

# ***El micro-museo de las plantas migrantes***

**(The micro museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter)**

**Name:** Belén Santillán

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El micro-museo de las plantas migrantes

The micro museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter

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**Department:** Arts and Crafts Department

**Program:** Master in Arts and Public Space - MAPS

**University:** Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo – KHiO

**Tutors:**

Main tutor: Dr Merete Røstad, Associate Professor

Writing tutor: Line Ulekleiv, Assistant Professor in Writing Practice

Contextualization Professor: Dr Sara R. Yazdani, Associate Professor

To Robert, my soulmate there.  
To Cole and her enormous heart and wisdom.  
To Mimmicita and her enchanted worldview.  
To Fin and his delirious imagination.  
To Wei, my soulmate here.

To Mapsito and  
all the kind beings of KHIO Island.

# Acknowledgements

Thank you for all for the faith, generosity, and kindness that you gave me during this quest.

Merete Røstad

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Susanne Winterling

Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo

Master in Art and Public Space - MAPSITO

Kunstnernes Hus

Tenthaus Collective

The migrant plants thriving in Norwegian winters.

The dreamy mediator at the Spain Pavillion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale.

Annie, Gry and Sisel at KHIO Kanteen

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# 1. Introduction

On the 9th of January 2024, Ecuador was declared on Inner Armed Conflict and, suddenly, the Western media was flooded with images of violence, which are symptomatic of an organic crisis that my country has endured at least for the last five years.

“El Micromuseo de plantas migrantes” (The micro-museum of migrant plants) is an artistic project motivated by my experience as a migrant, a journey shared by countless others, coming from a country that has faced several migratory waves due to structural poverty and violence, and that at the same time is described, by European botanical expeditions, as an abundant natural paradise.

This micro-museum is a self-made institution that borrows the credibility of the museal institution, in the name of migrant species. By producing objects, actions, performative lectures, and low-fi films, the micro-museum stages the life of relocated species. It is not confined to a permanent location, since it also borrows the tactics of migrant plants, and adapts itself —like a parasite— to thrive within different environments, like fellow museums and other public spaces.

How to hold to impermanence as a poetic response to the uncertainty of a migratory status? Through the metaphor of migrant plants, uprooted from their native soil, I seek to voice collective experiences related to displacement, while subtly inviting reflections on extractivism. The first piece I produced for this project is a flag, that depicts an Andean plant living in Norway imagined by AI. It is part of a series of flags that are meant to be an emblem of possibility, ready to take root wherever the micro-museum establishes a new museum branch.

## 2. My quest for *El micro-museo de las plantas migrantes* (The micro museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter)

In the lines that follow, I would like to introduce *El micro-museo de las plantas migrantes* (The micro museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter) as a quest or an expedition that sails from a particular practice and place of enunciation, finds and crosses the abstraction “museum” and its most common and expected practices, meets the waves of Institutional Critique and South American Conceptualisms, and, with the aid of many voices, becomes a self-made institution.

### 2.1 To be an art worker (there and here, here and there): situating my practice.

*“Whatever you do... don’t drink tap water.”*

*This is a piece of advice my former boss, at a public museum, gave to the technicians of TBA21<sup>1</sup> when they visited my city -Quito- to install a contemporary art exhibition.*

As a museum worker<sup>2</sup> at public contemporary art centers, I spent many hours with artworks, archives, text panels, vitrines, protocols, workers, and visitors. I thought how the institutional context, in which I was working, operated: how it came to be or was instituted, how permanent was its construction (physical and ideological), where it was located and how visible were its gates, (and) whom it served and whom it claimed to serve. This last question, led me to think of how someone, from outside of the institution, could approach it: what type of space was configured by the decision of what, how and when to exhibit? Does this imaginary visitor have any saying in what narratives are urgent to be displayed inside the museum’s exhibition spaces? How could this visitor make sense of (or contest) the institutional *why*, often narrated in guided tours?

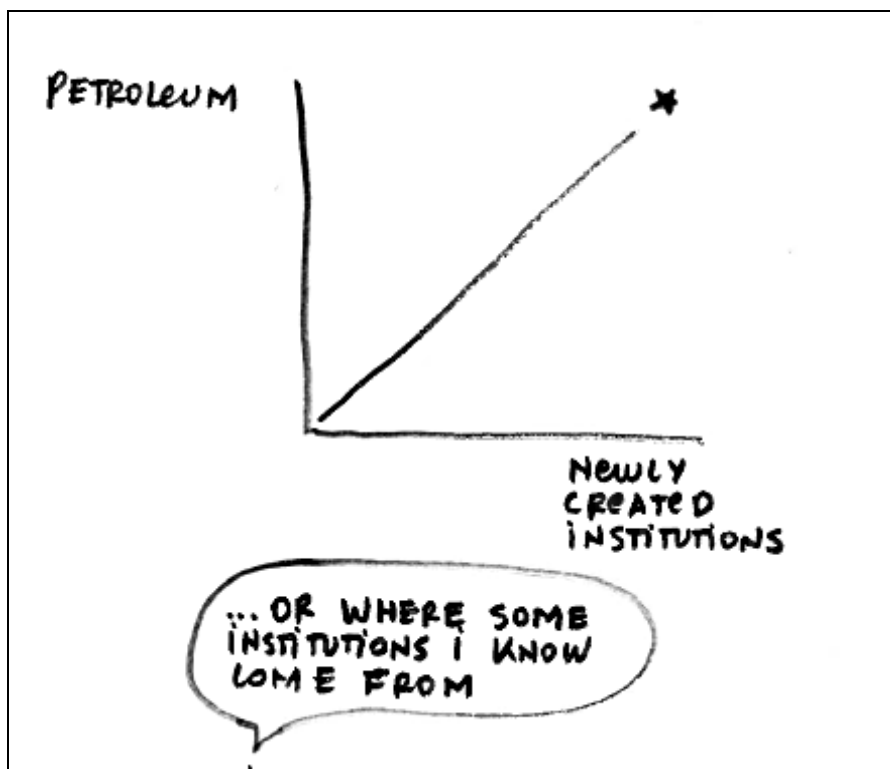
My practice as a researcher, educator and museum director was shaped by the encounter with temporary communities, institutional limits, and institutional contradictions. From there, I imagined *ways of doing* that sometimes were accepted (coopted) by the institution, and other times dismissed. By ways of doing, I refer to the

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<sup>1</sup> TBA21 (Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary – a 21st century version) hosts the program *Academy TBA21*, which is a “research arm fostering a deeper relationship with the Ocean and other bodies of water through the lens of art to inspire care and action.” (“TBA21–Academy,” n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> In “Urgent times claiming for a Global Southerly way of operating”, Lorena Vicini and Mario Lopes (2020) contextualize my practice as a museum worker alongside with other practitioners from South America: “They show a common sense on the concept of “cultural institution” in South America as called upon to fulfill other roles, such as caring for common goods and implementing the values of community relations. To them, the question is: Instead of believing in the institution as something solid and finished, unbearable, how to create flexible structures to be always on the go?” (Vicini and Lopes 2020).

process of making public (exhibitions, texts, educational programs, social infrastructures) and semi-public museal acts<sup>3</sup> (budgets, hiring processes).



**Image 1.** A diagram to explain how oil exploitation (and therefore an extractive model) is linked to the construction of cultural institutions in my country, or how buildings can appear way before intellectual projects.

These *ways of doing* were also nurtured by my engagement with political formation schools with an intersectional approach. There, I gained an insight: every oppression is exerted over a deeply rooted transformational power. Then, any plan that aimed to foster creativity in this context needed to acknowledge how transformational powers are expressed (created and recreated) in the quest for a dignified life (a meaningful life or *una vida digna*), and how is possible to connect a seemingly distant and specialized field (the arts) with the creative expressions that already were present at these schools (from making WhatsApp stickers, to the invention of words that could give an account of everyday experiences). Is in this context that I understood, from the perspective of Abolition Geographies, what means *organized abandonment* (defunding, extractivism, violence) in our region, and how *organized state violence* (punishment, migration and border policing, incarceration) worked against racialized and gendered communities. The participants of these schools ask how do these forms of cruelty become common-sense, and how can we built life-affirming institutions.

I would like to think that with the aid of many voices, I configured a specific and grounded knowledge<sup>4</sup>. Is from this place of enunciation, that I started to think about

<sup>3</sup> My understanding of *museal acts* and *ways of doing* owes to the Brazilian museologist and teacher Waldissa Russio's theory of "fato-museal".

<sup>4</sup> In the Editorial introducing the issue 53 of ONCURATING titled "Situated Knowledges – Curating and Art on the Move", Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter link Donna Haraway's claim

making a micro-museum: one that can fit in my migrant's suitcase. Also, from an awareness that this *action*, often associated with a first wave of Institutional Critique's works and other contemporary intervention<sup>5</sup>, needed to find a *ground* in my present: or how to hold to impermanence as a poetic response to the uncertainty of a migratory status (which adds to all I had experienced).

## 2.2 To preserve, to collect, to become a refuge.

I would like to briefly introduce the itinerary made to better understand the museum (as an abstraction) and its critical voices: its common functions and roles as stated by Daniel Buren in the seventies, the abstract definition of museum elaborated by the ICOM professionals, the relationship between museums, public spaces and political arenas according to Adrian Piper in the eighties, the critics to publicness and accessibility from an anticolonial perspective in Khairani Barokka, the administration of aesthetics as a landmark of museal administrators in Jelena Vesić, and a first approach to the importance of language (influenced by hierarchy, migration and translation) in Lynn Zelevansky and Hito Steyerl. Finally, I review a text by Cecilia Vicuña in my need to find a link between language and building a micro-museum as a life-affirming institution.

In the essay "The function of the museum", Daniel Buren (1970) characterizes the museum's role as *aesthetic* (a frame that serves as a place of inscription and viewpoint for the work), *economic* (as it gives value to what is inscribed and viewed within its institutional limits), and *mystical* (as it promotes the works that it exhibits to the status of "Art", almost as a divine designation) (Alberro and Stimson 2009, 102–6). He establishes a link between visibility, value, and historical inscription.

Considering this outlined role, Buren signals three main functions for a museum: *preservation*, *collection*, and *refuge*. About *preservation*, he states that:

One of the initial (technical) functions of the Museum (or Gallery) is preservation. /.../ This function of preservation perpetrates the idealistic nature of all art since it claims that art is (could be) eternal. This idea, among others dominated the nineteenth century, when public museums were created approximately as they are still known today. /.../ We can once again declare that the Museum makes its "mark", "imposes its frame"

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for a feminist objectivity with collaborative processes within the arts. They state: "Haraway therefore argues for the recognition of an embodied objectivity and thus for knowledge located, i.e., situated, in a certain time, embodied and with partial instruments of vision. Situated knowledge is never universal, but rather contains excerpts and different perspectives that can change in time and context. Only by negotiating the different positions and partial perspectives, by the stuttering and irritations that arise from this does more adequate knowledge become possible. **This seems to us to be a particularly valuable approach in collaborative processes that bring together different cultures and different political situations.**" ("From Space to Time: 'Situated Knowledges,' Critical Curating, and Social Truth - ONCURATING," n.d.). [emphasis added]

<sup>5</sup> I refer to "Musée d'Art Moderne - Département des Aigles" by Marcel Broodthaers, as representative of the First Wave of Institutional Critique. An interesting South American contemporary reference is "El Museo Travesti del Perú", initiated by the artist Giovanni Campusano. "Toda peruanidad es travestismo" (All peruvianity is transvestism) is the foundational claim of this museum ("El Museo Travesti Del Perú," n.d.).



(physical and moral) on everything that is exhibited in it, in a deep and indelible way. (Alberro and Stimson 2009, 103).

Afterwards, Buren reflects on how narratives are built through *collections*, by forcing the comparison of the terms included: “The Museum collects, the better to isolate. But this distinction is false, as the collection forces into comparison things that are often incomparable, consequently producing a discourse which is wrapped from the start, and to which no one pays attention /.../” (Alberro and Stimson 2009, 104).

From the interlaced acts of preserving and collecting, emerges the call to be a refuge or as Buren says “/.../ the Museum acts as a refuge. And that without this refuge, no work can “exist”. The Museum is an asylum. The works set in it are sheltered from the weather and all sorts of dangers, and most of all protected from any kind of questioning<sup>6</sup>.” (Alberro and Stimson 2009, 105).

Why do I revisit this text? Both the roles and functions, outlined by Buren in the seventies, seem to be still present in the definition of a museum agreed by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) for 2022. Is still important to be a permanent institution (or to become a lasting administrative and physical refuge) that collects and conserves what is considered valuable (heritage):

A museum is a not-for-profit, **permanent institution** in the service of society that researches, **collects, conserves**, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing. (NEMO-The Network of European Museum 2022) [emphasis added]

One important addition is the need to be open to the public, in an accessible and inclusive way. Considering that, which *public* or which type of *publicness* is relevant for this definition of museum? In the article “Some Thoughts on the Political Character of this Situation”, Adrian Piper (1983) makes two important connections: *museums as public spaces* and *public spaces as political arenas*. She states that “Galleries and museums are public spaces. Public spaces are political arenas in which power is gained, recognized, underwritten, disputed, attacked, lost, and gained.” (Alberro and Stimson 2009, 242). From this perspective, the museum (the abstraction) is grounded in a specific time and place, and acts within sets of socioeconomical relations and specific historical frameworks. Even in museums founded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (that can seem like monolithic entities) conflicts and changes occur<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding this affirmation, this text is prior to installations like *Mining the Museum* by Fred Wilson, at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992-1993 (“Mining the Museum: ‘Metalwork, 1793-1880,’” n.d.). I mention this installation since it allows a critical perspective to confront what may seem as a neutral and unquestionable museal narrative.

<sup>7</sup> On December 2023, with the support of *Sindicato Solidaridad y Unidad de los Trabajadores* (SUT), the visitor’s service staff from Museo del Prado (founded in 1785 by Charles III of Spain) went on a strike to demand better working conditions. Their letter stated: “/.../ “Subcontracting is applied, as happens on most occasions, to carry out social *dumping* by paying wages much

Following the need to ground a deterritorialized museum-abstraction, I found Khairani Barokka criticisms to the use of expressions like “making “public” and “giving access” in the context of Western art institutions, specifically in the United Kingdom. In the essay “‘Public’ and ‘Access’: Genealogies of Theft, Community, Violence and Pedagogies” (2021), she reflects on how the terms *public* and *access* often appear associated with an institutional willingness to share something that was previously inaccessible, like private collections. This differentiation is problematic since those who are included in *the public* are different from those who need *access*: it reveals how phrases like *making public* involve “false notions of universality”, since “public is bound within nation-state” (Choy et al. 2021, 329). Meanwhile, those who need access are quite often among classified or profiled groups (race, gender, class, income).

Now, let's examine how a hierarchical structure in a museum manages the “administration of aesthetic”<sup>8</sup> (Vesić 2015). Specifically, how does this structure use documents (such as letters, facility reports, press releases), wall texts, labels, and social media posts to materialize the museum-abstraction. In the essay “From inside the museum: Some thoughts on the issue of institutional critique”, Lynn Zelevansky (2006) says:

/.../ the idea that the institution “speaks in a single voice” —a sign of professionalism in the field— seems to be underlined in the common policy that wall texts are unsigned. An abstraction called “the museum” functions as a teacher and guide for a public that includes citizens of all kinds, among them artists, critics, dealers, and governmental and corporate sponsors, with the consequence that these publics relate to the museum as an entity of consciousness and will. (Haacke et al. 2006, 171–72)

The museum-abstraction institutes its presence, or becomes a consistent entity in the public sphere, through a set of spatialized and specialized practices (curatorial, museological, museographical, educational, administrative), performed by workers and communicated in a specific way to the public (nation-state bounded, able to). At first, to become a museal institution that *speaks in a single voice*, can seem a matter of coherency about *what and how is said* and that can be attained by sharing the same discourse across the institutional structure, with some variations. But also, the decision of what not to share, that is agreed in a non-public sphere, shapes the museum's public acts and, by doing so, its relation to the public sphere or as Barokka questions:

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lower than those that would be charged in the case of direct hiring. This is the only and crude reason why the visitor's service staff is outsourced: **to reduce the budget by destroying the working conditions of the outsourced workers.**” (Durán Rodríguez 2023) [emphasis added]. Though many public museums express their commitment to education, the material conditions for museum educators, expressed in budgetary planning, do not match this public discourse. This strike brought these economic conditions into the public agenda.

<sup>8</sup> “The term *administration of aesthetics* [coined by Jelena Vesić] has been forged for such needs as an allusion to or inversion of Benjamin Buchloh's term *aesthetics of administration*; the inversion in terms of difference between the exhibition mode or the moment when art is presented (on which Buchloh focuses) and the process that precedes it, i.e. agreements, negotiations, communication, all those things that have been categorized as too banal and therefore set behind “the stage” for exhibiting and presenting art.” (Vesić 2015)

/.../ Which parts of a 'public' exhibition or institution are public? Complaint forms? Donor information, lender information? Employee conversations? Though obvious, in laying out an institution's blueprint for what is *presented* as public, and *how*, we may lay bare the ways in which public relations schemata architect affect and disrupt capital flows. (Choy et al. 2021, 331)

Following this reflection on museal communicative acts within the public sphere, I met John A. Searle's (2005) article "What is an Institution?" on how language played a role in constituting institutional realities. In the introductory essay to the book *Institutional Critique and After*, John C. Welchman comments about Searle's writings in relation to the concept and social implications of institutions. He states that:

.../ Most theories of institutions, and much philosophy until the 20th century have, he suggests [referring to Searle], taken language for granted, so that of 'course if you presuppose language, you have already presupposed institutions'.(Haacke et al. 2006, 14–15).

Language is not a neutral or given platform for constructing and expressing institutions. In the context of art institutions, the language choice reveals the involvement of imperial and capital powers in creating globalized art scenes. In this sense, Hito Steyerl's reply to the essay "International Art English" (2012), written by Alix Rule and David Levine, can be insightful. In their article, Rule and Levine analyzed a corpus of digital press releases, published on the *e-flux* website, with the aid of statistical methods. They compare their writing style (vocabulary and syntax) with the standards of the British National Corpus (BNC). They introduce their findings arguing that "The internationalized art world relies on a unique language. Its purest articulation is found in the digital press release. This language has everything to do with English, but it is emphatically not English." (Rule and Levine 2012). They coin the term "International Art English" to refer to this "amateurish English language used in contemporary art press releases. /.../ They conclude that the texts are written in a skewed English full of grandiose and empty jargon often carelessly ripped from mistranslations of continental philosophy." (Steyerl 2013). For Steyerl, this analysis overlooks the contexts of production (which status does an author of press releases has in the textual production among a specialized field) and circulation of these texts. While the authors focus to proof how these texts do not conform a norm, Steyerl sees this deviation as a possibility.

From these previous reflections about how the museum-abstraction is constructed, through roles and functions, and performed through public and private actions, communicated in specific codes, and that happen within a structure that allows an administration of aesthetics and certain permanence: How can my micro-museum come into being via language, via migration, via translation?

As language has come to be a permanent reminder of my own migratory status, I found the article "Language is migrant" (2016) from the Chilean artist and poet Cecilia Vicuña. She writes:

20 years ago, I opened up the word "migrant," seeing it as a dangerous mix of Latin and Germanic roots. I imagined "migrant" was probably composed of *mei*, (Latin), to change or move, and *gra*, "heart" from the Germanic *kerd*. Thus, "migrant" became: "changed

heart," a heart in pain, changing the heart of the earth. The word "immigrant" really says: "grant me life."

"Grant" means "to allow to have," and is related to a far more ancient Proto Indo-European root: *dhe*, the mother of "deed" and "law" in English and *sacerdos* in Latin: performer of sacred rites.

What is the rite performed by millions of migrants displaced and seeking safe haven around the world? Is it a way to let us see our own indifference, our complicity with the ongoing wars?

Is their pain powerful enough to allow us to change our heart? To see our part in it? (Vicuña 2016)

A provisional answer to how this micro-museum will relate to language can be: our micro-museum's language will be that of displacement, of a desire of holding onto life. It will and must follow this desire path (as different from official routes): we will find our language through words and actions. The use of language, in order to build a life-affirming institution, needs to be an act of reparation.

### **2.3 Borderlines and outfields: Institutional critique, institution of critique, own-self-made institutions**

In the essay "Notes on Institutional Critique", Simon Sheik argues that "The very term 'institutional critique' seems to indicate a direct connection between a **method** and an **object**: the method being the critique and the object the institution." (Raunig 2009, 29). From this perspective, he traces the shifts in this connection among the historical waves of Institutional Critique:

In the **first wave** of institutional critique from the late 1960s and early 1970s –long since celebrated and relegated by art history– these terms could apparently be even more concretely and narrowly defined: the critical method was an artistic practice, and the institution in question was the art institution, mainly the art museum, but also galleries and collections. /.../ However, in the so-called **second wave**, from the 1980s, the institutional framework became somewhat expanded to include the artist's role (the subject performing the critique) as institutionalized, as well as an investigation into other institutional spaces (and practices), besides the art space. (Raunig 2009, 29) [emphasis added]

During the two historical waves, critique was predominantly performed by artists and directed towards institutions. However, these approximations differ from other contemporary critical approaches, where members of an institution are "opting for [the institutions] rather than against them" (Raunig 2009, 30). Their endeavors seem to be directed towards institutional change<sup>9</sup>, and this signals a movement from an institutional outside, towards its perceived inside.

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<sup>9</sup> A contemporary reference of this approach is the public program *Museo Situado* at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, Spain. This public program, initiated in 2018 by Ana Longoni during her time as Director of Public Programs, aimed to create collaborations between the museum and the social organizations of the neighborhood where it is located. *Museo Situado* had "an assemblage and polyphonic format that goes beyond the traditional concept of the museum to

In the article “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique”, Andrea Fraser challenges the understanding of an institution as something separated from its critics. She states that “Representations of the “art world” as distinct from the “real world”, like representations of the “institution” as discrete and separate from “us”, serve specific functions in art discourse” (Haacke et al. 2006, 133). This comprehension aims to maintain a separation between our social and economic interests and our artistic, intellectual, and political interests, or how the first inform or shape the latest. She concludes that “Every time we speak of an institution as something other than “us, we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions. /.../ We are the institution” (Haacke et al. 2006, 133). This is a claim not only for an internalized art institution (as a structuring-structure), but also a call for building critical institutions. Nevertheless, Sheik asks to whom refers we in that affirmation, as he underlines the connection between institutionalization and exclusions: “the question [is] which subjects fall outside of institutionalization, not due to a willful act or exodus /.../ but through the expulsions at the very center of institutions that allow them to institutionalize.” (Raunig 2009, 31).

But, what happens in contexts where art institutions are built differently from the Western context and, therefore, establish a different type of membrane that allows more than inside-outside-institution dynamics? What happens when we need to “become our own self-made institutions”? Can this experience have any importance in a Western context? Recently, I found this letter from Farah Wardani, Programme Director of Jakarta Biennale 2021, addressed to her team:

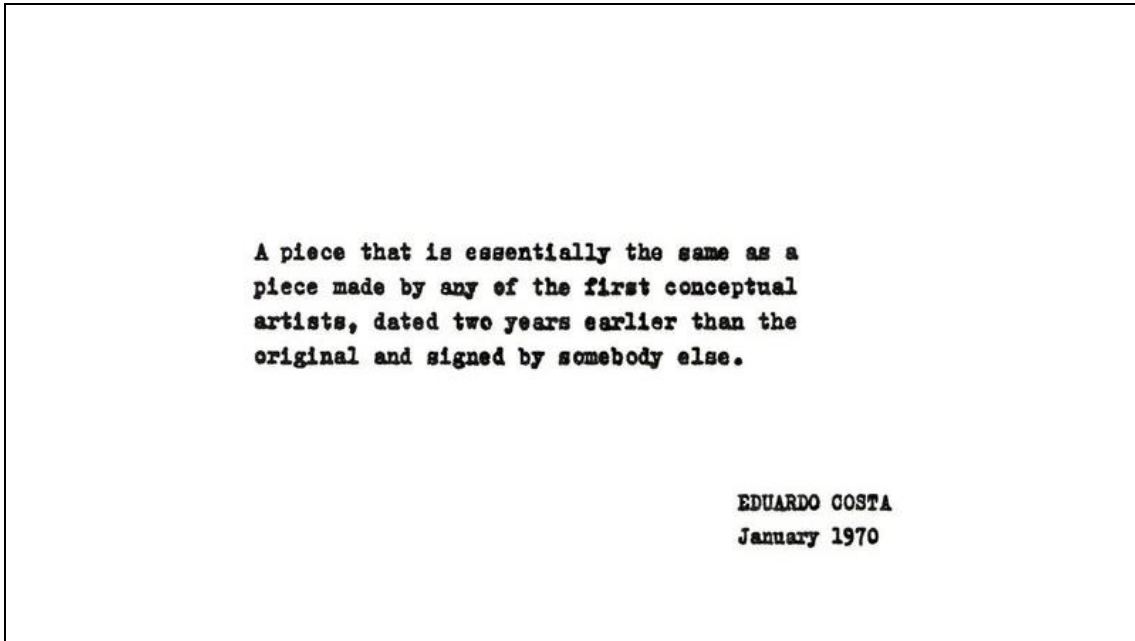
After experiencing a repressive regime for three decades—an experience shared by many of us—, its survivors have gotten used to taking care of themselves, minding their own business, cooperating with various non-governmental entities, be it locally, nationally, or even internationally. Therefore, it makes sense that many of us working in the arts, in academia or in any scene really, who managed to survive such regimes, have never felt the need to work with the government nor its institutions. **Many of us have become our own self-made institutions** and have carved out their own ways of doing things. /.../ All these romantic terms, like “organic”, “collegial”, “collective”, etc, I still use. I abide by these ideas, if you will. Like I said at the start of this letter, I do miss working in this way, I miss doing things our own way, the way we see fit. But, I believe that in such a convivial setting, roles and responsibilities must be clarified. (Wardani 2021) [emphasis added]

Another important connection I found was the relationship between Latin-American Conceptualism and Institutional Critique stated by Alexander Alberro. He states that “/.../ the role of Latin American and East European Art in the development of what in North America and Western Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s came to be referred as Institutional Critique /.../” (Alberro and Stimson 2009, 301). Here, I would like to

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enter into other dynamics driven by the history of organization, struggle and resistance of the Lavapiés neighborhood and its community movements.” (“Museo Situado. Una conversación con Ana Longoni” 2020).

briefly refer to the artwork of Eduardo Costa "A Piece That Is., 1970/2008", which signals how our intuitions need to be discovered to be legitimate.



**Image 2.** *Eduardo Costa "A Piece That Is. . . , 1970/2008"*. Technical information: Materials: Typewriter over paper. Dimensions: 24 in x 30 in.

### 3. An incomplete proposal: to make a micro-museo

“El Micromuseo de plantas migrantes” (The micro-museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter) is a self-made institution that borrows the credibility of *the museum* (the ICOM defined museum and the ones I experienced), in the name of migrant species. Operating nomadically, it will also borrow the tactics of migrant plants and adapt itself to thrive and flourish within diverse environments like fellow museums, project rooms, educational institutions, and communal spaces.

I established a first set of premises to guide the desire path of “El Micromuseo de plantas migrantes” (The micro-museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter):

*We are a shelter for actions, a refuge for all sorts of changes.*

*We will always find a new ground.*

*We will thrive and flourish amidst impermanence.*

*As the livable, became unlivable.*

*As borders move, we move too.*

In the following points, I propose a method that includes conversations, observations, and irruptions.

#### 3.1 Conversations: The beginning (Because we must start somewhere)

*Seeds come flying to Europe, from magical places, like The Andes.*

*An artist explaining how they mediate a guide for children about extracted seeds from the Global South, during an event at The Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (Germany).*

On May 2019, after visiting the “Welcoming Class”, at Lakkegata Skole, Kristine and I took a long walk. She was curious about how a group of persons (children, teacher, we), that did not have a common language, were able to laugh and play for such a long time. She was also worried that I felt too cold and, as a gift, she wanted to show me a place that could remind me of home: the Palm Tree House at the Natural History Museum - UiO.

As I entered the Palm Tree House, the artificial climate —moist and heated— was too much to bear with. I tried to zone out, but I could not. But why was this artificial climate so disturbing then? Years before 2019, drug cartels and gangs took over my country. It permeated everything: political parties, institutions, public spaces, and the ocean. We are the backyard, of the backyard, of the backyard. Days before my first trip to Oslo, in 2019, the offices at the museum I used to work were attacked, as a clear sign to push us to resign.

In 2022, I moved to Oslo and, in mid-September 2022 together with my peers, went to Berlin. One of them told us a beautiful story about the Palm Tree House. There it was: 2019 in 2022. *Asuntos pendientes.*

Since I moved to Oslo, I started to meet Wei Ting Tseng with certain frequency. Wei is a cellist from Taiwan based in Oslo, who focuses on improvisation, composition, and the relationship between space in music and music in space. During our conversations, she managed to make a beautiful balance between silence and thoughtful interventions. I told her about my first encounter with the Botanical Garden. She said that one of the reasons everything felt so familiar was also because of sound: in moist climates, sounds travel quickly and creates the sensation of a certain closeness.

In November 2022, I decided to go back to the Palm Tree House. I was wondering how will it feel this time: As home? As a memory? As a beginning? I observed quietly the visitors: families and elders. I photographed the plants tags (or how they were renamed in Norway) and asked them the questions I received as a migrant: *Where do you come from? Why are you here? Do you miss home? When are you going back? Can you repeat what you just said?* I sat there, I observed, I listened. I realized our shared common ground and how their name tag signaled them as collected beings in an artificial wilderness.

From here, I started to sketch a guide to talking with plants as a first step of this project.

### **Guide to talk with other beings.**

Do you notice the light,  
the warmth, the moisture?  
Have you ever been to  
a place like this before?

Approach one of the beings in this garden  
and, if you like, ask them kindly:  
Why are you here?

Different answers may come up...  
As presences, as whispers, as memories.





**Image 3. Notebooks to talk with other beings (Notebook N.1) Technical information:** Printing technique: Riso print, Editions: 7 (1st Edition), January 2023

### **3.2 The micro-museum as a parasite: a method for irruptions**

During my third semester at the Master in Arts and Public Space, I had an intuition: if I kept moving, I needed to make a *shelter* that was portable. What will this shelter be? A shelter for actions, for questions, for demands, for encounters. The idea of starting a self-made institution that can find an institutional existing body, irrupt, make a claim, and disappear, was at the core of my wanderings.

“El Micromuseo de plantas migrantes” (The micro-museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter) started as a self-made institution that temporarily borrows credibility of word *museum* (the ICOM defined museum and the ones I experienced), in the name of migrant species. As it needed to operate nomadically, it will also borrow the tactics of migrant plants and adapt itself to thrive and flourish within diverse environments like fellow museums, educational institutions, and communal spaces. We will be a parasite: “/.../: such a parasite is responsible for the growth of the system's complexity, such a parasite stops it. The other question is still there: are we in the pathology of systems or in their emergence and evolution?” (Serres and Schehr 1982, 14)

To begin, I looked back at my photographic archive of plant tags. They were among the first beings I felt connected through displacement: we shared a new ground and roots that pointed somewhere else. I started reading this description to an AI image generator:

Can you imagine a “*Bromeliaceae Ananasfamilien*” plant, native for South America, set in a South American landscape. The roots need to look as if

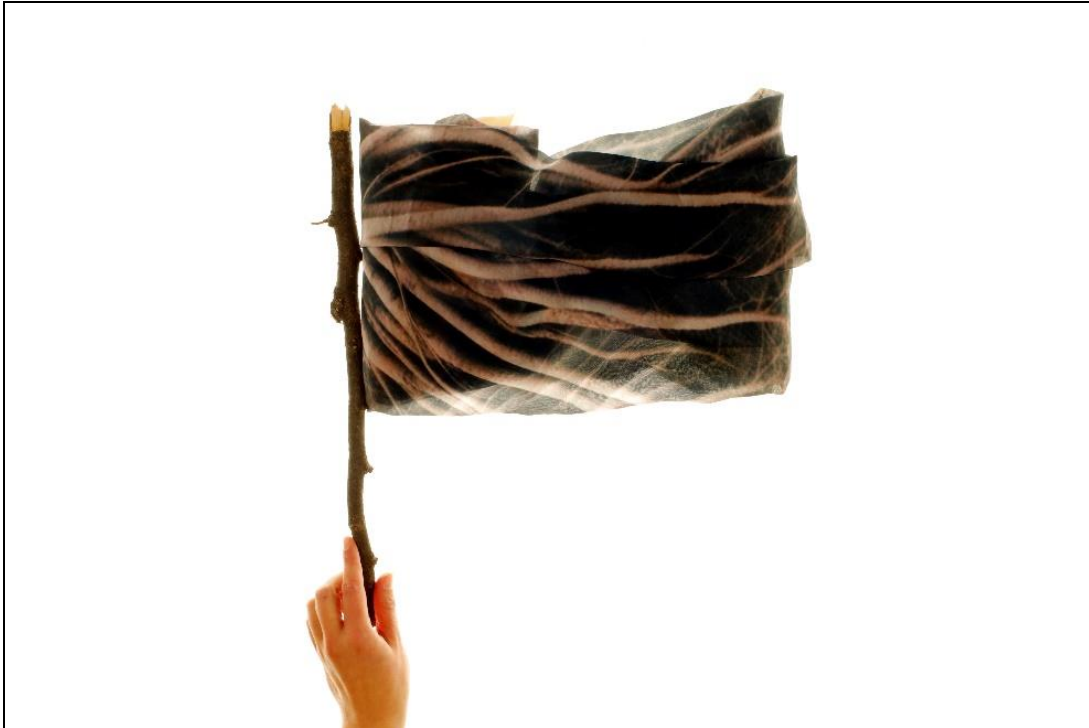
was about to get extracted to travel to a distant city in Europe, to inhabit a botanical garden. The plant feels very confused.



**Image 4. How Artificial intelligence imagines a Bromeliaceae Ananasfamilien Image credits: AI Generator**

I wanted to resemble the place this extracted plant came from was through the speculation of artificial intelligence. I wanted to produce “poor images,” different from the *virtuoso* ones of Botanical Expeditions, ones that can escape the classification protocols needed for extraction. Then, with this image, I printed a flag to signal our (me and the museum) arrival to a new ground.

First, the flag was presented folded, as a promise of opening of “El Micromuseo de plantas migrantes” (The micro-museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter) in 2024. It was part of the exhibition of artists books *We are fibrous structures* in November 2023, organized by the Master in Arts and Public Space – KHIO at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (HOK). This was the micro-museums first parasitic experience: inhabiting an institutional body to announce its opening.



**Image 5. Plant a flag, start a branch! *El micro museo de plantas migrantes. Abrimos en 2024! The micro museum of migrant plants. We open in 2024!*** Our flags are an emblem of possibility, ready to take root wherever we desire to establish a new museum branch. **Reel:** <https://vimeo.com/877184396> **Video credits:** Marie Cole. **Technical information:** Materials: Silk-printed flag and branch pole. Dimensions: 100 cm x 100 cm.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2024, “El Micromuseo de plantas migrantes” (The micro-museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter) officially opened during the Master’s Agenda, organized by the Department of Arts and Crafts, at Kunstnernes Hus. The flag was raised in the main flagpole of Kunstnernes Hus and, at their Auditorium, I gave a brief introduction followed by a conversation with Wei Ting Tseng to present the micro-museum to the public. The conversation ended by cutting a red string and declaring the micro-museum officially opened. This was the second parasitic experience.





Image 6, 7, 8. *Lecture and conversation My quest for El micro-museo de las plantas migrantes (The micro museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter)* Video stills from the documentation of the Master's Agenda at Kunstnernes Hus. Reel: <https://vimeo.com/934293083> Video credits: Milton Mondal

On April 24, 2024, together with the Master in Arts and Public Space, we visited the 60th Biennale di Venezia themed *Foreigners Everywhere* - *Stranieri Ovunque*. Adriano Pedrosa, the artistic director for this edition, states the following:

The title of the 60th International Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia is drawn from a series of works made by the Paris-born and Palermo-based collective Claire Fontaine since 2004. The works consist of neon sculptures in different colors that render in a growing number of languages the expression "Foreigners Everywhere". The expression was in turn appropriated from the name of a collective from Turin that in the early

2000s fought racism and xenophobia in Italy: *Stranieri Ovunque*. (“Biennale Arte 2024 | Introduction by Adriano Pedrosa” 2023)

After visiting the International Exhibition, I went to the Spanish Pavilion, curated by Agustín Pérez Rubio and commissioned to the Peruvian artist Sandra Gamarra. The title was “Pinacoteca Migrante”: it was the first time Spain was represented by an artist from one of its former colonies. But, is it possible for colonial powers to perform decolonization? Colonial powers installed a matrix of oppression in our lands that is functional to the extraction and structural violence we live today.

I decided to open my flag in front of one of Gamarra’s paintings titled *Miscegenation Mask 1 (Portrait of an Indigenous Woman from Quito with fruits)*. According to Gamarra’s research women from places like Quito, my city, face a double oppression: from the colonized males and from the colonial males. I can add to this that patriarchal oppression is functional to extractivist models those that take plants, seeds, raw materials, resources, and that racialize labour (who is able to rest, to create).



**Image 9.** *Plant a flag, start a branch! El micro museo de plantas migrantes at the Spanish Pavilion.* Flag opening in front of the painting *Miscegenation Mask 1 (Portrait of an Indigenous Woman from Quito with fruits)* from Sandra Gamarra Reel: <https://vimeo.com/941866412>  
**Video credits:** Marie Cole. **Technical information:** Materials: Cotton-printed flag. Dimensions: 150 cm x 100 cm.

### 3.3 The final exhibition: KHIO – This must be the place (to make a claim)

*I don't want nothing related to anything political.*

An student in response to the proposal of including “Free Education for All”, as part of the title of our Graduation Exhibition.

In the article *Tuition fee for non-European students in Norway: Unfair and a threat to education quality*, Poul Wisborg analyzes the consequences of the newly approved tuition fees from the perspective of access. Regarding the relation between racialized territories and access to higher education, he states:

This proposal is unjust because it worsens the problem of unequal global access to higher education. It reflects and exacerbates discrimination because it disproportionately disadvantages students from the global South – Africa, Asia and Latin America – whose students are both excluded and generally have less economic opportunities for funding their higher education here or elsewhere. The government fails to even consider the way this worsens racial disadvantage in access to higher education. (“POLITICAL ECOLOGY FORUM,” n.d.)

The notion of a racialized territory, as a distant and disadvantaged place, is actively produced. This production, which is not only discursive, is realized through material conditions like the access to education (not only higher education). In our actual context, we can gain a deeper understanding of how access and, therefore epistemic justice, is closely related to race and class.

As I finish writing this text, I am producing the installation for the final exhibition at Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo. The plan for the final exhibition started in a quite different way: at first, I thought of printing several flags with different images of extracted plants and install them with branch poles at the Asian Gardens of KHIO. As the time approaches, and after attending the meetings to decide the exhibition’s title, preparing my visa application for the UDI, saving all that I can to reach the 300.000 NOK savings asked for visa seekers, there is only one thing I would like to say:

EDUCACION GRATUITA PARA TODOS LOS TERRITORIOS RACIALIZADOS.

FREE EDUCATION FOR ALL RACIALIZED TERRITORIES.

So, for the final exhibition, the “El Micromuseo de plantas migrantes” (The micro-museum of migrant plants | Mikromuseet for migrantplanter) will parasite and make a claim related to epistemic justice and to the desire of many of us-migrants: to hold on to life.

Note: The documentation will be uploaded to <https://belensantillan.cargo.site/>

## 4. Conclusions

As a very provisional set of conclusions, I would like to propose a working method that carried me across this quest:

1. Propositions-questions above instructions-statements.
2. Then, hope that this turns walls-gates into membranes.
3. Whenever possible, no material outcomes. But, if necessary, use as little as you can.
4. Remember whose voices live through your voice.
5. Doubt your own program and rewrite it constantly.

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