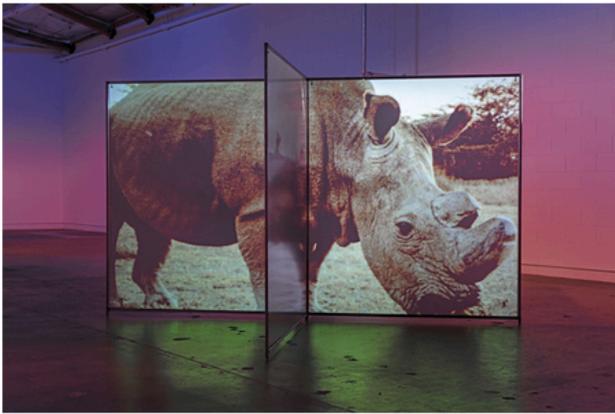


By Alexander Keefe
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Diana Thater THE MISTAKE ROOM



Diana Thater, *As Radical as Reality*, 2017, Plexiglas, steel, two-channel video projection (color, silent, indefinite duration). Installation view. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.

“I’m always working with multiple, simultaneous perspectives,” Los Angeles–based artist Diana Thater explained to Lynne Cooke in an interview published on the occasion of her 2015 retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This statement makes sense, given the complexity of Thater’s subject matter: the networked entanglements between human and other, species and habitat, viewer and viewing space, zebra and zeal (the last a term of vengery for a group of zebras). “A Runaway World” adds to the artist’s bestiary of transitory media architectures. The show presents two cruciform structures. Each is composed of four Plexiglas sheets arranged via metal scaffolding to form the prone Xs; their four sets of moving images alternately bleed into and jarringly abut each other, creating bifurcated viewing environments that choreograph the body into position, then divide and mend the gaze. Viewed from afar, the screens appear as moving images in the round; up close, these immersive viewing stations facilitate what Thater describes as an “in-between space and time that we (humans and animals) can occupy together, whose mode is instinct and whose affect is beyond simple emotion.”

Thater has been working with architectural screening environments since 1995’s six-channel video projection *China*, a Deleuzian body trip into the multiple subjectivity of the pack wolf that muses on what it might be like to feel like many instead of one. Travel and zoological research have formed key parts of her practice ever since; both works in the current exhibition emerged from trips to Kenya in 2016 and 2017. The piece that gives the exhibition its title draws from footage of a herd of African elephants that the artist filmed in the country’s Chyulu Hills. Images of elephants dominate the screens, singly and in groups, viewed from up close and far away. These intersect with scenes of the threatened landscape that the magnificent creatures inhabit: rolling grasslands and distant mountains, gorgeous trees isolated in motion against azure skies. Thater has said of her work that it “must have a presence like a subject.” An installation like this one conjures and sustains a particular interplay of subjectivities, here entangling viewer, elephant, and land in what feels like a daydream. But it’s also something of a nightmare.

Few animals are as emblematic of species loss as the northern white rhinoceros named Sudan, the subject of the adjacent work *As Radical as Reality*, 2017, a moving meditation on extinction in the Anthropocene. Per the show’s press release, the last surviving male of his species has shown little interest in mating with the last two remaining females that accompany him in the Kenyan conservancy that shelters them (an assertion that is challenged by the conservancy, which provides the sobering counter that Sudan’s two female companions are themselves incapable of normal copulation). Soon his advancing age will preclude reproduction regardless. To make matters worse, poachers would love to have his horn. Species loss and individual death are inseparable in this pathetic story; so are human and rhinoceros. Thater’s installation creates a space to encounter Sudan as he lives, a rhino in a post-rhino world, ringed by the armed guards who will accompany him everywhere until someday—too soon—security team becomes funeral escort. And we stand and mourn.

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