

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

15 March 2021

The (Invisible) Garden IV/IV

ponds among ponds:

an exhibition of threshold behaviour & nested life

25 March – 29 May 2021

ica.shanghai.nyu.edu

***ponds among ponds: an exhibition of threshold behaviour & nested life* opens at the ICA at NYU Shanghai**

SHANGHAI, CHINA: Opening on 25 March 2021, the Institute of Contemporary Arts at NYU Shanghai (ICA at NYU Shanghai) presents *ponds among ponds: an exhibition of threshold behavior & nested life* (on view through 29 May), guest-curated by Anna-Sophie Springer & Etienne Turpin (*Reassembling the Natural*), with artistic contributions by Agency, John Feldman with Lynn Margulis, Anne Duk Hee Jordan with Pauline Doutreluingne, MAO Chenyu, Maximilian Prüfer, and Monika Lin of Zaanheh Project. *ponds among ponds* is the final iteration of Springer and Turpin’s international exhibition-led inquiry *Reassembling the Natural* (2013–21), and the fourth and final season of the ICA’s inaugural artistic research program, *The (Invisible) Garden* (2019–21).

In a recent essay addressing the intersectional frictions of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the climate crisis, and recent microbiome research, the philosopher Tobias Rees remarked, “We humans are really little more than a multi-species ecosystem among multi-species ecosystems — ponds among ponds.” Borrowing this as an umbrella term for rethinking the relationship between organisms and their various endo- and exo-somatic ecologies, *ponds among ponds: an exhibition of threshold behavior & nested life* proposes an alternative approach to the presentation of natural history. Instead of beginning from the assumption that the organism is the basic unit of evolution, what if we consider the multi-scalar, nested ecologies of life as symbiotic sequences that challenge ideas of competition and survival of the fittest? The fundamental proposition of *ponds among ponds* is that the current concept of organismic life is insufficient for thinking with and adapting to contemporary climate and biodiversity crises.

Thinking with the pathbreaking work of evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis (1938–2011), *ponds among ponds* presents objects, images, texts, performances, and movements through artistic points of view, troubling current forms and proposing other organizations of life. The concept of “threshold behavior” contends that all organisms are ecologies unto themselves that operate as assemblages ordered and kept alive by various environmental gradients. While “nested life” challenges the predominant image of climate change as an eventuality

wherein an organism (typically, a human organism), as a unit of coherent and sovereign volition, struggles against the outside forces of nature. Such an impoverished sense of threshold behavior leads to a repetition without difference. Instead, in order to begin to conceive of, and thereby adapt to, the massive challenges of climate change (and the no less imperiling situation of biodiversity destruction), it is necessary to imagine the human, and the organism, as ecologies within ecologies, or ponds among ponds.

Central to the exhibition, in its performance-installation, Brussels-based **Agency** calls forth gatherings and discussion around controversial intellectual property cases, raising questions such as: are living things patentable subject matter? A video by **Maximilian Prüfer** explores the consequences of environmental destruction upon the pollination process within agriculture, while Berlin-based artist **Anne Duk Hee Jordan**, in her collaboration with **Pauline Doutreluingne**, has developed a multimedia wedding bed-installation, opening a nonlinear perspective on species migration and the botany of desire. Shanghai and Yueyang-based artist **Mao Chenyu**'s further invokes the figure of the agricultural worker and space-time of Chinese rural society in two films, one of which will premiere at the close of the exhibition. Extending the exhibition out into the city, walking maps designed by **Zaanheh Project's Monika Lin** invite visitors to key areas around Shanghai to think with the emergent ecologies of the local watershed. Finally, the curatorial project of **Anna-Sophie Springer & Etienne Turpin**, *Reassembling the Natural*, frames the exhibition, conceptually and materially, with traces of **Lynn Margulis** and her collaborators, including a documentary film directed by **John Feldman** exploring her life and ideas.

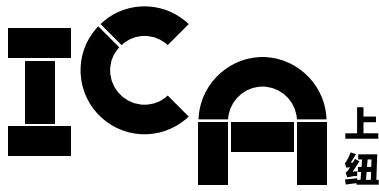
Reassembling the Natural (reassemblingnature.org) is an ongoing exhibition-led inquiry, co-directed by Anna-Sophie Springer & Etienne Turpin, into the role of natural history collections in a time of climate crisis and biodiversity collapse. In its final iteration as *ponds among ponds: an exhibition of threshold behavior & nested life*, Springer and Turpin have worked with the ICA at NYU Shanghai to engage with local collections, museums, and related sites of scientific research, as well as artists and cultural producers. By bringing these respective objects of research together in one exhibition space, their project continues to work across disciplines and develop new modes of spatial juxtaposition and curatorial montage that enable scientific and aesthetic practices of inquiry to inform one another.

ponds among ponds: an exhibition of threshold behavior & nested life is accompanied by related events, including:

Symbiotic Earth & roundtable

a virtual screening by John Feldman with Lynn Margulis, followed by a roundtable discussion with the curators, artists, and scientists

20 Mar-29 May (virtual screening) - Online
English with Chinese subtitles



Sat, 27 Mar, 16:00-17:30 CST (roundtable) - Online
Chinese and English

Assembly (ponds among ponds)

performative assemblies called forth by Agency around cases of “boundary things”

Sat, 17 Apr, 16:00-18:00 CST - Online
English with Chinese interpretation

Sat, 15 May, 16:00-18:00 CST - ICA Gallery
Chinese with English interpretation

Anti-Rural China & conversation

a film premiere by Mao Chenyu, followed by a conversation with the filmmaker, curators, and Lu Xinghua

22-29 May (virtual screening) - Online
Sat, 29 May, 15:00 CST (in person screening) - ICA Gallery
Chinese with English subtitles

Sat, 29 May, 16:00-17:00 CST (conversation) - Online & ICA Gallery
Chinese with English interpretation

As with every season, the ICA will host Study Sessions on **8 April** and **29 April** at **13:00** in the **ICA gallery**. ICA Study Sessions are guided conversations focusing on one work in one hour, based on curious exploration, critical reflection, and collective meaning making.

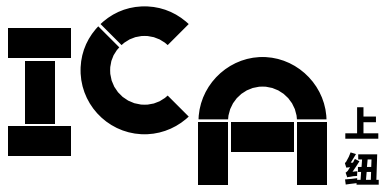
Registration is required for all events.

For more information on all events, please visit the ICA website.

For more information about each of the curators and artists, please see below.

ponds among ponds: an exhibition of threshold behaviour & nested life and its related events are presented as the final season of *The (Invisible) Garden*, the ICA’s 2019-21 artistic research program that inquires into the garden as a method that shapes our understanding of Nature and our relationships to other species. From Fall 2019 through Spring 2021, the ICA at NYU Shanghai presents artists, thinkers, and practitioners, through exhibitions and events, to consider the garden and ask how might we denature Nature?

Select artworks and projects in the exhibition have been generously supported by: in part, the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Flanders Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Media; and, in kind, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



NOTICE TO VISITORS AND MEDIA

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and in accordance with university guidelines, the ICA gallery is open to the NYU Shanghai community only and temporarily closed to the public until further notice. All visitors may access the 360VR exhibition tour on the ICA website, view virtual screenings, and join events online. Some events will be in the ICA gallery for the NYU Shanghai community only.

Visits by the media must be scheduled by appointment by contacting Iris Zhu via email: iris.zhu@nyu.edu. Press and media may preview the exhibition on 24 March by scheduling an appointment.

For further updates, please check the [ICA website](#), subscribe to our [mailing list](#), or follow us on [WeChat](#), [Weibo](#), or [Instagram](#). For more about NYU Shanghai's COVID-19 response plan and health protocols, please visit <https://shanghai.nyu.edu/returntocampus2020>.

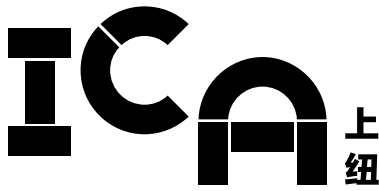
ABOUT ICA AT NYU SHANGHAI

The Institute of Contemporary Arts at NYU Shanghai (ICA at NYU Shanghai) is a non-profit kunsthalle and research center committed to the development, presentation, and exchange of diverse ideas through contemporary arts. Our commitment is based on a core belief that engagement with art engenders critical thought, creativity, and openness to complexity, across disciplines and society and in everyday life. From 2015 to 2017, the NYU Shanghai Art Gallery was established as one of the few university-affiliated art institutions in China to focus on contemporary art.

In Fall 2019, following a two-year hiatus, the university art gallery of NYU Shanghai reopened to the public with a new mission and reinvigorated vision as the Institute of Contemporary Arts at NYU Shanghai. The ICA at NYU Shanghai builds upon the earlier ambitions of the Gallery, while expanding our aims to emphasize experimentation, to further understand art and exhibition-making as a form of research, and to learn from artists living and working today.

ABOUT NYU SHANGHAI

Founded in 2012, NYU Shanghai is the first Sino-US joint research university in China and the third degree-granting campus of NYU. With an enrollment of some 1,700 students and a distinguished international faculty, NYU Shanghai exemplifies the highest ideals of contemporary higher education. At the undergraduate and postgraduate level, NYU Shanghai's programs prepare graduates to be creative and culturally adept leaders with global vision.



NYU Shanghai was founded through a unique partnership between New York University and East China Normal University with the support of the city of Shanghai and the Pudong District. We are pioneering innovative curricula and stimulating a culture of creativity, at the forefront of a new breed of global institutions of higher education.

MEDIA CONTACT:

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All media assets, including high-resolution images, are available for download via the exhibition webpage: <https://ica.shanghai.nyu.edu/program/ponds-among-ponds-an-exhibition-of-threshold-behavior-and-nested-life>

GENERAL INFORMATION:

1555 Century Avenue
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+86 021 2059 5809
<https://ica.shanghai.nyu.edu>

Gallery Hours
Monday – Friday, 11:00-18:00
Saturday & Sunday, Closed

Temporarily
OPEN to NYU Shanghai community
CLOSED to the public

Please note that, due to COVID-19 prevention measures, the ICA's opening hours and visitor policy are subject to change. Please check the ICA website for the most up to date information.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Anna-Sophie Springer & Etienne Turpin

Anna-Sophie Springer is an exhibition maker, writer, editor, and publisher. Since 2011, she has directed the boutique publishing imprint K. Verlag in Berlin, advancing new forms of the “book-as-exhibition.” In her research-based practice, Anna-Sophie works with cultural and scientific archives and collections to produce postdisciplinary ecologies of attention and care. As co-principal investigator of *Reassembling the Natural*, an exhibition-led inquiry into the natural histories of the Anthropocene, she recently co-curated *Disappearing Legacies: The World as Forest* presented at the university natural history institutions in Hamburg, Berlin, and Halle/Saale (2017/18), and *125,660 Specimens of Natural History* in Jakarta (2015). She is the co-editor of *Fantasies of the Library* (MIT Press, 2016) and the *intercalations*:

paginated exhibition series, published by K. and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. From 2016 to 2019, she was a Visiting Lecturer at the Art Institute, FHNW Basel. In 2020, she received a Deutscher Verlagspreis (German Publishing Prize) for K. Verlag.

Etienne Turpin is a philosopher living and working in Berlin. Previously, he was a co-founder and director of User Group GmbH and PetaBenanca.id; he has also worked in the Higher Education Industry as a Research Scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow at Australia's SMART Infrastructure Facility, and faculty at the Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture, and Design, UC Berkeley, the University of Michigan, and the University of Toronto. He is the co-editor of the *intercalations: paginated exhibition* series in the context of Das Anthropozän-Projekt (K. Verlag & Haus der Kulturen der Welt), *The Work of Wind: Land* (K. Verlag, 2018), *Fantasies of the Library* (MIT Press, 2016), and *Art in the Anthropocene* (Open Humanities Press, 2015); and editor of *Architecture in the Anthropocene* (Open Humanities Press, 2013).

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Agency

Agency is an international initiative that was founded in 1992 and is a registered association in Brussels. Agency constitutes a growing “list of boundary things” that resist the radical split between the classifications of nature and culture. Agency calls the “things” forth from its list via varying “assemblies,” which combine the formats of exhibitions, performances, workshops, and publications. All of Agency's assemblies explore the operative consequences of the apparatus of intellectual property for an ecology of diverse art practices and aim at caring for their singular modes of existence. Agency invoked boundary things, most recently at Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria (2021); Tabakalera, San Sebastián, Spain (2020); Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy (2019); KIOSK, Ghent, Belgium (2019); VOX, Montreal, Canada (2018); Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia (2018).

John Feldman with Lynn Margulis

John Feldman is a highly original and critically acclaimed filmmaker. His career spans over 40 years and covers a wide range of genres. His films have won numerous international awards. He is currently focusing on documentaries in the arts and sciences. He has a BA in Biology from the University of Chicago and is an avid naturalist. He met Lynn Margulis when he was making his documentary: *EVO: Ten Questions Everyone Should Ask about Evolution* (2011, CINE Golden Eagle Award). His independent dramatic feature films include the pioneering digital video production *Who the Hell is Bobby Roos?* (2002, New American Cinema Award, Seattle International Film Festival), *Dead Funny* (1995, starring Elizabeth Pena and Andrew McCarthy), and *Alligator Eyes* (1990, First Prize Audience Jury San Sebastian Int. Film Festival).

Lynn Margulis (1938–2011) was an American evolutionary theorist, biologist, science author, educator, and science popularizer. She was the primary modern proponent for the significance of symbiosis in evolution and a strong critic of neo-Darwinism. Margulis transformed and fundamentally framed current understanding of the evolution of cells with nuclei by proposing it to have been the result of symbiotic mergers of bacteria. Her pathbreaking work in the late 1960s was largely ignored until a decade later, when it was powerfully substantiated through genetic evidence. Margulis was elected a member of the US National Academy of Sciences in 1983 and given the US National Medal of Science in 1999. The Linnean Society of London awarded her the Darwin-Wallace Medal in 2008. In 2002, *Discover* magazine recognized Margulis as one of the 50 most important women in science.

Anne Duk Hee Jordan with Pauline Doutreluingne

Anne Duk Hee Jordan lives and works in Berlin. She studied at the Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin and continued with a Master in Fine Arts at the Institut für Raumexperimente in Berlin under Olafur Eliasson. Transience and transformation are the central themes in her work. Through movement and performance, Jordan gives materiality another dimension – she builds motorized sculptures and creates edible landscapes. Recent solo exhibitions include *A Handful of Dust*, Berlin (2020); *Ziggy goes Wild*, Kunstverein Arnsberg (2019) and *Ziggy on the Land of Drunken Trees*, Galerie Wedding, Berlin (2018); recent group exhibitions include *Sonsbeek 2020-24*, Arnhem, The Netherlands; *Down to Earth*, Gropius Bau, Berlin (2020); *Making Kin*, Kunsthaus Hamburg (2020); Beaufort Triennial, Ostend, Belgium (2018); Riga Biennial (2018); *Festival of Future Nows*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2017). She has been shortlisted for Hector Art Award 2019 and for the Böttcherstrasse *Prize Bremen 2020*.

Pauline Doutreluingne works as a curator and visual researcher in Berlin. In her artistic practice she tries to stimulate cultural and ecological differentiation in order to deconstruct societal ideas originating from colonial thinking. Her curatorial projects are dialogues and research for imaginative thinking. Recent exhibition projects she has curated include *A Handful of Dust* (2020), Berlin; *Interiors to Being* (2019), Acud Macht Neu, Berlin; *The Conundrum of Imagination* (2017), Leopold Museum, Vienna (with Bonaventure Soh Ndiung) and *Agency of Living Organisms* (2016), Tabakalera, Spain. Since 2019, she has been teaching at the HBK Braunschweig about questioning the western canon in 20th century art. She has worked together with the artist Anne Duk Hee Jordan on numerous projects since 2014.

Mao Chenyu

Mao Chenyu lives and works in Shanghai. He is the host of Second-Text Lab and the founder of Paddyfilm, and works around the area of Dongting Lake Watershed. In 2012, Mao founded the experimental social platform Paddyfilm-farm in Hunan, which investigates and analyses rural societies in China. Thirty mu of paddy field has been transformed into a self-sufficient farming system which nurtures the linguistic and film practices of Paddyfilm. In 2015, in opposition to the drastic transformation of rural societies in China, Mao has set up a private Elaphurus Davidianus University (EDU) within Paddyfilm's farm, and has carried out social research and education as a kind of institutional practice aimed at the new formation of rural social subjects and their relation with knowledge production. His recent solo exhibitions include: *Litchi Girl*, A+ Contemporary, Shanghai (2018), *Paddyfilm in Beijing*, The Room Art Project, Beijing (2016).

Maximilian Prüfer

Maximilian Prüfer lives and works in Germany. Prüfer's conceptual art practice deals with topics of philosophy, politics, and natural phenomena. Employing a printing process he developed himself, which he calls "Naturantypie," Prüfer records tracks of natural movements and makes it possible for unseen worlds to provide new approaches to thought. Prüfer's recent solo exhibitions include *Tier*, Galerie Lisa Kandlhofer, Vienna (2019); *Vieh*, Museum Villa Rot, Burgrieden (2018); *Nest*, Sotheby's Artist Quarterly, Sotheby's Munich (2018). His work has been included in recent group shows: *Flügelschlag*, Museum Sinclair Haus, Bad Homburg (2019); *Egon Schiele, Reloaded*, Leopold Museum, Vienna (2018/19), *I Followed You To The Sun*, Galerie Lisa Kandlhofer (2018). Maximilian Prüfer is a recipient of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation EHF Artist Grant 2018.

Zaanheh Project

Zaanheh: A Natural History of Shanghai is an interdisciplinary endeavor that explores the history of Shanghai's urban ecology in order to reimagine the future city as it adapts to a changing environment in the era of climate change. Taking a layered temporal approach, the project attempts to recover the vegetation, animal life, and human culture of the city's older and hidden ecologies and open new ways of thinking about nature of the future metropolis. *Zaanheh* is led by a team at NYU Shanghai who bring together multiple institutions, scholars, researchers and artists from across the world, working in a broad range of disciplines. *Zaanheh* combines historical investigations, ecological analyses, ethnographic inquiry, artistic explorations with the tools of emerging media (online experimentation, data visualization, VR/AR, etc.). The project will result in scholarly publications, policy papers, academic conferences, public exhibitions and more.