

Caring for what is extinct. Arts creating alliances with nature

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to experience knowledge, to put oneself in a state available to collect, to place, to feel; to be ready of decyphering the signs. This paper is based on the exhibition of the Portuguese artist Gabriela Albergaria, entitled *A Natureza Detesta Linhas Retas* (Nature Abhors a Straight Line), curated by Delfim Sardo at the Culturgest Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal, in 2021. The article begins with a description of the contextual framework involved in conceiving her artistic practice as a study case in relation to the environmental emergency. It then goes on to speculate on the role of nature as the only territory - crossed by essential elements - in her work. A nature manipulated, planted, transported, set in hierarchy, catalogued, studied, felt and recalled through the ongoing exploration of gardens with photography, drawing and sculpture, which Albergaria has experimented for the last 20 years.

The article ends with a speculation on the strategies of transformation, reconstruction and assemblage in contemporary art. A reflection on the mark left by extinct creatures in human cultures and the artistic practices -action, performance- that are also becoming vanished. Occasional kinships mobilized by Vinciane Despret (*Living as a Bird*) and José Luis Viñas (*on the extinction of lepidoptera - butterflies and moths*) will serve to support some of the ideas of this study.

Keywords: change-makers, extinction, visual arts, contemporary art, legacy, ecofeminism, art exhibition, Gabriela Albergaria.

Introduction: "What Methods Do"¹

These pages are a meeting point for different ideas and materialities, constituted from contemporary artistic practices related to nature in the context of the climatic emergency we are confronted to nowadays. Specifically, in this article we will start from the analysis of two exhibitions held by Gabriela Albergaria in Madrid (2006) and Lisbon (2021), as case studies, as an epistemic nucleus towards a network of elements with which to sediment the material and conceptual conditions that we have been able to detect in the research (Passeron & Revel 2005, 28). Or as "examples" in the sense given by Isidoro Valcárcel-Medina, when in the context of the constructivist exhibition *Forma y medida en el arte español actual*, in 1977, he was repeating for hours, at the opening: "Art is a personal action that may serve as an example but can never have an exemplary value" (Valcárcel-Medina 1994). The opportunity to study these exhibitions, as devices

of knowledge, is the basis of this essay. Here we will collect, situate and feel from the artworks and what surrounds them, in order to interpret their signs. This mode of knowledge is typical of artistic research where the methodology is based on the material we are studying, "in dialogue with it" (Anke Haarmann 2024).

Starting moment: *Indigenous and Exotic* (2006)

The origin of this article goes back to a solo exhibition we² coordinated in 2006 at the independent art space *Liquidación Total*, in Madrid. Under the title *Indigenous and Exotic*, the Portuguese artist Gabriela Albergaria made an exhibition about the colonization of plants in the European territory. After a stroll around Madrid, Albergaria (Vale de Cambra, Portugal) visited the Botanical Gardens and then walked down the Paseo del Prado towards the Tropical Garden in Atocha train station. During this walk, Gabriella

¹ The title is a nod to the name of the seminar What Methods Do. See reference to Anke Haarmann in the bibliography.

² This "we" includes Victoria del Val, Ulrich Schoetcher, Mariano Sanz, Galileo Tejero, Antonio Ballester and the author herself.

became interested in relating both places through their two defining traits: as places for study and places for fun and play. These two gardens in Madrid called her attention chiefly by the way people “behaved” inside of them, their functionality, their use. How can a botanical garden, a place as anachronic as an Opera, keeps provoking an incredible fascination in people? What relationship to nature do these people establish, in what ways do they behave in places like that? Based on this relationship, Gabriela analyzed the behavior of people at these spaces, facing “their need for nature” on an urban environment such as the capital of Spain (Albergaria 2006). For this exhibition, the study had materialized as a series of drawings and photographs of both gardens (see figure 1)³, in which we observe the relationship between people, plants and those recreational spaces – created artificially– but to which we associate the idea of nature. The artist has built models of the gardens and showed them together by means of photographs she took. The models were made with branches, leaves and other elements that she looked for and combined, obtaining as a result the reconstruction of a garden. She then illuminated these models and photographed the details, producing pictures that were situated between the real and the artificial. These were constructions from constructions, as if the artist had set out to reaffirm the representational character that exists in all creation and even in our gaze towards “the natural”. In Gabriela's works, the idea of Nature was present, composed of fragments of reality -assembled by the artist in her studio- that resulted in an ideal landscape. Albergaria paused to observe how European gardens had changed their original function – from serving as a pleasure garden for a royal or noble family– to become places of recreation and visitation for citizens and tourists. This concern of Albergaria in the “colonization” of plants from distant places, by the metaphorical dimension of this phenomenon, and by its cultural significance had already been explored at the Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém with the exhibition *Collect, transplantar, coloniser* (Albergaria 2004) when the artist presented an installation with a large wooden door and wicker baskets reproducing the originals, which were loaded with

new species of plants from the scientific expeditions of the 18th century (see figure 2)⁴. These works refer to the great transformation that European gardens underwent at that time, due to the efforts of scientists and botanists who brought to Europe an unprecedented number of flowers, plants, trees and shrubs that affected the development of Science and Botany. The point is to establish links between Humans and Nature, not from a nostalgic, but from an ongoing point of view. The exhibition at *Liquidación Total* presented several pieces: A drawing of the sign at the Botanical Garden entrance, with the regulations on how to behave in this space. Next to it, texts and drawings, photographs of people in both gardens (The Botanical Gardens and Atocha station), an animation of the construction of the garden and an installation with a tomato plant (see figure 3)⁵.

What can we do

This time travel is also a historical-epochal portrait and yet the concentric circles, spirals and other geometric figures of the eternal return, serve us to experience an anachronism in the present continuous, which takes us to the context of the *Documenta VII* exhibition (Kassel 1982) when the German artist Joseph Beuys was invited to participate with his work *7000 Oaks*. In this mythical action he proposed taking seeds and planting them as a new form of awareness of the environmental, social and cultural problem. This “piece” (see figure 4)⁶ was supported by other works and a manifesto that Beuys himself wrote in 1978, entitled *Appeal for an Alternative* where he cited the ecological crisis as one of the four symptoms of the crisis caused by late capitalism:

Our relationship to nature is characterized by the fact that it is a totally disturbed one. The complete destruction of the natural foundation on which we stand is imminent. We are well on the way to destroying it in that we maintain an economic system based on the unrestrained plundering of this foundation. It must be stated very clearly that, on this point, the economic systems of private capitalism in the West and state capitalism in the East do not fundamentally differ. The destruction is a worldwide

³ <https://www.liquidaciontotal.org/gabrielaalbergaria.htm>

⁴ <https://galeriavermelho.com.br/en/artistas/gabriela-albergaria/>

⁵ <https://www.liquidaciontotal.org/gabrielaalbergaria.htm>

⁶ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beuys-7000-oak-trees-ar00745>

phenomenon. Between the mine and the garbage dump runs the one-way street of modern industrial civilization, whose expansive growth victimizes an ever-increasing number of lifelines in the ecological system (Beuys 1978, 747).

What does the half-century lapse of time add to this situation? It presumes certainties and facts that have been accelerating, inferring a point of no return according to the *Scientist Rebellion* movement that warned that the planet had already reached the point of no return (Rebelión Científica 2022). In a report by the *World-Wide Fund for Nature* (WWFN 2018), human behavior has been responsible for the extinction of 60% of wildlife in the last 40 years. Meanwhile, the *State of the World's Plants and Fungi* report (Kew 2020), published by the Kew Royal Botanic Gardens in London, states that two out of five plant species are at risk of extinction. In the article "Worldwide decline of the entomofauna: A review of its drivers", published by the *Biological Conservation* magazine, reports that the alarming decline of insect populations worldwide could lead to the extinction of 40% of species in the coming decades. Among the five previous extinctions the Permian-Triassic one, ended with 90% of life due to a high increase of CO₂ in the air. This time, the sixth mass extinction, is advancing ten thousand times faster.

Bruno Latour, in his book *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (1999) insisted, also as a matter of urgency, on putting ecology at the center of politics. Following this line, in this text we would like to explore this intimate association between ecological context and artistic and social practices, because one is not possible without the other. The language of the arts seems, therefore, useful and necessary if we want to expand our level of empathy and capacity to identify ourselves with the complex system of cause and effect, adapting ourselves at the same time as we strongly and emphatically wish to achieve a more responsible relationship with the environment as a whole.

Tree Time: it's about time for alliances

In this line of an art that seeks alliances with nature -to look at the world some other ways- we found Gabriela Albergaria. Observing the landscape with her, we treasured trees with her. Around 30% of the earth's surface is composed of trees, these potentially immortal beings, not only

produce oxygen, but also reduce atmospheric pollution produced by human "activities". Our health and our state of mind can change, thanks to their closeness. If we stop looking at them on the basis of their "usefulness" for our specie, recognizing that we depend on them, and trying to leave aside the binary discourse -colonizing and colonized- we propose to stop and understand how trees communicate and behave.

A tree is not a forest. On its own, a tree cannot establish a consistent local climate. It is at the mercy of wind and weather. But together, many trees create an ecosystem that moderates extremes of heat and cold, stores a great deal of water, and generates a great deal of humidity. And in this protected environment, trees can live to be very old. To get to this point, the community must remain intact no matter what. If every tree were looking out only for itself, then quite a few of them would never reach old age. Regular fatalities would result in many large gaps in the tree canopy, which would make it easier for storms to get inside the forest and uproot more trees. The heat of summer would reach the forest floor and dry it out. Every tree would suffer. Every tree, therefore, is valuable to the community and worth keeping around for as long as possible. And that is why even sick individuals are supported and nourished until they recover (Wohlleben 2016, 4).

As Peter Wohlleben rightly points out, trees base their interactions on an intelligent social network model, in which the symbiosis between fungi and roots creates a fertile soil rich in an organic matter (2016, 49). Miriam Martin, Spanish filmmaker, describes it this way:

From trees, which are also social beings, we have taken away -as we have taken away from ourselves- the community. They remember, they communicate and care for each other, they support the young, they care for the sick, they pool their resources, they remain linked underground through their roots and the mycelium of fungi.... They would not survive if they were only interested in competing. We are blind to trees, to their intelligence and even to their beauty. We see, if anything, wood, fruit or shade. We see servitude. Relating to them we would never be bored, but we renounce a company that lightens, the infinite play of

resemblance-cups like spiders, like lightning, like fireworks, seeds like helicopters, serrated leaves, pine needles- and the pleasure of admiration (Martin 2024).

This blindness, as Miriam Martin points out, seems to be an asymmetrical and arrogant one, which we are witnessing or in which we are immersed, contemplating with sorrow the different faces it shows. Unprecedented fires, logging and deforestation dynamics of the rainforest -mainly the Amazon, with the consequent destruction of cultural habitats and biodiversity and acceleration of global warming. The art moves, shakes some of its leaves, to focus specifically on the relationship with trees, forests and jungles and is situated, historically and culturally, in the contemporary era, in a situation of emergency.

We are now talking about the exhibition *Tree Time*, which took place at the Museo delle Scienze (2020-2021) curated by Andrea Lerda and Daniela Berta originally for the National Museum of the Mountain Duca degli Abruzzi in Turin, in 2019. This exhibition reflects on trees, forests and the possibility for the worlds of art and science to mix, learning to coexist and communicate within different environments. Albergaria's artworks also where there.

Tree Time was part of an ecological thought process that involves all spheres of human existence, where global warming, and all its harmful consequences for living species and more, represents a political and social problem, as well as an environmental one. The project focuses on the concepts of plant care and health, balance and imbalance, symbiosis and new forms of governance. In this proposal to learn about the sociability and trans-sociability of plants they suggest to: "it is therefore time for a new linguistic revolution able to decipher nature's various languages in order to create a new "ecophilia" in our minds. It is time to return to meta-sustainability, listening to the messages that nature is giving us, as we ourselves are part of nature; we need to take note of our symbiosis with the other "social networks" that surround us and of the cross-cutting dialogue with all the other communities with whom we share this Earth" (*Tree Time*, 2020). According to Ruyu Hung, Professor of Philosophy of Education at the National Chiayi University, Taiwan, the neologism "ecophilia" refers to the emotional and incarnate bond between humans and their surroundings

and between humans and nature. Ecophilia is a source of educational inspiration as it enriches the meaning of human life. The concept of ecophilia may therefore be considered an idea to guide education. This education is what Hung defines as "ecopedagogy". This opens up a way of working through artistic practice that involves the creation of a new imaginary, the practice of new languages and new places from which to relate to nature. The words of Chus Martinez resonate for us when she writes:

Another thing that fascinates me is that art is slow, and it is good that it is so. It has a total absence of spectacularity; it works more by osmosis than by impact and gives you a great opportunity to grow. But it is true that you have to be close for a long time and maintain that closeness. If we could take this same closeness to a pedagogical program, if there was a political will to bring art closer to many people and to do it slowly and through the epidermis, this would have a great impact. Art affects memory from the experience and transforms you, makes you more fragile, but also more skillful and flexible when it comes to imagining alternative ways of thinking (Martínez 2018).

In that interstice we meet again Gabriela Albergaria.

Natureza Detesta Linhas Retas (2021)

Gabriela among the trees, the forests and her experiences in relation to nature that she has put into play as a way of understanding art and life. The landscape comprehended as a human construction, aesthetic, economic, political and socio-cultural organization of the territory. The title of this exhibition seems to be aligned with the artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser who radically launched the following slogan:

The blind, cowardly and stupid use of the straight geometric line has turned our cities into desolate wastelands, from the aesthetic, spiritual and ecological point of view. The straight line and its derivatives are cancerous ulcers that poison urban planning and physical health alike. Our cities are the realization of the insane whims of criminal architects who never took the Hippocratic oath of architecture: I refuse to build houses that can harm nature and people. Two generations of Bauhaus-minded architects

have destroyed our environment (Hundertwasser 1997, 58-61).

Nature abhors straight lines, reaffirms in the title of her exhibition Gabriela Albergaria, the path of geometric logic seems not to have augured well for the planet. However, like any complex situation, Albergaria is also fascinated by ordering the elements, by geometry, by the way it structures the lines. Something reminds us of the minimal space but exposed to the degradation of these materials. Let's see what kind of initiatives she practices in this exhibition of the year 2021 in Lisbon. Eighteen years have passed since that show in Madrid. Our vision and relationship with the natural world have changed a lot since then. We propose a trip back in time to visit the exhibition *Nature Abhors a Straight Line* (Culturgest Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal, 2021). This exhibition curated by Delfim Sardo, gathers, as an anthology, works by Albergaria where she continues to approach the representation of nature, but the context is already different. There are emergencies, there is extinction, there is decadence, but also a search for hope. We wonder, therefore, what researches she has continued to work in, and what new concerns she has incorporated.

We continue to find gardens, probably one of the most important fields of research for Gabriela Albergaria. Urban forms of contact with the natural world, they are situated as spaces of negotiation between design, architecture and other recreational or scientific needs that led to their construction. Descriptive mechanisms that embody a set of fictitious beliefs used to represent the natural world. Gardens are also historical productions of what is knowledge and what is pleasure. Albergaria's work involves, therefore, a territory: Nature. A *nature* that is manipulated, planted, transported, hierarchized, catalogued, studied, felt and remembered through continuous exploration by means of photographs, drawings or sculptures, present in the different rooms of the exhibition. Probably the novelty comes from the acceleration of the climatic emergency. Let's take a closer look at the pieces in the exhibition.

Repairing, reconstituting, rebuilding: the gesture

Artist and curator decide to include in the exhibition, through their reconstruction, some of the central works of her career. This procedure, the reconstitution of what formerly existed as artworks, seems to be the result of an "ecological" stance towards artistic production itself. To return to what has already been created, to re-create from something that once was, that perhaps also became extinct -or at least the material that formed it did so- we can read it as a gesture towards degrowth in the production of contemporary art. This is the case of *Árvore* (2004/2020) made up of branches of Australian Acacia, collected in the Lisbon region, cut and reassembled with a new morphology adapted to the place. In the artist's trajectory, strategies present since the beginning of her career that she has continued to develop in other works. From a dead tree, felled, Albergaria reassembles its branches creating a new form from minimal gestures that signal and evidence her intervention and that places the tree in relation to the surrounding space, as if it were a drawing in space. Albergaria says: "In the construction of the piece I refer to the grafting technique used to enhance species of fruit trees and other plants, seeking here to explore the theme of plant colonization" (Albergaria 2021, see figures 5⁷ and 6⁸).

This idea of assemblage from a dead tree evoked for us the piece *Trémula* that the artist Javier Cruz (Madrid) presented, also in the year 2021, at the *Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo*, Móstoles. Here the main work was a trembling poplar - scientifically called *Populus Tremula*- that was planted in 1980 next to the building where the artist grew up and lived, in the neighborhood of San Blas, and that had been cut down a year earlier due to an illness. The night of the felling, Javier brought up to his house about 500 kg. A few days later, with his friends Jacobo and Lorenzo, he returned to load what he could fit into the longest van he could drive. The lives of the tree and those that emerge from its remains were constituted as a user's manual for a second life of things, a context conducive to the emergence of both existences and stories, where things become

⁷ <https://eumoceano.pt/obras/arvore/>

⁸ <https://eumoceano.pt/obras/arvore/>

dissident with the real and fiction can become law (see figure 7⁹).

Expedition/Exhibition

Albergaria's exhibition features a thematic room dedicated to her travels and research in the Amazon, as well as a room dedicated to Redwood National Park, a North American forest park home to some of the most striking species of the northern United States. The work *Between Fact and Fiction II* (2015) is composed of broken and eroded tree branches that were collected by Albergaria on the banks of the Magdalena River (Colombia), on the beach of Cape Cod (USA), in the forest of Neuenkirchen (Germany) and in Alentejo (Portugal), fossils of tree branches from various origins and metal supports on painted wall (see figure 8¹⁰). These pieces occupy a wall almost 5 meters long, although their dimensions can be variable. These works play with the idea of a timeline, the horizontal line that runs along the wall, formed by fragments of wood from different times and places (including different archaeological periods, as is the case of the fossilized wood). Each fragment has been modified by natural processes and its surface bears witness to the effects of the passage of time on the material.

In *Repair/Recover* (2010-2020), the materials she uses are wooden sticks and sulfur-free plasticine: "For 10 years, I collected wood in different states of preservation in various places around the world. In the study I proceeded to repair each of these fragments with organic materials that would accompany the deterioration process of the wood itself" (Albergaria 2021, see figure 9¹¹). In this work, as in others -*Trianon* 2010/2020- the artist works in creative processes extended in time, where the accumulation of elements, the found woods or sticks, are added as she collects them. For this reason, the pieces will probably remain alive as long as the artist will be.

Caring for the fragile, the extinct

We could speak of a third category of pieces in the exhibition defined by the ways in which danger, injury or extinction affect the artist's

pieces. Some titles Albergaria has chosen evidence this relationship- *Endangered and Vulnerable* (2014) or *Landscape in Repair* (2019-2020). This artwork are drawings through which the artist highlights the concern for burned trees (2019-2020) that seems to heal by the pencil strokes on paper (see figure 11¹²).

In *Couche sourde* (2010/2020) these issues become evident starting from a reflection on the soil- a seemingly minimal monolith built with a technique to grow plants and develop seeds in non-endemic places. The humus and the warmth it produces create ideal conditions for New World seeds to germinate in Europe, paving the way for the colonization of plants from around the world: "What interested me was how this cultivation technique completely transformed the world's landscape. I discovered drawings documenting this ancient technique and decided to use them as a model for an earth sculpture" (Albergaria 2021). The piece itself is made of rammed earth, another ancient technique used in the construction of houses in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, Africa and South America (see figure 10¹³). From the representation and manipulation, Albergaria evidences the material occurrences, through its interventions and displacements. Thus, we understand that Albergaria is working on the thin layer that rests on the surface, that there is a network, roots and microbial communities that favor diversity, the availability of hundreds of species, which also interest her. They are fellow travelers. As Garrison Sposito of the University of California points out, "The health of forests is underpinned by the health of the soils in which they grow. The health of soils is supported by microorganisms that improve the availability of green water and provide forests with resilience against drought and disease" (Sposito, 2016).

If European modernity was based on an imaginary of superiority of a species over everything else, among other things, it was based on the privilege of sight as the sense from which to organize perceptions from a distance. However, other cultures based their understanding of the cosmos on other perceptive forms, such as orality, developing

⁹ <https://ca2m.org/exposiciones/javi-cruz-tremula>

¹⁰ <https://www.gabrielaalbergaria.com/Nature-Abhors-a-Straight-Line>

¹¹ <https://www.tique.art/features/gabriela-albergaria/>

¹² <https://www.gabrielaalbergaria.com/Landscape-in-Repair-1>

¹³ <https://www.gabrielaalbergaria.com/O-Balanco-da-Arvore-Exagera-a-Tempestade>

forms of listening and being able to sense the invisible (Casablanca 2022).

These words from Casablanca take us back to the concert by Xoán-Xil, Ariel Ninas and Paula Ballesteros at the Museo Nacional Reina Sofía, in Madrid, in the year 2023 in the context of the cycle "Cuando el destino nos alcance. Acciones desesperadas ante la sexta extinción"¹⁴ (Espejo 2023). This speculative essay, based on attentive listening and from a contemporary perspective, revisits the myth of bees in Galician folk practices associated with death. Honeybees, an endangered pollinator species, have been one of the most important animals in Western culture, both for their influence on the wealthy classes, with contemporary Western architecture and eighteenth-century beekeepers, and for their importance in the funerary rituals of traditional and rural societies. For example, in Galicia, northern Spain, the buzzing of bees, reproduced by voice, accompanied the dead to the grave. This project included the staging, by Paula Ballesteros, of the book *Abellón. O libro negro das zoadeiras* signed by Xoán-Xil López and Mauro Sanín (2020). An open and suggestive proposal related to experimentation and sound creation, areas from which we are invited to rethink our relationship with "noise".

Extinction and ambiguity: it is the dead that summon us

Between these ideas surrounding a wounded Nature, we would like to propose the reading of these contemporary artistic practices from the suggestive ideas proposed by Vinciane Despret in some of her books such as *Our Grateful Dead: Stories of Those Left Behind*, (2021) or specifically in *Living as a bird* (2022). We appreciated to hear the call of attention that she makes on the stories that summon the dead, situations that, like the pieces of *Albergaria*, manifest "the mobilizing power of the enigmas". A logic that does not try to find the correct version, the story that fits and closes a starting hypothesis, but that allows different versions to coexist. It calls for what the poet John Keats called negative capability, "the fact of being at peace with ambiguity, of remaining with the difficulty of contradictions and of not knowing" (Keats 2020,

137). For here too, as in artistic practice, one does not always act directly, but reality becomes perceptible through semantic and syntactic choices that make it possible to describe the ways in which they act.

These syntactic forms qualify what they are capable of, that is, their ways of being, their ethology, their singular potency. Other terms could be added, all of them characteristic of these regimes of presence, whether from the register of what summons, authorizes, calls, makes possible, induces, incites, recruits, invites, mobilizes, instructs, arouses, claims, and even disturbs or forbids, or also from the particular regime of actions that awaken certain forms of availability. All these verbs stand out for this: they can leave the question of the origin of the action completely open, indeterminate (Despret 2022).

Facts that serve to open us to questions, like good artworks, signs to make us gain strength. There is in these words of Despret a fruitful directionality.

Thinking about relationships with other beings, such as animals, plants, stones, and microorganisms, based on what is not present, on what is extinct, led us to the work of José Luis Viñas, who calls himself a taxonomist of absence, a detective in bio-historical research.

I work on the quest of recently extinct species. I am a collector of their dooms. I am a late descendant from Noah, an artist/naturalist who harvests but ghosts. My ark is wrecked, torn to pieces among different spaces, along different times. I avoid vividly depicting all that has already passed away because there is no way back. I am an insurgent gravedigger who stirs rebellion designing new mourning facilities. I build eco-memorials driven by a non-speciesism outlook. These settings could become educative displays for a dissident remembrance (Viñas 2020).

Viñas' work articulates it with the rigor of science, the furor of the archive that shows the layers of trauma we humans can bear on our shoulders. Documenting every step of the

¹⁴ "When fate catches up with us. Desperate actions in the face of the sixth extinction".

process, research is a central part of his artistic experience. For example, in the series *Extinct Lepidopterans/ 1750-2020 CE*, he shows a collection-archive that includes all 84 extinct Lepidopteran species from the last three centuries. Concerning each record in the archive, we shall always come across a glass dome with a pair of fluttering butterflies and moths. They have been thoroughly replicated by using artisanal procedures. Next to the domes, some pictures of people on their fumigation and disinfection duties are shown. All images have been downloaded from the Internet. To accomplish the project, a database with extinction venues, a chronological line and a pinpointed earth globe do provide us with valuable scientific information (see figure 12¹⁵). Those sites where the dead take care of the alive, where the extinct enquires us, bring us to the works *Endangered and Vulnerable* or *Árvore* by Gabriela Albergaria, taking care of, repairing, reconstituting the tree, nature, as a space of double encounter. Also, the butterflies and moths of Viñas. Pieces that both nurse us and are nursed by the subject they evoke, that have been mutually attentive to each other, a key question of reciprocity.

But the attentions are as much on the side of the animal, as on the side of the earth, the trees, the neighbors, the peripheries, etc. Subjects without intentions do not exist. Or so I believe. A new theory of the subject is needed, but it seems to me very complicated to construct, given all that accompanies our theory of the subject. However, intentions without subjects become much more interesting. And wouldn't intentions without a subject then be attentions? Ways of letting oneself be affected by othernesses (Despret 2022).

The othernesses are the ones that shape drawings, stroke by stroke, line by line, in a stopped time, which also occupies the surface. These are the woods, branches or trunks collected by Albergaria or Cruz. The photographs and collections of branches that these artists share are evidencing the beauty that we have in front of us, but also acknowledging that we are leaving it behind.

By means of conclusions: stratification

Rather than closing the sense of the article in a series of conclusive sentences, it seems to us more suggestive and in accordance with the ideas and methods we deal with in this article, to propose a layering of ideas in several levels of operations. The areas we mention occur simultaneously and can be guided by the following strategies: *transformation, reconstruction and assemblage* in contemporary art in its relationship with nature.

1. **Transformation:** In the course of this paper, we have been talking about a *nature manipulated, planted, transported, set in hierarchy, catalogued, studied, felt, and recalled* through the ongoing exploration of nature in Albergaria's photographs, drawings and sculptures. How can matter transform our approach, our understanding of the environment? In Gabriela Albergaria's pieces we have seen, in a span of less than twenty years, how the environmental crisis, on a planetary scale, overtook the forests, burned the trees. In her proposals, Albergaria seems to have moved towards a profound questioning of the prevailing actions, knowledge, and feelings. It does this through the presentation and collection of materials: wood, trunks, branches. This enchainment logic, of mutual interdependencies, was the one that Miriam Martín proposed us not to forget. Not to forget the magnificent things that we have in front of our eyes and that we push to another level. Let us not forget the trees, the forests, the rivers: "Even with everything, despite everything, against all this and in favor of the films, we will find ourselves in the rivers of the cinema and in the Arga, with arg- of clear and bright, so that they shine and enlighten us" (Martín 2024).

2. **Reconstruction:** It is important to keep in mind that the context of the artworks we analyzed dated from a time "before the pandemic of covid 19", which completely changed the way of perceiving the threats and effects that the climate crisis is having on our planet. Although it is still not present as a "central issue" in the agendas of politicians, there is a growing clamor among citizens. The space occupied by art in all this story can be described as visionary, at least there is a

¹⁵ <https://www.joseluisvinas.com/lepidoptera-1>

direction indicated by artists such as Gabriela Albergaria, whom we want to follow.

In a context that seems to be determined by ecological urgency and the need for action, we ask ourselves what idea of the future do we have? If the future is that destiny, that of dealing with our constant human activity, with acquired habits, with their consequences. Or it is also important to think of a future as something more than a temporary idea. Nor do we intend to make a portrait of the future from a philosophical approach, not even from the oracle, from the fortune-telling. We bring a certain idea of the future, to ask ourselves about the extension of the present and its relationship with the past, looking for ancestors, choosing them to find the possibility that our present is sustained, sustainable and different.

In this reconstruction task, we would like to be accompanied by the concept of cosmoecology that we quoted in this article by Vinciane Despret. An approach that sought to counteract the mechanistic consequences of ecology by proposing a space where the living and the dead coexist and mutually nourish them, where animals and plants learn each other's languages and forms of communication. In the line of authors such as Bruno Latour and his demand to "rethink everything anew" in an operation that dismantles the divide between Humanity and Nature: "to understand that humans are part of nature and we cannot submit it to our interest, because the damage we do to it we also do to ourselves" (Latour, 2021).¹⁶

3. Assemblage: As Jane Bennett says, following Deleuze and Guattari, assemblages are "living, pulsating confederations that have the capacity to function despite the persistent presence of energies that undermine them from within... the assemblage is never an impassive block, but an open collective. A non-totalizable sum" of affective bodies, objects, materials, and gestures (Bennett 2022). We read this quote at the publication *Lo vivo. Lo pueblo. Lo jondo* (Sánchez Mateos-Paniagua and Velasco Sanchez 2023, 18), which accompanied the exhibition of an assemblage put on by *Operaciones Cuncatio* at the Casa de Porras, Granada, in April 2023. They are a way of articulating materials and their

connections, from an artistic point of view to place, to put together, to situate ways of being and doing, of inhabiting territories, of making citizenship or, as we discovered in this research, *florestanía*, a mixture of the Portuguese "floresta" (forest) and citizenship, which refers, therefore, to a type of ecological meta-citizenship. It implies a critique of the key ideas of modernity, such as the hierarchical dualisms Society/Nature, Male/Female, Human/Animal, that we are interested in remixing and reinventing. Assemblages to question that the only order in the world is that of inequality, discrimination, lack of opportunities. To think from direct action the role of nature in relation to humans and help develop visions of sustainability with a sense of responsibility -ethical, political, social, and cultural- towards the community. Towards the commons and some hope. The possibility from art practices, the beauty that has not yet been extinguished, the life that it creates, the desire to keep on doing. The invention of forms and disciplines, of spaces for poetic interrelations, to look again at the marks left by extinct creatures. Art with its possibility of attempts, with its lack of interest in establishing dogmatic truths, with its own notion of inhabiting practices that are also becoming extinct (action, performance). The movement of the trees, the wind swaying the leaves, a long time. The speed of fire, its destructive power. Before humans and after. Albergaria conjugates, with her colored pencils, with the branches that she rescues from the garden, engraving on the wood, these processes that we enunciate and that are not abstract. They only demand from us, like nature, to be attentive, perceptive. The speculation, the enigma, the oracular. Meanwhile caring, sustaining life, giving it. Searching for new languages, inhabiting the impossibility, the incomplete, the failed, the desire to be capable, the fragments that summon it. The still unarticulated hope that, at some point, together, from the qualities summoned here, small displacements can be produced that give rise to care for what is extinguished, to create kinships with nature. Let us pay attention, from our clumsiness to the whisper, to the noise, to the scream.

¹⁶ It is worth mentioning the context of this speech, given by Latour when he received the Kyoto Prize awarded by the Kyocera Corporation, founded by Kazuo Inamori in 1959. This ceramic engineer, dedicated to electronic ceramics, ceramic engineering and structural ceramics,

created this award in 1984 as "a way of recognizing people who have contributed to the progress of science, civilization and the human spirit. To create and rebuild a certain balance."

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