

Portfolio

Agustín Ortiz Herrera
visual artist and filmmaker

2021-2022

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Nature is above all and predominantly queer. Maja Bondestam describes in her article *When the Plant Kingdom Became Queer: On Hermaphrodites and the Linnaean Language of Nonnormative Sex* (2016) how Linnaeus (1735) had no choice but to include the notions of gender fluidity, bisexual behaviour or hermafroditism in his taxonomical influential publications. Focusing on that evidence could have been a revolutionary act. But the morality of the Enlightenment patriarchal-colonial project structured the binary thinking that predominates in western science. Since we in fact live in a techno-scientific oriented society at the crossroads of a serious environmental crisis, I believe it is crucial to come together, talk and take action to see the possibilities of influence.

My work wants to explore intersections that problematize the binary idea that western science has over biological life. Recently I have started an artistic project with a research group from the University of Barcelona that studies the planarians, some fascinating beings that clone themselves by fission. Their bodies are constituted by stem cells capable of regenerating each and every one of its parts and functions. If a planarian gets splited in 3, every part will regenerate in a new individual. Some planarians are asexual, some other seek to mate, but all are hermafrodites. Indeed an extraordinarily queer being.

In the past I've been interested in lichens, a symbiotic being that is the result of two species collaborating: a fungus and a bacterium. The fungus creates a structure where the bacteria progresses to get energy from the sun meanwhile the fungus gets part of it, difinitely a win-win. I made works that clashes life and history, like the ones where the life of fungi and bacteria spread over the canonic publications of Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae* (1735) and Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum Historia* (1605) in a gesture of iconoclasm and the creation of new opportunities. I have also been interested in the plant names colonial past, especially those coming from colonized territories, for instance the *Washingtonia* (Central America), the *Bougainvillia* (South America) or the *Banksia* (Australia), among other many.

I am interested in the works recently published by Jack Halberstam (*Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*, 2020) and Emanuele Coccia (*Metamorphosis*, 2021 / *The life of plants*, 2018) both on a new approach to the notion of "the natural". For the groundbreaking application of the first's gender studies and the second's revolutionary vision of living matter and the radical idea of interdependence. Also the theories on the evolution of life by Lyn Margulis and her definition of the holobiont, unfortunately still somewhat marginal in science.

CV's

Agustín Ortiz Herrera's artistic practice is developed in the fields of audiovisual, performance and installation. He uses these media to activate the queer perspective in the patriarchal-colonialist context of scientific and historical disciplines. He studied Fine Arts at the University of Barcelona, and filmmaking at The New School University in New York. After a period working as a screenwriter, he returned to artistic practice by completing the Master of Fine Arts at the Konstfack College of Arts in Stockholm. His latest film **Gnosis iluminada** was selected as part of the program [Not Yet Yes](#) curated by Simon*e van Saarloos at the IDFA 2022. His recent exhibitions and collaborations include, The tradition that runs through us, Center d'Art Santa Mónica, 2022, An accidental message on violence, Festival PLECS-Cultura Rizoma, 2022, Future Forest Diorama, La Escocesa [CREAF](#), artistic research project, 2022, Science Friction, The Symbiont Circle, CCCB, 2021, Another Times, The Green Parrot, 2021, Vanitas, Center d'Art Maristany, 2021, Queer Committee, Barcelona Loop Festival, 2021, Disorder Fictions, Hangar Public Program, 20/21, A colonial history of the cabinet-garden, GRAF Routes, 2021, To name. To possess. Critique of taxonomic practice, Artistic research project selected by La Capella/Barcelona Producció, 19/20, Artificialia: WunderChapel, Barcelona Loop Festival, 2020, Artificialia is Coming!, Polivalentes, Hangar 2020, Oblivion, KROPP, Uppsala Konsert & Kongress, 2019, Words of vision, Österbybruk, Sweden, 2018, Agustín received the Barcelona Production La Capella 2019/20 grant in the artistic research category, the OSIC artistic research grant, 2020 and 2022, and the Escocesa Ecotons artistic research scholarship in collaboration with CREAM, 2021/22. In 2021 his work *Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria* was acquired by the MACBA collection.

Education

Master in Fine Arts, **Konstfack College of Arts, Crafts and Design**, Stockholm 2016
Filmmaking Program, **The New School University**, New York 2003
Bachelor in Fine Arts, **Barcelona University** 1998

IDFA

Gnosis iluminada, film selected for the **IDFA 2022** (International Documentary Festival Amsterdam)
Included in the program [Not Yet Yes](#), curated by [Simon*e van Saarloos](#).

Awards

[MACBA](#), Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona, especial collection acquisition 2021 for the artwork:
Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria
Nils Johan Sjöstedts Stipendium, Stockholm 2016

Solo exhibitions

El inicio, su principio, [Espai Souvenir](#), Barcelona 2022
Vanitas, [Centre d'Art Maristany](#), Sant Cugat, 2021
Artificialia Wunderchapel, [Loop Festival](#), Barcelona 2020
Potenciación a largo plazo, El umbral de primavera, Madrid 2018
Om Jag var där / If I were there, Köttinspektionen, Uppsala 2016
They talk, Centrifugue @ Konsthall C, Stockholm 2016
Breakdown, Konstfack Gallery, Stockholm 2015
Light Control, Performance, Uppsala Art Museum 2015
Self-Storage, Snerk Gallery, Tromsø, Norway 2015
Shelter, Konstfack Gallery, Stockholm 2015

Collective exhibitions

Gnosis iluminada at the exhibition [La tradició que ens travessa](#), Santa Mònica Arts Center, Barcelona 2022
Fungi Fantasi and their friends Crazy Bacteria, at the exhibition *Another Times*, [The Green Parrot](#), Barcelona 2021
El cercle simbiot at the exhibition *Ciencia Fricción* at the [CCCB](#), Barcelona, 2021
A colonial history of the cabinet-garden, [GRAF Routes](#), 2021
Gabinets at the exhibition INDEX, La Capella, Barcelona 2019/20
Oblivion at the KROPP festival 2019, UKK, Uppsala, Sweden
Words of vision at the exhibition *Konst tar plats* Österbybruk, Sweden, 2018
Potenciación a largo plazo at the exhibition *Paratext 24*, Hangar, Barcelona 2018
An accidental message on violence, Konstfack Spring Exhibition, Stockholm 2016
Home, at the biennial exhibition *Open Art Bienal*, Örebro, Sweden 2015
Self-Storage + Empty Living at the exhibition *Det vi ännu tror oss kunna benämna*, Centrum för Fotografi, Stockholm 2015
Diptych, at the exhibition *Hungry Eyes* @Platform Gallery, Stockholm 2015
Another Sisyphian Round, performance at the *uNder_gROund_sTockholm_ptII* performance festival, 2015
Filling the gap, Black Mountain Archive-Residency, Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin 2015

Grants

Artistic Research Grant *Ecotons* by [La Escocesa](#) and CREAM, Center of Research in Ecology and Forestry Applications. *Project Future Forest Diorama*, 2021-22
Artistic Research Grant, [Barcelona producció / La Capella](#) 2019/2020 for the project *To Name. To possess. Critic to the taxonomic practice*.
OSIC (Catalan Government Cultural Office) Artistic research Grant, 2020 and 2022.

Video Art Festivals

An accidental message on violence at the [PLECS Video Art Festival](#), 2022

Comité Queer, urban assembly for the [Loop Festival Opening](#), 2021

Division of labor, Loop Discover 2017

Residencies

[La Escocesa](#), Barcelona 2023

[Hangar Barcelona](#) from may 2019, 2020, 2021, may 2022

El Graner-West Kowloon Cultural District, Barcelona 2019

Nordic Studio / Rejmyre Art Lab / Rural resistance / august 2017

Black Mountain Archive-Residency, Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin 2015

Public programs

Ficciones del des-orden for [Hangar Barcelona](#), 2020 a one year public program of talks, activities and performances made in col-laboration with the artist Paula Bruna and the curator Carolina Jiménez.

[Leer diarios juntxs en lugares escondidos](#), activity for Hangar Barcelona, 2021 in collaboration with Marta Echaves.

Teaching

From 2020 Agustín is teaching every summer semester at the **Utrecht University College** a course named *Film Documentary: theory and practise*.

Documentation of recent work

Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria, 2021

Gnosis iluminada, 2022

El inicio, su principio, 2022

El cercle simbiont, 2021

Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria

Fungi and bacteria growing on top of a copy of the *Systema Naturae* from Carl von Linné (1735)

glass cabinets, book facsimile, metal structures

82 x 54 cm each

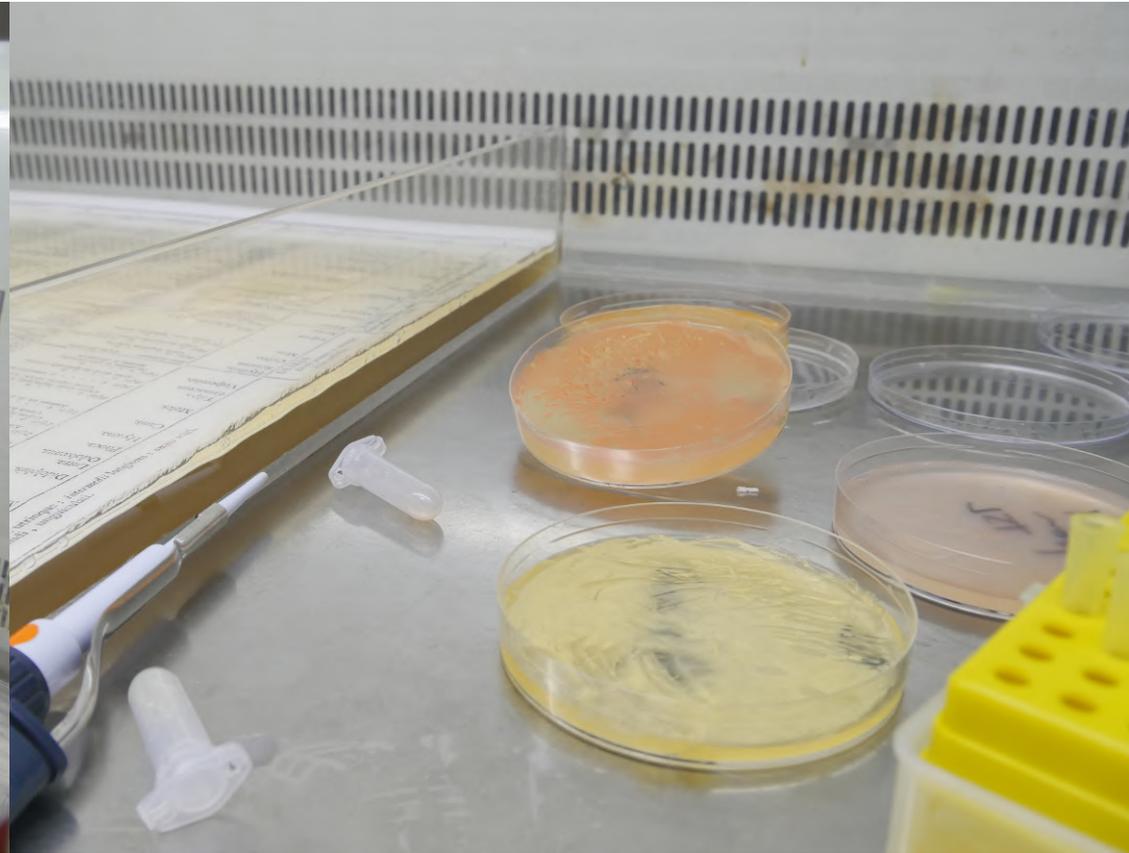
In biology the term Fungi is used to designate a taxon that includes molds, yeasts and mushrooms. They are distinguished from plants in that they obtain their nutrients through the digestion of organic matter by enzymes, which indicates their phylogenetic proximity to the human species. Until 1969 they were not cataloged as their own "kingdom" since Linnaeus put them in the plant category. On the other hand, bacteria are the main biological group to understand the web of life, it is considered that we only know a tiny part of the existing species, which, due to the debate they generate, resist being classified by taxonomic parameters. Our human body host several species of bacteria, we are so intertwined that we couldn't survived without them. Are we humans really a bounded and defined species?

In the Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria project, a series of fungi and bacteria slowly colonize and phagocytize specimens of Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* (1735), the foundational work of biological taxonomy. Bacteria grows on the "Animal Kingdom" and fungi covers the "Vegetal Kingdom". During the time of the *Altres Temps* exhibition (The Green Parrot, Barcelona 2021) fungi and bacteria slowly unfold their imprint on the paper, growing and multiplying, feeding on the matter on which they rest and thus creating a surface of whimsical and fantastic shapes. Neither bacteria nor fungi, difficult to catalog in a binary system, had an important position in Linnaeus' classification, although they are by far the most extensive, powerful and enigmatic biological "kingdoms."

This piece was acquired by the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona MACBA at the end of 2021 through a special contest organized by the Barcelona City Council, from that moment on the piece is part of the permanent collection.



Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria. Exhibition view.



Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria. Process.



Fungi Fantasy and their friends Crazy Bacteria. Exhibition final moment

Gnosis iluminada

Video HD, 2 synchronized channels, 52', 2022

Installation: different objects from the movie, historical books from the former convent library.

Premiered internationally at the [IDFA 2022](#), section curated by Simon*e van Saarloos

[Link to watch video](#)
with English subtitles

This polyhedral audiovisual project, which incorporates multiple artistic collaborations, speculates with time jumps to channel queer and non-normative countercultural responses that question the Western Gnostic tradition. At the same time, it draws a line of tension between the origin of classical thought and the new epistemologies, passing through the observation of traditional university institutions.

The former convent of Santa Mònica (Barcelona 1636-1835), today the Santa Monica's Center for Contemporary Art, had a library of which more than 500 volumes are currently preserved at the University of Barcelona. The study of some volumes serves as the beginning of this artistic project. The works that articulated the scholastic thought of Thomas Aquinas, introducer of Aristotelian thought and of the most problematic essentialism (from a contemporary point of view), return to their place of origin to cohabit in space, horizontally, with the development of other knowledge, other ways of being and creating knowledge.

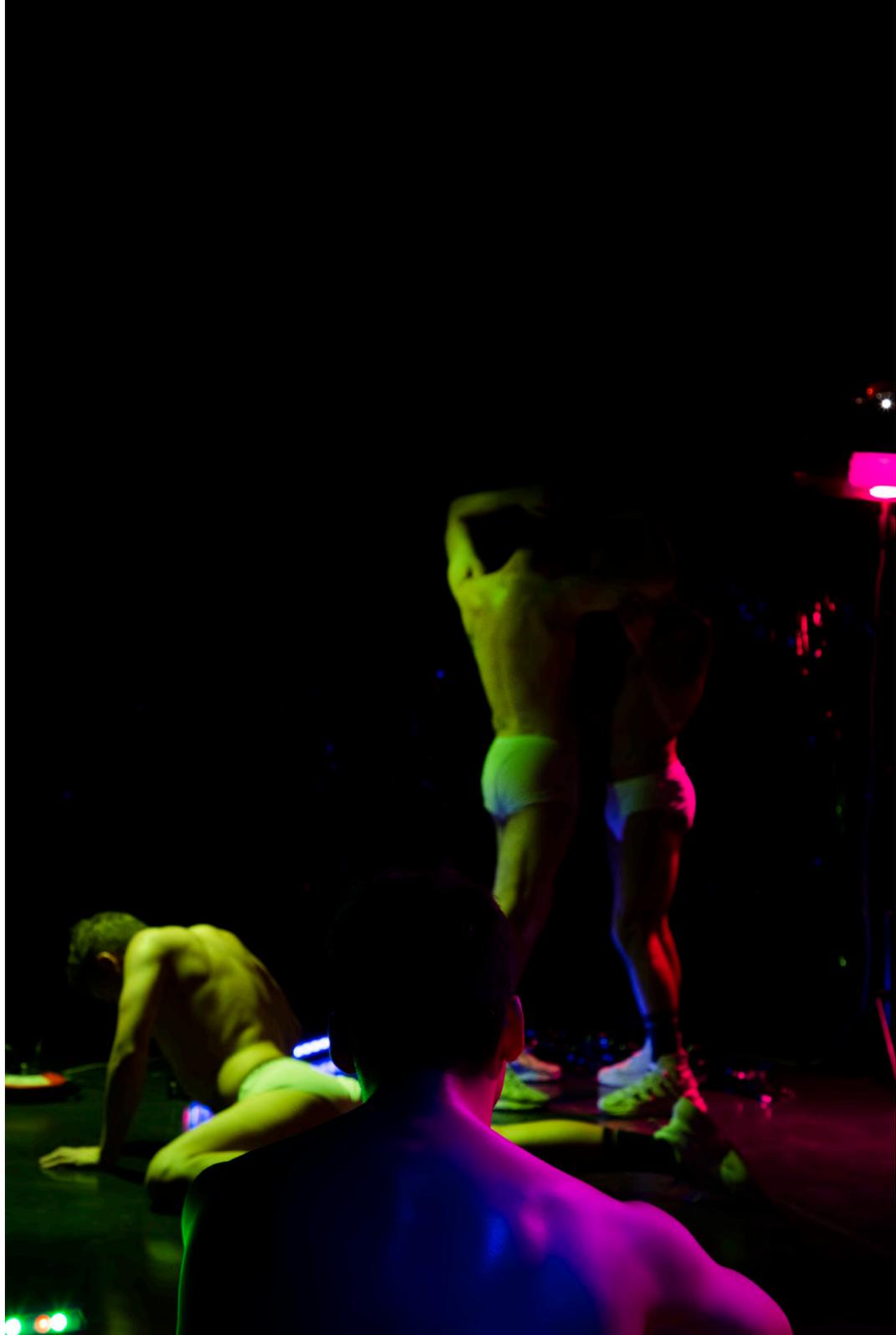
The film was part of an installation where 2 opposite screens held the 2 movie channels. In the surroundings there was a display of some objects from the movie shown next by a glass cabinet with two books from the former convent's XVII library that were brought back especially for the exhibition from the Barcelona University historical archives. In return some queer bodies make a visit to the University building, whose architecture mimics a convent, challenging the place with new ways of producing knowledge.



Gnosis Iluminada, film capture



Gnosis Iluminada, film captures





Gnosis Iluminada, film capture



Gnosis Iluminada, film capture

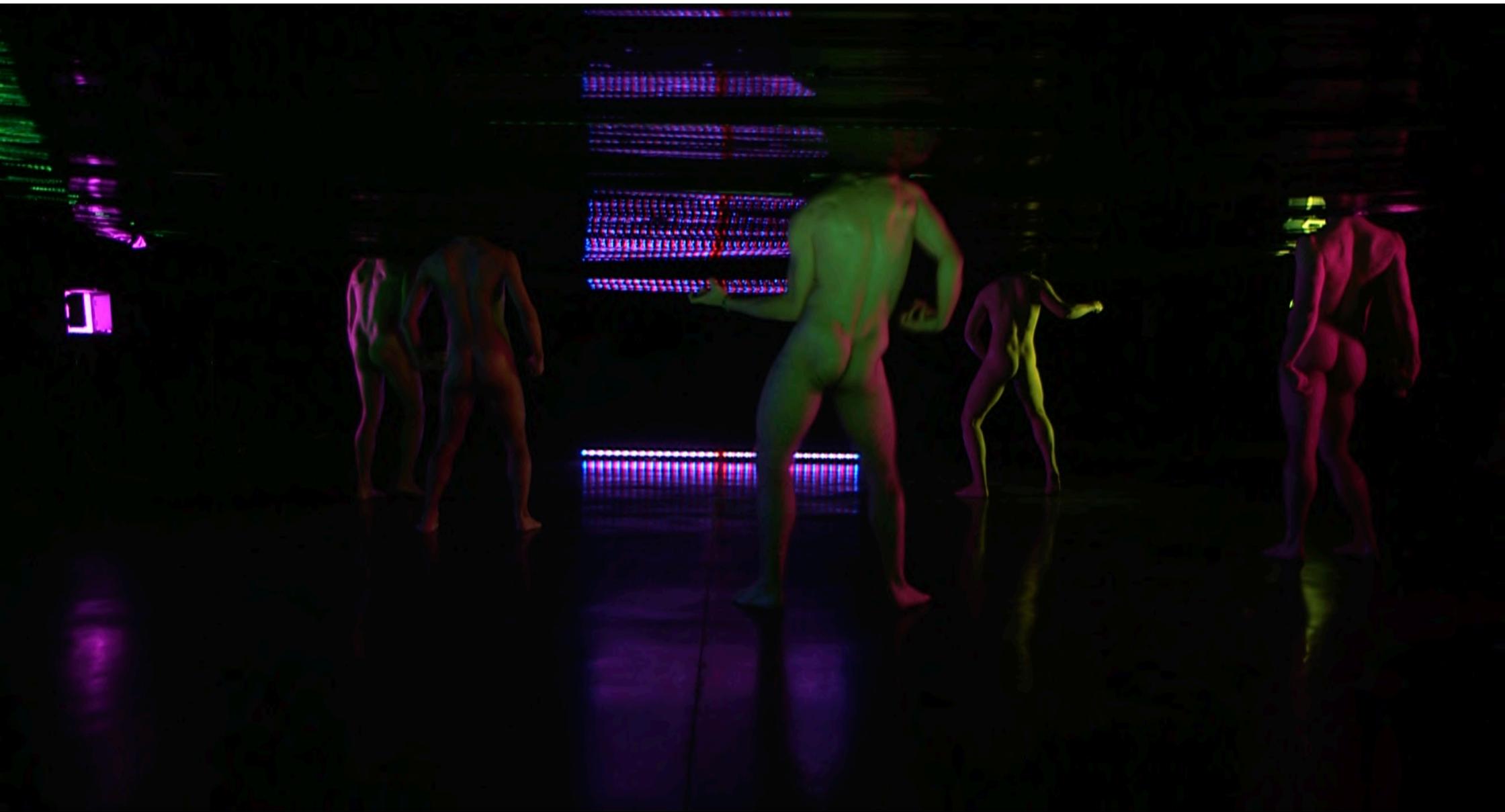


Gnosis Iluminada, film capture



Gnosis Iluminada, film captures

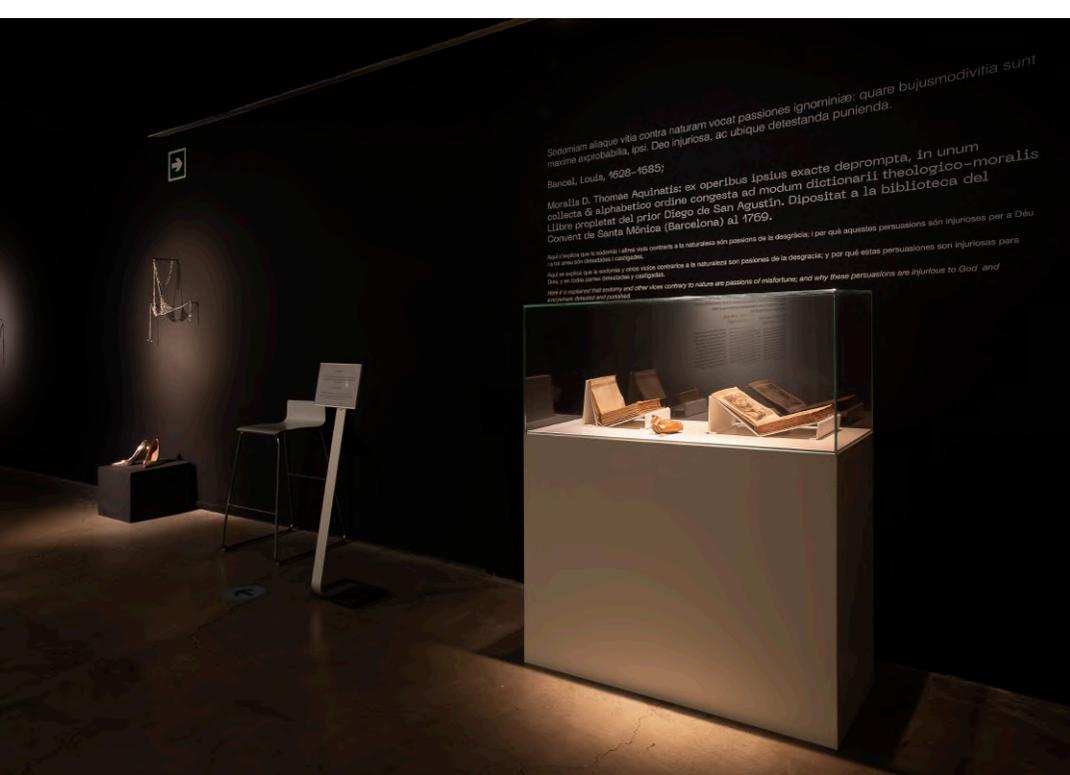




Gnosis Iluminada, film captures



Gnosis Iluminada, film captures



Gnosis Iluminada, exhibition displays



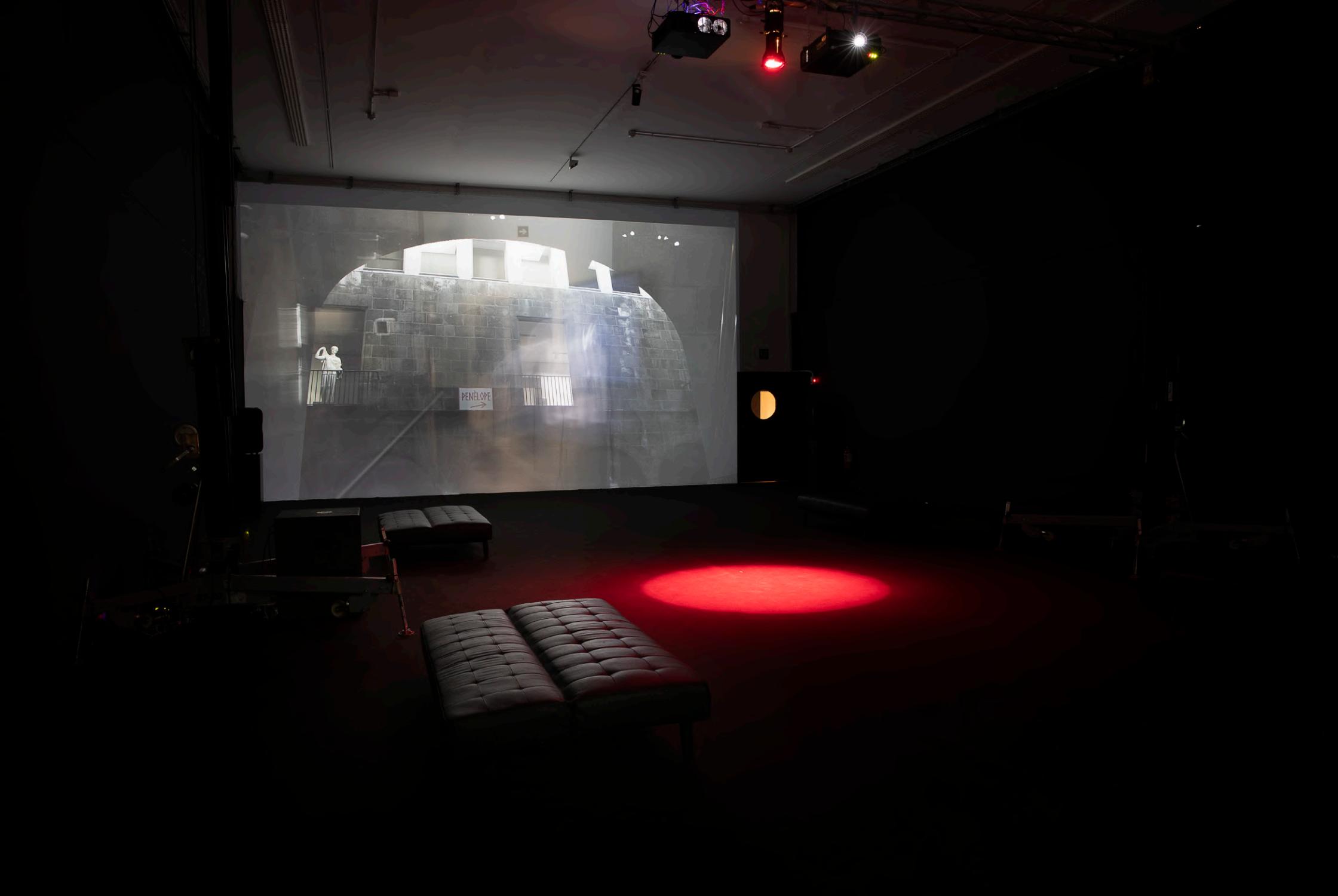


Gnosis Iluminada, exhibition displays



Gnosis Iluminada, exhibition displays





Gnosis Iluminada, screening room

El inicio, su principio

Installation of glass cabinets with fungi and bacteria growing on top of Ulisses Aldrovandi's Monstrorum Historia facsimile
Fucsia neon, wood structure, mirrors, plastic and water.
Multiple sizes

The natural sciences, specifically those dedicated to the study of life, had a starting point with the proto-encyclopedia of Ulisse Aldrovandi (Bologna 1522-1605). His classification of living things laid the foundation for a specific way of seeing the world. *Monstrorum Historia*, one of his volumes, included everything that was difficult for him to explain scientifically. This strange and somewhat marginal work collects everything xenos of the time, such as malformations in plants and animals, fossils of extinct species or legends of mythological animals. But surprisingly, it also includes a study of the female reproductive system, androgyny, and people of other races. The work fluidly moves between the pre-modern scientific yearning, the naturalization of fantastic superstition, racism, misogyny and aberrant prejudice, conceptual bases of the colonial eurocentric cosmogony. The question is how much of that substratum persists at the base of Western science and society.

In the artistic project *el inicio, su principio* a selection of images from Aldrovandi's work are hacked by living beings that are somewhat difficult to classify. Fungi are distinguished from plants in that they obtain their nutrients through enzyme digestion of organic matter, indicating their phylogenetic proximity to the human species. Until 1969 they were not classified as their own "kingdom". On the other hand, bacteria are the main biological group to understand the network of life, it is considered that we only know a tiny part of the existing species, which resist being classified by modern taxonomic parameters.

During the period of the exhibition at Espai Souvenir, living beings expanded, colonizing the surfaces where the images were installed, influencing and transforming their iconography. The queer power of nature interferes in the cultural conception of life sciences, reminding us of its colonialist, racist and misogynist past.

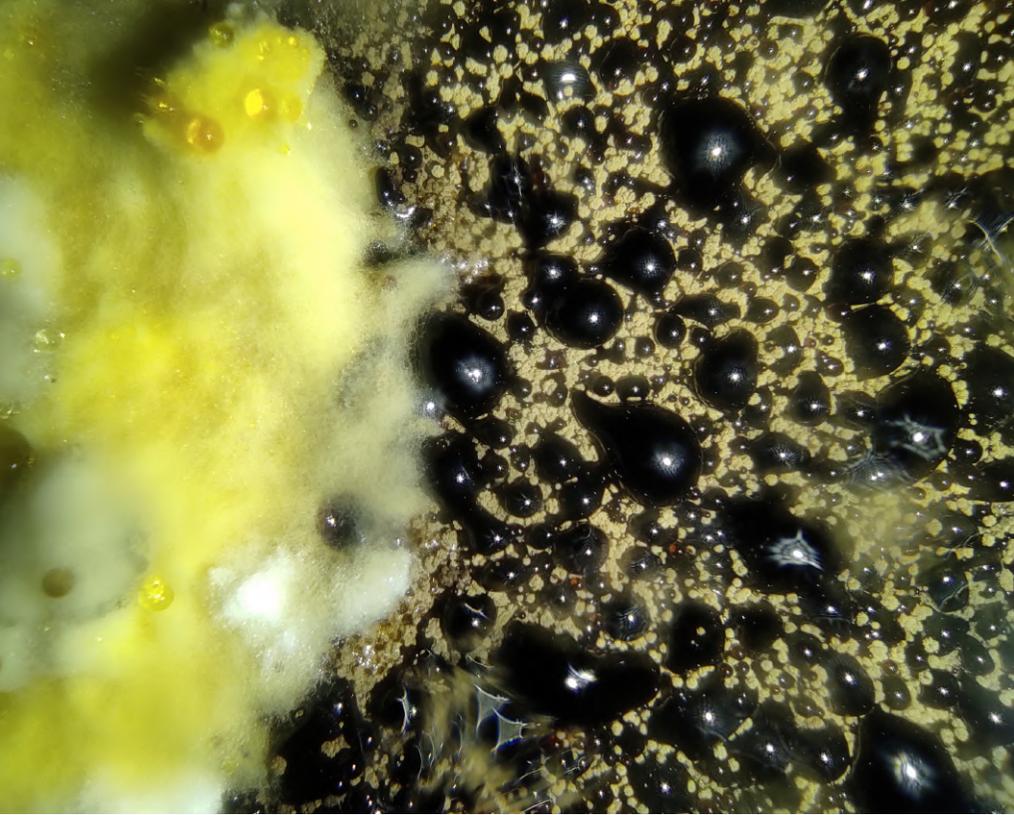




El inicio, su principio, cabinets with Aldrovandi's images and bacteria growing on top



El inicio, su principio, cabinets with Aldrovandi's images and fungi growing on top



El inicio, su principio, details of fungi growing



El cercle simbiot

Public program and publication
CCCB, 2021

The lichen is not one living being, but two (and in some cases three). A symbiont made up of an alga (or a photosynthetic bacterium) and a fungus, (with the addition of yeast in some cases), united in an interdependent relationship of mutual support. This alliance allows this model of life to establish itself in practically all terrestrial ecosystems, from the equator to the poles. Lichen health is a reliable indicator of air quality, and as a result it is becoming increasingly scarce in urban areas. On this route a circle is drawn joining various locations in the metropolitan area. From the Collserola forest to the sea, also covering the industrial belts and river basins. In some places the lichen persists, in others it is just a trace or speculation. The symbiote circle expands through the artistic production of Agustín Ortiz Herrera in collaboration with the scientific assistance of Jordi Moreno-Romero.



El cercle Simbiont, lichen detail

El cercle Simbiont, video capture



Previous works

Animalia Paradoxa	2020
Potenciación a largo plazo	2018
Olvido	2018
Words of vision	2016
Division of labour	2015

Animalia Paradoxa
Video HD, 11', 2020
Watch the trailer [here](#)



Potenciación a largo plazo

Vídeo HD, 20', 2018

Watch the film [here](#)



The policy of oblivion was very effective.

Olvido

Vídeo HD, 14', 2018

Watch the film [here](#)



Words of vision

Video HD, 10', 2016

Watch the film [here](#)



Division of labor

Video HD, 6', 2015

Variations on the movie "Man with the movie camera! From Dziga Vertov and Elizabeta Svilova, 1929.

Watch the film [here](#)



Agustín Ortiz Herrera, 2022