

NOMAD

CAPE
FAREWELL



phy·tol·o·gy

www.phytology.org.uk

Artists & botanists, wild plants & weeds | Bethnal Green Nature Reserve | London E2
Vhils | Talya Baldwin | Ministry of Stories | Jagonari | Institute of Use | Siobhan Davies Dance



Launch events: 17 May – 18 May with Urban Hedgrow, Talya Baldwin, Michael Smythe, Peter Giovannini, Monique Simmonds, Melissa Ronaldson, The Nest Collective, Ken Greenway, Johanna Gibbons & Neil Davidson and others

Open: Friday & Saturday 26 April – 14 September 2014, or by appointment

In the north-west corner of Bethnal Green Nature Reserve in East London, *Phytology* is quietly gestating. Part urban physic garden, part natural laboratory and part pharmacy, it is a new year-long collaboration with artists and botanists, exploring the medicinal properties of wild plants and weeds common to derelict urban environments. Thirty-two species of wild plants – usually regarded as weeds - have been sown on a specially created site that was once meadow and pasture, and occupied by a medieval nursery and market gardens.

Ranging from Black Mustard, Common Nettle and Feverwort, to Wild Garlic, Marsh Mallow and Sweet Woodruff, the plants have been selected for their continued use in phytotherapy and traditional medicine. The scheme would have been familiar to readers of the *Old English Herbarium* that was translated from a 5th century Latin text in around 1,000 AD and widely used in Europe for centuries. Visitors to the Reserve are encouraged to learn how to safely identify, harvest and utilise the plants for medicinal and nutritional purposes.

The new medicinal plant field is celebrated in a series of year-long artist commissions taking place in the Reserve throughout the spring and summer, supported by an Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust. British artist **Talya Baldwin** is producing a contemporary take on botanical illustrations depicting all 32 species of 'weeds' for a billboard hoarding located within the Reserve and an online archive at phytology.org.uk

Vhils, a Portuguese artist whose radical form of urban art explores the aesthetics of vandalism, is responding to the plant collection with a large-scale site-based carving, street stencils and billboard posters; and artist-designers **Institute of Use**, whose work re-purposes underused spaces, investigate the history, ecology and derelict materiality of the site.

Phytology launches from mid May with *Human Nature*, a series of talks commissioned by **Siobhan Davies Dance** in parallel to Chelsea Fringe Festival and the London Festival of Architecture 2014. Focused around ideas of urban wildness, harvestable medicine, alternative urban planning and biodiversity in the modern metropolis, it takes place within the Phytology site, and at Siobhan Davies Dance Studios. Speakers include **Thomas Heatherwick, Dan Pearson, Tony Juniper, Ackroyd & Harvey, Urban Hedgrow, Talya Baldwin, Michael Smythe, Peter Giovannini, Monique Simmonds, Melissa Ronaldson, Ken Greenway, Johanna Gibbons** and **Neil Davidson**. The Nest Collective, a 'new folk, old folk, no folk' music venue also begin a five month residency on 17 May for *Phytology*.

Phytology is also a collaboration with locally based, internationally influential organisations including the **Ministry of Stories**, who work with young people and renowned novelists, scriptwriters, poets, artists and filmmakers on experimental creative writing projects; and **Jagonari**, a ground-breaking organisation for non-European women based in Whitechapel.

Bethnal Green Nature Reserve was once the site of St Jude's Church, one of ten churches built in the area to serve what the Bishop of London then called 'one of the most desolate of parishes'. It was bombed in 1940, and almost totally destroyed though remains can still be seen amongst the trees and plants. In the 1990s the local Teesdale and Hollybush Tenants and Residents Association took the site over and have cared for it ever since.

* *Phytology*: a rarely used 17th century word meaning botany.

Phytology is a Nomad and Cape Farewell project. Supported by the Wellcome Trust and Arts Council England. It is a partnership with the Teesdale and Hollybush Tenants and Residents Association, whose dedicated management of the Reserve has protected and developed it.

Human Nature is curated in collaboration with Alison Proctor of Siobhan Davies Dance, and independent producer Vicky Long.

For more information, interviews and images please contact Janette Scott Arts PR on janettescottartspr@gmail.com, or Michael Smythe on Michael@nomad.org.uk or 07817 262277.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Phytology is open 26 April – 14 September 2014, Friday and Saturday, 10:00am – 5:00pm, or at other times by appointment. Email info@phytology.org.uk Admission, free. Bethnal Green Nature Reserve. Middleton Street, Bethnal Green, London E2 9RN - <http://goo.gl/maps/mOza7> For more information see www.phytology.org.uk

For details of the *Human Nature* talks and events programme please see www.phytology.org.uk. The Nest Collective are performing 17 May, 13th & 28th June, 12th & 26th July, 10th & 30th August and 8th September. See www.phytology.org.uk or further details.

Phytology brings artists and botanists together to explore the medicinal properties of plants that are common to derelict urban environments. Thirty-two species have been sown on a specially created site in the *Bethnal Green Nature Reserve*. Generally regarded as 'just weeds', each plant has been selected for their on-going use in phytotherapy and traditional medicine. The project invites visitors to explore the site, to harvest and use the plants for medicinal and nutritional purposes. *Phytology* aims to challenge ideas of use, value, resilience and the function of wildness within our urban ecosystem. *Phytology* has been advised by ethno-botanist Dr Peter Giovannini, International Projects Officer for Kew Botanic Gardens. He was recently part of a group of international experts on plants used by humankind that urged the development of a global program on the conservation of useful plants and associated knowledge.

Talya Baldwin is a British illustrator who graduating from *Central Saint Martins*, London and is now based in West Yorkshire, England. Her drawings are always rendered by hand using biros, coloured pencils, pastels, wax crayons and felt tip pens. Her work often documents the unloved, forgotten, unpopular or overlooked such as weeds, pigeons, rats and human outsiders. www.talyabaldwin.com

Alexandre Farto a.k.a Vhils was born in Portugal in 1987. He studied at *Central Saint Martins*, London. Vhils currently lives in both London and Lisbon, Portugal. An avid experimentalist, he has been developing his notion of the aesthetics of vandalism in the form of stencil painting, wall carving and pyrotechnic explosion drawings. www.alexandrefarto.com

The Nest Collective The Nest Collective (offspring of The Magpie's Nest – BBC Folk Club of 2010) – has grown to become London's place to go for discovering the amazing resurgence in music being made under the banner of 'New Folk, Old Folk & No Folk'. Formed in 2006, The Nest Collective hosts regular events, creating platforms for traditionally-inspired British and World artists from both emerging and established backgrounds. www.thenestcollective.co.uk

The Jagonari Centre was founded by a group of Bangladeshi women in 1987, its original aim in part to challenge mainstream representations of Bangladeshi women, though it is now an inclusive women's organisation providing a wide range of events, workshops and educational projects. www.jagonari.org.uk

Institute of Use founded in 2013 explores methods of collaborative design, ways of extending the lifecycle of materials and developing new uses for underused spaces. www.instituteofuse.org

The Ministry of Stories provides a free and encouraging space for young people to explore and experiment with creative writing in all its many forms. It was founded in London by the author Nick Hornby and co-directors Lucy Macnab & Ben Payne in 2011. www.ministryofstories.org

Founded and led since 1988 by pioneering choreographer Siobhan Davies, Siobhan Davies Dance has evolved over the years from a touring dance company into an investigative contemporary arts organisation. www.siobhandavies.com

Nomad was established in 2009 by Michael Smythe to facilitate new dialogues between artist, collaboration and exhibition in the public domain. Nomad continually strives to build support structures for artists to explore non-traditional working and presentation methods. Their commissioning process is orientated towards increasing knowledge and experience for artists, collaborators and audiences alike. Recent projects include Marcus Coates' *The School of Imagination* (2013) and *Vision Quest* (2010), *Day of the Dead* in the Old Vic Tunnels (2012), and *The Memory of W T Stead* (2013) by Lundahl & Seidl and Cassie Yukawa. www.nomad.org.uk

Cape Farewell works in partnership with scientific and cultural institutions to deliver an innovative climate programme of public engagement using the notion of expedition - Arctic, Island, Urban and Conceptual - to interrogate the scientific, social and economic realities that lead to climate disruption, and to inspire the creation of climate focused art which is disseminated across a range of platforms - exhibitions, festivals, publications, digital media and film. www.capefarewell.com

The Wellcome Trust are a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. The Wellcome Trust are independent of both political and commercial interests.
<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk>

Image credits: Middle, Talya Baldwin, *Sweet Woodruff*, Courtesy of NOMAD & the Artist - 2014
Right, Vhils, *Scratching the Surface Project*, Fame Festival, Grotalie, Italy – 2010, Photo by Vhils

