

PROJECT 34

Asad Raza

2019

Absorption

3 – 19 May 2019

The Clothing Store, Carriageworks, Sydney

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1974 in Buffalo, USA, and of Pakistani background, Raza works with experiences, human and non-human beings, and objects. He conceives of exhibitions as metabolic entities, zones of activity in which he constructs dialogue and scenarios between visitors and participants. Past works include *Untitled (plot for dialogue)*, for which Raza installed a tennis-like game in a deconsecrated church in Milan. *Root sequence. Mother tongue*, first shown at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, is a forest of twenty-six living trees with human caretakers in the museum. For *home show*, which took place at his apartment in New York, Raza asked friends, family and artists to intervene in his own life.

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

Daniel Boyd, Chun Yin Rainbow Chan, Megan Alice Clune, Dean Cross, Brian Fuata, Agatha Gothe-Snape, Jana Hawkins-Andersen, Khaled Sabsabi and Ivey Wawn

FACTS

- Asad Raza's practice is multifaceted, and comprises the roles of artist, curator, dramaturge, editor, producer and director.
- Project 34 was a site-specific work, which occupied the entire Clothing Store building with almost 300 tonnes of soil.
- Raza collaborated with Professor Alex McBratney and the Sydney Institute of Agriculture to create a new soil mixture, or "neosoil". They varied the components of the soil to cultivate specific properties, including the ability to react and absorb elements, in order to improve its productive capacity.
- Raza invited a number of artists to create interventions, taking the form of installations, performances or experiments, and focusing on dialogue and collaboration.
- A number of "cultivators" were present at all times throughout the exhibition, acting as custodians and caretakers of the soil, prompting informal conversations with visitors and enacting daily rituals and processes of mixing, watering and testing.
- The project was a network of living organisms and non-living materials, which changed, developed and grew over time.
- The engagement of the audience is central to Asad Raza's work. He aims to foster new encounters, produce moments of active and participatory dialogue, and explore what the experience of exhibitions can make possible for visitors.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

At Carriageworks in Sydney, on the site of the former Eveleigh Railway Yards, Asad Raza's project *Absorption* filled the Clothing Store with approximately 300 tonnes of "neosoil". The work continued to grow over the course of the project, tended to regularly by a team of "cultivators". Through these processes, *Absorption* addressed the living and changing nature of both the political and biological ecosystems that shape today's world.

Raza conceives of exhibitions as metabolic entities, zones of activity in which he constructs scenarios between visitors and participants. Past works include *untitled (plot for dialogue)*, 2017, which saw Raza install a tennis court in a deconsecrated church in Milan; and *Root sequence, Mother tongue*, first shown at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, wherein the artist created a forest of twenty-six living trees with human caretakers.

Presented in conjunction with Carriageworks, and developed in collaboration with the University of Sydney Institute of Agriculture, *Absorption* transformed the Clothing Store into a site for active processes, collaborations and conversations. Cultivators tested, monitored and mixed different materials—including sand, silt, clay, phosphates, lime, cuttlefish bones, legumes, spent barley from a Marrickville brewery, coffee grounds and green waste—in order to create a new composite soil. In the closing days of the project, visitors were free to take soil for their own uses, allowing *Absorption* to develop into the future.

Raza invited local artists Daniel Boyd, Chun Yin Rainbow Chan, Megan Alice Clune, Dean Cross, Brian Fuata, Agatha Gothe-Snape, Jana Hawkins-Andersen, Khaled Sabsabi and Ivey Wawn to create interventions in the form of installations, performances and experiments. Gothe-Snape's cultivator uniforms featured fabric from archival John Kaldor Fabricmaker samples; Hawkins-Andersen's clay figurines were made by cultivators on site, then broken down and raked into the soil; Sabsabi's interest in Sufi mysticism informed his work *Unseen*, wherein twenty pieces of kikuyu turf were buried under the soil.

Raza drew together the approaches and ontologies of art and science, allowing for absorption to take place across multiple levels in the creation of this work. "*Absorption* dramatises the differences between art and science, but it also shows us what they have in common", wrote the Sydney Morning Herald's John McDonald. "Artists, like scientists, are constantly pushing back the frontiers of the thinkable."

Absorption was later presented at the Gropius Bau, Berlin, in 2020, and is in development for the 2021 Ruhrtriennale.

Kaldor Public Art
Project 34: Asad
Raza, *Absorption*,
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Photo: Pedro Greig



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