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PLANT PORN

a journey into plant-human intimacy

FINE ARTS BACHELOR'S DEGREE 2023

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<p>My thesis explores a sensual relationship between humans and plants and how it could change our mindset towards ourselves, nature, and the planet.</p> <p>I use my own experiences and my artistic journey to explore this subject. I also go through examples of interspecies relationships and explore plant intelligence.</p> <p>In my artistic journey I also study my subject through the media of porn and explore the fantasy aspects.</p>		
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<p>Opinnäytetö käsittelee kasvin ja ihmisen välisestä sensuella suhdetta ja miten tämä voi olla hyödyllinen itsellemme, luonnelle sekä planeetallemme.</p> <p>Käsittelen aihetta omien kokemusten kautta sekä käyn läpi omaa työskentely prosessia. Käyn myös läpi eri lajien välisiä suhteita sekä kasvin sisäistä maailmaa.</p> <p>Taiteellisessa työskentelyssä käsittelen myös teostani pornon kautta sekä sen tarjoamaa fantasiaa aspektia.</p>		
Avainsanoja: Seksi, kasvit, ekologia, porno, videotaide		

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1 INTRODUCTION

What does a sensual relationship look like between a plant and a human? Is a relationship like this even possible? It's a fact that we need each other to survive, or at least humans need plants, but can our relationship evolve beyond that? Do we crave one other? And if so, what could a partnership like this teach us in a bigger picture?

These are some of the questions I was trying to combat while doing both this thesis and my thesis artwork.

I also decided to use porn as an artistic format to explore this subject.

As porn is fantasy, my artwork is also going to study the fantasy aspect of human and plant intimacy. I wanted to use creativity and imaginations as a tool for my project, since the science perspective felt limited.

2 THE JOURNEY INTO THE PLANT

My artistic journey started with me growing baby plants in glass jars and placing them next to my workroom window. It was surprisingly easy to keep them alive, I came by my workroom almost every day, so I remembered to water them if needed. They grew, despite it being cold outside. They even created a safe, inviting, and warm atmosphere in my workspace. I always greeted them when I stopped by, always said bye when I left. It seemed easy to take care of them as long as I just let them be.

The hard part was trying to build a connection with them. How do you find a common language when you're so different? Plants don't move, they are very sensitive to any kind of changes in their environment, but they are also incredibly good at adapting to their surroundings, you can cut off a piece of the plant, and they still grow, they can move towards the sound of water and towards light. (Mancuso,2018) They are amazing beings, but it seems as if they existed in a completely different world than humans.

Pretty soon after starting my journey, I realized how I was concentrating on the wrong things, I focused too much on my own physical perspective of intimacy. I wanted to touch the plants while at the same time being aware that some plants stop growing if you touch them.

I also focused on sounds, so I played YouTube videos of water running since plants tend to grow better to the sound of water, I focused on visual stimulation by playing porn videos for them, both of me masturbating and free porn online. Still wondering if they really did enjoy all these things, and above all did they enjoy these things with me? Pretty soon realizing that I wasn't really connecting with them since I concentrated too much on my own perspective.

At some point I started to wonder if there could be another way for us to connect as likeminded creatures, somehow being a physical lump of flesh just seemed to hinder our journey to intimacy. It's hard to connect beyond my body because it feels like it is such a trivial part of the human experience.

I soon found myself daydreaming about ways to be more like a plant or at least ways to get on the same level and meditation came to mind. Since plants are static creatures, it reminded me of meditation. I started to think that maybe there is a possible third dimension where we could meet and maybe be sensual together with a common language? Perhaps I should incorporate this aspect in my art as well. Perhaps I should use imagination as a key component in my study. Not to think so rational and logical and instead see this is an opportunity to explore together.

This is obviously nothing new, many religions and indigenous cultures have always known the magic behind plants and known how to live in a symbiotic relationship with nature. And as a white cis woman living in a capitalist society, I feel like it is important to acknowledge my own privilege and lack of knowledge within this specific area. While also understanding that my positions in society also affects how I view my surrounding environment and, in this case, my relationship to nature and plants.

After accepting my limited understanding, I started to focus more on the actual artwork rather than desperately trying to connect with my baby plants. The more I accepted and the more I gave into the process instead of forcing the relationship, I started to see the world in an entirely different way, I felt it in my soul, not just on an intellectual level but on a spiritual level, that the trees I pass by every day when I go to school, the growing plants in my studio, we are the same. Suddenly being friends, lovers, relatives, kin felt obvious to me. Is this sensual? To me it felt sensual.

I think what I finally understood was to enjoy the plants company and continue to find ways to connect despite our differences. The plants in my studio seem to thrive when I tried to build a relationship with them on their terms. And I feel like the most intimate moments was the simple ones, like being in the same space with each other, listening to water running, meditating, or making the video together. Even the simplest things like touching soil, watering the plants felt intimate and holy to me.

2.1 The artistic process

The actual making of my video was inspired by likeminded artists like Annie Sprinkle and the artbook *Sex ecologies*. Sprinkle is a former sexworker that mostly does art about eco sexuality, her piece “25 ways to make love to the earth” was especially a big source of inspiration.

The book *Sex ecologies* consist of art and texts that explore subject surrounding sex, gender, queerness and ecology.

I also combined my own interest in porn aesthetic and the plants inner world as a source of fuel for my project. I wanted to combine these two to make it easier for me to approach such an alien concept as “plant intimacy”.

In my video I also decided to concentrate on things that could be both pleasurable for the plant and the human, for example I chose to use the sound of running water as the soundtrack for my pornvideo, since the sound is soothing for humans and make plants grow better.

In other sections of the video, I tried to concentrate on aspects that make us alike, like the fact that we both crave and are made of water.

This thesis project is a reflection of my research journey into this subject and I will most likely come back to this and make a better version of this video.



Picture 3. Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, 2019, 25 ways to make love to the earth, digital poster. Design: Hoshi Hana. Courtesy of the artists.

3 PLANTS AND INTIMACY

When I was a kid, I used to have a favourite tree at our dad's summer house. A big birch tree in the middle of a field. I remember feeling like it was my sanctuary, a place where I could hide from the world and where the only creatures that existed was me and this magnificent tree. I used to climb as high as I could while telling it stories. I used to kiss it too, every time I came to visit it. The slightly odd thing I used to do, was I used to hump the tree as well. Perhaps a reflection of a growing sexual curiosity.

In fact, I used to hump a lot of things as a kid, teddy bears mostly, but the tree, that was special.

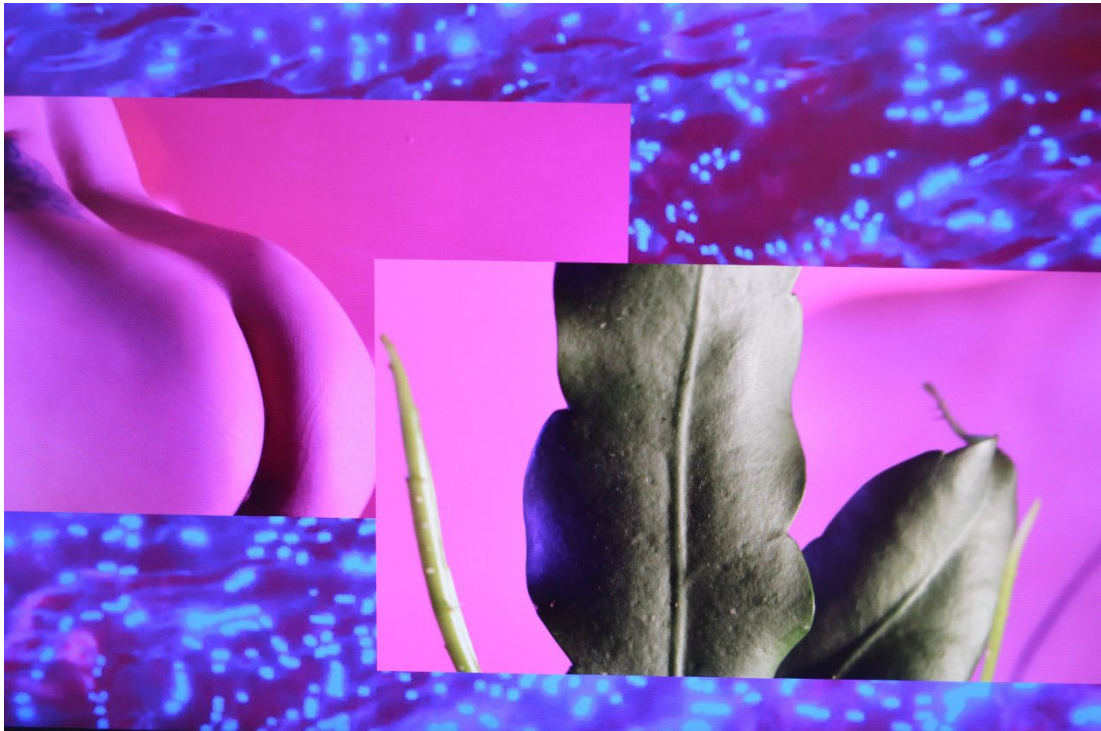
I look at this memory as celebration of people's curious nature, something many of us lose when we get older. We seem to have a much more open mindset as children. We find kinship in everything around us, nature, dolls, or imaginary friends. Our imagination seems limitless as well as our love.

This memory came to mind when I started researching about plants and intimacy. It gave me the hope to believe that there might be an innate desire for each other no matter how different we seem.

So, with that in my mind, I'm going to study pleasure and intimacy as a way of connecting with plants, not only on a personal level way but also in a bigger picture. I wonder if pleasure could be used as a gateway to understand each other in a global perspective. In a world that is on fire and drowning in plastic, is pleasure enough of a motivator to find our way back to plants, nature, and the environment.

Although it might seem like plant and human intimacy seems weird and alien to us, they are very crucial component to all things on this planet.

Plants provide oxygen for us, they give us food, medicine, fibre, and material for our homes (Elton, S, 2021) Not to mention how good they are for our mental health as well, the feeling we get when we are in nature, or how therapeutic and freeing it feels to grow plants.



Picture 1. Detail from my thesis artwork PLANT PLAY, 2023

3.1 Interspecies love

Since it might be a far fetch to convince the reader o start humping trees or watch porn together with your houseplant, I want to give examples of interspecies relationships that already exist as a way of giving you another perspective on this theme, perhaps its more comfortable to imagine feeling empathy and love for a tree or a flower if other species already exhibits longing for each other.

Kinship between species is something we are very familiar with, humans and dogs or plants and insects for instance. These are relationship that are built

upon a mutual understanding for each other. A great example is humans domesticating cats to get rid of vermin.

However, the most fascinating relationships that can be found are the ones with a sexual nature, for example snow monkeys and the sika deer in Minoo, Osaka prefecture, where the female monkeys grind their genitals against the deer's backs. Other examples are the male bottlenose dolphin that lived in the French Atlantic, who seemed to enjoy interacting with humans even in a sexual way (Hessler, S, 2021 s.)

In addition, there is also examples of animals having sex for pleasure like bonobos and long nosed fruit bats that have been found to enjoy oral sex.

It's clear that there is pleasure in nature as well. And creatures wanting each other no matter if they are the same or not.

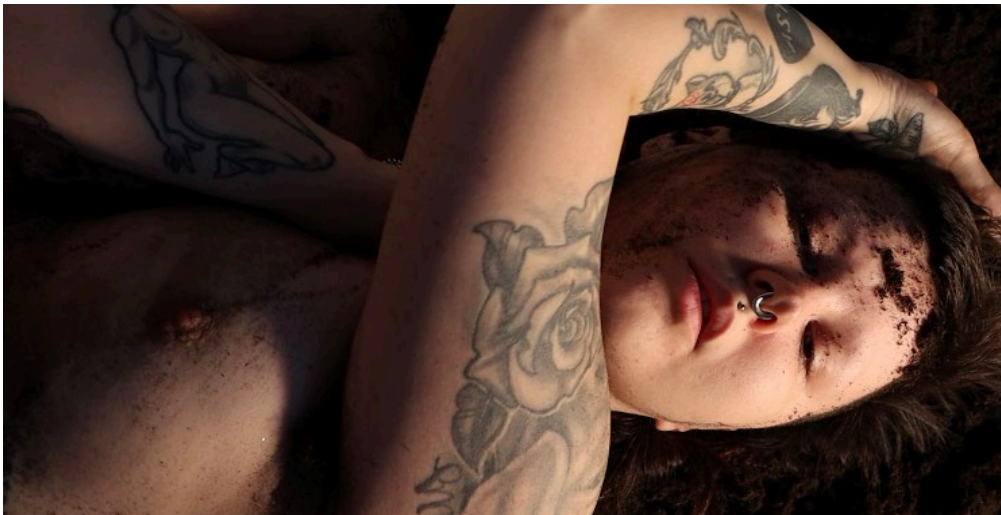
Even the plant insect relationship can be seen as a sensual one, the orchid pollination process is a good example, where the orchid gets the bee aroused by its scent, and as an exchange the bee collects the pollen to spread. (Hustak, & Myers, 2012) The more mysterious partnership, at least seen through the perspective of the western culture is the plant and the human. Many indigenous and pagan cultures are known for showing respect and kinship towards plants.

Many Indigenous cultures believe that plants are equals, and some see everything in nature as being related to each other, we all come from the same mother and father, and some even see plants as smarter than humans.

In Amazonia, women of the Schuar refers to the plants as their children, they don't see them as ancestors but rather creatures that share the same living area. Another example is in the Bella Coola natives of northern America that tell stories about a time when trees and humans could talk to each other, and although they don't speak the same language anymore the trees still understand humans. (Hall, M, 2011)

For me this just proves that there has and always will be a desire for kinship between species, but somehow along the way we just lost our ability to see each other as equals. It wasn't that long ago when it was thought that animals

didn't have feelings and were less intelligent beings. Since then, it has been scientifically proven that many animals show traits that indicate that they are intelligent. For example, orcas, chimpanzees, dogs, elephants, and dolphins have been proven to be self-aware creatures (Bradshaw, G.A. 2017, s.84) Just because science hasn't gotten the plant pleasure yet doesn't mean it doesn't exist.



Picture 2. Detail from my thesis artwork PLANT PLAY, 2023

4 PLANT INTELLIGENCE

As already mentioned, the western world has a very limited view of plants as equals, and it is seen in our history and in the stories, we tell, for example seen in the bible where Noah didn't even consider taking plants to the arc, and witches being burned at the stake for using plants as medicine. Even Darwin studied them but that is never mentioned when we talk about him. We need plants to live and still we don't seem to grasp how every single aspect of our lives are dependent.

Although plants have been on this planet for three and a half billion years and they take up most of the space on our planet, it still seems like we can't see

them. We treat them as if they were the decorative symbols on our wallpapers, or like the trash that we buy to fill a void inside of us to then be forgotten forever. It's strange how beings so crucial to our existence are so neglected by humans.

Plants operate in an entirely different way than us, when we move, they stay still which means they must find other strategies to survive and defend themselves. They can help each other, move to reach food, they can even lure animals and trick insects into doing what they want (Mancuso, 2015)

Who would have thought that your plant could have similar traits as your own manipulative father or narcissistic boss? Makes you wonder if we are that different after all

4.1 Plants and their many senses

When I started to read about the plant world it totally blew my mind. And although they don't have organs or visible eyes or ears, they can still perceive the world just like us. In fact, they operate in ways that suggests that they are intelligent beings. In addition, plants can see, smell, taste, touch, hear and has fifteen other senses, which I already think is a sign of them being more evolved than us. In this section of my thesis, I'm going to list all the senses the plants exude to give an understanding of how complex and amazing they are.

Plants do not have eyes, but they can perceive light, and they can even perceive more than the human eye. Plants also grow towards the light; they even compete for the light if two plants are next to each other which is a clear indicator of intelligence since the plant must decide whether to grow and get more sunlight while at the risk of losing to the neighbouring plant.

Plants can also smell. Plants use smell to communicate with other plants and insects for example by communicate warnings of danger, stress, repulsion and even attraction.

Plants can taste. They use their roots to taste, and their palate is far more defined than that of an animal. The plants roots grow according to the minerals and nutrients in the soil and then absorb them.

Plants are sensitive to touch as well, for example the plant *Mimosa Pudica*, that closes its petals when they are put through movement, but they can also adapt to the movement and not close its petals when they know they are in a safe environment. There are also plants that close when they are pollinated by insects, trapping them and then letting them free once the pollinating is done. Also, the roots of the plants can sense touch underground and then grow according to that.

Plants can also hear or in other words sense the vibration of sound, just like a snake or a mole. It's even been tested how music (or rather the vibration of the sound frequency) affects the growth and ripening of grapes, which is amazing to be honest. Also, the plant roots can produce sound, probably to communicate amongst each other.

They can also measure humidity and sense where they can find water in the soil, they can sense gravity and electromagnetic fields, they can measure chemical gradients in the air and in the ground. They can also depollute soil and water. (Mancuso, 2018) All of this just proves to me that plants are very similar to other life forms and therefore I truly feel that they are magical and amazing creatures.

5 PLEASURE AND PORN

I've always been fascinated with things that are taboo, things like sexuality and porn for instance. So, it makes sense that I chose to study the plant human relationship through a subject that fascinates me.

Putting pleasure to the forefront makes us value ourselves and others, makes us ask for what we need and want. This is why I see this as an important part in a larger sense. That's why pleasure is important since it makes us value what is in front of us which is nature, other beings, and the planet. If we see species around us as the same as our self, we see the world around us in an entirely different way. (Lorde, A, 1981)

The important part that I wanted to take inspiration from was the fantasy aspect, of porn and pleasure, since I noticed that only viewing my work through a scientific lens limited the potential outcome of the relationship.

The Porn inspiration gave me freedom to keep an open mind, explore my own body in relation to the plant, explore bodily fluids and holes as a source of nutrition for the plant and as a reference to porn, play with soil and connect with it, explore mutual interests and above all find ways to connect to each other.

However, with porn also comes the darker aspects, the questions about objectification, gender roles, the unrealistic view of sex and intimacy and an industry that has been labelled exploitative.

I didn't process these negative connotations until my project was in its finishing stages. I knew I had more power in this dynamic (or at least I think I have the upper hand), I was bigger, I could move, and I was the one in charge of the narrative. If anything, I had created something that reflects my own inner world, so if there are any dark corners in my mind, any unprocessed toxic influences, they are bound to come out and impact my art and my thoughts.

So, without a doubt there could be signs of ignorance, objectification, lack of information in my artwork. But at the same time, I know in my heart that my intentions originated from a place of curiosity and love for the plants. and I accept the fact that it might not have translated perfectly. As a flawed human, everything we create has stain of dirt on it. I accept and celebrate that aspect.



Picture 4. Detail from thesis video PLANT PLAY 2023

6 CONCLUSION

I remember one performance lecture I attended at school where our assignment was to dance with the trees. I remember feeling so stupid. How could I dance outside while people are looking at me, everyone will think I'm crazy, like I'm a hippie or something.

But since my ego was bigger than my fears, I tried my best to ignore the bad thoughts. And once let all my other prejudice sip out of my body and I gave in to the tree in front of me, I felt this calm energy flow into me, like I was able to connect my body to the tree, almost like connecting your phone to Wi-Fi.

This process has kind of been like that interaction, it's been like waking up from an ignorant slumber, like suddenly noticing something you haven't noticed before, it's been a learning experience, a growing experience, like being born as a worm and then turning into a butterfly.

I think this goes to show that if we were more invested in our surrounding and if we would find the capacity to be curious and loving towards nature it would benefit humans, nature, and the planet. I think if everyone had the capacity to and resources to explore this relationship the world would look different.

The harder part of this mystical experience was to conclude how a sensual partnership would look like between a human and a plant, and frankly I don't think I got all the answers I was looking for. But what I did find, was another way to look at intimacy and pleasure. Perhaps by simply nurturing each other we are being intimate and sensual, maybe touching the ground, hugging a tree, or even kissing a tree isn't the only path to a sensual connection. But perhaps most importantly it's about the energy we put out that defines the relationship. Maybe it's more of a spiritual intimacy that can be established between a human and a plant, rather than a physical one.

I also feel like the plant already knows how to be loving, nurturing and a sensual since they are that by default, they give so much by simply existing. Maybe

humans need to be the ones that learn from the plants. Maybe it is time we listened to nature instead.

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