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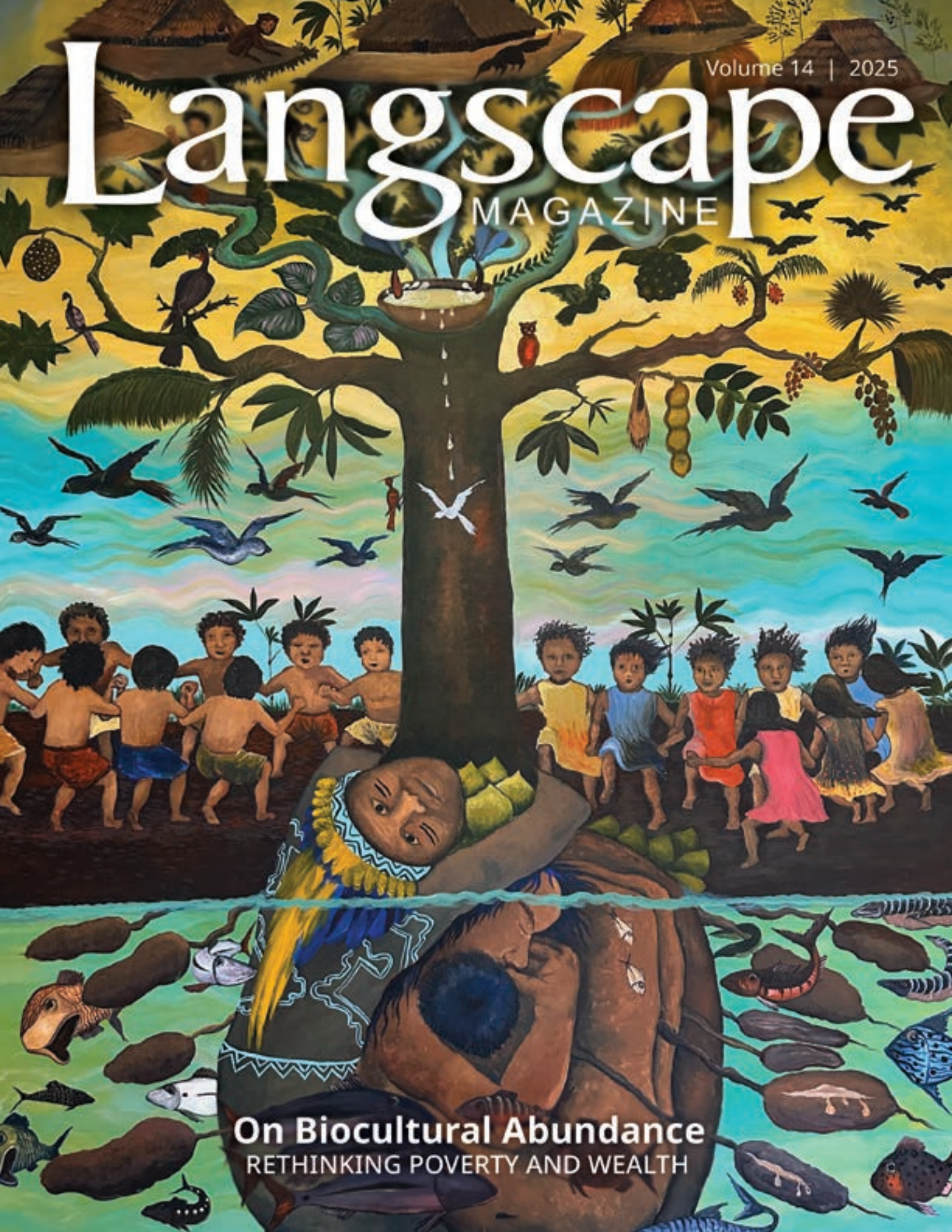

On Biocultural Abundance

RETHINKING POVERTY AND WEALTH

Langscape Magazine is an extension of the voice of Terralingua. Through the power of stories, images, and art, it supports our mission to educate minds and hearts about the vital value of biocultural diversity for the thriving of all life on earth.

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTOS

Front: *Flourishing Diversity*, acrylic on canvas. The branches of this tree of life lead to different communities, all of which contribute to the flourishing of life. Children dance in celebration. Representing the creative force of life, a young mother with her baby are the roots of the tree, the source of life. A shaman protects it all from collapse. Art: Bruce Rubio Churay

Back: Salome Gatumi and Brennie Muthoni walk through a field. For the Tharaka community of Mount Kenya, reviving traditional agricultural practices has increased abundance and autonomy over nutritional security. Photo: Andrew Pilsbury

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On Biocultural Abundance:
Rethinking Poverty and Wealth

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Langscape MAGAZINE

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FOR A WORLD OF ABUNDANCE

EDITORIAL

In Praise of True Wealth

Luisa Maffi

In *Mother of Many Children*, renowned Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin's first documentary (1977), Sally Skead, a young Ojibway woman, recalls growing up on the land. Wearing moccasins for shoes and rabbit skins for socks, she followed her grandparents, who would take her with them wherever they went—"fishing, trapping, everywhere." Hard on her? Not a bit. "It was a good life," she avers. "I never felt like I was poor. I was just happy."

Those simple yet profound words strikingly resonate with me. No, I didn't grow up wearing moccasins and rabbit-skin socks—although, had I been born a couple of generations earlier, I might have been wearing wooden clogs fashioned by my clogmaker great-grandfather, Francesco, in his home village of San Zenone in the Po Valley of northern Italy. Born in Rome in the early post-WWII era, I wore "regular" Western shoes instead, and my childhood wilderness (to which I did take with a passion) was merely the garden in the back of the house, where the grass, which my parents left uncut, was almost as tall as I was! I never "fished" more than a few frogs out of a nearby marsh to see them hop or "trapped" more than a few lizards to study their dinosaur-like features. Like Sally, though, I was happy and never wished for more.

That's why I can deeply relate to the sense of both "enoughness" and "plenty" that Sally's statement poignantly conveys: enoughness because you just don't need or wish for more, and plenty because "just enough" is in fact a lot! It's the plenitude that comes from a sense of connectedness—of being one with your family, your human community, and the larger community of all your non-human relations. It's a miraculous abundance that never gets depleted no matter how much you share it—in fact, the more you share it, the more abundant it becomes.

Since coming across Sally's words, I noticed many more similar statements made by members of Indigenous and other place-based communities around the world. Again and again, the gist seemed to be: if you are intimately connected to people and place, and if you recognize the wealth of nature as a priceless gift to be cared for and shared—so that everybody has enough while also nurturing natural abundance itself—then your life is rich and fulfilled in a way that no material wealth could provide.

I started thinking of the meaning of "poverty" and "wealth" a lot—indeed, *rethinking* the meaning of "poverty" and "wealth" altogether. And the idea of "biocultural abundance" as true wealth began to emerge—along with the question: given how good a bioculturally abundant life can be and is, how did so many of us go wrong, choosing a disconnected, impoverished material quest for more?

Indeed, in our increasingly materialistic, profit-oriented world, being "wealthy" has become inextricably associated with having an abundance of money and material goods. Lured by this chimera—you are what you own—more and more people around the globe define themselves by their ability to acquire ever more material wealth. The voracious accumulation of that kind of "abundance" by the few dramatically depletes the world's richness in nature and culture, leading to scarcity for the many. And ironically, this often does not even result in happiness and contentment for the "haves" but instead in a sort of acute "accumulation anxiety." Arguably, this dominant yet unsustainable and inequitable idea of a "good life," rooted in capitalistic systems of various stripes, is a fundamental driver of the social and ecological predicament we face globally today. What hope, if any, is there of seeing the world change course from the current destructive (and ultimately self-destructive) trajectory?

The answer, I believe, largely depends on whether we—meaning "we in the Western[ized] world"—can make a radical shift in how we perceive ourselves and the relationship between economy and ecology. That is, it depends on whether we can stop seeing ourselves as apart from and dominant over nature and quit treating the web of life as a mere pool of resources to be scavenged in the service of an almighty economy that self-perpetuates by creating endless wants; and whether we can instead begin to view ourselves as a part of and totally dependent on nature and start reimagining the economy as a tool for meeting basic human needs while also serving the thriving of all life.

Again, such alternative ways of thinking do exist, enshrined in the worldviews of many communities around the globe, both Indigenous and not, who define a "good life" in terms of collectively sharing the abundance of nature within a context of flourishing social and cultural relationships. So, what if we all shifted toward those other ways of thinking about abundance and replaced "more and more for the few" with "just enough for the many," fulfilling everyone's needs without undermining our world's biocultural wealth? How might life on the planet be different if a biocultural abundance outlook were embraced by all? This issue of *Langscape Magazine* delves into these momentous questions.

In the first section, we contemplate the enduring and changing values of "abundance" and the tensions between worldviews centered on abundance and those that, in contrast, foster scarcity. **Jerome Lewis** eloquently lays the groundwork with his opening story about the BaYaka hunter-gatherers, living in the forests of Central Africa. For millennia, the BaYaka, a highly egalitarian people, have been sharing their forest's bounty according to strict moral principles, thus maintaining abundance for all. They now face an existential threat, however, from outsiders—be they loggers or conservationists—who view the forest as a valuable resource to be fenced off and hoarded. This creates scarcity and disconnects the original inhabitants from the wealth of the forest and therefore from their entire way of life, leaving the BaYaka with an uncertain future.

Around the globe, many communities have similarly upheld values of caring for and sharing biocultural wealth for generations, thereby ensuring ecological abundance and social prosperity, but today confront outside pressures that threaten their ability to sustain the thriving of life in nature and culture. In the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, **Alex Ventimilla** tells us, the Bën za (Zapotec) people have managed to maintain self-governance, communal land tenure, and a worldview of responsibility and care that, together, have allowed them to preserve their biocultural prosperity to this day. Likewise, the Bugun people of the Eastern Himalayas, among whom **Vanessa Cholez** has lived and worked, have retained social and ecological abundance through cultural practices centered on sharing among people, with deities, and with other living beings. In both cases, however, market forces are knocking at the door, leading the authors to wonder how long those resilient communities will be able to resist the encroachment.

In some cases, those enduring biocultural values may be somewhat hidden from view, yet if you scratch the surface, their traces can still be found. In her Northeast India homeland, **Küvethilü Thülüo**, a young Naga woman, follows ancient paths in search of the menhirs (upright stones) that stand as witnesses to her people's tradition of "radical giving," or sharing of wealth. Suppressed by colonizers, who saw it as "wasteful" and promoted "sensible hoarding" instead, sharing is making a comeback, although Elders worry that its spirit may no longer be the same. It is now up to the younger generations to raise awareness and help revive ancestral values.

In turn, archeologist **Cecilia Porter** and her husband **Chris Lundy** trek along ancient paths in Greenland, dispelling common misinterpretations of that vast land as a barren and empty mass of rock and ice. Quite to the contrary, they find themselves walking through unmistakable signs of biocultural abundance past and present, born out of millennia of interdependence between the territory's hardy Kalaallit (Inuit) inhabitants and its surprisingly rich flora and fauna—a shared abundance that Greenlanders proudly hold on to in the face of outside threats.

Proudly holding on to shared abundance is just what campesinos (farmers) in the Brunca Region of southern Costa Rica do, as well. In **Felipe Montoya-Greenheck**'s and **Ana María Martínez**'s story, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous farmers in the region emphasize that wealth does not reside in economic growth and material accumulation; it resides in quality of life, well-being, and connection to land. That's their idea of *Buen Vivir* (a good life)—and there's nothing they would exchange it for!

Darryl Whetung's "glass half empty or half full?" musings wrap up this section. How we perceive life, he reminds us, depends on our perspectives and choices. Reflecting on life's journey through an Ojibway cultural lens, guided by Mother Earth's teachings, reveals that living with good values and gratitude—never taking too much, always leaving enough for others—creates abundance and balance among people and within the natural world.

When ways of life that foster abundance and balance are put at risk, or when abundance and balance have already been compromised, people and communities worldwide take defensive or restorative action. That's the topic of the next section. **Rowan Glass** introduces us to the Kamëntšá and Inga Indigenous peoples in Colombia, who strive to defend their threatened agricultural system as a repository of collective biocultural heritage, wisdom, and wealth. Living among the Shipibo people in the Peruvian Amazon, **Tanya Kammonen** witnesses their struggle to protect the wealth of their spiritual and healing traditions, which sustain true abundance: the connections between environmental, social, and individual well-being. Forcibly transported to Barbados during the slave trade, **Sonia Peter**'s African ancestors were wrenched away from their rich biocultural heritage, yet drew from both traditional and newly acquired knowledge to learn how to survive and thrive in an unfamiliar land thanks to a wealth of food and medicinal plants found there.

In places as different as southern Europe, Kenya, Japan, and California, community activists are rebuilding biocultural abundance through farming and other land-based practices. **Peppi Gauci**, a permaculture expert from Malta, recounts his life's journey as he learns from both ancient traditions and contemporary approaches how to regenerate abundance by following nature's processes. **Simon Mitambo**, along with **Rory Sheldon**, tells the story of how his Tharaka people, a community of farmers living on the slopes of Mount Kenya, are reclaiming their biocultural wealth by revitalizing their traditional knowledge, earth-centered wisdom, spiritual beliefs, and governance systems. **Saori Ogura** returns to her native Japan to learn how farming communities are consciously bringing back ancestral millet cultivation and, in the process, rediscovering the wealth of time. Finally, in northern California, **Annabelle Law** takes part in and learns from the North Fork Mono Tribe's efforts to reintroduce the ancestral knowledge and practice of cultural burns as a way of promoting biocultural abundance—that is, not only ecological

regeneration through fire but also social and cultural regeneration through "community work, sharing, and joy."

And it's not only whole communities that are reclaiming and recreating biocultural abundance. Reacting to the widespread sense of disconnect and perceived scarcity that afflicts contemporary society, more and more individuals from all walks of life are engaging in healing and transformative reflections on interconnectedness and true wealth. Several such reflections, expressed through art and poetry that celebrate abundance, grace the next section.

The South African creative duo of **Hobbs and Borton** showcases the riotous diversity and abundance of fungi in their "artwork with a message": we should stop trying to [artificially] *make* abundance and start recognizing and embracing the natural abundance of which we are a part. In her ancestral homeland in the Indian Himalayas, artist and researcher **Shriya Malhotra** finds health, solace, and artistic inspiration in the "principle of abundance" and the habit of sharing that have traditionally governed every aspect of her maternal community's life. Scholar **Mark Turin** takes a pause from a busy life of thinking and doing and, opening to feeling and being, expresses in poetry his learnings from the "abundant dignity and glory" of nature.

Having moved from Japan to the interior of British Columbia, Canada, **Hiroko Takaya** realizes her childhood dream of living off the land—and weaves into her baskets the biocultural abundance of her adopted First Nation home. Through the ancient art of wool dollmaking, **Coreen Boucher** reclaims her maternal Scottish ancestry while rooting herself in the biocultural history of her place of birth, British Columbia, and in so doing discovers that abundance is a feeling of belonging and connection. Lastly, in a poetic meditation on abundance and scarcity inspired by a humble mouse, **Chang Liu** proves that no creature is too small or insignificant to convey the deep teachings of nature.

Together, the wealth of stories I have introduced so far should more than begin to answer the question I posed earlier: what hope is there to see the world change course, shifting away from a self-destructive worldview of scarcity and back to a life-giving one of abundance? Our last set of stories delves deeper into the question.

A multicultural group of grassroots storytellers—**Valiana Aguilar**, **Samar Awaad**, **Ysa Calderón**, **Brijlal Chaudhari**, **Joanne Cheung**, **Kamasa Dorothy**, **Mai Thin Yu Mon**, and **Dawn Morrison**—contemplates the meaning of a "good life." From their diverse perspectives, they decry the colonial mindset that has disconnected human beings from the living world and has created the false dichotomy of poverty and wealth and suggest that returning to gift economies offers hope for a future of solidarity, reciprocity, and biocultural abundance. **Sinéad Fortune,** writing with **Amber Hayward**, offers a similar view, focusing on the recovery of "seed economics": an economy of gifting and sharing that embraces the intrinsic generosity of nature and teaches us to "reciprocate through a system that serves life." The lessons of Indigenous practices of gifting and wealth redistribution, argue members of the **First Peoples' Cultural Foundation** and the **Kw'umut Lelum Foundation**, can be successfully applied to domains such as philanthropy, shifting away from a "competition for money" mindset that creates and reproduces scarcity and toward a perspective in which the purpose of gifting is to "acknowledge and demonstrate responsibility for a shared mutual existence." Also operating in a philanthropic space, **Jerome Lewis**, **Ameyali Ramos**, and **Jessica Sweidan** point out that "biocultural diversity is not just a sign of a thriving world; it is a fundamental requirement for one," and issue an urgent call for cultivating a "flourishing diversity" of place-based solutions as the only way to restore biocultural abundance on earth.

As the respected Tla-o-qui-aht Elder and master carver Joe Martin puts it, what we need is not "sustainability"—which, he thinks, only amounts to keeping things on a lifeline for as long as we have a use for them. Instead, we need "abundability": a way of being and acting in the world that ensures abundance for all for generations to come. Arduous and challenging as the path toward abundability may be, individuals and communities around the world are hard at work to bring about that change from the ground up. And that is where hope lies.

Bioculturally yours,
Luisa Maffi

NATURE IS ABUNDANCE, AND WE ARE NATURE

Art that celebrates nature's abundance and invites us to reconnect with, respect, and revere the existing natural balance.

WORDS AND ART Hobbs and Borton

Above: *Foraging Fungi Mindfulness Mushrooms*

About the Artwork

Maybe, we need to stop trying to *make* abundance.

Let us ponder the symbiosis of tiny decomposers and the balance in nature, which sometimes looks like annihilation—a veld fire, a decaying tree. That's only deceptive death: there's life under the surface, a decarbonizing, bustling world of natural abundance, a web of life connected by fungi, mosses, lichens, insects, bacteria, and millions of other microorganisms.

Maybe, we need to reconnect with, respect, and revere the existing natural balance, something we so desperately seek as the world gets warmer and systems we know collapse.

Could it be that in this reconnection, in this reverence, we find some peace? Can we look past our fear and into an uncertain future with more hope than before, together with nature? In many ways, abundance is about equilibrium, and nature shows us how to achieve that every day. We need a sense of awe and a deep respect for nature's power.

As humans, we only acknowledge what we can see, assimilate, and interpret. Nature's vast ability to heal itself, morph, and transform is beyond our human imagination. But as artists, we try to create multimedia myths that share a story and show an engagement with it. We tap into the human-made knowledge networks within South African National Collection of Fungi (PREM), connecting the artwork to forays, hikes, and walks in the Magaliesberg and Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens. The intention of both the art and the forays is to show that our fear of never having enough or trying to control life on our terms is a self-delusion: we have so much already. Now we need to connect the dots between the knowledge, archive, history, past, present, and future, and work at being completely present. Let us make new stories for the now. Let us be inspired by our natural heritage, hold it safe, and protect it. Let us collaborate and celebrate the symbiosis of nature's work.

Maybe, we need to acknowledge the symbiosis of small things, which are road maps showing that nurturing healthy symbiotic relationships is naturally generative—abundance follows.

We are inspired by the natural heritage that surrounds us: a lineage of lichens, mosses, mushrooms, and fungi—our ancestors. Our entire food system relies on microorganisms, unseen biodiversity connected across swathes of soil, knitted together by mycelium, mosses, and symbiosis. Our soil food web is the beating heart of food production and more. We need to embrace our soil and nurture it to grow better food, be better humans, and sustain ourselves for longer. We learn that the little things, the detritivores, slime, and molds that often make us exclaim, "Gross!" are vital parts of our ecosystem. Just as important as the slimy, moldy, fungal decomposers in our soil food web are the millipedes, centipedes, woodlice, earthworms, slugs, and snails. These small yet powerful creatures are responsible for cycling decaying matter back into our earth, transforming it into nutrient-rich soil in which the trees that help us breathe, plants for pollinators, root systems that knit the earth together, and food for our bellies can grow.

As we imagine tiny decomposers at work in our back gardens, along pavements, in forests, in community gardens and parks, it can feel a bit surreal, a bit like science fiction at work, and slightly confusing as we come to terms with how vital something almost invisible can be.

Nature is abundance, and we are nature.

> *We need to stop trying to make abundance.*

Our artwork consists of mixed media (clay, linocuts, paper and cardboard, images of mushrooms and fungi from research trips, acrylic paint, ink, shiitake mushrooms, lichens). Most materials are found objects; the clay is gifted by a nearby local studio; paper and cardboard are recycled; linocuts are reused; other items can be composted and returned to the earth. These materials are compiled into a physical collage, which is photographed and then digitally rendered into the final artwork pieces in carefully considered digital collages.

Connecting Beyond the Frame

Discovering the Archives

Diversity in the Split Gill and Ink Cap Family

Above: *Abundance and Divine Decay.* **Opposite:** *Imprints from the Mycelial Network*

Above: *Conversations and Collaborations*

Right: *Finding Invisible in the Clay*

Recipe for Richness

Support the Cause: Take a walk in the woods and meet the mushrooms, mosses, and lichens, or put your nose in the soil and meet the slugs, snails, and earthworms. Have conversations with our natural collaborators and guardians. Connect with the ground beneath your feet and the clouds above your head. Extend your own self into the natural realm of abundance and feel safe in an uncertain world—you are part of nature, after all. Share your story with us! Let's connect. Find us at hobbsbortonmixedmedia.studio

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Pauline Borton *has a background in connecting people and spaces. Her recent artwork focuses on fungi and mycelial networks and how these become metaphors for social, and often hidden, connections between people and all living things. Find her also at paulineborton.com*

Mike Hobbs *loves to watch an image grow, morph, and transform at his fingertips and feels empowered by the process of digital image-making, as the possibilities are literally endless. He is steeped in the literature that chronicles the journey from modern to contemporary artmaking.*

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Terralingua
Unity in Biocultural Diversity

Terralingua *n* **1:** the languages of the Earth, the many voices of the world's diverse peoples. **2:** the language of the Earth, the voice of Mother Nature. **3:** an international nonprofit organization that works to sustain the **biocultural diversity of life** — a vital heritage to be valued, protected, and nurtured for generations to come.¶ From Italian *terra* 'earth' and *lingua* 'language'

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"Wealth is so much more than money changing hands; it is all around us, and it is shared."

— First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and Kw'umut Lelum Foundation

"True wealth is found in mutual aid, collective reciprocity, and sacred relations between us and the living world."

— Valiana Aguilar, Samar Awaad, Ysa Calderón, Brijlal Chaudhari, Joanne Cheung, Kamasa Dorothy, Mai Thin Yu Mon, and Dawn Morrison

"When we commit to the flourishing of the earth, we are also committing to the flourishing of our own lives."

— Jerome Lewis, Ameyali Ramos, and Jessica Sweidan