

PRESS RELEASE

'Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms', an exhibition and workshops programme by artist Ami Clarke, in partnership with Friends of the Earth, Digital Art Studios, Sonic Arts Research Centre and PS² (Belfast), and Banner Repeater (London)

Exhibition and workshops:

- Thursday 4 September: Late Night Art (6pm - 9pm)
- Friday 5 September: collective writing and sonic ritual jam
- Saturday 27 September: exhibition closes

'Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms' explores ways of 'sensing' Lough Neagh at a microbial scale, from a multi-species perspective.

-STARTS-

'Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms'

In the long hot summer of 2023, Lough Neagh became overwhelmed with algae blooms to such an extent that the vibrant green images of the blue green algae went viral, making international headlines. Once a site of great abundance, supplying (as it still does) 40% of all drinking water to NI, with eel fishing famously being passed down through generations over centuries, the complexity of how the Lough became eutrophic presents a textbook case in converging dynamics of power, influence, and conflicts of interest, that have also developed over decades, if not centuries, around Lough Neagh and the watershed. Algae blooms offer a symptom of the climate crisis that emphasises the interconnectedness of vulnerable ecosystems with human-made systems.

The microbial scale of the cyanobacteria (blue green algae) is important in allowing us to cut through the complexity, drawing our attention to certain indisputable material facts that show that there is simply too much phosphorous in Lough Neagh, at which point we can start to dismantle everything that makes it this way. It's all about the nutrients! Our focus at the microbial scale has the potential to lead to a paradigm shift in thinking; a gut feeling, as we start to understand our relationship to nature in a more de-centred way. As just one species amongst the multitudes that live within the vulnerable eco-system of Lough Neagh, vital to finding a more sustainable equilibrium.

Shifting perspectives to the microbial scale

The evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis' work, shows that algae blooms also speak of deep, geological, planetary timescales, as cyanobacteria brought oxygen to the atmosphere at a crucial stage in evolution about 3.4 billion years ago, bringing about mass speciation and eventually humans.

Expanding upon her previous work on complex systems and informed by a collective writing project with Friends of the Earth NI, Clarke worked with many local people to record something of the multiple scales and temporalities of the lough, combining 4K drone footage with cinematography, underwater filming and microscopic footage. With kind support from local scientists working on the lough for several decades the film includes footage of Microcystis, the current cyanobacteria, different from the previous algae bloom outbreaks which were Anabaena.

The atmospheric videos combine with an underwater soundtrack, to explore how ecological systems enmesh with human systems established over the last century, informed by a very particular world view, derived from a mechanistic science that viewed nature purely as a resource to be extracted from. The deep resistance shown towards Margulis' teachings on symbiosis and cross-species collaborations, was no coincidence, with the emphasis on 'the individual' writ large in ideas of the 'selfish gene', that characterised both neo-Darwinism and neo-liberalism, also emerging at that time.

But, as the evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis would say, as she commented on the 'thought collective' of her time: it doesn't have to be this way! There's nothing 'natural' about it, that says it has to be the way it currently is, despite the best efforts of the neoliberals to make it seem that way. There *are* other options, coupled with an urgent need to move away from the current narrow channels of choice for all involved.

-ENDS-

Contacts:

Jane Morrow, Co-Director/ Strategic Vision and Development Curator, PS²:
E: jane@pssquared.org T: 07854034765

Ami Clarke, artist
E: ami@bannerrepeater.org T: 07958996834

Notes to editors:

- Ami will be in Belfast and around the banks of Lough Neagh from Thursday 4 September to Saturday 6 September.
- Late Night Art will take place on Thursday 4 September, during which the gallery will be open 6pm - 9pm

Events - Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms

Collective writing and sonic ritual jam

Friday 5 September, 2pm - 5pm

Sonic Arts Research Centre, QUB

Expanding upon Ami Clarke's exhibition at PS³ - Meeting the Lough On Its Own Terms - we invite you for a sonic ritual jam that combines a collective writing project with listening and sound.

Rituals have acted historically, as early technological interfaces, scoring human / nature relationships, in very particular ways. Moving forwards, the sonic ritual is a work that attempts to develop a new multi-species perspective drawn from workshops with DAS Belfast XR group, thinking through alternative ways of 'sensing' the Lough, that combine with conversations held with local people, indigenous to the area, as well as druids, herbalists, and permaculture practitioners. It emphasises listening, and sound, as practices central to de-centering the human, amongst the vulnerable ecologies of Lough Neagh and the watershed.

The work considers how human voice/s in a polyphonic approach might sit within this delicate ensemble, to reflect the new calibration we are hoping to bring about, with John D'Arcy (Sonic Arts) and HIVE Choir and Richard Davis of DAS, and is informed by a collective writing project that has been running for over a year and a half with Friends of the Earth.

Sounds already gathered include:

- eels
- microbes
- nutrient readings of the water in the Lough
- underwater recordings of the loughs deepest point
- other ambient underwater recordings
- human voices articulating some of the collective writing done so far

Please RSVP to jane@pssquared.org if you'd like to join us. Light refreshments will be available.

Reading group (online) led by Ami Clarke

We will meet every two weeks on Monday evenings, 7-9pm, over the following dates:

- Monday 1 September
- Monday 15 September
- Monday 29 September

We will begin with [*Bacteria to AI: Human Futures with our Nonhuman Symbionts*](#) by N. Katherine Hayles, followed by two books on Neo-liberalism, in order to be able to bring together the microbial with the neoliberal apparatus, more fully.

Please email jane@pssquared.org to receive the Zoom link for all three sessions and a link to the book in a digital format.

About PS²:

PS² = [Paragon Studios](#) x [Project Space](#). We are an artist-led collective, connecting art and society, based in the centre of Belfast.

PS²

Property House

11 Rosemary Street

Belfast BT1 1QA

UK

<https://www.pssquared.org/>

PS² is supported by The National Lottery through [Arts Council of Northern Ireland](#), [Belfast City Council](#)'s Artists' Studio and Makerspace Organisational Grant, and [Arts & Business NI](#)'s Blueprint Investment Grant.