

# Wet lands

May 26 - July 8 2018

*Alma Heikkilä, Gideonsson/Londré, Ada Kästel, Nancy Holt & Robert Smithson, Nisrine Boukhari, Katja Seitajoki & Tomas Björkdal*

The exhibition *Wet lands* continues Art Lab Gnesta's investigation of the swamp to which we have devoted the recent years, together with artists, scientists and the young people of Gnesta. This is the second edition of the Swamp Biennale, an exhibition that returns every two years. If the first edition (2016) posed the question *What can the swamp be?* through this edition we want to present a proposal.

In a time characterized by ongoing and potential ecological disasters, it is necessary to find a new direction. Humanity must better listen to the overlaps and similarities between everything that is alive. During recent years many artists have been preoccupied with these and related issues, at the center lies a critique of the human perspective - a dominance that has already eradicated many other forms of life.

In her writing, the philosopher Donna Haraway is stressing the need to make kin with all living critters: "I think that the stretch and recomposition of kin are allowed by the fact that all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense, and it is past time to practice better care of kinds-asassemblages (not species one at a time). Kin is an assembling sort of word. All critters share a common "flesh," laterally, semiotically, and genealogically."<sup>1</sup>

The installation *Mikrobiota* by Alma Heikkilä explore and makes visible in what ways we as humans are part of our surrounding nature: the microorganisms we perceive as different to ourselves, something possibly unhygienic, are the prerequisites for our lives. These microorganisms, such as mold, are reappearing in the work by Gideonsson/Londré the *Monsoon Library*, posing questions of how wetland temporality affects preservation of human culture and its traces.

And if we dive into it, the wetland? The film *Swamp* by Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson, takes us to a muddy and moist swamp in New Jersey, where we step into the transformed spatial and visual perception of Nancy Holt. The human perspective may claim dominance and superiority, but is unbearably limited. The film *The Trans Animal* by Ada Kästel reflects upon the discovery of the own body, as part of a larger organic weave.

In the context of the exhibition and our long term project *Swamp Storytelling*, we also present the sonic work *Kärrkosmos* by Katja Seitajoki and Tomas Björkdal, in the local swamp by Marksjön in Gnesta. During the opening of the exhibition Nisrine Boukhari will serve all visitors custom made drinks in exchange of a poem. A lot of our projects are characterized by our interest in collaborating and co-producing together with others. On the monitor in the WC we present a part of our collaboration with the eighth grade students of Gnesta Waldorf School. After joint discussions about the swamp, the students developed a hand choreography for wetland environments inspired by previous kaleidoscopic explorations.

The exhibition *Wet lands* continues Art Lab Gnesta's investigation of the swamp, which we have devoted the last four years to, it is also a way for us to invite all of you to make kin with the swamp. To bring the human body into the swamp with its ongoing degradation processes, its cacophony of voices, its sucking, preservative, blurred depth. Becoming aware of how the human body is an organism among organisms, and that our attempts to free ourselves from it are vain, not to say devastating. We think the wetlands can teach us that.

*Caroline Malmström, Curator*

**Exhibition team:** Sebastian Dahlqvist, Emanuel Hallklint, Signe Johannessen, Caroline Malmström, Peter Olsén, Erik Rören.

<sup>1</sup> Haraway, Donna - Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin, Environmental Humanities, vol. 6, 2015

### Mikrobiota - Alma Heikkilä, 2016

Ink, plant pigment, Rice glue and acrylic on polyester, plywood, plaster, cotton

Microbes (microorganisms) are for example bacteria, algae and fungi, found everywhere among other living creatures and organisms. Although they play a crucial role in different ecosystems, they are not possible to see with the naked eye. Thanks to their immunological, hormonal and metabolic functions, they are part of making humans into what we are. They work to maintain natural cycles as decomposers, in wetlands as well as in our intestines.

In her work Alma Heikkilä explore and makes visible in what ways we as humans are part of a larger material, social and ecological fabric. Her work informs us about the fact that our bodies are populated by a large number of different lifeforms. Something we need to remind ourselves of, not least in the light of the ecological changes we currently live in and are facing. The installation *Microbiota* consists of a number of objects placed in front of a large painting where the artist merges the organic and non-organic materials as co-creators of various movements and layers. By combining micro and macro perspectives, Heikkilä questions the human perspective always dominating non-human perspectives, and encourages the viewer to reflect on the relation between her own body and the surrounding material world.

### Monsun Library - Gideonsson/Londré, 2018

Video, 13 min

During 2017, the artist duo Gideonsson/Londré traveled to Coorg, India as a part of Art Lab Gnestas residency exchange programme *Swamp Storytelling*. They arrived with an interest in chronobiology, a field of biology studying organisms' reactions to time. As the monsoon enfolded the rainforest, they ended up talking to Maya Goel, who were deeply fascinated by the fact that the artist's copy of *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf were published already in 1933. In the rainforest, the book would, since long been destroyed, broken down, decomposed and forgotten. This was the start of the *Monsun Library*.

The *Monsun Library* explores how books decompose by moisture, taking us from a family library in the Indian rainforest to the conservatories at The National Library of Sweden. The work explores in what ways climate impacts time, when everything molds and melts together. Writing other histories, in a wetland time.

### Swamp - Nancy Holt & Robert Smithson

1971, 6 min, sound, 16mm film

The film *Swamp*, takes us to a muddy and moist swamp in New Jersey, US. Through the lens of a shaking hand-held Bolex camera we follow the artist Nancy Holt as she tries to navigate in the swamp by transforming Robert Smithson's verbal instructions into movement. Visual and spatial perception is not only limited but totally transformed as she walks in this seemingly endless landscape. The sound of wind, reeds cracking, and Holt's own boots sinking down into the swamp to be brought back up meets moving images of reed and mud. Smithson's instructions to move forward in a straight line are hard to follow, not least in a swamp which - with its soft, moist and ever-changing characteristics - offers few straight lines to follow. The film was recorded in 1971, while the Vietnam War was still raging and has since been discussed based on the topological similarities these environments share.

### Transdjuret - Ada Kästel, 2018

*Transdjuret* is a filmed performance based on the artist's experience of her transition. We watch the trans animal sitting and chewing on a plant in a wet trench, wearing a suit made of bulrush found in the trench. The hand-woven duvet the viewer sits on is made of the same material, inspired by a Japanese tatami mat traditionally used as a floor mat in both household environment and within martial arts.

In the small stripe of wetland, that is the trench, the discovery of one's own body is reflected. A discovery of how the human body is linked to everything living around it.

"I surrender to the reality of this body. Sinking into this physical lump that is I. This body whose intestinal movements are as important as its thoughts or the words formed by its vocal cords.

In the transition, I get to be this body. In the transition I am this animal. An animal among other animals. A body united with other bodies.

A body that carries other bodies within. A body that is being carried by other bodies. I am this mass of cells whose life depends on the inhalation of the slag products of other cellular masses. My slag products are a prerequisite for the lives of others.

In the transition, I become the gendered being I have always been. In the transition, my sex is brought to the surface of a body without an inside or outside. Gender as a physical reality of a body without a front or back."

## DURING THE EXHIBITION

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### Swamp Cosmos

*Swamp Cosmos* is a interactive performance, a soundscape that bubbles of sour water, smells and varying colors, taking place in a local swamp. Through the use of camouflage, the participants are able to explore the specific flora and fauna as well as the mysterious sounds and movements in the swamp. We ask ourselves if we, by using camouflage, becoming an animal, insect or a plant, can approach nature differently and challenge man's domination over nature. In an era of climate challenges, we combine artistic, scientific and philosophical perspectives in a choreographed audio installation.

**The performance will be presented on May 27 & August 26** in Marksjön, Gnesta. The participants will be able to enjoy the work via headphones. Bring boots!

This is a Arena Baubo production in collaboration with Art Lab Gnesta and UngaTur. With the support of the Swedish Arts Council and the city of Stockholm.

*Concept and direction:* Katja Seitajoki. *Composer:* Tomas Björkdal. *Text:* Katja Seitajoki and Eva Wichman  
*Contributors:* Katja Seitajoki, Per Sacklén and Tomas Björkdal

### Prose & Poetry Bar - Nisrine Boukhari

During the opening of the exhibition Nisrine Boukhari will serve all visitors custom made drinks in exchange of a poem. In collaboration with AllArtNow.

## WC

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### Hand choreography - Students of Gnesta Waldorfskola

Video, 6 min

On the monitor in the WC we present a part of our collaboration with the eighth grade students of Gnesta Waldorf School. After joint discussions about the swamp, the students developed a hand choreography for wetland environments inspired by previous kaleidoscopic explorations. Students: Linus Borin, Albin Hagberg, Mira Königsson, Joselanny Mercedes Mora, Marcus Rantanen, Saga Sahlberg, Klara Sederholm.

