



Spora

Works currently on view by: Raven Chacon, Lee Mary Manning, Hendl Helen Mirra, Christian Nyampeta with Cass Nakashima, Uriel Orlow, Jenna Sutela, Vivian Suter

In May 2023, Swiss Institute launched *Spora*, a curatorial initiative centered in SI's institutional imperative to integrate environmental consciousness and climate action into all facets of the institution. Like spores spreading throughout the physical structure of our building and permeating the immaterial processes of SI, *Spora* is an experiment that explores what a practice of environmental institutional critique could be.

Unfolding and growing over the course of two years, the artworks in the project are on long-term view in the non-gallery spaces of SI. In the stairways, hallways, roof, and other interstitial spaces, artists have contributed to the daily life, maintenance and functioning of the building with artworks that take shape through compost, plants, wall paint, public space and more. These include Jenna Sutela's earth battery-powered oracle, Vivian Suter's weather-exposed mural, Hendl Helen Mirra's chance-determined background painting, Uriel Orlow's planters filled with weeds from the surrounding neighborhood, Christian Nyampeta's hosting structure that functions simultaneously as a floor sculpture, stage and outdoor seating furniture, a newly composed score as a large-scale mural by Raven Chacon, and Lee Mary Manning's photographs merging private and public, natural and urban spaces.

The artworks at the core of *Spora* are accompanied by the institution's initial steps towards climate action, begun in 2022, which take form as a thorough analysis of SI's carbon emissions through transport, travel, energy, and other ecological and social factors, and a plan of actions developed with the entire SI team for reducing the institution's environmental impact. SI will publish and share this process with the hopes to sprout inspiration and collaboration across institutional boundaries. *Spora* is conceived as an open-ended approach, which acknowledges that this is a continuous project that will generate more questions than answers. It is an attempt to germinate change while acknowledging context and limitations, with the understanding that this process is imperfect but urgent.

Spora and the accompanying event series, *These Seasons*, as well as the institutional initiatives of climate action, propose a start to a morphing process of reflection and transformation.

Spora is made possible by Teiger Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Consulate General of Finland in New York City. The project is organized by Stefanie Hessler, Director, Alison Coplan, Chief Curator, and KJ Abudu, Assistant Curator.

Works List:

Raven Chacon, *Vertical Neighbors*, 2024

Large format outdoor score

Vertical Neighbors is a composition for pairs of the same brass horn instrument. The score exists as a set of murals, visible to one or more musicians on the ground and their counterparts in an elevated position. A performance of this composition becomes an acknowledgement of vertical orientations as temporal relationships, aligning past and future knowledge. The term “vertical neighbors” was first relayed to Chacon by lawyer, activist and joik (traditional Sámi song) artist, Ánde Somby, to refer to relatives past, present and future who co-exist in vertical dimensions.

Lee Mary Manning

A Formal Feeling, 2023

And all the lives we ever lived and all the lives to be are full of trees and changing leaves (For Jenni), 2023

Lifes Rich, 2023

Chromogenic prints, paper, mat board, artist's frame

Lee Mary Manning's photographs are studies of people and sites of urban nature-cultures in the East Village and beyond. They connect the inside spaces of galleries, artists' studios and domestic environments with dancers moving against the backdrop of a building in Chelsea, arboreal autumn foliage, or a bicycle leaning against a tree. Manning's photo collages of the city explore movement set against its built environments while interrogating dualisms of nature and culture, interior and exterior, motion and stillness.

Hendl Helen Mirra, *Harmless mistake*, 2023

Mistakenly mixed wall paint

Harmless mistake centers errors as generative moments. Mirra's instructions developed for SI intend for any painting repairs in the interstitial spaces of the gallery to be performed with leftover and “mistake” paint, mixed erroneously in the wrong color and discarded by paint shops. Inspired by John Cage's work with Crown Point Press in San Francisco, for which he used leftover ink from other artists' projects, the intervention in SI's installation and maintenance work will reduce the amount of new paint consumed while leaving traces of what has come before on the walls.

Christian Nyampeta with Cass Nakashima, *A Flower Yet To Be Named*, 2024

Natural wood, plywood, paint, fixtures, original composite of salvaged wood with bio and non-bio resin including gelatin, glycerin, potato starch, citric acid, vinegar, resin, salvaged wood shavings, madder root, alum, dish soap, water

Construction and assembly: Ptaceck Home

Located on SI's rooftop and intended for all ages, *A Flower Yet To Be Named* is a hosting structure that functions simultaneously as a floor sculpture, a stage, and when broken up into its smaller modular units, as outdoor seating furniture. The platforms are modeled in response to entries from *The Sonic Archives of Black Literature*, a series of audio recordings from the 1970s and 1980s featuring conversations with major figures of Francophone African literature, philosophy, and politics. Featured in the series is a dialogue with Mauritian writer and painter, Malcolm de Chazal, who created vivid, cosmic renderings of the natural world. Nyampeta and Nakashima's work spatializes a specific painting by Chazal, which vibrantly depicts a flower. For de Chazal, an encounter with flowers reveals what love really is in the cosmic, human, and universal sense of the word: to become one another. Inspired by Chazal's oeuvre and bygone sonic gatherings, *A Flower Yet To Be Named* choreographs conditions of dynamic conviviality and collective pedagogy for future talks, workshops, listening sessions, screenings, performances and celebrations at SI.

Uriel Orlow, *Welcome Weeds*, 2024-ongoing

Custom planters, local edible/medicinal weeds including nettles, red clover, plantain, sorrel, lemon balm, nepeta, sow thistle, Canada thistle

Featuring 4 planters in the back stairway and roof of SI, *Welcome Weeds* hosts edible and medicinal plants commonly found growing wild in the surrounding neighborhood. Thriving in overlooked or in-between spaces of the city, in cracks and vacant lots, these plants, which are often referred to as weeds, possess remarkable adaptive and protective qualities. By inviting them indoors, where they will be cared for and maintained by the institution, Orlow celebrates their resilience and draws attention to their often-overlooked healing powers. Additionally, *Welcome Weeds* honors the legacy of community gardens in the East Village and the fertile history and vibrant networks they cultivate within the urban environment. The project also pays tribute to the pioneering NYC-based artists who have repurposed liminal urban spaces with vegetal interventions that foster ecological awareness including Agnes Denes, Cecilia Vicuña, Becky Howland, Gordon Matta-Clark, Linda Goode Bryant, and many others. Visitors are invited to take some leaves from the planters for their own use and consumption.

Jenna Sutela, *Vermi-Sibyl*, 2023

Acrylic, powder coated steel, polyester, copper, aluminum, environmental sensors, wires, single-board computer and microcontroller, food scraps, earthworms, microorganisms, soil, speaker

Team: Vanda Skácalová and hoyahelper / Thank you: Ertl & Zull, arrit Sattlerei and Elvia Wilk

Vermi-Sibyl conjures a figure from the television series, *The Muppet Show*, a matronly compost-pile named Marjorie. Because everything from vegetal and fruit scraps to coffee grounds and organic leftovers is deposited in her, Marjorie knows all; she is an oracle. For this new project developed especially for SI, Sutela creates a receptacle into which staff deposit their compostable materials. Garnering the electrochemical reactions in the soil as an earth battery, the compost powers a sound installation, transmitting oracular messages to the East Village.

Vivian Suter, *Untitled (Mural)*, 2023

Mixed media on wall

Vivian Suter's painting on the building adjacent to SI and facing St Marks Pl is the artist's first mural work to date. Suter is known for painting large-scale canvases in the forest in Guatemala, where she exposes them to sunlight and rain, falling leaves and critters passing. Exposed here to the elements of New York, Suter's mural will change over time, affected by weather as much as the pollution of the city. In the artist's words, Suter works *with* nature, not against it.