

Exhibition Title:

Pseudomorphs and Fighting Fish

Text:

As part of **Un/stable: Lands, Anxieties, Dreams, Photoworks Festival**, we are thrilled to present **Pseudomorphs and Fighting Fish** by Sam Kaufman and Holly Birtles. These two bodies of work examine instability conceptually, materially and digitally to illuminate ecological concerns and a lack of responsibility over them by design.

Pseudomorphs (2026) by Kaufman, is a film about cephalopods, doubling bodies, institutional friction, hypnosis and disappearance. It is staged across three locations: a marine biology laboratory studying cephalopod cognition and skin camouflage; a beach home to giant ammonite fossils; and the mesopelagic zone of the sea.

The film takes the pseudomorph as its starting point - a decoy ink body created by cuttlefish, squid and octopuses - to think through disparate instances where the body's boundary against the world becomes unstable and altered. It is narrated through multiple voices: interview fragments, email correspondence and a bookending exercise to facilitate out-of-body experiences.

In *Fighting Fish*, Birtles reflects on her work inspired by the Thames River London and Estuary in Kent, Essex and Suffolk, where performers and artists contemplate their choreographed roles as 'Thames Monsters.' In Chennai, during a darkroom residency hosted by Chennai Photo Biennale and Photoworks, Birtles responds to the Adyar and Cooum rivers, identifying parallels linked to sentimentality, dedication, care, and destruction. The paradox lies in the personal reverence for these sacred sources, juxtaposed with the toxicity and damage caused by anthropocentric activities and neglect.

The project *Fighting Fish* embodies monstrosity, intertwining beauty and magnificence with the grotesque, haze, mud, waste, life, and death. The concept of 'fight' is explored through performative and directed body language during constructed performances. The physicality of these gestures conveys an ecological struggle, a lack of oxygen and a growing frustration with governmental inefficiencies related to new infrastructure.

Public Opening Dates:

2 – 18 Oct 2026, Wed – Sun (12:00 – 16:00), or by appointment

Associated Events:

- Public Opening Sunday 4th October at 3pm with artists present
- Performance and reading by artists on October 16th 6pm

Participating Artists

Holly Birtles is a UK (London) based photographic artist. Her practice incorporates performance, prop production, and digital/analogue techniques, often in collaboration with writers, visual artists, and musicians. Her work connects performance to place, exploring personal narratives associated with specific eco- systems and/or geo trauma. Props and performances respond to natural phenomena such as volcanic eruptions; sitters personify specific materials or structures related to the selected sites. Using sound- based performances and tactile props, her works document experiential loss through the photographic image. Recent projects integrate performance and AI into darkroom processes, reflecting on slow violence, ecological crises, myth and sentimentality linked to rivers. Birtles exhibits internationally, often collaborating with artists and writers and is course leader of BA (Hons) Photography at Brighton University.

Sam Kaufman is a filmmaker, educator and researcher based in Brighton. Working with moving image, text and sound, he is currently exploring how understandings of nonhuman worlds are created, and how scientific environments produce or trouble the complex boundaries between subjectivities and their worlds. His most recent project centres on a film about cephalopods, marine laboratories, ink bodies and out-of-body experiences, working alongside researchers at the Comparative Cognition Lab in Cambridge. He lectures in film, animation and digital arts at the University of Surrey, is a producer at Devonshire Collective in Eastbourne, and runs Volta, a forum for artists' moving image in locations along the UK's south-east coast.

Holly Instagram: [@hbirtles](https://www.instagram.com/hbirtles)

Sam Instagram: [@s_am_k_](https://www.instagram.com/s_am_k_)