

Rik Dijkhuizen, *Rooted in the Deep*



Artist Rik Dijkhuizen created a new, site-specific performative installation in an open field near Broedplaats Baggerbeest in Amsterdam, as part of the exhibition *Deep Watering*, organised by the artist collective Pleasure Ground on 28 September 2024.

Titled *Rooted in the Deep*, the work examines humanity's reconnection with the hidden forces that sustain life, merging philosophical, ecological, and phenomenological perspectives. Inspired by various historical and literary sources, including Nietzsche's meditations on nature, Astrida Neimanis's work on water, embodiment, and ecological interconnectedness, and Silvia Federici's critique of capitalist alienation, the installation underscores the concept of being 'rooted in the deep' — both within the natural world and the often overlooked aspects of human existence.

Rooted in the Deep

Set within a sculpted garden featuring a deep pond, gravel and dense foliage, root-like medical tubes weave through the landscape, forming a network that sustains the watery ecosystem of the installation. In this otherworldly place between reality and fiction, the artist staged a performance where he, embodying a plant-like figure, reconnects with nature, seeking solace and nourishment from the waters in the deep — thus becoming part of the landscape once again.

The installation unearths the often-hidden narratives of how modern life has uprooted us from our natural state, despite how deeply connected we are to the landscapes we inhabit. The exposed medical tubes serve as a metaphor for the unseen forces that bind all living things as interconnected bodies of water, relying on each other to thrive. As the artist remains motionless for over an hour, he encourages viewers to reflect on how the loss of collective embodiment and belonging continues to erode our fragile well-being.

The immersive experience is further enriched by a soundscape created by **Hugo Boccara**, echoing the resonant sounds of subterranean waters and deepening the sense of fluid interconnectedness.

Plant man

During the performance, a plant-like figure moves through an immersive environment, where the deep, life-sustaining forces beneath the surface are brought to the forefront, blurring the boundaries between nature and culture and subverting the dichotomy that traditionally separates them. References to medieval and Renaissance lore — such as the mystical mandrake root, the Green Man found in church masonry as a symbol for nature's cyclical power, and the anthropomorphic plant figures depicted in historical manuscripts — remind us of humanity's enduring fascination with nature, shaping both the design and meaning of the 'plant man' in the installation.

A second source of inspiration for this figure is the Green Knight from Arthurian legend, whose embodiment of nature's untamed forces challenges human constructs of power and mortality, represented by Sir Gawain's test. Alongside the Green Knight, Shakespeare's Prospero in *The Tempest* and Nietzsche's Zarathustra present similar journeys toward reintegration with nature: Prospero eventually abandons his magic to embrace a natural existence, and Nietzsche's Zarathustra guides humanity toward the Übermensch, a new form of humankind that transcends societal constructs and affirms a deeper instinctual vitality rooted in self-overcoming and creative power. The plant-human hybrid in this installation evokes these ideas of interconnectedness and ecological symbiosis, urging a re-examination of our deep connection to the natural world.



Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*) - Scanned from a 15th-century manuscript, *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, which provides medical and herbal information.



Sir Gawain and the Green Knight - Illustration from the *Cotton Nero A.x* manuscript of the Middle English chivalric romance by the Pearl Poet (also known as the Gawain Poet), a notable 14th-century work.



The Enchanted Island Before the Cell of Prospero - Prospero, Miranda, Caliban, and Ariel, depicted from Act 1, Scene 2 of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. American edition of Boydell's *Illustrations of the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare*. Engraving by Peter Simon after Henry Fuseli.

Amor fati

While Nietzsche does not explicitly call for a *re-naturalization* of humanity, his philosophy strongly advocates for a return to the instinctual and life-affirming forces that modern society suppresses. His writing often portrays humans as part of a larger, vital ecosystem, where flourishing involves a return to the objective chaos of primal instincts and natural rhythms. Nietzsche's nuanced view of re-naturalization suggests that true human flourishing comes from embracing a more organic existence, *beyond good and evil*, where one's life and actions are aligned with the deep, instinctual forces that underpin both the natural world and human consciousness.

This idea is closely tied to his concept of *amor fati* — the love of fate — which encourages the full acceptance of all aspects of life, both the chaotic and ordered, as part of nature's indifferent and cyclical rhythms. The metaphor of the 'plant man' captures this idea: a plant-like figure who flourishes not by adhering to the artificial constructs of society, morality and religion, but by embracing the deep, natural forces that sustain life — like a plant rooted deeply in the earth. By reconnecting with nature, humanity can aspire to transcend its current state, realizing its fullest potential through the *will to power*.

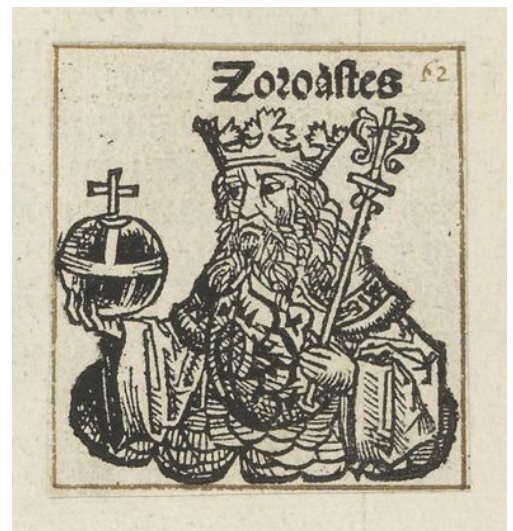
Bodies of water

Building on Nietzsche's vision of vitality, the installation's fountain serves as a powerful symbol of the hidden, life-sustaining forces that exist beneath the surface. Water, used in the installation as both matter and metaphor, represents the unseen processes which nourish plants, animals, and humans alike. Here, the work of Astrida Neimanis in *Bodies of Water* provides an essential framework for understanding our watery existence. Just as water sustains life by circulating through ecosystems, so too does it flow through human bodies, connecting us to the earth and one another.

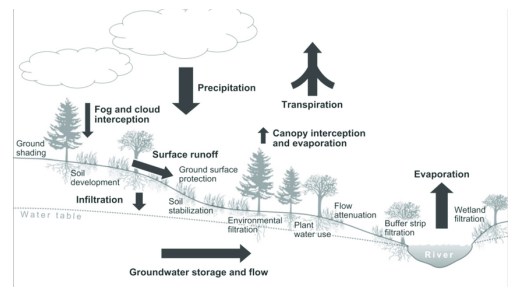
In the context of *Rooted in the Deep*, the deep waters beneath the fountain mirror these unseen currents of life. Neimanis' phenomenology of water challenges the notion of the body as a fixed boundary, proposing instead that our existence is porous, fluid, and in constant dialogue with the environment. The deep water, therefore, becomes a metaphor for the hidden connections between humans and nature, inviting viewers to reclaim an awareness of these often overlooked ecological bonds.

Fluid Connections

The installation continues to explore this theme of interconnectedness by moving beyond anthropocentric ideas of the human body. In Neimanis' posthuman framework, human bodies are no longer isolated entities but part of a larger, watery ecosystem — referred to in *Rooted in the Deep* with a fountain element that unearths the unseen forces concealed in the deep, vital currents below. In this setting, water flows through all things, reminding us of our fluid entanglement with the world around us. The artist, dressed as a plant-like figure, becomes a living embodiment of the idea that humans are deeply rooted in the natural world.



Zoroaster / Zarathustra - Illustration from the *Liber chronicarum* (also known as the Nuremberg Chronicle), featuring Zoroaster, depicted with a crown, a rich apple, and a scepter, emphasizing his significance as a wise figure in ancient lore.



Water cycle and ecosystem interactions - Brauman et al., 2007. This diagram illustrates the complex interactions between water cycle processes and ecosystem functions, highlighting how water flow impacts various ecological components and services.



Fountain of Youth (sometimes referred to as Fountain of Life), La Mantra - Illustration by Giacomo Jaquerio, 1411, depicting the mythical Fountain of Youth, reflecting the Renaissance fascination with themes of rejuvenation the cycle of life.

This posthuman vision aligns with Nietzsche's idea of re-naturalization, as it seeks to transcend the alienating constructs of modern life, allowing for a deeper connection to primal forces. By engaging with these fluid connections, the installation invites viewers to reconsider their relationship to nature, challenging them to move toward a more embodied and interconnected existence. We are all 'bodies of water', in continuous interaction with the deep, life-sustaining forces around us.

Fluidity and Transformation

In this context, the myth of Alpheios emerges as a poignant symbol of fluidity and transformation. Alpheios, the river god, represents the unending pursuit of connection with the natural world, mirroring the installation's themes of re-naturalization. His story of yearning for the nymph Arethusa, who transforms into a spring to escape him, highlights the intrinsic relationships between desire, water, and nature. This narrative invites viewers to reflect on their own connections to the deep, life-sustaining forces that nourish both body and soul, encouraging an awareness of the often overlooked currents that flow between humanity and the environment. The pose of the ancient statue of Alpheios has also served as inspiration for the plant man's pose during the performance, emphasizing the deep, embodied connection between human and nature that the installation seeks to convey.

Unearthing embodied knowledge

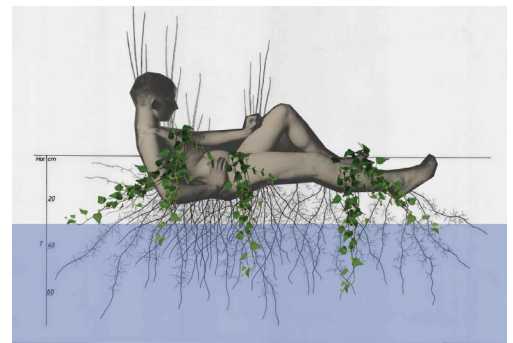
This rethinking of human embeddedness within ecological systems also resonates with Silvia Federici's critique of capitalist alienation. In *Caliban and the Witch* and *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, Federici argues that capitalist and patriarchal systems have severed people from their embodied knowledge and connection to nature. Federici's work aligns with both Nietzsche's concerns about modern alienation and Neimanis' call to reconnect with the fluid forces of nature, particularly water as a life-sustaining element. In *Rooted in the Deep*, water symbolizes not only natural cycles but also the deeper, embodied knowledge that has been suppressed by modern systems. Federici's critique is especially relevant here, as the installation evokes a reclamation of this primal, life-sustaining force. By embracing the body's natural rhythms and reconnecting with these deeper, hidden sources of vitality, the piece suggests a resistance to the fragmentation imposed by capitalist structures.

Deep water

Rooted in the Deep challenges us to reconsider our embeddedness in the natural world. By using water, plants, and deep-rooted metaphors, the installation encourages viewers to reflect on how modern life has severed humanity from the primal energies that sustain all living beings. Just as plants draw nourishment from deep within the earth, the installation proposes that humans, too, can find strength and sustenance by reconnecting with the natural forces that underlie existence. The work invites us to reclaim a more embodied, holistic existence — one that recognizes our dependence on the earth and the deep, watery, and hidden life forces that nourish us all. It urges us to reconnect with the ecological and instinctual forces that sustain life and resist the fragmentation of contemporary society.



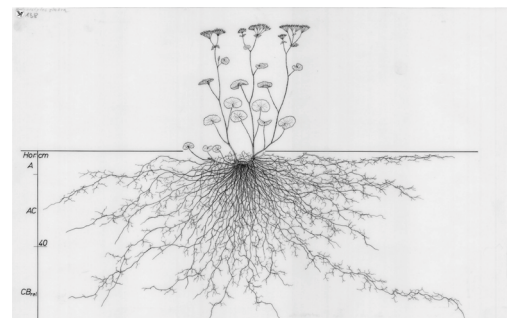
Fountain of Wellbeing - Created in 2022 by Rik Dijkhuizen for psychiatric institution GGZ Breburg in Dongen, this installation explores care practices through collective embodiment.



Rooted in the Deep - artist impression, 2024



Alpheios - A 5th-century BC Greek sculpture of the river-god Alpheios, located in the far-right corner of the East Pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.



Root System Drawings - Prof. Dr. Erwin Lichtenegger (1928-2004) and Prof. Dr. Lore Kutschera (1917-2008), leader of Pflanzensoziologisches Institut, Klagenfurt, Austria. Made available via Wageningen University Image Collection.

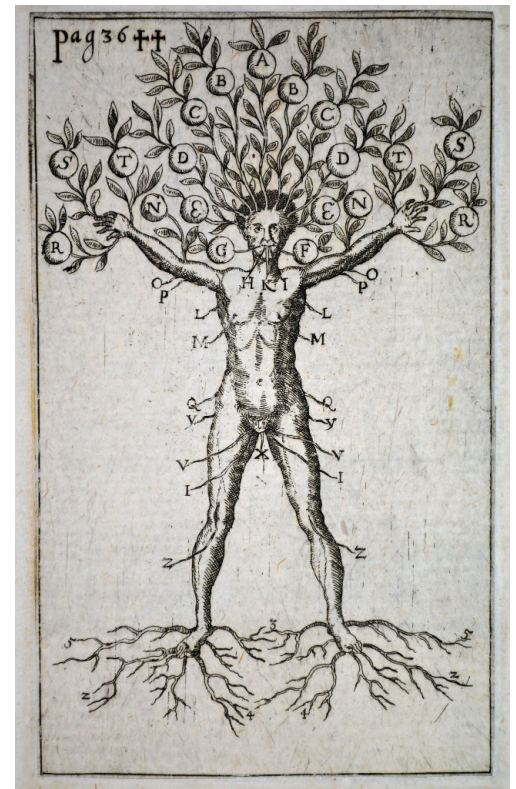
Rik Dijkhuizen (NL, 1988) is a visual artist whose multidisciplinary work reflects on mental health in a hyper-individualistic society. In his scenographic installations and imaginative narratives, he uses numerous (personal) references and connotations to create sanctuaries for wellbeing and collective embodiment; convincing topos that invite and call for reflection. These places are not quite of this world but feel strangely familiar and are situated somewhere between reality and fiction. Water is a recurring material in his work. Rik studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy Amsterdam, and Art History and Aesthetics at the University of Amsterdam.

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Photography: Bart Treuren



Caliban - Etching by John Hamilton Mortimer, 1775. Illustrates Caliban, the complex character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.



Anthropomorphic Tree-Human Figure - Unattributed artist. Kunstsammlungen der Fürsten zu Waldburg-Wolfegg, Schloss Wolfegg. The artwork features a humanoid tree figure, highlighting themes of nature and humanity.



Further reading

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – Nietzsche's exploration of human flourishing and instinctual wisdom in this work touches upon the metaphor of the 'plant man', advocating for a life attuned to nature and primal forces. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Penguin Classics, 2003.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Section: Aphorism 44 – Nietzsche contrasts artificial constructs of morality with the wisdom found in nature and instinct. He critiques the prioritization of intellect over the body and argues for a deeper connection to life's natural, unconscious forces. This links directly to themes of re-naturalization and embodied knowledge in *Rooted in the Deep*. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*. Section: Why I Am So Clever – Friedrich Nietzsche presents *amor fati* — the love of fate — as central to human flourishing and acceptance of life in its totality. He describes this concept most explicitly in *Ecce Homo*, where he advocates for the full embrace of all aspects of life, not merely enduring what is necessary but loving it. This ties directly to Nietzsche's broader philosophy of re-naturalization and instinctual living. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. Translated by Duncan Large, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Damon Young, *Philosophy in the Garden*. Section: Nietzsche's Garden: A Naturalistic Perspective on the Will to Power – Young explores Nietzsche's love for nature and the influence gardens had on his thinking. He argues that gardens were places of solitude and inspiration for Nietzsche, helping him reconnect with primal and instinctual forces central to his philosophy. In the context of *Rooted in the Deep*, the garden serves as both a literal and metaphorical space for re-rooting oneself in nature. *Philosophy in the Garden*. Melbourne University Press, 2014.

Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water* – Neimanis' work provides a crucial theoretical framework for understanding the interconnectedness between human bodies and the world's water systems, emphasizing a posthuman phenomenology of fluidity and ecological entanglement. Neimanis, Astrida. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

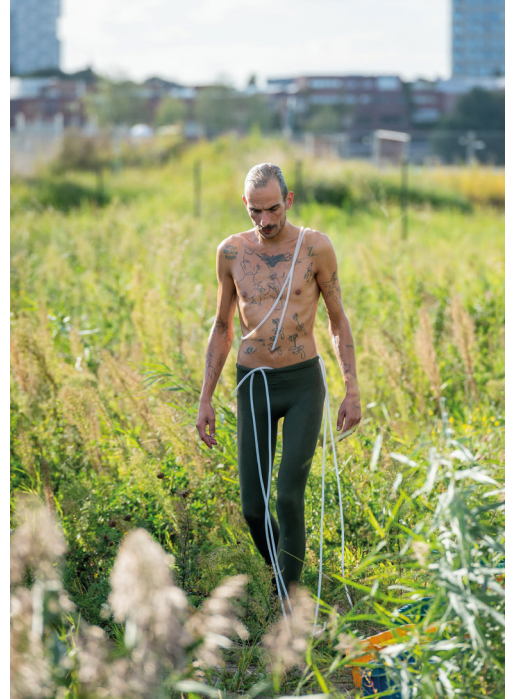
Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* – Investigates how water has been historically mythologized as a source of life and transformation. Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Harcourt, 1987.

Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* – This work expands on Federici's earlier critiques, focusing on reclaiming the body and its natural rhythms as a form of resistance to capitalist alienation. Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. PM Press, 2020.

Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* – Federici offers a feminist historical critique of how capitalist and patriarchal systems have alienated individuals from their natural bodies and collective knowledge, especially through the suppression of women's relationship with nature. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici draws on the character of Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a symbol of rebellion against colonial and capitalist forces. Caliban represents the figure connected to the earth and bodily existence, standing in contrast to Prospero's more rational, controlling relationship with nature. Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004.

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* – In *The Tempest*, Prospero's control over nature through magic symbolizes humanity's complex relationship with natural forces. His ability to command the island's elements reflects both domination and deep engagement with nature. By the end of the play, Prospero renounces his magical powers and seeks to reconnect with a more natural, human existence. This transformation parallels Nietzsche's nuanced vision of the 'plant man' and Neimanis' ideas on fluid ecological interconnectedness. Prospero's journey — from a figure of control to one of harmony with nature — serves as a narrative of reconnecting with hidden, life-sustaining forces. Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Arden Shakespeare, 2016.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight — In this Arthurian tale, the Green Knight symbolizes the untamed, cyclical forces of nature and challenges the ideals of knighthood and human mastery over the natural world. His green colour, along with his regenerative abilities, aligns him with the natural world's life-death-rebirth cycle, emphasizing nature's resilience and autonomy. Gawain's journey to face the Green Knight ultimately reveals human vulnerability and the limitations of control over the natural order, themes that resonate with Nietzsche's idea of returning to instinctual life forces. The Green Knight's challenge is not just one of physical courage but also a confrontation with the unpredictable and uncontrollable aspects of nature, inviting reflection on humanity's deeper relationship with the natural world. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Translated by Simon Armitage, WW. Norton & Company, 2008.



Edward Wilson, *Mandrakes and Other Magical Plants: History and Myth* – Mandrakes, depicted with human-like forms and magical properties, align with the concept of the 'plant man'. Their depiction as anthropomorphic beings highlights a deep connection between humans and the natural world. In *The Tempest*, mandrakes are portrayed as having human-like features and their scream upon uprooting underscores the mystical and profound bond between humans and nature. This portrayal emphasizes the integration of human and plant forms, reflecting the 'plant man' concept and its underlying themes. Wilson, Edward. *Mandrakes and Other Magical Plants: History and Myth*. Heritage Press, 2012.

Hans-Peter Dürr, *Mensch und Natur: Über das Gestaltende Prinzip der Wirklichkeit*

— The concept of Mensch-Baum-Gestalt expands on Nietzsche's vision of humanity deeply intertwined with nature, metaphorically drawing nourishment from the natural world. It connects to the idea of rediscovering primal, instinctual forces. Dürr, Hans-Peter. *Mensch und Natur: Über das Gestaltende Prinzip der Wirklichkeit*. Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 2002.

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* –

Descartes' philosophy famously separated mind and body, privileging rationality over the body and nature. This dualism has been critiqued for fostering the alienation of humans from the natural world by viewing humans as distinct from and superior to nature. In contrast, the *Rooted in the Deep* installation emphasizes rejecting this Cartesian mindset, advocating for a reconnection between humans and the primal forces of nature. Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* —

In *The Waves*, Woolf explores the fluidity of identity, time, and consciousness through the metaphor of water, using the rhythmic rise and fall of waves to represent the interconnectedness of individual lives. The novel's focus on the cyclical, natural rhythms of existence mirrors Nietzsche's idea of re-naturalization, as both suggest that human flourishing comes from aligning with nature's deep, instinctual forces rather than societal constructs. Woolf's use of water as a symbol for the porous boundaries between self and environment resonates with Astrida Neimanis's phenomenology of water, where bodies are seen as fluid, interconnected entities. *The Waves* ultimately invites reflection on the continuous flow between individual experience and the larger natural world, underscoring humanity's inextricable connection to these primal, life-sustaining forces. Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, Harcourt, 1931.

Michael Pye, *The Edge of the World* —

In *The Edge of the World*, Pye examines how the North Sea shaped the development of societies along its shores, acting as both a barrier and a conduit for exchange. The sea, in Pye's account, represents an unpredictable, transformative force that reshaped economies, cultures, and ways of life, much like the deep waters in *Rooted in the Deep* symbolize hidden currents that connect and sustain human existence. The book's focus on the North Sea as a vital, life-sustaining entity aligns with Astrida Neimanis's ideas of water as a connective force and Nietzsche's vision of returning to primal, instinctual life. Pye's exploration of life on the edge of land and water offers insights into how humans are continually shaped by natural forces, inviting a reflection on humanity's interdependence with nature. Michael Pye, *The Edge of the World: A Cultural History of the North Sea and the Transformation of Europe*, Penguin Books, 2014.

Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* —

In *The Sea Around Us*, Carson explores the ocean as a dynamic, life-sustaining force that shapes the planet's climate, geology, and ecosystems. Her vivid portrayal of the sea as both a nurturing and destructive power echoes the metaphor of deep water in *Rooted in the Deep*, which represents the unseen forces that connect and sustain all life. Carson's emphasis on the ocean's rhythms and cycles aligns with Nietzsche's vision of re-naturalization, where humanity must reconnect with the primal forces of nature. Her work also resonates with Astrida Neimanis's concept of bodies as fluid and interconnected with the environment. Carson's reflections remind us of the deep, ecological bonds between humanity and the sea, challenging us to recognize our dependence on the earth's vast, hidden systems. Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, Oxford University Press, 1951.



