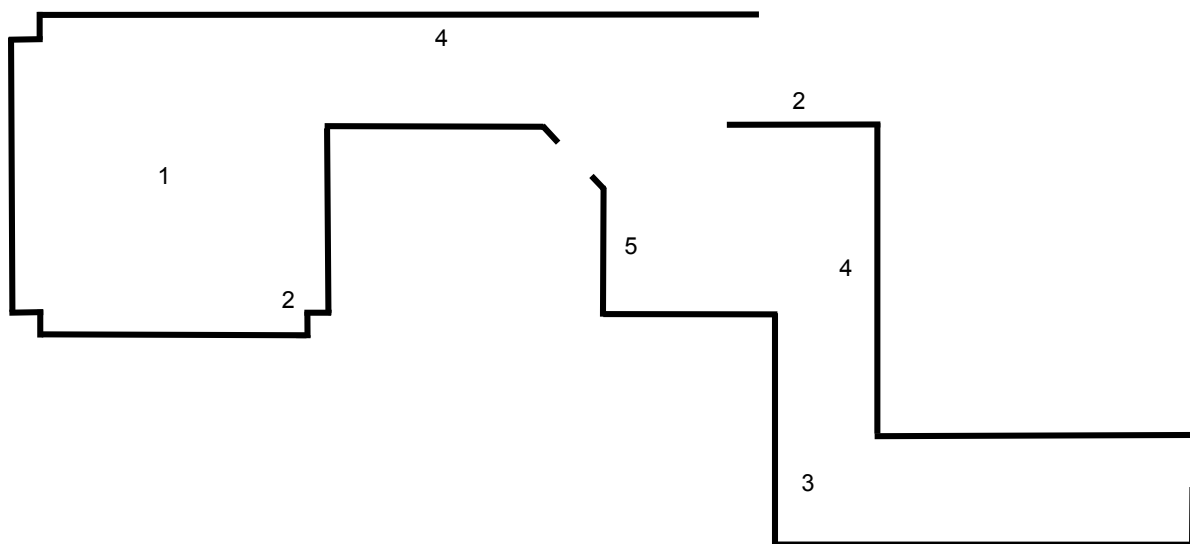


ALEX IMPEY -GNOSTIC CAUTERY

16.11.19 - 23.2.20



1. *Exta* (2019). Nickel on electroformed copper, elements from *Orangutan* (2012), steel, fibres.
2. *Nesting* (2019). Cathode waste.
3. *a-pyr* (2019). Looped digital video
4. *pyr transect* (2019). Pounded animal ash, nails.
5. Charles Rogers, 'Prometheus Eaten by the Eagle' (After Cambiaso). Etching in brown ink on paper. From volume 2 of *A collection of prints in imitation of drawings* (1769).

-gnostic cautery features new work in sculpture and video by Glasgow-based artist Alex Impey. Impey's practice often engages with intersections between artistic form making, animal embodiment, and critical perspectives on technologies. For this exhibition, the artist has explored these themes through research into ancient Babylonian practices in which sheep's livers were interpreted to divine the future. The exhibition is also informed by much more recent scientific experiments that employed precise cauterisation to damage butterfly pupae and thus study the effects of this damage on the development of mimetic eyespots. Through casting and electro-forming processes, including the casting of animal specimens from The Hunterian's collection, the sculpture *Exta* finds forms analogous to the sacrificial, diagnostic animal bodies produced by both these uses. In *Nesting*, by-products of the electro-forming process become synthetic nests that treat the gallery as a host environment. Elsewhere, computer programs that simulate the effects of grassfires are appropriated to 'consume' photographic images of the natural world, generating abstract patterns that determine the placement of nails on the gallery's walls in the twin works *pyr transect*. A new video work, *a-pyr*, sequences photographs taken by the artist into a flame-like schema in which they too are consumed. A booklet publication including new writing by Impey accompanies the exhibition, and features a commissioned text by the Glasgow-based artist Sarah Rose.

Shown alongside Impey's new works is a print from William Hunter's collection. *Prometheus Eaten by the Eagle* was published by Charles Rogers in 1769, in imitation of a drawing by the Renaissance artist Luca Cambiaso (1527-1585). In Greek myth, the Titan Prometheus is the instigator of human culture and dominion: he steals fire and gives it to human beings after his brother Epimetheus had neglected to distribute any positive qualities to them, instead bestowing these on animals. In consequence, Prometheus is condemned by Zeus to a violent punishment – he is nailed to a mountainside and subjected to having his immortal liver eaten daily by an eagle. Prometheus has often been used as a figure of both scientific ambition and technological hubris, with fire representing a primary form of human command over nature. Prometheus is also credited by some authors, notably the 8th-century BC poet Hesiod, with initiating the sacrificial practices by which offerings are made through acts of burning animal bones.

The philosopher Bernard Stiegler urges us to think Prometheus and Epimetheus together, as double figures of a technological humanity that begins in flawed acts of omission and theft. Stiegler's writing, like the works in *-gnostic cautery*, turns on a set of relations between animality, technology and culture that uses the mythic past to diagnose our own era, and to offer a stark prognosis for the future:

'Discovery, insight, invention, imagination are all, according to the narrative of the myth, characteristic of a *de-fault*. Animals are already marked by a de-fault (in relation to being as it is and as it endures through change, and in relation to the gods): they perish. One must understand "de-fault" here *in relation to what is*, that is, a flaw in being. And yet, whereas animals are positively endowed with qualities, it is *tekhne* that forms the lot of humans, and *tekhne* is prosthetic; that is, it is entirely artifice. The qualities of animals make up a sort of nature, in any case a positive gift of the gods: a predestination. The gift made to humanity is not positive: it is there to compensate. Humanity is without qualities, without predestination: it must invent, realize, produce qualities, and nothing indicates that, once produced, these qualities will bring about humanity, that they will become *its* qualities; for they may rather become those of technics.'¹

Dr Dominic Paterson (Curator of Contemporary Art, The Hunterian)

¹ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 193-4.