

*Glass-Houss and Soft Stones*

*Explorations on grafting and pruning as epistemological tools for academic transformation*

# Annexe: Project proposal template description, applicant competence and requested funding

## 1. Abstract

In response to the growing interest in interdependence and multispecies thinking within the arts, this proposal explores how embodied practices can help bridge the gap between intellect and lived experience. Rooted in ecofeminist perspectives, this pedagogical project proposes the horticultural techniques of grafting and pruning as epistemological tools<sup>1</sup> to rethink how knowledge is produced, shared, and valued in learning contexts.

*Glass Houses and Soft Stones* reimagines art academia, in particular KASK, as a space where *earth-bound* wisdom – embodied and relational practices – can reshape knowledge production. This project explores grafting and pruning as metaphors and tools of experiential learning, in collaboration with Bijloke's ancient apple trees. This approach positions grafting and pruning as catalysts for *scholars'* to engage with embodied knowledge, fostering interconnected thinking and empowering a deeper relationship with nature while urging institutions to recognise and integrate these experiential forms of understanding. These traditional fruit varieties are addressed as a *living archive*<sup>3</sup> of intangible heritage, bridging generations of ecological knowledge.

Building on previous case studies on my research of tree care in Flemish and Catalan contexts, I developed a *Toolbox* and *Study Guide* that consolidates the specific techniques and cultural dimensions of pruning and grafting across diverse socio-ecological settings. These educational resources will serve as the foundation for the classes and workshops at KASK. This initiative will be integrated into the curricula of courses taught by Jana Haeckel, Tom Callemin, and Hannes Verhoustraete, engaging broader audiences from the departments of Curatorial Studies, Photography, and Film during Project Weeks and Master Classes<sup>4</sup>.

The workshops will be embedded in departments that typically have less exposure to ecological or material-based methodologies, specifically the lens-based and writing disciplines. Over the course of a year, students will explore how trees can become teachers, reflecting on how embodied, place-based experiences inform their creative processes.

The project will culminate in an exhibition at STAM, curated by students of Curatorial Studies, that shows the results of how the students applied these learnings in their work and how teachers integrate embodied practices into their curricula. Rather than proposing definitive answers, my teaching proposal fosters a sense of shared inquiry, foregrounding grafting and pruning as pedagogical tools for engaging with the real conditions of the world and imagining it otherwise. If this experimental approach to teaching proves successful, it could lay the groundwork for a formal proposal to integrate such methodologies into KASK's broader teaching infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the ideas we use to think other ideas with, how different ways of knowing shape our understanding of the world. In short, methods, frameworks or approaches that are used to acquire, analyze, and validate knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> define *scholars* in a radically inclusive way, as anyone engaged in the process of learning. This definition extends beyond students, researchers, and teachers to encompass all individuals involved in the production of knowledge. Throughout this research proposal, I redefine the concept of 'scholar' to reflect a broader, more democratic understanding, showing that learning and contributing to knowledge is open to everyone.

<sup>3</sup> Grafting is an ancient horticultural technique where a branch (scion) of one plant is joined to the rootstock of another, allowing them to grow as a single organism. This method has long been used not only to propagate fruit varieties with desired traits but also to preserve genetic diversity and local adaptations. Because grafted trees can live for generations and are often passed down through families or communities, they act as carriers of ecological memory. The practice preserves unique, non-commercial fruit varieties and the know-how tied to their care, harvesting, and cultural significance—transmitting ecological heritage across time and place.

<sup>4</sup> Find the agreements in the annexes.

## 2. Project description

### 2.1 Problem statement

"It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with)"  
(Haraway, 2016: 12)

Contemporary Western academia remains influenced by a tradition of rationalist, empirical, and abstract knowledge over embodied, practice-based ways of knowing. Despite this division, often termed *the brain-body* or *thought-experience dichotomy*, being widely acknowledged as problematic by the educational community for the last few decades, it persists. Thinkers such as Donna Haraway (*Staying with the Trouble*), Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), María Puig de la Bellacasa (*Matters of Care*), Bell Hooks (*Teaching to Transgress*), Yasmine Ostendorf-Rodríguez (*Mycelium teachings and the arts*), Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (*Hospicing Modernity*) and Robin Wall Kimmerer (*Braiding Sweetgrass*) reflect on this disconnection, and counter it by proposing a more holistic and interdependent view of the webs we live within, acknowledging the politics of care in understanding the invisible framework from which knowledge is produced.

However, educational institutions still struggle to integrate experiential and relational knowledge<sup>5</sup> into their structures and curricula. This contradiction is particularly evident in art academies, which are intended to be practice-led environments, yet often remain places where we frequently encounter reflections in the form of verbal articulation over embodied learning. My academic journey abroad<sup>6</sup> further exposed this gap: intellectual discourse frequently remains detached from material, physical engagement, perpetuating a division between thought and action, theory and practice, and so-called *high* and *low* culture<sup>7</sup>.

As a woman raised in a rural Catalan community, my family's small fruit-holding instilled in me a deep appreciation for agriculture and a broad understanding of what the land can teach us. Despite never having had the opportunity to learn to read or write correctly, my grandparents could predict the weather by reading the sky, heal themselves, grow anything, and graft trees. These skills were gained through lived experience rather than formal education and stand in stark contrast to the legitimised knowledge produced within institutional settings.

This upbringing taught me a particular understanding of agriculture and of being with nature that contrasts with the harms of a financialised, patriarchal agricultural system<sup>8</sup> that exploits both women and nature, especially in terms of resource extraction and rapid results. This made me reflect on the system's similarities with the contemporary art industry and how these kinds of logics have seeped into the classroom, primarily affecting those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Over time, I became even more entrenched in my principles and certain of the need to open up the academic tradition to different ways of thinking. This shift encompasses alternative ways of distributing and generating knowledge methodologies; perhaps more rural, and certainly ecofeminist.

Tim Ingold's *Dwelling Perspective* advocates for "living in and with the world rather than standing apart and observing it."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Isabelle Stengers argues that "to care for the Earth, we must understand ourselves as part of

<sup>5</sup> This refers to knowledge that emanates from communal gatherings or encounters with people or with other living beings; knowledge that comes from mutual influence rather than isolated thinkers.

<sup>6</sup> During my academic formation in the arts in Spain, The Netherlands and Belgium, I always felt a persistent division between the knowledge that comes from making, doing and experiencing on one side and the knowledge that is thought, reflected and theorized on the other. The brainy one lives in the intellectual frameworks in the form of podcasts, roundtables and books, where culture is thought and not necessarily experienced to progress.

<sup>7</sup> I do not personally uphold this distinction, but acknowledge its historical context. The classification of cultural expressions into 'high' and 'low' is a construct rooted in Western academia and cultural institutions, where certain forms of knowledge, often tied to elite and written traditions, have been systematically privileged over others associated with oral, embodied, or community-based practices.

<sup>8</sup> A manner that, unfortunately, we find in not only food supply systems but also the more extensive web of structures of management: from hospitals treating health as a profitable acid to universities shaping education within financialised frameworks.

<sup>9</sup> Ingold, T. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*.

a network of relationships that include the non-human.”<sup>10</sup> Comparably, Donna Haraway's concept of the *Chthulucene* calls for a shift from human exceptionalism to a recognition of multispecies interdependence. However, despite the increasing theoretical interest in interdependence and multispecies perspectives, art that aims to speak about ecology is frequently romanticised without genuine engagement, leading to misrepresentations of nature rather than fostering actual interconnection.

This manifests in a significant portion of the Global North population remaining disconnected from fundamental natural processes<sup>11</sup> such as flowering cycles or cross-pollination, which form the basis of nature and an understanding of interconnectivity. This fracture underscores a systemic neglect of what I call *earth-bound knowledge*<sup>12</sup>, even in fields like agronomic engineering that directly engage with agriculture<sup>13</sup>. How can academics, curators or artists genuinely engage with these topics without experiencing agriculture first-hand?

In her book *Let's Become Fungal!* Yasmine Ostendorf-Rodríguez critiques a gallery in Amsterdam that attempted to recreate an Amazonian rainforest indoors and called on her to purchase tropical plants at a reasonable price. While the exhibition wished to immerse visitors in a “powerful and hypnotic” atmosphere, it ended up being a “battlefield of dead plants,” revealing how the attempt to include ecological topics within the arts easily ends up being superficial and caricatured. Ostendorf-Rodríguez says, “These tantalising forces of the jungle were clearly dreamed up with little understanding of the plants’ needs”<sup>14</sup>. Her words illustrate a significant misconception on how to raise awareness for the Amazon rainforest's ecosystems, ironically resulting in a deteriorating ecosystem within the gallery itself. This is one of the exhibition examples that, despite their good intentions, end up perpetuating a colonial, naïve and extractivist gaze, proving that there is a generalised lack of deep understanding of how to apply these new theoretical approaches in physical contexts respectfully.

My pedagogical proposition addresses this knowledge gap by using horticultural techniques, specifically grafting and pruning, as experimental tools to reflect on how knowledge is being produced in art academies. Through collaboration with fellow *scholars* at KASK, this project engages with earth-bound knowledge to foster learning and research. This initiative have been incorporated punctually in different contexts of the school environment, such as: The symposium ‘Making the World More than Less Real’, ‘Research Methods’ Master’s Class with Stoffel Debuysere, Courtisane Festival, ‘Affinity Crip Group’ with Bauke Lievens, among others. After these pedagogical encounters, I distributed feedback forms that confirmed this was an inspiring experience for the participants, which changed their framework and their approach towards their work and working methods. Building on these past experiences, I believe it is a good moment to include this proposal as one of the working lines of the educational development projects in KASK.

As Yasmine Ostendorf-Rodríguez states, “Metaphors can inform our behaviours and assist us where technical language falls short” (2023:7). Within this endeavour, I envision my role as artist as one of cross-disciplinary facilitation, contributing to the current discussion of opening the art academies and their pedagogies to other ways of understanding, such as earth-bound education, and making artistic research more inclusive and accessible.

<sup>10</sup> Stengers, I. *Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*.

<sup>11</sup> According to the first systematic review examining temporal trends in EoN, humans are experiencing a global decline in the “experience of nature”. This review identified only 18 studies that assessed changes over time, with many reporting negative trends in both direct EoN (such as in-person visits to parks) and vicarious EoN (the representation of nature in cultural products like films and literature). Notably, these studies primarily focused on North America, Western Europe, and Japan. <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/fee.2540>

<sup>12</sup> I refer to practices and knowledge deeply connected to the natural world and its cycles, often rooted in agriculture and often passed down through generations often using oral tradition.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre-Louis, Jean. 2020. *The Balance of Theoretical and Practical Skills in Agricultural Technical Schools in Haiti: An Exploration of the Curriculum*. ResearchGate.

<sup>14</sup> Ostendorf, Y. (2018, June 11). *Artists & Climate Change*. <https://artistsandclimatechange.com/2018/06/11/the-impossibility-of-plants-in-exhibitions/>

## 2.2 Research questions and objectives

Given the increased integration of artificial intelligence in today's learning environments, physical and embodied experiences have become more vital than ever. In parallel, the arts are witnessing a growing interest in interdependence and multispecies perspectives, prompting an urgent need to soften the disconnections between intellect and embodiment, human and nature, body and mind. My proposal on experimental pedagogies responds to this context by proposing collective, participatory laboratories that foster curated reconnections between people and the living world, rural and urban spheres, and sensorial and intellectual modes of knowing. The aim is to re-humanise ourselves by acknowledging the physical dimension of our being; its capacities, its limits, and its entanglement with ecological systems.

Grafting is the process of inserting a fresh sprout into a grown tree, an approach akin to integrating new ways of doing things into existing structures. It is the only technique that encourages new life growth by using the wound of an existing structure. After a cycle of 21 days<sup>15</sup> there is always a risk that the main tree might refuse the new incorporation. This refusal demonstrates the tree's agency to accept or reject what is introduced by a human's forced action.

Pruning, by contrast, is an intentional removal of excess, a practice of trimming the unnecessary, aiming to either boost resilience or productivity. Both processes foster transformation in an existing structure, as Agustín Pérez Rubio suggests: "How can we humanise history anew, if not with imagination and rewriting strategies that advocate letting the imagination run free and creating grafts, or cutting short the future of the story so far told?" (Es Baluard Museum, 2023)<sup>16</sup>.

Within this framework, I investigate the application and impact of grafting and pruning as both transformative metaphors and pedagogical tools, in kinship with the ancient apple trees at the Bijloke site, under the following research question: **How can grafting and pruning be a catalyst for *scholars* to experience embodied knowledge, foster interconnected thinking, and empower our relationship with nature?**

Several secondary research questions may emerge from this central question throughout the investigation, such as:

1. In what ways can grafting and pruning reshape artistic methodologies, education, and knowledge distribution?
2. How can grafting and pruning be applied as specific narrative creation strategies to foster conversations on implementing rural knowledge in art school?
3. How can horticultural methodologies be integrated into collective artistic practices without being extractive?
4. To what extent can grafting and pruning help integrate knowledge, as opposed to merely consuming information, in an era of artificial intelligence?
5. What social, cultural, or ecological motivations drive pruning practices in specific communities that differ in their cultural landscapes, histories and knowledge production, such as Catalonia – Flanders?
6. How can the wound-healing processes of trees inform alternative ways of engaging with existing systems?
7. What parallels exist between perspectives on disability theory and approaches to nature management?

## 2.3 Methodology and lines of action

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<sup>15</sup> The graft begins forming vascular connections (xylem and phloem) within the first two weeks, but these strengthen significantly after 21 days, enabling the graft to sustain itself by efficiently transporting water, nutrients, and sugars. The graft begins forming vascular connections (xylem and phloem) within the first two weeks, but these strengthen significantly after 21 days, enabling the graft to sustain itself by efficiently transporting water, nutrients, and sugars.

<sup>16</sup> There are plenty of examples of how contemporary artistic strategies allow in-depth and critical exploration of colonial archives, highlighting marginalised voices, questioning established narratives and encouraging a broader reflection on the impact of colonisation on today's society. *Sin rumbo, confrontar la imago mundi* by Agustín Pérez Rubio is a new curatorial approach to the Es Baluard Collection, together with loans from private collections on the island. It is based on the notion of disorientation and dislocation as strategies consciously taken to dismantle the construction of the history of humanity and the representations of the Imago Mundi - Image of the World - that have come down to us.

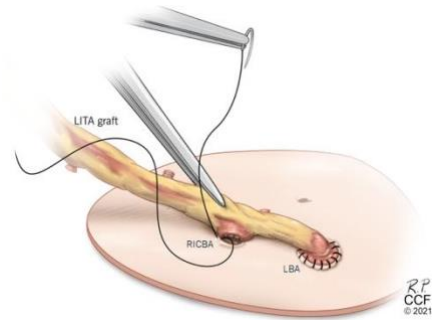
Why applying pruning and grafting as transformative tools through physical experience in art academies? Val Plumwood writes, “Some events can completely change your life and your work (...) they can lead you to see the world in a completely different way, and you can never again see it as you did before.” (The Eye of the Crocodile, 2012). Much like ecofeminist academic Val Plumwood’s realisation after her near-fatal crocodile encounter<sup>17</sup>, the concept of embodied knowledge became profoundly tangible to me through an experience.

In May 2020, during an art residency in France, I suffered a severe accident that resulted in the partial amputation of my left hand. During a month and a half of hospitalisation, I underwent the *McGregor flap technique*<sup>18</sup> surgery. During this procedure, my injured hand was grafted to my abdomen for 21 days to facilitate reconstruction using my own skin, veins and flesh. Having practised grafting on trees since childhood, I immediately recognised the striking parallel: the 21-day cycle.

My body was being treated just as I had treated trees.

Since then, I have reflected deeply on my approach to knowledge, understanding the importance of embodied learning to integrate information and not only just learn it. In this sense, an embodied approach implies learning through direct experience and engaging with the senses rather than simply consuming theory and discussing it verbally or through writing exercises.

By integrating perspectives from agriculture and the arts through embodiment in collaboration with *scholars* in KASK and the trees of Bijloke, this project aspires to reshape academic spaces by taking actions from the garden. The result of this research project will be an exhibition at STAM showcasing the applications of grafting and pruning in the works of the students. The final version of the Study Guide and the toolbox used will also be printed and exhibited.



### Lines of Action:

Fostering interdisciplinary dialogue between art and agriculture: by organising hands-on workshops, including land-based collectives such as (Dieter Dewitte) Pomko and the Groendienst.

Integrating knowledge through hands-on, embodied learning: by engaging students to connect what they learn from horticultural techniques with their artistic projects in class, helping them link theory to practice and better understand nature.

Activating a practical Study Guide and toolbox on grafting and pruning: by utilising insights from previous case studies (video and photographs of fruit tree care in Flemish and Catalan territories) I am creating a practical Study Guide that includes a Toolbox to compile this knowledge in an accessible form for classroom use. This resource aims to bridge artistic research and agricultural practices, offering methodologies for future interdisciplinary work. This Study Guide looks and portraits at living systems from an ecofeminist perspective, for example by showing archives that question the usual scientific view, like using a cut tree to study it.

Collaborating with Bijloke’s trees as a living archive and working space: by a stablish collaboration with the Groendienst, we can prune and graft the trees at the Bijlokesite. During our classes we will deep upon the historical origins of these traditional fruit varieties and their ecological significance in the present and future, reflecting on how to archive a *living archive*, and how to generate new narratives around rural wisdom and land-based knowledge.

## 2.4 Work plan and milestones

<sup>17</sup> Val Plumwood looked into the eye of a crocodile and reflected on the meaning of her experience of being crocodile prey. This experience changed her view of selfhood, human life and human freedom by acknowledging the dangerous Western illusion on our denial of human inclusion in the food web, by positioning ourselves as higher thinking beings.

<sup>18</sup> The *McGregor flap technique* is a reconstructive surgical procedure where skin and soft tissue are transferred from one part of the body to another, maintaining blood supply to promote healing, often used for hand reconstruction after trauma or amputation.



Working with trees implies working by seasons, and this cyclical rhythm shapes the structure of the research: autumn, winter, spring and summer. This seasonal structure is not symbolic, but operative: it grounds educational practice in ecological rhythms and connects disciplines often removed from material processes to cycles of growth, care, and transformation. By working with pruning and grafting both metaphorically and practically, the research proposes new ways of learning, making, and relating in artistic education.

The project unfolds in close dialogue with the Film Department (Hannes Verhoustraete – Video Editing Group), the Photography Department (Tom Callemin – Project Week and Master Classes), and Curatorial Studies (Jana J. Haeckel – Museums and Collections class), disciplines that often engage less directly with tactile materials. These departments become sites for exploring how practices like pruning and grafting can inform experimental, embodied pedagogies within writing and lens-based education. The integration of this research into the three departments goes through including tasks into their current curriculum, project weeks, and also organising master classes when having an external lecturer.

The pedagogical material provided in the classes, the *Study Guide*, and *Toolbox*, focuses on tree physiology and its transformative potential as applied to students' working methods. The aim is to equip participants with the necessary tools to better understand the biological logic that unfolds in a tree system. We envision the ontology used in this research as a decolonial alternative to traditional academic approaches, drawing on eco-feminist, ancestral, and relational perspectives. The classes will revolve around the following question: What learnings can we integrate from tree physiology that can be applied to our making and our personal and professional lives?

We will examine the physiology of trees and humans through three interconnected layers of depth: the cell (the individual – the body), the tissue (relationships – the relational), and the tree (the system – organisations). This structure draws a parallel between botanical and human processes, offering a lens to explore critical aspects such as wounding and trauma in grafting, where injury becomes a site for transformation and new growth, or the fluid and non-binary nature of sexual reproduction in fruit trees, which challenges rigid categorisations and opens space for discussions on queerness in biological and social systems. Each of these themes will be developed by me, coordinated by Jana in dedicated sessions and assisted by two experts in the field: Patricia Kühfuss and Dieter Dewitte.

The content will be taught to the classes of Jana J. Haeckel, Hannes Verhoustraete and Tom Callemin equally. It will unfold as follows: Grounding Tree Family, Tree Physiology and its resemblances to the Human Body, Pruning and Grafting as a Methodology with the support of an invited lecturer Dieter Dewitte, Applying grafting and pruning through mind mapping with the support of an invited lecturer Patricia Kühfuss, The politics of Care about Tree Care, Existing Wounds through Disability Studies, and The Cambium's Fluidity and Reproduction of Fruit Trees by myself.

In Autumn, as trees prepare for dormancy, the academic year begins with an invitation to slow down and reflect. The focus is on observing cycles of transformation, acknowledging decay as a generative phase; we will deepen our connection to the Grounding Tree Family. This season will include sessions on the theory of how trees live and work, Tree Physiology and its resemblances to the Human Body, Pruning and Grafting as a Methodology with Dieter Dewitte (from Pomko), as an invited lecturer. I will work alongside Dieter in classes to bridge the knowledge of tree-based practices and artistic expression, grounding students in both ecological literacy and artistic attentiveness. Activities will include exploring the trees at the Bijloke, note-taking, and gentle attunement to materials, both human and more-than-human, as a foundation for the months ahead.

In Winter, when trees are dormant and pruning takes place, students will learn this technique from Dieter and practice it with the pruners of the Groendinst, from which there's a previous experience with the class of research methods with Stoffel Debuysere. The three courses of the three departments will take the before mentioned basic content classes equally. Whether working with film, photography, or text, participants reflect on how cutting, shaping, and composing are acts of care and transformation. Nevertheless, it will go in different directions when materialising to learn from this method with various techniques: photography, film editing and curating. For instance, the *Video Editing Group* led by Hannes Verhoustraete will explore editing as pruning with me under the prompt of edit as a method. Editing becomes a way to think critically about what is removed, what remains, and how meaning emerges through structure.

Patricia Kühfuss and I will support the students of photography in using photography as a tool for fragmentary documentation, capturing the evolving life of the trees as living archives. The specific exercises will revolve around photographing the fruit trees at Bijloke before and after pruning (December-February). Through a steady yet permeable photo booth, we seek to trace seasonal transformations and offer a space for reflective practices, such as creating collages. With these collages, we aim to visually represent the decision-making process of farmers in pruning by annotating their spoken thoughts on the photographs. This approach provides a clear comparison of pruning practices between the North and South by taking photographs in both latitudes. Film, in contrast, will weave these images and processes into a broader narrative. Its storytelling capacity will integrate the questions that emerge, creating an open dialogue between trees, caretakers, and landscapes, making their interconnections tangible and accessible to diverse audiences.

In Spring, as sap begins to flow and grafting becomes visible, the focus turns to assemblage and hybridisation. Grafting: joining two living parts to grow as one. It serves as a model for interdisciplinary and collaborative work. The workshops will again be taught in the three classes with the assistance of Dieter Dewitte, but we will work more profoundly on the concepts of graft and wound with the Curatorial Students. Building on a previous collaboration with the Curatorial Studies department—specifically the workshop "Grafting Ecofeminist Strategies into Artistic and Educational Practices," held during the seminar "Making the World More Than Less Real"—this next phase deepens the ongoing exploration of grafting as both a practice and a metaphor. In that earlier workshop, curatorial students began to conceptualise codes of practice for museums by approaching them as living entities, recognising that values like openness could be grafted onto institutional frameworks, whereas more abstract concepts, such as intersectionality, might require deeper, more systemic cultivation.

Now, this collaboration takes root in both practice and place. We will delve into the complexity of tree systems that make grafting possible—an entry point for understanding institutions as organisms composed of people, relations, and histories. Within this metaphorical framework, we will explore how entrenched structures might adapt, regenerate, and transform. Through a hands-on, conceptual approach, students will experiment with blending visual, textual, and curatorial elements to create new forms, narratives, and connections across media.

A central part of this process will be the co-creation of a speculative code of practice for an art academy like KASK. Drawing inspiration from the biological logics of grafting—including the 21-day healing cycle, the phenomenon of *la quimera* (chimeric fusion), and the understanding that grafting can only occur between embryonic tissues rather than fixed ideas—we will ask how educational institutions might be reimaged, not through rigid reform, but through slow, embodied, and interdependent transformation. Practically, we will work with the traditional varieties of the Bijloke so that we will be taking scions (branches) to graft onto small trees. We will hold these workshops at the existing Greenhouse at Tuin Louis Van Houtte<sup>19</sup>, which apart from a working space, will serve as a tree nursery and showcase.

In the Summer, after the school year has finished and during the time of the graduation show, the participants will show how they have integrated these methods into their works. The process will culminate in a public exhibition at STAM, curated by students from the Curatorial Studies programme. This exhibition will gather the year's collective reflections, materials, and interventions into a living archive of practices shaped by pruning and grafting as pedagogical tools. The exhibition is still pending detailed dates from programming the exhibition, which will be held sometime during the summer and the following school year 2026 – 2027.

<sup>19</sup> The Greenhouse is located between the departments of Drama and Architectural Design, near the chickens. I spoke with María Boto, who incorporated the infrastructure at the Bijloke, and with Jean Paul Monbaliu, a former KASK teacher who still takes care of it. Jean Paul Monbaliu agreed to allow its use for the research as an open office or hub for mentoring sessions and gatherings on Tuesdays, while María Boto is no longer in charge of the construction.



As a conclusion of the year, the participants on the project will gather in and around the garden to harvest apples and make juice, bringing together physical labour, attention to time, and communal action. This moment closes the cycle with a gesture of shared, embodied learning. The apple juice becomes a trace of growth, care, and co-creation, and is shared with incoming students and staff.

[Video](#)



Workshop during the Courtisane Film Festival, 2025.



Documentation of the research applied during the Symposium 'More Than Less Real' organized by the curatorial studies at KASK, 2024.

### 3. Relevance of the research project

“We must learn to tell *geostories*”.  
(Latour, 2017: 99)

My vision relates very much to Strathern's view that “Knowledge is not a thing, but a practice” (Strathern, 2004: 66). **However, what are the implications of practising embodied knowledge within the academy? How can we embody knowledge in the first place? Why is it essential to acknowledge embodied knowledge and include it in the actual curriculum of the school?** For me, this can be achieved by situating the knowledge from the students' lived experiences as a valid resource for informing research in the context of a workshop and by developing communities of practice where learning is contextual and meaningful. Removing power hierarchies and employing teachers as learners, and learners as teachers, engaging with the other 'teachers' that have no formal education, such as pomologists (experts in apples, that are nothing else more incredible than farmers that have been working with apples for their whole lives), elderly women who have a green thumb, or the greenkeepers of the city of Ghent (Groendist). Rather than proposing definitive answers, my teaching proposal fosters a sense of shared inquiry, foregrounding the method of grafting and pruning as a pedagogical tool for engaging with the real conditions of the world, and for imagining it otherwise

The land is, first and foremost, a place to cultivate, at least from a human perspective. This is also the case for the Bijloke; long before it became known for its hospital and monastery, it was a landscape for cultivation, as seen in the images in the annexe. The presence of trees and agriculture has persisted through centuries, interwoven with the site's use in healthcare. The orchard has been a place of continuity, where fruit trees were followed by walnut groves, and hedges have coexisted with human interventions.

As the site evolved, trees served both productive and functional roles. In the late 18th century, when the Commission of Civil Hospices transformed Bijloke into a public hospital, walnut trees were planted in the courtyards, as they were believed to repel insects and improve air quality around the wards. In fact, apple varieties have always travelled in the form of grafts<sup>20</sup> across regions and generations; for their taste and resilience, these were always transported as goods. Apple trees do not originate from Europe; their ancestral roots trace back to the forests of Central Asia, particularly the Tian Shan mountains in present-day Kazakhstan, where the progenitor of domesticated apples, *Malus sieversii*, still grows wild.

This project emphasizes the significance of vernacular knowledge surrounding traditional apple varieties as a living, ephemeral archive, challenging conventional methods of archiving information. Engaging with Archival Sensations' themes of *Implementing Knowledge*, *Alternative Time Ecologies*, and *The Radicality of the Fragmentary*, it raises questions about how to archive a *living archive*. Specifically, I am interested in exploring what film and art can offer in rethinking the traditional scientific practices of archiving apples and what can be its impact in today's society.

In the context of *Implementing Knowledge*, I am particularly interested in uncovering overlooked narratives still rooted in rural landscapes, embodying a connection between land, community wisdom, and ecological heritage. This method reflects the research's emphasis on micro-histories that challenge traditional, linear storytelling, creating space to question and reshape broader histories. This holistic perspective will be integrated into all the graphics created for the Study Guide and the final exhibition. For example, rather than dividing the tree into separate sections to explain its individual parts, the tree will be presented as a connected whole, embodying an ecofeminist approach to creating educational posters and images.

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<sup>20</sup> The reason fruit varieties were historically transported through grafting rather than seeds is that grafting creates a clone of the original specimen. In contrast, planting seeds produces offspring of the apples, but not identical replicas of the parent variety.

## 4. Communications

Communicating this project effectively means working within the existing platforms that KASK already offers, while also expanding outward to utilise the networks of collaborators who are naturally embedded in the project. Rather than seeing dissemination as a separate, external task, it will be an organic extension of participant's network itself. I envision it as an ongoing task among the people involved, such as students, researchers, and teachers at KASK, invited lecturers, the Green Office of Ghent (Groendinst), Green Office of UGent, and STAM.

At KASK, the project is already being shaped in direct exchange with students and faculty across departments, making the school itself a primary space for communication through their existing channels, such as Public Talks, newsletters, Official Website or the different Instagram Accounts (Photography Department, Curatorial Studies, Film Department and Archival Sensations Cluster). The visibility of this research will continue through periodic lectures by invited speakers, integration into students' work, and the final exhibition at STAM, ensuring that it remains an active and evolving conversation within the academy.

But since this project is not meant to exist solely within the KASK community, it is essential to acknowledge the many other platforms that are equally invested in it. As a worker at the Green Office of Ghent University, I also have access to their outreach networks, where sustainability and ecological concerns already have a strong presence. Similarly, the Green Office of the City of Ghent is deeply connected with local environmental initiatives and has an established communication system through its newsletters and networks. I will actively propose to connect these two by proposing the works and outcomes of the students undertaking the courses. Furthermore, as a doctoral researcher, I will redact an article (A1) for a research magazine, such as Journal for Artistic Research (JAR) with the findings on how this embodied practiceses integrated in the curricula through the different didactic encounters and how this have shaped the acemic journey of the participants.

Beyond academic and institutional platforms, some key external agents will naturally help carry this project further. STAM, as a museum and historical space, will be a host for gatherings of pomologists, bringing together experts in fruit-growing practices with artists and researchers. Pomko, a crucial Belgian external collaborator, has an engaged audience that follows its work on ecological and agricultural knowledge, making it an ideal partner for sharing events and identifying potential interested parties. Each of these collaborators brings their network, multiplying how this research can travel and be encountered by different communities.



## 5. Qualifications research group

### Coordinator

Jana J. Haeckel is a Brussels-based researcher, lecturer and independent curator. She studied at Humboldt-Universität Berlin and the Sorbonne in Paris, before obtaining her PhD in art history from the Université catholique de Louvain in 2016. Her written and curatorial work examines image and body politics in contemporary art, focusing on the new ethics of photography in the digital age. She is an associate senior researcher at the Lieven Gevaert Centre and currently lectures at the Photography and Curatorial Studies Department at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Ghent (KASK). Before this, she served as director of Photoforum Pasquart (CH) and worked for the Goethe-Institut Brussels, where she curated various international exhibitions in the field of photography, video and new media. Recently edited books and exhibition catalogues comprise *Love, Maybe. Intimacy and Desire in Contemporary Art* (Distanz, 2025), *Everything Passes Except the Past* (Sternberg Press, 2021) and *Photography Today: Resistant Faces* (Pinakothek der Moderne, 2020).

### Doctoral Researcher

Laura Palau studied Fine Arts at the University of Valencia (UPV) in Valencia, Spain, where she also completed an MA in Artistic Production. She pursued further studies through international programs, including the MA in Photography & Society in The Hague, The Netherlands. In addition, she has participated in seminars and workshops led by artists such as Joan Fontcuberta, Laia Abril, and Isidoro Valcárcel Medina, among others. Her image-based and time-based practice responds to climate and social emergencies, often collaborating with and involving participants. Engaging with the public and local communities, she transforms them into participatory laboratories. Drawing on feminist perspectives and the rural knowledge of her upbringing, her work interweaves rituals of care, seeking to reconcile dichotomies such as human versus nature, rural versus urban, and local versus global. Through this approach, she challenges distinctions primarily established by Western academia. Since 2017, her work has been exhibited internationally at PhotoEspaña (ES), Dupho (NL), Helsinki Photomedia Conference (FI), IVAM (ES), CCCC (ES), Torino PhotoFestival (IT), EAC (ES), PALMA Festival (FR), among others. Recently, she was awarded the La Caixa Fellowships Abroad and was recognised as one of ARTPIL's *30 Women Under 30*. She is currently conducting research on grafting and pruning as artistic methodologies within the academic context of KASK.

### Invited lecturer: Dieter Dewitte

Dieter Dewitte is a Belgian tree expert and former coordinator of Pomko, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the preservation of ancient fruit trees and traditional horticultural knowledge in Flanders. With a background in agroecology and orchard management, he has spent over two decades cultivating and mapping endangered apple and pear varieties. Dewitte's work bridges botanical conservation and cultural heritage, fostering community engagement through practical workshops and citizen-science initiatives. His approach centres on trees as living archives of regional knowledge, encouraging sustainable stewardship and intergenerational learning. He regularly collaborates with artists, researchers, and environmental educators across Belgium.

### Invited lecturer: Patricia Kühfuss

Patricia Kühfuss is a photographer, visual researcher, and artist based in Cologne, Germany. Her work explores the intersections of health, care, and capitalism, using photography to question how societal narratives are shaped through visual representation. Kühfuss studied Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at Hanover University of Applied Sciences and Arts and the Danish School of Media and Journalism, and later earned her MA in Photography & Society at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. Her graduation project, *What Counts*, critically examined medical imaging and bodily commodification within the German healthcare system. Represented by the laif photo agency, she has contributed to Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, GEO, National Geographic US, and ZEIT Magazin. She is a recipient of the VG Bild-Kunst scholarship and was awarded second place in the Sony World Photography Awards. In addition to her photographic practice, Kühfuss is a skilled mind mapper. Within this research, she will contribute to organising the conceptual lines of thought that emerge from exploring the trees on the land, helping to navigate and articulate the connections between embodied experience, ecological inquiry, and artistic methodologies.

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## 7. Funding requested

### 7.1 Requested number of FTEs for staff

The total planned expenditure on personnel is given in full-time equivalents (FTE) per year. To estimate staffing, one should consider the volumes required to realise the various steps in the work plan. The implementation of educational development research projects can be done by an OP/ATP member/members (i.e. also the project coordinator), contractual researchers or a combination of these. For medium and large projects, there is funding of a minimum of 0.2 FTE and a maximum of 1 FTE calculated over one year. Avoid fragmentation of staff costs: for large preferably a single consecutive period per staff member and always minimum appointments of 20%.

The estimate of this amount in euros will be made (by staff category, by year and in total) after submission by the Finance Department.

Name of staff member (or category if not yet known)	Number of FTEs	Period
Laura Palau	50% (0,5)	1 year

Describe and justify the requested funding for the staff deployment. Include:

- The number of FTEs (one full-time 100% employment corresponds to 1 FTE);
- the number of months the staff member works on the project (within the maximum 2-year duration of the research project);
- if it is already known (possibly by staff category) which employee will be nominated, the name and department can already be mentioned;
- No funding is allocated for externals.



## 7.2 Funding for operation and equipment

Per research project, funds for operation and equipment can be requested for up to €20,000. Distinguish between resources for operation and resources for equipment. The request for these resources should be justified.

	Budget (euro)
<b>Request operating funds</b>	
<i>Fees for invited lecturers: Patriccia Kühfuss and Dieter Dewitte</i>	6.000 €
<i>Didactic materials: print of photographs, texts, tapes, rent of a canvas, biomaterials like trees and soil. (Pruning seasons and other materials will be supplied by Dieter Dewitte from Pomko)</i>	1.000€
<i>Materials for the exhibition at STAM: production of photographs, framing the works, artists fees and curatorial fees.</i>	3.000€
<b>Application resources equipment</b>	
<i>description: greenhouse at Tuin Louis van Houtte</i>	
<b>Total (euro)</b>	10.000€

## 2.0. Co-financing

Here you can mention any co-financing, always specifying the source of funding and the amount. A letter of intent will be drawn up for this purpose. Co-financing is split into three types:

1. Third-party input **directly** used for the (part of the) research carried out **within** HOGENT. This refers, for example, to the cost of HOGENT staff paid by third parties or a support for operation or equipment that will be used in the college.
2. Partners may also carry out part of the research project. The second type of co-financing is then the amount that partners invest in the part of the research that will be carried out at the partner itself and therefore **does not** flow **directly** to the research in the university college. No budget is requested for this within HOGENT. For example, the cost of personnel working at the partner itself; operation or equipment that will be used for the research **outside** HOGENT.
3. A third type of co-financing is this where HOGENT itself deploys **additional resources** in carrying out the research project. This is, for example, the part of the costs incurred by a department for deployment of staff and for working resources.

For each type of co-financing, an explicit description of what exactly the co-financing entails is given. This includes the amount provided.

Type of co-financing	Specific description of co- financing to the project	Amount (euro)
Third-party input directly to HOGENT for project implementation:		
Share that partners invest for their part of the research:		
Contribution HOGENT partner (share that HOGENT will invest additionally to the project in addition to the allocated funds from the Research Fund for the Arts):		
Total (euro)		

### 7.3 Parallel applications

If an application for funding was/is being submitted to other bodies for the same, a closely related or part of the present research project, this should be mentioned. Please indicate the body and title of the project proposal submitted.

This information will not be taken into account at the time of assessment - applying for project funding externally is, of course, encouraged - but when allocating funds to a project, consideration will be given to ensuring that the same research is not funded twice.

### 7.4 Annexes to project application

#### Letters of intent

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/15Qq0O-GnEAfC6ChwnAvuVQqXH7aWoXT5/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15Qq0O-GnEAfC6ChwnAvuVQqXH7aWoXT5/view?usp=drive_link)

#### Other relevant documentation to support the project proposal

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1PEoGITbhrrSQ38iQ8Fgd-ajTQXX4xkWp>