

# Umbigo

This is my body in excitement.  
This is my body in harmony.  
This is my body in humaneness.  
This is my body in peace.  
This is my body in correlation.  
This is my body in safety.  
This is my body in transition.  
This is my body in fullness.  
This is my body in inner transformation.  
This is my psychoanalytic body.  
This is my changeable body.  
This is my expanded body.  
This is my free body.  
This is my ready body.  
This is my victorious body.  
This is my whole body.  
This is my generating body.  
This is my intuitive body.  
This is my loved body.  
This is my fitted body.  
This is my body in love.  
This is my body in exchange.  
This is my body in the mirror.  
This is my body in solidarity.  
This is my body in repetition.  
This is my body in confidence.  
This is my body in affirmation.

**VASCO**  
**ARAÚJO**  
**ART PROJECT**  
  
**CHUS**  
**MARTÍNEZ**  
**MUTUALITY**



MU-  
TUAL-  
ITY

Both my grandfathers were convinced – as am I – that they were able to talk to animals. They were too poor to be farmers and, at that time, unlike today, the fields around our village in the northwest coast of Spain, in Galicia, were very expensive to own. My grandfather on my mother's side bought a cow with the money he earned in Switzerland working as a carpenter and he did alterations on the ground floor of our family house so that the kitchen and the cow barn would be facing each other. He installed a window in the barn and made an open kitchen – "in a very modern gesture" – as he put it. My grandfather on my father's side was a handyman in the village. Without land of his own, he worked day jobs all his life. He knew the sea so well that just by the smell of salt in the morning he could predict the weather. He often walked out in the middle of the night to go see what the tides, current or waves were doing. He was a man of very few words, but he insisted to his children how he was able to talk to the fishes. He said he had long conversations with the conger eels. Those conversations were had staring down each other for the longest time. There was a particular spot on the coast, around the cape by our village with a humble – by Caribbean standards – but immensely beautiful coral reef where the conger eels loved to swim. He sat there for hours with the family dog "o Key". I never knew why the dog was called this, but for sure, he was a very okay dog. They both would contemplate the water for hours on end, falling into a trance beyond even the greatest meditation masters. Apparently, a conger eel would meet him regularly and tell him all about the seas.

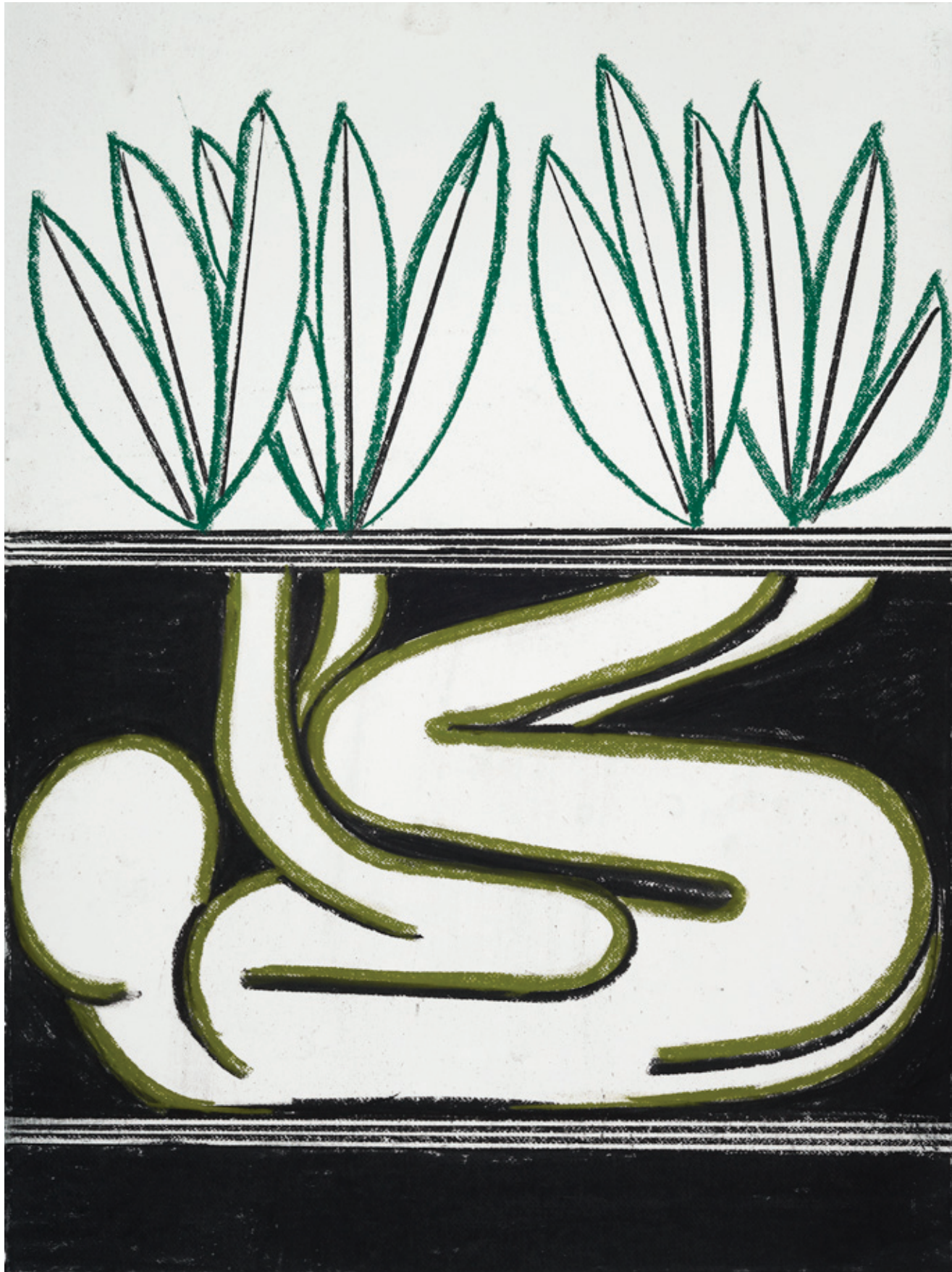
Back then no one in the family or in the village thought that there was something strange or extraordinary about this man. Today he would be considered a true local expert about this difficult coast or even a marine biologist *avant-la-lettre*.

When I got to university, I became a vehement critic of the merest hint of spirituality or mysticism. I proposed a seminar "against" Suzi Gablik. She was the author of a book – a wonderful book – called *The Reenchantment of Art*, published around 1994. My seminar, which my male teachers were so happy to champion I should had been more suspicious, argued that: "The near-absence of religion from contemporary discourse on art is a fundamental trait in postmodernism. Artists critical of religion can find voices in the art world, but religion itself, including spirituality, is taken to be excluded by the very project of modernism. The sublime, 're-enchantment' (as in Weber), and the aura (as in Benjamin) have been used to smuggle religious concepts back into academic writing, and now the world of art is divided between 'religionists' and scholars."

I was – of course – a scholar.

However, my own physical and rational reaction left me with a doubt, one that has persisted and made me wonder if it was religion that those who I called "religionists" wanted back or simply *mutuality*. And it has been a long and arduous journey through notions, ideas, scenarios and, most of all, exchange with artists that has allowed me to get a sense of the emergence of a world full of interactions, or inter-species pedagogies. I am very happy and honoured to have learned all I know through the work of artists – some of them featured in this beautiful issue – the many ways we can and should talk to the plants, the eels, to the wind, the rocks and seas... And how this conversation should be the one nourishing technology and future notions of artificial intelligence.

Yes, I do believe that – as always – art has shown us the path towards reconnecting with life.





Eduardo Navarro, from the series *Photosynthetics*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and La Casa Encendida, Madrid



Heather Phillipson, from the exhibition *Rupture No. 1: Blowtorching the bitten peach*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist