

artistam

International Art Magazine

www.artistam.org

Issue 1 – Summer 2024
Photography
Theme: Tree



artistam

The International Quarterly of Creative Expression

Cover Artwork by Amin Alkasir

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Masthead



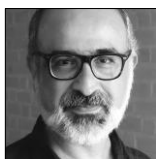
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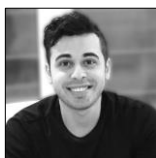
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Section 1

Papers and Notes

Editor's letter

by Ali Asghar Kalantar

Within the depths of history, a migrating hunter from present day Indonesia drew the image of three humans onto the Sulawesi cave wall. Little did he know that his creation would endure over 51,000 years. Nor could he have anticipated that future generations would examine it using the most advanced scientific tools, seeking to extract information from the markings. For millennia, from Africa to the present day, and across the globe, humans have been driven to express their personal perspectives—their needs, ideas, beliefs, fears, and joys—to the world around them.

The boundless diversity of lines, colors, and shapes in figurative and abstract forms are all testimonies of the endeavors of those we recognize today as artists. The migrant humans chose major centers of civilization for their life and growth, and Iran is one of the most splendid among them. Not only has it been a cradle for numerous heroes, magnificent ideas, and advanced scientific achievements, but also a secure haven for the communication, convergence, and dialogue of significant Eastern and Western civilizations. The title "Iranian Art" is plentiful, abundant, intricate, and diverse in books, historical treasures, private and public collections around the world, manifested through calligraphy, paintings, ceramics, mirrors, and more. Although, as always, the form, meaning, and subject of Iranian artists' creations are influenced by numerous complex factors, today, in its interaction with the outside world, it faces compounded anxieties. Linguistic challenges and severe political and economic sanctions have created a complex labyrinth, which the artist

must navigate as they strive to create their work of art.

"Artistam" is a magazine about contemporary Iranian art and its interaction with the rest of the world. It aspires to communicate, listen, and be heard on the global stage. We are honored to have esteemed university professors, artists, and critics from diverse points across the world contribute to this publication with their valuable insights and good intentions. Although the magazine's initial steps will focus on introducing Iranian artists, its ultimate vision is to create a discursive platform for artists from around the world.

The first issue of the magazine, published in July 2024, featured the theme "Tree" and focused on the medium of "Photography." Following the call for submissions, 161 photographs from 72 artists were received for evaluation. This round's selection process was conducted independently by the editorial board members through blind evaluations. Consequently, 46 photographs from 26 artists who received the highest ratings were selected for publication. Additionally, Navid Maghami was recognized as the "Selected Artist of Summer 2024," and a photograph from Amin Alkasir was chosen as the "Selected Work of Summer 2024."

A notable aspect of the selection process was the diverse perspectives of the jury members, which led to a wide range of works being eligible for publication in the magazine. As such, the submitted works were evaluated and chosen based on aesthetic and semantic criteria from different parts of the world, avoiding biased selections. We consider this diversity one of our

strengths, as it allows us to feature a more varied range of works and provide opportunities for a greater number of artists to be seen.

About Trees: The Theme of the First Issue

In the realm of mythology, trees symbolize timeless mysteries and the eternal bond between the natural world and humanity. From Eastern myths and the tale of the "Assyrian Tree" to its pivotal role in both earthly and everlasting life within Abrahamic religions, trees have long held a significant place in a diverse array of beliefs and cultures. Throughout time, the value of trees has remained unwavering.

In terms of the environment, trees and forests serve as the Earth's lifeblood, providing us with the gift of fresh air and nourishing life itself. The captivating beauty and visual impact of trees—whether they stand alone or as part of a sprawling forest—have continuously drawn the attention of artists across various art forms and periods. From ancient petroglyphs to numerous contemporary art movements such as Impressionism and Romanticism, trees have left an indelible mark on the world of art.

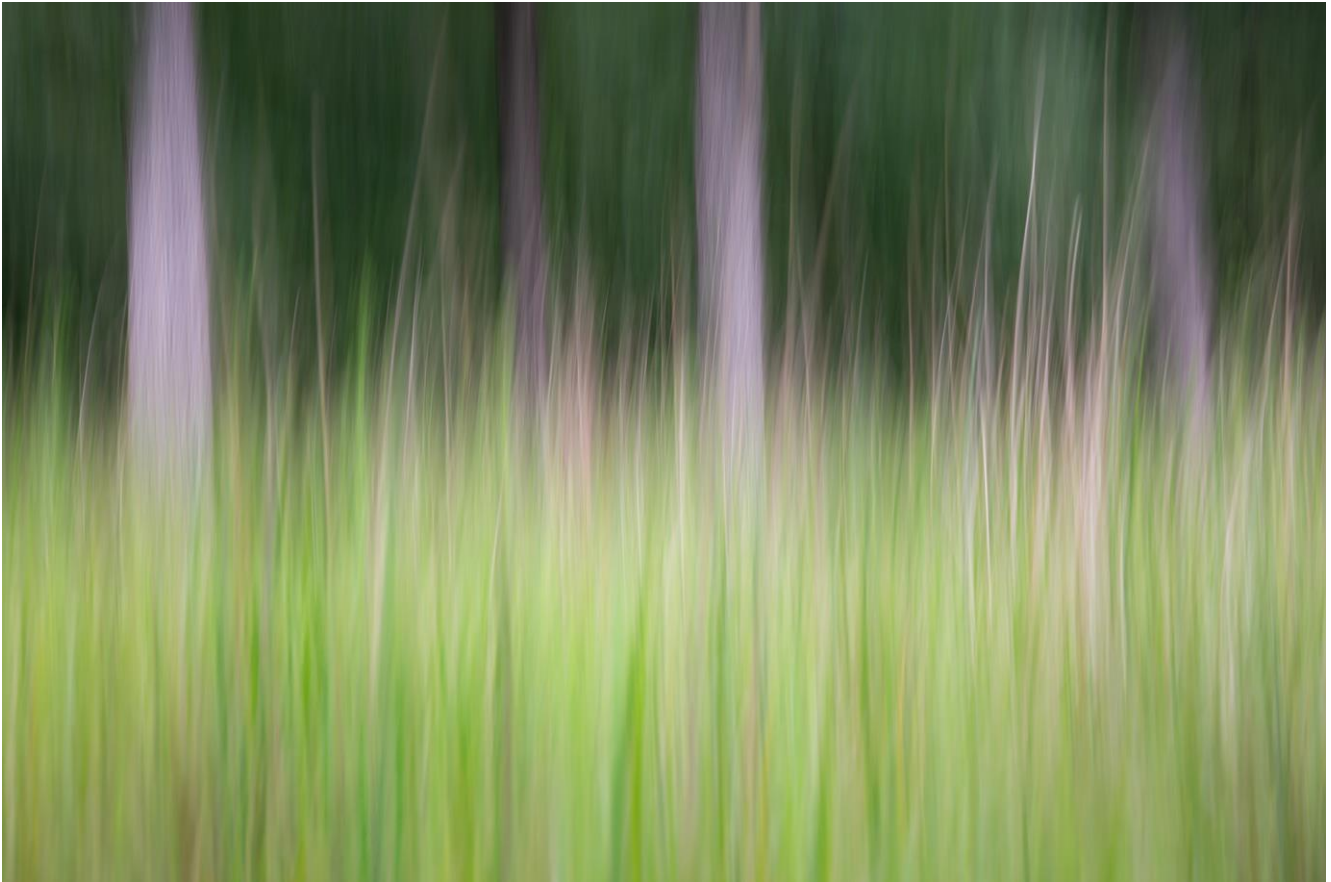
The Art of Trees

by Stephanie Johnson

Member of the Editorial Board

I have a long-held fascination with trees, and I have spent many hours walking among trees in woodland areas. Trees are life, and their energy can be palpable when immersed in quiet solitude in the middle of a forest. Their roots are a web of communication, and they are deeply connected to this physical space we see, but also to a world we cannot see below the surface. The

past several years, for me, have been an exploration of creativity and art through the lens of my camera. I've been primarily focused on expressing myself through the use of Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) and Multiple Exposure ICM (ME ICM) to create unique visions of the world around me, and trees have always been an important subject.



Stephanie Johnson - Spirits of Trees ~ Single Exposure ICM

My goal with the work I do is to create images that evoke a sense of wonder and to spark the imagination. I am much less interested in

representing the subject in literal ways and much more interested in expressing how the subject feels for me, or how I felt in that particular

moment of being immersed with the subject. Being present in the moment, and creating in the moment, are important aspects of my art and creative expression. Using less-than-traditional methods of working with the camera, I am able to reimagine the world in new ways that can transform any given scene into something that appears to be one thing, when in fact it might be

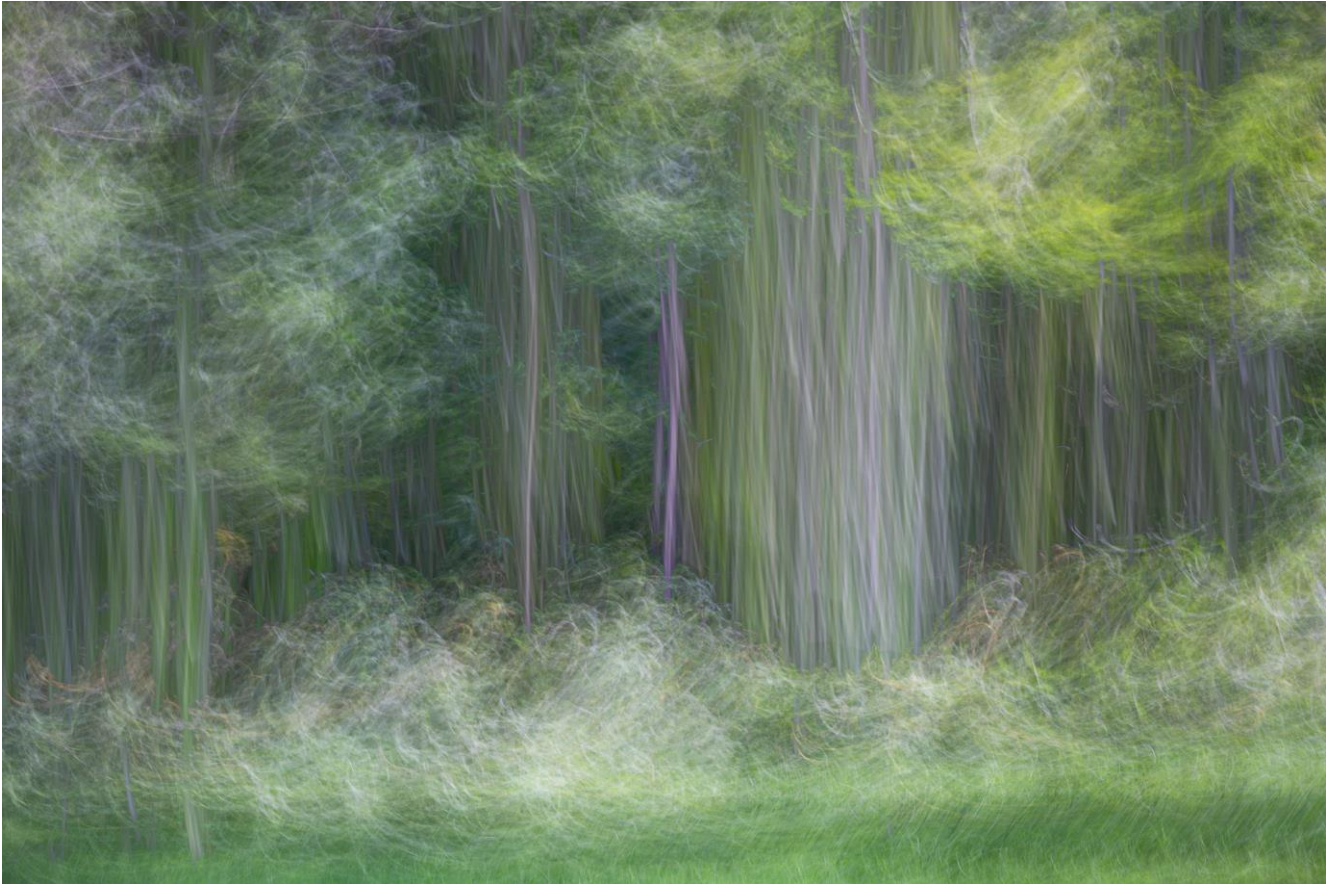
something completely different. For example, in this next image, these trees look and feel like winter trees in snow. In reality, I was immersed in the midst of these trees in the middle of summer, and in using the Multiple Exposure ICM technique, I was able to create the illusion of a winter scene in the high desert surroundings of New Mexico.



Stephanie Johnson - The Illusion of Things ~ Multiple Exposure ICM

We often associate trees with magical worlds and freedom, and I think this is one of the reasons I am drawn to trees. I am always in search of magic and freedom—magic that reveals itself on the back of my camera and freedom of expression. My hope is that these concepts shine through in my images and make the viewer *feel*

something. When I am immersed in the natural world, among trees, I feel connected to the energetic flow of energy that exists in all things, and I hope my images encourage viewers to make deeper, more meaningful connections to the inner and the outer landscapes for themselves.



Stephanie Johnson - The Fantastical World of Trees ~ Multiple Exposure ICM

I am extremely grateful to be a part of the *Artistam International Art Magazine* project, and for this inaugural issue of the magazine dedicated to trees, I hope you will be inspired to see things differently, to reimagine the world in new ways, and to make art that only you can make, and to share your unique vision in a world that needs your creative expression to flow through you. Art has the power to heal, just as trees do, and the world needs your art.



Stephanie Johnson - Winter Spirits ~ Multiple Exposure ICM (A Part of Photo)

Shelter

by Prof. Bartosz Posacki

Member of the Editorial Board - Opole 26.08.2024

Man builds houses to enclose his memories and dreams, even if he knows that they will eventually be forgotten.

Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude, 1967

All a man has are the traces he leaves behind on the earth, small traces that say he was here, that he lived, that he loved.

Cormac McCarthy, The Road, 2006

The Shelter project focuses on the universal and primal human need to have one's own space. The need to domesticate and privatize space, both in a material and symbolic sense. It is not only about

in a personal and subjective way, accompanied by rituals and small gestures that leave their marks on the fabric of reality. These actions, though undertaken with full awareness of their



Bartosz Posacki - Shelter B-01 & B-02-pigment print

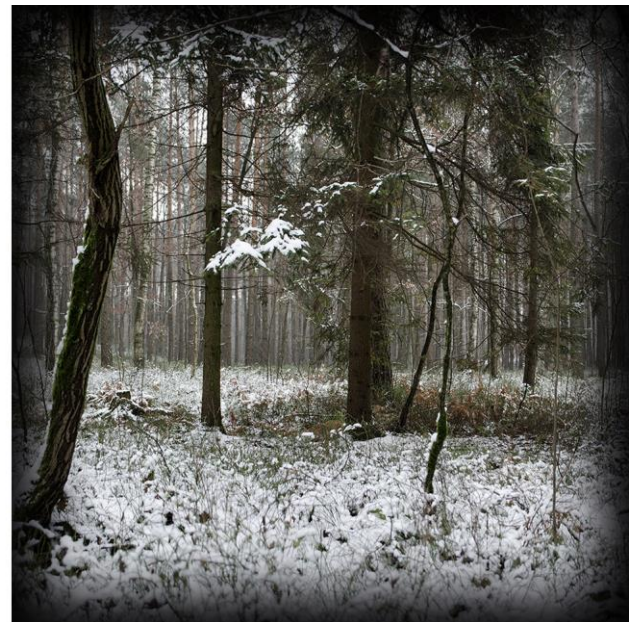
the important and obvious yet superficial functionality of transforming physical space into a machine that sustains biological existence. From the project's perspective, the more significant aspect is the symbolic gesture of taking possession of a specific fragment of space

impermanence and fleeting nature, are imbued with a kind of desperate idealism. They bear the hallmarks of a beautiful, albeit fundamentally hopeless, and ultimately doomed struggle to preserve memory and give meaning to one's own experiences.

It is in these seemingly trivial gestures and their remnants that the truth of each individual's existence is hidden. It is within them that the trace of human presence is found in a deeply humanistic sense, and it is through them that one's humanity, far exceeding the biological dimension, is revealed. From these scant remnants, a keen observer can tell their story to themselves and the world. To tell it, because it cannot be literally read—it is always written in a private alphabet and, as such, will always remain merely a shadow. But isn't our entire experience composed of shadows? Aren't shadows the fundamental building blocks of our memory, and aren't our perceptions, from which we construct the image of reality, mere projections on the

that contemporary societies strive to ignore. This truth is something that the consumerist cultural and social model attempts to push as far beyond the horizon of everyday experience as possible. From this perspective, it seems crucial to carefully read the signs of another person's presence, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or where they are headed. Tenderness towards impermanence emerges as a duty of all transient beings and the only way to momentarily preserve the richness and complexity of a former presence in the present flash of conscious perception.

The Shelter project was inspired by the humanitarian crisis of migration unfolding in the forests and swamps of Poland's eastern border,



Bartosz Posacki - Shelter-04 &06-lightbox

fabric of our consciousness?

And yet, it doesn't matter that they are impermanent and fluid, for all being is fluid and impermanent. The fact that time erases the traces of each of us, just as the wind erases tracks in the snow, is only a reflection of a general truth

which also marks the eastern boundary of the European Union. This crisis is not an exception; in fact, it is merely, and yet significantly, a reflection of a global crisis. The presence of characteristic, narrow landscapes of Polish forests in the images is not so much a gesture

confirming the reality of the depicted situations but an attempt to anchor them in a familiar and visually domesticated context. A context where many stories already have their places, but this

particular one is new and somewhat incongruous. Without imagining it, we cannot find a place in our memory and hearts for it and its protagonists.



Bartosz Posacki - Shelter-01 & 03-lightbox

The Shelter project is an open project. Currently, it consists of six lightboxes measuring 25 x 25 cm, 26 photographs of various sizes, one video projection, and one audio-visual performance. Works from the Shelter series have been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions in Poland, Germany, France, Italy, the Czech Republic, Spain, and Iran.



Bartosz Posacki - Shelter-04, 05 & 06-lightbox.

From Bonsai to the Socotra Dragon Tree

by Guest Contributor: Dr. Amir Beshkani
National Museum of Natural History, Paris.



There seems to be something poetic in bonsai¹, something akin to the rows of verses in its branches that turn it into a Haiku-like poem. The intricately arranged lines of this orderly form appear to seduce the viewer's gaze toward the upper three-quarters of the frame, leaving the lower quarter, or the roots, intentionally overlooked in a relatively small container. I believe that in this minimalist manifestation, the act of bonsai sharply contrasts with the concept of "return"² the return of roots, the all-encompassing return of buds. It's as if the act of bonsai restricts and predefines the new state (synthesis).

While Heidegger does not explicitly explore "exteriorization" in *Being and Time* (Sein und Zeit)³, this concept can be inferred from his broader philosophical ideas. *Dasein*, or "being-there," represents human existence as fundamentally intertwined with the world, always engaged with its surroundings and inseparable from the "Other." Through this ongoing interaction, *Dasein* continuously exteriorizes itself—manifesting its being through actions, choices, and relationships. In this light, bonsai transcends its botanical form, symbolizing this process of exteriorization, where *Dasein's*

essence is expressed in the deliberate shaping of nature. *Gestaltung*, meaning the act of shaping or forming, perfectly captures the essence of bonsai as an external expression of *Dasein's* inner world. In the careful crafting of a bonsai tree, we see *Dasein's* engagement with its being-in-the-world, an embodiment of how it shapes and forms both itself and its environment. The bonsai thus becomes more than just a tree; it is a living metaphor for *Dasein's* ongoing project of self-formation and world-formation, reflecting the intricate dance between being and becoming.

1. Bonsai and Care

Bonsai serves as a profound symbol of *Dasein's* interaction with the world into which it is thrown. The art of bonsai mirrors the being-in-the-world of the people of the Far East, as they actively shape and organize something external to themselves. This minimalist recreation can be seen as the exteriorization of *Dasein* within a specific cultural and temporal context. In this act of creation, Heidegger's concept of "care" (*Sorge*) is vividly expressed in *Dasein's* relationship with the world. "Care" involves imbuing the external world with meaning, but in the context of bonsai, this care takes on a peculiar form. In bonsai, care paradoxically includes cutting young roots, pruning newly

1 - Bonsai is the traditional art of growing and meticulously shaping small trees in containers, designed to capture the essence of a full-sized tree in nature. This practice combines horticultural techniques with artistic vision, aiming to create a living miniature that reflects harmony, balance, and the passage of time.

2 - Elliott Oring (1993). Victor Turner, Sigmund Freud, and the Return of the Repressed. *Ethos*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), pp. 273-294 (22 pages). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/640551>

3 - Heidegger, Martin (1996) *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. State University of New York Press.

sprouted stems that deviate from the intended design, and wiring older branches to achieve a desired form. This process forces a tree to become something it is not⁴. One might argue that the relationship between *Dasein* and the tree in the practice of bonsai does not evolve into a dialectical, reciprocal interaction where *Dasein* (thesis) and being-in-the-world (antithesis) engage in dynamic tension, leading to the

of a new state (synthesis), and the process continues only within the confines of metal wires, leaving the synthesis severely restricted to the lower quarter of the frame. It's as if these pots, which sometimes forcibly bind the tree and its roots with wires, conceal something repressed within them something that cannot tolerate young roots and misplaced buds, treating their return as a nightmare that must be severed⁶.



Elephant Bush Bonsai (Portulacaria Afra)
(abanahomes.com)



Socotra Dragon Tree
(leaflimb.com/dragon-blood-tree)

formation of a new state (synthesis)⁵. Instead, the art of bonsai can be seen as a one-sided imposition of form, where *Dasein's* care constrains the natural growth of the tree, preventing the emergence of a truly dialectical synthesis.

In bonsai, the annual pruning of roots and newly sprouted branches prevents the formation

Therefore, while a bonsai shrub may represent the pinnacle of beauty and be seen as a coexistence of opposites or a pursuit of perfection, I still have my doubts about the practice of bonsai. I find the Socotra Dragon Tree, with its neutral and natural expression, far more appealing. While a bonsai shrub may be celebrated as the pinnacle of beauty, embodying

4 - The Elephant Bush (*Portulacaria afra*) is an excellent choice for bonsai cultivation. This hardy shrub can reach heights of up to 5 meters in the dry, rocky terrains of South Africa, yet in its natural form, it looks quite different from the meticulously crafted bonsai trees.

5 - McKenna, T. (2011). Hegelian Dialectics. *Critique*, 39(1), 155-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03017605.2011.537458>

6 - Freud's concept of "the Return of the Repressed" is based on the principle that repressed thoughts and desires, which have been kept away from conscious awareness, reappear in altered forms such as symptoms, dreams, or slips of the tongue.

a delicate coexistence of opposites or the pursuit of perfection, this practice raises doubts. The forced restraint and manipulation inherent in bonsai suggest a deeper tension, one that challenges the harmonious integration of opposites. In contrast, the Socotra Dragon Tree, with its neutral and natural expression, offers an unrestrained beauty that feels more authentic and appealing. The Dragon Tree stands as a symbol of nature's true form, untouched by the constraints of human intervention, representing a more organic and perhaps more genuine synthesis of growth and form.

2. The Socotra Dragon Tree and the Zero Degree of Writing

In his book *The Zero Degree of Writing* (*Le Degré zéro de l'écriture, 1972*), Roland Barthes describes a type of writing that distances itself from all stylistic and linguistic features, striving to achieve a neutral and impartial state.

Barthes examines naturalism as a writing style that aims to represent reality objectively, stripping away literary embellishments to portray life directly. This form of writing, according to Barthes, employs precise descriptions and focuses on the simple, everyday aspects of life, minimizing the author's personal voice and literary ornaments to present a direct and realistic depiction of the world. Barthes' analysis of naturalism is not merely a study of a literary style but also a reflection on broader cultural and ideological shifts in the 19th century, particularly in response to social changes and the rise of scientific thought. By striving for a "neutral" form

of writing, naturalism embodies an attempt to capture the world as it is, devoid of subjective interpretation. Barthes uses naturalism as a key example to explore how writing seeks neutrality and how these efforts are shaped by historical and social contexts.

The Socotra Dragon Tree, in its natural, unembellished form, can be seen as a botanical counterpart to Barthes' concept of zero-degree writing. Just as naturalistic writing seeks to strip away the author's influence to reveal the world plainly, the Dragon Tree, with its unique and unaltered appearance, represents a natural state that stands apart from human intervention, embodying a form of neutrality in the natural world. Both the Dragon Tree and zero-degree writing share a commitment to a form of expression that resists ornamentation and highlights the essence of existence in its purest form. Perhaps the trees of the Socotra Archipelago in the western Indian Ocean can be introduced in nature through this writing style. "The Socotra Dragon Tree is a rare species with a thick, cylindrical trunk. At its base, it has a conical shape with leafless branches. The tree's leaves are lanceolate and needle-like, concentrated at the ends of the branches, giving the tree's crown a canopy-like appearance. The trunk's bark is grayish-brown, and when injured, a red resin known as "dragon's blood" is released."

I ponder, do they not perceive the beauty in language, simple and unadorned? A chill grips my heart at the thought that poetry itself might be the curse that haunts my homeland.

— Dedicated to Inès D.

Tree

by Guest Contributor: Mohammad Tajeran
Iranian cyclist and world traveler

Mohammad Tajeran is an Iranian cyclist and world traveler who began his journey around the globe on a bicycle in December 2006 and has been on the road ever since. He has tied a childhood dream to an unexpected revelation on a mountain, aiming to raise global awareness—especially among children—about the vital importance of trees. So far, Mohammad has cycled through 60 countries, covering over 97,000 kilometers, conducted more than 700 workshops in various schools, and planted over 4,000 trees. To further his mission of educating people around the world, he founded an NGO called "We Need Trees" and hosts a podcast named "The White Line of the Road." Every morning, Mohammad rises early in his tent, opens the door to greet the sunrise, and shares these magical moments with his Instagram followers. Each fresh greeting marks the start of an endless quest to uncover the meaning of life. Recognizing the importance of Mohammad's work and its alignment with this issue, we invited him to share a brief reflection on his motivations for embarking on this extraordinary journey.



During my university years in the mid-1990s, when Iran's social climate was still heavily constrained, a solitary tree stood in a valley near Mashhad named Kordineh. In those days, unlike today's abundance of cafes, socializing opportunities were limited across the country, especially in Mashhad. This tree became my sanctuary, a faithful friend I sought out every Tuesday. Pedaling through the valley to the heart where it stood, far from the orchards, felt like a gift. I cherished every moment of tranquil companionship the tree offered.

Upon arriving there one Tuesday, I was shocked to discover the tree's trunk had been cut down. My faithful friend, my steadfast companion, was gone. Disbelief washed over me as I struggled to process the sight before my eyes. The tree didn't belong to any garden, nor did it obstruct

anyone's path. The most heartbreaking part was the utter waste, as months later, when I returned, the wood remained untouched, left to decay beside its severed trunk. The tree had survived years of floods, its solitude a testament to its strength and resilience. That Tuesday marked my last regular visit, and throughout the journey home, a constricting lump formed in my throat as I grieved for our final conversation and the tears I shed over its severed trunk. It must have been around 1995 or 1996. Even today, the yearning for that comforting shade and the gentle rustle of its branches remains.

Nearly a decade later, I resolved to embark on a new path—to live the remainder of my life in perpetual motion, like the flow of water. It occurred to me that no matter how strong and patient one may be, like the tree, standing firm offers no protection from those who cannot tolerate resilience. Thus, I chose not to live like a

tree, but rather the fluid, ever-changing nature of water.

Yet, even water finds its purpose in nourishing

beside the tree with his chainsaw, assessing it to determine how to bring it down. Maybe then, if he had noticed the birds and their nests, and he had noticed the birds and their nests, and



Untitled

Mohammad Tajeran

Germany, Nuremberg, Winter 2014.

a tree, in greening the earth, in sustaining roots. So, drawing inspiration from water, I embarked on a journey to plant trees around the world and educate children about their crucial role in sustaining all life on Earth. My ultimate quest has been to cultivate a deep love and appreciation for trees in the hearts of young minds.

In my dreams, I return to those years, to that final Tuesday, to the hours before I found the tree cut down. To that moment when the man stood

caught a glimpse of the chicks nestled among the branches, or if he had observed the line of ants climbing the trunk, or heard the whisper of the wind through the leaves, perhaps he wouldn't have decided to cut down the tree. He simply needed to be shown a bit of love. Love opens a person's eyes to the true value of things. If that man with his chainsaw had just been able to witness these wonders for a moment, the story would have been different.

Throughout my journeys and experiences, my goal is to reveal to children that bird's nest, that line of ants, and the wind whispering through the

branches. Perhaps, one day, should they find themselves holding an axe or chainsaw, their gaze will first fall upon these marvels.



Untitled

Mohammad Tajeran

Germany, Near Nuremberg, Winter 2014.



Mohammad Tajeran- Germany, Near Nuremberg, Winter 2014.