

Sluggardizing: Sebastian Jefford
Alex Bennett

The silkworm is lazy to the human eye, yet its laziness is active. Pendulous, it writes a lulling syntax in the air, saliva-to-silk. Secreting nearly one mile of filament, the worm cocoons itself; submerged in hot water, the silk is loosened, killing the pupa in turn. The *degumming* process. Gluttonous, Sebastian Jefford cocoons the image. A *regumming* process? With fistfuls of languid indulgence his imagery is thickened. Freightened with presence and the bravura of process, it vents intransigence.

Salt crust pillow; petrified meringue; tremelloid flora—the volumes of Jefford’s sculptures convey a rolling bathos with manic preservation about the surfaces and edges, in frenzied pawing and hyperbolic tacking. These plastic snap fasteners are crucial, figuring the folded panels of polyurethane foam as pelt, garment, or membrane while steeping a verb energy of detachability or tellurian accretion. Barnacled in patchy swaddling, the gibbous and beetling forms may be etched with rotted teeth eager to masticate or heaped in flatulence. Poorly padded, they require the image to take time, matting it in corporeal contact to be given a sort of life. Dust will settle in a buttery thumb crease in a want for time’s creep—as though to touch the puckery socket would disturb the synthetic, sedimented evidence of years. Jefford’s liberal application of fasteners invites temporal undoing, like his crooked cyclicity—exhausted tires, recycling symbols, warped clocks—expressing a blunderbuss of levity, atrophy, and indolence. Indeed, to extrude an image as bloated quasi-object, all wrong like a domesticated diplodocus, is to goad a symbolist and structural chaos. Its bonding, “to re-materialize the dematerialized,”¹ permits the image to reel in multiple pasts or pucker up for present anxieties, letting go into the now with the spittle-strewn *o* of a garbled moan. Or a yawn. The schlub outlined in *Evening Colours* (2019) sinks into an armchair beside a toxic-orange view that rips a new image: an asphyxiated fish and a torched tree. Drowsiness twines blindly with crisis, almost to suggest that the world has enough allegory, it is engorged—*get real!* Urgency is mollified in agreeable distraction. This hiberna and gangrenous rendering is not to shore up privacies or fortifications; it is like a liquid that grows a skin, a boggy indeterminacy. Moreish now for snoozers: coagulant, coddling marsupials whose fingered frame is brandished recyclable (*Lovely Pungent* [2018]); a tableau of alarmist red sees pets indulge in a catnap despite a deathly time stamp of 737,152 days (*Sleep Furiously* [2019]).² The daffy renderings of cartooned monks, a stupefied teddy, or a sheepish panda gesture to the aesthetic digestibility of the cute—a state of suspended agency. Imagining the world as perennially cowering to human will, the cute is more smothering divergence. “Nostalgia” is a dirty word, churned with fiction and encrusting commerce. So boring. Jeffordian time, rather, is a substance disordered and garbled, as it is often felt. The plasticity of the past is a fallible plug for the leaky, needy holes of the now. Time as “a force of deformation in the material world,” as Jefford says, asks “how the past is formed or unformed, which in turn forms or un-forms the way forward.”³ Jefford’s segmented time, then, is spasmodic and cloggy: clockworks deteriorate, rotations

stammer, sheer days are absurd pageantries. Content is intuited like watermarks on loose sheets of consciousness, privileging blotchy impressions over hard facticity. The imaginary numbs the edges of inherited pasts and may circulate strategically or ignorantly, like the apocryphal’s denatured logic or the red herring’s artifice. The gorge between historical trajectory and imaginative leap articulates Jefford’s pregnant moments. *Little difference between living and lying*—the thought squirts into my brain. The large rosettes of the *Buffering* series (2020–21) show medieval European imagery of moralistic narratives alongside more everyday gravities of digestion and duty. Dread eats itself in paralysis and overdrive, fatalism and transgression. Mottled and sinewy, each quashed floret resembles a warping of that omnipresent symbol of stasis: the buffering wheel. Of inertia and technic deadlock, it is a rich and treacly cipher. In *Buffering: the smell*, Jefford excerpts Pieter Jansz Quast’s depiction of scent (*De Reuk* [1618–45]) where a peasant’s defecation is met by a snuffling pig—the scatological circle of life. Image and surface fuse like the deadening process of flower pressing. In their torpor as stuttering doomsayers or dreary lodestones, these discs conjure the faulty infrastructure behind the image; defect snags at acceleration in an unintentional ouroboros. Elsewhere, the beast of ignorance is licked in magic⁴—its appetite can disappear things, *abracadabra*, and forget about it. Servers, sweatshops, coral, coelacanths, *poof!* It’s a tactic that *Buffering: Not then not now not ever* negates: time, though intolerable, is expressly charged as unforgettable. Through curdled motions and exhumed histories, window views and modeled stairways, Jefford hints at speculation’s bending of time to carve space. Unrealized projections or accidental fissures serve as temporal loopholes to think time materially. Archaeologies are a kind of portrait, too. Omens breed in the night. Lost keys full of secrets. Victories of nauseous dissonance . . . look at the time! *Sweet dreams*.

1 Sebastian Jefford in conversation with the author, November 12, 2021.
2 These time stamps, sometimes numeric patterns, record the days from day 1 of the Common Era to the day when the respective artwork “began.”
3 Sebastian Jefford in conversation with the author, November 12, 2021.
4 See *Buffering: Old bad news* (2021).

93 Sebastian Jefford, *Looping (III)* (detail), 2021. Courtesy: the artist and GIANNI MANHATTAN, Vienna. Photo: Alexandra Colmenares
94 Sebastian Jefford, *Buffering: Not then not now not ever*, 2021. Courtesy: the artist and GIANNI MANHATTAN, Vienna. Photo: Alexandra Colmenares
95 Sebastian Jefford, *Buffering: Old bad news*, 2021. Courtesy: the artist and GIANNI MANHATTAN, Vienna. Photo: Alexandra Colmenares
96 97 Sebastian Jefford, *Natural Gas* installation view at Liebaert Projects, Kortrijk, 2021. Courtesy: the artist and Liebaert Projects, Kortrijk. Photo: Alexandra Colmenares





