

Bob Vanderbob

ARTIFICIAL MYTHOLOGY



bobvanderbob.com

I had been developing science and sci-fi inspired projects for a long while when, about twelve years ago, I started to look at my work through the lens of mythology. I was wondering what a modern mythology would feel/look/sound like and decided to work from first principles. What is a mythology? What is it not? What does it do? etc.

I was impressed by Joseph Campbell's analysis of the four functions of mythology – metaphysical, cosmogonic, societal and psychological. It seemed obvious to me that the cosmogonic dimension – the creation story – is now no longer provided by shamans or prophets, but by science, a slow, incremental, oftentimes messy, but cumulative and powerful collective endeavour.

Science is very fragmented, with thousands of fields and sub-fields, each using their own exclusive jargon. Yet, taken as a whole, it is producing a story, one of cosmic proportions. It is telling us that the universe is best thought of *not as a place, but as a process*. And it informs us of where we are – both in space and in time – in the unfolding of that process. It is a radical new idea. There is no order, nothing is immobile, everything is ongoing. And we, with all our flaws and frustrations, are part of this unfolding, both as a species and as individuals. We are an integral part of cosmic *ongoingness*, we have agency, our actions matter. This realisation touched a chord deep within me. It seemed to me to a strong mythological core on which to build.

As an artist, I use the language of metaphor to conjure a “layer” of poetry – of augmented reality – on top of the foundational story that science gives us. I am gradually building a constellation of what Joseph Campbell called “mythological motifs”. Each of my installations can be seen as a landmark in a modern mythological landscape, a *mythscape* if you will. When juxtaposed in a large, darkened space, they resonate with each other, creating a continuous, immersive experience, in which the sound provides an aural bridge between the individual modules.

Excerpt from Aesthetica Magazine interview 2021

I have so far created six Artificial Mythology installations (with several more in development). They are:

Mr Generic Tries On The Masks of God

Offspring

Fecundity

Dreaming Hive

Excavation

Accelerando

Watch the **teasers** for these projects on my website bobvanderbob.com

Mr GENERIC TRIES ON THE MASKS OF GOD

Video installation

A 3D-printed face stares at us. On the surface of its polygons, a series of masks - animistic, hieratic, electronic - appear in flowing and hypnotic succession.

Enveloping sound textures create an expectant tension.

We share the dreams of this head that thinks the world, wander with it across a timeless *mythscape*, at once strange and familiar.

As we stare back at Mr Generic, we see in his masks the reflection of our own thoughts and questionings.

Are we heading for the inexorable collapse of civilisation, or for rebirth, renaissance, metamorphosis?

Mr Generic is no oracle.

We, children of the solar system, must carry on dreaming, playing, searching.

Watch the teaser:

<https://vimeo.com/259586595>





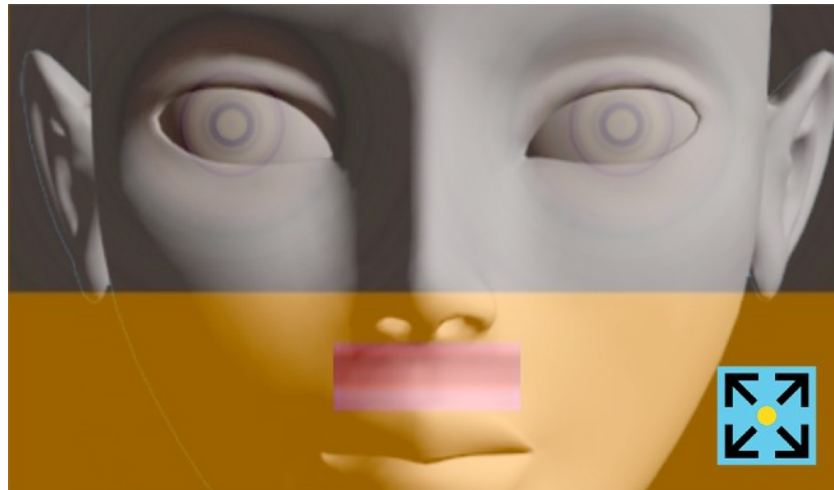




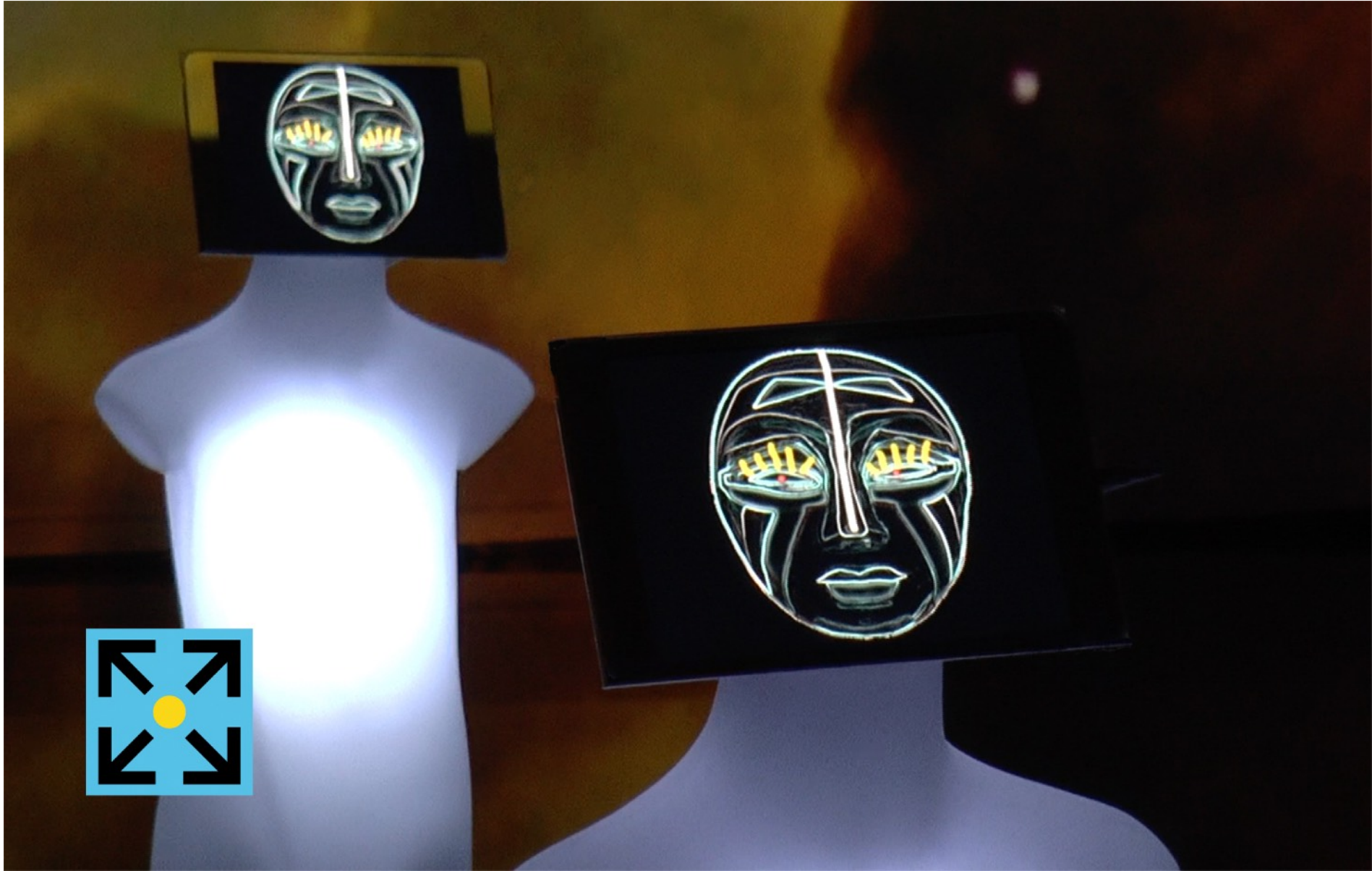
OFFSPRING

Video installation

In a lake set against galactic skies, cyborg babies are standing knee-deep in the water. They seem to be looking at us, their biological forebears, as haunting images of the natural world and cultures past flicker in their minds.



Watch documentary :
[https://vimeo.com/
artificialmythology/oboaam](https://vimeo.com/artificialmythology/oboaam)



FECUNDITY

Video installation

fecundity (noun)

- the ability to cause or assist healthy growth
- the ability to produce offspring
- the creative power of the imagination

In this installation, a 3D-printed female figure becomes a screen onto which are projected images of life, energy, water, bacteria, sperm and ovules, genetic and binary code. The 'power' icon is projected onto her skull. In stark contrast, images of desert landscapes and of Venus, Earth's barren sister planet, are projected onto the back wall. The whole installation is enshrined in a large mirror box, reflecting the fecundity figure ad infinitum in all directions.

Watch the teaser:

[https://vimeo.com/
artificialmythology/fecundity](https://vimeo.com/artificialmythology/fecundity)





The 3-D female Fecundity figure is inspired by a neolithic fecundity representation found in Harappa, in the Indus Valley (2500 BC)



DREAMING HIVE

Video installation

Three heads with closed eyes hover in front of a strangely symmetrical, flowing landscape. Their appearance changes constantly, synchronously. The intense yet restful atmosphere brings to mind a shamanistic ritual. We feel we are watching a collective dream, that we are part of one.

But from time to time there is a glitch and the image suddenly shatters: the symmetry is ruptured and computer code or black and white static briefly appear on both the floating heads and background landscape. Is the collective dream a simulation, the product of manipulation?

In a world that is ever faster, more unpredictable and volatile, will we manage to create a collective mythological space to transcend that which pits us against each other and divides us? Can technology help us conjure such a space? What would it look like? What would it take to bring it into being?





EXCAVATION

Video installation

Two bodies lie in a hole evocative of an excavated site. We look down on them from above, standing behind waist-high barriers surrounding the hole. Each figure is draped in a pristine white cloth and their faces are covered with 3D-printed masks. We are surrounded by darkness.

Layer upon layer of poetic images flow over them: landscapes, natural elements, technological-looking materials. The scene is bathed in an evocative sound environment.

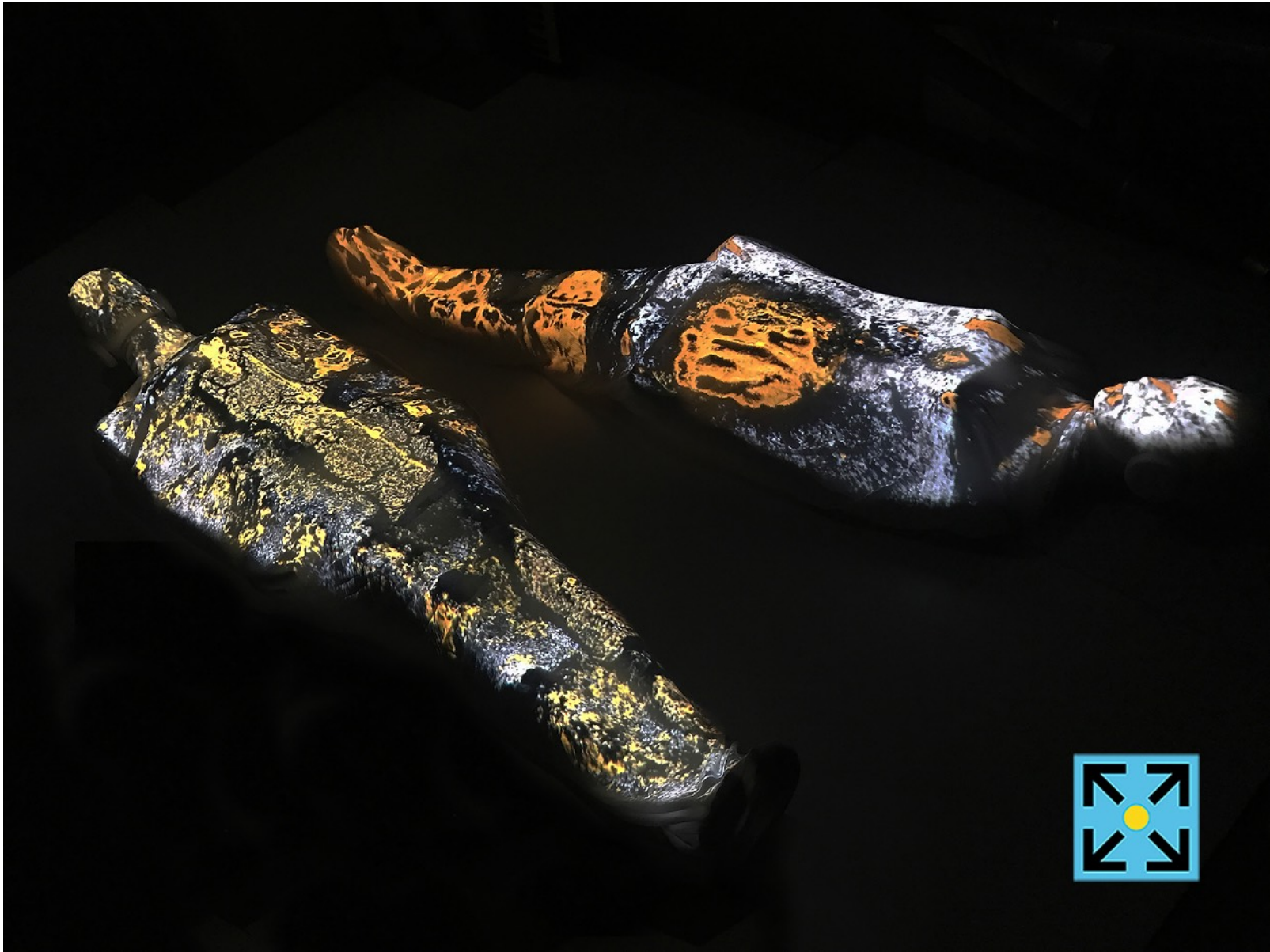
Something about the atmosphere suggests that these beings may be from the future. But then, if they are already dead and buried, they belong to a past that is in our future. That begs the question: Who are we as we stand there looking down on them? And *when* are we?

Excavation is a meditation about life and death, time, the idea of humanity as a process, and the possibility of civilisational metamorphosis.



Watch the teaser: <https://vimeo.com/557076269>







ACCELERANDO

Video installation

Eyes closed,
she feels the energy caress her,
flow through her,
electrify her.

She's at home in the Universe.





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