

Substantialis Corporis Mixti

(Substantial Form of the Blended Body)

THE SYNERGIES EXHIBITION OF THE BASEL, ROTTERDAM AND STOCKHOLM CONVENTIONS



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The challenge of hazardous chemicals can appear invisible and remote to many of us.

While science offers us the rationale and objective evidence of the risks, art connects the heart: In doing so it can move and mobilize each and of all of us to act in new and transformative ways.

This is the twin goal of the Safe Planet campaign, an initiative of the United Nations and its three global chemicals and hazardous wastes treaties known as Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm in short.

Several high profile individuals have agreed to have themselves tested in order to spotlight the sobering fact that all of us are tainted to a greater or lesser extent by chemicals.

Equally, that these substances are everywhere and respect no gender, race, income bracket, country or Continent.

Substantialis Corporis Mixti or Substantial Form of the Blended Body exhibition brings the power of art centre stage into the debate, offering via the canvass and the camera a new dimension and perspective to this global challenge.

The works underline not only the tragedy of an unsustainable path, but the beauty of the natural world at risk from a failure to intelligently and creatively respond.

Chemicals have transformed the modern world including the worlds of science and of art.

The challenge is not to live without chemicals, but to ensure their production, use and disposal leaves a footprint on this and future generations that is light and respects all living things.

On behalf of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, I would like to thank the Czech Center New York for their support for this pioneering artistic endeavor. And also thank the artists whose work is not only provocative but persuasive and perceptive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Achim Steiner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Achim" and last name "Steiner" clearly distinguishable.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director

Safe Planet: the United Nations Campaign for Responsibility on Hazardous Chemicals and Wastes

Safe Planet is an ambitious campaign for ensuring the safety of human health and the environment against hazardous chemicals and wastes. This global public awareness and outreach campaign is designed to show how we can take responsibility for keeping the planet safe from these harmful substances.

Safe Planet has invited high-profile individuals to share human bio-monitoring information with the wider public. Human bio-monitoring is a method of assessing the toxic chemical burden increasingly borne by the life of our planet.

The Campaign will highlight solutions to the growing problem of hazardous chemicals and wastes that are available through initiatives undertaken by the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, the leading United Nations treaties addressing the issue globally.

These conventions share the common objective of protecting human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and waste. They can assist countries in safely managing chemicals at different stages of their life cycle, to protect the natural cycles of life.

Safe Planet Co-Chairs

Nao Badu (Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea)

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Olga Speranskaya (Moscow, Russian Federation)

Sharon Sprung (New York, USA)

Jeremy Wates (Bantry, Ireland)

Substantialis Corporis Mixti

Substantialis Corporis Mixti is from the work *De Mixtione Elementorum* ("On the mixture of the elements", circa 1272) by Thomas Aquinas.

In this short scientific work, Aquinas seeks to understand how the manner in which the modern elements behave in combination, and in particular the aggregation of imperceptible bodies (aggregatione corporum insensibilium), impact the nature of corporeal bodies.



Chris Jordan
Untitled, from
"Midway: Message from the Gyre", 2009

In September 2009, Chris Jordan photographed the bodies of Albatross chicks that had dropped to their deaths on Midway Atoll, a remote marine sanctuary in the middle of the North Pacific. The decomposed bodies revealed skeletal and feather remains along with a remarkable gathering of elements visible in the place of the birds' stomachs. Bright and sharp bits of plastic, colorful minutia from bottle caps to cigarette lighters filled their bellies refusing to be the food their parents must have thought they were feeding them. They are direct and unadorned images, fascinating because they reveal an unwitting hoax on the more base instincts of life on this planet.

In considering the "Blended Body" exhibition of the United Nations Safe Planet Campaign with its oblique focus on chemical body burden, the enormity and breadth of the issue became very real. Chris Jordan's photographs are not images of human bodies but assert a tragedy human parents would hope never to identify with. As such, the birds act as a powerful metaphor for humans to consider the residue of our invention and action as it affects our planet, the multitude of species we share the planet with, and our own bodies.



Barbara Benish
Bruno VII, 2001-2002

"The dolphins of Bohemia" are how Barbara Benish has affectionately referred to her images of some of the earth's most intelligent animals. A resident of the Czech Republic, Benish's work expressing the plight of the dolphin is unearthed in her images of "Bruno", a chemically-ravaged toy dolphin standing in for the fates of those living in the seas of the world. Benish compares this modern vestige of an animal to dolphins reproduced on the Palace walls of Knossos three millennia ago. Here, the animals exist in a harmonious and rhythmic composition, frolicking on the walls of an ancient dwelling. Images of Bruno displace this idyllic play with a jarring contrast of photographic and painted surface. *Bruno VII* presents the dolphin with large patches of discoloration. They feel rancid, corrosive, compared to a healthy dolphin. This caustic permutation of the skin provides a visible reference to the effects "the aggregation of imperceptible bodies" – the chemical pollution found in the Mediterranean – wage on living dolphins.

The threat is not confined to the Mediterranean; organochlorine contaminants, the products of our chemical culture, have been detected in stomach contents of large marine fish of the Arctic, such as the Greenland shark.

The changing conditions of nature are inevitably swayed by the choices of individuals, affecting not just a fish, a bird, a single stream's crystalline beauty, an ocean's diverse ecology, but the precarious balance of a healthy community of human beings and the diverse assortment of species we share the earth with. No species exists in isolation. The title of this exhibition, *Substantialis Corporis Mixti*, suggests the dynamic constitution of the human body as it is affected by the alteration of elements initiated both by natural forces and human intervention. It allows us to reexamine humanity not as a separate starting point from above and somehow in control of nature, but as a vulnerable cohabiter susceptible to the same consequences of our actions as the albatross and the dolphin.



Miloš Šejn

Javořím potokem, Krkonoše / Being
The Javoří Brook, The Giant Mountains,
27. 7. 2000

Two artists suggest this relationship in grandly different ways. Miloš Šejn is a Czech artist whose career has consistently sought to engage the natural environment. Photographic and video media document the often literal melding of his body within visceral natural settings. Water and plant forms encapsulate and nearly erase the image of his body. Yet, one does not always feel this relationship as being soft, easy, relaxing and safe. Nature is diverse and unrelentingly oblivious to the meanderings of its human offspring.

In his image *Javořím potokem, Krkonoše / Being The Javoří Brook, The Giant Mountains*, Šejn's own face is bent and twisted and pressed intensely against a rock surface. The contortions are not without strain. The shift in scale suggested by the close focus of the camera to the face renders less a human presence than the craggy base of a mountainous landscape. Yet, clearly the face is there and clearly, too, it is Šejn who has made the effort, bent his form, reconstituted his edifice, to meet the rocky surface.

Šejn's film *Grass*, a looping narrative of softly billowing grass, slows time down. It creates a Romantic otherworldliness devoid of human activity. The viewer, though, feels invited in and like *Javořím potokem, Krkonoše*, participates as if visiting another culture where the language and form of these natural elements are to be respected as cohabiters and not fodder for human need.

Floyd Newsum

What's Your Primary?, 2010



A second artist is Floyd Newsum. His work for this exhibition is as broadly undertaken as Šejn's work is intimately conceived. *What's Your Primary?* engages the viewer with three large panels, the top portions of which are an intense red and orange impasto. Beneath this globally warmed sky, in the lower portion, corrugated cardboard with smatterings of white paint are collaged with bits of detritus, grass, an attached chrome water faucet, and in the center panel, in a moment of realism, a small gouache painting on paper depicting the portrait of a young woman. For the young woman, her future lays ahead of her, yet the environment in which she exists offers uncertainty. Outside the frame, lying on the ground in front of the panels, is a small toy bath tube filled with water referring to the constant implied drip of the faucet within the frame just above it, a callous use of an essential resource. We find an American football on the right symbolic of the mass gatherings of social gatherings and the equally mass amounts of plastics consumed and discarded at like events. Centrally, beneath the image of the young woman is a box with bits of organic material and the dried body of a long dead frog. The young woman, her own body linked inextricably to this environment, surely must ask the question: What are humankind's primary concerns?

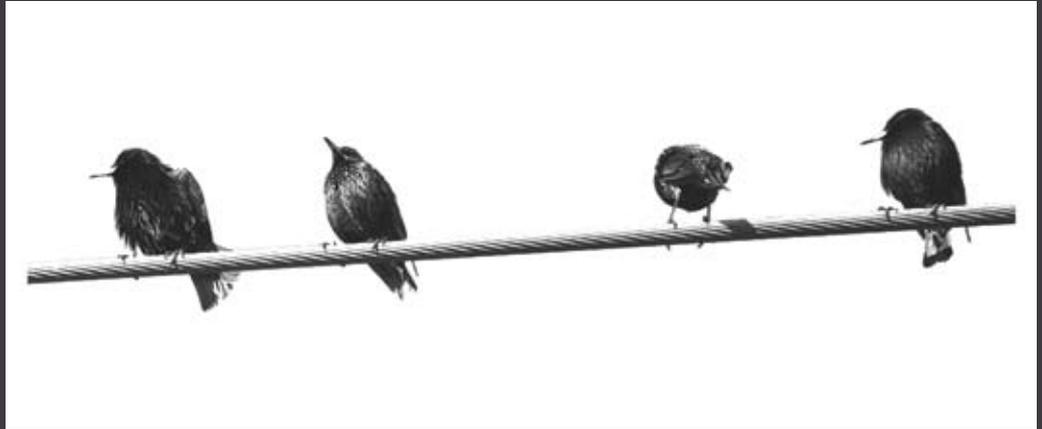


Lynn Randolph
Among Phragmites, 2006

Lynn Randolph has explored the Texas Gulf Coast in a variety of works. *Endangered Species* invites the viewer to a surprise engagement of a group of Whooping Cranes, an endangered species who nest on the coastal shores of Texas, and a young woman who seems to belong more to the world of these birds than to the vicarious nature of our interlude. She looks up and spies us as a wild animal might but not with a look of fright. The relaxed quality of facial expression suggests we are known to her, in fact, one of her. Yet she is different. She exists in an in-between world of wild animal and civilized humanity. She begins to grab a blade of grass. She tells us in this action that our humanity is not so separate from the materials of the earth that give form to our bodies. And, despite the young woman's glowing health, our bodies are as vulnerable to the residue of our choices as the Whooping Cranes are to the impurities in the waters that feed the Gulf of Mexico.

Among Phragmites continues this dialogue as a young woman drops her hand into a pool of water while the care-giving pelicans attend to her. The symbiotic and cyclical in nature is present in the vulture flying above.

In Randolph's recent work, *You Know*, a city burns in the background offering a massive layer of darkened smoke against a transcendent violet moonlit sky. The violet tops of trees in the middle separate the foreground figure from burning civilizations. We speak with the woman facing us and her aviary companion. The conversation is a compliant gesture acknowledging the home we make for ourselves, and the choices, the priorities we set, are clear.



Brian Collier

from "Teach the Starlings", 2006-present

Starlings first came to America by the whim of a gentleman who wished to introduce all the birds represented in Shakespeare's writing into the United States. His releasing of 60 pairs of Starlings into Central Park in New York City at the end of the 19th century began a growing population that now covers the entire North American continent. While the birds themselves are not responsible for their immigrant status, their invasive presence affects the balance of the ecosystem that they have involuntarily entered.

Brian Collier has undertaken the project, *Teach the Starlings*, which examines this balance. His project asks his viewers to provide a nesting site for Starlings and then, exploiting the bird's innate ability to mimic human speech, teach the Starlings to speak the last name of the man who brought them to America, Schieffelin. The birds then teach other Starlings to caw "Schieffelin" and their bond with human intervention is cemented. Entropy in nature inevitably prevents an unchanging ecosystem, but Collier's Starling project asks us, as a species with the gift of contemplation and foresight, to consider the ramifications of our actions. While Collier brings wry humor to his Starlings project, he brings, too, a serious evocation regarding how a seemingly innocuous action can alter an entire continent and the individual life forms that inhabit it.



Anila Quayyum Agha
My Forked Tongue II, 2010

Achieving a global understanding of the challenges posed by hazardous chemicals and waste within the larger issues of biodiversity and human survival seems paramount to the Safe Planet Campaign. Its strategy of exploring these issues through the relative microcosm of the human body invites us to a more comprehensive and inclusive dialogue with diverse human communities. Anila Agha's original work, *My Forked Tongue*, provides a call for such international dialogue. A native of Pakistan now living in the United States, Agha has dealt with political and gender issues in the land of her birth. Her exquisite use of sewing, beading, and textiles symbolizing work traditionally associated with women provides a rich commentary on the freedoms of women. Underlying tenets reveal an artistic intent that addresses equality and freedoms for all people.

In Agha's recent installation, *My Forked Tongue II*, letters from alphabets of different languages hang on threads in an organized harmonious manner. The integration of English, Hindi and Urdu cross-pollinate the base building blocks of language, communication, toward a symbolic universal openness to international relationships. In a world of many languages and sovereign states, this kind of communication seems essential toward building a consensus on the set of global, local and individual actions needed to achieve the goals of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions.

Santiago Cárdenas
Overcoat and Umbrella, 1983



Two other artists in the exhibition bring a focus to the body itself. The Colombian artist Santiago Cárdenas' work, *Overcoat and Umbrella*, depicts the back side of an exquisitely rendered coat held up by a hanger and otherwise suspended on a white ground. The body here is absent – only its shell, its protection remains. It is in some ways a wonderful introduction to the exhibition as it invites the viewer to discard one's shell, to focus on the underlying and more fragile skin of the body. The realism of the image is offset by the lack of color and the medium values that create the image, a wonderful implication of the lifeless quality of the garment versus the dynamic experience of the wearer.

Sharon Sprung offers the exhibition works that suggest what is intentionally absent in the Cárdenas drawing. *The Sari* depicts the unclothed body of a woman, sitting and with her back toward the viewer. We are unable to know or communicate with this woman through the usual methods of speech, eye contact, facial expression. Yet she is, for us, ultimately vulnerable, no garment for protection and no means of reacting to the space of the viewer. Unknowable, she contemplates in her own space but is susceptible to the activities around her. In the case of this exhibition, issues surrounding the United Nations Campaign become a part of those activities. Her body stands in for all of us, ultimately vulnerable to the complex negotiation of a modern technological world where interrelationships of invention may provide unintended and undesired consequences. Sprung's paintings provide a starting point for reexamining the human body as a complex biological marvel not unlike the celebration of the figure in ancient Greece. But different in Sprung's works is the delicacy of the biological system. Unprotected by the Grecian gods, *The Sari* and *CC* contain figures at once elegant and real, their humanity present in its most fundamental manifestation.



Sharon Sprung
CC, 2007

Tangent to Cárdenas and Sprungs' work is Benish's *Body Burden*. The ancient Venus / fertility figures found in the eastern parts of Europe have long been an introductory part of countless art history courses. Amongst the earliest known sculpture produced, these more than twenty thousand year old carvings in stone reflect on the female body as a magical vessel for the remarkable creation of new life. Benish's installation resurrects this *a priori* sentiment, bringing the essence of the human form into a contemporary environment where human intelligence and curiosity again meditate on the human form. Reflective discs and medical tubing symbolize our technological advancement and gift at understanding the world in which we live. At its core, though, the basis of life, the most fundamental of life attributes are not unchanged but connected to continuous evolution. We are reminded of our immense ability to learn, to create. We are reminded of our biological ancestry which is both mysterious and mortal. We are reminded finally that all are needed to contemplate a continued positive presence on this planet.

The mortality of the human body is at the heart of the Safe Planet Campaign. I am hopeful that this exhibition helps us to step back for a moment from modern ensconced living and an assumed separation from the continuum of our environment to reconsider our evolutionary path toward a thoughtful and healthy future.

Chris Jordan *Untitled, from the "Midway: Message from the Gyre" series*, 2009
Barbara Benish *Bruno VII*, c. 30 x 40 cm., 2001-2002
Body Burden, mixed-media, dimensions variable, 2010
Miloš Šejn *Čertovo jezero, Šumava / Devils Lake, Bohemian Forest*, 19. 5. 2001
Javořím potokem, Krkonoše / Being The Javoř Brook, The Giant Mountains,
27. 7. 2000
Grass, 8mm film, 1967
Floyd Newsum *What's Your Primary?*, three panels, 50" x 29" each, plus floor elements, mixed-
media, 2010
Lynn Randolph *Among Phragmites*, 48" x 60" oil on canvas, 2006
Endangered Species, 48" x 60" oil on canvas, 2007
You Know, 60" x 48" oil on canvas, 2010
Brian Collier *Teach the Starlings*, 2006-present
Anila Agha *My Forked Tongue II*, 2010
Santiago Cárdenas *Overcoat and Umbrella*, 1983
Sharon Sprung *The Sari*, 2009, Oil/Panel, 38" x 48",
CC, 2007, Oil/Panel, 40" x 48"
Christopher Edgar *They in themselves like to fire*, poem, 2010

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The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal

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The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade

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