

# Morphology of Errors - Zero Points

## Malin Franzén

In a technique for studying plants inspired by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, all the leaves of a plant are picked to be placed in a circle. Where the oldest leaf connects the youngest, the zero point arises: its beginning and end, contraction and expansion, approach and retreat. This study of the plant's leaf metamorphosis connects the works of art in the exhibition *Morphology of Errors - Zero Points* by Malin Franzén, a partially mutated version of the exhibition that opened at Art Lab Gnesta in the autumn of 2020.

In the new exhibition, the artist has returned to the beginning of her multi-year work, in an attempt to stay at and examine the zero point, its (im)possible knowledge-making and representation. Here rests the fascination for the book *Herbals, their origin and evolution - a chapter in the history of botany 1470-1670* (1912), an overview of how illustrations of plants developed during the 15th-17th centuries. Inside the book's purple cover, the slightly carelessly scanned plant illustrations are surrounded by black minimalist glitches - digital waste. No one really knows how these "errors" occur. But in Malin Franzén's work, old representations of plants and more randomly generated glitches have laid the foundation for a method of approaching questions of knowledge.

Perhaps the most important companion in the work has been the plant morphologist and philosopher Agnes Arber (1879-1960), who through her scientific career followed her wonder at nature and the idea that we cannot know everything. As a woman, Arber was not admitted to the university's research community on the same terms as men; she was "wrong", and had to set up her own laboratory at home. In the greenhouse, there is a newly built projection of Arber's home laboratory as a place for new observations and explorations of the soil that remains after digging ditches. The ditch itself is another zero point connected to the work's exploration of wetlands: the ditch empties the wetland and changes the possibility of what can grow there, but its closure recreates flooded water-filled soils

In the artist's hands, the material moves from rubbish to resource. This is done in manual practices such as filling a pillow with dried grass, binding a book or coloring a plant with black paint and printing it on a piece of paper. But also through digital representations, such as when the leftover plants are mixed into papier mache and formed into new shapes with the help of a digital carver, or when using augmented reality technology to make the home-cooked plant ink turn into 3D shapes moving through the rooms. The diversity of connections, impulses and expressions presented here speaks well with Arber: the exhibition gives them a temporarily fixed form, but in reality they are, like all knowledge, elusive.

In a monumental floor painting that runs through the exhibition's different rooms, the purple color returns from the book cover. On a purple podium in one of the exhibition rooms rests *Marksjön's flora*, hand-bound by the artist and including a printed overview of plants from a wetland outside Gnesta. In the exhibition's own leaf metamorphosis, this new flora becomes the last leaf to be laid next to *Herbals*, thus closing the circle.

## The Field Study (The Main Hall)

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### 1. I was digging my sand-castles on the edge of a tumultuous sea of great and ancient problems<sup>1</sup>

8 parts - 200 x 200 cm

Alder lamella wood, woodcuts, plant ink from Marksjön

### 2. Which the incessant unrest itself produces<sup>2</sup>

iPad, 3D models/AR, sound

### 3. Gradually reducing to small scales, and thence to nothing<sup>3</sup>

Purple floor painting.

### 4. The storm print

800 x 150 cm

Nature print

### 5. The camera knows nothing, and can record merely that aspect of plant form which is actually presented to it, but the observer, who draws a plant, is not thus limited<sup>4</sup>

18 min

HD video with sound

Camera: Adrian Roche and Malin Franzén

Participants: Savita Avicennia and Danika Tavora

### 6. Book support cushion

200 x 200 cm

Fabric, mowed hay from Marksjön

## Arber's Study (The Black box)

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### 7. Stemming, spreading, segmenting, sprouting<sup>5</sup>

Installation, mixed size Alder lamella wood, plant ink from Marksjön, letterpress, woodcuts, pressed plants from Marksjön, video.

### 8. A laboratory of one's own<sup>6</sup>

111x154 cm

Digital print

## The Scanner (The Garage)

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### 9. The danger of swimming in formlessness<sup>7</sup>

Handbound books, Herbals by Agnes Arber, stoneware, earthenware, alder lamella wood, pressed and dried yellow water lily, digital print, letterpress print, purple linseed oil paint, papier maché, mowed hay from Marksjön.

### 3. Gradually reducing to small scales, and thence to nothing

Purple floor painting.

## The Laboratory (The Greenhouse)

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### 10. Sprouting occurs while breathing<sup>8</sup>

Soil from a ditch, laboratory shelving, microscope, stoneware, earthenware, video, nature print, bench, purple linseed oil paint.

### 3. Gradually reducing to small scales, and thence to nothing

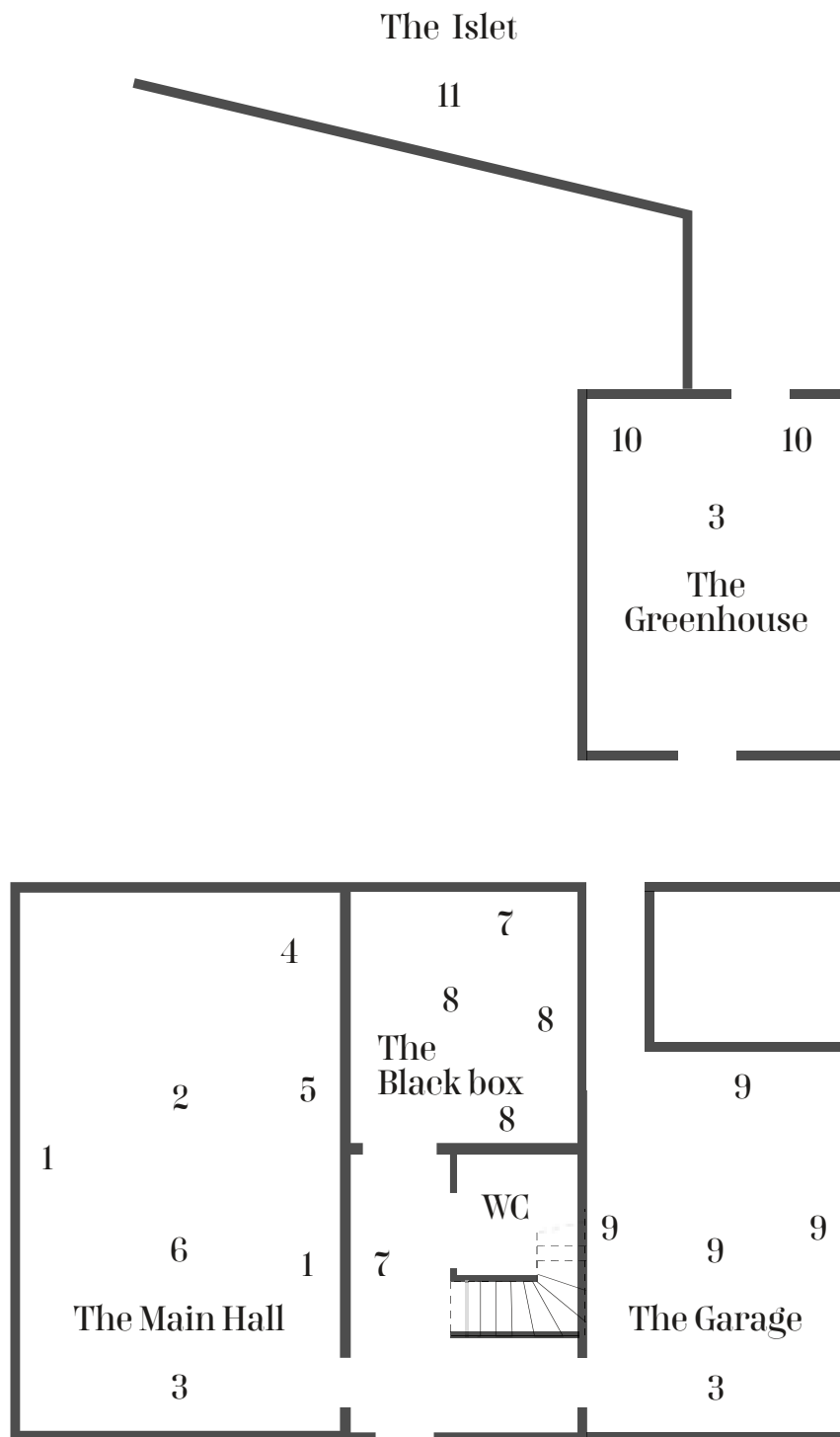
Purple floor painting.

## The dike (The Islet)

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### 11. Turn your gaze now, my beloved, to the many-coloured hosts<sup>9</sup>

Purple distemper, digital print, stoneware, ditch.



<sup>1</sup> Arber, A. (1957/1967). *The Manifold and the One*. 2:nd edition. Wheaton, Illinois. Theosophical Publishing House.

<sup>2</sup> Steiner, R. (?/1959). *Växternas metamorfos*, s. 8. 2:nd edition. Järna. Kosmos förlag.

<sup>3</sup> Arber, A. (1946). *Goethe's botany*. New York, Ronald Press Company. *Chronica Botanica* Vol. 10, No. 2, ss. 63-126.

<sup>4</sup> Arber, A. (1950). *The Natural Philosophy of Plant Form*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Kjellenberg, L (2001). *Former i förvandling (Växternas formspråk, p.20)*. Järna. Nordisk Forskningsring för Biodynamisk Odling.

<sup>6</sup> Packer, K. (1997). *A Laboratory of One's Own: The Life and Works of Agnes Arber, F.R.S. (1879-1960)*. London. Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London. Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 87-104.

<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia (2021). *Groning*. <https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groning>. (2021-04-16)

<sup>9</sup> Goethe, J.W.v. (1798/1996). *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. Dikt återgiven i *New eyes for plants*. Lansdown, Storbritannien. Hawthorn press.

The exhibition is shown April 17-May 23, 2021, Fri-Sun at 12-16.

[www.artlabgnesta.se](http://www.artlabgnesta.se)

**Filmed tour of the exhibition *Morphology of Errors* (2020)**, a dialogue between the artist Malin Franzén and the curator Caroline Malmström is shown on the toilet. Filmed and edited by Emanuel Hallklint.

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**Curator:** Caroline Malmström

**Artistic leaders:** Signe Johannessen, Caroline Malmström and Erik Rören

**Exhibition design and installation:** Erik Rören and Mikael Jonasson

**Communication:** Emanuel Hallklint

**Intern:** Isabelle Ribe

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