



Agnieszka Polska: Love Bite | February 15, 2020–January 31, 2021



From left to right: *The New Sun*; *The Happiest Thought*. Installation views, Frye Art Museum. Photos: Jueqian Fang.

Introduction

Agnieszka Polska's computer-generated media works draw on language, history, and scientific theory to illuminate issues of individual and social responsibility. Combining original poetic texts with digitally manipulated imagery, her hallucinatory videos attempt to describe the overwhelming ethical ambiguities of our time. In this exhibition, the artist presents two immersive, deeply affecting audiovisual essays that address the urgent global issue of climate change and the specter of mass extinction.

The first installation pairs two videos, *The New Sun* and *What the Sun Has Seen* (both 2017), depicting a sentient sun that is witness to environmental and ethical collapse on Earth. The sun speaks directly to the audience in half-sung monologues, moving through a range of emotional states and modes of address, from professing love and telling silly jokes, to pondering the power of language to construct a new world order. Passages of the text refer to the effect in quantum mechanics in which the observer influences the event observed through the act of interpreting it. From this point of view, the sun character is seen to be both helpless witness to and cause of the transformation it beholds.

Extending from Einstein's notion that space-time is dynamic and relative to the perspective of the observer, the second installation, *The Happiest Thought* (2019), takes us back to a prehistoric environment that might pre-figure our own: Earth's biosphere before the Permian-Triassic extinction, which occurred more than 250 million years ago and annihilated as much as 90 percent of life on the planet. The piece offers a hypnotic exploration of this lush and alluring ancient environment while contemplating humanity's potential to overcome enormous threats like the current climate crisis.

Incorporating online-video tactics such as emotional mimicry and ASMR triggers (heightened sounds and whispers that stimulate pleasant tingling sensations), Polska crafts a mesmerizing atmosphere to compete with what she calls the "environment of seduction" surrounding consumer marketing and organized religion. Through her work, the artist aims to create "a common territory of exchange, a territory for involvement in ritual," in which we can confront our collective calamity.

Agnieszka Polska (Polish, b. 1985, Lublin, Poland) lives and works in Kraków and Berlin. She has presented her works at international venues, among them, the New Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou and Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Tate Modern in London, Hirshhorn

Museum in Washington, DC, and Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. Polska also participated in the 57th Venice Biennale, 11th Gwangju Biennale, 19th Biennale of Sydney, and 13th Istanbul Biennial. In 2018 she was awarded Germany's Preis der Nationalgalerie.

Agnieszka Polska: Love Bite is organized by the Frye Art Museum and curated by Amanda Donnan, Chief Curator. Generous support is provided by the Frye Foundation and Frye members. Media sponsorship provided by *The Stranger*.



Ring of Fire, 2019

Digital Print

105 x 87 ½ in.

Courtesy of the artist and Overduin & Co., Los Angeles



The New Sun, 2017

Digital video (color, sound); 12:19 min.

Vocal track: Aaron Ronelle Harrell

Courtesy of the artist and Overduin & Co., Los Angeles



What the Sun Has Seen, 2017

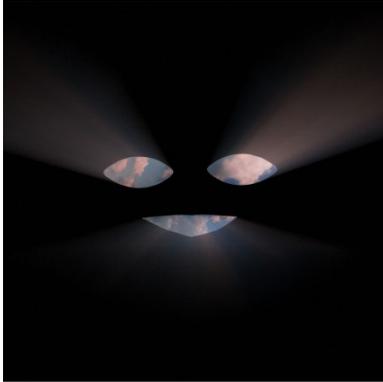
Digital video (color, sound); 7:16 min.

Vocal track: Aaron Ronelle Harrell

Courtesy of the artist and Overduin & Co., Los Angeles

The videos presented here operate as a looping diptych centered on the figure of a childlike sun who is a helpless witness to ethical and environmental collapse on Earth. The two-part installation was inspired by the poem *Co słonko widziało* (What the sun has seen) by the Polish writer Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910), a children's story that depicts the harmonious daily routines of modest rural life as if seen from above by the sun.

In *What the Sun Has Seen*, the sun addresses a listener reminiscent of the solitary figure pictured in Caspar David Friedrich's iconic work of German Romanticism *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), but in contrast to the sprawling natural landscape of Friedrich's composition, here the sun observes the vast quantity of "information waste," or unnecessary and useless data, that clutters the internet and our minds. In *The New Sun*, the sun character delivers a moody, half-sung monologue addressed to its beloved (effectively the viewer), presenting a vision of a collapsing world in which the only immutable elements are words and language.



The Happiest Thought, 2019

Digital video adapted from full-dome format (color, sound); 21:02 min.

Vocal track: Geo Wyeth

Courtesy of the artist and Overduin & Co., Los Angeles. Based on a work commissioned by the Berliner Festspiele / Immersion / The New Infinity in coproduction with the Planetarium Hamburg. Funded by Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media of Germany.

The Happiest Thought is an elegiac, time-traveling rumination on our current existential-environmental dilemma. Through simple animated imagery and a hypnotic voice over, the piece offers a meditative visualization of Earth's biosphere prior to the Permian-Triassic extinction—the so-called Great Dying of 250 million years ago, which killed off over 90 percent of life on the planet and may have been caused by warming related to atmospheric carbon.

The work takes its title from the famously dark revelation that led Albert Einstein (1879–1955) to formulate his theory of general relativity in 1915. Watching workers on the roof of a nearby building, Einstein realized that if one of them fell, he would plummet to the ground at the same speed as his tools and other loose belongings. From the worker's perspective, these items would appear to float around him, in defiance of gravity; ergo space-time is relative to the position of the observer. Polska's video begins with a reconstruction of Einstein's scenario, suspending and then bending space-time to transport us back to a historical moment with alarming echoes in the present.