



Moët Hennessy

## THE WORLD LIVING SOILS FORUM:

**When art encourages the social and natural environment in which we live to thrive.**

For the first edition of the World Living Soils Forum, Moët Hennessy is displaying the work of Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila, a monumental cinematic installation of disarming simplicity that invites us to take a closer at a tree.

### A contemplative and environmentally conscious piece

Produced in 2011, *Horizontal* marks a major shift in the artist's career, which had previously focused on the representation of human psychology. Convinced of the importance of "constructing an image of the world that also incorporates the presence of non-human living beings in order to understand the present moment and the changes taking place," Ahtila wanted to develop a non-anthropocentric art piece that would place nature at the heart of the creative process and cinematic medium.

The result is this monumental piece which displays the portrait of a tree, pivoted, unexpectedly, horizontally. In addition to the contemplative character it takes on, particularly thanks to the sound in the background, this film evokes the importance of agroforestry in viticulture and makes us rethink the role an image can have in our relationship with the plant world. The movement that emanates from it promotes awareness around the protection of biodiversity and the life of the soil.

Just like the artist who remained attentive to the micro-changes in the life of the spruce tree during the making of her film, the viewer is invited to take part in the breathing of this giant tree that seems to fit into a single shot. In reality, it took several cameras and post-production work to give this impression of continuity.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila, reveals, unveils, and highlights the looped images of this coniferous tree to stimulate dialogue around real environmental concerns, and thus invites the viewer to follow a mental and poetic, even eco-poetic journey that spurs new perceptions and narratives on ecology. Speaking of the ecological narratives she has been developing for more than a decade, Ahtila says, "I felt the need to explore the challenge of addressing ecological topics with concrete and alternative methods. I then tried to develop visual approaches and storytelling methods that could allow us to break away from anthropocentrism and ensure the presence of non-human species in our imagination."

Part of the ecological art movement, this creation echoes artistic practices of those such as Daniel Lie or Natsuko Uchino which aim to preserve, rehabilitate and/or energize life forms, resources and the ecology of the Earth, even duplicating them within the generally confined spaces of museums or art centers. By applying the principles of ecosystems to species and their habitats, these artists perpetuate respectful, collaborative art.

While environmental art, land art, sustainable art, landscape painting and landscape photography have preceded ecological art since the sixties, and well before, the latter inspires compassion and respect, stimulates dialogue, commonly manifests itself in the form of an art that "supports", more than it intervenes. The human being appears, therefore, as one of the actors in this new community of the living. In Eija-Liisa Ahtila's film, the human is placed at the foot of the tree, as an indication of a new relationship to the world around us.

### The artists' perspective on the environment

Julia Marchand - Curator of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation Arles - has made the selection of artists invited to the World Living Soils Forum. She states, "Many artists use the earth to rethink the way we inhabit and occupy the land and to contextualize a relationship to production in a web of sustainable relationships and symbolic connections. This ethic of "doing" encourages sustainability in art, and moves toward educational work that addresses environmental injustices, ecological and societal issues. Marchand continues: "Many of these artists are also researchers, or even gardeners or farmers, because, by practicing agriculture of the land they infuse in their approach an experience of doing and a sensitivity that reconfigures the paradigm of production and societal models. This is the case of Natsuko Uchino, who co-managed "Art and Agriculture" from 2007 to 2011 after several years of living in the city and often addresses issues related to the regenerative economy, such as soil. They are also ambassadors of nature and accept that its rhythm dictates the artistic process. Nature becomes their most unpredictable partner, as Eija-Liisa Ahtila confirms in a discussion with the curator about these two new productions - currently in the making, "we are planning the filming, but as nature is a major player, it affects the way we work."

Upon the initiative of Moët Hennessy, whose wish is to bring people together behind living soils, Julia Marchand has invited the Japanese artist, based in France, Natsuko Uchino, and the Brazilian artist Daniel Lie to share their experiences with the earth, plants and the different associated life cycles (and decomposition). They will be in discussion with the philosopher of the living, Emanuele Coccia (author of numerous books on plants and cycles of metamorphosis), and Marc-André Selosse, soil scientist. The challenge will be to show how art (composed of organic matter) is created in the image of the soils and helps us to think more about the world around us in macro and micro-dimensional perspectives. "The works of these artists guide us towards a more refined understanding of the living world and I am delighted that these different fields (viticulture, agroforestry and artistic practices) are intersecting more to pool knowledge and symbolic power, as the objective here is to articulate the properties of soil in cultural and artistic terms. In short, how can the soil be a model of bioinfrastructure and transformation?" concludes Julia Marchand.