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Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection

Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, *Potential Worlds 1: Planetary Memories*, Zürich, Switzerland, 2020
Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection

22nd Biennial of Sydney, *OIKOVYTERI ITEKO'A MÔ'NGUEVYA (Decolonization continues)*, Autralia, 2020

22nd Biennial of Sydney, *OIKOVYTERI ITEKO'A MÔ'NGUEVYA (Decolonization continues)*, Autralia, 2020

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MIMA - Middelsbrough Institute of Modern Art, *Fragile Earth : seeds, weeds, plastic crust*, Middelsbrough, UK, 2019

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IAC - Institut d'Art Contemporain, *The Middle Earth* (w/ Jimmie Durham), Villeurbanne, France, 2018

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Michel Rein, *Seeds of Change: New York - A Botany of Colonization*, Paris, France, 2018

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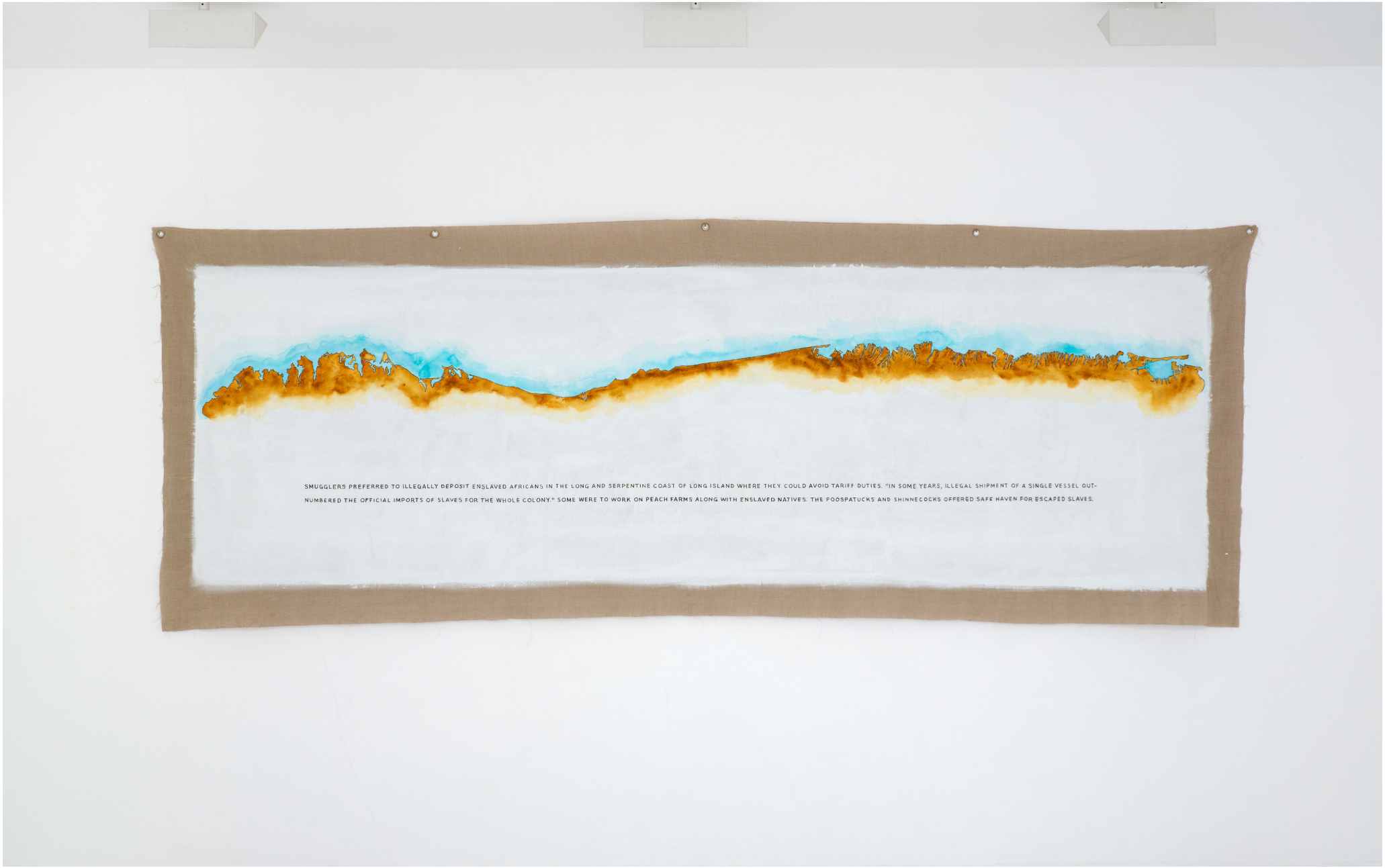

Michel Rein, *Seeds of Change: New York - A Botany of Colonization*, Paris, France, 2018

Michel Rein, *Seeds of Change: New York - A Botany of Colonization*, Paris, France, 2018

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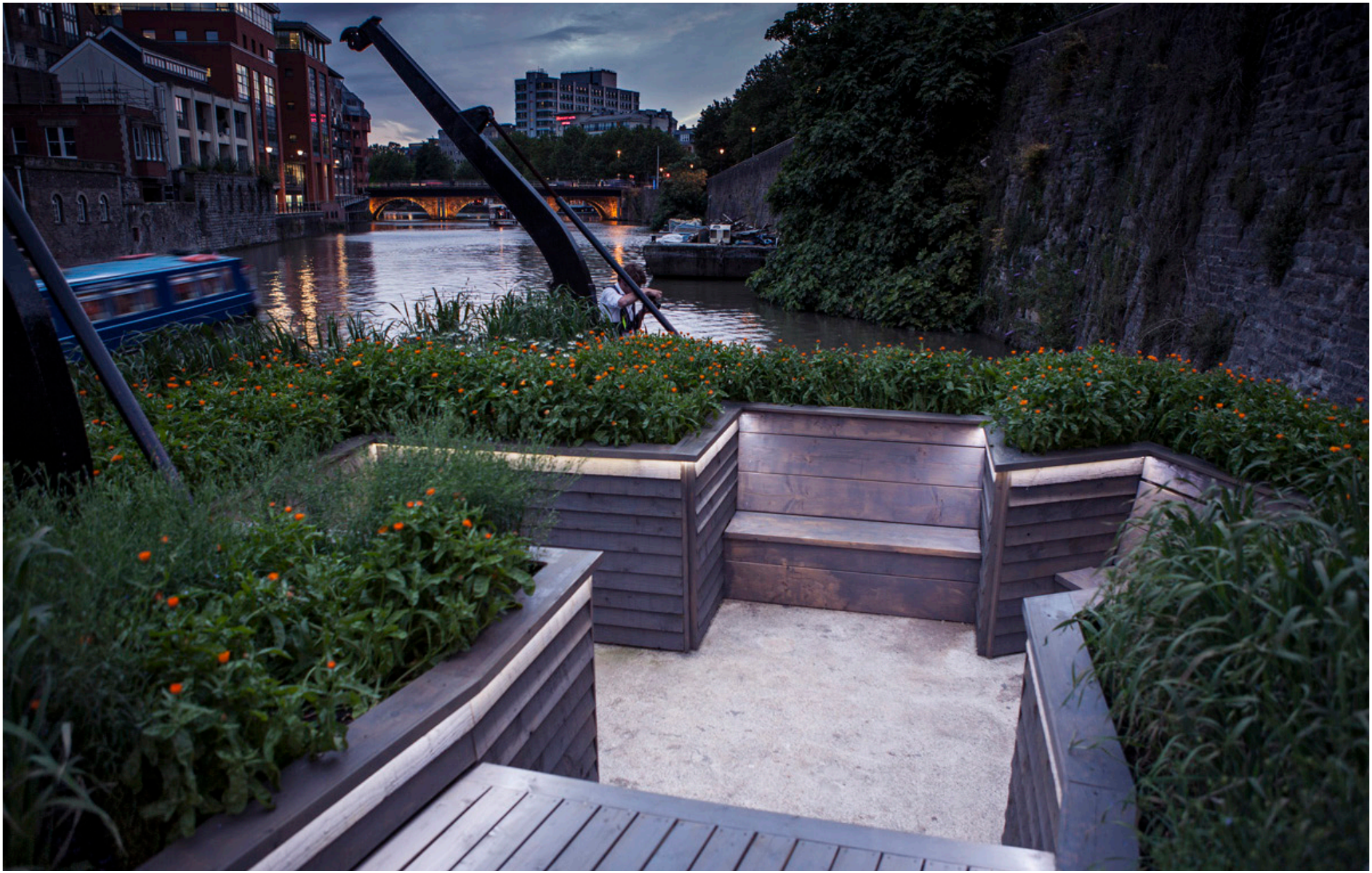
Michel Rein, *Beyond the Painting / Unrejected Wild Flora*, Paris, France, 2014

Seeds of Change: Floating Ballast Seed Garden, Bristol, UK, 2012



Seeds of Change: Floating Ballast Seed Garden, Bristol, UK, 2012

dOCUMENTA (13), *El regreso de un lago*, Kassel, Germany, 2012

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dOCUMENTA (13), *El regreso de un lago*, Kassel, Germany, 2012

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Michel Rein, *Constructed Landscapes*, Paris, France, 2009

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3rd Guangzhou Triennial, *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, Guangzhou, China, 2008

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ARTWORKS
ŒUVRES

Shaushka, 2020
printing on paper, adding elements by hand
impression sur papier, ajout d'éléments à la main
70 x 50 cm (27.56 x 19.69 in.)
ed of 30 ex + 10 AP
ALVE20125

Inanna, 2017
glass, seed-necklace
verre, collier de graines
25 x 24 x 34,5 cm (9.8 x 9.4 x 13.5 in.)
unique artwork
private collection

Olea europaea (1), 2018
painting on paper, wooden frame, plexiglas
peinture sur papier, cadre bois, plexiglas
75 x 60 x 3 cm (29.5 x 23.6 x 1.2 in.)
ALVE18120

The Flood (My favorite cousin, Piu...), 2017
watercolour and acrylic on paper, wooden frame, plexiglas
aquarelle et acrylique sur papier, cadre bois, plexiglas
watercolor: 56 x 77 x 3,5 cm (22.05 x 30.31 x 1.18 in.)
texte: 50 x 65 cm (19.69 x 27.95 in.)
unique artwork
ALVE17104

The Flood, 2013
painting watercolour on paper, wooden frame, plexiglas
peinture aquarelle sur papier, cadre bois, plexiglas
29,8 x 37,8 x 3,5 cm (11.7 x 14.9 x 1.4 in.)
ALVE17093

The Flood, 2013
painting watercolour on paper, wooden frame, plexiglas
peinture aquarelle sur papier, cadre bois, plexiglas
24 x 32 x 3,5 cm (9.45 x 12.6 x 1.4 in.)
ALVE17096

Untitled (Unrejected Wild Flora), 2017
acrylic on paper, wooden frame, glass
acrylique sur papier, cadre en bois, verre
102,3 x 72,8 x 3 cm (40.3 x 28.7 x 1.2 in.)
ALVE17087

Untitled (Unrejected Wild Flora), 2017
acrylic on paper, wooden frame, glass
acrylique sur papier, cadre en bois, verre
102,3 x 72,8 x 3 cm (40.3 x 28.7 x 1.2 in.)
ALVE17088

Untitled (Unrejected Wild Flora), 2017
acrylic on paper, wooden frame, glass
acrylique sur papier, cadre en bois, verre
102,3 x 72,8 x 3 cm (40.3 x 28.7 x 1.2 in.)
ALVE17090

The Flood, 2013
painted wood, metal pedestal
bois peint, socle en métal
98 x 42 x 15 cm (38.58 x 16.54 x 5.91 in.)
ALVE17112

Seeds of Change: New York - A Botany Colonization, 2017
22 elements: 8 acrylics and ink on linen, 4 watercolors on paper, 10 watercolors and ink on paper
22 éléments : 8 acryliques et encre sur toile de lin, 4 aquarelles sur papier, 10 aquarelles et encre sur papier
variable dimensions

Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst collection

Coigbâcete recou (Metaplasmos), 2014
bronze
50 x 28 x 24 cm (19.7 x 11 x 9.4 in.) / 20 kg
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE15078

Aimõbucu (Metaplasmos), 2014
bronze
57 x 39 x 17 cm (22.4 x 15.3 x 6.7 in.) / 16,1 kg
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE15079

Aicoabeeng (Metaplasmos), 2014
bronze
50 x 45 x 16 cm (19.7 x 17.7 x 6.3 in.) / 20,5 kg
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE15080

Seeds of change: Bristol, 2007 - 2012
photos, texts, map, 2 frames
photographies, textes, plan, 2 cadres
125 x 240 cm (49.2 x 94.5 in.) / 90 x 140 cm (35.4 x 55.1 in.)
ed. of 1 + 1 AP
ALVE14074

Seeds of change: Liverpool, 2004
photos, text, map, frame
phowtographies, texte, plan, cadre
115 x 225 cm (45.3 x 88.6 in.)
ed. of 1 + 1 AP
ALVE14076

Seeds of change: Reposaari, 2001
photos, texts, map, frame
photographies, textes, plan, cadre
110 x 215 cm (43.3 x 84.6 in.)
ed. of 1 + 1 AP
ALVE14077

Beyond the painting, 2011
video work, color
oeuvre vidéographique, couleur
23'43"
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE12033

Through the Fields and into the Woods, 2007
fer, chaînes en métal
iron, metal chains
225 x 70 cm (88.58 x 27.56 in.)
unique artwork
ALVE08027

Fair Trade Head, 2007
color photographs (diptych) and text (French or English), lambda prints, oak frame, glassbronze
photographie couleur (diptyque) et texte (français ou anglais), tirages lambda, cadre en chêne, verre
each: 100 x 100 cm (39.4 x 39.4 in.)
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE08024

Iracema (de Questembert), 2009
video work transferred to DVD
oeuvre vidéographique transférée sur DVD
26'43"
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE09029

What is the color of a German Rose, 2005
video work transferred to DVD
oeuvre vidéographique transférée sur DVD
6'14"
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE08004

Diothio Dhep, 2004
video work transferred to DVD
oeuvre vidéographique transférée sur DVD
2'35"
ed. of 5 + 2 AP
ALVE08006

PRESS
PRESSE

Mousse Magazine

Maria Thereza Alves
Mousse Magazine
summer 2019

Maria Thereza Alves

CONVERSATIONS

On Fights, Rights, and Real Forms of (Artistic) Contribution

Maria Thereza Alves and Antonia Alampi in conversation

This exchange with Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves is the outcome of a dialogue begun during the section of Art Basel Conversations this year. Artist, editor, and writer Julieta Aranda—curator of the program in 2019—invited me to moderate a panel with Maria Thereza, Pedro Neves Marques, Markus Reymann, and Kate MacGarry, revolving around environmental issues and focusing on how, on which terms, and with what engagement and methods artists, galleries, and institutions deal with the climate crisis and with the communities engaged in fighting it. On that occasion, and spearheaded by Maria Thereza's strong statements, we ended up talking of redistribution: Namely, how the surplus value produced by artworks in the art market—artworks inspired by or engaging with the social, cultural, and political contexts of vulnerable communities needing economic support (for example, engaging with environmental matters)—can, in one way or another, give back to them and avoid an otherwise very extractivist logic. How could a social contract be made between artists/organizations/funders and the communities they make work with or about? Maria Thereza Alves has clear ideas in response to all of this, ones that struck me for their depth, pragmatism, and criticality. Here, we discuss her ongoing work with indigenous communities in Brazil, and in particular with the Association of the Movement of Indigenous Agroforestry Agents of Acre and the ways she believes the global art world can *really* contribute to such causes.

ANTONIA ALAMPI: I would like to start by reflecting on a few terms circulating within the art context, particularly when addressing issues related to the climate crisis. While environmentalism (understood here, for me, as a political movement), fights against climate change, or the notion of the Anthropocene seem to have become buzzwords in the last years, they seem also to have been used in rather abstract and generic terms. They tend to produce a discourse whereby all humans and human cultures are defined as equally responsible for the current state of the planet and for its saving, a kind of universal guilt of humanity. I want to point out that it's a particular type of culture, one whose beginning we could trace back to the fourteenth century, that has understood nature—and the notion of nature here comes to define any subject outside of the European male subject—as something cheap and disposable to be used, abused, and exploited in any way possible to serve a particular type of human lifestyle. There are many other cultures, instead, that don't have such abusive relations with the environment. So, as a starting point, I'd like to know what references —cultural, spiritual, in terms of community building, et cetera—inspire, shape, and even determine your work, your position, and more generally your practice.

MARIA THEREZA ALVES: I agree with the strangeness of where the Anthropocene and climate discourse is going but am dismayed at the discourse of decolonization, too. There is so much disappointment about where it is going that some indigenous thinkers believe it is best to chuck it out completely and concentrate solely on sovereignty. If we do that, however, it will be only a superficial approach since the forces governing will always remain colonial and anti-indigenous and hold the military power. There are examples of artificial semblances of sovereignty (e.g., Yellowknife Territory), but it is the European settler state that continues to have a hold on the land and continues traditional European approaches towards (and hence against) the environment.

The starting point of my work is the colonization of the Americas against indigenous peoples and cultures. My engagement started long ago, as I joined the International Indian Treaty Council in New York in 1978, at the age of seventeen, to learn how to make a national indigenous organization in Brazil, as the genocide campaign against indigenous peoples was very hard and harsh during the military dictatorship of Ernesto Geisel. My thought was that creating such a national organization would make indigenous issues more visible. In 1979 I made a presentation at the United Nations Human Rights Commission against the Brazilian government on human rights violations of indigenous peoples.

In terms of references, I would like to talk in particular about the work of AMAAIAC (ASSOCIAÇÃO DO MOVIMENTO DOS AGENTES AGROFLORESTAIS INDÍGENAS DO ACRE / Association of the Movement of Indigenous Agroforestry Agents of Acre), where I met thirty-four indigenous agroforestry agents while making the work *To See the Forest Standing* (2017), commissioned for the exhibition *Disappearing Legacies: The World as a Forest* (2018).
AMAAIAC was founded in 1995 to represent agroforestry agents throughout the different indigenous reservations in the state of Acre, in Amazonian Brazil. AMAAIAC's mandate is to preserve forested areas on indigenous land and provide training for more efficient agroforestry methods, particularly for areas that have been heavily deforested and destroyed by settlers. The agroforestry agents of AMAAIAC come from various reservations throughout the state of Acre and are from different indigenous peoples, such as the Huni Kuin, Shanenawa, Ashaninka, Shãwãdawa, Yawanawá, Katukina, Nukini, Poyanawá, Nawa, Manchineri, Kulina, Jaminawa Arara, Kontanawa, Apolima Arara, and Jaminawa.

AMAAIAC agents are elected by their communities and are responsible through community consensus for managing reforestation, sustainable farming, and development projects, overseeing animal life, and promoting biodiversity, protecting water sources, organizing environmental education programs for indigenous and nonindigenous residents, caring for archaeological sites on indigenous lands, and protecting the land from destruction, illegal logging, or gold mining.

Spending a month with AMAAIAC, I came to greatly admire their knowledge, humility, and the quiet and persistent courage in their efforts as custodians, whether as individuals or as communities, who protect the forest. This amazing and insistent labor occurs every day of their lives, and it gives us the air we breathe, but their work goes unrecognized by the global community and is under constant threat by the Brazilian government. On my last day in AMAAIAC, I was asked to be a facilitator for AMAAIAC, and I am committed to continue my search for support for the organization and their work.

AA: I want to underline here what the video artist and filmmaker Zina Saro-Wiwa has defined as a call for "decolonizing environmentalism," by it meaning a certain Western approach to that too, as a lot of actions being called upon are relatively mindless, one could even dare to say problematically naive, of the actual conditions in which humans and nonhumans alike live in different areas of the planet (could we think of a lack of intersectional thinking?). Not everyone can afford a certain type of environmentalism, also because many will have to prioritize other basic survival needs—such as food, shelter, education. In this sense, how do you deal with the layered aspects of the issue—at hand and in your practice—particularly considering the art world and, I assume here, both producers and consumers, being still an extremely bourgeois context?

MTA: I was a cofounding member of the Partido Verde of São Paulo. I also participated in our contribution to the party platform and to lobbying in the making of the new Constitution of 1988, which is being dismantled. The PV was, at the time, a very elitist party. Almost all members were from the Euro-Brazilian elite. Ecology was not a buzzword at the time. In part, that was why we were so successful in making the most progressive constitution in regards to the environment in the world, since the reactionary elite didn't have a clue about the green movement and didn't understand ecology or environmentalism. I remember very well one article in the Constitution supported by the PV that would allow no hunting of any kind. I said that indigenous people, respectful of mating seasons and availability of animals, would then lose a major source of food. But a separate article would keep this situation viable to indigenous communities. However, I also mentioned peasants who hunt one animal for food and not for the market. I was informed that the article must say "no hunting" because in Brazil there is no respect for the law and so, if there were any exceptions, then it would fall apart. I was also assured that no one would activate that article against a lone peasant. Of course, the anti-environment lobby did just that—the first case of hunting was against a peasant. And these are people who rarely eat any meat—it is an immense luxury, and yet the brunt of the law was brought against them so that the right-wing politicians could make a point. This also occurred in the US with anti–coal strip mining legislation in New Mexico when the first one arrested was an Acoma Pueblo person, the cousin of the great poet Simon Ortiz. He had a wheelbarrow and would take coal from a naturally opened vein for his family's needs… in another case, Sierra Club took to court the Havasupai people for living in the Grand Canyon!

Some of my work involves communities. I meet communities, I ask what is important for them and what they think I could do as an artist. Then I try to do what is requested to the best of my ability. In 2009 I met with the Community Museum del Valle de Xico in Mexico. At a community meeting, they mandated that I tell the history of their lake. This resulted in the work *The Return of a Lake* (2012), for dOCUMENTA (13), and in the book with the eponymous name. Today, progressive teachers use it as a textbook in the local grammar schools. In Brazil, during the making of the site-specific installation *A Full Void* (2017), realized for the Frestas Triennale in Sorocaba, São Paulo, I worked with indigenous students from the local university. We read a selection of texts translated into Portuguese by published contemporary indigenous thinkers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Jimmie Durham, Vine Deloria Jr., Richard Hill, and others. The racism is so strong in Brazil that indigenous thinkers are not published except when writing children's books. At the end of the workshop, the students requested that I come back because they wanted to make the book titled *Decolonizing Brazil*. The students wrote essays about indigenous activists they find important today and mostly unrecognized by Brazilian society. Recently, I have had some recognition in the art world, and for the first time I used this advantage to fund-raise in order to realize this book (only online) along with several workshops and publications of indigenous language magazines, particularly of languages spoken by the students, to give away to the nonindigenous ones on campus, in order to activate interest in those languages and perhaps convince the university of the importance of teaching them (none, in fact, are taught). In return, I gave a free workshop to nonindigenous artists at SESC, the local cultural center that funded the project. I forfeited my artist fee in order to secure the funding for the students. I also attempted to forge a relationship between these students and SESC. Students were hired to be guides to the exhibit of *Decolonizing Brazil* (and although this should have been an obvious arrangement, there was much resistance to hiring them). Since then, SESC has hosted several events organized by the students and paid them fees for this work.

Regarding my work, I make it with a community: if I sell a work that I realized with them, and a gallery is involved, the profits are split as such: one-third goes to the community, one-third to me, and one-third to the gallery. If there is no gallery involved, then one-half goes to the community and one-half to me. I also work with researchers hired from the community, and they are paid upfront during the making of the work. The *labor* conditions and relations established are important to me. After many years, I find it is essential to realize work for both the local community—where it is developed—but also for the global art community, otherwise each space becomes a ghetto. Who I am addressing depends on the needs that the community I work with has determined. The ways in which I will bring the work to the public depend on direct suggestions by the community or are based on my experiences as an artist. As I am working in communities that are in difficult economic situations, I attempt to secure sources of funding for them and also to open networks that they might not have access to ordinarily due to deep and historical economic segregation. I also make myself available for what might be needed after the work is done. I strongly believe that if I work with a community, then I become a member of it, and I must act responsibly in relation to their present and future. I don't hop into communities that are economically deprived and spend a week to make a workshop and leave (as is, sadly, easily and way too often the case). For example, I continue to work with the Community Museum del Valle de Xico in Mexico and the students in Sorocaba in Brazil.

AA: I'm thinking on what you mentioned about using a privileged space in the art context as a spot able to provide a key point, precisely when questioning the transnational economic elite that stands behind it. I wonder whether we could discuss the possibility of creating alliances, coalitions, using the economic power and symbolic value the art system has in order to pressure politicians, industrialists, and so on. I believe some of them are directly involved in the art world, such as powerful collectors who are industrialists, private funders with a lot of leverage on a political level. My question is how do we move from acting in the symbolic realm of art to having agency in the real material conditions of the world?

What kind of protocols or social contracts could be proposed and established in order to move beyond addressing the subject merely on a discursive, temporary level, but in order to let this subject shape the way in which we—cultural practitioners, organizations, institutions, collectors, funders—work? Could we think of creating protocols that might have an impact in the long run and bring forth an awareness that is also self-critical?

MTA: Yes, indeed, how to formulate and organize protocols is important. Take this as an example. In the eighties in New York, among a certain class of the intelligentsia, such as artists, lefties, and liberals of all sorts, the now famous work of Hans Haacke, titled *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, which documents where the money came from for an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum—all corporate money—was considered revolutionary. Sadly, it changed nothing except that there was the pretense that attitudes changed.

Decolonization is now the buzzword in Brazil, and it will be over in a year probably, and then, I guess, we can take it for granted that we are decolonized, although genocide of indigenous peoples continues and usurpation of their lands too. Recently we had a conference about decolonization organized in a museum where local indigenous peoples were not invited to the first meeting. A groundbreaking decolonization symposium on psychology in 2018, where the sole indigenous speaker of the first day was the last speaker and the first three speakers were Euro-Brazilian men. This is constantly happening in Brazil, and no one questions this because the myth of multiculturalism and ethnic plurality is so strong and accepted worldwide—a nice sell job by Euro-Brazilians. The problem in the Americas compared to Europe is that the institutions, collectors, funders, et cetera, are predominantly Euro-descendants in colonized lands.

The federal government in Brazil is cutting education funds. Some universities will lose 50 percent of their available courses. Indigenous students are facing cuts in their modest living grants (food and accommodation), which allow almost all of the students to study, as so many come from economically underprivileged households and live far from city centers where universities are located. I once did the math that if we had six hundred indigenous students that we could fund for four years at five thousand euros per year per student, that would be twelve million euros. In the world, that is not much money. And it would change not only the Eurocentric Brazilian intellectual world forever but also Brazilian society. Now, does anyone know how we could make a conglomerate of wealthy people who could do this?

Mr. Masha of the Huni Kuin people, who is an indigenous agroforest agent and a leader on his reservation in the state of Acre in the Amazon, was chosen by his community for this work, which is unpaid. His principal responsibility is to organize new tree plantings. But he also inspects the community's lands, catalogues the flora and fauna, and decides how many trees can be cut for fuel or housing and how many animals can be hunted. He also attempts to give workshops to the local nonindigenous settlers about the preservation of the forest and the animals. The community is in great angst [because] of loggers and mining. Mr. Masha is responsible for noting any intrusions on community lands. He is a courageous person and is our first line of defense of a future. Mr. Masha ensures that we breathe and has asked for support. Like all agroforest agents that do all of this work, he must also farm his own plots of land, hunt and gather seeds to make necklaces, and try to sell them in towns that would rather see them dead. He made an eloquent plea in a conversation with me; he asked "that we not be left alone."[1]

This has remained in my brain, and I do not know how to respond, how to find means to support. I have asked for help in different places, I have talked about this work in many contexts, to ask for suggestions—but it has been mostly students who reacted actively and who themselves usually have precarious means. I have purchased necklaces from the Huni Kuin for resale to help raise funds for them but have not been able to sell one.

AA: I wonder whether continuing to participate in the type of conferences you described above might lead somewhere in terms of fund-raising if one, just like you did in Basel, were to be more direct in terms of what is needed right now beyond complacent understanding. Do you imagine a transnational coalition of art workers putting pressure on such things, and do you have experience (or hope, for that matter)?

MTA: I think it is important to resist the forces that be, which urge us to be complacent with their consumerist culture. It is important to decide to be committed long-term to a community and to resist pressures to move on to something *more interesting*. I don't know what long-term structure to think of in order to support the indigenous agroforestry agents in Acre. In the meantime, I will continue to talk about their work whenever possible, and yes, I agree with your suggestion to be clear about what is needed. I participated in Artists' Call against US Intervention in El Salvador by organizing a students' exhibition at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York in 1984, when I was a student there. I also attended various meetings of Artists' Call. It was an important mobilization among the art community. I think all attempts and efforts are important in these situations, whether or not we can see a short-term improvement, as long as we proceed with the support of the community while listening to what they think is important. And I do think it would be feasible for the art circuit to pressure in certain situations, particularly for those artists who are in positions of relative safety, in terms of economy and fame.

[1] This conversation happened on August, 2017, at the Transacreana Highway kilometer 7 in Rio Branco in Acre.

ARTFORUM

Maria Thereza Alves
Art Forum
June 1th, 2018
By Rachel Aima

Maria Thereza Alves

SECRET GARDENS

Rahel Aima on Maria Thereza Alves's *Seeds of Change*

Seeds, like colonized populations, bear buried within them the capacity to endure despite the most oppressive of surroundings.

Maria Thereza Alves, *Seeds of Change: A Floating Ballast Seed Garden*, 2012–16, barge, plants, soil, wood. Installation view, Bristol, UK, 2015. From *Seeds of Change*, 1999–. Photo: Maria Thereza Alves.

THE FUNNY THING about ships is that you have to weigh them down to keep them afloat. Historically, stones, soil, sand, wood, and bricks placed inside a ship's hull have provided this weight. At the end of a voyage, the ballast is dumped, to be repurposed as building materials or to settle as soil. It becomes a pedological archive: A portion of the ground beneath Manhattan's FDR Drive is built from the rubble of British buildings demolished during World War II; the area came to be known as Bristol Basin. Meanwhile, Liverpudlian stones that were a by-product of the transatlantic cotton and tobacco trades make up Savannah, Georgia's iconic cobblestone streets. Sometimes, ballast creates new terrain, too, as is the case on Lilla Norge, an island off the eastern coast of central Sweden that blooms with Norwegian flowers found nowhere else in the area.

Ballast similarly anchors Maria Thereza Alves's project *Seeds of Change*, 1999–. Like people, seeds can unexpectedly find themselves far from their homelands. They travel in the bellies of animals and amid ballast in the hulls of ships before being discarded as waste on new shores. These seeds can lie dormant for hundreds of years before a chance upheaval exposes them to light, causing them to sprout. Seeds are patient, after all: In 2005, Israeli researchers were able to germinate a two-thousand-year-old date-palm seed; the resulting plant was subsequently dubbed the "Methuselah" tree. Seeds, like colonized populations, bear buried within them the capacity to endure despite the most oppressive of surroundings. In 2012, a team of Russian scientists announced that they had successfully grown a flower from a thirty-two-thousand-year-old squirrel cache of seeds buried in Siberian permafrost. They failed to germinate the seeds but were able to extract cells from their placentas and grow new flowers. The next year, the flowers—which were identical to one another but had narrower petals than the same species of flower today—produced seeds of their own.

Like the best time travelers, seeds are storytellers. Since 1999, Alves has been using these inadvertent hitchhikers to unspool violent histories of colonialism, transnational commerce, migration, and resource extraction. After researching a city's ballast sites, she takes soil samples, germinates whatever seeds they contain, and consults scientists and archives to identify the flora, later displaying them in gardens. Previous iterations of the project took place in the European port cities of Marseille in France; and Dunkirk, Exeter, Liverpool, and Bristol, in England; and on Reposaari, a small island that was once Finland's largest port.

In each location, Alves reverse-engineers horticultural history to question what it means to be indigenous to a land. Consider the species Japanese knotweed and kudzu. Both were initially introduced to Europe and North America from Japan as ornamental garden plants, which is to say, as plants that can be controlled and contained. Today, they are billed as invasive alien hordes, kudzu in particular, which has gained the moniker "the vine that ate the South." Parallels between this extension of xenophobia to foreign-origin plants and the present-day rise of nativist sentiment are clear, if sometimes overdetermined. For example, in Bristol, where Alves planted her garden on a floating river barge, the selection of flora included rocket and marigold. Both plants are beloved for being quintessentially English, and are semiotically loaded as such, but they are also relatively recent products of the shipping trade—the marigold is, in fact, native to the Americas.

A YEAR AFTER winning the biennial Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics, Alves transposed her project to the Americas. The resulting multiyear installation, *Seeds of Change: New York—A Botany of Colonization*, has displayed flora propagated from ballast seeds in several locations, first as a living installation at the Aronson Galleries at the New School (which sponsors the List Center Prize) in New York this past November, followed by iterations at Manhattan's High Line, and at Pioneer Works and the Weeksville Heritage Center, both in Brooklyn. Just as the movement of ballast stones is not unidirectional, this New York chapter of her project briefly traveled to Michel Rein in Paris in February and March before returning to the city this spring.

This time, Alves's process differed, because many of New York's ballast sites—Red Hook, Inwood Park, and the Gowanus Canal, among them—had been built up and were inaccessible. Instead, she turned to historical records to identify four hundred plants from seven sites. Working with students and faculty from the New School and children from Pioneer Works' community youth program, she grew seeds from these plants last summer. At the New School, the plants sprouted in plywood boxes alongside some rather lovely botanical sketches of tumbling saltbush, perennial wall-rocket, annual mercury, and common vervain, all so-called indicator plants that signal the presence of ballast. Watercolor maps plotted local ballast sites

(including Bristol Basin), and a cerulean-washed diagram of ship arrivals used snaking arrows to identify the sources of the city's ballast: elsewhere in the United States and Europe, but also Cape Verde, Cuba, Haiti, Barbados, and Brazil. A map of the Long Island coast makes the role of the slave trade explicit: As Alves's neat print explains, smugglers used to stealthily unload their enslaved cargo there so as to avoid paying city tariffs.

At the Weeksville Heritage Center, which occupies the site of one of the country's first free black communities, the ballast plants grow in soil enclosed by wattles—chubby, sausage-like straw barriers used for erosion, sediment, and stormwater control. Their growth nonetheless bespeaks a kind of liberatory ability to endure and to thrive. Later this summer, Pioneer Works will host walks around the neighboring Red Hook area, where participants can expect to see a kind of Ophelia's litany of the shipping trade: jimsonweed from Mexico, perhaps, or Asiatic dayflower hailing from East and Southeast Asia, and of course the aforementioned Japanese knotweed.

Left: **View of Maria Thereza Alves's "Seeds of Change: New York—A Botany of Colonization," 2017**, Aronson Galleries, New School, New York. Photo: David Sundberg. Above: **Maria Thereza Alves, *Verbascum Nigrum*, 2007**, ink on paper, 16½ × 11¾". From *Seeds of Change*, 1999–. Right: **Maria Thereza Alves, *A Ballast Flora Garden: High Line*, 2018**, straw wattles, plywood, plastic liner, soil, seeds. Installation view, High Line, New York. Photo: Timothy Schenck.

Alves is by no means the only artist to focus on seeds in her work. In recent years, Pia Rönicke, Jumana Manna, Michael John Whelan, and Andreas Siekmann and Alice Creischer, among so many others, have made work inspired by the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, a massive seed bank located on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen. The vault was the subject of Yongwoo Lee and Hans Ulrich Obrist's 2017 exhibition "Seeds of Time," and the island now hosts an artist residency, Artica Svalbard. Meanwhile, protests against the biotechnology company Monsanto, and other industrial corporations' forced displacements of indigenous communities in the eastern Indian state of Odisha, germinated another seed-bank work—Amar Kanwar's *The Sovereign Forest*, 2011–15, a project made in collaboration with activist Sudhir Pattnaik and filmmaker Sherna Dastur, which debuted at Documenta 13 in 2012. Further iterations have traveled to India, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Austria, Singapore, and Sweden.

Kanwar's contribution to the first Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2012 centered on a set of sumptuous video works that pay quiet testament to Odishan workers and their land-rights struggles. Kanwar is known for his lush cinematography, and particularly lovely were videos projected onto open books of handmade paper, which seemed to collapse the skeuomorphic distance between page and screen. Yet most affecting was the installation *272 Varieties of Indigenous Organic Rice Seeds*, 2012, which displayed the titular seeds in shallow spotlit, wall-mounted shallow boxes. Their colors ranged from taupe to coffee, and some were husked and others not, but together they were dizzying in their sheer plurality. They left an indelible impression, furnishing a metaphor that feels increasingly poignant as a different kind of monoculture—that of Hindutva, or Hindu fundamentalism—asphyxiates the country.

YEARS AGO, I remember looking down at a Manhattan sidewalk and noticing a spray-painted stencil that read, SMILE. YOU LIVE ON AN ISLAND. We're surrounded by water and might cross a river several times a day, but this fact, like New York's shipping past, is easy to forget. Not so on the High Line, where both water views and the memory of a freight depot are inescapable. The park currently features the second installment of Alves's project, part of "Agora," a group show organized by Cecilia Alemani and Melanie Kress. Like ballast flora, the installation seems to have arrived there by accident. As at Weeksville, wattles enclose some soil, some hyperlocal ballast flora. On a hillside, wattles evoke topographical contour lines; here, the effect is more akin to the animal waste that carries seeds. Yet plants, like immigrants, just want to put down roots and flourish, and, over time, these seeds have, too.

This iteration of the project underwhelms compared to the other sites. But it becomes interesting when one considers the park's history. The defunct railroad was slated for demolition, yet thanks in large part to photographer Joel Sternfeld's documentation of its luxuriant wildscape in 2000 in 2001—the greenery came up from seeds spilled from cross-continental trains in a kind of locomotive analogue to ballast flora—it is now an impeccably manicured, ersatz-wilderness park. To walk the High Line today is to experience a profound sense of loss for Sternfeld's feral garden, and for an older time when Manhattan was Mannahatta. It shows us history like layers of soil. It is here that *Seeds of Change* feels truly decolonial, in its potential to go beyond awareness and education and refract the landscape into disparate pasts. After all, as much as Alves' sprouting plants bring to mind New York's industrial history, they also invoke the ghostly ecology of the pre-colonial period that shipping and transport infrastructure effaced. The remarkable Welikia Project from the Wildlife Conservation Society charts the peoples, plants, and wildlife of the city in 1609, when Dutch settlement started. It suggests that the site of Alves's project might have been home to red maples, American hornbeam, starved panic grass, prairie fleabane, and white wood aster, some of which would later be displaced by ballast flora.

Hung with wall text on an adjacent fence is a map of ballast sites. In the middle distance is the bedbug-like carapace of Thomas Heatherwick's *Vessel*, 2018, the public-art centerpiece of the multibillion-dollar Hudson Yards redevelopment project. It looms over the rail yards like a ship nobody is happy to see on the horizon, and suddenly the wattles feel like they're guarding against more than soil erosion. It's easy to forget, too, that Wall Street's foundations sit atop a historical African burial ground, while the city around it is built on land stolen from the Lenape people—the original native New Yorkers. But the seeds remember. □

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ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

Maria Thereza Alves
Asharq Al-Awsat
May 16th, 2018

Maria Thereza Alves

New York High Line Park Displays Works of 9 Artists

People stroll on the New York High Line. (AFP)

New York visitors can now enjoy some culture in Manhattan at an outdoor art exhibition organized along the High Line Park. The High Line, a deserted old railway that was transformed into a park in New York, will display the artworks of nine painters until next March at a massive exhibition entitled "Agora." The works of the nine painters focus on the role of art in the definition, creation and use of public spaces. The name of the exhibition is taken from the ancient Greek word that refers to the square, which is traditionally the gathering place, according to the organizers. The pieces were placed along the two-mile-long park on the west side of Manhattan from Gansevoort Street in the Meatpacking district to the 34th street. The participating painters include Timur Si-Qin from Germany, Duane Linklater from Canada, Sable Elyse Smith from the US, the Irish-German Mariechen Danz and Maria Thereza Alves from Brazil. The park has been attracting more visitors annually than the Statue of Liberty, according to officials. Inspired by the "La Colle Forte Pak" in Paris, High Line Park was built on a railway line that authorities had previously pledged to dismantle. It boasts more than 300 carefully selected plants and trees and overlooks Hudson Lake and the streets and buildings of Manhattan. Dutch landscape architect Piet Oudolf, who designed the garden, decided to retain the wild character of the park, which constantly changes according to the seasons. Parts of the former railway have been preserved. The park is open from 7 am till 11 pm during the summer, making it a popular destination for New Yorkers to relax and enjoy free art and celebrations.

e-flux

Maria Thereza Alves
E-flux
March, 7th, 2018

In Spring 2018, the IAC in Villeurbanne will entrust the totality of its space to artists Maria Thereza Alves and Jimmie Durham for their project The Middle Earth, devoted to the Mediterranean region. This new and original collaboration comes from the artists' desire to explore together the territory where they live, in a poetic and critical fashion. After a period in Marseille, followed by Rome and then Naples, where they regularly travel, Alves and Durham settled on the coast of the "inland sea" following a continuous and engaged period of roaming that led them away from the American continent and all the way to Europe. In a similar vein to Jimmy Durham's Eurasian Project, begun in 1994 just after his departure from America, and the project Seeds of Change that Maria Thereza Alves began in the port of Marseille in 1999, the idea of The Middle Earth began little by little to take shape, in search of that vast continent, not at all defined by nations, but rather something that is completely imagined and dreamed, and thus, endless. The two artists, who both have their own distinct, internationally recognized, artistic practices, reveal common influences that come, on the one hand from a political engagement that flows through their respective work, and on the other hand common areas of research that deal with notions of territory and authority. One can indeed observe these questions in the work of both artists, and in both cases, their thought processes are engaged in the same criticism of the ideological and normative frameworks that shape people's relationships with the world. Maria Thereza Alves brings a particular focus, that is also that of an activist, to the experience of a territory and this guides the research, between poetry and ethnology, that she does on migratory phenomena and uprooted peoples. In Europe, Durham's work has focused mainly on the relationship between architecture, monumentality and national history, through the deconstruction of stereotypes and official narratives. Considering history as a process, he seeks the reality of objects, their intentionality even, within an evolutive context, as opposed to their frozen categorization. Starting from the matrix form of relationship that exists between their artistic practice and the places that they move through or live in, the two artists will work in collaboration with one another, embarking upon new research at the IAC that deals with the mixed heritage of the Mediterranean. The exhibition The Middle Earth has been created and imagined in the form of an active dialogue between recent artworks, original creations and a multiplicity of archeological pieces and objects originating from the Mediterranean basin, that have been borrowed from the collections of different museum collections: The Museum of Archeology of Marseille, The Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon and The Musee des Confluences of Lyon. Divided into specific fields of knowledge, the exhibition thus plays with universalist and scientific models such as the traditional museographic codes. Western museums of art, ethnography, cultures and society, through the objects that they choose to exhibit, do indeed transmit a certain vision of the world, reflecting a certain vision of what they "represent," often referring to historical stereotypes. It is this vision that Jimmie Durham and Maria Thereza Alves have decided to challenge, remaining faithful to the poetical and critical engagement that forms the basis of their artistic approaches, whether in the very principle of assembly of Durham's sculptures or the contextual work being done by Alves.

BeauxArts

Maria Thereza Alves
Beaux Arts Magazine
March 29th, 2018
By Maïlys Celeux-Lanval

IAC VILLEURBANNE

Maria Thereza Alves & Jimmie Durham, la Méditerranée en terre promise

Par **Maïlys Celeux-Lanval** • le 29 mars 2018

Maria Thereza Alves et Jimmie Durham ont vécu à Marseille et à Rome avant de poser leurs valises à Naples. Ensemble, ils ont exploré les richesses de la mer Méditerranée. Ils présentent le fruit de leur collecte à Villeurbanne : textes, végétaux et objets archéologiques dressent le portrait sensible du berceau de l'humanité.

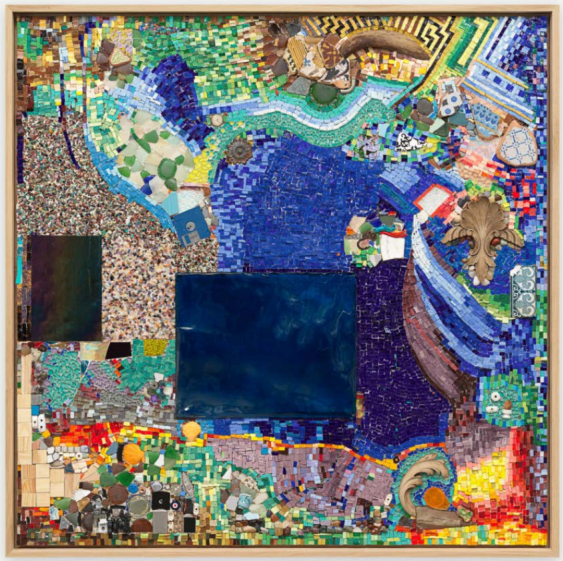
Vue de l'exposition « The Middle Earth – Projet Méditerranéen » de Maria Thereza Alves & Jimmie Durham

« Cette exposition est dédiée à ceux qui, en ce moment, rejoignent courageusement les frontières de l'Europe et aideront à construire le futur. » De la part de deux artistes autoproclamés « citoyens itinérants », cette dédicace souligne l'importance des migrations et du mouvement. Dans ce projet intitulé « The Middle Earth », chaque objet semble façonné par des siècles d'histoire(s), à l'image des migrations qui tirent des lignes invisibles sur la mer Méditerranée.

De cette errance émerveillée sur les bords de la Méditerranée, ils retiennent également une part de rêve.

Les identités se définissent comme des flux. Maria Thereza Alves (née en 1961) et Jimmie Durham (né en 1940) engagent dès la première salle à se débarrasser de tout rapport normatif à l'art. Le duo n'établit d'ailleurs aucune hiérarchie entre les reliques archéologiques, les œuvres d'art contemporain et les textes. Autrement dit, le visiteur peut ici toucher, s'asseoir sur les chaises de l'artiste, lire, sentir, goûter, écouter de la musique. Le parcours se déploie sur une dizaine de salles aux murs jaunes, roses ou beiges, chacune dédiée à un thème : l'écriture (inventée en Méditerranée !), les plantes, les déchets, la couleur pourpre… À la façon d'un herbier, Maria et Jimmie inventorient leurs trouvailles, qu'ils ont dénichées au gré de leurs pérégrinations à travers les paysages et les villes – certains objets proviennent de fouilles dans les poubelles ! De cette errance émerveillée sur les bords de la Méditerranée, ils retiennent également une part de rêve, collectant des textes aussi bien littéraires que scientifiques, enregistrant les cris du phoque moine – animal en voie de disparition – comme les témoins du passé sonore d'une mer sans navires bruyants, ou l'évocation du chant des sirènes dans *l'Odyssée* d'Homère.

On croise ici des poissons de verre dressés sur une table, une plante à palmes qui pousse sagement dans un coin, un tronc d'arbre posé sur le sol, une mosaïque faite à deux mains (œuvre qui concentre l'idée centrale de la collaboration, où chacun apporte sa touche), le tout étayé par quelques explications au mur – où l'on apprend par exemple que « le verre n'est pas solide parce qu'il est dans un état d'écoulement. Cet écoulement est plus lent que l'expansion de l'univers »… L'exposition « The Middle Earth » semble toujours s'étonner face au réel, face à la faune et à la flore, face aux sons, aux textures, au patrimoine, face aux crises et aux déchets. On pourrait y voir une forme d'archéologie multi-sensorielle de la Méditerranée, mais sans volonté de donner un aperçu exhaustif de ce qu'est le berceau de l'humanité. La proposition des artistes induit plutôt une relation poétisée à cette région du monde, actuellement au centre d'une crise humanitaire dramatique.



Maria Thereza Alves & Jimmie Durham, *Mediterranean*, 2018

Engagés, Maria Thereza Alves et Jimmie Durham l'ont été et le sont toujours : elle a lutté pour les droits des peuples autochtones au Brésil, lui pour la reconnaissance des natifs indiens en Amérique du Nord. Mais ici le sujet écologique – incarné par un sol jonché d'ordures, de pots de yaourt, de cotons-tiges et canettes de bière – et la (rapide) référence aux migrants cède le pas à un récit essentiellement esthétique, où l'on s'arrête sur des détails… Tel ce minuscule poisson en silex daté d'il y a « au moins 30 000 ans », sans doute l'une des plus anciennes œuvres d'art du monde ! « The Middle Earth », par son aspect inachevé, sa modestie et ses élans poétiques, réussit à provoquer un sentiment d'espoir, une sensation de mouvement, où l'ancien côtoie l'actuel et où rien n'est jamais figé.

→ **Maria Thereza Alves & Jimmie Durham : The Middle Earth**

Du 2 mars 2018 au 27 mai 2018

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i-ac.eu

Frieze

Maria Thereza Alves
Frieze
September, 2018
by Evan Moffitt

How Nature and Art Reveal the Illogic of Borders

Even as right-wing politics increasingly tries to enforce them, remembering that nature and art know no borders

This past summer, to escape the heat, I found myself wandering New York's Hudson embankment and considering its jagged outline. Where beneath that steel and asphalt is the island the Lenape call Manaháhtaan? From 1690 to 1976, millions of tonnes of earth were carved from the island's rolling hills and dumped onto its shores, padding a growing port while flattening the city into its famously monotonous grid.

Not all that dirt was local: much was unloaded from the cargo holds of trading ships, where it was used as ballast on the long voyage back from South America or Singapore. The river's shores began to bloom with flora few had ever seen before: cheatgrass, mugwort and pink purslane. Many of those plants now thrive on the High Line, New York's popular selfie promenade, where artist Maria Thereza Alves has planted a selection of them for the latest iteration of her project 'Seeds of Change' (1999–ongoing). All appear wild on their blacktop perch overlooking the West Side Highway, as though the wind, not the artist, had buried them there.

These plant species colonized the Hudson ecosystem because they were first imported by agents of the nations that colonized their points of origin. For more than half of New York's history, human bodies were also packed in the bellies of ships, like ballast, and unloaded in American ports. Alves's work reveals that the effects of colonialism run deep into the soil; but, also, that this same soil – a stolen mulch – is itself a colonized body.

If the earth could shed its carapace, it would remind us that it was never ours to own. As I write this, more than 2,300 children have been forcibly separated from their families and locked in cages by US immigration officers – victims of a 'zero tolerance' policy that regards their hope for survival as a crime. Many migrants are indigenous and consider the border an ancestral home: what the Aztecs called Aztlán, stretching from the low Sonoran Desert high into New Mexico and Arizona. Who has the right to label them 'illegal'? Their wells tapped to bottle beer for export, their villages plagued by a violent drug trade, they come north to work on US farms for low wages and without labour protections, only to be labelled hostile 'aliens' on their own land.

NERO

Maria Thereza Alves
Neromagazine
March, 2018

Maria Thereza Alves & Jimmie Durham "The Middle Earth" at IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

Jimmie Durham, *Four Fish Flasks*, 2018
Ph. Nick Ash, Courtesy the artist

This Spring, the IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes handed the totality of its space over to artists Maria Thereza Alves and Jimmie Durham for their project devoted to the Mediterranean, called The Middle Earth. This new and original collaboration comes from the artists' desire to explore together the territory where they live, in a poetic and critical fashion. After a period in Marseille, followed by Rome and then Naples where they regularly travel, Alves and Durham settled on the coast of the "inland sea" following a continuous and committed period of roaming that led them away from the American continent and all the way to Europe. In a similar vein to Jimmie Durham's Eurasien Projet, begun in 1994 just after his departure from America, and the project Seeds of Change that Maria Thereza Alves began in the port of Marseille in 1999, the idea of The Middle Earth began to form little by little, in search of that vast continent, not at all defined by nations, but rather something that is completely imagined and dreamed, and thus, endless. The two artists, who both have their own distinct, internationally recognized, artistic practices, reveal common influences that come, on the one hand from a political engagement that flows through their respective work, and on the other hand common areas of research, that deal with notions of territory and authority. One can effectively observe these questions in the work of both artists, and in both cases, their thought processes are engaged in the same criticism of the ideological and normative frameworks that shape people's relationships with the world.Maria Thereza Alves brings a particular attention, that is also that of an activist to the experience of a territory and guides the research, between poetry and ethnology, that she does on migratory phenomena and peoples that have been uprooted. In Europe Durham's work has focused primarily on the relationship between architecture, monumentality and national narratives which deconstructs the stereotypes and official tales of powers. Conceiving history as a process, he seeks the reality of objects, their intentionality even, within their evolving context, moving backwards and away from any kind of frozen categorization.Starting from the matrix form of relationship that exists between their artistic practice and the places that they move through or live in, the two artists will work in collaboration with one another, embarking upon new research at the IAC that deals with the mixed heritage of the Mediterranean. Divided into specific fields of knowledge, from archeology to biology by way of climatology, The Middle Earth explores a multiplicity of sources. Playing with universalist models, Alves and Durham's dialogue hijacks the apparent objectivity of classification in order to deploy an active dialogue between recent artworks and archeological and ethnological objects in each category, with writing that places itself somewhere between the poetic and the scientific.

Le Monde

Maria Thereza Alves
Le Monde
March 18th, 2018
by Philippe Dagen

CULTURE

La Méditerranée, en long et en travers

A Villeurbanne, les artistes Maria Thereza Alves et Jimmie Durham remontent l'histoire

EXPOSITION
VILLEURBANNE (NORD)

Les notions de « musique à programme » et de « musique descriptive », voisines mais distinctes, sont d'usage courant en musicologie. La première désigne une composition fondée sur un sujet précis – historique ou religieux par exemple – qu'il faut évoquer ou exalter. La seconde s'applique à des œuvres qui intègrent des références sonores non musicales. Elle peut s'étendre aux inclusions de sons prélevés dans le monde extérieur, collages et montages. Conçue par le couple Maria Thereza Alves et Jimmie Durham, « The Middle Earth » est une exposition à programme et descriptive, fondée sur collages et montages. C'est même le prototype du genre, avec ses habitudes établies et ses limites, ici flagrantes.

Les deux artistes sont connus de longue date pour leurs interventions critiques. Maria Thereza Alves, née au Brésil en 1961, s'est engagée à partir de 1979 en faveur des droits des peuples autochtones, bafoués par l'Etat et les entreprises. Elle a participé à la fondation du Parti vert au Brésil et adhéré ensuite au Parti des travailleurs. Ses participations à des biennales et des triennales ou à la Documenta de Kassel se placent sous le signe de l'observation et de la dénonciation de conflits politiques, écologiques, économiques et sociaux. Jimmie Durham, né en 1940 aux Etats-Unis, a d'abord une activité essentiellement politique et éditoriale, militant de la cause indienne, auteur d'essais critiques. A la fin des années 1980, son mode d'action devient artistique et visuel. Performances, assemblages, environnements sont allégories ou métaphores de ses colères et dégoûts. Parmi les plus puissantes, ses automobiles haut de gamme écrasées par un bloc de pierre brute de quelques tonnes.

Leur projet commun, pour l'Institut d'art contemporain de Villeurbanne (Rhône), évidemment intriguant quand il a été annoncé, a le monde méditerranéen pour sujet : son passé depuis les temps les plus reculés, les inventions qui y ont été faites, son état actuel.

Sobriété délibérée

Les sections sont descriptives, sous des titres qui rappellent le Musée de l'homme d'autrefois et celui des arts et traditions populaires, disparu du bois de Boulogne en 2005. Elles s'appellent « Silex » – quelques silex taillés ramassés en Egypte par Durham –, « Plantes » – une collection de plantes méditerranéennes en pots – ou « Ecriture » – des sceaux-cylindres de Mésopotamie prêtés par le Musée des beaux-arts de Lyon. Il y a aussi une salle consacrée au murex et la fabrication de la pourpre, une autre à la couleur bleu, une troisième au fer. Chacune est didactique et métonymique. Didactique parce que textes explicatifs et photocopies de pages tirées d'ouvrages scientifiques d'il y a un siècle présentent le thème. Métonymique parce que quelques objets sont là pour

Les objets archéologiques sont d'une grande banalité, sans doute pour éviter tout spectaculaire

illustrer : un fragment de tronc d'olivier pour l'arbre, la réplique d'un crâne de phoque moine pour la faune marine. La présentation est d'une sobriété que l'on suppose délibérée : vitrines et socles éparpillés dans les salles blanches et, au bas des murs, les noms latins de la flore régionale. Les objets archéologiques, à peu d'exceptions près, sont d'une grande banalité, sans doute là encore pour éviter tout spectaculaire. Mais, à pousser la sobriété à ce point, on court le risque d'ennuyer. C'est le péril du genre : s'en tenir à une suite de documents et de vestiges qui ont une fonction essentiellement mnémotechnique et symbolique. Ils font penser à. C'est peu.

C'est trop peu, d'autant que cet exposé d'ambition encyclopédique est étrangement privé des chapitres historiques qui rappelleraient empires, guerres de religion – les monothéismes sont à peine mentionnés – et guerres de conquête – à peine une vague allusion à la colonisation. Célébrer la naissance de l'écriture et de la métallurgie, est-ce vraiment l'essentiel ? Faut-il se contenter de ces aimables commémorations, des aquarelles d'oiseaux méticuleusement peintes par Alves et des charmants poissons de verre filé de Durham ? D'artistes engagés, on s'attendrait à des œuvres un peu moins joliment pittoresques. Il n'y a guère ici que deux œuvres à plus haute tension, réalisées en commun par les artistes. L'une est un panneau polychrome de matériaux divers, du tesson de bouteille usé par la mer à la disquette informatique désuète et au débris de carrelage. De loin, on dirait la carte d'un port, et les allusions aux mosaïques romaines et à celles de Gaudí à Barcelone fonctionnent efficacement. L'autre est un environnement intitulé *Mediterranean Sea* : des bouteilles en plastique, des déchets impropres, des filtres de cigarette, des cotons-tiges, tout ce qui est chaque jour jeté à la mer. Et, au centre, un baril plein d'eau. Cette brutalité ironique rompt avec la tonalité générale et rappelle cette évidence : une œuvre d'art n'est pas qu'une idée ou un sentiment, si bons soient-ils. C'est une forme, qui doit intéresser pour être efficace. ■

PHILIPPE DAGEN

The Middle Earth, *Institut d'art contemporain, 11, rue Docteur-Dolard, 69100 Villeurbanne. Tél. : 04-78-03-47-00. Du mercredi au vendredi de 14 heures à 18 heures, samedi et dimanche de 13 heures à 19 heures. Entrée : de 4 € à 6 €. Jusqu'au 27 mai.*

Mouvement
magazine culturel indisciplinaire

Maria Thereza Alves
Mouvement Magazine
March 9th, 2018
By Orianne Hidalgo-Laurier

Maria Thereza Alves & Jimmie Durham, *The Middle Earth* © Aurélien Mole

Critiques arts visuels

The Middle Earth

Le couple d'artistes américains Maria Thereza Alves et Jimmie Durham, présentés comme « citoyens d'itinérance », composent ensemble une odyssée méditerranéenne qui réfute les hiérarchies et les sens uniques.

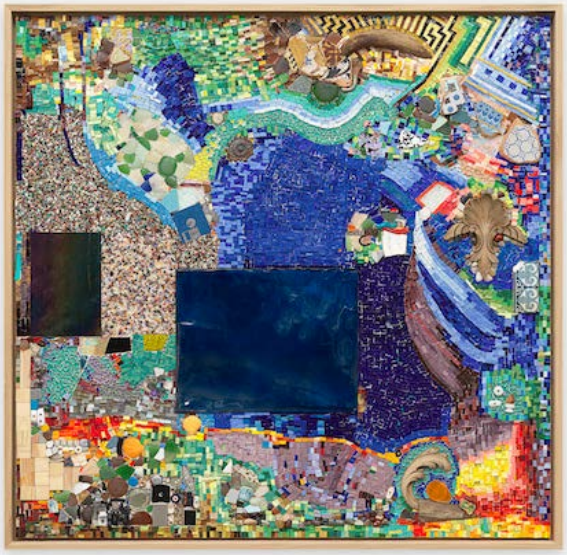
Par Orianne Hidalgo-Laurier
publié le 9 mars 2018

VOIR LE SITE
de l'IAC de Villeurbanne

D'emblée, l'exposition de Jimmie Durham et Maria Thereza Alves fait oublier que l'on se trouve dans un centre d'art. Le voyage qu'ouvre *The Middle Earth* débute dans une pièce aux murs jaune safran, décorée de multiples images et meublée de tables en bois sombre. Dessus, reposent de la vaisselle en céramique typiquement méditerranéenne et de petits objets – dont des ampoules *« trouvées dans les racines d'un acacia jouxtant la plus vieille église de Naples »* – que l'on imagine chéris par les éventuels hôtes. Des produits issus des industries agro-alimentaires méridionales – dattes, olives, pain azyme, amendes, poids chiches espagnols, fleur d'oranger – ajoutent à l'ambiance tout en relativisant son pittoresque. En fond sonore, les notes d'une lyre donnent la réplique aux cordes d'un oud. Ni ready-made, ni nouveau réalisme à la Spoerri, cette scénographie s'associe davantage à un incipit romanesque, où sont distillés les motifs constitutifs de la trame. Parmi ceux-ci, une mosaïque composée par le couple avec des résidus hétéroclites glanés au cours de leurs dérives – puces électroniques, piles, pièces, bouchons, coquillages, éclats de céramique et d'ornements architecturaux classiques. Les époques, les sociétés, les cultures, la faune et la flore s'y enchevêtrent. Cet ouvrage intitulé *Mediterranean* semble une synthèse non linéaire de ce « berceau des civilisations », en forme de cosmogonie actualisée et alternative au mythe vertical et biblique de la Tour de Babel. Comme une boussole qui guiderait vers l'autre côté du miroir, cette œuvre cartographie un envers de la Grande Bleue, sans zones d'influences délimitées, postes-frontières, garde-côtes et plan d'action immigration. Dans le couloir qui mène aux autres salles, un préambule intitulé « La condition humaine », écrit par les deux artistes et dédicacé à ceux qui arpentent les routes de l'exil, rappelle que les peuples européens, en tant que premiers déportés aux Amériques, ont été les victimes initiales des politiques impérialistes. Cet appel à une solidarité universelle n'est pas sans lien avec l'engagement politique des auteurs pour la reconnaissance et les droits des peuples indigènes, le rôle de Jimmie Durham au sein de l'American Indian Movement et celui de Maria Thereza Alves dans le Partido Verde et le Partido dos Trabalhores au Brésil.

Réminiscences animistes

Le parcours en enfilade dans le ventre de *The Middle Earth* se déploie en neuf chapitres – d'« écriture » à « fer » en passant par « sirène », « temple » et « arbres » – tissant un récit hybride entre mythologie, anthropologie et géologie, défiant l'autorité des taxinomies. Contrairement à ce que l'entreprise peut supposer d'encyclopédique, aucune monumentalité ici mais des écriteaux discrets, des noms de plantes qui courent sur les murs, des petits dessins naturalistes photocopiés et collés au dessus de quelque plinthe, des vestiges archéologiques, précieux mais sans grandiloquence, issus de la collection du couple ou de celles de musées consacrés. Entre les statuettes et les figurines animales de différents âges, les amulettes d'Égypte antique, les colliers de l'époque ptolémaïque, les silex ou encore les arbres en terre, s'immiscent des installations, sculptures et peintures signées de l'un ou de l'autre artiste, parfois des deux. Que ce soit un morceau de « réel », comme cet énorme tronc d'olivier huitcentenaire couché entre un bois de noyer et les branchages d'un cyprès, une œuvre d'art ou d'artisanat, un objet fétiche ou une canette de bière, les éléments cohabitent dans une harmonie toute horizontale. La sculpture *Heléns* de Jimmie Durham, à mi-chemin entre l'arte povera et le totem, cumule les différents âges. Sur un socle fait d'une caisse en bois manufacturée, trônent trois branches dont l'une, pour atteindre la hauteur des autres, s'appuie sur une boîte de conserve, elle-même posée sur une pierre. Juste après l'espace « temple », au centre du parcours, le duo aménage une sorte de chapelle. L'autel est un bidon en métal – habituellement converti en brasero – rempli d'eau, le sol est parsemé de déchets contemporains à la manière d'une plage. Survivances des cultes païens ou installations à dimension géopolitique, l'une de ces interprétations n'exclut pas l'autre.



Maria Thereza Alves & Jimmie Durham, *Mediterranean*, 2018, Courtesy des artistes. p. Nick Ash

Exposition non-domestiquée

Sous leurs faux-airs de Bouvard et Pécuchet, Maria Thereza Alves et Jimmie Durham ouvrent un pan de leur recherches et pérégrinations autour de ce bassin saturé d'histoires, façonné par les métissages. Les regards de ces deux Américains installés de longue date sur le vieux continent remettent en jeu les récits nationaux, la linéarité historique, les discours ethnocentrés et les théories essentialistes, sans avoir besoin de faire commerce de l'actualité politique et migratoire. Tout en jouant sur des cordes pseudo-scientifiques, ils construisent humblement une odyssée transversale sans égard pour ce qui *doit* être une œuvre ou une exposition d'art contemporain selon des règles, non pas universelles, mais bien occidentales.

The New York Times

Maria Thereza Alves
The New York Times
October 31th, 2017
by Annie Correal

A Seed Artist Germinates History

An exhibition using plants brought to New York in ships' ballast illuminates the city's hidden past using stinging nettle, milk thistle and amaranth.

Written by ANNIE CORREAL; Photographs by KARSTEN MORAN OCT. 31, 2017

Amaranth, which grows wild in Red Hook, Brooklyn, is among the plants introduced to New York via ships' ballast long ago. It will be included in "Seeds of Change," an exploration by the artist Maria Thereza Alves of how plants were carried around the world.
Photographs by Karsten Moran for The New York Times

About 140 years ago, a botanist named Addison Brown noticed an unfamiliar red-tendriled plant growing around Red Hook, Brooklyn. Trade had lately picked up, he told readers of the Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club in 1879, and as ships arrived, they dumped thousands of tons of ballast — earth and stones used to stabilize ships — that carried seeds from far-off lands. The red plant, among several new species growing along Gowanus Creek, was Amaranthus crispus, native to South America.

"Amaranth," said Marisa Prefer, a gardener leading a group through the same neighborhood last week, picking up a stalk of the crumbly plant, which was spilling out from a crack in the sidewalk like a Medusa head. "These wild urban plants can survive in the craziest circumstances."

This year, a few dozen New Yorkers have been learning about and growing plant species that were inadvertently brought to the city in ship ballast as part of "Seeds of Change," an ongoing exploration of the phenomenon by the artist Maria Thereza Alves. Ms. Alves, whose exhibition on local ballast plants opens on Friday at the galleries of the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center at the New School, is the most recent winner of the Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics. She has spent nearly two decades uncovering long-buried colonial histories using ballast seeds, which can lie dormant in the soil for hundreds of years, only to sprout in the right conditions.

Marisa Prefer, the resident gardener at Pioneer Works, lifting the leaf of a stinging nettle.

Lindsay Benedict, who teaches at the New School, holding a sprig of Virginia pepperweed.

Lindsay Benedict wiping the hand of Simone, her 2-year-old daughter, as they repotted plants at Pioneer Works.

New School students and faculty replanted seedlings grown in dorm rooms and offices on campus.

Born in Brazil, Ms. Alves has explored several European and British port cities, creating a floating garden using seeds native to Africa and North America found in the soil of Bristol, England; documenting exotic plants from Asia and elsewhere that turned up in people's yards in Reposaari, Finland. "I liked the idea that these plants were witnesses to things we would never understand, to paths of trade that we no longer have information about," Ms. Alves said in a telephone interview. "They are living there in our midst and saying 'hi.'"

This is Ms. Alves's first look at ballast seeds brought to the Americas. The exhibition, "Maria Thereza Alves, Seeds of Change: New York — A Botany of Colonization," will include examples of local ballast flora, watercolor maps, and drawings and texts by the artist exploring two centuries of maritime trade, including the slave trade.

The director of the Vera List Center and one of the judges for the prize, Carin Kuoni, said the project had struck the judges as an original way to track history — and as a powerful comment on contemporary political reality. "What struck us as pertinent when looking at Maria Thereza's project was its focus on migration and forced migration," she said.

Ballast plants including smartweed sprouting from the sidewalk at Sullivan and Van Brunt Streets in Red Hook.

Sitting in a coffee shop near the New School in Greenwich Village, Ms. Kuoni held a large satchel on her lap. As she spoke, she reached inside and took out a plastic planting tray and put it on the table next to her latte. Minuscule white insects fluttered up, and the people at the next table glanced over.

"Mugwort," she said, smiling down at a few tiny leaves.

She took out another plant. "Stinging nettle."

After learning about ballast plants, she said, her perspective on her adopted city — she is Swiss-born — shifted. "You look down at weeds in the street and say: 'That's incredibly sweet. I wonder what history is trying to tell me.'"

Ballast plants including mugwort, top center with pointy leaves, grow from cracks in the sidewalk on King Street in Red Hook.

Amaranth on Sullivan Street in Red Hook.

Smartweed flourishing on the sidewalk at Sullivan and Van Brunt Streets in Red Hook.

Ms. Alves, who lives in Berlin, visited New York twice to do research. The first thing she learned, she said, was how little of New York was actually New York. “New York was hilly and swampy, and they decided to drain it and make it more linear,” she said. Low-lying areas and marshland were commonly filled in with refuse, ashes, sand — and ballast from around the world. Ballast was brought from ports by boat to Harlem and elsewhere.

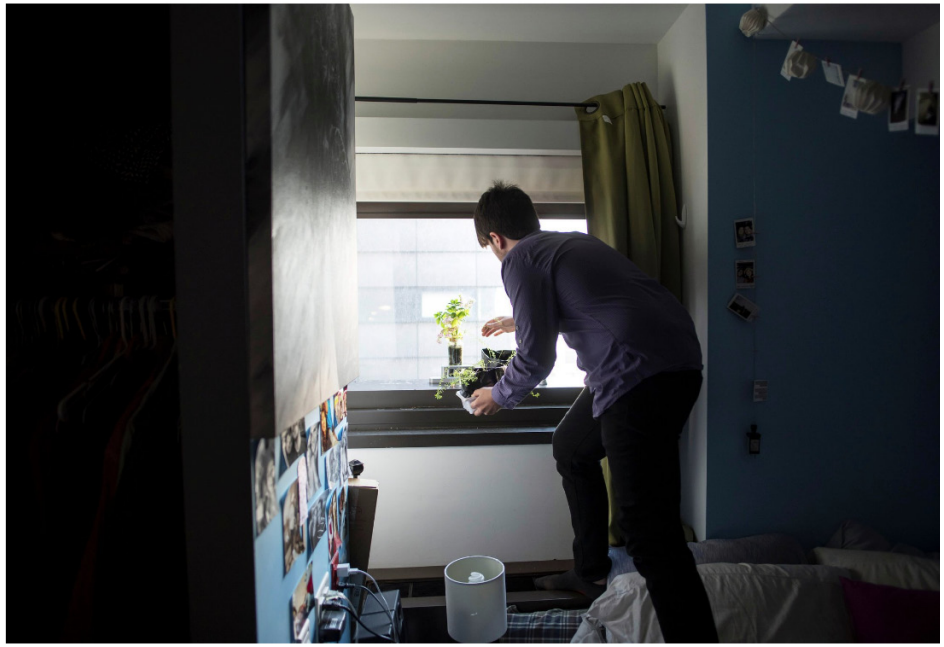
Solid ballast was largely replaced by water ballast in the early 20th century, but ships continued to bring ballast into New York until after World War II. After delivering goods and arms to bombed-out English cities during the war, ships sailed back filled with rubble. “There was nothing else,” Ms. Alves said. Bristol Basin, a patch of land under the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive in the Kips Bay neighborhood in Manhattan, is made from “stones, bricks and rubble from the bombed city of Bristol.”

Bindweed, with its white flower, on King Street in Red Hook.

In other cities, Ms. Alves took soil directly from ballast sites and germinated the seeds. In New York, many ballast sites had been paved or built over, so she turned to historical records, including the list of ballast plants identified by Mr. Brown. With the help of a graduate research fellow at the Vera List Center, Michael Castrovilla, she came up with a list of more than 400 species found on seven sites.

Marisa Prefer, the resident gardener at Pioneer Works, a cultural center in Red Hook, worked with the show's curators, Ms. Kuoni and Amanda Parmer, winnowing down the list to some 40 species that were still abundant in the city. New School students, faculty and staff, and children enrolled in a free summer program at the Miccio Center in Red Hook, were invited to grow them from seeds.

Recently, the growers gathered at Pioneer Works and in the courtyard of a New School building for their final planting parties, where they would transfer their plants from flimsy containers to the black plastic bags in which they will be exhibited.



Michael Castrovilla, a research assistant for the project, tending to plants in his dorm room.

Mr. Castrovilla, the researcher, had sent students regular emails reminding them to tend to their plants, but not all had flourished. Some of his own had failed to thrive on the windowsill of his room in a Fifth Avenue dorm. "My blinds are often closed," he said. "But the flax is going crazy."

The students plopped their ballast plants into bags, adjusting the roots, adding water and soil. Alana Giarrano, an undergraduate, appeared with a box containing milk thistle, St. John's wort, stinging nettle and a plant with a fuzzy pink shock of a flower, like a tiny mohawk, called dwarf coral, or celosia. It was native to East Africa and grew around Southeast Asia, as well as New York.

New School students and faculty repotting seedlings on campus in preparation for the exhibition.

She has been interested in the project for a couple of reasons, she said. "First, I was interested in the idea of plants and migration and involuntary migration. They're kind of byproducts that didn't mean to come over." Her mother was a refugee from Laos, she said. "Second, I just wanted plants in my room."

Back in 1879, Mr. Brown had been realistic about the future prospects of plants brought in ballast to the city, predicting that most of them would "perish after a few seasons." And yet, he predicted, some would survive.

A dwarf coral flower growing along the waterfront in Red Hook.

He was correct. On the waterfront in Red Hook, where Mr. Brown had once watched vessels spreading ballast “without cessation, night and day,” there wasn’t much vegetation to be seen last week. But construction for a new ferry terminal had turned up soil along the water, and a strip between a concrete walkway and a sea wall was overgrown with weeds. “Wow,” Marisa Prefer said, pointing out mugwort, St. John’s wort, lambsquarter and tufts of downy brome — all on Ms. Alves’s list. “Holy moly. That’s cool.” Amid them was even a lone, four-inch tall celosia with its fuzzy pink flower.

Follow Annie Correal on Twitter @anniecorreal

A version of this article appears in print on November 3, 2017, on Page A25 of the New York edition with the headline: Seeds as City History, Carried Across the Sea.

frieze

Maria Thereza Alves
Frieze
April, 2015 - N°170 - Page 144
By Max Andrews

SPAIN

MARIA THEREZA ALVES
Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville

Since the early 1990s, Maria Thereza Alves has addressed both the devastating effects of Portuguese imperialism on the indigenous peoples of her native Brazil and the impact of the Spanish conquest in the Americas. Hosted by the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (CAAC), this long-overdue survey was, in part, a pre-history of her extensive project for dOCUMENTA(13), *The Return of a Lake* (2012). Extended in Seville, this room-sized installation centered on tabletop models that related the disastrous effects of the 1908 desiccation of Lake Chalco in Mexico City by Spanish businessman Iñigo Noriega Laso, and the ongoing injustices suffered by those who live in nearby Xico. Bookended by the earliest work in the exhibition, *NoWhere* (1991), in which overpainted photographs from Amazonas address European delusions of city planning in 'empty' territory, 'The Long Road to Xico' (1991–2014) illuminates the ecological assault and epistemological violence ushered in by colonialism. Given the city's past as the main port for Spanish trade with the New World, the context of Seville granted particular acuity to the ethical armature of Alves's decolonizing art. Moreover, CAAC's home is the former Monasterio de Santa María de las Cuevas, from where Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus) planned his second voyage of 1493 and where his remains were once interred.

Several works were sited in the monastery's grounds. Two enlarged bronze jackfruit seeds (*"When they come, flee", said my grandmother to my mother* and *"When they come, flee", said my mother to me*, 2014) were placed at the foot of a mighty ombú tree near the entrance – a specimen apparently brought from South America by Colón's son, Hernando. Native to Southeast Asia, jackfruit was first planted in Brazil as a ready supply of food for slaves, although it's now a forest bully, outcompeting native species. Such ecological and cultural dynamics of displacement and 'misunderstandings' of non-natives in alien contexts seeded many of the perceptual clouds and squalls of concepts that gathered and precipitated throughout the exhibition.

Alves's aesthetics don't sit comfortably with the 'relational' label, yet her art has seeped frequently beyond spectatorship into collaboration, advocacy and political activism. Wary that incautious claims to activism make art seem toothless, curator Pedro de Llano included three vitrines of documents for the avoidance of any doubt. (Moreover, co-written wall texts on each work were both rigorous and generous.) This supplementary material reflected Alves's formidable formative work, including speaking at the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1979 as a member of the International Indian Treaty Council, representing Luiz Inácio da Silva's Workers' Party in the US, and forging indigenous peoples' rights onto the agenda of the São Paulo Green Party for the first time in 1988.

Presented as six boards of annotated maps and photographs, *Seeds of Change* (1999–ongoing) is an astonishing investigation into the unintentionally exotic botany of port cities, including Bristol and Liverpool, and how their colonial trading and slaving history can be read through dockside flora. Ships coming from the Americas used earth for ballast – inevitably containing seeds – which was often dumped on arrival. 'Unrejected Wild Flora' (2014) comprises a series of brightly coloured paintings made using plants as rudimentary brushes – plants which had happily sprouted outside the artist's home until someone tore them up, deciding they were unwelcome. The concept of a weed only exists if you are invested in defending a monoculture, Alves cautions. By contrast, her art solicits biotic diversity and linguistic plurality. Twenty paintings of different fruit from an Amazonas market (*This Is Not an Apricot*, 2009) disclose an uncomfortable truth: every fruit is now referred to as an apricot because the indigenous names no longer exist. Like the scores of extinct native Brazilian languages, Alves stresses how they were not 'lost' but systematically persecuted out of existence.

Two of the eight videos in the exhibition emphasized the cultural specificity and richness of non-verbal gestures. *Oculesics. An Investigation of Cross-Cultural Eye Contact* (2008) scrutinizes eye contact (a sign of honesty for Europeans yet of aggression to many other cultures) while *Tchâm Krai Kytôm Pandâ Grêt (Male Display Among European Populations)* (2008) satirizes colonial anthropology: an indigenous Brazilian woman asks a white European man to account for some members of his exotic tribe's superstitious habit of touching their *cojones*. This seriously ironic method of reversal was one of the exhibition's most effective strategies. *Fair Trade Head* (2007) comprises a portrait photograph of a tattooed Frenchwoman named Emilie, the first person to sign up to a scheme Alves devised in response to the French Ministry of Culture's 2007 veto of a Rouen museum's wish to repatriate a mummified Māori head. Upon their deaths, participants will have their heads dispatched to New Zealand and only returned to their descendants when the Ministry has changed its policy.

MAX ANDREWS

ARTFORUM

Maria Thereza Alves
Artforum
January, 2015 - Online
By Miguel Amado

Seville

Maria Thereza Alves
CENTRO ANDALUZ DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO (CAAC)
Monasterio de la Cartuja de Santa María de Las Cuevas, Avenida Américo Vespucio, 2

This survey of Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves's practice intelligently includes her seminal work *Seeds of Change: A Floating Ballast Seed Garden*, 1999–. Here, panels with pictures, maps, and texts dedicated to European port cities document her scrutiny of the connection between trade, the scattering of ships' ballast flora, and landscape. Alves's interest in ecology is her trademark, but this exhibition addresses her range through a selection of works focused on colonial themes, including the subaltern condition of native peoples across history. Take for example *NoWhere*, 1991, which combines scenic views of the Amazon rainforest via photographs, partially obscured by black painted doodles, with geometric patterns of wooden battens diagonally positioned on the wall. This installation smartly reflects on utopia, modern architecture, and the clash between American indigenous culture and European ideas.

The exhibition's peak is *El retorno de un lago* (The Return of a Lake), 2012, an installation that brilliantly encapsulates Alves's key concerns. It consists of three elements: models of the Xico Valley region in Mexico; photographic portraits of its various inhabitants who are affiliated with a communitarian museum cofounded by Genaro Amaro Altamirano; and three-dimensional renditions of the Spanish empresario Íñigo Noriega Laso and his home village's mansion. All together, they narrate the 1908 artificial desiccation of the Chalco Lake as orchestrated by Laso, an endeavor that caused severe environmental damage impacting the local population's lives. Despite Altamirano's efforts to call attention to the consequences of Laso's project, he is still celebrated in Spain for it. This piece poignantly questions the amnesiac state of the European consciousness in regard to the effects of its imperialist enterprise.

Maria Thereza Alves, *The Return of a Lake*, 2012, installation, dimensions variable.

ouest france

Maria Theresa Alves
Ouest France
March 2012, N° 20559, Page 12

30 femmes endossent les grands nus de l'histoire

Avec ses vidéos percutantes, l'artiste brésilienne met en avant d'autres manières de voir le monde et l'histoire au musée du château des Ducs de Bretagne à Nantes.

« Par ces murs, nous sommes mal enfermés. » L'intitulé de l'exposition de Maria Thereza Alves donne le ton. Et c'est à travers l'étude de plusieurs thèmes que la vidéaste amène le visiteur à changer ses angles de vue, à chambouler ses notions d'occidental en bousculant ses certitudes éthnocentrées. **« Ces réalisations entrent dans le cadre du projet de recherche Pensées achipéliques, mené à l'école des beaux-arts »**, précise Emmanuelle Chérel, commissaire de l'exposition.

Avec les réflexions que sous tendent ces œuvres, elles trouvent parfaitement leur place au musée d'histoire du château des Ducs. C'est d'ailleurs en découvrant une œuvre de sa collection, *Le Percement de l'oreille*, que l'artiste a donné naissance à *Beyond the painting*. **« La vidéo traverse l'histoire picturale du nu féminin du 17e au 19e siècle, et convie à s'interroger sur les représentations des corps de femmes. »** Avec une attention particulière pour la femme indigène.

Pour sa démonstration, Maria Thereza Alves a proposé à 30 femmes d'aujourd'hui, et de Nantes principalement, de réinterpréter des postures de nus de la peinture française. Le résultat est proprement déroutant. Chacune d'entre elles s'insère dans un décor minimaliste de drapés, tient la pose 30 secondes, puis fixe la caméra le temps d'un clin d'œil et disparaît.

Ainsi vont défiler, *La grande odalisque*, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, ou *Le regard provocateur de L'Olympia*. Les vues révèlent à la fois une forte charge érotique et sensuelle, tout en basculant parfois dans une

certaine forme de naturalisme à la Courbet et son *Origine du monde*. **« Cette œuvre s'inscrit dans un travail de déconstruction du regard et des représentations. La sexualité est interrogée sous l'angle des rapports sociaux de race, dans un contexte intellectuel post-colonial. »** Derrière l'esthétique, le questionnement.

Tout aussi efficace, on appréciera la vidéo sous-titrée Oculesics. Elle aborde la façon de regarder l'autre en fonction de ses codes culturels. **« Pourquoi m'évite il ? Est-il timide ? »** se demande un occidental. Un autre du bout du monde se dit **« ses yeux m'agressent »**. Le malentendu de ce face à face illustre avec pertinence l'incompréhension de la différence.

D'autres œuvres abordent la mondialisation débutée avec la traite négrière. Où l'on voit qu'avec les hommes, les végétaux aussi ont traversé les mers. Car Maria Thereza Alves est aussi engagée dans un combat écologique. Il en ira de même avec Dicionario, l'histoire des Krenaks, peuplade brésilienne victime d'un véritable génocide.

Jusqu'au 27 mai, exposition intégrée dans le parcours du musée d'histoire, au château des ducs. 5 €, tarif réduit 3 €

EL PAIS
ARCHIVO

Maria Thereza Alves
El Pais, June 2010, Page 6
By Sergio C. Fanjul

6 EL PAÍS, miércoles 9 de junio de 2010

MADRID

Arte contra el sistema

Veinte obras critican la realidad económica ironizando sobre sus símbolos

SERGIO C. FANJUL
Madrid

Hay una tonelada de sal gorda repartida en paquetes de tres kilos (es decir, 333 saquitos) apilados en una montaña. Dentro de uno —solo uno— de los saquitos que forman esta instalación artística se encuentra un diamante valorado en al menos 1.000 dólares. El visitante tiene la opción de comprar un saco por tres euros, pero, claro, no sabemos dónde se encuentra el diamante y, además, en caso de que abriésemos nuestro paquete de sal para buscarlo, el paquete perdería todo valor como obra de arte: la artista dejaría de considerarla obra de su autoría. Esta paradoja, que plantea Fritzia Irizar en su obra *Sin título (fe de azar)* es solo una de las que deja al descubierto la exposición *Fetiches críticos. Residuos de la economía general*, que se puede visitar en el Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo de la Comunidad de Madrid, en Móstoles.

De eso se trata: de criticar al sistema económico dominante mediante la fina ironía, la reducción al absurdo, la transgresión o el uso de imágenes y objetos propios del sistema en contra del propio sistema, tergiversando, en algo que, a veces, recuerda a *détournement* de los situacionistas franceses. "No apelamos a ninguna comunidad racional, no creemos que se obtenga ventaja de mostrar el dolor que produce el sistema, eso se ha demostrado inoperativo", dice uno de los comisarios, Cuauhtémoc Medina. "Así que mostramos la realidad del sistema deformada para mostrar que la realidad del sistema es la propia deformidad".

El fetiche del título supone, a juicio de los comisarios, una descripción de las relaciones coloniales entre Occidente y África. Así, por ejemplo, uno de los objetos de *Obras de la Chapman Family Collection*, de Jake & Dinos Chapman, es un típico fetiche africano, parecido a un trofeo primitivo o a una máscara iniciática, que muestra el logo de los restaurantes de comida rápida McDonald's, tallado en madera, en una especie de juego de espejos etnográfico. La exposición provoca en el visitante desde la media sonrisa a la cosquilla en la conciencia crítica, pasando por la indignación ante los absurdos del sistema económico.

El dinero, cómo no, es utilizado de esta manera en algunas de las más de 20 obras expuestas: por ejemplo en *Hacer Dinero*, un vídeo que muestra cómo el artista Federico Zukerfeld imprimió billetes bifacéticos falsos en una de cuyas caras se veía un valor de 100 dólares y en la opuesta el de cero pesos argentinos; billetes que posteriormente repartió de diferentes maneras por las calles de Buenos Aires. Una reflexión sobre el valor que se le otorga al objeto-dinero inspirada en los tiempos del llamado *corralito* argentino. En *Museo de la moneda roja*, Fran Ilich hace un muestrario de monedas y billetes de diferentes regímenes o movimientos revolucionarios: se pueden ver lópez soviéticos, monedas zapatistas, pesetas de la Segunda República Española o cupones de la Revolución Cultural China, como en una historia económica paralela.

Comercio justo de cabezas, de Mara Thereza Alves.

Museo de la moneda roja de Fran Ilich. A la derecha, *Mobiliario para museos* de Mart Anson.

También los documentos oficiales son tergiversados, como el testamento real del artista Miguel Calderón, en el que deja como heredero de todas sus posesiones al multimillonario mexicano Carlos Slim, el hombre más rico del mundo según la revista *Forbes*. Los documentos fiscales y administrativos de empresas ficticias son convertidas en cuadros hiperrealistas en *Pinturas Jiménez, modelo 036*, de Martí Anson.

El Espectro Rojo es el nombre bajo el que se esconden los tres subversivos cerebros artífices de esta exposición: los comisarios Mariana Botey, Helena Chávez Mac Gregor y Cuauhtémoc Medina, establecidos en México DF. El nombre está tomado del *Dieciocho Brumario* de Karl Marx (1852), según explica Medina: "Hoy en día la transformación radical del sistema se ve como un espantajo, tal y como explicaba Marx en el libro. Esto es algo que creemos que hay que redefinir, una postura que hay que tener en cuenta y recuperar, crear una nueva cultura radical". La exposición se complementa con un periódico, *El Espectro Rojo*. El fin de todo esto: "Hacer confluir la producción poética, la teoría y la reflexión política", en palabras del comisario Medina. Lo consiguen.

Un supuesto fetiche africano lleva tallado en la madera el logo de McDonald's

Los documentos fiscales se convierten en cuadros hiperrealistas

Fetiches Críticos. Residuos de la economía general. Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo. Avenida de la Constitución, 23-25. Móstoles. Gratuito. Hasta el 29 de agosto. Más información en: Tfno: 912 760 221/13 o http://ca2m.orgles/presentes/fetiches-criticos

TEXTS
TEXTES

Seeds of Change: New York - A Botany Colonization
Michel Rein, Paris
10.02 - 31.03.2018

Maria Thereza Alves' *Seeds of Change* studies settler colonialism, slavery, global migration, and commodification through the lens of displaced plants in ballast — the waste material historically used to balance sailing ships in maritime trade. Dumped in ports at the end of passages as the ships took on more freight, ballast often carried "dormant" seeds collected from its place of origin that remained in the soil for hundreds of years before germinating and growing.

Scientifically these plants are categorized as "ballast flora" for no other reason than that they come from elsewhere, in this sense the plants are metaphors for today's undocumented immigrants. The ballast plants speak specifically to the forced displacement of lands and peoples through the transatlantic slave trade, but in Alves' project they also literally and metaphorically hold open a space at the intersection of art and science to challenge and think expansively about our social, cultural and political history and possible futures.

Seeds of Change is a long-term project started in 2002 that has been presented in several European port cities — Marseille, Liverpool, and Bristol among them. This is its first iteration in the Americas.

In order to contextualize Alves' project in New York, and to understand distinct and often violent ways of land creation here, Maria Thereza Alves, Seeds of Change: New York — A Botany of Colonization is conceived as an ongoing collaboration between horticultural experts, students, and local communities at four sites: The High Line in Chelsea, Pioneer Works in Red Hook, Weeksville Heritage Center in Crown Heights, and The New School in Greenwich Village. Each of them brings their own distinct history to this project: the rails of The High Line tracked the seeds arriving in New York from the West on the underside of freight trains that would connect the industrial 19th century metropolis with the rest of the rapidly expanding country. The gardens at Weeksville Heritage Center contain the history of one of the first free black communities in the U. S., founded in 1838 by stevedore James Weeks, himself a freed slave. Perhaps most obvious is Pioneer Works in Red Hook, Brooklyn, a site built entirely on ballast ground.

The ballast plants in the Aronson Gallery stem from these collaborations, were propagated and cared for by students, children, and other community members since June 2017 at The New School and Pioneer Works, and will be transplanted into outdoor ballast flora gardens in spring 2018. In the exhibition, the plants are supplemented by Maria Thereza Alves' paintings, drawings, maps, and poems made for the New York iteration of Seeds of Change.

Vera List Center Prize for Arts and Politics jury citation:
"The jury unanimously awards Maria Thereza Alves the third Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics for her boldness in addressing through art urgent questions of resistance to the homogenization of life itself. By reimagining the historical geography of the contemporary world, she practices globalization from below to understand the planet as a holistic ecology. Seeds of Change, since 2002, tracks the routes of transport of goods and people while making visible the dormant potentialities of soil, seas, and people. Artistic excellence is expressed across mediums and Alves' critical practice inside and outside of the art world is key to the precise forms of impacts her projects achieve."

Seeds of Change de Maria Thereza Alves aborde le thème des colonies de peuplement, de l'esclavage, des phénomènes de migration mondiale et de marchandisation sous l'angle des plantes de ballast – l'eau et les réservoirs historiquement utilisés pour stabiliser les navires dans le commerce maritime. Vidangé dans les ports à l'arrivée des navires avant que ceux-ci n'accueillent de nouvelles cargaisons, le ballast transporte souvent des graines « en sommeil » provenant de leur lieu d'origine et restées enfouies pendant des centaines d'années avant de germer et grandir.

En science, ces plantes sont classées dans la catégorie « flore de ballast » pour la seule raison qu'elles viennent d'ailleurs. En ce sens, elles sont une métaphore de nos immigrants sans papiers. Les plantes de ballast sont tout particulièrement associées aux déplacements de populations et de terre par le commerce transatlantique d'esclaves. Cependant dans le projet de Maria Thereza Alves, elles créent, littéralement et métaphoriquement, un espace de rencontre entre l'art et la science permettant de questionner et de penser en profondeur notre histoire sociale, culturelle et politique, et les futurs qui s'offrent à nous.

Seeds of Change est un projet au long cours initié en 2002, déjà présenté dans plusieurs villes européennes comme Marseille, Liverpool et Bristol, et pour la première fois aux Etats-Unis.

Pour contextualiser le projet de Maria Thereza Alves à New York et comprendre les différents processus – parfois violents- de création botanique, Seeds of Change: New York — A Botany of Colonization est conçu comme une collaboration entre experts horticulteurs, étudiants et communautés locales répartis sur quatre sites: la High Line située à Chelsea, Pioneer Works dans le quartier de Red Hook, le Weeksville Heritage Center de Crown Heights, et la New School du Greenwich Village.
Chacun de ces lieux apporte son histoire au projet : les rails de la High Line ont vu les graines arriver à New York depuis l'Ouest, foulées par les trains de marchandise reliant les métropoles industrielles du 19ème siècle au reste du pays en pleine expansion. Les jardins du Weeksville Heritage Center sont liés à l'histoire d'une des premières communautés noires américaines libres fondée en 1838 par le docker James Weeks, lui-même esclave affranchi. Le plus évident étant probablement Pioneer Works dans le quartier de Red Hook à Brooklyn : un site construit entièrement sur ballast.

Les plantes de ballast de la Aronson Gallery sont le fruit de cette collaboration. Depuis juin 2017, elles sont propagées et entretenues par des étudiants, des enfants et d'autres membres de la communauté entre la New School et Pioneer Works. Elles seront ensuite transplantées dans des jardins de flore de ballast en extérieur au printemps 2018. Ici, les plantes sont remplacées par des peintures, dessins, plans et poèmes de Maria Thereza Alves réalisés pour l'exposition new-yorkaise de Seeds of Change.

Citation du jury du Vera List Center Prize for Arts and Politics :
« Le jury décerne à l'unanimité le troisième Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics à Maria Thereza Alves, pour son audace à aborder la question urgente de la résistance à l'homogénéisation du monde à travers l'art. En réinventant la géographie historique du monde contemporain, elle pratique une mondialisation sous-terraine dans le but de comprendre la planète en tant qu'écologie holistique. Depuis 2002, Seeds of Change étudie les voies de transport des biens et populations tout en révélant les potentiels insoupçonnés des sols, des mers et des hommes. L'excellence artistique est une affaire de médiums et l'approche critique de Maria Thereza Alves, aussi bien à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur du monde de l'art, est déterminante pour les impacts multiples de son projet. »

Beyond the Painting
Unrejected wild flora
Michel Rein, Paris
01.02 - 22.03.2014

Beyond the Painting (2011) is a 24-minute video for which thirty women reinterpreted postures of female nudes in French painting. One after the other, they enter the frame, position their bodies, freeze in the pose for almost a minute, then leave the stage-like space to make room for the next woman. The presentation is sober. One or two lengths of dark blue velvet highlight the physical and carnal presence of the models. This video passes through the pictorial history of the female nude from the 17th century to the 19th, and invites us to question representations of women's bodies and the way they have contributed to a fantasized construction of the Other. It actually pays special attention to representations of the "indigenous" or "native" woman (like the odalisque—that virgin slave in harems), while at the same time establishing links with representations of the female nude in a more general manner.

Beyond the Painting exposes the fact that sexuality, like the many different fantastic configurations of desire, is a stage on which power is incarnated, circulates and is wielded in a precarious manner, redefining power plays, and territories of sexuality, re-signifying fantasies (hetero-racial sexuality offering another version of the domination/submission fantasy) and re-inventing identities as identifications.

"*Unrejected Wild Flora* is a new series of paintings by Maria Thereza Alves, which joins previous projects focused on the amalgam composed by nature, history, and culture, such as *Seeds of Change* (1999-ongoing), *Wake* (Berlin 2000 and Guangzhou 2008), or *The Return of the Lake* (2012).
Recently, a colony of wild plants (normally considered weeds) grew up in the garden that the artist takes care of on a terrace. Some were particularly beautiful and, contrary to the usual customs, they were not exterminated right away, but instead stayed living there. Back from a trip, however, Alves found the plants uprooted and tossed all over the place: someone saw them as a threat to the other plants, with more "pedigree", and had pulled them up without hesitation. This little incident, although apparently banal, is reinterpreted and transformed within the frame of Unrejected Wild Flora as a representation of the gradual alienation of nature upon which Western civilization seems embarked upon. Through a group of paintings and a photograph Alves reminds us of the reality of these punished weeds as well as enhancing their grace. Alves attempts to maintain the delight that they give as well as their vitality by creating a work which addresses our insatiable anthropocentrism, and invites to reflect on a destiny which will be shared, or won't be."

Beyond the Painting (2011) est une vidéo de 24 minutes pour laquelle trente femmes ont réinterprété des postures de nus féminins de la peinture française. L'une après l'autre, elles entrent dans le cadre, installent leur corps, se figent dans la pose pendant presque une minute, puis quittent l'espace scénique pour laisser la place. La mise en scène est sobre. Quelques tissus de velours bleu foncé rehaussent la présence corporelle et charnelle des modèles. Cette vidéo traverse l'histoire picturale du nu féminin du XVIIe au XIXe siècle et convie à s'interroger sur les représentations successives du corps des femmes et sur la manière dont elles ont contribué à une construction fantasmée de l'Autre. Elle prête, en effet, une attention particulière aux représentations de la femme «indigène» (telle l'odalisque – cette esclave vierge des harems) tout en établissant des liens avec les représentations du nu féminin de manière plus générale.

Beyond the Painting expose le fait que la sexualité, comme les multiples configurations fantasmatiques du désir, est une scène sur laquelle le pouvoir s'incarne, circule et s'exerce de façon précaire, redéfinissant les rapports de force, les territoires de la sexualité, re-signifiant les fantasmes (la sexualité hétéroraciale offrant une autre version du fantasme domination / soumission) et réinventant les identités comme les identifications.

"*Unrejected Wild Flora* est une nouvelle série de peintures de Maria Thereza Alves, qui rejoint de précédents projets focalisés sur l'amalgame entre nature, histoire et culture tels que *Seeds of Change* (1999-en cours), *Wake* (Berlin 2000 et Guangzhou 2008), ou *The Return of the Lake* (2012). Récemment, une colonie de plantes sauvages (normalement considérées comme de mauvaises herbes) a grandi dans le jardin dont s'occupe l'artiste sur une terrasse. Certaines étaient particulièrement belles et contrairement aux habitudes, elles n'ont pas été exterminées immédiatement, mais sont restées y vivre. Cependant, de retour d'un voyage, Maria Thereza trouva les plantes déracinées et jetées partout : quelqu'un les avait vues comme une menace pour les autres plantes avec plus de "pédigré" et les avait donc arrachées sans hésitation. Ce petit incident, bien que d'apparence banale, est réinterprété et transformé dans le cadre de la série Unrejected Wild Flora comme une représentation de l'aliénation progressive de la nature qu'opère la civilisation occidentale. A travers un groupe de peintures et une photographie, l'artiste nous rappelle la réalité de ces mauvaises herbes tout en soulignant leur beauté. Maria Thereza cherche à maintenir aussi bien le plaisir qu'elles procurent que leur vitalité en créant une oeuvre qui interpelle notre insaciable anthropocentrisme et reflète cette destinée qui sera partagée ou non."

Constructed Landscapes
Michel Rein, Paris
07 - 28.02.2009

Text: Pascal Beausse

The Ecosophy of Maria Thereza Alves

Maria Thereza Alves's art is based on an ecological line of thinking. It broaches ecosystems through the dynamism of equilibria brought about by the diversity of species. It sets up investigative procedures, calling first and foremost for its own incorporation in the specific landscape, human and territorial alike, that it deals with. Archaeological methods are applied for the artist's major projects Seeds of Change and Wake, which reveal a secret cartography of globalization through the shifting movements of plants in travellers' clothing and the ballast jettisoned from merchant vessels. By establishing her research alongside scientists, Maria Thereza Alves asserts the possibility for artistic activity to develop a line of thought about life, issuing from a combination of perceptible and cognitive knowledge. An ecosophy, in the sense in which Félix Guattari conceived of the ethical-cum-political articulation between the three ecological chords: the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity. What is involved, for her, are the conspicuous processes of forms of life. By highlighting a poetics of diversity, which dodges the powers and injunctions of territorialization.

The migration of plants is connected to the history of globalization, echoing the thwarted migration of people. The plant market is one of the borderline places acting as a junction between first and third worlds. What is the Color of a German Rose? expresses the paradoxes of this exploitation. In a video with mellow sounds and colours, a mixture of educational programme and commercial demonstration, a young woman shows us a succession of flowers, fruit and vegetables, while a male voice-over informs us of their place of origin. A geography of world trade is thus drawn up, based on the availability of everyday consumer goods in a European city. From the supermarket shelf to the still life buffet, we have the expression of the consumer orgy invented by capitalism, cocking a snook at the ecological side-effects of this kind of daily traffic on the world's surface.

Resembling a piece of ironwork, the sculpture Through the Fields and into the Woods brings together so-called European plants which, needless to say, are not all European. "The work is kind of a 'barrier' to presumptions of 'known' history which assumes identity to be linear", we are told by Maria Thereza Alves. On this level of consistency we find an assembly of plant depictions forming a landscape conceived as vernacular, and yet imported from other cultures. The questioning of notions ordinarily accepted as defining cultural identity is one of the on-going themes of the critique constructed by the artist. The sharp edges of the plants climbing over this door between two worlds challenge the present-day restriction of people's right to freedom of movement. Plants circulate so much and so well that they are turning the world into a "planetary garden", but human beings, for their part, depending where they hail from, do not have the same freedom.

A determined desire to criticize colonial structures underpins Maria Thereza Alves's research. She uses the methods of ethnographic and anthropological inquiry, re-applying them to western cultures and civilizations. The persistence of European ethnocentrism is thus brought to the fore. For the video Male Display Among European Populations, an Amerindian ethnologist questions an Italian man about the daily rituals and beliefs which prompt him to touch his testicles out of superstition. The ethnologist's polite curiosity refers to the condescending eye cast by dominant cultures over peoples they designate as "other" and "different". The ironical mirror effect produced by this reversal principle calls for a broadening of our understanding of humanism, by entering into "the mutations of plurality allowed as such", as we are invited to do by Edouard Glissant. It is the artist's struggle to "gradually contribute to 'unwittingly' admitting to human groups that the other is not the enemy, that what is different does not cause me to erode, that if I change on contact with the other, this does not mean that I am diluted in him", as we are taught by the thinker of creolization.

The Fair Trade Head project starts out from a recent current event in France, when the Ministry of Culture prevented the city of Rouen from returning to the Maori community in New Zealand a head held in the collection of its Museum of Natural History. In response to this support of the trade in human remains by the government, the artist invents a Fair Trade Head programme, for which European citizens can choose to give their head as a symbolic replacement. From the heritage-conscious and neo-colonial logic of the State there issues the relentless logic of the artist's project, proposing as she does the simple and radical application of the basic principle of equality.

Art is a place for bringing to light various paradoxes which underwrite contemporary culture. An experiment with new social relations based on an ethical responsibility striving to put an end to the archaic and destructive practices of the western world. An invitation to go beyond the binary split of nature and culture. To grasp the ordinary, shared history that links humans and non-humans. To understand the humanity of the animal. As in the video Bruce Lee in the Land of Balzac, where a cry which may be that of a wild cat or a karateka rises up in a landscape shrouded in wintry fog. A French cultural scape, that of La vallée du Lys, redefined by the cinematographic spectacle of the Asiatic martial arts. Grappling with these disjunctive cultures, the mystery of the cry summons up an original state of co-existence between humans and animals. By calling to mind the ambiguity of the concept of "human nature". Animals are humans like the rest.

L'écosophie de Maria Thereza Alves

L'art de Maria Thereza Alves s'établit sur la base d'une pensée écologique. Elle aborde les écosystèmes à travers le dynamisme des équilibres générés par la diversité des espèces. Elle met en place des procédures d'enquête, nécessitant en tout premier lieu son inscription dans le paysage spécifique, humain et territorial, qu'elle aborde. Les méthodes de l'archéologie sont mises en œuvre pour ses grands projets Seeds of Change et Wake, qui révèlent une cartographie secrète de la mondialisation à travers les déplacements des plantes dans les vêtements des voyageurs et le ballast délesté par les navires marchands. En établissant ses recherches à côté des scientifiques, Maria Thereza Alves affirme la possibilité pour l'activité artistique de développer une pensée de la vie procédant d'un alliage de savoirs sensibles et cognitifs. Une écosophie, au sens où Félix Guattari pensait l'articulation éthico-politique entre les trois registres écologiques : l'environnement, les rapports sociaux et la subjectivité humaine. Il s'agit pour elle de saisir les processus de singularisation des formes de vie. En mettant en évidence une poétique de la diversité, qui échappe aux pouvoirs et aux injonctions de territorialisation.

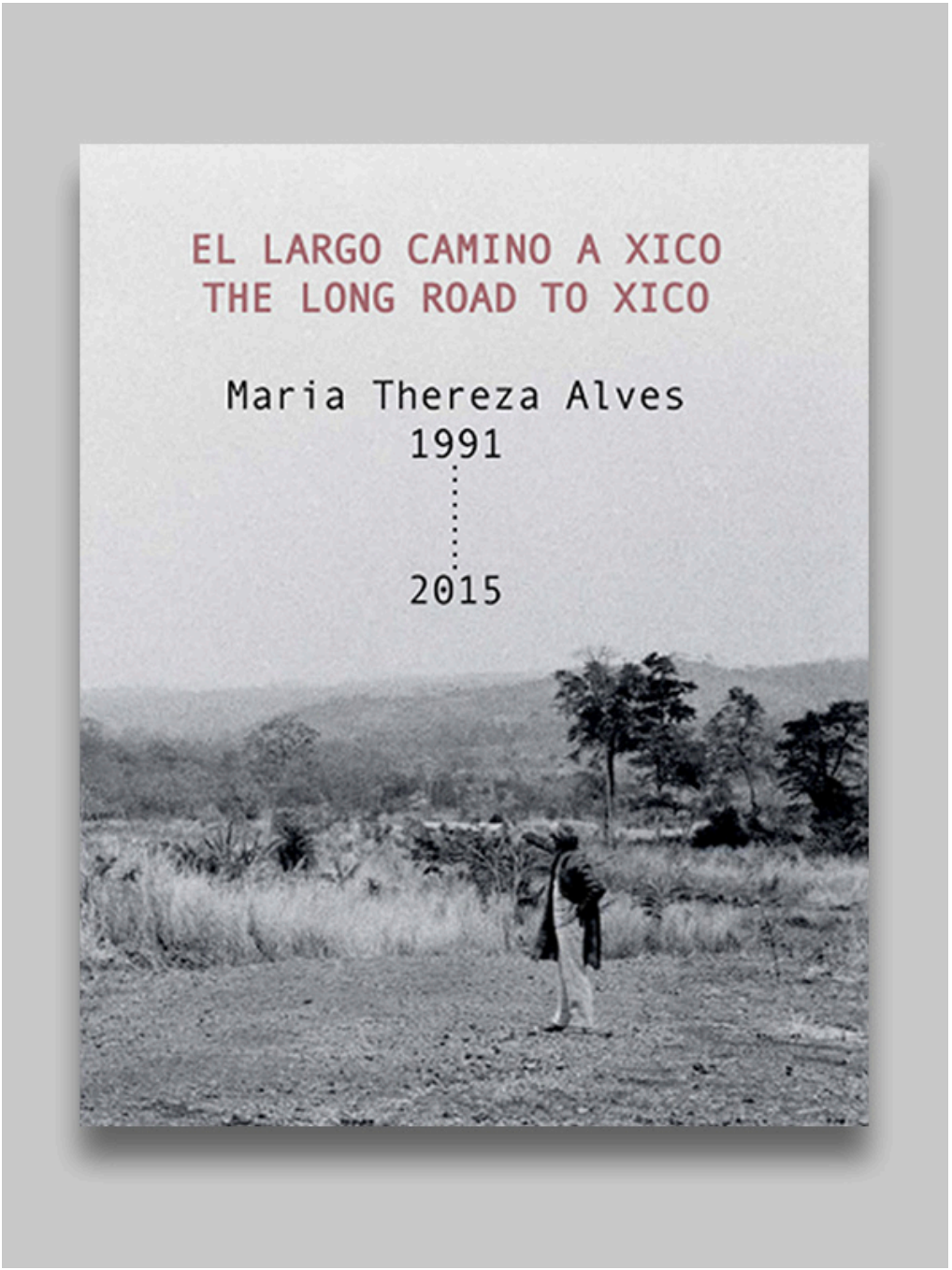
La migration des plantes est liée à l'histoire de la globalisation, en écho à la migration contrariée des personnes. Le marché des végétaux est l'un des lieux-limites de jonction entre premier et tiers mondes. What is the Color of a German Rose ? exprime les paradoxes de cette exploitation. Dans une vidéo aux sons et couleurs suaves, mixte de programme éducatif et de démonstration commerciale, une jeune femme nous présente une succession de fleurs, fruits et légumes tandis qu'une voix-off masculine désigne leurs lieux d'origine. Une géographie du commerce mondial est ainsi dressée à partir de la disponibilité des biens de consommation courante dans une ville européenne. De l'étal du supermarché au buffet en nature morte s'exprime l'orgie consumériste inventée par le capitalisme, faisant fi des conséquences écologiques d'un tel trafic quotidien à la surface du globe.

Sous les aspects d'un ouvrage de ferronnerie, la sculpture Through the Fields and into the Woods rassemble des plantes dites européennes qui, bien sûr, ne le sont pas toutes. « L'œuvre est une sorte de "barrière" aux présomptions d'une histoire "connue" qui suppose l'identité comme linéaire », nous dit Maria Thereza Alves. Sur ce plan de consistance viennent se rassembler des représentations de végétaux constituant un paysage pensé comme vernaculaire et pourtant importé d'autres cultures. La remise en cause des notions communément admises définissant l'identité culturelle est l'un des axes constants de la critique construite par l'artiste. Les arêtes acérées des végétaux grimpant sur cette porte entre deux mondes viennent interroger la restriction actuelle du droit à la libre circulation des personnes. Les plantes circulent, tant et si bien qu'elle font du monde un « jardin planétaire », mais les êtres humains, eux, selon leur provenance, sont privés de la même liberté. Une volonté de critique des structures coloniales fonde la recherche de Maria Thereza Alves. Elle emploie les méthodes de l'enquête ethnographique et anthropologique, en les appliquant en retour aux cultures occidentales. La persistance de l'ethnocentrisme européen est ainsi mise en évidence. Pour la vidéo Male Display Among European Populations, une ethnologue amérindienne interroge un homme italien sur les rituels et croyances quotidiens qui le conduisent à se toucher les testicules par superstition. La curiosité polie de l'ethnologue renvoie au regard condescendant pratiqué par les cultures dominantes sur les peuples qu'elles désignent comme « autres ». L'effet de miroir ironique produit par ce principe d'inversion en appelle à un élargissement de la compréhension de l'humanisme, en entrant dans « les mutations de la pluralité consentie comme telle », ainsi que nous y invite Edouard Glissant. C'est le combat de l'artiste de « contribuer peu à peu à faire admettre "inconsciemment" aux humanités que l'autre n'est pas l'ennemi, que le différent ne m'érode pas, que si je change à son contact, cela ne veut pas dire que je me dilue dans lui », nous enseigne le penseur du Tout-monde.

Le projet Fair Trade Head part d'un événement récent de l'actualité française, lorsque le ministère de la culture a empêché la ville de Rouen de restituer à la communauté Maori de Nouvelle-Zélande une tête conservée dans la collection de son Musée d'histoire naturelle. En réponse à ce soutien du commerce des restes humains par le gouvernement, l'artiste invente un programme de « Tête équitable », pour lequel des citoyens européens choisiraient de donner leur tête en remplacement symbolique. De la logique patrimoniale et néo-coloniale de l'Etat découle la logique implacable du projet de l'artiste, qui propose l'application simple et radicale du principe fondamental d'égalité.

L'art est un lieu de mise en évidence des paradoxes qui fondent la culture contemporaine. Une expérimentation de nouveaux rapports sociaux qui seraient fondés sur une responsabilité éthique travaillant à mettre fin aux pratiques archaïques et destructrices du monde occidental. Une invitation à dépasser la division binaire nature-culture. Pour comprendre l'histoire commune qui lie humains et non-humains. Pour comprendre l'humanité de l'animal. Comme dans la vidéo Bruce Lee in the Land of Balzac, où un cri dont on ne sait s'il est celui d'un chat sauvage ou d'un karateka monte dans un paysage de brouillard hivernal. Un paysage culturel français, celui de La vallée du Lys, requalifié par le spectacle cinématographique des arts martiaux asiatiques. En lutte avec ces cultures disjonctives, le mystère du cri vient évoquer un état originaire de coexistence entre humains et animaux. En rappelant l'ambiguïté du concept de « nature humaine ». Les animaux sont des humains comme les autres.

PUBLICATIONS
PUBLICATIONS



The Long Road to Xico / El largo camino a Xico, 1991-2015, 2017
ed. Pedro de Llano
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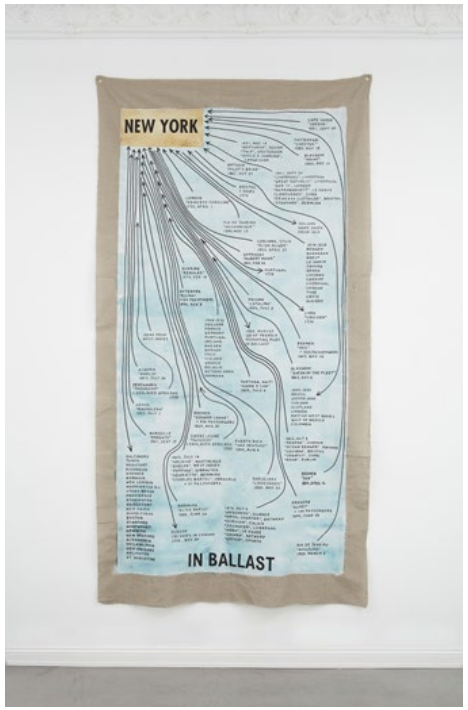

Maria Thereza Alves, *In Ballast: To and From New York*, 2017. Acrylic and ink on linen. 115 ¾ × 61 inches (293 × 155 cm). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Michel Rein.

New York— A Botany of Colonization

THE VERA LIST CENTER WAS FOUNDED TWENTY-five years ago, a time of rousing debates on freedom of speech and identity politics, the Culture Wars in the U.S, and challenges to society's investment in the arts. In a radically changed world, new articulations of related conflicts are now erupting with similar fervor throughout the world — and the Center is marking its 25th anniversary with two major assemblies: in November 2017, an international conference on art and social justice, celebrating the third Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics, and in April 2018, a celebration of twenty-five years of Vera List Center Fellows… p. 48

CHANGE

PRIZE FINALISTS p. 30

Forensic Architecture
Gulf Labor
House of Natural Fiber
IsumaTV
MadeYouLook

On the brink of the elimination of federal arts funding in the U.S., widespread xenophobia, forced global migration, environmental destruction, and ongoing systemic racism, the Vera List Center Prize Conference looks at the urgent and necessary work of the recipient of the third Vera List Center Prize… p. 40

Maria Thereza Alves

INTERNATIONAL BIENNIAL PRIZE CONFERENCE
November 3 & 4, 2017
EXHIBITION
November 3–27, 2017

THE NEW SCHOOL

VERA LIST CENTER FOR ART AND POLITICS TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

1 Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics

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THE VERA LIST CENTER Prize for Art and Politics honors an artist or group of artists who has taken great risks to advance social justice in profound and visionary ways. International in scope, the biennial prize is awarded for a particular project's long-term impact, boldness, and artistic excellence.

The prize is named in honor of New School trustee Vera G. List (1908–2002) and reflects The New School's commitment to take intellectual, political, and creative risks to bring about positive change. This commitment goes back to the university's founding in 1919 as a forum for progressive American thinkers and the creation in 1933 of the University in Exile as a refuge for scholars persecuted in Nazi Germany.

The inaugural Vera List Center Prize was awarded to Theaster Gates for *Dorchester Projects* in Chicago, Illinois. The Vera List Center Prize 2014–2016 was awarded to anonymous filmmakers collective Abounaddara from Syria. The Vera List Center Prize 2016–2018 is bestowed on Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves for her ongoing project *Seeds of Change*.

The biennial prize initiative unfolds across various platforms and over two years. It serves as a catalyst for activities that illuminate the important role of the arts in society, and strengthen teaching and learning in public and at The New School in art and design, social science, philosophy, and civic engagement. Rather than a single moment of recognition, it represents a long-term commitment to the question of how the arts advance social justice, how we speak of, evaluate, and teach such work.

The prize recipient is honored with an exhibition of the winning project, an international conference, deep and scholarly engagement by New School students and faculty, a publication, the award — a sculpture by Yoko Ono — as well as financial recognition and a New York City residency. In celebration of the Center's 25th anniversary, the Prize Finalists have also been invited to New York, to share in the urgently needed conversation on art and social justice as global issues that engage audiences in New York City, nationally, and around the world. •

FOUNDING SUPPORTERS

James Keith (JK) Brown and Eric Diefenbach
Elizabeth R. Hilpman and Byron Tucker
Jane Lombard
Joshua Mack
The New School

Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics, 2016–2018

FINALISTS	London-based interdisciplinary research agency Forensic Architecture Gulf Labor Artist Coalition House of Natural Fiber (HONF), a new media arts laboratory in Yogyakarta, Indonesia IsumaTV, a collaborative multimedia platform for indigenous filmmakers and media organization in Canada MadeYouLook, an artist collective based in Johannesburg, South Africa
RECIPIENT	Maria Thereza Alves, Berlin
JURY	Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, chair Ruth Wilson Gilmore Charif Kiwan, Abounaddara Carin Kuoni Radhika Subramaniam

NOMINATORS' COUNCIL	Taylor Aldridge Katia Arfara Kader Attia Virginie Bobin Christopher Cozier Attilia Fattori Franchini Mariam Ghani Kaelen Wilson Goldie Candice Hopkins Eungie Joo Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev Lara Khaldi Miguel Lopez Michelle Marxuach Fernanda Nogueira Nontobeko Ntombela Hetti Perkins Planting Rice Rasha Salti Joshua Simon Mari Spirito Alia Swastika Hrag Vartanian Joanna Warsza Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

Prize Recipient

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Maria Thereza Alves

Seeds of Change: New York

Who belongs, and who does not? What do stories afford? How is value defined?

Maria Thereza Alves' *Seeds of Change* studies settler colonialism, slavery, global migration, and commodification through the lens of displaced plants in ballast — the waste material historically used to balance sailing ships in maritime trade. Dumped in ports at the end of passages as the ships took on more freight, ballast often carried "dormant" seeds collected from its place of origin that remained in the soil for hundreds of years before germinating and growing.

Scientifically these plants are categorized as "ballast flora" for no other reason than that they come from elsewhere, in this sense the plants are metaphors for today's undocumented immigrants. The ballast plants speak specifically to the forced displacement of lands and peoples through the transatlantic slave trade, but in Alves' project they also literally and metaphorically hold open a space at the intersection of art and science to challenge and think expansively about our social, cultural and political history and possible futures.

Seeds of Change is a long-term project started in 2002 that has been presented in several European port cities — Marseille, Liverpool, and Bristol among them. This is its first iteration in the Americas.

How to present such a project in the U.S. at this moment?

In order to contextualize Alves' project in New York, and to understand distinct and often violent ways of land creation here, *Maria Thereza Alves, Seeds of Change: New York — A Botany of Colonization* is conceived as an ongoing collaboration between horticultural experts, students, and local communities at four sites: The High Line in Chelsea, Pioneer Works in Red Hook, Weeksville Heritage Center in Crown Heights, and The New School in Greenwich Village. Each of them brings their own distinct history to this project: the rails of The High Line tracked the seeds arriving in New York from the West on the underside of freight trains that would connect the industrial 19th century metropolis with the rest of the rapidly expanding country. The gardens at Weeksville Heritage Center contain the history of one of the first free black communities in the U. S., founded in 1838 by stevedore James Weeks, himself a freed slave. Perhaps most obvious is Pioneer Works in Red Hook, Brooklyn, a site built entirely on ballast ground.

The ballast plants in the Aronson Gallery stem from these collaborations, were propagated and cared for by students, children, and other community members since June 2017 at The New School and Pioneer Works, and will be transplanted into outdoor ballast flora gardens in spring 2018. In the exhibition, the plants are supplemented by Maria Thereza Alves' paintings, drawings, maps, and poems made for the New York iteration of *Seeds of Change*.

Jury Citation:
"The jury unanimously awards Maria Thereza Alves the third Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics for her boldness in addressing through art urgent questions of resistance to the homogenization of life itself. By reimagining the historical geography of the contemporary world, she practices globalization from below to understand the planet as a holistic ecology. *Seeds of Change*, since 2002, tracks the routes of transport of goods and people while making visible the dormant potentialities of soil, seas, and people. Artistic excellence is expressed across mediums and Alves' critical practice inside and outside of the art world is key to the precise forms of impacts her projects achieve." •

Exhibition Checklist

The Entire Coast of Long Island, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
59 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 162 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (152 × 412 cm)
MTA_0104

In Ballast: To and From New York, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
115 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 61 inches (293 × 155 cm)
MTA_0111

Common Ballast Flora on Long Island, 2017
1 vase on shelf with a fresh bouquet every week, consisting of dandelion, daisy, buttercups, chicory, plantain, clover, burdock, and wild carrot

Untitled, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
44 × 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (112 × 82 cm)
MTA_0119

Untitled, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
44 × 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (112 × 82 cm)
MTA_0123

Untitled, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
44 × 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (112 × 82 cm)
MTA_0127

Untitled, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
44 × 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (112 × 82 cm)
MTA_0114

Untitled, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
44 × 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (112 × 82 cm)
MTA_0124

Untitled, 2017
Acrylic and ink on linen
44 × 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (112 × 82 cm)
MTA_0115

Ballast Indicator: Atriplex rosea, 2017
Watercolor on paper
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (30 × 30 cm)
MTA_0193

Ballast Indicator: Verbene officinalis, 2017
Watercolor on paper
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (30 × 30 cm)
MTA_0191

Ballast Indicator: Mercurialis annua, 2017
Watercolor on paper
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (30 × 30 cm)
MTA_0195

Ballast Indicator: Diplotaxis-tenuifolia, 2017
Watercolor on paper
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (30 × 30 cm)
MTA_0194

"Peach Tree War," 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0182

"Whenever people were transported…," 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0183

Caribbean Coral Sand in Manhattan, 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (46 × 61 cm)
MTA_0190

"Spring had come…," 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0185

"The Liberia," 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0184

"Much Ballast arrived in 1877 from Norway…," 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0186

All works height × width. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Michel Rein

"Documents of Disturbance," 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0187

"Inwood Park," 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0188

Traces from the Past: Some Ballast Material and Flora, 2017
Watercolor and ink on paper
24 × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (61 × 46 cm)
MTA_0189

A Botany of Colonization
Maria Thereza Alves

Over 400 species of plants, mostly European in origin, were growing on ballast grounds throughout New York and New Jersey, from where they've spread further since. Ships arriving with ballast over the last few centuries were responsible for introducing much non-native flora to the East Coast of the U.S. So much so that botanist Viktor Muhlenbach writes, "Combing ballast grounds […] for the appearance of new plants was a popular botanical pastime of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."

Earth, stones, sand, wood, bricks, and whatever else was economically expedient was used as ballast to stabilize merchant sailing ships in relationship to the weight of the cargo. Upon arrival in port, the ballast was unloaded, carrying with it seeds native to the area where the ballast had been picked up.

Seeds of Change unearths historical ballast sites and ballast flora. It is an ongoing investigation of ballast flora in numerous port cities. Projects have been developed for Marseille, Reposaari, Dunkirk, Exeter, Liverpool, Bristol, and now New York.

When New York was a British colony, British commercial regulations stipulated that commodities could only be imported via England; likewise, ships from the colonies were allowed to sell their goods in just a few foreign ports. Thus the colonial ships based in New York would return home completely in ballast rather than plod the seas to England because only there would they be allowed to pick up goods.

The added complexity of trade along the East Coast expanded the likelihood of ballast flora arriving in New York. Between 1732 and 1763, for instance, the majority of the ships sailing from St. Augustine in Florida, which was then a Spanish colony, to British New York left "in ballast." Ballast and seeds could have arrived from any point of the vast Spanish colonial empire.

Hundreds of thousands of tons of ballast arrived in New York City each month. Take June 30, 1900, when 7,584,000 tons of ballast reached the city's ports from a range of destinations — Colombia, various Caribbean islands, Venezuela, British Guyana, the "Chinese Empire," the Dutch East Indies, Japan, and the British Cape Colony in today's South Africa.

Accumulations and processes between different beings including the land make a place specific. Earth itself becomes a witness and provides testimony of the multispecies relationship of "place-making." Architect Charlie Hailey observes that, "… ballast collapses distance: how else can we reckon thousands of miles of geography, terrain, city-states, nations, and natures?"

In New York topographical particularities, specificities, and relationships were literally crushed. Water was banished: rivers, creeks, streams, and ponds were drained, filled in, or covered over. Non-linearity was banished with the leveling of hills, nooks, crannies, niches as well as gullies and ravines. Marshlands and swamps were considered an affront to the settlers, and were filled in. Among the Guaraní in South America it is unfathomable to remove a hill as it would result in a change of the currents of air. In New York City, a hill became a street or material to be used to fill in a swamp. The river was defined as a set of potential real estate plots, and pieces were sold to be filled in: converting water to land to property. Thinking forests were made dumb as their mycorrhizal networks were severed.

Middle East scholar Laleh Khalili writes that, "Landscapes were harvested of ballast, looted clean of sand and shingle and rock. […] This resource extraction transformed landscapes in ways that have been forgotten." Hailey further reminds us that, "discarded ballast spawned landscapes born of displaced materials from far-flung lands."

However, this is not a question of reconstruction of a lost landscape or purity but of acknowledgement of the present we all find ourselves in.

As we walk we are, at times, 33 feet above the place that was a New York for many more species than ours. River silt, Native American relics, household and industrial waste, ecological wreckage, hills torn down with earth removed for tunnels, and ballast was used to level New York, and that began quite early in colonial history — 1646.

By 1790 New York was the most important port in the country due to its central location in relation to the North American colonies. It connected Europe to the West Indies, and later also the Midwest via the Erie Canal, and later still via the rails arriving in New York at what is today called The High Line.

Contrary to our ideas of mercantile shipping practices of the Atlantic triangular slave trade, it was more profitable to return in ballast than wait for sugar, rum, cotton, etc. especially during the early days of colonization as this freed up the ships to sail to Africa more quickly and pick up more slaves — "cargo" that was four to six times more lucrative than colonial goods. Slave trade was the cornerstone of the New York economy, much of it via the West Indies. And the transport of bodies in ships required ballast to offset their movement. In New York, ships arrived from England with ballast material such as English flint, iron, and soil, and from other areas of the world with ballast consisting of large chunks of coral as well as coral sands from the Caribbean, volcanic sand, bricks, stones, and rocks. Much of England, specifically chunks of Devon, Cornwall, Poole, and Bristol ended up in New York.

While elsewhere solid ballast was slowly replaced by water in the 1920s, in New York, solid ballast continued to arrive well into the early 1950s. During World War Two, for instance, the U.S. Navy shipped weapons to the Allies, with boats returning in ballast as no goods were available. After World War Two, American ships brought goods to devastated Europe and, again, would return with earth or now also war rubble as ballast. Upon arrival in port, the ballast was unloaded, carrying with it seeds from the area where it had been collected. And lots of ballast was used as landfill throughout the boroughs of New York City, hence for example the name "Bristol Basin" where East 25th Street meets the Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive along the banks of the East River.

"Displanting humans and plants are elements of the same multispecies colonial endeavor," says philosopher Tomaz Mastnak as he argues for the importance of "botanical decolonization." But in New York we are also faced with a colonized earth. Let's begin by looking at these plants that both indicate ballast ground and are witnesses to the submersion of New York into a colonialized earth. As such, they teach us that we are in spaces of coloniality which, however, must not become the sole defining feature of these places. At the same time, we must acknowledge that these are landscapes of violence.

Mastnak calls for attention to "place-based" relations between plants. People must be placed within the context of how that place, its flora and the geographic specificity are constituted by settler-colonialism. Geographer Omar Tesdell echoes this when he argues, "that scholars must examine how wildness, native-ness, and agro-climatic suitability are scientifically constituted with and not apart from colonial conquest."

Art historian Wilma Lukatsch reminds us that, "Things come and have a walking history. And when we think of soil we do not think about traveling soil. There is history in soil."

Colonization is built into the very soil of New York. A process of decolonization must begin on the ground. •

Maria Thereza Alves is an artist, a founding member of the Green Party in Brazil, and the recipient of the Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics, 2016–2018.

Sites as Citations of New York's Colonial Past in Ballast
Carin Kuoni and Amanda Parmer

"The earth you think you're on is not, it is someplace else, the only way you would know the place is from the flower."
— Maria Thereza Alves

Over eighteen years, Maria Thereza Alves has disentangled the naturalization of bodies, ideas, and objects through her ongoing project *Seeds of Change*. Presented in various iterations and in collaboration with different communities, organizations, and art events, in countries ranging from England to France and Finland, Alves' momentous body of work — encompassing an entire human generation — has given form to ongoing legacies of colonization that have recently come into sharp, violent focus in Europe and the United States.

For Alves, the use and occupation of conventional tools of analysis and scientific proof are the fodder for pointing to and delimiting modes and spaces for thinking anew about how and what we know. As Audre Lorde wrote in *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, "those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference […] know that survival is not an academic skill." In *Seeds of Change* Alves considers ballast soil — used to balance ships during colonial trade and displaced onto the shores of port cities — to steer her research. Working with soil as an interlocutor she traces the effects, impacts, and distribution of plants that can be seen as ciphers for individuals and communities sold as commodities in the transatlantic slave trade and branded accordingly. The persistence and survival of these beings form the literal and metaphorical ground of the exhibition.

By making this marginal byproduct of colonial trade — seeds inadvertently carried by ships as part of their ballast — the focus of her work Alves activates the knowledge of botanical experts, historical records and the "silent archive" Saidiya Hartman speaks of in relation to slavery. In so doing, she decolonizes the ways we know and engage with our surroundings. The exhibition *Maria Thereza Alves, Seeds of Change: New York — A Botany of Colonization* reworks the physical and discursive material that we shape and that shapes us in order to suggest a proximity between human body and land, both branded and marked by processes of often violent, sometimes inadvertent migrations. The artist's constellation of markers elicits new modes of recognizing where we are, who we are, where we are from, and what we are responsible for — and to.

To understand this history from a material perspective, Alves researched the stories ballast flora tells us about migration, movement, trade, and valuation. Not surprisingly, the connection is immediate to pressing issues of our contemporary moment such as indigeneity and belonging: which plants do and do not belong to this land; which plants stand to threaten "native" species and vice versa, and which have the "right" to be here? Rather than provide a comprehensive history of plant migration in the New York area, the artist examined, in detail, key moments of such encounters. She parsed, for instance, the *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club* from 1879 to 1881 and then developed a list of ballast flora sites, including specific locations in New York City such as 107th Street and 8th Avenue in Manhattan, Hunter's Point in Queens, Gowanus Creek in Brooklyn, Mott Haven and Oak Point in the Bronx, and Communipaw and Hoboken in New Jersey. The names of ships arriving or departing "in ballast" appear in the painting *In Ballast: To and From New York*. Another work, *Traces from the Past: Some Ballast Material and Flora*, shows ballast flora, ballast, and earlier manmade landfill that may, or may not, have included ship's ballast.

These maps of land displaced in trade are supplemented by a series of watercolor paintings of ballast indicators and entitled accordingly: *Ballast Indicator: Atriplex rosea*; *Ballast Indicator: Verbene officinalis*; *Ballast Indicator: Mercurialis annua*; and *Ballast Indicator: Diplotaxis-tenuifolia*. Stylistically these works are akin to those of botanical illustrations produced during the 18th and 19th century that were seen as both appealing and scientifically valid. Alves has also included seven text-based works that relay specific narratives from ballast dumping sites in the New York area. These are transcribed by the artist into poetic accounts: *"Peach Tree War," "Whenever people were transported …," "Spring had come …," "The Liberia," "Much Ballast arrived in 1877 from Norway …," "Documents of Disturbance,"* and *"Inwood Park."*

Historical records and botanical journals cite the plants that have grown out of ballast soil as "non-indigenous." Outside of botanical gardens and the realm of horticultural expertise, they are often referred to as "weeds" growing out of the cracks in the sidewalks, city parks, and suburban landscapes. *Seeds of Change* familiarizes visitors with these persistent and enduring plants through the extended project of the exhibition. Through this they begin to operate as keys to knowing an alternative, extra-anthropocentric mapping of the New York landscape and the traces of colonialism that continue to shape it.

In this New York iteration, the first in the Americas, the exhibition scales between micro and macro iterations through a network of partner sites around the New York area: The High Line in Chelsea, Pioneer Works in Red Hook, Weeksville Heritage Center in Crown Heights, and The New School in Greenwich Village. In the spring of 2017 approximately four hundred individual plants selected from thirty-eight species were propagated at Pioneer Works and The New School. These plants populate the gallery for the November 2017 exhibition at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center. In the spring of 2018 the same plants will be distributed to the full list of partner sites to live indefinitely as ballast flora gardens in those spaces.

This cultivation and dispersal organically tie together each site's distinct history of trade and the distribution of people, plants and goods. Pioneer Works near the banks of the East River in Brooklyn is literally built on ballast: in the 1851, an Irish immigrant, William Beard, purchased land and gained permission to build the Eerie Basin, originally marsh land below the Brooklyn Docks where ships from around the world would dock. Beard invited ships to dump their ballast at the Basin to shore up the space producing a landmass that is largely made of ballast soil and populated by ballast flora. Weeksville Heritage Center is testimony to a community founded by African American freedmen, located between Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, and Brownsville, Brooklyn. After abolition purchasing land became a means for freed African Americans to gain economic and political freedom. Weeksville was established by stevedore James Weeks and others in 1838 to accomplish this. By the mid-1800's Weeksville was providing for a community of five hundred people with their own newspaper, school, orphanage, housing and, perhaps most importantly, $250 worth of property owned by every non-white man — the ticket to democratic participation, i.e. a vote. The High Line is a public-private partnership park in Chelsea that was opened to the public in 2009 on elevated train tracks. Here, the story of ballast dispersal shifts from the ports to the Western frontier of this country. As goods arrived at the city's ports, carrying seeds with them, they were loaded onto the trains that had traveled on what is now The High Line, themselves the carrier of seeds from the West and now transporting "non-native" seeds across the United States on their undercarriage.

In these pieces, Alves works an idea eloquently articulated by scholar Fred Moten, "seeing is a sensuous assemblage." Using paint, text, and imagery the artist evokes an alternative way of knowing, by layering the stories plants tell as witnesses in the anthropocentric histories of trade and migration. The traces these plants leave, as annuals and perennials, create a map of colonialization that is deeply embedded yet often invisible in the landscape of New York City. Selected for their presence in sites around the New York area, the ballast flora in the exhibition sets up a key for the map of the city's sites of colonization. In the shape-shifting cultural, economic and social environments of New York, *Seeds of Change* holds open physical and temporal spaces for thinking with the plants about the reasons that these landscapes are constructs we all actively co-produce. •

Carin Kuoni and Amanda Parmer are the curators of *Maria Thereza Alves, Seeds of Change: New York — A Botany of Colonization*.

Transcending Movements: Weeds as Queering Species Boundaries

Marisa Prefer

Anthropocentric ideologies and the reigning dominance of humans has ushered an era of global climate temperature variation, creating perfect instances for species to migrate. Opportunistic seeds travel on wind, in fur and beneath human feet, these plants are often coded as threatening, labeled "weeds" or "invasive." What if instead of deeming these plants unwanted and warranted of expulsion, we were able to consider them as part of a transitory continuum, where the cycling worlds of physical space, energy and spirit, combine to uncover an inter-species liquidity? Through an expansive lens of queer ecology, we may embark down winding paths towards softening the rigid cultural boundaries between living beings.

Earth is a series of rocks, now dominated by human-centric realities. From crumbling neoliberal infrastructure to political upheaval driven by social inequalities, humans tend to build and contend with systems for and about themselves. The recognition of this period as the Anthropocene also signifies the possibility of a juncture: the *Anthropocene* can serve as a moment to begin a deep dive into theories that blend intrinsically human behavior with that of concurrently evolving species; the work of tapping into interspecies magic seems more necessary than before. In particular, how can we illuminate the most prolific of oxygen-bearing species, plants which some call "*weeds,"* as embodied outliers? Can we welcome them as entities that help to lubricate the fold between sentient beings and other Eukaryotes? I turn here to Donna Haraway's instance of *natureculture,* (Haraway 1) in which the two terms cannot be separated from, and are in fact tied together by, the forces of each other. If we use this as a lens to consider plants that exist *en masse* largely as a result of human interference, perhaps we may begin to uncover the power enmeshed within.

Along dusty urban roadsides and beneath the cracks of seemingly impermeable asphalt, plants thrive in mutualistic conditions amidst fleshless beings, including mycelial networks interspersed with endobacteria that transfer carbon and nitrogen between species. These pioneering plants partner with other life forms to penetrate ruderal physical landscapes, blanketing spaces of transition by creeping into slivers of dirt, emerging year after year beyond instances of their origins. Migration can be described as a "movement of one part of something to another" *(Oxford English Dictionary).* In Eastern North America, when late summer heat sets in, tiny inconspicuous mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) seeds develop, ripening while bitter compounds complexify within its leaves. Autumn winds sweep through alleyways and empty lots, and the seeds of mugwort are released from their pasts, projected by wind into their potential futures. It is fairly easy for these tiny seeds to find a new home, they carry only the weight of themselves and need little to thrive, doing so in most soils and light conditions. In some ways mugwort seems to even be drawn to the interstitial spaces between here and there, finding ground that is not already occupied by any other of its kind. Is this true for humans as well, if to be human is to be enmeshed in a series of transitional moments, elements bound up in matter that exist between one space and another? If all living beings are considered part of this transitory continuum, between the cycling worlds of physical space, energy, and spirit, are humans all always some type of migrant? We are also all energies that inhabit space in relation to each other, for a time that on some days might seem like forever, but in relation to some ancient species, is a mere instant.

Some species are seen to stand on the shoulders of others, utilizing abundant forces (wind, water, sun, earth) in building communities; grasping chance and, under the right circumstances, becoming prolific. The conditions are a product of whole and symbiotic ecosystems, photosynthetic eukaryotes (plants) which feed and are also decimated by *Homo sapiens sapiens* (humans), which are continuously being colonized by prokaryotic microorganisms (bacteria). Anthropocentric ideologies and the reigning dominance of humans have ushered in an era of global climate temperature variation, creating perfect instances for other species to migrate. Opportunistic seeds travel on wind, in fur and beneath human feet, these plants are often coded as threatening, labeled "weeds" or "invasive" (Van der Veken 212–216).

Mugwort is often marked by both of these terms, in the Northeast region of North America, to which it is not "native" (Swearingen, 2017). The exact origins of a plant can be somewhat difficult to decipher, some plants have been deemed to be "from" many places. Mugwort is believed to have been found earliest in Asia and Eastern Europe[1]. It carries a habit for vigorous reproduction via rhizomatous rootstock beneath the ground, using lateral methods to inhabit waste places or urban lots and sandy roadsides. It is also a known phyto-accumulator, performing well when employed to remove Cadmium from soil compounds (Rebele, Lehmann 93–103). Mugwort has a longstanding history of widespread usage in relation to the human body; externally for rashes, internally as a bitter stimulant for the circulatory and nervous systems and for the relief of abdominal cramping, but it is also a powerful spiritual and energetic healer when it is dried and burned in an act of cleansing (Fern, 2017). The idea that plants can reach or encourage transcendental spaces moves beyond a place where its phytochemicals are assessed for measurable impact, beyond facts, and towards interspecies experiential storytelling. Having migrated to the Americas by many means, mugwort has been "... introduced to at least six separate locations in North America via ship ballast, ranging from the arctic to both oceanic shorelines, and on multiple occasions in several of these locations" (Barney 8, 703–717). It is not alone in this duplicitous travel: stinging nettle *(Urtica dioica)* has similarly noted origins in Asia and Europe (Schellman, 2008). In the quest to unpack "origins" — and encircling the idea that everything *must* come from somewhere — how do species that once shared space, having journeyed beyond those places, experience new grounds and build symbiotic community with new others?

All living things have ecosystem functions; every being serves an energetic purpose in relation to any number of modulating forces. Humans are major players here, but are far from the majority. We are all voids holding space; containers for relationships with species that are not us. In organizing ourselves culturally, we make up a portrait of culture, one that is cobbled atop the colonial forces that cannot be divorced from the drive of human-instituted systems like global capitalism. As humans, we are always becoming but never arrive. Can we ever actually *move* somewhere else? Assigning functions, actions, and meanings to other species separates human thought from "other." Or does it actually help humans to biologically relate with other species? We can experience this exchange without opening windows or even forcing something out of the ordinary, but by becoming another *immediately.* To allow plants like stinging nettle to penetrate this edifice of controlled or neat categories, by welcoming it into or onto one's body, we are paying attention to it as a force for healing. Nettles have been used for generations in a practice of *urtication,* or hitting of oneself with the plant for the circulation of blood, quelling of allergies, and simultaneous relief and onset of stinging, burning symptoms (LeBaron-Botts, 2017). It is the irony in this that astounds many; why a human would engage in a relationship with a plant that would at the same time *inflict* pain as it heals? Nettle carries this enigmatic agenda in its growth habit as well, often reproducing under damp, wilder conditions in stands that quickly tend towards dominating other species of plants.

Or maybe that's the anthropomorphic speaking: there is always a transition moment. When upon setting out for a walk in the woods alongside a creek, you unknowingly brush by a patch of stinging nettle and your hand grazes its stalk, soon you can't feel your fingertips, and your human blood starts pumping more vigorously. What if our species is calling us to sit in this transitory space, to observe and listen, letting the desire of ever becoming next fade away? What do the plants want, or should we ask this of them? Humans seek to integrate "useful" attributes into agriculture, or functions that benefit humans and capital accumulation. Conservationists and foragers capitalize on inherent opportunities of productive "wild" plants, reaping the benefits of prolific species and extracting use value for food and culture.[2] This interchange allows humans to eat, produce, to heal and build. Plants have been erupting from the soil for hundreds of millions of years, and only in the last 23,000 have humans begun to interfere with their whereabouts (Snir, et al, 2015). How did pre-human beings interact with their co-inhabitants, and can humans listen, observe, and learn without looking to assign human qualities to other species? Plants are actants upon humans as much as humans are shaping landscapes by eradicating plants. Plants transcend "utility" as the ruling forces of the Holocene; their tendencies are to reproduce in abundance, encouraging relationships with other species. What if we let them? One step forward might be in

1 — Mugwort is listed as an "invasive" species in New York, according to Cornell University, as cited in "New York Native Species Information: Mugwort." Web, 2017

2 — Lots of foragers and ecologists encourage readers to "eat their weeds," see http://eattheinvaders.org/ and http://www.eattheweeds.com/.

not claiming totality; but rather inhabiting a conscious praxis of decentralization regarding dominant cultural forces, a push to unpack and dismantle environmental binaries.

If we are to sit in the space of twisting binaries and opening doors between worlds, we must look to dismantle forces that control by understanding how they are built. The United States Government defines "invasive" species "as a species that is non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health" (Beck, et al., 2006). Signifying plants as "invasive" enables a cultural alarm for humans managing land — to eradicate. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing speaks of disturbance as a product that lays the groundwork for cultural usage of resources in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*:

> "While I refuse to reduce either economy or ecology to the other, there is one connection between economy and environment that seems important to introduce up front: the history of the human concentration of wealth through making both humans and nonhumans into resources for investment. This history has inspired investors to imbue both people and things with alienation, that is, the ability to stand alone, as if the entanglements of living did not matter." (Tsing 5).

Many of these now revered plants were once treasured and cultivated by humans. Forces that encourage plant species to migrate and reproduce are based on ecosystem symbiosis; humans have driven warming planetary conditions as a result of global trade, which has left in its wake a wealth of ruderal lands. Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus,* reported as an "invasive" by the U.S. Forest Service in twenty states,[3]) is an early colonizer of bare ground, a biennial plant, and one that reproduces only in its second year if it is able to accumulate enough biomass to produce a large stalk that tends often to reach up taller than most humans. According to (somewhat) modern scientific inquiries, "the rate of biomass accumulation by the rosette is influenced by the environmental conditions occurring at the time of growth" (Booth, Murphy, Swanton 256). Do exclusionary identities help to separate nature from culture, therefore severing a holistic view of humans as part of nature? If symbiosis were a liquid, enveloping all of its inhabitants, volunteer plants are merely performing in relation to other biota. Similarly, the act of citing plants or humans as immigrants merely marks a moment in time. Who, when and what exactly constitutes something, or someone as "native" or "immigrant?" (Marinelli 2016). These terms are signified based on any number of markers, and appropriate acknowledgement of time, place, context, identity and social conditions are all needed to assign any being (human or non-) to an affinity group or category for cultural convenience.

Permaculturalist and former conservationist Tao Orion opens space for the blending of terminologies, when she says "modern research increasingly shows that all native plant communities are, to some extent, the products of human intervention" (Orion 154). Forces of attribution are never sincerely distributed evenly; whether by color or style, or origin; by which no human follows these markers without direct relation to the self. Observation based on sublime reality can be an organizational method for understanding species, (here or there, present or absent;) instead of meticulously assigning identities to plants, animals and microbes. Mullein leaf has been used for centuries as a lymph and lung medicine, for coughs and congestion. Physiomedicalist William Cook called mullein an "absorbent" of "peculiar and reliable power" (McDonald, Herbcraft.org). Can we identify a set of inclusive methodologies that speak across disciplines and beyond known categories in order to reach the power of something considered unwanted; or so to say, somewhere that might work towards understanding the desires of others, which might look something like species solidarity? Timothy Morton calls upon this species-blending transcendence in *Humankind,* arguing between disciplines and states of thought, "worlds are perforated and permeable, which is why we can share them" (Morton 14). Cellular walls separate plants from animals; these walls help to bind, nourish and regulate growth, providing strength and protection. What can humans learn from these permeable walls between worlds, between species? •

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3 — See https://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/common-mullein.pdf

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The Importance of Words and Action
Jean Fisher

"In this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a sacred white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth — even though it be covertly, and by snatches."
— Herman Melville[1]

Debates on the relationship of artistic practice to the sociopolitical sphere have gained momentum as the more negative effects of globalization have visibly extended what Walter Benjamin called "states of emergency" beyond their *apparent* earlier confinement to colonial geographies and into the dark and dissimulating heart of the western world. When Benjamin coined this phrase, however, he also noted that these states were not the exception but the rule.[2] And, indeed, as the democratic mask of globalized neoliberal capitalism has slipped, so it is now clear that most of us are vulnerable to economic, political and military forces that undermine the concept of the nation-state as a benign agent of the social contract and expose its capacity to treat its own citizens as the enemy, increasingly bereft of legal or political agency. This state of affairs had, of course, long been experienced by peoples under hegemonic colonial rule and post-independence state violence; and it is from a deeply felt engagement with the visual and verbal representations that sustained social injustices in these geographies that, I suggest, the work of Maria Thereza Alves gains its resonance.

In retrospect, it is not surprising to find that artists and scholars from the geographies of the global South, long subjected to oppressive regimes, were engaged in sociopolitical counter-hegemonic tactics of resistance whilst Northern artists were merely tinkering around the edges with the "institutional critique" of an elitist Euro-American art system. From the late 1960s throughout the 1980s, there were few Latin American and Caribbean countries (or Arab states, for that matter) that had not been forced into repressive dictatorships by the combined interference of the world's fi organizations and the United States' covert CIA operations or blatant military invasion. Amongst Southern artistic responses to the repression of the nineteen seventies one can cite a tendency to act through collectives, which provided modest support; whilst artists in Brazil — Maria Thereza Alves' place of departure — produced additional interventionary tactics: most well known in the West are Cildo Meireles's *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, and Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica's interactive sculptures that sought to redefine the relationship between art and society as an embodied experience. To an extent, however, these artists emerged from a background outlined by Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagic Manifesto" (1928), which redefine Brazilian culture in terms of native "cannibalism", which, for Andrade, was the form of appropriation by which Brazilian national culture would find its own identity against the historical imports of the European. One notes here, however, a parallel *criollo* misinterpretation and misuse of indigenous cultures whilst ignoring the state and corporate violence enacted upon them. Although Alves was educated and lived during much of the 1980s in New York,[3] and although she may well eschew any concept of national identity as a fabricated and dangerously divisive form of exclusivity, one might suggest that her work inherits this Southern sensitivity to sociopolitical injustices. However, she understands their roots not in the de-colonizing struggle between European settlers and imperialists, but in the actual and linguistic violence against indigenous peoples, an understanding that she carries over into Europe with her archival research into the concealed histories and the prejudices embedded in language that form or deform local experience and identities.

The art practice of Maria Thereza Alves does not lend itself to easy categorization. For the most part, she eschews the concept of art as a discrete object, which, whatever its author's initial intention, is too readily commodified by the wealthy élite as an asset to trade in the auction houses. With Alves' work we have to ask different questions about art's purpose; we therefore have to abandon the notion of aesthetic objects and look to the productive effects of imagination, process and social or inter-subjective relations. One can perhaps suggest that Alves's work proposes an "aesthetics of resistance" against the norms of western art alongside the "world of lies", as Melville put it, peddled by the hypocrisy of the political classes everywhere. Such an art practice is bound to the political insofar as it is deeply implicated in the conditions of life, but realistically knows it cannot claim to impact on politics as such. Its sphere of action is therefore the "local," listening and seeing beyond the surface appearance of things, identifying other ways of seeing and reading towards reclaiming the power to act in and against the limits imposed by power and its mediated versions of reality. The form her work takes is therefore an *art engagé*, in which participation, both at the point of initiation of a project and during its execution, has been a central aspect of her practice to date.

To reclaim agency demands a *pro*active subject armed with knowledge. The problem is that the subject is not only oppressed by power but is itself its product, suggesting that the subject is always somehow complicit in its subjugation. So how to imagine a politically viable agency capable of overcoming this impasse? In the colonial scenario, Frantz Fanon insisted that it was impossible to do so by a *nostalgic* retreat into some lost or fragmented pre-colonial past. As Fanon said, one had to recognize the dynamics of repression and reconfigure social narratives from the conditions of the present. One might add, considering the centrality of archival research to Alves' work, that one must first understand how the past is selectively used by the powerful to write its own version of history. To reclaim agency meant turning language towards re-imagining an existence not defined by trauma and victimhood, a role Fanon assigned to the intellectual and storyteller.[4] Edward Said likewise suggested that the intellectual had a responsibility to 'speak truth to power', to give voice to injustice, which was best done by the 'amateur' uncontaminated by the institutional pressures to which academics were inevitably subjected,[5] Such a description fits the unaffiliated or "nomadic" artist like Alves, whose "home" is located in the processes by which the *work* of art comes into being. We therefore arrive at another issue raised by Said that is pertinent to Alves' working process, namely, the space of exile. In his essay "Reflections on Exile," after disparaging some of the least attractive tendencies of the exiled subject, he comes to Adorno's commentary in *Minima Moralia*, in which, as Said relates, "he argued that everything that one says or thinks, as well as every object one possesses, is ultimately mere commodity. Language is jargon; objects are for sale. To refuse this state of affairs is the exile's intellectual mission." Exiles cross boundaries, break barriers of thought and experience; and "seeing 'the entire world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision." [6] This form of being, simultaneously *outside and belonging* to the world, is how I understand Alves' position: a "storyteller" and "exile," who adopts the procedures of the investigative scientist, anthropologist or ethnographer, not, however, to produce a reverse anthropology in which the "native" looks at the "European" using the latter's criteria, but to disclose the distortions of language and history by which hegemony exerts its control.

Seeds of Change is an extensive project that Alves researched and conducted in several port cities across Europe and Scandinavia. In one sense it is an extension of her earlier active engagement in ecological issues: she was a founding member of the Brazilian Green Party (*Partido Verde*), which was constituted in 1986 after the military dictatorship and committed to furthering social democracy and sustainable development. *Seeds of Change* is not an artwork in the conventional sense, nor does it possess an outcome that could be anticipated in advance; it is better described as an experimental, multidisciplinary collaboration by Alves with various environmental scientists, botanists, engineers, local authorities and communities, in which Alves applies an artistic imagination to specific contexts in order to disclose hitherto concealed sociocultural histories. The "point of departure" of the work was the observation that the ships that plied the trans-Atlantic colonial trade routes deposited ballast in their ports of call: ballast was loaded onto ships to control stability and later off-loaded — as Alves found, in legal and illegal sites — in order to lighten the ship to receive further cargo. Ballast would, however, consist of

1 — Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," *The Literary World*, August 17 and 24, 1850. http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/nh/hahm.html
2 — Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 257.
3 — Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, [1961], trans. Constance Farrington, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p. 193.
4 — Edward W. Said, "Speaking truth to power" in *Representations of the Intellectual*, London: Vintage, 1994, p. 65.
5 — This was a time nonetheless of expanding postcolonial studies and insistent critique of the mainstream art world by ethnic "others."
6 — Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 1983.

whatever natural aggregate material was available, with the result that plant seeds from the collection site were transported to the ports of deposit, where they may germinate, remain dormant for several years, or be dispersed even further afield.

Alves' process was firstly to research shipping and municipal archives and maps to identify ballast sites. She would then take core soil samples from these sites and observe what "exotics" germinated under controlled conditions. The next phase of the project was to engage the local community in constructing a "ballast flora garden," which, certainly in the case of Bristol and Liverpool as the most notorious slave and immigrant ports, would be likely to reflect the triangular trans-Atlantic slave trade. In Bristol, Alves indeed found an Argentinean and a Portuguese plant, which linked the Bristol-based adventurer Sebastian Cabot with the Anglo-Portuguese slave trade in Brazil, which, as Alves relates, even well into the twentieth century had repercussions on the sense of security of the local people of the Mato Grosso. If this part of the project was curtailed in Marseilles due to a change in local politics, the idea was received with enthusiasm in Bristol, whilst in Reposaari, Finland, Alves discovered that the local population already valued and nurtured the "exotics" that had sprung up in their midst to the extent that they functioned as a form of social currency.

Ballast flora are of course "illegal immigrants," and *Seeds of Change* presents an elegant allegory for complex human identities that expose Europe, not as a discrete set of monocultures but as the result of ongoing intercultural exchanges that undermine fantasies of national identity — a relatively recent construct born during the political and colonially inscribed upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Benedict Anderson's seminal book *Imagined Communities* makes clear.[7] As Alves notes, given that the process of exotic seed dissemination has continued for several centuries, both through inadvertent immigration and deliberate introduction by plant collectors, in places like the British Isles plants introduced centuries ago are now regarded as "indigenous." [8] But as her earlier work *Wake* (2000–01), a project for Berlin sponsored by the DAAD, revealed, plants are also emotively bound up with nationalist symbolism, despite the fact that they persistently fail to respect national borders. As *Wake* demonstrated, Bismarck's attempt to define a national flora like Nazi Germany's later disastrous attempt to define an authentic German *Volk*, were doomed to failure.

With a few rare exceptions, plants tend to stay within their species categories, unless geneticallly modified by humans, although they may naturally adapt to differing environmental conditions. Humans, of course, are a single species despite the rhetoric of "race"; there may be ethic or cultural differences, but these do not preclude interethnic mixing. One might be wary of calling this "hybridity," if only because this word tends to sediment onto "things" when cultural exchange is a fluid *process*. Rather, Gramsci's notion of "war of position" often best describes the relation between minority and majority cultures, where differences are negotiated either as a matter of political expediency, or in acknowledgement that there is something useful in the "foreign" to be incorporated into existing cultural traditions. Likewise, in discussions of the relation between the "global" and the "local" in art practices, Gerardo Mosquera disputes the notion that this leads to the global homogenization of art practices, arguing that the local "re-signifies" the global to suit its own concepts and needs.[9] From this perspective we may see Alves' work as a "war of position," exploring the various negotiations that take place in intercultural exchanges.

Three of Alves' works in particular narrate different perspectives on the complexities of intercultural negotiation: *Oculesics: An Investigation of Cross — cultural Eye Contact* (2008), *Iracema de Questembert*, 2009, and *Orée*, 2011. *Oculesics* presents the viewer with the alternating images of two men: one, a "typical" white Northern European dressed in a suit, stares unblinkingly at the camera, whilst the other, dressed casually and whom we take to be an Arab possibly from North Africa, occasionally glances at the camera, but whose gaze mostly drifts elsewhere. Meanwhile the text captions, which appear to be "voiced" from a female perspective and derive from Alves' associates in the art world, relate differing responses to these gazes although they not do necessarily coincide with each face: the steady frontal stare was "predatory," "disconcerting," "encouraged" or "didn't encourage" conversation; whereas the Arab man's gaze signaled "inattention" and "disrespect." It is not until the end of the video that we learn that the European world regards its own tradition of maintaining eye contact as a "universal" sign of politeness, ignorant of the fact that most other peoples interpret this as aggressive and disrespectful.

Alves' *Fair Trade Head* (2009) made for the "Museum of European Normality," is also concerned with European disrespect for other cultures and peoples, which is nowhere more grotesquely illustrated than by the nineteenth century habit of collecting "native" body parts. Ethnographic museums in many ex-imperial countries have returned these human remains to their communities for proper burial, but the French Ministry of Culture blocked the return of a Maori person's tattooed head by Rouen's Museum of Natural History on the extraordinary grounds that this was an "art object" and part of French "national heritage." Alves notes a similar reluctance by the Musée du quai Branly in her video *Iracema de Questembert*. Alves' ironic proposal in *Fair Trade Head* is a tattooed white female head as a reciprocal "gift."

It may be remembered that the remains of Saartjie Baartman (known as the "Hottentot Venus") were only returned by France to South Africa during 2002 at the specific request of Nelson Mandela. Baartman was paraded in European freak shows during the early nineteenth century, because her steatopygic buttocks and genitals excited attention. Sander L. Gilman plausibly shows how popular images of Baartman merged with those of white prostitutes showing exaggerated buttocks, as signs of an "intrinsic" excessive and corrupting female sexuality.[10] It is to this history of the displayed female body, the fetishization of which seemed to increase during the height of nineteenth century imperialism,[11] that Alves' video *Beyond the Painting* (2012) alludes. The artist invited several "Caucasian" women, most of whom were not professional models, to choose and present poses from historical paintings of the nude. Each woman enters the frame and adopts the pose in a scene of simple black drapery; she holds the pose, candidly addresses the camera and exits the frame. Most of these poses are recognizable — examples from Boucher, Goya, Ingres, Delacroix and Manet, amongst others, are all presented — but they are no less discomforting for all their familiarity when one knows that most of the original sitters were either the mistresses of the wealthy élite, prostitutes by economic necessity, or the objects of an artist's colonial fantasies. The Renaissance established the lexicon of poses for the female nude genre, which, whilst initially depicting proactive women like Diana the Huntress, became increasingly addressed to the lascivious gaze of the male observer until all pretense to classical myth was abandoned in Boucher's sexually posed *Miss Murphy*, 1752. This gaze gained added frisson with "Orientalist" fantasies of the "Turkish" or "Arab" seraglio introduced with European military campaigns in North Africa and the Middle East — an allusion that Alves does not ignore in her inclusion of the prostrate woman posed in Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827 — or later, with Gauguin's nubile Tahitian girls. The female viewer might despair at the extent to which these poses have become naturalized within western depictions of the female body, and the amnesia about the realities from which they derived. Nonetheless, it is the spell of the exotic fantasy that Alves breaks by presenting the everydayness of the model's work, reminding us that these women were real people.

Iracema de Questembert, however, provides a counterpoint to what might seem to be *Beyond the Painting*'s depressing visual history of female objectification. The video presents a financial account of an indigenous Brazilian woman, Iracema, who inherits her father's wealthy French estate. We see her move from her forested home, passing the logging trucks, the farmland clearances and the mining companies, on her journey to France to take up her inheritance, where racial bigotry is figured in her encounters with the lawyers, who, with "false manners like anthropologists and missionaries," try to persuade her to return. She does not; instead, she takes up the life of an artist in the intercultural milieu of French "primitivist" modernism and founds an Institute for Science and Art. As she says, from the gracious cultural perspective of indigenous America, she is "returning the gift of inheritance by accepting it"–and also by passing it on. *Iracema de Questembert* circulates around a critique of what commonly constitutes a national belonging and identity, questioning what "Frenchness" means for both the peoples in the country's colonized "départments" around the world and for their reception inside France. The name "Iracema" refers to a fictional founding myth of Brazilian national identity formed by the union of a native woman, Iracema, and a Portuguese colonizer, Martim. This sexualized myth, in which the native woman is both vilified as a traitorous whore and valorized as the mother of the

7 — Maria Thereza Alves, "Seeds of Change", in *Plot*, Simon Read and Jean Fisher (eds), London: Middlesex University, p. 44.

8 — Edward W. Said, "Reflections on Exile", in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, London: Granta, 2001, pp. 184–186.

9 — Gerardo Mosquera, "Alien-Own, Own-Alien," in Nikos Papastergiadis (ed), *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference*, London: Rivers Oram Press, 2003, pp. 18–29.

10 — Sander L Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed), *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1986, pp. 223–261.

11 — The era coincides with the fashionable bustle of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, which also exaggerated the buttocks. It is considered to be a covert "contained" sign of male ascription of dangerous excess to female sexuality.

(settler) nation, is a common trope in the Americas and was a way of legitimizing colonialism — one recalls the similar narratives of Malinche and Cortés in Mexico and Pocahontas and John Rolfe/John Smith in the Virginias. On the surface, therefore, it would seem that Iracema's "assimilation" into French society is an example of cultural "hybridity," but Alves' story is not so simple. Iracema's cultural integrity is maintained in terms of ethical responsibility and adaptation — as, for instance, indigenous dishes adapted to available local ingredients. "Adapting" is not quite the same as "hybridizing"; it implies a movement of change, whereas hybridity, as already mentioned, identifies "things." In the end, we discover that Iracema is not the descendent of an interethnic liaison, and is French not by "ethnicity" but by choice; and perhaps the most significant statement of the work is: "Home, where is that? If home is not found in the intellectual life of friends and discussion, it is only a tomb."

Alves returns to the issue of intercultural exchange in *Orée*, which explores an aspect of the linguistic traditions of La Réunion, a department of France located in the Indian Ocean. Seemingly uninhabited, the island was undoubtedly known to Arab and Swahili sailors trading between Africa and India; but by 1665 it had been officially claimed and settled by French colonizers with their African slaves and indentured workers from India and South-East Asia. La Réunion therefore presents a specific colonial history of multiethnic cultural exchange, whose common language is creolized French. In *Orée,* a fixed camera is positioned in a tropical forest touched only by a faint breeze, whilst two female voiceovers individually narrate a text delivered in tones that are alternately seductive, sing-song, or indignant, ending in the exclamation, "... bois de négresse!" The French and creole text describes the names of indigenous plants used by local people as food, medicine, spices and teas — knowledge developed by ancestors who escaped into the forests to avoid slavery. Given that no indigenous names could have been installed on an uninhabited island, plant names reflect the ethnic diversity and socio-political history of La Réunion's colonial relations: "bois de négresse" is, it seems, regarded as an imitation of a tree named "bois mazelle" (mademoiselle), reflecting the hierarchical value assigned to enslaved black women and privileged white women on the island.

The "importance of words" is again a central issue in Alves' collaboration with Shirley Krenak (the actor who plays Iracema) and Jürgen Bock of Maumaus, Escola de Artes Visuales, Lisbon, in the translation and production of *Dicionário: Krenak-Português / Português-Krenak*, 2010. During the filming of *Iracema de Questembert* in Minas Gerais, Shirley, with her brothers Douglas and Tam Krenak, approached Alves with a proposition: to translate a late nineteenth century German dictionary of the Krenak language into Portuguese. Alves in turn approached Bock, who enthusiastically supported the project, and enabled the translated dictionary to be incorporated into Alves' exhibition in Maumaus, *On the Importance of Words, A Sacred Mountain (stolen), and the Morality, of Nations* (2010). The significance of this project cannot be overstated; after hundreds of years of physical and cultural genocide, dispossession of land, constant relocation and official denial of existence, initiated by the colonial Portuguese and continued by the Brazilian government and corporate interests, the Krenak population had been reduced to around six hundred souls. Nonetheless, they were fiercely intent on cultural survival; and to this end the translation of the old German dictionary[12], distributed to every surviving member of the Krenak, would enable them to reclaim a language that had all but been lost through systematic deculturation. The dictionary project is a rare example of an artistic intervention resulting in a positive outcome for the community in question: insofar as language describes the meaning of the world for its users, there is no more significant route to agency than its reclamation.

One might conclude by suggesting that *Orée*, despite the apparent cultural specificity of its context, functions as an appropriate allegory of Alves' search for Melville's "sacred white doe of truth" among the forest of visual and verbal signs that entangle us in dissimulation about the real state of affairs — political and ecological — of our relations to the world. If Alves has focused her attention primarily on the indigenous or local situation it is not simply because it is a discursive terrain with which she is familiar, but because it is here, first, in lived realities, that the proliferating effects of political injustices, born of abstract ideologies and vested corporate interests that respect neither sustainable ways of life nor the finitude of the earth's resources, are most keenly and impotently felt. It is, then, to solicit in the viewer a more creative way of thinking about how we inhabit and understand the world as an irrevocably shared inheritance that Alves' work is directed. As Jean-Luc Nancy has said: "'I' is always and already 'us' s … there is no meaning if meaning is not shared."[13]

12 — The obsessive documentation of indigenous cultures by European colonizers, to "prove" their "primitiveness" and justify the "civilizing mission," sometimes *does* present an archive for the reclamation of buried histories. As Alves' work demonstrates, *reinterpreting* archival data from its misuse in colonial ideologies is an essential part of this process. However, Alves' logical proposal that the Krenak data be incorporated into a website for local and scholarly research, has so far — at the time of writing — met with no interest from Brazilian educational institutions.

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Jean Fisher (1942–2016) was a writer, professor emerita in Fine Art and Transcultural Studies at Middlesex University, and the editor of *Third Text*.

13 — Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 2.

The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors
Saidiya Hartman

The slave ship is a womb/abyss. The plantation is the belly of the world. *Partus sequitur ventrem*— the child follows the belly. The master dreams of future increase. The modern world follows the belly. Gestational language has been key to describing the world-making and world-breaking capacities of racial slavery. What it created and what it destroyed has been explicated by way of gendered figures of conception, birth, parturition, and severed or negated maternity. To be a slave is to be "excluded from the prerogatives of birth." The mother's only claim — to transfer her dispossession to the child. The material relations of sexuality and reproduction defined black women's historical experiences as laborers and shaped the character of their refusal of and resistance to slavery.[1] The theft, regula tion and destruction of black women's sexual and reproductive capacities would also define the afterlife of slavery.

Most often when the productive labor of the slave comes into view, it is as a cate- gory absent gender and sexual differentiation. In two of the greatest works of the black radical tradition, W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* and C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins*, the agency of the enslaved becomes legible as politics, rather than crime or destruction, at the moment slaves are transformed into black workers and revolutionary masses fashioned along the lines of the insurgent proletariat. However, representing the slave through the figure of the worker (albeit unwaged and unfree), obscures as much as it reveals, making it difficult to distinguish the constitutive elements of slavery as a mode of power, violence, dispossession and accumulation or to attend to the forms of gendered and sexual violence that enable these processes. In *Black Reconstruction*, women's sexual and reproductive labor is critical in accounting for the violence and degradation of slavery, yet this labor falls outside of the heroic account of the black worker and the general strike.

Black women, too, refused the conditions of work on the plantation, and Du Bois notes their presence among the "army of fugitives" rushing away from the fields. Yet, in the shift from the fugitive to the striking worker, the female slave becomes a minor figure. Neither "the potentialities for the future" represented by the fugitive nor the text engendered by flight and refusal and furnished for abolition idealists embraced her labors.[2] Marriage and protection rather than sexual freedom and reproductive justice were the only ways conceived to redress her wrongs, or remedy the "wound dealt to [her] reputation as a human being." The sexual violence and reproduction characteristic of enslaved women's experience fails to produce a radical politics of liberation or a philosophy of freedom.

Black women's labors have not been easy to reckon with conceptually. Feminist thinkers, following the path cleared by Angela Davis' groundbreaking essay "Reflections of the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," have considered the significance of gender, sexuality and reproduction in defining the constitutive relations of slavery and the modes of its violence.[3] It has proven difficult, if not impossible, to assimilate black women's domestic labors and reproductive capacities within narratives of the black worker, slave rebellion, maroonage, or black radicalism, even as this labor was critical to the creation of value, the realization of profit and the accumulation of capital. It has been no less complicated to imagine the future produced by such labors as anything other than monstrous. Certainly we know that enslaved women fled the plantation, albeit not in as great numbers as men; poisoned slaveholders; plotted resistance; dreamed of destroying the master and his house; utilized abortifacients rather than reproduce slaves; practiced infanticide rather than sentence their children to social death, the auction block, and the master's bed; exercised autonomy in suicidal acts; gave birth to children as testament to an abiding knowledge of freedom contrary to every empirical index of the plantation; and yearned for radically different ways of being in the world. So where exactly does the sex drudge, recalcitrant domestic, broken mother, or sullen wet-nurse fit into the scheme of the general strike? If the general strike is a placeholder for political aspirations that Du Bois struggles to name, how does the character of the slave female's refusal augment the text of black radicalism? Is it at all possible to imagine her as the paradigmatic slave or as the representative black worker?

Reproductive labor, as scholars Hortense Spillers, Jennifer Morgan, Dorothy Roberts, Alyss Weinbaum, and Neferti Tadiar note, is central to thinking about the gendered afterlife of slavery and global capitalism.[4] Yet attending to the status of black women's labors has confounded our conceptual categories and thrown our critical lexicon into crisis. On the slave ship, captive women were accounted for as quantities of greater and lesser mass, and the language of units and complete cargo eclipsed that of the subject, the person or individual. The "anomalous intimacy of cargo," according to Stephanie Smallwood, represented a new social formation. Those African persons in Middle Passage, writes Spillers, were "literally suspended in the oceanic." They were "culturally unmade." "Under these conditions one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into account as quantities." [5] For Spillers, the categories of flesh and body are deployed to describe the mutilation, dismemberment, and exile of captivity and enslavement. Flesh provides the primary narrative rather than gendered subject positions. The flesh is produced by the violence of racial slavery and yet it brings into view a new mode of relation.

On the plantation, black women were required to toil as hard as men, and in this way "ungendered," according to Spillers, by which she means that "female and male adhere to no symbolic integrity." *Partus sequitur ventrem* negated kinship and denied it any "legal or social efficacy." The condition of the mother marked her offspring and was "forever entailed on her remotest posterity." We carry the mother's mark and it continues to define our condition and our present.

The role of gender and sexual differentiation in the constitution of labor is especially complex in the context of slavery. On one hand, the category of labor insufficiently accounts for slavery as a mode of power, domination and production. The fungibility of the slave, the wanton uses of the black body for producing value or pleasure, and the shared vulnerabilities of the commodity, whether male or female, trouble dominant accounts of gender. Depending on the angle of vision or critical lexicon, the harnessing of the body as an instrument for social and physical reproduction unmakes the slave as gendered subject or reveals the primacy of gender and sexual differentiation in the making of the slave. Natal alienation is one of the central attributes of the social death of the slave and gendered and sexual violence are central to the processes that render the black child as by-product of the relations of production.[6] At the same time, the lines of division between the market and the household which distinguished the public and the domestic and divided productive and reproductive labor for propertied whites does not hold when describing the enslaved and the carceral landscape of plantation. Reproduction is tethered to the making of human commodities and in service of the marketplace. For the enslaved, reproduction does not ensure any future other than that of dispossession nor guarantee anything other than the replication of racialized and disposable persons or "human increase" (expanded property-holdings) for the master. The future of the enslaved was a form of speculative value for slaveholders. Even the unborn were conscripted and condemned to slavery.

"Kinship loses meaning," according to Spillers, "since at any moment it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by property relations." Extending and revising this line of argument, Morgan notes the importance of maternity and reproduction in the evolution of the legal codification of slavery. "Women's bodies became the definitional sites of racial slavery." In North America, the future of slavery depended upon black women's repro-

1 — See Eduoard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 6, 75; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). *Laboring Women* was one of the first historical monographs devoted to examining enslaved women's sexuality and reproductive lives and the centrality of reproduction to the social and legal machinery of colonial slavery.

2 — W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880* (1935; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1992), 13, 44, 39, 67.

3 — Angela Davis, "Reflections on Black Women's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Black Scholar* 13 no. 4 (1971): 2–15; Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14 no. 4 (1989): 912–20; Darlene Clark Hine, "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 3 no. 2 (1979): 123–27.

4 — Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in her *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 203–29; Morgan, *Laboring Women*; Alys Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Alys Weinbaum, "Gendering the General Strike: W.E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and Black Feminism's 'Propaganda of History'," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112 no. 3 (2013): 437–63; Neferti Tadiar, *Things Fall Away* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Neferti Tadiar, "Life-Times of Disposability within Global Neoliberalism," *Social Text* 31 no. 2 (2013): 19–48.

5 — Stephanie Smallwood, Saltwater *Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Spillers, Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 215. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley describes this anomalous intimacy in terms of a queer Atlantic in "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic," *GLQ* 14 nos. 2–3 (191–215): 191–215. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten describe the experience of the shipped as "hapticality in the hold" in *The Undercommons* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013).

6 — Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death.*

ductive capacity as it did on the slave market. The reproduction of human property and the social relations of racial slavery were predicated upon the belly. Plainly put, subjection was anchored in black women's reproductive capacities. The captive female body, according to Spillers, "locates precisely a moment of converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange." [7]

Forced to labor for the "satisfaction of the immediate needs" of their owners and overseers, however, those needs were defined, the captive female body was subjected to innumerable uses. It could be converted into cash, speculated and traded as commodity, worked to death, taken, tortured, seeded, and propagated like any other crop, or murdered. The value produced by and extracted from enslaved women included productive labor — their labors as farm workers, cotton pickers, tobacco hands, and rice cultivators — and their reproductive capacities created "future increase" for farms and plantations and human commodities for markets, yoking the prospect of racial slavery to their bodies. Even the unborn figured into the reproductive calculus of the institution. The work of sex and procreation was the chief motor for reproducing the material, social, and symbolic relations of slavery. The value accrued through reproductive labor was brutally apparent to the enslaved who protested bitterly against being bred like cattle and oxen. This reproductive labor not only guaranteed slavery as an institutional process and secured the status of the enslaved, but it inaugurated a regime of racialized sexuality that continues to place black bodies at risk for sexual exploitation and abuse, gratuitous violence, incarceration, poverty, premature death, and state-sanctioned murder.

The sexuality and reproductive capacities of enslaved women were central to understanding the expanding legal conception of slavery and its inheritability. Slavery conscripted the womb, deciding the fate of the unborn and reproducing slave property by making the mark of the mother a death sentence for her child. The negation or disfigurement of maternity, writes Christina Sharpe, "turns the womb into a factory reproducing blackness as abjection and turning the birth canal into another domestic middle passage." [8] *Partus sequitur ventrem* — replicates the fate of the slave across generations. The belly is made a factory of production incommensurate with notions of the maternal, the conjugal or the domestic. In short, the slave exists out of the world and outside the house.

Labor remained a category central to the fashioning of gender and sexuality in the context of slavery's aftermath. In *The Negro American Family*, Du Bois writes that the slave ship and the plantation revolutionized the black family primarily by destroying kinship and negating conjugal relations. Invariably the remedy proposed for this wounded kinship converged on the figure of the (restored) husband–father as the primary breadwinner. The problem of black women's labor made apparent the gender non-conformity of the black community, its supple and extended modes of kinship, its queer domesticity, promiscuous sociality and loose intimacy, and its serial and fluid conjugal relations.

The "lax moral relations, promiscuity, easy marriage and easy separation," which Du Bois identified as the consequences of slavery, continued in the aftermath of emancipation, extending the plantation to the city. "Plantations holdovers," to his dismay, shaped life in the emergent ghettoes of northern cities. The ghetto became the third matrix of black death and dispossession, after the slave ship and the plantation, and anticipating the prison.[9] The urban enclosure produced another revolution of black intimate life, another rupture in the social history of the Negro.[10] Mothers and wives and daughters were forced into unskilled and low-paid work, with the overwhelming majority confined to labor as domestics. Black women served as the primary breadwinners in households that bore no resemblance to the patriarchal nuclear family. These black laboring women troubled gender conventions by being "outfitted like men," as was the case with their enslaved mothers and grandmothers. The independence granted by wages, even low wages, made them less willing to marry or live with men unable to provide and granted them a degree of sexual autonomy that made Du Bois shudder. He longed for a future where the "betrayed girl mothers of the Black Belt," while retaining their economic independence, would be transformed into virtuous wives and married mothers.

The continuities between slavery and freedom were underwritten by black women's domestic labor. Their "success or frustrations in influencing the character of domestic labor," writes Tera Hunter, "would define how meaningful freedom would be." [11] Slave women working as domestic laborers in white households experienced forms of violence and sexual exploitation that troubled simple distinctions between the privileges of the house and the brutalities of the field. Nowhere was the heterogeneity or discontinuity or instability of the category gender more apparent than in the plantation household. No uniform or shared category of gender included the mistress and the enslaved. The white household, as Thavolia Gylmph documents in *Out of the House of Bondage*, was a space of violence and brutality for the black women forced to serve as housekeepers, caretakers, nannies, and wet-nurses. The domestic space, as much as the field, defined their experience of enslavement and the particular vulnerabilities of the captive body; and it continued to define the very narrow horizon and limited opportunities available to black women in the first decades of the 20th century.

Black women regularly complained about being forced to labor as domestics. Domestic work carried the taint of slavery. While Black women's physical and affective labors were central to the reproduction and security of the white household, their own lives and families remained at risk. As free workers in the North and South, black women continued to labor as poorly paid workers in white households, tended and cared for white families, endured the exhaustion and the boredom part and parcel of caring for children, cooking, cleaning, and servicing the lives of others.

In northern cities like Philadelphia and New York, the overwhelming majority of black women were confined to domestic and service labor. Besides the arduous toil that characterized this work, black women experienced great isolation and were vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation by the men of the household. While social reformers and Progressive intellectuals encouraged domestic work as a form of moral tutelage and training, black women knew first-hand that they were safer in the streets and the tenements of the ghetto than in white homes. Domestic work subjected them to forms of intimate violence as well as exploitation as low-wage workers.

The systematic violence needed to conscript black women's domestic labor after slavery required locking them out of all other sectors of the labor market, a condition William Patterson described as economic genocide. Race riots, the enclosure of the ghetto, the vertical order of human life, and the forms of value and debt promulgated through emergent forms of racism, what Sarah Haley terms "Jim Crow modernity," made it impossible for black women to escape the white household.

As domestic workers, black women were conscripted to a role that required them to care for and replenish the needs of the white household, and tend to the daily activities necessary for its maintenance. They were forced to perform the affective and communicative labor necessary for the sustenance of white families at the expense of their own; as surrogates, they were required to mother children who held their children in contempt; to cook, clean, and comfort white men enabling them to go out into the world as productive laborers; and submit to intimate relations with husbands and sons and brothers or be raped by them — you cannot choose what you cannot refuse. In this labor of service to the white household, the domestic worker struggled to enable the survival of her own.

Her lover, her spouse, and her kin depend on this labor for their subsistence, as does her community. As a consequence, she comes to enjoy a position that is revered and reviled, essential to the endurance of black social life and, at the same time, blamed for its destruction. The care extracted from her to tend the white household is taken at the cost of her own. She is the best nanny and the worst mother. Yet this labor remains marginal or neglected in the narratives of black insurgency, resistance, and refusal.

Where does the *impossible domestic* fit into the general strike?[12] What is the text of her insurgency and the genre of her refusal? What visions of the future world encourage her to run, or propel her flight? Or is she, as Spillers observes, a subject still awaiting her verb? Strategies of endurance and subsistence do not yield easily to the grand narrative of revolution, nor has a space been cleared for the sex worker, welfare mother, and domestic laborer in the annals of the black radical tradition.[13] Perhaps understandable, even if unacceptable, when the costs of enduring are so great. Mere survival is an achievement

7 — Jennifer Morgan, "Partus Sequitur Ventrem: Slave Law and the History of Women in Slavery," A Workshop with Jennifer Morgan (Irvine: University of California, Irvine, 2014); Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 75.

8 — Christina Sharpe, "In the Wake," *The Black Scholar* 44 no. 2 (2014): 59–69.

9 — Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 73. Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17 no. 3 (2013): 1–15.

10 — W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899; reprint, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1989).

11 — Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

12 — Fred Moten, "Uplift and Criminality," in *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality and W. E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Alys Weinbaum and Susan Gilman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 317–49.

13 — Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1998); Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Welfare* (New York: Basic Civitas Book, 2003); Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means," in *Race-ing Justice, Engendering Power*, ed. Toni Morrison and Leon Higginbotham (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 323–63; Fred Moten, "The Subprime and the Beautiful," *African Identities*, 11 no. 2 (2013): 237–45.

in a context so brutal. If we intend to do more than make the recalcitrant domestic, the outcast, and insurrectionist a figure for our revolutionary longing, or impose yet another burden on black female flesh by making it "a placeholder for freedom,"[14] then we must never lose sight of the material conditions of her existence or how much she has been required to give for our survival.

Those of us who have been "touched by the mother" need to acknowledge that her ability to provide care, food, and refuge often has placed her in great jeopardy and, above all, required her to give with no expectation of reciprocity or return. *All we have is what she holds in her outstretched hands.*[15] There is no getting around this. Yet, her freedom struggle remains opaque, untranslatable into the lexicon of the political. She provides so much, yet rarely does she thrive. It seems that her role has been fixed and that her role is as a provider of care, which is the very mode of her exploitation and indifferent use by the world, a world blind to her gifts, her intellect, her talents. This brilliant and formidable labor of care, paradoxically, has been produced through violent structures of slavery, anti-black racism, virulent sexism, and disposability.[16] The forms of care, intimacy, and sustenance exploited by racial capitalism, most importantly, are not reducible to or exhausted by it. These labors cannot be assimilated to the template or grid of the black worker, but instead nourish the latent text of the fugitive. They enable those "who were never meant to survive" to sometimes do just that. This care, which is coerced and freely given, is the black heart of our social poesis, of making and relation.

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14 — Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4, 15.
15 — This is a restatement with a difference of Fred Moten: "All that we have (and are) is what we hold in our outstretched hands."
16 — Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 136.

BIOGRAPHY
BIOGRAPHIE

Born in 1961 in Sao Paulo (Brasil). Lives and works between Naples (Italy) and Berlin (Germany).

Maria Thereza Alves' artistic trajectory is inseparable from her political activism, be it in favour of ecology, the rights of indigenous minorities or territorial and decolonising struggles.

Maria Thereza Alves does not favour any particular medium, although her work often takes the form of prolific installations mixing natural and manufactured objects, videos, texts, drawings and photographs. These installations, like real investigations, reconstruct the artist's explorations and actions on a given territory. In the same way, its field of research and commitment is free of geographical boundaries, whether it invests in the urban environment (New York, Manchester) or natural spaces. In 1992, on the occasion of the commemorations of Christopher Columbus' arrival in America, she presented, with Jimmie Durham and Alan Michaelson, the performance Veracruz / Virginia, in Monterrey, London and Madrid. The three artists wear metal helmets that prevent them from speaking, symbolizing the muzzled speech of the colonized peoples. The *Seeds of Change* project, begun in 1999, this time articulates the issues of colonization, slavery and ecology. Seeds brought back to Europe by merchant ships are exhumed and then replanted in the heart of large western cities on floating platforms. The circulation of beings, be they human or vegetable, allows Alves to draw up a paradoxical history of globalization, between uprooting, abandonment and resistance, in the manner of those garments washed up on the shores of Senegal in *Time, Trade and Surplus Value* (2004), which take human form again.

In 2017, she has been awarded by the Vera List Prize.

Selected exhibitions include solo shows at IAC - Institut d'Art Contemporain (Villeurbanne), High Line (New York), Parsons - The New School of Design (New York), CAAC - Centre Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (Seville), Musée d'Histoire de Nantes - Château des Ducs de Bretagne, Serpentine Gallery (London), Crac Alsace, Jewish Museum (Berlin), (d)OCUMENTA 13 (Kassel), Manifesta 7 (Trento), 3rd Guangzhou Triennial, 29th Sao Paulo Biennial.

Her work is part of prestigious collections as Migros Museum, Centre National des Arts Plastiques (Paris), National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Heather & Anthony Podesta (Washington D.C.), BPS22 - Collection de la Province de Hainaut (Charleroy).

Née en 1961 à São Paulo (Brésil). Vit et travaille entre Naples (Italie) et Berlin (Allemagne).

La trajectoire artistique de Maria Thereza Alves est indissociable de son activisme politique, que ce soit en faveur de l'écologie, des droits des minorités indigènes ou des luttes territoriales et décolonisatrices.

Maria Thereza Alves ne privilégie aucun médium en particulier, bien que son travail se présente souvent sous la forme d'installations foisonnantes mêlant objets naturels et fabriqués, vidéos, textes, dessins et photographies. Ces installations, telles de véritables enquêtes, restituent les explorations et actions de l'artiste sur un territoire donné. De la même manière, son champ de recherches et d'engagements est affranchi des frontières géographiques, qu'elle investisse le milieu urbain (New York, Manchester) ou des espaces naturels. En 1992 à l'occasion des commémorations de l'arrivée de Christophe Colomb en Amérique, elle présente, avec Jimmie Durham et Alan Michaelson, la performance Veracruz / Virginia, à Monterrey, à Londres et à Madrid. Les trois artistes portent des casques métalliques qui les empêchent de parler, symbolisant ainsi la parole muselée des peuples colonisés. Le projet *Seeds of Change*, débuté en 1999, articule cette fois les problématiques de la colonisation, de l'esclavage et de l'écologie. Des graines rapportées en Europe par les navires marchands sont exhumées puis replantées au coeur de grandes villes occidentales sur des plates-formes flottantes. La circulation des êtres, qu'ils soient humains ou végétaux, permet à Alves de dresser une histoire paradoxale de la mondialisation, entre arrachement, abandon et résistance, à la manière de ces vêtement échoués sur les rivages du Sénégal dans *Time, Trade and Surplus Value* (2004), qui reprennent forme humaine.

En 2017, elle fut récompensée par le prix Vera List.

Le travail de Maria Thereza Alves a notamment été exposé au IAC - Institut d'Art Contemporain (Villeurbanne), High Line (New York), Parsons - The New School of Design (New York), CAAC - Centre Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (Seville), Musée d'Histoire de Nantes - Château des Ducs de Bretagne, Serpentine Gallery (London), Crac Alsace, Jewish Museum (Berlin), (d)OCUMENTA 13 (Kassel), Manifesta 7 (Trento), 3rd Guangzhou Triennial, 29th Sao Paulo Biennial.

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