

We are Compost / Composting the We

Alexandra Toland, Asad
Raza, Désirée Coral

Sat 30 July — Sat 10 September 2022
Tue - Sat / 11am - 6pm

CCA:

**Centre for Contemporary Arts,
350 Sauchiehall St.**



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



As part of the **22nd World Congress of Soil Science – Crossing Boundaries**, Changing Society, CCA were invited to respond and further expand our work and commitment to ecological questions and concerns. The exhibition **We are Compost / Composting the We** is the result of this. It forms a process of collaborative thinking between art, science and ancestral ways of knowing, continuing our work, through Glasgow Seed Library, of research, dialogue and experimentation into solutions for seed saving, food politics, land sovereignty and how decolonial practices can work within an institutional framework.

The exhibition guides you through three separate but entangled works following the cyclical processes of composting: first of knowledge, then materials and finally histories, to ask what new kinds of transformation are possible when we read, share, shred, till, test, plant and grow collectively with the land and its soils.

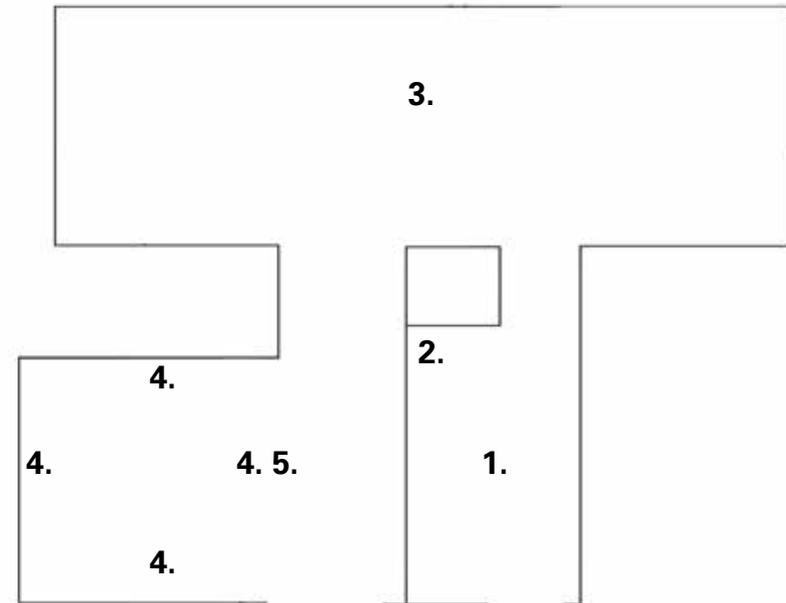
"We are all compost, not post-human."

Donna Haraway, 2015, *Staying with the Trouble*

We are Compost / Composting the We, responds to the feminist theorist Donna Haraway's metaphoric use of composting to stir up the "we" at the center of the Anthropocene. "We" know by now that there is no universal "we" responsible for... the desertification of soils, razing of forests, rising of sea levels, and biodiversity loss on land and at sea. Not Homo sapiens as such, but individual companies, families, governments and the knowledge regimes they represent are culpable – and perhaps even compostable.

In an age characterised by the entangled crises of climate change and political upheaval, the exhibition asks: how can compost be used as a method for deconstructing and decolonising? How can healthy soil become not only a metaphor but a driver for social transformation? Compost heaps are dynamic spaces of multi-species engineering and convivial, collective metabolism that materially and conceptually intersect with concerns about e.g. food sovereignty, waste and energy streams, allotment politics, right to land movements, seed saving strategies, and soils as relational bodies.

Gallery Map



- 1. Time for Growth**, Désirée Coral
- 2. Shadow Constellations**, Désirée Coral
- 3. Absorption**, Asad Raza
- 4. Absorption, ingredients storage**, Asad Raza
- 5. Gaia Glossary**, Alexandra Toland

Bios

Asad Raza creates dialogues and rejects disciplinary boundaries in his work, which conceives of art as a metabolic, active experience. Using actions and processes such as soil-making, tennis, and horticulture, his projects create encounters within and beyond the exhibition setting. They have been realised by institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney; Gropius Bau, Berlin; the Serpentine Galleries, London; Kunsthalle Portikus; Metro Pictures, New York; Urbane Kunst Ruhr, Essen; and the Lahore Biennale.

Dr. Alexandra Regan Toland is professor for arts and research at the Bauhaus University Weimar, where she directs the Ph.D. programme in art and design. She was recently elected chair of the international IUSS Commission on the History, Philosophy and Sociology of Soil Science and has published widely on artistic contributions to soil protection. In her artistic practice, Alex explores social and cultural issues of urban soils and plants and more-than-human relations in the Anthropocene. Her work has been exhibited at Prix Ars Electronica, the German Hygiene Museum Dresden, and Art Laboratory Berlin.

Désirée Coral is an artist born in Quito-Ecuador, she received her MFA degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she is currently a Doctoral researcher at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in the University of Dundee in Scotland. Désirée explores and examines early global botanical exchanges from the Americas to the rest of the world and analyses the diversity of relationships generated from those encounters. Désirée is the Glasgow Seed Library's first artist/researcher in residence at CCA Glasgow. Désirée's art and research is supported by the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities.

Lea Maria Wittich is an artist currently living and working in Weimar, Germany. She holds an M.F.A. in "Public Art and New Artistic Strategies" from the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar and is an Artistic Associate at the university. As she studied Fashion Design at the UDK Berlin, her practice is rooted in craft and material processes. In her individual and collective, artistic, theoretical and curatorial work, she explores empathy and global solidarity that expand the boundaries of the humane.

Eating the Ancestors

"For both the archaeologist and the native dweller, the landscape tells -or rather is - a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation. To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past."

Eating the Ancestors is an offering to previous generations, sowing seeds in pots and soil to germinate questions about the future. the idea that germination is the moment of awakening the seeds from a dormant state while the process of collecting seeds and saving them for the next season implies a poetic sense of hibernation, the idea that germination is the moment of awakening for seeds from a dormant state.

In this space, copper vessels spring from the walls, taking the shape of countries on the American continent and clay vessels replicate the ceramic containers designed by pre-columbian cultures throughout the Americas. Each pot represents a crop or seed that was domesticated, exchanged, adapted and for thousands of years, used daily for gastronomical and ritual practices. Seeds will be awakened from their dormant state during the exhibition, to be sown and germinated into the artwork landscape by visitors, with the intention to generate a systemic common care and responsibility.

Acknowledgements

Francis McKee, Sabrina Henry, Rowan Lear, Alkmini Gkousiari, Alaya Ang, Pernille Spence, Lee Mitchell, Sean Kingsley, Alan Keen, Kate Theodore, Siri Black, Killian Dunne, Juan Serrano Dueñas, Richie Walsh, Nat Walpole, Jessie McGoff and to all my ancestors and the seeds.

Eating the Ancestors

Désirée Coral

Is a tribute to past generations, in which time, the past and the present establish a dialogue through seeds and open questions for the future.

Shadow Constellations

Shadows of memories that are impregnated in the soil, in the seeds.

Shadows as place to rest and eat to keep the work on the

fields hands fields hands fieldshandsfieldshandsfields hands fields hands fields fields hands fields hands fields hands fields hands fields hands

Shadows of the ships moving towards other

worlds.



Science fiction properly conceived, like all serious fiction, however funny, is a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story. In it, as in all fiction, there is room enough to keep even Man where he belongs, in his place in the scheme of things; there is time enough to gather plenty of wild oats and sow them too, and sing to little Oom, and listen to Ool's joke, and watch newts, and still the story isn't over. Still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars.

Ursula K. Le Guin 1986
The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction

The novel is a fundamentally unheroic kind of story. Of course the Hero has frequently taken it over, that being his imperial nature and uncontrollable impulse, to take everything over and run it while making stern decrees and laws to control his uncontrollable impulse to kill it.
Ursula K. Le Guin 1986
The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction



Ideas run, like rivers, from the south to the north and are transformed into tributaries in major waves of thought. But just as in the global market for material goods, ideas leave the country converted into raw material, which become regurgitated and jumbled in the final product. Thus, a canon is formed for a new field of social scientific discourse, postcolonial thinking. This canon makes visible certain themes and sources but leaves others in the shadows.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Ch'ixinakax utxiwa:
A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization

The process of collecting seeds and saving them for the next season implies a poetic sense of hibernation, the idea that germination is the moment of awakening the seeds from a dormant state. In Andean cosmologies, the world is connected as a whole and time and space are perceived in a different dimension as western cosmologies. Food and crops are the way to connect to the ancestor and the recipient of that dormant life are the seeds.



If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solid container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again--if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time.

Ursula K. Le Guin 1986
The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction

Time for Growth

My ancestors,
your ancestors,
our ancestors,
we are the ancestors
of future generations.
Every population has its own
ancestors, their landscape, soil
and their seeds.



The organic seeds that are used today are the effort and ingenuity of thousands of years of collecting, drying, saving and passing the knowledge for generations.

Thousands of hands have been part of that process for seasons all over the world.

The seeds and their knowledge belong to a community effort still alive.

We are the ancestors of future generations

Down with the reversible world, and against objectified ideas. Cadaverized. The stop of thought that is dynamic. The individual as victim of the system. Source of classical injustices. Of romantic injustices. And the forgetting of inner conquests.

Manifesto Antropófago, Oswald de Andrade 1928

For both the archaeologist and the native dweller, the landscape tells -or rather is -a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation. To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past." (Ingold, Tim. The temporality of the landscape)



The struggle between what we might call the Uncreated and the Creation—illustrated by the permanent contradiction between Man and his Taboo. Everyday love and the capitalist way of life. Cannibalism. Absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into a totem. The human adventure. The earthly goal. Even so, only the pure elites managed to realize carnal cannibalism, which carries within itself the highest meaning of life and avoids all the ills identified by Freud—catechist ills. What result is not a sublimation of the sexual instinct. It is the thermometrical scale of the cannibal instinct. Carnal at first, this instinct becomes elective, and creates friendship. When it is affective, it creates love. When it is speculative, it creates science. It takes detours and moves around. At times it is degraded. Low cannibalism, agglomerated with the sins of catechism—envy, usury, calumny, murder. We are acting against this plague of a supposedly cultured and Christianized peoples. Cannibals.

Manifesto Antropófago, Oswald de Andrade 1928

The title of this paper is "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa." The world of ch'ixi also exists.²¹ Personally, I don't consider myself q'ara (culturally stripped and usurped by others), because I recognize my fully double origin, Aymara and European, and because I live from my own efforts. Because of this, I consider myself ch'ixi and consider it the most appropriate translation of the motley mix that we, who are called mestizas and mestizos, are. The word ch'ixi has many connotations: it is a color that is the product of juxtaposition, in small points or spots, of opposed or contrasting colors: black and white, red and green, and so on. It is this heather gray that comes from the imperceptible mixing of black and white, which are confused by perception, without ever being completely mixed.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Ch'ixinakax utxiwa:
A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization



Gaia Glossary

The earth sciences are rich with terminology that may be conceptually appropriated by other fields of study and social life. We speak of “erosion” of civil society, economic “porosity,” or “aggregation” of data without actively acknowledging the salience of these terms for soil study. The **Gaia Glossary** is a research installation designed by Alexandra Toland and Lea Wittich that weaves together soil scientific terminology with ideas and imagery from the arts and humanities. The installation incorporates soil text books and field guides, artists’ books, nature writing, scholarly essays, childrens’ books, brochures, zines, soil and rock samples, podcasts, maps, tools, and organic matter to encourage a “composting of knowledge” for the growth of new ideas. A selection of draft papers, old data sets, anonymised reviewers comments, field notes and unrealized project proposals, celebrating the hidden messiness, risk, and unpredictability of scientific and artistic research, will be shredded each day and composted into Asad Raza’s soil installation Absorption. Together with locally sourced organic materials, they become part of a sculptural, relational commons, later used to grow seeds from Désirée Coral’s Eating the Ancestors project in the opposite room.

First proposed as a counter-hegemonic earth-systems theory by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in the 1970s and then re-examined by scientific historian Bruno Latour in a series of writings presented at the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh in 2013, Gaia provides a point of departure for speaking anew about the soil-bound interface between the lithosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere, and technosphere, as well as the interface between the natural sciences, humanities and arts. Invoking Latour’s understanding of Gaia, the project seeks to expand ideas about more-than-human relationships with soil by analysing the language and images we use to describe it. As an archive of composted and compostable sources, the installation explores the semantic nuances of understanding Gaia – from modelling and soil texture analysis, to poetry, pottery, and performance, to permaculture, urban farming, and dry toilet design. The glossary as a framework provides a non-hierarchical approach to organising ideas across disciplines, cultural backgrounds and formats, encouraging a citational practice that recalibrates the gravitational pull of historical hierarchies in knowledge

production. It gathers on the one hand key concepts of soil science and on the other hand provides space for segued reflection on the indexicality and aesthetics of soil as a pluralistic and networked system of attributes, agents and actions.

The Gaia Glossary is finally a space for reciprocity and learning. Set up as a library and work-space with comfortable seating and soft lighting, it invites visitors to engage with background materials and resources conceptually relevant to the entire exhibition.

Acknowledgements

We would especially like to give thanks to Clive Adams of the Centre for Art and the Natural World; Willie Towers, Christine Berrill, Sarah Garry and Bruce Lascelles of the British Soil Science Society; Anna Krzywoszynska of Soil Care Network; Katie Revell, Open Jar Collective and Propagate for the Soil and Soul podcasts; Dirk Wachowiak and Stefanie Schwarz for Lambrecht (recycled) typeface; Zabriskie Books; Aye Aye Books; Alaya Ang, Sabrina Henry, Francis McKee and the rest of the CCA staff; and to all of the individual artists, authors and activists who have generously shared their knowledge and passion represented by the objects and publications presented here. We also give thanks to the soils and stones, plants and critters who contribute their presence to the exhibition.

Absorption

This is the first UK showing of Asad Raza's work Absorption, where 60 tonnes of artificial soil has been created in the gallery spaces of CCA. This "neo-soil" as Raza calls it will be tended by a team of cultivators who will till, turn, test and monitor it, adding new waste materials each day from the byproducts of the city's life and consumption including; coffee grounds, pizza oven ash, cocoa husks, spent hops and grain from Dookit and Epochal breweries in Tollcross and Port Dundas, paper, textiles, rubble from Laurieston construction site, oyster shells from Byres Road, dredged sand from Scottish Canals, hair from local salons and raw vegetable waste from a packing plant in Govan. Visitors to the exhibition are free to take soil for their own domestic spaces or community gardens ensuring the work has a life and use beyond the gallery First shown at the Clothing Store, Sydney in 2019, it has since been realised at Gropius Bau, Berlin (2020), Ruhrtriennale, Essen (2021), and now here at CCA.

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Scientific Advisors: Jess Chadwick, Alex McBratney, Benjamin Nunn, Gerd Wessolek

Producers: Olivia Fairweather, Alex Misick

Curator: Sabrina Henry

Soil Ingredients Coordinator: Toby Mills

Related Events

Can we compost that?

Dialogue Event on Human–Soil Transformations

5 Aug, 2.30pm - 6pm

CCA Theatre

Free but ticketed

A series of impulse statements, featuring geologist and WCSS Keynote Suzi Huff Theodoro, artistic director of Zone2Source, Alice Smits, and Farmerama podcaster, Katie Revell, will set the stage for group exercises in soil futures-making.

CCA Annex

Throughout the exhibition, CCA Annex will host a series of online lectures on the topic of soil with a range of guest speakers.

18 Aug, 6pm Telegraphing the Dead through Soil: Rolf Hughes and Rachel Armstrong (performance lecture)

25 Aug, 6pm Composting Settler Nationalisms: Mathew Arthur and Reuben Jentink (performance lecture)

1 Sept, 6pm Unearthed: Claire Ratinon (lecture and virtual garden tour)

8 Sept, 6pm Soil Interfaces and Interactions: Panel discussion with Karmen Franinovic, Roman Kirschner and Duy Bui

Registration or pre-booking is not required for these events, simply open CCA Annex before each event to view.

<https://cca-annex.net/>