



Large Print Guide

ASHMOLEAN NOW

BETTINA VON ZWEHL

THE FLOOD



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The exhibition series, Ashmolean NOW, engages with new artistic voices, encourages critical conversations and supports early-to mid-career artists based in the UK. Artists are invited to visit the Museum to look at historic collections in Oxford and to create contemporary responses.

This exhibition features new experimental photographs by London-based artist Bettina von Zwehl (b.1971 in Munich) alongside objects chosen by the artist from the collections of the Ashmolean, the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the Bodleian Libraries.

During her residency in 2022 – 23, von Zwehl researched the Ashmolean's founding collections and the many narratives embedded within historical objects. This served as inspiration for a *Wunderkammer* exhibition that seamlessly transitions between silhouetted still-lives and imaginary landscapes, hybrid creatures, monumental and miniature elements, as well as non-art objects and specimens. The artist's aim is to rekindle wonder and curiosity as critical tools for generating new ideas, while reflecting on our interdependent relationships with animals, plants, fungi and other non-human domains of existence.

Representing the artist's voice, a film introduces and contextualises her photographic practice.

Curated by Lena Fritsch, Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art

Supported by

Arts Council England

The Patrons of the Ashmolean Museum

Christian Levett

Laura and Jim Duncan

Johannes and Helene Huth

Carlos and Francesca Pinto

and those who wish to remain anonymous

All works by Bettina von Zwehl are on loan courtesy of the artist.*

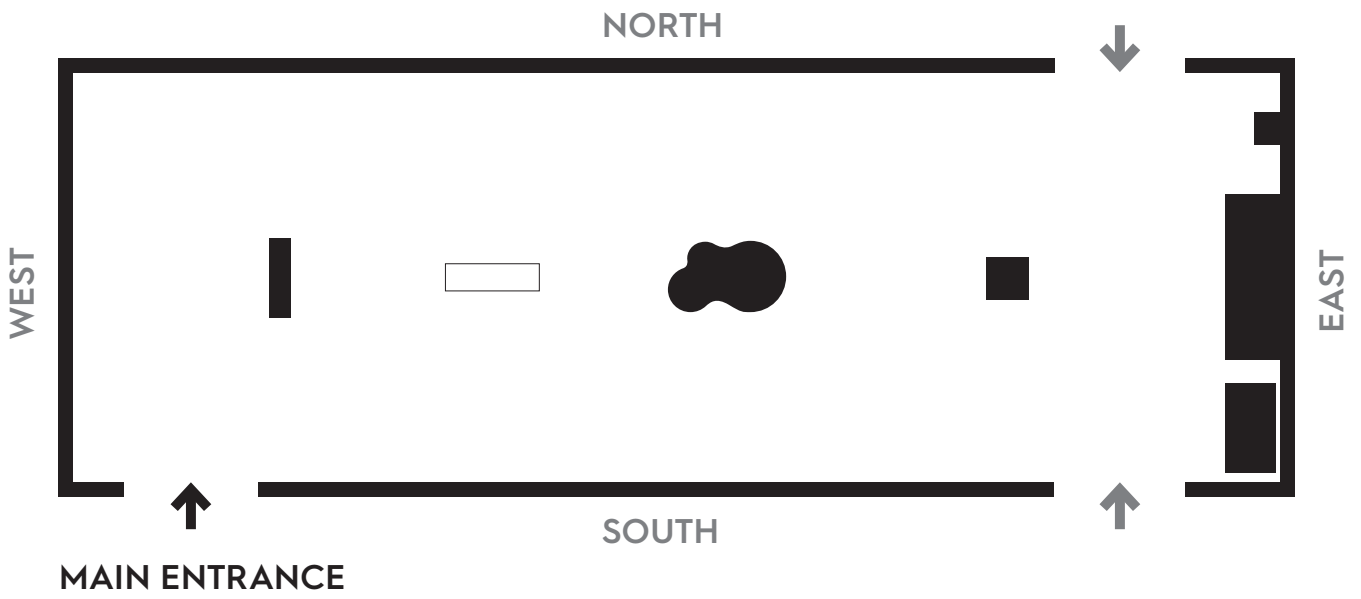
*Fungi Island, 2024 - courtesy David Robinson & Bettina von Zwehl

*Remember Me. Remember Me? 2024 - courtesy Robert Innis Hopkins, Sophy Rickett & Bettina von Zwehl

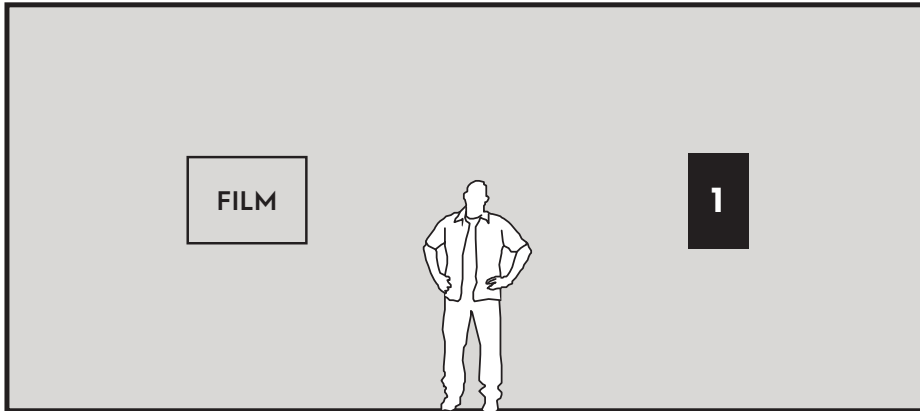
We thank Bettina for this remarkable collaboration.

All artworks © Bettina von Zwehl unless otherwise stated.

GALLERY MAP



WEST WALL



Film Lena Fritsch, exhibition curator, in conversation with Bettina von Zwehl

Film duration 10 minutes

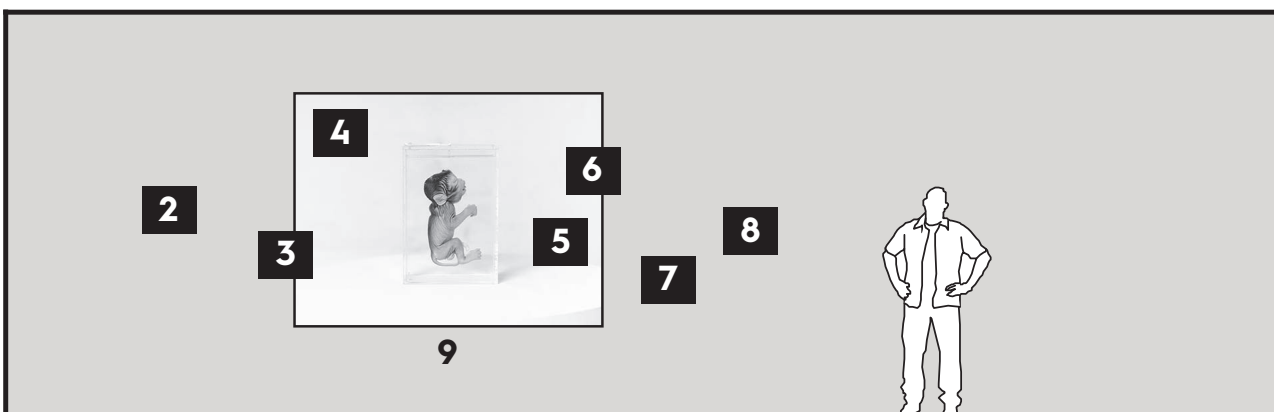
Quotation Bettina von Zwehl, in conversation with author Stephen Grosz

Sea of Troubles series

1 *Aspalathus Linearis* (Rooibos), 2024

Collage, two photographs on rice paper

NORTH WALL



2 *Camellia sinensis* var. *assamica* II (Assam tea), 2023

Archival pigment print

3 *Camellia sinensis var. assamica* VI (Assam tea), 2024

Archival pigment print

4 *Camellia sinensis var. sinensis* IV (Chinese Tea), 2023

Archival pigment print

5 *Camellia sinensis var. assamica* I (Assam tea), 2023

Archival pigment print

6 *Camellia sinensis var. assamica* V (Assam tea), 2024

Archival pigment print

7 *Camellia sinensis var. sinensis* II (Chinese tea), 2024

Archival pigment print

8 *Camellia sinensis var. sinensis* I, (Chinese tea), 2023

Archival pigment print

9 Southern Pig-tailed Macaque (*Macaca nemestrina*), 2023

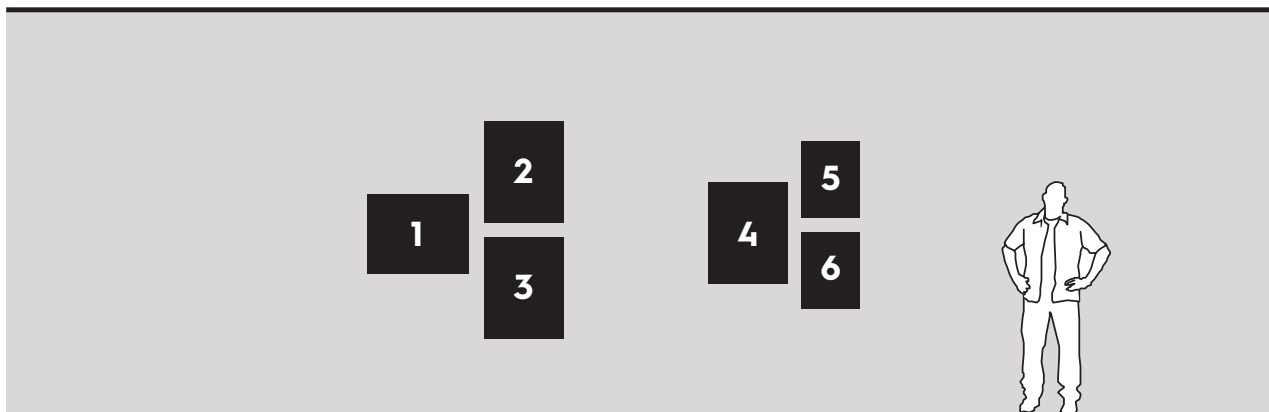
Enlarged photograph

Courtesy of Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH-ZC-20305)

THINGS SERIES, 2023–24

This series is based on small everyday things from the artist's home and surroundings that she has photographed together on a glass plate, creating abstracted compositions. Sweets are combined with acrylic eyelashes, chicken bones encounter onion skin, and painkiller pills enter into dialogue with crystals, seaweed and jelly beans. Each composition embodies a small *Wunderkammer*: objects from different artistic and scientific backgrounds converge in an associative and intuitive manner.

Archival pigment prints



Thing series

1 *Thing Five, 2023*

Black balloon (fragment) / Red and green marbles / Pine needles / Seaweed / Crystals / Mustard seed / Crab Claw / Dried bean / Chicken bone / Blade of grass. Archival pigment print

2 *Thing Nine, 2023*

Shark-tooth fob / Blue sand / Pine needles / Red painkiller. Archival pigment print

3 *Thing Four, 2023*

Chicken bones / Wishbone / Belladonna pill / Crab claw / Seaweed / Pebbles / Red painkiller
Archival pigment print

4 *Thing Six, 2023*

Clear Slime / Red Lego / Miniature crystals / Nitrous oxide / Blue-black mussel shell
Archival pigment print

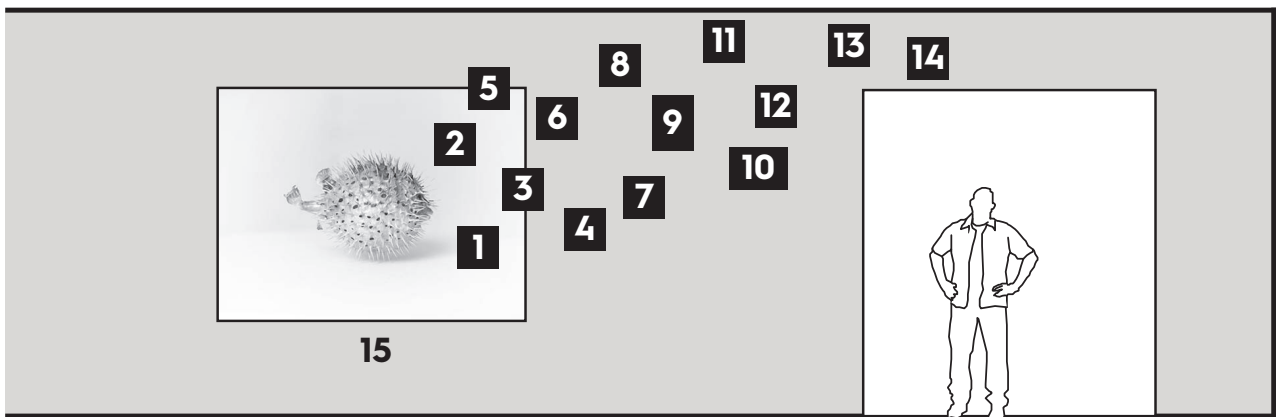
5 *Thing Seven, 2023*

Black feathers / Piano key / Silver coin / Coloured slime / Vitamin D / Red Marble / Peppercorn / Plasticine / Clear quartz / Chicken bone. Archival pigment print

6 *Thing Eight, 2023*

Starfish / Red painkiller / Ceramic fragment / Chicken bones / crystals / Seaweed / Jelly bean / Mustard seed / Rubber ring. Archival pigment print

NORTH WALL



1 *Maggie, London, 2017*

Chromogenic (C-type) print

2 *Jax, New York, 2016*

Chromogenic (C-type) print

3 *Hercules, New York, 2017*

Chromogenic (C-type) print

4 *Harriet, New York, 2017*

Chromogenic (C-type) print

5 *Skipper, New York, 2017*

Chromogenic (C-type) print

6 *Lily*, London, 2016

Gelatin silver print

7 *Billy*, London, 2016

Chromogenic (C-type) print

8 *Charlottetown Dylan Thomas of Pepyswood*, London, 2016

Chromogenic (C-type) print

9 *Vita*, London, 2017

Chromogenic (C-type) print

10 *Lily II*, London 2016

Chromogenic (C-type) print

11 *Leogem Renaissance* (Puppy of the Year 2016), London, 2016

Chromogenic (C-type) print

12 *Myra*, London, 2017

Chromogenic (C-type) print

13 *Buddy*, New York, 2017

Chromogenic (C-type) print

14 *Oskar Bear*, London, 2016

Chromogenic (C-type) print

15 Long Spine Porcupine Fish (*Diodon holocanthus*), 2023

Enlarged photograph

Courtesy of Oxford University Museum of Natural History (LHS OUMNH-ZC-19614)



1 *Musæum Tradescantianum: or, A collection of rarities. Preserved at South-Lambeth near London, 1656*

John Tradescant (1608-62)

Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

2 *Sari (Lampropeltis Triangulum Nelsoni), 2016*

Two individually framed Chromogenic (C-type) prints from negative

3 *Scherzo di Follia, 2015*

Chromogenic (C-type) print, framed

4 *Tallulah and Jasmine, 2015*

Chromogenic (C-type) print, framed

5 Flowers & Insects, about 1657-63

Jan van Kessel the elder (1626-79)

Oil on copper

Ashmolean, WA1940.2.44

6 Owl cup, about 1540-80

Maker unknown

Carved coconut shell, parcel-gilt silver, glass

Ashmolean, WA2013.1.70

7 *Wasp (Amo)*, 2021

Collage, gelatin silver print

8 *Cut-out (Ruby)*, 2021

Gelatin silver print

9 Extinction symbol woodblock, 2018

Goldfrog ESP for Extinction Rebellion Arts Group

This block was used by XR Hackney in their public printing workshops 2018-19

Courtesy of Extinction Rebellion Arts Group, London

10 Two Badges

REGENERATIVE CULTURE, 2019 and *WE ARE NATURE*, 2020.

Courtesy of Extinction Rebellion Arts Group, London

11 *Romeo and Juliet*, 2020

Cat hair

12 Crystal ball, 2008

Glass

13 Cannon Ball, 18th century

Iron

14 Aye-aye

(Daubentonia madagascariensis), 1911

Courtesy of Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH-ZC-05119)

15 Ruby, 2023

Archival pigment print

16 *Memento Mori pendant*, 1510-30

Elephant ivory, silver

Southern Germany

Ashmolean, WA2013.1.30

17 *European Stag beetles*, one male, one female

(Lucanus Cervus)

Courtesy of Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH-2013-050)

18 *Golden Eye (Ruby)*, 2012

Chromogenic (C-type) print

19 *German Shew Stones [Sehsteine] to communicate with spirits*, 2024

Stones, acrylic eyelashes, glue, variable dimensions

20 Two Unicorns, date unknown

Lenticular print

21 Two test prints, 2023

Bellybutton nautilus (*nautilus macromphalus*) broken and partially polished shell, front and back

Courtesy of Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH-ZC-M001505)

22 *Spider (unknown sp.)* – two images

Archival pigment print

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23 *Blue Flag with a print of a North Atlantic Cod*, 2021

Miles Glyn for Extinction Rebellion Arts Group

The flag was first used during a protest march at the G7 Summit in Cornwall, June 2021. It was last used during the Restore Nature Now March in London, 22nd June 2024

Courtesy of Extinction Rebellion Arts Group, London

24 *The Symptoms, #41*, 2021

Gelatin silver print

25 *The Symptoms, #40*, 2021

Gelatin silver print

26 *The Symptoms, #38*, 2021

Gelatin silver print

27 *Cradle, 1471-1530*

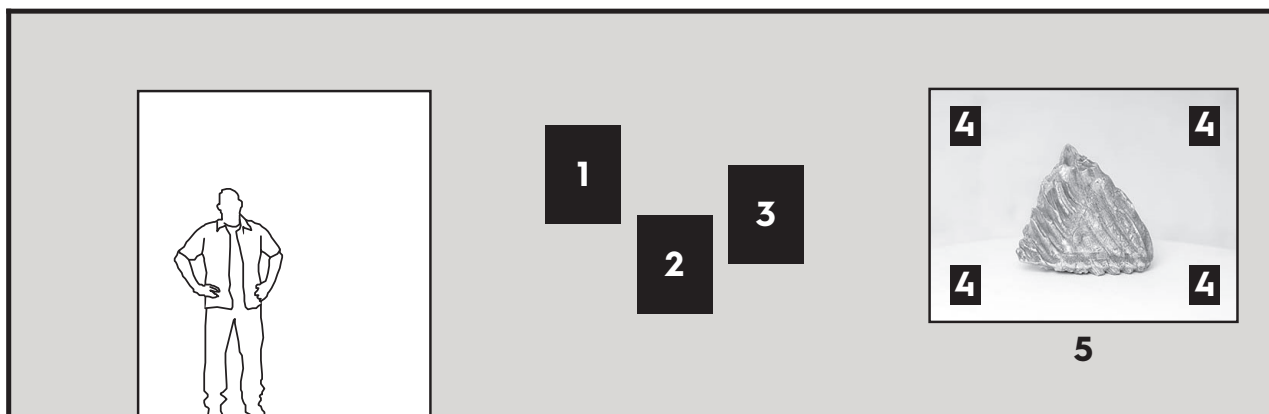
Wrought iron

Presented by Elias Ashmole in 1677, from the Tradescant collection.

Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum

AN1685 B.749

SOUTH WALL



Thing series

1 *Thing One, 2023*

Black feathers / Moonstone / Glass sphere / Crystal ball / Blue plastic gel / Pebble
Archival pigment print

2 *Thing Three, 2023*

Black feathers / Night guard / Ammonite / Crystal ball / Red plastic gel
Archival pigment print

3 *Thing Two, 2023*

Black feathers / Rubber band / Shoe sole fragment / Peppercorn / Stone pendant / Sea glass / Canvas fragment / Pink plastic gel / Clear quartz
Archival pigment print

4 *Series of rolled Feather (Test strips), 2023*

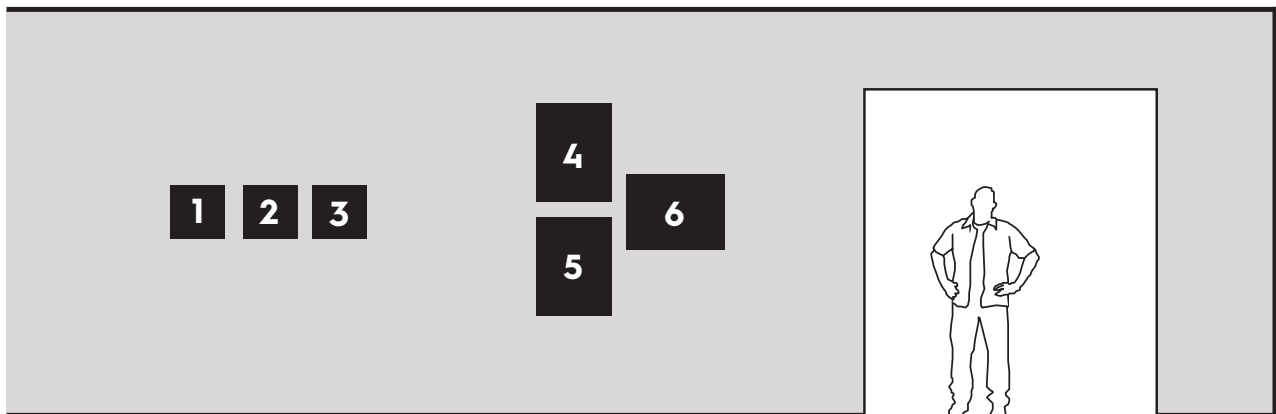
Archival pigment prints, tied with black string

5 Asiatic Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) molar tooth, 2023

Enlarged photograph

Courtesy of Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH-ZC-17480)

SOUTH WALL



1 *Thing Thirteen*, 2023

Phantom butterfly / Miniature plastic spheres / Blue plastic dome / Brass tubes / Copper rods / Clear quartz / Chicken bone / Sky blue Lego / Seaweed
Archival pigment print

2 *Thing Fifteen*, 2023

House fly / Blue gummy bear / Young mouse / Crystal ball / Acrylic eyelashes / Miniature plastic sphere / Seaweed / Butterfly wing / Coriander seed / Metal sticks / Stones / Blue sleeping pill (faded)
Archival pigment print

3 *Thing Fourteen, 2023*

Blue sleeping pill / Acrylic eyelashes / Stainless steel fish hook, barbed / Chicken bone / Crystals / Stag beetle (Mandible and front leg) / Clear slime / Ceramic fragment / Pink and red Lego / Copper tube / Dandelion seeds / Button Blue painkiller
Archival pigment print

4 *Thing Ten, 2023*

Blue slate chipping / Red onion skin / Chicken bone / Coriander seed / Seaweed / Miniature crystals / Plasticine
Archival pigment print

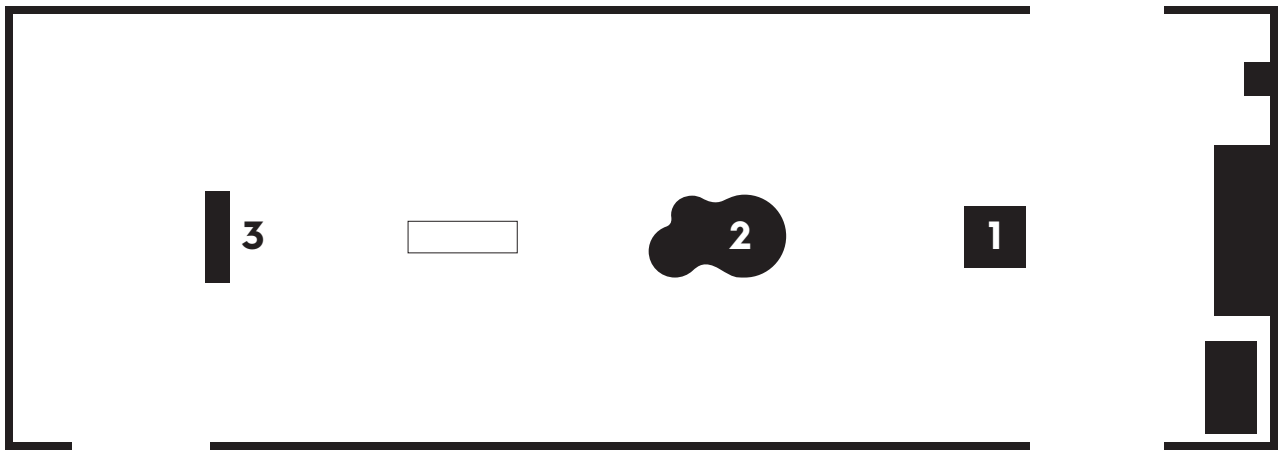
5 *Thing Sixteen, 2023*

Credit card fragment / Butterfly wing / Blue slate chippings / Red Lego / Metal sticks / Seaweed / Miniature plastic sphere / Red glass splinters
Archival pigment print

6 *Thing Eleven, 2023*

Haribo lips / Cowrie shell / Clear quartz / Blue-black mussel shell / Acorn / Button / Amethyst / Seaweed / Chicken bone / Red marble / Plasticine / Metal wire
Archival pigment print

GALLERY PLAN



1 *Remember Me. Remember Me? 2024* (An Opera, unwritten)

Courtesy Robert Innis Hopkins, Sophy Rickett & Bettina von Zwehl

Speaker 1 (the artist) and **Speaker 2** (the artist's friend) are sitting upstage of the proscenium arch on spindly gold chairs. They are facing each other and between them is a large spherical glass object reminiscent of an oversized crystal ball. A large black and white photographic portrait of a woman hangs upside down on the back wall of the stage, her matriarchal presence complicated by the inversion of

the image. The orchestra pit at the front of the stage is filled with rippled dunes of dark, almost black, sand.

Chorus (visitors murmuring softly mingle around the edges of the otherwise empty stage)

The **Speakers**, centre stage, are discussing **Speaker 1's** forthcoming exhibition at the museum, and how her research has uncovered the story of Hester Tradescant, wife of the collector and horticulturalist John Tradescant the Younger. **Speaker 1** wants to understand more about Hester's role in building and caring for the couple's vast collection.

The **Speakers** reflect on the distortion of stories about historical figures by simplified tropes that deny subjects and situations complexity and nuance. **Speaker 1** describes some of the narratives that have built up around Hester, the whispered rumours over

the circumstances of her death.

They discuss **Speaker 1's** use of photography as a way of understanding and representing Hester's story. Elements of the stage set are reminiscent of photographic processes: the optical inversion of the image, the reflective, refractive qualities of the crystal ball, and the resemblance between a theatre's proscenium arch and the viewfinder of a camera. **Speaker 2** notices that when viewed through the crystal ball, the portrait appears the right way up.

Chorus (becoming restless)

'Up is down. Left is right.'

Speaker 1 and **Speaker 2** imagine the thousands of stories the collection must hold: the severed horn of a *Unicornu Marinum*; the hawking glove of a medieval king, moulded into the shape of his warm puffy hand; a wrought iron cradle with deadly spikes, one at each corner.

They wonder what lay behind the Tradescants' drive for acquisition, the relentlessness of it.

Chorus (increasingly restless)

'Will they ever be satisfied?

Could that voice ever be stilled?'

At points **Speaker 1** and **Speaker 2** become distracted, and, just as the botanical specimens that made their way out of the collection to find roots in parklands around the country did, the focus of their conversation escapes, meandering away through half-forgotten dreams, and train rides, and muddy fields on misty mornings. And the silence of a gong bath in a darkened space, and the feeling of wet grass under bare feet in the City of London in the middle of the night, deep and delicious.

And a box of biscuits with tapered edges, and green tea steaming hot, drunk from a

soft pink cup with a mottled metal lining, and a drowned river valley, and why do people have to wear perfume. And remember that time, and that time, and one of the times they disagreed, and went to a party in another artist's studio that had a lenticular print of a unicorn, its fluorescent colours signifying 'magical' tacked to its paint-splattered door. And how do you say 'I'm sorry' in Italian? Shared consciousness. Spontaneous, unplanned.

And aren't the objects in the collection like those thoughts: distinct entities drawn together to produce powerful new affects? A noisy, unruly cacophony of meaning, which in time would come to be moderated by an even greater force: the first public museum; the beginning of museum culture as we know it now. A means of representation, endless streams of possibility enabled by contingency, determined by politics. And the violence that has been and is yet to come.

Chorus (agitated as they react to a disturbance off stage)

'What do they say?

What does it mean?'

From behind the wings, stage left, sand starts to blow over the stage, accumulating in shallow drifts and the lights fade to darkness.

End of scene one

2 *Fungi Island, 2024*

Courtesy David Robinson & Bettina von Zwehl

3 *Thing Twelve! 2024*

Grey Feather / Carnelian / Sea glass / Metal screw /
Vitamin D / Pebble / Clear quartz / Peppercorn
Archival pigment print