

“La Natura es un templo de vividos pilares donde a veces se escuchan las confusas palabras y el hombre se encamina por florestas de simbolos que lo observan despacio con ojos familiares.”

- Correspondencias - Charles Baudelaire

“Nature is a temple in which living columns sometimes emit confused words. Man approaches it through forests of symbols, which observe him with familiar glances. Nature’s music is never over; her silences are pauses, not conclusions.” – Correspondences, Charles Baudelaire

NILS-UDO

Pathways

Senderos

Ana Serratosa Gallery
Valencia, Spain

- John K. Grande

Looking at one of John Constable’s sketchbooks, and seeing one of his drawings of a fir tree on Hampstead Heath, the poet William Blake exclaimed, “Why, this is not a drawing, but inspiration.”¹ Artists, in each and every way, embody a spirit of transformation through their art work, and trees embody a process of transformation, for their lives, like ours, are temporary, ephemeral, but contribute to a living ecosystem that

when cared for, generates a healthy environment

A love of the land inspires the structures NILS-UDO assembles using a vernacular language of living elements. Our relation to unrecorded holistic history, agriculture, the wilderness and the culture of nature come together. This show at Ana Serratosa Gallery provides a rare opportunity to encounter NILS-UDO's art produced in immediate response to environments on the island of Lanzarote, Spain, the Ile de la Reunion, in Germany, in the deserts of Namibia and in France. Nils-Udo "uncontains" nature when he presents an ephemeral assemblage work *in situ*. His installations are merely a pretext for heightening our awareness of nature itself. They offer a window into our contextual and ever so real dialogue with nature.

Nils-Udo belongs to that first generation of 1960s artists that include Andy Goldsworthy, David Nash and Richard Long who worked with nature in Europe. Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) established a new way of perceiving the artist's role. From his first "plantings" in Bavaria where he would lease land from farmers to plant artworks, NILS-UDO has been engaged with using materials from nature as an artist. Nature conceives the art, and NILS-UDO steps in as a kind of medium to engage. Less aggressive, more passive, the artist/ interpreter moves in a landscape. NILS-UDO seeks to unify culture with nature. more a way of seeing, with nature as co-

participant. Still earlier on, Edvard Munch presented scenes where inner and outer worlds merged, with humans as part of a landscape – a kind of psychic world vision. Munch's *The Sun* (1910-13) on unprimed canvas is a powerful expression of nature's place in our lives.

NILS-UDO brings nature's place into our lives, just as much as Munch once did. He now does it in a world transformed by human activity and intervention. There are still places on this earth where we discover the magic and mystery of nature's life force. As NILS-UDO says, "Nature is still complete and inexhaustible in her most remote refuges, her magic still real. At any time, meaning any season, in all weathers, in things great and small. Always. Potential utopias are under every stone, on every leaf and behind every tree, in the clouds and in the wind. Pitting poetry against the inhuman river of time."2 Most recently, with the recent Habitat series of sculptures that were integrated at RUINART vineyards to encourage sustainability and break down the monocultural monotony of the standard vineyard, NILS-UDO brought biodiversity to a spectacular historical vineyard in Reims.

From one of his first installations *Homage to Gustav*

Mahler (1973) in Chiemgau, Germany, NILS-UDO travelled the world producing ephemeral art pieces. He often uses live vegetation as a medium, to create assemblage patterns and organic arrays, designing art with and in nature. Nils-Udo sees no apparent contradiction between designing nature and design in nature because his works reflect a conscious desire to merge with, rather than stand out from, the surrounding context. By highlighting nature's presence, NILS-UDO's landscape montages make us all the more aware of our place in relation to nature. His art reminds us of the fragile balance between human activity and nature. Just as Claude Monet painted nature and brought it all to life with light and colour, so Nils-Udo's art paints with nature.

Nature assemblage art is every bit as ingenious as *Arte Povera's* installations using industrial and manufactured refuse. The difference is that, in the words of the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss,

"Nature is so much richer than culture; one very quickly exhausts the range of manufactured products as compared with the fantastic diversity of the animal, vegetal and mineral worlds ... in short, the novel character of the 'readymade' presents a kind of last resort, before the return to the main source."3

Wood Window (2018) presents a point of entry or window into nature - the subject, the object and the image exist with no distance between... Here is nature with all its complexity and beauty. The image is a personification of interactivity in the theatre of nature. The artist is a medium, a translator, who intervenes in an incredibly diverse ecosystem presenting a connectivity to this earth...

In this sense. NILS-UDO's art and photography represents a discovery, an exploration within nature. The artist in microcosm creates within nature's realm which is full of change just as art is.

To bring nature to our attention NILS-UDO creates works that are nature works of art. He is a witness to nature. The passages in his art are testament to being a witness to nature's flow processes we are a part of.

A vista of volcanic Padhoehoe lava enables a set-up of flower petals called "tongues of fire" on the Ile de la Reunion in 1990. NILS-UDO follows the line of this crack or fissure into the distance. He embroiders his aesthetic on the earth's surface in a very human way. Eco-design in the earth. Nature is with time, through time, outside time, in time, constant to all human history, memory and life. Nature is an ephemeral and eternal theatre we are a part of. The drama we sense in the juxtaposition of art with nature is due to its physical, actual presence. Images of art or nature can never replace a living mix of culture and ecology.

Life becomes a living museum. The artist is the conduit. The artist is the catalyst and the connector

of these contextual energies. Art and nature involve the reintegration of human culture and life with the ecosystems we all depend upon for our survival. The immediate environment, the physics of materials and the cycle of life all play a role in nature art. Sustainability has helped in the evolution of art in ecology.

NILS-UDO establishes connections between living environments and his presence therein. NILS-UDO's photoworks as much as his installations in nature have their essence, and exist as art independent of the outdoor installations. The way NILS-UDO captures each work within an environment is as unique for the way it is conceived as the original installation is. Art is a pretext for heightening our awareness of the physical natural world. One such In another photowork based on an installation in Upper Bavaria in 1978 *Fallen Spruce Tree* has a line of yellow maple leaves that extend into the distance in a body of water. The lake reflects

the surrounding trees and sky above. **NILS-UDO presents a mirror of origin to us all.** This mirror in nature itself, with the artist leaving traces.

Sand dune, pampa grass (2000) becomes a set up in the Namibian desert. In Africa. Drawing the form with pampa grass the event of this artwork follows the natural curvature of a sand dune. Elements were brought in in a refrigerated truck and introduced into this scene out of a natural context. As installation, objects are recontextualized and reassembled to become a window into the artist's imagination.

A triptych of photo images titled *Brookbed* made with bondweed blossoms on the Ile de la Reunion (1990) presents a time sequence of change. The patterns, natural forms and the way NILS-UDO structures the colourful blossoms into the surrounds tells a story of human interaction within a microcosm of nature. Each photo has these blossoms in sequence but changing. The piece becomes a story about time's passages and subtle

change in nature. Regarding his interventionist approach to art, NILS-Udo says, "Turning nature into art? Where is the critical dividing line between nature and art? This does not interest me. What counts for me is that my actions, Utopia-like, fuse life and art into each other. Art does not interest me. My life interests me. My reactions to events that shape my existence."⁴

A circular arrangement of palm stalks assembled in the elements, has the feeling of a great dance that celebrates the great vista sea and sky that meet and the artist's humble celebration of life. For NILS-UDO's art exists within an ever-changing natural ecosystem, indeed the art is in a world that itself is like an immense work of art. Chaos and order co-exist next to the artist's sometimes ephemeral, sometimes permanent contributions. We are brief candles amid the wind and elements.

At Sylt in the North Sea of Germany, *Reeds, Blades of Grass, Rose Petals* (1986) ferns supported by birch branches, are adorned with pine needles and embroidered with wild sweet briar rose petals build into a nature design piece made of and with nature. As whimsical and ephemeral as the wind there is a symbolic essence to the way NILS-UDO draws with elements in surrounding space. Brief and all-encompassing, such works remind us of our connectivity to nature the source of all life and our lives.

Water is the source, what ensures our survival on this planet, and embodies all life forms. In *Waterhouse* (1982) created in Cuxhaven in 1982 a symbolic house stands on spruce trunks, with birch branches and willow stitching, a patch of grass atop. For this work, part of a staged series whose theme is the tides, the house is built on water. The natural surrounds and space are part of the art, hence bringing a life energy to the whole piece. Nature is the constant backdrop,

the filter, the epigram, and a living dynamic NILS-Udo interacts with.

Nature is our bank. Nature is the very foundation of the well-being and for all species on this planet.

Signs of life abound... Nature is the window and the elaborate intricacy of her intertwined processes is evident. Energy.

Footnotes

1. C. R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, London; Phaidon, 1995, pp. 233-234
2. *Art & Design Magazine* (Art & Design Profile No. 36), "Art and the Natural Environment", 1994, p. 59
3. G. Charbonnier (ed.), *Conversations with Claude Levi-Strauss* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 99
4. NILS-UDO, *Art & Design Magazine* (No. 36), "Art and the Natural Environment", 1994, p. 59

John K. Grande's writings have appeared in *Artforum*, *Artlyst*, *Vice Versa*, *Art Papers*, *British Journal of Photography*, *Burlington Magazine*, *Lensculture*, *Interalia*, *ARTE ES*, *Espace*, *Border Crossings*, *Public Art Review* and *Landscape Architecture*.

He has published numerous books and catalogues, notably *Kunst, Raum, Natur*. (J.S. Klotz Verlagshaus, 2022), *World Walks* (Go If, Montreal, 2021) *Art Space Ecology; Two Views Twenty Interviews* (Black Rose Books, University of Chicago, 2019), and *Dialogues in Diversity* (Pari Publishing, Pari. Italie, 2007), *Balance: Art and Nature* (Black Rose Books, University of Chicago, 2004), *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (SUNY Press, N.Y., Etats Unis 2004), and *Art, nature et société* (Éditions Écosociété, Montréal, 1997. In 2015, he received Doctor Honoris Causa from Pécs University in Hungary. John K. Grande is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, FRSA. www.johnkgrande.com.

