Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance

La Biennale di Venezia

59. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

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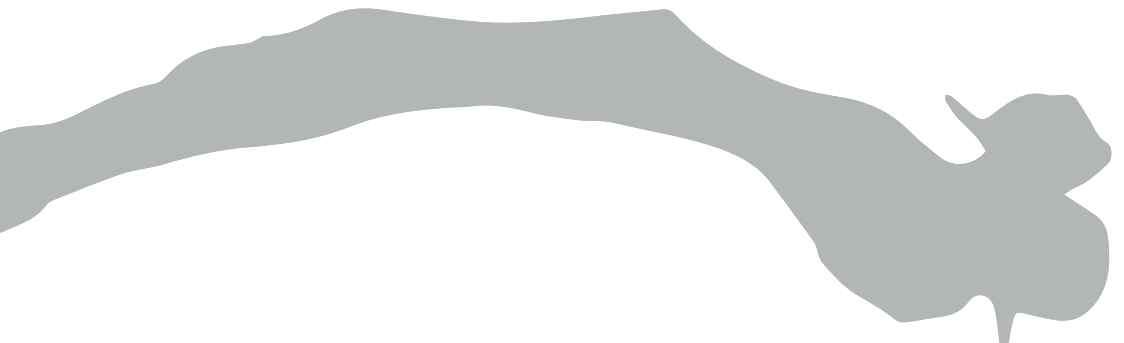

Kristina Norman, Bita Razavi, Corina L. Apostol


AN APPETITE FOR

Kristina Norman, Bita Razavi, Corina L. Apostol

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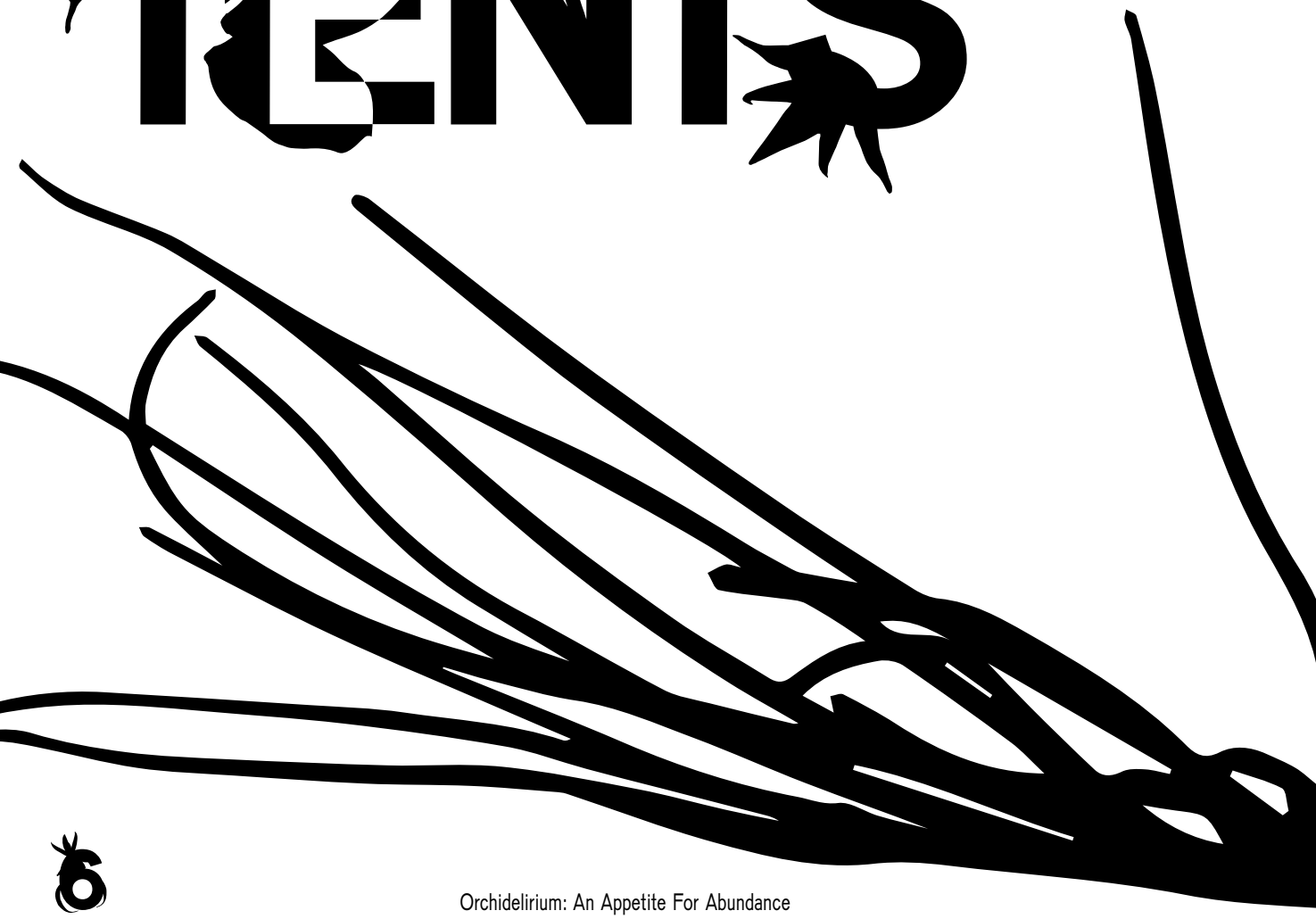
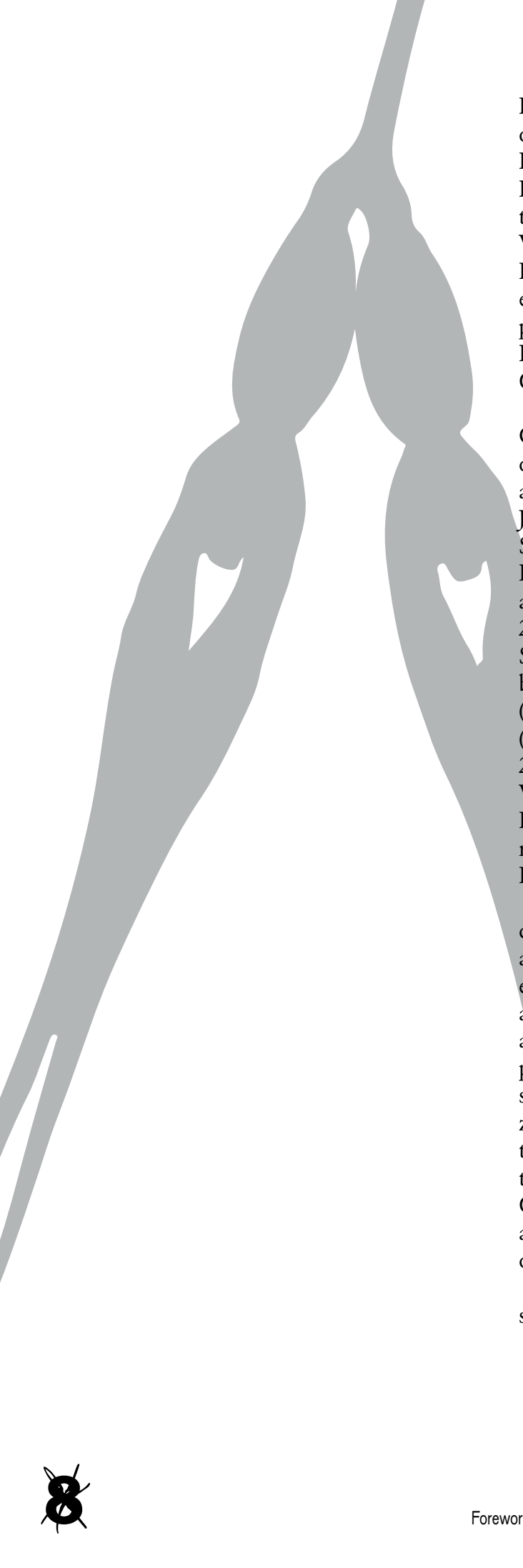




Foreword

In 2022, Estonia celebrates 25 years since our first national participation at La Biennale Arte. In 1997, Tamara Luuk, the Estonian cultural attaché in Brussels at the time, together with Eha Komissarov, Ainiki Väljataga, and the kind support of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, organised an unprecedented series of site-specific installations and performances by artists Siim-Tanel Annus, Raoul Kurvitz, and Jaan Toomik at the gates of Giardini on la Riva di Sette Martiri in Venice.

Since then, the Estonian Centre for Contemporary Art has had the honour and opportunity to work with a wide selection of amazing artists and curators: Ando Keskküla, Jüri Ojaver, Peeter Pere (curated by Johannes Saar, 1999); Ene-Liis Semper and Marko Laimre (2001); John Smith (Marko Mäetamm and Kaido Ole, curated by Anders Härm, 2003); Mark Raidpere (curated by Hanno Soans, 2005), Marko Mäetamm (curated by Mika Hannula, 2007), Kristina Norman (curated by Marco Laimre, 2009); Liina Siib (2011); Dénes Farkas (curated by Adam Budak, 2013); Jaanus Samma (curated by Eugenio Viola, 2015); Katja Novitskova (curated by Kati Ilves, 2017); Kris Lemsalu (in collaboration with Andrew Berardini, Tamara Luuk, Irene Campolmi and Sarah Lucas, 2019).

Exhibitions by the listed artists have been commissioned and produced by the CCA but always in collaboration with a wider group of experts, such as designers, architects, technicians, and historians. The team is always tailored around the artists and the project. The Estonian pavilion exhibitions have taken place in several spaces in the City of Venice, from the Fondazione Querini Stampalia and Palazzo Malipiero, to an old wood workshop building, remodelled to an exhibition venue for the pavilion in Giudecca. Today, we are thankful and proud of all the chapters in our short and intense history of the Estonian pavilion in Venice.

For 2022, based on the continued outstanding work by Estonian artists and the

thought-provoking exhibitions they have created for Estonian pavilions throughout the past two decades, the Netherlands invited us to exhibit at the Rietveld Pavilion in Giardini, the historic location of the Dutch pavilion. This was a beautiful gesture of trust towards the Estonian art scene, and has proven itself to be uncompromising, meaningful and open to challenges. Although it is the first time in the context of the art biennale, it was not the only time Estonia has exhibited in Giardini. In the 2000 Biennale of Architecture, the Estonian team exhibited in the Polish pavilion as Poland did not participate. In 2008, again during the Biennale of Architecture, the Estonian pavilion consisted of a yellow gas pipe, constructed between the Russian and the German pavilions.

In Estonia, it is a tradition to choose the exhibition for the national pavilion via an open call, which includes a wide-ranging international jury working through all the projects and making the final selection. We were very glad and honoured that the jury for the 59th Venice Biennale included Antonia Alampi, Hendrik Folkerts, Krist Gruijthuijsen, Sirje Helme, Jaanus Samma, and Maria-Kristiina Soomre. As a result of critical and in-depth discussions, the multi-layered ecocritical project *Orchidelirium. An Appetite for Abundance* by Kristina Norman and Bita Razavi, in close collaboration with curator Corina L. Apostol was selected. This project was inspired by Emilie Rosalie Saal's (1871–1954) watercolours and paintings of tropical plants. In the exhibition the artists combine historic and new artworks to propose a multifaceted view on colonial history and its problematics. The jury was fascinated how the project provided an unexpected perspective on questions otherwise widely researched both within academic and art discourse, based on a unique story and utilising versatile artistic form that highlight complex relationships between the East, the West and the South in the the twentieth century and how those ramifications manifest in the present-day.

As the system of national pavilions of the biennale is manifested both in the physical map of the Giardini garden and, through that, in the rather distorted world map it creates, the concept of *Orchidelirium. An Appetite for Abundance* provoked an interesting dialogue and intrigue, being located at the central position to which countries like Estonia usually do not have access.

We entered the biennale garden of paradise with *Orchidelirium* which, despite the menacing title, creates a space to calmly reflect on the various aspects of power hierarchies–subjectivity and agency, the oppressed and the oppressor, territory and autonomy, and the complex relationships between colonial subjects.

The extremely multi-layered exhibition and research led the team to ponder difficult choices and decisions in a world of multiple answers. These discussions happened face to face with different approaches and artistic positions, and were finally shaped into the exposition at the Rietveld pavilion.

This exhibition project was created together with a large team of experts and advisors, whose names are listed in the colophon at the back of the publication. A huge thank you to everyone who helped to realise this project–without your contribution, this exhibition would have never come to life.

Alongside the artistic team, I would also like thank the co-authors of the catalogue Sadiah Boonstra, Linda Kaljundi, Ulrike Plath, and Mike Watson, whose advice and critical thinking contributed to the making of this book that allows readers everywhere to gain an in-depth look into the multifaceted world of *Orchidelirium. An Appetite for Abundance*.

Maria Arusoo
Commissioner of the Estonian Pavilion
at La Biennale di Venezia
Director of the Estonian Centre for
Contemporary Art

Rietveld Pavilion in 2021. Photo: Corina L. Apostol.

INTRODUCTION

Corina L. Apostol

ON POST CURATING

"Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance" started when I discovered the works of Emilie Rosalie Saal[1]—an artist whose own work was overshadowed by her husband's career, merely mentioned as a footnote in his biography. She gained the power to pursue art, nonetheless, focusing on unique tropical orchids and other rare tropical flora.

Once a colonial subject in Estonia herself—then part of the Russian Empire—Emilie eventually became an elite member of white Dutch colonial society in Indonesia, at the turn of the nineteenth century. As an artist, she relied heavily on the labour of Indonesian women and other indigenous servants to fulfil her practice, travelling widely throughout the archipelago.[2] Although her legacy was lost in Estonia, I discovered lithographic copies of her art in the United States where she emigrated later in life. I was struck by their significance in relation to contemporary conversations, Emilie's works offering a provocative case study in entangled histories of self-determination, colonial experiences, neo-colonial structures, botany, science, and art.

While constructing my curatorial strategy for this project, I noticed the striking similarities between the extraordinary circumstances of Emilie's life and the unique development of the Estonian Pavilion for the 59th Venice Biennale 2022. The Mondriaan Foundation's invitation to take over the Rietveld Pavilion presented our team of artists, producers, and commissioner with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take the stage. Previous iterations of the Estonian Pavilion have been relegated to other locations within the City of Venice, however we are now in the Giardini, at the centre of power and visibility in a historic building designed by Gerrit Rietveld, one of the most renowned architects in Dutch history.

Beginnings always start with conversations or the desire to have a discussion, to exchange ideas and explore. Two years ago, artist Kristina Norman introduced me to the biography of Estonian writer, photographer, and topographer, Andres Saal who worked and lived in Netherlands-colonised Indonesia together with Emilie over a century ago. We were immediately drawn to her story, as so little was known about her as an Estonian woman artist who had traversed many positions and countries, having been raised in Tartu and educated in St. Petersburg, Russia before becoming a resident of Jakarta and eventually a US citizen living in Los Angeles, CA. Our initial conversation turned into a long-term project during which we encountered unexpected stories and people connected to Emilie's life, work, and world-travels. We invited Bita Razavi, an artist originally hailing from Iran who spends her time between Finland and the Estonian countryside, known for her work critically reflecting on her identity at the intersection of several cultural contexts, to join us in the discussion and to shape together with us the project "Orchidelirium."

While researching the story of Emilie Rosalie Saal over the past two years and engaging in numerous debates with Estonian Pavilion artists Kristina and Bita, and a growing number of collaborators and advisors from different fields and contexts, I have become dedicated to asking these questions: What happens when a person

1 Emilie Rosalie Saal (1871–1954) was born in Tartu, and studied art in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), before living in Java between 1899 and 1920.

2 Saal's incomplete biographical references and part of her correspondences are archived at the Estonian Literary Museum.

of humble origins, from a country that had been struggling to find its presence in Europe, becomes an elite member of the Dutch upper class? What choices did Emilie make to become an emancipated woman artist, after being born into a patriarchal society that denied her recognition? What were the experiences of the colonised and indigenous people of Java who worked for her, who were not afforded the same privileges? To what extent is the Colonial Empire still actively with us from political, economic, and consciousness perspectives?

It became obvious that in order to fully engage with these questions, we could not omit from the discussion the perspectives, experiences, and insights of the native communities in Indonesia living in the aftermath of the Dutch Colonial Empire, something which left lasting wounds and did irreversible damage to these communities' livelihoods, environments, and psyche. We received invaluable support and guidance from curator Sadiah Boonstra who introduced us to the practice of dancer and choreographer Eko Supriyanto, whose contribution, in dialogue with Kristina Norman's works and our research, makes a striking contribution to the project, as I will later describe.

During the development of this exhibition, I carried the aforementioned questions, all the while observing what happens when a smaller national pavilion, usually on the periphery, steps inside a space of privilege–into the pavilion of the Netherlands, one of the most economically developed countries in Europe. This extraordinary situation required a different approach in my curatorial practice–a *'Post-curating*–in line with ongoing crises in the social, economic, and political worlds, where it's clear that we can no longer go back to what was deemed "normal." In his essay for Springerin, "Post-Curatorial: Testing Site," curator Vasif Kortun reflects on this strategy as "visualising research in a context where different subjectivities are assembled around a set of questions, curiosities, and fascinations."[3] I believe the context of national representation on such an international public scale requires precisely such a strategy, one that on the one hand would allow for the multi-layered approach required by our project on such a timely and sensitive topic, and on the other would begin to address the structure of nationalism embedded in the Venice Biennale format itself, which is at odds with the prevailing internationalism that runs through art today.

At the same time, the formation of this project was an emerging response to the heightened nationalist climate in Estonia and the accelerated changes in the (art)world that expose the deep inequalities brought about by advanced capitalism. We linger in these circumstances but face the potential for change: to reconfigure the Venice Biennale and prevent the perpetuation of a double pyramid of power and exclusion. In this prime position, I engaged the artists to play out their artistic visions and ambitions, laying out my research and the expertise of our advisors and collaborators as a backdrop to analyse their understandings and learnings of, and empathy for, the subject matter at hand.

As I am writing this, the first presentation of the project "Orchidelirium" is set to open in Venice, and a topic of conversation for many in the art world is the long-awaited "return to normal" of the Biennale circuit. Meanwhile, for those of us living at the edge of Europe, the war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine–which brings new

3 Vasif Kortun, "Post-Curatorial: Testing Site," *Springerin*, 1 (2017). Accessible online: https://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/post-curatorial-eine-versuchsanordnung/

focus to the topic of colonial violence—means that the notion of "normal" is an illusion. With this in mind, I sense a hard escape: What will happen to the Biennale? How will we survive these crises? What are we learning, and what can we learn? What is misunderstood? How do we engage with colonialism and its present-day legacy? For the late curator Harald Szeemann, "the attitude becomes the form," and when power shifts in a decisive way, the opportunity to gauge the balance between ego, intention, and outcome becomes available.[4] However, in this process failure is inevitable, teaching us to come to terms with our histories, privileges, and interactions with the *Other* instead.

Victimhood is seductive. The privilege of refusing to acknowledge a lack of empathetic and dignified treatment of others, however, is less so. In my opinion, Eastern Europe has always seen itself as a victim of colonial power(s), be it the Soviets, the Nazis, or the Ottomans, placing emphasis on the sacrifice to be part of a Greater Europe, to conjoin with Western Europe, to which we still have trouble fitting in. But have we always been victims? Have we not collaborated with strongholds of power? Have we not tasted the ambition to colonise? Why is the trauma of being Eastern European the main vehicle to communicate our past and present? Thirty years after the Soviet Union collapsed, seventy years after the Second World War ended, and almost a century after the Ottoman Empire dissolved, can we finally break away from the narrative of victimisation? *What else is there?*

In preparing the proposal to curate the Estonian Pavilion, I was eager to break through the nationalist narrative of victimhood in Estonia and create transversal collaborations with creative communities in Indonesia. I was committed to switching the narrative of how Estonia has historically seen itself *in antagonism with* and *as a victim of* Russia/the Soviet Union. Since relocating to Estonia in 2019, I have observed how Estonian nationalism is based on the premise of restoration—the continuity between the post-Soviet Republic of Estonia and the interwar Eesti Vabariik (Estonian republic). Nationalism manifests through the public declaration of anti-Russian and-Soviet sentiments, expressed in the urgency to remove any vestiges of the former Soviet Union's occupation of the country.

Even though "Orchidelirium" was planned long before, the questions that it raises have been complicated even further by the ongoing war in Ukraine. But there is also reason to hope. The overwhelming support for communities in Ukraine from both the Estonian community and the wider community of the Baltics has renewed a spirit of activism and solidarity, though the question of two-sided segregation and otherness pitched against the local Russian-Estonian community still lingers.

For me, the Estonian Pavilion at the Rietveld Pavilion must be seen as a measure of how Estonia can engage with its own colonial past as well as a metric to determine Estonia's willingness to enter into a meaningful, painful, and necessary dialogue with those outside of Europe today. What happens when something goes beyond a given understanding of one's own history? How do we perceive this? How do we cope with it? All of us in the artistic team wanted to break the norm of what "national representation" could mean in the Biennale and go beyond this premise.

Similar to the biography of Emilie Rosalie Saal herself, the exhibition that the visitor

4 Harald Szeemann, curator, "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form (Works–Concepts–Processes–Situations)," Kunsthalle Bern, (March 22–April 27, 1969).

encounters in the Giardini offers a protean set of questions, curiosities, differences of opinion, and ideologies, which encounter each other under the same modernist roof of the pavilion offered to us by the Dutch. Kristina Norman addresses Estonia's past in her film trilogy (*Rip-off*, *Thirst*, and *Shelter*) referring to experiences of serfdom within the Baltic-German feudal system from a botanical perspective, before addressing the ongoing, present-day exploitation of orchids grown in vast quantities in nurseries in the Netherlands, as well as extractions made from Estonian peat bogs to serve as a substrate for the flowers. In the pavilion installation, Eko Supriyanto's film *Anggrek* (Orchid) is in dialogue with and interrupts the trilogy at specific points, aiming to disturb the colonial gaze from the perspective of colonised peoples. Shot on location in Central Java in a rock quarry where mining exploitation still happens, the film contrasts the "fragility and struggle of nature" against "anthropogenic exploitation"[5] featuring strong, resilient gestures by Supriyanto and dancer Putri Novalita. Meanwhile, Bita Razavi's strategy for engaging with the subject matter is to make material and formal references to both Indonesian and Estonian cultures and traditions. Her work has taken the form of spatial installations inside the pavilion, (titled *The Allegory of the Cave*, *Elevation*, *Kratt*), where she addresses who should speak about privilege and in what context and why, and engages audiences to reflect on their own positionality, such hierarchies relating to the power dynamics between colonisers and colonised.

My research, assembled with the support of Boonstra and Norman, is also presented within the exhibition, connecting different geographies and temporalities through the metaphor of flowers, or more specifically, orchids. All these perspectives and different strategies have played out in the development of "Orchidelirium," where consensus has been as important to the process as dissensus within the artistic team. We have collaborated on weaving together the different sensibilities, experiences, and approaches of a diverse team of peoples, where theory and practice have been sometimes at odds and at times intertwined, letting them sit side by side and creating a multi-layered conceptual space for all our voices to talk to and through each other.

When I embarked on this project two years ago, I named the exhibition "Orchidelirium,"[6] which refers to the "orchid madness" that gripped Europe over a century ago. The subtitle "An Appetite for Abundance" was inspired by a painted photograph from Java (taken by Andres Saal and overpainted by Emilie) that depicted a lush still life of fruit and vegetables stacked on top of each other in a pyramid, framed by a deep red curtain and an ornate relief cup with stags. The subtitle makes reference to the insatiable appetite for reaping "exoticised" flora from its indigenous environment to be translated into European visual cultures that feed into colonial, commercial ambitions.

The title and subtitle together highlight the disjuncture between the colonial impulse to collect, consume, and commodify ecologies and the violent realities of the colonial experiences in both Estonia and Indonesia. I was curious to explore how the dialogue between artistic positions in these two countries would unfold in the aftermath of the colonial project, which continues to cast a long shadow on the present-day circumstances of communities in both contexts. Now, history repeats itself.

5 Sadiah Boonstra in conversation with the author online, March 2022.

6 Mark W. Chase, Maarten JM Christenhusz, and Tom Mirenda, "Orchidelirium," in *The Book of Orchids* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 26–29.

Do we replicate the choices or outcomes of our heroine's actions? Are we wise enough, mature and compassionate enough not to let history repeat itself as a farce?

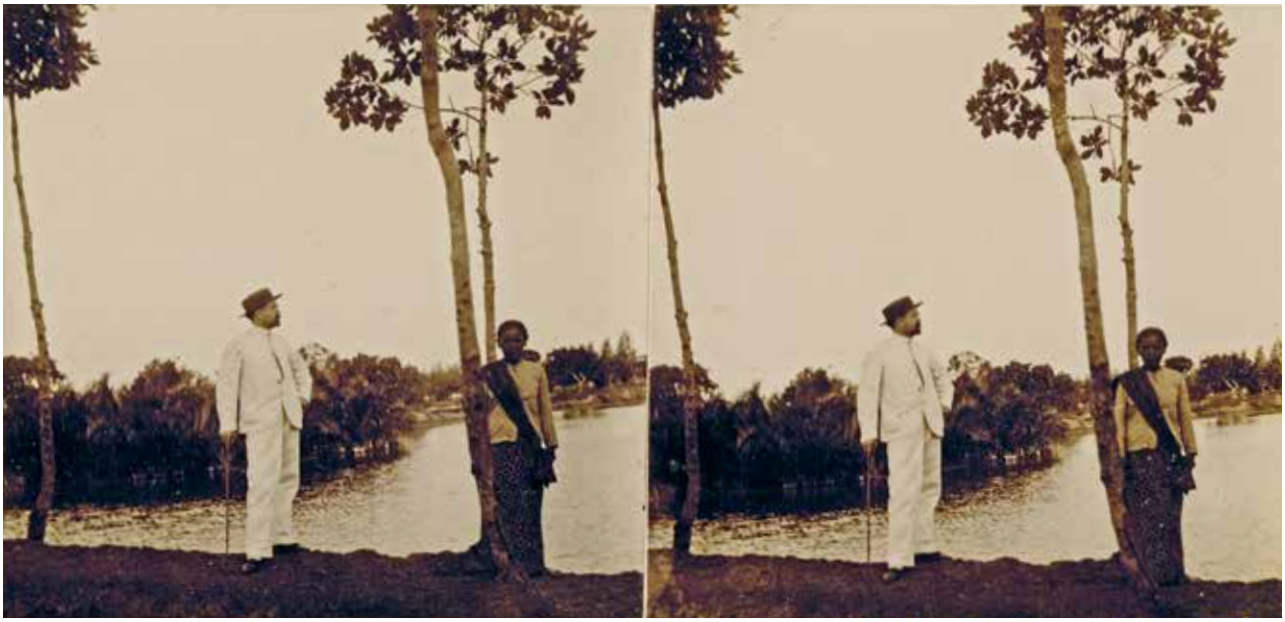
Curating this project has made me keenly aware of the choices that artists can make when using their given power and visibility in talking about privilege. On a bigger scale, we have been given the chance to discuss the colonial and neocolonial frameworks that are still with us. And as an extension, *art* can challenge these power structures, rather than represent or describe them, enabling communities and individuals to find common ground for empowerment.

Having been born in Romania, lived and worked in different parts of the United States, and now, through living and working in the Baltics, I have been exposed to the profound diversity of world-views and social realities present in places that have been profoundly affected by colonialism. Working with colonial and postcolonial ways of seeing and thinking, I have observed how a holistic approach can define the potential and power of art. Following and shaping the project's progression, including the development of the artistic dialogue, it has also been revealing to discover what the invited artists have done with this afforded privilege, through the way they approach the topic of colonialism in their practices. I will take these with me in future publications and exhibitions, with the intent to continue addressing these open questions: What were the consequences of Emilie Rosalie Saal's choices for indigenous peoples and landscapes? How are we implicated as viewers and consumers of the colonial project? How are present-day artists reflecting on their own cultural heritage and lived experiences, whilst learning about colonial history and engaging with neocolonial discourses critically in the contexts of Estonia today?

What follows are sections of my research surrounding the life of artist Emilie Rosalie Saal, that formed a basis for "Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance," as well as my analysis of how the first chapter in this planned multi-year project has unfolded aesthetically and from the point of view of social practice.

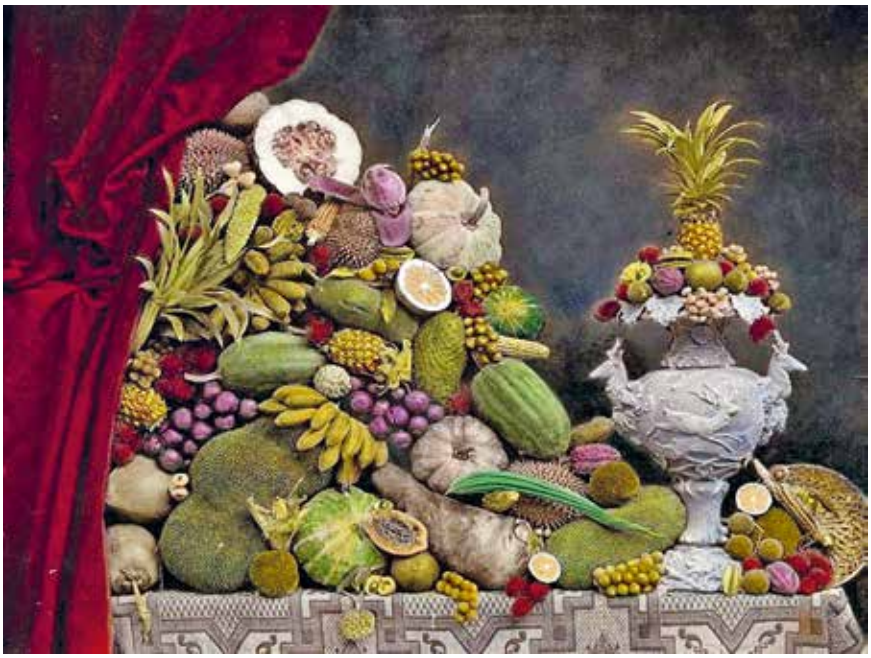
> *A flowering orchid is a sensation. There is something fairy-tale-like about the term orchid. Awesome characteristics are attributed to the flower. The positive aspect about these fairy tales is that orchids have become desirable (...) When an orchid flowers, it is discussed in newspapers.*[7]

These words were written over a century ago by Andres Saal, who together with his partner Emilie Rosalie Saal, lived on the Island of Java–then part of the Dutch-colonised Indonesia. Today, orchids have become so commonplace, still widely cultivated and collected that it requires a stretch of the imagination to fathom the "orchid fever," or *Orchidelirium*, that gripped Europe long ago in the nineteenth century. Yet, behind the allure and beauty of tropical orchids, lies a more complex and darker story of colonial ecological exploitation that still has repercussions to this day.



Andres Saal and servant on rubber plantation. Stereo-photograph, 1902–1916. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

Andres Saal, *White Morning* (in Estonian *Valgus hommikust*), 1929. Historical novel. Courtesy of the Digital Archive DIGAR.



Emilie Rosalie Saal, Andres Saal, *Fruit Still Life*, undated. Retouched photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Climbing Screw Pine*, 1995, [1910s]. Offset print. Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.

Emilie Rosalie Saal is a central character in my project of unraveling the entangled histories of national self-determination, western colonialism, botany, science, and art. She made her mark internationally as a colonial botanical artist and world traveller. Born in Tartu (then part of the Russian Empire), she studied art in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), then joined Andres Saal in Java between 1899 and 1920.[8] In many ways, her story is similar to that of other white European noblewomen who pursued botanical art as a pastime and occupation. At the same time, her accomplishments were particularly significant because, unlike many of her upper-class counterparts, she was able to continue to pursue an art practice by travelling across the world to Indonesia.

Interestingly, as Estonia was then part of the Russian Empire, Emilie was a colonised subject herself but then became, and passed as, a white coloniser living in Java, her appearance giving away nothing about her own background. She challenged convention by arranging trips throughout the islands to study tropical plants while becoming impressively proficient in drawing the fine details of local flora at the Buitenzorg Botanical Gardens (Indonesian: Kebun Raya Bogor, today Bogor Botanical Gardens). In 1926, after emigrating with her family to the United States, her collection of more than 300 of her works was exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science and Art, and received praise from the press of that time.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Baltic-German women painted plants and flowers, which became an inspiration for patterns for weaving. Women artists were strongly encouraged to concentrate on portraits, still lifes, and landscapes, which created the idea of "woman art," something which was considered as much less important in society. While women played a significant role in the development of plant science through botanical art, many have still not received recognition for their work compared to their male counterparts. Turning to Saal's career as an example, the Estonian National Museum and Archive Library actually rejected Emilie's botanical art around 1915, including documents relevant to her life and work. The Museum, however, accepted all archival material relating to her husband Andres in the same year, including letters, photographs, essays, postcards, and travelogues.

As I pieced her life-story together, I read between the lines.

The Dutch trade and conquest in Indonesia involved new research, profiting from the trade of rare and exotic plants and medicinals, as well as seeds and animals.[9] The Dutch East India and Dutch West India Companies, for example, played a vital role in the advancement of cartography, commissioning botanists and artists to record the natural history of local lands.[10] As the wife of a prominent official, Emilie had unparalleled access to botanical gardens and different sites across the archipelago, using her privilege of mobility through colonised landscapes that other social classes of Indonesian women did

7 Andres Saal and Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Representatives of Tropical Flora: The most important and interesting from the plant world of Java in colour pictures based on nature by E R Saal with explanatory text and photographic images by A Saal*, unpublished manuscript, Tartu Literature Museum.

8 Andres worked as manager of the reproduction photography, zincography, and carbon printing department E. Fuhri & Co. printing house located in Surabaya, and then as the manager of the photography department at the Topography Bureau located in Batavia in the service of Holland's colonial army. Andres' archive is housed at the Estonian Literary Museum.

9 Remco Raben, "Epilogue. Colonial Distances: Dutch Intellectual Images of Global Trade and Conquest in the Colonial and Postcolonial Age," in *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600–2000*, ed. Arthur Weststeijn et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 205–232.

10 Kevin Blachford, "Revisiting the expansion thesis: international society and the role of the Dutch East India company as a merchant empire," *European Journal of International Relations*, 26, 4 (2020): 1230–1248.

not have. Moreover, at least a dozen indigenous servants were employed in the Saal household, enabling Emilie to pursue her work as an artist.[11]

Together with Andres, Emilie worked on the manuscript titled, *The most important and interesting examples of the Javan flora in coloured drawings from nature*, which they intended to publish. She also collected specimens for a herbarium, demonstrating the artist's interest in the many parts of a plant, which she often included to help readers identify specimens in different stages of bloom. In Europe, the appetite for collecting these specimens and the concomitant study of natural history became integral to the production of art and culture, inspiring the emergence of new philosophies and encouraging the development of science and medicine. Botanical gardens, ultimately, played a key role in the trade and scientific study of nature.

In the nineteenth century, a number of Estonians worked for Baltic-German nobility in manors. Raadi manor house in Tartu, for example, was owned by the noble Baltic-German baron Reinhold Karl von Liphart (1839–1870),[12] who left his job as a military official to fully dedicate himself to gardening and breeding orchids. He donated tropical plants to the botanical garden in Tartu, and in 1858, a new greenhouse was built for orchids, providing an opportunity for the Garden to expand their collection.

Founded in 1817 by the order of the Dutch government that colonised Indonesia, the Herbarium and Museum for Systematic Botany at Buitenzorg (now the city of Bogor) was built on the site of a sacred forest demolished for this purpose, with the somewhat contrary intention of protecting the seeds of rare trees from the Sunda Kingdom existing since the fifteenth century.[13] Besides a purely botanical and aesthetic function, the Botanical Garden also had a commercial purpose. For example, tests were carried out to cultivate countless varieties of commercial crops. A substantial amount of successful plant clones were sent to local companies and abroad. During her time in Indonesia, Emilie had unparalleled access to the Buitenzorg Gardens due to her husband's connections and the privileges given to her as a member of the colonial class, and also had the privilege of bringing specimens home for studying and painting.

Local Indonesian workers made specially-crafted *Wardian cases*–named after an East London doctor and amateur horticulturist, and its proprietary inventor, Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward–for shipping plants from the Buitenzorg Gardens.[14] In the aforementioned manuscript, Andres described how orchids were once transported in damp conditions causing them to wither, however in due time more appropriate inventions allowed collectors to import the flowers successfully. The Wardian cases protected orchids and other tropical plants during transportation, facilitating the trade of plants worldwide. By allowing the transport of goods such as fruit and flowers, and crops such as coffee, sugar, and rubber, this invention helped globalise modern tastes and economies, aiding the reach of European colonialism.

What can we make of Emilie Rosalie Saal's life and artistic legacy? From being a

11 Susie Protschky, "Chapter Five: Seductions of the tropics: Race, class and gender in colonial images of nature and landscape," in *Images of the Tropics* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011), 127–144.

12 Juta Keevallik et al., *Unistuste Raadi: Liphartite junstikogu Eestis (Raadi of our dreams: the Liphart family and their art collection in Estonia)* (Estonia: University of Tartu, Estonian National Museum, 2015).

13 Adam Luthfi, *Cultivating Power: Buitenzorg Botanic Garden and Empire-Building in the Netherlands East Indies, 1745–1917*, Diss. Northwestern University, 2020.

14 Luke Keogh, "9. Case of Colonialism," in *The Wardian Case* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 161–180, and Luke Keogh, "1. Experiments with Plants," in *The Wardian Case* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 15–29.

colonised Estonian to becoming a coloniser under Dutch employment, her story twists the traditional colonialist narrative. Furthermore, her collection of rare orchids and tropical plants was arguably part of a shared European colonial visual tradition, and in order to gain this knowledge, Saal utilised everything at her disposal as an emancipated woman, at the expense of the lives of the colonised women and men who worked for her.

In the Saal household, different races, ethnicities (Dutch/Eurasian/Indonesian), classes, and genders intersected along the social patterns of the colonial divide. Indigenous women—kept invisible in archival images of lavish interiors—were part of the self-definition of white European women and the defining of the hierarchy within white colonial society.[15] In his writings, Andres explained that he wanted the people of Estonia and Indonesia to become closer, often writing articles about the culture and history of their new country of residence in Estonian newspapers. He collected "oriental" alphabets and sent them to Estonian linguists; he was interested in Indonesian folk music and published their lyrics in the Indonesian press.

Paradoxically, Andres Saal was critical of the problems of Dutch colonial power, in which he played a key role as the head of the photography department at the Topography Bureau on Java. His novels *White Oath* and *White Morning*[16] dramatised the consequences of the conquest of Java at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, these novels weren't published until a decade or more later due to their anti-imperial messages, at a time when the Russian revolution (1905) was well under way.[17] Nonetheless, partly motivated by a better social, economic, and political position, and partly in support of his wife's botanical endeavours, Andres accepted the employment of the Dutch Colonial Army in 1902. As a high-ranking administrative official, he eventually fully adopted a Dutch way of life, owning a rubber plantation in Java himself.[18]

The accepted history of botany and science during the colonial era ignored, and ultimately erased, the role of Indonesians. Silenced by the colonial system and subordinated in social class, indigenous Indonesian servants were not allowed to speak for themselves and were rendered docile in visual imagery. Due to this, initial resistance to Dutch rule and exploitation firmly took root. The Saminist Movement began in the last decade of the nineteenth century in the Kendeng Mountains Complex of Java, a region that the Saals travelled to during their explorations.[19] Surontiko Samin of the Randublatung village, located in a teak forest, headed the movement. Enacting the Forest Law in Java, the Dutch government forced the farmers to pay taxes on their own land and restricted villagers' access to the forest, which Samin questioned. By 1907, as many as three thousand families started to follow these principles. Though as a form of protest, some families resisted by lying down on their land when Dutch surveyors arrived, while others refused to pay taxes and fines, or denied the provision of free labour. After 350 years of colonisation, Indonesia eventually proclaimed its independence on

15 Remco Raben, "Colonial shorthand and historical knowledge: Segregation and localisation in a Dutch colonial society," *Journal of Modern European History*, 18, 2 (2020): 177–193.

16 Andres Saal, "Valge vanne ehk Viimased sultanilapsed" (Tartu: G. Grenzstein, 1912) and "Valgus hommikust" (Tartu: Odamees, 1929).

17 Kristina Jõekalda, "Heritage, Patrimony or Legacy? Baltic German and Estonian Cultural Dialectic in Facing the Local Past," *Letonica*, 37 (2018): 186–201.

18 Pim de Zwart, "Globalisation, inequality and institutions in West Sumatra and West Java, 1800–1940," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 51, 4 (2021): 564–590.

19 Nawiyanto Nawiyanto and Eko Crys Endrayadi, "The Saminist Movement of the Kendeng Mountains Complex of Java during the Dutch Colonial and Indonesia's Reform Eras", *TAWARIKH: International Journal for Historical Studies*, 8, 2, (April 2017): 117–130).

August 17, 1945, fighting a war that lasted from 1945 to 1949.[20] Even after the country's declaration however, the Indonesian-run state was still reflective of their Dutch colonial-era practices, as it opposed the traditional Javanese agrarian lifestyle, a turn of events which has contributed to severe environmental degradation.

In 1920, the Saals retired to Los Angeles, California, settling in Hollywood Heights (near the Hollywood Walk of Fame as it currently exists). During that period, Americans were going through an *Orchidelirium* of their own. At official engagements the first lady Edith Wilson, for example, would be seen wearing an over-the-top orchid corsage[21]—a five-flower embellishment that even the most distant audience members could see. During their courtship, it was reported that President Woodrow Wilson gave her a fresh cattleya orchid corsage every day, and in the press, the orchid became hailed as the official flower of the White House.

In 1926, perhaps unsurprisingly, Emilie Rosalie Saal's merits were recognised in her new country of residence: she exhibited 300 of her works on plants, flowers, and fruits at the Exposition Park of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art. The *Los Angeles Times* gave her a glowing review, including a special mention of her 100 paintings of rare orchids: "A work of over twenty years, a labour of love and beauty, with a scientific interest." The show was open to the public from May 1926 to May 1928 with the collection valued at 15,000 USD, a substantial amount at the time.

While Emilie found acclaim, many other female botanical artists went without recognition.[22] Her postcards are one of the few pieces of writing we have penned from her lifetime (the Estonian Literary Museum collected her husband's archive and materials that shed light on *his* achievements). Nevertheless, as other botanical artists of the time, Emilie herself seems to have failed to recognise the connection between orchid hunting and environmental destruction in Southeast Asia despite her involvement.

During the interwar period, Estonia's own colonial ambitions manifested, having recently been established as a nation-state in 1918. In 1933, Johannes Maide published an article in *Valis-Eesti* on Estonian colonial policy, calling on the government to buy small islands from Spain. Some diplomats supported the idea of an Estonian colony, and in 1936 the characteristics of each of these islands were discussed in the press with the view to plan for colonisation.[23]

In 1931, the creation of the International Colonial Exhibition in Paris conceptually and materially supported Dutch political, economic, and cultural programs.[24] The architecture of the pavilions, sites, and displays had an experimental quality that offered visitors an alternative means to interact with and understand the relationship between modernity and power. However, this understanding is something that must still be unpacked. Dutch sovereignty over the Indies enabled Emilie's work, her art is thus deeply implicated within colonial expansion itself.[25]

20 Pham Thi Huyen Trang and Dinh Tran Ngoc Huy, "The Struggle for National Independence and Some Revolution Features for Strengthening Independence in Indonesia," *Review of International Geographical Education Online*, 11, 5 (2021): 2941–2956.

21 Michael Hastings, "First Lady Edith Wilson still remembered for her love of orchids," Winston-Salem Journal (November 22, 2018) https://journalnow.com/first-lady-edith-wilson-still-remembered-for-her-love-of-orchids/article_80fcf39e-c16d-5364-b5ed-d404bda3857d.html

22 Heather Pardoe, and Maureen Lazarus, "Images of Botany: Celebrating the Contribution of Women to the History of Botanical Illustration," *Collections*, 14, 4 (2018): 547–567.

23 Välis-Eesti Almanak, "Harutlusi asumaade küsimuse ümber," Välis-Eesti Ühing (1936): 121–123.

24 Yulia Nurliani Lukito, "Colonial exhibitions, hybrid architecture, and the interpretation of modernity in the Dutch East Indies," *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 36, 3 (2019): 291–316.

25 Andreas Weber, "A Garden as a Niche: Botany and Imperial Politics in the Early Nineteenth century Dutch Empire," *Studium*, 11, 3 (2019): 178–190.

And today, as viewers of her works and works created by Kristina Norman and Bita Razavi in response, we also become implicated in the problem of inclusion and exclusion that the Empire represented in the botanical works she poses.

Heavily dependent on the exploitation of indigenous Indonesian labour, "Orchidmania"[26] images whetted colonial appetites for what these forests held. Fueled by the lavish illustrations of artists and collectors, trees were felled to reach the orchids growing atop their branches, paths were cleared through the rainforests for easier transportation of the specimens, and common plants were cast aside in search of more alluring species. For example, the ethnographic Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, which still holds a vast collection of colonial-era artifacts and images, organised the exhibition "Orchids" (1971) which fast became one of the most popular exhibitions of that period in the city.[27] Recently, the Dutch Council for Culture declared that museums should return statues[28] and other artifacts stolen during the colonial era to their countries of origin. The Council focused on objects that were removed by force from colonies such as Indonesia and Suriname, declaring that "injustices that took place in the colonial past cannot be undone. But a contribution can be made to repairing that injustice by taking responsibility when dealing with colonial objects."[29] While such statements are key to undoing some of the profound harm done to communities by the Dutch Colonial Empire, what's to be done with the ecological devastation and lasting traumas that continue to affect present-day generations? Repatriation of objects isn't enough.

To add another dimension to this research and share perspectives from those who lacked representation in these images, whose voices have been silenced in the colonial archives of Estonia and the Netherlands, I have sought to collaborate with specialists from Indonesia, sharing their knowledge and offering surprising insights from their local contexts.

Curator and author Grace Samboh offered key research contributions, bringing a modern descendant of colonial exhibitions to my attention. With its various attractions and exhibits, the theme park Taman Mini Indah Indonesia (translated as "Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park") was constructed as a response to increasing tourism.[30] Located in East Jakarta, on a land area of more than 170 hectares, the Taman Mini was launched in 1975. Now, the self-proclaimed "edutainment" park contains twenty-six traditional houses from twenty-seven of Indonesia's provinces, several museums (Communication Technology, Transportation, Military, etc), theatres and an iMax cinema.[31]

In national politics, the creation of parks like Taman Mini also sparked the invention of particular cultural traditions. During General Soeharto's dictatorship between 1971 and 1998,[32] the former first lady, Siti Hartinah Soeharto (known as Bu Tien), launched Taman Anggrek "Indonesia Permai" (trans-

26 Nora Eugenia DG Anghelescu et al., "A history of orchids. A history of discovery, lust and wealth," *Scientific Papers-Series B, Horticulture*, 64, 1 (2020): 519–530.

27 Markus Balkenhol and Wayne Modest, "Caring for some and not Others: Museums and the politics of care in post-colonial Europe," in *European Memory in Populism* (London: Routledge, 2019), 173–190.

28 Iris van Huis, "Contesting cultural heritage: Decolonising the Tropenmuseum as an intervention in the Dutch/European memory complex," in *Dissonant heritages and memories in contemporary Europe* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 215–248.

29 Author unknown, "Return stolen colonial art, Dutch Council for Culture tells minister," *Dutch News* (October 7, 2020). https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2020/10/16518731

30 Roberto Costa, "Harmony Is Beautiful: A Reappraisal of the Aestheticisation of Politics in 'Beautiful Indonesia' Miniature Park," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 21, 4 (2020): 352–370.

31 John Pemberton, "Heaven Forbid! What Sort of Sign is This?" in *Transformations: comparative study of social transformation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Ann Arbor, 1993), 1–31.

32 Sokphea Young, "A Strongman and Dissidents in Indonesia," in *Strategies of Authoritarian Survival and Dissensus in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 177–203.

lated as "Orchid Park 'Gorgeous Indonesia'") in 1974, located on the border of Central and West Jakarta.[33] In 1993, Bu Tien's orchid garden was relocated to Taman Mini, where annual orchid expos continue to be held. In the same year, Soeharto announced the moon orchid, or Anggrek Bulan (*Phalaenopsis Amabilis*) as one of the three national flowers in the "Presidential Decree" (the other two are the white jasmine [*Jasminum Sambac*], the main symbol of high-class Javanese culture, and the giant padma [*Rafflesia Arnoldii*]).

Involving new kinds of expression to address "the realities of an emergent nation and as statements of the officialdom that builds them,"[34] as Benedict Anderson observed, the Orchid Park became the ultimate symbol of the "unity in diversity" of the archipelago–the Soeharto family's dedication to the nation of Indonesia. International leaders who visited were welcomed and celebrated there, from presidents and prime ministers, kings, queens, and sultans, to the 1992 Non-Aligned Summit attendees. The park's construction, however, saw more than 300 families evicted from their homes, receiving minimal compensation. Students who led protest demonstrations were captured without receiving a fair trial, and many state businesses were extorted to make Bu Tien's project happen.

In our conversations, Grace also suggested collaborating with the Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists,[35] a network of local artists and students who are largely self-taught, founded by Eunike Nugroho and Jenny Kartawinata in 2017. According to the group's creators, while botanical illustration is still important to describe new species, the practice can also be useful to promote indigenous Indonesian plants to a larger audience in a more emotional way. Through botanical art, their aim is to promote artists who raise awareness and support the existence of these plants, especially those that are threatened or already endangered.

Sadiah Boonstra was another scholar whom I invited to advise the exhibition and contribute to this catalogue. In the recently curated "On the Nature of Botanical Gardens" (2020), Sadiah featured contemporary Indonesian artists who look critically at botanical gardens, colonial power, knowledge-building, and the economics of nature. From spending time with their perspectives, other facets of the legacies and current consequences of approaching nature and plants were thus revealed in my research.[36] For example in the works of Zico Albaiquni, the Dutch colonial gaze is problematised via imagery from Mooi Indië (Beautiful Indies) paintings being made to include narratives from different cultures and histories.[37] His painting *Tanah Air Beta. Reciting Rites in its Sites* (2019) depicts the pavilion inside the Botanical Garden Bogor (formerly Buitenzorg, where Emilie Rosalie Saal created many of her works). Here, he attended a traditional Sundanese cleansing ritual named *ruwatan* "to cleanse the world from bad omen, reconnect with [the] nature, the spirits of the ancestors."[38] The artist decided to focus on this site as a witness of its history, a manifestation of collective memory that encompassed different cultures: the Sundanese, the colonisers, and the constant-

33 Roberto Costa, "Metamorphoses in an Everlasting Present: Desires, Changes, and the Power of Mini-isation in Taman Mini's Stone Age," *Indonesia*, 111 (2021): 25–44.

34 Benedict Anderson, "Notes on contemporary Indonesian political communication," *Indonesia*, 16 (1973): 39–80.

35 Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists: https:/idsba.com/about-us

36 The Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists, "An Interview with Eunike Nugroho," *Botanical Artists*, 14 (August 2020) http://botanicalartists.blogspot.com/2020/08/the-indonesian-society-of-botanical.html

37 H. G. Masters, "Spotlight: Farah Al-Qasimi, Zico Albaiquni, Liu Chuang," *ArtAsiaPacific*, 116 (2019): 78–83.

38 Elly Kent, "Traditions of Dissent: Contemporary Artivism in Indonesia," *Journal of the Asian Art Society of Australia* (2019): 16–17.

Leo Plunkett, *Lodia Oematan of the Mollo People with the loom that she carried to Mount Mutis*, undated. Photograph. Courtesy of The Gecko Project/Mongabay.

Eunike Nugroho, founder of the Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists, paints a Titan arum (in Indonesian Bunga bangkai or "Corpse flower"), native to Sumatra, 2018. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

ly-evolving Indonesian nation. Albaiquni composed the scene from a photograph he took with similar older photographs from the collection of the Tropenmuseum. By inserting references to the stone statue of the Hindi deity Nandi and flat baskets of rice, which are commonly used in the ritual, the artist repositions the viewer's perspective toward Sundanese cultural traditions.

The present dynamic between destruction and protection has been an important facet of my research, echoing the colonial logic of the past in a new corporate guise. In the documentary film *Our Mother's Land* set in Indonesia,[39] journalist Febriana Firdaus reveals that present-day followers of the twentieth-century ecological anti-colonial movement believe that land, water, and forests are common property, to be used for the common good. In her introductory monologue, Firdaus describes how patriarchal society limits the actions of women; the film, in addition, spotlights women who were able to break these boundaries in order to build their own movements. Like their predecessors, these ecological anti-colonists reject the idea that the state can impose control over natural resources—an idea that still resonates. Now, they struggle against the expansion of heavy extractive industries that threaten their land and water, while connections to Dutch enterprises remain. The stories of ecological and anti-colonial activists show how the women's movement in Indonesia is a manifestation of eco-feminism, and how nature can not be separated from the role of women.

The results of this ongoing research reflect the difficulties of working with entangled histories and relationships between "perpetrators" and "victims," in which characters from both colonial pasts and our colonial present are engaged dynamically. All in all, the research for "Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance" involves scientific, biological, historic, and aesthetic considerations of the close ties of botanical histories to colonial relationships shared by the Netherlands, Estonia, and Indonesia.

39 Mohani Niza, "'Our Mothers' Land' spotlights the fight by Indonesian women against corporate greed," *The Culture Review Magazine* (May 11, 2021) https://thecultureviewmag.com/2021/05/11/our-mothers-land-spotlights-the-fight-by-indonesian-women-against-corporate-greed

A BOTANICAL PAVILION IN THE GIARDINI DELLA BIENNALE

The main entrance to the Estonian Pavilion in the Rietveld Pavilion is closed. The sign "Olanda" sits in its usual place, but above it on the roof we see "Estonia" written in a dark botanical-orchid font, which has been conceptualised by designer Laura Pappa in collaboration with Jungmyung Lee. In conversation with the artists, I purposefully left the sign of the pavilion in place, as a conceptual readymade piece, with the new, specially commissioned piece for the Estonian project to function as its strange counterpart. Indeed I imagine a lot of our audiences will initially assume that they are stepping into the Dutch Pavilion. Such clashes of (national) identities are at the heart of our project and speak to Emilie Rosalie Saal's own subjectivity as an Estonian-born resident of Netherlands-colonised Indonesia, and later in life a US citizen.

In front of the pavilion, guards wearing vests adorned with herbarium pressed plants direct audiences to one of the two side entrances, seemingly at random. The divided audiences enter the pavilion and experience the exhibition differently, the majority entering the space at ground level, while a few are invited to climb onto a platform and once at the top experience *Kratt*, a kinetic sculpture rotating copies of Emilie Rosalie Saal's botanical drawings, based on a mythological creature from Estonian folklore.

These approaches to the pavilion through performative and spatial interventions have been conceptualised by Bita Razavi, an artist whose multidisciplinary practice is steeped in bringing pointed critique on societal problems to the form of personal observations that raise difficult ethical questions.

On the wall opposite the *Kratt* sculpture, shadows created by artificial plants form the traces of a lost garden. The shadows are created by a shifting artificial light placed above them, imitating sunlight as it enters the space from the upper windows, and giving the illusion of a day cycle. The artist references both what is shown and what is made invisible in botanical art, through the use of shadows in her installation *Plato's Cave*. These shadows suggest the erasure of the local context in Saal's paintings, referencing the trappings of plants in herbariums, squeesed and pressed, incarcerated. In another corner of the space, next to the entrance, shadows from the trees outside in the Giardini combined with the grid pattern of the large window, create a juxtaposition by organically revealing the changes in the shadows created by natural light.

Specially designed Wardian cases are placed at different corners of the pavilion, mixing different strands of the research presented above. Each case is thematically linked to Kristina Norman's film trilogy described below, highlighting the role of women in colonial and ecological struggles, the conditions and consequences of women's emancipation, and the building of lasting colonial structures.

In her practice, Kristina Norman engages with microhistories of marginalised peoples past and present, through which she reveals uncomfortable truths and interrogates historical processes from a feminist-political perspective. The *Orchidelirium* trilogy also tests different possibilities for making sensuous, human and non-human, visual and semantic connections between key moments in Emilie and Andres Saal's life story, using the sum of

their choices to critique and participate in the colonial project and bring it forth into the present day.

Norman's film trilogy, comprising of episodes entitled *Rip-off*, *Shelter*, and *Thirst*, respectively explore *the manor* as a place of cultural transfer between upper-class Baltic German women and their servants through knowledge of, and fascination with, tropical flowers; *the cage* as a liminal place of transformation, divided between the inside perspective and the objectifying gaze of the outside; and *the orchid nursery* as a site connecting the Estonian mires and peat excavation industries, the import of tropical orchids from the Netherlands, and the circulation of capital and natural resources.

We enter the mystical world of Norman's films through the subjectivities of women, as well as those of non-human subjects– orchids and industries are central characters alongside the servant, the lady of the manor, the spectator, and the zookeeper. These characters, their shifting identities, and their choices in the three storylines, are archetypes of the main players in colonial structures past and present. They are chained to the repeating cycle of the trilogy, revealing that underneath the reasoning bodies and thinking machines of coloniality lies violence and the exploitation of a forever-altered nature, and of peoples who yearn to construct a different way of life.

The metaphor of the "doppelganger" is central to the three films. In *Rip-off*, the at times erotic and some time violent interplay between the lady of the manor, who is proficient in painting exquisitely detailed orchids on her veranda, and her servant / double who tends to her garden growing envious of her mistress' attributes, serves as a commentary on the phenomenon of cross-pollination between those emancipated women whose craft allowed them to find more meaning in life despite being part of a patriarchal society, and women whose potential was stifled by the class hierarchies at the foundation of the manorial system. The orchid plays a central role in the interplay between the women, as both object of fascination and fantasy, revealing the desire to capture in painting the obsessive attention to aesthetic and technical detail poured into the exotic specimens– undoubtedly something that Emilie Rosalie Saal herself would have practiced and experienced. The manor acts as a liminal space of transformation, which is then dramatically blown up: this was an actual event in 2020 when Estonian Defence Forces blew up the historical building of Tapa manor, as it was in the way of the territorial expansion of a NATO military base.

Doubling again appears in *Shelter*, where the zookeeper who tends to animals trapped in cages becomes a prisoner herself, while crowds of visitors gawk from beyond the bars. All these episodes follow a similar logic to *Rip-off*, where the protagonist begins in a position of power that eventually gets overturned as she becomes ensnared in her own environment. For Norman, the inspiration for this film came from Andres Saal's travelog, in which he refers to witnessing a "Rampogan Maccan" or tiger fight, in which tigers are released from wooden boxes and surrounded by warriors with spears attempting to prevent them from escaping. The symbolism of the big catfight was the purification and overcoming of evil. In the film, the protagonist undergoes a transformation from feeling like an incarcerated human to doubting her own humanity, as she is relentlessly observed from the outside and seen as an animal. We then see her acting out her "animal" identity for the "civilised gaze" of the viewers outside of the cave, while at the same time revolting against being an objectified subject. Towards the end of the film, when the audience disappears, she is left confronting her own double who walks away. Or, perhaps is it the protagonist herself who has escaped the cage?

The third episode shifts the anthropocentric perspective towards the orchids

themselves, as well as peat, a soil extracted from Estonian bogs that is used to sustain the flowers mass-produced in nurseries in the Netherlands. Entitled *Thirst*, the film weaves a dystopian magical universe where machines mass-produce and transport the soil from Estonia[40] to nurseries in the Netherlands, where orchids whose ancestors were once reaped from colonies, are cloned and then transported once more to be sold in Estonia and beyond. The lone human protagonist of this machine dystopia is an embodiment of Thirst, emerging from a dried-up well and unleashing her scream in a supermarket among heaps of glossy packaged orchids. The cycle of exploitation of peoples, plants, and animals comes full circle: Norman brings the past into the present highlighting present-day repercussions of the colonial project through the language of myth and magic, keeping us enchanted, disturbed, and alert at the same time.

But what of the experiences of the peoples of Indonesia? Those generations who have matured with the legacy of the colonial system and exoticism mindset? And what of the pain that these legacies have inflicted, that is palpable even in the present?

In response to the life and works of Emilie Rosalie Saal, the themes of the exhibition, and the artworks in "Orchidelirium," I invited Sadiah Boonstra and Eko Supriyanto to develop *Anggrek* (Orchid), a performance film that, at intervals, interrupts Norman's film trilogy and is in dialogue with it. Recorded in Java, Indonesia the film explores structures of coloniality with regard to nature by highlighting the continuing exploitation of nature in Indonesia, as well as issues of gender and race. It asks the seminal question: "To what extent has colonialism actually ended?" Further, it invites the viewer to see orchids for what they are, to remove the shackles of the colonial gaze with its exoticising cover that dissociates these flowers from their indigenous lands.

Supriyanto and Putri Novalita are the main protagonists of the film, interacting with the environment of the mining quarry and the lush landscape through dynamic, strong gestures. Their intervention explores the extensions of coloniality in nature, highlighting its ongoing exploitation in Indonesia and tying in issues of gender and race. At the same time, this intervention addresses the loss of indigenous ecological knowledge but foregrounds the lasting presence of indigenous peoples' knowledge of nature. Despite the generational trauma inflicted by the colonial project that is still with these peoples, Supriyanto and Novalita offer indigenous ways of being and patterns of knowledge through movement, and imagine and enact resilient futures.

40 Despite its small size, Estonia is one of the world's largest exporters of peat. A very large part of the peat that is mined from our bogs reaches Hawaii, Asian countries, China. It is absolutely mind-blowing to think about the ecological footprint of this.

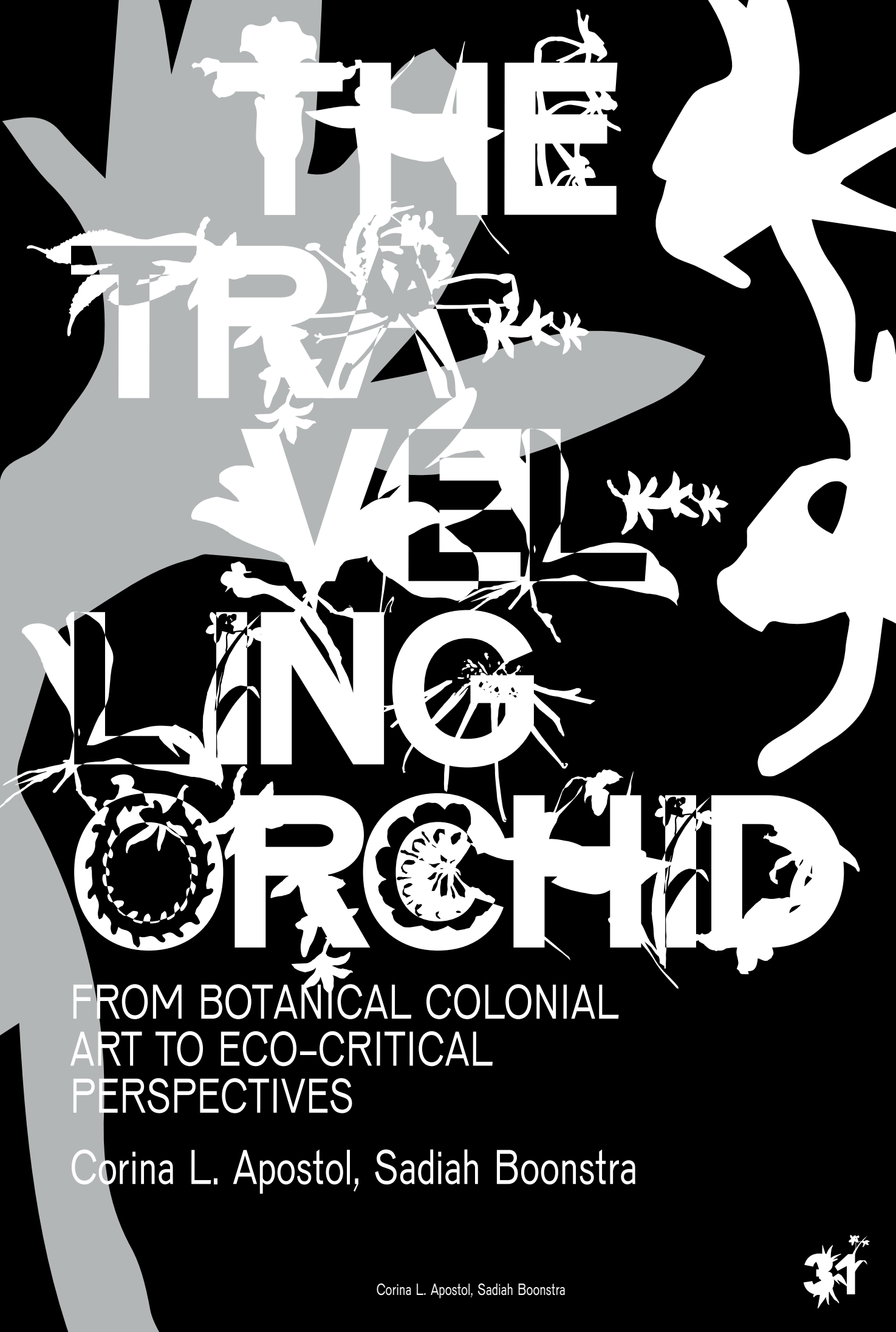
BOTANICAL ART AND ACTIVISM

Is activism within the exhibition space still possible? How can we be critical of existing structures of colonialism? *Civis* comes to mind–the Latin root word of "activism" which emphasises the power of citizens. Art and activism don't need to compete. Art has a spectrum of different tools. By engaging with diverse contexts, art touches upon many pressing issues of the times; activism, on the other hand, also has its own forms of interaction, in which art can be born unexpectedly.

Studies of botanical illustrations, state-sponsored expeditions, and scientific discovery have laid the groundwork for understanding material and visual culture during the late colonial period. However, I've found during my research that often these elements draw little connection to contemporary environmental concerns. Whether the botanical illustrations drawn by the skilled hands of naturalists, or the still-life paintings of flora from talented artists, there are few eco-critical projects that actively discuss contemporary moments from a feminist, decolonial perspective, such as visual production, biodiversity, decolonial strategies and the urgency of eco-critical concerns. Using a post-curatorial methodology, my research approach bridges these spatial and temporal gaps, inviting nature-history in dialogue with artists, activists, and scholars, connecting botanical lives with the Anthropocene along an East-South axis.

At the 2022 Venice Biennale, "Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance" explores the historical experience of serfdom in Estonia from which the Saals emerged, their role in Dutch colonial history, and the experiences of the colonised people of Indonesia, in tandem with the alteration of their landscapes during the late colonial period and the ecological impact it continues to have to this day. While immersed in this exhibition, the viewer will access ecological imaginaries proposed by the artistic team of the Estonian Pavilion and the socio-political ramifications of colonial ways of being, thinking, misunderstanding, and doing.

There are no set formulas or patterns to engage with coloniality, it being one of the more complex issues that we need to collectively deal with as a society. However, we must develop the maturity and understanding to learn from history so as not repeat the same mistakes. Through the case study of Emilie Rosalie Saal, the artistic team has focused on an entangled situation from which we can discern that one person's choices can lead to great personal, ecological, and even global catastrophes. Even now, when looking back at the unfolding of "Orchidelirium," we come to the realisation that we need to find ways in which we can learn from history and each other, so as not to cause even more harm, as something that gets lost in translation can bring about the same consequences as not being understood.



FROM BOTANICAL COLONIAL ART TO ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Corina L. Apostol, Sadiah Boonstra

Corina L. Apostol, Sadiah Boonstra

1. In In nineteenth-century Europe, tropical plants, shipped from exotic landscapes, were an extravagance enjoyed by the nobility.
At the turn of the twentieth century, the Tartu-born artist Emilie Rosalie Saal dedicated herself to the study of these plants in Dutch-colonised Indonesia. For two decades, she captured over 100 rare orchids.

2. Baltic-German noblewomen painted plants and flowers, inspiring many for use as patterns in weaving. Female artists were mainly encouraged to concentrate on portraits, still lifes and landscapes, which created the idea of "woman art," considered less important in society.

Corina L. Apostol, Sadiah Boonstra


16. April 1886. Illustrirte Frauen-Zeitung. XIII. Jahrg., Nr. 8, 2. Blatt. 63

72-73. Anzüge für kleine Mädchen.

72. Anzug mit Jackenfaille.

74. Anzug mit Jackenfaille.

75, 60 u. 70. Anzug mit Mantelet.

76. Promenaden-Fächer.

77-78, 56, 61-62 u. 68. Promenaden- und Haus-Toiletten.

77 u. 68. Anzug mit langem Mantel.

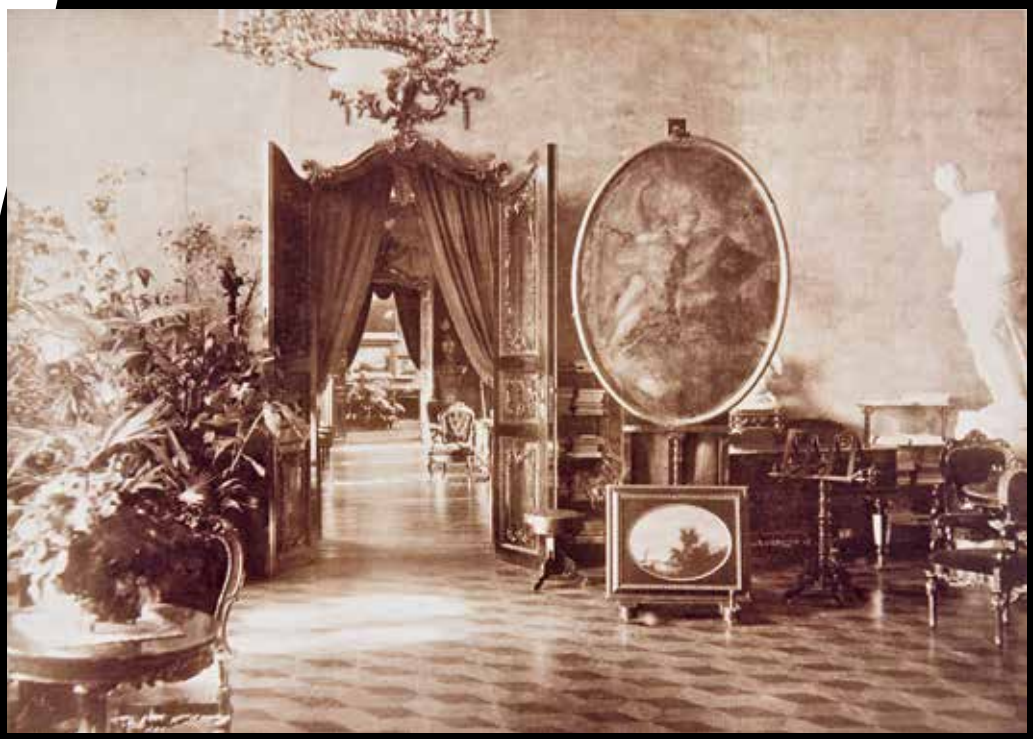
78, 56 u. 61-62. Anzug mit langer Tournüre.

3. During the second half of the nineteenth century, women's domestic handicrafts increasingly became dominated by floral patterns. German fashion and handicraft magazines circulated these widely in the Baltic countries. Among peasant families, it was popular to send their daughters into town to train as seamstresses and learn more "refined" handiwork. From the late 1870s, German floral patterns were popularised in handicraft courses, schools for girls and handicraft display sections of agricultural societies' exhibitions.

4. The Romanovs were patrons of the flower shows in Russia and England. They indulged in private joys like planting flowering Dutch bulbs around the palace. The Imperial family were patrons of flower shows and experimental greenhouses in Russia. Empress Alexandra Feodorovna built a modern greenhouse that could accommodate the largest palms.

Russian explorers hunted throughout the world for new types of plants and sent samples to the Imperial Greenhouses, where they were carefully nurtured.

Across Europe, the rapidly growing popularity of botany fuelled the gifting of live plants as a new category of diplomatic presents. The opportunity to receive rare and precious species from the Southern Hemisphere, in one of the coldest capital cities in Europe, was a testament to Feodorovna's powerful international connections, the skills of her gardeners and the vast reach of the Russian Empire.



5. In the nineteenth century, many Estonians were working for the Baltic-German nobility in manors.

The Raadi manor house in Tartu was owned by a noble Baltic-German baron named Reinhold Karl von Liphart (1864–1940) who left his job as a military official, fully dedicating himself to gardening and breeding orchids.

The Music Hall in the manor was richly decorated with exotic plants, palm trees and orchids. Marble copies of ancient sculptures were hidden in the thickets of tropical plants.

von Liphart donated tropical plants from the Raadi manor greenhouse to the young botanical garden in Tartu. In 1858, a new greenhouse was built for orchids, which provided an opportunity to enlarge the Tartu collection.

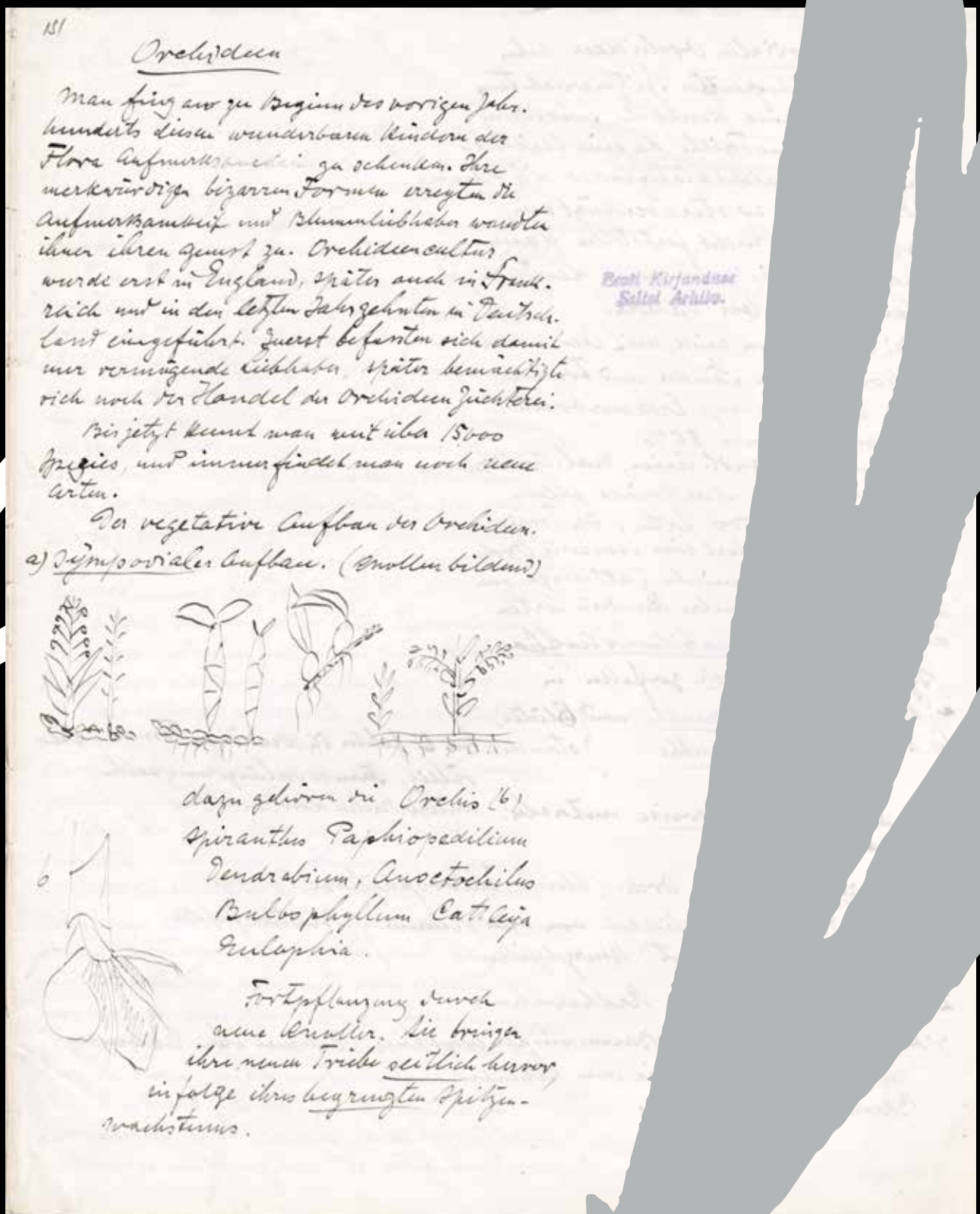
6. Emilie Saal's life and artistic legacy twists the traditional colonialist story: she went from being a colonised Estonian under the Russian Empire to becoming a coloniser under Dutch employ. She became an emancipated woman at the expense of other colonised women.

Her husband, Andres Saal, held prominent positions at the E. Fuhri & Co. printing house in Surabaya, and later, at the Topography Bureau in Jakarta in the service of the Netherlands' colonial government.

7. Demand for "exotic" plants emboldened hunters who hounded new specimens for the European market. Among them, orchids sold like jewels. By the early twentieth century, orchid picking and sales increased so much that they faced extinction in parts of Indonesia.

Behind the allure of these tropical plants lies a complex and violent story of colonial ecological exploitation. The movement of plants went hand-in-hand with the transportation of enslaved people on ships that crossed the oceans.

The mentality behind orchid collection mirrors the logic of colonialism. Even when colonisers intended to "protect" plants and peoples from their so-called "unrefined" state, it was still a violent process. Orchid hunters' obsessions devastated the indigenous landscapes where these plants thrived.



8. With Andres Saal, Emilie worked on the manuscript titled "The most important and interesting examples of the Javan flora in coloured drawings from nature," which they intended to publish in Europe.

In the entry on orchids, Andres wrote: "A flowering orchid was a sensation. There was something fairy-tale-like about the term -orchid-," adding that "when an orchid flowered it was discussed in newspapers."

The appetite for collecting these specimens and the concomitant study of natural history became integral to the production of art and culture, the emergence of new philosophies and the development of science and medicine in Europe.

9. Founded in 1817 by the Netherlands East Indies government, the Buitenzorg Botanical Garden or Lands Plantentuin (in Dutch, "Plant Garden of the Land") was built over a sacred forest that was created to protect seeds of rare trees from the Sunda Kingdom in the fifteenth century. The garden served the cultivation of plants for economical purposes.

Invented by doctor and horticulturist Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward, the so-called *Wardian cases* from Buitenzorg (currently Kebun Raya Bogor) in Java made international plant transportation possible and helped expand colonial empires and shape global tastes.

Plant clones were sent in substantial quantities to companies abroad. Emilie Saal had the privilege of bringing specimens from the gardens to study and paint at home.

10. Images of serene, non-violent and fertile landscapes in Dutch representations of Indonesia created a conceptual space for colonial expansion. These strongly suggested an absence of local opposition to colonial rule, even though this was not the case. The Mooi Indie ("beautiful Indies") style of painting and dioramas for World Exhibitions, popularised by Dutch artists like Leo Eland (1884–1952), sketched an image of natural beauty and social tranquillity in Java, which confirmed the status quo but ignored the realities of indigenous peoples.

11. In the history of botany and science during the Dutch colonial era, Eurocentric knowledge production erased and submerged the role of indigenous Indonesians and their traditional knowledge. Silenced by a colonial hierarchical construct based on race and class plus the subservient nature of their work, Indonesians weren't allowed to speak for themselves nor were their voices expected.

12. The rise of the opposition increased in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the century. In January 1905, the events of (what was later called) "Bloody Sunday" took place: a group of workers marched to the czar's Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to make their demands. Imperial forces opened fire on the demonstrators, killing and wounding hundreds, which marked the beginning of the first Russian Revolution.

13. Andres Saal wanted the people from his native Estonia and Indonesia to become closer; he often wrote articles about Indonesian culture and history in Estonian newspapers. He also collected "oriental" alphabets and sent them to Estonian linguists. Saal was also interested in Indonesian folk music and published their lyrics in the Indonesian press.

Saal was critical of the problems of the establishment of Dutch colonial power in nineteenth century Indonesia. Between 1898 and 1903, Saal wrote a series of essays for the Estonian newspaper Olevik. He criticised the ego and mistreatment of Dutch colonists towards the local Javanese and the problematics of Christian missionary work, among other topics.

His novels *White Oath* (1904/1912) and *White Morning* (1908/1929) dramatised the consequences of the colonial conquest in Java. Due to the books' anti-imperial messages during the time of the Russian Revolution, they could not be published until years later.

14. In the late medieval European feudal system, the manor house formed an administrative centre where most of the lords' manorial courts took place. Estonian peasants were tenants of the land that belonged to the landlord. In order to pay their rent, peasants had to work for a certain number of days in the manor. After the abolition of serfdom in 1868, however, peasantry was liberated from the manor. During the 1905 Russian Revolution, hundreds of manor houses were burned and destroyed.

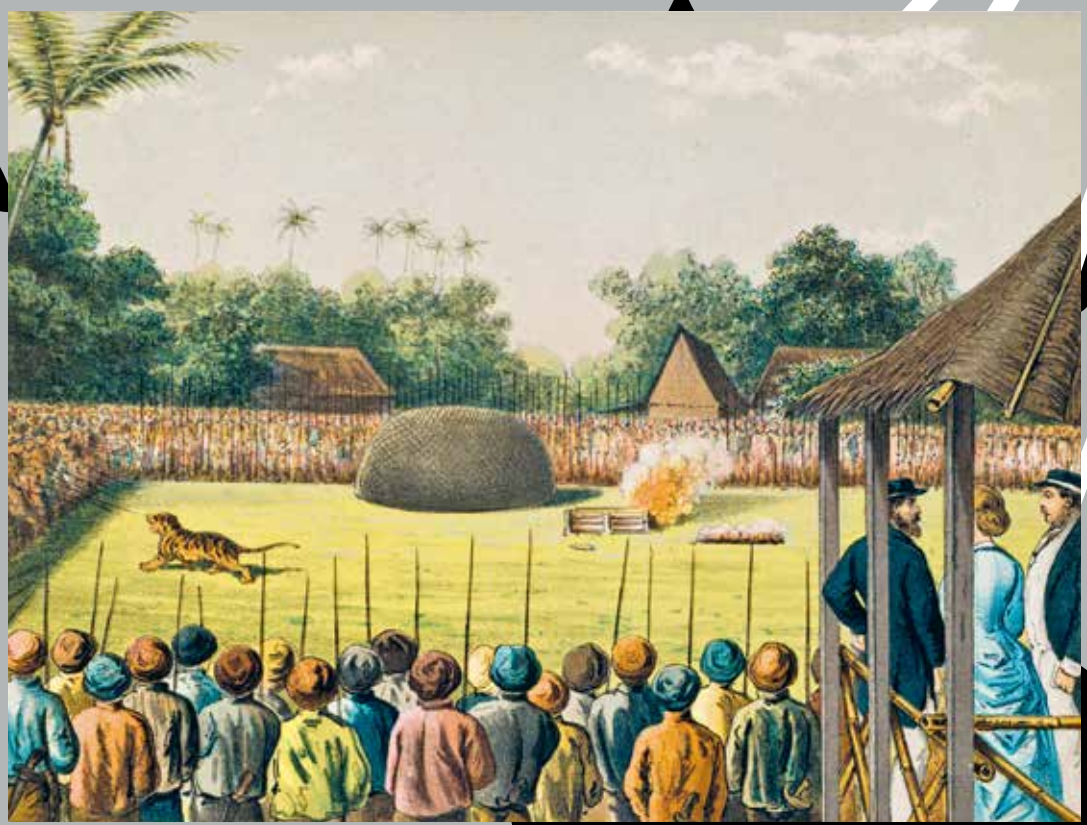
Estonians established their independent nation-state in 1918, not recognising a noteworthy place for manors or Baltic nobility. The Land Reform, carried out in 1919, ended the "manor era." This alienated all the lands, which were eventually divided up into small peasant holdings.

15. Emilie Saal's tropical flower paintings were directly implicated in colonial expansion as the feverish desire for rare and unique plants gripped the world. This was also propelled by increasing numbers of images that showed what treasures the Indonesian landscapes held.

Like in many of her works, this painting demonstrates Saal's interest in the different parts of a plant, which she often included to help scientists identify specimens in various stages of bloom. As viewers, we are implicated in the problem of inclusion and exclusion that the Colonial Empire represented in Saal's botanical works.

16. As the wife of a prominent official, Emilie Saal had unparalleled access to sites across the archipelago and the privilege of crossing colonised landscapes that few other classes of Indonesian women were able to enjoy. A dozen Indonesian servants were employed in the Saal household, enabling her to pursue her artistry.

Indigenous women were part of the self-definition and self-delineation, not only of individual white European women, but also of the internal hierarchy of white colonial society.



17. In his travelogue, Andres Saal wrote about his deeply emotional experience witnessing a Rampogan Macan, a public show of fighting tigers organised by the local Javanese nobility. The event was held in honour of the coronation of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands in 1899.

Multiple bamboo cages with tigers and leopards would be placed in the centre of a square surrounded by hundreds of men armed with sharp spears. While attempting to escape, the animals would then be killed.

Many Dutch colonisers understood the ritual as a symbolic eradication of Evil. From the perspective of the local authorities, this was likely, however, meant to demonstrate the sovereign's opulence and power over the chaos the tiger represented, purifying the kingdom and imposing royal influence.

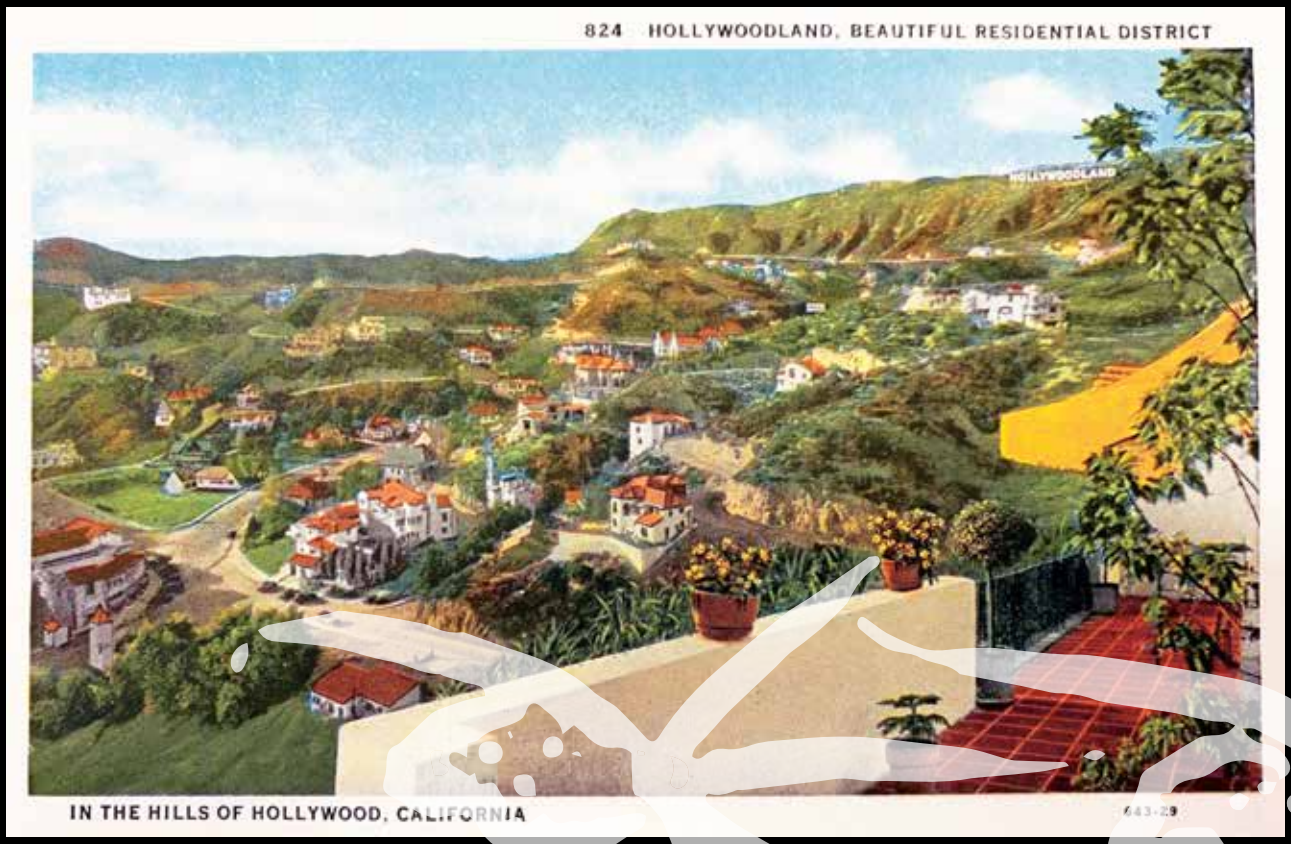
While observing the spectacle, Andres Saal asked himself: "What if those thousands of spears would one day turn against the white man?"

18. Resistance to Dutch capitalist rule and exploitation took root at the turn of the century. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the Saminist Movement started in the Kendeng Mountains Complex of Java, a region that the Saals travelled to in their explorations.

Surontiko Samin of the Randublatung village, a teak forest village, headed the movement. Through the enactment of the Forest Law in Java, the Dutch government forced farmers to pay taxes on their land and restricted villagers' access to the forest. Samin questioned the state ownership of the forest.

By 1907, 3000 families started following the ideas of Samin. Some of those who resisted protested by lying down on their land when the Dutch came to survey; some refused to pay taxes or fines, or denied performing free labour.

19. The 1917 revolution in Russia created the opportunity for Estonia to gain its independence. The National Front, Estonia's main ideological movement, based its ideas on US President Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination. On 24 February 1918, the Salvation Committee (Päästekomitee) declared the independence of the Republic of Estonia. This date was celebrated as Independence Day until the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940.



20. In 1920, the Saals retired to Los Angeles, California, and became US citizens. The same year, thanks to the women's suffrage movement, American women were enfranchised with all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship that had once only been afforded to men.

Emilie Saal's postcards from America are one of the few pieces of writing we have penned by the artist during her lifetime (the Estonian Literary Museum only collected her husband's archive and materials that shed light on his achievements).

21. The ways museums organise, categorise and display the cultures of non-European peoples reflect and reify outdated cultural hierarchies, which have their origins in nineteenth-century science. Natural history museum practices are still guided by the following: a belief in a civilisational hierarchy, with Northern European cultures figured as superior to all others; the importance of "salvage" anthropology, in which scientists sought to preserve the remnants of "primitive" cultures that are supposedly on the verge of extinction; finally, the naturalisation of non-European populations in specialised exhibit spaces—a segregation of the "West from the Rest."

Mrs. E. R. Saal-Macksy and Her Paintings

22. In 1926, Emilie Saal's retrospective of 333 watercolours and paintings of tropical plants, including 100 rare orchids took place at the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art. Her collection received praise and was valued at a hefty price. While women played a significant role in the development of plant science through botanical art, many have not received recognition for their work in comparison to their male counterparts.

The US was also going through an "orchidelirium" at the time of Emilie Saal's retrospective. President Woodrow Wilson would gift his wife, Edith, a fresh cattleya orchid corsage every day during their courtship. For special occasions, she would wear as many as four or five flowers on her lapel.

23. After retiring to the affluent neighbourhood of West Hollywood, the Saals recreated the European upper-class garden of abundance in their new home, albeit with local plants perfectly manicured. The subjugation of nature on display in European photographs of the late colonial period has come full circle.

VÄLIS-EESTI

VÄLISEESTLASTE AJAKIRI

MAI 1936 Nr. 5. 8. AASTAKÄIK

Harutlusi asumaade küsimuse ümber.

Sõnum Hispaania lehes. — Vastuvõetud asumaade soetamise kavadele eesti ajakirjanduses. — Väliseestlaste koondamise vajadus avaldustesse. — Eesti Lõuna-Ameerikast.

24. Estonia's own colonial ambitions manifested during the interwar period when it had just been established as a nation-state. In 1933, Johannes Maide published an article in the *Almanac of Foreign Estonia* about the Estonian colonial policy that called for buying islands from Spain.

Some diplomats supported the idea of an Estonian colony. In 1936, they even published an article, where the characteristics of each of the islands that could be colonised were mentioned.

25. In Estonian folk mythology, a *Kratt* is a living being made of various objects; a servant that works for its owner. In many folk stories, the *Kratt* is connected to the devil: if its owner doesn't keep it occupied with tasks of labour, it will focus all of its ability on attacking, like a slave who revolts against his master.

In 1940, Eduard Tubinal's ballet titled "Kratt" was presented, becoming one of the most popular modernist representations of the creature in the 20th century (this along with paintings of it by Aleksander Promet and Kristjan Raud).

In June 1940, the USSR invaded Estonia and banned all modernist music. The ban continued throughout the German occupation that began in 1941. Despite this, "Kratt" avoided censorship due to the music's folkloric character.

26. The photograph of Indonesian men carrying 300 heavy portraits of the Dutch colonial governors out of the Governor's Residence (later called "Istana Merdeka" or "Palace of Freedom") shows the weight of history. In ridding themselves of their former Dutch masters, the Indonesian people bear this symbolic weight. Although independence was proclaimed on 27th August 1945, the Dutch would only recognise this after a four-year period of intense political struggle.

27. On Friday 17 August 1945, Soekarno (leader of the Indonesian struggle for independence from the Dutch colonialists and the first president of Indonesia), proclaimed Indonesian independence with a short and simple yet smart text: "We, the people of Indonesia, hereby declare the independence of Indonesia. Matters concerning the transfer of power, etc. will be executed in an orderly manner and in the shortest possible time." And just like that, Soekarno, accompanied by Hatta and a handful of other people, made history on the doorstep of his house in Jakarta.

The proclamation is considered as a reference for Indonesia in implementing all state laws. The nature of the proclamation of independence is also used as a sign that the Indonesian people have the right to live their own lives without interference from other nations and are free to determine their own destiny for the future of the nation.

28. Founded in 1864, the Tropenmuseum (Royal Tropical Institute) is an ethnographic museum located in Amsterdam. The international "Orchids" exhibition took place in the museum's main hall in 1971. Opulent displays of orchids dazzled visitors. The museum hosted a record number of visitors to the exhibition.

Recently, the Dutch Council for Culture announced that museums in the Netherlands should return statues and other artifacts that were stolen during the colonial era to their countries of origin.

29. General Soeharto was officially elected as Indonesia's president in 1971 and ruled as a dictator until his resignation in 1998. In 1974, Siti Hartinah Soeharto (known as Bu Tien), the former first lady of Indonesia, launched her Taman Anggrek "Indonesia Permai" (Orchid Park "Gorgeous Indonesia") located on the border of Central and West Jakarta. The park held annual orchid expos since its inception. In 1976, a researcher in LIPI (Indonesian Institute of Sciences) found a new genome of orchid endemic to North Sumatra and named it after the first lady's full middle name, Cymbidium Hartinahianum.

30. Located in East Jakarta, on land of more than 150 hectares, Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park) was launched in 1975. The park initially contained 26 traditional houses from all 26 of Indonesia's provinces. Today, it includes several museums (Communication Technology, Transportation, Military, etc.), theatres and an iMax cinema. Bu Tien's orchid garden was relocated to the miniature park in 1993, where annual expos are still held. Hundreds of families were evicted for the construction of the project. Students who were leading demonstrations were captured, and many state businesses were extorted in the process. In 1993, Soeharto announced the moon orchid as one of the three national flowers of Indonesia.

31. In 2006, the Mollo people of South Timor started to see outsiders around their sacred rocks: policemen, excavators, and other mercenaries who were involved in a mining project to extract marble from Mutis Mountain without their consent.

Led by activist Aleta Baun, who travelled for two months and met the elders of the twenty-four villages, around 150 women started to meet every morning in the mining site. They brought their looms and weaved intricate tapestry, a historic practice among Mollo women. Despite the aggressive response from the mining company, they officially withdrew from the mining site in 2010.

32. In 2017, the Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists was created by Eunike Nugroho and Jenny Kartawinata, consisting of a large network of local artists and students. The founders hope that botanical art can raise awareness for and support the existence and conservation of plants, especially those that are threatened.

A large-scale commercial trade of wild orchids for food, medicine and the beauty industry continues. While diverse, all of these trades have been linked to overharvesting, causing the decline and loss of species from the wild.

33. Present-day followers of the ecological anti-colonialist movement believe that land, water and forests are common property, to be used for the common good. Like their predecessors, they reject the idea that the state can impose its own control over these natural resources. In many cases, the resistance has been led by women.

They have been struggling against the expansion of the cement industry that threatens their land and water, where connections to Dutch enterprises still remain.

34. "Orchidelirium" is still alive and well globally, including in Estonia. A large-scale commercial trade of tropical orchids grown in nurseries throughout the Netherlands thrives. In Tallinn, the Botanical Garden organises "Orchid Days" yearly, which is immensely popular with locals, longing for exotic specimens that conjure the warmth of the tropics in the depths of Baltic winter.

People spend more money on orchids than on any other houseplant, making orchid cultivation a multi-billion euro industry. Despite the flower's availability, orchid hunters continue to travel to remote locations in search of new and more exotic orchids.

IMAGE CREDITS

1. Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Bamboo Orchid*, 1995, [1910–1916]. Offset print, 48 × 63.5 cm. Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.

2. Julie Hagen-Schwarz, *Flowers in a Vase*, 1845. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Art Museum of Estonia.

3. Illustrierte Frauenzeitung: Ausgabe der Modenwelt mit Unterhaltungsblatt (Illustrated women's newspaper: fashion and entertainment edition), 1886. Magazine. Courtesy of the University of Düsseldorf.

4. Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna of Russia, 1866–1870. Photograph. Courtesy of Heritage Image Partnership.

5. Raadi Manor, *Interior of the Yellow Hall*, 1906. Photograph. Courtesy of Rosemarie von Liphart-Kampf private collection.

6. Andres Saal, *Emilie Rosalie Saal stands next to thirteen Indonesian servants and a palanquin or joli, a vehicle the Dutch co-opted as a status marker*, 1902–1916. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

7. A nursery (right) and an orchid greenhouse (left) in Lands' Plantentuin in Buitenzorg, West Java, 1894–1929. Photograph. Courtesy of the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll. no. TM-10010782.

8. Andres Saal, *[Tropical flora]* (in Estonian *[Troopika floora]*), undated. Manuscript. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

9. Wardian cases prepared for the shipment of plants from Lands Plantentuin in Buitenzorg, West Java, 1913. Medium. Courtesy of the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll. no. TM-10010760.

10. Leo Eland, *Landscape of Java*, 1939. Detail of diorama made in the Dutch pavilion at the World Exhibition in New York. Courtesy of the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll. no. TM-60047421.

11. Portrait of a tobacco planter with servants in front of his house, Sumatra, Indonesia, 1888–1890. Photograph. Courtesy of the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen. Coll. no. TM-60010556.

12. Vladimir Yegorovich Makovsky, *The 9th of January in 1905 on Vasilyevsky Island*, 1905. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia.

13. Andres Saal, *White Oath* (in Estonian *Valge Vanne*), 1912. Novel. Courtesy of the Digital Archive DIGAR.

14. Nikolai Königsfest, *Lohu manor.* Around 100 Baltic German manors were burned or looted by the Estonians during the Russian Revolution, 1906. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian History Museum.

15. Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Magnolia*, 1995, [1910s]. Offset print. Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.

16. Emilie Saal on horseback, date and author unknown. Stereo-photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

17. Josias Cornelis Rappard, *Tiger Fight on Java*, 1883–1889. Coloured print after the original work of Rappard. Courtesy of the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

18. Indonesian man standing in front of a teak tree in Java, Indonesia, 1900–1940. Medium. Courtesy of the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

19. Karl Akel, *The first celebration of Estonian Independence Day in Tallinn*, February 24, 1919. Photograph. Courtesy of the National Archives of Estonia.

20. *In the hills of Hollywood, California*, undated. Postcard. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

21. Museum and Sunken Gardens, Exposition Park Los Angeles, date unknown. Postcard. Courtesy of the Western Publishing & Novelty Co.

22. "E.R. Saal—Macksy and Her Paintings," Los Angeles Times, 1926. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times.

23. Emilie Saal and Andres Saal in their garden in Los Angeles, 1930s. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

24. Front cover of Välis-Eesti, May, 1936. Courtesy of the Digital Archive DIGAR.

25. Kristjan Raud, *Kratt-Viija*, 1927. Drawing. Courtesy of Art Museum of Estonia.

26. Henri Cartier Bresson, *Indonesia, Jakarta, Independence*, 1949. Courtesy of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

27. Frans Mendur, *Sukarno accompanied by Mohammad Hatta (right), proclaiming the independence of Indonesia*, Jakarta, 1945. Photograph. Courtesy of Department of Information Presidential Documents, National Library of Indonesia.

28. International Orchid Exhibition at the Royal Tropical Institute Amsterdam, 1971. Photograph. Courtesy of the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

29. Siti Hartinah Soeharto (Bu Tien) in her Orchid Garden Taman Anggrek "Indonesia Permai," 1976. Photograph. Courtesy of Taman Anggrek Indonesia.

30. Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, 1993. Photograph. Courtesy of Taman Anggrek Indonesia.

31. Mollo women weaving to protest Mutis Mountain, 2010. Photograph. Courtesy of Indonesia Nature Films Society.

32. Bari Paramarta Islam, *Eunike Nugroho with her painting of Amorphophallus titanum, exhibited at the first IDSBA exhibition, for Worldwide Botanical Art Day*, May 18, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

33. People from North Kendeng demonstrate outside the presidential palace in Jakarta, with their feet set in cement, 2016. Photograph. Courtesy of Natalie Stuart.

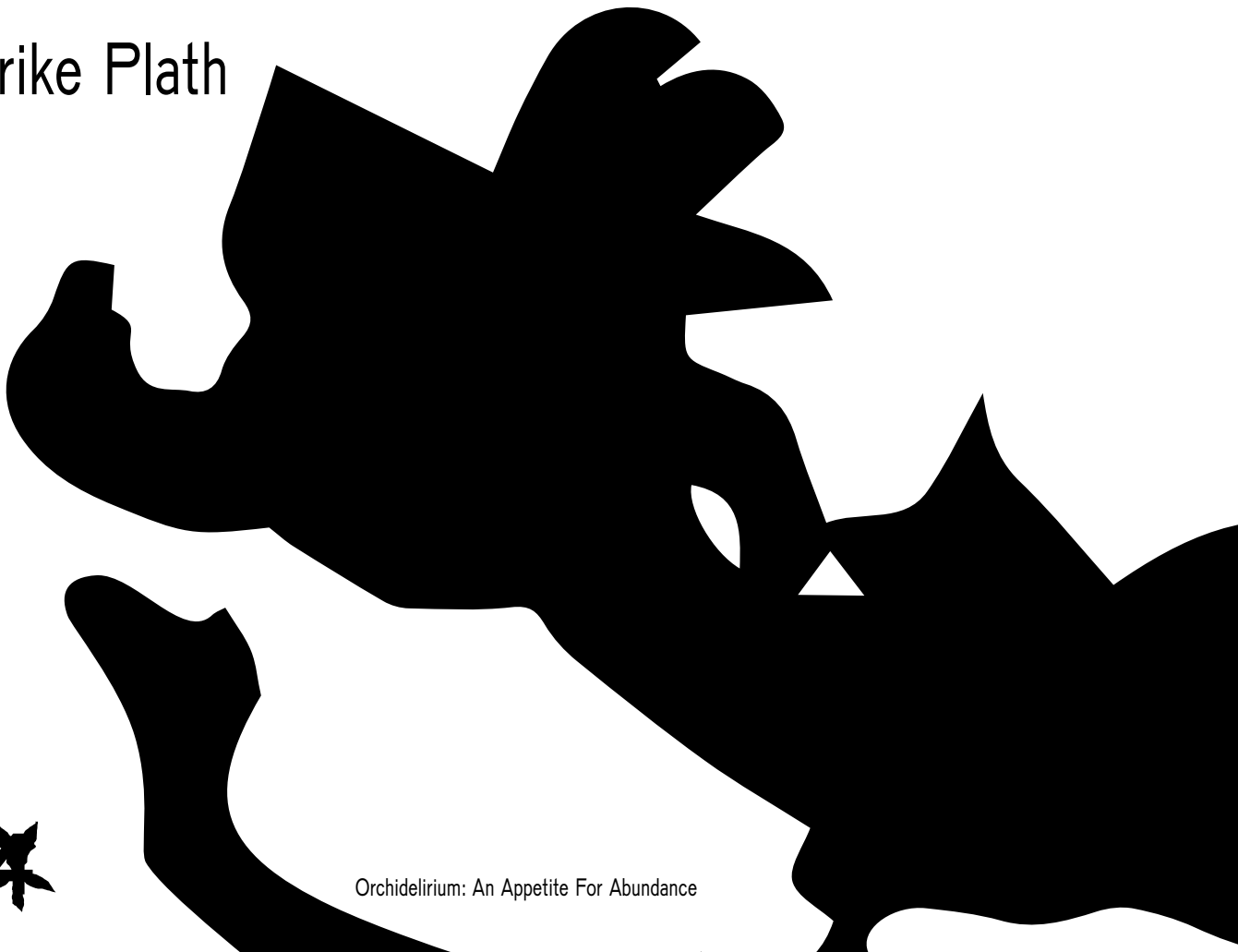
34. Tropical orchids imported from the Netherlands on sale during "Orchid Days" at the Tallinn Botanical Garden, 2020. Photograph. Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.


ESTONIANS
ORCHIDS
AND

EXOTIC OTHERS

BALTIC COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS REVISITED

Ulrike Plath



INTRODUCTION

What does Estonia have to do with exotic orchids and questions of colonial othering? Today, this small country at the shore of the Baltic sea has been stereotypically branded as a Nordic country, with a smart economy and IT-friendly developments. Little is known by the broader public about its colonial history, which nevertheless has recently become a vibrant object of research in history, art history, and literature studies.[1] Estonia has contributed to global colonial history in a number of ways, which will be expanded upon throughout this article.

"Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance" unfolds the depths of Baltic colonial history by framing it alongside radical environmental and global questions of the twenty-first century. By doing so, the exhibit is part of the growing field of environmental art and environmental humanities which has blossomed in the age of the anthropocene.[2] However, the exhibition does not focus on expressions of general global anxiety in the planetary age, but rather uses history and concrete people and places as anchors to link decisions made in the past with questions asked today. Through artistic practice it blurs the logic of time and place, and we can follow how the formerly colonised become colonisers themselves. This holds true not only for humans, but also for flowers, animals, and even soils, which are given the agency to spread, and to change global cultures and habits. Even the global North, South, East, and West are now melting together, much in the same way as globalisation and local identities have come to belong together as two sides of the same coin. In this charade Estonian history becomes an example of the *conditio humana* and inescapable global and post-human entanglements.[3] Through history we can see the aching global scars created by colonialism, capitalism, and environmental exploitation; the violent longing for beauty; and the powerful urge to change roles, social, and natural conditions.

This article aims to expand upon some of the most significant topics of the exhibition from the perspective of Baltic social and environmental history. It will lead you from the glass veranda of an Estonian manor house to the personal life of Emilie Rosalie Saal and from here to the question of mimicry and assimilation in colonial settings. We will also turn to human-animal entanglements before delving into the colonial history of orchids by looking deeply into the beauty of their blossoms and the needs of their roots, as this essay will then close with the discussion of the colonial dimension of peat excavation in order to produce orchid substrates and other soils for flowers. Each of these topics has deep roots in Estonian history, as well as being part of the global story of environmental colonialism.

1 Linda Kaljundi, Eha Komissarov, Kadi Polli, curators, "The Conqueror's Eye. Lisa Reihana "In Pursuit of Venus,"" Kumu Art Museum (September 19, 2019—January 26, 2020); Ulrike Plath, *Esten und Deutsche in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands. Fremdheitskonstruktionen, Lebens-welten, Kolonialphantasien 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011); Pauls Daija, "Colonial Patterns in Latvian Popular Enlightenment Literature," *Interlitteraria*, 19, 2 (2014): 356–371; Kristina Jõekalda, *German Monuments in the Baltic Heimat? A Historiography of Heritage in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'* (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2020).

2 Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2014).

3 Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

GLASS VERANDA LOOKING AT ESTONIAN COLONIAL HISTORY

The glass veranda is a topos often used in Baltic German[4] nineteenth century literature,[5] it has been a part of many manor houses (ill. 1). Often decorated with wood carvings and colourful windows, it was here that the manor owner's family sat and took breakfast or tea during the short summers, a place to read and write, to chat and play, to knit and paint. It was also the place where indoor plants were kept during the spring and autumn, before or after they were transported to heated glasshouses to survive the harsh winters. The veranda therefore was a semi-place that opened the manor toward its surroundings, but also symbolised the glass wall between the Baltic Germans inside and the Estonians, Latvians, and Russians outside. The veranda was a glasshouse itself that created a much-needed atmosphere where Baltic German aristocratic culture could exist during the final period of the Tsarist Empire, with its growing social and political movements and all the other signs of a changing political world climate. Open to all directions and views, the veranda could also be interpreted as a cage or aquarium, where the last days of a dying upper class was carefully watched by those on the outside.

However, the veranda was also a place destined to smash. In the late nineteenth century the veranda was accused of the murder of hundreds of birds who died on the glass windows by members of songbird protection societies. Their bloody remains had to be cleaned up every morning by domestic workers, before the family life of Baltic Germans, obsessed as they were with beauty, could begin for the day. Verandas as glasshouses were also the first places to be destroyed during uprisings and revolutions, as in the revolution of 1905 when hundreds of manor houses were burned down by Estonians and Latvians who wanted to free themselves from the burdens of the past and the Baltic Germans with their outmoded privileges and colonialistic attitude.

This attitude has centuries-old roots, reaching back to the medieval times when the territory of the present Baltic states was subjected to German domination. With the crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth century a colonial structure was established that lasted until the early twentieth century. Although there were many assimilation processes, the society was in general divided into two groups: the Baltic Germans who formed the upper class in the cities and the countryside, and the so-called "Un-Germans," Estonian and Latvians, who were working mainly as serfs, peasants, and domestic staff for the Germans. Although only 10% of the Baltic Germans belonged to the nobility, the privileges given to Germans created a colonial setting even though the territory

4 Baltic Germans refers to the Germans who lived on the territory of what is today known as Estonia and Latvia from the Middle Ages until 1939. During the early modern times we can see a constant but small-scale German migration that rapidly grew after the massive losses of the Great Nordic War in 1700–1720. Some 10% of the Baltic German population formed the noble upper class.

5 Armin von Ungern-Sternberg, "Erzählregionen" in Überlegungen zu literarischen Räumen mit Blick auf die deutsche Literatur des Baltikums, das Baltikum und die deutsche Literatur (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003).

ill. 1: Kristina Norman, *Rip-off*, 2021–2022. Video still. 13 minutes 37 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

ill. 2: Ekaterina Khilkova, *Interior view of the women's department of the St. Petersburg drawing school for auditors*, 1855. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the State Russian Museum.

ill. 3: Reinhold Sachker, *Andres Saal with his family*, undated. Photograph, 10.4 × 14.6 cm. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

ill. 4: Kristina Norman, *Shelter*, 2021–2022. Video still. 10 minutes 30 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

belonged to the Swedish Empire in early modern times and between 1710 and 1918 to Russia. Alongside the rise of the German State in 1871, the idea that it was thanks to the conquest of what is today known as Estonia and Latvia that European colonialism was born and these territorial conquests were seen as the cradle for the European expansions which followed.[6] In doing so, Germany, a colonial latecomer, constructed deep colonial roots that reached well beyond the colonial experience of the British Empire, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal. According to this rhetoric, the light of the colonial age rose thanks to German culture and politics from the European East—ex *oriente lux*.

In Estonian cultural memory this long colonial-like experience is expressed in the phrase "700 years of serfdom" under Baltic German rule. Indeed, the pressure on the peasantry steadily rose from the Middle Ages to the late eighteenth, and even nineteenth, century. An important aspect of the Baltic colonial setting was the growing fear of the uprisings that would bring about a bloody end to Baltic German colonial dominance. Between 1816 and 1819 Estonian and Latvian serfs were officially freed, but were still not allowed to own land. Therefore the peasant classes were bound even more directly to their landlords and continued living in more or less pre-modern conditions. Instead of creating a new society with equal rights, the nationalist tension between Germans, Estonians, and Russians grew. It was the revolutions in Russia and the First World War that helped to create new political realities. In 1918 Estonia declared its independence from Russia and fought for it in the War of Independence (1918–1920).

The young state also introduced new rules for the former Baltic German upper classes. Their land was taken from them and distributed amongst Estonians. For the Baltic German manor owners this meant the loss of most of their former privileges, and as a result many started to leave Estonia. On the eve of the Second World War nearly all Baltic Germans left the country when Hitler called them back to Germany. After 1945 some of them moved on to South Africa and Latin America to continue colonial practices, but most of the Baltic Germans assimilated into German post-war society and forgot their Baltic roots. During this time, Estonians and Latvians endured a period of occupation under German and Soviet rule that lasted until 1991. Although Soviet ideology tried to erase the colonial footprints of the Baltic Germans, hatred against the former upper classes became even more pronounced.

Estonian history is a history of multilayered colonisation and migration, a history during which not only the identities of the people living in the region changed, but also the environments around them. It is unique in that it replaced its former colonisers twice, once in 1918 and again in 1991. However, even when the former colonisers left the country, such as in the case of the Baltic Germans, many traces of them remained. We are in a story that shows us how political clear cuts and sudden ends might not work in the sphere of cultural memory, a story where revenants and doppelgängers are always at play reminding us of the past, and where othering and adapting to new identities belong to the daily efforts of those seeking social mobility. It is a story that invites the visitor to change their former views on colonial history and to delve deeper into the colonial entanglements of the Baltics. It is here, where the story of Emilie Rosalie Saal begins.

6 Ulrike Plath, *Esten und Deutsche in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands. Fremdheitskonstruktionen, Lebenswelten, Kolonialphantasien 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011).

EMILIE AND ANDRES SAAL

It was in the very same year that the German Empire was founded that Emilie Rosalie Maksi (1871–1945) (ill. 2) was born in Tartu, the city with the oldest university in the whole of the Russian Empire, founded in 1632 under the rule of Gustav Adolf II, emperor of Sweden. She grew up in a context of growing national problems. From St. Petersburg new voices called to end the cultural dominance of the Baltic German elite and to make the Baltic provinces an integral part of Tsarist Russia. In the University of Tartu and in public life the Russian language replaced German. At the same time, Estonians and Latvians began to actively promote their own cultural and political identities.

Emilie met her future husband, Andres Saal (1861–1932) in 1886 as a young woman.[7] Andres, ten years her senior, was already working as an editor for an important Estonian cultural journal and studying history at the University of Tartu. When they first met, he was already well-known for his first historical novel written in Estonian, and as an inspiring speaker. He was also a gifted ice skater, which impressed Emilie. However, she refused his first offer of marriage. When her family moved to St. Petersburg, she started to study painting at the Art Academy in St. Petersburg, which offered courses for women. This step meant that Emilie was one of the first Estonian women to be trained in visual arts at the Academy level. Throughout this time she stayed in contact with Andres, whose historical novels inevitably ran into conflict with Russian censorship and who was forced to find a new income as a photographer.

As his problems with the Russian authorities grew, he decided to accept an offer from the Dutch East-India Company to work as manager of the reproduction photography, zincography, and carbon printing department at E. Fuhri & Co. printing house located in Surabaya. In February 1898 he arrived there and in the same year Emilie accepted his second marriage offer. She moved to Indonesia where they married the next year. From this point on the Estonian couple changed their behaviour and lived as members of the Dutch colonial upper classes; a lifestyle they would have never been able to achieve had they remained in Estonia. They owned many houses and rented them out, hired a dozen Indonesian servants for their private household, traveled widely, and adapted to the local colonial system they were now part of. In 1902 Andres accepted a job as the manager of the photography department at the Topography Bureau in the service of the Dutch colonial army. They had now become the colonisers (ill. 3).

For Emilie, or Emmy as she was now called, this new life gave her an enormous amount of freedom. Driven by a deep interest in botany she started to organise botanical trips all over the Dutch East Indies, and throughout the upcoming decades painted more than 300 flowers, fruits, and plants. It was thanks to these botanical trips that she started to becomeinterested in local orchids (ill. 5). While her husband maintained his connection with Estonia

7 Olaf Klaasen, *Hüvasti Insulinde. Andres Saali elu Indoneesias* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 1996).

ill. 5: Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Fagácea Imperialis*, 1995, [1910s]. Offset print. Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.

and continued to write historical novels for the Estonian public, the Saals' joint project was the manuscript *The most important and interesting examples of the Javan flora in colour drawings from nature*, which was handwritten in German, but never published. Emmy's scientific and artistic interest in the local flora was, however, never "innocent." It was part of the Dutch colonial system that desired in-depth information about the natural resources of the area as well as being part of a growing capitalist trade that provided exotic flowers for the European market. The more the demand for new and exotic plants grew in Europe, the more the colonies were botanically exploited. Women took an active role as botanists and artists, as has been recently, convincingly, highlighted.[8]

The older he got, the more critical Andres became of the Dutch colonial system and its growing nationalism. He refused to become a Dutch citizen, did not accept the local hierarchies and was called a "Russian nihilist" by his colleagues.[9] He became a dubious outsider due to his strong roots in Estonia. However, in the meantime, Estonia had also changed, as Andres had witnessed twice, during a longer stay in 1911/12 and in 1925.[10] In 1920 Emmy and Andres Saal decided to leave Indonesia with their Dutch state pension and retire to America, making West Hollywood their new home. Andres later explained that this decision was made because of their two children, Rosa Regina Saal (later Bailey) and Leo Henri Wladimir Saal. The school system was poor in Indonesia, and Dutch nationalism made it hard for the Estonians to strengthen their roots there. But they could also not go back to Estonia, as the children could not bear the European climate, nor could they speak Estonian (ill. 5). America offered the rootless ones a new home and in 1925 Andres got American citizenship using the pathway of naturalisation. He died in 1931 and the following year his ashes were brought to Estonia, where they remained unburied for a number of decades. At the time of his death he was one of the most popular writers in the genre of the Estonian historical novel. His sixteen books and innumerable articles made him a phenomena of his own: a charismatic Estonian writer in exile with an immense output and a clear national narrative, who also brought colonial stories of the global world to Estonia and explained local history from a global perspective.

Emmy was sixty years old when Andres died, and since arriving in America she had chosen a quite different path. Between 1926 and 1928 she had a large exhibition of her 333 paintings of plants, flowers, and fruits in the Exposition Park of the Los Angeles Museum of Science and Art that received positive reviews in the Los Angeles Times. At the time, her collection was valued at 15,000 USD. The fame she earned in America as a colonial and botanical artist did not spread to Estonia, neither in the 1920s nor later, and her stay in Estonia in 1927 didn't change this. When she died in 1954 the Soviet-Estonian newspapers didn't publish a single word about her. The story of Emmy as an artist, and a woman with lofty academic goals has been unknown in Estonia until the exhibition "Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance." She was a forgotten artist. She was, as were many women of her time, overshadowed by her husband. Emmy's work only ever spoke to the art market in America, her public has never been in Estonia or wider Europe–until now…[11]

8 Heather Pardoe and Maureen Lazarus, "Images of Botany: Celebrating the Contribution of Women to the History of Botanical Illustration," *Collections: A Journal for Museums and Archive Professionals*, no. 14, 4 (2018): 547–567.

9 Olaf Klaasen, *Hüvasti Insulinde. Andres Saali elu Indoneesias* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 1996), 219.

10 Oskar Urgart, "Andres Saali elu ja looming," in *A. Saal: Waltitud kirjatööde kogu I* (Tartu: Eesti Kirjanduse Seltsi Kirjastus, 1931), 5–18.

11 Olaf Klaasen, *Hüvasti Insulinde. Andres Saali elu Indoneesias* (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 1996), 231–246.

BEING THE OTHER, CHANGING ROLES

Changing positions, mirroring each other, and mimicking one another are all basic concepts of colonial settings. For the Estonians this was mostly a question of cultural assimilation to German or Russian culture or as it would later be interpreted, as self-colonisation.[12] Around 1900 the future of Estonian culture as an independent culture was heatedly discussed, while in the centuries before it had been a class language that was neglected by all Estonians with ambitions of exiting their class position. Still it was a goal for many Estonians at the end of the nineteenth century to copy the Baltic German upper classes in language and behaviour, architecture and food practices, in literature and the arts. Modernisation and urbanisation meant an escape from the smell, dirt and burdens of the conservative peasant culture. While the Baltic German manor owners had enjoyed their golden age during the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, as they could invest even more money into the beauty of the architecture, the parks, and the gardens, the living standard of the peasants remained mostly unchanged during early modern times. It was only during the second half of the nineteenth century that the wooden farmhouses, where humans and animals had lived closely together, started being modernised: only now did windows and chimneys spread, smoky air and sooty surfaces were replaced by new understandings of hygiene, animals were slowly placed in barns, and by the end of the century plants started to decorate indoor rooms. At the same time, fruit and flower gardens appeared around the farmsteads. In those days, copying the model of Baltic German manor house culture was common among the first generations of Estonians who stopped living as peasants.

Andres' and Emilie's parents already belonged to this contingent of people who had left peasant life behind and formed an Estonian urban middle class. While others of their kind made their careers in Estonian cities, Andres and Emilie used what was offered by their connections to become part of the "real colonial system" in the Global South. In doing this, they were a role model for the next generation of Baltic colonial adventurers who attempted to establish Estonian settlements in New Guinea and Latin America[13]—a dream that remained on a larger scale unrealised. The few Baltic persons we know who followed Andres Saal to Indonesia earned their money in infrastructure, as gold seekers, or by hunting exotic animals.[14]

One of the most well-known Baltic hunters was the famous "Tiger Man" Alexander "Sasha" Siemel, in Latvian Aleksandrs Žiemelis (1890–1970), who left Livonia for the Americas at the age of seventeen and there became a professional colonial adventurer, a hunter who specialised in hunting jaguars with a simple spear, as well as a writer, photographer, and actor in numerous films.[15] There was

12 Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*, no. 28 (1984): 125–133.

13 Martin Hallik and Olaf-Mihkel Klaassen, "Eestlane Indoneesias pärast Andres Saali," *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, vol. 103, no. 4 (1998): 73–75.

14 Ibid., 73.

15 Julian Duguid, *Tiger-Man. An Odyssey of Freedom* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932).

also Arvīds Blūmentāls, whose nickname was "Crocodile Harry" (1925–2006) and who was also born in Latvia, who deserted the Waffen-SS for the Foreign Legion in Australia by pretending to be a descendant of a Baltic German noble family. He specialised in killing crocodiles–the final count was between 10,000 and 40,000.[16]

Acting as colonisers by shooting or seeing exotic animals was a typical pastime during the early twentieth century (ill. 4). Hunting safaris to Africa or other destinations were organised for the rich,[17] while middle-class people could consume exoticised perspectives through literature, art, and film, or by visiting local zoos where often even native people were exhibited to stage colonial settings.[18] Watching exotic animals was, however, common practice much earlier throughout Europe. At many courts exotic animals had already been held in captivity since medieval times, where they were presented to visitors and sometimes even to the common people at special festivities. Exotic animals were symbols of noble power. Some of the animals had been brought to Europe as presents, while others were sold by tradesmen and commercial companies.

Before the Tallinn Zoo was founded in 1939[19] watching exotic animals became possible for ordinary people thanks to the first menageries and traveling circuses. The first menageries of this kind were seen in the Baltic provinces of Russia at the very end of the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century more and more exotic animals were seen in the Baltic provinces. In 1871, the year Emilie was born, chimpanzees from Sumatra were brought for the first time to Russia and showed in Riga. At menageries it was also possible to buy exotic animals such as parrots, monkeys, peafowls, guinea fowls, snakes, etc and to watch indiginous African dances and other exotic cultural habits. Although owning exotic animals was a hobby for the upper classes, knowledge about them passed quickly to the Estonian and Latvian peasants, who could also watch them for money at the menageries and also learned about them in educational texts in calendars and school books. While in the eyes of the Baltic Germans in early modern times the local peasants behaved like wild creatures, in the modernising process of the late nineteenth century Estonians became part of modern European culture. During this time watching exotic animals and other exotic native cultures became part of the new Estonian national culture.[20] Watching the "Other" defined the civilised European. The Others were indigineous people, women, and animals.

Seeking social mobility through Othering and showing dominance over nature, more precisely over animals, by owning, watching, hunting, and killing them was a strategy mainly used by men. Trophies of exotic animals on the walls of living rooms are sad signs of that struggle to dominate the other. Women had to find other ways to make their way in global colonial enterprises. Mostly, like Emilie, they used marriage as a tool to do so. Unmarried or divorced women could also engage in missionary work as some of the

16 Michael Mustillo, "Latvia's Crocodile Harry: Inspiration for Hollywood," *The Baltic Times* (December 2, 2015), latvia___s_crocodile_harry__inspiration_for_hollywood

17 Angela Thompsell, *Hunting Africa. British Sport, African Knowledge and the Nature of Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

18 Luis A. Sánchez-Gómez, "Human Zoos or Ethnic Shows? Essence and contingency in *Living* Ethnological Exhibitions," *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 2, 2 (December 2013); Greg Gillespie, *Hunting for Empire Narratives of Sport in Rupert's Land, 1840–70* (Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press, 2007).

19 Nelly Mäekivi, *The Zoological Garden as a Hybrid Environment—A (Zoo) semiotic Analysis (Dissertationes semioticae universitatis Tartuensis 29)* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2018).

20 KUMU project space exhibition "Rendering Race" (curated by Bart Pushaw) in Kumu's new permanent exhibition "Landscapes of Identity: Estonian Art 1700–1945" (curated by Kadi Polli and Linda Kaljundi).

upper-class Baltic German women did.[21] For Estonian women it was not easy to find their means of entering existing colonial structures and so far Emilie Rosalie Saal is the only Estonian woman we know of who did have a kind of "colonial career." In the beginning she did this through the typical path of creating an Estonian family in exile. But from there she started to develop her own career as a colonial artist and botanist. True, there were also male colonial climbers who started dealing with flowers. So we know about the Latvian Ernesto Foldats Andins (1925–2003), who left his country during the war and studied botany in Germany. From here he left for Venezuela where he became one of the worlds best known orchidologists specialising in the orchids of Latin America.[22]

Every century has its flower. In the sixteenth century Dutch tulips were traded for extraordinary prices, in the seventeenth century it was the carnation, and from the eighteenth century onwards orchids took their place, followed by jasmine and lilies of the valley in the late nineteenth century. Every century also has its fragrance. The fragrance of the twentieth century might be that of the orchid *Vanilla planifolia* that was used in many desserts and perfumes. While vanilla from Mexico was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a highly prized product only affordable for the European upper classes, it was thanks to a method of artificial production invented in 1874 that made the martial twentieth century taste and smell of vanilla.

This, however, is only the latest development in the history of how orchids colonised the world. The globalising world made flowers and soils travel, and uprooted people and animals to relocate them in unforeseen conditions. If we could attribute free will and agency to orchids, we would have to admit that they skillfully used humans and new technologies to spread all over the world, finding themselves new habitats such as window ledges and supermarket shelves. They are the sad winners of globalisation and colonialism. The price they pay for their ubiquity is high: the destruction of their original habitats and with that the variety of their genome. Only the most perfect orchids make it to the new habitats all across the world, while the overwhelming masses die along the way.

Orchids have been known in Europe since the seventeenth century when the first wood carvings depicting these extraordinary beauties spread from the overseas colonies. For the flowers themselves it was a difficult journey to Europe, as they had to survive the harsh transportation on ships and later the even harsher European climate that could be counterbalanced only by the gentle hands of profoundly knowledgeable gardeners. It was Dutch horticulturists who made orchids blossom in the first heated glasshouses of the time.[23] It was also in Dutch botanical gardens where the earliest collections of orchids can be found, which is no wonder when you

21 Debora Sommer, *Eine baltisch-adelige Missionarin bewegt Europa: Barbara Juliane v. Krüdener, geb v. Vietinghoff gen. Scheel (1764–1824)* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013).

22 Ernesto Foldats, *Contríbucíón a la Orquídíoflora de Venezuela* (Caracas: El Cojo, 1969); Carlo Aulisi and Ernesto Foldats Andin, *Monography of the Venezuelan Cattleyas and Its Varieties* (Caracas: Torino, 1990).

23 Elizabeth Den Hartog and Carla Teune, "Gaspar Fagel (1633–88): His Garden and Plant Collection at Leeuwenhorst," *Garden History*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2002), 191–205.

consider that the Dutch Republic was a great colonial power in the seventeenth century. The Dutch East India and Dutch West India Companies were leaders in the field of colonial cartography and botany, combining scientific, economic, and artistic interest. The companies attracted leading botanists to help them with their work in exploiting the natural elements of the colonies.[24]

The leading botanic painter of the time was the German Maria Sibylle Merian (1647–1717) (ill. 6), who after her marriage and the birth of two daughters, left her husband and sold all of her possessions in order to embark upon a trip to the Dutch colony of Surinam on the northeast coast of South America.[25] Her scientific interest in the natural world was mostly about the coexistence of flora and fauna. While traveling in Surinam with her youngest daughter, she made direct contact with the Indigenous populations of the area to gain access to the most unusual flowers and insects. This behaviour was unheard of for a woman at that time. After two years of fieldwork, she returned to Europe and worked as a teacher and specimen dealer before publishing her book *The Metamorphosis of the Insects of Surinam*, which made her one of the most outstanding scientists of her time. Emmy definitely knew of her and her work (ill. 13). Although Emmy never got as famous, both women had something in common. In being colonial botanists and artists, both were helping to find new specimens for the colonial power and the global market–both formed part of the Dutch colonial system.

In the eighteenth century orchids spread to England. From then on British botanical gardens were hotspots for the commercial and scientific trade of exotic plants, but gardeners and adventurers or scientific travelers also helped to spread exotic specimens or their seeds all over the world. While the plants spread easily, gardening knowledge was needed to make them survive. Only by the end of the century was it understood that orchids do not need heat,[26] and with the invention of the Wardian cases in the nineteenth century the transport of delicate exotic plants over sea was facilitated.

The first mentions of orchids in Estonia date back to the late eighteenth century, when Carl Gotthard von Liphard (1778–1853), a former statesman and soldier who retired near Tartu, created one of the richest and most beautiful manor environments in the region. He created a park, invested in a beautiful garden and indoor plants, and became especially known for his azaleas, rhododendrons, and his large collections of orchids.[27] The Botanical Garden at the University of Tartu was founded in 1803,[28] and step by step exotic and native plants started to live not only a public life in the glasshouses, but also a secret one in the herbaria. As the early herbaria in Tartu were lost or brought to St. Petersburg, the earliest traces of a dried exotic orchid dates from 1872. The Botanical Garden's collection grew in the upcoming years as travelers brought them back from their journeys. So, for example, the Livonian writer, nobleman, and orchid hunter Jegór Julius von Sivers, brought from his travels

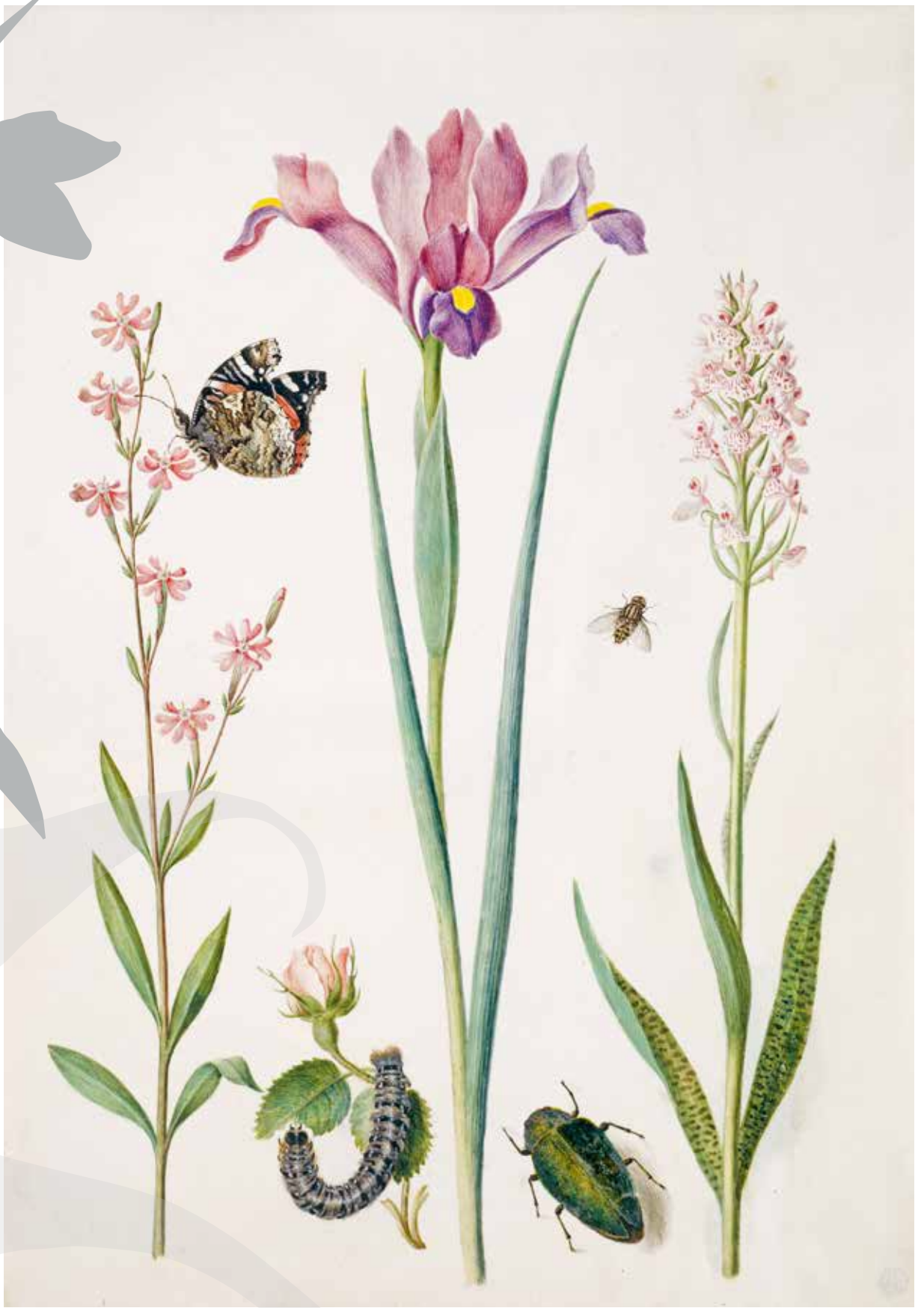
24 Yota Batsaki, Sarah Burke and Cahalan Anatole Tchikine, *The Botany of Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2016); Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Andrew Goss, *The floracrats: State-sponsored science and the failure of the enlightenment in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

25 Kay Etheridge, "Maria Sibylla Merian and the metamorphosis of natural history," *History of Biology*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2010), 15–21.

26 Mark W. Chase, Maarten J. M. Christenhusz and Tom Mirenda, *The Book of Orchids. A Life-Size Guide to Six Hundred Species from around the World* (Brighton: Ivy Press, 2017), 27.

27 *Österreichisches botanisches Wochenblatt*, no. 24 (June 14, 1855), 192.

28 Heldur Sander, "The Life and Activities of Professor Gottfried Albrecht Germann, the First Natural History Professor at the University of Tartu," *Acta Baltica historiae et philosophiae scientiarum*, no. 3 (2019), 58–124.



ill. 6: Maria Sibylla Merian, *Catchfly with admiral, rose with fox moth, iris, hoverfly, jewel beetle and orchid*, 1691. Watercolour and body colour on parchment. Courtesy of the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.

in Central America during 1850–1852 a significant number of orchids to the Tartu Botanic Gardens, among them the spider orchid. A large number of exotic plants were also donated by the Russian Empress Maria Feodorovna (1759–1828) from the Pavlovsk Imperial Gardens. By the end of the century, orchids were central elements of official flower arrangements for important political occasions. In 1898 for example when the first chancellor of the German Empire Otto von Bismarck died, a 2 metre high wreath was sent from Riga composed of bay laurel, white roses, white lilies and white orchids.[29]

The obsession with foreign flowers was part of nineteenth century culture. Exotic flowers were used for decoration and step by step they also reached the living rooms of the middle classes (ill. 14). For the orchids, this step was taken only recently in the last couple of decades. In the late Tsarist time orchids still were very precious and available only for the upper classes. It was here the habit of painting and drawing them spread as an exercise for girls and women.[30] During Soviet times, exotic orchids were available as cut flowers. Owning orchids as a common practice spread in Western Europe in the 1990s, and in Eastern Europe and Estonia a decade later. They are now so widely spread, that a whole industry is taking care of them by developing special orchid pots, orchid fertilisers, and orchid soils. But what do orchids really need?

COLONIAL SOILS

To make orchids live and blossom more than once, their needs have to be satisfied. It took professional gardeners several centuries and dedicated hobby gardeners years to understand how to take care of these exotic beauties (ill. 15). An uncountable number of dying plants was the outcome of these experiments in the acculturation of exotic plants in the Northern hemisphere. Orchids do not need extraordinary heat, nor constantly wet ground, which would cause their roots to rot. In fact, they can live quite well even without any soil, as they live in symbiosis with trees and no soil around. Still humans are obsessed with soils as one of the most fundamental requisites for gardeners. It is no wonder that soil history has become one of the most intriguing fields of environmental history as it combines historical analysis with geological and chemical knowledge.[31] While it is easy to sympathise and commiserate the tragic fate of the charismatic megafauna on their way to the man-made sixth extinction,[32] globalisation has not only made animals and plants travel, as it is continuously transporting soils from one place on the earth to another, digging and draining the ground with fatal consequences for the local people and environments, in order to excavate soils for the use of others in more privileged parts of the world (ill. 16). If we can read the soils we can see the consequences of our economical systems, pollution, erosion, and soil degradation, but also the long term fertile impact and melioration within sustainable forms of gardening.

29 Libausche Zeitung, no. 170 (July 30, 1898).

30 Kadi Polli and Kristiina Tiideberg, "Lillevihikud. Õdede von Helffreichide joonistused / Flower Booklets: The von Helffreich Sisters' Drawings," *Eesti Kunstimuuseumi toimetised*, no. 11, vol. 16, (2021): 289–323.

31 John McNeill and Verena Winiwarter, "Soils, Soil Knowledge and Environmental History: An Introduction," *Soils and Societies*, ed. John McNeill and Verena Winiwarter (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 2006), 1–6.

32 Anna-Helena Purre, *Carbon dioxide dynamics and recovery of vegetation on restored peatlands* (Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikool, 2021).

Estonia and most of the Baltic region around the Baltic Sea is a region with poor and sandy soils over limestone or granite. In addition it has an uneven sunlight-warmth ratio with its long winters, its light, but cold springs, and short, but warm summers. The much too intensive sun in February and the much too light, but cold and wet springs formed the basic challenge for gardeners in the Baltic region. However it was said in the nineteenth century, that the best technological education in gardening and the best gardeners themselves would not come from Italy or even England with their much milder climate, but from exactly the Baltic region with its more challenging climate. It was here near the capital of the Tsarist Empire, St. Petersburg, where the artisanry of gardening exploded in the late nineteenth century. While during the early modern times it was German gardeners who monopolised the field within the Russian Empire, by the end of the nineteenth century Estonian, Latvian, and Russian gardeners also used the techniques of counterbalancing light and temperature, and upgrading the local soil (ill. 17). The idea was simple: As horses still dominated the transport in the cities around 1900 and as waste systems did not exist, the streets and public spaces were full of free waste that could easily be used as manure. As the demand for fresh and local flowers for city festivals and personal reasons was growing rapidly, flower nurseries spread all around the larger cities, importing seeds and plants, growing and selling them to the local population.

Although the fertilisation of the soil seems to be the main struggle of these gardeners, it was actually finding the right soil mix for the different plants as unmixed compost would kill the offspring of many plants. The right amount of sand, peat, or meagre soil has to be added to make soil work nicely. Soils are mixed constantly in gardening on a smaller scale. And they have been excavated on a larger scale for hundreds of years to extract resources used for the industrial revolution. Sand has been used for manufacturing glass, loam was used for building houses and pottery, peat was used for heating. For the Netherlands it has been shown that it was the peatlands that enabled their economic growth in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to happen[33]. It was peat that fired the engine of its colonial Empire (ill. 18). While there and in other parts of Europe the natural peatlands were already destroyed, in Eastern Europe with its much later industrial revolution they were still intact at the end of the eighteenth century when the Russian Empire started to recognise and exploit its natural resources.[34] As deforestation became a problem at the end of the nineteenth century, peat was massively exploited. And here the so-called "Moorkultur," the cultivation, or rather *destruction*, of the peatlands started. This term was linked with the enlightenment understanding that humans had to cultivate nature and make it into a better place. Humans as god's gardeners were allowed to mix soils, to decide what plant should grow and which animal had to die.

In and around Estonia peat was used at the end of the nineteenth century for the heating furnaces of industry and as litter for animals in stock farming. The first Estonian peat thermal power plants were built in the 1920s, and during this time peat was also promoted as an energy source for private households (ill. 19). Today it is used mainly

33 Astrid Kander, Paolo Malanima and Paul Warde, *Power to the People. Energy in Europe over the Last Five Centuries* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 112.

34 Katja Bruisch, "Nature Mistaken: Resource-Making, Emotions and the Transformation of Peatlands in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union," *Environment and History* (2018), 1–24.

in gardening to produce soil for all different kinds of flowers, and for artificial football grounds. Still to this day 20% of the terrestrial land of Estonia is covered with peat soils and bogs, which are used mainly for nature tourism (ill. 20). Yet behind the image of eco-friendly Estonia with its beautiful nature, every year one million tonnes of peat are extracted from over 200 km^2 of land. With that Estonia still is among the five largest peat exporting countries in the world. Knowing that peatlands are the largest stores of carbon dioxide, excavating and using peat has become a political question. The question of what to do with the nearly 10,000 ha of abandoned peat production fields and how to restore them into functioning ecosystems is also currently unsolved.[35] The scars in the landscape and the problem of water management will be seen for centuries (ill. 21). Still Estonian peat moss is found in many gardening soil packages. You can use it for carnivorous plants, orchids, cactus, bonsai, and vegetable gardening, as well as in aquariums.

Orchids do not need Estonian peat to grow. And they never will. It is a human invention to put them together in a pot and to make them co-exist. Globalisation, colonialism, and (self)exploitation made not only people start to travel all around the world– they also made flowers and soil homeless migrants within the global market (ill. 22).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this article and the exhibition "Orchidelirium: An Appetite for Abundance," Estonia has been shown to be a place of multiple global and environmental entanglements. During the course of this entangled history, humans, animals, plants, and soils have irrevocably changed. However, despite this, we can also tell stories of successful adaptation and acculturation, of meaningful re-interpretations of history and old identities, and the building of new ones. It is in our hands to make surprising "unnatural" coexistences blossom and to discover their beauty. It is in the eyes of exhibition visitors to see the individual and environmental entanglements between Estonian and Dutch history, and to make sense of the architectural setting of the exhibition in a deeply human, historical, and environmental way.

35 Anna-Helena Purre, *Carbon dioxide dynamics and recovery of vegetation on restored peatlands* (Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikool, 2021).

Stills from Kristina Norman's Orchidelirium trilogy: *Shelter*, *Rip-off* and *Thirst* (2022)


ADDRESSING
ERASURES
AND

MAKING RESISTANCE

ON WORKING WITH COLONIALISM AND MEMORY, ENVIRONMENT AND EXTRACTIVISM IN THE AGE OF CRISIS

Linda Kaljundi in conversation with Kristina Norman

The interview took place in December 2021.

LINDA KALJUNDI

For me, one of the most amazing things about your project is to see how it started with the rediscovery of two almost forgotten individuals from the Estonian past, but yet has gained—and continues to gain—so many contemporary and global layers. What inspired you about the artist Emilie Rosalie Saal and her husband, the writer and topographer Andres Saal?

KRISTINA NORMAN

Rediscovering the Saals' legacy was triggered by the fact that it is one of the best documented connections between our cultural space and the colonial history of Western Europe. Andres Saal gained prominence in the colonial hierarchy when he was appointed manager of the photography department at the Dutch East Indies Topography Bureau in 1902. In my opinion, we need to research and discuss stories like this in Estonia right now, because as a society we are part of a globalised world and need to acknowledge both our historical and contemporary connections with the so-called Global South. This is important because of the deep ethical implications.

I'm glad to be able to speak about these topics with you, Linda, because you were the one that pointed me towards Andres Saal. Having obtained a Russian-language education in Estonia, I was completely unaware of Saal. I've also heard from my Estonian friends that Saal's historical novels were not included in their curriculum either, despite their immense popularity around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Saal's rich literary legacy has been overshadowed by the work of other national romanticists, and today it is best known by a narrow circle of literary historians. Using similar patterns, Saal's books romanticise both the struggle of

Estonians against German crusaders in the early thirteenth century and the fight of Indonesians against Dutch colonialists.

Reading Olaf Klaasen's biography of Saal, I noticed that Andres' wife was an artist and she painted the local flora in Java all through the twenty-two years that the family lived there. I immediately sensed the hidden potential of shifting the focus to Emilie and telling a unique her-story. I shared this gut instinct with Corina Apostol, and she found an LA Times article on Google, from 1926, about an exhibition of Emilie Rosalie Saal's botanical paintings in the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science and Art. Corina soon also found a few reproductions of Emilie's paintings on eBay and Etsy. Then came Covid and the first lockdown, and around that time, the open competition for the art project for the Estonian Pavilion was also announced, adding that the Pavilion would be housed in the Netherlands' Rietveld Pavilion in the Giardini. I called Corina, and our eyes just lit up—we thought the project would be a perfect fit for that space.

LK A defining feature of the Saal family's life story seems to be ambivalence, which is characteristic of Estonian national identity in a broader sense. In nineteenth century Estonian nationalism, comparisons between Estonian peasant serfs and slaves in the overseas colonies were widespread. Like many national activists, the Saals identified with colonised peoples. Yet, as they emancipated, they also assumed the role and identity of colonial lords. Hybridity as well as simultaneous opposition to and imitation of the colonial overlord is emblematic of decolonising societies across the globe, and it seems to me that this controversial relationship is also a central topic of your films.

KN I was just getting acquainted with Andres Saal's works and biography when I read a chapter from his travelogue in the newspaper Olevik, "Beast's struggles in Java" (1899). It was a vivid account of a tiger killing ritual, Rampok Macan ("rob the tiger" in Sundanese), that he had witnessed on a town square in Java. Officially, this traditional ceremony had been dedicated to the coronation of Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (1898), but Saal's description suggests that it may also have been a demonstration of power by a local regent against colonial rule. Saal sees it as an allegory of the colonial hierarchy and at

Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Atropa Bell donna*, 1995, [1910s]. Offset print.
Courtesy of Corina L. Apostol.

Emilie Saal, Andres Saal and their daughter on their mansion veranda in Java, 1910s. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

the same time realises that the indigenous peoples' spears aimed at the tigers could just as well turn against the white man at any time. This passage made me think about his position as the author. Saal seems to have seen himself as a neutral bystander whose sympathy lay with the feline fighting for freedom, and also with the Javanese, who were similarly biding their time before confronting the European usurpers. And then, all of a sudden, the writer realises his own whiteness, and with that comes the fear for his own life.

The transformation from a colonised subject to coloniser is the motif that inspired me most in the Saals' biography. When planning my films, I tried to imagine the formative and transformative dynamics of their self-image, the inner struggles deriving from the conflict between their peasant background and becoming part of the white elite in Indonesia.

However, your film Shelter does not show a re-enactment of the ritual, nor the Indonesians, Andres Saal, or tigers. Instead, it shows two women reflecting on the role and position of human and non-human colonial subjects. How should the viewer relate this to Emilie and Andres and their aspiration to simultaneously identify with the Dutch colonial elite and subjugated Indonesians?

My film trilogy is essentially a set of intuitive images—three images of colonial processes, tensions, and transformations within the characters' inner and outer worlds.

The characters in the trilogy—similar women on both sides of the bars of an animal cage, a couple of doppelgangers on either side of the fragile glass of a veranda window in a manor house, or Thirst arising from a dried-up well—are more like helpful devices to allow us to reflect on the colonial processes of the past and neocolonialist phenomena in today's globalised world. For me, there's a bit of Emilie in every one of them. While growing up in Estonia, she probably found herself on one side of the bars or veranda window, and in Indonesia, on the other. But these power positions are marked by the opportunities for self-realisation and the insecurities of maintaining a position, and are largely performative.

If we talk about how I ended up in a cage at the zoo, it was through the fact that the Javan tiger, whose agony Andres

describes in his story, has become extinct as a species due to the destruction of habitats and hunting. While a century ago living beings were brought back from the colonies as curious exotic specimens to be shown in the zoological and botanical gardens of the metropolises, the function of these institutions now is to be a refuge for the last survivors of these endangered species.

It would be impossible not to see the connections between the still ongoing catastrophic environmental changes taking place in Indonesia and its colonial history as well as neocolonialism, the main outcomes of which include landscape transformation as well as plants and animals becoming extinct. Local people continue to be exploited to produce tropical products for the Global North. Someone might ask how this is related to Emilie and Andres: Andres' job in the colonial topographic service was to map natural resources and record information on local resistance. Thanks to his job, Emilie, the botanical artist, had access to the Dutch colony's richest plant collection in the Buitenzorg Garden in Bogor, Indonesia, which included many foreign species being tested for plantations. Andres was one of the first owners of a rubber tree plantation in Indonesia. The rubber tree itself was brought to Indonesia from South America. Emilie could devote herself to painting, as housekeeping and childcare were left to local women. The wealth of tropical plants and fruits in Emilie's pictures lives on as an illusion of the carefree abundance of the tropics even now as we use palm oil in our cookie dough or body lotion, because it is produced in Indonesia and is so affordable.

It seems to me that one of the challenges of your project is to find ways to speak about the Eastern European colonial experience in the art world, which is already deep into dealing with Western colonialism. The ways of speaking about Eastern European entanglements with colonial history are only emerging—in the global art world, but also in Eastern Europe itself. Although many Eastern Europeans seem to believe that their forefathers had no connections with the transnational colonial world, the Saals' life story shows clearly how closely and quickly the Eastern European peasantry could integrate themselves into the imperial and colonial networks and institutions. In this context, how important was the question about the specifics of the Eastern European colonial experience for you? Is there anything at all that differentiates Andres Saal from a typical Dutch colonial official?

To answer this simply, I believe that, from the perspective of the subjugated indigenous people, the nationality of the coloniser is irrelevant. Identifying the values that our society is built on and their genealogy is important in our cultural space. It is important to research our ancestors' contacts with other cultures and the power relations that characterise these contacts. And who is this "us" in that equation anyway?

My works are produced from the perspective of a contemporary person more than one hundred years on. How do we identify the signs that today's world is a product of that era—a set of things and phenomena that derive from the personal choices of the Saals among others? How can I as an artist address this subject? How can we explore the Saals' legacy to make sense of the problems with our own identity as actors in our cultural space?

As to the specifics...

I thought about the parallels between the Estonian and Indonesian colonial situations in the late nineteenth century and the possible similarities and differences, or what we could transfer from one context to the other.

The situation was similar because the power hierarchy was dominated by settlers from a different cultural background. The differences are numerous, but the main one in my opinion is that in Indonesia the racial divide between the colonisers and the colonised is associated with skin colour as well as cultural parameters. The colonial imagery, fantasies of the Other, as well as the architectural heritage (e.g. Baltic German manors and colonial villas) is often quite similar when comparing Indonesia and the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire.

For example, in connection with the exhibition *The Conqueror's Eye* curated by you, Eha Komissarov, and Kadi Polli in Kumu Art Museum in 2019, I am reminded of that image of an Estonian man as a lion-like animal (presented in a completely scientific context), which caused a small furore in the local media. It originated in Julian Simashko's encyclopedic work *Russian Fauna, or Description and Depiction of Animals occurring in the Russian Empire* (*Русская фауна, или Описание и изображение животных, водящихся в Империи Российской*). The album was published in St Petersburg between 1850 and 1851, a decade before Andres Saal was born.

Baltic German nobility drinking coffee on the veranda of Luiste manor, 1900s. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian National Museum.

Heinrich Tiidermann, Tõnis Lang and Pääre Eilmann, participants of the Estonian peasant rebellion of 1858, the so-called Mahtra War (photographed in 1898). Courtesy of the Estonian National Museum.

Nikolai Königsfest, *Lohu manor*, 1906. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian History Museum.

Alexander Schlater, *Rye Harvesting*, late nineteenth century. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Art Museum of Estonia.

Johannes Pääsuke, Estonian Farmhand's Hut in the Village of Jõelähtme, 1913. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian National Museum.

Heinrich Tiidermann, Estonian Couple Sitting at the Table (end of the nineteenth century). Photograph. Courtesy of the Tallinn City Museum.

LK This is not the first time that you are linking colonial legacy and contemporary identity conflicts. Your film *Bring Back My Fire, Gods* (2018) shows Sofia Jernberg, a Swedish singer with Ethiopian roots performing in Estonian and Russian a song called Transvaal, which dates back to the Boer Wars, the late nineteenth-century conflicts between Britain and the South African colonists. By the way, the Second Boer War is also the topic of one of Andres Saal's historical novels, and there were also Estonians participating in that conflict. Your video first and foremost addresses the relations between Estonians and Estonian Russians, and the heated discussion about whether to include a Russian-language song in the repertoire of Estonian Song Festivals, which are absolutely central to the performance of Estonian identity. Sadly, it was not included. Yet the film obviously also relates to racism and the anti-immigration movement. How could working with history help confront all these conflicts?

KN Yes, Estonians worship folklore as a carrier of cultural memory more than any historical document. In the national awakening period, Estonian historical literature strongly contrasted with documents and chronicles produced by foreign conquerors ever since the Middle Ages. The oral tradition of folk poetry was seen as authentic cultural memory. At the same time, it's interesting to see how the key events in Western colonial history, such as the Boer Wars, have been recorded in Estonian folklore, and according to some historians, have been an inspiration for the struggle for decolonisation, which culminated in gaining national independence in the War of Independence fought between 1918 and 1920.

As concerns migration, I had taken up the topic much earlier than the wider public became aware of the so-called migration crisis. From regaining independence in 1991 up until 2014, there were very few people who wanted to come to Estonia (compared with Western Europe, the number is still minute), and most of the arriving individual asylum seekers were deported. My video *Common Ground* (2013) shows how people had to wait for their asylum decision in a disused building with faulty plumbing, located in the middle of a swampy forest a kilometre from the Russian border, and how their mobile phones kept switching to Russian networks. In my film, you hear about the

Kristina Norman, *Common Ground*. 2013. Video still. 36 minutes 36 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

Kristina Norman, *Common Ground*. 2013. Video still. 36 minutes 36 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

psychological image of Estonian society created in the minds of asylum seekers. But you can also hear about the survival experiences of Estonians who fled to the West to escape the Soviet occupation in 1944, and their reception in Sweden.

In Estonia, migration is immediately seen as a threat to national security, instead of recalling our own dramatic history, which might inspire solidarity. The story of Estonian boat refugees in 1944 is a central narrative of suffering, for which international recognition is sought. But why not acknowledge the suffering of the people who are arriving here today? In fact, it is our own traumatic history as Eastern Europeans that is cited as a reason not to take in refugees and not to help alleviate the situation in southern Europe. It is said that Estonia bears no guilt or responsibility for Western colonialism, and that is why the West should deal with the migrants arriving on the shores of the Mediterranean. It is said that non-Estonians (meaning the Russian-speaking community) and their descendants already make up a third of the population here as a Soviet legacy, which is a big societal issue. Politicians occasionally shout out about concerns and fear for the Estonian nation and culture itself—if fair-skinned Russians do not want to become Estonians, how could we expect this of people of a different skin colour?

That is why I thought we should work with biographies that might help imagine Estonia as part of a larger history and global narratives to help us get rid of the idea of the state as an island entirely of itself, one that is constantly being attacked from the outside and colonised by foreigners.

In your artistic practice, you seem to increasingly entangle the legacies of the Second World War and colonialism. There are many connections between the remembrance of the terror of the Second World War, especially the Holocaust, and slavery. Eastern Europeans have perhaps only now started to realise how closely these two commemorative cultures are interlinked but often seem to see the remembrance of slavery as a rival to their own trauma and victimhood. How do you look back on your earlier works? In the introduction to your first Venice Biennale project, *After-War* (2009), you wrote that you come from a country where the past strongly affects the present. How have the memory conflicts changed in and for Eastern Europe meanwhile?

It is interesting to think back to the 2007 Bronze Soldier crisis, which revolved around the removal of a Soviet Second World War monument in Tallinn and the relations between "non-Estonians" and the state, which I discussed in *After-War*. On the surface, the monument conflict was about the conflicting interpretation of the outcomes of the Second World War in the official politics of memory on the one hand and mainly in the Russian-speaking community on the other. More deeply, however, it was about the vulnerable position of the Russian minority in the public space and everyday life.

Before the "refugee crisis," the Russian-speaking population was the main racialised group in Estonia. Among non-Estonians, there were and still are a considerable number of people without citizenship who were left without the opportunity to express themselves politically after the collapse of the Soviet Union and after Estonia regained its independence, and whose lives, as the state sees it, are limited by the biological rights of their bodies. Against the backdrop of the Bronze Soldier conflict, there was a lot of talk about a glass ceiling that limits the opportunities for the self-realisation and self-definition of Estonian citizens who are Russian speakers or simply have Russian names. Against the backdrop of a conflict of memory, the image of an uncultured savage and enemy of the state, which was attached to the Russian minority in 2007, is still perpetuated through the images of the so-called Bronze Night events. In fact, only a little over one thousand people took part in the street riots following the removal of the monument, and a third of them did not even consider themselves Russians.

These issues remain unresolved, but a new stratum has emerged around them, new boundaries that have redefined social groups and worldviews. Many people who were once in different camps on issues relating to memory and the Second World War may be happy to go out together and vote for the Conservative People's Party of Estonia today. This party, also clearly xenophobic towards Estonian Russians, is pursuing policies that target the coloured bodies of immigrants, gay people, and women's bodies. In my opinion, it is unfortunate that a society divided along national lines is united by the perceived precariousness of its own racial identity and the crisis of masculinity.

Kristina Norman, *After War*, 2009. Video still. 10 minutes 7 seconds. Exhibited at the Estonian Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

Kristina Norman, *After War*, 2009. Video still. 10 minutes 7 seconds. Exhibited at the Estonian Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

LK You have highlighted the urge among Eastern Europeans to become European as one of the key topics of your artistic practice, and also spoken about the complexity of that process, which relates to both privilege and responsibility for, among other things, colonial history. One of the trilogy's films, Rip-off, catches the eye with its very intriguing use of white colour. Becoming white has been an important part of Europeanisation for people from young Eastern European nations such as Estonians, who themselves have been colonised for centuries and also represented as non-white. In your video, white colour first and foremost associates with botanical drawings, where the white surface also embodies imperial power over colonial nature. But was it also meant to address the Eastern European desire to become white?

KN Yes, I thought a lot about the iconography of botanical illustration and the meaning of the unfilled white surface around the image. I thought about how the white surface symbolically severs every single ecological or social tie the plant has. It also makes the people around the scientist or artist invisible—the people who ensure the material conditions for their work. I wanted to address such erasures with my film and imagine a resistance to obliteration.

Above all, white symbolises a privileged space where it is possible to symbolically separate yourself from annoying characters and events. It is the land of the elite, a world where life is comfortable and things happen as if by themselves. If we read the memories of the Baltic Germans who ruled over Estonia, there are great descriptions of how the stoves warm up at night and the food appears on the table in the morning as if by magic. It's an invisible job that someone does for you but it seems like these things just happen, that it is part of the natural environment. In the film, the character of the lady of the manor withdraws into her white space, and it becomes important for the opposite character to also find her way into this environment. She unpicks the white paper surface and enters a white sphere of influence through the threads where the desires and fantasies of the opposite characters intertwine.

I used doppelgangers to say that racial or class affiliation is contingent. Who we are born as and which privileges

automatically apply to us is subject to chance. But there is also tension. Will the privileges stay with their original owners ? Is this order of things really as natural as it seems? There is still a way to change it. This aspect of a struggle is very important and interesting to me, and I have tried to amplify it dramatically.

We have spoken about the complicated, anxious and uneasy relations between the coloniser and the colonised, which entail both mutual hatred and attraction. Postcolonial studies and literature have demonstrated effectively that this ambivalence lies at the very heart of the colonial situation. Your films explore the eroticism present in this relationship, connecting it also to "an appetite for abundance." Did you plan to thematise eroticism and sexuality from the start? Is it mainly intended to address colonial relationships, or can it also be extended to the ways in which we relate to the legacies of colonialism and race today?

Every attempt by a "civilisation" to exoticise something or construe it as the Other can be traced to suppressed desires and sexuality. In my films, I tried to use erotic tension as a tool for empowerment in a narrative about undermining and reversing hierarchies. This motive is shared by the films *Shelter* and *Rip-off*. Through growing erotic energy in the zoo cage, the sight of the creature in the cage is made uncomfortable for the viewers. In this way, they are also deprived of the power of the objectifying gaze.

In the film *Rip-off*, I tried to compare the manor itself with a seductive flower. As showing the Baltic German manor as a venue for cultural cross-pollination was a key aim of the film, the image of an orchid and pollinator came to me. The splendor of the manor was intended as a lure, placing its little parcels of pollen on the backs of pollinators. While the peasant opened the parcels in their farmyard, built a little veranda onto their farmhouse and planted a peony bush next to the entrance, Andres and Emilie carried the Baltic German manor gene far away from home, to Java. I believe many will agree that our protagonists fit the bill as a perfect example of cultural mimicry.

LK You said you are interested in rooms of privilege. One of the key symbols of the whole project is a manor. In Estonian history, manors signify the colonial domination of the Baltic German elite. Yet, also in connection to the Saals' life story, Baltic manors have many links to the overseas colonial palaces and villas. How much did you think about these global connections? Could manorial palaces as a phenomenon help bring out and make understandable the contacts between Eastern European and larger colonial histories?

KN The fascination with manor houses was where it all started. The film *Rip-off* was inspired by the realisation that the owners of manor houses in today's Estonia are in fact Estonians themselves. The urge to own a manor house reflects what is happening in our society right now. There are very different owners of manor houses today, but it often happens that when people get rich, the first thing they think about is buying a manor. It inspired me a lot to think about how important the narrative of "700 years of slavery" under the Baltic Germans is for the Estonian national identity and how central the role of the manor is in this story. At the same time, the family stories of Estonians are so closely connected with manors, as also in the case of the Saals. Everything they encounter later in their lives—exotic plants, women painters—first existed for them as a reality in a Baltic German manor. From there, Emilie and Andres carried this knowledge and fascination with them to Indonesia, where they were able to re-embody it all themselves.

I thought a lot about Emilie as a woman artist in that era. Emilie used her position as a lady of the manor to realise herself through art. As a woman, she emancipated through art. This was an important motif for me—how an Estonian woman actually realises herself through art, and does so at a time when it is not so common. When we think of women's art education in our region, it was really the purview of the German ladies. And the goal was to teach women drawing skills so that they could become better housewives rather than professional artists. The practice of drawing plants was an important part of women's art education. While men were taught to draw the human body, architecture, perspective, and everything else that is important in professional art, women were taught art mainly based on floral depictions. All this comes from the Baltic German manorial environment. And it travels with the Saals to Indonesia, to their magnificent villa.

Emilie Rosalie Saal and Andres Saal in their garden in Los Angeles, undated. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

(top and bottom) Garden of the Liivaoja farm, owned by Friedrich Krause, a hunter of the Puurmani manor, early 1900s. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian National Museum.

Gustav Münther, *Two Estonian Servants in the Garden of Pagari manor*, 1912. Courtesy of the Estonian National Museum.

Karl-Eduard Kangur, *Veranda of the wealthy Estonian farmhouse Lepiku*, 1910. Photograph. Private collection.

LK Your films and the stories behind them include diverse perspectives, experiences, and agencies—Western and Eastern European colonial elites, Estonian peasants and Baltic German landlords, as well as non-human animals, plants and other elements of the environment and the vibrant matter surrounding us. What they lack, however, is the voice of the Indonesian colonial subjects. This was a result of the pandemic, which did not allow you to travel to Indonesia. How did you come to terms with not being able to work with the Indonesian communities?

KN It is very difficult to come to terms with that. For me, politically, the whole idea of the project was the opportunity to be in dialogue with the communities and environment in Indonesia. Until the last minute, I didn't even consider the possibility that the project could take place without this exchange of ideas and energy materialising in the third part of the film trilogy.

It is true that the development of the project was full of uncertainty in absolutely every possible and impossible aspect, including multiple illnesses. The whole process was affected by delays and the constant refocusing of both content and form. I have never been to Indonesia, and have no experience of the tropics whatsoever that might have allowed me to set creative goals and plan meaningful collaborations from a distance. The perception of space is absolutely central to my work; I need to have a deeply reflected experience of the space before I start planning an intervention. As I also had no personal acquaintances among Indonesian artists, starting a collaborative partnership by Zoom or Skype was not really an option. So, when the project became absolutely time-critical but Indonesia remained completely closed to people coming from Europe, alternatives had to be considered. Unfortunately, the Indonesian perspective had to be left out of my film trilogy, but I look forward to the choreographic interventions by Eko Suprianto at the "Orchidelirium" exhibition in Venice. And, of course, I hope that the project will succeed and that there will be an opportunity to collaborate with artists and communities in Indonesia to open up new horizons.

LK Seeking alternative solutions, you ended up working with Estonian peat, which in the contemporary Dutch flower industry is paired with exotic plants originating from the former colonies. Probably many of us are used to associating colonialism first and foremost with the warm tropical countries of the Global South; therefore addressing its implications in Nordic nature may come as somewhat of a surprise. Yet, as such, it seems to offer a powerful tool for demonstrating the global extent of today's neocolonialism and its ability to reach every corner of the world. What fascinated you about peat? Was it the opportunity to move beyond plants and to work with the different layers of the environment, soil and water? Or was the main trigger the connections between peat and the global capitalist systems?

KN Yes, I was looking for signs of re-colonisation and the ongoing exploitation of nature. First from Indonesia, and when that was not possible, then from Estonia. I began to look for signs that could be seen without having to leave the country: signs of how the exploitation of the same plants that began in the former colonial era continues to this day, and signs that the environment around us is changing because we are participating in this global circulation of capital and natural resources. What is Estonia's contribution to this and what signs could I use to tell this story? I was surprised that I hadn't thought about it before, but the orchidelirium—the craze for tropical orchids that we associate with Andres' and Emilie's time—still exists in different forms all around us. The Phalaenopsis, whose natural habitat overlaps with the former Dutch colony, today's Indonesia, is now mass-reproduced on Dutch farms. But the substrate in which these plants grow is partially made out of peat. For me, the ultimate discovery was that Estonia, despite its small size, is one of the world's largest exporters of peat. This order of magnitude is insane given the size of our country.

However, all this is glossed over by the representation of the landscape. When Estonia is advertised today to wealthy Western European or North American tourists, the main emphasis is on its very unique, almost exotic and untouched nature. The advertising images depict bogs, their bonsai-like vegetation, trees, various species of moss, the abundance of water and a palatable ecosystem tailored for tourists.

Siima Škop, *Here Was a Bog: The Wealth of a Kolhoz is based on Stalinist Transformation of Nature*, 1950. Poster.
Courtesy of the Estonian Art Museum and Zoja Mellov.

Exoticising local nature—looking at it with the tourist's gaze—overshadows the material itself, which comes from the same type of landscape. Peat is the same moss that is harvested in completely unprecedented volumes. It is also interesting for me that the process of Estonia regaining its independence from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s was so strongly connected with the ecological movement. The massive spread of the nature conservation movement at that time was in turn facilitated by an earlier protest by Soviet Estonian scientists against the extensive drainage of bogs—the so-called Bog War—which lasted from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. They wanted to protect Estonian nature from the ecological consequences of the Soviet modernisation project. Many bogs and raised bogs were placed under nature conservation during the Soviet period.

It is a paradox indeed that despite the massive scale and political success of the 1980s environmental movement, in Estonia today environmental awareness among all age groups is remarkably low and activists are struggling with a lack of support both from among the population and politicians. What Estonia however has inherited as a legacy from the Soviet period is the myth of Estonians as a "nature nation" and the imagery of the untouched beauty of Estonian nature. This leaves aside the really acute problems and the real environment that is inevitably entangled with the human and the technological in the age of the Anthropocene. But, of course, these myths definitely provide a nice excuse for doing nothing.

It is painful to think that peat is harvested on a much larger scale today than in Soviet times. It is advertised as an organic product, a natural material with excellent features that saves water in agriculture. Peat moss retains liquid for longer, reducing the need to water the plants. Peat is exported globally, reaching China and even Hawaii. Transport alone has a large ecological footprint. Not to mention the wholesome ecosystems with a lot of water being destroyed in Estonia. Communities living near peat mines are often left without drinking water because wells become polluted and dry when the bogs are drained.

The motif of a dry well and thirst is what I decided to use in the third part of the trilogy. I follow the peat to the orchid

farm in the Netherlands, where orchids are almost like a part of posthuman machinery. The machines force these tropical plants into their own rhythm, choreographing their movements. During the process, plants may be accidentally damaged, but they are also attacked, raped, and forced to reproduce. Still, the machinery works and the products reach Estonian shops. People can buy these plants at a very low price, almost for nothing. What a waste. The same water resources lost here are channeled into the orchids. They are pumped full of water so that the plants can bloom abundantly. People buy them while they bloom but don't know how to recreate the tropical conditions in their homes. They get disappointed if the same plant doesn't bloom quite as beautifully again; they leave it to dry and finally throw it out.

Focus on this massive waste of water points so well to the scale of global extractivism. An appetite for the tropical abundance and exoticism is associated with the museums, zoos and botanical gardens founded in the nineteenth century in the rapidly modernising West, which was eager to draw the boundaries between human and non-human, but also between white and non-white. Your films connect this desire with contemporary cheap consumer culture, but also with post-socialist environments. When I saw the films for the first time, I was quite overwhelmed by the presence of post-socialist space—signs of very different layers and decay at Tallinn Zoo and the manor houses. Only later I realised why it started to trouble me—the combined signs of colonial legacy with the environments of the Eastern European public that would perhaps much rather not think about colonial history at all. Now, as you said, space is highly important for you as a medium. How much did you think about post-socialist elements while designing the films?

I absolutely thought about it. The post-soviet environments, which are increasingly falling apart and soon to disappear altogether, are related to the experience I share with my peers and parents and the different interpretations of the experience. As a legacy of this era, our society is diverse; we have an Estonian and a Russian language space. There are very few descendants of the former inhabitants of the manors in

Estonia today. As can be seen in my manor film, in order to reach the historical Baltic German core, several layers of paint and plaster must be symbolically peeled back. At the same time, most of the surviving manor houses are under national heritage protection.

In this sense, fate also dealt us great moments when making the film. First, wall paintings with lush roses unexpectedly appeared from under the Soviet-era layers of plaster in the manor house at Maidla. A very rare find in the context of Estonian manors. Although it cannot be confirmed, I took the inspiration from the idea that they were painted by Sally von Kügelgen, one of the few Baltic German women in our art history who achieved success as a professional artist, active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For me, the connection with the flower painting lady of the manor was absolutely striking. And, of course, it is inspiring that the documentary footage of the discovery of the paintings by our top heritage conservationists, Hilkka Hiiop and Hannes Vinnal, became part of my film.

And another highlight of the project—the blowing up of Tapa Manor—was also purely fortuitous. The territory of the NATO base in Tapa was expanded to include the historic manor house, and the Defense Forces used the building as part of their training exercises. The building also used to be occupied by the Soviet Army, and this stratum was dominant in the interior. Therefore, it was secondary from a heritage protection viewpoint. But with it, the historical dimension and an important landmark for the locals also disappeared.

LK Due to the pandemic, but also as a part of the creative process, the main topics of your films have developed and changed quite a bit. What are the keywords of the films for you at present, and are there connections that you would like to reveal to the viewer?

KN For me, "collaboration" has been one of the most important keywords in this project. I am always happy to open a new chapter in my collaboration with cinematographer Erik Norkroos, which started in 2006. Our last collaboration, *Lighter Than Woman* (2019), also looked at the identity of Eastern European women through their experience as care workers in

Kristina Norman, *Lighter than Woman*, 2019. Performance at International Festival of Contemporary Theatre Homo Novus, 2019.
Photo: Erik Norkroos

Kristina Norman and Teresa Silva during the filming of *Shelter*, 2021.
Photo: Meelis Muhu

Italy. In addition to Erik, I designed this film trilogy as creative dialogues with dancers-choreographers. First with Teresa Silva, because I had been watching her for a while and I was fascinated by her ability to create a tense stage presence with a small gesture. We spent a couple of weeks together in an animal cage, looking for ways to domesticate this concrete and steel uncomfortable environment, to activate its small details (such as shadows of the bars moving across the walls and the floor of the cage, random plants protruding through the concrete) and create drama based on them. In my opinion, it is nice how, in the three films, water became an element that acts as a trigger for the transformation of the characters. In the bear cage, Teresa's transformation begins from the episode of washing her face. In the manor film, the maid, played by Karolin Poska, escapes into the alluring white space, turning into an incidental drop of watercolour, a mistake on a white background. The theme of the third film in the trilogy is water scarcity; Mari Mägi embodies *Thirst*.

Of course, the collaboration with Karolin Poska was very nice. Her own practice as a performing artist is very unique. While Bita Razavi was a good fit as Teresa's doppelganger, Karolin suggested that her sister Piia Haab play opposite her. Piia actually works as a biology teacher in an elementary school and does not dance, but the sisters came across as exciting in close contact, in my opinion. An unforgettable experience on its own was the shoot in Uue-Põltsamaa Manor, where a bunch of schoolchildren came to help open the enfilade doors, but people also came from all over Estonia. Throughout, it has been exciting to discuss the topics surrounding manorial and environmental history with you, Ulrike Plath and Hilkka Hiiop.

At the moment I am recovering from Covid, and the work on the films is again on a hiatus for a while, but there are collaborations coming soon with choreographer Mari Mägi, composer Märt-Matis Lill, and singer Iris Oja. And, of course, it is a pleasure to continue the creative dialogue with Bita, Corina, and Eko Suprianto within the wider context of the exhibition.

If I were to name the keywords for the concept of the trilogy, these could be ruins, palimpsest, privileged space, cultural transmission, whiteness, woman, art and science, invisible work, emancipation, crossing borders, peat, orchids, water, and the environment.

LK One of the main conclusions of your films, as well as of our talk here appears to be that colonial extractivism does not belong to the past, but rather continues to exist through contemporary unequal networks of power, exploitation, and trade. While producing the films, how much were you thinking about despair and hope? Inequality between the Global South and the Global North does not seem to vanish, but rather grows bigger and more acute in the age of global political and environmental crises. How do you deal with that as an individual and as an artist? How important is it for you that you should offer hope of some sorts, some guidance of dealing with the knowledge gained and deepened through your artistic works?

KN The project began with the reclamation of Emilie as an important female artist in Estonian national history, in an attempt to bring her out of the shadow of her famous husband. Corina put quite a bit of effort into finding the originals of Emilie's paintings, but unfortunately—and in some ways fortunately too!—with no success. All she managed to find were the reproductions of lithographies based on Saal's works. From the her-story of a white woman and her seemingly safe floral paintings, the logical path of research led to modern environmental problems and their connections to colonial history. It was important for us to understand how Emilie's paintings reflect and support the colonialism of botanical science, how to expose and respond to it as contemporary inhabitants of the Global South and Global North.

I believe that our project as a whole adds something important to the discussion of colonialism, introducing new perspectives and showing the global intertwining of colonial histories. However, for me as an artist, a number of important issues, figuratively speaking "white spots," remain unresolved. I feel the need to continue working to raise awareness of my position as a white female artist. The more personal contacts I make outside Europe, and the more perspectives I come across, the more I feel the need to hear what others have to say about my work and what the issues and concerns of others seem to be from a cultural, geographical and political perspective. If the opportunity arises to collaborate outside Estonia as the pandemic recedes, I would like to find new ways to build a foundation for solidarity and justice by sharing my agency as an artist.

ORCHIDELIRIUM:
FILM TRILOGY
BY KRISTINA NORMAN
Text by Linda Kaljundi

Kristina Norman's film trilogy offers multiple ways to reflect on the legacies of colonialism. Investigating forgotten connections between Eastern Europe and the global south, it relates to the post-Socialist countries' often uncomfortable rediscovery of their colonial history. The trilogy stems from research on an Estonian couple, Emilie and Andres Saal who end up as members of the Dutch colonial administration and elite in Indonesia in the late nineteenth century. Norman is intrigued by the conversion of the colonised into the coloniser and the hybrid identities resulting from this, full of controversies and tensions. Including acts by three performance artists, the films explore the longing for privilege and abundance, as well as the environmental effect of these desires on the invisible consumption of human labour and non-human animals, plants, soil and water. Being first and foremost interested in the contemporaneity of colonial past, the films explore the workings of neo-colonialism in the age of accelerating crisis, but also hint towards the possibility of resistance.

Rip-off
13 min 37 s
Camera, performers, music, etc.

Set in various Estonian manor houses that prior to the collapse of the Russian empire used to belong to the German-speaking nobility that had dominated the Baltics for centuries, Rip-off takes a spatial turn in observing the relations between the coloniser and the colonised. One of its first scenes documents the discovery of a historical mural painting beneath the layers of paint and post-Soviet decay. The film also points to the fragility of heritage, as it shows the explosion of a manor due to the extension of a NATO military base.
The main part of Rip-off follows the dynamic relationship between a lady and her servant keen to mimic her mistress. The performance of the two Doppelgängers becomes increasingly intimate, eroticising the tension between them, as well as the entanglement of their fantasies and desires. Converting the servant into a trickster-like character eager to break through the categories of class, space and time, the film also empowers the agency of resistance.

Using a manor veranda as its prime location, Rip-off asks questions such as how are rooms of privilege produced and how much invisible labour do they take? Yet it associates privilege not with leisure, but with women's artistic aspirations. This links the story closely to Emilie Saal who by becoming a member of the colonial elite seized the opportunity to dedicate herself to botanical illustration, but also shows the complexities behind what might otherwise seem like a happy rediscovery of a forgotten, marginalised female artist.

It is the whiteness of the room that problematises the tradition of botanical illustration further, referring not only to racial differentiation, but above all to the white background emblematic to colonial botanical images. This functions as a metaphor for colonial power, as the plants that are depicted against white background are subverted to the colonial gaze, taxonomy and power, as well as cut off from their original environment. Thereby whiteness also becomes an allegory for erasure, which can be extended to the invisibility of the labour of native peoples who assisted the colonial botanists in their research or households.

Shelter
10 min 30 s
Camera, performers, music, etc.

Offering another performative commentary on colonial legacies, Shelter departs from Andres Saal's newspaper story from 1899, which describes a bloody display of tiger fight that was native in origin, but transformed into a spectacle aimed at glorifying the Dutch crown. Saal, belonging himself to colonial elites, reveals his sympathy for the Indonesians, predicting that one day they will raise against the colonial lords with the might of the wild beasts.

Starting out again with a female servant, Shelter follows a zoo worker locked in a cage and transformed into a wild animal. Paying intense attention to the passing of time, the film follows the different stages of her transformation. Key elements in this process relate to sexuality, closely connected to exoticising the other. Far from being merely subversive, the erotic tension appears empowering and gradually becomes a tool to challenge the visitors' objectivising gaze, as they grow increasingly uncomfortable by what they see. The post-Soviet setting of the zoo adds another layer to this, as it links the visitors' discomfort to the Eastern Europeans' reluctance to admit their post-colonial heritage.

As such, the zoo also contextualises the dynamics of colonial displays. While historically the zoos performed and presented colonial might, today, they have become the last shelters for many animals that are on the verge of extinction, as their original habitats in the former European colonies have been destroyed due to environmental change, but even more so due to the ongoing exploitation of the global south.

Thirst
14 min 20 s
Camera, performers, music, etc.

The final film of the trilogy takes an even more explicitly post-human approach, focusing on the ecosystems of plants, soil and water in the age of the Anthropocene. Showing that today's exploitation of environment is largely inherited from the colonial age, Thirst connects the forms of botanical and biological repression witnessed in the two other films with the neo-colonial and neoliberal capitalist economy.

Blending local with the global, Thirst follows the appropriation of Estonian peat in the contemporary Dutch flower industry, where it is used as a soil substrate for

the botanical exploitation of orchids that originate from the former colonies in Indonesia. The greenhouse scenes show a sad post-human parody of a Fordian production line, where the machines appear to drive the plants around endlessly, forcing them to mass-reproduce.

Linking the orchid industry to an appetite for abundance and privilege, the film investigates how these desires are connected to the invisible consumption of labour and resources. While the cheap mass-produced orchids may seem like a pathetic mimicry of what once was a luxury good (and a sign of being able to consume more than necessary), the film reveals that these plants actually relate to abundance in unimaginable extents, as they consume a wealth of energy and above all water during the manufacture process.

Paying special attention to water, the film follows the superfluous watering of orchids in the greenhouses, as well as the drying of watery bog environments during the extraction of peat. It also includes the performative figure of the Thirst, who embodies the invisible consumption of water. Making Thirst its central metaphor, the third film also points that one of the unifying features linking all the films together is water, which unites the ecosystems plants, human and non-human animals, soil and even watercolours, as well as brings forth the anthropocenic dimensions behind the drive towards privilege and abundance.

Kristina Norman, *Rip-off*, 2021–2022. Video stills. 13 minutes 37 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

Kristina Norman, *Thrist*, 2021–2022. Video stills. 14 minutes 20 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

Kristina Norman, *Thrist*, 2021–2022. Video still. 14 minutes 20 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

Kristina Norman, *Thrist*, 2021–2022. Video still. 14 minutes 20 seconds. Courtesy of the artist.

Bita Razavi's installation *Allegory of the Cave* (2022)

Photos by Heidi Piiroinen

PLANT FORMS OF PRIVILEGE

RESISTING THE POWER STRUCTURE FROM WITHIN

Mike Watson in conversation with Bita Razavi

MIKE WATSON

Visitors are, prior to their entrance into the Estonian pavilion, categorised into one of two "classes" which then access the space from different sides which govern what they can see of the show. The privileged class enjoy, I assume, a fuller view of the space, gaining access to more knowledge, as well as aesthetically more impressive vantage points.

The statement is clear—you repeat the wider societal practice of giving a more impressive vista point to wealthy or high-status people. Yet it also raises a question about the limits of contemporary art too. Surely, all of the people who get to see the pavilions in the Giardini are to some degree privileged (given the cost of tickets, or the privilege already conferred on those visiting for free during the opening). Is there not a risk that artworks about social stratification to some degree whitewash the privileged by making games out of the existence of social classes? How do you overcome this?

BITA RAZAVI

The first thing the audience, no matter how privileged, is confronted with is not being allowed to enter the Pavilion from the main entrance. The main entrance of the pavilion is blocked by a performer/exhibition guard, addressing class divisions inscribed in architecture where the servant class is physically separated and made invisible by being obliged to use the back or side entrances. When I was introduced to the Saals' biographies by Kristina and Corina, the first thing that attracted my attention was the notions of class, access, and privilege. We often think of class as something that is assigned to people—each person is born with a set of privileges. Being from a third world country, I have to confess that's very true. But how much is it possible to tackle these assigned privileges and how much choice is involved? The Saals improved their social class by moving to Indonesia and adopting the coloniser's lifestyle. They climbed the ladder—or the colonial hierarchy—when Andres accepted to

Emilie Rosalie Saal at their house in Batavia, 1902–1916. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

Andres Saal, Emilie Rosalie at the top of the crater, undated. Photograph. Courtesy of the Estonian Literary Museum.

Bita Razavi, *The Better Half*, 2009. Installation view, FAFA Gallery, Helsinki. Photo: Bita Razavi

work in the Dutch East Indies as a cartographer. Emilie travelled and collected plants to study, draw, and turn into herbarium.

The privilege of being able to travel, as well as access to modern transportation methods, was only available to elite European women in the Indies and not their indigenous counterparts. I'm not sure if I'm giving a better experience of the exhibition to the privileged by categorising the audience, the way I see it is that I take a tiny bit of privilege away from some visitors by reenacting a societal practice or ritual. It's true that the ones entering the space from the right entrance walk on an elevated platform, and are thereby placed above the others, enjoying a more impressive vantage point. They may appear, at least temporarily, to gain access to greater knowledge, though this is soon thrown into question. It becomes clear that, due to the positioning of the platform, the privileged observers also have blindspots. While they enjoy a perfect view of artificial light and shade, the natural shadows are obscured from their view, producing a false sense of accuracy or truth defined solely by their position of power. From below, the division and inequality of the space is made clear. In an ironic twist, while those above gain better insight into the botanical subject matter, those below have a wider angle for understanding the structural imbalances that uphold privilege and which maintain ignorance among the elite.

I have employed architectural interventions to manipulate access to parts of the exhibition space in earlier works, such as *The Better Half* (2009), in which I created exclusive zones based on gender. To my experience, these games might appear shallow at first sight but if the latter experience is well thought through, it can become a ritual through which one gains insight. In my body of works presented for "Orchidelirium," I'm trying to explore physical forms and media through which my work can create a bodily experience rather than describing social structures on printed papers inside exhibition vitrines as distant problems of the past. I'm aware that the work raises a question about the limits of contemporary art, and I hope it questions the existing hierarchical power structures in the field as well.

As an art critic accustomed to gaining special access to exhibitions, I can only imagine that some people will be allowed special access to both parts of the show without any difficulty (this would include art world VIPs from diverse backgrounds). Is this the case?

BR Actually, the audience can always try their luck by entering the space again and possibly be given access to the other entrance. Also, the platform has a hidden gate, symbolising choice and allowing those who find it to enter the other section. My intervention is meant to give a set of different opposing perspectives and gazes such as: insider–outsider, perpetrator–victim, coloniser–colonised, and the crossover between these roles. What I'm trying to create is a symbolic game where the audience is repeatedly confronted with social structures and privilege, which may be given to or taken away from them. The dividing mechanism is a form of a proposition rather than an actual division. It is symbolic and performative. The spectators have options and can reenact and participate differently. However, due to the nature of the biennale even the choice is not real—it is a phantasm of engagement and participation.

MW Your works (including a hanging garden and a print press machine) make frequent references to plants and the day cycle of light which is necessary to photosynthesis. These point to the special place that plants and botany have in the history of Empire, being valued as objects of medicinal and aesthetic worth, as well as being items of luxury. This meant, for example, that a number of plants were treated with utmost care in making the journey from Australia to Europe, while a number of humans died when making the same voyage. Is your strong focus on plants and natural cycles a focus on human history?

BR Very interesting point, I often think about hierarchy in relation to classification. How it manifests and intersects between human and non-human. Your comparison between plants and humans on a voyage also reminds me of the event in 1913 when suffragettes vandalised the orchid houses at Kew Gardens and destroyed dozens of rare species of orchids. They associated orchids and orchidomania with the patriarchal hierarchy, a plant version of aspects of the society they wanted to overturn. I would like to emphasise that what I am really discussing with these works is not plants but the human craze for abundance, power, and the exotic through the lens of colonial botany. I'm trying to shed light on the erased context and background that Emilie's drawings were detached—or plucked—from, rather than the drawings themselves.

Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Feeder*, The Java Collection, 1995 [1910s].
Offset print. Courtesy of Bita Razavi.

Emilie Rosalie Saal, *Critus Deaumana*, The Java Collection, 1995 [1910s].
Offset print. Courtesy of Bita Razavi.

The print press kinetic sculpture that reproduces Emilie's drawings is actually a "Kratt," a mythical creature from old Estonian folklore notable for doing everything the master ordered it. Made up of household objects, this machine would come to life once three drops of blood had been sacrificed to the devil. I see Kratt as the servant of a servant, representing the possible dream of Estonians—the majority of whom were unfree, serfs—to own a servant themselves. Although the abolition of serfdom in Estonia came into act in 1816, the period following the emancipation did not witness the bettering of the peasants' situation. Hard working conditions continued in the form of the corvée labour. My Kratt hints at the role of Emilie's Indonesian servants and is a connection to her own past. Emilie's practice as an artist was enabled by her position as a European woman in colonised Indonesia, and at the expense of the labour of local Indonesian women. Emilie gave three drops of blood to gain her Kratt.

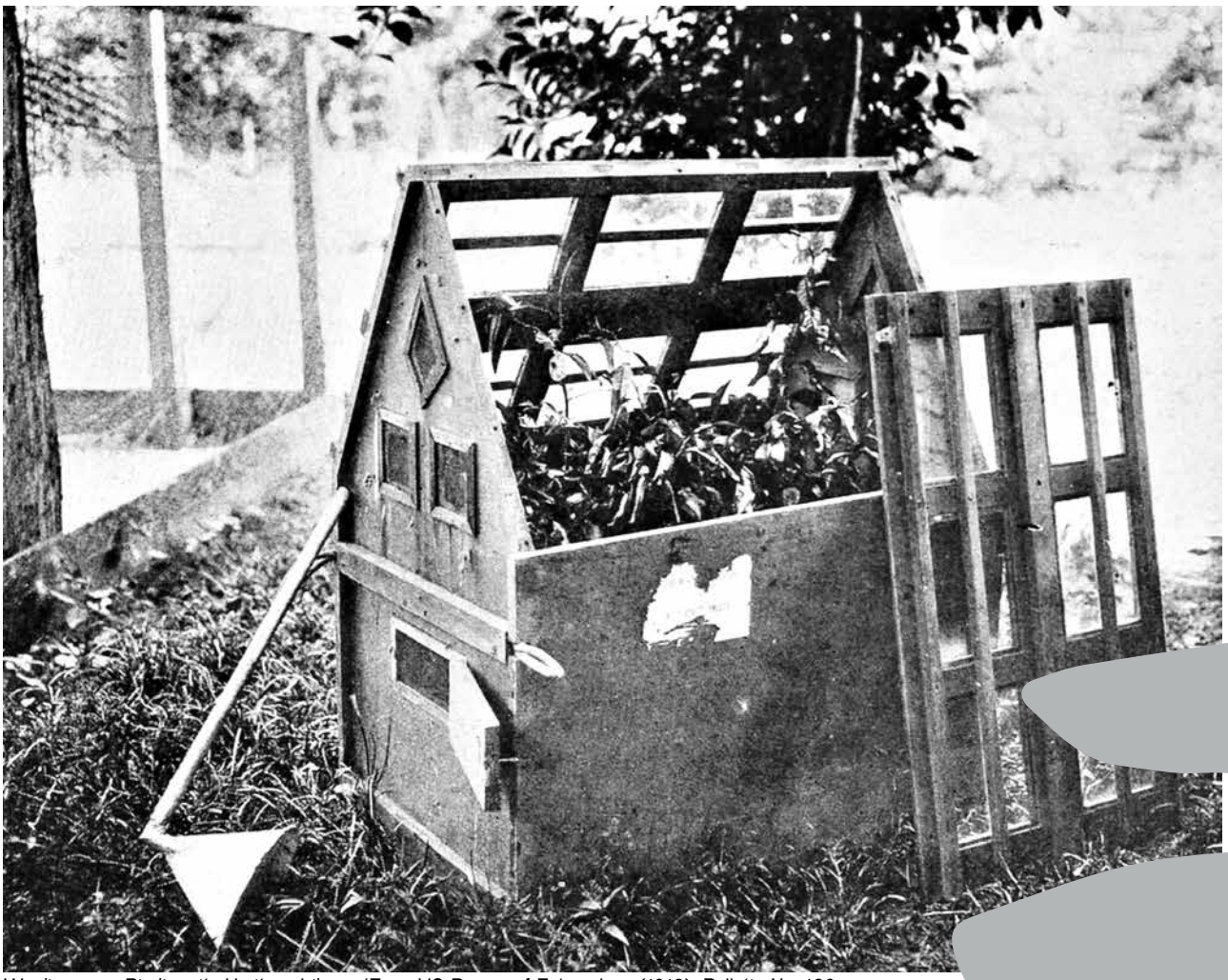
The sculpture also has a connection to Andres' background as a printmaker. He moved to Indonesia in 1898 to work for a print house, E. Fuhri & Co. Development of modern printing techniques made the colonial worldview reproducible for a wider audience. Images were produced in larger numbers from school maps to postcards of abundant and exotic landscapes. This also allowed people in the home country to become familiar with the colonised land from an early age.

I also see my kinetic sculpture as representative of the complex machinery of colonialism. It's hard to remain aware of one's own role and of the consequences of individual actions. Kratt's arms roll images out in complex paths that are hard to follow, not knowing where they came from or where they are going, the images spiral in a rushed loop.

The hanging garden forms part of my light installation entitled *Allegory of the Cave* and it could as well be made of any set of objects capable of casting shadows on a wall. The aim is to mimic the shadow cast on the other wall of the pavilion by moving leaves and trees from the outside garden of the Giardini. As the hanging garden is very high it's not possible for the spectator to recognise the nature of the objects which make up the shadows and its source: A true Allegory of the Cave following upon Plato's symbolism, addressing incomplete narratives and historical erasures.

A kratt featured in the Estonian film *November*, 2017 written and directed by Rainer Sarnet. Film still. Courtesy of the Homeless Bob Production.

Bita Razavi, *Kratt*, kinetic sculpture for the Estonian exhibition at the 59th Venice Biennale, 2022. Photo: Anu Vahtra



Wardian case. Biodiversity Heritage Library/From US Bureau of Entomology (1913). Bulletin No. 120.

MW You also developed a series of "Wardian cases" that feature archival documents and research materials related to Emilie Rosalie Saal's life.

BR I came across Wardian cases while reading about a craze for another plant; Pteridomania or Fern fever. Later I noticed that they were also present in a photo Corina found from Buitenzorg Botanic Gardens which Emilie had access to. The invention of Wardian cases aided the development of modern global economies and the transportation of tropical products for the people of the Global North, mostly at the expense of the exploitation of indigenous people, which continues to this day.

I'm introducing Wardian cases as exhibition display cases because I see a connection between the selective preservation of historical materials in museums and that of plants. Wardian cases were used to transport and later accommodate—as luxury items— only selected valuable plants based on a subjective western point of view. That is exactly how history has been written and preserved. My vitrines vary in form, referring to different eras in the transport of and housing of plants, from the first Wardian cases invented by Dr. Nathaniel Ward in 1833, to modern terrariums. They also hint at museumisation as a tool that the colonial states used to define the legitimacy and history of their authority in the nineteenth century.

I've dealt with museumisation, and the national museum as a concept and have employed museum vitrines in other works such as *Bita's Dowry* (2015), *Museum of Baltic Remont* (2019), and *Dialectics of Outside and Inside* (2018). *Museum of Baltic Remont* is a commemorative scientific installation showcasing the invisible building materials that people in the Baltic region live alongside as remainders of the Soviet and subsequent era. Scrutiny of the various materials that have been used to repair homes in relation to changing economic and political situations in the region.

Here, I go one step further, introducing two-way glass for the vitrines to address historical erasures and incomplete narratives: changes of light inside the cases make the archival materials disappear at times when the glass turns into a gentle mirror and the spectator confronts their own reflection momentarily, questioning our implications as viewers and consumers.

Bita Razavi, *Museum of Baltic Remont*, 2019. Installation view, Kogo Gallery. Photo: Bita Razavi

Bita Razavi, *Museum of Baltic Remont*, 2019. Installation view, Kogo Gallery. Photo: Bita Razavi

Bita Razavi, *Bita's Dowry*, 2015. Installation view, Lajevardi Foundation gallery, Tehran. Courtesy of the artist.

Bita Razavi, *Bita's Dowry*, 2015. Installation view, Lajevardi Foundation gallery, Tehran. Courtesy of the artist.

MW As Europeans living in a colonised territory, the Saals were no doubt aware of the privilege that being European bestowed on them, yet had also experienced Imperial rule, having lived under the Russian Empire (the period of Estonian independence only crossed over briefly with the Saals' period of residence in the Dutch East Indies, which ended in 1920, two years after the Estonian Declaration of Independence). Many of us are in this position—of being white but relatively poor on a local scale, of being wealthy yet African American, and so on. There are so many permutations, and it is difficult to generalise, except to say that many of us working in the cultural fields get to feel privileged to some degree while also being made aware of a relative lack of privilege (or vice versa). I am not sure if this is good or bad, but I know it brings both feelings of inadequacy and of guilt even to people with low levels of agency within, say, the contemporary art scene, while possibly impacting minimally on the global elite. Do you ever think of these things, and how do you think your contribution to "Orchidelirium" addresses issues of privilege within this very privileged space (the Giardini, Venice)?

BR Privilege for sure is relative. Fluidity and the ambivalence of character is a focal point in "Orchidelirium." Having spent some time with Andres Saal's writings, what inspires me the most are the contradictions that suggest an ethical conflict, or perhaps an element of metanoia. Andres Saal is best known for his novels romanticising the Estonian liberation struggle, as well as for his critical writings on the role of the Dutch Colonial Army in Indonesia. Yet as well as being critical of colonial power, the Saals contributed to and benefitted from it. Indeed, not only were the Saals aware of their privilege, they made choices in order to achieve these privileges. Andres Saal was the manager of the photography department at the Topography Bureau located in Batavia in the service of the Dutch colonial army. This gave Emilie access to one of the biggest plant collections in the Buitenzorg gardens—a botanic garden run by the Dutch colonisers—allowing her to map the exotic flora and fauna, just as her husband mapped the land. I see too many Andres Saals around me and at times I recognise a bit of him inside myself too. It's hard not to be aware of my own privilege and simultaneous lack of privilege while working on such an

expensive institutional project. I do think about these nuances and permutations on a daily basis.

I'm well aware of the problems of exhibiting such work in a venue such as this. My work within the phantasmagoria of a complex institution such as the Biennale might seem as misplaced as Courbet's *The Stone Breakers* at the Paris Salon of 1850. I see the venue as an effective stage that offers greater visibility. Artists are in a very vulnerable position in the hierarchy of the art field, unless they are well established enough to have the power to question the establishment. It's such a privilege to have visibility and power and to use it for change, to talk about privilege and hierarchy, and to challenge them.

The Giardini site where this year's Estonian Pavilion is housed stands as an historical record of wealthy nations that were powerful at the time it was built (in the early 1900s with pavilions being added up to the 1990s). Estonia does not have a pavilion, meaning that it generally exhibits as a collateral event in a building outside the official Biennale sites. To what extent is Estonia's location in the Giardini important for Orchidelirium's consideration of global power play and Empire in particular, and how did this affect your works?

To understand the motivating forces behind Andres and Emilie's choices it's important to understand Estonia's history in a world system which has always been narrated from the perspective of being colonised by foreign powers, be it German, Russian, or Soviet. Eastern Europe's historical position as part of Europe but not exactly, complicates the asymmetry of the Global North and Global South. Andres looked at Estonian and Indonesian colonial history as similar situations, and although Eastern Europeans always longed for becoming European, for the Indonesians white Europeans, whether they be Dutch or Estonian, would have been seen as colonisers.

"Orchidelirium" investigates the botanical history shared by the Netherlands, Estonia, and Indonesia, and linked to their colonial relationship. It takes into account the phenomenon of the Giardini and its pavilions, looking critically at the relationship between national accounts and global power imbalances. Moreover, my work considers the history of the Rietveld pavilion itself and closely relates to its forms. As Kristina deals with the

architecture of Baltic German manor houses in her film, my site specific interventions deal with the modernist architecture of the pavilion, its aesthetics and materials.

MW Speaking of art and symbols of power, there were Indonesian anti-imperialist resistance movements which opposed Dutch rule. One in particular, Saminism, arose while the Saals lived there. How did your research into this influence your works on display?

BR It did to some extent, but I wish I could deal with it more in depth. I must confess, it took me a while to find my approach to this exhibition, one that would be absolutely honest. My works are usually autofictional and stem from very personal experiences or are inspired by historical events and people involved in them, whose struggle I have identified with. I'm very used to time based, narrative mediums. The story of "Orchidelirium" is highly narrative and I felt paralysed not being able to work with moving images and voices due to the specific realities of the space. I also felt paralysed with all the rules concerning who can speak about what and expectations of introducing elements of my own culture, an expectation that has been with me during my entire career.

To understand cultural appropriation, we need to make sure we have a working definition of culture itself. Culture isn't biologically inherited and I'm not sure if it necessarily follows arbitrary notions such as nationality and political borders. The rules of who can and should talk about a given subject become particularly complex when you have personally moved between several cultures your entire life, and when working on a project that depicts entangled relationships between East, West, and South. Am I allowed to talk about an Estonian couple born in the nineteenth century? How about a resistance movement born in Indonesia in the same century? Can I talk about the Iranian national oil movement while I wasn't born then and I haven't lived in Iran for years? Does an Indonesian contemporary artist necessarily identify with resistance against commodifying teak better than an Iranian contemporary artist? Or can it be that they can both identify with it because of a shared lived experience. Can such movements be considered transnational historical movements expressing a solidarity of the Global South?

Lambert & Co., G.R, Logging for the construction of a plantation in Deli, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies (1883–1918).
Courtesy of Nederlands Fotomuseum.

A view of the Oilfield of Anglo-Persian oil company at Masjid Sulaiman, Iran.
Courtesy of the Petroleum Museums And Documents Center.

Coming from a country where resistance is an inevitable aspect of life, I've long been fascinated by diverse and creative strategies of resistance. While researching the exploitation of local resources in Indonesia, I came across resistance movements , such as Saminism—a movement which rejected the capitalist views of the colonial Dutch. The Saminist Movement started in the last decade of the nineteenth century in the Kendeng Mountains of Java, a region that the Saals travelled to, though surprisingly there's no mention of it in Andres' writings. Surontiko Samin, an illiterate Javanese peasant who led the movement, encouraged pacifistic resistance in the form of not paying taxes and the utilisation of teak by indigenous people for their own needs, instead of providing free labour for the Dutch forestry industry. I remember reading about the movement, identifying with them and becoming enthused that I had found another personal angle to the story. Then I lifted my head and looked around my apartment. All my sixties Scandinavian design furniture is made of Indonesian teak.

Thinking about that connection to resistance, your works here, as always, are obviously very politically involved. Yet they also confront to some degree the inherent contradictions of a political art that is essentially elitist. So long as art remains art it can't impact politically, and this is perhaps why it is so attractive to a class of people who benefit from maintaining the status quo. How do you deal with that in your own mind?

I'm glad we are talking about this, and I agree with you, therefore I've decided to keep a foot in activism. Although we need to think about the problem of political art based on the assumption that there is art without political dimensions. I hope we could discuss the social animation within contemporary art practice in general and commodity fetishism. I still have a tiny bit of hope that we can discuss location and the place of action and, indeed, criticise the epistemology of the field based on colonial/capitalistic attitude rather than questioning the foundation of the practice.

I still believe it's possible to provoke thoughts and raise awareness with art. I still dream of an art that is more sincere, more just, less institutional, less narcissistic, less commercial, and less artificial. But I have also spent long enough in the

elitist field to acknowledge that the reality is different. Eco-critical exhibitions are put up by people who haven't recycled a single object in their lives, while a shopping addict makes anti-capitalist shows, or a curator who uses institutional power and resources to censor and abuse artists, brands themselves as a guardian of artistic integrity. But of course in this field—very similar to the wider neoliberal system in its hypocrisy—it all depends on the consumer's buying capacity. If you make it sellable the audience will buy it. And what sells are trends and sexy topics, of which politics can be one.

Indeed, can art impact politically, and should it? This has been an ongoing concern. I feel extremely divided, and I know that I'm not the only one. But one has to carefully plan an exit, rather than an escape. An exit that could make a change and actual impact.

CONCEPTUAL GARDEN: A STAGE FOR POSITIONALITY

Text by Àngels Miralda

The Designated Entrance
Durational performative intervention
Exhibition guard, spectators, three entrances of the pavilion, the guard's costume

Razavi's work begins outside of the Rietveld pavilion, where the audience, initially unaware, enters into a system of categorisation. The emblematic front door of the pavilion is shut, and a guard dressed in a uniform with herbarium interventions, instructs visitors, one by one, to enter using either of the two side doors. In Dutch colonial architecture, as well as in Estonian manor houses, class divisions are inscribed spatially and the servant class is physically separated and made invisible. The two side entrances of the pavilion offer separate routes to the exhibition, mimicking those designed to separate social classes. One group is given access to an elevated platform, and the other enters the pavilion from the ground. If the Venice Biennale acts as an exclusive zone of privilege for a cultural elite, the performance re-enacts these processes through a spatial and performative intervention. A bureaucratic policing gaze, usually accompanied by underlying racial and class profiling prevails in zones of surveillance, airports, train stations, embassies, and representative national pavilions.

Elevated Platform
Sculptural spatial intervention
Marble, teak

The privileged class, selected by the guard, is rewarded with the power of observation from an elevated zone from which the exhibition can be seen, visitors below can be observed, and some works can be manipulated. This platform is situated just over a metre off the ground so that the other audience members symbolically circulate at the feet of the observers. Standing on the balustrade gives a good view of another artwork consisting of an artificial day cycle and a hanging garden. The group on the platform can also enjoy Emilie Rosalie Saal's botanical drawings produced by the printing press installed in front of the structure. From this position, it is possible to see a combination of elements from an advantageous perspective unavailable to the other viewers. A hidden gate at the base of the platforms allows for the switching of positions to compare the two views of the exhibition.

To reach the tip of the platform illuminated by a spotlight, the visitor has to walk on a floor of marble supported by a ramp made of raw teak. Both products were exploited at the expense of the monumental modification of landscape and destruction of nature in Indonesia. The floor also references the main marble entrance of the Rietveld pavilion built only four years after the independence of the colony. The materiality and design of the platform are heavy historical references that emulate the socio-political conditions which enable some to climb above others.

Bita Razavi, *The Designated Entrance*. A durational performative intervention. 2022. View to exhibition "Orchidelirium—An Appetite for Abundance". The Estonian Pavilion at the 59th Venice biennale. Photo: Luke Walker/CCA

Bita Razavi, *Elevated Platform*. Sculptural spatial intervention. Marble imitation, teak veneer, metal, 2022. View to exhibition "Orchidelirium—An Appetite for Abundance". The Estonian Pavilion at the 59th Venice biennale. Photo: Luke Walker/CCA

Kratt
Kinetic sculpture
Metal, electric motors, sound of un-oiled machinery, photographs and botanical drawings printed on canvas belt

In front of the elevated platform is a kinetic sculpture evoking a *Kratt*, a mythological creature from Estonian folklore. Comprising household objects, this machine came to life—the artist asserts—once three drops of blood had been sacrificed to the devil and thereafter performed any task, including wrongdoings, for its owner. The spidery creature moves its mechanical insides to produce images on command for the viewers on the platform while those below can only observe. The upper rollers reproduce Emilie Rosalie Saal's botanical drawings. These beautiful images emerge from a central printing press that references Andres Saal's background as a printmaker and the development of modern printing technology which made the colonial worldview tangible for a wider audience through the production of botanical images, maps, and information about the colonies.

This machine represents the possibility of a servant for a servant. Emilie's practice as an artist relied on the labour of local Indonesian women who worked in her household. Addressing historical erasures and incomplete narratives, the images are placed on the machine's white belts just as Emilie's drawings appeared on white backgrounds that detached the plants from colonial contexts. From below, the visitors can barely see the botanical drawings produced by the upper part of the machine, instead they see images in a rushed loop pressed through rotating rollers resembling the legs of a spider. The legs spin a web of archival images of destroyed landscapes that document conditions of colonial extraction of labour and soil. Among them are archives of the rubber plantation owned by Andres Saal. Despite its offerings, the artist's *Kratt* is old and un-oiled—a crooked structure with audible creaks standing on missing legs that, nevertheless, has managed to continue functioning for years.

(top and bottom) Bita Razavi, *Kratt: Diabolo. N° 3*. Kinetic sculpture. Metal, electric motors, botanical drawings printed on belts, sound of machinery, 2022. View to exhibition "Orchidelirium—An Appetite for Abundance". The Estonian Pavilion at the 59th Venice biennale. Photo: Luke Walker/CCA

Allegory of the Cave
Site-specific light installation
Artificial light, artificial plants, fans, natural light, shadows of plants, and artificial plants

This artificial light installation only functions fully when observed from the elevated platform. The movement of the sun is mimicked by a staged light source that crosses an invisible hanging garden. Hidden from view, fans imitate wind causing the vines and branches to swing. A full day is completed in an impossibly short ten-minute duration, gliding across the wall, its hues changing before coming to replicate sunset shades. This compressed temporality reflects on the abstraction of time in Saal's drawings and her method of drawing plants in different stages of bloom, with various light sources making them uncanny and impossible images.

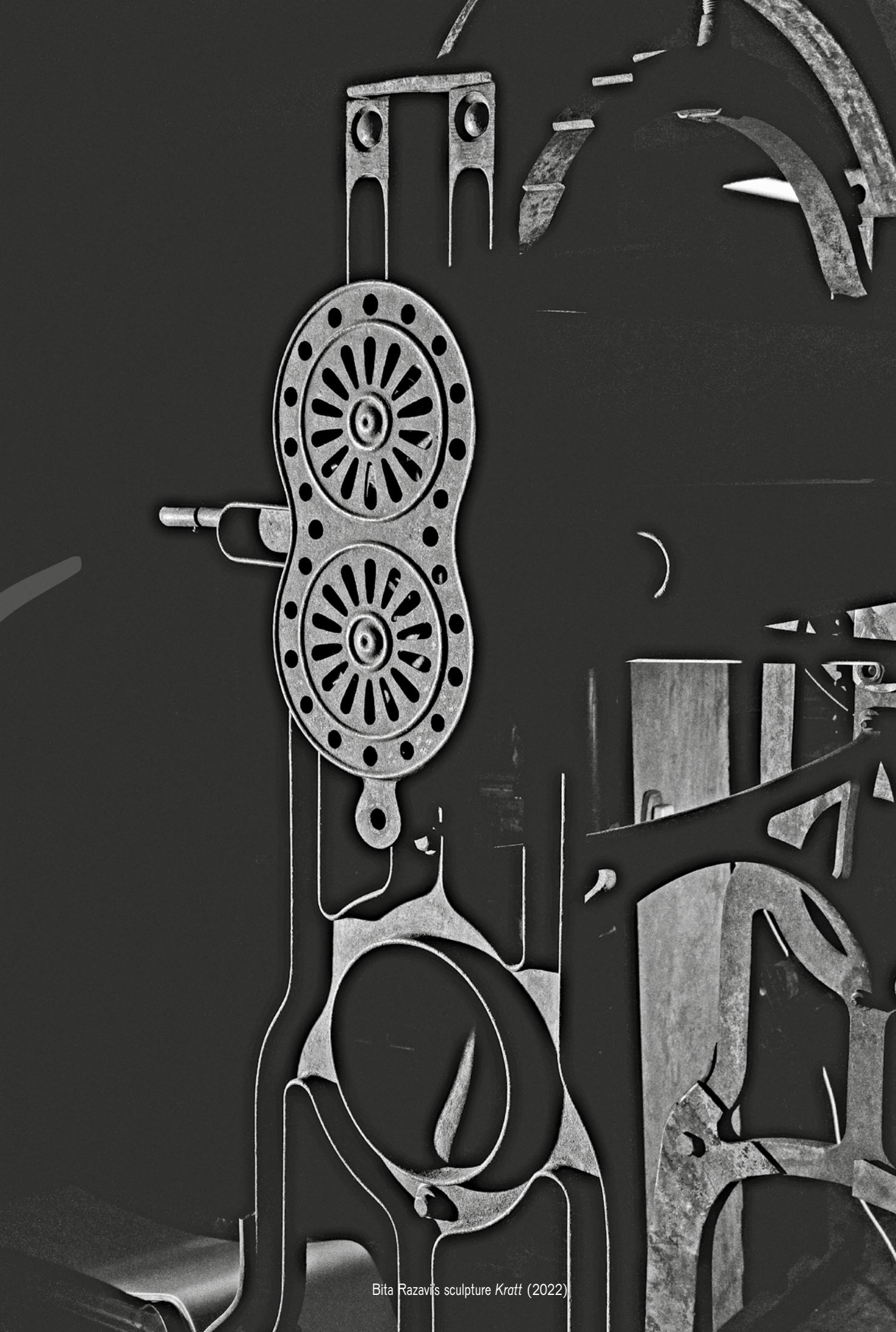
The play of light and shadow references Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*—a classic reference to perception and knowledge that reinforces the thesis on opacity and positionality played out in the nuances of privilege and illusion. While the viewers on the platform enjoy a perfect view of artificial light and shade, shadows created by natural light are obscured from their view. From the ground floor, viewers can compare this scenographic production with the natural sunlight that enters the modernist windows of the Rietveld pavilion from the opposite corner of the space. This simulation of natural cycles recalls the colonial obsession with recording and categorising nature through representation rather than developing a connection with the land. Botanical gardens, terrariums, and scientific illustrations capture and offer the tropics in portable, entertaining formats that conveniently deny the simultaneous destruction of landscapes from which they were derived.

References to the blindness of positionality within colonial relations are initiated by the performance of the guard at the entrance and are architecturally reinforced through the class division of the platform. Visitors on the ground can choose to enter the platform after having seen the conditions that support it, and those on the platform can choose to descend and witness the source of what is presented—beautiful botanical offerings which, upon closer viewing, fall flat into the blankness of Saal's page.

(top and bottom) Bita Razavi, *Allegory of the Cave*. Site-specific light installation. Artificial light, artificial plants, natural light, shadows of plants and artificial plants, fans, 2022. View to exhibition "Orchidelirium—An Appetite for Abundance". The Estonian Pavilion at the 59th Venice biennale. Photo: Luke Walker/CCA

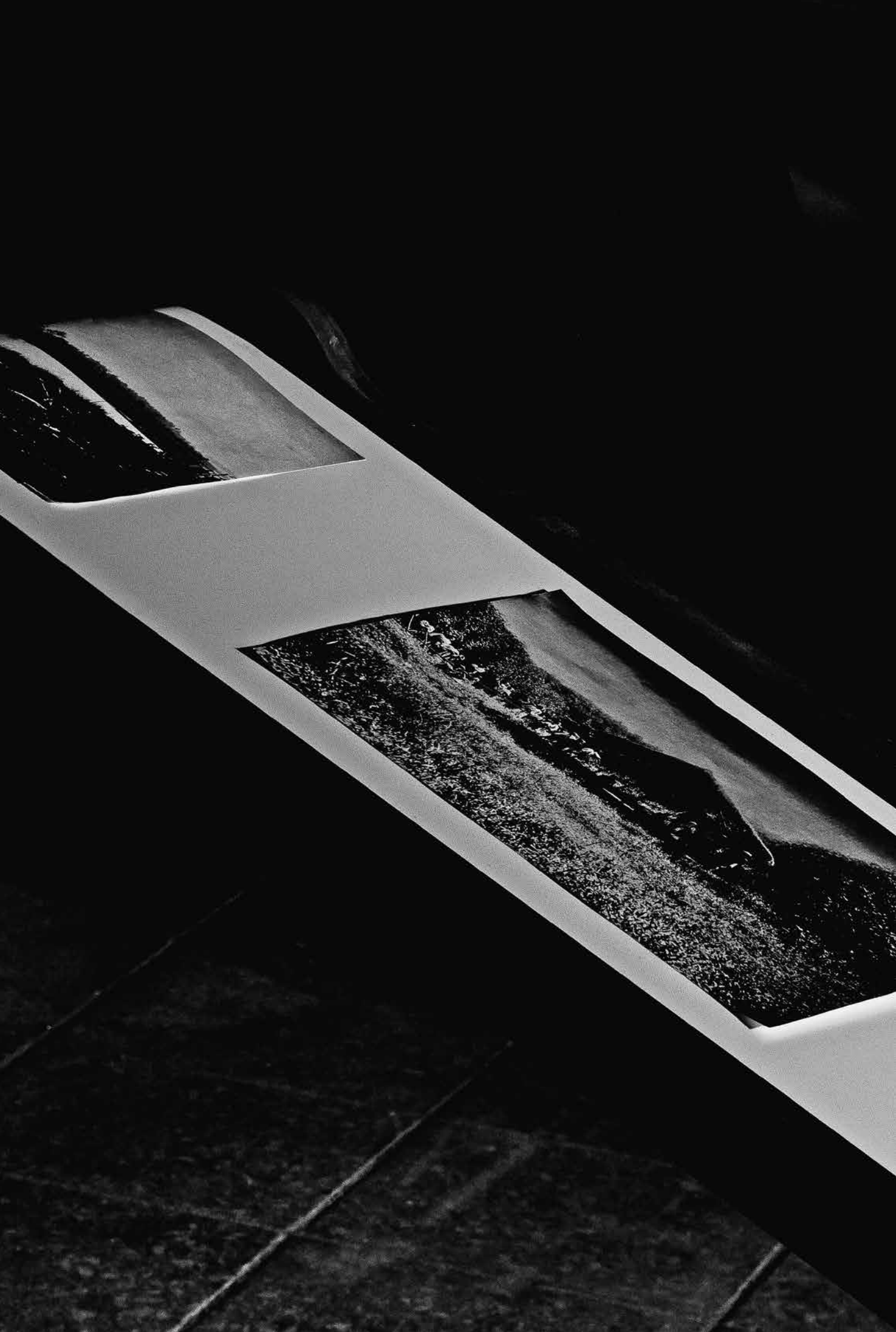
Bita Razavi, sketch for *Allegory of the Cave*, a site-specific light installation for the Estonian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

Bita Razavi, sketch for *Allegory of the Cave*, a site-specific light installation for the Estonian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Bita Razavi's sculpture *Kratt* (2022)

DIABOLO. Nº3



Photos by Anu Vahtra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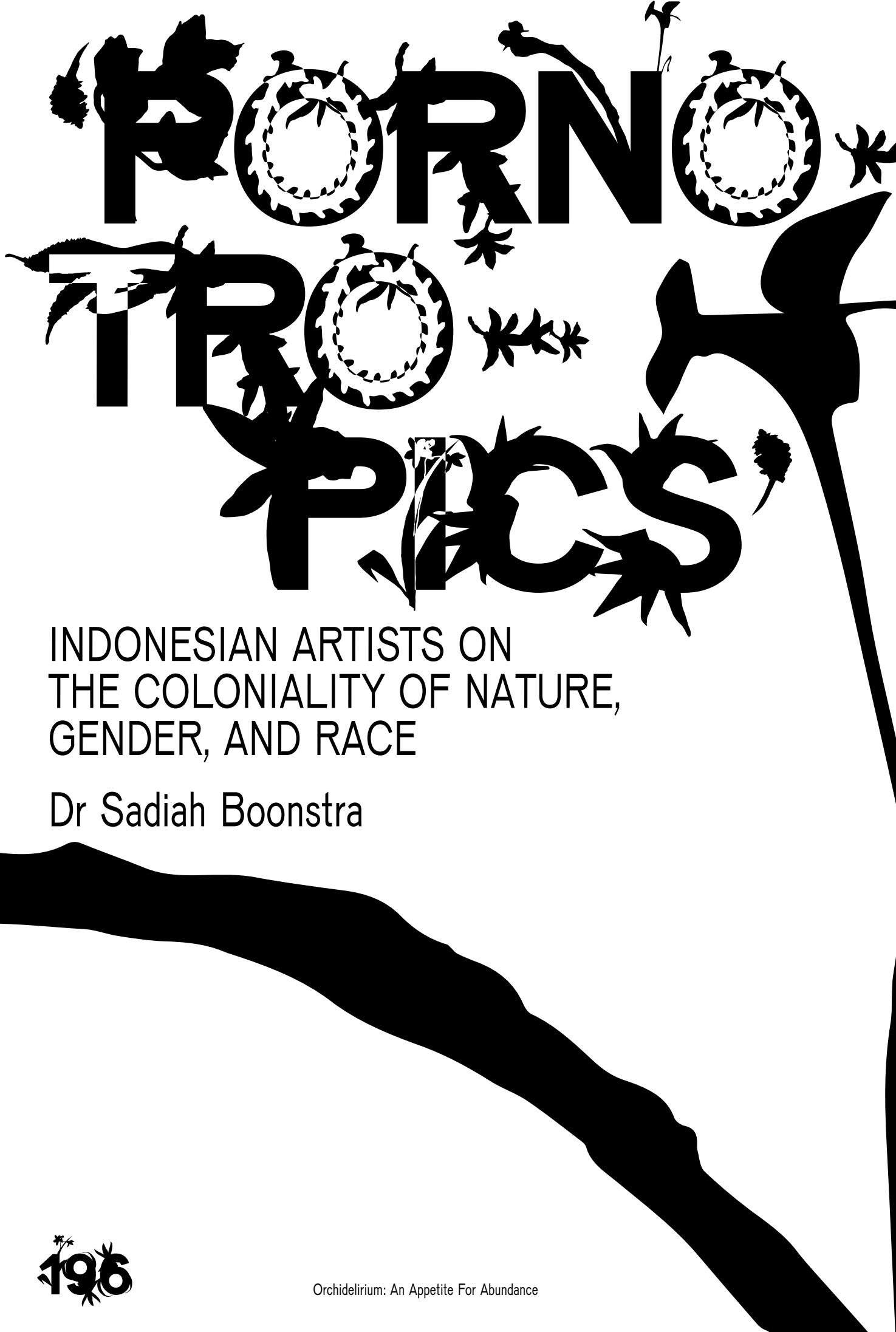


INDONESIAN ARTISTS ON THE COLONIALITY OF NATURE, GENDER, AND RACE

Dr Sadiah Boonstra

EMILIE ROSALIE SAAL IMAGES OF NATURE, GENDER, AND RACE

Emilie Rosalie Saal (1871–1954) arrived in Java in 1899, accompanying her husband Andres Saal (1861–1931) who worked for the Dutch colonial government. During her stay until 1920, Emilie created over 300 paintings working directly from nature. As a woman artist, Emilie was confined to portraits, still-lives, and landscapes (see the timeline in this volume), which might explain, at least in part, her interest in the flora she encountered in Java.[1] Emilie seems to have been particularly fascinated with orchids, of which she created hundreds of images. The rest of her oeuvre, consisting of over 200 drawings, depicts other plants, such as crops and cultivated plants, tropical fruits, ferns, and palm trees, as well as field and forest flowers.[2]

She created some of these drawings in the botanical garden in Bogor (then called Buitenzorg), now known as Kebun Raya Bogor. Although today the botanical garden is largely associated with leisure and tropical nature, connotations which resonate with Emilie's drawings, botanic knowledge as developed and institutionalised in botanical gardens around the world was pivotal for European imperialism in Southeast Asia. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, botanic knowledge contributed to the ability to control nature and the development of agriculture, which in turn facilitated the advance of massive plantations and the consolidation of empires.[3] Expansive networks connected the colonies to Europe and vice versa which facilitated the transplantation of plants, expertise, experience, and art in connection to botanical knowledge. Historians Andreas Weber and Robert-Jan Wille demonstrate that the botanical garden in Bogor functioned as a site of colonial politics for Dutch imperialism. The wealth acquired through resources taken from nature enabled the transformation of the Dutch Republic into a leading European power in the seventeenth century and continued to form the basis of Dutch wealth up until the 1950s. Economic, social, and political histories of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia are thus firmly rooted in land, environment, and natural resources.[4]

The circulation of Emilie's paintings of tropical orchids for an exhibition in the United States in 1920, and the European orchid craze itself at the start of the twentieth century bear testimony to the global circulation of botanical knowledge and images. Emilie, along with many others, was captivated by the beauty of the 'tropical" orchid

1 For the development of her various subjects, see the timeline.

2 The most important and interesting examples of colour drawings of Javan flora from life can be found in *Representatives of the Tropical Flora* by E. R. Saal, with explanatory texts and photographic images by A. Saal.

3 See Andrew Goss, *The Floracrats State-Sponsored Science and the Failure of the Enlightenment in Indonesia* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); Zaheer Baber, "The Plants of Empire: Botanic Gardens, Colonial Power and Botanical Knowledge," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2016): 659–679; Andreas Weber, "A Garden as a Niche: Botany and Imperial Politics in the Early Nineteenth Century Dutch Empire," *Studium: Tijdschrift voor Wetenschaps- en Universiteitsgeschiedenis*, vol. 11, no.3 (2018): 178–190.

4 See also Susie Protschky, *Images of the Tropics. Environment and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia* (Leiden, Netherlands: KITLV Press, 2011).

Dr Sadiah Boonstra

as well as other plants, trees, and even crops. The drawing of plants was a practice that went hand in hand with the collection of botanic knowledge. From the start of the colonial project, knowledge of specific plants and their functions was crucial to fighting diseases on the long overseas journeys undertaken in the European quest for spices and land. When the Dutch East Indies Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC) was founded in 1602, ships were instructed not only to return with highly sought-after spices like pepper, nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon that enriched the European diet, but to also bring back branches and leaves from resting plants. In addition, they were instructed to make illustrations of those plants, record their local names and uses, and to document the ways in which they grew.[5]

Visual images of the colony Netherlands Indies during the colonial period (circa 1800–1949) take centre stage in *Images of the Tropics* by cultural historian Susie Protschky. As she shows, landscape visualised in paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs was one of the most popular and enduring subjects in European visual images during the colonial period. The *mooi Indië* (Beautiful Indies) painting style became exemplary of the landscape of colonial Indonesia, depicting idealised and exoticised imaginations of the colonial landscape without any trace of violence or destruction of the environment. These images were not just decorative but were part and parcel of empire building as they justified territorial claims and offered tangible European imaginations of the tropics. These idealised and exoticised landscape images were heavy with cultural significance that mirrored European moral and social concerns surrounding the tropics. Such visualisations thus involved negotiations "between tropical imaginings and sensuous, embodied experiences."[6] These tropical imaginings contributed to the creation of colonial racialised differences between peoples and natures, labeling native Indonesians and nature as "wild" and "savage" as opposed to "modest," "civilised," and "cultivated" Europeans. These racialised differences, in connection to sensuous, bodily experiences and imaginations of the tropics, contributed to the way in which the tropics came to be known, interpreted and imagined.[7]

When Emilie Rosalie Saal arrived in Java to join her husband, who was working for the colonial government, her homeland Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. As a white couple who were part of the colonial system, they occupied a privileged position in the colonial hierarchy of race, class, and gender, categories that were also constructed in relation to the natural environment. As a white woman Emilie had the privilege of mobility and could take advantage of the new transport and communication technologies of the late nineteenth century which enabled her to move through the colonial landscape more freely than the lower classes of Indonesian men and women. However, European women too were usually accompanied by men, particularly on long journeys or through dangerous regions, and were confined to socially reproductive and domestic roles inside the house.[8] Emilie's life and her art depicting tropical flora exemplify the complex entanglement of nature, botanic knowledge, race, gender, and art during the early twentieth century. It was the result of her privileged position within the racialised and gendered hierarchy of colonial Indonesia that Emilie was able to create her art and show it to global audiences.

5 Pieter Baas and Jan Frits Veldkamp, "Dutch pre-colonial botany and Rumphius's Ambonese Herbal," *Allertonia*, vol. 13 (2013): 10.

6 Dennis Cosgrove, "Tropic and Tropicality," in *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire*, edited by Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 197.

7 See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995); Protschky, *Images of the Tropics*.

8 Protschky, *Images of the Tropics*, 128–9.

Zico Albaiquni, *Ruwatan Tanah Air Beta. Reciting Rites in Its Site*, 2019. Oil and synthetic polymer on canvas. Installation photograph from the exhibition *On the Nature of Botanical Gardens*, 2020. Curated by Sadiah Boonstra at Framer Framed, 2020. Photo: Eva Broekema / Framer Framed. Collection of Dutch National Museum of World Cultures. Courtesy of the artist and Yavuz Gallery.

Zico Albaiquni, *For evidently, the fine arts do not thrive in the Indies*, 2018. Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia. Courtesy of the artist and Yavuz Gallery.

Zico Albaiquni, *Arahmaiani, Memory of Nature*, 2013 – ongoing. Installation photograph from the exhibition On the Nature of Botanical Gardens, 2020. Curated by Sadiah Boonstra at Framer Framed, 2020. Photo: Eva Broekema / Framer Framed. Courtesy of the artist.

In "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," philosopher María Lugones writes that "the coloniality of gender is constituted by and constitutive of the coloniality of power, knowledge, being, nature, and language. They are crucially inseparable."[9] Lugones thinks of coloniality of power, knowledge, being, and nature as intrinsically intertwined which contributes to our understanding of systems of oppression as complex interactions of powerful economic, racialising, and gendering policies and practices. The issues of colonial history and the impact of its legacies in terms of economics, race, and gender, fascinate many artists in Indonesia today. Some of these artists work around environmental issues with historical roots from an ecofeminist approach, while others directly confront colonial history in their work. They use their practices as a means to expose and criticise coloniality, and propose decolonial visions rooted in local cosmologies.

Using a historical approach, this essay looks at a number of contemporary artists from Indonesia to explore how they uncover and visualise these complexities, how they challenge and resist the entanglements of coloniality, botany, nature, gender, and race through their art. The essay highlights works by Arahmaiani and Tita Salina as a commentary on the destruction and exploitation of nature through the lens of ecofeminism, and turns to a younger generation of artists by looking at the works of Zico Albaiquni and Edwin which directly confront the coloniality of nature and gender and its structural impacts today. Each of these artists take a unique perspective and approach to the complex entanglement between coloniality, nature, gender, exploitation, and economics both in the past and the present.

THE BOTANICAL GARDEN AND KNOWLEDGE OF NATURE

Emilie Rosalie Saal created some of her work in the botanical garden in Bogor, a site that existed as the result of the belief that man is separate from nature. The South American decolonial thinkers Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh describe how after 1500 the distinction between man and nature developed under the influence of Christian theology, the European Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. As a result of this, man became the centre of the universe which enabled his separation from nature. As the (Western) European man began to distance himself from nature, nature turned into something that man could control, dominate, and exploit by the middle of the eighteenth century. Prior to the 1500s the distinction between nature and man did not exist as a concept, and even today the separation between nature and man does not exist everywhere.[10] Philippe Descola clearly shows in *Beyond Nature and Culture* that the distinction between nature and man is meaningless and does not exist in Indigenous (written with a capital letter out of respect) cosmologies.

9 Marìa Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2010): 757.

10 Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018), 155–164.

Ecofeminism, or *ekofeminisme* in Indonesian, emerged in the international field of environmental art in the late 1960s and can be distinguished into two strands: cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism. Ecofeminism takes a holistic approach to humanity and nature—it rejects the separation of man from nature, and critiques the patriarchal views and social structures that have led to the domination and control of nature. In this sense Indonesian ecofeminism resembles decolonial feminism which understands the coloniality of gender as constituted by the coloniality of power, knowledge, being, nature, and language. Art historian Edwin Jurriëns explains that cultural ecofeminism intends to connect and understand natural earth cycles, but also to revive ritual around symbols of feminine empowerment, care, and interconnectedness, such as the Earth Goddess, Mother Nature, and Gaia, and restore related imagery. Social ecofeminism, on the other hand, seeks to heal both environmental and social problems. It regards misogyny for example as a social problem that affects the exploitation of the natural environment. It also recognises the danger of the use of female imagery such as Ibu Pertiwi (Mother Earth) and local symbols of fertility, as such symbolism reinforce the restricted positions and roles of women in Indonesia's patriarchal society, which in turn prevents them from having a voice in political decision-making about key social and environmental issues.[11]

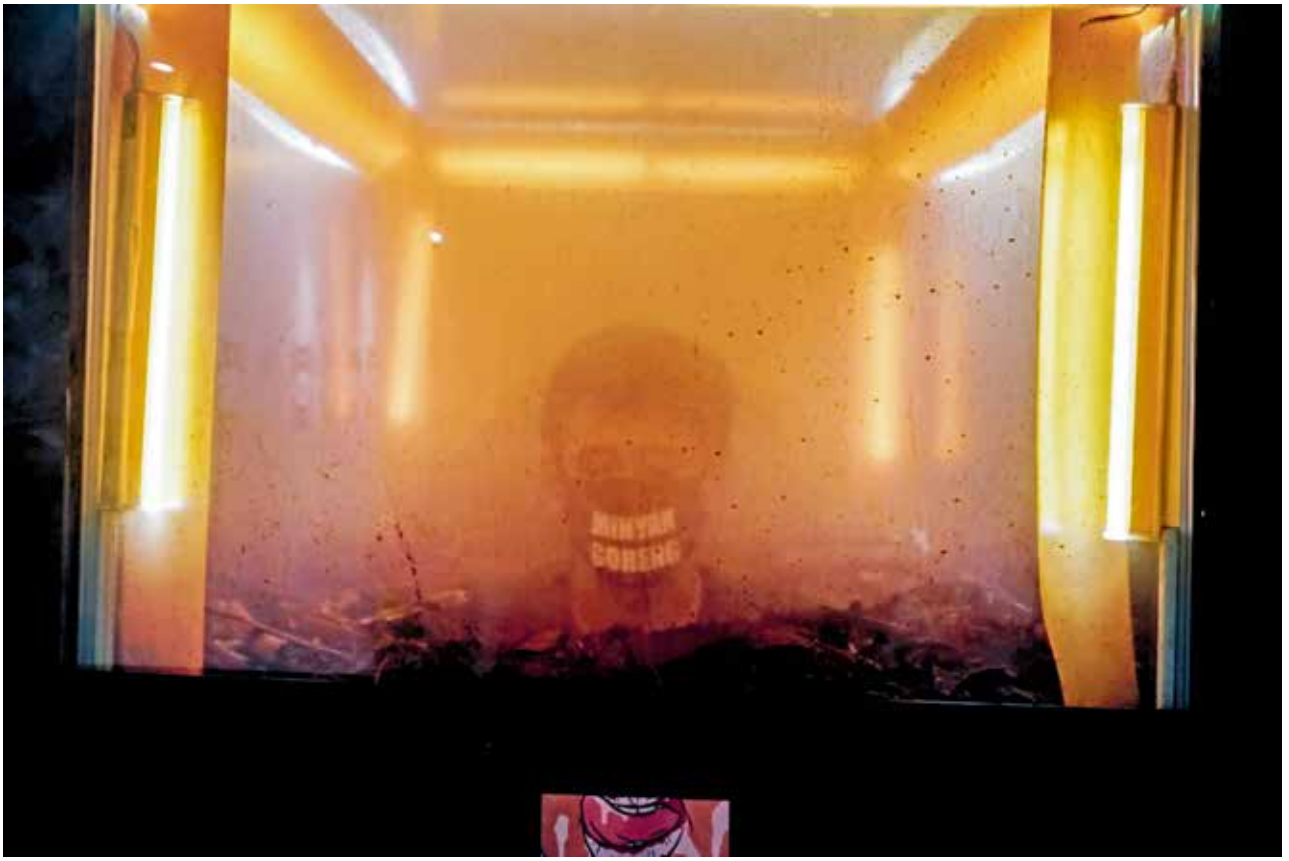
Tita Salina's (b. 1973) practice often engages with environmental issues and the effects of natural exploitation and destruction. Her machine installation *Anthropocentric Annual Ritual* (2019) aims to address the issues surrounding the destruction of primary forest in Sumatra as a result of the expansion of palm oil plantations. During the dry season under the influence of El Nino, annual forest fires run for months causing a haze from burning leaves and peatland that reaches as far as Thailand and the Philippines. This pollution and the destruction of forests are a direct impact of what botanic knowledge set in motion in the mid-nineteenth century when palm oil seedlings were introduced to the botanical garden. The global demand for palm oil led to the destruction of primary tropical forest to make way for palm plantations. To mimic the experience of haze pollution, the installation comprises a large wooden cube with holes cut into its walls, through which visitors are encouraged to place their heads to be met with a cloud of smoke. In this way the visitor is able to experience the suffering of the people affected by the annual forest fires, in the installation newly configured by Salina as an "anthropogenic annual ritual" of ritually inhaling the smoke from the annually burnt woods and leaves, and burning palm tree peat. The names of products such as "mascara," "toothpaste," "biodiesel," "butter," and even "ice cream" are printed on masks which visitors can wear while their heads are inside the installation. These words are all references to consumption products that contain palm oil. *Anthropocentric Annual Ritual* aims to raise awareness of the wide application of palm oil and address how our consumption of it contributes to the destruction of the environment.[12]

Arahmaiani (b. 1961) is one of Indonesia's foremost women artist-activists who has created environmental art throughout her career. Jurriëns signals that her work "stands out for providing a gendered perspective on the socio-political dimensions of environmental problems and solutions."[13] The installation *Memory of Nature* (2014–ongoing) takes the shape of a wooden mandala with four "'gates" filled with soil into which mung bean

11 Edwin Jurriëns, "Gendering the Environmental Artivism: Ekofeminisme and Unjuk Rasa of Arahmaiani's Art," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2020): 13.

12 Email from the artist, November 24, 2019.

13 Jurriëns, "Gendering the Environmental Artivism," 4.



Tita Salina, *Anthropocentric Annual Ritual*, 2019. Photo: Jin Panji. Courtesy of the artist.

Tita Salina, *Anthropocentric Annual Ritual*, 2019. Photo: Jin Panji. Courtesy of the artist.

Tita Salina, *Anthropocentric Annual Ritual*, 2019. Photo: Jin Panji. Courtesy of the artist.

seeds have been sown. As they grow, the seeds slowly begin to reveal the mandala flower at the centre and, as they develop into mung beans, they can be harvested. Arahmaiani first created the work in 2010, after she began actively working and studying environmental issues with Buddhist monks on the Tibetan Plateau. These monks customarily make mandala sand paintings during rituals. The use of natural materials such as wood, soil, and vegetation in the artwork also references nature and environmental issues.[14]

Memory of Nature is simultaneously inspired by the spiritual and ritual significance of the mandala, and as such it is a reminder of the Buddhist knowledge which once had a strong presence in the western part of the Indonesian Archipelago. The mandala, as a representation of the universe and a sacred space for meditation, is a reminder of our place in the universe and invites the viewer to evoke memories of the place humans once occupied as a part of nature instead of thinking of themselves as separate from it. According to Arahmaiani, metaphysical values and ethics are pivotal in supporting humans to respect the environment and live in harmony with nature.[15] Without these values and ethics, humans will ultimately regard nature as simply an object for them to exploit. For the purpose of raising awareness, the audience is invited to create mandalas with seeds arranged on top of four wooden tables which surround the central mandala, to contemplate their relation to and place in the universe and the natural environment. From both an ecofeminist and decolonial perspective, the installation *Memory of Nature* rejects the distinction between man and nature, and proposes a reconnection to the cosmologies that existed prior to this separation.

THE LANDSCAPE

While the exploitation of nature fueled the colonial economy and destroyed the landscape, the art forms visualising the colonial landscape in turn obscured this destruction, as detailed by Protschky. The Indonesian landscape, and more specifically the *mooi Indië* landscape painting tradition, are recurring themes in the work of Bandung-based painter Zico Albaiquni (b. 1987). Committed to decolonising painting as an art form introduced to colonial Indonesia by the Dutch, in their previous work Albaiquni has created new colour combinations by mixing *mooi Indië* pigments. His signature colourful palette, sometimes derogatorily referred to as *kampungan* or *plebeian*, is part of this strategy. In his painting *For evidently, the fine arts do not thrive in the Indies* (2018) Albaiquni depicts an artist studio setting of which the walls are entirely filled in salon style with highly abstract landscape paintings which feature *trimurti* or the trinity of *mooi Indië* landscape paintings: the mountain, the coconut palm, and the *sawah* or rice field.[16] These piles of paintings create a decorative enclosure around the central image which is taken from a nineteenth century photograph from the Leo Haks collection of the National Gallery Australia. This image shows a white man surrounded by a group of Papua men, which suggests a reference to the practices of physical anthropologists in Papua. Albaiquni explains that the photograph has lost its original meaning of an equal encounter between the Papua men and the white man and that the racialised colonial gaze has become the dominant view of the landscape

14 See Sadiah Boonstra, *On the Nature of Botanical Gardens. Contemporary Indonesian Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Framer Framed, 2020); Jurriëns, "Gendering the Environmental Artivism."

15 Personal Conversation with the artist, October 2019.

16 Protschky, *Images of the Tropics*, 83.

and its people. This results in the assumption of the colonial photograph having been taken in the context of the practice of physical anthropology.[17] With this painting Albaiquni aims to show how the colonial gaze directed at the Indonesian landscape has become the dominant perspective and continues to determine the perception of both colonised landscapes and their people.

The urge to address and challenge the coloniality of the botanical garden also underpins Albaiquni's *Tanah Air Beta. Reciting Rites in its Sites* (2019) in which he connects sites in Kebun Raya Bogor to colonial knowledge making. As I have demonstrated elsewhere,[18] in this colourful work, Albaiquni visualises the sites and objects in Kebun Raya Bogor which were photographed by Isidore van Kinsbergen (1821–1905) in 1863. The objects and corresponding photographs are part of the collection of the National Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands, which was originally founded as the Colonial Museum, and over the course of its history, museum employees have assigned different meanings to the objects in the botanical gardens depicted in the photos. Albaiquni counters the Eurocentric perspectives implicit in the meanings documented in the museum database and transforms them to become Indonesian, and at times specifically Sundanese (an ethnic group in West Java), perspectives. By highlighting the discrepancies in understanding between museum staff and Sunda Wiwitan (Sundanese beliefs) Albaiquni addresses how the Indonesian landscape and its people were seen and interpreted in the past and subsequently highlights Indonesian and Sundanese perspectives.

This spiritual layer becomes even more apparent when looking at Albaiquni's creation process. Before starting this work, Albaiquni contacted the spiritual community that gathers in the pavilion in the botanical garden. He attended a *ruwatan*, a ritual that aims to bring balance to Sundanese cosmology, to show his good intentions, and to instigate conversations about the memory, history, spiritual practices, cultures, and histories that are contained in Kebun Raya Bogor or the botanical garden in Bogor. Another painting, *Ruwatan Tanah Air Beta, Reciting Rites in its Sites* (2019), depicts a number of sites in the Kebun Raya Bogor as a means of expressing collective memories from colonial Sundanese and Indonesian perspectives. The work critiques the coloniality of the botanical garden and then reverses this perspective by highlighting and foregrounding the sites that contain Sundanese knowledge, and are embedded in the spiritual practices observed in Kebun Raya Bogor; which have been ignored, degraded, or obliterated by colonialism as illustrated in the colonial knowledge about those specific sites, documented in the museum database of the National Museum of World Cultures. Albaiquni thus expresses a decolonial attitude towards the different historical layers in the botanical gardens by highlighting Sundanese spirituality, knowledge, and memories. Albaiquni both revalues and creates new relationships with Sundanese knowledge and practices, not just in relation to nature, but Sundanese cosmology in general.

17 Personal conversation with the artist, January 12, 2022.

18 Sadiah Boonstra, "On the Nature of Botanical Gardens: Decolonial Aesthesis in Indonesian Contemporary Art," *Wacana: Journal of the Humanities Indonesia* (2022).

GENDERED IMAGINATIONS OF LANDSCAPE AND NATURE

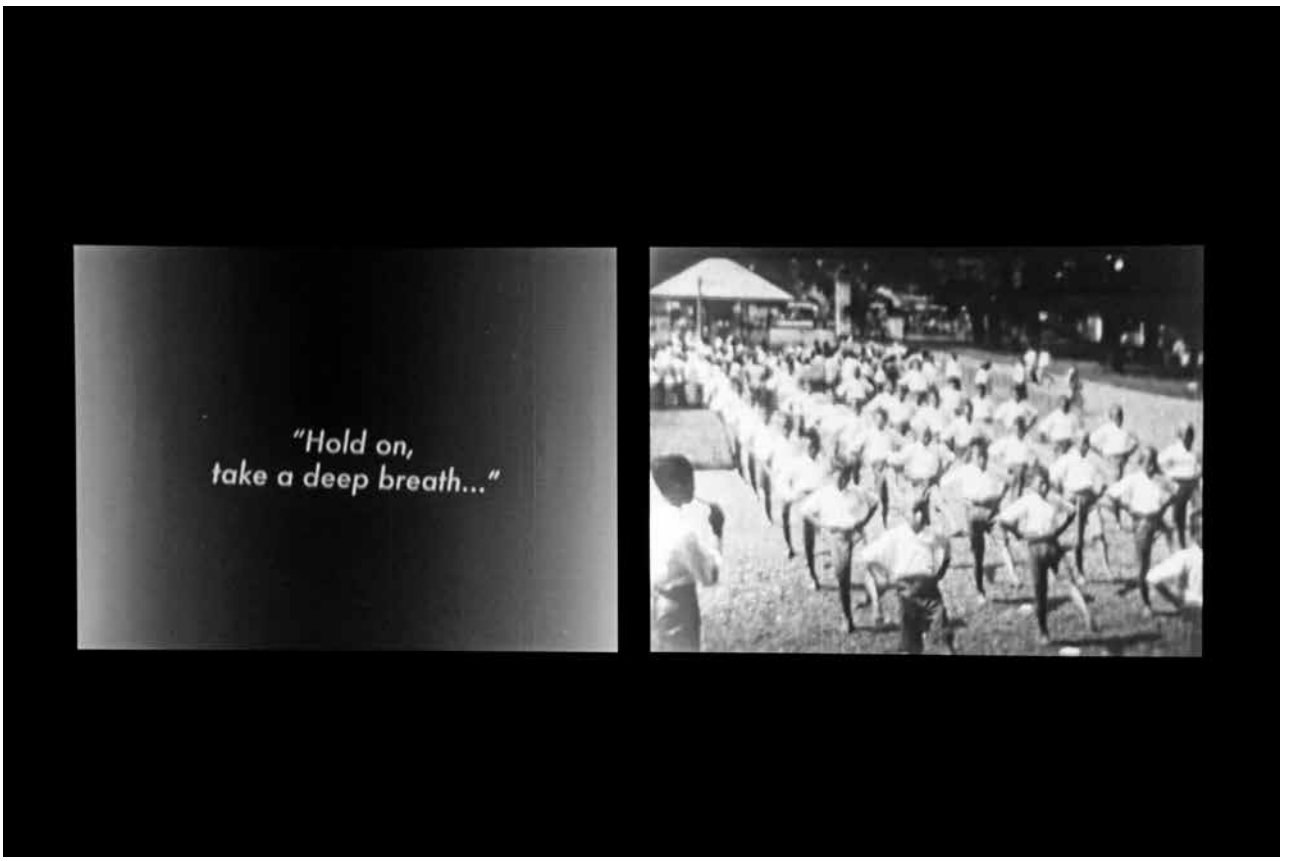
During colonial times from circa 1800 to the mid-twentieth century, visual representations of the Indonesian landscape made the colonised land and people imaginable for audiences in the homeland. Such images worked in collusion with the maps which newly visualised the outlines of colonial territory. Benedict Anderson's thesis in his influential *Imagined Communities* has already pointed to the map as one of three tools, together with the museum and the census, that enabled empire building in the nineteenth century. Maps made visible and imaginable the perimeters of the land that was colonised, defined the environment of the population it ruled, and legitimised and historicised the authority of colonial rule.

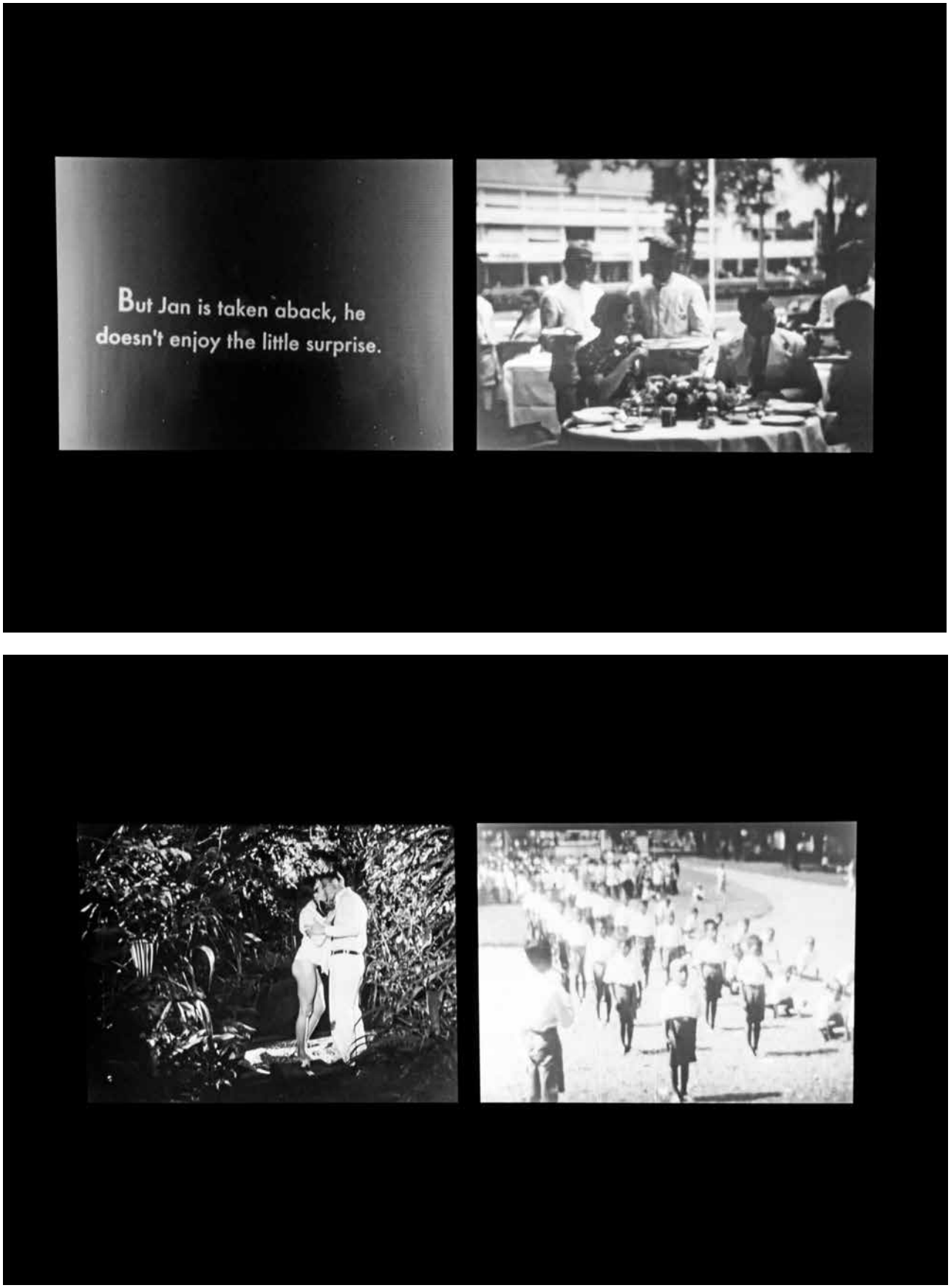
Scholar Anne McClintock, writing in the context of British imperialism, argues in *Imperial Leather* that maps, as representations of the land and landscape, were highly gendered and entangled with notions of race. While Protschky acknowledges the importance of gender and race for the interpretation of colonial landscapes, she is of the opinion that "McClintock's Freudian analysis overdetermines the role of the feminine in colonial images of the tropics."[19] To Protschky, the environments of colonial Indonesia were not consistently feminised so much as they were racialised. However, McClintock's notion of mapping the "virgin" land, was part and parcel of colonial knowledge building and influenced the development of a number of new sets of knowledge such as geology, biology, archeology, anthropology, history, art history, and botany. For each of these new disciplines the selection and ordering of objects and plants in evolutionary sequences was crucial to the mapping of human reality and history. Generally, Europeans were able to separate and distinguish their knowledge-building from other people and worlds through the process of "othering" and "racialisation." In turn, this process of "othering" and "racialisation" resulted from a Eurocentric worldview and colonialism. This specific form of colonialism was facilitated by what sociologist Aníbal Quijano calls "coloniality of power," a colonial structure of power that produced specific social discriminations which were later codified as "racial," "ethnic," "anthropological," or "national."[20]

McClintock points out that for coloniing powers, mapping the "virgin" land and the urge to control nature were deeply connected to a long tradition of white male travellers who started to "explore" the world. She argues that the knowledge of the unknown world was mapped as a "metaphysics of gender violence." In the fantasies of the white male traveler, the world was feminised and spatially spread for male exploration, then reconstructed and organised in the interests of imperial power. McClintock highlights Rene Descartes' view that made men "masters and possessors of nature." In the minds of these men, the imperial conquest of the globe found both its form and its political authorisation in the subservience of women as a

19 Protschky, *Images of the Tropics*, 127.
20 Ibid., 168–169.

Arahmaiani, *Dayang Sumbi Menolak Status Quo*, 1999 – ongoing. Video stills. Courtesy of the artist.


"Hold on,
take a deep breath..."



Edwin Hortus, installation photograph from the exhibition *On the Nature of Botanical Gardens*, 2020. Curated by Sadiah Boonstra at Framer Framed, 2020. Photo: Eva Broekema / Framer Framed. Courtesy of the artist.

category of nature. As such, the categorisations of people according to race, gender, and sexuality resulted from colonialism.[21]

White male travellers projected their fears and desires onto the tropics, the geographical region around the equator. In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock coins the term "'pornotropics" to describe this colonial notion of the tropics as "a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears."[22] Within the trope of porno-tropics, women represented sexual peculiarity, abundance, and a lustful sensuality, which even more so than that of men, bordered on the bestial.[23] Protschky notes that it was largely ordinary, Indonesian lower-class women who were subjected to the prying gaze of painters and photographers in search of erotic images, for example while they were bathing or carrying out daily tasks.[24] Often Indonesian rural women were depicted using "ethnic types" by colonial painters and photographers blurring the boundaries between anthropology and souvenir tourism. As Driver and Martins note "The tropics, perhaps more so than any other geographical sphere of colonial expansion, were represented by Europeans 'as something to be seen—a view to be had or a vision to be experienced'."[25] But this view or vision was only determined by the white male traveller.

"Pornotropics" and the associated notions of sexual fantasy, desire, and racial difference are, as I have argued elsewhere, the theme of award-winning Jakarta-based filmmaker Edwin's *Hortus* (2014). *Hortus* explores the "pornotropics" of botanical gardens, on the one hand as a sexual fantasy of exoticised tropical beauty, and on the other hand as a site which created not only a distinction between man and nature, but also racial hierarchies. Edwin's two-channel video work, an adaptation of his final examination project for the Netherlands Film Academy in Amsterdam, has the look and feel of a black and white silent movie from the 1920s with inserted text slides that provide a narrative context to the projected images. Edwin used archival material sourced from Eye Film Institute in Amsterdam and from KITLV (Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde) in Leiden. This material consists of an anthropological film that was created during the colonial period to obtain knowledge about Indonesian people, their culture, and society. The archival footage is juxtaposed with pornographic scenes which the artist shot inside the Hortus Botanicus in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

In *Hortus*, Edwin connects "pornotropics" to the construction of knowledge surrounding the tropics, not just in terms of botany, but also in the field of physical anthropology, which conceptualised the human body as a recording instrument. *Hortus* comments on how Dutch colonisers instrumentalised, objectified, and sexualised the bodies of Indonesians. When the film becomes an actual porn film it can be regarded as a visualisation of the sexual fantasy of the white male traveller projected onto tropical nature and Indonesian women. The juxtaposition of anthropological material produced in colonial Indonesia with a newly shot porno film reveals the perversity of the colonial practices of exoticising and sexualising both nature and people. This perversity creates a discomfort that forces the viewer to reflect on this colonial practice and pushes the viewer to revisit internalised ideas of nostalgia, guilt, explicit voyeurism, repetition, and exploitation embedded in coloniality and pornography.

Hortus contests the racialised and sexualised imaginations of the tropics and

21 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 22–24.
22 Ibid., 22.
23 Ibid., 22.
24 Protschky, *Images of the Tropics*, 131.
25 Ibid., 5.

Indigenous women. Edwin's work asserts that the viewer plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of race and gender hierarchies in relation to exotic fantasies and other imaginations of the tropics. *Hortus* turns the spectator into an active viewer who cannot escape the raw reality of the pornographic material as the white male imagination of the tropics, an image of desire, lust, and voyeurism. This realisation opens up space for a new way of seeing and ensures that the viewer understands that imaginations of the tropics are exoticised, sexualised, and racialised, and that these fantasies sit in a paradoxical relationship with the botanical gardens as a site of scientific knowledge.

In Arahmaiani's practice, projection of sexual fantasy and feminisation of the tropics is also explored. *Dayang Sumbi Menolak Status Quo* (Dayang Sumbi rejects the status quo), a work that Arahmaiani has performed multiple times since 1999, comments on the inscribing of women's bodies with stories, socio-political and cultural values, rules, and conventions. The title of this performance is a reference to Dayang Sumbi, the female character in a Sundanese creation myth about the origins of the Tangkuban Perahu volcano in West Java and as such can be understood, following with McClintock's conception of the "pornotropics," as an example of gendering the landscape. As pointed out by Jurriëns, throughout the Indonesian archipelago, female characters play a central role in similar creation myths of the landscape. Other examples include the legend of Malin Kundang from West Sumatra and the Sampuraga legend from Central Kalimantan, which both are stories of boys whose mother's wrath turned them into mountain rocks, markers in the landscape. Then, when Hinduism began to penetrate the Indonesian archipelago at the start of the first millennium, Pertiwi, the Goddess of the Earth or Mother Earth, who is associated with the fertility of the natural environment, was also introduced. In nationalist discourse, Ibu (Mother) Pertiwi has been used as a gendered reference to the Indonesian nation-state as the motherland.[26]

In her ongoing *Dayang Sumbi Menolak Status Quo* performances, Arahmaiani, accompanied by the *azan*, the call for prayer, strips off a traditional *kebaya* blouse-dress and invites audience members to write messages on her partially uncovered body. From a decolonial feminist perspective *Dayang Sumbi Menolak Status Quo* can be viewed as a comment on the ongoing exploitation of "mother" nature, as well as addressing the entanglement between the destruction of the environment and its gendered connotations. It can also be seen as protesting the domination, objectification, and sexualisation of the bodies of women by Arahmaiani actively taking control of her own body and allowing other people to interact with it. From an ecofeminist angle, Jurriëns views the performances as an act of shedding off tradition and phallogocentrism, while at the same time, Arahmaiani asserts control over her body and its interactions with other people and discourses.

According to Jurriëns, the performance also comments on the nationalist politics of President Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime (1966–1998). Arahmaiani's rewriting of existing understandings of dominated and sexualised bodies breaks with *kodrat wanita*, literally "the essential nature of women," a socio-political construct that can be traced back to the Dutch colonial era which naturalised the role of women as loyal wives, caring mothers, and obedient citizens. This concept was a prominent part of Suharto's discourse of *Pembangunan* (Development)

26 See Jurriëns, "Gendering the Environmental Artivism."

which underlined the distinct gendered positions, roles, and expectations of men and women in society, values that continue to be strong in Indonesia today. Arahmaiani's *'Dayang Sumbi menolak status quo* performances suggest that narrow forms of developmentalism and religiosity have not only negatively impacted women, but also justified the endless exploitation and destruction of "mother" nature. The performances seek to give voice and agency to both women and nature, by showing that their fates are irrevocably integrated, an action and need that remains ever relevant in Indonesia today.

The works that I have explored and discussed in this essay keenly show that the complexities of racialised and gendered hierarchies created by Dutch colonial society in Indonesia, which underpinned the works and life of Emilie Rosalie Saal, still continue to have an impact to this day. Indonesian artists are highly aware of the continuing coloniality of nature, race, and gender and are not afraid to criticise and re-visualise these problematic entanglements, resisting and countering these elements of coloniality while simultaneously proposing imaginations for a more equal future.

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BOTANICAL GLOSSARY

Corina L. Apostol

This glossary reconsiders our relationship with plants by highlighting voices, gestures and approaches that challenge dominant assumptions. It supports the opening up of new perspectives and encourages multiple ways of thinking and imagining. Reflecting plant entanglements with one another, including the histories of colonialism, gender, economics and politics, the glossary explores how words *make* worlds and put forth perspectives for different futures. Featured keywords that have inspired this publication include *plant blindness* and *botanical feminisms*, among many others; each keyword works as a tool to access the social and ecological imaginaries that unfold in the exhibition, acknowledging diverse ways of being, thinking and doing. The glossary is also a reflection of how colonial taxonomies have shaped the language and conditions of botanical conscriptions that were extensions of political power. This glossary is, therefore, a conscious untangling of patriarchal vocabulary as new voices emerge, creating space for reflections and producing textual tools to understand botanical lives.

anthropocene

Anthropocene, the name given to the impact that humans and their activities have on the earth's ecology and geology, was coined in 1938 and has been repeatedly resurrected—first revived in the 1980s, and more recently, in the 2000s. The term is, on one hand, revolutionary; it links the fate of natural and geological history with the history of human society with some of its detractors claiming that the term holds a political position rather than a scientific one. On the other hand, however, critics focus on its obvious anthropocentrism, which makes the geological impact of other non-human factors invisible. There is no common agreement to the precise date of its time frame; some consider it to be the start of the Industrial Revolution while other researchers date its beginning back to agricultural development, which overlaps entirely with the Holocene (the current official geological epoch).[1]

archive

Twentieth-century philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida[2] have engaged with the subject of "the archive" deeply. They have emphasised the importance of the ideology that underlies their particular ordering and narration of the past: the archive as both the terrain of the past and the condition of possibility of the present. In contemporary artistic practices, artists have explored the condition of the archive to narrate other pasts and other possible presents and futures. In this context, the classical archive focused on human activity. Since the "ecological turn," however, artists and scholars have begun to question whether the archive or the records of history, should also take non-human factors into account. Just as the Anthropocene implies an impact of human activity on the terrestrial strata, the archive now also considers the importance of non-human factors in the narrative of the past and possible futures.

BioArt

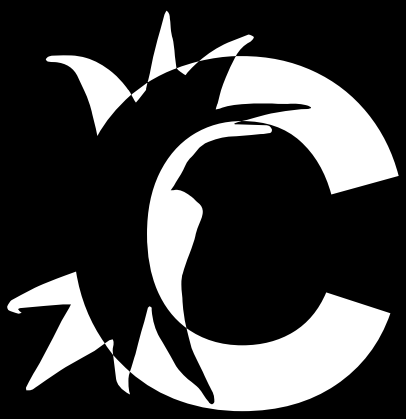
BioArt was coined by the Brazilian-American artist and scientist Eduardo Kac in 1999.[3] BioArt blurs the boundaries between art, science, and on many occasions, technology. From this nexus of union, it intrinsically raises questions about the ecological relations between humans and non-humans, the notions of progress, the human conception of life, the definition of art and the invisibility of non-human lives. BioArt is part of an ecological and environmental shift in the arts and humanities that seeks to decentralise the human, or to relativise its centrality, and establish more horisontal relations with the environment.

biosemiotics

According to bio-semioticians, humans are not the only ones who establish relations between signifiers and meanings by means of a pseudo-language. In fact, all living organisms use signs, but the decoding system is alien to humans due to a speciesist subjectivity. This unique subjectivity is closely related to the term "Umwelt," ("environment" in German) which refers to an organism's own perception of the world as a result of their interactions and relationships with the surrounding environment.[4] Taking this biological relativism into account, Biosemiotics is the science that stands at the intersection between biology and linguistics. It is a study of the signs, codes and interpretations of communications in the biological world.[5]

biosphere

Biosphere, or *ecosphere*, was coined by geologist Eduard Suess in 1875.[6] It can be defined as the sum of all ecosystems on Earth. The biosphere contains living organisms, and includes their relationships with other organic and inorganic elements. There are also human-made biospheres, such as the Biosphere 2 experiments in Arisona, US, and BIOS-3 in Krasnoyarsk, Russia. These artificial biospheres are human experiments designed to replicate ecosystem interactions in order to better understand non-human relationships while also testing the feasibility of biospheres for space colonisation.



cave

In Estonian mythology, the cave represents a gate to hell. In some folk representations of hell, serfdom is a milder version above ground, adding that the German landlords and other local officials would be less cruel in hell. In mythology, caves have been used to depict darkness and abandonment, branding it as a symbol of chaos. From this perception, other associations are made, which connect the cave to prejudices, malevolent spirits, burial sites, sadness, resurrection and intimacy. Individuals, chained deep within the recesses of the cave, mistake their shadows for physical existence. These false perceptions, and the escape from bonds held within the cave symbolise a transition into a world of reality.[7]

Colonial Botany Studies

Colonial Botany Studies is an inter-disciplinary field that studies how national colonialist politics and botany are intertwined throughout history. With a critical eye, it studies botanical expeditions, the naming of plants, fetishisms for the exotic, and the meanings behind garden and landscape planning.; it also explores the uses and misuses of edible, toxic or medicinal plants within societies in geopolitical tension. The study of colonial botany focuses on the Early Modern ages in Europe as botany was developed alongside the imperialist trade policies of the Old World. Colonial botany also refers to the archival art generated by botanical experiments and explorations, which originated the artefact called "herbarium."[8] Between fine arts and science, herbaria are archives that hide—within their beautiful pages—the ecological history and violence of imperialism in colonised societies and territories.

Collective Healing

Collective Healing refers to the overcoming of traumas that have affected a society and the cooperative and dialogic way of healing these traumas. The end of collective healing is inseparable from the means to achieving it. Art has proved to be an ally to this practice, since it works on traumas at a rational, conscious and expository level, in addition to emotional, unconscious and immersive levels. Trauma affects human societies, but non-human species and landscapes also suffer traumatic changes in their interactions with extractive logic. BioArt has the capacity to work with these collective traumas holistically, encompassing human and non-human organisms, landscapes, and the relationships they maintain and have maintained in the past.

Contra Naturam Law

The imposition of human subjectivity as the only possible reality is what's expressed in the law of *contra naturam* (against nature). According to post-structuralist theories, the "natural" is what makes its ideology invisible, not what appears to have no ideology. Throughout history, sins or disruptions *contra naturam* have been labelled as essential aberrations to what humans should be or do.[9] However, the "natural" has a moral and religious bias and refers to human nature as unique, inviolable and isolated—a nature that is derived from God.

cultural appropriation

Cultural appropriation is the adoption of certain elements from another culture without the consent of people who belong to that culture. It steps into the culture of activism—typically a movement that has originated from people-of-colour and/or other marginalised groups—and adopting it for personal or individual causes, without consultation or credit from the originators of the respective movement. Cultural appropriation can create conflicts within a movement, which takes away from its aim and purpose.[10]

decolonisation

Decolonisation regains cultural, psychological and economic sovereignty for indigenous people to attain rights over their lands, cultures, political and economic systems. It is associated with often long and violent cases from dominating colonialists who obtain their national and political independence from colonial metropolitan power. In its various forms, modern colonialism emerged between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. In the New World, the first wave of decolonisation occurred in the eighteenth century for those who were subjected to Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Dutch colonial rule. In this regard, the so-called "classical age of imperialism" in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was short; the second wave of decolonisation was achieved after the end of the Second World War.

1 Paul J. Crutzen, "The 'anthropocene,'" in *Earth system science in the anthropocene*, eds. Eckart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2006), 13–18.
2 Rudi Laermans and Pascal Gielen, "The archive of the digital an-archive," *Image & narrative*, 17, 1 (2007): 3–14.
3 Eduardo Kac, "Bio art," *AI & SOCIETY*, 36, 4 (2021): 1367–1376.
4 Morten Tønnessen, Riin Magnus and Carlo Brentari, "The biosemiotic glossary project: Umwelt," *Biosemiotics*, 9.1 (2016): 129–149.
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6 Maria do Céu Patrão Neves, "Biosphere," in *Dictionary of Global Bioethics* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2021), 203.
7 Benjamin Barber, "Mystical Caves Used Throughout Mythology," Benjamin Barber, October 2019, accessed February 2022, https://benjaminbarber.org/mystical-caves-used-throughout-mythology-2/>.
8 Pieter Baas, "The golden age of Dutch colonial botany and its impact on garden and herbarium collections," in *Tropical Plant Collections: Legacies from the Past* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2017): 53–62.
9 Noe Gough et al., "Tales from Camp Wilde: Queer (y) ing environmental education research," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education (CJEE)*, 8, 1 (2003): 44–66.
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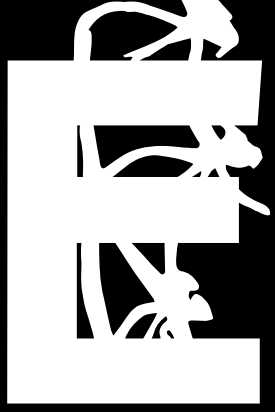


edible matter
In her eponymous essay, Jane Bennett analyses the material interactions of human beings with food, reconceptualising it as an active agent that transforms us when ingested. Starting from the popular expression "We are what we eat," Bennett looks at the possibilities of the relationship between humans and edible matter, including its emotional, aesthetic, physiological and social implications. Bennett reviews different human reactions, such as Nietzsche's disdain for vegetables, or how Thoreau, whose life is largely influenced by nature, ends up rejecting food of animal origin. Finally, she argues for an active understanding of the materiality of food.[11]

ecocide
Ecocide refers to an unlawful or arbitrary act that causes serious and lasting damage to the environment. International law and the United Nations, however, do not recognise ecocide as a crime. Political platforms, such as "Stop Ecocide," are fighting to get a legal framework within which this crime can be condemned internationally alongside war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Oil spills, deforestation and deep-sea bottom trawling are examples of ecocide and could manifest as unlawful crimes against the planet.

ecocriticism
Ecocriticism is the study of interactions between nature and literature. As part of the field of cultural studies, it examines the representation of nature and the (in) consistency of an ecological moral in literature, whether it is absent or appears under a certain gaze. In a broader sense, it is the study of relationships between nature and cultural artefacts.[12]

ecoracism
Ecoracism has a historical continuity that ties the concept to the ontologies of the supremacy of colonialism and imperialism. These include colonial ideologies of backwardness versus progress, extractive paradigms of production, land rights and the discrimination of indigeneity, essentialising local identity as closer to nature, and the glorification of animistic religions as ecotopias. These are instances in which the identities and places of others are approached from conceptions grounded in essentialist and racist biases.[13]

ecological justice
Ecological justice acknowledges that non-human beings have rights that humans should respect. As such, their rights should be taken into account from legal and ethical perspectives. This is a shift towards a more decentralised concept and regulations of the environment, where humans are no longer at the core and share space with non-human species.

environment
When talking about the natural environment, we refer to sets of external, physical, chemical and biological components in which all living organisms interact. However, in some cultures, the term and concept of the "environment" do not exist. For these cultures, there is no separation between humans and their natural surroundings and are, instead, thought to be indissociable.

environmental colonialism
Environmental colonialism points out different ways of how colonial customs have impacted natural environments and Indigenous peoples. Historian Alfred Crosby thinks that the success behind colonists was mostly caused by their ability to change native ecosystems.[14] Colonists exposed native societies to foreign markets and exotic invasive species, restricting Indigenous peoples' abilities to defend themselves against economic and biological invaders. Recovery from the damage done to native ecosystems proved difficult for native populations.

exoticisation
An action that fetishises the unknown, transforming it into an easier-to-digest object of desire. It is usually a result of the tension between the urge to possess and dominate *otherness* and the fear of its differences. By fetishising these differences, exoticisation transforms an encounter with the "Other" into a safe experience of domination between a subject—the coloniser—and an object of desire—the colonised—denying any horisontal negotiation. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century botany and zoology began the exoticisation of the New Worlds' colourful species, which became the subject of collections or were anthologised in luxurious herbariums and bestiaries. Alexander von Humboldt's fascination with orchids is the epitome of this paradigm, but this can also be noticed in Romantic literary and pictorial depictions of newly explored lands. As for the object of desire, such as the colonised woman, the objectifying gaze is accentuated due to the underlying patriarchal logics that also cross this colonial mindset, which results in the hypersexualisation of the indigenous woman's body.[15]

Extractive Logics
Extractive Logics materialise the concept of capitalism in its interaction with the environment. According to anthropocentric capitalism, the earth is conveyed as a field of resources to be exploited for economic benefits. However, collateral consequences to the earth's ecosystem, including human and non-human lives, are not taken into account. The idea of land as separate from the human—who sets up one-way profit relations with nature—allows these actions not to conflict with the capitalist ethical system. On many occasions, extractive logics completely change the landscape; in order to obtain raw materials, humans often put entire biomes at risk of desertification, deforestation, flooding and other environmental catastrophes.[16]

floriography

Floriography refers to the language of flowers. It is an ancient human use of different species of flora to deliver encrypted messages. Ascribing symbolic meanings to flowers is a common practice that can be traced back to the origins of oral and written literature. In 19th-century Europe, floriography reached its apex. In an era of ambivalent morals, romantic feelings could be transmitted by gifting specific types of flowers to avoid a social scandal. Likewise, this practice coincided with the rise of botany, at a time when modern relationships between humans, plants and the arts were forged, pointing to the symbolic association of the floral with the feminine and emotional realms. During this period, publications of floral dictionaries became increasingly popular; many of them, such as Kate Greenaway's *The Language of Flowers*, were written by female authors.[17]

forest

A forest, in Western culture, is a place that has always been the vessel of diverse significance: an ecosystem that is geographically close to civilisation, yet untameable and alien to norms and morals. Forests are liminal zones—alien to reasoning—where human beings face their demons and transform. Beyond their cultural history, forests are ecosystems from which humanity has extracted food and material for subsistence and commercialisation. Forests cover large areas of the earth, provide habitats for animals, modulate hydrological flows and conserve soil. However, the regulatory and necessary effects of forests conflict with extractivist logic: the area of primary forests has decreased by 81 million hectares since 1990. Agricultural expansion continues to be the main driver of deforestation, forest degradation and the associated loss of biodiversity.

garden

Gardens are shaped landscapes, at the boundary of work between people and nature; it is a privileged place for studying the evolution of this friction, in addition to reflecting on the concepts of nature held by different cultures. A garden's most usual characteristic is to "beautify" urban spaces and sublimate "natural" beauty. In landscaping, the garden's geometry (or absence of it), the type of species that inhabit and the corresponding transcendental symbolism of its expression all vary based on an understanding of nature and humankind. In Hebrew and Christian traditions, the garden is a restoration of nature to its divine essence; walking through it, one can glimpse both the paradise from which one was expelled and the heaven to which one aspires. In the gardening traditions of China and Japan, the purpose of the garden is contemplative and formative: the garden must refer to the completeness of the world so that the walker understands their place in it. However, when the hierarchy between the natural and the cultural is inverted and the values of untamed nature are defended, as they are in Romanticism, gardens lose their geometry, seeking to introduce the raw force of nature into the urban space instead.

11 Jane Bennet, "Edible Matter," *Literature and the Environment*, 1 (2021): 209.
12 Nasrullah Mambrol, "Ecocriticism: An Essay," *Literary Theory and Criticism* (November 27, 2016), https://literariness.org/2016/11/27/ecocriticism/
13 Martin V. Melosi, "Equity, eco-racism and environmental history," *Environmental History Review*, 19, 3 (1995): 1–16.
14 Christopher Lloyd and Jacob Metzer, "Settler colonization and societies in world history: patterns and concepts," *Settler Economies in World History*, 9, 1 (2013):
15 Camilo Uribe Botta, "Orchids of the greatest rarity of Colombia: collecting orchids in the Northern Andes in the 1840s," *Warwick* (June 25 2021), https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/blog/orchids_of_the/#_ftn5
16 Verónica Gago and Sandro Mezzadra, "A critique of the extractive operations of capital: Toward an expanded concept of extractivism," *Rethinking Marxism*, 29, 4 (2017): 574–591.
17 Kate Greenaway, *The Language of Flowers* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1987).

herbarium

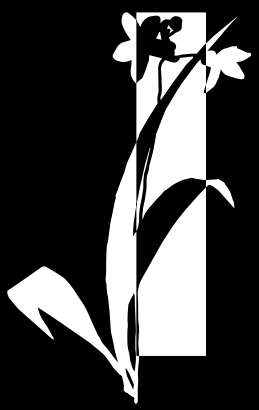
Herbaria are a collection of documentative depictions through realist drawings, compressed specimens, or photographs that record the natural life of a region, representing their physical characteristics and applications for human needs. Drawings of vegetal life, as a means to gather knowledge, can be retraced to antiquity when it was usually done to identify medicinal plants. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through intercontinental colonial conquests, herbaria became more elaborate, merging scientific purposes with artists' and botanists' skills. This allowed many women to approach science and the colonised territories of the New World through one of the few accessible means: drawing and painting. Colonial exploitation has contributed to an inverse relationship between the existence of plant biodiversity in nature and that in herbaria.[18]

hybridisation

Hybridisation, in the field of art, is the junction between diverse technical, semiotic and aesthetic components. It is presented as a trait in which culture transforms into something new that can be called "hybrid." Identifying something as "hybrid" means that it does not look native or natural. Hybridity is considered to be a volatile feature, and its presence depends on the beholder.

hyperobject

In his essay "Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World" (2013), Timothy Morton describes concepts and objects that largely surpass human perception of time and space. According to Morton, a black hole, plutonium, uranium, plastic bags, the Solar System, the biosphere and capitalism are all examples of hyperobjects. In the essay, he also acknowledges that we, as humans, are currently experiencing the end of the world because the impact of hyperobjects in our perception of the world now demands a geophilosophy that doesn't think simply in terms of human events and human significance.[19]

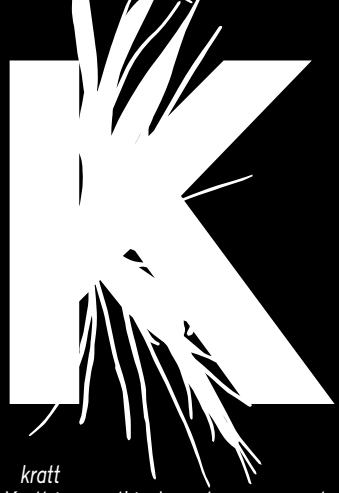


indigenous

When a species or population has always existed or lived naturally in a particular environment this is known as being indigenous, or native. Throughout history, there are many examples of the degradation of environments harming indigenous species and populations, which have ruined or confiscated their means for survival. In spite of this, many activists today are working to combat the erasure of indigenous cultures.[20]

intersectionality

Introduced by the scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality refers to the complex ways in which different forms of discrimination are combined, including its consequential effects on those who are subordinated. While the term was first used in feminist studies and the exclusion of women-of-colour from societal debates, the term has been increasingly applied to queer and critical race theories in recent years.[21]



kratt

A Kratt is a mythical creature represented in old Estonian folklore. It is made of different items found in a household, created by its master, which is usually the estate owner. In order to bring the magical creature to life, its master had to cede three drops of blood to the devil. The kratt's main trait is to fulfil its master's orders, which included mischiefs and wrongdoings. It's essential for the kratt to work; if the master doesn't give the creature a task and satisfy this demand, the kratt would turn against its owner. No matter how difficult the task is, the kratt somehow manages to accomplish it.[22]

manor house

Manor House is the main house of the lord of the manor. In the Late Mediaeval European feudal system, the manor house formed an administrative centre where most of the lords' manorial courts took place. Besides banquets and communal meals with its tenants, the manor house was considered to be the most important and dashing part of the complex. Manor houses are loosely comparable with castles, palaces and mansions. Estonian peasants were tenants of the land, which belonged to the landlord. In order to pay their rent, peasants had to work in the manor for a certain number of days throughout the year. After the abolition of serfage in 1868, the financial lease was changed, and the revolutionary reforms of the 1860s liberated peasantry from the manor.[23]

marble

Marble mining in Indigenous Mollo territory in West Timor, Indonesia took place without consent, following government officials seizing the Mollo people's land and giving permits to mining companies for extracting marble in Mutis Mountain. West Timor, a protected conservation reserve, is not only home to the Indigenous Mollo people but also to an important ecological area full of rich biodiversity. The Mollo consider the forests of Mutis Mountain to be sacred and rely on them for their livelihoods. Mollo women use forest materials to make art, which defines their cultural heritage and identity. The Indigenous Mollo people consider themselves deeply connected to the land, and all of them are named after parts of the forest, such as its soil, water, stones and trees. After years of protests, the mine in Mutis Mountain is now closed, but the company continues to operate elsewhere in Indonesia.[24]

monocropping

Monocropping is an agricultural practice that grows the same kind of crop in the same land every year in order to decrease production costs and maximise overall profits. By contrast, the loss of variety directly affects the ecosystem, limiting soil nutrients and decreasing the crop's immune response, making it dependent on highly polluting chemical pesticides. Companies argue that monocropping is not an option but a necessity, since it would otherwise be impossible to feed the current world population. Monocropping is part of capitalist extractive logic and usually takes place and resides in colonised countries. This type of colonising and capitalist use of land continues to displace indigenous populations and aboriginal wild plants.[25]

natural capital

Natural Capital is the stock of natural assets, resources and environmental services that directly, or indirectly, benefit humans. Natural capital describes the role of ecosystems in the qualities of human life and economy. However, even if this approach often results in a greater awareness of the degradation of the environment, it still implies a hierarchisation of the value, and hence, the care of eco-systems according to human needs.

non-human

Non-human is a term coined to designate factors and entities that have been traditionally thought to be outside of humanness. Current topics in philosophy such as eco-criticism, posthumanism, Object-Oriented-Ontology and Actor-Network Theory centre the attention on questions that non-humans pose in traditional ontology. Concurrently, the same term has been used in animal rights to specify that, while humans are considered as animals themselves, animals (and some machines) also show human characteristics that should be taken into account in law and ethics.

orchid

The word "orchid" is derived from the Greek word for "testicles," which resemble that part of the anatomy due to the shape of the flower. The Orchidaceae family consists of more than 25.000 species, which makes it one of the largest and wide-ranging families in the plant world. Orchids that have fascinated humans the most since ancient times are those with large, colourful flowers that are normally found in tropical geographies; around the eighteenth century, Western civilisations' discovery of and conquest for these flowers awakened a possessive "fever" to search for and capture the rarest and exotic specimens. This period, beginning in the seventeenth century (and lasting until towards the end of the nineteenth century), receives the illustrative name of "orchidelirium," or orchid mania. During this era, the ambition of the wealthy Western classes plundered Amerindian forests, putting many specimens in danger of extinction.

18 Daniel S. Park et al., "The colonial legacy of herbaria," *bioRxiv* (2021).
19 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
20 Sarah A Radcliffe, "Geography and indigeneity I: Indigeneity, coloniality and knowledge," *Progress in Human Geography*, 41, 2 (2017): 220–229.
21 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum (Chicago: University of Chicago Law School, 1989).
22 Anneli Mihkelev, "Rahvapärimus ja multimeedia eesti kaasaegses kultuuris [Folk tradition and multimedia in contemporary Estonian culture]," *Philologia Estonica Tallinnensis*, 2 (2017): 108–128.
23 Richard Phené Spiers, "Manor-house," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1911), 597–598.
24 "Climate change impacts: voices from the villages," *Down to Earth*, 83 (December 2009)
25 Peter J. Jacques and Jessica Racine Jacques, "Monocropping cultures into ruin: the loss of food varieties and cultural diversity," *Sustainability*, 4, 11 (2012): 2970–2997.

peat
Peat is a fossil material that takes thousands of years to form. Peatlands and mires are two of the most important places for biodiversity to thrive but are also carbon sinks in the world. The draining of mires for excavation starts the decomposition of peat and re-injects the carbon they hold into the atmosphere. In Estonia, peat is the second most attractive and mined natural resource after oil shale, and with its existing number of natural peat reserves, the country is ranked as one of the top ten in the world. The geological deposits of peat in Estonia have been rated at 2.37 billion tonnes; passive deposits account for 0.6 million tonnes and active deposits (i.e. usable deposits) at 1.8 million tonnes.[26]

plant blindness
Shared cultural hierarchies—replicated by individuals, and media and cultural products—shape our subjective perceptions of the world. Plant blindness refers to a shared human cognitive bias, especially in Western hyper-urbanised societies that tend to make plant species invisible. It highlights the low value attributed to the plant world, in addition to the insufficient care from humans.[27]

Plant Horror
A subcategory of the horror genre, Plant Horror encompasses fictional narratives in which beings from the vegetal realm are cast as evil characters. From *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *The Day of the Triffids* (1963) to *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), and more recent films like *Annihilation* (2018) and *Little Joe* (2019), Plant Horror investigates human anxieties about nature. This includes perceptions about "living creatures" and their dissimilarities with human bodies and psyches. Plant Horror gives form to the "absolute alterity" and subconscious fear of nature as an opposite force to civilisation. In more recent fictions, the genre embodies human feelings of guilt regarding ecocides.

Plant Visibility
Awareness of this fact has led to the development of actions in Plant Visibility, which can be found in the revaluation of urban green spaces, such as orchards or educational gardens. In art and literature, the ecological turn of posthumanism appears in art exhibitions that focus on themes of the vegetal realm.

posthumanism
Most commonly found in science fiction and philosophy, posthumanism is a concept that attempts to describe an existence or state that is beyond human. In opposition to the concept of humanism that was first conceived in the Renaissance, scholars such as Donna Haraway, argue that posthumanist beings do not have autonomy over their environment. Instead, posthumanist beings are dependent on their environment for survival and are of no greater importance than other species and beings, which are all part of a larger evolving ecosystem.[28]

postnaturalism
Postnaturalism coincides with the notion that intelligent life-forms are the central force in the universe, including having a higher moral status than other organisms. The transition to a post-naturalist era is widely regarded as the biggest philosophical shift of the 21st Century.

privilege
The term privilege is often used in discussions of social inequality. Privilege refers to the advantages or rights that a particular person or social group may have that result in preferential treatment. Privilege can frequently be found in the context of disability, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality and social class.

queer ecologies
Queer Ecologies refers to perspectives that depict nature, biology and sexuality through queer theory. It objects to heterosexist notions of nature, drawing from science studies, ecofeminism, environmental justice and queer geography. This perspective breaks various "dualisms" that exist within the human understanding of nature and culture.

rhizome
For biologists, a rhizome is a stem that grows underground, which usually grows horisontally below the soil's surface. As a stem, the rhizome has nodes and can grow other stems that might be straight up and above ground. This means a patch of what looks like several individual plants grouped near each other may actually all be offshoots of the same plant from the rhizome.[29]

rhizosphere

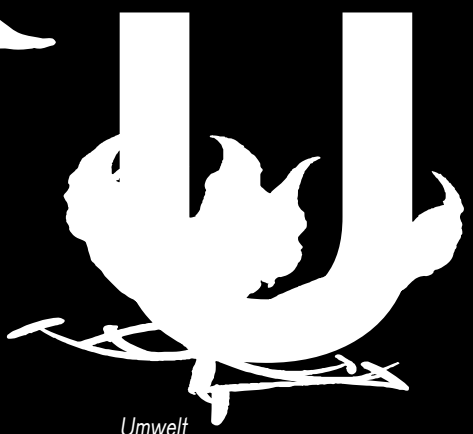
Rhizosphere is a dynamic region governed by complex interactions between plants and organisms that are in close association with the root. It consists of the soil, mud or water that surround the surface of the roots of the plant. The rhizosphere also includes the space near the roots where the microbial community is directly affected by the roots' secretions. In addition to microorganisms, the rhizosphere also contains fungi and animals. The composition of the rhizosphere is important for plants because it is the environment from which they receive substances and trace elements that are necessary for survival.[30]

Slow Food

Slow Food is dedicated to stewardship of the land and ecological food production. The movement revives the kitchen and the table as centres of pleasure, culture and community, which invigorate and proliferate regional and seasonal culinary traditions. This also encourages the creation of a collaborative, ecologically-oriented and virtuous globalisation, which prompts living a slower and more harmonious rhythm of life.

teak

A Teak is a large deciduous tree of the family *Verbenaceae*. Teak has been widely used in India for more than 2,000 years; its wood is considered to be one of the most valuable timbers worldwide. The Saminist movement rejected the capitalist views of the colonial Dutch who predominantly forced taxes upon the people of Indonesia, including the poor. They monopolised their forest lands for trade, particularly those that contain precious teak forests.[31] Due to the dry climate in South India, teak plantations are popular. With its commercial value, the British extensively planted teaks in South India during the 19th Century. However, excessive teak plantation and monoculture have led to the destruction of natural forests.[32]



Umwelt

In the semiotic theories of Jakob von Uexküll and Thomas A. Sebeok, *umwelt* (plural: umwelten; from the German *Umwelt* meaning "environment" or "surroundings") is the "biological [foundation] that lie at the very epicentre of the study of both communication and signification in the human [and non-human] animal."[1] The term is usually translated as "self-centred world."[2] Uexküll theorised that organisms can have different *umwelten*, even though they share the same environment.[33]

Uncommon Nature

Uncommon Nature is a term coined by anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena that identifies a particular approach to the environment that does not separate humans from landscapes. This thinking highlights the violence of extractive logics that perceive natural resources as dissociated units.[34] De la Cadena defines "uncommon nature" as an assemblage of entities that are *intra-becoming* with each other. Refracting the individuation of entities translates them into units that require the literal use of force. Uncommon nature coincides with, differs from, and exceeds the idea of nature as an object, exploitable and defenceless from the state, mining corporations and environmentalists that see them as resources.

26 "Peat", *Eesti Turbaliit*, https://www.turbaliit.ee/en/peat/
27 Sarah B. Jose, Chih Hang Wu and Sophien Kamoun, "Overcoming plant blindness in science, education, and society," *Plants, People, Planet*, 1.3 (2019): 169–172.
28 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
29 Liz Baezzler, "What Is A Rhizome: Learn About Rhizome Plant Facts," *Gardening Know How*, 2020, https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/bulbs/bgen/what-is-a-rhizome.htm
30 T. S. Walker et al, "Root exudation and rhizophere biology," *Plant Physiology*, 132, 1 (May 2003): 44–51.
31 Korver, A. Pieter E, "The Samin Movement and Millenarism". Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Landen Volkenkunde, 1976.
32 Md Mahmud, Mohammad Rahman, and Mohammed Hossain, "The effects of Teak monoculture on forest soils: A case study in Bangladesh," *Journal of Forestry Research* (2014).
33 Carlo Brentari, Jakob von Uexküll, "The Discovery of the Umwelt between Biosemiotics and Theoretical Biology", *Springer*, (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2015).
34 Marisol de la Cadena, "Uncommoning Nature," *e-flux journal*, no. 65 (May 2015), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/65/336365/uncommoning-nature

vegetal subjectivity
Vegetal subjectivity suggests that plants are objects in the natural environment and subjects with peculiar modes of accessing the world. The core of the "plant enigma" suggests the vegetal ability to experience, interpret and understand in similar terms as humans can. Positively understood, the secret of their subjectivity leaves enough space for the self-expression and the self-interpretation of vegetal life.

veranda
Veranda, also known as a "portico," is a roofed platform along the outside of a house, levelled with the ground floor. A veranda most often refers to a long porch that extends along the outside walls of a house and is mainly used for outdoor activities. However, in the US, a veranda can be any type of porch; in India, it refers to either a long, open porch, or an enclosed area, in the front of the house where visitors are received. In Estonia, verandas were a big part of a Palladian-inspired architecture style that flourished in the 16th century. As part of the manor culture that was mainly attributed to the wealthy Baltic-Germans, verandas gained a symbolic meaning to show wealth and position in culture. This meaning changed throughout the years and eventually reached a common parity.

wayang
Wayang is a classical Javanese puppet drama. A tyical performance shows the shadows of the puppets, which are manipulated by rods behind a translucent screen. Developed before the tenth century, the form had its origins in the *thalubomalata*—the leather puppets of southern India. The art of shadow puppetry probably spread to Java with the spread of Hinduism.[35]

weeds
Weeds is a generic name given to plants that grow in so-called "undesirable" places. Weeds are considered to hinder human activities, and based on this definition, species that are identified as weeds vary in space and time. Some plants for culinary consumption grow as weeds in specific climates; many other types of weeds have also been found to be edible and/or medicinal. In all cases, there is an ideological and hierarchical ranking within the plant world, categorising which plants are, or aren't appropriate for use or consumption.

whiteness
Whiteness refers to the construction of the white race and culture. Through government policies, media portrayal, corporate decision-making power, academia, legal and judicial frameworks, among many others, systems of privileges and advantages are afforded to white people across the globe. Whiteness has a long history in European imperialism and epistemologies. It does not simply refer to skin colour but ideological beliefs, values, behaviours, habits and attitudes that result in the unequal distribution of power and privilege based on skin colour. Whiteness represents a position of power, in which the power holder, as a "master narrator," defines social categories and realities. Becoming white means having access to sets of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guarantee basic subsistence and needs and therefore, survival.[36]

35 Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "wayang," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (August 1, 2018), https://www.britannica.com/art/wayang.
36 "What is whiteness?," Diversity Councils, Portland Community College (April 2016), https://www.pcc.edu/diversity-councils/cascade/whiteness-history-month/whiteness/

FIGHTS OF THE BEAST ON JAVA ISLAND
Andres Saal

Spectators young and old have already gathered around. Everyone has found a place and is waiting. Then the Regent signals with a hand; the spears in the first rows are lowered and all game leaders without weapons step out of the enclosure. One man walks to the cage of the King's tiger to open it with his two helpers. He cuts through the strong ties with a couple of stokes of his short blade (kris) and then opens the door to the cage with a forceful pull. His helpers step away, whereas he gets on his knees next to the open cage to make a short prayer and show to his lord that he is ready to surrender without fear to the moody hand of destiny. Then he slowly gets up and starts walking away from the cage just as slowly. It takes a few minutes. For men like him it is a matter of honour not to show any fear or try to escape. He doesn't even look back, and the only thing he has to defend him in the case of an attack from behind is a short, wavy dagger called a kris, similar to the Estonian sword. No matter what, he must not run. That would be an extremely dishonourable thing to do, worse than death. Such men usually also have a high social status.

It all seems so simple and there is seemingly nothing to fear. Most of the times the tiger remains in his cage and refuses to come out until the cage is pulled apart with a long rope. First, the animal looks around and then gets moving without paying any attention to the person who opened the cage. It is stunning to watch such a creature running. A giant cat jumping and landing! What a gorgeous flexible body and strength in these legs! His only thought seems to be escaping from the enclosure. Being faced with a whole forest of sharp spears doesn't seem to concern him the slightest. But oh, how he is startled when several iron spikes penetrate deep into his flesh, all at once! Only now is the tiger beginning to understand that there are obstacles to getting out. He has already tried in many ways, but still only received new wounds. Then he becomes furious, and with a single leap he is in the midst of the spearmen. Before any spear can stab him to death, he has broken free and reached the city streets.

Shouts of fright and joy, mixed. Horses bucking and parasols flying in the air—what a horrible chaos! Thousands of spectators are stirring in irritation; people start falling from the trees as if the world had suddenly come out of joint. A group of men with spears and fire guns rushes after the fugitive. The commotion lasted for quite a while; finally the enclosure was closed again and the spectacle could continue. If such a powerful predator had more sense, he could be much more formidable, but their reason is extremely limited. Instead of escaping they seek shelter somewhere nearby. Hence, it didn't take long before gun shots announced to us that the beast had been found and the judgement executed. They said that the tiger had terribly wounded two people on the streets and then fled to the house of a Javanese, where he was finally shot.

The other tiger didn't have the luck of breaking free from the enclosure. Even though they are terrible predators themselves, the way they are killed still evokes the feeling of endless disgust. First the animal will run onto the spears himself, then starts running in circles, still in the stabbing range, looking for a way out and trying to protect himself from the spears with his teeth. He keeps getting new wounds and soon he is weakened, with several spears stuck in his body. Yet he still tries to find an escape. With his teeth he is only able to pull out the stem, while the spearhead still remains in his body. It is disgusting and ugly to see this proud prince of the jungle in such an awful condition, fighting for his life. He is devastated, pieces of his body lie on the ground here and there or dragging behind him, until finally the dozens of spears bring him down and kill him. This whole affair of murdering a wild beast is brutal and nauseating. I assume many people do not wish to see it twice. Looking at the thousands of spectators gathered here for this barbaric entertainment, you inevitably notice the bloodthirstiness in every one of them. Taken together, that would be an awful lot of thirst for blood—more than these poor animals would ever be able to satisfy with their blood. What if those thousands of spears would one day turn against the white man? When I asked this from my companion, he answered that he had wanted to say the exact same thing to me. It probably isn't going to happen today or tomorrow, but the time will come. After all, Europeans are too pale for the eyes of the Javanese who prefer painted faces. And the games we are witnessing are a nice preparation for a future grand spectacle of blood, where their spearheads will be no longer painted red by the blood of wild animals, but rather, that of their current masters—the white men.

Andres Saal, "Elaja võitlused Jaawa saarel," *Olevik*, no. 3 (January 19, 1899).

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Kristina Norman (b. 1979) is a Tallinn-based artist and documentary maker, who explores the converging trajectories of national identity, politics of memory, and public space. Norman's most recent work is a poetical documentary performance entitled *Lighter Than Woman*, whose protagonists are the Eastern European women who work in Italy as elderly care workers and who overcome the gravity of life in a metaphorical and literal sense. This is the second time Norman has presented her work at the Venice Biennale–in 2009 she represented Estonia with her solo project *After-War*.

Bita Razavi (b. 1983) is a multidisciplinary artist best known for her autofictional practice centred around observations and reflections on a variety of everyday situations. While working as a cleaner in Helsinki, Razavi photographed traces of design in Finnish homes observing them as manifestations of national identity (2010). She married her schoolmate in her studio at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts to address Finnish immigration policies (2011) and spent four years renovating two houses in Estonia to study Soviet renovation materials throughout years of changing economic and political situations (2019). Razavi has exhibited in Biennials, won prizes, and has her works in museum collections among all other achievements that are expected from any accomplished artist.

Dr Sadiah Boonstra is an independent curator and cultural historian living and working in Jakarta, Indonesia. In her broad cultural practice Sadiah combines academic research with curation, public programming, writing, as well as producing performing arts. Her research and curatorial interests focus on the history, heritage, and art of colonial and contemporary Indonesia. Sadiah is currently post-doctoral researcher at VU University Amsterdam and Honorary Fellow at Melbourne University. Previously she was Asia Scholar (2019–2020) at Melbourne University and Curator Public Programs Asia TOPA (Melbourne), Senior Manager Programmes, National Gallery Singapore, and post-doctoral fellow at Royal Holloway, University of London/British Museum (London). She is curator of *Constellations of Being*, a solo-show by Sinta Tantra and of Tilem. *Disruptive Liminalities*, a solo show by Zico Albaiquni. She has curated exhibitions at Framer Framed (Amsterdam), Galeri Nasional (Jakarta), Erasmus Huis (Jakarta), British Museum (London), and Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam), amongst others.

Linda Kaljundi is a Professor of Cultural History at the Estonian Academy of Arts and a Senior Research Fellow at Tallinn University. She holds a PhD from the University of Helsinki. Specialising in Baltic history, historiography, and cultural memory, as well as environmental history, she is first and foremost interested in finding new, entangled perspectives on the region's transnational history, culture, and environment. Kaljundi has published and edited collections on Baltic and Nordic history and history writing, heritage, historical fiction, and images. At the Kumu Art Museum (Tallinn) she has co-curated the exhibitions *History in Image–Image in History: The National and Transnational Past in Estonian Art* (2018, with Tiina-Mall Kreem), *Conqueror's Eye: Lisa Reihana's In Pursuit of Venus* (2019–2020, with Eha Komissarov, Kadi Polli) and the new permanent exhibition *Landscapes of Identity: Estonian Art 1700–1945* (2021, with Kadi Polli). Currently she is working with a cooperative research and exhibition project *Art or Science* between the Art Museum of Estonia, University of Tartu Museum, and Estonian Academy of Arts that centres on past and present entanglements between art and science.

Àngels Miralda is a curator and writer based between Catalonia and Amsterdam. Her curatorial practice can be described as a secret politics of materiality with the belief that materials contain embedded meanings, relating to global chains of extraction, trade, and industry. She has realised residencies and new productions in volcanic craters and sulphuric pits with artists Regina de Miguel and Paul Rosero Contreras. Based on observations of how biotechnology interacts with our world as well as our bodies in evolving and often violent ways, she has imagined speculative sculptural futures with artists Julia Varela and Andrej Škufca. She is a contributor to Artforums Critics' Picks, and has been an author in multiple catalogues published by Tallinn Art Hall & Lugemik (Tallinn), Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin), Grimm Gallery (Amsterdam), Casa Velázquez (Madrid), and the Academy of Performing Arts (Prague). She has organised exhibitions at the Tallinn Art Hall, MGLC–International Centre for Graphic Arts (Ljubljana), De Appel (Amsterdam), Galerija Miroslav Kraljevic (Zagreb), the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chile (Santiago), Museu de Angra do Heroísmo (Terceira–Azores), and the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (Riga).

Ulrike Plath is a professor for Baltic German studies and environmental history at Tallinn University and a senior researcher at the Literature Centre of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. She studied history, Finno-Ugric languages and European anthropology at Hamburg and Tartu University. In 2000

she started her Phd project at Greifswald University, which she defended at Mainz university in 2005. In her doctoral thesis she explored Baltic German colonial discourses in the 18th and early 19th century. Since 2011 she has devoted herself to building up the Estonian Centre for Environmental History and to establish interdisciplinary cooperation in the field of Baltic Environmental Humanities. She has been working on Baltic animal, food, gardening and climate history as well as on Baltic German early modern literature and cultural entanglements. She has been serving on several commissions at the European Society for Environmental History and has been (co)organising major conferences in the field (BALTEHUMS 2018 and 2021, ESEH 2019). Right now she is leading a project on "Estonian Environmentalism in the long 20th Century" financed by the Estonian Research Foundation (PRG908). She is also working as a curator of the *Anthropocene* exhibition in the KUMU Art Museum (upcoming in 2023).

Mike Watson (PhD from Goldsmiths College) is a theorist, critic, and curator who is principally focused on the relation between culture, new media, and politics. He has written for Art Review, Artforum, Frieze, Hyperallergic, and Radical Philosophy, and has curated events at the 55th and 56th Venice Biennale, and Manifesta 12, Palermo. In September 2021 he published his third book, *The Memeing of Mark Fisher: How the Frankfurt School Foresaw Capitalist Realism and What to Do About It*. Prior books, *Towards a Conceptual Militancy* and *Can the Left Learn to Meme?* were published in 2016 and 2019. Mike has taught at The New Centre (online), The Royal College of Art (London), and the Estonian Academy of Arts (Tallinn) as a visiting lecturer and teaches regularly at the University of Oulu (Finland). He is currently researching Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* in relation to the economy of digital culture.

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