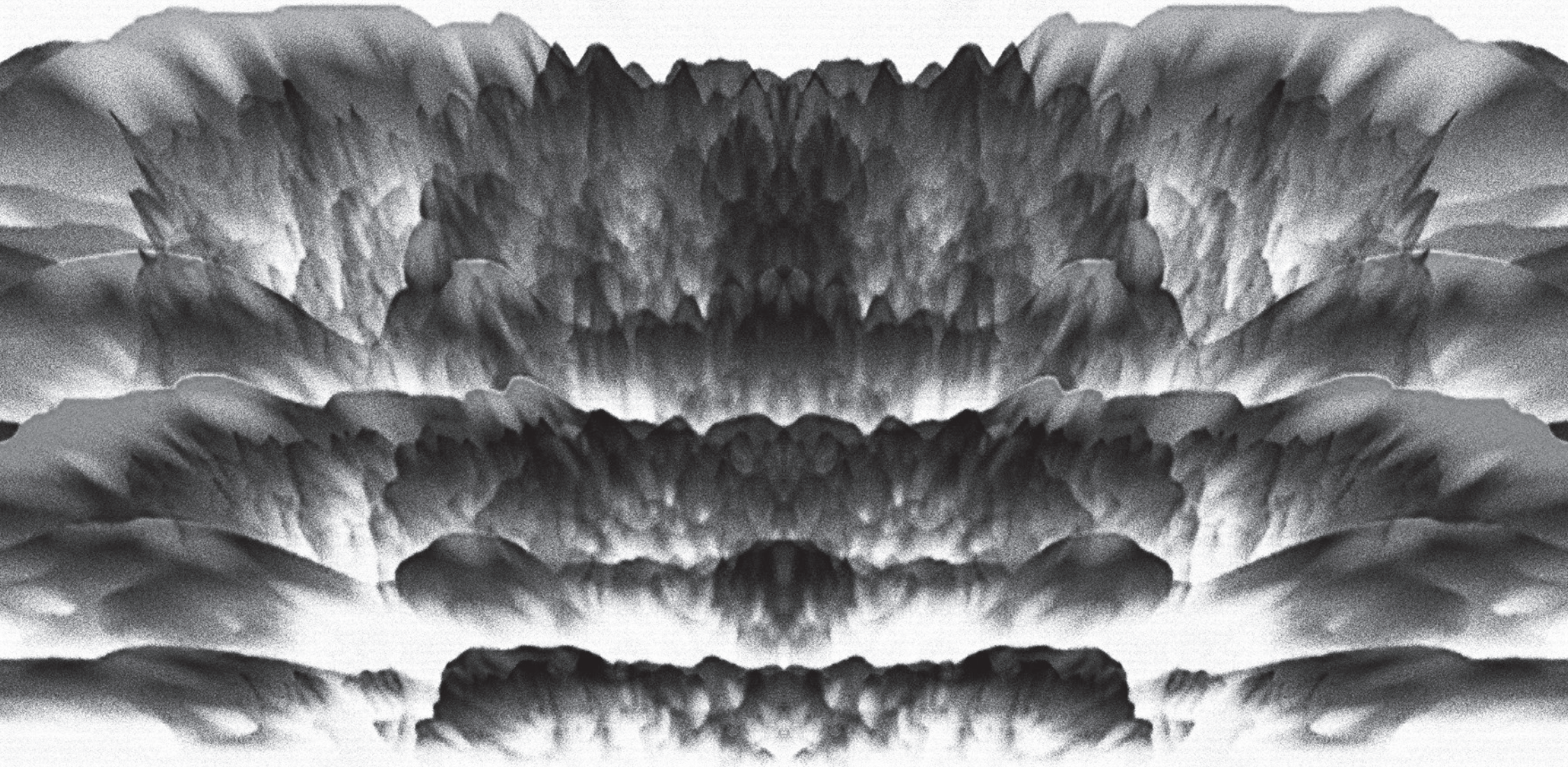
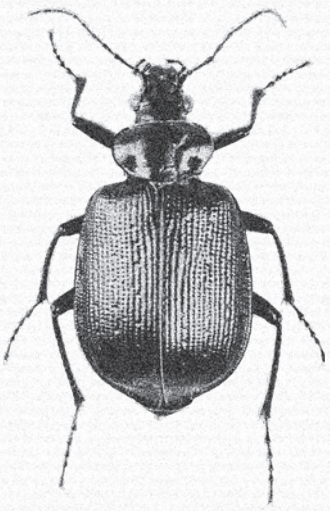
LOS SARA FONTÁN

AGOSTINA LAURENZANO





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INSECTODROME
25.03.22—07.08.22
BÒLIT_ST.NICOLAU

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LOS SARA FONTÁN
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CURATOR:
INGRID GUARDIOLA

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A RADICAL OTHERNESS AND SUBALTERNITY

Even though they were discovered in the late 19th century, insecticides came into massive use after the Second World War. Before a biocidal relationship between humans and insects became the norm, many scholars studied the life of these fascinating, strange animals. We still have the texts by Ulisse Aldrovandi on the taxonomy of insects in *De animalibus insectis libri septem, cum singulorum iconibus ad vivum expressis* (1602), which improved on Aristotelian biology, the thoughts of M. de Reaumur in the 18th century on caterpillars and butterflies, Maurice Maeterlinck's approach to the world of bees, passages from the classics in which insects feature as beings or as metaphors (Aristotle, Pliny, Aristomachus, Virgil, Homer and others) and Michelet in his laudatory *L'insecte* (1857), among many others.

Insects fascinate and frighten us in equal measure. Historian Jules Michelet begins *L'Insecte* with a chapter devoted to the horror and repugnance they provoke in us, reminding us that when people disapper from a place it is the insects that take his place, and that all the features they use to survive (stings, claws, filaments, mouthparts and so on) are simply tools to make a living, a part of their job, of their role as a worker - according to Michelet. And workers are historically our 'subaltern' or underclass.

Insects were the first multicellular organisms and many of them form part of superorganisms. Their biomorphism based on the absence of the vocal tract, multiple legs, the exoskeleton, their liquefying ability and other features are so distant from our mammal world that we have created an irrational fear of them. Their small size means we often fail to notice them or leads us to imagine them getting into our bodily orifices. Their materials - such as the cuticle - and their sophisticated, instinctive social organisation alarm us. When there are lots of them, our disgust increases exponentially, as we can't quite figure out what we see before us. The shapeless, the amorphous, paralyses us, as do the cocoons and other coverings they use for metamorphosis. What's more, that they have existed for so long makes us look pretty small as a species. As Clarice Lispector says in *The Passion According to G.H.*, "What had always repelled me about cockroaches is that they were obsolete yet still current. Knowing that they were already living on the earth just as they are now, even before the first dinosaurs appeared, knowing that the first man already found them proliferating and crawling around, knowing they witnessed the formation of the great oil and coal fields of the world and were there during the great advance and then the great retreat of the glaciers, the peaceful resistance. I knew that cockroaches could survive more than a month without food or water, and that they could turn wood into a nutritious, usable substance. And that even after being trodden on, they gradually regained their shape and went on. Even frozen, when they were defrosted, off they went... They have been reproducing without changing for three hundred and fifty million years. When the world was almost bare, they were already spreading across it." Exterminated or confined, these are the only ways we have of living with them.

Insectodrome is an interactive audio and visual installation by **Eduard Pou** and **Sara Fontán**, musicians based in Calonge, and **Agostina Laurenzano**, a Girona-based artist of Argentinian origin. It sets out from everything that is at stake in the friction between the human and the non-human, taking insects as the basis. The installation is a sensory recreation of what they awaken in humans: disgust, fear, incomprehension, curiosity, fascination. These tiny creatures have featured in films, fables and stories, the subject of childish fears and Biblical plagues, as well as being legendary deities. While 17th-century zoologist Jan Swammerdam had built his own microscopes to look at insects (not so far from the same time as Galileo was inventing telescopes to look at the stars), from the second half of the 20th century, thanks to progress in optical devices, all this could be filmed - and once our visual machinery is engaged, our relationship with what we see changes. In the 21st century they are also seen as solutions to the climate crisis and the food crisis, as well as striking models of social organisation.

Eduard Pou and **Sara Fontán** have created an installation in which the friction between the human and the non-human comes to life, because as the visitor moves about the venue, the sound of insects disappears. It consists of fifty-odd floating pieces of matter, light and sound, around a central piece that makes us think of an organisation, a society and hierarchies, all unknown. The humans become intruders invading a private space, a nest, an incubator. Human action intervenes in the course of the visit, as any movement by visitors disturbs the ecosystem: movement disrupts and distances the sound composition, while the presence of the body heat, human humidity and the mobile phone alter the electrical buzzing of the speakers. Therefore, the installation invites visitors to stay still and contemplate without intervening, to listen, understand the insects and coexist with them.

In the field of composition and musical language, the aim is to explain this relationship not through logic and rationality, but through feelings in the skin, the subconscious and the insides. As such, this musical installation is an artificial biophony, a fiction that doesn't resort to real insect sounds, but sounds created using violins, wood, electric glitches, MIDI and percussion, which are turned into a sound composition that lets us get close to the insects in a simulated setting. The principal tools used for this transformation are accumulation (like a hive), electricity (a common tool for communication between insects) and acceleration (to bring us closer to the speed and sound frequency in which their ecosystem works). In narrative terms, the piece of music consists of four movements: it starts by reproducing the visceral horror that the immense number and tiny size of the insects cause us. Once we get over this initial feeling, we plunge into a rich, complex, alien universe. In a third stage, we are able to separate the different elements of which this ecosystem is made up. The experience ends with a fourth moment that recalls the co-existence - and the inevitable clash - between worlds. The ten-minute composition finishes with the same atmosphere as at the beginning, one that could become an endless loop. This synesthetic, enveloping symphonic composition dialogues with the music of Krysztof Penderecki, who died in 2021. He was a Polish composer who, setting out from sacred music, became famous for his homage to the victims of Hiroshima and ended up working on soundtracks like those of *The Shining* by Stanley Kubrick and *Inland Empire* by David Lynch.

The pupa (etym. "golden ") or chrysalid is the state through which holometabolous insects pass in their metamorphosis. The phases in these insects' life cycle go from egg to pupa, from pupa to larva and from larva to adult or imago. While in the pupa, the body develops legs and antennae, as well as segmented head, thorax and abdomen.

Agostina Laurenzano pursues her research into sustainable design through the making of bioplastics, to interpret the biomorphism of insects by concentrating on the chrysalid, nervous structures and exoskeletons of insects that, rather than growing, change their outer cuticle. The material used is a bioplastic made from locust bean gum, more specifically the ground endosperm, in an artisanal way hydrated to give it plasticity. The seeds can be easily found in our surroundings.

Laurenzano works under parameters of production and creation with sustainable material, with which it can be integrated back into the earth in just two months, without generating alterations in the environment. In this sense, the proposal of this plastic work fits the socio-political framework of care and respect for the biosphere. The forest of Laurenzano larvae synthesizes this radical alterity and organicity of insects.

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***The installation is started every 30 minutes, on the hour and half hour**