

## Whispers from Tides and Forests

Caroline Bachmann  
Johanna Calle  
Lena Laguna Diel  
Abi Palmer  
Nohemí Pérez  
Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa  
Belén Rodríguez  
Ana Silva  
Julia Steiner  
Surma  
Liu Yujia  
11.4.—  
17.8.2025

If someone whispers, you have to listen carefully. In the midst of political and climate crises and social upheaval, this exhibition featuring eleven artists from all over the world—China, Guatemala, Colombia, Angola, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Switzerland—is an invitation to listen closely and take a deeper look at a delicate web of new stories by artists of different generations who explore forests or forest floors, rivers, lakes, and seas, as well as landscapes and urban structures. They track weather conditions, tides, and the natural disasters triggered by climate change, as well as the traces already left behind by human violence and threats, mass exodus, waves of a global pandemic, and extreme political situations. Kate Crawford, a professor and expert in artificial intelligence, recently pointed out that the largest energy consumer now and in the future is the use of AI, and that minerals are the backbone of this technology. The battle for raw materials will thus intensify in the years to come, and with it wars over land reclamation.

So, there is a good reason why artists such as Belén Rodríguez are addressing this issue; the latter bought a piece of forest with the limited resources available to her as an artist and used it for creative purposes to save it from the hands of developers and deforestation. Or the Beijing-based artist Liu Yujia, whose research and video project relate directly to the writing of anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Tsing writes, for example, that it is only through collaboration that we can change both within and across species. Would this lead to a different appreciation of forest cultures such as mushrooms, which find the strength for new life in even the most contaminated soils and were therefore the first organisms to grow abundantly again after the serious nuclear reactor accident in Chernobyl (1986)? These exemplary positions illustrate what the artists in the exhibition are all about: a polyphony of themes with participants from diverse backgrounds and different generations. It is through this juxtaposition that the exhibition acquires a unique depth, and in speaking about and listening carefully to these themes, it offers us a *nevertheless*—a *nevertheless* despite everything, which is full of beauty, poetry, and hope.

The large-scale exhibition begins with the artists Nohemí Pérez, Julia Steiner, and Lena Laguna Diel in the first room. **Nohemí Pérez**, who lives in Colombia, has dedicated decades of her practice, which primarily consists of drawings, to the regions of the global South. She focuses mainly on stories of displacement, extinction, and the domination of habitats that—shared by animals and humans alike—are being deforested, torched, and burned. For Pérez, as she explains in a conversation, climate change has exacerbated this situation of global vulnerability, because global warming causes even more fires and increases the domination and domestication of the region. At the same time, according to the artist, the boundaries between North and South are also becoming blurred, as the effects of this are being felt on a global scale.

The Bogotá-based artist spends many weeks and months working on her large panoramic drawings, which might depict landscapes such as forests, individual trees, or even riverscapes. Approaching the works, you are immersed, layer by layer, in these natural spaces, which completely occupy the largest rooms in the new Kunsthau Baselland. As you get closer, you can see that the large, black-and-white charcoal drawings and landscapes are repeatedly interspersed with colorful paintings or embroidery—whether in separate, small-format paintings or within the large drawn landscapes. When asked about this, Pérez talks about the pleasure and also the necessity for her to bring color and thus life into the dark black-and-white works during the painting process. For her, this is an attempt to save beings and fragments from extinction; in other words, to repair something that we are on the verge of losing.

Basel-based artist **Julia Steiner**, meanwhile, created the *whispering systems* series of works comprising sixty-two different objects made of copper-plated grasses over a period of two years. A large number of these are on display in the exhibition at the Kunsthau Baselland. Resembling a large field of grass, the delicate copper works are now spread across the entire height and width of the wall. Steiner collected various long-stemmed grasses from her immediate surroundings, which she bent and arranged in different—sometimes playful, sometimes conceptual—patterns and networks based on the naturally grown lines. In each piece, the artist, who has a background in drawing, searched for her own laws of composition and structure. The resulting delicate spatial drawings were then coated with copper using the electroplating process to stabilize and preserve them. As a result, each of the copper objects still contains the grass itself—like a reminder of the naturally grown form and structure, which is usually only short-lived in nature but has now found a permanent expression.

It is precisely through this shift in material that the objects acquire a new impact and message for the artist. The ephemeral becomes permanent and simultaneously remains stable yet fragile; a fundamental state that has played an important role in Steiner's drawing practice for many years. As Steiner explains in a conversation, she is interested in the physical act of being-in-the-world and the experience of space and time, of movement and perpetual cyclical renewal. How everything is connected: humans, nature, living beings. Looking closely at the quiet, the delicate, and the fragile also shows her the power of the bigger picture. Through extensive spatial and wall drawings, which the artist has realized both for the short period of the exhibition and for a much longer or even permanent duration, drawing has become an artistic medium for Steiner. An artistic technique that does not depict nature directly, but rather captures its fragility. "I try," says Steiner, "to explore this fragility and power, the ephemerality and changeability of growth, genesis, and decay in and through my work and to connect with it."

**Lena Laguna Diel** also spent time in nature for her work in order to work directly with it. She collected plants that are reminiscent of aquatic plants, or those that represent movement, as well as plant species that are usually hidden from our view. The Spanish Swiss artist used what she collected as the basis for this large diptych, which was created entirely using the cyanotype technique. Cyanotype is an old photographic process in which light-sensitive iron compounds are exposed to UV light. This produces the characteristic blue tones that capture delicate structures and forms with great precision. The process results in deep blue silhouettes that render the fine structures and movements of the plants visible and at the same time create an impression of movement. The artist subsequently cut out the silhouettes of the plants from large pieces of paper, producing cut-outs of the same size, and used these as templates for further cyanotypes. As a result of this duplication, a more abstract form of the plants is now superimposed on the direct reproduction of the plants, like an artistic echo.

This dialogue between documentary accuracy and abstract continuation allows Diel, who has a background in painting and has concentrated on expanding it ever since her studies, to create an important thematic overlap: using the cyanotype technique, the artist draws our attention to the movements and visual appearance of living creatures and plants that normally remain hidden from our eyes—from species that thrive under water to exclusively nocturnal birds, which appear in another series of works. Due to the size of the work chosen for the exhibition, Diel was only able to execute the technical realization of the large canvases outdoors. Nature has therefore inscribed itself into the canvases in several layers and on different levels.

But how can we build a relationship with the landscape, the tides, or the seasons if we can't go outside? What many of us had previously only experienced as a finite number of days of being sick and having to stay at home suddenly took on a completely different guise during the global pandemic: the UK-based artist **Abi Palmer**, began performing and filming in her apartment during this period. As she is immunocompromised and vulnerable to Covid-19, she was unable to leave her home for long periods of time. The main protagonists are her two indoor cats Cha-U-Kao and Lola Lola; two creatures that need the landscape, nature, wind, and weather to live and survive just as much as we humans, who cannot thrive when we are cooped up and thus separated from the outside world. For the four video episodes, which correspond to the four seasons, Palmer gathered materials from nature in various cardboard boxes, creating items through fermentation and distillation or by collecting leaves, mosses, and similar items on her rare trips outdoors. Similar to a love letter, as the artist describes it, the performance-based video work is an acknowledgement of the vital necessity of nature for us living beings, but also of the beauty of being able to perceive and take in the weather and seasons—such as rain, smells, fog, light, heat, and so on—with all our senses. In the video sequences, the cats are presented as gentle creatures that are attentive to their surroundings and the environment created by the artist. For Abi Palmer, however, the four video chapters are also a great filmic meditation on her own feelings towards the climate crisis: an attempt to speak to —and connect with— a natural world that that can't talk back.

Female strength and vulnerability are ongoing major themes in the work of artist **Ana Silva**, who comes from Angola and lives in Portugal. According to the artist, it is precisely because of her origins that sensitive global issues such as water shortages, a lack of schools, or a precarious, mostly non-existent healthcare system—in other words, the fundamental basis for a decent life—form the major themes of her work.

In the new series of works presented here, the artist embroiders narratives and fragments of intimate memories on almost transparent gauze fabrics or photographic prints on canvas. According to Silva, women are a central motif for her, as they can represent the personification of nature, but also symbolize fertility and renewal. By superimposing the images and allowing them to emerge as the viewer walks through the textile “forest of images,” she is able to address the connection between nature, water, tides, vegetation, and animals as well as the mutual interconnectedness between women and children. Totems also appear in this multilayered narrative, as well as protector animals, which in many African legends and traditions represent an important interrelationship between caring for nature and the feminine. In Africa, according to Silva, women are the backbone of society, passing on not only life, but also culture, wisdom, and hope. Since the beginnings of civilization, women have played a crucial role in shaping societies and passing on knowledge from generation to generation. They are therefore important preservers of memory, creators of connections, and motivators of change. In light of the position of women around the world and their sometimes extreme oppression as well as the life-threatening dangers and violations they face in many countries, it is easy to understand the artist’s call for the equal presence of women worldwide in order to build a fairer and more harmonious future.

Beijing-based artist **Liu Yujia** takes a completely different look at the topic of the future by examining mushroom cultures in the ecosystems of the northeastern forests of Asia. While filming her major *Changbai Mountain Project* in the forest-covered regions of the Changbai Mountains on the border between China and North Korea, Liu Yujia would frequently accompany local ginseng gatherers. It was a journey into the depths of mixed coniferous and deciduous forests to search for ginseng and other rare medicinal plants. This haunting experience often reminded the artist of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. While Tsing’s ethnography primarily examines the global commodity chain of matsutake mushrooms and their strategies for survival in the ruins of capitalism, the artist states that it drew her attention to the intertwined and dynamic biological networks and microcosms that thrive under the forest canopy. Liu Yujia was particularly fascinated by the subdued, ethereal light that permeates the undergrowth, a phenomenon that she views as the vitalizing force of this ecosystem. It is precisely the video camera’s perspective—its low vantage point and the time lapse—that enables the viewer to directly experience the growth, movement, and interrelationship of fungi, mosses, insects, mycelium networks, and soil in between fleeting moments of light and shadow. In this light-filled environment, the entire flora and fauna of the undergrowth engage in a constant exchange of energy, which promotes and demands a symbiotic interdependence. With the aid of macro photography, the artist magnifies the complex ecology of the undergrowth. The loop of the video work reveals the incredible beauty and diversity of form, color, and growth variations. At the same time, Liu Yujia leads us into a distinctly jungle-like realm, highlighting the symbolic role of fungi, mycelium, and light, which exist as subtle yet vital energies within the broader ecological network of the undergrowth.

**Surma**, a sound artist who also lives in Portugal, records the sounds, atmospheres, and also the silence of all the external stimuli that she encounters outside of her daily routine and experiences—usually while traveling. According to the artist, nature is one of her most important sources of inspiration, as it offers both a space of silence and a broad palette of sounds that she can explore and work with.

For the first time, the artist is presenting a photo series in combination with a soundtrack, which she realized on her most recent trip to Los Angeles—dramatically influenced by the major fires around the metropolis. Starting with these images, the artist then superimposed other places and times, creating a simultaneity of events. According to her, it was a sense of urgency that prompted her to do so, reflecting the chaos that the world is currently experiencing and that is making society increasingly anxious, leaving little time for ourselves and less empathy for one another. Urgency is also a word that Surma often uses to describe her work and her artistic drive, as well as this overlapping of image and sound, tension, chaos, and sadness, but also care and hope. It is the sound composition that breaks through the silence of the images. Performing at various venues as a sound artist or working in collaboration with other artists, Surma also views sound as a powerful sociopolitical instrument for evoking emotions, empathy, and therefore social awareness—a universal language, so to speak. From a feminist perspective, the artist explains, sounds have long been used to amplify voices that are marginalized or silenced. The very act of creating and sharing sounds is an act of resistance, a declaration of identity, and a call for equality. Sound can draw attention to issues such as gender, inequality, and violence.

The corridor leading to the upper floor of the Kunsthaus Baselland leads directly to **Johanna Calle**'s delicate works. This interplay between distant and close-up views harbors a surprise: what appears to be a drawing from a distance is revealed as lines and natural formations combined with written texts when viewed up close. The artist, who lives in Colombia, uses old photographs, maps, and documents as supports for her work. Her interest in trees, leaves, trunks, forests, gardens, bonsai, and water resources is the result of many years of work and research. She is particularly interested in mutual dependencies: for example, she prefers to use old paper to depict trees, which in turn is made from trees that had to be felled a long time ago for its production. How, wonders the artist, can this damage be reversed? Nowadays, the use of paper is so commonplace that its abundance is taken for granted. That is why it is so important for her to investigate the significance of paper in earlier times.

Together with her husband Julio C. Pérez N., Johanna Calle has begun to focus on historical, ethnographic, and traditional vintage photographs, mainly of Colombian and Latin American origin. They visit antique stores, auction houses, state auctions, private sales, second-hand bookstores, and markets in order to acquire archives and then classify and research them. In addition to analog photographs, negatives, and files, unexposed old photographic paper is also considered a potential resource. This particular focus gives rise to numerous creative moments. For example, Calle also refers to it as “resonance material,” which she in turn uses for her own works. She mostly draws and writes on these papers and various historical supports using an equally historical typewriter from the 1940s. The artist determines the type of drawing by choosing from the twenty or so machines, which vary according to their lettering, size, and age. The combination of a machine with a certain paper, a certain text, decade, or picture is intentional and symbolic for her, because she regards the typewriters as a political artistic tool. For example, there were times when there were hardly any job opportunities for women, and secretarial work was one of the few jobs that was accepted in the patriarchal and conservative society of her home country.



In the fall of 2023, **Caroline Bachmann** set off to paint and draw the river Rhine. This important waterway stretches more than 1200 kilometers from its source in the Swiss Alps to its mouth in the North Sea, crossing borders and passing a wide variety of landscapes and cities. The artist, who lives and works in Berlin and French-speaking Switzerland, used her numerous sketches to create twenty-four circular paintings on a wooden support, eight of which are exhibited at the Kunsthaus. The unique shape of the *tondo* (round painting) immediately creates the impression of looking at the landscape through a porthole or telescope. At the same time, this also raises the question of where we are actually situated in this view: on the river or looking at it from the bank?

The series is characteristic of Caroline Bachmann's work, which is dedicated to a single theme here. With bold colors, a matte application of paint, and clear contours, she translates what she sees into a painting that exudes an astonishing calm and power at the same time. Day and night, cloud formations, the flow of water, waterfalls—all kinds of movement appear to be present, and yet everything seems to stand still for a moment. There is no impasto application of paint, but rather a conceptual, focused treatment of a theme and motif, which the artist deftly approaches in a multifaceted way that celebrates the power of painting. The restrained color palette is activated by bold, bright framing of the circular paintings; the reference to historical painting is thus immediately disrupted and shifted into the contemporary. Installed in the space, the paintings presented next to each other create a situation that unites with the architecture and enables the viewer to physically experience being both inside and outside as well as looking out or in. At the same time, following the variations on a theme also allows us to trace the course of the Rhine at different times—wild, romantic, clean today, previously toxic in the Basel area, calm.

**Belén Rodríguez**, an artist living in Spain, moved to the countryside with her young family during the pandemic. When she learned that the forest in front of her house was for sale and was under threat from deforestation and developers, she decided to buy it. She wanted to leave it in its free and wild state and to use it, along with the animals living there such as birds, pheasants, and other creatures, as a starting point and source of inspiration for her work. The Spanish artist's focus is not on depicting nature, but on creating natural works with nature and its materials. For Rodríguez, the material of the forest is thus raw material: for example, the feathers shed by a pheasant, which have mixed with the leaves of the trees on the ground; or the water that flows through the rivers, changing its colors, and the rain that drips down from the trees, which the artist mixes with her chosen colors to dye her cloths and textiles. The colors of the forest and water therefore run through the work like the sap that flows through the trees. Chance is an important aspect here, because even if Belén Rodríguez chooses colors from nature, the result is usually unpredictable. "In nature there are no ugly colors, but there are also no inharmonious colors either. Nature is able to combine impossible mixtures without batting an eyelid [...]" I like this quote from the book *The Overstory* by Richard Powers: "People aren't the apex species they think they are. Other creatures—bigger, smaller, slower, faster, older, younger, more powerful—call the shots, make the air, and eat the sunlight. Without them, nothing [...]" It could be the eternal project of mankind, to learn what forests have figured out."

**Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's** complex oeuvre, which includes painting, sculpture, installation, and video, often traces stories of loss, melancholy, violence, and colonial exploitation that are in danger of being forgotten, without losing the poetry of the images he creates. The artist often invokes personal and collective memories and narratives from Guatemala, including the stories of family members who were killed during the civil war between the military government and the rebels over unfair land distribution (1960–1996) in Guatemala. The artist himself was born in Guatemala City during these years of war in 1978 and moved to Canada at the age of six.

With the work *Esquisúchil*, Ramírez-Figueroa refers to the popular name of the tree *Bourreria huanita*, an endangered species in Guatemala that is closely associated with Saint Pedro de San José de Betancur (Saint Peter of Saint Joseph de Betancur). Hermano (Brother) Pedro, as he is also known, was the founder of the Order of Bethlehemite Brothers and strategically planted the tree in the courtyards of churches in Guatemala to attract and convert the Indigenous population. The Spaniards observed that the tree was revered by the locals and used as a source of homeopathic medicine. After the saint's death, the veneration of the tree, which was said to have miraculous properties, merged with that of Pedro, who was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2002. The veneration of and belief in the esquisúchil tree can be considered the most open form of local tree worship today.

The video work *Mimesis of Mimesis* takes a similar thematic direction. The performance shown here took place at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, one of the institutes founded during the Dutch colonial era. With a slow tracking shot and only the sound of a crackling fire in the fireplace, the viewer is led through rooms, past seating such as chairs and armchairs with their cushions removed. The naked body of the artist appears in the center of the image, lying on several layers of the removed cushions, apparently asleep, with his eyes closed. Placed all over his body are small upholstery buttons, as if the body itself, fused with the layers of upholstery beneath it, were a kind of Chesterfield sofa. On the one hand, this performative gesture alludes to art historical references; on the other hand, it becomes an absurd and simultaneously perfidious critique of colonialism made human: lying on top of the lives of others, wrenching away their culture and traditions, and exposing them, naked and defenseless, to violence against their will. (IG)

# Events

## Opening

**Thursday, 10 April, 6.30 pm**

Opening of the group exhibition "Whispers from Tides and Forests" in the presence of numerous participating artists.

5 pm	Exclusive members preview
6 pm	Doors
7 pm	Welcoming and Introduction Marina Meijer-von Tschärner, President Kunstverein Baselland Jeanne Locher, Municipal President Münchenstein Ines Goldbach, Director Kunsthaus Baselland
9 pm	Concert by sound artist Surma

## Kids Holiday Program: Easter

**Wednesday, 16 April, 2-5 pm**

Come along and experience the joy of working on large formats!

5.- CHF / 4.- CHF with family pass

Thanks for your registration by 14 April at  
[leonie.vogt@kunsthautbaselland.ch](mailto:leonie.vogt@kunsthautbaselland.ch)

## Inclusive offer together with Anrufkultur

**Thursday, 24 April, 6 pm**

Art viewing as an inclusive offer for people with visual or mobility impairments.

With art mediator Katharina Anna Wieser and the Anrufkultur association. Free offer.

Registration at [anrufkultur.ch](http://anrufkultur.ch)

## Kunsthaut Cinema: Erich Busslinger

**Thursday, 8 May, 8 pm**

Filmpremiere of "DEUTSCHE LANDSCHAFT - ein Fragment."

A Film essay by Erich Busslinger  
Free entry.

## Karaoke with Live Band by School of Rock Basel

**Thursday, 15 May, 6 pm**

Sing your favorite ESC songs with live band from School Of Rock Basel in the foyer!

Followed by public viewing of the ESC semi-final.  
Free entry.

## Art @Dreispiß

**Tuesday, 17 June, 8 pm**

8 pm Short guided tours (30 min.)  
in English and French with a  
focus on the architecture and the  
exhibition

9 pm Sound performance by Surma  
Bar with snacks and drinks. Free entry.

The exhibition is accompanied by multilingual guided tours, workshops for children and adults, holiday programs, sound performances and much more.

In cooperation with the Anrufkultur association, the Kunsthaus is now offering people with visual or mobility impairments an inclusive offer for viewing art. Kunsthaus Baselland organizes a special program for Open House, ESC and Art Basel. You can find out more about all events as well as regular offers in our agenda.



KUNSTHAUS BASELLAND  
Helsinki-Strasse 5  
4142 Münchenstein/Basel  
T. +41 61 563 15 10  
[kunsthautbaselland.ch](http://kunsthautbaselland.ch)  
[@kunsthautbaselland](https://www.instagram.com/kunsthautbaselland)

Tram 11  
Münchenstein Freilager  
(Approx. 15 min from  
Bahnhof SBB)  
Accessibility information at  
[ginto.guide](http://ginto.guide)

Many thanks to the partners  
of Kunsthaus Baselland, to the  
sponsors of the exhibition, and  
to all those who wish to remain  
unnamed:



Jenzer Fleisch + Feinkost AG  
Hotel Gasthof zum Ochsen,  
Arlesheim

## Opening Hours

Tuesday to Friday  
11 am – 6 pm  
Thursday  
11 am – 8 pm  
Saturday to Sunday  
11 am – 5 pm  
Mondays closed

## Special Opening Hours

**Art Basel:**

16.6.–22.6.2025  
Mon 10 am – 6 pm  
Tue 10 am – 10 pm  
Wed noon – 6 pm  
Thu 10 am – 8 pm  
Fri 10 am – 6 pm  
Sat/Sun 10 am – 6 pm

**Summer:**

1.7.–17.8.2025  
Thu–Sun 11 am – 5 pm