

# Kunsthaus Langenthal

English Handout

## Hunter Longe. Various Lambent Portals

03.09. – 19.11.2023

1st Floor

Sculptures made of fossils, solar cells that generate sound, and videos based on dreams: Hunter Longe (\*1985 in California, lives in Geneva) has developed an extraordinary, independent oeuvre in recent years, which is now being shown for the first time in a large institutional solo exhibition at Kunsthaus Langenthal. He invites us to pass through “Various Lambent Portals” and journey through unimaginably vast periods of the earth’s history. Often using particular minerals and stones in his work, the past is quite literally brought into the present. For example, gypsum crystals and lime appear — minerals that are relics of primeval seas and their inhabitants, but also omnipresent today as building materials. Longe’s artworks tell of the history of science while evoking possible futures through their unusual material combinations and their speculative character.

### Room 9 (Corridor)

Throughout the exhibition there are small-sized objects cast from plaster mixed with magnetite sand, with minerals and fossils embedded in them. They were cast in discarded plastic packaging or directly in sand in the Arve riverbed. Most contain flickering LED lights, like those found in artificial candles.

The largest group is the *Relics of an Evaporated Sea* series in the corridor. The title refers to the prehistoric sea, whose evaporation left minerals such as salt and gypsum. The latter is contained in the objects in two forms, in addition to the cast material of plaster (which is just gypsum), the transparent crystal form, called selenite, is also gypsum, which is illuminated here by LEDs. The artist found the crystals in the Jura Mountains not far from Langenthal as well as in the salt mines of Bex/VD.

Gigantic spans of time are condensed in the small works of art: the evaporation of prehistoric oceans lies unimaginably far back for the human understanding of time, but its consequences are commonplace. What remains is salt, which nourishes us, and gypsum, which we use in our dwellings. LED lights and packaging point to the fact that consumer goods production and technology are based on the excavation of ancient raw materials. The theme of the imaginability of time and the aftermath of enormously distant events is a constant throughout the exhibition.

### Room 1

Two works in this room have the term “source” in their titles. The colored pencil drawing *The Source – Chicxulub* is based on the scientific representation of the Chicxulub impact crater in what is now Mexico. This was formed by the asteroid impact at the end of the Cretaceous period, which caused a mass extinction. At that time, among others, the dinosaurs disappeared, from which the mammals benefited. The end here is also a new beginning. The work *Sourcière* – the play on words in french in the title connects source and witch – consists of divining rods superposed by a video showing light reflections on the water. The (scientifically unproven) function of the divining rod is to indicate water and certain minerals. The elements of water and light (which help shape geological processes) are present throughout the exhibition, and finally, the Kunsthaus stands on a water vein, namely the Langete River. Hunter Longe and his friend Lucas Monème climbed into the canal beneath the house to make sound recordings of the river. These are played on the audio player in Room 1 and sent through the exhibition by laser beam (light) from the corridor (*Clam Hole Hag Stone Portal IV*, see below).

## Room 2

Dreams play an important role in Hunter Longe's artistic practice. Inspired by a dream sequence, the animated film *Dream* was created for the exhibition. In addition to the actions of a cartoon wolf, it features a clock that moves at different speeds and in different directions. Again, the theme of the perception of time emerges here, which is different in dreams than in waking life. Where the projector projects the clock on the wall, a solar cell is suspended, which makes the frequencies of the projected light audible and connects back to the assemblage of glass and audio equipment entitled *Summoner*.

Dreams originate in the brain. The motif of the brain can be seen on the cast objects located on the glass shelf in the room. Like all such objects in the exhibition, they contain, in addition to plaster, the mineral magnetite. This magnetic iron oxide is also found in the human brain, where it contributes to long-term memory, according to current research. In animals, e.g. birds, it helps with orientation on the earth's magnetic field, as well as in certain bacteria. By means of fossil chains of magnetite from bacteria in rocks, it is possible today to draw geological conclusions about the magnetic field of the earth.

## Room 3

Another drastic event from Earth's history that Longe refers to is known as the Great Oxygen, which occurred 2.4 billion years ago. Photosynthesis by organisms increased the oxygen content of the atmosphere and oceans. On the one hand, this opened new paths for evolution (after it had wiped out most life), on the other hand, this initiated the formation of nearly two-thirds of the minerals we find on the planet. Thus, a large part of the inanimate world of minerals was created by processes triggered by living organisms.

One of these minerals is malachite, which Longe uses in *Mallow Mined*. The Greek name of the deep green copper oxide translates as «mallow stone.» The artist adds a drawing of a mallow leaf bearing traces of a caterpillar to the stone. The name of the insect is borrowed from the world of mining: it is a leaf miner moth.

For *Cyprian Idol*, Longe grew copper crystals on wood. The name copper comes from the island of Cyprus, where wood was found in abandoned Bronze Age copper mines that had been partially fossilized in this today omnipresent metal. Copper is essential as a raw material for electrical devices and wiring, such as the cables used to suspend the objects seen here.

## Room 4

As with the sculptures in Room 3, Longe derives cross-relationships of materials and conceptual relationships in *Birth*. In geology, «matrix» refers to the rock in which a crystal or fossil is embedded, such as a malachite in the present object. The term matrix derives from the Latin word for mother and womb. By bringing the two notions of matrix together, Longe refers to the history of an animistic worldview, according to which, stones are part of a living earth-body. In fact, one could conflate the idea of birth with the fact that organisms gave rise to minerals such as malachite during the Great Oxygen Event. The drawing  $\mu\text{-CaCO}_3$  (*Vaterite*) is based on an image produced by a scanning electron microscope of a tiny crystal of vaterite, a mineral chemically identical to the calcium carbonate found in the shells of mollusks and other animals.

## Room 5

The series *Elizabeth Philpot* pays homage to the British fossil collector and self-taught researcher of the same name. Philpot (1780-1857), along with the now more famous Mary Anning, were important to paleontological research of their time and were highly regarded and consulted by the leading (male) academic paleontologists of their day. In 1826 they discovered fossilized ink in fossils of belemnites, cephalopods that had become extinct as a result of the Chicxulub meteorite impact 66 million years ago. Philpot liquefied this ink and used it to create drawings. Longe's homage uses fossilized belemnites of transparent calcite illuminated by flickering LEDs and the light from one of these pieces is converted into sound by a solar cell (see below).

Another work that relates to scientific history is the drawing *Girl Folding a Napkin*. This shows the movement of a worker folding a cloth and comes from the work of Frank and Lilian Gilbreth, who con-

ducted elaborate photographic experiments to study (and ultimately optimize) work processes. Detached from the Gilbreths' rationalizing thinking, the tangled space-time line in Longe's work becomes part of the reflection of the perception of time and linearity.

## Room 6

Hunter Longe speaks of the «importance and continued impact of formerly living things in the present.» Longe's preoccupation with life cycles includes looking back into the history of the earth as well as the infinitely easier to understand time spans of a human life. Longe executed ***Green Dragon Mountain (Grown from Seed)*** from sketches and instructions by his father (who was also an artist) as he suffered from illness near the end of his life. This tribute to his recently deceased father hangs in the exhibition across from the work ***Birth*** in Room 4, which suggests new beginnings and growth. New beginnings, cycles of life and materials, the interconnectedness of living and non-living things as foundations of the world are basic themes of the exhibition. This is also the case in ***Transmutation***, cast in the sands of the Atlantic Ocean, where the trace of a living being was present, doubled on the left by Longe as a copper track made with a chemical process used in the production of circuit boards.

At the doorway back to the corridor, a gap between the walls flickers with light controlled a solar cell facing the LED in one of the ***Elizabeth Philpot*** pieces in the adjacent room). This passage also features a door made by the artist (***Doorway to Brain (Left)***). Traces of salt remain on the door, which was sprayed with salt water that was left to evaporate. The salt, like the gypsum in the plaster of the objects, came from the evaporation of the prehistoric sea that once covered the area that is now Switzerland. Grasp the granite handle and pass through the portal.

## Laser installation and rooms 7 and 8

Since 2016, Hunter Longe has been using small solar cells to convert light into sound by connecting them to amplifiers and speakers. A synesthetic connection is created – allowing us to hear what we see. In several places in the exhibition, light from projectors and lamp objects is directly translated in this way, including in Room 8 in the double projection ***Twinning***. The starting point for the videos were scientific representations of waveforms. The interference of waves are what we hear and see here, and waves in turn connect the elements of water and light.

For the laser installation ***Clam Hole Hag Stone Portal IV***, which links several rooms, the principle of translating light to sound is extended. Here, a sound source – an audio recording of the water of the Langete river below the Kunsthaus – modulates the light beam. The light flickers in the frequency of the sound. This is not visible to the human eye, but the solar cells in rooms 7 and 8 translate the light back into sound by simply plugging them into speakers. The laser beam is directed into these rooms via a semi-transparent mirror, penetrating stones that contain holes made by boring-hole clams or piddock clams. In various traditional rites, such stones, known as «witch stones» or «hag stones» are used to in-voke magical protective powers or to enter other dimensions.

A portal to another dimension like from a science fiction movie seems to be represented by ***Tethys Portal***. In it, Longe also refers to the image of an energy curtain to be passed through when entering hypnosis. Longe has dealt with hypnosis as well as with dream states in depth during the last years. The interactive aspect of ***Tethys Portal*** can be read as a play or critique on the concept of objectivity. The closer we get, the more subjectivity gets in the way.

The exhibition concludes with the poem ***Partition***, which can be read in the original English and heard in a Swiss German translation (voice: Belia Winnewisser), and which condenses the various themes of the exhibition with the architecture of the Kunsthaus.