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# Fables

Representation of Synanthrope Plants and Invasive Alien Plants in Rome



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My research's goal was to reorganize, rethink, and develop my research-based project on Synanthrope and Invasive Alien Plants in order to construct a coherent narrative what could be the backbone of an exhibition. In the first section of my report I will describe the places of my scholarly and artistic research, and in the second part, I will introduce the new projects ideas resulted from my research in Rome.

## Institutions, gardens, and locations

The following institutions and locations were the most important for my research.

### Primoli Foundation

The Primoli Foundation established in 1928 contains the house museum and the archive of Mario Praz since 1982. Mario Praz was one of the most influential researcher and collector of emblem book, what is also in the center of my research. An emblem book is a collection of allegories, and it was the most popular in the Baroque era. The allegories in the emblem books typically explained in three form: with a motto, an image and a moral in poetry or prose that reveals the didactic function of the motto and the image, and the connection between the two. Emblem books continue the tradition of the medieval bestiaries, most commonly collections of fables: animal and plant moral stories.

I find two emblem books the most interesting for my research:

Georgette de Montenay: *Emblemata Christiana*

Joachim Camerarius: *Symbola et emblemata*



## Casa di Goethe

The museum and archive exhibit documents related to Goethe's journey in Italy between 1786 and 1788, including drawings of Goethe, and the Piranesi etchings what he might see in Rome. Among Goethe's artistic and scientific research his Primal Plant concept was the most notable for me. He wanted to find the single species what is the origin of all the plants on earth. He came out with this idea when he studied a date tree in the botanical garden of Padua.<sup>1,2</sup> I had the opportunity to see this Mediterranean dwarf palm (*Chamaerops humilis* var. *arborescens* Pers.) planted in 1585, in 2013.



<sup>1</sup> "Goethe had been fascinated with the progressive structure of the leaves of various plants, first of a palm tree in the Botanical Garden at Padua (samples of which he then carried around Italy and treasured for the rest of his life" Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. Introduction by Gordon L. Miller, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009. [https://rekveld.home.xs4all.nl/growth/Goethe\\_MetamorphosisPlants2009.pdf](https://rekveld.home.xs4all.nl/growth/Goethe_MetamorphosisPlants2009.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> "The date palm presents a striking example of such successive and pronounced differentiation in the most simple leaf form. In a sequence of several leaves, the central rib advances, the simple fanlike leaf is torn apart, divided, and a highly complex leaf is developed that rivals a branch." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *The Metamorphosis of Plants*



## The Photographic Archive of the American Academy in Rome

The photo archive specialized to archeology, arts, architecture, landscape architecture and gardens of Rome. Here, I looked through several photo and graphics collections in order to follow the phases of the habitation of the Forum Romanum, in particular, in the years of the excavation in the early 20th century and in the era of the grand tours. I ordered photo scenes from the most important images for my research.



## Gardens

I visited several gardens in Rome from these the garden of Villa Doria Pamphili was the most interesting, and I also visited a garden outside Rome.

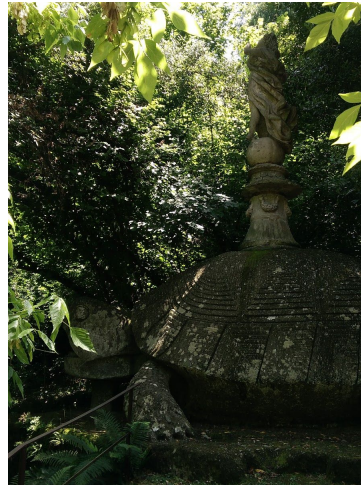
### Doria Pamphili Garden

The Pamphili Garden is the largest public park in Rome with many different garden styles. In the 1.8 km<sup>2</sup>, I could find landscape gardens, a formal garden, a sculpture garden, with various kinds of invasive alien species.



### Garden of Bomarzo

The Garden of Bomarzo or the Park of the Monsters is a monumental mannerist garden in the province of Viterbo. The garden full of monumental sculptures based on the proto emblem book images of Hypnerotomachia Poliphili made from huge rocks found in the location.



## Filming locations

I recorded footages in Rome. The most notable locations are the followings.

Basilica of Maxentius

Arch of Paul V

Parc of Villa Doria Pamphili

View from Viale della Trinità dei Monti

Pons Fabricius

Oppian Hill Park

Torrione Prenestino Park



MVI\_5092.MOV



MVI\_5160.MOV



MVI\_5244.MOV



MVI\_5304.MOV



MVI\_5347.MOV

## Museums

I visited different museums, from the Vatican Museum to the small private collections. I find some really interesting works.



## Documenting the growth of Ailanthus colonies

I revisited some locations what I find in 2016.



## Flora of the Colosseum of Rome, 1855 by Richard Deakin



## Fable Exhibition

Based on my research in Rome, I finalized a narrative for an exhibition. I'm using the phrase narrative because my intention with this set of artworks is forming discursive space where the artworks add topics to the discussion in the forms of fables. I use the term fable in the literary-theoretical sense as a moral story what features non-humans with human characteristics, but I don't anthropomorphize the non-human, I use parallel stories, and use the form as a non-anthropocentric way of storytelling.



## Invasive alien species videos

Together with Kitti Gosztola, we developed further the plan of our artistic documentary series about the reception of these plants and animals.

The first episode is about utilitarianism through the Ailanthus tree. How the EU decides which plant will be eradicated in the continent, how they measure the costs and benefits of the killing. We will use the ancient Chinese text Huizi's Ailanthus Tree by Zhuangzi what is a philosophical dispute about usefulness.

In the second episode, we will deal with protectionism with two stories about the sacred ibis bird. Pliny the Elder in his Natural History mentioned the sacred ibis. He said it is a beloved bird in Egypt because it protects the country's Eastern border from the flying winged dragons. Hundred years ago the sacred ibis was extinct in Egypt, but zoo runaways settled in western Europe. The EU ordered the total annihilation of the European population, and they argued, they need to protect native birds.

The third episode – entirely shot in Rome – is about colonization. The Ailanthus tree arrived at Rome from east and started to produce colonies. This story is parallel to the story of Aeneas. This tree re-inhabits the now empty former cow pasture, what we know now as the Forum Romanum.

In the fourth episode, we introduce the relatively new term: green xenophobia. The Japanese knotweed originally lives in volcanic lands, where it is the first plant what capable of break the lava and start to rehabilitate the land. In Europe the plant act in the same way, just with the concrete – it breaks through it as it was a consequence of a volcanic catastrophe and tries to make a habitat. Because this plant can destroy human infrastructure the media started to demonize it, and they mimic the xenophobic narratives – the Japanese knotweed becomes the “terrorist weed”. The Japanese knotweeds in Europe are descendent of one single female plant, so it isn't capable of sexual reproduction just asexual reproduction therefore all the Japanese knotweed in Europe are genetically identical. Therefore the press started to call it the female monster.

## Musical instruments

Based on a previous project of ours, with Orsolya Barna, we will make musical instruments what facilitate collaborative actions.

We designed an overtone flute with two nozzles. An overtone flute produce different notes based on the speed of air goes through it. If you blow harder its pitch higher. In our case, the pitch is depends on the two players combined air, neither of them capable of controlling the instrument separately, but they can figure out different roles.

Continuing our collaborative project with Kitti Gosztola we will make two horn for two people to signal each other. This big wood horns traditionally made for long distance communication.

The first instrument will be made from Japanese knotweed, the second is from Ailanthus tree. These two plants are invasive alien species.

## Furniture

I will build a three-person armchair model, invented in a baroque era. In that model, the tree person seats in a position, where their heads are close to each other, and their feet are in three different directions.

I will build this furniture from ailanthus tree.

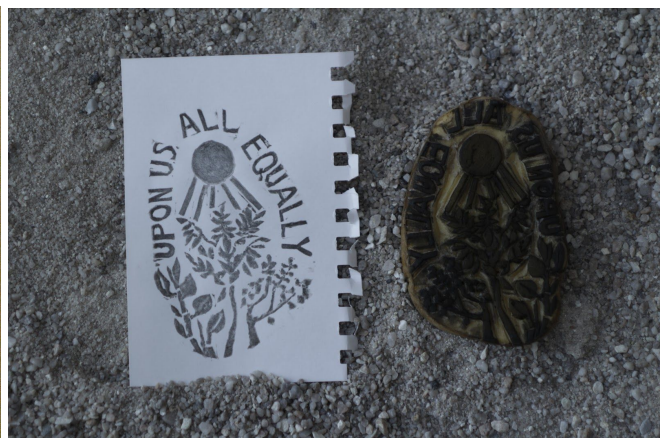
## Plants

I will plant living plants as a scientific demonstration and a plant symbol. I will use planting bags – a common technic in urban gardening – made from recycled textile.

I plan to make a plant sociological demonstration of nitrophilic plants, and how day competes and nurture each order at the same time, and another about soil rehabilitation plants.

## Potato prints

I started a potato print series inspired by my image research. The first one was already published in the Műértő magazine in a tranzit.hu project.



## Wild Garden Utopia



In collaboration with Kitti Gosztola, we evolved our Global Villager project into a new broader project the Wild Garden Utopia.

A single Japanese knotweed arrived at a garden in Leiden in the 1840s, and soon it was named the “most interesting ornamental plant of the year” by the Society of Agriculture and Horticulture at Utrecht. Later the plant was widespread mostly in the United Kingdom thanks to the fashion for ‘wild’ gardens. The ornamental plant was popular as long as it was an obedient part of the human-made landscape. But the viable plant was escaped from the gardens and started to act naturally. This seemed dangerous from an anthropocentric point of view because the plant is capable to harm infrastructure and agriculture. The plant is commonly framed as an ecological hazard but based on new thermodynamic approaches every ecosystem will approach a stable state, no species can resist this necessity (except one). However, a plant like Japanese knotweed can create a completely new environment. In the project, we will try not to criminalize and eradicate the plant, but see ourselves a part of the ecosystem and us the plant as free energy.

In our collaborative project, we will use this story and a utopian harmony between human and nonhuman as a starting point to organize an event collectively. We intended to use collective decision making in three suggested activities what are the most fundamental needs of a human community: shelter making, eating, and cultural activities. We will use plants what we will collect on the island.

To the shelter making events, we will introduce Buckminster Fuller's experimental structures and ideas on nomadism and his idea of spaceship earth.

On the cooking and eating sessions, we will show the Japanese recipes of Japanese knotweed or as they call it itadori and also new western dishes what use the plant as rhubarb replacement, and we will propagate of experimental and fusion cuisine.

As a cultural event, we will propose instrument making workshops and jam sessions. Lots of various instrument can be made from this plant, from overtone flute to percussion. These instruments spread around the world because they transform a plant in the simplest way into a sounding device. We could also make lyrics for the music from the story of the Japanese knotweed and our experiences with it.

As an ending event, we planning to organize an event where we will introduce our activity to the broader audience.

## Wild Garden Utopia on Instagram

With Kitti Gosztola, we also started a thematical Instagram profile, where we document our expedition through the political terrain of the synanthropes:

<https://www.instagram.com/wildgardenutopia/>