



Orto 745



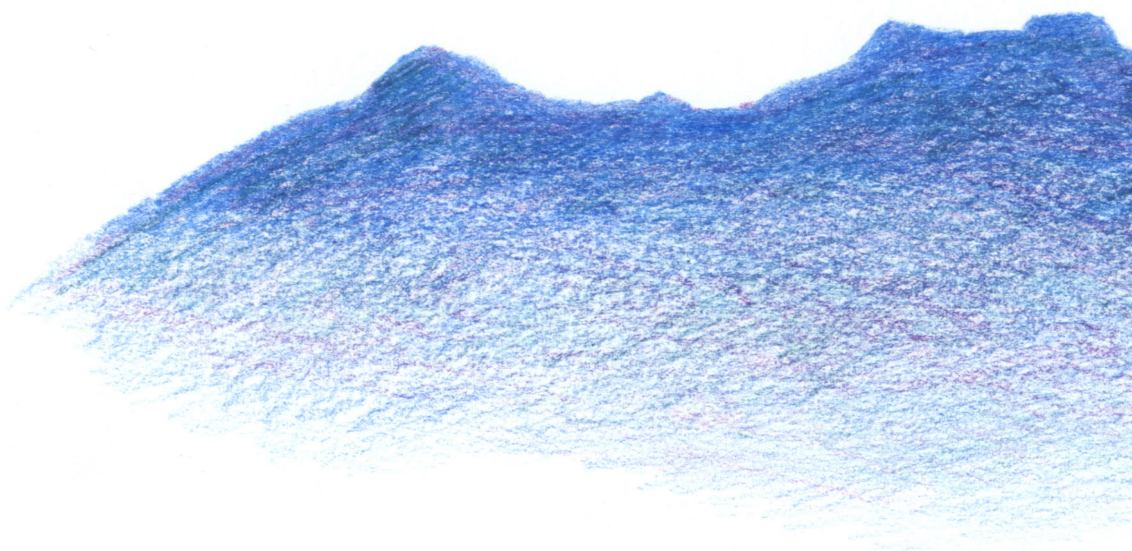
Orto 745 is a collective artistic ecology project created by Hannah Beilharz and Daniela Ardiri, active from 2021-2024. In the project the artists worked collectively to establish a sustainable urban garden on the Lucerne University Design Film Art campus in Switzerland. They co-curated screenings, workshops, and research exchanges on the combined topics of arts practice and ecology. Confronting the climate crisis through personal experience and the practical challenges of creating a garden in an institution, Orto explores how we belong to place in a time of ecological emergency.

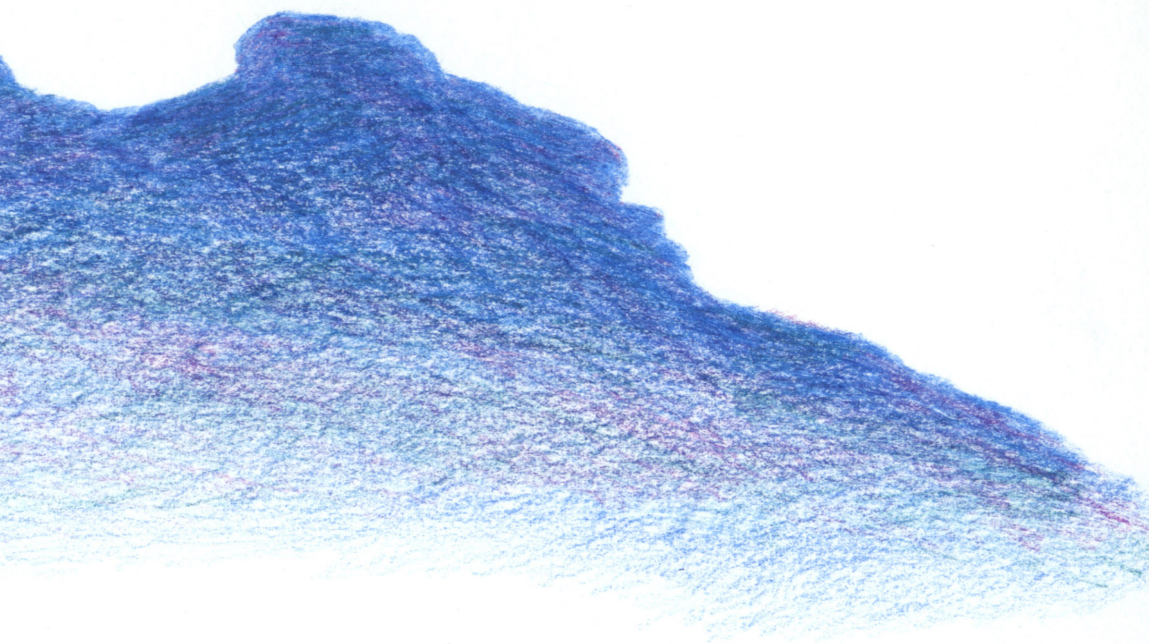






maybe they hear our voices:  
soils in conversation between Orto and Baroda









I want to begin with the event of the soil arriving, a responsibility and a gift, given to us in carefully measured weight, in leaking materiality. To gather soil around ourselves, within this concrete desert, this institution, the brutal architecture that terrorizes both human and plant alike – too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter, no natural protection possible. They gave us this space, saying: ‘here is the only place you can make a garden at the university’. The only possibility seems like an impossibility.

We didn’t imagine that earth let alone plants would really thrive there. But then when the soil arrived, it sparked a resistance, a stirring. This soil made us work, brought us back into our bodies, finding strength in its movement. Even inside and under all the concrete, glass, and metal, a moving began. Sometimes in our planning, we dreamed of this soil covering everything, a living avalanche of nourishment that could drown this concrete, that could grow trees. This was one of the beginnings.

This soil’s arrival brought us into a living relation, making possible connections with plants and animal visitors, and a slowly evolving sense of place. This soil also then made possible connections with other soils, on other continents, across oceans and climates. This soil seemed to ask us, in its stirring and movement, “where else are my relatives finding a voice? Who else is speaking to us? Where else is soil part of a slow, peaceful resistance?”





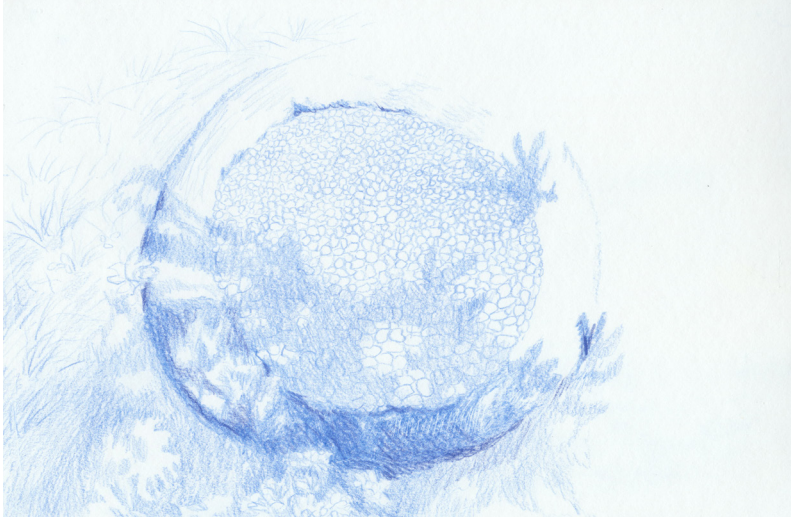
Seeds from Kaki fruit used as a tool for predicting the upcoming season, revealing the image of spoon, fork or knife – Photograph Daniela Ardiri, 2022.

Soil and all its living relations are the thread tying us together, as women artists of different generations, different cultures, distant locations, and homelands. Soil as a great connector, a shared family member. The practices we have with soil are our shared traditions, though varied, there are some fundamental principles, involving elements and our relationship with them: light, air, water, seeds, and breath, smell, touch.

Pressing seeds into holes in the soil made by my fingers, I wonder what the soil remembers. Maybe it recognises my human hand reaching, a memory emerging through the touching of communities of bacteria and the porous layers of my skin and self, becoming entangled, becoming (re)contaminated. Maybe

they hear our voices above ground, and underground, and they remember the sounds from our ancestor's speech.

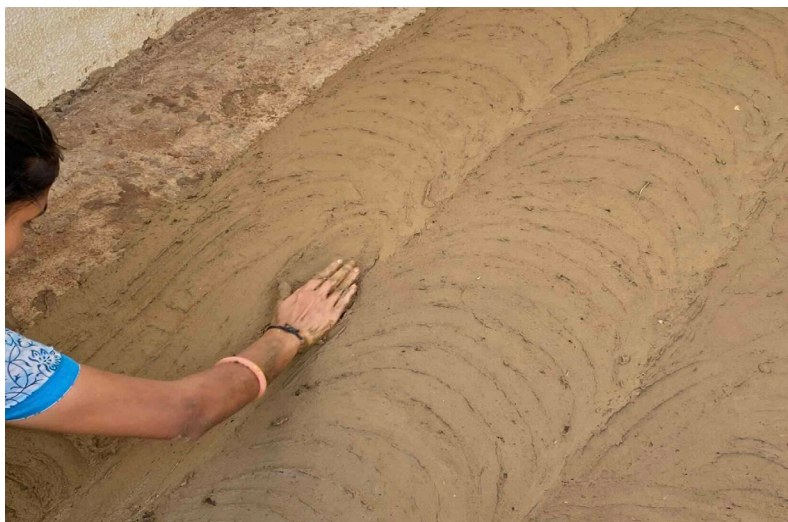
Sometimes we left the phone recording on, while we turned the soil. While we chatted about the things you do while working, about the qualities of this soil, about our dreams of what might grow there. The curation humans do, which is called gardening, of removing unwelcome 'guests' we called them, and planting what we know, or what we have heard of, maybe the species our parents grew, or plants we discovered through partners and friends. This curated cultivation grows out of a broader network of ancestors, memories, climates and our intimate or alien



Drawing of water pool created for turtle visiting Varsha's garden – image Varsha Nair, drawing Hannah Beilharz, 2022.

relationships with them. This network is constantly building up sediments of soil memory that speak to personal and political topics and inheritances, including the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, western ideas of ownership, extraction, and control, entwined with the connections to our families, traditions, and cultures. So many things held within a handful of soil, a momentary gathering of elements within time and space.

As we press hands into the soil, as we speak, and the phone records, this transmission travels across borders, across waters, lands, and time zones.



Technique described by Varsha of soil and dung mixture for creating walls and floor surface – Photograph Varsha Nair, 2022.



Summer landscape around Varsha's garden. The shrubs and trees, including mango, neem and palms along with soil provide material for domestic use. Photo: Varsha Nair

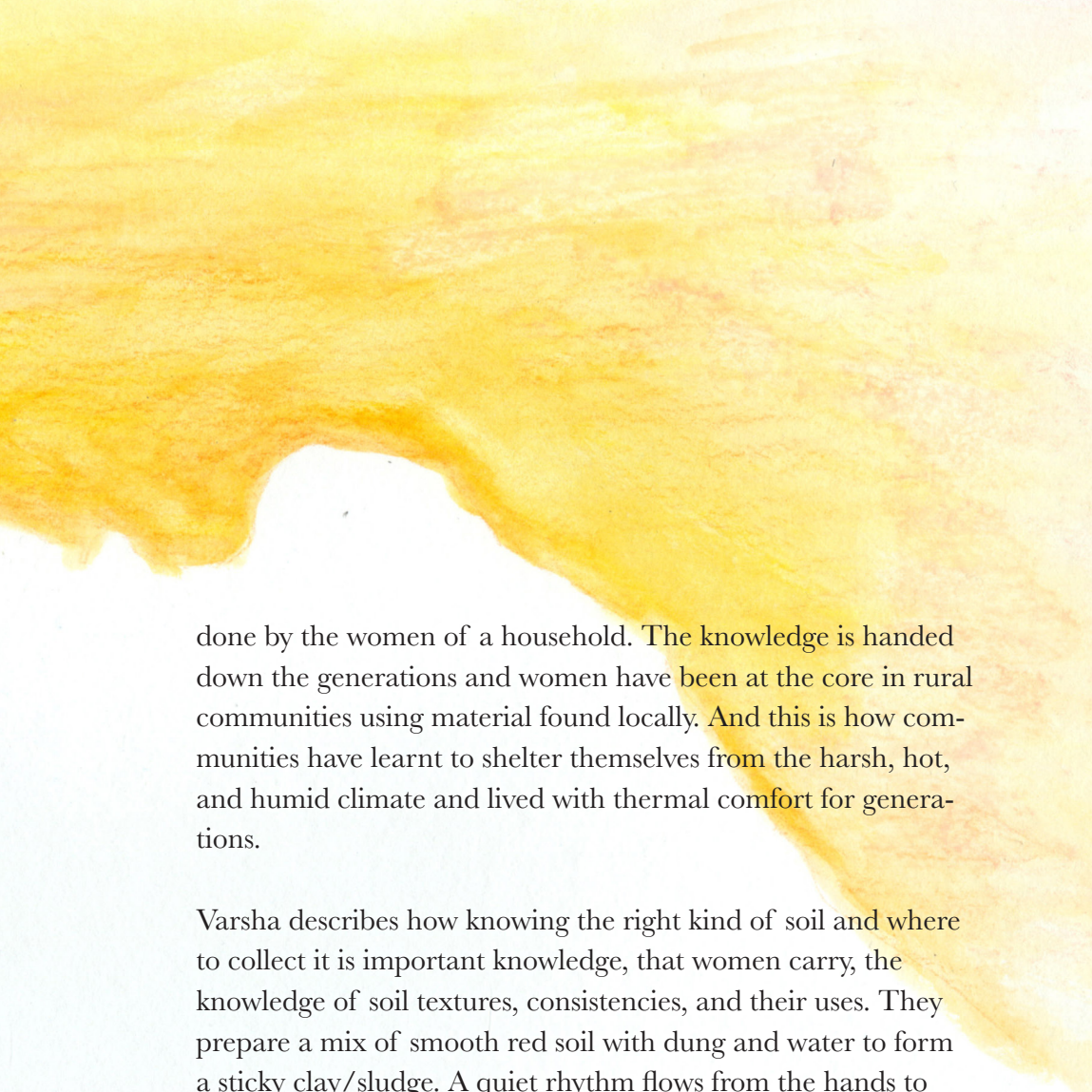


Varsha sends us a new voice recording. Daniela says she loves to listen to them in the morning when it is still quiet and peaceful at the start of the day. Varsha sends us an update about fireflies, the welcome cool weather, in her speech and the ambient sound of crickets, we can almost feel the relief that cold weather brings in a warm climate. Even meanwhile here, the sky has that empty look before the snow begins to fall.

Our eggplant is growing, we tell Varsha, we hope it will ripen before the season ends, but maybe the season in Switzerland is not long enough for it. Tamarind leaves are ready to make a daal, Varsha writes us the recipe. Sometimes the world feels smaller and more intertwined through our Whatsapp messages, I recognise my very distant homeland in the images of the sun hitting the path in Varsha's garden, the exact deep blue colour of the sky. Daniela and Varsha compare temperatures, between Baroda and Sicily, how our bodies become accustomed to heat. Even in a Swiss climate, the smell of the tomato plant's leaves is like time travelling, my body remembers when it was much smaller, and the plants were much bigger. There are memories carried inside the soil, waiting to be awoken.

Varsha sends us a report: A few weeks ago, we created a sit-out in the garden and decided to plaster using dung and mud which helps keep an area termite free and insulates against the elements. Traditionally, the plastering of walls and floor is only





done by the women of a household. The knowledge is handed down the generations and women have been at the core in rural communities using material found locally. And this is how communities have learnt to shelter themselves from the harsh, hot, and humid climate and lived with thermal comfort for generations.

Varsha describes how knowing the right kind of soil and where to collect it is important knowledge, that women carry, the knowledge of soil textures, consistencies, and their uses. They prepare a mix of smooth red soil with dung and water to form a sticky clay/sludge. A quiet rhythm flows from the hands to create traces of patterns, resulting in the smooth surface of walls, floors, doorways. A world built out of the relationships between women and earth, a container that carries one generation after another, a home held within collective hands and soil.

Orto X Baroda is an artistic exchange project between the gardens of collective Orto 745 based in Switzerland and artist Varsha Nair and her garden based outside Baroda, India. Our exchange incorporates recordings, drawings, and texts, including an extensive whatsapp archive of visual and written exchanges, updates, and reflections. The exchange often includes reflections on the weather, climate change effects on seasons, our work as women artists and connection across generations, family traditions, cultures, and the significance and political dimensions of gardening.

#### Notes:

“maybe they hear our voices: soils in conversation between Orto and Baroda” written by Hannah Beilharz, inspired from conversations with Varsha Nair and Daniela Ardiri, as part of the Orto X Baroda exchange.

Images without captions on pages 6, 7, 14, & 15, are pencil drawings by Hannah Beilharz, inspired by photos of the mountains outside Baroda sent by Varsha Nair, 2022.



Pencil drawing of eggplant flower from “If I was Born Rosa” artist book and master thesis by Daniela Ardiri, 2024.



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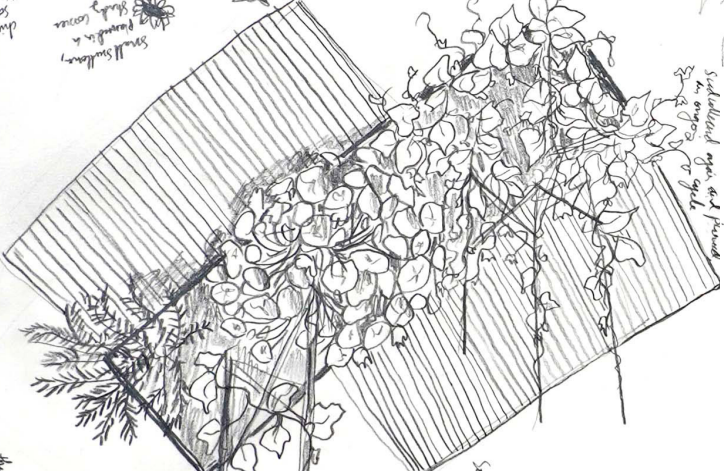
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Harvesting Melissa Citronen tea leaves, digital photograph, 2023, Daniela Ardiri.

Previous pages: Map from Memory of Orto 745 space, 2023, Hannah Beilharz.



## Entangled Stories: a manifesto of care

‘Entangled Stories – a care manifesto’ is a short film exploring the entanglement of nature and culture within human-food-plant systems, through a collection of stories involving plant, human and animal actors. ‘Entangled Stories’, elaborates on storytelling as a methodology and central principle of circular economies – revealing storytelling as a practice that builds collective knowledge and experience through mutual care, deep listening, and shared connection across diverse perspectives. The film weaves two collections of stories together, both from the collective project, Orto, of artists Daniela Ardiri and Hannah Beilharz and the Master arts studiolarb research group ECO!







The collective Orto is an ongoing research project and urban garden at the Lucerne University campus in Switzerland, and for ‘entangled stories,’ presents short segments of stories from seeds donated by individuals to the garden space. These stories speak about human connection and the origin of different seeds which are now growing as plants in the Orto Garden. Included in the film are footage of these individual plants growing larger over time and eventually bearing fruit.

The contribution from the ECO! Studiolab is film documentation of the actions and discussions of a participatory performance titled “entangled lunch”. In this performance participants are invited to a collective lunch in which they bring one ingredient with a story about its origin, to be discussed and then incorporated into a collective meal. The film will show short segments of the ingredient’s stories from participants within the



Seed stories, photo Hannah Beilharz, 2023.



performance, as well as the collective action of cooking.

The mixing of these two artistic projects and their collected stories within the short film shows the many and multiple life cycles of our food as both nature and culture, highlighting the complexity, circularity, and entangled qualities of these systems within human societies. The artistic decision to show at some points in the film two moving images simultaneously speaks to the complex nature of the topic of cultures of care and circular economies, and how our food systems are embedded within ourselves and each other, and within relationships to land and place, family, traditions and new cultures emerging.

The film aims to draw from the practices of seed collecting, gardening, cooking together, and food consciousness, to show the possibilities of a circular economy within human and food cultures. A thread holding the two separate projects together and in conversation is the use of stories as a method for exchanging and building knowledge. Stories connect us to the earth, plants, and each other, and as the film argues, will become vital survival strategies in a post climate change world.

#### Notes:

Above text by Hannah Beilharz, 2023.

The film was commissioned by Lucerne University Design Film Kunst for the 2023 Pilatus Economic Forum of Central Switzerland, as a contribution to imagining new forms of economy in the future.

'Entangled Stories' offered perspectives through film and sound from the Orto 745 garden space. It also showed the performance 'entangled lunch' and explored the topics of circular economies and relationships between plants and humans. The film was created in collaboration with the Master Kunst Studiolar days 2023, and the student research group ECO.

Artistic concept and direction by Daniela Ardiri and Hannah Beilharz, production HSLU Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Filming by Daniela Ardiri, filming, editing and post-production by Gianfranco Bastianelli, sound by Hannah Beilharz.

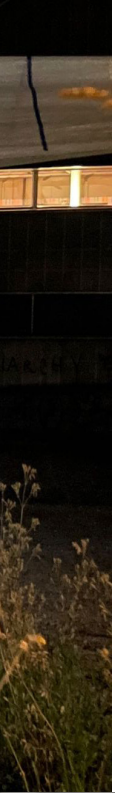


## cOrto Film Evenings: Südpoll and Lucerne University

cOrto was a series of short-film open air screenings of a curated selection of recent films, exploring the topics of collaboration, ecology and climate crisis.

The Orto collective curated short films that engage with the themes of collaboration, collective practices, and ecology. The works explored how collaborative practices in the fields of art and ecological activism work to imagine alternative futures within and beyond climate crisis.





They included diverse stories of collaboration and connection such as the more-than-human, assisting us to imagine new ways of existing alongside the complex living systems that make up our world. Shown in the Südpol cultural centre in Lucerne, and the Lucerne University Design Film Kunst campus, the film evenings examined the critical importance of collaboration and cohabitation in fighting the ongoing climate crisis, as well as encouraging new connections and potential future collaborations across departments of the university and broader community.

### Notes:

Text by Hannah Beilharz, for the cOrto open call and promotional material.  
cOrto film screenings documentation photos, Peter Spillman and Hannah Beilharz, 2023.



The Orto 745 project was made possible with the support of Nicole Rickli Waslem and sustainability at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

All texts and images produced by Hannah Beilharz, Daniela Ardiri, and Varsha Nair. See image captions for further information.

Cover image: Daniela Ardiri, film photograph, 2023.

Book layout and graphic design by Hannah Beilharz.

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To learn more about Orto and follow our work:





## Biographies:

Hannah Beilharz is an Australian multi-disciplinary artist and poet based between Naarm (Melbourne), and Berlin, Germany. She is currently working on an artistic research project exploring the transformative potential of ecological grief and meaning of home within climate crisis, undertaken from 2021-2024 in Lucerne, Switzerland as part of the Master of Art in Public Spheres program at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

Daniela Ardiri is a Sicilian artist currently studying a Master of Art in Public Spheres in Lucerne, Switzerland. She is conducting research on the kitchen as a public space, investigating contemporary feminist practices in the arts in parallel with her personal history. Her artistic practice is expressed through drawing, painting, ceramics, bronze, fabric, photography, and performance.

Varsha Nair is an artist based in Baroda, India. She mentors at Lucerne University, where she is also invited to collaborate by Orto and is growing a garden near Pavagadh hills outside Baroda. She studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India. Inviting multidisciplinary collaborations her work encompasses various approaches and genres, including bringing people and things together. She is the co-organizer of Womanifesto – an international art exchange in Thailand, and has also exhibited internationally.





