

Coffee in Contemporary Puerto Rican Artworks:

Materialism in the Age of Anthropogenic Climate Change

Fall 2020
Summer Scholars
Program



Central argument

Coffee—from cultivation to consumption—can be characterized by **labor, colonization** and **cultural identity**. These connections situate coffee as a rich ally for putting *social, political* and *economic forces* into focus in the material world.

When used as matter for *making art* and allowed the **agency** to carry out its own life as a material, coffee and its human-driven contexts become entangled in greater *ecological forces*. We are invited to de-center humankind and see the **nonhuman** as our **allies**, for the world to remain in balance.

Materiality

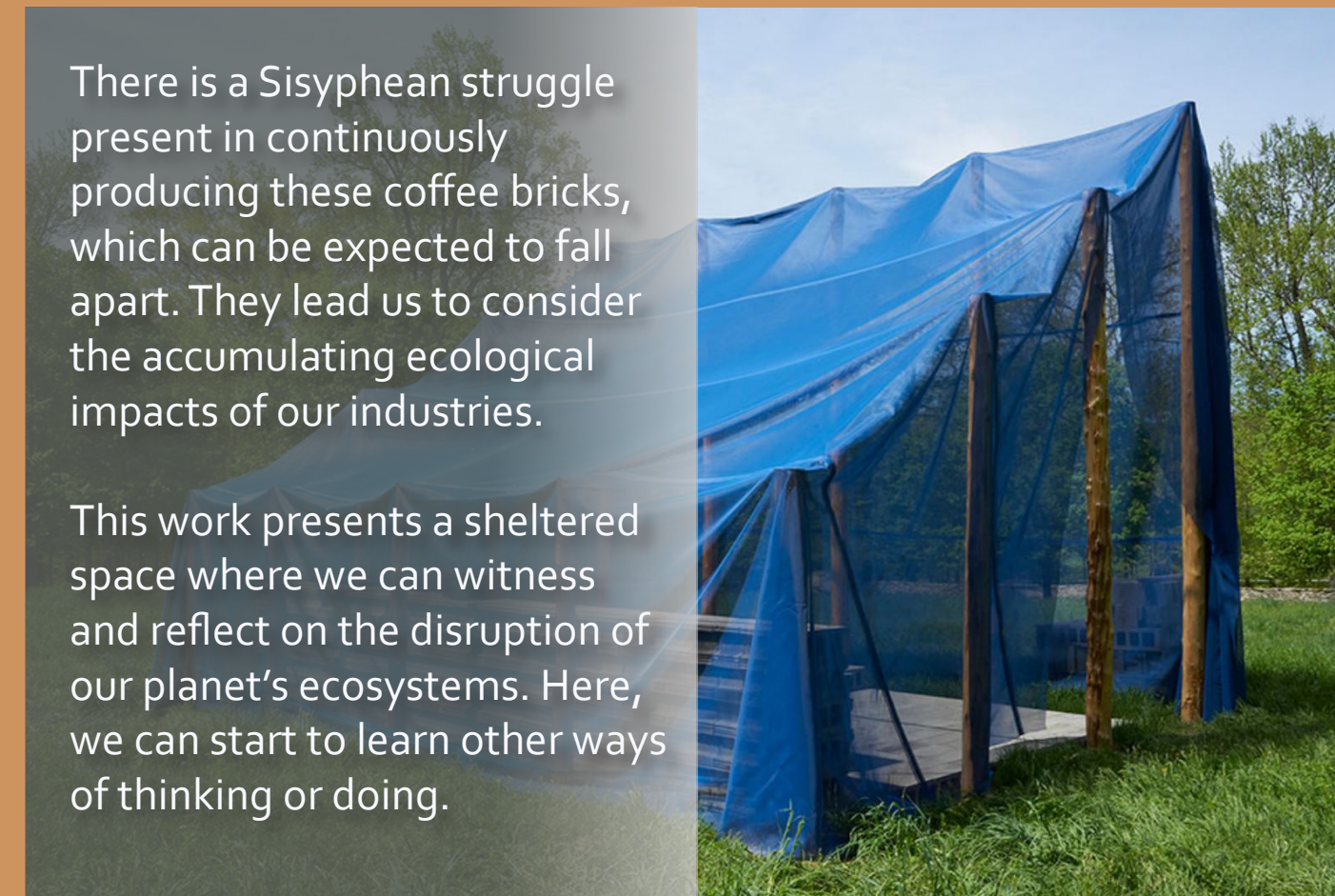
The material world has historically been seen as stagnant matter that is awaiting human activation, but is it really such a one-sided relationship? While modern science can see that all life is connected, our greater society remains human-centered. As wild fires rage and hurricanes intensify, we have no choice but to learn how to think in a way that is inclusive of all entities. We must see the material as our ally if this world is going to flourish.

Can food in art, prone to deteriorating and changing in a timespan that we can easily comprehend, help us see how the materials of the world are changing—many with dire impacts—due to our activities? If we can follow (rather than seek to dominate) this matter-flow of the world, we may just be led towards a truly global sense of ecological justice for all.



Gabriela Salazar

My Lands are Islands, 2015



Jan Henle

Matters in Shelter (and Place, Puerto Rico), 2018



La Jibarita I, 1991-92 (bottom left) & *Living on Love IV; Con el Mismo Amor series, 1999-2007* (top: final, bottom right: process)

Ecologically-engaged artworks

Contemporary ecologically-engaged artworks are thinking outside of the enforced narratives of disaster capitalism that brought us to this age of human-caused climate change, and are following the materials to allow an out-of-balance world to push back. These artworks might model possibilities for how our species could anticipate, or even accept, its eventual displacement or disappearance. Likewise, they can hint at how it feels to bear witness to the dawning awareness of our own decline.

Michaela Morse

Silvia Bottinelli,
Principal Advisor



My ritual of brewing coffee, tea or yerba mate daily, and now saving the remains of those moments, has become a response to the climate crisis. Consuming a warm beverage is an act of selfcare in the face of so much devastation. Drying the drink matter back out becomes an effort to acknowledge these materials, and they way they are in the world right now. These memories are accumulating into a monument as the future becomes ever more uncertain.

My dried hot drinks, 2019-ongoing