

Re-Evaluating the Aesthetics and Politics of Plants (Vienna, 11–12 Dec 25)

Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Oskar
Kokoschka-Platz 2, Seminar Room 7 (1st Floor), Dec 11–12, 2025

Anita Hosseini

The many Meanings of Flora: Re-Evaluating the Aesthetics and Politics of Plants.

Plants are not rigid symbols; they are dynamic actors in cultural, political and economic processes. Depending on the historical context, the meanings they carry can be altered, recharged or transformed into resistant narratives. The interdisciplinary conference The Many Meanings of Flora critically re-examines the aesthetics and politics of plants, scrutinising their role in art, literature, science and society.

Throughout history, plants have shaped cultural narratives, functioning as projection surfaces for ideas of power, belonging, nature and civilisation, and becoming symbols of resistance, home, exile, knowledge, remembrance and oblivion. In art and literature, for example, they have been used as allegories of life and transience, while in colonial contexts they have become tools of exploitation and control. Botanical knowledge production was closely linked to imperial interests, contributing to the consolidation of Eurocentric systems of knowledge. Current debates demonstrate the growing importance of plants in political struggles, ecological movements and postcolonial discourse. However, these meanings are not fixed but are subject to constant re-evaluation depending on the political, social or economic climate. This conference focuses on the multifaceted meanings of plants, placing particular emphasis on viewing them as active elements in historical and contemporary negotiation processes.

Organized by Anita Hosseini (Department of Art History) and Isabel Kranz (Department of Cultural Studies) moderated together with Lisa Marie Heuschober, Maria Inês Lopes Vales & Lorenzo Zerbini.

Thursday, 11 December 2025

15:00 Anita Hosseini & Isabel Kranz: Welcome and Introduction

15:30 Botanical Memories

Clelia Coussonnet: There is no Silence in the Earth – Curatorial Approach to Botanical Politics.

Bethan Hughes: An Elastic Continuum.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll: Longer Botanical Drifts.

17:15 Coffee break

17:45 Discussion

18:30 Break

19:00 Keynote

Maria Thereza Alves: Seeds of Change. Memory of Earth, Plants, and other Histories.

Friday, 12 December 2025

10:00 Rethinking Botanical Epistemologies

Emilia Terracciano: Invasives in the Home/at Home: The Beautiful, the Bad, and the Ugly.

Silke Felber: "Willi" and the Sensory Afterlives of Austrian Botanical Imperialism: The Case of *Amorphophallus titanum*.

11:15 Discussion

12:00 Lunch break

13:30 Ecologies of Fascism

Nanna Heidenreich: Nature in and out of Place? Border Fascism and Plant Imaginations.

Sonya Schönberger: Forest and War.

14:45 Discussion

15:30 Coffee break

16:00 Queer Botanical Ecologies

Banu Subramaniam: Migrant Ecologies: Plant Worlds and the Queer Afterlives of Empire.

Joela Jacobs: "Moves to Naturalization": The Aesthetics and Politics of Queer Plants.

17:15 Discussion

18:00 Coffee break

18:15 Concluding Remarks

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Reference:

CONF: Re-Evaluating the Aesthetics and Politics of Plants (Vienna, 11-12 Dec 25). In: Arthist.net, Oct 23, 2025 (accessed Dec 22, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50978>>.