


EMILY JAN  KALI YUGA



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The artist would like to thank:



COVERS: *Kali Yuga III: Through a Glass Darkly* [detail], 2022-2023.

OPPOSITE: *Kali Yuga II: I'll Remember You* [detail], 2022-2023. PHOTOS: Doug Derksen.

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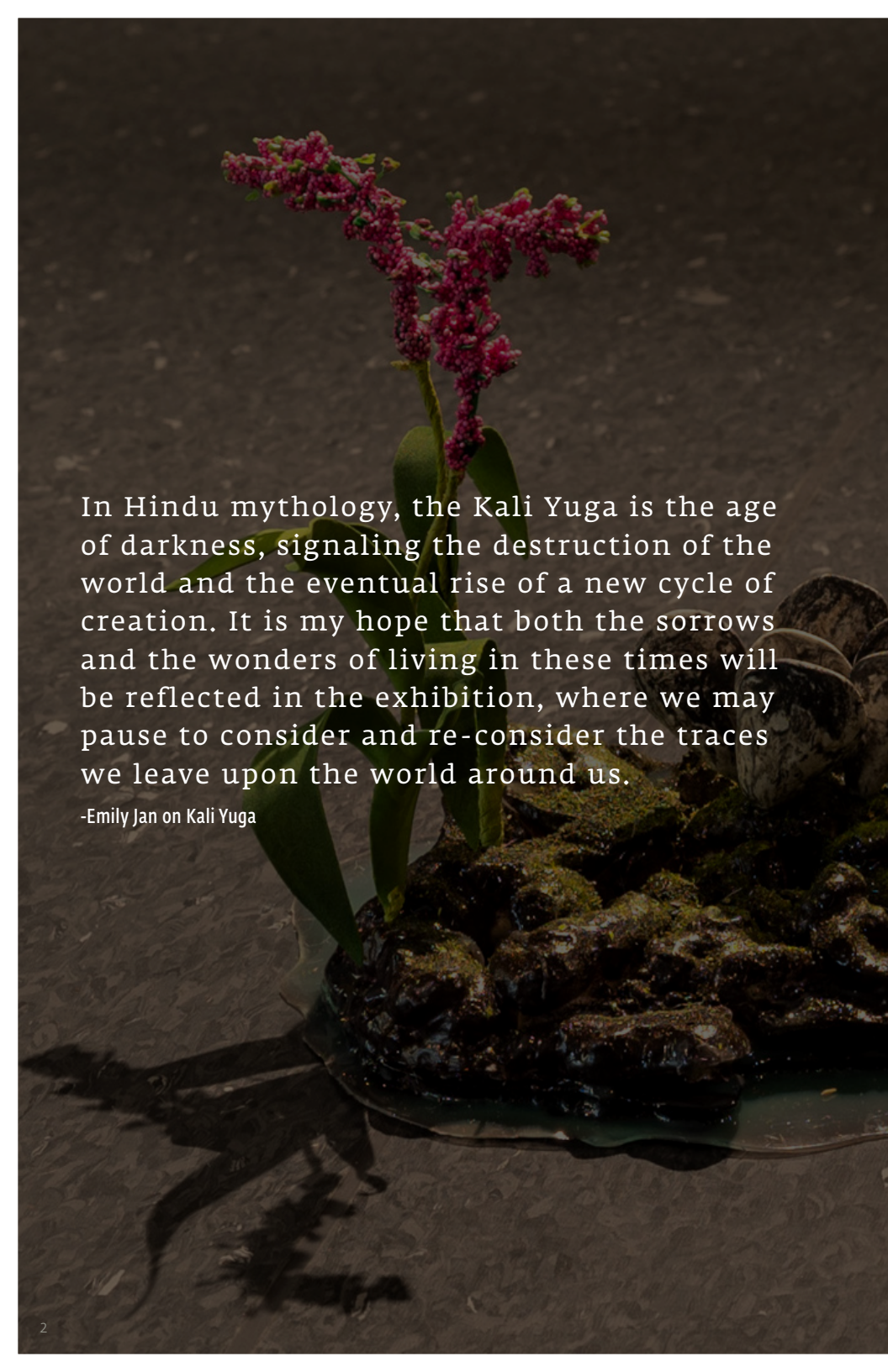
# EMILY JAN KALIYUGA

JANUARY 26 - APRIL 1, 2023

Curated by Lucie Lederhendler







In Hindu mythology, the Kali Yuga is the age of darkness, signaling the destruction of the world and the eventual rise of a new cycle of creation. It is my hope that both the sorrows and the wonders of living in these times will be reflected in the exhibition, where we may pause to consider and re-consider the traces we leave upon the world around us.

-Emily Jan on Kali Yuga

Text by Lucie Lederhendler, Curator.

The “realness” of Emily Jan’s hyperrealism functions on two registers: the illusionistic and the readymade; it corresponds accordingly to her working practices of sculpting and collecting. The former is in dialogue with 17th-century Dutch *Pronkstilleven* (ornate, hyper-detailed still life paintings), indicating luxury, sensory pleasure, and wealth,<sup>[1]</sup> while the latter is a wry reference to *Kunstkammer* or *Wunderkammer* (Cabinets of curiosities or wonder), which were especially popular in Western and Northern Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both enduring cultural trends rely on actions of displacement and replacement, which, in turn, take for granted that things have a proper place. In the case of still lifes, bugs, water drops, and even decay—the “trick” of the *trompe-l’oeil*—speak to the duality of the real. It is not that bugs do not belong in bouquets of flowers, but that bugs don’t belong in paintings of flowers. A similar fascination is at play in the *Wunderkammer* tradition: a thing where it goes is interesting, but resettled in the cabinet, is it a wonder.



Jan has played with unsettling and repositioning in the gallery before. Combining found objects and meticulously handcrafted sculptural work, the environments she creates are exercises in decontextualization. For example, some iterations of her installation *After the Hunt* (originally 2014) used real food, which was allowed to decay on the table, supplying genuine smells and insect life to the simulated. Otherwise long since interested in more-than-human threats and adaptations in the Anthropocene, *Kali Yuga* dwells on the tension between displacement and invasion. Invasive species in particular, the vast majority of which are human-caused,<sup>[1]</sup> are so-labeled based on the amount of harm they enact on a native ecosystem.

In *Kali Yuga*, Jan focuses on the more nefarious invasive species. The central installation is subtitled *Footsteps*, and nowhere is the blame laid more clearly at the feet of human activity than the quagga mussel and its relative, the zebra mussel. Native to Eastern Europe, their spread across the globe has been punctuated by jumps in numbers

ABOVE: *Kali Yuga IV: Out from the Deep*, 2022-2023. PHOTO: Doug Derksen.

that are correlated with human expansion activities, both infrastructural, social, and political, such as the building of canals and reservoirs, goods trading, environmental regulations, and shifting national borders.<sup>[iii]</sup> Because of the disruptive, coral-like agglomerate structures they create, which are replicated in the exhibition, they are called “ecosystem engineers.”<sup>[iv]</sup> Jan has handcrafted dozens of mussels that fill footprints, messaging a respect for their adaptability and an acknowledgement that that very adaptability, measured in terms of population growth, is the source of their menace.

An owl and three fish do not represent menace, but the uncanny. When these mysteries are experienced within a pervasive sense of climate anxiety, they begin to emanate the low hum, which has become a part of daily life, of harbingers of bad news. A lone snowy owl, like the one included in this exhibition, has been seen in a suburban Southern California community since December 2022.<sup>[v]</sup> Its isolation is a safeguard against significant disruption of the ecosystem, but alongside the marvel of witnessing it is the pressing worry of how it got there. The bodies of three anglerfish, more specifically Pacific footballfish, have likewise been found out of place in Southern California, washed up on the shore. Because they live in the freezing darkness of the deep sea, where the pressure is over 1300 pounds per square inch, they are rarely seen by humans. While scientists say there is no cause for alarm, they allow that it is odd,<sup>[vi]</sup> and that oddness sets the stage for the dystopian marshland of *Kali Yuga*. These news items of animals out of place leave a nagging residue of weirdness. Why are they there?

Resting with uncertainty and unanswered questions is uncomfortable, and resting in discomfort is downright counter-instinctual. Jan jokes that for someone so fixated on doom she’s a pretty joyful person in life. She offers



two alternatives to false hope in this exhibition: heavy compartmentalization and a cyclical worldview.<sup>[vii]</sup> The Yuga cycle is the structure and outline for the exhibition's dialogue, in that both optimism and pessimism make dialogue moot, but a cyclical worldview, in which a beginning is preceded by an end, makes optimism and pessimism moot.

Kali Yuga is the fourth and last age of the four-age Chatur Yuga, which is 12,000 divine years long, and generally converted to 4,320,000 solar years.<sup>[viii]</sup> Over the course of the cycle, time passes through ages that are ruled by, briefly, love, insight, intellect, and finally despair.<sup>[ix]</sup> The first Yuga, Satya or Krta Yuga, is 4/10 of the full cycle. The following, Treta Yuga, is 3/10, and the third, Dwapara Yuga, is 2/10. Finally, at 432,000 years long, Kali Yuga is 1/10 of the full Chatur Yuga. The 4, 3, 2, 1 proportion suggests a countdown. From where we currently stand, a little more than 1% of the way through Kali Yuga, or about 15% through the dawn of it, this might also give the impression of a speeding up, a tightening, as though the universe were somehow growing more dense.

As the poorly-attributed saying goes, "Everything will be all right in the end, so if it is not all right, it is not yet the end."<sup>[x]</sup> By incorporating the myths and allegories from the linear Greco-Roman cosmology into a cyclical form, the exhibition vacillates between a countdown and a forward march. The protagonist of *Kali Yuga* is a chimera—an organism that is made up of several distinct organisms—who trundles forward. A mound of marine and terrestrial flora mingles with sea lampreys and a mane of boar hair over a crouched form with two enormous muskie heads and a single human hand. It has left a serpentine trail of footprints behind it, weaving between native cattails and grasses. Neon puddles of toxic algae blooms form at each footprint, encouraging the agglomeration of invasive





loosestrife and mussels, which increase in density as the creature moves onward. It is more than just plural, it is diametric, as in it is the one and the Other.

While such organisms do exist in nature (it is possible, for example, for a human being to have two separate sets of DNA), the mythological chimera is akin to an aberration, created with monstrous intent. In his chapter *Embodying the Chimera*, philosopher Bernard Andrieu writes, “The chimera is a trial to initiate humans to the dark side of creation: There is no creation without anomaly, there are no creatures without monsters, no whole bodies without mixed bodies.”<sup>[xi]</sup> The imaginary, the invisible, and the impossible have an entwined relationship, but not an inseparable one. Jan has intervened in the part of the chimera figure to ensure its detachment from the possible, but two significant works ground the thesis of the exhibition in the realm of mythology.

ABOVE: *Kali Yuga I: Footsteps* [detail], 2022. PHOTO: AGSM.

Mythology is a word that must be defined each time it is used, and the most appropriate definition here comes from Thompson Highway, who writes that myth is what happens “at a point exactly halfway between these two polar opposites” of truth and lie<sup>[xii]</sup>. Two diptychs, the orchid and the rabbit, play in this halfway point. They materialize the absent and track the journey from fact to fiction. In the first, Jan has faithfully reproduced *Ophrys apifera*, the Bee Orchid, according to a reproduction in a comic strip by artist xkcd, which has also been literally transposed onto the wall. Jan encountered this comic in Donna Haraway’s seminal work *Staying with the Trouble*. Both Haraway and Jan understand this narrative format—a dialogue described in a comic strip—as the appropriate way to tell the orchid’s story. Modes of reproduction and communication are questioned here: while a plant can only tell the truth, this truth contains a misdirection, and, importantly, these stories are at play outside of the human sphere.

The rabbits, on the other hand, are translated and distorted through the limitations of human communication. The diptych is based upon the theory that the jackalope, an imaginary jackrabbit with the antlers of a deer, was conceived of via sightings of rabbits who were afflicted with the Shope papilloma virus. Infected rabbits will grow carcinomas around their heads and necks made of keratin—the same material that horns are made of. Between the two creatures, an invisible mirror sits at Highway’s exact halfway point. It is easy to imagine someone returning from the woods of the Midwest excited to tell a friend that they saw a rabbit with horns growing out of its head. That report would be true. It is easy to then imagine that same friend reconstructing those horns into antlers, and putting those antlers where antlers tend to go. Easiest of all to imagine is how that story gets told again and again, with delight, until it becomes a legend.

OPPOSITE: xkcd, *Bee Orchid*, n.d. Courtesy of <http://xkcd.com/1259/>

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THERE ARE THESE ORCHIDS WHOSE FLOWERS LOOK LIKE FEMALE BEES.

WHEN MALES TRY TO MATE WITH THEM, THEY TRANSFER POLLEN.



THIS ORCHID — *OPHrys APIFERA* — MAKES FLOWERS, BUT NO BEES LAND ON THEM BECAUSE THE BEE IT MIMICS WENT EXTINCT LONG AGO.



WITHOUT ITS PARTNER, THE ORCHID HAS RESORTED TO SELF-POLLINATING, A LAST-DITCH GENETIC STRATEGY THAT ONLY DELAYS THE INEVITABLE.

NOTHING OF THE BEE REMAINS, BUT WE KNOW IT EXISTED FROM THE SHAPE OF THE FLOWER.



IT'S AN IDEA OF WHAT THE FEMALE BEE LOOKED LIKE TO THE MALE BEE...

...AS INTERPRETED BY A PLANT.



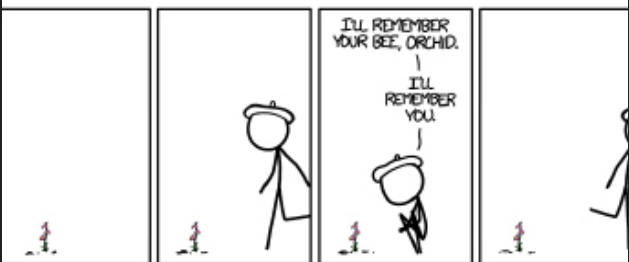
...THE ONLY MEMORY OF THE BEE IS A PAINTING



BY A DYING FLOWER.

I'LL REMEMBER YOUR BEE, ORCHID.

I'LL REMEMBER YOU.





THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR  
GENEROUS  
SUPPORT





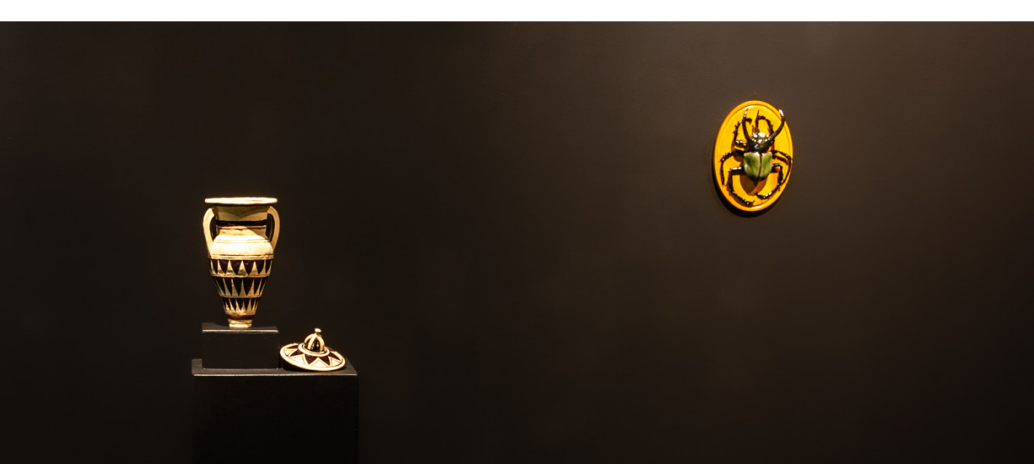




As the orchid is, in some ways, the bee, and the jackalope is the rabbit, the ceramic objects in the *Cipher* series embody their own immense mythologies. An alternate word for zero, a cipher is an empty vessel, filled with a will that is not its own. In Ancient Egypt, the scarab held the expression of life after death in its small form.<sup>[xiii]</sup> Here, it is translated into a male Atlas beetle, an aptly named, frightening but harmless insect. Auk eggs are rare and valuable objects, and sites of intense morbid fascination, as the last viable egg, laid by the last mating pair of auks, was unceremoniously stepped on in 1844.<sup>[xiv]</sup> Jan has replicated both the natural marbling and the human notation marks on the shell.<sup>[xv]</sup> The symbol of the ouroboros originated in Egypt and spread across the globe, signifying repeating cycles on different scales, from a solar year to a reincarnated human life.<sup>[xvi]</sup> Jan emphasizes the innate calamity of it by rendering her serpent in an imperfect circle, which recalls the tragedy of real captive snakes who devour themselves to death. Finally, Pandora's jar lies opened, having let loose ills, sickness, and labour into the world, but still containing hope, trapped on the inside of the lid.<sup>[xvii]</sup> In modern hindsight we blame the jar for this badness, so that we might avoid blaming the woman, her husband, or their god.

PREVIOUS: *Kali Yuga I: Footsteps*, 2022. PHOTO: Doug Derksen.

ABOVE: *Cipher Series*, 2023. PHOTO: Doug Derksen.



If the generally accepted numbers are correct, this Chatur Yuga cycle began as the continent we now know as North America was joining Asia and South America via narrow bridges of earth and ice. The nearest thing you would find to a human would be Australopithecus, who appears at the end of the dawn of the Krta Yuga, with a brain just proportionately large enough to create the first tools. By the time the Kali Yuga begins, humans are everywhere, urbanizing and trading with each other. According to our best guesses, at this most recent dawn begins, humans in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus Valley invent systems of writing. Two millennia later, Hesiod uses the written word to record a story about the beginning of sorrow, and hope trapped in the rim of a jar lid. The stories we know that correlate knowledge to a downfall should sit uncomfortably with us because as much as hope is a human impulse, so is the pursuit of understanding.

Realizing that modern human impact on the planet will be visible in the geological record far into the future, the current epoch has been nicknamed the Anthropocene. There is some debate as to whether our strata will begin with the carbon emissions of the industrial revolution or the radioactive particles in soil all around the world following the first test and subsequent weaponization of



nuclear bombs in 1945. Both moments in history might make an English speaker wish for a more potent word than nostalgia—more potent, even, than solastalgia,<sup>[xviii]</sup> because we find ourselves missing a future that is different from the future that we have now. The creature who confronts us as we enter the environment of *Kali Yuga* is alone, monstrous, pitiable.

That word, “pitiable,” seems to me the right word for this kind of missing, this frustrated grief. Without offering any reprieve or solution, it carries an equal share of care. Likewise, the despair that comes from confronting the reality of today’s environmental disaster is accompanied, always and inevitably, by as much love.



ABOVE FOREGROUND: *Kali Yuga I: Footsteps* [detail], 2022.

BACKGROUND: *Kali Yuga IV: Out from the Deep*, 2022-2023.

FOLLOWING SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Cipher 1: Oroboros*; *Cipher 3: Pandora's Box*; *Cipher 4: Scarab*; *Cipher 2: Spallanzani's Egg*. All 2023.

PHOTOS: Doug Derksen.



## NOTES

- [i] Miya Tokumitsu. "The Currencies of Naturalism in Dutch "Pronk" Still-Life Painting: Luxury, Craft, Envisioned Affluence." *RACAR* 41, no. 2, 2016. 30–43. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1038070ar>.
- [ii] National Ocean Service. "What is an invasive species?" *The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration* (NOAA). <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/invasive.html>. Accessed 17 January 2023.
- [iii] A.Y. Karatayev & L. E. Burlakova. "What we know and don't know about the invasive zebra (*Dreissena polymorpha*) and quagga (*Dreissena rostriformis bugensis*) mussels." *Hydrobiologia*, 2022. 1–74. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10750-022-04950-5>
- [iv] Ibid.
- [v] Michael Levenson, "'Extremely Rare' Snowy Owl Sighting Transfixes a California Suburb," *The New York Times*, December 31, 2022. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/05/world/snowy-owl-cypress-california-rare-sighting-scen/index.html>.
- [vi] Livia Albeck-Ripka, "Why are Freakish Fish Washing Ashore in California?" *The New York Times*, January 6, 2022.
- [vii] In conversation with the artist, 19 January 2023.
- [viii] This is contested, such as in the 1894 text by Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, *The Holy Science*, which puts the length of the full cycle at 24,000 years.
- [ix] "The Yuga Cycles & Yogic Astronomy. What are the Four Yugas?" *Human Origin Project*. <https://humanoriginproject.com/the-yuga-cycles-yogic-astronomy-what-are-the-four-yugas/>. Accessed 13 January 2023.
- [x] This is widely attributed to John Lennon, but it likely originated as an Indian proverb.
- [xi] Bernard Andrieu, "Embodying the Chimera: Biotechnology and Subjectivity." In Eduardo Kac. *Signs of Life : Bio Art and Beyond*. Leonardo. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2007. 57-68.
- [xii] Thompson Highway, "Chapter 2: On Creation." In *Laughing with the Trickster: On Sex, Death, and Accordions*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2022.
- [xiii] Myer, Isaac. *Scarabs The History, Manufacture and Symbolism of the Scarabæus in Ancient Egypt, Phoenicia, Sardinia, Etruria, Etc.* 1894. Project Gutenberg.
- [xiv] Wikipedia. 2023. "Greak Auk." Last modified 24 January 2023. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_auk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_auk)
- [xv] This particular specimen is known as Spallanzani's Great Auk Egg, and is held in the Natural History Museum at Tring, UK.
- [xvi] Sluijs, Marinus Anthony van der, and Anthony L. Peratt. "The Ouroboros as an Auroral Phenomenon." *Journal of Folklore Research*, 46, no. 1, 2009. 3–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40206938>.
- [xvii] HESIOD'S WORKS AND DAYS. Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Project Gutenberg.
- [xviii] See Albrecht G, Sartore G-M, Connor L, et al. Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change. *Australasian Psychiatry*. 2007. 15 (1\_suppl):S95-S98. doi:10.1080/10398560701701288



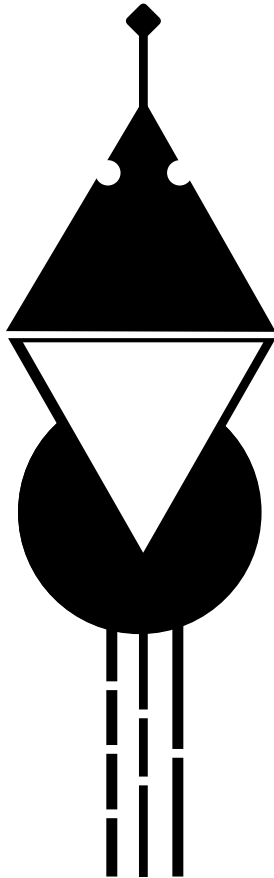


## KALI YUGA LOGO

The logo for this exhibition was designed by Oreo, a Brandon-based emerging artist.

Follow Oreo on Instagram @dhairyartgallery.

## WEAPON + SERPENT HYBRID

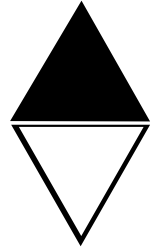






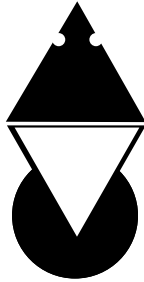
Black triangle with two white dots looks like a hidden/concealed weapon in a larger weapon.

Black triangle over white one to describe the Kaliyuga age which is the age of sin, deception, negativity.



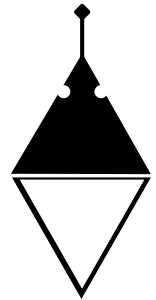
It also describes two parts (human and serpent) of one form (Hybrid).

Adding a circle at the bottom makes it a minimal human figure.



And the white dots appear to be eyes staring at the viewer.

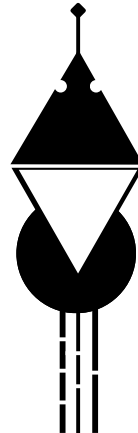
A line with a diamond ending on the top makes it look like a serpent's tongue.



Three lines below that act as a handle for the weapon. These lines describe the 432,000 years (1200 divine years) of Kali Yuga age.



Weapon is a tool of destruction.



Snake is usually connected to betrayal.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST



Emily Jan (b. 1977, Los Angeles) is a Chinese-American artist and writer currently based in Edmonton, AB. Her biophilic sculptures and installations combine the found with the fabricated to evoke the faraway and the fantastical. As a wanderer, naturalist, and collector of objects and stories, she is guided in her work by the spirit of exploration, kinship, and curiosity.

Recent exhibitions include the 10e Biennale nationale de sculpture contemporaine, (Trois Rivières, QC), Textile Museum of Canada (Toronto, ON), the Robert Bateman Centre Gallery of Nature (Victoria, BC) Galerie Art Mûr (Montreal, QC), the Museo Textil de Oaxaca (Mexico), and the Mary M. Torggler Fine Arts Centre (Newport News, VA). Upcoming exhibitions include the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, the McIntosh Gallery at Western University (London, ON), and dC3 Gallery (Edmonton, AB). Past residencies include Artscape Gibraltar Point (Toronto Island, 2018), the Elsewhere Museum (Greensboro NC, 2017), and Denali National Park (Alaska, 2016).

Jan has written and illustrated three books: *still life* (2014), *A Denali Book of Hours* (2017) and *Glory of the Seas: A Shell Collector's Journey* (2019, with Stephen H. Kawai), and contributed writing to catalogues for the PHI Foundation (formerly DHC/ART), the Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA), and magazines such as *esse : art + opinions*.

She currently teaches at MacEwan University, and sits on the board of directors for Union House Arts Inc, Newfoundland, and CARFAC Alberta.

ABOVE: Emily Jan. PHOTO: Phil Bernard.

## LIST OF WORKS

### *Kali Yuga I: Footsteps*, 2022

Mixed Media (Silk, wool, found textiles, reed, resin, silicone, epoxy, soil, gravel, found cardboard boxes). Installation, dimensions variable

### *Kali Yuga II: I'll Remember You*, 2022-2023

Faux flower components, wool felt, epoxy resin. Pencil on Canson paper. appx 3 x 3 x 28" and 20 x 13"

After xkcd (Randall Munroe) as reprinted in Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016. Page 70.

### *Kali Yuga III: Through a Glass Darkly*, 2022-2023

Reed, wool, epoxy resin, hog gut. appx 15 x 9 x 28" and 19 x 10 x 18"

### *Kali Yuga IV: Out from the Deep*, 2022-2023

Wool felt, resin, found faux fur, dyed rawhide, sand. Installation, dimensions variable, appx 23 x 23 x 4" each.

### *Kali Yuga V: The Passenger*, 2022

Wool fleece gifted by farmer Amanda Cull from the Bonavista Peninsula, Newfoundland. Wool felt, found floral components, resin, found branches, found stool. appx 18 x 18 x 48"

### *Kali Yuga VI: Melt*, 2023

Found fur, dyed lichen, unfired clay Installation, dimensions variable

### *Cipher I: Oroboros*, 2023

Glazed ceramic. 11 x 11 x 2"

Based on internet footage of a Speckled Kingsnake eating its own tail, uploaded by YouTube user @robclarkvenitox5161 on June 13, 2019.

### *Cipher 2: Spallanzani's Egg*, 2023

Glazed ceramic. 5 x 5 x 6"

After Spallanzani's Greak Auk Egg, donated in the 1760s and added to the collection of the British Museum of Natural History in 1937. Collection of the Natural History Museum at Tring.

### *Cipher 3: Pandora's box*, 2023

Ceramic and iron oxide. 8 x 8 x 17"

The word "pithos" was translated to "box" but more properly refers to a type of wide-mouthed earthenware storage jar used throughout ancient Greece.

### *Cipher 4: Scarab*, 2023

Glazed ceramic, wood, escutcheon pins. 9 x 13 x 4"

After Atlas Beetle, *Chalcosoma atlas*.

Soundscape by Steve Bates, 2022

The AGSM would like to extend our gratitude to Look Music for their generous consultation.

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