

SARAH SANDLER

Boolagoorda

Exhibition from 11 September au 20 November 2021

Opening the Friday 10 September from 4.30pm



Another is I, 2021. Video extract

The Madeleine-Lambert Art Centre presents a personal exhibition by Sarah Sandler entitled Boolagoorda, which means "black water" in the language of the Malgana People of Australia.

A site of ecological, scientific and spiritual interest

Boolagoorda is the title of this exhibition but it is first and foremost a remarkable coastal site that has been inhabited for more than thirty thousand years and is home to the bacterial fossils known as stromatolites, which the Malgana consider to be their ancestors. These natural formations more than 3.5 million years old, that look like dark sculptures emerging through the surface of the clear water, grow patiently a few millimetres per year and are a rich source of scientific information concerning the origin of life on Earth and also – perhaps – elsewhere in the universe. The exhibition has its roots in the particular features of this site, on the westernmost point of Australia, and in the childhood memory of the artist, from which she has created a fiction in film.

The first impression of the exhibition space is one of airiness that invites the visitor to move around freely from one artwork to another, to go closer to examine the details, to move back again, to sit down in front of the screen, to pass from one luminous atmosphere to another.

Southern reminiscences

Several elements of the exhibition can be viewed as memories of the south: certain fleeting sun-drenched images in the film *Another is I*, or again the model of a house constructed from memory by the artist, the scale and materials of which are puzzling: it is visibly not an architect's model, nor is it a dolls' house for a child, despite being set down on a soft carpet. A miniature maze, the house

becomes a mental space into which you can project yourself, where you can walk around, change scale. It creates an "interior" (as we say in common parlance) and it is also a space in which life can unfold in the secretness of intimacy.

In the course of her development, Sarah Sandler breaks down the barriers between disciplines: previously she drew inspiration from research outside art, in the domains of anthropology or ecology. The interplay of autofiction, science, literature, choreography and the visual arts is particularly visible in the video *Another is I*, which occupies the centre of the room and divides it into two spaces. The carpet at the foot of the screen invites us to settle down before the images filmed among the geological collections of the CNRS scientific platform of the University of Lyon 1. We follow the film and listen, and we hear the voice of a young woman, exploring the mineral collection, moving around between the classification drawers and the aisles and remembering a visit to Boolagoorda. Her inner voice accompanies us, she speculates on her presence in the world, on the nature and the independence of her own being as a living form in symbiosis with others.

The image is at once beautiful, controlled and altered by the projection canvas, made up of several layers: an interweaving of frames which transpose their moiré effect onto the colours, the lights and flashes of the video. This dialogue between the image and the surface that receives it weaves a relationship of interdependence: the fabric only contributes to the image which is projected onto it, but the image cannot exist in the void without the support that modifies it: in a way that is akin to a symbiotic relationship in the living world when species live and evolve together at the same time.

A play on materials, shapes and textures

The soft padded panel of the screen finds its negative equivalent in the rust and the industrial roughness of the perforated expanded metal which is used to form screens made of frames that play with transparency, to which are attached other smaller articles that, in their delicately worked details, are reminiscent of ritual objects or ornaments.

In reference to the image of the stromatolites, several works consist of strata or successive deposits of matter, like the three ceramics in the series *Sisters*, created in a fab lab with a 3D ceramic printer which operates millimetre by millimetre and progressively reveals the work, in exactly the same way as the cone of sand in the lower part of an hourglass is formed slowly, grain by grain.

Using glass, pewter and sandstone Sarah Sandler has recourse to numerous skills and ancient techniques such as foundry sand, but with 3D printing, she also calls upon technology. The exhibition strikes a balance between oppositions, between tensions, notably between natural and artificial lighting. The pile of the carpets, the rust of the metal sheets, the matte, granular minerality of the ceramics, the smooth, aqueous sheen of the glass, the soft weave of the stretched fabric, the cold sheen of the pewter: the materials and the surfaces of the works are ever-present and interact with one another, hide themselves or else mutually influence one another. Almost irresistibly, they call out to be touched (impossible in an exhibition space, in which we have to resist this urge!) and draw us more readily towards the aspect of materiality and the body than towards language and the distancing that it brings.

Another is I

In her new works, Sarah Sandler explores our relationship with the living world from the perspective of doubt and mystery, reflecting on the evolutionary continuity of species and micro-organisms that we are not aware of, but with which we live. Organic, mineral, enigmatic, the works of Sarah Sandler oscillate between scientific references and fiction, between rationality and spirituality without setting them in opposition or in a hierarchy. Intuition plays an important role in the artist's work; as if an inner voice speaks to us in a language we don't understand and invites us to feel, to perceive differently, in the disquieting experience of this encounter is an otherness perceived as an "other self".

Xavier Jullien, exhibition curator

*This often repeated phrase is taken from a letter by Arthur Rimbaud, who in 1871 wrote « je est un autre [...] cela m'est évident : j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée : je la regarde, je l'écoute. (» I am another [...] this is clear to me: I am present at the hatching out of my thought : I watch it, I listen to it. »)