

(re)imagine by Anu Radha Verma

It feels like we are being ripped apart. From the inside, and externally. In 2019, the things that divide us have longer shadows than the things that bring us together – the violence of racism and xenophobia, climate crises, and the continued pain of structures and systems designed to keep certain bodies contained. In these times of horror, we have opportunities to intervene and disrupt, to imagine and build other ways of being.

Lisa Hirmer's *Mother Trees of Forests Not Yet Here* asks us to pay attention to the permeability of being, the ways that we might not always have the discrete edges that capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy tells us we do. This blurring echoes the possibilities of interdependence and access intimacy, concepts of disability justice that I've learned about through the work of writer, educator and community organizer Mia Mingus. One of the most powerful ideas we can unlearn is that of "independence," the "self-made" person (man) who (supposedly) relies on no one, and is both productive and "high functioning." I have seen interdependence and access intimacy be modelled through my own relationships, through the brilliance of so-called marginalized community organizing across the world. It's Hirmer's work that has highlighted the parallels within forest worlds globally, where networks of trees share resources especially in times of peril, disease or threat. The problem of not seeing parallels (or relationships) is precisely what Hirmer seeks to address through *Forest Scores* for example, asking questions about vulnerability, connection and dependence.

Even this essay is a reflection of the kind of re-imagining that I want for our world, the kind of re-establishing that Hirmer puts forward as a proposition, a series of questions with a multitude of answers. I am a reluctant curator and writer, more accustomed to agitating, building relationships outside or in spite of institutions. In the wake of how structures alienate us – whether arts and cultural ones, the designed apparatuses of development in the suburbs where I live, or the machinery of violences in my place of origin (India) – I want to model something else, with Hirmer and her work.

It's been ten years since I first met Hirmer, through DodoLab. Ten years since we first shared space and laughter on questions of identity, community change and public engagement as artistic practice. A decade is a long time for a human, a short time for a tree, a long time for a dog, a short time for an ocean. The questions Hirmer is asking are certainly current – global climate justice strikes occurring just before the exhibition opens; the federal election taking place just after – but they also point to concerns about futurity. Technologies we don't fully

understand like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and tools with unknown implications like Big Data, co-exist with simplistic approaches to mental health struggles that rely on pharmaceuticals like SSRIs, developed in the late 1980s and mostly unchanged. We are in living in complex times, times where complexity is promised as our (collective) future. Like Hirmer, I am deeply concerned with how we will find ways to build in times of crisis, when crisis is guaranteed and many peoples' skills largely underdeveloped.

Who we are, and who we are in relationship to one another, are in flux.

I fluctuate between hopefulness and deep despair. Hirmer knows this, and her approach to work and life creates space for my multitudes. Her proposition that we remember or learn our possible roles and responsibilities within the various (eco)systems we are crucially important parts of, feels to me like a call to action. It also feels like a powerful statement, feels like what we say in community gatherings with those who have survived traumas like displacement, assault and isolation:

we see you

we believe you

we feel you

What if our multitudes could be seen, believed, felt? What if they could be valued? How might we imagine? How might we practice this?

As 15th century mystic Kabir says "Wherever you are is the entry point."