**How to lament the death of nature?**

Wildfires are complex occurrences: they have an important role in environmental cycles, but can also be overwhelming and deadly. Current environmental disruption is further complicating things: wildfires patterns are changing and extreme events are becoming more common. With often dramatic effects on ecosystems and communities, wildfires are telling us something about the urgency to deal with the vulnerability of ecosystems - also at an emotional level. Margherita Pevere’s newest artwork *Lament* explores what happens ’after’, asking how to mourn something that is not human, and how this affects preconceived notions of life and death.

The Berlin-based artist is known for otherworldly works that challenge death-life and human-nature binaries, from an organ-like sculpture that contains her own vaginal epithelial cells and slug egg cell to an artwork that stores strangers’ memories on synthetic DNA. Her new performance and installation *Lament* invites viewers to experience the intimate intricacies of death and its ecologies after wildfires.

*Lament*, which is currently exhibited at Brussels’ iMAL – Art center for digital cultures and technology, calls us to encounter a death bed, a white colour-dominated setting with traces of soil on a milky floor surface. Above it, as if they are levitating, we see one hundred organically-shaped glass sculptures. As we find out, they contain soil microbes, charcoal, and moss which Pevere herself collected after visiting wildfire areas across Europe. With her distinctive embrace of living matter as an artistic tool, Pevere treated the materials reflecting on how their transformation can unfold stories of urgency, death and rebirth. And it is exactly this transformation of the artwork that repeat visitors will notice – growing out of their glass habitats at iMAL, the seemingly dead matter comes back to life.

During the performance, Pevere appears as a tentacular being in the corner of the space below the levitating sculptures, semi-nude and with limbs replaced by burnt barks and striking red tentacles - a creature of the soil. She is joined by musician Ivan Penov who performs a composition for prepared cello and field recordings written especially for *Lament.* With crawling and sliding movements, Pevere interacts with a dense yet lyrical musical score, the heaps of soil and ash on the floor, and the glass sculptures which look like they are weighing her down. Contemplating the interconnection of life and death, Pevere opens up a space to express grief and solastalgia. Through her art, the latter become tools to be used emotionally, artistically and politically to reconsider compassionate interactions with the world in times of crises.

*Lament* stays on view in “[Naturarchy: Towards a natural contract](https://www.imal.org/en/events/naturarchy)” show at iMAL – Art center for digital cultures and technology until September 29th.

More information about *Lament*: <https://margheritapevere.com/lament/>

[Lament - Video trailer](https://youtu.be/p4O1h02NSSc) & [Lament - Video interview](https://youtu.be/vfzvHFmOdfU)More about Sonic and material exploration of ‘dead’ environments, page 2.  
More about exploring resilience of vulnerable communities, page 3.

**Sonic and material exploration of ‘dead’ environments**

Wildfires are aural and material experiences, too. Along with the heat, the sound of fire eating away everything in its way can encompass the entirety of one’s senses. But what are the sonic qualities of a burnt environment? And what ecologies unfold in an apparently dead ecosystem?

Pevere was joined by musician and artist Ivan Penov on a journey through a landscape that was hit by wildfires. In 2023 and 2024, while preparing for the artwork, Pevere and Penov conducted fieldwork on the Karst Plateau along the Italian/Slovenian border, where a large-scale wildfire had taken place in 2022. They were met with a vast landscape by scorched soil, layers of ash, trees and shrubs charred or devoid of their greenery, with traces of recovery peeking through.

In this landscape where the familiar birds chirping and leaves rustling are absent, Penov set out to explore exactly this acoustic void. Burnt woods can seem like a mute environment, however, they are filled with ‘ghost-like’ sonic qualities. The forest has its own body, whose resonances change due to disruption of its physical structure. For example, the wood of burnt trees acquire a different, resonating spectral richness. Penov’s field recording focused thus on altered resonances of plants, trees, and soil. In his composition, field recordings interplay with live electronics and cello to shape a dense and lyrical piece.

During the fieldwork Pevere sampled soil, which she treated according to bioremediation methods to balance the alkalinity caused by the fire. Soil bacteria and algae will display their activity inside the glass sculptures over the duration of the show. She also collected a special species of moss that is among the first to populate burnt soil. Barks that were detached from tree trunks for the heat became, in the hands of the artist, part of the performance costume.

**Exploring resilience of vulnerable communities**

Wildfires have become an increasingly worrying experience. The growing number of communities being vulnerable to large-scale fires opens up another dimension to the discussion on the climate crisis. While developing the project, Pevere joined forces with environmentalist Céline Charveriat to learn about the resilience that nature and communities display following a traumatic event. After visiting Karst plateau which was hit by fires during the extreme June 2022 heat wave, Pevere and Charveriat went to Santa Comba Dão in Portugal, a municipality affected by the devastating wildfires in 2017, which burnt almost 300,000 hectares and caused over 50 fatalities.

In January of 2024, Pevere and Charveriat came to the Portuguese town “tragically famous for being severely affected by the extreme wildfires that ravaged the region” to meet, listen to, and eventually embark on a shared creative journey with the community members. The collective process aimed to reflect, offer space for mourning and possibly learn about trauma and recovery to build resilience for the times to come.

They spent a week at the local firefighter’s headquarters, supported by researchers in the field of wildfire management and the local psychologist. The group included women leaders, students, and the elderly. Together, they explored local memories of the event, starting with a walk through the site which allowed them to share their personal experiences. The next step was a co-creation of a “Resilient scars map,” a canvas of local communal memory that has been included in the installation in Brussels. The map, which will after the exhibition return to its place of origin, tells a story about this community members’ remembrance and resilience.

Report on the community engagement programme:

[From scars to collective resilience: post-fire restoration in Santa Comba Dão](https://fire-res.eu/from-scars-to-collective-resilience-post-fire-restoration-in-santa-comba-dao/)