

To reforest our imagination

In the book *Ancestral Future*, Ailton Krenak launches a collective survival appeal: “we need to reforest our imagination”¹, which is rendered in the form of an immersive visual essay in the exhibition ***Exploratorius***, by Brazilian artist and researcher **Elaine Pessoa**.

Revisiting naturalist illustrations and engravings about the Brazilian territory, produced during the Portuguese colonial period, this installation occupies cabinets and work surfaces of the Laboratory of Analytical Chemistry with overlapping documentary and composite representations of flora, fauna, cartography, and geology, on scales ranging from the microscopic to the panoramic. Mimicking the fragmentary, eclectic, and all-encompassing *ethos* of a cabinet of curiosities, the project explores the tension between nature and its representation, questioning the “natural” as a historical construction, the result of successive scientific, artistic, and technological interventions - in which images, according to Emanuele Coccia, always operate as mediations that become autonomous from reality².

Using artificial intelligence (AI) – to synthesize images from travel diaries and expedition descriptions – and manual interventions with gold pigment, *Exploratorius* dissolves the boundaries between the manipulated and the historical, reflecting on the transition to an increasingly mediated world by digital data, where remixing and reuse dilute the relevance of the authentic. Hence, the exhibition affirms *promptography* as a method of artistic and critical investigation of AI systems themselves, also highlighting the biases of their algorithms, whether to reproduce dominant or self-referential views, in concentric cycles that hinder the encounter with otherness, as Byung-Chul Han has observed³.

In its intertwining of the analogic and the digital, the real and the imaginary, the historical and the contemporary, *Exploratorius* also proposes a confrontation with the absences produced along the years, as many of the landscapes and species then illustrated are now profoundly transformed, vulnerable, or extinct—after expeditions that transported thousands of specimens to Europe, and centuries of extraction and anthropogenic violence that continue to present day. In its multi-layered approach, the exhibition evokes Krenak's call to reforest our imagination: to rethink the relationships between humans and non-humans and reopen the possibility of a more sensible and less mediated encounter with the world.

Catarina Vitorino

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¹ Ailton Krenak, 2022, *Futuro Ancestral*, Antígona, p.53

² Emanuele Coccia, 2010, *La Vie sensible*. Payot & Rivages, p. 52

³ Byung-Chul Han, 2018, *The Expulsion of the Other*, John Wiley and Sons