



A Comet in Your Eyes, Panos Aprahamian and Janaina Wagner
13 March – 29 June 2025 at the Twin Galleries, Sursock Museum
Curatorial text by Marie-Nour Hechaimé

I am molten matter returned from the core of earth to tell you interior things
— Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red* (1995)

Set against the Brazilian landscape, this exhibition transports us into unfamiliar geographies and histories. Janaina Wagner's *When the Second Sun Arrives / A Comet in Your Eyes* and Panos Aprahamian's *The Vanguard Outside of History*, offer a contemporary reflection on modernity and the Anthropocene¹, while being permeated by a sense of doom.

This exhibition was conceived in 2023, a few months before the onset of the genocide in Gaza, prompting an ongoing internal debate about its relevance. Should we be, right now, turning our gaze toward Brazil and the climate emergency? Would that mean turning away from what is unfolding—in plain sight—mere kilometers from us? Beyond the easy rhetoric purporting that the climate catastrophe falls on us all, this exhibition reminds us that the current genocide in Gaza is also inscribed within a continuum of means and intents—intrinsic to the advent of the Anthropocene.

In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Amitav Ghosh opens with the story of the Banda Islands and the exploitation of its nutmeg trees by the Dutch East India Company. He describes how the islands were cleared of their inhabitants and how, as suggested by historical accounts, their villages were burned to the ground to make space for a new economy with settlers and enslaved people. Ghosh expands his scope to other spice trees—allowed to grow only in specific regions—subjected to a 100-year campaign of eradication (exterpatie) when found outside sanctioned territories. It is evident for Ghosh that genocide and ecocide are intertwined, both serving as the backbone of

¹ The artist Janaina Wagner has indicated a preference for the term 'Capitalocene'. I am employing 'Anthropocene' for its wider use in today's scholarly and popular count. Although both terms refer to the geological epoch we are in—where humans are the primary geological force on the planet—they differ in designating the onus of responsibility.

an “economic rationality predicated on armed conquest, the elimination of natives, and the creation of a racialized social structure similar to that of European colonies in the Americas”.²

If the term ‘genocide’ is commonly understood³ and was first coined in 1944, that of ecocide was born from the devastation of the Vietnam War and the widespread usage of Agent Orange. It designates the “unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts”.⁴ Early drafts of the Rome Statute⁵ included crimes against the environment, but the articles were removed at the request of the United States, The United Kingdom, and France. Today, as per article 8, only in times of war are environmental crimes prosecuted under the Statute, limiting the scope of prosecution. This omission fails to account for the role of developmentalism—and modernity—in “destroying the entire web of nonhuman connections that sustained a certain way of life”⁶ and thus in constituting genocide.

This ‘ecocide-genocide nexus’ provides us with ways to fully reckon with the Anthropocene and its scale of destruction. As one of modernity’s foundational myths—the right to terraform—crumbles, a vast number of artistic practices have turned towards the Anthropocene’s aesthetic, mythological, and speculative dimensions, engaging in storytelling, investigation, and counter-mapping.

A Comet in Your Eyes features two video installations, with Brazil as a backdrop. Although they refer to different events, they are both infused with deep climate anxiety—or solastalgia. The cosmos plays a recurrent role in both artists’ works—through depiction or reference. It offers a coda or escape route to the contemporary ills haunting their works.

The installation of Janaina Wagner exhibited at the Museum is the last chapter of her trilogy invested in the Rodovia Transamazônica [Transamazon Highway], the mega-infrastructural project that started during the civic-military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). Also known as BR-230, the

² Ghosh, Amitav. *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*. The University of Chicago Press, 2021.

³ Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) defines it as actions “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group”.

⁴ This definition was fixed in 2021 by the Independent Expert Panel for the Legal Definition of Ecocide, convened by the Stop Ecocide Foundation and has been widely used since.

⁵ The treaty that establishes the International Criminal Court.

⁶ Ibid, Ghosh, Amitav. *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*. The University of Chicago Press, 2021

highway spans over 4,000 km and runs across seven states. It was one of the cornerstones of the civic-military dictatorship's promotion of "significant settlement expansion to create a development frontier through roadbuilding projects, the construction of hydroelectric dams, and large-scale livestock production in the Amazon."⁷

Wagner's first chapter, *Curupira e a máquina do destino* [Curupira and the Machine of Destiny] (2021), revisits *Iracema – Uma Transa Amazônica* (1974) by Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna. The film, an example of Cinema Novo⁸, is prescient in many ways and encapsulates the horrors and devastations faced by the Indigenous communities of the Amazon. The film was shot in a national security zone under strict military control and combined scripted scenes with documentary footage. This gives an impression of closeness, DIY, with a fluidity that drags the viewer deeper and deeper within the Amazon—and into the torments of Iracema, one of its main characters, a young sex worker traveling the road with a truck driver. The film ends with her fate remaining unclear as she is left to fend for herself.

Wagner's version follows the ghost of Iracema as she retraces her journey through an Amazonian roadscape marked by rugged paths, dense forests, motorcycles, and roadside bars—culminating in a final encounter with the Curupira, a mystical Brazilian creature that guards the Amazon and its more-than-human inhabitants. Recently chosen as the mascot for COP30, the annual UN conference on climate change, the Curupira—with its backward feet and fiery hair—remains a spectral guardian of the Amazon, protecting its forests through trickery and illusion. The Curupira confounds the human drive to conquer nature, leading loggers astray. In Wagner's work, The Amazon forest is watching. The lurking spirit is awakened.

Wagner's second chapter, *Quebrante* (2024), highlights another of the legends encountered along this road—of a meteor colliding with Earth, causing small pieces to break and fly into the universe: the Moon is a lost part of Earth and we are still longing for it, like a lost part of ourselves.

Her third and latest installation, *When the Second Sun Arrives / A Comet in Your Eyes*, also tells the story of a legend. Only here, it is a fictional legend that Wagner crafts from impressions collected along the road, pop songs, and planetary anxiety. The moving images are superposed with subtitles, forming a dialogue that borrows from *Autobiography of Red* (1998) by Anne Carson

⁷ Urzedo, Daniel, and Pratchi Chatterjee. "The Colonial Reproduction of Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon: Violence Against Indigenous Peoples for Land Development." *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 2 (2021): 302–24.

⁸ 'Cinema Novo', meaning new cinema in Portuguese was a film movement from the 50s to the 70s that emphasized social and political problems and was influenced by Italian neo-realism and French new-wave.

and *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein* [The Ravishing of Lol Stein] (1964) by Marguerite Duras. Two literary works that revolve around love stories—often behind great myths and legends. Love for another—man or woman—but also love for what surrounds us, human or non-human; a love that endures across time and cosmos, one that blinds, moves, and consumes.

The two-channel video opens inside a planetarium where a rock is quietly burning. The camera then escapes to find the road, the Rodavia Transamazônica, across the states of Para and Ceará. We encounter prehistoric petroglyphs of celestial bodies carved into rocks, ex-votos deposited on tree branches, a Natural History Museum fresco depicting an enchanted, primeval forest, and sculptures of creatures caught between myth and extinction such as dinosaurs and a giant turtle recalling Amazonian cosmologies in which the world rests upon its back.

The second channel inverts the journey: a parallel world unfolds—'the world of below and the world of above, mirrored in wings'⁹—except that the road now glows red. The footage has been burned and the color bleeds into the image, at times taking on the appearance of liquid, an organic texture scrutinized under a microscope. A new cosmic—red?—order is here, born out of memory burn, extinct species, and stars "consumed ten thousand of years ago."¹⁰ The arrival of a second sun does not signal renewal but an unfolding of temporal dissonance, a flickering between catastrophe and possibility.

Marguerite Duras was an author invested in stories of colonialism and genocide. She is known for many seminal texts, including *La Douleur* [The Pain] (1985), a harrowing account of waiting for her husband Robert Antelme's return from the Dachau concentration camp; the dialogues of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), Alain Resnais's film about memory, trauma, and the legacy of the atomic bomb; and *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* [The Seawall] (1950), in which a mother's obsessive attempts to cultivate coastal land in Cambodia, acquired through a program of 'mise en valeur' (value-adding), mirror the hubristic logic of colonial terraforming. The novel's theme resonates with environmental tragedies such as the Dust Bowl, where imperial visions of 'blooming deserts' led to catastrophe. Duras' works expose modernity's illusions: that land can be forced into submission, that history can be rewritten, that memory can be controlled. The passionate conviction of the mother—verging on tragic obsession—takes central stage in the novel. *Lol Stein* is also moved by radicality—a desire to feel, to live, to be alive through a lover's love.

⁹ Taken from Janaina Wagner's subtitles in *When the Second Sun Arrives/ A Comet in Your Eyes* (2025)

¹⁰ *ibid*

The second gallery exhibits a two-channel video installation by Panos Aprahamian. *The Vanguard Outside of History* blends fictional tales with documentary realism and follows Aprahamian in his attempt to uncover the psychological mechanisms behind the disappearance of Ypsilon, a young Brazilian of Lebanese-Palestinian descent. Filmed in the fall of 2020 in Boiçucanga, São Sebastião, Brazil, the work is inspired by the "landscape theory" cinematic approach (or fukeiron in Japanese), used by Eric Baudelaire in his film *AKA Jihadist* (2016) and originally developed by the Japanese avant-garde filmmaker Masao Adachi in his film *AKA Serial Killer* (1969). Footage from places where the main character lived and traveled constitutes the core of the film, serving to decipher the motivations of a serial killer in the case of Adachi, and a Jihadist in the case of Baudelaire.

To assess Ypsilon, the artist interviews his close relatives and friends—all women, and a child translating for his mother. The child is an unreliable interpreter, struggling with English, preferring the gist to the totality. Lying on the bed and playing with his mother's hair, he is also questioned on his opinion and entertains a complex mix of feelings. The second interview centers on two women—the best friend and the ex-lover—who had more direct access to Ypsilon's quest, coming along on trips and collecting his dreams. As such, they seem more combative, less perplexed by his choice. Intercalated between the interviews, footage of a private pool and a swimming man going back and forth. Idle luxe is superposed with luxuriant greenery.

Several times in the video, the dispositif transpires: the makeshift white screen behind the pool, the voice of the artist asking a question or revealing details about Ypsilon's background, the producer indicating that the camera is still running... These transgressions could look like DIY but instead reveal the deception—the film is a fiction carried by the artist. What else is implanted? Ypsilon becomes even more elusive. What remains is that he is moved by a feeling greater than love, coming at him through dreams and ordering him to the desert.

In *I Want to Believe: Posadism, UFOs and Apocalypse Communism* (2020), A.M Gittlitz retraces the history of the Posadist movement. Originating in Argentina within the ranks of the Fourth International, it broke away with the Trotskyist organization and ventured at a later stage into a blend of catastrophism communism and intergalactic solidarity: "A peculiar synthesis of ufology and Marxism, Posadism argued that the visiting extraterrestrials must have come from a highly advanced civilization that was capable of intergalactic travel, and therefore, a civilization that must have already achieved their society's full utopian potential. He [Juan Posadas] proposed that

Terran workers, as in the human workforce on planet Earth, should embrace these visiting “space comrades” as a lending hand for the coming revolution”¹¹.

The installation of Aprahamian is haunted by the “End of History” ideology that arose after the collapse of the USSR, a moment of deep deroute for the International Left. In the following decades, a persistent feeling of capitalist realism took anchor, or “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it”.¹² This feeling of inertia of contemporary politics and culture could explain the revival of left-wing militancy with esoteric ideas and ufology, especially during climate collapse. Indeed, “as temperatures break new records each year and our asphalt planet turns back to tar, it is far more pragmatic to relate to apocalypse than to these fairytales of twentieth-century socialism’s sudden mass reemergence.”¹³ From that lens, Ypsilon's disappearance can be understood as the ultimate act of radical engagement. What remains if not the cosmos? Or as proclaimed by the radical ufology group Men In Red in a public action during the Sixth World Ufology symposium in 1998: “The revolution will be exoplanetary or not at all”.¹⁴

The arrival of the second sun announces the exoplanetary. A second sun arrives, speculatively from another solar system. What might revolution look like if taken at its primary meaning—to revolve or roll back around the sun? Could the ultimate revolution be that of revolving around a second sun?

The trilogy of Wagner weaves competing and interlacing timelines—the time of the road and the planetary time—or that of stones, dinosaurs, myths, and legends. As such, it is situated at the threshold, a cross-over, offering a glimpse of what was, what is, and what will (be)come. Modernity is represented by the road, which engulfs the Amazon, its ecosystem, and its original inhabitants. In reaction, it avenges, takes revenge, through elusive characters, muted but lurking—in caves, subtitles, off-road. Terrible characters, such as the Curupira animated by passion—anger, revenge, despair, but also love. The arrival of a Second Sun comes to symbolize a cosmic turn of

¹¹ Aprahamian, Panos. Culture and Revolution: Toward a Leftist Politics of Oscillation (Part 1 of 2). The Public Source, 2020 <https://thepublicsource.org/culture-and-revolution-toward-leftist-politics-oscillation-1>

¹² Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?* Zero books, 2009

¹³ Gittlitz, A.M. *I Want to Believe: Posadism, UFOs, and Apocalypse Communism*. Pluto Press, 2020.

¹⁴ Cited in Gittlitz, A.M, see *abid.* Men in Red flyer, “UNIDENTIFIED FIGHTING OBJECT, I GRIGI SIETE VOI!” Geuriglia Marketing, 4 April, 1998, <http://www.geurigliamarketing.it/mir/volant.htm>.”

events. Can modernity be defeated? Wagner does not offer us answers, but only a cosmology she has gathered along the BR-230 highway; a cosmoecology.

In an essay titled *Counter-apocalyptic beginnings: cosmoecology for the End of the World* Martin Savransky, proposes cosmoecology as a method, a prism, "an attempt at the End of the World, to escape the hold of the Anthropocenic refrain".¹⁵ First coined by philosopher Vinciane Despret and ecologist Michel Meuret in 2016, this porous term has come to signify the necessity to weave ecological systems with folklore, in a process of re-enchantment since "ecology and cosmology are knotted in a common story, forming a cosmoecology of multiple beings, gods, animals, living and dead, each bearing the consequences of the others' ways of living and dying"¹⁶.

The two installations of this exhibition dance around the Anthropocenic refrain – or the constant reminder that the End of the World is looming. The cosmos is called upon: to surrender and redeem or ally with it. However, they also hint –joyously– that "the Euro-American extractive mode of living through which 'civilization developed,' is not the end of everything as such"¹⁷. Rather, and to cite Aimé Césaire, it might be "the only thing in the world that's worth beginning"¹⁸. In a burning world, where climate catastrophe has emerged as an inescapable horizon, what future can we still summon?

¹⁵ Savransky, Martin. "Counter-Apocalyptic Beginnings: Cosmoecology for the End of the World." *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* 4, no. 1 (July 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1080/25729861.2021.1914423>.

¹⁶ Despret, Vinciane, and Michel Meuret. "Cosmoecological Sheep and the Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet." *Environmental Humanities* 8, no. 1 (May 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3527704>.

¹⁷ Ibid. Savransky, Martin.

¹⁸ Césaire, Aimé cited in ibid. Savransky, Martin.

Participating artists: Panos Aprahamian and Janaina Wagner

Exhibition curator: Marie-Nour Hechaime

Translation of curatorial text from English to Arabic: Dima Hamadeh

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Exhibited works

Left Gallery: Panos Aprahamian

The Vanguard Outside of History, 2025, Panos Aprahamian
Two-channel video, 22'

Right Gallery: Janaina Wagner

When the Second Sun Arrives / A Comet in Your Eyes, 2025, Janaina Wagner
Two-channel video, brass sheets, 14'

A Comet in Your Eyes (from the series of storyboards), 2024
5 drawings, oil bar on cotton paper, 21 x 21 cm

When the Second Sun Arrives / A Comet in Your Eyes (from the series of storyboards), 2024
3 drawings, engraved copper, oil and plastic paint, 30 x 40 cm

When the Second Sun Arrives, 2024
Diptych, oil bar on engraved lead; engraved lead, 11 x 16 cm

Panos Aprahamian (b.1987, Beirut) is an unfiction filmmaker, media artist, and writer. Through film, text, new media, and ritual, his practice explores the spectral presence of the future past in undead bodies, sacrificial landscapes, cultural practices, and social relations. In 2024, Aprahamian received the Han Nefkens Foundation—Fundació Antoni Tàpies Video Art Grant and the Eliza Moore fellowship for artistic excellence.

Janaina Wagner (b.1989, São Paulo) is a filmmaker and visual artist. Working with film, drawing, and installation, her research-based practice delves into notions of progress and legacy, articulated through a constellation of stories, facts, images, and memories. She is a PhD student at Le Fresnoy—Studio National des Arts Contemporains and is developing her first feature film, *A Mala da Noite*.