

APRIL 2020

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ON VIEW



(Brooklyn, NYC)

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"Umwelt" installation shot. Photo credit: On White Wall.

By [Michal Gavish](#), contributor

"Umwelt" is a series of installations in which three veteran artists - [Christine Davis](#), [Patricia Olynyk](#), and [Meredith Tromble](#) - generate visual commentaries on scientific ideas. Using science as their resource, the three artists build their work on scientific data using collaborative technological expertise. Davis creates art on big-data aspects of biology and physics. Olynyk applies archives and data collection methods to the history of medicine and to current environmental issues. Finally, Tromble deals with psychology and the subconscious. The artists explain that the exhibition name, "Umwelt," or 'environment' in German, evokes more than just this meaning. This concept relates to bio-semiotic theories of Jakob von Uexküll about "the world as it is experienced by a particular organism. As such, it describes an organism's ability to sense - a condition for the existence of shared signs. These signs offer meanings about the world..." The artists take these signs from science and build them into installations that develop through free association.

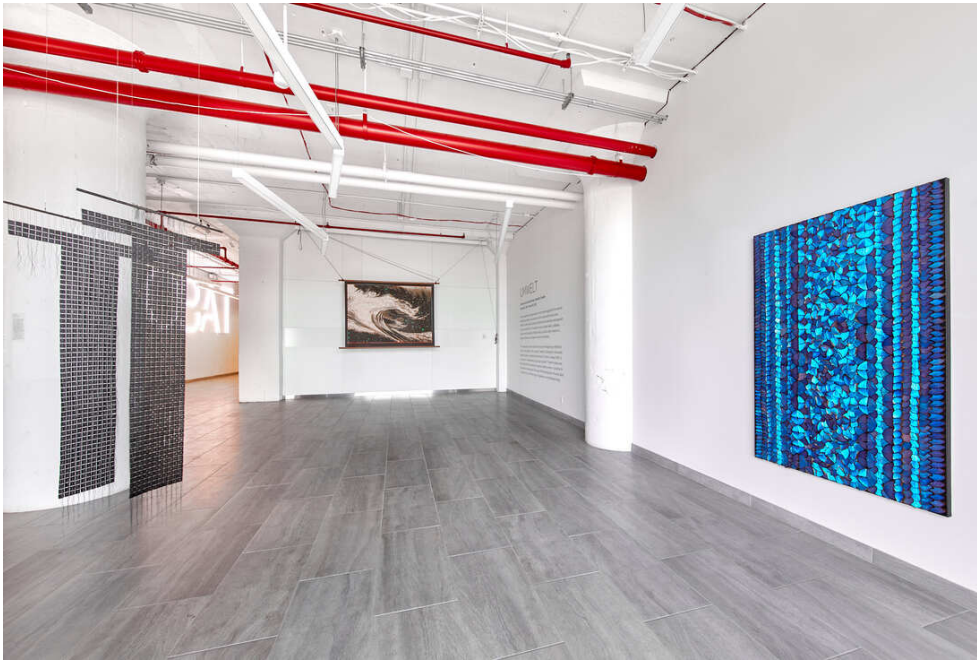


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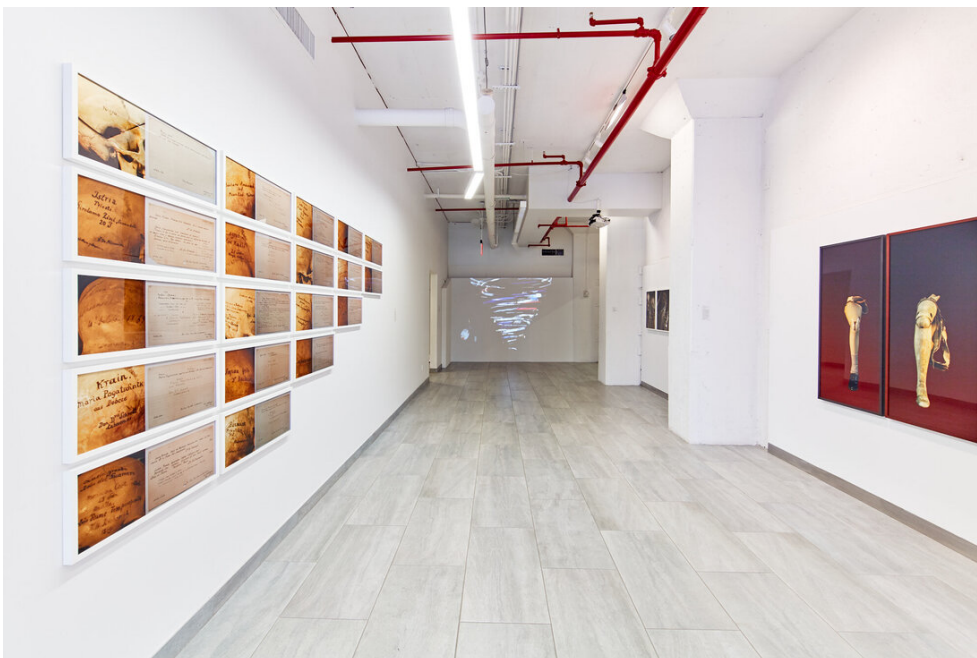
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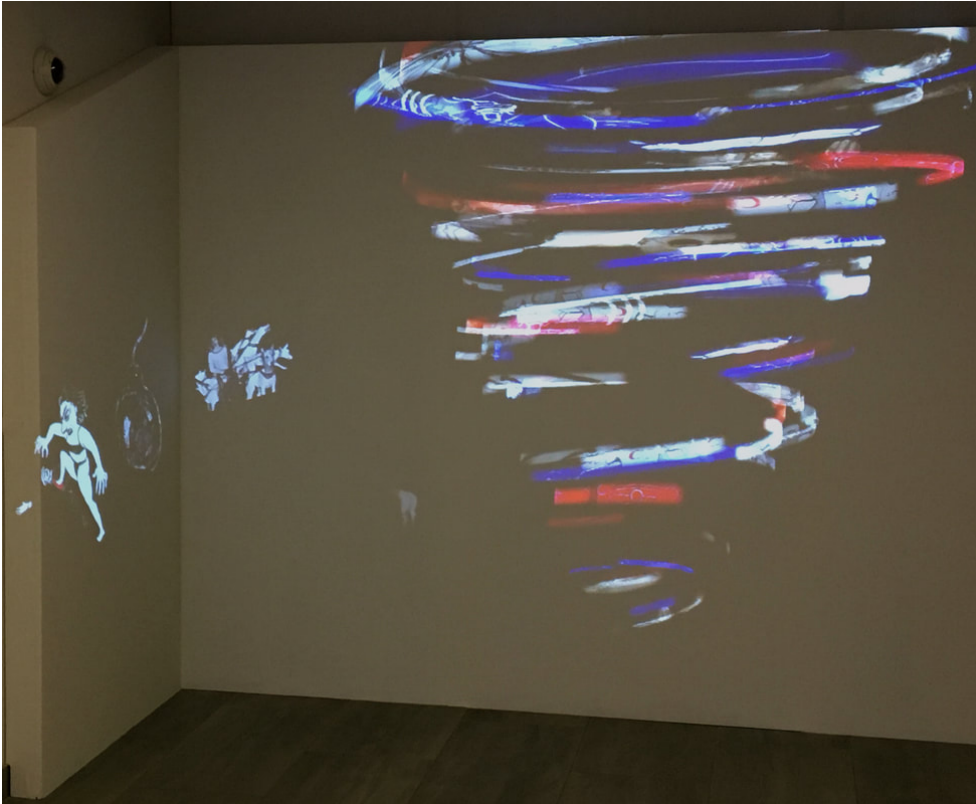


"Umwelt" installation shot. Photo credit: On White Wall.

Presented at Brooklyn's [BioBAT Art Space](#), the exhibition extends from a brightly lit display at the entrance hall into a second, dark backspace. There, in the pitch black, the viewers scout out objects and videos in enclaves separated by thick, supporting columns. This dramatic transformation, of light extinguished, adds momentum to the progression of the show from the entrance to the complex, multi-meaning presentations burrowed in the dark.



"Umwelt" installation shot. Photo credit: On White Wall.



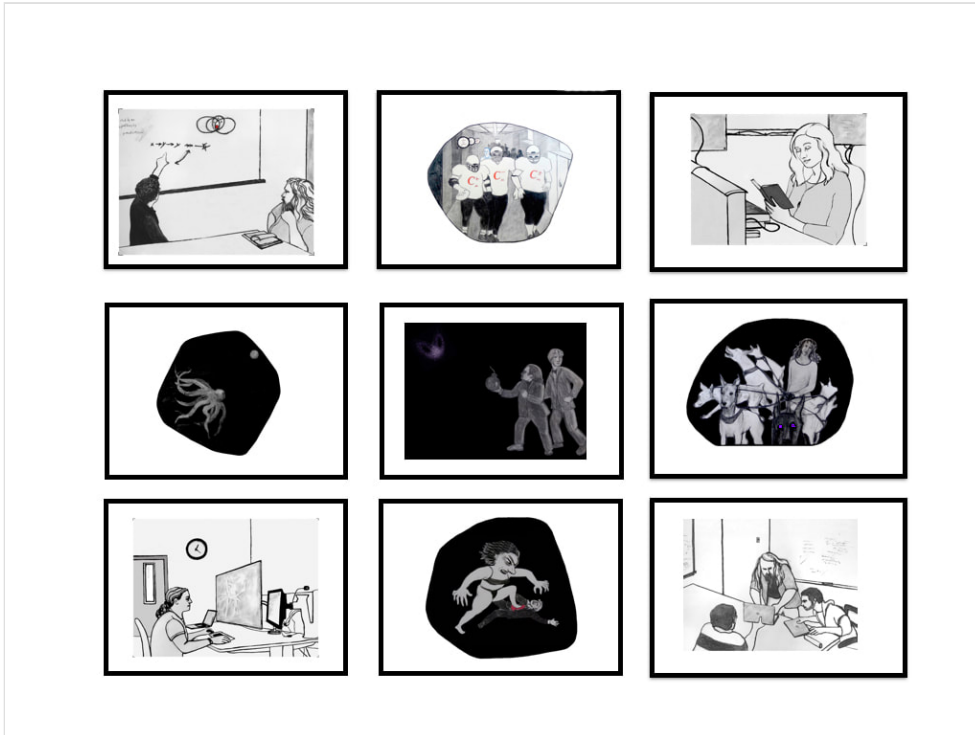
Meredith Tromble with Dawn Summer; "Dream Vortex 8.2" 2011-2019; courtesy of the artist.

Reaching to the world of science, the artists turn to collaborations that enable them to adopt technologies associated with contemporary scientific practice. Using data as their source material, their presentations reflect the research process of aggregating experimental results by displaying the works in series and grids.

Oakland-based media artist Meredith Tromble deploys this multiplicity in her *Dream Vortex* installations. In *Lab Meeting* from the series "Dream Vortex 8.2, 2011-2019," she opens with a set of illustrations that she drew during her residency at the Complexity Sciences Center in Berkeley. The drawings are based on her conversations with scientists about their dreams.

Tromble presents this set as a grid, and uses it as a preface to *Vortex*, her video collaboration with Dawn Summers. The *Vortex* animation is a spiraling ribbon created continuously from a flow of dream imagery. Leaning on Summer's expertise, the animated coiled shape rotates continuously on the screen. As Tromble's installation continues into the backspace, she maintains her illustrative approach to a formal association with lab-notebooks. She clarifies that through this process

she is claiming to act as intermediary between the subjectivity of dreams' meanings and the objectivity of their existence through her "programmable, dynamic vortex in which the viewer could interact."



Meredith / Tromble "Lab Meeting" from the series "Dream Vortex 8.2" 2011-2019; mixed media on paper. Photo credit: On White Wall.

READY TO USE GRAPHIC ASSETS





Christine Davis' "Tlön" (2019). 48" x 70". Ethically sourced butterfly wings on black gessoed canvas. Photo credit: On White Wall.

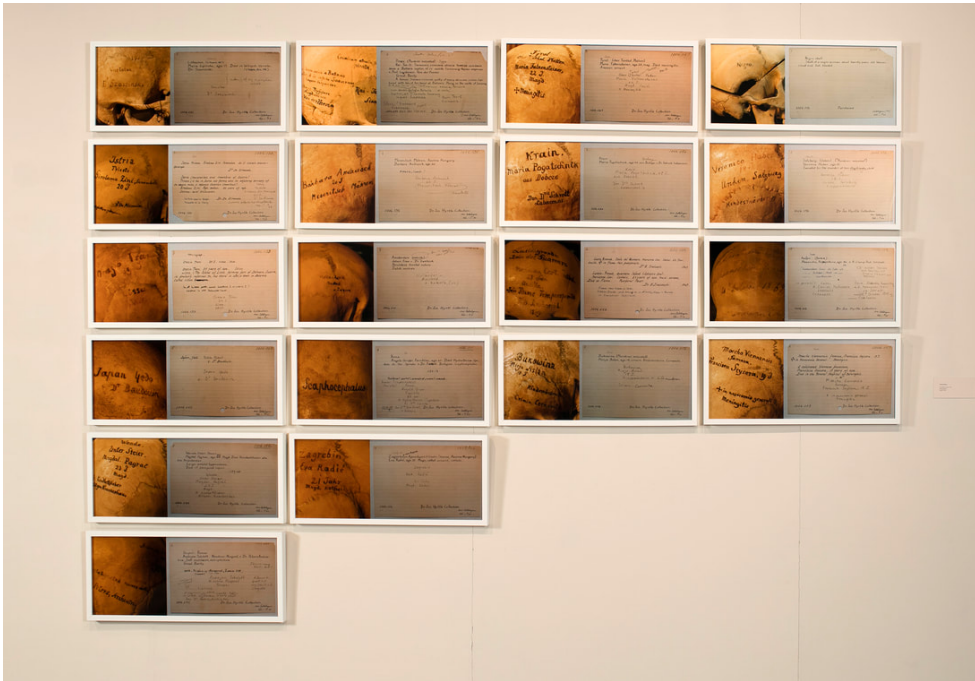
Canadian artist Christine Davis also uses the grid as a tool for classifying and producing scientific and cultural knowledge. Hanging at the entrance, near a large window, *Tlön* is a colorful collage of disembodied butterfly wings pinned symmetrically in a flat frame. This format suggests an association to naturalists' collections in display boxes. An additional layer of meaning lies in the work's title - it is adopted from Borge's novel about a fictive system of knowledge. A single image of a solar eclipse is projected onto the surface of the work continuously, becoming visible every evening at sunset. The cyclical

appearance of light at the end of each day changes the installation's appearance and shifts its meaning.



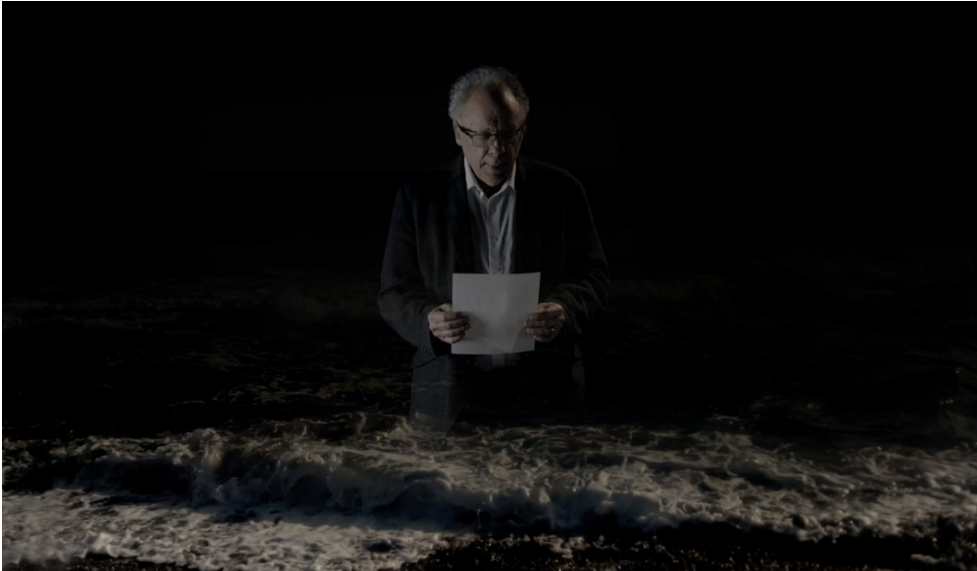
Christine Davis' "Drink Me or Alice was beginning to get very tired" (2006). Slide projection on screen of silk roses suspended with wire, 229 x 305 x 114 cm. 3min. loop. Still courtesy of the artist.

Davis repeats her layered motifs in *Drink Me*, a collaborative performance video with a narrative following the paradoxical system of logic in *Alice In Wonderland*. Davis adds layers to the projected moving image by constructing the projection screen itself from silk roses that she arranges as a large matrix, throwing a symmetrical gridded silhouette of the wall. Projected in the second dark space of the show, the screen itself is an important part of this presentation, adding texture to the figurative motion.



Patricia Olynyk's "The Mutable Archive" (2012). Series of nineteen digital C-Prints on archival paper, 70" X 150". Image courtesy of the artist.

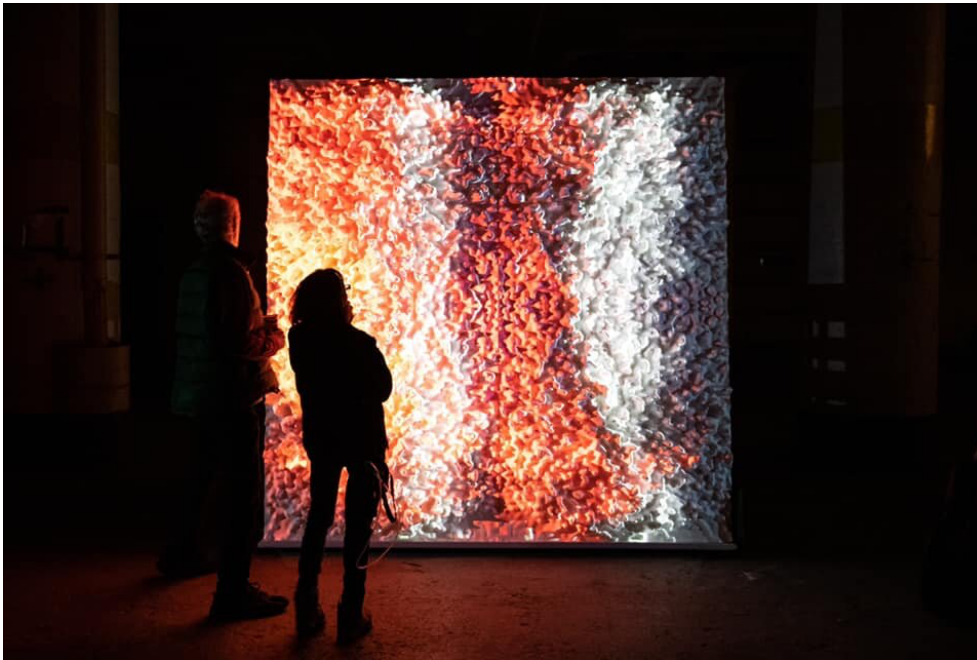
St. Louis-based artist Patricia Olynyk presents her grid of digital pigment prints in *The Mutable Archive*. This multi-part and multi-media installation spans the gallery. During her residency at the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, Olynyk photographed a set of skulls from the 19th century collection of Viennese anatomist, Joseph Hyrtl. Captured from above, she presents the skulls as a set of round ivory surfaces, scripted in ink writing describing their postmortem diagnosis. She aligns her photographs by pairing them with images of their accompanying archival index-cards, creating alternating columns of recorded data. The hand-painted titles that the anatomist minted on the skulls combine visually with the high-resolution optics of the meticulous calligraphy on the adjacent information cards. Olynyk's focus on the script resonates with visual longing for penmanship and for the perishing format of old archival systems. In the back hall, Olynyk pursues this archival project in a performance video, which she edits from a series of collaborative performances that relate to the skulls and invent fictive narratives of their lives. This video closes another cycle in the show of a visual progression from archival to fictional and from light to dark.



Patricia Olynyk's "The Mutable Archive" (2015). Video performance projection, Buzz Spector recites Dutch Suicide, 9'x17'. Installation shot courtesy of the artist.

The repeated passages from sets of lit pictures and installations in the front space to the videos and objects in the dark back space allow the viewers to experience "Umwelt" as a visual journey. Multiple parallel routes of connected still matrices and moving projections invite the viewer to pursue a coordinate academic path of becoming familiar with the background of each piece and tuning into the manifold associations that it opens.

This setup creates an instructive walk through the visuals, examining their interpretation of scientific backdrop and associated systems of knowledge. The flow of the show into separate spaces inserts momentum in the exploration as the viewer orbits through them from light to darkness and back again.



"Umwelt" installation shot. Photo credit: Laura Merrill.



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