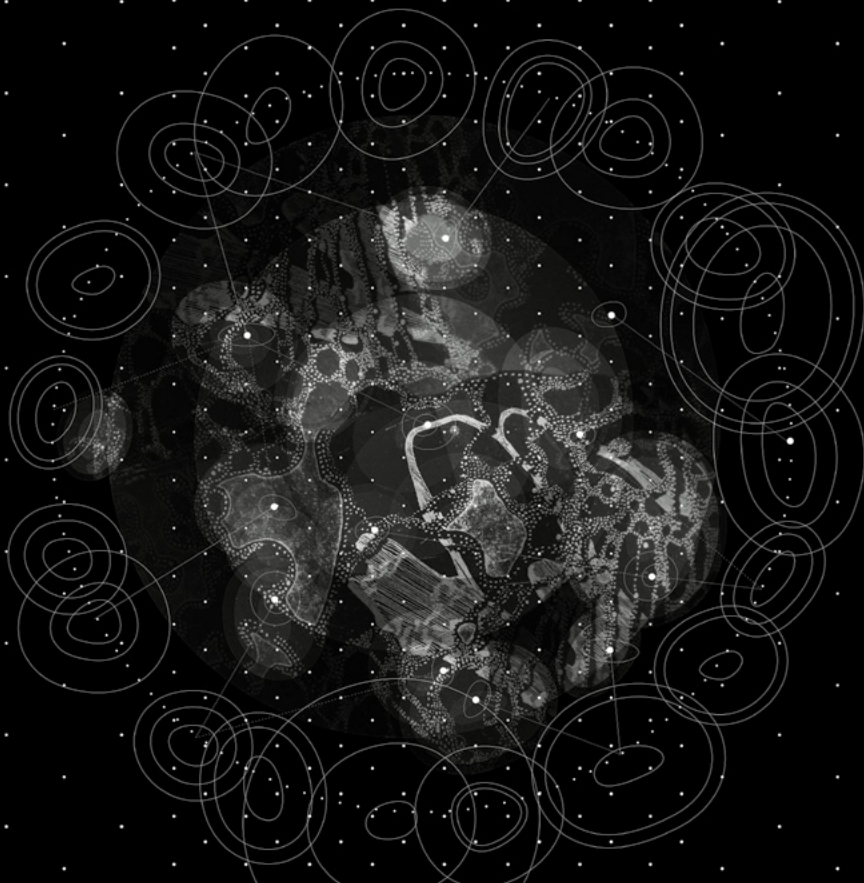


**Zeszyty**

**#48**

# **Artystyczne**

Kuratorstwo  
dla planetarnej  
równowagi



# ZA

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Kuratorstwo dla planetarnej  
równowagi: troskliwe strategie  
kuratorские wobec wyzwań  
współczesności

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## ***Planetary Interdependencies. Between Mourning, Caring, and Repairing—Curatorial Strategies of Care for a Changing Planet***

### **Abstract**

Based on the etymological meaning of the term curating, lat. *curare*, to care for, to look after, in my contribution “Planetary Interdependencies. Between Mourning, Caring, and Repairing—Curatorial Strategies of Care for a Changing Planet” I examine different curatorial practices as care work in the context of the Anthropocene and climate change. I interweave a close reading of Elke Krasny’s concept of the modern museum as an institution of the Anthropocene with the analysis of current curatorial and artistic practices, such as the exhibition *Monet and London. Views of the Thames* at The Courtauld Gallery (London, UK, 2024/2025), the exhibition *Greenhouse* at the Venice Biennale (2024), and the exhibition *Down to Earth* at Gropius Bau Berlin (2020). In doing so, three different dimensions of curating as care work will be central in these three exhibitions: Curating as mourning, curating as care work, and curating as reparative practice. The analyses show that curating as care work in the context of the Anthropocene can take various forms and overlap. It is a process that is constantly changing and will adopt new practices of curating as care work in future exhibitions.

**Keywords:** Garden, landscape, more-than-human, climate change, care work, curating

### ***Wzajemne zależności planetarne. Pomiędzy żałobą, troską i naprawą – kuratorskie strategie opieki nad zmieniającą się planetą***

### **Abstrakt**

Opierając się na etymologicznym znaczeniu terminu „kuratorowanie” (łac. *curare* – opiekować się, dbać), w moim artykule *Wzajemne zależności planetarne. Pomiędzy żałobą, troską i naprawą – kuratorskie strategie opieki nad zmieniającą się planetą* analizuję różne praktyki kuratorskie jako pracę opiekuńczą w kontekście antropocenu i zmian klimatycznych. Łączę wnikliwą analizę koncepcji Elke Krasny dotyczącej nowoczesnego muzeum jako instytucji antropocenu z analizą aktualnych praktyk kuratorskich i artystycznych, takich jak wystawa *Monet i Londyn. Widoki Tamizy* w The Courtauld Gallery (Londyn, Wielka Brytania, 2024/2025), wystawy *Greenhouse* na Biennale w Wenecji (2024) oraz wystawy *Down to Earth* w Gropius Bau Berlin (2020). W tym kontekście trzy różne wymiary kuratorstwa jako pracy opiekuńczej będą miały kluczowe znaczenie w tych trzech wystawach: kuratorstwo jako żałoba, kuratorstwo jako praca opiekuńcza oraz kuratorstwo jako praktyka naprawcza. Analizy pokazują, że kuratorstwo jako praca opiekuńcza w kontekście antropocenu może przybierać różne formy i przenikać się wzajemnie. Jest to proces, który nieustannie się zmienia i w przyszłych wystawach przyjmie nowe praktyki kuratorstwa jako pracy opiekuńczej.

**Keywords:** ogród, krajobraz, ponadludzkość, zmiany klimatyczne, opieka, kuratorstwo

# Planetary Interdependencies. Between Mourning, Caring, and Repairing—Curatorial Strategies of Care for a Changing Planet

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A garden is growing in the interior of Palazzo Franchetti. Every room is dominated by garden beds hosting different plants, herbs, and flowers. In contrast to the painted flowers on the walls of the building, the plants growing on the top floor are claiming space. The collective exhibition project *Greenhouse* was created by artist-curators Mónica de Miranda, Sónia Vaz Borges, and Vânia Gala for the Portuguese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2024). They have recreated a Creole Garden which, historically, was a plot given to and cultivated by enslaved people in order to sustain themselves. The gardens and plants in the exhibition address the simultaneity of plot and plantations, of resistance and exploitation, of people and nature. This exhibition is part of a large number of exhibitions that explore the motif of the garden/landscape as a crisis indicator of global conditions, such as *Radical Nature. Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet* (Barbican, London, UK, 2009), *Down to Earth* (Gropius Bau Berlin, Germany, 2020), or *Turner. Three Horizons* (Lenbachhaus Munich, Germany, 2023).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the garden as an *ecosystem en miniature*<sup>2</sup> seems to be developing

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1 A large number of other exhibitions could be mentioned here, such as *Anthropocene Curriculum* (HKW, Germany, 2013–2022), *Manifesta 12* (Palermo, Italy, 2018), *Radical Landscapes. Art inspired by the Land* (William Morris Gallery, London, UK, 2023/24), or the exhibition *Rebel Garden* (Museum Brugge, Belgium, 2024).

2 The concept of the garden as an *ecosystem en miniature* was developed by Thari Jungen and myself, see: Jungen, Thari, and Friederike Nastold, "Einleitung. Re-Lektüre des Gartens: Queere Ökologien, Kolonialismus, Gewalt." in *Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur* 76, no. 2 (2025): 8. <https://doi.org/10.57871/fkw762025>.

into a place in artistic works where planetary interdependencies and the crisis of the Anthropocene between violence and world design are negotiated. Current eco-phenomenological approaches understand the garden/landscape as a “dynamic structure” of sensory experiences with which humans relate in a variety of ways.<sup>3</sup> Relations of violence and the imagination of human and more-than-human worlds are interwoven in a simultaneity. Sayidia Hartman similarly states: “Care is the antidote to violence.”<sup>4</sup>

Based on the etymological meaning of the term curating<sup>5</sup>, lat. *curare*, to care for, to look after, in my contribution I want to examine what forms curating, understood as care, can take in the context of the Anthropocene and climate change, such as mourning, care, or reparation. In doing so, I draw on Elke Krasny’s discussion of the modern museum, which describes the museum as an institution of the Anthropocene.<sup>6</sup> If we want to rethink museum and curatorial strategies, we do need reparative practices: Curating as care work following Krasny imagines and practices mourning work and care for the future and insists on the hope that a planetary coexistence of human and more-than-human actors becomes possible again.<sup>7</sup> In my contribution, I will interweave the close reading of

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3 See also the following eco-phenomenological approaches like Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Corine Pelluchon, *Das Zeitalter des Lebendigen. Eine neue Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Freiburg: Herder, 2021); Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), and Sigrid Adorf, Ines Kleesattel and Léonie Süess, “sich verlandschaften – in relationalen Praktiken,” *INSERT. Artistic Practices as Cultural Inquiries* 5 (2024). <https://insert.art/ausgaben/sich-verlandschaften/>.

4 In a salon on Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*, see: Hazel Carby, Kaiama Glover, Saidiya Hartman, Arthur Jafa, Alex Wheliye and Christina Sharpe, “In the Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe,” recorded salon, February 2, 2017, posted February 8, 2017, by Barnard Center for Research on Women, YouTube, 1:34:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGE9oiZr3VM> (accessed July 23, 2025).

5 See Helena Reckitt, “Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction,” *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2016): 7. <https://doi.org/10.1386/jcs.5.1.6.1>.

6 See Elke Krasny, “Das moderne Museum als Anthropozän-Institution: Für feministisches Kuratieren im Zeitalter des Massensterbens,” in *Kunstpädagogische Positionen* 57, edited by Andrea Sabisch, Torsten Meyer and Heinrich Lüber (Köln: Universität Köln, 2022).

7 In the context of curating as care work, the following texts by Krasny are particularly insightful and interesting, among other things, at the intersection of activism and curating as care work: Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, Lena Fritsch, Birgit Bosold and Vera Hofmann, *Radicalizing Care. Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating* (London: Sternberg Press, 2021); Elke Krasny, “Caring Activism: Assembly, Collection, and the Museum,” *OnCurating* 29 (2016): 96–108.

Krasny's concept with the analysis of current curatorial and artistic practices such as the exhibition *Monet and London. Views of the Thames* at The Courtauld Gallery (London, UK, 2024/2025), the exhibition *Greenhouse* at the Venice Biennale (2024), and the exhibition *Down to Earth* at Gropius Bau Berlin (2020).

Central to this are practices of curating that develop reparative practices (mourning work and care for the future) as care work. Vas Borges writes that the gardens imagine "another future that is not just concerned with the human being but with everything and the whole ecosystem we live in".<sup>8</sup> The following questions are central to my contribution: How can art and culture serve as space for reflection and action in response to the climate crisis? What forms of interspecies cooperation can be explored through curatorial activities? How can curators and artists foster dialogue and drive change in the face of ecological disaster?

### **Mourning: Affective landscapes as indicators of crisis**

Landscape surrounds us. On the one hand, in nature, in the city, or in museums. On the other hand, landscape has always been an important genre in the visual arts,<sup>9</sup> for example, as a space of experience in Impressionism: painters went out into nature to paint *en plein air* and transferred the various dimensions of nature into a painting. In doing so, the landscape painting oscillates between the incorporeal, distant, surveying painter and viewer *and* the relational landscape structure. Landscape has always told of the reciprocal influence of humans and the environment. Following the science theorist Donna J. Haraway, this reciprocal relationship between landscape and humans can be thought of as a network of affective and material "nature cultures".<sup>10</sup> According to Tim Ingold, landscape is no longer a "passive" backdrop to human activity, but rather a dynamic structure of human and more-than-human actors: "[T]he world is not anything we

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8 See Emilie Dinsdale, "The Venice Pavilion Using Gardening as a Metaphor for Decolonisation," *AnOther*, April 19, 2024, [www.anothermag.com/art-photography/15582/greenhouse-portuguese-pavilion-venice-biennale-2024-garden](http://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/15582/greenhouse-portuguese-pavilion-venice-biennale-2024-garden) (accessed July 23, 2025).

9 In the 16th/17th century, 'landscape' became established as a technical term in painting and poetry. See Hilmar Frank and Eckhard Lobsien, "Landschaft," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, Bd. 3, ed. Karlheinz Barck (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 617–664.

10 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press LLC, 2003), 8; Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2016).

can look at but a process that we are part of.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Birgit Althans et al. describe landscapes as “always endangered and damaged ecologies and, more than ever, under pressure to transform due to climate change, resource depletion, energy production, nature and animal conservation, food production, and much more.”<sup>12</sup> In this context, I would like to situate my re-reading of Elke Krasny’s examination of the museum as an institution of the Anthropocene and ask about curatorial strategies of care for a changing planet.

The painter Claude Monet is particularly well known for his water lily series. He planted the water lilies in his garden in Giverny—arranging them exactly as he wanted them to appear in his paintings.<sup>13</sup> In extreme terms, this could be described as a domineering approach in his confrontation with nature. His relationship with nature is expressed differently in his less frequently seen Thames series. In this series, Monet painted the Thames: the water, the light, and the air pollution over London. In other words, he devoted himself to the industrialization processes of a growing city whose skyline was expanded by factory towers around 1900, significantly influencing and changing the Thames, the city, and the environment. The sky glows yellow-orange, penetrated by the sun, structured by the contaminated air clouds blown into the air from the factory towers. The exhibition *Monet and London. Views of the Thames* at the Courtauld Gallery in London presented this cycle of works by Monet in London for the first time in 2024.<sup>14</sup> Between 1899 and 1901, Monet visited London three times to paint Charing Cross Bridge, Waterloo Bridge, and the Houses of Parliament from the Thames. The interplay between water and air created fantastically beautiful, iridescent worlds of color and at the same time told of the advancing processes of industrialization, a changing planet, and the associated consequences for the

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11 Tim Ingold, “The Temporality of Landscape,” in *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 189–208, ed. Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 2000), 201.

12 Birgit Althans, Mirjam Lewandowsky and Fiona Schradig, “Zugänge zu affektiven Landschaften,” in *Landschaft – Performance – Teilhabe*, ed. Jens Oliver Krüger, Wiebke Waburg, Kristin Westphal, Micha Kranixfeld and Barbara Sterzenbach (transcript Verlag, 2023), 176–177.

13 See Karin Sagner, *Monet in Giverny* (München: Prestel, 1994).

14 See the exhibition website for more information: “Monet and London. Views of the Thames,” The Courtauld Gallery, accessed July 23, 2025, [www.courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/exh-monet-and-london-views-of-the-thames/](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/exh-monet-and-london-views-of-the-thames/).



environment.<sup>15</sup> At this point, I would like to talk about affective, or rather affecting, landscapes, which fascinated Monet as a painter as a “natureculture” subject and, beyond that, made binaries such as city/country, water/air, human/nature, technology/nature porous, for landscape is always experienced by humans physically and sensually. Ingold emphasizes that the perception of climatic phenomena such as wind, sun, and clouds in particular makes it possible to experience reciprocal embeddedness in the environment as shared matter.<sup>16</sup> The concept of “atmosphere”<sup>17</sup> is central here, as it makes an overviewing, disembodied spectator perspective porous and instead focuses on the dynamic, reciprocal structure. The question remains as to what extent Monet’s cycle of works could be described as a form of mourning work. I am using the term mourning work here because the aforementioned feminist theorist Elke Krasny defines curatorial practice as “mourning work and caring for the future”<sup>18</sup> in order to counter the violent traces of the modern museum as an Anthropocene institution.

In her book *Das moderne Museum als Anthropozän-Institution. Für feministisches Kuratieren im Zeitalter des Massensterbens* (2022), Krasny examines the role of museums with regard to planetary interdependencies. Krasny describes the modern museum as “an institution of the Anthropocene”.<sup>19</sup> The implications of this are made even clearer in her following reflection: “The museum is the repository of the non-living”.<sup>20</sup> Krasny is referring to the modern museum, in particular natural history museums, which collect and display skeletons of more-than-human beings or rocks, minerals, or plants that have been torn from the

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15 Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

16 See Tim Ingold, “Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather,” in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 1 (2007). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4623118>; for further reading see Maximilian Gregor Hepach and Catharina Lüder, “Sensing Weather and Climate. Phenomenological and Ethnographic Approaches,” in *Environment and Planning* 3 (2023): 350–368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26349825231163144>.

17 See Hermann Schmitz, *Der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand. Grundzüge der Philosophie* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 2018); Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995); Marie Ulber, *Landschaft und Atmosphäre. Künstlerische Übersetzungen* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2017).

18 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 10 (own translation).

19 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 9 (own translation).

20 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 29 (own translation).

earth elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> The museum “separates what it collects and exhibits from life and prevents it from remaining alive as well as from being alive with others”.<sup>22</sup> Krasny concludes that the museum is based on the separation of life and is therefore a place that exhibits the deceased and must thus become a place of mourning. Contrary to a long-standing, anthropocentric control over nature, a feminist curatorial approach must be developed that cares, that bears joint responsibility, and that develops curatorial practices as mourning work and caring for the future.<sup>23</sup>

At this point, I would like to return to the key question posed at the outset—How can art and culture serve as a space for reflection and action in response to the climate crisis?—and intertwine it with Krasny’s reflections in the context of Monet’s affective landscapes. Even though Krasny did not write her reflections with Monet’s Thames cycle in mind, but rather with dead fossils in modern museums, among other things, I would like to highlight a parallel. Monet’s painterly observations and approaches to the atmospherically changing Thames invite us viewers into an affective landscape. The play of colors opens up a space for reflection on the beauty of “naturecultures,” reminding us of our responsibility—or, to use Haraway’s term, our ability to respond—towards human and more-than-human actors.<sup>24</sup> The landscapes oscillate between a jointly imagined future and at the same time tell of violent conditions and early industrialization processes. In this sense, the engagement with Monet’s affective landscapes in contemplation, in perception, can be described as a form of mourning work in the sense of becoming aware: affective landscapes as crisis indicators and a space for reflection on a changing planet.

### **Caring: Gardens in museums and beyond**

Krasny speaks of the need to develop a “new historiography of curating” that “raises awareness of the fact that the practice of curating today must grapple with historical responsibility”.<sup>25</sup> Art and culture as a space of reflection could be

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21 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 29–30.

22 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 30 (own translation).

23 See Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 30–31.

24 For Haraway’s concept of responsibility, see Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 115.

25 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 23 (own translation).

one first step, that offers in contemplation, as we have seen with Monet, one of many forms of responsibility for more than human beings. In doing so “feminist curating imagines care for the future”.<sup>26</sup> The relationship-building imperative inherent in the words *curare* and “feminist curating” is to be put to productive use in the analysis of the exhibition *Greenhouse* (2024), which was on display at the 69th Venice Biennale. The English word care, which is related to *curare*, follows on from this and reinforces the caring relationship structures that span between human and more-than-human actors.

The exhibition *Greenhouse* (2024) no longer focuses on the landscape as such, but rather on the garden as an *ecosystem en miniature*. Gardens are places where diverse forms of human and more-than-human actors co-exist. For a long time, however, the garden was seen as a Garden of Eden, a paradise, a utopia. Utopias hold the potential for imagining the future, but they are unable to take responsibility in the here and now or to develop a process of mourning, for paradise has no place.<sup>27</sup> In 1997, French botanist Gilles Clément described the world as a “planetary garden” with humanity in charge of being its gardener.<sup>28</sup> Almost 30 years later, the metaphor of the planet as a garden is still productive, not as a space for humans to take control, but rather as a site where “gardeners” recognise their interdependencies to other species. By gardening the human and more-than-human entities have the ability to respond to climate, time, or an array of social factors, in a shared interspecies responsibility.<sup>29</sup> From this, I would like to conclude that the garden still functions as an *ecosystem en miniature* for reflecting on the here and now and its crises in the Anthropocene. The garden is a space that tells of interspecies relationships, species extinction, and inclusions and exclusions. On the one hand, violent developments such as climate change, industrialization processes, and exploitative conditions play a role. On the other hand,

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26 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 31 (own translation).

27 Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour criticize the concept of utopia. They emphasize that utopias always take place “nowhere” rather than “now here” and therefore represent places for which no responsibility needs to be taken in the here and now. See Ann-Kathrin Günzel, “From no-where to now-here! Ein Gespräch über Utopia mit dem Soziologen und Philosophen Prof. Dr. Bruno Latour und dem Künstler, Kurator und Medientheoretiker sowie Leiter des ZKM in Karlsruhe, Prof. Peter Weibel,” in *Kunstforum International* 275, (2021): 134–136.

28 See Gilles Clément, and Sandra Morris, *The Planetary Garden' and Other Writings* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

29 See the event days at Manifesta 12 (2018) in Palermo on Interspecies, in which Gilles Clément also participated in discussion rounds: “Interspecies,” Manifesta 12, accessed July 23, 2025, [www.m12.manifesta.org/interspecies/index.html](http://www.m12.manifesta.org/interspecies/index.html).

however, the garden can also become a space of possibility in which a “worlding”<sup>30</sup> between human and more-than-human actors can be imagined.<sup>31</sup>

The exhibition *Greenhouse* takes up gardening as a metaphor for decolonization and gardening as worlding: on the top floor of the Palazzo Franchetti in Venice, various gardens are growing, developed by the curatorial team of Mónica de Miranda, Sónia Vaz Borges, and Vânia Gala for the Portuguese Pavilion at this year’s Venice Biennale. The team has recreated a Creole garden which, historically, was a plot given to and cultivated by enslaved people in order to sustain themselves. “Creole gardens challenged systems of forced labour and monocultural plantations in colonial empires”,<sup>32</sup> explains De Miranda. Two different dimensions of care work overlap in these Creole gardens. On the one hand, these gardens embody a social and relational hub amid the violent conditions of slavery: Creole gardens were a place where knowledge about plants and medicinal herbs was exchanged. These gardens were identity-forming and self-determined. At the same time, the soil in the midst of monoculture was able to breathe and regenerate in certain areas, as the land was cultivated according to their own traditions. “The gardens were therefore not just spaces for cultivation, but a symbol of resistance and resilience, a place where people could claim their own dignity and freedom”.<sup>33</sup> In other words: In the current exhibition context, the plants speak of the simultaneity of resistance and exploitation, of pasts and futures, and function as an embodied, green archive.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Gala, a choreographer and researcher, points out: “It’s a polyphonic assemblage. There are multiple rhythms happening in the Creole garden ... plants flourish at different times and, working side by side in collaborative ways, they make new

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30 For the concept of “worlding,” see Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 13.

31 See, among others, the artistic collective Queer Ecology, which explores interspecies companionship in its projects: “The Institute of Queer Ecology,” Institute of Queer Ecology, accessed July 23, 2025, [www.queerrecology.org/](http://www.queerrecology.org/).

32 Dinsdale, “The Venice Pavilion”, 2024.

33 Dinsdale, “The Venice Pavilion”, 2024. The gardens and plants in the collective exhibition project *Greenhouse* address this simultaneity of plot and plantation, of resistance and exploitation, as Sylvia Wynter already formulated in her 1971 text “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou* 5, no. 1 (1971): 95–102.

34 For more on the concept of the archive and its performativity, see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

worlds”, And Gala adds, that the Creole garden „is a practice of tenderness of caring, of listening to the different plants flourishing”.<sup>35</sup>

What forms of interspecies cooperation can be explored through curatorial activities? Instead of dead, more-than-human skeletons or dead, uprooted plants, growing, blooming gardens are transferred into the exhibition space. The museum becomes a place of life. Visitors feel the warm air as if they were in a greenhouse, breathe it in, smell the scent of the earth. The green of the plants glows and catches the viewer’s eye. As with Monet, viewers are physically addressed and invited into similar oscillating and reflexive explorations of human-nature relationships. In this exhibition, the beauty of the plants is countered by questions of colonial exploitation of humans and nature. The title of the exhibition also refers to the climate change caused by colonial monocultures in agriculture. In other words, the flourishing plants convey questions about slavery, exploitation, and climate change in the form of a green archive. In particular, the embodied experience refers to a form of interspecies cooperation that unfolds in breathing, in the sensory experience of the plant gardens. Krasny defines “feminist” as “attitudes and practices of thinking, feeling, and acting that are committed to solidarity with the ability to exist in peace between human and non-human living beings and their shared planet Earth”.<sup>36</sup> “Peace” is not yet here, but the following strategies for addressing concerns can be observed in the curatorial work at *Greenhouse*: Responsibility is being taken with regard to the violent history, as Krasny demands. Care is taken for history, perhaps also in the form of mourning work, by retelling history through plants and at the same time highlighting the practices of resistance that were lived at that time. This creates “reparative”<sup>37</sup> spaces for human as well as more-than-human actors that make futures conceivable.

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35 Dinsdale, “The Venice Pavilion”, 2024.

36 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 31 (own translation).

37 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

**Repairing. Relational practices between human and more-than-human actors in the museum: *Down to Earth* at Gropius Bau Berlin (2020)**

The title<sup>38</sup> of the exhibition itself implies a shift in perspective in the context of mourning and caring for the future. But who or what is *Down to Earth*, and how does this relate to the question posed at the beginning: ‘How can curators and artists foster dialogue and drive change in the face of ecological disaster?’

Krasny suggests that curators should engage with the historical responsibility that modern museums as institutions of the Anthropocene have brought about in the first place.<sup>39</sup> Following feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial approaches, which have repeatedly criticized and deconstructed care/curation with regard to collecting, preserving, maintaining, and managing, the relationship-building, caring dimensions of care/curation once again come to the fore. As Krasny writes, responsibility concerning an intersectional attitude in research, knowledge transfer, and aesthetic practice must be expanded to include a “physical-material-ecological” responsibility.<sup>40</sup> Krasny asks:

How can we today, with our knowledge of the state of planet Earth in the Anthropocene, which is the age of mass extinction, explore the becoming of the Anthropocene itself, its cultural imaginary, its epistemic formation, its ethical-political orientation, through research into the modern museum, as an idea of this institution and as a multitude of museums that have actually existed?<sup>41</sup>

In other words, in order to address the tension between mourning and caring for the future in the museum, it is necessary, on the one hand, to identify and analyze the violent relationships and, on the other hand, to develop a space of possibility for futures. Feminist theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes something similar with the concept of reparative practices. For Sedgwick, the context of AIDS in the 1990s is central to questioning strategies for survival within structural power relations. Reparative practices not only analyze the causes of structural power relations, but also develop possibilities for action in

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38 The title of the exhibition refers to Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

39 See Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 23.

40 See Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 23–24 (own translation).

41 Krasny, *Das moderne Museum*, 24 (own translation).

life and survival.<sup>42</sup> Reparative spaces are needed in the midst of violent relationships, spaces that also present themselves as spaces of possibility, in which human and more-than-human life can be lived and mourned—and through which caring for the future can also be addressed.

The exhibition *Down to Earth*, initiated by curator Thomas Oberender at the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin (2020), questions curatorial practices in terms of caring about and being concerned about the climate and advancing environmental pollution. The aim of the exhibition is not only to reflect on knowledge production in artistic works, but also to question its own curatorial practices in terms of carbon footprint and sustainability:

20 degrees Celsius, 50% humidity in the exhibition building – how did this come about? How did our predecessors arrive at these modern standards in the museum? How did they work in this building when there was no air conditioning? How does our air conditioning work and where is it located? Which hotels are ecologically acceptable, which energy companies, how does the program change when our contributors travel by train?<sup>43</sup>

The exhibition presented over 20 international artists in 14 rooms for a period of four weeks. All artists dealt with questions of nature, the environment, the earth, and the ocean. The exhibition was expanded to include readings, workshops, and concerts on nature and sustainability topics. The subtitle *Climate Art Discourse Unplugged* provides an initial reference to the curatorial approach's concern for and criticism of climate issues: all bands, performances, and readings were “unplugged”—without amplification, without lighting; in short, without electricity. All of the artistic works on display in the exhibition—whether performance, photography, sculpture, or installation—were shown without additional lighting, and the rooms were not air-conditioned. The culinary offerings were also prepared by chefs without electricity. Furthermore, none of the participants travelled by plane. All materials for the exhibition were produced using recycled paper and environmentally friendly algae ink.<sup>44</sup> This means that

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42 See Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

43 See website of Berliner Festspiele, “Down to Earth,” Berliner Festspiele, accessed July 23, 2025, [www.berlinerfestspiele.de/programm/archiv/immersion/2020/down-to-earth](http://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/programm/archiv/immersion/2020/down-to-earth).

44 See Miriam Hinternes, “‘Down to Earth’ im Gropius Bau. Der (Erd-)Boden der Tatsachen,” *monopol*, August 20, 2020, [www.monopol-magazin.de/gropius-bau-down-to-earth-der-erdboden-der-tatsachen](http://www.monopol-magazin.de/gropius-bau-down-to-earth-der-erdboden-der-tatsachen) (accessed July 23, 2025).

the entire museum operation was redesigned with a view to more sustainable strategies, yet it was still possible to present a 'regular' museum operation to the public for a period of four weeks.

Krasny demands that curators confront the historical developments of the museum, take responsibility, and develop alternative, caring curatorial strategies. The Gropius Bau has done this with *one* exhibition. A temporary, reparative space has been created that critically analyzes conditions in the context of advancing climate change and at the same time creates alternative spaces that represent habitats and living spaces for human and more-than-human actors. It remains questionable to what extent these curatorial strategies will be sustainably incorporated into museum operations.

### Closing Thoughts

Mourning, Caring, Repairing. These three terms and the guiding questions that follow—How can art and culture serve as space for reflection and action in response to the climate crisis? What forms of interspecies cooperation can be explored through curatorial activities? How can curators and artists foster dialogue and drive change in the face of ecological disaster?—have structured and accompanied my previous reflections. Finally, I would like to summarize my discussion of the subtitle of Krasny's book: *Für feministisches Kuratieren im Zeitalter des Massensterbens*. Krasny writes: "The preposition 'for' has a temporal dimension that expresses that this specific feminist curating does not yet exist, that it is only to be developed in the future as mourning work and care for the future".<sup>45</sup> Clearly, feminist curating is discussed here against the backdrop and critique of the museum as an Anthropocene institution. Nevertheless, based on my brief analyses of *Monet and London. Views of the Thames, Greenhouse, and Down to Earth*, I was able to show that there are already caring practices and curatorial approaches that take responsibility and explore the tension between mourning and concern for the future.

Even though I have interpreted each exhibition with a specific form of curating as care work—mourning, caring, repairing—it becomes apparent that the different modes of curating as care also overlap: Already in the contemplation of Monet's cycle of works on the Thames around 1900, the affective landscapes



open up a space for reflection that discusses the landscape as an indicator of crisis and an affective landscape structure in the context of industrialization processes and climate issues. In this space for reflection, a process of mourning can unfold, brought about first and foremost by the thematic, curatorial focus—and thus concern for the relationship between humans and nature and the environment. In the exhibition *Greenhouse* (2024) at the Venice Biennale, the garden as *an ecosystem en miniature* tells of colonial violence, climate issues, and exploitative relationships—and at the same time, across a chronological temporality, of relational, caring practices in gardens on plantations, which here too are presented as reparative spaces in the sense of survival in the context of violence, following Sedgwick. In *Greenhouse*, the different levels of curating as care work overlap, as here too, mourning work is performed—for enslaved people and for nature. In other words, curating as care work and curating as reparative practices are at the center here. Through these curatorial practices, new futures between human and more-than-human actors become conceivable in the first place. This brings me to my third and final brief analysis of the exhibition *Down to Earth* at the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin (2020). Here, albeit for a temporary moment, curatorial practices are being tested that question the legacy of a modern museum and create alternative spaces of experience. The museum's opening hours are based on daylight, the windows are open, and artistic works are shown 'unplugged'. Curating as care work is developed here both as a space for reflection and as a space for practice—e.g., through the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It became clear that multiple, feminist, caring curatorial practices are needed to develop and further develop the different dimensions of care/curare—mourning, caring, repairing. Because: Curating as caring for a changing planet is not yet here and still has to become.

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