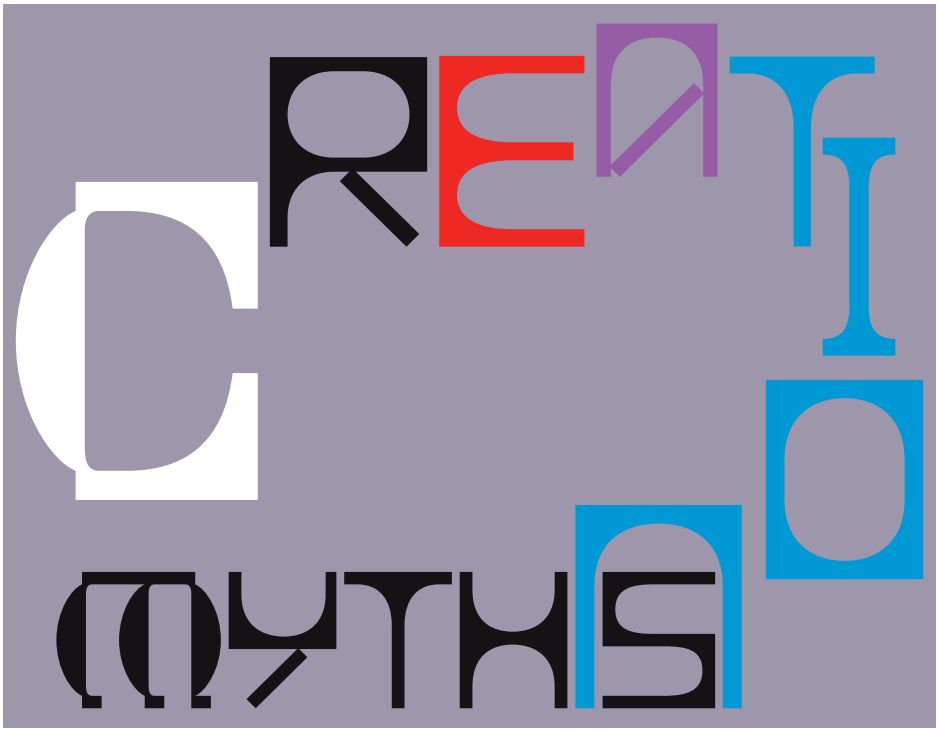


EN

AND
OTHER BEGINNINGS

Nest is a space for contemporary art in The Hague, the Netherlands. Since its founding in 2008, Nest has dedicated itself to exhibiting, publishing and discussing the work of artists and thinkers.

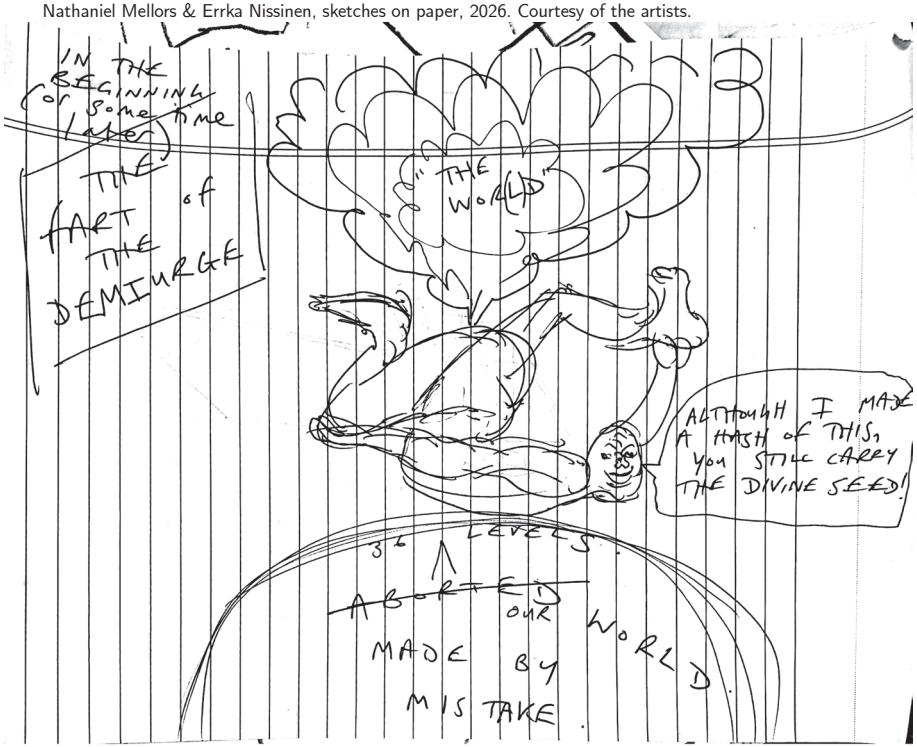
Mounira Al Solh, Yael Bartana,
Yaïr Callender, Louis Braddock Clarke,
Fiona Lutjenhuis, Claudia Martínez Garay,
Nathaniel Mellors & Erkka Nissinen,
Rithika Merchant, Marie-Claire Messouma
Manlanbien, Narges Mohammadi,
Selma Selman, Müge Yilmaz,
exhibition design Zoë Hollander

4.9. – 29.11.2026
Launch of *Nesting Habits – the space* with spatial design by Ariane Toussaint and Remco Osório Lobato

Summer/Autumn 2026

Nesting Habits #3

Nathaniel Mellors & Errka Nissinen, sketches on paper, 2026. Courtesy of the artists.



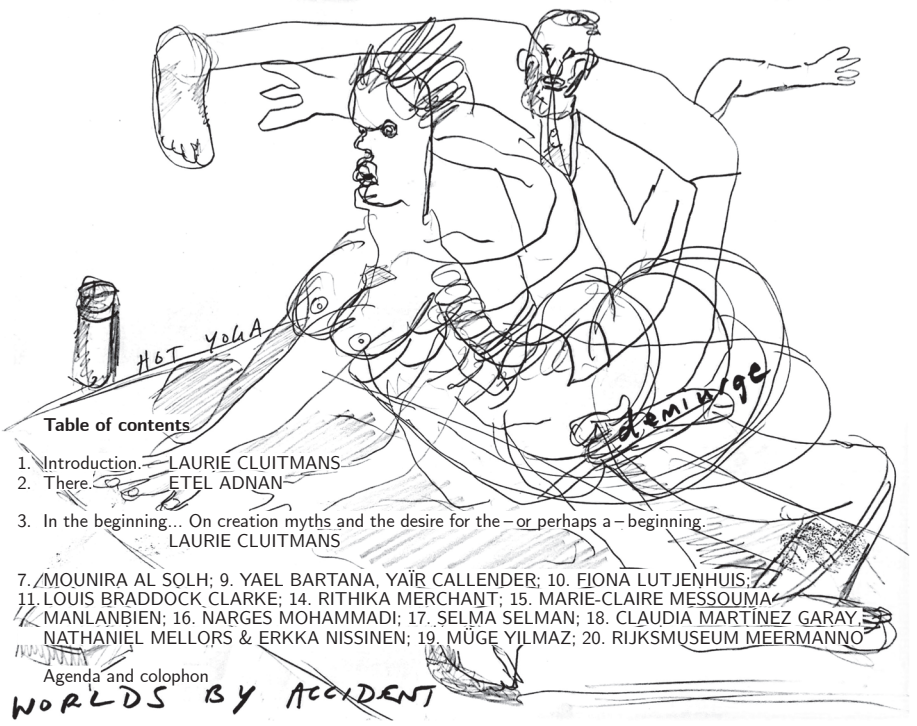


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Agenda and colophon

WORLDS BY ACCIDENT

INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure that I write this foreword for what is already the 3rd issue *of Nesting Habits*. *Creation Myths and other Beginnings* is an exhibition about origin stories and the desire to understand 'the' beginning, or even to return to it. A theme that resonates with my own fresh start at Nest as director earlier this year. At the same time, an exhibition about origin stories is fitting for Nest's multi-year theme, in which we actively question, together with our audiences 'the future of history'. How can we look back on that past without becoming nostalgic (read: uncritical)? Which stories and events can help us better understand this turbulent 'now'? And can we rethink our relationship with the past to envision a different collective future?

In *Creation Myths and other Beginnings*, we reflect on these questions from the perspective of origin stories. These are stories that hold a strong political-cultural significance: they shape collective identity and offer a moral compass. Origin stories are therefore never neutral; They can legitimize power relations, confirm the status quo, or exclude other narratives. Therefore, this exhibition focusess on non-dominant creation stories: myths transmitted through oral traditions, across generations, as well as speculative and fictional alternatives. What might these stories reveal about our social reality, and about the futures we might yet imagine?

The exhibition brings together works (largely new, created especially for the exhibition) by: Mounira Al Solh, Yael Bartana, Louis Braddock Clarke, Yaïr Callender, Fiona Lutjenhuis, Claudia Martínez Garay, Narges Mohammadi, Nathaniel Mellors & Erkka Nissinen, Rithika Merchant, Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien, Selma Selman, Müge Yilmaz and an exhibition design by Zoë Hollander.

Simultaneously, we are opening *Nesting Habits – the space*: a permanent meeting place within Nest where visitors can learn more about the artists and themes of our program. And where we host screenings, lectures, debates, and workshops for all ages.

The name is inspired primarily by nesting behavior—building a safe place where something can grow—as well as by a lyric by Nick Cave, in which *nestinghabits* stands for a place where desire, the everyday, and the chaos of the world come together. In doing so, we hope to create an environment where ideas, visions, and perspectives can be safely shared and developed.

Ariane Toussaint designed new curtains specifically for the space, and Remco Osório Lobato is responsible for the interior design, which will continue to develop over the coming months. You will find an overview of all activities on the last page. We hope to meet you there.

Laurie Cluitmans, September 2026

"From the primeval water we arose — you and I, from the beginning we went on a search and when the garden grew we looked together for a shade, didn't we?

From the desire to live we arose and built nations, didn't we?

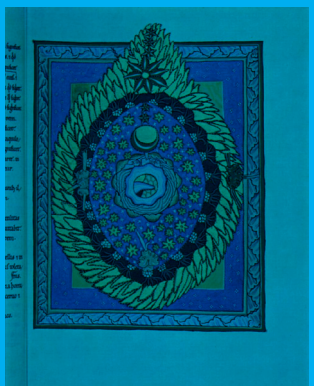
Then we were visited by a creature not named by any of the gods and we called it Death, and it took power over us, and autumn, on its first day started to shed yellowish leaves on our beds; then the trees stared at their own bareness and we didn't come to their aid, did we?"

Etel Adnan, *There*, 1997, p. 70.

In the beginning... On creation myths and the desire for the – or perhaps a – beginning

Laurie Cluitmans

'The end is in the beginning and yet you go on' Samuel Beckett wrote in *Endgame* (1957). It is the line that comes to mind as I study an illustration from Hildegard von Bingen's twelfth-century *Liber Scivias*. A blue, egg-shaped field, surrounded by yellow, flame-edged red and filled with large yellow and small white stars; at its centre, undulating abstract forms – the Earth. Above it, a red crescent moon, topped by a star-like sun, and unevenly distributed across the field, four clusters of three heads with wide-open mouths. These clusters represent the four elements and the four cardinal directions, and contrary to what one might expect, they are unequal in size and composition,chaotically dispersed across the cosmos. The consequences of the Fall of Man (the expulsion from Paradise) were, after all, a disruption of order. The ominous flames encircling the Earth also seem to announce an approaching end. "The end is in the beginning."



Hildegard von Bingen, *The Cosmic Egg, from Scivias (Know the Ways)*, Book I, Vision 3, c. 1151–1152, originally from the Rupertsberg Codex. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Hildegard von Bingen (1098, Bermersheim vor der Höhe – 1179, Bigen am Rhein) was a Benedictine abbess, mystic, writer, composer, herbalist and physician: in short, a remarkably versatile scholar. From early childhood she experienced intense visions (possibly a result of her migraine attacks)which she only dared to record much later in life – perhaps out of fear of the stake – and only with papal approval. In 1151 she began writing them down in *Liber Scivias*.[1] She translated her 26 visions into richly coloured and complex illustrations, such as this one of the cosmic egg.

> "After this I saw a vast instrument, round and shadowed, in the shape of an egg, small at the top, large in the middle and narrowed at the bottom; outside it, surrounding its circumference, there was bright fire with, as it were, a shadowy zone under it. And in that fire there was a globe of sparkling flame so great that the whole instrument was illuminated by it, over which three little torches were arranged in such a way that by their fire they held up the globe lest it fall..."
>
> Hildegard von Bingen, *Liber Scivias*, 1151, pp 93 – 94.

The biblical creation story of Adam and Eve in Paradise, the story I grew up with in the Catholic southern Netherlands, always struck me as puzzling. A woman created from a rib? A forbidden apple? And the woman punished with labor pains? Somehow, it always sounded to me like one of those fairy tales with terrible endings, just like in the Brothers Grimm. How different this

1. **Liber Scivias from the Latin Sci Vias Domini – Know the way of the Lord.**



Hildegard von Bingen, *The Turning of the Seasons, from the Liber Divinorum Operum (Book of Divine Works)*, early 13th-century copy (c. 1210–1230), Lucca, Biblioteca Statale, MS 1942, folio 38r. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

twelfth-century interpretation by Hildegard is. *Scivias* is her treatise on the nature of God, the universe and the human being within it. In it, she repeatedly connects the microcosm – the human soul – with the macrocosm. The human being, though clearly positioned at the top of the hierarchy, is given a clear task: to care for the Earth and restore balance. Hildegard merges the biblical creation story with the Greek cosmology of the four elements – fire, air, water and earth – and additionally added a feminist perspective.She dared to mention and foreground the female position within creation. Her cosmic egg has also been compared to the female genital form. Hildegard also studied female orgasm and identified plants used to induce abortion. Here, then, no Eve as scapegoat, but a cosmic egg that, like a womb, nourishes all life. The creator is not imagined as a patriarch in the sky, but as a cosmic mother who embraces, nurtures and cares for all creation. Moreover, Hildegard dared to present a holistic worldview that encompassed theology, cosmology, and the natural sciences. What would have happened if this creation story, genesis, myth and history in one, would have become the dominant narrative?

Cosmogony

> "Go deep into the world's throat, there's no way out of this universe, but then is there a universe, and why, and where from, and is its existence necessary for anything to be, and if there's not a somewhere what then, with no faith, no hope, there's maybe love, somewhere?"
>
> Etel Adnan, *There*, 1997, p. 5.

Hildegard's vision of creation resonates with similar imaginings of the so-called cosmic egg across cultures worldwide (from ancient Greece and ancient Egypt to Hindu mythology). In these traditions too, the egg contains worldly and cosmic chaos. When it cracks open, the universe awakens, the world comes into being, and life begins. Imagining the origin of the world and humankind is timeless and still challenges our imagination. Even today, scientific answers transmitted to us via telescopes evoke mystical associations through their sheer scale and abstraction. 14 billion years ago the universe had no size and no age, marking the beginning of time and space.[2] The scientist Dr Amanda Dillon points to a striking resemblance between contemporary images from the James Webb Space Telescope and Hildegard's cosmic egg. When I look them up, the Cartwheel Galaxy and the Southern Ring Nebula – a cloud of gas surrounding a dying star – stand out immediately because of their resemblance.[3]

Of all myths, cosmogony – the myth of the origin of the world – is perhaps the one that has most persistently stimulated the collective imagination across eras and cultures, continuing to

2. Zornitza Doleva, 'The Point of Time When Time Begins. A Reflection on the Birth of the World', *Philosophia* 20/2018, pp. 100-106, www.philosophia-bg.com/archive/philosophia-20-2018/the-point-of-time-when-time-begins-a-reflection-on-the-birth-of-the-world/.

generate stories and images to this day. Derived from the Greek *kosmos* and *gonos* or *genesis*, cosmogony refers both to the scientific study of the cosmos and to mythological or philosophical creation narratives. These are stories that speak to the central worldview of a culture, shaping its moral compass and providing a framework for the self-identification of both culture and individual and to capture our experiences. Whether we look at the biblical Genesis story, Islamic traditions, Hindu cosmologies, or Potawatomi or Quechua narratives: they often revolve around similar themes such as order emerging from chaos (as in the cosmic egg), our interconnectedness with nature, or a shared origin of humanity.

Creation stories arise from a deep human desire to trace – or perhaps invent – an origin and to fix the beginning. That fragile beginning becomes a key to existence, as though it were an archetype against which we might measure ourselves. And yet, tracing an original starting point is nearly impossible, even absurd. Like a game of telephone, each story transforms as it is retold. It is endlessly adapted, tweaked, reinterpreted and consciously or unconsciously updated, perhaps even misunderstood. Origin stories are never neutral, yet they are often presented as singular truth. In light of current geopolitical developments, polarisation around migration, and the backlash of the political right against BIPOC, queer and women's rights, certain origin narratives are once again being clung to from conservative perspectives in order to legitimise power relations and maintain the status quo.

In *The Patriarchs* (2023), British-Indian writer Angela Saini asks why patriarchy is so often presented as an entirely natural condition. It is the stories we locate at the origin of such thinking, she argues, that confer that power. One example she gives is how we describe our kinship with apes, consistently using the chimpanzee as our mirror – a species in which males are dominant. This comparison is then used to "prove" that male dominance over women is natural, and that men are therefore better leaders. Yet another ape species, the bonobo, is equally closely related to humans. The crucial difference is that bonobos are organised according to a matriarchal structure.

In *Braiding Sweet Grass* (2013) botanist, writer and mother Robin Wall Kimmerer offers a different possibility. Kimmerer's ecological thinking is grounded in botanical and Potawatomi Indigenous knowledge. To better understand our current condition of crisis – of climate, extractivism and exploitation – she turns to the creation story of the Iroquois and Huron peoples of North America, centred on Sky Woman, known variously as Ataensic, Atahensic, and Ataentsic in Iroquois and Huron traditions. One day, Sky Woman falls from Sky World. She is caught by geese and slowly lands on the back of a turtle. Together with plants and animals, she creates the Earth and makes it habitable. How different is the position of Sky Woman compared to Eve, building a world and giving life. Kimmerer describes Sky Woman as the first migrant on Earth. The story is emblematic

3. Aylin Woodward and Brian Patrick Byrne, 'James Webb Telescope: See Some of Its Latest Images', *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 August 2022, www.wsj.com/story/james-webb-space-telescope-see-the-first-images-sent-back-to-earth-4f4de83f.

of how hospitality and reciprocity lie at the heart of the Potawatomi worldview. *Sky Woman Falling* stands in many respects in contrast to the Christian creation story of Adam and Eve.

> "Same species, same earth, different stories. Like Creation stories everywhere, cosmologies are a source of identity and orientation to the world. They tell us who we are. We are inevitably shaped by them no matter how distant they may be from our consciousness. One story leads to the generous embrace of the living world, the other to banishment. One woman is our ancestral gardener, a cocreator of the good green world that would be the home of her descendants. The other was an exile, just passing through an alien world on a rough road to her real home in heaven."
>
> Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Skywoman Falling*, p 7.

In a sense, Kimmerer suggests, we are still living with the consequences of the clash between these two creation stories. It is not simply a struggle between narratives, but one of domination, oppression and destruction. What would the world look like if we compared ourselves to bonobos? Or if the Sky Woman story had become dominant? The desire for another historical beginning also tells us something about the present – and about the desire to do things differently. The hope that change is possible. What if we could choose a different point of origin? Can we learn from other origin stories? Or invent new ones? "The end is in the beginning. And yet you go on." And yet. And yet we continue to search for these stories, hoping that another beginning might contain another present.

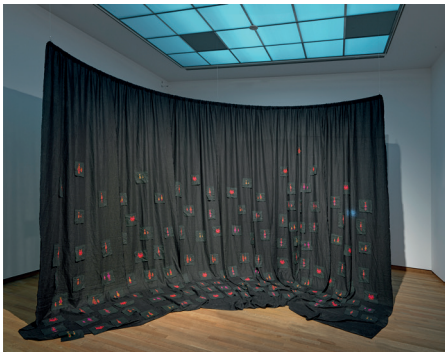
In the group exhibition *Creation Myths and Other Beginnings*, we turn to non-dominant creation narratives – stories transmitted orally across generations, or speculative and fictional alternatives. We approach these myths through their cultural and philosophical contexts, opening up space for dialogue rather than conflict. What can these stories teach us about our social reality and our future? In this time of crisis and deep uncertainty, we turn, like Kimmerer, to ancestral narratives, plant teachers and cosmologies as sources of orientation. Her words, imbued with transformation, attentiveness and agency, resonate as a foundation for this exhibition and for the new works created for it.

The artists in this exhibition return to origin stories that have shaped their own artistic practices and lives. They offer critical or visionary perspectives, displace origins, and open up other possibilities. They dive into the past in order to bring us speculative – and no less truthful – visions of where we came from and where we might head.

Mounira Al Solh

Mounira Al Solh is a born storyteller. In her videos, paintings, embroidery, animations and performances, she creates worlds in a critical yet playful and sensitive way. These works are steeped in lived experiences of loss, migration and war, but also in hope, resilience and in poetry and humour. In her film installation *A Dance with her Myth* (2024), she turns to the myth of Europa. What happens if we retell this myth from a different perspective? Not from that of Zeus, the male protagonist as often depicted in ancient Greek narratives, but from the perspective of Europa (or Erub in Phoenician), present-day Lebanon. What if Erub was not a passive victim of the advances of Zeus dressed up as a bull, or a victim of her representation as a victim, but instead chose to set out and explore the world on her own terms? Al Solh filmed at various heritage sites in Lebanon, such as Tyre and Byblos. Tyre in South Lebanon, along with its ancient heritage sites, has come under heavy Israeli fire in recent days.

Together with the Lebanese organisation Inaash Tatreez, Al Solh created *Red Cypress Textile* (2025). Since 1969, Inaash has been supporting Palestinian women in refugee camps through tatreez. Tatreez is the traditional Palestinian embroidery practice, passed down from mother to daughter and from generation to generation. Each village or city has its own styles, colours and symbols, and each textile can be read as an expression of place and of the individual maker. Tatreez thus becomes an expression of love, motherhood, loss and mourning. Al Solh has collaborated with the women of Inaash on several occasions, but since 7 October 2023



Mounira Al Solh, *Red Cypress Tree*, 2025, embroidered textile hanging with system, 6 fabrics Installation view, *A land as big as her skin*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Netherlands. Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut / Hamburg. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij.

and the destruction of Lebanese and Palestinian life and heritage, this form of cultural transmission has become even more urgent. Together with Inaash, she embroidered this black cloth with cypress trees: a motif that symbolises both resilience and mourning.

هي تفضّل أن تبقى
حُرّة

As she prefers to be free.

بحثتُ عن صدفة المريق
على التِّلال و في البحر .
لكنّني لم أجد سوى بصل أحمر مستورد،
و رأسي ملفوف و سُمندر .

I looked for the murex shell on hills and by the sea.
But all I found were imported red onions,
cabbage and beets.



بحثتُ عن وشاح أوروبا
الذي كان يلوح فوق كتفيها .

I looked for Europa's scarf,
fluttering over her shoulders.



لكنها بدت غير مهتمّة

She said that she didn't care if I recovered it.

بحثت عن والدة أوروبا.
وهي التي مرضت وماتت في أرض بعيدة.
فيما كانت تُفتّش عن ابنتها الضائعة.

I looked for the mother of Europa,
who got sick and died in exile,
as she searched for her disappeared daughter.

بحثت عن ثورٍ أبيض رائع،
كان خطف أوروبا.
هذا الثور هو زيوس الإغريقي .

I looked for a magnificent white bull,
who abducted Europa,
and who was none other than
Zeus, the Greek.



فوجدت البحر وملحه
يحاول تذوّق
الحريّة.

instead, I found the sea.
Its salt tried to taste free.

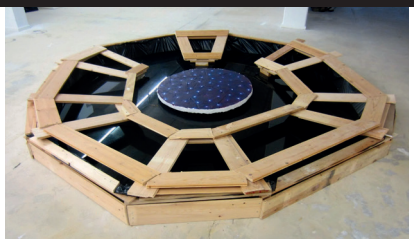
Mounira Al Solh, *A Dance with her Myth* (still), 2024, video with color and sound, 11'59".
Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg.

Yael Bartana, Yair Callender



Yael Bartana, *My Sister Eva*, 2004, c-print, 42.2 x 57.2 cm. Collection de Bruin-Heijn. Courtesy Yael Bartana and Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam.

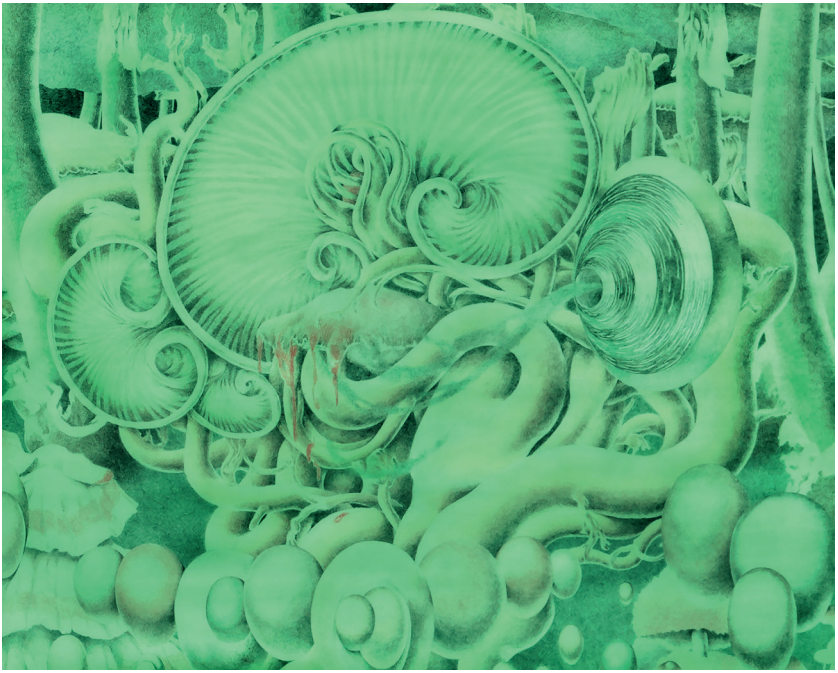
Yael Bartana — In the Christian and Jewish creation story in Genesis, Adam and Eve are seen as the first people on earth. Despite the warnings and the prohibition, Eve eats the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They are banished from Paradise, but in doing so also gain a new form of consciousness. In her photograph *My Sister Eva* (2004), Yael Bartana offers a personal reinterpretation of this story. On the one hand, the image resembles a family snapshot. On the other, Bartana raises critical questions about national consciousness in her country of birth, Israel, and about the nation-state more broadly. For this work, she draws on propaganda photographs of Jewish settlers who began arriving in Palestine from the 1930s onwards. By disrupting this Zionist visual language, she interrogates notions such as 'return', 'homeland' and national identity. Seen in the light of the genocide in Gaza and the current flow of propaganda and disinformation, the 2004 photograph acquires, more than twenty years later, a bitter and unsettling contemporary resonance.



Yaïr Callender, *The Night Sky*, 2017, sculpture. Courtesy of the artist.

Yaïr Callender's images and installations often evoke ritual, mystical or ceremonial objects. They are never simply about religious concepts or narratives, but rather draw on a visual language that is recognised intuitively. Geometric forms, ornamentation and the use of colour function as signs of something greater, something spiritual, without necessarily carrying a fixed iconographic meaning. The octagonal works presented in *Creation Myths* are no exception. They are loosely inspired by the story of Enoch. Together with artist Sis Josip, Callender explored the significance of this biblical figure: a descendant of Adam, regarded as a visionary who journeyed through the heavens. In the apocryphal Book of Enoch, a group of fallen angels descends to earth. There they take human women as wives and father the so-called Nephilim, giants who watch over the earth. Together, they teach humanity magic and occult knowledge, for which God ultimately punishes them with the Great Flood. Although the story was preserved in the Ethiopian Bible, it only came to wider attention in the West following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls between 1947 and 1956. On large octagonal panels, Callender renders this narrative in chalk drawing. One work takes the form of a cosmological circle within which the story unfolds; the other evokes primordial chaos and offers a vision of infinity.

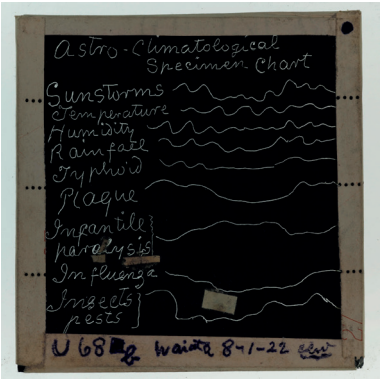
Fiona Lutjenhuis, Louis Braddock Clarke



Fiona Lutjenhuis, *Born and Buried and Born*, 2025, diptych (detail). Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij.

Fiona Lutjenhuis — At first glance, Fiona Lutjenhuis's colourful, atmospheric, and richly imaginative drawings, paintings, and installations appear to depict gentle, dreamlike worlds. Yet on closer inspection, a more ambiguous – and at times unsettling and claustrophobic – undertone begins to emerge. Lutjenhuis's practice is rooted in the religious ideologies with which she was raised. Within this belief system, the origins of humanity were linked to the mythology of Atlantis, the Apocalypse was believed to be imminent, and salvation was thought to lie in extraterrestrial life. According to the myth, Atlantis was once a powerful civilisation that was punished by the gods and submerged beneath the sea. Over time, the story has continued to capture the imagination, becoming entwined with theories of alien life and celestial beings said to have brought advanced technologies – from crystals to flying machines – to the lost continent. In these works, Lutjenhuis evokes the unfathomable depths of Atlantis's underwater realm, populated by aliens and hybrid creatures drifting through its submerged landscapes. Each painting is framed by an architectural wooden structure, functioning as a self-contained paragraph within a larger narrative of fantasy and ritual. For the artist, however, the work is not primarily concerned with recounting the myth itself. Rather, it seeks to create a psychological space in which belief, desire, and imagination converge: a space where the boundaries between faith and fiction remain deliberately unresolved.

For this new body of work, **Louis Braddock Clarke** turns to a question that has long fascinated him: how did the ideas and systems through which we have sought to understand the Earth since the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century first emerge? During this period, knowledge of the Earth and theories about its origins underwent a profound transformation. Ancient mythologies and theological speculation gradually gave way to an empirical science grounded in observation, supported by new instruments and systems for recording and interpreting what was seen. Yet this shift did not occur overnight. For a long time, scientific observation remained entangled with fiction, mysticism, and belief. One figure who embodied this convergence was the nineteenth-century meteorologist and mystic Clement Lindley Wragge. In his magic lantern slides – an early form of image projection – Wragge combined atmospheric science with cosmological imagination. Weather systems, planetary diagrams, and geological material were woven into a broader metaphysical narrative, one in which the universe appeared both measurable and ultimately unknowable. *A Sea from Soot* (2026) consists of five large glass slides that cast shadows like a contemporary magic lantern projection. Each slide offers a reinterpretation of early geological thought. To create them, Braddock Clarke developed a carbon-soot emulsion based on recipes dating back to the fifth century. He coated the glass with this material before scratching images and inscriptions into its surface. These inscriptions appear as direct annotations in the margins – fragments of thought, notes in the periphery, ideas taking shape at the edge of knowledge.



Clement Lindley Wragge, *The Midnight Sermon in the Observatory*, c.1890s–1920s, lantern slide. Courtesy Auckland War Memorial Museum, Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Clement Lindley Wragge collection. Photo: Clement Lindley Wragge.



Clement Lindley Wragge, *Astro-Climatological Specimen Chart*, c.1890s–1920s, lantern slide. Courtesy Auckland War Memorial Museum, Tāmaki Paenga Hira, Clement Lindley Wragge collection. Photo: Clement Lindley Wragge.

THE SACRED THEORY OF THE EARTH

"I selected this extract on the ideas of cosmological knowledge production transitioning into earth science. The extract comes from the essay 'The Sacred Theory of the Earth', which was written in the late 17th century by natural philosopher Thomas Burnet. He tried to entangle biblical history with emerging observations of the natural world. Burnet proposed a rupturing account of Earth's origins, imagining the planet as a smooth, harmonious sphere that was later fractured by the Biblical Flood, creating mountains, oceans, and geological irregularities. The Earth was imagined as

a series of rings of liquid and atmospheres. Blending scripture, cosmology, and speculative geology, the work became one of the most influential early attempts to explain Earth's history as a narrative of change."

Louis Braddock Clarke

We must resist the temptation to compare the three concentric shells of Burnet's model with the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere of modern science. His "liquid shell" included not only ordinary water, but fat and oily liquids which rose to the top of that unit, so that it became divided into two parts: ordinary water below and oily liquid above. Dust settling from the primeval atmosphere was incorporated in the oily shell, converting it into "a certain slime, or fat, soft, and light Earth, spread upon the face of the Waters".

As these sedimentary particles accumulated, they soaked up the oily liquor, so that the outer liquid shell became firm, its surface suitable for habitation, its base resting upon a shell of water. These waters of the "deeps" would later form the world ocean, but when first accumulated were all vaulted over with a universal layer of fertile land.

In this smooth Earth were the first Scenes of the World, and the first Generations of Mankind; it had the beauty of Youth and blooming Nature, fresh and fruitful, and not a wrinkle, scar or fracture in all its body; no Rocks nor Mountains, no hollow Caves, nor gaping Chanels, but even and uniform all over. And the smoothness of the Earth made the face of the Heavens so too; the Air was calm and serene; none of those tumultuary motions and conflicts of vapours, which the Mountains and the Winds cause in ours: 'Twas suited to a golden Age, and to the first innocency of Nature.

Because the axis of Burnet's paradisiacal earth was upright and not tilted, there were no seasons. In the habitable temperate zones "there was neither Heat nor Cold, Winter nor Summer—every Season was a Seed-time to Nature, and every Season an Harvest." The fertile soil, moistened by water drawn up from the oceanic shell below by the heat of the sun to settle as dew or to fall as mild showers, teemed with the vital seeds of animals as well as plants. As Eve was the mother of all mankind, so the earth was a natural incubator, the "Great Mother" of all other living creatures.

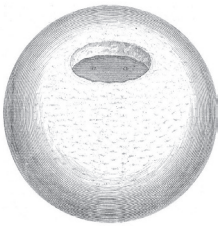
Extract from Thomas Burnet, 'The Sacred Theory of the Earth' (1681–89), reproduced in Claude C. Albritton Jr., ed., *The Abyss of Time* (Dover, 2002), pp. 60-61.

8—Burnet, 1965, pp.57
9—Burnet, 1684, pp.67-68

Tao Te Ching

"The *Tao Te Ching* is one of the foundational texts of Daoist thought from the sage Laozi and composed in China around the 4th–6th centuries BCE. I selected and extract from this text on the balance and harmonies of the natural world. Written as a series of concise poetic verses, it explores the nature of the Tao, the 'Way' that permeates all underlying existence. Rather than prescribing fixed doctrines, the text embraces paradox and uncertainty, inviting reflection on the relationship between action and stillness, knowledge and mystery, staying with the shadows. The book is made of 81 verses read independently."

Louis Braddock Clarke



The tao that can be described

is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be spoke
is not the eternal Name.

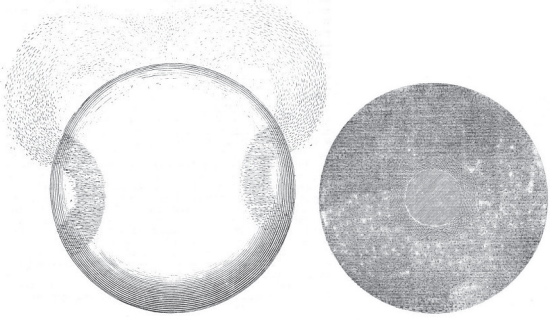
The nameless is the boundary of Heaven
and Earth.
The named is the mother of creation.

Freed from desire, you can see the hidden
mystery.
By having desire, you can only see what is
visibly real.

Yet mystery and reality
emerge from the same source.
This source is called darkness.

Darkness born from darkness.
The Beginning of all understanding.

Extract from *Laozi. Tao Te Ching* (New York, 2009), trans. Stephen Mitchell, p. 29.



Thomas Burnet, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, 1681–89, drawing sequence of Earth. Courtesy Public Domain via The Linda Hall Library. Photo: Digital Scan by the Linda Hall Library.

Rithika Merchant, Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien

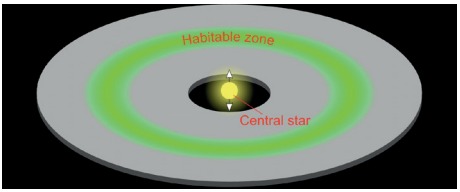
I find thinking in mythological terms has helped people. Myths and dreams come from the same place; they come from realisations of some kind that have then to find expression in symbolic form. A myth can be a lens through which to view our hopes and dreams.

Angela Saini, *The Patriarchs*, p. 82.

Drawing on her research into mythologies from around the world, Western science fiction, concepts from Eastern spiritual traditions, and seventeenth-century botanical illustrations, **Rithika Merchant** has developed a distinctive visual language and an imagined future world of her own. Merchant is less interested in the origins of individual myths and stories than in the parallels between them: the ways in which different eras, regions, and belief systems have sought to make sense of the world through remarkably similar frameworks. Each drawing and series interweaves this wide-ranging constellation of references.

For *Monument to Us* (2022), for instance, she draws on the history of Egyptian obelisks: tapering stone pillars whose height and placement established a direct relationship with the sun, serving as monuments that honoured the gods and commemorated the dead (see page 22). Of the thirty obelisks that survive worldwide, only one remains in its original location; the others were removed during successive periods of foreign rule in Egypt and relocated to public squares in cities such as Rome and Paris. In the process, they lost their original function as guiding landmarks. Merchant therefore describes her drawing as a monument to a lost civilisation and the beginning of a new one.

In *Sun Feeders* (2021), she turns her attention to the finitude of energy resources and to the sun as a source of life. As part of this project, she explored the concepts of Dyson spheres and Alderson disks – thought experiments that investigate how the energy of a star might be harnessed to sustain life. Both drawings are characterised by a symmetrical composition, framed by plants, celestial bodies, currents of water and air, and hybrid figures that combine human, animal, and divine attributes. These characters assume a cosmological role as mediators and messengers between different forms of existence within a single, interconnected system.



Alderson Disk. Courtesy of Cryonic07 via Wikimedia Commons.



Rithika Merchant, *Monument to Us*, 2022, gouache, watercolour and ink on paper. Collection De Bueil & Ract Madoux, Paris.

Having grown up between the Ivory Coast, Guadeloupe, and France, **Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien** draws on a rich network of plural imaginaries in her textile installations and woven works. Her practice is inspired by various techniques of textile and understandings of femininity and the cosmos passed down through her mother, grandmother, and the long matrilineal lineage of Akan women on her father's side. Each textile she creates becomes an act of remembrance, transmission, and synthesis, bringing together these inherited and borrowed beliefs, practices, and stories. In this way, she continuously weaves narratives that can be understood as expressions of creolisation: the complex and layered processes of cultural exchange that emerge within societies shaped by forced migration and colonial histories. In the two textiles from the series *Human intra Natura* (2021), Messouma Manlanbien engages with ideas of opposites and duality, ultimately proposing a state of profound interconnectedness between humanity and nature. Here, the human being does not stand in opposition to nature, but exists within it. Humanity is conceived as part of a larger living network, embedded in an environment that evokes the structure of a cosmos. Through *Human intra Natura*, Messouma Manlanbien demonstrates how identity is continually formed through relationships with other forms of life, as well as through the memories and stories that connect them.



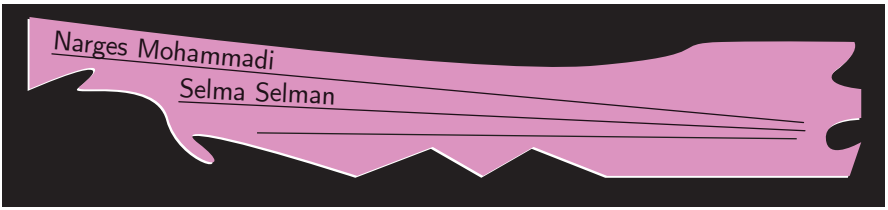
Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien, *Human intra natura #2 La Nuit*, 2021, raphia, various threads, aluminium, canvas. Courtesy of the artist.



Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien, *Mémoires des corps*, 2025, installation view. Courtesy of the artist and AKINCI. Photo: Peter Otto.



Marie-Claire Messouma Manlanbien, *Human intra natura #2 Le Jour*, 2021, raphia, various threads, aluminium, canvas. Courtesy of the artist and AKINCI. Photo: Peter Tijhuis.



The Afghanistan-born, Netherlands-based artist **Narges Mohammadi** explores questions of cultural memory and transmission in her work. The installation *When the ruin became a hum*, created specifically for this exhibition, addresses the erasure of a culture through the destruction of heritage and material history, as well as the censorship of rituals and even of joy itself. For this work, she focuses on a pivotal moment in Afghanistan's history: the 2001 destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban. These monumental historical figures, carved into a sandstone cliff around the sixth century, once symbolised the region's cultural plurality and exchange. Paradoxically, their destruction revealed another layer of cultural heritage hidden within the caves behind them: seventh-century oil paintings that had long remained obscured.

WHEN THE RUIN BECAME A HUM
Narges Mohammadi

They fired with a tank
Dynamite
The rock stood solid grounds

Their Air Force used rockets
In the end

They drew a line in the sand

And blew up beauty

But forgot
to shoot, the stories
drawn in hearts to come

In *When the ruin became a hum*, Mohammadi works with drying oils such as walnut and poppy seed oil, combined with mineral pigments including lapis lazuli. On one level, she reactivates a material tradition that predates dominant Western art historical narratives. The murals discovered behind the Bamiyan Buddhas are currently considered the earliest known surviving examples of oil-based painting, providing evidence that oil painting techniques were already being developed in Central Asia centuries before their widespread use in Europe. By drawing on these materials, Mohammadi presents oil painting not as an exclusively European invention, but as a practice with roots in Central Asia that has often been overlooked or displaced.

On another level, Mohammadi reflects on the meaning of erasure itself. Using marl stone from Limburg, where she grew up, Mohammadi connects her Afghan heritage, only experienced from afar, with her Dutch upbringing, bringing together two cultural and material histories within a single sculptural gesture. Accompanying the sculpture is a soundscape that reinterprets the frequencies of the televised destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas through traditional instruments from Afghanistan and the surrounding region. These elements become carriers of cultural memory, memory that is once again under threat of suppression or disappearance under Taliban rule.

When the ruin became a hum is made possible with the support of Stichting Zabawas.



Site of the Bamiyan Buddha statue in Bamiyan, Afghanistan.







Selma Selman, *The Mother of my Mother's Mother*, 2025, wallpaper, installation overview Kunsthuis Syb. Photo: Ernst van Deursen.

In *Creation Myths*, **Selma Selman** presents a work from her series *600 Years of Migrant Mothers*. It consists of wallpaper endlessly repeating the words: 'The Mother, The Mother of My Mother's Mother, The Mother of My Mother's Mother's Mother.' A straightforward intervention that recurs in several places throughout Nest's exhibition space, yet whose scope is anything but simple. For her installations, paintings, and performances, Selman draws on both personal family histories and the collective identity and culture of the Roma. She describes herself as an artist of Roma origin rather than a Roma artist. The significance of the word *origin* is equally central to the works in the *600 Years of Migrant Mothers* series. How do you trace that origin when it is primarily based on oral transmission? Or when the sources preserved in archives originate from those in power and from institutional systems that have historically marginalised Roma culture? At the same time, Selman focuses very deliberately on the genealogy of the female line within her family. Historiography is often a story passed down from father to son. The story transmitted from mother to daughter has frequently been confined to the private sphere, to the realm of care and motherhood. It is an oral history that, in combination with a Roma background, is especially vulnerable to erasure.

Claudia Martínez Garay, Nathaniel Mellors & Erkka Nissinen, Müge Yilmaz

In her colourful installations, **Claudia Martínez Garay** speculates on historical events in her home country of Peru. Martínez Garay was born in the province of Ayacucho. Due to the violent conflict that broke out there in the 1980s, she, like many others from the Andean provinces with a predominantly Indigenous population, ended up in the capital, Lima. She grew up between two cultures: her own and the predominantly white, Westernised culture of the capital, shaped by customs imposed by Spanish colonisers. Her films, installations, murals and collages are the result of a continuous rereading of this complex and violent historical duality. In her work, she reflects on a history to which she herself has had limited access—for instance because Quechua, the Indigenous language, is not recognised as an official language (and which the artist is currently learning), or because colonisers looted archaeological objects to display them in European museums. How can one understand one's own identity without access to its past?

The five tufted rugs in *Quedó el mundo a medio hacer, y ya se fue la mano de obra* (2026) [The world was left half made, and the workers had already left] can be read as a rebus-like narrative in which Martínez Garay interweaves historical events. We see extractivism, in which the earth is stripped of its minerals; we see the revolutionary leader Túpac Amaru (1545 – 1572) breaking the chains of slavery; looted archaeological objects displayed in a museum setting; and mothers mourning their children. In bringing these events together, Martínez Garay draws on the Aymara concept of *ch'ixi*, in which contradictions are not resolved but are allowed to coexist. Identities do not need to merge into a single whole, but can retain their internal tensions.



Claudia Martínez Garay, *Quedó el mundo a medio hacer, y ya se fue la mano de obra*, 2026, tufted tapestries.



Nathaniel Mellors & Errka Nissinen, *The Aalto Natives*, 2017–2019, video installation with textile dolls and grass mat. Courtesy Ellen de Bruijne Projects and Stigter van Doesburg.

Nathaniel Mellors and Erkka Nissinen together created a new origin story for Finland in *The Aalto Natives* (2017). The cosmic egg also plays a role in this work, though in a less elevated and more absurdist form. The artists drew inspiration from the *Kalevala*, Finland's nineteenth-century national

creation myth, while also reflecting on the recurring presence of the cosmic egg in creation narratives across cultures. At the centre of the film are Geb, a large talking egg, and his son Atum, a talking cardboard box. These two god-like figures return to Finland, which they originally created millions of years earlier. Their attempt to make sense of the country as it exists today, with its customs, culture and rituals, is recorded through animation, drawings, claymation, CGI, handmade puppets and performance. What unfolds is an absurdist narrative in which ideas of the nation state, patriarchy, xenophobia and religious conflict are sharply and playfully subverted.

Before the gods, the story went, there were the goddesses.

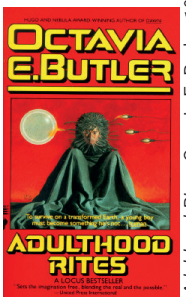
Angela Saini, *The Patriarchs*, p. 75.



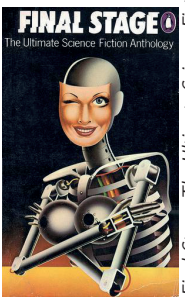
Müge Yilmaz, *Gyps* (series), 2019, CNC-cut relief. Courtesy of Quinta do Quetzal. Photo: Lais Pereira.

Müge Yilmaz's work takes us back to the knowledge embedded in ancient stories and ways of making meaning. In her sculptures, installations, narratives and gardens, Müge Yilmaz looks both to a distant past and to imagined futures. In doing so, she sketches a matriarchal future world, drawing on archetypes from Anatolia. Yilmaz grew up in Turkey and focuses on a number of significant archaeological Neolithic sites: the nearly 11,500-year-old Göbekli Tepe and the 9,000-year-old Çatalhöyük, in south-eastern and central Anatolia respectively. These are mysterious places associated with the beginnings of the agricultural revolution, and are often interpreted as having been part of matriarchal societies. For *Creation Myths*, Yilmaz created a new wooden sculpture of a Goddess with her two daughters. She reimagines the so-called Asherah poles in this work. These Asherah poles were artworks dedicated to the fertility goddess Asherah (also known as Astarte or Asherim), the last surviving goddess who was violently eradicated 2,000 years ago by patriarchal belief systems. As stated in the Bible (Exodus 34:13): "Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles."

The bright red wooden sculpture on the wall is a CNC-cut relief of a gyps vulture with human legs. Gyps vultures formed the roof beams of the matriarchal houses of Çatalhöyük, but also symbolised a funerary ritual known as "sky burial", in which the deceased were left to be consumed by vultures so as to be carried into the sky.



Adulthood Rites, Octavia E. Butler, 1988



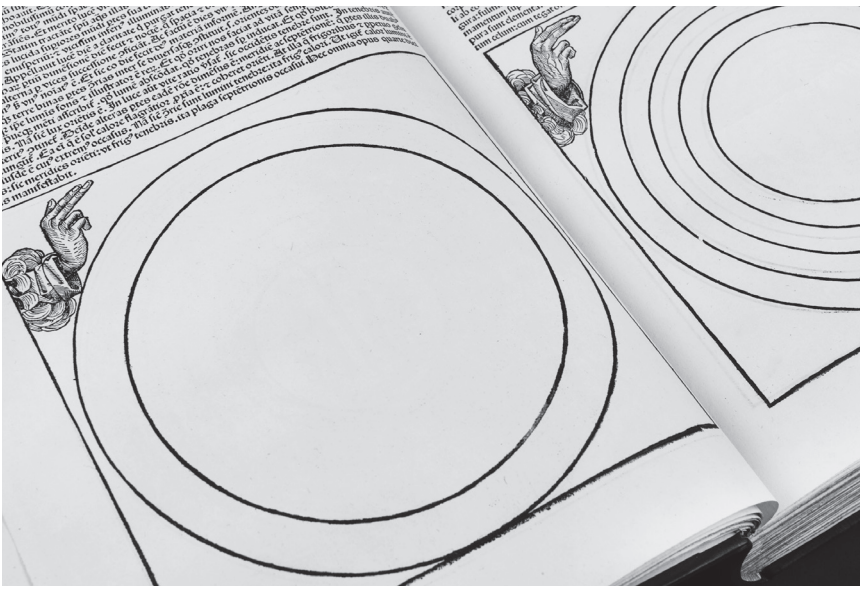
Final Stage: The Ultimate Science Fiction Anthology, Edward L. Ferman, 1974

In *Nesting Habits*, Yilmaz also presents one of her totemic sculptures from the feminist sci-fi library *The Adventures of Umay Ixa Kayakizi* (2022 – now). For years, Yilmaz has collected science fiction stories by women writers (some of whom published under male pseudonyms), and has also written science fiction herself.

No other book from the 15th century contains as many illustrations as the *Liber chronicarum*. They are created by Michael Wolgemut and his workshop. Here, he had to visualise the creation of the universe as described in the Bible. No easy task, because how do you depict abstract concepts such as heaven, light and darkness? Wolgemut opted for a succession of circles, with the creating hand of God in the top right-hand corner of each of the illustrations.



Hartmann Schedel, *The Fourth Day of Creation*, from *Schedelsche Weltchronik (Nuremberg Chronicle)*, 1493, woodcut on paper. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Hartmann Schedel, *De opere primidiei (The First Day of Creation)*, from the *Liber Chronicarum*, First Edition, Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1493, Folio IIIr. Woodcuts by Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurff. Courtesy of Rijksmuseum Meermanno. Photo: The Book Photographer.

Agenda

Summer/ autumn 2026



VERWEND NEST: IS A ROCK MADE OR BORN?

4 September, 8:00 – 10:00 pm
Opening event and workshop for all ages. Especially for children aged 7 – 12.

Are rocks made, or are they born? It was a question that fascinated writer Clarice Lispector from childhood. Her answer was simple: rocks are.

During Verwend Nest, artist Sara Pape invites you to explore this question further. Nest will be filled with large rock sculptures, water and ink. Among these rocks, you will experiment with suminagashi, a Japanese technique in which ink floating on water creates beautiful, unexpected patterns. These patterns evoke mountain landscapes and layers of the earth. Using your ink paintings as a starting point, you will invent your own stories and create a small booklet to take home with you.

Deze workshop is gemaakt door Sara Pape in co-productie met Rewire Festival.

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30 September, 28 October, 18 November
13:30 – 15:00

ART WORKSHOP FOR CHILDREN (AGES 6 – 12) WITH EXHIBITION VISIT DURING DE BETOVERING ARTS FESTIVAL!

At Nest, you can join a workshop with artist Elena Rosa and guitarist Filipe Oliveira on Sunday 18 October from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm. During Art to Music, Elena will show you how to paint a clay surface. You will then attach and shape clay figures onto your artwork. Step by step, you will create your own imaginative miniature world in clay, inspired by the music you hear. While you work, you will listen to Filipe's classical guitar music. Which shapes suit gentle music? And what happens to your artwork when the music becomes faster? Many artists draw inspiration from music, and musicians are inspired by art in return – just like Elena and Filipe. Would you like to join us?

THE FAÇADE

16 September

Book event about the colonial history of the Netherlands in Brazil

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WEDNESDAY NIGHT TALKS

23 September, 14 October, 18 November
from 19:00 – 21:00

Every month, Nest invites an artist from the exhibition to talk about their work and share their favorite obsession, source of inspiration, or reference with the public.

Museum Night

10 October
19:00 – late

only accessible with Museum Night ticket

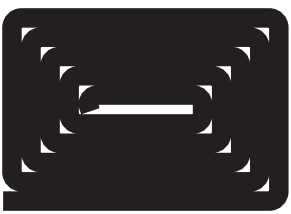
Performance by Ginevra Petrozzi

THE HAGUE CULTURAL SJOEL COMPETITION



On October 29 at Nest Laak: slide, score, and connect!
The annual sjoel battle for all cultural workers in The Hague.

ONE NEST STAND
5, 6 & 7 November
i.c.w. KABK One Weekend Only!
Exhibition with artists from the KABK



CONNECTED PASTS
A Shared History, A Connected Future

10 September – 10 December
Every Thursday, 7:00 – 9:15 pm
(doors open at 6:30 pm)

Featuring: Ruggero Biswane, Marius Atmoredjo, Melvin Chang, and others
Language: Dutch

The legacy of the Dutch colonial past and its history of slavery has not disappeared. It continues to shape families, traditions, identities, and the ways people connect with one another today. Connected Pasts invites the residents of The Hague to explore this shared history together. Through lectures, conversations, and personal stories, the programme brings together people from diverse communities. Not only to reflect on the past, but above all to deepen mutual understanding and work together towards a more inclusive future.

10 September
Hindustani Women During the Period of Indentured Labour

17 September
The Boeroes in 1875
24 September
The Indigenous Peoples of Suriname

1 October
Understanding Winti: Religion and Culture
8 October
From China to Suriname: Migration, Indentured Labour, and Building a New Life
15 October
Chinese Surinamese Migration to the Netherlands
22 October
Indigenous Spirituality in Suriname and the Netherlands
29 October
The Return of the Boeroes to the Netherlands

5 November
The Surinamese Koto: Dress, Identity, and Heritage
12 November
The Decolonisation of Suriname
19 November
Surinamese Upbringing: Hindustani and Javanese Traditions

3 December
The Role of Javanese Women in the 19th Century
10 December
Your Surinamese Identity in the Netherlands (Workshop)

For more information, visit the Nest website.

Colophon

This publication was initiated by Nest, space for contemporary art, on the occasion of the exhibition *Creation Myths and Other Beginnings* from 4 September to 29 November 2026.

www.nestruimte.nl

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Obelisk van Sesostris I, 112th Dynasty. Oldest known obelisk in the world found in Cairo. Source material Rithika Merchant

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OPENING HOURS DURING THE EXHIBITION
Thu – Fr 12:00 – 19:00
Sat 13:00 – 20:00
Sun 13:00 – 18:00