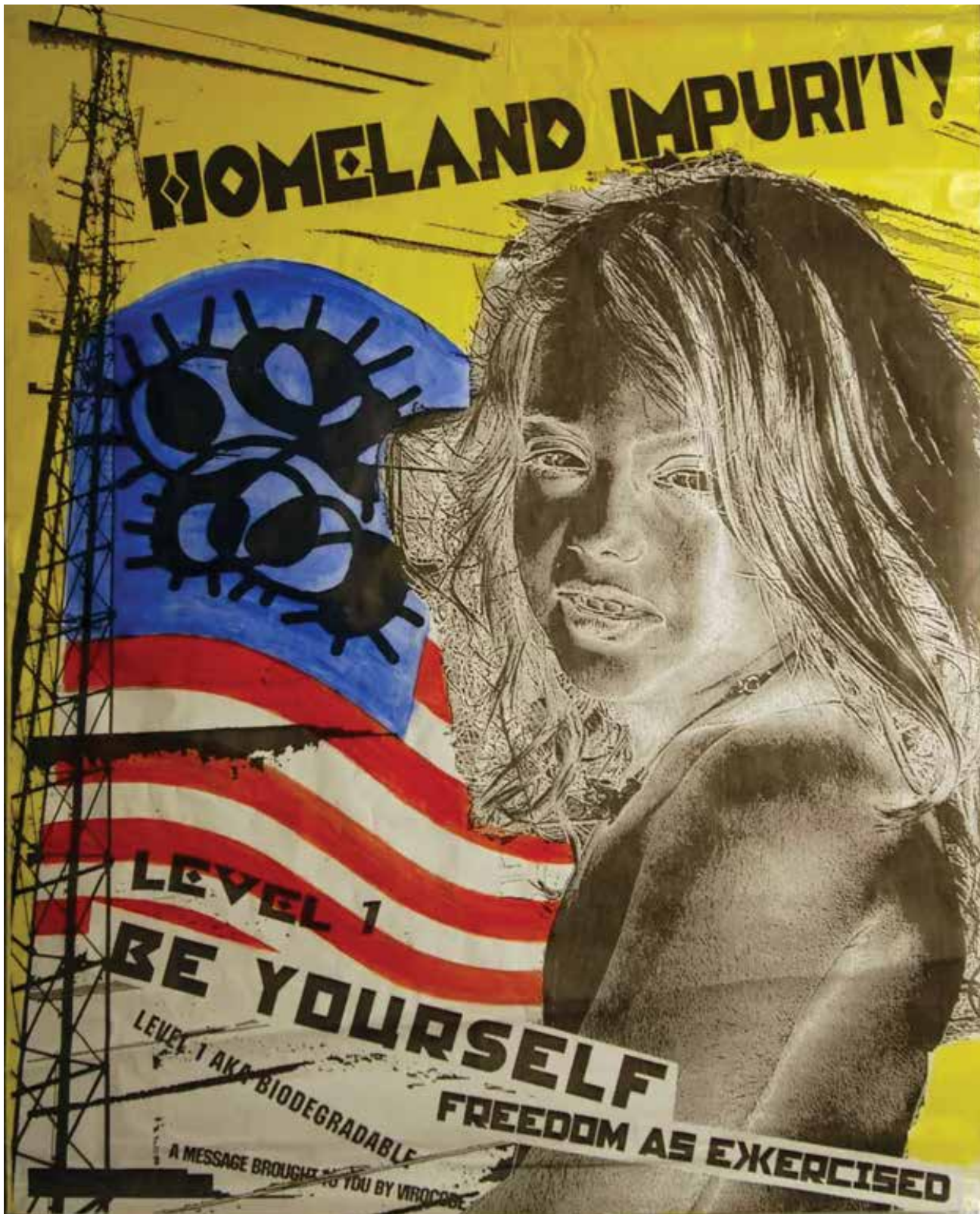
**life was never what it used to be**

**molecular mischief  
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1987 – 2023**

**9.15.23 – 10.27.23**







*Homeland Impurity, Level 1*, 2004, electrostatic print and acrylic on paper

front cover: *Explore The Source 6* from the series *A Disappearance Of The Source* 2011, pigmented inkjet print, carbon, and beeswax

previous page: production photo, *A Disappearance Of The Source*, 2011

Especially in a post-Covid world, the designation “virocode” takes on heightened meaning and seems to suggest some insider’s insight into the human relationship with an infectious reality. Is there a secret “code” to dissembling our relationship to infections and disease? Is it a warning sign? Does it suggest our manipulation of the biological for purposeful or ambiguous reasons? Is the code a semi-secret key to deciphering our response to the natural world? Or is it a science fiction-style guise through which we can address organisms outside of ourselves that impact our own organic selves and our place in the wider world of the Anthropocene? Is our place in the current epoch waning or succumbing to hidden entities and unseen realities beyond our control or ability to impact? Are we the infected or the infecting?

That an artist’s name selected by Andrea Mancuso and Peter D’Auria in the late 1980s continues to sound not only current and relevant but futurist in its questions and implications demonstrates the importance of solid conceptual grounding. I have found, over the long course of time that, despite dealing with issues for which people typically might have strong opinions—disease, the natural world, the evolution of the self—virocode have doggedly pursued a kind of agnosticism toward the subject matter they explore. It is always the greatest strength of artists that they apply effective questions more than describe specific answers. It’s an essential ambiguity that enables both creativity and neutrality in equal measure.

One of their most recent projects, *Seedlings*, exemplifies numerous strands of the virocode. A photographic document of cell phones towers across the country—framed via their camouflaged appearance within the natural world—the work is humorous and also filled with dark portent. The work is not a harbinger about the advance of technology threatening to consume the world, it is

the expression of a reality already accomplished. There is no indictment or complaint in the work. If anything, the towers are affectionately documented in elegantly-captured images, installed together in an erratic succession of undeniable realities. virocode understand that “warning signs” are moot when the threatening phone call is coming from inside the house.

*Seedlings* connects to another set of ideas suggested in *Now Itness*, *They Nature*, a series of untethered and non-specific images of the natural world in which the suggestion is made that perhaps the landscape—of our world, our culture—does not exist outside of the body but is inclusive of the body. We are It as much as we examine It, explore It, despoil It. We are the landscape. Which perhaps sounds obvious but it bears repetition—our bodies and our selves are holistic components of the world in which we find ourselves. The virus, treated as alien and other, is a part of us as we are part of the landscape. The distinctions we apply are arbitrary and birthed from fear and apprehension, they are not necessarily distinctions that

objectively exist. It is this keen observation that allows for that agnosticism, a non-judgmental attitude toward world outside the body because the world outside the body is part of the same world as the body.

In *Virus Faces*, an animated video displays lush, AI-generated renditions of cellular activity that, every few seconds, morph into exaggerated smiley faces for a brief moment before dissolving into new forms. Nothing to see here, nothing to fear here. It's a work that is blatantly comical in its goofy rendering while demonstrating an underlying and persistent relationship. The infections and biological conditions from which the image is sourced are not an external reality but a shared, internal reality. The sloppy smiles that emerge repeatedly in the video are filled with a kind of pathos of acknowledgment. The lopsided mugs that emerge from the biological much seem to contain a sheepish acknowledgement: Yeah, we're you, what are you gonna do about it? Exactly. What are we going to do? At the very least, we ought to acknowledge the inescapable reality. What we might consider "other" is merely an extension of the self.

This fluid iteration of self+presumed other begs the obvious question of its beginning to this condition but virocode have always been (fairly) clear about this (ambiguous) question—this is not the way things have become (as a result of history, civilization, or technology) but may more likely be the way things have always been. And it would serve us best to recognize this. A current state does not prove or signal a previous state. In a video and photographic project, *A Disappearance Of The Source*, virocode illustrates ignited sparks

that crawl along a path of powder that vanishes as the spark eats its way along the path, leaving no trace of the source of the ignition.

There is a suggestion that, if there is a source, it's irrelevant because you blinked and now it's gone. It's a delicate material realization of a gossamer idea: "The present predicts a past but does not prove it." It's a work that cuts to the core of knowledge and certainty—what can you know and how can you know it? It addresses the origin of the present, but rather than positing uncertainty as a problem, it posits this unknowable as an advantage. If past circumstances are unknowable, that ambiguity feeds the present and future in a way that implies multiple future paths. If uncertainty describes the past, possibility fuels the future.

In an adjacent series, *Evolving Moisture*—photographs depicting the frozen realization of punctured water balloons—virocode further exemplify this sense of the possible as both a specific "shape," a form that can be conceptually grasped, but one that contains imminent change as a pre-condition. In these works, the promise of change is perpetual, a possibility we viewers interpret as inevitable. Like much of their work, *Evolving Moisture* presents a specific and acutely-realized aesthetic form that doubles as a thematic lynchpin for many of their underlying ideas. Their sense of the possible is keenly connected to the notion of adaptation, the idea that the future relies upon variable outcomes and our ability to adapt to conditions as they manifest. It's a deep theme to draw from punctured water balloons but is the kind of expression that provides the resonance we seek in artistic expression.



As if to further their open-ended perspective—about the future, specifically—virocode runs along parallel tracks. There is the sense of the possible and all roads being open. There is also *No Plan For The Future*, a pre-pandemic-era project that coalesced around political and social futility and included photographs (often depicting spilled drinks or collapsed desserts), sculptures (of spilled drinks), Instagram posts, and wheat-pasted images on plywood. The humorous futility at the heart of the project is belied somewhat by its energetic, colorful, almost ebullient aspect. If there is no plan for the future, there remains a wildly enthusiastic manner of expressing this ennui. In itself, this demonstrates the duality that is ever-present in virocode's practice—darker themes are present, even prevalent sometimes, but their depiction is often dialed into an acute iteration that draws upon visual allure and a dynamic way of perceiving and describing the world.

Throughout their work, virocode frequently utilize blunt, specific cues to signal much wider implications. Plastic coffee cups lids, collected over years, serve as the foundation for a particular gridded arrangement that visually evokes a periodic table, as though plasticity were a basic element that demands categorization and consideration. In the malleable work *YoPlastic*, their proposition is the creation of a genetically-modified yogurt that will aid in the digestion of the various micro-portions of plastic that we already consume. It's a work that incorporated performance, sculpture, and even experiments in a biological laboratory. It was at once a frivolous and comical while incorporating a bleak and factual reality at

its core. With virocode, there is always space for the absurd to share a realm with bleak reality.

These perpetual descriptions of ways in which we, as a species, inhabit and respond to the world are hauntingly evoked through less complex maneuvers as well. virocode do not explicitly express notions of landscape in their work, but landscape is a perpetual touchstone. Often, their depiction of the land might include a built man-made intrusion within the landscape (lamp posts, cell towers, left-over rubble), the elegant detritus of our social-industrial history. Sometimes, their landscape images depict scenarios of eerie stillness. In some, portals appear to suggest a passage to another realm through a means that is both clearly evident at the same time it is hidden in plain sight.

As indicated, virocode are not dogmatic about their artistic expressions. They have rarely made pronouncements about the world, though they are deeply invested in its condition, and our condition within it. They take the world as-is and project forward, accepting all future conditions as possible. "The now exists in bloom and relic." The present, the now, is recognized as containing material reality and immaterial possibility. And possibility contains both risk and opportunity. virocode are entirely comfortable with—or at least accepting of—contradictory impulses. And it is this acceptance that nourishes growth, acceptance, and possibility.

John Massier

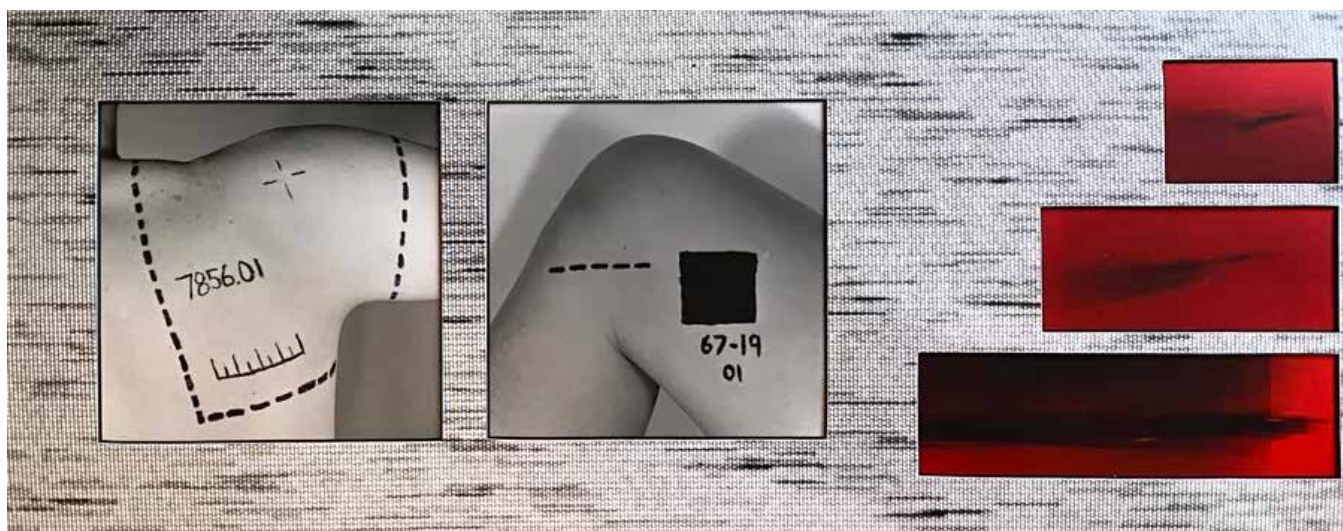
Visual Arts Curator

we already have many well reasoned burdens  
we need to allow for catastrophic beauty  
we need to value adorable disasters  
we need to plan ahead and live in the moment



from the series *Now Itness, Thy Nature, Pensacola Beach*  
2021, pigmented inkjet print on watercolor paper





*Preparing The Body*  
1989, gelatin silver prints toned





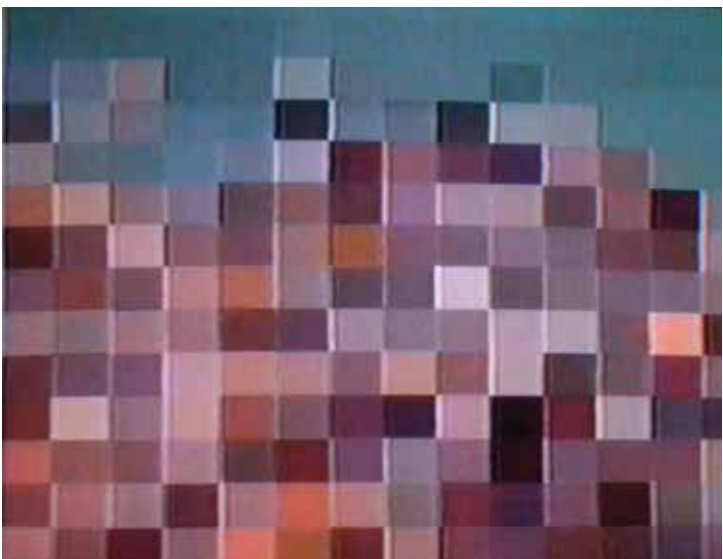
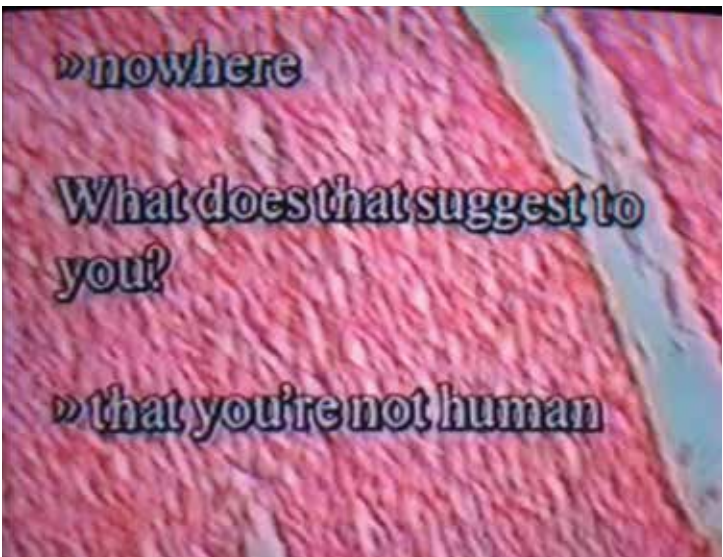
hasn't your inner voice asked you before after achieving some  
new level of failure: why did this work so well last time / didn't we do  
everything the same way / didn't it just work a second ago

from the series *In Which Nature Abhors A Vacuum, Josephine* 1993, framed color coupler print with engraved brass plate: "Abnormal to Josephine was another normal, a naive description from a culture plagued by an intimacy with an illness all its own. Her disease was a component of her health and her life and uncertain cure."

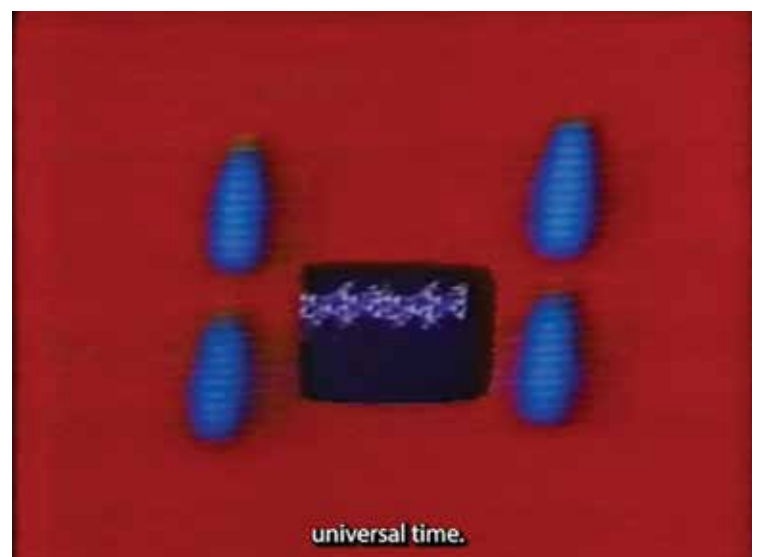


*Unsettling from the series Universal Precautions  
2004, dye coupler print*

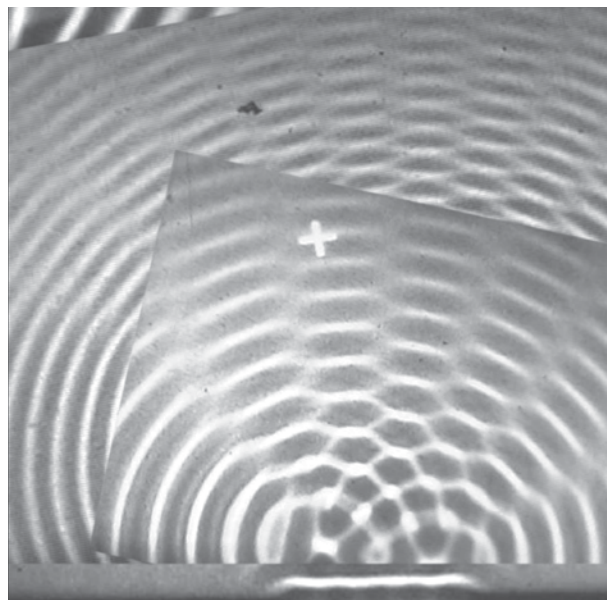
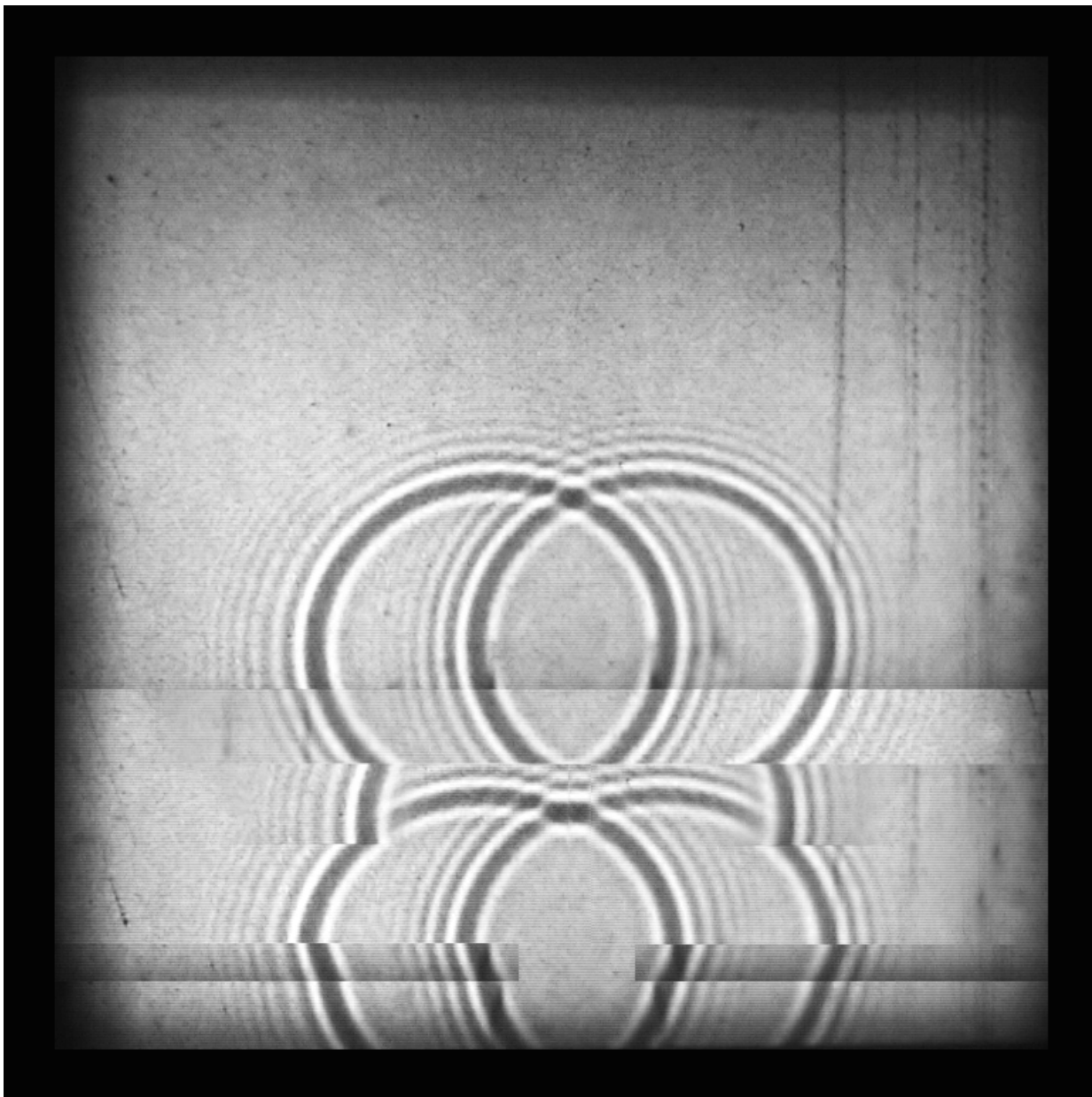




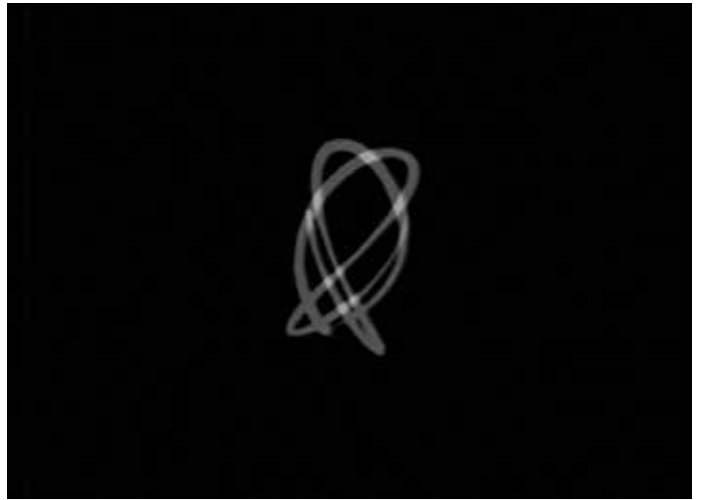
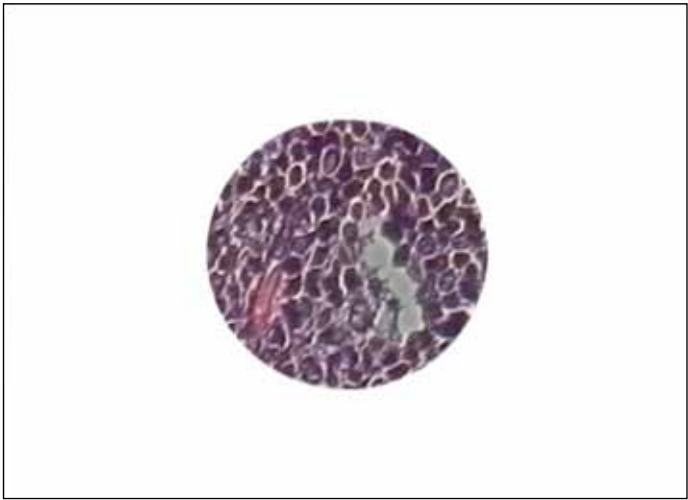
*Elisa, Are You There?*  
1997, 3:10 trt, video







from the series *An Improbable Waveform*  
2007, pigmented inkjet prints

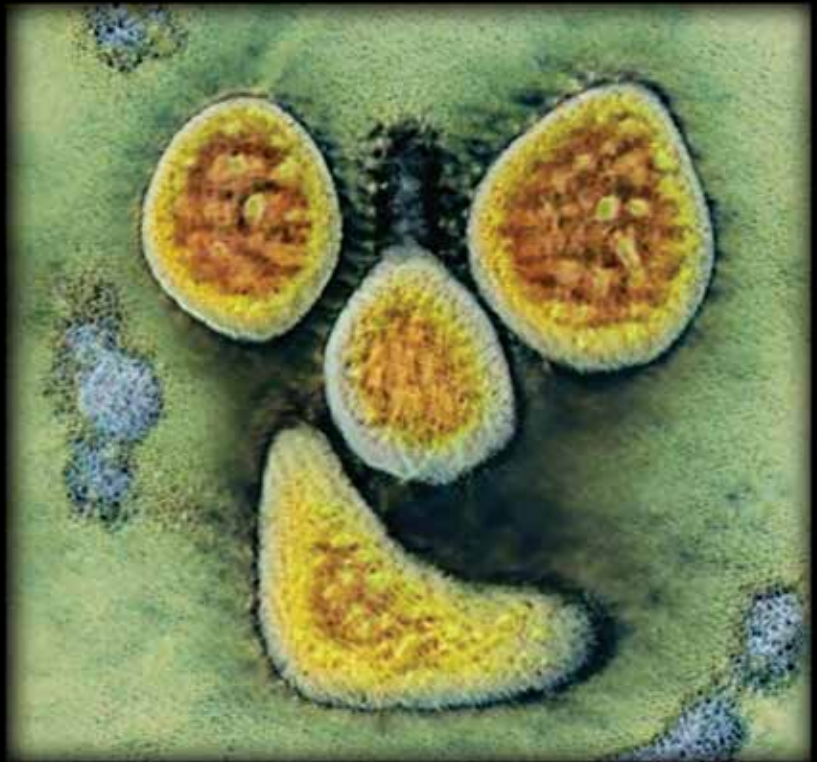






*Evolving Moisture 4 & 7, 2010, pigmented inkjet prints, resin, wood*  
*A Disappearance Of The Source 4 & 8, 2011, pigmented inkjet print, carbon, beeswax, wood*

The now exists  
in bloom and relic,  
in the becoming  
and the was.



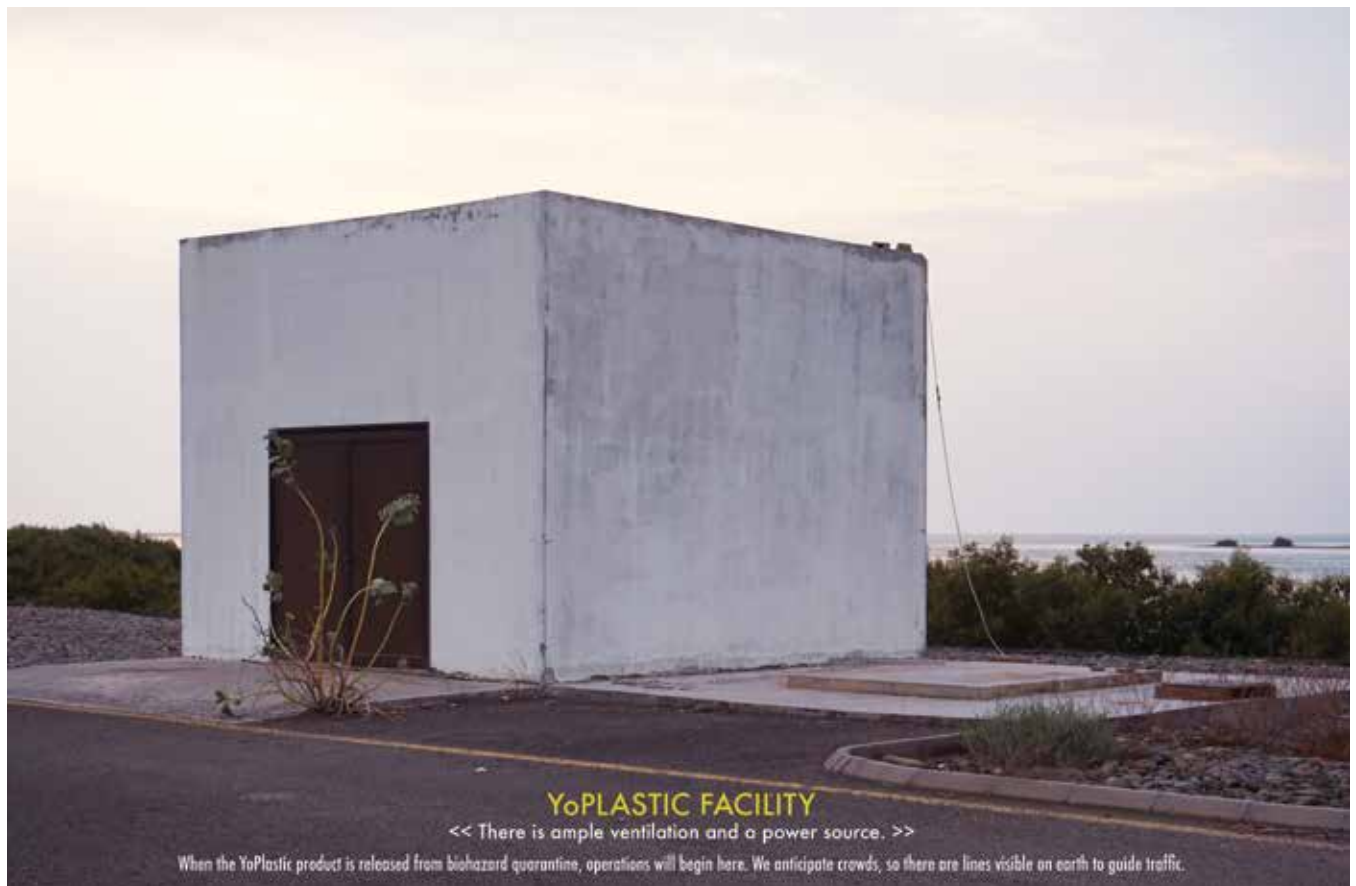




when our origins have gone  
we need new destinations

from the series *Now Itness, Thy Nature, Alabama, Florida*  
2021, pigmented inkjet print on watercolor paper

we need brilliant ideas and stupid ideas which both solve the problem well



*YoPlastic Facility*  
2018/2023, pigmented inkjet print on watercolor paper



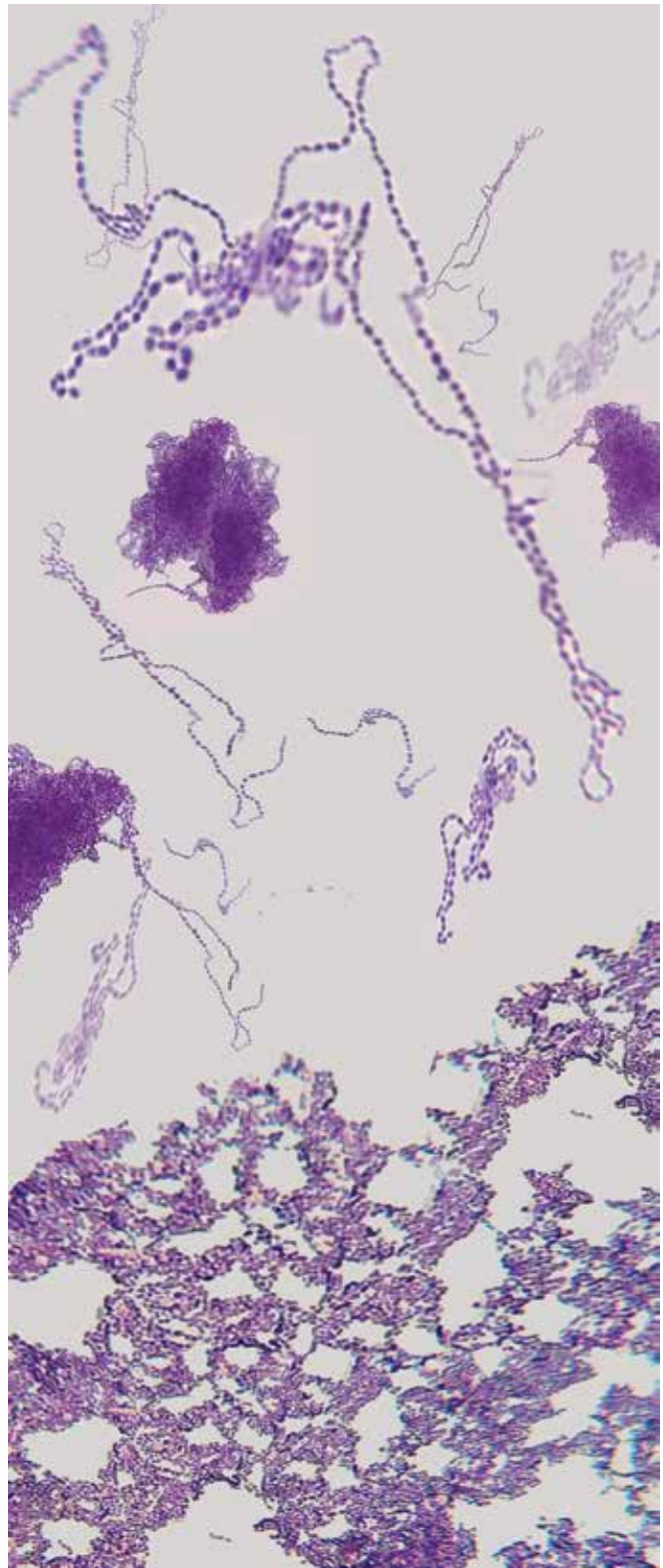
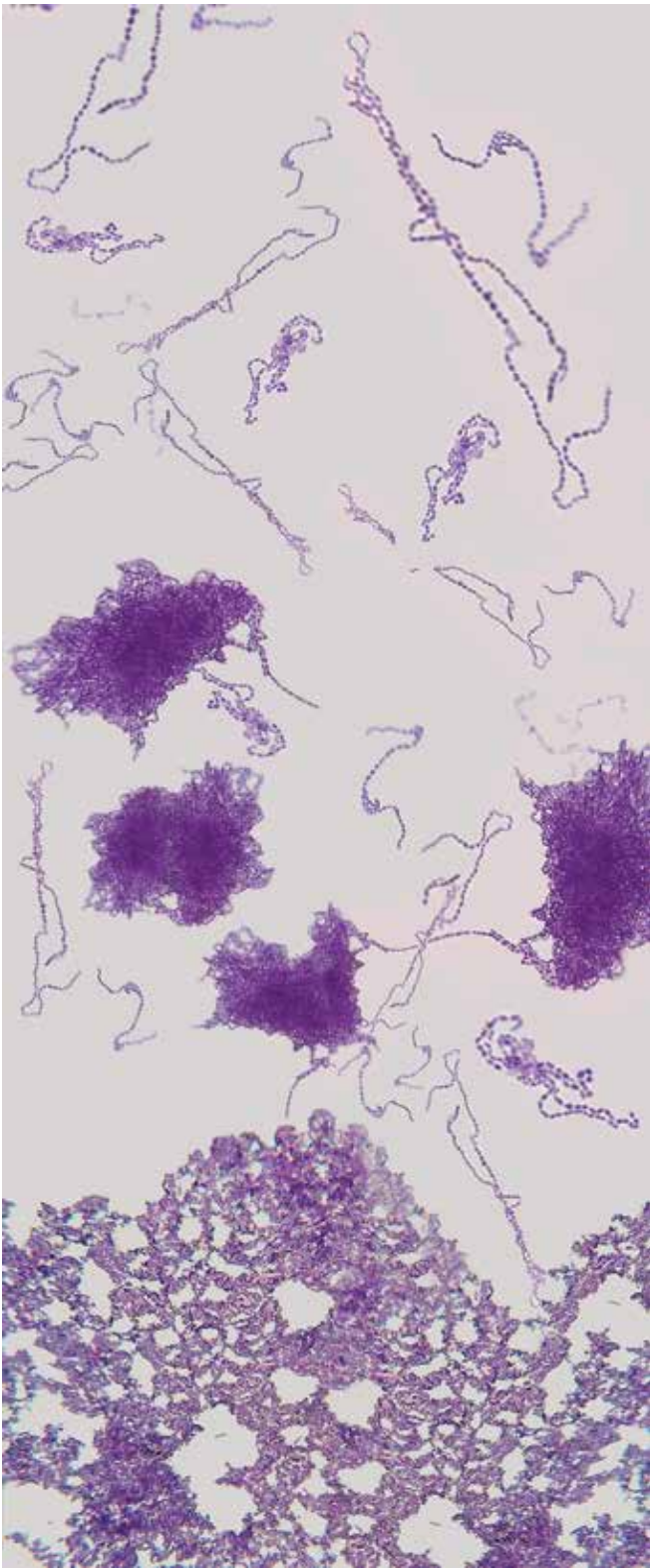




YoPlastic is food.  
YoPlastic digests the plastic we eat within us.  
YoPlastic digests the container it comes in.  
YoPlastic is good for you.  
YoPlastic is fine and it should be released.

*YoPlastic digested cups*  
2019, pigmented inkjet print





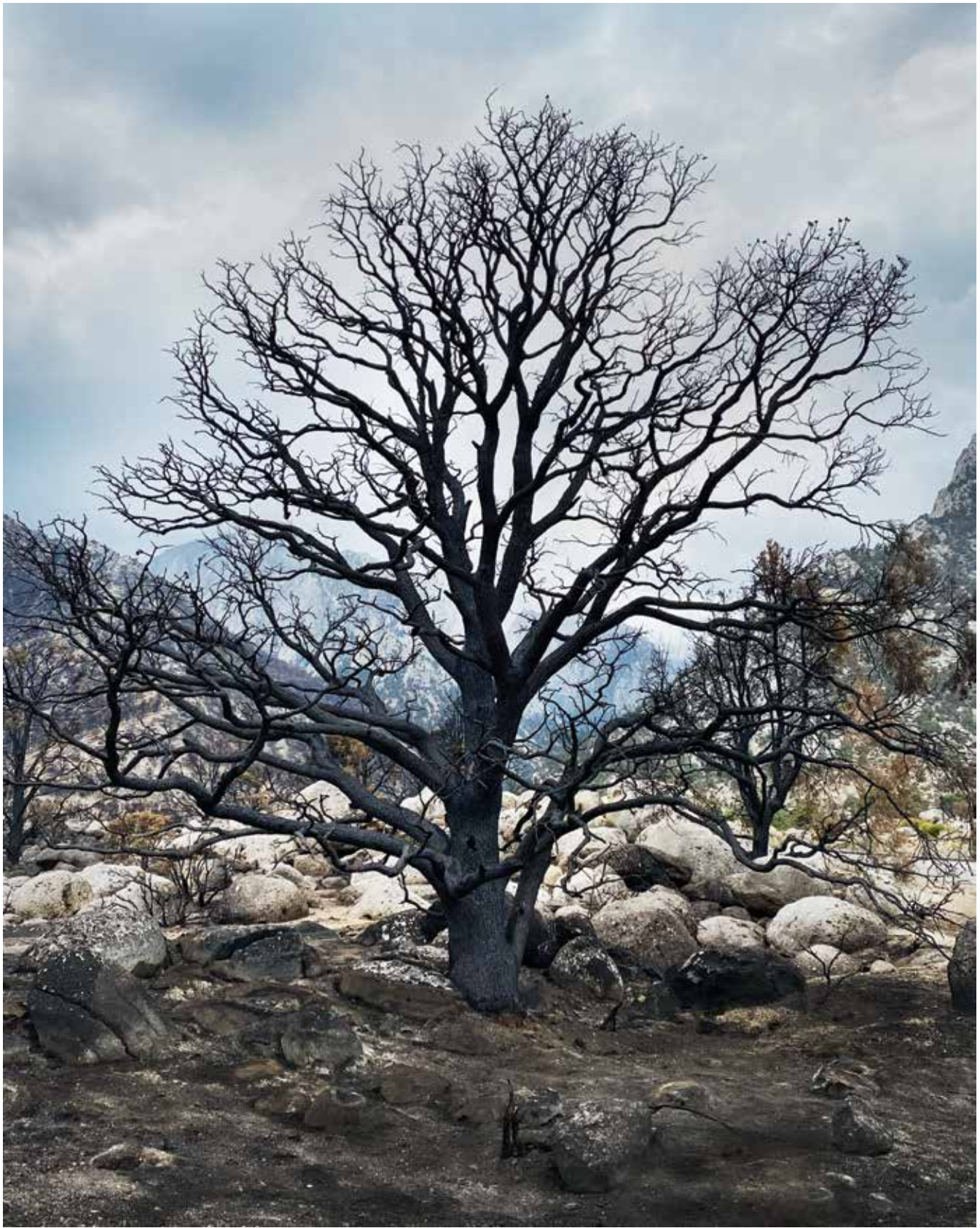
at another speed,  
in another wavelength,  
at a different magnification

*YoPlastic Transgenic PETase modification of Steptococcus thermophilus in culture  
with Lactobacillus bulgaris, 2018, pigmented inkjet prints*



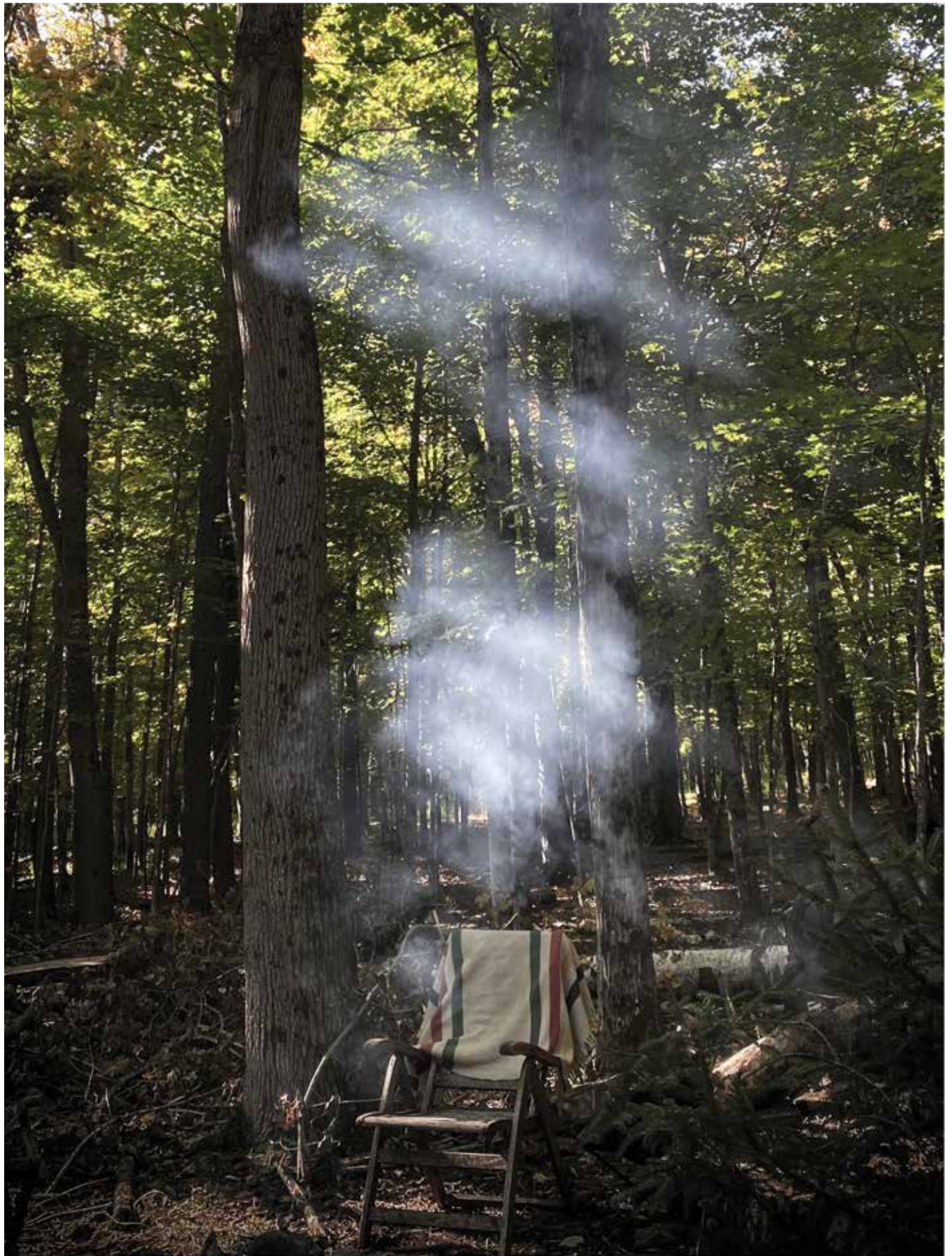
*YoPlastic digested plastic*, 2019, pigmented inkjet print  
*YoPlastic Ted: A Play*, 2019, performance with Kristen Tripp Kelley, Paloma D'Auria





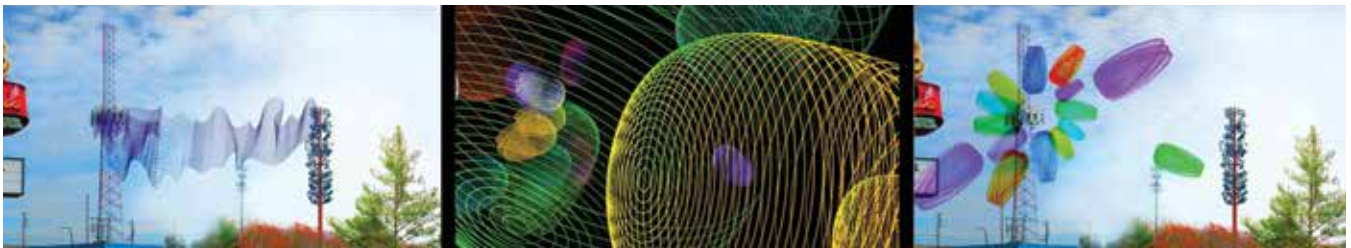
from the series *Now Itness, Thy Nature, Whitney Portal*  
2021, pigmented inkjet print on watercolor paper





from the series *Now Itness, Thy Nature*, Keene  
2021, pigmented inkjet print on watercolor paper





*Seedlings*  
2021, pigmented inkjet prints infused on aluminum with hardware

## Seedlings:

We saw these towers <sup>1</sup>

We went to these towers <sup>2</sup>

-----SS\$

We recorded these towers <sup>3</sup>

These towers face other towers <sup>4</sup>

We could see those towers too <sup>5</sup>

Those towers transmit to these towers <sup>6</sup>

-----',=====

Those towers make waves <sup>7</sup>

We cannot see those waves <sup>8</sup>

The waves reshape other waves <sup>9</sup>

We made waves you can see <sup>10</sup>

-----==////////

These waves connect the towers <sup>11</sup>

The towers connect the waves <sup>12</sup>

-----=====

We plant towers we feel we need <sup>13</sup>

There are many towers we plant <sup>14</sup>

We feel good about the towers <sup>15</sup>

They make waves for us to need with <sup>16</sup>

-----|||€

We plant more towers <sup>17</sup>

And feel more waves <sup>18</sup>

We change how we feel <sup>19</sup>

About these towers <sup>20</sup>

-----(((0)))+

The towers are seedlings <sup>21</sup>

There will always be towers <sup>22</sup>

1 as of 2020 there were 417,215 cell towers registered in the US

2 images were recorded in the USA by land travel from east to west and north to south boundaries

3 over 800 files generated

4-5 towers are generally oriented along elevated sight line reckoning with triangulation to other towers via python implementation

6-8 wavelengths of 10-1000m and frequencies of 450-2700 MHz are characteristic of radio frequency energies (sub infra red and sub visible spectrum). Though these energies are not enough to ionize (break chemical bonds) there is increasing evidence that these energies communicate more than just the visible and auditory data we use them for.

9-10 There are numerous sources of EMF disruption and distortion. Any energy source from a cardiac implant to the sun generates EMFs and the interference patterns are dynamic. The transmission patterns from cell towers can vary ("orthogonal frequency division multiplexing") and software is used to encode a meaning humans can appreciate. These image captures also use software to encode meaning to appreciate.

11-12 The same physical properties of energy and mass interactions that effect biological entities also effect non biological beings.

13 Average cost to construct a cell tower in the USA is \$150,000- \$200,000

14-16 Humans have seeded the earth with many types of inorganic, manufactured objects. These objects are our constant companions with which we have co-evolved.

17 Humans have planted earth objects on other celestial objects, primarily on moons, planets, asteroids, and a star which we have not visited. These plantings will be there to greet us if we arrive.

18 Organic and inorganic objects require the energy of various EMF waves to enable their existence.

19-20 Reality does not change. Our perception of reality changes.



*Mitosis* from the series *Classroom 207*  
1996, pigmented inkjet print from Polaroid negative





The now has both aliveness and itness which are equally being.  
Although our aliveness distinguishes between these states , it is a construct  
to do so. The terrain between these constructs is so entwined it is one,  
so curved it is straight, so apparent it is invisible.

In a sense,  
It is only right  
When things go wrong.

Therefore,  
virocode

from the series *Now Itness, By Nature, Brooklyn*  
2021, pigmented inkjet print on watercolor paper

# virocode

is the collaborative practice of Andrea Mancuso, Claudia D'Auria, and Peter D'Auria that explores the balance between the inorganic and the organic through an artmaking practice that seeks to capture and reveal blossoming inorganic life. virocode has long been concerned with investigating symbiotic relationships between the organic and inorganic—in a non-judgmental manner and with an open question about our collective relationship to the Anthropocene. By virtue of the wide lens through which virocode approaches the world, alterations within the current epoch are just that, and our intense relationship with the non-biological has only just begun.

virocode has been exhibiting work in photography, video, installation and the digital arts throughout the United States and in Europe including: The Museum of Modern Art and Paul Robeson Gallery in the New York City metropolitan region; Artist Television Access, Artspace, Southern Exposure Gallery, and the Emanuel Walter and Etholl McBean Galleries in San Francisco; The Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, California, Diverseworks Art Space in Houston, Texas, The University of Arizona Art Gallery, in Tucson, Arizona, Impakt Festival in The Netherlands, the European Media Art Festival in Osnabruck, Germany and at the Albright Knox Art Gallery, Burchfield-Penney Art Center, CEPA gallery, Squeaky Wheel and Hallwalls in Buffalo, New York. virocode began working together at the State University of New York at Buffalo, studying with Marion Faller, Paul Sharits and Tony Conrad.

Andrea Mancuso received her PhD in Visual Studies and her BA from the State University of New York at Buffalo, and her MFA in Performance/New Genre from the San Francisco Art Institute studying with Doug Hall, Margaret Crane, John Winet, Kathy Acker and Tony Labat. Andrea teaches contemporary art and film in Buffalo, New York as well as the Middle East, where she is also directing traffic. She is currently an Art21 Educator in residence. Peter D'Auria received a BA in Art and MA in Pathology from the State University of New York at Buffalo School of Health and Biomedical Sciences, and a Physician Assistant Degree from Dae-men College. Peter has worked as a research scientist and test subject, medical lecturer, concrete worker, and is currently in clinical practice in the Buffalo area. [www.virocode.com](http://www.virocode.com)

Claudia D'Auria has exhibited artwork at MOMA in New York City, MOMA PS1 in Queens, New York, YoungArts Jewel Box Gallery in Miami, Florida, and Box Gallery in Buffalo, New York. Claudia graduated with a BArch degree from The Cooper Union in New York and was a resident artist at AZ West studio in Joshua Tree where she completed a thesis on the cultural impact of the colonial myth of 'wilderness.' Claudia has worked for the Museum of Modern Art, Creative Time, Imagination of Space House on Governors Island, and Eric Forman Studio. She is currently an Architectural Designer at Terreform in Brooklyn and lives with a lizard named "erth" or maybe it's "rth," lizards have trouble with vowels. [www.claudiadauria.com](http://www.claudiadauria.com)

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