

# URBAN BIODIVERSITY? ARTISTS HAVE THE KEYS

If we look at the 'contemporary' art world filled with acrylics, solvents, chemical colors, and adhesives, it might be difficult to imagine how artists could be champions for nature and biodiversity. However, the work in contemporary art museums and galleries represents only a minor slice of what constitutes art around the world.

## TO FIND MORE ECOLOGICAL ART, WE MUST CAST A SLIGHTLY WIDER NET.

For three years as co-curators of arts programming at The Nature of Cities Festival, (<https://tnoc-festival.com/wp/>) we cast such a net. The result has been a wealth of biodiversity and life-sustaining art practices found in nearly every corner of the world—in 57 countries, to be exact.

Our premise is that, in its most elemental form, art must be an ecological practice. It can only be so, as **art is a means of conveying the truth of our individual relationship with nature and the universe.** In nearly every world culture, in nearly every time in history, this has been a constant feature of what we call 'art' in the broad sense. These acts of art are inherently acts of connection to the earth.

In curating art for The Nature of Cities Festival, we found artists who craft both subtle and direct bridges that awaken our awareness of the land and its diverse inhabitants. At the Festival, artists perform poetic dances with urban nature (Nadia Vadori-Gauthier). They open channels of communication with urban water (Robin Lasser &



**Carmen Bouyer  
and Patrick Lydon.**

Ecological artists and art curators at  
The Nature of Cities (TNOC)



Marguerite Perret) and with ancestral landscapes (Tanya Ruka). They create beatbox performances that speak for the trees (3'z), and they uncover our forgotten botanical memories (Pantea Karimi). At the end of each day, musicians sing and play aloud songs of interspecies kinship and resilience from Dakar (Leuz Diwane G), Portland (Sparkbird), and Busan (BomNunByeol).

Art, in this sense, is not so much an act of self-expression as it is an act of *awareness* of nature. In various ways, artists are masters of awareness, and this awareness is a key to uncovering ecological ways of seeing and doing.

Indeed, biodiversity conservation and regeneration ask for this acute awareness, this art of *sensing*, which ultimately leads to the art of *being*. The languages that art develops – the poetic, the symbolic, the embodied, the emotional – can connect humans and other lifeforms in profound and long-lasting ways. But one has to be open to the unexpect-

ed. Here, too, art can help, for it welcomes the unknown with curiosity and openness. This is how we start to foster an equitable ecological culture, to embody the leap toward a narrative of respect for biodiversity at all levels.

We are all artists of some sort, meaning we all experience the world in a unique and creative way, constantly perceiving and co-creating our reality in relation to other beings. We can make our awareness of these relationships more acute, and in doing so, we can better attune to the world. The art of relating with the world is the very expression of our humanity. This art asks us to celebrate. This art asks us to continuously explore its myriad facets, amazements, and miracles. This art asks us to keep the ecologically-aware spirit alive by infusing it into the fabric of our everyday lives, together as a global, multi-species community.

When we each venture to practice this art, we each hold a key to urban biodiversity.

Quote as: Bouyer, C., Lydon, P. Urban Biodiversity? Artists Have the Keys. P. 238. In: Mejia, M. A., Amaya-Espinel, J.D. (eds). *BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities with Biodiversity*. Bogotá. Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt. 2022. 288 pages.