

# Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni: The Unmanned, Part Two

28 June 2018 | **Roslyn Helper**





Is it possible to tell the story of human cultural evolution in a way that is separate to the interests of the teller? What happens if we look at ourselves through the lens of history as artefacts, or products of technological evolution, rather than as human? These are the central questions posed by French collaborative duo Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni in their epic, four-year project 'The Unmanned'.



*Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni, 1759 – Mil trois cens quarante huit, The Unmanned Season 1, Episode 6, HD Video, 26 min, 2017 © Fabien Giraud & Raphaël Siboni. Courtesy the artists and Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania*

The project is divided into three parts, called 'seasons', only the first of which has been completed so far. Exhibited at the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona) from February this year, this first season comprised eight haunting films depicting key historical (and speculative future) moments, each powerfully demonstrating the radical impacts computation has had on our social and political evolution.

Presented in reverse chronological order, the first film speculates the 'death' of American computer scientist Ray Kurzweil in the year 2045, which is the year he has famously predicted that the Singularity will be born. Shot entirely with drones in a lush rainforest, the film overflows with anticipation as we stand on the threshold of an emerging technological world. Contrastingly, the sixth film in the series is set centuries earlier in 1348, and centres around the escape and death of a bishop and his court in a forest during the first major outbreak of the Black Plague.

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which was said at the time to be 'born of the hair in comets'. The return of the comet in 1759 validated the computational prediction of British astronomer and mathematician Edmond Halley.



*Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni, 1997 – The Brute Force, The Unmanned Season 1, Episode 2, HD Video, 26 min, 2014 © Fabien Giraud & Raphaël Siboni. Courtesy the artists and Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania*

Mona is hosting the genesis of the project's second season, titled 'The Everted Capital'. Filmed in June as a live-edited, live-broadcast, 24-hour performance staged within the walls of the museum, the work takes us to the year 7231, an obscure reference to an essay published in the 18th century comparing and contrasting different theological methods for measuring time. Here we are introduced to a community living on a Dyson sphere, a hypothetical megastructure built from the material of dismantled planets (including Earth), that completely surrounds a sun in order to capture and harness its energy. The sun is posited here as the single most valuable commodity, emphasised by its journey towards extinction as it cools. As the work unfolds, members of the community attempt to remember what Earth could have been. The film archive of the performance is installed in the museum.

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*Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni, 1953 – The Outlawed, The Unmanned Saison 1, Episode 3, 2018, HD video, 13mins © the artists. Courtesy the artists and Mona – Museum of Old and New Art*

Presented alongside the film is a series of sculptures. Giraud and Siboni have used custom-built artificial intelligence technology to categorise a collection of historical blades archived by anthropologist and archaeologist Augustus Pitt Rivers. The technology taxonomises each blade, trying to predict its past life, and to ultimately compute the unattainable form of the first blade. The proposed designs will be made by craftspeople and exhibited in the museum. Blades are significant in the artists' work: the prologue film in Season 1 depicts a blade cutting through metal, 'filmed at the scale of a fold of matter'. The blade is the starting point and represents the first technological 'trauma' that severed humans from our environment.

To come back to the artists' central question, 'Is it possible to tell the story of human cultural evolution in a way that is separate to the interests of the teller?' Postcolonial political discourse would have us utter a firm 'No'. This is plainly illustrated in the artists' overwhelmingly Western references to theological, scientific and natural history and their resulting speculations of computation and automation. However, Giraud and Siboni do provide thought-provoking material for considering that a radical retelling of human history might be possible, albeit with other interests or constraints at play, when told by a non-human entity. In fact, it might just be what we need to see ourselves properly, for the first time.

Roslyn Helper is an artist, curator and writer based in Sydney.

**Museum of Old and New Art** (<https://mona.net.au/>)

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