

NORDIC PLANT HUMANITIES SYMPOSIUM: Plants, People, and Ecologies

Wednesday, 7 June 2023, 10.00–15.00
Tellus Backstage, University of Oulu



Eero Järnefelt, 'Berry Pickers' (1888), 45.4 x 69.7cm, oil on canvas, Tampere Art Museum

The symposium will highlight Nordic developments in the new field of the plant humanities through a combination of regional and international speakers. The interdisciplinary plant humanities comprises diverse academic disciplines—from anthropology, gender studies, geography and history to literary studies, philosophy, and social sciences. The field aims to develop novel approaches to understanding the sensory, material, and affective links between humans, plants, and ecologies. Presentations will address a range of topics including the role of plants in artistic research, children's literature, citizen science, environmental aesthetics, and Indigenous people's knowledge systems. The symposium will be preceded by a two-hour botanical writing workshop at the [Botanical Garden](#) on Tuesday, 6 June 2023 facilitated by John Ryan.

PROGRAMME

Notes: Each speaker will have 15–20 minutes to present followed by 5–10 minutes for questions and answers. Presentation timings refer to Finland ([Eastern European Summer Time](#)).

10–10:05 Symposium Opening, **John C. Ryan**

SESSION 1: NORDIC PERSPECTIVES

10:05–10:30 Revealing Narratives of 'Plantiness' in a Constrained World, **Dawn Sanders** (University of Gothenburg, Sweden)

10:30–10:55 Pondering with Pines, **Annette Arlander** (Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland)

10:55–11:20 Vegetal Way-Finding: Plant Pathways in the European Arctic, **Lydia Kokkola** (University of Oulu, Finland)

11:20–11:45 Faces and Forms From the Kingdoms of Trees, Snow and Ice and Our Relationship with Nature, **Francis Joy** (University of Lapland Arctic Centre, Rovaniemi, Finland)

11:45–12:10 Involving Refugees in Nature Exploration in Host Countries Through Citizen Science: An Example From Finland, **Mykyta Peregrym** (University of Oulu, Finland)

12:10–12:55 Lunch

SESSION 2: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

12:55–13:20 The Role of Aesthetics in Understanding the Wellbeing Aspects of Plant/Human Interaction, **Isis Brook** (Bath Spa University, UK)

13:20–13:45 Unlocking Landscapes through Westonbirt's Archive: Exploring the Inclusive Possibilities of Entangled Histories of Plants, Places, and People, **Clare Hickman** (Newcastle University, UK)

13:45–14:10 Storying Plants in Australian Children's and Young Adult Literature, **Melanie Duckworth** (Østfold University College, Norway)

14:10–14:35 On Becoming Entangled: The Grapevines' Story, **Costanza Sartoris** (Ca' Foscari University, Italy)

14:35–15:00 Ritualising Plants and Changing Human-Plant Geographies in Kodagu, India, **Subarna De** (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

ABSTRACTS

10:05–10:30 Revealing Narratives of 'Plantiness' in a Constrained World (Session 1: Nordic Perspectives)

In this paper, I will discuss the complexities of framing individual plants in relation to broader ecological sensitivities extant in the 'presented worlds' (Braund & Reiss, 2006) of botanic gardens. In particular I will consider if there is a place for art-based research in these spaces of inclusion and exclusion (Snæbjörnsdóttir, Wilson & Sanders, 2020).

Dawn Sanders is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education in the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. She has studied both Fine Art and Ecology and uses both disciplinary lenses to explore "Life as Plant" in her research work.

10:30–10:55 Pondering with Pines (Session 1: Nordic Perspectives)

Pondering with Pines is the title of an informal artistic research project by Annette Arlander as well as a small exhibition on Harakka Island off Helsinki (5–18 June 2023) showing video works created with two pines in the nearby Kaivopuisto Park in 2022. This talk will briefly introduce these works and the recent publication *Performing and Thinking with Trees* (2022).

Annette Arlander, DA, is an artist, researcher and a pedagogue, one of the pioneers of Finnish performance art and a trailblazer of artistic research. Former professor at University of the Arts Helsinki and Stockholm University of the Arts. At present she is visiting researcher at Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki. See <https://annettearlander.com>

10:55–11:20 Vegetal Way-Finding: Plant Pathways in the European Arctic (Session 1: Nordic Perspectives)

Way-finding in Sápmi (better known in English by its colonial name, 'Lapland') demands that one pay attention to nature, both the large inanimate structures

such as rock forms and water routes and the more intimate understanding of plant life. No map can guide a walker through the mires during the seasons when the surface is not frozen hard enough to carry a person's weight. Knowing where to tread requires knowing which plants to trust. In this paper, I introduce my new project centred on resistant readings of children's literature to promote critical thinking about plant agency. I examine the way-finding practices of the protagonist Elina in *Som om jag inte fanns*. [Invisible Elina] by the Swedish author, Kerstin Johansson i Backe. In doing so, I aim to use literary representations to promote under-standings of vegetal agency.

Lydia Kokkola works at the University of Oulu, Finland. She has recently finished a project on advanced L2 literacy skills and the embodied nature of all reading. She has just begun work on a new project centred on resistant readings of children's literature to promote critical thinking about plant agency.

11:20–11:45 Faces and Forms From the Kingdoms of Trees, Snow and Ice and Our Relationship with Nature (Session 1: Nordic Perspectives)

Trees like humans, breath, reproduce and can help sustain relationships between the physical and spiritual realms. The qualities of trees are often seen through close observation of their forms where faces and other phenomena become evident, which remind us of how different kingdoms exist within nature. On close observation of faces and forms within trees, snow and ice, it is interesting to note what it is they might communicate to us in their own particular ways and why? To answer some of these questions, my presentation provides a way of bringing in some new perspectives on why we need to look further towards nature and not the economy in order to help enhance creativity and bring back a sense of magic each time we walk outdoors and how this can help benefit us in our daily living.

Francis Joy is originally from the UK and lives and works in Rovaniemi since 2010, and currently working as a member of the Arctic Anthropology Research team at the University of Lapland Arctic Centre, Rovaniemi. Francis is also a Druid and practitioner of shamanism and healing. His particular focus within academia is on Sámi shamanism, cosmology and art and has published different research papers in relation to these subject matters. More recently, Francis has combined science, art and spirituality in order to undertake research into trees and their healing powers which is one of the ways of being a voice for nature.

<https://research.ulapland.fi/en/persons/francis-joy>

11:45–12:10 Involving Refugees in Nature Exploration in Host Countries Through Citizen Science: An Example From Finland (Session 1: Nordic Perspectives)

There are about 50,000 Ukrainian refugees in Finland at present because of the large-scale Russian invasion of their state. This presentation will give an overview of a new initiative to involve Ukrainian refugees in the exploration of the Finnish environment through citizen science activities that will educate them while also opening up new possibilities for earning a living and improving their health. Through a focus on Finland's biodiversity, including its plant species, the initiative at the same time will promote the accumulation of valuable data about the Finnish environment that is important for researchers and conservationists.

Mykyta Peregrym is a visiting researcher at the University of Oulu with a fellowship from the Biodiverse Anthropocenes Programme. He came from Ukraine where he works for the Department of Landscape Gardening and Ecology at the Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University. Mykyta has been studying plant diversity from various perspectives, with a focus on rare, endangered and invasive plant species, for approximately 20 years. Also, he is deeply interested in citizen science management and biodiversity data collection as well as in the impact of artificial light at night on biodiversity and its consequences. However, his research interests also cover nature conservation, herbarium management, and the history of science too.

12:55–13:20 The Role of Aesthetics in Understanding the Wellbeing Aspects of Plant/Human Interaction (Session 2: International Perspectives)

The evidence is now well established that activities engaging with plants can improve wellbeing. The supporting literature reveals a picture of the helpfulness of plants and gardening activities for those with health problems, but also the requirement of nearby nature for everyone. However, the emphasis on proving a benefit often leaves out explaining how or why this occurs. In this presentation the processes involved in plant/human relationships are examined through participant accounts in the literature and interrogation of the aesthetic elements involved in the experiential nature of gardening. Aesthetic engagement, and the shifts in our focus from self to world that it can bring about, presents a speculative answer to why gardening brings about positive and helpful mental states that support wellbeing.

Isis Brook has taught philosophy for over twenty five years, including being course leader of Lancaster's pioneering MA in Values and Environment and was also a Managing Editor for the journal *Environmental Values*. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on the aesthetics of nature, phenomenology of place, Goethe's approach to nature, and co-wrote *Between Nature and Culture: The Aesthetics of Modified Environments* (with Emily Brady)

and Jonathan Prior, 2018). She is now a Visiting Research Fellow of Bath Spa University's Research Centre for Environmental Humanities and Deputy Editor of the journal *Plant Perspectives*, and her current research and writing focuses on the plant realm with experimentation in phytography and other human/plant collaborations.

13:20–13:45 Unlocking Landscapes through Westonbirt's Archive: Exploring the Inclusive Possibilities of Entangled Histories of Plants, Places, and People (Session 2: International Perspectives)

This paper is based on research carried out by myself and Sarah Bell under our UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council Funded project, 'Unlocking Landscapes: History, Culture and Sensory Diversity in Landscape Use and Decision Making'. We will highlight here how meaningful and inclusive access to designed historic landscapes reaches beyond measures to enable physical presence to the ways in which such landscapes, and their entangled human-plant relationships, are storied and interpreted. Using twentieth-century archival sources, particularly the diaries of foresters, held on site at Westonbirt, the National Arboretum in Gloucestershire, UK, we will suggest ways in which sensory history approaches can be used to bring greater depth, context, and diversity to historic designed landscape interpretation.

Clare Hickman is Reader of Environmental and Medical History at Newcastle University, UK. Previously her work has merged the history of medicine, health and science, with that of the landscape and environment but she is now beginning to take a more sensory approach to these themes. Other areas of expertise include the use and experience of the countryside as a 'healthy space'; the tracing of pine scent from the sanatorium forest to the bathroom; and the park and garden as scientific and medical spaces.

13:45–14:10 Storying Plants in Australian Children's and Young Adult Literature (Session 2: International Perspectives)

This talk introduces my forthcoming edited volume, *Storying Plants in Children's and Young Adult Literature: Roots and Winged Seeds*, which situates the representation of plants in Australian children's and young adult literature in relation to Indigenous stories of and relationships with plants, Australia's colonial and postcolonial heritage, and the field of critical plant studies. I discuss the notion of "storying plants," grounded in Palyku writers Gladys Idjirrimoonya Milroy and Jill Milroy's call to tell the "right" stories about trees. I then demonstrate some of these themes through examples of children's and young adult literature.

Melanie Duckworth is an associate professor of English literature at Østfold University College, Norway, where she teaches British, postcolonial, and

environmental literature. Her research interests include children's literature, Australian literature, contemporary poetry, and ecocriticism. Melanie is co-editor (with Lykke Guanio-Uluru) of *Plants in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (Routledge 2022) and (with Annika Herb) of *Storying Plants in Australian Children's and Young Adult Literature: Roots and Winged Seeds* (forthcoming Palgrave, 2023).

14:10–14:35 On Becoming Entangled: The Grapevines' Story (Session 2: International Perspectives)

Wishing to study viticulture as a form of organizing in more than human worlds, I conducted a multispecies (Gatto & McCardle, 2019; Ogden et al., 2013; van Dooren et al., 2016) affective (Gherardi, 2019) ethnography with grapevines to study vine-caring practices. The main concern in data collection and analysis was on how to investigate viticulture 'from the perspective of multiple beings' (Ogden et al., 2013, p. 15) by bringing forward the point of view of grapevines: how was I developing my relationship with them? How were vines relating with me? Adopting a similar self-reflective practice of writing as the one by Valtonen and Pullen (2021) in writing with rocks, I developed a speculative fabulation technique (Haraway, 2011, 2016; Truman, 2019) writing with vines to unveil the grapevines' perspective.

Costanza Sartoris just completed her Ph.D. in Management at Ca' Foscari University, Italy. Her research centres on organising practices read through a post-anthropocentric perspective, with a focus on plants. She holds a BA in Management for the Arts from Bocconi University and a MA in Visual Culture and Curatorial Studies from Brera Academy of Fine Arts.

14:35–15:00 Ritualising Plants and Changing Human-Plant Geographies in Kodagu, India (Session 2: International Perspectives)

Since the nineteenth century, continuous thinning of plant species in Kodagu, situated in the Western Ghats in Karnataka in South India, has led to immense biodiversity loss, transforming, affecting, and displacing human and more-than-human lives. Paying attention to Kodagu provides an example of adopting a decolonial bioregional approach that transforms colonial coffee plantations into indigenous sites of multispecies conviviality and resituates human-plant relationships ecologically to perform reinhabitation and revive Kodava nature-culture relationships. In this presentation, I will examine Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills* (2010) and Kavary Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper* (2010) to understand the importance of native plants, forests, vegetal and feral spaces in the Kodava ritual of Kailpodh, celebrated annually to mark the commencement of the hunting season in the Kodagu coffee district.

Subarna De is a Research Affiliate at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands and an incoming CAIS Fellow at the Centre for Arts and Indigenous Studies, Lapai, Nigeria. She recently completed her Landhaus Fellowship at the Rachel Carson Center, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich. She researches the transformations of the environment and society, focusing on bioregionalism and indigeneity.

All participants are invited to submit their scholarly and creative work to the new journal [Plant Perspectives](#). Please see the next page for details.



Helmi Kuusi, 'Boggy Lake' (1965), 14.5 × 15cm, aquatint, drypoint, Finnish National Gallery



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