

vibrant mountains

Text published in the framework of the exhibition "["Vibrant Mountains"](#)" by the artistic duo [Bobrikova de Carmen](#), at [Telemark Kunstcenter](#).

Skien, Norway.

April, 2024.

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Vibrant Mountains is an exhibition that at first glance could be a powerful essay on alternative ecological futures, or on how to imagine other possible systems. However, I would like to argue that, in addition to being an essay, this proposal is anchored in an extensive and profound series of relationships, links, and movements. Guided by the acute intuition that characterises the practice of the artistic duo Bobrikova de Carmen, this series makes their work a complex web of actions, temporalities, and practices materialised in the five pieces that organise this exhibition.

a timeline

In January 2020, Martinka's friend gave her a scoby as a gift. Not quite understanding what it was about, Martinka received it and began a long relationship with the bacteria. After several attempts, she managed to find just the right amount of care to make her first kombucha. Fermentation is a way of cellular breathing that implements a system of transference, therein lies the germ of a practice that the artistic duo begins to implement: fermenting to share and generate ties that can be sustained over time; fermenting as a way to amplify and expand new relationships

In November 2022 Martinka and Oscar participated in an artist residency at the ICSP in New York. Martinka brought a vacuum-packed scoby from Oslo. It went through customs, got on the plane and arrived at the residency building in Brooklyn. The scoby was cultivated for three weeks; reproduced and made into kombucha; bottled in small glass bottles, labelled with information like flavor, date, city and BDC's signature. I joined them and at the end of the residency we traveled together to Mexico City. The scobys were left in New York among friends and people who attended their workshops. The bacteria spreads.

We arrived in Mexico City. At 2240 metres above sea level, we felt dizzy and sick. We were told that it was Montezuma's evil or revenge, a popular expression for the sickness that many tourists experience when visiting Mexico.

We visited the Zocalo, the Mexican Cathedral and the Basilica of Guadalupe. We saw the city from above on the hill of Tepeyac, the sacred site where, according to the Catholic faith, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to the native Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin.

We continued to travel in different directions. We saw more mountains—both white and green—in Colombia, Bolivia, Argentina, Slovakia, and Norway.

There is a mountain in the Andes called Cerro Rico—in Quechua Sumaq Urqu (beautiful mountain) or Urqu P'utuqsi or Qullqi Urqu (mountain from which silver springs)—also known as Cerro de Potosí, hence the name given to the Bolivian city. This exploited, razed and also worshipped mountain had the largest silver mine in the world. The Spaniards found it: lives were consumed and minerals were displaced, extracted, processed, and traded in other geographies.

The mountain is imposing and powerful.

Oscar began to research on the power of mountains as sacred places. Huacas, pyramids, syncretisms, devotion, legends, and formulas.

In October 2023 we all met in Madrid. Oscar and Martinka worked on a project in CAR. Scobys were travelling again, taking some of the local air, reproducing and staying with friends. Something like this happens to them as well, they travel, move around and make their practice a form of bonding. They relate, transform and leave something behind. This trip was an opportunity for us to work on the project re-(t)exHile, a piece that deals with the problem of the circularity of textiles. We thought about matter, *Hile* in Greek. What happens to the life of things we discard? What is the political meaning of waste? What responsibility do we assume for the fate of what we decide to stop using?

At an art book fair, someone suggested that we read *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* by Jane Bennett. In this book, the author presents her theory of a living materiality. Among other things, Bennett reflects on the vital power of material formations such as landfills. They generate living streams of chemicals and fatty acids, which can transform brain chemistry and mood. In this way, we delve into thinking about matter as an entity, as a thing, as a subject that can be understood from an ecophilosophical perspective.

In February 2024, we travelled to Lagos, Nigeria, with the project re-(t)exHile. Immersed in the development of the work, a project that addresses the issue of textile waste, Martinka and Oscar began to elaborate the approach of the exhibition in Skien: to fictionalise a series of mountains that reflect on different states of matter. *Vibrant Mountains* is finally a research which explores the contemporary power of matter.

the power of the mountains

Mountains have historically been the subject of cult worship. Different communities, cultures, civilisations and geographies have made of mountains powerful symbols. Imaginaries, representations, and beliefs have been associated with the power of mountains through pilgrimages, architectures and syncretisms.

What powers emanate from things? On this issue, Martinka and Oscar offer a contemplation of contemporary society, questioning the material values that surround us. They are interested in highlighting the transformation and action power things have, how they move, mutate, and generate new things.

What values do we assign to waste and to things we understand as non-human? Is there an intrinsic value to the things we do not see? Is it possible to change the perspective and try to establish other links with our environment?

Drawing from the legacy of the Telemark Kunstsenter building—once a bank, a prominent symbol of financial influence—the exhibition prompts us to envision the structure as a representation of a fictional "cult" around capitalist principles. In this sacred space, Martinka and Oscar generate a ritual: diving into the ruins of a failed, unequal, and damaging system. On the remains, they erect new symbols.

What we see as waste is in reality a world subject to infinite transformations: waste is not an end, it is not something inert that disappears; waste can be reused, consumed, transformed, and recycled.

the pilgrimage

As a sacred space or procession, the exhibition is a way: a journey through four mountains encircled by a marking. We move through different stages of matter: reused, conserved and in action.

1- The drilled mountain: Faced with a contemporary system that repeats patterns of exploitation and worships capital with religious fervour, this resignified space envisages a path: hacking. Inside a mountain-bank, a space for art. Inside a silver curtain, an exit to the green of rubbish.

2- The green mountain: In Norway, food waste bags are degradable and used to generate biogas and biofertiliser. The process includes burning the waste. Under this logic, a green and burnt mountain. Behind it, an extensive practice around waste recycling.

3- The living mountain: The scoby as living matter that reproduces, regenerates and causes powerful effects. A laboratory that constantly transforms itself. The process of a series of cares, relations, and expansions. The drink, the movement, the gas, that which grows without limits. The power of the organic.

4- The sacred mountain: In the old safe of the bank a value is kept. A resource. A non-renewable material: water. From the building's tap, the water rests in a series of limited-edition bottles, projecting the dimension of a future time, where water will be the most precious material value.

Finally, "the trace": a building contained by red ratchet straps. A temporary sculpture, which alludes to the binomial meaning of the straps: subjection and load. Subjection as domination, subjugation, the burden is the material.

If we live in a system that continues to venerate capital as the only way forward, *Vibrant mountains* propose to venerate matter. Not as a possible entity to be exploited, used or reformulated, but as power, as a latent energy that inhabits the planet. As a faith in the transformative capacity of matter and in the imperative to create other connections with the environment.

what lies behind

Behind each of Martinka and Oscar's works there is a story, a precise political gesture, and also a journey that has formed a value after almost 20 years of joint practice. The value of friendship, of trust, of alternative paths, of ways of producing; the value of intuition and the value of engaging in action with one's own body. The works mentioned here have been exhibited, destroyed, consumed, and recycled. The

works contaminate and transmit elements to each other, they are like an exquisite corpse that drags a material continuity. This gesture of not anchoring a work to a specific date, place or material, points to two things: on the one hand, the reuse of materials as part of a sustainable practice and, on the other, the construction of a narrative that is woven through each project. A syntax of elements that write the story of an immense network of friends, colleagues, artists, family, travels and loves that over time have sustained and accompanied their artistic practice.