

A ARTE DOS COGUMELOS

Editado por / edited by: FRANCESCA GAVIN

THE ART OF MUSHROOMS



INTRODUCTION

HELENA FREITAS
DIRECTOR OF THE SERRALVES PARK

Fungi play an important role in ecosystems, particularly as decomposers and in their relationships with other organisms. Together with bacteria, fungi are the biosphere's principal decomposers, being responsible for decomposing cellulose and lignin, the main constituents of the vegetal cellular wall. In the forest, fungi are responsible for decomposing fallen trees and promoting nutrient recycling and soil enrichment.

Almost all the trees in the forest establish associations with the soil's fungal filaments (hyphae) called ectomycorrhiza. These associations, from which both participants benefit, are very efficient: trees receive the soil's mineral nutrients from the fungi and in turn supply the fungi with photosynthesized carbon compounds. Mycorrhizal fungi might also help the plant to mitigate the negative effects of drought, heavy metal contamination or the activity of pathogenic organisms in the soil.

Mushrooms, or the fruiting bodies of some fungi, are increasingly sought for human consumption. Out of the huge variety of mushrooms in Portugal, including saprophytes, parasites and mutualists, the latter are the most prized and the most sought. Unfortunately, these mushrooms are often carelessly collected, which damages the ecosystems. In fact, the lack of knowledge about the biology and ecology of edible wild mushrooms may in the medium/long term compromise the use of this valuable resource.

When it comes to fungi, science has a long cataloguing work ahead. Recent numbers tell of around 148.000 species and over 90% of species are still unknown, i.e., there may be between 2.2 to 3.8 million species on Earth. The main reason behind our sparse knowledge of fungi is due to their life cycles, which are not always easy to interpret. While almost all plants are visible above ground, fungi often remain hidden.

The study of fungi is mostly based on their reproductive structures, including the mushrooms seen above ground, and many species only reproduce at certain times of the year. Indeed, some species do not even produce them every year, while others do not produce them at all.

The species of fungi that we know best are those that produce mushrooms; those that do not produce these visible reproductive structures are the least known by science.

Urban environments offer a surprising variety of habitats, and the conservation of biodiversity in these expanding human contexts is both a challenge and a responsibility. With this first, large-scale exhibition promoted by the Serralves Park, our aim is to approach the importance of fungi not so much from the biological perspective, but from an intersection of different gazes, in particular those of science and the arts. We believe that this interdisciplinary aesthetics can inspire the new times, which call for a growing harmony between people and nature.

THE ART OF MUSHROOMS

FRANCESCA GAVIN

Art and science seemed to diverge as disciplines in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both presented alternative ways of examining the world and its phenomena. Science took the route of the empirical, while art veered towards philosophy. Yet, increasingly, the lines between these areas of interest feel old fashioned and reductive. Fungi are a topic that has spread across culture and science, blurring any boundaries of separation. The scientific and economic view of natural organisms is changing. The late Ursula K. Le Guin in her 2014 lecture, "Deep in Admiration", suggested that art, poetry, and visual culture could help rethink how we perceive nature. As she wrote, "one way to stop seeing trees, or rivers, or hills, only as 'natural resources' is to class them as fellow beings – kinfolk."¹

In recent years, artists working with painting, photography, collage, sculpture, digital and other media have demonstrated a tsunami of interest in the humble mushroom. Their work has unpicked the anthropocentric view of the nature world. Instead, their imagery and projects demonstrate how art and science, nature and humanity exist together. The aim of *The Art of Mushrooms* is to address the following questions: Why are artists and designers so drawn to mushrooms and mycelium? Why are fungi so important to human culture?

Mushrooms have become the metaphor of the now. They are central to a cultural revolution in philosophy and art. Due to new discoveries in science, following DNA testing developing over past decade, fungi have become a catalyst for understanding the human relationship to nature. Mushrooms are being used to present new models of contemporary art, politics, technology, economics and design. This catalogue – an extension of the exhibition *The Art of Mushrooms* at the Serralves Foundation – includes photography, painting, sculpture, collage, digital animation and film. The artists brought together here are demonstrating how fungi is inspiring artwork and ideas that are equally poetic, psychedelic, political, colourful, inventive and informative.

Much of the artwork about fungi focuses on fruiting bodies, the familiar mushrooms that emerge from the hidden mycelium that exist in soil or trees. We have a shockingly small knowledge of fungi.

A 2017 estimate suggested that 2.2 and 3.8 million species of fungi, and only 148,000 of these have been described by taxonomists. The mushrooms we know by sight come in a variety of colour, shape and form but are connected by mycelial structures and the ability to disperse spores. A single mushroom can spread 30,000 spores per second.

Fungi are fundamental to all existence. They were the first colonizers of land, enabling soil to exist and thus plant and human life. All ecosystems would fail without mushrooms. Over 80 percent of plant species have a mycorrhizal association in their roots with fungi. Many plants would not be able to absorb water without mycelia. Fungi enable plants and trees to communicate information and share resources, via the so called "wood wide web". The same applies to the human body. Fungi exist in human skin, in our microbiome and help the body to function. We are, arguably, part mushroom. A fungus is neither a plant nor an animal. In fact, they are more closely related to animals and share a common ancestor with the human – emerging as their own genus over 360 million years ago.

Culturally, mushrooms had a bad reputation for centuries – outside of Russia and China which had more developed and knowledge approach. Fungi were connected with decay, death and rot. They were seen as something connected to witchcraft and the supernatural – something exacerbated perhaps by the role of ergot and mushroom poisoning. This shifted in the eighteenth century, with the rise of amateur botany and a wider public interest in the natural world.

During the nineteenth century, mushrooms became a staple in children's fiction such as *Alice in Wonderland*. Lewis Carroll's novel, with its notable scene of a talking caterpillar sitting on a giant mushroom, transformed the public imagination. The idea of mushrooms being linked to the fantastical perhaps originally came for an eighteenth-century travelogue which described Russian shamanic practises including drinking the urine of reindeers who had consumed Fly Agaric fungi. The red and white spot mushroom became a symbol for dreamlike fantasy which continues to this day.

For many artists, mushrooms imagery is strongly rooted in the psychedelic. Fungi were first adopted by the counterculture in 1957, following the publication by R. Gordon Wasson in *LIFE* magazine described an indigenous Mexican mushroom ritual. Mushrooms became intertwined with the discussions around psychedelics in the 1960s and 1970s. Terence McKenna's 1992 book *Food of the Gods* suggested human consciousness and the concept of the divine was connected to the consumption of psychoactive plants. Contemporary artists have been drawn back to these references at the same time as scientists are seriously reconsidering the positive possibilities of psilocybin – the psychoactive element present in some fungi. Universities, such as Monash in Australia and the Imperial College in London, are seriously researching the therapeutic possibilities of psychoactive substances to treat depression, addiction and other mental health issues.

There are other philosophical concepts that research around mushrooms are enabling. Research is proving there is a kind of fungal consciousness. Fungal hyphae show deep sensitivity to their environment, such as heat, and react by changing form and pattern. Mycelia also appear capable of short-term memory and capable of spatial recognition. This new research is completely shifting the idea that human consciousness makes us 'above' the natural world, rather than part of it. Mycelia also present an alternative idea of time – as they keep a physical record of their movements through space. Their past is as active as their present. These kind of discoveries are inspiring many artists towards fungi as a way of addressing the ideas of existence itself.

Under the influence of mycologists like Paul Stamets, there has been an international growth of myco-evangelism. Mushrooms are praised for their positive influence on the health of the human body – being positioned as possible treatments everything from memory loss to cholesterol to cancer. Mycelia is being positioned as an alternative for plastic, for building materials and packaging. Environmentalists are researching plastic-eating fungi and those that consume toxins at oil spills. The ecological crisis hitting the globe is leading to rise of myco-fix solutions. Yet as author and scientist Merlin Sheldrake points out in his fascinating book, *Entangled Life*, fungi are unpredictable and serve their own interests.

I have been curating exhibitions and researching art that depicts fungi for over five years. The shift of interest in the subject has reflected other changes in society. A looking inwards to how the human mind and body functions. A growing ecological panic and desire for environmentally conscious solutions. A movement away from the exploitative capitalist view of the Anthropocene. Fungi have become symbols of the future – existing as a topic in episodes of *Star Trek* or underpinning the structures of bitcoin and the blockchain. Symbiosis is the word many have used to describe mushrooms relationship with other organisms. This sense of balanced sharing says more about how humanity is striving for alternative forms of living in harmony than anything else. For many artists, mushrooms represent utopia.



SOPHIE SERBER

B19i, 2020

Acrílico, guache e cuspe sobre impressão digital com moldura com resina, cereais, Cheerios, cornflakes, Frosted Flakes e Malt Shreddies / *Acrylic, gouache and spit on paper on digital print in glass frame topped with resin, multigrain, Cheerios, cornflakes, Frosted Flakes and Malt Shreddies*

Cortesia da artista e / *Courtesy the artist and Shore Gallery*

STEFAN MARX

Mushrooms in Heaven, 2020

Tinta mono-pigmentada e acrílica sem solventes sobre tela / *Monopigmented, solvent-free acrylic ink on canvas*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

STEFAN MARX

Mushrooms in Heaven, 2020

Tinta mono-pigmentada e acrílica sem solventes sobre tela / *Monopigmented, solvent-free acrylic ink on canvas*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

STEPHAN DOITSCHINOFF

Tree, 2022

Acrílico sobre tela / *Acrylic on canvas*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

SYLVIE FLEURY

Mushroom (BC T 500 Gemini 0006), 2005

Fibra de vidro, tinta de carro metálica/ *Fiberglass, metallic car paint*

Cortesia / *Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, London, Paris, Salzburg, Seoul*

SYLVIE FLEURY

Mushroom UG 888 EC KK11 Red Kandy PRL 89

violet-Red, 2008-11

Fibra de vidro, tinta de carro metálica/

Fiberglass, metallic car paint

Cortesia / *Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, London, Paris, Salzburg, Seoul*

SYLVIE FLEURY

Mushroom UG schwarz Blue-Balls / Gelb Gold

Schoch 201, 2008

Fibra de vidro, tinta de carro metálica/

Fiberglass, metallic car paint

Cortesia / *Courtesy Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, London, Paris, Salzburg, Seoul*

STERLING RUBY

O. ILLUDENS, 2022

Cerâmica / *Ceramic*

Cortesia do artista e / *Courtesy the artist and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels*

TACITA DEAN

FILM, 2011

Filme anamórfico de 35mm a preto e branco com sequências pintadas manualmente, sem som, 11 min, loop contínuo / *35mm colour and black and white portrait format anamorphic film with hand-tinted sequences, silent, 11 min, continuous loop*

Vista de instalação / *Installation view,*

Tate Modern, London

Cortesia da artista e / *Frith Street Gallery,*

London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris

Fotografia / *Photograph:*

Marcus Leith & Andrew Dunkley

TAKASHI HOMMA

Chernobyl #3, 2017

Impressão c-print / *C-type print*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

TAKASHI HOMMA

Mushroom from the Forest #1, 2011

Impressão c-print / *C-type print*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

TAKASHI HOMMA

Mushroom from the Forest #11, 2011

Impressão c-print / *C-type print*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

TAKASHI HOMMA

Stony Point #4, 2018

Impressão c-print / *C-type print*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

THE MYCOLOGICAL TWIST

(ANNE DE BOER & ELOÏSE BONNEVIOT)

5 Amazing Tricks to Get Rid of Perception, 2016

Impressão digital sobre PVC/

Digital print on PVC mesh

Cortesia dos artistas / *Courtesy of the artists*

Fotografia / *Photo: Mark Blower*

TRAVIS BOYER

Secondary Sore, 2020

Tintura sobre veludo de seda sobre painel com moldura do artista / *Dye on silk velvet on panel in artist frame*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

TRAVIS BOYER

The Gangs all Here, 2019

Tintura sobre veludo de seda sobre painel com moldura do artista / *Dye on silk velvet on panel in artist frame*

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

TIM BARBER

Untitled Mushroom, 2008

Impressão a preto e branco /

Black and white photo print

Cortesia do artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

UDO LEFIN

Tempo, 1983/84

Pigmento e verniz sobre tela / *Pigment and lacquer on canvas (2 elementos / elements)*

Coleção privada / *Private collection*

Cortesia / *Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin*

VAL SMETS

Yellow Pages, 2021

Acrílico e barra de óleo sobre tela/

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas

Cortesia da artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

© Val Smets

VAL SMETS

Troublemakers, 2021

Acrílico e barra de óleo sobre tela/

Acrylic and oil stick on canvas

Cortesia da artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

© Val Smets

VIVIANE SASSEN

Amanita Fulva, 2017

Da série / *From the series Of Mud and Lotus*

Cortesia / *Courtesy Viviane Sassen*

and Stevenson

YULIA IOSILZON

A. Muscaria Figure 3, 2021

Óleo sobre tecido transparente/

Oil on transparent fabric

Cortesia da artista / *Courtesy of the artist*

Fotografia / *Photo: Deniz Guzel*

YAYOI KUSAMA

A Mushroom, 2002

Óleo sobre tela / *Oil on canvas*

Cortesia da artista e / *Courtesy the artist,*

Ota Fine Arts and Victoria Miro

© Yayoi Kusama

Curadoria / Curator

Francesca Gavin

Coordenação / Coordination

Marta Tavares

Arquitetura da exposição / Exhibition design

Ana Maio

Conceção / Concept

Francesca Gavin

Coordenação editorial / Managing editor

Maria Burmester

Conceção gráfica / Design

Nuno Maio

Tradução / Translation

Cláudia Gonçalves

Edição / Copy-editing

Marta Silva

Capa / Cover image:

Jonathan Zawada

Swing Prism, 2022

Imagem digital / Digital image

Cortesia do artista / Courtesy of the artist

Pré-impressão, impressão e acabamento / Pre-press, printing and binding
Orgal

ISBN: 978-972-739-407-4

Dépósito legal / Legal deposit: 501315/22

© desta edição / this edition: 2022 Fundação de Serralves, Porto

© das obras, textos, fotografias, traduções: os autores, salvo especificação contrária/
of works, texts, photographs, translations: the authors, unless otherwise mentioned.

Todos os direitos reservados. Esta obra não pode ser reproduzida, no todo ou em parte, por qualquer forma ou quaisquer meios eletrónicos, mecânicos ou outros, incluindo fotocópia, gravação magnética ou qualquer processo de armazenamento ou sistema de recuperação de informação, sem prévia autorização escrita da editora.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be printed or used in any form or by any means, including photocopying and recording, or any information or retrieval systems, without permission in writing of the publisher.

SERRALVES



Fundação de Serralves
Rua D. João de Castro, 210
4150-417 Porto
Portugal
Tel: + 351 22 615 65 00
www.serralves.pt

Adham Faramawy	Emily Mae Smith	MycoLyco
Alex Crocker	Florian Haas	Natasha Lawes
Alex Morrison	Geertje Geertsma	Nicolas Party
Alexander Binder	Ghislaine Leung	Paulina Ołowska
Alonsa Guevara	Graham Little	Pentagram
Amanda Cobbett	Haas Brothers	Perks and Mini
Andrea Pinheiro	Hamish Pearch	Philip Groezinger
Andreas Rüthi	Hannah Collins	Richard Hughes
Angelo Plessas	Haroon Mirza	Sachiko Morita
Annie Ratti	Henry Hudson	Salvatore Arancio
Arik Roper	Ingrid Britta	Sara Hurley
Aviva Silverman	Jeremy Shaw	Sarah Staton
Bella Ormseth	Jo Ratcliffe	Scorpion Dagger
Ben Jeans Houghton	Joep Van Liefland	Seamus Heidenreich
Ben Noam	Johanne Hestvold	Seana Gavin
Bianca Bondi	John Kleckner	Sofia Arez
Blunt Action	Jon Burgerman	Sophie Serber
Brian Degraw	Jon Cowan	Stefan Marx
Carsten Höller	Jonathan Zawada	Stephan Doitschinoff
Cody Hudson	Katherine Bernhardt	Sterling Ruby
Dale M. Reid	Kinke Kooi	Sylvie Fleury
Daniel David Freeman	Kristel Peters	Tacita Dean
Daniel Gordon	Lara Ögel	Takashi Homma
Daniel K. Sparkes	Laurence Owen	The Mycological Twist
Daniel Philosoph	Levack and Lewandowski	Tim Barber
David Fenster	Liz Craft	Travis Boyer
David Shrigley	Mae-ling Lokko	Udo Lefin
David Surman	Marcin Zawicki	Val Smets
Deanne Cheuk	Mark Scott Wood	Vanessa Barragão
Diana Policarpo	Marzena Abrahamik	Vivianne Sassen
Douglas Melini	Mathieu Corbier	Yayoi Kusama
Dylan Odbert	Matt Jones	Yulia Iosilzon
Emma Löfström	Mathias de Lattre	