

## Tuomas A. Laitinen Habitat Cascade

## Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art (WAM), Turku 14 June – 25 August

The term 'habitat cascade' describes a phenomenon whereby one species unwittingly creates a living environment for another, which then provides the home for a further lifeform, and so on. Tuomas A. Laitinen's exhibition of the same name is centred upon five twisted cylindrical glassworks designed to house octopuses: collectively titled Proposal for an Octopus (2019), these are displayed on two low black Perspex plinths in a room illuminated by a violet neon light. Standing no higher than 35cm each, the twisted tubular forms suggest largescale transparent arteries protruding from bulbous bodily organs. This inference is partly enhanced by Laitinen's accompanying soundscape, Cryptospores (for Glass and Voice) (2018), which evokes the calls of whales together with the movement of wind and water and the sound of glass being gently struck.

The furthest of the two plinths also incorporates a video, played via a screen embedded into the plinth's surface, in which an octopus swims and wraps itself around another glass sculpture. As the creature probes the artwork with curiosity before momentarily entering inside it, a feeling is conveyed of two radically different worlds meeting. Ultimately, the octopus's tentative movements around and inside the work of art raise the question of whether anything of our creative language can be understood by nonhumans. Can a 'habitat cascade' be described in any sense as a 'cultural cascade'? If not, we are ultimately alone.

Not that this would dissuade humans, like Laitinen, from projecting anthropomorphic traits onto animal behaviour. Reflections on the complex and sometimes elegant movements of the octopus led the artist to make a script executed in blown glass, here titled Tentacular Tongue (2018), which registers as a kind of tentacle-written Cyrillic alphabet. These pseudo-letters, no more than a few centimetres in height and width, are placed alongside the plinths, and their form is repeated in animated passages of the video, where similar

letters move in formation, mimicking the octopus's 'arm' movements.

A third plinth, joining the first two to complete a triangle, supports a number of deep blue tentacular glassworks. Collectively titled Haemocyanin (2019), these form part of Laitinen's ongoing research into the mythological associations and material properties of copper, an element found in octopus blood due to the presence of the eponymous protein instead of haemoglobin, giving it a blueish hue. This work, along with the installation itself, contributes to the artist's ongoing research into 'porosity' as alternative to binary modes of thinking in which objects, species and humans are rigidly categorised. The habitat cascade, seen in this light, is exemplary of how species can live and be perceived alongside one another despite their differences; as such, Laitinen's work here, though pinned to one genus, raises wider issues pertinent to our moment of endemic division and ecological catastrophe. Mike Watson



Proposal for an Octopus #1, 2019, glass sculpture, dimensions variable.

Courtesy the artist and WAM, Turku

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