

Alex Impey

←Term.←Lam.←

08.04.17 – 14.05.17

←Term.←Lam.← is a new exhibition by artist Alex Impey developed as part of Satellites Programme 2017.

The exhibition title ←Term.←Lam.← moves our eyes against the flow of text, with the arrows pushing against our instinct to read 'downstream'. The word 'term' has multiple meanings, including being a synonym for word, a reference to a period of time, and with the addition of the full stop a clipped prefix for the word 'terminal'. 'Lam.' is another clipped prefix for lamb, laminae and laming. The multiplicity of meanings and readings created by the title supports the introduction of key ideas within the exhibition, such as asking what 'terminal value' might be, and how processes of sacrifice, displacement and exchange, structure experience.

←Term.←Lam.← is a new sculptural installation drawing on Alex's research into animal motifs, composite materials, divination, and art history. Taking a mirrored form, the exhibition stretches across the gallery walls. This mirroring is informed by art historian Hubert Damisch's observations of symmetrical forms in the early Renaissance fresco *Madonna del Parto* by Piero della Francesca. In this fresco, Damisch notes that the two angels flanking the pregnant Madonna have been painted using a process of flipping a schematic outline of their figures, and both have a human ear shape at their stomach, traced in the folds of their gowns. This effect of warping the normal function of body-plans has been extended to the exhibition, creating two wings that highlight artifice through each side being reducible to a

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deliberately altered copy of the other.

In this mirrored format, there are nest formations produced at a 1:1 scale made with chitin, a natural material derived from crab shells. These are shown alongside a sculpture made from black plastic commonly used for car air-ducts. Stripped of the anticipations guiding its original design and use, this material creates a gridded form mirroring the negative, or internal, space of the nests. The grid motif extends across the walls in drawings made with nails used to repair the hooves of lame cattle. Each material employed in ←Term.←Lam.← has multiple and particular resonances, taken from the engineering practices of animals and processes in which humankind has tried to make sense of the world, adapting nature and animals to its own needs.

Alex Impey is a Glasgow based artist. His practice consists of sculptural installation and writing, which act as speculations on the production and organisation of value. Alex uses the metaphor of a hinge to describe an operation within his practice, where artworks hinge between before (priority) and after (potentiality of experience). In this process, research is metabolised, acting to question assumptions of how artworks can come into existence and how meaning is generated.



In the duplicity of beauty there is the strange trope of a presence which is the shadow of itself, of a being which, anachronously, lurks in its trace.¹

The *Madonna del Parto* was painted in the early renaissance by artist Piero della Francesca, directly on to the wall of the small chapel of Santa Maria di Momentana, in the rural hillside village of Monterchi in Italy. In this original location, it faced to the east and was illuminated by the sunlight cast through a circular opening above the entrance. Although details of the commission are unknown, the fresco dates from the period between 1450–1465, and is thought to have been made in haste by the artist over seven days, in homage to his mother after her death in the nearby town of Sansepolcro.

The fresco is a rare depiction of the Virgin Mary - the *Madonna del parto* 'of childbirth' - as visibly, heavily pregnant. Her duty as a conduit for the birth of Christ is more commonly indicated by a closed book in front of her body, which is physically unchanged. Through immaculate conception her purity is kept intact, and this innocence is implied by the aquamarine pigment that is often used for the colour of her robe. Piero della Francesca's *Madonna* is unbelievably youthful, hunching with the burden of her swollen stomach, in a vulnerable and ambivalent stance that reveals a sense of her humanity, rather than an image of divine remove.

Specular angels are positioned at either side of the composition, drawing open a tent in a symmetrical action to show her presence inside. Only the colours of wings, slippers and robes alternate between them: the emerald clothing of one figure reversed to red on the other. The surface of the parting fabric is embroidered with gold thread; an intricate detail that has faded from one half of the fresco, leaving vanishing silhouettes of the design. The texture of the shelter's interior is diffused and implies fur-lining that forms a

rectangular grid of animal skins. This pattern is extracted from the background and defined on elliptical halos - above the figures of the angels and the *Madonna* - where the hatched lines tilt to mirror the axis of her turning pose. The painted image operates within a logic of flipping, doubling and inversion to distinguish spatial and material qualities across the shifting planes.

Frescoes are composed of elemental matter; of earth, minerals and pigments that become part of the surface of the wall. Their layers are an experiment in lastingness. The *Madonna del Parto* endures as a fragment, bearing signs of its age and displacement caused by architectural adaptations to the chapel, earthquakes, war, conservation and dispute. The tremulous nature of its history is apt for a work whose subject is subtly, quietly, resisting allegory through her own melancholic disposition. As one arm comes to rest on her hip for support, the other meets the curve of an opening in her blue dress, marking the central point of the fresco. Her white under slip is visible in this crevice and in the neckline of the garment, with her fingers resting on the opening at her middle in a peculiar gesture that is almost chaotic to the balance and harmony of the scene. The space appears like a fissure - in the dual sense of the word - forming a narrow line of breakage or a state of incompatibility or dissent: splitting her body in two. Her hand hesitates, suspending this moment of tension to the effect of a tangible pause.

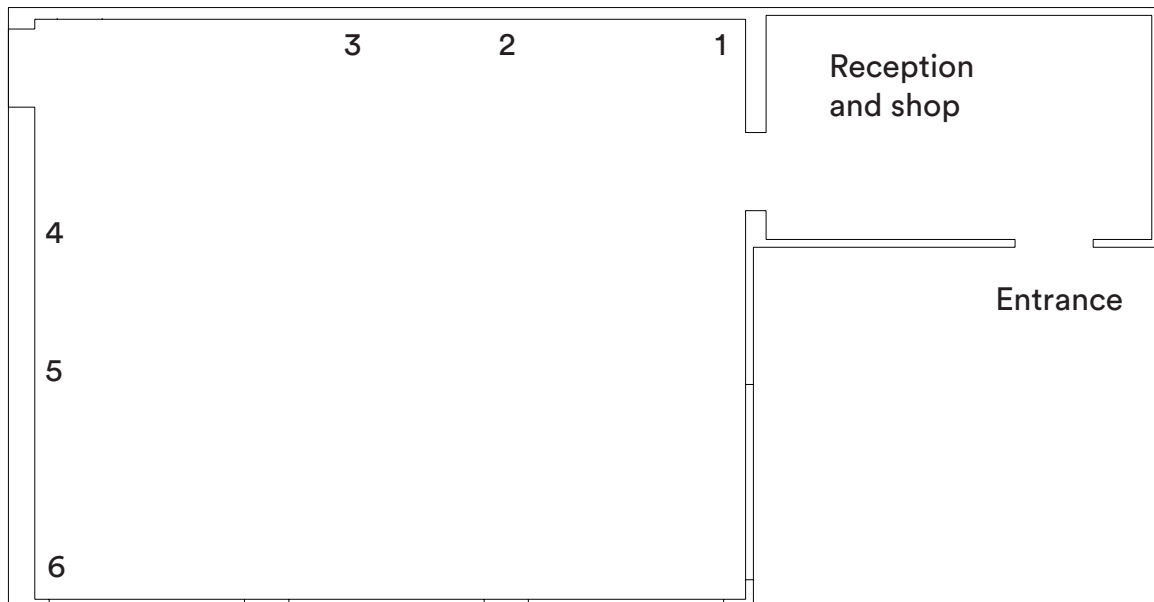
The visual correspondence between the tent and the *Madonna's* womb multiplies within the image like a Russian doll, appearing in her slanting eyelids and downward gaze, although not pertaining to a maternal tenderness. Is she waiting, or bored, or

dreaming? Her psychological state is visible as a material trace through the ambiguous spaces of her garments, with her weary contemplation emerging in white reams at the edges, curves, and contours of her body: from the luminous extremities of her feet to the ribbon at the crown of her head. The absences cut through a work that is full of imagery and mathematical logic, channeling her doubt to create small moments of rupture. As abstractions, these details allow latent self-reflection, for personal meditations can inhabit the strange, uncertain marks of her melancholic purity.

Endnotes

1. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1981), p.93

Grace Johnston lives and works in Glasgow. She graduated from the MLitt Curatorial Practice (Contemporary Art) at The University of Glasgow and The Glasgow School of Art in 2015, where she previously studied Sculpture and Environmental Art. Grace was a participant in Curatorial Studio in 2016. Her recent projects include: *Ours*, Collective, Edinburgh, 2017; *William's Palm*, Glasgow, 2015; and *Earth Wire*, a book made in collaboration with the artist Jamie Kane, 2015. Grace was Associate Producer at Collective and has been commissioned to develop texts as part of Satellites Programme 2017.



1, 2, 6. *Nesting*, custom chitin composite, 2017.

3. *Ocelli (auspicious)*, cow hoof repair nails, 2017.

4. *Ocelli (inauspicious)*, cow hoof repair nails, 2017.

5. *Nesting then*, HDPE plastic, 2017.

The artist would like to thank Jenny, Barbara, Gayle, Pat, Hirofumi and Dominic.

Alex Impey has an MFA from Glasgow School of Art, and a BA from Slade School of Fine Art. Solo exhibitions have been David Dale Gallery, Glasgow (2014), Glasgow Sculpture Studios (2012) and sic! Raum fur Kunst, Lucerne, Switzerland (2012). Group exhibitions include *2HB: What we make with words*, CCA, Glasgow (2011) and *Transmission*, Glasgow (2011). Alex was 2011-12 Glasgow Sculpture Studios Gordon Foundation Graduate Fellow.

←*Term.*←*Lam.*← is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artists based in Scotland. Satellites Programme 2017 includes three solo presentations by selected artists Alex Impey, Adam Lewis Jacob and Ross Little, and two projects by Associate Producers Grace Johnston and Timothea Armour. The programme is specifically developed to facilitate artists at this pivotal point in their career through peer review, professional development, mentoring, exhibitions and events.

Collective is a contemporary visual arts organisation that brings people together around the production and presentation of new work.

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