



LAMENT

a project by Margherita Pevere

in collaboration with

Céline Charveriat, Independent Environmentalist, Adjunct professor at the Paris School of International Affairs (PSIA) and Vice-Chair of the EU High Level Group on the Economic and Social Impacts of Research (ESIR)

and

Lucía Iglesias Blanco, Policy officer at the Nature conservation unit, Directorate-General of Environment. European Commission

for JRC SciArt Resonances IV on NaturArchy

Short Facts

- **Lament** is an art and science project that will materialize through a solo performance, a group performance and a bioart installation
- it addresses more-than-human death and grief related to extreme fires events in the context of eco-disruption
- the project combines art and science with a posthuman and queer studies approach
- **Lament** honours death in its ecological and social meanings as a necessary dimension to imagine NaturArchy alliances that are not based on exploitation

Lament is a project by Margherita Pevere, artist and researcher, in collaboration with Céline Charveriat, Independent Environmentalist, Adjunct professor at the Paris School of International Affairs (PSIA) and Vice-Chair of the EU High Level Group on the Economic and Social Impacts of Research (ESIR), and Lucía Iglesias Blanco, Policy officer at the Nature conservation unit, Directorate-General of Environment, European Commission. Scientific partners will be sought in the Natura 2000 Network or the JRC fire research group.

Concept

How to think of death beyond a human-only terms? How to engage with death in times of eco-disruption with the hope to formulate alliances with nature that are not based on exploitation? How may art contribute to address death, a pervasive taboo in Western culture? My long-term project **unframing death** (2022-2026) addresses those questions through bioart, performance and writing. Within **unframing death**, **Lament** artistically engages with ecological grief by responding to the changes in an ecosystem after anthropogenic wildfires.

Lament will be a composite piece offering intimacy with more-than-human death and space for grief. It will take place partly on the site of anthropogenic fires through a participative performance and partly in the exhibition venue with an installation. Philosophically, it draws on queer ecology and queer death studies by venturing in realms beyond classical divides between life and death.

Context

Current eco-disruption caused by global shifts like biodiversity loss or climate crisis may be read as a 'slow death' (1). Those shifts can be witnessed at global scale, yet their magnitude may be hard to grasp to general audiences, who may lack knowledge or emotional vocabulary to process information from the media. Other phenomena like the European drought and wildfires in 2022 are rather perceived as traumatic episodes, for they expose eco-disruption in areas that have been, until then, marginally affected by it.

In such context, traditional human-nature interactions – like fires – become more extreme and deadly to the environment, including humans. Controlled fires have been used across time and cultures to manage land and species and prevent uncontrolled events. Fire regimes are part of ecological cycles and depend on intersecting environmental and cultural factors. In the wake of eco-disruption, anthropogenic factors meet global shifts to trigger extreme events (European Commission, 2018). Climate-crisis driven droughts and heat exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and make ecosystems more exposed (European Environment Agency, no date).

Action is taken to monitor fires (GEO and Copernicus, 2020) and foster environmental resilience, as in the European projects and or Natura 2000 Network. However, little space is given in current projects to formulate new research and strategies that take into account how environmental trauma linked to wildfires affects mental health. This results in a need to extend research in the field to support affected communities and strengthen resilience and the possible engagement in protecting the environment.

Lament embraces the need to build environmental resilience through restoration and policies. But it also takes into account other two factors. The first is the human emotions of 'ecological grief' (Cunsolo and Ellis, 2018) and 'solastalgia', the distress caused by eco-disruption (Albrecht et al., 2007). The second is more-than-human materiality of the aftermath of a fire. Soil, wood, biomes: how will these affect future ecosystems? How will they respond to global shifts like climate change and biodiversity loss? Retardant agents are often employed to contain fires: how will they impact future ecologies?

Clearly, a single project will not answer all these questions. Though, **Lament** does have the ambition to weave a dialogue with current environmental research, delve into poetics and politics of burned areas and bring these to the audience by means of an aesthetic experience. **Lament** will zoom into the 'ecologies of death' (Radomska and Åsberg, 2019) linked with wildfires in the context of changing ecologies.



Artwork description

I plan the artwork as a crescendo of intensities that starts a solo walking performance, extends to a group performance, and transfigures both fieldwork and performances into an installation featuring bioart and music. These elements are woven together through biotechnological manipulation of materials derived from my body and from the site, for instance bodily fluids and soil. The crescendo of **Lament** will chant more-than-human death and take the audience into a space where grief is dignified. Its aesthetic will convey strong bodily affect and ideas of interconnectedness.

Walking performance in an area affected by wildfires

Walking is a meditative action that reconnects to the tradition of environmental and performance art. It will allow me to experience first hand the effects of fire on the ecosystem, such as the dryness of the air, smells, sounds. The solo performance will be a durational piece, repeated every day at dawn for a few hours. I will collaborate with a photographer on site for a photographic series to be included in the exhibition. Ideally it will be a local artist, but if not available I will opt for someone in my network.

The solo will then become a group experience by inviting curators, collaborators, and local communities. Its duration will be ca. one hour, adapted to the needs of a mixed group. It will rework elements from the solo (paths, objects, movements) and culminate in a group celebration of sensorial affects. Ideally, and if possible, it will take place in the surroundings of the gallery as to involve its audiences.

Exhibition piece

The installation will rework materials and experiences from fieldwork and performance into a setting that surrounds the visitors with bioart and sound. I plan objects suspended in the space rather than placed on pedestals, while the floor is littered by burned soil and debris. I imagine the installation as a dissident cathedral with overwhelming void and bare materiality which welcomes the visitors with smell and silence like in a burned forest, and where bioart components are mysterious devotional objects.

Sound piece

I will collaborate with musician and video artist Ivan Penov drawing on the observation and data gathered the first week of residency. Based on these, Ivan Penov will collect field recording on the Karst Plateau on the Italian/Slovenian border, which was marked by large-scale fires in 2022. The composition will reflect on the idea of un-learning as a necessary step to reattune to a world where usual references points have collapsed, like after a disruptive fire. Therefore, the sound environment is to be imagined as a 'deaf' space, suspended in the acoustic features of a burned site.

The articulated format of the artwork will increase its future tourability as curators can book either the whole piece or single elements. This will allow **Lament** to reach audiences of institutions with large budgets, but also of independent or local venues willing to bring advanced topics to less usual audiences.

Art and science collaboration

I conducted preliminary research on possible scientific partners with Céline Charveriat and Lucía Iglesias Blanco along two trajectories. The first was to identify fire-related projects, like Firelogue or RES FIRES. The second was to scout for sites that were affected by unusual fires, like the smouldering peat fire at Las Tablas de Daimiel National Park. We had conversations with Nicolas Faivre (Project Officer in Biodiversity, Circular Economy and Environment); Jean Paul Torre (Policy officer in Biodiversity Unit, DG Environment), and Grégoire Dubois (Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity).

The preliminary research provided insights into the diversity of policies and research around fires in Europe. Building on this, I intend to identify a partner within the EU research network like the JRC or/and Natura 2000. Ideally, it will be researchers working on extreme or unusual fire events. Once the partnership is established, I will collaborate through:

1. on-going dialogue, to create a shared ground across different disciplines
2. fieldwork on a site of anthropogenic wildfire, to collect joint ecological observations
3. lab work to develop and test methods of artistically manipulate ecologies of death

The partnership aims to understand ecology and physiology of wildfire at microscopic scale. While the most visible impact of fires is on underwood and trees (in forests), I am interested in the less-visible aspects like what happens under the soil or under the bark of trees. Through fieldwork and lab-work I will gain understandings and hands-on experience that I will use for the performance and the installation.

I intend to leave some aspects of the work to be inspired and determined by the experience of fieldwork. Smell, fatigue, wonder are crucial sites of inspiration in my practice, and they usually gift illuminations that could not be thought of beforehand. Therefore, this proposal is the roadmap of the work, but also acknowledges how certain aspects will be refined during the collaboration.

The project will benefit from collaborating with neuroscientists and psychologists to explore PTSD, grief and solastalgia related to fires. Exploring mental health and cultural aspects of fire may open new research questions to influence EU research priorities around wildfires.



Significance in the context of the EU policies

The Green Deal explicitly calls to “reduce the incidence and extent of forest fires”. It also calls “to boost the EU’s ability to predict and manage environmental disasters” as an immediate priority. Forest ecosystems cover 42 % of the EUs total land area. The burnt area in Southern Europe during the 21st century could increase by 50% to 100% for a 2 °C global temperature increase scenario (1). Extreme wildfire as in Southern Europe in 2017-2018 and in California, Brazil and Australia in 2019 are likely to become common in Europe.

Wildfires are among the first contributors to climate change, with up to 20% of total global greenhouse gas emissions per year. Burnt areas lose their capacity to absorb CO₂, reducing the climate mitigation potential of carbon sinks. Extreme wildfires are now observed more frequently in higher altitudes and latitudes and further contribute to accelerating climate change by more black carbon fall melting of underlying permafrost. In addition, large wildfires lead to fatalities and increase air pollution over thousands of square kilometres, with an increase in airborne fine particles and gaseous air pollutants. Members of affected communities are likely to suffer from Post Traumatic Shock Syndrome (2). Moreover, the increased risk of large wildfires and exposure to images of wildfires are contributing to ecoanxiety amongst the general public (3).

In summary, wildfires are a major environmental and public health challenge. To prevent fires and mitigate mental health related-risks, it is essential to allow citizens to engage with wildfires in a emotional way to strengthen mental resilience and contribute to fire prevention and preparedness efforts within communities at risk, with a focus on fire prone areas (e.g. Wildland Urban Interface areas bordering forestlands).

[this section received the irreplaceable input of Lucía Iglesias Blanco and Céline Charveriat]

The EU Birds (4) and Habitats (5) Directives play an essential role in protecting Europe’s nature. In particular, Natura 2000, the EU network of protected areas created under the Habitats Directive, protect and enhance natural heritage, while conserving and restoring the ecosystem services generated by the Natura 2000 sites, which benefit people and the economy. Natura 2000 is a worldwide unique network of conservation areas developed in cooperation between the 27 EU Member States. Natura 2000 currently includes around 27 000 sites and covers more than 18 % of the EUs land territory and almost 9% of its marine area. The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Proposal for a Nature Restoration Law aim at further expanding environmental restoration via scientific research, citizen engagement, and policy implementation.

Although in Natura 2000 there are fragile ecosystems that do not support human presence, in most of its sites human activities are not excluded. The conservation of some of them requires human intervention. Thousands of individuals, authorities, land owners, land and marine users, NGOs and public authorities work to conserve and restore Natura 2000 sites, contributing to implement an important EU policy and providing benefits to society. In this context, the role of artists as agents of change may be of significance in fostering empathy towards nature and the understanding of the value of conserving, restoring and protecting it.

1 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/green_deal/gdc_stakeholder_engagement_topic_01-1_fighting_wildfires.pdf

2 www.inverse.com/mind-body/wildfire-ptsd; <https://neurosciencenews.com/wildfires-ptsd-17717/>

3 <https://globalmedicaldata.com/what-is-eco-anxiety-how-climate-change-is-affecting-our-mental-health>

4 Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 /11/ 2009 on the conservation of wild birds. OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7–25

5 Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7–50

Further developments

The project may develop further in the future through with actions that directly involve local communities affected by fires as to offer them the possibility to rework their trauma and grief collectively. This may also include activists and local associations to engage proactively with communities prone to fire, for instance by designing a toolkit or methodologies of active participation and proactive prevention. While the present project may pave the bases for such ideas, further funding is needed to implement them.

I am a keen writer in academia and general outlets, both as a single author as well as co-author, and look forward to publishing possibilities that may emerge from the project. The project will thus reach professionals in artistic and scientific contexts and broader lay audiences. Moreover, the project will gift me with further artistic experience skills that I am eager to share in future workshops and teaching.

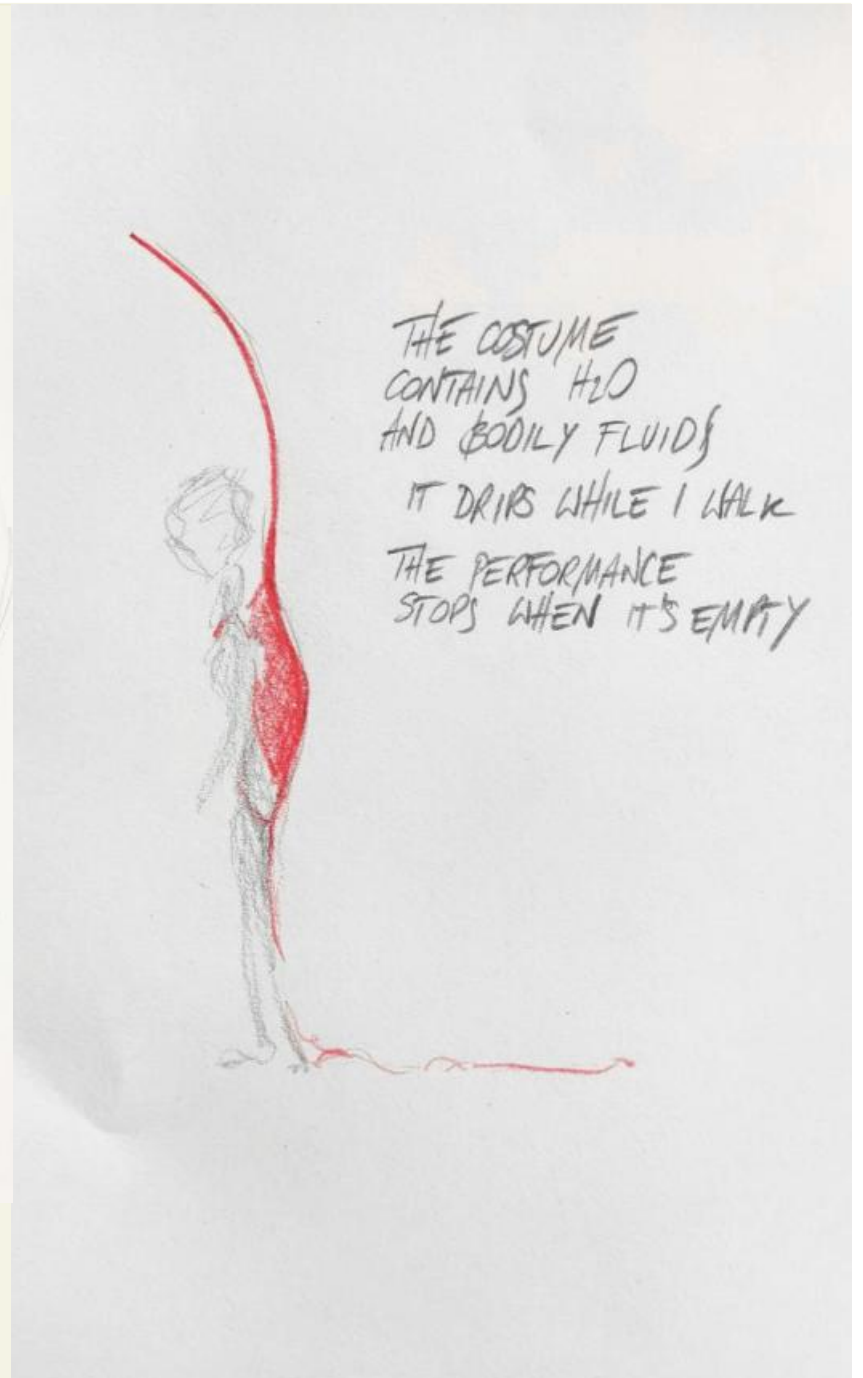
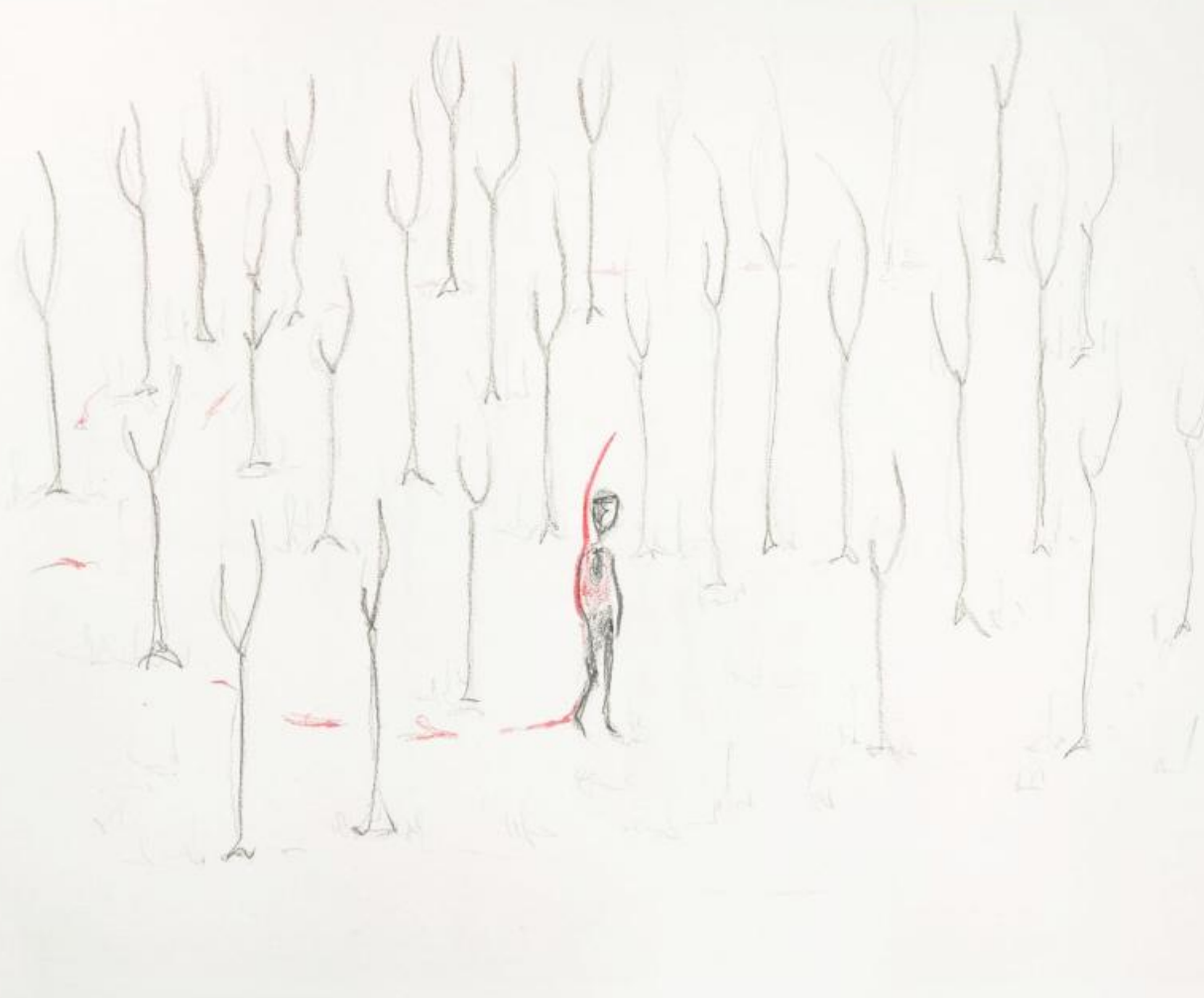
Accessibility of the artwork

While art and science traditionally aims at pushing boundaries and opening new perspectives, it generally lacks a solid discussion on accessibility and disability. As a practitioner in feminist and queer studies I can not be indifferent to matters of representation. Therefore, my proposal includes the accessibility of the work :

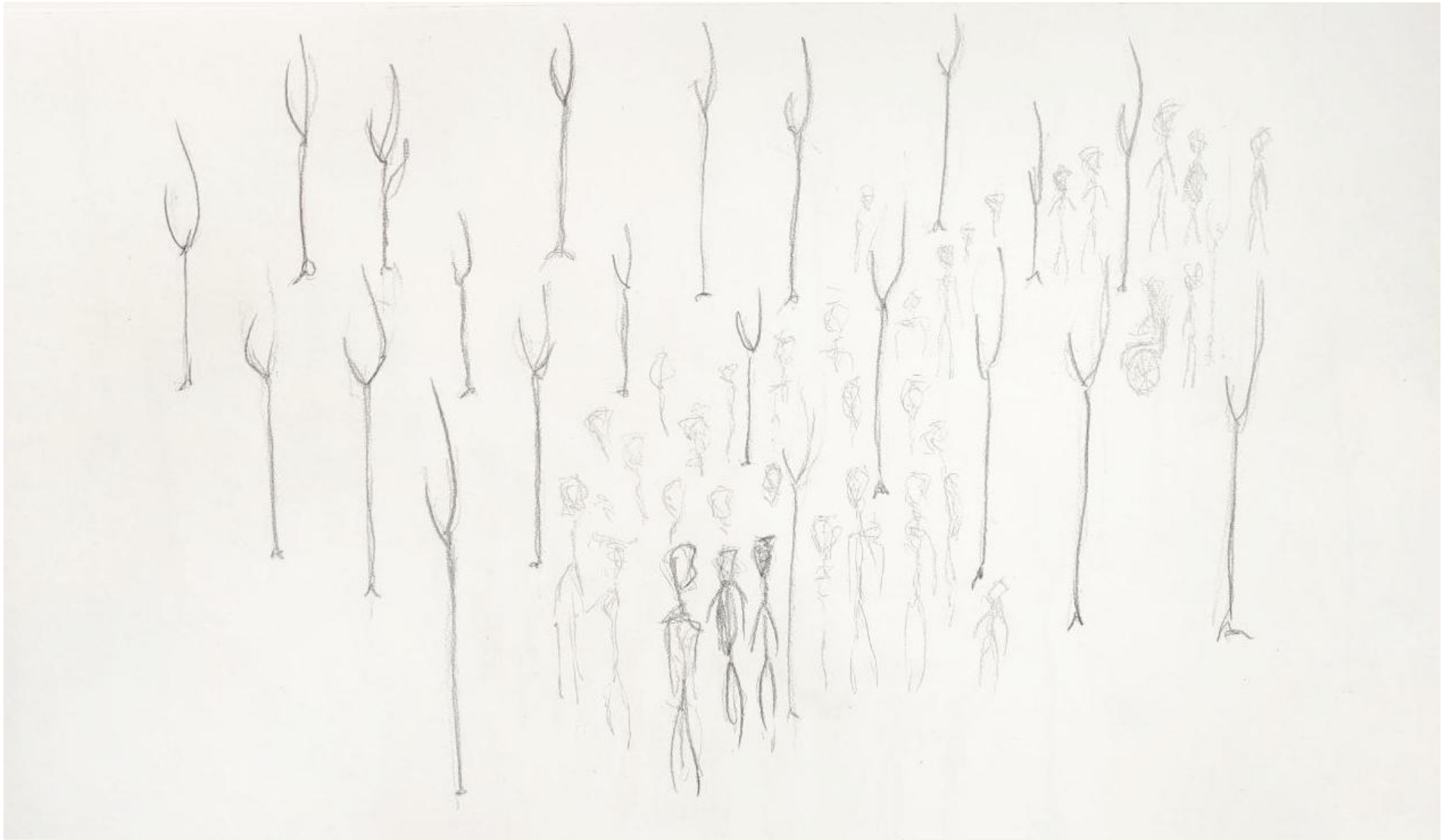
- 1 The accessibility of the group performance will be planned, together with curators, collaborators and SciArt team, for people with mobility and visual impairment.
- 2 I envision an audio-description of the artwork, to be included in any public show. The audio-description will be written by artist and researcher Karolina Żyniewicz, with whom I am currently preparing an art and science show with a focus on accessibility in December 2022.



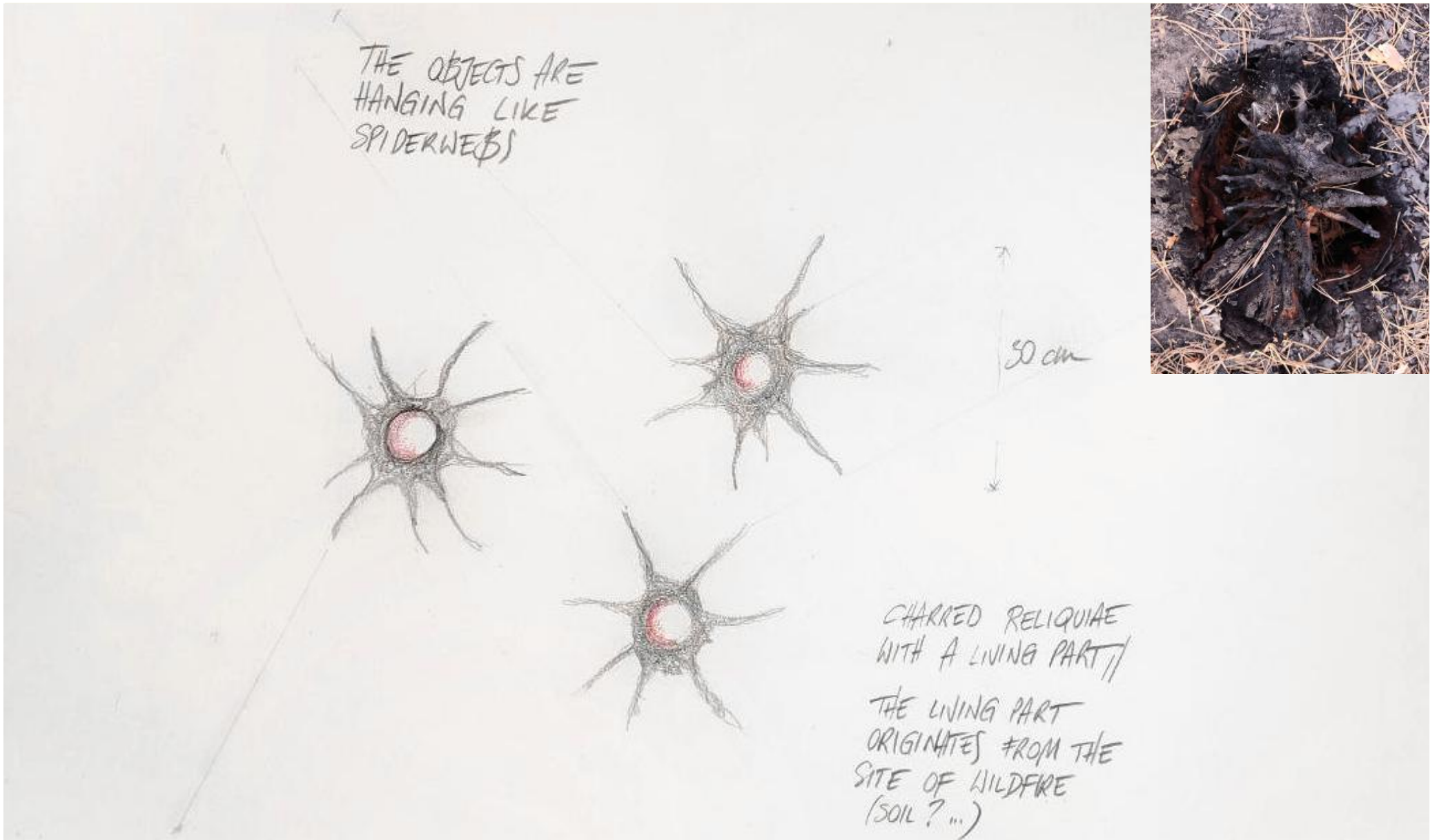
Sketches



Left: Sketch for the solo walking performance
Right: Sketch for the performance costume.



Sketch for the group performance:
The solo action becomes an action for a crowd.



Full page: Detail of the bioart installation.

Top right: a charred log in the soil. The fire consumed the outer layers of the log for about 40 cm into the soil

Provisional Tech Rider

Please note that details of the installation and performances will be defined during the residency.

Performance

During the performance days, I will need

- accomodation close to the performance site
- 1 assistant
- transport and vegetarian food on site for the photographer, myself and the assistant

The group performance will be planned in detail according to the specificity of the site. A shuttlebus will most probably be necessary.

Installation

The installation will constitute of

- objects, suspended in the exhibition space through thin cords or cable
- a sound installation
- the costume form the performance
- pictures from the solo performance

The objects will be bioreactors that rework life and death processes from the site of the research and performance. For instance, they could be bioreactors containing sediment with living microorganisms mixed with my bodily fluids, or repurposing an oxidation process that is triggered when deep layers of soil is exposed to moisture and light.

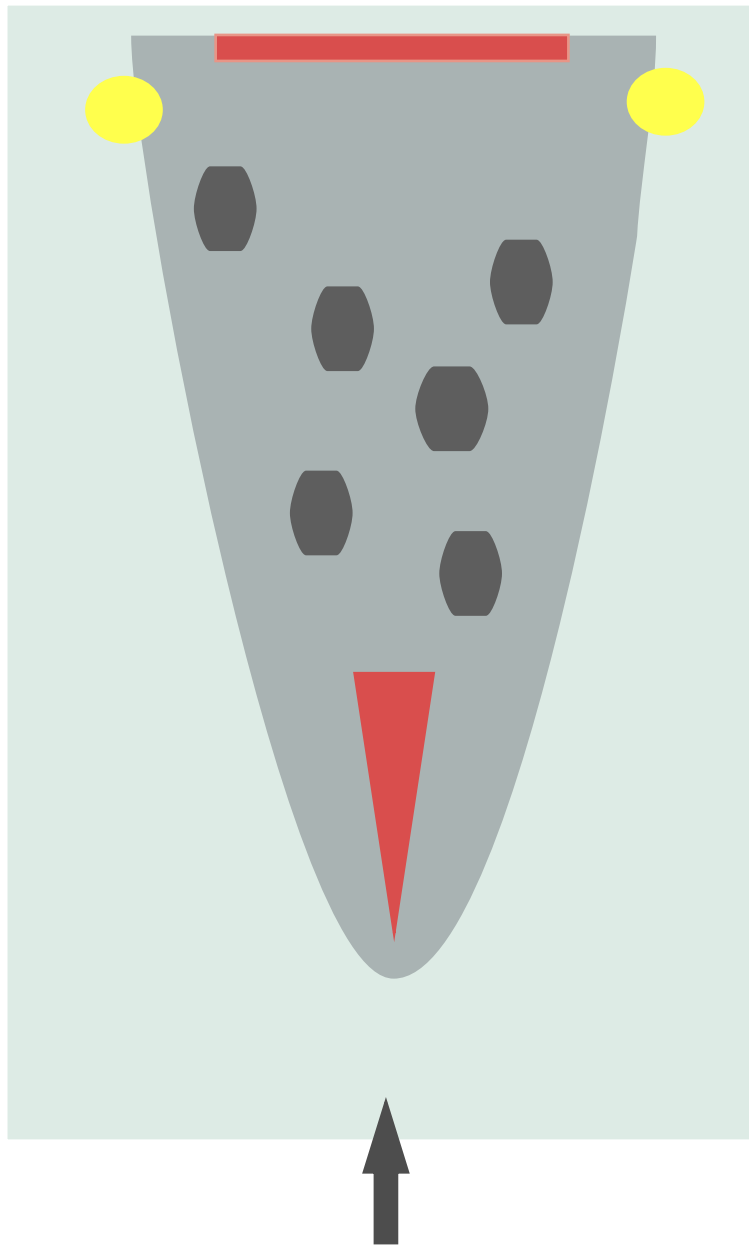
While the poetics is defined, I will conceive and design the objects and their processuality during the residency. Accordingly, the implementation of the biological components will be defined at later stage.

Venue requirements:

- possibly, a separate room
- electricity (for audio and illumination)
- Audio equipment to be defined
- Maintenance of the biological components may be needed (tbc)

I will take care of the setup personally, with two technicians.

Indicative Exhibition Set-up



Picture frames



bioart components



costume from the performance




loudspeakers



Area of the exhibition space covered in soil

Room dimension : approximately 5x12 meters



Berlin, August 2022
a summer of water scarcity

Thank you.