# Meetings with Trees for Unfold and Articulate

Oslo 2.2.2022 Annette Arlander

How to rethink our relationship to other life forms that we share this planet with is one of the core questions for art and philosophy today. In the artistic research project "Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees" (Arlander 2020a), I encounter individual trees that are remarkable in their context or rather unremarkable and spend time with them alone or together with the public in order to create video works and video essays.

The project is further developing experiences from the artistic research project "Performing with Plants" (Arlander 2016) as well as some previous publications discussing performing with trees (Arlander 2010; 2015; 2019; 2020c) and what that might mean.



Background:

#### **Performing with Plants**

artistic research project by Annette Arlander <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/</u> <u>316550/316551</u>

## 2017 at Helsinki Collegium for

Advanced Studies, funded by Kone Foundation

#### 2018-2019

at Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH) funded by Vetenskapsrådet (The Swedish Research Council)

Summary of outcomes https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/ 316550/709778





Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees

Project blog https://meetingswithtrees. com

Project archive on the Research Catalogue <u>https://www.researchcat</u> <u>alogue.net/view/761326/</u> <u>761327</u> The title of this artistic research project alludes to the celebrated photography book *Meetings with Remarkable Trees* (1996) by Thomas Pakenham and is in some sense forming a counterpoint to it, by questioning what is remarkable and what is unremarkable, while focusing on individual trees. The medium in this project is not photography, however, but rather performance for video and recorded voice.

Although we are often accused of "not seeing the forest for the trees", this project wants to look at the opposite danger, not seeing the trees for the forest, and look at individual trees. This is not to deny that trees form networks and ecosystems or symbiotic relationships not only with other trees but with fungi, bacteria and all kinds of micro-organisms, and are in a constant exchange with their environment, as humans are as well.

Emphasizing individualism is a risky strategy in our current neoliberal capitalist society, where the importance of individualism is exaggerated anyway. It can nevertheless be useful to focus on singular trees, as an important first step towards decolonizing our relationship with 'nature'.

As late ecofeminist Val Plumwood (2003) pointed out, colonial thinking tends to emphasize a very strong difference between 'us' and 'them', and to see 'them' as all alike, stereotypical, non-individualised. Thus, attending to particular trees might work as a way to help us see trees as life forms that we have much in common with, despite our undeniable differences.



Artistically the project can be placed at the intersection of performance art, environmental art and video or media art, in the encounter of traditions – performance art's emphasis on embodied presence, video- and media art's valuing of repetition, transformation and critical reflection on technology as well as environmental art's sensitivity to the possible effects and side effects an artwork can have. Historically speaking, there is no lack of artistic engagement with plants, from vegetally inspired music or ornamentation on textiles, pottery and architecture, to paintings, poems and science fiction stories of plants. Living plants are used as material in practices as divergent as garden design, sonification, floral arrangements and contemporary bio art.

Plants and vegetation are receiving increased attention in the context of the current climate crises and the rapid extinction of species. With the developments in plant science and the post-humanities artists, artist-researchers and scholars are looking at plants in new ways. The growing interest in plant studies, to some extent as a further development of the burgeoning of animal studies and post-humanist thinking, is influencing art and artistic research as well.



In scholarly terms the project could be situated within the emerging field of critical plant studies, which has been be linked to art's return to vegetal life and to looking at plants in art (Gibson & Brits 2018; Gibson 2018; Aloi 2018). Other discussions have focused on plant rights (Hall 2011), plant philosophy or plant thinking (Marder 2013; Irigaray and Marder 2016; Coccia 2019), plant theory (Nealon 2016; Myers 2017), the language of plants (Vieira, Gagliano, and Ryan 2015; Kranz, Schwan, Wittrock 2016; Gagliano, Ryan and Vieira 2017) queer plants (Sandilands 2017) and more.

There is a current 'plant turn' in science, philosophy and environmental humanities, accompanied by an abundance of popular accounts of recent scientific research on plant sentience, intelligence, memory and communication (Pollan 2002; Mancuso & Viola 2015, Wohlleben 2016; Chamovitz 2017; Gagliano 2018). For example, four issues of *Antennae* are devoted to plants, as are recent issues of *Performance Philosophy* and *Ruukku - studies in artistic research*.



Rethinking our relationship to other forms of life that we share this planet with is a central task for artists today. Artistic research can contribute through its capacity to allow and to generate hybrid forms of thinking and acting. This project wants to contribute to this growing field with examples of relatively simple artistic practices. The project has resulted in video essays and video installations to be shown in the context of contemporary art. The activities of the project were documented on a blog (Arlander 2020a) and in an exposition on the Research Catalogue (Arlander 2020b), an international database for artistic research. The outcomes will also be shared at international conferences, in local seminars and in journal articles in the context of critical plant studies, performance studies and artistic research.

In this context my working method, my way of documenting all meetings with trees and sharing the material online, as an ongoing process, is perhaps the most interesting aspect.

In the project so far, I have experimented with various strategies, partly based on previous work. My main strategy earlier has been creating year-long time-lapse videos, which has now been transformed into time-lapse videos of days with trees, and I have also engaged in some new explorations, to be described in the following.

One way of structuring the project is through specific sites, periods in particular residencies, as in the project blog <u>https://meetingswithtrees.com</u>

Another way is through individual trees or groups of trees, as the project archive on the Research Catalogue <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327</u>

A third way is through articulating the various strategies or techniques utilized or developed, which I use here.

but first a brief summary of the residencies, to acknowledge the sites and the support:

#### **Residencies during the project :**

ARA (Arts Research Africa) residency in Johannesburg in February-March 2020 https://meetingswithtrees.com/ara/ Including Nirox sculpture park (a few days) https://meetingswithtrees.com/nirox/

Mustarinda in Northeastern Finland in September 2020 https://meetingswithtrees.com/mustarinda/

Öres on Örö Island in November 2020 https://meetingswithtrees.com/ores/

Päiväkoti in Hailuoto in April 2021 https://meetingswithtrees.com/hailuoto/

Ars Bioarctica in Kilpisjärvi, two weeks in June 2021 https://meetingswithtrees.com/ars-bioarctica/

Eckerö Post and Customs House in July 2021 https://www.postochtullhuset.ax/en/ Background: Year-long time-lapse videos with trees in parks (a few times a week for a year in 2017-2019)

With Elms in Kaivopuisto 1-2<a href="https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=476426">https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=476426</a>With an Alder in Kaivopuisto<a href="https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=476425">https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=476426</a>

With a Beech in Djurgården <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=438266</u> With a Sycamore in Humlegården <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=438260</u>

Year of the Dog in Lill-Jan's Wood (On a Spruce Stump) 1 <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=612191</u> Year of the Dog in Lill-Jan's Wood (On a Spruce Stump) 2 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-

work?work=709461

Swinging in a Pine <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=709462</u> Year of the Dog in Lill-Jan's Wood (Sitting in a Pine) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=652999</u>

Year of the Pig with a Tatarian Maple https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-work?work=783427

Year of the Ox – On the lowest branch (in Helsinki) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1159196

With Elms in Kaivopuisto 1 performed 101 times between 10.1 and 17.12. 2017 in Kaivopuisto Park, Helsinki

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With Elms in Kaivopuisto 2 performed 101 times between 10.1.and 17.12.2017 in Kaivopuisto Park, Helsinki

*With an Alder in Kaivopuisto* performed 100 times between 12.1.and 17.12.2017 in Kaivopuisto Park, Helsinki

With a Beech in Djurgården performed 44 times between 7.1. and 16.12.2017 in Djurgården Park, Stockholm

*With a Sycamore in Humlegården 1* performed 44 times between 7.1.and 16.12.2017 in Humlegården Park, Stockholm

*With a Sycamore in Humlegården 2* performed 44 times between 7.1. and 16.12.2017 in Humlegården park, Stockholm

Year of the Dog in Lill-Jan's Wood (On a Spruce Stump) 1 performed 100 times between 14.1.2018. and 3.2.2019 in Lill-Jansskogen Park, Stockholm

Year of the Dog in Lill-Jan's Wood (On a Spruce Stump) 2 performed 100 times between 14.1.2018. and 3.2.2019 in Lill-Jansskogen Park, Stockholm

Swinging in a Pine performed 100 times between 14.1.2018. and 3.2.2019 in Lill-Jansskogen Park, Stockholm

Year of the Dog in Lill-Jan's Wood (Sitting in a Pine) performed 100 times between 14.1.2018. and 3.2.2019 in Lill-Jansskogen Park, Stockholm



*Year of the Pig with a Tatarian Maple* performed 108 times between 9.1. 2019 and 151.2020 in the Nobel Park, Stockholm

*Year of the Ox – On the Lowest Branch* performed once a month from February 2021 to January 2022 on Harakka Island, Helsinki Background: The Tree Calendars

(based on the Celtic lunar calendar with months named after trees)

The Helsinki Tree Calendar (2017) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/316550/327809</u>

The Stockholm Tree Calendar (2018) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/316550/425654





1. Birch – January (24.1220.1.) in Munkkiniemenranta	8. Holly – July (8.74.8.) in Kaisaniemi Botanical Garden
2. Rowan – February (21.117.2.) in Särkiniemi, Lauttasaari	9. Hazel – August (5.81.9.) in Herttoniemi shore
3. Ash – March (18.217.3.) in Kaivopuisto Park	10. Vine – September (2.929.9.) in Tehtaankatu yard
4. Alder – April (18.314.4.) in Mellsteninranta, Espoo	11. lvy – October (30.927.10) at home
5. Willow – May (15.412.5.) on Harakka Island	12. Reed – November (28.1023.11.) in Arabian ranta park
6. Hawthorn – June (13.59.6.) in Observatory Park	13. Elder – December (24.1123.12.) in Kaivopuisto park
7. Oak – June (10.67.7.) in Eugen Schauman Park, Kulosaari	



Birch in January – Humlegården
Rowan in February – Kräftriket
Ash in February – Långholmen
Alder in March – Haga Park
Willow in April –
Ladugårdsgärdet
Hawthorn in May – Brunnsviken
Oak in June – Hagaparken
Holly in July – Bergius Garden
Hazel in August – Djurgården
Vine in September – Rosendal

11. Ivy in October – Kungsholms Strand

12. Reed in November –

Djurgårdsbrunnsviken

13. Elder in December –

Kungsholms Strands Pulkabacke



Birch in January – Humlegården (20.1.2018)

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## **Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees**

Old strategies or techniques utilized:

Time-lapse videos of days with trees (every hour or two-hours)

New strategies or techniques developed:

Becoming Tree (two legged tree pose) with trees, daily for a month

Variations (either repeated practices or singular poses)

Writing letters to trees by the trees

Inviting other people to present and perform with trees important to them

Time-lapse videos of days with trees (every hour or every two-hours):

Day with Old Tjikko, Day with a Juniper 1 & 2 <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1013698</u>

Day with the Firethorne Rhus (Nirox) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/822442

Day with a Bog Birch (Mustarinda) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/999357/2/1002</u>

Day with a Pine, Another Day with a Pine (Örö) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1044218/0/0</u> Day and Night with a Mountain Birch (Kilpisjärvi) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1292734</u> Day with An Ash (Eckerö) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1307712</u>

Day with Old Tjikko (17 min 45 sec & 19 min 35 sec) performed on 14. May 2019 every hour between 10.30 AM and 7.30 PM on Fulufjället, Sweden

Day with a Juniper 1 & 2 (21 min 56 sec) performed on 3. August 2019 every hour between 7 AM and 9 PM on Utö, Finland

Day with the Firethorne Rhus (24 min 10 sec) with a Firethorn Rhus (Searsia Pyroides) in Nirox Sculpture Park every hour between 7 AM and 6 PM on 17 March 2020.

Day with a Bog Birch (with text) (52 min 17 sec & 20 min) on 23 September 2020 every hour between 7 AM and 7 PM with a birch near Mustarinda.



Day with a Pine (3 min 20 sec) performed on 13th November 2020 every hour between 8 am and 5 pm with a pine on Örö.
Day-long time-lapse videos

*Kära Tall (Another Day with a Pine)* (5 min 43 sec) performed on 28. November 2020 every hour between 9 AM and 4 PM with a pine on Örö

### Day (and night) -long time-lapse videos

Day and Night with a Mountain Birch (13 min 15 sec and 53 min 13 sec), recorded every two-hours between 6 June 2021 at 3.45 pm and 7 June 2021 at 3.45 pm in Kilpisjärvi.

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Day (and night) -long time-lapse videos

Day with an Ash (26 min 12 sec and 91 min 40 sec), recorded next to Eckerö Post Quay every two-hours on 22 July 2021 from 5 am to 11 pm.

Becoming Tree exercise (two-legged 'tree pose' daily next to a tree, often for a month):

With the Oak on Galway Road (in Johannesburg) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/796954 With the Maple Tree (Corona Diary) (in Helsinki) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/831532 June with the Spruce of Independence (in Helsinki) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/917581 July with a Pine (on Harakka Island) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/944410 Daily Birch (September in Mustarinda) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/978491 The Pine's Apprentice (in Örö) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1034899 The Pine on Skifferholmen II (in Helsinki) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1102386 *Practicing with a Pine* (in Hailuoto) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1219495 With the Maple Tree (in Eckerö) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1305636 With the Apple Tree (in Eckerö) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1305636



performed daily between 13.2. and 16.3.2020 with an oak on Galway Road, Johannesburg

With the Maple Tree (Corona Diary) (62 min 22 sec & 16 min 50 sec) performed daily between 29. 3 and 31.5. 2020 with a maple tree in Tehtaankatu yard.

June with the Spruce of Independence (36 min 31 sec & 15 min) performed daily 1.-30. 6 2020 with a spruce in Kaivopuisto Park.

July with a Pine (50 min 46 sec & 16 min) performed daily 1. -31. 7. 2020 with a pine on Harakka Island

*The Daily Birch (September in Mustarinda)* (60 min 20 sec & 14 min 10 sec) Performed daily 2. 30. 9. 2020 with a birch near Mustarinda house.

*The Pine's Apprentice* (53 min & 13 min 50 sec) performed daily 2.11. - 2.12.2020 with a pine next to the residency house on Örö,

The Pine on Skifferholmen II (35 min 38 sec and 20 min 10 sec) performed daily 1-28.2. 2021 with a pine in Helsinki.

*Practicing with a Pine* (25 min 10 sec), performed daily 4.-28.4.2021 in Hailuoto.

With the Maple Tree (15 min 10 sec), performed daily 3.- 30.7. 2021 in Eckerö.

With the Apple Tree (15 min 10 sec), performed daily 3.-30. 7. 2021 in Eckerö.

performed daily (when in Stockholm)from 4.8.2021 with a gingko tree on David Bagares gata -street.

Holding hands and other variations (daily next to a tree, often for a month):

With a Pine on Skifferholmen (in Helsinki) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1102386

The Pine Next Door (in Örö) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1107375

Monument in March (sea-buckthorne, in Helsinki) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1174139</u>

Listening with Mountain Birches (in Kilpisjärvi) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1289070

Power practice with a Weeping Beech (Stockholm) <u>https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1406102</u>

With a Pine on Skifferholmen (23 min 11 sec and 66 min 55 sec ), performed daily 1- 31. January 2021 with a pine in Helsinki.

Variations



Monument in March (31 min 10 sec and 122 min 20 sec), performed daily 1-31.3.2021 with a protected sea-buckthorn in Helsinki.

Variations

Variations

*Listening with Mountain Birches* (24 min 10 sec), performed twice daily 2.-13.6..2021 in Kilpisjärvi.

Variations

Power Practice with a Weeping Beech (24 min 11 sec), performed daily between 1.-8.11.2021 and 26.11.-11.12..2021 in Stockholm.

Writing letters to trees next to the trees:

Dear Olive Tree, Dear Ficus Macrofylla I & II https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1013698 Tallen på Hundudden 1-4 (The Pine on Hundudden) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/771644 Dear Firethorn Rhus https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/822442/51/603 Dear Firethorn Rhus II https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/822442/51/2128 Dear Pine – Kära Tall https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/831544 Kuusi Hyvä – Dear Spruce 1-7 https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/844990/0/0 Dear Spruce, Dear Birch and Dear Deceased https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/982302/20/3334 Writing with a Pine, Writing in a Pine https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1036306/182/2455 Dear Pine, Pines by the Path <a href="https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1036306/182/2455">https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1036306/182/2455</a>

Tala om det för tallen (Tell it to the Pine) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1107375 Dearest Pine, Esteemed Pine Tree https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1165222 Esteemed Tarri Pine https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1225961 Dear Mountain Birch (with text) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1294375/18/4222 Dearest Mountain Birch (with text) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1294375/18/4222 The Ash Tree on Eckerö (with text) https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/1289070/536/4656



With an Ancient Olive Tree (19 min) performed 19.12.2019 in Ulldecona, Spain

*Dear Ficus Macrophylla I* (19 min 30 sec) performed 25. 12.2019 in Alicante, Spain

Tallen på Hundudden 1-4 [the Pine on Hundudden] (c 14 – 20 min), performed 7., 13., 26.1 2020 and 19.7.2021 on Hundudden in Stockholm.

Dear Firethorn Rhus (20 min 15 sec & 6 min) Performed with a Firethorne Rhus (Searsia pyroides) in Nirox Sculpture Park 18.3. 2020.

Dear Firethorn Rhus II (20 min 15 sec & 6 min) Performed with a Firethorne Rhus (Searsia pyroides) in the Nirox Nature Reserve 19.3.2020.

Dear Pine – Kära tall 1-7 (12 min 30 sec - 20 min 32 sec) performed between 30. 3. and 6. 8.2020 with a pine in Brunnsparken, Helsinki.

Dear Spruce – Kuusi Hyvä 1-7 (c. 20 min 50 sec) performed between 10.4. and 25. 8. 2020 with a spruce on Harakka Island.

Dear Spruce – Rakas Kuusi (20 min 15 sec & 5 min 47 sec) performed 25.9.2020 with a spruce near Mustarinda

Dear Birch – Kära Björk (20 min 15 sec & 5 min 50 sec) performed 29.9. 2020 with a birch near Mustarinda

Dear Deceased (20 min 15 sec & 6 min 26 sec) performed 29.9. 2020 with a dead spruce near Mustarinda

Writing with a Pine II (20 min) performed 10.11.2020 with a pine on Örö

Writing in a Pine (13 min & 5 min 20 sec) performed 16.11.2020 with a pine on Örö

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Writing letters to trees

Dear Pine (10 min & 4 min 30 sec) performed 18.11.2020 with a pine on Örö
Pines by the Path (Kära tall) (16 min 20 sec & 4 min 5 sec) performed 1.12.2020 with two pines on Örö

Tala om det för tallen (Tell it to the Pine) 1 -3 (8 min - 14 min. sec) performed on 11.1., 20.2., 11.5.and 27.6.2021 with a pine on Örö

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Dearest Pine (with text) (15 min 45 sec) performed 21.2.2021 with a pine on Örö

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Writing letters to trees

*Esteemed Pine Tree* (16 min 15 sec) performed 23.2.2021 with a pine on Örö

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Esteemed Tarri Pine (with text) (8 min 10 sec and 27 min 30 sec) performed 14.4.2021 with a pine in Hailuoto

Dear Mountain Birch (23 min) and Dear Mountain Birch (with text) (7 min) performed 10.6 and recorded 13.6.2021 with a birch in Kilpisjärvi

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Dearest Mountain Birch (25 min) and Dearest Mountain Birch (with text) (7 min) performed 11.6 and recorded 13..6.2021 with a birch in Kilpisjärvi



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Writing letters to trees

For more trees and ways of meeting them, see:

Project blog https://meetingswithtrees.com

Project archive on the Research Catalogue https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327

The ARA publication <a href="https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327/1/1705">https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327/1/1705</a>

Or my website https://annettearlander.com

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## For the next project:

# Pondering with Pines – Miettii Mäntyjen kanssa – Funderar med Furor

Project blog https://ponderingwithpines.wordpress.com

Project archive on the Research Catalogue https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1323410/1323411

### **Proposal**:

based on a provocation created for Designing the Pluriversity <u>https://designingpluriversity.org</u>

Go to a tree that is important to you – if you do not have such a tree nearby, go to the nearest park or wood and approach a tree that is inviting you.

Bring a pen and paper with you.

Greet the tree and ask the tree for advice concerning a problem you are struggling with or conduct an interview with the tree about your main research concerns.

Write down by hand, while spending time with the tree, the questions and the possible answers that come to your mind.

Thank you for your attention!