

Emilia Beatriz declarations on soil and honey

Sat 4 May — Sun 30 June 2019

Preview: Fri 3 May, 7pm-9pm

Open: Tue-Sat: 11am-6pm // Sun: 12noon-6pm // free

“What our bodies, my mother’s and yours and mine, require in order to thrive, is what the world requires. If there is a map to get there, it can be found in the Atlas of our skin and bone and blood, in the tracks of neurotransmitters and antibodies. We need nourishment, equilibrium, water, connection, justice. When I write about cancer and exhaustion and irritable bowels in the context of the treeless slopes of my homeland, of market driven famine, of xenoestrogens and the possible extinction of bees, I am tracing a map with my fingertips, walking into the heart of the storm that shakes my body and occupies the world.”

Aurora Levins Morales, *Kindling: Writings on the body*, 2013.

In many cultures bees have a strong connection to grief. When a queen bee dies, the frequency of the workers’ humming alters, and remains altered for some time. In European cultures ‘telling the bees’ is a ritual of sharing important life events with bees, of ensuring a connection, particularly in mourning, between humans and non-humans. Grief work is at the heart of declarations on soil and honey. In the exhibition, Emilia’s films hum from their foundations, responding to the experience of environmental grief and/as personal crisis.

The exhibition space vibrates with the sounds and histories of bees and apiaries, the soft sucking of peat and the rustle of moss. In the narrative of the films, the practice of keeping bees is slowly disclosed as a way of knowing the world differently, as a form of storytelling and as a tool of environmental and political resistance. In bee keeping, knowledge is shared and gleaned from different lands and climates, and human borders become redundant, despite the application of the language of colonies and swarms upon their movements. Keeping bees is ultimately a relational practice, a practice that requires an attentiveness to a wider ecology, a history of land and land ownership, the effects of toxicity and pollution, and a way of addressing the future. Declarations on soil and honey began with the bees, and the bees have carried many conversations, on the weather, between Scotland and Puerto Rico.

In the installation a psychoemotional narrative plays out, which combines fictional spaces with archival footage, oral histories and other research. The works explore the ways in which

people come together collectively to protect and speak of the health of the land, their bodies and the climate. These acts are always informed and supported by the bees. The first of two film clusters - **A forecast, a haunting, a crossing, a visitation** (2019) - largely focuses on Scotland and Cape Wrath, wherein a series of characters Uranio (Uranium), Agüita (an affectionate name for water) and Vientazo (a gust of wind), write letters to one another. The letters appeal to the water, the wind and the toxic land, speculating upon the navigation of bodily crisis, health and grief, speaking of the feeling of mourning environmental loss. The second cluster, **Conversation with Ana Elisa** (2019) focuses mainly on Vieques and Puerto Rico, as beekeeper and activist Ana Elisa Pérez Quintero discusses ways of listening and speaking to and with the bees, relaying the practice of keeping bees as a collective practice of land management, activism, medicine making, walking and dealing with crises. Ana Elisa explains the remedial qualities of caring for bees, and how bee humming itself heals and support humans and non-humans through states of mourning.

At the beginning of what became declarations on soil and honey, Emilia began a process of exploring histories that might connect Scotland and Puerto Rico through archival research and interviews with bee keepers and sustenance farmers. One of the most striking connections was the way in which Puerto Rico and Scotland's land has been used for military testing by their own (contentiously installed) governments. Until 2003, the island of Vieques was a testing range for US military ordinance. After a half-century long struggle led by fishermen and locals, the Vieques range closed, but the damage to the local population, the land and local agriculture was already catastrophic. The bombing was attributed to a huge increase in the prevalence of cancer, with radioactive environmental contamination on a vast scale. When the ships finally left Vieques, they found a new site upon which to test – Cape Wrath in the far north west of Scotland. Three US ships came directly from Vieques in 2003, to continue their exercises at Cape Wrath. This history was first revealed to Emilia by historian and activist Roberto Rabin, from the Vieques Archive of Historical Memory, who had heard of Vieques solidarity protests taking place at Cape Wrath and Durness.

A forecast, a haunting, a crossing, a visitation includes images from the Vieques Archive of Historical Memory, video footage of protests recorded by Vieques filmmaker Andrés Nieves, and posters and stickers of Scottish Vieques solidarity actions, filmed at the Park Ranger Archives at Durness Information Centre. The film is informed by these connections, and by oral histories from farmers and workers from Durness and Cape Wrath, where Emilia visited in October 2018. The film holds an oral history of fisherman, crofter and mini bus operator James Mather, framing stories of healing and activism through the ubiquity of peat and moss. In his account we hear similar concerns as about land ownership, independence, radiation and toxicity, military money and the value of land. The work also speaks of Scotland's lesser told colonial history - the movement of ships and supplies across the Atlantic, and a Scottish ship's five-day occupation of Crabb Island (the British name for Vieques) in 1698, as part of the Darien scheme – Scotland's attempt to set up a colony in the Caribbean Gulf of Darién - a failed conquest which near bankrupted Scotland and weakened its negotiating power in the act of Union with England.

The significance of the Cape Wrath site for the military is its apparent desolation and inaccessibility – “nothing grows there”. The cape is a 107 square mile moorland, with vast areas of peat bogs. There is one single track road that is only accessible by ferry in calm weather and high tide, across the Kyle of Durness. Emilia's film contests this idea of usefulness of the land, many things grow there – and the moss is of vital interest. Sphagnum

moss is the protective soft top of peat, which keeps the peat bog from eroding. Peat is thousands of years of carbon held in the earth, its colours and warmth. Moss is suggested as medicine and metaphor, sphagnum moss, as we learn, is also an antiseptic dressing for wounds, it is a protective layer or filter; a blanket, insulation. Moss moves across (dia) the world as spores (spora) that germinates through the wind.

The moss present in the gallery space has been foraged from various sites across Scotland, in accordance with a moss foraging code. Some of the moss was gathered from sites proximate to military activity, such as near the nuclear submarine bases at Faslane and Coulport. The moss and the rest of the installation is intended to support many sensual experiences, with the vibration and sub frequencies omitted in Kiera Coward-Deyell's sound design also key to this. Making recordings in Puerto Rico, Kiera also travelled to Cape Wrath with Emilia where they read texts together and logged sounds from the land. The rhythm and rumble of the soundtrack is constructed from the noise of these visits, transmitting the haptic and emotional experience of each place, and the words they shared.

During the show, the cinema space hosts eight sporadic looped screenings of Sofía Gallisá Muriente's film **Asimilar y Destruir** / Assimilate and Destroy (2018). Sofía's film speaks both socially and materially about the strangeness of an ice rink in Puerto Rico, and how climate conditions memory - through a salty, alchemical 16mm filmmaking process. Sofía's work speaks about memory, humidity and decay, and ways of telling stories differently – concerns that are also referenced in the oral and written histories which surround the works in the show.

A final element that will appear during the show, is a book of recipes for **Grief into Action**. Emilia has invited poets, artists and activists from Scotland and Puerto Rico involved in health and land-based movements, to share a recipe for healing or grieving-in-action. The publication brings together voices whose working methods examine how to speak about grief and crisis, how to resist and listen from the land and work with other people in this resistance.

At the beginning of our discussions Emilia introduced me to Aurora Levins Morales' writing, in particular, a text called *The Historian as Curandera*. This text has guided the research and invitations to other people, and is an important and always present methodology in Emilia's practice. It speaks about how to think differently about the past and present, and how dominant cultural memories are produced by colonising powers. Levins Morales' work involves new ways of looking at relationships to the environment and politics by shifting the perspectives from which histories are told and remembered. Struggles for independence and sovereignty often focus on a history of humans, political borders or the impact upon economics, but Levins Morales speaks of the importance of seeking autonomy via the land. We witness this knowing in María Velázquez' song in **Conversation with Ana Elisa**, where knowing how to care for the bees formed one part of the resistance to the Naval advances. Knowing the bees is knowing the political potential of the land. In Levins Morales' writing and in declarations on soil and honey, political struggles, health crises and environmental decay are always already entangled. Political resistance is an ecological resistance from the ground up. The works in this show attempt to share the ways in which we can think critically, practically and more imaginatively about these questions.

Text by Ainslie Roddick

Events:

Assimilate and Destroy / Asimilar y destruir (2018) by Sofía Gallís Muriente

CCA Cinema, Wed 8 May, Fri 17 May, Sat 25 May, Sat 1 June, Fri 7 & 14 June, 11am-6pm, Wed 19 & 26 June, 11am-4pm, Free (unticketed) / All ages. Please feel free to drop in to the cinema when visiting Emilia's show on these dates.

Exhibition tour (quiet hour)

Sat 22 June, 10am, Free but ticketed / All ages

Exhibition tour with BSL interpretation

Sat 22 June, 2pm, Free but ticketed / All ages

Glasgow Seed Library launch

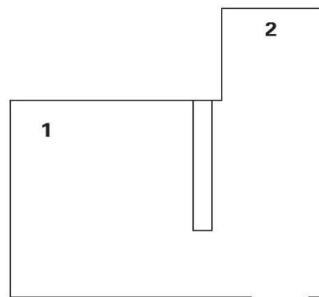
Open from Fri 14 June throughout CCA opening hours.

2HB 23 Journal launch

We also launch a new Spanish/English 2HB journal with poetry by Daisy Lafarge and Nicole Cecilia Delgado, available at the end of June 2019.

Gallery plan and work titles:

Film works are timed to begin on the hour, every hour. There are no rules for where to begin or how long to stay, but the total run time to watch each cluster in full is 2 hours. Feel free to move around, listen between the spaces and to touch the moss. Seating without moss coverings is also available. Assimilate and Destroy / Asimilar (2018) by Sofia Gallís Muriente screens once a week in the CCA Cinema space, next door to the gallery (run times above).



1. A forecast, a haunting, a crossing, a visitation, 2019. 3-channel film installation with sound and subtitles, 55 mins.
2. Conversation with Ana Elisa, 2019. 2-channel film installation with sound and subtitles, 55 mins.

The mossy infrastructures and blankets are hand-sewn, and include gathered Sphagnum (peat) moss, Hypnum (sheet or carpet) moss and Star moss (*Polytrichum commune*).

