



K Allado-McDowell
The Known Lost
May 7 – September 7, 2025

Swiss Institute (SI) is pleased to present *The Known Lost*, the first exhibition of the work of writer, artist, and musician K Allado-McDowell. Featuring a stage set composed of theatrical backdrops, a platform, and a microphone, the exhibition serves as a rehearsal and performance space for Act I of Allado-McDowell's opera of the same name. The gallery's scenography depicts a proposed monument, which will be made to recognize and honor all species that have ever lived and gone extinct on Earth.

Presented in the lower-level gallery, the monument is rendered in a graphic style, reminiscent of early 20th century European Spiritualist painting, across seven cloth backdrops. In the center, a platform hosts a set of books containing a list of the scientific names of the 180,285 known extinct species from all kingdoms, compiled by Allado-McDowell from paleobiology databases. This list functions as both the libretto of the opera and the names to be engraved into the monument. While the list acknowledges and celebrates life, it also frames life as ephemeral. Visitors are invited to read or sing the species' names over an original score by composer Derrick Skye. In doing so, they collectively rehearse and perform the first act of the opera, realizing the monument in the collective imagination - a foundational step towards its eventual construction.

Like a gravestone marker, the monument is a testament to the known lost species, whose names will cover the walls of an abandoned quarry, further marking the impermanence of their lives in stone for posterity. Allado-McDowell's monument is designed to preserve knowledge of the biosphere's history and act as a Rosetta Stone and site for reflection and pilgrimage for thousands of years. The names will be carved in a font by type designer Jeremy Mickel that uses dead alphabets and animal-inspired letterforms to indicate important information about each species, such as to which family it belongs and when it appears in the fossil record. Like the list of species, the quarry is a combination of natural and human-made absence. It is also a sublime and overwhelming byproduct of industrial activity, an accidental work of art, and a decimated site of capitalist extraction. Extinction is a biospheric process that necessarily leads to adaptation. The site might similarly enact renewal, restoration, or reimagination of the Anthropocene landscape.

There is a wealth of knowledge regarding the ongoing human- and capital-driven extinction event, known as the sixth mass extinction, yet there is so much that remains unknown. As species continue to go extinct, their names will be added to the monument in a recurring ritual performance designed to continuously honor life on Earth. Projected into the stage-set version of *The Known Lost* monument at SI, visitors will wander the quarry's metaphoric terraces, reading a seemingly endless ledger of lost species names. Its caverns will host the sounds of the opera - amidst other products of interspecies relationships - in an attempt to break the human-centric gaze inherent in our systems and technologies, reorient ourselves in a larger biospheric and ancestral frame, and face the incalculable loss that is yet to come.

The Known Lost (concept drawings 1-7), 2025
UV print on lightbox fabric
Typeface by Jeremy Mickel
Courtesy of the artist

The Known Lost Libretto Act I (scenes 1-7), 2025
Seven oversewn hardcover books
Typeface by Jeremy Mickel
Courtesy of the artist

Original score by Derrick Skye
Commissioned by The Lincoln Center

Research by Pierce Myers

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K Allado-McDowell wishes to thank Mary Birnbaum, Cath Britton, Oana Botez, Stephanie Fleischmann, and Marcos Lutyens.

This exhibition is curated by Alison Coplan, Chief Curator.

About K Allado-McDowell

K Allado-McDowell is a writer, artist, and musician. They have authored several books with GPT-3, co-edited and contributed to multiple anthologies, and regularly publish essays on art, AI and ecology. They created the neuro-opera *Song of the Ambassadors*, and record and release music under the name Qenric. They established the Artists + Machine Intelligence program at Google in 2015. Allado-McDowell has spoken at TED, The Long Now Foundation, New Museum, Tate, Serpentine Gallery, HKW, Moderna Museet, Christie's, MacArthur Foundation, MfN Berlin, Ars Electronica, Sónar, and many other venues, and has taught at SCI-Arc, Strelka, and IAAC.

About Swiss Institute

Founded in 1986, Swiss Institute (SI) is an independent nonprofit contemporary art institution dedicated to promoting forward-thinking and experimental artmaking through innovative exhibitions, education, and programs. Committed to the highest standards of curatorial and educational excellence, SI serves as a platform for emerging artists, catalyzes new perspectives on celebrated work, and fosters appreciation for under-recognized positions. SI is committed to being an organization that is diverse, equitable, accessible, and environmentally conscious in its work, structure, and programming. Open to the public free of charge, SI seeks to explore how a Swiss context can be the starting point for international conversations in the fields of visual and performing arts, design, and architecture.

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