

DIGITAL AGNES

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Artist talk with Iman Dattoo

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SPEAKERS

Dr Isabella Machado Altoé and Iman Dattoo

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TRANSCRIPT

Dr Isabella Machado Altoé: Hello. Good afternoon. Thank you, Sunny. I am very happy to be here and I am thrilled to introduce you all to Iman Dattoo. I'm sure many of you know her already from her previous visit to Kingston, but if you don't know Iman, Iman Dattoo is a transdisciplinary artist and researcher based in South Devon UK. She is currently a PhD student at a practice led program at University College London and the Head of Research and Community at Radical Ecology, an artist led studio working at the intersection of racial justice and environmental action. Her practice investigates the world-making capacities of plants, soils and people. Working through video, claywork, scoring, installation and performance, she crafts situated projects that become worlds in themselves. Looking to build relationality across species, Iman explores how agencies can be mobilized through modes of listening, noticing and sensory inquiry. Iman foregrounds a planetary intimacy between humans and non-humans and challenging binaries of what is natural and artificial to tell stories of ecosystems repaired through imagination and speculation. This year Iman is the Stonecroft Foundation Artist-in-Residence with the Queen's University Biological Field Station and the Agnes. And through this residency, she is studying natural kinships that span geographies, species and ecologies on the shores of Opinicon Lake at QUBS. And today, she will share a little bit more of her practice with us all. So, I'm very happy to introduce you all and have Iman here today. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

Iman?

Iman Dattoo: Hi, is this okay? Can you hear me? Okay, okay, great. Thank you so much for that introduction, Izzy. And thank you to Sunny and the team at Agnes and also Shelley and -- and Sonia and Stephen at QUBS for having me here. And of course, Alejandro and Amelia, for inviting me for this lecture. My practice investigates the world-making capacities of plants, of soils, of people, how we move, how we behave, how we make place. I work between film, installation, sculpture, performance and drawing to express different ways of being intimate with our planet, as a form of care work or labour that exists beyond economic commodified forms to reveal how bodies affect

each other, how bodies change one another. I often work with techniques, processes, vocabularies and logics unfamiliar to me. I try to approach things with a beginner's mind and with trust in the tacit embodied knowledge as a way to give rise to newness and transformation. This usually requires unearthing and challenging long-held assumptions and biases within extractive systems. Like many artists, I feel situated between worlds, between disciplines, in liminal spaces. And for me, that space sits somewhere between science and art. Although I imagine, speculate and play, my work always seeks to remain relevant to a particular place or context. So, today I'd like to take you through a series of works that show the development of my practice, the different spaces and the context that I work within, and the encounters and interactions that shape it. And I thought I'd begin with the project that brought me to Kingston, which was Kinnomic Botany. So, Kinnomic Botany is a film, installation and research project tracing the epistemologies and migratory patterns of the humble potato. The potato, as you may know, is often cast in a familiar hero journey, one that privileges progress, mastery, and the lone explorer. In this story, it becomes the unexpected reward taken by conquistador Francisco Pizarro on his expedition to Peru in search for gold. He did not find his gold, but instead returned to Spain with a potato. But in that telling, the significance of the plant as a whole is erased, as are the nuances of the knowledge systems that surround it. The result, a spread of potatoes emerging from a narrow genetic bottleneck, and a nomenclature or naming system that represents a new order over territories, borders and non-human bodies. Economic values prioritize yield through tuber-based cultivation, replacing traditional Andean methods of growing from seed for diversity. The domestication of the potato mirrored the language used to name, categorize and order them. Through the potato, I learnt that language and the trajectories of the world we inhabit are inextricably linked. But now it is time to remember I am more than my tuber. I am also my seeds, my flowers, my fruits and my roots. Working with clay animated in three dimensional, almost surreal landscapes, I created a parallel botany, an imaginary space to reorient ourselves around the potato, their histories and their possible futures. A way of getting to know them not only for their commodified tuber, but also for their seeds, their flowers, their fruits and their roots. The clay landscape centres around this potato pot, which I sculpted out of clay and then 3D scanned and animated digitally. A container for stories and for the many names, many different ways we name, categorize and orient ourselves around, with and as part of nature. Spatially, this world responds critically to how maps, routes and horizons have structured our ways of seeing, particularly through voyages of conquest and discovery. Instead, it unfolds as a cyclical meditation that imagines healing these logics from within, alongside the histories we already inhabit. The landscape becomes a home for a series of maps that take many different forms. Some are poems, some are stick maps, some are cosmological diagrams, others are drawings, sculptures. For example, this map which you can see above this landform shows how to plant potatoes according to the sighting of the Pleiades constellation, which determines next season's yield. But there's also a map for planting potatoes with their friends, offering an alternative to planting by Linnaean taxonomy, where closely related plants of plant -- where closely related plants of plant families compete for nutrients and are more prone to disease. A narrative is paired with a video offering poetry as a device for journeying and meditating on identities that refuse to be fixed in one place, instead staying in motion through relation. And on the screen are a few images of the work installed for my exhibition at Agnes earlier in this year. It was shown along more recent works in an exhibition called Kinnomics at Agnes's meanwhile exhibition space on Stuart Street. It was Sunny's idea to use the phrase kinnomics to describe a broad range of my works, not just Kinnomic Botany, but also works created since. And I think framing my practice through this word has become quite

significant for the way I'm thinking about the connections between my different projects and how they speak to one another, and then also my practice more broadly. The word kinnomic grew out of time spent in the economic botany collection. This is -- these are just some photos from my visits there. This is a collection at Kew Gardens in London. It's an archive essentially of plant materials, mainly from the time of the British Empire. And these plants were taken for medicine or collected, exchanged and traded in a mission to document and exploit the world's so-called useful plants as commodities. As I was looking into the history of this economic botany collection and the potatoes' movements through it, I traced the etymology of the words ecology and economy, which mean the story of the house, and to distribute the story of the house respectively. I coined kinnomics as a transitory term, to shift thinking away from an economics rooted in commodification towards making kin with overlooked care workers and labourers. For me, this term invites an understanding of worlds as relatively -- as relative to one another and intimately connected, where the human is never at the centre but always embroiled in relation. Alongside the film, I often present a participatory installation comprising potatoes, headphones and some work sheets and pencils. Visitors are invited to put on a set of headphones and pick up a potato to be guided through a potato renaming exercise. Participants handle the potato, trace their eyes, consider the textures of their skin and the animal that that skin reminds them of. From these sensations, they invent a name. Beige Wise Whale, Baby Bird, Pink Delicate, a violet shaft of stardust, surprised as a lost soil -- soul, are just some examples of some of the names that were created. And there are now about 2,500 to 3,000 names in this archive, each a distilled form of knowledge, a record of an interaction rooted in observation and an antidote to reductionism. And I think this really shows as well how specific language can be a lot. These people started with very similar varieties of 12 potatoes. But it's amazing how through this process, through this tacit knowledge and connection, they were able to come up with such diverse names. Next, I'll speak a little bit about Emergent Knowledge Bureau. So, around the time that I was working on Kinnomic Botany, I began collaborating with my close friend, architect and designer Russell Royer. Russell's research focus is repatriation and restitution. And together we formed the Emergent Knowledge Bureau, a governance framework for imagining new protocols for the long-term stewardship of cultural knowledge, both within and beyond the museum. Supported by Arts Council England, we created an online participatory performance hosted on a virtual board game, which you can see here. It combines role play and scenario design, bringing together a network of global experts whose interests and expertise lie in ethnographic collections and knowledge systems, including speculative thinkers, lawyers, world builders, digital technologists and archaeologists from institutions such as Manchester Museum, the Wellcome Collection, Kew Gardens, as well as grassroots organizations such as the India Pride Project and independent practitioners. We invite these stakeholders to join a game centred on this fictional artifact, which you can see here named Himofe. We wrote a story about Himofe together. I sculpted her and Russell animated her. So, in this game, participants switch roles. A community knowledge holder might become a curator for the day. A curator might become the artifact. Together they co-create the artifact's future. And this was created during COVID when in person participation wasn't possible. So, we treated the digital as a site for play and for co design. A mirror game board complete with tables, chairs, and these movable documents turn the 2D screen into a choreographed, scripted space. We drew on all kinds of imagery and documents that you'd expect to find in archival collections, building multiple accounts and layered maps informed by different ways of knowing. Working with a fictional artifact allowed us to avoid appropriating knowledge, while leaving open the possibility of adapting the game for real world objects. Our intent was to

make visible the overlapping narratives, voices and subsidiary objects that exist behind and beyond museum collections. Ultimately, we wanted to create a space where participants feel like they have the means and the confidence to imagine more sustainable practices in the museum, practices that might lead to the continual creation of things, objects, stories, drawings, memories and more or with a deep connection to our immediate surroundings and also to distant locations. Making kin with soil. So, in making new work and conducting art led research, I often find that small signals or echoes from one project lead into the next. Something that asks to be followed, deepened or seen from another angle. One summer while working on Kinnomic Botany, I visited a potato laboratory in Scotland that holds one of the largest collections of potato seeds from South America, but is also the leading centre for cultivating the perfect French fry. As I searched through the herbarium collections and archive, I came across the notes of potato taxonomist Jack Hawkes, who took potato seeds back to the UK as part of the British Empire potato collecting expedition in the 1930s. His detailed reports from these multiple expeditions to Peru and Bolivia described particularly in later accounts, the worsening soil conditions which he admits were caused by their assignment to retrain local breeders to plant what they conceived were better yielding standardized varieties. In all my work tracing the movements and migrations of the potato, I had not yet considered the impact that they had on the soil that it came from. What destruction is left behind when a seed or plant is taken? What happens to the soils that held them and carried them? What are the excretion zones that suffer as a result of these extractive economies? In 2023, I was given the opportunity to undertake a residency in the southwest of England between the Eden Project in Cornwall, which you can see amongst here and St. Austell, and also the University of Exeter's Environment and Sustainability Institute in Penryn. Both areas are home to a mining legacy. You can see in this aerial image the scars left behind by the mining of kaolin, a clay mineral at the Eden Project. And in Redruth, near the University of Exeter, its Penryn campus. There's also lots of tin, copper and arsenic mining. So, the Eden Project is actually a site, a botanical site that's constructed in an old clay mining pit. You can see the edges of the bowl here. I had freedom to shape my research topic and so it became the focus of the residency. The map on the screen was one of the first things I made, a watercolour map where I tried to understand the relationship between potatoes, rhizomatic bacteria and green beans in the soil created while responding to and learning about Vandana Shiva's work against the corporate control and genetic modification of crops where engineered golden varieties claim nutritional improvement but come at the price of biodiversity and farmers autonomy. It was my first attempt at imagining what makes a healthy soil, something I later learnt means entirely different things to different bodies. During the residency, I met with scientists, ecologists, academics working on soil at different scales. The map -- this map of people shows everyone I spoke with across the Eden Project, the University of Exeter and beyond. It's an ecology in itself. One of my reflections was how rarely in this specific scientific institution, people who were working on really deeply intertwined subjects rarely actually communicated. I saw my role embedded at these institutions as one of listening and drawing connections across scales, disciplines and ways of knowing, in this case, soil. Throughout this process, I recorded my conversations with scientists and asked them broad, expansive questions about their emotional connections to soil. I wanted to understand their intimate, tacit relationships that people have with soil alongside the empirical and scientific. And these are some of the booklets that resulted from that residency, from the conversations I had with these different experts. And I think this became my first attempt really deep listening with communities as well and thinking about ways of drawing connections, between different researchers work and really thinking about what is the role of an artist within a scientific

institution potentially. And yes, these are just some of the booklets. So, throughout -- so, as I explored soil health, I also was asking what makes an unhealthy soil? So, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization, soil degradation is defined as the diminishing capacity of soil to provide ecosystem goods and services as desired by their stakeholders. I find this definition revealing. It appears apolitical, yet it reduces soil to resource for human use. It raises questions who are soil stakeholders? Who is made culpable of degradation? I found trends in the political and scientific dimensions of soil erosion to blame nomadic migratory communities, even nomadic goats, for the scarcity of fertile land. It was a so-called world population problem. We often consider what soils are to us, but what are other bodies to soils? So, these issues like erosion, have always been thought of in relatively short time spans in the west and with narrow regional focuses too, without considering the broader context within which industrial agriculture emerged. So, for example, the expansion and legacy of colonialism and imperialism. So, I started to map out different folk taxonomies for naming soils, and also was doing some research into soil erosion in the Pich' taro basin in Mexico, where there isn't traditionally a word for erosion. Instead, it's seen as this process that they make the most -- try to make the most out of. Soils can get sick and recover again. They can lose and find a home again. They can feel hungry, tired, thirsty and then full again. This idea that erosion could be beneficial stayed with me and informed the creation of Soil Brain, Gut Brain, the artwork that you see on the screen here, which was presented as part of an exhibition called Against Apartheid at Karst Gallery in Plymouth, also located in the southwest of England. So, Soil Brain, Gut Brain is a sculpture, a ceramic sculpture, sorry, paired with an audio piece that invites you to experience the cycle of erosion from two perspectives. It disrupts notions that soils must remain in one place, instead presenting them as nomadic entities that move and behave. The audio piece is structured like a journey, and it's narrated from the perspective of a soil body, a thinking, acting and feeling soil body. You're invited to reorient yourself around this body, consider how you're connected and what fertility, productivity and vitality mean to soils. The piece finishes with an invitation to inhabit soil's skin, to become one of its skin pores and experience a worm, entering your surface layer, turning you, moving you, reorganizing you, feeding off of you and reshaping you, adjusting your weight, your thickness and your porosity. Accompanying the audio is this tall ceramic vessel shaped out of clay. And this recalls the digestive system of an earthworm, tracing its form from the mouth, pharynx and esophagus down to their crop, gizzard and intestine. These stacked vessels symbolize the journeys of soils and nutrients as they pass through an earthworm's body, where they mined, recycled, tamed, cleared and renewed. And working with clay specifically, has become a recurring medium that I enjoy working with, I think, because I feel like clay is always an animate body. There's something about clay where through the temperature exchange between your hands and the clay, it almost feels like touching flesh. And so, there's this process that I go through where I'm reading scientific papers or bringing together notes from different areas of knowledge and then sculpting from clay. And so, I feel like they really become these sorts of vessels or containers of stories. So together, these pieces explore the many relationships that underpin nourishment. Who is eating whom? Is the earthworm eating the soil or are the soils eating the earthworm? Perhaps it's both. It becomes a reorientation around the non-human other, understanding their relationships to eating, digesting and relating, perhaps as this antidote to human exceptionalism. And these are just some of the other kinds of works on paper created during the residency, including a film, which was focussing on Cornwall's postindustrial mining landscapes, which has later informed the proposal for my PhD, and was thinking about these landscapes as like these geological digestive bellies. And I worked with a sound artist to essentially create this sound

piece made from recording the ruminations of goats and then putting needles into different plant stems and basically creating a piece to go alongside this semi documentary, semi fictional reading of my walks through these landscapes. And I also had these questions on it, that I was asking scientists, on a table, with postcards, that people would respond to. Movement is natural. As I began spending more time developing my practice in the Southwest, I found myself increasingly drawn to this landscape. I felt a sense of belonging amongst the postindustrial landscape, making kin with these nomadic soil bacteria, deemed invasive species and other migratory entities that were helping the soils breathe better here. I also started working more closely with a Southwest based arts organization called Radical Ecology, which works to advance environmental justice between the local and the planetary to a vision for the future that is decolonial, sustainable and anti-racist. Radical Ecology, in collaboration with another arts organization called Southcombe Gardens, designed a season of contemporary land art on Dartmoor, which is a vast moorland of granite tors, rolling hills, heathlands and peat bogs in Devon. This program was titled Invasion Ecology, seeking to challenge the othering of species by deconstructing terms such as native and invasive. Southcombe Gardens formed the backdrop of the program as a former plant nursery known for their native wildflower meadows, juxtaposed with deemed exotic varieties of trees and plants, which you can find defined in these early planting notes on the right of the screen. The gardens are part of the UK's National Garden Scheme, attracting a nontraditional arts audience and a demographic of gardeners who in Southcombe's experience were quite set on rigid definitions of who belongs in a garden and who doesn't. As part of the exhibition and program, I was commissioned to create a map for Southcombe Gardens which focussed on the plants that were found to be contentious, the species that many said didn't belong there, including fern, gunnera, eucalyptus and rhododendron. I saw that list -- I saw this map as a navigational tool to move beyond categories of native and invasive, to consider the vitality and agency of land and landscape and our human implication within all this, to explore the multiple histories and interactions that despite -- define a species regardless of their origin. This artwork became a bridge between the exhibition space and the landscape itself. This was something that really resonated with me because I was really interested in making forms of work that sit outside of traditional gallery settings and work that is more land based. The map is composed in two layers. There's a visual component and also an audio component which is transcribed in a booklet. The audio is both instructional and poetic, guiding participants along a path through the gardens while also functioning as a score, prompting them to touch, listen, and play through all their senses. The visual component of the map plays with scale, with time, with symbol, acting almost like a portal into different ways of reading and interacting with landscape. It was important for me to use the process of mapping to convey the relational roles between life forms in place, as opposed to following the conventions of historical colonial maps, which have depicted land and body as property or resource, while also stratifying. This work gave me time and space to experiment with thinking about maps as containers of deeply personal subjective knowledge or felt relationships to land, to notice, sit with, and animate the gardens we're exploring. You'll see in the map, there are also these many green hands with eyes. And this symbol has started to develop across my works in this style. The hand, for me, represents where we are placing our agency within the landscape. We often demonize the human, and rewilding projects may remove us entirely because of the harm we've caused. And I'll say here also that when I use the term human, I acknowledge that race is inseparable from what the human is and what the human does to the planet. And I also think about Kathryn Yusoff's work, "A Billion Black Anthropocenes." This approach is about working with hands that aren't dominant, but receptive, intervening thoughtfully

with hands that act in tune with the land rather than acting over it. The eyes on these hands positioned near the thumb, reflect the idea that listening and noticing are in selves -- are in themselves a form of action, too. And this is something that we felt important in relation to constant acts of pulling out deemed invasive species without necessarily understanding the voids that they're filling and also the histories beyond our own human time spans. So, I thought I'd read maybe a section of the map, to you, which is about rhododendron, which is a plant that's found all over Cornwall. It's a plant that was planted in a lot of subtropical gardens which are in the landscape there. And specifically, by mining owners, who went out and brought back deemed exotic plants to plant in these specific gardens. And it's now considered an invasive. "I'm in the top 20 rankings of British aliens. How am I both British and alien? Those words stick to me. But not to bramble, bracken and ivy. All of us are said to dominate grasslands, heath, moors and bogs. I feel edgy, uncertain, pushed against, while they belong. What differentiates our high mobility other than where we're perceived to be from? Joseph Hooker brought me here from Sikkim in the Himalayas. Yet, I was also found in Ireland during the Gaussian interglacial period. What is native now? And what was native before? I was placed here, planted in gardens for show. Now, I'm asked to leave. Today I question not where I am from, but where is the word native from? And when will I be invited to belong? As I consider where I belong, it is not to one geographic place. I belong in soils rich with copper and zinc, in the industrial sites of mining landscapes alive with fungi and bacteria. I belong to the wood mice who shelter within me in turn, aerating soils, gathering and dispersing seeds of oats, oak, beech and hazel. I belong to the nightingales singing from within me, my dense leaves and branches amplifying their sound waves, helping their songs travel further. If I didn't grow here, who tend to the contaminated soils, shelter the wood mice, welcome the nightingales to sing? Find the path running through the rhododendron bush. Enter where the wood mice and nightingales dwell. Locate a distinct sound from around you. Focus in on it and follow it. As you listen to the sound, notice where you feel it in your body. Repeat the sound out loud or in your head. Feel it reverberate through the density of the leaves above you. Now, gather another sound, repeating the process, listening, feeling the sound in your body, repeating it out loud or in your head. Continue until you feel free in this space." So, alongside the exhibition, I collaborated with artists Tsitsi Chirikure and Ashish Ghadiali to create a participatory performance that toured the Southwest. Titled "Where Do We Go When We Realize that We Can't Go Back to Nature?" the performance opened a space to question how we got to such a pervasive language that shaped how bodies, human and more than human, are expected to move and behave. We look back to the founding text of the discipline of invasion ecology, the Ecology of Invasions by Animals and Plants, written by Charles Elton in 1958, and found parallels between its language and that used to support military and political action against humans, as well as mainstream narratives around migration. Ashish played the audio from a British propaganda film about the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, demonstrating language used to support violent counter-acts against them, and inviting audiences to recognize echoes of the logic of invasion ecology within European imperialism. I invited audiences to reflect on this series of stories about fern, gunnera, eucalyptus and rhododendron that I shared at Southcombe Gardens to consider empathy within a sense of time beyond our human history. The performance then shifted into a mode of deep listening, informed by practices of composer Pauline Oliveros, where participants were invited multiple times to respond back to the question, "Where do we go when we realize that we can't go back to nature?" Tsitsi, Ashish and I transcribed their conversations and performed them back into the collective at the end of the performance, allowing participants to listen back to the sounds of their thoughts and reflections on the question, allowing

these sounds to cross pollinate with one another and permeate this collective listening space. A 100-year care plan. So, around the time of Invasion Ecology or the end of Invasion Ecology, I was invited to take on a position within Radical Ecology as an artist working on a project about post-plantation woodland in Dartington, South Devon. So, this meant relocating from London, where I had lived most of my life, to Devon for at least six months. It felt like a good next step in my practice though, as it was becoming more and more inextricably linked with the Southwest landscape and much of my creativity was emerging from within that situatedness in place. And this was an opportunity to feed further into that. So, Radical Ecology had been commissioned by Natural England, which is the UK government's official advisor for the natural environment in England, to create a report evaluating the value of the north woods there and also now my local woodlands. I was asked to lead the project, and it was an experiment both for Radical Ecology and for me in seeing what might happen if an artist were to lead on the creation of policy. My ongoing research into care work and labour resulted in an aspiration to develop a 100-year care plan, which is now an open source or public document available online to read via Natural England and also our website. So, Dartington's northwoods is a post-plantation woodland of Douglas firs, cedars and also Californian redwoods, which are about 100 years old. Around the time of my commission, Dartington's Estate, who manages the woodlands, enforced a new management plan that involved felling large swathes of these woodlands for timber. This caused a lot of controversy. Many community members, particularly those aligning with the Deep Ecology movement, were outraged, whilst others argued that the woodland had been planted for profit and therefore this was simply fulfilling that original purpose. As a newcomer to the area, I began knocking on doors across the local housing estate, Huxton's Cross, interviewing residents about how they valued the woodland. I paired this with interviews with local foresters conducted together with my colleagues at Radical Ecology, Tilly and Ashish. And through listening to these different voices, I began to map patterns of value. Patterns that challenged notions that economic, social and biodiversity values were inherently in conflict with each other. I found out, for example, that healthy soils support both biodiversity and timber production. Residents who walk their woods daily for wellbeing often contribute as entomologists or archaeologists, providing surveys before management shifts disrupted this practice. I walked the woods regularly, documenting them and learning about them. Both my time in North Woods and having tea with residents of the local housing estate helped me feel at home in this new town. My camera became a third eye, enabling a closer relationship with the woodland. In one area, I noticed the shimmering, almost golden clay unearthed by the machinery used for the felling. I began processing this clay in the studio, learning in turn about my local geology and how to make natural pigments from the clay. Central to the project was a consideration and reevaluation of who has access to nature. I personally benefited from these woodlands as a newcomer in Devon. Yet many of the communities that Radical Ecology work with, including service users from Devon and Cornwall's refugee support and youth workers from nearby cities, lacked access to woodlands. This work therefore required one of focal attention to the marginalized and unseen care workers of nature recovery. We held deep listening workshops with these communities, spending time in the woods, getting to know them, listening and mapping their different shapes of sounds. Together, we co-imagined strategies of care, centred around a clay school and a film school. Both schools aimed to make use of an existing infrastructure to make possible better access to the woodlands while also working with arts programming as a way to create and inform long term stewardship for them. We speculated on strategies for supporting forms of value that replenished rather than depleted this landscape. With service users from Devon

and Cornwall's refugee support, we built a first iteration of a pizza oven using yellow clay combined with pig manure and sand from the local farm as part of a model for social forestry. And this is our pizza oven which unfortunately cracked. And so, we're going to try and rebuild it this year. I think for me this work felt significant because of how hyperlocal it was, but also because of the way it really challenged this sort of broader global nativist nostalgia of going back to what a woodlands once were. And there were echoes from previous projects like "Where do we go when we realize that we can't go back to nature?" or "Movement is Natural," which were maybe approaching these things in a theoretical way where this felt like it was more practical, hands-on and challenging that through working with community. And one thing to say is this is that this woodland is considered a PAWS, so a plantation on an ancient wooden site. So, a lot of the recommendations around those types of forests are about controlling the deemed plantation species that were planted for profit and -- and essentially going back to ancient oak forests. But they haven't ever conducted biodiversity surveys on what the benefits are of these woodlands now. So, finally, I wanted to speak about two residencies or two recent residencies, the first being my time here in Kingston between QUBS, the Queen's University Biological Field Station and also, my residency at Porthmeor Studios in St Ives in Cornwall. So, both are active and just coming to their end, and projects are still emerging from them. So, I'm not able to speak about these works in a finished or complete sense. But what I can do, however, is reflect on the ways of working and methods taking shape, as well as the functions of residencies for me as a space to play, to experiment, and to get to know and become intimate with a place. So, in both St. Ives and Kingston at Opinicon Lake, a connection to the geology and geography of place has felt particularly significant. So, in St Ives, I was working on tin ground near the Stennack river outfall, Stennack, literally meaning the place where tin is from. Cornish miners would even talk about how walking on this ground was wobbly, unsettling, destabilizing. I took walks along the same routes. Here in Kingston, I've been working on clay ground, learning that the Anishinaabe name for Kingston may translate directly as the place where there's mud. At Lake Opinicon, where QUBS is based, I was near mica mines, timber plantations and lakes of potatoes or duck potatoes, learning that "opin" in a Opinicon means "potato" in Ojibwe. What does it mean to feel all these places in my body? Does the residency allow an informed belonging across geographies in multiple places, time periods, worlds forming an intimate planetary existence? Is this what kinnomics means for me here and now? So, my time at QUBS back in May was shaped by an engagement with the quantum, in particular quantum time and quantum listening. I was reading Pauline Oliveros "Quantum Listening," Rasheedah Phillips's "Dismantling the Master's Clock," and also Katherine McKittrick's "Dear Science." Their works and words interacting with my listening to Grey tree frogs, Eastern Bluebirds, Baltimore Orioles, and also the researchers at QUBS and Queens, some of whom I had met, others whose practices were shared with me. I was thinking about how, like Oliveros, I could listen in as many ways as possible, simultaneously changing and being changed by that listening. This led me to speculate on what a non-origin story for a Opinicon lake might look like. A unique place where species converge, interrelate, respond to one another and push, merge or repel not just plants and animals, but humans too. So, I created a series of ceramic sculptures, creatures imagined from time spent at the herbarium, at QUBS on Cow island, which was near where my cabin was, at dinners with researchers and through gatherings and generating stories. These creatures are playful, speculative tools for methods of engagement with the sciences. They defy categorization. One creature, Bladderwort, which is the one just right at the front, is a sea plant combined with a land plant, and it hovers over the water. It has no root system. Its thin stems bear bladders that attract small aquatic animals. It lacks chlorophyll, obtaining nutrients by sending out

magnetic fields through their bladders to exchange nutrients and minerals across time with their kin, connecting past, present and future. Plants from the same generation appear purple to one another, while future generations appear clay-like, textured, monotone. Bruises on their bodies are weak signals from ancestors of the future, a way of treating anomalies not as errors, but as signals to be listened to and worked with alongside. I also speculated alongside the duck potato about nonselective forces that shape their evolution. I reframed invasive species alongside the zebra muscle as species that are not invasive but abundant. These vessels became tools and containers of stories that challenge the assumptions that we hold in the sciences. And this was a presentation that I gave at QUBS about the work. And these works sat in conversation with existing works at the show curated by Sunny and his students, back in May. It was also part of an event with FOLDA, which is a Festival of Live Digital Art. So, there was an AR component too to some of the works which brought some of the ceramic sculptures that I have in the UK into the exhibition space. And yes, these are just a few images of the space. So, my time at Porthmeor Studios in St Ives was spent alongside another artist called Kedisha Coakley, who's usually based in Sheffield in the UK. We spent time walking together, learning about each other's practices, visiting the subtropical gardens I mentioned earlier, and also walking through the mine -- tin mines with pigment -- with a pigment and paint maker, collecting these pigments to later map with them. And that's something I'm experimenting with at the moment. This time was relevant for us in different ways. For me, it was a time to develop work in relation to my ongoing practice led PhD which grapples with notions of healing through artist led recovery in the southwest postindustrial mining soil-scapes. For Kedisha, it was time to reflect on another residency looking at big dam projects in Borneo, Malaysia. We each decided to develop a new technique in the studio that we hadn't worked with before. And this is something that we've been doing over the past two weeks. It's funny because we both decided, I guess, on techniques that you would associate with a kids activities. So, Kedisha was working with spirographs, and I was working with paper marbling. And it was like just an intuitive response to wanting to work with these specific materials. And we both felt we needed the time just to play. And it's actually the first time, I think in my practice where I've just been in a studio space for two weeks just playing and working through process. So, it's really new and different and also vulnerable to be in a space like this where people make a lot of big paintings and then kind of just going crazy and seeing how things go and progress. But it was also funny because already it feels uncanny how so many stories of the mining landscape in Cornwall, are beginning to appear through some of these experiments with the paper marbling. Especially things like the conical tips of these deemed waste byproducts of the mining landscape that rise like miniature mountains. I started seeing them in some of these really small material tests and I guess also in terms of my work looking at mapping and specifically the mapping of soil as a stratified linear horizontal reading, even just working with these pigments and that embodied process of making through them, it started to develop a language of, I guess, mapping or drawing of representing how these soils are mixing and how they can't be demonstrated or how they can't be even shown, in this sort of stratified reading. And so, yes, it's been really interesting to work with this process and see some of like the imagery, even of some of the stories of the copper, for example, that is just being washed along the coastline appear in some of these images. And it was like quite technical learning in terms of the different types of pigments to use. And the plan is to start to work with some of the pigments that I also started to harvest from the arsenic landscapes, although I need to figure out a safe way of doing that as well. And then also, I spent a lot of time these past two weeks, walking along the sea and just observing the moon, observing the low tides. And it's funny also how I started to see all of these things in the

paper marblings, and then started drawing some of these imaginary landscapes out of them. And then another thing that I was doing was tracking and tracing a lot of the plants that were growing along the coastlines, because they're able to remediate salt, which is a toxin to them. And I also, on my walks through some of the mining landscapes, notice these same plants. So, I was interested in understanding the ways in which they are digesting and alleviating these toxic salts, but also doing that with the metals themselves, too. So that's where I'm going with this. And I think there's also something about -- I guess there's also a connection actually between the work at QUBS and then the work I'm starting to develop on paper here. This isn't a really great representation of it. I haven't really started it properly yet. But I guess what I'm thinking of is in the same way that at QUBS I was starting to combine and create these imaginary plants that defy categories, my next step is to start to do this with works on paper as well. Maybe doing something with the paper marblings, combined with some investigations into Persian miniature painting as well, an Indian miniature painting. Because I'm creating these creatures that are remediating and digesting these toxins, in the landscapes. So, that's where I've left off with it. But apologies, that's not like a really articulate description of what I'm doing with that. But I just found it interesting how the idea of the imagination really came to surface. I really started to think about it critically when I was here on residency, really thinking about the imagination not just as this fictional place, but also perhaps a reality in another dimension and a place to hold these images, stories, dream figures, embodied imagery and movements that come from us in a dimension that's beyond our rational intellectual perspective. And I think I'm really excited in exploring that further. But, yes, I think I'll leave it there. Thank you.

Dr Isabella Machado Altoé: Okay, great. Thank you so much. This was amazing. Very interesting presentation. I'm sure everyone is bubbling with ideas, but we'll give you all some time to think about it and prepare questions for Iman. I have a couple of questions, but I just start with -- a broader one --

Iman: Yes.

Dr Isabella Machado Altoé: -- because storytelling is a central part of your practice. And you mentioned deep listening, something we discussed about. And I was wondering while you were presenting all of your projects, what methods do you use to understand stories of new ecosystems, like, how these new encounters are translated into your pieces?

Iman: Yes. I would say that is through deep listening, but a very broad understanding of what deep listening is. I think in some parts it is through that embodied knowledge that comes from just walking and exploring and being in a landscape different to your own. I've been doing a lot of deep listening exercises, as well, that have been created by Pauline Oliveros, but then also other types of scores. But then I also read a lot of scientific papers. I speak to scientists. I speak to people who work with nature in lots of different ways. People who engage with nature or who are in the vicinity of nature. We can maybe also make assumptions about who has permission to talk about nature as well. And so, I guess when I do that, that involves talking to local communities like the Huxton's Cross residents. It involves centring that knowledge that someone who's growing potatoes in their backyard has from understanding the cycles of the seasons every day. So, I would say, listening to people is actually just as important as the imaginary—the imaginary space of entering deep listening with the non-human as well. Recently also at Radical Ecology, we've been doing a lot of deep

listening exercises together. And I think through that process I've come to understand how deeply personal your listening experience is. You can all be listening to the same environment but be taken on completely different journeys. And so, a lot of what I'm trying to do is celebrate that very personal, subjective way of knowing the world around you, the sort of connections you make, the incongruous ways of thinking, that bridge across and bring together different knowledge strands. And so, that all comes into the work. And I think early on in my practice I felt the need to describe and justify that. But now, it feels like I don't have to do that. As long as you acknowledge where that subjectivity is coming from, then you should celebrate it. The problem is when you don't acknowledge something that's subjective and you make it universal. So, yes, those are some of the ideas I'm thinking through, but probably deep listening.

Dr Isabella Machado Altoé: Thank you. Do we have questions? Yes, [inaudible]?

Audience member: One question.

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: It's more of a musing that I would love to hear your musing about. When you use the word -- like, there's a lot of discussion of these words about escaping the binary of nature and culture.

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: And I like how you used in one of your projects the words decolonial, sustainable and anti-racist. And these are also problematized words.

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: But I find they're useful to sort of draw a terrain.

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: And I'm wondering in your use of the word nature... is that... where do you land with it right now? How are you...

Iman: Yes, yes. I think it's this tricky balance of using words that are universally understood, but then also using them whilst also understanding the ways in which they also act to separate. Like a lot of people, when you talk about nature or what's natural, it immediately takes you out of that, or takes the human out of that. And so, it's hard. What I try and do is always talk about nature as something you're situated in or also embroiled in. And something that we're part of, something we're implicated in and we have agency in. I think it's really easy to talk about nature as separate in many ways. Like I mentioned rewilding projects specifically, and how this idea that we have had so much of a negative impact on the world around us that we shouldn't do anything and we should keep still and we should remove ourselves. But then actually, there are many amazing relationships with land in our respective cultures where that's... it's proven just how important it is for the human to be in that relationship. I think it's also one of the things that I struggle with or I'm trying to

contend with is this idea of idealizing nature as well. And we think often that we're the destructive actor and everything else is creative, but actually there's creativity and destruction in all of our actions. And it's about understanding that as a whole, and the cycles, and where those two meet. So, I don't think that answers your question so much.. I use the term nature a lot, but I feel like I don't know what else I would use in a way.

Iman: Yes?

Audience member: I was thinking as you were showing the wonderful work that you did with the playing with the pigments and how you were seeing these formations, the natural formations, echoed in that work. And it made me think of mining that took place in the area of Lake Opinicon. And I wondered if you came across any of those histories or if that informed your work in any way?

Iman: Yes, I did come across the mica mining. And so, I spent some time looking for pigments amongst the mica mines. I didn't put that up there. There was a lot of research that I've been doing that hasn't fully formulated yet, that wasn't in the presentation. And it was funny because in the herbarium at QUBS, there were these pictures of these arsenic landscapes as well. Like really, red arsenic landscapes. I've forgotten exactly where they are, but I think maybe north from here. I don't know how many hours away in which town, specifically. But yes, I was looking at both the mica mining history and also the timber plantation as well in QUBS, but not in a lot of detail so far. I think I was also at one point thinking.. I think someone here mentioned that Devon and this part of Canada were once very close to each other when we were all part of Pangaea. And so, I thought, "Oh, maybe there's a link geologically, between the areas I'm studying as part of my PhD and also the mines over here." But sadly, there's not. So, I did go down that rabbit hole as well. But apart from that, I haven't done any specific research on the mica mines.

Sunny Kerr: I appreciated that you shared this project that's really in-the- making, raw and unfinished. It's a refreshing and unusual move for an artist talk, in a way. But I feel like it's really appropriate for an audience that includes many kinds of students. So, I'm curious to just pull on that a little bit and ask you to talk about how you came to art, because I know that you're situating yourself in very "mixed company." And so, I just feel like some of that might be really exciting.

Iman: Yes, of course. So, I didn't study fine art. I studied architecture for five years and also worked in an architecture practice. I thought I would study art when I was younger. I would create a lot of works based on... different depictions of land and landscape, informed by a lot of the patterns from like my Indian heritage and also my Islamic heritage. And that was a direction I saw myself going. And I was doing a lot of pattern making when I was younger, as in like botanical patterns, and then went and did architecture instead. And then it was in my fifth year of architecture school where I was in a unit that was all about world building. So, we were thinking, or that unit specifically, students were tasked with thinking about what is the role of an architect in a climate where it's no longer sustainable to keep on building and constructing and making in the way architects traditionally make? And so, this unit was specifically thinking about analysing conflicts in the present day. Those could be social, political, environmental, and basically speculating on a future world that you might want to get to. And that was really where the development of my art practice began. And so, after I graduated from architecture school, I started working part time for an artist, as her researcher and designer, whilst also, continuing, the project that started at architecture school,

which was Kinnomic Botany. And so, I spent a good few years taking that, just experimenting with that work and taking it to a place that felt less constrained by some of the constraints you might find in architecture school, which were to make things spatial in a particular way. And yes, so that's how I got into art practice. It was more of an organic thing. I think architecture gave me that criticality and that strong base in research. But I did find that it also... it also made me separate the research aspect of a project from the making. And so, I think I've had to also relearn ways of thinking through making as well. And so, I think the reason why I also showed that last project is because I think it's the first time that I've just let go of trying to justify anything and just make something and then see what comes out of that. And so, it felt like quite a liberating thing to do. And so, I hope that I'll be doing more of that as well.

Audience member: Thanks. Yes. I was very curious about the map with the hands.

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: How do you use that?

Iman: Oh, how do you use it? So, it's hard to describe without it on the screen, but there's a little map of, different pathways and basically rings that match up to rings on the hands. So, there's one ring and then two rings and three rings, and those match up to a hand with a particular kind of plant that's narrated in the audio piece. So, the idea is that the physical map is taking you to different imaginaries. It's a lot looser, maybe more symbolic. And focussed on creating these signs. And then, the audio map is the thing that really takes you through the space of the garden.

>> I have a sort of unformed question or thought. But there's this sort of pattern in your work of engaging with these systems that have maybe colonial origins, but choosing to revise them or create alternatives rather than abandoning those systems in their entirety. So, I was just wondering if you could speak to the motivation behind doing that and what sort of labour it takes as well?

Iman: Yes, I think it's actually been different for different projects. I feel like Emergent Knowledge Bureau... that project was quite hard, because it was working within institutions and relying on an existing infrastructure. And that made it really difficult in terms of... what we were trying to do with that, and what I tried to do more broadly with my practice and think is to think about what new things can be created and if we can't change old systems, imagining and creating these ways in which we can also make our own systems of knowledge and cooperation and sharing. And Emergent Knowledge Bureau was trying to do that, but also in doing so, trying to engage with particular museums. And that just became really difficult in that particular project. But in others, like the Natural England 100 Year Care Plan, there was an aim and an ambition to move that further and actually turn some of those speculative ideas of the clay school and the film school into real schools. And then there were cuts in funding and Natural England could no longer support that project or couldn't take that to the next stage. And so, instead there has been a commitment on our side that we wanted to still do that in whatever way we could. And so, we do have a film school. We are doing things in those woodlands, but in a less programmed way and in a less official way. We don't have ownership of the specific part of the woodlands. But we're thinking about different ways of working with them. So, it's been a lot of shifting and I guess, being responsive as well. And when we speculate as well, and when we think of alternatives and imagine alternatives, you're thinking

towards a future that you want to get to, but that might not be your future, but it does help you reevaluate the present. And so, I think it does something to change and imagine different ways of being and different values that you can bring back into your present day and act on them in the infrastructures that you have that you're cooperating with as well. So, yes, it's a lot of being responsive to where funding is coming from or who's interested as well and who's invested in these things alongside you.

Dr Isabella Machado Altoé: I have another question, and it's sort of unfinished, so bear with me. While seeing your presentation, I was thinking about botanical illustrations and how they are like a colonial way of representing nature and trying to appropriate nature to create knowledge. And your practice offers this contrast because you're producing a completely different kind of knowledge with your illustrations. And then you mentioned at the end that you want imagination not to be a fiction, but like a mode to enrich perspective. Could you talk a little bit more about that and about the effort of making this contrast of your illustrations and botanical illustrations?

Iman: Yes, of course. So, I've been trying to figure that out recently. And whilst I was in Cornwall, I came across this book of Indian miniatures in the secondhand bookshop. And within it, it had documentation of the types of cosmological drawings that you might find or different representations of deemed real animals and plants, and how they were, visualized in these miniatures. But then also imaginary ones, too. And there was something in there that really resonated with me, which was that, these imaginary creatures, in the way that I was reading this book, was very similar to what I was thinking, in that these imaginary creatures were representing the potential possibility of all nature can do, rather than creating these distinct categories of what nature can do based on our understanding of where we are now. And so, I think with me, and with like the types of drawings that I'm trying to create—at the moment just in sketchbooks—is thinking about specifically the ways in which specific bodies can evolve and cross pollinate. And there's something about even collaging different things together that is starting to build on some of those ideas and possibilities. I think also when I was at QUBS, just being in an area that was a novel ecosystem and that doesn't exist anywhere else, that shows just how amazing like this planet is and how you can get very specific species interactions in this space, place, that don't exist anywhere else. And so, that also points towards this notion that anything is possible. And so, yes, it's been a lot of this work with novel ecosystems specifically that has been really cool, and amazing because it allows you to use and tend to your imagination in a way that explores all possibilities and doesn't limit yourself to specific categories. There was also something that I'm trying to explore within the animacy of visual language. And one of the things that I learnt was that paper marbling is something used in Islamic manuscripts as a form of sacred decoration. Because you're not meant to actually visualize human figures or any figures. And so, that's something that I'm learning... to tend to those contradictions as well. Because my family are originally from India, but Muslim. And so, there are all of these influences and references to specific bodies and specific jinn or demons within Islam that are visualized in certain parts of the world as these creatures with like, these hairs coming out of themselves, which reminds me of a lot of Octavia Butler's work. And then -- and then like -- but then also -- but also silenced in other parts. And so, I think that's an exciting space to be in right now as I'm creating these creatures and thinking with this paper marbling, and then also these miniature drawings. I don't know. I'm interested in where that might go as well.

Iman: That's fascinating. Do we have more questions? Yes?

>> Thank you so much for the presentation. It was wonderful to see your work. I couldn't help observe the architectural use of line work in your drawings. It was really visually... I think those are finished works within themselves as well. But also, the Indo-Islamic visual properties in your painted images. Are you able to speak about the role that your own personal history plays? Because you mentioned it few times. Right?

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: And the role diaspora --

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: -- plays in your residency. What are the traces of your own personal histories and the styles that you've observed? This sort of East and West conversation that seems to be occurring within you, but then also transplanted onto these lands, which in themselves have an economy and also an ecology, but also have histories of land politics, right, and the labour exploitations of other bodies as well.

Iman: Yes. Yes. And I thank you for so much for that. I would say yes, in relation to the question around diaspora. And there's that kind of visual language. It's funny because, when I started with that work, it wasn't ever intentional to draw on a specific language. It's something only that recently, even after making that Invasion Ecology map, people said that it reminded them of something specific. Like it reminded them of a tantric painting or a specific kind of Buddhist cave painting or... I'm not sure if you know Charles Young and his Red Books, who kind -- he worked a lot with symbol. And so, it feels strange to now look back on those works and see those resemblances, because, I've always just thought I had a style that emerged through a lot of line drawings in architecture school. And then, of course, diaspora is a huge part of that. I grew up learning about plants through the imagery and embroidery on my mum's saris, for example, and through studying some of the books that we had on Islamic architecture. And so, those were all things that were influencing the way in which I drew the world around me and made sense of the world around me and also constructed land and landscape within these references and drawings. In relation to how that relates to or responds to places already with their own histories and their own knowledge systems and their own communities, I would say that whenever I work within a specific environment, I'm always contending with this idea of making work in relationship to a place that I'm not from. And I think even in relationship to working with QUBS, one of the questions that I was asking is what does it mean to be working here when I'm not local to here? I think quite broadly about definitions of belonging as not rooted in one place, but rooted in the ways in which you give and take from a land or landscape. And so I'm not trying to make anything that is an objective sort of botanical illustration that other people should adopt and absorb. What I'm trying to do through my work is speak to a subjectivity that is coming from all of these different influences and respond to a place in a way that feels connected to my experience and interaction in relationship to it. And that's something that anyone will do and anyone will do within their own experiences and relationships and their own diaspora or seeds that they come from. And so, yes, I don't think that answers your question specifically, but what I'm trying to say is if we're also all a part of this planet and we think from this planetary existence, this idea of a place having a specific kind of aesthetic or community that are allowed to inhabit it and engage with it, is that also challenged? Can we

challenge those divides in which we make, that separate us or dictate how we can express or belong our relationship to a place?

Audience member: I really appreciate it, just because in seeing your work, what really is great example in my observation, just how, I received your work, there's a deep-rooted double consciousness which I really like that -- that echoes an experience of your work.

Iman: Thank you. Thanks.

Audience member: Hi. This is not related to your practice per se. It's a bit of a selfish curiosity question. I'm curious about, I think it's the Dartington Estate, where the trees were being logged.

Iman: Yes.

Audience member: So, it's under what ownership? What's the land ownership?

Iman: Yes, so it's under the ownership of the Dartington Trust. And so, it's a really interesting and complicated and long history. But they're an estate that were essentially once run by a couple called Dorothy and I've forgotten her husband's name, Elmhurst. And they came into a lot of money through inheritance and they went to India where they learnt about... where they engaged with an artist called Tagore and learnt about methods of forestry that were happening there. And then Tagore said, "you should go back to your home and do the same thing where you live." So, they were originally from California but living in Devon at the time. And so, they bought this land and started this alternative kind of school system way of living. So, the idea was to set up the forest as the place to essentially fund that community. So, it was this form of forestry. It was basically planted for profit. And then over time, it went through different management plans. There was an in-house management team, so they were in charge of creating a management plan that would see the woodlands through like at five years at a time. And then what happened recently was the trustees, essentially, have run out of money and so they're trying to make ends meet and make ways or find ways of replenishing this diminishing resource which is this landscape which was meant to be the school for arts based learning, a regenerative economy, that never ended up working. And so, what they did was outsource the management of those woodlands to a contracted team. And so, they no longer have an in-house management team. And so, though they said that they are following an old management plan which just was left to the side for a while; people who were in charge of that (older) plan say that what they're doing in those woodlands is different to what they wrote as part of the plan. And so, yes, it's crazy because then they're cutting down this timber and then essentially there's no... all of the biodiversity surveys that used to happen are now gone. The trees that they've replanted in these specific areas, they've died because just too much forest has been taken out to protect them from like winds, for example. And any of the money that's been made from the specific timber has been gone to fund a roof elsewhere on the estate. So, they're actually taking money out of these woodlands rather than replenishing it. So, it's a really complicated, tricky...

Audience member: Very contentious.

Iman: Exactly. Yes.

Audience member: Thank you.

Iman: No worries.

Dr Isabella Machado Altoé: We have four minutes, so we have time for one quick question. Otherwise, we're good to wrap up here. Thank you so much, Iman again. And I guess there will be more events, right? No? [Inaudible]

Iman: Oh, yes. That's at the Gender and Black Studies Institute on Wednesday next week 12 mid-day, maybe 12 to 1.

Alejandro Arauz: And also, your visits tomorrow starting at around 9:45. So please, [to students] have that in mind. You can sign on the chalkboard for your attendance.

Iman: Thank you so much.

[Applause]