



ar/ge kunst

# Songs To You About You

an exhibition by

## Islands Songs

(Nicolas Perret & Silvia Ploner)



curated by

Emanuele Guidi

room one

### The Forest Within — Within the Forest

*a collaboration with*  
César Enrique Giraldo Herrera

2018

7.1 channel sound installation

28'

Text: César Enrique Giraldo Herrera  
& Islands Songs

Voice: César Enrique Giraldo Herrera

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All sounds are derived from field recordings  
from the Colombian Amazon rainforest,  
non-human and human vocalisations,  
VLF recordings and modular synthesis.

room two

### For Indigenous Yeasts and other Microbes

*a collaboration with*  
Charlemagne Palestine & Thomas Niedermayr

2018

sound environment in three acts

headphones

length varies

08.09. — 10.11.2018

Opening  
07.09.2018, 6 pm

“You must not think hard  
in a dark night.  
Otherwise, you might wake them up.”

“Wake whom?”

“Them.”

“You must not name them.  
Unless you want them to visit.”

“When they arrive, you will feel  
the creeps running  
through your spine ...

When they settle, a rash ...

When they own you,  
they will bend your bones  
and your mind.”

Songs To You About You is produced by the artists, ar/ge kunst,  
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Deutschlandfunk Kultur



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**T**hrough microbiology, we have recently understood that microscopic entities – normally inaudible and invisible to the naked eye – inhabit air, water and land, but also that they inhabit us, as they do plants and other animals, building complex ecosystems called microbiomes. We have recognised that we are made of cells, but more importantly, that we are hosts to a highly diverse community of microbes, mostly bacteria, comprising up to 50% of the cells in our body, making us 50% non-human by the cell. Microbial cells have evolved in symbiosis with our mammalian cells. They continuously build and reshape our bodies, contribute to our nutrition, our development, our immunity and behaviour.

It is now also widely accepted that microorganisms are social beings and that they communicate with each other as well as with other species. More than that, recent technological advances have made it possible to understand that some microbial cells use sound and other signals that are physical in nature to communicate. Researchers have been able to identify the frequencies at which certain microbes vibrate. They have seen that every particle has a unique natural frequency of vibration and therefore produces a distinctive sound.

Furthermore, it has been observed that microbial cells absorb more energy when the frequency of the incoming vibration matches their natural frequency of vibration. This suggests that cells could be more receptive to the sounds generated by cells of the same species and may even be able to sense their own frequencies in a noisy environment. All this implies that a physical signal such as a sound could be a carrier of specific information. Proving such a theory would require much more work, says microbiologist Gemma Reguera, but she is convinced that

*Physical signalling, could be an ancestral language of all living forms and, perhaps, a key code to decipher if we want to understand the microbial conversations that have for so long remained inaudible.*

Colombian anthropologist and biologist César Enrique Giraldo Herrera suggests that microbial communication is not enigmatic to all. In his recently published book, *Microbes and Other Shamanic Beings* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), he suggests that the entities with which Lowland South American shamans interact have more in common

with microbial ecology than with the terms ‘spirits’ and ‘souls’, introduced by Christian missionaries as part of the colonial effort of conversion.

He develops arguments suggesting that human senses allow the unaided perception of the microbial world and that shamans employ techniques that enhance precisely these kinds of perception.

What if shamans have been smelling, seeing, hearing and experiencing these beings for more than five thousand years?

#### **Islands Songs (Nicolas Perret & Silvia Ploner)**

live in Berlin and Paris where they have worked together since 2012. Their interest is drawn to territories that transgress anthropocentric and Eurocentric systems of value and move the boundaries of the unknown. Through a syncretic approach to sound – situated between documentary, sound art and electroacoustic music – and with recorded sound material as a base, they undertake long-term projects that result in radio pieces, sound installations, performances and publications.

#### **César Enrique Giraldo Herrera**

is a Colombian biologist and social anthropologist. He is the current Victoria Maltby Junior Research Fellow at Somerville College and an Associate Researcher at the Institute for Science Innovation and Society (InSIS), School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography (SAME), University of Oxford, UK.

**S**ongs To You About You, a project by Berlin-based artist duo Islands Songs, brings western and non-western understandings of the microbial world into dialogue and celebrates the social interactions between humans and microbial communities.

#### **Thomas Niedermayr**

is the winemaker at Hof Gandberg, located in Eppan, 500 to 530 metres above sea level. Organic and sustainable wine cultivation was introduced at Hof Gandberg by Thomas' father Rudolf, from whom he took over in 2012. Since then, Thomas has taken the step from organic to natural wine production.

#### **Charlemagne Palestine**

is an American composer, performer, video and installation artist. Though he is often associated with minimalist composers such as Philip Glass, La Monte Young and Terry Riley, Charlemagne Palestine describes himself as a maximalist. Trained as a cantor, then a carillonneur, he has been creating intense, ritualistic, continuum music for electronic sound sources, bell carillons, crystal glasses, voice, pipe organs, pianos and other keyboard instruments since the 1960s.

Its nucleus is the 7.1 channel sound installation **The Forest Within – Within The Forest**, a collaboration with César Enrique Giraldo Herrera. Entangling a spoken fabulation with a polyphonic speculative score, the piece investigates indigenous narratives and knowledge of the natural world as well as sound and listening as methods of exploration of the ‘non-tangible’.

While the fabulation, co-written by Giraldo Herrera, sounds out animist understandings of reality by adopting various perspectives, the polyphonic score is inspired by shamanic conversations with the ‘forest within’ and delves into interspecies communications in the Amazon rainforest. All sounds are drifted from field recordings made by Islands Songs during a recent field trip to Colombia, non-human and human vocalisations, VLF recordings and modular synthesis.

The installation of **The Forest Within – Within The Forest** at ar/ge kunst is designed as a pure listening space. Eight speakers inhabit the room, creating an environment which the artists think of as a forest of selves.

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**With For Indigenous Yeasts and other Microbes**, the second work presented at ar/ge kunst, Islands Songs have set the process of transforming grape juice into wine to a soundtrack consisting of three acts written for and dedicated to microorganisms active in the production of wine.

The piece is both an experiment with South Tyrolian vintner Thomas Niedermayr (Hof Gandberg) and a soundtrack realised in collaboration with American artist and composer Charlemagne Palestine. It refers to the ancient tradition of humans and microbial communities collaborating to produce food and beverages.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Act I – approx. mid-September 2018**

Sound environment composed of field recordings from the Amazonian rainforest, harmonica tones and electronics. The sound environment is played to a fermenting wine barrel in Thomas Niedermayr's cellar through a surface speaker and to a human audience at ar/ge kunst via headphones once the must enters the barrel.

#### **Act II – Saturday, 29 September 2018**

Performance for microbes and humans by Charlemagne Palestine in the context of the Transart Festival at Hof Gandberg and Schloss Gandegg, Appiano.

#### **Act III – approx. mid-October 2018 until the end of the fermentation process**

Recordings from Act II integrate the Act I sound environment. This confluence is played to the wine barrel throughout the remaining fermentation period and to a human audience at ar/ge kunst until the end of the exhibition.

1. The special ‘split cuvée’ resulting from this collaboration will be tasted when ready.