

# Religar, from the Forest Time Project



This series of poetry emerged from deeply listening to seven plants who came to the stage at Estufa Fria, Lisbon, to participate in an artistic journey, speak to the people and express their messages through poetry. The *Religar* cycle is part of a larger project, Forest Time, which took place across two spaces, Estufa Fria de Lisboa – a botanical garden of tropical plants, and Monsanto Forest Park – a forest in Lisbon planted about ninety years ago, a biodiversity hotspot and a green lung of Lisbon. *Religar* explores seven plants and their ecological, historical, cultural and spiritual meaning – both in their place of origin and their extensive sphere of influence beyond. The plants' stories and messages are retold by the artist through poetry, a series of calligraphy works on paper and a set of immersive art experiences.

I approached this project by stepping into the space of Estufa Fria to go beyond the veil of colonial botany and mere technical descriptions, inviting the plants to join a council, a circle, to speak and reveal their true names and their true purpose of being here, as well as their message to humanity. I asked them the following questions, after which certain answers and guidance were given to me directly by the plants and put in the form of poetry. All the poems are written in the voice of the plant as if they were speaking to the human directly.

- What is your name?
- What is your journey?
- What is your story?
- What is your gift?
- What is your essence?
- What is your message?

## EMPTY YOURSELF

*(Fatsia japonica)*

What if I told you  
You come to me  
To empty yourself

Everything  
That weighs you down  
Throw it in the water!

Before you move  
Further  
Unaware  
Step on my being  
Judge  
Classify  
Speak as if you know  
Without tasting bitterness  
Or sweetness  
Blow it in the air!

Stay with me  
A minute  
An hour  
A day  
A moon  
A turn  
Come back  
As if you never  
Spoke to me  
Everything else  
That pulls you  
Out of this moment  
Toss it in the fire!

Your clock  
Your dates

EMETS

Your calendars  
Your deadlines  
Your commitments  
Your rush hours  
Your being late  
Your lack of time

Your horror  
For the world  
Disguised as unrest

Your fear  
Of the unknown  
Tagged as death

Your shame of what's  
Been done  
Reading regret

Your hate to  
Need to box  
Unmeasurable  
Compost it!

Now I am grateful  
Now I can teach you  
What is your story?  
What is your gift?  
What is your essence?  
What is your message?  
Throw them in the water!

HAIPU'U PULU  
*(Cibotium glaucum)*

My shadow that  
 Softens  
 Your wounds  
 Grows as my day  
 Slows  
 To patiently meet my ground  
 To meet the ones unseen

Pulu Pulu Pulu

My shadow that  
 Governs your strength  
 Simmers in our mother's belly  
 To nourish your hungry breath  
 Before it withers away  
 Doubting its own worth

Pulu Pulu Pulu

My shadow that  
 Guards your quest  
 Clears away  
 The tired time from your body  
 While you fall asleep  
 In the old crater's nest

Pulu Pulu Pulu

My shadow that  
 Calls your voice  
 Only your bones remember  
 Why did you wake up again?  
 To dream an impossible earth  
 In spite of the bleak prophecy

EMETS

Pulu Pulu Pulu

My shadow

That speaks your law  
The way you own your future  
I own my home  
Our soil always returns to us  
What has been received by her

CHIRIC SANANGO

*(Brunfelsia latifolia)*

Slow down Slow down Slow down  
Listen

All you have now

Is your heart  
Every human moment of time  
I hear it in the echo  
Of my breath

Listen

I belong

To this very piece of dirt  
With all my family  
You do not know their names  
But they know your pain

Listen

The nauseating fever

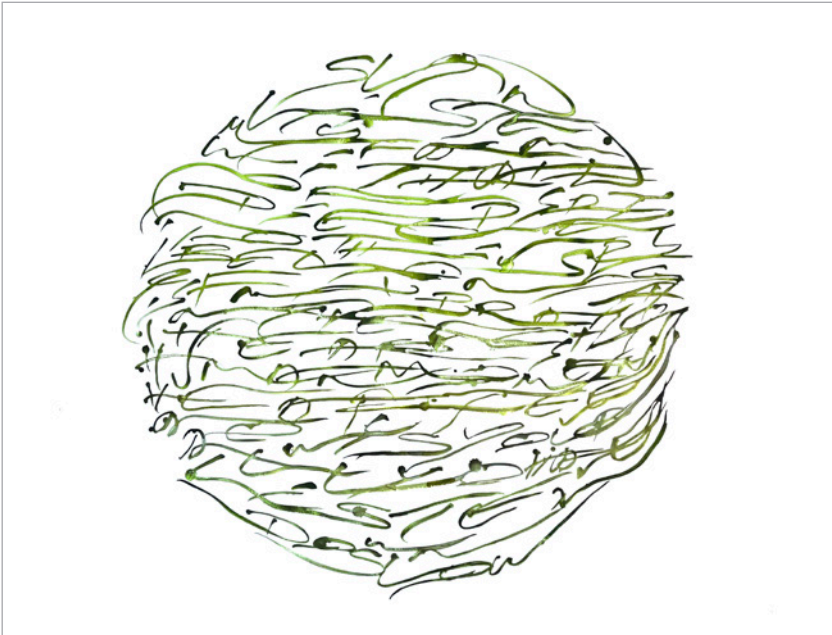
Of the world  
Draws its claws  
Into your chest  
This sickness is not yours

If you melt it down  
I will weave it into a song

Listen

Tour your heart  
With me to the wild place within  
Where your power  
Has petrified into a rock  
This is your finest medicine  
Crush it  
Grind it fine  
Take it in

Listen



Chiric Sanango, *Brunfelsia latifolia*, Watercolour on paper, 2023, 162x114 cm

TARO  
(*Colocasia esculenta*)

The greatest life force of all  
Grows from the centre of the earth  
The womb of gravity  
The bowl of kalo  
An everlasting time  
Once offered  
Forever intertwined

Of all the stories  
One has not been told  
Our common root

Hold to that thread  
Never let it go  
It is your light  
Through dangers of the path

Before the deepest darkness  
Could be ever savoured

Before a blinded seed  
Could be ever woken up

Before my way of being  
Could be ever named

Before my presence  
Could be ever witnessed in your dream

Before my body  
Could be ever pounded into a meal

Before my gift  
Could be ever doubted by your mind

Before my freedom  
    Could be ever claimed by greed

Before our thread  
    Could be ever split in two

Before the loom  
    Could be imagined – weft and weave

Before the outcomes of your verdicts  
    Could be ever shaken off

Before unspeakable  
    Could be agreed by you

Before the time has ripened  
    For us to hear each other

The greatest lifeforce of all  
    Grows from the centre of the earth  
    The womb of gravity  
    The bowl of kalo  
    An everlasting time  
    Once offered  
    Forever intertwined

Of all the stories  
    One has not been told  
    Our common root

**PAPYRUS BOAT**  
*(Cyperus papyrus)*

The words I weave  
    Around you  
    Line by line  
    Come to protect



Your name  
Vowel by vowel  
Into a fine spell

Our floating world  
Swells and tides  
Revere  
Our journeys  
Unsettled, free  
Across the Great Green  
Into the infinite

The clarity  
I've soaked  
Into my thirsty body  
Shaped with your hands  
What has been meant for you  
Will be uttered  
Distilled to sound

The void you  
Reach in silence  
Unroll your scroll  
With light  
Unriddle your life  
Unravel your way  
Healer of all kin

The muddiest water  
Diluted with ills  
Unwanted, wasted  
Run through me  
Into the clearest stream  
Ripple by ripple  
Renewed eternally

The times  
I sailed with you  
Land after land



Papyrus boat, *Cyperus papyrus*, Watercolour on paper, 2023, 114x169 cm

A vessel of visions  
Made for you to return  
Home  
Your choice still remains

**PEREGRINATION**  
(*Coffea arabica*)

“What you seek  
Is seeking you”<sup>1</sup>

One road that comes from afar  
Never travelled by you

1 Rumi

The longing for the present  
What do you need to awaken?  
What sort of alchemy needs to happen  
Between us?

We both are  
The points of departure  
I am calling your being  
Stirring ecosphere  
Blending overtones  
This path is liquid  
Honouring tracks  
Etched into the land

Our encounter cannot be hurried  
Spiraling towards the centre  
From both ends  
I am not the goal of your journey  
I am its guardian  
Aid for your acute mind

There are two ways  
Of knowing the world  
By measure or by breath  
You are your own apprentice  
Radical reciprocity  
Your sharpest tool

We are mutually responsible  
To each other  
The colour of magic  
Is your choice  
I am powered  
By all the prayers infused  
Into my grounds

I am offering them to you

## RELIGAR

*(Nicotiana tabacum & Nicotiana rustica)*

Everything that you are not  
 Free yourself from it  
 To witness who you are  
 Besides  
 The body of bones  
 The nervous clumps  
 Of blood

Everything that I am not  
 Is just a moment of history  
 I fall to rise with you  
 To show you what  
 Powers you hold  
 I reach for you  
 To teach you

Everything that you heard  
 Enter your ears  
 Overshadows your growth  
 Examine deeply  
*The paths you cut*  
 Traces left  
 Unquestioned

Every piece you disowned  
 Rejected mindlessly  
 Call back Call back  
 Assemble yourself  
 Around your breath  
 Song comes alive  
 In your throat

Everything that you took  
 In ignorance

EMETS

Without permission  
Has turned against your  
Violence  
Surrender  
Do not fight

Everything that you hurt  
Troubles your mind  
Will be blown away  
For when comes the time  
Land heals herself  
With the medicine  
She grows



Religar *Nicotiana tabacum* & *Nicotiana rustica*, Watercolour on paper, 2023, 75x110 cm

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**Evgenia Emets** (b. 1979) is an international artist and poet working with forest ecology and community creating visual art, films, artist's books and large-scale ecological artworks. Eternal Forest (launched 2018), an ongoing multidisciplinary project, marks an integration of ecological thinking into her art. Eternal Forest is creating a network of 1,000 forest sanctuaries to be protected for 1,000 years through art and community. Eternal Forest has been presented in Portugal, Spain, Mexico and the UK: Bienal de Coruche in 2019 and CI.CLO / Bienal Fotografia do Porto, Roots & Seeds, Quo Artis, Barcelona in 2021, Pela Terra, an encounter for earth and community in Idanha-a-Velha, Portugal in 2023 and at Galeria Municipal do Porto, Jardins do Palácio de Cristal in 2024. Recent solo shows: 2022, National Museum of Natural History and Science and Botanical Garden of Lisbon, 2023, Forest Time, Estufa Fria and Monsanto Forest Park in Lisbon, 2024, Rewilding Time, Hall of Biodiversity – Ciência Viva Center, Porto. Evgenia's visual works and artists' books are in museums (Stella Art Foundation and MOMA, Russia), libraries (National Poetry Library, London, British Library and Gulbenkian Art Library) and private collections in the UK, Europe, Japan and Russia.

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