

Thomas Erben Gallery

ecofeminism(s) curated by Monika Fabijanska

June 19 - July 24, 2020

Press Day: Thursday, June 18, 2020, 12-6pm

526 West 26th Street, Suite 412-413,
New York, NY 10001

Gallery Hours: Tue - Sat, 11-6pm

Summer Hours: Mon – Fri, 11-6pm starting June 29

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Jessica Segall, *A Thirsty Person, Having Found a Spring, Stops to Drink, Does Not Contemplate Its Beauty*, 2011. Performance/video still, archival print.

ecofeminism(s)

curated by Monika Fabijanska

Helène **Aylon**, Andrea **Bowers**, Betsy **Damon**, Agnes **Denes**, Eliza **Evans**,
 Bilge **Friedlaender**, Lynn **Hershman Leeson**, Sonya **Kelliher-Combs**, Barbara **Kruger**,
 Carla **Maldonado**, Mary **Mattingly**, Ana **Mendieta**, Aviva **Rahmani**, Jessica **Segall**,
 Hanae **Utamura**, and Cecilia **Vicuña**.

June 19 - July 24, 2020

Gallery hours: Tue-Sat, 11-6 (through June 27); Mon-Fri, 11-6 (from June 29)

Opening reception: no public gathering is planned

Press Day: Tuesday, June 18, 2020, 12-6pm

Artists talks and gallery walk through (online - dates to be announced)

Thomas Erben Gallery is thrilled to present ***ecofeminism(s)*** curated by **Monika Fabijanska**. The exhibition will take place in the physical space of the gallery but no public opening is planned due to COVID-19 regulations. It will be open to the public from June 19. We are hosting a **press day** to view the exhibition on Thursday, June 18, noon to 6pm, when the curator and some artists will be present to answer questions, with social distancing rules observed. The exhibition will be accompanied by a **curator's essay and public programming online**, including artist talks and a gallery walk through.

ecofeminism(s) explores the legacy of some of the pioneers of ecofeminist art: **Helène Aylon, Betsy Damon, Agnes Denes, Bilge Friedlaender, Ana Mendieta, Aviva Rahmani**, and **Cecilia Vicuña**, and how their ideas and strategies are continued, developed or opposed by younger generations – **Andrea Bowers, Eliza Evans, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Carla Maldonado, Mary Mattingly, Jessica Segall**, and **Hanae Utamura**. It also features the ecofeminist works of **Lynn Hershman Leeson and Barbara Kruger**, who escape these categories.

The historical perspective gained over the last fifty years reveals how revolutionary the work of pioneer feminist artists was, and how relevant it remains, whether for women's rights or the development of social practice. The most remarkable, however, is their voice regarding humanity's relationship to nature. The foundation of ecofeminism is spiritual feminism, which

insists that everything is connected – that nature does not discriminate between soul and matter. Their recognition that Western patriarchal philosophy and religions have served to exploit both women and nature is particularly resonant in the era of the #MeToo Movement and Climate Change. But if the ecofeminist art of the 1970s and 1980s was largely defined by Goddess art, ritual performance, anti-nuclear work, and ecological land art – the curator poses the question – what makes female environmental artists, working today, ecofeminists?

Since the 1970s, ecofeminism evolved from gender essentialism to understanding gender as a social construct – to gender performativity. But today's feminists still address the degradation of the environment by creating diverse responses to patriarchal power structure, capitalism, and the notion of progress. They invoke indigenous traditions in maintaining connection to nature and intensify the critique of colonialist politics of overextraction, water privatization, and the destruction of native peoples. They continue to employ social practice and activism, but focus on denouncing global corporate strategies and designing futuristic proposals for life on earth.

Ecofeminist art emerged in the late 1960s when the development of conceptual art, spiritual feminism, and the exclusion of women from the art market pushed their inventiveness far beyond the limitations of painting and classical art gallery presentation, and led to creating new mediums, driving art into new territories. In consequence, ecofeminism is one of the richest hidden caches of contemporary art. It is art that delights the eye, provokes the mind, and can inspire change. It also restores art's function to what it was before the Enlightenment, when both science and art were tools to understand the world and propose solutions.

ecofeminism(s) presents many early gems of ecofeminist art, some of which have not been shown in decades, including *Cedar Forest* (1989), handmade paper sculptures by minimalist feminist artist **Bilge Friedlaender** (1934-2000), which comment on the myth of Gilgamesh cutting the sacred cedar forest; *The Earth Ambulance* (1982) by one of the most original ecofeminist artists, pro-peace and anti-nuclear activist, **Helène Aylon** (1931-2020), which carried earth "rescued" from military nuclear bases across the country; *Physical Education* (1973) by **Aviva Rahmani** (b. 1945) from her earliest, experimental body of work created as part of the early California performance scene; and *The Memory of Clean Water* (1985), a breakthrough work for **Betsy Damon** (b. 1940), where she cast a dry riverbed.

The show also presents the latest ecofeminist artworks that are literally being made now. In the project created especially for this exhibition, **Eliza Evans** offers the mineral rights to 3 acres of her land in Oklahoma for sale to 1,000 people, in order to prevent fossil fuel development in the area. **ecofeminism(s)** also features diagrams for the newest project of **Lynn Hershman Leeson** (b. 1941), to premiere at her exhibition at the New Museum in 2021. *Twisted Gravity* engages with the latest in applied science – a revolutionary off-the-grid water filter able to kill bacteria and degrade plastic. In this new work, the idea of survival through change meets the feminist interest in change as a life cycle.

About the Curator: **Monika Fabijanska** is an art historian and curator who specializes in women's and feminist art. Her critically acclaimed exhibition, *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Women's Contemporary Art in the U.S.* at Shiva Gallery, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY (with catalog) was ranked the fifth best NYC art show in 2018 by *Hyperallergic*. Fabijanska initiated the idea and provided curatorial consulting for The Museum of Modern Art's acquisition and retrospective exhibition of Polish feminist sculptor Alina Szapocznikow (2012).

For press inquiries and images, please contact the gallery at info@thomaserben.com
or Monika Fabijanska directly at monika@monikafabijanska.com



Helène Aylon (American, 1931-2020)

***The Earth Ambulance* (detail)**

1982

Inkjet pigment print, 11 x 8-1/2 in (sheet)

©Estate of Helène Aylon, Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects

The art of **Helène Aylon** tied the politics of war, which affects both human life and the environment, to the roots of our civilization in patriarchal religious systems. A painter, ritual performance and installation artist, Aylon's life-long career was focused on "rescuing" earth and "liberating" G-d from patriarchy. ***The Earth Ambulance*** carried pillowcases with earth "rescued" from SAC (Strategic Air Command) military bases. It departed on May 2, 1982 from the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories in Berkeley, to collect soil from Livermore Weapons Laboratory, CA,¹ and thirteen other selected nuclear facilities in ten states across the country, heading to New York City where a mass demonstration during SALT disarmament talks was planned at the United Nations on June 12. Aylon identified "confrontation and surveillance" at SACs as important aims of her project. She belonged to the Women's Party for Survival (later, Women Against Nuclear Destruction) and in the fall of 1981 taught the course *Performance Art as Anti-War Strategy* at the Feminist Institute in Berkeley. Aylon's action involved collaboration and ritual ("performance ceremonies"). It was inspired by her sensitivity – informed by her Jewish roots – to the images of refugee women fleeing with a "sac" of belongings: "We, too, would take our most precious belonging – i.e., the Earth itself, in all its variety, in our 'sac,' and carry it to safety."² Twelve women of different ethnic and class backgrounds joined her, including a Native American, Marie Fowler, who introduced them to the Hopi and Navajo lands. "It became horrifyingly clear to us that the deadly nuclear cycle had its genesis in these ancient lands, now being raped for their uranium stores."³ At the UN, they carried used army stretchers with the pillowcases, on which women across the country wrote "dreams of peace and nightmares of war," and emptied the earth into transparent containers across the street from the UN, creating a painterly installation of various soils.

1. After which they passed Diablo Canyon Power Plant, the site of massive women protests in 1981 memorialized in Andrea Bowers' Bowers series *Magical Politics*.

2. Aylon, H., "The S. A. C. /Sac Voyage of the Earth Ambulance," *WEAD/Women Eco Artists Dialog* magazine (<https://directory.weadartists.org/the-earth-ambulance>)

3. Ibid.

SUNRISE DEPARTURE OF THE EARTH AMBULANCE

MAY 2, 1982, 5 AM

DEAR FRIENDS,
WE ARE STARTING ON A VOYAGE TO TWELVE MILITARY SITES
AS THE SUN BREAKS THROUGH THE MIST
BEHIND THE BERKELEY/LAWRENCE LABORATORIES:
WE WILL FILL PILLOWCASES WITH EARTH FROM THESE SITES
AND THE EARTH WILL BE DRIVEN TO THE UNITED NATIONS
IN THE EARTH AMBULANCE.

TO AMERICA, I SAY, OPEN YOUR WINDOWS;
THERE ARE ARSENALS IN YOUR BACKYARDS.
THAT IS WHY WE BEGIN FROM THE WEST
WITH LIVERMORE WEAPONS LABORATORY
AND THEN SOUTH, THE HOME OF THE TRIDENT, VANDENBERG S.A.C.
HEADING EAST, LOS ALAMOS WHERE IT ALL BEGAN—
ALSO IN NEW MEXICO, THERE'S THE KIRTLAND WEAPONS STORAGE.
PETERSON S.A.C. AND ROCKY FLATS PLUTONIUM TRIGGER FACTORY—
BOTH IN COLORADO—AND MCCONNELL AIR FORCE BASE
NEAR THE MISSOURI NUCLEAR WASTE BURIAL.
WHITEMAN S.A.C. IN KANSAS AND RICKENBACKER IN OHIO—
BETTIS ATOMIC WEAPONS IN PENNSYLVANIA—
AND AS WE GET CLOSER TO NEW YORK,
THIS VOYAGE WILL END IN PICCATINY
WARHEAD DESIGN ARSENAL IN NEW JERSEY.

ON JUNE 12, THE DAY OF THE MASS RALLY FOR DISARMAMENT,
WE WILL WALK DOWN THE STEPS NEAR THE ISAIAH WALL
ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE U.N.
WE WILL EMPTY THE PILLOWCASES INTO TRANSPARENT FRAMES
TO LOOK UPON EARTHS FROM ACROSS AMERICA.
ON JULY 4TH, WE WILL HANG THE PILLOWCASES—
EMPTIED AND STAINED FROM THE EARTH—
ON A CLOTHESLINE ALONG TREES (BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND AVENUE
AT DAG HAMMARSKJOLD PLAZA ON 49TH STREET)
AND THE DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES (WRITTEN BETWEEN TWO OCEANS)
WILL BE SCRAWLED ON THE PILLOWCASE SACS.

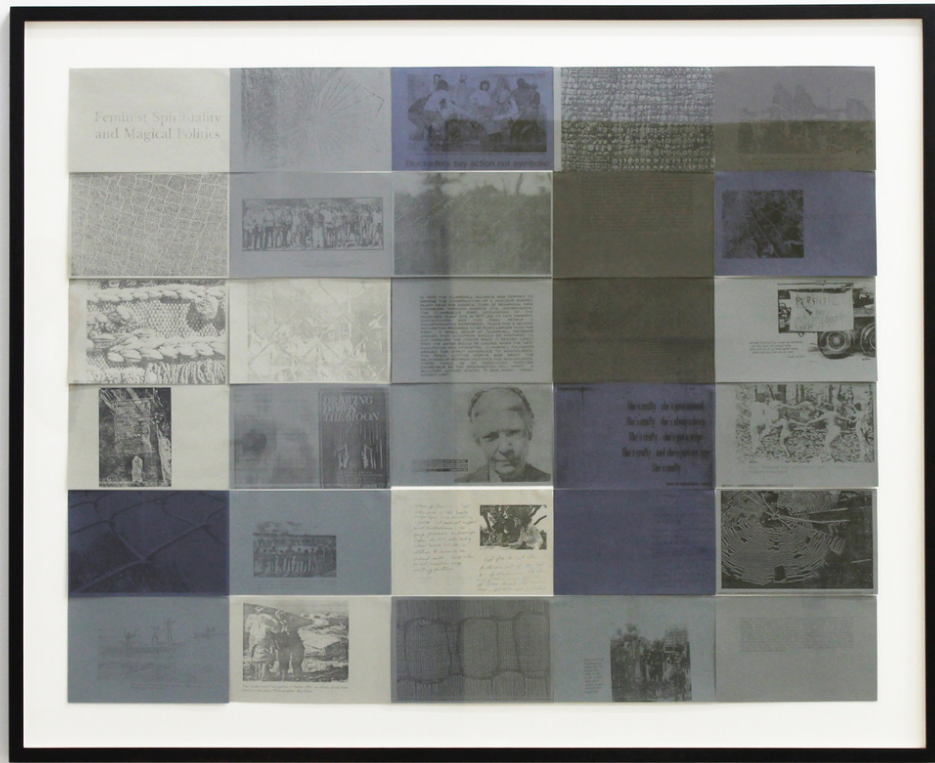
Helène Aylon (American, 1931-2020)

The Earth Ambulance

1982

Text panel, Inkjet pigment print, 11 x 8-1/2 in (sheet)

©Estate of Helène Aylon, Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects



Andrea Bowers (American, b. 1965)
Feminist Spirituality and Magical Politics Scrapbook
2003
Photocopy on paper, 33 1/4 x 42 3/4 in (84.5 x 108.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery

A feminist and social activist, **Andrea Bowers** addresses such issues as immigration, rape, climate justice and environmental activism, within the larger context of the history of protest movements in the U.S. A series of her works from 2013 was informed by a tree sit to save an oak woodland habitat in Arcadia, CA, in which she herself participated and was arrested. A key aspect of her art is creating and protecting the records of activism, often ousted from the official annals, just like the history of women. Her videos portray contemporary activists, from tree-sitters (*Vieja Gloria*, 2003), to anti-frackers (*The United States v. Tim DeChristopher*, 2010), to indigenous protesters against the Dakota Access Pipeline (*My Name Means Future*, 2019). The history and legacy of first-generation eco-feminism plays an important role in Bowers work. In the series *Magical Politics*, to which ***Feminist Spirituality and Magical Politics Scrapbook*** (2003) belongs, she analyzed the spiritual roots of pioneer ecofeminist activists and memorialized their acts of civil disobedience, such as the 1980 Women's Pentagon Action, or 1981 Mothers of Peace' protest at the Diablo Nuclear Power Plant built near San Andreas Fault, in which Helène Aylon most probably participated and where her *Earth Ambulance*, shown nearby, passed by a few months later.



Andrea Bowers (American, b. 1965)

Climate Change is Real (Multiple)

2017

Neon, MDO, paint, 20 3/4 x 57 in (52.7 x 144.8 cm). Edition 3 of 10, with 2 APs

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery



Betsy Damon (American, b. 1940)

The Memory of Clean Water

1985

©Betsy Damon. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery

The Memory of Clean Water (1985), a paper pulp cast of a dry riverbed in Utah, memorializing a river before it was dammed, was the pivotal work for **Betsy Damon** (American, b. 1940). The entire installation was 250 feet long; its live colors mostly came from local plants used in the pulp. Damon, active in the 1970s in New York as a performance artist whose work was strongly influenced by spiritual feminism and healing rituals, devoted her subsequent practice to public space projects focused on water decontamination. In the 1981 manifesto *What is Creativity* for No Limits for Women Artists, an organization she founded, Damon wrote "the nature of art is activist." Her large public projects, like *Living Water Garden* in Chengdu, China (1998), are created to educate and demonstrate how water can clean itself through the use of natural processes. This six-acre city park has a wetland which acts as a water cleaning system and an educational center. Damon's advocacy for living water is based on her research of sacred water sites on Indian reservations in the U.S. and in Tibet. Living water – which sources were protected by Native people – is highly biodynamic water, which continually moves and is therefore well oxygenated. Damon compares water cycle in nature to blood circulation in a body. Her inspiration for this idea were spiritual science writings of Theodor Schwenk, an anthroposophist, who viewed nature as a physical, biochemical and spiritual whole in the tradition of Rudolf Steiner and Wolfgang von Goethe. The association of spirituality and nature was central for both anthroposophy and early ecofeminist art.



Agnes Denes (Hungarian-born American, b. 1931)

Rice/Tree/Burial:

Preparations for the Rice Field with Irrigation System, 1977/2020 (image on this page)

Chaining the Sacred Forest, 1977/2020 (shown on the following pages)

Burial of the Time Capsule, 1979/2020 (shown on the following pages)

3 ink jet pigment prints on Epson Ultrasmooth Fine Art Paper, 11-5/8 x 22 in (each sheet), 6 images @ 4-5-7/8 inches on each sheet. Edition 1/10 + 2 APs

©Agnes Denes. Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects

Agnes Denes is internationally recognized for her pioneering synthesis of Land Art and performance and her commitment to ecology in monumentally-scaled site works. Unlike (mostly male) artists associated with Land Art, who have used earth as material for formal creations, she has focused on ecology and provoking socio-political change, "I do very large projects because there's no sense doing little things in the corner to teach the world what needs to be done."¹

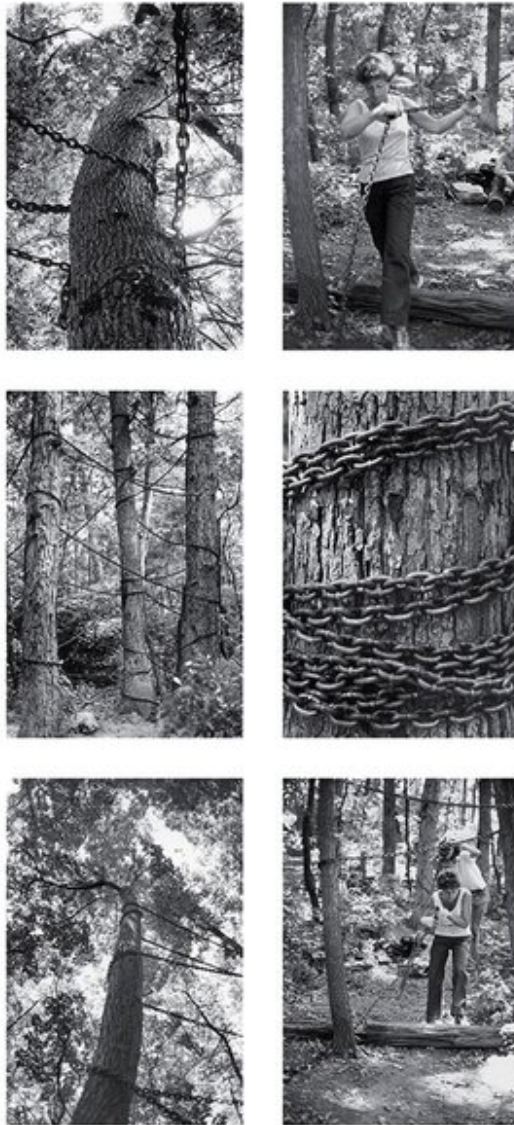
Recognized as the first ecological site work, ***Rice/Tree/Burial*** was first realized in 1968 in Sullivan County, NY, as a private ritual. Denes planted rice to represent life, chained trees to indicate human interference with nature, and buried her haiku poetry, referencing invention. The act of burial symbolized passing, reconnecting with soil and earth, disintegration and transformation. "It was about communication with the earth," Denes said, "and communicating with the future."² A decade later, this ritual was re-enacted at a much larger scale at Artpark in Lewiston, NY – a former industrial dumpsite near Love Canal.³ In 1977, Denes planted a half-acre of rice near Niagara Falls (due to soil toxicity the crop was mutant). In 1978, she chained the trees together in a sacred forest that was once a burial ground. On August 20, 1979, Denes buried a time capsule at Artpark, containing microfilms with her letter to "Dear Homo Futurus," and responses to an international questionnaire regarding human values and the future of humanity. It is to be opened in 2079.

The project paved the way for her best known works: *Wheatfield, a Confrontation* (1982), a 2-acre field of wheat on a landfill in lower Manhattan, near the World Trade Center, and the collaborative *Tree Mountain – A Living Time Capsule – 11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years* (1992–96) in Finland, which sent a message that conservation needs to become both an individual and collective responsibility, extending far into the future.

1. Lescaze Z., "Sandwoman: Land Artist Agnes Denes Has a Plan for the Rockaways," *Observer*, July 16, 2013

2. Kino C., "Stretching Her Creativity as Far as Possible," *The New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2012

3. A location of a landfill that became the site of a mass environmental disaster in the 1970s.



Agnes Denes (Hungarian-born American, b. 1931)
Rice/Tree/Burial: Chaining the Sacred Forest, 1977/2020
©Agnes Denes. Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects



Agnes Denes (Hungarian-born American, b. 1931)
Rice/Tree/Burial: Burial of the Time Capsule, 1979/2020
 ©Agnes Denes. Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects

QUIT CLAIM MINERAL DEED

THIS INDENTURE, made this ____ day of **June, 2020**, by and between **ELIZA ROBINSON EVANS**, (hereinafter "Grantor") and _____, a single person, as tenants in common, (hereinafter "Grantee").

WITNESSETH, that Grantor, in consideration of the sum of Ten Dollars (\$10.00) duly paid, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, does hereby quit-claim, grant, bargain, sell, and convey unto the Grantee, and to his heirs, successors, and assigns, forever, all her right, title, interest, claim and demand, both at law and in equity, of, in, and to all of the oil, gas, coal, hard rock minerals whatsoever having any economic benefit now or in the future, in and under, and that may be produced, from the following described property to-wit:

A 1/1000th undivided interest in and Eliza Robinson Evans 1/2 undivided interest in and to the SW 1/4 of Section 13, Township 18 North, Range 11 East, Creek County, State of Oklahoma;

together with the right of ingress and egress at all times for the purpose of mining, drilling, exploring, operating, and developing said lands for oil, gas, coal, hard rock minerals, and all other minerals whatsoever having any economic benefit now or in the future, and storing, handling, transporting, and marketing the same there from with the right to remove from said land all of Grantee's property and improvements.

This conveyance is made subject to and includes any rights now existing to any lessee or assigns under any valid and subsisting oil, gas, coal, hard rock minerals, or any other minerals lease of record heretofore executed; it being understood and agreed that said Grantee shall have, receive, and enjoy the herein granted undivided interest in and to all bonuses, rents, royalties, and other benefits which may accrue under the terms of said lease insofar as it covers the above described land from and after the date hereof, precisely as if the Grantee herein had been at the date of the making of said lease to the owner of a similar undivided interest in and to the lands described and Grantee being the lessor herein.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD THE SAME, together with all and singular, the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances thereunto belonging or in anywise appertaining, and all the estate, right, title, interest and claim whatsoever of the said Grantor, either in law or equity, to have and to hold forever the above granted premises unto the Grantee, and his heirs and assigns forever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Grantor does hereunto set his/her hand the day and year first above written.

ELIZA ROBINSON EVANS

STATE OF NEW YORK)
) ss.
COUNTY OF)

BEFORE me, the undersigned Notary Public within and for the said County and State, on this ____ day of _____, 2020, Eliza Robinson Evans, personally appeared to me known to be the identical person who executed the within and foregoing instrument, and acknowledged to me that she executed the same as a free and voluntary act and deed for the uses and purposes therein set forth. Given under my hand and seal of office the day and year above written.

My Commission Expires

Notary Public

Eliza Evans (American)

All the Way to Hell (fragment of the installation during the work)

2020

Mixed media and mineral deed, size: 9 ft x 5 x 5 in and 11 x 8.5 in

©2020 Eliza Evans. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery



Eliza Evans (American)

***All the Way to Hell*, 2020**

Mixed media and mineral deed, size: 9 ft x 5 x 5 in and 11 x 8.5 in

©2020 Eliza Evans. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery

Eliza Evans holds degrees in theology, economic sociology, and visual art, and thinks art functions best when it “moves in and breaks the furniture.” Focused on the consequences of climate change and choices we make, her social practice projects aim to educate and share knowledge. ***All the Way to Hell*** attempts to break the conventional process by which oil and gas developers gain access to private mineral properties, which, according to common law, extend to hell (*ad inferos*). In the new project created especially for this exhibition, Evans offers the mineral rights to 3 acres of her land in Creek County, Oklahoma for sale to 1,000 people in order to prevent fossil fuel development in the area. In this art of resistance, the burden of legal procedures plays a crucial role: by dividing mineral rights into small parts, *All the Way to Hell* (2020) weaponizes overhead expenses. As Evans invites us to buy a sliver of her mineral rights, she proposes a *test piece* for a participatory and educational model of a “sit-in.” In the vein of Agnes Denes’ 1992 project *Tree Mountain – A Living Time Capsule – 11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years realized in Finland*, *All the Way to Hell* offers us the opportunity to participate and the responsibility to make change.



Bilge Friedlaender (Turkish American, 1934-2000)

Cedar Forest

1989

Nine freestanding handmade linen paper sculptures, variable dims: 34 in. (86.36 cm)

©Mira Friedlaender. All rights reserved. Courtesy The Estate of Bilge Friedlaender

A minimalist feminist artist whose work has been awaiting rediscovery, **Bilge Friedlaender's** art takes root in spiritual feminism, which insists that everything is connected – that nature does not discriminate between soul and matter.

Her early works on paper are indebted to Agnes Martin and stem from Friedlaender's interest in mathematical rules observed in nature. Over time, she developed poetic, minimalist paper installations and included natural materials such as linen, sticks, stones, sand and beeswax. About ***Heart Nests*** (1977), she wrote "Hugging is in human nature, perhaps the comfort of the first hug in the mother's womb, seeking the hug after leaving the womb, making bundles, wrapping, [...] protecting them."¹ Intimate, small in scale and made of natural materials, her works reflected her ecological consciousness: "...every artist makes thousands of sorts of works, everyone wants their work to not vanish, we load and load the world. But what will this lead to?"² She designed her installations to be folded and packed into small nested boxes.

Inspired by Jungian psychoanalysis, Friedlaender revisited the Epos of Gilgamesh for the 2nd International Istanbul Biennial in 1989, her first exhibition in Turkey since she left forty years earlier. She questioned the myth of the male hero exposing the story of the Sumerian king cutting the sacred cedar forest in quest for fame, and reclaimed a female Goddess, Ishtar. "Gilgamesh [...] says to Shamash, the Sun God, 'If you let me accomplish this, I will raise a monument to the gods.' And Shamash shows him mercy and says, 'Go cut the sacred cedar forest,' just like we do today."³ ***Cedar Forest***, the handmade paper sculptures shown here, belongs to a series that also includes monoprints, an artist's book of etchings, and an installation of natural materials. The etchings show Gilgamesh's struggle with Goddess Ishtar, but Friedlaender reversed the familiar mythology and presented her not as a threat to people but as a metaphor for "the awakening of female consciousness."⁴

1. Interview with the artist by curator Zeynep Rona, Ayşe and Ercüment Kalmık Museum, June 9, 1998 (<http://www.zeynepronaarsivi.com/Contents/Documents/soylesiler/Bilge-Friedlaender.pdf>)

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Press release, the exhibition at the Jessica Berwind Gallery, Philadelphia, 1993



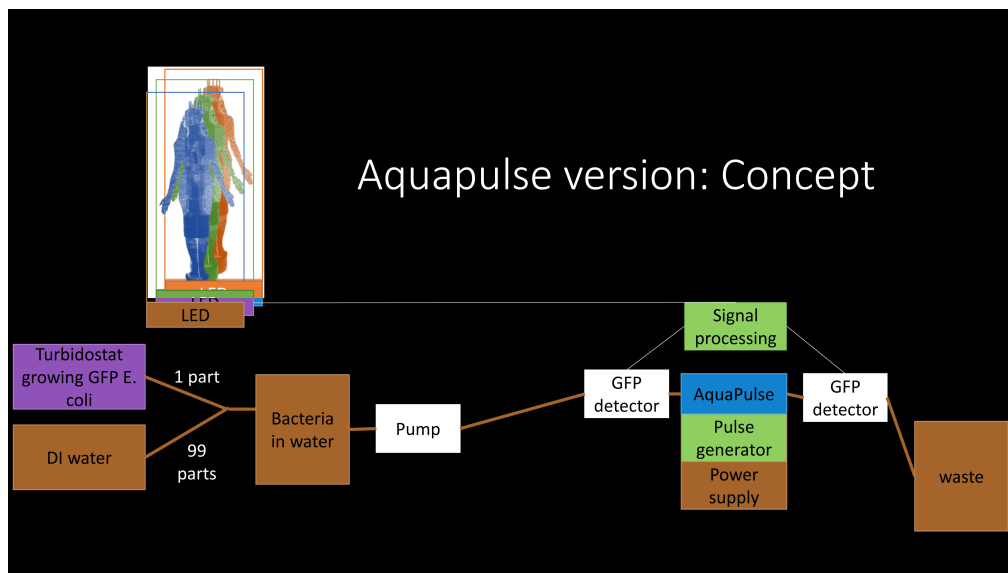
Bilge Friedlaender (Turkish American, 1934-2000)

Heart Nests III

1977

Beeswax, wire, string, pigment, 10 x 7 x 3 in (25.4 x 17.78 x 7.62 cm)

©Mira Friedlaender. All rights reserved. Courtesy The Estate of Bilge Friedlaender



Lynn Hershman Leeson (American, b. 1941)

***Twisted Gravity*, 2020**

Photography, etched plastic, AquaPulse, LED lights, polluted water being filtered, electricity, GMO bacteria or waxworms, petri dishes, Plexiglas casing; size variable

Edition 3 + 1 AP

Lynn Hershman Leeson in collaboration with Dr. Thomas Huber, Technology Leader and Head of Antibody Research at Novartis Institute for BioMedical Research; Dr. Richard Novak, Senior Staff Engineer, Advanced Technology Team at Harvard University Wyss Institute for Biological-Inspired Engineering and Aqua Pulse Technology; Lab Team: Elizabeth Calamari, Martinez Flores, Manuel Ramses. Originally commissioned by Margot Norton, The New Museum

©Hotwire Productions LLC 2020

Lynn Hershman Leeson is acclaimed for the pioneering use of new technologies – she was the first artist to use Videodisc and touch screen interface. Early on she employed artificial intelligence, biological computing, and DNA manipulation. In ***Twisted Gravity*** (2020), which will premiere at her exhibition at the New Museum in 2021, Hershman Leeson engages with the latest in applied science – Aqua Pulse filter able to kill bacteria and degrade plastic in water. The project grows out of her early feminist works that examined woman's perpetual transformation and survival, ***Roberta Breitmore*** (1974–78) and ***Water Women*** (since 1978).

In ***Roberta Breitmore***, Hershman Leeson adopted an alternative persona to investigate what constituted female identity. ***Water Women***, a series of images in various media from collage to digital prints, highlights “ideas of disappearance, evaporation, alchemical and atmospheric connection to air, water, and electrical currents, and ultimately, the transient nature of life itself.”¹ ***Water Women*** resurfaced in Hershman Leeson's *oeuvre* over the years and in 2020 became part of a project exploring solutions to a global epidemic of plastic- and bacteria-polluted water. In this new work, the idea of survival through change meets the feminist interest in change as a life cycle. “Water travels disguised, from liquid to atmospheric vapor. Transience is its solid state. Water is a process, like life, that embraces the gravity of survival by simmering time into a perpetual and recyclable essence.”²

Aqua Pulse is a revolutionary off-the-grid, portable system which purifies one liter of water per minute. It kills bacteria and degrades plastic through electricity (Aqua Pulse) and by using waxworms to digest plastic (Evolution). In Fritz Lang's film ***Metropolis***, electricity brings a robot to life. The Aqua Pulse filter's action is made visible in ***Twisted Gravity*** when purification cycle sends light through the body of ***Water Woman***, etched in a transparent plate. She “comes alive” the moment bacteria are killed, and plastic disappears.

1. The artist website, <https://www.lynnhershman.com/project/photography/>. Accessed on May 13, 2020

2. Hershman Leeson, Lynn, *Twisting Phantasms to Defy Encroaching Realities*, sent to the curator by email, February 28, 2020



Lynn Hershman Leeson (American, b. 1941)

Twisted Gravity

2020

Photography, etched plastic, AquaPulse, LED lights, polluted water being filtered, electricity, GMO bacteria or waxworms, petri dishes, Plexiglas casing; size variable.

Edition 3 + 1 AP

©Hotwire Productions LLC 2020



Sonya Kelliher-Combs (Native American, b. 1969)

Mark, Polar Bear

2019

Acrylic polymer, polar bear fur, fabric flag, metal brackets, 40 x 65 in

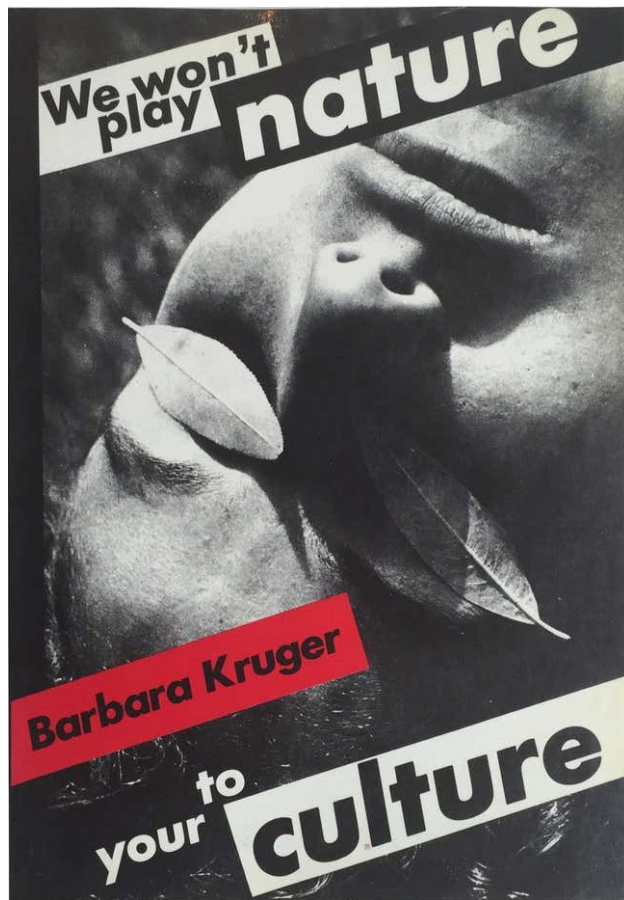
©2019 Sonya Kelliher-Combs. Courtesy of the artist and Minus Space

The art of **Sonya Kelliher-Combs** honors the traditions of her people, Iñupiaq from the North Slope of Alaska and Athabascan from the Interior, and speaks to their plight: marginalization and abuse, and the degradation of their land as a result of industrial exploitation and climate change. She works in local materials and traditional techniques. "I'm inspired by the relationship of our ancestors to their environment – how they used skin, fur and membrane in material culture."¹ "Growing up in a rural community, I was taught that the land and sea would provide resources, spiritual and physical, necessary to sustain a healthy life. We have unspoken truths: honor all that you harvest; respect the natural world that provides for you, your family and community; take care of one another; and do not take more than you need."²

From the almost complete wipeout of Alaskan Natives by Russian and American colonizers in the 1830s and 1900s, to physical and cultural abuse of their children in boarding schools and churches, to continued rape of women, and massive dying of native species, the recent history of native people in Alaska is the history of multigenerational trauma. Kelliher-Combs' art, preoccupied with this trauma, is also informed by the Indigenous women's struggle against their stereotype as exotic and sexualized. The heavy presence of male-dominated industries in Alaska, like the military and oil drilling, continues to ravage the environment and contributes to widespread abuse of women.

1. Press release, *Sonya Kelliher-Combs: Mark*, MINUS SPACE, New York, 2019

2. Fabijanska M., *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.*, Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, 2018, p.66



Barbara Kruger (American, b. 1945)

Untitled (We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture)

1983

11.82 x 8.27 x 0.2 in (30 x 21 x 0.5 cm)

Softcover catalogue of the exhibition, *Barbara Kruger: We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*

Authors: Barbara Kruger, Iwona Blazwick, Sandy Nairne, Craig Owens, Jane Weinstock

Photo illustrated wrappers. 63 pp. Illustrated essays and black and white plates.

Publishers: London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, Basel: Kunsthalle ©1983

Historically, ecofeminism was marked by the struggle with patriarchal dualism between culture (a notion almost tantamount to civilization and progress) and nature; the dualism inseparable from the issue of gender roles. One response was Goddess art, aimed at reclaiming Herstory and the creator as a female, and at empowering women by asserting their connection with nature. Yet the essence of the fight of early feminists may have best been expressed on the witty and perfectly aimed cover of **Barbara Kruger's** exhibition catalog, ***We Won't Play Our Nature to Your Culture*** (ICA London, 1983). The publication featured works made 1981-1983 and accompanied the first major exhibition of Kruger in Europe, which traveled to Watershed, Bristol; Nouveau Musée, Villeurbanne; and Kunsthalle, Basel.

A feminist postmodern artist who belongs to Pictures Generation, Kruger uses the techniques of mass communication and advertising to explore gender. Her immediately recognizable collages of found images taken from the media and her text, address the issues of power, gender roles, and consumerism. In many of them, Kruger has used images involving the male gaze. She radically rejects the dichotomy of superior culture and inferior nature contrasting the image of a woman represented as submissive and created for man's delight with the aggressive letters reading *We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture*.



Carla Maldonado (Brazilian, b. 1986)
Dystopia of a Jungle City, and the Human of Nature
2019

digital video with sound, 31 min.
edition of 3 + AC

In collaboration with Cipiá Indigenous Community Center, Manaus, AM, Brazil
©2019 Carla Maldonado. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery

Carla Maldonado's 2019 film ***Dystopia of a Jungle City, and the Human of Nature*** was created in collaboration with Cipiá Indigenous Community Center, Manaus. With editing that evokes the rhythm of forest sounds, it is a haunting ode to their daily life in fragile harmony with nature, and an alarming call for action against the far-right regime of Jair Bolsonaro, which aggressively attacked the laws protecting the Amazon forest and people. In September 2019, the U.S. and Brazil agreed to promote private-sector development in the Amazon. Drought-related and intentionally set fires (which grew by 84% in 2019) and advancing deforestation will soon lead to the tipping point, when the entire forest will start dying. It will have catastrophic effect on global climate.

The artist lends us her lens to gaze at this dying ecosystem. The film presents tragically conflicting points of view: one of Bolsonaro's regime and global corporations, and that of indigenous people, who already live in close proximity to "civilization" and are increasingly dependent on it, silently asking us where we stand.

Maldonado walks jungle paths and city streets recording the outcasts, struggles and revolutionaries of our time. She understands ecofeminism as the fight against the degradation of the environment by patriarchal power structure and capitalist economy. In other works, searching for a successful revolution to ensure survival, she looks to female leaders of native communities in Brasil – women who understand our connection to nature.



Mary Mattingly (American, b. 1978)
Life of Objects
2013
Archival Pigment Print, 30 x 30 in. Edition 5/5
©Mary Mattingly. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery



Mary Mattingly (American, b. 1978)

The Damned (Titian, again)

2013

Archival Pigment Print, 30 x 30 in. Edition 2/5

©Mary Mattingly. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery

In 2013 **Mary Mattingly** wrapped all her belongings into seven bundles, isolating them away from her life to “make monuments to things I stored” and to make visible our conflicted feelings about material objects production, hoarding, and personal attachment to objects. She pushed or pulled these sculptures through streets in performances, and photographed them against the scale of human body or in natural habitats, pointing to their organic beginnings. By focusing on the mass-produced objects that she personally owns, Mattingly addressed the economy of global supply chains, which is based on exploitation of resources and people.

“I recently dragged one of these sculptures across the Bayonne Bridge, which connects Staten Island and New Jersey. [...] The struggle of bringing the sculpture over the bridge was painful. But it was a small pain compared to that felt the world over, from the over-extraction of the earth, to the working conditions of the makers, to the chemicals that enter the air and water affecting all of us. From the oils necessary to make the plastics to rare metals in electronics, these sculptures contained the stuff that starts wars, now and in the future. How can I be complacent with the knowledge embedded in these objects of trauma?”¹

1. Lindquist G., “Life of Objects: An Interview with Mary Mattingly,” *Art in America*, May 29, 2013 (<https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/life-of-objects-an-interview-with-mary-mattingly-56327/>)



Mary Mattingly (American, b. 1978)
Microsphere: A Breathed Commune
2012
Archival Pigment Print, 30 x 30 in. Edition 4/5
©Mary Mattingly. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery



Mary Mattingly (American, b. 1978)

Swale

2017

Archival Pigment Print, 30 x 30 in. Edition 1/5

©Mary Mattingly. Courtesy of Cloudfactory and Robert Mann Gallery

Mary Mattingly is one of the most accomplished ecofeminist artists of her generation who employ social practice and activism, address global corporate strategies, and design futuristic proposals for life on earth. Her photographs accompany larger projects: sculptures, installations, performance and collaborative social practice, in which the artist offers fantasy but also tackles the real world problems of environmental sustainability. She invents new methods of living off the land for natural disaster survivors and the society of the future, envisioning sustainable ecological spaces and communities sharing resources.

In ***Microsphere: A Breathed Commune* (2012)**, we see people inhabiting dome-shaped structures floating on industrial waterways. Expecting greater migration as well as the increasing privatization of water, Mattingly's works often portray scenes from a post-apocalyptic era where nomadic individuals survive with the help of wearable technology or small self-contained systems.

Swale (2016–ongoing) is Mattingly's largest model of an autonomous living system so far. Informed by the realization that it is illegal to grow food on public land, *Swale* was conceived out of the artist's concern for food security and keeping water as commons. This floating food garden on a 130 by 40-foot barge has docked at various piers in New York City, allowing visitors to gather free fresh produce. It also has live chickens, living quarters, rain water collection, and an autonomous solar power system. Jessica Segall's *Fugue in B Flat*, presented nearby, was installed on *Swale* in 2016. A result of collaboration with numerous local groups, *Swale* is an art installation and community engagement project.



Ana Mendieta (Cuban American, 1948-1985)

Bacayu (Esculturas Rupestres) [Light of Day (Rupestrian Sculptures)]
1981/2019

Black and white photograph, 40 x 55 in (101.6 x 139.7 cm)

Edition 2 of 3 with 2 AP

© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

Bacayu belongs to *Esculturas Rupestres*, a group of works incised by **Ana Mendieta** in Escaleras de Jaruco caves during her trip to Cuba in July 1981. They are named after Taíno goddesses, like Bacayu – Light of Day, or Atabey – Mother of the Waters. The feminist artist quietly subverted monumental gestures of Land Art by working at a human scale in the landscape, and leaving no, or minimal, footprint. While Land Art displaces or alters vast pieces of land, Mendieta creates intimate fusion with nature not to violate it but to become one with it. Her highly private rituals and ephemeral marks in nature were to be seen by audience only in photographs and films.

While many feminist artists in New York at the time – inspired by the rediscovery of Jungian archetypes – looked for a universal Goddess, Mendieta's art was rooted in her Caribbean identity. As *Siluetas* (1973-80) were filled with her longing for beloved Cuba, *Esculturas Rupestres* brought a closing to Mendieta's overwhelming experience of exile. "During the last twelve years my work has consisted of establishing a dialogue between Nature and the female body. In this, weighs the fact of having been ripped away from my homeland as a teenager and feeling torn by the violent rupture from the womb. My art is the way with which I reestablish the ties that bind me to the Universe. It is a return to my land, to mother earth."¹ But if *Esculturas Rupestres* are named after the goddesses of the indigenous people of Cuba, their shapes are influenced by Paleolithic Venuses – brought to the attention of artists by feminist anthropology and the interpretation of European culture as *matristic* before it was supplanted by the Bronze Age Indo-European patriarchal culture. It is a clear sign of Mendieta's bicultural identity, influenced by her Cuban roots and activity in the New York feminist art circle (*Esculturas* were shown in November 1981 at A.I.R. gallery, and Mendieta published *La Venus Negra: Based on a Cuban Legend* in the feminist magazine *Heresies* #13, 1981).

1. Pamphlet, the exhibition Ana Mendieta: *Geo-Imago*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 1983, where these photographs were probably included.



Aviva Rahmani (American, b. 1945)

Physical Education

1973

performance documentation: slide projection

©Aviva Rahmani. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery

Drawing the connection between the abuse of woman and of the environment as part of the same culture led feminist artists to search for ways of healing nature. One artist who made the parallel between rape and ecocide the subject of her art is **Aviva Rahmani**. Rahmani's earliest, experimental body of work concerned with rape, which she created as part of early California performance scene, inspired the theory and strategies on which she built her ecological art practice.

Physical Education was the first performance where she made the connection between ecocide and the abuse of women. Its documentation, a photo essay, is presented in its original format of a slide projection. Participants were instructed to travel from CalArts to the Pacific Ocean and empty a plastic bag of faucet water – mixed with arable soil collected on the way to the beach – into sand, and replace it with ocean water to be then flushed down the CalArts toilet, symbolizing the man-made water cycle. Performances such as *Physical Education* (1973) and *Synapse Reality* (1970), a living sculpture with communal farming intended as ecological art model, formed the base of Rahmani's *practical ecofeminism* – "the work of artful repair to damaged ecosystems." Analyzing disturbance theory, she realized that just as some people never survive PTSD, neither do some ecological systems; but she also imagined means for possible healing and partial repair. From 1990–2000 she realized her first ecological site-model to explicitly identify rape as a metaphor for ecological devastation, *Ghost Nets*. Combining art, science and indigenous knowledge, it restored the site of a former town dump in Maine into flourishing wetlands.



Jessica Segall (American)

A Thirsty Person, Having Found a Spring, Stops to Drink, Does Not Contemplate Its Beauty

2011

Performance / video still, Archival Print.

Edition 3 and AP

©2011 Jessica Segall. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery

In **Jessica Segall's** practice, sculpture and performance are often interconnected in long-term, research-based projects addressing the multitude of systemic issues endangering our environment and future. Most of them consider animals as equal cohabitants of the planet. Some, like ***Fugue in B Flat*** (2016), involve interspecies art – sculptures designed for both people and animals. A piano sculpture where bees were introduced to hive, creating music while interacting with its strings,¹ belongs to a larger project which involved exposing the bee business in the U.S. Approximately 70% of bee population in the country is packed and transported from location to location to pollinate orchards. Inserting herself into corporate system, Segall traveled with a bee rental business to the sites of brokered pollination like the almond groves in the California desert. There, the artist created a beehive-bed, a sculpture she shared with bees in a private performance, documented in photographs.

Segall's performances often involve perceived danger and propose tools for survival or provoke ideas for environmental conservation. They are informed by the artist's travels to the zones of hostile climate. ***A Thirsty Person, Having Found a Spring, Stops to Drink, Does Not Contemplate Its Beauty*** (2011), took place at the Global Seed Vault – a secure seed bank on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen established as a genetic Noah's Ark for world's plants, and alludes to survival and mourning. In her performances, Segall plays with both the risk of engaging with the environment and the vulnerability of the environment itself.

1. Among other locations, the piano was installed on Mary Mattingly's barge *Swale*, also shown in *ecofeminism(s)*.



Jessica Segall (American)

Fugue in B Flat

2016

piano, honeybees, audio, approx. 5' x 4' x 1'

©2016 Jessica Segall. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery



Hanae Utamura (Japanese, b. 1980)
***Secret Performance Series* (a selection)**

2010-2013

HD Video, 21:05 min. looped

Edition of 3 + 1AP + 1EP

©2010 Hanae Utamura. Courtesy of the artist & Thomas Erben Gallery

***Wiping the Sahara Desert*, 2010, 2:04 min, Sahara Desert, Tunisia**

***Casting the Wave*, 2010, 1:53 min, Den Haag, The Netherlands**

***Splashing Water at Sahara Desert*, 2010, 2:25 min, Sahara Desert, Tunisia**

***Scrubbing the Edge of Salt Lake*, 2010, 1:53 min, Chott el Djerid, Tunisia**

***Red Line*, 2011, 3:06 min, Dover, England**

***Wiping the Snow*, 2011, 3:04 min, Haukijärvi, Finland**

***When a Line Becomes a Circle*, 2013, 6:40 min, Baengnyeongdo Island, South Korea**

Ritual in open landscapes, and especially at the sites of nuclear contamination, plays a special role in the art of **Hanae Utamura** (Japanese, b. 1980), who was born 80 miles from the Fukushima plant, a daughter of a scientist involved in the research of nuclear power generation. The central focus of her practice is the negotiation between civilization and nature, specifically, the relationship between man, science, and nature, which she explores using her physical body as a conduit. By decentralizing human perspective, she confronts earth and nature that was here before us and will be here after us and introduces speculative perspectives: non-human or post-human. In ***Secret Performance Series*** (2010-13), the artist's petite figure performs durational rituals which seem to be Sisyphean acts of taming nature, but where nature itself is the co-creator. Like the first ecofeminists, Utamura focuses on the connection of all the energy in the universe, including our bodies. Her subtle interventions insist on the impermanence of an artwork as negation of civilization-old efforts to "leave a mark" – especially as in painting – which is omnipresent in ecofeminist art.



Cecilia Vicuña (Chilean, b. 1948)

Tres elementos (Precarios)

2014

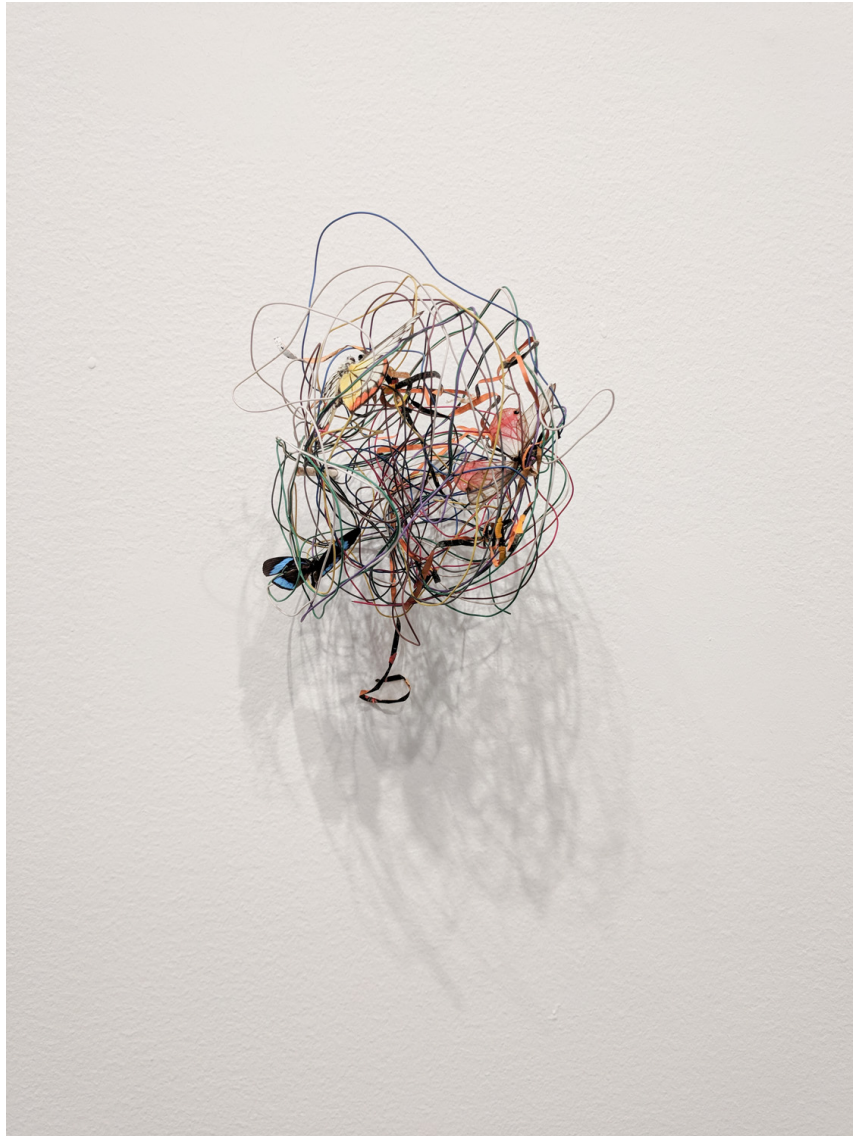
mixed media, 6.875 x 5.75 x 0.25 in (17.5 x 14.6 x 0.6 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

Deeply rooted in feminist and indigenous practice, the unique *oeuvre* of **Cecilia Vicuña** is grounded in her understanding that the political, environmental and indigenous are inherently connected and must be addressed as such. Concerned with colonial legacy – the deprivation of rights of indigenous peoples and ecological destruction, she understands art as a form of political resistance. Her art and poetry point our attention to what has been erased or marginalized by official history and to all that has been lost.

Tiny arrangements of natural and man-made materials such as driftwood, feathers, stones, yarn, wires, and bottle caps, ***precarios*** combine ritual and assemblage. These trash sculptures – *basuritas* as Vicuña also calls them – are small totems and haiku poems in one. She describes her work as a way of “hearing an ancient silence waiting to be heard.” Fragile and unassuming, the first *precarios* were created in 1966 and installed on the ocean shore in Concón. Vicuña said that they belong to the oceans from which many of their parts were collected and will not be fully complete until the sea embraces them again.

In 1973, following the Chilean coup d'état led by General Pinochet, Cecilia Vicuña went into exile in London, and between June 24, 1973-August 1974, created over 400 *precarios* as an act of political resistance in response to the coup. She published twenty two books of her visual art installations and poetry, translated into many languages, and performs her poetry internationally. Reproductions of *precarios* can be found in her 1973 book *Saborami* or 1983 *Precario/Precarious*.



Cecilia Vicuña (Chilean, b. 1948)

Bola de cable (Precarios)

2014

mixed media, 5.75 x 6 x 4.675 in (14.6 x 15.2 x 11.9 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul



Cecilia Vicuña (Chilean, b. 1948)

Untitled (Precarios)

Date TBD

mixed media, 12 x 34.25 x 0.125 in (30.5 x 87 x 0.3 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

ecofeminism(s)

Thomas Erben Gallery, June-July 2020

essay by Monika Fabijanska

Ecofeminism is grounded in spiritual feminism, which insists that everything is connected – that nature does not discriminate between soul and matter. Ecofeminist art emerged in the late 1960s when the development of conceptual art, spiritual feminism, and the exclusion of women from the art market pushed their inventiveness far beyond the limitations of painting and classical art gallery presentation, and led to creating new mediums, driving art into new territories. The political climate of the early 1970s heavily contributed: protests against the war in Vietnam, as well as growing concerns about limited resources, nuclearization, pollution, and over-population required new artistic languages. Ecofeminism is one of the richest albeit still little known caches of contemporary art. It is art that provokes the mind, and can inspire change. It also restores art's function to what it was before the Enlightenment, when both science and art were tools to understand the world and propose solutions.

This exhibition presents some of the strategies of ecofeminist art, by its pioneers as well as the youngest generation of artists. It also provokes the question: if the ecofeminist art of the 1970s and 1980s was largely defined by Goddess art, ritual performances, anti-nuclear work, and feminist land art, what makes female environmental artists working today ecofeminists?

Historically, ecofeminism was marked by the struggle with patriarchal dualism between culture (a notion almost tantamount to civilization and progress) and nature; the dualism inseparable from the issue of gender roles. One response was Goddess art, aimed at reclaiming Herstory and the creator as a female, and at empowering women by asserting their connection with nature, yet the essence of the fight of early feminists may have best been expressed on the witty and perfectly aimed cover of **Barbara Kruger's** exhibition catalog, ***We Won't Play Our Nature to Your Culture*** (ICA London, 1983).

A minimalist feminist artist whose work has been awaiting rediscovery, **Bilge Friedlaender's** (Turkish American, 1934-2000) installations made of handmade paper and natural materials such as linen, sticks, stones, sand and beeswax, like ***Heart Nests*** (1977), expressed ideas of care and maintenance, bundling, covering, and protection. Small in scale and made of natural materials, they reflected her ecological consciousness. In the series of works about Gilgamesh, which included handmade paper sculptures ***Cedar Forest*** (1989), Friedlaender exposed the story of the Sumerian king cutting the sacred cedar forest in quest for fame. She questioned the myth of the male hero, and reclaimed a female Goddess, Ishtar, as a metaphor for "the awakening of female consciousness."¹ Inspired by Jungian psychoanalysis, Friedlaender revisited the Epos of Gilgamesh for the 2nd International Istanbul Biennial in 1989, her first exhibition in Turkey since she had left forty years earlier. **Ana Mendieta's** (Cuban American 1948-1985) search for self and return to her homeland almost twenty years after her painful exile, produced a similar but more embracing response. ***Bacayu*** belongs to ***Esculturas Rupestres***, a group of works she incised in natural caves during her trip to Cuba in July 1981 and named after the goddesses of Taíno, the indigenous people of Cuba. It was Mendieta's "return to my land, to mother earth."² The feminist artist subverted monumental gestures of Land Art by working at a human scale in the landscape, and leaving no, or minimal, footprint.

Such ecological consciousness is inherent in the work of indigenous artists, whose practice has been an inspiration to others, including Helène Aylon, Aviva Rahmani, Betsy Damon, or Andrea Bowers. The unique *oeuvre* of **Cecilia Vicuña** (Chilean, b. 1948) is grounded in her understanding that the political, environmental and indigenous are inherently connected and must be addressed as such. In her vision, the object is merely the tangible manifestation of our will to return to being one with nature. Her ***precarios*** (1966-present), tiny arrangements of natural and man-made materials such as driftwood, feathers, yarn, or wires, combine ritual and assemblage. According to the artist, they belong to the oceans from which many of their parts were collected and will not be fully complete until they return to the sea. With ***Mark, Polar Bear*** (2019), **Sonya Kelliher-Combs** (American, b. 1969) honors the traditions of her people, Iñupiaq from the North Slope of Alaska and Athabascan from the Interior, and makes a

damning comment on the American abuse of Alaska. The film ***Dystopia of a Jungle City, and the Human of Nature*** (2019) by **Carla Maldonado** (Brazilian, b. 1986), is a haunting ode to the daily life of indigenous people in fragile harmony with nature, and an alarming call for action against the far-right regime of Jair Bolsonaro, which aggressively attacked the laws protecting the Amazon Jungle and its people.

The recognition by pioneer ecofeminist artists that Western patriarchal philosophy and religions have served to subordinate and exploit both women and nature is particularly resonant in the era of the #MeToo Movement and Climate Change. ***Physical Education*** (1973) was the first performance in which **Aviva Rahmani** (American, b. 1945), made the connection between ecocide and the abuse of women. Its documentation, a photo essay symbolizing the man-made water cycle, is presented in its original format of a slide projection. Rahmani's earliest, experimental body of work concerned with rape, which she created as part of early California performance scene, formed the base of her *practical ecofeminism* – "the work of artful repair to damaged ecosystems."

Healing led to recultivation projects, and ecofeminist artists devoted particular attention to waste. Recultivation and waste projects were the most radical way of fulfilling the postulate of conceptual art and leaving the art gallery. Whether actions and performances, projects of ecological Land Art, or turning towards what could be considered urban planning, they almost always include the element of ritual. Secretive and intimate, or public, ecofeminist rituals signify purification and pay respect to the cycle of life, where birth, growth, change and decay are its natural stages.

Recognized as the first ecological site work, **Agnes Denes'** (Hungarian-born American, b. 1931) ***Rice/Tree/Burial*** was first realized in 1968 in Sullivan County, NY, as a private ritual. In 1977-79, this ritual was re-enacted at a much larger scale at Artpark in Lewiston, NY which was a former industrial dumpsite near Love Canal.³ Denes planted rice to represent life (the rice grew mutant due to soil toxicity), chained trees to indicate human interference with nature, and buried a letter to people in the future. The act of burial symbolized passing, reconnecting with soil and earth, and transformation. **A synthesis of Land Art and performance, the project paved the way for Denes' commitment to ecology in monumentally-scaled site works,** "I do very large projects because there's no sense doing little things in the corner to teach the world what needs to be done."⁴ The same was **Betsy Damon's** (American, b. 1940) motivation for her large public projects, like *Living Water Garden* in Chengdu, China (1998), a six-acre city park created to educate and demonstrate how water can clean itself through the use of natural processes. ***The Memory of Clean Water*** (1985), a cast of a dry riverbed in Utah in paper pulp, memorializing a river before it was dammed, was her pivotal work. Damon, active in 1970s in New York as a performance artist, whose work was strongly influenced by spiritual feminism and healing rituals, devoted her subsequent practice to public space projects focused on decontaminating waters.

Artists who address waste and contamination are mostly women: in their approach, the concept of care and maintenance as artistic practice, most famously proclaimed by Mierle Ukeles in *Manifesto For Maintenance Art 1969!*, meets the opposition to capitalist overproduction. The awareness that artists contribute to solid and chemical waste informs the scale of works and use of materials by such artists as Friedlaender and Vicuña. Among younger artists, this concern is strongly voiced by **Mary Mattingly** (American, b. 1978), who wrapped all her belongings into seven bundles, isolating them away from her life to "make monuments to things I stored." She pushed or pulled these sculptures through streets in performances, and photographed them against the scale of human body (***Life of Objects***, 2013) or in natural habitats, pointing to their organic beginnings (***The Damned Titian, again***, 2013). By focusing on the mass-produced objects that she owns, Mattingly addressed the economy of global supply chains, which is based on the exploitation of resources and people.

The soil contaminated with nuclear waste required special care and rituals. One of the most original ecofeminist artists, a pro-peace and anti-nuclear activist in the 1980s, **Helène Aylon** (American, (1931-2020) tied the politics of war, which affects both human life and the environment, to the roots of our civilization in patriarchal religious systems. ***The Earth***

Ambulance carried pillowcases with earth “rescued” from fourteen selected SAC (Strategic Air Command) military bases across the country, from Berkeley to New York’s mass demonstration during SALT disarmament talks at the United Nations. Aimed at “confrontation and surveillance” at SACs, Aylon’s activist art involved ritual (“performance ceremonials”) and the collaboration of thirteen women. At the UN, they carried used army stretchers with the pillowcases, and emptied the earth into containers across the street from the UN. The history and legacy of first-generation eco-feminism plays an important role in the work of **Andrea Bowers**’ (American, b. 1965), a tree sitter herself. A key aspect of her art is creating and protecting the records of activism, often ousted from the official annals, just like the history of women. ***Feminist Spirituality and Magical Politics Scrapbook*** (2003) belongs to the series *Magical Politics*, where she analyzed the spiritual roots of pioneer ecofeminist activists and memorialized their acts of civil disobedience, such as the 1980 Women’s Pentagon Action, or 1981 Mothers of Peace’ protest at the Diablo Nuclear Power Plant, in which Aylon most probably participated and where her *Earth Ambulance* passed by a few months later.

Ritual at the sites of nuclear contamination, and in landscapes generally, plays a special role in the art of **Hanae Utamura** (Japanese, b. 1980), who was born 80 miles from the Fukushima plant, a daughter of a scientist involved in the research of nuclear power generation. Utamura explores the connection between humans and earth using her physical body as a conduit. The central focus of her practice is the negotiation between nature and civilization, specifically, the relationship between man, science, and nature. By decentralizing human perspective, she enters the imagination of nature. In ***Secret Performance Series*** (2010-2013), the artist’s petite figure performs rituals in open landscapes some of which seem to be Sisyphean acts of taming nature; where nature itself is the main doer.

Since the 1970s, ecofeminism evolved from gender essentialism to understanding gender as a social construct to gender performativity. But today’s feminist artists still address the degradation of the environment by creating diverse responses to patriarchal power structure, capitalism, and the notion of progress. They invoke indigenous traditions in maintaining connection to nature and intensified the critique of colonialist politics of overextraction, water privatization, and the destruction of native peoples. They continue to employ social practice and activism, but focus on denouncing the ways in which global corporations affect the environment, and on designing futuristic proposals for life on earth, while celebration of the cycle of life seems to be less important motif today. Whether the earliest or the newest, ecofeminist projects are often collaborations with local communities and scientists.

If Agnes Denes’ futuristic projects for self-supporting city dwellings to withstand tremendous weather changes include a habitat suspended in air by a magnet (*Model for a Teardrop*, 2019), **Mary Mattingly** (American, b. 1978) imagines a post-apocalyptic world with a boat as a self-sustainable closed environment. Expecting greater migration as well as the increasing privatization of water, Mattingly’s photographs often portray scenes where nomadic individuals survive with the help of wearable technology or small self-contained systems, like in ***Microsphere: A Breathed Commune*** (2012). A floating food garden on a 130-foot barge with living quarters, rain water collection, and an autonomous solar power system, ***Swale*** (2016–ongoing) is Mattingly’s largest model of an autonomous living system so far. Informed by the realization that it is illegal to grow food on public land, it was conceived out of the artist’s concern for food security and keeping water as commons. Inserting herself into corporate system, in ***Fugue in B Flat*** (2016), **Jessica Segall** (American) traveled with a bee rental business to the sites of brokered pollination. Most of her projects consider animals as equal cohabitants of the planet and involve interspecies art – sculptures designed for both people and animals. The piano sculpture where bees were introduced to hive was installed on Mary Mattingly’s *Swale*. Segall’s performances often involve perceived danger and propose tools for survival or provoke ideas for environmental conservation – a mourning ritual, ***A Thirsty Person, Having Found a Spring, Stops to Drink, Does Not Contemplate Its Beauty*** (2011), took place at the Global Seed Vault on the island of Spitsbergen. In the new project created for this exhibition, **Eliza Evans** (American) offers the mineral rights to 3 acres of her land in Creek County, Oklahoma, for sale to 1,000 people, in order to prevent fossil fuel development in the area. In the vein of Agnes Denes’ 1992 project *Tree Mountain – A Living*

Time Capsule – 11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years realized in Finland, Evans' **All the Way to Hell** (2020-ongoing) offers us the opportunity to participate and the responsibility to make change. The project consists of actual mineral deeds for buyers and an installation.

Lynn Hershman Leeson (American, b. 1941), acclaimed for the pioneering use of new technologies, is an artist who "lives" in the future. In **Twisted Gravity** (2020), being developed at Harvard University, she engages with the latest in applied science – a revolutionary off-the-grid water filter able to kill bacteria and degrade plastic through electricity (Aqua Pulse) and by using waxworms to digest plastic (Evolution). The project grows out of her early feminist works that examined woman's perpetual transformation and survival – *Roberta Breitmore* (1974–78) and *Water Women* (since 1978). In the new work, the idea of survival through change meets the feminist interest in change as a life cycle. The filter's action is made visible when purification cycle sends light through the body of *Water Woman*, etched in a transparent plate. She "comes alive" the moment bacteria are killed and plastic disappears.

Ultimately, ecofeminist art is not there just to be looked at, provoke or simply be admired. It proposes solutions for the planet and our survival – both spiritual and practical.

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1. Press release, the exhibition at the Jessica Berwind Gallery, Philadelphia, 1993

2. Pamphlet, the exhibition Ana Mendieta: *Geo-Imago*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 1983, where these photographs were probably included.

3. A location of a landfill that became the site of a mass environmental disaster in the 1970s.

4. Lescaze Z., "Sandwoman: Land Artist Agnes Denes Has a Plan for the Rockaways," *Observer*, July 16, 2013