

ISSUE 01 / NOVEMBER 2020

revival

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SOLUTIONS

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OPEN OUT FESTIVAL
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JOIN
THE
REVIVAL

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who we are

The Tartu Artists' Union is a non-profit organisation comprising professional artists and art theorists. The aim of the union is to promote art, create opportunities for professional development, provide information about events and exhibitions held in Estonia as well as abroad. This publication was made possible by all of the international and local artists, scientists, and collaborators who took part and shared their work with us.

website: <http://kunstimaja.ee/in-english>

what is revive?

"We survive only if we all survive, and I truly believe it is our moment to save the world." - Betsy Damon.

"Revive" is a research and knowledge exchange project that was initiated in Southern Estonia in anticipation of the 2024 cultural capital of Europe (Tartu, Estonia). The online exhibition and publication interviewed 18 scientists, artists, and curators from the Nordic States, the Baltic, and internationally. It behaves as a reawakening not only in our cultural scene but focuses upon innovative artists and scientists whom are passionate about cultural outreach and creative approaches that focus on the relationship between the environment and human activity.

The online exhibition and launch of the "revive" publication lays the foundation of our collaborative goals for the future.

We have endeavored to create an oasis for international artists to come and work as residents, to share knowledge, and to learn from us and our contacts. We endeavor to expand our outreach not only across cities but in smaller townships. In the form of traditional artistic practices, performances, talks, or interventions. By encouraging collaboration in our country, we better enable ourselves to share artistic/ecological expertise with other corners of the globe. For those



special thanks

The City of Tartu - for financial support and backing

The Arctic Dive Base - for introduction to photographer Viktor Lyagushkin

Nordic and Baltic Young Artist Award - for promotion of our youth

Sander Kiviselg, Rummu Adventurecenter - for all their support for “Under the Water, on the Moon”

TYPA Print and Paper Museum - For being a pillar for artist residencies in the city of Tartu. Without whom many of the projects of James Cook, Charlotte Biszewski, and Sarah Epping would not have been realized.

title page

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Betsy Damon

The most popular park in the city of Chengdu, China is a 5.9-acre public park called the Living Water Garden. A viewer might find it difficult to believe this area was once a polluted urban landscape. Now, on a sunny afternoon, couples walk along the sidewalk, and children splash in the water cleaned naturally by the park. At the time the park was built, the idea that a garden could aerate, revitalize, and clean the river seemed perhaps an impossible dream. For artist Betsy Damon though there was no doubt. "Of course we are going to do it," she said. Innovative research, the threat of imprisonment, and watching as the massive park began working were all parts of the process. In an exclusive talk with Damon, we learned how she went from being an activist in feminist performances on the streets of New York to an inspirational icon for ecological artists the world over.

Damon's youth was a tapestry of cities and cultures having spent several years of her childhood in Istanbul during the 1940s. She said, "It was a time where we were swimming in a clean Bosphorus." When she and her family returned to the U.S. Damon said it wasn't the same consumerist America of today. Although her family could have purchased a set of

skis for her, they told her if she wanted a pair of skis she should learn to make them. Perhaps it was this do-it-yourself upbringing that would empower Damon in many of her future endeavors.

In the 1980s she began a group for the support of female artists. "We were dealing with the question of, 'Where does a woman belong and what can a woman do?' The answer was, 'Anywhere and anything she wants.'" "Maybe in this generation, it isn't that obvious, but at the time I was young it was considered that if I was a woman, I couldn't become an artist, and I wanted to change that way of thinking. In our culture, we are always struggling with an individualist mentality, and often we see other people as our competitors. We want to be better than the next person, and that has led to so many different levels of oppression. It's a myth, though; there is so much more we can do with brainstorming and working together than being on our own." -Betsy Damon

This mentality has led to Damon's support and outreach of younger artists. "I ask all of my students what is their biggest goal, and what do they have to do to get there?" Damon recalled almost all of the students had ideas, and many

were convinced they couldn't make them happen. The question was followed with conversations about what needed to be done to move forward. Maybe they needed to cry, or scream, or talk about it. Some of them ended up doing projects in five months they originally believed would have taken five years. The San Antonio River cleanup was a project which was spearheaded by one of Damon's students. Empowerment, support systems, and collaborations became the keystone of her career. She would often say of grandiose projects that are credited to her that the project is not mine "but ours."

Later in her career, the content of Damon's work changed directions. "For some reason, I set out to understand water; the projects I did were the consequence of that. Every living thing is created by water and is significantly made up of water. There is some level of communication between us that indigenous people knew and that intense meditators understand. In a droplet of water, there are more bits of information than in an entire computer. This is my passion right now, the biophysics of water, and how can we communicate with this water on a quantum level to make the world a better place?"



The Living Water Garden



Testing the River photo credit: Betsy Damon

“We desperately need a solution. Not in 10 years, not in 20 years, but now.”

The living water garden is a prime example of the fascination with water, and the result is beyond all expectations; Chengdu was the only city with a green plan, which Betsy said she wasn't aware of at the time. “I didn't go there to do that project, and I entered stage left. At that time they had designed 19 kilometers of parks along the river, and they asked if I had any knowledge of restorative ecosystems in parks. I lied and said, yes. I went to the Netherlands after that. I had read they were doing some experiments with it, but there just wasn't much

information out there. In the aftermath of the project, when we turned the systems on and saw it working, it was the most rewarding part of the process.” Since then, there have been many people or countries who created projects inspired by this, but no one has replicated the idea.

“What we discovered years later is that we didn't understand why it worked so well. Because the systems throughout all of the park were interconnected, they could recycle toxins in this system. The park wasn't just my triumph though. We had an incredible team. Zhang Jihai, the

only bio-hydraulic engineer who had been doing work for the government at that time in China, was on our team. At the time the Chinese premier was opposed to the park, and Zhang Jihai wrote 35 letters to the government in support of this project. The opposition made the mayor of Chengdu reluctant to build it, and he asked Jihai if he was willing to go to jail for this woman. Jihai answered back, “Yes, this woman is me.”

The level of absolute trust this colleague had in Damon may seem unfathomable to the reader. However, even during

our short conversation, I found she had an astonishing way of dealing with questions and the recording of the interview read more like a conversation between friends. Perhaps it is one of those intangible things about her as a person that has made her projects so successful making her an inspiration to students and colleagues alike.

When asked with how she deals with the weight of the ecological crisis and fear when she is faced with such overwhelming evidence of environmental decline. She states, “I never

considered defeat. It is a waste of our time; it takes too much energy to fall into being disappointed, defeated and despaired. I'm not afraid to die, and if I do, I'm glad to say that I will have gone down fighting. What is defeat? It is not to be alive, and most people are walking dazed from day to day. You have to choose to be fully alive, and when you do so, it's a choice to feel how challenging it is going to be, and you will feel your fears. Feeling fear though isn't the same thing as feeling defeat. So I am convinced that if we can plant enough trees and enough rivers flowing, then the

world may bounce back. It may take 50-60 years, but I believe it will bounce back.”

After the interview with Damon, I am convinced more than ever environmental issues aren't a problem to be left to environmentalists or scientists. These are issues that will affect all of us, and we must all collectively decide to change. but now.”

(All images and quotations are the intellectual property of artist Betsy Damon.)



India Mansour

The growing popularity for the relationship between art and science in the modern age has inspired many artists to create work that has a deep understanding of the natural world. These works reach out towards large ranges of people, engaging them in knowledge that may have otherwise seemed unattainable. Scientists working with artists believe it can assist with outreach of ideas, and help them see their own work from a different viewpoint.

Berlin's "Art Laboratory" is one glowing example of blurring the lines between art and science, creating a space where scientific innovation gains greater outreach by becoming an innovative part of Berlin's cultural scene. The exciting repertoire of exhibitions featuring results such as bioplastic textiles and a discussion of the future of food, are the end result of collaborations between the artistic space and many scientific institutes.

India Mansour, one of the ecologists working with the art lab, is currently working in Berlin's botanical garden and is active in outreach projects in both German and English. Even with a phd in ecology, she is the type of scientist who can take words like eutrophication, and community coalescence, and paint an understable and clear picture of the state of ecology in today's world.

"DIY Hack the Panke," is a prime example of a project in which Mansour partook in that blurred the lines between science, art,

and outreach. A century ago, the Panke river in Berlin was known as the Stink Panke due to run off from nearby factories. Changes in the past century have seen it become a popular green space with increasingly high-hopes for rewilding. DIY Hack the Panke is interested in these changing areas and carried out "Citizen Science" projects and workshops focused on microplastics, biodiversity and water ecology in the Panke river.

As part of the project Mansour wrote a zine, illustrated by Sarah Hermanutz and designed by Fara Peluso, entitled "Invisible Life." The zine itself focuses on the importance of bacterial cultures in the Panke river and explains how human activities cause "eutrophication" or oxygen dead zones in waters around the world. Popularization of what is a worrying and sometimes overwhelming topic is the jumpstart many of us need to understand what can be done to alleviate issues of the growing climate crisis.

As Rachel Carson once said, "the more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe, the less taste we shall have for destruction." It seemed the perfect quote to open the zine "Invisible Life" as Mansour's text shone a light on a world that many of us don't consider human's effects on.

More information on DIY Hack the Panke: <http://www.pankeculture.com/panke-life-microbiodiversity-workshop-diy-hack-the-panke/>

Laura Pöld

photo credit: Laura Pöld

In recent decades, greater awareness about where food comes from, and what is necessary to produce it is becoming more popularized. Books like “Farmageddon: The true cost of cheap meat” and Netflix documentaries such as “The Gamechangers” promote the idea of veganism and expose some of the evils of the food industry and the extreme pollution being caused by it.

Artist Laura Pöld, during her residency in ISCP New York in 2019 became inspired by the idea of pollution in the food industry ending up inside of the human body. Her exhibition “Hello From

Inside” focused on making non-human objects the protagonist, on making the viewer consider and observe how food and trash are interconnected. With recent studies in psychology and health fields showing that pollution may be linked not only to rise in physical health problems but in mental health issues, Pöld’s work was not only powerful but necessary (ref 2).

“The studio project (work that developed during the residency at the ISCP New York in 2019) was very much entangled with my readings at that time,” Laura stated. One of the

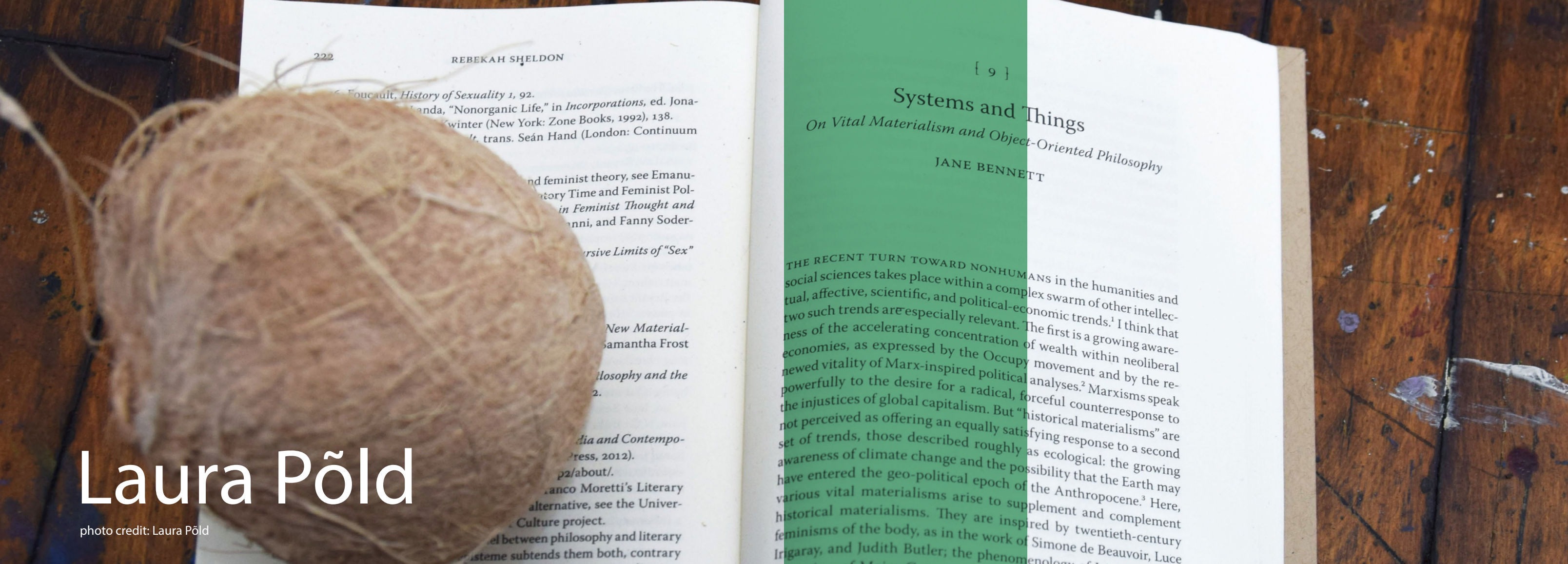
Diet and the agency of food have always been a puzzling topic for me personally, and I was starting to read about it more from environmental and social perspectives.

essential books besides Jane Bennett’s “Vibrant Matter” was the book titled “Gut Feminism” by Elizabeth A. Wilson. It created a point in Pöld’s work, where working with pollution was working with the human body; environmental issues became “very real and close to every cell in our body.”

The powerful inspiration behind her work reminds one of ecologist, James Lovelock, who coined the concept of Gaia, or “the earth body” (ref 1). Sometimes, the symbiotic nature of the earth and the human are overlooked, and society does not realize that

wounds in the body of the planet may have directly impacted our own lives and natures.

In Vibrant Matter, Bennett speaks about industrial toxins that humans spill in the environment never really being in a safe distance from our bodily cycles. On planet earth, there is no such thing as a “dumpster.” Our trash is just being integrated into the environments of the planet. In the Pacific are gyres of waste, bays in Chittagong are covered with broken ships, and landfills take up unprecedented amounts of land. Science magazine put it into perspective





When the overwhelming pollution of the food industry is put into perspective it makes eating, breathing, and drinking political issues.

photo credit: Laura Pöld



that 100 years of America's trash would be 32 times bigger than the great pyramids at Giza. (ref 3) Perhaps the 8th wonder of the world will be a testament to waste.

When the overwhelming pollution created by the food industry is put into perspective it makes" breathing, drinking and eating political issues. Diet and the agency of food have always been a puzzling topic for me personally, and I was starting to read about it more from environmental and social perspectives. The three words "Environmental, Social, Mental," were put side by side by Wilson herself in "Gut Feminism." So I imagined my studio with the sprouting yams, my books, the words made of thread and the needlework like a gut or a stomach where different processes took place. The three words marked my intent and directions of thinking: environmental, social, mental

(health)." – Laura Pöld

Laura discussed the importance of the word "vermicast" and why it held such a prominent position on the gallery wall. I was considering making a composting-sculpture for a public space. Unfortunately, it was winter and the wrong season. Still, the idea of food waste becoming fertile soil for new plants and the caretaking of the valuable living matter was an important part of the mind map I was creating in that time. I did not start a real composting project, but some of the yams were getting soft and starting to rot – it was another process to witness."

It was an interesting role that Laura put the artist into, in a sense she removed herself from the creative process. She made the relationship between inanimate objects the protagonist. Laura stated, "A lot about this work was about

witnessing and not producing. Looking, thinking and creating in alliance with the living matter such as the yams that were either sprouting and growing tall green shoots or rotting away. Most of this exhibit was not about making, but about being with the materials. Sometimes I provided water to the yams, or I chose to place them in the sun, but in general, it was about letting the other species have their own life. It was a key component, thinking and noticing how much we work in alliance with other species and vibrant matter."

Ref 1: Adrianabo. "JAMES EPHRAIM LOVELOCK. Sylwetka – James Ephraim Lovelock." Ekologia.pl. January 19, 2015. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.ekologia.pl/wiedza/ekolodzy/naukowcy/james-ephraim-lovelock,6510.html>.

Ref 2: Bennett, Chloe. "Pollution and Mental Health." News. February 14, 2020. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://www.news-medical.net/health/Pollution-and-Mental-Health.aspx>.

Ref 3: Brain, Marshall. "What If the U.S. Put All Its Trash in One Giant Landfill?" HowStuffWorks Science. June 30, 2020. Accessed October 19,

socially-engaged art

Xavier Cortada

"I clearly care a lot about science and I am distraught by the lack of fact based science in our world, and in our decision making. A lot of my art is in reaction to our inability as human beings as a species to elect efficient leaders. A lot of my work tries to elevate science, yet still there is a ritualistic aspect that speaks to the interconnectedness of people and nature."

Xavier Cortada's work has expansive outreach and speaks to people of all longitudes. His project on the effects of sea level rise in the state of Florida, "Underwater HOA" began with a project at the South Pole called "Longitudinal Installation." It was a representative global campfire for persons impacted

by climate change. The trip to Antarctica was funded by an artist's grant from the national science foundation. "I want individuals to know that climate change is real and that it is affecting humanity at every longitude. People around the world are suffering because of human caused impacts. There are two points on the planet where the longitudes converge, the north and south pole. In the Longitudinal Installation, 24 pairs of shoes were placed along 24 longitudinal lines. Using stories from 24 persons around the planet, there was a recitation of the stories from different locations about the planet suffering from the impacts of climate change. All of them meeting at this singular point.

"This ice will eventually cause coastlines of Florida, and my city, to be reclaimed by the sea."



The performance done at the South Pole was repeated in multiple locations, and though the viewer would no longer be at the convergence points of longitude at the south pole, the travelling sets of shoes became a portal to empathy. The viewer could walk around the sets of shoes and

walk around the theory of every line of longitude on the planet. "That's the constant tension in my artwork, finding a balance between the promotion of science and having an impact on the emotionally driven creatures that humans are. I want to speak to your heart but open your mind." -Xavier Cortada

Cortada also spoke about the exchange of knowledge and inspiration he gained onsite. "I went to the South Pole with a lot of ideas, thoughts on proximity to different nations and cultures around the world. I wanted to talk about climate change, and I wanted to talk about time and imagine the future of these icebergs. It was connected a lot to human issues, my parents were both refugees and climate change is related so closely to displacement. What was it like [for them] coming from Cuba and ending up in Albany, New York? As Xavier stated, the performance opened a portal to our empathy as humans, with the thought of how many people will be displaced by the incoming climate crisis? However, when participating in the performance at the convergence of longitudes, Xavier

Cortada was impacted by the massive sheets of ice around him that would soon melt. The scientists working there told him that the melting ice will eventually cause the coastlines of Florida to be reclaimed by the sea. "It wasn't part of my proposal to make ice paintings, but once I was there I felt I had no choice but to make them."

In the aftermath of the Antarctic ice paintings the project Global Coastlines and Underwater HOA" was birthed. Rather than bombarding individuals with all of the facts pointing towards our sinking coastlines, Cortada printed numbers on the paintings of ice. Each number was related to each home's elevation above sea level. The lower the number, the greater the likelihood their home would sink in the coming decades. For individuals who wished to collaborate, all that was required was to go online and follow a clear instruction sheet. The app www.eyesontherise.com allowed participants to discover their home's elevation above sea level.

The project was a cry out to all of the people watching the developer's cranes, changing their city landscapes. "Developers have a different timeline than we do. A developer's job is to build something that has a return on investment in 2 to 3 years. For those of us investing in a home, we potentially have a lifetime invested in paying off our home. For developers, the

incentive is making money, and desire for profit makes the truth more opaque."

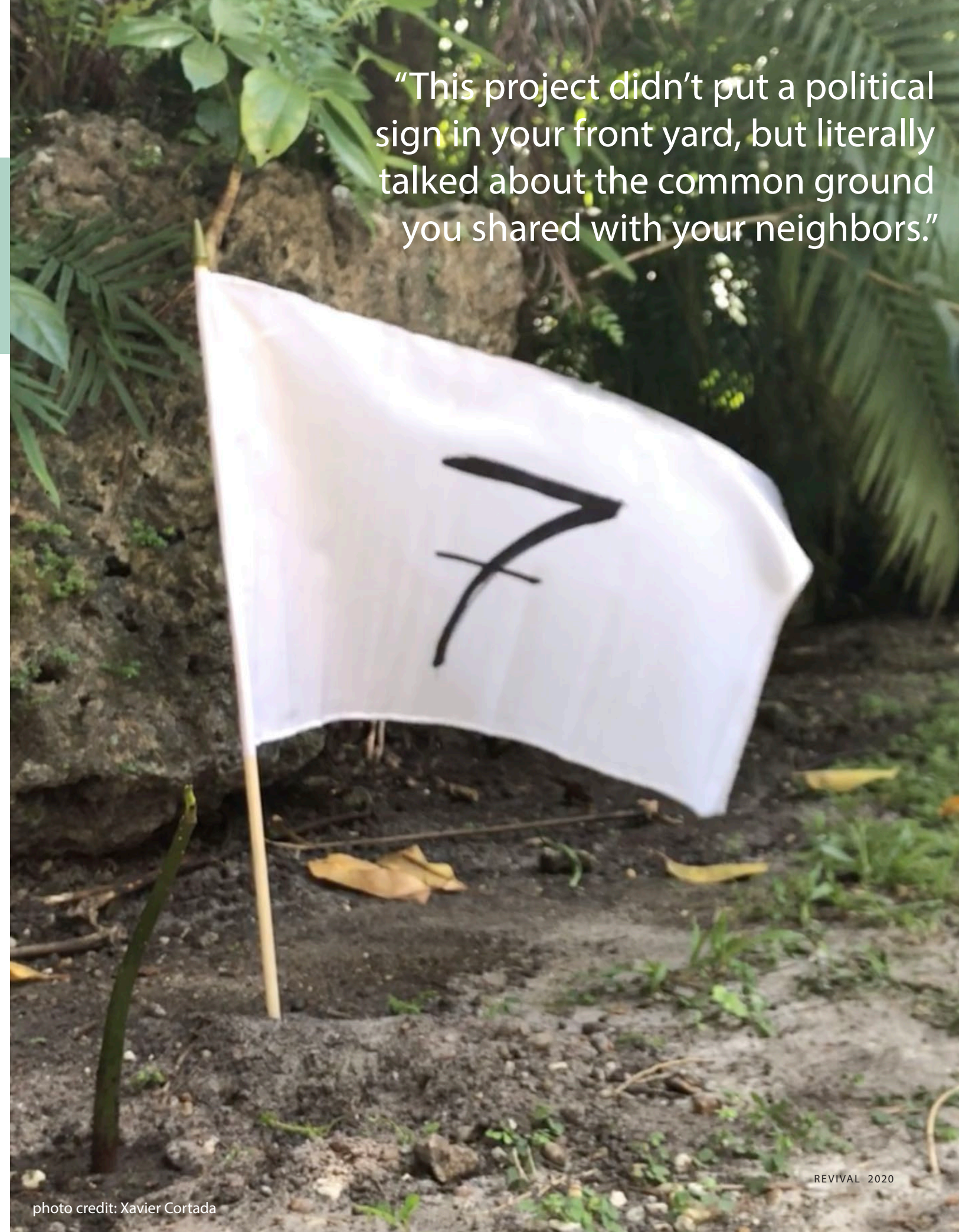
For anyone wanting to purchase a home in Miami, consistent development makes the market seem healthy and it can be difficult to convince people otherwise. Cortada's project demanded for everyone to look 30 years in the future, the assertiveness of which made time seem less linear. Cortada claimed that the issue of sea level rise "needs a broader vision, more courage, and greater responsibility on the part of the developers to give individuals security that their home will not be underwater 30 years from now."

As with most of Cortada's projects, they appeal to our emotions rather than just presenting an overwhelming list of facts, or isolating persons due to beliefs. "This project didn't put a political sign in your front yard, but literally talked about the common ground that you shared with your neighbor of a different political party. It became a question for everyone, How are we going to address this in the future? It is about changing public opinion and changing commissions' perspectives on what we want our timeline to be."

Find more information on Xavier Cortada and his projects on <https://cortada.com/>

ref 1: <http://hibiscusgallery.com/about-2018-icepaintings/>

"This project didn't put a political sign in your front yard, but literally talked about the common ground you shared with your neighbors."



Rait Lõhmus + Maarja Mäemets



In the sunken soviet prison at Rummu, Estonia, artists Rait Lõhmus and Maarja Mäemets created an eerie commentary on the temporality of life.



photo credit: Rait Lõhmus



photo credit: Rait Lõhmus

Located forty-five minutes west of Tallinn, Estonia, in a town called Rummu, is a quarry. Up until the fall of the USSR in 1990 and the subsequent independence of Estonia, the quarry was the site of forced labour by inmates at Rummu prison. Now primarily underwater, tourists can still see the decaying walls of the Rummu prison protruding from the waters of the quarry. It's now a popular spot for divers to come and explore the decaying landmark that is so far removed from its original purpose.

Rummu Quarry in Summertime
As freedivers, Maarja Mäemets and Rait Lõhmus were inspired in using a space that had an exclusivity to it. The waters of Rummu, and the flooded Soviet prison provided that exclusivity. A team of SCUBA divers from the Rummu Adventure centre became the necessary support team for the two artists.

"Originally we thought the installation would take a day or two, and it ended up taking two weeks. We had a plan, but nothing seemed to go exactly as we had intended it to at the beginning, so there was a lot of spontaneity as well. On paper, it had seemed much easier but ended up being so difficult. If we wanted to sink a table, and it didn't want to sink, then you have to spend so much time figuring out how to make the table do what it really doesn't want to."

The exhibition consists of installations

on different levels, some located at up to 8 meters of depth, and some that could be clearly be seen from the surface.

"There is a sort of story that runs through these six spots, its like a journey and a story that you should travel through to get to the end". The artists stated that "we dive here, but as we continue our journey there is a feeling of isolation that may be exciting at the beginning, and the farther into the depths we descend, the deeper in melancholy we may find ourselves."

The Hands Installation – Rummu Quarry One of the installations that has received an especial amount of attention is the circle of hands reaching upwards. "As I was working with the piece I imagined all of the prisoners, I think this was the biggest influence for me." There is a longing to turn back at some point, that's maybe what these hands were about, reaching back towards an unobtainable past and realizing that you have gone too far? This is the deepest place for our pieces here (8m). Rait described the location as "seeing the silence." It seems fitting that the smoky clouds in the water around the hands come from decaying plants that are part of the sunken forest in the quarry.

Glass figures and sunken forest
I was lucky enough to experience the exhibit from different perspectives.

Having been able to dive in the lake, but also having paddle-boarded along the surface of the water. Rummu's water is crystalline and offered a surprisingly clear view of the exhibition beneath the water as well. Eerily, one has the opportunity to paddle over the tops of trees and feel the sublime emotion of them reaching up towards you. Glass sculptures which have been installed in the trees seem to behave as a teaser to gain intrigue, or perhaps as a siren calling us down to the depths. They shone so brightly as they captured the midday sun that they appeared to be ghosts or spirits floating among the skeletal branches. This relationship between the levels of the exhibition was what made this underwater exhibition so multifaceted. Being on the surface of the water and gaining the first glimpse of the exhibition also gave the feeling that you were being constantly drawn deeper. Like standing at the edge overlooking a precipice.

It was intriguing how the artists had very little control over what was going on in the exhibit, they had to allow themselves to be at the mercy of the environment. When I asked the two if they would ever go back to a four-wall gallery space, they both laughed and said "No, we are never going back. This was only the beginning."

art and architecture

Vinicius Libardoni

“There was a point I decided to follow a different path, I am still an architect, but I am not building things.”

Vinicius Libardoni’s expired futures prints approach construction in an unexpected way, from a theoretical or artistic point of view rather than a practical one. Architectural elements of the 20th century appear half-finished or half-destroyed depending on the viewer’s perspective.

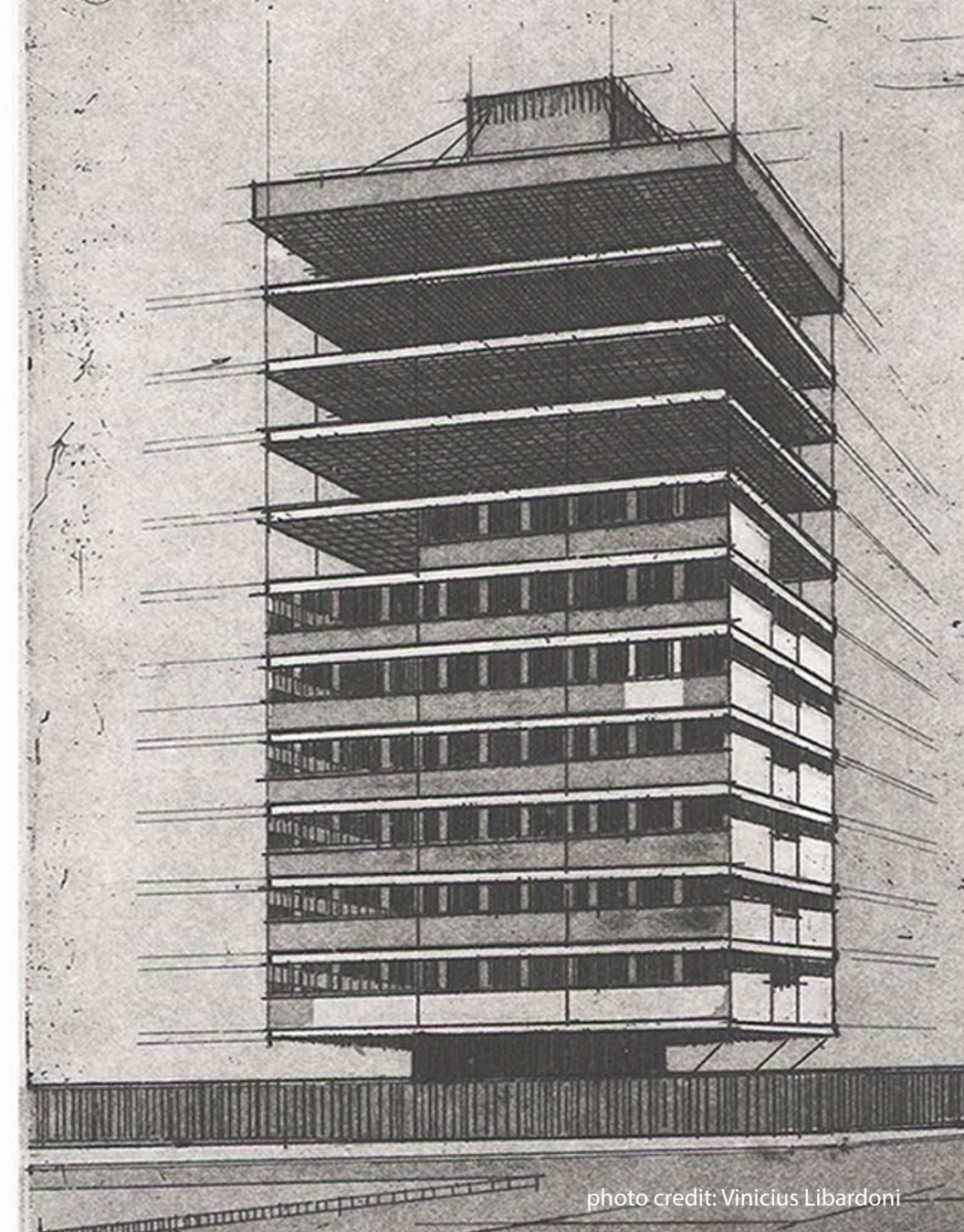
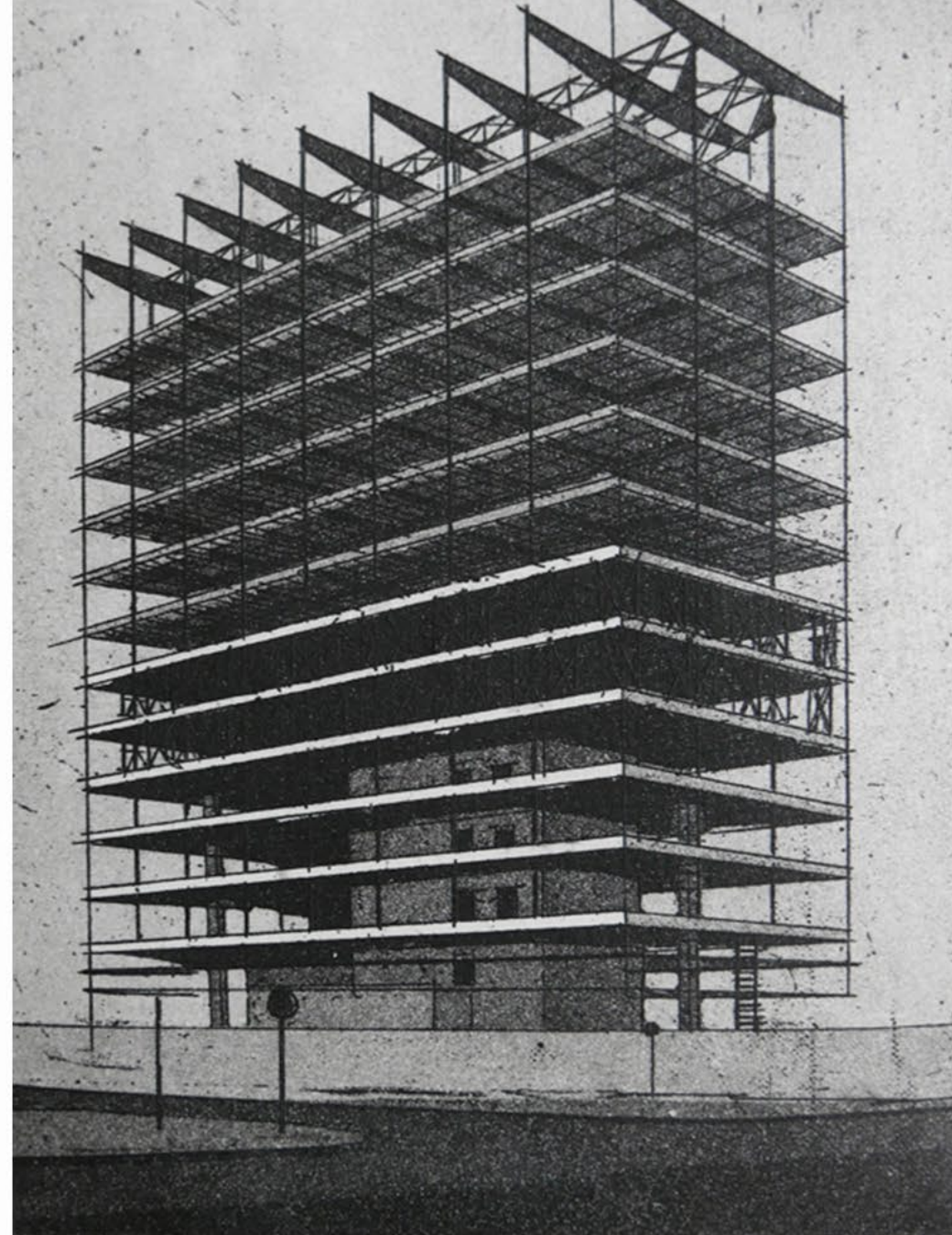
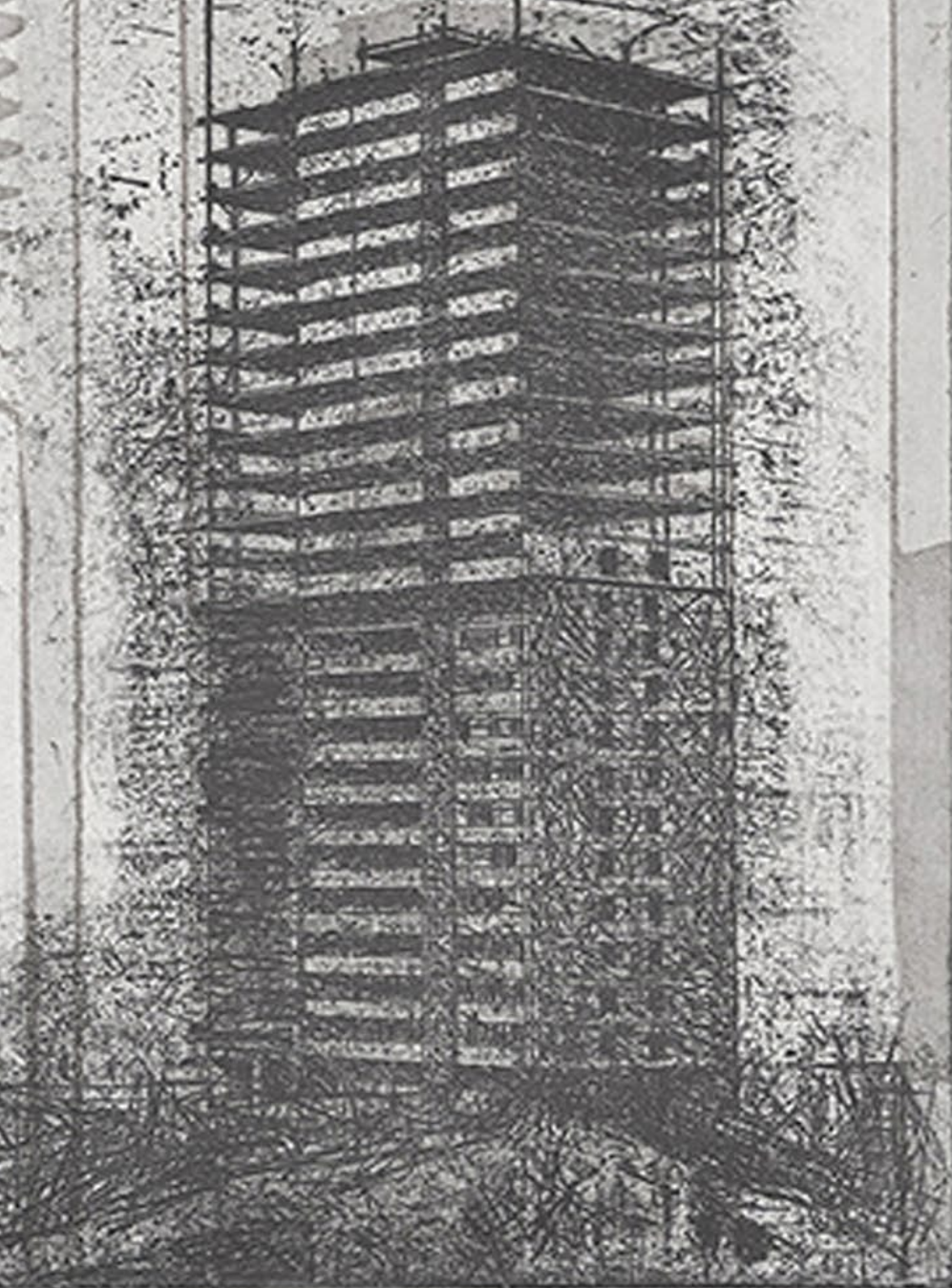
“I am fascinated with these decaying or forgotten structures, I don’t want to humanize architecture, but I felt that I did not wish for those buildings to die or that I did not wish for those buildings

to disappear. I began making prints that predicted cities’ lives, the idea was to thrust these projects into the future; and indeed the imagery comes across as a bit sad and apocalyptic. They have disappeared, but there is this feeling that they are under construction. In my mind they are actually under destruction. It is like having plants growing from the belly of the building and tearing down the structure from within. There are all of these elements that exacerbate the natural decay of the building.”

The dichotomy that Libardoni’s prints present us with is totally bizarre. For

“In my opinion, we don’t allow time for these things to grow old anymore.”

photo credit: Vinicius Libardoni



example, when you have an ancient piece of architecture, as a society we work as hard as we possibly can to restore or rebuild it so that we have a place to go back and reflect upon our history. With evermore of our society moving online our physical presence in the world is becoming muted. Our buildings are becoming utilitarian backdrops. The physical just isn't as necessary anymore

A tragic trend in many central European cities, is that buildings predating World War II tend to collapse rather than be restored. Many of the locals would prefer not to live in them due to many issues that plague them. As a result the city sprawls outwards leaving its centre to ruin. Vinicius raised the question "is it possible to save part of the building rather than the whole? It can become like an architectural layer cake over time."

"In my opinion, there is no time for things to grow old anymore. When time passes, everything becomes part of history; these things we are building in this area are also part of history. If we cannot find a way to respect and conserve these pieces of the recent past, we will create a hole in visual history at one of the most complex and dynamic moments in the span of humanity."

During the conversation Libardoni

brought up the burning of Notre Dame last year, and how so many were shocked by the great tragedy. Critics asked why people should be distressed with the destruction of a building whilst the rainforests were burning at the same time. Perhaps it is in such tragedies, that as individuals we feel so poignantly the loss of a world that once was. Vinicius brought up the fact that the wood used in the ceiling could no longer

be found because it was a product of an ancient forest that has long since been destroyed. This observation made the reaction to Notre Dame feel connected to an Amazon that was on fire at the same time, as the destruction of our cities is directly connected to the destruction of our environment.

Though sometimes it is easy to see our materials as endless, or everlasting, in truth we can see through the history of

our architecture and the world around us that this isn't true. Perhaps this is the actual reason why Libardoni's prints and the burning of Notre Dame are so hauntingly sublime. They both cause a deep shudder in the face of our own temporality.

ref 1: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/20/us/california-wildfires-new-york-city-trnd/index.html>

Ivan Juarez



photo credit: Ivan Juarez

REVIVAL 2020

Hacking the knowledge that was available in Linz was a core part of the project “Insect City,” an architectural intervention that imagined a skyline for non-human inhabitants.

Linz, Austria contains one of the largest collections of bees in all of Europe and with this collection comes a staggering amount of knowledge about the decline of bees in past decades. Bee colonies have seen decline of more than 50% in some EU member states, and Agricultural Committee MEP’s are calling for urgent action and support for bees. Juarez states that “It’s no longer a choice, but necessary to think of art and life in this way.” We must consider how we can cohabitate with nature. It is for our own well-being as well as the well-being of the natural world

Contrary to popular belief, most bees do not live in a hive but require safe spaces such as this insect city for their housing. Bees that fly out and pollinate alone are known as solitary bees, yet with no hive present, they must also search for a safe refuge to let their larvae hatch. These bee population inspired an artistic proposal in an urban place that was in many ways untouched or perhaps a space in an inhabited area that is forgotten and unused.

There was a highway, some houses, and a few gardens or small greenhouses in the area. Essentially though, I wanted to take an un-curated space and change it, without a huge budget or without a

lot of purchased materials. There was talk of expanding the highway while I was there, and cutting down whatever forest or grassy areas were still there. So the team of creators decided to place the project right on the median, as to protect the nature from the threat of an expanding highway.

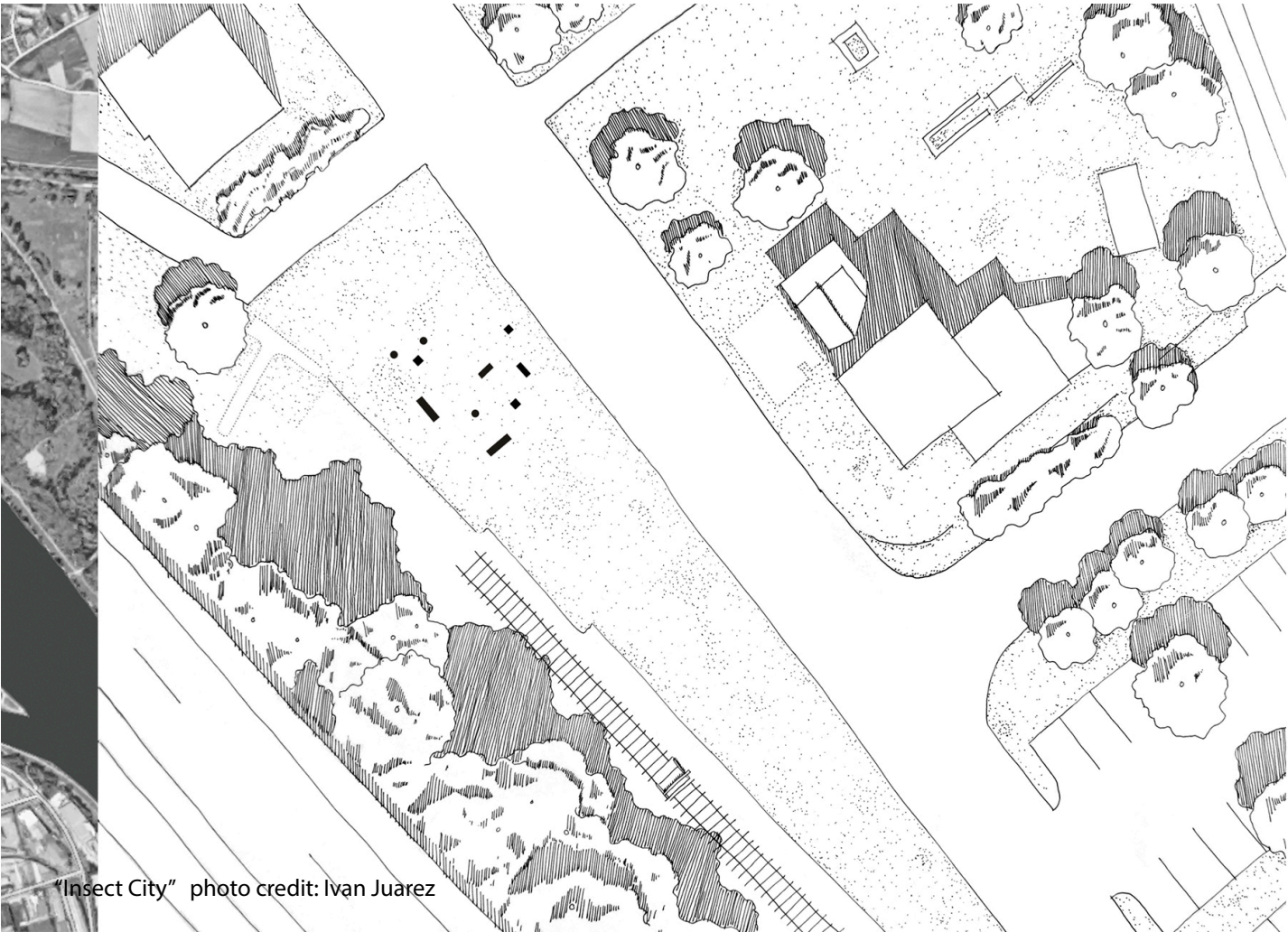
The city that resulted became as much a community project as it was Juarez’s. All of the wood used for the project was donated, the labour for installation was volunteer work, and the person’s in the area all had to agree for Juarez and his team to have access to this space. Encouragingly, when I asked Juarez what the project’s biggest challenges during the project were, the answer was a shrug of his shoulders. It was an answer that said many people would like to see a change in the world, but are often overwhelmed as to how to begin.

“It wasn’t necessarily about doing the best thing we could for the bee population in that city, but it was about rethinking the way we build and design our cities or installations. In a public space, I wanted to build a city without thinking about humans as the most important client, so we humanized something as small as insects and gave them the lead role.” The skyscrapers and cozy houses inspires a touch of emotion, connecting the idea of our own comfort with the safety of those communities in this insect city.”

In beautiful harmony with the city for



"City of Lights" photo credit: Ivan Juarez



"Insect City" photo credit: Ivan Juarez

bees, is the city of lights installation in Taiwan. The garden, and the houses surrounding it seemed out of place in the center the city. The community had for years been at risk of destruction, and these "villagers" living in the center of a big city used this garden as a meeting place once a week. Using nothing but bamboo and the traditional gardening hat's, Juarez created a dedication to the space and the person's living inside of it. "We don't always see it that way, but people who have spaces like this are the

lucky ones, they are living in luxury with this garden in the center of industry." This calming light display became not only an ode to the garden itself, but appears to be figures amongst the garden, creating a spiritual feeling with the nature that exists on this green island. Though this project was a world away, and was made of hats and bamboo instead of feathers, this project was much like the first intervention Juarez did in Spain. Lanterns in the sky mourning a paradise lost, yet reminding

us, that these paradises still exist. It is our responsibility to conserve, create, and integrate them into the world around us. Find more information on Ivan Juarez and his projects at <https://www.x-studio.tv//>

Lisa Fluegelfeld

For many of us we take for granted how luxurious it was to have a yard or a back garden, or even a public park to walk through. Perhaps we are living in an age in which the modern park is so numerous that jokes about children in cities not knowing what grass looks like would fall flat. Yet even though the desire for more natural spaces within city walls had been a concept honored since the ancient Roman rule, these spaces were very often reserved for the wealthiest residents. Even now, with cities striving to create more “rus in urbe” public spaces in our concrete lives, many of us feel starved for the connection with the natural (ref:1).

This craving for connection with nature is what makes the work of Lisa Fluegelfeld so appealing. Her botanical illustrations typically appear in monochromatic palettes, and offer a solid contour of objects that have a very organic life. As Rothko and Frankenthaler knew, there is

an ephemeral feeling in the absence of detail that allows the viewer to interact with their own desires in the calm that the artwork offers them.

It is no surprise then, that Lisa said each of her plants were often portrayals of persons in a very emotional state. They may have been very melancholy, or joyous, or angry in that moment, and each of these plants captured that emotion. When one holds the plants up to a similarly stylized image of the people she sketches, the personification of the plants becomes easier to grasp. This concept of plants being so closely connected to individual emotions is similar to shinrin-yoku, or forest-bathing as a means of wellness. Many people are becoming more aware of the fact that plants and nature do have a direct connection with our own mental well-being.

“I imagined
that plants
represented
individual
emotions.”



photo credit: Lisa Fluegelfeld



photo credit: Lisa Fluegelfeld

Works being connected to emotions made the next step Fluegelfeld took seem incredibly appropriate. She transitioned into 3-d works, and created “head-space” vases. The hand-rolled slabs of ceramic were cut into simple graphic human forms, and were glazed in whites or greys. The eyes and detail were missing from the face,

and the human figure then became a functional object for keeping flowers or plants in. Her work is a space of warmth that both revives and rejuvenates us after an exhausting work week. When considering the idea of “Revival,” we often think of what needs to be saved or rejuvenated in natural spaces, and very often the following question is why

is it important? If Lisa’s works were the answer to this question, it may read as, “for our own calm.”

Follow Lisa on instagram @fluegelfeld

Ref 1: <http://urbanrambles.org/background/a-brief-history-of-rus-in-urbe-1307>



Sarah Epping

Exposure performance at Open Out: photo credit: James Cook

At the end of Summer 2020, a piece called “Exposure” was presented at the Open Out Festival in Norway. Under the theme, “Leave no Trace,” individuals at the festival were meant to consider mans’ relationship with the natural world, unhealthy habits of travel, and one time use objects. Exposure asked participants to take a whale bone and write a letter to someone they had lost contact with. The letter could be about death, a fight, or those individuals that we lose contact with over space and time.

The piece was done on ceramic replicas of Minke whale bones, the most hunted species of whale in the Nordic countries, which is an often overlooked practice by Europeans. “I think sometimes we ignore practices that are happening in our countries or continents. It can sometimes be easier to criticize something that is happening on the other side of the planet. This was about starting a conversation, about setting fishing limits, and to raise awareness about the 429 Minke whales fished within Europe last year.”

Even with the environmental tone though, the piece was more focused on people than it was on the whales themselves. in some ways, it was a lesson in empathy. Loss and pain is something that everyone is connected by, and when we feel these deep pangs of sadness by writing letters to someone we have lost contact to, we connect it with loss in the natural world. Together, people placed bones on the beach, offering them to the water. Even though the bones were similar, and all part of a massive

animal, each piece represented a human relationship. There were enough bones for two Minke whale ribe cages, or 44 human stories. “The most surprising thing to me was how the project was dwarfed by the sea, the bones were large and incredibly heavy, in a gallery space it would look like a huge piece. However, in the scale of Norway’s giant mountains and fjords it made the performance a small temporal part of it. Feeling miniscule, and temporal was part of the project.

Originally, we had planned to slow travel with the project by train up to Tromso, but the COVID pandemic made it impossible. Instead, we ended up carrying two rib cages worth of bones through the airport. However, we did still arrive a few days before our performance so that we would have a chance to travel a bit around Finnmark and learn a bit more about the local culture and landscape. As we travelled around we told people about the project, and asked theto partake. “You know I felt I’ve been missing something

all my life.” Stated one of the anonymous participants as she told her story of loss that took place when she was just a child. As the bones filled up with letters in languages from Estonian, Portuguese, to Japanese almost all of the stories remained anonymous and unreadable to many participants. A local artist painted beautiful patterns on her bone, and the individualization of each person’s story was truly touching. The sand we would later filled with memories of broken relationships, and sometimes people who had perished.



Exposure performance at Open Out: photo credit: James Cook



Exposure performance at Open Out: photo credit: James Cook

“I was surprised at how intimate everyone seemed to get with their stories. There were lots of people sitting along the beach, and really engaging with their letters.” I don’t know if I was expecting for people to share their stories as openly with me as they did. Society has trained us that it’s not usual to connect so deeply to someone we don’t know, so when a stranger tells you their story of loss you feel that you have overstepped.

The time in which this project found itself being displayed was perhaps the most heartwrenching. Co-vid 19 stopped most of us from travelling for work and inconvenienced bars, shops and restaurants.

On the day of the performance over 1 million people had died from the virus. There are many more of us, who did not get a proper chance to say goodbye to those they lost during this time. Funerals couldn’t be held, as large meetings and travel were banned

Statistics are difficult to connect with the sheer loss of life that the entire world is experiencing. Many scientists and biologists are theorizing that this is only the beginning of many more natural disasters to come. The breakdown of biodiversity across the planet has destroyed a protective buffer that stopped rapid spread of viruses amongst different species (ref 1). the imminent challenges that life brings with it are at times overwhelming. The letter was a time to say goodbye to those people who we remember with love, and remind ourselves that we have the ability to positively impact

the world for the years to come.”

The empathy for things lost, living, and yet to come was pinnacle in this performance.

Shortly after the performance, I received a short video from a person that I hadn’t met before. They told me that they had been reunited with their partner the day after the performance. Writing about the relationship and leaving a letter on the beach had encouraged them to get back together. It was pretty encouraging to hear that, because it reminds us that things lost can be regained and that it’s our reaction to the situation that changes the outcome.

Follow Sarah on instagram: eppingsm

Ref 1: Vidal, John. “‘Tip of the Iceberg’: Is Our Destruction of Nature Responsible for Covid-19?” The Guardian. March 18, 2020. Accessed December 05, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/tip-of-the-iceberg-is-our-destruction-of-nature-responsible-for-covid-19-aoe>.

Torill Kornfeldt

Author of the Re-origin of Species on how science could save animals from extinction

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," still holds a poignant message today—"Science can take us to new heights or hold terrifying consequences." Synthetic biology involves redesigning organisms for useful purposes by engineering them to have new abilities—humankind may even have the godlike ability to bring extinct animals back from the dead. In the book "the Re-origin of Species" author Torill Kornfeldt travelled around the world to research stations where scientists endeavor to do just that. Kornfeldt details trials and tribulations of human endeavor and asks the reader, "How and why a scientist may want to bring an animal back to life?"

The premise of the book is reminiscent of Jurassic Park, in which scientists draw blood from an ancient amber fossilized mosquito and use it to rebuild dinosaur DNA. This idea is actually not so farfetched, and may at

one point have seemed a viable solution for reconstructing DNA. Kornfeldt explains our current limit on reconstructing extinct DNA is at maximum 400,000 years old. It may be possible to stretch this reconstruction back to around 800,000, but that still leaves dinosaurs far outside of the limits.

Dinosaurs are out, but woolly mammoths are in—at least for researchers in Siberia. They believe there is a chance to see mammoths walking the Steppe again. In order to make this dream a reality, scientists need to build a DNA "skeleton" of the woolly mammoth's closest living relatives—the Asian Elephant. Then they need to compare it to mammoth DNA to find out which traits account for furriness and other more mammoth-like traits. Kornfeldt explains trying to find the correct DNA pieces is a bit like putting together a puzzle that has



photo credit: Torill Kornfeldt

been trampled over in the wild for the past 100,000 years. The process could still take decades, and once realized would not be a perfect DNA match for a mammoth, but rather an Asian elephant-mammoth hybrid.

Although there are sceptics, there are many examples of how reintroducing species into their native habitats can have wonderful effects on the entire ecosystem. Examples of this reintroduction of species can be seen throughout natural parks such as Yellowstone where wolves were reintroduced and helped balance out the excessive number of deer whose overpopulation were damaging bushes and undergrowth.

However, even with the hope of positive effects on the eco-system, there are a few select projects that may be less popular amongst the masses. The main one that comes to mind is the Passenger Pigeon Project. The passenger pigeon used to be the most populous bird on the planet. Descriptions of these flocks are reminiscent to a living, flying wildfire or hailstorm moving across nature. Some accounts describe the sky being blacked out for days, and feces falling like snow from the sky. Unlike most migratory birds, their movements were completely random, meaning no other predator would become dependent on these birds for the food chain, but they would

create a momentary feast for both humans and animals when the pigeons would pass through. The invention of the railroad and the telegraph in the mid-1800s made it possible for humans to share the location of these bird storms and became the ultimate downfall of the species. They went from being the most populous bird on the planet to being hunted to extinction by the year 1900.

Kornfeldt does explain these "pigeon wildfires" can have many benefits for ecosystems and functioned in this way for a reason. However, this project is a prime example of a natural function modern-day humans may not be enthusiastic about



(synthetic biology could save species like the White Rhino photo credit: Torill Kornfeldt)

experiencing. Imagine a super-flock showing up around the time of an outdoor festival or the Super Bowl. Researchers attempting to rebirth these birds don't wish to create just one, but hope to reintroduce the function of "bird thunderstorms."

Throughout the text, Kornfeldt presents the scientific experiments with shocking neutrality. When I asked her for a personal opinion on the projects she said it was a fight between her inner 10-year-old and inner adult. For mammoths, one of the proposals for the realization of the project is to use Asian

Elephants as surrogates for the mammoth babies—arising many ethical issues. Using this technology for saving near-extinct species seemed to Kornfeldt like a more practical use of the technology. In the case of the only two remaining white rhinos on the planet, the rhino's closest relatives could be used as viable surrogates and thus save a species driven to near extinction by poaching.

Torill also gave us an introduction to her newest book, "The Unnatural Selection of Us." Although it is currently not available in english (language of publication swedish) the book is

a perfect companion novel to the Re-origin of species, as she discusses not how the genetic technology will change the wilderness but how it may change the genetics of the human.

It has been two years since the first genetically manipulated humans were born in China. The doctor in question illegally attempted to remove genetic traits that might cause AIDS. Although the children are anonymous, and the doctor has been arrested for the nature of his experiments, the potential benefits of this technology are explored in this new novel. Doctors could

Is this a Doctor
Frankenstein
endeavor, or
is it the most
powerful tool we
have to save a
once biologically
diverse ecosystem
that has been
broken down by
human activity?

genetically alter humans to be immune to cancer and genetic diseases. Hypothetically, editing a child in the womb would simply stop genetic diseases. However, when a child is edited within the womb their reproductive system is also changed. This means the engineered child's offspring would carry new genetic traits in their DNA, and would also pass them on to offspring.

Almost everyone would agree we could relieve the world of much pain and suffering if we could rid the world of genetic diseases, but this new branch of technology brings about another moral question. Who will have access to it?

Many genetic tests offered to new parents behave as modern-day horoscopes—predicting whether your child will have a language ability or be a long-distance runner. Kornfeldt states humans are not machines and our genes react with one another in

complex and interesting ways. There are also some genetic predispositions that often positively correlate with other negative ones. Kornfeldt gave the example creative people are often more predisposed to have depressive tendencies. It's not easy to decide what would be 100 percent ethical.

In the case of the first two genetically edited human beings, the doctor who performed the editing gave a single presentation at a medical conference. In the presentation, which is the only public reference on these two children, he claimed there were genetic edits, but they had not functioned in a way that he had wanted. Afterwards this experiment was widely condemned by the scientific community—mainly due to the manner in which it was conducted. The scientist who conducted the experiments is imprisoned and the family anonymous.

The most important thing to do with this knowledge is to open ideas for the implementation of this technology to public debate. For both of the books, Kornfeldt has spoken to many researchers who wanted this knowledge to be publicly discussed. Is it a Dr. Frankenstein endeavor, or is it the most powerful tool we have to save a once biologically diverse ecosystem that has been broken down by human activity?

Find Torill Kornfeldt's popular science novels on amazon. https://www.amazon.com/Re-origin-Species-Second-Extinct-Animals-ebook/dp/B07HMYQ6Q9/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=the+re-origin+of+species&qid=1607208811&sr=8-2



James Cook

Ivory

Our ancestors worshiped her,
Tattooed her rituals on cliff faces across the Steppe,
Tattooed her rituals deep within collective memory,
Planting the seed of that dream,
Teeth cracking and shattering,
Spitting up blood,
See your dentist if you experience tender gums,
A collective insanity,
She has always dealt in ivory,
Used to hunt mammoths,
Spent long days and nights,
Chasing them across the Siberian Steppe,
Hounding them relentlessly,
Till exhausted they collapse,
Bodies overheating,
Brains short circuiting,
She does not harvest tusks any longer,
The endling she watched slaughtered,
By barrel chested men with spears of flint,
In Africa she began the ritual anew,
Elephants are becoming harder to find though,
And they do not tire as quickly,
And she moves so slowly now,
Weighed down by the heat of this continent,
No longer strong enough to hunt she spins a story,
Millenia in the making,
The story you already know,
Withered hands search pillowcases,
Her believers are too small to be of much use,
Their teeth are not the violent tusks of yesteryear,
We've all had that same dream,
A collective insanity.

You see a lot of dead birds around; you don't usually see the beauty in a dead bird. Here in Wrocław, there was one that had died behind the window in a dilapidated building. It must have been looking out the glass when he died and I walked by it every day. Consider what a unique experience that is, seeing the detail of this delicate creature, the way the wings are formed and the detail in the feathers in something that would usually fly away from you.

As a navigator at sea, James Cook spends the majority of his time on the water. As a writer, it stands to reason that he might find inspiration in unorthodox places, something that the rest of us with the millions of distractions in everyday life might never think to look.

There is no doctor aboard the ship, so when we are out at sea, all of us are expected to have first aid skills and use the medical guide for reference in all other situations. The sentences from the poem were removed from the book and remixed. If you read all of the words to a novel in a remixed sequence, you will not have digested any of it, though you have read all of its parts. I like deconstructing things and taking apart something that

escapes the author's original intent. One of my current favourite poems is, "A basic life support" all of the text comes from a medical guide.

Forcing yourself into using found words, or sentences from technical manuals that are in no way meant to be creative forces your writing to exhibit a type of candour. Many people try to hide behind complexity or forced innuendos in their writing; with me, it's just simple. "I don't like commercial fishing; extinction is bad, the world is getting hotter." The meaning is there, but without being swathed in complexity.

Rather than printing this series on a computer, I did the entire series of poems by hand at TYPA print and paper museum in Tartu. I used old letterpress machines to construct each poem separately. Revisiting old technologies rather, made me analyze each word as it was constructed. Knowing how much time it would take me to put this word together out of metal objects made me rethink the way I write. Or for example, "basic life support" was meant to be a "basic life support sequence." A q was missing from the typeface I was using so I changed it. The weeks of printing was a period of analysis, where I felt that

I have been given the chance to look at something from a different perspective.

"Medusa" tells the story of a gorgon who never wanted to be a monster. Instead, she depicts herself as one of the early Greek sculptors, "immortalizing every lover she ever had" as they turned to stone. In this sense, even common myths can be dismantled and seen from a different perspective. Rather than a monster could she have been an early Michelangelo remembered only for her destructive nature? I saw it fit in the poem for her to find love. As with many things, there was a tragic temporality in this relationship.

The photo that is paired with it is a highly venomous Australian sea snake. It's supposed that they tie themselves into such elaborate knots when they are shedding their skin. You see a lot of them out at sea, and they are such a beautiful elegant creature. Fishermen are wary of these though, if one snags in a net or a line out at sea it could mean a fatal bite.

Find the entire collection of seascapes and dreamscapes at <https://www.jamessutherlandartist.com/>



photo credit: James Cook



Viktor Lyagushkin

photo credit: Viktor Lyagushkin

The Arctic Dive base, is located about a five hour drive from the Russian city of Murmansk. Winter in the arctic circle is the quintessential wonderland of fir trees and ice, and the roads are surrounded by seemingly endless forest. When you first stand at the edge of the white sea, it appears to be a great plain covered in snow rather than a body of water, the only thing that gives it away is the elaborate fissured ice formations produced by the entire sheet of ice moving up and down with the tide. It is a popular tourist destination in both Summer and Winter, yet the people who come here during the different seasons are like night and day.

In this icy tundra is where one might encounter the work of the legendary Russian photographer Viktor Lyagushkin. The lodge is filled with extraordinary imagery of photography under the ice. Before diving there many are convinced that the vibrant green of the water is a filter. “Until the Ice Melts” was the first exhibition to take place underwater in the arctic, creating an unorthodox and exclusive way to display photographs that sometimes show up in National Geographic and other well circulated magazines. This exhibition found itself in a remote place, and underneath the ice they are all but impossible to get to.

Anyone wishing to view the imagery would need to drive in snowmobiles across the iced over sea. Put on 25 kilograms of

equipment, tie themselves to a spotter on the surface and descend through a small hole in the thick sheet of ice covering the entire sea. Maybe it was a comment on the impossibility to recreate this environment in photographs without being already present in the water? Or perhaps it was about the ingenuity of the human to create a curate display of imagery beneath the thick ice, but ultimately to our inferiority in the face of global climate change. If the ice melts, the gallery disappears. Human creation is struggling to find its place in a world that is melting.

After the world’s first gallery under the arctic ice, I was not surprised to discover than many of Lyagushkin’s projects endeavor to be shocking, surprisingly beautiful and not strictly documentary. They take on a spiritual heir, and represent not only the beauty of nature but the personification of nature’s wonders.

Projects such as the “Lady of Orda Cave” (<https://phototeam.pro/gallery/lady-of-orda-cave/>), dedicated to the longest gypsum cave in the world located in the Urals, photograph the spirit of Orda inside the cave. In the freezing water, Viktor photographed a freediver in a flowing dress and wig. She did not wear any dive equipment to avoid bubbles showing up in the images. Viktor stated, that a project like this takes so much planning, and if you don’t spend the time planning you might end up dead. The awe and dedication to

the frozen world from both himself and his team is what most certainly makes Viktor’s photographs so unique.

Resulting from these projects is the sense of an otherworldly knowledge, something that many of us may have been missing as most humans, don’t have the opportunity to be somewhere so absolutely “untouched.” The photographs are a documentation, but also a plea from the prismatic beauty of an invisible world beneath the ice. An invisible world that is experiencing decline due to our daily activities.

Until The Ice Melts exhibition was opened to visitors 19th of February 2019 under the ice of the White Sea, beyond the Arctic Circle. It included the photographs, “Martians and space ships, Eywa the Wood and alien brain, aquanaut traveling across the sea on balloon.” A wide-angle macro shot taken with a fisheye lens is a new photographic technique invented by Viktor. The invention allowed the author to do something that no one had managed before him: to show the tiny inhabitants of the underwater Arctic in their natural environment.

The exhibition “Until The Ice Melts” is a part of a large project by Viktor Lyagushkin on documenting the animals of the White Sea.

Follow Viktor on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/viktor_lyagushkin/?hl=pl.



"The world changes before our very eyes, the Arctic ice is melting, the climate is changing, species are disappearing. My goal is to show people this wonderful world under the ice so that humanity understands what we will lose in the near future if we do not turn our attention to this problem." -Viktor Lyagushkin

“This is about art, but it is also about society.”



Open Out Festival

photo : Procession by Stephanie Imbeau

“We need to think globally on how to address topics like the environmental crisis, and we need to collaborate on the art scene to bring different ideas and visions to where we live and to export different perspectives.”

Organizing a festival in Norway’s most northern city, quite far from the rest of Europe and from public transit connections, is a challenging and rewarding experience. We asked the curators of “Open Out Festival” in Tromsø, what their goals were for this year’s edition of the arctic festival in the wake of the worldwide pandemic.

Marion Bouvier moved to Tromsø, Norway five years ago and is one of the head organizers of this year’s festival “Leave no Trace.” In 2020 the theme of environmentalism is ever more present, and the curators of the Open Out festival decided it was high time for a large-scale event to reflect this sentiment. The 2018/2019 version of the festival went off beautifully. Still, after the ten days, the artistic event was over, the remnants of their performances and installations became waste, which could not be reused or restored. This inspired the idea of, what can we do with no waste, or can we turn waste into art?

The open call forbade the purchase of new materials. Artists had to reuse, recycle, and take their materials with them. As a surprise to the curators, the reaction to the open call was slightly lower than in the previous years. Marion stated that “I

felt it was still a challenge to put that out there in the art scene.” It brought about the terrifying question, are we as artists capable of creating without consuming? Can ecology be a present theme in our work without this merely being a passive idea?

Marion stated that her dream project would be to have this connection of local and international, still being able to interact with other artists without having to pollute so much. Sadly, “I feel a bit stuck on how to organize an international festival without things such as air travel.” To come to Tromsø you can take a car, or you can fly, those are the two options you have. It’s the tricky question that many people are dealing with now as the online format seems to lose something in terms of engagement. Still, for those of us who have ever taken a trans-Atlantic flight for a five-day conference, the casualness of flying has become overwhelming and unhealthy.

Even in the digital age however, the presence of the artist becomes something that is pinnacle to the effectiveness of a festival. It gives us the chance to collaborate on the art scene. We bring different ideas and visions to where we live and also export different perspectives to other people. Even if the CO-VID pandemic and closed borders did thwart some people’s plans to slow travel to Tromsø, it was still encouraging that a festival made the people travelling to it think more about the ecological impact of air-travel.

Organizers of international events often struggle with the question of, how do we make our events get as much outreach as possible without being unnecessarily wasteful. “This year felt like the first step into that, the first step to asking artists to consider what they would leave after they left?”

We invited some artists that we knew were working very closely with this topic. For example, artists Øyvind Novak Jenssen and Karoline Sætre work with food and find food around them. They constructed a raft from found materials, and served a dinner to the audience. This wasn’t only about promoting the idea of veganism, but the curators described it as a form of generosity and inspiration. Imagine walking along the boardwalk in Tromsø, Norway (an expensive city for most Europeans) and discovering an artist emerging from the water offering a free dinner made from fresh caught urchins. A species that is over-abundant and destroying the healthy kelp species in Norway. Similarly, Scottish artist Leva Grigelionyte presented a dessert parlor inviting participants to test homemade ice creams created from common weeds. Personally, my favourite flavour was the roasted dandelion and sea salt.

The local area as well presents a fascinating concept of revival. The Sami culture and language was all but destroyed after the Second World War, completely repressed by the Norwegian



Image: Et Flytende Måltid (A Floating Meal).Kvae og Bark (Øyvind Novak Jenssen and Karoline Sætre)

government. Only recently has there been more government support and awareness of support for the Sami culture. During the time at “Open Out,” the Tromsø Polar Museum hosted a fascinating exhibit of arctic maps with Sami names in exchange of Norwegian.

Such efforts are a massive leap forward for modern day governments. The realization that in the past humanity has been destructive in the name of industrial progress, gives governments and individuals the drive to change this cycle step by step.

I can’t imagine going back to the way we were organizing festivals before this, even

though we are a small festival and weren’t wasting so much. Yet still, being able to create art and leave nothing is so powerful. We will keep all of this experience and continue to apply it. “It felt like this moment where we took the first step out of the cave and saw how impossible it is to go back.” On one side a feeling of transcendence, on the other the weight of what we are leaving behind us when the “open call” doesn’t require us to think in an ecological manner. As creators and consumers of art and culture, we should expect of ourselves that these practices become the norm.

A festival ultimately is a way that we can

all learn from one another. This is about art, but this is actually about society. It’s an opportunity to be a platform for ideas and mainstream culture. It is in these moments that we all have to remember that society was constructed. If our society has become destructive, it is also possible to remake ourselves and to rebuild. Together this festival was a way to envision the future together, and not just this apocalyptic vision of it that we see in the media, but also a more constructive picture of what type of world do we want? “Only once we have decided then we can start building it.”

Follow Open Out Festival online or on Facebook.

Cortada Projects



“There is an action step;
there is hope. It isn’t like
[we are] talking about
saltwater intrusion and
hurricanes, and that is
it. There is something
that can be done.”

Cortada Projects is the name given to the social art and activism projects of Xavier Cortada across Florida and internationally. Outreaching and organizing events on such a large scale requires a team of people with drive and engagement. For Cortada Projects the director of that team is Adam Roberti. A master of “Environment, Culture, and Media” and with a love for community outreach, Adam expressed what some of the biggest challenges and rewards of managing such large-scale projects entails.

Before the COVID pandemic, Cortada Projects was working on a state-wide environmental engagement project called Plan(T). As sea levels rise, science tells us that groundwater in Florida will reach a salinity level that makes it impossible for many plants to grow. Plan(T) asked participants to take a mangrove propagule and plant it in their yard next to a white flag with a number on it, as mangroves can survive even in the case of high salinity ground water. The number represented their homes height above sea level. The lower the number, the higher the vulnerability of the location.

“We were lucky that Xavier has built so many connections throughout all of his work in Miami. That made the network part of it more accessible, but as our contact list grew there were a lot of moving parts throughout the project. It was a lot of making sure that people

were where they needed to be and making sure that documentation of the planting happened.

“I have found that most people don’t know what social practice is, so that was so important, just making sure that everyone understood what socially engaged art is.” Many of the projects Cortada Projects engages in are about inspiring undergraduate and graduate students at a very beginning level. Everyone would get together and go into mangrove forests to gather the mangrove propagules for replanting. COVID created a whole new level of difficulty as it forced many of these projects and get-togethers to be cancelled.

Adam recalled that even with the pandemic, there were a lot of rewarding moments throughout the process. One of these moments in particular was a presentation at a library that reached out to people of all ages. Everyone seemed to really grasp what was being said. They understood the urgency of the issue and wanted to do something about it. Adam stated one of the most important things about socially engaged art is that “there is an action step; there is hope. It isn’t like I am talking about things like saltwater intrusion and hurricanes, and that is it. There is something that can be done. They (people) can use art to effectuate change in their community. That is something that we desperately need to be doing...”

In the conservative climate of the United States today, one can only expect that there must have been some backlash from the public during their community outreach. However, Adam stated that “There was none of that from the youth; everyone was just interested and excited to be a part of it.”

“Occasionally though someone would come up to speak with us, and it was easy to tell right from the beginning that they were disinterested in the issue we were trying to address.” Referencing a study called Global Warming’s Six Americas (ref.1), done by Yale University, Adam stated that Americans’ levels of concern about the climate crisis were put in one of six categories, from alarmed to dismissive.

If someone falls on the far right of this spectrum, there is very little that can be done to persuade someone otherwise, regardless of scientific evidence. In that case, there isn’t much point in holding a long drawn out discussion, but to speak to someone else who wishes to be informed with facts that we can present to them. It is encouraging however, that even with the broad scope of the projects, how very little backlash there seemed to be. Perhaps its due to the fact that the core of this social engagement art is to connect first with a person’s emotions, rather than isolating someone because of their political party. Sea level rise does not care about a political party.

“I think there is an underestimated impact of art, and artists like Xavier exemplify the



ability of art to effectuate change. The goals of projects like Plan(T), for example, isn’t just about planting mangrove forests. He, of course, cares about the mangrove being put in the ground, but that isn’t the point of the project. He cares more about the person who is planting the mangrove. Even if the tree itself were going to die, that wouldn’t mean that the project was a failure, because hopefully the person that placed it in the ground is more science literate and will be changed for the future.”

This personal connection and empathy are one of the things that make Cortada Projects so powerful. In a year where COVID has decimated cultural scenes and gatherings around the world, Xavier adapted to the new reality within the

city of Miami. It allowed a moment to step back and regroup for our plans for the years to come. Adam stated that “this moment has allowed us to innovate and create in ways that we may not have had without this pandemic. It forced elasticity and effectivity on the part of artists in ways that we have never done before. For example, with Xavier, he is holding meetings with city officials, scientists, and politicians. It is about informing, inspiring and encouraging positive change in the public.”

“We understand that a lot of the community is in pain. Rather than being weighed down by this severe pain, we can promote a better understanding of what is happening in the world. By spreading

this knowledge, we can hopefully save lives as a result.” Although this comment was made in regard to the COVID pandemic, it reflected all that Cortada Projects are undertaking. These things are interconnected, the social and the environmental, and the heart of these projects was most certainly to create less pain in the current world and the world of the future. There are many points of actions that we can take, and in closing Adam stated, “even in times of struggle, you just need to keep going.”

ref.1. (https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/about/projects/global-warmings-six-americas/)



Charlotte Biszewski

The Wrocław-based art festival “Survival” strives to put on unique displays of artistic collaboration in abandoned places throughout the city. This year’s edition, “Wasteland,” took place in an old sewage pumping stage at the half abandoned city port. The presentation was described as, “a memento to foregone capitalism.” Survival, took on a variety of different topics under the wide apocalyptic theme of “Wasteland.” In the case of Charlotte Biszewski’s and Sarah Epping’s work “the Resonance of Waste,” environmentally harmful industrial processes were criticized in an interactive soundscape piece. (<http://glissando.pl/relacje/brzmienia-ziemi-jalowej-18-przeglad-sztuki-survival-wasteland/>)

Set in a massive pump hall in the factory, the soundscape of these industrial processes, recorded at a paper-making mill in Estonia, could be heard before the source was located. Rather than a traditional speaker, was a green paper membrane with an intricate weaving of copper wiring, which was the source of the sounds. The paper itself was created from overabundant seaweed growing in the Baltic as a result of eutrophication (higher level of nitrogen lower level of oxygen in the oceans). If one approached the paper, there was the delicate smell of this seaweed still, an aura from the effects of industrialization on a sea shared by all of us. Surrounded by the sound of the process in this great hall, the viewer was thrust into the reality of gargantuan industrial processes necessary to make mundane objects such as a piece of paper. These mundane items, have effect on

natural environments a world away. Elizabeth Colbert’s novel “The Sixth Extinction,” puts this into perspective for us. Her book concludes by telling us the danger in the condition of the human species lies not only in its ability to manipulate and mine for fossil fuels, but also in our desire to create, travel, and read books.

This is what makes the juxtaposition of handmaking paper and interactive electronics so jarring and so powerful. Biszewski first began working with creative and interactive design installations at the Rusty Squid when she was studying in Bristol, United Kingdom. She was fascinated by finding ways that electronics can become tactile and incorporate other forms of life in the use of it. Later she would meet artist Liza Stark who works with embedding electronics into clothes and fabrics. This presentation style, she would later include in works that shouted with more environmental concepts. She stated that “It seems like an area of printmaking and artistry that is relatively unexplored. How can we marry technology and traditional techniques? Is there a way to deindustrialize tech?”


It wasn’t until she started researching paper pulp and paper making that she realized just how destructive the chemical waste and runoff has been. The new knowledge encouraged her to do a piece about this type of waste. Biszewski stated, “Particularly inspirational to me was a couple of artistic researchers doing a project called “Baikal Lenses.” Up until only recently, a tremendous source of pollution in the remote region of Russia was a paper-making plant at the

edge of lake Baikal, and Biszewski became interested in how the paper industry affected areas closer to home. She stated, “Where I am currently working in Estonia, the case of pollution in the Baltic is a big issue. When collaborating with Sarah Epping we became more and more aware of this, and started trying to consider what we could do to actually affect change on this massive problem. Nitrates, phosphates and other chemical runoff cause massive algae blooms and in the past, industrial paper mills have been a large contributor to this pollution.”

Biszewski mentioned her current work in TYPA print and paper museum “I think as a society we just aren’t in tune with full industrial processes, it applies to us in the Print and Paper museum where I work as well. We make everything by hand or on a small scale and most of the processes are human powered. I thought that by including the audio it would associate this loud obtrusive industrial process connected with a small piece of paper.”

The industrial revolutions led to rapid growth and progress within Europe and the World. Yet as with many human inventions they would cause unpredictable destruction for the modern age. It is a time for humans to reconsider how we can change these processes to build a more sustainable future.

Hansson, Sture. “Effects of Pulp and Paper Mill Effluents on Coastal Fish Communities in the Gulf of Bothnia, Baltic Sea.” *Ambio* 16, no. 6 (1987): 344-48. Accessed October 5, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4313398>.



Mark Isaac + Gabriela Bulisova

“We need to be concrete about things people can do to make a change, it’s like a ripple in the lake.”

Lake Baikal, the world’s oldest, deepest and most voluminous lake, located in Eastern Siberia, contains 20% of the world’s freshwater. If one is to put this into perspective for North Americans, all of the Great Lakes together could be swallowed by Baikal. Artists Mark Isaac and Gabriela Bulisova spent 11 months living in Siberia as part of a Fulbright grant. Their project places a special emphasis on the Lake’s ecological problems, including growing levels of pollution and rapid climate change. They discussed the deep connection the native and local people have with Baikal and the irreversible effects the rising temperatures can have to the unique ecosystem should we not act quickly. Their project “Baikal Lenses,” composed of photographs, video, original music derived from scientific data, and essays, not only records the beauty of the Lake but also the spiritual and cultural elements around it that have evolved through history.

Relaying a story about their research, Mark and Gabriela noted that they came into contact randomly with people who were very aware of rapid changes in the ecosystem. “We were in a taxi and started a conversation with the driver. The taxi driver said, ‘I know exactly what you are talking about! When I was a boy this stream here by the Lake used to be so full of fish you could catch them in your hand. Now it is practically empty.’”

The artists discussed a particularly disturbing meeting of prominent business

and community leaders in Irkutsk, the closest major Russian city to the Lake. “The consensus of participants seemed to be that Baikal is completely clean and safe, and they found it odd that as foreigners, we were focused on the Lake’s protection.” Many overlook the pollution taking place in the shallow areas of the Lake, and focus on the fact that in the depths, Baikal is exceptionally clean. The two stressed the fact that this [myopic vision] isn’t limited to Baikal; it is not limited to Russia; it is not limited to cities or the countryside.

There were also many encouraging experiences for the two artists; they stated that “we had never worked somewhere where people had such a strong spiritual connection to a natural space.” Indigenous people consider the Lake to be a living, breathing being and call it “the Sacred Sea.” Even little children, if they were asked what Baikal is to them, would answer “Baikal is us, we are Baikal.”

According to the artists, there is a revival of interest in “native environmental ethics” in Siberia and other parts of the world. These ancient traditions promote seeing things from a different perspective. Rather than considering what I can earn from tourism today or tomorrow, the thought process is turning to, “How can I preserve this place for future generations?”

Now, many scientific studies demonstrate that the Baikal region is one of the areas experiencing the most rapid increases in temperature in the world. Surface water temperatures at Lake Baikal

have risen by 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.1°F) since 1946. (2) The annual ice-free season has lengthened, and the thickness of the ice has decreased by an average of 4.7 inches (12 centimetres) in the same period. (1) Russian scientists are really at the vanguard of this, understanding that we can reach a breaking point with Baikal and destroy it completely.

“We used to say as artists that we were trying to do projects to raise awareness; now this problem has gotten to such a point globally that basic understanding is no longer enough. The earth is in such a crisis you have to aspire in your projects and your rhetoric to push people into action. We are trying everything possible to get people to the next level. Things are happening too slowly, too imperfectly, and we don’t have enough of a consensus to make the changes. Or people see that the problem is too big and just give up.”
– Mark Isaac

There is a growing trend of environmentally engaged artists and activists. The romanticism of the isolated artist or the lone genius is disappearing, and the idea of the collective is becoming more important as we realize with an increasing poignancy that we cannot change the world for the better without collaboration. Gabriela and Mark addressed this isolation that an artist can feel, especially once outside of academia. They were two of the founders of “Atlantika Collective” a group of like-minded interdisciplinary artists and



scholars. “We wanted a diverse group of people, artists, writers and thinkers that were continually discussing and pushing each other forward. We had been members of collectives in the past that were only from one genre, photography.” So the two wanted to create something where diverse focal points would add value. That’s what Atlantika Collective is; it doesn’t only have diversity in terms of people, but also in terms of geography and technique.

“We saw, especially during the pandemic, that people were excited to

share advice and stories and grow from contact with one another. Something refreshing about this group of people is that we have such a level of trust that we don’t need to share a final project. We can share projects that are in progress and get precious feedback from one another.” This is an encouraging approach in an environment where artists can be blinded by competition; it reminds many of us as artists and curators how necessary this collaboration is to make the greatest impact possible.

1.Shimaraev, M.N., L.N. Kuimova, V.N. Sinyukovich, and V.V. Tsekhanovskii. 2002. Manifestation of global climatic changes in Lake Baikal during the 20th century. Doklady Earth Sciences 383A:288–291. Cited in Hampton et al. 2008
2.Hampton, S.E., L.R. Izmest’eva, M.V. Moore, S.L. Katz, B. Dennis, and E.A. Silow. 2008. Sixty years of environmental change in the world’s largest freshwater lake–Lake Baikal, Siberia. Global Change Biology 14:1–12.

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