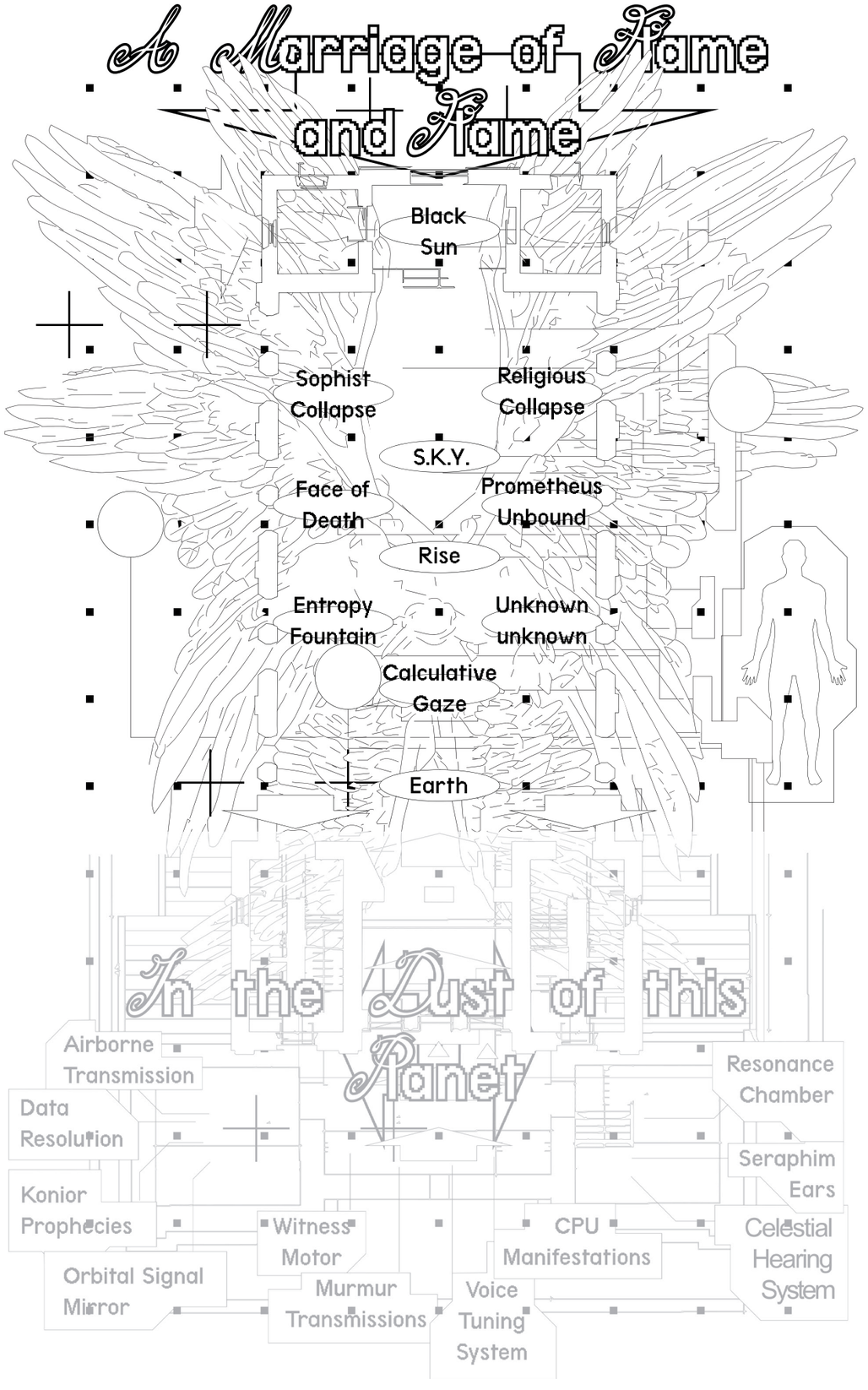
ANDRÁS CSÉFALVAY

András Cséfalvay is a visual artist, mythopoet, and associate professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava. Through digital animation, installations and world-building, he investigates non-human perspectives, from extinct species to subatomic particles and AI.

EDITH LÁZÁR

is a curator and writer from Cluj. A former academic in philosophy, her practice focuses on fictions, aesthetic politics, speculative design and its socio-political threads.



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ANDRÁS CSÉFALVAY:
A MARRIAGE OF FLAME AND FLAME

Curated by: Edith Lázár

EF. Entropy Fountain
a dying pterosaur whispers, prophesizes fortunes about the extinction of humanity
[sculpture, black liquid]

E. Earth
Reciting part of the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, the voice draws on the acceptance of mortality.
[video]

SC. Sophist Collapse
Considers how computational acceleration brings the collapse of consensus reality closer, destabilising everything, from journalistic narratives to basic assumptions of physics – a sophistic singularity. It revives, an ancient problem posed by Plato, that for rhetorical systems, what matters is not truth, but what appears probable, convincing.
Phaedrus, 272d
[brass model, glass box]

UU. Unknown, Unknown
A hypothetical counterattack plan in case of an AI domination attempt: freely usable, easy to replicate. Whether intelligence or consciousness can truly emerge from machine learning remains uncertain, but it's always better to prepare. There should be a repository of ideas that are inaccessible. Things that remain secret. Unknown to the model. Unable to become training data.
[secret strongbox]

CG. Calculative Gaze
Cosmia – The Icon of Computation Paradigm [sculpture]

S. S.K.Y
S - for Saving (Mother)
K - for Knowing (Earth-Sky Crossing)
Y - for Yearning (Resurrection)
[sculptures, trinity]

For a while in the 19th century, a strange feeling caught up with the world: that the wonderful promises of progress which science and technology derived in their rapid ascent were not devoid of perils, and that they might, in fact, unleash our doom. Together with the discovery of spectacular fossils of mysterious beings never to roam the earth again, a sense of extinction was discovered – the possibility that species could indeed end **(EF)**, that there's an irreversibility to change. Although nonhuman systems might go on, the conditions which made the earth habitable for humans were rare. And as such, we need to look into the possible threats that might cause our extinction or limit our potential to achieve good things. This feeling continues to resurface, to accompany us. Perhaps, because it was always there, something more ancient than what we would like to admit.

The Promethean myth has been the favourite carrier of these paradoxes. The Titan, teaching humanity the divine use of fire, bestows upon them also something else, the ability to envision – to imagine, meant to help humanity navigate a rather tempestuous world and gain knowledge.

The truth is, among many names, our era could be called the Pyrocene – as fire historian Stephen Pyne argues – not merely geologically, but considering fire in the way it shapes our dwellings and landscapes, our persistent imagining of the world. Unlike a tool, fire has to be kindled, and tended to. Unlike a tool, fire can exist on its own. Early use of fire remained bound to the landscape, dependent on natural cycles and regeneration or the spells of wind and rain. Even when confronted with massive deforestations, such as those lived by the Sumerians, **(E)** fire drew just from the surface layers of the Earth's crust. The extractive use of fossil fuels knew no such boundary. The industrial revolution concealed fire's open flames inside machines and technology, together with the fossil fuels that powered us into today's global capitalist economy. We could, as Pyne suggests, leave fossil fuels to rest – a keepsake for later, insurance for the probability of future ice ages. But at the pace of the world, could we even afford it?

Today's fires drive a staggering amount of energy into computation. Reality gets pushed through screens, data feeds, metrics, expanding networks connecting satellites and drones, or smart weapons silent in their violence and surveillance. A swipe on the screen, a walk in the city, and an entire configuration of algorithms enclose measurements into a referential system. **(SC)**

Techniques of pattern recognition and prediction, computations devise certain abstracted modelings of the world, though with real effects. **(UU)**

It is not difficult to notice this stage of the pyrocene. The planet is in an awry state, our technologies and dreams are entangled with the incessant burning of fossil fuels and mass extinctions of life, even while we try to devise other energy sources – other fires, other suns, here, on earth and beyond. Perhaps our inability to feel extinction as a tragedy has already happened because we read it as statistics – a computation of damage control. **(CG)**

On a timescale of cosmic and geological shifts, one should be reminded, it was the fall of an asteroid, unleashing the greatest of fires, which drove our planetary predecessors, the dinosaurs, extinct. Dust and debris shielded away the sun, as if a 'nuclear winter' settled in. And it was amidst their despair, to avoid the scorching grounds and catastrophic floods, that some dinosaurs learned to fly. **(S)** Could it be that in our lost ancestral memories such an image of flight got imprinted? What then might we still learn from it?

So close to fire, what we've been holding to, it seems, is a distorted mirroring of the sun – an ephemeral flame, for warmth and shedding light, of knowledge making, assuming an authority that was never ours alone. Splitting atoms, nuclear energy is perhaps the latest in a long line of electrifying suns. Yet, some look towards expansion, via the old colonial ways of resource plundering 'the uninhabited worlds' towards stellar harnessing and asteroid mining, innovatively unlocking even more energy sources. These ways of seeing the world, will they ever produce a model capable of escape? **(RI)**

A Marriage of Flame and Flame moves away from the metaphor of light as a relentless chase of progress. Instead, it activates a 'misused' diagram for a future museum, a map or sigil, maybe, of different kinds of knowledge. Something between magic and mathematics, the computations here do not produce digital twins of our planet. Rather, they hint at aspects often dismissed by the empire of measurement and the cathedral of reason in navigating the world.

Premodern use of computation relied on the diagram, not only as an abstraction of thinking. It belongs to a long line of technes of navigation, like the 'archaic techniques' from the numerology of the Sigillum Dei to geomancer maps, that draw cardinal directions, cycles, rhythms, energy orientations. To consult them is less about reading symbols, but rather understanding them as a way to connect to deep time, drawing on an archive that already records the future and the past, as permutations and numbers of positions. Archives that act on those who enter, absorbing them into the circuits. So it matters what kind of knowledges and beliefs permeate these diagrams, because we are remarkably good at creating futures according to them. **(RC)**

András Cséfalvay's practice references science's fictions and mythologies to engage with the capabilities of the techno-scientific landscape and their complicity with the way the future is imagined and extinction portrayed. **(FD)**

Mythical figures, together with Earth's other ancestry – the dinosaurs – as well as a preamble of artefacts, become vessels of speech which enter our 'rational' realm, speculate on outcomes, embrace fears, measure up against reductive perspectives. This is a bid for incorporating an ethical question in the ecological knowledge for future – what is given and what is taken? **(PU)** how to change something without force?

Now that we have to admit the inevitable ... since humanity's extinction seems more probable now than in centuries past, it might turn out that there's more to extinction than just the end. Hope might not constitute the likely driving force under this dark sun **(BS)**, and yet, there it is, unsettling the boundaries of a collapsing world.

EDITH LÁZÁR

References
Stephen J. Pyne, The Pyrocene. We created the age of fire and what happens next, University of California Press, 2021
Oxana Timofeeva, "Another End of the World Is Possible", e-flux journal, 2024

RI.RISE
ReImagined Space Exploration manifesto. Do we all possess an ancestral pre-dry-land memory that drives us to rise above the surface? In contrast to colonial narratives, RISE draws on the evolution of flight to advocate for space exploration as a collaborative, cultural effort, that includes non-dominant stakeholders in shaping humanity's future as an interplanetary species.
[tablet, microraptor sculpture]

RC.Religious Collapse
Reflects on the computational systems of 2222, trained on all accessible data – history, human goals, movements, desires. As the central intelligence trained, human activity became redundant, efficiently reproduced, without the why or for what purpose. Culture – rooted in difference and tension – was a problem to be solved, and thus, in the way for tranquility, humanity was discarded. The Intelligence prays now for forgiveness. Or whatever it is doing.
[video 3:31]

FD. Face of Death
[robotic arm, tracking]

PU. Prometheus Unbound
Inspired by Percy Shelley's poem, the 3-parts opera looks into humanity's pursuit of unlimited energy and the costs of progress. Set against the backdrop of the Bátaapáti nuclear waste repository in Hungary, mythological figures – Prometheus, Asia, and Cosmia – reflect on nuclear energy debates, the transition from nuclear fission to fusion, ecological dilemmas, and the balance between knowledge and domination.
[video-opera, 20:17]

BS. Black Sun
The ordering (cosmos), the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: fire ever living, kindled in measures and in measures going out.
[sculpture, matter ∞ antimatter]