



The plants are talking; can we listen?

Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis - Master of Visual Arts
Auckland University of Technology

Abstract

This research explores how a sculpture practice might hold space for co-creation and collaboration with the fallen branches of native trees. How might different methods of carving and making bring me into a deeper relationship with the plant realm? Traversing concepts of syntropy, pluriversality, herbalism and indigenous cosmologies, this project considers the rhizomatic history humans share with the plant realm. Through honouring the life force spirit and the ecosystems of tree branches, plants, shells, soil, and clay, I explore a 'remembering' of our ancestral kinship to place. Being on the autism spectrum and having heightened sensory gating channels helps me to redefine the boundaries of my being and navigate the space between beings allowing for energetic communication. Consciousness extends bodies into a web of interrelationships, creating conscious communicative ecosystems where humans can participate. My art practice explores these microbial-like connections of entanglement and remembrance of our ancestral connections to the living world, restoring kinship to place. My intimate relationships with the plant realm sprout new mythical vegetative beings to hold me in ritual and as guides in my healing and relationship to place. These mythical beings become an invitation to listen to the plants.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (*except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements*), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

03 / May 2023

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge with love the ancestors that hold space for us on this land, the stories and bodies that have grown this soil. My ancestors that hold me and the spirits of this place, my plant family, my animal family, my insect family, my microbial family, my bacteria family, my stone family, my water family, my soil family, my air family, and my mineral family-blessed be.

I wish to honour the Mana whenua of the places I collected driftwood and fallen branches from:

Karaka bay (Ōrohe), Ngāti Paoa, Mana Whenua Kaitiaki PWG,
And the Kaitiaki of Eskdale reserve Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, Ōkahu Rākau.

This has been collaborative work. A composting of very talented and creative minds. I wish to thank my supervisors Natalie Robertson and Layne Waerea.

The technicians Harriet Stockman and En Torng Sung in the wet lab for teaching me how to use the wheel and navigating the kiln.

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My love Antonio Karam for co-creating the soundscape and always believing in me.

Introduction

Welcome reader I offer this writing as a libation of words. May it be used as a seed for sprouting new ideas and ways of being.



Decomposition

Bodies of living organisms begin to decompose shortly after death. Decomposition is the process of dead organic matter being organised into simpler organic and inorganic substance such as water, carbon, mineral salts gasses and simple sugars. This nutrient cycle is essential for recycling the finite matter of bodies that inhabit the corporeal space in the biosphere. No two organisms decompose in the same way; however, they all undertake the same sequential phases of decay. Organisms that assist with this process are known as decomposers or detritivores. The science of this process is Taphonomy the term is derived from the Greek word 'taphos', meaning tomb.²

About 3000 years ago, in south-eastern Sicily in the small town of Castelluccio, my Sicilian ancestors carved messages to their dead inside their tombs. Concealed by a plain stone slab, these designs would only have been visible from inside the tomb as a reassuring message to the dead that death was the beginning of something new.³ Leading up into spirals that could symbolise the eternal soul, the designs on the tomb door depict an intimate sexual act, a representation of the departed return to the earth's

Fig 1. Paoli Orsi, Archaeology Museum, Syracuse, Sicily.¹

1 "Paolo Orsi Regional Archeological Museum: Archaeological Park of Syracuse Eloro," 30 January 2021, <https://parchiarcheologici.regione.sicilia.it/siracusa-eloro-villa-tellaro-akrai/en/siti-archeologici/museo-archeologico-regionale-paolo-orisi/>.

2 "Taphonomy: Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Taphonomy by Etymonline," accessed 8 May 2023, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/taphonomy>.

3 "The Spirals in the Doors of the Tombs of Castelluccio (Sicily): Prehistory in Italy (blog)," published 2 November 2020, <https://www.preistoriainitalia.it/en/2020/11/02/le-spirali-nei-portelli-delle-tombe-di-castelluccio-sicilia/>.

decomposing the physicality of death, we can realise it is the breaking down of the material body into its specific compounds creating ingredients to grow something new. There is no reason to not believe that the dying spirit does not experience a similar journey and that this might be the closest we get to our ancestors who are the spirit ingredients to our being. In this same sense of spirit relationship, I believe that my ancestors lived their lives feeling supported and guided by their ancestors in life and as they approached death.

As Joshua Schrei remarks:

“All our ancestors experienced Death; you are descended from around 10 000 human beings who stared into that vast holy unknown and then went there. How did your ancestors meet Death? How will you?”⁴

Many cultures have communal small death rituals that prepare them as individuals for the process of death. Death is the inevitable unknown that marks the end of our individual journey woven at a specific time. What happens at the point of death, is significant. In this liminal time the interior consciousness becomes the sea in which the dying person swims. At that point, there are no layers between us and the naked raw reality of existence. As our bodies prepare for the journey of melting into a new becoming.

Sophie Strand describes the body to be like an ancestor.

“That the body is an altar to your ancestors. Every one of your cells holds an ancient and anarchic love story. Around 2.7 million years ago, free-living prokaryotes melted into one another to form the mitochondria and organelles of the cells that build our bodies today. By curling your body in a foetal shape, emulating a foetus or new life, your body then becomes an altar not just to the womb that grew you but to the retroviruses that 200 million years ago taught mammals how to develop the protein syncytia that creates the syncytiotrophoblast layer of the placenta.”⁵

In decomposing my ancestry, I can understand the connections they all share, I can rebuild a story of my ancestors and in doing so I can discover a deeper understanding of myself and my place in the world. Through this knowledge, I can decompose the narratives we currently live, stories like economic growth and capitalism, where we are not the author or the main character. I can decompose these ideas and see them for the damage they do because they carry no relational ties to the living world but rather exploit her. For me, remembering the stories of my ancestors and how they are rooted in the earth, is like the vegetation Gods and Goddesses that decomposed their trauma through myth and ritual. These stories

⁴ Joshua Schrei, “The Emerald: No One Here Gets Out Alive (The Death Episode),” accessed 28 March 2023. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/no-one-here-gets-out-alive-the-death-episode/id1465445746?i=1000579757945>.

⁵ Sophie Strand, “Myth & Mycelium”, published 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCX5h4ASROk>.

grew as they were shared orally, they rooted in place and time and in decomposing the stories we are shown how we can compost them into fertile ground for new ones that are rooted back into the earth to sprout up and speak of this time and place.

“Most of us have been displaced from those cultures of origin, a global diaspora of refugees severed not only from land, but from the sheer genius that comes from belonging in symbiotic relation to it.”

Tyson Yunkaporta⁶

The myths of my ecosystem include me and my ancestry. With every breath I take, I am breathing in the place where my feet are planted. I breathe in all the microbial spores that are the web of communication of that ecosystem. Every time I drink water, all the water in my body is replaced by the water of that place. I become part of that landscape and that ecosystem. I am healed and held by the place I live. I am in an intimate relationship with this land. It is up to me how I nurture this relationship. As my choices will impact everyone involved in that relationship. I can come home to the great mother and have her hold me.

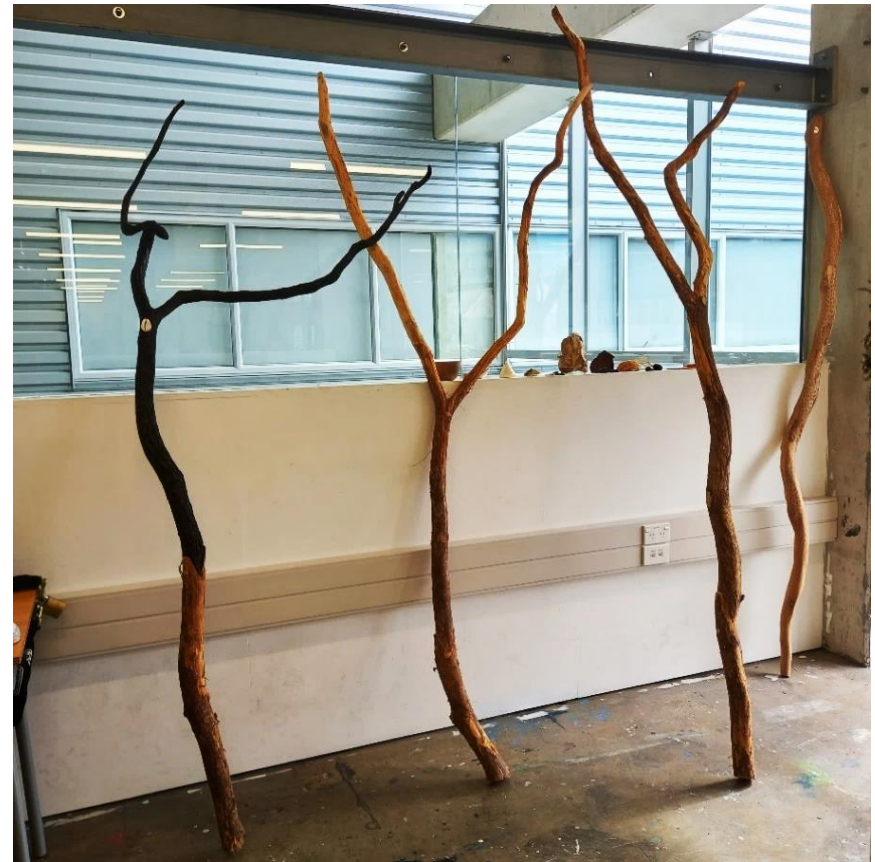


Fig 2. Minke Lupa, three branches of Totara, Manuka and Kanuka wood in studio, 2022.

⁶ Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save The World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020).



Fig 3. Angus Roberts, burning of Kanuka branch in AUT workshop, 2022.



Fig 4. Minke Lupa, saddle graft detail in gallery, 2023.



Fig 5. Minke Lupa. Sisters in gallery, 2023.



Fig6. Minke Lupa. Sisters is an interactive piece can be touched to dance and can make music by blowing into the Cowrie shells, 2023.

Sisters

Fallen branches of Kanuka, Manuka, and Totara with a grafted base of Kanuka. Three branches grafted to wood from the same Totara tree, the same foundation holding and supporting, in a saddle graft. Through grafting trees, the plant grows and heals the wound but in this combines two different trees to create something new. Grafting in my sculptural practice has become a story of not only healing but growing from trauma.

The 'y' shape of the branches speaks of the tree's growth, one branch becoming two. Searching for sunlight or navigating climatic extremes the tree will grow through the trauma its branches telling a story of resilience.

Entering a forest, I hold the intention of reverence — this is where my art practice begins. Fallen branches are limbs that hold a liminal space between living and dying; they are released by the tree in a flourish of growth, in a collaborative dance with the forest, and as a loving, nourishing gift to the earth. These branches often hold pockets of rot that contributed to their fall. I must time their retrieval to the seasonal patterns as they speedily become claimed by the forest soil. In their materiality alone, they are mythical beings. This practice is a form of ritual, allowing space for something new to grow out of 'death'. I release the bark and rehome the insects that live in it. I keep enough bark to honour its past and the tree's essence.

Occasionally burning the surface to heal the wounds of rot and in a ritual of releasing pain and cleansing. In this space, I think about how; our atoms don't die, our molecules don't die, they restructure and repurpose. Does anything ever really, die? Or is life the perpetual shapeshifter?

Many believe fallen branches to be dead wood as the sap that flowed through the tree stops once the branch is severed. Maybe in a human-centred idea of death fallen branches are dead. Nature as teacher, reveals that death is just a liminal space for something new to emerge. Wood breathes as it contracts and expands and cracks in relation to its environment even after felling. Its lifecycle changes but it doesn't die.

Working with wood makes me rethink my way of being. My way of living in this world, what I give back to the earth and how I treat the eco-system that supports me. And in death what will I leave behind, what will the essence of Minke be, what will I grow into?

"If I am a single verse of a great song that has extended for thousands of generations, a humming, a vibrational strand in a great sonata tapestry of song that lives in the rivers and Acacia trees, that lives in the ritual heartbeat of the people that continue. Then what dies? Then what can my role be, other than to add my footsteps to it for a few brief cycles of the moon? It is the dance itself that is eternal, that is alive, not me."

Schrei Joshua⁷

For me, the grouping of these three branches holds a remembering of women dancing in circles, of a community ritual or trauma healing.

A personal longing and remembering of this sense of community. An invocation of my ancestral ways. These branches are suspended using hemp twine. Hemp is one of the oldest crops cultivated by humans.⁸ A reminder of how dependent we are on the plant world; the hemp twine signifies being supported by ancestry — humans and plants have grown our roots together for tens of thousands of years.

The cowry shells hold a long history throughout Africa, the Middle East, Egypt and into Southern Europe. Because of trade routes around the Mediterranean, the Cowry shell shared symbolism of fertility and protection among these cultures. Its elegant shape is reminiscent of a pregnant woman's form, its rounded top a pregnant woman's belly. The slit on the underside of the shell is indicative of an eye, which is why it was often and still to this day used to ward off the evil eye and in divinity rituals. It is found in prehistoric artefacts associated with the Goddess throughout this region. Bar- Yosef Mayer, suggests that evidence of archaeological remains of strings of native Sicilian cowrie shells found in Cypress proves the trade of these shells during the late Pleistocene/

Early Holocene transition (around 10 000BCE).⁸ With the introduction of colonising languages in Sicily it acquired the name 'porcellana', in old Italian it means little pig (referencing a pig's vagina), 'porcellana' translated into the English name porcelain.⁹

⁷ Joshua Schrei, "The Emerald: No One Here Gets Out Alive (The Death Episode)," accessed 28 March 2023. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/no-one-here-gets-out-alive-the-death-episode/id1465445746?i=1000579757945>.

⁸ Jelena Visković, Valtcho D. Zheljzkov, Vladimir Sikora, Jay Noller, Dragana Latković, Cynthia M. Ocomb, and Anamarija Koren, "Industrial Hemp (Cannabis Sativa L.) Agronomy and Utilization: A Review", March 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/agronomy13030931>.

I surmise this to be an attempt to discredit the sacred feminine connection and its power as a form of currency. As why else would a symbol of the Goddess that was revered for centuries prior, be denigrated by a colonial power who saw pigs as dirty but if only to erode its power? The Cowry shell was a main source of currency throughout the trade routes of the Middle East and into southern Europe and introduced into West Africa in the eighth century and is still used as currency in certain parts of the Pacific to this day.¹⁰ The beauty of this precious currency, formed by nature and free of human-made qualities, speaks of the divine connection the earth has to humanity. Imagine a currency that you could harvest and that grew because you were in a healthy relationship with the living world. In West Africa it was still used as a currency until 1940, despite the attempts of the colonial French to use their franc, the locals resisted. Instead, unfortunately, it became an effective payment tool for slaves.⁹

Inserted into branches In the Three Sisters, the viewer is invited to blow into the shell to have their breath trace the empty vessel that was grown by the mollusc. Their soft fleshy bodies growing these protective shields that hold them and grow with them. These shells leave their legacy as shimmering jewels strewn across the ocean sand. I invite the viewer to reclaim the sacred feminine through their breath and so challenge colonisation that attempted to strip this shell of its power. This act of blowing into a shell is associated with calling in ancestry, in grounding oneself in place and opening ritual. The

sound of blowing into the Cowry is reminiscent of the wind, and in many Shamanic cultures, when a person dies, the shaman will whisper the sound of the wind, creating a thread for the spirit to follow into their next becoming. Here, the viewer is offered the opportunity to create their own thread on the wind into their new becoming as a ritual of release and remembering.

During our lifetime our bodies create little death rituals, preparing us for the inevitable, in the guise of pain, illness, and trauma. If we can see these as an opportunity for ritual within, that is medicine. I long for my ancestral rituals and stories that spoke wisdom into this inevitability, but there is only silence. I must find the wisdom on my own I must learn to listen to my body. I know I am not alone in not knowing the rituals of my ancestors and feeling this longing for a connection to my ancient culture, rooted in the spirit of place.

Sensing the whole history of my people inside me, inside my womb as a memory. This memory feels broken and only offers me small pieces like the Sicilian terracotta remains left by my ancestors

⁹ Alvarado Santana, "Cowrie Shells: Hope Beyond Despair," accessed 25 April 2023, <https://africanamericanslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/cowries/>.

I feel a kindred connection to the practice of Ana Mendieta in using her practice to remember and connect to her ancestry and in this I feel lies the power of her work. Mendieta's Silueta Series consisted of more than 200 earth-body works. Mendieta explored her silhouette in relationship with the landscapes of Iowa and Mexico.

Rooted in Afro-Cuban Santería and the indigenous Taíno practices, she reclaimed her connection to the land and her culture as a displaced child. Seeking a way to, in her words, "Return to the maternal source." And finding her way through. "To become one with the earth."¹⁰

She used her body to intimately connect with earth elements. Exploring sacred traditions, Mendieta's earthworks occupy an ephemeral space. For many years she tried to create a work by sending an image made of smoke into the atmosphere, designed to dissipate, to be reclaimed by the earth's elements, offering reverence. This work was never captured but in this alone it holds that liminal, sacred space that ritual holds. Her practice as rituals brought her closer to these elemental forces melting her physical being into the eternal elemental cycles. I find these works to be the most beautiful death poems. For it holds a collective remembrance as a woman of our bodies in relation to the eternal mother and as humans the infinite relationship we share with the earth. Her practice speaks a similar language to mine in that, as a practice, it is a prayer without religion, but with the ecology of energy. It creates a ritual space for listening to the earth. Feeling a call to remember the ways of our people and finding it in listening to the earth.

¹⁰ Ana Mendieta, "Ana Mendieta: My Thirst for Being," in *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination*, ed. Paul Buhle et al. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982), 121.

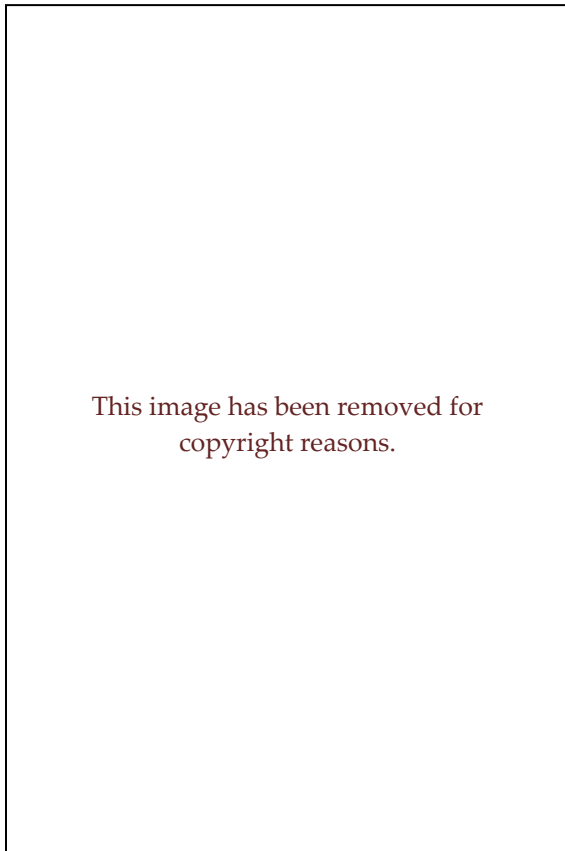


Fig 6. Ana Mendieta, Imágen de Yágul, 1973. Colour photograph. © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co. Licensed by Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York.

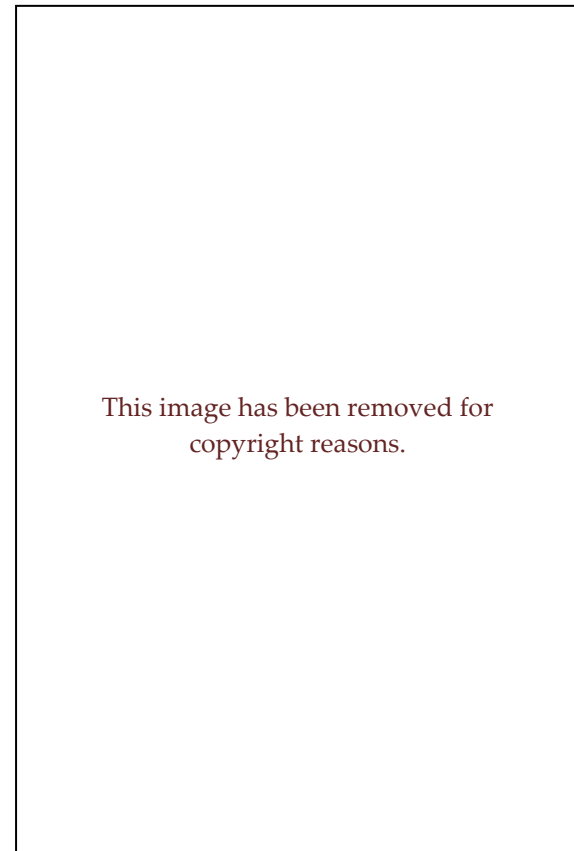


Fig 7. Ana Mendieta. Alma, Silueta en Fuego, 1975. Colour photograph. © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co. Licensed by Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York.

If I decompose my story in this time and place, I find that, as an artist, herbalist, mother, and woman entering menopause, this is the ecology of my being and of my practice. It is all interlinked as I navigate feeling my way into being in this new phase. I use my practice to co-create with my plant and elemental allies and, in sharing their wisdom, I remember my way back to my ancestors while rewriting a story that roots me in this place and time.

In the appreciation of your life lived, the writing of a death poem can be a death ritual and offer a reflection on your lived life.

What will your death poem be?

May the earth hold your body.

May the rain wash away any pain.

May fire burn your fear.

And may the wind carry you into your next existence, my friend.

Blessed be.

This death poem I have used for many years in farewelling any passing living being. I offer it in a whisper as a thread for the soul to follow back into the eternal mother and as a seed for you the reader to grow your own death poem.

Growth through trauma

I feel trees to be the most beautiful sculptural representation of trauma as the pattern of branching, and the presence of wounds and scars are the life-lived experiences of a tree. Phenotypic plasticity is the growth pattern of a plant and its behaviour, morphology, and physiology in response to its unique environment.¹¹ An environmental ecosystem affects how branches develop and elongate. When a tree sustains a wound, it immediately begins a protective response, a first immediate chemical phase, followed by a slower, long-term physical adjustment. The chemical response to the wound is an effort to limit injury by insects, who are attracted to sugars and phytochemicals. These phytochemicals are antimicrobial and antifungal and assist in cleaning the wound. During the healing process the wound remains open to allow oxygen availability which is essential in its healing.¹²

This is why the tree gradually grows a callus over the damaged tissue, effectively healing a wound, retaining the overall health of the tree, and ensuring new growth that will enable new fruits or seeds. Trauma is not ignored, it is systematically healed through acknowledgement, cleansing and growth. Trees do not ignore their suffering — they bear them as beautiful scars of growth. They are supported through this by a community of other trees and mycelium in a web of relationships.

Response patterns to trauma are intertwined with everything life entails. Somatic healing IRF (Inner relationship focusing) offers an approach to embody distress while not becoming consumed by it. By sensing where it is felt in the body, we build a relationship with the feeling.¹³ In this practice the feeling is connected to a specific place in the body. This prevents the experience from being overwhelming, as it is not the entire body experiencing the feeling.

¹¹ Amanda Gefter, "What Plants Are Saying About Us." Nautilus published 7 March 2023, <https://nautil.us/what-plants-are-saying-about-us-264593/>.

¹² Beronda Montgomery, "Psyche: Trees Don't Rush to Heal from Trauma and Neither Should We," accessed 2 April 2023, <https://psyche.co/ideas/trees-dont-rush-to-heal-from-trauma-and-neither-should-we>.

¹³ Maureen Gallagher, "Embodying Psychotherapy: Inner relationship focussing," accessed 1 May 2023, <https://embodyingpsychotherapy.com/inner-relationship-focusing>.



We gain the capacity for the rest of our body to hold and support that piece of us experiencing the discomfort. This is similar to how a tree responds to trauma and finds the resilience to grow through it. As a tree navigates climatical shock and discomfort, it grows through it towards sunlight and sustenance. Furthermore, like a tree, distress can help us grow into the most beautiful versions of ourselves as individuals and as communities. Trauma takes the brain into a space where it can be repatterned. Carefully harnessing pain can help regrow and repattern the tree of the nervous system called the dendrites.

Dendrite is Latin for little trees, these trees of the human nervous system evolved in relationship with the plants with which we share this world. Hundreds of thousands of neuron receptor sites are sensitive to specific plant compounds,¹⁴ verifying that our biological systems are directly structured around the plant realm. This is why our ancestors used plant substances as an integral part of repatterning trauma.

Fig 8. An image of a human dendrite, a little tree in Latin. See worldsoflearning.blogspot.com

¹⁴Joshua Schrei, "The Emerald: On Trauma and Vegetation Gods," (podcast) accessed 26 April 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/on-trauma-and-vegetation-gods/id1465445746?i=1000526444929>.

Indigenous elder and writer Tyson Yunkaporta speak on the importance of growing through trauma and not getting stuck in it. In a discussion on trauma stories being exploited by capitalism and colonialism in a vicious intergenerational cycle.

"Trauma narratives can become capital if there is failure to make meaning of an event." and "The problem of trauma stories becoming an identity."¹⁵

Current findings in epigenetics have confirmed that our lived experiences can be kept and expressed in our bodies and inherited across generations. In a clinical study run by Rachel Yehuda¹⁶ pregnant mothers, who experienced PTSD from a significant distressing event in their third trimester, baby's saliva when tested at nine months old were found to have low cortisol levels. The shock left a trace in the offspring even before they were born.

Yehuda writes 'Epigenetics potentially explains why the effects of trauma may endure long after the immediate threat is gone, and it is also implicated in the diverse pathways by which trauma is transmitted to future generations.'

What does this mean for ancestral remembrance and ancestral healing? Yehua argues that our DNA is modified by our experiences.

of trauma, it is not only carried in our minds but is also physically carried and expressed in our bodies. The epigenetic signatures are modifiable.¹⁷ When we heal ourselves from ancestral trauma, we moreover heal future generations.

Through communal ritual my ancestors opened space for wounds to heal, they called on their plant allies to assist in this transformation. There is still evidence of these rituals within religious festivals throughout Sicily.

Being displaced and losing connection with our culture, communities and land impacts our resilience to negate trauma. Growing connection to place, land and plants has brought healing and resilience to my life. There is a reason why I feel this ancestral connection to the plants. It is why the plants call to me and it all started with a little girl who spoke with the trees.

¹⁵ Joshua Schrei, "The Emerald: Sand Talk with Tyson Yunkaporta," (podcast) accessed 20 January 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-emerald/id1465445746>.

¹⁶ Rachel Yehuda is a professor of psychiatry and neuroscience and director of the Centre for Psychedelic Psychotherapy and Trauma Research at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. She is also director of mental health at the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Centre.

¹⁷ Rachel Yehuda, "Trauma in the Family Tree," *Scientific American* 327, 1, 50-55 (published July 2022), doi:10.1038/scientificamerican0722-50.



Fig 9. Antonio Karam. unknown native tree root broken off its trunk found at Glenfield reserve after a storm, 2022.



Fig 10. Minke Lupa. inspection into the tree root shows the wood is dry and must have died before being washed out, 2022.



Fig 11. Luca Namoa. cleaning Pohutukawa tree found washed up on the beach at Tahuna Torea reserve after a storm broken off at its trunk, 2022.



Fig 12. Minke Lupa. grafting the roots and tree together using a saddle graft, growing a new story, 2022.



Fig 13. Minke Lupa, grafting different roots to the root system, roots found at Eskdale reserve, 2023.



Fig 14. Minke Lupa, grafting detail made visible with Pohutukawa dowel, 2023.



Fig 15. Minke Lupa, Cat's eyes individually inserted into the wood, 2023.



Fig 16. Minke Lupa, Tree suspended using Hemp twine., 2023.

Tree

He has grown into a strong Tree supported by ancestry. His root system combines different stories, roots from different trees. All the woods from this piece were found and died due to erosion in Auckland, the reality of our current ecological story. Displacement is growing something new out of the unfamiliar. Where do we find the strength to do that? — by remembering our roots. This is how we grow in strength for if our roots are strong, we will be resilient. Fig.8, If our connection with our spirit is secure, we can stand tall. Each "cat eye" symbolises an ancestor walking with you, protecting you. " Cat eye" is the common name for the lid or operculum of the common sea snail. When the snail is exposed above the tide or threatened by a predator, it withdraws into its shell, and the operculum seals the opening.¹⁸ In Sicily it is called the eye of Saint Lucia and offers protection against 'mal'occhio' (evil eye or a curse).¹⁹

My son and I have collected these shells together on beaches around New Zealand. Treasuring a natural object by giving it the reverence of protection, bestowing oneself luck to discover one, and sharing in this ritual act and the stories they hold, with your children, holds magic. It's in remembering and sharing our stories we can help others find and remember theirs. It's in listening to the stories of the plants we can tie our stories together and remember that they are our ancestors too.

My ancestral homeland of Sicily holds many trauma scars from volcanic eruptions and earthquakes to colonisation and famine. It is through communal ritual that resilience has been built. These rituals are shrouded in myth and mythical beings. These mythical beings are entangled with the vegetative realm. Even with the religious appropriation of indigenous rituals and myths, the vegetative realm is still present, our plant ancestors still speak to us.

The sculptures I have co-created with the more-than-human world hold myths for my healing. I feel the ties to my indigenous ancestors through working with the plants. They are the earth speaking and me listening; it's only in retrospect that I can see this as when I am in practice; it's an intimate getting to know and listening to the branches, the wood, the shells, the clay. Even exploring different ways of carving brings a different perspective to the materiality of the wood it is a very intimate and slow process.

Carving slowly reveals the branch's history as you peel away the layers. Rot emerging like flecks of gold and silver. Each sculpture reveals a different story wrapped in its materiality but also readthrough different eyes: it reveals a relational story to the viewer. What the mythical beings reveal to us, carries within it our personal stories rooted in our culture and life experiences. These are gifts from the vegetal realm, awakening a remembering of how our ancestors communicated with the plant world

¹⁸ Melanie Lovell-Smith, "Cat's Eye in Shell," New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Te Manatu Taonga, accessed 30 April 2023. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/8014/cats-eye-in-shell>.

¹⁹ Antonio, "Eye of Saint Lucia," published 20 February 2015, <http://www.capriblog.it/it/occhio-di-santa-lucia/>.

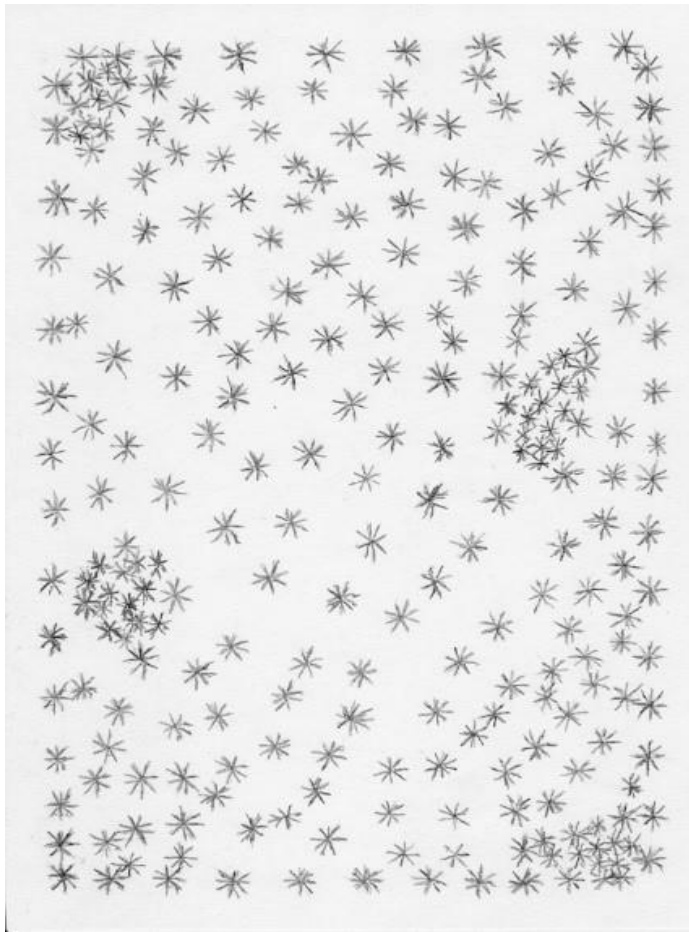


Fig 17. Chiara Camoni, *Grandmothers drawings of stars*, image courtesy of Arcade.

Italian Artist Chiara Camoni creates her art from earth elements, clay, wood, plants, and wool collected close to her home around Fabbiano, Italy. Her house and life are interwoven in her practice, her kitchen table becoming a space for collaborative exploration. For her, her practice is healing, and she shares this with others, an example being a series of drawings she curated for her 'nonna' (grandmother) to help heal her melancholy while dying. Her 'nonna's' final series was drawings of stars, and while drawing them, she dreamt of eating the stars.²⁰ What a beautiful way of working through trauma supported by love and finding peace of consuming and embracing the eternal.

The source of Camoni's works is in materials discovered by chance and through relationships with the ecology of place and community. In Camoni's exhibition, 'Gli immediate dintorni' (the immediate surroundings) she honours these. She describes these encounters as "deviations", an empathic view of the world.²¹ Her practice is moulded by intuition and ancestral knowledge, the magic of extending from the past into future generations.²²

²⁰ Chiara Camoni, "Chiara Camoni: Index," accessed March 21, 2023, http://ChiaraCamoni.net/Chiara-Camoni_arge-kunst.jpg.

²¹ "Centre of contemporary culture: Chiara Camoni | CCC Strozziina," accessed 26 April 2023, <http://www.strozzina.org/en/artists/camoni/>.

²² "Bordeaux of contemporary arts: Chiara Camoni," accessed 26 April 2023, <https://www.daily-lazy.com/2021/09/chiara-camoni-at-capc-musee-dart.html>.



Fig 18. Chiara Camoni, *“La Ninessa e altre Creature,”* n.d, 2015.

Camoni's sculptural series 'Ninesse' embody the great mother form; they are polymorphous beings that live in multiple times and places. They hold the energy of a collective fertility symbol present since the Neolithic times. Similarly, Anna Mendieta's 'sulietas' series and Camoni's 'Ninesse' sculptures speak of remembering and connection to the great mother. They draw in the ancestral feminine energy of their indigenous cultures, illustrating beautifully the pluriversality²³ of this feminine spiritual energy and its ties to the earth.

I find beauty in Camoni's way of holding space, how her exhibitions are not an ending point but act as a familiar and shared space for an intimate exchange between the artist's work and the viewer. They offer an experience. They awaken a remembering.

²³ Pluriversality a term created by Walter Mignolo as a solution to the self-proclaimed universality of Western cosmology. Not as cultural relativism and a world of separate units rather an entanglement of cosmologies. A decolonial political vision of a world in which many worlds would co-exist.

Bernd Reiter "Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge." Duke University Press, published 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv11smf4w>.



Fig 19. Chiara Camoni, *Installation view, Persones*, 8a Biennale Gherdëina, Ortisei, IT, 2022.

The sculptural mythical beings I co-create, reveal a strong identity in their evolution to male or female while pertaining a fluidity of both aspects. I refer to them in the identity they reveal to me in their creation, for in this, there is medicine. Every aspect of the making process is a slow reveal of story, materiality, and medicine through the intuitive guidance of co-creation.

These mythical beings have helped me make connections between the worlds of plant beings and human beings. A nonlinear understanding of the relationship tied to indigenous wisdom. Many indigenous cultures see Autistic members of their tribe as sacred because of their ability to lift the veil and communicate with the sentience of the living world. Psychologist and senior lecturer Dr Steven K Kapp wrote a paper on how the indigenous Navajo practice inclusivity and believe that everyone has a place in society, differences bringing diversity of knowledge. They see value in people with disabilities and autism through their concept of 'Hozho', meaning balance and beauty. 'Hozho' is about holistic, relational wellness and is the essence of Navajo philosophy. It guides their views on health, illness, and their way of life. The belief is that all life is interconnected; everything has a spirit and is sentient and thus values equal respect. It celebrates the mystery of life rather than absolute knowledge, acknowledging that life consists of multiple truths.²⁴

Each living being is celebrated for the gifts they bring into the community through their diversity.

I am learning to understand that how I perceive the world, is influenced by how my brain works and the fact that I have autism. Being on the Autism spectrum can feel traumatic as you try and fit into a Western society that does not understand neurodiversity. It is like trying to tap a round branch into a square hole. You are expected to whittle parts of yourself away to fit in; this is impossible. I have found it soothing to relate to the materiality of things, of blurring the lines that separate me and sensing others' being. Sometimes feeling into the living world so intensely I can lose my sense of separation and feel into other beings. Bayo Akamolafe describes his son's experience with autism and how he feels into the soul of the living world.

"The 'soul' is everywhere, a desirous, preindividual force that shapes, convenes, travels, and melts between and through membranous borders, creating reality in its wake."²⁵

²⁴ Steven Kapp, "Navajo and Autism, The Beauty of Harmony," *Disability & Society*. published 1 August 2011(Pages 583–95), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2011.589192>.

²⁵ Bayo Akomolafe, "A Hundred Other Names for Autism: Writings," published 8 April 2023, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/a-hundred-other-names-for-autism>.

I find a healthier description of autism in Bayo's attempt to (in his words) 'depathologize' the term Autism "looking for alternative terms playing with names like "mycelialism" and "rhizomism", in an attempt to connect plant life, fungal inquiries, and ecological goings-on to human minds," in his article, One hundred other names for Autism.²⁶

This blurring of lines of separation is made more accessible through the ability to hyper-focus and intentionally open sensory gating channels. Someone once told me that autism is human evolution and that our ecological systems are evolving us as a species to connect back. Therefore, most children on the Autism spectrum find peace in nature, for here we do not feel alone. We understand our connection and our place inside the living world. This is why I build relationships with specific places and ecosystems.

I have a few sacred sites I visit regularly and have built a relationship with. First, it calls to me, then invites me to stay and feel into the space, and then it reminds me to come back and visit. These sacred spaces often call to me when I am not there; this is when I return and find the branches for my work. This intimate relationship with an ecosystem and land gives me an insight into, and respect for the relationship indigenous communities have with their land.

Research by Medical researcher Barry Wright, and archaeologist Penny Spikins, suggest that the early development of genetically inherited autism was, in part, an evolutionary response to harsh climactic conditions at the height of the last Ice Age. "Harsh conditions favoured the natural selection of genes which predisposed some humans to develop abilities to focus on tasks in detail for extended periods; to perceive their environments in three-dimensional terms in an enhanced way; to develop more detailed image retention abilities; and better aptitudes to identify and analyse patterns of geography and movement. Spikins suggests that much of the world's earliest great art is likely to have been created by gifted early humans on the autism spectrum.²⁷

Through trauma the dendrites in the brain repatterned and regrew, evolving the brain with heightened sensitivity to place, opening sensory gating channels and humanity developed autism. Why is Western society branding autism as a disability? I will leave you to ponder this and the message it sends to those labelled disabled.

²⁶ Bayo Akomolafe, "A Hundred Other Names for Autism: Writings," published 8 April 2023, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/a-hundred-other-names-for-autism>.

²⁷ David Keys, "Prehistoric autism helped produce much of the world's earliest great art," The independent quoted Barry Wright and Penny Spikins, published 15 May 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/prehistoric-autism-cave-paintings-barry-wright-penny-spikins-university-of-york-a8351751.html>.

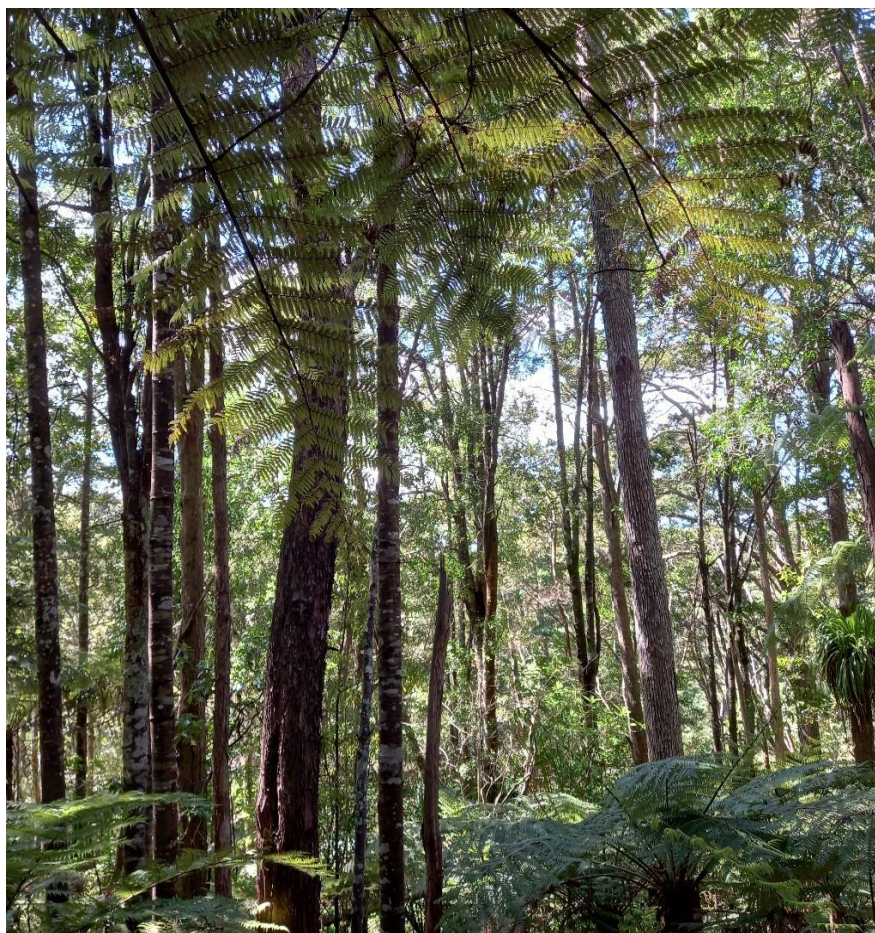


Fig 20. Minke Lupa, Places sacred to me- Karangahake gorge, mana whenua and kaitiaki Ngāti Tara Tokanui, 2024.



Fig 21. Minke Lupa, Places sacred to me- Eskdale reserve, mana whenua and kaitiaki Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei and Ōkahu Rākau, 2024.

Ecosystems

I often think of the 39 trillion microbes that call my body home, the bacteria and fungi that evolve, swap genes and change, creating new environments within me. The two kilograms or so of bacteria and other organisms that live primarily in my gut, profoundly influencing my awareness and behaviour. This microbiome directly affects my intelligence. Because of this, I wonder whether my thoughts and ideas are truly my own or if they are a product of the ecological conversations happening within me. Does the art I create come from within me, or is it a product of a conversation between the microbes and fungi within me and the clay and wood and their microbial ecosystems? Am I merely a vehicle for the more-than-human world to communicate through?

American Feminist and theoretical physicist Karen Barad describes a universe comprised of phenomena that emerge not from bodies themselves but from what she calls their intra-actions. When thinking about the world from the perspective of Quantum theory, intra-action is not interaction. Rather it is the process of touching and becoming one another. For Barad, our world and the entire universe is in a continual process of emergence.

Nothing is fixed or static but instead evolves through intra-action with others. Barad explains that the Quantum field permeates everything and is entangled in all life within the universe, at all scales and is inside and extending from our human bodies.²⁸ We live in this evolving vibrating field of which we are largely unconscious. We are entangled within our living ecosystems to the point where our permeable bodies become part of those ecosystems like a great big composting of living entities growing and evolving together. Microbes penetrating like mycelium into each living being and creating a web of relationships.

Much like this Bayo Akomolafe speaks about us seeing ourselves as between bodies the feelings we experience are the experience of the web of our relations.

Emotions are not ours: it is territorial phenomena. It enlists bodies in how it comes into matter.”

Bayo Akomolafe²⁹

If our emotions are the stories, we tell ourselves, the feelings we feel where are these sprouted, where are they rooted and into what do they grow?

²⁸ James Bridle, *Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence* (New York: Allen Lane, 2022), 84-85.

²⁹ Bayo Akomolafe, and Joshua Schrei, “The Emerald (Podcast),” accessed 7 April 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-emerald/id1465445746>.



Fig 22. Minke Lupa, Bird woman in studio Kanuka wood and Retusa Opima shell. Still evolving mythical being, 2023.



Fig 23. Minke Lupa, preliminary carving of Totara into bird woman's head, 2023.

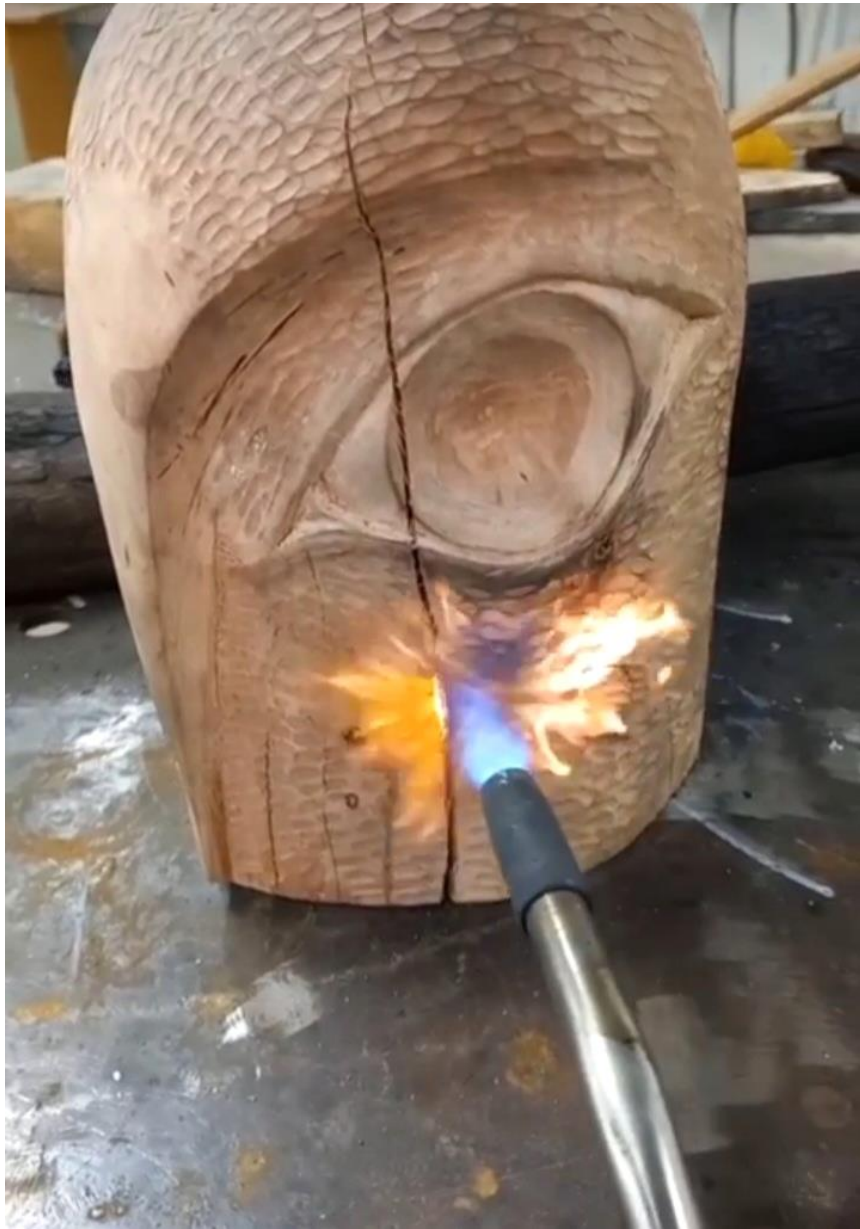


Fig 24. Minke Lupa, burning in ceremony of cleansing. Speaking prayers to Kore and Totara, 2023.



Fig 25. Minke Lupa, carving back into the burn to create detail and then painting with fire over that, 2023.



Fig 26. Minke Lupa, Unknown shell umbilicus found and gifted by my son, 2023.



Fig 27. Minke Lupa, Bird woman, Kore in Gallery, 2023.



Fig 28. Minke Lupa, Kore in Gallery, 2023.



Fig 29. Minke Lupa, Kore's head reflecting the sheen of the charcoal in the gallery sunlight, 2023.

Kore, Birdwoman

Bird woman is inspired by the ancient Sicilian goddess Kore, or some earlier form of her, perhaps associated with the Goddess Inanna, whose name is lost to time. She was the Goddess of death and rebirth, an independent Goddess who stood for the totality of life. She was seen as a messenger from the spirit world bringing her wisdom of being all seeing into the earthy realm.

The colonisation of Sicily by the Greeks in the eighth century BCE led to the rise of agriculture, and the Greeks superimposed their religion of Demeter and Persephone onto Kore. The Romans in the late third century claimed her as Ceres and Persephone. However, her original story belonged to the twin peaks of Enna and Lake Pergusa.

Lake Pergusa was of profound spiritual significance to indigenous Sicilians, associated with female divinity, the underworld, and women's rites of passage. The basin of Purgusa was formed by a sudden sinking of the earth's rock layer and is fed by rainwater and underground springs, which are salinated and sulphurous. When the red oxidising bacteria thrive during summer, the lake turns red. I can only imagine how magical this must have seemed to my ancestors. It was because of this that Lake Pergusa was seen as a portal to the underworld, and the water birds that reside in the lake embody the divine, symbolising the Goddess's dominion over the sky, air, earth, and the underworld and overworld. Various artefacts found next to the lake prove it was a significant spiritual site, with temples dating back to the late palaeolithic era.

Included in the discoveries were hollow bird bones from swans and herons that were fashioned into straws suggesting the ritual use of medicinal drinks.³⁰ Before the Greeks renamed her and gave her grain, Kore was the goddess of wild medicinal flowers.

The reality for Lake Pergusa is she has been ringed by a racetrack run by the Sicilian mafia. This racetrack has severely damaged the ecology of the lake and is suffocating it as it cannot breathe, a natural process of a tidal flow. Lake Pergusa has stopped turning red and is slowly dying.



Fig 30. Lake Pergusa, Sicily, www.patrimoniidelsud.net.

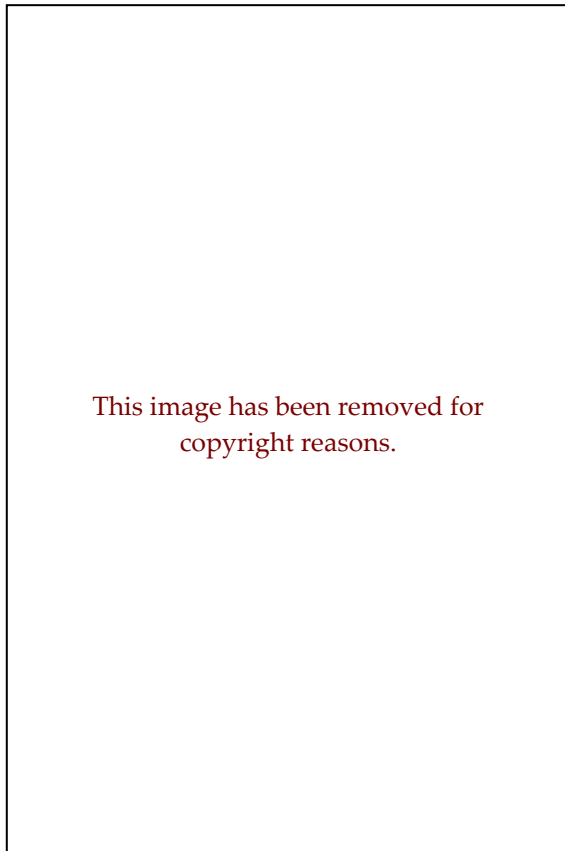
One large Kanuka branch was cleansed with fire; she released her healing essence. - documented by Ngā Rauropi Whakaoranga, that traditionally Māori women used Kanuka wood smoke as medicine to cleanse the body, including the vulva, against venereal diseases (this being a coloniser's disease as it did not exist amongst Māori before Aotearoa was colonised).³¹ I found this kanuka tree lying in a stream, broken at its roots. I have tied the story of my roots to that of the Kanuka, cleansing my grief by burning her bark for smoke medicine. Birdwoman's head is Kanuka grafted together with a kanuka dowel. Her wings are Manuka branches suspended from a Kanuka dowel. She stands on an unburnt Kanuka base reminiscent of an egg this and her shell umbilicus telling her story of bird and woman.

I am tying my roots and the legend of Kore to the stories held in this land and the legend of Kurangaituku as told from the bird woman's point of view through the author Whiti Hereaka. The bird woman and her creation from and connection to Te Kore, the great nothingness, the emptiness yet still everything.³² How these two myths have sprouted from different lands, different indigenous cultures and at different times, but share the same name is no coincidence.

³⁰ Marguerite Rigoglioso, "Persephone's Sacred Lake and the Ancient Female Mystery Religion in the Womb of Sicily," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21, no. 2 (2005), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25002531>.

³¹ Land Care Research (Ngā Rauropi Whakaoranga), "Podocarpus Totara. Tōtara", accessed 13 March 2023. <https://rauropiwhakaoranga.landcareresearch.co.nz/names/fb454c7e-cb0c-4d98-9f97-1e9d14d3a080>.

³² Whiti Hereaka, *Kurangaituku (The bird woman)*, (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2021).



Writer Sophie Strand creates a beautiful metaphor.

"Mycelium put in place will thread underground, connecting different trees and plants, becoming the connective tissue of the soil, so becoming a map of relationships. Fruit bodies of mushrooms that look like individual beings but are reproductive flourishes that sporulate and create a new myth. For we are all planted in a specific place, the place has a myth, and we need to become the instrument for that place's stories of relationship. For all these myths are created underground as part of the same mycelium, they look different as they respond to our place in space and time."³³

Listening to Wangechi Mutu talk about her series of sculptures 'Sentinel,' it is evident that she embraces a symbiosis with the earth elements she uses. She speaks about how, not only their energy permeates her work, but the energy of where they came from and how they birthed into this world.³⁴ Their energy is magnified in her work, raising the importance of how every plant and living being sustains each other. These pieces of the natural world are woven into new beings that hold mythical energy.

Her work speaks beautifully of the ecology of energy and rewilding mythology. Of how the living world can communicate through art

Fig 31. Wangechi Mutu, 'Sentinel'. picture credit to Yale University

¹⁹ Sophie Strand, "Myth & Mycelium", published 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCX5h4ASROk>.

³⁴ Art 21, "Between the Earth and the Sky: Wangechi Mutu," Accessed 27 January 2023, <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/wangechi-mutu-between-the-earth-and-the-sky-short/>.

“The fact that we make art has nothing to do with ourselves. It has very little to do with what we want to say, and it has everything to do with getting closer to the reason why the earth decided for us to be born.”

Wangetchi Mutu ³⁵

The objects we make often stem from us and even in their physical separatism continue to relate to us and us to them. They become part of us. I walk into my studio and see a forest of mythical beings, but I also feel them as family. These embodied beings meet my gaze and inspire me to reflect on the corporeal conditions of my being. As the pattern in the wood invites me to caress its forms to trace my fingers along its grain. Carrying and holding the branches like limbs intertwined, it is a dance of balance and support. There is strength required in working with large pieces of wood and using the requisite equipment and it brings my physical body into focus. For my body has lived many lives in the last 45 years and she holds many memories. Following the shape of the branch I see its story lines; I get a sense of its history. How we have both grown over this brief moment in time, our bodies holding the scars and stories of this. We are not so separate; our story lines have touched our being, have become entangled.

"If we are going to survive, we must tie our roots to other roots. Resilience ecology tells us that landscapes with more biodiversity and more overall connectivity are better able to withstand natural disasters and climatological pressures. We are going to need to drop below human exceptionalism into the underworld of symbiotic co-creation."

Sophie Strand ³⁶

³⁵ FAMSf, “Wangetchi Mutu: I Am Speaking, Are You Listening?” exhibition opening May 7, 2021, <https://www.famsf.org/exhibitions/wangetchi-mutu>.

³⁶ Sophie Strand, “What Is the Underworld?” Substack newsletter, Make Me Good Soil (blog), published 1 October 2022, <https://sophiestrand.substack.com/p/what-is-the-underworld>.

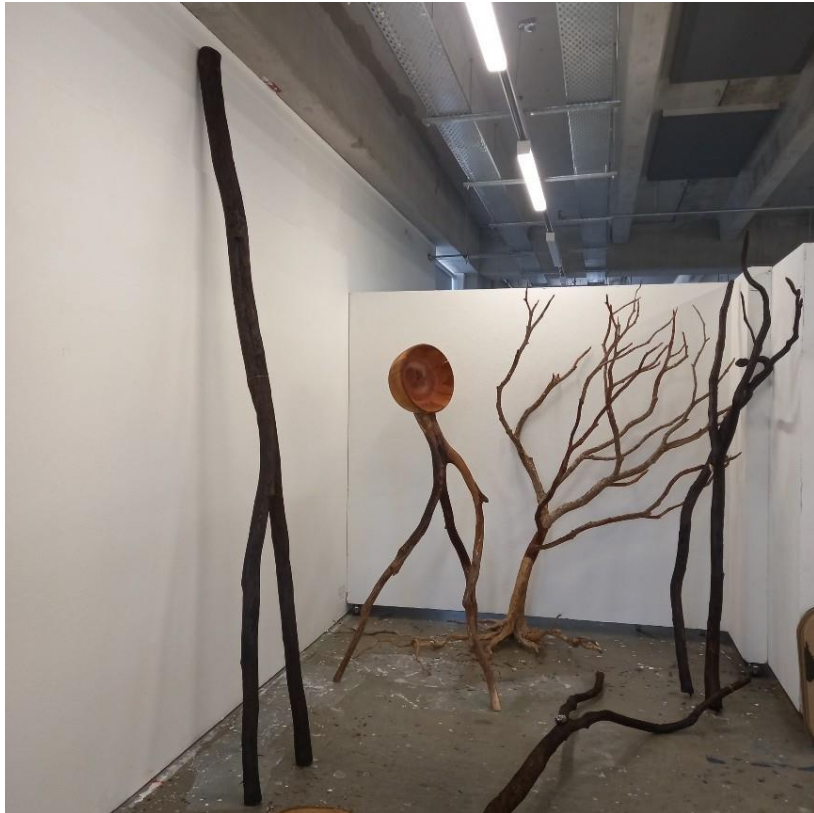


Fig 32. Minke Lupa, *mythical beings evolving and in conversation*, Studio at AUT, 2023.

In the Sicilian language, the word “ambienti” means the ecological or environmental area inhabited by a particular species and the relationships it has to its immediate surroundings.³⁷ It speaks of ecosystems but also how they make you feel the ambience of place.

The re-weaving of my ancestral stories was guided by the ideas of Aboriginal scholar, teacher, artist and Apalech clan member’ Dr. Tyson Yunkaporta. He encourages learning from other indigenous cultures how to use our knowledge to rebuild our own indigenous wisdom and find unremembered methodologies again. Through curiosity and observation, instead of appropriation, we find patterns to use as a map to weave the bits and pieces of our own cultures back together again. He speaks of using the ancestor mind as a way of tapping into unconscious knowledge systems and into the collective memory that exists as patterns between all living beings.³⁸

I have been inspired by how humans and plants have grown our roots together and evolved alongside one another for as long as we humans have existed, how our ancestors’ weaved plants into festivals, myths, magic, and rituals and I celebrate this human-plant connection. I experience my ideas as ecosystems, constituted by my multiple ancestries, weaving patterns of connection and support, telling the story of my becoming. By cultivating fertile mythic gradients between the different cultural wisdoms of my heritage, I can weave the ideas of my ancestors together and create a mythical story that speaks of biodiversity and pluriversality.

³⁷ Glosbe, “Ambienti: Sicilian-English Dictionary,” accessed 14 March 2023, <https://glosbe.com/scn/en/ambienti>.

³⁸ Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save The World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020).

For I am not a being of singularity, I was grown from various ancestral roots and am sustained by a biodiversity of microorganisms as my body extends its physical being, permeating into my surroundings. How can I not hear the river's song as I stand in her waters? How can I not feel the flower's song while breathing in her essence? In that moment, do we not become entangled? These are simple gestures, but when we experience them in relational ecology, our perception changes and our beings become entangled. We open the remembering from our ancestors and become co-creators in this world.

In his book *Ways of Being* (2022) artist James Bridle discusses the world beyond human intelligence and how the earth is not organised through harmonious equitable relationships, but rather through networks of relation. Life did not take over the earth by warfare, but by networking by building relationships. We share in this world that is not linear or singular. It consists of many worlds, many of which do not include humans. We need to consciously decentre ourselves as the principal of this world and admit to the intelligence of the world outside of humankind. We need to un-weave ourselves from this “one world” delusion and re-weave ourselves into a more extensive cosmology.³⁹

Indigenous cosmologies remind us that the plants, mountains, stones, water, and air are our relatives and ancestors. The earth is a living being, and we are part of her body. From a Kaupapa Māori ecological perspective, the human is a guardian (Kaitiaki) keeping the balance and maintaining the life force (te mauri) of the soil. To strengthen and look after your genealogy, (whakapapa), you have to care for and nurture the treasured handed down from your ancestors (taonga tuku iho), This will sustain your spiritual power (mana), your well-being (orange tanutanga) and ensure your spirit (wairua) thrives.⁴⁰

Without remembering these concepts of interconnectedness woven throughout mythology and the spiritual connection we share to place and the more-than-human world. We will never heal ourselves and continue to harm our ecosystems for we are all woven into one another; what effect one affects us all. We, the people belong to the land not the land to us and in that sense when we heal ourselves, we heal the land. Healing of land must include healing of people. Recognising and processing the emotional traumas held in our bodies is necessary for the healing of the land. To see the earth and ourselves as going through cycles of continuous transition. Like in any process of composting, there is comfort in knowing that death always brings us to rebirth. In the cycle, we all have a responsibility. Recognising and healing our suffering is healing earth's traumas because we are connected.

³⁹ James Bridle, *Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence* (New York: Allen Lane, 2022), 84-85.

⁴⁰ Manaaki Whenua, “Concepts of Soil Health from a Māori Perspective,” accessed January 17 2023, <https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/discover-our-research/land/soil-and-ecosystem-health/soil-health-and-resilience/kaupapa-maori/concepts-of-soil-health-from-a-maori-perspective/>.

I have found that when looking into the living world for solutions optimism is an inevitability, the way the natural world finds solutions to problems is inspiring. The way the living world guides and teaches through relation, nothing is revealed in isolation. This ecology of research and thinking is part of the methodology of my practice. It is a journey that reveals a network of ideas and inspiration. It evolves and inspires different ways of thinking. Through sensitivity and love of the land that hold us I find myself wanting to gift a 'koha' back. Wanting to intentionally create with the land in the least exploitative and impactful way. I have been experimenting with integrating these concepts in a performance, installation, and sculptural process at festivals. This is like much of my previous works an open-ended series, a continuous growth opportunity for practice and process. The sculpture is supported by a metal circular frame that I welded. Branches are collected on site considering their decomposition, shape, and size. The fallen branches are arranged in the frame using their own weight to balance the structure and hand-carved dowels connect. The performance consists of the building, dismantling, and the return of the branches to their original site. As a performance I find this cycle lyrical in its process with a beginning, middle and end. I am excited to see how each piece relates to place and space in future performances. Reflecting on this process reminded me that we are relational beings sharing a world with other relational beings; many of these unconscious relationships affect our daily lives. Can we, as our ancestors did, remember to listen?



Fig 33. Minke Botes, Manuka, Kanuka, mangrove fallen branches and driftwood, Earthbeat festival, 2023.

The plants are talking, are we listening?

Plants do not have brains or centralised organs. They are modular beings and if you cut it in half, both parts can survive independently. Their internal communications pathways have a completely different design from an animal's. A plant uses electrical, hydraulic, and chemical signals to transport information from one part of its body to another. Stefano Mancuso and Viola Alessandra explain how the mechanosensitive channels diffuse sound through their entire being. In this way, the entire plant can hear, and sense touch above and below ground.⁴¹ They are very sensitive and have at least fifteen senses that humans do not have. By rethinking what intelligence might be, allows us to rethink the methods that might produce it.

Are plants sentient, aware or conscious? There is scientific evidence that plants perform intelligent and cognitive behaviours without having neurons.⁴² Scientists Paco Calvo and Louise Barrett reject the fact that cognition is purely brain bound and draw from the idea referred to as '4E cognitive science.'⁴³ This concept consists of looking at cognition from the perspective of these four E's; Embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive cognition. Through their study Calvo and Barrett have added ecological psychology.

Their research is changing scientific perception about how the human mind is not confined to the brain, it is the body's engagement in the world made not of neural firings alone but sensory-motor loops that permeate the brain, body, and environment. That cognition is generated by the connections and relationship between the organism and its environment. This research proving that human and plant cognition is not so different after all, that our thoughts are not our own but rather belong to our web or relation.

⁴¹ Stefano Mancuso, and Alessandra Viola, *Brilliant Green* (Washington D.C.: Island press, 2015).

⁴² Monica Gagliano, *Thus Spoke the Plant* (Berkeley California: North Atlantic Books, 2018).

⁴³ Amanda Geffer, "What Plants Are Saying About Us." Nautilus published 7 March 2023, <https://nautil.us/what-plants-are-saying-about-us-264593/>



Fig 34. Minke Lupa, Totara wood stump from a felled tree that was slipping down the bank after floods. Eskdale reserve, 2023.



Fig 35, Minke Lupa, Totara 'Listening' being turned on the lathe, 2023.

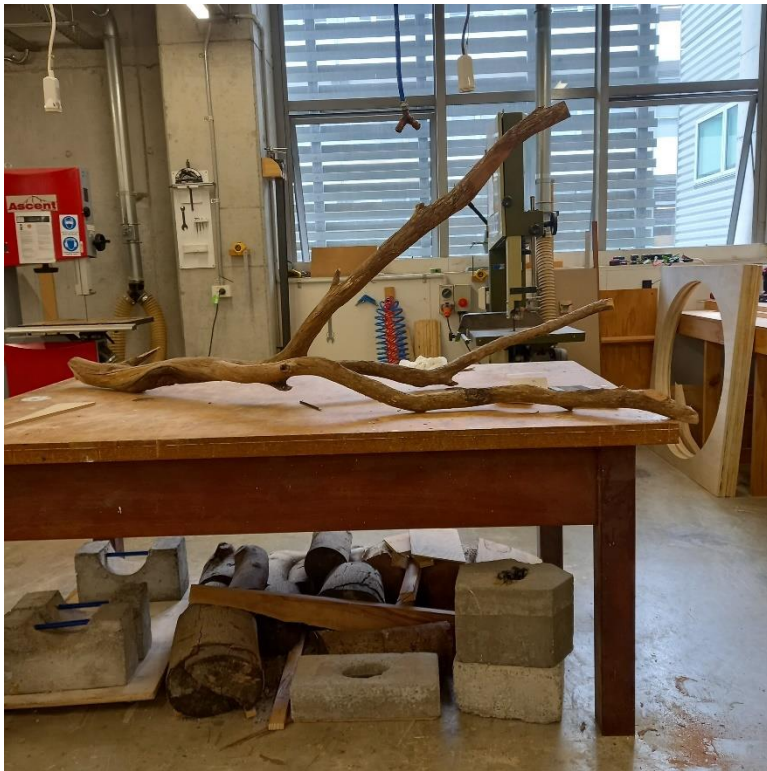


Fig 36. Minke Lupa, Totara legs being levelled to create a solid base for 'Listening', 2023.

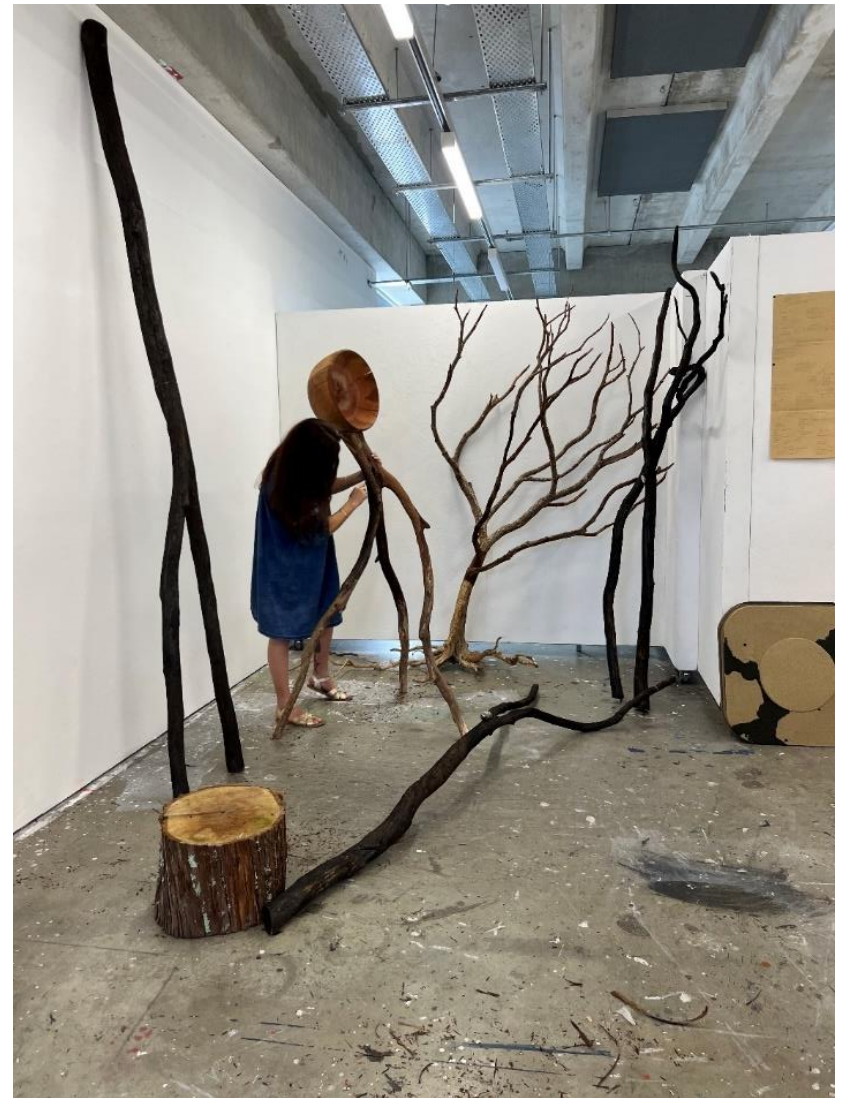


Fig 37. Monique Redmond, Carving 'Listening' in studio to reveal rot, 2023.



Listening

A three-forked Kanuka branch and a Kanuka bowl carved on the woodworking lathe creating a Kanuka mythical being invoking listening. I was inspired by a Kanuka wooden bowl which I use as a speaker for my phone as the wood offers a rich tonality. Here it is used to amplify the sounds of the natural surroundings, some of which are electromagnetic waves and inaudible to our human ear. It is about listening as a whole-body experience. The kind of listening we need to foster to hear the plants. It's not just an audible experience but a feeling sensation. This reminds us to be quiet, observe and listen with our entire being. Feeling the sensory-motor loops that run through the brain, body, and environment. Feeling the permeability of our beings in relation to one another.

"Magic is all that sensory data is beyond what we gate out beyond what we're culturally expected to see and to believe. It is both absence and presence. It's everything combined. It's things that are so impossible and so real that our apparatus, our cultural systems, can hardly even comprehend them." ⁴⁴

Fig 38. Minke Lupa, 'Listening' in studio foyer, 2023.

⁴⁴Sophie Strand, (@cosmogyny), <https://www.instagram.com/p/CnwgqPNuCzd/>.

Gating parameters is the neural process of filtering in and out external information, and it tends to move across a spectrum in all people. As a species, we need to be adaptable to altered circumstances. Adaptation of gating channels in relation to the environment is a cognitive response and having rigid gating would limit cognitive responses to environmental perturbations and could be detrimental. This perception is fluid, and you can learn to play with it. Through this, we can open the doors of perception if we wish to do so and as widely as we wish.

I have always been aware of my gating channels even before I had a name for it; I was exploring this way of perceiving the world and felt its Magic. And quickly learned to never speak of it as no one else understood and other kids thought I was weird. In this private world of exploration, I would get lost in connecting with the trees, insects, and animals by opening my gating sensitivity and communicating with the world energetically. I have discovered that for myself and through working with children that are considered high functioning on the autism spectrum, the ability to hyper-focus increases the opening of gating channels. We must often train ourselves to close them or find coping strategies to avoid sensory overload. Neurotypicals have better unconscious gating defaults that respond to environmental and cognitive demands and thus are continually in flux depending on circumstances and environmental inputs. It becomes so unconscious that training the channels to open on demand takes time.

Our intention when we approach something in the world determines, to various extents, the degree of sensory gating that occurs as we perceive that phenomenon. Tyson Yunkaporta talks about how the first approach to the living world should always be one of respect.⁴⁵ The intent should be to establish rapport and deep friendship and to learn from that relationship, too, to 'think like a tree' from the tree itself. Knowing that our cognition is influenced by our environment and that plants share this experience when in relation with one another this is the liminal space where we can connect.

Our first sense to touch the world is usually sight. To look outwards but seeing is more than looking as it combines the feeling and seeing senses. In seeing you bring the world inside yourself through the feeling sense. Such depth engagement is crucial when communicating with plants.

⁴⁵ Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save The World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020).

Herbalist Stephen Harrod Buhner describes it as,

" Feeling into the thread that has caught your attention; everything slows down the deeper you go so that you begin to attend to every aspect of what you see. A sense of self and separation fades. The only thing of significance is the plant you are seeing and feeling. There is an authentic and profound ecstatic feeling to touching a plant so closely with the feeling sense in this way. You realise you must follow and not pull at this thread, or you will lose your connection if you force it. That is why it is so important to listen with your feeling sense".⁴⁶

Reclaiming the feeling sense and developing it as a primary sensing tool is essential to begin to connect to the sentience of the world. Our perception of the world changes when we connect with plants; we touch the wildness of the world. When we connect with the world in this way the living world will respond. At that moment, you will feel the reality that our ancient ancestors lived, which is why they revered the plant beings.

When starting to connect with plants, many herbalists recommend you start with the plants that grow near you. The wild plants that grow around you that you share an ecosystem with because you are already entangled. This was my starting point for my final MVA exhibition, and it developed into me growing the plants that I have been using in personal healing and the plants that were significant to my ancestors. I have chosen to build an ecosystem to hold them all in relationship. Grown from different ideas and origins these plants have grown in community with one another and with myself.

Many of the plants I have grown for this exhibition are considered weeds by the dominant Western culture that praises extractive ways of being. It is essential to mention that there are no weeds in botany, no plants are revered or demonised. Just like the term weeds refers to plants that are vilified and unwanted in certain circles our societies have viewed certain immigrants with a similar disdain. I feel a strong affinity with these sentient beings as Immigration holds stories of displaced people and disturbed societies affected by tragedy and exploitation. Weeds love disturbed soil, which is why they love growing near humans, as we are great disturbers of soil. These plants have a diverse, prosperous relationship with other beings they are in community with where they repair the soil structure, adding nutrients and bringing diversity. Why are certain plants and animals considered separate or irrelevant or suited for removal out of kingship.

⁴⁶Stephen H Buhner, *The Secret Teaching of Plants* (Vermont: Bear & Company, 2004).

At a young age I was told to dislike my wildness by a society that feared what was different. As a first-generation immigrant to Aotearoa, I was often told as a teenager in a small town in NZ in the 1990's.

'You do not look Kiwi....'

'Go back to where you came from!'

'What are you?'

'Where were you born?'

It felt like they were undressing me with questions. They were stripping me bare, staring with judgement. You have already decided what I am; I am a weed.

I have grown happy being a weed.

Plants are much less superficial; they accept you in relation to your intention towards them and their kin. The way they speak into your being instantly makes you feel connected to the entire metaphysical world and in community with everything. They never speak to you the way humans do.

Can we, as our ancestors did, remember to listen?

When we listen to weed beings, we learn their medicinal and healing benefits within the cycle of kingship, and the word weed converts to a term found in ignorance.

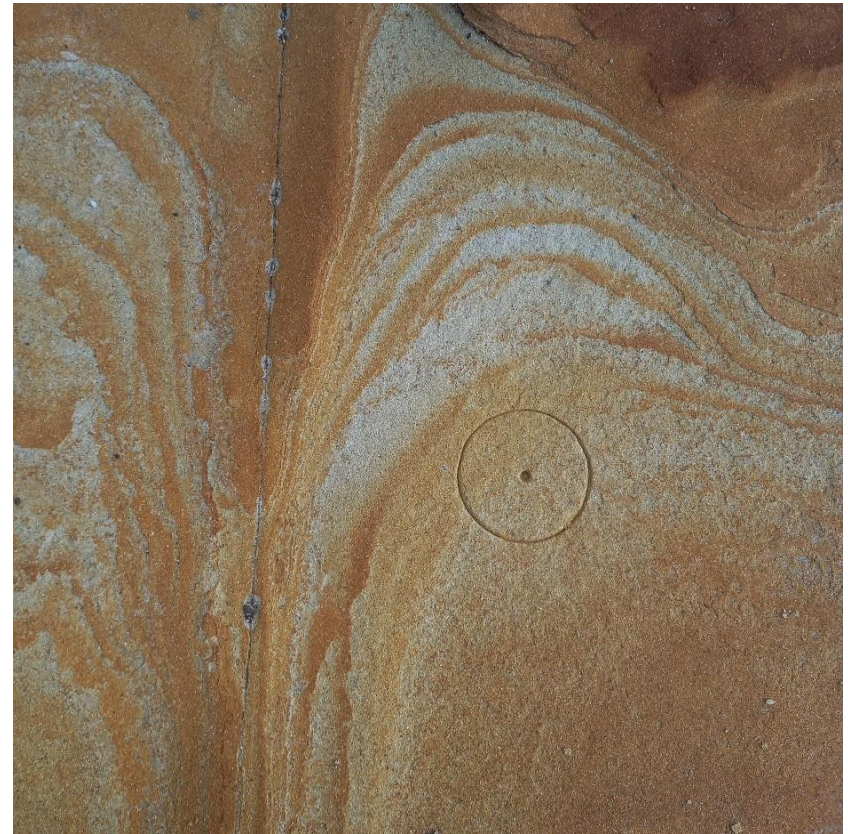


Fig 39. Minke Lupa, mother, and child symbol carved into Sandstone, 2023.

The exhibition layout is structured around the ancient symbol of mother and child, death into rebirth. Tyson Yunkaporta speaks of this symbol as one of the oldest symbols known to humans; it is carved into rock around the earth. If we ask the cultures who still draw this symbol, they say it is about a relationship to everything, life.⁴⁷

In this exhibition, the centre is the seed, an ecosystem of medicinal plants I have grown and nurtured over the last year. They are designed to rest on the floor, connecting to their ancestral home, the soil. This system is intended to seem small, like a seed protected by the guardian mythical beings encircling it. The pots are constructed to allow the plants to live in community with one another and their environment. The unglazed terracotta breaths and is permeable to absorb and release moisture, eventually becoming a stable environment for beneficial moss and lichen to grow. Ecosystems are built on relationships, and the stronger those are, the more resilient the system. Coevolution is about the strength of our bonds, constantly responding to each other and the environment. These resulting adaptations and evolutions create behaviours that help the system, and its individuals grow, survive, and thrive.



Fig 40. Minke Lupa, three unglazed, terracotta pots constructed by joining hand coiled and hand thrown pots together, 2023.

⁴⁷ States of Change, "How Indigenous Thinking Can Change the World" with Tyson Yunkaporta, published 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBc-p2H2T2Q>.

⁴⁸ Douglas E Van Buren, "Archaic Terra-Cotta Agalmata in Italy and Sicily," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 41 (published 1921): 203–16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/625496>

For over 3000 years Sicilians have used terracotta to make everything from ancient Goddess effigies and alters to everyday household items.⁴⁸ I work mainly with terracotta as I feel a strong connection to my ancestry when working with it even while using New Zealand clay. The way this clay responds to touch, fire, water is all woven into Sicilian history, and I feel a remembering in its materiality.

Self-watering system using terracotta Ola pots. These Ola pots are bisque-fired, allowing the water to penetrate through and into the soil, creating a slow-release watering system. The lids are darker in colour as they were double fired to prevent water evaporation. The origin of the Ola pot has been lost to time but is has been used throughout the world in warm climates to sustainably water plants, including Sicily.



Fig 41. Minke Lupa, Unglazed Terracotta ecosystem pots allowing for plants to thrive in community, including three Ola pots. Copper plant identifying tags, copper is an essential element for plant growth, 2023.



Fig 42. Minke Lupa, unglazed and bisque fired Ola pots with double fired lids, 2023.

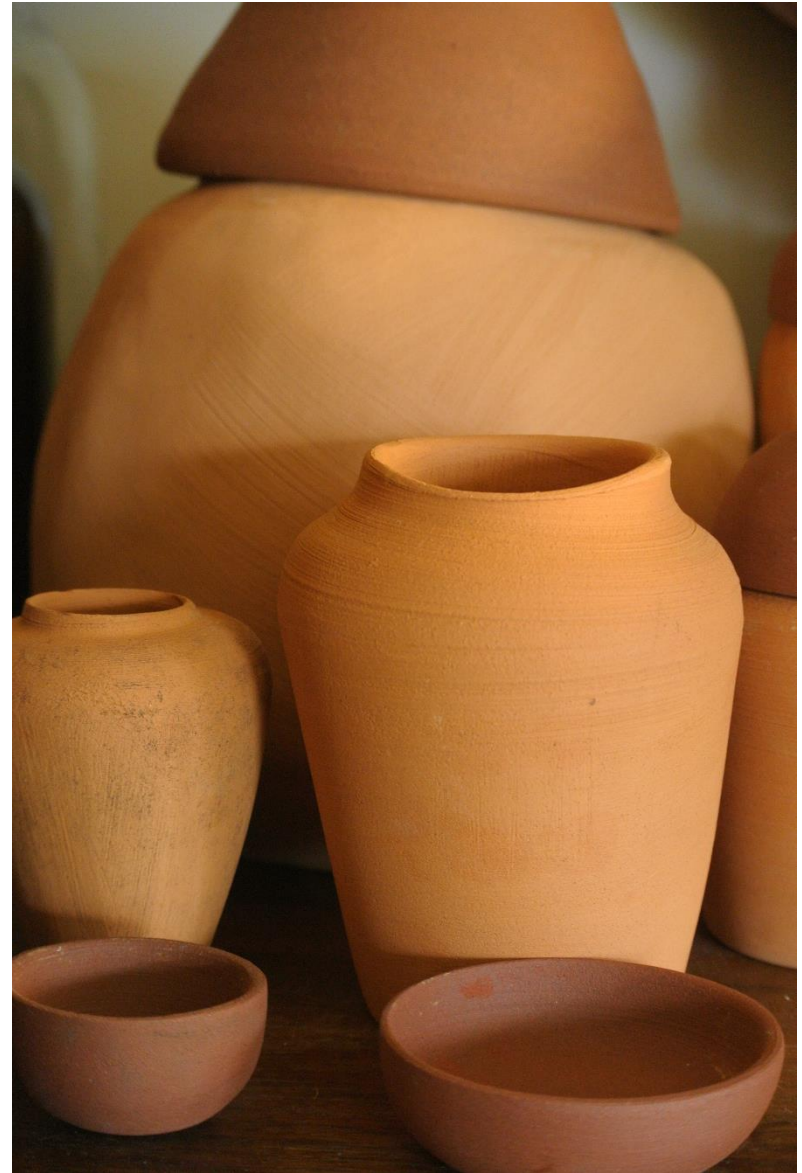


Fig 43. Minke Lupa, Ola pots in different sizes. These were my introduction into learning to throw on the wheel, 2023.



Fig 44. Minke Lupa, plants in ecosystem pots including three ola pots. Mullein, Pomegranate, Motherwort, Nettle, Dandelion, Mugwort, Horehound, Ashwagandha and Evening Primrose, 2023.

The viewer was invited to sit amongst the mythical beings and be in conversation with them. This was shared space of reverence and collective listening. The experience was the artwork to just be, in the space, and to sit with what it made you feel. There was no expectations or prescribed outcome. The exhibition was a conclusion to my MVA, it was a conclusion to this exegesis. It was inspired by an experience, a calling from deep within to connect back into relationship with the plants. With the promise it would help me connect back with my indigenous people. And in doing so I would work towards healing the intergenerational trauma of displacement held in my body. It was a very intimate and personal journey, yet I very much feel the collective trauma of disconnection to place and culture. I wish this exhibition to offer a remembering back into relationship with these through the plants. That our ancestor's extent well past the human and time. This exhibition might be a conclusion to my MVA but, in many ways, it is a beginning. It left me questioning the difference between the experience of animism and autism.

Included is a takeaway poem an invitation to connect holding these words.



Fig 45. Minke Lupa, the viewer is invited to sit on this Totara stump and become an active member of this gathering.

I see you.

I see your beauty emanating, calling me closer.

I see you.

My eyes feeling your being, sensing what it must be like to be you. I feel us not so different.

A remembering washes over me, of us meeting before, when I was a child mesmerised by you, touching your leaves gently with my tiny sticky fingers.

I feel your plant words growing inside my heart, they are sweet and lovely and unfold into:

I have missed you.

A tear runs down my cheek as I am touched by your gentle grace.

A shame tightens in my chest for what we have done to our plant family, and I whisper into my heart I am sorry.

I feel your plant words in my heart.

I see you,

Your words are few but hold so much wisdom.

I feel the separation between us fade,

we become entangled, and, in this moment,

I can see why my ancestors held you so dear.

The plants are talking,

they are listening,

they are inviting us to connect to remember.

Can we listen?

This remembering is offered as part of the exhibition,

The plants are talking; can we listen?

Minke Lupa



Fig 46. Minke Lupa, Final MVA exhibition in St Paul St gallery, 2023.

Transcript of soundscape

This soundscape is a song of different species singing together. The trees blowing in the wind recorded in Glenfield Eskdale reserve. The wind playing a significant part in the ecosystem of this forest and in me being able to collect and find fallen branches. This place being of significance to my collection of fallen branches and of connecting to place. The listening to the wind and trees making music together was the foundation of the soundscape. The music they make together is played alongside me blowing into a Cowrie shell. My breath tracing the shape left by the mollusc that once grew this shell. I am singing with the wind listening to our breaths overlapping into song and becoming one. For the breath carries the soul and, on the wind, it arrives and leaves this world. The balaphone a wooden percussion instrument plays the rhythmic beat grounding the music in the present and bringing the songs together for without it the songs would be lost to the wind.

Taxonomy

Native Wood

Kānuka

Family name: Myrtaceae

Māori names: Kōpuka, Mānuka-rauriki, Mārū, Rawiri, Rauwiri, Rauiri, Toa Mānuka, Kahikātoa, Manuea, Manuoea, Makahikatoa.

Botanical name: *Genus Kunzea ericoides*

Parts used: Leaves, bark, wood, and seeds.

The leaves were used in vapor baths or as an infusion or tea for infections. Kānuka oil is used for its anti-worm, anti-bacterial and insecticidal properties. Seeds to make a poultice for wounds.

Kanuka is a hard and strong timber. It was favoured for the making of agricultural implements –mainly different types of digging sticks. It was also prized for making weapons – taiaha, tewhatewha, and koikoi.⁴⁹

Mānuka

Family name: Myrtaceae

Māori names: Manuka, Kahikatoa, Pata.

Botanical name: *Genus Leptospermum scoparium*

Parts used: Leaves, bark, wood, and seeds.

Ashes from the wood can be used to treat skin problems. Leaves can be made into a tea to drink for anti-viral properties. In the forest ecosystem Manuka and Kanuka provide a nursery for slower growing podocarps and die off allowing more. Their root systems help clean polluted soil and waterways.

Māori used the bark for water containers and insulation of whare. The wood was used for digging instruments, bird spears, weapons, and buildings.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Tāne's Tree Trust, "Kanuka," accessed 22 April 2023, <https://www.tanestrees.org.nz/species-profiles/kanuka/>

⁵⁰ Department of Conservation (Te papa atawhai), "Mānuka/Kahikātoa and Kānuka", accessed 22 April 2023, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-plants/manuka-kahikatoa-and-kanuka/>.

Pōhutukawa

Family name: Myrtle

Māori names: Pohutukawa, Hutukawa, Rātā.

Botanical name: *Genus Metrosideros excelsa*

Parts used: Bark, flowers, and wood.

To Māori Pohutukawa is a sacred tree as the ancient trees on the cliffs at Te Reinga that the spirits of the dead left this land are Pohutukawa. Traditionally Māori used flower nectar to treat sore throats.

The inner tree bark contains ellagic acid, used as an astringent in the treatment of diarrhoea and dysentery. The wood has a rich reddish-brown colour. It is durable and resistant to the marine worm, teredo. It is heavy and dense and can be easier to work when green as it is more pliable, but it does shrink when it dries. The growth habit of the tree makes it almost impossible to acquire long, straight pieces of timber.^{51 52}

Tōtara

Family name: Yellow-wood.

Māori names: Te riu o tāne, Amoka.

Botanical name: *Genus Podocarpus totara*

Parts used: Leaves, bark, seeds, leaves, and wood.

Revered by Māori, who referred to it as 'Rakau Rangatira' – chiefly tree. For Māori, Totara is used to treat chest complaints and venereal disease. The bark was made into a tea and the wood burnt and the smoke used as medicine. It has antiviral and anti-fungal properties.

Its timber was prized above all others, and it is used as the primary wood for carving. The wood is used to construct houses, tools, weapons, musical instruments. Totara wood is light, strong, and straight and for this was the preferred wood to use for Waka. A single log could be fashioned into a canoe capable of carrying 100 warriors. The chemical compound 'Totarol' is found in the heartwood of Tōtara trees and is thought to be responsible for the wood's resistance to decay.⁵³

⁵¹ Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (Ngā Rauropi Whakaoranga), "Pōhutukawa," accessed 22 April 2023, <https://rauopihwakaoranga.landcareresearch.co.nz/names/9f92ed8b-2c9f-4bb2-85fe-60203014cd23>.

⁵² Tāne's tree trust, "Pohutukawa (Metrosideros Excelsa)," accessed 1 May 2023, <https://www.tanestrees.org.nz/species-profiles/pohutukawa/>.

⁵³ Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (Ngā Rauropi Whakaoranga), "Podocarpus Totara. Tōtara", accessed 13 March 2023, <https://rauopihwakaoranga.landcareresearch.co.nz/names/fb454c7e-cb0c-4d98-9f97-1e9d14d3a080>.

Shells

Cats eye

Sicilian name: l'occhiu di Santa Lucia

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Mollusca

Class: Gastropoda

Sub: classVetigastropoda

Order: Trochida

Superfamily: Trochoidea

Family: Turbinidae

Genus: Lunella

Cat's eye is the common name operculum of the sea snail. When the snail feels threatened, it withdraws into its shell, and the operculum serves as a lid to seal the opening. When the snail dies, the operculum falls free from the shell. Kanohi pūpū is the Māori name for cat's eye.⁵⁴

Cowry or cowrie

Sicilian name: Caviru

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Mollusca

Class: Gastropoda

Subclass: Caenogastropoda

Order: Littorinimorpha

Superfamily: Cypraeoidea

Family: Cypraeidae⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Melanie Lovell-Smith, "Cat's Eye in Shell," New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Te Manatu Taonga, accessed 30 April 2023. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/8014/cats-eye-in-shell>.

⁵⁵ Cowrie, In Wikipedia, accessed 27 February 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cowrie&oldid=1141878259>.

Medicinal Plants

Ashwagandha

Other names: Queen of the herbs, Winter Cherry, or Indian Ginseng

Family name: Solanaceae

Botanical name: *Withania somnifera*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds, and roots.

The leaves have analgesic and antioxidant properties. Used in the treatment of viral infection and fevers. The flowers have aphrodisiac properties and kidney health. The seeds help aid in the prevention of infectious diseases and parasites. It can significantly reduce stress levels due to its direct and can help alleviate symptoms of menopause. It has been proven to improve cognition. The plant can be ingested as food, tea, tincture, or capsule. Originated from India, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. It prefers to grow in well-draining, dry soil. Once the seedlings are established in a warm environment, planting in a dry and sunny area is best.⁵⁶

Dandelion

Sicilian name: Pignatu Family

name: Asteraceae

Botanical name: *Taraxacum officinale*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds, and roots.

Dandelion has a long list of virtues not only for human health but also for that of animals and the soil. Every part of the plant is edible leaves, roots, and flowers. The leaves are stronger for the kidney's excretion and the root for the liver-based secretion. It's a nutritional powerhouse rich in fibre, magnesium phosphorus, protein, vitamins A, B, C, D, minerals potassium, iron, zinc, copper, calcium, sodium, nickel, cobalt, and tin. Dandelion is often the first food source for bees in spring keep this in mind when harvesting flowers.

Dandelions originated in temperate and subarctic Eurasia before the last Ice Age. They grow best in well-drained, fertile soil but do well in any soil anywhere and prefer full sun but will grow happily in partial shade.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The ayurveda, "Ashwagandha Benefits: Boost Immunity, Body, Mind and Soul Health," Published 18 July 2020, <https://www.theayurveda.org/ayurveda/herbs/ashwagandha-benefit>.

⁵⁷ Herb Federation of New Zealand, "Dandelion," accessed 1 May 2023, <https://herbs.org.nz/herbs/dandelion/>.

Evening primrose

Sicilian name: primura di sira

Family name: Onagraceae

Botanical name: *Oenothera biennis*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds, and roots.

The entire plant is edible. Evening Primrose has been cultivated for its nutritious edible roots. A tea made from Evening Primrose can aid digestion and tiredness. A hot poultice from its ponded roots supports the healing of bruises, piles, and boils. Evening Primrose roots were chewed and rubbed onto the muscles to improve strength.

The plant was used to treat pain associated with the bowel and the womb and aids in relieving menstrual pain. Oil from the seeds is used for skin conditions. It grows best in full sun to partial shade and in moist but well-drained soil. Evening primrose originated in North America.⁵⁸

Horehound

Sicilian name: Cavaddu

Family name: Lamiaceae

Botanical name: *Marrubium vulgare*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds, and roots.

Marrubium is thought to have been derived from an ancient Italian town, Maria urbs Vulgare.⁵⁹ Perennial herb in the mint family. Horehound is well known for its calming effects on sore throat and to help reduce mucus. It contains high levels of vitamins A, B and C. It is anti-inflammatory, especially for the gut. It is calmative and not recommended to those with low blood pressure. It was found in the tombs of pharaohs and was named by the Egyptians priests 'the seed of Horus'. It is a famous witches herb. It's a well known curse fighter used in counter curse working. It is used in potions and smoke medicine to ward off curses and cleansing rituals. A little of the fresh herb in your pocket will help you navigate difficult people and situations. Sun loving plant but avoid the sun at the hottest part of the day morning sun is ideal and it prefers well drained soil. Old-World plant native to Europe, Central and Southwestern Asia, and Northern Africa and has been growing wild since ancient times.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Susan Elizabeth, "Evening Primrose," The Lost Herbs (blog), published 30 November 2020, <https://thelostherbs.com/evening-primrose/>.

⁵⁹ "Horehound: 5 Key Benefits, Dosage, Safety: The Botanical Institute," 31 January 2022, <https://botanicalinstitute.org/horehound/>.

⁶⁰ Heather Saba, "Reviving Horehound: 6 Ways You Can Use This Traditional Herb", Herbal Academy (blog), published 1 November 2019. <https://theherbalacademy.com/reviving-horehound/>.

Hemp twine

Sicilian name: Canapa

Family name: Cannabaceae

Botanical name: *Cannabis sativa*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds, and roots.

Hemp was believed to originate in Central Asia. Carbon tests have suggested that the use of wild hemp dates to 8000 B.C. (stone age). This makes hemp one of the oldest plants cultivated by humankind. Hemp thrives best in loose, deep soils rich in organic matter.⁶¹

Motherwort

Sicilian name: Maturi

Family name: Leonurus cardiaca

Botanical name: *Leonurus cardiaca*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds, and roots.

It contains alkaloid leonurine, a mild vasodilator, which acts as an anti-spasmodic to relax muscles. Its calming nature is an excellent remedy for cardiac anxiety and can slow heart palpitations. Other important compounds found in motherwort include iridoid glycosides help to decrease cholesterol and triglycerides, prevent blood clots, decrease blood pressure, and improve heart circulation. Motherwort helps to soothe the emotional heart and relieves grief, anger, and irritability. As an emmenagogue, it is a uterine tonic that helps regulate menstruation, delay periods, and reduce menstrual cramps. It can also be used during childbirth but not to be taken during pregnancy. Motherwort is part of the mint family and native to the southeastern part of Europe and central Asia, where it has been cultivated since ancient times. It prefers to grow in partial shade and loamy, sandy, moist, but well-drained soil.⁶²

⁶¹ Jelena Visković, Valtcho D. Zheljazkov, Vladimir Sikora, Jay Noller, Dragana Latković, Cynthia M. Ocamb, and Anamarija Koren, "Industrial Hemp (*Cannabis Sativa* L.) Agronomy and Utilization: A Review", published March 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/agronomy13030931>.

⁶² Herbal Academy, "Motherwort Monograph," accessed 1 May 2023, <https://theherbalacademy.com/motherwort-monograph/>.

Mugwort

Sicilian name: Muggurt

Family name: Asteraceae

Botanical name: *Artemisia vulgaris*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds, and roots.

Is an artemisia and the name is derived from the Greek goddess of the moon, hunt, and the patroness of the freedom of women. Folk use to repel moths and other insects. Prescribed for painful menstrual issues, during labour to help clear the uterus, reproductive health and regulate the libido it's also helps relieve digestive issues, clear gut, and stimulate appetite. Antibacterial and antifungal. It is often referred to as the Witches herb as herbalists hung bunches of Mugwort over and at doorways to expel bad energy, evil spirits. Smoke medicine to clear energy. Support through lucid dreaming, connect to intuition. As a smoking herb it has a reputation to aid dreaming and astral travel. Member of the daisy family native to temperate Europe. Prefers a damp nitrogen rich soil in full or part sun. Harvest when it's in peak power before sunrise or the night of a full moon. To be avoided for pregnant women.⁶³

Mullein

Sicilian name: Mulliuni

Family name: Scrophulariaceae

Botanical name: *Verbascum thapsus*

Parts used: leaves, flower, and stalk.

Vitamins A, B complex, D. Minerals – iron, magnesium, potassium, sulphur. It helps with the respiratory system – bronchitis, respiratory catarrh, colds, coughs, tuberculosis, pleurisy, and whooping cough as it helps alleviate mucus. It is antimicrobial and helps with respiratory tract infections, earaches, and wounds. A poultice can be made to help heal injuries. If dipped in wax, the flowering stems can be used as torches, and the dried leaves and stems make excellent tinder for fire. The central stem of the dried leaves can be used to make wicks for candles. The soft, thick fresh leaves are great as insulation in shoes to keep feet warm, emergency bedding when camping, or even toilet paper. Native to Europe, northern Africa, and Asia, Mullein thrives in full sun. Plant them in a dry, warm spot near walls or large trees to protect them from the wind. Prefers disturbed soil.⁶⁴

⁶³ Melissa Szaro, "How to Use Mugwort for Dreams, Sleep, and More", Herbal Academy (blog), published 4 December 2020, <https://theherbalacademy.com/how-to-use-mugwort/>.

⁶⁴ Herb Federation of New Zealand, "Mullein," accessed 1 May 2023, <https://herbs.org.nz/herbs/mullein/>.

Nettle

Sicilian name: Urtizza

Family name: Urticaceae

Botanical name: *Urtica dioica*

Parts used: leaves.

One of nature's greatest multivitamins. Rich in nutrients, minerals and high in iron, Nettle is deeply nourishing to all body types, it is particularly useful to the womb pre and post cycle, for fertility, for postpartum, after birth, and in the case of a miscarriage. Nettle may also support kidney health, may clear urinary tract infections and is incredibly effective at reducing seasonal allergies. Nettle can be enjoyed in many ways. You can ingest fresh (or dried) as a tea, as a food as a tincture or as an extract powder. Nettles are native to Europe and Eurasia and grow wild throughout temperate parts of the world. It can grow in full sun to partial shade and likes moist soil.⁶⁵

Pomegranate

Sicilian name: Granatu

Family name: Punicaceae

Botanical name: *Punica granatum*

Parts used: leaves, flower, seeds and roots and bark in moderation.

The pomegranate is revered in the Mediterranean for treating ulcers, diarrhoea, and male infertility. It has many health benefits, such as anti-diabetic, anti-tumour, anti-inflammatory, anti-malaria, anti-fibrotic, anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and more. It helps maintain a healthy gut microbiota. In Sicily, the pomegranate traditionally represents fertility, abundance, and prosperity. It has ties to the Persephone myth. The seeds represent the cycle of life and death. As Persephone descends into the underworld, she takes pomegranate seeds with her and returns in spring with the seeds in hand, signifying abundance, and life. The pomegranate originated from Iran and spread to the Himalayas, northern India and has been cultivated throughout the Mediterranean region and into Asia, Africa, and Europe since ancient times. It grows best in well-drained fertile soil and in areas with cold Winters and long, hot, dry Summers.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Britannica, "Stinging Nettle: description & Uses," accessed 1 May 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/plant/stinging-nettle>.

⁶⁶ Makayla Bezzant, "Pomegranate Imagery: A Symbol of Conquest and Victory," *Studia Antiqua* 18, no. 1 (published 2019), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studiaantiqua/vol18/iss1/2>.

Red clover

Sicilian name: Trifogliu russu

Family name: Fabaceae

Botanical name: *Trifolium pratense*

Parts used: Flowers.

One of nature's best vitamin and mineral supplements, as it contains beta-carotene, calcium, vitamin C, a whole spectrum of B vitamins, and essential trace minerals such as magnesium, manganese, zinc, copper, and selenium. The plant's phytoestrogens help support common menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings, and night sweats. Due to its blood-purifying and mineralizing properties, Red clover can also aid fertility and is an excellent tonic to prepare the uterus for pregnancy. Used to treat skin conditions like eczema. Red clover is native to Europe and thrives in moist or dry conditions, but drainage should be good. The plant fixes nitrogen in the soil, enhancing soil fertility for better growth in other plants.⁶⁷

Terracotta clay sustainably sourced from Aotearoa.

Terracotta the word originates from the Italian translation: 'baked' or 'cooked earth'. One of the biggest reasons that terracotta is so prevalent in history across so many genres is that it can be found anywhere and is known as being the most found clay across every continent. Terracotta is usually not a pure clay and is found mixed with other minerals full of flux and plenty of iron oxide.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Herb Federation of New Zealand, "Red Clover," accessed 1 May 2023, <https://herbs.org.nz/herbs/red-clover/>.

⁶⁸ Douglas E van Buren, "Archaic Terra-Cotta Agalmata in Italy and Sicily," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 41 (published 1921): 203–16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/625496>.

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