

1000 WORDS

MAX HOOPER SCHNEIDER

Below: Concept rendering for Max Hooper Schneider's untitled abandoned-shopping-mall project (work in progress), 2015.

Right: Max Hooper Schneider, *Aral Spring Trolley*, 2014, modified popcorn trolley, live freshwater ecosystem, genus *Pomacea* snails, submersible filter, 60 ½ × 35 × 12 ½".

Far right: Max Hooper Schneider, *Aral Spring Trolley* (detail), 2014, modified popcorn trolley, live freshwater ecosystem, genus *Pomacea* snails, submersible filter, 60 ½ × 35 × 12 ½".





A **SINK** with a grim provenance—salvaged from a morgue—is filled to the brim with turquoise water that disguises the school of fish within; snails crawl inside an old-timey popcorn cart: Max Hooper Schneider has become known for artworks that fuse natural ecosystems with unlikely readymades, resulting in uncanny, otherworldly habitats. Hooper Schneider’s ephemera, including dishwashers, a porcelain birthday cake, and a coffin, become host sites for invasive species whose mere presence reminds us that no matter how hermetic our online, mostly indoor lives might seem, we can’t seal ourselves off completely.

Trained in landscape architecture, Hooper Schneider applies his knowledge of various scientific fields to his goal of creating strange ecologies that seem both of and not of our earthly environment. This summary may call forth the work of artists such as Pierre Huyghe and Anicka Yi, and rightly so (Hooper Schneider has worked with both artists). Yet Hooper Schneider’s unique investigations into

the notion of the Anthropocene are, he says, much more closely aligned with magic realism than with speculative realism, its vogueish counterpart. And though his living sculptures often resemble apocalyptic filmic fantasies à la *Blade Runner* or Kurosawa’s *Dreams*, Hooper Schneider insists that his works optimistically point to the possibilities, however tentative, that still linger in the future. In this way, they function as propositions rather than as nihilistic commentary.

In the past two years, Hooper Schneider has elaborated what he calls his “ecology of neglect” through exhibitions such as “The Pound” at Jenny’s, Los Angeles, in 2014 and “Nature Theater of Violent Succession” at High Art, Paris, in 2015. The former exhibition was a kind of futuristic impound lot for feral biomachines (crocodile-skin treadmills, etc.); in the latter show, Hooper Schneider created a series of artworks that functioned as worlds within worlds, each a distilled moment in a fictive cycle of ecological succession. As the fate of the planet seems to teeter

on the threshold of disaster, Hooper Schneider’s vivaria, in their fragility, strangeness, and resilience, point one way forward.

—Beau Rutland

I TRAFFIC IN MATERIALS that are often volatile and novel. They seem to exist precisely for creating alternate worlds, with their own innate limits and sets of conditions. Since my earliest recollections I’ve been interested in these sorts of “other” places that can’t be described; also in making these places.

Part of the reason I studied landscape architecture instead of getting an MFA was to develop a skill set for working at any scale with any material, an ambition that has been supplemented by my interest in science. Basically, science lays out particular ways of knowing the “natural world” and thus furnishes an imaginative point of departure for aesthetic production. The MLA program I attended at Harvard synthesized everything I had been doing and researching up to that point. It also provided a studio that was



Left: **Max Hooper Schneider**, *Blood Alcohol Level CH59X*, 2014, CH59X human-spine replica, acrylic tank, crushed human-bone substrate, isopropyl alcohol, pig blood, human blood, metal stand, 71 × 10½ × 10½".

Right: **Max Hooper Schneider**, *The Extinction of Neon 2 (detail)*, 2015, acrylic terrarium, used and broken neon signs, plastic flora, gallows structure, automotive detritus, steel chains, GTO wires, found objects, insect and animal matter, polymer resin, custom aluminum stand, 66 × 42 × 24".

Below: **Max Hooper Schneider**, *Precor Crocodilian 9.1*, 2014, modified Precor 9.1 treadmill, crocodile-embossed leather, 67 × 24 × 49".

Opposite page: **Max Hooper Schneider**, *Mineral Complex*, 2012, photoluminescent cement, animal bones. Installation view, Ikh Gazriin Chuluu, Gobi desert, Mongolia. From the 2nd Land Art Mongolia 360° Biennial.



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more like a laboratory where I had access to an unusual set of materials and biota.

Once I graduated and started making work, I found support in the most unexpected ways. I was leaving Santa Fe after visiting my mother and was on the plane back to New York, and it turned out that I was sitting next to Lynda Benglis. I was obsessed with her phosphorescent polyurethane pours. I didn't recognize her, but we started talking and ended up chattering the whole time and became close in the following years. She made my first "official" work possible. It was part of the Land Art Mongolia 360° Biennial, a super-renegade and amazing residency program. The work was situated in the middle of the Gobi desert on a granite outcropping. I clad the enormous rock face with a phosphorescent cement mixture. Since there is no ambient light pollution there,

the piece has a really powerful glow. Six months after installation, I heard from the organizers that nomads crossing the desert now use it as a beacon, and that shamans began leaving bones from their campgrounds there. That was the most exciting thing—that the work generated something other than itself.

"The Pound" at Jenny's was my first concerted effort to put together a world as an exhibition. Essentially, the Pound is a facility where all these faceless, biomorphic machines and systems and collisions of materials are gathered. It takes place in an uncalibrated epoch—moments of future, moments of past—and all these things have been collected somewhere "out there" and are now waiting, though it isn't clear what they're waiting for. I created a narrative for these works, but very loosely—I don't really ever want to know the full story myself. Does it revolve around



the Pound's denizens being on death row, or is it about them eventually being acquired (collected) as speculative objects? Is the show an addendum to the *Codex Seraphinianus*? I can say narrative is present as a material in my work, but I also can say that what I'm doing is giving you a set of conditions with no plot. You imagine a world: What are the parameters of this world? Play is afforded because we are all impounded within our own subjective modes of knowing.

Most recently, I had a show at High Art in Paris, "Nature Theater of Violent Succession." It's a freighted title, alluding to the Nature Theater of Oklahoma in Kafka's *Amerika*. The premise of the show was that there is no difference between what you perceive as synthetic, artifactual, or natural. There are no moralizing precepts. It's not supposed to be utopian/dysto-

pian—it's not nihilistic. You accept it on its own terms. Dust falls on the acrylic. It has to be wiped. Or, let's say the fish die. You accept that these things will mutate. I think the actual dramaturgy of the show is the attempt to describe the indescribable. There is tension there. That's at the core of what I'm doing. I definitely adore Tetsumi Kudo. But I think he considered his works to be a combination of the polemical and the grotesque, whereas I see what I do in terms of approaching the uncanny. It's really about the possibilities that come out of uncouth taxonomies.

Coming up, I'm planning a large-scale work, an extension of what the High Art show was addressing. I've been researching abandoned malls throughout the Midwest, particularly in Ohio, contemporary epitomes of sites of ruination and succession—which

of course are ubiquitous phenomena in "art" and "nature" as well as in the symbology of commodity capitalism. But how do you approach an abandoned structure as a system, as a kind of sculptured world? Can you direct or even curate its attendant neglect? I think of it as a future public entity—imagine a botanical garden, but the Tarkovsky *Stalker* version. Maybe I'll simply offer planting plans and blueprints and that's it—self-governing, no maintenance. Perhaps we wait twenty years for the first recognizable cycle to complete itself. Maintenance, as an idea and practice that's integral to my sculptures, is something I want to explore more in the future. It's part of the altering temporality and spatiality of a work, but it's rarely addressed. It would be fascinating to analyze what I am calling an ecology of neglect. □

