



Photo: Ricard Estay

The Intimacy of Strangers

Curatorial vision

The curatorial vision takes its point of departure in the overarching concept of natural sciences, focusing on the complex connections between environment, life forms and matter. The future artistic works should contribute with artistic perspectives on these relationships in order to highlight different ways of thinking about life and humankind in relation to its environment.

The context for the artistic works consists of the Natrium building and the organisations which operate within it. The consultation group have expressed their wish that the art should stimulate students, researchers and visitors, and contribute to the creation of a distinctive identity within the building. The artistic works should be conceptual and aesthetic investigations which are connected to the activities in and around the new Natrium building; that is, the overarching project Naturvetenskap Life. Rather than illustrate the building's professional and educational focus, the artworks should contribute to the context with alternative ideas and perspectives.

About the concept The Intimacy of Strangers

The natural sciences –together with many other disciplines of knowledge– have made multiple attempts to define what life is. Over the last decades, a great number of researches have contributed to this debate through discourse around the complex interwoven strands between life forms, matter and environment. This framework interrogates the dichotomy between human and non-human and claims that humankind is deeply interconnected with other life forms and with our environment. In her studies of bacteria and microbes, evolutionary theoretician and cell biologist Lynn Margulis uses the expression “the intimacy of strangers” in order to describe how all beings develop together, in connection with each other. She argues that beings are not individually defined entities, but rather a complex and intertwined constellation – what has been called “multi-species entanglements”.

These perspectives lay the foundation for a redefinition of our shared knowledge systems. This challenges the idea that humankind is the measure of everything and advocates a broader understanding of the complex and resilient ecologies that sustain life on earth. These questions seem particularly relevant at a time when many studies have repeatedly signalled a deep disturbance of the environmental balance on the basis of exploitation and overconsumption of natural resources.

We need to rethink how we relate to our environment if we want to continue living on this planet. Both natural sciences and art play fundamental roles in the processes of redefining how we understand life. Seeking collaborative frameworks between art and natural sciences can lead to a beneficial cross-pollination for both fields. The interlacing of knowledge and other cultural forms can be a platform to describe alternative philosophical and ecological scenarios, like those depicted in science fiction for more than a century.

We want to invite three artists/artist groups to take these thoughts as starting points to redefine the existing conditions and contribute with reflections and perspectives that can help us continue working on one of the most urgent challenges of our time: how to live together.