

grief

and

hope

ANDREA BOWERS
grief and hope

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Booklet

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Cover: Andrea Bowers, *grief and hope*, 2019

Introduction

“Environmental grief” describes mourning the loss of nature and its creatures. Coined as early as twenty years ago, the term describes the feeling of bereavement experienced by those who either witness or anticipate the loss of landscapes, plant or animal species, or entire ecosystems as a consequence of human-induced climate change and other intervention. The notion of environmental grief has circulated widely in recent years, steeped in evidence that the Earth’s sixth mass extinction event is already underway, that our global ecosystem is growing weaker and weaker and that the entire biosphere is being irreparably destroyed by human activity.

Andrea Bowers has been recording activists as part of her multimedia practice for twenty years. In “grief and hope” Museum Abteiberg surveys a selection of Bowers’ works focusing on environmentalism, ecofeminism and climate justice. Always topical, Bowers’s work can also be read as a documentation of the environmental movement itself; subjects she draws from include the “magical politics” movements of the 1980s, the feminist push against nuclear power, resistance to oil drilling in the Arctic, tree sitting in Los Angeles to save green spaces from urban sprawl, and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s battle to protect their water and halt construction of pipelines under the Missouri River. Though her early work is characterized by the notion of radical patience, the artist has described a shift in her thinking since activist Tim DeChristopher declared in one of her films that it is too late to stop climate change and that we must prepare ourselves as best we can.

Bowers’s most recent work with Tokata Iron Eyes reflects the hope of the youth climate movement and its demand for change now in the face of climate emergency. Equally essential to the content of Bowers’ work is her use of aesthetics. She uses craft to show how important artwork can be as an instigator for social and political change.

Political Ribbons for Abteiberg 2020

#1

Courtesy of the artist and Captain Petzel Berlin,
Andrew Kreps Gallery New York and Vielmetter Los Angeles

This piece was first made for an exhibition at the Hammer Museum in 2017. Sentiments shared by the activist groups Food & Water Watch and the South Central Farm are evoked in a series of multicolored takeaway ribbons. Screen-printed by hand, the ribbons show various statements that reflect the concerns of the #NoDAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline protest) movement and broader commitments to sustainable agriculture and clean water. While the slogans change with the project's exhibition at different institutions, they always underscore issues that directly affect the local community where the museum is located. Bowers's long-standing commitment to environmental advocacy sits at the heart of her artistic work; statements seen here can be read as personal calls to action. The project as a whole also reflects the artist's interest in gift culture, as viewers are invited to take a ribbon from the wall.



#2

The United States v. Tim DeChristopher 2010

16:15 min

The United States v. Tim DeChristopher puts a spotlight on the defendant named in the title: a Utah student who posed as a bidder and disrupted a government auction of 150,000 acres of wilderness for oil and gas drilling as an act of civil disobedience. In December 2008, DeChristopher bid for and won fourteen parcels (22,000 acres) of land near Arches National Park and Labyrinth Canyon worth \$1.8 million—and then announced that he had neither the intention nor the money to pay for them. When authorities realized what DeChristopher was doing, the auction was stopped and he was arrested. Many of the leases that would have permitted drilling on pristine acres of public land in Utah—land that included some of the most beautiful, environmentally-sensitive red-rock desert in the US—were subsequently canceled. But DeChristopher has faced serious consequences as a result. The activist was charged with making false statements and interfering with an auction, felonies that can lead to up to ten years imprisonment and fines of \$750,000. On July 26, 2011, DeChristopher was sentenced to two years in prison and ordered to pay a \$10,000 fine. Bowers's video includes an interview with DeChristopher and footage of the artist walking through the parcels of land that the activist won in the auction.



People's Initiative Poetic Protest on Paper (Group 1) 2020

#3

Bowers was in Bremen in 2018 when she learned of a local civil initiative against the planned removal of 136 plane trees by the nearby Weser river. Each of the trees was assigned a poem with the help of the public, a collaborative act that resulted in a site-specific wall painting that shows the plane leaves along with a selection of German- and English-language slogans used in the protests. *People's Initiative Poetic Protest on Paper* is a group of large-scale graphite drawings Bowers created in response to her site-specific work at Weserburg Museum in Bremen. It has been incorporated into her survey exhibition at Museum Abteiberg.



#4

**Step It Up Activists, Sand Key Reef, Key West, Florida, Part of
North America's Only Remaining Coral Barrier Reef (2007)
2009**

Collection Charlotte Feng Ford, New York

This drawing is based on a photograph of Step It Up activists raising awareness about environmental issues affecting Sand Key Reef in Key West Florida, part of North America's only remaining coral reef. Ocean warming is killing coral around the world.



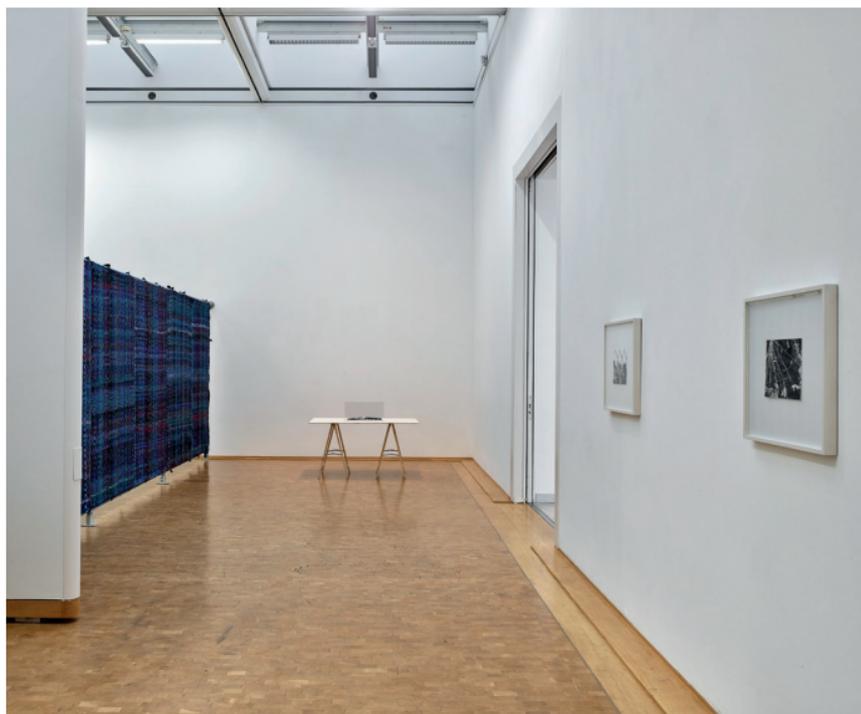
Feminist Spirituality and Magical Politics Scrapbook**Diablo Blockade, Diablo Nuclear Power Plant, Abalone Alliance (1981)****Women's Pentagon Action, Detail of Woven Web around Pentagon (1981)****Soft Blockade Scrapbook
2003–2004**

#6, #7, #8 Collection Gaby & Wilhem Schürmann, Herzogenrath

The entrance to gallery one is blocked by a woven tapestry with needlepoint that resembles a chain link fence. The piece bears reference to the first Woman's Pentagon Action in Washington DC, when 2,000 women wove the doors of the Pentagon shut with symbolic webs to protest nuclear reactors. The weaving of webs was embraced as a metaphor for women's power against patriarchal institutions. The action inspired a number of other protests in the 1980s.

Bowers on Magical Politics: "I discovered the idea of 'magical politics' in Barbara Epstein's book *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution*. Magical politics was a non-violent, directaction movement that emerged in the United States in the early 1980s and combined feminism, spiritualism, and environmentalism. The majority of their actions centered on the arms race and its impact on the environment, and some of the actions realized by the women's affinity groups involved in this movement took place at sites including the Pentagon, the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant in California, the Seneca Army Depot in upstate New York, and the U.S. Department of Energy's Nevada Test Site north of Las Vegas. The term 'magical politics' was coined by Epstein, though I doubt any members of the movement are even aware of it. It refers to the movement's spiritual makeup, which constituted an alliance between radical leftist Christians (mainly Catholic and Protestant groups such as the Catholic Workers, Jonah House, Atlantic Life Community, and Ground Zero) and feminist pagans. There is an absurdity in the union of these groups' faiths that is at once humorous and utopian. Their ability to work together effectively was an amazing accomplishment, especially considering the fraught interactions of other opposing religions around the world. Viewed from the current climate of religious fundamentalism in the United States and throughout much of the world, the collaborative spirit of the magical politics groups presents an almost unimaginable model of acceptance of others' differing beliefs."

These two drawings (#7, #8) are based on newspaper photographs. They show protestors behind fencing at Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant in California in September 1981 and at the first Women's Pentagon Action in November 16-17, 1980.



Mavis Muller - Alaskans Still Fighting for the Earth Banner
2009

The installation includes a banner that environmental activist Mavis Muller painted and hung on a trawler in 1989 during the Exxon Valdez incident and a handmade book titled *The Day The Water Died* that contains personal accounts of locals' experience of living through the Exxon Valdez oil spill on March 24, 1989. Bowers spent time in Arctic Village, Alaska, where she spoke to community members from the affected area around the Prince William Sound. They told stories about the aftermath of the disaster and explained how the land and economy had still not recovered almost twenty years later.



17:03 min

Circle combines panoramic landscapes with interviews and footage showing four generations of women from the Arctic Village. These women—some of whom are members of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, an activist organization led by the indigenous Gwich'in Nation—eloquently express their people's urgent need to prevent oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and protect their lands from global warming.



Collection Charlotte Feng Ford, New York

Ken Saro-Wiwa's Last Words, November 10, 1995 shows the last words of slain Nigerian activist Kenule Beeson "Ken" Saro-Wiwa: "Lord take my soul, but the struggle continues." It is exhibited alongside a selection of newspaper clippings about the case. Saro-Wiwa, an avid critic of the Nigerian government, helped lead a resistance movement against the international petroleum industry's expansion into the Ogoni region. He was tried by a military court for allegedly masterminding the murder of Ogoni chiefs and was subsequently executed by hanging on November 10, 1995.



Courtesy of the artist, Capitain Petzel Berlin,
Andrew Kreps Gallery New York, Vielmetter Los Angeles

“Environmental grief” is an experience of sadness or mourning for the loss of nature and its creatures. As our options for reversing climate change fade, Bowers is trying to move from grief to hope by making activists and political actions the focus and main subject of her work. Graphic design by Julieta Gil.



**I Am Nature: Champion International Clearcut;
West Flank of the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness
2013**

#16

This large drawing monumentalizes part an environmental activist flyer—a reproduced, photocopied image depicting a razed forest. The enlarged rendering fluctuates between abstraction and representation. Bowers has mused that this is her way of making the (notoriously macho) Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock an ecofeminist.



#17–20

Clean Air Pure Water Healthy Land Tree
Sitting Platform for Forest Defense
2012

Tree Sits - Canopy Camping, Earth First!
Direct Action Manual with Dream Platform
2011

Save Our Last Places Tree Sitting Love Seat
2012

Stop Ecocide Tree Sitting Platform for Forest Defense
2012

#17 Private Collection, #18 Collection Charlotte Feng Ford, New York

Tree sitting speaks to the highest level of forest defense and has been very successful in halting logging all over the world. It is a form of environmentalist civil disobedience in which a protester sits in a tree, usually on a small platform built for the purpose, to protect it from being cut down. This exhibition includes a selection of sculptures from Bowers's series of tree sitting platforms—works focused on climate justice and feminist subjectivity in art and activism. Bowers fabricated all of the works with an activist from the Arcadia tree sit, a veteran tree sitter who spent over six years living in old growth redwoods throughout Humboldt County in Northern California. Like many of Bowers's projects, they are a celebration of craft: in this case, the activist's work with reused and recycled wood and his exceptional knot tying.



Collection Gaby & Wilhelm Schürmann, Herzogenrath

This is a self-portrait drawing of the artist's mug shot taken at the time of her arrest for tree sitting in 2013.



#22

Interview with Betty Ann 2009

8:28 min (on view in mesh tent)

Bowers took a trip with a small group of activists to the Arctic Village in northern Alaska in the summer of 2009. It is a village of 150 indigenous people, called the Gwich'in, and is located in the southern edge of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. The events were organized by the Gwich'in Steering Committee, a group formed in 1988 in response to proposals to drill for oil in the Sacred Place Where Life Begins, the coastal plain of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. The body of work she produced from this experience investigates the complicated politics of dealing with the contemporary idea of landscape. During this trip, she realized that a motley crew of global environmentalists in a strained alliance with an indigenous population were no match against big oil companies. *Interview with Betty Ann* continues Bowers's interest in storytelling. For the first time, she turns the camera on herself to tell a story about her correspondence with a deaf woman and bead artist she met in the Arctic Village.



Nonviolent Civil Disobedience
Training-Tree Sitting
Forest Defense
2009

#23

33:50 min

This video, one in a series of training videos, documents a tree-climbing lesson that environmental activist John Quigley gave to Bowers. This piece focuses on the metaphor of ascension. It captures the good intentions and hopes of the environmentalist movement and continues Bowers's exploration of choreographic movements resulting from political action. The platform was used in the 2006 South Central Farm tree sit in Los Angeles.



#24

I Plan to Stay a Believer The Arcadia 4 Tree Sit 2013

1:00:55 min

In 2011, the artist and three other activists were arrested for climbing into the trees of a native oak woodland habitat in Arcadia, California. The group was trying to save a pristine forest of 250 trees from being razed by Los Angeles County. One of the horrible and unanticipated outcomes of this action was that all of trees around them were ripped out of the forest as they were tied to the canopies of two oaks. The destroyed trees were subsequently put into wood-choppers. Bowers was arrested on three misdemeanor charges and placed in jail for two days. She videotaped the entire experience until law enforcement took her camera into evidence. The video *I Plan to Stay a Believer* (2013) includes her footage, news footage, and the sheriff's department's recordings.



Bought 1978

Piano: Jelena Terwey, Berlin.

Thanks to Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Henrich Böll Stiftung, Berlin

Joseph Beuys, Revolutionsklavier, 1969 © Joseph Beuys / VG-Bildkunst, Bonn 2020

Petra Kelly was a politician, activist and pioneer of the German eco-feminist movement. Andrea Bowers's exhibition at Museum Abteiberg includes a site-specific installation centered on Kelly's legacy, a piece made in close dialogue with Joseph Beuys's *Revolutionsklavier* (Revolutionary Piano). Alluding to their close relationship (Beuys and Kelly knew each other well, as they were both founding members of the Germany's Green Party) Bowers positions Kelly's original piano right next to the one Beuys placed his roses on during his famous action in 1969—once again, here on site at the opening of Museum Abteiberg in 1982. Projected behind the works is a video collage that incorporates archival footage of Petra Kelly's interviews and talk show appearances. Original sheet music for old revolutionary songs was found hidden inside the piano only after it arrived at the museum.



Collection Gaby & Wilhelm Schürmann, Herzogenrath

Bowers asked a male tree sitter what his fantasy tree sitting platform would be. His response took her aback. As the artist herself put it, "All of my frustration, insecurities and inequalities of living in a patriarchal culture flooded over me with his two words: pirate ship. I was immediately annoyed and unamused, of course. A typical man, I thought. Somehow it was so obvious and yet, I would never have thought of that. For years I've been negotiating the gender imbalances in both art and activism. The Humboldt [County, California] activist and I built a 25-foot, feminist pirate ship tree sitting platform together."



The Capitalist Vampire (Illustration by Walter Crane)
2013

#27

Private Collection, Cologne

The Capitalist Vampire takes its cue from an illustration by Walter Crane, a founding figure in the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain in the late 19th century. The story of Bound Prometheus—the immortal god who was chained to a rock and perpetually punished for his betrayal of the gods—is reimagined to show Prometheus as a worker. This time it is not Zeus who torments him but a vampire-like monster that represents capitalism, party politics and religious hypocrisy. Socialism appears as a winged Fortuna, emerging from the background to come to his aid. Bowers remained true to the original design, altering solely the dimensions. Her work points to the unchanged political relevance of Crane's commentary for the modern world.



Sabotage Handbooks Drawings 2009-2016

The *Sabotage Handbooks* are resistance movement artifacts that include detailed instructions for non-violent acts of civil disobedience. The subject matter and views expressed in these books do not reflect those of any established group or movement. The drawings exhibited take their cue from the handbooks. *The Black Cat Sabotage Handbook, 2004: "Animal Liberation Front"* (2009), *The Black Cat Sabotage Handbook, 2004: "Mommy Says Never Talk to Fuckin' Cops!"* (2009), *Armed bands are roaming the highways and marching through your neighbourhood* (2016), *A Spell Against Developers* (2016), *A Single Act of Defiance* (2016), *The Black Cat Sabotage Handbook, 2004: Visualize Industrial Collapse* (2011) and *Bracelets and Lock Boxes, Earth First! Direct Action Manual* (2011).



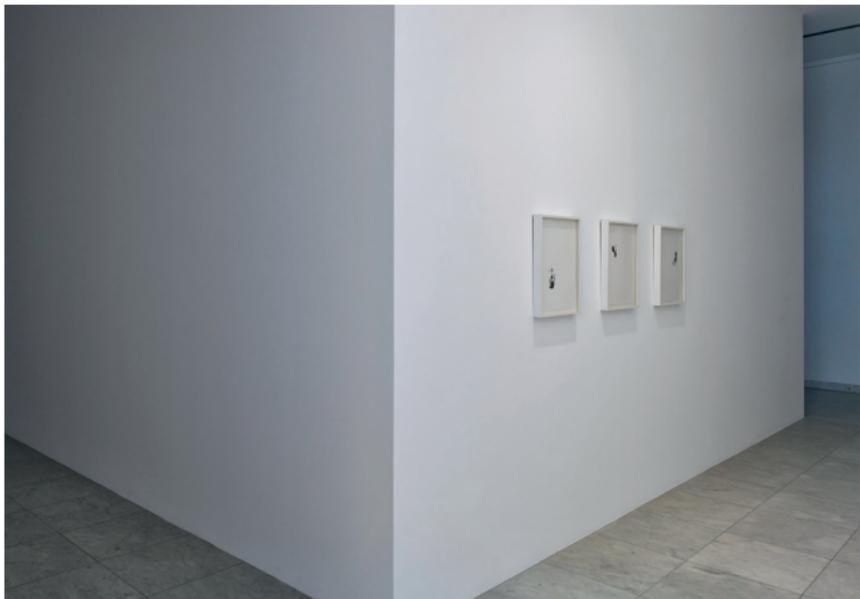
**Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Drawing-Go Perfectly
Limp and Be Carried Away
2004**

#36

Collection Charlotte Feng Ford, New York

So-called “soft” blockades are human barricades that use no gear except for the human body. Examples include holding hands, locking arms or forming a human chain. These barricades can involve one person or thousands of people in nonviolent direct action; they can be a stand-alone tactic or part of a larger overall strategy, as in an occupation.

Bowers isolates a group of figures to highlight their body movements, transforming the documentation of an activist event into a dance performance still. The artist’s drawing triptych puts a heroic spotlight on an anonymous subject and acts as a reminder that the impact of many results from the power of one. The work draws inspiration from feminist activists involved in 20th century protests. It also attests to her love of choreographers, including Anna Halpern, Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti.



17:29 min

Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Training is essentially a training video. The left side of this two-channel video projection shows young, classically trained dancers attending a direct action training course taught by nonviolent activists and educators. The right side shows the students physically acting out what they have learned. The choreography of non-violent protest bears a strong resemblance to modes of early modern dance championed by Anna Halpern and Yvonne Rainer. The political underpinnings of their art is implicit in its break from traditional choreography and all-around empowerment of women.



Constructed from repurposed cardboard, the three texts—Water Is Life, *Tierra y Libertad* (“land and liberty” in Spanish), and Mni Wiconi (“water is life” in Lakota)—form direct links between environmental sustainability and recent divestment campaigns, the #NoDAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline protest) movement, and the global support of indigenous rights. Graphic design by Marcelinda del Norte.



Battlefields, Gardens and Graveyards (Sentimental Scrapbook Displayed) and *After You've Gone* were part of the exhibition "From Mouth to Ear." Bowers was looking for a way to use repetition and imitation as a model for invention and creativity. The title is a reference to storytelling, a different kind of historical recording. The project, as the artist notes, "was about my subjective historical influences in art, music, and writing, all of which dealt in some way with familial heritage—the tradition of passing information from one generation to the next. In the process of looking for influences and role models, I began to perceive a historical gender imbalance. At that time, there were so few publications or exhibitions of women artists to access as influences. I started to work on a positive model of historic precedence through the use of repetition to pay homage and memorialize." *Battlefields, Graveyards and Gardens (Sentimental Scrapbook Displayed)* contains photocopies of source material, a subjective grouping of artists, musicians, and writers that influenced Bowers personally and whose artistic practice commemorated other artists or served as a model for making art that portrayed a positive familial relationship.



After You've Gone
2002/2020

#40

After You've Gone consists of three large pieces of stone, two video monitors and a sound system. The project began when Bowers learned that American singer Janis Joplin helped pay for a tombstone on blues icon Bessie Smith's unmarked grave and then died two months later. The video on the front monitor is a seven-minute, looped shot of the back of Smith's grave in Pennsylvania; the only movement in the footage can be seen in the sky. The video on the rear monitor is a thirty-second clip of the inscription on the front of her tombstone, "The greatest Blues singer in the world will never stop singing." It loops forward, and then in reverse. The sky is clearly reflected on the surface of the tombstone. The sound is looped in two parts: first Bessie Smith's voice is blended with Nina Simone as both sing "After You've Gone," then Simone's voice is heard layered over Joplin's rendition of "Little Girl Blue."

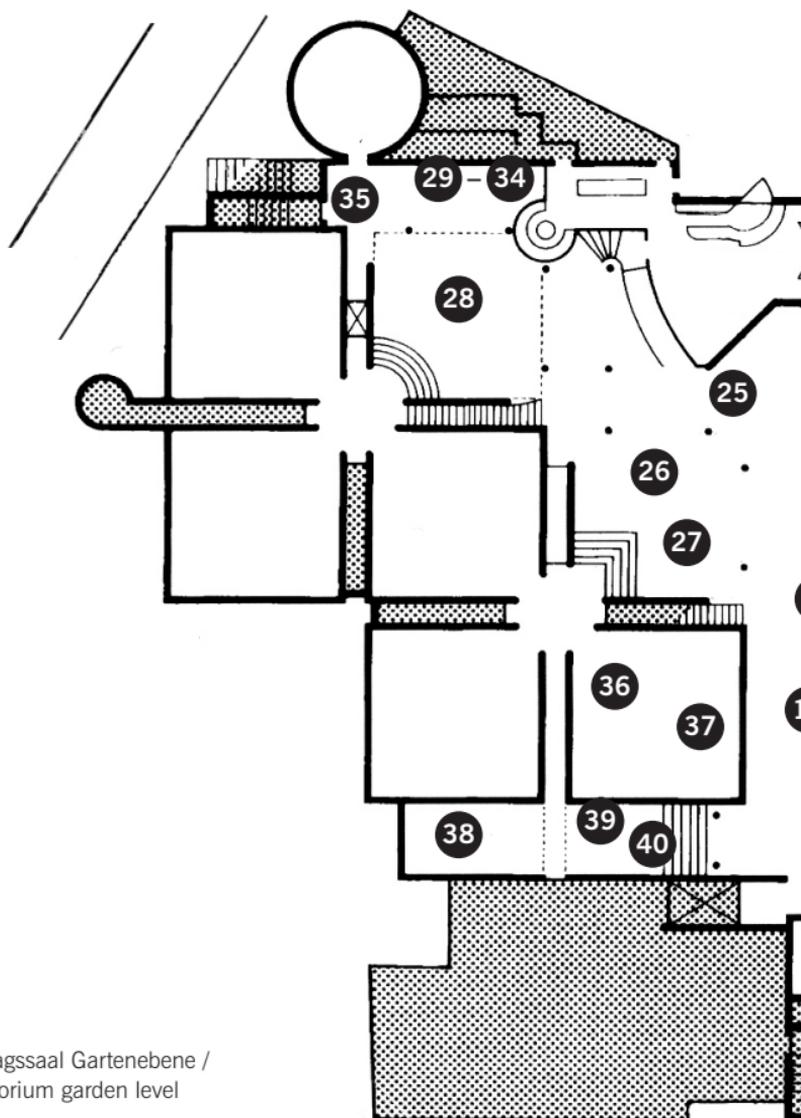


51:06 min

My Name Means Future. Centered on Tokata Iron Eyes, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe who has been involved with the movement to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline since its inception, the video continues Bowers's commitment to documenting important activists of her time. Bowers asked the young activist to show her some of her most sacred places in South Dakota. They spent four days travelling together with a small group of artist and activist friends. The resulting video shows interviews and landscape drone shots of the youth activist discussing the landscapes, their histories, and the personal and political issues that being in these sacred sites raised for her. "Tokata" means "Future" in the Lakota language



RAUMPLAN / FLOOR PLAN



41

Vortragssaal Gartenebene /
Auditorium garden level

