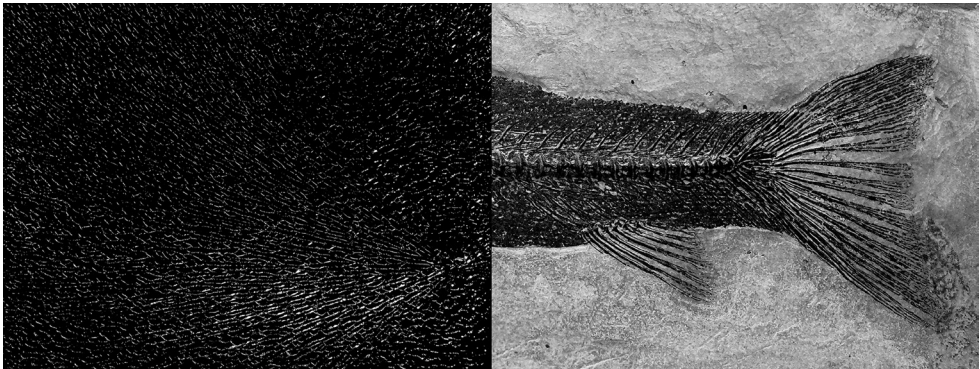
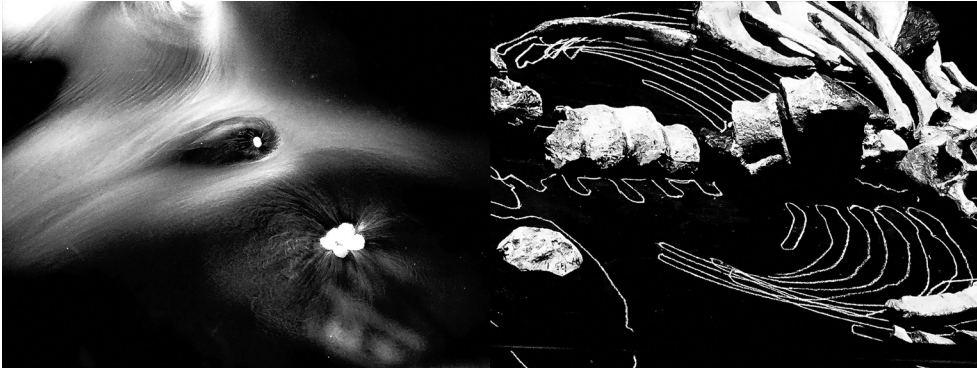


Lyric Intangibility and the Objects of Science: On *The Heat Equation*

Sophie Thomas

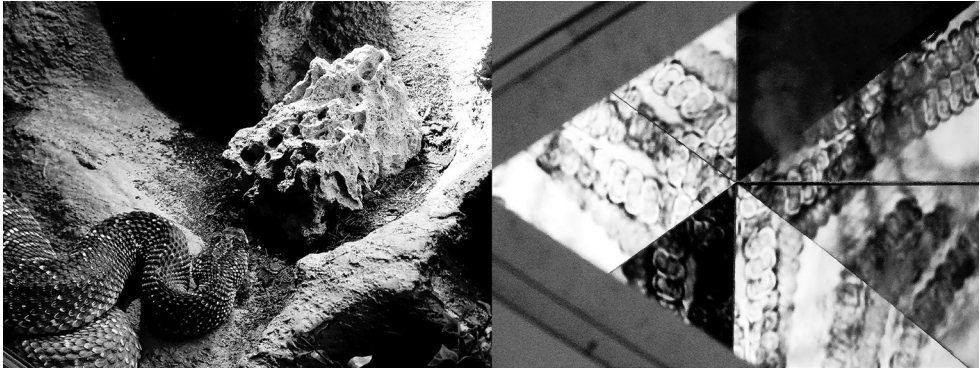


The group of photographs presented here have been selected by Joséphine Michel from her photobook, *The Heat Equation*, published 1 November 2019, to accompany a live recording of the musician Mika Vainio's last performance in the UK (Ramsgate, August 2016). The ten images, composed and juxtaposed as diptychs, were taken primarily in science museums: the Science Museum in London, the History of Science Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, the Royal Belgium Institute of Natural Sciences in Brussels, and the Glasgow Botanic Gardens. The project was sadly occasioned by the death of Vainio, with whom Michel had previously created the sound-image composite, *Halfway to White*. Michel had also written about Vainio's work for [Optical Sound](#) (No. 5) and created the cover image for his recording, [Fe304 - Magnetite](#). The imaginary world evoked by Vainio's soundscapes is suggestively re-captured in Michel's images, which are also poised between a scientific and a lyrical engagement with materiality.



While initially attracted to exhibits designed for children that involve playful transformations of matter, the resonance Michel felt in science museums—perhaps by poetic analogy—with Vainio’s body of work, led her to create images that explore the relationship between the tangible and the intangible, between stasis and movement, as well as the tension between the micro and macrocosmic. Firmly grounded in the visible world, they also, as a photographic homage, are preoccupied and informed by latent as well as overt connections—and by the state of connection itself—in which music ‘infiltrates’ image. Taken together as a group of 69 images, the collection operates, as Michel observes, like an energy field: additions, subtractions, or re-combinations set the whole in motion, activate it, in the manner of a chemical process—or of a musical (re)composition. Juxtaposed in groups of two, meanwhile, a nuanced dynamic emerges from each image. The object swims into view, sits alongside, disappears, as relations between things, under the suggestive pressures of placement, form and reform. Our capacity to perceive the interconnectedness of things is clearly as much a function of creative agency as of scientific articulation. And yet, implicit in any act of combination is the inevitability of both attachment and loss.





The Heat Equation, while perhaps pointing towards the climatic (in)balance of our historical moment, also extends Michel's longstanding interest in the 'sonic photograph,' in the underexplored relationship between acoustic impulses and visual forms, and in what she regards as the 'mutual porosity' of photography and sonic phenomena. This multi-valent approach to the multi-valence of things is evident for example in *Mercurus*, which attends to the interstitial in the life of birds, and in the images of *(Un)Frozen Improvisation* that capture the patterns in things that arise from the provisional symmetries characteristic of matter in motion.



For more information about *The Heat Equation*, see <https://mikavainio.bandcamp.com/album/the-heat-equation> -- and about Michel's other projects, <https://www.josephinemichel.com>.