

GENDERS OF THE FORESTS

Master Symposium

As part of the symposium series *Gender and Equality in the Arts*

24 – 25 May 2023

Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW

On-site and online:

Auditorium D 1.04, Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW

→ LIVESTREAM

With contributions by Jumana Emil Abboud, Paula Baeza Pailamilla, Chiara Camoni, Gauri Gill, Pujita Guha, Monica Ursina Jäger, Pauline Julier, Gayatri Kodikal, Franziska Lauber, Alexandra Navratil, Claire Pentecost, Lucia Pietroiusti & Filipa Ramos, Mathilde Rosier, Ana Vaz, and Yvonne Volkart & Felipe Castelblanco

Moderated by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer

Research and Coordination: Marion Ritzmann and Arianna Guidi

Press: Anna Francke

The symposium is open to the public and will be held in English.

More information and program: dertank.ch

The spring Master symposium at Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW, will feature a special convening of artists, writers, ecologists, thinkers, curators, activists, and other art practitioners, all of whom, in their disparate practices, consider the forest as both fact and metaphor, at once life form and a kind of epistemology. Titled *Genders of the Forests*, and held on 24 and 25 May 2023, the symposium will examine the various forms our ecological relationships with forests take, from language-making and care and pedagogy to human-nonhuman communication, at once nonbinary and myriad in possibility.

Acknowledging forests means to address both their extant meaning and their rapid extinction, and to render visible the differences between the rural, the countryside, forestry, and nature itself. Avoiding reductionistic solutions means imagining new realms for the arts in relation with the nonhuman in an era in which our art systems are being profoundly transformed due to climate collapse, retracting economies, and energy transformation. The forest—as an image and as a reality, as a site of growth, relation, and destruction—presents us with unexpected ground from which to imagine the world from within its coverage.

Forests are entangled with the lifeforms—both human and nonhuman—that they support. As such, they are often contested, endangered, exploited places. Forests have long been utilized as refuges in times of war and conflict, been gleaned for their wood and other resources as sources of shelter, and are both ancient and contemporary sites of Indigenous life, medicine, inheritance, and knowledge. The decimation of forests, then, at the hands of multinationals, both democratic and autocratic governments, warring forces, and others, can be seen as an example of a violent disregard for life in toto. Where forests die, so do lifeforms and epistemologies; where they live, diverse forms of existence, community, knowledge, and language are propagated. As Bojana Piškur has noted: “A forest is not the sum of its tree-parts. It is more than that: an ecosystem based on complex, intertwined relationships among plants, animals, fungi, bacteria, and other organisms.”

Understanding the forest's multiplicity bears a similitude, perhaps, with current understandings of our multiple and gendered identities, as well as the many roles and functions of artistic practices and cultural conditions outside the modern and after the modern city. Imaging and imagining new futures and ecologies, at once more equitable, sustainable, and full of real possibility, makes us look for new forests, new forest cultures, new poetic and pragmatic and technical languages that expand the practice of what is sometimes called forestry, sometimes called forest knowledges, and sometimes called art.

To that end, *Genders of the Forests* will emphasize what various disciplines have long noted: that plant thinking exists, and that important concepts are borne from the living world, not only from human thought. Understanding the forest as a force in the transformation of the world is a political act that modifies binary assumptions that we often hold about nature and culture, but also those plans that we envision for technology. If Western cultures believe intentionality is at the core of development, plant thinking has shown that non-intentional consciousness exists. As Michael Marder has written, vegetal thought "amounts to an essentialism-free way of thinking that is fluid, receptive, dispersed, non-oppositional, non-representational, immanent, and material-practical." A forest that thinks indicates that intelligence is always alive and embodied, and that those codes that animate machines are generated from life itself. No technological development can therefore ignore the forest. Thus forest-related research conducted by artists and other thinkers offers us a philosophical, ethical, and ontological way to envision a more livable future. Learning to live with and for this transformation is the aim of this symposium writ large.

The symposium is dedicated to the memory of artist Silke Otto-Knapp.

Genders of the Forests continues the biannual Master symposia series at Institute Art Gender Nature, Basel, begun in 2018, which centers questions of gender, language, ecology, social justice, and artistic practice, in an intimate environment of artistic inquiry and generous conversation. We look forward to you joining us there.

Technical team

Ashvanthi Appapillai, Katharina Kemmerling, Marco Mastrogiacomo, Kristina Pavlovic, Françoise Payot, Emma Rodewald, Stefanie Rohrer, Tabea Rothfuchs, Konrad Sigl, Kim Surenthiran, Suresh Surenthiran

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PROGRAM (subject to alterations)

DAY I – 24 May 2023

Part 1

10.00 am Welcome by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer
10.15 am Reading by Quinn Latimer
10.25 am Jumana Emil Abboud
11.00 am Gayatri Kodikal
11.30 am Mathilde Rosier
Noon Lunch

Part 2

2.00 pm Welcome by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer
2.10 pm Yvonne Volkart & Felipe Castelblanco
2.50 pm Franziska Lauber
3.20 pm Claire Pentecost
3.50 pm Break
4.00 pm Pauline Julier
4.30 pm Ana Vaz, online presentation
5.00 pm Round-up of DAY I by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer
5.10 pm End of DAY I

DAY II – 25 May 2023

Part 3

10.00 am Welcome by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer
10.10 am Reading by Quinn Latimer
10.20 am Gauri Gill
10.50 am Alexandra Navratil
11.20 am Lucia Pietroiusti & Filipa Ramos
Noon Lunch

Part 4

2.00 pm Welcome by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer
2.10 pm Paula Baeza Pailamilla
2.40 pm Chiara Camoni
3.10 pm Break
3.20 pm Monica Ursina Jäger
3.50 pm Pujita Guha
4.20 pm Round up DAY II by Chus Martínez and Quinn Latimer
5.00 pm End of DAY II

BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS

Jumana Emil Abboud was born in Shefa-'Amr, Galilee. Her artistic practice constellates personal stories and collective mythologies, weaving folklore and contemporary tales to navigate themes of memory and dispossession. Employing drawing, video, performance, objects, and text, she surveys place and resilience amidst the topography of Palestine. She lives and works in Jerusalem and London.

Paula Baeza Pailamilla was born in Santiago. They received a degree in Pedagogy in Contemporary Dance and an MA in Art Theory and History at the Universidad de Chile. Their performances often consider their Mapuche identity, and their textile works are often made collectively, evoking issues of gender, erasure, and displacement within their Indigenous community. Since 2016, they have been part of the Mapuche collective Ranginñulewfü, which gave birth to the digital project *Yene: Revista de arte, pensamiento y escrituras en Wallmapu y Abya Yala*. In 2020, their work was featured in the 11th Berlin Biennale. They are currently based in Switzerland.

Chiara Camoni was born in Piacenza, Italy. The diversity of her practices—drawing, vegetal prints, video, sculpture, and ceramics—are often made in collaboration with friends and relatives, as informal and spontaneous groups or more institutional seminars and workshops, all interested in forms and ideas of shared authorship. The “Centro di Sperimentazione” has appeared at the artist’s side for a few years now as a container for the collective processes. She lives and works in Fabbiano in the Apuan Alps, Tuscany.

Felipe Castelblanco is a multidisciplinary artist and researcher who works at the intersection of participatory practices, the moving image, and new media art. His diverse work explores institutional formats and creates platforms for inter-epistemic dialogue. Recent exhibitions include the 2019 Quebec Biennial and the project *Water Territories*, at Helmhaus, Zurich. His PhD, from the MAKE/SENSE PhD Program at HGK Basel FHNW, examined avenues for biocultural peace-building through participatory art and media in the Colombian Pan-Amazon region. He lives and works in Basel.

Gauri Gill was born in Chandigarh, India. Her image-based practice addresses Indian identity markers of caste, class, and community, as well as ecological issues and Indigenous life. Her works include a two-decade-long engagement with marginalized communities in rural Rajasthan called *Notes from the Desert* (1999–), and *Fields of Sight* (2013–), a collaboration with Adivasi artist, Rajesh Vangad that combines her photographs with ancient Warli drawing. She has exhibited at the 58th Venice Biennale; documenta 14, Athens and Kassel; and the 2016 Kochi Biennale. She lives and works in Delhi.

Pujita Guha is an artist and curator. She completed her Masters and MPhil in Cinema Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, and is a PhD candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research concerns the intersection of environment and media, primarily forest ecologies of South and Southeast Asia, with a focus on military and guerilla practices, anthropogenic urban forests, animism, and contemporary moving image art of the region. With Abhijan Toto, she runs The Forest Curriculum, a curatorial project focused on questions of pedagogy and environmental thinking in the forested belts of South and Southeast Asia.

Monica Ursina Jäger was born in Switzerland and received her MA at Goldsmiths College, London. Her multidisciplinary work examines notions of landscape in built environments and natural landscapes, rethinking ‘topography’ as a mental landscape rather than as a form of visual representation. Her research excavates histories of the social, political and sensorial conversations between natural and built elements, the rural and late-century modernist architectures. She is a researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Natural Resource Sciences at the ZHAW School of Life Sciences and Facility Management.

Pauline Julier was born in Geneva. An artist and filmmaker, she studied at the École Supérieure de la Photographie d'Arles and the SPEAP, Art and Politics Experimental programme, Sciences Po, Paris. In her works, she explores the links that humans create with their environments through stories, rituals, knowledge, and images. Her films and installations are composed of elements of diverse origin and form—documentary, theory, fiction—to reconstitute the complexity of our relationship to the world. Her films include *Naturales Historiae* (2019), which examines the history of nature and includes an interview with Bruno Latour. She lives and works in Geneva.

Gayatri Kodikal was born in Chennai, India. She is an artist, writer, educator, and game-maker known as gamedevi. Her game worlds and performances are informed by psycho-geography, cinema, oral storytelling, animism, and proto-feminisms. Recent works include *Sinking into the Mangroves*, a Zoom performance and game-world reading that tells the story of an encounter with the mangrove forest on the western coast of India during an expedition to record the sound of a rare species of crustaceans, which was performed at *Forests as Imaginations*, at the School of Environment and Architecture, in Mumbai. She lives and works in Rotterdam.

Quinn Latimer was born in Venice, California; she lives and works in Basel and Athens. A poet, critic, editor, and occasional curator, she is Head of the MA at Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW. Her books include *Like a Woman: Essays, Readings, Poems* (2017), *Sarah Lucas: Describe This Distance* (2013), *Film as a Form of Writing* (2013), and *Rumored Animals* (2012). She was editor-in-chief of publications for documenta 14, in Athens and Kassel. Recently, she curated the exhibition *SIREN (some poetics)*, which explored technologies of myth and mouth, earth and alarm, gender and poetics, at Amant, New York. She is a PhD candidate in the MAKE/SENSE PhD Program at HGK Basel FHNW.

Franziska Lauber is a Swiss artist and researcher. She is a member of SARN (Swiss Artistic Research Network) and founder of the workgroup *Sense of Forest–Sense of Place: On the possibility of perception as an artistic research method in the eco- and energetic system FOREST*. Her installations and video works consider points of contact with nonhuman animals and reflect on concepts of landscape, forests, temporality, and landmarks. They also often emphasize the ephemeral, both transience and disappearance, which play out over the course of her exhibitions. She lives and works in Bern.

Chus Martínez was born in Spain and studied philosophy and art history in New York. A writer and curator, she is Head of Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW. She is curator of Ocean Space, in Venice, for TBA21 Academy, and curatorial director of der TANK, in Basel. Her books include *Like This: Natural Intelligence As Seen By Art* (2022), *Corona Tales: Let Life Happen to You* (2020), and *Club Univers* (2017). Previously, she was chief curator at El Museo del Barrio, New York (2012–2014), and Head of the department of artistic direction and a member of the core agent group for DOCUMENTA (13), in Kassel.

Alexandra Navratil was born in Zurich. She studied fine art at Central St. Martins College and Goldsmiths College, both in London. Her work often starts as scientific-historical research on the beginnings of photography, film, and industrial history. By combining and animating found visual material, Navratil's works reflect on early modernism and its impact on imagery today, while her videos, installations, sculptures, and silkscreens follow material histories. She is a lecturer at Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW, and lives and works in Zurich and Amsterdam.

Claire Pentecost is an artist, activist, and writer who researches the living matters of the unified multi-dimensional being that animates the critical zone of our planet. Her work is driven by research and inspired by questions of form; her longstanding interest in nature and artificiality predates her recent responses to anthropogenic climate change. Her projects often address the contested line between the natural and the artificial, focusing on food, agriculture, bio-engineering, and anthropogenic changes in the indivisible living entity that animates our planet. She is Professor in the Department of Photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Lucia Pietroiusti was born in Rome. She is a curator working at the intersection of art, ecology, and systems. Founder of the *General Ecology* project at Serpentine, London, she is also the co-curator (with Filipa Ramos, since 2018) of *The Shape of a Circle in the Mind of a Fish*, an interdisciplinary festival, radio, and publication series on consciousness and intelligence across species also held at the Serpentine. Elsewhere, Pietroiusti was curator of *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, by Rugile Barzdzikaite, Vaiva Grainyte, and Lina Lapelyte, for the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 58th International Venice Biennale. She lives and works in London.

Filipa Ramos was born in Lisbon. A writer, lecturer, and curator, she received a PhD from the School of Critical Studies at Kingston University, London. Her research focuses on how art addresses ecology, fostering relationships between nature and technology. Curator of Art Basel Film and a founding curator of Vdrome, the online artists' cinema she co-founded in 2013, her recent projects also include *The Shape of a Circle in the Mind of a Fish* and *Persons Personne Personen*, the 8th Biennale Gherdëina (2022), both curated with Lucia Pietroiusti. She is a lecturer at Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW, and lives and works in Lisbon and Normandy.

Mathilde Rosier was born in Paris. Her moving, multidisciplinary work emerges from her interest in the physical and psychological experience of ancient rites and rituals, manifesting in constellations of self-made costumes and mystic and hybridized representations of animals, humans, and nature. Through an admixture of painting, film, dance and theatre, she reflects on the need to reintegrate human activity with the "natural environment," including pre-industrial practices, observing the world from the vantage of the present-day countryside. She is a lecturer at Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW, and she lives and works in Burgundy.

Ana Vaz was born in the Brazilian highlands inhabited by the ghosts buried by its modernist capital: Brasília. Originally from the cerrado and a wanderer by choice, she has lived in the arid lands of central Brazil and southern Australia, in the mangroves of northern France and in the northeastern shores of the Atlantic. Her filmography questions cinema as an art of the (in)visible and an instrument capable of dehumanizing the human, expanding its connections to forms of life other than human or spectral. Her activities are also embodied in writing, critical pedagogy, installations, and collective walks.

Yvonne Volkart is head of research at Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW. From 2017 to 2021 she headed the research project *Ecodata–Ecomedia–Ecoaesthetics*, for which she completed the monograph *Technologies of Care: From Sensing Technologies to an Aesthetics of Attention* (Diaphanes, 2022). Until 2025 she will direct the SNSF research project *Plants_Intelligence: Learning like a Plant*. In collaboration with Sabine Himmelsbach and Karin Ohlenschläger she curated the exhibition and book project *Eco-Visionaries: Art, Architecture and New Media After the Anthropocene* (Hatje Cantz, 2018). She lives and works in Basel and Zurich.