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Landscapes of Hope: Sculptural Practice to Test Positive Adaptation to Climate Change

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Introduction and Research Aims:

This practice-based Fine Art PhD investigates the relationship between contemporary perceptions of landscape and the visual arts. It positions art as a critical tool for engaging audiences in dialogue around pressing environmental questions. Central to this inquiry is the cultivation of a deeper awareness of our relationship to place, drawing on local knowledge systems and material practices. Water is explored as both a physical and metaphorical connector, intimately linked to survival.

Research Questions:

- Can sculptural practice generate an understanding of place through the translation of embodied landscape experience into material form?
- How can contemporary art practice mediate nature-culture relationships by revealing locally situated ecological knowledge?
- How can the production of artworks articulate how places shaped by hydrological extremes function as sites of climate adaptation?

Scope of Study and Field Sites:

The research focuses on routines and adaptive strategies of communities living with hydrological extremes, utilising a comparative Global South/Global North structure to acknowledge the uneven distribution of climate disruption.

Armila (Panama's Darién Rainforest): Dense forest, mangrove, and sea convergence; experiencing environmental excess.

Coyo (Chile's Atacama Desert): The driest non-polar region on Earth; experiencing environmental scarcity.

UK Counterparts (The Southwest & Southeast): Enabling comparative readings of localised resilience.

Ethical Framework: Fieldwork was episodic (three-week collaborative residencies in 2022 and 2023) and supported through La Wayaka Current via invitations from local communities. This project develops situated, materially grounded insights but does not seek to comprehensively represent Indigenous knowledge systems.

Figure 4: Finding Water (2023). Desert Plants, Fabric and String, Dimensions Variable, Coyo.

Methodology / Context:

This research operates within contemporary ecological art practices. It foregrounds artistic practice as a mode of investigation rather than illustration. The researcher's role is both observational and participatory.

The Source-Translate-Make Framework: The project is structured across three interconnected stages:

Field → Studio → Exhibition.

Primary Medium: Sculpture and installation.

Supporting Media: Film making, performance, printmaking and collage.

Material Strategy: Intuitive methods utilising discarded and repurposed materials. Through layering, splicing, and material experimentation, the work explores improvised constructions as speculative propositions for adaptation.



Figures 1 and 2- Field research sites experiencing hydrological extremes: Top: Dense forest and mangrove canopy, Armila, Panama (Excess). Bottom: Arid terrain of Coyo, Atacama Desert, Chile (Scarcity).



Figure 3: Hope (2022). Found materials including banana leaves, rope, woven basket from palm leaves, palm leaves and clay. Dimensions variable. Panama.

Reflection and Findings:

- **Art as Enquiry:** Iterative processes of making and material experimentation function as a form of environmental enquiry, generating embodied knowledge about landscape change.
- **Structured Narratives:** The resulting artworks map "landscapes of hope" amid environmental uncertainty, offering speculative understandings of resilience.
- **Relational Futures:** By weaving together field observations and site-specific experiences, the research suggests that artistic practice can create spaces for imagining alternative, relational futures, offering new ways to *live with* environmental change rather than simply respond to it.

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