

m/other becomings

6/11-12/12 2021

with Karin Bolender, Riina Hannula, Anna Ihle, Kultivator, Anna Ting Möller, Rhizomatic Squad for Caring Technologies, Save the Earth Club & Signe Johannessen

How can the notion of family expand beyond normative and anthropocentric kinship? What radical potential does not emerge if we consider *motherhood* as an action instead of something bound to a certain kind of body and its innermost being? Led by invited artists, the exhibition *m/other becomings* decomposes habitual notions and shares methods of care intended for a wider surrounding than the immediate, human sphere.

The exhibition gathers considerations and encouragements based on the premise that maintenance and care (such as raising children, cooking, cleaning, gardening) are practices full of ecological, political and aesthetic potential. Several of the artworks spring from a collaborative work week, when artists and partners gathered to work, talk and live together. In parallel, two new works have been developed in our residency.

The exhibition is part of the project *m/other becomings* initiated by the curator Ida Bencke/ Laboratory for Aesthetics & Ecology in collaboration with Art Lab Gnesta, Kultivator and Bioart Society. The project is kindly supported by the Nordic Culture Fund, the Nordic Culture Point and IASPIS. Anna Ihle's production has been made possible in collaboration with Västerås konstmuseum, where it will be exhibited starting in January 2022.

Caroline Malmström, curator

The exhibition is shown on
Saturdays and Sundays at 12-16.

Art Lab Gnesta

m/other becomings: (re)generating kin

Practices of motherhood and the different kinds of labour that relate to it such as reproductive work, gestational work, domestic work and care work takes up a very little space in the cultural imagination. Traditionally, social and somatic reproductive labour has been regarded as 'women's work'; considered part of women's nature as a sort of innate desire, and unworthy of monetary compensation, as well as cultural, philosophical and political attention. In effect, domestic spaces have long been regarded as non-political spaces, places where life 'simply' is carried on, but with very little attention to the manners through which life is continued and reproduced everyday within our households.

However, how we compose and organize family matters. Who and what we consider to be part of our families matter. How we dwell and with whom is a crucial political question with implications that reach far into issues concerning sustainability, gender, pedagogy, affect and justice. Who we entail and who expel matters, who we make home with and who is denied access, expelled to the margins of society, exiled into the invisible domains of the nameless, the storyless, the homeless matters.

Motherhood is a haunted category, at once an ignored practice that desperately needs reckoning within our cultural landscapes, and at the same time offers a troubled, gendered category that all too easily lends itself to a heteronormative narrative that feeds of a biological essentialism which equals motherhood with biology.

However, there are several senses in which rethinking motherhood and the relations built around the maternal can open up a range of important questions. The maternal as a lived, physical embodiment of connectedness challenges liberal politics based on individualism and competition, and foregrounds questions of proximity, entanglement and vulnerability. And furthermore, (re)thinking motherhood beyond the biological gender, and family beyond the heteronormative nuclear family unit allow us to engage in alternative ways of cultivating relations, kinship and care. As ecofeminist thinker Donna Haraway reminds us, in a world of ecological devastation and a surplus of refugees of all species, we need to seriously and urgently engage in creative kin-making, in reconstructing notions, practices and idea(l)s around what we consider home in order to assemble and to build more spacious, more generous and gentle living arrangements for carrying on, together, in spite of everything on an earth so deeply wounded. We need to challenge and expand notions of family in order to create more sustainable and inclusive spaces of coexistence, refuge and repair.

The project m/other becomings is an attempt to open conversation and hold space for questions around various fluctuations between motherhood and otherhood as both categories intersect, produce and sometimes repeal or reverse each other. The project emphasises care work, reproductive labour, and opens questions of how to make kin beyond the normative family unit and its particular gender politics - social norms that are so entirely formative for how we navigate and reproduce life, but which often remains unexamined. m/other becomings probe the possibilities of artistically investigating, challenging and broadening politics of the domestic by taking a closer look at the interconnections between ecology and the home (the word ecology comes from the Greek 'oikos', meaning home).

Activities such as maintenance, repair and care make and remake our world everyday. Child-rearing, cooking, cleaning, gardening, keeping house, building home, caring for self and caring for community, making family, making love are all examples of practices teeming with ecological, political and aesthetic potential. m/other becomings is an endeavour to gather some voices around m/otherhood(s) in an expanded field, and to speculate in the construction of alternative, liveable futures by taking serious the sometimes exhausted and sometimes ecstatic, sometimes exploited and sometimes joyous bodies enrolled in the taxing labours of care that everyday pave the way for life to continue to be a possibility for (some of) us.

1. Feng - Walk alone

Anna Ting Möller, 2021

kombuchascoby, bamboo, epoxy, sisal rope, fishing line, water

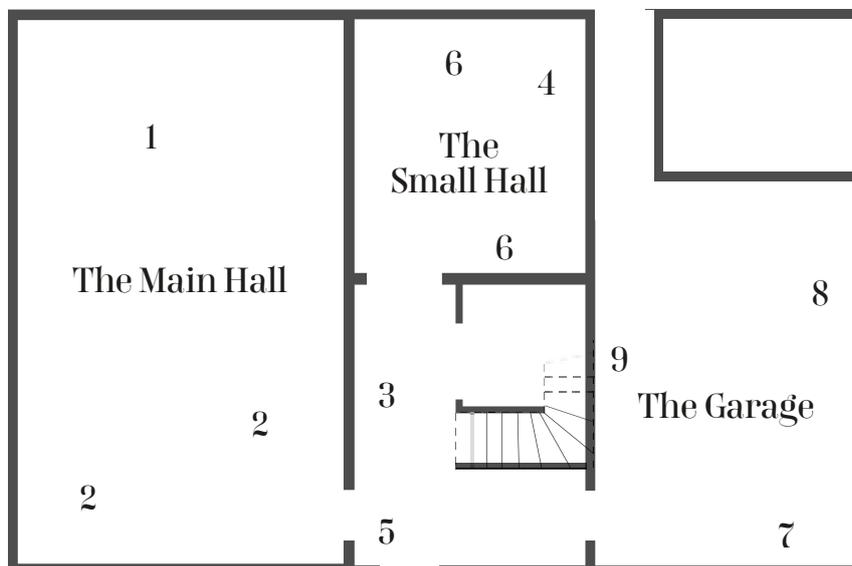
Humans have always hacked nature and manipulated nature. By co-opting with nature and learn from its language we can witness how to bend time, define space and interact with others.

I am working with a narrative around the mythical creature "Feng" in ancient Chinese folklore, which is a deity that resembles a lump of rotten flesh. It's a friendly deity but because of its disturbing appearance is doomed to wander the earth forever alone detached from its origin.

I am an interdisciplinary visual artist working in the field of undefined "bio-art". My work explores the concept of living art by growing and cultivating bacteria and fungi culture by using one "Kombucha-mother", a species of bacteria known for its ability to produce cellulose. By feeding the micro organisms with tea and sugar activate a symbiosis where the bacteria begin to ferment and create a thick layer of cellulose that closely resemble human flesh. I am creating living art pieces that challenge the conventional ways of both looking at and consuming art, with focus on the process, experimental methods and materials in relation to the human body. It can be argued that an art piece (painting, sculpture) "dies" when it is completed and displayed. However, my art works are "alive" even in a literal sense and require participation from both visitors and exhibition staff. Growing my own material helps me work from a sustainable perspective while at the same time it makes me independent from the economic market. Scientific ideas and contributing to the discussion of the correlations between human dynamics and nature is an important part of my artistic practice and I am trying to actively show it in my work.

I am adopted from China and came to Sweden as an infant. Growing up in a predominantly white context has made its imprint and formed an in-between identity. Adoptees are often misinterpreted as blank sheets, implicating that the adoptee's life begins with an adoption process, but of course a person's life begins at birth. The process of making living art installations that require constant care is for me a personal allegory for the notion of adoption, where various components in the actual process are charged with symbolic meaning. For example the act of the cultivating of art using tea and sugar, which are classic colonial trade goods and charged with the history of imperialism, puts an ambiguous tone to my work.

China will always be a motivating factor for me and I am trying to connect and rebuild a relationship with the culture by enter an unknown world based on a fantasy.





Anna Ihle works in the Art Lab Gnesta residency.

Photo: Espen Birkedal

2. Pauses of saliva and milk, bodies of water

Anna Ihle, 2021

oak, steel, photo documentation from the work period

During my residency at Art Lab Gnesta, I wanted to work with oak. With an interest in criticism of work and a frustration with the working norm in society, I wanted to try to start from the oak - maybe it could teach me something about a different way of looking at time management. For several years I have been thinking of a shorter working day as a way of resisting, but the oak has no clock. During the time in Gnesta, I met several people who taught me more about the oak, and who helped me approach my questions in unexpected ways. Large amounts of water pass through the tree. The oak lives together with a great diversity, in it, on it, by it. As living, dying and dead, it lives with other species.

The shape I have sculpted takes its shape from parts of a biting toy that my partner got for my daughter when she drooled so much. During the work period in Gnesta, I brought my 3 month old daughter, and my partner who took care of her. I worked and breastfed and took it easy. My daughter didn't have a clock either. The distribution of time at work was based on when the breaks were needed. Who is hungry, who is worn out, when should we be together.

3. *m<other tongues forest-kulturing workshop*

petri dishes, photo

4. On the shores of now

video, 2:54, photo: Sameh Jamal

Karin Bolender and Kultivator, 2021

The *m<other tongues* collaboration began in 2018, when Ida Bencke connected the Rural Alchemy Workshop (R.A.W.) and Kultivator to create a pre-conference event at Kultivator Oland for the *Multispecies Storytelling* exhibition in Vaxjo in January 2019. Building on related projects that each had done before they met--and inspired by the idea of inviting a keynote from the magnificent mare, Burberry, who lived at Kultivator—they cooked up a different kind of “roundtable” event before the conference: a shared meal in the barn, welcoming the resident horses, humans, and other guests of all kinds, known and unknown.

As a way of inviting sub-visible, microbial worlds to the table, Karin Bolender and Malin Lindmark Vrijman exchanged a technique in advance for “culturing *m<other tongues*” that the R.A.W. had been exploring through a project called *Welcome to the Secretome*. This technique cultures significant bodies-in-places (in this case, the tongues of domestic mammals) and then engages images of these microscopic cultures as secret “treasure maps” in specific ecologies. At Kultivator, Malin cultured the muzzles of resident horses (Burberry and Tussan), cows, and sheep and made beautiful “maps” of these cultures. The R.A.W. meanwhile expanded outward from the original Secretome culture-map, made from the donkey Aliass’s tongue two years earlier; on a foggy and rainbowy December afternoon in Oregon, Karin, Rolly, and Aliass embarked on a culturing adventure deeper into the barn, pastures, and mysterious forest edges. Later Malin traced an image of one special barn-forest culture onto a large tablecloth, which all the guests gathered around for the first *kultivating m<other tongues* event in winter 2019.

After this special meal at Kultivator, the *m<other tongues* tablecloth and its collective cultures traveled to Vaxjo. Here the project wove together with other *m<other futures* artists, who were also part of this *Multispecies Storytelling* exhibition curated by Ida Bencke: Signe’s *Protector* and a plant-sitting inhabitation by members of the r.s.c.t. (as dance for plants. . .) were present in Vaxjo Konsthall. At the conference site, a roundtable sat in a central space holding the tablecloth, and every participant received a needle and colored thread to embroider on traces of microbes and other stitches, stains, and residues, visible and not--along with spores of the *m/other futures* assemblies-to-come. Indeed, the *m<other tongues* tablecloth, and the different lives and places and tissues it stitches together, resurfaced as an unassuming site of departure and return at the *m/other futures* workshop this past summer.

The *m<other tongues forest-kulturing* workshop was presented by the R.A.W. and Kultivator on the first day of *m/other futures*. It revolves around the presence of two new residents of Kultivator, the donkeys Jack and Jenny. Arriving just days before *m/other futures* began, Jack and Jenny played many important roles in the proceedings. Their presence also deepened questions and opened new directions for the *m<other tongues* collaboration, connecting across oceans with the R.A.W.’s twenty-year practice of living with and learning how to care for and respectfully unknow the lovely, wise-muzzled creatures called “asses.”

Following the belief that *m<other tongues* can lead us to discover bodies-in-places in different ecological and intergenerational ways, the workshop began by gathering the *m/other futures* herd around the roundtable to prepare for a journey with Jack and Jenny to the forest. Borrowing from a previous Secretome culturing adventure with a wild deer, Karin suggested that rather than directly swab the donkeys’ tongues, we instead follow them closely as they move freely in the forest and make cultures from what their tongues touch.

In this sense, the kulturing becomes a matrix of relations between the different mammals (herbivores, omnivores, carnivores, and so on), plants and rocks and mosses and soils, and the unknown microbial presences that lead us deeper into the unknown forest than we've ever gone before.

The images presented here document this matrix of visible and subvisible lives, showing the different cultures grown collectively during the m/other futures gathering. Just as their mysterious paths connect with an immense past of ecological relations hidden in the spaces between bodies, so these *m<other tongues kultures* also stitch and weave us together in stories of bodies-in-places going forward.

5. RJK:s Manifest

sound 01:02

6. Abbots of Unreason 2

wood, textile and reflective tape

7. Clever Girl

video 03:42

Signe Johannessen and Rädda jorden-klubben

(Lova, Liv Juli, Sally, Judith, Ebba, Frances, Lilly & Majken), 2021

Making a hobby horse can be an act of resistance, a way of creating new magical creatures that roar at the apathy of the adult world and those in power who refuse to listen to the young generation's worries about the future. The self-organized Rädda jorden-klubben (Save the Earth club) gathers a group of young people in Gnesta who want to make their voices heard. Together with artist Signe Johannessen, they have during this autumn developed new methods for being heard. Claws suddenly grow out of their hands, the hobby horses used during important marches suddenly begin to glow in the dark, and from an ear that has somehow grown out of the wall we hear their steady shouting: When? Now! When when when? Now now now!

8. Multispecies rug manifesto

Riina Hannula, 2021

Video 15 min. Green plastic tarp with a painting by soil on it, painted horn of a cow as a capillary system for nursing the plants with water, gardening gloves with claws, reflector (saying the animal is your neighbor in Finnish). Rug making materials: Soil, seeds and grains for sprouting (sunflower, pea, oat), plastic bottle (with anonymous seeds)

The multispecies rug is made out of the belief that co-existence with other than human animals can increase responsibility towards them. The rug is manufactured with tenderness, listening and observing companions and becoming together in a new composition or assemblage. It requires placing human in the animal continuum. The multispecies rug is a living body but it is not a hybrid that produces a generic difference. Rather it emerges mutually inclusive vital gesture as described by Massumi (2014). It is a post-anthropocentric becoming animal or a becoming with animals and collaboration with nonhuman agents.

Multispecies rug making is a sympathetic and speculative door opening where the agency is distributed. The human intention is not central. It is ethico-aesthetic material-gathering and kin making that tunes towards the nonhuman expression and affect. Ludic gesture is impotent unless it captures the others attention, rug making thus is an act of love that should resonate one way or another to our companions.

Brushing a goat is care that leaves a human hand with fluffy matter. There is hair fallen from human head and feathers dropped by a winged companion. Seeds and grains we all eat are binding the rug together with their living roots. Matters meet and become in a platform of compost made out of manure of goats or other soils that provide microbial companionship to macro-materials. The adhesive that enables entanglement of beloved matters and bodies.

Multispecies rug encourages to think material entanglement beyond instrumentalizing scope by composing matters differently. Pursuing ethico-aesthetic becoming, symbiosis, or creative evolution it grows species together creating a new type of holobiont. Multispecies rug states we are not separated entities although we have separated bodies in space. We speak, sing and bleat in a different language but we have a sympathetic tendency to comprehend each other. This is not the first becoming, we have always become in our relations as Haraway (2016) and others reminds us.

Sources: Massumi, Brian (2014) *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. Haraway, Donna J. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

7. do it when you feel it when you do it

Rhizomatic Squad for Caring Technologies (Douceur Erajh, Loup Rivière, Niusha Ramzani, Shifa Doğuştan, Stella Faelli), 2021

Following the moments shared and co-created during the m/other futures workshop that took place in Kultivator last July, we crafted *do it when you feel it when you do it* for this exhibition. The RSCt infuses its collective energies, intentions and time to acknowledge, invent, pass on, grow, celebrate forms of magic, precious and fragile relationships. With this piece, we share a story or/and a million of stories: a story of what happened in Kultivator, a story of what working together is making us do, an intimate story of what resonates inside us. We chose to share it two ways : as a momentum with these words and the written scores, here in this space. And with this fabric free for you to cut, take away, transform, sew, recombine, pin, hang, wash, give, etc. We share it as a map, a mnemotechnic note, an activating presence. We invite you to do it when you feel it and to feel it when you do it.

This collection of patterns is a possible configuration of activities and practices that could be performed each time you see them. It can be cut, shared, offered, mixed but also transformed. It's a memory of a ceremony in the woods, a mark of the rediscovery of childhood, a timespace dedicated to body and mind exploration and much more.

Here is what the squad passed on about each pattern printed on the fabric:



Soften your jaws // Relax your anus // Say hi to the gates of your inner worlds // Your body is a pearl

Take 1, 2, 3 deep inhales, you're now a puppy ready to playfight with other puppies.



DANCE!
(listen with your bones)

the very gentle rice wash

*pick through the grains
remove grit if you see
open water tap
give them a cold shower
wash them very gently
move your fingers
in circular motions
without breaking any grain
without losing any grain
wash them very gently
until the water is clear
soak them for 30 min
meanwhile, sing a song
or call a friend
lastly, cook and eat*



I KNOW WHAT I ASK FOR

As a kid, cracking open walnuts was a family evening duty in the winter time. The walnuts were picked up from all the walnut trees around in autumn and dried in the attics for some time. In order to be ready to be used in case of some walnut cake emergency, they needed to be cracked open and the loose walnut kernels stored in jars. It was a tedious task and the whole bunch of people living in the house was put to work around the dining table. You could hear dramatic cracks, meticulous grumbling and clunks. You could also hear the conversation -usually defensive and pretty violent around this very table- being changed by this put together mindfulness and effort: knowledgeable facts, old and new stories, genuine questions, vulnerable affirmations happened. Cracked open. Until the pile of walnuts was gone, the kernels ready for the sweets to be made and our fingers microcut and burnished. Some years all the walnuts were bad, all of them. But we had to do the work to know. To know what we ask/ed for.

Invite some loved ones to spend the night doing together some around the table task you need to be done for a future goodness to happen. Feel it in its repetitiveness and its need of several hands together at the same time to be done.

www.artlabgnesta.se

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Curator for the project m/other becomings: Ida Bencke

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