

## How like a leaf: Sue Parr

Eype Centre for the Arts  
26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> July 2023



This exhibition focuses on the relationship between humans and plants, in particular stinging nettles. Nettles are often considered a weed, having no particular use, yet over millennia they have been an important source of food, medicine, fibre and colour for human life.

There are many synergies between the nettle and us humans. We all have the power to hurt or to heal. Our bodies are fibrous, pigmented, porous and leaky. We respire, expire, digest and decay together, leaving traces as we go.

The title of the exhibition “How like a leaf” is a quote from author and philosopher, Donna Haraway, whose writing focuses on caring for, and making kin with, non-human others alongside fellow humans. In an interview with Thyrza Nichols in 2000 she explained that her thoughts were initially influenced by her observations of the commonalities between the human body and that of a leaf, noticing all that we share.

The work on show examines and enacts these ideas through video, performance, drawing, print and textiles that incorporate both human and plant body matter. Drawing from pre-modern attitudes towards plants which were built on respect, reciprocity and care, the work aims to honour the debt owed and give thanks to the nettle through acts of ritual and relic.

The “String Figure” pieces were created using string, paint and ink made from the nettle alongside earth pigments and matter from the human body. They reference string figure games that have been played by humans for millennia; as well as early cave painters who saw materials from their own bodies as valuable and viable resources in parallel to those found around them. These early wall paintings have often been cited as works made by shaman, and the caves as being sites for ritual incorporating imagery that acknowledged their place - firmly situated within the natural world.

The video “Touching” documents the making of the nettle pigments but also extends this into a form of ritual designed as a process of exchange –giving thanks to the nettle for what it provides as well as honouring the life given. The compost painting traces are relics of these performances. Over time they have faded, adding to the sense that all bodies are in a state of transience, decay and renewal. As Haraway notes in her book “Staying with the Trouble” (2016): “We are all compost”, all in a constant entangled relationship with the other inhabitants of the earth.

These inter-relational, reciprocal activities and similarities are also explored in two experimental videos: “Breathing with” and “Porous Bodies”. Each incorporating digitally drawn animated frames to speculate the invisible exchanges that occur between plant and human bodies. They both also ask the question ‘How is it possible to care for something that has no face?’

The exhibition venue is located at St. Peter’s Church. The connotations of the place as setting for ritual gatherings, plus the church’s unique architecture and imagery have inspired additional new works made specifically for the site.

Research into early Christianity and the cross-over between pagan practices and Catholic ideas with the church being a central space for healing with plants, provided a rich source of inspiration. The live performance, entitled ‘Communion’, is structured around the Celtic Medicine Wheel and demonstrates the value of nettles as a source for healing. This was in part inspired by two female figures, St Hildegard of Bingen and the Norse Shaman, Völva.

The exhibition is supported by the Gane Trust Grant and the Open College of The Arts Enterprise Enhancement Scheme.

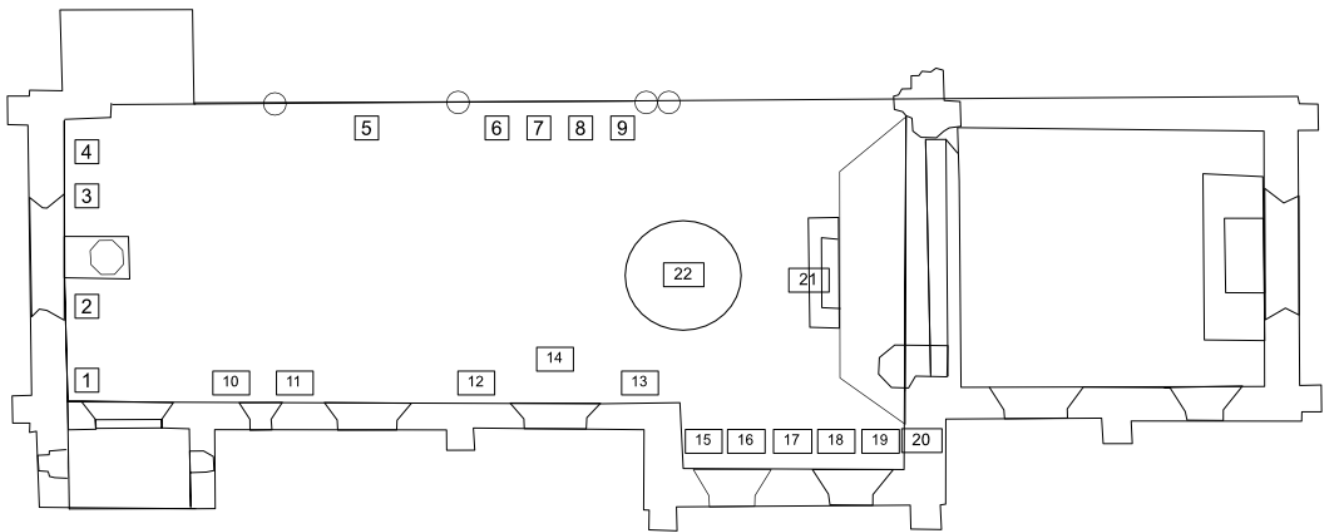
### **About the artist**

Sue Parr is a British visual artist whose work honours and celebrates the modes of exchange between human and non-human ‘peoples’ via ritual encounters and slow making practices.

Her work has developed from painting into an expanded practice incorporating moving image, textiles, drawing and printmaking. She is building a more ecological practice working with plant and body matter alongside other sustainable materials.

She is currently studying for a BA in Painting through the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) this exhibition will be her final degree show.

## List of works



### 1 Urticaria (skin)

2023

Homemade nettle ink, human breath & burns on paper

42 x 59.4 cm



### 2. Urticaria (stem)

2023

Homemade nettle ink, human breath & burns on paper

42 x 59.4 cm

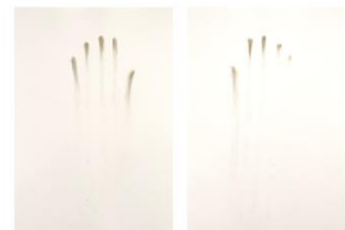


### 3.& 4. Touching (Traces) I & II

2022

Homemade nettle pigment and human breath condensation on paper

42 x 59.4 cm



5. Signatures (Votives) I

2023

Homemade alder and walnut ink, nettle eco-printed, dyed  
reclaimed & composted cotton bed sheets

215 x 220 cm



6. String Figure (cruciform) I

2023

Traces of nettle string and human hair

Homemade nettle ink on paper

56 x 78cm



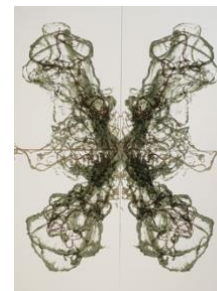
7. String Figure (cruciform) II

2023

Traces of nettle string and human hair

Homemade nettle ink on paper

56 x 78cm



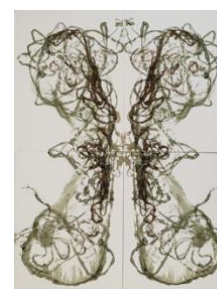
8. String Figure (cruciform) III

2023

Traces of nettle string and human hair

Homemade nettle ink on paper

56 x 78cm

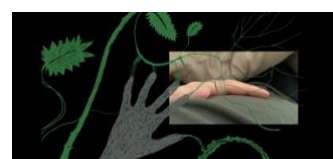


9. Porous Bodies / Breathing with

2022

HD video and animation

4:07 minutes



10. & 11 Signatures (Votives) II & III

2023

Reclaimed composted cotton bed sheets, chlorophyllin ink  
28 x 115 cm each



12 & 13. Compost Painting (Touching) I & II

2022

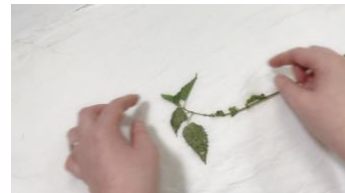
Nettle eco-printed and composted reclaimed cotton bed sheet.  
63 x 218 cm



14. Touching

2022

HD Video



15. String Figure I

2022

Homemade nettle pigment, earth pigments and saliva on  
hosho paper.

Traces of nettle string and human hair

28 x 38 cm



16. String Figure II

2022

Homemade nettle pigment, earth pigments and saliva on  
hosho paper.

Traces of nettle string and human hair

28 x 38 cm



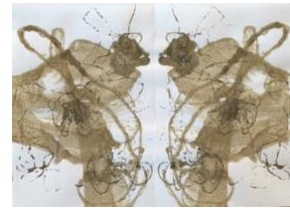
17. String Figure III

2022

Homemade nettle pigment, earth pigments and saliva on hosho paper.

Traces of nettle string and human hair

28 x 38 cm



18. String Figure IV

2022

Homemade nettle pigment, earth pigments and saliva on hosho paper.

Traces of nettle string and human hair

28 x 38 cm



19. String Figure V

2022

Homemade nettle pigment, earth pigments and saliva on hosho paper.

Traces of nettle string and human hair

28 x 38 cm



20. Transit

2022

Nettle fibre, human hair, recycled bed blanket and rubber latex.

12 x 16 x 80cm.



21 & 22. Communion (installation and costume)

2023

Nettle yarn, twine and cordage, nettle dyed reclaimed cotton sheets printed with homemade alder cone ink.

Composted reclaimed cotton printed with chlorophyllin ink, reclaimed linen fabric dyed with chlorophyllin.

28 x 43 x 145cm (on stand)



Live performance – “Communion”. Healing ritual.

**29<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 11.30 am.**

Audio incorporates: “Real Shaman Healing Rhythm” by *Shaman drums* into track.

## Statement

My practice considers the symmetries and sympathies between human and non-human bodies and how art rituals can develop bonds of kinship and care across species through differing modes of exchange.

By expanding small daily practices of self-care, such as breathing, meditation, drinking, composting and playing, outwards to incorporate the non-human, a sense of kinship and reciprocity is considered as our porous boundaries are mapped via the lines of living and dying.

Working through digital media as well as with plant, earth and body matter, the work visualises the body as extended, entangled, mediated and in a state of constant transience through its relationships within the more-than-human world.

The resulting relics enact their own histories and stories, and operate in a hybrid space combining the graphic, mechanical and technological, with the organic and temporal life processes.

In my current body of work, I am honouring human relationships with stinging nettles; considering the gifts they have bestowed us over millennia, as well as the shared spaces we inhabit. Our bodies are fibrous, pigmented, porous and leaky. We respire, expire, digest and decay together, leaving traces as we go.

Through slow making and intimate ritual encounters, I am bringing the human body back in touch with the plant's, in an attempt to repair and restore bonds of care and promote mutual well-being and healing.

## CV

Born Lincoln, 1977. Currently living and working in West Dorset.

### Education

Currently studying for BA (Hons) Painting – University for the Creative Arts (OCA)

1995-1998. BA (Hons) English Literature – Winchester University

## Exhibitions

2019 *Osmosis*, The Island Gallery, Bristol

2018 *Showcase*, OXO Gallery, London

2018 *Work In Progress*, Old Brick Workshop, Wellington

## Publications:

2023 Illustrations for *The Quiet Moon* by Kevin Parr, Flint Books

2018 – 2020. Contributor various articles for *Edge-zine* contemporary art magazine.