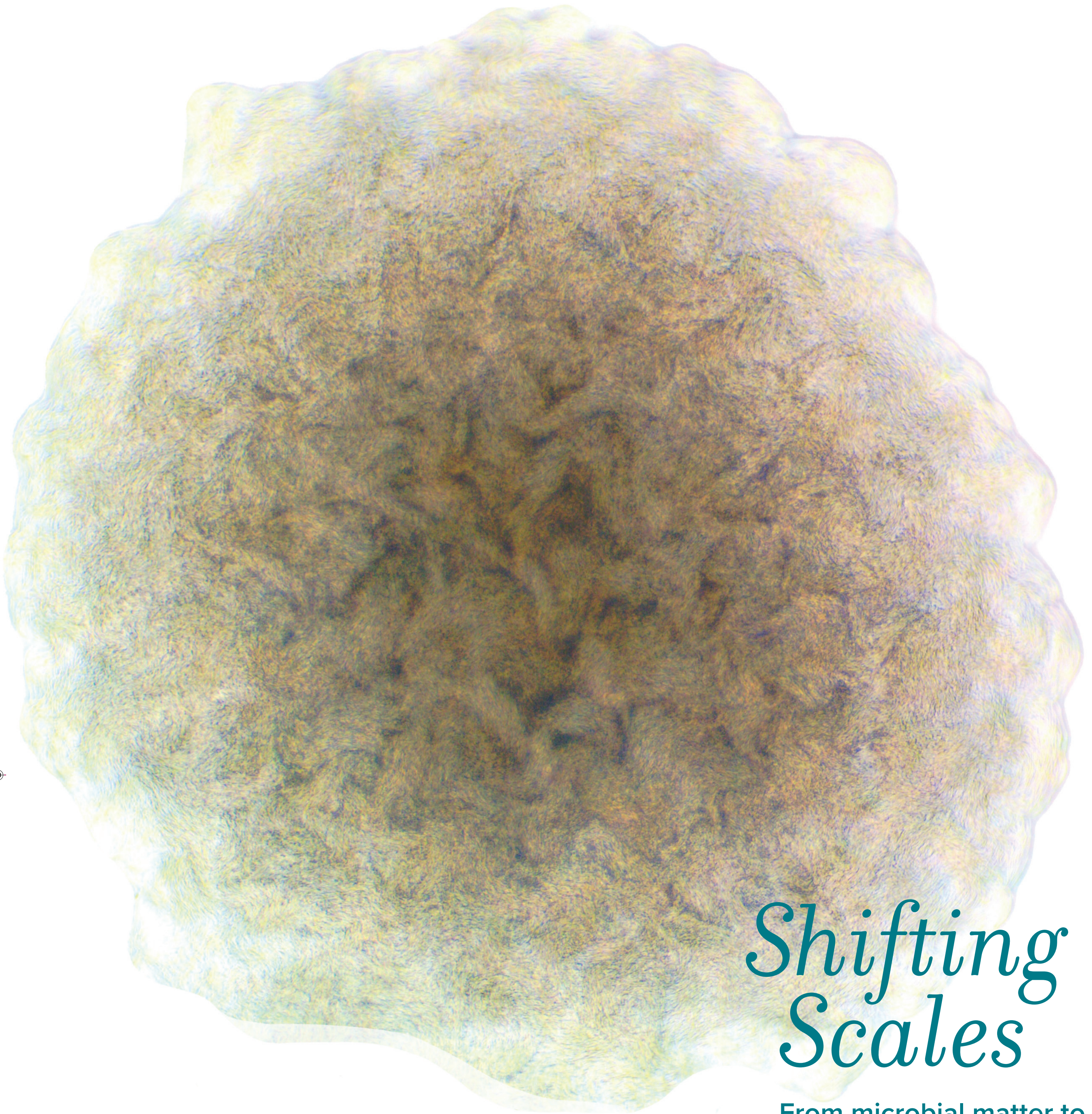




Shifting Scales

From microbial matter to
how microbes matter

Shifting Scales is a journey through art and research, through life, death, and everything in between. It emerges from ongoing investigations on the importance of taking microorganisms on their own terms. It centres on transdisciplinary practices and more-than-human perspectives. We invite you to attune to a world full of complex, fragile, and surprising connections. Shifting Scales reflects, provokes and engages in relationships with the living world.

Can we look beyond the surface of things and embrace biofilm, coculture, mycelium, synthetic lifeforms, and all that lives and moves in the cracks?

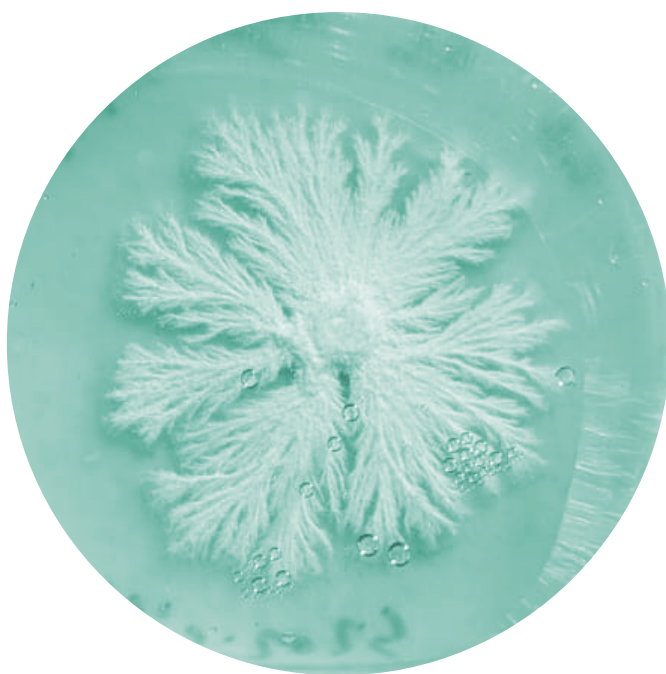
This exhibition aims to contribute to ongoing reflections in bioart and artistic research and is part of the following projects: Bactohealing, Koelieven, (Research into) Genetically Modified Art Organisms (GMAO), Photovoltarium, Mycelium as Alternative for Paper

Contributing Artists

Nele Buyst (NB)	Matthijs De Block (MDB)	Jonas Ghyselen (JG)
Janne Halme (JH)	Christina Stadlbauer (CS)	Bart Vandeput (BV)

Researchers and experts Marjan De Mey, Kristien Hens, Katrien Schaubroeck
Curators Christina Stadlbauer, Bart Vandeput
Editor exhibition paper Nele Buyst
Design exhibition paper Idea in a Forest
Producer Michelle Coenen

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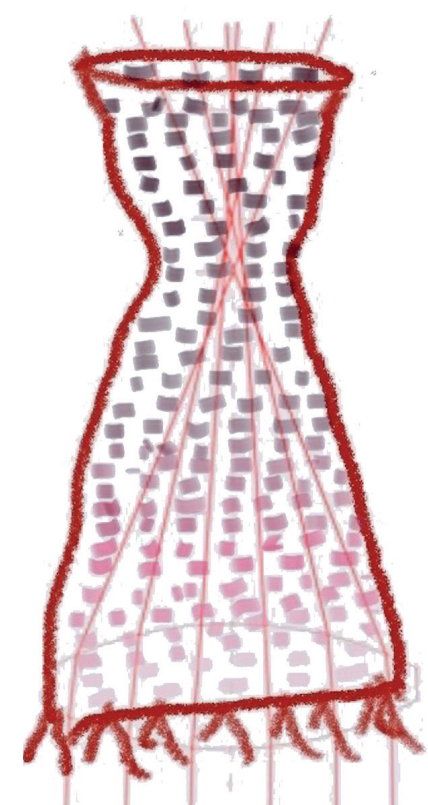




MICROBES AND ETHICS

Should I start using the most technically advanced lenses to make the most detailed pictures possible? Sure, it would make beautiful pictures. But shifting the focus to the aesthetic would harm the relational aspect of the research. BV

I have been wondering what this engineering language that is used in synthetic biology is doing to our approach towards this work and the ethics we are supposed to apply. CS



If shifting to an ethic of care means we should re-organize our thoughts on private property, do the commons offer a way forward? What are commons? By definition? Examples? NB

What do we seek?
What does an energy company building a solar plant seek?
A corporation acquiring renewable energy?
A consumer using solar electricity?
A landowner leasing land for energy production —
or a local resident opposing it? JH

MicroTuning is an evolving ecosystem of microbes, light, electricity, minerals, natural-dyed solar cell, pH, artificial lung tissue, gravel, slime, spirit, algae, sand, titanium dioxide, science protocol, biofilm, cooling towers, protozoa, cellulose, ecology, platinum, glass, polymer, researcher, agar, bio-scaffold, salt, colourant, player, metal, iodine, spectrometer, root, soap, vibration, glass-cutter, respiration, emotion, hustler, energy dreams, improvisation, air, water, amoeba, ethics, glass, gelatine, latex, copper, sociomicrobiology, pyomelanin, microfiber, sanding, antibacterial agent. BV



A biotech lab teems with protocols. They're invisible, but inside the minds of everyone in a white coat, protocols are stored—neatly ordered. Maybe this is closer to the white room from the stock photos? Now, I don't mean to diminish the creativity of scientists—when you need to grow and genetically modify a bacterium, you won't get far by merely following a protocol. Beneath all those cabinets of protocols lies a concrete structure built on tons of knowledge. All kinds of languages and symbols that explain how chemical bonds form, how DNA is translated into RNA, and what codon optimization actually does.

When an artist enters the lab, they also bring a concrete structure — but the chemical bonds that make up this structure are entirely different. The language of intuition, of the chaotic process, of deliberately not following



The language of not understanding is the most interesting one there is.

protocols, and exploring how humans think differently. And that's precisely where the friction arises. It's like walking into someone's living room on another continent — you don't speak the language, you don't know the customs, and you're unaware that wearing shoes indoors is disrespectful, so you walk in with muddy boots. That creates tension; the unspoken suddenly gets a face, and you have something to talk about. That conversation is, in my opinion, the whole point. MDB

INQUIRY AS ART

Can microbes help us reimagine care, coexistence and collaboration?

Welcoming artists into scientific labs has significant potential, despite the natural tensions that may arise. Such tensions should be viewed not as obstacles but as productive forces that can lead to new discoveries. By fostering environments where artists and scientists collaborate closely, we create opportunities for innovation, deeper understanding, and breakthroughs that neither field could achieve independently. MDB

True interdisciplinarity is more than structure. It's a process. A willingness to stay in the in-between. BV

Sometimes I don't choose the medium. The microbes, the plants — they choose it for me. BV

If our aim is to reconnect with nature and understand our relationship with other organisms, we should move away from viewing art as static objects and instead embrace art as genuinely living entities—not metaphorically, but literally alive. MDB

The academic framework simply is not designed for having an artist or artist-scientist in the lab. Not yet. CS

Each language is a kind of song, a particular way of singing the world.

David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, 1996

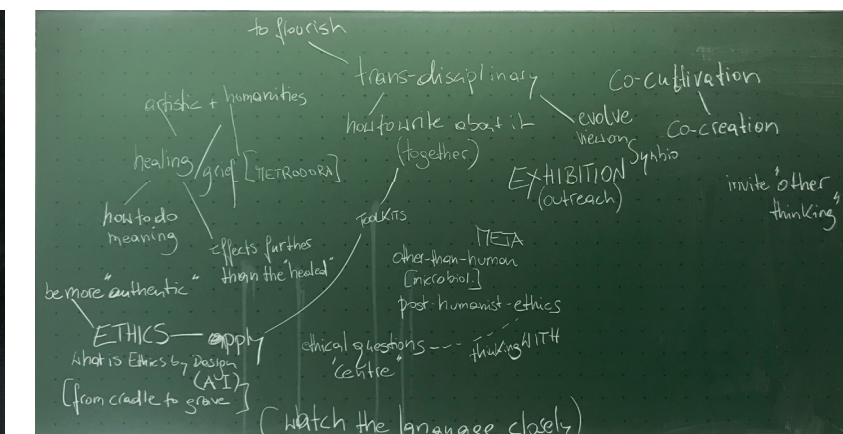
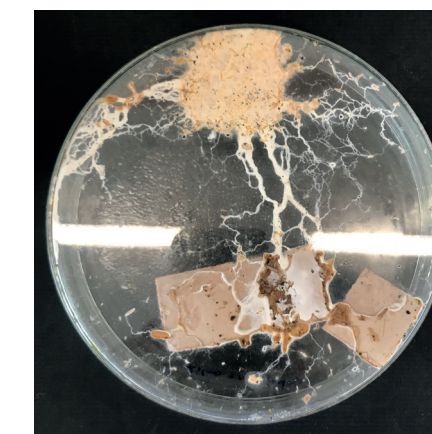


NB

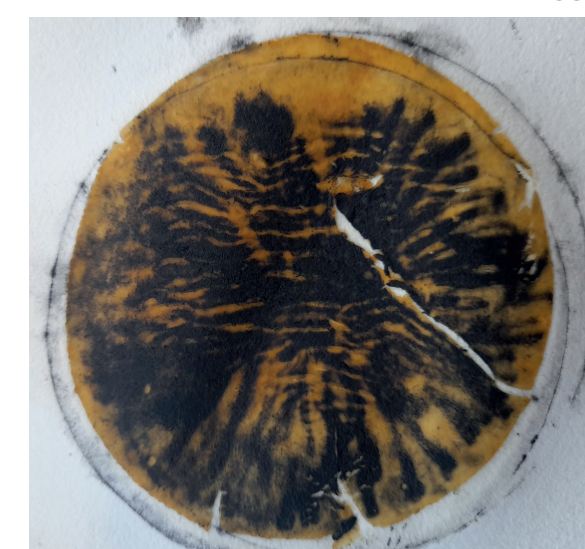
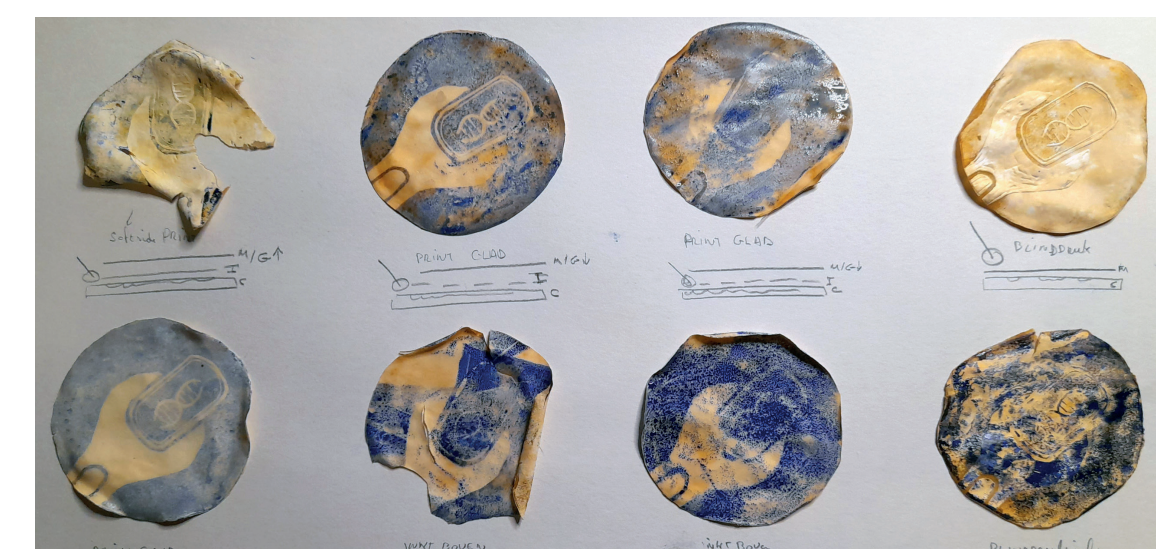
LAB LOGBOOKS AND ARTIST'S NOTEBOOKS



JH



CS



JG



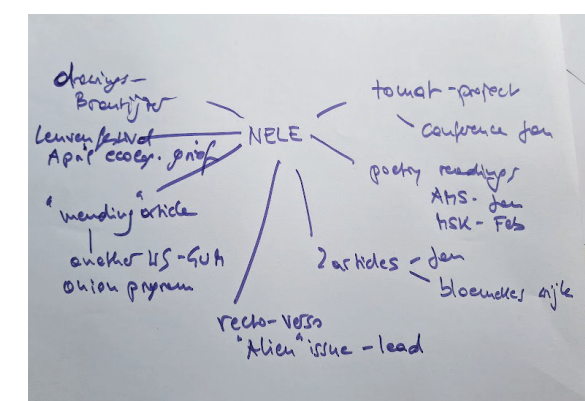
Does the idea of dealing with/interpreting the process as an interplay between musicians work at all?

When a player feels strongly about something, asking me to play along, but I don't feel like it, I invite him/her to go solo. Some playing needs to be done alone before bringing the part into the whole group.

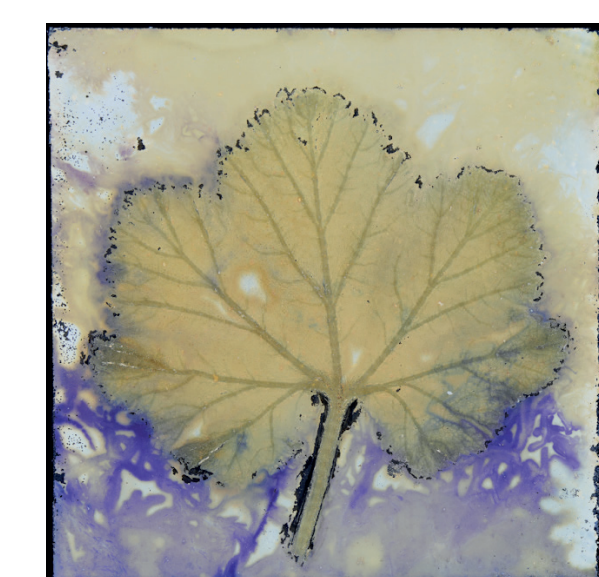
Any tension needs to be converted creatively. Feeling unfree to move in biolab; resolved by asking an abc-intro course.

Resistance to Information flow. Reluctancy to share data - preliminary results - with the whole group. Not feeling confident yet to play that part with the group. BV

Artists are not just guests in the lab — they're co-authors of its evolving culture.



NB



Photovoltarium No. 2 — Rubus chamaemorus — Lighting series (V1a-c), 2025

The images in this series originate from a single botanical solar-cell monotype. It was photographed at a neutral 5500 K colour temperature, with light coming from different directions. Even the slightest shift in the angle of illumination transforms the image — just as a change in viewpoint can alter our perception. JH

