

HOXTON 253 art project space
253 Hoxton St, Whitmore Estate, London N1 5LG
25th September - 4th October 12 - 8pm
PV Thursday 24th Sept 4 - 9pm

EARTH EATERS

Featuring: Sol Bailey-Barker, Natasha Bird, Charly Blackburn, Ebinum Brothers, William Cobbing, Kathryn Graham, Byzantia Harlow, Gregory Herbert, Timo Kube, Jane Lawson, Dunstan Low, Tasha Marks | AVM Curiosities, the Institute of Queer Ecology, Hannah Walton, Charlie Warde, Russell Webb, Trystan Williams, William York

Having experienced the fallout from a global pandemic, we now know that we not only anticipated the exact situation we are in (*see the film Contagion for nostradamus like predictions*), but potentially we could have had the vaccine for it by now. Those countries that prepared and handled it correctly, avoided death tolls that surpassed those of WW2 and international economic freefall. Why was it that we did not do something about our impending doom when we had all the warning signs? Will we now learn that lesson and take action against climate change - an outcome of which we cannot learn how to simply live alongside - and that we have known about since it was discovered in 1824 - when French physicist Joseph Fourier describes the Earth's natural "greenhouse effect"

EARTH EATERS is an alternative name for the condition *Geophagia* - the practice in humans and animals of eating earth or more specifically the clay and mineral content within it. It is part of a larger eating disorder called *Pica* - the consumption of non nutritive substances such as clay, starch, ice and chalk. This behaviour is usually found in people that have underlying deficiencies (blood cells, haemoglobin or zinc). That said, Pica has been practiced since 400BC and has both positive and negative consequences. This exhibition will explore soil's potential role in prevention of climate change, the artistic use of soil/earth as medium, and calls on us to readdress and promote the health of the vital substance that we take for granted.

One of the things that makes soil such a fundamental component of any climate change mitigation strategy is because it represents a long-term storage of carbon. With news that the permafrost (the frozen layer of soil that has underlain the Arctic tundra for millennia) is now starting to thaw, we are now able to excavate mammoths from their ancient graves, and the race between world leaders to exploit the vast untapped resources of the Arctic signifies our total rejection of warning signs which we cannot afford to ignore.

By exploring the relationships between philosophy and nature, the personal and the political, destruction and construction, and considering the distinction of non-human and human agents- the works in **EARTH EATERS** will question what is at stake in the ecological crises of the 21st century. This will be navigated by blending diverse areas of expertise, including paintings, sculptures, videos and installations to challenge the conventional systems of classification, suggesting a worldview that strives to dislocate humans from their assumed position of centrality and superiority as knowers and actors in the world.

Living soils in the gardens of earthly pairi-daêzã - Essay by Aliya Say

How can we learn new forms of care for more than human worlds? How can we remember the pace of life of cultures other than ours, othering ours? How can we tell the time, when the hour hand stands still, but the minute hand rotates at the accelerating speed of ecological disaster?

In *Soil Times: The Pace Of Ecological Care*, a chapter from a book on speculative exploration of meanings of care in the more than human worlds of technoscience and nature-cultures, the author Maria Puig de la Bellacasa considers ecological concern for this planet's soils and the endless creatures and forms of life that populate it. She sets out to elicit conceptions and practices that have the potential to disrupt the reduction of soil to a mere resource, paying particular attention to a temporal dimension of care.

Following De La Bellacasa's line of enquiry coupled with the news feed–2020, we ask: can we learn to make time for care, and can we learn from the Now? Who do we care to care about most, and how much do we care about being cared about in return? Does caring towards being A (human or non human) for x minutes a day, makes caring towards being B (human or non human) z times more likely? Is care contagious? Is it expanding just like the universe – exponentially, in direct proportion to the number of times we said yes to stepping onto the soil, shoes off, feet bare, little toes buried in the infinitesimally thin outer layer of the Earth's sourdough crust?

Following centuries-long service to the appetites of intensive agriculture, soaking up byproducts of our swelling consumerist desires, today's soils are abysmally polluted, eroded and depleted. 'Nature' itself is conceptually dead, while many of her former constituents are dead in the most acute biological sense of the word – in a sense of atemporal non-existence following the event of extinction. Together with artists in the Earth Eaters show, I ask: how are we to home-school ourselves into caring for soils and their inhabitants, into ways of biological and spiritual nourishment for all, not the select few? What practices, rituals, and gestures can we cultivate against the ongoing environmental degradation and towards a just, equitable, multispecies present and future? In the prevailing paradigm of our present-day culture, soil is taken for granted, worse equated with dirt. In the soulless, soilless environments we typically inhabit, gingery terra is mostly hidden from view, buried deep underneath pavements and buildings, roads and warehouses, asphalt and concrete, plastic and steel.

Against this invisibility, De la Bellacasa calls for the reconceptualization of soil as living: in this conception, soil is not just a habitat or medium for plants and organisms; nor is it just decomposed material, the organic and mineral end product of organism activity. Organisms *are* soil.

How does it feel for the soil to be buried alive, I wonder, and what kind of magical act would bring her back into thriving existence, allow her to breathe again, following a centuries-long act of murder by suffocation.

In his lectures on the great Goddess, Joseph Campbell narrates a myth widely disseminated throughout the planting cultures of the ancient world: Southeast Asia, the Pacific Isles, and the Americas. The story takes place in a timeless mythological age, the Age of the Ancestors, when there was no distinction between female and male, or between human beings and beasts. This undifferentiated, dreamlike epoch flowed on and on, until at certain moment a murder was enacted. The divine victim's body got cut up, the pieces were buried, and out of those buried parts grew the food plants by which human life in this world is now supported. From that point onwards, we are

living on the substance of the body of this sacrificed god.¹ We tend to our lands and gardens which give us all the nourishment we need, and much more, enabling cycles of life and death uninterrupted.

Yet, the subtle balance of the earthly nature-garden has been irrevocably disrupted in the ongoing climate emergency and environmental degradation. While seeking eschatological heavenly paradise since Biblical times, today fast assuming its techno-scientific, transhuman and offworld ambitions, we have fully denied the possibility of cultivating an earthly garden of delights, the abode of feminine mystical divine with her doings of nurture and disintegration, regeneration and decay, known to ancient planting cultures.

The word 'paradise' traces its etymological origins from the Old Persian *Pairi-daêzã*, 'walled (enclosed) estate', where 'pairi' means 'around', while 'daeza' is rooted in a verb that means 'to construct from the earth' or 'to be made of clay'. The original description of paradise in the *Avesta*, a collection of religious texts of Zoroastrianism, explicitly illustrates an image of an earthly place. 'It signifies and has the sense of a dwelling place, earthen enclosure, of those intimately associated with death: the place where you should eat and wear clothes, the place that you should live in: the city.'² Against separation of nature-culture, vegetal/animal-human, biological-technological, what would an urban dream look, feel, smell and taste like, if we were to conceive of cities as earthen enclosures, with the paradise dwelling all around and within, not far away and outside? A kind of *Pairi-daêzã* where no Ryanair flight could take us.

Can we bring virtual all-thriving worlds into physical, earthly existence, allowing more than humans to participate in our visions of techno-biological co-existence, giving earthly agents access to imaginative tools, inviting them to participate and co-create? What would *pairi-daêzã* look like from the point of view of species other than ours? And from our own point of view, just in case we have accidentally, in a rush to live – which today increasingly feels like a rush to die – forgotten what enables us thrive? Today as ever, we look to art and artists in our common search of tools for earthly, magical, ecological and political re-enchantments.

by Aliya Say, July 2020

¹ Joseph Campbell, *Goddesses: Mysteries of the Feminine Divine*, edited by Saffron Rossi (New World Library, 2013), p. xvii.

² Healy, P., 'La Difesa della Natura,' (2007) in Hamed Khosravi, *The City as a Project*, 'Paradise', 4 July 2011. Accessed on 7 May 2020, <http://thecityasaproject.org/2011/07/paradise/>