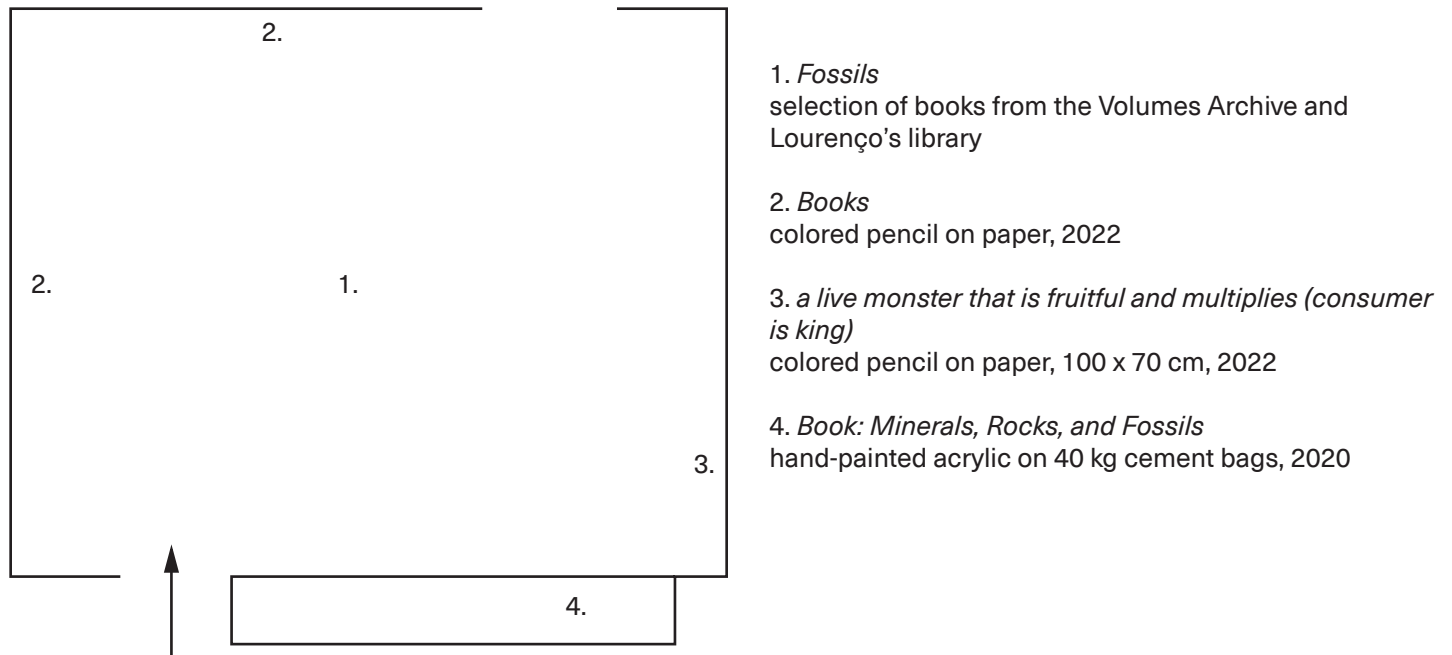


VOLUMES archive presents:

*Fossils: a critique of political imaginations (fig. books)* by Lourenço Soares

01-09.10.22, Material

artist talk 6 pm 7.10.22



*Fossils: a Critique of Political Imaginaries (fig. books)* is made up of two parts.

1.

## FOSSILS

The section *Fossils* is composed of publications chosen from the Volumes archive and my library, creating a dialogue between my current research and that of the artists present in Volumes.

This work focuses on Mesozoic knowledges and imaginaries. In it, the dinosaur is thought of as a natural-cultural object that accompanies the development of political ideologies in narratives of power, gender, the free market, obsolescence, and extinction. This research departs from a history of science that understands nature as a political space where human social relations are mirrored: scientists' cultural biases are projected into the phenomena they observe and describe; knowledge from the natural sciences legitimates forms of social organization (Haraway).

*Fossils* traces some of the political imaginaries associated with dinosaurs. FIG. NATURAL HISTORY On the table from the left, the books are organized around the idea of natural history: taxonomies, encyclopedias, and museums. In western modernity, natural history was a fundamental tool in the project of domination and control over nature. The history of scientific research is entangled with that of imperialism and commerce. Some of the publications propose new taxonomies and use the logic of classification to subvert them. Others point to the materiality of minerals and fossils. FIG. OBSOLESCENCE The books trace loosely a history of dinosaur representation. The first type is the classic model and refers to tropes in depictions from the first half of the 20th century where dinosaurs are presented as "the slow, stupid giant that is incapable of adapting to any sort of change" (W.J.T. Mitchell). Their image is a symbol of obsolescence and scientific explanations for their extinction become moral justifications for the proper role of progress and competition. In this section, there are some books about cars, disasters, and household appliances. FIG. COWBOY The painting of a Tarbosaurus unfolds a reflection on masculinity. The figure of the cowboy is important in the adventurous universe of male paleontologists. Some of the most important paleontological findings made during the 19th and 20th centuries happened in the landscapes of the American West. This Western imagery sometimes bursts into the animal images themselves, like in the Tarbosaurus by Zdenek Burian, which poses like an invincible hero controlling his territory. Predictably, the books here focus on cowboys and the American landscape. FIG. NEOLIBERAL DINOSAUR Motivated by new paleontological theories (and — my suggestion — the rise of neoliberal capitalism) after the 70's dinosaur imagery overly emphasized scenes of action, violence, and conflict. Such emphasis could also be explained by the interest of 20th-century western science in organizing nature on the logic of domination and competition. The dinosaurs from that period are portrayed as fast, smart, and voracious — like the market. The book *State of Matter / Matter of State* names multinational companies and lists the environmental crimes they are responsible for. FIG. BIRDS In contemporary taxonomies, birds are classified as dinosaurs that descend from theropods like *T. rex*. If in the first images dinosaurs were portrayed as heavy sluggish creatures doomed to extinction, now they are light, feathered, and alive.

FIG: SF'S The book *All Yesterdays* (and *All Your Yesterdays* available online) collects a series of images that test the potential of speculation in imagining different pasts. What is especially exciting about dinosaur representation (or more broadly Paleo Art: the representation of prehistoric life) is the importance and central role of speculation. From the start, the knowledge paleontologists deduce from fossils is very limited. Since mainly bones and footprints are fossilized, there is little evidence about physiological characteristics such as skin, flesh, and soft-body parts, but especially, there is little information about behavior and forms of social organization conserved in fossil records. Although some knowledge can be produced using scientific methods, a big part belongs to the realm of speculation: science fiction in a strict sense. There are currently many artists and scientists stressing this aspect and developing surprising representations of Mesozoic life. Such artists like to describe their work as 'informed speculation' (probably to distance themselves from fantasy) and base their propositions on observations from animals living today. In many of these recent images, there is an interest for scenes of symbiosis, cooperation, play, curiosity, and care. This could be explained by new findings and technical developments but also by the diversification of artists and scientists contributing to these images.

The work developed with the Volumes archive will lead to a publication to be released on the 26th and 27th of November at Zentralwäscherei.

2.

## BOOKS

The second part of the exhibition is made up of a series of drawings of book covers. These drawings are a sort of dictionary for existent and speculative knowledges about pre-historic life. Or to put in another way, an overview of science-fiction encyclopedias. Some of the drawings use elements from existing books and point at specific paradigms in natureculture relations: the tradition of natural history, Linnean classification, and extractivist practices. Others are speculative: books that are still to be written and illustrated. The range of designs and temporalities corresponds to an experience of living under overlapping and contradictory epistemic worlds.

## VOLUMES ARCHIVE

VOLUMES is a non-profit organisation created in 2013 in Zürich by Anne-Laure Franchette, Patrizia Mazzei and Gloria Wismer. The collective aims to research and showcase art publishing practices through a series of events (book fairs, exhibitions, talks, workshops, performances, awards) and an ongoing research agenda materialised by its archive project. The VOLUMES Archive is a collection of zines, artist books and publications, which exists thanks to the many donations received annually since 2013 for our International Open Call exhibition and Book Awards. Archives are normally understood as a coherent form of organization, having as objectives to unify, identify and/or classify the elements within a determined body of documents, objects, etc. The VOLUMES collection is on the contrary a diverse collection of material that has been mostly donated. Therefore, it presents a challenge to the classical idea of archival categorization because there hasn't been any systematic process of selection and articulation. Taking this library as a site of investigation, we have been asking ourselves how we could activate and organize this content. We embarked on a research about new forms of categorization and activation that take differences, associations, interstices and gaps as categories to re-think the paradigm of the archive, wondering how to deal with the issues of classification and conservation, permitting a constant flux between different temporalities.

Since 2015, we have worked towards expanding specific sections of its collection of publications, collaborating with artists, historians and curators. Together with our guests, we look at what is already there, drawing connections and/or frictions; but also to look at what is not there and how to invite new gazes and voices. Each section within the archive compiles and activates content from VOLUMES's existing collection, while suggesting new acquisitions to complement and expand this curated constellation of publications. This final compilation is what gets archived.

The VOLUMES Archive is an ongoing process, we are developing existing and new sections in collaboration with a variety of artists, historians, curators or scientists. We are open to suggestions for new archive sections and to donations of zines and printed matters.

[www.volumeszurich.ch](http://www.volumeszurich.ch)

LOURENÇO SOARES (lives in Zurich) is a research-based artist working with epistemic ecologies.

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VOLUMES – Art Publishing Days