

Superflux creates a 'Refuge for Resurgence' at La Biennale di Venezia

A multispecies dining experience with animals, birds, plants and fungi

21 May to 22 November 2021



This imagined dinner brings together all animals – including humans – for a shared future. Photoshoot by Mark Cocksedge.

As part of their ongoing mission to explore hope through crisis towards a more-than-human future, Superflux invites you to a table around which multiple species gather as equals. In response to the Venice Biennale's theme – 'How Will We Live Together?' – the studio considers how all forms of life on earth might come together around the dinner table to celebrate their ecological interdependence in a post-Anthropocene world – a symbolic home where all species can prosper with resilience, adaptation, and hope.

A multispecies banquet

Occupying a space beneath the arches of the Arsenale, Refuge For Resurgence presents a magnificent 4m-long table, hand-made in Didcot from the wood of a wild Surrey oak. Placed around the table are 14 wooden stools, each one carefully customised for the creature it is intended for. As the viewer enters the space, they are beckoned by a bespoke soundscape, a chorus recital of a poem that brings the story of the banquet, and its mythological origin story, powerfully to life.



The cutlery for each animal showcases their distinct personality. Image courtesy Superflux.

The banquet attendees represent a cross-section of life on a resurgent Earth, inclusive of species that were once domesticated, or might have been considered ‘weeds’, ‘pests’ or ‘vermin’ under human domination, but are now reclaiming their rightful place in the ecological order. Around this table, three humans – man, woman and child – join a fox, rat, wasp, pigeon, cow, wild boar, snake, beaver, wolf, raven and mushroom.

Each creature has a place set at the table, but only the wasp, mushroom and raven (in taxidermied form) physically join the installation. By exploring each place around the table, the

viewer can infer the identity of the guests from finely detailed clues on display. These include species-symbolic cutlery, hand-crafted from materials foraged from a former world (avian bones, brakelights, twigs, a rusted circuit board or telephone wire), food offerings carefully catered for each guest, and ceramic plates meticulously illustrated by Nicola Ferrao with mythopoetic scenes depicting the species protagonists and their narrative journeys, from destruction to resurgence.

“We're drawing on ideas of folklore, mythology, the transformative potential of ritual and ceremony. We want to open up poetic aspects of other worlds that might feel enigmatic – or even magical. This is an invocation and a prayer for a different kind of world.”

– Jon Ardern, co founder, Superflux

A window to a new world

The table sits beneath a trio of suspended LCD screens that form a triptych window onto the world outside. Created by designer Sebastien Tiew, the windows reveal a cityscape in the aftermath of catastrophe – streets are flooded, buildings lie in ruins, the urban fabric lies shredded – but the vision is far from dystopian. Green plants and trees are creeping in to reclaim the city, and the wildlife that was previously barred from human spaces is finding its way back to the streets and making a new home. From the perspective of the creatures at the banquet, nature is building a new world from the wreckage of the old. Their task is to work together and find their respective places within it.

The audacity of hope



Each plate tells part of the story with a unique illustration by Nicola Ferrao. Image courtesy Superflux.

Like its sister installation, *Invocation For Hope*, which is running in parallel at Vienna Biennale (28 May to 3 October 2021), *Refuge for Resurgence* is remarkable for its optimism. Where the Vienna piece uses the idea of a living forest emerging from the remnants of burnt trees to find speculative threads of positivity in the narrative of climate crisis, the Venice installation uses the concept of the shared dining experience as a symbol of interspecies communion, and to present a manifesto for a more-than-human future ecology founded on equality of the species. A relationship founded on interdependence rather than one that is extractive or exploitative.

As is typical for Superflux, both of these installations offer a highly nuanced response to climate change – a complex and multifaceted issue which can often be presented with overly simplistic or alarmist ‘cautionary tale’ narratives that frighten their audiences without engaging or edifying them. With these two installations, Superflux makes the argument, not for us to address climate change within the established frameworks of the Anthropocene, but to mitigate its impact by entirely changing the way we understand our relationship with nature.

In many ways, Refuge for Resurgence extends the ideas raised by Superflux's 2017 installation 'Mitigation of Shock', where they created an apartment for a future version of London, where the climate crisis has had a devising impact on food security. For this installation, Superflux's approach was intellectual and materials-led – involving the creation of computer-controlled 'fogponic' food stacks and bespoke radio programming – making the reality of climate-induced food scarcity real and relatable through super-realistic attention to detail.

Despite the common theme, Refuge for Resurgence takes a different, more abstract approach, engaging the viewer through symbol and metaphor – an emotive and poetic visual language that strengthens the installation's dreamlike impact.

"Thus far, we've adopted an approach of speculative realism in a lot of our work. However, a mytho-poetic approach can give form to aspirations that are often present in the cultural ether but not always apparent. There is something powerful about engaging on a direct physical and emotional level that you don't always get from a more straightforward explanation. It stays with you."

– Anab Jain, co founder, Superflux

Notes for editors

For more details about Refuge for Resurgence, Superflux, and their other visionary projects, please contact chris@zetteler.co.uk.

About Refuge for Resurgence

The installation will be free to view at the Venice Arsenale, as part of the Biennale Architettura from 21 May to 22 November 2021.

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Windows

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creatures-eu.org

Superflux

Founded in 2009 by Anab Jain and Jon Ardern, Superflux is a design studio, consultancy and research lab that constructs speculative worlds and experimental scenarios that allow their clients and themselves to imagine and explore alternate futures. Pioneers of speculative design as a means of broadening perspectives and influencing decision making, Superflux weaves emerging trends in climate, technology, politics, society and culture together with the understanding that humanity occupies just one element in a richly complex system of life. The results are the physical expressions of imaginative journeys towards alternative futures in a climate-altered world. The studio has worked with international organisations, cultural institutions and government offices including Google AI, DeepMind, Microsoft Research, Cabinet Office UK and the Government of the UAE.

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