

FORBES EAST 9

Mentorships for Audacious Minds

**FORECAST
FESTIVAL**
MARCH 14–15
RADIALSYSTEM

Forecast is an interdisciplinary platform dedicated to facilitating, mentoring, and promoting audacious creative practitioners. Its international program Forecast Mentorships offers an up-and-coming cohort of artists and creative thinkers the chance to work with accomplished mentors toward bringing their project ideas to fruition. Forecast transcends neatly defined genres and eschews prescribed research themes to carve out space for the multitude of questions that define our time.

In winter 2024, creatives from around the world answered an open call and submitted their proposals to work with one of the mentors shaping our ninth edition: choreographer Alice Ripoll, artist Theo Eshetu, documentary filmmaker Tomer Heymann, designer Fiona Raby, photographer Lieko Shiga, and composer and performer Ute Wassermann. Active in a variety of disciplines, the mentors in the 2024–25 edition push against the constraints of the practices with which they engage. They renegotiate the common definitions of their respective fields and experiment in ways that defy simple readings of their work. The project ideas they have received via our open call have also reflected these expansive approaches.

Reading a total of 1,140 applications from 113 countries, the mentors invited 18 nominees to participate in the Forecast Forum in August 2024 at Radialsystem, Berlin. There, visitors could experience boundary-pushing contributions ranging from performances and screenings to performative explorations and aural experimentations. At the event's conclusion, the mentors each

selected one mentee and accompanied the development of their respective projects until their premiere at the Forecast Festival. This publication introduces the six mentee projects and invites guest writers and critics to consider the different histories and narratives contextualizing these artistic endeavors.

During the eight months between the Forum and the Festival, one-on-one mentorships took place, in which each of the six mentees went on an individual work-stay with their respective mentor. In this edition, Forecast partnered with organizations in Brazil, Japan, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey for these work-stays, which offer generous space for a condensed period of creative exchanges, fine-tuning, and concrete mentoring. These personal exchanges and work sessions, which prove crucial for the final productions ahead of the Forecast Festival, were captured in short videos produced with local camera people on the ground.

Having reached the end of their mentorship period, the mentees will unveil their productions in the two-day Forecast Festival. In addition, the mentors will also offer insights into their own work, and the topics that inspire and move them. All of Forecast's initiatives are centered on in-person gatherings and exchanges not only between mentor and mentee, but among all participants across the different fields of creative expression. It is in this trans-disciplinary approach that Forecast radiates far and wide, and new ideas blossom.

Unfinished by Design

FREO MAJER

Artistic Director, Forecast

In *Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Hannah Arendt wrote: “Without the beauty of cultural things, without the radiant glory in which potential immortality is made manifest in the human world, all politics would be sheer expediency.” It may seem paradoxical to describe art as something lasting, given its ever-changing, fluid, and transient forms—relentlessly imagining and calling forth the unexpected, and driven by curiosity and enthusiasm. But I’m convinced that precisely this paradox represents a special characteristic of every artistic work and creative practice in general: it is something constantly in motion, process-based, incapable of being stagnant, not aimed at a specific endpoint or goal. Indeed, these qualities represent precisely the cultural achievement of the arts for our communal coexistence—something Hannah Arendt often describes with the ancient polis. Where political actors—and even more so, political ideologues—aim for solutions, for a final arrival at a fixed destination, poets, musicians, artists, designers, architects, and directors reserve the right to engage in perpetual reflection and to continually pose new questions. It is precisely this process-oriented nature of their practice that represents one of the fundamental characteristics of democracy, and this is the society that Hannah Arendt calls the polis.

Equally as complicated and time-consuming as every creative process and artistic practice is the political negotiation of how we want to live together in society—a negotiation that has little chance of ever being completed. The arts are capable of showing individuals and society at large various models, images, and narratives of experiences in the world; through them, we practice our understanding of the world and interactions with it. Without the experiences provided by the arts, all that is political lacks permanence and meaning.

Every year, Forecast receives several hundred submissions from a new generation of creative thinkers, most recently over 1,100 from 113 countries worldwide. On the one hand, we have the unique privilege of encountering an enormous variety of individual questions, visions, and ambitions, and celebrating them in their uniqueness. At the same time, within the broader framework of these concepts, certain common traits or abilities emerge, as well as larger intellectual trajectories toward which many of these creative minds are currently moving. Some of these tendencies shift slightly each year, becoming stronger or weaker. Reflecting this, we assemble a new group of six mentors for each edition, whom we consider exceptionally capable of capturing and amplifying relevant movements. But one particular

desire—one goal—clearly emerges from the thousands of submissions since our first edition in 2015: a striving for freedom.

For Forecast, the unrestricted freedom of the arts is not only a foundational value of a free and open society that respects individual rights but also the ethical core of our daily work. In their freedom, the arts offer a model for how human beings can engage with the world without being bound to outdated categories or supposedly universal truths. They fuel the imagination, expand our intellectual horizons, and promote the kind of pluralistic and reflective judgment necessary for our coexistence. In a democratic society, the freedom of the arts is of crucial importance for the vibrancy of a public sphere where people come together and engage in an ongoing exchange of differing perspectives and beliefs, which we recognize as the heart of all political freedom. Without free and powerful art, the foundation of all progress would wither—that is, the ability to reflect on life as it is and imagine a better one. This ambition—to look toward a future full of curiosity and trust—gives Forecast its name.

Life in a pluralistic society brings with it the experience of multiple perspectives, and we see that as an asset. But this doesn't mean that the negotiation of common values or even basic agreements can function without real effort by all involved—or without the willingness to listen and to compromise. Freedom is never absolute in the sense of being detached from human relationships and the responsibility we have for each other. Art, like political action, must maintain the conditions that allow freedom in the first place: the promotion of a vibrant public sphere, the respect of pluralism, and the readiness of all citizens to make considered and reflective judgments. When art succeeds, it is the opposite of totalitarian. But when art simply

expresses opinions without putting any real effort into reflection, it evades precisely what the public sphere demands—the plurality of perspectives.

Consequently, for Forecast 9, we did not seek out mentors with the loudest voices but rather personalities who persistently and consistently explore and express artistic freedom. These six exceptional mentors do not constantly seek to amplify their own voices or live from applause and affirmation. Instead, their respective methods are anchored in concentration and serious reflection. All of them have maintained a persistent and incorruptible clarity regarding complex issues and ideas. They aren't satisfied with mere simplifications or polarizations. Their passions do not cloud their sharp intellect. Accordingly, their selection of mentees from among the numerous applicants reflected this, with each of the six tandems establishing a deeply trusting, personal rapport and developing a highly precise form of collaboration. The final results of these respective collaborations mirror the depth of the relationships, as well as critical phases of feedback, revision, and many bold changes throughout the process. I am certain that the mentees of Forecast 9, like their mentors, will continue to make their voices heard in the future.

Since its inaugural edition in 2015, Forecast has been supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM), based on resolutions passed by the German parliament. To them, as well as to our other supporters and partner institutions, I would like to express our deepest gratitude—on behalf of the mentors, mentees, and nominees involved. We see the privilege of this support as a profound responsibility, and, like our participants, we remain committed to reflecting on our work and its role within society.





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A shirtless male dancer with a shaved head is captured in a dynamic, acrobatic pose against a solid black background. He is wearing black shorts and is suspended in the air, with his body arched and his legs extended. The lighting highlights the contours of his muscles, creating a strong contrast with the dark background.

MENTOR
ALICE RIPOLL

MEHDI DAHKAN
**KMs OF
RESISTANCE**

A dance that offers access to the
social struggles of our contemporary society

France-based Moroccan choreographer and performer Mehdi Dahkan uses the body to interrogate social constructs prevalent in the Maghreb today. Rooted in hip-hop dance styles and urban practices, Dahkan later transitioned into modern dance, performing professionally with various companies in Morocco and Europe. In 2019, he founded the company Jil Z and began to develop his own choreographies.

The piece *KMs of Resistance*, created within the framework of Forecast, is the third in a trilogy centered on the legacy of folk dances traditional to North Africa and their evolution under colonial rule. The trilogy is based on ritual, protest, and desire. Here, Mehdi seeks to explore the act of celebrating as a form of protest and resistance: the work draws inspiration from *Chaabi* dance gatherings, which sparked resistance movements and were used to transmit coded information during Morocco's struggle for independence. With a physically challenging choreography that uses the act of breathing in unusual ways to spur movement in the body, the piece offers a subtle yet festive means of accessing the social struggles of our contemporary society.

Dahkan responded to Brazilian choreographer Alice Ripoll's call for ideas, which she titled *Open Minded Body*. Following the Forecast Forum in August 2024, Ripoll chose to continue mentoring his project. "Dance can remind us that we are made of flesh, we have texture, smell, temperature, a muscle that pulsates in the chest, and the overwhelming flow of air that tirelessly enters and leaves our lungs," she said. In October 2024, they convened in Bahia, Brazil, where they worked on developing Dahkan's solo performance into a choreography for two dancers.

Alice Ripoll

Open Minded Body

Brazilian choreographer Alice Ripoll was studying to become a psychoanalyst when she took a deviant turn at the age of twenty-one. Curious about the possibilities of movement research, she decided to study dance. Ripoll began her career as a choreographer, performer, and movement director in 2002. Through research, her work opens space for dancers to transform their experiences into images and movement.

Based in Rio de Janeiro, Ripoll currently directs two dance companies: REC and SUAVE. Both groups stemmed from independently organized collectives or social

projects and became professional touring companies that elaborate upon and recreate contemporary art. Merging urban dance styles from Brazilian favelas with contemporary dance, theater, and voice research, their work operates at the threshold of dance and performance. Ripoll works collaboratively with the dancers in both companies. “Usually, I work less with my own ideas, or trying to find new interesting ideas, and more in the sense of building worlds that are born from encounters,” she says.

Ripoll’s productions have been performed on stages around the world, including





at Kampnagel, Hamburg; Theater Spektakel, Zurich; Noorderzon Performing Arts, Groningen; Rencontres Chorégraphiques, Seine-Saint Denis; the internationally touring Projeto Brasil; Centre national de la danse, Paris; Festival de la Cité, Lausanne; and Norrlandsoperan, Umeå; as well as in numerous dance festivals across Brazil.

As a mentor, Ripoll sought candidates who are open to new challenges. “I expect from the mentee, and also from myself, to be open to the encounter, to be curious about each other. To dare to both fantasize and then stand by the creative choices. I believe artistic collaboration is a form of recognizing.”



“Through Forecast I learned that there is no formula for mentoring. Each artist needs a different approach, and I’m learning to work with Mehdi; with another artist, it would be different. It was also interesting to realize

how much dance is an activity that requires live presence. I already imagined this, but in this process, it was confirmed with great clarity.” ALICE RIPOLL

Defiant Bodies

Mehdi Dahkan's choreography *KMs of Resistance* highlights the body's ability to codify messages and sidestep constraints.

by GESINE BORCHERDT

Imagine a breathing sculpture. Its ribcage moving up and down, as if undulating, slowly and steadily. Almost imperceptible at first, it gradually starts taking more and more space, claiming more air, expanding into infinity. It is a meditative, circular gesture and you can almost imagine the whole world being one breathing, vibrating sculpture, where everything is connected.

Mehdi Dahkan's sculpture is his body. For his performance series, *KMs of resistance* he moves and expands his body by doing

what we all do, all the time, to stay alive: breathing. He focuses on the movements enabling the intake of air, and invites others to join in. Sharing his rhythm of inhalation and exhalation, his body becomes an "everybody": a vast, moving organism taking space in, and out.

Dahkan was born in Tangier, Morocco, in 1998. In his childhood, it was hip-hop and breakdancing that sparked his interest in choreography. As Dahkan describes it, "self-learning but actually just doing" is





what then led him to the rituals and gatherings in public spaces, which occur in the Maghreb specifically in conjunction with various resistance movements, and to the culture they all share across North Africa. By focusing on the body, Dahkan also looks

Gesine Borchardt is a Berlin-based curator, art critic, and author for *Welt*, *Welt am Sonntag*, *BLAU International*, *Artforum*, *Art Review*, *Aperture*, *AD Germany*, and other art publications. She is the Berlin correspondent of *ART—Das Kunstmagazin*. She recently published her first book, *DREAM ON BABY* (Starfruit Publications [German] 2023, and Hatje Cantz [English] 2024) in which artists including Marina Abramovic, Ai Weiwei, Lynda Benglis, Richard Billingham, Valie Export, Mona Hatoum, Jeff Koons, Gregor Schneider, Ryan Trecartin, Raphaela Vogel, Jordan Wolfson, and Wong Ping discuss their childhood.

at the ways in which communal movement often serves as a means to circumvent taboos in a society where codification—as a form of resistance—becomes an inventive response to restrictions. “This requires a certain awareness of how you present it and how you live in it,” he says.

How does the body work as a container of coded information, and how does this transform when the information is finally expressed? How do we use rhythm, movement, and feeling to create meaning? And how can the body become a symbol of political resistance? These questions form the basis of Dahkan’s choreographic work. “I liked the idea that with your own body, you can become and create something else,” he says, explaining that as a young boy, the gravity-defying movements of hip-hop



dancers spinning on their heads seemed to him like a superpower. In *KMs of Resistance*, he seeks to invoke once again exactly that potential—by relating to the rituals and protests that his country has seen in the last hundred years.

The core of his trilogy, of which *KMs of Resistance* is the third and final part, is—in contrast to what comes to mind when one thinks of protests—silence. Dahkan describes a “physical silence, trying to protest as loud as I can without actually making any noise.” For him, the body is a symbol to play with, just as there are different ways to silently protest. “One way to do this is when you simply leave your country, so the absence of your body becomes an invisible imprint of resistance.”

“I liked the idea that with your own body, you can become and create something else.”

Growing up in Tangier, the closest African city to Europe, the passage of people was an energy he felt every day. He calls it “existing in the moment,” which is also what conscious breathing means in meditation: embracing a precarious state of being, leaving the past behind, the future unclear.

Another form of passive protest that compelled Dahkan was people silently watching the sea, resisting activity. “There is a square in Tangier called Lazy Wall, where protests were not permitted. Now people go there and don’t do anything. There is just stillness. The city is full of life, but when you get there, it is as if somebody muted the space. It’s not an organized happening, people just started going there to sit in silence.” When the groups got bigger and bigger and blocked traffic became an issue, the authorities started asking questions. The answer would always be: “I’m just watching the sea.” And thus the still, silent body became a peaceful, powerful protest tool.

But there is also resistance in the act of celebration. For the piece he produced in the framework of Forecast, Dahkan honors the *Chaabi* dance gatherings that were used to share information about the resistance movement during Morocco’s struggle for independence. (*Chaabi* or *Sha’bii* means ‘folk’.) “Nobody would see them as more than entertainment. But during the period of French colonization, the musicians called for rebellion in their songs.” says Dahkan. Resistance was taking place as folkloric dance performances in front of the French soldiers’ eyes. They didn’t have a clue.

Dahkan’s latest piece—which he first performed as a solo at the Forecast Forum and later developed for two dancers during his mentorship with Alice Ripoll—relates to the *Chaabi* dancers, but also to the traditional vocal *Shikhat* music of rural Morocco, called *Aita*. “Aita in Arabic means cry out, lament, or scream, which describes perfectly the shrill tone of the *Shikhat*,” Dahkan explains. Here, too, the body became a tool with which to defy restrictions while avoiding censorship. “My piece takes this on by focusing on the breath. You can make noise and say a lot with it without speaking.

“... trying to protest as loud as I can without actually making any noise.”

You can create rhythm and show different feelings. The way you breathe can signify if you’re happy or upset.”

It’s certainly captivating to witness how Dahkan honors both his country’s celebratory art form and its creativity in finding ways to express resistance. By turning these stories into performative, minimalist sculptures, his work couldn’t feel more contemporary. Inviting others to breathe with him is a symbol for the interconnectedness of all beings in an almost Zen-like, non-dualistic way, where the individual self is overcome. In Dahkan’s case, this happens through shapes created by the act of breathing. “At a certain point, an entire room full of people starts breathing in the same way, which feels like a common ritual beyond any cultural tradition,” he says. “Everybody breathes in the same way, in every part of the world.”

Project credits

Production: Cie Jil Z
Co-production: Forecast, Ettijahat-Independent Culture, Le Phare, Centre chorégraphique national du Havre Normandie
Concept and choreography: Mehdi Dahkan
Performers: Mohamed Bouriri, Mehdi Dahkan



Read and see more about Mehdi Dahkan’s project.

forecast-platform.com/mentee/mehdi-dahkan/

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's face, focusing on the mouth and hand. The person's hand is near their mouth, and their lips are slightly parted. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and bright highlights, creating a somber and intimate atmosphere. The background is dark and out of focus.

HAO ZHOU
**CORRECT ME
IF I'M WRONG**

A documentary about a family's attempt to
correct a male heir's deviation from societal expectations

MENTOR
**TOMER
HEYMANN**

Hailing from southwest China, filmmaker Hao Zhou explores queer and feminist stories in peripheral spaces. In their latest and most personal documentary project *Correct Me If I'm Wrong*, Zhou turns the camera to their own family as its members confront Zhou's deviation from their expectations of their sole male heir. To challenge their contempt, which Zhou recognizes as a concern motivated by care, Zhou commits to their family's wish to rid them of everything they hate and fear.

In their mountainous town, their grandmother and other family members expose Zhou to a series of mystical interventions to transform the male heir's body, mind, spirit, and fate. As this arduous pursuit exposes tensions and traumas amid all participants, will the family end up being the ones who are transformed?

Zhou answered the call for ideas by documentary filmmaker Tomer Heymann, who titled his field of mentorship *A Place Beyond Fear*, seeking artists willing to step outside their comfort zone and test their artistic boundaries. Following the Forecast Forum, Heymann chose to further accompany Zhou, stating that "in Zhou's project, I discovered a deep personal story with a unique point of view intertwined with high-quality cinematic aesthetics. Zhou has the courage to investigate unfamiliar places of family and gender identity without fear or judgment. Zhou's materials reveal their challenging confrontation, both as a director and protagonist, with their family traumas and tensions in a fearless way."

In November 2024, the two met in Amsterdam for an intensive work-stay, where they fine-tuned the film's final edit and networked during the IDFA film festival.

Tomer Heymann

A Place Beyond Fear

Tomer Heymann is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose career has spanned over two decades and includes some of the most successful films in the history of Israeli documentary cinema. His critically acclaimed documentaries have been screened in festivals worldwide and have received prizes from the Berlinale, The Israeli Academy of Film and Television, Hot Docs, SXSW, and IDFA. Two of his films, *Mr. Gaga* (2015) and *Who's Gonna Love Me Now?* (2016) have streamed on NETFLIX. *Mr. Gaga* was also shortlisted for the European Academy Awards, theatrically released in seventeen countries, and is considered the most viewed Israeli documentary film.

Heymann was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 15th Monterey International Film Festival in Mexico. Several retrospectives have been dedicated

to Heymann's films in New York, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Istanbul. His film *Jonathan Agassi Saved My Life* (2018) won the 2019 Israeli Academy Award for Best Documentary and aired on the BBC documentary series Storyville. *I Am Not* (2022) had its world premiere at Docaviv, Tel Aviv, where it received both Best Director and Best Cinematography Awards. The film also won the Best Documentary Film at the Israel Documentary Forum Award in 2022.

As a mentor, Heymann sought artists willing to take creative risks—"I am interested in exploring various forms of the art of storytelling, from cinema to video art, animation, photography, paintings, and even dance. I want to find places that might surprise; to start a process without any ideas about the final step."

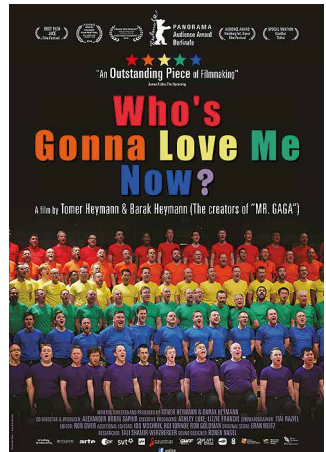
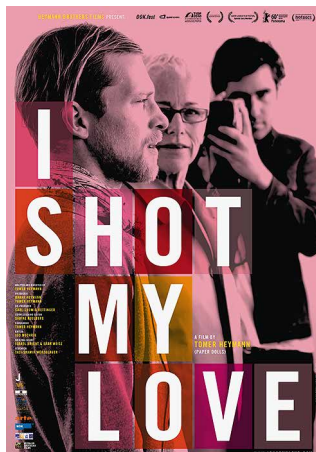
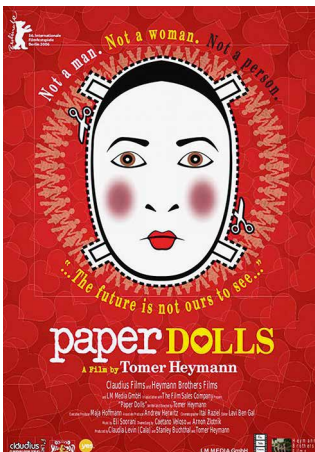
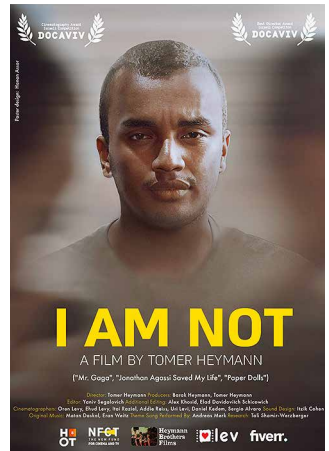
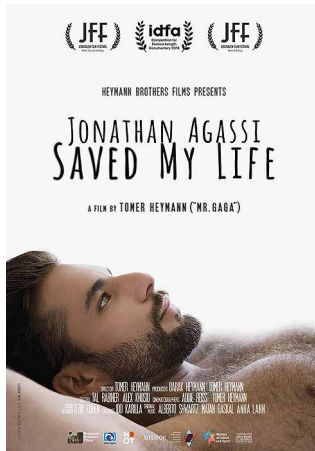


Photo: Mari Laukkanen



“As an artist, an important lesson from my journey with Forecast relates to restraint. After twenty-five years of developing a distinct documentary language, one becomes attached to patterns, insights, and judgements towards unfamiliar things. The fascinating collaboration with Hao, whose background, biography, and documentary language are so different from mine, challenged me to not react automatically and rely on my own work methods, but to be an open and patient listener. Thanks to the connection with Hao, I discovered a world of cinematic expression, symbolism, structure, and rhythm that is different from my own. This made me a more enriched and complex artist.” TOMER HEYMANN



Correction Through Connection

A multi-layered journey of love and transformation, *Correct Me If I'm Wrong* explores the intersection of modernity and tradition to navigate personal and familial history while testing social and personal boundaries.

by DIANA D'ARENBERG

Growing up, Chinese-born, Ohio-based filmmaker Hao Zhou had limited access to films, let alone positive portrayals of queerness on screen. Consequently, for the past decade, the University of Iowa graduate has used film as a vehicle to explore and spotlight queer, marginalized, and diasporic stories and characters, often in peripheral or overlooked spaces.

In 2014, while still a 21-year-old college student in Chongqing, Zhou made their first feature film, *Ye (The Night)*, about young, queer sex workers in China searching for intimacy in the urban backstreets and alleyways of Chongqing. Premiering at the 64th Berlin International Film Festival, where the film was described as having “the poetic intensity of Jean Genet,” *The Night* was later adapted as a stage performance at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre in 2017. Their 2023 film, *Here Hopefully*, featured a nonbinary aspiring nurse from China striving to build a gender-affirming life in rural Iowa.

An alum of the Berlinale Talents and the Cannes Résidence, Zhou has also presented films at SXSW, Hot Docs, HKIFF, and Images Festival, among others, and was a 2021 Student Academy Award medalist for

their film *Frozen Out* (2021). Mixing narrative, documentary, and experimental modes, Zhou makes films about other people's lives—but they also turn the lens on themselves. Over the summer of 2024, Zhou returned to their hometown in Chongqing, Southwest China, to film their documentary *Correct Me If I'm Wrong*.

In post-production at the time of writing, the autobiographical documentary sees the writer and filmmaker taking on a much more personal and intimate project based around their own family's interventions to “fix” Zhou's queerness. Although homosexuality is neither a crime nor officially regarded as an illness in China (Chinese authorities removed homosexuality from its list of diseases in the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders, a national clinical guide, in 2001), many LGBTQ people are nonetheless

Diana d'Arenberg is a Hong Kong-based art and culture writer. She has written for numerous international publications including *South China Morning Post*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *Vogue*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Ocula*, *Christie's*, *Artomity*, and *Asia Tatler*.



pressured or forced to undergo some form of “conversion therapy” by their families. In some cases, hospitals and private clinics offer such programs, while in other cases, such as Zhou’s, more folk and traditional approaches are sought by family members.

For years, the filmmaker’s grandmother has expressed a desire to correct her grandchild’s queerness before Zhou decided to document the journey depicted in *Correct Me If I’m Wrong*. Working with a small team, Zhou captures a variety of folk, mystical, and traditional Chinese medicine interventions—from shamans and fortune-telling to blood cupping. “I grew up seeing shamans coming to our house. My grandmother would bring them to fix any issues,” Zhou explains their upbringing. “I realized that even if I said ‘no’ to her, she would still hire shamans to do those things to me. So, I thought, why don’t I go along with what she wants, and

I can document that process and my relationship with her and my family and see how this relationship can shift throughout the process?” Zhou says of the documentary’s genesis. “When I was a kid, I was very feminine... My grandmother believes in a potential female spirit inside me, and she uses her own mix of methods to get rid of this female energy or spirit... and balancing my yin and yang.” They cite blood cupping as one example of a treatment designed to “bring out the feminine energy through sucking out the ‘bad’ blood.”

Although free of the religious stigma associated with homosexuality, Chinese society, like many others, firmly upholds conformity and traditional values, where heterosexual marriage and child-bearing is strongly favored. “My family and grandma want to fix me because they think that is the only way to be happy. There is no other

“When I was a kid, I was very feminine... My grandmother believes in a potential female spirit inside me, and she uses her own mix of methods to get rid of this female energy or spirit... and balancing my yin and yang.”

version of happiness provided to them,” Zhou explains. “It is really coming from a place of love from my family which also makes it hard to disconnect from them and shut them down or not have a dialogue with them.” Zhou notes that their circumstances are quite different than in a lot of western families where issues over queerness come from a belief that “it’s a sin.” “It’s like you’ve committed a crime—and that’s not the case with my family.”

The relationship between Zhou and their family, particularly with their grandmother, is not only important to the

filmmaker but also central to the film. This relationship, and the struggle to communicate and understand each other across generations, drives the documentary forward. Here, film is employed as a medium to bridge distance and to connect with their own family and audience. The filmmaking process serves as an opportunity for healing and opens a new avenue for dialogue. “I need to have a device to continue to push me to talk about these things,” the filmmaker explains. “I feel like without this external force, I was trying to avoid communicating with them, especially expressing the queer side of me.”





For many people, Zhou notes, the most direct response to having one's identity challenged or rejected is to engage in conflict, and in the case of family members "people would just shut each other down and disconnect. But once they've tried all these methods to fix me, and failed, maybe it's then easier for my family to accept the reality of who I am."

A multi-layered journey of love and transformation, *Correct Me If I'm Wrong* explores the intersection of modernity and tradition to navigate personal and familial history through testing social and personal boundaries. "My family want to correct me, but I also want to correct them in some way," Zhou muses. "I hope that there's a mutual correction, but it's more important for me to let them understand me a bit better." Offering a window into the filmmaker's world, Zhou hopes the film presents an opportunity for

greater understanding. "Documentaries like this are like catalysts for greater dialogue. At the core of this process I want to make connections."

Project credits

Directed by: Hao Zhou

Produced by: Tyler Hill

Cinematography: Zhanwen Yang

Edit and mix: Hao Zhou and Tyler Hill



Read and see more about Hao Zhou's project.

forecast-platform.com/mentee/hao-zhou/

MENTOR
LIEKO SHIGA

MEI LIU

HOMESICK FOR ANOTHER WORLD

An image-making process
based on a speculative screenplay

Amsterdam-based Chinese filmmaker and artist Mei Liu researched the histories of people across China who experienced forced confinement. With the project *Homesick for Another World*, she experimented with transforming and transcending those experiences. Mei has thus embarked on an image-making process based on her speculative screenplay, which follows a young Chinese filmmaker who's confined to a room for mysterious reasons.

Between four cold walls, the protagonist turns inward, to lucid dreaming. In a meditative and hypnotic cinematic journey, the project takes the form of an audiovisual experience about confinement and emancipation by means of tapping into other dimensions. The work explores the underbelly of urban landscapes, lives on the margins, and mystical realms of existence.

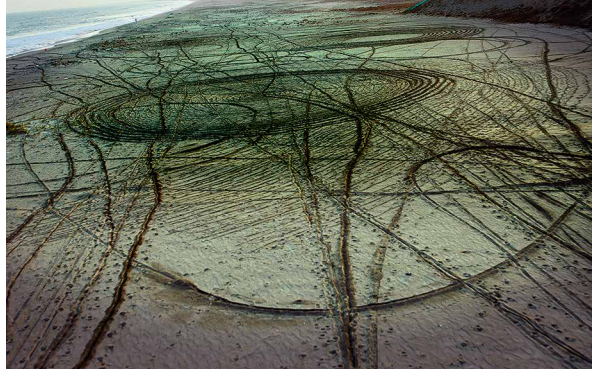
Mei answered mentor Lieko Shiga's call for ideas, titled *Images Invisible to Our Naked Eye*, in which the Japanese photographer sought applicants interested in challenging the role images play in our lives. "In today's society, where every image seems to feed into consumerism, what kind of image can evade becoming propaganda?" Shiga asked. At the Forecast Forum's conclusion, Shiga chose to accompany Mei's project to fruition. "Mei Liu is trying to convey what is happening in this world according to her beliefs, while using all manners and methods of media production to tell us about the touch of our spirit's essential freedom," said Shiga.

In October 2024, Mei joined Shiga in Japan for a workstay. They engaged in research in and around Ishinomaki, where Lieko's studio is located, and traveled to Tokyo, where they delivered lectures at two universities. They also held a talk at the Kyoto Experiment Festival hosted by the festival's director Yuya Tsukahara, who is also a former Forecast mentor.

Lieko Shiga

Images Invisible to Our Naked Eye

Japanese photographer Lieko Shiga combines ancient local myths with stories, memories, and personal experiences gathered from the people she encounters in her daily life. Her oeuvre is deeply rooted in Japanese folk traditions and attests to the omnipresence of the supernatural in everyday life in the country. Shiga's photographs visualize what she calls "the eternal present"—a moment suspended in space-time that is neither past nor future. They are photographic spaces in which the viewer can find reflections of their own body and consciousness. Similarly, her call for applicants included a prompt "to think about how to capture and express the images invisible to our naked eye in a concrete way and to enjoy the trial-and-error process of doing so."



Lieko Shiga, *Rasen Kaigan 46*, from the series *Rasen Kaigan* 2011.

In 2008, Shiga settled in Japan's Miyagi Prefecture, where she quickly became involved in the local community. She began documenting the history of this region as well as its rites and customs, and continued producing works related to memories that span generations. Following the devastating natural catastrophe of 2011, she stayed in the region to continue her photographic research. In 2021, Lieko Shiga received the prestigious Tokyo Contemporary Art Award. Her *Human Spring* series was presented in a solo exhibition at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum (2019). Her work has also been shown at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2022); Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan (2022); the 5th Ural Industrial Biennial of Contemporary Art, Ekaterinburg (2019); the Centre Pompidou-Metz (2017); and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2017).

Lieko Shiga, *Piano*, (1998).



Photo: Camille Blake



“I create my works based on my own thoughts, but the ‘I’ is also made up of information about the people I grew up with, those who taught me things, what I saw and read, and so on. Because I always believe that ‘I’ am an ‘open’ existence, I create my works through dialogue.” LIEKO SHIGA



Lieko Shiga, *Portrait of Cultivation*, from the *Rasen Kaigan* series, 2008–2012 (2018).

Echoes of Darkness

Starting from China’s nationwide lockdown during the COVID-19 epidemic, Liu Mei’s research moves between various societies, times, and political struggles to map the underground rhizomes of connected structures of violence and spirituality.

by QU CHANG

When Liu Mei sent me the previews of her works, I was enveloped by the dark winter next to a forest north of Vilnius, Lithuania. Every day at 4pm, the thick, viscous night devoured the etiolated woods outside. Impenetrable darkness rendered the deep forest into a flat, pitch-black surface that warped tightly around my studio window. This first radical northern winter experience showed me to what extent darkness can flatten the exterior world, pushing one’s consciousness back into the body and its unexpected depth. I was fearful of sinking into myself, of sensing that the inner space is perhaps an integral part of the darkness outside—a horrifying realization. A local friend later told me that the Baltic winters were normally accompanied by the illuminating element of snow, at least before the intensification of climate change. When white snow reflected the moonlight, even night forests were navigable.

“At nightfall, young people began to walk out of their houses and onto the streets in Shanghai. They held blank sheets of white A4 papers high above their heads. The silence on the city’s streets was so loud that the police came to stop them. This, what later unfolded into the nationwide White Paper

Movement, has ended the lockdown order. These sheets of paper are, in fact, portals. They transport us out of confinement and into utopian imaginations, towards another world. Maybe the only things we can see on these blank sheets are dreams.”

—Liu Mei, Lecture performance for *Homesick for Another World*, 2024

Mei’s artistic effort in her research-based series *Homesick for Another World* lies in her conscious exploration of depth in the often flattened narratives of dualism such as black and white, day and night, justice and evil. Oral accounts of different experiences of confinement, dreams, and sleep are her primary pathways to delve into the strata of darkness, sense the moving magma of hopes and despairs, and explore ways to situate oneself in a world of growing darkness.

Dreams as Portals

Starting from China’s state-enforced, nationwide lockdown during the COVID-19 epidemic, from which she escaped in early 2022, Mei’s research moves between various societies, times, and political struggles to map the underground rhizomes of connected structures of violence and spirituality.

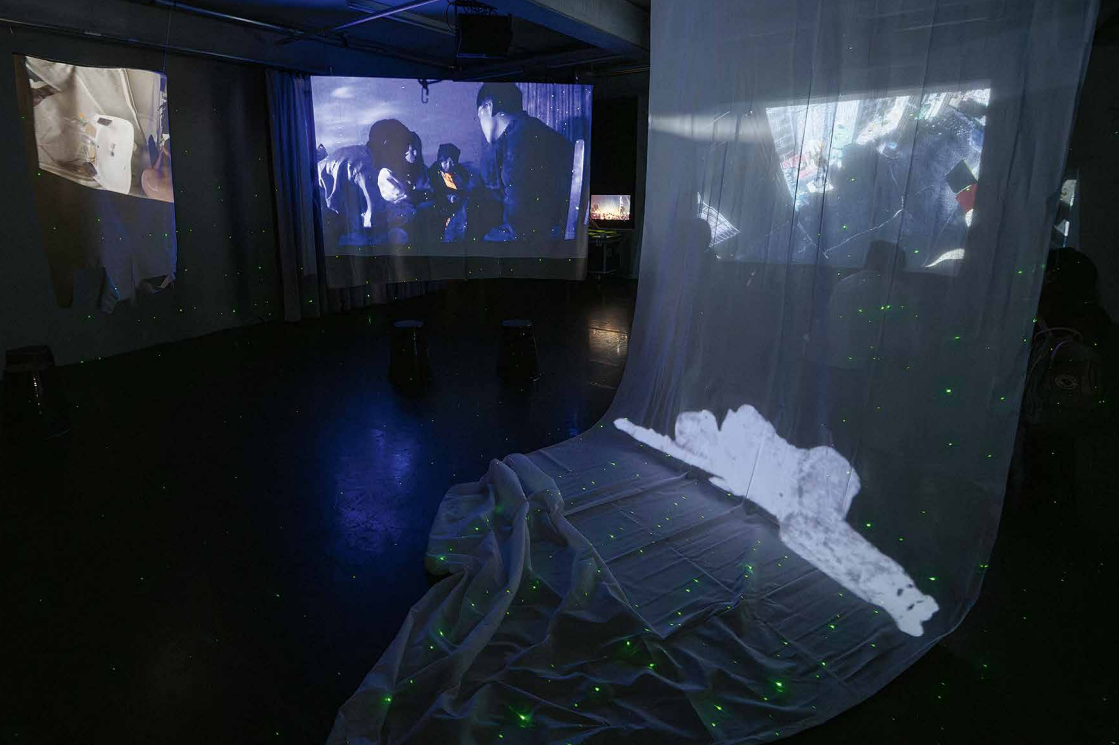
In a 2024 lecture performance of *Homesick for Another World*, she tells the story of a friend in China facing both immobility and starvation, who resorted to hibernation and slept eighteen hours a day. In extreme darkness, extended sleep opened spaces for them to confront stark reality. “Those days were fake,” her friend says. But they were also real. Dreams dissolve reality into fantasy, confinement into long, hallucinatory sleep. They reshape the physical condition and carry one through hardship. Dreams, in this sense, are not simply the spatial-temporal opposite of reality. At times, they are portals cutting through and transforming the real. Another protagonist in Mei’s work, the political dissident Lao Yang, imagined himself taking the sailboat printed on his bath towel on expeditions far and free during solitary confinement.

Dreams function in multiple layers in Mei’s exploration of socio-political darkness. They document personal memories

and collective psyche amid proliferating conflicts and crises; they unfurl spaces for fabulation and fantastical thinking as alternative forms of remembrance against the backdrop of erased histories and unutterable feelings; they not only operate in parallel with reality but also permeate it, altering its perception while providing escape routes. During China’s lockdown, Grandpa Cui, who enjoyed relative stability with sufficient supplies at home, dreamt about his days of hard labor during the Cultural Revolution. More recently, Malaz, witnessing the dictatorship’s downfall in his homeland Syria, can also

Qu Chang is a curator and writer based in Berlin. She is the Curator of Discursive Practices at Haus der Kulturen der Welt and runs the exhibition programme between 2025 and 2026 at Shekma Space with Echo Shi. Qu received her PhD in 2024 from the Cultural Studies Department at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. Previously, she served as a curator at Para Site, Hong Kong.





see the menacing shadow of new powers. Dreams can remind one to be vigilant and discerning on brighter days.

Shattered Subjectivity

The core realization in Mei's exploration of the complexity of social darkness is the dismantling of subjectivity as an isolated entity. After all, before critically engaging in any political discussions and deconstructing entrenched systems of power, shouldn't we first de-territorialize ourselves?

"At this point in my research, I am slowly sensing the presence of something bigger—an interconnected web of the universe of some sort. Maybe we have many doubles, in the past, in the present, in the future. One confined

body, one outside; one suffering, one is fine. All the bodies are stacked on each other in a meticulously parallel universe. I wonder, in Northeast China, how many meters apart is Grandpa Cui's dream body during hard labor from Lao Yang's physical body in solitary confinement? [...] Maybe our individuality is a lie. Maybe there is a bigger unity, a solidarity in very literal ways. Maybe we are physically connected through our dream bodies."
—Liu Mei, Lecture performance for *Homesick for Another World*, 2024

In its current format, *Homesick* is a multi-media performance that envisions the multiplicities of bodies, consciousness, spiritual flows, and their co-existence through the

“Maybe our individuality is a lie.
Maybe there is a bigger unity,
a solidarity in very literal ways.
Maybe we are physically connected
through our dream bodies.”

connecting portals of dreams. Oral accounts, personal journals, and published texts are overlaid with polyphonic voices, performing bodies, and their ghostly extensions in projected lights. The work continuously articulates a conscious attention towards depth—be it the depth of political gloom, the body, or dreams. Fragments of glimmering shards scatter in the darkness. The task, contrary to modernity’s desire for scale, completeness, and piecing things together, is to unearth long-existing connections that require more than sight and logical thinking to perceive. It is precisely the not-yet-namable interrelations that reify the feeling of being homesick and the process of worlding in Mei’s artistic research.

The fluid nature of dreams is bound to usher in more uncertainty. Is the moving image, a medium created by modernity’s singular, authorial perspective, sufficient to imagine radical intersubjectivity? And more broadly, if bright is dark, past is future, you are me, is there any space for clarity and definitive actions? Perhaps what we should learn at this moment is to accept complexity and uncertainty as the constant condition for thinking and practicing, in contrast to illusory rationality. This might teach us to weave ourselves into more organic interactions with the world and invent more resilient acts of worldmaking. The thinking of dreams reminds me of the Taoist idea of

wuwei, or inaction, which does not point to a simple nihilism or neoliberal laissez-faire policy, but to actions guided by an awareness of the myriad relations that connect one to the world. When darkness falls, we sleep and dream; when daylight casts in, we become watchful; when water starts flowing, we swim; when silence overwhelms, we sing.



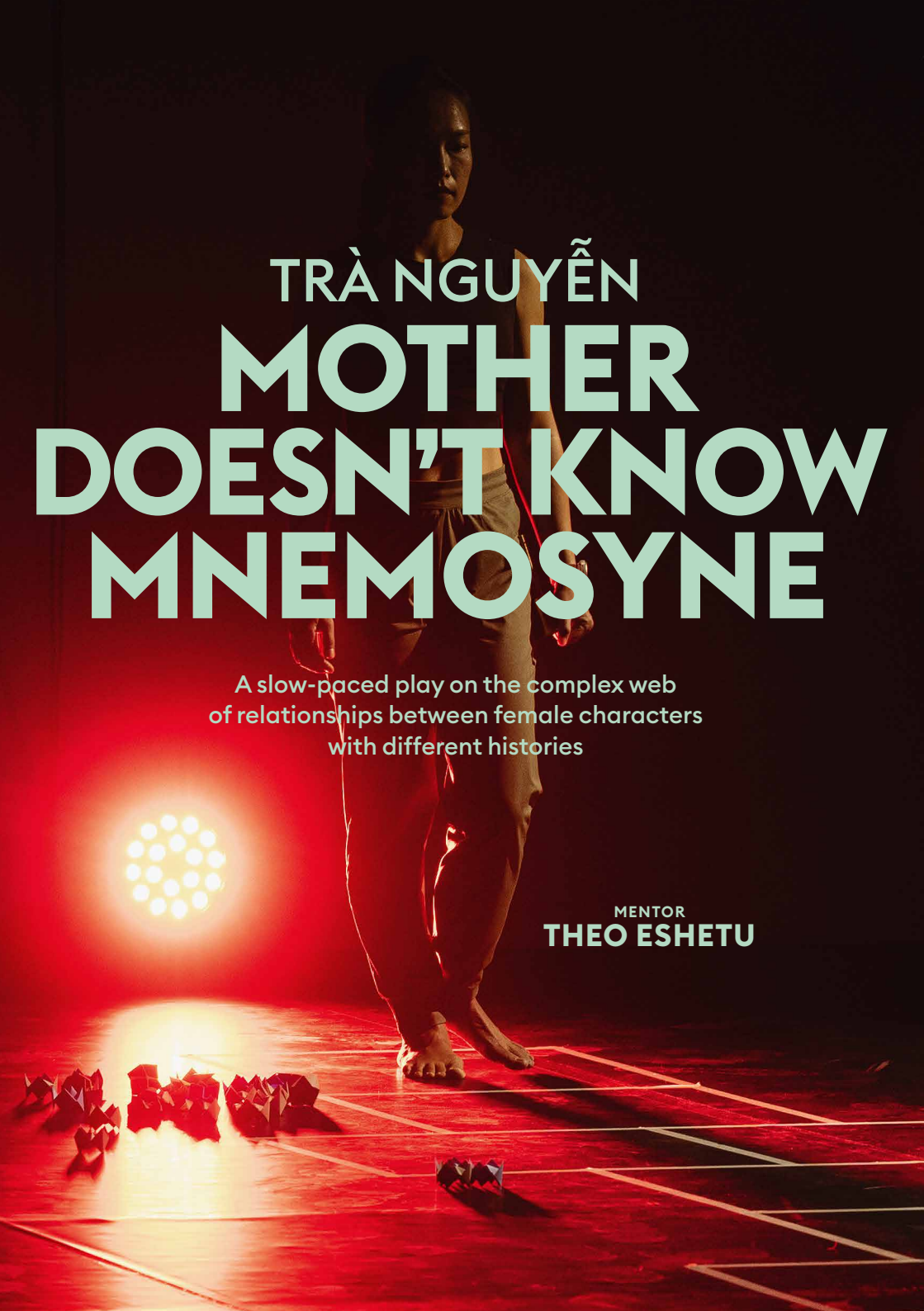
Project credits

Concept: Mei Liu
Music and Sound design:
Will Freudenheim, Malaz Usta
Film and Visual:
Mei Liu, Malaz Usta



Read and see more about
Mei Liu’s project.

[forecast-platform.com/mentee/
mei-liu/](https://forecast-platform.com/mentee/mei-liu/)



TRÀ NGUYỄN
**MOTHER
DOESN'T KNOW
MNEMOSYNE**

A slow-paced play on the complex web
of relationships between female characters
with different histories

MENTOR
THEO ESHETU

Vietnamese theatermaker Trà Nguyễn creates plays and set designs within which the performers move and act particularly slowly. With this method of staging works, Nguyễn seeks to carve—and place her work in—the quieting space of deliberate attention. Her screenplays, on the other hand, reflect the complexities of modern life, portraying the human struggle to connect in a digitally networked world. She is currently based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where her independent initiative The Run – A Theater Project aims to build infrastructure for experimental theatermaking via production, training, and critical discourse.

Her play *Mother Doesn't Know Mnemosyne*, which Nguyễn produced in the framework of Forecast, evokes the Greek mythological figure Mnemosyne—or Memory, the mother of the nine muses—to narrate the complex relations between female figures with different histories.

In early 2024, Nguyễn replied to artist Theo Eshetu's call for ideas in the field of mentorship he had named *Shapes of the Unknown*, which was open to all practices. Following Nguyễn's showcase at the Forecast Forum, Eshetu selected the work out of three nominated projects, stating that "Trà Nguyễn dug deeply into childhood memories to develop a powerfully emotional work that relied on stillness and repetition to convey its strength." The two discussed the work's development remotely until the fall, when Eshetu and Nguyễn met again for a condensed week of comprehensive mentoring at the German Academy Rome Villa Massimo in late October 2024. There, they also shared insights into her method and work-in-progress with a local audience.

Theo Eshetu

Shapes of the Unknown

Video artist Theo Eshetu's oeuvre ranges from essay films to large-scale video installations. His practice touches on themes drawn from anthropology, art history, scientific research, and religious iconography to create a distinctive body of work based on a synopated rhythmic montage of sounds and images that reflects upon how electronic media has shaped and formed our perception of the world.

Born in London to Ethiopian and Dutch parents and raised in Rome, Eshetu's multinational background speaks to the complexity of identity in an increasingly globalized world. His research often questions forms of representation related to cultural hybridity. In particular, the relationship between Africa and Europe informs his work through images that tap into a collective unconscious. "I'm interested in the practice of freedom to explore the contours of the things that bind us," he says.

Eshetu's works have been shown internationally at film festivals and major exhibitions, including the Gwangju Biennale (2020), Shanghai Biennale (2017), documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel (2017), Dak'Art (2016), the Sharjah Biennale (2012), and the Venice Biennale (2011). His works are included in the collections of MoMA, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; the Newark Museum of Art; and Museo delle civiltà, Rome.

Eshetu sought applicants with "a sense of wonderment to explore the limits of what is knowable." He encouraged candidates to "approach an idea with a desire to uncover its hidden properties, or to explore a given theme—political or personal—from a position of uncertainty, while delineating pathways that will lead to discovery."



“What I’ve learned from mentoring at Forecast is that there is no method that one can apply, no predetermined path to follow, and that it’s hard to predict what approach could work

and what couldn’t. What I certainly enjoyed was watching a work develop by trying to stay out of the way of its development.” THEO ESHETU



Theo Eshetu, *Atlas Fractured* (2017). Digital video, color, sound, 18 min. documenta 14, Athens Conservatoire

Mother. Daughter. The Goddess of (Fragmented) Memory

In *Mother Doesn't Know Mnemosyne*, Trà Nguyễn delves into the interplay between intergenerational trauma and fragmented recollection, weaving a slow, meditative theatrical experience that embodies the complex legacies of motherhood, memory, and resilience.

by XIAOWEN ZHU

“There is no established framework for experimental theater in Vietnam,” Trà Nguyễn tells me, her voice carrying the weight of experience rather than complaint. It’s a statement of fact, one that underscores the precariousness of an artist working at the intersections of memory, identity, and performance in a country where infrastructure for such explorations is scarce. Yet this very scarcity fuels her resolve: not to conform but to create, stitching together a practice as layered and fragmented as the memories she seeks to unearth.

At the heart of her work lies a paradox: a theater of slowness that demands immediacy, and an inquiry into memory that resists coherence. Nguyễn’s latest project, *Mother Doesn't Know Mnemosyne*, is emblematic of this tension—a deeply personal yet universally resonant meditation on the fractured legacies of motherhood, history, and identity.

Xiaowen Zhu is a bilingual author, curator, and artistic director based in Berlin and Manchester. She is the Director of esea contemporary and an advisor for the British Council’s Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Group.

A Theater of Slowness

Nguyễn’s performances unfold with an intentional deceleration that defies conventional dramaturgy. If the frenetic pace of contemporary life urges us to consume stories quickly, her work asks us to linger. “Theater is not about events but about attention,” she says, distilling her artistic philosophy into a single, elegant statement. Her movements stretch time, creating a space where memory is not narrated but embodied, where silence speaks and slowness becomes an act of defiance.

This approach finds its fullest expression in a method she calls *verbatim bodies*, in which characters are not imposed upon performers but emerge from their physical presence, as if the stage itself coaxes untold narratives from their being. Inspired by figures like Robert Wilson and Hans-Thies Lehmann, who defined postdramatic theater, Nguyễn rejects the actor’s role as a vessel for text. Instead, the body becomes an archive of memory, conjuring stories through gesture and stillness. Her work also draws from Jérôme Bel’s experimental choreography, which further informs her exploration of physical presence and layered narratives.



In *Mother Doesn't Know Mnemosyne*, Nguyễn's body becomes both the site and the subject of this inquiry. The work layers her personal history with archetypal narratives, drawing upon the Greek goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, as both a symbol and a guide. Just as Mnemosyne gave birth to the nine Muses, Nguyễn's performance gives life to a multiplicity of stories, each fragmentary yet interconnected, resisting linearity in favor of a dreamlike multiplicity.

Threads of Personal and Collective History

Reading through Nguyễn's script, I'm struck by a single, haunting image: a mother stitching garments she will never see completed. It is a metaphor for labor, separation, and the unseen threads that bind families across distances.

She sewed clothing for unknown people. With machines. Automation. Each person only took up one part in the making of the clothes. She did the patching of major parts. She never knew how they looked as the final garment. She never saw anyone wearing them.

For Nguyễn, this image is not abstract—it is her mother's reality during Vietnam's embargo period, when she worked in the USSR while Nguyễn and her brother grew up in Vietnam, navigating their concept of motherhood in her absence.

The play draws upon this history, weaving together personal memory and intergenerational trauma against the backdrop of Vietnam's complex socio-political landscape. Yet Nguyễn resists the urge to turn the personal into spectacle. "It's a play for my mother," she explains, "filled with

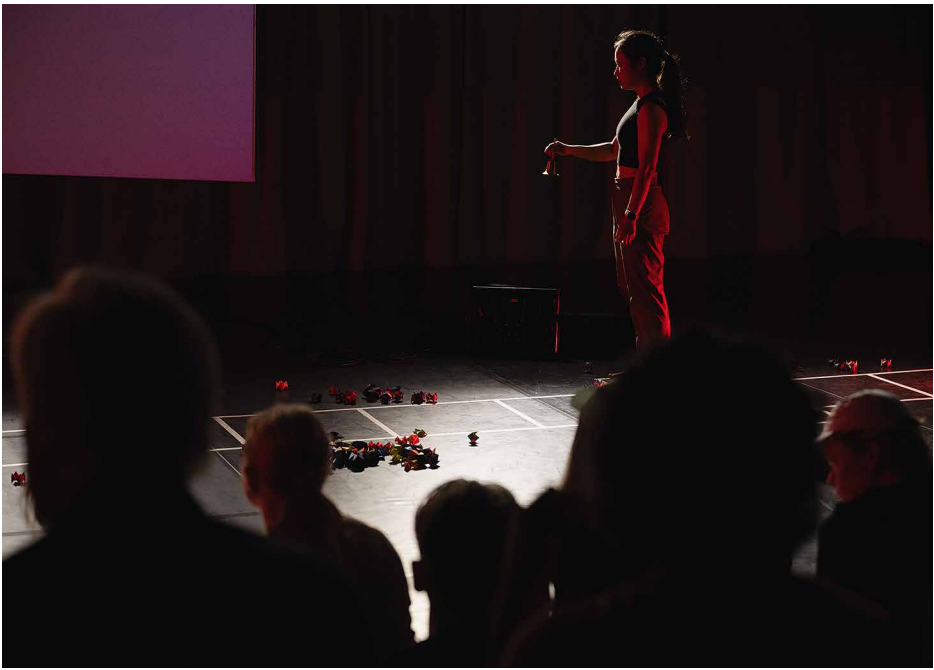


Photo: Camille Blake

metaphors, symbols, and gestures that only she might fully understand.”

This intimacy, paradoxically, deepens the work’s universality. The specifics of Nguyễn’s story—her mother’s labor, her family’s separation, and the weight of history—become a lens through which broader questions emerge: How does memory shape identity? What is lost in translation between generations? And how do we reconcile the fragments of our past with the demands of the present?

Building a Future for Experimental Theater

The development of *Mother Doesn’t Know Mnemosyne* reveals Nguyễn’s engagement with the complexities of cross-disciplinary collaboration. During her mentorship with visual artist Theo Eshetu, Nguyễn shaped a performance that blends theatricality with

visual art. The result is a stage transformed into an installation, featuring two large frames, a hopscotch pattern, and a monitor displaying pre-recorded narration.

Nguyễn’s movements are repetitive and ritualistic, contrasting with the stillness embodied by her fellow performer, an instrumentalist. Together, they create a dynamic meditation on time, memory, and presence. At one point, the audience is invited to explore the stage themselves, shifting from passive spectators to active participants. This moment underscores Nguyễn’s philosophy of theater as a collaborative space where meaning is not imposed but discovered.

Her ambitions, however, extend far beyond the stage. In Vietnam, where experimental theater operates on the fringes, Nguyễn has focused on creating opportunities for independent performance. Each year, she produces two major projects: one

Photo: Stephen Natanson (film still)

“Theater is not about events but about attention.”

a performance, the other a training or incubation program designed to support emerging artists. These efforts are shaped by her own journey—self-taught for two years before earning a scholarship to study dramatic writing at Carnegie Mellon University. This experience introduced her to frameworks unavailable in Vietnam, motivating her to build an ecosystem for experimental theater in her home country.

Memory as Resilience

Through *Mother Doesn't Know Mnemosyne*, Nguyễn crafts a meditation on memory's paradoxical nature—personal yet shared; fragmented yet whole. Her deliberate and introspective approach transcends traditional performance, creating a space where memory, healing, and identity intertwine across cultural and generational boundaries. The Berlin debut of *Mother Doesn't Know Mnemosyne* adds a poignant layer of resonance. Berlin's Vietnamese community, one of the largest in Europe, originated during the Cold War when East Germany recruited thousands of contract workers

from Vietnam's Communist government. Approximately half of these workers were women, housed in segregated communities and subjected to strict state controls and systemic racism. This fraught history of displacement and resilience provides a meaningful contextual backdrop for the presentation of Nguyễn's performance in Berlin.

Nguyễn acknowledges the uncertainties inherent in presenting such a deeply personal piece. When asked about her expectations for the Vietnamese community's reception of her work, she offered no definitive answers, instead inviting further reflection: How might diasporic audiences connect with the performance? Could those whose lives also bear the marks of dislocation find their own fragmented histories mirrored in her narrative?

Project credits

Stage Designer and Production:
Lina Oanh Nguyen
Stage Production Associate: Kieu Lam
Nguyen and Lam Weaving Space
Costume Designer: Tom Trandt
Video Artist: Vicky Do
Video Assistant: Nguyen Phuong Anh
Sound Technician: Tuyen Bui
Volunteer: Le Anh Thu, Ly Le Minh Trang,
Le Xuan Hong Nhung
With heartfelt thanks to:
Lang Spot, Thuy-Tien Vo, Phuong Huynh,
Quyen-Nguyen Hoang, Mom, and
Goethe Institut Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Read and see more about
Trà Nguyễn's project.

[forecast-platform.com/mentee/
tra-nguyen/](https://forecast-platform.com/mentee/tra-nguyen/)



JOHANNA SEELEMANN

SOIL ASSEMBLY

A transformative approach to farming



MENTOR
FIONA RABY

Based in Germany and Iceland, Johanna Seelemann leads a design studio that explores the mystification of everyday objects and materials. Her work developed in the framework of Forecast, titled *Soil Assembly*, takes a transformative approach to farming through speculative design and other-than-human perspectives. Through this speculative research project, Seelemann seeks to find out what it might look like if a society were to focus on cultivating and protecting healthy soil to withstand extreme weather conditions.

Teaming with microbes, a farm community takes initiative. Informed by historical and emerging experimental farming methods, nutrient production, and DIY culture, they construct tools that range from specialized shoes to farming machines. Linking agricultural futures with design research, and exploring emerging trends, *Soil Assembly* is a study of ideas and possibilities for a seemingly strange new world.

Seelemann answered the call for ideas by designer Fiona Raby, who titled her field of mentorship *Paradoxical Imaginings: Ideas and Objects*. “We use design to ask questions about the kinds of worlds we want to live in,” says Raby, who chose to accompany Seelemann’s project following her showcase at the Forecast Forum in August 2024. “Seelemann’s focus on material transformations from her Industrial Design training is unusual,” she added. “It’s an opportunity to go deeper into the role of objects, storytelling, and speculative thought, raising questions around non-human worlds and addressing the paradox of an unknowable living ecology within the inert materiality of design.” In early November 2024, Seelemann and Raby convened at the Nordic House in Reykjavík for a condensed work-stay.

Fiona Raby

Paradoxical Imaginings: Ideas and Objects

British designer Fiona Raby is a partner in the New York-based design studio Dunne & Raby, whose practice is centered on Critical Design, which uses design fiction and speculative proposals to challenge conventional notions of the role objects play in everyday life. She is University Professor of Design and Social Inquiry, and co-director, together with studio partner Anthony Dunne, of the Designed Realities Studio at The New School in New York.

“When we recently tried to explain what we do to a colleague in the humanities, he said, ‘Oh, so you design for non-existent worlds?’” says Raby. “We hadn’t thought of it like that, but yes! I think that’s pretty much what we do. At Dunne & Raby, we think of it as designing for the ‘Not Here, Not Now,’” she adds. “We use design to ask questions about the kinds of worlds we want to live in and to put those ideas out in the world to engage with multiple imaginations, the collective imagination.”



“I have been mentoring in different forms for the last thirty years. I grew up in a creative environment with a community of independently minded practitioners and although we didn’t know it at the time, we all

mentored each other through our early struggles. There were less opportunities for experimentation outside of teaching, so I have always had this mindset of exploring something collectively—each bringing their own perspective—which is both inspirational and supportive.” FIONA RABY



Raby is a co-author, together with Dunne, of *Design Noir* (2000, 2021) and *Speculative Everything* (2013). Her projects are in several permanent institutional collections, including MoMA, New York; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and MAK, Vienna. In 2021, Raby was made a Royal Designer for Industry (RDI) and Life Fellow by the Royal Society of Arts (UK). Dunne & Raby received the inaugural MIT Media Lab Award (US) in 2015.

As a mentor, Raby sought to accompany design practitioners inspired by these kinds of inquiries. She looked for projects by that would stretch their thinking and imagination, explore abstraction, and engage with unexpected logics and de-familiarization.

Soil Searching

In *Soil Assembly* Johanna Seeleemann explores new experimental methods of farming, nutrient production, and tools to build new soil ecosystems.

by WILL JENNINGS

The field of design is expanding. While we understand designers as those who create the furniture, objects, tools, and systems we use in our everyday lives, some designers think bigger and deeper into the future, with the field of speculative design serving as a framework for such imagining. “A good way of defining what design does is that it can shape people’s behavior; it defines a certain relation we have to the world and how we interact with the world,” Johanna Seeleemann says of her relationship to a field that’s engaged with pushing boundaries, forging new perspectives, and imagining potential solutions to our future’s ecological needs.

As half of the New York-based studio Dunne & Raby, Fiona Raby is a co-author of the 2013 book *Speculative Design*, which Seeleemann deems “the Bible of the design field—a very simply written, well explained story of where this whole idea of speculative design comes from.” Seeleemann found out about Forecast through Raby’s Instagram account, who she’d been following for many years. It turns out Raby was also an Instagram follower of Seeleemann’s, so when the two met for the first time at the Forecast Forum in August 2024, there was familiarity with each other’s practice—though neither knew then that the following few months would be such a period of strong collaboration and intertwined research.

Speculative design can start with creative narratives as ways of searching for as-yet-unknown outcomes. As a prospective mentee, Seeleemann showcased her research with a performative provocation suggesting experimental new methods of farming, nutrient production, and tools to build new soil ecosystems. It was a way of emphasizing the complexity and richness of soils, and a gesture towards imagining new relationships between the soil and us humans. “We have had the same farming practices for 10,000 years, maybe we should reconsider,” says Seeleemann.

Performing Design

The performative aspect proved both challenging and inspiring. “We had a theater director who could assist us, helping us construct the storyline,” the designer recalls. “Then we had a stage manager, light technicians, and all the people you would need

Will Jennings is a writer, educator, and curator based in London, interested in how arts and architectures intersect. He is editor of the online platform *recessed.space* as well as writing widely for art and architectural publications. He teaches at UCL Bartlett School of Architecture and the University of Greenwich, is director of art charity Hypha Studios, and is a member of the Association of International Art Critics.



if you work performatively—we learned a lot!” Forecast can take practitioners out of their comfort zone, and for a designer more used to reading, drawing, and studio-based practices, Seeleemann was pushed to expand her way of thinking. A circle of soil was projected onto Radialsystem’s floor, an enlarged video detail of not only soil but the insects, worms, microbes, and diverse materials that make up the earth we humans often take for granted.

The film showed just how full of life soil is, while a performer walked over the projection in lightweight sledge-like shoes, presenting minimal contact with the floor. The shoe-as-tool took inspiration from Southern French shepherds who historically navigated uneven terrains on stilts, allowing high

vantage over their flocks. A crackling sound playing in the background was recorded using a geophone, a microphone designed to record vibrations of the earth. This approach to exploring design was a reason Raby relishes her Forecast mentorship. “It’s a world I know very little about,” she says, “and having the opportunity to consider design objects within a performative context is something I was very curious to learn.”

Seeleemann had already been working on projects looking at German farming practices and the intent had been to link these parallel projects with new research for Forecast. But having been awarded with the mentorship, she realized that the platform offered unique opportunities to go further and design projects “not bound to any client,

and into a certain kind of imaginative space.” It also offered her the opportunity to move the project away from German soil and into a more extreme landscape, perhaps more suited to future ecological imaginaries.

Iceland as Laboratory

Ahead of the Forum, Raby had plans to take her chosen mentee on a research trip to Iceland, and after selecting Seelemann the trip revealed unexpected poetic foresight. Born in Leipzig, Seelemann had initially started an interior design bachelor’s degree at Burg Giebichenstein Kunsthochschule Halle before switching to industrial design. While studying, she visited Iceland on an academic exchange, immediately enjoying the country’s approach to design education. “They were way more conceptual, they had more layers and looked at local production,” she says. She swapped school and stayed there. It started a relationship with Iceland, its

landscapes, people, and processes that has remained, offering rich understanding of the place ahead of Raby’s research trip. In 2015 at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, Seelemann and fellow students conceived the *Willow Project*, an investigation into the destruction of the island’s forests and vegetation following the introduction of sheep, proposing willow forestation to support new industries and vernacular design cultures. A year later, for the Icelandic Research Fund, the *Ministry of Icelandic Vegetables* was founded by Seelemann and five other designers, exploring how wasted rutabaga crops (Swedish turnip) might be utilized to create syrup and ethanol, the root ingredients for alcohol and sugar industries, both of which currently reliant upon carbon-intensive imports.

“The Iceland study trip was immensely important and a turning point in the project,” Raby says, “taking both of us out of our everyday situations and mindsets,



“A person with a certain skillset to bridge different fields and channel it towards tangible propositions which are object focused, and maybe also scenario focused.”

immersing us in a very different reality.” On a tour compressed with meetings and creative exploration, the pair examined landscapes Raby describes as “rock, lava, glaciers, ice caves, lava tunnels, and turf houses,” a territory that aided Seelemann to “disengage from rational thought and let her imagination float.”

Seelemann’s moodboard of the trip contains many landscape photographs, though they do not dwell solely on the romantic and well-known rugged Icelandic beauty. Yes, there are images of rocks, glaciers, and sublime vistas, but the designer’s eye repeatedly noticed ways in which humans worked with nature, sometimes resulting in what many may consider prosaic or ugly: Geothermal machinery puncturing the earth; solid metal hooks fixed deeply into glaciers; reindeer antlers painted with luminescence so drivers can avoid them; weather measuring units; water infrastructure; pylons; communication masts; industrial structures, and found objects that speak to an Icelandic language of place distant from the romantic. It is this language that Seelemann hopes might “consider the non-human and other-than-human, that isn’t just imitating natural process, but acknowledges our industrial histories.”

Breadth of Imagination

The shared collaborative research was suitably broad in the fields and sectors they drew ideas from, though Raby says that a designer “can never know everything. Nothing ever

finishes, things can evolve and be different depending on budgets and people, possibilities are fluid.”

A breadth of imagination, on the other hand, is key to what Seelemann thinks a designer is: “a person with a certain skillset to bridge different fields and channel it towards tangible propositions which are object focused, and maybe also scenario focused.”

The outcomes of Seelemann’s design speculation—machines of various scales, each telling a different story—only offer a small glimpse into the journey undertaken. One important outcome of the process is, however, that Raby and Seelemann are no longer just Instagram acquaintances, but are now firmly entwined in one another’s creative processes—and who knows where that new journey might lead.

Project credits

Sound design: Áskell Harðarson
Animation: Felix Hobrucker
Sound recordings: Magnús Bergsson
Voice: Þuríður Blær Jóhannsdóttir
Text contribution: Ólafur Gestur Arnals
Development assistance:
Laura Laipple, Lion Sanguinette



Read and see more about
Johanna Seelemann’s project.

[forecast-platform.com/mentee/
johanna-seelemann/](https://forecast-platform.com/mentee/johanna-seelemann/)

A person is shown from the side, leaning over a dark table in a dimly lit room. Their hands are resting on the table surface. A microphone is positioned on the table to the right, pointing towards the person. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the person's arms and the table's surface against a dark background.

CAMIL NAVARRO

ECOLOGICAL ASSEMBLAGE

A sonorous reflection
on water-risk issues in Chile

MENTOR
UTE WASSERMANN

Paris-based Chilean artist Camil Navarro's practice has its roots in theater, dance, and performance. Navarro's Forecast project stems from an analysis of and a reflection on water-risk issues around the Aconcagua River Basin in Chile, where the Petorca River has dried up as a result of a global fruit industry.

In Navarro's performance piece, a sonorous assemblage weaves dissonant voices, somatic practices, and the sounds of water and nature into a polyphonic set of autonomous melodies. Through a performative process of dehydrating her body, Navarro invokes an ecological entity and seeks to explore the potentialities that arise from such interaction. What strategies can we explore to stimulate an understanding of symbiosis? And how can an absent ecological entity be present in one's perception?

Composer and performer Ute Wassermann, who titled her field of mentorship *Expanding Your Voice*, chose to accompany Navarro's project following her showcase at the Forecast Forum. Wassermann said: "I was moved by Camil Navarro's research into an environmental disaster for her project. With her intense somatic performance, they explored how an absent ecological entity can be present in one's perception." In mid-November 2024, Navarro and Wassermann convened in Istanbul for a work-stay at Salt Galata, to continue developing the work.

Ute Wassermann

Expanding Your Voice

Ute Wassermann is a German voice artist, composer, performer, and improviser. At the core of Wassermann's research is an ongoing and uncompromising exploration of her voice. Her singing style transcends the traditional usage of the human voice, resulting in multidimensional sculptural sounds that oscillate between electronic, animalistic, inorganic, and human qualities. Wassermann takes this to the extreme by creating a visceral sound-space through the use of different types of microphones.

In her 2015 solo album *strange songs for voice and birdcalls* (TREADER, UK), for example, she embodies a hybrid vocal persona with tone-colors consisting of swirling, trilling, screeching, sighing, breathing, and vocalizing. She extends the voice and renders it alien by including the use of bird whistles, lo-fi electronics, resonators, field recordings, and everyday objects. Wassermann's performances create imaginary acoustic habitats in which her chameleon-like voice forms a collaboration with the voices of



“During my art studies, Danish composer and Fluxus artist Henning Christiansen was my most important mentor. He involved me as a performer in his productions outside the art academy, not as a student

but as a professional musician. That was a great boost to my self-confidence at a young age. His multifaceted remarks were sometimes hard to fully grasp at first, but they stayed with me and unravelled over time—which made me think for myself. My favorite quote of his is ‘Freedom is around the corner.’ His mentoring was not a top-down process, but about sharing—a performance, a conversation, a phone call, a walk, a letter, a laugh, or a dinner.” UTE WASSERMANN



Schwebeteilchen, Sabine Vogel and Ute Wassermann). Photo: Cristina Marx / photomusix

other-than-humans as well as sounds from raw materials and objects.

Wassermann has premiered numerous compositions written especially for her voice with ensembles and orchestras and has been increasingly realizing audiovisual voice performances, installations, and compositions for soloists and ensembles. She has received commissions by Ryogoku Art Festival, Japan; WDR; The University of Amsterdam; Poetica Sonora / Fonoteca Nacional, Mexico City; Transart Festival, Bolzano; The Maulwerker vocal ensemble, Berlin; Distractfold Ensemble, Huddersfield; Ruhrtriennale, Bochum; MaerzMusik, Berlin; Villa Aurora, Los Angeles; and Casa de Lago UNAM, Mexico City.

As a mentor, Wassermann sought practitioners who question “the binary of the human and other-than-human world, of the self and the environment.” Especially interested in what could be gained through improvisation and experimentation, she added: “I believe in the transformative power of accidents.”

Getting in Tune with Ecological Entities

Performer Camil Navarro's sound project *Ecological Assemblages* explores the connection between sound and movement and the body's own hydrological processes.

Interview by PABLO LARIOS

What could a sonic experience of a dried-up landscape sound like? And what form can a physical performance on ecological topics take on? Through somatic practices that produce sounds and cause the performer's body to dehydrate, Camil Navarro connects her own body to the drying-up of a river in Chile that can no longer be seen, yet whose underground streams are still audible.

PABLO LARIOS: Tell me about your project, *Ecological Assemblage*.

CAMIL NAVARRO: I'm a performer and performance artist, working with my body and my voice. My project *Ecological Assemblage* is a performance inspired by issues being faced right now by people in Chile, specifically the Yoaycán and Petorca communities



Ecological Assemblage is conceived as a somatic and reflective work that emerges from an analysis and reflection of the water risk problem (or work in the basin) of the Yoaycán water valley, specifically in the lower of the Petorca River basin, the communities of Guayacán and Petorca in the center of Chile. The reality for the people of the province is to have to survive with 70% less water than any inhabitant of the country because of the floods that, although they still form a collective memory of those who were born, raised and stayed in these territories. The aesthetic impact of this problem is perceived through the sound of water trucks that supply drinking water to the inhabitants of the desert landscape, and the absence of underground water sources that, as a ghost, are vaguely heard in the middle of silence and eroded soil.



along the River Aconcagua in the north of the country. The Petorca River, on which these communities depend, has dried up completely—or at least that’s what I thought when I began the project and visited these places myself.

What did you learn when you spoke with people in this region?

After I went there to conduct interviews and do research, I learned something interesting. Despite the challenges faced by these river communities—many of whom have been forced to leave the region—I was actually wrong

in assuming that there is no water in the river. In fact, the water is still there—you can still hear it. It’s underground. The river has dried up, but as an ecological entity, the river is still there; children born here can hear the river, just not see it. That was the catalyzer of this project, which builds on the connection between sound and movement and the body’s own hydrological processes.

How did this shape your approach to the project?

I began this project by doing two performances in Santiago de Chile. One performance was titled *Ecological Ghost*. For this sound performance, which I developed together with a sound artist, I made somatic exercises

Pablo Larios is a writer, editor, and an international editor at *Artforum*. He lives in Berlin.



Photo: Stephan Talneau (film still)

inspired by the notion of a “hybrid body,” sometimes involving becoming dehydrated. I performed exercises of repetition and movement for which I repeated certain bodily gestures, resulting in the emergence of sounds. The sound artist I worked with constructed interferences and patterns and modified the sound of my voice to create an ecosystem based on these movements.

How have you worked with your Forecast mentor, Ute Wasserman? What are the other ideas that influenced this project?

Ute is very interested in sound technologies, and her works are inspired by ecological beings and entities and sounds from nature. Another influence was the writer Timothy Morton, especially a book called *Humankind*:

Solidarity with Non-Human People. There, he writes about hyper-objects and the big mass of ecological entities as beings that you cannot see and touch directly but can only perceive their manifestation in space and time. Working with that idea, I decided to illuminate just parts of my body—turning into an instrument and an ecological being, acting as a voice recorder.

How has the project changed since your performance at the Forecast Forum?

The seed of the project was already there, but after working on it with Ute, and especially following our residency in Istanbul, I realized that I was mistaken in my initial effort, which approached these issues in too *human* of a way. Now, I’m working in a gestural laboratory with dancers, here in Paris, where I live. Applying these ideas to ecological entities, geographical entities, and my experience of being part of a landscape, there is now less movement, less execution, and less intensity—now, the focus is on the experience of sound, and the contemplative process of getting in tune with these ecological entities.

What’s the link, for you, between sound and movement?

Here, movements and gestures don’t just come from anywhere—they come from a hydrological process that is a manifestation of the water that’s a part of my body, as a surface. In my work on the body’s movements, I have explored three iterations, such as evapotranspiration—letting out the amount of water in my body. Through these exercises, sounds emerged in an undetermined way. It was the body’s hydrological process.

“I wanted to make something that people could visit as a contemplative experience, as if they were entering a landscape.”

How was this work realized or continued?

At its inception, it was a twenty-minute performance—I wanted to make something that people could visit as a contemplative experience, as if they were entering a landscape. That idea is still there, but with Ute we are now working on a composition with sounds. I take sounds and activate them with different voice recorders; these are related

to the sound of my body and my voice, resulting in an indeterminate structure.

What do you want viewers to take away from your work?

I want viewers to enter a sonic experience of a dry landscape. I introduce the audience to a text that provides context on the project and this ecological issue—showing, for instance, how it’s connected to the extractive practices of the avocado industry in Chile. Avocado manufacturers project an image of lush, beautiful gardens; yet just beyond that, there’s a dry territory that’s been dried out of water. The people who live there continue to do so because they think they belong to the land; yet there is no water anymore, and tanker trucks need to be brought in to deliver drinking water. By conveying the appearance of that landscape to the audience, I want to make them understand these issues.



Project credits

Concept and Performance:
Camil Navarro
Space and Lighting designer:
Matías Segura



Read and see more about
Camil Navarro's project.

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camil-navarro/](https://forecast-platform.com/mentee/camil-navarro/)

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