

**IMAG::
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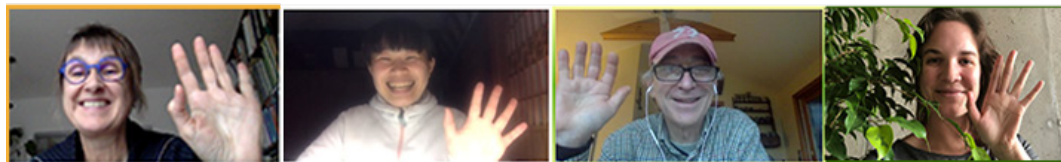
RESILIENCY THROUGH ARTMAKING

Re-charging the IMAGination

As artists and educators, we continually find ways to energize and invigorate our practice. Now, as we strive to make sense of unprecedented global events that have uprooted our routines we are at new beginnings compelled to again witness the power of art to bring us hope, joy, and meaning. In this issue we present visual essays that have demonstrated novel and innovative ways that artists, educators, and community members recharge as an active commitment to revitalize the imagination and sense of wonder. These essays illuminate how visual language and aesthetic experience brings optimism and resilience into the creative process. By exploring the unexplored they refresh the imagination of self, learners, and community members.

As newly appointed co-editors we are also at new beginnings exploring the unexplored and honored to present this, our first issue. We are grateful to Teresa Eca who pioneered and edited IMAG through these past seven years and to graphic designer Angela Saldanha for her keen dedication and vision. We hope to follow their path to Re-charge Imaginations for our readers through many upcoming IMAG issues.

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IMAG issue 11 **RESILIENCY THROUGH ARTMAKING**

The first issue by the IMAG QUARTET ::

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Maria HUHMARNIEMI

Front and back cover image: ©Wanfei HUANG

Forest talks to us: Art and coping with forest disputes

Keywords or phrases: installation art, forest disputes, post-humanism, eco-anxiety



Maria **HUHMARNIEMI**

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Figure 1
Detail of an installation. Amir Abdi, *On the Ropes? BioArt yantra: Rope and oyster mushrooms*, 2021.
Photograph by Maria Huhmarniemi 2021.



Figure 2
Forest in Finland.
Photograph by Saara Huhmarniemi, 2020.

Introduction

Most Finns spend a lot of time in the forest, resting and recharging in a nature. The coronavirus pandemic has motivated Finns to spend even more time in the forest since social interactions have been discouraged and even forbidden. At the same time, global awareness of climate change, of the role of forests as carbon sinks, and of decreasing biodiversity have increased. More and more people are experiencing eco-anxiety due to concerns about the state of nature and the local and global ecological issues (Pihkala, 2020). As a result, time spent in the forest may now be shadowed by anxiety especially when seeing traces of forest industry. Artists and art education respond to issue in many ways by making art in nature and discussing forest issues in their art. This essay focuses on installations and bio-art interpreting forest conflicts.

The essay presents artistic interpretations of the dispute over Finnish forests and illustrates efforts to co-create with nature. This approach draws on post-humanistic theories that encourage recognition of the agency of non-human parts of nature. Artists can enhance human collaboration with non-human parts of nature to change human's relationships with the non-human world, and post-humanist discourses are increasingly influencing pedagogical studies and art education (de Oliveira & Lopes, 2016; Rousell & Fell, 2018).

The artworks presented in this essay were included in the group exhibition *Forest Talks to Us*, which was curated by Maria Huhmarniemi, the author of this essay. The

exhibition was part of the project *Acting on the Margin: Arts as Social Sculpture* (AMASS) at the University of Lapland. The project focuses on promoting art that moves people, educates society, questions broadly accepted narratives, and introduces new perspectives for the future. Art as a tool for participating in local and global political discussions is central to AMASS. *Forest Talks to Us* is part of the growing genre of art addressing sustainability and sustainable development in the Arctic (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020); it also contributes to the body of political contemporary art dealing with ecological and environmental issues (Demos, 2016).



Figure 3
Forest in Finland.
Photograph by Saara Huhmarniemi, 2020.

Art installations commenting on forest disputes and highlighting the agency of non-human nature

Finland is Europe's most densely forested country. However, biodiversity in forests has decreased significantly due to the reduction in mature forests. The timber industry has endangered many forest species. Clear-cut forest looks like rape (Fig. 2–3, 10).

The exhibition *Forest Talks to Us* offers new perspectives on forest disputes and highlights the constant contact of human and non-human nature, emphasizing the need for cooperation and dialogue. This group exhibition included a number of artworks; below are works by the two artists, Huhmarniemi and Amir Abdi. The exhibition was curated by Huhmarniemi as part of the AMASS-project.



Figure 4
 Maria Huhmarniemi, *Forest Culture*. Part II of the series *Sense of Forest Conflict*, 2021. Installation: Eight knitted punching bags hanging from chains. Photograph by Maria Huhmarniemi. Photograph on wall by Touko Hujanen 2020.

Most Finns have an emotional relationship with the forest and strong opinions about the current state of the forestry industry. Conservation organizations and some decision-makers are calling for the protection of biodiversity and of forests as carbon sinks. Continuing the current method of industrial forest maintenance is not an acceptable solution to many Finns. However, this ongoing battle positions most of us in the audience. We follow the battle as we would watch a boxing match on television (Fig. 5).

Maria HUHMARNIEMI - Forest talks to us: Art and coping with forest disputes



Figure 5
 Maria Huhmarniemi, *Battle*. Part I of the series *Sense of Forest Conflict*. 2021. Installation: Boxing gloves and stickers from companies in the forestry industry and conservation organizations. Photograph by Maria Huhmarniemi.

Recent research indicates that Finns gain a stronger sense of well-being from mature forests than younger ones (Simkin, Ojala & Tyrväinen, 2020). The installation presenting knitted punching bags reflects on human well-being gained from encountering trees (Fig. 4, 6, 9).



Figure 6
Maria Huhmarniemi, *Forest Culture*. Part II of the series *Sense of Forest Conflict*, 2021. Installation: Eight knitted punching bags hanging from chains. Photograph by Maria Huhmarniemi.

A yantra is a geometrical diagram used as a meditation aid. This yantra was co-created by an oyster fungus and artist Amir Abdi with the help of mycologist Katarina Česnik for the *Forest talks to us* exhibition. The title *On the ropes?* refers to a fighter in a conflict. It is a vulnerable position for a boxer to be pinned against the ropes that enclose the boxing ring (Fig. 1, 7-9). The artwork can be interpreted as a proposal to focus on mental capacities to cope with wicked problems such as forest maintenance and eco-anxiety. While previous studies show that artists mean to intervene in environmental conflicts include fostering of cultural resilience, transforming values, supporting hope and campaigning with art (Huhmarniemi, in press), the presented artworks of the *Forest talks to Us* exhibition highlight arts leverage on human capacities at the age of environmental crises and social isolation.

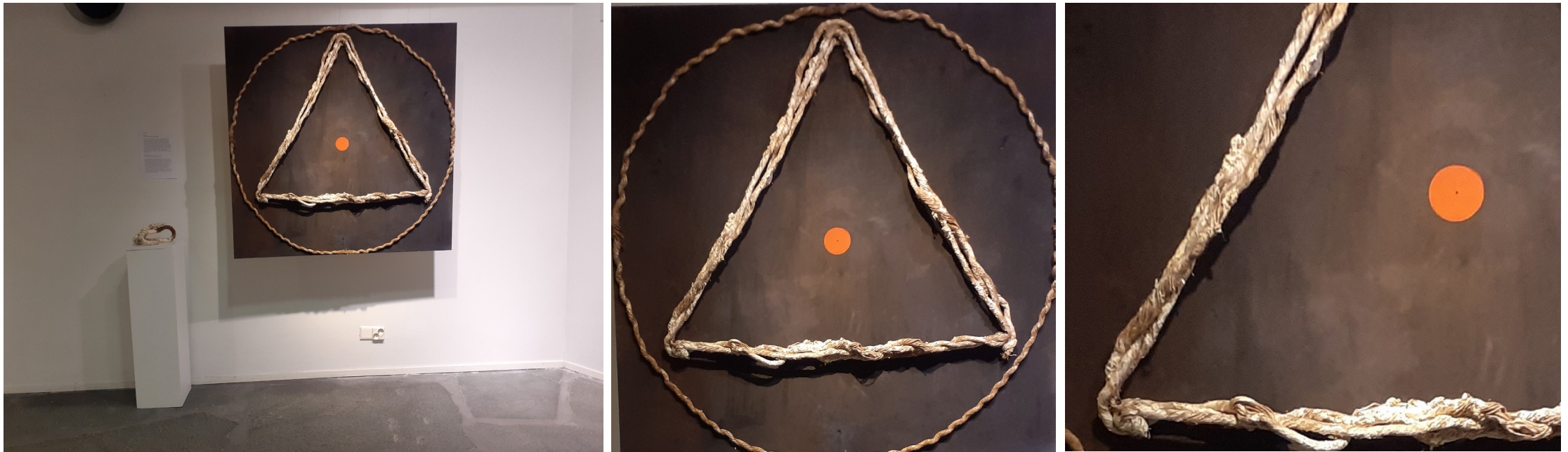


Figure 7-9
 Amir Abdi, *On the Ropes?* BioArt yantra: Rope and oyster mushrooms, 2021.
 Photograph by Maria Huhmarniemi.

Reflection

Discussions about forest maintenance in Finland have been polarized by traditional and social media. It is necessary to understand the cultural backgrounds of environmental conflicts and to balance the conflicting needs of encouraging rapid tree growth and protecting forest biodiversity. The works of art presented in this essay seek to make sense of these conflicts over forests by interpreting and representing some aspects of this dispute. One of the artworks explored artistic collaboration with non-human nature. Ways to release stress in forest and cope with environmental awareness and eco-anxiety were the main conclusions of the presented exhibition *Forest talks to us*.



Figure 10
 Maria Huhmarniemi, *Forest Culture*. Part II of the series *Sense of Forest Conflict*. 2021. Installation: Eight knitted punching bags hanging from chains. Photograph by Maria Huhmarniemi. Installation in the middle by Katja Juhola 2020.

Acknowledgement

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Figure 11
Forest in Finland.
Photograph by Saara Huhmarniemi, 2020.



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