

NEST

# Fluid Desires

English

# Fluidity is bliss, fluidity is doom

Because of science and (nano)technology, more things are being discovered, measured and explained that before remained hidden. An example is the discovery of the pentaquark which was brought to light by the Large Hadron Collider (particle accelerator) at CERN. The development of astronomy is tracing more and more planets, stars and comets. With this new knowledge, boundaries are extended even further. The expansion and wide application of the internet - with its vocabulary drenched in fluid terms (surfing, data streams, streaming) - stretches the world even further and challenges the concept of chronological time and space. Everything interpenetrates into the different realities within which we exist. The digitalisation of society also contributes to a greater role for the immaterial. Much of what used to be tangible has now become virtual.

Not just the advent of the internet but also developments in philosophy have caused a shift in the understanding of reality. Philosophical movements such as *speculative realism* and *object oriented ontology* no longer maintain Kant's *anthropocentrism* (seeing humans as being the centre of the world) but as-

sume a reality that also exists outside of the human perception. This perspective has enormous consequences on both the perception of the object itself as on the object-human relationship. Human beings are no longer superior to the object, they are at the same level. The fact that objects outlive people poses the question: who serves who? Objects have acquired *agency* (the power to act). Now that objects and humankind increasingly blend and merge into each other (think of artificial hips, pacemakers, chip implants or digital hearing aids), the delimitation between them has become porous.

In the realm of nature, humanity has in fact made more impact than before. Because of the significant influence of human activity on the planet's climate and atmosphere, we have slipped unnoticed from the Holocene to a new geological age: the Anthropocene. Various artists reflect on how the Anthropocene will develop, which leads sometimes to post-apocalyptic visions: a landscape characterized by trash, pollution and exhaustion of the soil because of over-consumption. Other artists create a new chemical nature on the garbage heaps of the petrochemical industry, a cocktail of organic and inorganic, natural and

synthetic. Now that industrial and technological developments have obscured the distinction, plant-based and chemical raw materials are mixed, resulting in one giant blur.

An important place in this story occupies the Polish-British sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman († 2017), who has extensively analyzed the increasingly slippery society. In his book 'Liquid Modernity' (2000) he states that life on earth is changing rapidly and that modernity is fluid. Fluid, because solid concepts of time and space have transformed into fluid values. Ideas and ways of life that had been anchored have come under pressure. Globalization and individualism are, according to him, the reason for this fluid society. We, *the liquid moderns*, have to be prepared to adapt to these changing notions. Zygmunt Bauman viewed this with sorrow. In the many publications that succeeded 'Liquid Modernity' such as 'Liquid Life', 'Liquid Times', 'Liquid Fear' and 'Liquid Love', the philosopher demonstrated the shadow-side of fluidity. A state of constant change, fed by variation, pluralism and ambivalence could lead to insecurity and even fear. Bauman was convinced that the fluid society would quickly dissolve.

In the meantime, notions of fluidity are spreading like an oil spill and appear in many disciplines. Think of gender studies (gender fluid), journalism

(liquid journalism), fashion (the wet look of fabrics or the wet dress worn by Kim Kardashian), art history (liquid antiquity), architecture and design (blobs, blubs and other fluid forms). Striking is the craze for homemade slime that went from niche to hype on social media among young people. From photographs and videos, it is clear that there is an enormous fascination for the jelly like substance and that it is a thrill to touch it. It is also evident that words like *fluidity* increasingly appear in everyday language and in various topics.

In the visual arts, the fluid movement is facilitated by industrial developments. Many artists have a renewed interest in industrial materials and production processes. The creative potential of processes in chemistry and physics such as galvanization and electrolysis are currently being explored in the arts. As are new materials and new applications of silicone, acrylates, epoxy, polyurethane, polyester, resin, wax, plexi(glass) and gels. Artists rarely use these materials in a way that they were originally intended to be used. The multifaceted developments in industry and chemistry encourage the emergence of an alchemist side in many artists. There is a modest alchemistic, molecular revolution underway. Where the traditional view of the alchemist is as someone who can transform regular metal into gold, a number of contempo-

rary artists strive for materials that continuously change and are in that respect, unstable. They refuse to accept a steady form and dream of changeability. The core of alchemy is, after all, transformation. Furthermore, it is striking that some of these alchemist concoctions have a mystical lining. The resulting fluid art is difficult to grasp and this quality has a certain force of attraction. Beside that, the visual effects generate a sense of wonderment. For instance, the revival of iridescent colors (the rainbow effect) and oil slicks is only just recently behind us.

Fluidity knows two sides. Where Bauman pointed out the negative consequences, others experience liberation now that so many possibilities and opportunities present themselves in gender, relational and social spheres. However, the knowledge we currently accumulate does not automatically make us happier. A world that is continuously expanding and deepening can also give a sense of the inhospitable and can be disorienting. As unconditional notions have become slippery and with the blurring boundaries between human and non-human, organic and inorganic, material and immaterial, this provides potential but desperation too. These two opposing approaches in respect to changeability can be loosely tied to two aesthetic perspectives distinguishable in the exhibition. *Finish fetish* dominates the smooth, sleek artworks with their seductively shiny surfaces in

shimmering colors. Alternately, the 'polluted aesthetic' reveals the dystopian side of fluidity. In these amorphous works there is often an aspect of deterioration, disintegration and putrefaction.

*Nanda Janssen, 2020*

Fluid Desires is a Nest production  
24 Jan 2020 – 22 March 2020

Hicham Berrada  
Mimosa Echard  
Inge van Genuchten  
Marie Maillard  
Shanta Rao  
Jérôme Robbe  
Maya Rochat  
Leonid Tsvetkov

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# Hicham Berrada

The alchemistic artist Hicham Berrada composes underwater landscapes in aquariums using alkalis, acids, water, minerals and elements such as copper, cobalt or iron. During the exhibition these landscapes slowly continue to develop. Here lifeless substances reveal that they possess movement and behave in a manner close to being alive. Forms continuously evolve and dissolve and although this happens naturally, nothing is alive. Iron can, for instance, crystallize in exactly the same way as certain corals. The ecosystems that Berrada brings into being shake up the distinctions between living and mineral, between organic and inorganic. Even though the lead, silver, aluminium and other elements the artist uses in his work are naturally occurring, these substances are actually poisonous, especially in high concentrations and in limited space. In a time of foreboding that nature will ultimately cease to exist, these evolving, chemical landscapes open the door to other forms of life, movement and beauty.

In his work, Hicham Berrada reveals invisible, physical phenomena with evocative forces and captures energies that usually are overlooked. He sees himself as a director of energy, a servant to nature that helps fulfil specific processes.

Not a single form is created by Berrada, all he does is allow for certain forms to appear at a specific moment in a specific place. The process is the work. For instance, in the video 'Céleste', it is the wind that paints the clouds. He is not interested in a fixed form or a finished sculpture but rather the idea of a form in movement. The artist is intrigued by the concepts of morphogenesis and creation. Morphogenesis, literally the 'beginning of form', is a biological process through which an organism develops its form.

Suggested reading by Hicham Berrada

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— Gaston Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries du repos*, 1948. (Earth and Reveries of Will: an essay on the imagination of matter)

— Gaston Bachelard, *L'air et les songes*, 1943. (Air and Dreams: an essay on the imagination of movement)

— Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 1960. (In particular the passages about natural elements.)

# Mimosa Echard

Nature grows from lifeless matter, the organic meets the artificial. Welcome in the world of Mimosa Echard. The bottle sculptures 'I still dream of Orgonon' and the painting, 'A/B14' can be considered as futuristic still lifes. In the 'A/B' series, to which the pink painting belongs, the artist mixes pure with polluted, chemical with natural and organic with inorganic. These post-apocalyptic cocktails contain shaving cream, moss, Coca Cola Light, kombucha, anti-conception pills, bee wax, food supplements and butterflies. In her compositions - the complete list of ingredients of which would fill a paragraph - Echard ignores the traditional classifications and reconciles opposing facets. Liters of epoxy resin forge all the elements together.

The bottle sculptures are also hybrid objects with a fluid allure, but here it feels as if the liquid has solidified and petrified, as if fossilization has taken place. The sculptures are a play on so-called 'orgonites' - small objects that protect against negative energy and radiation.

'Chakra Crachat' is like a semi-transparent membrane made up of varying layers, objects and materials. Slippery latex connects the different bits of fabric and gives a wet finish to the artworks. The meaning of the compositions lies in the chosen

material and the exchange between them. Echard creates illogical connections, she mixes and fuses them until a certain ambivalence or paradox is achieved. The idea of contamination is also present. Not so much in the sense of contamination from bacteria or viruses, rather that of meaning that interweaves, images that coalesce and ideas that influence each other.

[Suggested reading by Mimosa Echard](#)

[Mark A. McMenamin & Dianna L. Schulte, \*Hypersea: Life on Land\*, 1996.](#)

# Inge van Genuchten

Liquid drips down in continuous, unceasing movements. It appears to flow from the building and then to disappear back into it, as if it briefly escapes the system. The solid has become fluid. The dripping line 'Untitled' is reminiscent of a contemporary hourglass. Time is fluid, or perhaps even elastic. The artist thinks of liquids as ambiguous: magnificent to look at but also - with its quality to always find a way through things - embodying something destructive.

In almost all of her work Inge van Genuchten uses liquids. Some materials might not literally be considered liquid, but in her hands, they appear to take on a flowing, fluid quality. She uses material such as oil, water, sand, fat, butter and flour. Raw materials that, through (art) history have become loaded with ritualistic, mythological and political meaning. In her work, this merely plays a role in the background.

The main attraction of liquids lurks for the artist in the fact that it is difficult to practice control over liquid materials. Squeeze sand in a fist and it slips through the fingers. The pursuit of control and the failure to achieve it are recurring concepts in her artwork and performances. Often, she performs simple, meaningless

actions with the material and thereby marks the presence of humans on the world. Much of her work has an existential character. Inge van Genuchten ends up with liquid materials as she aims to capture the intangible in a tangible form.

## Suggested reading by Inge van Genuchten

- \_Mark Miodownik, *Liquid: The Delightful and Dangerous Substances That Flow Through Our Lives*, 2018.
- \_Esther Leslie, *Liquid Crystals - The Science and Art of a Fluid Form*, 2016.
- \_Kōbō Abe, *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1962.

# Marie Maillard

Marie Maillard is first and foremost an artist that follows closely what new materials are developed and introduced into the market and how these can be applied. This is an expertise that is useful in her work for the French architectural firm Jean Nouvel. She has been combining this job with her artistic practice for twenty years. In her visual works she also focuses on the nature of material and the materials of the future. 'UNIT 1912' is made up of cylindrical rods that resemble ground drilling samples. With this she anticipates future technology that enables the transformation of material by, for instance, changing its molecular structure: marble, wood, stone or metal could become transparent, or even fluid while a branch could transform into inorganic matter such as glass or water ('TWIG 1808').

Her approach might appear to be science fiction but is based on various scientific studies and publications such as 'Informatique Céleste' (2017) by the French philosopher Mark Alizart. He postulates that everything around us is coded. Mathematics and computers might be human inventions but are much closer to nature than is generally thought because everything in nature can be reduced to codes. Once it is understood how nature

is coded, that information can be used to generate new forms. An example of such a code is the Fibonacci Sequence. These coded forms can be found in the infinitely large and the infinitely small. A cyclone - or even a galaxy - have the same form as a cochlea (a snail's house or the organ of the inner ear). Marie Maillard and Hicham Berrada share an interest in coded nature.

[Suggested reading by Maria Maillard](#)

[\\_Stephen Wolfram, \*A New Kind of Science\*, 2002.](#)

[\\_Emanuele Coccia, \*The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture\*, 2018. \(La Vie des Plantes; Une métaphysique du mélange, 2016\)](#)

[\\_Mark Alizart, \*Informatique Céleste\*, 2017.](#)

# Shanta Rao

'Soft Cells' is a series of flexible sculptures that investigates the metamorphic and ductile and challenges the conventional view on our solid world. The soft sculptures dwell on the fact that the world is predominantly sponge-like: of all organic mass, more than half is made of gelatinous organisms living mostly in maritime environments. 'Soft Cells' is based on marine biological research, especially on the transformative capabilities of jellyfish. The jellyfish is a hybrid organism and a symbiotic creation. Shanta Rao is intrigued by this mollusk's ability to adapt. Some jellyfish are practically immortal, in the way that they are able to reverse the process of cellular differentiation (aging). In their primitive form they can exist for many years, to first reincarnate at a more convenient time in a new form. By their very existence, jellyfish touch on questions about the border between life and death.

The sculptures of Shanta Rao are a type of thought experiment about a more fluid and coalescent world in which the relationships which connect us to both the living and the non-living are reconsidered. Perhaps the boundaries are less rigid than previously assumed. Hard surfaces in the water, such as car wrecks for instance, stimulate the dissemination of

the jellyfish. The artist applies thin layers of polymer paint, used to coat cars and protect boats, to molds (car carcasses) and subsequently peels them off. The iridescent and anisotropic pigments in the paint refer to particular types of jellyfish. The sculptures appear malleable: they have taken a temporary form which, before long, will change into something else. The artworks, made exclusively of paint, are ambivalent, the work can be both a painting and a sculpture. In that respect, their defying classification also contributes to the fluidity of the artworks.

## Suggested reading by Shanta Rao

\_Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves: essai sur l'imagination de la matière*, 1942. (Water and Dreams: an essay on the imagination of matter)

\_Robert Morris, *Anti Form*, 1968.

# Jérôme Robbe

Jérôme Robbe focuses on the fluid aspect of painting. In the paintings from the series 'L'Air de Rien' and 'Surfaces' he lets the paint flow freely. It seems as if paint and support have briefly solidified before the paint continues to drip, curve and flow. Each painting is an evocation of a fluid world. To Robbe, fluidity represents freedom. Just like the artists Shanta Rao, Hicham Berrada and Leonid Tsvetkov, it is not Robbe's intention to control the creative process. He would rather let things run their course, letting it develop in the here and now by anticipating what happens with the material.

Jérôme Robbe doesn't believe that painting has to do with genius, but rather with invention. The essence lies in discovering materials and techniques that enable better and different painting. The series 'L'Air de Rien' has been painted on plexiglass with a silver or gold coating which effects the depth, clarity and temperature of the applied color.

His paintings are the result of an elaborate process in which fluidity plays an important role. The initial step is warming the plexiglass with a heat gun. This results in it becoming soft; expanding; forming bubbles and ripples; and, craquelure appearing on the surface.

Subsequently the artist vaporizes several liters of water above the plate. The mist slowly swirls down onto it. Varnish, colored with pigments, is then poured on and allowed to find a way across the distorted surface. Because of the consistent application of a lateral line onto the canvas, the abstract monochromes can also be recognized as landscapes.

## Suggested reading by Jérôme Robbe

Edward MacCurdy, *The notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2002. (Leonardo da Vinci, 1519). In particular:

Book 1, treatise

- *Physical Geography* (Liquid Sphere and Centre of the World)

- *Movement and Weight* (movement of air under water, movement of liquids and sand)

Book 2, treatise

- *The Essence of Water*

- *The Melting of Metals*

# Maya Rochat

On all levels is the approach of Maya Rochat permeated with fluidity. Her practice for instance is hybrid: photography, painting, installation, video art, performance and fashion are all being merged together. Next to that, she explores the layered and fluid quality of time and space. Her photographs are inspired on the transformation of material and nature: the way flowing water slowly carves out a riverbed, how wind does the same to rocks; stone that becomes fluid or vice versa; lava that solidifies. These are reflections on a world that is constantly in flux. Everything flows, melts and blends in her photographs. Her working process is also led by fluidity. Rochat often paints straight onto her photographic prints whether on glass, paper, aluminium or meters long fabric.

The physical boundaries of her photographs are stretched in various ways. The images break out of their frames and occupy the entire space. The photographic installation for 'Fluid Desires' entails several wall and floor covering banners upon which sometimes other photographs are presented. Besides that, Rochat often combines different prints in one work by placing images on top of each other (on different supports) or by printing them onto each other. In this psychedelic play

of colors, a visual language of contamination is induced. Everything mutates and flows into the other. Moreover, this accumulation contributes to the existing stream of images.

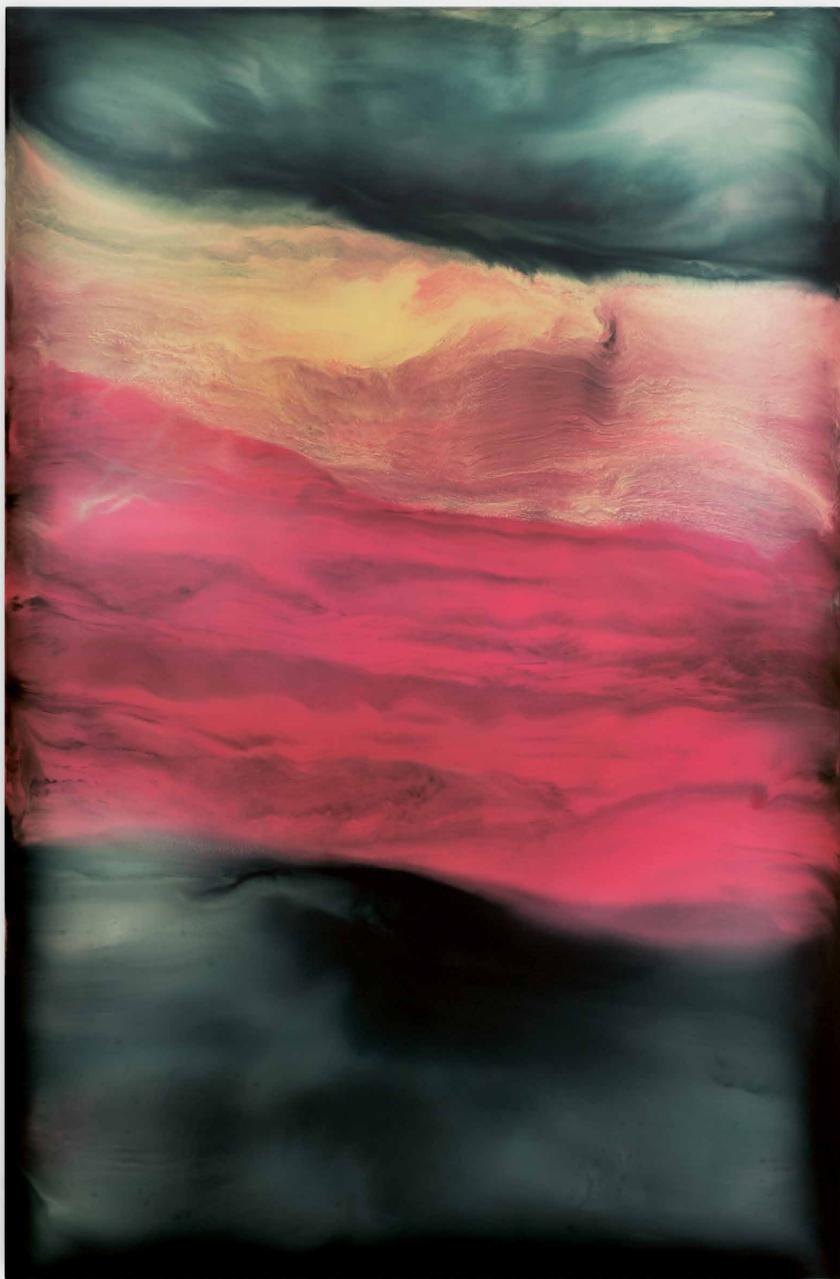
# Leonid Tsvetkov

'Cell#3' is an exploration of the always present flow of change. In a shallow *cell* - with the assistance of water, electrolyte and direct current - a fluid landscape is created. Temperature, current, and changing molecular structures, each influence the result. The cell generally colors in gradations of blue-green-silver and sometimes an iridescent haze forms. Throughout the exhibition, the work is continuously transformed, even after the fluid evaporates.

'Cell#3' is situated among a series of other works by the artist investigating the idea of landscape and territory. Leonid Tsvetkov is fascinated by the nature of deconstruction, construction, degradation and the variability of form, particularly the vague delineation between fabricated and existing landscapes. His own nomadic existence (having lived in several countries) has demonstrated to him that landscape, territory, and perceptions of nationality and identity are by definition unstable. The artwork offers a macro perspective on these themes, vacillating between what humans fabricate (in this case Tsvetkov's cell) and what the universe itself contributes. Like a satellite image of the earth, the work invites to zoom out and contemplate the terrifying beauty of ruination and change.

[Suggested reading by Leonid Tsvetkov](#)

[\\_J. Scott Turner, The Extended Organism, 2001](#)



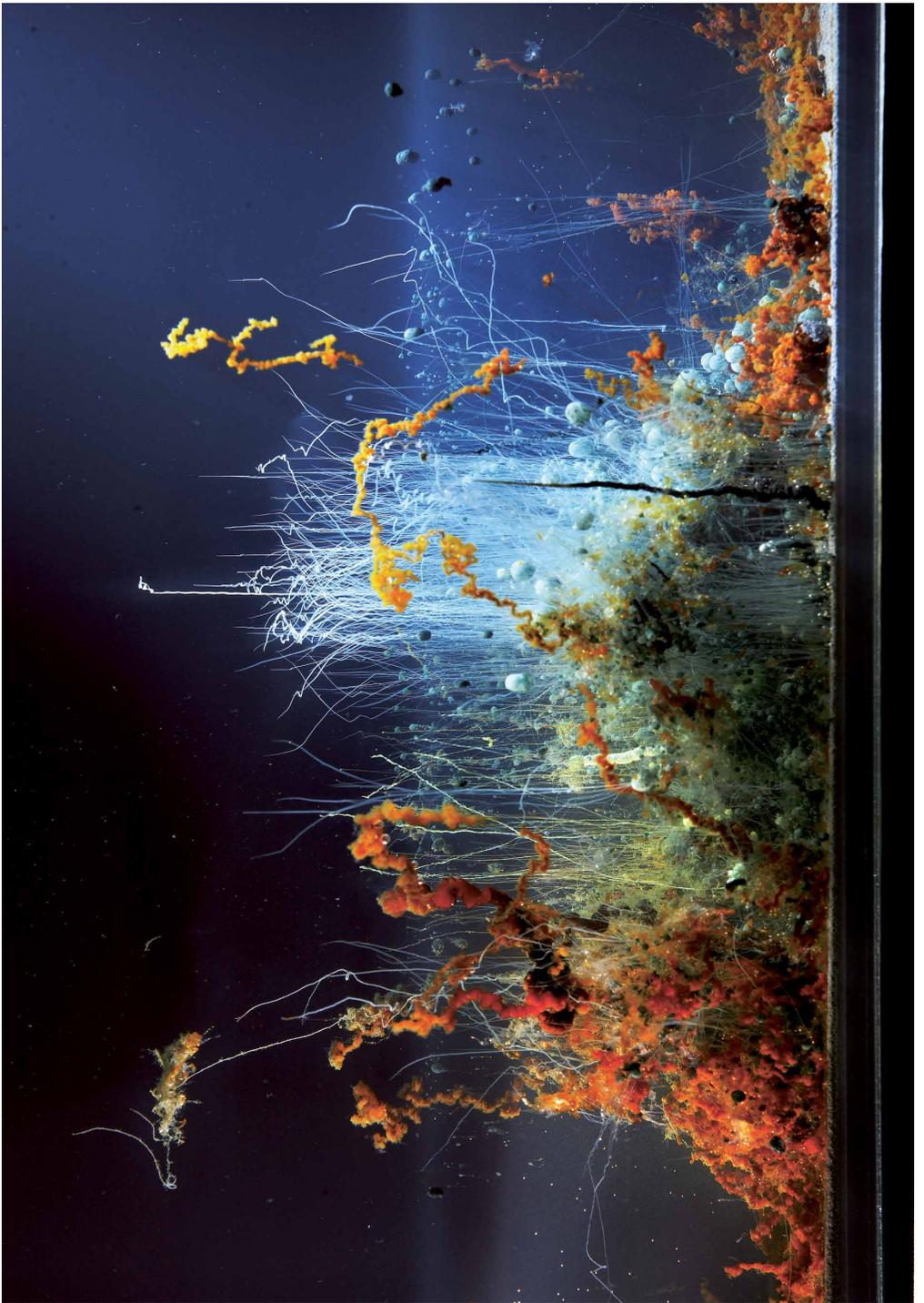
Jérôme Robbe, *Surface #5*, 2019



Mimosa Echard, *A/B (A01)*, 2019

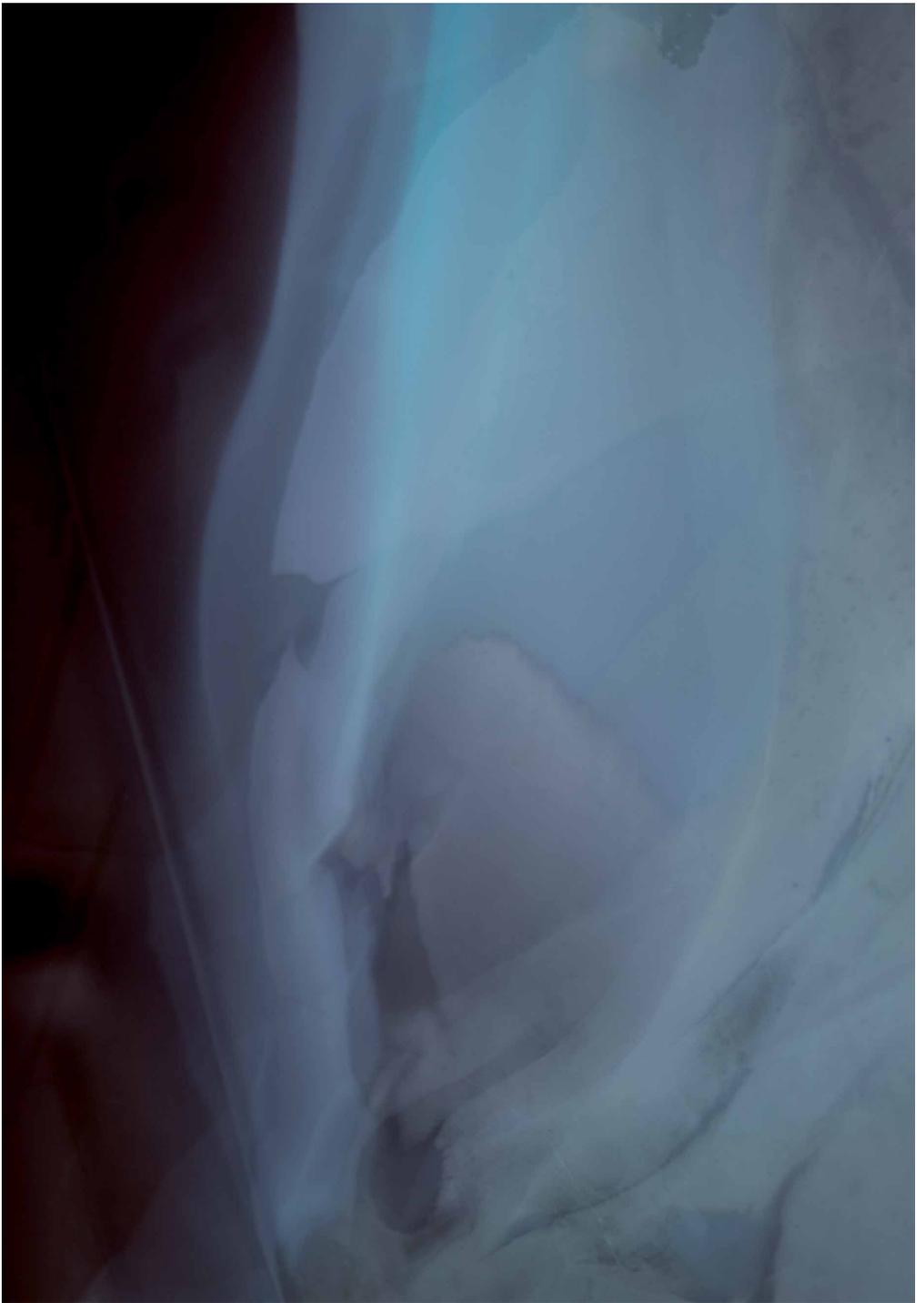


Inge van Genuchten, *Untitled*, 2017



Hicham Berrada, *Présage*, 2007-ongoing

© ADAGP Hicham Berrada © Photo: Laurent Lecat, Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London



Leonid Tsvetkov, *Cell #1*, 2016



Shanta Rao, *PERLEŤOVÉ MAGICKÁ FIALOVÁ* (pearl magic purple), 2018



Marie Maillard, *TWIG 1808*, 2018



Maya Rochat, *Living in a painting*, 2018