

Phyto-Human Collaborative Drawings as Intimate Entry to Biosemiotic Field of Hope

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Hope resides in collaborative efforts across species, in co-producing knowledge and in a relational approach to the living earth. Plants, animals, and fungi and all parts of living systems have been silenced to such an extent that bringing their voices to the fore is a primary task for healing and repair. Relationality is central to Indigenous ontologies in kinship extending across beings. From the western tradition, the I-Thou relation, described by Jewish scholar Martin Buber (1937), contrasts with today's dominant I-It relation. Trans-species experiences or relations decenter humans and engender place-based community awareness, intimacies, and engagement with the living world as a system that fosters life.

This practice-based research paper presents examples of trans-species artwork, both in images and in theory, that were created with vegetal guidance. The images evoke plant minds and voices, bringing their own artistry forward. Plants were artists well before humans, and their aesthetics organize landscapes and human conceptions of beauty. Plants are primary to existence, they form the ground of human existence, and they do so in mindful ways.

The oil pastel drawings that access plant minds are made with a process of bodily co-inhabitation, of permeable selves, close listening, and intuition. The artmaking involves a kind of shapeshifting, that has informed rituals of healing, communication, and upholds more-than-human relationships. These vegetally-informed images tap into a phyto-human enmeshed meaning-making field that maps contours of relations with place and self. This phyto-human social and semiotic realm has been central to ancient cultures. In contemporary work, the biosemiotics realm has been described by Eduardo Kohn (*How Forests Think* 2013) and in complex systems theory in which intelligence and communication reside in relational complexity (Calvo et al 2020). This trans-species realm of meaning and possibility is a space and time of healing for all who engage.

Plant life cycles and plant communities face radical change due to climate change, pollinator decline, habitat loss, feral processes, and generally from extractive approaches to the Earth. Other beings' face enormous challenges, and hope resides in attentiveness to their perspectives. Yet, as Stella Sandford (2022) writes, vegetal lives cannot be understood with animalistic metaphors; plant minds may be to some extent, unknowable. Trans-species art lives in the paradoxical common ground of the ineffable. Science communication about the climate crisis can benefit from integrations of trans-species collaborations, shapeshifting, bodily permeability and relationality.

This paper presents images, explanation of the collaborative process as well as corresponding theory of the phyto-human semiotic field, the Entangled genre. Each mark made on the paper has been directed through yes and no questions to a plant or a plant archetype, for direction in terms of color, shape and location. This project builds on the author's monograph that is currently in publication (Lexington Books) titled, *Shaped by Vegetal Matters: Phyto-Influences on Humans, Other Animals and Place*.

Works Cited

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Figures 1-4 present plant-informed drawings from top left and clockwise: mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), willow (*Salix spp*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*), redwood tree (*Sequoia sempervirens*).