



*Whoever's
is the soil*
Amelia Hine

2 — 3 October 2021

STABLE

Our human lives are deeply entangled with underground spaces. The knowledges we hold around subsurfaces are affected by the way their presence is materialised, often away from human sight, but also by the diverse imaginaries that the spaces have been filled with. For example, in karstic environments – where erosion has resulted in caves and sinkholes – the underground is constantly exposed to the human eye in subtle (cave openings) and not-so-subtle ways (sinkhole collapses). In other contexts, underground spaces are forcibly opened. Their insides extracted, transported, and transformed for various purposes (mining). But in between the contrast of the openness by force and the proximity by willingness of nature, there is a myriad of connectivities between surface and subsurface – groundwater, fertile soils, fibre optic cables, pipes – essential for our human lives.

Whoever's is the soil is a sensorial experience that brings together the complexity of underground spaces, made visible as the elements that fill and shape subsurface forms (i.e., water, rock, axolotl, stygofauna) in unavoidable connection with human presence and impacts (i.e., tunnel boring machine, vehicle, pipe). The question of subsurface ownership emerges from the title of the exhibition but also by the visual and sonorous entanglement between human, non-human and the underground. The Latin maxim *cuius es solum, eius est usque ad coelum et ad inferos* – 'whoever's is the soil owns also up to the heavens and down to hell' – showcases matters of perceived and enacted ownership under Western law. Property regimes that defy the limitations imposed by the materiality of the sub-land and sub-waterscapes. Ideas of conquest, presence, transformation and utilitarianism are challenged. As our senses travel through the underground, we realise that it is more-than-soil, that the convergence of water and rock is a home for others that adapt to the absence of light, that exist in the perfect darkness that is not absent of anything, on the contrary it is what is because it is full and complete.

A completeness that knows of different rhythms, scales and times. There is a slow floatiness of beings that contrasts with the fast vertical motion of what enters the space through the surface – fertilisers, excavator, human objects.

Whoever's is the soil, is a conversation of ownership, and presences. A dialogue in which those that have not been invited to the conversation are brought to the front in a bigger scale, they travel through underground realms in their magnificence and grandiose presences. Their 'real-life' sizes challenged and expanded to better represent their role and presence in subsurface spaces. The scales of the human, the scale of humans, are distorted and paired in contrast to the beauty of beings so radically different, so rebellious in their persistence and existence. At first glance the observer may think that there is a repetition, a being that looks very similar to another one in our travels through the subsurface, but no – they are unique. They are different, this conversation is also a challenge to rethink assumption about the underground, to recognise their diversity and uniqueness.

Whoever's is the soil is full of light – unlike undergrounds – but we humans need the light to see. Light is the essence of visualisation. It allows us to clearly see presences and movement. To imagine this world, light is needed – the artificial light makes human and non-humans interact and act. Colour, size, speed and movement exist in contrast with each other. In a world of contrasts, it is possible to see the absences – one of the main ones is human female bodies. This is intentional, it reflects how undergrounds across the world remain the world of the divine, the sacred and the danger – and women's bodies are often not welcome.

This body of work is ultimately an experiment in visualising the underground in a way that makes it real and present. It asks you to look below your feet with generosity and to consider how infrastructural intrusions into the subsurface may impact upon non-human others. *Whoever's is the soil* throws open a conversation around volumetric living and forms of dispossession embedded not only within our legal and political systems, but also the way that we move through and conceive of our environments.

By Marilu Melo Zurita

A Millennium of Seepage was a collaborative effort with the musician cyberBanshee (Hannah Reardon-Smith) and was funded by a stART grant from Arts Queensland and QMusic. Support for this exhibition has been provided by the Centre for Decent Work and Industry at QUT.

www.stableartspace.com

