



IN TRANSIT

(Botany of a Journey)

Asunción Molinos Gordo

Artist's Garden by Asunción Molinos Godo

IN TRANSIT: Botany of a Journey

This art project follows the invitation to develop a proposal for the Artist's Garden commission at Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai, whose curatorial criterion is to realise work with the ability to riff on our relationship with the natural world.

IN TRANSIT: Botany of a Journey is a site-specific installation consisting of a garden grown from seeds that have travelled in the intestines of Dubai's diverse population.

Dubai, as a global city and the business hub of the Middle East, receives an average of 90 million passengers a year to the city and through its airport, coming from 270 destinations, across six continents. Additionally, the resident population is extraordinarily diverse. The culinary habits of such a heterogeneous population are incomparable; all of the seeds ingested by Dubai's fluid and transient population make their way to the same location — the city's main sewage treatment plant in Al-Aweer.

Several seeds are capable of surviving the process of human digestion and leave our bodies almost undamaged. Tomato, pepper, aubergine, okra, guava are some of the crops we eat, with fleshy mesocarps and hard seeds which we ingest without mastication on account of their small size. The digestive enzymes cannot do much to release the contents of these seeds, and many of them are excreted intact, remaining capable of germination.

With the advice of agricultural engineers and horticulturists, two cubic meters of dehydrated faecal sludge have been cultivated at Al Zahra farming facilities. They have been provided with adequate irrigation, light and temperature and thousands of plants have germinated from 11 different species.

A selection of these plants has been transplanted to Jameel Arts Centre and are now growing at the Artist's Garden, including tomatoes, watermelon, chillies, aubergine, muskmelon, zucchini, amaranth, mustard, citrus, sunflowers, pomegranate and pumpkin. Once the plants produce crops and are ready for collection, they will be harvested for seed saving and research by the artist's fellow scientists and researchers.

The work is conceived as a ruderal garden that reflects on the ideas of globality, interconnectivity, mobility and cohabitation. Ecologists defined ruderality as the ability to thrive in spite of challenging conditions.

This garden aims to challenge hardwired ideas on the romantic concept of nature and to sum up on Timothy Morton's concept of the 'mesh'. In his writings, Timothy Morton alerts us over the dangers of understanding human activity as a separate category from other natural phenomena. He highlights the importance of dismantling the Nature-Culture divide that reduces the concept of nature to plants, animals and geological processes.

Morton stresses the idea of interconnectedness of all living and non-living things, in what he calls the 'mesh'. All life forms are the 'mesh'; with no central position that privileges any one form of being over the others, and thereby erases definitive interior and exterior boundaries of beings.

The project is a poetic enactment to reconfigure our understanding of a world without 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.



Food crops growing from the sludge

THE MAKING

The project has been developed following the professional advice of Al Aweer waste management engineers, as well as Sia Landscaping and horticulturist Kumar Palanisamy. It unfolds in four different phases; collecting, germinating, growing and analysing.

Collecting:

The dewatered faecal sludge has been selected by Al Aweer in-house engineers and consists of the odourless matter that comes out of the second filter in the treatment plant.

This matter looks very similar to regular soil or compost, and contains in it the seeds that survived the digestion process.



Treatment plant operators assorting the sludge into sacks





Dewater fecal sludge

Germinating:

The germination process has been carried out at Al Zahra Farm with the support of Sia Landscaping agronomists, who buried the dewatered sludge in sweet soil and coconut fibres.



Sia Landscaping Horticulturists planting the sludge



Dewater sludge ready for germination at Al Zahra farm, Dubai

The greenhouse structure was equipped with six drip irrigation lines and within two weeks, healthy seedlings were coming out from the planting beds.



Seeds germinating from the sludge





Seeds germinating from the sludge
at Al Zahra farm, Dubai

Thousands of different kinds of seedlings have grown from the sludge.

With the support of horticulturalist Kumar Palanisamy, the plants have been identified and transplanted to independent pots to facilitate their development into adulthood.

So far, different types of tomatoes, zucchini, mustard, amaranthus, sunflower, watermelon, pumpkin and citrus trees have been identified.



Kumar transplanting the seedlings



Seedlings grown from the sludge



Plants grown from the sludge
at Al Zahra farm, Dubai

Growing:

The young plants will soon be transplanted into the assigned garden at Jameel Arts Centre. The garden will open officially to the public on February 1, 2020, together with a public programme and an artist talk.



Potting the seedlings

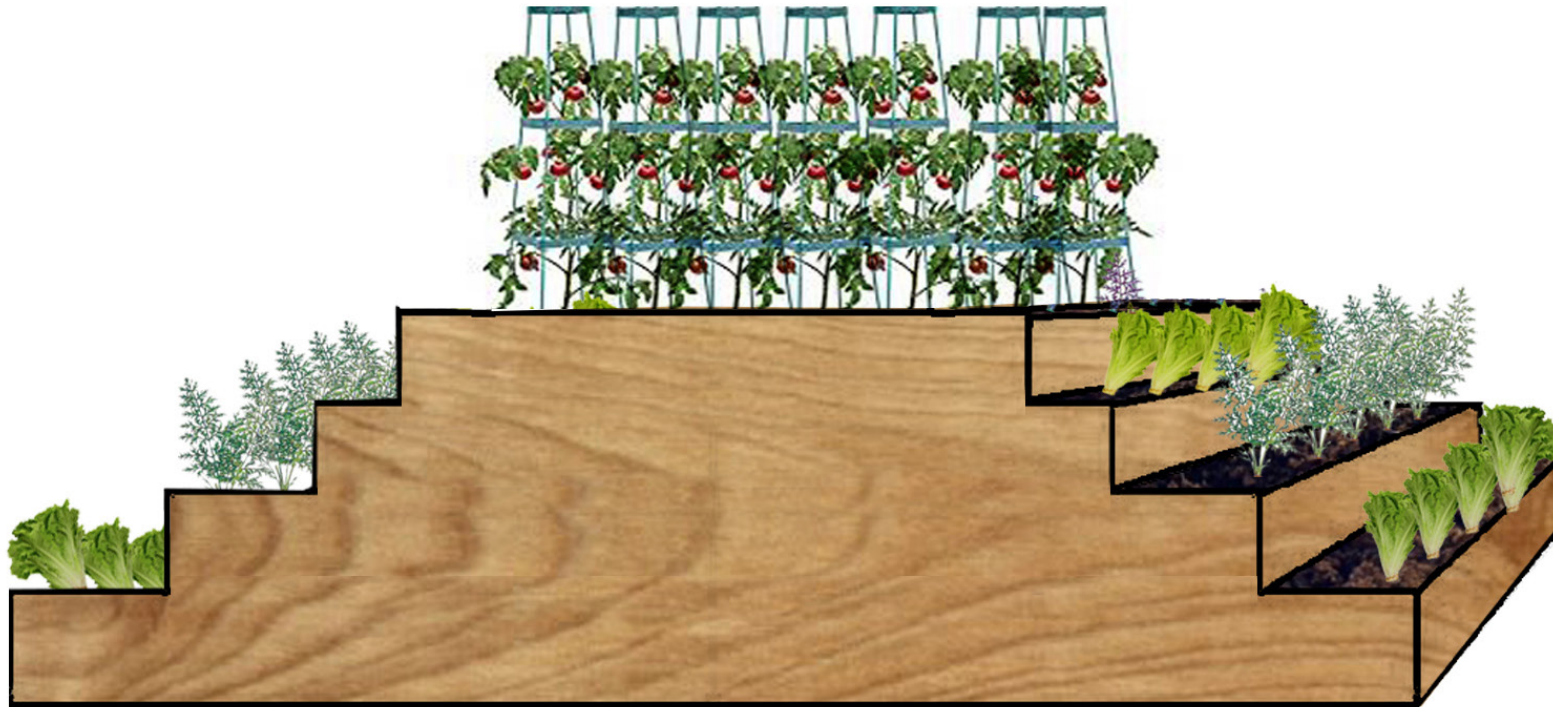




Kumar holding a melon plant

The Garden

The garden will grow in sync with the agricultural calendar in Dubai. When the crops are ready for collection, they will be harvested and handled for seed saving to be later redistributed.



Garden draft



We walked here through a corridor of photomontage, transmuting the identity of walls in metro Buffalo. They were made by David Mordt. We walked through these images in art, through The Center. These artists create a culture... but they are not the only ones in search of space and understanding. They are ready to construct, to let nature and construction. We all have ways to identify ourselves through the complex we enter. The way we talk and walk and arrange our lives. We all contribute to the space beyond our neighborhoods. We are all here, and if these things are successful, we call them art.

Scott Propoyck
 Site Director and
 Chief Curator



IN TRANSIT

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This proposal follows the invitation to develop an art project for the Garden commission at Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai. The goal is to realize work with the ability to riff on the natural world.

"In Transit: Botany of a Journey" is an art project that explores the intersection of nature and human activity. It is a journey of discovery, a quest for meaning and connection. The project is a collaboration between artists and scientists, a dialogue between the natural world and the human world. It is a journey of discovery, a quest for meaning and connection. The project is a collaboration between artists and scientists, a dialogue between the natural world and the human world.

حديقة الفنان
 Artist's Garden

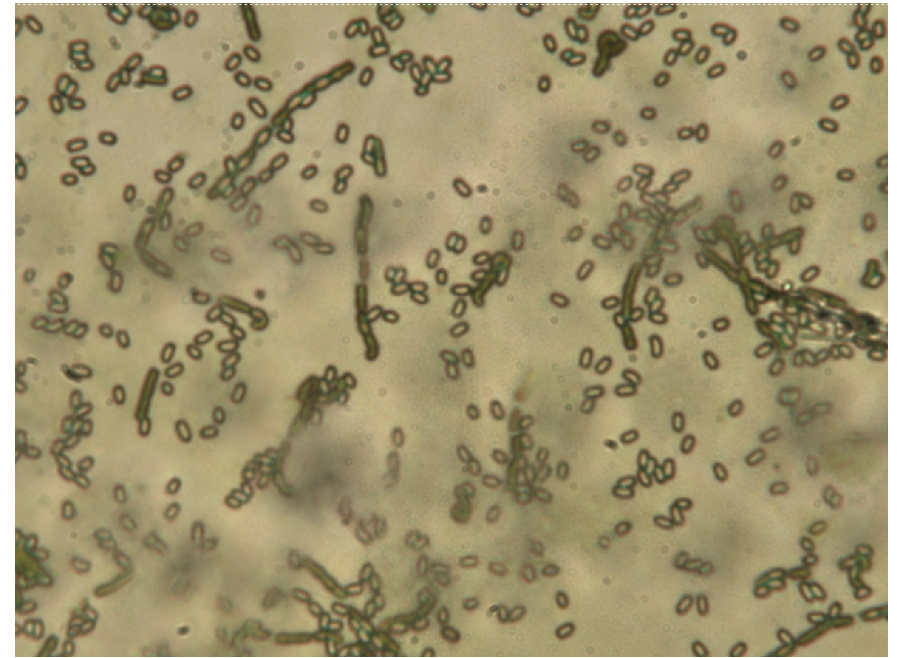
Garden's draft photomontage

Analysing:

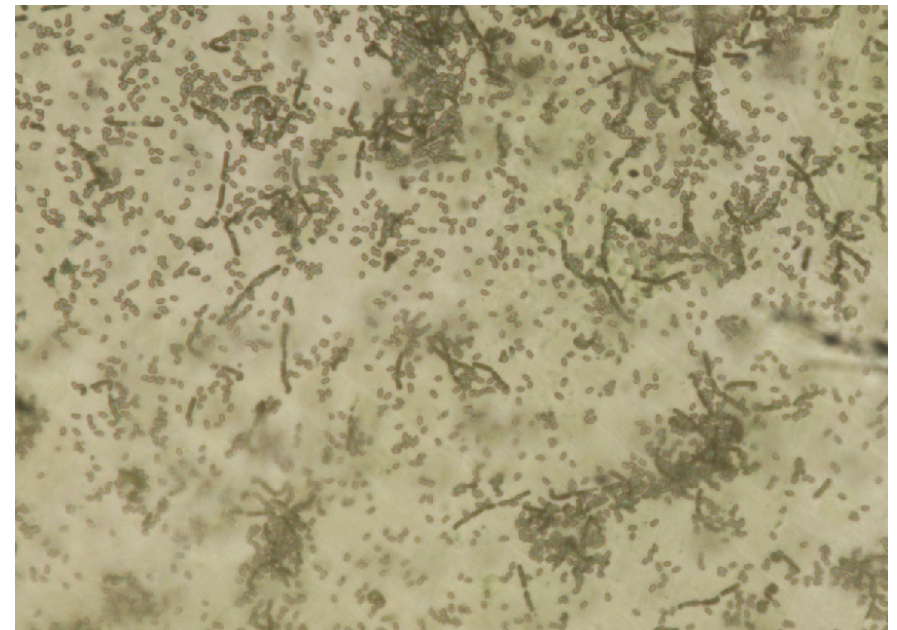
In a similar manner to the seeds, the gut microbiota that arrives to the treatment plant shows the extraordinary diversity of life forms contained inside our intestines. The average gut microbiota that one person contains is tens of trillions of microorganisms, including at least 1000 different species of known bacteria.

In collaboration with Doctor Ruqaiyyah Siddiqui, we are growing the bacteria from the sludge samples, that reproduces at the human body temperature (37 °C).

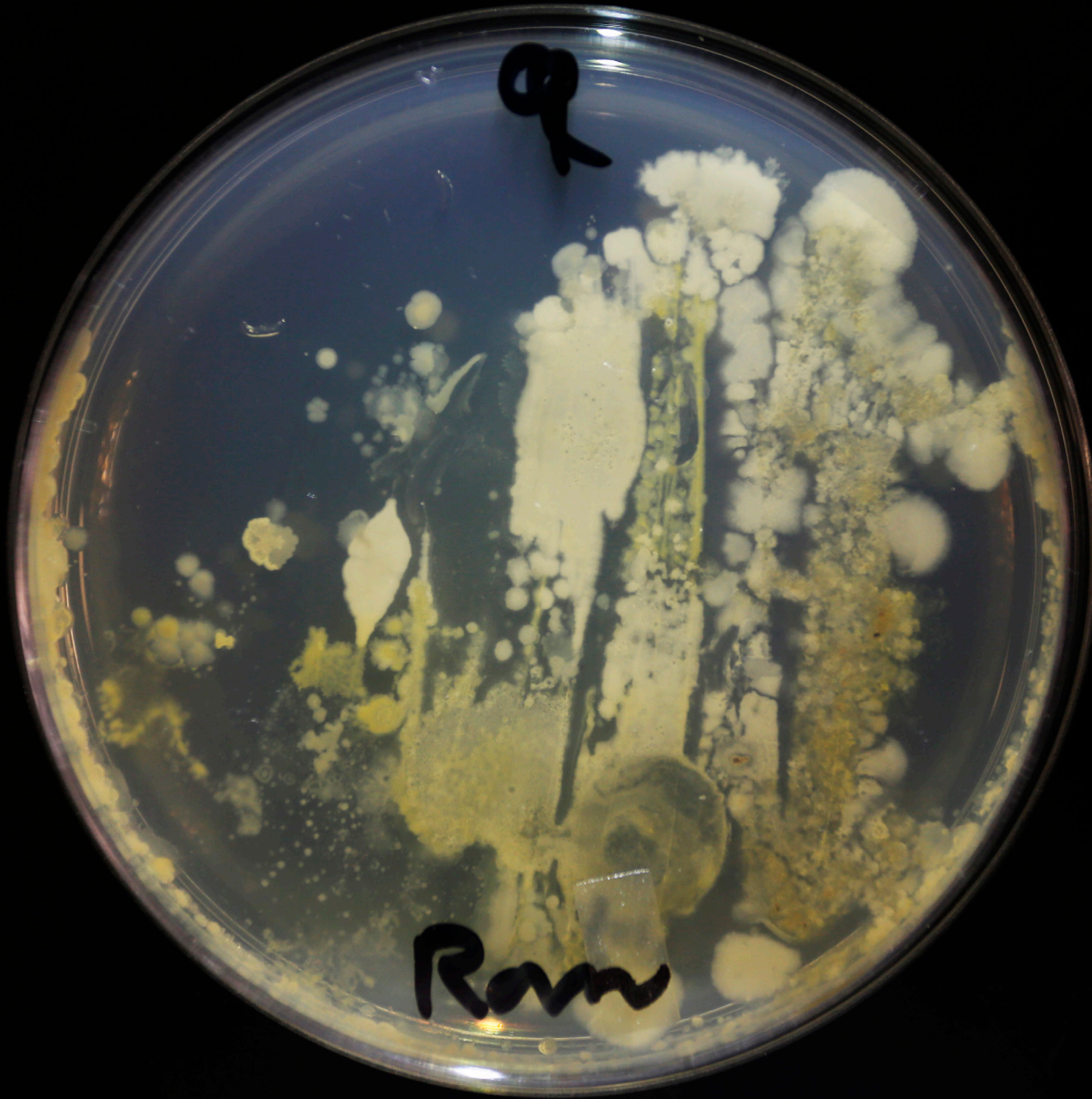
The visuals and other relevant research material from the sample analysis will be developed as an extension of the project under the name *IN TRANSIT (Taxonomy of a Journey)*, which will be on display at Art Dubai, March 2020 within the fair's commissions programme, curated by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez.



Agar plates with sludge bacteria samples



Sludge bacteria samples under the microscope



Gut bacteria cultivation
from sludge samples

Project by
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for
JAMEEL ARTS CENTRE

curated by
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with
Nadine El Khoury, Curatorial Assistant, Jameel Arts Centre

Image front cover: Intestinal transit
Image Source: armoured-
vehicleslatinamerica.com

IN TRANSIT: Botany of a Journey is commissioned and produced by Art Jameel and has been developed with support and advice from Dubai Municipality, American University of Sharjah, Sia Landscaping, Al Zahra Farm, horticulturist Kumar Palanisamy and Acción Cultural Española (AC/E) (through the programme for the Internationalisation of Spanish Culture (PICE), in the framework of the mobility grants).

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