

Where are all the Flowers Gone?

Invited by researchers Ana Cristina Torres, Marion Brun and Yoan Miot¹, as well as by Université Gustave Eiffel as part of a *Faire Ville Circulaire* programme, I am taking part in a research-creation project.

Research-creation is a renewed form of research in which urban planning professionals, researchers and artists engage in processes of inquiry in order to develop and construct new forms of knowledge through new ways of narrating and debating. Within the framework of this project, which seeks to cast a new light on the wastelands of Roubaix, I am developing an artistic project around three brownfield sites in the area: Nord Éclair, Mieillet and Les Trois Ponts. I approach these marginal spaces through a sensitive lens. Often regarded as empty spaces, as “reserves for the useless,”² I seek instead to reveal their fragility and beauty, and to imagine a practice of care.

Over the course of a year, marked by seasonal visits, I observed these sites as they transformed: spontaneous vegetation, the persistence of living organisms, human traces and the waste that accumulates there. In September, I was struck by their enclosure. Most of the sites are surrounded by wire fences, like thwarted dreams. They evoke certain heterotopias, such as prisons: two worlds existing at the margins of society, yet in which life persists. Behind the fences, people sometimes live in extremely precarious conditions; women sometimes give birth there. Flowers emerge, life pulses. These wastelands thus appear as spaces of memory, where abandonment and resilience, extreme fragility and the enduring power of the living coexist.

My practice combines photography, drawing, textiles and video. I work “at flower height,” attentive to the fragility of what remains. My digital and Polaroid images explore the tension between appearance and disappearance, sometimes moving towards abstraction in order to emphasise the invisibility of these places within the city. Some of the images will subsequently be extended into textile forms, echoing the industrial textile history from which these brownfield sites emerged. Woven, unwoven and embroidered, they will become sensitive fragments, “images-caresses,” seeking either to symbolically repair these landscapes or to give symbolic form, through my stitches, to breaths, languages, or a kind of swarming of the wastelands.

¹ Ana Cristina Torres : Maître de Conférence à l'Université Paris Est Créteil (UPEC), Chercheuse au Lab'Urba associée au centre d'Écologie et Science de la Conservation (CESCO)

Yoan Miot : Urbaniste, Maître de Conférences, LATTS, Université Gustave Eiffel, Responsable axe politiques publics d'aménagement et biodiversité

Marion Brun : Ingénieur de recherche ENSA Versailles, Responsable axe écologique et paysager

² 2 Michel Lussault, géographe

I embroider with threads dyed using plants that can be found on site, such as nettle, weld and buddleia, thereby extending the direct relationship between territory, living matter and image. Others are printed on 9-gram Kozo paper, as a way of emphasising the fragility of these spaces. I am also considering creating a video from film footage captured with my MiniDV camera, projected onto a photographic surface in order to allow the animated and the inanimate to coexist.

During a winter visit to the Mieillet site, the landscape appeared to me profoundly disturbed: the earth had been torn open and turned over, like a battlefield. The public authorities had deliberately driven out precarious populations in order to turn over the soil and deposit waste there. Faced with this overturned world, a profound sadness took hold of me. This wasteland seemed to me to reflect a society that has been uprooted, fragmented, disconnected from the living world and from what binds us together. One question then persisted: how can we repair? How can we weave connections back together?

The title of the project is inspired by the song sung by Marlene Dietrich and written by Pete SEEGER, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* In the background, it raises the question of when human beings will finally put an end to their murderous madness. I therefore ask myself: how long will it take for us to find our flowers again? To recover our capacity to listen to the living world? So that clouds may emerge from our flowers.

And yet, by taking the time to sit down and listen to the stories of the people who live there, and to observe the living world that continues to make itself heard, I realise that these spaces could become laboratories for reweaving interspecies connections, between humans and the more-than-human. From this experience emerges a desire: to care for these territories, to caress them, to reveal the beauty that persists despite everything.

This project is a poetic and ecological immersion that seeks to shift our gaze: to no longer see wastelands as empty spaces, but as places of life, resistance and possibility, where, despite the disaster, spring is already preparing itself.