

“FUTURE AGES WILL WONDER AT US, AS THE PRESENT AGE WONDERS AT US NOW”.

The exhibition is titled after an excerpt from this quote from Pericles, that serves both as a provocation and a lens through which to experience the artworks. A Greek statesman and war hero of Athens (circa 449 to 431 B.C.), Pericles made this bold declaration when Athens was at the height of its glory, as the site of architectural, cultural, and economic achievements, and about to venture into war with Sparta. Despite its bravado, Athens lost the war after an unexpected pestilence wiped out almost two-thirds of its population.

This turn of events is familiar. We have witnessed repeatedly how scientific and technological advancements are presented with narratives of geopolitical power with regards to discovery, expansion, and the domination of people, lands and resources.

Advances in genetic research and engineering, such as gene editing and CRISPR have now opened up new vistas of imagination and industry, with poetic and philosophical speculations of origins and adaptive biological possibilities, but also raised corresponding ethical issues of practice linked to the centralisation of bio-data and surveillance.

The speck, the droplet, the pixel. The granular contains both the intimate potency for regeneration, and the contagion with planetary impact, as we have seen how laboratory spillages and ecological imbalances have possibly resulted in the worldwide unfolding of the pandemic and its impact on socio-political structures, health care systems, local communities and the intensification of digitalised life. However the long scope of history reveals its many twists and turns. Thus the view through the lens of wonder, is multiperspectival - to not only feel curiosity, astonishment, or even admiration; but also to doubt and question. It is in the act of questioning that perhaps we find the possibility of fairer, more equitable futures.

To wonder, thus, is to dig into the bedrocks of institutionalised and common knowledge, including the myths of science, profit, and progress, and interrogate the normalised structures of violence and inequality. To wonder, is to arise from the scorched earth, and spark anew the wayfinding of lost ancestral pathways, the nurturing of alternative kinship networks, and the reimagining of stories we tell ourselves, about our past, present, and future selves.

Two millenia after Pericles, Ruth Bader Ginsburg (feminist judge of the Supreme Court of the United States) and a very different type of political leader, challenged instead that ‘dissents speak to a future age...that’s the dissenter’s hope: that they are writing not for today but for tomorrow.’

Featuring 9 UK and international artists working across multiple disciplines and media of textile, embroidery, found and sculpted objects, algorithm, creative design, print, photography, moving image, augmented reality, and installation, the exhibition presents a showcase of diverse thoughtful and provocative artistic ‘wonders’.

Curated by Annie Jael Kwan.