

NANCY LA ROSA

## A garden as a heap of disturbance

13.11–29.11.2025

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**At Affiliate, Nancy La Rosa presents 'A garden as a heap of disturbance', a selection of works from a series that began during her residency at WIELS. This exhibition focuses on botanical archives, exploring the presence of plant extraction and their natural vitality. Drawing on locations such as the Meise Botanical Garden, the River Senne, archive collections, and the Amazon, the artworks reveal how the presence of nature disrupts official archives, single-story narratives, and spaces silenced by erasure.**

The title of the exhibition, is inspired by Jamaica Kincaid, Antiguan writer who proposes that in the garden "we perform the act of possession". (1) The garden's apparent order, its careful boundaries and taxonomic classifications, depends on prior acts of dispossession and displacement that render plants and people extractable through the seemingly benign act of naming. To possess botanical specimens, colonial systems first displaced them from their original territories and knowledge systems. "These new plants from far away, like the people far away," writes Kincaid, "had no history, no names, and so they could be given names". (2) In this way, she argues, naming becomes "crucial to possession...a spiritual padlock with the key thrown irretrievably away...an erasing" (3), thus severing plants from their territorial and cultural bonds to make them available for extraction. In reflecting on the garden as a space unsettled by the ghosts of such colonial acts, Kincaid identifies its essential nature as "a heap of disturbance". (4)

Julietta Singh might recognise the possessive impulse that underpins botanical archives and gardens as what she calls "masterful consumption... because I have named you, I can consume you". (5) In Singh's formulation, naming enables possession, which in turn authorises consumption, a logic which can be read as an organising principle of the colonial capitalist order that persists today. In "Green Imperialism," Richard Grove identifies colonial anxieties about environmental degradation and resource depletion as a key driver of the creation of botanical gardens as laboratories for colonial power. Yet Grove also notes how these gardens operated through an "analogue" that framed intervention as therapeutic, which positioned the colonial management of nature within "established Hippocratic ways of defining the well-being or health of man". (6) This therapeutic framing, combined with botanical gardens' function as sites of bourgeois recreation, aestheticized the violence of colonial extraction as care for both nature and society.

Nancy La Rosa's practice works in deliberate complicity with plants to propagate the disturbance Kincaid identifies, unsettling botanical archives and the colonial taxonomies that continue to possess and dispossess them. Shadows of plants are projected onto and painted over archival images of botanical gardens and plantation scenes. These collaged images stage plant visitations that reverse the logic of possession—instead of collections containing plant specimens, the vegetal world inhabits and overshadows the archive. By allowing plant shadows to breach the archival frame, La Rosa troubles the cultivated/wild binary that naturalises extraction. Her methodology might be read in terms of what Natasha Myers describes as 'plant-people conspiracies', moments where humans and plants work together to resist systems of control, creating alliances that trouble the boundaries between nature and culture, subject and object. Rather than positioning herself as interpreter or documenter of plant life, La Rosa attempts to work alongside botanical subjects as co-agents in unsettling the systems that classify and contain them. This practice of disturbance operates across the exhibition. Where colonial botany sought to fix plants in place through naming and taxonomy, La Rosa's work lets things slip, overflow, and refuse assigned positions. In so doing, she calls forth what has been renamed and covered over, mobilising botanical complicity towards reclaiming the archive from a site of possession into a heap of disturbance.

- (1) (4) Jamaica Kincaid, "The Disturbances of the Garden," *The New Yorker*, August 31, 2020.  
(2) (3) Jamaica Kincaid, (1999). *My Garden (Book)*. New York: Picador. (pp. 119).  
(5) Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).  
(6) Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13.

**Nancy La Rosa** (b. 1980, Peru) uses installation, video, drawing and printmaking to poetically deconstruct the ways in which power operates through systems of representation. Exploring the colonial legacies embedded in historical archives, she challenges the Western appropriation of local narratives by creating counter-narratives through images and sounds. With a focus on extractive capitalism and its impact on land, La Rosa traces the life of extracted matter such as minerals, stones and plants. She observes their flow and seeks to understand their hidden vitality and agency as active forces that shape meanings and reciprocal relationships among humans, non-humans and the land. She received her master's in Visual Arts at KASK, Ghent and her works have been exhibited at Centrale for Contemporary Art (Brussels), Americas Society (New York), Biennial das Amazonias (Belém do Pará) and currently at MAMM – Medellín Museum of Modern Art.

[nancylarosa.com](http://nancylarosa.com)

**Susie Quillinan** is a curator, researcher, and editor. She is the curatorial director of Hawapi, a project that develops *encuentros* in territories of socio-ecological importance in the Andean region. She is the curator of *sala de lectura* (Lima) and *Mundos Habitables*, an initiative dedicated to creating practices, resources, and imaginaries of accompaniment. From 2018 to 2023, she was the Director of Master's Studies at Transart Institute for Creative Research and is currently a PhD candidate in the Curatorial Practice program at MADA, Monash University, Naarm (Melbourne), Australia.

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