

INCUBATOR

"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias."

– Oscar Wilde

Derived from the Greek words ou, meaning 'not,' and topos, meaning 'place,' the term "Utopia" offers dual interpretations: a perfect place that is imaginary or the concept that no place is truly ideal. Incubator is delighted to partner with ClientEarth on 'Utopia,' a group exhibition that addresses the most urgent and pressing issue that faces humanity: the climate crisis. Art, at its best, is a space for new ideas, engagement with the world, and a catalyst for positive cultural change. The current crisis is climatic, ecological, political, but it is also a crisis of imagination – what could an alternative future look like?

In 'Utopia,' five emerging artists explicitly engage with this question as Incubator reorients towards what a climate-conscious art gallery could be. Each artist has created works that are not only sustainable in their materiality and process but also in their transportation to Incubator, embracing a 'leave no trace' philosophy. Incubator is operating as close to climate neutrality as possible, utilising 100% renewable energy in all gallery operations and carbon offsetting where necessary.

Featuring the work of Alicja Biala, Enej Gala, Ranny Macdonald, Laila Tara H and Emily Wilcock, 'Utopia' finds each artist engaging in innovative sustainable practices, transforming found materials, natural pigments and even toxic waste into art. By doing so, they challenge conventional methods of production and propose a future where creativity directly emerges from environmental responsibility.

Each artist's work converges around sustainable materiality and an exploration of humanity's relationship with nature. Emily Wilcock's transformation of recycled Georgian roof tiles into canvases not only extends the life of historical artefacts but also serves as a testament to the durability and symbolic potential of unconventional, yet sustainably sourced, materials. Her meticulously etched works evoke a mythical world where the spirit of landscapes, animals and memories connects with humanity. In this world, Wilcock urgently details the codependence of our interior lives and the environments we inhabit, tying dreamlike knots between emotive symbols of home and environment, people and animals, hair that spirals into intricate webs like the creeping vines of a forest or constellations of a night sky.

Similarly, Enej Gala's delicately balanced mobile sculptures, crafted from discarded materials gathered from neighbours, exemplify resilience, complex interrelationships, and material transformation. By repurposing detritus into interconnected or repeated forms that challenge



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spatial hierarchies, both Gala and Wilcock's work transforms overlooked materials and potential waste products into profound meditations on our relationship to the world around us.

In contrast, Laila Tara H's landscape-reductions on handmade hemp paper, created using natural pigments, embody a deliberate reductionist approach rooted in memory and observation. The four works depict landscapes from London and The Hague, where the artist has spent considerable time. Each coloured dot, rendered in pigments such as terre verte, lapis lazuli, chalk, and indigo, represents a different element of these landscapes. For instance, a dot of chalk pigment signifies a cloud, while mars red represents the brick of a London house. These works reject mass production, instead favouring relational compositions that harmonise with natural rhythms.

Ranny Macdonald uses similar methods in his series "Natura Morta," which blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination, juxtaposing ecological and existential themes through surreal compositions. By imbuing his faux-flowers with anthropomorphic features and through his use of natural pigments and repurposed wood for his studio-made frames, he invites viewers to ponder the interplay between the natural and artificial.

Finally, Alicja Biała's research-driven exploration into toxic landscapes of England and Wales further enriches the exhibition's dialogue on environmental impact. Using contaminated water from mining drainage ponds as a replacement for commercial acid to etch copper plates, Biała highlights nature's resilience and adaptation in the face of human-induced environmental degradation. Nettle is a recurring theme in her work for the show, a plant with cultural and ecological importance for its phytoremediative abilities that was recently discovered. Her cast bronze and electroplated copper nettle sculptures symbolise the plant's role in ecological restoration and local medicinal customs.

Together, these artists engage with the complex interdependencies of ecosystems and human activities, fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability and envisioning paths toward a harmonious coexistence with the natural world. Each artist's work convenes to explore 'Utopia' not as a perfect place but rather a journey towards idealism. Through sustainable practices and innovative media, they challenge artistic norms and advocate for ecological awareness. Each of their works, from Wilcock's preservation of history to Biała's exploration of nature's resilience, weave a narrative of survival through ethical living, inspiring a deeper understanding of our relationship with the environment, urging us to rethink our impact and encouraging us to strive towards a more sustainable and imaginative future. "Utopia" is not just an exhibition, but a reflection upon humanity's enduring quest for a better world.

