

23<sup>rd</sup> Biennale of Sydney  
12 March – 13 June 2022

[www.biennaleofsydney.art](http://www.biennaleofsydney.art)

The Biennale in Sydney is on again. A large number of artists and organisations display their work in exciting ventures throughout Sydney.  
The theme of this years Biennale is rīvus. Rīvus invites water based creatures and beings into a dialogue with human beings and with the visitor.

There are two contributions from Dutch organisations / artists.  
Diana Scherer, although born in Germany, lived already 25 years in The Netherlands and developed her art and skills there. Her artwork is in the Cutaway in Barangaroo. In her artwork she works with rootsystems of plants, in this case oats, to develop living textiles. She explained the processes and her artwork in detail on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March.



*Picture: Diana Scherer on the right in between her artwork and growing plants (Roland Spuij, president of the DACC on the left)*

The Embassy of the Northsea was established in 2018 in The Netherlands. They represent the Northsea as a legal entity. The work they commissioned for the Biennale can be seen in Walsh Bay, Pier 2/3. It shows cold water coral reefs from the Northsea in beautiful 3D displays, accompanied by the natural sounds that they produce. Hapro 't Hart, the artistic director of Embassy of the Northsea was there on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March to explain the work.





Below overviews of the exhibition at the Cutaway, Barangaroo



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What is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Biennale about? Below as quoted from the webpage:

Quote

Rivers, wetlands and other salt and freshwater ecosystems feature in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Biennale of Sydney (2022), titled *rīvus*, as dynamic living systems with varying

degrees of political agency. Indigenous knowledges have long understood non-human entities as living ancestral beings with a right to life that must be protected. But only recently have animals, plants, mountains and bodies of water been granted legal personhood. If we can recognise them as individual beings, what might they say?

rīvus invites several aqueous beings into a dialogue with artists, architects, designers, scientists, and communities, entangling multiple voices and other modes of communication to ask unlikely questions: Can a river sue us over psychoactive sewage? Will oysters grow teeth in aquatic revenge? What do the eels think? Are the swamp oracles speaking in tongues? Do algae reminisce about the days of primordial soup? Are waves the ocean's desire? Can a waterfall refuse gravity? Considering the water ecology's perspective entails a fundamental shift in understanding our relationship with the rest of the natural world as a porous chronicle of interwoven fates.

Rivers are the sediment of culture. They are givers of life, routes of communication, places of ritual, sewers and mass graves. They are witnesses and archives, our memory. As such, they have also been co-opted as natural avenues for the colonial enterprise, becoming sites of violent conflict driven by greed, exploitation and the thirst to possess. Indeed, the latin root rīvus, meaning a brook or stream, is also at the origin of the word rivalry.

The 23rd Biennale of Sydney is articulated around a series of conceptual wetlands situated along waterways of the Gadigal, Burramatagal and Cabrogal peoples. These imagined ecosystems are populated by artworks, experiments, activisms and research, which together follow the currents of meandering tributaries, expanding out into a delta of interrelated ideas including river horror, creek futurism, Indigenous science, cultural flows, ancestral technologies, counter-mapping, queer ecologies, multispecies justice, hydrofeminism, water healing, spirit streams, fish philosophy and sustainable methods of co-existence.

Sustainability should be an action, not a theme. rīvus will reflect on its own conditions of possibility, becoming the catalyst for works already in progress; encouraging the use of non-polluting materials and production processes; advocating for locality, collectivity, collaboration and reduced waste; acknowledging its own impact on the environment while aiming to lower it through a systemic and creative approach

*Also quoted from the Biennale website the description of the two Dutch contributions:*

### **Diana Scherer**

Born 1971 in Lauingen, Germany  
Lives in Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Diana Scherer explores the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Through her installations, photographs and botany, she examines the boundaries between plant culture and plant nature. What does “natural” mean in the Anthropocene? Are human beings part of nature or a parasitic species on the environment? For the past few years, her fascination has focused on the dynamics of the root system. Scherer applies the intelligence of plants in her work and makes their hidden world visible. With her long-term project Exercises in Rootsystem Domestication, the natural network of the roots is transformed into an artificial textile. Scherer brings together her research in weaving techniques with the strength of the botanical material. Often working closely with biologists and engineers, she manipulates the growth processes below ground and produces living textiles.

### ***Entanglement, 2021***

**soil, seed, grass roots, timber**

Courtesy the artist

**Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Goethe-Institut Australia and with generous assistance from Mondriaan Fund and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Australia**

In a laboratory-like set up, visitors are invited to see Diana Scherer at work as she undertakes what she refers to as “collaborations with nature” growing networks of roots into unique patterns of woven textile. Known by neurobiologists as the brain of plants, Scherer draws attention to roots as active intelligent agents in the process of producing living fabrics.

Scherer is particularly fascinated by the hidden systems of plants. Her project *Entanglement* looks at xylem vessels, the tissue responsible for transportation of water through plants. Examining closely the interdependence of plants and water, the pattern Scherer creates with the roots is inspired by the forms of the xylem vessels in plant anatomy. The emergence of these water vessels in plants is considered one of the most important evolutions in the life of plants. Taking geometric and ordering principles and patterns from nature, Scherer poses a dilemma as her craft is both a manipulation of natural processes and possible cultivation of a joint path together.

*“A root navigates, knows what is up and down, perceives gravity and can locate moisture and chemicals. Roots are incredibly strong. In their search for food and space they fight for every space they can find. I use this strength to create my work. I expose the subterranean life and natural network turns into a textile-like material. The dynamism of the plant makes it seem as if the work is making itself.*

*I have learned to deal with the autonomy of nature. Despite my intervention, the outcome is unpredictable every time. The interaction of control and letting go is an important element in my work.” – Diana Scherer*

### **Embassy of the North Sea**

Established 2018 in The Hague, the Netherlands  
Lives in Amsterdam, the Netherlands North Sea

Harpo 't Hart Born 1985 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Anne van Leeuwen Born 1987 in Zaandam, the Netherlands

Thijs Middeldorp Born 1978 in Velp, the Netherlands

Diversity is in the interest of all life. Therefore, direct political representation of the sea and the life within it is necessary. The Embassy of the North Sea was founded on the principle that the North Sea owns itself. Here, the voices of plants, animals, microbes, and people in and around the North Sea are listened to and involved. The Embassy has plotted a route through to 2030, firstly learning to listen to the sea before learning to speak with it. Finally, the Embassy will negotiate on behalf of the North Sea and all the life that it encapsulates.

### ***Ghost Reef, 2020-ongoing***

**3D animated collages, underwater field-recordings of North Sea reefs**

**3D modeling: Sacha van den Haak; Sound design: Sébastien Robert; Project partners: Wageningen Marine Research, Dutch Maritime Productions and Stichting Duik de Noordzee Schoon**

Courtesy the artist and Embassy of the North Sea

**Originally commissioned by Embassy of the North Sea, MU Hybrid Art House, and Re-Nature Festival**

**Presentation at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney is made possible with generous assistance from Mondriaan Fund and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Australia**

The Embassy of the North Sea is a collective founded in the Hague in 2018. Working from the fundamental belief that the sea owns itself, through imaginative projects and initiatives grounded in paying deep attention to the voices of plants, animals, microbes and people connected to the sea, The group advocates for the very real

political representation of our oceans and the more-than-human lives they support in the human world.

*Ghost Reef* (2020-ongoing) is a projection and sound installation that seeks to give representation to the North Sea, located off the Eastern Coast of Great Britain. Though large pockets of this mass of water are biodiversity hotspots that play an immense role in the ongoing resilience of even larger ecosystems, they are barely present in the public's imagination, and accordingly not protected. Within this installation, each of the animated video collages projected onto the metal screens are based on scarce footage taken by divers, while the sounds are field recordings taken from what the collective call 'anthropogenic substrates', man-made structures – often wreckages – plotted throughout the sea which act as reefs for a plethora of life forms.

*Ghost Reef* seeks to give artistic representation to these reef patches of the North Sea, to give a more truthful sense of the feel of these places, rather than the narrower, data-driven representations often employed in the scientific realm. Stitched together, these fragments of sight and sound combine to give a full vision of the biodiversity of the North Sea.

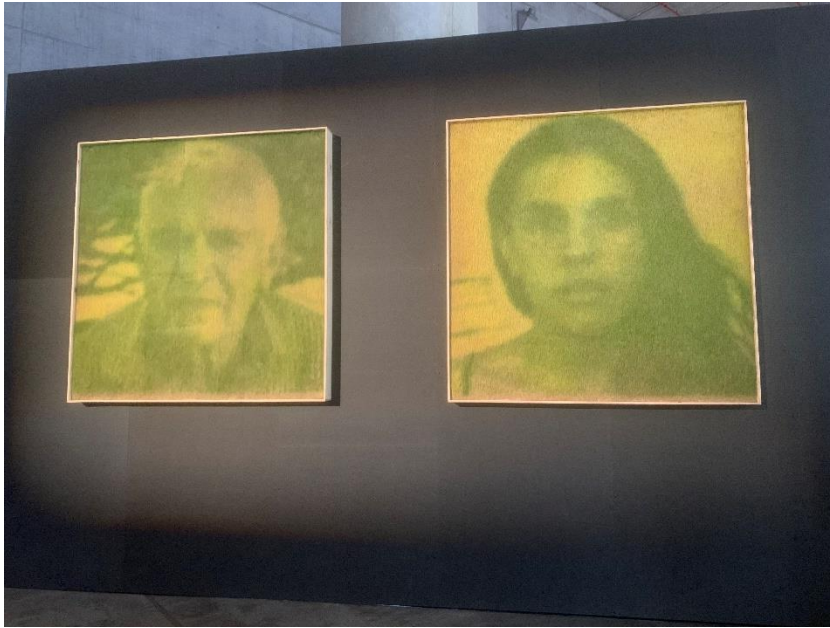
*The project is a continuation of research into listening to the North Sea and exploring its human and more-than-human entanglements. Coral reefs are complete ecosystems with multispecies identities, expressed through their unique soundscapes and incredible variation in shapes, colours and textures. This project demonstrates that cold water coral reefs are no different than tropical reefs, and thus deserve the same (much needed) recognition, appreciation and protection.*

– Xandra van der Eijk, The Embassy of the North Sea  
Unquote

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Below some of my other favourite displays / artworks at the Cutaway and Pier 2/3



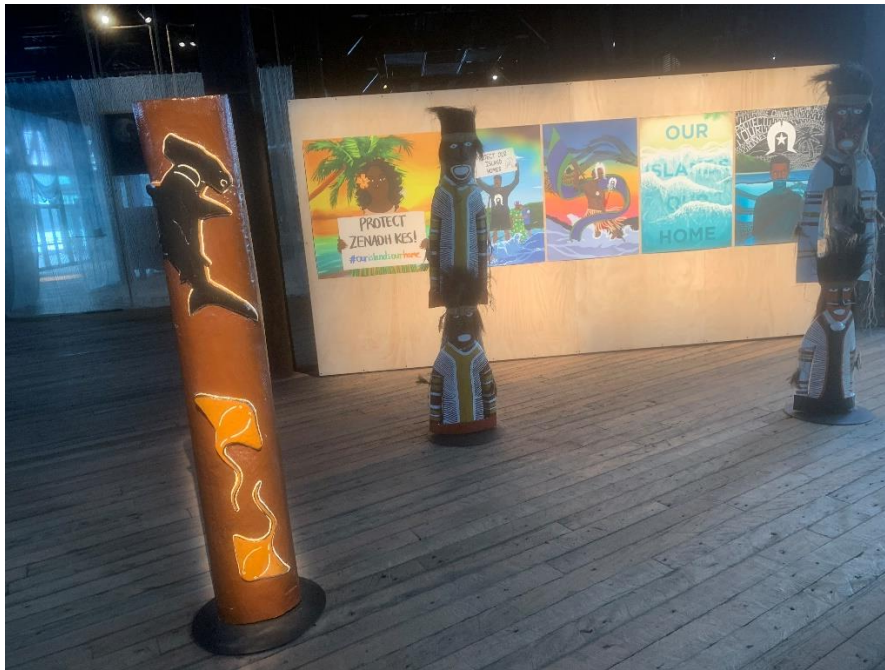


*Portraits created by English artists by growing grasses on clay and photosynthesis*



*Large "painting" created from just gold plate and fishhooks by a Cuban artist*





*Display created by Torres Strait Islanders who are in severe danger of losing their habitat and islands due to rising sea level.*