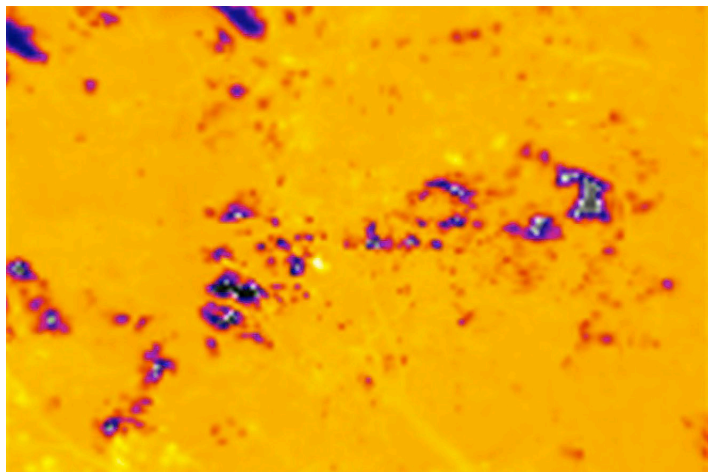


Three or, well maybe four monkeys: the View, the Lens, the Eye and the...

Liucija and Laurynas Adomaitis



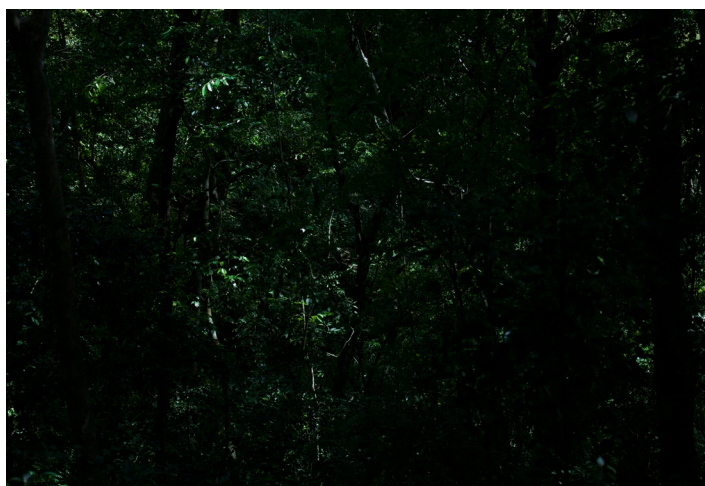
"Three monkeys... well, maybe four", 2015

Nature and culture is a temporary division – what is made, crafted or recycled and what is given, born or evolved are shifting categories. Beings endowed with language and, to Rousseau's dread, dishonesty, we reckon ourselves beyond the perpetuity of nature. We strive to become the first known virtual breed. While in reality there's nothing to us except nature's mouth and ears.

Some ancients foresaw that right. Take for example Chaldeans who developed natural magic based on manipulations in three equal groups: plants, animals and metals¹. It is the same theurgy that applies to all of them. A magical conjunction (σύστασις) and conjuration used by the oracles of the past treated nature undivided – according to Byzantine testimonies, oracles equally employed stones, plants and small animals and called them all σύμβολα, or as we do today, "symbols".

So it is with the series of Quentin De Wispelaere. He drew inspiration from the ordeal of a tourist who got lost in a jungle for several weeks without any survival equipment, whose mental state got seriously impaired during the experience: hallucinations due to the isolation, fear, heat, starvation galore! Following the steps of the unfortunate vagabond the series recreates the state of indefinable Chaldean "symbolism". For the past decades intellectual clowns of all flavours have postulated that symbols are not merely linguistic. Indeed, they opted to convince us everything is symbolic, a chain of indeterminate, continuously deferred signs, all interconnected, all self-contradictory.

Fine, says De Wispelaere, but the story is not over. Some signs are alive and some are fatal, some are perceived and some are perceiving, seeing how they intertwine in the Belizean jungle, you are convinced that the chain is actually metal and so you hear it squeak as it devours everything into a Parmenidean unity.



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It's not the absence of hierarchy that matters in the end. De Wispelaere's rather philosophical visual essay has introduced a fresh perspective once again – he clings to the view that investigation of the perceptual or conceptual premises of the human kind can lead us to see the paradox and unity of nature and consciousness. The point is that it does not matter whether hallucinations are more or less real than whatever we want to call reality. The point is that hallucinations are colourful and often dreadful, they are loud and taste so bad that you can't sleep at night, they anger you to the point of screaming

and screaming doesn't help, hallucinations are strong symbols, and, moreover, as natural and as devious as they get.

I guess the recipe for that is worthless after it's been done

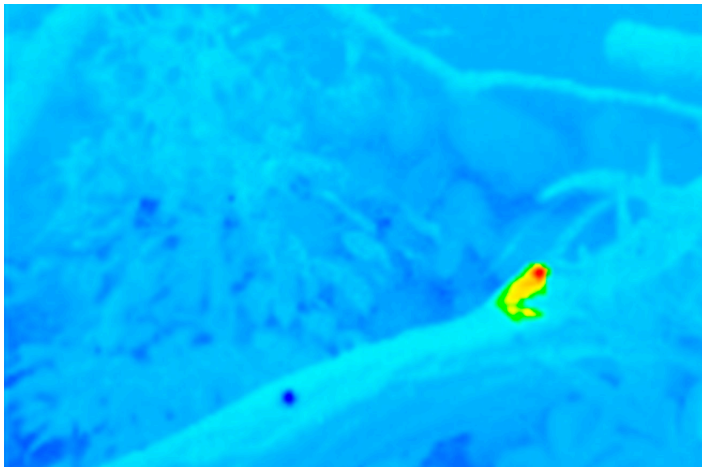
¹ All of them appeared in techniques of theurgy aimed and the salvation of the soul or soteriology. For the description of techniques and tools used see Ruth Majercik, 1989, *The Chaldean Oracles*, E. J. Brill: Leiden, pp. 21-46.

but here it goes anyway: the thermosensitive and night vision high-tech cameras crank the heat up and bring the primordial non-hierarchical stew to a boiling condition and then we wait for the lid to blow over (that's how Hegelian dialectics work in physics, just to let you know). And as it does, we are hit by it. We are hit by the realization that nothing escapes the escalate of nature's becoming. There is nothing that creeps out of the stew and remains dry-foot – no pure subject, no ex nihilo.

The observer is as much a part of it as are the wet clouds in the sky and the juicy legs of a lethal frog that hides in De Wispelaere's back pocket as he takes another shot. The observation as a fact is a fact that belongs to the moist seeds of nature.

Let's consider the backbone of visual making, the top-notch instrument – steel cameras and lenses, grinded to perfection. They are mere instruments, inhuman oculars that help to produce the ridges and valleys of photography. Still yet, how far have we gone out of place here? How far have we deferred, especially considering how much we've tried in recent times? The mirrors, the metal plates, human retina, the squishy brain – it's all still there. A hint strikes back – magic can take three at a time: plants, animals and metals.

And so the magical journey has begun. De Wispelaere's borderline representations (bordering nature and culture) has brought us in. See them on a gallery wall, small or even a smaller LCD screen, doesn't matter – it's nature and it's at its best. Your clumsy sweaty feet are in the mud right now. And there are no holes in the sky. At last, at last those who left sooner don't need us anymore.



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