

MIYA MASAOKA

REFUGE

IN THE

VEGETAL

WORLD

FUNDING Dieses Programm findet im Rahmen der Reihe "Topographies of Hearing" der 2024 Ausgabe von MaerzMusik statt. Das Projekt wird durch den Hauptstadtkulturfonds gefördert.

**S A V V Y CONTEMPORARY**  
**THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS**

**MAERZ**  
**MUSIK**  
Berliner Festspiele

HAUPT  
STADT  
KULTUR  
FONDS

SOLO EXHIBITION

WITH Miya Masaoka

ON SHOW 18.03.–14.04.2024

Thursday–Sunday 14:00–19:00

SAVVY TOURS IN SAVVY TONGUES

21.03.2024	16:00	IN ENGLISH	Miya Masaoka
23.03.2024	16:00	IN ENGLISH	Lili Somogyi
28.03.2024	18:00	MAGYARUL	Lili Somogyi
12.04.2024	18:00	AUF DEUTSCH	Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock

ACTIVATIONS IN SOUND

17.03.2023 15:00

Opening Performance of *Anamnesis* WITH Miya Masaoka

23.03.2024 17:00

Performance *Cubistics* WITH Zeynep Ayşe Hatipoğlu

14.04.2024 17:00

Performance *Cubistics* WITH Zeynep Ayşe Hatipoğlu und Biliana Voutchkova

ON OUR SAVVYZLAR RADIO WAVES

24.03.2024

16:00 Miya Masaoka: *For Birds, Planes and Cello*

17:00 Interview with Miya Masaoka

07.04.2024

16:00 KUPFERGARTEN A conversation between Christina Kubisch and Antonia Alampi

TEAM

ARTISTIC DIRECTION Renan Laru-an Kamila Metwaly

CURATION Billy Fowo Lili Somogyi

PRODUCTION Billy Fowo

PROJECT MANAGEMENT Onur Çimen Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock

GENERAL MANAGEMENT Lema Sikod

COMMUNICATION Anna Jäger

GRAPHIC DESIGN Juan Pablo García Sossa

ART HANDLING Ayham Allouch Rey Domurat Jesse Omamogho Julian Frank Zehnder

LIGHT Emilio Cordero

TECH Bert Günther

SAVVY.DOC Sagal Farah Onur Çimen

INTERNSHIP Vanessa Garcia Just Eboa

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# TRACING REFUGE IN THE VEGETAL WORLD

TEXT BY LILI SOMOGYI

“Such a co-existence with vegetal beings – I could almost say: this vegetal existence – keeps me alive and secretly goes with my words. In other words: can I still return among humans, and through what path?”

– Luce Irigaray

Presented as the 8th collaboration between SAVVY Contemporary and MaerzMusik 2024, REFUGE IN THE VEGETAL WORLD is a solo exhibition and activation series featuring composer, sound artist, musician Miya Masaoka. The project takes cues from the seminal work *Through Vegetal Beings*, co-authored by Luce Irigaray, and highlights Miya Masaoka's lifelong body of work, dissecting the significance of vegetal lives, and exploring the myriad possibilities of collaboration between humans and more-than-human entities. Be it an installation, live performance or composition, the context in which each work exists and is presented is central to the artist's exploration.

The exhibition delves into Masaoka's multifaceted approach to sound and her profound connection to natural beings. Masaoka manifests as a shape-shifter, seamlessly transitioning between various roles such as composer, performer, sound maker, and facilitator. Her identity undergoes a continuous metamorphosis from one piece to the next. In one work, her body transforms into a living canvas where bees congregate and rest, where hands serve as vessels for translating sounds derived from the energies released by plants. On another occasion, Masaoka taps into the direct energy of plants, finding echo in the lineage of deity spirits like the Kamui or Inau from Ainu mythology. These plants hold a vital significance, a crucial role on the stage during performances in Japanese tradition – an ancestry that Masaoka summons frequently in her practice. She invokes her alter persona, Hiko Hiko, echoing the lineage of shamans, acting as a conduit that connects with the divine. In her sonic pieces, more-than-human beings are active collaborators and essential components of a rich sonic tapestry. She follows the path of water through human-made constructions such as fountains and pipes, reverberating its sonic footprint in a variety of ways.

## WALK THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Upon entering the space, visitors are greeted by an immersive sound installation titled *Lingering*. This piece invites guests to embrace transitions, encouraging them to wander, reflect, or simply close their eyes and absorb the atmosphere of the space. The hyper-directional speakers employed in this installation react to the movements of individuals, sparking an interaction between the audience and the equipment. As spectators traverse the area, distinct reactions will produce a unique composition generated in real life. Before our ears receive its sound, the landscape of dirt meets our eyes and draws us in. What we see are subtle movements of the soil created by microphones planted beneath the surface. With each shift of the earth, a soft, rhythmic sound akin to gentle blubbling emanates, captivating our senses. This unique interplay between the soil's composition and its movements creates a symphony of sounds, aptly titled *The Earth Codes*, as if the earth itself is communicating through its gentle motions and auditory cues. In the backdrop, forest spirits dance upon the wall in the engrossing three-channel video installation titled *Plant People in Forest*. This entrancing display invokes traditional Japanese festivals and rituals taking place in forests. In the piece, musicians assume alter personas, entering into a realm where they harmonise with each other and their surroundings, inviting exploration of a new inner world through their transformative experience. Continuing along this green thread, we encounter the interactive plant installation *My Life as a Plant*. It summons visitors to come close, encouraging tactile exploration and interaction as it responds to their presence. In this way, the work articulates the subtle and intricate language of plants – a communication invisible and incomprehensible to human perception. Walking on after this vegetal conversation, we see large-scale prints from the project *Monumenta Ethereal* on the wall, depicting the concept of a feminised monument following the water's path, from fountain to fountain, through the city of Rome. They invite viewers to contemplate themes of memory culture and remembrance within the public spaces of Rome, a city of ancient history, where the weight of the past

is palpable at every turn. The images raise important questions about the representation of a primarily male-oriented (his-)story and identity in contemporary society.

Upon entering the basement, visitors are welcomed by a sound installation titled *Natural Signs*, marking another immersive transition space into the pulsating resonance of the underground. The title is a play on the term “sinusoidal,” which refers to sine waves – the foundational elements used in creating sound compositions through oscillators and filters. Within this installation, sine waves generate rhythmic patterns with varying tones, intertwining and harmonising to create a vibrant array of sound frequencies. The piece *Cubistics* is presented as a floating wooden cube with a projected animation on the wall. Initially conceived as a performance element, the cube functioned as a surface for sound mapping during the performance. As sound interacted with the cube, it was translated into music, drawing the audience into the scoring process in real-time. Thus, the audience played a significant role in comprehending and actively participating in the unfolding of the musical composition. On the opposite wall, coming from *Plumbing Noises and Their Causes*, a piercing light illuminates a whispering toilet, beckoning viewers to lean in closer than comfort permits to hear its secrets. The toilet bowl itself evokes the spirit of Duchamp, yet with a twist – it bears a little heart shaped form drawn by the artist, challenging the male-centric and genius-focused narrative of art history. Nestled within the shelter of a small room, visitors encounter the video installation *Adventures of the Solitary Bee*. Here, the artist’s body becomes a vessel for a bee colony, juxtaposed with a text exploring the inherent violence within the hive and the bee individuals who opt to forsake their collective existence.

After engaging with the art works, you are invited back upstairs to our documentation centre, the S A V V Y .doc. Here, a Listening Station invites you to scroll and listen through a collection of readings and music that delve into the concepts explored within the exhibition.

The exhibition at S A V V Y Contemporary will be accompanied by performative and sonic activations throughout and after the MaerzMusik festival, both within our physical space and on the radio waves. The exhibition will open with a performance by Miya Masaoka, embodying her pseudo persona, Hiko Hiko. Zeynep Ayşe Hatipoğlu will perform *Cubistics* on 23.03.2024. For the closing ceremony of the exhibition, Hatipoğlu will return to engage with the piece in a different constellation, collaborating with violinist Biliana Voutschkova on 14.04.2024. Additionally, we are expanding our reach to the waves of our radio platform, SAVVYZΛR, where Masaoka's composition, *For Birds, Planes, and Cello*, as well as an interview with the artist will be featured on 24.03.2024.

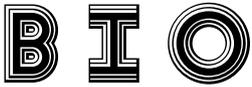
## O N R E F U G E

The concept of “refuge” embodies a dual sanctuary from both physical danger and emotional distress, often intricately entwined. Within contemporary discourse, it carries a profound weight and significance, representing a place sought by those fleeing various humanitarian catastrophes in search of shelter and safety. Miya Masaoka’s body of work calls upon the urgency to reconsider how we relate to the natural world around us, as well as within us, challenging the continuous “othering” of these natural beings. Her artistic endeavour invites us to immerse ourselves in her world, defined by the lack of familiar rules and orders. Within this exhibition, artworks of two decades come together in a shared sense of urgency.

Masaoka articulates this urgency as a plea to reassess and reevaluate our relationship with the world that surrounds us. Recognizing the “human” in the “more-than-human” becomes paramount in this discourse. Amidst the persistent and intensifying waves of war, humanitarian crises and environmental emergencies, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the underlying societal afflictions that perpetuate the dehumanisation of specific individuals, regions, and ecosystems. These pathologies are rooted in a binary framework of perception, which fragments our collective consciousness and impedes a comprehensive grasp of our interconnected existence. Each piece she presents beckons us to transcend our habitual modes of engagement, encouraging a deep listening that encompasses not only our ears but our entire body and being. In this process, we encounter unfamiliar and perhaps disconcerting sensations, not within a realm of absolute safety, but rather within a realm of exploration and transformation. It is an invitation to recalibrate, to engage in play, to touch, to lea(r)n, to wander, and to dream. By seeking refuge in the vegetal world, we embark on a journey of rediscovery – not only returning to nature but also reconnecting with our own self.

Before, while or after delving into the exhibition, we invite you to peruse an interview with Miya Masaoka, conducted by Lili Somogyi and Billy Fowo. The interview, this “technology of curiosity” in the words of our colleague Hubert Gromny, unravels questions around Miya Masaoka’s lifelong practice. Thinking beyond the anthropocentric viewpoint that rigidly distinguishes between humans and the so called non-humans, the works presented in the exhibition are continual endeavours to re-contextualize the perceived passivity and objectification of plants and animals as well as musical instruments.





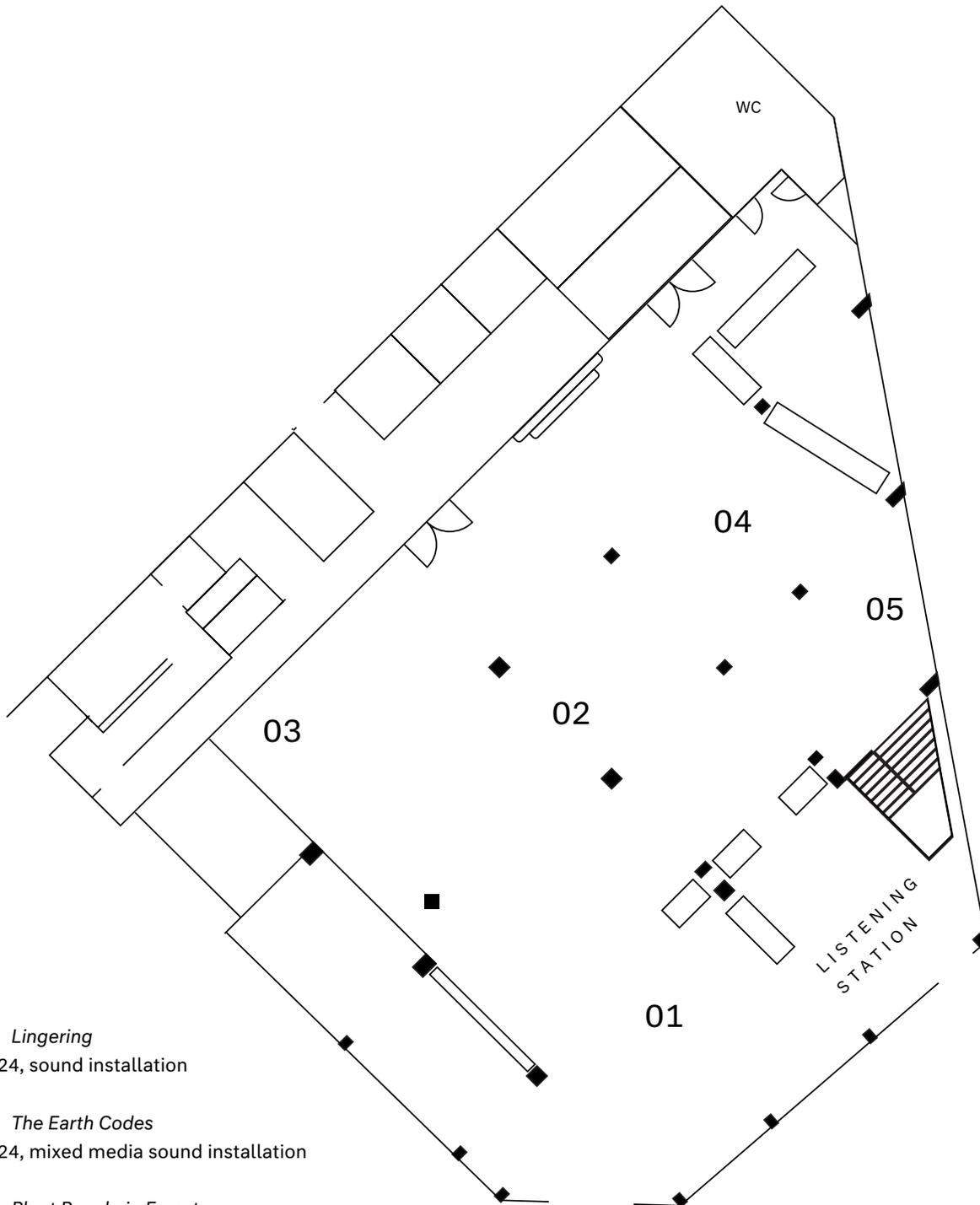
Miya Masaoka is associate Professor at Columbia University and Director of the Sound Art MFA Program. The composer, sound artist and musician creates works for orchestra, acoustic phenomena, video, electronics and installation. Whether recording inside physical objects, plants or the human body or within architecturally resonant spaces or outdoor resonant canyons, Masaoka creates incongruencies that feed the paradox of the contemporary condition.

She is the recipient of the Rome Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright, and commissions from the Fromm Foundation, the Library of Congress, EMPAC and the Studio Residency at Park Avenue Armory. Her works have been presented at the Venice Biennale, MoMA/PS1, Governors Island (NY), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and Kunstmuseum Bonn, and Darmstadt. Her compositions have been performed by the BBC Scottish Orchestra, Jack Quartet, MIVOS, Dal Niente, the S.E.M. Ensemble, Volti, Bang On a Can All-Stars, Either/Or Ensemble, Del Sol Quartet, Volti, Ensemble Mosaik, and Joan Jeanrenaud, formerly of Kronos.

As an improviser, Masaoka has performed and recorded with artists such as Pauline Oliveros, Cecil Taylor, Pharoah Sanders, Henry Brandt, Christian Wolfe, Andrew Cyrille, Reggie Workman, Gerry Hemingway, Zeena Parkins, Myra Melford and a Duo CD with Anthony Braxton on RogueArt Records. Her teachers include Alvin Curran, David Tudor, Maryanne Amacher and Togi Suenobu.

Her writings, such as “The Vagina is the Third Ear” or “Vaginated Chairs”, have been published by *The Theater Review* (NYU) and *Peripheries* (Harvard Divinity School's Center for the Study of World Religions).

# FLOORPLAN



01 *Lingering*  
2024, sound installation

02 *The Earth Codes*  
2024, mixed media sound installation

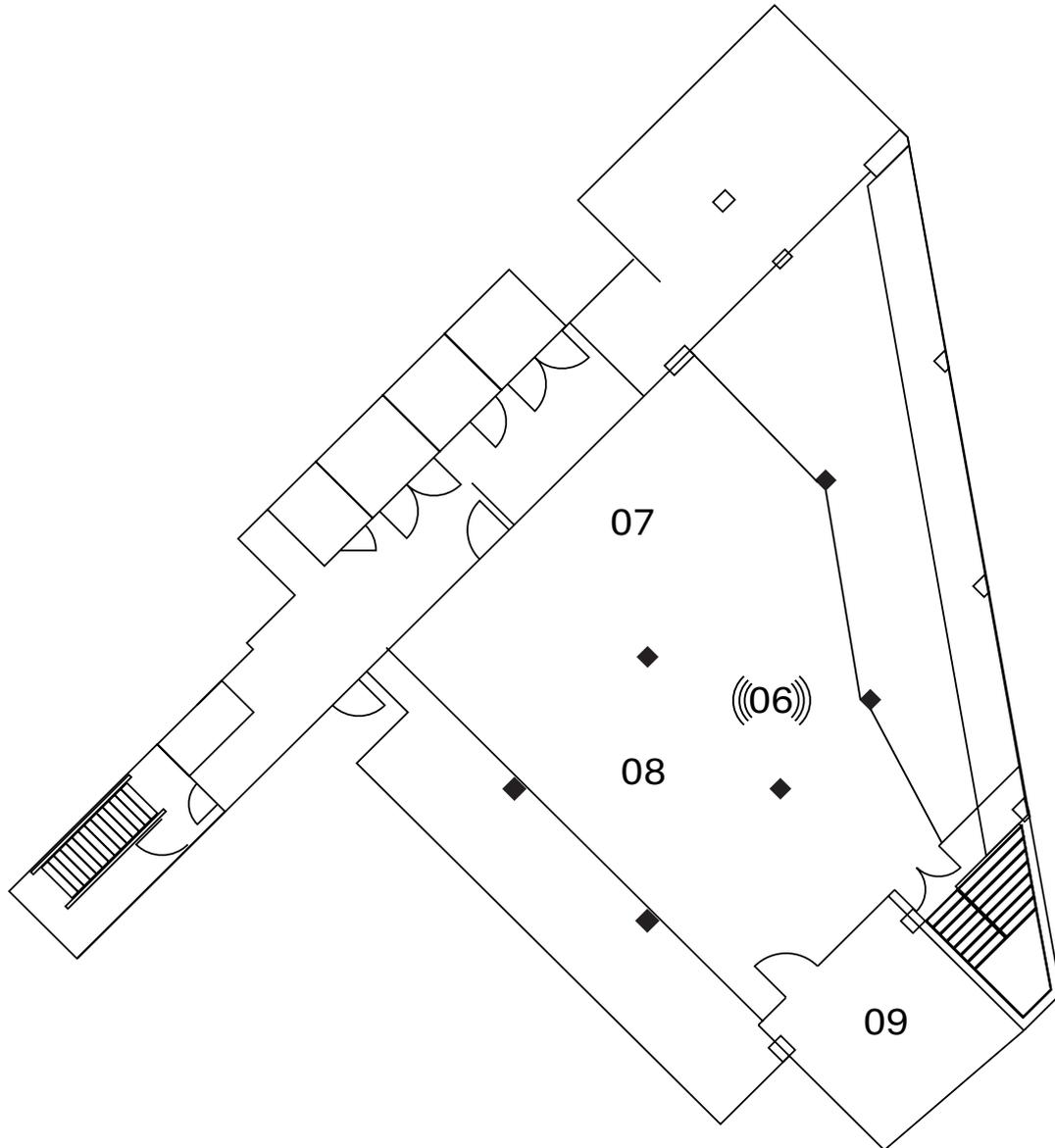
03 *Plant People in Forest*  
2021, multi-channel video work

04 *My Life as a Plant*  
2019, mixed media installation

05 *Monumenta Ethereal* \*  
2024, mixed media installation

\*These prints are available for purchase. If you are interested, kindly reach out to [studio@miyamasaka.com](mailto:studio@miyamasaka.com).

# FLOORPLAN



06 *Natural Signs*  
2024, sound installation

07 *Cubistics*  
2019, mixed media installation

08 *Plumbing Noises and Their Causes*  
2024, mixed media installation

09 *Adventures of the Solitary Bee*  
2000, two-channel video

“ I THINK IT'S  
HEALTHY FOR  
EVERYONE TO  
HAVE SOME KIND  
OF ALTERNATIVE  
PERSONA. ”

MIYA MASAOKA

IN CONVERSATION WITH LILI SOMOGYI AND BILLY FOWO  
EDITED BY ONUR ÇIMEN AND ANNA JÄGER

SAVVY Let us start with a quote by Luce Irigaray that you shared with us and that became an anchoring point for our exhibition. It goes: “Such a co-existence with vegetal beings – I could almost say: this vegetal existence – keeps me alive and secretly goes with my words. Can I communicate it, and how, without betraying it, without forgetting it and forgetting myself in such a forgetting: without losing both it and myself? In other words: Can I still return among humans, and through what path?”<sup>1</sup> What are your thoughts about return and what or where is the act of return directed to? Is it a return to a specific space or time ?

MIYA MASAOKA [MM] With return, I am talking about entering a way of perceiving nature. Whether it is a plant or a tree, we meet them on our own terms, without thoughts of using or traditionally approaching nature. I want us to perceive nature with the idea in mind that these are autonomous beings. It changes how we think about them and how we perceive them. Combining that with listening and sound is a way of redirecting our senses, reapproaching how we live with various aspects of nature. This also extends to how we think about dirt and soil, about the roots and this underworld, which is another aspect of the plant that we don't necessarily see. The roots live in darkness, they are dark, their colour is dark, the colour of the dirt, of the roots, of the rhizomes. There are all these sociological components of colour that exist in society. Thinking about this aspect of the soil and the dirt and that world is enlightening because it is hidden from us

as we walk on top of the soil and on top of the earth, and not thinking much about what happens below this surface. Going back to your question of returning, I think about how we experience these kinds of autonomous beings, and thinking of them as autonomous beings is connected to how we respond to others, not just to plants, but to other beings like animals, people.

SAVVY Could you tell us more about your proposal for the exhibition at SAVVY and how you decided what should be included in your selection?

MM The title of the show is “REFUGE IN THE VEGETAL WORLD” which is a quote from philosopher Luce Irigaray, whose work has so much meaning for us today. It is really interesting for me to have works from different times in my life come together like this. I am now seeing connections that I didn't know existed before. For example, the piece “Adventures of the Solitary Bee” is from more than 20 years ago. I didn't think this somewhat humorous piece would have the kind of resonance that it can have now. Working with different aspects of the natural world, before this awareness of global warming, was very different. So it is very interesting now, there is so much urgency. How to respond to this urgency is so important, but it is not always obvious. I admire many activists working towards this urgency. As for the selection, I think there is a way of bringing together

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<sup>1</sup> Irigaray, Luce. *Through Vegetal Beings*. Columbia University Press, 2016.

different pieces that have existed in different venues at different times, and to have them now manifested all at one time is extraordinary. Of course, I don't see this happening too often.

S A V V Y Could you elaborate a bit about your shaman persona that you are invoking through the opening performance of the exhibition? How was this persona born? How do you transform into and out of this persona? The name of the alter persona is Hiko Hiko, who is a female shaman, right?

M M I think it is healthy for everyone to have some kind of alternative persona. It lets us live in a different way without so many restrictions. And we can inhabit another way of existing and from there we can have a path to a felt existence that can empower us in different ways. Sometimes that can take the form of de-powerment by actually leaving the self and becoming more like the air or the atmosphere – not necessarily as a performative figure, but a way of time travelling, a way of leaving our given reality without the use of psychedelics or something else. So, it has also to do with altered reality.

As for femaleness, I don't think of the persona as gendered. It is a kind of shaman, I would say. There are different kinds of evocative acts that can be unpredictable and not so prescribed. In different cultures the shaman can have possibilities of connecting with other realities. Not exclusively, but there is a healing aspect to it as well in the way that these altered perspectives can bring about positive states against maladies in different communities.

S A V V Y Is it some form of presence of spirituality? A connection with the divine or as you said, also other realities?

M M The role of shamans is also performative in different cultures. I don't want to dwell too much, because it can be an aspect of it, but not necessarily. This figure is not always a shaman. It is kind of just very non-performative. There is nothing to actually look at or to hear, but it is just a figure that appears and disappears, for example.

S A V V Y Could you maybe elaborate more on how other aspects of spirituality come up in your practice?

M M I have had quite a religious background. I used to say: "Oh, I don't really think about it so much." But actually, my childhood was very much surrounded by different kinds of religions growing up in the United States, including Baptist religions of speaking in tongues that my mother would force me to go to. For a number of years, I went to Quaker meetings in Palo Alto. And those are very interesting because there is no hierarchy of a mediator to another world. People just sit in benches facing each other. There is no pastor, there is no minister, there is no priest, but people talk

and use silence as a way of communicating to each other. Of course, I need to mention Buddhism and attending Buddhist funerals as a child, and later also as an adult, in different kinds of Buddhist communities in New York City. So, religion has been a big part of my life. But I haven't really integrated it in a very cohesive way perhaps. I feel like an independent person. I don't belong to any congregation, I should say.

S A V V Y I thought of spirituality in the way you mentioned the energy that plants release. What about this kind of presence of spirituality?

M M I mean, I am always cautious of words that are really gendered. And often, the word spirituality gets connected to being female, and then becomes summarily dismissed as being less serious. So, I don't use that word to describe my practice for those reasons.

S A V V Y How does this return to nature manifest for you, either visually or sonically, in your practice? How do you invite the audience to return to this deep connection with the nature around us?

M M We live in this world of manufactured goods, in this everyday life of tables and chairs and computers and cell phones, and these kinds of things. We often live in urban concentrations of people, whether it is New York City, Tokyo, Berlin,... This is the reality for so many people who for whatever reason are not living in the woods. But there is a way of perceiving ourselves as individuals and ourselves in the world. This dynamic of exterior and interior can be changed, can be fluid, and can be focused in different ways of listening or thinking. I misunderstood you first, I thought you were talking about returning to this world of manufactured tables, chairs, cell phones, computers, etc. And with that return from that space, we still can have some of that memory with us, that feeling of being with plants, trees and dirt.

But the other way round, in shifting our focus of perceiving when we are in our quotidian mode, we have a slightly different sense of alteration. Something has maybe changed a little bit in that mode. And something that motivates me to work through and to continue is the possibility of these subtle changes, incrementally little by little changing us as human beings, and how we think about fellow living things around us.

S A V V Y When you mentioned the healing aspect of returning to this alter persona, and then returning again to your human self, and thinking about how you are inviting people to come together and experience something like a sound installation, which translates the energy that comes from the plant, I feel it is about becoming one. So, we are returning to nature, but that means we are returning to ourselves because we are nature. And this is where this kind of binary thinking gets challenged. It feels like there is a connecting force and an invitation to expand and at the same time to return.

M M I think that is really well put. I just want to question this word, return. Return to what exactly? And what is it that we are really coming back to when we were never even in that place to begin with? So, there can be a return, but for me, it is not so much a return in the sense of going to someplace and then returning, going someplace else and then returning. It is more of a rethinking: it is new. It is not a return. It is a new way of thinking of even what happened twenty minutes ago. We are thinking differently from that person which we were twenty minutes ago, or that person we were twenty hours or twenty weeks ago. We are new beings at every moment in terms of cellular structure, in terms of different kinds of input of relationships that affect us through the external world. So we are always new beings at every moment. We never return to where we were, ever. We are always changing and progressing. So, I don't use that word return, either. Sorry. (laughing) I think by refusing certain words, all of a sudden, we are talking about all these other extraordinary things, right? Sometimes words can lock us into ideas. I am interested in the ideas opening up. In that sense, as autonomous beings, we are finding new ways to think about our relationship to the Anthropocene, to our environment.

S A V V Y If you think a little about the word turning, it is a continuous motion, actually. I love that etymologically "conversation" means to turn together. It means a continuous motion. Turning as a constant movement doesn't have a specific direction, up and down, anywhere. But it is in motion.

M M I love that! "Con" of course means "with", and then there is also a version. It is definitely something new. These are different versions of our interactions with each other, with a "con", and with a "version", a new version. It is interesting to think about how we can interact by rethinking how we use these words that mean interactions that we just assume. Breaking down the assumptions is a way of starting, of creating a new something.

S A V V Y Your practice brings together lots of different sounds: some of them are more traditional, and then some more electronic elements and much more. How do you work with their collaboration beyond this widely accepted idea of old and new forms?

M M All these questions are so good, but not easy to answer! First of all, listening is just one of the senses. But there is an aspect of how sound amplifies the difference of where sounds come from. The different kinds of technologies that exist can be the tools, not just the tools, but also a way of thinking of possibilities and capabilities. Even if analog synthesizers have sounds "canned", they have the capability of something being created from oscillators. These possibilities exist and how we are working with these can move us forward in ways that we think are vital, interesting, important. There is an aspect of aesthetics, and also

a drive or a desire, an obsession to move forward with a particular kernel of an idea that might make sense as we are working with an idea further down the road. What is interesting to me is that sometimes things don't make sense at the moment, but they do later on, eventually.

S A V V Y We are really interested in this process, because it almost sounds like you have an intuition. And if you follow it, it makes sense down the road.

M M For artists, to work with sound usually means working with some kind of technology, whether it is amplification from loudspeakers that are placed inside a tuba or some other resonant surfaces. Becoming familiar enough with all of the potential of technology is crucial. It is such a plastic, malleable way of working, like with clay or another kind of material. It becomes part of us. I think that there is a slippery slope with using technology, too, when it becomes the goal rather than the means to making art. Using these kinds of very trendy things can be tricky. But I think overall, having to think about what is possible in terms of sound diffusion, synthesis, working with wave-field synthesis, ways of working with sound in a space has changed me. I can think about sound and space differently from working with certain kinds of sound environments.

S A V V Y Is translation between these different technological languages of interest to you?

M M To give an example, for working with dirt, I was using geo-microphones and together with a friend who is an earthquake scientist we discussed different ways of recording earth as well as recording very small waves with a smaller, simpler geophone. I don't want to get too deep into the tech-nerdy world of microphones. But I do see what you are saying that different kinds of microphones are like different kinds of ears in that they hear really different ways. Some can hear sounds from far away, and other ones just very, very close. And different things are used to make that happen, while thinking: "How can we listen to this? How can we hear that? How can the public hear this or experience that? How would different microphones, and eventually speakers, work with these ideas, which are fluid and always changing?" This is all just to say that the technology is changing.

S A V V Y We are very interested in the role of the body – your body and the general female body – within your practice, especially regarding the question of vaginal listening. Are we listening with our vaginas, given that vaginas resemble ears? Are our vaginas active listeners? Is it somehow maybe in line with giving agency to seemingly inactivated entities?

M M Wow, that's a lot to talk about. Where to start? Maybe with the vagina as a third ear, which was my idea for a piece. Actually, the folds of the vagina resemble

the folds of the ear only without the cartilage. So the ear is like a hardened vagina in a sense. The vagina can be rethought as an organ of listening because people sit down on surfaces and feel the vibrations, reflective vibrations of different sounds that might be going on. But because of society's repressive views on sexual organs, it has been repressed with girls and women. This organ never developed into a device other than for sexuality and reproduction, but potentially it can have another role. Some of that might be serious, but also a way of nudging ideas further, even if it is not in total seriousness. There is also an element of humour and paradox that I think is an interesting area to work in. For that piece, I had twelve different chairs that are vibrating to a different frequency along a spectral grid. For example, at MoMA PS1, some people had small, little microphones that were put in the vagina, and then the wire came out down the pants. It was very discreet, people were sitting on chairs without knowing who had the microphones in their vaginas, and who didn't, because everybody is fully clothed. The sounds were put into the loudspeakers and mixed with the sounds from the chairs' vibrations. Initially the piece evolved with my students at Bard College. They were really eager to do it. For a while, it looked like it was too difficult for the university. Maybe it is, who knows, problematic!? For almost every generation, it seems, there is a need to discover these things for themselves. I was really inspired by young people wanting to do this piece.

S A V V Y We would like to ask about the different mediums in your practice, such as composition and installation. We are curious about how you make a decision when choosing a medium for a project. Do you think they are interchangeable?

M M Sometimes there are ways of conveying something that feels like this is going to work. Then I try it and it doesn't work. Artmaking often is immediate recognition of something that you believe will work, but also lots of trial and error. There are ways of working with these different ideas of pictures, abstract ideas that we have in our minds. For example, with C U B I S T I C S , which is a three-dimensional score, I wanted to bring the audience together with the musicians, creating an understanding of what the musicians were experiencing. So, during the performance there was this kind of iconic shape of a cube hanging from the ceiling. And as I was playing, sound would approach the cube very slowly, and then go along the lines of the cube, through the different factors, which would be depicted on the projection simultaneously. There is this element of the musicians moving through the three-dimensional score and the audience being right there with them as if they are understanding that process. This mental movement of the audience connects with both sound and visual aspects: there is a physical cube, there is also a computer-generated image of the sound moving through the cube and changing colour becoming more

complex with other sinuous lines through the cube and eventually filling with water and spinning and turning. That is maybe an example where there is an idea, and then trying to see how to make something that can achieve this idea. One thing doesn't always achieve everything. And it achieves different levels for different people. Everybody has a different sense of what works for them.

S A V V Y Then let us continue to walk through the exhibition and talk a little about each work. Watching T H E A D V E N T U R E S O F T H E S O L I T A R Y B E E , I felt a lot of tension. Visually, it has a soothing effect, but the text is a different story.

M M I was doing these different pieces with insects and interactions with insects as beings, autonomous beings, and sound making insects, mainly bees, but I also worked with Madagascar hissing cockroaches, which make really extraordinary sounds. They have an interesting role as an individual, but also as a colony. I find that a very fascinating phenomenon of living things. I researched these sound-making insects that are both individuals, and they are a group, there is not much distinction between them as a group and as an individual. I worked with a beekeeper for a while who brought the big demonstration hive to the performances. For these performances, string players played with the pitch of the bees, which was a round C sharp. So it was a kind of collaboration between these bees and the string players. As time went on, I knew that some documentation needed to happen because it wasn't sustainable to take bees to different venues and galleries. So we did a documentation of the performance and when I saw the footage, I found it a funny way of thinking about it. And so that's how that piece happened.

S A V V Y My next question is about M O N U M E N T A E T H E R E A L : Could you talk about this work and its context?

M M I was at the American Academy of Rome and while being in this beautiful place, I thought of different ways of covering. It is a way of negating a certain aspect of individuality in our body that might be pleasurable. There are so many ideas of what a monument is. The piece's title is a play on words, as monument is normally a masculine word with "o", and in this case, I made it "a", so it's *monumenta*. And ethereality is really something that is here for a moment and then not here. It is opposing this idea of something that lasts and lasts, as in permanence. The permanence of a monument is for people to perhaps remember something important, something sad, something majestic. But this idea of having something that initially resembles stone, but it isn't stone, it is something that is completely ethereal. In that sense, it works with sound and ethereality of sound, but it does have the sense of working with the memory and this impermanence and anti-monument of

things that will last into eternity, or for a very, very long time. I reflect on Rome because there's so many of the aqueduct systems that were important to Roman life, such brilliant and sophisticated systems for that time. In Rome, there are many sounds of water from all these different fountains that are there for the public. In a way, they are very democratic as they are for everybody. All those kinds of elements come together for me in the piece, *Monumenta Ethereal*.

S A V V Y So in a way there is a connection to T H E P L U M B I N G N O I S E S A N D T H E I R C A U S E S . Could you talk a little bit about that piece? Somehow you are humorously invoking the shaman, but then also in *Monumenta Ethereal*, you are questioning these figures that somehow exist outside of time, they are there forever and that will not be a victim of the fading of memory.

M M T H E P L U M B I N G N O I S E S A N D T H E I R C A U S E S was taken from an advertisement for a plumbing company, which is very funny, because the plumbing company listed all these noises, which almost sounded like a sound piece. If you hear a scraping noise, then you should do this; if you hear a deep loud noise, then this is what could be wrong. The sounds were all highlighted, like deep, loud noise, scraping sound, rattling sound, so it almost sounded like a homework assignment for sound students. I thought it was really funny. At the same time there is the very iconic work of Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, and my work is connected with it and other fountain pieces. The listener has to put their head into the toilet bowl to hear the softer sounds that are coming from the noise of the toilet bowl. So it is drawing the audience to listen to these sounds if they care to.

S A V V Y I would like to ask next about the P L A N T P E O P L E I N F O R E S T with Hiko Hiko, where your shamanic persona also comes back. Could you talk a bit about this piece?

M M I was working with an ensemble called the Ghost Ensembles and they had commissioned me to do a new piece. We did read these during different retreats in the forest. There are a lot of kinds of processions to the forest that take place in Japan for different rituals and festivals. It is quite common and that is a really strong image for me. We were working with the musicians in different ways, sometimes the score was very precise in terms of what to play exactly or when to play. And then other times, I felt it was possible to have this in a different environment, outside in the forest. Then I thought that this could be a way for them to become a little bit outside of themselves as musicians, that occupying, inhabiting this way of being into another kind of being. It also had to do with the score and the preparations before going to the forest, a way of focusing and concentrating on how we will be together doing music. I don't want to make it sound

like a marching band, because it was the complete opposite of that. But when you put on these uniforms of a marching band, you inhabit a different sense of self. There is a sense of unity in it. There is a sense of power, a sense of altering yourself, because everyone all of a sudden is wearing these uniforms and maybe helmets. There is something powerful in it.

S A V V Y It also reminds me of the energies and dynamics of carnival.

M M Yeah, that's really a great thing to think about. Because I think there is sometimes a perception that something that might seem performative has that quality for a public, but that is not the case for the person inhabiting that. Even if there is no public, like in a carnival, it is not necessarily performative for other people, but for yourself.

S A V V Y Which brings us again to the collective experience where there are so many energies released and experienced together. Can I ask you to talk about the main piece, and the renaming of it to *Lingering*?

M M One of the pieces is titled L I N G E R I N G . As we were talking about words before, I think of loitering and lingering. I don't know whether they have anything in common, maybe not. But loitering has got some kind of a negative connotation and lingering is almost something that we want to experience deeper, or again, or for a longer period of time, and therefore we linger on something. So, the idea is that there will be some kind of unpredictability of sounds that can appear out of nowhere with special speakers. This is based on working with the Wave Field Synthesis system that I did at EMPAC and some of those ideas have stayed with me. I think that the people will walk in the space, they will hopefully linger and walk and linger some more. In an installation situation, people linger in one thing more than another. And that is the point of their choice and how they move through a space, what is going on with the rest of their tasks for that day. But it is this act of lingering, which can get us to be there just maybe a few seconds more to reconnect with something or to want to experience something and want to understand something. Or you turn your head and say: "What is that? What is that going on over there?"

S A V V Y I really liked the anticipatory aspect of the title. It is almost rather a question mark than a statement. Let us move to M Y L I F E A S A P L A N T .

M M That is a work with a large life size plant and it is interested in the physiological response of the plant. Years ago, I worked with these medical EEG sensors and brain analyzers, and this work is a different form of it. Approaching and touching a plant creates a response internally from the plant. They have developed, from evolution, this very symbiotic relationship with insects and birds for their reproduction. For example there are

different ways of spreading their seeds with the birds eating them and then flying to another location. So, they are very sensitive to birds, insects, and humans in ways that are probably not fully understood. Considering these ways in which plants respond, I created this idea that plants have a memory of what it was like to be a small plant, a seedling. I live across the street from Central Park where I took some videos that are very slow. I would just sit there with the video camera for hours and take videos of the water, the dirt, insects on a rock.. I followed the idea that the plant has these memories of when it was a small plant. It means that plants have a past. The rings on a tree, they record their years much better than I do, for example. It means that this plant had a childhood, and is now reminiscing and remembering some scenes from its youth. In the exhibition, people can approach the plant and touch it. On the sand on the floor, there will be images of its youth, from its memory when it was a younger plant. Actually, the piece could also be called "My Life As a Younger Plant".

S A V V Y I think we reached the end of our questions for today. Thank you!

M M Thank you so much, you had such really great questions and made me think about things I hadn't thought about before. So, I really appreciate this time together.

## MORE INFORMATION

savvy-contemporary.com

S A V V Y Contemporary – The laboratory of form-ideas is an artistic organisation, discursive platform, place for good talks, foods and drinks – a space for conviviality and cultural plurilog. S A V V Y Contemporary is a public and independent organism in perpetual becoming, animated by around 25 members and a network of collaborators, co-creating community and communities it breathes with. Founded in 2009, S A V V Y Contemporary situates itself at the threshold of the West and the non-West to understand their conceptualisations, ethical systems, achievements, and ruins. It develops tools, proposes perspectives and nourishes practices towards imagining a world inhabited together. The space was founded in 2009 in Berlin-Neukölln by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, S A V V Y 's artistic director until 2022. From 2023 onwards, the space – located in Berlin-Wedding since 2016 – is under artistic direction by Renan Laru-an alongside the executive directors Lema Sikod and Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock.

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