

Planet Telex

Dr Daniel Mudie Cunningham

It wasn't that long ago that we would communicate 'instantly' by sending thought-missives via telex or fax. These were messages transcribed and sent into the ether via telecommunication systems that spat out flimsy reams of paper through machines resembling a photocopier/phone. Today, the scrolling paper of yesteryear faxes are replaced by the scrolling of information on pocket-sized phone screens performed in tandem by eye to finger, a relationship of sight and touch playing constant catchups in a sea of too-much information.

Guido Maestri's new body of work has materialised from a process of encountering the landscape through digital interfaces and reinventing them anew. Sourcing imagery online, from constant obsessive scrolling on digital apps, a chaotic array of gathered imagery is printed out, cut up, and put back together with paint in a studio located in an industrial urban street, far removed from so-called nature. Though telex machines are long obsolete, paint somehow endures, offering its own anachronistic and antiquated way of conveying information and presenting ideas.

Rejecting a 'plein-air painter thing', Maestri's new paintings also reflect life of recent times: a global pandemic that created isolation, enforced physical and psychological interiority, and intensified dependence on the screen as a conduit to the world outside. Maestri's landscapes are uncanny evocations of a planet collapsed unto itself, where nature is digitally reordered by social, cultural, and technological advancements that inevitably loop us back to an analogue impulse. Both familiar and strange, Maestri seeks connection to lost nature using abstracted figuration like currency left idling in the ether as a divining, numinous force. Once remote and lonely, Maestri's repurposed nature cajoles with fantastical scenes of almost childhood wonder, imagination, and reverie.

Assembling his imagery from paper collage origins enables a teetering sense of fragmentation and disconnection between pictorial elements that don't always easily connect and belong. In this sense his visual language is less about landscape as a romantic notion and more about how we experience landscape in the present through its digital remediation. These disjointed, fanciful, and manipulated scenes convey a creeping sense that the landscape is being used and abused, managed like crops, yet another playground for the neoliberal woes of late capitalism.

Maestri sees this sense of intervention as 'little bits of human creeping in' to a world rendered alien, though paradoxically, there is scant presence of human and animal life. These largely uninhabited forests, gardens and parks also potentially read as underwater vistas swarming in psychedelic rhythms and hues.

In the Radiohead song from which the exhibition title is drawn, Thom Yorke's pining wail, repeats: *everything is broken, everyone is broken...* and concludes, *why can't you forget, why can't you forget?*

Using the logic of collage and the handmade impulse upon which it insists, Maestri sees around him a world ripped into pieces, where fragmentation is an ocular problem for artists to crack open and resolve as a defence against neglect and forgetting. A new world beckoning from mnemonic ruins.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Dr Daniel Mudie Cunningham is an independent curator and critic renowned for his work with contemporary Australian artists and collections. He has also worked as an artist since 1993.

He was recently appointed the Guest Co-Artistic Director of Performance Space for 2023 and the Curator of Cementa's 2024 festival. Previously, he was the Director of Programs and Senior Curator at Carriageworks from 2017-2022. He has held curatorial roles at Artbank and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery; and teaching and research positions at Western Sydney University, where he completed his PhD in cultural studies in 2004. Most recently, he curated *The National 2019: New Australian Art*; initiated The Katthy Cavaliere Fellowship; and led the curatorial delivery of a major public art strategy tied to the redevelopment of South Eveleigh in inner-Sydney.