

EARTH**Keith Arnatt, Heidi Bucher, James Capper**

19 March - 28 April 2021

ALMA ZEVI Venice

Salizzada San Samuele

Keith Arnatt, *Self-Burial*, 1969.

ALMA ZEVI Venice is proud to present ***EARTH: Keith Arnatt, Heidi Bucher, James Capper***; an exhibition exploring three radical artists' work within the context of landscape and performance. Arnatt, Bucher and Capper use photography, collage, and drawing to give concrete form to durational and ephemeral processes. By combining these different ways of art-making and documentation, each artist creates their own unique and self-contained world. The show follows on from ALMA ZEVI's presentations of Heidi Bucher (2019, 2017) and James Capper (2017, 2015); and is the first time Keith Arnatt's work has been shown in Italy since the major exhibition *Decomposition* at San Giovanni in Monte (Bologna, 1996).

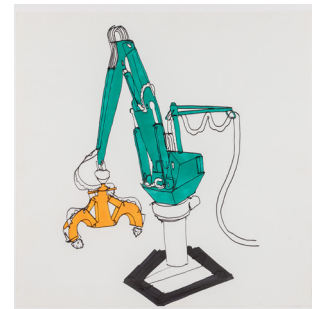
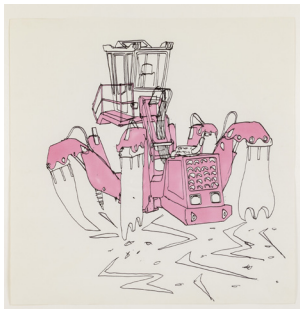
The British artists Keith Arnatt (1930-2008) and James Capper (1979-) and the Swiss artist Heidi Bucher (1926-1993) share a connection to Land Art, the dominant movement in the 1960s in both Europe and the United States. The artists associated with Land Art expanded the field of materials used within sculpture, for example, introducing earth, rocks and mud. They infused their practice with elements of Performance Art and documentary photography. It is within this framework that the singular artists in EARTH can be re-examined.

Keith Arnatt's iconic works from the late 1960s are presented in EARTH. One of the artist's primary objectives was to manipulate both the viewer's perceptions of his body and the landscape surrounding it. The acts that constituted his art were planned and executed by Arnatt himself. He conceived of spaces within the ground that concealed mirrors, creating shadows and optical illusions. ***Self-Burial*** (1969) is a suite of photographs that depict the artist gradually disappearing into a hole into the earth. The work conveys the depletion of the presence of the human body; the eventual removal of the artist from the image signifying the dematerialization of the artwork itself; leading it to conceptually 'collapse' into itself. In addition, ***Mirror-Lined Pit (daisies)*** and ***Untitled (Mirror Plug)*** (both 1968), are key examples of Arnatt's excavations into the landscape; their mirror-lined casing creating an impression of the ground 'reappearing' out of a void. Both ***Self-Burial*** and ***Untitled (Mirror Plug)*** demonstrate Arnatt's preoccupation with absence-as-presence; one of the chief concerns within Conceptual Art of the period. The traces of Arnatt's body are shown, or indeed not shown, via an empty hole or the shadowy human outline.

Heidi Bucher was a pioneering Swiss artist, widely recognised for her ground-breaking technique of 'skinning' domestic architecture by using latex to cast floors, wooden walls and other architectural elements. The conceptually and materially complex work ***Flying Skinroom*** (1981) is one of Bucher's largest pieces: a full-size 'skinning' of an entire room in her family house in Winterthur. The ***Flying Skinroom*** appears in one of Bucher's photocollages on display in EARTH, as does the process of bringing the work outside. These rare photocollages from the 1980s, which are on display for the first time, are a unique part of her oeuvre. They are titled ***Der Schlüpfakt der Parkett Libelle*** (1981), where *libelle* is the German word for dragonfly. Bucher's signature dragonfly stamp that adorns the works is of particular interest; here, displaced architecture is united with this powerful nature-symbol, contrasting a static element (architecture) with the metamorphic (dragonfly). The floating dragonfly and the relocation of domestic spaces into outdoor settings can also be read as symbolic of gendered liberation. Bucher's work transcends the boundaries between internal and external, the works on view signifying the artist's ambition to 'free' domestic interiors. Hers is a practice that captures both the permanence of physical space and the fleeting experiences of emotion and memory. For Bucher, this physical setting was the landscape of Winterthur, near Zurich, where she grew up. Bucher's photocollages suggest the impermanence of the artist's marks on the earth

as well as her preoccupation with the place of her body within the landscape. Whilst she is pictured measuring the ground in one photograph, she is notably absent in the other two photo-collages on display, where the *Flying Skinroom* and the latex *skinning* of a parquet floor must act as legible traces of her practice.

James Capper is a young British artist whose work lies at the intersection between sculpture, science and engineering. Capper's practice is inspired by both the technically-driven, ambitious interventions of Land Art, as well as those artists' ability to mark the landscape. His use of machinery within art (and machinery-as-art) poses thoughtful questions about the use of unconventional art materials in Conceptual Art. On display in the gallery are a selection of Capper's **ATLAS** sculptures: metal mills that he designed and fabricated himself. They act as both parts of larger, kinetic machine sculptures, and individual artworks in their own right. Removed from their original context (mills are commonly used for mining/drilling), they are transformed into totemic sculptures. This process neatly 'solves' the dilemma of how to document the artist's interventions in a tangible way. Capper's machine-sculptures have specific, functional uses, whilst the palpable impact they have on the environment fuses together the natural world, performance art and technology. He uses drawing as way of mapping out the potential of these ideas. Capper's works on paper, including **WALL DESTROYER (BUILD BRIDGES NOT WALLS)** (2018) and **FABER WITH ATLAS GRAB** (2019) follow in the tradition of artists like Arnatt and Bucher, where two-dimensional works represent complex performative gestures.



There are clear parallels between Capper's **ATLAS**; in effect, a sculpture which eats away at its own plinth, and Arnatt's *Self Burial*, where the artist gradually dissolves his own image. The idea of self-burial, or moving an interior space to the outdoors, presents a sense of thresholds: between the artificial constructs of our everyday life and the primality of human existence. The artists engage with the ground and natural world to convey freedom, or constriction, or as a neutral, blank canvas. In resisting traditional categorisation, Arnatt, Bucher and Capper produce work which is all-encompassing in its quest for an intimacy between the earth and the individual. Yet they also present realities and perceptions shifted by physical (and often arduous) human gestures. These dialogues with the earth, whether repositioned to make space for the human body, shifted or dug, highlight the unease of our society's co-existence with the natural world. By establishing these frameworks, Arnatt, Bucher and Capper have created work that is rich with symbolism and metaphysical power.

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Images from left to right:
 James Capper, *WALL DESTROYER (BUILD BRIDGES NOT WALLS)*, 2018
 Heidi Bucher, *Der Schlüpfakt der Parkett Libelle*, 1981.
 James Capper, *FABER WITH ATLAS GRAB*, 2019.

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