

VILNIUS ACADEMY OF ARTS

MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN TEXTILE ART AND DESIGN

Artist as a Creator of Connections in a Nature–Culture Rhizome

Master's Artistic Research Thesis



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Introduction

We are in a crisis of interconnected things — not only climate, food, energy, and poverty, but also a crisis of meaning — and the least we can do to overcome it is to recreate the human being.

— Arturo Escobar¹

This artistic research is an attempt to look at the Anthropocene crisis through creativity and its processes. To try to understand what this crisis is — the one discussed in scientific research, documentary films, and the media. It is also an attempt to cope with large amounts of unsettling information about the changing planetary ecosystem, pollution, and other consequences of human activity on Earth.

In trying to better understand my role as an artist in the context of sustainable social development, I see this research as a way to give meaning to the world. It helps to create a more sustainable relationship with the environment — "for this global crisis is also a crisis of meaning."²

The research raises the assumption that unsustainable processes of social development are rooted in certain core cultural values that regulate our mutual relationships. One possible cause of this imbalance is a worldview in which culture is seen as the opposite of nature.

The thesis consists of three chapters: *Visions of Sustainability*, *Inspiring Change*, and *Symphony of the Earth*. The first chapter reflects on the global crisis through an understanding of the human–nonhuman nature relationship. The second chapter addresses the role of contemporary art in the context of sustainability. The third chapter presents a creative project combining personal and collective art practices.

Key Concepts

Rhizome — in biology, this word describes an ever-growing mass of stems, usually growing horizontally underground.²¹ The concept of the rhizome is also used in philosophy, proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as a way of thinking about the world that emphasizes non-hierarchical, non-linear connections between different elements.²²

Anthropocene — a period marked by the dominance of human activity in Earth's ecosystems, signaling the "sixth great extinction."¹⁷

Sustainable social development — understood here as cultural, social, political, or economic processes of social change based on systems thinking, ensuring favorable conditions for Earth's ecosystems.

CHAPTER 1

Visions of Sustainability

Reflections on the Anthropocene crisis and the nature–culture relationship

Future at the Edge of Extinction

The planet's resources are dwindling. So if we truly care about the future of our planet, we must stop leaving all problems for them to solve. It is up to us to save the world for tomorrow — it depends on you and me.

— Jane Goodall²³

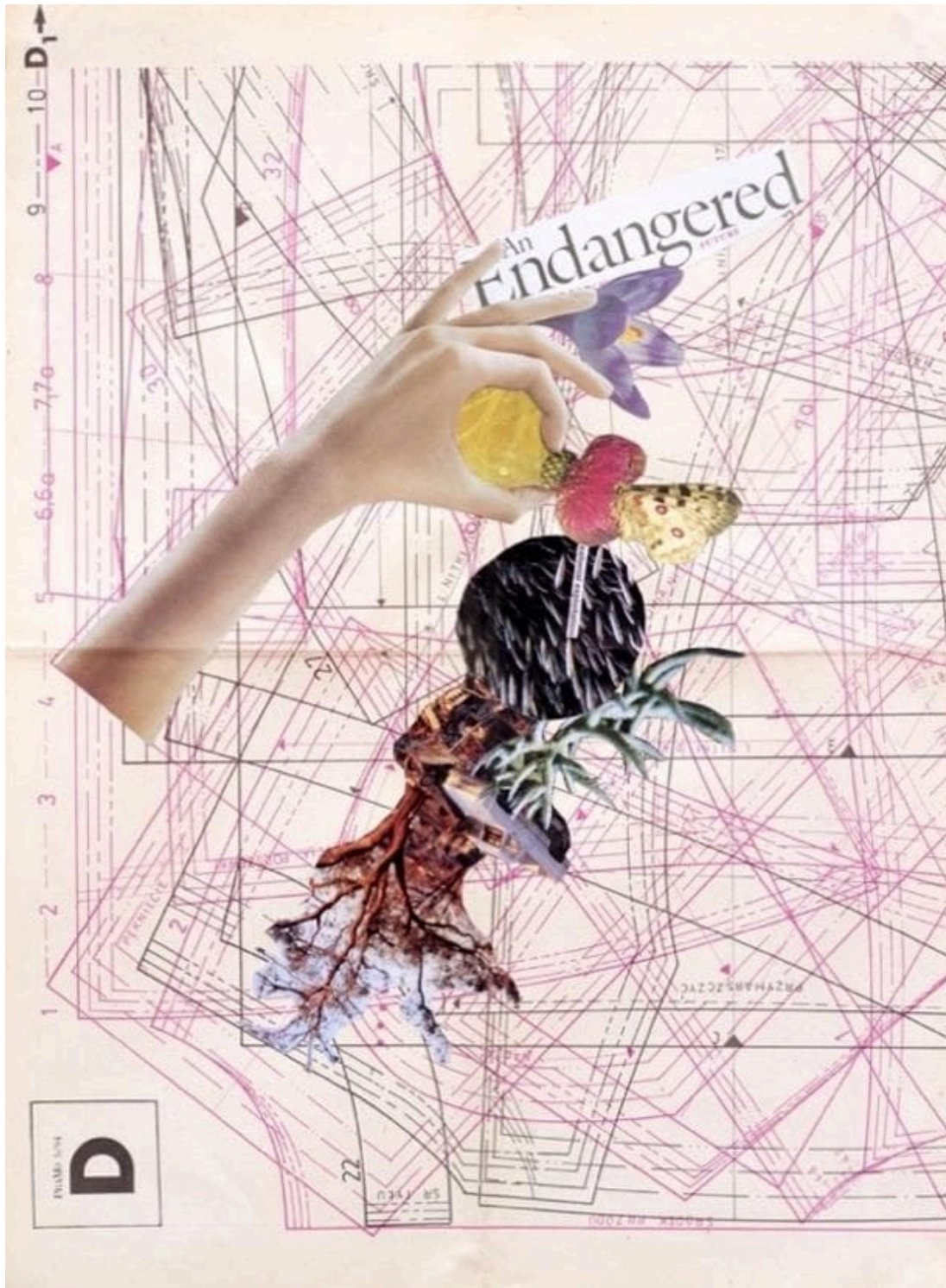


Fig. 1. *Future at the Edge of Extinction*, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2021.

I want to begin this work from personal experiences — the foundation of this journey — and from an attempt to understand what the Anthropocene crisis is. The sheer volume of unsettling statistics drove my personal need to delve

deeper into the theme of sustainability. Yet I understand that dwelling too long in such information can lead to despair. It is important to reflect on the information and seek new perspectives.

There is no room for waste in this world.

*Consumerism comes
from psychological problems.*

*Then you fell forests,
you wipe out other cultures.²⁴*



Fig. 2. No room for waste, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2021.

Observing my surroundings I began to pay more and more attention to unsustainable global consumption patterns and their impact. My journey began with the textile and fashion industry. As stated in a World Economic Forum article, it is the world's second- largest water consumer

(approximately 3,000 liters of water are needed to produce a single t-shirt), and is responsible for 20% of all industrial water pollution worldwide.²⁵ Based on the 2020 Fashion Revolution White Paper,²⁶ the majority of textile production takes place in impoverished countries where factory workers receive low wages, work in poor conditions, and are often exploited.

When the World Forgets

Think.

Chocolate.

Burning palm oil forests,

3000 problems,

Endangered species.

Your responsibility.

Do less,

Make decisions.²⁷



Fig. 3. When the world forgets, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2021.

Nature allows humanity to develop, but our constant demand for Earth's resources accelerates ecosystem collapse. The WWF Living Planet Report²⁸ indicates that 73% of non-glaciated land surface has already been affected by human activity, and between 1970–2016 the populations of mammals, birds,

amphibians, reptiles, and fish declined by an average of 68%. As Hannah Ritchie notes,²⁹ about 50% of land is used for food production. Despite the enormous resource demands of food production, 820 million people still face hunger.³⁰

Life After the Apocalypse

*A moment comes
when nature itself shows
something is wrong,
something must change.
We are entering a new era of humanity.
It is unclear how things will be,
it will not be good.*

*There will be great hardship,
a great transformation into something unknown.
But humanity tends to adapt.³³*

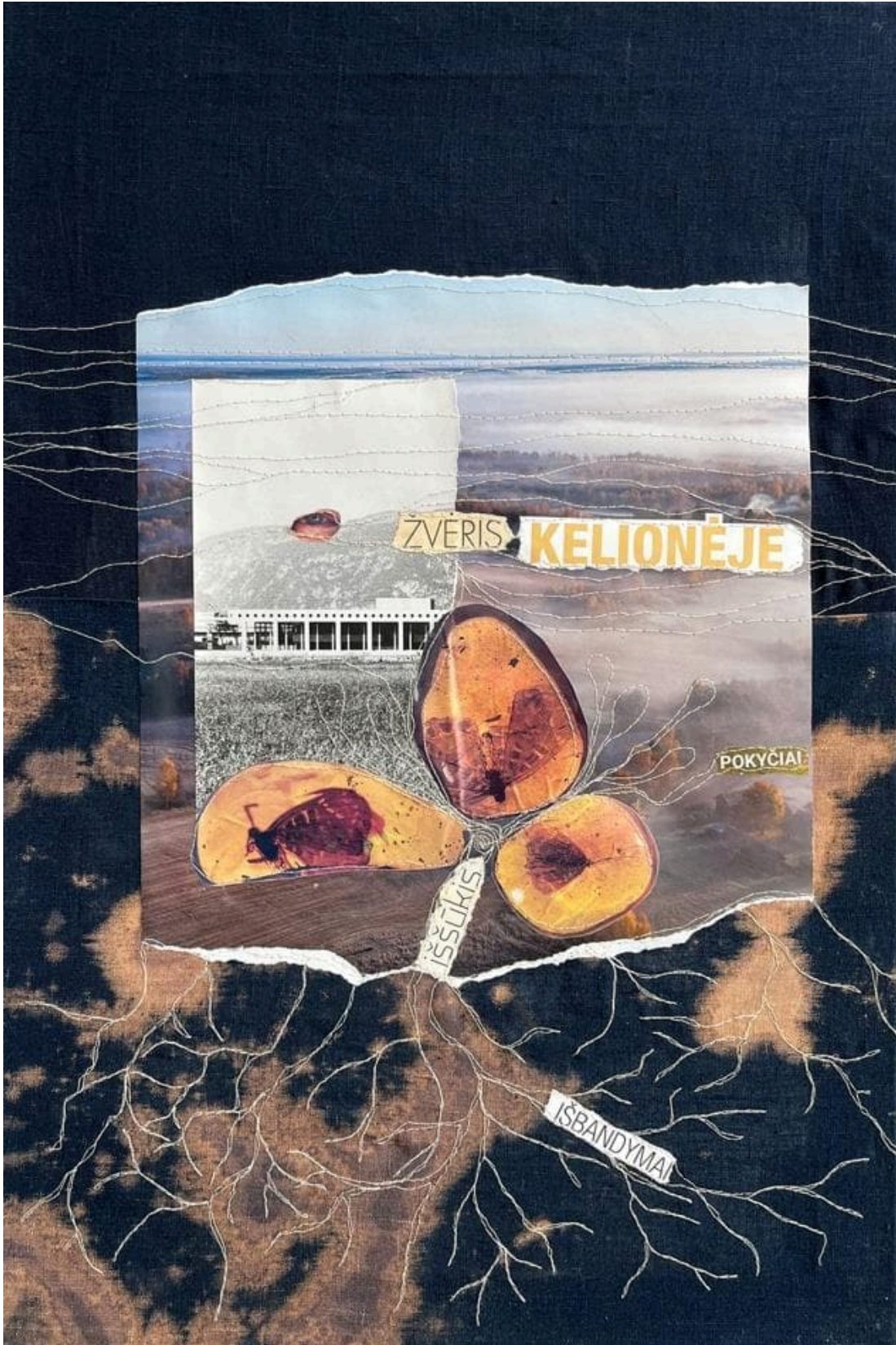


Fig. 4. *The beast on a journey*, textile collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2020.

Perhaps the most visible changes in society occur during significant events or upheavals. As Donna J. Haraway argues, in these troubled times it is especially important not to sink into despair, but to stay present — "to live with the trouble on our damaged planet."³⁵ Every crisis is the beginning of something new, an opportunity to learn and create new meanings.

Culture in Nature or Nature in Culture?

Everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree.

— The Kybalion³⁶

Our understanding of reality has an enormous impact on our behavior toward nature and other people.³⁷ It is therefore important to understand how we perceive our place in the world — what we call nature, and what we call culture. As Frédéric Ducarme and Denis Couvet observe, "although conservation of nature has become a major social concern, the idea of nature remains obscure."³⁸

The word "nature" in Lithuanian is semantically close to "birth, innate quality, being,"³⁹ much like the Latin "natura" — "birth, innate quality,"⁴⁰ and the Ancient Greek "physis."⁴¹ The word "nature" is thought to derive from the Indo-European root "bheu," the ancestor of the English verb "to be."⁴² Different interpretations of this word exist: one emphasizes the separation between the human and the surrounding environment, while another describes nature broadly as "the universe with all its phenomena."⁴³ The concept of nature also encompasses humans and the culture they create, as an inseparable part of it. Despite this, culture is often seen as the opposite of nature.



Fig. 5. Nature / Innate quality, textile collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2021.

Cultivating, Caring, Preserving

The root of "culture" can be found in Latin, derived from "colere" — "to care for, to guard, to till, to cultivate"⁴⁴ — from which arose "cultura" — "cultivation, care, culture, agriculture, veneration."⁴⁵ Culture is the totality of a society's knowledge, values, traditions, and activities, transmitted through social bonds — "everything created by humans through physical or mental labor."⁴⁶ A narrower meaning encompasses arts and philosophy as important to the development of civilizational thinking.⁴⁷ Culture policy analyst Jon Hawkes describes culture as "the medium encompassing all human relations, a means of expression, and information defining the result of social processes."⁴⁸ Researcher Sacha Kagan defines it as "a collective memory of knowledge and agreements that, interacting with individual minds, forms an ecosystem of ideas and mental images."⁴⁹ There also exists the broader meaning of culture as the provision of suitable conditions for life, when speaking of growing bacteria, animals, or plants.⁵⁰

Environmentalist Rod Bennisson proposes defining culture as "an expression of natural evolutionary processes."⁵¹ But one could add that other life forms also operate on socialization principles — microorganisms, fungi, and plants also form their own cultures. Culture thus becomes a form of nature's expression that encompasses humans too.

Having reviewed the concepts of nature and culture, one can attempt to answer the question: "culture in nature, or nature in culture?" Both propositions can coexist without negating each other. If culture is an expression of nature's functioning, then it exists within nature — it cannot exist without it. Nature is composed of many cultures interacting with each other. Its roots.



Fig. 6. Cultivation, embroidered on a waistcoat by project participant Emilija's father, Liucija Dervinytė, 2021.

Sustainability in Symbiosis

We must truly begin to listen to the rest of life. Just one melody in a living opera, we are repetitive and steady... this life, our life, now as always, is embedded in the rest of the sentient Symphony of the Earth.

— Lynn Margulis⁵²

Having reviewed the concepts of nature and culture, the oppositions and connections between them become clearer. I therefore explore what influenced the dualistic nature–culture image in society and how it might be transformed.

Nature–Culture Poles

*Destruction
gives birth
to something new.
Everything comes from nature.*

*I am learning to accept
that humans
are also nature.⁵³*



Fig. 7. Nature-culture poles, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2021.

Although we biologically understand humans as part of nature, we often emphasize that our social bonds and culture are not natural formations. This opposition arose in the collective embroidery conversations as well. According to historian William Cronon, "the contemporary vision of

wilderness as the last place on Earth untouched by human destructive behavior, and of cities as the absence of nature, places culture and nature at two opposing poles."⁵⁴ The first changes providing ground for this separation likely occurred at the end of the Bronze Age with the beginning of livestock farming.⁵⁵ In Europe, Christianity also exerted strong influence, placing God — creator of all — above nature as its ruler, and thus granting humans, made in his image, divine qualities entitling them to use nature as a tool for their needs.⁵⁶

René Descartes had a major influence on the dualistic nature–culture image, proposing a dualistic perspective — separating matter and form, mind and body, object and subject, rationality and intuition, human and nature.⁵⁷ Lynn Margulis called Cartesian dualism the "Cartesian license," granting humans, as the only divine beings with a soul, the right to manipulate or even destroy nature, which was seen as a dead mechanism.⁵⁸ This view helped expand the boundaries of scientific research but also made science the only "correct" knowledge and lost its dialogue with other forms of knowing,⁵⁹ dismissing mythical and mythological thinking.⁶⁰ As anthropologist Arturo Escobar notes, Cartesian dualist ideas "are still reflected in our patriarchal capitalist societies, where the priority is production and consumption, individual success, future-orientation, and the subordination of spirituality and communality to materialism."⁶¹

Accepting the Shadow Side

*Until you accept
your inertia,
your thoughtlessness,
your inconsistency,
it is hard to find balance
within yourself.*⁶²



Fig. 8. Why can't we just agree?, textile collage on participant Martyna Plioplytė-Zujienė's blouse, Liucija Dervinytė.

Although sustainability is widely discussed across society, we still struggle to steer humanity in a more constructive direction. It is therefore important to keep talking, in as many ways as possible, about how we can live more sustainably. In Lithuanian the word "sustainable" is defined as something "firm, durable, steady, and unchanging."⁶³ In English it came from the Latin "sustinere" — "to maintain, to carry, to withstand,"⁶⁴ and is described as the ability to maintain the continuity of a certain activity without causing harm or problems.⁶⁵ The term was defined in the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development report *Our Common Future* as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."⁶⁶

The foundation of sustainable development is the assessment of interconnections, their consequences, and feedback within the all-encompassing structure of nature. According to ecologist Teresa Ryan Sm'hayetsk, drawing on Indigenous worldviews, "sustainability means

thinking in systems with all their interconnections, consequences and feedback cycles."⁶⁷ Perhaps everything begins from understanding that the human is "just one part of an orchestrated life form"⁶⁸ that cannot exist without others. As Arturo Escobar argues, "we must accept destruction and construction as equal sides, and begin to value the often undervalued — emotions, intuition, spirituality, non-scientific knowledge, non-humans, inorganic life forms, death."⁶⁹ William Cronon believes that "by accepting the full spectrum of the natural landscape, including the cultural, we can find a middle ground uniting wilderness and city into a place called home."⁷⁰ Perhaps sustainability is this constant attempt to integrate the "shadow sides" in our daily lives⁷¹ and collectively build the shared meanings that help us pursue common goals.

CHAPTER 2

Inspiring Change

*The power of art to create connections and inspire sustainability
visions*

Resonances of Art

Art is the creation of meaning through stories, images, sounds, performances, and other methods, allowing people to share their experiences and feelings about what it means to live.⁷² For a long time in Western countries sustainability strategies were based on three principles of sustainable development: social equity, ecological integrity, and economic well-being.⁷³ Yet culture policy analyst Jon Hawkes was among the first to propose adding "cultural vitality" as a fourth foundational pillar of sustainable society.⁷⁴ As Ellen Dissanayake argues, art is "an essential behavioral property that deserves to be encouraged and nurtured in every one of our lives, not only in the art world."⁷⁵ Drawing on Sacha Kagan's insights, "art's contribution to a culture of sustainability lies in its potential to create experience, forge connections, and extend rational thinking beyond pragmatic goals."⁷⁶

As Donna J. Haraway notes, "it matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."⁷⁷



Fig. 9. Resonances of Art, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2021.

Inner Connections

*A conscious
warrior of light*

*concerned about the world,
changing society —
shaper of culture.*

*Speaks to people,
practices self-therapy
not only for oneself —
but for society.⁷⁸*

Considering ways in which creativity can become an agent of change, I realize that such ways and their variations can be endless. In this search, the word "connections" becomes the key word, linking both the themes I personally explore and the different modes, techniques, and materials of creation. As one collective embroidery participant observed, "it is important to accept one's natural shadow side."⁷⁹

Art therapist Shaun McNiff argues that "both the artist and the shaman are able to discover meanings and structures in the stream of experience and to act in a state of heightened sensitivity."⁸⁰ The role of the artist as shaman helps us understand the importance of art as a means of addressing social questions through intuition.

Creators of Sustainability Visions

*Another group of people in our community is known as visionaries, creative people. They are artists, writers, and performers, whose duty is to introduce innovative perspectives into the community, to inform us of creative viewpoints and new ways of looking at things. These visionaries remind us that we must always leave room for new things, and that creativity is necessary to solve problems we have never faced before.*⁸⁶

— Jeannette Armstrong

Art can become a tool to reflect the contemporary world and open up new perspectives. Sustainability in art can unfold from many angles — through material choices, or conceptually by raising questions about the nature–culture relationship. Returning to the question raised during embroidery sessions: "what does knowledge and responsibility give?"⁸⁷

Inspiration for Change

*The legacy of the environment
is linked to human
stories.*

*Nature
mediates
between trees
and human actions.*⁸⁸

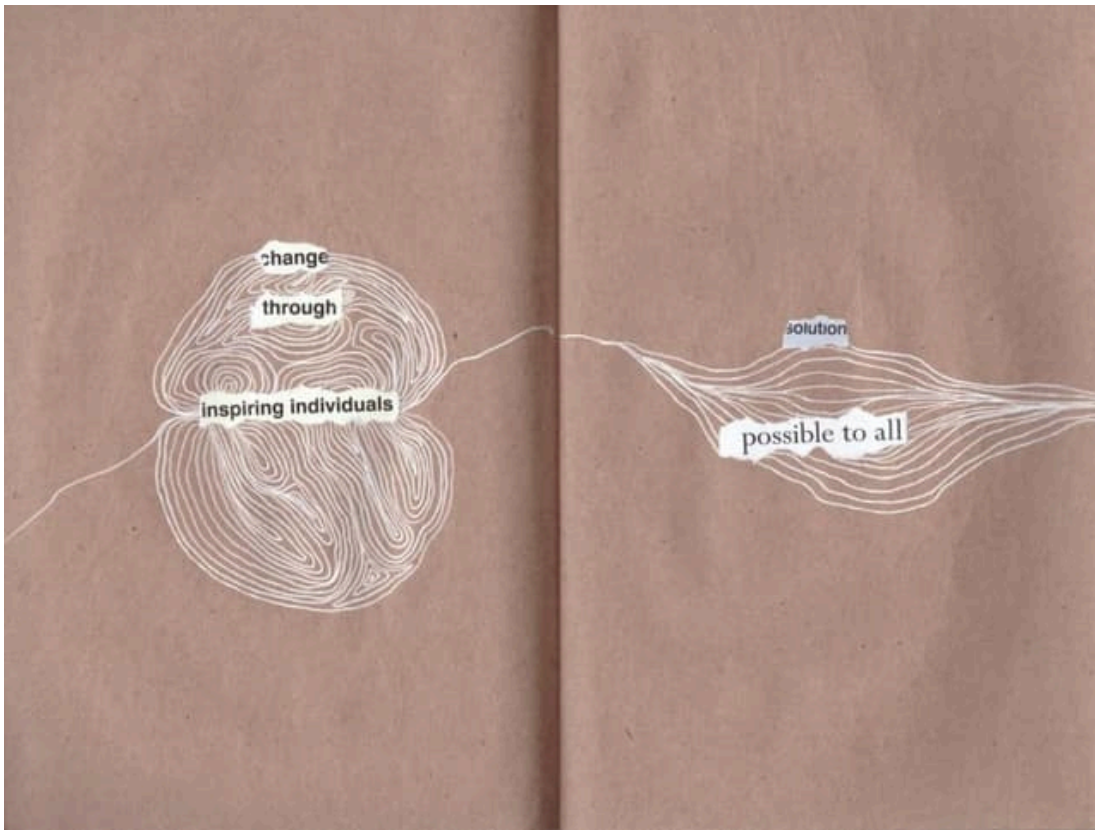


Fig. 12. *Inspiration for change*, from the book *Between the Lines: a planet–human story*, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2019.

Looking at other artists' work I reflect on the balance between intuition and rationality in their creative processes. I am interested not only in the final result, but also in the creators' own experiences and worldviews. Listening to an interview⁸¹ with four artists examining ecological themes in Vermont, I found an artist close to my own creative processes — Cameron Davis,⁸² who paints intuitive abstractions of organic forms.



Fig. 10. A Question of Incendence: Magnolia Memorial I, 243 × 152 cm, acrylic on canvas, Cameron Davis.

According to Davis, "there are so many connections in life, even between apparent differences, and if we thought about our existence in that living system, we would behave differently."⁸³ Artist Vita Zaman shares similar thoughts, turning to her inner world through art.



Fig. 11. *Naujoji Vaidilutė (The New Vestal)*, 2022, canvas, acrylic and cotton thread embroidery, Vita Zaman.

Vita Zaman through her creative expression tries to show that "there is no shame in inner softness, dramas and weaknesses."⁸⁴ She also describes the present as "a time of emotional crisis, well worth reflecting on."⁸⁵ In her works I see similar layers to my own practice — the first layer of intuitive abstract marks, the second of further reflection, balancing intuition and rationality.

A mythological worldview finds new forms of expression in contemporary art. Rithika Merchant⁸⁹ recreates world myths connecting different cultures and collective memory. As the artist notes, art is "a reaction to what is happening in the world."⁹⁰ According to Merchant, "science answers the question 'how' — myths answer the question 'why',"⁹¹ giving meaning to our daily lives. As Dissanayake notes, "humans have a deep desire to systematize the world and give it meaning."⁹²



Fig. 13. Hyperlife, mixed media, Rithika Merchant, 2020.

Another artist and storyteller in whose work the worldview of ancient cultures can be found is muralist Mona Caron⁹³ – not only an artist but also an activist, creating protest posters and collaborating with social and environmental movements. Starting from the stories of people in her city, San Francisco,⁹⁴ she has painted murals around the world, often telling the stories of climate activists and marginalized communities.⁹⁵ As the artist says, she

became fascinated by the stories of weeds — plants we often see as "dirt" to be "cleaned up."⁹⁶ In her Weeds project,⁹⁷ she calls dandelions "a radical and patient plant," seeing them as a metaphor for change: "changes happen through patience and persistence, individually and collectively — a cumulative impact that brings life back to 'sterile' places."⁹⁸



Fig. 14. Mujeres Custodias de Nuestro Hábitat en Peligro, mural, 10m × 50m, 2008, Mona Caron and Raúl Ajala.

So what can knowledge and accepting our responsibility give us? We cannot completely erase from our memory what we learn about the world. If we understand what impact we have on the environment, can we live without taking responsibility for what we create and communicate to the world?

Commonality in Creation

When all those with lungs breathe the space between their hands and the space around their hands and the space of the room and the space of the building that surrounds the room and the space of the neighborhoods nearby and the space of the cities and the space of the regions and the space of the nations and the space of the continents and the space of the islands and the space of the oceans and the space of the stratosphere and the space of the mesosphere breathe in and out.

<...>

*How lovely and how doomed this connection of everyone with lungs.*¹⁰⁰

— Juliana Spahr

In this section I have discussed two important aspects of sustainability that art creators can address — inner human balance, which helps external harmony emerge, and the connection with the surrounding environment. Here I want to look at our mutual connections and communication — what forms communities. Such art practices have many different forms and names — "socially engaged art, community art, participatory art, collaborative art, or social practice."¹⁰¹



Fig. 16. Opening of the exhibition Spacetime Un[b]locked at Ideas Block – Kompresorinè, 2023.

In 2017, together with artist Roberto Becerra, we founded the creative space Ideas Block.¹⁰² This place combined many seemingly different activities — a café, gallery, and maker shop, with concerts, exhibition openings, workshops, lectures, and discussions. It became a gathering place for people of different fields and interests, enabling conversations and connecting people for further communication.

Kirstie Macleod spent decades creating the global collective embroidery project The Red Dress,¹⁰³ which travelled to 50 countries involving people from different cultures. The dress was made of 85 parts embroidered by 365 women and girls, 7 men and boys, and two non-binary artists, all of whom received payment for their work and can sell their works in the Red Dress Embroidery online shop.¹⁰⁴

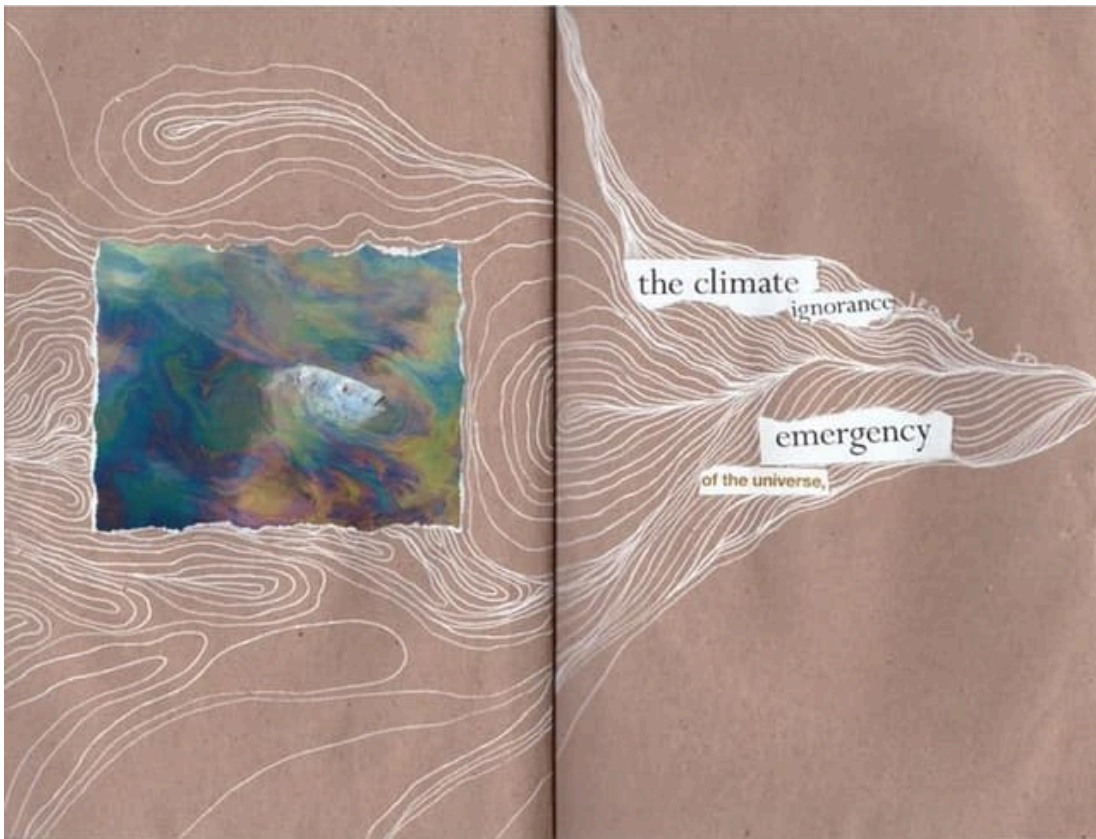


Fig. 17. *The Red Dress*, Lekazia Turner, embroiderer from Jamaica, 2022, project initiator: Kirstie Macleod.

As Macleod states in interview,¹⁰⁵ embroidery and community become the basis for healing processes. The collective creative process — inevitably — has the potential to become a healing process. Through this process, mutual connections and understanding strengthen, making it easier to see one's place in a broader context as part of a larger structure. All of this heals a person caught in the heat of the Anthropocene crisis and helps create meaning.¹⁰⁶

According to Ellen Dissanayake, "creating connections is our instinct and the foundation of evolution, and art can become a tool to ensure this need, together with the feeling that we are part of a larger structure. This understanding provides the basis for full engagement, the fullness of lived experience and meaning — the meaning of living together with others."¹⁰⁷

CHAPTER 3

Symphony of the Earth

Personal creative project and collective embroidery sessions

Element in the Structure of Nature

In recent years my personal creative activity has often been influenced by troubling world events, thinking about the consequences of human activity on everything that surrounds us and on ourselves. Both individual painting or textile works and collaboration-based projects and installations created during this period gave rise to the artistic research project discussed in this text.



Fig. 18. *Critical situation*, collage from the personal book *Between the Lines: a planet–human story*, Liucija Dervinytė, 2019.

In 2019 I began creating a collage book *Between the Lines: a planet–human story*, filling its pages with magazine clippings — texts, images, and embroidered details. This book is a reflection on humanity's place in nature

and its impact, touching on ecological and social problems and possible solutions. It became a kind of journal in which I captured information on troubling topics each time I read or heard it.



*Fig. 19. The world needs a break, collage from the personal book *Between the Lines: a planet–human story*, Liucija Dervinytė, 2019.*

Creating the first collages I used magazine clippings, drawing, and embroidery. Over time the formats grew, and the works became based on watercolor abstractions of organic forms supplemented with collage elements. Collage became my storytelling tool, giving a certain directness that I felt was missing in the abstractions of my earlier creative phase.

The different elements coming together in the works reflect the poles of duality — intuition and rationality — where organic forms born in a meditative process gain concreteness and create a narrative through collage fragments. Thinking about others' indirect contribution to individual artistic processes, the desire arises to highlight these connections by inviting direct participation — to create together.



Fig. 20. Features of a new world, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2022.

Thus a communal element emerges: recurring creative gatherings — embroidery conversations — during which we not only engage in the collective embroidery process, but also weave conversations on relevant topics. Participants are invited to embroider an old sheet together, which travels from hand to hand around the circle during meetings. The communal embroidery becomes a binding element — a means of verbal and visual communication.

The Threads That Connect Us

*Being together.
An open agreement.
Simple communication,
Not about material things.
To be together,
To share together,
Without statuses.
Like sutartinės.¹⁰⁹*



Fig. 21. Collective embroidery session, Alt lab, SODAS 2123, Vilnius, 2022.

This artistic research is about the relationship between what is personal and what is common and connects us all. Gradually the entire creative process begins to develop around the collective embroidery and the conversations that take place during it and the community that forms.

In my creative project "community" is an open variable, dependent on place, time, and other factors. In Lithuanian, this word refers to a group of people united by something in common.¹¹⁰ It is shared interests, ideas, or understanding of the world, not limited to a specific social group or territory. The collective embroidery is open to include new people for whom it becomes relevant.

Everyone who has contributed to this project becomes its co-creator, though each leaves a different contribution. During the process I give participants no instructions about what to embroider. The whole idea grew gradually — starting with a collaboration on textiles for the film *Vesper*,¹¹¹ and growing to involve 56 people¹¹² across at least 15 sessions by spring 2023. Each individual chooses how intensively to engage and what connections to nurture further.



Fig. 22. Collective embroidery, in the project Creative Exchange for Community Cohesion, Tartu, Estonia, 2022.

From the summer of 2021 to the spring of 2023 at least 15 embroidery sessions have taken place, involving 56 people. Sessions were organized in both private and public locations, in different contexts. One of the first larger collective creative gatherings took place at Alt lab in a workshop series exploring sustainability perspectives. A memorable session took place in the Creative Exchange for Community Cohesion network¹¹³ in Tartu, and the positive impact of the sessions — as "a shared presence allowing open conversation about immaterial things"¹¹⁴ — was also noted at the VDA Textile Art and Design department. New sessions continue at the reopened Ideas Block,¹¹⁵ including in the context of exhibitions such as Transitions.¹¹⁶



Fig. 23. Threads of conversation, collective embroidery work almost a year into the project, 2022.

The collective creative process offers the opportunity to approach certain shared understandings and helps one more easily identify oneself in the surrounding environment in a broader context, seeking new points of

connection. By strengthening mutual connections in society, we provide a more sustainable foundation for relationships with other forms of life, the environment, and ourselves.

Rhizome of Connections

The rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance.

— Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari¹¹⁷



Fig. 24. Rhizome of Connections, mixed-media work exhibited at Spacetime Un[b]locked, Ideas Block – Kompresorinė, Liucija Dervinytė, 2023.

This artistic research — *Rhizome of Connections* — is an attempt to establish new connection points and practise different modes of communication. The word "rhizome" was chosen as the project title not by accident — it is a reference to the multi-layered network of nature, with many components and connection points, each having their effect. In biology, the rhizome is described as a constantly growing mass of underground stems, creating plant systems through shoots and storing nutrients for growth and development.¹¹⁸

In philosophy the rhizome concept emphasizes non-hierarchical, non-linear connections between different elements. Deleuze and Guattari argue that in the rhizome any point can and must be connected to any other point.¹¹⁹ This connection between apparently unrelated elements exists not only in the rhizome — it is a worldview that negates dichotomy. Even such elementary concepts as "good" and "evil" are temporary products of selection whose understanding changes over time.¹²⁰



Fig. 25. Connected by a bond, textile collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2022.

The rhizome is composed of various different elements, where the collectively embroidered fabric forms a complex structure from which visual works, textual conversation collages, factual information fragments, and video documentation grow in different directions. This Rhizome is an exchange of ideas — both during the collective creative process and when presenting the artistic research results to the public. The sounds heard in the short film¹²¹ are collectively improvised works — a meditative collective improvisation that took place during arts and community workshops in Tartu.



Fig. 26. Knowledge and responsibility, dress collage, exhibition example, Liucija Dervinytė, 2023.

The individually created works are an eclectic formation combining different techniques and aesthetics. The series consists of three large-format paintings combining watercolor, embroidery, and collage on canvas, serving as directional markers for each part. Secondary-use materials dominate: an old torn sheet, textile scraps from previous projects, previously worn clothing donated by others. As Arleta Griffor writes, "contact with the whole is reached through creative movement in which ever subtler meanings are disclosed."¹²²



Fig. 27. Nature's tear, watercolor, embroidery, collage, Liucija Dervinytė, 2022.

This project reminded me that art can be not only an aesthetic object, but also a research tool, a form of communication, and a social action. The artist as a creator of connections is an active participant in the nature–culture rhizome, creating new links and meanings between personal experiences, mutual relationships, and nature. Every work, every gathering, every thread — a new node in this network.¹²³

Conclusions

*Even though creating shared meaning is very valuable, this does not appear to be the final end of dialogue. When both socio-cultural and individual disinformation clears, it is only the beginning of a new order of mental activity. Then the mind engaged in dialogue is truly participating in a creative movement in which ever subtler and new meanings are disclosed, and, as has been said, there is no end to this movement. It may be that participation in this movement is the true contact with the whole, which humans have always sought.*¹²⁴

— Arleta Griffor

The Anthropocene, as an era marked by human dominance in Earth's ecosystems and characterized by rapid species loss and biodiversity decline, signals a great danger — not only to the environment or other life forms, but to humanity itself. The crisis is also a critical moment in nature's cycle, bringing destruction and renewal, and offering the opportunity to rethink our behaviors and their consequences.

The research confirmed the assumption that the dualistic nature–culture concept contributes to unsustainable processes of social development. It is proposed to abandon this dualistic image and integrate multifaceted culture into the all-encompassing network of nature. Accepting our own shadow sides¹²⁵ does not mean justifying destruction — rather, it should help us cultivate an inner balance that contributes to a positive relationship with the outer world and to "restoring the quiet places."¹²⁶

The dualistic view — placing humans above or beside "others" rather than together with them — defines the Anthropocene.¹²⁷ When embroidery participants were asked about this, many agreed that "everything comes from

nature,"¹²⁸ and that egocentric thinking can be redirected — to begin seeing life "not as an island, but as the cosmic matter around it, dancing to the rhythm of the universe."¹²⁹

The collective embroidery sessions demonstrated that the artistic process can become a dialogue, a research tool, and an instrument for building community. Participants noted that it is rare to spend time with others sharing relevant ideas — simply, without status or hierarchy, in "open negotiation."¹³⁰ Engaging in collective creative processes and sharing thoughts can offer "the fullness of lived experience and meaning — the meaning of living together with others,"¹³¹ and, most importantly, open up new possibilities for change.

The results of this art project are a combination of collective and individual creativity, becoming a reflection of the entire research process. Everything interacts without a traceable beginning or end — this is how the Rhizome of Connections forms. This is only a beginning, only a small part of the flow of thoughts — a "contact with the whole in the creative movement"¹³² that each of us must seek. It is also important to remember that in this connection we leave our mark.

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