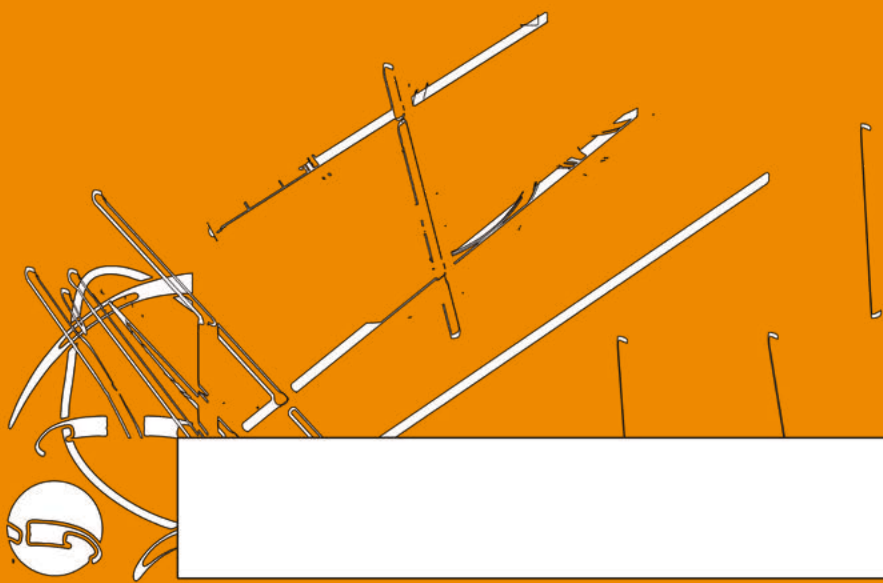


A Vegetal  
Encounter:  
Patricia Domínguez,  
Ingela Ihrman and  
Eduardo Navarro



VE

# 700 million years ago (MYA)

Photosynthetic marine organisms—green algae—emerge.

# 450 MYA

First terrestrial plants (they grow in humid environments as they don't have a vascular system capable of transporting water).

# 251 MYA

Seed-carrying plants become dominant.

# 66 MYA

Vast ecosystems of savannahs and grasslands where animals can flourish. Conifers become dominant in colder climates, while angiosperms (plants with flowers) are dominant in tropical climates.

300,000 years ago

**First humans**

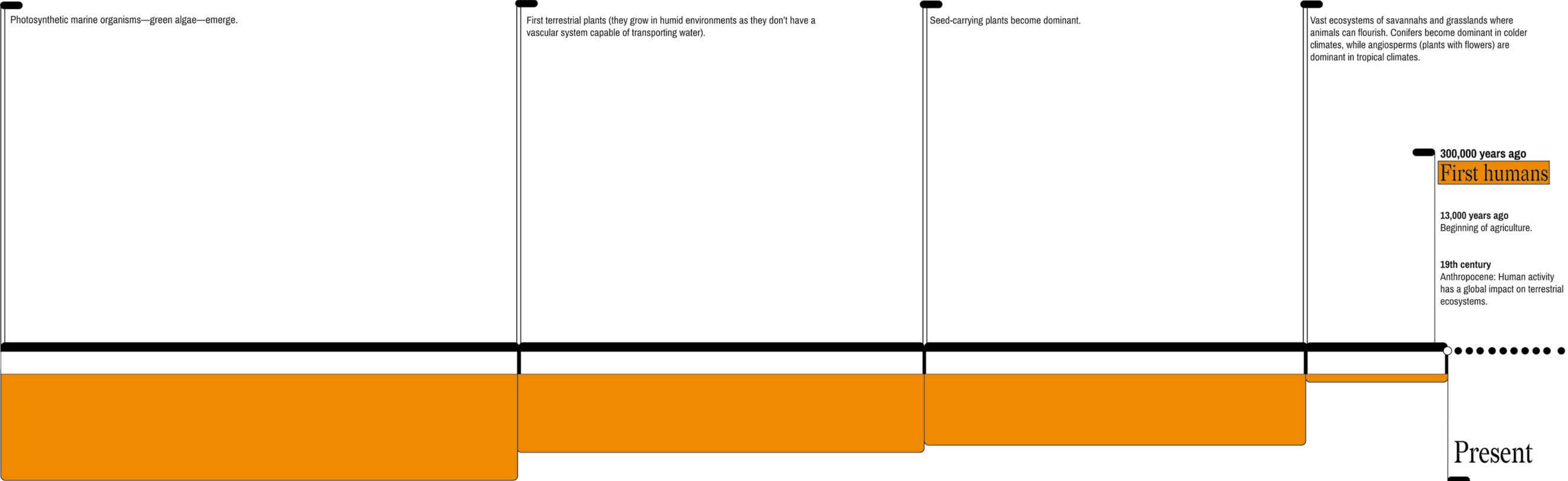
13,000 years ago

Beginning of agriculture.

19th century

Anthropocene: Human activity has a global impact on terrestrial ecosystems.

Present



La Casa Encendida presents the exhibition *A Plant Encounter*. Patricia Domínguez, Ingela Ihrman and Eduardo Navarro, resulting from a collaboration with Wellcome Collection in London. The show's aim is to highlight the value of plants as beings that have populated the Earth for millions of years. The project is based on a dialogue between three artists—Patricia Domínguez (1984, Santiago de Chile), Ingela Ihrman (1985, Kalmar, Sweden) and Eduardo Navarro (1979, Buenos Aires)—whose proposals about life and the world of plants serve as a common thread for the exhibition.

La Casa Encendida has a long tradition in programming events related to the environment, in the course of which some of the most urgent issues regarding the matter have been addressed, both from the scientific and the artistic point of view. The present project examines this theme from perspectives that have not been widely explored so far, and proposes new interpretations that help us reflect on the need for coexistence between species.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a wide range of parallel activities, starting with Terraza Magnética, where music and images are used to question the relationship between human beings, nature and myths. From the monstrous dimension of jungles to the critique of their Western idealisation as mythical spaces; from forests as places of personal growth to the dystopian sounds of post-human landscapes; from man's will to dominate nature to the echo of indigenous and ancestral voices; from the psychoactive substances contained in plants, and their medicinal and curative effects, to gardens as personal and artistic creations. A cycle of eight feature-length films—including genres such as fantasy, documentary and fiction—and eight musical proposals—including ambient, experimental electronic sound, folk and r&b—whose common thread is the pervading presence of the world of plants and the fairness and balance with which nature is regarded.

The programme will be complemented with Lucrecia Dalt's *Preta*, a multi-channel sound installation based on the concept of listening as an organ for poetical and speculative exploration from the Earth; the course "How to Tell the Story of Our Plants", with NØCollective; "The Ecology of the Soul" course, as part of the Clarice Lispector Cycle, with Brazilian poet, composer and artist Beatriz Azevedo, Chilean writer Andrea Jęftanovic, critic and essayist Isabel Mercadé, cultural critic Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego, and expert on Portuguese literature Elena Losada Soler; and a series of conversations between writers Benjamin Moser and Nélida Piñón chaired by philosopher Ignacio Castro Rey.

\_ A Vegetal Encounter  
Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz. 06

\_ The Conquest of *Terra Firma*  
Cristina Nieto. 08

\_ A Roundtable with  
Artists Patricia Domínguez,  
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Ingela Ihrman. 24

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Eduardo Navarro  
and Michael Marder. 28

# A Vegetal Encounter

06

Plants sustain all living organisms by exhaling breathable air and engaging in photosynthesis. They are sensitive beings, attentive to the elements and life forms around them, rooted but constantly evolving, building alternative anatomies to survive and flourish, breathing, perceiving, feeding and reproducing throughout their entire bodies. They have memory, they communicate with each other, create symbiotic communities and influence the global climate.

Our vegetal companions moved out of the water and colonised the land 450 million years ago. 300,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens* emerged, and today humans represent only 0.01 per cent of the world's biomass. 13,000 years ago, agriculture began a reciprocal process of domestication: we turned plants into food and medicine, into lifeless property for our consumption. In turn, the cycles of grains, ploughing, collecting and grinding shaped the foundations of modern civilization.

Humans are also creatures of the soil ("human", from the Latin *humus*: soil), but we cut all ties to land and nature, normalised them as resources while denying the vital and fragile entanglements between all human and non-human lives.

*A Vegetal Encounter* proposes a meditative reflection on the vegetal world and what we can learn from it. The exhibition is conceived as a dialogue between the practices of three artists whose work slowly decomposes the artificial and pervasive wall that separates us from nature, devastating our ecosystems, our liveliness, our health.

Patricia Domínguez's new commission features five futuristic totems with ethnobotanical reproductions from Wellcome Collection (London) and the Museo de America (Madrid), and collection items from South America and Europe held by the Real Jardín Botánico and the Real Academia de La Historia (Madrid)—vocing the narratives of violence and healing embodied by the displayed material. Ingela Ihrman's bodily algae installation speaks of the artist's recovery on the seacoast and the links between the flora in her intestine and the flora in the oceans. Eduardo Navarro's expansive and contemplative drawings use biodegradable envelopes containing latent tree seeds. They will be returned to nature at the end of the exhibition, becoming soil, and the seeds will be activated, reconnecting us with the holistic *humus*. Navarro's performative instructions to experience this exhibition as a plant might—co-written with philosopher Michael Marder—further invite us to embark on a path of vegetal enlightenment:

You are in an endless state of communion and infinite contemplation with other natural elements and beings. Can you see with your skin and hear with your arms? Can you think together with the air and the sun and the soil?

[...]

Move in the place where you are and sense the place moving along with you, growing and contracting rhythmically. Care for your place and for your attachment to it. You do not have your place; the place embraces you in itself. Render it equally welcoming, open to others.



Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz

(Curator, Wellcome Collection, London)

07

# The Conquest of *Terra Firma*

08



**Cristina Nieto**

(Researcher, Centro de Recursos Fitogenéticos-INIA)

This long vegetal history begins with a series of organisms that made use of the energy of the sunlight to convert inorganic substances into organic matter by capturing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen during the process. Outside of their original aquatic habitat, photosynthesis became essential for terrestrial life. Today, we cannot conceive of life without oxygen and are increasingly aware of the fact that carbon dioxide could do away with us altogether.

A long journey was required before we arrived at the form of life we now know. Photosynthetic eukaryotes, armed with **chloroplasts**, conquered all the environments in which light and water were present. They adopted many different forms and functions and scattered throughout freshwater and saltwater, but that wasn't enough. Of this great photosynthetic family, one privileged lineage managed to escape the waters and thrive on land: terrestrial plants.

Those primitive plants, the brand-new occupants of a freshly conquered world, had to face a hostile environment. Adapted for growth in the water, which served as a shield against the sun, they developed pigments that protected them from the ultraviolet rays of the sun. They constructed a vegetal wall that gave them stability and allowed them to develop asymmetrical structures and alter their morphology in accordance with their needs. They did not forget to manufacture their own **vascular tissue**, whose role as a "pipeline" for water and nutrients enabled them to scale another rung on the ladder of evolution. They covered themselves with cuticles—which served as a sheltering shield against their enemies—developed **stomas** and breathed in relief. They also wove a complex and highly precise network of vegetal hormones with which to respond to the stimuli they constantly received. Finally, they designed an infinite variety of desiccation-tolerant seeds that allowed them to multiply from generation to generation. Fortunately, not everything was struggle. Terrestrial life facilitated an association between plants and fungi. Such symbiosis helped to improve the absorption of nutrients from the soil and made it easier for plants to conquer the land. Then came the best of inventions: flowers. These green organisms painted their sexual organs in bright colours in order to attract pollinators, thus ensuring reproduction.

The rest is well known. The birth of agriculture made it possible for human populations to change their way of

life, leading to the appearance of the first civilisations. As **autotrophic** organisms, plants are the basis of the **trophic chain** and make up the vast majority of the planet's biomass. They are biofactories of oxygen and sinks for carbon dioxide and other pollutants. Domesticised, they have gifted us an almost unlimited variety of leaves, seeds, roots, fruits and flowers, all tailored to our needs. Plants temper the climate, they feed us, heal us and take care of one another. They are possessed of a sense of community and they protect each other, as in the case of sunflowers, which turn their leaves to one side or the other to keep out of one another's way.

The second part of the story is a little less hopeful for humans. Throughout the **Anthropocene**, in our role as superpredators, we have widely overtaxed the generosity of plants, and our way of life has led to the extinction of many species. We know for certain that the future belongs to plants, which will continue to populate the *terra firma* after we have disappeared and will even be glad when we are gone. After all they have given us, the time has come for humanity to nurture them. Reciprocity with the vegetal world is the only path to a true "vegetal encounter".

## Glossary:

**Chloroplast:** A cell organelle occurring in green seaweed and plants that carries out photosynthesis.

**Vascular tissue:** A system of conduits made up of the xylem, which transports water and nutrients from the roots to the leaves, and the phloem, which distributes the nutrients resulting from photosynthesis among the rest of the vegetal organs.

**Stomas:** Small pores occurring in the leaves and stems of plants which serve for the exchange of gases with the external environment and regulate the loss of water of vegetal tissues.

**Autotrophic:** An organism that is able to produce its own food through the use of the energy of light or of inorganic chemical reactions. These organisms are also called primary producers since they do not require living sources of carbon or energy.

**Trophic chain, or food chain:** The flow of energy and nutrients that begins with photosynthesis and moves between the different species of an ecosystem. In a biological community, each series of organisms that feed off the preceding level and serve to feed the succeeding level.

**Anthropocene:** The period during which it is deemed that human activity began to have a global impact on terrestrial ecosystems. Some authors define it as beginning with the advent of agriculture, while others place its starting point at the time of the Industrial Revolution.



# A Roundtable with

10

## Artists

Patricia Domínguez,  
Ingela Ihrman and  
Eduardo Navarro

and Curator Bárbara  
Rodríguez Muñoz

9 March 2021 / Transcribed by Dominic Neergheen\*

**Bárbara:** This programme originated with the urgent need to expose the vital-yet-fragile entanglements between human and planetary health. I was drawn to your practices as artists and how they transcend anthropocentric and utilitarian views of the vegetal world, which understand plants as lifeless property; a notion that has led us to the current environmental breakdown. Instead, you embrace plants' vitality, sensitivity and attentiveness, and how we are all part of a *community of living* with the vegetal world.

**Patricia:** I started with a scientific outlook, studying botanical gardens and scientific illustrations, and slowly opened my perception to a more energetic relationship to plants. I'm still in the process of understanding how powerful they are, their verbal and chemical communication with us. Plants permeate our cells, our being; we live through plants.

**Bárbara:** In the exhibition we display botanical collections from London's Wellcome Collection and Madrid's Botanical Garden and Real Academia de la Historia, which are the result of the great eighteenth-century scientific expeditions to South America. These botanical collections highlight how the active principles of plants were extracted to create medicines, as well as the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge.

**Patricia:** In South America, ancestral healing techniques were invisibilized after the colonisation. I'm slowly trying to dig into all of this knowledge, to learn from it and digest it in order to transform myself. Christianity, colonialism and bio-piracy separated the ecosystems of knowledge and alliances between people, plants, soil and the more-than-human.

**Bárbara:** We are intimately connected with plants. This is something that we used to know but has been gradually erased since the Enlightenment. But we still *know it* at a somatic level. Philosopher Emmanuel Coccia says that every breath we take is an act of communion with a tree.

**Eduardo:** Plants are a complete mystery. From that starting point, we can propose the exercise of imagining what a plant dialogue can be like. With our limited human perception, we approach nature as an "experience".

The way I see it, breathing is the simplest way to understand that we are part of a communication system with vegetal beings.

**Ingela:** I started with my own body. We have this idea that there are humans and then there is nature. This culture split, which was created for a reason, causes a lot of trouble on many levels, but also for me. By dressing up as a plant or a flower, I highlight my longing to be "good enough", because when I look down on my skin and mass I don't see the perfect human but something else that maybe feels more like the interior of a flower, or seaweed. Art has given me the opportunity to solve some problems in my life but, of course, other problems emerge as soon as I put on a flower costume, because that makes me more human than ever: I fabricate a huge petal and present it as an artwork in a gallery and expose myself to the visitors. Art is a human practice.

**Bárbara:** Thinking about the limits of human language, you "use" flowers as a way to communicate with fellow humans.

**Ingela:** Yes. To bloom is an attempt to attract and create a social situation.

**Eduardo:** When you focus your attention and become emotionally connected to something, whether it's a plant, a chair or a human, then you are in a state of symbiosis. Maybe the problem is the definition of communication, given that communication happens even when we don't want it to. If you stare at a plant for an hour, your perception changes.

**Patricia:** I have a lot of herbs that I drink to see how I feel. I dream with plants under my pillow. I have also been ingesting some "visionary" or hallucinatory plants. They have this amazing power to help you reconnect with yourself in a non-verbal way. I'm in complete awe. Indigenous knowledge has a deeper connection to plants. Science is now just beginning to articulate plant sensitivity and communication.

**Ingela:** I find the limits of science inspiring. The way humans try to understand everything, to categorise and describe everything through really detailed paintings or

texts... it's so obvious that it's not possible to capture everything. I am interested in art's potential to invent, lie, fantasise. It's a simultaneous process of creation and constant failure.

**Bárbara:** The word "human" comes from the Latin for soil, *humus*, and from the verb "to bury", *humando*—we are creatures of the soil but we have cut ties to the ground, to place and nature. This concept has gained a renewed relevance during the COVID lockdowns. Many pay more attention now to the elements and their immediate surroundings, to the blooming of spring, to being "rooted".

**Eduardo:** During the lockdown, it was like I was going crazy, so perhaps it was a good thing that I just buried my feet in a pot and tried to survive! I think there's something to be said about conceiving plants as a territory. It's completely dark and you are there trying to figure things out: this vegetal territory offers endless possibilities to rethink how we live.

**Patricia:** Being in lockdown for so long, I have been thinking about how bones are made from soil, and how we are water in our blood and fluids, and our cells feed on plants. We are infinitely permeated but also stuck in the same place. I've been dealing with this contradiction.

**Ingela:** I already knew that staying indoors all day doesn't do me any good. I also know that, as a creature, it's not good for me to travel as much as I used to. This has become very clear to me during the lockdown.

**Bárbara:** Futuro Studio has designed the gallery space at La Casa Encendida to allude to an infinite landscape, a shift in perception of time and space that allows for your artwork to emerge.

**Ingela:** The exhibition space makes me think of what things look like under the surface. You can't really see where the ocean ends as water enraptures you. The gallery becomes a space for my seaweeds to float within.

**Patricia:** My reference is the cosmic tree, the *axis mundis*. The *Machi on Rehue* photograph from Wellcome Collection comes to mind. *Machis* are healers from the Mapuche indigenous communities in Chile. They make use of a tree trunk with four to seven levels—an interpretation of this *axis mundis* or cosmic tree—to connect with higher realms and bring down

cures to Earth. To me, the gallery speaks of this cosmic and healing relationship.

**Eduardo:** I have been exploring the idea of drawings that can be buried at the end of the exhibition. I have a very intuitive connection with the space design. It's like compost: a germinating exhibition.

**Bárbara:** I'd like to go back to the idea we began with: planetary health. Your works open a path to seeing ourselves as an inextricable part of the living Earth.

**Ingela:** We have forgotten how to cultivate our sensitivity towards non-human life. However, we can still encourage other ways of being instead of that of the rational western human. In my work, I make use of seaweed to enter into my tummy, which has a different nature; it's a vegetative space, an ecosystem where things grow. These are conditions we all share, as we share our bodies and homes.

**Eduardo:** At a given point, you have to trust art; you have to trust that you're sending out a message that really comes from within yourself, like a seed in your head that you hope will sprout. In order for that seed to grow in someone else's mind, they have to go through a process of contemplation, an exercise of taking care of the message they receive. You don't need to slow down to reach contemplation. It's not about how slow you move. Contemplation transcends speed—just think of a cheetah and how it contemplates while running at great speed. It's about how much of the mirror you can turn around.

**Ingela:** That was beautifully put, Eduardo. Also, the seed can grow elsewhere besides your head. It can also grow in your fingertips.

**Eduardo:** I completely agree. Ours is an exhibition about not using your head!

**Bárbara:** Exactly! Humans think of each function as being performed by a specific organ. In the case of plants, these functions spread through their entire extension. Like leaves, we can also breathe through our skin, not just with our lungs.

**Patricia:** Have any of you read Eduardo Kohn's book *How Forests Think?* According to Kohn, "Artists can be at the avant-garde. My work resonates with

artists because they are already thinking with and like forests. They have the pulse of the planet because they know how to dream. They are the psychic avant-garde. They resonate with what's going on and they know what the problems are."

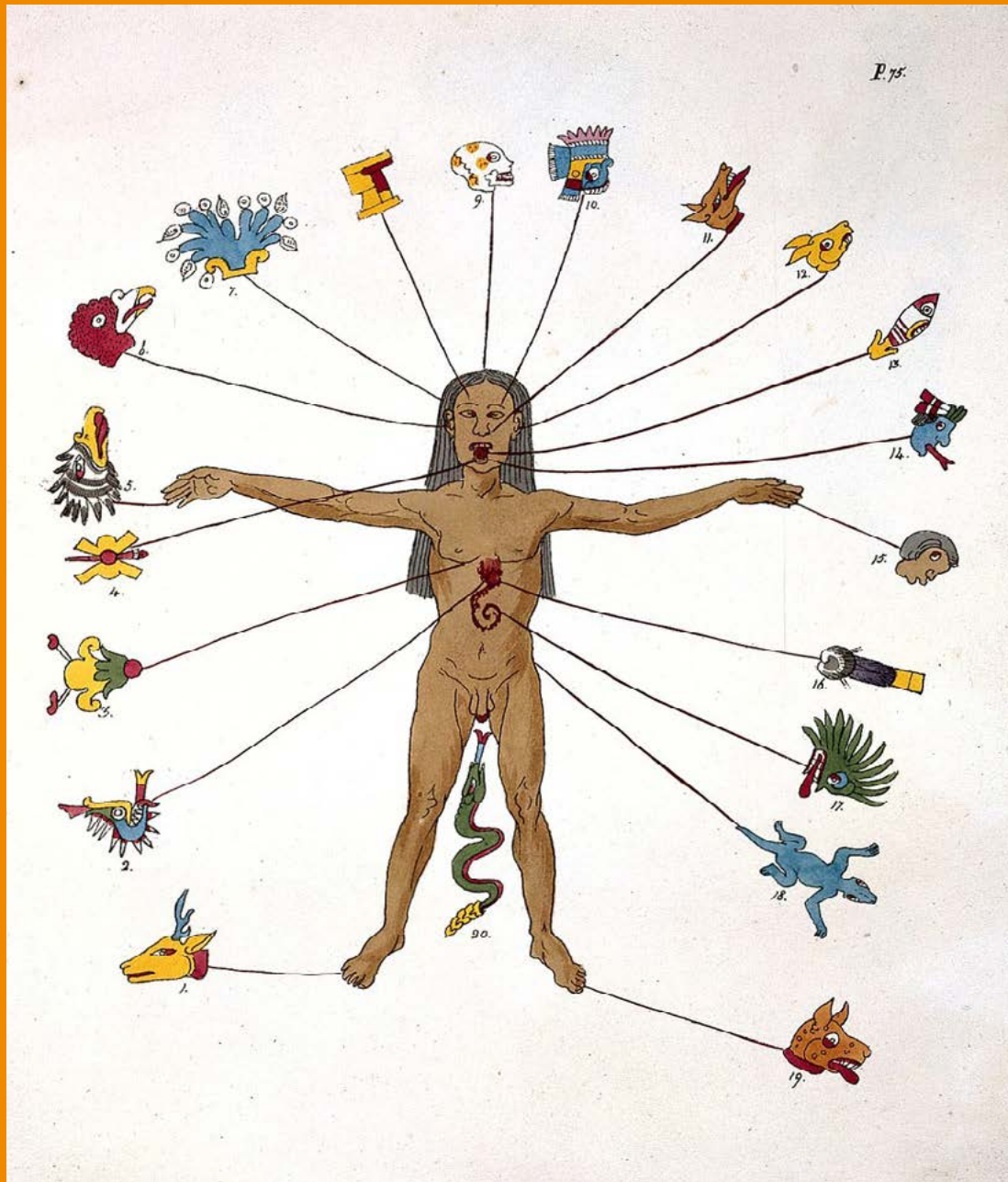
**Bárbara:** Yes, Kohn's book is an exceptional exercise on turning our ethnographic attention to the non-human and how the "symbols" that form the basis of human thinking and language reinforce this pervasive dualistic separation between humans and other beings. Like you, he believes that *thinking like a forest* can inspire us and attune us to the ecological relationships in which we exist!

\* Project Assistant, Wellcome Collection, London.





Viscount Edward King Kingsborough,  
*Antiquities of Mexico* (Vol. 2), 1831  
Wellcome Collection, London



John Eliot Howard,  
*Illustrations of the Nueva quinologia of Pavon*, 1862  
Wellcome Collection, London





# Perceptive Activity

16

I

Plants shed the sheets of paper regaining moisture, volume and colour. Regaining their life.

Labels peel off; descriptions and classifications are erased.

Latin nomenclature disappears: *Brugmansia*, *Datura*, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, *Psychotria viridis*, *Cinchona officinalis*, *Mandragora autumnalis*.

Seeds abandon the boxes in which they are preserved.

Plants abandon the botanical garden.

Herbariums and Natural History collections empty out.

The empire's ships leave their harbours in conquered lands and sail in reverse.

Seeds return to the hands of those who were forced to sow them.

The monoculture of imported species vanishes. Enslaved labourers return to their homeland and recover their freedom.

The ravaged fields are once again populated by a multitude of native species.

The usurped lands return to the care of ancestral communities.

The exogenous seed leaves the geography where it does not belong, where it is foreign and unknown, where it is unrespected.

The species are not discovered.

Routes of dispersal dissolve.

The plant does not reach the pharmaceutical industry; it is no longer a commodity, nor sold, nor patented, nor trademarked.

The colonial plantation system crumbles.

Modern Western botany loses its hegemony. Christian sources no longer Satanise the traditional medicinal uses of plants.

Ritual and magical bonds to the plant kingdom are no longer reduced to myth, folklore or mere representation.

Their sacred rites and ceremonies are not debunked as irrational or primitive or savage.

The persecution of ancestral spiritual authorities ceases.

The expansion of the empire wanes.

II

Seeds germinate in their native soil. In the warmer regions of Central and South America, in the western Amazon, in the temperate and humid mountainous regions, along the Andes in Colombia to northern Chile and even the southeast of Brazil, in the misty forests, in southern and central Europe and around the Mediterranean.

Vegetal beings grow.

Healing, powerful, propitiatory or punitive, visionary, sacred, symbolic, wise: magical plants.

Those who know them call them Angel's Trumpet, Borrachero, Toá...; Toloache, Mihayi, Huacacachu...; Quinine or Peruvian Bark; Yage, Ayahuasca, Caapi and Chacruna...; Mandrake.

Medicine.

They open portals of knowledge and healing to traditional medicine men and women, taitas, grandmothers and grandfathers, healers, dreamers, feelers, knowers, curacas and machi.

Spiritual authorities that are recognised, accepted and respected by their communities.

Thanks to their manifold powers, visionary plants serve as antidepressants, anaesthetics, aphrodisiacs and fertility enhancers.

They favour the favourable, counter evil, differentiate between sacred and profane spaces, invoke supernatural forces, benign or evil, and provide protection.

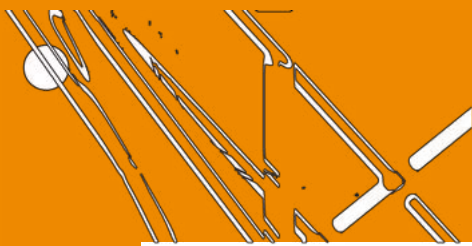
In the form of punishment, they are capable of annulling the will, producing pain or discomfort, bringing poverty, causing madness and even death.

Medicinal plants are collected with respect for the protective spirit of their native land.

The sacred plant is extracted only as much as is needed to serve the healing purpose.

The people retribute by protecting the plant and protecting its sacred territory.

The bond between the plant, human and non-human worlds is reciprocal.



## Angélica Muñoz

(Researcher of contemporary artistic practices)



### III

Knowledge of their powers reaches the present through dreams, careful observation and initiatory practices.

Ritualised space and time, as well as music and song, enable the alliance with vegetal beings to communicate with the questioning world.

The sacred plant modifies direct perception: filling its gaps and enriching it.

Healers embark on “magical flight”, they attain remote vision, they interpret the signs, omens, imperatives; they diagnose and cure.

Complementarity governs the bond between plant, human, and invisible worlds.

Each becomes a mirror of the other.

Female and male forces combine and form alliances, the same among plants, humans and more-than-humans.

Body, mind, the spiritual, animal and vegetal worlds harmonised: the pluriverse of the living.

A scanner captures the image of a plant along with a coloured card and a ruler.

The plant now circulates in the abstract space created by 1s and 0s.

It can be enlarged, shrunk or even downloaded.

They say that observing the plant reveals its properties to the suitable reader.

In heavily westernised cultures, visionary plants are primarily perceived as toxic drugs.

But the difference between a poison, a medicine and a psychoactive drug is only the dose.

The same substance is considered legal or illegal depending on the cultural context and the historical moment.

Appropriation.

Biopiracy and large-scale extractivism, the new forms of colonialism that silence numinous knowledge and subjugate peoples.

Ancestral authorities are imprisoned, even murdered, for defending their territories.

Their communities are displaced.

Indigenous peoples reclaim their right to the ritual use of sacred plants.

Ritual and medicinal uses of plants are also forms of resistance.

The digital paradigm, ruled by unbridled neoliberalism, brings new disease, trauma and malaise.

We create new totems and new rituals.

The body is reunited with its ancestral memory and its contemporaneity through sacred plants.

Alliances are woven between organic plant, digital and body technologies.

The system is hacked.

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Patricia Domínguez,  
*Madre Drone*, 2020



*Machi on Rehue*  
Wellcome Collection, London



*By permission of the South American Missionary Society.*  
**A WITCH-DOCTOR OF ARAUCANIA.**



Patricia Domínguez,  
*Matrix Vegetal; Mandrágora*, 2021  
(detail)



Denis Dodart and Nicholas Robert,  
*Estampes pour servir à l'histoire des plantes*, 1701  
Wellcome Collection, London





About

*A Great Seaweed Day*

(2018–2020)

Ingela Ihrman



*A Great Seaweed Day* began in the stomach: that sensitive spot where the flow of energies and the flow of emotions come together. Bowel pain, or stomach pain, can be caused by any number of things: sometimes it can be nervous unrest, other times it may be too many plums or even the presence of a bleeding ulcer. The stomach is as crucial to the body as it is to the mind. However, it is also a mystery. I see it as I see the cosmos: both are infinite and difficult to interpret, even if the stomach is part of the body and the body is part of the cosmos.

When I began working on the material that would subsequently take the shape of the sculptures of *A Great Seaweed Day*, I was trying to approach my own stomach, to listen to it while allowing it its own space. By way of research and inspiration, but also rest and convalescence after an exhausting period in my life, I spent some time in different places by the sea—in Scotland, the Koster Islands, and Malmö, my hometown—alone or in the company of old and new friends. I came across seaweed and other marine plants that had been swept up with the tide or were to be found in the stretches between the beach and the sea. I would sometimes gather the ones I deemed prettiest and take them home to dry. I also learnt a lot about metabolism, permaculture, bacterial flora of the stomach and what is known as the intestinal brain—the nervous system of the gut.

About one hundred trillion microbes—including bacteria, fungi and viruses—coexist in the inside and outside of every human being. Roughly eighty per cent of them live in the gut; microbes proliferate very comfortably in that humid, warm and nutrient-filled environment of the human body, feeding on what we have previously eaten. It has recently been learned that our gut microbiota is more important than we thought. In their search for a new way to look at the relationship between human beings and other forms of life, researchers have begun to use the term “holobiont”: an ecological unit in which the host/human body and all the microorganisms that inhabit it come together in a joint entity of mutual dependency and benefit.

The enteric nervous system—or abdominal brain—is a network of nerve fibres that surrounds the gut. The abdominal brain communicates with the brain in the head, but also generates emotions and physical sensations which the conscious brain cannot control. This second brain, the abdominal brain, can make us feel unwell,

suffer constipation, feel “butterflies in the stomach” or experience peace and calm. The concept of having an “upset stomach” connects the psychological sphere to the physical sphere, like two sides of the same coin, as it were.

I use green seaweed (*Ulva intestinalis*) as a link between gut flora and marine flora: a slippery channel for returning to the water and approaching those photosynthetic forms of life which have the gift of capturing the sun’s energy by means of changes in pigment and colour.

Several of the seaweed sculptures that make up *A Great Seaweed Day* are too large for me to handle. They slip from my arms and slide between my fingers. They hang limply, as if they had just been snatched from the rising thrust of the sea. Some of them are soft and viscous to the touch. Others are in a drier, stiffer stage.

The sculptures are made of different types of cloth, flour, joiner’s glue, silicone, putty, textile dyes, acrylic paint, foam rubber, lacquer and other materials found in the city in which I live. The red, brown or green colour of the seaweed has to do with the depth reached by the different wavelengths of light. I paint my sculptures in a manner that reminds us of how different pigment layers of watercolours gradually make up transparent membranes, exactly the same way as the delicate cell strata in the dry seaweed of herbariums.

The title of the series, *A Great Seaweed Day*, is taken from the diary of Margaret Gatty (1809–1873), an English botanist who felt a special passion for seaweed. She lived in England between 1809 and 1873. Her vibrant interest in marine algae developed at the age of thirty-nine, when she travelled to the seaside to breathe the pure ocean air and recover from seven exhausting pregnancies. Although Margaret would still have another three children, for the rest of her life she combined motherhood with her scientific career in the field of marine botany, with a formidable predilection for seaweed. Most of the pages of her diary are full of entries regarding family dinners, social visits and other aspects of the life of a high-society woman. On some pages, however, we read: “A GREAT SEAWEED DAY.” Her use of double underlining and capital letters gives us an idea of her excitement and a feeling of utter fulfilment.

Ingela Ihrman,  
*A Great Seaweed Day*, 2019



Ingela Ihrman,  
*A Great Seaweed Day*, 2019



Ingela Ihrman,  
*A Great Seaweed Day*, 2019





# Vegetal Transmutation

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Eduardo Navarro  
and Michael Marder

(Ikerbasque Research Professor of Philosophy, University of the Basque  
Country [UPV-EHU], Vitoria-Gasteiz)



Please, use these performative instructions to explore the exhibition,  
the artworks and the space as a plant would.

\*\*\*\*\*

Take a moment to draw a cosmic breath with your whole body,  
slower than any breath you have ever taken in your life.

Close your eyes. See and hear with your skin as you embody the  
density that emanates from within the seed of your thoughts. Register  
the vibrations rippling throughout the space around you and the radiant  
waves enveloping you. Caress the air with your hands, petting its flows  
with each fingertip. Feel how grounded, yet free, you are—stable,  
but supple.

Your skin is more than skin. It is at the same time an enormous leaf in  
which your whole body is wrapped, as well as a respiratory system and  
a number of sense organs, photosensitive and acoustically engaged.

Break out into light while staying connected to the dark and the obscure.  
Your fingers are roots and branches. There are more fingers branching  
out from your fingers in order for you to hug the earth and the sky  
better, more thoroughly.

One arm stretches tall; the other seeks deep in the soil. Span these  
extremes with your midsection: your chest, your trunk. Pay equal  
attention to both arms, orientations, worlds. Receive the kisses of the  
sun on your eyelids, ears, mouth, cheeks, fingers... Imbibe the cool  
moistness of the earth with the other arm and a part of your trunk.

Become the crossing between the warmth that gently touches  
you and the coolness you soak up.

Your limbs rotate in every direction,  
weightlessly reaching out to light and to darkness. Grow little by little,  
both intensively in time and extensively in space. Contract, minimize  
yourself, decay. Grow from contracting; contract from growing.

Focus on the soles of your feet as they absorb energy from planet  
Earth with every breath. Concentrate on the crown of your head,  
receiving the energy of the atmosphere. More like a tree crown, it is no  
longer a head. Think as you are breathing and perceiving—with your  
whole body, skin, limbs, lips, tips and edges. Do not hoard thoughts in  
your brain. Instead, let them circulate, like sap, in every part of yourself.

You are in an endless state of communion and infinite contemplation  
with other natural elements and beings. Can you see with your skin and  
hear with your arms? Can you think together with the air and the sun  
and the soil? Can you dream with your feet? Imagine with  
your fingertips?

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Perhaps, there are other plants sharing the space with you. Acknowledge these vegetal beings as you gradually move around in a wordless communicative practice. Experiment with the language of gestures, of physical expressions and forms. A choreography of touching without touching: the language of plants.

Move in the place where you are and sense the place moving along with you, growing and contracting rhythmically. Care for your place and for your attachment to it. You do not have your place; the place embraces you in itself. Render it equally welcoming, open to others. Experience your place as always the same and radically different, ramified and attuned otherwise in each instant. What does it mean for you to be at home there?

Your breathing is in constant dialogue with your surroundings. Breathe in your depths, with the lungs, and on the surface, with the skin. Re-establish the ties between inner and outer breathing to sustain a respiratory conversation with the world. Root in your body through this double breath.

Inhale the space,  
exhale the sky.

You are tending to your impulses, decisions and actions on a horizontal plane, letting them become a holistic garden. Nurture it with your breath and the humid density of the obscure ground, from which they spring.

As you are very slowly dying, while also staying alive, your body becomes the soil you are living in. You are perpetually feeding yourself and others in a delicate equilibrium.

Feel the slow rotations of the cycle of life. In tandem with it, let fresh sprouts, bulbs and seeds in the space gradually take over. Nourish and support them from below. Allow the subtle movements of air and visible or invisible winged creatures to carry your seeds and pollen like messages across time. Disseminate yourself, holding nothing back.

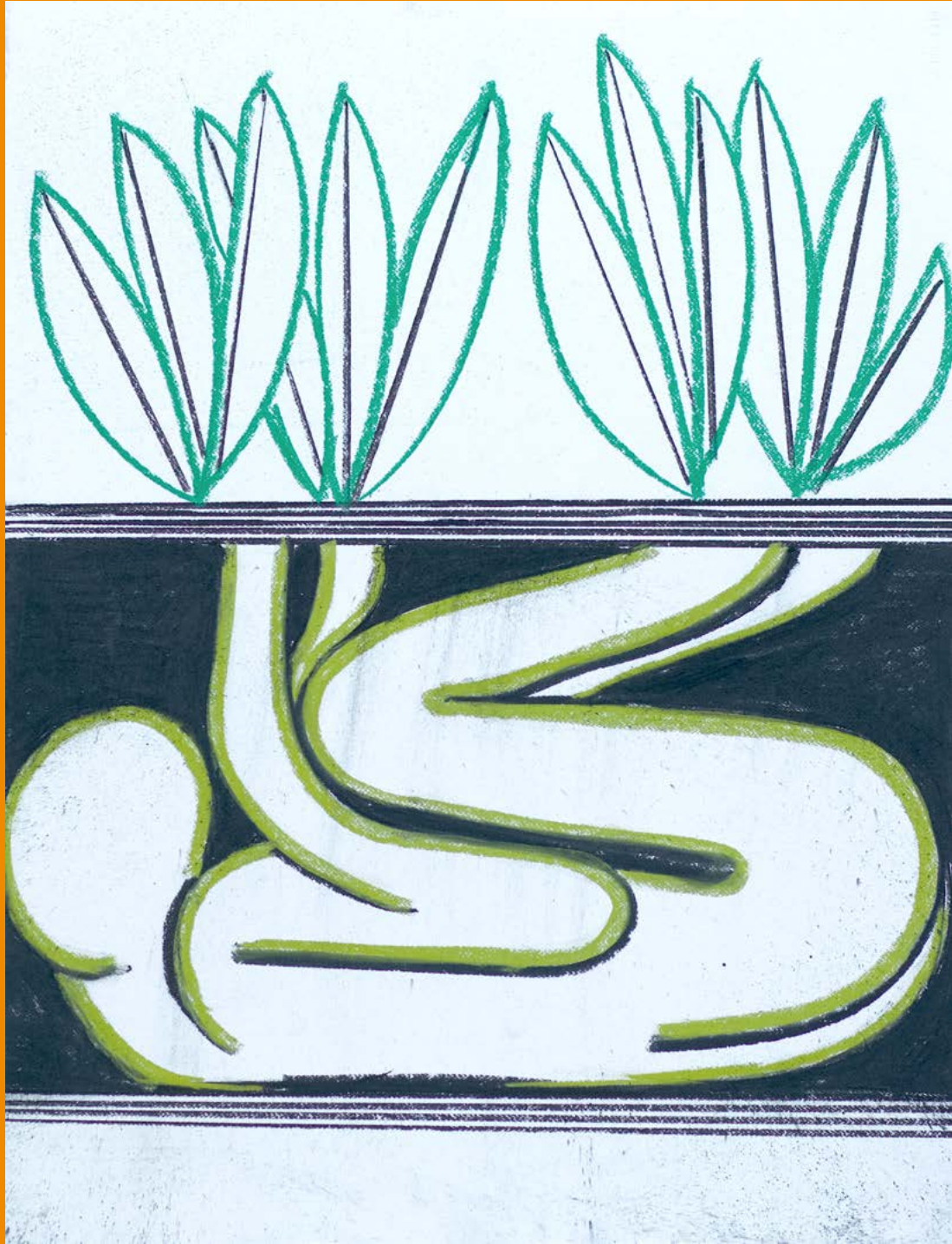
Repeat outside the space,  
weightlessly reaching out to light and to darkness.

Eduardo Navarro,  
*Photosynthetics*, 2021  
Photo: Sofia Jallinsky





Eduardo Navarro,  
*Photosynthetics*, 2021  
Photo: Sofia Jallinsky



Eduardo Navarro,  
*Photosynthetics*, 2021  
Photo: Sofia Jallinsky



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Patricia Domínguez and Eduardo Navarro's commissions are developed in partnership with Delfina Foundation.

Collection research and texts for Patricia Domínguez's commission: Kim Walker, Cinthya Lana and Dominic Neergheen.

The ongoing collaboration with various partners, practitioners and collections will culminate with the exhibition *Rooted Beings* at Wellcome Collection in 2022.

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This exhibition is a collaboration between La Casa Encendida and Wellcome Collection, London

**LA CASA ENCENDIDA**  
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## Exhibition

*A Plant Encounter: Patricia Domínguez, Ingela Ihrman and Eduardo Navarro*

05.28.2021 – 09.19.2021

## Rooms

B and C



## La Terraza Magnética. A Plant Encounter

Cinema and concerts  
Saturdays and Sundays  
4 July – 29 August

## Preta, by Lucrecia Dalt

Instalation  
8 June – 29 August  
Turret 1

## “Cómo contar la historia de nuestras plantas”, with NØCollective

Course  
01 – 29 June  
Tuesdays and Thursdays: 6 pm – 8 pm  
Online activity

## Clarice Lispector Cycle “La ecología del alma”

Course  
With Beatriz Azevedo, Andrea Jeftanovic, Isabel Mercadé, Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego and Elena Losada Soler  
Wednesdays, 02 – 23 June: 6 pm – 8 pm  
Friday, 11 June: 6 pm - 8 pm  
Online activity

## “La ecología del alma”

Conversations  
With Benjamin Moser, Nérida Piñón and Ignacio Castro Rey  
04 – 25 June  
Online activity

## “En torno a las exposiciones”

Workshop  
Saturday, 12 June: 11 am – 1 pm  
For boys and girls ages 6 to 9

## La Casa Encendida

Ronda de Valencia, 2  
28012 Madrid  
T 91 506 21 80  
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## Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday  
10 am to 10 pm  
Exhibition spaces are  
cleared at 9:45 pm

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