



# EMPATHY FOR NATURE

*Exploring interdisciplinary  
collaborations in the Arts*

*Edited by Efi Kyprianidou and Danae Ioannou*

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# Introduction

Ever since Aristotle, the arts have been associated with the arousal of empathic responses towards the suffering of others and, consequently, with the development of a compassionate stance. In what ways can engagement with works of art affect people in emotional ways so as to become more compassionate towards nature and non-human beings and thus affected in morally positive ways? How can arts help us move beyond the mere recognition of climate change and the unprecedented current environmental challenges and actually act on it? Can the arts help us think like nature? Can we empathise with the burned forests of Southern Europe, with the plastic-polluted ocean and its creatures, with the drought land and the non-human animals harmed by human activity?

This is the overarching inquiry that framed the journey of the “Empathy and Sustainability: The Art of Thinking Like a Mountain (EMPACT)” Creative Europe funded project. Despite the fact that the vast majority of public opinion in the EU see climate change as a top priority and recognize that it is at least partly caused by human activity, concern about climate change and willingness to adopt measures to fight is lower than expected. The project adopted an innovative approach by addressing the role of empathy in advocating for the climate crisis at the speed needed through artistic co-operation and creation of novel art-projects, and suggested that exploring the empathy-sustainability relationship through the arts can bring significant advances to the promotion of sustainability actions and pro-environmental behaviours. Understanding the aesthetics of empathy and sustainability as powerful tools, EMPACT envisioned motivating artists and cultural influencers to champion environmental responsibility, bridging personal interests with the broader well-being of society. The project invited artists, cultural institutions and key thinkers in creative sustainability, philosophy and social sciences to discuss and explore ways of intensifying the powers of empathetic imagination in tackling the key pillars of sustainability.

In a nutshell, EMPACT developed the idea that cultivating empathic responses to nature and non-human beings may be the key to a game-changing move in communicating and acting upon environmental challenges. To address this issue with a fresh perspective, EMPACT brought together seven European partners with diversified experiences, expertises, missions,

identities, and audiences that represent a balanced and targeted geographical spread: Cyprus University of Technology (Cyprus), Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli (Italy), Espacio Rojo (Spain), National Academy of Art (Bulgaria), Maribor Art Gallery (Slovenia), Nature, Art & Habitat Residency ECO-Laboratory of Multidisciplinary Practice (Italy), and Vorres Museum (Greece).

This book presents a comprehensive exploration of fourteen collaborative interdisciplinary artistic projects, implemented by the partners of EMPACT in a period between June and December 2023, that explored the intricate connection between artistic expression and disciplines such as philosophy, architecture, urban planning, biology and anthropology. The thematic of the collaborations, centered on cultivating empathy for nature and non-human beings and advancing sustainability, underscores the strenuous efforts of inspired artists working on various artistic genres.

Each organisation invited one prominent artist to collaborate with an expert from non-artistic disciplines (such as urban planners, architects or philosophers or sustainability scientists) for a period of several months. Each collaboration resulted in a unique artistic creation, showcased individually by the hosting organization during a live discussion between the two collaborators. The discussions initiated at the opening presentation of each production encapsulate the essence of this project, illuminating the transformative power of interdisciplinary collaborations in redefining humanity’s relationship with the natural environment.

This book not only offers a glimpse into the diverse and fascinating collaborations between artists and experts from non-artistic disciplines but also prompts reflection on the significance of collaborative art itself. As we navigate through these collaborative projects, we are reminded of the vital role of collaborative endeavours in addressing the complex challenges of climate-change and advancing our shared commitment to empathy, sustainability, and a harmonious coexistence with nature.

FONDAZIONE  
LAMBERTO  
PUGGELLI

Catania, Italy

*L'invasione delle aliene /  
Alla luce del sole sono di un nero brillante*

*Habitus Resonans*

# L'INVASIONE DELLE ALIENE

*ALLA LUCE DEL SOLE SONO DI UN NERO  
BRILLANTE*

*A DIALOGUE BETWEEN VISUAL ARTIST NATÁLIA TREJBALOVÁ, DANCER  
ANNAMARIA AJMONE & BOTANIST MANLIO SPECIALE*

## **Introduction to the Collaboration**

The result of the project *L'invasione delle aliene/ Alla luce del sole sono di un nero brillante* was an intense one-week experience involving a dancer (Annamaria Ajmone), a visual artist (Natalia Trejbalova) and a botanist (Manlio Speciale, from the Botanical Garden of Palermo) into an interdisciplinary dialogue “guided” by the suggestions coming from their experience within the island of Salina environment: surrounded by the island landscapes and vegetation, by the sea and the other Aeolian archipelago islands.

They explored Salina and some of the other islands nearby, with the assistance of local guides and the islands’ people. An exchange of knowledge, reflections and feelings was established day after day; in the evening, every day was resumed with a sort of game called “I remember (Io mi ricordo)” during which each person’s memories and impressions started conveying into a collective memory and feeling.

The artists realized how far from understanding plants (as other non-human living beings) our common (and “human”) concept of “nature” is. The botanist deeply empathic perspective and knowledge of plants transmitted to the artists a new experience: in their own description, it has been like “meeting” the plants in the same way you encounter new people. They were impressed by the plants’ capacity to co-exist and cooperate, in a surprisingly “inclusive” way.

The botanist realized once again how deep his connection with plants is, as this experience reminded him of those days when he left his performative arts studies to start botany studies: therefore, as he wrote in his contribution, this project made clear that human and non-human forms of life not only coexist, they co-evolve together and arts and nature can converge, representing this co-evolution.

This exploration focused mainly on the typical vegetation of the Aeolian islands but also of

this part of the Mediterranean: la “Macchia Mediterranea”, which is particularly rich of biodiversity. A similar ecosystem exists in other part of the world: it is called ‘Chaparral’ in California, ‘Matorral’ in Chile, ‘Mallee’ in Australia, ‘Fynbos’ in South Africa. What it is important to remember is that these ecosystems typically do not include trees in their vegetation and they are made of plants adapting to water scarcity: the next step, would this water scarcity turn into drought, would be for the Macchia to turn into a steppe and then into a desert.



Salina © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

These plants adaptation strategies, therefore, are also a warning for us humans about the risks connected to our exploitation of Earth’s natural resources. These reflections and collaborative activities then led to new artworks concepts and two public events: a live talk with Manlio Speciale (“L’invasione delle Aliene” on June 29th), focusing on plants’ life and habitat, and a performative project (“Alla luce del sole sono di un nero brillante”) mixing dance, music, narration and visual art led by Annamaria Ajmone and Natalia Trejbalova (live display on July 3rd). The public events were joined by 45/50 people each: the participants formed a group that followed all the project’s activities. All the exploration activities involved guides from the local inhabitants’ community.

**A conversation with Annamaria Ajmone, Natália Trejbalová & Manlio Speciale**

**Annamaria Ajmone:**

In Salina we really lived an experience. During one week, we built a relationship based on mutual trust and exchange: a promise “in progress”. In a society obsessed by “products”, in which you exist only if you “make” something visible, it’s more and more difficult to find time and space for researching, studying, exchanging knowledge in a free and independent way. Art is also what is concealed, invisible, undeclared, a wisdom flux spreading toward those among us who let it in, feeding our being and actions.

In Salina we were not looking for something in particular, we let the island talking, trying to explore, observe it from different perspective, discovering colours and smells.

Being together, with our three different professional background – a choreographer, a visual artist and a botanist – allowed us to observe the world around us through unlimited viewpoints. We listened to the island trying to translate it into our different and alien languages, making the effort to create a common language, questioning what we thought to know and we found ourselves fragile and unknown. Sometimes also the island seemed that way: fragile, unknown, so beautiful.

Our days included trips, visiting and encountering the island inhabitants. During these activities, our local guides helped us in understanding the surrounding ecosystem: to this, we added our knowledge and impressions. Day after day, our viewpoints were mixing together.

In the evenings, we used to play a game we called “I remember”, lying down in a circle on the Palazzo

Marchetti terrace. Each of us was sharing aloud memories of the day, so to build a multiple voices narrative from our different experiences. This allowed us to create a collective writing, through an association of images. Within this shared memory there are our discoveries, as finding



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© Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

out the impressive difference between looking at the island from the sea and looking at it from the Fossa delle Felci mount. During these 5 days, we exchanged our expertise and shared perspectives: the start of a journey through an unknown land, the protagonist of our encounter. My wish is to have another chance together in the coming future.

**Manlio Speciale:**

The impact with such an archetypal landscape triggered intense forces. During the collective sessions we called “I remember”, we were diving into the unconscious and the willing to communicate

was facing with a sort of impossibility. We have always been taught that you don’t talk to stranger, but this time, somehow, we did it.

We didn’t know each other – me, Natalia and Annamaria: at first sight, this seemed to be the weakness of the project; in the end, it has been its strength. In our interaction, we needed to be genuine, without preconception or prejudice. In the same way, the encounter with the vegetation started: immediate, without mediation, a disclosure of forms and feelings, visions and dynamics, emotions and complicities and sharing.



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© Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

We went into the Nature, joyfully, among the primordial ferns and then into the Mediterranean scrub; we trusted lichen and jellyfish.

The *Genista thyrrena* with its spores, ensuring continuity to its species, population of marine heroes, coastal scrub.

At Punta Lingua, the triumph of halophyte: the *Limbarda crithmoides* and then right after the *Crithmum maritimum* and then the old and twisted *Tamarix Africana*, getting our fingers wet when touching them, and the *Glaucium flavum* standing right there, in the middle of it: as a yellow expressive poppy. Then the Mount of Porri which is not named after the “porri”- the edible *Allium ampeloprasum* or wild leek – but the extraordinary *Allium commutatum*, the Onion of the Islands,

which inflorescence, once being observed, it's impossible to forget.

Salina amazed me, maybe because it has a “sacred mountain”, the Mount of Ferns. The Ferns, the Pteridophyte, million years old.

And here it is the *Pteridium aquilinum*, the eagle fern, with its thick and extended community. Going through it, touching it, feeling like sinking into its incredible and luxuriant fronds it's such an immersive experience, leaving you breathless.

A geological-vegetation state of mind. While climbing up the Mount of Ferns, time itself seemed to slow down and, once at the top, it became rhythm, flow, evolution, pulsating life.





Live talks and creative experimentation in Salina © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

Connected with the landscape, we were alive, complicit, parallel to the ferns, the mount, the Flora, and this is the reason why the human and the vegetation world can and must converge. Co-evolution. Art. Nature. The Mediterranean basin is one of the five geographical regions characterized by the scrubland; the other regions are in California, Chile, South Africa and south-western Australia. These not Mediterranean scrubs have other names: 'Chaparral' in California, 'Matorral' in Chile, 'Mallee' in Australia, 'Fynbos' in South Africa. The Mediterranean ecosystems consist of heterogeneous environment, in fact they are considered very rich in biodiversity. In the Mediterranean basin it is particularly important the high number of endemic vegetal species. One of the Mediterranean most peculiar feature is the adaptive characteristics of its species. Mediterranean species developed numerous strategies to survive the summer aridity. The more evident morphological and physiological adaptation the plants developed to resist in the Mediterranean climate is the thickening of the leathery and usually small leaves: a smart response to the lack of water in the summer.

Another characteristic of many Mediterranean plants is the development of a wide roots system, both at surface and at deeper level, that allows them to absorb the water from the soil also during extreme aridity, and the dew too.

Another aspect is that the scrubland is a very thick community of shrub species in which composition there are no trees.



Artworks created in collaboration with the public © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli



A moment of the dance study performed by Annamaria Ajmone en plein air, captured in a frame of Natalia Trejbalova video  
© Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

As a warning about the Mediterranean scrub preservation, it is important to remember the definition of “Gariga”: it is often a deteriorated form of the scrubland characterized by short and sporadic vegetation with large areas of uncovered soil, with small shrubs and undershrubs, frequently fragrant ones. A further state of degradation leads to the steppe, with grassland plains. After this state, if deterioration intensifies, the process leads to desertification.

**Natalia Trejbalova:**

In my artistic practice, I often draw inspiration from the natural science sectors. Like me, other artists are developing similar research, with different methods and goals. I understand now that what we artists call “nature” is a concept produced by the human mind. This concept does not exist in the sciences, as sciences focus on the different forms of life, organic and inorganic elements, vital systems, their coexistence and interdependency. From a scientific perspective, it’s probable for an artist to glance superficially at a landscape, at its

shapes and colours and shades of light looking for a sort of iconic image. Through the history of painting and landscape photography, we can deduce many reflections on the presence of nature in the arts, from the social, cultural, iconographic and political point of view.

Anyway, it’s difficult for an artist to reach the same awareness of a scientist studying and living “within” botany.

My greatest discovery during this project has been finding out that my way of looking at the plants’ world was not profound, despite my fascination with it and my attempt to understand as much as possible about it. Thanks to the encounter with Manlio Speciale, the opportunity came to look at the individualities. Manlio’s deeply empathic perspective toward the “flora”, allowed me to reflect in a new way: as, when meeting new people, you reflect about their origins, the context they have been growing up and its influences on them. Finding out that our perspectives could dialogue



Dancer Annamaria Ajmone during the performative study live event at Palazzo Marchetti in Malfa © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli



© Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

was exciting. We and Annamaria Ajmone started a daily practice of sessions during which we were comparing our memories of the island, to create a collective memory of it.

I remember looking at the landscape, observing the plants and their positions, colours, their encountering each other: I had the feeling that everything was like an immense botanical garden and that them – the plants – were perfect.

I had never perceived such a spontaneous and graceful distribution of flora. Why? Why they are so balanced in the landscape composition? It was something I never noticed before. In Manlio's opinion, there's a very precise order, but a natural one. Among them, plants leave space for each other to grow up: the Mediterranean scrub is like this and you can find marvelous examples of it in Salina. Slowly, I started looking at the landscape as a city, a society consisting of different beings, deeply multicultural and multispecies. In some areas, we can find specific balance and we rest our eyes there: on beauty.

I think the knowledge of this composition comes directly from an accurate observation of what we call "nature".

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### **Annamaria Ajmone**

Annamaria Ajmone is a dancer and choreographer. At the centre of her research is the body as malleable matter, transforming spaces into places. She shares the creative process with collaborators, thus involving different imaginaries and visions. She presents her works in numerous dance theatre and performing arts festivals, museums, art galleries and atypical spaces including: FOG Triennale Milan, Santarcangelo Festival, La Biennale Danza Venice, Public Fiction/Night Gallery LA, PalaIs de Tokyo Paris, brut Vienna. In 2015 she won the Danza&Danza 2015 award as "best emerging contemporary performer". She co-organizes Nobody's Indiscipline, a platform for the exchange of practices between artists. She is associate artist of the Triennale Milano Teatro (IT) 2021- 2024.

### **Natália Trejbalová**

Natália Trejbalová is a visual artist based in Italy. In her latest films Trejbalová explores through the possibilities of science fiction and speculative world-making our individual perception of global scale transformations, possible future interspecies relations and changes in the planetary environment. She participated in various solo and group exhibitions and her films were screened in different institutions and spaces such as Palais de Tokyo, MUDAM Luxembourg, Power Station of Arts in Shanghai, Fotomuseum Winterthur, La Quadriennale di Roma, Gossamer Fog, MAGA, L'Esprit Nouveau, Fondazione Pini, Regional Art Gallery Liberec and others. Trejbalová was also artist in residence at Schafhof - Europaisches Kunsterhaus Oberbayern; Kunststiftung Baden-Wurtemberg; AIR Futura Prague and others.

### **Manlio Speciale**

Manlio Speciale PhD is a botanist, agronomist, and violinist. He has been the Curator of the Botanical Garden of the University of Palermo since 2006, and a consultant for many public and private historic gardens throughout Sicily. He is also the author of various scientific articles, as well as popular science books and the protagonist in educational television broadcasts for the national public broadcasting company of Italy (RAI). His books include: *Pomelia felicissima. Storia, botanica e coltivazione della plumeria a Palermo* (Ed. Kalòs&quot;, 2005); *Alberi di Palermo* (University Press, 2020); *Andare per Orti Botanici* (Ed. Il Mulino, 2021).



© Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

# HABITUS RESONANS

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN PIANIST GIOVANNI DI DOMENICO, PETROLOGIST  
GAETANO ORTOLANO & GEOCHEMIST MARCO VICCARO

## Introduction to the Collaboration

The result of the project *Habitus Resonans* was an intense one-week experience involving a pianist and composer, Giovanni Di Domenico, and two researchers: Marco Viccaro (geochemistry, volcanology and geothermal resources) and Gaetano Ortolano (petrology and petrography). They started an interdisciplinary dialogue, putting together scientific knowledge of the island of Salina environment and its geological history with music essence and creation.

They explored the complexity and beauty of the Salina's rocks layers, particularly as it can be seen by the sea (from a boat), together; in addition, the artist went on excursions with the assistance of local guides to develop a more intimate connection with the island. An exchange of knowledge, reflections and feelings was established and the researchers' powerful narrative created a common feeling about the vitality of Earth: tectonics shifting,

rocks formation and evolution, the beach pebbles among those layers testifying the transformation and the different sea level in the past era, as they explained "once there was a beach there, this means the sea was at that higher level".



Walking and exploring Salina with the pianist Giovanni Di Domenico © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

The artist worked applying the science within the music, (as music too has scientific, research aspects, method and discipline) to the knowledge that he was receiving, the



FLP team and pianist Giovanni Di Domenico on a guided tour with the Salina reserve Le Montagne delle Felci e dei Porri guide Mr. Elio Benenati © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

understanding he was experiencing and the natural elements and beings he encountered. He then started from colours and sounds he experienced and then translated this experience into a graphic musical score and notes into a music creation.

The researchers experienced a new kind of scientific and cultural dialogue, introducing and sharing their knowledge about the nature and timescales of magma storage, processes in active volcanic systems, behavior of rocks subjected to deformation due to plate tectonics-induced phenomena and the geological history of the Aeolian islands, with a pianist and composer. They perceived the capacity of arts to appreciate, understand and connect with the natural dynamics through an active exchange with sciences and the possibility for science to re-connect with emotions and feelings through arts, the remarkable potential arts have in establishing communication.

This exploration focused mainly on the Aeolian archipelago formation and development, the ancient volcanic activity and the traces that can be seen looking at the rocks' colours, layering, structures and forms. This exploration culminated with a "360 degree" boat trip around the island of Salina to look from a more effective perspective at the coastal rocks, "reading" those layers and the different colours revealing the different materials and origins, the transformation and vitality of what seems to most of us as something "not-alive", but it is "very" alive instead and moving, changing, evolving.



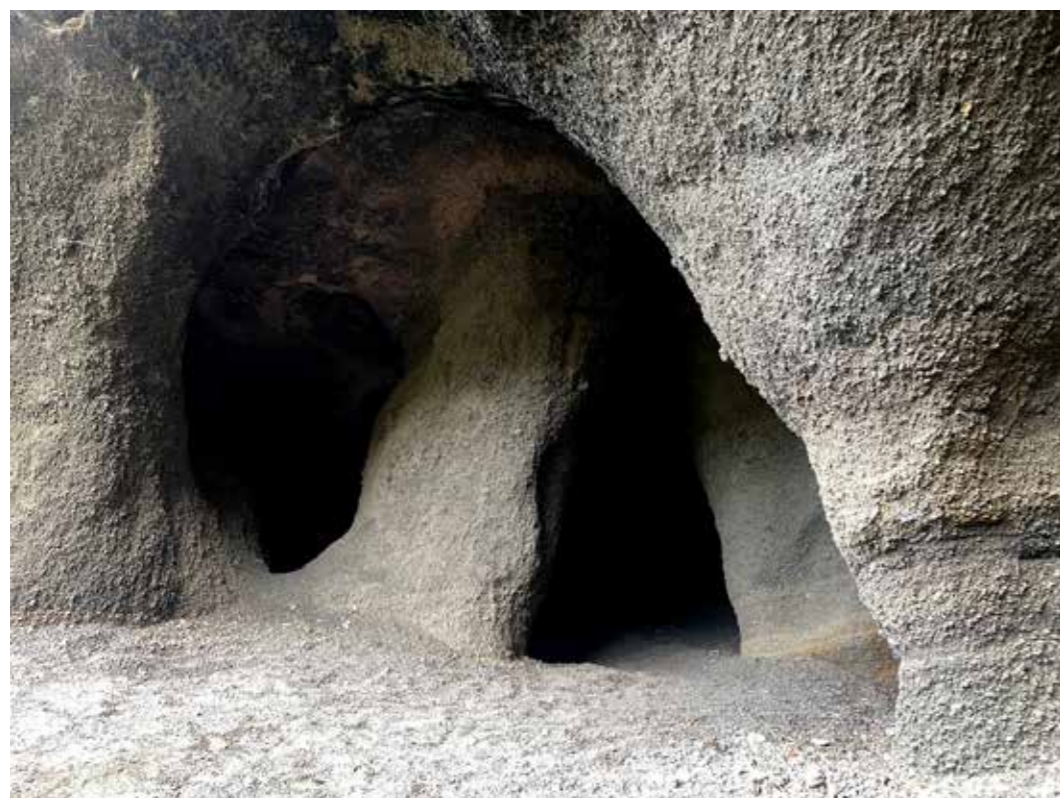
These reflections and collaborative activities then led to the new music score *Habitus Resonans*, which was performed by Giovanni Di Domenico on September 30th evening, after the live talk with Marco Viccaro (“Salina e i suoi vulcani”) and Gaetano Ortolano (“La danza delle micro-placche e la nascita del Mediterraneo”) in the afternoon.

The final event on Sept. 30th was joined by 30 participants from the local community and also other artists and tourist who were in Salina for cultural and excursion activities.

**A conversation with Giovanni Di Domenico, Gaetano Ortolano & Marco Viccaro**

**Moderator (Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli):**

Rocks with different revealing colours, pebbles of ancient beaches among the rock layers above the sea level... understanding geology studies transmits the inner vitality of earth: did this strike a chord with you? Which aspect of the communication between science and art do you consider more effective?



**Giovanni Di Domenico:**

I am very attracted by science (or at least some aspect of science); geology appears to me as one of the most fascinating sciences, considering that it studies the materials on which everything is laying down: earth. As the human being is “walking earth” (as Atahualpa Yupanqui, great Argentinian musician, said) we should know more about earth, as much as possible. Personally, I’ve always been inspired by a lot of things in addition to music, I need this to create a framing to work in and also if science is not considered art, I think science and art are much closer than expected, this is particularly true for music which, in a certain sense, is a science too!

**Gaetano Ortolano:**

Arts can trigger emotions trough forms and essence and very different ways of communication. Sciences try to understand nature and its complex functions without dogmatic approach and, for centuries, scholars barely dedicated time to communication activities. Great science communicators, even though not scientist, have been capable to trigger emotions and spread knowledge about scientific

discoveries to the wider general public. Scientists are now becoming more and more aware of the importance of communication with the public and of dedicating time to direct and exciting ways to communicate about their work. Initiatives as the one we’ve been involved in the EMPACT project make people collaborating “out of the box”, promoting

© Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

an exchange among very different sectors that investigate, in their own way, the same essence of human beings and their relation with nature: always looking for a balance between the need for emotions and the challenge of understanding nature and its rules. In his “Divina Commedia”, Dante highlighted, through the character of Ulysses, the fundamental relationship humans have with knowledge, which can be considered essential for the development of our human soul and inseparable from emotions and feelings. For this reason, I think that art and science are two different forms of communication with the same importance, targeting different human spheres but inseparable within the human being.

**Moderator (Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli):**

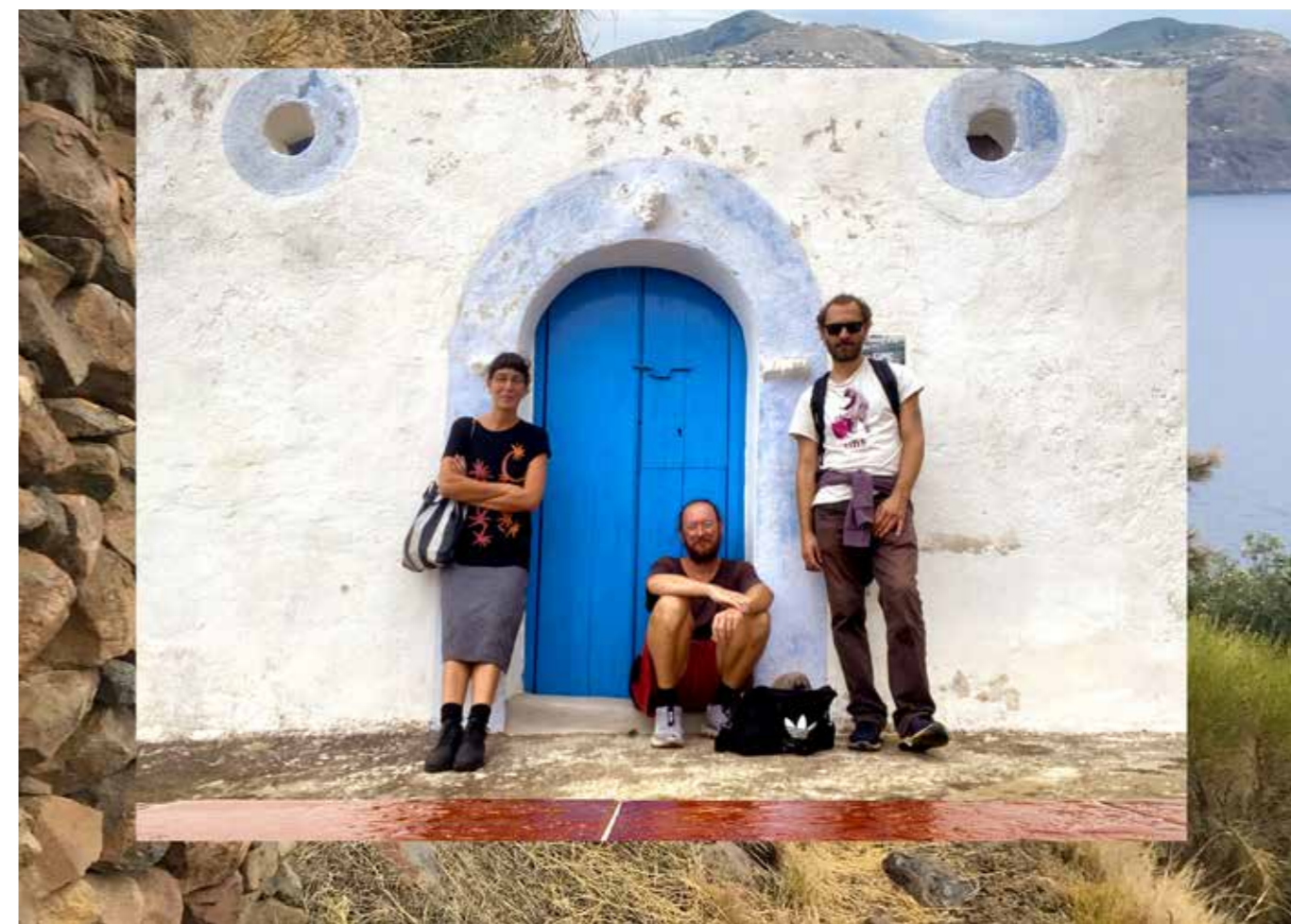
When translating the geology and morphology of the Salina island into signs and then into notes, which process did you apply/did you perceive listening to Giovanni’s music?

**Giovanni Di Domenico:**

I’ve tried to apply an “internal/external” creative approach to this project: I observe the island as being “outside” but this observation takes me inside myself to dig up and take the sign, the musical line out, and this sign comes out again to be played, experienced. At a more technical level, I focused on the “macro” aspect (the forms of the island rocks, lines and colours of the different layers of lava, rock, ancient beaches etc.) and the “micro” aspect (the tiny rocks under Marco and Gaetano’s microscope, with their geometric shapes and colours, their expressionist beauty).

**Gaetano Ortolano:**

The artist translated feelings into emotions and then into music through his sensitivity, sometimes a spiritual one. As a scientist, I tried to communicate with enthusiasm my knowledge about the development of the Thyrrenian sea and, as a consequence of this, the development



FLP team Valentina Lucchetti (left), Giovanni Donadini (centre), and pianist Giovanni Di Domenico (right) © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli





Marco Viccaro (right) giving a geology & volcanology lecture on a boat, G. Ortolano (left) © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

of the Aeolian Vulcans, through millions of years and very changeable geological conditions. Apart from transmitting some deeper knowledge about geology, I think I've triggered in the artist the understanding of the emotions, the effort and dedication that my studies focusing on nature and its development process have been requesting through the years. It seems to me that the artist focuses on a more intimate process, investigating emotions arising from his relationship with himself, the other human beings and maybe, thanks to this experience, from a new relationship with the nature surrounding him.

**Moderator (Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli):** After this EMPACT experience in Salina, can we say that the music movement elaborates the shifting of the tectonic plates and the capability

of "reading" the rocks, showing that an effective collaboration among arts and sciences can transmit more empathy in our coexistence with natural phenomena and the acknowledgement of their dynamics?

**Giovanni Di Domenico:**

Yes, absolutely. Dialogue is everything, knowledge is everything, dialogue and knowledge together bring also emotions and understanding, therefore empathy: we need this a lot.

**Gaetano Ortolano:**

I think this experience has been a very valid one, not only because of its "out of the box" perspective but because it involved all the participants connecting them emotionally. Our world needs empathy desperately and the blending among



art and science, emotion and curiosity about knowledge, is a powerful driving force to seek after a holistic development of the human being.

**Conclusions by Marco Viccaro:**

The EMPACT interdisciplinary collaborative project has been a pleasant and stimulating experience: to bring science closer to the people and a larger community is an important mission for Universities, in addition to teaching and scientific research. I've felt great interest from the participants toward the parallel between the ancient eruptive activity, which characterized the island of Salina in the past millennia, and the contemporary and similar one happening in various Earth's areas. The visual impact of volcanic activities, by images and videos, allowed the participants to achieve more awareness about Salina's territory history: today it is a Mediterranean paradise; in the past era - but relatively recent ones, from a geological point of view - violent natural events happened on the island.

The transposition of the various characteristics of Salina's sediments and volcanic rocks into musical scores by Giovanni Di Domenico has been very

evocative; a clear example of art getting inspired and then "contaminated" by science. I think the youngest generations, as children, should be involved too, in project activities like this one.

This initiative has been of great cultural value. I'm thankful for having being involved in it, both as University teacher and as a member of the Associazione Italiana di Vulcanologia, the Italian association of volcanology.

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**Giovanni Di Domenico**

*Giovanni Di Domenico, pianist and composer, born in Rome currently lives and works in Brussels. Following his father's assignments as a civil engineer, he lived his first ten years of life in Africa: until age five in Libya, until age eight in Cameroon, and until age 10 in Algeria. Musically self-taught until the age of 24, when he enrolled at the Royal Conservatory in Den Haag, Netherlands (Koninklijke Conservatorium), specializing in "jazz piano." He aspires to develop an encyclopedic technique, with rhythm, harmony and tone informed by non-Western traditions, but equally sensitive to Debussy's Préludes, Luciano Berio's*





Gaetano Ortolano giving a lecture on geology and vulcanology at Palazzo Marchetti © Fondazione Lamberto Puggelli

*Sequences, the ambi-ideation heard in Borah Bergman's Soul Note recordings, Cecil Taylor's polysemic density, Paul Bley's livid transparency and, of course, the more radical manifestations stemming from the underworld of pop music, invariably linked by original praxis.*

#### **Gaetano Ortolano**

*Gaetano Ortolano is associate professor of petrology and petrography at the University of Catania. Since 2017, he has been treasurer of the International Association in Rheology and Tectonics (DRT). His research is particularly based on the study of the behavior of rocks subjected to deformation due to plate tectonics-induced phenomena, measuring their changes in temperature and pressure. Over the past two decades he has become one of the most highly regarded experts in Italy and abroad in the rheological and thermodynamic study of the rocks of all Calabria and the northeastern part of Sicily, an area known as Calabrian-Peloritani Arc or Orogen. An area among the most geologically and geodynamically complex of our entire national territory. To date, he has authored more than 150 publications, including articles in international journals, book chapters, articles in popular science magazines and conference proceedings.*

#### **Marco Viccaro**

*Marco Viccaro is a professor of geochemistry, volcanology and geothermal resources at the University of Catania and a research associate at INGV - Osservatorio Etneo. Since January 2021, he is the current president of the Italian Association of Volcanology. His research mainly aims at defining the nature and timescales of magma storage, transfer and degassing processes in active volcanic systems worldwide. In recent years, he has been working on technology development for the capture of geothermal resources and their sustainable use. He has*



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*organized and participated in numerous conferences of national and international significance, as well as coordinated and actively participated in various ministerial research projects. To date, he has authored more than 250 publications, including articles in international journals, book chapters, articles in popular science magazines and conference proceedings.*



# MIGRATION, EMPATHY, NATURE, SUSTAINABILITY

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST TWENTYTHREE & ARCHITECT  
KONSTANTINOS AVRAMIDIS

## Introduction to the Collaboration

The interdisciplinary project Migration, Empathy, Nature, Sustainability is the result of the collaboration between the architect and Lecturer at the University of Cyprus Konstantinos Avramidis and the street artist Vasilis Vasiliou (aka Twenty-Three) in the production of a socially-engaged mural and an associated workshop.

The workshop — which precedes the mural — aims in engaging the local community as well as equipping it with practical skills to participate in the creation of the mural hosted in the neighborhood of Kaimakli. For the creation of the mural solely carbon neutral spray-paint as well as recycled cardboard paper are used. The participation is open to everyone following a public invitation realized within the context of the Pame Kaimakli annual festival. The workshop takes the form of a walk that seeks to map urban elements and imprints of local hidden histories in the neighborhood. These are to be transferred in the mural by the individuals who will have tracked them. Engaging members of communities in activities aims at exploring shared experiences and understanding different perspectives. The mural itself is a collaborative effort, representing the collective aspirations of the participants towards a more empathetic and inclusive society.



Architect Konstantinos Avramidis during the mural's creative process in Kaimakli neighborhood © Cyprus University of Technology

The theme and iconography of the mural address issues of social and environmental sustainability in the divided city of Nicosia. They focus on promoting interspecies inclusivity as well as undermining the notion of borders on the island. They take migratory birds that call Cyprus home as a starting point, symbolizing the interconnectedness of all beings whilst challenging the conceptual and physical existence of borders. This inclusion signifies the importance of extending empathy beyond human boundaries and fostering compassion towards all living beings. The portrayal of birds with human characteristics and elements of the local Cypriot culture is used to critically comment on the cultural/natural divide whilst encouraging viewers and participants to empathize with nature, promoting a sense of responsibility towards environmental preservation and sustainability. At the same time, this adds a multiscale dimension to the project: it highlights how the local social ecosystem interacts with and mutually shapes and is being shaped by global environment.

Geographically, the wall of mural/workshop is in close proximity to the green line (less than

100m). Kaimakli district is demographically and historically characterized by displacement, refugeedom and compassion. Thus this imagery and socially-engaged approach serves as a reminder of the power of empathy in nurturing unity within the community and cultivating an interspecies ethos.

## A conversation between Konstantinos Avramidis & TwentyThree

The following is a loosely edited and expanded version of the notes from the dialogue between the two practitioners. This dialogue took place at Kaimakli after the activities and aimed to be a reflective account of our shared experience. The transcript assigns views to each practitioner relatively freely, as the dialogue developed in a quite organic manner. It is structured around four key moments of the project: theme, site, walk, and execution. The notions of migration, empathy, nature, and sustainability are running across all the sections.



Artist TwentyThree and architect Konstantinos Avramidis during the design of the mural © Cyprus University of Technology



Artist TwentyThree during the creative process © Cyprus University of Technology

**Konstantinos Avramidis:**

When we first met with Twenty-Three we agreed upon a common vision: a mural that would celebrate social and environmental sustainability. Our way of understanding sustainable environments in Cyprus was through unity, diversity, and (interspecies) coexistence. Thus, we started considering how we could challenge division —the hegemonic narrative and cultural construction of the island— and the notion of borders —its physical manifestation— by means of nature. The comedy “Smuggling Hendrix” (Piperides 2018) —which shows a dog (‘Hendrix’) crossing the Green Line and causing all sorts of funny incidents— was a playful inspiration on how other species can undermine the notion of borders in the island.

Thus, we came up with the idea of the migratory bird. The latter symbolize the interconnectedness of all beings whilst challenging the conceptual and physical existence of borders. We should not forget that this is happening in the context of the refugee crisis and that our mural preparation took

place in the light of the recent racist attacks on immigrants in Limassol.

**Twenty-Three:**

We investigated the five most popular migratory birds of Cyprus: Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*), Alcedo atthis (Common kingfisher), Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*), European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*). We chose the European Roller, ‘Kragka’ in Cypriot, due to its migratory route in our wider region: the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levante and Africa, where it overwinters. European Roller visits Cyprus in late spring and is characterized by its intense blue colours. Another reason for choosing it was that it is near threatened by the International Union of Conservation of Nature, underlining the fragility of our ecosystems, and promoting a sense of responsibility towards preserving environmental pluralism. This is used to critically comment on the cultural/natural divide whilst encouraging viewers and participants to empathise with nature. The idea was to have a key protagonist in the mural: an anthropomorphic



CUT collaborative interdisciplinary workshop in Kaimakli, Nicosia © Cyprus University of Technology



Stencil cutting during the collaborative interdisciplinary workshop in Kaimakli © Cyprus University of Technology

portrayal of this migratory bird that also incorporates elements of the local Cypriot culture. A bird-backpacker, that has its home with it at all times.

**Twenty-Three:**

Kaimakli district in Nicosia —where I had the privilege to spend some time of my life— provided an ideal space for our project. Kaimakli was embraced by immigrants as their home and has expressed its solidarity to the immigrants when they were attacked and welcomed them to the neighbourhood. No surprise that the banner expressing solidarity to immigrants in Limassol who have suffered a racist attack was raised in Kaimakli.

Here, the mural could convey the challenges immigrants face in finding their place within the community whilst celebrating the diversity they bring, projecting acceptance and inclusivity. Thus, the idea was to create an impactful artwork within Kaimakli challenging traditional cityscape perceptions and visually representing the neighbourhood’s flux composition.



The collaborators working with the participants for the design of the stencils © Cyprus University of Technology



**Konstantinos Avramidis :**

It was our intention that the mural would be located in the heart of a neighbourhood that would encourage co-existence and celebrate diversity (ethnic, political, etc) whilst allowing multiplicity. Kaimakli is like a mosaic of cultures, textures, patterns and colours. The form of its urban fabric, the details of its traditional houses, tons of cats in the streets, sounds from the church and the mosque across the divide, elderly chatting with immigrant teenagers; all create a unique atmosphere where the past meets the present, 'here' meets 'there'. The mural took place in the context of the long-standing Pame Kaimakli Festival with a proven societal impact and network in the area. This facilitated recruiting people from the community and allowed visibility during the execution.

Geographically, Kaimakli and the wall that hosts the mural, are near the Buffer Zone. Kaimakli district is demographically and historically characterised by displacement, refugeedom and

solidarity. Thus this imagery and socially-engaged approach serves as a reminder of the power of empathy in nurturing unity within the community and cultivating an interspecies ethos. It is a site where you feel the essence of the slogan "We are all immigrants".

**Konstantinos Avramidis:**

In order to appreciate the urban and natural surround of Kaimakli and engage the local community, we issued a call prior to the mural. This consisted of two 'meetings' that would shape and lead to the execution of the mural: a walk and a workshop. This way we could forge trust with the community whilst building up anticipation. The participation was open to everyone and the invitation was circulated in the context of the Pame Kaimakli festival.

During the walk, we weren't looking for something specific, we let the neighbourhood to speak back to us: the mere act of walking, absorbing the rhythm of the area, appreciating its material and immaterial essence. We also had the chance to

map urban elements and imprints of local hidden histories of the neighbourhood. During this walk, we were able to exchange our experiences, both Kaimakli residents and visitors. The former would raise the challenges they face, shared their routines and mapped urban 'moments' that had meaning for them; the latter, had the chance to share their reactions to a relatively new environment and map elements that stroked them. Further, the bicomunal participation encouraged dialogue and broke down stereotypes, prejudices and cultural barriers whilst promoting cross-cultural understanding and cooperation.

**Twenty-Three:**

The walks made me appreciate our positions as street artist/architect: our shared preoccupation is primarily with the urban, yet we opened it to the natural together with the participants and the locals who, in a sense, guided us in the neighbourhood. My usual 'strickness' of working

with stencils was 'softened' [...] I could trust your architectural background in appreciating the environment while the introduction of natural elements in the mural also introduced some freeness to the process, a loss of control. As we were preparing for the mural, the walk was also an opportunity for me to attentively look at the textures of Kaimakli and capture its colour palette. This was a dive to the hidden, often in plain sight, aspects of Kaimakli. The walk was an opportunity for me to rediscover my ex-neighbourhood and see it through other people's eyes. This allowed multivocality and blended our views.

**Twenty-Three:**

This blending was crystallised in the workshop and echoed in the mural. The workshop —when we cut in stencils the photographic material that the participants collected during our walk—aimed in engaging the local community as well as equipping it with practical skills to participate in the creation



of the mural. It provided participants with the opportunity to learn art techniques, empowering them with new skills. At the same time, it created a welcoming and inclusive environment for locals and visitors alike by involving them in the mural's creation.

The festive nature of painting live facilitated its sharing to the entire neighbourhood. Friends of the participants came and, some of them, even painted part of the mural. Passers-by's would stop to talk to us (participants and artists) and asked to know more about the mural, what it symbolises, how we do it and why. Some people also asked us to paint their walls as well! Most importantly, residents and participants came together and became active co-creators of their environment.

#### **Konstantinos Avramidis:**

The stencils of the participants were transferred in the mural by the individuals who have tracked them in the neighbourhood. Engaging members of communities in activities aimed at exploring shared experiences and understanding different perspectives. The mural itself is a collaborative effort, representing the collective aspirations of the participants towards a more empathetic and inclusive society. The workshop, as much as the mural, promote unity and inclusivity within a diverse society, emphasizing our interconnectedness despite cultural differences. Through this collaborative art-making, participants shared their stories, fostering a sense of value and acceptance. Participants become aware of their power to mutually, collectively co-produce and co-shape the environments they live and share with other beings.

By encouraging engagement and interaction, the live performance turned every spectator into a potential participant-actor thus cultivating empathy and turning the mural into a common estate of the neighbourhood.

The mural sits quite naturally on the wall. I found striking an observation that some participants made: they mentioned that the stencils of some natural elements (e.g., leaves) blend with the shadows of the tree in front of the wall. The colours perfectly match the surround whilst the western orientation of the wall together with the Cypriot sunset make wonders. You get the feeling that the mural was always there, and it becomes anew every single day when the light hits the surface. This indirect inclusion of this sort of 'circadian rhythm' of the wall signifies the importance of extending empathy beyond human boundaries and fostering compassion towards all living beings. The mural—as a process and (constantly in the making) result—allowed us appreciate ecosystems as both local and global, social and natural, always flux and under construction, continuously mutually shaping each other. It destabilised our (sup) positions and perceptions whilst rethinking the importance of empowering communities through participatory art and urban awareness projects.

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#### **Konstantinos Avramidis**

*Konstantinos Avramidis is a Lecturer in Architecture and Landscapes at the University of Cyprus. He holds a DipArch from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, an MSc in Architecture and Spatial Design from the National Technical University of Athens with distinction, and a PhD in Architecture by Design from the University of Edinburgh. He has taught extensively at various institutions in Greece and the UK, most recently at Drury University and the University of Portsmouth. His designs have been awarded and exhibited internationally, including the 8th and 10th Biennale of Young Greek Architects. Konstantinos cofounded the architectural design research journal Drawing On and coedited Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City (Routledge, 2017).*

#### **Twenty Three**

*Twenty Three is an international street artist born and based in Cyprus. Active in the streets from 2012, he has reinforced his interest not only in stencil technique but also in producing participatory art projects, illustrations, interactive installations and experimentation with cyanotype printing process. The most recurring element in his work concerns the question of transformative identities at a local and global level and the constant negotiation between tradition and modernity. Twenty Three left his mark in Madrid, La Coruña, Brighton, Rome, Calabria, Puglia, Mexico City, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Palermo.*



The final mural in Kaimakli neighborhood © Cyprus University of Technology

# CALCULATING YOUR PAUSE

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST PANAYIOTIS MICHAEL & ART HISTORIAN  
CHRISTINA LAMBROU

## Introduction to the Collaboration

The interdisciplinary project *Calculating Your Pause* is the result of the collaboration between the artist and academic Panayiotis Michael and the art historian Christina Lambrou. The collaboration is realized through the exhibition of Michael's artworks and the discussion between the artist and Christina Lambrou about this unit of works, along with their companion edition. Their dialogue is focused on the spaces created in transitional periods and examines the forms of life that develop in moments of suspension. Within the framework of the objectives of the EMPACT program, the activity is developed in spaces that open up between the traditional categorizations of genres and methods, exploring the transformative possibilities of visual collaborative practices and new possibilities of relationships with the surrounding space, place and landscape.

Through the juxtaposition of material

works, performance and discussions, the collaborative interdisciplinary project *Calculating Your Pause* focuses on the suspended spaces in times of transition from one condition to another. The discussion of the concept of suspension, a key theme that runs through the work of Panayiotis Michael in recent years, is a central point of reference in this work. In continuation and development of this theme, the spaces, places and practices created in the transition condition are approached through simultaneous and multiple perspectives and methodological lenses. The redefinition of textual forms, the revision of theoretical positions through the prism of subjectivity and the form of discussion as a tool for redefining certainties and negotiating limits acquire a central role in this work. Through a process of research, chance encounters and personal processes, Michael's works examine the gestures associated with displacement, abandonment and absence which are also bringing decay and transformation. They notice the change



Panayiotis Michael artwork for CUT Collaborative Interdisciplinary Project in Korai Space, Nicosia © Cyprus University of Technology

## Christina Lambrou

*How do we respond to a landscape that is constantly in flux?*

*What is the position of artistic practice in the everyday as the dynamics of change and transition are progressively accepted as not the exception but the rule?*

*What kind of spaces and objects come out of transitional periods?*

*What is our responsibility toward the representation of territory and its historical ties to exploitation of land, people, cultures?*

A network of encounter points were drawn and re-drawn over the period of three months, establishing new connections between the artworks, the space, the public and the cultural producers involved, while paying great attention to maintaining the fragility and openness of the process. Within this framework, the following conversation between Panayiotis Michael and Christina Lambrou, is composed through many fragments of talk and discussions that took place in various times and places during the months of the project.

## Christina Lambrou:

The text of the "Landscape Theories" performance begins with a personal re-reading of theoretical texts on the landscape, taken from the reader "Landscape Theory", and edited into an emotionally charged, confessional monologue addressed to the landscape. While the narrator speaks directly to the landscape, which emerges as an "object of desire" the performance challenges the rationality of theoretical discourse, as well as the claims to objectivity embedded in the history of theory and the shaping of large cultural narratives. Here, the subversively subjective reading of theoretical writings is approached through a personal formulation in which the tension between official, theoretical discourse and personal expression opens up possibilities for disobedient readings. Can you talk about how you worked on the performance?

## Panayiotis Michael:

Landscape and place are of course extremely important elements in our lives. We live in them and from them. The discussion around them has always been daily, intense, persistent and painful. An immense body of texts / books / essays and a huge number of projects have developed as a





Panayiotis Michael (artist) and Christina Lambrou (art historian) conversation on the collaboration © Cyprus University of Technology

result of our care and interest in them. Theorists, scientists, writers, artists, designers, political analysts, and politicians have been thinking, dreaming, envisioning, interpreting, approaching, researching, debating and trying to define what landscape and place might mean, based on their own experiences, needs and desires.

Landscape is contested every day, parts of it are torn apart and others join together. It is constantly changing form. The landscape is an ideology and it is not an ideology. It is heaven and hell. It is a refuge and a prison. It's beautiful and ugly. It's a dream and a nightmare. It is matter and it is illusion. It is my property and not yours and vice versa. It is all these together and countless others. And when things get difficult, we tend to blame it.

It is obvious that all this talk has not been in any way helpful for the landscape, or the planet - it has failed to protect it from us. Environmental destruction due to human activities is a fact that is no longer disputed.

And since things are looking bleak, I thought I should turn to the landscape itself and protest my discontent – always with love, compassion and understanding - as we communicate with each other now - in the hope that it would assume its responsibilities. Because no one else seems to be listening anyway.

**Christina Lambrou:** Gradually unfolding in time, the personal premise of the performance reveals a sort of despair at the inextricably dependent relationship between us and the landscape.

**Panayiotis Michael:** The idea is to indicate, to challenge, to praise, to provoke, to confront the landscape itself for what / who it is as an entity, based on the words, approaches and interpretations of scholars coming from different fields (geography, political history, art history, philosophy, sociology, literature, political science, fine arts, etc.).

At the same time, it is important for me to be

intentional about the delicate balance that occurs between presence and absence. I direct my attention toward the observation/exploration of temporality and ambiguity, the suspension of time and unresolved tension and the impact of such dynamics on these places. I observe as new textures and shades grow on their surface / body, as narratives develop and stories are implied.

Our behavior towards the landscape and place is not positive over time. They are claimed, conquered/occupied, settled, abandoned, sidelined. We blame them, deify them, demonize them, beautify them, patronize them, romanticize them, bypass them. These behaviors of ours have an impact on the planet and, therefore, on us.

the narrator-victim to the landscape-perpetrator. It expresses love and hate, attraction and repulsion, inclusion and rejection, acceptance and denial, understanding and contempt.

These conflicting emotions make up our timeless attitude towards this thing in which we live and upon which our existence depends.

**Christina Lambrou:** I would like to talk about the series of drawings, entitled "Shading Exercises". For these large scale Still-lives on paper, you collected and arranged found objects from areas in the city that were in the process of transitioning from one function to another, like the building of the demolished General Hospital in Nicosia.



Panayiotis Michael artwork for Calculating Your Pause collaboration © Cyprus University of Technology

This relationship of absolute dependence is implied in the performance "Landscape Theories". It's like a love letter, a monologue-confession of

In part, the selection and composition of these discarded objects, seems to reflect, reverse and comment on the tradition of the Still Life, a visual



Panayiotis Michael artwork for CUT Collaborative Interdisciplinary Project in Korai Space, Nicosia © Cyprus University of Technology

practice born out of 17th Century colonialism, with the aim to demonstrate to a European audience the luxurious spoils of conquered exotic lands. In the case of your landscapes, the discarded objects you selected and composed are -like the space- caught in a continuous process of change. Their use becomes fluid, and possibilities take the place of certainties. In a sense, your careful, soft academically correct drawings of the various objects you collected from the spaces you visited have a very subversive function.

**Panayiotis Michael:**

For years, the state would announce various development projects, which would remain shelved. Around 2015, I began visiting the plots in which these projects would be realized, among them the site of the demolished General Hospital in Nicosia, where the new Archaeological Museum would be built.

Initially, I started to observe the flora and how it slowly occupied each space, since human activity was absent or maybe just different from the state plans. During my visits to the site where the old hospital used to stand and where the new archaeological museum would be built (a project that has eventually



Panayiotis Michael artwork for CUT Collaborative Interdisciplinary Project in Korai Space, Nicosia © Cyprus University of Technology



© Cyprus University of Technology

began in the last year), I began to pay attention to various objects left there because they were no longer useful to their owners (plastic boxes, metal paint cans, wooden boards, household appliances, or car parts). These objects were used by people who visited the site for different reasons and spent their time there in different ways. They were turned into small tables and seats for groups that gathered to drink beers. Other times they became stands for people to place their car parts and repair them. Or, they were transformed into houses, or more abstract compositions, by local children who played there.

I decided to join in the game, setting up my own compositions with these objects and drawing them as an exercise. I observed and recorded the creases, stains and marks on these objects, in the hope that they would confess to me about their previous lives, the stories they carried, the relationships and roles they developed with their owners. It was also an attempt to explore the history of the place that was hosting them at the time.

**Christina Lambrou:**

Could we see these series of still-live drawings then, as landscapes?

**Panayiotis Michael:**

I see them as visual notes referring to the reality of the place; as elements contributing to a different/ an alternative reading of it; and as components of its mapping.

**Christina Lambrou:**

The work in progress entitled “Ideas that are bound to give your room some spark” materializes through calculations of spaces and areas. The work explores the conceptualisation of space in visual terms, and can be seen as an exercise in transferring the spaces with the life they enclose, from one materiality to another. The work negotiates planning, projecting, failing and repetition. What is the position of these configurations of space that are related to the visual, political, legal, social and the aesthetic in your practice?

**Panayiotis Michael:**

For this work I focused on the variability of time through the extension of the conceptual and material presence of the place or the landscape, or in this case the house I am exploring as its existence is transferred to the exhibition space. The expanse of an enclosed area, its perimeter, its shape and form – the elements that define its limits – are vast spaces in which we can constantly wander and in which we can discover hidden corners concealing information about the history of space; unseen parts where signs of lived experiences are inscribed.

**Christina Lambrou:**

In the process that you develop, the viewer has a central position. Is this a relationship that you design and direct intentionally?

**Panayiotis Michael:**

I put these ideas and many more before the viewer

aiming to open a dialogue that will reflect on the temporary nature of the examined place. I look at the subtle stories that uncertainty, ambiguity and the ephemeral weave hoping that we can view these places together through different perspectives adding layers to the collective viewing experience. I want to bring attention to the beauty that lies in the uncertainty and the floating and transitory aspects of these places, but also in the possibilities of transformation. I hope that the sense of connection between the audience and these places through the artwork will be enhanced creating a collective viewing experience through which we will construct new narratives and meanings. I hope that the artwork will enhance a sense of connection creating a collective viewing experience through which we will construct new narratives and meanings.

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**Panayiotis Michael**

*Panayiotis Michael (1966, Cyprus) is an artist and Associate Professor at the Arts and Communication Department at Frederick University. He co-represented Cyprus at Venice Biennial with Konstantia Sofokleous, 2005, curated by Chus Martinez; XX Alexandria Biennial, 1999; and Rijeka Biennial, 1997. He participated in ev+a Limerick Biennial, 2006, curated by Katerina Gregos; Roaming Images, in the frame of 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, 2011, curated by Iara Boubnova; and Occupation: Unknown, Manifesta Coffee Break, Liverpool Biennial 2004.*

*Other participations include: 2018 I know where you have been for the last four hundred & twenty six days, Point Centre for Contemporary Art, Nicosia, Cyprus. (with pick nick); 2016 Terra Mediterranea: In Action, Halle 14, Leipzig, curators Yiannis Toumazis and Michael Artz; 2015 Exercises In Orientation, Peltz Gallery, Birkbeck University of London, curator Elena Parpa; 2014 Point Centre for Contemporary*

Art, Nicosia; 2013 Episode 2: sabotage, insitu, Berlin, curators Marie Graftieaux, Nora Mayr and Gilles Neiens; 2010 Suspended Spaces, La Maison de la Culture, Amiens, curator Brent Klinkum; 2007 The Soap Factory, Minneapolis, curator Elizabeth Grady; 2006 I promise., Rena Bransten gallery, San Francisco, curator Leigh Markopoulos; 2005 Leaps of Faith, Buffer Zone, Nicosia, curators Katerina Gregos and Erden Kosova

He is a co-founder of pick nick (art group) along with writer Maria Petrides and visual artist and architect Alkis Hadjiandreou. He was artist in residence at: 2018 Point Centre for Contemporary Art (with pick nick); 2017 Embassy of Foreign Artists, Geneva, Switzerland (with pick nick); 2016 Capacete, Rio de Janeiro (with pick nick); 2016 HIAP, Helsinki (with pick nick); 2013 Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; 2013 Apartment Project, Istanbul (with pick nick); 2005 The Artists Residence, Herzliya.

Recent publications: 2018 Dandilands (with pick nick); 2016 A Book of Small Things; 2015 Symphonic Node (with pick nick)

### **Christina Lambrou**

Christina Lambrou is a writer and researcher in art history, with specific interest in the modern period in Cyprus, global modernisms in the visual arts and modernist articulations outside of the Eurocentric canon. She holds a PhD in History of Art from the Visual and Material Culture Research Centre / FADA, Kingston University, London, on "The Modernist Horizons of Adamantios Diamantis: Visual Politics and Cultural Narratives in Twentieth-Century Cyprus". She holds a BA from the Academy of Fine Art in Florence and an MA from UCL in Anthropology of Visual and Material Culture. She has taught Art History at the University of Nicosia and writes on the visual arts in printed media.

As part of her interest in the many facets of modernism in Cyprus, she has curated the exhibition and publication "Loukia Nikolaidou: Stories", (Lefteris Economou Foundation, Nicosia, 2020), participated in conferences and published on modern and contemporary visual culture in Cyprus and the role of the visual in political and ideological formations. She has co-authored the chapter «The Ground Beneath Our Feet: A discussion on contemporary art and archaeology in Cyprus \ Participating Artists: Alev Adil, Haris Epaminonda, Maria Loizidou, Christodoulos Panayiotou», in the publication Contemporary Art from Cyprus (eds.E. Stylianou, G. Koureas and E. Tselika), Bloomsbury, 2021. Most recently she has presented the papers The Cyprus Folk Art Museum: artefacts, cultural narratives, modern belongings, within the context of the conference Post-colonial heritage in the present: museums, archives, art and activism, (British School at Rome 2022) and Histories, stories and microhistories of art: looking anew at Greek Cypriot modernism, for the conference Decentering art and design history: research, practice, education. (University of Nicosia 2023).



Panayiotis Michael artwork for CUT Collaborative Interdisciplinary Project in Korai Space, Nicosia © Cyprus University of Technology

THE  
NATIONAL  
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OF  
THEATRE  
AND  
FILM ARTS “KR.  
SARAFOV”

Sofia, Bulgaria

*Brain Waves Art*

*Museum of Emotions*

# BRAIN WAVES ART

*A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST JORDAN VARBANOV & MICROBIOLOGIST SPAS KERIMOV*

## Introduction to the Collaboration

On the basis of the collaborative work between an artist and a professional, Jordan Varbanov studies the connectivity between and focus the research on Empathy. As a professional actor finds an interesting opportunity to find the language of the concrete performing act through scientifically exploring the Empathy that brings the human brain. This performance is instigated by the reflections that nature and arts bring to the brain waves and how they reflect.

Nature and its sounds and visions can bring us to places that we remember or dream to be. It can make us smile or feel peaceful. This reflection of the brain can make a positive impact on human behavior. It can be referred to as a process that can help realize the importance of nature to society.

The purpose of this project is to analyze the meeting points between the performing arts

and microbiology. It is produced by the usage of information from electroencephalography and creating it into an art form. Music is created by the waves of the brain and performed at the performance as well as the actions (the dialogue) from which the waves are gathered. This is micro-biology information translated into the language of art. Basically, it can be an endless circulating process that can never stop creating art through Empathy.

The creative process is led by Jordan Varbanov (actor), with the collaboration of Spas Kerimov (entrepreneur and microbiologist). The project has four stages and each of them has an opportunity to be presented physically and digitally.

The first stage starts with a conversation between the artist Jordan Varbanov and the micro-biology specialist Spas Kerimov. It begins as an exchange of thoughts on the matter of how the surrounding circumstances, such as the wind, water and forest sounds



NATFA Collaborative Project with Jordan Varbanov, Katya Ivanova and Spas Kerimov, with the special assistance of Assoc. Radoslav Milchev and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory Sofia Tech Park in Sofia. Music by Kalin Nikolo © NATFA

affect the thoughts as well as the soul of a person. This conversation is filmed and based on it there is a performance/public presentation. Some fragments of the footage are presented at the performance.

The second stage is about gathering information from the electroencephalographic apparatus EEG to study the brain activity of an artist who listens to the sound of nature or exercises an art form (performance of poetry, singing, playing a musical instrument). This part is independently documented and presented on the performance. It is the reading of the extracted information. It is the moment when the art is able to be reproduced. On the basis of these brain waves, we are able to create art in different forms - composing music/poetry. We are discussing the conversation (lines from a drama play, or poetry) with another person who is related to the object of the research.

The third stage is the use of EEG to study the brain activity of an artist who is practicing an art form (performing poetry, singing, playing a musical instrument). This happens in the circumstances of sounds derived from nature (wind, water), as well as the use of speech from the research object within a dialogue that is part of a dramatic work, for which a partner will be required. This part is independently documented and presented digitally. It extracts information about brain waves while the person is making art. The reliance on retrieved information. This is when the art is able to be reproduced. On the basis of these brain waves, it is possible to create art in various forms - composing music. A composer makes a music piece on the base of the collected data.

The fourth stage is the presentation of the creation, which is accompanied by documentary material for the first two parts of the project. This is a performance in which part of the activities during which the information from the brain waves was collected is performed against the background of the music that was created from the collected information.



NATFA Collaborative Project in Sofia with Jordan Varbanov, Katya Ivanova and Spas Kerimov and with the special assistance of Assoc. Radoslav Milchev and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory Sofia Tech Park. Music by Kalin Nikolo © NATFA

As a conclusion, there is a discussion between the artist and the micro-biologist, in the presence of an audience that will be able to interact and ask questions. A questionnaire related to the impressions of the project and the impact of the activities included in it was also prepared for each viewer.

The collaboration aims to define the importance of sustainability for humans and artists, to create art, through art with the help of technology methods and create art that is alive in every sense of the word, and is connected with science. Last but not least, it introduces an artist with his own thoughts expressed through art.

### **A conversation between Spas Kerimov & Jordan Varbanov**

The main question that's going to be the starting point of the conversation is - Is nature feminine?

Well, feminine or masculine is always a concept that is really related to gender and I think that our first big disclaimer should be that feminine and masculine shouldn't be related to gender. And when we are speaking about femininity the female beginning or the goddess only, but more of understanding feminine in its role and participation in creation. in form, not only in nature, but as a whole, is the zero, the negative space, because it is full of possibilities that could be born out of it. be useful for us to create some different reality and different forms. Exactly, exactly. Because out of zero or out of nothing, you can practically create everything.

To be the negative space, to be the womb that will generate anything you like out of nothingness. And that's why the masculine is, for me, the selector, the finger that is selecting what can be done out of this nothingness. So we're speaking about some kind of a duality in the creation? By all means. I think we are bound to think in dualities. It's impossible not to think in dualities. So for sure we live in a dual world in a way and we can adjust ourselves to some kind of collectiveness and it can be created by the duality of ourselves and this is a process that is connected to the creation of things and the whole thing, not just the world.

### **What is the role of humans in nature?**

So, to be a part of something bigger than you, is very important to humankind, to be empathic to the world that is around us and we can find this by doing some kind of meditation to destroy this ego.

We have to test it now. Boundaries. Boundaries, yeah. So, when we speak about connectedness with other things that are surrounding us, we can be concentrating on destroying the boundaries.

### **What kind of hypothesis can we make out of this?**

We can make a hypothesis that in some kind of way, the human kind can be not just the part of the whole ecosystem that creates some new forms, but to be just a part of nature, just part of the whole things that are surrounding us.

We can blur those boundaries and those lines between us and nature, between people.

It is possible when we use some universal component. They can blur everything between us and let us feel. These are boundless experience. And most often, eastern traditions use the way of destroying, not destroying, but silencing your presence as to blur and to merge with nature, but also with reality as a whole. This could be also one tool that we can use to is to silence our presence, our ego. The ego is the epitome of ourselves, maybe. And it's good to be silenced as well just for a second, at least, in order to experience some moment of rejoice with nature.

This is a process of finding peace within yourself and finding your true self to be part of something else that is outside of you.

We can concentrate on finding our true self by showing our ego and using some kind of meditation to do this and trying to find the true

self of the humankind, of the man, of the woman.

### **Is it possible for a human being to recreate his own self and remake the way of his thinking? Can this process be a key part for finding empathy for the surrounding world?**

Yeah, it's possible and many times when you try to remake yourself or rediscover yourself, you are seeking the far opposite. So here again we can start with the first duality between the feminine and the masculine within people, but also between spiritual and technological. We can also unite our brainwave signatures with meditative states. We can also merge them and we can also use this interplay between the two seekers in order to be one. So we can try to weave a lot of threads in one direction and with those kinds of counterparts they can act not to annihilate but to be complementary. And complementary and we can see such behavior of molecules and cells in nature between species and we can easily, not easily, but we can try to see if a true self-expression could be one thing, not a dual thing, but could be oneness. And this could be some kind of music in these brainwaves. This could be the music of connectedness. It could be musical, yeah.

### **What kind of an art form can refer to these thoughts?**

I think the art form that we can create can be based on finding your true self by the duality and creating music of the brainwaves. a person who is doing meditation to find himself. That could be the first layer and then layering more in experiencing those moments again and again and hearing the music created by itself in this wandering process. I think this could be very interesting research.

### **How could this be a useful process to find some truth about empathic way of thinking?**



NATFA - Collaborative Project in Sofia, with Jordan Varbanov, Katya Ivanova and Spas Kerimov, with the special assistance of Assoc. Radoslav Milchev and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory Sofia Tech Park. Music by Kalin Nikolo © NATFA

Between the two seekers in order to be one so we can try to weave a lot of treads in one direction and with those kind of counterparts that they can act not to annihilate but to be complementary and we can see such behavior of molecules and cells in nature between species and we can easily not easily, but we can recreate this in the form of artistic expression between two individuals, for example, and uniting in this way. Dualities. We can try to see if a true self-expression could be one thing not a dual thing but to be oneness and this could be the direction that we can take and this could be some animal music in these dark waves. This could be the music of the connectedness, it be musical. Yeah. I think the art form that we can create can be based on Frank your true self by the duality and creating music of the brain waves of the person who is doing.

#### ***How about the artistic form? What can be done to translate this into art, performed live?***

Well, this process is very interesting for researching the performing language. This way of expressing yourself by using information from the source, the brain will be exciting. Also this is an experimental work. Making a performance cannot be made in just one way. Not two, but many ways to express yourself. But not just have the same feelings put on the scene, but concentrate them on the theme of the research. The usage of the thoughts recreated again by using the emotions, which are created by them. This is some kind of an endless process which is recharging from itself. This would be a useful metaphor to regain power and to be sustainable.

This would be a challenge to express the artistic nature of the human by finding himself through meditation and finding inner peace. With the help of technology the artistic process will be a dual research to make the duality of man a whole, which refers to the connectivity with nature itself by making the living a peaceful action.

#### ***What is the conclusion for the process of connecting the art with the science?***

This is a question which can have many answers, so if we concentrate on the concrete artistic project we can tell that this gives us opportunities to think in a different way of crossing the lines and focusing not on the differences, but on the similarities. The research will give us the chance to see the beauty of different points of views about the same process. This performance will be a sacred ritual to make an effort to find the true meaning to be peaceful not only with yourself, but with the surrounding world.

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#### ***Spas Kerimov***

*Dr. Spas Kerimov is the CEO and co-founder of Pneuma, a pioneering company producing carbon-capturing living biomaterials. An internationally recognized bioinspired entrepreneur and scientist, his expertise lies in engineered living materials and 3D bioprinting. Dr. Kerimov founded the Association of Students Explorers in 2015 and the International Biomedical Congress - Sofia. Additionally, he co-founded OPIA (2018) a non-profit foundation exploring the nexus of science and art. A TEDx speaker, as his contributions have been spotlighted by Forbes 30 under 30 and The Outstanding Young Persons (TOYP) awards by JCIBulgaria. Dr. Kerimov has delivered over 30 lectures on living materials, the biotech revolution, longevity, and transhumanism. He is passionate about the intersection of AI, genetics, biotechnological advances, and the symbiosis between nature and technology.*

#### ***Jordan Varbanov***

*Jordan Varbanov is a professional actor and art manager, who has studied at NATFA and who's interests are in the field of the theatre and performing arts. He has experience with drama performances at different theatres in Sofia and other cities in Bulgaria.*

*As an art manager he has done 3 performances in Sofia and also workshop for professional actors. He is the head of theatre company „5x5“. The goal of this non profit organization is to develop the youth artist in Bulgaria and create opportunities for independent art.*

#### ***Katya Ivanova***

*Katya Ivanova is a professional actress, who has studied at NATFA and who's interests are in the field of the theatre and performing arts. She has experience that includes the participation of drama performances at different theatres in Sofia and other cities in Bulgaria. She is part of drama theatre "Nikola Vapcarov" Blagoevgrad.*

#### ***Kalin Nikolov***

*Kalin Nikolov is a award winning music composer from Bulgaria. Author of more than eighty theatre scores, six feature films, four documentaries and fifteen short films. Winner of: Three awards "Askeer" for best theatre music, two awards "Icarus" for best theatre music and one "Bulgarian film academy" award for best music score. He graduated from secondary special education at Arts school "Dobri Hristov", Varna and Higher education bachelor in Music and Media Technology and Sound engineering at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia.*



# MUSEUM OF EMOTIONS

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHOREOGRAPHER ALEKSANDER MANDZHUKOV & PEDAGOGIST VANYA TODOROVA

## Introduction to the Collaboration

This collaboration is a creative project and performance by Aleksander Mandzhukov's idea, inspired by a conversation with Vanya Todorova (Equestrian base "Achilles") with the participation of 1st year students majoring in Theater of Movement (Dance Theater, NATFIZ, under the supervision of Al. Mandzhukov). The musical environment includes Bach, Vivaldi and natural sounds.

The focus of the presented artistic project is an intervention between an artist and a professional from another field, on one of the main themes of the project - Empathy. As a professional artist in the field of dance theater, Aleksander Mandzhukov finds a connection between the language of corporeality and the empathetic impact through the body to construct a performance. Artistic performance through the body and the relationship with the audience makes a specific impact on the

viewer through an invisible connection and considers the relationship as a projection of a human problem. This creative project is focused on the understanding of empathy as a formula that represents it as a passive-contemplative attitude to the experiences of another - empathy or sympathy, but without active intervention to change through actions (Psihologeskii slovar, 1983: 413).

For the purposes of the artistic intervention, an interview-type conversation was carried out with a professional horse caretaker (equine) who works with horses for the purpose of supportive therapy for children and people with deficits and cerebral palsy. Main topics provoking the creative team from this conversation are focusing on the interesting parallel between the box breeding of the horses and the self-isolation of the people – alone in their own boxes sunk in another box that presents itself as a window to the world. And a parallel between communication



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with nature and communication with artificial intelligence. In addition, the communication through "emotional intelligence" is also explored. A person communicates with the world around him outside of his rational understanding of it. "Emotional intelligence" is one possible way to communicate with the world of other "sentient beings" and only communication through it can allow us freedom and peace. What it follows is a social experiment presented by Vanya Todorova (not her authorship), which provokes the creative team to create a certain interaction with the audience. Last, the human-horse empathic communication is presented: there are different types of therapeutic practices for restoring mental balance through a human-horse relationship, both for establishing a healthy mental structure and for developing certain qualities in a person for a more human relationship and presence with another person. For work and restoration of correct empathic connections in society and for the role of man - society. For the work for children with deficits and not only. Children

with typical development increasingly begin to experience symptoms of modern diseases such as hyperactivity, attention deficit, etc. Therapeutic work with horses - horses "sponge and battery at the same time" - is a good rehabilitation system for development.

The performance is based on a specific designated space, which is an association for an arena, for a riding arena for horses. Each student-artist is placed in his own box or space and tries to establish some kind of connection with the viewer through a bodily experience of a certain emotion. Depending on whether it is successful or not, the reaction of the emotion will be different. The second part of the performance is a specific construction of a visible network of threads such as emotions will try to connect the viewer with certain boxes, cells, emotions. And the subsequent violent severing of these connections, which manifests itself on the viewer when this visible thread is severed. A mixed attempt to recreate the example presented by Vanya Todorova and a psychological game from family

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psychotherapy, in which each family member is connected to another family member through a visible thread. The play of roles, significance and connection in the family (as the smallest structural unit of society). In performance, we will refer it to emotions as a building block of our own empathy.

The third part of the performance provides a choice for the audience to feel freedom as the highest goal of man. In the first stage, conducted an interview with a horseman, a person who works with horses, and teaches children and adults to communicate with horses and ride. The interview was filmed in the stables of the “Achilles” horse base, in Sofia, Bulgaria, with Vanya Todorova. The main focus of the conversation is the relationship and communication of man with horses and accordingly - how this type of communication affects our empathy towards other people. How does an animal manage to communicate with a human? And what is the key to building an empathic connection through “emotional intelligence”. Due to the proximity of a major thoroughfare, the atmosphere of the recording is a

mixture between the tranquility of nature and the industrial and technological progress of mankind, which corresponds extremely adequately to the topics covered in the conversation. The outcome of the first stage is a short film to present the point of view of a professional and provokes an artist to create a performance for the relevant empathic connections. It also aims to build an idea and a concept for a performance entitled “Museum of Emotions”.

The second stage is in action: a research experiment together with students from the program “Theater of movement - Dance theater”, the final stage of which is the realization of a stage performance inspired by the interview presented above. Students are challenged through different emotions and the way they can affect and express themselves through physicality. This communication between building an image of an emotion through the body and building a relationship with the viewer not only helps their learning process but is also a good basis for building the corresponding stage performance. In

addition, the participants themselves have never had access to such a stage realization from the field of performative arts, and it is a challenge for them to encounter this kind of conceptual art. This stage aims to create and present a stage performance. It also focuses on the research and familiarization of young future artists and their audiences with different emotions and emotional competence and communication for full communication and different contemporary stage forms through the body. Last but not least, it provokes the audience to a different kind of performance, interaction and participation.

#### **A conversation between Alexander Mandzhukov & Vanya Todorova**

##### **Vanya Todorova:**

My name is Vanya Todorova, I am the owner of the “Achilles” horse base, and I am the chairman of the “We Can Together” foundation, which works on projects to support children with special needs and their families. As part of this support activity, it is related to conducting horse therapy with children, conducting various activities and events related to making them feel accepted, to feel not only accepted, but also respected. Accordingly, our activity is also aimed at families and children without special needs, so that they can get to know their peers who have different disabilities, be able to accept them, respect them, which in a wider context greatly supports the process of inclusion, of inclusive education, which is so much talked about and so difficult at the moment. This is in short.

***The main subject of the EMPACT project is “Environment, empathy, sustainability”. How is it possible to situate the work with horse, horse breeding and the communication horse-human within this theme?***

##### **Vanya Todorova:**

The subject of the relationship between man and horse dates back centuries ago. As everyone knows, horses have been helpers and partners since many, many years ago. Now, with the development of technology, their role as a main means of work, so to speak, is falling away. They are still used as work tools in some smaller settlements, but in general it is falling away. Their role remains more of an activity for attraction, for having a good time, for relieving stress. Another line of this communication is therapeutic work with horses and with people and children who have various mental, emotional, physical and so on problems. Now, in my professional work for 5 years, I mainly emphasise the communication of children with special needs and the horses, and not only the communication and the therapeutic work with which the horse contributes to the improvement of the condition of these children. Horses are very good friends, very good therapists of every person, i.e. It works very well for them with stress and mental strain, which each of us experiences in our hectic everyday life.

***And is it possible to say that the communication with the horse assists us differentiate our emotions and somehow learn to recognize and deal with them?***

##### **Vanya Todorova:**

I have read that the horse is like our mirror, i.e. It reflects our mental state very well. On the one hand, his reaction is a very good indicator of mental state, i.e. When we are more tense, they feel it very well. On the other hand, with their behavior, with their desire to communicate, they take us out of this very moment, from the moment of the hole, from the moment of anxiety, from the moment of mental strain. Because when a person spends time with a horse, even if he is not riding, but when he is in the environment of horses, he goes to a very different mode of concentration and attention.

This is an animal with which we cannot afford... i.e. All interaction is no laughing matter. It is a very large, very strong animal that wants our attention so we can deal with it. When we ride, the attention must be on the ride, so that we can do well and not make a mistake that could be fatal at some point. It could lead to a fall, to an injury. By riding the horse, a person simply gets out of some severe emotional state and then feels extremely relieved. Whenever a ride has taken place, when a person dismounts from a horse or even if he has just been in the company of horses, he feels relaxed and as if all problems have gone into the background. Precisely because the attention is redirected, and all the muscle and mental strength goes into being able to deal with the present situation.

Our daily life is like that it is extremely busy, extremely stressful, in most cases many people do not have the time and desire to look for relaxing factors, relaxing activities even. Which accumulates stress, accumulates anxiety, and subsequently results in some other more serious mental conditions.

If it comes down to it... I will give an example for my question: If I have a communication with a horse or some animal, in a way, so to speak with some non-human Being. Does this mean that I will then be able to build the necessary approach for creating connections in human relationships? Or the human-animal relationship is not always equal to the human-human relationship.

Animals teach us.... So, for me, who still had no contact with horses until 10 years ago... and actually my encounter with horses, my personal experience, that I got to know horses when I was in a pretty big hole in life. Then I started just as a play, I wanted to learn to ride, I wanted to communicate more with the horses at another horse base. And in fact, for myself, I felt exactly this effect of letting go, of relaxation somehow... I pulled myself out of

the state I was in. And in a very soft and very calm way. And then I realized that this was the reason, this was the factor that helped me. And so, this equestrian base was created. Absolutely without any preconceived ideas, any kind of plans. It's just that I felt for myself what the effect is, especially of communicating with the horses from riding itself. And so, I decided that I could help other people feel the same way.

***Did this interaction change how you interact with people?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

This communication has changed my communication with people. It made me much more patient, much more (how to say it) positively emotional. I managed to bring out the positive emotions so that I could communicate through them with people, with more patience, with more empathy, with more understanding, and for myself I consider this a big plus. Because I'm a very impatient person, I get anxious very easily, but on the other hand, since this place has existed, since I interact with horses on a daily basis, whether I'm working with other people or just spending time with them. I feel much more balanced and much calmer. When I'm tense, when I come here and I'm tense, even if I don't realize it, their behavior immediately reflects it. I feel them tense too. But on the other hand, they are very strong energy batteries. And they manage to draw this tension. And this is what I was talking about earlier. A person after riding, after communicating with the horses, feels extremely relaxed, as if this huge problem, this very serious problem that he experienced before he came, has somehow remained in the background, it is not so serious, there is a solution. And so.

***Horses somehow help a person to bear his loneliness and not feel alone?***



Museum of Emotions ©NATFA



Museum of Emotions ©NATFA



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**Vanya Todorova:**

No, no. They in many ways help a person to bear his loneliness, because when .... In communicating with horses, one is never alone, that is one. But the communication with them, somehow makes up for the lack of another human being around. I.e. This loneliness is taken for naturally. One gets used to being alone and self-sufficient, which on the other hand is a big advantage.

*Now let me go back to your work, because you work with children who have communication disabilities?*

**Vanya Todorova:**

Not only non-communicative, but also children with physical disabilities, children with mental disabilities, children with sensory disorders. In general, when a child has any deficits, the underlying impairment is leading for example, a child with cerebral palsy may have severe mental retardation. Disability is never one. In this idea....

In a manner of speaking, the child also finds it difficult to find empathetic approaches to another human being, but with the horse...

**Vanya Todorova:**

This child does not find approach and connection with another human being or finds it extremely difficult. It is very difficult for the child and for those around him to have such communication.

Whereas in the relationship with the horses somehow this process happens extremely smoothly and very calmly. The child understands that the horse does not have these requirements for him. The horse shows a desire to communicate - he hangs up, nudges him, decides he wants to beg for a reward.

*Because our non-verbal communication doesn't always show emotion?*

**Vanya Todorova:**



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In a manner, we learn empathy through non-verbal communication, perhaps. Because we don't always realize it, i.e. we react very spontaneously and very irrationally to non-verbal communication. It happens naturally, in that essence. It does not lie, and in this way, through it, one learns to be more empathetic. And not only to be more empathetic, but somehow to be more considerate, i.e. a considerate human or non-human being.

*There is a theory about empathy that it is observation without sympathy and compassion. What is your opinion on this?*

**Vanya Todorova:**

This to me is a very high form of mental and emotional mastery. /This will deprive us of human thought. A.M./ Yes. This is human. We humans are used to expressing feelings, we can't seem to do without it. Because I have gone through many years of experience and a very strong desire to understand Buddhism, with them, this very

compassion, in my opinion, this very compassion, these zero points, the levelling of emotion. On the other hand, there are other philosophical theories in which we express a negative emotion towards someone who... Not us expressing a negative emotion but getting involved in the negative emotion of someone who has a problem does not help him. It adds more to his problem. If, for example, someone has a serious illness and feels bad, if we internally feel bad because he feels bad, and we think that in this way we are helping him a lot. There are many theories that believe that in this way we are contributing to his problem, making him feel even worse. Rather, we express compassion in the Buddhist sense, and thus a pure and positive desire to help, help him more. I have read such theories, and they make sense.

*And what is your vision for the development of the profession of horseman and of human-horse communication?*



Aleksander Mandzhukov's idea inspired by a conversation with Vanya Todorova (Equestrian base "Achilles") created Museum of Emotions  
©NATFA

**Vanya Todorova:**

Since my practice with horses began, I have always thought that they should be given the necessary respect, i.e. We must consider them as they consider us. There are many cases where I feel that they are not in the mood on that particular day. I try to consider their mental state as well. Especially when we work with children with disabilities because they are, so to speak, the main healer. Both energetically and mentally and physically. Horses are stressed and tired very quickly. They take in all that negative energy. A person who has taken care of horses cannot help but build a relationship. If he had followed this path of respect and acceptance and consideration, he could not have destroyed a relationship. A person who has followed the path of violence has no way to build a relationship. For him then receives an obedience, but this obedience is the result of fear. The horse is afraid that he will be hit, that he will be forced in some way, and he obeys. Although he has enough strength and energy to disobey. But it does.

***Is that really a weird thing?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

Yes, this is really the strange thing, and many people think that even in equestrian sports, and I differ and our actuality also. In sports cases of violence against horses are every day.

***Do your horses feel free?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

To be honest, working with them, sometimes I'm quite worried that I'm not giving them the freedom of experience they need. Horses, like all animals, really should be free. They should be able to run freely, graze where they want, lie where they want. When they are in working mode though, there is no way, I'm really sorry, but on the other hand they help a lot, they heal, so they don't... I feel satisfied. Right, because they can do it. I try to

create absolutely any conditions for them to rest. Like today, when the horse base rests, they were out, walking, grazing so that they could take their own.

When people are unwell, they tell each other, when animals are unwell, they have no way to tell each other and you think, now what, why did he do that now, is he well, is he ill. And all these things spin like a worry. Maybe at times we overlook too much, but to be honest since we started working 10 years ago, we have had the same horses. We have not changed horses - because of death, illness, or anything like that. There are horse bases where horses are changed every year, because they are used very roughly, they are overloaded a lot, they are injuries that are not paid attention to. And accordingly, when at the end of the season, when this horse is lame and no funds are invested in its treatment, this horse it is sent to the slaughterhouse, and another is taken. We can't talk about empathy here, or...it's not about empathy or any kind of attitude at all because this horse made you money this year.

So, I've noticed that when they're working with an adult or a typically developing child, they behave in one way. When they work with a child with a disability or with special needs, they become radically different. I feel like they know inside that they are doing something very special. And internally they understand that they are helping and that it is meaningful.

They are like a sponge, they really suck...

***Are they both a sponge and a battery?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

They are both a sponge and a battery, they suck out all the voltage in half an hour and, accordingly, return recycled what we need.



Aleksander Mandzhukov's idea inspired by a conversation with Vanya Todorova (Equestrian base "Achilles") created Museum of Emotions ©NATFA

Now there are even super modern diagnoses - hyperactivity, attention deficit, behavioral disorders, etc. And most children are very impatient. Most children are extremely screen-addicted. And this communication with animals and especially with horses teaches them many things. First of all, discipline, you can't do this now, the horse must be fed and cleaned, you come here, so you have these duties - this, this, this.... It also teaches them patience because you can't do what you decide and when you decide. The horse reacts negatively, i.e. Children need to become more patient. It teaches them to be more focused, because to really do this whole thing you have to put all your attention because otherwise one small mistake can lead to some kind of accident. Even if it's an advent.

There are a lot of workshops with psychologists leading them. For the reaction of a man and a horse, when the horses are released freely into enclosures, they are still free to move. And a group

of people come in and actually turn out to be waiting for the horses to bond with them. It turns out that more anxious people come with horses that are much calmer in temperament. And with people who are more melancholic come horses that are more active in temperament.

But the truth is that when we take a horse out for work, the children stand... Here we have a boarding platform. The particular kid stands there and usually the horse goes to him. Directly. We lead him, but the horses know that we go up and down on this platform, they know that they must stand in a certain way and not move until the child gets on. This is already a matter of training. But the other thing is that they go to hook and nudge the child or the person who came for them. They are extremely smart, I don't underestimate them, maybe they are much smarter than we know them to be. Because they know very well when they have done something that is not ok. They know very well by the intonation of the person who is

with them whether what they have done is ok or not.

In this direction of talking, I have a new question for you. Humanity somehow has currently put a huge resource to the development of artificial intelligence. And I was thinking about how a person communicates with a machine that is programmed for certain things? But in the next moment, the resource and knowledge that we have had as traditions in communicating with a horse disappears.

**Vanya Todorova:**

I'm not for AI or any at all...I'm very far from this topic. I prefer not to pay much attention to it, although that's where things are going.

***Even if we don't want to pay attention, it starts flooding us from above.***

**Vanya Todorova:**

Yes, that's right. Whether it's a horse or a dog, for me that's true communication. Which teaches us humans to communicate with people with our loved ones.

**Vanya Todorova:**

In a sense, contact with nature, with animals is priceless. It will never lose a role in our lives. Rather, if we isolate it to the point where we no longer use it, that is our problem.

***What will happen?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

What are we going to do? We will become robots. We'll take pills.

***And now we drink them.***

**Vanya Todorova:**

Yes. We will continue to drink them. We'll become

absolute sociopaths. We will shut each one up in our own box and so on. But that's the trend.

***Yes, but the horses are also locked in a box and despite everything they feel happy in themselves?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

Apparently, horses...they don't think the way we do. Their brain does not spin at such speeds, and they fall into such "movies" in which.... They rely more on their emotional intelligence than we do. We rely more on the mind than the heart. It just came to me like that because what is emotional intelligence? Exactly.

***Do they actually communicate only and only through her?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

Yes. It can be said.

And despite everything that it is a very primary process in their...

**Vanya Todorova:**

Yes. Even though it is a primary process, this is the thing that...even though it is not exactly like that, because right...it is like that in principle, most horses that are bred in boxes, as ours are, even though our boxes are not separated, i.e. ... horses are herds, they must be with friends, a horse does not live alone. Hormones have been studied in horses that have lived alone, they also suffer from such depressive states, the cortisol level increases enormously, they fall into anxiety disorders, as well as people who are alone. In this way we are very similar, we are social, animals, us and them. When horses are looked at, for example horses in sports where some outstanding achievement is aimed at, they are looked at alone. Box breeding, so this horse may not see a friend, may not see his own kind. And this, although not every horse would show it in a profound way, more anxiety or



Aleksander Mandzhukov's idea inspired by a conversation with Vanya Todorova (Equestrian base "Achilles") created Museum of Emotions ©NATFA

more mental strain, with them it also shows. The key word for me is respect.

***Empathy through respect?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

Empathy through respect for all sentient beings.

***Which is strange because respect is more of a thought process than an emotional one?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

On the contrary, it is emotional...and emotional, thinking and acting. So, you can respect someone mentally but not express it in any way emotionally. We communicate primarily through emotion. You can always tell when a person is expressing emotion by saying, "oh, too bad whatever happened to you, how are you?" Whether he just says it or expresses that emotion, and you feel it makes a big difference.

***Does emotion speak to us on one vibration?***

**Vanya Todorova:**

So, when our vibration rises to theirs then we are truly speaking of one vibration. When our vibration is low, they help us balance it, but there is no way to communicate even between people, a high vibration person and a low vibration person. communication fails. There is rational communication, there is no empathic and emotional communication.

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### **Alexander Mandzhukov**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Mandzhukov is a lecturer at the National Academy of Theater and Film Arts “Kr. Sarafov” and head of the Dance Theater program. His research interest is focuses on the explosion of bodily emotion as a synthetic over corporeal theatrical language. As an artist-choreographer, he works in various forms of dance, theater, opera and performative performances and creates also productions as an author. His work focuses on the materializing the connection between emotion and body and their interaction with the bodily emotion of the other. About the relationship between a man and a woman and the hidden truths about the nature of desires.

### **Vanya Todorova**

Vanya Todorova has a master’s degree in special pedagogy. In 2014, she decided to establish the “Achilles” horse base near Sofia as a place in nature that would bring joy to young and old. He completed a horse riding instructor course at the “Vasil Levski” NSA and a course in horse psychology. In 2017, she began working with children with special needs through horse therapy, which is why she increased her qualifications as a special educator and took part in an international two-year project under the Erasmus+ program “Innovations in Hippotherapy”. In 2018, Vanya Todorova founded the “We Can Together” foundation, which works to improve the quality of life of children with special needs and their families through equine therapy and through extensive campaigns aimed at increasing the level of public awareness of life, needs and children’s dreams.



Aleksander Mandzhukov’s idea inspired by a conversation with Vanya Todorova (Equestrian base “Achilles”) created Museum of Emotions ©NATFA



VORRES  
MUSEUM  
Athens, Greece

*Three Hundredth (230<sup>th</sup>) Concealment*

*Orbital Objects*

# THREE HUNDREDTH (230<sup>TH</sup>) CONCEALMENT

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST DIMITRIS ALITHINOS & MUSEOLOGIST STAVROS VLIZOS

## Introduction to the Collaboration

Dimitris Alithinos carries out his 230th concealment on September 18th at the perimeter of the Vorres Museum in Paiania, Attica. He ceremonially buries one of his works in the depths of the earth, performing yet another symbolic “memory concealment” for the sake of the future. Stavros Vlizon observes and intervenes as the archaeologist of the future, assuming that he is discovering the artist’s work in the future. They met several times over the course of two months, from the beginning of the excavation for the Concealment to the day of recording the work. They discussed the artist’s concern about the extinction of the human species, a timeless but even more relevant concern in our days, as it is what drove him in 1981 to start the “Concealments,” an ongoing work that is rethought over the years. Freedom and repression are strong collective traumas. Grief is a keyword for our mental state as a society. Revenge. It is an inevitable reaction to ongoing violence. It also has to do with the fact that there is no space for grief. And today, no one wants its public expression.

Through the discussions that took place, the work ended up incorporating Alithinos’s theory about the current human condition.



View from the Gallery of Vorres museum during the creative process © Vorres Museum

In summary: Wars, violence, and agony seem to mainly concern those who experience them, while for others, it is limited to virtual and harmless information buried in a multitude of news. It is a combination of an era that constantly pushes things into the next day. As you detach from collective experience, cynicism takes hold. The health crisis was also a profound social and psychological crisis because people’s isolation was enormous. We have an obsession with archaeology, perhaps even ignorance of modern culture. We don’t give contemporary artists the opportunity to enter our lives. Any reactions from the public reveal “hooks and a Roman arena function. We see it in social media too. We tear apart what we don’t like and the one who created it. I don’t understand why we have to have an opinion on everything, to express ourselves so aggressively. On the other hand, many things in our time are described as sensational and everyone is considered great. Words have lost

their meaning. Volunteers played their role in the preparation of the work and in the discussions.

The basic principles of EMPACT are revealed in the artist’s epilogue: The only safe “village” in the universe where humans can live (at least until today) is the Earth, and the future of humans (as well as all living organisms) is closely connected to this sacred planet. Only with it. ... “I believe that after the industrial age, and especially after the Second World War, which brought the discovery and use of nuclear weapons, the eternal conditions of human coexistence with nature and the relationship of species with the environment have changed radically and with such speed that the chances of preserving life as we know it are decreasing year by year. Tomorrow is already present. 2122 or 2222, as distant as we may think they are, are here, next to us, and are, without exaggeration, the next moments of our time.



Visiting the site of the artistic project © Vorres Museum

The indications that we are facing danger with awareness and seriousness are not optimistic. And if I'm not afraid of being misunderstood, I would say that as unreasonable leaders multiply and become emboldened, people become hypnotized, and technology, instead of being used as a tool for the benefit of humanity, becomes a mass addiction. If we do not anticipate developments, the destruction will be painful. One of the mottos for the Concealments would be "I didn't ask, I didn't take, I only offered." ... - My satisfaction comes when I realize that I may have stimulated the consciousness of some viewers and contributed, through the tool of art and aesthetics, to the interpretation of my era".

#### **A conversation between Dimitris Alithinos & Stavros Vlzos**

I bear witness that on September 18, 2023, the painter Dimitris Alithinos carried out another

'memory concealment' and ritually hid one of his works within the depths of the earth at the Vorre Museum, for the sake of the future. The painter narrates that the forty-year evolution of concealments is a creative process that culminates in an artwork with the goal and content of presenting the great dangers of the present. The painter is concerned about the great destruction and extinction of the human species, but it seems that the disappearance of culture terrifies him even more. And he adds something significant: 'In my life, I didn't create works, but I stored perspectives.' 'The poet is a teacher; he must comment on the society of citizens.' Thus, the role of the artist must be active in their era and society, with the purpose of art being the expression of 'cultured' people and their works. Every artistic interpretation in its historical moment is legitimate. But is it accepted as Truth?

I bear witness that I am one of many servants of



Artist Dimitris Alithinos bringing the objects for the installation © Vorres Museum

art. My job has always been to observe, educate myself, understand, and present to the viewer what I understood from the art produced by my own people. My own people are those of my era. Therefore, I am an intermediary educator for the present. The foundation of the narrative about the 'Concealment' works... Does art have meaning when its works do not interpret the life, passions, and anxieties of its era? 'Concealment works were born from questions and concerns, and by intervening in their own way in the core of visual language, they interpret our era, echoing the cry to save the human species. They were created to awaken the consciousness of their viewers, interpreting the enigma of Life and Death with the data and anxieties of their time.

Each new Concealment is an exorcism of evil, an offering to the present, a wish for the future...' and up to here, it's good. A trench has already been dug next to the Museum, waiting for 'offerings' from August 10 to September 18, 2023, when it will be closed. So, I tell you that on September 18, 2023, the painter Dimitris Alithinos carried out another 'memory concealment' and ritually hid one of his

works within the depths of the earth at the Vorres Museum, for the sake of the future. It is clear that this text does not deal with the evaluation of Dimitris Alithinos' artistic work; it is a testimony of what happened. It is the beginning of a story delivered to the public as a document for them to take as part of oral human language and turn it into a legend or not.

Point 1. Each Concealment work exists for viewers through its documents. Almost never are the servants and the few viewers the same, and also, they probably will never meet.

Point 2. The Concealment work is conceptual, and its final image is a painting by the artist that disappears immediately after its recording.

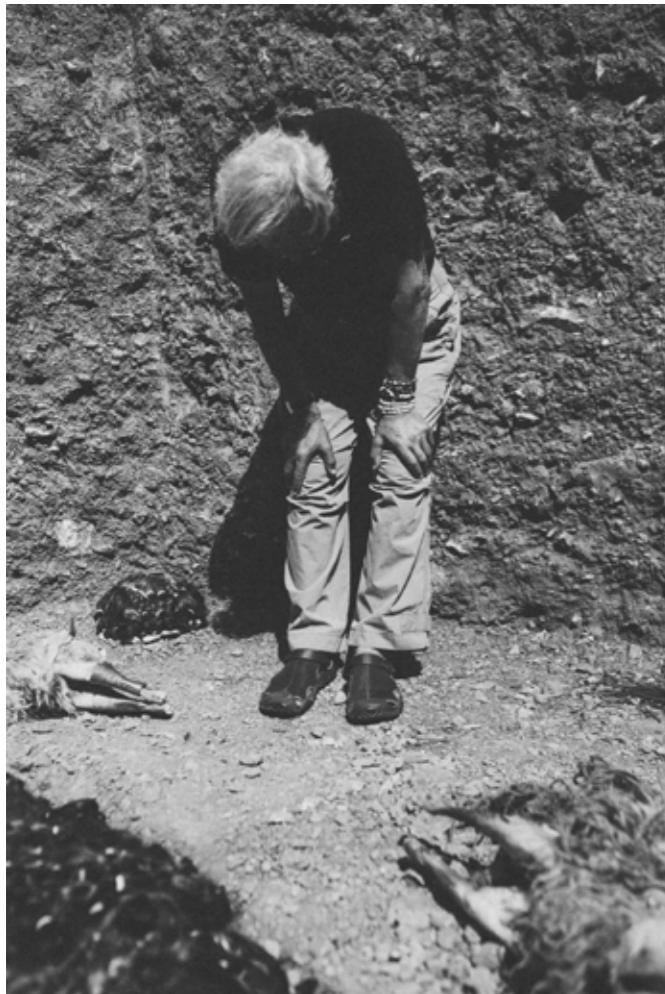
Point 3. The final image that the viewer sees, even one who sees it from a distance and does not come close, will not touch it; it is the surface of the image. Just as a painting can have many layers of subject and color, the image of Concealment has many layers of materials, most of them hidden.

Point 4. Besides the painter, the poet himself, no one knows the content of the concealments in detail. They must begin to shape the 'myth' from the surface and with an unknown depth. Nevertheless, I call it a painting installation.

Point 5. An intellectual work in the form of a visual installation is almost never reconstituted. It follows the web of the poet's narrative, who can compose the entire story, shape it, and pass it on orally or in writing, assisted by memory and photographs.

Point 6. The painter also becomes a writer because otherwise, he will not have access to the viewers.

Point 7. We see the documents and hear the narrative. We relay the narrative by shaping our



The artist at work © Vorres Museum

own supportive images. Ultimately, if the poet is good, we all have the conviction that we saw the work.

Point 8. While in conceptual art, ideas have more significance than the actual art object, in the Two Hundred Twenty-Ninth Concealment, the object and its materials have equal or even greater significance than its ideas. It is the artist's ideological structure that activates the object."

The Two Hundred Twenty-Ninth Concealment contains twelve thousand women's braids, well-cared for and fragrant. Twelve lamb slaughterings, unkept and dirty. Many bundles of heavily scented sheep's wool. Dozens of secret boxes submerged in the depths of the hair and hidden among the bundles. Twelve bottles of wine dedicated

nominally to the poet's beloved artists and pledges. The entire installation was created at the foot of a cliff that opens passages to the underworld.

Point A. Dedicated to the feminine entity that gives birth and to the beauty of the female presence that attracts the male, the braids divided into three symbolize love, life, and death. In their allegory, however, they contain insinuations that generally conceal meanings different from those that appear to be expressed.

Point B: If there are no remnants of the braids for future archaeologists, they will still find thousands of carriers of female genetic cells to reconstruct an army of new Amazons.

Point C: The existence of the slaughtered lambs may be a sacrifice of redemption, but also a simple slaughter as an act of survival by humans. The future spade will discover genetic information of a being that lived close to humans and supported them in the chain of life. I find it difficult to believe that a future interpreter will identify Christian tradition or Greek mythology, which today are so rich in allegories with the symbols of lambs, sheepskins, and the sacrifices of the work.

Point D: The wine will carry a taste of pleasure and reconstitution of the orgy of a feast. The reconstitution of the image may be the overabundance of females in an endless celebration filled with drunkenness and lust for the ultimate purpose of reproducing.

Point E: In antiquity, a "bond" referred to the practice of writing a curse or spell, usually on a lead tablet. A magical incantation is a practice and action aimed at harming or preventing harm. The bond aims to subjugate the potential victim to the will of the person performing this practice. The deceased is the messenger of a retaliatory desire received by the god, somewhat like placing an



order for revenge. Bonds are necromantic finds from the graves of untimely or violent deaths.

Point F: The cliff shapes the exit, allegorically leading to the future.

In 1789, utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham wrote: "There will come a day when we will grant other creatures the rights we have denied them by imposing our tyranny. The French have recently discovered that dark skin is no reason to abandon a human being to the whims of a demon. One day, we will understand that the number of legs, the hair on the skin, or the way the sacred bones are shaped are not sufficient reasons to abandon beings to their fate. What other characteristic could be an insurmountable dividing line?"

The ability to think and communicate with others?

A horse or an adult dog are more logical and communicative than babies.

But even if they weren't, what would change?

The question is not: Can animals think logically?

Nor: Can they speak?

But: Can they suffer?"

Fotis, Panoria, and Galatia were once in our herd. Pyrrhus, Eftichis, and Manolis came once into our dreams or fantasies. Diana, Thetima, and Iris came one day into our dreams and fantasies. The painter Dimitris Alithinos created a work with the intention of capturing the raw reality of human fate as he perceives it at that precise moment, insisting that works of art must be timeless. However, this work is timeless precisely because it is buried through a certain ritual before we have the chance to experience it, protecting it from any comment or hostility.

The 300th Concealment took place at the Vorres Museum on September 18, 2023, while the real



Artist Dimitris Alithinos placing the elements of the installation © Vorres Museum

world is sinking into terror, and while only a small chance of hope remains to be reconstituted from youth.

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### **Dimitris Alithinos**

*Dimitris Alithinos studied painting at the Athens School of Fine Arts and at the Academia di Belle Arti in Rome, as well as architecture at the Ecole Speciale d'Architecture in Paris. The connection between his visual and literary work emerges from both the artist's interest in politics and social reality and a common poetic thread in which rawness and romanticism alternate. Dimitris Alithinos is considered one of the most significant contemporary Greek visual artists, with a significant presence in the international art scene. In 2013, a major retrospective of his work was presented at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, and in 2015, he was awarded for his overall work by the Association of Art Critics AICA Hellas. Painter - One of the*





The preparation of the installation © Vorres Museum



Placing the elements of the installation © Vorres Museum

most important contemporary Greek visual artists! He was born in Athens in 1945, with distant roots from Asia Minor (Constantinople, Pontus). He has a significant presence in the international art scene, drawing his themes from myths, history, politics, and culture in his works. Over the course of his career, his literary talents emerged with a series of books, further enhancing his inexhaustible talent and his passion to express himself more profoundly. He completed his comprehensive studies in Maroussi. He continued his studies at the Athens School of Fine Arts (ASFA) and at the Academia di Belle Arti in Rome, and he studied architecture at the Ecole Speciale d'Architecture in Paris. His works adorned major exhibitions abroad and in Athens. Since 1972, he has held 34 solo exhibitions in various European cities, and most of his 299 "Concealments" are scattered in remote corners of the planet.

Among his participation in group exhibitions and international events are: *Avanguardia e Sperimentazione* (Modena, Venice, 1978), *Europalia* (Brussels, 1982), *Young Artists' Biennale Paris* (1980), *Sao Paulo* (1983), *Istanbul* (1989), *Venice* (1997), *Cairo* (1998), *Theologies* (Athens, 2002), *Athens by Art* (2004). He aims to convey a holistic experience of art through the collaboration of image, word, motion, sound, and action. His themes encompass history, political action, rituals, and myths from various cultures. The "Concealments," a series of works he began in 1981 and is still evolving, symbolically addresses the preservation of humanity in the face of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

Furthermore, since 1993, he has personally participated in cultural and religious processes and ceremonies worldwide with the goal of preserving cultures endangered by globalization. A notable achievement of his is the connection between his visual and literary work, which arises from both the artist's interest in politics and social reality and a common poetic thread in which rawness and romanticism alternate. This is why Dimitris Alithinos is considered one of the most significant contemporary Greek visual artists with a significant presence in the international art scene.

He writes literature, with an endless wellspring of inspiration within him. He has published the following books:

- "Lo - Logos Echo, Echo" (1976),
- "Histories of a Fluid Work," Estia Bookstore (1997),
- "If You See Time, Tell It I Passed By," Estia Bookstore (2008),
- and "On the Back of a Leopard" (2010),
- "To the Initiated" (2011),
- "Never Without the Innkeeper" (2012) by AEGEON publications in Nicosia. Additionally, his articles have been published in numerous newspapers and magazines.

### **Stavros Vlizo**

Stavros Vlizo is Associate Professor in Museology: Presentation and Promotion of archaeological goods, Department of Archives, Library Science and Museology Ionian University. He graduated from the University of Ioannina and Dr.Phil. of the Ludwig- Maximilian University of Munich. He first worked as a contract archaeologist at the Ministry of Culture (1997-2001) and then at the Benaki Museum (2002-2013) as a researcher and assistant to the Director. In the Department of Archives, Library Studies and Museology of the Ionian University, he teaches as Associate Professor a wide range of courses in Museology and Archeology.



Video screening in the Vorres Museum © Vorres Museum



Artist Dimitris Alithinos naming the elements - animals of the installation © Vorres Museum

*From 2003 to 2017 he was a member of the Advisory Academic Staff at the Hellenic Open University. He is the director of the Museum Collections of the Ionian University and the Amykles Research Project, and He is associate of the Athens Archaeological Society, corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute, member of the ICOM, and co-founder of the Athens "Roman Seminar". As Scientific Director of EU funded projects, he conducts research related to the promotion of the archaeological heritage through new technologies. His research interests and publications refer to issues of promotion and management of cultural heritage and archaeological goods, as well as issues of highlighting the material culture of Ancient and Roman Greece, and the importance of ancient sanctuaries diachronically.*

*01/2002-12/2013, Benaki Museum, Senior Researcher and Assistant to the Director, Prof. Angelos Delivorrias.*

*05/1997-05/98, 09/1998-01/2002, 3rd' Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classic Antiquities, Contract Archaeologist.*

*6/1998-08/98, Athens Archaeological Society, Scientific collaborator.*

*1993-95, Institute of Byzantine Studies, Ludwig-Maximilian University Munich, Scientific assistant of the Director Prof. Armin Holweg.*

*Since 2006, Ionian University, Department of Archives, Library Studies and Museology (Adjunct Lecturer for the years 2006-2011, faculty member at the level of Lecturer from the academic year 2013-14, at the level of Assistant Professor from the academic year 2016-17 and as an Associate Professor from June 2020).*

*2021- , Ionian University, Postgraduate Programme (MSc) "Preservation & Management of Cultural Heritage", by the Department of Environment in collaboration with the Department of Archives, Library Science & Museology.*

*2016, German Archaeological Institute, Cluster 6 (groups 3 and 4) meeting in Ancient Olympia, invited researcher.*

*2016, University of Würzburg/Germany, Professorship of Museology, visiting Professor.*

*2013-15, Italian Archaeological School at Athens, Postgraduate Studies Programm on «Atene e Sparta: I due skele della Grecia a confronto».*

*2008-09, University of Münster/Germany, Institute of Classical Archaeology, visiting Professor.*

*2005-06, University of Ioannina, Department of History and Archaeology, Adjunct Lecturer.*

# ORBITAL OBJECTS

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST PANTELIS CHANDRIS & ART HISTORIAN  
PAVLINA KYRKOU

## Introduction to the Collaboration

Pantelis Chandris is creating a work from the series “Orbital Objects” as a result of his research and in-depth discussions with the historian Pavlina Kyrkou. They are discussing the fundamental principles of his artistic exploration in the research of objects in orbit. They met several times over the course of three months, recording their discussions at the Vorres Museum and in the artist’s studio.

The work, titled “Orbital Objects,” is a study in painting with the aim of examining the rendering of shadows in the works of Giorgio Morandi, Francis Bacon, and Edvard Munch. In this research, a series of celestial bodies known as “Kuiper Belt Objects” was added, which are remnants of the formation of the Solar System. The installation “Orbital Objects” reflects a cosmic reference. It is an artistic universe with the ancient interpretation of the term, meaning a Cosmos where a sense of the oceanic, the awe of the unknown, the infinite, and the incomprehensible drift. Therefore, the works are part of an orbit, a motion that abolishes time and reinterprets the concept of the present.

The artist Pantelis Chandris defines it as a “peculiar planetary garden,” where sculptures and

paintings function as rotating objects. Their orbit revolves around a white, frozen, and motionless flame reminiscent of the inextinguishable but silent flame of monuments and statues. Chandris constructs an artistic narrative, an unexpected world, a world of contrasts and references that function associatively. It’s the world of empathy, governed by threads that connect and convey meaning in individual works while simultaneously connecting his work with eternal nature, with which modern-day humans grapple daily.



At the artist’s Pantelis Chandris studio © Vorres Museum

Pantelis Chandris’s Universe is not confined. Its boundaries lie in the associations, perceptions, memories, and references of the viewer. The goal of the program was to produce an object that would sculpturally, or materialize, the empty space that exists between the body and the “gray wall” onto which its shadow is cast. In the initial phase, I created a clay sculpture that represented, as realistically as possible, the hare from the painting, in its actual size. In this way, a model emerged that, when rotated and illuminated from different angles, would allow me to capture the boundaries of the cast shadows on the shadowed sides of the body (cast shadows) and the projections of its shadows on a plane that would serve as the painting’s background. Subsequently, from this original clay hare, a silicone replica was produced. This sculpture was illuminated at an angle that corresponded to the way Scholderer’s painting is lit.

This three-dimensional outline automatically defined the form of the spatial structure that needed to be filled with material in order to create a **solid sculpture**. This resulted from the merging of the cast shadow on the hare’s body, its projection onto the vertical plane (background), and the intermediate, invisible, and immaterial space between these two visible shadows. The desired sculpture (made of black porcelain plaster) is the imprint of this intermediate space, and the intended extension of the sculpture was done with a subversive disposition towards this paradoxical “objectivity” of the imprint. Through this process, by illuminating and imprinting the shadow from the hare’s body from four different sides, the sculptures “Scholderer’s Hare” # 1, #2, #3, #4 were created.





The creative process in Pantelis Chandris' studio © Vorres Museum

- If the balance between different levels of consciousness is what every person seeks, Pantelis Chandris illustrates through his sculptures and their various aspects of relationships, without, however, "illustrating a psychoanalytic manual," he clarifies.

- What is the artist trying to convey with this composition of polyester constructions? "I don't think I want to say something. Art does not direct, but advises."

#### A conversation between Pantelis Chandris & Pavlina Kyrkou

##### **Pavlina Kyrkou:**

In the section "Orbital Objects," you start by creating a universe or a "planetary garden," as you describe it. With the "stone" flame as the centerpiece, the composition appears to move in an orbit, which, along with attraction and complementation between the works, leads to a cessation of time. Through what process is this formed?

##### **Pantelis Chandris:**

First and foremost, I chose the flame as a familiar element: we have all seen monuments in which a stone flame comes to light a shadowy area where memory resides. So, this central element of the flame essentially activates a desired aspect, which appears in various ways in my work; this is the recovery, the reconstruction of a memory. Thus, having this stone flame as the central point, a series of objects develops around it, divided into two categories. The first category pertains to sculptures derived from the imprint of the shadow of a dead hare, making the shadow material, generating sculptural spaces. The second series of sculptures, reminiscent in morphology of archaeological finds, could be considered



The creative process in Pantelis Chandris' studio © Vorres Museum

products of excavation. It appears as if there is a set of sculptures - fossilized bones of large animals, bearing such characteristics that they could be perceived as pieces of stone, meteoric. The appearance of these objects "emanates" from our planetary system, where a multitude of such bodies, essentially the leftovers of the creation of the universe, are in orbit around a bright center, the Sun.

This relationship of the center with a periphery is something we also encounter in the garden. Gardens, in their initial forms, are defined as spaces where various plants grow, with a fountain at their center: the source of life, symbolically, and a source that practically sustains inherent species. The concept of the garden interests me and frequently reappears in my work, primarily because it is a rather complex concept, within which other notions coexist. Additionally, it is a natural space in which I had the privilege to spend my childhood years.

##### **Pavlina Kyrkou:**

Could the garden be seen as the basis for organizing your exhibitions? In the current exhibition, this structure is detected, with the fountain coming into proportion with the flame, and the works functioning as the individual elements of a garden, creating poses and paths.

##### **Pantelis Chandris:**

Indeed, over the years, as I have worked on these seemingly different works, which have emerged through my "essayistic" approach to certain things, some units of work have been created that may appear different but are essentially connected by a strong internal relationship. Similarly, the "adventure" with shadows, although it seems to have begun to occupy me much more consciously in recent years, is something that has been present in my work for quite some time.



The creative process in Pantelis Chandris' studio © Vorres Museum



The creative process in Pantelis Chandris' studio © Vorres Museum

**Pavlina Kyrkou:**

Regarding the issue of the shadow, the journey through which it becomes an autonomous space is very interesting. What led you to this?

**Pantelis Chandris:**

Searching for the beginning, we would “return” to the 1990s when the shadow first appeared, without any other form of treatment, as the figure of a person projected onto a very simple painting surface, aiming at the conceptual activation of this surface. This was something that intrigued me significantly in relation to shadows, having accepted the fact that the visual stimulus we receive when looking at and trying to understand the world around us is essentially created in two dark recesses of our body: inside the eyeballs, as in a camera obscura, the image of the external world is projected upside down. Therefore, this small internal darkness, this small internal shadow, to some extent, is something we carry and most of the time perceive as a natural phenomenon.

**Pavlina Kyrkou:**

Usually, we perceive shadows as absence or concealment. However, you reverse the internal and external aspects, revealing something further through the shadow.

**Pantelis Chandris:**

Yes, I was trying to understand why people tend to seek refuge in shady places. Many times in our lives, we all seek a shadow, literally or metaphorically, in order to reassemble ourselves. Even the word “shadow” comes from the word “iskios,” which means shadow in Greek, and it was initially masculine, but with the disappearance of the “i,” it became “skia,” which is feminine. The shadow is also a dwelling, in the sense that it is used to create a space under which one can take shelter, rest, and even dream. It is not coincidental that we often seek shelter under a large tree that casts a big shadow to be able to see the light through that shadow, the absolute, unhesitating light that essentially blinds us. So, thinking about these different shadows and their corresponding

uses, I started to perceive the shadow as a living space, not just as a natural phenomenon but as a three-dimensional, potential dwelling place.

**Pavlina Kyrkou:**

Shadow, dwelling, refuge are the starting points for your artistic production. How do stimuli derived from your relationship with nature and your experience affect your work?

**Pantelis Chandris:**

This is a relationship I have always had and still maintain with the outside world, a physical and metaphorical exterior. It is something that has determined the way I have learned to think and, consequently, to act. It is not coincidental that an entire exhibition titled “Man Is an Island” emerged from an experience of living on some arid islands for some periods: I would choose places that were uninhabited and completely inhospitable, yet managed to accommodate my particularity. So, living in those inhospitable environments, I often sought their shadows to both think and, to some extent, survive. The experiential element, therefore, enters the work, offering expressive solutions. Obviously,



The creative process of the rabbit model in Pantelis Chandris' studio © Vorres Museum

it manifests in various ways, which is an important concern for me: not to repeat something I have solved to some extent.

**Pavlina Kyrkou:**

You mentioned this earlier when you said that there is a continuity in your work, in the sense that you are looking for different ways of representation, forms, and meanings related to the timeless issues that concern you. At the same time, this very apparent elliptical quality of the unity of Orbital Objects, with the forces or tendencies of completion between the works, also exists between your sections, activating the intermediate space.

**Pantelis Chandris:**

Over the years, a way of understanding has been formed through a very internal process. As I mentioned earlier, while it may seem that each unit of my work differs from the other, many times one could conclude, having understood the process of producing my work, that there are returns to certain

themes in new formulations. For example, in Orbital Objects, these “petrified bones” appear, which someone could relate as individual parts of Ens Solum, possibly originating from the two supernatural beings, corresponding to a different scale, both physical and spiritual. The expressive disposition is different, but the meaning is very close. Furthermore, the relationship between all

these shadows, which come from and correspond to the body of a dead rabbit, what relationship can they have with the fossilized skeleton of a huge and perhaps supernatural being? Therefore, in the case of the rabbit, I am interested in the everyday, the recognizable, the familiar, and the potential conversations with something that transcends multiple levels, both concepts and units. This is related to the very interesting text of Argyris Hionis “Being and Non-Being (Hare),” which I

haven’t had the chance to read, but it seems to refer to the “rabbit” I am interested in:

- The rabbit is born with its eyes open and jumps as soon as it is born, not out of joy for coming into the world but because within its cells, danger and fear are already written. The rabbit is born ready to flee.

- The rabbit is like the people, with a gamma between alpha and omicron. The phrase “became a rabbit” could very well be “became people.” Ordinary people are always ready to run to escape from their hunters, autocratic or foolish or even

autocratic and foolish authorities.  
- The rabbit has no eyelids - it sleeps with its eyes open. Even in sleep, it must be vigilant, even from its dreams it must guard itself, just like a poet. Just like the poet, the rabbit dies with its eyes open - it sees death weighing it down, as if it were inserted into its heart, and then it continues to look at nothing.



The creative process of the rabbit model in Pantelis Chandris’ studio © Vorres Museum



The final artworks of Pantelis Chandris © Vorres Museum

- The rabbit has no body - it is entirely a hairy heart that beats incessantly and breaks, like a dry branch, under the pressure of terror. I never understood how such a bloodthirsty anxiety could be considered an exquisite dish.

So, the rabbit in the section “Orbital Objects” appears because of its specific properties, with the starting point being the research I have been doing in recent years on paintings that depict animals as trophies of a hunt. So, I started working on the work “Still Life with a Dead Hare and Partridge in front of a Gray Wall (1885)” by Otto Scholderer because I was more interested in the form rather than the artistic value of the work. These elements allowed me to “locate” these painted shadows in two dimensions, creating a sculpture that represents the rabbit with the utmost precision. Then, the sculptural rendering of its shadows led to these three-dimensional sculptures. From the study of painting, another sculptural formation emerges through the different shadows of painters, such as in the case of Francis Bacon, which is filled with paradoxical, underlying entities of a human form and they play the role of the shadow, but they are something beyond their shadow. In a parallel way, the shadow becomes autonomous, claiming space and existence within the pictorial space to become a “co-protagonist” of a pictorial subject - this is where my motivation lies in developing these “materialized” shadows. If the attempt to materialize the shadow and create a three-dimensional, solid object had not been made, the shadow would lack the claim of vital space in relation to the viewer. A painting represents three-dimensional space. A sculptural work claims space, naturally existing within the space.

#### **Pavlina Kyrkou:**

I was wondering, in closing, if in some way, this transformation of the place, the landscape, and nature affects your work or if it leads to a process of redefining all these parameters we mentioned - if it is another driving force for your work.

#### **Pantelis Chandris:**

The framework within which one thinks and acts is not strictly defined. The stimuli are endless, and they vary greatly. Through discussions, something crystallized and was determined each time, but



The creative process of the rabbit model in Pantelis Chandris' studio © Vorres Museum



The creative process of the rabbit model in Pantelis Chandris' studio © Vorres Museum

how many and different stimuli have worked is something else that works very productively. Now, in relation to all these changes, it is certainly something that activates the work, but in ways that are not apparent. I have never been interested in addressing urgent issues in a way that is visible. Even the work I am presenting now in Elaionas is a result of all these profound changes that have been taking place in recent years. It is not a coincidence that this work essentially expresses itself through two parallel addresses: one is the address of the poet, Nietzsche, with the poem appearing as a bright Morse code, coexisting with a love call

and a love address emanating from a male and a female bird, trying to find each other in a similar way to what the poet is trying to do somewhere. These two different yet so similar things - one is anthropogenic and the other is natural - coexist within a space essentially defined by a surface, of which the material is a survival blanket. So there are things that someone can “read” by looking at the work, and usually they do. Therefore, all these coexist, sometimes expressed in a more distinct way, sometimes insinuatingly.

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#### **Pantelis Chandris**

*Pantelis Chandris was born in Athens in 1963. He studied painting at the Athens School of Fine Arts with teachers Dimitris Mytaras and Rena Papaspyrou. He has presented 16 solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions in Greece and abroad. Additionally, he is a Professor at the Athens School of Fine Arts and serves as the director of the 10th painting studio.*

*For his work, he was awarded the 1st Prize from the Jannis & Zoe Spyropoulos Foundation in 1992 and the 1st Prize from AICA Hellas in 2010 for his exhibition titled “Ens Solum.” His works can be found in the collections of the National Gallery and Sculpture Museum of the Greek Ministry of Culture, as well as in private collections in Greece and abroad.*

#### **Solo Exhibitions:**

- 2023 - “Orbital Objects” / Citronne Gallery / Athens.
- 2019 - “Dragon Kite” “Stasis / Taking a Stance” / Thessaloniki Biennale / MOMus - Museum of Contemporary Art.
- 2017 - “Schattenentblösster” / Elika Gallery / Athens.
- 2015 - “Stealth” Elika Gallery / Athens.
- 2013 - “Issue of Faith” Elika Gallery / Athens.
- 2010 - “Man is an Island” a.antonopoulou.art / Athens.
- 2007 - “Ens Solum” a.antonopoulou.art Athens.
- 2005 - “Almost - In Between” a.antonopoulou.art / Athens.
- 2003 - “Substance II” TinT / Thessaloniki.

2003 - "Substance" a.antonopoulou.art / Athens.

1999 - "Medlent" Contemporary Art Space Epikentro / Athens.

1997 - "Parallel Images II" Art ATHINA 5-97 Kreonidis Art Space / Athens. 1996 - "Parallel Images" Kalphagia Gallery / Thessaloniki.

1995 - "Notes of the Blackboard / Kaleidoscopic Images" Kreonidis Art Space / Athens. 1993 - "Trophies" Kreonidis Art Space / Athens.

1991 - "Reconstructions - Remodelings" Domus-Desmos Gallery / Athens.

#### **Group Exhibitions:**

2023 - "Elaiōnas 2023: Earth and Anthropocene." 2023 - "SYMBOLS II: Memory."

2023 - "Free Associations in the Collection of Contemporary Art of Polly and Christos Kollialis" Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

2022 - "Idyllia Street" Technopolis, Municipality of Athens / Athens.

2021 - "The First, Last, and Eternal Biennale of Psiloritis" Curated by Stamatios Sitzakis, Heraklion Museum of Visual Arts, Crete.

2021 - "SYMBOLS & ICONIC RUINS" E.M.S.T.

2021 - "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis. In the Belt of Change" HAINAN, China.

2019 - "Coffins of Black, Coffins of Luck" Ileana Tounta Contemporary Art Center / Athens. 2018 "In the Beginning was the Word Thoughts - Images - Writing" National Art Museum of China (NAMOC)

#### **Pavlina Kyrkou**

Pavlina Kyrkou (1985) is an art historian, born in Athens, Greece. She has a wide and interdisciplinary work experience, in the art field, she has been involved in art criticism, also as a curator, coordinating exhibitions, guided tours and educational programs. Additionally, she has recent experience as a Press Officer in the 7th Athens Biennale Eclipse and also in the field of social media, communication and artists' coordination (PLAYGROUND for the arts artistic hub, Athens). During the years, she has grown a deep interest in the aspect of language and the experience of both nature and the city, as central elements of the everyday and in their extended potential, towards the orientation of forming conditions for change and inclusion.

#### **Studies:**

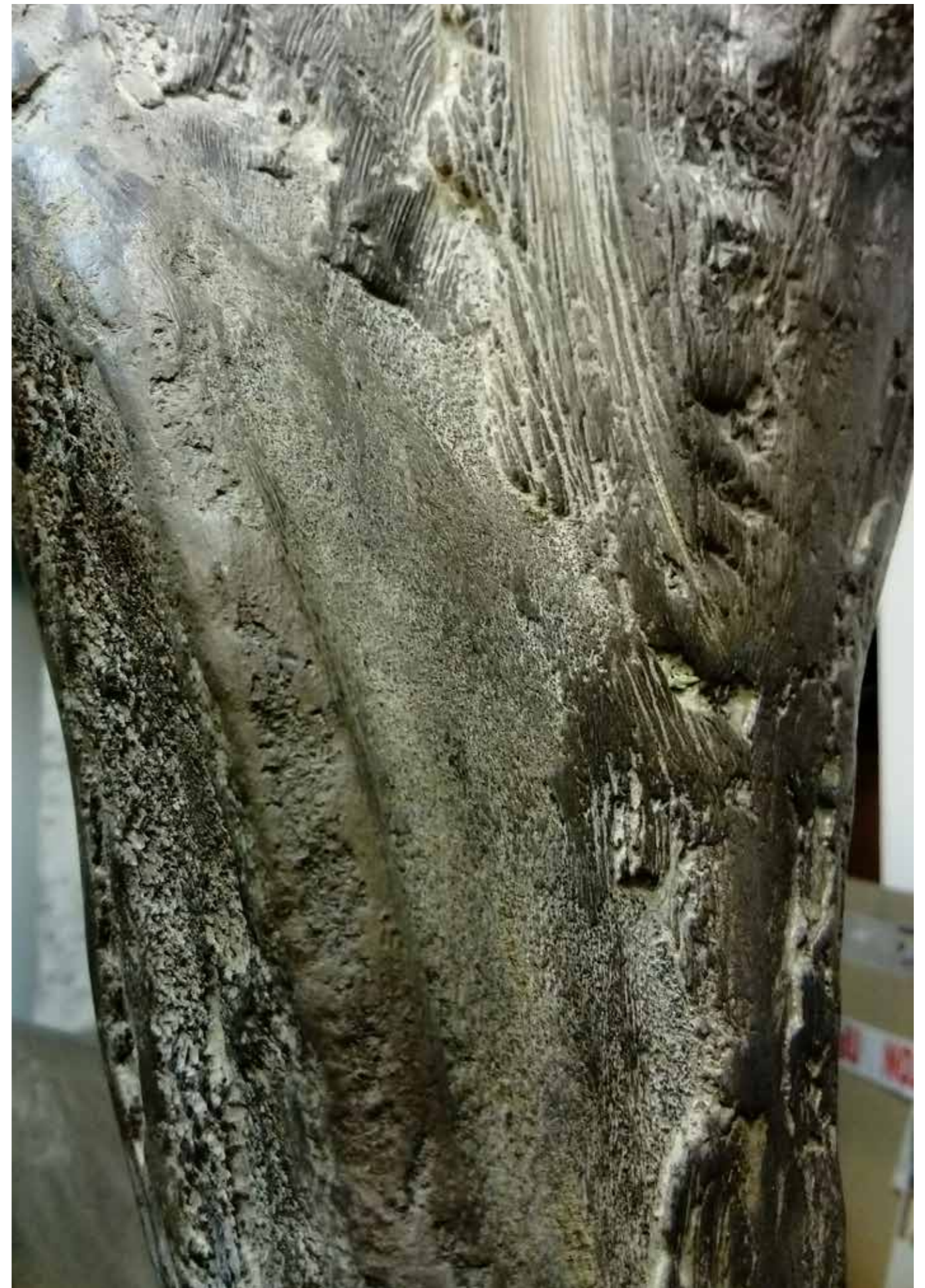
-BA History & Theory of Art (Magna Cum Laude) Athens School of Fine Arts (Asfa) (GR)

-University of Barcelona (Universitat de Barcelona) (ES)

-Department of Philosophy (Erasmus+ Scholarship)

-BA Philosophy, Pedagogics & Psychology Faculty of Philosophy, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens (GR)

**CURATOR, 365 + 1 sunsets of exception, Group show, ATHENS**



UMETNOSTNA  
GALERIJA  
MARIBOR

Maribor, Slovenia

*Marina Češarek Gallery*

*Man Face Down*

# MARINA ČEŠAREK GALLERY

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST ANA LIKAR AND ANTHROPOLOGIST TEA  
HVALA

## Introduction to the Collaboration

Ana Likar's art project *Marina Češarek Gallery* is based on witch trials, the prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft, and their association with natural disasters and medicinal plants, the absurd accusations and torture that accompanied them, and absence of any perspective of the accused. The unknowns, antagonisms and unresolved questions associated with these trials led the artist to lay the groundwork for the project by turning to the existing transcripts, historic literature and contemporary feminist interpretations. Her collaborator in these efforts is Tea Hvala, a writer, editor, critic and translator with the BA in comparative literature and sociology, and MA in gender anthropology, whose areas of expertise span feminist theory, activism and art, and who inspired the project at multiple levels already during the preparation for the collaboration under the EMPACT project. Tea's most notable works include the Slovenian translation of one of the seminal texts on the history of witch trials, Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2020), and *A Path of Their Own: Excursions into Women's History* (2021), a travel guide project where she served as editor. The travel guide includes a trip to Ribnica, which was one of the main reasons that triggered the artist's interest in witch trials in Slovenia.



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The first step in this collaboration consists mainly of the dialogue that discusses the existing literature and the dilemmas involved in dealing with historical unknowns and essentialisms that may arise from the juxtaposition of witch trials, magic, natural disasters and medicinal plants, which entails a certain risk of reiterating the very arguments that have historically contributed to oppression. The two collaborators thus begin by discussing the existing representations of historical trials, feminist interpretations of women's connection with nature, and reference books. They focus in particular on the work of science historian Carolyn Merchant and her books *The Death of Nature* (1980) and *Autonomous Nature* (2016), in which she recognized parallels between the methods involved in scientific investigation of nature and interrogation of witches, and the fact that the elements exemplified nature's most intractable aspect that evaded the control of the scientific method the most persistently.



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In the next stage the collaborators focus on the video text background, which is based on the transcripts of the hearings of Ribnica witch trials of 1701. The author understands them as a reference baseline, but at the point where the interrogation led to torture, which was used to force the accused into subjugation and coerce preordained answers, she transforms the contents so as to allow for always new incomplete answers, slips (of the tongue), and excesses, while forging links with the present. In these imperfections she seeks the prospect of questions (on magic, natural phenomena, the future) that mirror back and open up a dialogue. At the same time, the artist with the assistance of Tea Hvala returns to said literature and tries to position the text in the contemporary context so as to open up an associative field beyond facile mythologizations.

The conclusion deals with video editing and embedding of the textual part in a manner that ensures consistency with said premises. In the first place this means intertwining the symbolic and fictitious dimensions of the text with concrete material realities shown in the video. The concluding part also brings a presentation of the landscape and St. John's wort in the exhibition space, which in a way takes us back to the *Marina Češarek Gallery* as a shelter that can be re-built time and again.

#### A conversation between Ana Likar & Tea Hvala

##### Ana Likar:

A little more than a year ago, when I was preparing the exhibition at the Miklova Hiša Gallery in Ribnica, I spent a lot of time thinking about its context – the location, history, Ribnica museum and the house that accommodates the gallery, my personal memories of the town and prospective visitors, until at one point it became impossible to think the new work of art without it engaging in a dialogue with this space. As it turned out, the key trigger for my return to Ribnica was the travel guide published by the City of Women in 2021 – *A Path of Their Own: 25 Excursions into Women's History*. One of the 25 excursions in the book takes you to Ribnica and it was there that I first learned that St. John's wort

was used in witch trials to coerce confessions. This incidental comment triggered a series of reflections about the plant that I had known as a home remedy for depression and wound healing, and I have been replaying them over and over again ever since.

##### Tea Hvala:

The excursion you've mentioned took us to Ribnica because as the editor and one of the authors of *A Path of the Their Own* I wanted to write about the victims of witch trials in Slovenia in a manner that would give voice to the accused, rather than the prosecutors. When I first visited the only permanent exhibition on the subject in Slovenia several years ago (it takes place in the tower of Ribnica Castle, not in the Mikl House Gallery, although they share the same manager), I was left aghast, for several reasons.



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The title, to begin with, addresses the visitor from the perspective of witch hunters (*Bloody fight against the witch brood*); the exhibition continues with a sensationalist demonstration of torture devices used to coerce "serial" confessions, and then there's a very realistic doll of a suffering "witch" with a shaved head. She is hanging from the ceiling and when you look up you see under her gown, which humiliates and depersonalizes her even more, and certainly does not arouse empathy or identification in the visitor, but quite the opposite. Then there is the text that welcomes you as you enter the exhibition – it attributes the responsibility for the trials to the abstract "human" ("one of the great tragedies in European history caused by man"), but on the other hand relieves that same "man" (along with anyone today trying to comprehend the reasons for such persecution) of any responsibility, because this "phenomenon (...) cannot easily be explained with reason alone". As if civic and church officials who promoted extermination of "witches" were not driven by deliberation and intent, but acted under the influence of something irrational for two hundred years (as long as these trials took place in Slovenia); as if they were in an "abnormal" or "irrational" state of mind, without any free will.



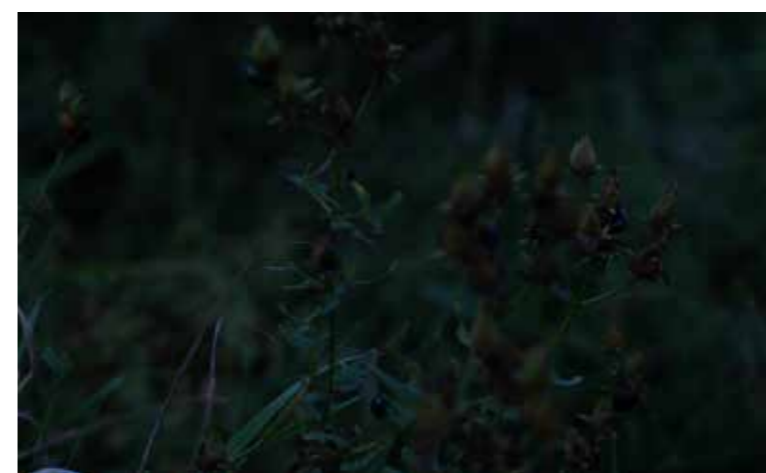
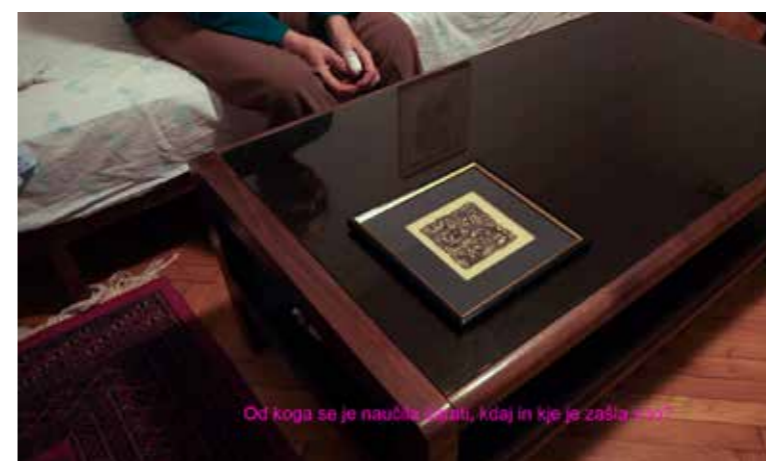


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St. John's wort and other medicinal herbs and animal-based remedies used by village healers, who thus also risked being accused of witchcraft, were dedicated the most remote corner of the exhibition on the top of the tower. The exhibition makes only a meager attempt at explaining why they too had to burn at the stake, but it does clarify that St. John's wort was used to force confessions because it was believed to frighten demons away (it was known as "fuga daemonum") and protect against lightning strikes and fire – albeit not from the fire that claimed the lives of between five hundred and one thousand victims in Slovenia alone. The history of St. John's wort is indeed fascinating and full of contradictions; it still holds true that this "panacea" is to be taken with care, because its effects can be as harmful as they are beneficial.

#### Ana Likar:

I have always felt that similar contradictions occur at multiple levels and open up possibilities for rereadings – of witch trials, devastating natural disasters (for which the blame fell on "witches"), and magic. All branches of these thought processes finally came together at the Ribnica gallery in which I set up my exhibition and which goes by the name Mikl House Gallery (Mikl was the former owner of the house). At the exhibition opening I was told that before the house was renovated, the exhibition space was named Marina Češarek Gallery (after one of the accused women) for one single exhibition. The circle thus became full, but not complete – these interactions (of natural disasters and natural remedies, accusations and defiance, magic and rationalization of work, dominant representations and marginal stories) became the starting point for the next stage of the project that will be on show at the EKO 9 Triennial, but at the same time I (still) see them as a slippery slope. I really want to avoid resorting to essentialisms, especially in juxtaposing the positions of women, medicinal plants, and natural disasters. Any word of advice?



#### Tea Hvala:

It is a slippery slope indeed, because essentialism is difficult to avoid when we have been bombarded for centuries with arguments claiming that women are defined by our physiological and psychological fate. It is argued that what separates humans from animals is precisely the fact that we are not motivated by our instincts alone, but have the power to resist (our) nature. And if women have

been denied this possibility, then we really are (have been), as Simone de Beauvoir argued in *The Second Sex*, reduced to animals and in this sense closer to them (nature) than men (culture).

Feminism proposes at least three interpretations of how women came to be related, and even equated, with nature. The first finds the source of this connection in the dualism that has defined the Western thought since the ancient Greeks (at least since Plato), i.e. the distinction between human/animal, male/female, culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, and similar. The problem is that we take these dichotomies to be hierarchical (humans as superior to animals, men as superior to women etc.), assuming that consequently the "first" may take advantage of the "second", and that we understand them as mutually exclusive oppositions that never overlap, have no nuances and leave no space for the third, the fourth, and so forth.

The second theory is much like the first, except that here the "second" category became inferior later, with the emergence of the mechanist thought in the 16th century, which was in contradiction with then prevailing view of the world as an organism in which all parts are interconnected to the point where

neglecting one would be detrimental for the whole. Science historian Carolyn Merchant thus argues that the scientific revolution brought about by Cartesian mechanistic philosophy degraded nature, the body, and women to the rank of "standing resources", thereby "removing any ethical constraints to their exploitation". (Cited in: Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*. New York: Autonomedia, 2004, p. 203).



The third position argues that these dichotomies originate from (social, patriarchal interpretation of) biological or physiological differences between the sexes, the main being that men cannot create life (give birth), which is why they long to deny their own mortality and equate themselves with God's transcendence, thereby excluding women, because we are defined by our bodies and doomed to mortality. It's only a short step from here to the conclusion that all ideas "of male origin" are destructive. Or to the conclusion that only women can offer a way out of previous delusions, because unlike men we have stayed true to (our) nature. Which brings us to the clichés ("women's intuition", irrationality, etc.) that deny women their freedom and humanity.



I cannot but bring this up because this interpretation is as harmful as it is popular – especially among women who have been disillusioned by their own emancipation, for it has not brought us only freedoms and rights, but new duties and dilemmas as well. This interpretation is important because its ubiquity allows for the possibility that your reflection on the connections between women and nature, and the artwork that it will shape, will be perceived as "essentialist", even if your premises are derived from the specific social circumstances in which this connection was established and in which it is still maintained today. Carolyn



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Merchant identified such historic circumstances in the work of philosopher Francis Bacon (one of the "fathers" of mechanism), who modelled his concept of the scientific investigation of nature on the interrogation of "witches" under torture, portraying nature as a woman to be conquered, unveiled, and raped. This grisly parallel implies that "witches" were persecuted because they were believed to embody all that seemed uncontrollable and impossible to exploit in nature.

**Ana Likar:**

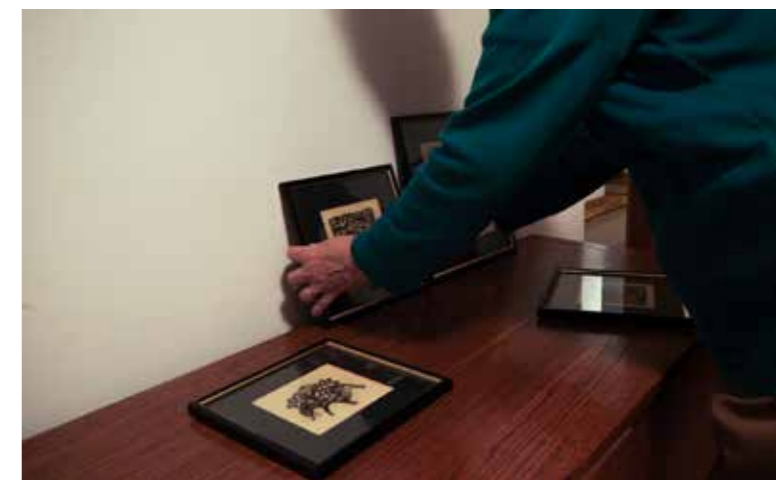
That's fascinating! One of the key motives that started this project was the transcript of the hearing of Marina Češarek, which is part of the permanent exhibition that you have referred to, and which first lent its name to the gallery in which I showed my work. The hearing was designed so as to leave no room for open answers to the questions, but instead coerced (preordained) answers through torture. Reading the court minutes I got the impression that in the course of the trial the victim's initial resistance and her denial of guilt inevitably always turned into expected, *demande*d answers. Without exact information on the circumstances in which such confessions were made, the trial reveals itself to us in the first place through answers that are becoming less and less believable, but at the same time more and more acceptable.

**Tea Hvala:**

In *Caliban and the Witch* Silvia Federici also stressed that there was a standardized, bureaucratic format to the trials, which accounts for the similarities between forced confessions across national boundaries.

**Ana Likar:**

I find Carolyn Merchant's argument particularly interesting. She argues that the weather was the most unruly of nature's phenomena as it remained out of control of Bacon's scientific method: "... despite all the successes of seventeenth-century science in celestial and terrestrial mechanics, the weather remained an intractable problem." (Carolyn Merchant, *Autonomous Nature*, New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 93). This perspective puts a whole new dimension to the following excerpt from the Ribnica trial: "Did she do magic? – The year before last she caused storms that damaged crops in our region and towards Croatia." As if this "confession" of having caused storms marked the turn that implied resistance against control. This led me to the idea to design the project so as to remake the hearing and use the questions



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as a baseline and a reference point, but allow the answers to remain ambiguous, just like the statement “she caused storms” never really concedes the final judgement.

#### Tea Hvala:

Excellent idea! It does, however, remind me of the dilemma associated with the epistemological difference between the time of the Ribnica trial (1700–01) and our time. Philosopher Luc Ferry illustrated this with trials of an entirely different kind that took place between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries throughout Europe – trials, in which animals (rats, mice, leeches, and similar) that caused damage to the crops (but not thunderstorms per se) appeared as legal entities: the accused with their (human) defense lawyers, damage appraisers, judges. Ferry argues that based on these rituals (unclear and comic to us now) we cannot ascertain the truth of an age “which we know today to be more beautiful and more complex than the imagery inherited from the Enlightenment would lead us to believe”. Like Michel Foucault in *Words and Things* he wonders: “How to understand that what was



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a fact of life in one world can be so perfectly hermetic to another?” (Luc Ferry, *New Ecological Order*, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. xvi). But perhaps this dilemma burdens historians more than it does you, because as an artist you are allowed much more freedom in your interpretation. So how do you imagine these new, ambiguous answers to standard questions from interrogations; do you visualize them, like images?

#### Ana Likar:

No, I am in the process of collecting stories and interviews, trying to put together a fictional dialogue that is based on archival material, but rather than simply recreating historic documents it opens up new readings based on slips (of the tongue) that occurred in the answers of the accused.

Still, I want to stress that I don’t want the project to focus on semantics. I guess that’s why I want to include very concrete realities – St. John’s wort, for example, symbolizes forced confessions, but on the other hand it does in fact heal (wounds, burns, depression) and grows (abundantly) on the very spots that exist like a kind of remnants of the commons – on boundaries and along pathways, on the edges of woods and fields. And while the Marina Češarek Gallery exists in collective memory, today, after a leaking pipe flooded the entire building, the gallery premises with their peeling walls and bare floors remind us not of the Mikl House Gallery, but of the archival photographs of this first exhibition – as if the Marina Češarek Gallery happened anew after the flood (just before more than half of the country was flooded in the summer of 2023). It’s with this in mind that I begin the project. And while St. John’s wort that I picked during the summer is hanging to dry in my studio, I wander around and film everyday scenes of places that hold these stories – along pathways, in the Ribnica gallery, on Croatia’s Mt. Klek (where witches are believed to gather).

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#### Ana Likar

Ana Likar is a visual artist based in Slovenia. Her practice ties together the topics of labour, ecology and the question of powerlessness while attempting to undermine the instrumentalization of nature for obscuring oppression and power relations. Usually in the form of installations, texts and videos, her work has been exhibited internationally. Most notably in Gallery P74, Ljubljana (2021), mumok, Vienna (2022), Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana (2022), Slovenian Natural History Museum, Ljubljana (2022), Slovenian Center for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana (2022), Galerija Miklova Hiša, Ribnica (2022), 13. Biennial of Young Artists, Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje (2023), and Youth Biennial, Belgrade (2023). In 2022, she was shortlisted for Vordemberge-Gildewart Award and in 2023 she received the OHO Award. She graduated in fine arts from the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, and is currently continuing her studies at Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main.

#### Tea Hvala

Tea Hvala has a BA in comparative literature and sociology of culture, and an MA in gender anthropology. She writes and translates texts on feminist theory, activism and art. She is the (co-)author of many essays, reviews, zines, and teaching materials, the children’s book *Skrivna bolnišnica* (Secret Hospital, 2017, with co-author Špela Oberstar), and the editor of the travel guide *A Path of Their Own: 25 Excursions into Women’s History* (2021). Her past collaborations (as an advisor, dramaturg, script writer or co-author) include works by artists such as Robertina Šebjanič, David Krančan, Tina Valentan, Maja Delak, Teja Reba, and Nataša Živković. Currently, she is co-working on an exhibition on the history of women’s reproductive rights in Slovenia (as part of the FIERCE project), writing and lecturing on media’s views on female masculinity (as part of a project by the Journal for the Critique of Science), co-creating a performative act *Festival of Possible Futures* produced by the Maska Institute, and collaborating with artist Ana Likar on her new work (as part of the EMPACT project).

# MAN FACE DOWN

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST MATJAZ WENZEL AND PSYCHIATRIST MIRAN PUSTOSLEMŠEK

## Introduction to the Collaboration

Man Face Down is an artist book by the artist Matjaž Wenzel produced in the framework of EMPACT. The book is based on a series of photographs over a decade in the making. In collaboration with psychiatrist Miran Pustoslemšek the photography project was expanded and enriched in order to create an in-depth artistic investigation on the relationship of man (figure) and his environment (landscape) in the form of a newly-produced artist book.

In his photography series Man Face Down the artist Matjaž Wenzel places lying bodies of men on the ground, surrounded by nature or built environment. The subjects are the artists friends and acquaintances, belonging to the artist's broad generation of middle age, some on the precipice of it and others firmly in it. They are a varied band of characters, creatives, men of ambition, inquisitive, thinking men, who, it seems, have stumbled on their way and landed face down on the floor. Wenzel uses the uncanny placement of the immobile men (at least immobile when captured in the photograph) in the wide shots of his framing in order to illustrate how small and powerless one is in the context of his surroundings: be it local or indeed global. A reading of the scenes as a metaphor for the struggle of man is possible. The eternal questions of man vs. nature, man vs. man, man vs. self can be explored in these images. Furthermore,

parallels between the impermanence of men, of nature and indeed of image can be drawn. Invoking Susan Sontag's seminal text Regarding the Pain of Others, the relationship between the weapon and the camera becomes a frame of reference: have the men been shot? By a camera?

For the artist book, the images have been equipped with texts from an amalgamation of sources: interviews with the subjects of the photographs, quotations from literature, literary impressions by the author and his frequent collaborators and by a psychiatric insight by the psychiatrist Miran Pustoslemšek. Thus, an exercise in thoughtful empathy towards these depicted resilient artists is invoked.

Finally, the artist book adds to the broader field of interest of the UGM | Maribor Art Gallery in the framework of EMPACT, which will culminate in the final contemporary art exhibition of the project in the spring of 2024: the body in nature, the body as nature and the potential of this mindset to personalise, internalise and meld the emotional response we, as bodies have towards the natural environment.

## A conversation between Matjaž Wenzel & Miran Pustoslemšek

**Matjaž Wenzel:**  
Man Face Down, my series of photographs,

thematises the influence the (social) environment can hold over the individual, among other things. From the point of view of psychiatry, how would you define the influence of the environment on a person?

**Miran Pustoslemšek:**  
In very different aspects and dimensions, but in each case, individually as well as on a broader level. I wouldn't limit the influence to the social environment only. For example, the influence of a mountainous environment compared to a flat one, with regard to the availability of resources and the work invested for survival, which is consequently said to be a local character trait, for example, stinginess or generosity, the level of mutual solidarity, but also melancholy in the absence of light and warmth. Not only physical, but also political environmental factors have an influence, for example paranoia and apathy, but also conformity, even with agency, in

totalitarian systems.

The matrix for the system of transmission of cultural elements is a key system that forms personality and defines mutual relations, including positions of power and subordination. The stability of the matrix is necessary for the stability of civilization, on the other hand, it can be very limiting. Of course, an individual with a higher level of self-awareness and non-conformity,



Matjaž Wenzel ©\_MAN FACE DOWN

# D A M

The asphalt of all roads would decay after just two years – grass, rhizomes, and the likes would have done their job. The last human structure to disappear from the face of the Earth is said to be the Hoover Dam, that still has wet concrete in its foundations today. It would take about a thousand years for it to disappear.

8

9



The oldest walk at the front and lead the pack, as everyone can advance at their pace. The strong males follow at the core. After come the females with their pups. Lastly goes the alpha – the leader of the pack. A little further back, keeping everyone in his sight. The weak come first while the strongest, at the tail, protects their back. The capital, however, sets up the manager as a general who commands and persecutes, not someone who cooperates and protects. We can't even learn from animals.



**Can artificial intelligence solve matters scientists don't even know about? Challenges we are not aware of? Will AI be able to ask questions that arise each new day? For instance, solve the dilemmas of artificial intelligence itself?**

Many solutions to humanity's problems rose from the unconscious, for instance via dreams, meditation, or something alike ... Is AI capable of that? To dream? Is it capable of nonsense?

Matjaž Wenzel © MAN FACE DOWN

sense of exploration has more individual peculiarities, seasoned with more or less random events and circumstances that shape us. In a cross-generational way too. It should be emphasized that the matrix itself in our post-traditional period is subject to changes created by technological progress and social changes, new ideologies, secularism, the Sexual Revolution, the affirmation of subordinate classes and gender, and also the reaffirmation of conservatism.

At the individual level, the concept of neuroplasticity should be emphasized, the essence of which is that the central nervous system, in a neurophysiological sense, is in a constant dynamic relationship with environmental influences, regardless of their valence. It also reacts to the absence of environmental influences, for example with hallucinations when confined to a space without sensory stimuli. Of course, there is also a modern, digital component of influence, which is in a dynamic relationship with the “analog” segment, which is of course older and perhaps has the greatest consequences due to its absence, which is eliminated by the modern “digitalized” subject.

**What prompted you to start the series? Why “man face down”?**

**Matjaž Wenzel:**

The trigger was a comment made during the summer of 2012, when the city of Maribor held the title of the European Capital of Culture, where at first the naive hope for a cultural renaissance in a provincial city was quickly replaced by the fact that things turned sour. I was invited by curator Vasja Nagy and



Where is the limit of creativity?  
Are these algorithms capable of being faster than human imagination?

**What will the capital still need from humans?  
A body? The signature of that body, perhaps.**

Maybe only at

created three large-format photographs captured behind glass in a wooden frame and hung them on the walls of the Stolp Photogallery. They were a commentary, at that time still without words. Later, with extended pauses in between, I expanded the series, until I felt the moment was right to collect the series in the form of this book.

The portrait of a reclining figure (in the exterior), lying belly and face down is the polar position of the usual standing or sitting position. Such image instantly evokes the feeling of discomfort in the viewer, that something is wrong and alludes to misfortune, confusion and mortality. I was interested in the effect an experiment might have, of specific portraits of male artists in their middle age. It addresses a generation that experienced cardinal changes in the social fabric and values and grew up with the foundation of humanism, then had to adapt to the world of pragmatic materialism. The presentation of public figures from the opposite point of view that is expected from marketing practices, is established both in the artistic aspect of depicting a reclining figure, as well as in the text, which is based on intimate conversations with the chosen subjects depicted in the project.

The lying position is a punctum, an irritation, a state of appeal, of communication and of warning. There are many possible interpretations.



Matjaž Wenzel © MAN FACE DOWN

**Nurture or nature: how much is a person shaped by socialization/upbringing and how much are they shaped by (an innate?) character? What shapes a person's view of his environment?**

**Miran Pustoslemšek:**

This dilemma ranks high in scientific inquiry and the answer is indeed unclear. Certain biological components can have such a power that socialization has little chance of influence, perhaps only on a superficial, "cosmetic" level. A good example

of this is psychopathy. The smaller the potent biological component, the more room there is for socialization to have an effect. In traditional society, socialization has greater immanent power, in postmodernism, paradoxically, in its chaos, it gives more space to biological influence, which is reflected in the occurrence of psychological disorders, even in epidemiological dimensions. In particular, the higher frequency of personality disorders due to unstable conditions during the formative early years of life, when personality is shaped, stands out.

A person's view of the environment creates "big" and "small" stories or circumstances. The aforementioned factors actually outline the scenario, which is then shaped by life with all its range of interference, from talents, traumas, competitiveness, need for security, physical appearance to banal coincidences.

**The testimonies of Man Face Down seem more bitter than sweet. But is there an element to their honesty that has a potential of bringing relief to the subjects?**

**Matjaž Wenzel:**

What's interesting, for example, is how often the following exchange takes place when meeting an acquaintance: "How are you?" "I'm okay, thanks, how about you? I'm okay as well." People don't commonly reveal what's behind the mask, most often it's simply a matter of being polite, rather than a real interest or concern for the fellow person.

Being truly honest and addressing generally avoided or silenced topics is what makes way for new dialogues and spurs reflection. The texts accompanying the photographs are of various kinds, short or long, sometime confessional, other times responding to social situations, place, country, the position of artists in society, to successes or failures, to contempt, but also to fond memories...

**How, in your view, is a person's psyche affected by a state of crisis or disappointment, which remains unaddressed, which is suppressed?**

**Miran Pustoslemšek:**

Confusion in the realm of the unconscious has a strong energy valence, within the framework of defence mechanisms it takes a huge range of shapes, either in behaviour, in the area of motivation, of establishing relationships, and in the area of subjective experiences and moods. When the disorder occurs, for how long and in with what intensity depends indeed significantly on the level of subjective psychological maturity and the level of vulnerability. In the field of mental health, disorders appear when they cause psychological symptoms, dysfunctionality or behavioural outbursts.

**What environments do you place the subjects you portray in?**

**Matjaž Wenzel:**

At its core, the project is spatially oriented around the city of Maribor and its surroundings. The artists all have something to do with the city in one way or another. The locations were proposed or chosen by the subjects depicted in them, who form either emotional or intellectual relationships with them. Figuratively, these images thus hint at the subjects' experiences of (or even at the consequences of) the state of the city, the country or the society as a whole. In some cases, the relationship to their environment is expressed through an intimate and hermetic feeling, and in others it can be read as a social commentary.

In an unfinished video project of mine, the footage of a person screaming in a wide shot conveys analogous message to the experiment of the reclining figures in this series. There too, the subject is depicted relatively small in the context of the meaningfully chosen location in which they are placed. Someone denoted, that as a mature man, he could have screamed out loud in the yard of his elementary school, where he had experienced bullying from fellow classmates for many years because of his nature.

**A sense of being misunderstood or an indifference of the environment towards one must have a negative effect on a person. On the contrary, a sense of connection with the environment, an active role in society makes a person feel fulfilled. Is that right?**

**Miran Pustoslemšek:**

Entirely correct. In our genome, the connection with a reference group is represented in a period of millions of years, not limited even to the homo sapiens period. The postmodern fragmentation of society, which has been a thing for the last 150 years, is therefore a speck in the era of human evolution and at the same time a major formal handicap, which, together with the increase in life expectancy, increases the number of the unhappy, ailing and lonely people. In European cities, the share of single-member households is between 50-60%, Great Britain has a Ministry of Loneliness, in Japan there are funeral companies, specialized in disposing of decomposing bodies of those, who were only discovered dead because of the stench emitting from their flats. Technological progress and digitized modern administrative procedures bring a lot of new problems and obstacles too, particularly to older people.

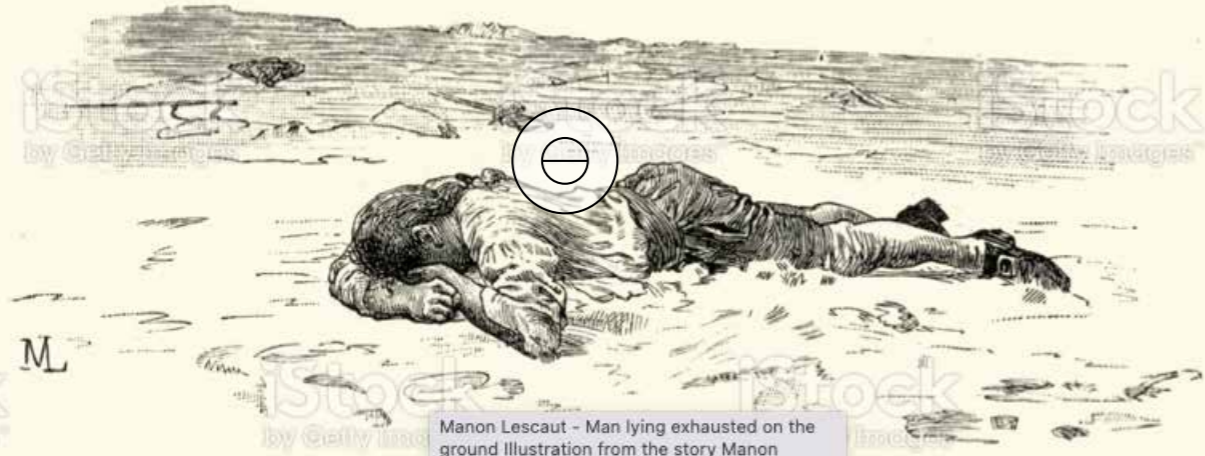
Manon Lescaut, *Man lying exhausted on the ground*, 18<sup>th</sup> century

Abraham Bloemaert, *Two reclining nude male figures and a foot study*, 18<sup>th</sup> century

Dall-E, *Man face down*, Caravaggio painting, 2022

Jan Both, *Cavalier lying on the ground*, c. 1640

Hendrick Avercamp, *Peasant boy lying on the ground sleeping*, c. 1620

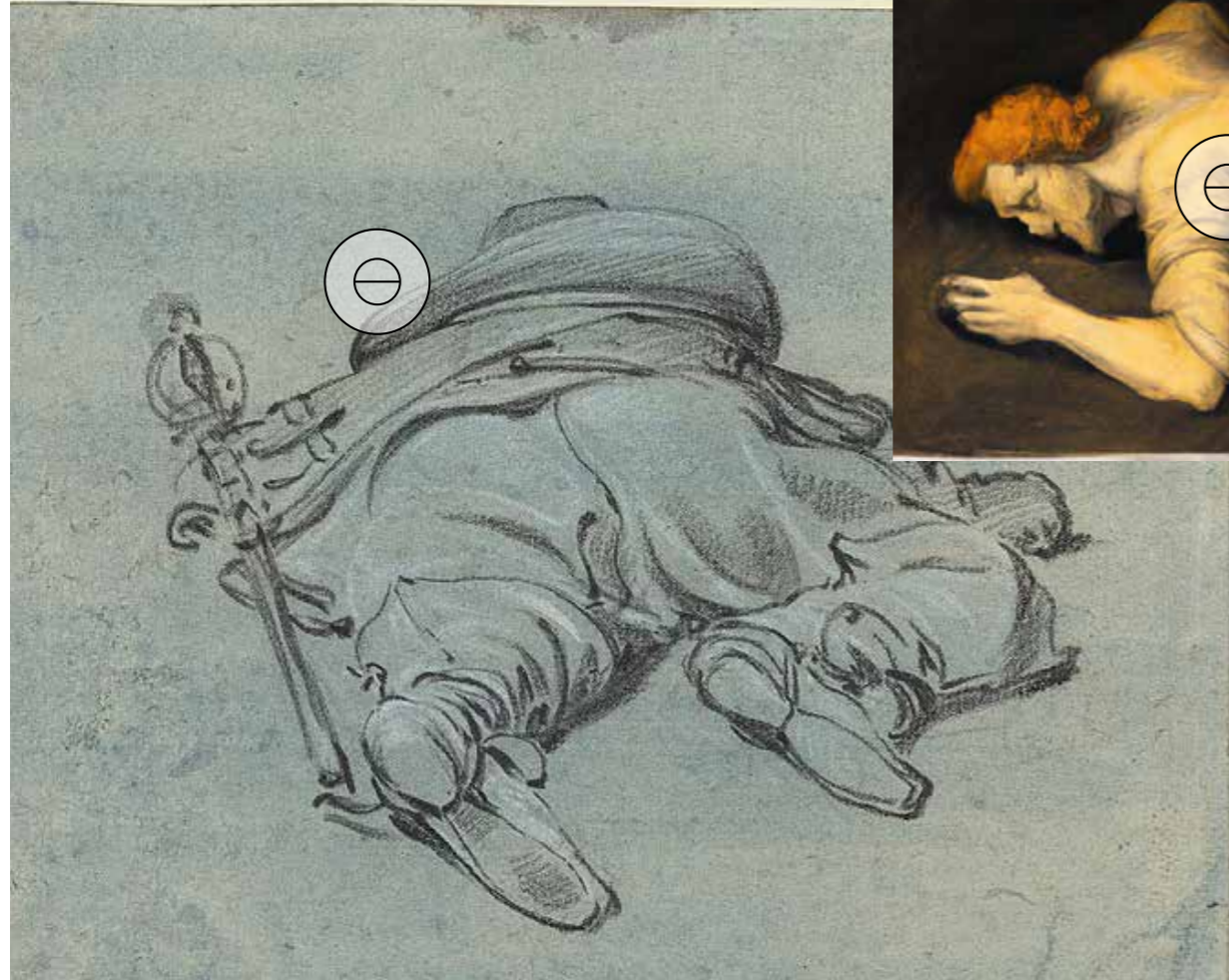


Manon Lescaut - Man lying exhausted on the ground Illustration from the story Manon Lescaut by Abbe Prevost. Set in France and Louisiana in the early 18th century, the story follows the hero, the Chevalier des Grieux, and his lover, Manon Lescaut. Man lying exhausted on the ground Shock stock illustration



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Matjaž Wenzel © MAN FACE DOWN

Publisher and gallerist, 60

It was a special oak - after, a new one had to be imported from the Netherlands.

# 2017



**After, that tree was turned into a sculpture. They cut the branches, and started to carve a bear, a squirrel, an eagle and so on from the trunk. The authors were famous carvers, who have an annual colony in Makole, where they carve from old trunks. Of course, an art project in the centre of Maribor was a great opportunity for them. In fact, this was a precursor and an announcement of the European Capital of Culture - pure energy. Pure rural energy.**

Maribor can no longer exist without a crisis. As if, without one, it might lose its identity.

Matjaž Wenzel © MAN FACE DOWN



**People get excited rapidly - there are too many things going on - it's all fast food. As for history, you have to delve in it.**

**There is no audience. I have no one to sell to. Perhaps to 50 libraries and maybe 20 individuals. Perhaps.**

The project has in some shape or form been in the making for more than a decade. How did the portrayed subjects respond to your initial invitation? And what were some of the reactions of the passers-by while you were taking photographs in public?

### **Matjaž Wenzel:**

the project, accepted it and identified with it, there was no other way. A simple action can be a very interesting thing, when a person lying face down on the ground in public space is received with an extremely strong reaction; in an instant a distressing situation arises - something is wrong. The scene, which without the reclining figure would be nothing but ordinary, becomes the scene of drama.

Once while shooting in the city park, the large-format camera on the tripod was partially obscured by a public sculpture, so the reclining subject for a few moments appeared to be lying motionless on the ground next to a young tree. This prompted a young couple to come running, worried and ready to help the man on the ground. There were not many other such situations, most of the time passers-by simply gave us a surprised look.

*Speaking of lying on the floor: In recent years, there has been some discussion on the benefits of some kind of literal grounding, touching the ground. Do you believe there can be a tangible or even a measurable impact on a person; contact with the earth below our feet?*

### **Miran Pustoslemšek:**

In an attempt to neutralize the confusion of modern life, including the supersonic speed of life, we turn to such things, among others, whether using intuition or information. There is also the concept of grounding in the sense of mindfulness, which a new-age iteration of traditional Buddhist and Hindu practices. What I'm trying to say is that our grandmothers had less to complain about when they worked in the garden, which can be seen as a traditional form of grounding, which may have benefited them more than many of the new-age practices. Contact with nature in any form is one of the better ways of self-healing and finding balancing.

*What kind of response do you expect from the audience? Pity, sympathy, empathy, understanding?*

### **Matjaž Wenzel:**

It's not about expectation, nor about complaining or feeling sorry for oneself, rather a desire to activate thought and awareness in a broader sense. We live in a time when very few things touch people or hardly anything moves them. Being bombarded with information makes people numb to the human desire for a deeper, slower meaning. That's why people often don't fully grasp the message, they skim through books superficially, perhaps they only read large or highlighted text.

The book Man Face Down is a unique visual and textual document that marks the often-hidden experience of middle-aged artists in the city of Maribor. It is also a book about Maribor. Reclining figures can easily evoke a feeling of discomfort, morbidity, which is a sensation that can easily overpower and overshadow the core message. At the same time, this very state of lying down acts as a kind of lure, to listen to the subtle whispers and screams of the portrayed artist.





**Final question: What can help a person get off the ground?**

**Miran Pustoslemšek:**

A hand, extended to them by either a friend or by a stranger, sometimes by an expert. And at times they could do with the addition of a concrete, but professional, ethical and politically correct “kick in the ass”.

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**Matjaž Wenzel**

Matjaž Wenzel is an artist working in the mediums of photography, video, graphic design. He graduated from the University of Maribor in fine art. Following several engagements as an art teacher, he founded the studio MILIMETER for photography and graphic design. He has designed over 50 books and book jackets for several publishing houses. With his photographic works, he has had several solo exhibitions and has participated in numerous group exhibitions at Moderna galerija (Ljubljana), Maribor Art Gallery Art, he Rencontres de la Photographie d' Arles, International Photographic Salon (Tokyo); Pavillon Populaire, Musée Fabre (Montpellier), Nuit Blanche (Paris), among others. Among the notable recognitions for his work are the best book design of the year 2007, 2017, 2018 (Slovenian Book Fair, Ljubljana), Glazerjeva listina (Maribor, 2011) and a nomination for the Prix Albert Renger-Patzsch (Museum Folkwang, Essen, 2009), Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize (The Photographers' Gallery, London, 2009) and was a finalist for the OHO Award (Ljubljana, 2007). He lives and works in Maribor, Slovenia.



Matjaž Wenzel © MAN FACE DOWN

**Miran Pustoslemšek**

Miran Pustoslemšek is a psychiatrist with a MSc degree in cultural anthropology. He works at the UKC Maribor (University Medical Centre Maribor) in the Department of Psychiatry – Unit for Forensic Psychiatry. In addition to his day job, he worked as a contributing columnist in Saturday supplement of Večer, Slovenia's second national daily newspaper (2008-2012), which were collected and published as a book and he co-authored several other books. He worked as an advisor for the docudrama Inhumanum: The Inhumanity of Man (RTV Slovenija, 2023). Pustoslemšek is a member of the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe.

NATURE,  
ART &  
HABITAT  
RESIDENCY

Taleggio BG, Italy

*I Am In Between Forces And  
I Am Gravity*

*Lì*

# I AM IN BETWEEN FORCES AND I AM GRAVITY

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ELENA NEMKOVA & PETRA GRUBER

## Introduction to the Collaboration

In line with EMPACT's intentions and NAHR's vocation to develop a project thinking about the interconnection of nature's elements especially in a mountainous context, artist Elèna Nemkova and bio-architect Petra Gruber have worked collaboratively on the topic of empathy, starting from the observation and study of natural phenomena which, when observed by trained eyes, reveal meanings far beyond those usually attributed to them.

Their project starting point was based on Gruber's ongoing research on the structure and function of some natural elements. Remaining always close to scientific research and interested in the internal structure of natural elements and their transformation, Nemkova was particularly inspired by Gruber's texts on the relationship between the morphology of leaves and their thermoregulatory power. After a thorough reading of Gruber's texts, the artist highlighted the convergence of the analytical and poetic aspects of these considerations.

Their intertwined reflections lasted several months, in a continuous back and forth between the real forms found in nature, the synthesis of design, the abstraction of scientific principles and a series of poetic considerations. It was all finally formalised on a shared immersive experience:



Tests for the performance "I am in between Forces and I am Gravity" © Elena Nemkova

a walk in the woods with a performative character, during which the architect, the artist and a naturalist with great knowledge of Val Taleggio, Enrico Bassi, took turns highlighting the interconnections that exist in nature between the function, context and formal principles of the elements that make up an ecosystem. In this manner, the results of academic research were brought into the specific context of the ecosystem of the Valley.

Along the walking path, a series of panels painted with different types of leaves were displayed, in which Nemkova artistically summarized the reflections that emerged from the collaboration. Some of the images are compositions based on the morphology of the leaves. The walk was complemented by a workshop experience in which all the participants got to be actively involved.

The project thus took the form of an invitation to exercise seeing and listening, and an implicit proposal to explore the connection between elements and phenomena, to open up to a sense of proximity, and to expand understanding of what lies behind the everyday experience. The convergence of views showed how fruitful the interdisciplinary dimension can be when combined with an empathic attitude, and how unpredictable and fortunate its consequences can be.

A final presentation of *I Am In Between Forces and I Am Gravity* with Nemkova and Gruber took place on 23 October 2023 in Bergamo. After much exploration, research and exchange, after the projects had



Walk lecture and performance © Elena Nemkova

taken on a performative dimension on site, a more precise outline emerged. Its meaning as an artistic practice that is at once theoretical, relational and practical has found a new form.

### A conversation between Elena Nemkova & Petra Gruber

#### Elena Nemkova:

Dear Petra, how are you doing? I hope you had some nice relaxing days in Italy. I am sending you some inputs from my side for the project. It would be lovely to discuss it with you when you have a bit of time. My best regards, Elèna.

Let's start our exploration with an expression: Contemplative transparency!

I would like to find a way to stimulate the perception of reality by exploring the transformation of the tangible, anchor points of a gaze, to refine this transformative cycle in motion, providing material for the sensory ambiguity of this world affected by its own replica. The so-called ASMR effect (autonomous sensory meridian response), - could be a key to building a devout and contemplative perception, which causes some sensations of a physical nature (tingling sensations in the back

of the head, which spread in the form of skin goosebumps, auditory-tactile synesthesia), a subjective experience of "mild euphoria": we have all experienced it when it is evoked by specific auditory or visual stimuli and, less commonly, by the intentional control of attention. And that's exactly what I'd like to "build" in a point of the valley.

Transplanted micro-objects that change over time, plants, micro-organisms, generative sounds, smells, heat sources, everything that gives rise to air movement, a kind of synthetic wind force. These experiences prevent the visual scan of the landscape that runs endlessly, skirts the rocks, falls into the ditches, climbs again and beams quietly on the mountains. Different materials cling, intertwine, repeat and dissolve artificial and biological material aggregate. The datum of nature passes through the test of a contemplative organization, which makes it something the same but at the same time completely different. That is, the place (always however confined by the limits of the coverage of the gaze) of a complete experience, the adventure of observing, which invents nothing, but which is every time surprisingly compartmental.

#### Petra Gruber:

Hello Elena, Thank you I have received your letter. I will send you some thoughts this weekend. Thanks, Petra.

Dear Elena, I have attached a text with some inspirations. The coming week is already very tight for me but we could touch base on the coming Friday. I am in the home office, so hopefully I will be flexible (so far no meetings). Let me know if this works for you. Looking forward to meeting you again, Petra.

Atmospheric rivers - streams of humid air delivering the rain. Tree leaf boundaries - designed



Walk, lecture and performance with Elena Nemkova (visual artist) and Petra Gruber (bio-architect) © Ilaria Mazzoleni

noise of moving objects, leaves again? Make the flow strong so there is more impact. Use free energy - solar and wind. Both can be used to create "wind space".

Thinking like a mountain: Who am I, where are my borders, do I see the others, who else is there? I feel the rain and the sun on my surface. I am naked on the top and well-covered on my sides. Inner forces make me move ever so slowly. The clouds greet me, and stay, and the fog emerges from my sides. Water runs off me in small rivers, cutting my flesh, taking me away. I change the flow of the air, it moves around me. Street nets crawl on me, animals leave path networks in my skin, but most parts of me have never been touched by legs and hands. I host so many living creatures, even the bare rocks are settled with microbes. I remember aeons of time, when I was young I was steep and dangerous as I grew older, I became rounder and more patient. I am the in between forces and I am gravity.

#### Petra Gruber:

Dear Elena, I added some resources to the Word file I had sent earlier, sorry to be so late before the 5th. The rehab place is great, close to the forest and border to Czechia. They keep me busy with all sorts of therapy but I sneak out whenever I can. Cheers, Petra.

The NAHR inspirations for Empact - The Art of Thinking Like a Mountain: AIR Ecosystems perspective

to modify airflow and water flow, cooling effect by design - influencing the so-called boundary layer, a tiny layer of change, where the humidity of the leaf gradually changes to the aerial average humidity in the surrounding space (scale from global to micro).

Insects mechanosensors - insects have tiny hairs that are anchored in a spring-like base in the outer shell, the cuticle, so that any mechanical movement is amplified and sensed by the nerve cells in the base - those are so sensible even acting with thermal flow. Skyscraper design - designed airflow along the facade deflects air from storms and hurricanes - immaterial walls of air.

Solar chimney materials and spaces that heat up can create airflow in the sun - convection. Designing the airflow. Invisible - making it visible? Sensory system - make it perceivable? Create waves - make sound - wind sound, the



Measurements during the lecture of Petra Gruber (bio-architect) and Elena Nemkova (visual artist) © Elena Nemkova

the cuticle, so that any mechanical movement is amplified and sensed by the nerve cells in the base - those are so sensible even acting with thermal flow. Skyscraper design - designed airflow along the facade deflects air from storms and hurricanes - immaterial walls of air and other strategies. Wind-resilient civil structures: What can we learn from nature, Wei Zhang, Petra Gruber. Solar chimneys materials and spaces that heat up can create airflow in the sun - convection.

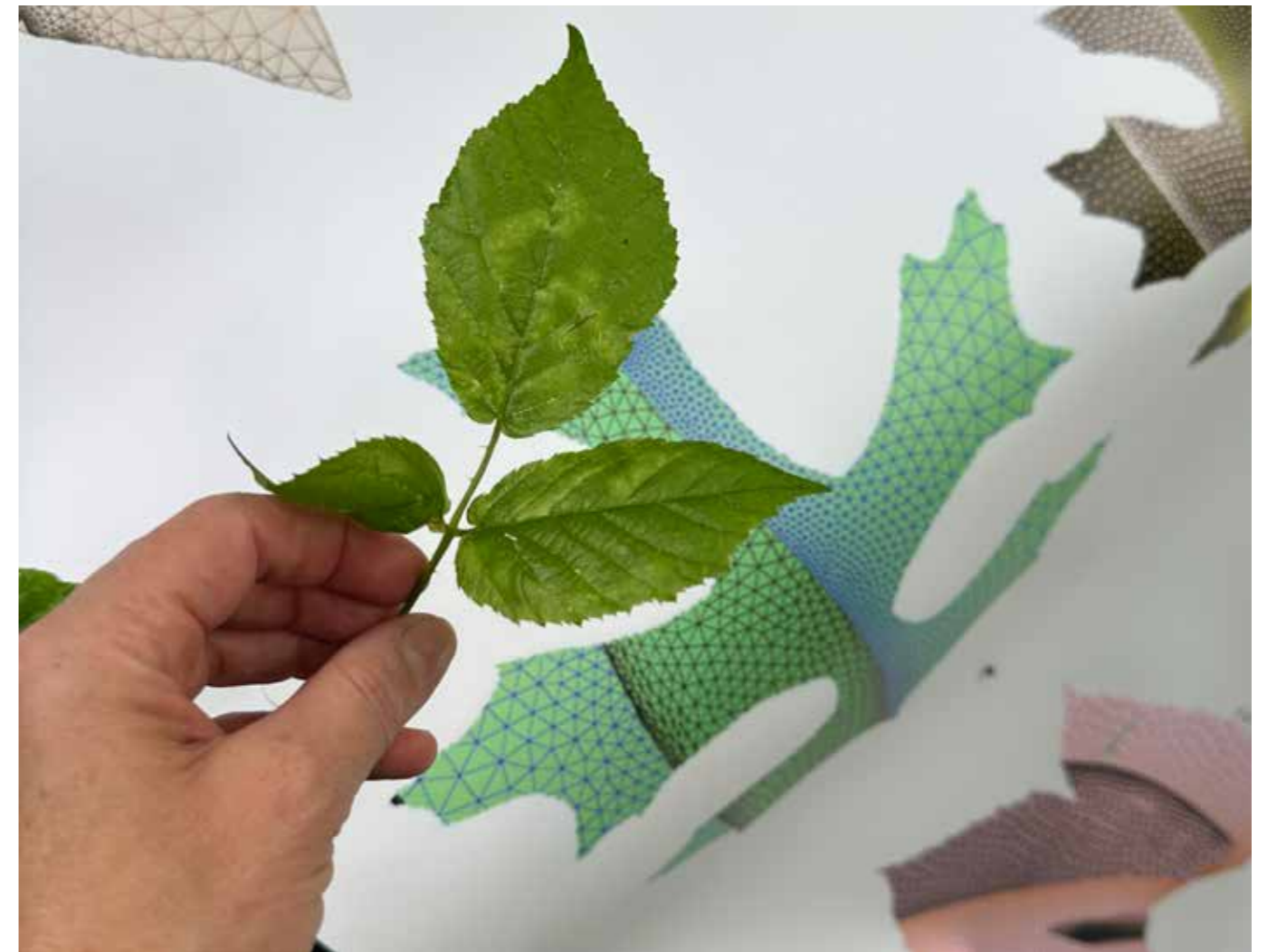
Designing the airflow. Invisible - making it visible? Sensory system - make it perceivable? Create waves - make sound - wind sound, noise of moving objects, leaves again? Make the flow strong so there is more impact. Use free energy - solar and wind. Both can be used to create wind space.

**Elena Nemkova:**

Dear Petra, I took this time to give a 360° look at the photos, drawings, materials, words and messages we have exchanged. The most interesting/ feasible it seems for me is the process of re-modulate/ engineering/ making extensions/ losing ourselves in the ambiguity of real-unreal, natural-artificial, where everything coexists and is connected through a superconductor - gazo substance of the air. I send you my reflection per image, mostly, as I am going better on a visual basis. I leave an intentionally editable PP file in case you would like to leave your notes or comments directly in the file. If you find any eco in your thoughts, please let me know and I will proceed with the more detailed development of the visual part. I also got the enormous pleasure of going through the messages, sci -papers and emails we have exchanged, there is so much interesting information that could be mined, so, a creasy idea, why do we not do a small publication, which would include (compatibility with the author's permissions) this exchange of ideas? Please find in the attachment the visual draft of the source materials... My best regards, Elèna.

and Multispecies design, using some examples from nature and technology. Atmospheric rivers - streams of humid air delivering the rain. Tree leaf boundaries - designed to modify airflow and water flow, cooling effect by design. Influencing the so-called boundary layer, a tiny layer of change, where the humidity of the leaf gradually changes to the aerial average humidity in the surrounding space (scale from global to micro).

2 of our publications are in the attachment! Bio-inspired evaporation from shaped interfaces: an experimental study, Ariana I K S Rupp, Petra Gruber. Biomimetic Groundwork for Thermal Exchange Structures Inspired by Plant Leaf. Design, Ariana I K S Rupp, Petra Gruber. Insect mechanosensors - some insects have tiny hair that are anchored in a spring-like base in the outer shell,



**Petra Gruber:**

Dear Elèna, thank you for the presentation, I love the drawings and words! Currently, I have nothing to add, I was quite busy with work and some requests by the university already as it is their final month. I will be travelling from 8th-11th, being on holiday. It would be good to connect after that, as I will be very busy with other stuff. I hope you are well! Cheers, Petra.

**Elena Nemkova:**

Dear Ilaria, Dear Gabi, (Dear Petra), we have featured some proposals and we would like to share them with you. Petra, please add your considerations to this letter if you might have any. Generally, collaboration titled I am the in between forces and I am gravity. A walk performance/scientific lecture By Petra/Elena studied and featured together during the meeting days in Val Taleggio July 20-23 (a circular path walk (TBD) in Val Taleggio with 3-4 stops of live performance - scientific topics (designing the airflow...), 1,5 hours-2 hours ca. It would be interesting to involve the audience during those days... What time can we have for this performance? I will be happy to hear your comments on this proposal. My best regards, Elèna.

**Petra Gruber:**

Hi Elèna, I attach a presentation here, it is a first draft of what we could organize as a "walking lecture"

with little experiments on the way. I thought of 4 stations, that are dedicated to the topics and also linked to each other, see slide 2. I can bring an IR camera phone setup, and a wind speed and maybe also humidity measurement would be great - is it possible to organize those? The attached presentation is just a collection, I want to maybe bring an iPad for images or we make some printouts. What do you think? Cheers, Petra.

**Elena Nemkova:**

Thank you, Petra, I will carefully study your lecture summary, at first glance, it looks amazing! How do you plan to present these slides? I also can have a big-sized iPad and we can show them in synchronization. Could you please give a bit more information on how this living wall is composed? I am working right now on the bas-relieves in this technique, maybe it could be somehow combined with the lecture. I do not have the humidity and wind measurement devices, they can be bought, I suppose, if they are essential. My best regards, Elèna.

**Petra Gruber:**

Hello Ilaria, thank you very much! It looks very dense. I am looking forward to meeting all those interesting people! About our title, I am in between forces and I am gravity: the I is the mountain, so singular would be great. The mountain is subjected to erosion and mountain building by the internal forces of the earth at the same time, that is why forces. The mountain is also gravity, by its own weight part of this force-field, so it would be great to make two sentences. What you are and do also shapes you at the same time. Elèna, would you agree? Thank you, looking forward to coming together soon! Petra.

**Elena Nemkova:**

Dear Petra, Sure I 100% agree with you. I've been fascinated from the beginning by this poetic sentence. I also think the singular reinforces the romantic side. My best regards, Elèna.

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**Elèna Nemkova**

*Elèna Nemkova was born in Tajikistan in Central Asia, with the years of training spent in Milan, with a step at the Université Paris VIII. Coming from the St. Petersburg family of scientists, she learned to interpret the world in its tension between the most advanced scientific studies and human beings still governed by primordial instincts. In the search for the way that can best express each idea, Elèna finds the synthesis between performance, sculpture and above all in drawing. The synthesis of media as well central in her work, such as the performance for TV reality show SKY ARTE Pomilio Blumm prize, where the sound of the magnetic resonance machine is interpreted by the AllegroModerato orchestra.*

*Elèna was the member of the OUNPO \_Visual Forum interdisciplinary group, in the frame of which she collaborated with the neuro-scientist dr. Stephen Whitmarsh. His works have been exhibited in the exhibitions at IED/ Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, the Fondazione di Monti, Bologna, in the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, in the Elektro Museum in Moscow, in Spiral Wacoal Art Center, Tokyo, in Casa Rosa, Serralves Museum in Porto, Museum MART Trento and Rovereto, Shargorod art center in Ukraine, San Francisco Art Institute, Palazzo Re Rebaudengo, Guarene d'Alba, in the Museum of New Art, Detroit. He took part in the II Ural Industrial Biennale in Ekaterinburg, at Manifesta 10 Parallel Program\_ San Petersburg; and has participated in solo exhibitions at PERMM Museum, Perm, at HGallery, Paris; KUNSTHALLE São Paulo, Rong Wrong, Amsterdam, AssabOne, Milan, Buchsenhausen.lab, Innsbruck, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry.*

**Petra Gruber**

*Petra Gruber is a researcher and educator in architecture and biodesign. She holds a PhD in "Biomimetics in Architecture" from the Vienna University of Technology in Austria and worked*



Measurements during the lecture of Petra Gruber (bio-architect) and Elena Nemkova (visual artist) © Elena Nemkova

internationally on three continents in inter- and transdisciplinary design, research, and education, at the intersection of biology, architecture and art. She taught CAD, studio design, building construction and vernacular architecture at the Vienna University of Technology and the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. At the University of Applied Sciences in Villach she co-designed and taught in the program "Bionics in Energy Systems". She was a research fellow at the Center for Biomimetics at The University of Reading, UK. In her own office "transarch" she has been leading research projects in traditional architecture and on spatial and functional aspects of biological structures for biomimetic innovation in architecture and the built environment.

From 2012-2015 she held a long-term visiting professorship at the Ethiopian Institute for Architecture, Building Construction and City Development EiABC in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, leading the Chair for Architectural Design, and designed and implemented the first master program in architecture in the country. From 2016-2021 she was Associate Professor for Biodesign at the Biomimicry Research and Innovation Center BRIC at The University of Akron, US. Since her return to Austria in 2021 she was a senior researcher at Hochschule Rhein-Waal in Germany and the University of Applied Arts, Vienna with the project "Biocool" on self-cooling biomimetic building facades. In 2021 she joined the Austrian Research Promotion Agency FFG as a program expert. Her work has been published widely in books, journals, exhibitions, and documentary films. She holds lectures and workshops worldwide and acts as reviewer for scientific journals and funding organizations. In October 20223 she will join the University of Applied Arts in Vienna as a professor and department



Forest walk during the lecture of Petra Gruber (bio-architect) and Elena Nemkova (visual artist) © Elena Nemkova



# LÌ

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST FRANCESCO PEDRINI AND PHILOSOPHER LEONARDO CAFFO

## Introduction to the Collaboration

*Lì* is a collaborative project by artist Francesco Pedrini and philosopher Leonardo Caffo which has been developed as part of the European project EMPACT - Empathy and Sustainability: The Art of Thinking like a Mountain. It took place in the rural setting of the Taleggio Valley (Bergamo, Italy) where Nature, Art & Habitat (NAHR), an eco-laboratory dedicated to rethinking our relationship with nature, is located. The project revolves around the topic of Air, the focus of NAHR's 2023 programme.

The project started from Francesco Pedrini's idea of intercepting the wind. To achieve this, the artist has conceived a complex detection device: a wooden hut equipped with several anemometers capable of detecting and recording signals and movements from outside. This peculiar hut was set up in the woods. People could sneak inside it, stop it, or even look inside it through its tiny spy holes, as the children who intercepted it did during its stay in the landscape. The movements it has recorded are primarily of trees reflecting the presence and intensity of the wind during the period of reference. Inside the walls of the

shed people could leave a trace of their stay. This mimetic observation point, whether it functioned with people present or not, is a metaphor for being receptive, in connection.

An idea to which Leonardo Caffo reacted with an immediate capacity for adhesion, his complementary proposal was to activate an exchange in the form of a shared diary. Francesco Pedrini and Leonardo Caffo took



Francesco Pedrini (visual artist) and Leonardo Caffo (Philosopher) sketch for the wooden hut device © Francesco Pedrini

turns, usually at a distance, to continue a dialogue writing signs and words, sentences and drawings, always led by the desire to arrive at the essence. It took place in a continuous relaunch, with rhythm and constant intensity, following with the utmost spontaneity the progression of feelings, thoughts and moods. The diary became extremely intimate. The whole process became not only an enrichment but an essential part of the project.

In diving into the true meaning of sympathy and empathy, the pages of the diary became a catalyst of thoughts and feelings which, like the wind, is an uncontrollable process with no comprehensible objective, but thanks to which sometimes things casually come in our direction, leading to the unpredictable emergence of reflections in the form of words, drawings and quotations.

The connections created remain long after the project. The title of the project refers to a phrase that Gilles Deleuze attributes to Proust in his *Abecedary*, in the letter V for "voyager", meaning travel in French. Deleuze claims that travelling

is useless unless, like Proust, one considers the traveler as a dreamer: "The true dreamer is the one who goes to see if the color he has dreamed of really exists".

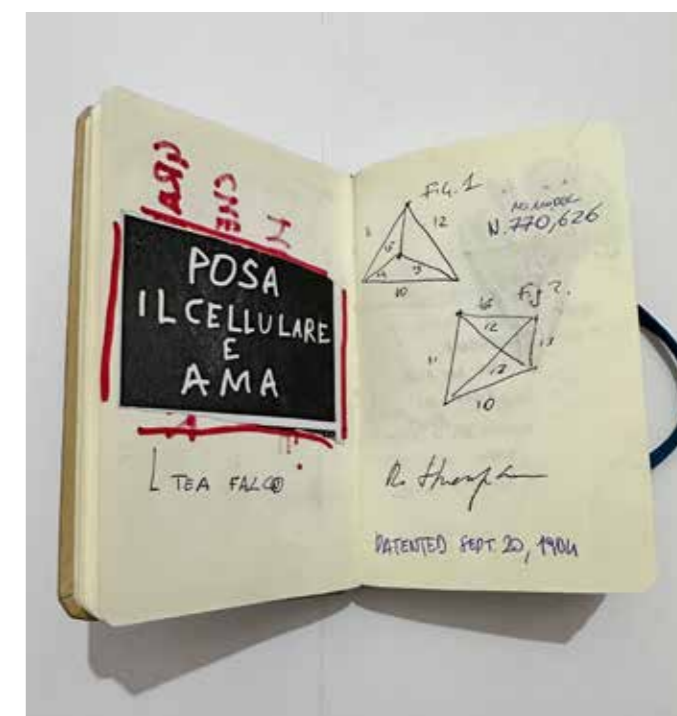
Thus the work, with its ability to combine the depth of the relationship and the attention to the territory and its phenomena, with its experiential progression, between the scientific and the extremely personal, represents an agitation of a physical and emotional nature; an inner journey towards the essential.

In a later phase of the project, all this will come together in the shed, where, in addition to the drawings already made, other signs and phrases taken from the diary will be displayed on the walls, as well as a video in which the human and the more than human, the wind and the words of the diary will alternate and become one.

A final presentation of *Lì* with Caffo and Pedrini took place on 23 October 2023 in Bergamo. The magmatic relationship, the emphatic exchange



Shed imprint © Francesco Pedrini

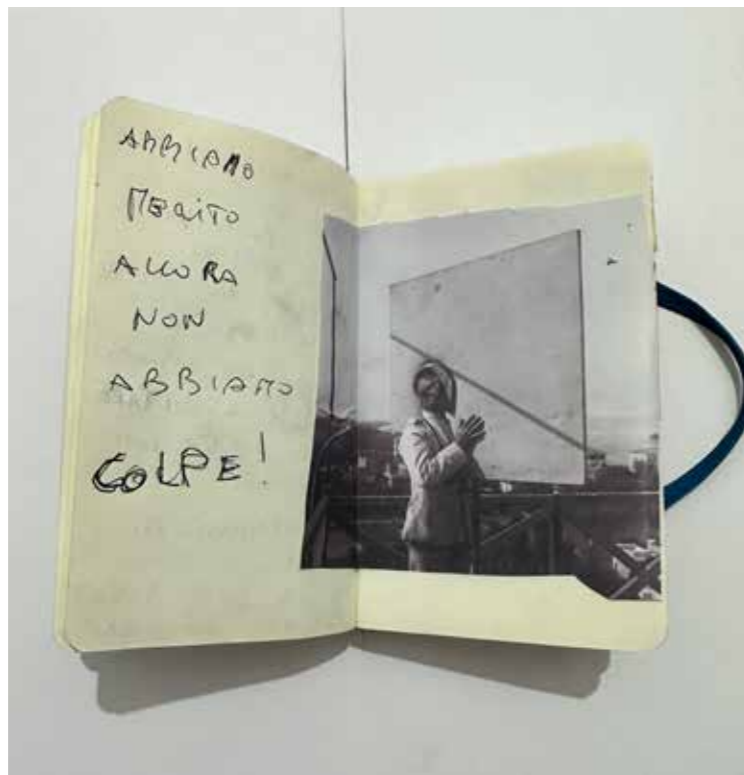


Inside the diary © Francesco Pedrini





Inside the diary © Francesco Pedrini



Inside the diary © Francesco Pedrini



Inside the diary © Francesco Pedrini

**Francesco Pedrini:**

Leonardo, I wrote to you that you are like the wind, you are a south-west wind with constant gusts. You thought of a diary, you infected me with the idea of a shed, I built it, and I made holes in it to look out and catch the wind. The wind almost ignored us, but not the children's eyes. They entered our story, they looked inside, into our fragile shed, and we will never be the same again.

I am proud of myself, of us and our fifty-kilometer-long table, of our empathy. Years ago I left because I wanted to find the nothingness that touches infinity, and I went to see if the color I had dreamed of was really there, and there it was, a tornado, made up of things, people, time and space, with no before and after. Maybe it was just the sound of a wind, of a movement that had always been active, bombastic, full, sure and ceaseless... it sounded like God.

we had seen developing page by page in the diary, took on a kind of performative dimension in the lively and vibrant conversation between the two authors.

**A conversation between Leonardo Caffo & Francesco Pedrini**

**Leonardo Caffo:**

Francesco, a diary is personal. Mine or yours. But here there is no identity and we have become two or perhaps three: the third person. There is no more me here or there and we have gone where the winds and empathy go ...elsewhere. Like a shed that houses individuals who are no longer citizens but just people ... floating in the animal becoming what Deleuze spoke of. I wanted to make art, but instead, I was just a word ... I became a philosopher. So writing a diary for you, who's an artist, helped me to stop talking. I drew and painted and lived to free myself from who I am .... And who are you? You are also there, but where? Where is Li?

That is why I love the wind, it becomes whatever you want it to be, it is the staff of the shaman, it is the pen of a draftsman, it is the use of words of which you are the master.

I don't know why, but I'm sure you understand me, this text has only one purpose, to give you hope that all the gaps you open with philosophy will give someone the opportunity to spy the beyond. That is what our diary was for me, and I looked. Beyond that, I remembered that I had been there before, in the Argentine Puna, when I felt synchronized with the movement of the tornado.

Is Empathy looking together from a single gate? Let us try it:

"I am in my studio, dedicated to us for the first time. I would start from here. From this little diary in which I put flowers from my last walk in the woods, in April. They are crocuses cut by the animals that trampled them. I made a botanical diary out of it, perhaps, but more a culture of



Inside the diary © Francesco Pedrini

color. I could not have done better. Do what you like with them. I believe that every creative work is a dedication. Over and out.

I am also sending you this, I am drawing it, it is Graham Bell kissing his deaf-mute wife inside a tetrahedral kite. It's an overused image, but not many people know that he dedicated his life to her. There is a lot of air here too".

Empathy is like the wind. It moves from within to without - it reaches the stranger and breathes him in. Without wind, there are no flowers - without compassion, there are no children. Everything is renewed!

When they want to point to the mother (the Egyptians), they represent a vulture, because in this species the male does not exist. They are born in this way: when the vulture wants to conceive, she opens her cloaca to the north wind and allows herself to be fertilized by it for five days, during which she takes no food or drink, with the sole aim of procreation. There are other species of birds that conceive with the help of the wind, but their eggs are sterile and are used only as food; the vulture's mating with the wind produces fertile eggs instead.

Francesco is in the wind. Perhaps he too is an animal, the animals are in Val Taleggio.

-  
Here, talking about the wind, my life is exploding.  
And it makes noise -  
And it goes BOOM  
It goes BOOM  
BOOM  
BOOM  
BOOM

I don't know the sound of the wind, I know the sound of life. Every thought is a STRING. My hopes for the future are SHOCKED. Energies? SHIT.



Shed in the woods © Francesco Pedrini

## Hurricane

"But to search for the miraculous it is sometimes necessary to be alone to the end, indeed the search for the limit makes one lonely, and that is why on 9 July 1975, at the age of 33, Bas Jan Ader set sail from Cape Cod on his boat, "apparently" called Ocean Wave, Six months later, the remains of the boat were found off the coast of Liverpool, and in some notes found after his death, there was an entry in his diary about future projects that the Dutchman had written he wanted to do: A whole series of photographs about dying at sea, about being carried away by the waves. My body is practicing drowning'.

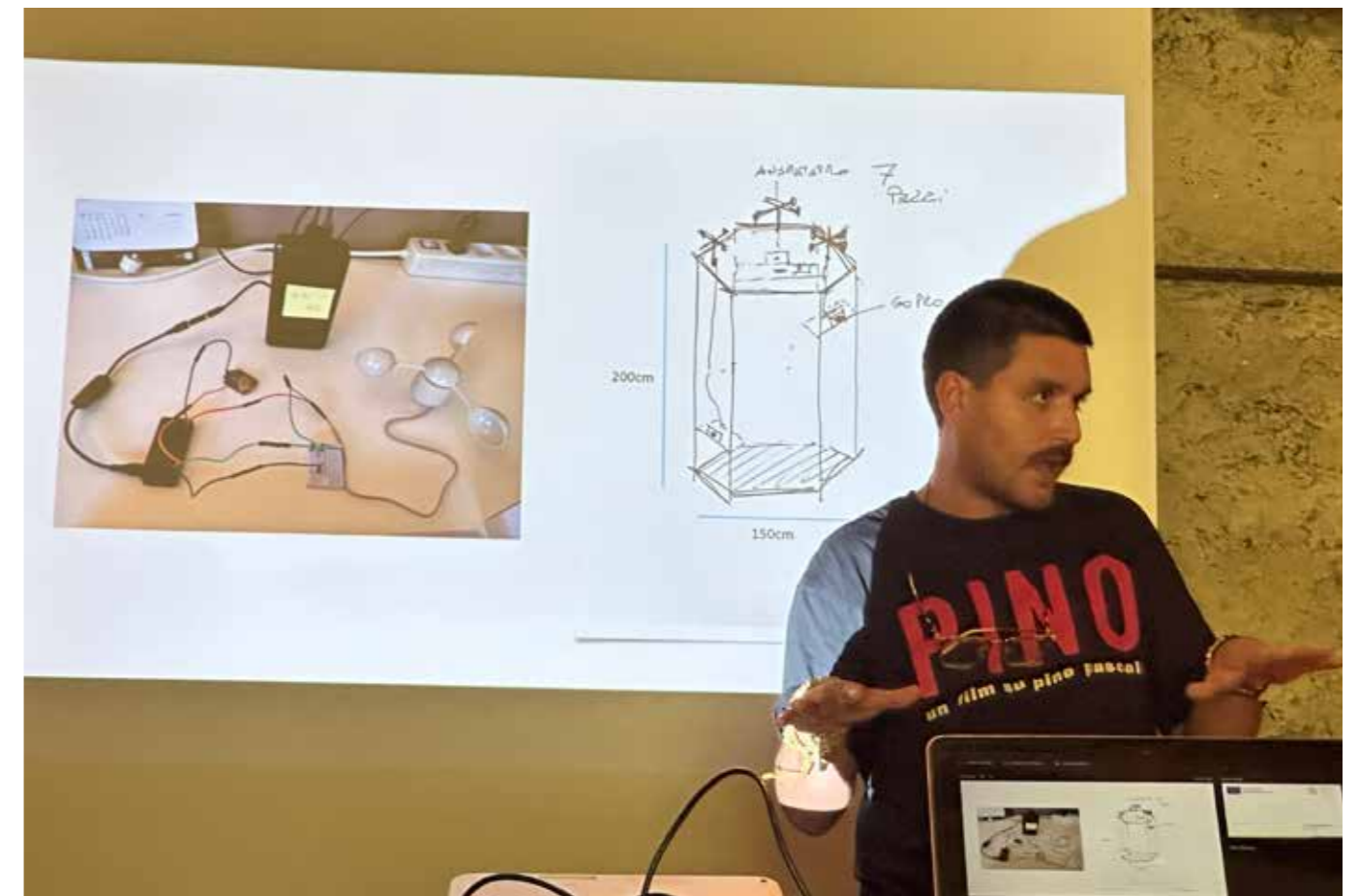
Imagine an endless series of all the people who have died in the sea. Atomic empathy. Lack of air. "I liked to introduce the idea of happiness and unhappiness in the readymade, and then there was the rain, the wind, the pages flying, it was fun." Citing M. Duchamp. I thought today that empathy is overrated. In what way?

## EVEN THE ONION

but it makes you cry

Few things are guaranteed to make you cry, like my grandfather's slipper, empathy was in my grandfather's slipper. Sorry, Leonardo, I disappeared. Just stick the diary in the slit of a cat's eye.

It's an invisible matter anyway. Invisible matter is that nature which builds up and blocks the contact between everyone, the contact of that body which lives as if it lived first, as if it lived for each thing missed, so as not to miss it again and again.



Leonardo Caffo explaining the project during EMPACT Seminar in Taleggio Valley © Ilaria Mazzoleni



Francesco Pedrini explaining the project during EMPACT Seminar in Taleggio Valley © Ilaria Mazzoleni

Invisible matter is displaced without the hope of a gift, with the only conviction that it cannot really go along with a single intention.

Invisible matter is the celestial prologue to every relationship that proves to be meaningful.

Invisible matter is the voice within the voice, sound before sound, enchantment before song and pain.

Invisible matter is the dark and fleeting infection.

Invisible matter is the weak force of resistance. It is the hope that gives no gift. Invisible matter gives no accumulation but passes through the bodies of knowledge.

Invisible matter deceives time and makes the space of relations between people shine.

Invisible matter does not just have a name.

Invisible matter does not liberate through enlightenment but makes weight possible.

Invisible matter is the vice of the flesh, its overpowering lack of restraint.

Invisible matter is the transgression of the flesh, its past. Invisible matter moves ages.

Invisible matter is potential attention.

It is the carnal conquest of an opportunity.

Watch the wind from an operculum like those of snails, openings/closures that look like galaxies.

#### **WIND INCENSE AND AIM!**

Observing nature moved by the wind from a shed.

“Fukinagashi” moved by the wind.

The only solution remains astonishment, and wonder, the wind does not whip, it educates.



Francesco Pedrini and Leonardo Caffo in Bergamo during the project presentation © Marco Macconi

We are passive in our choices, we have no merit. What we can do is to listen to those who stir us, those who move us. I, Leonardo, listen to you, but I cannot save you, because if we have no merit, then we have no fault.

Stirring, high intensity. Everything and now. The bora is pornographic.

It is us, two holes on two pages that, with the book closed, make empathy.

Empathy is the hole with the man around it. Is Empathy the hole with the man around it?

I have given you a gift, they are two bubbles hidden in this diary, they are two equalizers who together seek a balance, but always lose it, and less badly.

Living to have a place forever.

Gilles Deleuze, in his Abecedary, in the letter V as travelling, says that travelling is useless.

Except in the sense he attributes to Proust, comparing the traveler to the dreamer: “

The true dreamer is the one who goes to see if the color he dreamt of really exists.

I realized that every time I say this sentence, I take a breath and say... there.

In that, there is the world of each one of us, the dream that can exist in the real world and the only way is to ‘go and check’. I believe that every artist and researcher always makes this.

And when this meeting between dream and reality takes place, wonder happens.

Where is the wonder?

\*\*\*

### **Leonardo Caffo**

Leonardo Caffo is professor of Aesthetics of Fashion, Media and Design and Semiotics of Art at NABA in Milan; he also teaches Aesthetics at IULM, also in Milan. He previously taught Theoretical Philosophy at the Polytechnic University of Turin. He writes for the "Corriere della Sera," holds regular columns in "Internazionale," "Lampoon" and "Interni," and has been among the presenters and authors of Radio 3 RAI; he has worked as Curator at Triennale di Milano, was Philosopher in Residence for the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea and is a Member of the Steering Committee of the MAXXI Museum in Rome. His latest books include *Costruire Futuri* (Bompiani 2020) and *Quattro capanne. O della semplicità (nottetempo 2020)*. For Einaudi he has published *La vita di ogni giorno* (2016), *Fragile umanità* (2017), *Vegan* (2018) and *Velocità di fuga* (2022). He directs the magazine "Parola," the publisher of the international magazine *Flash Art*, and the Mater Matuta Master in Curatorial Studies for the Mediterranean at the Abadir Academy of Design in Sicily. He has curated dozens of exhibitions, worked directly on artist installations and design for museums and galleries including the research series on the concept of huts "Cabin-Out." He has written novels and diaries on the border between literature and philosophy including *Il cane e il filosofo* (Mondadori 2020), *Essere Giovani* (Ponte alle Grazie 2021), *La montagna di fuoco. Etna la madre* (Ponte alle Grazie 2022). Every year in May, he holds the experimental workshop "Rethinking Lampedusa" in collaboration between Northeastern University in Boston, the Made Program and the Moleskine Foundation on the Sicilian island. His forthcoming novel, published by Fandango publishing house, is called *Due sogni*. His works are translated and commented on in numerous languages.

### **Francesco Pedrini**

Francesco Pedrini in 2021 holds as director of the G.Carrara Academy of Fine Arts in Bergamo, where he is professor of drawing and painting. In 2022 he becomes deputy director of the Bergamo Polytechnic of the Arts with delegated authority to the Academy of Fine Arts. In 2011 he obtained a Master's Degree at IUAV in Venice in production and design of visual arts and from 2012 to 2021 he was artistic coordinator in Accademia di belle arti G.Carrara. In 2011 he graduated with a master's degree in Production and Design of Visual Arts at the IUAV in Venice and from 2012 to 2021 he was artistic coordinator in Accademia di belle arti G.Carrara. His research focuses on themes such as astronomy, vision, wind, and practices for crossing the landscape. He travels to Cameroon with Salvatore Falci to arte e luogo project and for his research he makes trips to the Argentine Puna and the highland deserts of Chile where the world's most advanced telescopes are installed. Drawing, photography and video are the mediums through which Pedrini has most frequently expressed himself exhibiting in international galleries and biennials.

### **A selection of exhibitions follows:**

2023 "Quando guardiamo in basso siamo muso", quando guardiamo in alto siamo viso" (When we look down we are muzzle, when we look up we are face) @Il crepaccio Instagram Show, Caroline Corbetta. - solo show -  
2022 Here. Between Not-Yet And No-More, Galleria Milano.  
2020 "Autoprogettazione", Galleria Milano, curate by Toni Merola, Bianca Trevisan, Nicola Pellegrini.  
2020 "I must report something I saw," Luogo\_e curated by Federica Mutti, Chiara Fusar Bassini and Luciano Passoni, Bergamo.  
2019 "Panorama.Approdi e derive del paesaggio in Italia"(Panorama.Landings and drifts of the landscape in Italy) Fondazione del Monte di Bologna, Bologna.

2018 "Gli strumenti del cielo" (The instruments of the sky), Galleria Milano, Milan - solo show -

2017 "I heard the sounds of the sky," Galerie Susanne Albrecht, Berlin - solo show -.

2016 "Nebula," Galleria Milano, Milan, curated by Alessandra Pioselli. - solo show -  
"Diffusa," Palazzo dei Pio, Carpi, curated by Luca Panaro.

"Michetti Prize 2016," Michetti Foundation, Francavilla a mare Museum, Chieti.

And other exhibitions in prestigious spaces including Galleri Rotor (Göteborg), Zenith Gallery (Tirana), MSGSÜ Tophane Culture Center (Istanbul) and at Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad de Buenos Aires and Galleria Martano (Torino).

ESPACIO  
ROJO  
Madrid, Spain

*Wings to believe and create*

*Shared Cosmogonies*

# WINGS TO BELIEVE AND CREATE

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARTIST BEGOÑA RIUS PEÑA & BIOLOGIST ENRIQUE RIUS PEÑA

## Introduction to the Collaboration

This multi-artistic collective project for social transformation aims to visualize the Montagu's harrier from different perspectives (life, environment, threats). It is also related to migration and the sub-Saharan migrants and it analyzes its connections with the rural human environment. The key ideas of the collaboration is the exploration of possible synergies between science and art, the research and advance knowledge of the bird, its biology, ecology, threats and ways to minimize them and the resilience and preservation of the ecological and cultural diversity of the rural environment (depopulated Spain). In addition, empathy plays a major role in the parallelism of the migratory odyssey of the bird and of man, the creative strategies focused on promoting and provoking social change and the education with training and awareness tools. Last but not least the collaboration emphasizes on the creation and its polyhedral artistic perspective and the further dissemination of its potential outcomes.

The scientific dimension of the project is focused on Montagu's harrier (*Circus pygargus*), a falconiform bird of prey. It is present in the European continent, where it breeds, and in Asia and Africa where it spends the winter (cultivated cereal crops). The social aspects approached in this collaboration are migration through strictly migratory species. In spring, the bird leaves



The artist Begoña Rius and the scientist biologist Enrique Rius collaborating on their artistic project ©Espacio Rojo

Africa (Sahel) and Asia (India) heading towards its breeding areas in Europe. Similar land and sea routes are undertaken by sub-Saharan migrants. Furthermore, it is focused on the rural environment since a bird is linked to cereal crops, crucial during the harvest season. Its conservation depends on management and awareness policies.

The research on the environment and artistic possibilities of the bird is focused on its slender figure and the elegance of its flight. The steppe/cereal environment with its shapes and colors and natural interweaving. The study of the journey as a transformative element allows us to expose traces of cultural diversity, knowledge and adaptation to the new habitat. The research takes a humanistic approach from the knowledge of territories to ornithological and human contact. Breaks in borders. An interactive map is created, relating man and bird.

The artistic and social research work on the journey of the Bird / man, to strengthen awareness. The project involves transforming the bird into a man through figurative sculptural iron studies. Artistic details are captured in a graphic work; a collective artist book is created in different transit zones. Its preservation depends on management and awareness policies. Environmental education are addressed through bird cards and Dialogue Tables for Creative Research are developed, taking into account the involved stakeholders, themes and methodologies. Collective actions are carried out in the territory, encompassing a map of the area in engraving, creative activities around color, the creation of poetry/haikus, and photography.



The artist Begoña Rius and the scientist biologist Enrique Rius during their artistic collaboration ©Espacio Rojo



First sketches of the Montagu's harrier on paper ©Espacio Rojo

The research projection also includes audiovisual pieces with migration as the guiding thread. Contacts are made with environmental and cultural associations in Africa and Spanish cereal lands. Interviews with a scientific focus and exploration of the journey as a transformative element (environmental agents, conservation organizations and sub-Saharan migrants) are conducted, incorporating external audiovisual material.

#### A conversation between Begoña Rius & Enrique Rius

##### Begoña Rius:

Do you think that this bird plays a great role in biodiversity and therefore it is important that protection programs continue over time? Taking into account that this year it has been given a lot of importance, Isn't there a risk that after this awareness campaign it will be forgotten?

##### Enrique Rius:

I understand what you mean, I think that the most interesting thing about this project and any other in this sense is not the relevance of the species itself, in isolation, but its role in the environment and its usefulness to put in value a certain ecosystem, such as in this case the steppe/cerealists so linked to the rural human environment. Regarding the second question, I agree with you that there is a risk and I have sometimes seen very interesting campaigns that lose strength over time or even remain only specific efforts. This project was born with the idea of continuity and has both a spatial and temporal projection.

##### Begoña Rius:

Why is it important that there are social and human awareness campaigns about birds in rural areas and what could be their importance in the local economy?

##### Enrique Rius:

It is difficult to quantify the benefits of campaigns of this type, but qualitatively the advantages are multiple. Environmental (obviously knowledge favors the conservation not only of the species itself but of the natural environment), social (helps make visible the current problems of the rural environment) and economic (for example, there are many studies that confirm and quantify the positive impact on the agricultural environment of certain species such as raptors due to their direct impact on pest control). Indirectly, the more information there is, and the more diverse tools we have, the easier it will be to conserve these spaces not only from a natural but also a socio-economic point of view.

##### Begoña Rius:

In the educational environment, are there environmental awareness programs aimed at young people? What is its value?

##### Enrique Rius:

They exist, of course. There are Organizations that do magnificent work in this regard and these programs will have, in my opinion, a great impact in the medium term in terms of how future generations will understand our role in nature. I think that perhaps there is a greater lack of more specific programs aimed at specific sectors, such as agriculture. Perhaps due to the special sensitivity of this sector and its social (as representatives of a very punished rural world) and economic connotations that must be treated with the utmost respect to prevent any action from entailing a cost for farmers. Any alternative means of raising awareness, and art is one, can be a very valuable tool.

##### Begoña Rius:

To what extent is climate change modifying the travels of this bird and many others?



Scientific Cards for *\_Wings to Believe and Create\_* with watercolors by Enrique Rius ©Espacio Rojo

**Enrique Rius:**

The increase in global temperature is affecting the migratory patterns of many species. It must be taken into account that these seasonal routes are marked by the, until now, important climatic differences at different latitudes. But not only that, there are much more direct problems. To give an example that directly affects the Montagu's harrier, changes in climate and the use of new varieties of cereal adapted to these conditions have caused harvesting to be anticipated and the risk of baby Montagu's harrier dying due to the effects of the cereal harvester machines has significantly increased.

**Begoña Rius:**

What is the reason why bird care and protection is more established in certain areas? Do you think it helps how the programs are being done in different communities or is it the economic and cultural situation of the environment?

**Enrique Rius:**

It is a very interesting question and the answer is complicated. I think, and this is a particular opinion, that in the areas with better response in terms of the protection of this bird (using it as an example of conservation, but which can be extended to other species and ecosystems) several factors come together, some of which you have already mentioned. In all conservation work, not just on a large scale, they are taken into account and therefore work is done at different levels. Favor and even economically prioritize conservation, raise awareness and inform, and control and monitor. As you can see, logically, everything involves getting the involvement of the local population.

**Enrique Rius:**

I am not very objective, because I think it is a beautiful bird, but as an artist, what possibilities do you see for working with it and its environment?

**Begoña Rius:**

Artistically, the most interesting thing about the bird itself is its aerodynamic shape, its size, etc. But not only that, the environment in which it lives and nests allows you to play with a wide variety of materials and plastic possibilities.

**Enrique Rius:**

It seems very interesting to work on the trip as an element of change, how do you think we could approach it?

**Begoña Rius:**

In this sense, the main approach that we could address is the relationship of migration as an axis of social transformation. Migration of Bird and man working the parallelism of care and sustainable social coexistence. In short, respect. We will also be able to work in different areas where sub-Saharan migrants and the bird share a route. We have contacted Organizations from Morocco, Senegal and Europe which will allow us to work in situ and from other perspectives.

**Enrique Rius:**

Could we involve the different agents involved in the protection of birds, migrants, and rural areas in some way in the project?

**Begoña Rius:**

It is interesting that we combine different reflections to obtain a broader social wealth, inhabitants of the environment who cohabit with the bird and the migrant, environmental professionals, farmers and cultural agents who, channeling through an artistic vocabulary, allow us to provoke change.

**Enrique Rius:**

In the end, of all the information we generate and the planned collaborations, what artistic elements could emerge?

**Begoña Rius:**

Could be interesting to expand the initial project that we began with the transformative work of sculpture and its natural elements to carry out an evolutionary and transformative journey from Bird to man, uniting that more global sense of similarities and coexistence.

**Enrique Rius:**

As we have already talked about before I am concerned that it is a project that has no continuity or practical use, how can we approach it to avoid this?

**Begoña Rius:**

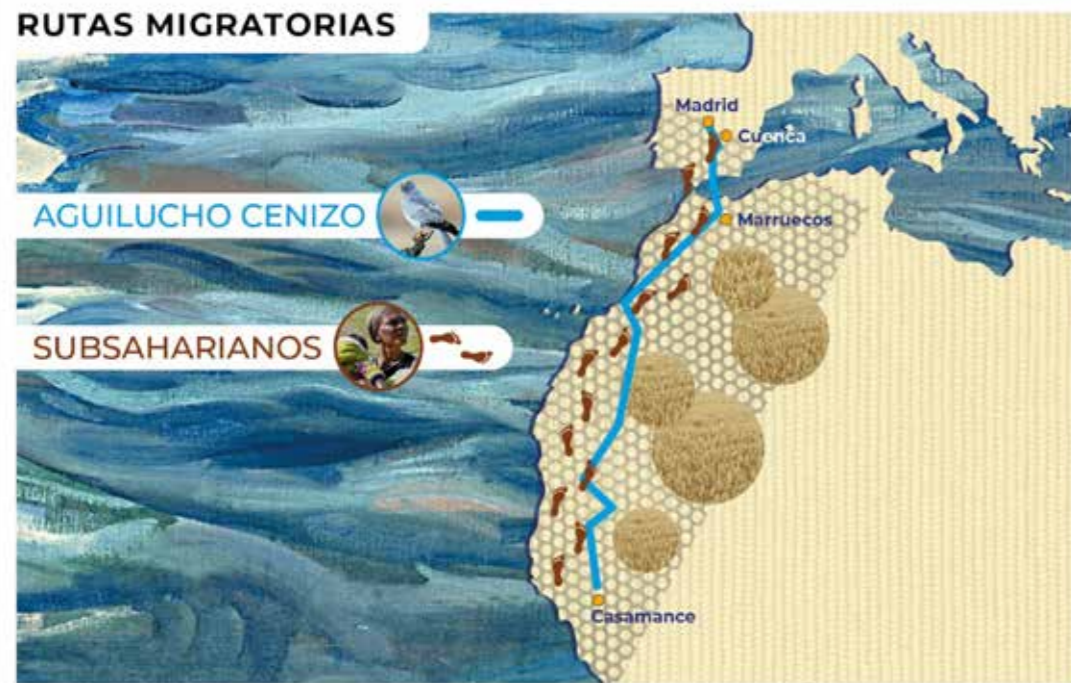
The idea of a social project is that it continues to grow and nourish itself firmly according to conditions and confluences in the environment. We began the study of this bird because of its needs and its importance in maintaining biodiversity; this awareness-raising work is long. Work that will extend in different places and milestones that have been marked as a research that will last 1-2 years and that will build material for the development of the audiovisual and the artist's book in each area thanks to the development of collective artistic research tables. In the future, all the research work and artistic elements generated will help us to hold traveling exhibitions in areas where dissemination and awareness-raising work is more interesting.

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**Begoña Rius Peña**

*Begoña Rius Peña is a multidisciplinary artist who focuses her work on movements and artistic work linked to social issues in Madrid where she resides, at the National and Latin American level (social transformation and mediation programs). She has a Degree in Pharmacy specialized in microbiology at the Complutense University in Madrid (practiced for 19 years in a research laboratory) and in Fine Arts*





Interactive Map of migratory landmarks linked to the Montagu\_s Harrier Design by Angel Merlo. Artistic direction and production by Begoña Rius.

at UAH Madrid specialized in creation processes and sculpture. She graduated in Chinese Medicine Escuela Neijing (Cuenca) España, she develops her work as a teacher and artist combining all her knowledge of human nature and the environment.

She is actively part of neighborhood cultural associations creating cultural programs of community change (Asociación Carabanchel Distrito Cultural, of which she has been a member of the board of directors since 2021 and of REACC (Network of spaces and Agents of community culture) an active member since the beginnings. She founded and developed the “Metier” Association creative space and “TuPatio Hall de artistas” as places of artistic and social exchange in neighborhoods; creating cultural development programs. In both spaces she carries out her work as a cultural manager, her work as a teacher and the artistic development of her own and collective work.

She is teacher in individual and collective programs in creation processes for 15 years. She Research in artistic-plastic teaching and teaching through human knowledge and as a way of expression and communication between people. She creates education programs in equality centers and inclusion projects (different abilities and migration) using sculpture and creative processes to change human realities. Her artistic work always follows a social path and ]he has developed numerous collective and individual exhibitions along with development programs and links with human rights and the improvement of social and human training.

#### Enrique Rius Peña

Enrique Rius Peña has a Degree in Biological Sciences from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in 1993. He is specialised in the Environment while both his training and his interests have always been directed towards nature. For more than twenty years he has been a member of the Spanish Ornithological Society where he has collaborated in various bird conservation programmes, such as the Sacre Programme for the monitoring of breeding birds, particularly in Spanish cereal-growing areas. In his search for creative knowledge he also develops a facet as an artist as a watercolour painter, having carried out individual and collective exhibitions, and as a writer where he has published several books of poetic prose.



Transformation from bird to man\_\_Wings to believe and create\_ sketch by Begoña Rius ©Espacio Rojo



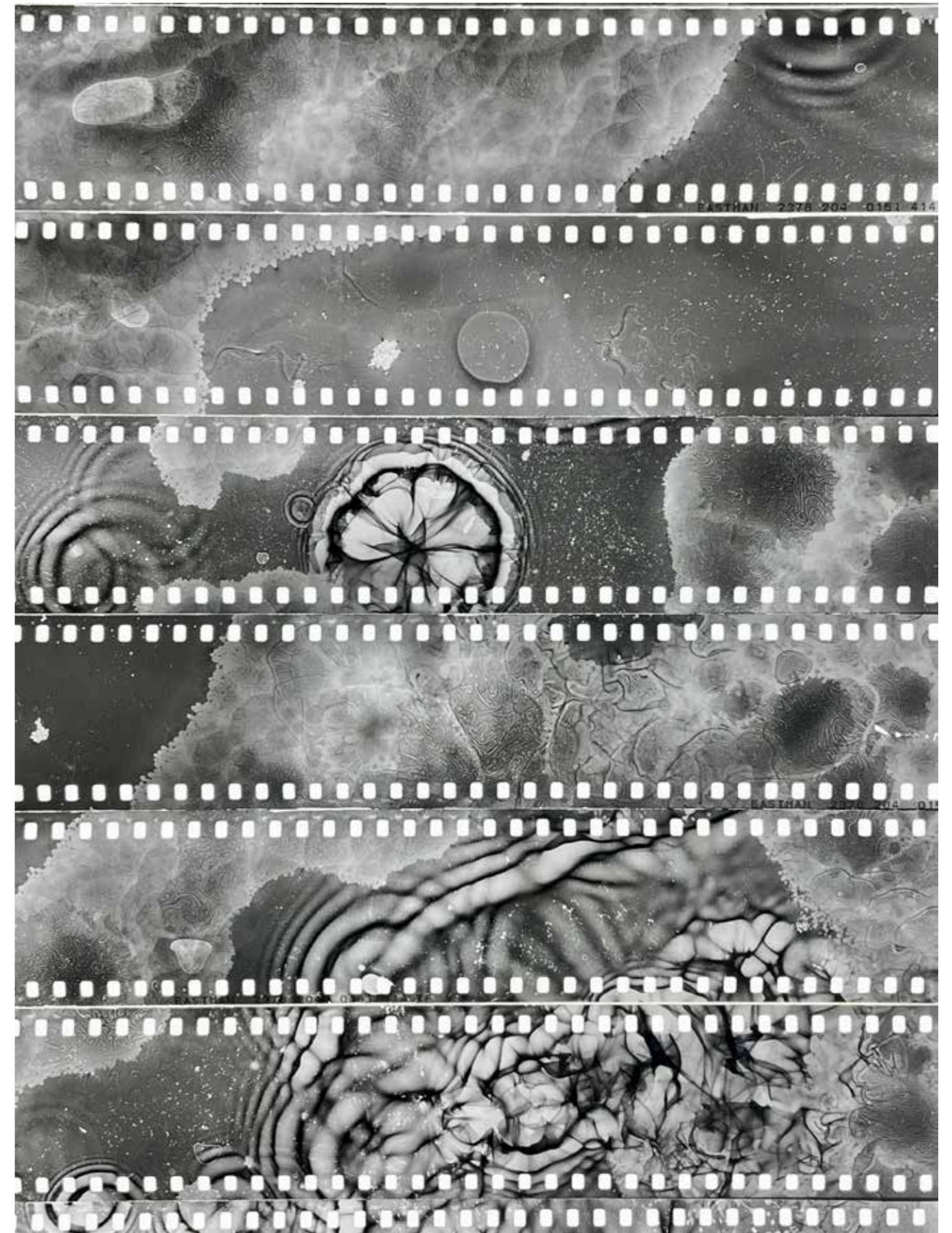
# SHARED COSMOGONIES

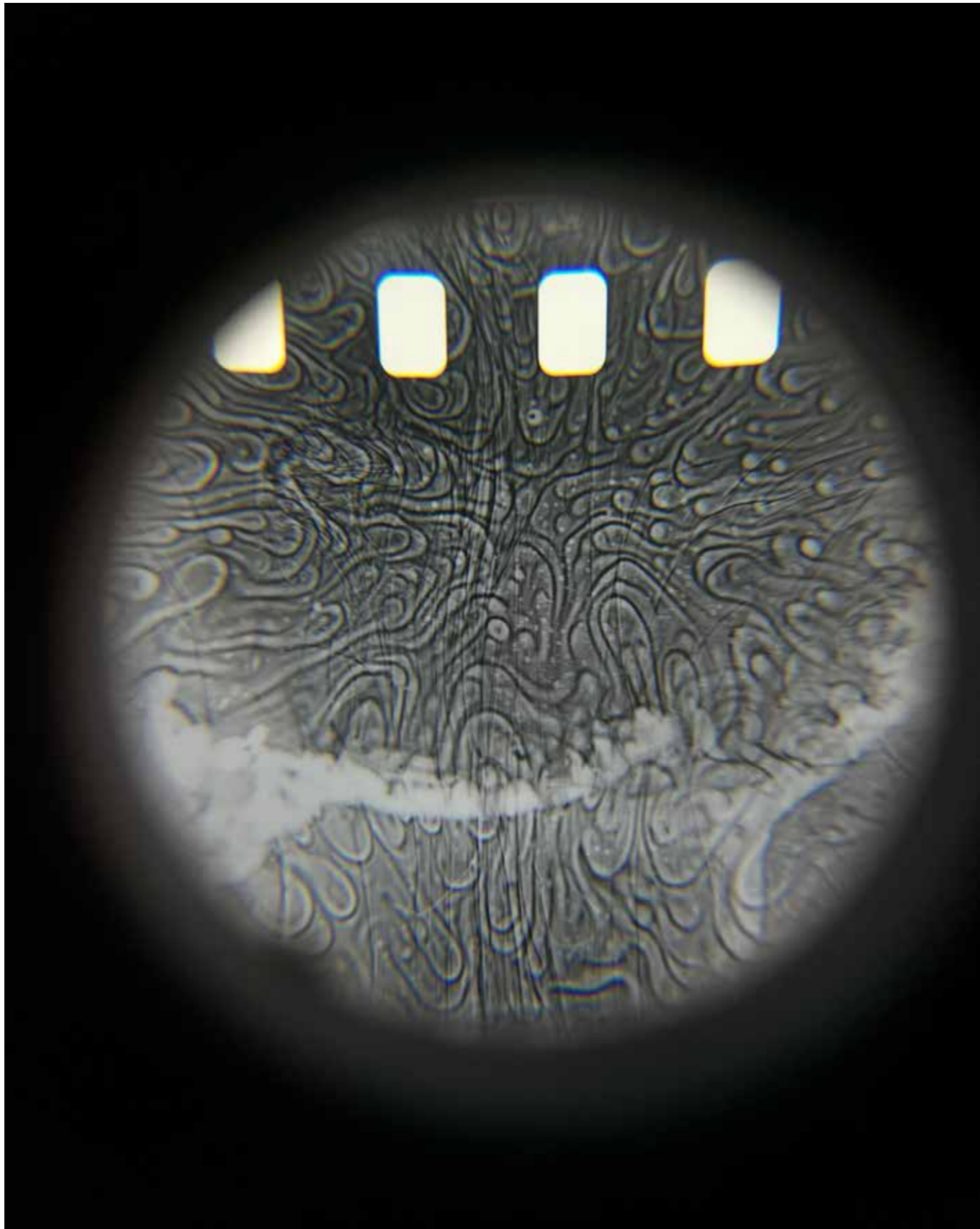
A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE IMAGE THINKER MIGUEL ALFONSO BOUHABEN  
AND THE VISUAL ARTIST DENEK MARTOS

## Introduction to the Collaboration

*Shared Cosmogonies (Kosmogonías compartidas)* is an invitation to a dialogue of diverse actions and knowledge; an intersection between painting, cinema, science, and philosophy; a sharing of the genesis of the constellations and galaxies that constitute us; of the words, ideas, images, and emotions that traverse our acts of creation.

*Shared Cosmogonies (Kosmogonías compartidas)* is a conversation between the image thinker Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben and the visual artist Deneb Martos around the work of the latter, *Cosmogony. Film performance for a planetarium.* A film of expanded cinema that takes the cosmos as its starting point, created with cameraless film techniques on 35mm celluloid with live improvised music by Wade Matthews. A dialogue about the birth of the world; chaos and order; the visible and the invisible. A joint reflection on visible chaos, which draws a constellation in becoming, a map of dynamic lines, a Dionysian and atomic movement, a non-form; and on the invisible and underground order that tells the story of the creation of a world; from genesis to apocalypse. In the beginning was *Chaos*, as Hesiod tells us in his *Theogony*. Chaos as a condition of possibility, articulation, and systematization of order. Thanks to this order from chaos, there is the search for arché, the foundation of reality, and therefore, philosophy and science. Thanks to this order from chaos, light and night exist, *Érebo* and *Nix*, and therefore, cinema.





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*Shared Cosmogonies (Kosmogonías compartidas)* is an intersection of disciplines. Knowledge is not limited to stagnant departments; it is fluid, fractures territorialities, lines, borders, and properties of knowledge to vindicate dialogue, transversality, hybridization, and epistemic cooperation. Knowledge as a form of interweaving, network, rhizome, and interdependence. The dialogue between a filmmaker and a philosopher is possible because both produce ideas: ideas as moving images; ideas as concepts.

*Shared Cosmogonies (Kosmogonías compartidas)* is an assemblage of diverse materials: projectors, mirrors, images, ashes, traces, sounds. Heterogeneous connections where anything connects with anything else: the artistic with the political; the semiotic with the biological; the astronomical with the mystical. Expressive matters are not fixed and closed essences but lines of flight open to dialogue/transform from their experiences in externality. All things are susceptible to being articulated: subjects, chemical processes, love, astronomy, social mechanics. It is about deterritorializing the boundaries of an image.

#### A conversation between Deneb Martos Marcos & Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben

##### Deneb Martos Marcos:

Before I start, I'd like to contextualize my piece *Kosmogonía*, which was born out of Manuel Asín's invitation to the Punto de Vista Festival in 2021 as a proposal for a film performance in the Pamplona Planetarium. I decided to work on my own terrain, cinema without a camera, working with a 35 mm film projector and projecting directly onto the dome. It is my most personal work at a delicate moment in my life, coinciding with the course of my father's degenerative illness, from whom I learned to look at the sky and the world together with my mother from a perspective close to Eastern philosophies of life such as Tao and with

resonances perceived by different cultures, and to become obsessed with the micro and the macro. The world is a unity that comprises a whole, a series of energies and elements that are generated and destroyed in constant coexistence.

It was at this moment of vital crisis, after the pandemic, a sick father and a friend who is dying, that this proposal awakened me to work with film processes without a camera, where the materiality of the celluloid comes into direct contact with the trace of things. I make a journey to my past and to my collection of objects, in Diogenes zen mode. In this process of making, my father passed away, and it was clear to me that the work would be a tribute-duel to him; a process of making, feeling him close from intuition, thanks to which I came to include him directly in the film, using his ashes to make rayograms. I designed a filmic device like a totem with the film projector and a mirror as if it were a telescope redirecting the image towards the zenith of the dome in the space that is the Tornamira hall. There are no frames per se, in that sense it is restless cinema without the effect of animation or realistic movement, but rather it vibrates, but because our brain has the capacity to recognise these forms and capture this pregnancy. It has to do with the creation of the world, almost the Big Bang, how that energy, that matter, begins to form, and I look for a way to show the universe, the formation of the galaxies, that dark matter that forms the Earth when it cools down. I use earth, water, grapes as microorganisms, cells that transform, leaves that are neurons, roots that move, and I incorporated the human footprint and my father's ashes.

##### Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben:

One of the things that has struck me most about this work is that it is a type of cinema that has nothing to do with mainstream cinema, with that type of stereotyped and codified images. It is a cinema that detaches itself from that hegemonic line, a cinema that opens up a space for thought,

a cinema that truly serves to philosophize. What ideas resonate in *Kosmogonía*? The first idea that resonates with this work is Hesiod's *Theogony*, which is a kind of family tree of the Greek gods. It begins: "In the beginning was chaos". Chaos is the primordial void, the place where being is installed and from which all the gods are derived. Now, this impulse to think about the foundation of reality is the first gesture that leads to Ionian physics, which deals with the arché or founding principle of all that is real; but above all with the atomistic metaphysics of Democritus. Democritus affirms that the world is constructed by means of random collisions and collisions. And *Kosmogonía* seems to stage this physics of chaos and chance in the foundation of the world through a restless, shifting, pulsating cinema. However, the chaos is only apparent, because there is a whole series of articulations that construct a circular narrative.

##### Deneb Martos Marcos:

Yes there is, from my approach to Eastern philosophy and the I Ching, the Book of Mutations, sacred geometry, the universal laws as those vibratory energies that put things in order, from that chaos. When I start the film I begin in chaos, I am not clear how it is going to be ordered, and I work with different materials that I have been collecting, conscious of their symbolism and their possibilities of estrangement to awaken the imagination and connect with atavistic memories. In *Kosmogonía*, those atoms that are being generated and that energy that is merging and exploding appear, and there I see how to tell the story, from where it all began, using earthly, residual and everyday materials: wild cane down found in the river Nacimiento, grapes and soil collected from a vineyard in Logroño, water from Madrid, lentils in different stages of germination, leaves from a Bodhi tree, roots collected from a beach in Cabo de Gata, footprints of a five-month-old baby, footprints of a mother, footprints of a daughter, skin of a 48-year-old man, ashes of a



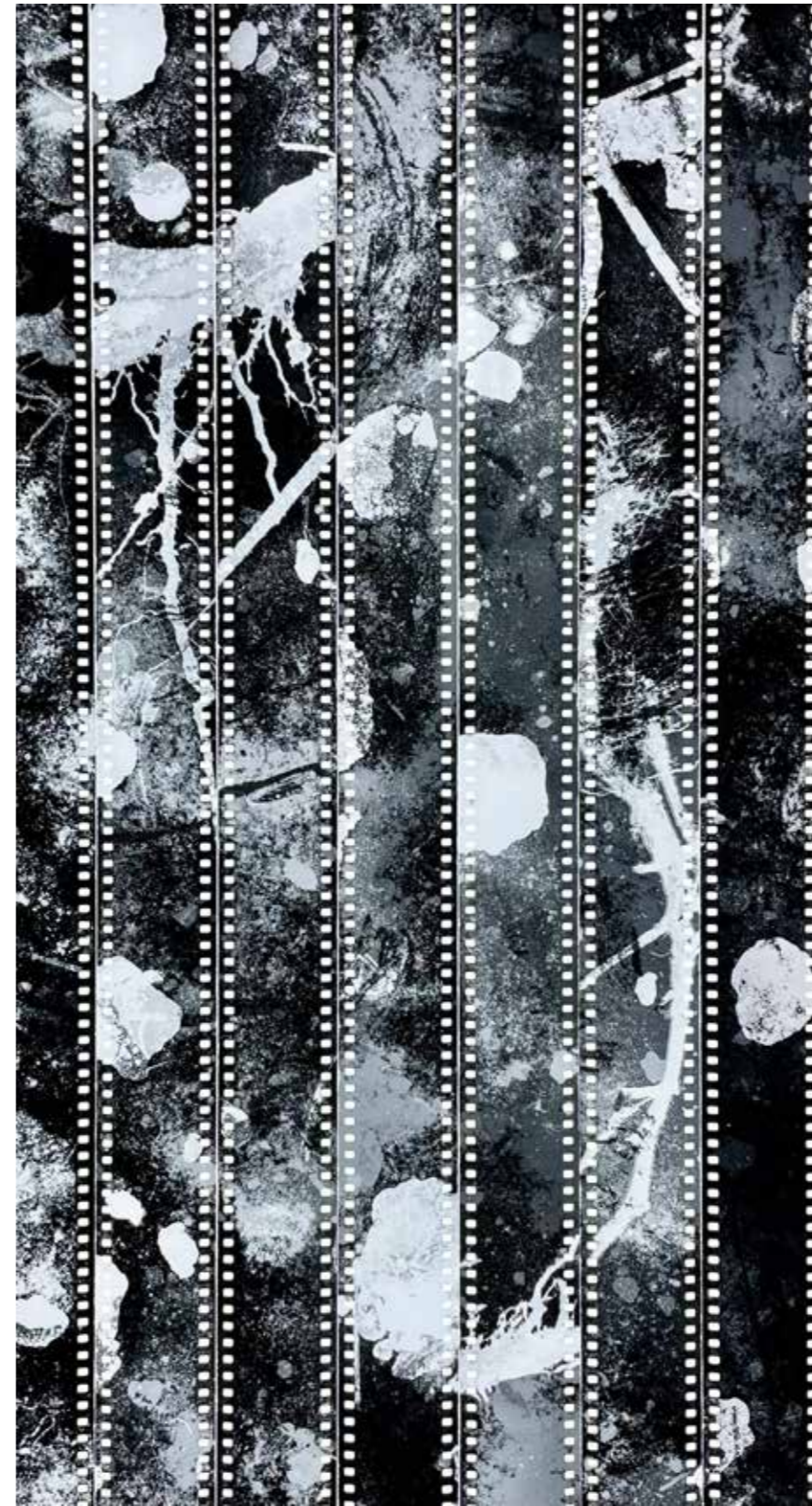
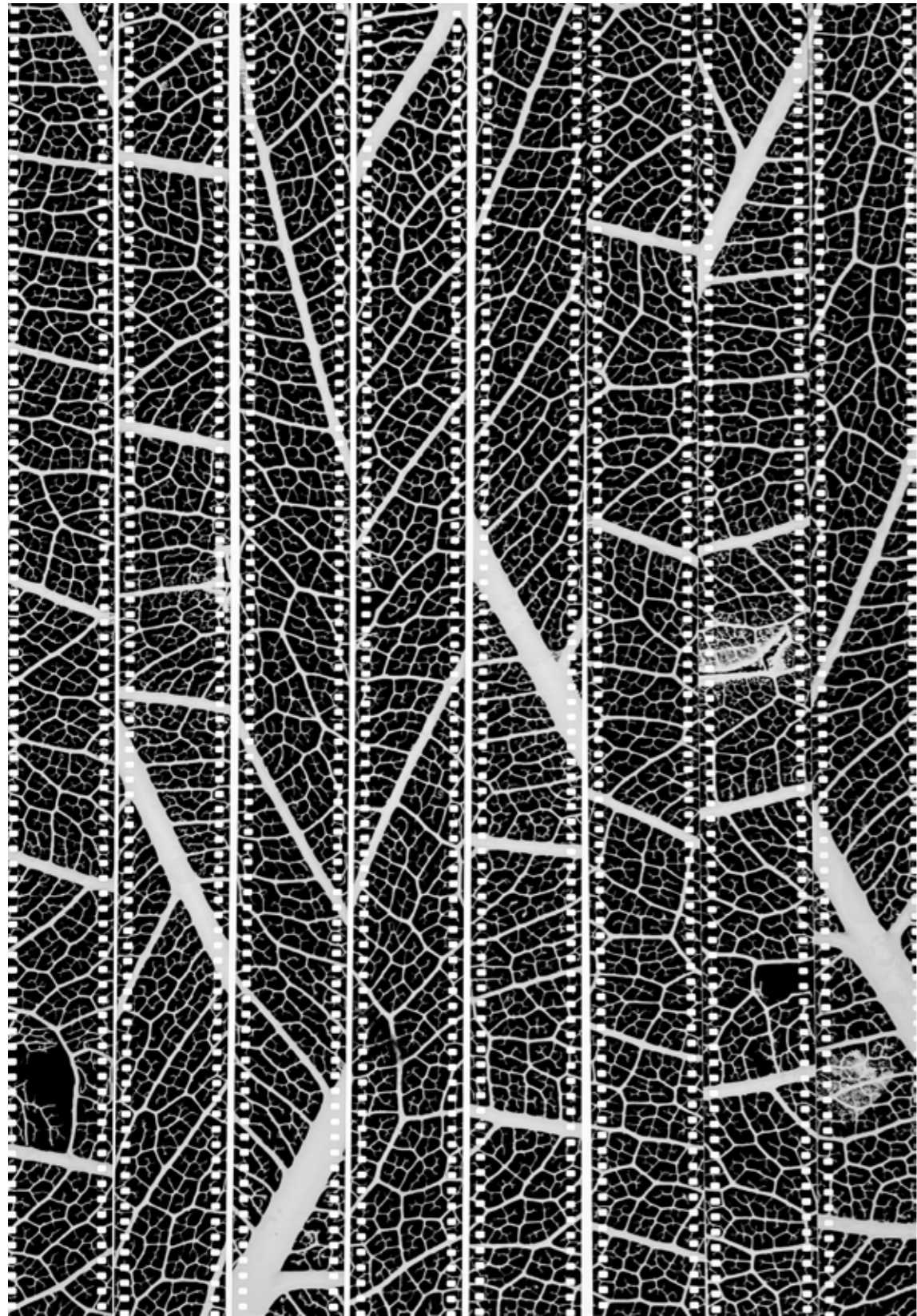
The artist Deneb Martos and the philosopher Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben ©Espacio Rojo



The philosopher Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben envisioning the work of the artist Deneb Martos ©Espacio Rojo



Deneb Martos in dialogue ©Espacio Rojo





MiguelA.Bouhaben and Deneb Martos ©Espacio Rojo

father. In this chaos on a linear level there is no clear measure of time, but the intrinsic qualities of film call for structure, working in turn with musician and sound improviser Wade Matthews.

**Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben:**

Apart from the physics of chaos and the continuous becoming of the image, Kosmogonía is made up of hetero-materialities, of very diverse materials such as feathers, earth, grapes, water. In other words, a whole range of materials that impregnate the physical matter of the celluloid. And that's where Deleuze's idea of rhizome resonated with me, of the idea of heterogeneous connection, of the conjunction of things that in principle have no connection and can be connected. And Manuel de Landa's theory of assemblages, which has a little to do with what you do too, because you make assemblages with materials and disciplines. In the same way that any material can be joined with any other, in this film you are basically making painting, music and performance. In other words, there is a whole dialogue of knowledge, a kind of hybridisation of different disciplines that cross each other.

Why can painting dialogue with film or with performance or with painting? Why can one discipline dialogue with another? Why can a poet talk to a filmmaker? Or why can a scientist talk to a philosopher? Because they are all engaged in constructing ideas. What happens is that a philosopher's ideas are concepts; a painter's are lines, shapes and colours; and a filmmaker's are moving images. But they can talk because they have something in common: creative work, ideas. I find your work very interesting because it hybridises cosmology with the ideas of painting, with the intervention of the celluloid with all these different materials and with the performative device, where we are seeing the projector, the

mirror, the projection in the dome, the space itself and the musician who is in dialogue with the images from the digital and analogical sounds that he constructs. There are scientific ideas, philosophical, pictorial, cinematographic, musical in your work. But there is also an affection that runs through everything. In the last part of the film, your father's ashes are impregnated. So, of course, this materiality is loaded with meaning.

**Deneb Martos Marcos:**

From the moment the idea was born I shared it with my sisters, Brezo and Adria, and we three daughters met at our father's house to do it for a night with a lot of care and respect. In my creative processes I question the limits of the different media, where the process of making is literally action art, and through play and experimentation I have explored different languages and disciplines. I speak of my works as haptic cinema, of thinking with the hands and the body: a hand that thinks, a hand that makes. Perception enters into a very bodily and subconscious meaning. According to Jung, the creation of something new is not achieved by the intellect, but by the playful instinct that acts from an inner need: "the creative mind plays with the objects it loves".

**Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben:**

I thought that your film can be approached philosophically from three perspectives. We have already talked about two of them: from the perspective of the metaphysics of chaos, chance and becoming; and from the perspective of the heterogeneity of materials and ontological transdisciplinarity. I am now interested in talking about a third perspective, a sort of political and performative dimension of the film. The performative dimension is in the direct work with the material, and also in the device of the projection. How did you come up with this whole system to construct this device?

**Deneb Martos Marcos:**

I am sensitive to spatial qualities and the energies that move places, and a planetarium is a temple. A dome has all its power in its center; I was determined that the device should be activated from the center. On the other hand, I had to take into account the physical properties of light, the technical limitations of the projector and the symbolic charge of the device, so I did some preliminary tests with different types of mirrors in order to project a perfect circle. I truncated the window to project a circular format, more organic and natural, similar to scientific observation instruments. My first idea was to hold the mirror myself, but when I tried it out, I found that my pulse made it impossible, so I decided to invent this system of holding it on a tripod. In addition, I consider my projector to be my collaborating machine. Everything was activated, a kind of ceremony, a ritual, a time out of time.

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Rayograph process in water ©Espacio Rojo

### **Deneb Martos Marcos**

*Graduated in Audiovisual Communication from the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), she continued her studies through various seminars and workshops with artists such as Javier Vallhonrat, José María Sánchez-Verdú, Francisco López, Joan Fontcuberta, Bruce McClure, Enric Mira, Thomas Bachler, Joan Morey, and Llorenç Barber, among others. This additional training led her to focus on the fields of film, photography, philosophy, and music. In addition to her main interests, her curiosity led her to the study of ancient sciences such as sacred geometry, which she studied with Carlos Martín Lamonedada and Raymond de Montercy, symbology, with Raimon Arola, and I-Ching Jing Fáng Ì, with Shu-Yuan Chen Tsai. Also as an artist, Deneb Martos has specialized in cameraless photography and experimental cinema through various investigations in photogram techniques, chemigrams, and eco-friendly development techniques with plants, creating a substantial body of work in these fields.*

### **Miguel Alfonso Bouhaben**

*PhD in Audiovisual Communication (Complutense University of Madrid-UCM). Graduate in Philosophy (UCM) and in Theory of Literature (UCM). Postdoctoral Researcher María Zambrano (UCM) with the Mediaclastia and imagomaquia Project. Disruptive and subaltern visualities in video activism, experimental cinema and net-art. Teacher-Researcher at the Film School of the University of the Arts and at the Faculty of Art, Design and Audiovisual Communication of the Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral in Ecuador (2015-2022). Professor in the Master of Latin American and Caribbean Cinema (University of the Arts-ISA, Cuba). Founder and Editor of the Scientific Magazine Ñawi: art design communication. Author of 70 articles in scientific journals indexed in WoS and SCOPUS such as Artnodes, BRAC Barcelona Research Art Creation, L'Atalante and Fotocinema (Spain), Aisthesis (Chile), Kepes and Cuadernos de Música, Visual Arts and Performing Arts (Colombia), Chasqui (Ecuador), Cinemas d'Amérique Latine (France) or Cine documental (Argentina). Coordinator of the books Descolonialidades — Ñawray (with Daniel Villegas and Silvina Valesini) and Nuevas Perspectivas, Nuevas Denuncias. Visualities of contemporary activism in Latin America (with Javier Campo). Co-director of the documentary Fragments to come (2020) presented at International Film Festivals in France, Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador and Peru.*

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