

LA CRIÉE
CENTRE D'ART
CONTEMPORAIN
RENNES - F

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MOLUSMA

an exhibition by

ELVIA
TEOTSKI

from 25 September to 19 December 2021

curator: Lotte Arndt

production: La Criée centre for contemporary art, Rennes



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Molusma in Greek means stain, filth. In the 1960s the marine biologist Maurice Fontaine proposed the term to designate the current geological era, defined by the production of waste, but it was abandoned in favour of Anthropocene.¹

Elvia Teotski's exhibition returns the value to this linguistic reject, in a similar way to how she reuses discarded or abandoned materials. She invites visitors into a living space, accessed through a curtain, delineating the passage into an inhabited, experimental environment, filled with constant, barely perceptible movements. The space into which the humans enter is one where they may be in the minority. In a display that refuses any sensationalism, each person is encouraged to attentively walk through an environment where various organic elements are co-evolving. The exhibition, conceived like an ensemble, asks us to take our time, to enjoy the smells and the minimal movements that indicate the presence of other living beings and of biological processes at work.

¹ While researching biological oceanography, Maurice Fontaine coined the term "marine molysmology" to designate a new scientific discipline: the study of marine pollution linked to human activities.

The starting point for *Molusma* is the artist's extensive research along the Breton, Marseilles and Mexican coastlines; she weaves connections between these regions and questions their relationships. Trained as an agronomist, Elvia Teotski floods the space with movement: interdependent life forms settle, and human societies leave their mark. Her explorations have taken her to Mexico, where she developed evolving installations created from layers of domestic and agricultural waste collected on the outskirts of plantations since the colonial era (2019). In Marseilles an investigation into the impossibility of recycling the toxic waste from the red mud resulting from the industrial extraction of alumina extended her inquiries into environmental imbalances (2020). It was during these projects that she became interested in the proliferation of stranded seaweed (sargassum in the Caribbean, and green and brown seaweed in Brittany and along the Mediterranean coast).

She continued her experiments in Brittany, exploring various traditional building techniques, integrating organic components closely connected to the land and its diverse inhabitants. While patiently observing environments on the border of agricultural and marine activities, she has collected samples and engaged in dialogues with activists, traditional building professionals and scientists (for example the Station Biologique de Roscoff).

In combining materials that have been altered by human action, by taking them well beyond their initial intended use and engendering entropic processes,² Elvia Teotski explores what the anthropologist Anna Tsing calls *feral* ecology: an environment composed of domesticated beings whose evolution is beyond human control.³ The artist takes hold of these unstable configurations, where life forms emerge in the

² From the Greek word for transformation, entropy describes unpredictable energy, physical or social processes.

³ Anna Tsing et. al., *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene*: <https://feralatlus.supdigital.org>.

rubble left by the modern productivist promise of ever-increasing returns. She occupies the tipping points where new forms of existence appear in afflicted environments, and there she develops speculative propositions. The body of work in the exhibition thus engages with the entanglements between human and non-human histories, organic and transformed materials, evident and imperceptible toxicities, conscientious cultural transmissions and violent environmental dislocations.

The exhibition presents *Molusma*, an installation composed of a group of sculptures made of adobe, earth bricks partly produced during a community volunteer project at the cooperative brickworks run by Association TERRE, part of an Emmaüs community in Chevaigné. The bricks were made using stranded seaweed as a binder, earth recovered from building sites, and beach litter combined with other materials, including bricks eroded by the sea or recuperated from building sites in the city: altogether they are part of complex constructions where the discarded materials – considered useless or invasive – have their value reinstated. The working process involves local networks and is based on participants learning, sharing and transmitting knowledge. In preparation for the exhibition, Elvia Teotski learned about earth masonry at the Grands Ateliers in Lyon, and so implemented a technique once used in ancient Egypt for the construction of the Nubian vaults.

With this expertise she assembled the bricks in the exhibition into sculptural elements in transitory states, in precarious equilibrium. They absorb the ambient humidity, and thus become substrates for mould or shrink as they dry, thus altering the equilibrium.

Locusts nest in the interstices of these constructions, and they, in turn, become part of a food cycle: while they are fed scraps from a nearby market, they themselves are a low-cost protein source, in both monetary and energy terms, a potential food for humans and non-humans. The introduction of locusts is a speculative proposition regarding alternatives to intensive livestock farming, in a region where large concentrations of

chickens and pigs contribute significant amounts of nitrogenous effluent into the groundwater. In creating a space where the public is welcomed into organic installations inhabited by insects, Elvia Teotski poses the questions: what is harmful and what is useful, who is protected from whom, and what cohabitations are possible, including within the exhibition.

The vaults in the space are visually extended by a loosely defined landscape, composed on hundreds of sheets of potato starch paper. This edible print, *Sans fin* (Endless) shows a series of regular bumps, in close-up, as far as the eye can see, without any scale or reference point. These canopies, known as “polytunnels”, are used to protect fields of vegetables from insects and the cold, continues the *Molusma* installation. Like the bricks, the potato starch paper absorbs the ambient humidity, becoming clouded and reacting to light. The image is thus made from an organic material, while depicting a landscape shaped by industrial agricultural practices that use petroleum-based materials, such as perforated tarpaulin, whose apparent regular beauty conceals the noxious effects of the polluting substances used.

White seaweed dries on recuperated fruit ladders leaning against the wall. *Le reste des vagues* (The vestiges of the waves) refers to the kanji title of Ryoko Sekiguchi’s book *Nagori* –which evokes the nostalgia of the last fruit of the season and the uncertain future.⁴ The work is a reminder of (marine) organisms’ vulnerability, to chemical processes and industrial pollution, while at the same time incorporating a ruse: the sculptures are a visual tautology, their decolouration blurring the certainties of the limits between nature and culture, and the cast seaweed created from a material that is itself extracted from brown algae. Chemically bleached, the alginate becomes a sculpture in its own right. While the absence of pigment (which is essential to photosynthesis)

⁴ Ryoko Sekiguchi, *Nagori. La nostalgie de la saison qui s’en va* (Paris: P.O.L., 2018).

seems to halt life itself, the sculptures rot and in this process of decomposition, give life to living organisms.

In a darkened separate room, the words *Zone sensible* (Sensitive zone) appear and disappear. Sketched out in fragments in the video projection, erased and recomposed, they are difficult to read. Elvia Teotski made the video after many experiments with bioluminescent marine bacteria, working with the Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography in Marseille. The sensitive forms allude to the invisibility of these marine organisms, as well as their ability to signal the presence of heavy metals and other potential dangers in the water. The tube in which the bacteria develop empties and fills, making an image appear, testament to the delicate fragility of the organisms producing it. The sensitive zone is presented not only as an environment requiring special care; it is also part of an unspectacular aesthetic requiring careful attention: with a certain humour, the device mimics neon signs, one of contemporary art's most flamboyant and eye-catching forms.

By minimising the neon's advertising aspect, Elvia Teotski proposes an alternative to the spectacular, often energy-consuming presentation of certain works of art. By using fragile organisms whose luminosity signals imminent danger, she reminds us that humans are also predators.

Inviting Elvia Teotski to join the thematic series *Lili, la rozell et le marimba*, devoted to contemporary art and vernacular practices, broadens the scope of the cycle to knowledge and practices of a place beyond human agency. Here attention focuses on the precarious interactions in living, inhabited environments that the artist has developed with materials found on site. Thus, the exhibition emerges organically, bringing together multiple human and non-human interactions, including a significant unpredictable dimension.

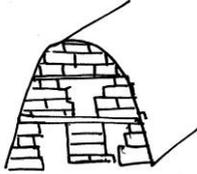
At a time when criticism of intensive livestock farming is mounting, and its detrimental consequences for animals, soil and the marine environment is being recognised, in Brittany and elsewhere, *Molusma* invites the public to the “sensitive zone”, to listen, to care.

Lotte Arndt, exhibition curator

Researcher and author, Lotte Arndt is a member of the editorial board of the La Criée contemporary art centre’s journal, *Lili, la rozell et le marimba*, 2019-2022.

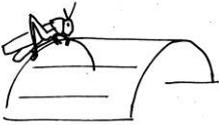
Exhibited works

[In the large room]



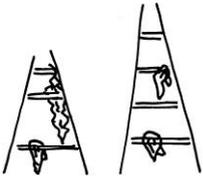
Molusma, 2021

Site-specific installation in unfired earth bricks made from building-site soil, washed-up seaweed, sand, silt, beach litter, dehydrated waste from edible seaweed combined with other waste, constituting an ensemble to shelter locusts, variable dimensions



Sans fin (Endless), 2021

Edible print
450 × 252 cm



Le reste des vagues (The vestiges of the waves), 2021

alginate sculptures, wooden fruit ladders, variable dimensions

[In the 2nd room]

Zone sensible, 2021

HD video, looped, produced with the technical support of the MOI (Mediterranean Institute of Oceanography), Marseilles



production: La Criée centre for contemporary art, Rennes

[In the documentation space]

Video by Jérémy Laffon on the collective volunteer project co-organised with Association TERRE, Chevaigné (35) from 10 to 12 August 2021 to create the bricks for the installation *Molusma*.

Acknowledgements

Orane Bert of the cooperative brickworks, Association TERRE, brickworks and all the volunteers of the community project: Orane, Jeremy, Benoît, Pascal, Marilou, Marie-Christine, Ghislaine, Tifa, Jess, Elen, Meven, Sana, Cédric, Morgane, Romane, Lucas, Pablo, Karen, Myriam, Amandine, Erwann, Franck, Lucien, Célia, Pierre, Emilie, Frédéric, Louise, Hermès, Husein, Tabea

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The Écomusée de Plouguerneau, the Musée de l'Algue and Lanildut Biocéan, seaweed harvester and producer

Marielle Macé for the webinar “Paysages incertains (enquêtes, récits, poèmes)” (Uncertain landscapes [surveys, stories, poems]) at EHESS

The technical services of the City of Quiberon
The staff of the Boëdriers stone deposit, Rennes métropole
L'île aux fruits, greengrocers at La Criée central market

Jérémy Laffon, ADVENTICES, Nathan Crouzet, Philippe Eydiou, Manuel Orhant, Ghislain Maetz, Anaïs Charton, Anaïs Touchot and all the staff at La Criée contemporary art centre

Green flashes

(Events at La Criée)

Saturday 25 September 2021, 4 pm

Round table

Échappées férales (Feral escapes)

Cyrille Bret, art historian, Sophie Houdart, anthropologist, Lotte Arndt and Elvia Teotski

A round table within the exhibition *Molusma*, presented by artist Elvia Teotski, introduced by curator Lotte Arndt, in conversation with anthropologist Sophie Houdart and art historian Cyrille Bret. The speakers discuss the living in contemporary art, the agency of materials, and contaminated diversity in a damaged world, “infinitesimal worlds”, populated with “more-than-human-lives”: a *feral* ecology, an environment of disarray, evolving spontaneously while keeping the imprints of its past exploitation.

duration: 2 hours, free entry subject to availability.

Saturday 11 December 2021, 4 pm

Conference

Dialogue avec les criquets (A conversation with the locusts)

Marc Dufumier, agronomist, followed by a discussion with Orane Bert and Adrien Aras of Association TERRE, Briqueterie Solidaire and Elvia Teotski

Trained as an artist and an agronomist, Elvia Teotski carries out research at the intersection of these two fields, and frequently engages with scientists working on the living world. During the event, researcher and agronomist Marc Dufumier will converse with the locusts living in the exhibition, and will question current agricultural models by discussing alternatives. Orane Bert and Adrien Aras of the cooperative brickworks TERRE, an Emmaüs community, will join the round table to introduce the volunteer community project that contributed to the manufacture of many of the bricks in the

exhibition and about their work on economic, ecological and social alternatives.

Duration: 2 hours, free entry subject to availability.

For more information about the participants: www.la-criee.org

Rendez-vous

Friday 3 December, 5:30 pm

Multisensory exhibition visit

(for visually impaired visitors).

duration: 90 minutes, free, please register: c.brulard@ville-rennes.fr or 02.23.62.25.11

Sunday 17 October and 5 December, 3 pm

“La petite fabrique” workshop with the artist Line Simon

for 6 to 12 year olds, duration, 90 minutes, free, please register:

www.la-criee.org

Your visit

Individually, with friends or family

visit Tuesday to Friday from midday to 7 pm

and Saturday and Sunday from 2 pm to 7 pm

Staff are available to answer your questions, talk about the artist's conception and production process, and explain the rules of the game *LiZellBa*, created by the artists Léa Bénétou, Fanny Martel and Yann Baïzid during the *Lili, the Rozell and the Marimba* (2019-2022) cycle, which is available on request.

In groups

Guided visits adapted to the needs of the groups, accompanied by a cultural mediator

From Tuesday to Friday, 9:30 am to 7 pm

Free, only available on request and by reservation.

Young visitors

Mini-pousses (crèches), *Pêle-mêle* (1st level/kindergarten & primary), *Mille-Feuilles* (2nd level, secondary), *À modeler* (after school), *À plier* (extracurricular) visits feature educational tools developed from the works and determined in conjunction with educational partners.

From Tuesday to Friday from 9:30 am to midday, after school and extracurricular. Free, on request and reservation.

Resources and news

A video on the community project for the production of *Molusma*, as well as a selection of works and publications connected to the work of Elvia Teotski are available in La Criée's documentation space "Les Sources".

Educational resources are available at: www.correspondances.la-criee.org

And all the centre of art's news can be found at: www.la-criee.org and social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Contact and reservation

Audience services

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Access

metro: République; bus: La Criée

The entrance is accessible to people with reduced mobility.

A health pass is required for those older than 12 years and 2 months. Restricted capacity.