

For the final chapter of the NATURECULTURES year-programma at RADIUS, artists Diana Al-Halabi and Hilda Moucharrafiéh collaborate in an exhibition that explores the intricate relationship between the political manipulation of food resources with famine, displacement, migration, and ecological devastation. In *THE POLITICS OF THE ARMED LIFEBOAT*, the artists situate Europe's international relations with the Global South as the armed lifeboat, whereby the availability, distribution, and control of food become tools of subjugation of nations and populations by means of crisis, scarcity, and catastrophes. How much is this eurocentric armed lifeboat interested in the ethics of humanitarianism, and to what extent is our moral compass threatened by a globalised free market? What role do international aid and humanitarian efforts have in creating food insecurity and dependency, and how are these practices connected to a (neo) colonial mentality?

In 2023, more than 345 million people are facing high levels of food insecurity, according to the World Food Program report. Climate change, wars, and economic inflation can all be direct preconditions of famine. However, famine has also been historically used as an excuse for colonial, neo-colonial, and capitalist transformations to take place. Departing from food as one of the most common human experiences, Diana Al-Halabi and Hilda Moucharrafiéh navigate the oppression of peoples through famine, whilst holding a critique of neo-colonial and capitalist practices that are sailing populations towards imminent global food insecurities.

The exhibition is scored with a soundscape by Diane Mahín, presenting sounds of the human digestive system. Abdominal sounds have been part of her work for various reasons, but mainly due to their relationship to life and death. In a living human body, putrefying bacteria break down excessive proteins in the intestines. After death, these same bacteria break down the lifeless human body. While putrefaction is only one of the many processes of digestion, it evokes questions about similarities between the sonic reality of decomposition and digestion.

Note from the artists:

While we were preparing for this exhibition, we caught ourselves witnessing the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. The works in this exhibition have the taste of our attention dictated by the news we receive from our loved ones in Gaza. This is an interrupted exhibition, like every focus in the world must be interrupted because colonialism did not end. We stand by Palestine, and we call for you to learn its history under settler colonialism from 1948 up until our day.

Diana Al-Halabi

*Record on the first page
I do not hate people
nor do I encroach,
but if I become hungry
I will feast on the usurper's flesh
Beware!
Beware my hunger
and my anger!*

Excerpt from *Record, I am an Arab!* — Mahmoud Darwish

When thinking of food, one often thinks about appetite, a certain degree of physiological hunger, kitchens, and choices of food that is affordable to eat. In summation, a constellation of the psychological, the physiological, and the economic. However, is the political considered to be a part of this constellation?

Can we consider and look at food, beyond the reductional and narrow bandwidth of the biological, towards a macro image of the political use of food, so as to arrive at the notion of political hunger, its preconditions, and its aftermaths? How can food be weaponised against people, to subordinate them or ethnically cleanse them? How can famine inflicted by war, neo-colonial sanctions, or caused by climate change be a precondition to migration and thus affect its policy in Europe? In my approach to the topic of political hunger, I have been working on the juxtaposition between famine and hunger strikes: one informed by states that subordinate people in a top-down manner (famine), and another that uses hunger individually or collectively, but as a bottom-up resistance to fight for a right (hunger strikes).

In previous exhibitions, I used the concept of aprons made of mulberry fruit leather to speak about the question of preservation, food security, the domestic, the public, and the political. Who can preserve food beyond its inherent season? Why preserve food? Is preservation a result of a surplus, or a fear-taming method of protection? In this exhibition, aprons—a domestic element used for protection against accidental stains—mirror kinds of protection that surpass the domestic. What shapes does protection take when adopted by states and its apparatuses? Is it by creating borders, migration policies, systematic violence, counterinsurgency techniques, and ballistic shields?

This exhibition departs from these concepts and intersectionally relates the personal and the digestive to geo- and necropolitics.

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Schemes of isolating people—such as blockades, economic sanctions, border control, and apartheid—inform the very idea of isolating one person in a safe space, and the other person in a precarious one, marking it as a dangerous place. It is to elevate and gravitate one person into the center of the world, and the other into the periphery.

In that, creating a “homeland” mirrors how life is perceived inside a home. A homeland is a land that needs to be marked as home, as a shelter, yet only for family members, whilst everyone else is defined as a guest. In fortress Europe and the ongoing propagation of its colonial artefacts such as the Israeli settler colonial state—a living example of the colonial past and its atrocities—I would rather call this isolation scheme an “insulation” scheme, from which this exhibition takes its inspiration. According to the website *Etymonline*, the etymology of the word “insulate” is “the blocking from electricity or heat, state or action of being detached from others”. The literal meaning is the “act of making (land) into an island”; that of “a state of being an island.”

Isolation and insulation work as two parallels, where the existence of one, by default, means the implication of the other. To isolate a nation is to build a wall around it, be it a physical wall, or be it by cutting electricity, water, internet, aid, or any economic exchange. We see this evident in Gaza, where the strip has been under siege for the last sixteen years, and the Israeli settler colonial apartheid has been calculating the calories and liters of water that are allowed to enter. In October 2023, this siege, which has been described as “collective punishment”, turned into a whole-scale war, whereby having the upper hand to cut water on two million people is accompanied by internet blackouts to dim the ethnic cleansing happening.

To that end, when we speak of apartheid, it is vital to remember that insulation takes place when the extraction is manipulated and incorporated inside the aforementioned “home.” A reflective glass is then necessary to make unclear what has been extracted and hidden behind walls and to enter a process of gaslighting and victim-blaming those who come to ask for their stolen rights.

This exhibition is about who owns the means of power, and how the domestic is a model for fascist politics to take control of the bodily, the visceral, and the digestive system of the people, and use it as a means of subordination.

No-one is safe except those who know how to navigate the hell they created. Those who do not live in bunkers but own them, those who know how to keep their emergency-alert sirens in check. Reminding their people that the danger is not only a tale of the past but also lives in the present, even if imaginary, and in the near future, even though as a possibility. Those for whom the machine that creates sanctions, arms, and the graphs for a free economy, is the machine that protects them from those who are crawling to their shores.

“To protect” oneself against the other—a canon used in rightwing fascist discourse—is to work towards a condition of being unaffected by, and indifferent to the political climate. Oftentimes, the term “protecting oneself” is mentioned, and the term “defending oneself” is delusionally adopted. “To protect” is to assess the foreseen dangers and take preventive measures, but to defend oneself surely should mean that an attack has already happened and it is time to defend oneself. In both cases, the entity of danger is often imaginary, created to imply fear of that which is the other, and in better words, it is a method of prioritising one life over the other. A tool that allows a cold war to be inherited from one generation to the other. A method of regenerating a sense of superiority bound with fear to keep a position of power.

In the state of siege, time becomes space

Transfixed in its eternit

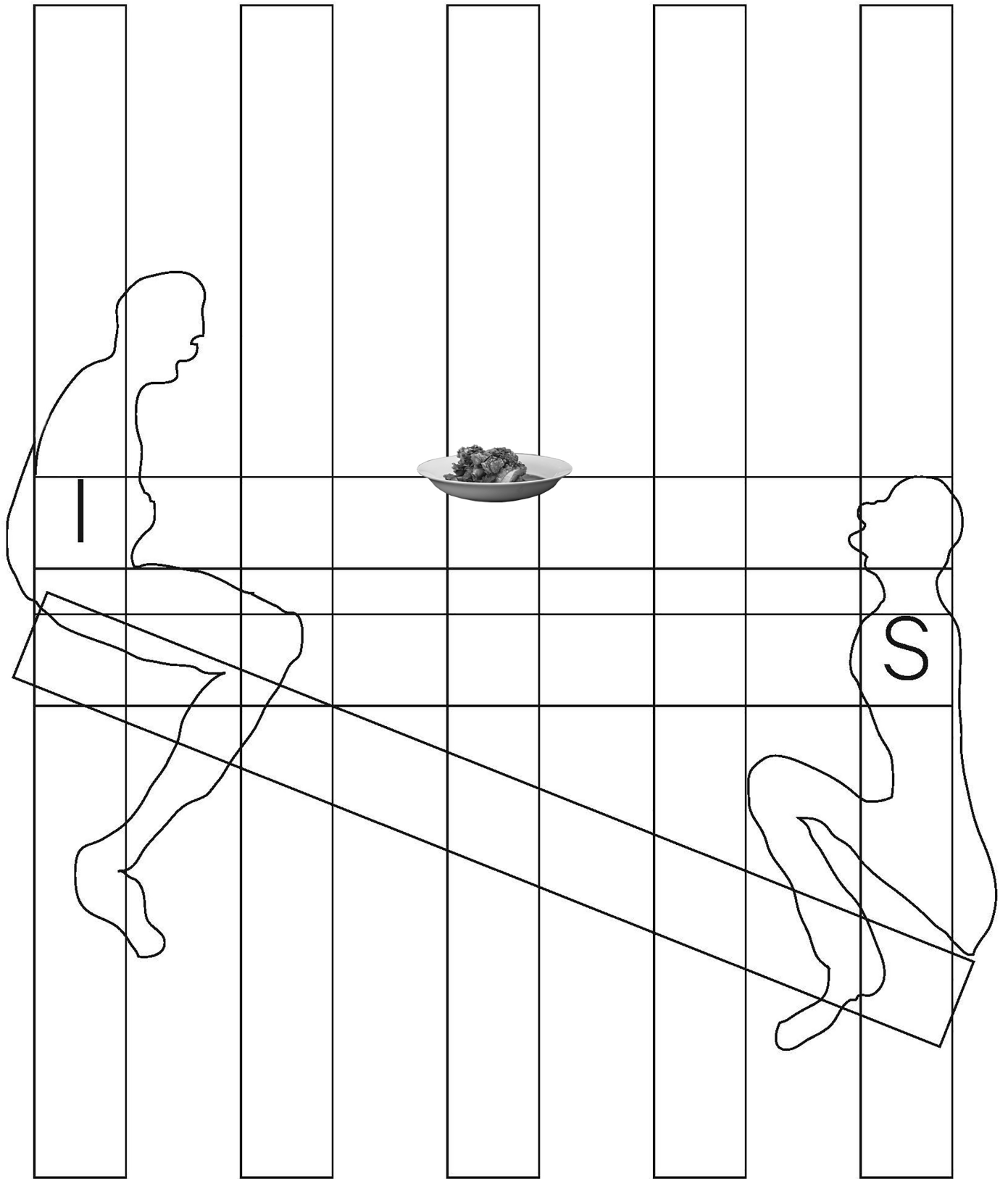
In the state of siege, space becomes time

That has missed its yesterday and its tomorrow.

Excerpt from *Gaza's Siege* — Mahmoud Darwish

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Hilda Moucharrafiéh

أنا أسف يا أمي لأن السفينة غرقت بنا ولم أستطع الوصول إلى هناك.
شكراً لك أيها البحر الذي استقبلتنا بدون فيزا ولا جواز سفر.
شكراً لقنوات الأخبار التي ستتناقل خبر موتنا لمدة خمس دقائق كل ساعة لمدة يومين.
شكراً لكم لأنكم ستحزنون علينا عندما سستمعون الخبر.
اطمئني يا دائرة اللجوء فأنا لن أكون حملاً ثقيلاً عليك.
أنا أسف لأنني غرقت.

*I am sorry mother, the ship sank and I could not make it to the other side.
Thank you dear sea for receiving us without a visa or passport.
Thanks to the news channels that will report our deaths for five minutes every
hour for two days.
Thank you for feeling sad about us upon hearing the news.
Rest assured Asylum Department, for I will not be a heavy burden on you.
I am sorry that I drowned.*

As the above words made their way towards my attention, the writer's body had already withered away on land. This letter is said to have been found in his pocket as they pulled him towards land at the coast of Greece. Written in Arabic, we sense that he must have written this letter as he realized that the boat was going to sink. He wrote it from the moment after his death, and a grief in the present, filled with awareness at what got him in this situation.

Washing up on the European coastlines, are the bodies of those who fled from wars and economic crises, which cannot be seen independently from the political history and the neocolonial legacies of the North-South power dynamic.

"We are here because you were there," says Hayat in response to every person questioning her reasons for migrating to Europe, borrowing the words of Ian Patel. Since the colonialists physically withdrew from their colonies, several measures were put into place to ensure that the oppressed would not be able to easily attack the oppressor, or claim back their stolen goods. This is a simple gameplay that I am sure both you and I know about from childhood. Was there this kid in your neighborhood who threw little stones at the neighbor's window, then went running back to their house, shut the door tightly, and proceeded to change the game rules and assisting excuses to cover up the act, and slip away as the smart one who managed to stay free from holding any charge?



The map of the world created by the Muslim-Arab cartographer Al-Idrīsī in 1154.

The above map is drawn by and featured in Al-Idrīsī's legendary book, the *Kitābnuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*, which directly translates to the *Book of the Journey for He Who Longs to penetrate the Horizons*. In his book, Al-Idrīsī chronicles his journeys, combining Greek and Arab knowledge with first-hand observations and reports by travellers to produce the work, spanning over fifteen years. The maps are oriented with the North at the bottom, and the West to the right, not an uncommon practice with cartographers during those times. For long, all perspectives for perceiving the globe's geography and its inhabitants were viable. Nowadays, we take for

granted terms such as the Middle East, without questioning, east of whom, and middle of what? The text in the mentioned book of Al-Idrīsī was at no point busy with ethnicities or religious differences of the people he met along his journeys. As he moved from one place to another, he described the socioeconomic, physical, cultural, and political conditions of each region. Understanding that observation is always subjective, he did not shy away from allowing his poetic gaze to be informed and attracted to superstitions and fantastical tales.

“One striking tale is that of the Sea of Herkend, which today is known as the Bay of Bengal. The Sea of Herkend is not referenced in the map but it is very important in the text of the *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq fi ikhtirāq al-āfāq*. According to Al-Idrīsī, the Sea of Herkend was said to contain many mysteries as well as fish in a multitude of different colours. There was apparently a type of fish “hundred arms” in length and white in colour. This fish was called Al-Waly (الوالي) meaning “the Ruler” and it was always followed by a smaller kind of fish – a Lashnak (لشنة). The story goes that if Al-Waly went wild and started attacking other fish in the sea, the Lashnak would stick to its ear until the Al-Waly was dead.”¹

In our contemporary time, what would happen if we flip the Map, how would it impact our reconsideration of the world? What would happen to the gaze of the Global North to the Global South, which has been translated from a sought-after reality, to the Map, to a hegemonic reality? A reality where the Global North establishes itself in a dominant relation to the Global South, in verticality, in hierarchy, having the upper hand, in control of, and looking down upon.

Flipping the map is not about a reverse of that dominance, but rather a challenge to the normalization of that established perspective. It is a flipping of the hour glass, in order to investigate all what has been accumulated due to that unquestioned normalization. Al-Idrīsī’s poetic descriptions of the land offered a look at a map with poetic potentials rendered peculiar at our times, devoid of artificial separation lines. Whereas our standardized map of today constitutes lines as political and militarized borders drawn by the imperial colonialists. Finalized in the mid 20th-century, the lines did not only cut through their lands, but also divided their war-gained trophies to different dominions of power. An example here is the Sykes-Picot secret agreement of the United Kingdom and France in 1916 cutting through the organic cultural and historical relations between peoples of the so-called Middle East region.

The political system has dictated and co-opted within it all other possibilities of existence. Whereas the poetics within the cartographic labor of Al-Idrīsī wove the mundane, the biological, the cultural, and the political as a whole. Having common tales that constituted the region were the base upon which provisional delineations were made. While in our day, delineations are bound strictly to the political and the military covetousness, rendering such a map of Al-Idrīsī a detained artefact of symbolic poetry that is locked in history without any consequence towards a future.

The efforts of mapping the world have thus been cleansed from their cultural aspirations and reduced to a political tool, rendering our bodies merely a political being, with strings attached to bureaucracy, visa regimes, taxation, state surveillance, and any other subjugation from above ruling powers.

The hegemonic political power in the hands of the ruling supreme became the rule penetrating and dictating our mundane realities. Our bodies dispossessed of their unbound potentialities, are at once locked within frames of classification deeming their valuation. Accordingly, the North-dominance, and by now its disembodied enacting tentacles, dictates the worthiness of life, what is deemed valuable, and what is sacrificial for its own protection and growth. Becoming itself the Al-Waly fish (as described by Al-Idrīsī) which rules the seas, while the Lashnak small fishes are hanging to its ears until its imminent death.

YEAR PROGRAM NATURECULTURES

In 2023, RADIUS will present seven exhibitions, including three solo presentations and four group exhibitions, with a coinciding public and educational program. The year program takes shape on the basis of naturecultures, a term that refers to the increasing entanglement between nature and culture, enforced by climate change and ecological breakdown.

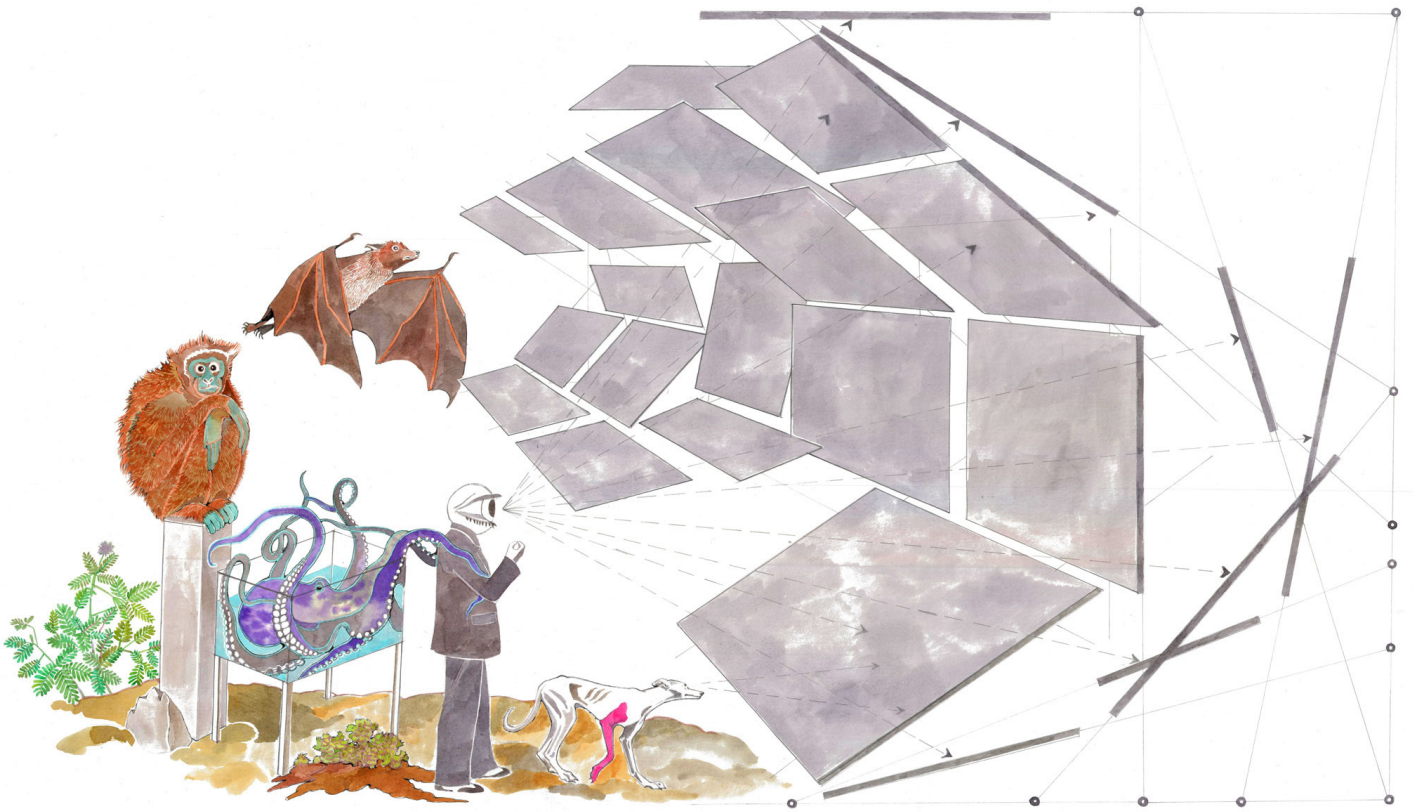
AT RADIUS IN 2023

We start the year with the group exhibition *THE MEASURE OF THE WORLD*, revolving around the ghosts of Western Enlightenment thinking and the relationship between science, truth-finding and the consequential creation of world views. With the work of fifteen artists, the exhibition stands as the starting point for the year program and presents a first counterpoint to the current crises that bear witness to the perverse reality of modernism. For primary school students, we present *ONDIERPLeZIER*: a workshop that pays tribute to weeds and pests and wonders: shouldn't we appreciate these "invasive species" instead of seeing them as a threat?

The following group exhibition *THE GLASS CITY* zooms in on the Westland—the largest contiguous agricultural greenhouse complex in the world, located between Hoek van Holland, Delft and The Hague—with the question: how can monocultural agriculture, often focussed on profit maximization, be reconsidered to more reciprocal, sustainable and fair systems of food as a common good? At the same time we present a solo exhibition by OSCAR SANTILLAN, which centers around the continuity between colonial botany and the contemporary destruction of our planet. How can indigenous knowledge and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality contribute to more reciprocal modes of existence?

As part of the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Year—the Delft cloth merchant Antoni van Leeuwenhoek became renowned with his microscopes and is regarded as the founder of microbiology—we present the group exhibition *RADICAL SYMBIOSIS: SOCIAL LIFE WITH MICROBES*, curated by guest curators Àngels Miralda Tena and Mateo Chacón Pino. The exhibition takes the form of a petri dish, in which artists experiment with and present work on the basis of bacterial and microbial worlds, as an endless conversation between people and the living environment. In SISSEL MARIE TONN's solo exhibition, the audience encounters three bog bodies, who collectively hum, murmur and converse with each other about their transcendental experience of becoming-with the bog. In the educational workshop *MIJN MICROBEN EN IK*, for secondary school students and adults, the microscope becomes the central medium, as a means to link awareness about micro life to the pandemic and the ways in which humans treat the Earth and its natural resources.

The year program concludes with the group exhibition *THE POLITICS OF THE ARMED LIFEBOAT*, which examines the differences between climate politics and the current political climate. Subsequently, we present JUNGHUN KIM's solo exhibition, for which RADIUS will be transformed into a biotope in which geological meditation and entanglement beyond the exclusively human-oriented are central.



Overview drawing of the *NATURECULTURES* year program by Lisa Rampilli.

*There is no border where evolution ends and history begins, where genes stop and environment takes up, where culture rules and nature submits, or vice versa. Instead, there are turtles upon turtles of naturecultures all the way down. Every being that matters is a congeries of its formative histories—all of them—even as any genome worth the salt to precipitate it is a convention of all the infectious events cobbled together into the provisional, permanently emerging things Westerners call individuals, but Melanesians, perhaps more presciently, call dividuals.—Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 2004.*

The term naturecultures originates from the feminist scientist Donna Haraway. She introduced the concept to describe the intertwined histories of a multitude of life forms on Earth, to reveal new ways of thinking about agency and power, difference and sociality, forms of existence and knowledge. Naturecultures is a term that arises from the scientific questioning of binaries—including, for example, human/animal, object/subject, and nature/culture—that are deeply rooted in the intellectual traditions of the sciences. The pronounced boundaries and divisions produced within and between scientific fields have led to the separation of humanity and nature, sometimes to the point of exempting humans from fundamental physical properties and laws of nature. The term naturecultures has no clear definition. Rather, it is a vibrant and unruly spectrum of transdisciplinary approaches united by a common argument: approaching and maintaining worlds that are more than human requires a change in the methods and tools with which we study those worlds. In other words, to remove the boundary between nature and culture, a radical mixing of disciplines including art, design, architecture and science is necessary. In this sense, naturecultures is a synthesis of nature and culture that recognizes their inseparability through ecological relationships that are formed biologically, physically and socially.

The thinking in binaries and divisions that emerged from Western Enlightenment thinking has failed, although its consequences are no less real and dualisms have (had) real consequences. The cultural field that deals with the Anthropocene—the current human-dominated epoch—oftentimes considers this as a new revelation, that while anthropologists and scientists have been challenging the contradiction between nature and culture for decades. This contradiction, they argue, is the basis for a dangerous belief in human exceptionalism, the root of both progress (for a few) and catastrophe (for the rest). Yet thinking in binaries in the cultural sector—between nature/culture, object/subject, human/non-human, organic/inorganic, natural/synthetic—is still the rule rather than the exception. But challenging contradictions alone is not enough! To understand the violent consequences of thinking in terms of exclusion mechanisms, we must divide history through new prisms, perspectives and points of

view. We need to develop a counterpoint to the centripetal force of the dominant narrative of the Anthropocene—which centres on a particular type of human—by telling centrifugal narratives that recognise the vast inequalities generated by the various forces changing our planet.

Artists have always sought new ways to experience, represent and interact with 'nature'. Although the addition of quotation marks in the previous sentence shows how dramatically the perspectives on nature have changed in recent decades, and how much this has changed the way we talk about 'culture'. If we just think about the way in which 'nature' has re-entered 'human' history and 'culture' through climate change, we have to agree that there is a hybrid world. If the way we imagine the world changes, how should this be reflected in the way we create and interpret art?

In 2023, RADIUS looks at the deep dividing line we have drawn between ourselves and our living environment and asks: what makes this pattern so persistent? How can we use imagination to move from a human-centred vacuum to a world continuum of naturecultures? How can we learn to recognise the magnitude of the current climate regime without succumbing to despair? How can we transcend anthropocentrism in the Anthropocene and remove the human from the center of humanity? How can we reshape the canons that define how the world should be seen and what is considered important in it? How can we endorse what we mean when we say "we"? How do you move from dominant ways of seeing to ways of experiencing the world that makes use of the entire sensorium and rejects a one-sided perspective? How can a center for art, ecology and climate be more than a fashionable phenomenon and be embedded in everyday life? How can responsibility for the living environment—more than a rhetorical, symbolic commitment—be compatible with the impact of an art institution on that same environment?

As the recently deceased philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour put it, "we have never been modern." Yet we will have to keep finding new ways to learn to live in the ruins of modernism and capitalism that surround all of us; we need to "stay with the trouble," as feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway suggests. At RADIUS we take this assignment to heart and with the *NATURECULTURES* year program in 2023 we will look for the possibilities of a more earthly Earth.



NATURECULTURES Chapter 4
Diana Al-Halabi & Hilda Moucharra eh
THE POLITICS OF THE ARMED LIFEBOAT
2 December 2023 – 11 February 2024

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