

Rossella Biscotti

Clara and other Specimens

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*Stadtgalerie Zwergelgarten in collaboration with
Salzburg International Summer Academy for Fine Arts*



Seeds (2019), exhibition view, Salzburg, 2021

Leaving Buru: Rossella Biscotti, in the Garden of Statues

Tania Roy

*A garden therefore projects in its figure
the state of the world that it forms.*

Michel Serres

The ‘rubber works’ – *Annalies, Mei, Princess of Kasiruta, Sanikem - Nyai Ontosoroh - Madame Le Boucq, Surati* (2019) – by Rossella Biscotti converge around the entangled biographies of individual women to invoke the Dutch East Indies, on the cusp of the twentieth-century, through a plurality of ecological interactions.

Drawn from Biscotti’s engagements across the Indonesian archipelago, and with colonial archives in the Netherlands since 2016, each installation is inflected by the artist’s passionate encounter, over several years, with the *Buru* novels (1980-1988) of Ananta Toer Pramoedya. Famously, these novels were first composed as oral narratives, during Pramoedya’s detention in a camp on Buru Island; denied writing materials, the author recited his story, daily, to fellow inmates in the fourteen year-long period of imprisonment. An exemplary staging of the operations of memory on the written record or the historical archive, the *Buru Quartet* narrates the advent of the anti-colonial Indonesian nation through multiple scales and points of contact, which are mediated across the novels, through the voice of a masculine protagonist. In the decolonizing world, literature unfolds as a foundational event because it encapsulates a multiplicity of experiences within the action of a singular form, thereby anticipating the revolutionary consciousness of a people while documenting current social realities. If bodily containment, silence and the failed project of decolonization describe the author’s immediate circumstances in 1965, Biscotti extends the temporal detours and documentary precision of that literary event into our own ‘global’ moment, locating us within the conceptual legacies and material residues of the *epoch of the plantation*.

Biscotti’s sculptural installations emerge from the dispersed or unrecorded experiences of a multiplicity of biographical subjects, organisms and micro-biological potentialities. The story-lines of their capture, transport, extinction or violent regeneration unfold across this collection’s evocation of uneven networks of world-trade, wealth-accumulation, and transnational mobility; in the transition from mercantilist capital, dominated by the Dutch East India Company

(*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, VoC) in the 17th and 18th centuries, into the industrial revolution. From the angle of the disparate bio-cultural entities that make up the exhibit, the ‘world’ is forged in extractive economic logics that tie the “radical simplification of landscape”, under the private compact between multinational capital and state-formations, to the racialized division of labour. The plantation then, as a world-forming event, historically specified, through its emergence across the South-East Asian archipelago, in the authoritarian transaction between a Dutch-colonial ruling elite and its indigenous proxy, a land-owning Javanese patriarchy. From yet another angle, the intersecting lines and patterns of mutually related existence attest, at every moment of the display, to the currents of an *ontological* reality that exceed the scale of human intention, or, indeed, the periodicities of historical chronology. In the verticality of cotton and rubber-embossed screens, as in the suggestive adjacency of the printed extract of the merchant-ship’s log-book to the folio-like surfaces of Biscotti’s ‘botanical monographs’, we encounter clusters of discrete iconographic forms, as they repeat, stagger and re-coalesce into new, if unresolved formations across the image-plane. [fig. 1–4]

The mark of feminine detail, in the art of the textile and the hand-dyed print, is conjoined to the mathematical distribution of seeds scattered on a surface, and from here, to the self-mimicking symmetries of exuberant vegetal growth that surge, to human height, around the exposed axis of the organism’s reproductive organ. As such, each image-plane composes entities and organism through their capacity for auto-generation and nonlinear lexical structures. While suggesting untimely mediatic proximities between the artisanal surface and the cybernetic screen, the works are, nevertheless, allusions to the advent of industrialization and the slow-time of the handcraft – each are the product of the artist’s consistent, combined uses of hand-drawing with small instruments of mechanical reproduction (from the screen-print technique, the small-scale, manual operation or direction of extractive technologies, and the generation of the rubber moulds).

On the one side, then, history and determinism: the plantation and its emergence in South East Asia during the rule of the VoC, as a limit condition of species-life, which links the fate of organisms and entities to the history of human labour; the capture of the reproductive body, across species-types and organisms, by monetized systems of equivalence and substitution. On the other side: the

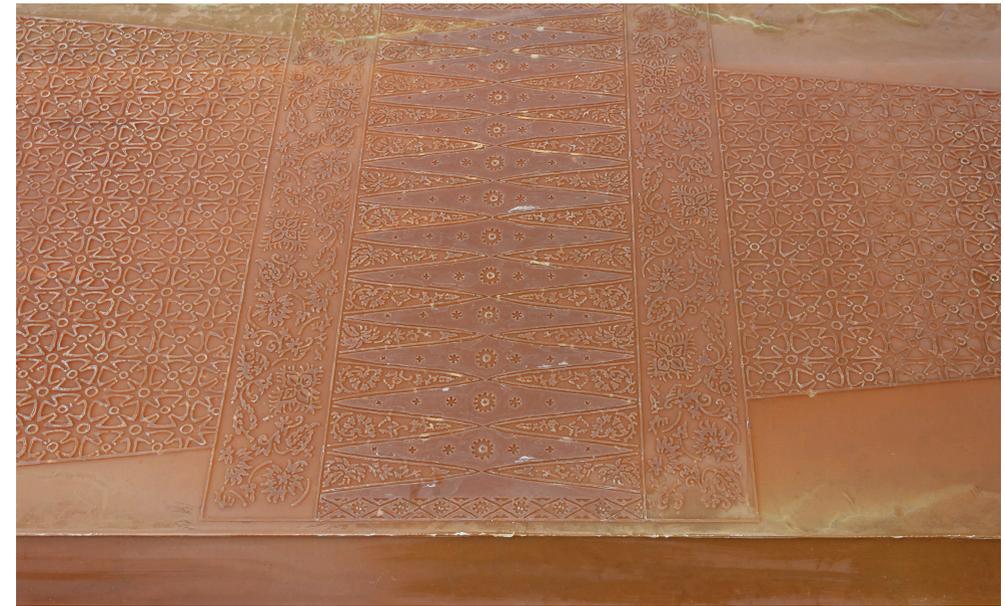


Fig. 1: *Surati* (2019), detail, exhibition view, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, 2019



Fig. 2: *Sanikem – Nyai Ontosoroh – Madame Le Boucq* (2019), detail

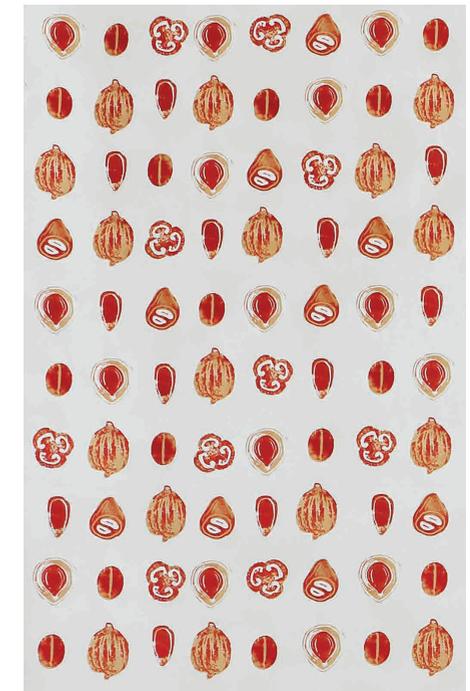


Fig. 3: *Seeds* (2019), detail

Bataria In's Casteel 1741.

De verordening van Bengalen na 't Bataria In's Casteel 1741. 241224.7.0 / 872562.0

420	... f. Lamand	4041.6.0
300	... f. fuficken	2593.2.0
200	... f. affaffa	2430.0.0
80	... f. foffro	2621.10.0
300	... f. affabanyf	953.1.0
300	... f. aliabanyf	2025.0.0
100	... f. fologoffro	1001.17.0
200	... f. fawer	1075.0.0
40	... f. fuchetto	1019.12.0
1980	... f. malleweller	27761.14.0
800	... f. fawpoo	12293.16.0
470	... f. Dorniaffer	8424.2.0
3710	... f. Caffa	70820.12.0
1900	... f. anoffijner	23299.7.0
400	... f. allegiaffer	4416.0.0
3600	... f. roomaalo	16083.4.0
900	... f. quigan	6622.10.0
3400 1/2	... f. Dornijf	3660.18.0
van de fuballagie van alle voortf. goederen		9433.17.0
, ongeten op compantje:		6223.11.0
		429274.4.0

Na Delft en Rotterdam met den boom Kinapenhoff 1741
lyke, onder dato 22: november anno 1740. Notkerk fca'min bij de gen: Koniglych
Primaal pag: 106. ten befpooren van de gendiaal gbragte dijn, als

200000	... f. foppe fca'nt bantant	27936.0.0
62000	... f. fuffanboit	1591.4.0
34200	... f. fofpeter	39674.2.0
1740	... f. fozag	800.3.0
816	... f. Cottonwagren	462.0.0
12010 1/2	... f. Zep in Zoort	69263.0.0
360	... f. amoffijer	1799.1.0
800	... f. Dorniaffidijf	3711.11.0
120	... f. Saclerijf	461.18.0
400	... f. foffaffen	1411.16.0
2000	... f. fawmoffen	11849.18.0
500	... f. fuffaf fawer	2271.2.0
500	... f. faw	2961.2.0
5000	... f. gawmoff	44664.9.0
1200	... f. gawffan	17296.17.0
3200	... f. fawmpawer	14022.0.0
1230	... f. Zeylkleeden	4700.17.0
1100	... f. foffaffen	4923.0.0
518	... f. Dorniaffer	6982.3.0
1990	... f. malleweller	28264.0.0
400	... f. B'kell's Cingam	4043.12.0
800	... f. fawpoo	13633.0.0
200	... f. fawmoffant	4400.14.0
480	... f. Lamand	4961.10.0
300	... f. fuffanant	2056.17.0
300	... f. fufficken	2383.2.0
200	... f. affaffa	2162.10.0
240	... f. foffro	3096.1.0

Transporteere . . . 318090.0 / 131606.11.0

Fig. 4: Clara (2019), facsimile of cargo list of VOC ship, Bengal to Delft/Rotterdam, 20 July 1741, in: Knappenhof: Groetboek 1741-1742, National Archives of the Netherlands, The Hague

Bataria In's Casteel 1741.

De verordening van Bengalen na 't Bataria In's Casteel 1741. 308090.0 / 131606.11.0

300	... f. affabanyf	953.1.0
300	... f. aliabanyf	1987.10.0
100	... f. fologoffro ffigal	1122.0.0
300	... f. Lamand	1922.12.0
40	... f. fuchetto	770.12.0
2124	... f. amoffijner	24892.6.0
800	... f. allegiaffer	4448.6.0
3400	... f. roomaalo	14390.3.0
2632 1/2	... f. Dornijf	3884.3.0
1000	... f. quigan	6681.17.0
3610	... f. Caffa	49404.4.0
van de fuballagie van alle voortf. goederen		9086.14.0
, ongeten op compantje:		1714.28.0
		446907.2.0

Dus komt de Generale Compagnies Rekening 1741. 1747543.13.0

7 P. Commande f Comptois qd. 16976.0.0. fign: de beragen der overnemens' compmanfchapp
in novemb' 1741, onder d'lyt de Bengaale directie met de fhip 't Ruyt te fteyk onder dato 10: januarj
1741. na de Commande de quinquante fonder; en bij volgenten Koniglyche bevelen van onder pag: 166.
ten laften van de generale affaffa. fign: 7 noten

1000	... f. fawpoo Zep	2147.19.0
100	... f. fawpoo	48.2.0
24000	... f. fawpoo fawpoo	2467.0.0
800	... f. fawpoo fawpoo	799.10.0
200	... f. amoffijner fawpoo	2582.1.0
229	... f. fawpoo fawpoo	258.6.0
7000	... f. gawmoff	1627.10.0
van de fuballagie van alle voortf. goederen		1664.14.0
, ongeten op compantje:		148.14.0
		2419.0.0

28. Cabo de goede hoop 't Comptois qd. 10610.0.0. fign: de beragen der overnemens' compmanfchapp
in novemb' 1741, onder d'lyt de Bengaale directie met de fhip 't Ruyt te fteyk onder dato 10: januarj
1741. na de Commande de quinquante fonder; en bij volgenten Koniglyche bevelen van onder pag: 166.
ten laften van de generale affaffa. fign: 7 noten

1000	... f. fawpoo Zep	2147.19.0
100	... f. fawpoo	48.2.0
24000	... f. fawpoo fawpoo	2467.0.0
800	... f. fawpoo fawpoo	799.10.0
200	... f. amoffijner fawpoo	2582.1.0
229	... f. fawpoo fawpoo	258.6.0
7000	... f. gawmoff	1627.10.0
van de fuballagie van alle voortf. goederen		1664.14.0
, ongeten op compantje:		148.14.0
		2419.0.0

met de fhip Lybedas fpeel en 22: ghu: anno 1740 als

440	... f. Zeylkleeden	1893.0.0
240	... f. gawffan	904.1.0
van de fuballagie van voortf. goederen		110.4.0
, ongeten op compantje:		40.19.0
		2948.12.0

met den boom fawpoo onder fawpoo d'lyt, fawpoo

140	... f. Zeylkleeden	1930.6.0
160	... f. gawffan	623.16.0
van de fuballagie van voortf. goederen		96.11.0
, ongeten op compantje:		57.7.0
		2607.1.0

met de fhip fawpoo onder dato voortf. als

660	... f. Zeylkleeden	2420.16.0
van de fuballagie van voortf. goederen		78.6.0
, ongeten op compantje:		36.8.0
		2524.10.0

Transporteere . . . 8170.4.0 / 1774620.0



Fig. 5: *Dismembered Rafflesia* (2019), exhibition view, Salzburg, 2021



Fig. 6: *Surati* (2019), exhibition view, Dhaka Art Summit, Dhaka, 2020

generation of unresolved patterns of meaning on the 'page' that scatter away from the organised knowledge-forms [fig. 5–6] – probabilities of future events (whether catastrophic or otherwise) that exceed human intent and prediction, even as the significance of such intelligent design might still be enfolded into the logic of calculation, under the ruse of 'securitizing' risk or profit. In these clusters of aggregated or simplified designs, the exhibit stages an encounter with *ecological intelligence* as it emerges through the very media of its colonization. In the singularities that are assembled within each installations – from the *Buru* works, *Dismembered Rafflesia*, *Live Feed*, and, indeed, in the missing presence of the animal body around which the inventory of equivalent weights and objects are listed, in *Clara* – Biscotti presents the ecological as capable of advancing evidentiary claims on behalf of its own existence – a mode of witness, in other words, to the very regimes of rationalised control and measurement that disbar its claim upon thought and language.

The Literary Event: Ecological Aesthetics after Buru

If the world of *Buru* is one point of departure for the group of works on display, this is perhaps because Biscotti recognizes how literature, in its contemporaneity, is an enquiry between its own forms and the deep currents of reality – an opening between the unvocalizable event and its trace across the page, the movement of a phrase or of personal witness as it emerges into the force of a communal language, the fate or future of a fiction as it is expressed and actualized in popular knowledges. By organizing her installations around the unresolved overlap of proper names and scientific taxonomies, Biscotti's installations specify themselves, along this axis, as inheritors of the literary event. The group of sculptural works, together with the inscriptions that run across them, might be approached, in the first instance, as a *reading* that strives to disburden the symbolically over-laden text of national origins to reveal how the narrative of 'home' is written over the reproductive organ, the family-origin, the *genus* or species. Hence, 'woman' as, at once, body and trope; a trace that reveals how disparate organisms and entities are tied together through processes of forced displacement, domestication and strategies of (racialised or fleshly) differentiation in the transition from the Dutch East India Company to the emergence of the sovereign nation. In the collection of 'batik-works' named directly for the women of *The Buru Quartet*, the skin-like texture of the rubber artefacts address

us through their disturbing tactility, and through flesh-like tonalities derived from natural resin, sometimes accentuated or exaggerated through the use of consumable food colouring. But while the ensemble conceives of these objects in their capacity to solicit and accommodate the touch, each piece is also starkly *de-eroticised* through the elaborate abstractions of the *batik* motif, whose pin-like dots and dashes are neither superficial nor extricable from the moulded contours of these ‘bodies’ of rubber. [fig. 7–8] Removed from the architecture of personhood, Biscotti’s constructs of ‘femininity’ are offered to the viewer less as a narrative, than as an index to logics of enforced homogenization/difference, which repeat, across altered regimes of value staged in the exhibit, as the boundary conditions for the survival of *other* bodies, organisms and species in the display.

Biscotti takes the feminine names, Annalies – Mei – Princess of Kasiruta – Sanikem – Surati, to lend a provisional title for her series of rubber castings (2019). In their evocation of disparate lives and fates, these linked names establish a syntax for the organisms and entities that comprise ‘the natural’ in the exhibition space, even as each piece ‘draws’ a portrait of geographically and culturally distinction regions, imagined, as a series of archipelagic links across periods and styles, as entities that precede or survive the homogenizing frame of the nation (e.g. ‘Annalies’ refers not only to the tragic biracial beauty of Pramoedy’s character, who is born of a Dutch settler and his Javanese concubine, but also, in its particular uses of *batik*, to the provenance of the narrative, Surabaya; ‘Mei’ signals the Chinese influence in Java island, while ‘Kasiruta’ redirects our attention to the Bacan Island in the Molucca Sea). Moulded from textile patterns from Java Island, these tensile rubber artefacts approximate the responsiveness of naked skin. In the outward press of dots and discontinuous lines that run in motivic variations across the pieces, each ‘figure’ recalls the wax-resist process of *batik* dyeing, suggesting, first, that the textile, and the figure of the detail itself, is an inscription of feminine time into the domestic space. By extrapolating a differentiated feminized subjectivity, specified in exuberant sensorial detail in each piece, Biscotti, the reader, makes a remarkable claim upon *The Buru Quartet*. While the quartet elaborates the *Bildungs*-plot of its masculine protagonist, a journalist who integrates his personal biography into the novel’s thematization of collective resistance to colonial rule at the turn of the century, Biscotti extrapolates itinerant references to textiles from the books – the fabrics, like the names given to them by fathers, husbands, brothers and owners, are

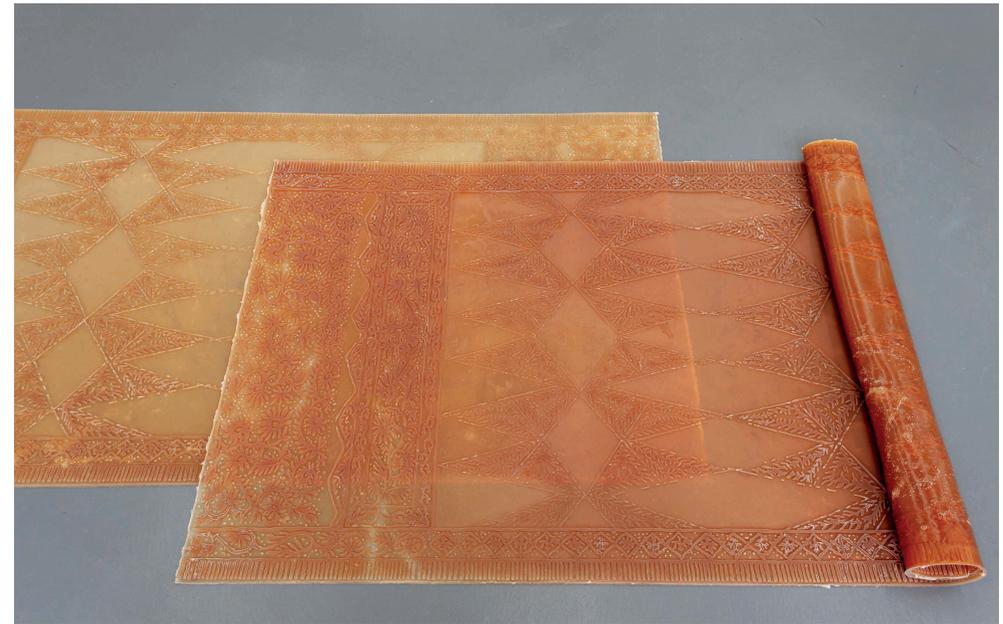


Fig. 7: *Annalies* (2019), exhibition view, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, 2019



Fig. 8: *Princess of Kasiruta* (2019), exhibition view, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, 2019

substitutes for propertyless women, who are permitted ownership over portable items of marriage, but not the value of their bodies. As an extensive preface to the exhibit, Biscotti's 'Buru' pieces disassociate the subjectivities of women from the epic (implicitly masculinist) work of national imagination, retrieving their subjectivities from interruption or erasure within the dominant perspective of the narrative. In *lieu* of life-stories, which are often abruptly terminated in the novels, Biscotti honours unrecorded strategies of survival and transformation by tracing the persistence of the woman's body into other organic materials and entities. In their unsettling fleshliness, at once intimate and de-sexualised, these rubber artefacts imply the expropriation of the reproductive body – the 'birth-place' of home, the *genus*, the locus of life, itself – to property – or the *law* that yokes patriarchy, kinship and colonialism together.

Biscotti's uses of natural latex as the indissoluble medium of her 'Buru works' serves to rescale our imagination of this organic extract along multiple gradients and loci. Implied within the other 'specimens' of megafauna and flora on display is Brazilian rubber, the natural *hevea* seed, which is cast, in its world-shaping mobility, abundant potentialities, and miniscule presence, as the essence of 'the plantation' – across the media displayed in the exhibit, rubber materialises the law of productivism, a logic of substitution that operates through the organic extract, setting in motion equivalences and forced displacements between bodies, seeds and crops. 'Rubber', for Biscotti, is the sign under which the coerced labour of migrant workers (on the Dutch plantations of South Sumatra) substitutes for the "broken generational time" of the slave (in the Amazon, and in the Congo basins);¹ through jagged lines of wealth and depletion, rubber is the connection between the history of industrialization in South-East Asia, and the legacies of empire in metropolitan Europe.

Altogether, each of the singularities presented in Biscotti's sculptural installations presuppose a history of environmental modernization that links the South-East Asian plantation through itineraries of coerced mobility, domestication and control, to the modern nation form on the one hand; and the inheritance of racial-colonial dominance in metropolitan Europe, on the other. Within this

¹ Greg Mittman, 'Reflections on the *Plantationocene*: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing'. June 2019/October 2019. <https://edgeeffects.net/haraway-tsing-plantationocene/> Accessed 26/02/21.

contemporary conjuncture, each installation stands, under the borrowed sign of femininity, as a prefiguration of the others. If the name of 'woman' is drawn primarily through reference to the sharply characterised, if fragmented women of *The Buru Quartet*, it also derives its force from the missing, massive animal body of the Indian rhinoceros which forms the principle subject of *Clara and Other Specimens* (2016-2021), a sequence of installations resulting from Biscotti's discovery of documents related to the animal, in the VoC archives. Pirated by Douwe Jansz Mout van der Meer, captain of the *Kappenhof* ship of the Dutch East India Company as a fantastical curiosity, the rhino was taken from her adopted home in the Calcutta residence of the director of the Company, to make landfall in Rotterdam in 1741. The pachyderm was one of only five rhinos ever to have been encountered in Europe since Albrecht Durer illustrated the animal in 1515 (defining it as a figure of centuries-long fascination for the European imagination). She was exhibited by van der Meer for nearly seventeen years on wildly popular public tours across the Continent, and is outlived, in art-history, by French, Italian and Flemish paintings, as well as anatomical illustrations, which endure under her European name, 'Clara'. In the excerpt presented from the larger ensemble of the same name, a page of the log-book of the *Kappenhof* lists an inventory that does not, however, register the animal directly – here is Biscotti's compressed gesture to the dispersal of the entity into a quantum of properties that do not, in truth, cohere around its ontological weight. The typescript also suggests the trace of unregistered events that are nevertheless legible, through alternative syntactical conjunctions between names and materialities. The printed page, in its reference back to the novel-form, or again, to the folio-like surfaces of the other installations on display is also an oblique attestation to the emergence of print-culture as a global phenomenon, out of the port-cities of Asia and Africa. Clara's charm trails across the Swiss cantons, the capitals of Germany (through the surfaces of Meissen porcelain) the Netherlands, (the royal menagerie in) Versailles, Paris and Madrid; her allure thus links the most politically significant maritime itineraries across the colonies during the period of mercantile expansionism, to the emergence of commercial entertainment networks on Continent. As to the page itself – we confront, perhaps, a censored reality, one that is nevertheless present in the discrepancy between the Custom's record, which officially notes *nothing*, and the animal's disembodied 'entry' through commodified equivalences, into the log-book of the world.

The feminine analogy between *Buru's* women and the missing body of Clara is visibly extended to Biscotti's presentation of the 'corpse flowers' of Sumatra and peninsular Malaysia (also exported to England, Italy and the Netherlands at the turn of the century, as spectacular botanical trophies). The *Rafflesia*, like the *amorphophallus titanium* or the 'titanium arum', are colloquially named for dead bodies because of the flesh-like colour and texture of their massive inflorescence (the different orders of floral growth along the original shoot, or shaft of the plant). Mistaken for vegetal predators because of their putrid fragrance when their blossoms are sexually mature, both plants attract insects such as carrion beetles and flesh-flies for the purposes of pollination by exuding the smell of decaying organic material (but not, in fact, devouring these other organisms). Concatenating the display's links between narratives of sexual captivity, bodily abduction, and extinction, with those of forced intimacy, Biscotti presents us with her own rendering of the folios of *Annals of the Buitenzorg Botanical Garden* (Volume XXXII, 1923); the page she cites here, shows the dissected remains of an imported specimen. [fig. 9–11]

Scattering and rescaling the dismembered parts of the massive shaft of the plant – some of which flower to a diameter of over 100 centimetres – Biscotti does not quite cite, here, the 'rare flower', the *puspa langka*, in its current valence as the state flower of Indonesia or as the 'giant flower', *padma paksasi*, as it is known in the East Malaysian state of Sabah and in the Surat Thani province of Thailand. Hoisted upon the fleshly lathes of rubber, Biscotti's image-screen refocuses our perspective on the sliced and dispersed segments of the reproductive shaft of the plant, redirecting the question of 'genus' – the ostensibly indivisible *locus* of life and origins – back to the law of property, and, indeed, to the name of that colonial founding-father and proto-botanist in South-East Asia, Sir Stamford Raffles. Manifesting through the law that links the father's name to ownership, the fragmented elements of *Disembodied Rafflesia* impute the racialised organization of populations and organisms, to the knowledge-claims of modern science. In its materials, the work sites the historically transformative confluence of consumption and science by dispersing and redistributing the value of the *Rafflesia* through other materials and points of contact, such as exotic fabric-weaves and dyes – if the plant's 'discovery' would, indeed, change the study of modern botany in Europe, Biscotti returns that event to the material history of commodities, and its intersection with the racialised properties of 'difference'. Reiterating the exhibit's concern with depletion of context and the transformation, therein, of

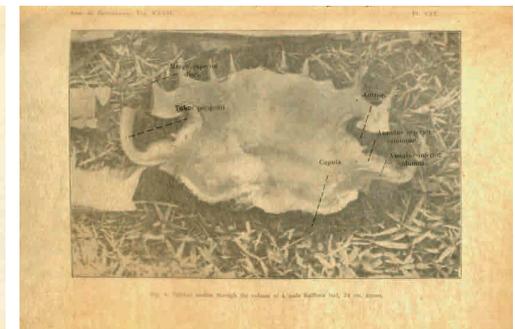
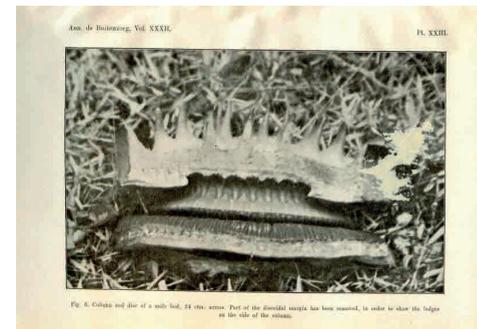
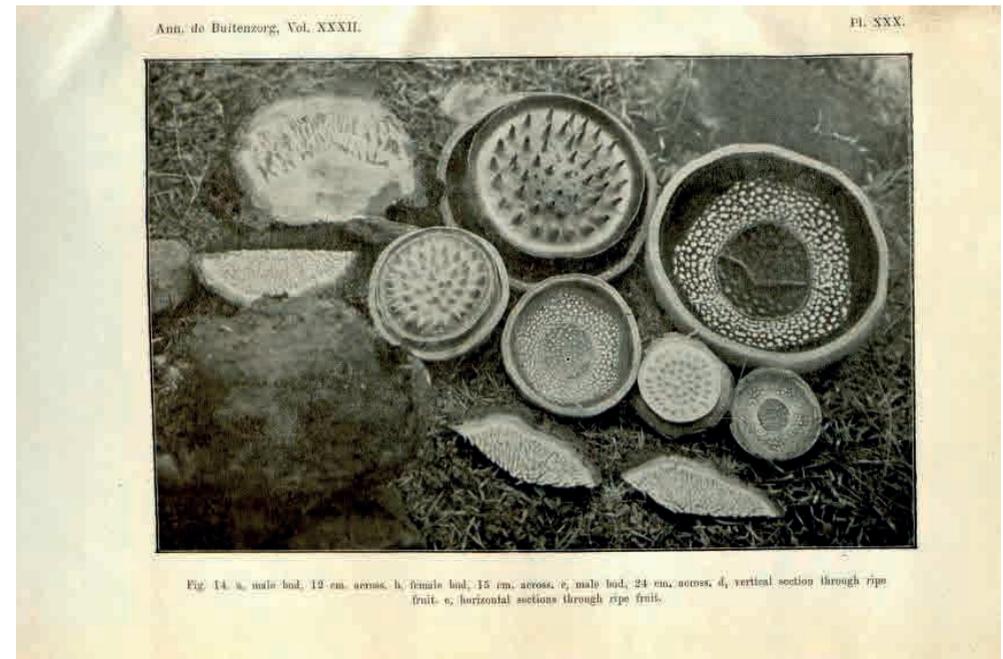


Fig. 9–11: *Rafflesia*, in: *Annals of the Buitenzorg Botanical Garden*, Volume XXXII, 1923

the boundary conditions for demarcation of territory and the experience of political space, Biscotti's *Live Feed* (2019) alludes to the plant's import from Sumatra to Europe by the Florentine botanist, Odoardo Beccari in the first decades of the twentieth-century. Biscotti repeats the famous gigantism of the plant by scaling the work to its actual human height: the repetitions of floral growth along the inner spike of the plant, together with the external collar of petals along the protruding external shaft, comprise the largest inflorescence in the world. Blooming over a period of 4 to 10 years, the plant's cycle of sexual maturation and depletion is readily available online, through time-lapse videos accessible to tourists as well as the casual viewer. Intervening into the symmetrical return of proportions between the flower on the silk-screen and a gazing public, is the installation's assembly through different image-planes – segmented layers, in colour, which overlap, but do not intersect. [fig. 12–14]

Biscotti's use of colour on flattened, dilated block-prints of the plant's morphology rehearses both the exposure of a singular organism through the hyper-visibility of its forms; as well as the abbreviation of time that links the consumable video-image, through the disaggregated bodies of other animal and vegetal lives, to the implied disappearance of a species.

The Garden of Statues

The philosopher of science, the late Michel Serres, claims, in a celebrated insight, that the origins of geometry arose from the calculations made to divert the “chaos and disorder” caused by the flooding of the Nile. Measurement and the ancient art of the land-surveyor did not only reorder the catastrophic flood event for the purposes of irrigation, thereby redeeming or domesticating “natural” elements in “a new birth into culture” (*The Natural Contract*). For Serres, the mathematical calculation fuses ecological processes with rationalised land-use to create a mode of extraordinary abstraction – a weaponizable *empiricism* at the confluence of military organization, the pre-emptive intelligence of warfare, and the actual expansion of power over rationalised units of space. In *Statues*, Serres presents another version of this proposition by returning to that particular enclosure we associate with the garden, linking this plot of parcelled land to formations like the cemetery, the domestic courtyard, and also the military barrack:



Fig. 12: *Amorphophilia*, Bogor Botanical Garden, Indonesia, 2019, photo: Rossella Biscotti

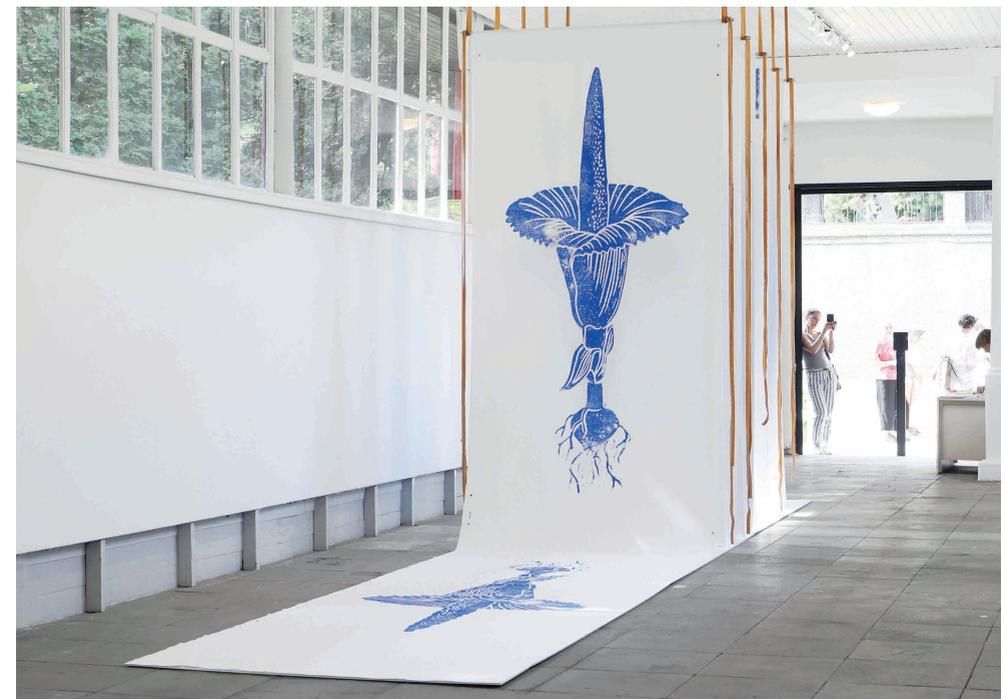


Fig. 13–14 (p.18-19): *Live Feed* (2019), exhibition view, Salzburg, 2021



Each garden marks an epoch in the dawn of history, when the unknown forefathers of our forgotten ancestors were sowing space with menhirs, betyls, cromlechs, or cairns, megaliths that defined its singularities, which were occupied for the first time by an animal recognizing at once its world and its dead (Serres, *Statues*).

The garden is birthed through the first ‘statues,’ those primal markers of a meaningful coordination of space – here is the sculptural operation on space itself, which creates the conditions of possibility for experiencing time, death and endurance in memory. The capacity to recognize statuefied formations as both aesthetically and ethically significant – in their “singularity” – and so, to dwell in the circumstantial spaces that arise *between* these forms – depends on the very materialities that have been consigned to obliteration and obscurity. As the garden is enfolded into the spaces of the cemetery or the barracks, so also the ethical relation to the openings created *between* markers: Emerging through the emplacement and manifestation of the ‘statues,’ the garden is a sensibility that hides within the weaponization of space, a series of pathways or detours that turn the arts of scaling, measurement and confinement to the operations of memory and witness,

Annalies, Mei, Princess of Kasiruta, Sanikem – Nyai Ontosoroh – Madame Le Boucq, Surati (2019) the fleshly bodies of *Disembodied Rafflesia* and the ‘deformed phallus’ of *Live Feed*, the plangent epilogue to the exhibition, the facsimile of a ship’s log book, exhibited under the heading, *Clara* – like the statue’s force on memory, Biscotti provides us with pathways across these disparate compositions, which are, by turns, novelistic, scientific, technical, artisanal, and always, sexuate.

Scientific delineations of a singular, complex organism are repeatedly inscribed onto folio-like surfaces only to evoke other modes of description that have historically engaged with the entity, from the literary, the painterly or the economic. Each installation comprises, thus, of internally consistent scenes that describe the shifting value of an empirical entity across cycles of production and consumption, at once mortifying and revivifying the organism through techniques of iconographic simplification, exaggeration or abundance. Concurrently, however, each organism manifests artistically through the force of its address toward *other*, repeated, rescaled and distributed forms – an iterative, self-mimicking

process, relayed across image-planes, through the ‘raw’ material of rubber and cotton, to reorganise the space of the display into hitherto unexperienced biotopes. As Serres’ originary ‘statues’ gestate the power to recognize singular forms *in situ* – in the shape of gardens that emerge from violent logics of equivalence, substitution and forced differentiation – Biscotti’s sculptures reorganise the spaces of display, and, indeed, our current location in the world, into an invocation of the archipelago across unresolved historical and material conjunctions.

This reflection was first initiated during Rossella Biscotti’s residency at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. I would like to acknowledge the original invitation by NTU CCA Singapore to engage with the artist’s works, in a forthcoming volume.

Dr Tania Roy is Senior Lecturer, and coordinator of the Graduate Programme in English Literature at NUS (National University of Singapore). She is the author of *Adorno and the Architects of Late Style in India: Aesthetic Form after the Twentieth-century Novel* (Routledge, 2020). At NUS, she teaches topics in Critical Theory, especially the aesthetics of the Frankfurt School, trauma studies, postcolonial and world literatures. Related interests on art after the liberalization of the Indian economy considered, especially, as a response to civic violence under the current dispensation of far-Right supremacism, and on ecological aesthetics, have appeared as book-chapters and journal articles, including, *boundary 2, Theory, Culture and Society, Political Culture, The European Legacy, and The Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*.



Maiko (undeveloped, 2019), exhibition view, Salzburg, 2021



Exhibition view, Salzburg, 2021 (quotes compiled from documents of Straits Settlements, Singapore National Archives)

p. 22/23: *Dismembered Rafflesia* (2019), *Sanikem – Nyai Ontosoroh – Madame Le Boucq* (2019) and *Surati* (2019), exhibition view, Salzburg, 2021



Biography

Rossella Biscotti (born in 1978 in Molfetta, Italy) lives and works between Rotterdam and Brussels. She graduated from the Accademia di Belle Arti in Naples in 2002 and later attended the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam from 2010 to 2011.

Biscotti took part in major international exhibitions, including the 55th Venice Biennale and 13th Istanbul Biennale (2013), dOCUMENTA 13 (2012), and Manifesta 9 (2012). Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions at Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam; Fondazione Ratti, Como; daadgalerie, Berlin (2019), Kunsthaus Baselland; Protocinema Istanbul (2018), V-A-C foundation at GULAG History State Museum in Moscow (2016-2017), Museion Bolzano (2015), Haus Lange Haus Esters, Krefeld; Wiels, Brussels; Sculpture Center, New York (2014), Secession, Vienna e-flu, New York (2013), CAC Vilnius (2012). She has also exhibited in a number of group exhibitions including Dhaka Art Summit, Dhaka (2020), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2019-2018), Kunstmuseum St Gallen, Tate St Ives (2018), Contour Biennale, Mechelen (2017), MAXXI, Rome (2010-2017), Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Swiss Institute New York (2016), Sonsbeek, curated by ruangrupa, Arnhem (2016), the IMMA Dublin (2015), ICA London, Pinchuk Art Center, Kiev (2014), Castello di Rivoli (2012), Museu Serralves, Porto (2010).

List of Works

Live Feed (2019)

Silkscreen on cotton, natural rubber stripes
4000 × 160 cm (textile)

Seeds (2019)

Silkscreen on cotton, natural rubber stripes
700 × 150 cm (textile)

Dismembered Rafflesia (2019)

Silkscreen on cotton, natural rubber stripes
700 × 160 cm (textile)

Annalies (2019)

Natural rubber sheets
200 × 100 cm

Maiko (undeveloped, 2019)

Natural rubber sheets, food colouring
200 × 100 cm (each)

Mei (2019)

Natural rubber sheets, food coloring
240 × 60 cm (each)

Princess of Kasiruta (2019)

Natural rubber sheets
230 × 105 cm / 210 × 100 cm

Sanikem - Nyai Ontosoroh - Madame Le Boucq (2019)

Natural rubber sheets, food colouring
305 × 108 cm / 210 × 100 cm

Surati (2019)

Natural rubber sheets
240 × 105 cm / 210 × 100 cm

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