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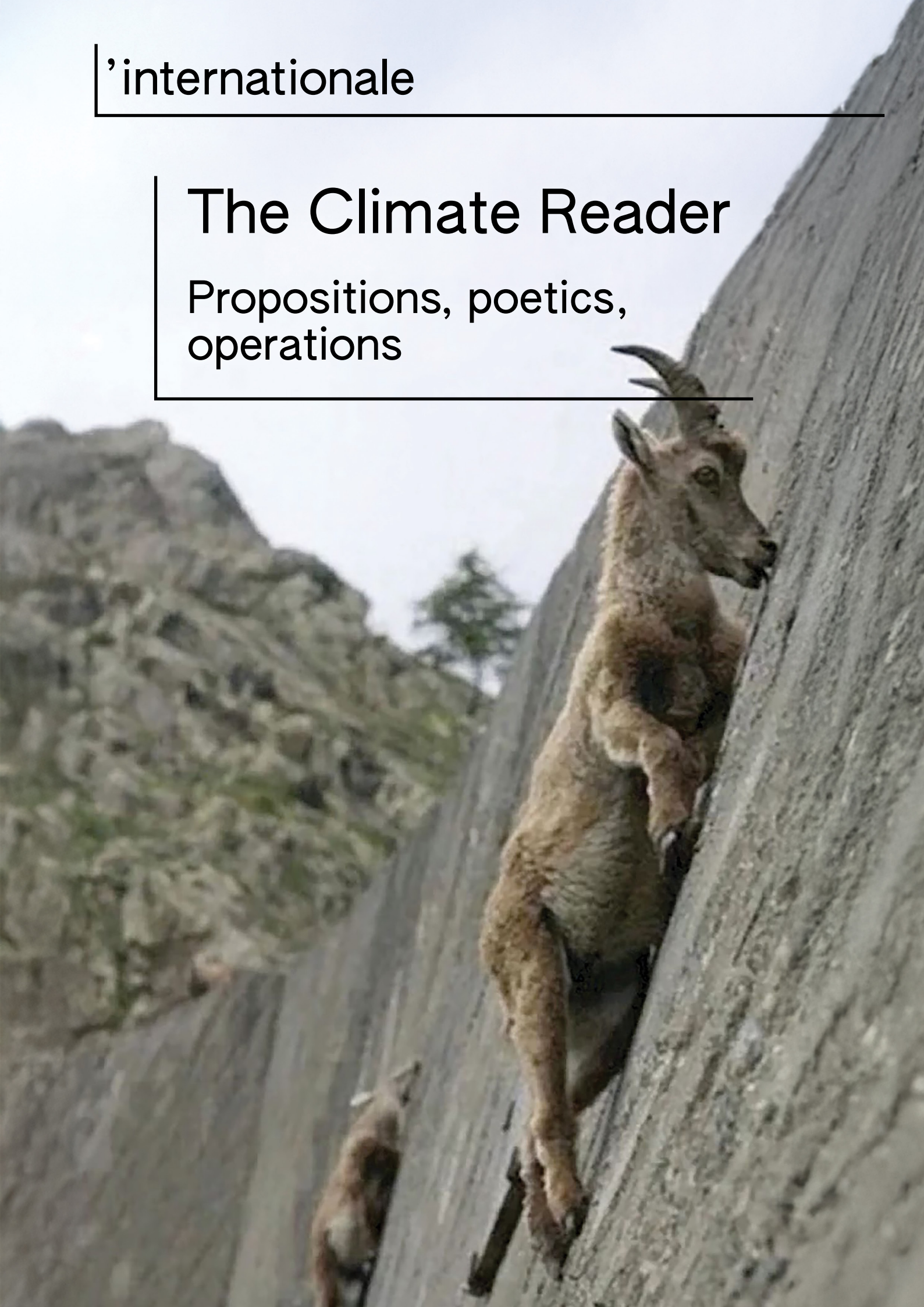
The Climate Reader

Propositions, poetics, operations



As the garden was located on leased land that had been designated for construction, cultivation in the ground was not permitted. Growing the potatoes in sacks was one way of overcoming this obstacle. This made harvesting easier, as the potatoes could be sorted when the sacks were emptied. However, the plants would have been happier growing directly in the soil, where they could extend their roots and have more stable access to nutrients and water. Photography: Åsa Sonjasdotter and Marco Clausen, 2010.

POLYNÉSIE

Un secret qui tie

Dans les années soixante, les autorités françaises ont sciemmen[illegible]ché les conséquences

Les essais nucléaires militaires français

De 1960 à 1996, la France a fait 210 essais nucléaires. En Alg[illegible]erie, jusqu'en

A cost-effective way to fix a technical flaw in the free market —that photosynthesis has not previously had a price tag.

Close-up of dug-out clay with iron-rich ochres in its colourscape. Photo: Zayaan Khan

Åsa Sonjasdotter, *Towards Peasant Cultivation of Abundance*, Gothenburg: ArtMinotor, 2024, pages 38–39

Samia Henni, 'Performing Colonial Toxicity': 2023, Framer Framed in collaboration with If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution, Amsterdam. Photo: © Maarten Nauw / Framer Framed

Keywa Henri, *Kassulu tolili: Anaxi wonumingali lo moloma* (Story of Beads: Anaxi's Choice), 2025, still from animated movie, 4 min 20 sec

Robel Temesgen, *Practising Water*, 2023. Photo: Shimelis Tadesse

Eline Benjaminsen & Elias Kimaiyo, 'Footprints in the Valley' 2023, 8 min 30 sec, video still

G, *WHAT WOULD IT BE IF THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE AND ONLY FEEL WOULD BE IN 3D*, 2021, installation at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, OPEN 2021. Photo: Sander van Wettum. Courtesy the artist

’internationale

The Climate Reader

Propositions, poetics, operations

Introduction

Nick Aikens and Nkule Mabaso

15 Dec 2025

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At a time when several planetary boundaries of the Earth system have already been surpassed, creating feedback loops of intensification, the essential role of the arts must be to speak up and make space for collective action, care, and imagination – which are so often endangered by politics of isolationism and exclusion – as well as for the speculative construction of just, eco-transition-ready paradigms that shrug off the logic of capitalist expansion.

– Hiuwai Chu, Meagan Down, Nkule Mabaso, Pablo Martinez and Corina Oprea, 2022[1]

1. Hiuwai Chu, Meagan Down, Nkule Mabaso, Pablo Martinez and Corin Oprea (ed.), *Climate: Our Right to Breathe*, Berlin: L'Internationale and K. Verlag, 2022, p. 13.

This reader assembles contributions published by L'Internationale Online (LIO) in the context of the Climate Forum (I–IV), a series of online seminars hosted by HDK-Valand that took place between 2023 and 2025 as part of the four-year project 'Museum of the Commons'. Bringing together over twenty artists, curators, academics and activists, all working through forms of practice-led research, the Forum was conceived as an iterative space of dialogue and exchange across discursive, artistic, political and operational registers in response to climate breakdown and ecological degradation. Building on and extending the work of L'Internationale's *Climate: Our Right to Breathe* (2022), it has been an attempt to extend one of that book's central propositions: that 'climate' is to be understood as an ecosocial condition that intersects the ecological, the social, the political and the cultural.

Over the course of four day-long seminars and throughout the accompanying publications (comprising reading lists, commissions, edited transcripts and dispatches), in terms of the address to climate, there has been a consistent focus on and return to practice, or what was described during Climate Forum III as the interrelation of 'poetics and operations'. On the one hand, this has manifested as a move away from the discursive register in which climate and climate breakdown are so often evoked or called up, and towards naming and amplifying the operations of what we term 'change practices'. On the other hand, there has been an insistence on the speculative, associative register of artistic practice as a vital means to 'think climate', through and across many layers. As the organizers, we have attempted to approach the ecosocial condition of climate in kind: not as a thematic to be described, explicated or represented, but rather a reality that shapes and is attended to by the constellation of artists and thinkers taking part. At the same time, we developed and structured the series itself in terms of practice, for example by publishing accompanying readings selected from *Climate* and elsewhere ahead of each session, as a means to facilitate collective study among Climate Forum contributors, publics and LIO readers.[2] We subsequently extended the ideas put forward in the sessions by publishing edited transcripts and commissioned contributions online, all of which are assembled in this reader.

Methodologically, we have adopted an interdisciplinary and transhemispheric approach to address power relations, epistemic hierarchies, cultural assumptions and asymmetries in the responsibility for and the experience of climate change. This orientation allows for critical reflection on how climate knowledge is produced and whose perspectives are legitimized, while challenging extractive modes of knowledge exchange and advocating for reciprocal, situated forms of dialogue that recognize interdependence while respecting difference.

The structure of this reader follows the sequencing of Climate Forum sessions I–IV, with a section assigned to each, opening with readings selected by that session's convenors. These are followed by presentations, edited transcripts of conversations, and commissioned works. In 'Climate Forum III' we have additionally included two 'dispatches', shorter responses to the sessions by people who attended. The resulting constellation of texts is by no means exhaustive or fully reflective of the breadth of practices and ideas the Climate Forum engaged with. Still, it offers further means through which to navigate our current climate.

Climate Forum I was convened by curator-researcher Nkule Mabaso, artist Åsa Sonjasdotter and researcher-educator Mick Wilson in November 2022. The morning and afternoon sessions foregrounded situated artistic practices, working with and through the land in diverse contexts across the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe. In the analogous first section of this volume, the accompanying readings (which include contributions to *Climate* by Marwa Arsanios and Munem Wasif) are introduced anecdotally by Mabaso. There then follow contributions by Sonjasdotter and the artist Zayaan Khan that, spanning text, photography and moving image, chart their respective relations with land in rural Sweden and Cape Town, South Africa. Sonjasdotter's 'Cultivating Abundance' (2024) traces the history and representation of monocultural farming techniques in Sweden through her long-term artistic research project. Outlining the dangers of these techniques, both ecological and cultural, the project uncovers the vital work being done by counter-movements to the monopoly of large-scale agribusiness. In 'Eating clay is not an eating disorder' (2024), Zayaan Khan explores the qualities of clay – specifically that found at Devil's Peak in her home town of Cape Town – as food, as body, as memory, as witness, as storyteller, as time machine. Khan's encounters with clay emerge from different forms of situated knowledge – scientific, sensorial, material and emotional. In this section we also include an interview with Kasangati Godelive Kabena, whose work *Made 10* (2023) was produced for and screened at Climate Forum I. The dialogue between Mabaso and Kabena offers a reflection on Kabena's *Made* performance series (2021–23), which investigates the political and ecological dimensions of bodies, human and beyond. *Made 10* in particular reflects on vegetal agency and ecological time. This section closes with the 'Art for Radical Ecologies' manifesto (2023) compiled by the Institute for Radical Imagination, a collective project working at the intersection of art and activism and a partner of L'Internationale. The text, collectively written over a period of many months, makes a

2. 'Collective study', a term and practice introduced by radical thinkers Fred Moten and Stefano Harney that alludes to a 'study without end', has inspired LIO's approach to research and publishing. See for example Nick Aikens et al. (ed.), *Collective Study in Times of Emergency*, L'Internationale Online, 2024, internationaleonline.org

compelling case for 'aesthetic-political concatenations that interpret creativity as a radical character of the social and not as a commodity'.[3]

Climate Forum II was convened in September 2024 by Nick Aikens and Mabaso under the title 'Colonial Toxicity, the Climate Movement and Art Institutions'. The readings chosen and introduced here by Aikens and Mabaso are 'How to Keep On Without Knowing What We Already Know, Or, What Comes After Magic Words and Politics of Salvation' (2022) by Mônica Hoff, and Ursula Biemann's 'Late Subatlantic. Science Poetry in Times of Global Warming', previously published in the LIO publication *Ecologising Museums* (2015). Both point to the trajectory of and discrepancies in the ways L'Internationale has engaged with climate over the last ten years. 'Climate Forum II – Readings' is followed by an extensive contribution by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, Olivier Marbœuf, Samia Henni, Marie-Hélène Villierme and Mililani Ganivet. Titled 'The Debt of Settler Colonialism and Climate Catastrophe' (2025), the piece is an edited transcript of a session convened by Petrešin-Bachelez, curator, former editor of L'Internationale Online and one of the editors of *Ecologising Museums*. The panel assembled research approaches and forms of address towards this 'debt', speaking to and from former or present-day French colonies in the Sahara, the South Pacific and the Caribbean and the various forms of ecological, emotional and imaginative damage that have been wrought. One of the central claims of *Climate* was to think climate through the lens of the ecosocial. Petrešin-Bachelez extended this at the Climate Forum, insisting on the need to consider climate intersectionally. Next, in a commissioned text, Jakub Depczyński, the curator and chair of the Climate assembly within L'Internationale's Museum of the Commons project, builds on the panel 'Can Art Institutions Strike for Climate?', which he convened as part of Climate Forum II. With activists Kinga Parafiniuk and Helen Wahlgren. The panel reflected on how art institutions might support (or hinder) the work of the climate movement. Here, Depczyński considers the trajectory of L'Internationale's work within its Climate assembly and what institutions can learn from the movement.

The contributions emanating from Climate Forum III, also convened by Aikens and Mabaso, also foreground artistic practices within institutional framings and beyond. Under the title 'Towards Change Practices: Poetics and Operations', this third forum was structured around two exchanges between an artist and a curator, each of which is published here in edited form. As their chosen readings for collective study, Curator Zola Zoli van der Heide offered the poem 'Graduation' by Koleka Putuma (2020) while her interlocutor artist G offered the 2023 essay 'Depression' by Gargi Bhattacharyya.[4] Part II' reflects on death and grief in G's work and narrates their ongoing project of collaboration in the context of the Van Abbemuseum's forthcoming collection display, considering the life–death cycle of artworks and exploring how else death might operate within heritage institutions amid practices of sustainability and care. At stake here is the possibility of breaking the stranglehold of infinite accumulation and conservation that is at odds with the acknowledgement

3. See 'Art for Radical Ecologies Platform', Institute of Radical Imagination, instituteofradicalimagination.org.

4. Previously published in her collection *We, the Heartbroken*, London: Hajar Press, 2023.

of climate breakdown. Artist Otobong Nkanga and curator Maya Tounta's contribution 'Poetics and Operations' moves between Nkanga's studio in Antwerp; the farm she co-runs with her brother Peter in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria; and Akwa Ibom, the space she co-founded with Tounta in 2019, in Athens, Greece.[5] Nkanga's poetry and close readings of images and objects serve as entry points or invitations to dwell on questions of transformation, failure, regeneration, repair and change.

The final range of contributions reflects the ambition of Climate Forum IV, titled 'Our World Lives When Their World Ceases to Exist', convened by Aikens, Mabaso and curator Merve Bedir. This section speaks of and to Indigenous peoples, practices and land relations, and how they are 'called up' within non-Indigenous cultural institutions. Here, Bedir's chosen readings for her session 'Financialization of the Environment; Fluid Practices of Survival and Resistance' comprise an expansive prelude.[6] Her interview with Kulagu Tu Buvongan, a collective of majority Pantaron Range Indigenous Lumad members, details the ways their collective practice, across sound workshops and installations, is responding to the appropriation and destruction of Indigenous land and culture in the Philippines, and to the ongoing murder of Indigenous activists. In 'Breaths of Knowledges', artist Robel Temesgen describes his current artistic research project *Practising Water; Rituals and Engagements*. Across two geographies – those of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia and the Glomma river in Norway – Temesgen's investigations in and through water are articulated as processes of listening, breathing and translating. Then, in an exchange between Kalin'a Tɨlewuyu artist Keywa Henri and researcher and archival programme coordinator Anaïs Roesch, Henri discusses their background, their studies, the development of their commitment and how their identity feeds into their work. In the last contribution, 'Some Things We Learnt: Working with Indigenous culture from within non-Indigenous institutions' (2025), curators Pablo Lafuente, Sandra Ara Benites and Rodrigo Duarte offers a series of reflections and critical insights into what it means to work justly with Indigenous communities in, and from within, non-Indigenous institutions, drawing on their own experience of working on projects together with Indigenous communities in Brazil since 2017.

Climate discourse has been shaped largely by perspectives rooted in the Global North, resulting in partial narratives that have overlooked the uneven distribution of environmental harm, responsibility and knowledge. Reflecting on the structural limitations of prevailing ecological debates, including gaps identified after the publication of *Climate*, for the Climate Forum we took on the challenge of fragmentation produced by geographical exclusions. Recognizing our position as forum organizers based in the Global North and our relation to the Global South, we deliberately situated climate change within transnational, geopolitically diverse contexts. By including contributors from diverse regions and lived realities, the Climate Forum has foregrounded how ecological crises have been and are being experienced, interpreted and contested across varied social, cultural and territorial settings. The aim of this approach is to resist the abstraction of climate change into universalized

5. See Akwa Ibom, akwaibomathens.org.

6. Conversations with architect Ola Hassanain, whose texts appear in the readings, were formative in shaping this panel.

frameworks and instead to emphasize its entanglement with specific histories of colonialism, extraction and dispossession. By creating space for geographically situated knowledge, particularly of communities directly affected by ecological degradation, we have worked to defragment debates and make their underlying power relations visible. In this way, the series and publication have come to operate as a network of mediating platforms that bridge otherwise disconnected geographies of climate knowledge.

Climate Forum I – Readings

Nkule Mabaso

13 Nov 2023

The following anecdotes are organized around seeds and colour in order to draw to one's mind the connections between feminist politics, land struggles, ethnobotany and sustained, embodied archival engagements that present pluralities of resistance to dominant economic and social systems. From here, we move to the two readings for Climate Forum I, Munem Wasif's juxtaposition of archival plant images and Prussian blue cyanotypes of rice seeds that poetically speak of the degradation of indigenous agricultural practices by colonialism and its continuities through colonialist-capitalist legacies of monocultural production, and Marwa Arsanios on the politics of seed collections and preservation.

Anecdote 1

The creole seeds are beings with nonlegal status; the seed guardian is an undesired being with a legal status. She knows that the beings with nonlegal status are her only allies. In this desertic territory, there is a real water scarcity: the little water there is, is either sucked by the hydroelectric mechanism already in place or the one in the process of being built, then diverted through a government-built irrigation system to endless hectares of rice plantations.

Marwa Arsanios[1]

Anecdote 2

[undated notes]

In the leather bag the following items are contained:

— 2 Skirts, 1 brown, 1 check

— 1 navy twin set (new)

— 1 winter night dress

— 1 winter pyjamas

— 2 winder panties

— 1 blue dress

— 1 yellow jersey

The leather bags were given to the security branch on the 16 May 1969 and given to me on the 06 of May 1970 upon my admission to hospital.

[signed] W. Mandela[2]

1. Marwa Arsanios, 'A Letter Inside a Letter: How labor appears & disappears', Hiuwai Chu, Meagan Down, Nkule Mabaso, Pablo Martinez and Corin Oprea (ed.), *Climate: Our Right to Breathe*, Berlin: L'Internationale and K. Verlag, 2022, pp. 124–25.

2. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, *491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013, pp. 95–96.

Anecdote 3

In the performance gesture titled *Made 5* Kasangati sits is a blue dress, on a chair in the middle of a river at the Kwame Nkrumah University, Kumasi, Ghana.

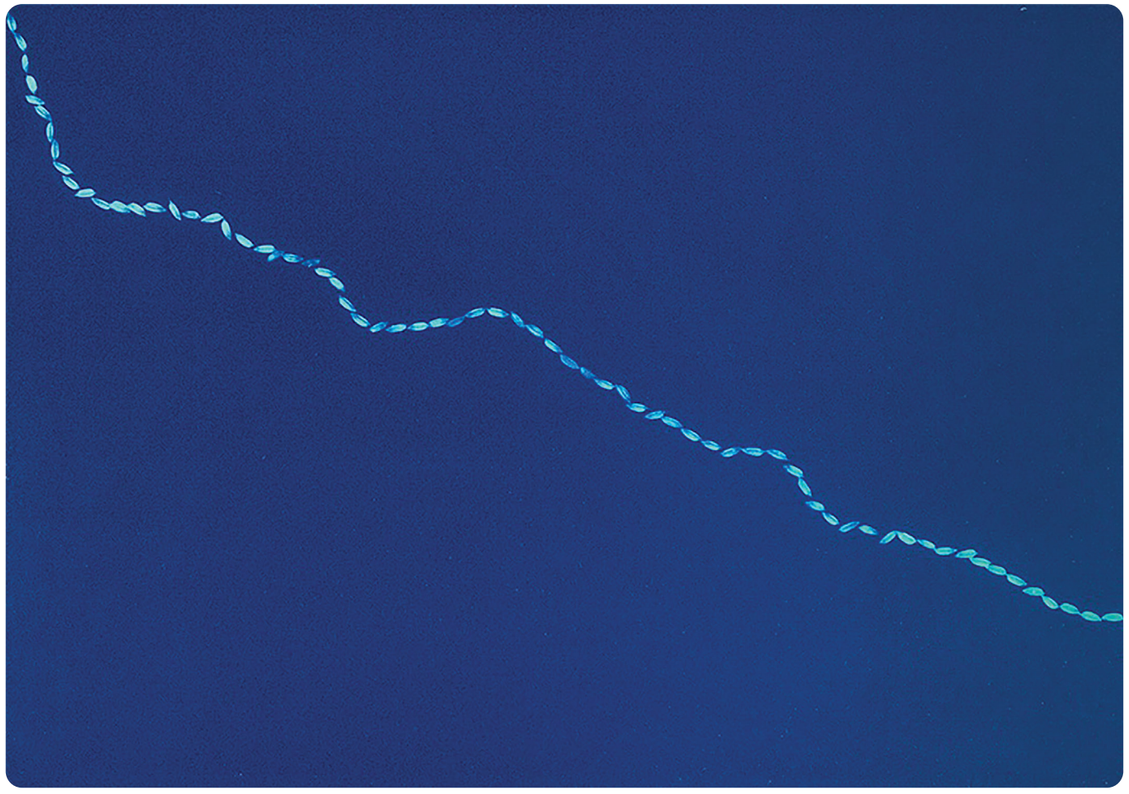
Kasangati Godelive Kabena, *Made 5*, 2022. Photo: Justice Amoh. Image courtesy of artist

Climate Forum I: Readings

Munem Wasif, 'Seeds Shall Set Us Free II', 2022

Marwa Arsanios, 'A Letter Inside a Letter: How labor appears and disappears', 2022

Marwa Arsanios, still from *Who Is Afraid of Ideology? Part IV – Reverse Shot*, 2022. Image courtesy of artist



Munem Wasif, *'Seeds Shall Set Us Free II'*: 2022, detail (part of a series). Cyanotype with rice grains

Cultivating Abundance

Åsa Sonjasdotter

28 Jun 2024

This is a story that begins from soil that accumulated comparably recently, geologically speaking. It is generated from clay that gathered by the fringes of the vast ice cap that covered the northern hemisphere until some 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. The retraction of the ice left behind vast plains of mineral-rich earth. Over the years it bore ground to oak and elm forests, where it became soil that would prove to be very generous for farming.

I would learn to know this soil intimately. I grew up in its habitats and by its waters and I was fed from its yields, harvested in my family's back garden. The scattered houses of the settlement where we lived were squeezed between vast farm fields where we kids laboured, weeding sugar beets in the summer. We should not drink the water from the wells, we were told, as toxic stuff used in the fields leaked into it.

Extract from a map of southern Scandinavia, the region from which this research departs

Fields of the Sveriges utsädesförening (Swedish Seed Association). Photography courtesy Lantmännen, c. 1907

Having grown up near these fields, yet with an unsettled feeling towards them, some twenty years ago I began looking more closely into their stories. One of the sites I visited for research was a local centre for plant breeding. When the janitor learned that I was a visual artist, she asked if she could take me to the attic; there were a few things she wanted to show me. Pointing at long rows of what I would come to learn were photographic silver-gelatine glass plates stacked side by side across the floor, she asked, could you make use of any of these? The plates were covered in dust and pigeon droppings. The moments captured on these plates, I would later learn, documented the very first steps towards monoculture plant breeding as it is practised today by the global seed industry.

I continued researching this history as well as its counter-movements. The outcome of this research has been processed in various formats, among them the 2022 film *Cultivating Abundance*, made in dialogue with local seed association Allkorn (Common Grains) and plant breeder Hans Larsson. The film revisits the photographs and moving images recorded and then archived at this plant-breeding centre, which was later called the Swedish Seed Association. Further, it follows Larsson's and Allkorn's work to restore and regenerate still-extant peasant-bred grains that have survived the monocultural takeover.[1]

1. For further information about Allkorn, see allkorn.se.

Tracing these events with respect to the soil, there was a decisive moment that brought about a shift in relation to the land – a shift that, in many ways, enabled monoculture farming to become a thinkable and even credible concept. Between 1749 and 1827, a few generations before the formation of the Swedish Seed Association, the Swedish state imposed land reforms in this region.[2] For about a thousand years before the reforms, the land had been in the custody of peasant communities – even when it was owned by the church, by the crown or by lords. In this older system, each farming village formed a legally responsible entity. Thus, all of the village's inhabitants were collectively responsible, for example, for tax payments. The land reforms compartmentalized the land and allocated each farmhouse of the village to one land unit. One member of each farming household became the private legal owner of both the farmhouse and the land. The remaining people in the household had legal rights only through this person. In a patriarchal hereditary system such as this, this person was most often a man. The initiative to found the plant-breeding centre, which opened in 1886, came from farmers and landowners that had gained wealth through these reforms.

2. The Storskiftet (Great Partition) was an agricultural land reform in Sweden imposed by the government from 1749 onwards, with the purpose of shifting over to a new system where every farmer owned a connected piece of what was formerly village-community land. The reform was slow, however, and new reform laws were eventually introduced. The Laga Skifte of 1827 was a milder reform with better consideration for local necessities.

Excerpt from the film *Cultivating Abundance* by Åsa Sonjasdotter, made in dialogue with the plant breeder Hans Larsson and the Allkorn association, 2022
Watch movie on internationaleonline.org

The voice-over of the film *Cultivating Abundance* (2022) introduces the purpose of the silver-gelatine photographs at the Svalöv Institute:

> These glass plates document the very first years of the Swedish Seed Association in Svalöv. It was here that crop breeding for uniform crops was systemized, becoming the approach practised today by the global seed industry.
>
> The breeders knew it was possible to grow uniform crops: Nearby, Copenhagen's Carlsberg breweries had demonstrated this. Since the end of the 1880s, Carlsberg had cultivated a 'pure' yeast culture from a single strain of fungus. This enabled them to predict the

outcome of the brewing process, making large-scale production much more efficient. So, the breeders in Svalöv applied the same method to plants.

This method was, in the words of the plant breeders themselves, a 'total reversal of the old understanding'.[3] Instead of saving selected seeds, which since ancient times had been understood as a regenerative, ongoing process of crop adaptation, breeders worked towards 'recognizing and controlling the uniformity' of 'already existing' properties in the seeds.[4] The traditional understanding, that living matter is in constant flux was abandoned as a result of this shift. Instead, ideals were formed in resonance with theories of immutable laws of hereditary, such as those proposed by German friar Gregor Mendel in the 1880s.[5]

To put these theories into practice, selected plants were inbred over several generations until so-called 'pure lines' emerged from which genetic 'contaminants' had been removed.[6] Crops showing traits of interest to breeders were taken from the fields to the clinical environment of the laboratory, where they first underwent the process of inbreeding. Once a varietal 'pure line' had been realized, it was then crossbred with a 'pure line' of a different variety of the same crop. The aim was to obtain a new, so-called 'elite variety' that would combine desirable features of both 'pure' strains in one and the same plant.[7] This crossbred 'elite variety' would then be propagated in large quantities, to be sold and distributed over long distances for large-scale cultivation. The plant-breeding institute in Svalöv became internationally renowned, receiving prestigious study visits from scientists based at leading research institutes abroad.

The technique of monoculture plant breeding was developed in conjunction with experimentation in the visual representation of uniform and standardized crops, using the recently invented technique of photography. The light-sensitive medium generated black-and-white images, emphasizing contrasts in volume and line while omitting colour. Early photographs show how photographers embedded at the institute developed a method of visually imposing 'originality' and patterned uniformity on the plants. Root crops were sorted and arranged into rows and grids in the field after harvest, or else attached to metal poles on wooden structures that lifted them into the air.[8] A sheet was then placed behind each structure, whitening or blackening the surrounding environment. Indoors, a studio setting was created. Here, grains and root crops were placed in wooden boxes filled with soil to suggest a farm field, again with white or black sheets suspended behind them.

The production of such images ran parallel to the breeding of crops towards uniformity. However, as this breeding technique required up to ten growing seasons to achieve results, in the early years of the institute's operation, it was the soon-to-be-obliterated peasant-bred crops that were used as props to visualize 'originality' and uniformity in the institute's studio settings.[9]

3. '*Sveriges Utsädesförening 1886–1936. En minnesskrift*', *Sveriges Utsädesforenings Tidskrift*, no. 46, 1936, p. 168.

4. Ibid.

5. J.G. Mendel, '*Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden*', *Verhandlungen des naturforschenden Vereines in Brünn, Bd. IV für das Jahr 1865, Abhandlungen*, 1866, pp. 3–47. For an English translation, see 'Experiments in plant hybridization', *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, vol. XXVI, 1901, pp. 1–32. For a contextualization of this regained interest in hereditary laws, see Staffan Müller-Wille, 'Leaving Inheritance behind: Wilhelm Johannsen and the Politics of Mendelism', in *A Cultural History of Heredity IV: Heredity in the Century of the Gene*, Berlin: Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 2008, pp. 7–18.

6. '*Sveriges Utsädesförening 1886–1936. En minnesskrift*', p. 168.

7. Ibid.

8. The photographs referred to here are currently archived at the Centrum för Näringslivshistoria (Centre for Business History) in Bromma, Sweden. As I detail later in this chapter, they were moved from a cold-store barn at the Lantmännens breeding company in Svalöv to this professionally structured archive, a process I was involved in.

9. See documentation of the photographic installation *The visual process towards the image of uniform and original crops*, presented in the exhibition 'The Kale Bed Is so Called Because There Is Always Kale in It' by Åsa Sonjasdotter at the Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany, 6 October to 3 December 2023.

The Sveriges utsädesförening (Swedish Seed Association). Photography courtesy Lantmännen, c. 1907

Disseminated through advertisements and thematic journals, these photographic representations of monoculture cultivation became vehicles for conveying a visual impression of what the agricultural landscape could become. Drivers towards the realization of an 'original' and 'purified' landscape, such images furthermore came to amplify what I call the *eugenic imagination*: voices from the eugenics movement would argue for the possibility – ultimately, the 'duty' – of 'purifying' and homogenizing life forms without restriction. The establishment of the State Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala in 1922, an institution that politicians from all parties agreed would serve the common good, was directly fuelled by the results of the Swedish Seed Association's activities.[10]

In 1936, together with geneticist Fritz Lenz, Erwin Baur and Eugen Fischer published their research in *Human Heredity Theory and Racial Hygiene*, a book that was to provide scientific justification for the biopolitical ideology of National Socialism.[11] Baur and Fischer were, respectively, the directors of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Züchtungsforschung (Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Plant Breeding Research), founded in Müncheberg, Germany in 1928, and the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Anthropologie, menschliche

10. Maria Björkman and Sven Widmalm, 'Selling Eugenics: The Case of Sweden', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2010, pp. 379–400.

11. Elina Olga, Susanne Heim and Nils Roll-Hansen, 'Politics and Science in Wartime: Comparative International Perspectives on the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute', *Osiris*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2005, pp. 161–79.

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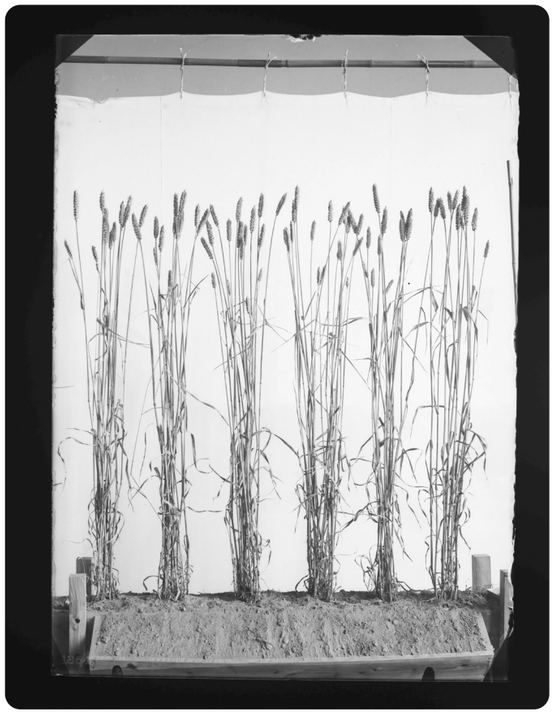

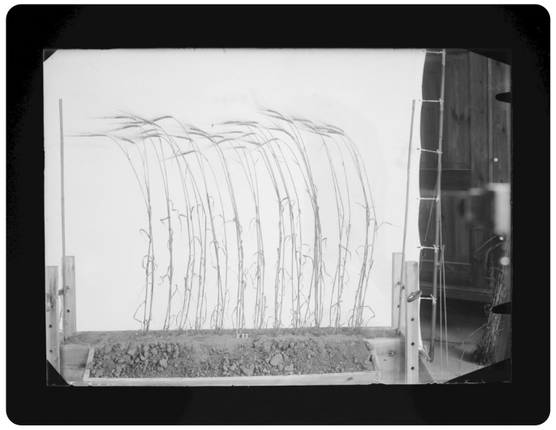

Parts of the photographic installation *The visual process towards the image of uniform and original crops*, presented at the Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany, 6 October to 3 December 2023, and at Lunds konsthall, Sweden, 31 May – 26 August 2024

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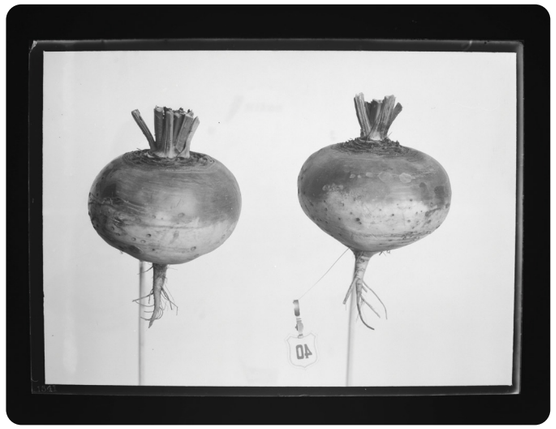


Erblehre und Eugenik (Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics), founded in Berlin in 1927 – both directly modelled on Swedish equivalents.[12]

During and following World War II, food shortages incentivized increased state control of agricultural production for the Axis and Allied powers, a centralization of structures and standards that would benefit both totalitarian interests and commercial food industries.[13] State-level approval of uniform plant varieties incentivized industrial seed producers to claim that they had the right to collect royalties on their 'new' and 'original' varieties, regardless of the fact that they had been engineered by the mining of peasant-bred seeds' genetic code. Some of these producers would grow into multinational enterprises after the war. Based in Europe, they joined forces for the instigation of the globally purposed International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV). Its declared aim was to 'protect' the commercial seed companies by stipulating 'universal criteria' for defining 'original' varieties as such that were copied from standards developed under the Nazi-controlled agricultural sector in Germany and France during the war: *distinctiveness*, *uniformity* and *stability* (DUS).[14] In 1961, UPOV passed a convention defining how the so-called DUS criteria are to be applied, and not only in relation to breeding.[15] It further stipulates that only crops meeting the DUS criteria are permitted to be grown for the market by professional farmers. This obliges farmers to pay royalties to the breeders of these varieties, including when they save the seeds from their own crops for the next season. Today, the UPOV convention is fully ratified by seventy-seven countries, including those belonging to the EU. Currently, while other large agricultural countries such as Argentina, Brazil and India are in the process of ratifying the agreement, peasant movements and civil rights organizations in West and Central African countries where UPOV is currently mobilizing to gain access are pushing back against its implementation.[16] The fact that the UPOV convention is packaged into free trade agreements (FTAs) and further bilateral and global trade agreements such as TRIPS (on intellectual property) and TPPI (on trans-pacific trade) makes the negotiation of their every detail more complicated.

Returning to *Cultivating Abundance*, another trajectory exemplifying the peasant counter-movement to the impositions of agrobusiness follows the work of plant breeder Hans Larsson. In the early 1990s, Larsson initiated a research project on ecological farm systems at the Agricultural University in Alnarp, South Sweden. As part of the research, extant local peasant varieties of rye, wheat, oats and barley that had been stored in the Nordic Gene Bank's deep freezers, located on the university's grounds, were test-cultivated on campus.[17] In collaboration with the farmers who would later form the seed association Allkorn, the project was extended to test-cultivate the grains on farms in various other climate zones. With this step, Larsson and the Allkorn members began very slowly – so slowly that it went unnoticed as an act of dissidence – to move these peasant grains away from the system controlled by the monoculture industry and into the hands and soils of farmers.

12. For further reading on how the institutionalization of breeding became a central aspect of the fascist and National Socialist political project, see Tiago Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs: Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016.

13. Nazi Germany gave the fascist Vichy regime – unoccupied France, its ally – the task to produce food not only for its own people but also for Germany. This was organized through a centralized system in which a set of criteria for the genetic composition of the seeds would be implemented with the aim of increasing the yield. After the war, this invention of a concept for genetic standardization proved to suit industrial production methods as well as the lasting interests of commercial royalties. Their alignment was manifested in 1961 when the first International Convention for the Elaboration of Regulations for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants was held in Geneva by UPOV.

14. Christophe Bonneuil and Frédéric Thomas, 'Purifying Landscapes: The Vichy Regime and the Genetic Modernization of France', *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 532–68.

15. The variety must be distinct (D), that is, easily distinguishable through certain characteristics from any other known variety (protected or otherwise). The other two criteria, uniformity (U) and stability (S), mean that individual plants of the new variety must show no more variation in the relevant characteristics than one would naturally expect to see, and that future generations of the variety through various propagation means must continue to show the relevant distinguishing characteristics.

Still from the 2022 film *Cultivating Abundance* by Åsa Sonjasdotter, made in dialogue with the plant breeder Hans Larsson and the Allkorn association, 2022
Watch on internationaleonline.org

One vital stage in this process was that of attuning the crops to the current climate and soil conditions, altered since the grains were frozen. Larsson describes how he undertook this procedure by building upon the concept of 'evolutionary plant-breeding', which has become the established scientific term for breeding using traditional techniques and varieties. Central to this technique is that it involves a diverse range of varieties, that it is based on selection instead of imposed crossbreeding, and that it takes place with and within the surrounding habitat:

> In order to breed plants, you need to find locations that emphasize the climate and the environment. Everything about the surroundings is important: the trees, the water sources, and the wild plants as well. You are, in fact, co-creating an environmental space. This is a place that has become a breeding ground. Where the land itself and the trees play a part.

By the time the plants are in blossom, the film team revisits the breeding ground. Larsson continues sharing the process:

> The breeding of evolutionary material is a fairly recent approach. A variety has to be stable and uniform in order for it to be registered. And this is the total opposite. They're not uniform, they're not stable. Quite the contrary, these have evolutionary capacity in them. They're a blend of many different varieties. And that mixture means that they have lots of resistance genes as well. So, these crops are healthy. And in truth, this is the only route that will lead to disease-resistance in the future.

Moving to the breeding ground's collection of wheat varieties, Larsson continues:

16. Cloé Mathurin (ed.), *Incorporating Peasants' Rights to Seeds in European Law*, Brussels: The European Coordination Via Campesina, 2021, pp. 15–18. See eurovia.org.

17. The Nordic Gene Bank, today the Nordic Genetic Resource Center, was established on the campus of the Swedish Agricultural University in 1979. The Swedish Seed Association initially hired its scientific staff from this university as well. See Gösta Olsson (ed.), *Svalöf 1886–1986. Växtförädling under 100 år*, Svalöv: Sveriges utsädesförening och Svalöf, 1986.

Still from the 2022 film *Cultivating Abundance* by Åsa Sonjasdotter, made in dialogue with the plant breeder Hans Larsson and the Allkorn association.
Watch on internationaleonline.org

The heirloom material is often more diverse with regard to colour. We don’t know why they come in different colours, but it appears to be tied to the plant’s antioxidant content. I’ve used it as a criterion for selection; I like to use the colourful varieties. I see it as a form of communication between the plants and the breeder. And that the plants are signalling something. I’ve often noticed that this colourful material develops nicely. It’s an indication that something is happening at a deeper level as well. And if there is a change at the genetic level, the colours shift as well.

Still from the 2022 film *Cultivating Abundance* by Åsa Sonjasdotter, made in dialogue with the plant breeder Hans Larsson and the Allkorn association, 2022
Watch on internationaleonline.org.

Since a few years ago, Allkorn has been running a self-organized seed bank for storing and redistributing the grains regenerated and rebred by Larsson. This enables the association to operate autonomously, away from seed monopolies. However, according to the ruling seed laws, the members of Allkorn are not permitted to exchange their grains beyond the association. The law recognizes the association and its members as one and the same juridical body – not unlike the legal status of villagers prior to the land reforms. Within this legal body, exchange is allowed. But since the association is growing rapidly – at the time of writing it has come to include more than 450 members – Allkorn is forming a critical mass, moving away from dependence on the state-authorized agribusiness monopoly.

Allkorn is one example of the many powerful initiatives that the global peasant movement is mobilizing against the enforcement of industrial monoculture farming and its resulting erosion of ecosystems, social structures and local economies. With La Via Campesina as one of the main coordinators, represented in Sweden by the association NOrdBruk, this movement is also mobilizing several unilateral legal complexes against the seed industries’ claims. Central to these is Article 19 of the ‘United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas 2’ (UNDROP). The declaration was adopted in 2018 by the member states of the United Nations and marks a considerable shift in discourse. This statement defines and recognizes peasants, for whom traditional seed relations are central, as fundamental for food and agricultural production throughout the world. Further documents protecting traditional seeds are Articles 5, 6 and 9.3 of the ‘International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture’ (ITPGRFA), negotiated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for open access to seeds stored in public seed banks, as well as Article 31 of the ‘United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’.[18] Ending seed monopolies is an important step towards opening up non-authoritarian and non-totalitarian agricultural relations with – and taken from and by – the soil.

Endnote: Abundance away from the scarcity/growth paradigm

The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), an autonomous and self-organized global platform that works at regional as well as global levels towards advancing food sovereignty systems, includes not only peasants, but also other practitioners excluded from and resisting the legislative dictations of agrobusiness, including women and youth: small-scale food producers and growers landless rural and agricultural workers, fishers and fish workers, hunters and gatherers, pastoralists and herders, Indigenous peoples, and food consumers. The platform has mobilized a set of terms that are used by the IPC and its member organizations, in their political negotiations with regional, national and international bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), to

18. For further reading on the current legal status of the work of Allkorn, see, for example, Mathurin (ed.), *Incorporating Peasants’ Rights to Seeds in European Law*, pp. 15–18.

define peasants' and Indigenous peoples' practical, philosophical, social, and political conceptions. With regard to the term 'traditional knowledge', for example, the 'International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture' (ITPGRFA),[19] which came about thanks to the negotiations of the IPC and other organizations, states the following:

> Peasant and Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge encompasses all knowledge, innovations and practices that peasant communities and Indigenous Peoples have developed over time, and continue to develop in the present and future, in order to preserve and develop biodiversity and to use it sustainably. Traditional knowledge has the following key characteristics:
>
> It is based on oral transmission;
>
> It encompasses dynamic knowledge that is constantly enriched by peasant and indigenous innovations;
>
> It is essentially collective knowledge that is embedded in a social system of communities.
>
> All measures to protect traditional knowledge need to take into account these criteria.[20]

The IPC's policy documents, which serve as tools for political negotiation, are developed within and between its member organizations. In this way, together with those of other organizations, the IPC's millions of members constitute a 'social system of communities' that collectively collate, describe and redefine the 'worlds' and conditions of their practices and knowledge systems, as a means to halt and resist their violation by state-authorized global agro-industry.

The shift towards monoculture plant cultivation made cultivars a matter of *conservation* and of *scarcity*. Of the many thousands of grain varieties that grew in farmers' fields in southern Scandinavia before monoculture breeding was invented and implemented, only around one hundred were still alive to be stored in the Nordic Gene Bank when it was finally established in the 1970s. Today, the remnants of their genetic data are monitored and controlled by large administrative institutions such as the EU Database of Registered Plant Varieties or the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. These costly apparatuses make peasants' seeds dangerously scarce, a reminder that scarcity is always relational. In *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996), geographer David Harvey elaborates scarcity's political and ecological dimensions:

> To say that scarcity resides in nature and that natural limits exist is to ignore how scarcity is socially produced and how 'limits' are a social relation within nature (including human society) rather than some externally imposed necessity.[21]

19. The 'International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture' (ITPGRFA) was adopted in 2004 following seven years of negotiation. Today it has 148 member states and intergovernmental signatories, including the EU.

20. Philip Seufert (FIAN International), Mariapaola Boselli, and Stefano Mori (Centro Internazionale Crocevia), *Recovering the Cycle of Wisdom: Beacons of Light Toward the Right to Seeds: Guide for the Implementation of Farmers' Rights*, The Working Group on Agricultural Biodiversity of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), FIAN International and Centro Internazionale Crocevia, 2021, p. 15: fian.org.

The process of slowly and repeatedly thawing frozen grains from the Nordic Gene Bank and reintroducing them into cultivation carried out by plant breeder Hans Larsson together with the Allkorn farmers, as described in *Cultivated Abundance*, is an insurgent act of rescue. In view of their initiative, the question arises as to why the seed industry was not convinced that monoculture varietals would come to reign without heavy legal protection. In the article '"The Goal of the Revolution Is the Elimination of Anxiety": On the Right to Abundance in a Time of Artificial Scarcity' (2016), the poet and scholar David Lloyd offers a response:

> Perhaps, then, we need to recognize that precisely what neoliberal capital fears is abundance and what it implies. Abundance is the end of capital: it is at once what it must aim to produce in order to dominate and control the commodity market and what designates the limits that it produces out of its own process. Where abundance does not culminate in a crisis of overproduction, it raises the specter that we might demand a redistribution of resources in the place of enclosure and accumulation by dispossession. The alibi of capital is scarcity; its myth is that of a primordial scarcity overcome only by labor regulated and disciplined by the private ownership of the means of production.[22]

Considering Lloyd's argument, how does abundance emerge, especially when starting from a place that for centuries has been marked by the paradigm of scarcity and growth? In *Cultivating Abundance*, Larsson describes how the process of traditional breeding, which generates an abundance in plant variation, cannot take place in an isolated laboratory. It needs to evolve in the living habitat, where 'everything about the surroundings is important'. The breeders' task here is that of 'co-creating an environmental space' in which the plants, according to Larsson, can thrive and open up for pollination. In line with Larsson's description, the IPC's policy documents emphasize the importance of the fact that peasant and Indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge of plants emerges *relationally*, and which, as such, cannot be restricted to genetic information about a particular crop, variety, or plant characteristic. On the contrary:

> [It] encompasses knowledge on how these plants relate with their environment and all other organisms or living beings that constitute the local ecosystem and, based on this, the ways in which they interact with other plants, animals and microorganisms, whether cultivated or wild, and the care to be taken in the event of problems related to the plants' health, their nutritional and cultural use by human communities, etc. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that such knowledge is embedded in a social system, meaning that it has been built in a community, and that it is continuously shared and enriched within this community.[23]

It is thus through the mobilization of peasant relationalities of cultivation, 'through interaction with other plants, animals and microorganisms,

21. David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996, p. 147.

22. David Lloyd, '"The Goal of the Revolution Is the Elimination of Anxiety": On the Right to Abundance in a Time of Artificial Scarcity', in Critical Ethnic Studies Collective (ed.), *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 203–14.

23. Lloyd, '"The Goal of the Revolution Is the Elimination of Anxiety": On the Right to Abundance in a Time of Artificial Scarcity', p. 30.

whether cultivated or wild’, combined with continuous sharing, that communities in places marked by the paradigm of scarcity and growth (such as the agricultural landscape of southern Scandinavia, where this enquiry began) can contribute to the recovery of sensory relations and social responsibilities towards collectively generating abundance.

Eating clay is not an eating disorder

Zayaan Khan

17 Sep 2024

The act of eating things outside of what we consider food has the generalized label of *pica*, often seen in young children who explore the world through their mouths, but also in many older people who have the compulsion to eat non-food items that may be damaging to their health: spoons or other metal objects, soap, concrete, paint peeling off plaster (which may contain lead), even soil (which may be contaminated) – all of which may lead people to need urgent care or even surgery. Pica's cravings have a sensory element. It is considered an eating disorder, listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and subdivided into an array of Latin-worded disorders such as hyalophagia (the eating of glass, which brings up vivid memories of watching the Mad Hatter's tea party and the wonderful crunches when they eat the teacups) or lithophagia (the eating of stones). There is a distinct dissonance around eating these non-food items which gets everything grouped together under the banner of 'disorder', immediately creating a sense of othering. Imagine the stresses new parents go through when their mouth-sensory-seeking child is labelled as having an eating disorder, when they explore the world and cannot differentiate between what to swallow and what *not* to swallow. Easy to simplify in black and white, but I would like to make some room here to think beyond the usual categories about, or assumptions around, what it is to eat that which is not considered food.

Pica is taken from the Latin name for magpie, *Pica pica*, birds known around the world for their intelligence; for their cultural practices, particularly around grieving, and for gleaning the shiny and the curious. Within a myriad of beliefs with folkloric and mythological associations, the magpie represents both good and evil in equal amounts: immense luck but also bad luck, depending on who you speak to. Kind of makes sense, then, the sweeping grouping of the eating of non-food items under this one banner. Still, I am motivated to make some space in this definition to claim that eating clay is not an eating disorder – that, in fact, we should nominate clay as a valid ingredient.

At the same time, I would like to create space for a new kind of eating: the deep satisfaction and craving for, the love and appreciation of, foods with minimal flavour, especially delectable if they're soft like air or paper. Like puff chips, but the lite version, minimally flavoured air chips – just a dusting of punch. There's a sweetness of nothing there, or perhaps a sweetness in the nothing. My mother loves food like this, my mother who is also well known for her most delicious traditional cooking skills, with spice and mountains of ingredients – but give her, let's say, Japanese fluffy sponge cake (known around here as *bread*, even with its sweetness) and she will melt, not so much for the flavour but for the way the food seems to disappear as you bite into it, a solid food you can breathe in.

I nominate the love of these foods as *insipiphilia* – yes, *insipi-* as in insipid, but not in a negative way. Definitely not 'lacking interest', as dictionaries tell us, but *insipi-* as in, along the spectrum of 'tasteless'. Have you ever craved rice paper? Or clay?

At the shop across the road from our house we used to buy rice paper for half a cent a sheet, an amount accessible to very young children. The way it would be ripped off its cardboard backing as it hung on the shelf in that dark and dirty old shop, then the softness it melted with as you manipulated it past your teeth – it satisfied the textural and sensorial cravings, but ultimately tasted like nothing.

Paper UFOs, the rice- or wafer-paper outer with delicious sour-sweet sherbet inner; the paper, offering a beautiful textural weight of nothingness, balancing out the sweetness and short shock of sour. White Rabbit Creamy Candy and other milk sweets of our childhood, toffee goodness wrapped in dry and also creamy rice paper. You meet a moment of nothing, of minimal flavour, in this salivation that mixes with the sweet milkiness.

This desire is so specific – for a texture more than a flavour perhaps? Or for the group of foods that lie along the nexus of soft–light–delicate, in flavour *and* in taste (these being two different things).

Then there are the cravings that have mostly to do with texture, those where flavour or taste don't really feature, those dubbed *pica* and considered an eating disorder. Twenty years ago I worked in retail, and one of my coworkers on the cosmetics floor was pregnant and in her third trimester. She fondly told the story of how her husband drove her up to Devil's Peak alongside Table Mountain, Cape Town, to where the old road led past an area of red slate. Here, after a short walk with incredible views of the city and harbour, she would harvest some of the clay which was slaking off in pieces as the watery wall kept the slate soft. She recounted how she'd pick off pieces with glee to eat them right there with her front teeth (here she was specific: this was not a chewing affair, but a continual nibble), and packed some in a tissue for later. All along this walkway on the mountain are tributaries and waterfalls where clean icy cold sweet mountain water is ready to quench your thirst and help you wash down your serving of clay. Her craving was textural: the way the moisture had seeped in, the transition of moist to sodden, hardness into softness through eager teeth. She salivated, recalling her story, smacking her lips; you could still see the desire for that iron-slatey clay.

This craving exists around the world but is mostly known as an African custom. In South Africa, pieces of clay are sold at medicine stalls, at taxi ranks, by fresh produce hawkers, and so on, eaten sweet with a sprinkle of sugar or sprayed with some salt water (even sea water). Word on the street is, it is not considered an eating disorder but a common enough foodstuff. This land is so rich in all kinds of clay that the recognition goes beyond cultural and human–animal separations. What is this desire we have, all of us creatures who eat – dogs consuming concrete, people's stories of craving old plaster – a kind of cool damp mineral need?

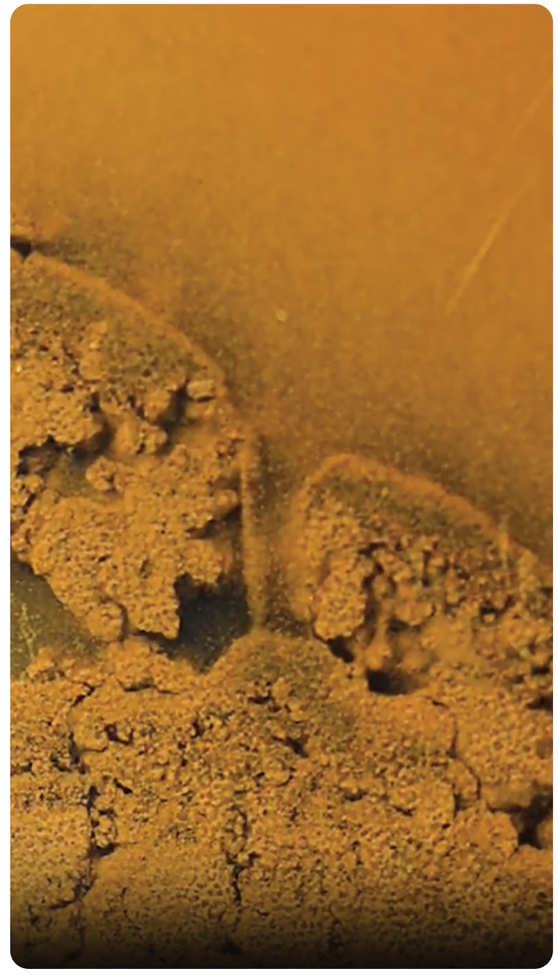
Mineral cravings take us to literal heights, from Alpine ibexes climbing cliffs to lick salt deposits, to my coworker driving up the mountain.

‘Crave that mineral’ meme. Found on Tumblr, October 2014

We crave that mineral clay, so much so that we *should* recognize it as an edible thing, as a food, if you will.

The medicinal regard for clay is perhaps better known than clay as a foodstuff or cooking ingredient. Clay is recommended in cases of light poisoning, where it is said to bind to the consumed contents, or as a detox, particularly for heavy metals, and in general for stomach or gut ailments, as it can stick to toxins and regulate the digestive tract. It is also used to dry out mouth ulcers or wounds. What a magic thing this clay is, to adhere to your loose stool while also being the main material of your toilet bowl and the tiles that surround it. Clay is the finest of geological components and can take some million years to form. It flows the furthest with water and will settle at the ultimate destination; to find clay, it is often just about following the flow. Clay stays suspended for a very long time, needing hours or days to settle after the water stills; it will stay in suspension as long as the water is in suspension too. It’s like a down feather dancing on a never-ending warm summer breeze. There’s a soft delight in this, in the plumage of clay in water.

The past few years I’ve been focusing on working with the terracotta-red clays that come out of Devil’s Peak, the mountain I grew up on and that me and my husband’s family grew up on. We have many stories of forced removal in our family, in our communities, and working with the land directly



Heather Thompson, video footage of Devil’s Peak clay, detail, still.

has helped to unlock some of the silent sounds I’d been picking up, distant calls through the veils, calling me. There’s a soft and deep listening, so clear but silent, so audible but only inside my mind. Hearing silence through inside ears, I try to find what I’m looking for as I walk this field I’ve walked so many times before. I imagine I can trace the lines of where the bulldozers moved, I see them in their chaos and through the crying and screaming of the forcibly removed. I see this all in the calm of day, walking to where my grandparents’ house was, where they refused to leave and were among the last to do so.

My grandfather always had this steely resolve, and I imagine how much this period influenced the rest of his years till when I eventually met him, two generations later. Something in him broke that day, as it must have in everyone when they were told to move from this neighbourhood to make space for white people who never moved in. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was a way the Apartheid government of South Africa could actualize their Apartheid Spatial Planning, architecturally designating

Section of fallow District Six at the foot of Devil's Peak, with Table Mountain, flat as a table, behind. Foundations of homes and other buildings can be seen in the forefront. Photo: Zayaan Khan

the entire City of Cape Town (and the rest of the country) according to racial segregation, forcing entire communities out in order to create spaces for 'Whites Only'. District Six is one such area, well known as it sits under the spectacular vista of Table Mountain, our Wonder of the World. Speaking with anyone who was from District Six, the value of this neighbourhood was the community's wellness, the archetype of what Apartheid was trying to destroy: multicultural, multiracial, a mix of religions and designations; people got along famously, neighbours cared for one another, children did not go hungry, even at strangers' homes. There was always a place to rest your head, as my uncle would tell us. That all changed as people were moved. Less doors opened for weary travellers, pots stopped being placed on the stove in the early hours to ensure food for those who might need it. Apartheid, as part of the colonial project, aimed to destroy Indigenous ways of knowing and decimate the sense of community that was part of the natural solidarity of people who lived under severe oppression.

Much has changed since then, but scratching beneath the surface, not much has changed, too. This land still lays fallow, never being forged into a suburb for 'Whites Only'; I've walked here over and over, wondering about the dirt my mother kicked up with her friends and, perhaps a couple hundred years before, what hyenas or lions or baboons had kicked up in their scuffle. Some millions of years before all of them, prehistoric animals stepped exactly where my mother later stood, regardless of what the land was doing at that time. We know that this land has been roughly the same for at least 1.5 million years, when the mountains were still an island and as the oceans receded.

There is a lot to witness in this place of nothing, with its makeshift housing and overgrown grass, boulders sticking out, the undulation of land as it cascades down the foot of the mountain. There are big witnessings and tiny ones too. I trace the new arrangements of sandstone rocks as

people remove them or rearrange them over a beloved pet's grave. I come to harvest fennel pollen in the warm times and clay in the seasons when the rain is just beginning. I come to listen to new stories: maybe the wind has remembered something for me, or the antlions have caught a new anecdote in their sandy trap. I trace the lines – this clay is leading me, from a Deep Time-line to all the forms this clay wishes to be – and I follow these lines and check for knots, check for breakages, let it all land inside me and manifest in the practice of making (whatever that making may be). Oftentimes, it feels as if my making is not up to me, so I sculpt and I make chalk and record sound and plan terracotta make-up palettes – what is all this, if not methods of storytelling?

Antlion nests where larvae wait in the central den of the dug-out pit and sense passing prey through the falling sand and clay particles. Photo: Zayaan Khan

This clay alludes to satisfaction, a textural perfection not found in many other edible things. It settles in the space of insipiphilia, a nothing taste that is full of texture – so astringent, it claims all your water for itself. Kind of slimy but smooth, a smodginess, if you will. Not as plastic in texture as you'd prefer for sculpting, but not impossible. This clay is so alive and raw, some excavated from deep underground and some superficially harvested. The invisible microbial worlds are fermenting it in wild ways. I have stored these bags of processed clay with just a bit too much water content so that fermentation kicks in and bubbles its way through the heart of the wedged clay loaves. They are growing, truly, more than any processed clay I've lived with; algal blooms, fungi, even a happy little slug are making their home there. The bubbling fermentation I cut through when I open a new bag makes me think of how the invisible ancient microbes who must still live in this clay, or at least in the now-aerobic environment they find themselves in, are being consumed by aerobic bacteria. We crave that mineral, after all.

Working with this clay is an immediate time machine. Forming over millions of years, not able to be synthesized, this clay must know things beyond our humble evolutionary assumptions. I wonder what the soil remembers and what stories these clay bodies would tell, and I've been focusing on

letting the land know that we remember too. We live in a time of polycrisis – a time when crises upon crises are part of our lived experience – and, as is argued within epigenetics (the study of heritable traits), these crises and traumas are being passed on to generations who have not lived them. I see the trauma lingering in our communities, overlain by further traumas of modern-day extractivism and labour enforced simply to survive in this world. I see how lost I feel and how walking these lands offers me some sense of belonging, offers some answers to questions I don't yet know how to ask. Our colonial heritage brought with it rounds of genocide, both through European illnesses and also mercenaries who, in the late 1700s and early 1800s, were sent to hunt and kill large animals by decree, including our people. They discovered there were cheaper ways to kill our people besides ammunition; they used parts of the land, like the rocks that had been here for millennia.

I learn these moments of history and I need to mourn. I need to return to the sea or to parts of the land and ask forgiveness on behalf of my humanity, to stress that we have not forgotten these stories and we will not rest until we right these transgressions, no matter how many generations it will take. We are hundreds of years away from that violence but we are still uncovering transgressions. We still feel it, we still discover it. We have had three rounds of colonial rule in our part of the world, ending with an unspeakably cruel Apartheid. This violence even seems tame in comparison with the apartheid and genocide we witness in Palestine today, enacted by Israel and largely funded by America, which keeps Palestinian lands, people, plants and animals in a constant state of separateness. With the transition to democracy, South Africa quickly accepted a free-market economy as a global trade value system, despite its severing of many people's livelihoods as foreign investment with foreign gains entered South Africa, only benefiting those who had the money or the means to make this work. So still, we find ourselves ruled by extractive external powers, holding on to the threads of our own survival as the weight of the world's crises keep the struggles alive.

Somehow, my heart beats strong through all of this. My father's family has cardiac weakness; they have died from heart attacks or broken hearts. I have learnt that our hearts inherit our spiritual stories, that they hear ancient tales and hold space for the emotional wealth that has been built up over generations. To grieve with this land is also a type of familial healing, an acknowledgement and processing of pain. Working with this clay, I have learnt a lot about my heart. It's become a muscular metaphor for the processing of trauma, of becoming, of transitions, of relationships finding their ways in the world.

This clay goes through processes where it is wild and alive, full of stone and egg, insect carcasses and bacterial microworlds. It sits in my garden where so many different animals come to visit, poop in the clay, eat the clay, take clay away to build their own homes. Then I process the clay, refine it, separating the sand or stone detritus of forced removal from the microparticles of pure clay and metal minerals. Then, it sits for months

Close-up of dug-out clay with iron-rich ochres in its colourscape. Photo: Zayaan Khan

as I carry on with the daily grind of family care. The processed clay gets wedged to remove any air pockets, which weaken the structural integrity once formed into sculpture, and sits for more time, amalgamating. Ideally I'd let it sit for years, but months will have to do. Sometimes it reaches a year or two and the clay is remarkably smoother and more pliable.

This clay is so precious to me: in my practice, I learn how it leans into some forms better than others, recycling it over and over again. Hardly anything of what I make goes through the intense heat of the kiln's furnaces, where it turns to ceramic once all traces of water are removed – I would say only about 30 percent. I prefer to make new forms, and when they dry, I break these clay bodies into a bucket of water and they soak it up into every crack and pore, meeting every molecule to stay bonded. Clay, as opposed to ceramic, is raw and wild, soft and powdery when dry, and stone-hard when appropriately baked. In clay, there's something about the relationship between water and land, where all the sounds of both the invisibles and the visibles enter the material; there are clues and hints, from a time long before harvesting it, which settle in my ears as I work. In the digging and excavation that exposes this clay through the sandstone sediments, am I hearing some Deep Time memories?

I am convinced by clay, convinced by its satisfaction. I trace new recipes with it, why not, tempted to involve the clay in recipes for the heart. What

Heather Thompson, video footage of Devil's Peak clay, still, detail

can I eat to fortify a broken heart? When faced with questions beyond our immediate knowledge, I turn to our heritage to see where answers may rise up. Growing up in Islam has taught me immensely about the scope of acceptance grief will give you; how much it stretches your capacity to love, how much it is necessary to heal. There is also a particular calm to the fact that there is a *sunnah* recipe for grief,[1] for deep sadness, based on barley flour, milk, a touch of dates or honey, and the simple act of making porridge – recipes dating back at least 1,400 years, which stay humble in their simplicity. This Prophetic Medicine helps to form a road map for adopting recipes as ways to navigate worldly problems, as digestible methods of processing grief.[2]

In the time I have been learning from this clay, I have been learning about love as an ancient force, about romantic love and familial love and the way souls meet each other in a sacred place before landing in our fallible earthly bodies. I have also been pregnant in this clay time, and can't help but acknowledge metaphors of our bodies being made of clay, now that I understand what clay truly is: just the mineral detritus of all life in a particular place and time, contained in and passed through geological Deep Time, the slowest, most reliable time. Much like souls and much like love, there is something about the way my heart became clay in this time, too, especially when I recycle the sculptural work I've made, placing it into water to rehydrate, and I put my ear to the water and hear the gradual slaking of the clay as the water enters its body. It's like the process of a gentle heartbreak, where you are still held in the support of all this perfect water, but you, or the clay, gently fall, falls, apart, fizzing and whizzing, bubbling and collapsing into a fine powder, becoming one with the water, eventually settling at the bottom of the bucket, ready to be dried and wedged and sculpted into new, more powerful forms. This process is much like the aches we inherit and the breaks we go through in our fallible bodies in our fallible lives, where, when the heart breaks but is not broken completely, when it is made anew, there is more potential for fortitude.

1. *Sunnah*, the way of living and being in accordance with Islamic principles and the example set by the Prophet Muhammed, peace be unto him.

2. This has even been shown in clinical trial; see Manal M. Badrasawi et. al, 'Effect of Talbinah food consumption on depressive symptoms among elderly individuals in long term care facilities, randomized clinical trial', *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, vol. 8, 2013, pp. 279–85. Available at: ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.

In this process of renewal I find myself needing to go back to knowing nothing, to be led instead of leading, to lean on other recipes and not create my own. But still, this clay is asking to be yielded, asking to be met with satisfaction, which relays a kind of reciprocity in the relationship. I wonder about a full circle in the metaphoric of being clay-made and of eating clay, as opposed to eating out of clay. Clay is no longer only the food vessel (or wall or floor or roof dressing, among other home necessities), it is remembered as the vessel of our bodies, while we are also eating clay. A strange cannibalism, perhaps, but really a longing for connection, for reclaiming our place in a world run according to necropolitics in the guise of sustainability goals or economic empowerment.

A sliced date collapses into the merciful warmth and comfort of talbinah, a recipe for sunken hearts. Photo: Zayaan Khan

In this moment, I offer a recipe as an attempt at reconnection, as an offering for some ease: Our recipe for Talbinah, the gentle milky barley porridge, with a generous dusting of the clay from this land.

Ingredients:

One cup of milk

Two to three tablespoons of barley flour. We prefer to toast it a little bit before, freshly ground is best.

An offering of prehistoric clay, a spicing of memories, stories and secrets. Just enough to draw in astringency but not enough to detract from the creaminess.

One teaspoon of ghee

One teaspoon of honey

One deseeded date

Method:

Heat up the milk gently and as it climbs, dust in the barley flour, sieving the hard bits out. Stir after each tablespoon, this ensures even texture.

Serve with a teaspoon of ghee and a teaspoon of honey. Garnish with a date when the porridge is still piping hot, let the date collapse and soften.

May this warm your heart and enrich your future memories.

Making Ground

Kasangati Godelive Kabena, Nkule Mabaso

7 Jan 2026

The following short-form interview builds on Kasangati Godelive Kabena's contribution to Climate Forum I – a screening of *Made 10* (2023), as part of the afternoon session titled 'Plant Bodies as Archive'. Touching on the conceptual and thematic dimensions of this work in relation to ecology, climate and worldmaking, Kabena situates her practice within the architectural and agricultural history of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the construction of which disrupted pre-existing farming communities. In her Made series, Kabena employs collaboration as both a performative act and as a speculative and critical tool to question the status, agency and emancipation of bodies – whether human, vegetal or spatial. In *Made 10*, through the recurrent motif of lettuce, she stages acts of planting, uprooting and chopping as choreographic gestures that symbolize transformation, displacement and the hidden histories embedded in land and materiality.

Nkule Mabaso: At the time of Climate Forum I, due to technical challenges, you could not give us insight into the work you had produced. Please now describe the work, and shed light on the insight you wanted to share through it.

Kasangati Godelive Kabena: The *Made* series of performances (2021–23) focuses on the potential of performance as a tool and historical referent. They explore the political status of bodies and their emancipation – beyond just those of human entities. My interest in the corporeal was fuelled by my constant presence in front of a camera (Canon 1300D) between 2018 and 2021, during which I made a series of self-portraits that led to several performance works. The *Made* performances use a specific discursive framework and production method to negotiate questions of egalitarianism, collaboration and more. By exploring ideas of democracy and the distribution of power through the performance itself, a self-referential zone of dissensus emerges. Proposing a speculative analysis, the research investigates the political status of bodies and their potential emancipation beyond the corporeal.

We could say that the lettuces that appear in the work I showed in the Climate Forum open a reflection on bodies and how they can be seen. The state of these lettuces – planted, uprooted and chopped – become evidence of hidden events connecting the lettuce field and the architectural history of KNUST (Kwame Nkrumah University of Technology).

I read 'Land Imaginaries: The Gift' (2024) by Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh and Łukasz Stanek just after collaborating with farmers for the production of *Made 10*.[1] In the article, the authors discuss the architectural paradigm of KNUST and how its formation dislocated an older ecology of agricultural practices. There were many land and farming communities that existed on the site of KNUST's campus before its construction, for many of whom its building was hugely disruptive. The few remaining farms visible on campus now, fragments of cultivated land, have come to constitute a self-referential proposal of how the land might be – as it was once – used or as Ohene-Ayeh and Łukasz Stanek say, 'the takeover of the land by the university is not an event of the past but rather an event that continues to take place every day'.[2]

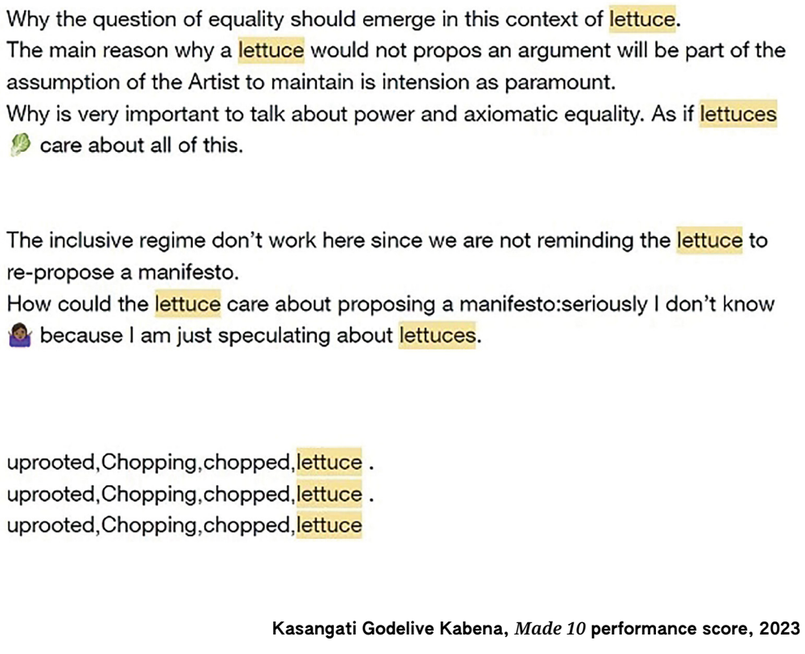
1. Łukasz Stanek and Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh, 'Land Imaginaries: The Gift', e-flux Architecture, March 2024, e-flux.com.

2. Ibid

The question of land here reminds me that bodies in this context do not always reveal meaning, relations and possibilities. In this sense they are in withdrawal. Similarly, the events they form remain volatile. Therefore, any attempt to address through art practice what happened to the communities tends to result in a form of performative operation.

NM: In the work you produced, we see farmers picking lettuce that you then chop on a table. I read the work as an ecological movement between 'bodies' or materials, those being yourself and the lettuce. Can you describe your approach to the site and the process of conceptualizing the performance?

KGK: At first, the farms that are present at KNUST were an aesthetic frame. But my working at one was not a question of using the farm as a site but rather of the farm itself becoming the work. It would have been naive to think of the work as just me chopping lettuce – the important thing to remember is that bodies always form discursive sites. I think of the stages in the choreography, of uprooting, chopping, etc., as different forms of relation to objects or bodies. Every stage in this choreography: changes the approach to the lettuce. From being planted at the farm


uprooted,Chopping,chopped,lettuce .
uprooted,Chopping,chopped,lettuce .
uprooted,Chopping,chopped,lettuce .

Why the question of equality should emerge in this context of lettuce.
The main reason why a lettuce would not propos an argument will be part of the assumption of the Artist to maintain is intension as paramount.
Why is very important to talk about power and axiomatic equality. As if lettuces 🥬 care about all of this.

The inclusive regime don't work here since we are not reminding the lettuce to re-propose a manifesto.
How could the lettuce care about proposing a manifesto:seriously I don't know 🤷‍♀️ because I am just speculating about lettuces.

uprooted,Chopping,chopped,lettuce .
uprooted,Chopping,chopped,lettuce .
uprooted,Chopping,chopped,lettuce

Kasangati Godelive Kabena, *Made 10* performance score, 2023

Kasangati Godelive Kabena, *Made 10*, 2023, 1 hr 30 min, film stills. Shot on location at KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana, 24 November 2023. Contributors Aduku Thimathy, Awintoo Samuel.

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to being uprooted, chopped then discarded, these various stages offer ways to direct attention towards the relations between the lettuce, me and the performative moment. This is a way to think performativity not as something that takes place over a period of time but as an event in a single moment, always staged by different, human and other-than-human entities, not in order to be acknowledged but as a political stance.

NM: What role does collaboration – with other artists, institutions, or even non-human entities – play in your practice?

KGK: A few weeks ago, I was saying that I think working with different institutions, artists, entities and so on is a mess! Everything is so entangled that collaboration does not necessarily mean working together, but also responding to what is denied or not recognised in the working process. The *Made* series questions collaboration as a possibility or aim, we could say, suggesting that collaboration will fail because the self-referential nature of different entities constantly undermines it. *Made 10* creates a space where the positioning of bodies always imposes a certain type of event, which appears not only as a presence but sometimes as a projected proposition, capable of being staged in a choreographic and rhythmic manner. This stage becomes a reference to this event and not the event itself.

NM: Your practice seems to open alternative timelines, moving between what happened, what might have happened, and what could still happen. How do you think about ecological time in relation to this work?

KGK: What is interesting about ecology is that it holds a form of interobjectivity, refusing to acknowledge time.[3] Here, the event becomes more relevant than time passing, because situations cannot be relegated to the discursive arena as time-lapses but rather exist as singular propositions that cannot be grasped and framed. These unseen possibilities that cannot be experienced are what interests me.

NM: What are you currently working on or thinking through?

KGK: I am working on a project that explores reproduction as a process, and how it can be manufactured, through archival images of the Basenji dog from the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo).

3. See for example Tim Morton, *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Art for Radical Ecologies Manifesto

Institute of Radical Imagination

15 Nov 2023

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1. Art is part of the world. Art for Radical Ecologies is part of the struggles to change it.

2. Art is a promise of other worlds, but it is in the actual world that promises must be kept participating in the struggles for its transformation.

3. New materialism and historical materialism together act against exploitation and domination. Speculation opens up to potential becoming counter-hegemonic social practice, otherwise it is neutralization and capture.

4. In our current environmental breakdown, the necessary condition for autonomy of art is its autonomy from the neoliberal-extractivist apparatus. Art workers and art institutions must reflect about their positionality and act accordingly.

5. Art for Radical Ecologies is abolitionist, against police repression, fascism, racism, colonialism and genocide. It is grounded in the voices of the oppressed and is our breath of liberation.

6. The revolutionary subject is not only human. Transversal and interspecies alliances can powerfully act against ventriloquisms, dualisms, and othering hierarchies.

7. Art for Radical Ecologies makes visible the human and other-than-human vulnerabilities and precariousness and takes care of them.

8. Dismantling the foundations of colonial privilege in this era of environmental and democratic collapse is paramount. Art for Radical Ecologies opens up space against the contention and detention of migrating humans and other-than-humans.

9. Struggles are interconnected, because so are oppressions. Ideological and material extractivism abusing lives as resources, means or products must end now. In shared life, liberation is total.

10. End Fossil is the priority. Any complicity with biocapitalism, extractive industry and financial greenwashing in and outside art institutions must end.

11. Art for Radical Ecologies is either anti-capitalist or it is not. Capitalism is the driver of environmental breakdown. There is no such thing as sustainable capitalism. Techno-solutionism and transition reformism are bullshit.

12. Art for Radical Ecologies stands with technologies that free human and other-than-human life and do not perpetuate the exploitation of productive and reproductive labor.

13. Art for Radical Ecologies is generative yet anti-productivist. It embraces degrowth and multiplies questions, terminologies, connections and scenarios.

14. Art institutions funded by toxic philanthropy must be abolished. Anti-museums and alter-institutions are the forms that we adopt for common instituent imagination.

15. As art workers we inhabit spaces of race, class, gender privilege as well as subordination. We stand with those whose freedoms are menaced. We reclaim freedom of speech and stand against censorship.

16. Dystopia is privilege. Enough with the apocalyptic talk, it's not the end of the world, but of global capitalism and its toxic imaginaries. Art repairs temporalities and liberates futurity, opening horizons beyond capitalist realism and catastrophism.

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Sign the manifesto on instituteofradicalimagination.org

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Climate Forum II – Readings

Nkule Mabaso, Nick Aikens

25 Sep 2024

The Climate Forum is conceived as an iterative space of dialogue and exchange responding to climate change and ecological degradation. It builds on earlier research and commissioning that resulted in the publication *Climate: Our Right to Breathe* (2022) and focuses on changing practices. It is driven by a wish to understand how the speculative and critical insights framed within the registers of the discursive, the affective and the symbolic might be operationalized within everyday working.

For Climate Forum II we, the organizers, have selected two texts from the archive of L'Internationale Online that speak to the very dynamic of the affective and the operational; that press for a reconfiguration of the art system's relationships to past, present and future, that appear rhetorically enticing but in fact demand systemic and epistemic change. These dynamics will undoubtedly straddle the historical reflections and present demands for action that permeate Climate Forum II.

In her contribution to *Climate*, Mônica Hoff lays out with fierce clarity the contradictions embedded within the art system's thematizing of the climate 'crisis', which itself calls for a fundamental shift in how it engages and captures temporalities. In the pointedly titled essay 'How to keep on without knowing what we already know, or what comes after magic words and salvation', she asks:

> **Wouldn't thinking about the future as something behind us, and the past as something ahead, as the Aymara people suggest, be a way to learn everything we need to unlearn, in order to stop knowing what we already know?**

In the second text, written for the 2016 publication *Ecologising Museums* edited by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez – also a contributor to Climate Forum II – artist Ursula Biemann describes her film *Subatlantic* (2015). Telling the story of a female scientist on the North Atlantic making observations on glacial metals that took place thousands of years ago, the film and essay point to the meeting of temporalities and types of knowledge – scientific, artistic and poetic – required to engage with climate breakdown beyond representational gesture or discursive signalling. The moment, she writes:

> **... urges art and art institutions to get involved in dynamics that are not comfortably located in the designated human-centric field of cultural inquiry, although altogether disturbingly concrete and pertinent for human continuation. These efforts would not simply seek to ground scientific knowing differently or to draw physical and biological phenomena into a cultural discourse from where they have been effectively discouraged or entirely left out. These efforts aim at breaking down the opposition between science and poetry and instead offer a diverse configuration of that encounter.**

Climate Forum II: Readings

Mônica Hoff, 'How to keep on without knowing what we already know, or what comes after magic words and salvation', in Hiuwai Chu, Meagan Down, Nkule Mabaso, Pablo Martínez, and Corina Oprea (eds.) *Climate: Our Right to Breathe*, Berlin, L'Internationale Online and K. Verlag, 2022, pp.281-295.

Ursula Biemann, 'Late Subatlantic. Science Poetry in Times of Global Warming', in *Ecologising Museums*, L'Internationale Online, 2015.

Ursula Biemann, *Subatlantic*, 2015

The Debt of Settler Colonialism and Climate Catastrophe

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, Olivier Marbœuf, Samia Henni,
Marie-Hélène Villierme and Mililani Ganivet

19 Nov 2025

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Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez: I would like to welcome our four wonderful speakers, who have managed to join us despite the time zone challenges. I would also like to welcome listeners. I would like to thank Nick Aikens, Nkule Mabaso and L'Internationale Online (LIO) first and foremost. Working with LIO brings so many beautiful memories back, especially as the issue being addressed by this panel was the focus of the LIO e-book *Ecologising Museums* that we made nine years ago.[1] While there have been many more discussions and conversations in museums since we put that publication together, what is lacking, I would say, is an intersectional approach. This conversation therefore aims to see how questions of environmental justice can be understood through an intersectional lens. Environmental justice is a systemic issue, a struggle against colonial capitalism that has been affecting the places from which we are speaking today for decades, sometimes centuries. There are a number of art institutions that, embracing the necessity for effective conversation about this issue, aim at going beyond the strategic symbolic gestures of greenwashing.

We will have contributions from Samia Henni, who is in Montreal; Olivier Marboeuf, who is sitting next to me here in Paris; Marie-Hélène Villierme in Tahiti; and Mililani Ganivet in London.

The title of this session is 'Debt of Settler Colonialism and Climate Catastrophe'. I am aware it sounds apocalyptic but we live in apocalyptic times, as the ongoing atrocities in Gaza, Sudan, Congo and elsewhere unfortunately attest. In July 2024, three months ago, Palestinian activist Susan Abulhawa remarked that, compared with the atomic bomb that the US dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, Gaza, which is 40 percent the size of Hiroshima, has had six to seven times more tonnes of bombs dropped on it since 7 October 2023.[2] So, as of July 2024, 219 tonnes per square kilometre of Gaza versus 14.4 tonnes per square kilometre of 1945 Hiroshima.

What we are going to talk about today is the debt of colonial capitalist extraction. We will also focus on its naked impunity: What does impunity enable and what has it enabled in the past? I wanted to address this because it not only touches everyone who is listening today, but generations of our ancestors and generations of human beings and nonhuman beings to come. And the impunity with which colonial systems in particular have operated: when it came to extraction on the one hand as well as land appropriation and usage and the total abuse of that land on the other, all of this has been done with impunity. My understanding of this debt comes from the writing of our esteemed colleague Denise Ferreira da Silva, who has thought about the intrinsic links between coloniality and raciality, which she brings together with the term 'unpayable debt'.[3] This term addresses a debt you carry even though you are not the one responsible for something created over centuries of colonial abuse. Since we are speaking from the heart of empire in Paris, I wanted to bring the geographies of France's colonial relations into dialogue: Algeria, Mā'ohi Nui or French-occupied Polynesia, which is still called French Polynesia today, and Guadeloupe, an island in the Caribbean which is also occupied by the French and where Olivier is from.

1. L'Internationale Online and Sarah Werkmeister (ed.), *Ecologising Museums*, L'Internationale Online, 2016, internationaleonline.org.

2. Susan Abulhawa, Instagram post, 6 July 2024, instagram.com. Given the many months of bombing that have followed, these statistics also now exceed those given in this early report by the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 'Israel hits Gaza Strip with the equivalent of two nuclear bombs', 2 November 2023, euromedmonitor.org.

3. See Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, London: Sternberg Press, 2022, sternberg-press.com.

In our preparations for this talk we realized some people knew each other. Speaking from my heart, I am especially and sincerely indebted to Olivier and Samia for their very engaged, devoted and precise work and writings, and also to Marie-Hélène and Mililani, with whom I have had the chance to work at the Cité internationale des arts where we are sitting today. I now would like to pass the word to Samia.

Samia Henni: Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be here in this fantastic company. I think it's important to have this conversation and to insist that colonialism is very much related to human-made climate change, the Anthropocene and the destruction of Earth. Today, I will share with you work I have been doing the last few years, a project called 'Colonial Toxicity' that discusses the continuity of coloniality that echoes the temporality of colonialism in many places around the world. Today I will focus on the French military nuclear programme in the Algerian Sahara that happened between 1960 and 1966. 'Happened', meaning that it technically happened between 1960 and 1966. But then it continued – because radioactivity does not stop when nuclear bombs cease to be detonated. Colonial radioactivity continued, continues and will continue for years – that's also why it's called 'Colonial Toxicity'.

The French colonial regime, civil and military, built two nuclear sites in the Algerian Sahara: the Centre saharien d'expérimentations militaires (CSEM, or Saharan Centre for Military Experiments) in Reggane, on the Tanezrouft plain of the Algerian Sahara, approximately 1,150 kilometres south of Algiers, and another, the Centre d'expérimentations militaires des oasis (CEMO, or Oases Military Testing Centre) near In Ekker (also spelled *In Ecker* or *In Eker*), approximately 600 kilometres southeast of Reggane. When the French decided to test their nuclear weapons in Algeria, the country was under French colonial rule. The colonization of Algeria started in 1830 and ended in 1962; the War of Independence started in 1954 and ended in 1962. So the French nuclear bomb tests (1960–66) continued after independence. This is because the French promised the newly independent Algerian state that all nuclear testing would take place underground, inside a mountain called Tan Afella, and that therefore there would, as they believed, be no impact on the territory and the people of the Sahara. What happened was exactly the opposite. Out of thirteen underground nuclear bombs that were detonated inside Tan Afella, eleven were not contained. These 'accidents' had a huge impact on the area: environmental, social, political and economic.

In Reggane, between 1960 and 1961 four atmospheric nuclear bombs were detonated. Named after a small jumping desert rodent, an animal called *gerboise* in French, *jerboa* in English, the four atmospheric bombs detonated in Reggane were named *Gerboise bleue, blanche, rouge et verte* (Blue, White, Red and Green Jerboa). And then, between 1961 and 1966, they moved their atmospheric nuclear bombs under the ground, into the granite massif of Taourirt Tan Afella. For their part, these underground bombs were named after gemstones, *Agathe* (Agate), *Béryl* (Beryl), *Émeraude* (Emerald), *Améthyste* (Amethyst), *Rubis* (Ruby), *Opale* (Opal),

Topaze (Topaz), *Turquoise* (Turquoise), *Saphir* (Sapphire), *Jade* (Jade), *Corindon* (Corundum), *Tourmaline* (Tourmaline) and *Grenat* (Garnet), and detonated near In Ekker on the Hoggar mountain of Taourirt Tan Afella. In addition to these seventeen bombs, the French army also tested other nuclear technologies in the atmosphere of the Sahara between 1960 and 1966.

When I was working on the book *Architecture of Counterrevolution: the French Army in Northern Algeria*,[4] I focused on northern Algeria because it became clear that the next research project would centre around the southern part of Algeria, the Sahara, especially following the French promise to declassify some of the remaining classified archives in 2020. However, in 2020 the French authorities closed some of the archives that were already declassified and did not, in fact, open the archives relating to the nuclear weapons programme in the Sahara. In fact, they closed what was already open to the public.

4. Samia Henni, ***Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria***, **Zürich: gta Verlag, 2022.**

Photograph taken in the 1960s by French workers or officers who served in one of the two nuclear military bases (CSEM in Reggane or CEMO near In Ekker). The panel clearly forbids employees and passers-by to take photographs of the sites, indicating that this site was classified as secret on grounds of national defence. Image courtesy Observatoire des armements

This is a photograph from the 1960s of a sign stating that pictures of the French nuclear bombs testing sites in the Sahara were forbidden, at that time, because they were supposed to be secret. Today, the French military archives of their 1960s nuclear programme are still classified. So this whole research project of 'Colonial Toxicity' was, for me, a question of how to make those events, that catastrophe, more public or more accessible to the public: How to find other ways of exposing this secrecy, knowing that these nuclear bombs were no secret for those living in the Sahara, nor for the French who came back to France having lived among and participated in the detonation of those atomic bombs?

When Megan Hoetger, programme curator of the Amsterdam-based performance arts organization If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part of Your Revolution, invited me to participate in their 2022–23 biennial Edition IX called 'Bodies and Technologies', I mentioned that I was working on my 'Colonial Toxicity' research project and that I wanted to find different ways of sharing this knowledge with the public. Therefore I proposed to use the following three forms of performativity, which were also three different forms of publicness: translating, exhibiting and publishing.

Of these, the translation act, called the 'Testimony Translation Project' (2023–), was and is indebted to the work of the French environmental activist Solange Fernex, the Lyon-based French NGO Observatoire des armements and the Franco-Algerian photographer Bruno Hadjih. They collected witness accounts from victims and survivors of the nuclear bombs in the Sahara, and who were either still in the Sahara or in France. I selected forty testimonies that were either in French, Arabic or Amazigh, and we invited twenty colleagues to translate them into English so that we could make them public and share them with the world. The twenty translator-participants include Raoul Audouin, Adel Ben Bella, Omar Berrada, Megan Brown, Séverine Chapelle, Simona Dvorák, Hanieh Fatouree, Alessandro Felicioli, Anik Fournier, Jill Jarvis, Augustin Jomier, Timothy Scott Johnson, Anna Kimmel, Corentin Lécine, Natasha Llorens, Miriam Matthiessen, Martine Neddam, M'hamed Oualdi, Roxanne Panchasi and Alice Rougeaux. We used the platform of If I Can't Dance Studio to disseminate the original and translated testimonies. The publishing of these translations, which are still online, happened before the exhibition and publication to create awareness of the gravity and the seriousness of the disaster that this colonial toxicity generated in the Sahara and around the world.

The aim of the 'Testimony Translation Project' is threefold: first, to begin making these materials available for open digital access; second, to begin the long-term project of their digitalization, as well as their translation into English, allowing for searchability and broader transmission globally; third, to begin to build a broad network of 'translator-participants' – that is, of people who are not professional translators but instead come from various academic, artistic and activist spheres, with practices staked in French and/or Algerian history. This was and is the first disclosure of the 'secret' colonial toxicity which, I emphasize, is no secret to many victims and people. In fact, if one goes to Reggane or In Ekker, one will see open air archives of radioactive environments of ruins.

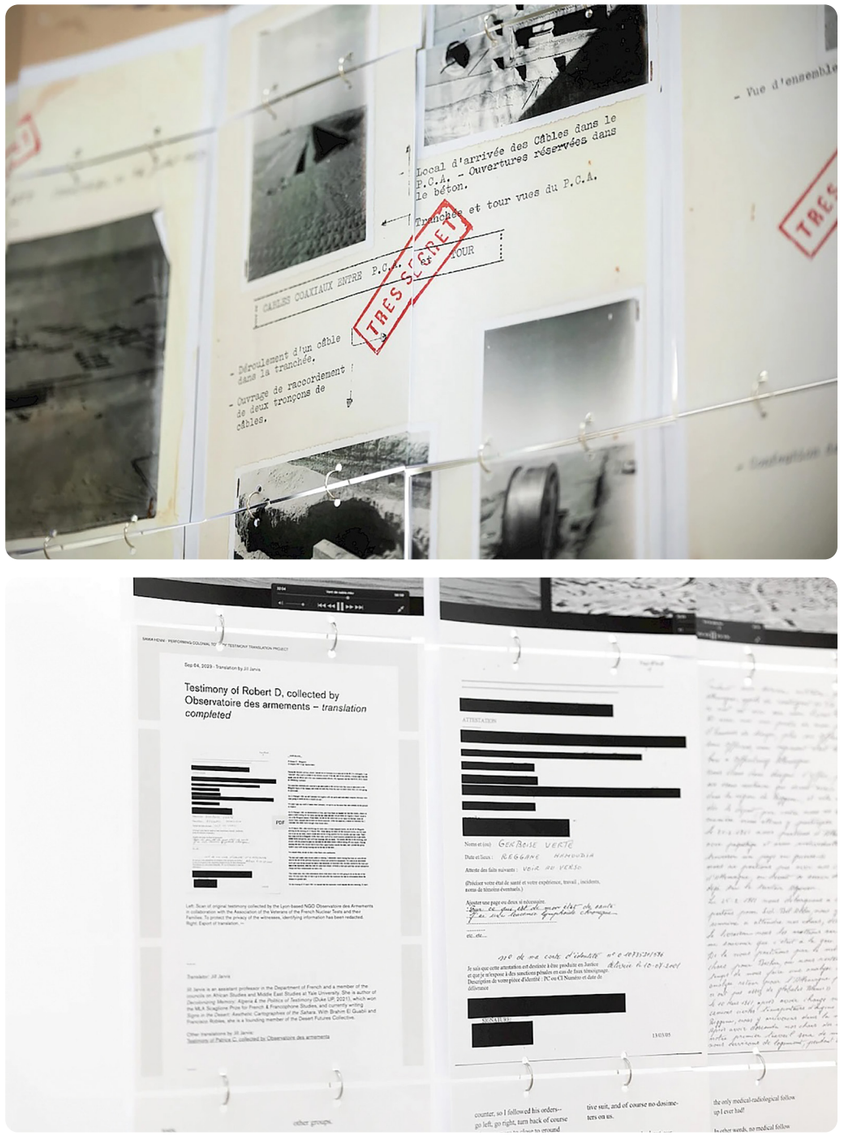
The second act was the exhibition 'Performing Colonial Toxicity' at Framer Framed in Amsterdam (October 2023 – January 2024). It was presented at gta exhibitions at ETH in Zürich (March – April 2024), and travelled to the Mosaic Rooms in London (March – June 2024). Thanks to the initiative of Ariella Aïsha Azoulay and Macarena Gomez-Barris, and the work of Adel Ben Bella and Amelle Zeroug, it's going to open in two weeks at Brown University, and will continue to go to other places – Paris, Berlin, Ottawa and Montreal – next year. I'm mentioning these places because for me the exhibition is also a forum of research and

of publicness, a way of sharing knowledge with different audiences in different places. This is also why I tried to design the exhibition in a way that means it can easily be transported around the world.

The show presents various available, offered, contraband and leaked documents in an immersive multimedia installation, creating with them a series of audio-visual assemblages that trace the spatial, atmospheric and geological impacts of France's atomic bombs in the Sahara, as well as its colonial vocabularies and the (after)lives of its radioactive debris and nuclear waste. Architectural in scale, these assemblages, or 'stations', as I refer to them, were meant to be moved through and engaged with. Visitors were invited in to draw their own connections between what is present in the installation, as well as with what is absent from it.

Installation shots of the exhibition 'Performing Colonial Toxicity', 2023, by Samia Henni at Framer Framed, in collaboration with If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Amsterdam. Photo © Maarten Nauw / Framer Framed

At Framer Framed, there were thirteen stations. Each station had a specific title, a descriptive text and an assemblage of images with their captions. For example, one station portrayed atmospheric bombs and one the question of justice. The translated testimonies of witnesses and victims were also part of the exhibition so visitors could read them in the exhibition, and there was a QR code that linked visitors to the online 'Testimony Translation Project'. We also projected onto the stations the current environmental and spatial conditions in Reggane and In Ekker. In addition, we included a number of interviews with scholars, activists, photographers and people living in the Sahara so they could tell us about their version of the facts. The exhibition is a kind of juxtaposition of different documents, audio, photographs, maps, and stills from videos and documentaries. The idea is to create an assembly of evidence so that the public are surrounded by an undeniable amount of information. This is to oppose secrecy and to say that it is possible to find ways to gather and expose information. Even if some of the images were of low resolution, we were able to portray and illustrate the transformation of the territory, the destruction of the environment, and the denial of the past, present and future for the generations that live in the Sahara as well as the veterans that live in France.



Installation shots of the exhibition 'Performing Colonial Toxicity', 2023, by Samia Henni at Framer Framed, Amsterdam. Photo © Maarten Nauw / Framer Framed

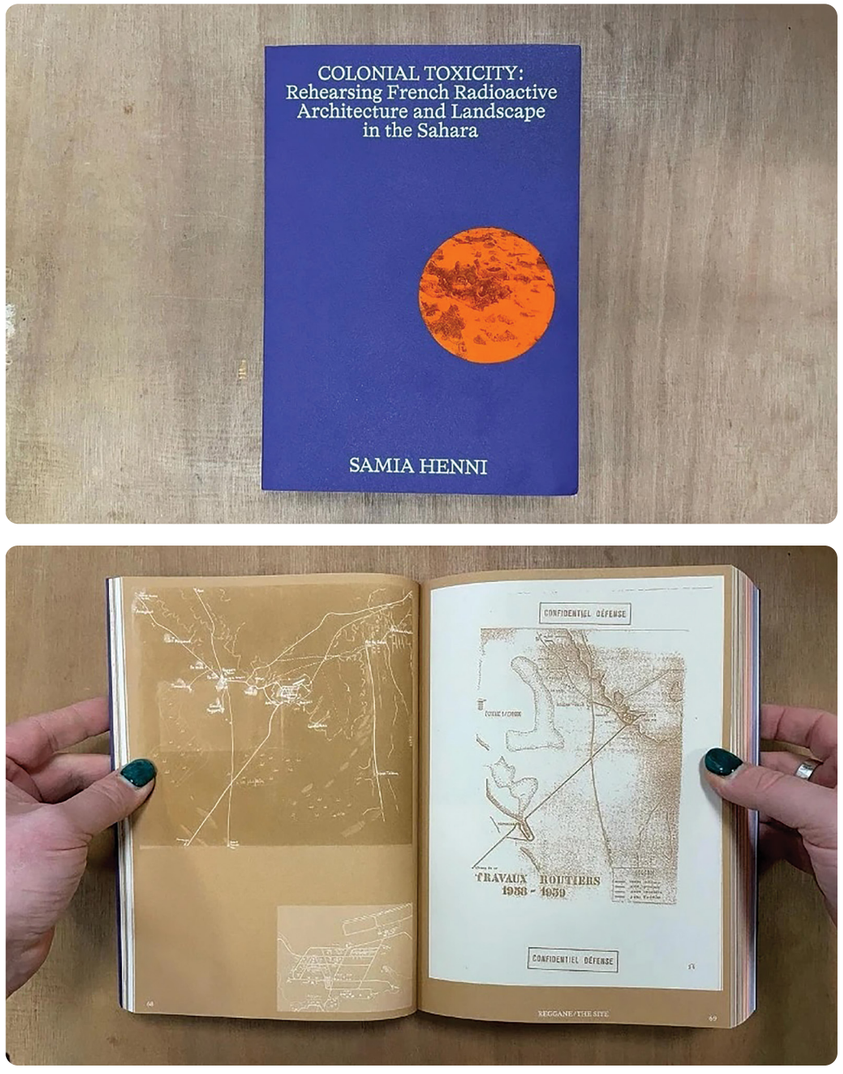
As I mentioned, it was important to try to design this exhibition so that it could be easily deconstructed and reassembled – it's very light and it can be reproduced very easily. This was of course a practical consideration, but it also challenges the temporality of colonial toxicity, meaning that historical and contemporary images and videos are exhibited on the same platform so that visitors can see that it is untrue that the French army dismantled the radioactive infrastructure when they left these sites and this territory in 1966, though they claim that after 1966, everything was cleaned or buried and that there is nothing to be seen there.

Installation shots of the exhibition 'Performing Colonial Toxicity', 2023, by Samia Henni at Framer Framed, Amsterdam. Photo © Maarten Nauw / Framer Framed

The exhibition also shows that most of those radioactive engines were buried under the ground of the Sahara, as you can see here in the station 'Below Ground'. So this means that even the underground spaces and soils are also contaminated. I also used Google Earth to search for the coordinates of where the bombs were detonated and map the territory around them, and one can indeed see that there are many radioactive traces apparent in the contaminated territory today. Therefore the idea of the exhibition 'Performing Colonial Toxicity' was to make colonial toxicity, this invisible radioactivity, perform on the bodies and senses of visitors.

The last iteration of this project was the book *Colonial Toxicity: Rehearsing French Radioactive Architecture and Landscape in the Sahara*.[5] It is a rich repository that brings together nearly six hundred pages of materials documenting this violent history of France's nuclear bomb-testing programme in the Algerian desert. It addresses all those concerned with histories of nuclear weapons and those engaged at the intersections of spatial, social and environmental justice, as well as anticolonial archival practices.

5. Samia Henni, ***Colonial Toxicity: Rehearsing French Radioactive Architecture and Landscape in the Sahara***, Amsterdam and Zürich: If I Can't Dance, Framer Framed and edition fink, 2024.



Samia Henni, *Colonial Toxicity: Rehearsing French Radioactive Architecture and Land*, 2024; front cover, contents, pages 68–69, 286–87,440–41, 540–41. Images courtesy Good Press

When one starts gathering and collecting, one becomes a sort of collector or archivist. There are almost no borders, no limits to that, but one has also to make choices. If the exhibition is organized around the stations with different titles, the book is structured according to two main categories: Reggane, where the atmospheric bombs were detonated, and In Ekker, where the underground bombs were exploded. So these sites guide the readers throughout the book. Each category encompasses a few chapters, such as 'Construction Sites', 'Exposed Bodies', and so on. The records that we worked with came from many different places and sources, so we had to find a way to organize this body of knowledge and make it as accessible as possible. With the graphic designer François Girard-Meunier, managing editor Megan Hoetger and contributing editor

and publisher Georg Rütishauser, a series of coloured spaces were created within the pages of the book. Each chapter has a specific colour treatment so that readers can find coherence in reading the images that rest within the specific colour of that same chapter. These colours were inspired by the radioactive lava that came out of the uncontained underground bombs in the Sahara.

Left: photograph by Larbi Benchiha, 2010. Courtesy the artist. Right: photograph by Bruno Hadjih, as featured in *A(t)Home*. As featured in Elisabeth Leuvrey (dir.), A(t)Home, 2013, France, Les Écrans du Large

On the left is a 2010 photograph by Algerian film-maker Larbi Benchiha. On the right is a photograph by Franco-Algerian photographer Bruno Hadjih, portrayed in Elisabeth Leuvrey's 2013 documentary *A(t)Home*. Whereas Benchiha's photograph portrays radioactive stone, lava that came out of Tan Afella mountain, Hadjih's photograph illustrates the metamorphosis of contaminated stone that's also radioactive. Both were generated by the heat and blast of a nuclear bomb. So we took this palette of colours to organize the book to show different tones of degradation. The book starts with an assembly and assemblage of images (rather than texts) so that readers might be overwhelmed with visuals that oppose and resist the imposed amnesia.

With this project and its forms of publicness (translating, exhibition and publishing), it is important to overcome the assertion that one cannot talk or write about these histories and lived realities because there is not enough evidence, or due to the classified status of institutional archives. Therefore, translating, exhibiting, searching, scanning, photographing, gathering, saving, assembling, indexing, arranging and rearranging the visuals is a means of documenting and 'writing' of colonial toxicity. It is not a French colonial or an Algerian story, history or event, as it has planetary consequences. Through sandstorms and wind, radioactivity has no boundaries. It travels all over the world. It is toxic. Colonialism is toxic.

This toxicity is anthropogenic. It is irreversible, enduring and destructive.

NP-B: Thank you, Samia. I'm giving the floor to dear Marie-Hélène, who is in Tahiti right now, where it is 2.30 a.m., and to Mililani Ganivet, in London. Thank you for being with us at this late hour. I had the great pleasure to meet you both a year ago at Cité internationale des arts, where Marie-Hélène was a resident and where she introduced us to Mililani and to their collaboration. The following excerpts are from their video essay *Nu/clear Stories* (2024). It's a collaboration between Marie-Hélène – an artist, photographer, producer and director from Mā'ohi Nui, or French-occupied Polynesia, who for thirty years has been documenting, visual testimonies of the transformation of the society and of the impact of coloniality on the society of the archipelago. Mililani, on the other hand, is from Tahiti and is currently doing a PhD at the Sainsbury Research Unit at the British Museum. She is also an activist and collaborator on several artistic projects, working most specifically on the consequences of thirty years of nuclear tests in the archipelagos of so-called Polynesia.

Mililani Ganivet: Thank you so much for having us and for taking the time to make our voices heard and represented. Before starting I would like to acknowledge Marie-Hélène's work. We've been working together on this project but she's been doing most of the work, weaving voices and stories together. The project started with thinking about thirty years of nuclear testing. We don't come from the same generation. I was born just before the end of the nuclear testing, but both of us witnessed its long-lasting effects from different perspectives, and which are almost invisible today. It was important for us to have funding from the Pacific and not from France, so we remain independent. And, in a way, our podcast *Nu/clear Stories* is an act of resistance against what has been said about our people, while trying to amplify the voices of people that are not heard.

We try to make space for voices of people from other islands. In the podcast, we have decentred Tahiti to hear other islands close to the testing site. You'll see a lot of the aspects that Samia has talked about in relation to language and testimony.

Marie-Hélène Villierme: For ocean people, stories are very important. They combine layers of truth, of reality, of imagination. For us, working with voices, and multiple languages, as they carry and mediate complex emotions – of guilt, of intimacy, and many more – we wanted to work on all the different layers of subtlety.

MG: Almost thirty years after the last French nuclear test was conducted in 1996, the people in what is today known as French Polynesia were still dealing with this violent colonial legacy. Between 1966 and 1996, France conducted 193 nuclear tests in French Polynesia. Today, the consequences of those tests are still perceptible, whether visible or not.

Polynesians and Tahitians, like many Indigenous peoples, have an important tradition of naming specific aspects of a person. So colonial

toxicity, as Samia said, was also imposed on Indigenous peoples and environments through practices of naming – imposed not only just on the landscape and people, but also on their genealogies. Like ‘Canopus’, the code name for the first thermonuclear bomb in 1968 – the story of Canopus is very well known in Mangareva and the rest of French Polynesia. You realize how mapping these stories upon the lands and the people also consisted of renaming. It tells you a lot about the disruptive and deeply problematic aspects of colonial toxicity that are not immediately apparent – something that really struck us during our fieldwork.

So, that’s a brief word on the importance of naming and the impact of nuclear testing on the minds, peoples and landscapes of many generations and their ties to the land.

Watch on internationaleonline.org

M-HV: I would like to introduce the second excerpt, which is centred on environmental issues and how the narrative of the French government tried to create confusion among local people. The excerpt touches on how the official narrative tried to shake local knowledge of ciguatera poisoning that affects corals.

Watch on internationaleonline.org

MG: From 1963 the Pacific testing centre gradually became part of the lives of the inhabitants of Mangareva. Torn between feelings of curiosity and uncertainty, Mangarevans quickly adjusted to the visible presence of the newcomers on their island, whether they were military or civilian. How did the Pacific Testing Centre change their lives? What were the obvious, but also the more subtle disruptions that shook the daily life of this island, which is barely fifteen square kilometres in size?

If we are to think about colonial toxicity in the context of French Polynesia, it is vital to address mental confusion as an effect of not knowing about the direct and indirect consequences of the testing. There is a refusal to think holistically and take into account how mindscapes, landscapes and mental health are all related and connected.

In the course of the twenty-minute interviews we conducted, people would say something and then gradually change their perspective. The fact that we knew about some of the consequences now plagues us and prevents us from shedding light on it today. As a people, collectively, it’s been really hard to deal with that issue in particular – to acknowledge there were things we knew. That’s one instance of the pervasive aspects of nuclear testing that may not be initially apparent. And when you start talking to different communities, you realize how deep the consequences are.

NP-B: Thank you so much Marie-Hélène and Mililani. We now end with Olivier Marboeuf. Olivier is an author and a storyteller – we have heard a lot today about the importance of stories – that’s something that comes from your long-term practice in visual arts, the curatorial, poetry and film production, living between Guadeloupe and hexagonal France. Through institutional work, but also through artistic research, Olivier has been addressing many of the questions that are at the heart of France’s colonial legacies. I had the pleasure to meet Olivier through the work that he led at Kiasma between 2004 and 2018. Kiasma was, we might say, one of the first attempts to bring together knowledges of visual culture, of activism, of theoretical thought; situated in the north of Paris, a space where coloniality, postcolonialism and decoloniality were thought through and interrogated very precisely with and for its local public. Today you are part of the RAY|RAYO|RAYON Inter-Caribbean Network of Research and Art Education and part of the Akademie der Künste, among many other things. For those who might have been to Venice, we presented your work there in April 2024 in the exhibition ‘When Solidarity Is Not a Metaphor’.

Olivier Marboeuf: Thank you very much Nataša. Thank you so much for the two preceding presentations that point to the core of what I would like to talk about. They allow me to expand in other directions, even though I could unfortunately do the same kind of exposé in relation to the Caribbean, as you may imagine: not to speak about nuclear tests, but about the toxic economies of sugar, bananas, coffee and cotton. But I would like to discuss another aspect of this conversation that crossed your presentations, which is the issue of archives.

First, I would like to underscore that colonial apparatus is, at its core, a machine of erasure and destruction. It's important to name in the most precise way the vocabulary of colonial violence to try to anticipate its repetition. The particular kind of destruction we are talking about always takes place in spaces considered as savage: *terra nullius* ('nobody's land'), places supposedly empty of people and forms of civilization, places without master. So, even if you could find people in the Sahara, in Polynesia, as you could find some in the Caribbean, the destruction of those people was allowed by the denial of their humanity. This is a radical principle shared by these three situations: the refusal to acknowledge the humanity of the beings living there, and of course of the set of reciprocal relationships they share with nonhuman entities, visible and invisible. This is the refusal of a world, of a cosmogony, a mode of entanglement – of an interdependent way of being human. This denial of another humanity and civilization is the central condition of Western modernity. It allows a radical destruction by emptying a space of its own history in order to have a moral licence to exploit the land in a way that Western civilization thinks that the exploitation of a territory should function. This is a way to produce everywhere a year zero, a new calendar, a new history without precedent. That's why we could say that a colonial genocide is always an ecocide and an epistemicide at the same time. And as we saw in the contexts of Algeria and Polynesia, a radical destruction of a world can be quick, or it can happen very slowly, too, over a very long period of time.

And so now the question is: How are we to repair? What can we do with that colonial legacy? How can we deal with it? How can we rebuild a world from its toxic ruins? From what kinds of traces and traditions shall we draw? From what kind of technics and knowledge? What kind of humanity? There are different ways of working towards that; we have already touched on some of them here. The first step is to recompose an archive from scattered, lost, damaged stories. It's not enough, but it's a very important step, I would say. Afterwards, the task is to develop from it a practice of repair. The difficulty with the territories we're talking about, historically colonized by France, is that today they're caught up in an interweaving of different traditions. They are partly westernized, and we therefore tend to approach colonial destruction with tools that are themselves fairly westernized. This is the case when we insist on renaming: the act of affixing one's name like a mark over another name is a typically Western obsession that aims to appropriate a thing, a land, a body. And, as we've said, it produces an epistemicide, erasing in the process all the variety of ways of understanding the world and the stories they carry, the genealogies. The same applies to the primacy accorded in Western culture to the visible over the other senses, and how the visible determines what exists and has value. This is where the demand for minority visibility is troubling. It is the very nature – and at the same time the paradox – of any policy of reparation based on recognition to validate a certain dominant gaze.So I have the feeling that we're caught up in the master's desires, or at least in desires that are similar to those of the master, that our way of imagining repair is dependent on the master's tools. What concerns me is the need to imagine other tools that aren't based on recognition, gestures that invent other regimes of the visible capable of translating other ways of being present.

We could also say that these tools do not in fact belong totally to the master, or not only. For enslaved people, for example, who always refused, every day of their lives, with every breath, to become totally the master's objects. They resisted, and in return the master himself became possessed by these supposed objects, which he knew full well were in fact human. And this thought plunged his own life into a turmoil of his own making, as he accepted this pact of violence that would henceforth accompany and haunt him. Agreeing to treat human beings as disposable objects, fungible materials – to treat Indigenous populations as pests whose lives can be disposed of and whose deaths can be decided – is not without consequences. It opens up a chasm in the ethics of the living, while radically extending the limits of the exploitation of bodies and of a world that is no longer anything other than a vast collection of resources. It undoubtedly produces a category of humans who have lost many of their attachments to the world through capitalist necessities, and who are haunted by this particular right to violence.

The Martiniquan thinker and politician Aimé Césaire spoke of a 'boomerang effect', in French '*un choc en retour*', to describe the phenomenon of the fatal return to the heart of the Western world itself of what had happened elsewhere, during the colonial period. This is exactly what happened with Nazism and the extermination of Europe's Jews, and what is happening again today. The consequences of colonial destruction are therefore not only an expansion of violence in masterless lands, but also an involution of this violence in Western societies. And I obviously include Israel in this Western history as a power that produces violence: against the Palestinians by animalizing them, and against itself in a paradoxical process that is both existential and self-destructive.

So now we too are totally caught up in this process of capitalistic self-destruction as subjects of Empire. How can we get out of it? How can we oppose it? How do we build the conditions and ethics of a place of reparation? And how do we do this by refusing to demand recognition and visibility from powers whose economic and existential basis is precisely the denial of a whole range of human and nonhuman worlds to which we belong or wish to belong.

These are obviously very vast questions, and we need to try and determine the scales on which they can be answered. So, for today's discussion at least, we need to ask ourselves what art can do in this matter, to what extent it can contribute to the beginning of a response or initiate a place for this response; in other words, how it can help define the conditions. Given that we have to show images as evidence of colonial destruction, that they are sometimes necessary – even if never sufficient – in a judicial context, what more can we artists and art professionals do?

Olivier Marboeuf, *Museum of Breath*, *A Liquid Monument* (fragment), wall-drawing as part of the show 'When Solidarity is Not a Metaphor', curated by Simona Dvorak, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Zaina Zaarour, Venice Biennale 2024. Photo: Ivan Erofeev

On this matter, I'd like to talk about a series of graphic experiments I've been developing recently, with the support of Nataša in particular, the aim of which is to weave together fragments of minority histories that appear in an indexical form; histories that beckon to some more than to others, that remain partially indecipherable, cryptic for a whole set of people – like captions that evoke images that aren't quite there, images that aren't shown, but that produce a ghostly presence. I prefer not to call these attempts drawings, but rather annotations, to follow in Christina Sharpe's footsteps when she talks about annotating images in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.[6] The annotation technique she evokes is a gesture to be understood in relation to Black lives in the West, which find themselves literally overwhelmed by images, and in particular by images of themselves taken by others, by images captured by the white gaze and technologies. And these images that capture them in moments of ecstasy, shame or suffering, these images that are both libidinous and sad at the same time – the technique of annotation makes it possible, to a certain extent, to respond to them with something other than simply other images supposedly more dignified, more just.

6. Christina Sharpe, ***In the Wake: On Blackness and Being***, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. See in particular her thoughts on 'Black Annotation', pp. 113–20.

Annotation is a nonheroic intervention. By affixing discreet signs, a few words and captions, perhaps even traces of irony and humour, the obscure fragments of a poem, it breaks the symmetry of the response, signifying a fleeting presence, a presence that has taken leave of this scene of representation and recognition. Annotation is a way of confusing and saturating the meaning of the minority presence, which becomes equivocal and elusive. This reflection, this practice of annotation has kept me particularly busy over the last few years, insofar as it makes it possible to signify what is not quite there. To evoke presences without needing to show them, to welcome the spectres of those who were rejected on the margins of humanity. The annotation is a declaration of fleeting presence, the trace of an excess of presence and absence at the same time. Absenting ourselves from the table of dominant conversation, its terms and regulations, is also a way of saying that we need another table, elsewhere, other conditions of conversation. Are we capable of leaving this dominant table and abandoning our claims and demands for recognition at the same time? Can we imagine an active policy of refusal to influence the conditions of negotiation here, but from elsewhere, from outside the major art institutions in particular? It's a difficult challenge, but one that can be built from a multitude of small refusals, small acts of marronage that announce another place and destabilize the recognition scene.

Nataša underlined how deeply interdependent art and culture workers are. This leads us to broaden the way we reconsider the conditions and scope of artistic gestures. Reflecting on our own practices of display and archival production from a reparative perspective is not just a question of content, it's also a question of place. In what places are the reparations we're talking about possible?

At the beginning of 2024, Nataša curated an exhibition with the artist and researcher Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc, '*La Mémoire des Hauts-fonds*'. '*Hauts-fonds*' means 'shoals', places that are neither quite land nor quite sea, but in-between, shifting spaces. This exhibition itself echoed the book *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* by Tiffany Lethabo King,[7] which attempted to imagine sites of expression and protest, but also of encounter, between Indigenous and Black cultures in the Americas, in short, other tables of negotiation and minority alliances. What's interesting about shoals is the idea of non-institutional, unstable places, with no master and no control. Here, the idea of a place without master is no longer the result of a denial of the presence of the Other but, on the contrary, the expression of a desire to consider all the intensities of presence/absence that hold and sustain that place, from near and far, and to give them equal value whether they are visible or invisible. Taking shoals seriously allows us to approach reparation as the search for and production of unstable situations, if we consider shared instability as a condition that makes a true experience of equality tangible – as in the mangrove. From a minority perspective, it will always be more interesting to propose that the conversation take place in these places of instability, these shoals where some have found refuge and learned to stand.

7. Tiffany Lethabo King, ***The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies***, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.

It was with these places in mind, and how to produce them – for they are not just physical places, but also relational ones – that I speculated, in one of my recent essays on 'bewitched mediation'.[8] This is a practice that displaces the classic function of cultural mediation in art institutions to turn it into a wandering form of collective ritual – the 'place' where a community of interpreters meets, negotiates and translates. A place where, far from the institution, we learn things we can't know on our own, but also, and above all, things we didn't know we wanted to know. 'Bewitched mediation' makes the mediator's body now both medium and milieu: the central tool in the production of the archive *and* the site of an unstable tradition constantly calling for new repetitions. This is a way for me to consider the practice of the archive as reparative and to produce this archive at the same time as we produce our place of enunciation, without using the tools of recording, production and display that are part of the colonial heritage and its extractivist principles.

8. Olivier Marboeuf, ***Médiation sorcière***, in Judith Dehail (ed.), ***Savoirs critiques de la médiation culturelle***, Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2025, pp. 47–84, eac.ac.

Of course, what particularly interested me about the cultural mediator is that they are a minor figure in the art institution, who doesn't enjoy the same consideration and symbolic capital as the artist, curator or critic. Working with this minor figure was a strategy for reconstructing a scene of conversation and reparation, which I decided to gradually move outside the institution, away from its discourse and power of subordination. However, this fugitive scene continues to exert a form of influence from a distance, as I said earlier about this scene of refusal that no longer demands to be recognized, but whose presence, somewhere in the vicinity of the institution, changes the conditions of the majority conversation. Just as the encampments of the maroon communities, not far from the plantation, gradually changed its conditions and discourse through the effect of a phantom threat and the possibility of a life that is other but close at hand. This is why I call this collective performance 'bewitched mediation', which is necessary to maintain and sustain the archive. In a way, it is opposed to

the idea of preserving the archive identically, just as it is opposed to the idea of a proprietary archive. In the intertwining of languages and words, this archive has no name, but it does have requirements, foremost among which is the need to always remake it, reproduce it, replay it, again and again. I know that in the traditions of the places we are talking about, in Saharan traditions, in Polynesian traditions, in Caribbean traditions, the practice of transmission is also based on the rehearsing and the repetition of the same stories. Which leads me to say that what has been destroyed by colonization is not only the variety of life forms, but also the variety of ways of preserving and reproducing life. So we need to be concerned with how to produce and reproduce the possibilities of life through our artistic practices. Because I have the impression that we sometimes accept rather mortifying ways of producing images of life in place of these possibilities of life.I wanted to share these ideas so that we could think together about a way forward.

[Addresses the panel:] How can we move forward on the basis of all the artistic work and research you've done, which is a necessary first step in the face of the denial of the existence of certain stories, certain acts of violence and tragic events? How do we deal with the denial of the long-term impact of such radical destruction? What other tactics are available to us to transform these tragic situations and invent modes of reparation on our own scale? This is what I'd like to discuss with you.

NP-B: Thank you so much Olivier. Arising from what we heard from Olivier is one of the questions that we wanted to have in this assembly, namely: What is a way out from institutions that have been infused with colonial violence, a violence that has been their modus operandi? What does this mean for the future of institutions? Should they exist? We are speaking of and from within fields of artistic research that operate with precision and patience, collecting stories and evidence not yet disclosed to the general public. We have heard from Samia about the importance of publicness and from Mililani and Marie-Hélène about the condition of unstableness or instability. I talked from the beginning about impunity, which for me is a core issue. In order not to talk about guilt, but rather debt, I think it's very important not to have a moralistic discussion, but to know and use other operational tools.

SH: First of all, thank you Nataša for bringing us together. I think it makes so much sense. Olivier – you created many intersections, and you also confronted us in a way. I have a reflection: What I'm trying to do, like you mentioned, Olivier, it's not enough. The question you ask is: How do we repair? I'm not there yet, to be very honest. I'm still very much stuck in the first phase. Maybe the question is, who has to repair? Not even who is expected to repair, but who *has* to repair. And that's also why I am in this very first phase, documenting and addressing it to the West. Lots of people ask me if I will show this in Algeria. And the answer is no. They know it, they live in it! The public, the audience, the target for me is the West. When I talk about the West it is not only France and London, it's also the US, it's also all those who sign the contract of the destruction of Earth through the colonial project, which is ongoing . So the reflection or the question or the struggle I am facing is: *Who* has to repair?

M-HV: We are immersed in a process of reparation. Even if it's very hard in reality and a very hard trauma to dig out of. We are trying to move towards a posture of affirmation. The time of revolution is obsolete – we now need to affirm ourselves, affirm our identity and affirm what our story is and the way we want to tell it, through Oceanian storytelling and Oceanian aesthetics.

MG: One thing that we don't talk about often, in places like Algeria or French Polynesia, is how to create a safe space for people to be able to articulate complex emotions. Telling their stories is a form of healing that we often underestimate. We did it through a podcast, because we wanted to make our voices and story salient, but we were also both thinking about our own processes of healing. What we found is that by making the time, talking to people, not extracting from them was a way to set a space for collective healing. Often, researchers come, extract information and leave. For us, taking time and care with people, showing trust and empathy, was central to the process. And that safe space is an ongoing thing. It is a form of healing that is often underestimated.

At the same time as we carve that space for ourselves, we also like being present in institutions, as a way to talk, to show that we still exist – and being very adamant about that. So I think based on what Olivier was saying, we're kind of facing in two directions, which I think are not mutually exclusive but can co-exist: To be anchored in what we know, and to set that space that makes our voices stronger; and to resonate louder outside our respective contexts.

OM: I agree that there are no exclusive phases. When I talk about phases, I think that the time of reclamation is normal. The first way of reacting is to reclaim something and to assemble some evidence. I'm just saying that we have to switch, at a certain moment, to another time and mode of operation. That doesn't mean that the first phase doesn't exist anymore. We are all in the Western world and outside of it at the same time. We are moving between different positionalities. And as you said, even the space to record voices and to host people is already that kind of shoal I'm talking about. It doesn't have to be big, just a space where people can say what they feel and speak with their own language and through their own experience. We need to collect fragile precedents. We also have to accept that we can't act heroically, and that we have to work in modest spaces. We have to learn to honour these small spaces, to give them a certain value. We mustn't underestimate them because they really do contain the reproductive potential I mentioned earlier.

NP-B: Olivier mentioned earlier our collaborative curatorial work with Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc at the Cité internationale des arts, where the discussions we had with Mathieu and with the participating artists revolved around Tiffany Lethabo King's intersectional understanding of shoals as

safe spaces despite their moving with unpredictability. Listening to you also made me realize that safe spaces should be considered as unstable spaces. And that shoals can and should be claimed as safe spaces.

OM: Yes, but instability is a natural space.

NP-B: Exactly. There is a question from Adeola Enigbokan to Olivier: How can we use bodies that are institutionalized, colonial and colonized to reproduce and rehearse body recordings that do not conform to institutional tools and practices?

OM: It’s a very important question, which sounds a bit like a dead end insofar as contemporary art institutions seem to enjoy this incredible plasticity that enables them to absorb minority practices more and more every day. It’s in the very nature of capitalism that they have become the privileged tools of ‘soft power’. This gives the impression that all minority gestures quickly become institutional commodities. But we are in fact partly responsible for this because of what we believe to be a desire, which is in fact an injunction: we want to be in these places to prove the value of our existence, to prove that we are up to scratch, that we are professionals. It’s a question that’s currently preoccupying me a great deal, as I’m in the process of thinking about the best form to give to the archive of my own experiences in relation to the question of art institutions, as my path has been built essentially from independent places and thanks to marginal and accidental interactions. If you want to keep certain practices alive, you have to resist the injunction to become a professional. It’s not easy, because everything pushes you to become one, as if to prove that you have the right to be there, that you’re legitimate. And I believe we must do our best to distance ourselves from this demand made on Western institutions that they should validate our humanity. For it is the very legacy of colonization to make us believe that some people are more human than others, more worthy than others, and that they can thus validate the existence of others, the gestures and civilization of others – as at the time of the Valladolid Controversy, when the Spaniards gave themselves the divine right to discuss the degree of humanity of the Native Americans in their absence. This is something we need to keep in mind when we find ourselves as a minority body in a Western institution, because there is a long history that is sedimented and working in the underbelly of this scene, which is itself nothing more than the toxic repetition of a very old scene of violence. I know today that in accepting to gradually become an art professional, I made a mistake that I’ve been trying to get out of for a number of years in order to return to my first intuitions, which were more just and profound desires. So it’s important to maintain practices considered non-professional, which are safer places for sharing. To escape the trap of visibility, we must therefore accept practices that are not immediately visible and reject the idea that visibility is the only desirable form of existence. We must remember that the famously ‘savage’ world, *terra nullius*, was not an empty space, but a place filled with presences, signs and attachments that were invisible only to the settler who was unwilling to enter into any relationship other than that of taking. The grip of land, the grip of lives: in his famous poem ‘The Sea Is History’, St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott proposes a real strategy in the face of the demand for visibility by settlers and their descendants. To the question, ‘Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? / Where is your tribal memory?’, he replies: ‘Sirs, / in that grey vault. The sea. The sea has locked them up. The sea is History.’ He poses this enigmatic asymmetry rather than wanting to exist in the eyes of his enemies. And in this way, he opens up the possibility of another world, another archive and other regimes of existence than Western hypervisibility, in the rest of the poem and beyond. This is a very important poetic and political proposition for me.

NP-B: Thank you so much to all. It’s just the beginning of a long discussion, of finding stable instability, or rather, unstable stability.

Can the Artworld Strike for Climate? Three Possible Answers

Jakub Depczyński

11 Jan 2026

As I write, in January 2026, the planetary climate and environmental crisis seems to have faded from public discourse. While the crisis itself accelerates the past two years have seen a rising backlash against environmental policies, climate science and climate movements and organizations. The 2025 Climate Change Conference in Brazil failed to generate any cohesive plan or bring serious commitments from the participating countries to phase out fossil fuels.[1] The European Union is progressively watering down its European Green Deal policy plan, quietly abandoning goals set in 2019. And the second Trump administration has recently announced that the US will leave the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The waning support for the climate cause is accompanied by the increased criminalization and persecution of climate activists. More and more, governments employ silencing tactics including anti-protest laws, extending the policing of climate movements and protests, issuing fines and pursuing court cases. Sentences issued by courts for participating in non-violent civil disobedience are more severe (including incarceration), and in some countries climate movements are now officially labelled criminal organizations.[2] The mainstream media eagerly entrench this discourse, often maligning climate activists and portraying them as 'extremists' and 'eco-terrorists'.[3]

It was in this context that I organized the discussion panel 'Can the Artworld Strike for Climate?' as part of Climate Forum II in September 2024. The goal was simple: to ask members of the global climate movement how art institutions can support their struggle at such a difficult moment – what are their needs, expectations and demands – and if or how they could understand and imagine art institutions organizing a climate strike. While those participating in different contemporary art worlds know that there are multiple, skilful strategies for representing and discursively evoking climate, the focus of the panel was on direct action. What emerged from the discussion was three possible answers.

The first was given even before the panel itself, from Indigenous climate activists. While planning the panel with the curators of the Climate Forum series, it was clear that we wanted Indigenous voices in the discussion. I reached out to two Indigenous-led climate movements and organizations with an invitation, explaining the basis for the panel as well as our motivations and goals. The first response was silence. Then, after some time a respectful, but firm and telling rejection. I was told that they did not consider a panel organized by a confederation of European museums, arts organizations and universities an appropriate space from which to speak about their struggle for climate, environment, the planet, and their rights. Neither did they feel that there was much art institutions can do to support their cause, or that they can do to support art institutions in their pursuit of a climate strike. The implied advice was clear: artists, cultural workers, academics, researchers, educators, writers, critics and others – discuss and figure this out among yourselves.

1. 'COP30: landmark outcomes emerge from negotiations despite unprecedented geopolitical tensions', COP30, 23 November 2025, cop30.br.

2. Nina Alizadeh Marandi, 'As Europe heats up, silencing climate activists is emerging as a troubling trend', euobserver, 18 July 2024, euobserver.com.

3. Zia Weise, 'Europe's climate activists face 'repressive tide', Politico, August 30 2023, politico.eu.

The second take was very different. It came from Kinga Parafniuk – a member of the Polish chapter of the youth-led Fridays For Future movement,[4] who agreed to participate in the panel. Before the event, she discussed the panel questions with her organization with a view to presenting a shared collective position, rather than an individual perspective. Kinga and her colleagues are young local organizers often working beyond urban centres in northern Poland. They face opposition to climate activism on a daily basis and experience directly the consequences of the political shifts away from the climate cause. Their position was much more sympathetic towards the art system. Kinga claimed that Friday For Future already considers the artworld an ally in the climate struggle, with many connections and cooperations between activist and artistic circles. For them, every gesture, action, project and programme matters – whether it's through representation, discourse, education or simply platforming climate-conscious voices. She emphasized that in climate organising, as in any other form of activism, there is space for different levels and modes of engagement – from organizing workshops to forming a human chain in order to block a street. If art institutions want to act for climate, they need to find a suitable way of doing it – even if that means sticking to climate-themed exhibitions, public and education programmes or festivals and events. It would be better, she said, if these are co-organized in cooperation with local climate movements and organizations – not only because they can bring in expertise and experience, but because they need public voices of support when they are routinely demonized and maligned. Still, what is crucial is for the artworld to stay with the struggle and not abandon the question of climate as a topic and a cause, especially when popular, political and media support is waning.

The third, much less enthusiastic, came from Helen Wahlgren, co-founder of the Swedish movement Restore Wetlands and active member of the A22 network,[5] which is one of the most active European climate movements and the umbrella organisation behind many of the notorious civil disobedience actions from the past couple years.[6] Helen is an experienced climate organizer and has been part of global environmental activism for many years, witnessing numerous ups and downs. In her powerful and moving contribution she presented the climate movement as part of the long history of protest, from the nineteenth-century workers unions and early women's right activists, through the civil rights movement, to contemporary anti-government protests toppling politicians throughout the world. She pointed out a common element to most successful protest campaigns is disruption, and claimed that without disrupting the flow of everyday life, change is impossible. This is why for her, the current artworld's engagement with the planetary climate and environmental crisis is inadequate – all the exhibitions, lectures, education programmes and workshops are 'nice' but ineffective. Helen understood the proposal of a climate strike at face value – shut down museums and galleries and stop any and all cultural or artistic activities, at least for a day. Or a weekend. Or a week, preferably a month. Or even better – until the powers that be finally start working on addressing the crisis seriously. The best case scenario for Helen would be for cultural workers to exit the

4. See msk.earth.

5. See a22network.org.

6. See, for example, Damien Gayle, 'Just Stop Oil activists throw soup at Van Gogh's Sunflowers', The Guardian, 14 October 2022, theguardian.com or Kate Connolly, 'German climate activists stop air traffic after breaking into four airport sites', The Guardian, 15 August 2024, theguardian.com.

artworld altogether, organize and join activist groups. The only path to change, she stressed, is to disrupt hostile realities.

To recapitulate, here are the three possible answers to the titular question:

1. The artworld, particularly the mainstream Western artworld, is the wrong space to address climate issues, art institutions are ill equipped to understand and tackle its realities and should focus on working out its own issues and contradictions, rather than seek engagement with the activist struggle.

2. The artworld is an ally of the climate movement. Art institutions should engage with the climate question in any way possible, voice public support for climate activists, and stay in the struggle despite the current political shift.

3. The artworld, particularly the mainstream Western artworld, is too complicit in anti-climate politics to effectively address the climate question. To be truly useful, art institutions need to move away from discourse and representation, learn from the activist approach and employ real disruption tactics.

Musuem of the Commons Climate Assembly, ‘Gathering into the Maelstrom’, Sale Docks, Venice, 2024

All of these perspectives heavily influenced our internal discussions within the L’Internationale confederation regarding a joint climate action, planned for 2026. We began with an ambitious proposal to organize a common climate strike: shut down institutions on a chosen day and prepare a programme of activities with local climate activist groups.

Unsurprisingly, initial enthusiasm turned into uncertainty and prompted a number of questions: Can we, as institutions, proclaim ‘a strike’? Who would actually proclaim it? Wouldn’t it be better coming from the bottom up? Will people working in L’Internationale institutions and organizations – artists, cultural workers, curators, educators, administrators, managers, technicians and others – be eager to join? How will our audiences react? And the authorities, ministries, funders and sponsors? What are the risks involved? Will we get support from the media? Should we close down, or rather just stop normal activities and dedicate the day to climate education platforming activists, scientists and organizers? Shall we release a statement? In whose name? Does it make sense to organize this climate action if in the end we are not able to strike, shut down or disrupt but only organize some thematic activities?

The more we dwelled on these questions, the more it seemed that the artworld and its infrastructure isn’t, in fact, able to accommodate the needs and demands of climate activists. More and more, it became apparent there was embarrassingly little we could do, especially in the face of a deepening anti-climate turn in global politics. Still, we decided to persist with the action – despite the doubts we agreed that what we can do is to platform the activist perspective and work, voice public support for the global climate movement and show that art institutions remain engaged with the climate question, despite the prevailing backlash. At the moment, every member of L’Internationale participating in the action works on building a relationship with a local climate activist group and preparing a joint programme of activities to be realized on a chosen day in 2026. These will range from performances, concerts and screenings, through lectures, tech-ins, discussions and workshops to assemblies, speeches and performative protests. On top of that the activist organizations will prepare written statements – perhaps a list of demands, reflection on the climate cause, testimonial or appeal to politicians or the public - that will be translated and circulated by L’Internationale. The confederation itself will also publish its own statement of support for climate activists, addressed to local and national governments as well as the EU. All of these texts will be read on the day of the action, and later gathered and published as an online zine, together with reports and reflections on how the action unfolded on the day in different places.

Can the artworld strike for climate? Perhaps it was the wrong question from the very beginning. But maybe, in doing something else we can begin to formulate a more appropriate and generative proposition.

Climate Forum III – Readings

Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

11 Oct 2024

Working with a modern art museum's collection is a little like how poet Koleka Putuma describes adulting in 'Graduation' from her book of poems *Collective Amnesia* (2020). As part of the museum's insistence on evading the death and disintegration of materials through conservation, you invariably engage with the act of dying without grieving. Or, in Putuma's terms, somewhere down the line of being grown-up you find a path toward being in harmony with a death/life cycle:

> You realise the elders in the room
> learned the alphabet of hurting and falling apart differently
> For you, healing looks like talking and transparency
> For them it is silence and burying
> And both are probably valid

Artist and death researcher G and I are in an ongoing investigation about the question of how death and grieving can figure in an institution, especially if – as G advocates – we are to domesticate grieving and dying and integrate it into daily practice.

To this end G proposed sociologist Gargi Bhattacharyya's collection of essays *We, the Heartbroken* (Hajar Press, 2023) as a baseline and diaristic study companion to the Van Abbemuseum collection team to help collectivize the research question of death in the museum. This question has expanded us and is living in the museum as one of four research threads on time that underpin the 2026 collection display *That Time When We Were Not There*.[1]

The exhibition sets out to make the act of telling the time in a modern art museum multiplicitous: that is, to stretch and break it open and away from normative, linear ways of telling the time which usually plague Western art historical stories. G, drawing on Bhattacharyya, is challenging us to reset our understanding of grief and 'dying'. As such, we have started to refine material 'dying' in the collection as the process of phasing out of public life because of material death, entering a private domain or deaccession. In G's words: 'We, the Heartbroken goes through all the various motions of grieving – "dirtiness" aka the moment Bhattacharyya talks about not washing, to becoming this clown to sexual desire while grieving. It's this all-rounded insight of honesty that I had never read before.'

In turn, G has offered the team the following meditation that lifts boundary between the living and the dead: If we approach artworks like living beings who eventually die and have an afterlife, what changes in how we care for them? How might a birthday party or funeral look for this item? And in Bhattacharyya's terms: 'What if we are already as one and have only to see it?'

Climate Forum III: Readings

Gargi Bhattacharyya, 'Depression', in *We, the heartbroken*, Hajar Press, 2023

Koleka Putuma, 'Graduation', in *Collective Amnesia*, Cape Town: Manyano Media, 2020

We, the Heartbroken, Part II: A conversation between G and Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

G, Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

8 Dec 2025

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G, Missed Call

Listen online →

G, *WHAT WOULD IT BE IF THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE AND ONLY FEEL WOULD BE IN 3D*, 2021, installation at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, OPEN 2021, featuring five clay sculptures, Morse-code programmed lighting and wall drawing. Photo: Sander van Wettum. Courtesy the artist

G: This is a body of work which I finished making in 2021. I think time has gone weird on me – us all – these past few years. There were five works and they all took about nine months to make, which also reminded me of a life cycle. The Morse code lighting omits a message that appears every five minutes and says 'Go away', 'Leave me alone' or 'F off', depending on who you ask. I also had the floor-to-ceiling drawing of '2020' on the back of the wall, which remains unfinished, and always will, because there's still work to do and questions to be answered from events that happened in 2020: political uprisings, Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo movement, Covid-19. I was also interested, and always will be, in the ephemeral – those moments on the bus or when you come out of the shower and condensation reveals a past drawing or an imprint of a resting head. Often simple, quick sketches – hearts, Superman 'S's, a crush's name, phallic shapes.

In the deep throes of grief, I would follow lookalikes of my father, or things I believe were sending me a message, or animals I thought he had become reincarnated as, or children who looked like my siblings holding his hand or playing. So, since his passing, which was eleven years ago now, I have been making work about grief and life. I only recently realized that I had started doing it before he passed. It's something I think you always work through in some shape or form. With this body of work, I'd ask myself: 'WHAT IF THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE AND ONLY FEEL WOULD BE IN 3D?' 'How could I give shape to something or someone that's no longer physically there?' The works were all kind of intuitive, there were sometimes quick rough sketches in order not to give Marianne a migraine (shout out to Marianne Peijnenburg, ceramics specialist without whom none of this would have been possible). I often had a clear idea of scale

G, *WHAT WOULD IT BE IF THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE AND ONLY FEEL WOULD BE IN 3D*, 2021, installation at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, OPEN 2021. Photo: Sander van Wettum. Courtesy the artist

G, *WHAT WOULD IT BE IF THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE AND ONLY FEEL WOULD BE IN 3D*, 2021, installation at Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, OPEN 2021. Photo: Sander van Wettum. Courtesy the artist

but I allowed this to shift depending on how things felt, which in the end came with a lot of challenges, like how to move these massive things. I had no idea how much they weighed, I wasn’t really thinking about practicalities. ‘About the weight of a baby elephant’, I often say as a semi-joke when asked.

There are three sorts of ‘prongs’ in the series: myself, my mother and my father. There are also references to Christianity present in some of the works, as I grew up in a religious-ish household. But I wasn’t holding any of this, really, in my mind. I was just moving through it.

All the everyday objects in the space – the carpet, the washing machine, the stretcher, the leather boots – were items that were either discarded, thrown away, or chosen to be given away: the second-hand leather boot from a once-alive cow; the frame from discarded wood; the sheep’s wool from a ‘free bin’ of offcuts in a textile store; the engraved conch shell that was once the shelter of a living being, from my mother’s land, Barbados.

G, *WHAT WOULD IT BE IF THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE AND ONLY FEEL WOULD BE IN 3D*, 2022. Bow evolution: satin bows dipped in glass resin for every yearly celebration. Photo: G. Courtesy the artist.

Work in progress, made by G at EKWC residency, the Netherlands, with the support of Stichting Stokroos, 2025. Photo: G. Courtesy the artist.

One thing that was bought, though, was the bows. After years of trying to feel through life after loss and death, in this work I wanted to kind of honour/celebrate life; so every year it would have a birthday. Each year I celebrate by adding a bow, as a way of remembrance; instead of flowers, I decorate it/them with a symbol to show the time; something like a present. The symbolism of the washing machine speaks about how grief can come up on you in moments when you least expect it, like flashbacks or sound glitches, or the scent of a passing person, even in an action completely seemingly unrelated to a memory of someone.

Time goes back and forth, and you can’t wash grief out; it doesn’t work like that. It just shifts and morphs and changes. So the washing machine is an important part of the work.

These sculptures will continue to be made throughout my life cycle. I am curious to see how my body changes throughout the different phases of life and age and how I approach, tend to or confront the material. I’m currently making one involving satellite dishes coming together, as a way to communicate with people that are no longer here. Dish-to-dish wouldn’t work, so I guess it could be seen as saying you cannot speak to ones no longer here. But I don’t necessarily think that’s true, it’s just the feedback – the response – won’t be what you’re used to.

G, *MISSED CALL*, 2022, durational performance with handmade urn handbag of the artist's father's ashes, commissioned by Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; sound piece produced by Cheb Runner. Photo: Özgür Atlagan. Courtesy the artist

G, *THERE ARE (MANY) PARTS TO THIS – 3*, 2025; *MISSED CALL XL*, performance, 20 min, borrowed car, soundtrack produced by Cheb Runner with audience members. Photo: Sophia Xu. Courtesy Marwan Gallery and Van Abbemuseum

also made a performance. I perform a lot, especially for the camera, it has become my way to communicate – actually doing interviews and presentations like this makes me nervous, as it can feel so static. I performed with my dad's ashes and turned an urn into a handbag so I could rave with him. The score of music at the beginning was the opening of the performance. Produced by Cheb Runner, it's called *MISSED CALL* (2002). I dance and interact with the sculptures through the performance. It's fifteen minutes long. The score becomes a really fast jungle drum-and-bass track, alongside my dad's voice, snippets of my granny singing, and heartbeat sounds. It takes you along the route of my life so far. Jungle was the music of my youth, and even now I believe that raving, dancing, makes me stronger and somehow also trains me to be emotionally stronger. It brings me back to my body and out of my head, which is important for me.

This is another piece of work: *THERE ARE (MANY) PARTS TO THIS – 1* (2024). I used Albert Heijn supermarket shopping-bag handles, and all of the objects are cast metal. When I was thinking about if I were to make my own urn, which I have, what objects would symbolize the kind of life that I live, or that I'm hoping to or trying to live? I never turned them over to be revealed because I don't think that is the point. You have various things here: the sheet I'd had for the last decade; a mouth guard; and other things which will remain hidden, because I think it's fun to imagine and it's more about us all than what my objects are. But the shopping-bag handles were fixed upwards, as if to say that you can't really carry all your own shit. You need people in order to live through life, so it's impossible to lift it alone without destroying it.

One small detail is these kind of Barbie figurines. The square is also a laptop. I was interested in social media trends. I would see a lot of adults starting to play with kids toys, making tiny cups of tea and things like this. I read it as a self-soothing activity and I thought it was interesting it happened in adulthood, people soothing themselves in this way.

G, *THERE ARE (MANY) PARTS TO THIS – 1*, 2024, casting sand, found objects collected over the past ten years, hand-poured aluminium. Photo: Franzi Müller Schmidt. Courtesy the artist and Marwan Gallery

ENGERLAND (2017–) is an ongoing series of films which I do every four to five years when there's an election in the UK. I will do this until the end of my life. So, the next one will be in 2025 or 2026.

I perform a lot with my mother; she has taught me a lot about performing. We dressed nearly identically in this work apart from she had a smiley face drawn on her shirt and I had a sad face on mine. In this still, we're embracing; there was a live percussionist, a family friend (Skins), and my mother and I were performing the dance routines. Skins has since passed so this piece is now dedicated to him. My mother and I have been working together for more than a decade, from before my dad passed away. It's a way for me to stay with the people I love the most. She's a big influence on my practice.

As I mentioned earlier, I often find language difficult, especially when thinking through or facing grief. So I made this colouring book, commissioned by the Van Abbemuseum. *GRIEF-SAD-FEELING-WEIRD-OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD-COLOURING-BOOK* (2022). And above, it says: 'These images were birthed in the quicksand. When it's unbearable, ask yourself the following questions… What are my favourite things? How do we love ourselves and our shadows? And where are my pens?'. So I hope to bring in elements of humour and drama in my practice. There is grief, but there is also life. I think there's about nine pages of drawings which people are invited to move through, and in their own time.

G, *ENGERLAND PART 2*, 2021, 4 min 13 sec, filmed by Artor Jesus Inkerö. Courtesy the artist

G, *YOU ASKED FOR IT YOU GOT IT*, 2020, performance still, performance with artist's mother at Emalin Gallery, London. Photo: Katarzyna Perlak. Courtesy the artist

That is me.

Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide: Picking up from where G left off, G and I are thinking about the question of death/life cycles in the context of the museum. G and I have been in conversation since 2022 about how death and grieving can figure in an institution, and I would say specifically a heritage institution, especially if – as G advocates – we are to domesticate grieving and death and integrate them into daily practice. Bringing up this question in the context of a museum means many things. But first it's important to remind ourselves of the context of the museum, and here specifically that of the Van Abbemuseum.

G, *GRIEF-SAD-FEELING-WEIRD-OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD Colouring Book*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2022. Cover by Bart de Baets. Courtesy Van Abbemuseum and the artist

Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

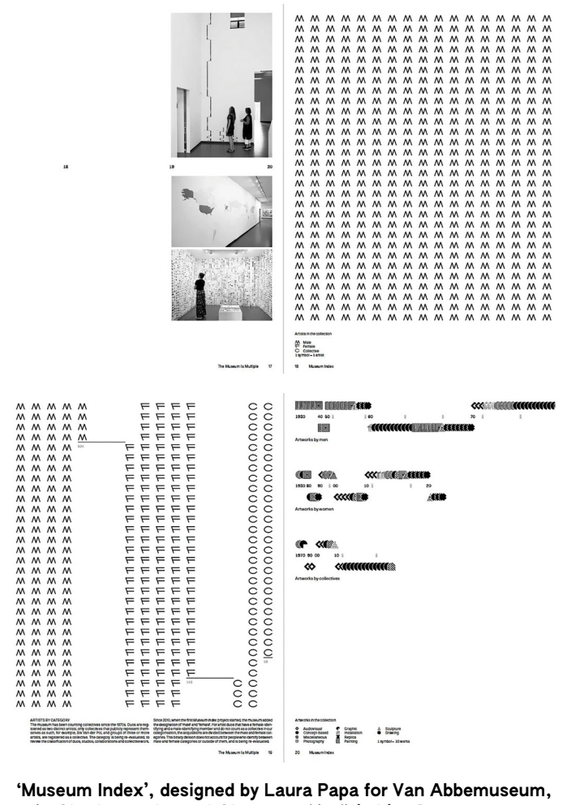
Van Abbemusuem, Eindhoven. Photo Peter de Koning & Twyce

Here's an image of the original building, the first structure of the museum, from 1936 when it opened. Designed by architect A.J. Kropholler, the building is notable for its neo-Romanesque style, reminiscent of Roman Catholic churches. Kropholler was commissioned by the museum's namesake, cigar manufacturer and founder H.J. Van Abbe. Van Abbe's cigar company, H.J. Karel I, sourced tobacco from Sumatra and Java in Indonesia, a former Dutch colony. While the Van Abbemuseum doesn't explicitly display colonial loot, its history, like many others in the Western world, has a colonial foundation. Van Abbe donated a small of 26 collection of paintings to the municipality, along with the building that became the museum. In 2026, the museum will celebrate its ninetieth anniversary, and the collection display that G and I are working towards will open. The museum was founded with the capital raised by Henri Van Abbe, often referred to as an entrepreneur today. Van Abbe's cigar factory, Karel I, was funded by the tobacco he bought in Amsterdam and plantations owned in the then Dutch Indies. The museum's origin story is heavily influenced by the slave labour used in plantations in Sumatra, where Van Abbe sourced his tobacco.

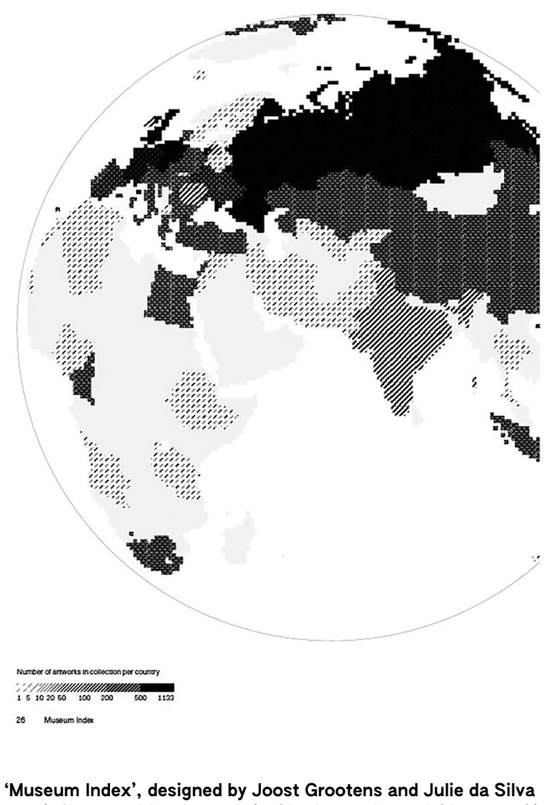
The Van Abbemuseum is located in Eindhoven, the main city in the north of Brabant, in the southern part of the Netherlands. Known as the Netherlands' technological city or design hub, with a population of around 250,000 people, Eindhoven comprises a unique blend of technocratic and agricultural areas. It's the birthplace of Philips Electronics, whose founder, another 'entrepreneur' in our origin story, played a significant, paternalistic role in the city's development, contributing to urban planning. ASML, the tech company responsible for manufacturing chip-making equipment, has its headquarters in Feldhoven, not far from Eindhoven.[1]

It's important to remember the specificities of a museum when discussing its composition. (If we're not in the same geography, I invite you to think about that of your local modern art museum.) Statistically, our collection looks something like the 'museum index' or data visualization above, put together by Joost Grootens and Julie da Silva Lenoir in *The Museum Is*

1. As of 17 September 2025, ASML's market capitalization was approximately 345 billion dollars. See companiesmarketcap.com; and Katie Tarasov, 'ASML is the only company making the $200 million machines needed to print every advanced microchip. Here's an inside look', CNBC, 23 March 2022, cnbc.com.



'Museum Index', designed by Laura Papa for Van Abbemuseum, in Charles Esche and Chương-Đài Võ (ed.), *The Museum Is Multiple*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2024, pp. 18–19



'Museum Index', designed by Joost Grootens and Julie da Silva Lenoir for Van Abbemuseum, in Charles Esche and Chương-Đài Võ (ed.), *The Museum Is Multiple*, pp. 24–25

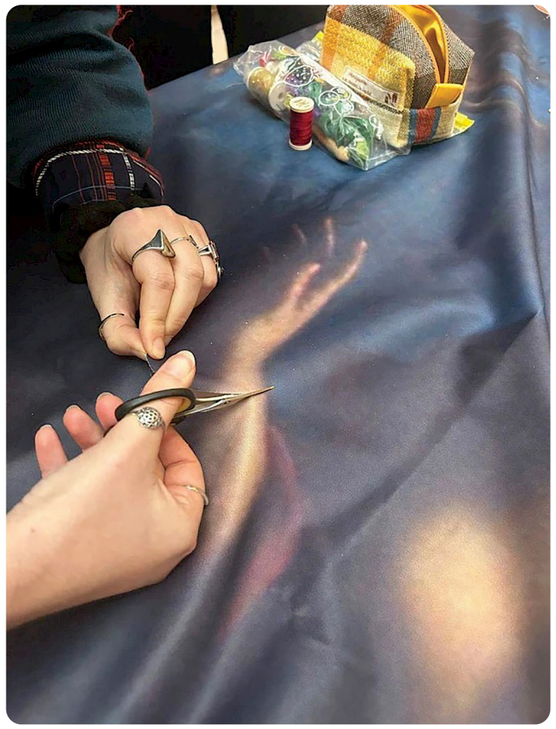
Multiple, coedited by Charles Esche and Chương-Đài Võ and designed by Laura Papa,[2] which reveals some discrepancies: for instance, that there are works by approximately 634 male-identifying artists compared to 143 female-identifying artists (as well as about 58 artist collectives) in our collection of around 3,600 works.

2. Charles Esche and Chương-Đài Võ (ed.), *The Museum Is Multiple*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2024.

This representation shows the geographical origin of artists in the collection, based on their birthplace. It's unsurprisingly European and American–heavy, with fewer artists from Indonesia and South Africa, where I'm from. This is particularly jarring when considering the colonial relations between these geographies. By keeping this data in view, we recast heritage sites as contested spaces – a view which, when discussing resistance, particularly against the frameworks that define museums and artworks and the role of death and life cycles, comprises the crucial contextual backdrop of our position.

In 2022, G and I began contemplating the life and death cycles of artworks after G's body-sized ceramic family of sculptures *UNSEEN/JUST FELT SOULS, HARDLY LIVING SKIN/ HOME & HEADS* (2020–22), and *MISSED CALL*, a performance tied to her life cycle, entered the collection. Since then, the curatorial and collection team have started considering a death/

G mimicking Francis Bacon's *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (1950) as part of the workshop dress rehearsal, Van Abbemuseum, 18 November 2024. To the left, Bacon's *Fragment of a Crucifixion;* Guernico's *Andromeda* (1660) to the right. Photo: Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide



Dagmar Marant requested a reprint of Guercino's *Andromeda* and invited workshop members to take cut-outs of the reprint as a way of collectively connecting to the painting. Van Abbemuseum, 18 November 2024. Photo: Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

life cycle for artworks in our collection. This approach aims to integrate questions of death, transition and afterlife, against the usual practice of suspending artworks in time to be conserved indefinitely.

Practically this has involved a re-evaluation of how we, as museum workers and custodians of artworks, can update collection maintenance practices. We're collaborating with the collections team to develop conservation protocols on a number of case studies – works at different stages of dying. G is also commissioned to design birthday parties and funerals for artworks as part of the upcoming collection display presentation with the working title 'That Time When We Were Not There'; both forms of commemoration will inform the design and logic of this exhibition.

In it, the collection display is further organized around three other research threads exploring time besides 'Regenerative Time with G': 'The Unchronological' thread, led by Lineo Segeote and David Andrew of the Johannesburg working group of Another Roadmap Africa Cluster, presents a special edition of their unchronological timeline tool, a tool which connects seemingly remote geographies, prompting questions and weaving-in personal stories; 'Public Time', developed with Ima-Abasi

Okon, draws inspiration from her road-running practice and incorporates art outside the museum's operating hours; 'Cosmic Times', created with Nolan Oswald Dennis, explores planetary temporalities, using the universe to address local concerns.

G has invited us, as well as others working in similar institutions, to rethink and reset our relationship with collections and collecting, while G's practice has helped us broaden our understanding of death and dying. With the collection team, we've begun to define dying as 'the phasing out of public life due to fragility of artworks': when an artwork is too delicate to be displayed, we could consider this a form of dying. Similarly, while a work's deaccession is often equated with its death as it moves out of the collection, G's practice is helping us to broaden this into a definition: now, if artworks were to enter the private domain (a rare occurrence), we could view this, too, as a form of dying.

Something else I would like to discuss is the concept of recasting and/or speculative narration. I continue to be in contentious relationship with the museum, particularly its collection, because it feels like an institution of standardization. Since joining the museum in 2020, I've been engaged in a lot of curatorial work that explores museum reform and the reasons behind it. Yet, when we consider how change could be incorporated into the museum, we're immediately confronted with the challenge of maintaining the status quo, which is, perhaps, a simplified way of describing conservation.

I invite you to recall the data I began with, and how, in the context in which we operate, this serves to highlight the ongoing forms of violence that occur within our modern art museum collections. Reform can be achieved through exhibition-making, experimenting with ways to recast artworks – beyond notions of autonomy and genius and towards a more convivial approach. Here, invoking ideas of public time or unchronological, regenerative time could involve placing works in close dialogue, allowing them to resonate with each other, for example; this could also involve dis- and re-assembling displays, challenging the linear narrative of art history that is often the default way collection displays are ordered.

Curatorially, my intention is not to disrupt our enchantment with canonized works, particularly when it comes to Western art; I'm not interested in fading this enchantment. Instead, I'm interested in unsettling the autonomy of the Western art project, which promotes a history of artistic geniuses. I do this by fostering conversations between works that challenge the established canon, and as I understand it, recasting isn't about stopping the default recreation of hierarchies within collection structures. Instead, it's about shifting the conditions of our engagement with the knowledge that history is negotiated. Many scholars discuss this kind of shifting, or recasting, but I keep returning to Karen Salt, a scholar of sovereignty, race, collective activism and systems of governance.[3] She argues for the role of the reviser, one who shifts the terrain by moving away from becoming and towards the disorganized unfinishedness that

3. Karen Salt, 'Living and Practicing Radical Movement within a Limited World' republished in Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide and Taylor Le Melle (ed.), *A Lasting Truth is Change*. Berlin: K. Verlag & Van Abbemuseum, 2023, p. 92.

we determine. This may not be a permanent fix for the hierarchies of the collection, but one of the first goals of revisioning is to reuse the tools around us to move the conditions. So, insertion and inclusion, yes, but on the terms that we determine.

I also want to say something about the decolonial strategy of inserting and including, which I'm also in a troubled relationship with. If we take the data of the male–female ratio – a formulation which is binary and highly problematic to say the least, but, as the saying goes, what we don't measure, we don't know – if we take this as an example, one correction strategy would be to acquire as many female-identifying artists as there are male-identifying artists in the collection. And that's maybe a job of around ninety years, given the age of the collection. We don't have this time, I don't have this time. Moreover, I don't think that strategic accumulation is the right measure, because it's precisely the logic of capital that we're trying to subvert; moreover, depot space is running out. But speaking in the context of the Climate Forum, we especially don't have the luxury of time, or time to be this short-sighted either. It's important to try and think of the collection in totality and to shift, a little bit, the conditions or the prism that we view works in or through.

That's why this act of recasting artworks is so important. Speculative narratives, particularly those that blend revisionist history with predictive futures, offer unique perspectives. Unlike narratives that neither acknowledge the past's tensions nor seek resolution, these narratives don't aim to eliminate all contradictions and unevenness in pursuit of a fixed future. Instead, they suggest we embrace these challenges for a while. They're actually saying, 'Let's stay with those challenges for a bit.' If the promise of Francis Bacon's [*Fragment of a*] *Crucifixion* (1950) or Guercino's *Andromeda* (1648) is not yet fully realized, then the horizon of that political project is still necessarily open.

G: Thank you.

Yolande mentioned the different categories of case study that we've attempted to place works in. These are: 'latent', 'the accumulative', 'artworks that are too big', 'the too fragile'... When the question of what could be put into the 'latent' case study was posed to the collection team, Guercino's *Andromeda* was one of the artworks they immediately identified. It has never been shown before, which I find interesting. It's not to say that it hasn't lived a life, but let's say it's in an institution and hasn't been let out, and essentially no one knows what to do with it. It was painted in the seventeenth century, and it was donated to the museum before it decided to follow the trajectory of becoming a modern art museum.

Yolande described this work as the outlier, which is a perfect description. I was interested in this case study in relation to what Yolande will speak about next – a high-stakes work. What happens when we think about life and death when someone like Francis Bacon comes into the picture? Everyone starts to get itchy feet. They are like, 'OK, now it's serious.'

I've been working with the collection team and also other people in the team – the librarian, archivist, where I have posed questions about language and how you move through – or how you are meant to move through a museum when you think about life and death, as opposed to how you might be outside of it. I asked team members to bring in an object from their home that they were willing to let go of, playing with the idea of freeing something, allowing it to move on, as opposed to how Yolande was mentioning, how museums are taught to preserve everything until infinity, right? The responses have been astonishing – not ever anything that I've heard discussed before in the museum. They have been incredibly creative and poetic and artistic – if and when we started thinking away from the institution, what people would do, in terms of ritual or ceremony for a deaccession or a loan, was incredibly interesting. We are now proposing a dress rehearsal where we will be dining with said artwork and maybe, fingers crossed, with Francis Bacon alongside it. We will be dining next to these works and, at the end of our meal, attempting to create a ritual that we will share with one another.

YH: When I approached G to work as one of the four artist interlocutors that I mentioned, the invitational commission had two goals. The first part was to design what we've been calling a footnote or an appendix to the care and deaccession protocol, in collaboration with the collection team – that is, the team in charge of maintaining and caring for artwork. Their task, I would define as like 'freezing' works in time: trying to keep them in one material state so that they can last for forever – the mandate of the modern art museum. Of course, we know that's impossible. How, then, do we contend with that impossibility? In order to answer this question and come up with appendix points that could be added to the usual protocols of care and maintenance, I invited G to think along; and that is what the workshops with the collection team are working towards. Part 1 is back-of-house work, domestic work, or the work that never actually comes to the fore. You don't encounter this maintenance work when you visit a museum.

The second part of the invitation draws from G's performance practice and presents that front of house. When we were thinking about death/life cycles in relation to artworks, the idea of throwing a birthday party or funeral ceremony which is present in G's work came to mind. The question is, how do we visualize death/life cycles? The invitation is for G to think of a score that she and others will eventually perform, and that can facilitate a birthday party or a funeral. G talks about how these are two sides of the same coin. The dress rehearsal with the collection team is us figuring out quite practically what that might feel like and look like.

To close out, we can spend a few minutes thinking about the other case study out of the six that we have, namely what we've called the 'high stakes' category. When we consider our seventeenth-century friend [*Andromeda*], the stakes seem low. But something changes when we look at a recognizable work from the canon, like Francis Bacon's *Fragment of a Crucifixion*. In the above images of G at the Van Abbe, both G and

Bacon's *Crucifixion* depict two figures: some interpret them as human, while others see them as animals in struggle. The upper figure, possibly a dog or a cat, crouches over, possibly at the point of a kill. The lower figure resembles a crucified Christ but is too small to hang on the cross. Thinly sketched passersby appear oblivious to the central drama. Bacon made several paintings on the theme of crucifixion, believing that so many beautiful paintings of the crucifixion in European art serve as a fantastic peg to hang various feelings and sensations. When reading about Bacon's intentions behind the painting, I was surprised to relearn that part of what is at stake in this piece is the act of producing an icon of crucifixion to peg new ideas on it. The practice of recasting, I believe, works similarly, which suggests I may be more of an art historian than I thought – this is deep art-historical work. Bacon didn't paint the crucifixion to promote religious themes, but he had a certain agony or fear around death that you see in his paintings. One reading of his paintings is as an attempt to escape this destiny. Ironically, this work we're trying to bring closer to death is a work that actively tries to escape it.

When preparing our workshop, our art handler colleague Toos Nijssen discovered that the work's frame wasn't made by Francis Bacon. This revelation allows us to display the painting without the frame. Initially, the painting and frame were attributed to him, but this isn't the case. Toos realised this while conserving the painting, which needed mould removal. Frames and glass protect the work from degradation, preventing it from being exposed to the elements and catching parts of the cotton pieces in the work should they fall. For this collection display, we are considering showing the painting without a frame, exposing it to natural disintegration. This challenges the tendency in collections to ward off death and offers a shift in thinking.

There's a clear tension between death or disintegration and conservation practices. Addressing death requires confronting value systems around capitalist accumulation and maintenance. Thinking about heritage also requires considering how its construction as a system of shared beliefs has been made possible through the destruction of other worlds and values, such as by removing existing settlements – purifying monuments or curating life – challenging universalism and anthropocentrism in world and heritage. Even removing a frame raises questions about a work's universality and its intended audience. Who's the 'we' being served?

I'm drawing from Rhania Ghosn, a social professor of architecture and urbanism at MIT, and El Hadi Jazairy, with whom she co-authored *Climate Inheritance*.[4] I'm interested in how Ghosn and Jazairy approach World Heritage sites as narrative devices that facilitate the process of figuring out and outlining. They draw from Donna Haraway's concept of 'string figures' as a way to engage in continuous unfolding and reweaving, challenging the assumption that the world cares about or should care about a World Heritage Site. Climate crisis conversations often speak about an ambiguous 'we', implying a shared future where everyone might be served. Uncommoning histories and futures involve uncommoning the 'we' of the world in climate response. Private interests like Henri Van Abbe's have come at significant public costs, and if we don't ask who's behind the 'we' of the world in climate response, solutions may perpetuate similar systems of dispossession.

Reframing collection displays as a way to think about regenerative time is part of our approach to shifting the conditions under which we view, accumulate and conserve works. We're trying to connect past oppositional practices to present resistance as part of a continuum. This is why working with collections is important: it's one way to address the future. Part of shaping just futures involves rescuing the future from its own utopian promises. This work is possible within the framework of a collection display of modern art, where we can do this by situating moments of transformation and revolution within the past, contaminating the future with ghosts.

4. Rania Ghosn and El Hadi Jazairy, *Climate Inheritance*, Barcelona: Actar Publishers, 2023.

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Poetics and Operations

Otobong Nkanga, Maya Tounta

15 Dec 2025

Otobong Nkanga, *Whose crisis is this?*, 2013, acrylic on paper. Courtesy the artist

Otobong Nkanga: *Whose crisis is this?* (2013) addresses the multiple life forms and entities living on this planet and their interactions with humans. Today, many things are cracking. The landscape is shifting. We are moving through the world differently. I wanted to think about a relationship to resources and the things that give life to other life forms. What does that mean for people that are in relation to natural resources? Human extraction has meant that those who take ownership of resources deny the possibility of the commons.

In this drawing, humans extract from other humans, while trees are being sucked dry of water and minerals.

Burning Tongues

Taste the salty skin
Tame the sultry
Burning tongues
Born from a tear:
Looking for some terms
That could unite us
Like a glorious choir in sync

I will start with an image of an anthill. Now think of the way we, as humans, make holes within spaces, extract, and then turn what is extracted into other forms. Like a skyscraper: imagine the holes and materials required to build skyscrapers, or phones. The performance and sculptural piece *Solid Manoeuvres* (2015–20) speaks to that process.

Otobong Nkanga, *Solid Manouevres*, 2015, duration 1 hr, performed as part of 'Bruises and Lustre', M HKA, Antwerp, Thursday December 17, 2015. Photo M HKA, courtesy the artist

Otobong Nkanga, *Solid Manoeuvres*, 2015, acrylic, Forex, make-up, tar, various metals, vermiculite, 'Bruises and Lustre', M HKA, Antwerp. Photo M HKA, courtesy the artist

Performance allows for an expanded form of storytelling in which we relate to materials through, inside and around the body. The materials in the sculpture – metallic, tars, acrylic – are all transformed from minerals in the ground to what's in the sculpture itself: the heavy sand, salt and make-up that are part of everyday life.

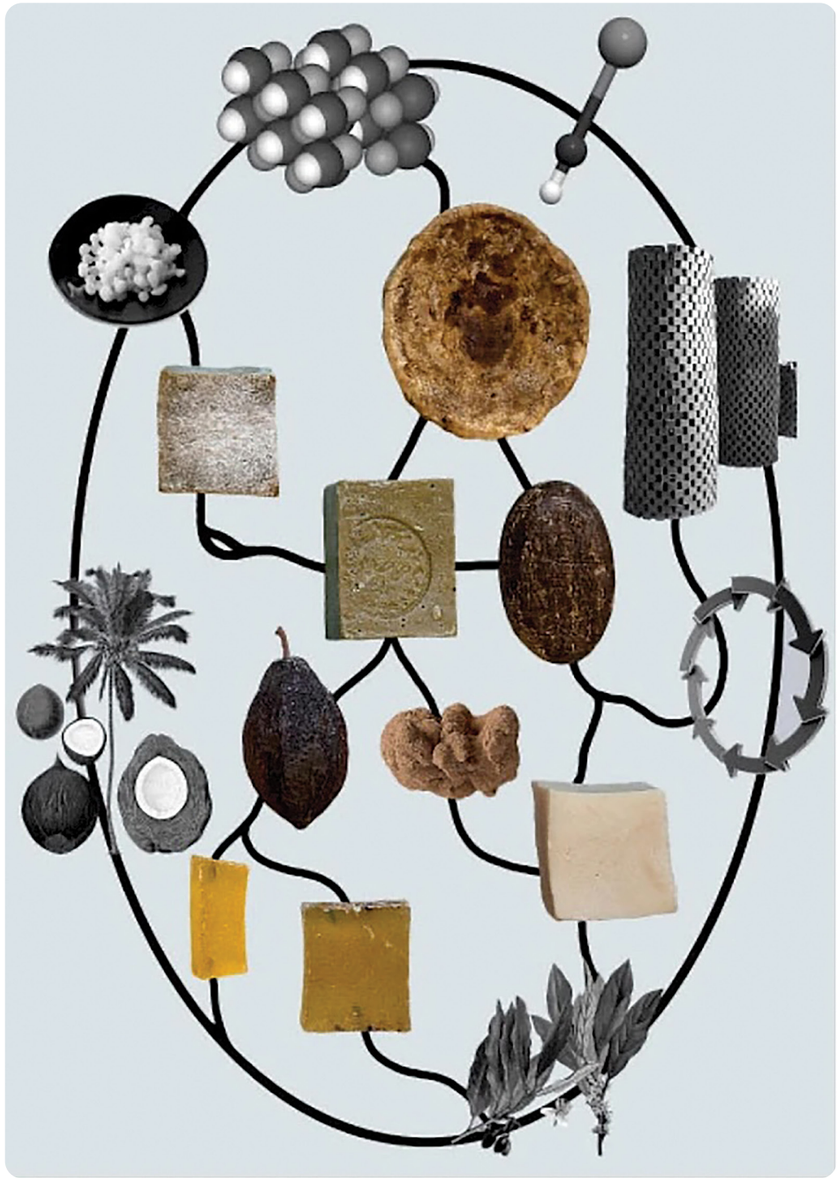
The works presented at Portikus in Frankfurt, addressing extraction, were pivotal for *Carved to Flow* (2016–), which I started thinking about in 2016. I was not only thinking about the things where holes are made, let's say, but how that affects places. I call them p*laces of obscurity*. Those places where things are taken out from the land, where the livelihoods of people also change and the landscape and ecology of a place changes. Most of the time we do not hear much about these places. I was moved to think: What does it mean to work from a place and not only think of the holes that are there, but to imagine and create structures that could be support systems for places of extraction? I wanted to create something that could be generative and that could be taken care of, something that would allow you to connect with the life – the flora, fauna and other life forms in a place.

In *Carved to Flow* I started to work with soap. This was the first drawing reflecting on places that feed the world – if we think of Southern Europe or North Africa, West Africa, the Middle East – with the oils and materials that come from these places. And at the same time, these places are going through wars, intense ecological crises, mass migration, political and social shifts. And that's where the idea of the soaps began.

Last Year June

I dreamt of you early in the morning early after mourning
I dreamt that you slightly foaming lightly with a smell

I was nervous when I was invited for documenta in 2016. I wanted to make work – or embark on a process – that was connected to different landscapes. The first idea for the project came from a dream about the smell of soap. I remember waking up at seven-thirty in the morning,



Otobong Nkanga, *Carved to Flow, Preliminary Recipe for a Support System*, 2016-17, digital drawing, collage and acrylic on paper. Courtesy the artist

and I turned around to my husband and said, 'Oh my God, I know what I'm going to do for documenta'. That clarity was based on the project being in two places, in Athens but also in Kassel, and reflecting on how many plant-based oils are found in the Mediterranean region, but also in many territories including Nigeria, where I come from. And that's where we started from. So this was 2017, when I met Maya Tounta who I have worked with since, and with whom I co-founded a space in Athens.

Maya Tounta: Up until that point, Otobong, you had worked with performance, installation, sculpture, drawing and painting. This was the first time you moved beyond those formats and the work became more difficult to categorize. The laboratory in Athens was opened up during documenta as an installation space: as a sculpture, but also as a workspace. There were many aspects of this work which were invisible to the public but were crucial to how it functioned. One was the development of a 'product' that would support and finance other endeavours independent of *Carved to Flow*.

The project wasn't conceived as a finalized idea that was then executed. Rather, you began with documenta, and then slowly things started to appear in terms of what made sense and how it should develop. And it's still evolving.

ON: In Athens, we needed a space where we could have a laboratory. And of course, a museum structure could not offer the kinds of things that *Carved to Flow* needed. We found a space in Kallithea but where we had to build everything: new floors, new lights, new windows. This became the workshop where we could invite people to test our prototypes for the soaps, but also a space for rest and conversation.

In 2016 I met different people – Maya, but also Evie Lachanae, a botanist. Evie knew how to think about the business model of the project but also to choose products that were ethically sourced, how to work within a circular economy of materials – all things that were important to me. With Maya we thought through the operations of the project, the production and presentation of the work as well as formulating the language around the exhibition. Maya curated the public programme. She sees and describes the project in very expansive terms, not only who is involved in the project itself but in relation to the realities of today.

MT: We had to understand, together, what this process of making soap entailed, including its history. In Greek villages in the 1960s, it was quite common to collect leftover fat and cooking oils to produce soap for the whole community. It was first and foremost a social process, one that embodied a circular economy through the recycling of material. Otobong researched similar practices in other places, including in West Africa and, of course, in Aleppo, Syria.

It was important to bring other people into the work in order to understand what kinds of extensions cold-process soap had, how it persisted and survived and what this revealed about similar products. One perspective

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***Carved to Flow: Laboratory*, soapmaking session with Otobong Nkanga and Evi Lachana, documenta 14, Athens, Greece, 2017. Courtesy the artist**

Otobong Nkanga, *Carved to Flow: Laboratory*, 2017, installation view, documenta 14, Athens, Greece. Courtesy the artist

was that of ritual in the act of production, which for Otobong became a way to consider what kind of life a product originates in and reproduces; whether it is made in a commercial setting or in a personal, intimate environment. What are the elements involved that are not, strictly speaking, part of production itself?

We started looking at things that might seem remote from the process. For example, the poet CAConrad had, for many years, devised rituals aimed in part at deconditioning himself from everyday consumption. For instance, he would go to the parking lots of large supermarkets in the US, sleep in his car, and then write poems informed by that experience. Another example he shared in a workshop, though I'm not sure he ever actually performed it, involved standing behind the door of his apartment with one leg in a bucket of water while looking through the peephole. The point, I think, was to enter an experiential process that disrupted a capitalist mentality centred on maximizing time.

The question of alternative valuation within an economic process was central to the work. It shaped not only the soap recipes but also the broader process: with whom the soap was produced, and where. It actively informed decisions that did not always make sense financially but spoke to other value systems the work sought to explore, raising the oblique question of whether these decisions could also be felt in the soap itself or in the work as a whole.

Otobong had a really beautiful talk with Erik Van Buuren who researches circular economics. Fernando Garcia Dory, who works with agroecology in his practice, spoke in the space.

> **Mould**
>
> Eight meet in a melting pot
> fifty five degrees perfect hot
> sign a pact to form a solid block
> bound by lye and blood

ON: Most of these poems were written in the development of the project. So, if we made the soap at a 55°-hot perfect temperature, it created a certain form for the soap, or type of texture.

MT: O8 Black Stone was the core of the work. It is impractical as a product – it relies on oils from several geographies, meaning it's not cost-efficient, yet it is the best soap I've ever tried. By that stage, which must have been a few months before the opening, there was a recipe in mind, but we didn't know who could produce it in large quantities, and Otobong wanted it to be produced locally. We began travelling across Greece to meet different producers – amateurs, businesses and others – who were each given the same recipe.

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Fernando Garcia Dory at the *Carved to Flow: Laboratory*, documenta 14, Athens, Greece, June 17 2017, programme curator: Maya Tounta. Courtesy the artist

Olive tree at the Vis Olivaie soapmaking laboratory in Kamalata Greece, where O8 Blackstone was produced, as seen during a 2017 research visit

The image you're seeing is from the Peloponnese, where we met Vis Olivae. They had just started making soap, purely for the love of it. They had set up a small workshop in their basement while both were working full-time at a nearby hospital. Their passion was real, especially for using oil from Kalamata. Once we met them, it was an immediate fit for the project.

ON: We had met a company that was making soaps for boutique hotels in Crete and we knew from the way they were working that it would not work. Later on, we met a company that mass produces soap. When we went to visit the company, we learnt they were working with a mix of different chemicals, even though they talked about using sustainable materials. When we put all the soaps together, we realised that you could actually feel and see when something is alive and when something is dead. And this shrivelled soap that came out of Athens had no life. We were shocked. We wondered how two formulas can produce such different things. The soap from Vis Olivae was alive. You could smell it. There was a flavour and texture to it with this marbley effect. And when you used it, it was amazing. But at the same time, it was the most expensive.

A funny thing that happened when we visited the maker of Vis Olivae. He has beautiful olive trees that are over 100 years old. I remember coming out of his space, hugging one of the trees and talking to it. At the time I did not know that his wife had seen me. Later on, I received a letter from him written in Greek saying, 'I heard that you hugged my tree', and that he wanted to sponsor the project. And actually with his proposition he was the cheapest option. The tree helped me or helped us do this project. It's always important to acknowledge that there are other entities working with you or creating a kind of passage for things to happen.

When we made the soap we made nine or ten prototypes, some containing seeds, olive seeds, cherry seeds; some of them containing chamomiles, indigo, and some just with earth. We were thinking of different geographies and what it meant to be able to use different materials in the soap. The one we chose for the project contains charcoal. It has seven oils and butters coming from the Mediterranean region, the Middle East and North Africa. The soap itself is a sculptural work that contains nutrients: it brings together different places of care, but also, through the charcoal, speaks to an absence of oxygen and what is burnt.

Exhale

Charred, so I hate to breathe
in the absence of oxygen
scarred, so I had to leave
these lands of bare ash residues
fleeing, breathing

Making the work, I reflected on what it means to be able to breathe in a landscape, in a place where the landscape is charred; in a place that has been affected by war, where there are droughts, water scarcity, where the

O8 Blackstone, 2017. Courtesy the artist

elements that you lived with, that you were born with, become scarce. What does that mean in relation to renegotiating the landscape that you have to continue working in? What does it mean to migrate and to leave a place that you were born in, that your ancestors have invested in and all of a sudden it becomes alien to you? What does it mean in relation to the breathability of a space? And in relation to its economy, in relation to its ecology, in relation to its materials, in relation to storytelling. There’s so many things you consider that make a place breathable. Once that starts cracking, once that is affected by internal and external factors, how does one still find a way to relate to it? When we’re thinking of migration or the movement of people from a place, it’s not always a simple choice to leave a place that you know and to go to a place of uncertainty. The soap is a way of thinking of the relationship to charcoal, to organic matter, once we feel burned by a place – and of being able to breathe within that landscape.

With *Carved to Flow* we produced about 15,000 bars of soap. But we also had to think about transportation, distribution and legal questions. It was important to find the right language to talk about the soap as an art work, not a product. I remember the lawyer saying you would have to pay 19 percent tax on all the soap. And I said no, as an artwork you pay 7 percent tax, but how do you convince the tax authorities of that? The legal advice helped us understand how the work should be presented within the context of the exhibition.

MT: Otobong set up a foundation in Brussels that was able to absorb profits and process them into funding, via the King Baudouin Foundation. The foundation functions almost like a bank, with a unique purpose: whatever comes in from a sale is converted directly into funding that can only be directed to another nonprofit. This financial model made the project possible.

The performance in Kassel was the first iteration of selling the soap. Later on it was also available in shops and museums, for example, but the first iteration of selling the soap was through performances. This led to adjustments in the way that transaction was made. One was that people would have to listen to the performer talk about the project if they wanted to buy the soap, which a lot of people didn’t have the patience for. From this came the second decision to allow the performers to refuse to sell the soap. It was a significant consideration of how a transaction could happen – that maybe money and the desire to acquire something is not enough.

And then we go to germination, which is the third stage of the project, and that is ongoing. The image that you’re seeing now is from an educational programme that happened in Dakar at Raw Material. There have been various iterations of this programme.

ON: We also had one in Gropius Bau during Covid-19. We invited the architect Nuno Vasconcelos, and he stayed in Berlin for six months. This space was an open space where people could come and work with soil related to different regions and areas. We made a sculpture for bees. Everything here could be touched. We did events within the spaces in

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***Carved to Flow: Storage and Distribution*, performance at Neue Galerie, documenta 14, Kassel, Germany, 2017**

'Earth Workshop – Bee Houses', workshop led by Nuno Vasconcelos, Thomas Meyer (RATIBOR 14), and Cornelis Hemmer (Deutschland summit!) in the framework of *Carved to Flow: Germination*, October 16 and 30, 2020, as part of 'There's No Such Thing as Solid Ground,' Gropius Bau, Berlin, Gemany, July 10 – December 13, 2020. Courtesy the artist

Gropius Bau, often involving artists and different forms of spatial practice. We also started a podcast where I worked with Sandrine Honliasso.

MT: I'm realising now that *Carved to Flow* operated like a think tank. It allowed us to be in relation to different practices: to learn from and with different research, like the podcast with Sandrine, or to foreground practices that were precursors to this way of thinking, like that of Newton Harrison with his wife Helen, who, at the Harrison Studio, are pioneers of environmental art in the US and have managed to help shape several policy changes related to ecology.

Beyond this, the two long-term investments of *Carved to Flow* are the farm set up in Akwa Ibom, which is Otobong's patrimonial land in Nigeria, and Akwa Ibom in Athens, which borrows its name from Akwa Ibom in Nigeria and is a nonprofit art space. This evolved quite naturally from the time that Otobong and I spent together in Athens.

I had left Athens in 2007 and came back ten years later to work with Otobong. I had no real sense of what the contemporary art scene looked like in Greece at the time. Together, Otobong and I realised pretty quickly that there was a lot of work, especially from the 70s and 80s, that had not really received attention and had not been written about or shown. That was one of our initial reasons for creating a space in Athens: to address the lack of institutional support for practices that were being overlooked. We set up this space together with an open approach to the programme, working with living artists, more historical material, but also different formats, including a fashion show with the German designer Kostas Murkudis.

Carved to Flow Foundation land in Uyo, Akwa Ibon State Nigeria. Courtesy Peter and Otobong Nkanga

George Touskovasilis, *Untitled*, no date (c. 1980s).
Courtesy Maya Tounta

George Touskovasilis, *Untitled*, 1981.
Courtesy Maya Tounta

The most concrete, long-term engagement has ended up being the representation of two estates. One is that of the Greek photographer George Touskovasilis (1944–2021) who I met in 2020, and who had rarely exhibited during his lifetime. Touskovasilis had an incredible archive of images which varied from diaristic, personal images of his daily life to more documentary, sociological studies of specific subcultures in Greece. For example, there is one series taken after the military dictatorship in Greece, showing transgressive, illegal events like the motorcycle races that would happen in the outskirts of Greece. Touskovasilis had infiltrated and these photographs are the only documents that exist of that ever happening. He was also the main documentarian of the rock and punk music scenes in Athens and Thessaloniki. Touskovasilis documented his relationships with men and women. In Greece, nothing like that existed in sanctioned art history, let's say. What we were able to do with Akwa Ibom, starting from the soap, was to make this work known. We did several exhibitions, and our next step is to translate one of his books into English to get the work known elsewhere.

Another figure we are working with is Christos Tzivelos, a sculptor who was active in the 80s who has also remained at the margins of the local canon. This is some of the work we are doing in terms of germinating back into the Athenian and Greek scene. I think it is an important contribution to try and change the narrative around different art histories.

Right Place

Our roots are anchored
To feed from this soil
The right place
To stay, to hold.
Home

This is a work that I made in Bregenz. A lot of the pieces I make consider what it means to be able to create work within a space and related to a

George Tourkovasilis, *Untitled*, 1973,
Collection of Tasos Gkaintatzis

George Touskovasilis, *Untitled*, no date (c. 1970s).
Courtesy Maya Tounta

place. This is a soil from the Voralberg region whose economy is changing due to climate shifts. For a long time I was interested in going back to my father’s village, which I hadn’t visited since he died in 1981. The first time I went back was in 2018. When I went back, all of a sudden it all made sense. With that we started looking for the land in Akwa Ibom.

I found this land in my father’s village. We started getting one or two plots and now have about three hectares of land which my brother manages. He used to live in Abuja, the capital, and he decided to make his livelihood and live in Akwa Ibom. He started working with the soil, trying to revive certain soils, and changing its pH. Then he started planting trees: lemon trees, orange trees, palm trees, palm wine trees. There are many, many types of trees that we have.

These are personal videos he has sent me. You can sense the aroma, it’s amazing. Queen of the night, flowering and bringing all of its extraordinary scent. This was a tree we planted about two years ago. My brother keeps sending me videos of things that are sprouting – a new flower, or if there’s a praying mantis or toad that he found at three in the morning, he sends videos.

This was when I visited. It is behind the little house we built where NAME lives. We’re planting vegetables and things that local women could come and buy at a cheap rate and then they could go back into the market and sell to earn money. The farm is off-grid. We have solar panels, converters and a solar pump. And with that we’re able to charge people’s phones, charge their batteries, charge their computers at a very low rate. The money is used to pay people working on the land. We are able to pump water from the grounds and give people free water. We have a tap and from seven in the morning till seven in the evening, people are constantly taking water. It’s a way of practising the commons, but a way of generating an economy with our resources so we can have more workers, pay them, and also for people to generate an economy for themselves. We work with local plants with different timelines. Some come out in three months, some in six months, some nine months, and some trees will be ready in five years.

The way my brother thinks about planting is to place plants in the vicinity of other plants and to see how those plants work for each other. But also to think about what insects eat – and plant those plants around other plants, so the insects eat them first before eating our plants. Sometimes my brother would notice a whole exodus of millipedes and he would then let them pass through, planting things around them so they would not eat our plants. We don’t kill them, we actually allow them to pass through during different seasons. It’s an observation of the landscape and shifts the way we work in relation to other life forms moving through space.

We’re still constructing and we’re constantly thinking about how we should work. Some land we’re thinking of as orchards and some other places we

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Unearthed – Sunlight, 2021, in collaboration with Martin Rauch, installation view third, floor Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2021. Photo: Markus Tretter. © Otobong Nkanga, Kunsthaus Bregenz. Courtesy the artist

have local palm trees where we make our own oils. We have animals now – goats, a snail farm – and we're creating a mushroom farm. People from the village are also working on the land. Carpenters, metal workers, all those people are part of building the whole space. It's really interesting to see how things have developed since 2020.

Repair

She took the threads out
From the same cloth
Each thread would find its place
Interwoven to cover the hole
She would squint at every gap
Cut her breath to make it work
Time flies as fingers stiffen
Some gestures overlap to Repair the flaws over time

With Akwa Inbom, the art space or the farm, we are constantly thinking about how to evolve. Do we need a space? Do we need the land this way? Do we have to shift? And so the space could be something else tomorrow. The project *Landversation* (2014–) was first done in Sao Paulo where I worked with an ecopsychologist, Peter Webb. He was later invited to Shanghai, Beirut and Bangladesh. The project involved conversations with people that are thinking about land in multiple ways: a homeless person, a permaculturist working with government on land policy, or those involved in water systems and infrastructures, for example. The conversations shift perspectives on different topics. For example, in one conversation we discussed how people might leave trash on the street not because

Video shot at Akwa Ibom Foundation, 2024. Courtesy Otobong and Peter Nkanga. Watch video on internationaleonline.org

they want it there, but because it serves to resist gentrification. Engaging with the economy and the politics of a place has shaped how I work with people, how I bring them together and negotiate their time, their labour, their way of getting involved. It's a negotiation within all projects – if it's a work in a museum or on the farm, with a painting or with a plant.

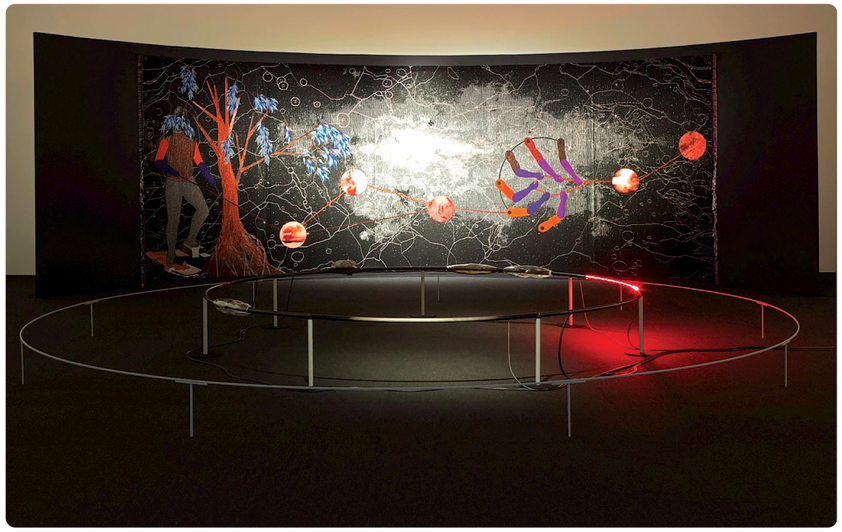
Double Plot

In a place between yesterday
Today and tomorrow
Paths form in slow motion
Visible traces melting away
That, which was solid
Flaking, aching, so many raging

In a place between stillness
Fear and a slow meltdown
a new form grows
Visible only to the heart
Palpitating at the unknown
Flaking, aching, so many craving

Once you're negotiating with the landscape, and with people, there are a lot of emotions involved related to loss and anger. We're seeing it also with places that are flooded. People are angry. We see that with people leaving places where they're meant to stay, where they thought they will stay their whole lives. I am thinking through the emotional weight of landscapes, in relation to our histories, and ancestry. Those relations crystallize and ask for different ways to engage with the political landscape, the economy of a place and how we can relate to others and think of otherness, in which we bring in race, identity. But also the relationship to resistance and riot as in *Double Plot* (2018), produced for the Arte Mundi exhibition in Cardiff, which includes a series of images from different manifestations worldwide.

Landversation, **conceived by Otobong Nkanga. Performed by Peter Webb, Shanghai, Sunday 4 September, 2016. Courtesy the artist**



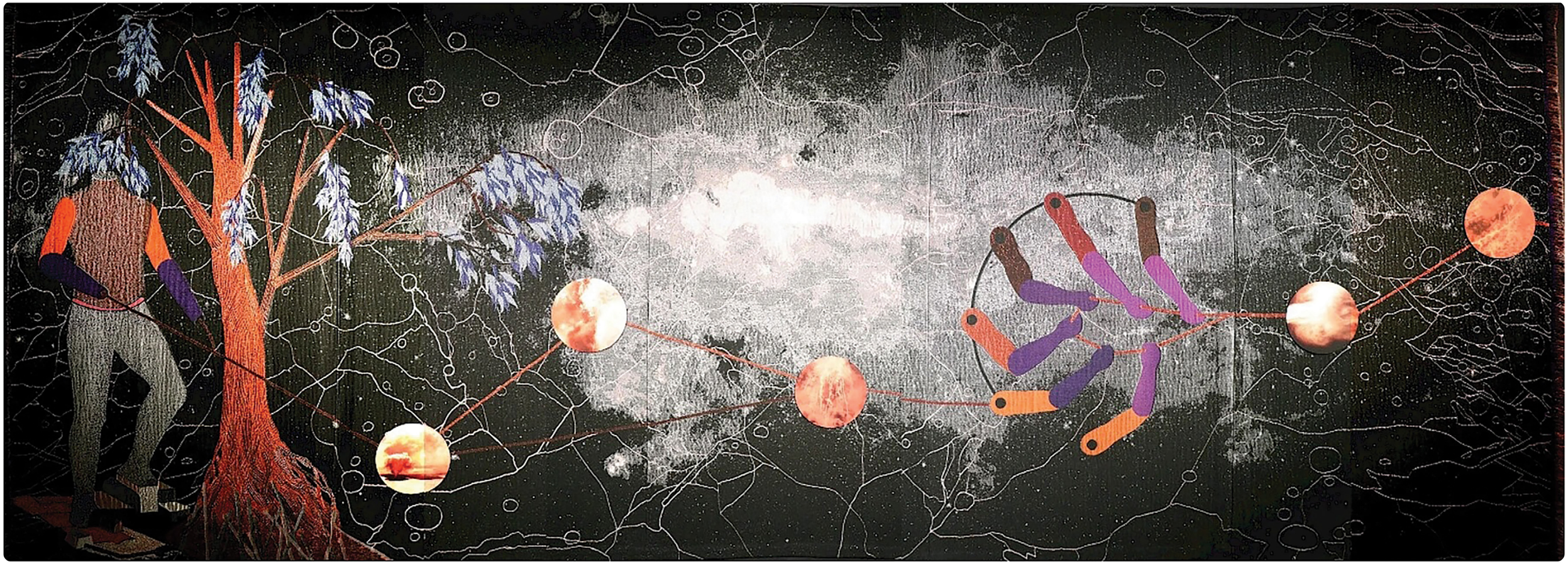
Otobong Nkanga, *Manifest of Shifting Strains and Double Plot*, 2018, National Museum Cardiff. Photo: Polly Thomas. Courtesy the artist

Shown next to this work was *Manifest of Shifting Strains* (2018). It is a circular form that contains different materials in different states. The work was looking at material and how it manifests through expansion, heat, rusting. For me, it's necessary and generative to think through material in relation to politics and to the kind of upheavals that are taking place today. But also to think through these upheavals in relation to matter, the farm land, soil, the shift of acidity, what all of that means for many life forms. One is not separate from the other; rather, these are different forms of translation and visibility. I hope that makes sense.

I would like to end with this poem.

Future

The chains are formed
Linking stubborn bubbles
Of isolated worlds.
Will it stain or purge these ageing cells future.



Double Plot, 2018, woven textile with photography. Courtesy the artist

Dispatch: Care work is grief work

Abril Cisneros Ramírez

18 Nov 2024

William Hogarth, *Time Smoking a Picture (Detail)*, 1761, etching and aquatint

There is no speaking about grief without speaking about volume. In the opening scene of *The Human Mourning*, José Revueltas describes death as sitting on a chair, waiting to enter the body of an ill young girl.[1] As she sits, her volume morphs, changing colors. Here, death is not dying but the materialization of the father's grief – occupying space, resting on a surface – in the moment he fully realizes his daughter is going to die.

Revueltas' description buzzes in my head, not only because it captures the moment grief becomes physically tangible but also because it pins down the exact instant the possibility of loss emerges – grief does not appear when we lose something, but rather when we recognize loss as inevitable. I have returned to this passage lately, particularly after attending the last session of the 'Climate Forum III: Towards Change Practices: Poetics and Operations'. Curator Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide and multi-hyphenate artist G presented recent research developments from Regenerative Time – one of four research threads in the upcoming collection presentation at the Van Abbemuseum, that, among other themes, explores how death can figure in a heritage institution.

And how can death figure in an institution that promises immortality after works are acquired for the collection? If objects enter a museum collection to live forever, must they not die first? Are archives not our graveyards? Like Revueltas' text, G's practice is generative in relation to these questions. Her work explores the volume of grief and its many expressions – the shape of absence, the gesture of contouring what is lost. Yolande's

1. 'For death is not dying, but what precedes dying, what immediately precedes it, when it has not yet entered the body but is there, still and white, black, violet, bruised, seated on the nearest chair'. My translation. José Revueltas, *El luto humano*, Mexico: Editorial México, 1943, p.10.

G, *WHAT WOULD IT BE IF THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE AND ONLY FEEL WOULD BE IN 3D*, 2024, (work in progress), G's Studio, EKWC. Courtesy the artist

practice, in turn, often deploys speculative narratives as a tool for recasting artworks away from traditional readings – away from claims of universal value, asserting that history is always negotiated. Yolande has invited G to develop, alongside the museum's conservation team, an addendum to the existing conservation protocol, based on a series of case studies that explore the many ways (beyond material decay) in which an artwork can 'die'. Additionally, G is to score a series of ceremonies to both celebrate and mourn art works, and to mediate this transition – attention to ritual insists that grief cannot be expedited.

Within the framework of a heritage institution, the task the project brings forth has both research and speculative latitude. A regenerative approach to time invites an expanded understanding of objecthood, recognizing that artworks can die means acknowledging that they also live – that they have lovers, detractors, and relationships unfolding over time, punctuated by ceremonial appreciation. And it involves a structural questioning of the museum's collecting practices, which lean toward accumulative preservation as a means of denying mortality. Is this refusal to let go itself a form of grief? Is there potential for renewal in the process of release?

Attendees at the online presentation at the Climate Forum III were asked to bring an object they felt represented them and were willing to let go of. In a previous in-person edition of the presentation these items were laid on a table. When reminded that they might actually have to part with them, attendees quickly reclaimed what they couldn't afford to lose. When projected onto the logic of conservation work, this anecdote

G, *ART*, 2024, video, 3 minutes 20 seconds. Courtesy the artist

prompts a reflection on what loss can trigger. Even as they care for objects, conservators are perpetually grieving them. Grief must sit in the conservator's chair because, in order to prevent possible loss, their task is to assume that loss is always possible, to search for evidence that death is a diligent creature.

Conservation, then, is inherently speculative labour, operating in the realm of preventative measures for a future change of state. Or as Jane Henderson observes, much of conservation work is guided by the question: 'Is my object being damaged in a way I currently cannot see, but someone might detect in the future with equipment I don't yet possess?'[2] If successful conservation delivers benefits for the future, how are these objects alive in the present? May we, propelled by anticipatory mourning, deprive our artworks from living a rich public life?

And yet, speculative vigilance collides with the growing burden of accumulation in a shrinking museum storage space. G plays a run and gun video, musicalized to drum and bass and shot at the museum's storage, where stacked crates tower over the cameraperson in a mazy configuration. From this paradoxical articulation follows the project's critique of the value system sustaining the presumed common horizon of cultural heritage. What feels easier to let go of? What do we rush to retrieve from the table? Who stands behind "we"? To uncommon histories we must uncommon futures, says Yolande – who are we keeping all this for? Regenerative time calls for a conservation practice that holds as much as it releases, cradles transition, belly laughs while mourning and allows itself some time. If only a minute. If only an hour. If only a day. For all ages.[3]

2. Jane Henderson, 'Beyond Lifetimes: Who Do We Exclude When We Keep Things for the Future?', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation 43*, no. 3, 2020, p. 198.

3. Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide (ed.), *G's Grief-Sad-Feeling-Weird-Out-of-This-World Coloring Book*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2022.

Dispatch: There is grief, but there is also life

Cathryn Klasto

1 Nov 2024

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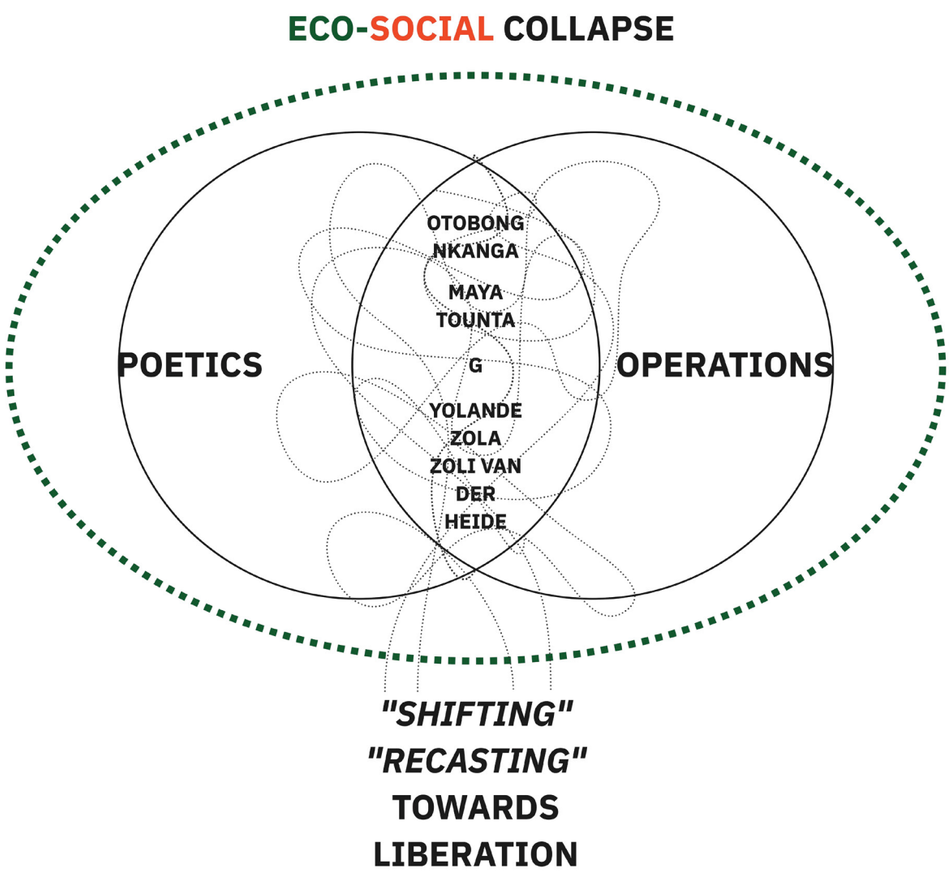
THERE



IS

HERE WE ARE,

YOU AND ME

FILLING THE HOLES

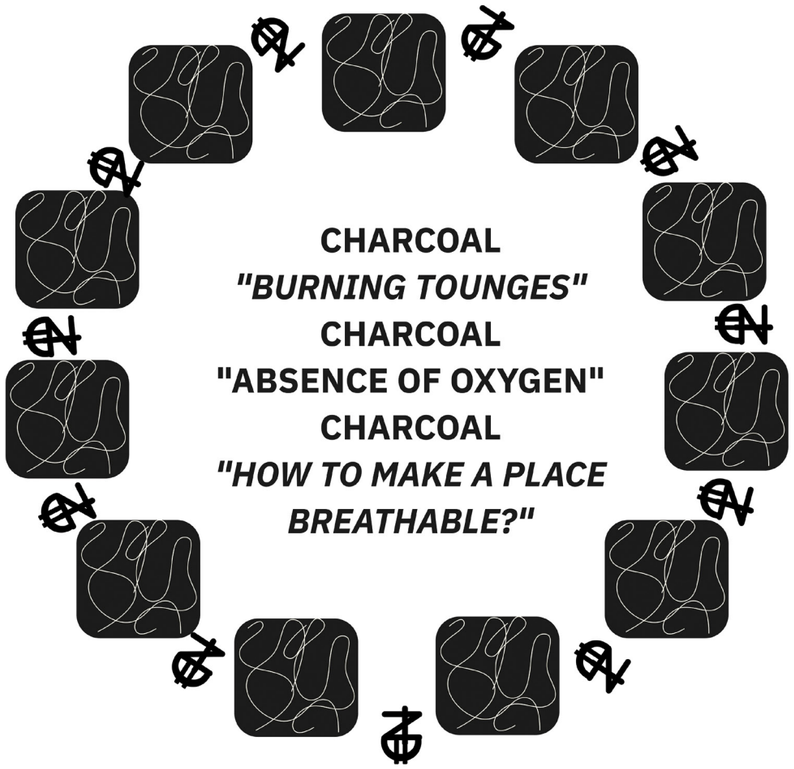
OF EXTRACTION

WITH A CARE THAT

CULTIVATES LIFE.

GRIEF,

RECIPE



SYSTEM

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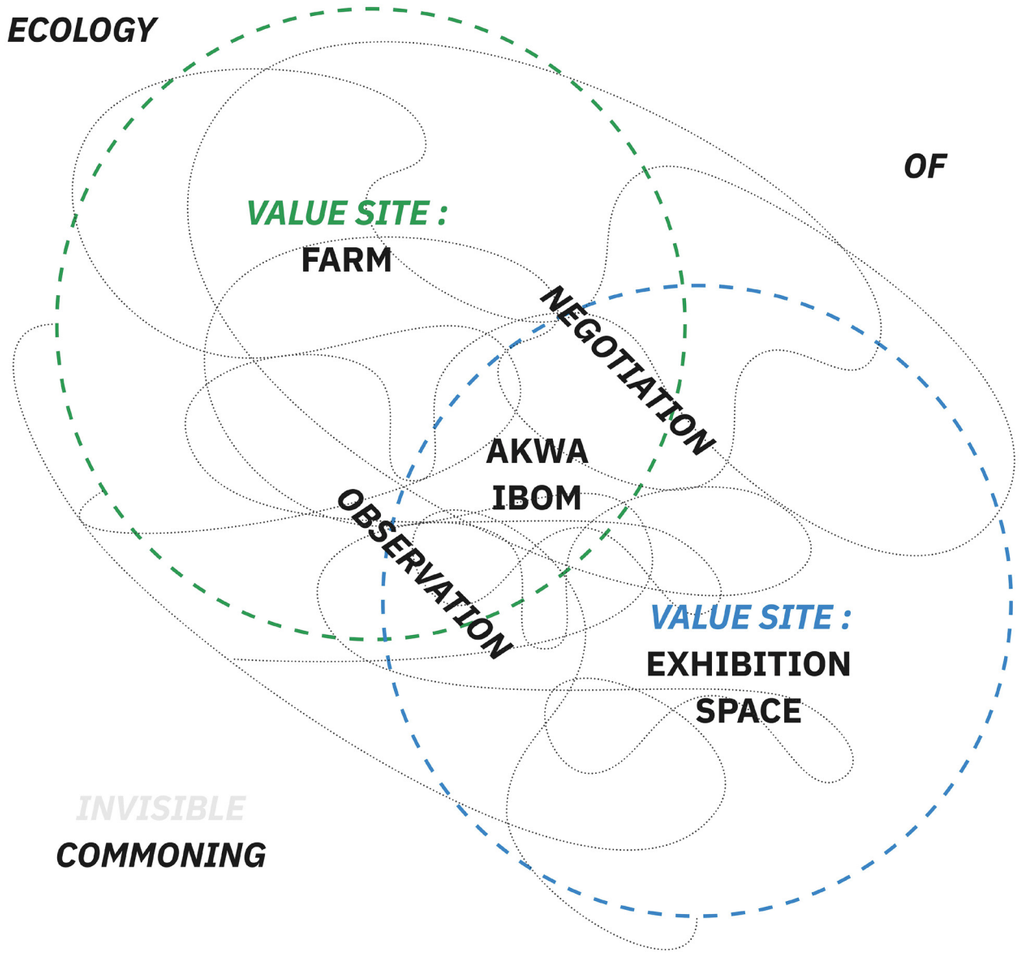

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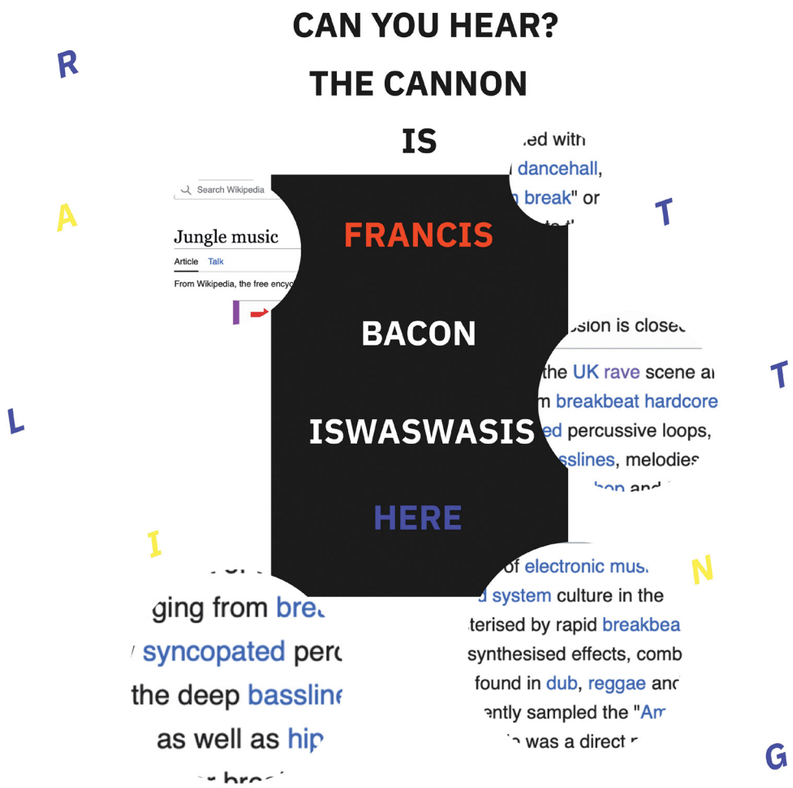
CAN YOU HEAR?
THE CANNON
IS
FRANCIS
BACON
ISWASWASIS
HERE
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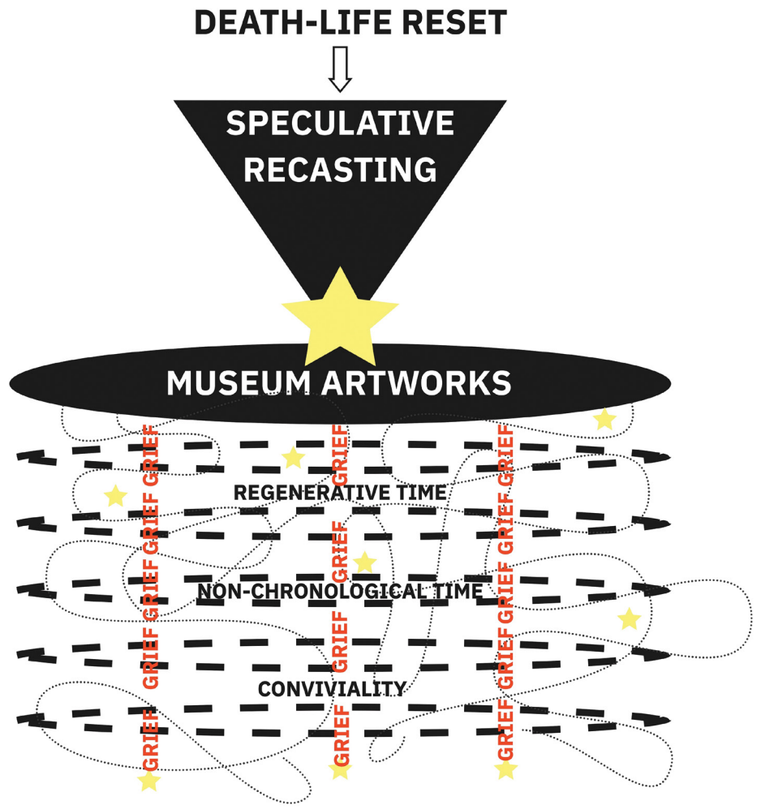
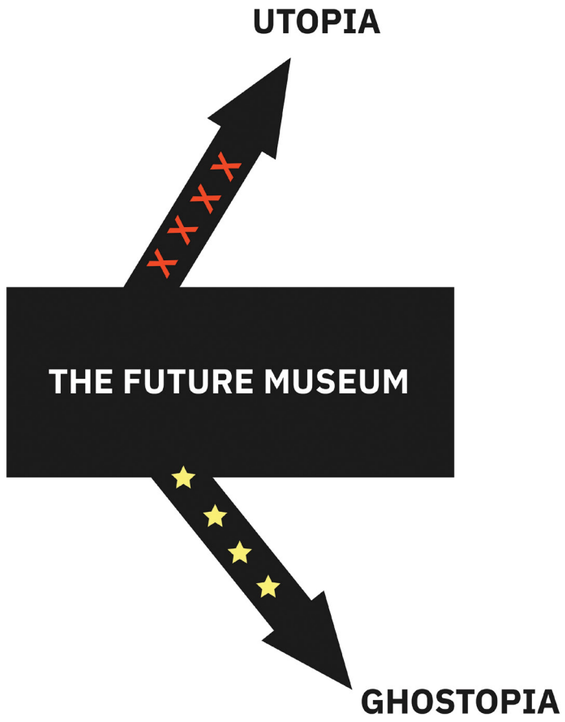
IS


DEATH-LIFE RESET
SPECULATIVE RECASTING
MUSEUM ARTWORKS
REGENERATIVE TIME
NON-CHRONOLOGICAL TIME
CONVIVIALITY
GRIEF

ALSO


UTOPIA
XXXX
THE FUTURE MUSEUM
GHOSTOPIA

LIFE


LIFE
SHOKU, HAPPY BIRTHDEATHDAY!
COME DOWN FROM YOUR HOOK AND EMBRACE
DEATH
SHOKU, HAPPY BIRTHDEATHDAY!
COME DOWN FROM YOUR HOOK AND EMBRACE

Climate Forum IV – Readings

Merve Bedir

29 Aug 2025

Inside the dodo bird is a forest, Inside the forest a peach analog, Inside the peach analog a woman, Inside the woman a lake of funerals, disappointed male lovers, scientists, Inside the lake a volcano of whale songs, Inside the volcano a language of naming, Inside the language an algorithm for de-extinction, Inside the algorithm blued dynamite to dissolve the colony's Sun, twinkle twinkle, I didn't mean to fall in love with failure, its molting rapture, I didn't mean to name myself from a necklace of silent vowels, I didn't go looking for the bird, I entered through the empty cage, hips first

Zaina Alsous, 2019[1]

1. Zaina Alsous, 'Bird Prelude', *A Theory of Birds*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2019.

The following questions, marked below in italics, are situated in the complexities and contradictions of Indigeneity, with the motivation to support, with readings, those who 'run alongside disasters and stay with the trouble', who witness ecocides, urbicides, genocides, those who think on violence and displacement, as well as the practices and pedagogies of endurance, inhabitation, and survival, today, at the end of many worlds.

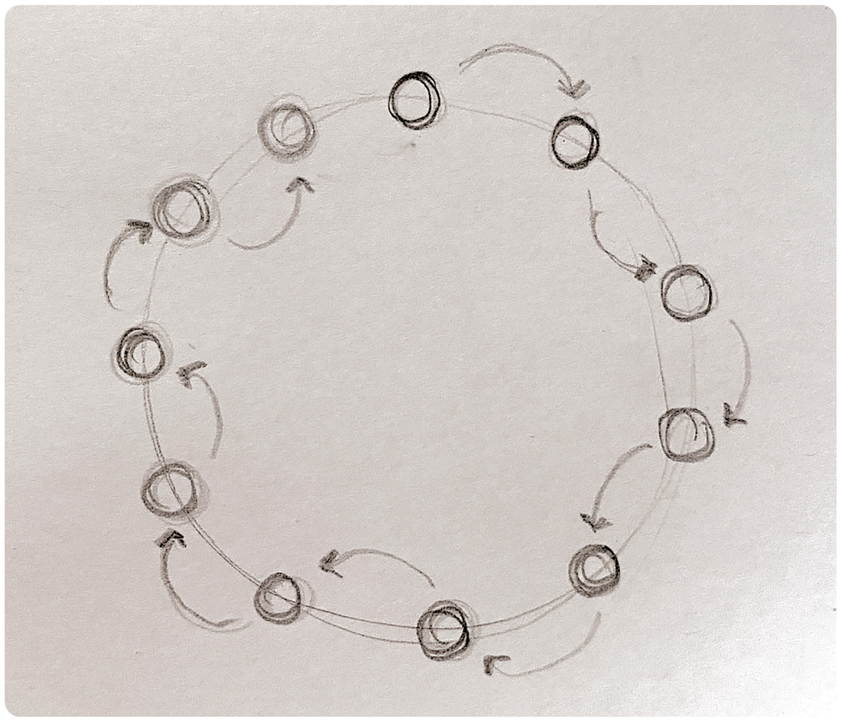
Living with Mangroves in Lau Fiu Shan Village, Deep Bay, Hong Kong, 2020.
Photo: Merve Bedir. Courtesy Mathew Pryor

This photo is from the 70s of Deep Bay, the fishing village, Lau Fau Shan, whose livelihood depends on oyster aquaculture. Villagers used to collect oysters from the bodies of mangroves, otherwise using stakes or lattice trays of bamboo. Oysters were cleaned on the shore, villagers then made building material from oyster shells, mixing it with glutenous rice, and egg white. Historians point to similar techniques that had been used in the City Walls of Nanjing, and the Tiger Hill Pagoda in Suzhou, centuries ago.

> *How and why do skills, techniques of living move from place to place along with their human and nonhuman communities? What and who is changed, displaced, disappeared, erased in this process across different times?*

Indigeneity is a complex and contradictory topic in Hong Kong, that touches on the logic of contemporary capitalist development, its history as a British Colony, and those of the dynasties in China. Michael Leung articulates its different dimensions in relation to autonomy and conviviality, in his novel Three Villages. This review offers an insight into the novel and the condition that Leung mines.

JN, 'Autonomy, Conviviality, Indigeneity', Lausan, 2024



Rotation of movement in Dhikr ceremony performed by Chechen women in Pankisi valley, Georgia

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In 2018, I was in Tbilisi for a series of workshops on landscape and pedagogy. Whilst there, I visited a village in Pankisi valley where Chechen women (away from their homelands) perform Sufi Dhikr ceremony: A ritual asking for peace, for their people and the land. This women's ceremony and community has survived centuries of oppression between Soviet modernity and patriarchal Islam. On ritual and resistance, Noor Abed asserts that 'Movement is a basic tool of resistance in Palestine. Improvisation is a necessity, not a choice'.

How do humans survive in relation to their rituals and homelands?

Emily Jisso Bowles, 'Resistance as Ritual. Interview with Noor Abed', Talking Shorts, 2025

In 'Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation', Leanne Betasamosake Simpson claims that 'a resurgence of Indigenous political cultures, governances and nation-building requires generations of Indigenous peoples to grow up intimately and strongly connected to our homelands, immersed in our languages and spiritualities, and embodying our traditions of agency, leadership, decision-making and diplomacy'.

Can humans survive in English?

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 'Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2014, pp. 1–25

Kulagu Tu Buvongan collective, LED strip listing martyred Philippine Indigenous activists, detail of forest sound installation exhibited as part of 'signals…瞬息: signals… here and there', Para Site, Hong Kong, 12 August – 29 September 2023. Photograph: Jason Chen

In Hong Kong, Kulagu Tu Buvongan's work was presented at the rooftop of Para Site gallery, with the sound weaving in and out of the staircase and the open space. Few people actually realize that Para Site exists in the building it occupies, most people know it by the tenant who occupies the first floor more prominently: a funeral service. the names of Indigenous activists martyred during the Duterte presidency are streamed on an LED. As you look at the names on the LED, you also see yourself amid the backdrop of Hong Kong development, some of whose capital have links to exploitative practices in the Philippines and Philippine migrant labour.

How to protect those who dedicate their lives to inform others about the ethical communication of indigenous livelihood?

Building debris deposited to Amik Valley after the February six earthquakes, Amik Valley, Turkey, 2023. Photo: Merve Bedir

For the inhabitants in the region, the predicament of having to endure disaster after disaster – be it at the hands of authoritarian regimes, the Covid-19 pandemic, war and displacement, fires and floods as a result of climate breakdown, and now the earthquakes between Turkey and Syria – is an experience tantamount to further extinction, of their cultures, and histories under the continuation of colonialisms operating in the region.

Could thinking with Indigeneity help to reimagine life after disaster?

Climate Forum IV: Further reading

Ola Hassanain
Ola Hassanain & Egbert Alejandro Martina, ‘Architectures of the (Un)inhabitable’, disembodieterritories.com
Ola Hassanain, ‘These Walls: The State and Humanly Workable Geographies’, PARSE, ‘On the Question of Exhibition’, vol. 3, 2021.

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu
Alexis Paulin Gumbs, ‘Undrowned. Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals’, Chico: AK Press, 2020.

Nkule Mabaso
May-Britt Öhman, ‘Settler Colonialism in Ungreen, Climate-Unfriendly Disguise and As a Tool for Genocide’ in Hiuwai Chu et al. (ed.), *Climate: Our Right to Breathe*, Berlin: L’Internationale Online and K. Verlag, 2022.

Kulagu Tu Buvongan
Kulagu Tu Buvongan, ‘For every name, a forest’, 2025
Manobo: ‘Mgo ngaran, puwason’ | Filipino: Sa bawat ngalan, kagubatan | Sugbuanon: ‘Sa kada ngalan, lasang’

Mgo Ngaran, Puwason (Manobo), Sa Kada Ngalan, Lasang (Sugbuanon), Sa Bawat Ngalan, Kagubatan (Filipino), For Every Name, a Forest (English)

Kulagu Tu Buvongan

28 Dec 2025

Amid the pandemic lockdowns in 2021, Manobo and Tinananun Indigenous elders in the self-organized camps in Davao City recreated forest sounds from memory and explained their meanings and use. The sounds and stories behind these sounds were documented and later taught to children in the camps, many of whom were born in exile and have never experienced forest life in their ancestral domains. The sounds correspond to different birds, animals and insects, some of which haven't been seen in years. A bird call recording is for children and future generations to remember: the sound of the forest offers a way of hiding from kidnaps and killings, as well as respecting the forest by learning its voice.

Home of endangered flora and fauna, and the source of several rivers, vast areas of the Pantaron Range have been usurped for large-scale monocrop plantations, mining and logging operations, disrupting the most important watershed and biodiversity corridor in Mindanao. Government and corporate interests have been driving out the Indigenous / Lumad stewards of the Pantaron Range, even labelling them as terrorists (Lumad is the Philippine term for Indigenous people).[1] Some Indigenous groups, vocally critical of this injustice, have been displaced and are now exiles in their own land, living in self-organised camps and sanctuaries across the Philippine archipelago; some have gone into hiding under threat of death, and several have been martyred.

Land reform in the Philippines has failed. The current oligarchic Philippine elite continue to perpetuate the injustices committed by Spanish and American colonizers. Mining contracts are made at the expense of Lumad lands, endangering watersheds and entire ecosystems for short-term profit. Since 2016, many human rights defenders, activists, and journalists have been killed in 'unresolved crimes' after being 'red-tagged' by the government,[2] with no one held to account for their murder. Farmer and peasant landlessness too go hand in hand with the continued exploitation and forced expulsion of the Lumad.

It is in this context that the Pantaron Mountain Range, which is home to many Lumad peoples, has been exploited via gold mining, logging and infrastructure, causing watersheds to be toxified, the rice fields to be bulldozed and Lumad peoples to be displaced. The mountain range is the source of food, medicine, materials and other necessities for Lumad peoples. This is what we (Kulagu tu Buvongan and Lumad peoples) stand up for, what we defend. The headwaters of most of the major rivers of Mindanao island spring from the Pantaron. The wild animals live in Pantaron. The trees live in Pantaron. Pantaron is gold.

When the logging started, we started organizing. Father Paps told us: 'Individual action is not enough. There must be collective action from the Indigenous (Lumad) peoples.' This is how we united with the Manobo from the Pantaron Mountain Range. Defending the mountains is not bad. Protecting the mountains of Mindanao is not bad. My actions are not just for my sake. They are also for the sake of others.

1. 'Adopted from the Bisayan word meaning "indigenous" or "native", Lumad, as their collective name was announced in 1986, along with their right to self-determination within their respective ancestral domains; representatives from 15 tribes took part in the decision.' Rudy Buhay Rodil, Asia Peacebuilding Initiatives (APBI), 4 November 2014, spf.org

2. See HRF staff, 'Red-Tagging in the Philippines: A License to Kill', Human Rights Foundation, 10 April 2023, hrf.org

It was in late 2021 that Kulagu Tu Buvongan, a collective of majority Pantaron Range Lumad members, held a series of recording sessions and workshops in the camps in Davao City, focused on forest calls and non-lexical vocables, non-words used in daily forest life that mimic forest fauna sounds. Recreated from memory by several Indigenous elders in the camps who explained their meanings and use – some sacred, some for play – these sounds were later taught to Lumad children, many of whom, as before, were born in exile.

A forest of sounds is a manifestation of these recording sessions and workshops: made by displaced human voices documenting a place they cannot yet return to, a landscape in the midst of disappearance. Kulagu Tu Buvongan's works are performative at home, and have been shared as installations elsewhere.

The mobilization and production of these recordings was initially supported by OCAC Taipei in 2021, with additional donations by Quezon City-based artist Lyra Garcellano and The Observatory (a rock band based in Singapore), along with the personal resources and initiative of the collective members. Meanwhile, Lumad schools continue to be attacked by state military and paramilitary troops.[3] Most of the collective members and people involved are kept anonymous. The raw video documentation materials were lost soon after the recording.

From the initial workshops in 2021, the collective's projects have since travelled across the world as iterative installations at various venues: the voices of Pantaron Range elders and their children are presented through a multichannel sound set-up, with the addition of visual components specific to the location.

Few people actually realize that Hong Kong's art space Para Site exists on the top floor of the twenty-two storey building it occupies, which most people know by the more prominent occupant of the first floor, a provider of funeral services. For our 2023 installation there, an LED strip faced out of the windows listing the names of Indigenous activists martyred in the Philippines since the Duterte presidency began in 2016, while the Pantaron Range forest sound recordings wove in and out through the staircase and into the open space. Here, as you looked at the names on the LED, you knew you did so amid Hong Kong and against the backdrop of its development, with its many ties to Philippine migrant labour and to exploitative practices in the Philippines.

For the 2024 iteration at FONTE in São Paulo, along with the sound component of the work, the names of Brazilian Indigenous activists who were martyred during a similar time period during the Bolsonaro presidency were streamed on another LED alongside the names of those from the Philippines.

3. See 'Lumad schools under attack in mineral-rich Mindanao', IBON Foundation,17 March 2017, ibon.org

Names of animals in Manobo, Kulagu Tu Buvongan workshop documentation, Davao City, 2021. Photo: Kulagu Tu Buvongan collective

Kulagu Tu Buvongan collective, LED strip listing martyred Philippine Indigenous activists, detail of forest sound installation exhibited as part of ‘signals…瞬息: signals… here and there’, Para Site, Hong Kong, 12 August – 29 September 2023. Photo: Jason Chen

Elder reflected in recording equipment documenting Kulagu Tu Buvongan forest sound recording session in Davao City, 2021. Photo: Kulagu Tu Buvongan collective

Simple instruments fashioned from plant materials with which forest sounds were made in addition to human voices. Kulagu Tu Buvongan forest sound recording session, Davao City, 2021. Photo: Kulagu Tu Buvongan collective

Kulagu Tu Buvongan collective, São Paulo iteration of forest sound installation, exhibited as part of ‘A Fonte Deságua na Floresta’ (A Spring Flows Into the Forest), FONTE, São Paulo, 27 July – August 2024. Photo: Filipe Berndt

We want our voices to be heard not just in Mindanao or in the Philippines. We want the whole world to hear. We tell them: We do not have any regrets over being red-tagged. Our consciences are clear. There are no intentions behind our activism other than to think and act for the common good. We tell our children that we have no regrets.

Philippine Indigenous activists killed July 2016 to June 2021[4]:

Joaquin Cadacgan, 9 July 2016
Remar Mayantao, 12 July 2016
Senon Nacaytuna, 12 July 2016
Rogen Suminao, 12 July 2016
Hermi Alegre, 15 July 2016
Makenet Gayoran, 30 July 2016
Jimmy Barosa, 12 August 2016
Jerry ‘Dandan’ Layola, 12 August 2016
Jessebelle Sanchez, 12 August 2016
Jimmy Saypan, 10 October 2016
Venie Diamante, 5January 2017
Veronico Delamente, 20January 2017
Renato Anglao, 3 February 2017
Matanem Pocuan, 4 February 2017
Moryel Latan, 6 February 2017
Emelito Rotimas, 6 February 2017
Jerson Bito, 11 February 2017
Pipito Tiambong, 11 February 2017
Edweno ‘Edwin’ Catog, 16 February 2017
Datu Pedro Pandagay, 23 March 2017
Federico Plaza, 3 May 2017
Mario Versoza, 21 May 2017
Daniol Lasib, 26 May 2017
Ana Marie Aumada, 27 May 2017
Ande Latuan, 6 July 2017
Remond Lino, 12 July 2017
Romy Rompas, 16 August 2017
Roger ‘Titing’ Timboco, 23 August 2017
Obello Bay-ao, 5 September 2017
Erning Aykid, 15 September 2017
Aylan Lantoy, 15 September 2017
Samuel Angkoy, 3 December 2017
Mateng Bantal, 3 December 2017
Pato Celarbo, 3 December 2017
Artemio Danyan, 3 December 2017
Rhudy Danyan, 3 December 2017
Victor Jr Danyan, 3 December 2017
Datu Victor Danyan Sr, 3 December 2017
To Diamante, 3 December 2017
Ricky Olado, 28 January 2018
Ricardo Mayumi, 2 March 2018
Garito Malibato, 22 March 2018
Jhun Mark Acto, 21 April 2018
Dande Lamubkan, 30 April 2018
Carlito Sawad, 23 May 2018
Burad Salping, 25 May 2018

4. Courtesy of Philippine Indigenous rights organizations Katribu and Sandugo. See respectively katribu.net and facebook.com.

Beverly Geronimo, 26 May 2018
Jose Unahan, 6 June 2018
Nestor Sacote, 10 June 2018
Menyo Yandong, 10 August 2018
Rolly Panebio, 18 August 2018
Jean Labial, 19 August 2018
Rex Hangadon, 15 September 2018
Jimmy Ambat, 7 October 2018
Esteban Empong Sr, 18 November 2018
Rommel Romon, 23 November 2018
Randel Gallego, 24 January 2019
Emel Tejero, 24 January 2019
Randy Malayao, 30 January 2019
Sanito ‘Tating’ Delubio, 1 March 2019
Jerome Pangadas, 15 March 2019
Kaylo Bontolan, 7 April 2019
Datu Mario Agsab, 8 July 2019
Alex Lacay, 9 August 2019
Jeffrey Bayot, 12 August 2019
Bai Leah Tumbalang, 23 August 2019
Sammy Pohayon, 11 September 2019
Romen Milis, 25 April 2020
Roel Baog, 1 May 2020
Reynante Linas, 1 May 2020
Don Don Cenimo, 11 June 2020
Randy Pindig,11 June 2020
Bai Merlinda Ansabu Celis, 23 August 2020
Resky Ma Ellon, 3 November 2020
Deric John A. Datuwata, 5 November 2020
Mario Aguirre, 30 December 2020
Garson Catamin, 30 December 2020
Maurito Diaz Sr, 30 December 2020
Rolando Diaz, 30 December 2020
Eliseo Gayas Jr, 30 December 2020
Roy Giganto, 30 December 2020
Reynaldo Katipunan, 30 December 2020
Artilito Katipunan Sr, 30 December 2020
Jomar Vidal, 30 December 2020
Julie Catamin, 28 February 2021
Randy ‘Pulong’ Dela Cruz, 7 March 2021
Puroy Dela Cruz, 7 March 2021
Abner Esto, 7 March 2021
Edward Esto, 7 March 2021
Angel Rivas, 15 June 2021
Lenie Rivas, 15 June 2021
Willie Rodriguez, 15 June 2021

Breaths of Knowledges

Robel Temesgen

7 Dec 2025

Breaths of Knowledges: Practising Water

The invitation to breathe together is, perhaps, the most fitting entry point into a conversation about *Practising Water*.[1] It began, as in the lecture that seeded this text, with an exercise borrowed from Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (2020).[2] The collective act of breathing – listening to one's own breath while attending to the rhythm of others – becomes a metaphor for a politics of attunement. To breathe in unison is not merely to synchronize lungs but to share vulnerability: to recognize that the capacity to breathe, both literally and metaphorically, is unequally distributed. In Gumbs's formulation, learning to 'breathe underwater' becomes a radical pedagogy of survival, a method for living in the suffocating conditions of the contemporary world.[3]

This opening gesture situates *Practising Water* in the same current of thought: one that conceives of artistic research as a practice of collective respiration, a series of attempts to attune, to listen and to co-exist with forces that exceed the human. Listening, in this context, is not a metaphorical act but a way of practising relational epistemology. It asks for an openness that allows knowledge to arrive through resonance rather than declaration. Breathing together, like listening to water, teaches that knowledge flows through presence, duration and return.

Practising Water: a framework of relation

Practising Water; Rituals and Engagements is an artistic research project that studies the chronicles of water spiritualities and the symbiotic relationships they devise as modes of communication and language. Rather than treating water as a resource, metaphor or subject, the project approaches it as a co-constitutive being – an entity that listens, remembers, resists and transforms, shaping those who engage with it in return.[4]

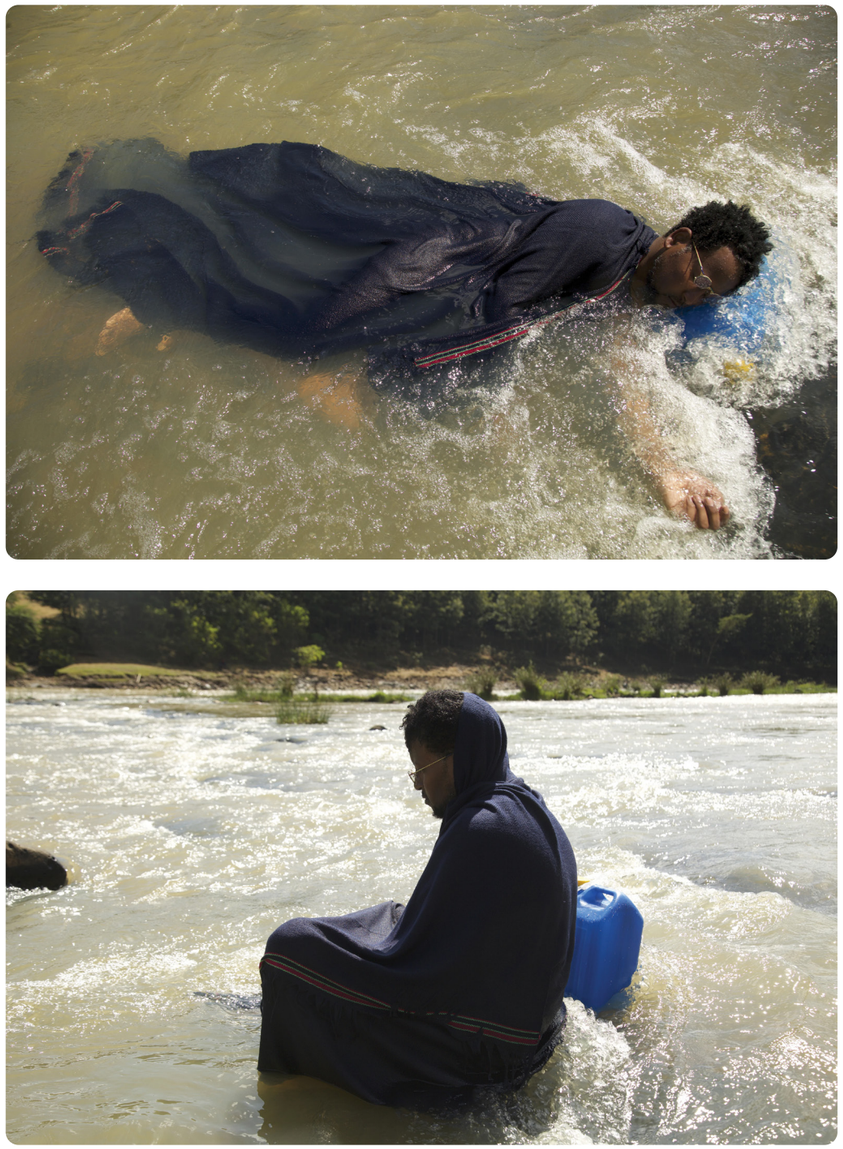
At the outset, the project was guided by several open questions: What does it mean to engage with water not as material but as a living relation? How might such questions be approached through artistic practice, gestures, and rituals? What epistemologies of practising water can help us untangle such questions? These questions were not meant to be solved. Rather, they were companions, shaping the project's path and deepening it through every encounter.

1 ***Practising Water*** **is Robel Temesgen's PhD project at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Norway.**

2 **Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.**

3 **Ibid.**

4 **See Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017.**



Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Practising Water*, 2023, sleeping performance. Photo: Shimelis Tadesse

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Meeting New Waters*, 2024–25, Glomma River, performance documentation. Photo: Frank Holtschlag

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Meeting New Waters*, 2024–25, Glomma River, performance documentation. Photo: Frank Holtschlag

The methodology of *Practising Water* centres on listening as an embodied ethical and spiritual act: listening here not as passive reception but as a form of relation – as an attunement to silences, memories, and the more-than-human presence of water. The project emerges from a localized context, beginning at Gish Abay, the source of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia, and extending toward Lake Tana; then on to other bodies of water: the Glomma river in Norway, and beyond. The two geographies of the Blue Nile and the Glomma mirror one another as sites of offering and listening. Each encounter with water carries its own temporality and ethics.

Between these places, the project articulates what I call *epistemic gestures* – acts through which knowing takes form materially, relationally and ethically. Sleeping beside a river, painting with holy water, entrusting parchment to a current – these gestures embody knowledge through care and attention. They reveal that research, when lived rather than observed, is not the accumulation of data but the cultivation of relation.[5]

5. See Shawn Wilson, ***Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods***, Halifax: Fernwood, 2008.

Material ethics and opacity

From its inception, *Practising Water* has been an inquiry into the ethics of artistic research. Working across geographies, I have sought to position myself not as an authoritative voice but as a participant within a web of relations – between human, spirit and water. The task, then, is to engage without claiming, to translate without appropriating, to create without erasing the contexts from which meaning arises.

This ethical stance finds resonance in local epistemic traditions such as *säm-inä-wärq* (wax and gold), a poetic system that encodes double meanings within language, allowing the spoken and the concealed to coexist. Within *Practising Water*, this becomes a methodological analogue for *opacity* – a way of holding knowledge that invites interpretation without surrendering depth.[6] To withhold is not to deny, but to care; to listen before speaking. Opacity becomes a relational ethic, one that acknowledges that some knowledges protect themselves through layers, and that what is concealed remains active.

6. 'Wax and gold' is a traditional Ethiopian literary technique characterized by dual-layered meaning. The 'wax' refers to the surface or literal interpretation, while the 'gold' signifies the hidden, often spiritual or philosophical message beneath. Commonly employed in Qene poetry and proverbs, here this oral tradition serves as a metaphor for navigating complex social, moral, political and theological ideas.

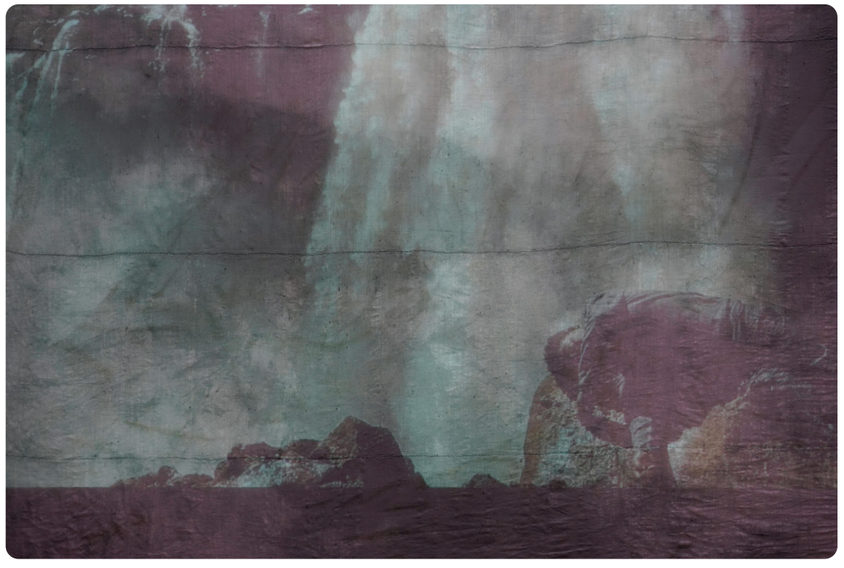
Within the artworks in the project, opacity is also material. It resides in the parchment I use in my work, which absorbs moisture and resists fixity; in the painting pigments that blur rather than define; in the gestures that elude translation. These qualities shape not only what the work reveals but how it behaves over time – fading, shifting and returning with new forms of meaning. The ethics of opacity thus extend to the processes of making and sharing, allowing the work to remain open-ended, unpossessable and alive.

Painting as translation and holding back

One of the project's central articulations takes form in a monumental painting – 60 metres long and 4.5 metres high – composed of hundreds of pieces of goatskin parchment. The decision to use parchment was

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Practising Water*, sleeping performance, 2023.
Photo: Shimelis Tadesse

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Practising Water*, 2023, sleeping performance.
Photo: Shimelis Tadesse



Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Practising Water*, 2023, exhibition documentation,
Photo: Kunsthall Oslo

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Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Practising Water*, 2023, exhibition documentation, Photo: Kunsthall Oslo

not aesthetic alone but ethical, an attempt to find a material capable of carrying the density of stories gathered over time.

The parchments were commissioned from local artisans, sustaining a lineage of craft that bridges generations. Each piece bore traces of touch, life and labour, forming a kind of collective skin. When sewn together, they created a continuous, breathing surface – a riverbed of memory.

On this surface, I painted with diluted pigments and graphite, tracing tools and gestures associated with rituals of water: vessels, cords, fragments, shadows of breath. Many of these shapes were drawn from stories collected in fieldwork, yet their translation remained deliberately partial. What was withheld became as significant as what was shown. The act of painting turned into an act of listening – listening to the material, to the stories that resisted depiction, to the silences between gestures.

In this sense, painting became an epistemic gesture: an embodied negotiation between what can be made visible and what must remain veiled. Holding back became both method and stance – an acknowledgment that relation requires distance, that meaning deepens in the space between.

Fieldwork, studio work and the ethics of rhythm

The project unfolded through two interdependent 'spaces': fieldwork and studio work. Fieldwork extended beyond ethnography – it was a practice of being present, of attending to water and its stories. At Gish Abay,

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Meeting New Waters*, 2024–25, Glomma River, performance documentation. Photo: Frank Holtschlag

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Meeting New Waters*, 2024–25, Glomma River, performance documentation. Photo: Karin Nygård

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Meeting New Waters*, 2024–25, Glomma River, performance documentation. Photo: Karin Nygård

I listened to those who live by the spring; to songs, to silences, to the tactile rhythm of water as it emerges from stone.

The studio, in turn, became a space of reflection and continuation. Fragments gathered from the field reappeared in material form – drawings, pigments, parchment – altered through time and distance. The studio was another riverbed, where what had been submerged resurfaced differently.

This cyclical movement between field and studio mirrors the hydrological cycle itself: evaporation, condensation, return. The project's second geography, Norway, introduced another current. Near the Guttormsgaard Archive in Blaker, I began observing the Glomma river. The archive held Ethiopian manuscripts collected decades ago – traces of another crossing. This meeting of manuscript and water, of archive and river, became the ground for *Meeting Glomma – New Waters* (2024–2025).

In this work, a 78-metre parchment leporello extended from the archive to the riverbank. Participants followed it through snow, their breaths visible in the cold air. The parchment absorbed water, decayed and, five months later, was retrieved in fragments, discoloured and fragrant with river silt. The act echoed a story from Gish Abay, in which Abune Zar'a Brook entrusts prayer books to the spring and later finds them intact. Here, that gesture was reimagined as correspondence across waters: the Blue Nile and the Glomma conversing through time, through trust, and through matter. But unlike the books of Abune Zer'a Brook, I anticipated the leporello's alteration as a sign of conversation rather than dictation.

Ritual, performance and the exhibition as a riverbed

The project's exhibitions have been less conclusions than continuations – spaces in which research breathes. The *Eye of a Water* (2025) installation transformed the gallery into a riverbed of parchment and pigment, an environment where visitors entered as bodies of water themselves, their movement through the space completing the relational circuit. [7]

The exhibition offered no narrative closure; instead, it unfolded as a flow of submersion, texture and opacity. The audience was invited to listen with their bodies *as* waters – to sense knowledge as humidity, as resonance. The work's abstraction was deliberate: it made room for the unknown. Within this atmosphere, opacity functioned as generosity – allowing each viewer to find their own rhythm of relation.

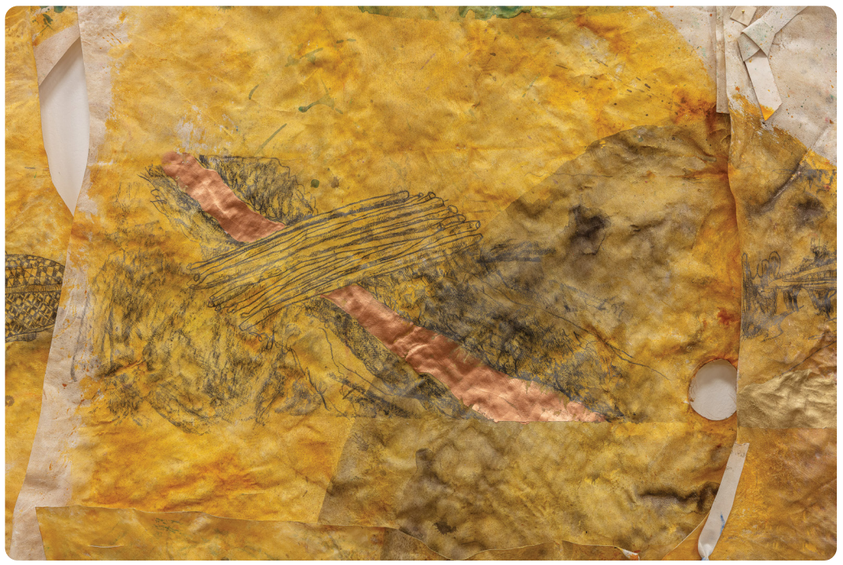
The exhibition thus operated not as representation but as a continuation of the research process – a performative space where material, ritual and thought converged.

7 Robel Temesgen, *Eye of a Water*, 2025, Nitja Centre for Contemporary Art, 1 November – 21 December 2025, nitja.no.

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Eye of a Water*, 2025, details, Nitja Centre for Contemporary Art, Oslo. Photo: Tor S. Ulstein

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Eye of a Water*, 2025, details, Nitja Centre for Contemporary Art, Oslo. Photo: Tor S. Ulstein

Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Eye of a Water*, 2025, details, Nitja Centre for Contemporary Art, Oslo. Photo: Tor S. Ulstein



Robel Temesgen Bizuayehu, *Eye of a Water*, 2025, details, Nitja Centre for Contemporary Art, Oslo. Photo: Tor S. Ulstein

Institutional gestures and relational ethics

Working within academic and exhibiting institutions, alongside communities and archives, required ongoing negotiation. The ethics guiding the artworks also guides the project's relation to such infrastructures, each collaboration – with Nitja Centre for Contemporary Art, Guttormsgaard Archive, or local parchment makers – becoming part of a broader ecology of care. Financial and institutional exchanges have been treated as gestures rather than transactions; acts of commissioning parchment, producing manuscripts, or exhibiting works as moments of reciprocity. In this way, even institutional frameworks have become part of the project's relational ethics: a recognition that every form of support carries history, value and responsibility.

These gestures – academic, material, collaborative – have coalesced into a practice of listening across systems. The project asks what it means to hold relation ethically in spaces of visibility, and how artistic research might offer continuity rather than extraction.

Breaths of knowledges

Practising Water can be understood as a series of iterative breaths. Each artwork, ritual and encounter is a respiration within a larger body – a pulse of knowledge that circulates between beings, materials and worlds. These *breaths of knowledges* are the living manifestations of the project's epistemic gestures.

Each gesture – painting, offering, listening, holding back – breathes with its own rhythm, extending the project's questions rather than resolving them. Together, they form an ecology of relation: water, field, studio, and institution all connected through cycles of trust, opacity, and care.

If the Blue Nile and the Glomma are two waters within this work, they are also two breaths – each carrying their own frequency, each teaching and revealing how knowledge moves between containment and release. Through them, I have learned that to practise water is to practise listening; to practise listening is to breathe.

And perhaps this is the most urgent lesson the project offers: that to know, ethically, is to remain porous – to breathe with others, to let understanding flow as water does, shaping and reshaping the conditions for living.

A Conversation with Keywa Henri

Keywa Henri, Anaïs Roesch

17 Dec 2025

Anaïs Roesch: To begin with, could you tell us where you come from and what kind of environment you grew up in?

Keywa Henri: My heritage and identity are made up of many layers: historical, cultural and personal. I was born in 'Guyana' in 1993 to a Kalin'a Tïlewuyu father and a Brazilian mother. On my mother's side, my Indigenous grandfather, who faced dictatorial repression, took a vow of silence. On my father's side, we are very proud to assert our identity, but in both cases we have experienced violence, both physical and symbolic, from a system that wants to erase us. In this context, how can we not lose sight of who we are, where we come from and what we stand for when the French Constitution does not even recognize us?

AR: You grew up in 'French Guiana' but studied art in Lyon. How did that work out for you?

KH: Yes, like all children from so-called 'overseas territories', I went to school in 'French Guiana' but had to leave for mainland France to continue my higher education because, until the 2000s, there was no university in 'French Guiana'. I enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts in Lyon because I was looking for a course that would give me some freedom. At the time, I was the only Indigenous student and the school was not designed for people like me. There was not a single black teacher, I couldn't find any Indigenous references in the library... I had to look for examples elsewhere, in Brazil and Canada.

AR: Today, you define yourself as an artivist. How has your political stance evolved over the course of your career?

KH: When I started my studies, I didn't want to highlight Indigenous issues because I didn't want to participate in this folklorization, exploiting my uniqueness just to produce something. The art world is like the rest of the world: it infantilizes us.

But today, I fully embrace this position: being an Indigenous artist means speaking out in resistance. We are still too invisible; people are interested in us for what we have, but rarely for who we are.

AR: Ecology is present in your work, even if you don't talk about it directly. Could you explain the link between this dimension and your commitment?

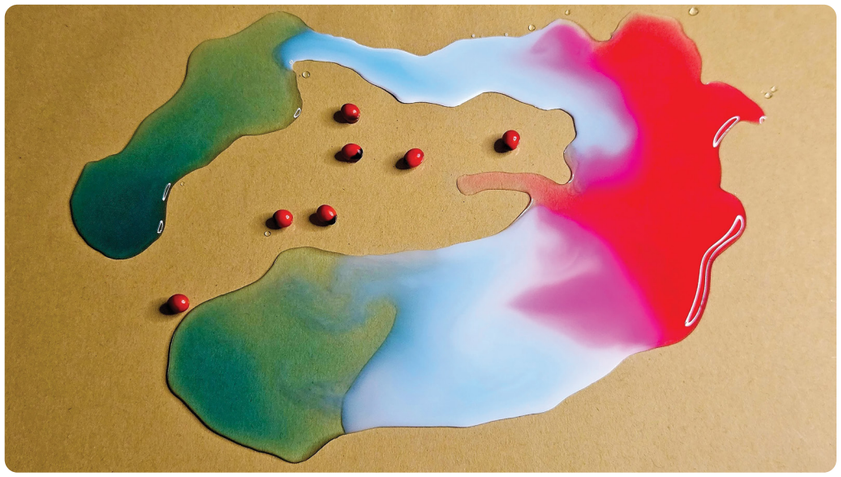
KH: For me, ecology is not a theme, it's a way of being. In Kalin'a culture, we do not separate humans from the earth, nor the body from the land. We belong to a whole. When I talk about the destruction of forests, the disappearance of languages or poisoned rivers, I am not talking about 'ecological' politics, I am talking about my family, my home, what makes me who I am. I observe that today we talk a lot about ecology without ever really listening to the people who live these realities. The West wants to save the planet, but without us. Yet as the Indigenous Peoples' Climate Movement repeatedly affirms 'we are the answer'!

AR: What changes would you like to see in this world?

KH: Today, from a societal point of view, we are accelerating our own collapse. But as Kalin'a Tïlewuyu, the greater the threat, the greater our resistance. For me, art is a way of saying, 'We are still here.'

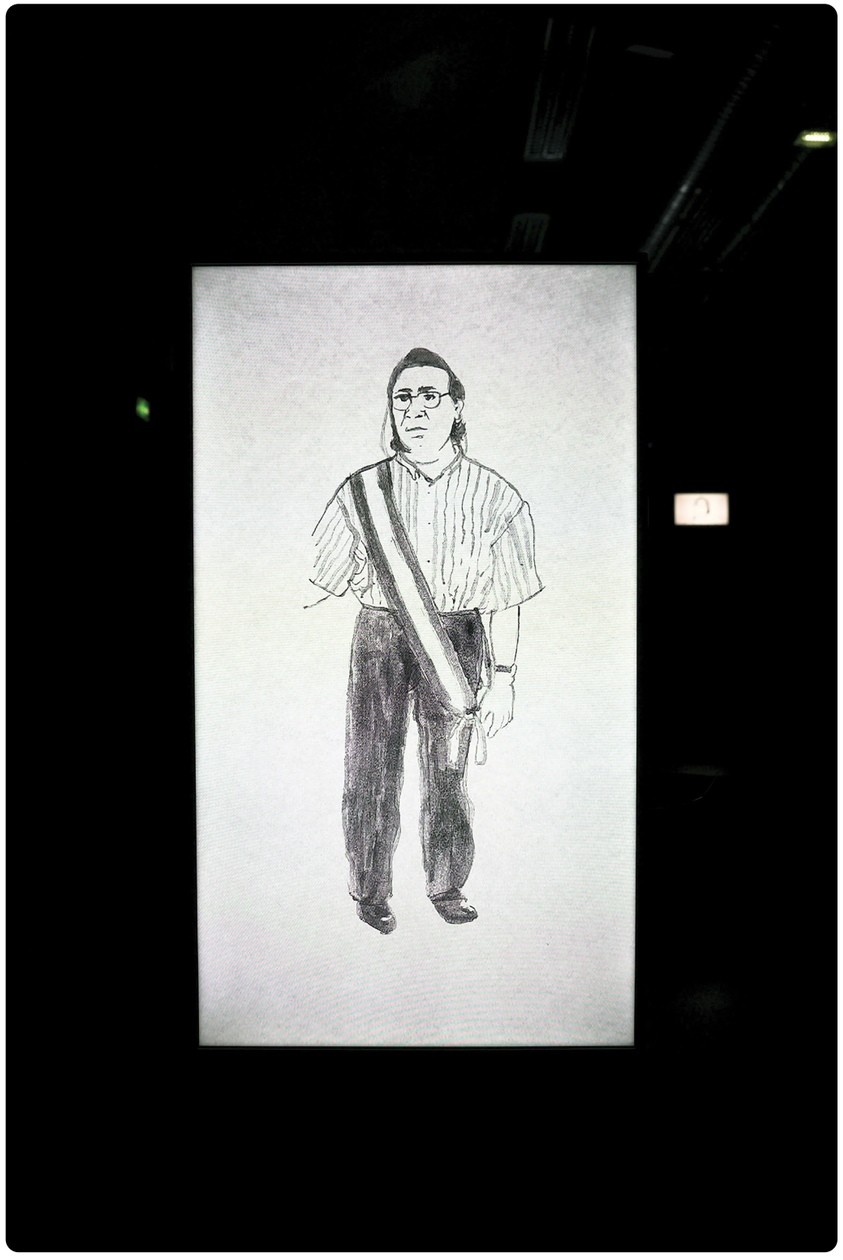
We must reclaim the right to exist differently and refuse to be defined by the gaze of others. In this respect, the art world must also evolve; it cannot limit itself to exhibiting Indigenous artists but must also integrate them into its very functioning.

This interview was carried out within the framework of the Common Ground research programme by AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research & Exhibitions.



Keywa Henri, ***French Guiana***, 2025.

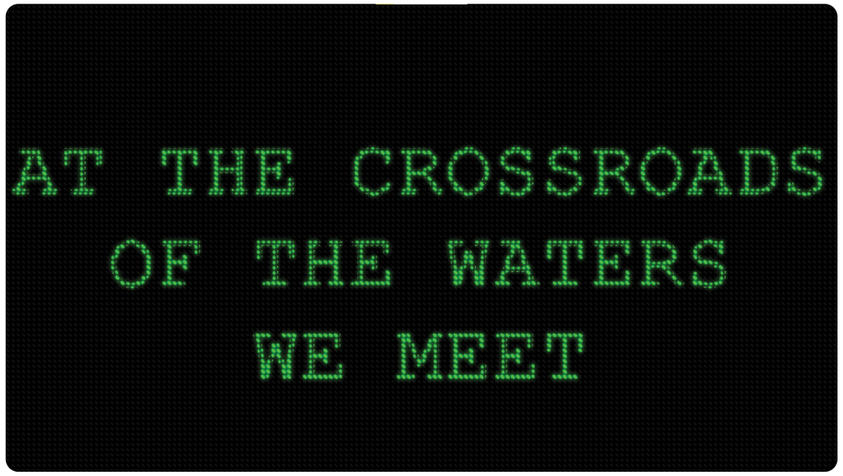
Keywa Henri, *Portrait*, 2025



Keywa Henri, *Atonin Winion* (*THROUGH*), 2022, installation, exhibition view. A portrait drawn with genipa ink, from an archive of Keywa Henri’s dad, Paul Henri, initiator of the 1980s Indigenous movements in ‘French Guiana’.

Keywa Henri, *Nanalo Abiwanon méma* (*We are the Answer*), 2025, performance at Musée des Confluences de Lyon

Keywa Henri, *Yati ayati enaha moloma* (*My house is your house*), 2025, installation, Jardin d'Agronomie Tropicale de Vincennes – former colonial French Guiana pavillion



Keywa Henri, *EKALITIO AGAIN* (*I TELL YOU AGAIN*), 2024, installation

Some Things We Learnt: Working with Indigenous culture from within non-Indigenous institutions

Sandra Ara Benites, Rodrigo Duarte, Pablo Lafuente

9 Dec 2025

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Over the past decade, art and cultural institutions in Brazil have developed a strong interest in Indigenous culture, a shift of focus that contrasts sharply with the lack of attention over the previous ten years. This shift happened in response, first and foremost, to a direct demand for access, agency and representation by Indigenous peoples and collectives, which in turn resulted from the intensification of Indigenous organizational processes in the struggle for rights and for the demarcation and legal recognition of Indigenous lands since the 2000s. After an initially lukewarm response from most institutions and the professionals working within them, a new willingness to respond to these demands emerged, eventually leading to invitations to artists, and to small- and large-scale exhibition projects. But the entry of Indigenous themes and individuals into art institutions was often not only mixed up with narratives and agendas that are not central to the Indigenous movement – for example, sustainability and/or the climate emergency, framed as issues that Indigenous communities should help solve – but also accompanied by urgencies, epistemological assumptions and working practices and processes that are rarely negotiated by, or negotiable for, these institutions.

Consequently, we can say that Indigenous presence has never been so significant in Brazil's cultural-institutional context, both as a topic and because of the number of people involved, almost exclusively artists; yet at the same time, it seems that this incorporation is simply that: an incorporation that assimilates Indigenous people and cultural practices into established institutional models, with no apparent willingness to reconsider assumptions, concepts, values and processes that may hinder the capacity of institutions, and the people working within them, to meet Indigenous demands with responses of the breadth and depth they deserve.

Thus, it happens that individuals who are able to operate as the art system requires – in terms of their availability for projects conceived by others, their mobility and production processes – are those who (always temporarily) gain access and visibility. The practices that are accepted are almost exclusively individually authored, object-based and commercializable, and artists' work is remunerated according to classic post-Fordist processes. As such, the way in which the art system incorporates and assimilates Indigenous artists reveals how cultural production models ignore and override the initial aims of the approach, namely to contribute to sustaining ways of life that differ from, or offer alternatives to, the system that non-Indigenous people inhabit and reproduce.

We, the authors of this text, are also part of this process. Over the past ten years, we have worked in this intermediary terrain of negotiation, organizing curatorial projects and discussion-based programmes focused on Indigenous issues and Indigenous people, developed for non-Indigenous cultural institutions (museums, art centres, cultural agencies). Among these projects are the exhibition and conversation series *Dja Guata Porã: Rio de Janeiro indígena* (2016–17) at the Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, curated by Sandra Ara Benites, José Bessa, Clarissa Diniz and Pablo Lafuente;[1] the seminar '*Episódios do Sul*' (2017) at the Goethe Institut, São Paulo, organized by Ailton Krenak, Suely Rolnik and Pablo Lafuente; the conversation cycle *Sawé: Liderança indígena e a luta pelo território* (2018–20) at Sesc Ipiranga, São Paulo (a related exhibition of the same name, curated by Sandra Ara Benites, Naiara Tukano, Mauricio Fonseca and Pablo Lafuente, that was scheduled to open in April 2020 was then cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic);[2] the "Jaraguá Guarani" project initiated by Funarte in 2024 and coordinated by Sandra Ara Benites and Pablo Lafuente; the 2024–27 project 'Pororoca* Water Cosmo-technologies' curated by Sandra Ara Benites, Walmeri Ribeiro and others at the Goethe Institut/Humboldt Forum;[3] and the 2025–26 exhibition 'Indigenous Insurgencies' at Sesc Quitandinha, Petrópolis, curated by Sandra Ara Benites, Marcelo Campos and Rodrigo Duarte.[4]

The reflections that follow result from our experience as cultural agents and serve, first and foremost, as notes of caution to ourselves, in relation to the work we have done so far. Perhaps they might also be useful for others wishing to work with Indigenous culture from within or alongside non-Indigenous institutions.

1. Listening as a foundation: listening while building trust

When we speak of *listening as a foundation*, we refer to actively seeking to understand meanings and intentions according to the logic of what the community or people involved in the project are trying to convey. When an institution arrives in a community or village through a cultural project such as an exhibition, it is essential to communicate the project's intentions and clarify the objectives being pursued. If the institution aims to create dialogue with the community and welcome its demands, it must communicate why that dialogue is desired. Often, institutions arrive with ideas constructed outside the community rather than from within it, and throughout the process this can lead to situations of conflict. By *conflict*, we mean situations in which a community may disagree over something that previously had not been part of its horizon of debate or its everyday reality. Before even formulating a project, institutions need to reflect on what the needs and demands of that community might be and to consider whether those demands can truly be addressed within that exhibition or that institution.

The moment of listening is only one moment within the dialogue of institutions, or institutional workers, with communities; nor is listening limited to hearing the words that are spoken. Listening means understanding the community's demands and discerning what can be materialized in an exhibition, as well as how that could be organized, mobilized and implemented within the community.

During the organization of the exhibition '*Dja Guatá Porã*,' the Pataxó people were engaged in the reoccupation of territory in Iriri, on the coast of the state of Rio de Janeiro, and were deeply concerned with

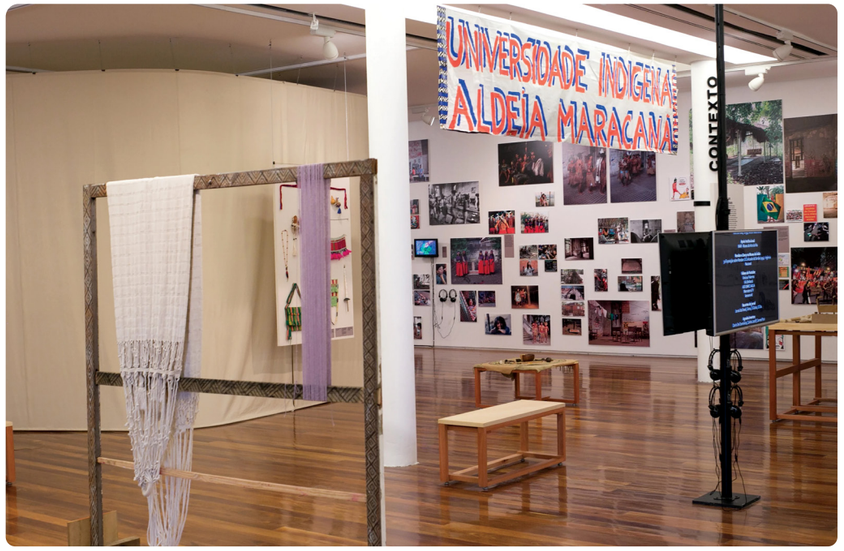
1. museudeartedorio.org.br

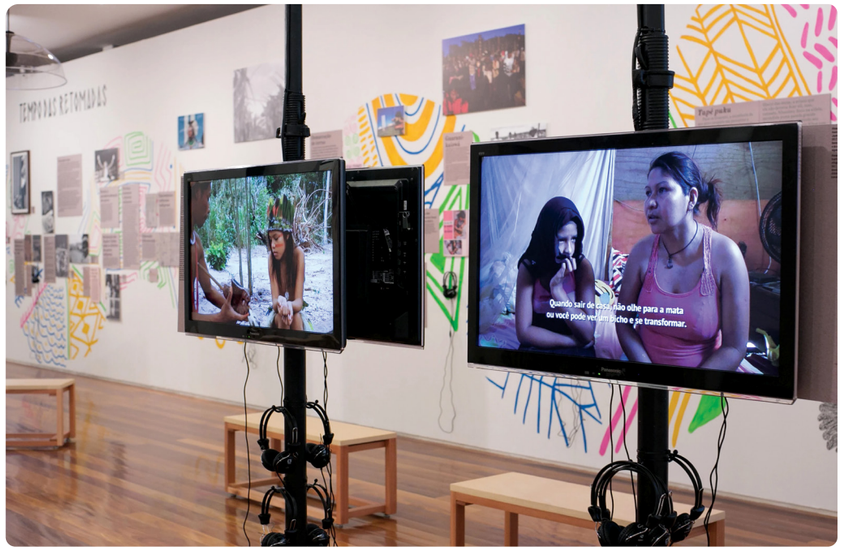
2. portal.sescsp.org.br

3. goethe.de

4. See 'Exhibition "Indigenous Insurgencies: Art, Memory and Resistance"', arte!brasileiros.com, artebrasileiros.com.br

'*Dja Guata Pora: Rio de Janeiro indígena*', 2016–17, installation view, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro





'*Dja Guata Pora: Rio de Janeiro indígena*', 2016–17, installation view, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro

‘*Insurgências indígenas*’, 2025, installation view, Sesc Quitandinha

discrimination and racial violence as well as with the urgency of occupying and demarcating their land. The Pataxó brought these concerns to the museum’s team so that they would be considered within the curatorial process. Based on this listening, we, as curators, actively sought partnerships that could address the issue of their territory. In theory, this is a matter that would not conventionally fit within an exhibition at that art museum, but we incorporated this demand into the project so that the community could receive support for their fundamental territorial claims. Through active listening and open, constructive dialogue, it became possible to articulate an institutional interface with the Public Defender’s Office, going on to conduct a mapping that supported the Pataxó people’s territorial claims in Rio de Janeiro.

Listening cannot merely be a procedural or static act, but rather a movement that mobilizes community demands, horizons and information through direct dialogue and the building of trust with that community. Trust is grounded in listening and dialogue. This process also helps shape paths of mediation and negotiation. The considerations of a curatorial approach that arises from such dialogue are woven out of what is collectively built through hospitality, encounters, partnership and continuity. Part of creating relationships of trust means being and staying together with communities beyond personal or institutional interests and the immediate limits of specific projects.

Extractivist practices of capturing and appropriating traditional knowledge, with no intention of returning to communities after a project or exhibition has been completed, are to be avoided at all costs – yet many institutions still operate by collecting information from local communities and disappearing with it, as if it were raw material to be processed for presentation in an exhibition without connection to the territory where it was generated. They conceive a project, seek out Indigenous peoples or traditional communities, collect information which then evaporates into the institutional sphere, reappearing, transformed, in the form or context of an exhibition.

Exhibition projects with Indigenous peoples must, rather, operate with a perspective of continuity that makes it possible to establish and maintain relationships of trust. In the project ‘*Pororoca* Water Cosmo-Technologies*,’ for example, the curatorial project of ‘*Nhande Rape Ysyry*,’ emphasized building trust with and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities by engaging with relationships to water.

Commitment to the process requires engagement in conciliations that help maintain trust. A trustworthy relationship is one in which the community welcomes and is welcomed in return, enabling the sharing of traditional knowledge. It is a way of contributing to Indigenous communities, helping to defend their rights, and ensuring the continuity and contemporary relevance of their knowledge. It is a commitment to leaving a legacy or at least a contribution, guaranteeing some kind of return to the community once the project is done.

2. Individual and collective agency: art and artists

Indigenous artists, broadly speaking, work collectively. We call an individual artist someone who has the skill to create and produce certain objects: someone who knows how to carve small wooden animals like a *tatu* (armadillo) or a jaguar, for example, carving, creating, working with his or her hands; and the more they practice, the more they develop their skill and creativity. The same applies to someone who knows how to weave baskets. Among the Guarani, some women and men can make very small and perfectly crafted baskets, while others have less skill. This is what we call ‘the artist as an individual’. But the knowledge that this artist carries in order to produce the object is already collective.

For example, when a Guarani artist searches for wood to carve a wooden figure, they must go through a process of asking permission from the spirits. Upon entering the forest to retrieve wood, it is necessary to ask permission from the spirits of that place, from the plants, from the trees. The same applies to the river: when someone goes to bathe or enter the water, they must also ask for permission from the river spirits. And when planting, one must ask for permission from the spirits before clearing; and at harvest time, the *karaí* ritual, the blessing of the harvest, is performed.

All this is part of the collective, of collective knowledge. So the process of carving wood, obtaining materials, creating the figure involves knowledge that comes from the collective. This is why an Indigenous person is never just an individual. As an artist they are an individual, but at the same time they are part of a collective that creates the knowledge that sustains the creation of such objects. So, it is important to consider both dimensions: when we speak of Indigenous art, we must understand that it does not come solely from an individual, nor solely from the collective. It emerges from the relationship between the two.

In Indigenous worldviews – and here we are not speaking only of a single people, such as the Guarani, Kaingang or Pataxó, but of Indigenous peoples at large – art is always connected to cosmologies and cosmovisions. It reflects how each people understands the origin of the world, how they relate to the land, to plants, to animals, to humans and nonhumans. Its connection with all that exists is what gives meaning to Indigenous art. All Indigenous populations share this perspective, even if each has its own way of expressing it. It comes from a deep relationship with the land and with the beings that inhabit it.

This understanding of art is very different from that of the *juruá* (non-Indigenous person). For the *juruá*, art is often linked to visual aesthetics, to form, to beauty. For Indigenous peoples, aesthetics has another meaning. For example, for a Guarani man, aesthetics lies in knowing how to relate to all beings around him – men, women, humans, nonhumans.

It means understanding the worlds of each, recognizing that all are part of a whole, and that coexistence is based on contributing and complementing, not competing.

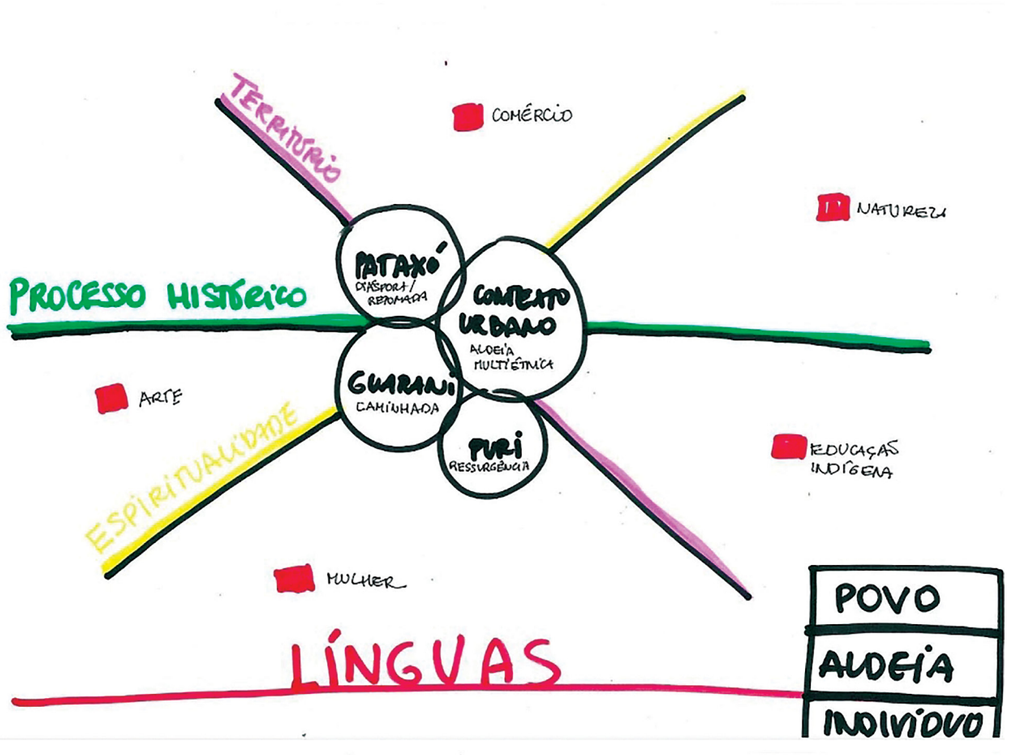
When an institution expects an Indigenous artist to behave like a non-Indigenous artist by separating him or her from the collective, or applies its own production or market logic, it ignores what is specific to Indigenous art.

3. Diversity of peoples and territories, from urban contexts to villages

The distributed presence of Indigenous people in both urban and village contexts is the result of the invasion of what is known today as Brazil. Many peoples were forced to leave their original territories, and others left in order to survive. The resulting dispersal is directly linked to resistance, but also to the processes of populational mixing that emerged from it. It is important to remember that the majority of Brazilian territory was once Indigenous territory. What we now call ‘city’ was once ‘Indigenous village’. Many groups resisted as collectives, but others were expelled or displaced to new areas. In many cases, so-called ‘Indigenous occupations’ or ‘urban villages’ were not created by the Indigenous people who originally lived there but emerged from processes of expulsion and reorganization. Many groups left and continued their lives elsewhere, while others remained in cities out of necessity. In this process of invasion, it was not Indigenous peoples who came to the city; it was the city that invaded the village.

Today, when Indigenous communities fight for existence and recognition, they demarcate their place, declaring from where they speak: from the city, from the village, from the community. Some communities still use their Indigenous languages, while others were forbidden from speaking them, as is the case of the Pataxó Hãhãhãe, who live in their own villages but lost their language due to prohibition policies. There were many attempts to eliminate Indigenous peoples: by prohibiting languages, invading territories, dispersing communities and forcing populations to mix. Many Indigenous women married non-Indigenous men. The identities of children who grew up in this context were transformed. From this process, new villages and new ways of existing emerged. To this day, it can be difficult to recognize Indigenous people living in cities. Many people do not understand this historical process and assume that the Indigenous person came to the city, when in fact it was the city that came and invaded Indigenous land.

For this reason, we need to be clear: this is a profound and historical issue tied to invasion and resistance. When we speak of representation, we must consider this broader political field. For Indigenous peoples, representation does not only mean debating public policies directed at them. It means being recognized as Indigenous – not white, not Black; it means the recognition of Indigenous existence, history and territory. It is a delicate issue, but also essential to understanding the struggle and presence of Indigenous peoples in Brazil today.



Preparatory drawings for 'Dja Guata Pora: Rio de Janeiro indígena', Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro

Every process of working with Indigenous culture within cultural institutions must acknowledge this history and incorporate both the diversity of experiences among different Indigenous peoples: their specific cosmovisions; their histories as village-based or urban-based peoples; and these violences that form part of their history, and Brazil's. This needs to be the foundation of all work, of all choices and interactions, ultimately defining what needs to be done in each project or exhibition.

4. Function and Purpose

The works that Indigenous people produce for exhibitions are a form of provocation-as-education: pedagogical provocations aimed at updating and revising knowledge about Indigenous peoples. What *juruá* or non-Indigenous people call contemporary art is a way for Indigenous peoples to position themselves politically, to bring visibility to their struggles. When Indigenous works appear in an exhibition, they instantiate, amplify and make visible the provocations of Indigenous peoples.

Institutions must avoid the trap of treating Indigenous artwork as something exotic, romanticized or fetishized – because that is not what it is. They must approach it with care, looking from multiple angles, seeking to understand through it what is important to the community. What is important to debate? What provocations should these artworks bring? Issues related to territory, to cosmovision, to Indigenous knowledge, to the situation of communities living in this territory or that city: the presence of such works in exhibition spaces necessarily makes these spaces places of discussion, debate and provocation. Without such discussion, the artwork loses part of its function.

If the function of the artwork is to prompt discussion and debate, then projects with Indigenous communities (whether they include contemporary Indigenous art or more traditional practices) must be the result of negotiation – starting with the process of listening with, and from which, these notes began. The institution's preconceived ideas about formats and objectives cannot be conceived in ways that do not allow change. The eventual format resulting from such listening and negotiation may ultimately satisfy the institution and meet its needs, but what the institution wants or needs cannot be the priority. Nor can it be intransient: we must always strive to understand in good faith whether what the institution wants is compatible with a history and a reality that goes far beyond its walls.

Translated from Portuguese to English by Rodrigo Duarte.

Nick Aikens

Nick Aikens is a curator, researcher, editor and educator. Researcher at HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg and Managing Editor and Research Responsible for L’Internationale Online, he assumed this role in August 2023 as part of the four-year EU funded project ‘Museum of the Commons’. Nick has a PhD from HDK-Valand, academic partner of L’Internationale. He was previously a curator at the Van Abbemuseum (2012–23), where he worked on numerous exhibitions and publications, as well as leading the research programme ‘Deviant Practice’ (2016–19). He was a tutor and course leader at the Dutch Art Institute in Arnhem (2012–19) and a guest professor in the Department of Exhibitions and Scenography at Karlsruhe University (2023–24).

Sandra Ara Benites

Sandra Ara Benites is a curator and researcher. She has previously worked as a curator at MASP (Museu de Arte de São Paulo) (2019–22) and the Museu dos Povos Indígenas in São Paulo, and curated the exhibitions ‘Dja Guata Porá: Indigenous Rio de Janeiro’, Museu de Arte do Rio (2017–18) and ‘Indigenous Insurgencies: Art, Memory and Resistance’, Sesc Quitandinha, Petrópolis (2025). She is currently Director of Visual Arts at FUNARTE (National Foundation of the Arts).

Merve Bedir

Merve Bedir is an architect. She is a visiting professor in Architecture at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). Bedir is a co-founder of Kitchen Workshop in Gaziantep and the Center for Spatial Justice in Istanbul.

Abril Cisneros Ramírez

Abril Cisneros Ramírez is a curator and writer from Mexico City, currently working as Assistant Curator at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Her practice often focuses on how cultural production shapes what can be seen, said, asked, or known within dominant frameworks of interpretation. Abril holds a BA in Art History from Leiden University and a MA in Curating from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. She is also a member of the project space The Balcony in The Hague, where she has co-curated eight exhibitions over the past two years.

Jakub Depczyński

Jakub Depczyński is Curator of Public Programs at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, focusing on postartistic practices, the relationship between technology and art, art in the face of the climate crisis and contemporary ecological thought. He chairs the L’Internationale Climate Assembly.

Rodrigo Duarte

Rodrigo Duarte Rodrigo is a visual artist and independent curator whose work focuses on the investigation of contemporary visual narratives, particularly at the intersection of art, memory, and territory. His artistic practice moves between photography, video, installation, and documentary methods, exploring social, political, and affective issues. In

addition to his own artistic production, he engages in curatorial projects that aim to broaden access to art and strengthen networks of collective creation, with a focus on emerging artists and productions rooted in dialogic and insurgent contexts. His approach combines creation and cultural mediation, proposing artistic experiences as tools for dialogue and social transformation.

G

G is an artist and death researcher.

Institute of Radical Imagination

Founded in 2018 Institute of Radical Imagination (IRI) is a group of curators, artists, activists and scholars with a shared interest in co-producing knowledge as artistic and political research-interventions aimed at implementing post-capitalist forms of life in the Mediterranean and the Global South. The Institute of Radical Imagination:

- Operates openly, consensually and collectively as reflected in its governance structure
- Valorizes and combines different urgencies, abilities and outputs
- Is committed to actions of international solidarity across the Mediterranean and the South
- Considers culture as a field of struggle and emancipation and encourages cultural experimentation as a critical attitude towards what we know as interdisciplinarity

Kasangati Godelive Kabena

Kasangati Godelive Kabena's artwork has been included in numerous exhibitions, such as the Stellenbosch Triennale (2025), curated by Khanyisile Mbongwa; 'How much do you weigh?' at FCA Ghana (2024); 'Silent Invasions: The Art of Material Hacking' (2023), an exhibition presented by the Ghanaian collective blaxTARLINES and the art communities of Uganda at Amasaka Gallery in Masaka; the 1–54 Contemporary African Art Fair, London (2023), represented by The Efie Gallery; 'Worldmaking' (2023) at Mitchell-Innes, New York, curated by Gideon Appah and Ylinka Barrotto; Jaou Photo (2022), commissioned by Karim Sultan; the sixth edition of Jaou Tunis (2022), organized by the Kamel Lazaar Foundation (KLF) and the French Institute of Tunisia (IFT); 'between future and dust', Kinshasa–(N)Tonga (2022); the 'Living Traces' project (2021), Kinshasa and Brussels; 'Materials and Things' (2021); and '*un Quartier Généreux*', curated by Exit Frame (2020). She was also a PICHA workshop participant at the Lubumbashi Biennale (2019–22) and an exhibitor and participant in Bamako Encounters, African Biennale of Photography, 12th edition (2019).

Zayaan Khan

Zayaan Khan approaches her practice from a space of care, healing and intuition, allowing her creative process to be both emergent and generative. As a transdisciplinary artist, she integrates various mediums and techniques to tell stories that reflect struggles and solutions.

Forwarding sociopolitical, ecological and spiritual perspectives, her work is deeply rooted in the connections between land, food and seeds. Driven by curiosity, research and experimentation, she engages with the in-between spaces that shape our collective heritage. Through this, she explores the intersections of environment and community, interrogating the relationships that inform our shared cultural landscape. As a participant in Cycle 4 of the Prince Claus Fund's mentorship programme 'Cultural & Artistic Responses to Environmental Crisis', committed to a practice of deep listening and making, her work and research came to focus on local clay foraged from sites of forced removal.

Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide's interests lie in intersecting perspectives and modes that decentre the oppressor in practices of freedom and liberation to influence art-institutional practices. She is senior Exhibitions Curator at Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, and was previously Deputy Director at Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons in Utrecht, where she began as an intern in 2008.
At the Van Abbemuseum she has curated Ima-Abasi Okon's solo exhibition 'Incorporeal hereditaments like Love [can] Set(s) You Free, according to *Kelly, Case, Dru Hill, Kandice, LovHer, Montel and Playa* with 50 - 60g of −D,)e,l,a,y,e,d1;—O,)n,s,e,t2;— ;[heart];M,)u,s,c,l,e3;[heart];—S,) o,r,e,n,e,s,s'4 (2025); Sung Hwan Kim's solo exhibition 'Protected by roof and right-hand muscles' (2023); 'Positions #7: Everything worthwhile is done with other people' (2023); and 'A Lasting Truth is Change' (2022), for which she co-edited the eponymous publication (K. Verlag, Van Abbemuseum, 2022). She is also co-editor of *Laure Prouvost, This Means Love* (2021) and 'I Think My Body Feels, I Feel My Body Thinks: On Corpoliteracy' (2022). She has been a tutor at the Dutch Art Institute Roaming Academy and a thesis advisor in the Fine Arts department at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam (2016–19). She is a member of the editorial board of L'Internationale Online and a board member at Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam.

Samia Henni

Samia Henni is a historian of built, destroyed and imagined environments. She is the author of *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria* (2017, 2022, EN; 2019, FR) and *Colonial Toxicity: Rehearsing French Radioactive Architecture and Landscape in the Sahara* (2024) and the editor of *Deserts Are Not Empty* (2022) and *War Zones* (2018). She is also a maker of exhibitions, such as 'Performing Colonial Toxicity' at Framer Framed (with If I Can't Dance), Amsterdam, gta Exhibitions, Zurich, and The Mosaic Rooms, London (2023–24); 'Discreet Violence: Architecture and the French War in Algeria', exhibited in Zurich, Rotterdam, Berlin, Johannesburg, Paris, Prague, Ithaca, Philadelphia and Charlottesville (2017–22); '*Archives: Secret-Défense?*', at ifa gallery (with SAVVY Contemporary Projects), Berlin (2021); and 'Housing Pharmacology' at Manifesta 13, Marseille (2020). Currently, she teaches at McGill University's Peter Guo-hua Fu School of Architecture in Montreal.

Keywa Henri

Keywa Henri is a Franco-Brazilian multidisciplinary artist and independent researcher, born in Kaulu/Kourou in French Guiana. The first Kalin'a Tɨlewuyu (Indigenous nation of French Guiana) to graduate from the Beaux-Arts de Lyon in France, they currently live and work between French Guiana and France. They develop a protean practice that exposes intersectional issues, exploring the visual arts, cinema, literature and fashion. They elaborate a reflection rooted in the Histories of the Original Peoples of Abya Yala (‘Americas’) and work towards an Indigenous protagonism in our contemporary global society, while questioning its place in the French context.

Cathryn Klasto

Cathryn Klasto is a transdisciplinary theoretician who operates within the field of critical spatial practice. Their theoretical production operates as a critical practice that takes both textual and material form. Although they do not produce artworks, they do work with prototype modelling as an investigative method of artistic research. Their scholarly interest is focused on interiors and processes of interiority, notably those operating within technological and conceptual infrastructures. Their work seeks to analyse how these interiors and their subsequent processes influence and produce social, ethical and emotional behaviours. Klasto is currently Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Pablo Lafuente

Pablo Lafuente is a curator and writer. Artistic Director of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (2020–), he previously worked as a curator at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, Oslo, as an editor at Afterall and Afterall Books, and taught at Central Saint Martins in London and the Universidade do Sul da Bahia in Porto Seguro. He was part of the curatorial team for the 31st Bienal de São Paulo in 2014.

Otobong Nkanga

Otobong Nkanga’s multidisciplinary practice examines the complex social, political, ecological and material relationships between bodies, territories, minerals and the earth. Unsettling divisions between minimal/conceptual and sensual/surreal approaches, her research-based practice constellates humans and landscapes, organic and non-organic matter.

Nkule Mabaso

Nkule Mabaso is a researcher based at HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg and Director of Fotogalleriet, Oslo. She is also director of Natal Collective, an independent production company active internationally in the research and presentation of creative and cultural Africana, contemporary art and politics. Mabaso is co-editor of *Climate: Our Right to Breathe*, Berlin: L’Internationale, 2022.

Olivier Marboeuf

Olivier Marboeuf is an author, storyteller, artist, film producer and independent curator from Guadeloupe. He is a member of the RAY | RAYO | RAYON inter-Caribbean research programme in art education, and of the artistic council of the Akademie der Künste der Welt in Cologne.

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez is an independent curator, editor and writer. She lives and works in Paris. Selected curatorial projects include ‘Contour Biennale 9: Coltan as Cotton’, Mechelen (2019); ‘Defiant Muses: Delphine Seyrig and Feminist Video Collectives in France in the 1970s and 1980s’, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid and Musée LaM, Lille (2019), with Giovanna Zapperi; ‘Let’s Talk about the Weather: Art and Ecology in a Time of Crisis’, Sursock Museum, Beirut (2016) with Nora Razian; ‘Resilience: Triennial of Contemporary Art’, Museum of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana (2013) and ‘Becoming Earthlings: Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and Non-Knowledge #18’, Musée de l’Homme Council and Mobile Academy (2015), with Alexander Klose; ‘Tales of Empathy’, Jeu de Paume (2014); ‘The Promises of the Past’, Centre Pompidou (2010), with Christine Macel and Joanna Mytkowska; and ‘Société anonyme’, Le Plateau/FRAC Ile-de-France (2007), with Thomas Boutoux and François Piron.

Between 2010 and 2012, she was a co-director of Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers and co-founded the European network of small-scale art institutions, Cluster. With Elisabeth Lebovici and Patricia Falguières, she is a co-organizer and co-founder of the seminar *Something You Should Know* at EHESS, Paris, and a member of the Travelling Féministe research group at Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, Paris. She was previously editor-in-chief of L’Internationale Online (2014–17) and the *Manifesta Journal* (2012–14), and is currently the chief editor of the publishing platform *Versopolis Review*.

Anaïs Roesch

Anaïs Roesch is a researcher and activist involved in ecological transition within the visual arts. A graduate of Sciences Po Grenoble, the Andean University Simón Bolivar in Quito, and the Academy of Fine Arts in Leipzig, she is currently preparing a sociology PhD (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) on the ecological engagement pathways of visual artists in France. In 2015, she produced ArtCOP21, a festival dedicated to climate issues, for the COAL association. In 2019, she initiated and then co-led the project on decarbonizing the cultural sector within the think tank The Shift Project. In 2021, she published, together with David Irle and Samuel Valensi, *Decarbonizing Culture: Facing Global Warming, the New Challenges for the Sector* (Presses Universitaires de Grenoble). She teaches at Sciences Po Paris and regularly works with the visual arts sector on these issues. She has also worked for ten years in international cooperation for various organizations.

Åsa Sonjasdotter

Åsa Sonjasdotter lives and works on the island of Ven in Sweden and in the city of Berlin in Germany. In her practice, she enquires into the relationalities of crops: their nurturing generosity; their cultivation and the tensions around power, politics and narratives that exist in relation to it; and, last but not least, how social organizations mobilize and form

coalitions around their cultivation. Sonjasdotter's work has recently been presented at the Limerick Biennial, the Singapore Biennale, the Bergen Assembly, the Biennale of Warsaw, the Delfina Foundation in London, the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, the Badischer Kunstverein, Lunds konsthall and the Kasseler Kunstverein. She is the author of the publication *Peace with the Earth – Tracing Agricultural Memory, Refiguring Practice* (2018) and the editor of a 2021 English translation of Elisabeth Tamm and Elin Wägner's 1940 tract *Fred med Jorden* (Peace With the Earth). In 2024, she received a PhD in artistic practice at HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg, for her thesis 'Towards Peasant Cultivation of Abundance'.

Maya Tounta

Maya Tounta is a curator and writer based in Athens, Greece. She is director of Akwa Ibom, a nonprofit exhibition space that she co-founded with Otobong Nkanga in 2019. Through Akwa Ibom and together with Radio Athènes and Melas Martinos, she represents the estate of Christos Tzivelos and the archive of George Tourkovasilis. Together with Tom Engels, she was co-curator of 'Same Day', the 15th edition of the Baltic Triennial organized by the Contemporary Art Centre in Lithuania (2024).

Robel Temesgen

Robel Temesgen is an artist and researcher whose practice spans painting, installation, performance and publication. His work explores the symbiotic relationships between people, places and spiritual traditions, often engaging with vernacular knowledge systems and the metaphysical dimensions of everyday life. Temesgen's long-term projects, including 'Adbar', 'Addis Newspaper', and 'Practising Water', investigate how cultural memory and ritual shape public space and collective experience. He is currently a PhD fellow in Artistic Research at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Since 2010, he has served as a lecturer in the Painting department at the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa University.

Kulagu Tu Buvongan

Kulagu Tu Buvongan is a collective of majority Manobo and Tinananun people of the Central Cordillera region of Mindanao. Their projects focus on environmental justice and Indigenous struggles in the Pantaron Mountain Range. They have exhibited at SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin; Estación Terrena, Bogota; Para Site, Hong Kong; FONTE, São Paulo; 421, Abu Dhabi; and Colomboscope 2024. Merv Espina is an artist and the only member of this collective based outside of Mindanao.

Mililani Ganivet and Marie-Hélène Villierme

Mililani Ganivet and Marie-Hélène Villierme and are co-directors of the film *Nu/clear Stories* (2023), an assembly of voices and stories around the legacy of thirty years of nuclear testing in French Polynesia, from 1966 to 1996.

Climate Forum I
24 November 2023
Programmed by Nkule Mabaso, Åsa Sonjasdotter and Mick Wilson

Morning: ‘On Different Grounds’ with Åsa Sonjasdotter, Pujita Guha and Huiying Ng

Early afternoon: ‘Plant Bodies as Archive’ with Nkule Mabaso, Zayaan Khan and Godelive Kasangati Kabena

Late afternoon: ‘Art for Radical Ecologies Manifesto’ with the Institute of Radical Imagination

Climate Forum II: Colonial Toxicity, the Climate Movement and Art Institutions
27 September 2024
Programmed by Nick Aikens and Nkule Mabaso

Morning: ‘Prologue’ with Nick Aikens and Nkule Mabaso

Early Afternoon: ‘Debt of Settler Colonialism and Climate Catastrophe’, convened by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, with Samia Henni, Olivier Marboeuf, Mililani Ganivet and Marie-Hélène Villierme

Late afternoon: ‘Can the Art World Strike for Climate?’, convened by Jakub Depczyński, with Kinga Parafiniuk and Helen Wahlgren

Climate Forum III: Towards Change Practices: Poetics and Operations
18 October 2024
Programmed by Nick Aikens and Nkule Mabaso

Morning: ‘Prologue’ with Nick Aikens and Nkule Mabaso

Early afternoon: ‘Poetics and Operations’ with Otobong Nkanga and Maya Tounta

Late afternoon: ‘We the Heartbroken, Part II’ with G and Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

Climate Forum IV: Our world lives when their world ceases to exist
5 September 2025
Programmed by Nick Aikens, Merve Bedir and Nkule Mabaso

Morning: ‘Prologue’ with Nick Aikens, Merve Bedir and Nkule Mabaso

Early afternoon: ‘Financialization of the Environment; Fluid Practices of Survival and Resistance’, convened by Merve Bedir, with Kulagu Tu Buvongan and Robel Temesgen.

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Afternoon: Kassulu tolili: Anaxi wonumingali lo moloma (Story of Beads: Anaxi's Choice), an animated short film by artist Keywa Henri. Screening in collaboration with AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions

Late afternoon: 'Curating Indigeneity and Institutional Frameworks' with Sandra Ara Benites, Rodrigo Duarte and Pablo Lafuente. Moderated by Nkule Mabaso

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The Climate Reader: Propositions, Poetics, Operations

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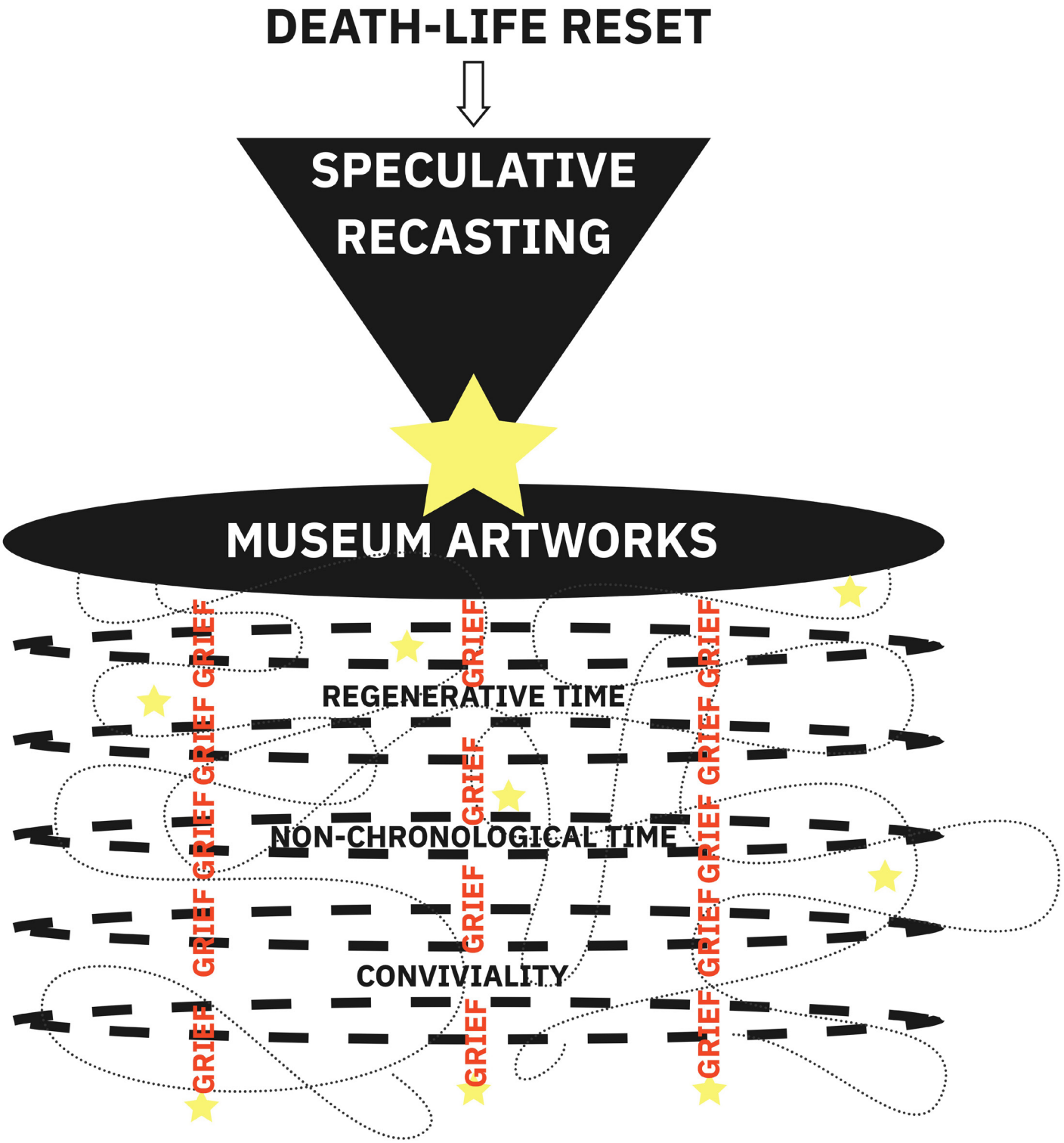

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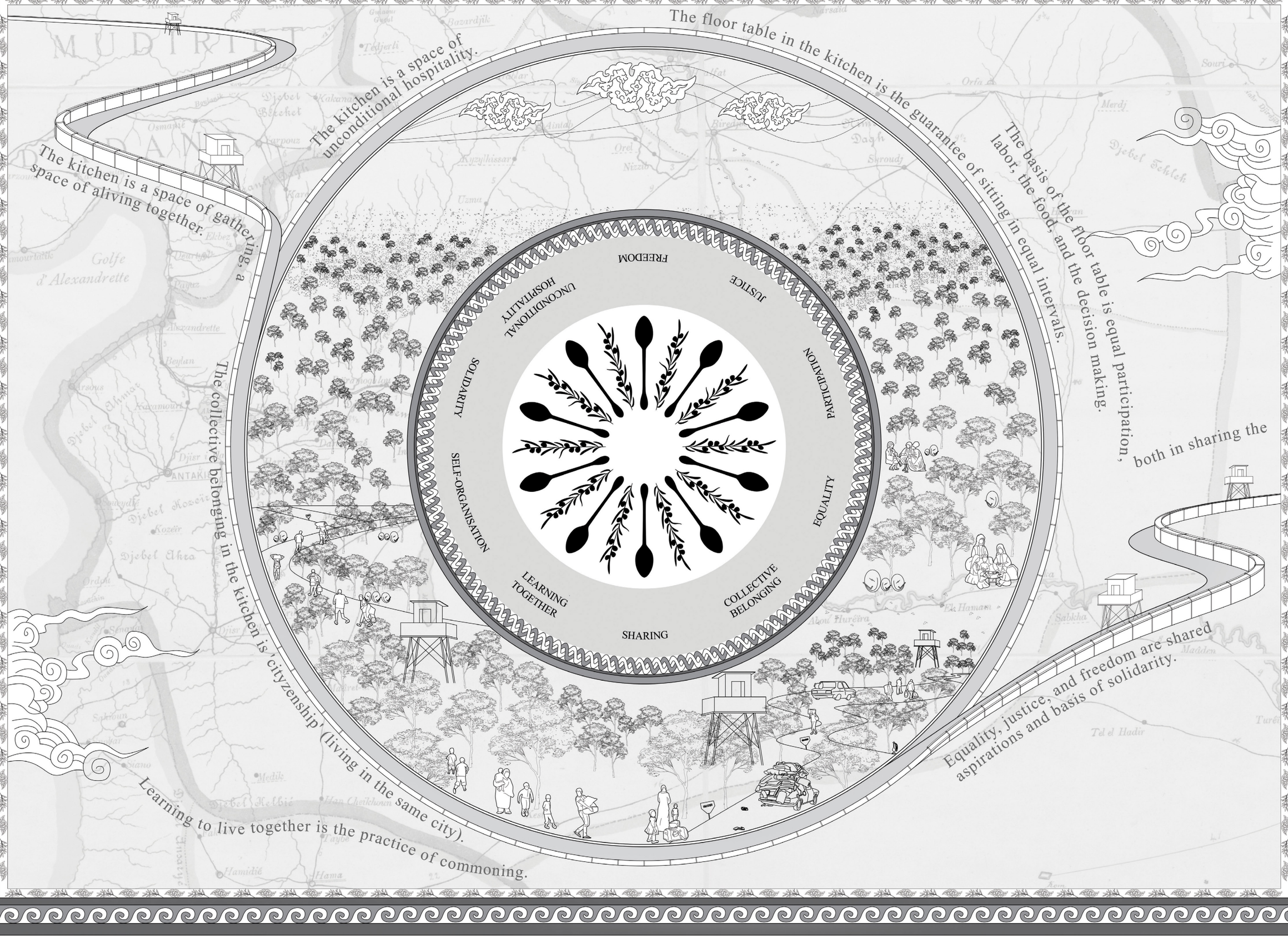
The floor table in the kitchen is the guarantee of sitting in equal intervals.
The basis of the floor table is equal participation, labor, the food, and the decision making.
both in sharing the
Equality, justice, and freedom are shared aspirations and basis of solidarity.
Learning to live together is the practice of commoning.
The collective belonging in the kitchen is 'cityzenship' (living in the same city).
The kitchen is a space of gathering, a space of aliving together.
The kitchen is a space of unconditional hospitality.
FREEDOM
JUSTICE
PARTICIPATION
EQUALITY
COLLECTIVE BELONGING
SHARING
LEARNING TOGETHER
SELF-ORGANISATION
SOLIDARITY
UNCONDITIONAL HOSPITALITY

Cathryn Klasto, ‘Death-Life Reset’, from ‘Dispatch: There is grief, but there is also life’, 2024, L’Internationale Online

Names of animals in Manobo, Kulagu Tu Buvongan forest sound recording session, Davao City, 2021.
Photo: Kulagu Tu Buvongan collective

Buhlebezwe Siwani, *Amahubo*, 2018, 14 min 31 sec, film still

Merve Bedir and Kitchen Workshop, *Kitchen Cosmology*, 2022, image courtesy Kitchen Workshop and Smithsonian Design Museum

Kasangati Godelive Kabena, *Made 10*, 2023, performance at Knust, Kumasi-Ghana, duration 90 minutes, video still.

Ola Hassanain, *The Watcher*, 2024, edition I of III, 19 min 18 sec, video still. Videography Juan Arturo Garcia. Producer: Shantelle Palmer Character played by Hammo Salhein

Otobong Nkanga, *Carved to Flow, Preliminary Recipe for a Support System*, 2016–17, digital drawing, collage and acrylic on paper. Courtesy the artist

The Climate Reader: Propositions, poetics, operations assembles contributions published by L'Internationale Online in the context of the Climate Forum (I–IV), a series of online seminars hosted by HDK-Valand between 2023-25 as part of the four-year project 'Museum of the Commons'. Bringing together over twenty artists, curators, academics and activists, the series and resulting publication were conceived as an iterative space of dialogue across discursive, artistic, political and operational registers in response to climate breakdown and ecological degradation. Building on and extending the work in *Climate: Our Right to Breathe* (L'Internationale and K. Verlag, 2022), The Climate Reader extends one of the book's central propositions: that 'climate' is to be understood as an ecosocial condition that intersects the ecological, the social, the political and the cultural.

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MUSEUM OF THE COMMONS

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