

International Photography Magazine

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featuring:
Augustin Rebetez
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Melanie Bonajo
Thomas Albdorf
Marie-José Jongerius
Anastasia Samoylova
Laurence Aëgerter



ON EARTH

LAURENCE

HEALING PLANTS
FOR HURT LANDSCAPES

ANASTASIA SAMOYLOVA
(b. 1984, RUS)

An artist and educator based in upstate New York. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and included in the collection at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago and ArtSlant Prize collection in Paris. She serves as assistant professor of photography at Bard College at Simon's Rock in Great Barrington, MA.

GREGORY EDDI JONES
(b. 1986, US)

An American artist and writer, and Founding Editor of *In the In-Between: Journal of Digital Imaging Artists*. His practice examines and re-authors existing image products through the mechanisms of digital and internet based tools, and focuses attention on the politics of photographs and other images common to the American cultural lexicon. Gregory is currently an MFA candidate at Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY.

AËGERTER

Somewhere between Norway and the North Pole, hidden deep inside a mountain on the island of Spitsbergen, lies the largest seed collection in the world. A concrete corridor sticking out of the bare mountainside leads to the 1.5 million seeds that are saved there, all of them carefully packaged and labelled. The scenery looks apocalyptic; it is empty and desolate, with no vegetation, no people, only snow and ice, as if you've landed in the end of time. But appearances are deceiving. These are precisely the right conditions to protect life in the form of seeds from natural disasters and damage from war. The first withdrawal from the Svalbard Global Seed Vault was in 2015, when Syrians working at the seed bank in Aleppo needed seeds they had previously deposited in Spitsbergen as a precaution. Thus the Svalbard Global Seed Vault functions as the 'backup to the backup', a kind of meta-archive bringing together seed banks from all over the world. Gathering food for survival and saving it for hard times is as old as humanity. The hunter-gatherers of 2.4 million years ago lived by hunting animals and gathering edible herbs, berries and other plants. And in the Old Testament, Noah built an ark and put a male and female of every species on earth in it. Commanded by his God, he ensured that his collection would guarantee the continued existence of the world's creatures once torrential rain covered the whole earth. As in the examples above, plants and seeds, natural disasters and gathering are brought together in the project *Herbarium Cataplasma* by Laurence Aëgerter. Aëgerter adds one new aspect: that of the ritual.

In 2013 Aëgerter was invited by the municipality of Leeuwarden, in the Dutch province of Friesland, to come up with an idea to for a piece of barren land in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, where the Galilea monastery had stood in the Middle Ages. Working with local residents, Aëgerter created a medicinal herb garden. As inspiration, she used the design of the oldest therapeutic herb garden in Europe from the world-famous abbey of Sankt Gallen (9th century), in what is today Switzerland. Surviving sources tell us that the monks grew plants for the local community and for their own use. Lovage, for example, a tall green plant with a hollow stem, was used for sore throats as well as the plague. Other plants were used to heal open wounds. In addition, the garden was a place for contemplation – a place where through physical labour, one could calm one's mind.

Together with residents, Aëgerter changed a plot of barren ground into an herb garden full of medicinal plants such as sage, cumin, fennel, calendula, mint and poppy. Working in the garden got people together and reinforced connections between people in the neighbourhood. Today, the garden is being run entirely by the local residents, and has been expanded to include a vegetable garden and the online community De Groene Apotheek ('the green pharmacy').

The second part of *Herbarium Cataplasma* consisted of *Healing Plants for Hurt Landscapes* (2015), which had a ritual and healing significance. Aëgerter used websearch to select 100 photos of landscapes from all over the world that had

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been destroyed by natural disasters such as volcano eruptions, tsunamis, floods and tornados. She also selected landscapes that had been destroyed by human activity, such as bombing or nuclear disaster. The photos were originally taken by photojournalists for newspapers or for documentary purposes. These 'hurt landscapes' were then treated with symbolic healing herbal poultices (*Cataplasma* in Latin) from the new garden by the residents.

A colour photo of the desolate landscape of the Japanese town of Minamisanriku was covered by the residents with orange marigold (*Calendula Officinalis*). Nearly half of the town's population disappeared during the tsunami in 2011. Traditionally the marigold symbolises loving memories. A photo of the town hall of L'Aquila in Abruzzo, Italy, which was severely damaged in an earthquake in 2009, was covered along the bottom with withered buds of *Rosa Gallica Officinalis*, a rose native to the Mediterranean countries that was used in medieval times for various ailments. The 'treated' places were published by Aëgerter in *Healing Plants for Hurt Landscapes. Cataplasma for 100 years of Destruction*. The photos were also shown in an exhibition in the Fries Museum.

Healing Plants for Hurt Landscapes takes an obvious place of pride in Aëgerter's oeuvre, in which photography, art in public spaces and books come together. Aëgerter herself says, 'My visual research develops around personal interpretations of existing images and texts sources, creating alternatives of historical and contemporary cultural products.[...] The consistency of my body of work has to be found through its methodology in the process of appropriation of the referential material. I confront the original identity of my subjects by imposing on them subjectively developed systems of constraints (for example: range of the action in time and space, selection of the external factors by specific characteristics, etc). During the production process organized chance often plays a significant role.'

It is remarkable how Aëgerter involves the participants in her community art without losing any of the artworks' visual power. Her work lives on in the ideas of the participants, is appropriated by them – without too much direction on the part of the artist – but also exists as autonomous art often in the form of a photograph.

Image list:

- p.205 *Artemisia dracunculus*
i.a. – Australia
- p.206 *Calendula officinalis*
i.a. – Minamisanriku, Japan
- p.208 *Cannabis sativa*
i.a. coastal Japan
- p.210 *Althaea officinalis* –
Al Ahmadi, Kuwait
- p.212 *Achillea millefolium*
i.a. – Nargis, Myanmar
- p.214 *Zingiber officinale*
i.a. – New York, USA
- p.216 *Trigonella foenum-graecum*
i.a. – Sabah, Malaysia groot
- p.218 *Ruta graveolens* i.a. –
Barrington crater,
Arizona, USA
- p.220 *Helichrysum italicum* i.a.
Nagasaki, Japan

LAURENCE AËGERTER
(b. 1972, FR)

She studied Art History in France and The Netherlands after which she finished her studies Fine Art at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam. Lives and works in Amsterdam and Marseille. Over the past years she has exhibited in several international solo and group shows including at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, MAMAC Nice and Lagos Photo festival, Museum van Loon Amsterdam, Arts Santa Monica Museum, Barcelona, FoMu, Antwerp and Les rencontres de la photographie, Arles. Aëgarter realised many site-specific installations and art-in-community projects in assignment.

KIM KNOPPERS
(b. 1976, NL)

Kim has been a curator at Foam Museum since 2011. She was previously curator at De Beyer Center of Contemporary Art. She has curated group exhibitions including *Remind* (2003), *Exotics* (2008) *Snow is White* (2010, together with Joris Jansen) and *Re-Search* (2012), and solo exhibitions by WassinkLundgren, Onorato & Krebs, Jan Hoek, Lorenzo Vitturi, Jan Rosseel, JH Engström, Geert Goiris and Broomb-erg & Chanarin amongst others. She lives and works in Amsterdam.