

# Bittersweet Symphony

Lara Almarcegui, Bianca Bondi, Fabien Conti,  
Uriel Orlow and Daniel Otero Torres

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March 11th — April 8th, 2023



Lara Almarcegui, *Gravera*, 2021 (video still)

*You yourself, don't you find it a beautiful clean thought, a world empty of people, just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting up?...*

DH Lawrence, *Women in Love*

In contrast to the concept of the apocalypse, which in its many variables always leaves behind a chosen few—who, in addition to witnessing the collapse, will bear the responsibility of repopulating the planet—the idea of dysanthropy is conceived as a total and often sudden absence of the human race. It appears as a literary theme at the beginning of the 20th century thanks to authors such as DH Lawrence or Virginia Woolf, and crystallizes through filmmakers like Werner Herzog or the Canadian multidisciplinary artist Michael Snow. Taking as inspiration an article by Greg Garrand (*Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy*, 2012) which analyzes, among other examples, Snow's experimental film *La Région Centrale* (1971), we wanted to delve into a series of visions of reality in which human presence seems to have vanished.

The fundamental element that ties together the work of all the artists presented is, nevertheless, an important ecological concern, which invites us to consider the effects of humans on ecosystems while at the same time fantasizing about their absence as an ultimate symptom of a catastrophe in the making—perhaps also as a "solution" to the problem? In a monumental series of paintings, **Fabien Conti** focuses precisely on the exploration of images of what we can consider natural disasters of our time: wildfires, melting glaciers, volcanic eruptions, storms... In all of them he recognizes, in spite of all, a sublime and poetic quality, a certain formal beauty that accompanies the destruction. Through color and texture, he tries to evoke the sensation of the landscape, and places us as spectators in front of the abyss of our own extinction.

In *Gravera*, **Lara Almarcegui** films the deserted landscape of an industrial complex in Lleida, destined to the transformation of various minerals into usable construction materials, which had stopped its activity for a day at the artist's request. Through this action, she wonders about the possibilities that open up when the processes of extraction

and production stop and give way to a purely contemplative space. As in many of her works, she questions the logic of economic profitability and exploitation of mineral resources. The phenomenon of the *rapture* —common in the imaginary of evangelical Christianity— envisions that, moments before the Final Judgment, believers will be literally abducted to meet God in heaven, leaving behind their earthly life, their possessions and clothes. As if evaporated in a sublime gesture of escapism. **Bianca Bondi**'s series of still lifes, which includes materials found during her project at CAP Saint-Fons, seems to cite this unexpected and spontaneous disappearance by including boots, protective helmets or instruction manuals for the use of machinery. As in Almarcegui's video, behind all this lies a complex symbolic subtext that goes beyond the mundane and points to the need to make sustainable economic and environmental policies coincide. On her *Cenote*, on the other hand, Bondi evokes the collapse of the Mayan civilization —a sudden disappearance that still puzzles the archeologists— with nature relentlessly taking over its ruins.

In the case of **Daniel Otero Torres**, an interesting paradox is established between the disappearance of animal and vegetable species due to the action of man —through the use of industrial fertilizers, for example— which would ultimately lead to the eradication of the human race. Giving even more emphasis to this disanthropic hypothesis, the artist introduces the production of images by artificial intelligence programs in his creative process, and refers plastically within the work to some of its visual contributions. **Uriel Orlow**, for his part, also evokes a form of disappearance through the spectral aspect, halfway between the photographic negative and the X-ray, of a collection of specimens of *Artemisia afra*. This plant, traditionally cultivated in Central Africa, has proven its efficacy in the treatment and prevention of malaria, yet the WHO advises against its use, favoring drugs patented by the pharmaceutical industry. As a result, Orlow shows how the incessant drive for economic extraction —linked to colonialist policies— jeopardizes not only the balance of ecosystems, but the very conditions of human existence.

## List of works

### Ground floor

#### **Bianca Bondi**

##### *Cenote*, 2022

Mixed-media installation inside  
wood and plexiglas vitrine  
120 x 50 x 70 cm  
Unique piece

#### **Fabien Conti**

##### *Sans titre*, 2022

Series of acrylic and oil on canvas  
200 x 180 cm each  
Unique pieces

#### **Lara Almarcegui**

##### *Gravera*, 2021

Digital video, color, sound  
10:15 min  
Edition of 5 + 1 AP

#### *Serralada dels Pirineus: Roques i materials*,

2021

Inkjet print on paper  
160 x 120 cm  
Edition of 3 + 1 AP

### Lower ground

#### **Daniel Otero Torres**

##### *Bailando en la oscuridad*, 2023

Acrylic and assemblage on fabric on panel  
175 x 175 x 8 cm  
Unique piece

#### **Bianca Bondi**

##### *Bloom (Vanilla Oxide)*, 2022

Series of mixed-media installations inside  
wood and plexiglas vitrines  
50 x 30 x 30 cm each  
Unique pieces

#### **Uriel Orlow**

##### *Artemisia in Katanga*, 2020

Series of 12 archival pigment prints on paper  
36 x 59 cm each  
Edition of 5 + 2 AP

##### *Malaria, Congo and the Belgians*, 2020

Diptych - Archival pigment prints on paper  
70 x 100 cm each  
Edition of 5 + 2 AP