

Photos: Jane Remm.



*The garden is a co-creation of many species – bumblebees pollinate the quince that humans have fertilised with their excrement and whose fruit they eat, the white wagtail fertilises the tomatoes and the seeds left behind by the tit grow into a sunflower. These points of co-creation are worth noticing and recording without intervening*

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*The creativity of other species can be seen as the outcomes of their life activities – creations such as abandoned nests – but also in the traces of their work, such as a bar of soap half-eaten by mice. The objects where human creation and the influence of other species intersect, are particularly interesting, for instance, a woollen jumper chewed by moths or honeycomb altered by human intervention.*

## EXERCISES FOR INTERSPECIES CO-CREATION



Co-creation with other species helps find ways of creating together with other living beings and making sense of creative practice. It aims to encourage empathy and responsibility, and to highlight multiple perspectives via experimentation with interspecies co-creation and more-than-human collaboration. Considering what is created by others as equal in value to human creation helps us critically assess what kind of creativity we need as resources diminish. The ethical questions it raises encourages the person initiating the co-creation to reflect critically on their own role. Co-creation involves knowledge of one's collaborators, an understanding of biology, observing their Umwelten, but most importantly, recognising our shared existence. Artistic methods are well suited to recording and strengthening co-existence and mutual interdependence.

According to scientific taxonomy, humans are mammals. Yet, in the Anthropocene – the human-driven sixth mass extinction – it may seem that we think we are more special than other species. Many people even struggle to think of themselves as a species, let alone as equal to others.<sup>1</sup> The appreciation of inter-species co-creation in art has been influenced by post-humanist thinking that encourages us to move beyond a human-centred perspective. It questions the notion of the human as the centre of the world and blurs conventional distinctions between humans, other living and non-living beings<sup>2</sup> by acknowledging the agency of all. Non-anthropocentric thinking exists in the web-like model of evolution proposed by the natural sciences, and in the worldviews of many Indigenous cultures, which are often subjective and multi-perspective. They understand human life as entangled with animals, birds, plants, and fungi.

Interspecies co-creation enables us to find value and meaning in objects created by others and to appreciate their activities. However, we need to understand that different species interpret the same phenomena each in their own way. Honeycombs, abandoned wasp nests and other structures created by them are a part of their life processes, just as art is part of a human artist's life activity. If we think about bees as creators and human art as a biological function, then our co-creation becomes more equal. It provides a different perspective on the agency of non-humans and our collaboration with them, even when we recognise that our aims differ.<sup>3</sup> Interspecies co-creation requires ethical sensitivity, since we are intervening in the life of someone else. For the artist, the central question in co-creation is how to relinquish control and open up the artwork to other perspectives so that others can emerge as dialogue partners and interpreters.<sup>4</sup> It is also important to consider what interpretive processes other species engage in.<sup>5</sup> A caring and respectful interaction could begin by observing existing relationships and exploring their *Umwelten*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Braidotti, Rosi 2019. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity Press.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Braidotti, Rosi 2019. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity Press ja Harawayvõi Wolfe, Cary 2021. *Art and posthumanism. Essays, Encounters, Conversations*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, London. (Series Art after Nature).

<sup>3</sup> Remm, Jane 2024. Koosloome paneb kõlama teiste liikide hääled. *ERR Novaator*, 29.01.2024. <https://novaator.err.ee/1609236348/koosloome-paneb-kolama-teiste-liikide-haaled>

<sup>4</sup> Remm, Tiit & Remm, Jane 2024. Vaated, hääled ja koosloome – paljuperspektiiviline tähendusloome ökokunstilistes sekkumistes. *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi* 2024 / 33/ 3-4, 155-178.

<sup>5</sup> See also Maran, Timo & Kull, Kalevi 2014. Ecosemiotics: Main principles and current developments. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 41–50, 96. 10.1111/geob.12035.

<sup>6</sup> Von Uexküll, Jakob 2012. *Omailmad*. Tlk Mari Tarvas. Tartu: Ilmamaa.

## Exercises

- Reflect on which non-human beings you already collaborate with in your creative practice, and who you would like to consider as a co-creator. Study their physiology and senses. Co-creation is based on knowing your collaborators.
- Reflect on how they might perceive you, the existence of your collaboration and co-creation. Have you noticed, for example, how appealing woollen garments knitted by humans are for moths, or for mice as nest material or food? Have you noticed how climbing plants interpret and use supports provided by humans? Knowing that amphibians have good spatial memory, have you tried to imagine what the mental geographic map of their perception might look like?
- How do you influence each other? Do you notice something in their activities that seems creative or inspires you? How might others interpret your activities? Find an object they have made. Enhance it using appropriate media and taking into consideration the welfare of others.
- The garden develops constantly through the collaborative efforts of many actors. Since the interpreters in the garden are varied, there is no one kind of garden, but there are many different gardens. Turn your attention to the constantly occurring collaborations, note and record without getting involved. Try to see the garden creatively from different perspectives. This can help you to see co-habitation as co-creation. Reduce your control of the garden and the garden will become more diverse, with more relationships. Look at the suggestions on the method card “Aesthetics of tanglement, decline, wear and tear”.
- Reflect on co-creation using words or images. How does it take place? Who are the authors?