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Hear the Call of the Forest. Visit the living exhibition at the Kunsthalle

They turned a New York taxi into a sculpture overgrown with trees, connected a gallery with a pipe made of branches, animated tree tattoos, and turned The New York Times newspaper back into wood. Kristýna and Marek Milde are looking for the intersection between nature and the city in their first institutional exhibition in Prague.

The exhibition *The Call of the Forest* reflects their long-standing interest in the relationship between humans and nature. The Prague natives, who have lived in Brooklyn, New York, for over twenty years, explore, through everyday spaces and objects, how we live in relation to nature and how we are often disconnected from it.

"We don't offer a view of nature as such. These are glimpses into different situations and places through the lens of urban life," says **Kristýna Milde**, the female half of the artistic duo, about the exhibition. The couple mentions that time spent in energetic and urbanized New York makes them appreciate moments in nature even more.

In their artistic practice, which includes installations, sculptures, collages and animations, the Milde family often works with materials from the natural environment, from bits of moss to mature trees. They use the tree motif not only as a metaphor for perseverance and growth, but also for the enduring bond between trees and people. "At a time when it is often difficult to discern our true nature and origins amidst the noise of the world we have created, *The Call of the Forest* seeks to listen and perceive the quiet but ever-present voice of nature, reminding us where we truly belong," they explain.

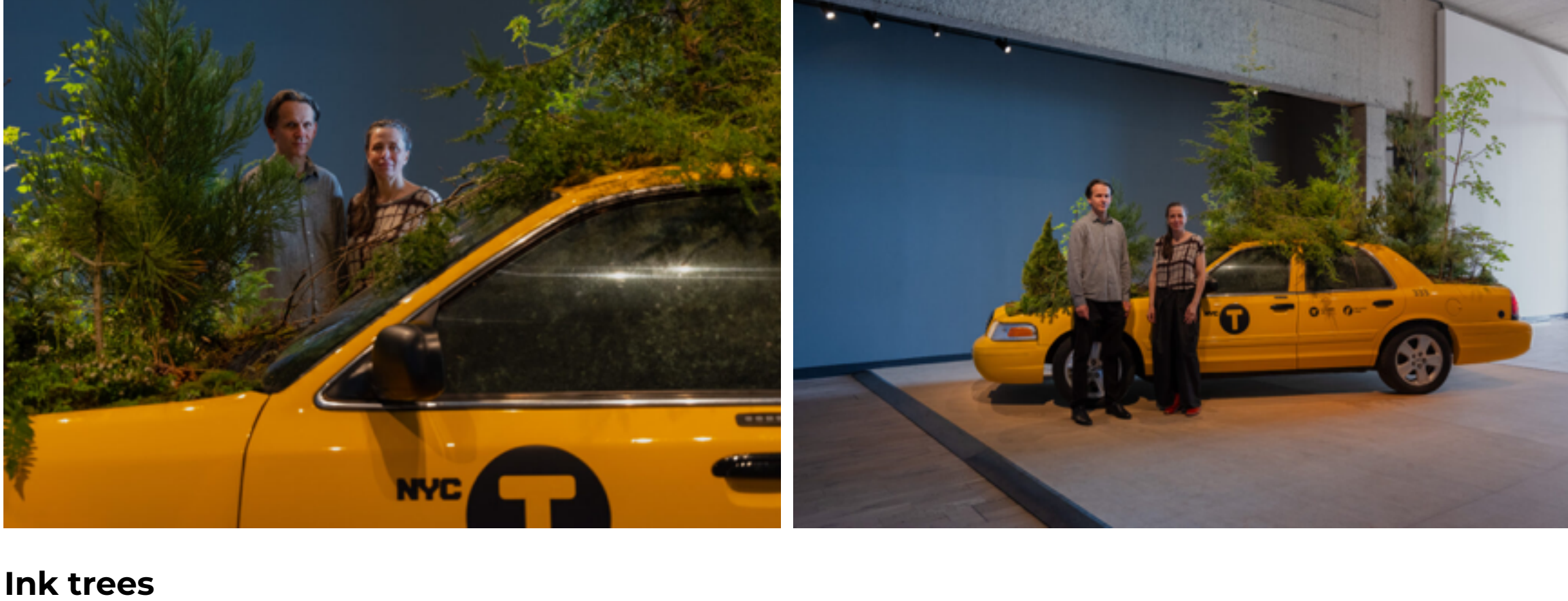


"The playfulness, poetics, and subtle sense of humor that Kristýna and Marek employ in their art offer a fresh perspective on the dichotomy of the artificial and the organic. The surprising nature of these works makes them easily accessible without diminishing the seriousness of the themes they address," says exhibition curator **Theo Carnegie-Tan**.

A crowded taxi as a symbol of migration

The exhibition has been in the works for almost five years. It presents a selection of new, long-term and older projects. New works created specifically for Kunsthalle Praha include *Arbomobil*. Cypresses, thujas and even sequoias, trees originating from North America, grow from a typical yellow New York taxi parked in Gallery 3. "The project highlights the fact that in colonial times there was a constant movement of vegetation from the New World and these plants became part of the European ecosystem," says **Marek Milde**.

"The mobility of our civilization, which we demonstrate with that taxi, contrasts with the long-term roots of the forest," adds Kristýna, smilingly pointing out that they even grew blueberries among the flora on display. After the exhibition, the taxi will remain in the Czech Republic - they plan to place it in a public space. The floor of the car will also be removed so that the trees can grow more freely and take root. In this way, the artists will symbolically return to their roots.



Ink trees

Another artistic novelty is the immersive large-format animation *Call of the Forest*, after which the exhibition is named. It is a video installation composed of tree tattoos that the artists collected from their bearers based on an open challenge that is still ongoing. "From these individual trees, we created a forest that visitors can enter. Interaction is important to us in the exhibition, so that people become a part of it," explains Marek.

The work also has an emotional dimension. The artists asked the wearers why they had this particular tree tattooed. "We have over fifty different stories that point out that a tree is a symbol of strength for people or a memory of a place or person," adds Kristýna.



After a year of preparation, they handed over the collected motifs to animator **Jakub Kouřil**, who animated them. The ambient music for the exhibition was composed by **Abhi**, an Indian composer living in Prague.

Overgrown gallery

The long-term site-specific project *In-Tree-Net* blurs the boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces. The trees here mimic engineering networks, such as pipes and cables, through which vital resources flow into buildings. "We used industrial elements along with the branches to secure the pipes in the architecture, thereby highlighting the contrast between nature and the city. At the same time, it is important for us to connect nature with indoor space, because without the energy that comes to us from the environment, we could not exist," says Kristýna, noting that the exhibition begins in the lobby and imaginatively grows throughout the gallery.

"Nature is not depicted here in an idealized way, as it would have come into being on its own. It is fixed. We want to awaken in people sensitivity and awareness of how we treat and influence nature," adds Marek about the concept with which the artistic duo responds to the space and has been dedicated to it since 2009. You can also find a similar work at Trébešice Castle.



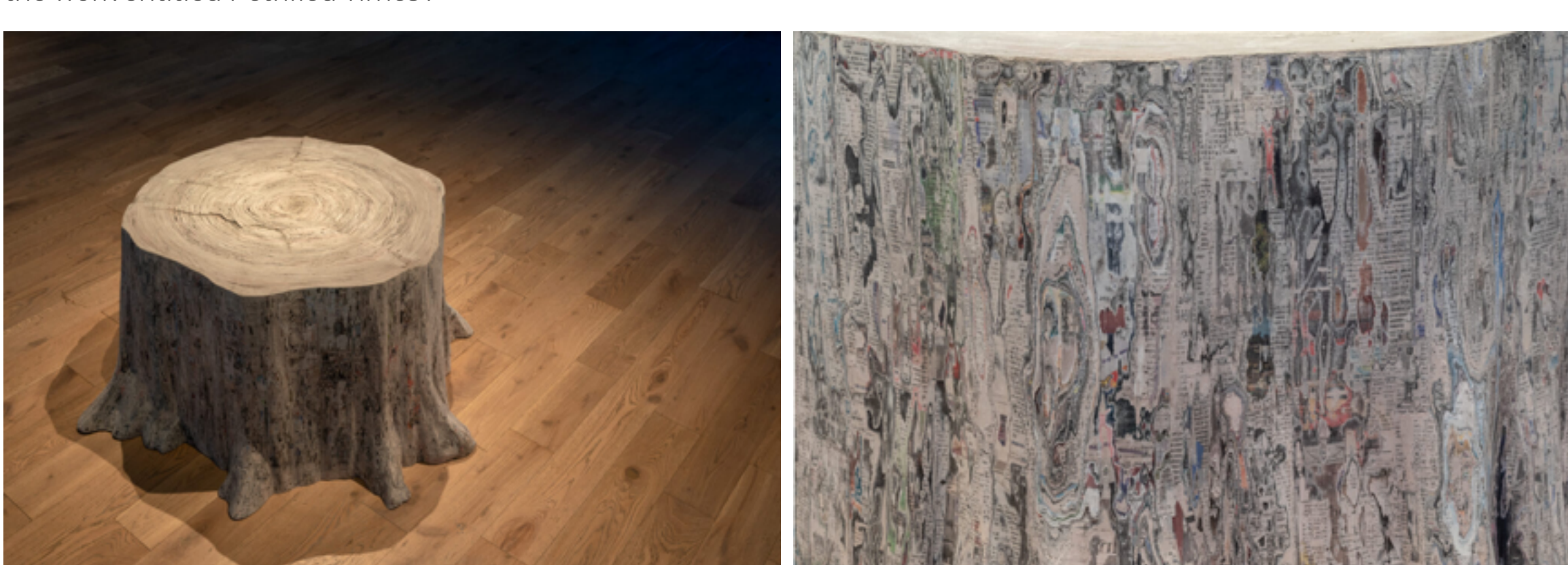
Cleaning nature

They are also trying to achieve the same goal they are pursuing with the branch pipe through two videos documenting the cleaning of nature, which the authors approached in the same way as cleaning the household. They scrub the trees with a sponge and common cleaning products, and they mop the floor with a mop. "With the care we take in cleaning our home, we also clean trees, stones and sweep in the forest. At first glance, it is absurd and a bit funny, but we are following a deeper idea that as a human civilization we are beginning to alienate ourselves and separate ourselves from the cycle of nature," says Marek, demonstrating this with the example that we do not mind when crumbs from our snack fall on the ground in nature, but as soon as the same thing happens at home, we go and deal with it immediately, because no ants will get rid of the crumbs. "By using chemical cleaning products, we are also pointing out how toxic our homes can be," adds Kristýna.

Petrified Times

During the Covid pandemic, the Milde family have been gradually gluing a year's worth of *The New York Times* into the shape of a tree stump every day, symbolically transforming it back into the shape of wood. The individual layers of glued newspaper sheets form the tree's annual rings.

"When we started making this stump on January 1, 2020, we had no idea how groundbreaking and fundamental a year it would be. The pandemic broke out, we had major social unrest in the United States, and there were also presidential elections. As a result, the media became increasingly burdensome over the course of the year. Their certain venom and sensationalism, used as a targeted method of presenting information, seemed overwhelming to us, and in this stump we silenced this information to just a piece of matter. In the forest, this year was like any other," Marek describes the creation of the work entitled *Petrified Times*.



They also cut out headlines from newspapers and composed poetry, haiku, from them. Seven of them are on display in physical form, and fifty-three are projected onto a curtain made of plastic bags in which American newspapers are delivered.

The largest exhibition to date

Breaking through on the American art scene is not easy. It was an even greater success for the Milde family to be selected among five hundred applicants for the prestigious Art Omi residency. They had a solo exhibition in Chelsea, for example. The current exhibition at Kunsthalle Prague, which will run **until August 31**, is the artistic duo's biggest and most heartfelt project to date.

The Call of the Forest is part of Kunsthalle Praha Invites – a series of solo exhibitions that present emerging artists with extensive original work. In many cases, this is their first major institutional exhibition. The series supports the emergence of new, research-based projects across media and is accompanied by a rich program for the public. Last year, Ester Geislerová, for example, exhibited here as part of this series.

The accompanying program for the exhibition includes guided tours with the authors, a tattoo workshop with artist David Čáp, a woodworking workshop with designer Matěj Coufal, and a lecture on non-native and invasive plant species by biologist Martin Hůla. Kunsthalle Prague also organizes special educational programs for schools, including free guided tours, workshops exploring the exhibition's themes through creative tools, such as images and texts generated by artificial intelligence, and a summer school for teachers. The exhibition will be followed by a new year of the innovative debate league, which will focus on the compatibility of sustainability and artistic creation.

Source: Katarína Hudačínová / Kunsthalle Prague

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