

PearlLam Galleries

Hong Kong

A Thousand Layers of Stomach: A Solo Exhibition by A.A. Murakami

Exhibition Dates 9 December, 2021–12 February, 2022 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm
Venue Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Hong Kong—*A Thousand Layers of Stomach* is an exhibition that simulates an endless state of change in a culture like the constant change that occurs in living cells. Drawn from Metabolism, a post-war architectural movement originating in Japan with an idea of rebirth of the built environment, the artists behind Studio Swine, A.A. Murakami, are bridging technological advancement with vernacular aesthetics to probe the cultural, historic, and economic changes of the postmodern world.

A Thousand Layers of Stomach refers to digestion in nature and specifically the notion of Metabolism and the whole range of biochemical processes that occur within a living organism. Metabolism consists of anabolism (the build-up of substances) and catabolism (the breakdown of substances). By connecting the notions of digestion and metabolism, this exhibition celebrates renewal in a metaphysical sense, specifically to insist on the endurance and perseverance of the human spirit in the face of adversity by improvising new ways of approaching our environment for a more sustainable and positive long-term effect on civilization. In favour of a sustainable and metabolic development of society, A.A. Murakami examines the cyclical and metamorphic relationships between nature, the built environment, the human body and their interaction with ecology, technology, and geology. Central to their research-based approach, their work straddles the disciplines of architecture, sculpture, installation, and film. Broken down into complementary modules, this immersive exhibition projects visions of what future anthropology, material culture, and processes of regeneration may hold in the post-technological era.

Taking a long-term interest in urban cartography, *Silent Passenger* is a rear-view mirror with an embedded screen that invites viewers to watch moving images from the past and the present simultaneously, causing a double vision effect. The intent is for viewers to bear witness to a visual sublime of China's urbanization, which resembles science fiction. *Cell 3* is a free-standing sculpture made with foamed aluminium that has been injected with a gassing agent when molten. By bridging the visual elements of the rugged landscape with the language of domestic design, this minimalist object addresses the tension between the power of nature and our desire for its permanence. The reflective and textured surfaces of an imaginary asteroid somehow blur our identification of its material origin, so we cannot decipher whether it is from the present or the distant future.

Metamorphosed 2 is a panel made of slices of aluminium foam upon which are embedded different metals shaped like crystallized rocks. The images on the panel resemble book-matched marble or Rorschach ink tests with their symmetrical patterns. Appearing as an excavated archaeological specimen, this work suggests that the sedimentary layers of Earth are made of post-industrial materials and waste.

Paper pulp is used as an architectural material that forms the miniature living pod which anchors the entire exhibition. The *C-type House* is a design concept for future organic architecture. "C" stands for "cell", which can be used to describe the microscopic structures inside living organisms or can also refer to a small room in a prison or monastery. Inspired by Japanese Metabolism architecture, this prototype visualizes a futuristic modular architectural structure in a more transient state, where buildings grow

when the need arises and can also revert into the earth to form new landscapes. This new organic building form is reminiscent of futuristic architecture models that were envisioned in utopian architecture in the 1970s.

A particular section of this exhibition takes the form of a factory line where the major components are *Machine* and *Base Layer* with a documentary video. *Base Layer* is a cardboard trolley in which the cardboard is collected from the streets of Hong Kong where they were used by domestic helpers congregating in the Central district. The cardboard is mulched and seeded with fungi spores, and the cardboard pulp is subsequently metabolized into living tissue or mycelium, the same fine root fibres that form the internet of the forest. *Mycelium Drawing* is an organic architectural rendering of a housing project with C-type houses. Behind the drawing is mycelium growing on recycled cardboard bits housed inside a transparent frame. The artists regard mycelium as an important sustainable material for the future. As one of the oldest life forms on Earth, mycelium provides necessary nutrients for the ecosystem. A.A. Murakami believes that to meet the challenges of this century with an expanding human population and ever-increasing pressure on the natural world, humanity needs to find a more symbiotic relationship between human population growth and the natural systems on which our existence depends.

Since 2017, A.A. Murakami has been working steadily on a series of works called "ephemeral tech" that blurs the distinction between digital technology and natural forces with the intention of transcending our perception and phenomenological understanding of our surroundings. A.A. Murakami uses new and artificial industrial luminance to create a new lightscape for observing an object and its ever-changing surfaces. The neon light installation *Mother* is part of the duo's long-time *Ephemeral Tech* series. They commented, "In *Ephemeral Tech*, boundaries between digital technology and natural forces are dissolved to create unnatural phenomena using real materials that engage with all our senses beyond the standard visual stimuli of flat screens, projections, and LED arrays."

Mother uses innovative new technology the artists developed to create a new 'unnatural phenomenon'. Tubes of argon mercury are suspended on the work without wires or cables. The neon gas in its plasma state in the glass tube is illuminated by an electric field. The fluctuating voltage creates a varying intensity of the plasma, shedding an ever-changing wonderful light in sealed tubes. The power is transmitted with electromagnetism through the air, illuminating the gas much like the sun that creates the Northern Lights. The pattern of the red within the blue is a big sun, the source of energy on earth. Unlike neon, where tubes are illuminated in one colour, the illumination here is a soft glow of colourful gradients from blue to sunset oranges. It creates an uncertain stasis, for light emitting from the plasma illuminates the entire gallery space that is sectorised by the use of yellow plastic curtains.

The second section of this exhibition makes reference to the landscape design of a classical garden in Suzhou, drawn by its poetic use of space and contemplative qualities. It is centred around a kinetic artwork titled *Photon Gate* that is reminiscent of Chinese ink paintings of misty landscapes. On view is a robotic fog mechanism that moves light sources in orbits like the orreries of the past which were clockwork models of our solar system. The light source is set behind a gradient-coloured filter that splits the white light into separate-coloured bandwidths, creating a constantly shifting gradient of hues. The fog absorbs light and colour, giving it a mass and volume. The intensity of the fog shifts. When dense, the fog desaturates the colours and scatters the light like the gases and clouds in our atmosphere. Two steel thrones, *Chair Type 1 & 2* made in the style of brutalist architecture of the early 20th century are present to introduce another perspective for perceiving the whole immersive environment. Leaning against the wall is *Day 1*, a large translucent coloured gradient glass panel, which captures daylight from the gallery's exterior to create a more natural experience.

Sliced Lotus Root Rock is a scholar rock sculpture, which in the garden is used to frame views and to trick the eye with distorted scales that create mountains in the gardens. With formal sculptural language, reminiscent of British modern artists Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth who used voids to play with mass and balance, this sculpture is based on a scholar rock that has been created in a three-dimensional computer model and sliced in intersecting flat planes. The sculpture appears to be a drawing in space stripped of its own mass. The sculpture creates optical effects as you move around the work; its two-dimensional shapes are flat yet expressive.

Altar of Rare Fungi addresses the issue of farming that has become increasingly relevant as a result of climate change. The time required for organic growth as a counter strategy for going against the instantaneousness of the global digital economy demands our recognition and respect. The metal shelf contains an array of mycelium growing in different stages from beginning stages to their bloom into mushrooms. On view is an assortment of artificial mushrooms used for culinary purposes often seen in

Japanese restaurants as a parody. The shelf is a stark minimalist design that serves as part of a vast archive of biodiversity like some future ark of life on Earth.

The final wall has a film projection of an evening sky in a city in Outer Mongolia. Bright LEDs illuminate the buildings and are mixed with the smoggy air to create an artificial purple-green atmosphere. Reminiscent of the fog painting in the previous room, the sky is a new dawn in civilization.

About the Artists

A.A. Murakami are the artists behind Studio Swine (Super Wide Interdisciplinary New Explorers). Working across the media of sculpture, film and immersive installations, their work explores themes of regional identity and the future of resources in the age of globalization.

In A.A. Murakami's *Ephemeral Tech* series, the boundaries between digital technology and natural forces are dissolved to create unnatural phenomenon using real materials that engage the viewer's senses beyond the standard visual stimuli of digital interfaces. The series looks to a future where technology transcends familiar interfaces and becomes inseparable from our built and natural environments.

A.A. Murakami's films have been recognized at Cannes and their work has been widely exhibited at institutions such as the V&A Museum in London and the Venice Art and Architecture Biennales. Their works have been collected by MoMA in New York and Centre Pompidou in Paris.

About Pearl Lam Galleries

Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. Founded in 2005, the gallery plays a vital role in stimulating international dialogue and cross-cultural exchange between the East and West.

Following a rigorous programme, Pearl Lam Galleries presents museum-quality exhibitions that re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice in Asia. With a thoughtfully balanced roster of Chinese and international artists, the gallery is strategic in its curation, positioning itself as an educator.

The gallery maintains a flagship space in the historic Pedder Building in Hong Kong, whilst the Shanghai gallery is situated in the heritage architecture in the Bund district. With a team of international staff, Pearl Lam Galleries' reach is global, having presentations at major international art fairs including The Armory Show, Art Cologne, Art Basel Hong Kong, Frieze Masters, and West Bund Art and Design.

Press Enquiries

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