

articulate 2023 | ecosystems

art

Academy:
20.10-09.11.2023

ecosystem

art & research days

www.ap-arts.be

ARTICULATE 2023 | ECOSYSTEMS. Programme

WEEK 1

WEEK 2

WEEK 3

WEEK 4

21.10-09.11, Wed-Sat, 12:00-18:00,
Ecosystems
exhibition

Lange Zaal

21.10-09.11, Wed-Sat, 12:00-18:00,
Forms of Life
exhibition

Wintertuin

17.10, 14:00-20:00, De Studio
**Sensing Earth – Cultural
Quests Across a Heated
Globe**
symposium by ARIA

20.10, Lange Zaal,
Wintertuin, Academy
**OPENING ARTICULATE at the
Academy!**

- **Carved to flow
– Germination.
Reseeding back into
the communities**
talk with visual
artist OTOBONG
NKANGA and eco-
philosopher EMANUELE
COCCIA
- **Forms of Life**
opening exhibition
- **Ecosystems**
opening exhibition

Food and drinks
by INSTRROOM ACADEMY

21.10-09.11, Library
Ecosystems reading table
by the Academy
Library

23-27.10, 10:00-18:00, Academy
Research classes
by ELINE DE CERCQ,
CHARLOTTE KOOPMAN,
DELPHINE WIBAUX,
BART VAN DIJCK,
ANDREA CAMMAROSANO

24.10, 14:00-20:00, De Studio
Pacifism
symposium by ARIA

24.10, 19:00, portal Academy
Dying Bear Meditation
by MARIUS POPA, BART
VAN DIJCK

25.10, 14:00-17:00, Havenhuis
ARTwork
by the YOUNG ACADEMY

26.10, 19:00, Lange Zaal
Artificial Ecologies
with JOHAN PAS,
NICO DOCKX, ROEL
ARKESTEIJN, ELINE DE
CLERCQ & LUC DELEU

27.10, 13:00-15:00, Academy
**Presentation research
classes**

27.10, 15:00-17:00, entrance
**Presentation immersive
poetry for 'UTM-Urban
Travel Machines'**

07.11, 19:00, Lange Zaal
**Patricia Johanson: The World
as a Work of Art**
book launch by ROEL
ARKESTEIJN

08.11, 14:00-17:00, Lange Zaal
Silver nor Gold
lecture-workshop by
TIM THEO DECEUNICK

08.11, 19:00, MoMu
**Augurism, the intriguing
world of Baloji**
talk with BALOJI and
BRANDON WEN

09.11, 19:00-21:00, Lange Zaal
**Restoring the Human
Element**
laser talk with
FRANK THEYS, EVA-
MARIA LOPEZ, RONNY
BLUST, EDITH DOOVE,
MARJOLIJN DIJKMAN
a.o., organised by
ALEXANDRA DEMENTIEVA
and KRISTOF
TIMMERMAN (MAXlab
research group).

For updates and more info on the programme:
www.ap-arts.be / IG @research_royalacademyantwerp

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ARTICULATE 2023 | ECOSYSTEMS. Introduction

For this 8th edition of ARTICULATE, the annual research festival at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp, our research groups put forward the topic of the ecosystem. This serves as the starting point for a diverse programme of exhibitions, research classes, performances and lectures. Ecosystems are intricate networks, critical to our planet's health and sustainability, where living and non-living, human and non-human elements interact and coexist. By incorporating the theme of the ecosystem into our programme, we aim to ignite critical thinking about interconnectedness, adaptation and resilience, and inspire both artists and audiences to explore and appreciate the world around them in new and profound ways.

The relationship between art and ecology plays an increasingly important role in the artistic research conducted at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. Based on the need to give ecology a permanent place within the Academy's fabric, we established the new interdisciplinary research group Art & Ecology, which will be launched during ARTICULATE. Social and political engagement and artistic activism linked to ecological issues have long been part of the identity of our other research groups.

To inspire a young generation of artists to delve deeper into the theory and practice of eco-art or to even move with their own practice into the field of art and ecology, ARTICULATE | ECOSYSTEMS presents a comprehensive programme that encourages critical reflection and engagement.

ARTICULATE | ECOSYSTEMS is an open invitation to get inspired by the variety of shapes, situations and outcomes that researchers generate during their artistic process at the Academy and beyond. It brings together a wealth of knowledge, groundbreaking ideas and rigorous artistic and scientific exploration from diverse fields. Expect a series of fragile and wondrous encounters with the work of artists who repeatedly reconsider their own practice and its position in the world.

About this publication

Like the programme itself, this publication does not seek to be all-encompassing, but to nurture the discourse and artistic practices touching upon art and ecology.

The inside cover of this publication gives a detailed overview of the programme of the ARTICULATE festival at the Academy.

The first two chapters are conceived as hands-on guides to the two exhibitions 'Forms of Life' and 'Ecosystems', including further explanations about the artworks on show. The artists are listed alphabetically and you will find their names next to the artwork in the exhibition spaces.

As a third chapter, you will find further reading aimed at fostering constructive discourse, including a key framework text which unravels some crucial terms and concepts, and introduces us to artistic movements that deal with environmental and ecological issues. With this third chapter we aim to provide a rich and nuanced background on the theme of ecosystems.

**Eco
systems**

**Eco
systems**

ECOSYSTEMS. Exhibition guide

In an era where our planet faces unprecedented environmental challenges, the need to nurture a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness with the natural world and all its human and non-human inhabitants has never been more pressing. 'Ecosystems' invites you to explore the intricate tapestry of ecosystems through the lens of historical and contemporary artistic practices. This exhibition tells a (possible) story of six decades of environmental awareness in the arts: how science inspired artists, and the other way around, to imagine a sustainable future. While the exhibition does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the vast and ever-evolving landscape of ecological art, it offers a selection of works and projects that exemplify inspiring practices and theoretical concepts.

The exhibition in the Lange Zaal is made up of three sections, assembled by our researchers, artists and teachers.

The exhibition opens with 'Artificial Ecologies', a presentation of printed matter, documentaries and films from the first generation of land-, earth- and eco-artists, selected from the Collection for Research on Artists' Publications. All these artists have reshaped the ways in which we perceive and present our natural environment.

Considering the printed artistic output of the 1960s and 1970s, it becomes clear that the scene was almost exclusively dominated by men. The work of one of the underrepresented female eco-artists, Patricia Johanson, printed as wallpaper on the surrounding walls, adds nuance to the canon, revealing a visionary, coherent ecological programme in which she devised sculptural solutions to environmental problems.

The second section of the exhibition hosts the iconic, reconstructed installation *Portable Orchard* by the artist couple Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, well-known pioneers in the field of ecological art. They worked in collaboration with biologists, historians, activists, urban planners and fellow artists to initiate dialogue and explore biodiversity and community development, emphasising holistic, systems-based thinking in relation to the environment. In this way, their work serves here as a bridge between the early land- and eco-artists and contemporary artistic practices and research.

The third part of the 'Ecosystems' exhibition looks at the current artistic research at our Academy. It shows how artists today engage in

practices and research to develop new and innovative ways to rekindle the relationship with the natural world we inhabit and acknowledge the fundamental interdependency of man and nature. The diverse contributions mirror the complexity, fragility and resilience of the ecosystems that sustain life on Earth. Several works were realised in the context of our international research project *Hydromedia: seeing with water* (further reading p. 83). The other works likewise took shape as part of ongoing artistic research being conducted at the Academy.

This exhibition is an invitation to join us in the continuous dialogue about art and ecology. We can only hope it gives inspiration to a young generation of art students who are looking for ways to cope with the world of today. Art, science and activism can help us to discover – and research, understand, share and take care of – our planet.

with printed matter by the early land-, earth- and eco- artists **MARINUS BOEZEM, CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE, LEO COPERS, AGNES DENES, HERMAN DE VRIES, JAN DIBBETS, HAMISH FULTON, PAUL-ARMAND GETTE, HANS HAACKE, PETER HUTCHINSON, RICHARD LONG, MASS (AND INDIVIDUAL) MOVING, DENNIS OPPENHEIM, ROBERT SMITHSON, T.O.P. OFFICE, NICOLÁS URIBURU** and works by **MIRJA BUSCH, CHARO CALVO, JEROEN CLUCKERS, TIM THEO DECEUNINCK, ELINE DE CLERCQ, ELS DIETVORST, HELEN MAYER HARRISON & NEWTON HARRISON, SASCHA HERRMANN, PATRICIA JOHANSON, ILARIA LUPO, JAREK LUSTYCH, DRIES SEGERS, KRISTOF TIMMERMAN, SASKIA VAN DER GUCHT**, among others

organised by Art & Research of the Academy

Artificial Ecologies. Publications and documents

This presentation aims at demonstrating how land-, earth- and eco-artists of the first generation have been using texts, photographs, and printed matter as tools to document their ephemeral projects in indoor and outdoor spaces. All these artists reshaped the notions of documentation and its relation to creation, introducing new ways of making, seeing and presenting photographs, and of perceiving our natural environment.

Part I, CURATING, focuses on the critical and curatorial discourse that flourished between 1968 and 1978 about Post-minimal and Conceptual art and the ecological turn they took with Land-, Earth- and Eco Art. Quite often catalogues were used by the artists to represent their ideas and document their work directly through texts and photographs.

Part II, WALKING, highlights the aspect of walking and travelling as 'soft' artistic strategies, as performed by the British land artists Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, the French conceptual artist Paul-Armand Gette and the Dutch poet and artist herman de vries. All these figures made substantial use of texts, photographs and books to represent and document their itinerary and ambulatory projects.

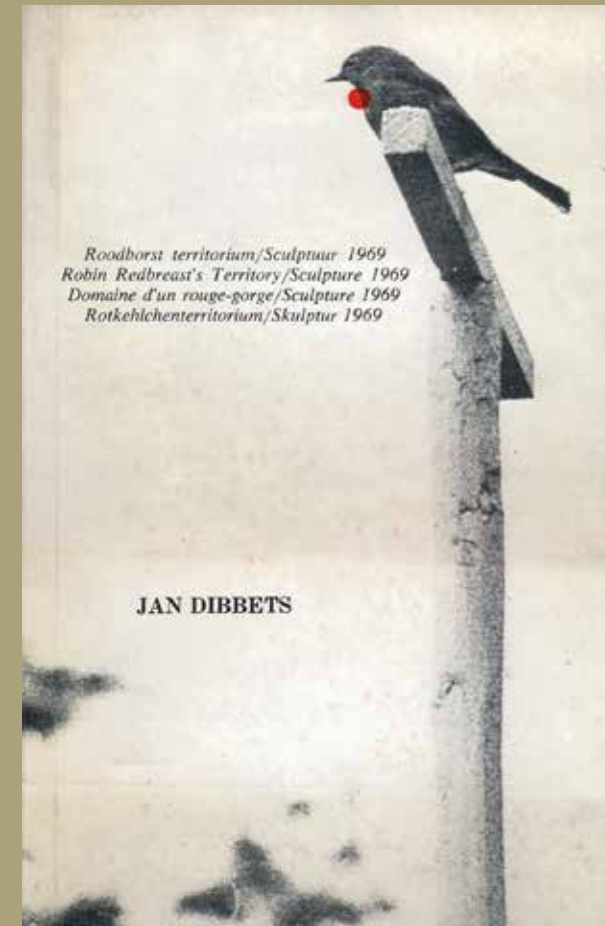
Part III, SITING, represents artists who coined the strategy of hard site-specificity as an alternative to the conventional gallery show. Robert Smithson focused on wasteland sites and entropy. Dennis Oppenheim expanded sculpture with large-scale landscape projects involving agricultural techniques, while Peter Hutchinson explored the artistic potential of mould and (other) growing and fermenting processes. Christo and Jeanne-Claude used land- and cityscapes as canvases for their monumental, temporary and site-specific projects.

Part IV, REVIEWING, shows four artists challenging our perception and representation of culture and nature. Jan Dibbets did so by manipulating our observation of nature and the landscape, while Marinus Boezem was one of the first artists to appropriate natural forces as conceptual art. Leo Copers intervened in nature by inserting alien elements in several environments and documenting this through photography. Agnes Denes used analytical and philosophical strategies to question our position in nature and in the world.

Part V, (RE)ACTING, reflects on the critical and political potential of ecological art. The German eco-artist Hans Haacke experimented with purifying polluted Rhine water, while the Argentinian architect and painter Nicolás Uriburu coloured rivers, canals and fountains in several cities

(including Antwerp) bright green as ecological performances. The Belgian 'urbanist' studio T.O.P. office (Luc Deleu & Laurette Guillemot) focused on recycling and reconsidering the urban environment, whereas the Belgian collective Mass (and Individual) Moving merged social dynamics with activism in their interactive collective projects to create an ecological awareness. Together with many others, these artists prove how artistic research and practice can shape new ideas about our relationship with the environment and encourage new behaviours and modes of activism.

Further reading p. 80



Jan Dibbets, *Robin Redbreast's Territory/Sculpture 1969*, Seth Siegellaub, New York, Verlag Gebr. König, Cologne, 1970 (artists' book, Collection for Research on Artists' Publications)

** This presentation is hosted by research group ArchiVolt. All documents are from the Collection for Research on Artists' Publications (CRAP).



Patricia Johanson, *Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility*, Petaluma, CA, 2000-2009

PATRICIA JOHANSON
The World as a Work of Art

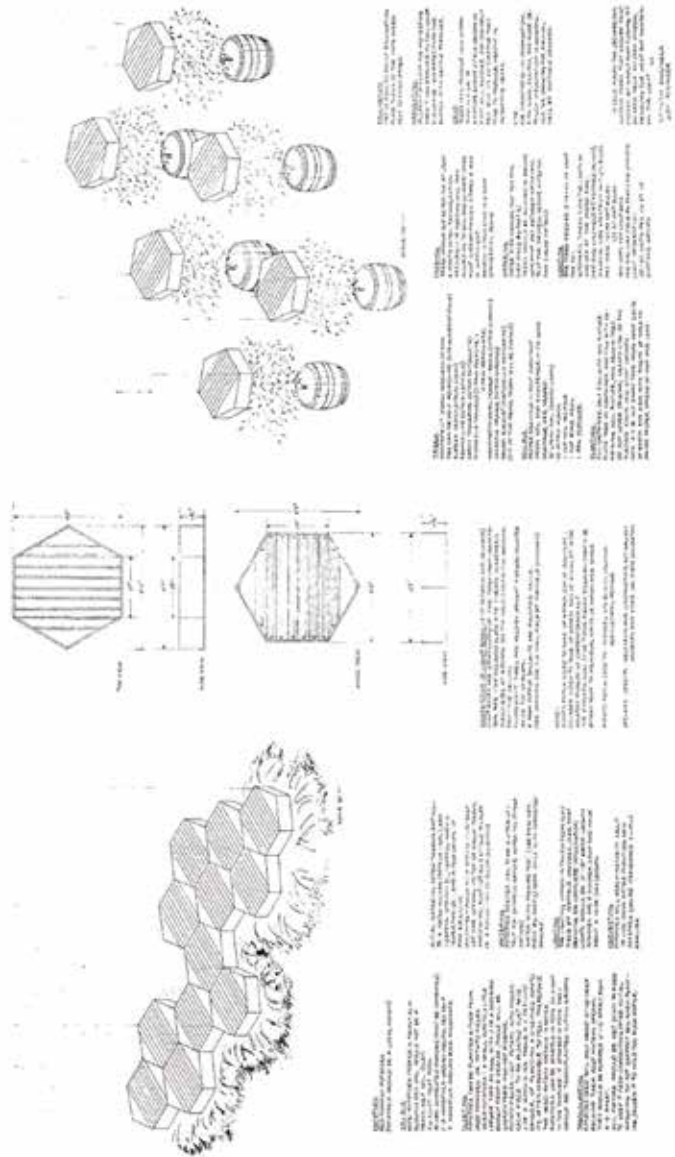
Virtually unknown to the general public, Patricia Johanson (New York City, 1940) has been rapidly gaining prominence in the United States over the last decade, on the one hand as a female Minimal artist and on the other as an eco-art pioneer, recognised as a role model by younger generations of ecofeminists. As early as 1969, Johanson developed a visionary, coherent ecological programme in which she devised sculptural solutions to environmental problems, planning issues, urban development and the loss of natural habitats of plants and animals. In each case, her work is conceived on a landscape scale and focused on practical implementation. As a visual artist, she creates complete landscapes or habitats, restoring local plant and animal communities and providing meeting places between people and nature.

Starting in the 1980s, Johanson realised several commissions in public spaces. At *Fair Park Lagoon* in Dallas, Texas (1981-1986), for example, she transformed a dead lagoon with slimy algae and eroding shoreline edges into an ecologically rich habitat and inviting park. The ground plan is based on the shapes of a local aquatic plant and a fern from the area. For the *Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility* in Petaluma, California (2000-2009), she developed a giant park around a water treatment plant, whose ground plan is shaped like a salt-marsh harvest mouse – an endangered local species. Johanson’s park includes not only a water treatment plant, but also a stormwater collection and treatment facility, farmland and a nature and recreation area.

The autumn of 2023 will see the publication of a voluminous volume of writings by Patricia Johanson, compiled and edited by Roel Arkesteijn. The book marks the beginning of the new Art & Ecology research group, and it is hoped that it will give the impressive, exemplary artistic-ecological programme Johanson has developed since the late 1960s international dissemination and prominence as a best practice for eco-artists. The lavishly illustrated publication will feature nearly 200 texts, letters and interviews by Johanson, including a new interview with the artist by Ann Goldstein and Roel Arkesteijn produced for this occasion. The American art critic and activist Lucy R. Lippard contributed a foreword. The book will run to 544 pages and be designed by Caroline de Lint. It will be published by Track Report and Fieldwork Museum.

** The book *Patricia Johanson: The World as a Work of Art* will be launched together with the new research group Art & Ecology on Tuesday 7 November, 19:00, at the Lange Zaal of the Academy.

SURVIVAL PIECE #6 PART 3 POTATO PATCH AND PORTABLE ORCHARD
 NEWTON HARRISON



Newton Harrison Drawing for Portable Farm, Potato Patch and Portable Orchard 1972

The Harrisons, *Survival Piece #6, part 3: Potato Patch and Portable Orchard*, 1972

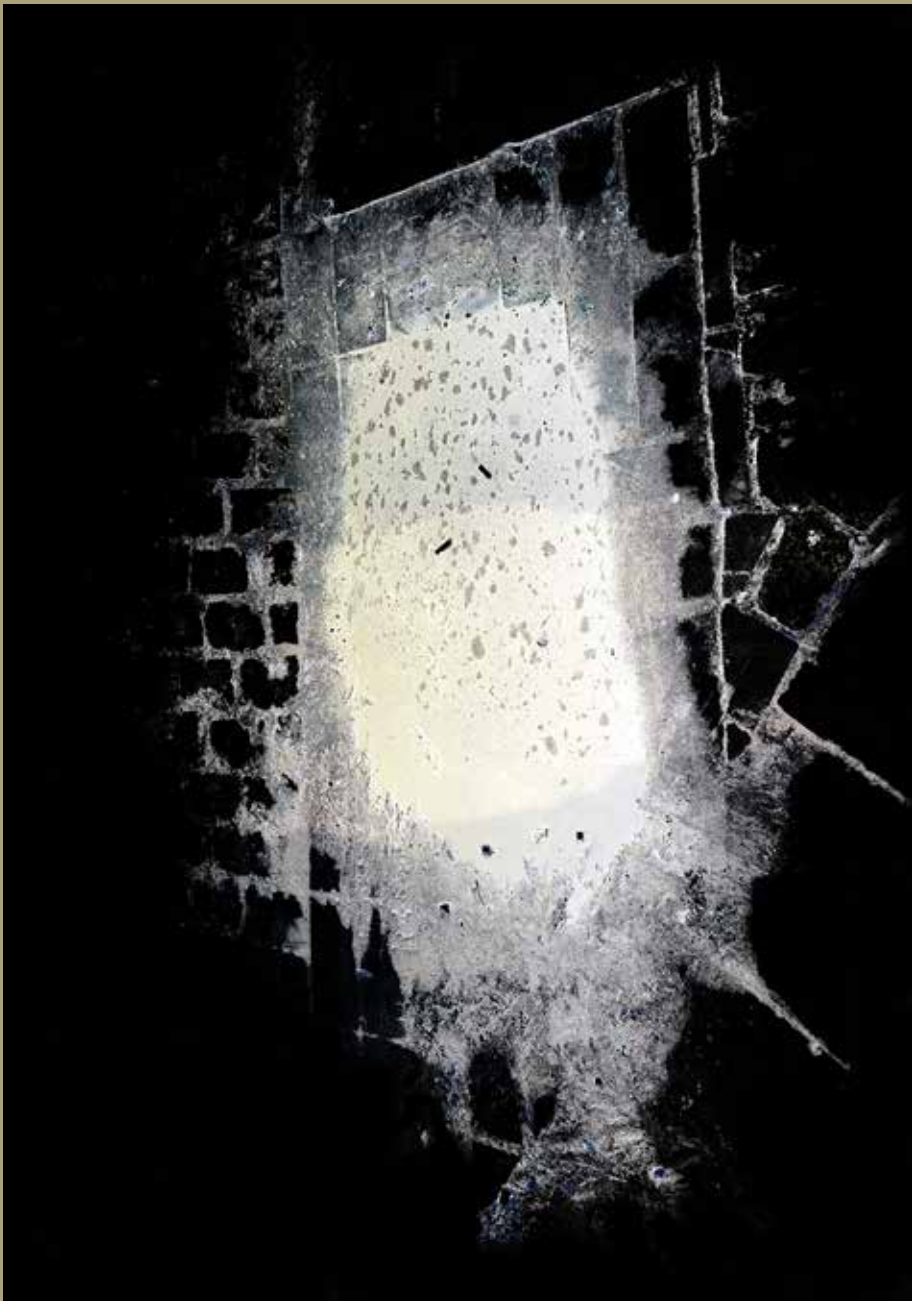
HELEN MAYER HARRISON AND NEWTON HARRISON
Portable Orchard

As part of the 'Ecosystems' exhibition, the Lange Zaal features an iconic installation by two very prominent early American eco-artists: the artist couple Helen Mayer Harrison (1927–2018) and Newton Harrison (1932–2022), also known as 'the Harrisons'. After the Earth Day of 1970, they decided that they would only do work which would benefit ecosystems. In 1971–1972, the Harrisons produced a series of so-called *Survival Pieces*: indoor farms, producing edibles which were cooked and shared with visitors in a series of museum exhibitions. The series included a portable fish farm, a portable orchard, a potato patch and even a crab farm. The artists created the works primarily as a means of teaching themselves, as urban people, how to grow their own food. *Portable Orchard* was designed as part of the giant installation *Survival Piece 6: Portable Farm*, which the Harrisons presented in 1972 at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Texas, and in which they brought together almost all the elements from the earlier installations. The *Portable Orchard* was conceived as a wistful monument to the slowly disappearing orange orchards that Orange County, California was originally rich in. The work makes us aware of our dependence on ecosystems, in this case a productive food system, and commented on the drastic measures the Harrisons believed may be necessary in the future to feed the world's population.

Whereas many eco-artists are valued primarily for their actually executed projects, perhaps the Harrisons' strength lies even more in their role as drivers of discourse on pressing, global ecological issues. In verbal discussions, they employed a strategy – in the form of the written word and monumental installations – that they dubbed 'conversational drift'. The artists introduced very distinct concepts and visions into the world with the expectation that they would eventually boomerang back, enriched by the insights of others. Their vision – as exemplified by their works on climate breakdown, Europe's endangered wildflower meadows and the protection of the Green Heart of the Netherlands – were often far ahead of their time.

With special thanks to Various Small Fires, Los Angeles and Seoul; The Estate of The Harrisons; and Esther Kim Varet.

** The reconstruction of the *Portable Orchard* was initiated and realised by research group Art & Ecology.



Mirja Busch, *Heavy-Metal Vibrations: or the dissection of a water Body*, C-print, 2023

MIRJA BUSCH

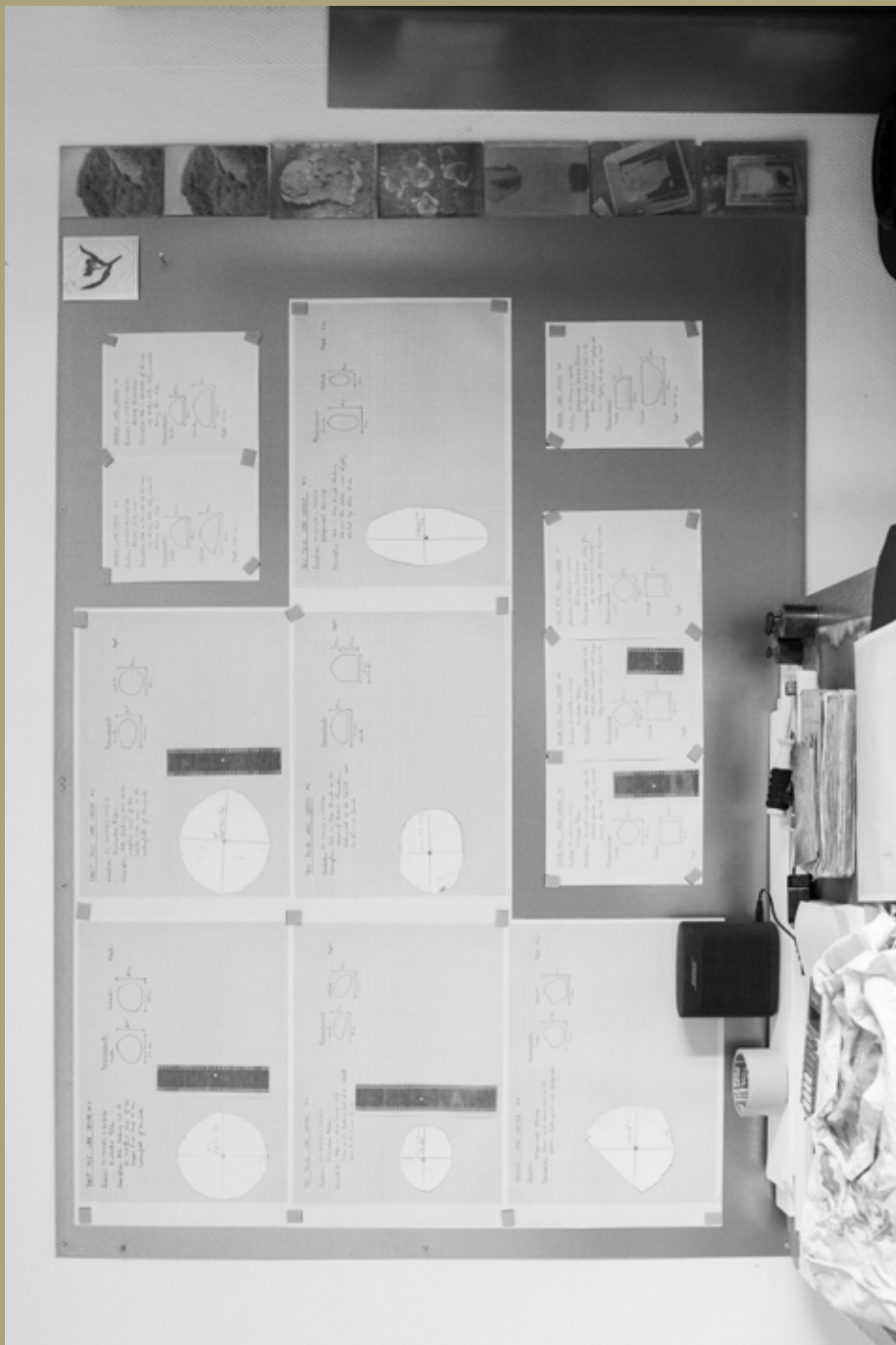
Heavy-Metal Vibrations: or the dissection of a water Body

Mirja Busch is a Berlin-based visual artist whose work explores modes of coexistence in nature/culture assemblages, relating to ecology through multi-species and speculative sensibilities. For over ten years, she has been exploring the volatile ontology of puddles, the earth-sky-surface-ground-weather interplay they embody and the social choreographies they create. Puddles are not random accumulations of water. Like some animals they display a high degree of site-fidelity. They always return to the same places, 'their' places, which they also shape. These are the hollows, the sites where they are found. They are literally embedded and highly site-specific. Puddles thrive in the cracks of human-made environments. They mirror their surroundings, collect materials and detritus, offer temporary, ecological niches. Present and absent, local and global, biotopes and climatopes, nature-cultural puddles are many things.

Busch created an installation comprising photographs, water samples and chemical profiles. The work transforms the observed puddles through visual inversion and solarisation, forming photo columns. Each column is accompanied by water from one to three puddles characterised by a relatively high presence of a heavy metal. This installation covers the intricate connections between water bodies, heavy metals and urban landscapes.

Interested in how puddles can become a medium for interdisciplinary conversations, for this project Busch collaborated with the EcoSphere lab of the University of Antwerp, directed by ecotoxologist Professor Ronny Blust, vice-rector of the Research Board at UA.

** This work was realised in the context of the international collaborative project *Hydromedia: seeing with water*, coordinated by research group Thinking Tools.



Tim Theo Deceuninck, *Becoming Terrestrial: reflections on the land-camera*, Documentation and Research Chart, 2023

TIM THEO DECEUNINCK

Becoming Terrestrial: reflections on the land-camera

Tim Theo Deceuninck is a photography-based artist working in the field of landscape representation, regenerative ecologies and restorative histories. Through historical processes and narratives, he tries to gain a deeper insight into the historical use of the photographed landscape. Subverting the toxic analogue photographic process, he uses non-toxic, organic exposure and printing techniques.

The environment today is often represented as landscape through mechanical devices acting as black boxes. In the Anthropocene we are challenged to think of methods of representation which go beyond objectifying the landscape on the one hand or overly romanticising it through a mere subjective perspective. In his work, Deceuninck uses a land camera – a photographic apparatus reduced to its bare minimum: a camera obscura – which is embedded in holes of tree trunks, rabbit holes, ditches, mud, industrial pipelines ... Starting from this embedded viewpoint inside the environment, leaving room for unpredictable factors to interfere with the process – water can wash the camera away, plants can overgrow the hole, crawling insects can distort the image –, the images materialise in a generative organic process without any interference by a human agent. As such, the land camera facilitates the non-human to represent itself as an active agent and gives us viewers the chance ‘to look from within’ instead of ‘to look at’.

The images for this series are produced by holes around the overgrown landfills of Hoboken Polder, the flooding areas of Kruikebeke polder and the riverbeds in the industrialised port area of Antwerp.

** This work was realised in the context of the international collaborative project *Hydromedia: seeing with water*, coordinated by research group Thinking Tools. On Wednesday 8 November 2023, Tim Theo Deceuninck will introduce you to the development of organic ink during his lecture-workshop ‘Silver nor Gold’.



Eline De Clercq, *The Sympoiesis Garden*, 2023

ELINE DE CLERCQ & SASKIA VAN DER GUCHT *Garden Table*

During ARTICULATE, the garden community of the Academy will have a worktable set up in the exhibition in the Lange Zaal. In 2022, Eline De Clercq started a community garden in the Academy's old garden, where weekly sessions are organised with students and artists. This artistic research project on art and ecology functions as an informal learning environment about climate change, gender norms, decolonisation and intersectionalism.

On the garden table you will find working texts, books, seeds, tools and more: a gathering of objects and ideas on what it means to work with nature as an artist. On the table is also the poster that Eline De Clercq printed with Track Report: a map of the garden project with patches of words and a path for the reader to follow.

On the table you can also see the work *On Sand*, a ceramic biotope dish made during a collaborative research project with Saskia Van der Gucht (researcher at Sint Lucas Antwerpen). This container holds sand that was carried by the wind to Antwerp more than 10,000 years ago. With the help of archaeologists, the artists were able to retrieve this sand from the dig site in Antwerp's Linkeroever area, right at the heart of the PFAS pollution, buried under layers of land and history. The collected material embodies matters such as care, habitation, touch and invisibility. In the clay receptacle the sand is once again given the opportunity to become a habitat for plants and animals. It's not a reconstruction of the original fauna and flora, it's a curiosity-fuelled 'what if' situation: the artists want to look after and care for the sand like a miniature nature reserve.

You can visit the community garden via the Academy's main entrance at Mutsaardstraat.
IG @royalacademyantwerpgarden

** *The Garden Table* was realised in the context of the two-year research project *Making Sense*, a continuation of the one-year research project *The Sympoiesis Garden*, within research group Art & Ecology within research group Art & Ecology (further reading p. 100). During ARTICULATE, Eline De Clercq organises the research class 'The Garden'.



Els Dietvorst, *Coastal Shrine*, (2020-2023)

ELS DIETVORST

Mantra

Coastal Shrine

Els Dietvorst's practice is remarkably diverse and comprises drawings, prints, sculptures, installations, films and documentaries, performative actions and one-act plays. Her work has always had at its core issues such as mass migration, social conflict, homelessness, nature, climate breakdown and our own mortality. Inspired by the holistic approach of regenerative agriculture, she brings forward the concept of 'regenerative art'. Regenerative art explores creative processes that integrate social and natural systems, using art to reinvigorate the bonds between human communities and the ecosystem in which they live. It uses the work processes to create healing within the environment and among communities as a whole.

On the wall of the 'Ecosystems' exhibition, Dietvorst places a mantra, which invites us to see, feel and think in new ways, refreshing our senses, looking beyond everything we see and hear.

In the same space she is exhibiting a print of her *Coastal Shrine*, composed of white stones to honour those who have suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dietvorst lives by the sea in a scarcely populated area of Wexford in Ireland. There she encountered a couple of stones that a girl had inscribed with the words 'Covid 19' and 'I am bored'. She felt inspired to place several white stones around it and kept doing so every day. Anonymous walkers started contributing to the temple. There are many sacred places throughout the world where pilgrims used to travel to connect to a special energy. *Coastal Shrine* is nested in a memorable place that can only be reached after walking for thirty minutes in a desolate area: it entails a different kind of pilgrimage.

** Works realised in the context of Els Dietvorst's PhD research project *Partisans of the real*, conducted within the research group ArchiVolt at the Academy.

SASCHA HERRMANN
Refracting Eutrophication

In his current works, Berlin-based photographer Sascha Herrmann examines the idiosyncratic properties of imaging techniques in the field of earth system science. In *Refracting Eutrophication*, he used experimental photographic processes concerning light refractions, colorimetry and bioluminescence to explore the changes in the environment of the Scheldt Estuary. Besides making photograms of one of the last resilient eels from the Scheldt and presenting them in so-called 'photoaquariums', he also developed a measuring system for detecting the levels of phosphorus in the ambient water. Finally, he filmed the mystical fluorescence of algae and microplastics in the old dry docks of the former port of Antwerp.

Due to a lack of renaturation areas, the strong tidal influence and the deepening of channels and polder management, there is a serious decline in the biodiversity of the Scheldt Estuary. This ecological breakdown is also amplified due to the over-fertilisation of the groundwater (eutrophication) with phosphorus. Phosphorus triggers the excessive growth of algae and aquatic plants and, when these die, they are decomposed by microorganisms. In the process, a lot of oxygen is consumed, which leads to oxygen deficits. These in turn have a negative effect on fish and other aquatic organisms. The eel – a hybrid, tolerant creature that can live at depths of 1,000 meters in both salt and fresh water, or in the salt marches – suffers exemplarily the consequences of human influence on the Scheldt Estuary.

All works have been created with the generous support of the youth and environmental protection organisation Stormkop.



Sascha Herrmann, *Photoaquarium* (unique black-and-white photogram of an eel, optiwhite glass, 54 L purified water)

** This work was realised in the context of the international collaborative project *Hydromedia: seeing with water*, coordinated by research group Thinking Tools.



Ilaria Lupo, *Nocturne for Pit Orchestra*, 2018, film still

ILARIA LUPO
Nocturne for Pit Orchestra

Nocturne for Pit Orchestra digs into the dynamics of music-making in the context of labour while aiming to explore the intermingled layers connecting the quarry's identity with the socio-economic and environmental shifts in twentieth-century Bahrain and the Gulf Region.

This project is part of a series of works by Ilaria Lupo spanning seven years and re-enacting workers' performances of work songs. In the region, such music is specifically rooted in a system of exploitation established during colonial times called *kafala*, which is still operational today in the Middle East. Some of these projects took place at industrial sites turned into temporary theatres.

Nocturne for Pit Orchestra, in collaboration with composer and musician Rabih Beaini, was especially conceived for the National Quarry of Bahrain. Beaini engaged with the site's labourers after contextual research, in particular on the pearl divers' music – a vocal music of great complexity called *fidjeri*, embodying a pivotal history of labour in the region – based on the *kafala* system today as before. Beaini involved the group in a process where an array of influences was explored and combined. They rehearsed vocal droning, looping, amplifications, polyphonies, singing solo and as a choir.

The final performance was presented at the stone quarry – located in the desert of Hafeera – the very heart of extraction of materials destined for the construction industry.

Performance at the National Quarry of Bahrain, a project by Ilaria Lupo in collaboration with Rabih Beaini, with the participation of Hassan Hujairi, Bahrain 2017 (film 2018)

** In her PhD research *The Mottoliese Archive* at the Academy – within research group ArchiVolt – and at ARIA, Ilaria Lupo continues to develop a public space practice through participative projects, focusing on issues of political ecology and environmental justice.



recording analysis, Scheldt - sample length 30"

Recording Analysis, Scheldt (Latent Voice - Schelde)

JAREK LUSTYCH
Latent Voice - Schelde

In his work, Jarek Lustych refers to social and political problems derived from post-humanist theories. Since 2000 he has been trying to go beyond the anthropocentric vision of the world by creating projects in which natural components of the environment are active participants.

There is a wide class of beings whose coexistence with us eludes the existing criteria of life, yet they have an agency of their own that cannot be ignored. One of them is the river. The immanent feature of the river is its persistent and at the same time directed fluidity. It is this attribute that triggered Lustych to create *Latent Voice*.

'A few years ago, I immersed a string into a river current. What happened next exceeded my expectations. I expected the sound, but its complexity surprised me. The river seemed to be talking to me and its voice was profound. The physical phenomenon displayed the traits of a symbolic utterance. This intimate encounter with the flowing water and the immediacy of this experience of non-human agency became the focus of my artistic practice.'

The Scheldt is an unusual river in that it does not flow, like other rivers, in just one direction; it flows in both directions. Such fluid dynamics is exclusive to tidal rivers and multiplies variables which presents a challenge to the human operator who tries to elicit the river's melody. *Latent Voice - Schelde* can be considered as an expression of cooperation between the human operator of the disturbing string and the non-human river whose flow disturbances determine the melody.

** This work was realised in the context of the international collaborative project *Hydromedia: seeing with water*, coordinated by research group Thinking Tools.



Dries Segers, *Responding Rain*, 2019/2023 (positive/negative of 4 x 5 inch colour sheets on Fuji Metallic Pearl, 42 x 58 cm)

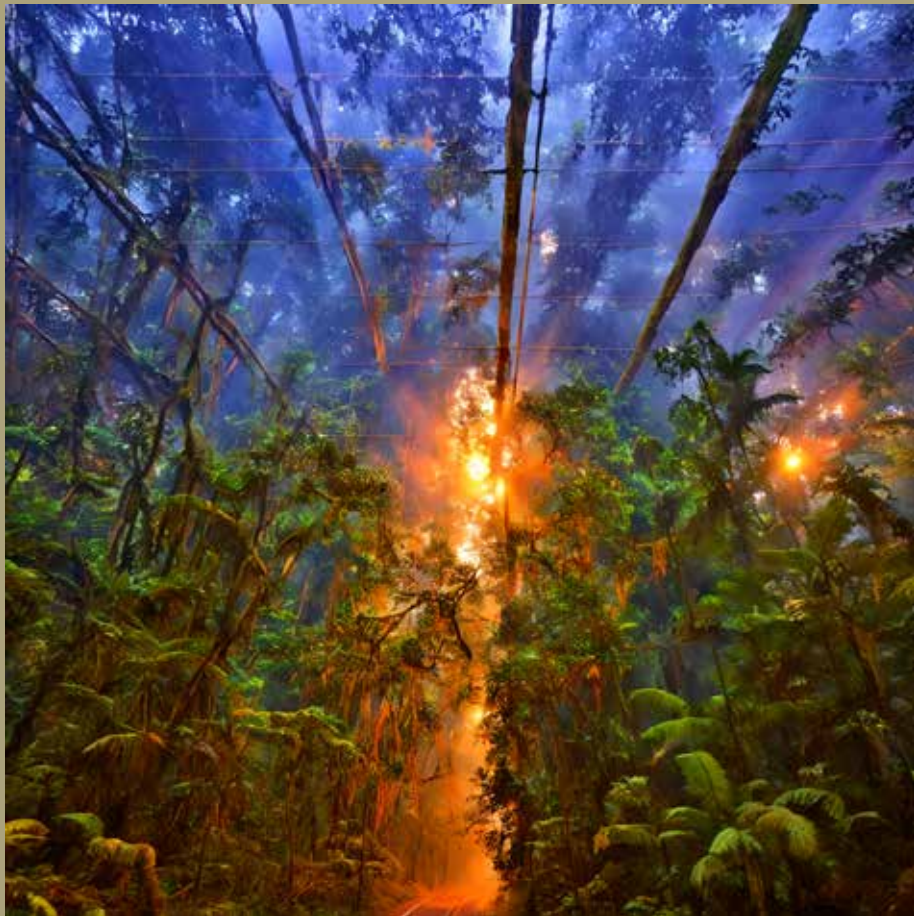
DRIES SEGERS *Responding Rain*

Responding Rain offers a photographic visualisation of the invisible fluctuations in the chemical composition of our surroundings, such as occur in light and air pollution. On rainy nights, Segers left light-sensitive material outside that reacted to the toxins and other chemicals in raindrops. These chemicals left behind direct imprints, while the light pollution in the air was partly responsible for the background colour of the abstract images.

Light, sound and toxic pollution disrupt the biorhythms of humans, animals and insects; they disrupt natural patterns of (wild)life and ecosystems, harm biodiversity and contribute to an increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Many species are affected by light pollution, including birds, mammals such as humans and bats, amphibians such as frogs, insects such as moths, and reptiles such as turtles. The acidity in acid rain can cause damage to plants, aquatic animals, infrastructure and buildings. Acid rain is related to the release of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere and is caused by human activities such as burning fossil fuels, industrial manufacturing, oil refineries, the meat industry, transport and the generation of electricity.

These photographs don't depict the world from a representational attitude but collaborate directly with matter. Segers' research at the Academy aims to respond to and co-create with unstable and risky components, it seeks to distort the photographic programme into an unstable technical system that interacts with and activates ideas of speculative realism, global climate issues and the paradox of achieving technical stability while we are in a state of extreme fragility.

** This work was realised in the context of Dries Segers' research project *Ask your hands to know the things they hold* within research group Thinking Tools at the Academy.



KRISTOF TIMMERMAN, CHARO CALVO, JEROEN CLUCKERS, FLORIAN STIGTER VAN THILLO, LOWIE SPIRIET & ROB MERTENS
Glasshouse

Glasshouse is a multisensory experience at the interface between the real and the virtual. The installation uses virtual reality and engages the visitor's senses. A sophisticated combination of analogue and digital media creates the conditions for an immersive experience.

In *Glasshouse*, the boundary between physical and digital reality is fluid. The installation acts as a portal between biotopes. Here, different realities converge between which the visitor is tossed back and forth.

The biotopes between which the visitor moves refer to the history of the tomato: from the wild tomato plant with tiny fruits from the Andes, to one of the most widespread, modified and industrialised products in the world. Flanders plays an important role in this with one of the largest concentrations of greenhouse horticulture worldwide.

This installation is the result of a transdisciplinary cooperation between researchers at MAXlab and the Immersive Lab.

Kristof Timmerman, Charo Calvo, Jeroen Cluckers, Florian Stigter Van Thillo, Lowie Spriet & Rob Mertens, *Glasshouse*, 2023, concept art for virtual reality experience

** This work is realised in the context of Kristof Timmerman's PhD research *Sense of Wonder. Artistic portals between the real and the virtual* and Jeroen Clurcker's research project *The Desert of the Real*, conducted at the Academy.

**Forms
of life**

**Forms
of life**

FORMS OF LIFE. Exhibition guide

The *Forms of Life* research project (2021-2023), developed with a group of sixteen young artists from different departments of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, explored the multiple resonances of a question animating all fields of contemporary creation, thought, and society: that of our relation to other forms of life, and the ways in which we inhabit the world. Its aim was to question the links that weave together the work of art and the world; images and the living; the forms that surround us and those we create – in other words, the fabric of life itself.

Fuelled by seminars, readings, regular exchanges within the group, encounters with guest authors and artists, and a collective experience at workshops in Antwerp and Venice, the participants decided to structure the second year of *Forms of Life* around the conception of an exhibition project.

Born organically, the 'Forms of Life' exhibition is as much a reflection of the artists' individual trajectories during these two years of research as it is of a collective experience. While the forms they take are varied – installation, sculpture, video, photography, painting – the works seem to be permeated by the same breath: that of a porous relationship with the world, in which the artistic gesture is not envisaged as the imposition of a form on a material, but rather considered from the angle of collaboration, listening, attention, and immersion.

Numerous questions that lay at the heart of the research project run through the exhibition: the relationship between humans and other-than-humans (Rafaela Figurski Vieira, Rune Tuerlinckx), the question of landscape (Paul Müller, Oona Oikkonen, Max Beets, Witold Vandembroeck), that of process and materials (Laurence Petrone), attention to 'weak signals' observed in everyday life (Pieter Eliëns, Maria Sawizki) and the notation of the present (Malena Guerrieri). Other proposals were directly influenced by the collective experience, particularly the workshop in Venice (Pit Riewer, Nina Gross). Finally, Alexandra Vitalyevna Samarova's proposal makes visible the constellation of times and personal geographies traced by the group members in the months leading up to the exhibition.

The exhibition also includes a collective project, the *Atlas of Forms*, which informed the development of *Forms of Life*. Each member of the group was invited to feed this 'atlas' with images related to the observation of 'forms' in everyday life. Some images were published as postcards (designed by

Kristi Fekete and Maren Katharina Rommerskirchen) scattered throughout the exhibition, continuing their life beyond the research project.

Christophe Gallois, Tina Gillen and Diana Murray Watts

with works by **MAX BEETS, PIETER ELIËNS, KRISTÍ FEKETE, RAFAELA FIGURSKI VIEIRA, NINA GROSS, MALENA GUERRIERI, PAUL MÜLLER, OONA OIKKONEN, LAURENCE PETRONE, PIT RIEWER, MAREN KATHARINA ROMMERSKIRCHEN, ALEXANDRA VITALYEVNA SAMAROVA, MARIA SAWIZKI, RUNE TUERLINCKX, WITOLD VANDENBROECK**

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** *Forms of Life* was organised by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in collaboration with Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, in the context of the Luxembourg Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022). In August and September 2023, 10 artists from the research project had short residencies at the Bridderhaus in Esch, Luxembourg, in collaboration with the Korschthal Esch.



MAX BEETS

Anchored in the field of sculpture, the work of Max Beets is nourished by his interest in found materials and forms. Archaeology – the ‘science of finding’, as he calls it – is an essential source of inspiration for him, and fragments have infinite narrative potential: ‘In the missing and the broken, with their myriad possibilities, there is space for a multitude of lives, references and feelings that might have been there once,’ says Beets.

The set of three small sculptures he has made for the exhibition originates in his observation of rock formations during a trip to Asia. For Beets, the strata of stone in the landscape are also layers of time. Each sculpture is composed of 20 to 30 thin ceramic tiles that can be arranged in different ways, and whose precarious stability is ensured by a simple wooden rod running through them. They evoke a landscape, a row of books or the lines of a poem – an interplay with time.

Max Beets was born in 1994 in Amsterdam. He graduated with an MA from the Sculpture Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in 2022. He lives and works in Amsterdam.

Max Beets, *Constellation (dial)*, 2022
Roman and Medieval pottery, brass and wood
21 x 21 x 107 cm



Pieter Eliëns, *Echo*, 2022
Metal, found torn flags, perspex, transparent wire
180 x 30 x 60 cm each

PIETER ELIËNS

Pieter Eliëns creates sculptural installations in which various materials, such as metal, fabric and plaster, are often combined with found objects and photographic images. His works pay attention to objects and places that are usually overlooked or neglected and explore the emotional charge carried by certain materials, maintaining a strong relationship with the body. The artist describes his works as 'temporary monuments' to fragility, care, support and loss.

Eliëns' sculptural installation for the exhibition delimitates a space on the floor, creating a space within the space. Its shape was inspired by the barriers that are usually found in public gardens to protect a plot of land where plants or seeds have recently been sown. The installation is partly composed of found objects picked up in the street. Some of them contain words, which together form a temporary, random and fragile poem representing the 'discarded words' that inhabit urban spaces.

Pieter Eliëns was born in 1989 in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He graduated with an MA from the Sculpture department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. He lives and works in Paris.



The *Atlas of Forms* is a collection of images that accompanied the *Forms of Life* research project during the two years of its development. In the course of their meetings, members of the group contributed to this endeavour by adding images related to the observation of forms in everyday life. For the exhibition, graphic designers Maren Katharina Rommerskirchen and Kristí Fekete decided to extend this *Atlas of Forms* by leading an image-collection system with the aim to publish the results as postcards. Scattered throughout the exhibition, the postcards are available to be taken away as a means to help extend *Forms of Life* beyond the walls of this room.

Maren Katharina Rommerskirchen likes to question and challenge her vision and understanding of graphic design whenever possible, seeking opportunities to learn new aspects of this discipline. She often uses graphic design as a tool to solve problems when working on a visual identity, for example. But there is a layer beneath this that she keeps exploring in order to expand her artistic practice which, in her eyes, can and should be about dialogue and caring for each other – including all life forms. Kristí Fekete uses both a typographical and literary approach in her artistic practice. She enjoys working with text – overlapping visual aspects with semantic ones – and utilises tools that come from the traditional discipline of graphic design to tinker with language. She perceives language as a life form, an organic growth. During their time as students, they started working together on several projects. ‘With the *Forms of Life* project, and more specifically the *Atlas of Forms*, there was a genuine attempt to go past the human-centric perspective,’ say Rommerskirchen and Fekete. ‘It offered us possible means to find empathy toward our environment beyond the human element.’

Maren Katharina Rommerskirchen was born in 1994 in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. Kristí Fekete was born in 1997 in Komárno, Slovakia. They graduated in 2022 with an MA from the Graphic Design Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp and both live and work in Antwerp.



B

Rafaela Figurski Vieira, *Elvis*, 2023
Single channel video
6 min 37 sec

RAFAELA FIGURSKI VIEIRA

Whether in the form of site-specific installations or films, Rafaela Figurski Vieira's works are always directly inspired by the places and objects that surround her. The artist sees constructed spaces and public spaces as sets that she transforms through micro-fictions, disrupting the way we perceive and use them. For instance, her latest film, *Well, Well, Well* (2023), took as its starting point the Babelsberg film studios in Berlin, developing from the numerous props that populate them the narrative of a film in the making. In the exhibition, Figurski Vieira presents another recent film, entitled *Elvis* (2023). The title comes from the name of a parrot owned by the artist's grandparents in Brazil. In order to invite and enable the parrot to return to its aviary every evening, they devised a sound system based on bird recordings. This family anecdote therefore becomes the genesis for a contemporary fable, the magic of which is conveyed through the playful editing and the sonic dimension of the film.

Rafaela Figurski Vieira was born in 1999 in Curitiba, Brazil. In 2023 she graduated with an MA from the In Situ art department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. She lives and works in Berlin.

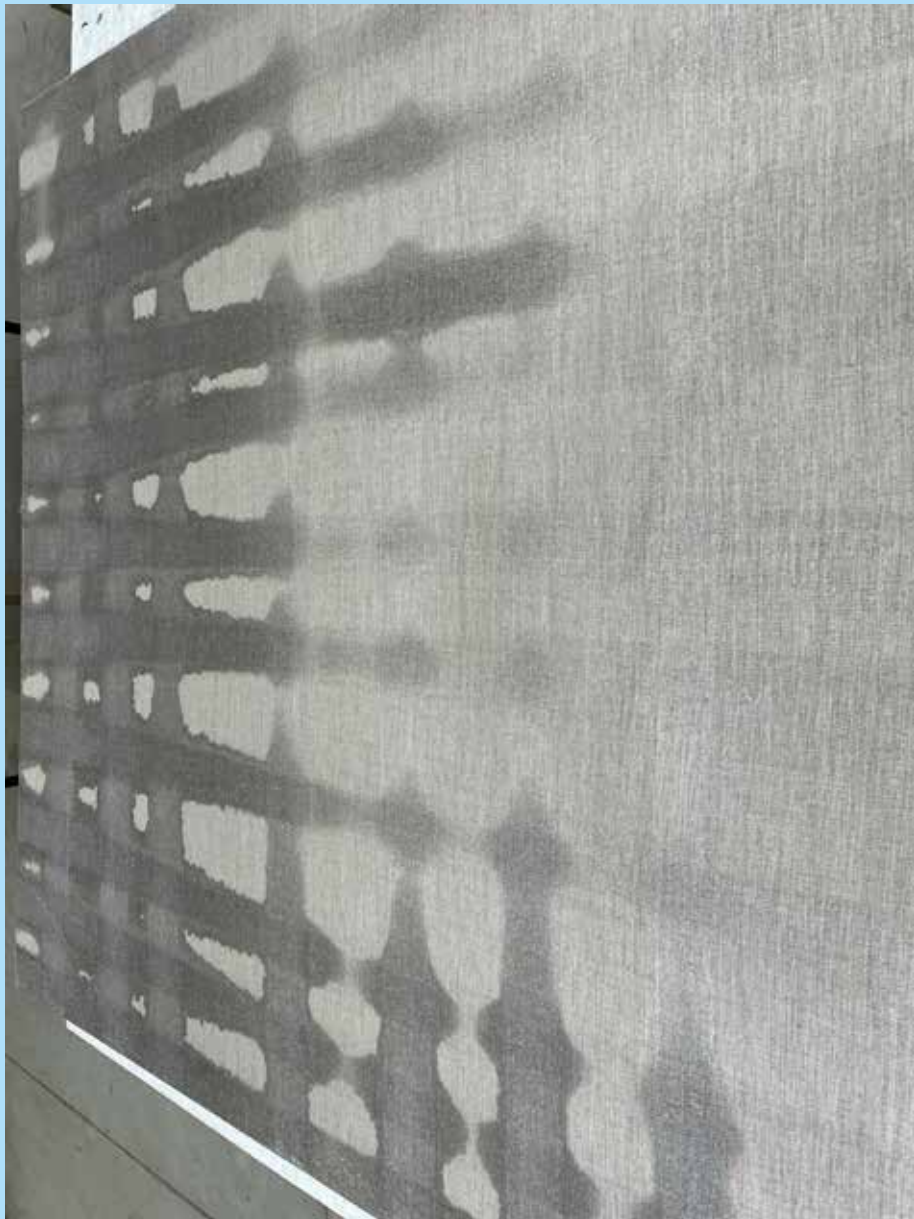


Nina Gross, *Cups in Transit*, 2023
Oil on panel
26 x 22 cm

NINA GROSS

The social dynamics in cities are never easy to define. Through means of deep observation, painter Nina Gross explores places where people cross paths, create history and build a common identity. 'I am interested in our relationship to the places that we live in and the culture produced in those places,' Gross says. For this exhibition, Gross makes the city of Venice the focus of her anthropological interests. There she participated in the one-week workshop organised by the research group *Forms of Life*. She shows scenes that expose the tension between the masses of tourists walking through the city and the few locals who try to lead their own lives. Her painting achieves this study through the elusive yet careful depiction of everyday details such as coffee cups. In this way, her work presents the precarious balance that permeates through this Italian city that for so many has become a non-place, a transit place that seems to live only through its past.

Nina Gross was born in 1989 in Berlin. She graduated with an MA in 2023 from the Painting Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp and lives and works in Vienna and Antwerp.



Malena Guerrieri, *working on my master project*, Antwerp, 2023
Acrylic base on linen canvas
130 x 144 cm

MALENA GUERRIERI

In her work, Malena Guerrieri is interested in the experience of space and time, and strives to create open, non-figurative, non-narrative forms that offer the viewer a 'mysterious, dreamlike journey'. She likes to quote the words of the Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector to describe her approach: 'I don't understand. This is so vast that it passes all understanding. Understanding is always limited. But not understanding can be without boundaries. I feel that I am much more complete when I do not understand. Not understanding, to my way of thinking, is a gift.' (*Too Much of Life: Complete Chronicles*) The works Guerrieri presents in the exhibition are at the crossroads of drawing and performance. They are part of an ongoing series of drawings made with her eyes closed, in a variety of contexts and situations, leaving aside any form of intention. Her aim is simply to recreate a subjective and sensitive experience of space, as if her hand were playing the role of a seismograph, making visible the perception of a space.

Malena Guerrieri was born in 1989 in Buenos Aires. In 2023 she graduated with an MA from the In-Situ art department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp.



Paul Müller, *SET 1 (Sensory Expansion Toolkit)*, 2023
Documentation photograph, Mullerthal valley, Luxembourg, 2023

PAUL MÜLLER

Two main spheres of interest occupy the thoughts of Paul Müller: how do we relate to things that are different from us as human actors? And how do we relate to institutions and fellow social entities that have managed to develop a life of their own? While Müller's range of artistic expression is vast, he speaks of his preference for the creation of tools. He explains that those tools can be physical or immaterial objects that help us bridge a barrier that is otherwise difficult to cross by language or imagination alone. Müller's work in this exhibition, *Sensory Expansion Toolkit (SET 1): Rocky and Mountainous Landscapes (2023)*, is twofold. The viewer stands in front of a set of handcrafted tools in beechwood alongside a series of photographs of Müller himself testing them in a mountainous setting. The tools were meant as an aid to understanding the unique geography of this landscape. 'It is very difficult to relate to a mountain,' Müller explains, 'for one must enhance a physical relationship with a place where you have to consider everything at once.' The photographs show an example of one of the many ways the tool can be used, allowing us to consider our relationship to this other being.

Paul Müller was born in 1999 in Frankfurt am Main. He received an MA from the In Situ Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in 2022 and lives and works in Antwerp.



OONA OIKKONEN

What occurs when nature, human beings and their complex behaviour come together is something that Oona Oikkonen is highly seduced to capture through a photographic lens. For this exhibition, Oikkonen's images bear witness to the disturbances that nature has created on volcanic lands through earthquakes and eruptions. 'Volcanoes serve as mirrors reflecting the potential devastation that the future will bring as a result of climate change and natural disasters,' Oikkonen explains. 'It is important to study these surroundings in order to understand how to live together amid looming dangers and the changing nature of our environment.' When her photographs are drenched in colour, the predominantly orange hues are cinematic in a way that feels sensual and dreamlike. In other cases, it is through black-and-white images that Oikkonen is likewise able to capture the individuality of her subjects, be they humans or natural elements.

Oona Oikkonen was born in 1997 in Helsinki. She received a BA from the Photography Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in 2022 and an MA in the Visual Arts (Photography) from LUCA School of Arts, Brussels, in 2023. She lives and works in Antwerp and Helsinki.

Oona Oikkonen, *The Aftermath*, 2022
From the series *Liquid Darkness*



Laurence Petrone, *Geb Ich Dir - a reading of Bernd Lohaus's writings*, Kleine Goddaard, Antwerp, 2023 © Photo: Flor Maesen

LAURENCE PETRONE

The sensory aspects of a material as well as its intervention in space are two themes that inhabit the artistic practice of sculptor Laurence Petrone. With a background in History, she seeks to answer a pressing question: 'what makes me see?' Realising that everything is enclosed in itself, Petrone wants to bring together people from different fields of thought. Stone, lead, copper, corn plants, turmeric, beeswax, and the sculptural quality of both the written and spoken word have all been transformed by Petrone to embody their innermost essence. Petrone contributes to this exhibition a sculptural work that features two vertically-hanging entities over a surface of turmeric. 'I made this sculpture during a period that felt to me as the highest peak of collaboration between members of the *Forms of Life* group,' shares Petrone. *Nebensonnen*, the title of the sculpture, is an allusion to a poem in which the protagonist sees multiple suns.

Laurence Petrone was born in 1987 in Lokeren, Belgium. She graduated in 2022 with an MA from the Sculpture Department and started in September 2023 a PhD research at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. She lives and works in Brussels and Antwerp.

PIT RIEWER

With influences as varied as expressionism, abstract expressionism and minimalism, the work of Pit Riewer is driven by an experimental approach to painting as a medium. Based on motifs observed in everyday life, his works are the fruit of a process of simplification of form and research into colour that sometimes brings them to the edge of abstraction. The surface and texture of the canvas also play an important role in his research. It is precisely from this angle that one can approach the group of small paintings that he has created for the exhibition. Inspired by a moment of collective practice the artist experienced during the *Forms of Life* workshop in Venice – one that called on the sense of touch through brick walls –, Riewer picked up on this motif as the starting point for new research on the canvas support, which involves the combination of different kinds of fabric and processes of sewing, bleaching and dyeing, with minimal paint use. The surface becomes the painting itself.

Pit Riewer was born in 1999 in Luxembourg. In 2022 he received a BA from the Painting Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. He lives and works in Luxembourg.



Pit Riewer, *Corridor*, 2022
Acrylic and oil on canvas
90 x 80 cm
© Photo: Marie Capesius



ALEXANDRA VITALYEVNA SAMAROVA

The artistic practice of Alexandra Vitalyevna Samarova is strongly inspired by her background in theatre, where she came to realise that every constituent element is essential for any play to work as a whole. With people and their relation to the universe at the centre of her thoughts, her vision as an artist takes into account, among other things, the irreplaceable importance of every living entity in the whole system of life. 'Each person perceives the world in a very unique way,' Vitalyevna Samarova adds, 'and therefore every person is an actor, director and protagonist of their own story.' Her contribution to this exhibition is a group portrait of the *Forms of Life* participants. It stands as a woven display of 18 cotton scarves on which she asked every member to record the presence of light at a moment of time and space of their choice. The resulting shades of blue testify to the cyanotype technique that had been previously applied on these textiles in order to render them light-sensitive. It was important for Vitalyevna Samarova to use this project as a means to represent the connectedness of the *Forms of Life* group throughout their two years of coming together.

Alexandra Vitalyevna Samarova was born in 1999 in Moscow. In 2023 she received an MA from the Costume Design Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. He lives and works in Antwerp.

Alexandra Vitalyevna Samarova, *888 km*, Antwerp, 2022



Maria Sawizki, *Ies(seIf)*, 2023
Single channel video

MARIA SAWIZKI

The work of Maria Sawizki weaves together practices as varied as performance, writing, sculpture, installation, sound creation and video. Combined, they produce singular artistic forms, in which the question of time often plays a central role. Her works convey a state of attention and consciousness akin to meditation: 'art as a practice of living,' as she often says. Her video installation featured in the exhibition further explores this interest in the connections between the inner self and the outside world. It takes as its starting point a performance that the artist presented at Het Bos in Antwerp in April 2023, as part of the SNOBS #8 festival. The video shows the artist generating sound with pharmacy bottles between a basin of water positioned on the floor and the floor itself. The watermarks left by the bottles on the surface of the floor discreetly and temporarily write, in the form of a circle, the letters that make up the title of her work, *Ies(self)*. In this way, they become part of a potentially infinite cycle.

Maria Sawizki was born in 1991 in Barnaul, RSFSR. In 2022 she graduated with an MA from the Sculpture Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. She lives and works in Antwerp.



RUNE TUERLINCKX

Rune Tuerlinckx bases his artistic practice on the act of wandering. He describes the photographs that result from his promenades as 'light-footed field notes', leading the viewer deep into the forest of his thoughts. The sculptural production that develops from this exploration of the natural world attests to his desire to create a particular atmosphere – one able to generate something beyond the merely visible. 'Those spaces should act as a trigger of emotions and function as both a conductor and container of meaning,' Tuerlinckx maintains. The work that Tuerlinckx creates for this exhibition features a series of photographs projected upon an almost imperceptible body of water. The visual mechanism that he designed allows the viewer to look beyond the physical borders commonly imposed by our minds.

Rune Tuerlinckx was born in 1999 in Antwerp. He graduated in 2022 with an MA from the Sculpture Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. He lives and works in Antwerp.

Rune Tuerlinckx, *stacking stones*, Jura, France, 2022
© Photo: Nina Marte Wilson



WITOLD VANDENBROECK

Exploring a territory that often lies on the edge between the figurative and the abstract, the paintings by Witold Vandebroek present imaginary landscapes populated by motifs and signs: networks of lines, crosses, circles, yet also stones, rivers, seas, clouds and volcanoes. Each of his works is the result of a process that sets aside intentions to focus entirely on what emerges in the very act of painting: 'Instead of forcing my vision upon the canvas, I try to embrace the friction with the material and enter the forward movement of the work's ongoing generation,' he writes. For the exhibition, Vandebroek has brought together a group of recent paintings that extend his research into the idea of an interior landscape oscillating between different scales, evoking both the smallness of still life and the immensity of the world. One motif in particular embodies this line of thought: that of the 'vessel' or, as Vandebroek describes it, 'a container that holds another world within it.'

Witold Vandebroek was born in 1994 in Leuven. He graduated with an MA from the Painting Department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in 2021. He lives and works in Antwerp.

Witold Vandebroek, *Ink in nature*, 2023
Documentation photograph, plein-air ink drawings,
The Netherlands, 2023

**Eco
systems
explored**

**Eco
systems
explored**

Ecological art aims at being life-supporting - not producing monuments. As such, there is often little to be photographed, and the demise of the art may be built into the project. Ecological art is currently a wide-ranging pursuit, but the earliest practitioners had clear goals on how to advocate for environmental causes, educate people, preserve and protect biological diversity and restore natural systems.

Patricia Johanson, 2023

Land art and beyond: from 'nature' to 'ecology'

Numerous artists in the late 1960s turned away from the white cube, which they viewed as conditioning, restrictive and elitist, to perform art interventions in alternative (self-organised) art circuits or in the landscape. It was partly from this stance that the global art movement of Land art emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The epicentres of Land art were located in the United States on the one hand (the Earth art of Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria and Robert Morris, among others, who often intervened radically in landscapes while digging with their excavators), and on the other hand in Great Britain (with the 'Walking artists' Hamish Fulton and Richard Long who elevated walking to an art form).

As early as the 1960s, artists like Robert Smithson and others, whether or not related to American or British Land art, began to turn against what they saw as a false - i.e. depicted as harmonious -, idealised and even compromising image of nature. Robert Smithson wrote in his programmatic pamphlet *Cultural Confinement* in 1972:

I am for an art that takes into account the direct effect of the elements as they exist from day

to day apart from representation. The parks that surround some museums isolate art into objects of formal delectation. Objects in a park suggest static repose rather than any ongoing dialectic. Parks are finished landscapes for finished art. A park carries the values of the final, the absolute, and the sacred. Dialectics have nothing to do with such things. [...] Parks are idealizations of nature, but nature in fact is not a condition of the ideal. [...] When a finished work of 20th-century sculpture is placed in an 18th-century garden, it is absorbed by the ideal representation of the past, thus reinforcing political and social values that are no longer with us. Many parks and gardens are re-creations of the lost paradise or Eden, and not the dialectical sites of the present. [...] The scenic ideals that surround even our national parks are carriers of a nostalgia for heavenly bliss and eternal calmness.¹

Smithson's refusal to participate in the *documenta 5* in 1972, which took place in part in the eighteenth-century Karlsaue Park in Kassel, can be seen in this light. Today, not only has the concept of the autonomy of art (propagated by Clement Greenberg and others) largely given way to more socially, participatively and activist-oriented approaches to visual art, our earlier conceptions of 'landscape' and 'nature' have also been axed by history and radically altered by numerous factors and new understandings.

Several prominent and influential contemporary philosophers and "conservationists" meanwhile regard the concept of 'nature' as hopelessly outdated, inadequate and even problematic. In 1989, American activist and author Bill McKibben published *The End of Nature*, a book that certainly marked a landslide in public perception of 'nature' in the United States. In the book, McKibben argued that the notion of 'nature' as a pristine domain untouched by human influence

¹ Robert Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement' in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 1996, pp. 154-156.



should now be considered fiction. In a time of climate change, he argued in the book, which was one of the first to dwell on this phenomenon, there is no place left on earth that has not been changed by human activity.

Not long after, French philosopher Bruno Latour would popularise the term ‘Anthropocene,’ which had been coined by the Dutch meteorologist Paul Crutzen. The human sphere of influence on the earth had become so strong that it could be thought of as a geological force, and that, properly speaking, it was the Anthropocene: a geological epoch determined by human beings. Latour also made short work of the concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘environment,’ which imply a hierarchy, or at least a separation, between the human sphere of influence at the centre and all other forms of life outside it. In the analysis of Latour and other, ‘post-humanist’ thinkers (including Donna Haraway), the concept of ‘nature’ is in some sense even at the root of the problems into which man plunged himself and the whole earth: the arrogance and conceit that it could separate itself from, or even elevate itself above, the rest of creation. Post-humanism criticises all forms of anthropocentrism and universalism, questioning the central and superior place of man within creation. In conjunction with this, the movement of New Materialism made its appearance, which assigns matter an active role, and has far-reaching implications for our perception of matter, creation and embodiment.



As a result of these new insights, it is hardly done these days among academics, ‘conservationists,’ philosophers and activists to speak of ‘nature’ or the ‘natural environment’ - even though those established terms are still popularly used. Instead, the more holistic term ‘ecology’ (literally from the Greek: ‘the study of the home or environment’) gradually made inroads: the part of biology that studies the interaction between organisms and their environment in context. It is noteworthy that the term ‘ecology’ was first formulated by an intellectual jack-of-all-trades who, with his dazzling illustrations in the publication *Kunstformen der Natur* (1899-1904), also

Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape*, 1965-1978; New York City

Patricia Johanson, *Fair Park Lagoon*, 2009; Petaluma, CA, USA

achieved fame as a visual artist: the German biologist, explorer, philosopher, physician and artist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919). Haeckel discovered, categorised and named thousands of new species, put all life forms together in a genealogical diagram and coined numerous biological terms.

Ecological art

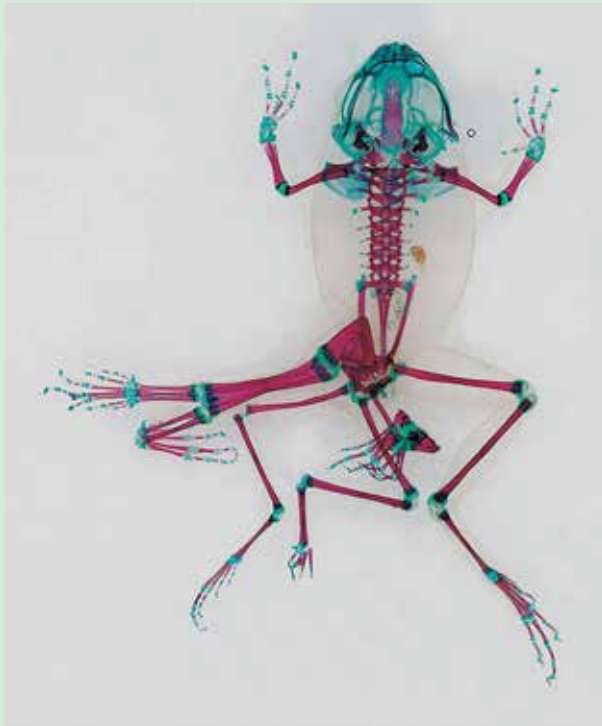
Several developments in the 1960s and early 1970s contributed to a burgeoning 'ecological consciousness' and the emergence of movements to protect nature and the environment. Rachel Carson's influential publication *Silent Spring* (1962) functioned as a wake-up call. In the book, Carson described the future scenario of a spring dawning without the sound of singing birds, which fell victim to the accumulation in the food chain of synthetic pesticides from agriculture. *Silent Spring* eventually led to a national ban of the carcinogenic pesticide DDT for agricultural use and the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Just as well, the Apollo moon landing in 1969 constituted a milestone. The first photograph of planet Earth as seen from the moon, which was the product of this and which touched many, made tangible what was at stake. In response to a massive oil spill off the coast of Southern California in 1969, the first Earth Day was organised in 1970 – with a poster designed by Pop artist Robert Rauschenberg – in the form of a 'national teach-in' on American university campuses. The global environmental movement gained further momentum by the publication in 1972 of the Club of Rome's highly influential report *Limits to Growth*. Using computer simulations, the report showed that on a planet with finite resources, exponential consumption and population growth is impossible.

Partly in response to such developments, in the late 1960s and early 1970s various individual artists in different geographical locations began – without any collective organisation – to produce work that attempted to confront environmental problems. For a long time, the work of these *Einzelgänger* often remained relatively invisible and on the margins of

the more dominant art movements of the time. If it was noticed at all, such art was initially referred to as 'Environmental art'. Only much more recently has the term 'Ecological art' been introduced as a container for the very diverse art forms that seek to contribute to the awareness of ecological interrelations and problems, and that develop active strategies to investigate and actually transform those problems into ecologically better situations. Ecological art thus retroactively constitutes a movement in art that has been going on for decades. In the historiography of Ecological art, it is often regarded as a branch of American Land art, with pioneers as far back as the late 1960s. At the beginning of the new millennium, the movement seemed to rapidly gain a renewed momentum, visibility and a (young) following.

Within Ecological art, roughly two main movements can be distinguished. Many of the American pioneers in the 1960s and 1970s left the white cube and developed practical site-specific interventions in landscape contexts – 'sculptural solutions to environmental problems' as Eco-artist Patricia Johanson summarised her own work and, indirectly, this art trend. Often applied at the landscape scale, these artist-initiated projects employ innovative strategies to physically transform sites and other ecological biotopes degraded by human influence into new, often surprising, better situations. An early example are the proposals for creating urban forests that Alan Sonfist developed in New York City starting in 1965. In his so-called *Time Landscape*, which the artist conceived in 1965 and created in 1978 in Manhattan, New York City, Sonfist reconstructed a forest representing the Manhattan landscape before it was colonised (and subsequently urbanised) by Dutch settlers in the early seventeenth century.

Similarly, the land-reclamation projects formulated by Robert Smithson to repurpose and redevelop areas degraded by industrial use or other inappropriate human activities exemplify this trend. As does the practical and visionary programme outlined by Patricia Johanson to restore plant and animal communities and



↑ Mark Dion,
*Park: Mobile
Wilderness Unit*,
2001; construction
trailer,
taxidermic
European bison,
painted backdrop,
dirt, leaves,
stones, artificial
fern and fungi,
290 × 380 × 170 cm

← Brandon
Ballengée, *DFA 18,
Triton*, 2001-2007;
unique Iris print
on watercolour
paper. Cleared
and stained
Pacific tree frog
collected in
Aptos, California,
in scientific
collaboration
with Stanley K.
Sessions. Title
by KuyDelair

ecologically regenerate natural and urban ecosystems. Another example is Mel Chin's pioneering collaboration with scientists in the early 1990s to clean up heavy metal-contaminated soils through 'green remediation'.²

The second wave, which has been gaining ground since the 1990s, rather emphasises art as a vehicle for raising awareness and sensitising the (art) public around ecological issues. This discourse-oriented and activist conception of art is rather object-oriented and manifests itself mostly within a circuit of exhibition spaces and museums. This movement prioritises the need for involvement, depth of content, a change in mentality, a less anthropocentric view and the changing our conception of 'nature' and ecology.³

An example of this movement is the work of American artist Mark Dion (New Bedford, Massachusetts, United States, 1961), one of the most prominent representatives of Ecological art and an 'artist's artist' for younger generations of eco-artists. In his encyclopedic work, he reflects on the visual representation of nature, pairs art with science, provides institutional criticism, contributes to postcolonial discourse in the field of visual art and bears witness to humanity's devastating impact on the natural environment in the Anthropocene era. 'I can't imagine a field more political than the history of the representation of nature,' he says. 'Works that attempt to articulate an understanding of the intellectual path we have taken that has led to our suicidal relationship to our own planet are, in my opinion, highly political,' the artist stated.⁴

2 Publications devoted specifically to this form of ecological art include: Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies. Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions*, Rizzoli, New York, 1992; Baile Oakes (ed.), *Sculpting with the Environment - A Natural Dialogue*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1995; Amy Lipton, Sue Spaid (eds.), *Ecovention. Current Art to Transform Ecologies*, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, 2002.

3 See for example: Stephanie Smith, *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art*, Smart Museum of Art, 2005; Andrew Brown, *Art & Ecology Now*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2014.

4 Roel Arkesteijn (ed.), *The Incomplete Writings of Mark Dion. Selected Interviews, Fragments, and Miscellany*, Fieldwork Museum, 2017, p. 19.

A prominent younger generation of artists in this field constitutes the artist, biologist and conservationist Brandon Ballengée (Sandusky, Ohio, United States, 1974). Central to his artistic and scientific research is the global decline of animal populations, species extinction and how animals adapt and evolve in particular ecological systems to survive. He is internationally known for his ongoing research project *Malamp* (Malformed Amphibian Project): a scientific and artistic study of anatomical deformities in frogs and other amphibians. Amphibians are important indicators ('sentinel species') of water and air quality. Although there have been reports of such deformities in amphibians as far back as 250 years ago, the huge increase in the number of reports since 1995 has alarmed the scientific community. Up to 40 percent of the approximately 7,000 known species of amphibians are currently endangered or already extinct.

As becomes clear from the aforementioned examples, Ecological art can encompass the most diverse subjects, take a multitude of forms and be expressed in all possible media. While its pioneers can be counted on two hands, Ecological art has since grown into an art practice with countless practitioners around the world. It constitutes one of the most pluralistic art movements, which has undoubtedly contributed greatly to the fact that more than fifty years after its inception, this art practice is still barely noticed or chronicled in art-historical surveys. Among the numerous topics covered within eco-art are the representation of 'nature,' ecological degradation, the climate crisis, species extinction, the finite nature of fossil fuels, colonialism, waste, species contact, taxonomy and classification, the Anthropocene, food, indicator species, ecological alternatives (such as permaculture) to contemporary intensive farming methods, water management, genetic engineering, land reclamation and ecosystem restoration. Many Ecological artists share a holistic worldview that focuses on ecological interconnections rather than humans; an interdisciplinary, inquisitive attitude; critical engagement with society, including through social and political activism; a tendency toward participation and

inclusion; and an interest in dynamic processes rather than immutable objects. Recognising that aspiring Eco-artists require additional knowledge and skills, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp offers the third-year Bachelor elective Art & Ecology and in 2023 dedicated a research group to the subject.

** Roel Arkesteijn, coordinator of the new research group Art & Ecology at the Academy, will launch the publication *Patricia Johanson: The World as a Work of Art* on Tuesday 7 November 2023, at 19:00 in the Lange Zaal of the Academy.

Exploring & expanding

Planet Earth was rediscovered as an environment at the end of the 1960s. Finally, 'Spaceship Earth' came to be seen as finite and fragile. Scientists, activists and artists took on ecological views that today seem more relevant than ever. Around the same time, contemporary artists also radically reconsidered the object of art. This process had started some ten years earlier, but by 1968, amid political and social turmoil, it gained momentum. After the extreme reductionism of minimal art, painting and sculpture were ready to expand. They exploded in a variety of post-painterly and post-sculptural practices labelled post-minimalism, post-studio art, Arte Povera, conceptual art, idea art, process art and the like.

Critics, curators, gallerists and publishers jumped on the bandwagon to spread the word about the new art. With their radical and ambitious approach, American artists appeared to take the lead. Many artists left the conventional venues of galleries and museums to - literally - expand the notion of art and explore new territories. This could be the non-urban environment, the public space of the street, the personal body, film and video, but also the space of the page in books and magazines. Art was created not only to be exhibited, but also to be published and circulated.

Around 1969 the new art seemed to be everywhere. Post-minimalism and conceptualism became the major trends in advanced art in Western Europe and North America. Experimental exhibitions like Prospect 68 and Prospect 69 (Düsseldorf, 1968 and 1969), 'When Attitudes Become Form' (Bern, 1969) and 'Op Losse Schroeven' (Amsterdam, 1969) established new practices and ideas that would shape the art of the 1970s. Documenta 5 (Kassel, 1972), curated by Harald Szeemann, brought the new artists and

movements to a broad international audience. Times were changing very quickly and seemed historical. Already in 1973, the American critic and curator Lucy Lippard surveyed these heroic years in her publication *Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*.

The ecological impulse

The ecological impulse of the late 1960s pervaded the new artistic strategies, and terms like land art, earth art and ecological art surfaced quickly. While the artists themselves might not have felt very comfortable with them, these catchy labels stuck and moved the momentum up a gear. It started with 'Earth Works', organised by New York gallerist Virginia Dawn at the end of 1968. This landmark exhibition focused on process-oriented work by ten American artists. The name *land art* was introduced by the German filmmaker Gerry Schum. His 'broadcast exhibition' comprised eight short film works by European and American artists made especially for the TV programme. The public broadcast of April 1969 in Germany was announced widely and documented in an extensive catalogue.

'Earth Art', on the other hand, was the title of a group exhibition at Cornell University (New York) in the same year. Willoughby Sharp assembled eleven American and European artists to create site-specific outdoor and indoor works on campus. *Ecological art* was a label coined by the American gallerist John Gibson. In the spring of 1969, he presented the works of nine American and European artists in his New York venue. The invitation card featured the work *Directed Seeding* by Dennis Oppenheim. Also in 1969, the Museum of Modern Art in New York showed recent 'Ocean Projects' by Peter Hutchinson and Dennis Oppenheim.

The year 1969 also saw the first monograph to document the new practices. *Art Povera. Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art?* was an exhibition in the form of a book curated by the Italian art critic and curator Germano Celant, who in 1967 had coined the label *Arte Povera*

(‘Poor Art’) to describe the newest tendencies in Italy. In 1968, Celant assembled the group show ‘Arte Povera più Azioni Povere’ in Amalfi with works and actions by Italian, Dutch and English artists, all documented in a catalogue that was released one year later. In 1970 he curated the large international group show ‘Conceptual Art – Arte Povera – Land Art’ in Turin.

Equally ambitious and programmatic was 1971’s ‘Earth, Air, Fire, Water: Elements of Art’, organised by Virginia Gunter for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Due to these and other events, toward the end of the 1970s, land, earth and eco art had become widely accepted. Late thematic exhibitions such as ‘Nature-Art’ (Amsterdam, 1978), ‘Sculpture/Nature’ (Bordeaux, 1978), ‘To Do with Nature’ (Amsterdam, 1979) and ‘On Walks and Travels’ (Maastricht, 1979) were already more retrospective and documentary than they were forward-looking and experimental. With some exceptions, in the postmodern 1980s, art and ecology were set to take different paths.

Artificial ecologies

Simplifying the artistic strategies of the artists in around 1969 a bit, one could frame a few tendencies that seem to echo national schools. Whereas the Italian Arte Povera mainly focused on indoor work with organic materials and natural processes, the American earth artists were fascinated by large-scale sculptural gestures in wastelands and on indeterminate sites. British land artists seemed to fit into the Romantic tradition by contemplating nature by walking, whereas some German eco artists tended to focus on a rather political approach to ecology. Artists of the Low Countries were exploring new ways of observing and representing man-made landscapes or were questioning our relationship with the environment.

The presentation *Artificial Ecologies: art & nature in the wake of 1968*, as part of the exhibition ‘Ecosystems’ in the Lange Zaal (see p.), focuses on how land, earth and eco artists of that first generation used

printed matter to represent and document their works. Most of the artists selected were part of the above-mentioned exhibitions and publications, some were not. The Italian Arte Povera movement has been excluded because it deserves a separate exhibition to credit its importance. Joseph Beuys’ printed matter was already given a personal exhibition at the Antwerp Academy two years ago.

The current selection in the exhibition aims at demonstrating how experimental artists have been using texts, photographs and printed matter as tools to document their ephemeral projects in indoor and outdoor spaces. Therefore, it takes the publications (artists’ books, artists’ pages, essays, invitations, posters, photographs, etc.) of sixteen noted European and American artists who represent different approaches towards nature and the environment.

All these artists have reshaped the notions of documentation and its relation to creation. They have also introduced new ways of making, seeing and presenting photographs, and of perceiving our natural and cultural environment.

Let’s conclude on a critical note. Considering the printed artistic output of the late 1960s and early 1970s, it becomes clear that the scene was almost exclusively dominated by men. Unbelievable as it may seem today, none of the above-mentioned group shows featured women artists, though some of them were curated by women. Only a few (American) women artists were active in the field discussed here, like Agnes Denes, Alice Aycock, Nancy Holt and Patricia Johanson, but their work was not as acknowledged by the art market to the same degree as was the work of their male peers. (In a 2015 interview, Agnes Denes refers to these as ‘a close-knit boys group’.) This started to change in the second half of the 1970s, when a new wave of feminist critics and curators began to present and publish the work of female artists, questioning the dominant discourse and challenging the exhibition and marketing system. It is also noteworthy that, during the 1970s, women artists seemed to focus more on the

personal and on the body, than on large ecological issues or big landscape gestures.

Apart from that, considering the huge impact of gallerist Virginia Dwan and of the critic-curator Lucy Lippard, one could ask if the male post-minimalist and conceptualist artists would have gained their reputation without them. I hope that the work of one of the underexposed women eco-artists, Patricia Johanson, on the walls surrounding (and embracing) the printed matter of her male peers, refutes and lends nuance to the canon as it is evoked by these fragmentary bits and pieces of yellowed paper.

Hydromedia: seeing with water

INGE HENNEMAN & STEVEN HUMBLET

The climate crisis is announced in images, but leaves the imagination orphaned. On the one hand, there are many images of raging wildfires, violent floodings, melting glaciers and desertification. On the other hand, there are images created by scientists studying the warming of the atmosphere and its effects on life on earth. Scientific images take the form of heat maps showing the rising temperature of the oceans, graphs detailing the increasing amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere, or macrophotographs of arctic ice cores with which long-term climate evolution can be researched. Without the data such images produce, we wouldn't even know that something drastic was afoot. However, scientific and journalistic imagery alone don't seem to communicate a sense of urgency.

Both types of images have one thing in common: they reduce the general public to passive onlookers. Scientific data are unreadable for us uninitiated viewers, while the images distributed by mass media seem so overwhelming that they render us powerless. We can only succumb to the sublime horror they represent. Both types of images also suggest that the solution can only be found in reinforcing human control of the environment. In that sense, both popular and scientific images only seem to worsen the crisis, to propose greater human control in mitigating a situation caused in the first place by humans meddling with nature.

What is missing in our current media environment are images which can propose a healthier relation to the biosphere on which life depends: one in which mankind is no longer at the centre of dominance over the universe, but simply a partaker of it. Alternative images require a mindset and production method whereby the human image-maker is only partially in control, creating in close collaboration with various natural forces and living matter. Such a creative method of image-making would be based on dialogue and direct contact with non-human

** The presentation 'Artificial Ecologies' within the exhibition 'Ecosystems' at the Lange Zaal is hosted by research group ArchiVolt (see p. 12). Johan Pas selected the exhibited documents from his Collection for Research on Artists' Publications (CRAP).

beings, organisms, chemicals or minerals constitutive of the living world. In such a constellation the human actor may initiate the process but is no longer the sole author of the image. Sidestepping conventional visual approaches to the current climate crisis, a radical ecological imagination based on co-creation and interspecies collaboration would invite non-human beings and material components of our environment to impress their co-presence on images. In such a poetics of shared human and non-human authorship, the anthropocentric perspective inherent in classical lens-based photography is challenged.

The collaborative project *Hydromedia: seeing with water*, funded through the Creative Europe programme by the EU, invites twelve artists to create experimental production methods based on co-authorship with nature. The artists work on sites specified by the three institutions participating in the project: the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Utrecht University of the Arts (HKU), and the Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG) Karlsruhe. The project runs from January 2023 through December 2024. Each institute hosts four artists for a one-month residency during which they are invited to develop new, easy-to-use, low-tech procedures toward a wider public understanding of eco-centric visions, with a focus on water. Not only are the environmental challenges addressed concerning the water element in the context of the unfolding climate crisis, but the life-giving qualities of water are appreciated in particular.

The focal point and context of the first *Hydromedia* residency that took place in Antwerp in April 2023 was the unique aquatic ecosystem of the Scheldt estuary. This living climate laboratory is a rare phenomenon worldwide. Determined by the ebb and flow of the river, the area contains brackish to saline to freshwater habitats and forms a unique ecosystem of mudflats and salt marshes. The wetlands and polders have great value as purification and flooding areas, important in the face of rising sea levels, and, if managed ecologically, these marshes can also store huge amounts of CO₂, thus providing important services in the fight against global warming. These aquatic nature reserves along the banks

of the Scheldt are home to endangered species ranging from waterbirds and eels to otters. They are also home to saltwater plants such as algae and seaweed, which are seen as essential to the ecological transition and a carbon-neutral future, because they can store carbon from the atmosphere faster than trees. The huge decline in biodiversity threatens the Scheldt estuary ecosystem, which is continuously challenged by natural and anthropogenic stressors. Our Antwerp research project explored three sites in particular: Kruibeke Polder, the largest floodplain in Flanders; the Drowned Land of Saeftinghe, the largest brackish-water salt marsh in Europe; and the Droogdokken, a zone along the Scheldt, from Noordkasteel to Sasdok, where a new mudflat and salt marsh area is being developed.

Although the four invited artists who worked in this ecological zone along the Scheldt use different media, they all worked with real material – often including unseen aspects of the environment – found on site, be it a living eel and bioluminescent phosphates in the dry docks of the port of Antwerp (Sascha Herrmann), the current of the tidal river the Scheldt (Jarek Lustych), the plants, algae and trees in the marshes of Kruibeke and Hoboken Polder (Tim Theo Deceuninck), or the waterbodies of urban puddles (Mirja Busch). The works created during the residency were presented in an exhibition at Stormkop in the port of Antwerp, and in ‘Ecosystems’ at the Royal Academy of Arts. While each residency ends with a small exhibition held in the city where the residency took place, at the end of the project, the works produced by all twelve residents will be shown in an overview exhibition at the Technische Sammlung in Dresden. A publication will accompany this final exhibition.

Hydromedia seeks to create tools and visual production methods to reimagine our relationship with nature. Thanks to a hands-on and low-tech approach, the ‘seeing with water’ procedures developed by the participating artists are shared with the public in exhibition hand-outs with easy-to-use manuals and protocols, in order to give the public the means to create their own images and to make the effects of global warming in the Scheldt Estuary and

in local water resources tangible to the senses. *Hydromedia* artists Tim Theo Deceuninck, Mirja Busch, Sascha Herrmann and Jarek Lustych worked in close, reciprocal relation to their material: listening, empathising, almost ‘becoming’ the natural components, the artists curated the agency of real matter and energy, living beings and natural forces, adopting their non-human perspective, as it were, in order to shift the perspective and ‘see from within nature’. Photographic processes of direct contact through tracing and recording are used to escape objectification, going from an outside view to ‘a view from within’ the Scheldt estuary. While the frame of thinking here is posthuman and materialistic, the experiential connection with the water element as a life force is made tangible and vibrant.

Another common aspect of the artistic research of the artists in the *Hydromedia* project is the bridging of art and science in a truly multidisciplinary approach. While all the works attest to a deep affinity with scientific investigation methods, the approach of Sascha Herrmann and Mirja Busch is characterised by a diagnostic observation and the analysis of data readings. In the case of the latter, a collaboration was entered into with Professor of Ecotoxicology Ronny Blust and his research group Ecosphere at the University of Antwerp. Tim Theo Deceuninck and Jarek Lustych work in a more romantic or spiritual way as ‘symbiotic’ artists facilitating terrestrial agents and the river itself to see and sing for themselves.

** *Hydromedia: seeing with water* is a collaborative project funded by Creative Europe. The partners are the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten (Utrecht) and the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung (Karlsruhe). Coordinated by Inge Henneman and Steven Humblet from the research group Thinking Tools of the Academy. During ARTICULATE, the four Antwerp residents of *Hydromedia* show their work in the ‘Ecosystems’ exhibition at the Lange Zaal.

Forms of Life

CHRISTOPHE GALLOIS, TINA GILLEN & DIANA MURRAY WATTS

Dwelling in the world (...) is tantamount to the ongoing, temporal interweaving of our lives with one another and with the constituents of our environment.

Tim Ingold, *On Weaving a Basket*

Forms of Life is a research project we ran for two years – from October 2021 to October 2023 – with a group of sixteen young artists from different departments (Sculpture, Painting, Photography, In Situ, Costume Design, Graphic Design) at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. From the outset, our aim was to create a collective, cross-disciplinary working dynamic.

During those two years, we explored the multiple resonances of a question animating all fields of contemporary creation, thought and society: that of our relation to other forms of life, and the ways in which we inhabit the world. Drawing on the ideas of the ‘ecopolitical turn’¹ currently underway in the human sciences, we questioned the links that weave together the artwork and the world; images and the living; and the forms that surround us and those we create. The driving force of this project was an exploration of the multiple meanings of the term ‘forms of life’ when approached through the prism of visual arts. What are the relationships between artistic ‘forms’ and living forms? What is a ‘form’ when we consider it not as an isolated, autonomous entity, but rather in its multiple interactions and interconnections with the ‘life’ that surrounds it? The starting point and framework of our reflections was most often the artistic practice itself – beginning with that of the artists making up the research group.

1 See Nicolas Trong, *Les Penseurs du vivant*, Actes Sud, Le Monde, 2023. Our research project was inspired by the writings of Tim Ingold, Emanuele Coccia, Vinciane Despret, Marielle Macé and Anna Tsing, amongst others.



Manuela Marques, *La Brassée*, 2017, pigment print on Baryta paper, 65 x 98 cm,
 Courtesy Galerie Anne Barrault, Paris

The seminars

The first year of *Forms of Life* gave rise to a series of monthly seminars in which each time a different artist or researcher was invited to spend a few hours with us. Our conversation with anthropologist Tim Ingold - with whom we had the privilege of launching the research project in October 2021 - revolved around various motifs that are present throughout his thinking: the line, rhythm, weaving, correspondence and walking, amongst others. Our talk with Franco-Tunisian artist Ismaïl Bahri focused on the specific temporality of images and the intimate links they forge with the context in which they appear. With Katinka Bock, we discussed processes, gestures and materials, as well as the possibility of a porous, horizontal relationship with the world around us. With Marion Neumann and her film *THE MUSHROOM SPEAKS*, we immersed ourselves in the world of mushrooms and the interconnectedness of life forms. With François Génot, we took an interest in the experience of place and explored the possibility of an artistic practice developed in a collaborative relationship with the living. Our conversation with Irene Kopelman focused on her approach to drawing as a way of paying attention to and connecting with the landscape. Finally, our seminar with Delphine Wibaux - organised as a prelude to a one-day workshop she had devised for our group - nourished our reflections around a question that had germinated during our initial exchanges, that of 'notation'²: how can we capture something of life at the very moment it unfolds?

Forme di vita - a workshop in Venice

In September 2022 we organised a one-week workshop in Venice in continuity with our monthly seminars in 2021-22 and in resonance with the Luxembourg Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale, from which the idea for

² To explore this question, we have relied in particular on the book *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1978-79)*, Columbia University Press, 2011, and more specifically on the December 16, 1978 session.

this research project emerged. The field of study for the workshop was the city and the Lagoon, prompting encounters, reflections and artistic experimentation.

At various levels, this unique territory crystallises a multitude of questions pertaining to our relationship with the world: from the singularity of the Lagoon ecosystem and the threats posed to it by climate breakdown and human activity to the pioneering role that Venice has played in the emergence of globalisation and the problems linked to international tourism with which it is confronted today. The cultural importance that the city has had historically and its current status as a hub for international art also offered us a rich context in which to question the role that art can play in our changing world.

The workshop's programme - developed in close collaboration with Edoardo Lazzari, an independent curator and researcher based in Venice - led us through different islands and municipalities of the Lagoon (Venice, Cavallino-Treporti, Lio Piccolo, Torcello, Murano, and Sant'Erasmus) to meet people who, through their everyday activities and engagements, maintain a strong link with Venice yet also with other-than-humans (plants, animals, and aquatic, natural, cultivated or urban environments) that compose the richness, diversity and uniqueness of the Lagoon.

Following on from the first workshop she designed for us in Antwerp, Delphine Wibaux accompanied us during this Venetian week, proposing an 'impromptu' each day: periods of individual and collective practice that punctuated the programme with in-situ meetings and visits. Exchanges and periods of artistic practice intertwined over the course of those one-week observations, encounters and visits. They nourished our collective imagination and helped us share reflections needed to develop the next steps of this collaborative research project.

The exhibition

Fuelled by our seminars, readings, regular exchanges within the group, encounters with guest authors and artists, and our collective experience at the workshops in Antwerp and Venice, we decided to structure the second year of *Forms of Life* around the conception of an exhibition project.

Born organically - in an approach very different from that which generally accompanies the development of a group exhibition - the 'Forms of Life' exhibition is as much a reflection of the artists' individual trajectories during these two years of research as it is of a collective experience. While the forms they take are varied - installation, sculpture, video, photography, painting - the works seem to be permeated by the same breath: that of a porous relationship with the world, in which the artistic gesture is not envisaged as the imposition of a form on a material, but rather considered from the angle of collaboration, listening, attention and immersion - from the angle of 'weaving' rather than 'making', to use Tim Ingold's distinction.

Numerous questions that lie at the heart of our research project run through the exhibition: the relationship between humans and other-than-humans (Rafaela Figurski Vieira, Rune Tuerlinckx), the question of landscape (Paul Müller, Oona Oikkonen, Max Beets, Witold Vandenbroeck), that of process and materials (Laurence Petrone), attention to 'weak signals' observed in everyday life (Pieter Eliëns, Maria Sawizki) and the notation of the present (Malena Guerrieri). Other proposals were directly influenced by our collective experience, particularly the workshop in Venice (Pit Riewer, Nina Gross). Finally, Alexandra Vitalyevna Samarova's proposal makes visible the constellation of times and personal geographies traced by the group members in the months leading up to the exhibition.

The exhibition also includes a collective project, the *Atlas of Forms*, which informed the development of *Forms of Life*. Each member of the group was invited to feed

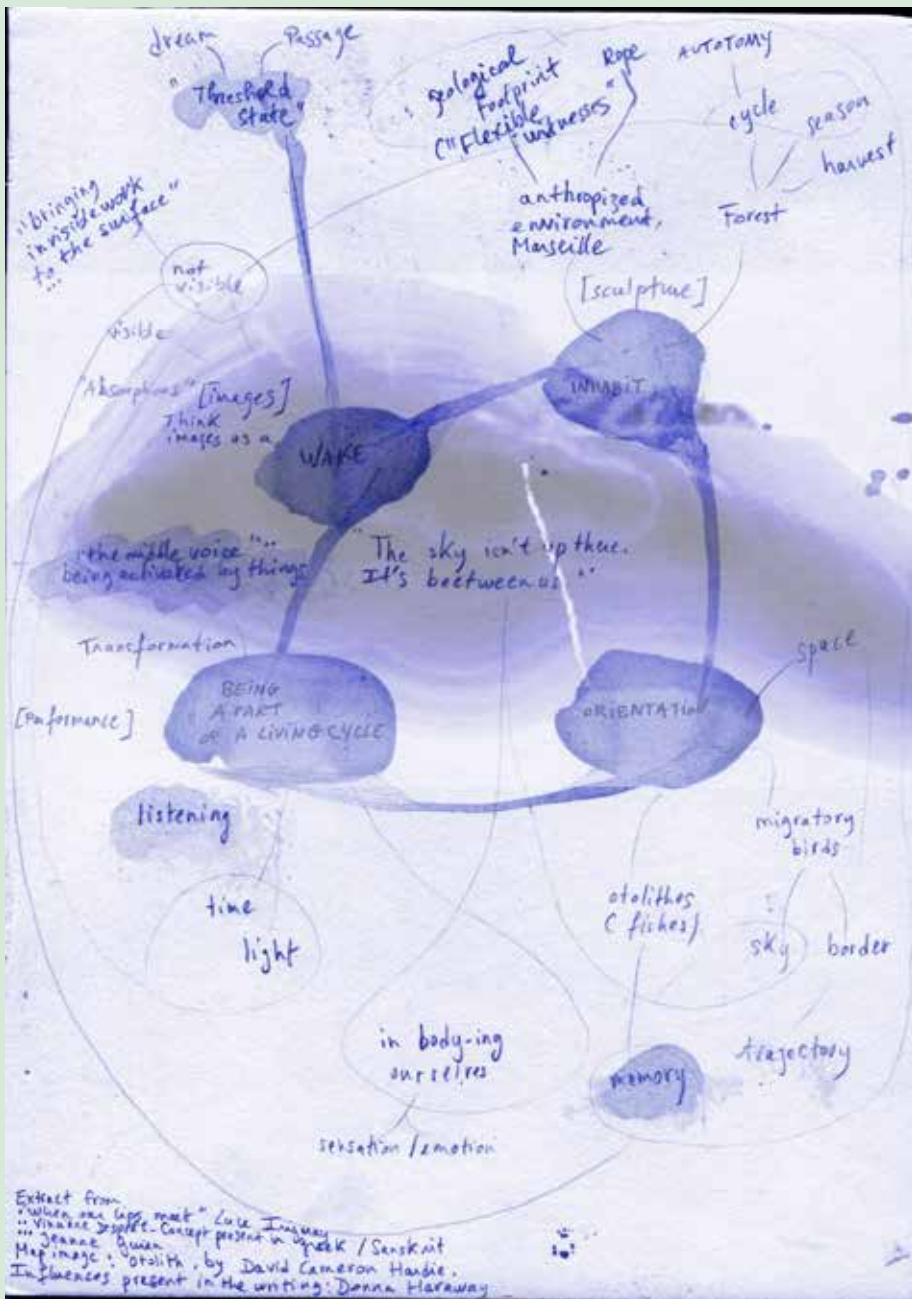
this 'atlas' with images related to the observation of 'forms' in everyday life. These images became one of the supports for our conversations and joint research, and we enjoyed observing the unexpected links that emerged. As another contribution to the exhibition, graphic designers Kristí Fekete and Maren Katharina Rommerskirchen – two members of our group – proposed to expand the *Atlas of Forms* by publishing images collected by the group in the form of postcards. Scattered throughout the exhibition and available for visitors to take away, these 'forms' will continue their life beyond the research project.

In-bodying ourselves – S'en.corporer
DELPHINE WIBAUX

** *Forms of Life* was organised by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp in collaboration with Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, in the context of the Luxembourg Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022). In August and September 2023, 10 artists from the research project had short residencies at the Bröderhaus in Esch, Luxembourg, in collaboration with the Kenschthal Esch.

The exhibition 'Forms of Life' is on view at the Wintertuin of the Academy as part of ARTICULATE 2023.

** Delphine Wibaux organises the research class 'In-bodying ourselves – S'en.corporer' during ARTICULATE.



She had decided to plant two trees around her alcove, gathering time and light among the feathers. She foresaw these trees as sentinel-resources, which she named Semag@phores - signs of the earth that carries.

Both trees began to take root in their very first season. The one whose leaves were like opened-up folding screens, made of two webbed lobes, was soon cradled by a nest of flying insects, a nest made of saliva and chewed wood. They nestled against the protective wood, enveloping the budding foliage and tender bark with their daily flights. As she pondered whether she should take any action to destroy this nest, she decided to sit back and act less.

The nest evolved into an earlobe cluster. It became a protective shield, even for the woman who had planted the tree. She kept her distance from these companion species who had made their choice of companionship, keeping all intruders away from the vegetal being. Respecting this silent pact, she settled down a few steps away from the tree and observed the life that was taking shape there. From a distance, she was taming what was forming in the hollows of the branches, by leaving space for it to grow. From dusk and until dawn, their activity kept silent.

These daytime sentries would catch all the things that could fly or climb the tree. They would sting on the mouth any creature that got too close and tried to water the tree. The place where she had settled to contemplate this first tree was equidistant from the second. She sought to think alongside them. The latter waved its downy feathers in the wind, topped with finely chiseled sensory leaves that closed against each other in the evening.

She had planted these two Signs not far from an almost dried-up spring. She made a water drum out of stretched skin, for storage halfway from the spring. She would wait for the water to cool down in the open evening air, so as not to scorch the roots when she watered them.

One evening, upon her return, she discovered a small animal drowned in the water. Life as a window of vulnerability - all life hinging upon the life of other beings. How could the etching of plantlife into this land.escape be weighed against this animal loss? Who was she, that the consequence of her actions could claim a life? Where did she belong? Without an answer, she placed a few sturdy wooden sticks, long and short, of varying diameters, in the water drum to create possible exits.

Creating passages and bridges seemed to her a just way to inscribe herself in the there and then. Summer was growing and the trees were shrinking. The wood was getting drier and creakier beneath her feet, the air warmer in her eyes, the land.escape more wrinkled. As she made her way to a nearby gully to investigate the eventuality of water, perhaps still trickling, evening fell. She let the word dissolve inside her :

In-bodying

This effervescent term resonated inside her and stood out from the rest, white noise in the blue hour. It swayed inside her. Eyes half-closed, she felt her way along the moss on the trees filtering through the sun, back to the water trail. She walked. Time passed. She ran more slowly and bit more gently.

The sun was growing whiter and whiter. The riverbed was now nothing but clay. In the deepest spots, her leaflets were drying still. She gathered wet flakes from the argillaceous marl. They detached easily under her fingers. She piled them up. Her attention was caught by what appeared to be earstones. Despite the advancing nightfall, she remained alert. She sat down on the dry riverbed and picked up the mineralized concretions in the palms of her hands. The inside was grooved. She could feel the thickness of time. She observed the ventral, dorsal, anterior and posterior edges, trying to find areas of marginal growth, of metamorphosis and transition. She knew that at the heart of these bones were the earlier stages of marine larval life, that she held in her hands a piece of interstitial present. She carefully gathered the clay leaflets on one side, the earstones on the other, and

returned slowly to her camp. She was looking for the balance point, the center of gravity with her two harvests and the night falling onto her arms. Something seemed to be working through her. In her body, the words were still floating :

In-bodying oneself

How to dance between the lines with this environment ? How to rethink her role as tree-watcher and waterer, when everything was so dry? How do you make yourself the object of an experience that counts? The sky surrounded her, all around her, from the soles of her feet to over her shoulders and up into the trees. She was stretching out her senses in all directions.

Before dawn, with the clay leaflets still damp, she set about making channels to connect the spring to the end of the tree - protected by its sentries. A few days later, once the leaflets had been baked in an earthen pit, she made sure that the channels would fit into the gently sloping ground, protected by a veil from evaporation and accidental deaths.

When it was too heavy outside and she was liquefying onto herself, she devoted herself to reading the earstones in her alcove. She sought to map out the trajectory of the beings who had been their hosts, crossing a space-time interval, hopping up the course of time of this watercourse. When evening returned, she would watch the leaves fold in and the flying insects return to their nests. The trees were still protected.

In-bodying ourselves

She continued to chew on these words and to question them, as her eyes opened in the night.

A garden needs a path for people to be able to move through it. From this path the visitors can admire the borders with the new planting arrangements. They walk along a prepared trajectory with oohs and ahhs exclaimed at the pretty views and rare plants. I see Gertrude Jekyll as the Darwin figure of garden design; her garden books are the origin of planting in the modern garden. Before her innovative designs, gardens were either practical or cultivated wilderness. Greek and Roman gardens provided a pharmacy, with holy plants, delicious plants and beautiful plants all taken from the wild and cultivated for the owner's needs. Old gardens belonged to aristocrats; they liked romantic landscape gardens surrounding their homes on ground that had been in their family for generations. In the late 1800s, at the height of colonial extraction, the new rich families needed new houses and new gardens, and Jekyll provided designs that reflected the times. She was modern, progressive and working towards a better future. She liked to take her own photographs of her garden designs, she wrote books on garden practice and theory, conserved disappearing tools and was an active artist within the Arts and Crafts movement. She valued garden work as a meaningful job for the many gardeners in service of the new rich families. Her gardens made the owners feel important. The path is central, wide, symmetrical and bright. New tableaux unfold behind every corner with garden rooms for different uses. Along a dry-stone wall one follows the steps into the sunken garden to sit beside a pond with water lilies. A pretty, year-round planting scheme holds a living collection of foreign plants. This garden says, 'we are cultivated'.

Post-Fordist gardeners with some time off on the weekend have small gardens modelled on the grandeur of the previous era. New districts with affordable houses were created for the standard nuclear family. The front garden has a low wall with a letterbox, a path to the front door and sometimes a gravelled area in front



Eline De Clercq, *The Sympoiesis Garden*, 2023

of the garage. The back garden has a lawn, borders, a little terrace and sometimes a kitchen garden. Hedges, wooden fences or green coated-wire mesh enclose the space. When we say 'garden', more often than not we refer to something along the lines of this middle-class outdoor area usually created within three generations.

It is the garden path that created gardeners. The gardeners believe that nature can be controlled, that a garden is a place made for and by people. Take away the path and all is lost. All this time it was just an idea about how we can create an outdoor place. The reality of gardening consisted of killed plants and animals, introducing synthetic mutations, growing sterile flowers, digging little tanks for fish to swim little circles their entire life, putting poison on the food of animals, poisoning the soil to kill weeds, making plastic nets and wires, pouring concrete and cutting everything short to keep the garden clean. Gardening is a long tradition of working against nature to create something that hardly turns out as we intended and seems to stop working the moment we're gone.

'Making Sense' is the short title I gave to my research project about starting a community garden with the students of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. During this research, we look into the possibilities of engaging with life on this planet. The garden is our entry point for various entangled topics like gender, decolonisation, climate change, working conditions, and so on. With the help of speculative and fabulous thinkers like Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Jamaica Kincaid and many others, we learn to think with nature and take up a feminist practice of gardening. To work in the old garden of the Academy between the tall trees is an exceptional practice for art students; it allows the formation of an artistic voice outside of the building. The neutral white cube of the exhibition space is nothing like the layers of compost where critters crawl and history is very much present. Art in a white room is art cut loose, made to work in any white room in the world. For art, this is a recent change. A lot of contemporary art is a reaction towards a nation shaped in the wake of the Second World War, when 'only doing

our job' became an excuse for atrocities, and artists refused to do their job. Many artists became excellent in adversity: they used jokes to be serious, used politics to undermine the nationalism, provided proof of incapability and found new meanings to add to the semantics of freedom. Because freedom, not peace, seems to be the opposite of war. Art in a post-war Europe is all about freedom – we were liberated. Amid all this freedom, what about being responsible and accountable?

The garden was not really part of this story on art in Europe. Freedom and gardens don't have a long history. But there is some common ground. There are a few questions in art that never go away, and they seem to work in the garden as well. 'Who is getting better from this?' is one of them, 'Who are you making this for?' is another. In the field of art these questions seem to speak to the difference between commercial markets and creative spaces. Contemporary art is becoming increasingly more complex, pluralistic and intersectional. To open the door into the garden isn't just to extend the playing field: words like *symbiosis* and *mycorrhiza* are meaningless in the disinfected area of a white cube and we can't just rake them up and bring them in. Ecology and art connect in the body, in our senses. It's a change that works both ways between nature and culture. We become different artists. When we arrive in the garden, the garden is already there. We are not the makers of our environment; we are not in control of nature. To be an artist outside of the art space is a change in how we think, what we do and who and what we are thinking with. The artists we were before we entered the garden can't work in a garden because they never knew how to, the artists we become in the garden can't return to the white space without taking some of the garden with them. It is the garden who makes us become gardeners. Here we can think like an artist, use our imagination and make a garden path in a garden that is already there.

The two-year research project 'Making Sense' is a continuation of the one-year research project 'The Sympoiesis Garden' (*sympoiesis* means 'making together'), which was the start of the student community garden.

It is a pioneering act of opening up the old historical landscape garden of the Academy towards a more sustainable, ecological and entangled future. 'Making Sense' is about senses, about our awareness of nature and thinking together. For students who are becoming artists it is most interesting to learn about nature now, seeing how climate breakdown is happening today. To quote Marilyn Strathern, 'It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas with,' and that is what 'Making Sense' is about.



** Eline De Clercq, researcher within research group Art & Ecology at the Academy with the project *Making Sense*, organises the research class 'The Garden' during ARTICULATE and shows a *Garden Table* in the exhibition 'Ecosystems'.

Eline De Clercq, *The Sympoiesis Garden*, 2023



Bart Van Dijck, *ÎNTERZONE* (architecture of the ritual space)

Walking awake in a dreamy landscape BART VAN DIJCK

When we talk about ecology, we are talking about caring for our home, our bodies and our environment; we are talking about the fact that everything is interconnected and that there is an interchange between plants, animals, people, the earth and the landscape.

In ritual time and space, we remind ourselves of this connectedness, that we are part of a greater whole and that our ancestors have gone before us.

It is the place where we make medicine so that we can heal the relationship with ourselves, the other and the environment.

It is the moment when we rub the gunk out of our eyes so that we can be awake and present to see the magic of life and be grateful for it.

** Bart Van Dijck, PhD researcher at the Academy with the project *ÎNTERZONE* (architecture of the ritual space), organises the research class 'The Bear and the Smooth Snake' during ARTICULATE.

** During ARTICULATE 2023, Charlotte Koopman organises the five-day research class 'Flow & Flatbread'. The kitchen becomes the ecosystem where conversations about skills, research methods and artistic practices take place while mixing, chopping and stirring. This photograph of Koopman's research class 'Cooking' is taken by Wannes Cré during ARTICULATE 2022. In the context of those research classes two publications will be realized by Charlotte Koopman and Expanding Academy.



Expanding the Academy INSTROOM ACADEMY

Since September 2023, Instroom Academy has settled down in the student restaurant of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. This collaboration is all about making this academy porous and intertwining the institution with the urban and social ecosystems of which it is part. Instroom Academy is not an ordinary restaurant, it is a learning environment that helps non-native newcomers and refugees to get a job in the hospitality industry. Green Michelin star chef Seppe Nobels and his multi-cultural and, above all, multi-culinary team cook the signature dishes that these men and women brought to Antwerp, built around organic, seasonal, and local products.

The collaboration between both academies is based on shared values: sustainability, hospitality, open culture, and inclusion on the one hand, and an emphasis on learning, passion, and mentorship on the other hand.

Starting from the research- and educational program Expanding Academy, artist-researcher Nico Dockx will explore and establish connections between the students and researchers of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, and the students of Instroom Academy. Currently, this collaboration is still in a start-up phase, but later this academic year the substantive links will be deepened through various experimental initiatives. This innovative cross-pollination has the potential to bring synergy and dynamism on several levels, connecting and challenging diverse ecosystems.

** Instroom Academy will serve food and drinks at the opening evening of ARTICULATE on Friday 20 October at 19:30.



Instroom [feeds] Academy!

Exchanges across domains: how a craft-based fashion education can stimulate creativity and collaboration

ANDREA CAMMAROSANO

Fashion design is a discipline of many languages, addressing the representation of garments (sketches, photographs), their 3D realisation (*coupe*), the fabrication of textiles.

Though it is undeniable that in fashion products these languages are inextricably mixed, in fashion *processes* – in the industry, in education – they are organised into specific domains, courses, methodologies.

By observing the exchanges across these languages, we can therefore reconstruct not just the creative processes but also the influence exercised on them by specific structures and settings, such as the learning environment or teaching methodologies.

This observation can rely on the analysis of the intermediate outputs – preparatory sketches, fabric samples, garment ‘*toiles* or mock-ups’ – which are produced in those points of the process in which ideas are elaborated from one language and domain to the other.

These artifacts – transitional objects detaining a raw creative potential – have long been, in my practice, a source of artistic fascination. Through the course of my PhD studies, I sought to use them as research material to gain insight on learning, creativity and collaboration.

Creativity in context

I based my theoretical framework on the research of Teresa Amabile, which contains a series of concepts particularly useful in looking at the effects of environments – and therefore domains – on creative performance. Amabile states that a product or response

will be judged creative to the extent that ‘(a) it is both a novel and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task at hand, and (b) the task is heuristic rather than algorithmic’ (Amabile, 1996).

The heuristic aspect plays a key role in setting creative performance apart from ordinary performance: ‘An artist who followed the algorithm ‘paint pictures of different sorts of children with large sad eyes, using dark-toned backgrounds’ would not be producing creative paintings, even if each painting were unique and technically perfect.’

In describing three main components of creative performance, Amabile attributes the search for heuristics to ‘creativity-relevant skills’: a set of personal, cognitive styles able to push the responders to search for ‘new pathways to solutions’. This set of skills acts in combination with ‘domain-relevant skills’, which pertain to knowledge and talent in the domain in question, and ‘task motivation’, which determines the interest and engagement in the activity.

These concepts form the theoretical base of my research. While the notion of ‘heuristics’ represents a useful tool to determine the creativity of a process, the componential model highlights the aspects allowing the elaboration of creative responses within and across domains.

Creative exchanges in fashion

Adapting the former example to fashion, a pattern-maker who executed algorithmically a series of instructions would not be producing *creative* garments.

As a matter of fact, behind highly creative fashion there are highly creative teams; pattern-makers, for instance, who will *interpret*, rather than execute, the information contained in sketches or photographs – or who will actually create designs directly on the dress form, without using sketches or photographs (Lindqvist, 2015). Similarly, garments can be ‘textile-led’, as when

they are designed 'to accommodate the characteristics of a particular textile' (Townsend and Goulding, 2011). Design, in conclusion, is 'a dialogue' in which 'different approaches may be mixed within collections or even within garments'.

Despite this notion, in many educational programmes, the term 'design' is often equated with 'drawing'; often, students are coached to start from 'visual research', then proceed in a fixed order to the drawing of sketches, the selection of fabrics, the drafting of patterns (Faerm, 2012).

Towards craft-based collaborative methodologies

New educational approaches could shift the attention from product to process, placing particular attention on collaborative exchanges across domains and on the role of individual creativity in the context of these exchanges.

I explored this idea through series of empirical activities with the students of the Antwerp Fashion Department. Students would be asked to engage in the creation of a collaborative collection, divided into teams according to the language of their choice (drawing, coupe or textile).

I observed the exchanges across teams and languages through photographs, notes and all the intermediate outputs elaborated throughout the activity. I organised this material into 'maps of the process', integrating it with interviews and participants' observations, documenting the impact of interpersonal exchanges.

These maps highlighted a series of dynamics pertaining to creative languages and their impact on creativity and collaboration. Often, the 'drawing' team was seen as responsible for 'design', while the 'coupe' team was tasked with 'execution'. In very few cases designs would be 'textile-led'. In one case, elite 'leaders' of the group streamlined the process towards the realisation of garments conceived through visual research at

the beginning of the activity. In another case, a combination of collaborative cognitive styles and intrinsic interest in the specific domains produced 'a dialogue' across teams and languages, resulting in 'the mix of different approaches within the collection or even within garments'.

These dynamics were influenced by the educational logics and environment, as well as by subjective factors like experience and motivation. To test this hypothesis, I repeated one of the activities outside the school environment, in a textile-manufacturing environment near Como, Italy, obtaining from the same individuals different maps and results.

Developing a conceptual model

With these observations in hand, I tried to go beyond a descriptive approach, and to synthesise my findings into a model that could be applied to other educational settings and other creative fields.

This model describes creative exchanges on the basis of creative languages, as derived from the observation of artifacts. While the specific languages examined in my research are drawing, coupe and textile, the model describes three components that are not just specific to these particular languages. These are the artistic component (i.e. the sketch as a visual artwork), the technical component (i.e. the sketch as an instruction), the social component (i.e. the sketch as a form of communication between people involved in the activity).

The interplay between all these components is highly conducive to creativity in collaboration, impacting the individual elaboration of creative responses while allowing the group to perform appropriately to the task and context. The artistic component allows a personal interpretation, which in turn invites heuristics and cross-domain elaboration; the technical component allows the appropriate elaboration into each specific domain; the social component impacts collaborative styles such as horizontal or bottom-up process organisation.

Each of these components can also be seen to impact task motivation. The artistic component can provide inspiration, for instance through 'storytelling'; the technical component can allow the translation of inputs into domains in which respondents have comfortable levels of experience; the social component can provide a sense of group belonging.

Applying these notions to fashion education would mean reconsidering traditional course structures and teaching methodologies. It would open up the dialogue around design – and authorship – to multiple domains and stakeholders, stimulating interdisciplinarity and collaboration while reaffirming the importance of both a craft-based education and individual creativity.

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** Andrea Cammarosano, PhD researcher at the Academy with the project Relational Creativity. The workshop as a space to build technical, social and creative relations, organises the research class 'Patterns - Ecosystems in contamination' during ARTICULATE.

Carved to flow by Otobong Nkanga HELON HABILA

A text on the 2019 Visible Award shortlisted project

One of the ten shortlisted projects for the socially proactive Visible Award is Otobong Nkanga's *Carved to Flow*. The entire concept of the work centres around the humble, but indispensable soap. Here soap becomes both a sculptural piece—carved and designed and produced in a laboratory in Athens, Greece—and also a metaphor for movement and cleansing and change. Nkanga describes the project as a 'circle arching out and back. . . . In Athens it is a laboratory where oils, butters and lye from all around the Mediterranean, Middle East, North and West Africa meet to create soap. In Kassel it is storage and distribution... through carrier hands to generate that which will circle back to somewhere else, to take new form'.

Production, distribution, and germination—art in the marketplace. Art as social engagement. *Carved to Flow* is at heart a critique of the sanitized, rose-tinted narrative around production and consumption fed to us daily by corporations and their PR machines. It turns our gaze away from air-conditioned malls and their display windows and cash registers and brings the distributor—Nkanga calls them 'carriers', a loaded term implying both burden and responsibility—and the consumer face-to-face, hand touching hand as exchange is made. Exchange becomes a communal act, an acknowledgement of how we all are part of the story of extraction and production, and how we all can be part of the cleansing of polluted spaces and the reconstruction of exploited communities. Most importantly, it turns our gaze towards the source of the raw material for production. What, it asks, is the fate of those communities where raw materials are extracted?

Once we begin to think that way, there is no going back. Think of women working in sweatshops in India and China. We all have these images that we have

pushed to the back of our minds—we have become willing collaborators to the deceit fed to us by professional spin machines. A few years back I was in the Caribbean island of Curaçao on a school visit with a few other writers. I was in a classroom when suddenly there was this hellish smell that pervaded the whole school and later I was told that the smell came from a nearby lake in which Shell had dumped about two million tonnes of toxic material (asbestos, heavy metals, etc.). They told me that every year about eighteen people died from the effects of the pollution and often, when the wind blew, the students had to vacate the schoolyard and people living downwind of the lake had to leave their homes because of the toxic emissions of sulphur dioxide and particulate matter. This was of course in the poorest area of town. The image of the young students evacuating their classrooms just because some corporation placed profit over the health of a whole community has always haunted me.

Once we begin to ask questions, there is no going back. Questions flow into questions, reminiscent of the way lather flows on the body. When we ask: how do raw materials travel, it is a natural jump from there to: what is travel? What does it mean to travel? Why do some people travel first class while others die trying to cross the Mediterranean in flimsy boats?

The third phase of *Carved to Flow* is the Germination phase. A sort of reseeded back into the communities from where raw materials were taken in the first place. This is perhaps the most ambitious of the three phases. Using money raised in the Warehouse and Distribution phase, Nkanga and her collaborators have bought land in Uyo community in Nigeria where they hope to work with women whose lives have been affected by the activities of oil companies and other extractive industries. Uyo community is contiguous with the Niger Delta—the oil rich region which was once described as the ‘lungs’ of Africa because of its abundance of clean rivers and extensive wetlands. These lungs have long since been choked by oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring. As fishing and farming decline, clashes have erupted over land and other diminishing resources, which then forces

the members of the community to flee, seeking hope in other places far away from home.

However, *Carved to Flow* centres will not be restricted to the Niger Delta alone; there will also be art spaces in Europe where artists will work and brainstorm to create ideas and artefacts that will continue to feed into the project in an endless loop of extraction, education and production.

Most artists are uncomfortable when they have to engage with social issues, but it is always refreshing when they do. Who is better qualified than the artist to ask the most important questions of our day, to demystify the mysteries woven over our senses by politicians and corporations? In times like this, the artist must become the soap we need to wash away the blind spot from our eyes.

** During ARTICULATE, on 20 October 2023, artist Otobong Nkanga discusses her ongoing project *Carved to Flow* with the philosopher Emanuele Coccia. Talk organised by Expanding Academy.

ARTICULATE 2023 | ECOSYSTEMS takes place at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp.

- 18-20 October: at the Conservatoire
- 20 October-9 November: at the Academy

This publication focuses on the programme at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp.

For more information on the complete programme, check:

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COLOPHON

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Eline De Clercq, *The Symptosis Garden*, 2023

