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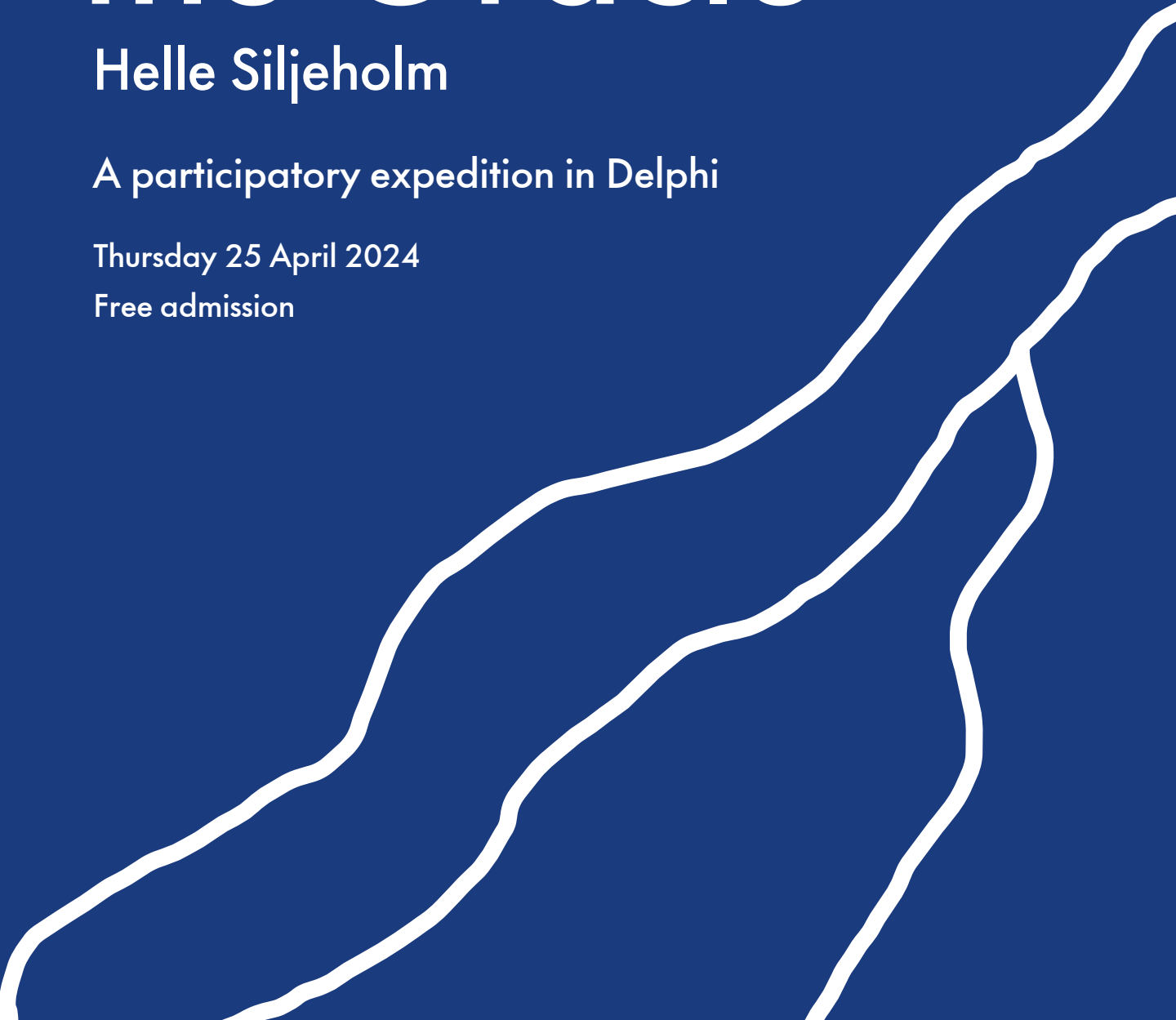
# Searching for the Oracle

Helle Siljeholm

A participatory expedition in Delphi

Thursday 25 April 2024

Free admission



## Searching for the Oracle

On April 25 Polygreen Culture & Art Initiative (PCAI) presents Searching for the Oracle, an expedition by Norwegian visual artist and choreographer Helle Siljeholm, in Delphi.

Driven by recent researches on Delphi's geomythological history, stating that the oracle's hallucinative fumes were due to seismic raptures Helle Siljeholm invites the public for a one-day expedition in search for the Oracle. While on the one hand, references in geomythology describe a metaphysical connection in which Gaia, Mother Earth, produced from its bowels fumes with hallucinogenic effects, capable of creating powerful images in people's imagination, on the other hand, urban legends report that these fumes seem to have disappeared from Delphi in the 1930s. Searching for the Oracle is a speculation and a meditation upon Delphi as a site, the fumes that disappeared, and the form they might have transformed into.

Inspired by the ancient journey to meet Pythia (the Oracle) the audience is invited to join the performers on an 8-hour expedition from Athens to Delphi. Leaving Athens at 15.30 and returning by midnight,

the expedition takes the form of a participatory performance with intermediate stops, including a meditative walk in nature, resting as well as a festive ritual. The last stop of the journey will be the Delphi PCAI venue, the former Pikionis pavilion, now "pi", where the participants, will be served a vegetarian dinner surrounded by the Delphic stunning scenery. All the while, performative and spiritual elements might appear and disappear throughout.

Searching for the Oracle is part of Siljeholm's ongoing and long-term project The Mountain Body based on the development of unique site-specific works in different locations. Together and over time these works and processes form a "mountain range" inspired by the nomadic movements of the continental shelves and the land surface, which are always in motion across borders and in various stages of transformation. The sites, research, and interventions that make up this mountain range can be understood as a community; a whole, that while possessing individual characteristics, is collectively rooted in one another, much like the ecosystems we depend on for survival.

**Concept, choreographer and researcher:** Helle Siljeholm,

**Co-creating performer and sound design:** Ilios,

**Co-creating performers:** Pernille Holden and Marianne Kjærund,

**Curator and research:** Kika Kyriakakou, PCAI Artistic Director,

**Curator and costume design:** Poka Yio,

**Production:** Vasia Magoula, Vicky Tsirou,

**Pi facilitator:** Menelaos Bakratsas,

**Performance documentation:** Maria Toultsa,

**Visual documentation:** Espen Haslene & Fred Arne Wergland,

**Administration:** Guro Vrålstad, The Mountain Body

**Communication:** Bjarne Asp, PCAI & Zuma Communications

**Organised by:** Polygreen Culture & Art Initiative – PCAI

**Supported by:** Arts Council Norway, OCA - Office for Contemporary Art Norway,  
Danse-og Teatersentrum, Norwegian Embassy in Athens

## The Navel of the Mountain Body

The landscape of Greece is mostly mountainous and interlaced with coastlines. This rough background, not much different from the Norwegian land, has formed our culture through the ages starting from our mythology. Large earth formations, like mountains, have fed the imagination of our predecessors. Where we see earth they saw Titans and Giants fighting for the shaping of the Cosmos. Now these Cosmological gods have fallen into oblivion, they lay silent and unsung. Forgotten. That connection with earth is long lost.

Coming across Helle Siljeholm's The Mountain Body has been an experience with a profound effect on me. The scale of humans, hanging, crawling, caressing the rocks awoke a long lost ritual. The Mountain Body addresses mountains, and rocks as living entities, with curiosity, awe, respect, affection. The possibility of setting up an invocation like The Mountain Body in Greece has been a dream for me since I first experienced it. Delphi, the ancient navel of the world, and famous oracle, is one of the most magical places in Hellenic history. It is a mountain formation, a gorge, a breathtaking landscape, that puts in scale and context our very existence. Today more than ever we are in need to reconnect with nature, to recalibrate our values according to nature, decelerate our frenetic pace and listen to its low frequency, its humming sounds and whispers which command a less arrogant, less self-destructive way of life.

The invocation of the mountain gods, the spirit of earth, is not yet another New Age escapist refuge. It is a metaphor and a powerful message for an active approach to nature. Currently the landscape of Greece has been ravaged and scarred by wildfires, floods, exploitation and hubris. Connecting the Mountain Bodies of Europe is like giving an electric pulse to the spine of Earth. Awakening the chthonic dragon, our collective conscience. Delphi, the symbolic center of earth, will be a nod in the invisible grid that these mountain bodies form. A pivotal center connecting the timeless with the present, the visceral with the logical, the artistic with the ecological. The Mountain Body Delphi will produce an iconic art project and extend far further from art. It will become a symbol, so much in need today.

Poka-Yio

Poka-Yio is an artist and curator,  
founding director of the Athens Biennale  
and professor at the Athens School of Fine Arts

#oracle #HelleSiljeholm #pcaidelphi #pi

## AN INTERVIEW

### between Kika Kyriakakou and Helle Siljeholm on Delphic geology, performative morphologies and the body

**KK** Your multidisciplinary work ranges from dance, choreography and performance to sculpture and installation. How easy or challenging has it been to navigate around different artistic fields as part of your practice?


**HS** Hmm, good question. It can indeed be challenging, but I love it because I find it extremely rewarding for the creative process to have a wide range of artistic disciplines and traditions to think with and work through. As a multidisciplinary artist I feel very inspired by Delphi as a site, where such diverse practices have been instrumental in fueling the imaginary and narration of the site through thousands of years. As “performative installation” Delphi is never ending.

**KK** Your environmental concerns seem to be a prominent part of your work and of your long-term project *The Mountain Body*, in specific. How does this particular work address climate disruption and anthropocentrism in the era of capitalocene?

**HS** *The Mountain Body* promotes a view on nature in which all bodies, human and more- than- human bodies (here: geological formations) are entangled and interdependent. This approach is inspired by multiple thinkers, activists and indigenous groups and communities in which nature has intrinsic value on an equal footing with humans. In the *Mountain Body* the aim is to explore human-nature entanglements but from the “perspective” of geological formations (mountains and land formations). A change in perspective (and imaginary), from the human to the more- than- human bodies, that shape the ground we stand on, quite literally speaking. The hope is that the project can contribute to a collective re-thinking towards a more just and sustainable future, for all bodies, human- and more- than- human alike.

**KK** Referring to the body without organs, Deleuze and Guattari address it at some point as a plane of consistency of desire. What sort of body does the mountain constitute for you?

**HS** What is immensely fascinating is the huge transformations and the different time-intervals the geological formations do operate within. It is fascinating when a material or a body show to us that the sort of power construction humans make on top, like i.e nationstate, doesn't apply to them. These bodies are nomadic and will transform and connect landscapes of the world, in different ways, no matter what and they exist forever.



**KK** Caspar Fredrich's *Wander* (1818) speculates over life and death atop a mountainous sea of fog. Which are your speculations when the Mountain Body is in process and how has this work synched with your practice as researcher and a dancer?

**HS** I think about time (deep time) and the archives (or diaries) of past and current life present in the nature archive and how these narrations exist in these archives both as horizontal time and vertical time. The author, John Macphee, who phrased the term deep time said: "If you liberate yourself from the conventional reaction to a million years, you liberate yourself a little from human time. And it becomes like you live forever, and at the same time, not at all." Arriving in Delphi I found this way of phrasing deep time resonating with how one could interpret the very materiality of the hallucinating fumes of the Oracle (Pythia). As a choreographer I am interested in both the movement and structures you can see, and the ones you can't so easily. The movement of the mountain, and how its visible and invisible effect is affected by its surroundings. Furthermore, I am interested in the immaterial and the ephemeral, both in nature landscapes and in choreography, or a dance, or a hosted situation let's say.

**KK** The Mountain Body has been presented in diverse areas, geologically and historically speaking. In which ways do the Delphic sceneries and mythologies differ from your previous implementations and which are the further connotations that the Delphi version might bear eventually?

**HS** Digging into the parts of the Geomythological archive in Delphi has been a real eye opener, it is absolutely amazing that it is such a direct link between the seismic raptures in the ground and one of the most well-known imaginaries in the world. This I somehow didn't expect. It is also interesting that there is so much information on Apollo's Oracle, Pythia, but very little on Gaia's oracle. So many questions arise from tapping into this enormous archive. It is really such a privilege to work with. The experiences, findings and questions that will arise from the work in Delphi will continue to shape the approach and research of the project series. But now I am very much looking forward to inviting the audience onto this expedition, journey and speculation with us.

**Kika Kyriakakou is the artistic director PCAI  
and the curator of the PCAI art collection**



## HELLE SILJEHOLM

Helle Siljeholm is a visual artist and choreographer based in Oslo. Her work encompasses film, installation, sculpture, choreography, performance, and curatorial practices. She is a Ph.D. candidate in artistic research at the Oslo National Academy Of The Arts. Siljeholm's artistic work often involves extensive collaboration across a range of artistic and academic disciplines. In her research project, she explores entanglements of human and more-than-human bodies and places, in the light of geological (deep) time and space. The more-than-human bodies are defined as geological entities, like mountains, structural formations, landforms, and deposits such as delta, sand, and others. Bodies that exist in different forms, have different mobilities and span different time intervals. A relational approach to nature, body and culture opens the possibility of studying how alternative perspectives and imaginaries may arise in encounters with nature as the more-than-human bodies themselves represent them.

[www.hellesiljeholm.com](http://www.hellesiljeholm.com)  
[www.themountainbody.com](http://www.themountainbody.com)

## POLYGREEN CULTURE & ART INITIATIVE (PCAI) and the former Pikionis pavilion, now "pi"

PCAI is a nonprofit organization, founded by Athanasios Polychronopoulos, Polygreen CEO, as a means to increase environmental awareness through an annual programme of commissions, contemporary art exhibitions, art residencies, workshops, conferences and events. The organisation implements its objectives through three areas of activity: its mainly commissioned-based art collection, its annual program of cultural projects and the support it offers to artistic initiatives and artists sharing its environmental concerns. In 2019 Kika Kyriakakou, PCAI's artistic director, initiated the organisation's artist-in-residence programme with a residency jury of esteemed members like Hans Ulrich Obrist, Serpentine artistic director, and Krist Gruijthuisen, KW Institute Director. In 2021 PCAI became an official nominator for the Earthshot Prize, the significant environmental award established by the Royal Foundation of the Prince and Princess of Wales. The recently renovated by PCAI former Pikionis pavilion, now "Pi" (Global Centre for Circular Economy and Culture), is a historic and architectural monument of the 1950s located in the archaeological area of Delphi. Designed by leading Greek architects Dimitris and Petros Pikionis the pavilion is a unique example of post-war architecture. This new PCAI cultural space aims to cultivate environmental awareness with contemporary art as its main vehicle and has already hosted important exhibitions and cultural activities in partnership with international institutions and art collections.

[www.pcai.gr](http://www.pcai.gr)