

## ABSTRACTS

### I panel: Globalising histories of environment and environmentalism

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#### **A System in which many worlds fit: Plural environmentalisms of the Socialist Anthropocene**

Maja and Reuben Fowkes (Postsocialist Art Centre UCL)

The accumulation of environmental disasters in the twilight years of the system and the prominent role of ecological protests in hastening its demise have coloured perceptions of attitudes and practices towards the natural world under socialism. A corrective to prevalent catastrophist accounts can be found in artistic engagements with environmental transformations, which reveal the multiplicity of approaches to nature that flourished in the furrows of socialist modernity. This presentation will consider how art practices illuminate the complexity of the Socialist Anthropocene, uncovering the distinctive traits and plurality of the environmental history of twentieth-century socialisms, while also demonstrating the coexistence within the system of a variety of environmentalisms, from the latent eco-consciousness nurtured by mass movements for nature protection to the resurgence of indigenous worldviews and spread of ecological activism.

#### **Orbán's View on Nature: The State and its Environment in Modern Hungary**

Viktor Pal (University of Helsinki)

Hungary's current environmental policy has been substantially criticized based on worrying trends, however, critics also employed emotionally charged methodologies on occasion. As a result, the root cause behind Hungary's new line of policies toward the environment and how it impacts the future of human-nature relations in the Middle Danube region remains unclear. However, such an explanation could be beneficial to understand the underlying causes both for Orbán's governmental environmental policies and indirectly contemplate the future of the environment in Hungary. Thus, in this presentation, I take a deep look into the present and past of Hungary's woodlands, wetlands, and floodplains as well as Lake Balaton, the country's premier tourism area, all of which have been central elements of the reorganization of state-led human-nature relations since 1800 as well as in post-2010 Hungary and employ historical methods to better understand the present and the future.

#### ***How I feel my body, 2'*: Interweaving decolonial and environmental position**

Ann Mirjam Vaikla (Kumu Art Museum)

*How I feel my body, 2'* (title borrowed from Romanian artist and choreographer Alina Popa's (1982-2019) drawing) focuses on the potential of an autoethnographic storytelling and research method when interweaving decolonial and environmental position. I will bring examples by introducing my research at the Decolonizing Architecture (RIA, Stockholm, 2022/2023) course working on a concept "of(f) focus",

developed when researching a coastal town Paldiski; and curatorial exhibition project “Botanical Witnesses” (8th Artishok Biennial, 2022) that took place at Tallinn Botanic Garden. Both case studies stem from a personal connection and inhabited experience with the site. The concept “of(f) focus” aims to redraw one’s sight, and asks: how might one unlearn this inhabited behaviour of the “off focus”, inherited from previous generations, to instead be “of focus” towards sites appearing as evidence of committed violence?

## **II panel: Gender and environmentalism across genres**

### **The Depiction of Abject in Late Soviet Estonian Art**

Liisa Kaljula (Art Museum of Estonia)

*Still Life Against the Backdrop of a City* is one of the most misunderstood paintings by Ludmilla Siim, a prolific painter of urban landscapes in 1970s Estonian art. This large piece shows a common juxtaposition of late Soviet art: the city as the focus of Western civilisation versus still life as a symbol of nature and rural life. And yet the still life set against the backdrop of the first modern high-rises in Tallinn does not simply involve a conflict between the damaged and polluted man-made world and the pure and innocent nature. At the centre of the composition, the fresh edible fruit has transformed into a dangerous and unpleasant, abject and slimy substance. In Julia Kristeva’s theory, the abject relates to the outcast feminine – amorphous, impure, associated with bodily fluids – that is opposed to the pure and clean masculinity of culture, threatening the symbolic order of things.

### **A more caring environment? Acknowledging the spatial needs of the most vulnerable in transitional and post-Soviet Estonia**

Ingrid Ruudi (Estonian Academy of Arts)

Transition from Late Soviet to post-Soviet society meant, in the broadest sense, an aspiration towards a living environment with more openness, individual agency and acknowledgment of people’s needs. The mentality of indifference and neglect of the late Soviet decades was countered with increasing care, a sense of belonging, and orderliness of the material environment, as manifested in civic activism in the name of nature and heritage protection. Drawing on the feminist ethics of care, the paper investigates, if and how the more caring attitude manifests itself in the realm of architecture and urban environment, looking at the process of acknowledging the spatial needs of the marginalised users like the disabled, the elderly and the orphaned or neglected children. It will focus on the slow changes in the discourse related to such users in the 1980s, from early disability activism, documentaries, and written media, to certain architectural projects that were nevertheless quite overshadowed by the business-driven and success-displaying mentality prevailing in mainstream architecture culture of the 1990s.

### **Unruly lines of ecological feminism**

Taru Elfving (Contemporary Art Archipelago)

With some of the works presented in the exhibition *Through the Black Gorge of Your Eyes* (Kumu Art Museum, 2023) as a starting point, I reflect on how ecological feminism might be understood in contemporary art when critically situated in relation to specific recent historical genealogies of artistic practices. Tracing and weaving together thematic strands found resonant in the diverse approaches and perspectives in the printmakers' works, I argue that they rupture rather than reinforce the gendered oppositions such as nature and culture, body and mind, or matter and meaning. This promise of the porosity of the boundaries and hierarchies challenges essentialism and dualism that haunts for example the hegemonic Western art historical notion of ecofeminism while opening up potential paths to reconsider the urgent intersection of ecological and feminist thought and imaginaries.

### III panel: Thinking through indigeneity and environmentalism

#### **Indigeneity and (em)placement: A view through Estonian 'foreign ethnology' collections**

Jaanika Vider (University of Vienna)

Fuelled by a desire to understand and control the world, collections of flora, fauna, and historical and contemporary material culture poured into various centres of learning leading to a proliferation of museums in the nineteenth-century Europe. Focusing on the 'foreign ethnology' (Est. *võõrrahvaste etnoloogia*) or 'world cultures' (Est. *maailmarahvaste*) collections acquired through learned societies and networks in Estonia in the mid-nineteenth century and now held by the Estonian History Museum and the Estonian National Museum, this paper asks what forms of relating to and caring for the environment these collections trace and afford.

Ethnographic collections as attempts to categorise and define people outside one's own environment offer one way to reconsider environmentalism not least because of the perceived notion that Indigenous communities have a special relationship to the natural world. Thinking through indigeneity in relation to place and emplacement in the Estonian context offers further nuance to arguments made from the perspective of metropolitan centres in Europe and North America where power relationships between Indigenous and settler and/or coloniser communities have been much more clear-cut.

#### **Those who don't know anything about it**

Art Leete (University of Tartu)

The presentation concentrates on the relationship of the Komi hunters to their natural environment. The Komi are a Finno-Ugric indigenous group inhabiting the northeastern region of European Russia. Hunting has been a prominent subsistence mode for the Komi until the early twentieth century. Even nowadays, it remains a relatively prominent region of subsistence hunting. The Komi hunters employ opportunism and preservation strategies in their environmental behaviour. The imperative of opportunism leads the hunters to attempt to catch all the game they encounter. At the same time, the rule of preservation prevents them from hunting too much. I will discuss how the Komi balance these seemingly contradictory hunting

rules. I also intend to demonstrate that the environmental knowledge of the Komi hunters works through their notion of 'not-knowing'.

## **80 Years Later: Relationships Between the Indigenous Livonian Community and the Historical Land They Have Been Expelled From**

Valts Ernštreits (University of Latvia Livonian Institute)

Livonians are the indigenous people of Latvia who inhabited almost one-third of the current-day Latvia in the thirteenth century. By the end of the 20th century, Livonians survived in an isolated island-like coastal area of 14 fishermen villages in the North of the Courland peninsula. This peripheral area known as the Livonian Coast determined a lifestyle different from the rest of the land, and altered Livonian tangible and intangible heritage, at the same time ensuring the survival and preservation of Livonians, their language, and intangible heritage. During the twentieth century, this area changed suddenly from peripheral to critical for different powers becoming a war zone during both world wars and the border area of the USSR which led to the expulsion of the Livonian community and scattering of Livonians across Latvia and abroad.

Today while the dominant majority of the Livonians reside in the cities of Latvia, the Livonian community retains a strong connection with the historical homeland. While lifestyle and transmission of the language and intangible heritage have changed entirely, the Livonian coast it's still a point of reference when talking about Livonian identity. It is also the area where some of the most important community events are taking place and the land that the community is trying to take back by re-introducing Livonianness in the form of revival of the tangible and intangible Livonian heritage elements.

At the same time after the Livonian departure, a major nature preserve and military presence expanded on the Livonian Coast limiting strongly any human activities. Today it is raising questions creating a kind of a "trolley problem" about whether it is the traditional livelihood of the indigenous people or the nature that is taking over and thriving undisturbed in the abandoned lands, that is worth preserving.