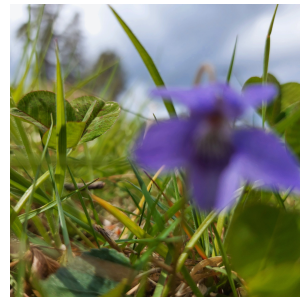


Archiving the intangibility of place (tell me the taste of a daisy)

Dr Gina Wall, Programme Director

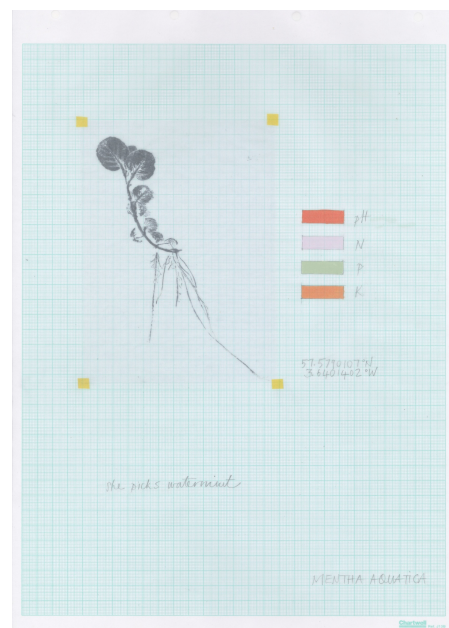
**THE GLASGOW
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Ecologies of entanglement IV; Ecologies of entanglement I; Loch of Blairs, ©Gina Wall 2022

Recent trans-disciplinary fieldwork with practitioners from a variety of disciplines has supported me to develop a visual practice which not only thinks *across*, but also thinks *with*. Thinking with others in the field makes new relational worlds through what María Puig de le Bellacasa calls a critical cut - cuts create new relations (2017, 79), agentic materialities

enfold one another, intra-actively entangled. Collaborative fieldwork that was undertaken last summer explored the lively, agentic landscape through experiments with fermentation using wild yeast and bacterial cultures. Building on the knowledge gained from the generosity of this collaboration, I began to understand the intra-actions of wild yeast and bacteria as intrinsic to the liveliness of the landscape. Fermentation is a process that produces living edible organisms that are part of the microbial terroir of the land's *-scape*. Making edible materials in this way harnesses the unseen agentic reality of a landscape teeming with life and brings it to the body.



She picks watermint, ©Gina Wall 2023

The images that I have chosen to show have emerged tangentially from this fieldwork and take the form of photographs and field notes. The field notes chart the assemblies of visual information such as the soil profile as revealed through simple soil sampling kits, prints of edible plant specimens and text pertaining to their lore - particularly that which is associated with women and with liminal realms. The images use a combination of direct printing and printing from laser cut plates, hand painting and writing. They are momentary imprints of the intangibility of place, which feel their way towards memory, towards knowledge, reaching for something that does not quite exist, and borrowing from Ann Cvetkovich (2003), they tentatively evoke the landscape as an archive of feelings. The

Fieldnotes chart relations between the human and non-human; they are, what Puig de la Bellacasa might call 'cartographies of sociotechnical, naturecultural assemblages' (2017, 29). In the Fieldnotes the plant specimens are at a ratio of one-to-one which sets a relation of scalar consistency with the world, the botanical elements are neither magnified nor diminished by human intention. This is not to argue for a pseudo-scientific neutrality, rather the aesthetic emerges in the act of bringing together, of idiosyncratically archiving the concrete and the intangible in word and image. The scale of the imagery feels both significant and insignificant all at once, as it gives a fidelity, and yet ultimately reaches for the impossible.

I had been interested in auto-poiesis and the idea that practice might have the capacity to intelligently self-organise, however, having worked on this project, I have become far more attuned to the notion of *sympoiesis*, or becoming-with human and non-human others. As Donna Haraway writes:

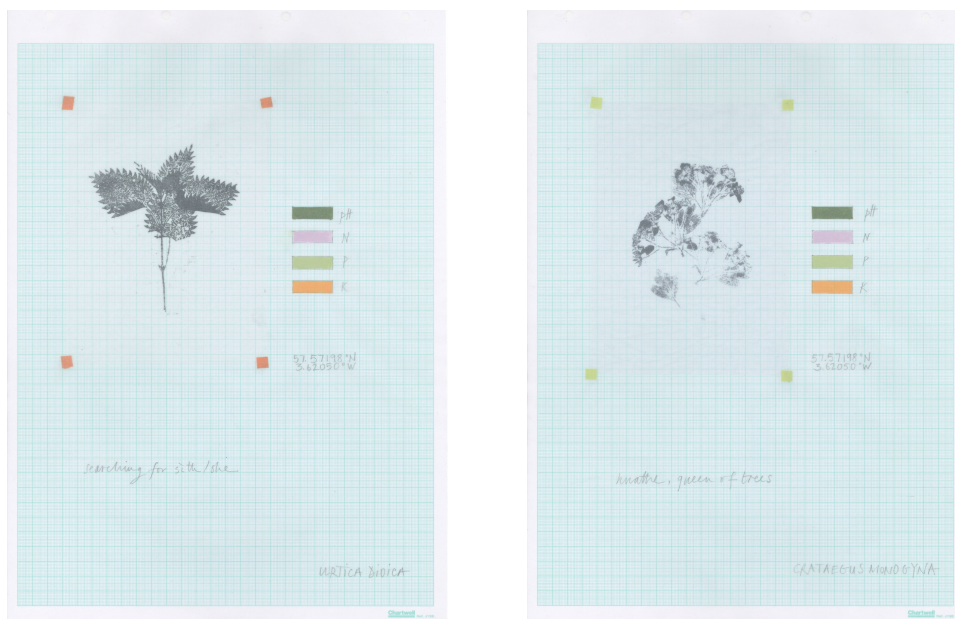
Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. *Sympoiesis* enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it. (2016, 58)

For me *sympoiesis* opens a space to make-with the vegetal, the microbial, the human, and in the process become-with, be worlded-with, in company. *Sympoiesis* takes my sense of autonomy and intentionality, and gently unfurls it.

The fieldnotes are works in progress, or we might say, works in process, which have the potential to grow with additive accretions overlaid like strata in the landscape: information; observation; memory; story. The catalyst for these images was time spent in the landscape with someone who taught me to attend to the landscape differently: I began to see the significance of plants, their culinary and medicinal uses, and importantly for me personally, I began to re-learn many of the maternal teachings that had been forgotten. *Sympoiesis* or becoming-with, challenges the centrality of the artist and finds the joy in being one of many agencies in the process, to be, as Jean-Luc Nancy would have it 'singular plural' (2000).

Admittedly, there is something slightly perverse in the methodology which is to laboriously colour match in gouache the soil profile chart. The creative perversity extends to mirroring the proportions of the actual colour boxes on the charts and as I was labouring away on these, I remembered my enjoyment of Gerhard Richter's Colour Chart paintings from the 1960s when I was a student.

She picks watermint resounds with the echo of an experience, it is a re-collection or a re-gathering of lived experience alongside a more abstract learning about culture. The *she* is both a living person and an imagined woman – a Druid perhaps – reaching into the liminal space between earth and water to gather *Mentha Aquatica* (Watermint), one of three sacred druidic herbs, the others being meadowsweet and vervaine/verbena. In the shallow waters at the fringes of the Loch of Blairs Watermint grows from late spring and flowers in later summer. As it matures, its flavour profile changes, becoming sweeter and mintier as the year unfolds. In May, the Watermint at Blairs has a mineral flavour, flat and vegetal with a taste of stone that lingers in the mouth. And this notion of *aftertaste* leads me tantalisingly towards spectrality, a resonance of taste, a feeling that continues to reverberate, disturbing any easy sense of now.



Searching for sith/she; Huathe, queen of trees ©Gina Wall, 2023

Searching for sìth/she plays with the sound similarity between the Gaelic word for the fey, or the Good People, and the English gendered pronoun. Alongside Hawthorn, which is also known as the queen of trees, nettles are associated with the supernatural in Scottish culture, growing proximate to the presence of the sìth, and a lone Hawthorn is said to mark a *thin place* a liminality between our world and the otherworld. The flower of the hawthorn, called the May, or the Beltane flower has a sweet, fetid odour which smells of decay and I have read that its association with the smell of death meant that although it was a tree that was revered, it was never brought indoors. It is forbidden to cut the branches of the hawthorn so if you wish to use the wood of the tree you should only use fallen branches. It is a hard-wearing wood, beautifully pale, and its tough roots were sometimes used to make combs. The specimens were collected from plants which grew together, side by side, and each Fieldnote works as a companion to the other.

So, to conclude, it is the very provisionality of the Fieldnotes that is, for me at least, interesting. Although I intend to make some more notes from laser cut printing plates which in time could form a finalised suite of prints, there is also something to explore further in terms of continued overlay which will result in a kind of thickening of the visual as the images are stratified with more and more information. The Fieldnotes are cartographies of *aporia* insofar as they aim to archive the affective qualities of landscape, to remember how it feels to be *in* it from moment to moment. The Fieldnotes practice a science which tries in vain to map memory, to re-collect the landscape-as-archive of affect. But for all their failing, the Fieldnotes, and the Fieldwork which preceded it, generated in me curiosity and wonder at the spectacular unspectacular landscape that is right beside us in the everyday.

Thank you.

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