

What if we shift our focus from sustainability to sustenance – to what nourishes and sustains us, acknowledging our interdependent entanglement with all life and the planet? Sustenance proposes a shift to a worlding mindset, where humans, nonhumans and the earth are inextricably interconnected, in transcontinental cooperative stewardship, to preserve one interdependent global ecosystem, in equitable cultivation.

Sustenance reframes sustainability, centring sustenance within planetary entanglement. It brings together the research-led practices of three transnational artists – Riya Bhagat, Victor Guerin and Elina Yumasheva – whose intermedia artworks engage ecological interdependence, technological mediation, and material intelligence. Materially and conceptually, their practices' sustainable materials and processes convey human and nature's interconnected ecologies, chance and unpredictability, coupled with human scientific investigation and technology.

Bhagat presents a futuristic fashion imaginary, a sculpture incorporating film, alongside a research scenography, in *Fashion After Fashion: The Clothing from the Future as an Ecosystem with Bacteria Living Inside It*, 2024. In the film, the woman's clothing is sculpted with living bacteria that produce cellulose on contact with skin, food and water. In this futuristic world, the clothes we wear are grown and cared for by us, like living beings, on our bodies. Bacterial cellulose is cultivated in one's home, nurtured and maintained like organisms. The processes, recipes and clothing later become entrusted hand-me-downs to friends and relatives, a life-sustaining lineage imbued with filial memories. Bhagat's artworks emphasize a symbiotic relationship between humans and non-humans that promotes care and healing. It is informed by research into fashion's scientific material creation, genetic engineering, and its environmental ethics.¹

Victor Guerin's intermedia works explore the entanglement between human innovation and the natural world. His practice integrates recycled and living materials – from bioplastics cultivated from bacterial cultures to cast metals and botanical fragments – to reflect cycles of growth, decay and adaptation. Through this synthesis of industrial and organic processes, Guerin investigates how technological and ecological systems might not only coexist but co-evolve.

Cracks of Potential (2025), is installation commissioned by Neumünster Abbey, in Luxembourg, to accompany Thierry Ardouin's photographic exhibition *Seeds*. Now restaged in London, elements from the original installation are recontextualised to underscore the local to global consequences of over-urbanisation and bitumen's role, in extinguishing life and global warming. Guerin stages a passage through disrupted ecologies – from *Lingering Presences*, where vegetation pierces urban surfaces, to *Fossil's Whispers*, evoking what has been lost, and finally to *Liminal*, a suspended zone between growth and stasis. Here, appropriated historic paving stones from the Abbey create a fragmented terrain – a space that could foster life but may remain inert. Adjacent paintings echo these in-between thresholds. Abstract grid compositions suggest speculative vistas, framed by the very

¹ <https://2024.rca.ac.uk/school-of-communication/information-experience-design-ma/profile/riya-bhagat/>

structure that contains or constrains them. Nonetheless, imagined vistas open through the cracks.

Earlier works from *Echoes of Extraction* (2024) complement this journey, highlighting the historical roots of ecological degradation. Through sculptural compositions combining digital modelling, traditional lost-wax casting, and cultivated biomaterials, Guerin mirrors the resilience of ruderal plants – those which thrive in disrupted environments. These works do not lament decline, but rather point to nature's enduring capacity to adapt and reassert itself, even in fractured terrain.²

Yumasheva's painting *Living Forms Diptych*, 2024, like Bhagat's research-based scenography and Guerin's intermedia installations, combine scientific, artistic, and performative elements to celebrate ecological awareness and the diversity of forms. Her paintings convey multilayered spatial atmospheres, landscapes of shifting sightlines, fecund lushness and growth. Her artworks engage the sensorium and manifest temporal spatial movement, through colouristic and formal nuances, deriving from the natural dyes and responsive performative artist intent.

Using natural dyes, pigments and pure oil paints, Yumasheva responds to the innate characteristics of the mediums, as they present themselves, 'to challenge conventional ideas of control and aesthetics in artistic creation'. Thus, she experiments with digital and historic painting practices. Her work speaks to human and nature's symbiotic creative flux, inherent natural processes, the 'formidable sway of the natural world' intertwined with human intention.³ Possibilities unfold, when humans and nature harmonize.

Victor's liminal reality that queries if nature may not recover is offset by Yumasheva's works' optimism. Like Bhagat's, Yumasheva's paintings project possibilities, the flow of all life, suspended in sustainable practices, natural dyes and materials – care, humans creating in concert with nature. Yumasheva's latest works create a visual dynamic and rhythmic movement, in a responsive byplay with Guerin's existential queries and Bhagat's imaginary.

Cumulatively, the works dialogue timely scientific environmental debates on worlding. Donna Haraway proposes 'making kin' with all beings, as earthlings, in the world's ecology, and reclaiming places of refuge. "My purpose is to make 'kin' mean something more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy.... all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense."⁴ She advocates new subjectivities and pluralities between human and non-humans, towards harmonious coexistence.⁵ If we see the earth as a refuge that sustains all beings as

² <https://2024.rca.ac.uk/school-of-arts-humanities/sculpture-ma/profile/victor-guerin/>
<https://victorquerin.com/about/>

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³ <https://2024.rca.ac.uk/school-of-arts-humanities/contemporary-art-practice-ma/profile/elina-yumasheva/>
<https://elinaart.com/>

⁴⁴ Donna, Haraway,. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin." *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159-165.

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kin, then global stewardship networks can develop to foster care, repair and create new ways of being, through international coordination and cooperation.⁶

Moreover, James Bridle discourses ways of being, advocating expanded human indicators and appreciation for all intelligence, whether human or non-human. He suggests we embrace a new global time, like nature's, based on the earth's cycles.⁷ Similarly, Zoe Schlanger investigates, thus fosters, an appreciation of plant intelligence,⁸ an intelligence intricately linked to the plant dyes and material fabrication of Bhagat and Yumasheva's artworks and research. Bhagat explores bacteria and plant-life's natural processes' intelligence, exploring human interdependencies. In Guerin's work, nature's cyclical time, plant life and its resilience are coupled with scientific research, traditional and technological innovation. Likewise, his work speaks to possibilities, potential that may or may not unfold, given human action.

In *Sustenance*, we experience the melding of nature, culture and human fabrication. Emmanuele Coccia proposes that with globalisation, earth has become synonymous with the home. It has the kitchen as its hearth, where vegetal and non-human mix, through technological fabrication, and are blended with human cultures worldwide in the conviviality of life.⁹ Likewise, in *Sustenance*, the artists' works resonate the convivial blending of all life, the blending of cultures and nature, across global cyclical time, past into present. The 'formidable sway of the natural world', as Yumasheva puts it, is a world in which we are an interdependent part, finding sustenance and refuge.

The artists in this exhibition embody these 'worlding' perspectives. They present alternatives - sustainable, remedial and attitudinal shifts. Thus, their art prompts socio-political environmental change. Philosopher, Herbert Marcuse notes, "Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness of men and women who could change the world."¹⁰ These artists not only demonstrate how shifts in attitudes

⁵ See: Theory, Culture & Society 2006 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 23(7–8): 135–158
DOI: 10.1177/0263276406069228 & Panos Kompatsiaris (07 Oct 2022): Companion species and comrades: a critique of 'plural relating' in Donna Haraway's theory manifestos, Culture, Theory and Critique, DOI: 10.1080/14735784.2022.2122527

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3m_0DnOa3E
Olufemi O. Taiwo, Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University, proposes the necessity for a new world order, one of shared stewardship, to foster a global way of living that would lead, not only to equitable climate reparation between global North and South, but also global ecological practices and ways of living, ones influenced by indigenous and traditional land-culture stewardship.

⁷ James, Bridle, Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The search for a Planetary Intelligence. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2022.

⁸ Zoe Schlanger, The Light Eaters: How the unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth, New York: Harper Collins, 2024.

⁹ Emanuele Coccia, Philosophy of the Home: Domestic Space and Happiness, trans. Richard Dixon, Dublin: Penguin Random House: 2024.

¹⁰ Malcolm, Miles, "Eco-Aesthetic Dimensions: Herbert Marcuse, Ecology and Art." Cogent Arts & Humanities 3, no. 1, (12, 2016), p. 1. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2016.1160640>.
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/eco-aesthetic-dimensions-herbert-marcuse-ecology/docview/1860813656/se-2>

and practices instigate change, but also manifest change in their artistic processes and artworks, for they embody a worlding perspective.