

Love All Live – Or: Caring for the *other*

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Procrustinean, Shrimp-Changingroom (2022). Material: tulle, airbrush, car-belts. Photo: Temet.Studio.

Philipp Schueller weaves an intricate tapestry, combining an array of threads that cannot easily be untangled. By seamlessly blending elements of fashion, marine biology, pop-culture, astrology, and kitsch, while reflecting on notions of care, he creates a rich and complex texture that speaks to the interconnectedness of all things living and artificial. Threading the needle of interspecies relations, Schueller invites us to consider our place in the web of life and the significance of our connections to the non-human world.



Procrustinean, LAL (2023). Material: watercooler, clay, silicone, sugar, vinyl, wood. LAL elixir in collaboration with Suzanne Bernhardt. LAL Branding in collaboration with Andrea Karch. Photo: Temet Studio.

Thinking with the *other*

Philipp Schueller's artistic journey began during his residency at the *Jan van Eyck Academie* from 2021 to 2022. In his previous practice as a fashion designer, Schueller critically investigated themes of ecology and care in the fashion industry. But his time at the *Jan van Eyck Academie* allowed him to step back from the production aspect of his work and contemplate on questions of coexistence.

He began to speculate what it would mean for fashion to become a hybrid practice, situated between science and nature. Fascinated by the way fashion constantly transforms itself to stay current and its ability to communicate messages, Schueller started to wonder whether fashion's evolutionary potential could be used to bring stories to life. Can designing for other species help to challenge dominant human-centric narratives? Is it possible to address the complex and diverse needs of other species through fashion? Can humans even think through or become another species? And how would we have evolved without fashion?

Driven by his long-standing fascination with aquatic life – Schueller used to breed fish as a teenager – he chose to focus his research on the horseshoe crab, a marine and brackish water arthropod with an armor-like exoskeleton and a spiny tail. Horseshoe crabs have existed in their current shape for at least 450 million years and are therefore often referred to as a 'living fossil.' Their blue blood has unique antibacterial properties, making them invaluable in medical research, particularly in the development of vaccines. Schueller's interest in the horseshoe crab's evolutionary secret led him to explore interspecies connections in a more profound way. They are a perfect example of perplexing ecological entanglement: the horseshoe crab, which has survived all stages

of extinction through its unique qualities, is now paradoxically threatened by humans who are harvesting their valuable blue blood for precisely these qualities. And yet, those of us who have been vaccinated carry a bit of the horseshoe crab within ourselves; a reminder of our mutualism and bond with non-human animals.

It is complex correlations like these that Schueller wishes to bring to the fore, creating an accessible narrative that interweaves interspecies relationships. This artistic research and practice aligns itself with a contemporary post-anthropocentric and post-humanist discourse that shifts the focus away from all things human, and vigorously questions human exceptionalism. Such practices include the *Institute of Queer Ecology*, in their own words a 'collaborative organism' that challenges the destructive human-centric hierarchies and aims to imagine a future where different species are treated equally. Similarly, the interdisciplinary research group *Okto Lab* uses the octopus as a lens to reevaluate our relationship with other species. The writing of author Peter Geoffrey Smith on animal-sentience, -consciousness and -intelligence in his books *Other Minds, the octopus and the evolution of intelligent life* and *Metazoa, animal minds and the birth of consciousness*, has gained widespread recognition in recent years.



Procrustinean, LAL (2023). Material: watercooler, clay, silicone, sugar, vinyl, wood. LAL elixir in collaboration with Suzanne Bernhardt. LAL Branding in collaboration with Andrea Karch. Photo: Temet.Studio.

Schueller's research culminates in the theme of 'Pro-Crustinacean,' a wordplay that carries multiple meanings. While the term nods to the notion of taking a pause, Schueller uses it to explore the idea of confluence – the coming together of different experiments and seemingly random thoughts that intermingle to create a floaty, explorative experience. However, Schueller also seeks to activate the idea of taking care of another species. In all its lightheartedness 'Pro-Crustinacean' can also be read as a call to action, urging us to pause, reflect, and find ways to take care of those that we see as *other*.



Procrustinacean, LAL (2023). Material: watercooler bottle, vinyl. LAL elixir in collaboration with Suzanne Bernhardt. LAL Branding in collaboration with Andrea Karch. Photo: Temet.Studio.

During his residency at *Jan van Eyck Academie*, 'Pro-Crustinacean' materialized as an immersive performance and space. Throughout the year, Schueller's studio was transformed into a speculative environment situated somewhere between a teenage bedroom and a DIY-laboratory. A live-action horseshoe crab, embodied by a Roomba-Robot, scattered blue paint on the floor of Schueller's studio and performance space. The sink was converted into a fountain spilling a blue fluid reminiscent of the creature's blood. In the center of the room, a carpet bulged into an organic shape, evoking the outline of a human-sized crustation; an exoskeleton or costume waiting to come to life during performance-hours. With a color palette that utilizes the stereotypically gendered pink and blue, as well as a soundscape produced by Bea1991 that blends pop music with hardcore and *The Moldau*, a symphonic poem composed by the 19th-century composer Bedrich Smetana, Schueller created a space where nature, pop-culture, trash, and literal waste were free to coexist and intermingle.

There is humor in the display. It becomes clear that Schueller's aesthetic interest in trash is not just informed by the materiality of a collapsing eco-system; it also signifies the subversive potential of that which has been tossed aside. Through embracing the artificial while speaking about the organic, Schueller challenges our preconceptions of what constitutes beauty and raises questions about our relationship to the natural world. In his work, Schueller employs *Kitsch* as a means to establish a connection with the audience. He is particularly intrigued by the concept of fabricated or 'fake' nature, such as synthetic rocks or man-made aquascapes. In his view, these artificial elements act as a conduit to comprehend the often unfamiliar realm of nature, which may help to make it tangible.

In previous iterations of his work, Schueller used interspecies embodiment by metaphorically transforming himself into a shrimp, serving as a proxy for the audience. During his residency at *Das Leben am Haverkamp*, he took a new approach and invited the audience to experience a transformation of their own. Schueller built an installation that played with the concept of the changing room as more than just a space for undressing and dressing; it became a site for collective shapeshifting. This time, the horseshoe crab, more concretely their blood, was introduced in the form of a water dispenser filled with blue liquid, which Schueller served to the audience in cone-shaped plastic cups.



Procrustinean, LAL-elixir (2023). Material: 50% H₂O, 30% Clitoria Ternatea, 10% Corallina Officinalis, 5% Agave Americana, 3% Piper Longum, 2% Pimpinella Anisum. In collaboration with Suzanne Bernhardt. Photo: Temet.Studio

The act of sharing the blue-blood-drink from a water dispenser familiar from office spaces, cleverly juxtaposed the mundane aesthetics of an office workspace with faint echoes of religious ceremonies or even vampirism. The drink was humorously named *LAL*, as an acronym for *Love All Life* – and as a nod to motivational slogans such as ‘Live Love Laugh’ that can for instance be found on wall tattoos. Collaboratively created with Suzanne Bernhardt, the drink itself, and the branding for *LAL*, which was developed in collaboration with Andrea Karch, symbolized an invitation for the audience to embark on a transformative journey. Schueller then proceeded his performance to conduct quasi-ritualistic astrology readings from inside the ‘changing room,’ encouraging the audience to metaphorically transform into something *other* together with him.

Expanding on the gap between the ordinary and the sacred, Schueller drew his divination directly from texts he found in a mobile app, utilizing a system known as *Primal Astrology*. This form of astrology combines elements of Western and Eastern astrology and assigns an animal to each person based on their birthdate. The animal is said to represent the primal nature of the individual and provide insights into their personality, behavior, and life path.

Similar to scholar Alice Sparkly Kat, who views astrology not as a tool for categorization but as a communal practice that flourishes by allowing for a diverse range of subjectivities, Schueller’s use of divination contributes to the complex meshwork he is weaving. Ultimately, it opens in-between spaces, and makes the work and its reflections on the concept of *othering* legible.

Through inviting the audience to see themselves as *other*, Schueller challenges the human-centered perspective and questions our tendency to categorize and define what is considered ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. Bypassing binary formulations, he humorously encourages viewers to see themselves and the world around them in a new and more expansive light, effectively *un*-othering the creatures that become part of his performance.



Procrustinean, installation (2023). Photo: Tenet Studio.

Through this, Schueller also allows us to see ourselves as hybrid, invoking the *transbiological* as described by writer Jack Halberstam: “The transbiological conjures hybrid entities or in-between states of being that represent subtle or even glaring shifts in our understandings of the body and bodily transformation.” By embodying creatures like lobsters, shrimps, other crustaceans and arthropods, which are vastly dissimilar to humans, Schueller challenges the idea of human exceptionalism and invites us to explore the intricacies of interspecies relationships. In doing so, he asks us to reflect on the historical and present marginalization and devaluation of non-human animals by human society. Schueller’s use of divination and incorporation of the *other* into his work disrupts human-centric notions of subjectivity and highlights the interconnectedness of all beings, forming a cross-species alliance.

Although Schueller’s performances are delivered in a playful tone, they raise pressing questions about human-animal relationships, underscoring the significance of empathy and compassion towards all living beings. Despite – or rather because of – its clichéd name, *Love All Live* serves as a sincere call to caring for the other.



Procrustinacean, LAL (2023). Material: laboratory bottles, glass, vinyl, aluminium foil.
Photo: Anouk Beckers.



Procrustinacean, Shrimp-Changingroom (2022). Material: tulle, airbrush, car-belts. Photo: Temet.Studio.



Procrustinean, artist talk with Warehouse & Das Leben am Haverkamp (2023). Photo: Anouk Beckers.



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