

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

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

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

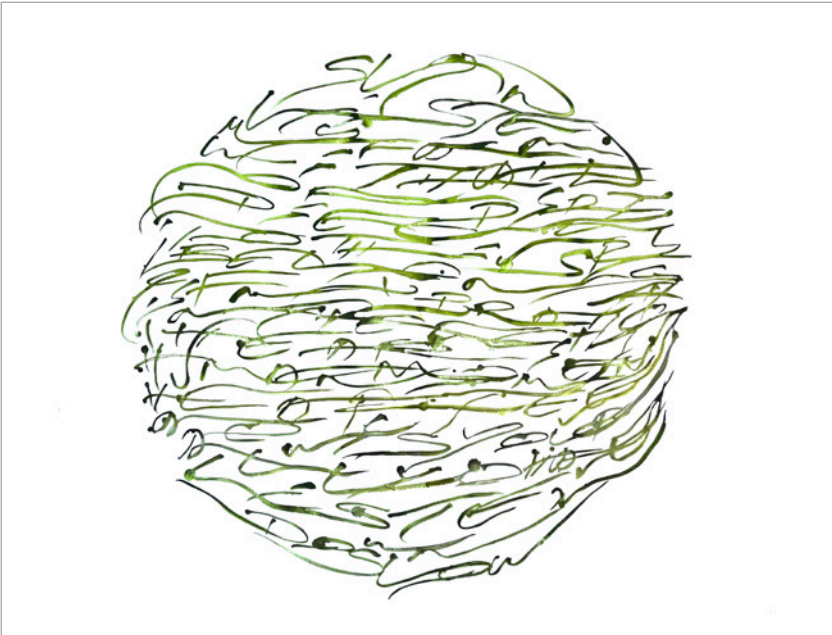
The nauseating fever
 Of the world
 Draws its claws
 Into your chest
 This sickness is not yours

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 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

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”¹

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

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

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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