INTERVIEW

LO QUE EL AGUA NOS DICE. EXPLORACIONES FLUIDAS DEL RIO MANZANARES. A CONVERSATION WITH ANA PAES AND DENEB MARTOS

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INTRODUCTION

Lo que el Agua nos dice (What Water Tells Us) is an artistic and environmental research project developed by Ana Paes and Deneb Martos about, within, and together with the Manzanares River. Beginning in 2023 and continuing through 2025, Paes and Martos undertook a journey following the river from its source in the Sierra de Guadarrama mountain range to its confluence with the Jarama River—from the northern to southern outskirts of Madrid. At various sites along the way—such as Manzanares El Real, Embalse de Santillana, El Pardo, Puente de los Franceses, Parque Lineal del Manzanares, and Soto de las Juntas—they conducted nighttime explorations using the rayogram technique, a form of camera-less photography involving the direct exposure of photosensitive paper to both light and the river's surface. Daytime fieldwork preceded these sessions, during which the artists gathered material for their corpus of images, including 16mm films, miniDV recordings, drifts, and sound recordings.

Characterised by a collaborative praxis that convokes multiple ways of sensing the Manzanares River, *Lo que el agua nos dice* attempts to overcome the nature-culture divide and incorporate hybrid forms of coexistence and knowledges in which the natural, urban, chemical, historical, and affective fluidities, giving shape to the river and its environment, merge and become a living archive. This attentiveness to the fluvial physical, chemical and biological properties, its water flow, its sediments

and biodiversity lead them to perceive layers of environmental degradation that opened a new path towards the encounter of artistic practice, science and the citizenry to reflect on water, not just in the river, but also its hidden streams, its water infrastructure, and in its chemical memory. Entering in contact with the surface of the river through photography is therefore a point of departure to embrace what Macarena Gómez-Barris defined as "submerged perspectives" that blur disciplinary boundaries, foster encounter between local and academic knowledge, and "perceive local terrains as sources of knowledge, vitality, and livability."[1]

A remarkable outcome of this project was the exhibition, *"Lo que el agua nos dice. Exploraciones fluidas del río Manzanares"* (What Water Tells Us: Fluid Explorations of the Manzanares River) curated by Emma Álvarez Marty, and held in December 2025 at El Local, an independent art space in Madrid devoted to contemporary photography. A couple of months later, a performative conference at Matadero Madrid gathered other voices that were also part of this interdisciplinary and collaborative dialogue—as the interview further explains. These participations, in the form of texts, complement the artists' rayograms and photographic documentation, and all together compose a book with the same title, which was published last April. All these elements are conceived as part of an artistic, environmental and collaborative project that is not finished but rather ongoing and in motion.

It also embodies a practice of care that—as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa puts it—is "a concrete work of maintenance, with ethical and affective implications, and as a vital politics in interdependent worlds."[2] It also inspires us to imagine other modes of inhabiting and sharing the world beyond human and more-than-human life and bordering, if we consider that the Manzanares flows into the Jarama, main tributary of the Tagus River, which traverses two countries on the west side of the Iberian Peninsula to reach the Atlantic Ocean. Ultimately, *Lo que el água nos dice* (What Water Tells Us) speculates on what art could look like, one that places caring for all life as core to its project.

DENEB MARTOS (Madrid, 1975) is an artist, educator and researcher specialising in photography, experimental film and photochemical processes. Her practice explores the other side of the image: light, matter and the processes that enable its emergence. Through collaborative research, she develops projects situated at the intersection of art, science and ecology, focusing on the relationships between territory, perception and non-human forms of knowledge. She has presented her work at festivals and venues such as S8, Punto de Vista, CCEMx, FCAYC, Europalia and Infinito Delicias.

ANA PAES (A Guarda, 1982) is a visual artist, educator and researcher based in Madrid. Her practice, centred on analogue photography and experimental processes, explores the materiality of the image, symbolism and the narratives of everyday life, incorporating eco-sustainable approaches and exploring the intersection between disciplines and shared experience. Her work has been exhibited at PHotoESPAÑA, La Casa Encendida, Infinito Delicias and the Luis Seoane Foundation, amongst other venues.

Vanessa Badagliacca: *What Water Tells Us* is a project that began in 2023. To use a river metaphor, I would like to ask: what was its source, or what motivated you to start it?

Ana Paes and Deneb Martos: It came about whilst we were preparing for a camera-less photography workshop we had been invited to lead at the Fundación Cerezales Antonino y Cinia (FCAYC). We had been exploring the technique of water rayograms in the photography laboratory at La Casa Encendida and wanted to take it outdoors to a specific location. In other words, to see if it was possible to do the same work in the river itself, taking advantage of the darkness of the night.

Our first interaction with the Manzanares took place in May 2023. We chose to carry out our trial in the area around the "Puente de los Franceses" (Bridge of the Frenchmen), in the north of Madrid, where the river has not yet been channelled. Although there was plenty of ambient light from the street lamps, we were able to find a small, sheltered spot on the riverbank, which at that time was protected by tall, lush vegetation. While we were there that night, observing the flow of the water and its surroundings, we began to feel as though we were in a kind of dialogue with the river. The results of these initial trials encouraged us to continue. This was the first step towards a potential project and led to an initial workshop on the Manzanares River in September 2023. We chose to go to the San Fermín neighbourhood, near the Caja Mágica. We were looking for a place with easy access to the river and situated within an urban setting. Comparing these rayograms taken further south with the previous ones, we began to notice certain differences in contrast and exposure, as well as the appearance of a series of peculiar reactions, such as small luminous spots on the paper that made us wonder whether they were related to the quality of the water and the sediments, as if something were affecting the photochemical emulsion.

We were also struck by—and this was recorded in the X-ray images of that area—a clearly evident problem with wet wipes being flushed down the toilet and other urban waste accumulating on the riverbanks, particularly after heavy storms that cause the sewage treatment plant's drainage systems to overflow. The wipes are not only present in the river and on tree branches, but are also forming new layers mixed with sandstone, roots and stones, giving rise to a sort of new geological layer.

Following our initial experiments with water rayograms, we explored other waters and territories. We began making rayograms in the streams of Cerezales, in small watercourses in Portugal, and even considered travelling to Galicia during the pellet crisis (a massive environmental disaster occurred in December 2023 when the cargo ship Toconao spilled more than 27 tonnes of plastic pellets along the Galician coast) to investigate how those waters would respond to the technique. The differences we observed between one place and another, the appearance of waste, the changes in the water and sediments, and the issues associated with river management gradually piqued our curiosity.

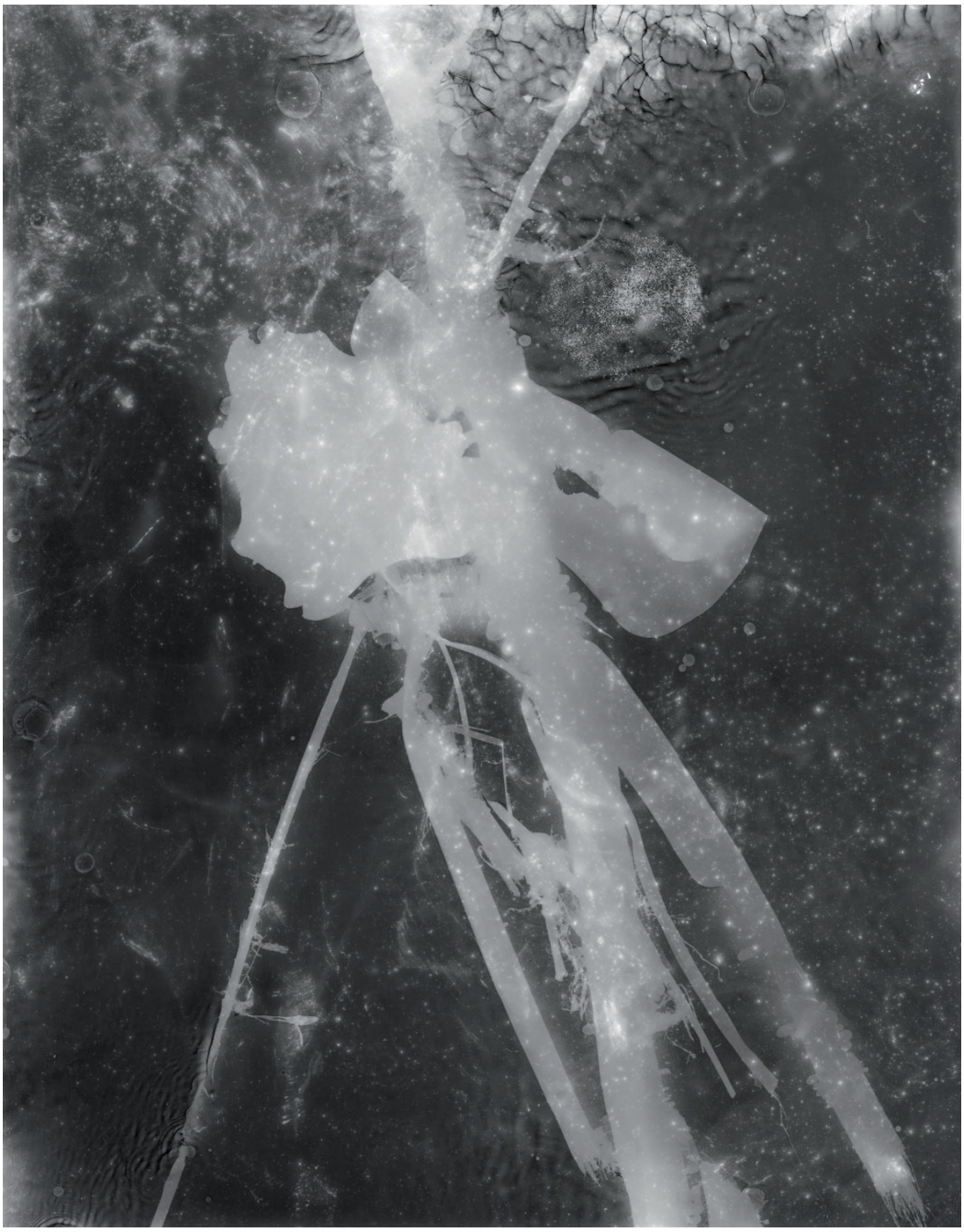

Figure 1

But as we looked at the results and, above all, spent time by the Manzanares, we realised that there was something there that spoke to us in a special way: it was our city's river. We began to build a relationship with the river simply by being there, observing it and returning time and again to its different stretches. The rayograms remained important, but we became increasingly interested in the questions that arose around them. It was then that we decided to focus our research on the Manzanares and begin to understand everything the river was showing us.

VB: The night has given you the chance to work outdoors. I'd like to explore this theme further: the night, the absence of light that transforms the surroundings somewhat into a camera obscura without walls. And this is

an idea that also makes me think of the theorist Karen Barad, who tells us, "We are *of* the universe—there is no inside, no outside. There is only intra-acting from within and as part of the world in its becoming."[3] So I imagine you in that environment where the exposure is not merely of photosensitive material but also of yourselves, as you expose yourselves to a nocturnal photographic practice in which you bathe alongside the paper. This act of exposure, without vision – or at least without absolute vision – invites us to reconsider or perhaps rethink the act of photographing from other perspectives, such as vulnerability, the welcoming of the image rather than its capture, the image that does not illustrate but reveals. What potential do you recognise in all this, in the night and in the kind of images you have been creating in the project "What the Water Tells Us"?

AP and DM: We need the night to enter the river. As we are working with light-sensitive material, darkness is essential; otherwise, the paper would become fogged. That said, this technical requirement of the rayogram also transforms the way we experience being there.

We spend a lot of time by the river observing the water and how the surroundings change in each area, but also getting to know the paths, so we can identify the most suitable spots to visit at night. In other words, during these daytime sessions, part of it is simply being there, getting to know and attuning ourselves to the river, whilst another, more practical part involves scouting locations, examining access points, lighting, and the best way to transport all the equipment later on. However, when we return at night, those same places seem different. The river remains the same, but the way we experience it changes. With nightfall comes a kind of estrangement from the familiar. Visibility diminishes and other senses become more acute. Our relationship with the surroundings becomes even more attentive, if that is possible. Little by little, we grew accustomed to these low-light conditions and learnt to move differently, relying less on our sight and more on a sense of perception that engages the whole body. We entered a kind of state of listening, of observation that was more corporeal. One of the most special moments we experienced in this regard was in November 2025 in the Sierra de Guadarrama National Park. We had finally obtained the permits and didn't want to miss the opportunity, even though it was already starting to get cold. Well, it happened to coincide with the first snowfall of the season. In the darkness of the night, amidst the granite beauty of the river in that area, dipping our hands into the icy water to make the rayograms intensified that sense of presence even further. Our whole body was there, attuned to the river.

Another aspect of this is that, in order to create the rayograms, we need to work together. Whilst one of us activates the flash, the other dips the paper into the water. As we try to prevent the current from carrying the paper downstream, our fingerprints appear. At first, we wanted to avoid them and even tried other methods, such as magnets. That is why some of the rayograms in the project have

small white circles in the corners. But then we realised that it was more honest to accept that presence; the act of holding the paper was also part of the image. We felt it made no sense to force a supposed neutrality when we needed to be there, in contact. What was happening was precisely an encounter between the river, the photosensitive paper and our bodies. Making our presence known and not worrying about our fingerprints seemed to us a sincere and also contextually appropriate way of doing it. Our fingerprints were part of the process. Because rayograms are not images captured from the outside with a camera, but images produced from that intra-action with the river.

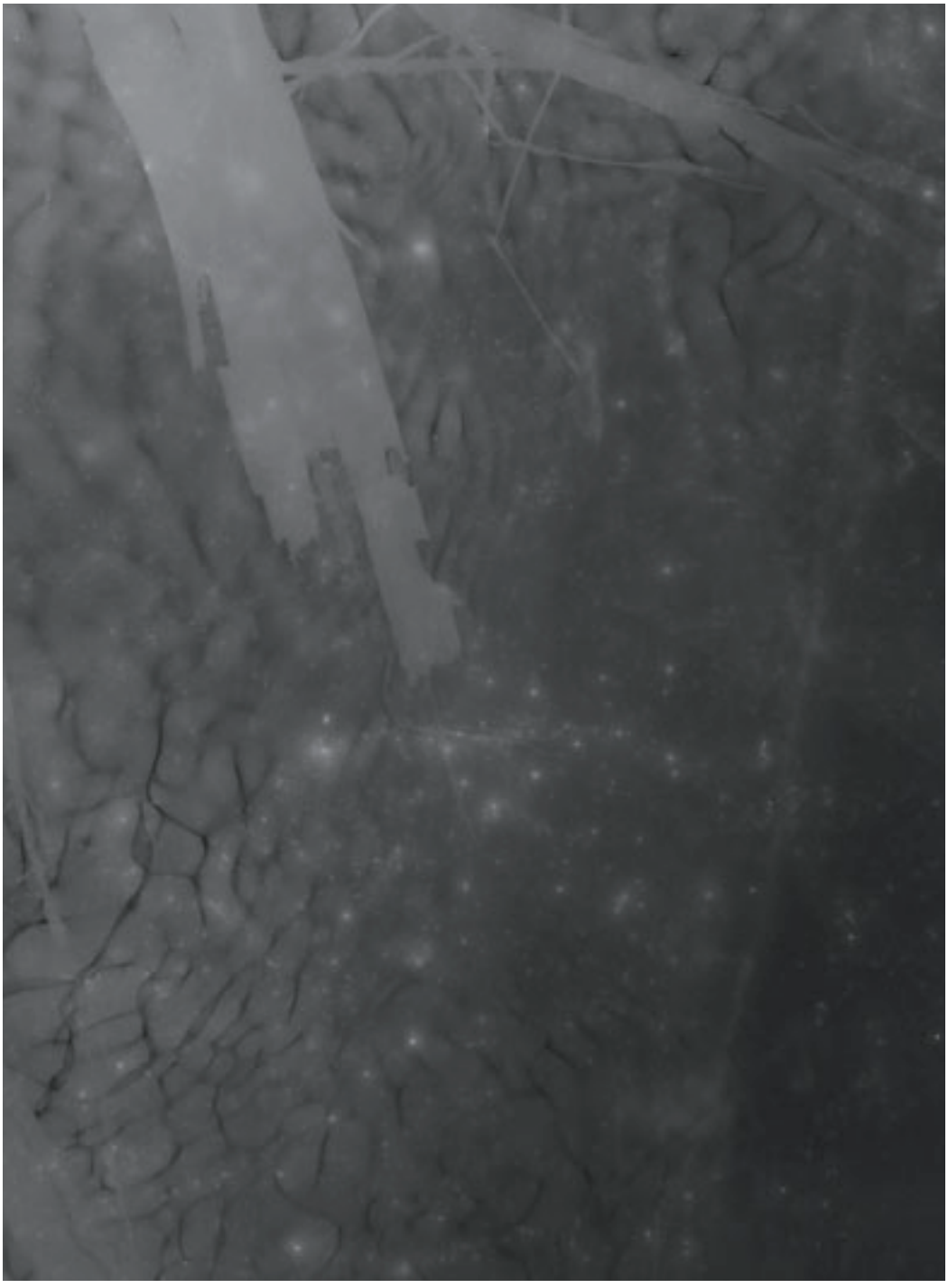

Figure 2

On the other hand, although the rayograms are deeply linked to the night, the project could not stop there. We felt the need to also record other aspects of the river that unfolded during the day. That is why other forms of expression and other images began to emerge. Alongside the slow, strange black-and-white rayograms, we began to use our mobile phones to document the processes, walks and actions that were shaping the project, building a sort of visual diary of the research.

We also wanted to explore the landscape image through colour photography and the moving image with two audiovisual pieces made on MiniDV video and 16mm film. We were interested in creating a dialogue between different materialities and temporalities of the image. Each of these technologies offers a different way of looking, recording and relating to time.

In a way, the night and the rayograms led us to an image more closely linked to experience, to presence and to direct contact with the river, whilst the other tools allowed us to broaden our perspective and situate that experience within a wider context. In contrast to the black-and-white abstraction of the rayograms, the videos introduce colour, time and environment. In all cases, there was a common aim: to slow down the act of producing images and to reclaim forms of attention that are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in a context marked by immediacy and visual overload.

> **VB**: This approach, which is more focused on learning and knowledge – as opposed to the capture and control of the image – leads me to certain aspects that you have touched upon, both in terms of corporeality and environmental concerns. Stacy Alaimo considers an ethical imperative to conceive of the environment not as a backdrop, a resource, passive material or a collection of substances separate from or inferior to human beings, but rather speaks of that exterior which is part of us and which we inhabit. She advocates the idea of transcorporeality, which places matter endowed with agency at the centre, reconfiguring the boundaries between human and non-human.[4] I think this is very much connected to your immersive practice, preceded by a phase by the river leading up to the moment when you enter the river, the water, where you expose yourselves, with all your senses, whilst simultaneously exposing the photographic material. Does that idea of transcorporeality resonate with you in any way?

AP and DM: Yes, this idea really resonates with us.

One of the things we've learnt during this process is that the boundary between us and the river is much more blurred than we imagined. After all, we're largely made up of water. That water is within us, flows through our bodies, returns to the river, and the river returns to us. It's a constant cycle that reminds us we're not separate from it. This awareness grew as the project progressed. From the outset, there was a desire to approach the river with respect and care, but the

more time we spent there, the more evident it became that we were not observing something alien to us, but rather engaging with a living system of which we, too, form a part.

This can also be linked to the way we position ourselves in relation to the materiality of the image. In our processes, there is a physical relationship with that materiality. For example, in the case of rayograms, there is a very direct relationship between the imprint of the material, the water itself in contact with the photosensitive paper, the light passing through that material, and our own bodies. As the rayogram is a camera-less photographic technique, the water functions as if it were a lens; it refracts light and has a focal length. The imprint

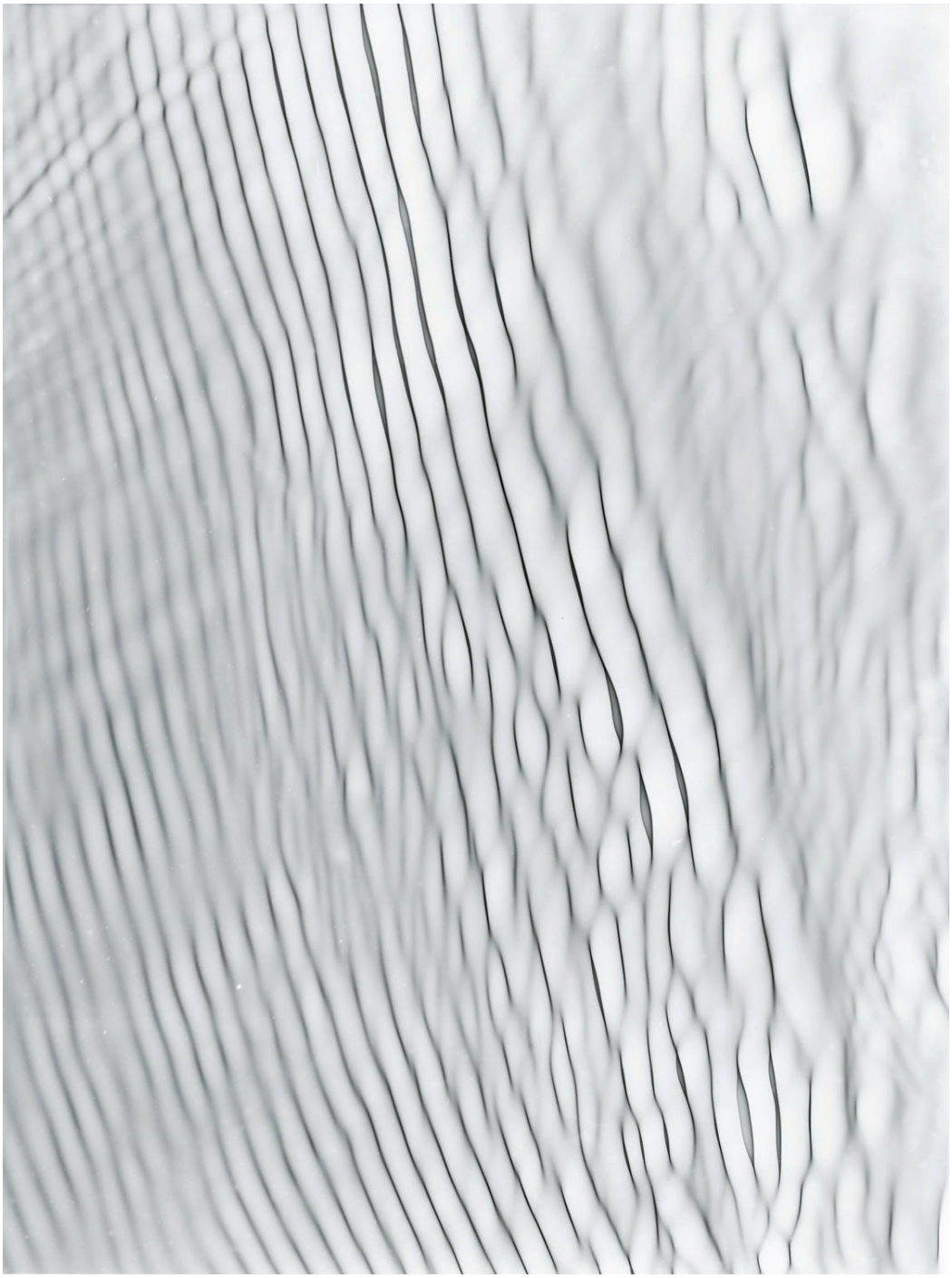

Figure 3

of the river, its undulations and qualities, are inscribed directly onto the paper through the contact of one body with another.

Perhaps this also highlights an important idea for us: that of co-creation. We tend to think of authorship in very human terms, as if the image were the exclusive result of a creative decision. However, in this project we have often felt that the images do not belong entirely to us.

Although there are intentions and decisions on our part, the final result also depends on the river's own actions. The current, the ripples on the water, the sediments, the suspended organic matter, the ambient light and even the weather all play an active part in shaping the image. The image emerges from the confluence of different materialities and human and non-human agencies.

In a way, rayograms have forced us to abandon the idea of photography as a capture and to move towards an understanding of photography as a relationship. It is not so much a question of taking a picture of the river as of creating the conditions for something to happen between the river and us. And perhaps that is why the presence of our fingers ended up being important. Because it reminds us that we, too, are not outside the image. The river leaves its mark on the paper, but we leave ours as well. The image thus becomes a record of a shared experience, of a process in which different bodies and materials influence one another and leave traces on one another.

> **VB**: Another thought occurs to me, inspired by Stacy Alaimo's observation that "recognising how the bodies of all living creatures intra-act with the place—with the perpetual flow of water, nutrients, toxicants and other substances—makes it imperative that we be accountable for our practices", and this can enable that "creatures, ecological systems, and other nondiscrete life forms can flourish."[5] These ideas have reminded me think again about your work, and I would say that *What Water Tells Us* brings to light a set of caring practices, in relation to your movements in the river, a care aimed at preservation, but also aimed at preserving and respecting the space in which you move. In light of these considerations, I would like to understand your position a little better.

AP and DM: The Manzanares is the river of the city in which we live. It forms part of our everyday surroundings and, in a way, of our own habitat. As we began to explore it and spend time by its banks, we gradually became aware of many of the issues affecting it.

There is an idea put forward by Donna Haraway that has been with us throughout the project: understanding responsibility as a capacity to respond. She reframes it as "response-ability", our collective, ongoing capacity to respond, care for, and act in deep relation with the complex, multispecies world we inhabit.[6] In a way, when we spoke of 'asking the river's permission', that is what we meant. It is neither a literal nor a romantic notion. It has more to do with adopting an attitude

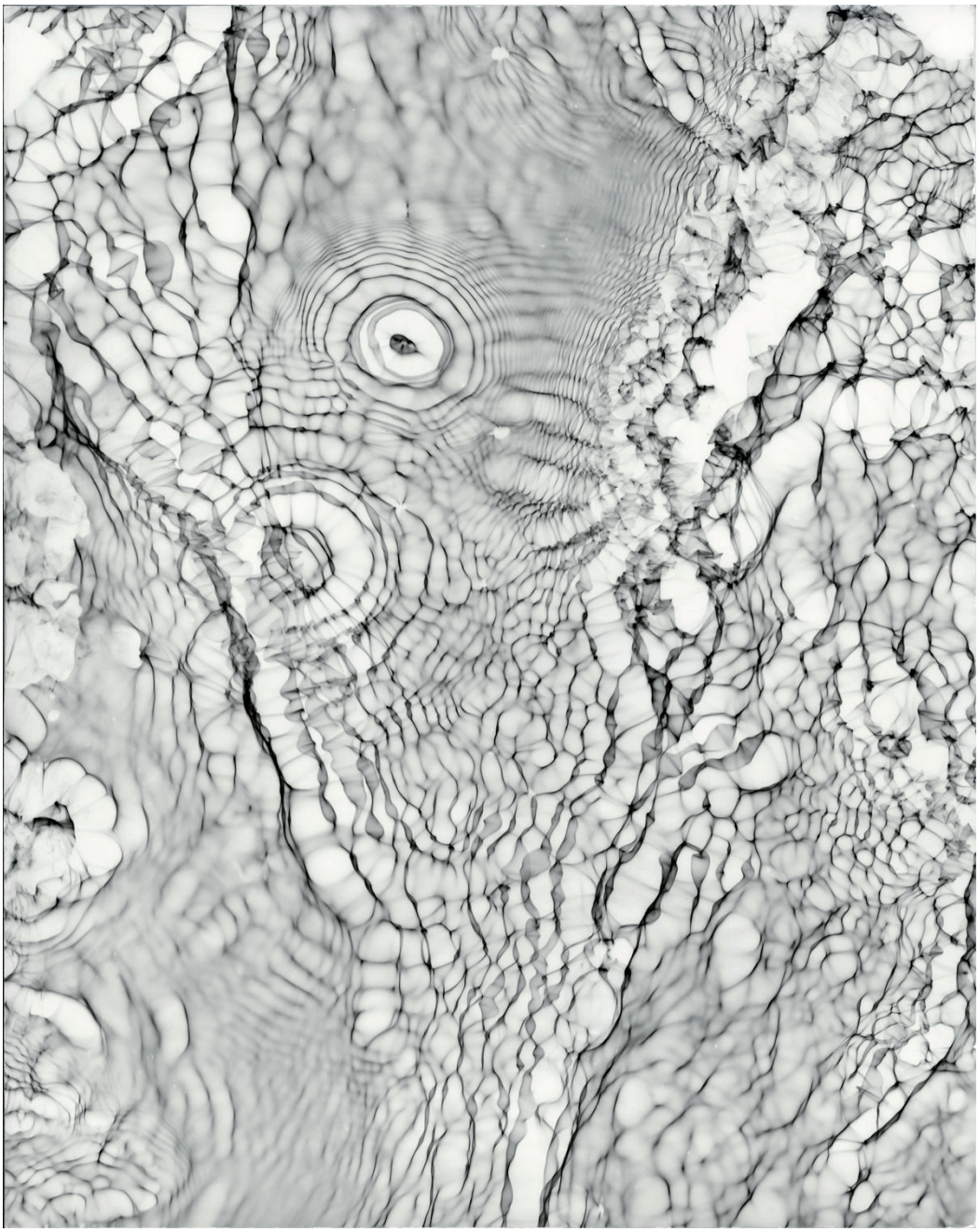

Figure 4

of listening. It's about recognising that we are entering a place we do not fully know, one inhabited by other beings and shaped by processes that often elude us. Before acting, interpreting or producing images, we felt the need to pay attention. The more time we spent by the river, the more questions arose. There were many things we sensed or observed, but for which we lacked the necessary tools.

That led us to realise that the project needed to be opened up. Because we felt a real need to learn. In a way, the river forced us to step outside our own discipline and reach out to people who had been observing it for a long time from other perspectives.

One of the first conversations we had was with Malú Cayetano. We had long been familiar with her project, *Madrid acuosa* [Aqueous Madrid], and the way she explored the city's vanished streams, its hydraulic infrastructure and

the memories of water.[7] We felt that many of the questions emerging from our research connected with hers, so we invited her to join the project. Together with her, we took a ramble around the Butarque area, which allowed us to begin to understand the Manzanares not only as a visible watercourse, but as part of a much wider network of hydrological relationships criss-crossing Madrid.

Further encounters emerged from there. Together with Juan Pablo Pacheco Bejarano, we went on a walk to the La China wastewater treatment plant, where drawing, observation, listening and paying attention to our surroundings became tools for engaging with the river through different rhythms and sensibilities. But as we progressed, more questions kept arising, along with more people with whom we could engage in dialogue.

We wanted to understand what was happening in the river beyond what was visible, what traces were recorded within it, and what stories could be read in its sediments. It was then that our collaboration with Miguel Izquierdo, Sandra Roudot and the scientific team from the Polytechnic University of Madrid began. Together with them, we carried out a sampling campaign at nineteen points along the Manzanares, building on research conducted twenty years earlier by Eduardo de Miguel and Eduardo Seijas.[8] Comparing the two periods allowed us to understand the sediments as the river's memory—an archive capable of preserving the traces of processes and transformations that are no longer visible on the surface.

The discussions with Emma Álvarez Marty and Ricardo Roncero were also very important; they helped us to think critically about the relationships between photography, science and ecology, and to situate our practice within a broader framework of reflection. Our meeting with Carmen Haro and Redes por el Clima introduced us to the "Declaration on the Rights of the Manzanares river and its basin", a citizens' initiative which we have joined as part of its "Guardianas del río" [Guardians of the River] platform, which gives a voice to the rights of nature and advocates for a more responsible relationship with the river. For us, this is a way of connecting our artistic research with concrete forms of action and participation within the local area.

Furthermore, throughout the project, we were constantly mindful of our own footprint. We both come from backgrounds where there is a concern for how we relate to materials, processes and the environment, and this project brought that issue into particularly sharp focus. We were aware that something as simple as walking along the riverbed, moving a stone or entering the water involves interfering with an ecosystem inhabited by other living beings. Beneath those stones there may be insects, eggs or tiny organisms going about their life cycles. That is why we always tried to act with the least possible interference, remaining aware of that contradiction and constantly asking ourselves what our place was within that environment.

All these collaborations gradually broadened our ability to understand and respond to what the river was showing us. One idea that emerged during the project, and which greatly helped us to reflect on these issues, was a thought by

Malú Cayetano regarding sewage treatment works as the city's new streams. And, to take that image further, as suggested by Juan Pablo Pacheco and Astrida Neimanis, our bodies, our pipes and the taps in our homes are also part of that hydrological network. Suddenly, the river ceases to be something external, and we realise that our everyday actions are connected to it in a far more direct way than we usually think. In that sense, care does not begin when we reach the river; it begins much earlier, in the way we inhabit the city and interact with water every day.

> **VB**: I would like to return a question I heard during your performance.[9] Can a river be an archive? Or is it possible to transfer the notion of archive as a repository of historical records to the river?

AP and DM: A living archive. We tend to imagine an archive as a place where things remain stable, classified and protected from the passage of time. A river works differently. We like to think of the river as an archive, a system in which memory circulates, mixes and is continually transformed. For that very reason, we could say that the river can also be a form of circulating memory. This project has taken us along the entire course of the Manzanares, from its source in the Sierra del Guadarrama to its confluence with the Jarama river. As we have walked alongside the river, the idea of the river as a sort of "matryoshka" has taken shape—a body containing multiple versions of itself, connecting different times and places.

In our conversations with Miguel Izquierdo, head of the scientific team, we discussed how water analyses provide a snapshot of the present, a sort of instantaneous picture of what is flowing at a specific moment. Sediments, on the other hand, accumulate chemical information over years and even decades. They act as an environmental archive, a sort of hard drive on which the various transformations of the river and the areas it flows through are recorded over time. Interestingly, one question that arose following the torrential rains that hit Madrid in March 2024 is that this archive is not entirely static either, as floods, rainfall or human intervention can disturb existing sediment layers and cause older ones to be exposed.

In line with this, we are also interested in the river as a form of "arqueología de lo vivido" (archaeology of lived experience). As we make our way along its course, we observe how the riverbed preserves traces of different moments in Madrid's history. From the granite bed of La Pedriza, we come across remains of rubble and shards of earthenware mixed with the river's sand and stones. These materials speak of the historical use of the land and of the city's complex relationship with its river and streams, which served both as a source of materials and as a rubbish tip. For the Manzanares was used for the extraction of sand that helped to build the city and, ironically, also as an unregulated rubbish tip for it.

During one of the days of filming, near the junction with the M-40 ring road, we stopped at a small traffic island. At first glance, there was nothing special about it; it simply served as a place to leave our equipment away from the water. After

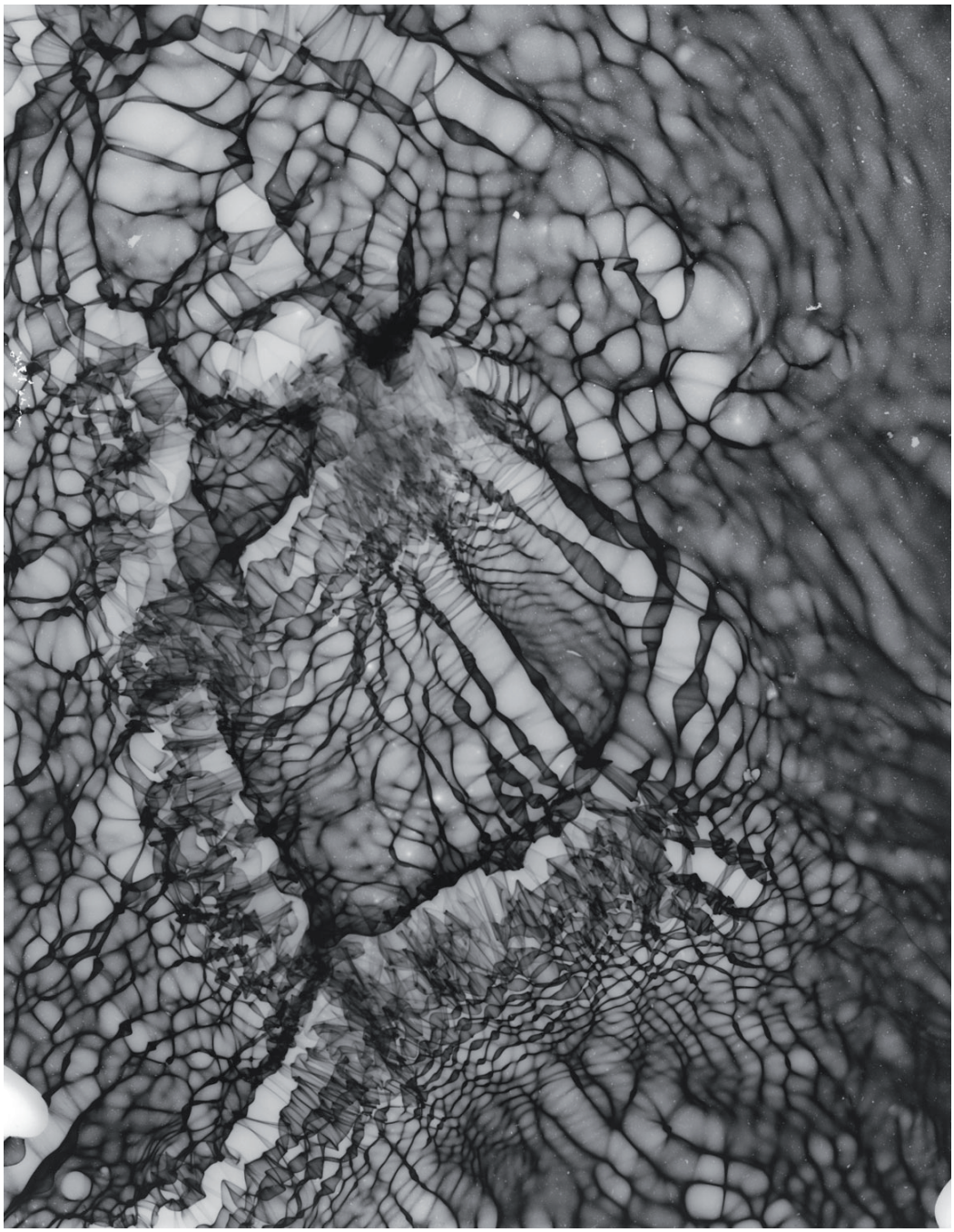

Figure 5

a while there, we began to notice that the whole place was covered in millions of tiny pieces of glass, coloured tiles, painted floor tiles, shards of crockery, as well as bricks, concrete and agglomerates, all polished to varying degrees by erosion. This island made us think of the river as a cacophony of times. In other words, a place where different pasts, the present and the possibility of the future are active at the same time and continue to influence one another. It is difficult to imagine time as a linear sequence of events that have already taken place.

This idea resonates with writers such as Karen Barad, whom you mentioned earlier, for whom the past does not simply disappear, but remains materially entangled with the present, playing a part in shaping what may yet come to be. Suddenly, that little islet seemed to speak of these things, and so we

wanted to collect some samples to incorporate into the exhibition materials. This islet was very special to us, because it was also one of the spots where we filmed (Ana with the MiniDV camcorder and Deneb with the Bolex for the 16mm film). We passed by there recently and the islet is no longer there. The river is constantly changing, revealing and concealing. There will be others, and new archaeologies will be discovered.

Perhaps that is why we believe a river can be understood as a living archive, one that keeps its traces in circulation, continually transforms them, and allows new layers of meaning to keep emerging.

> **VB:** I wanted to talk a little about the theme of living together in two senses. On the one hand, your collaborative practice demonstrates a desire to bring other voices into your research and artistic practice, reaching out to people from the fields of science, landscape architecture, creative practice and activism. On the other hand, there is also a dimension of conviviality when I think, for example, of the picnics, those gatherings that you organise both within the exhibition space and by the river. The theme of coexistence, as you frame it, reminds me of a quote by Irigaray that Astrida Neimanis echoes when she says, "Water both connects us, and makes us different. As water we are connected, we are different."[10] I'd like to know a little more about the role these shared moments play and how you situate them within your practice.

AP and DM: Working together has been a fundamental part of this project because, right from the start, we understood that our relationship with the river could not be built on our own. As we grew closer to the Manzanares, we discovered that there were already many people devoting their time, knowledge and care to this area, coming from very different backgrounds – such as the campaigns led by neighbourhood associations and activists, the initiatives launched by artists along the river, and the highly valuable work of researchers and landscape architects.

In our artistic practices, we are both interested in that space of encounter where disciplines begin to contaminate each other. Our collaboration with the scientific team at the Polytechnic University of Madrid, for example, raised questions about sediments, pollutants and ways of interpreting the river through data. Others, such as Malú Cayetano and Juan Pablo Pacheco, helped us to understand the historical, territorial, political and emotional dimensions that are also part of the waters of the Manzanares and other rivers and streams. We are grateful for the generosity of all of them and of the many others who have accompanied us on this project. We would also have loved to invite more incredible people, but we were constrained by time and budget.

One of them was Juan García Vicente from "Ecologistas en Acción", who has lived in the Carabanchel neighbourhood since he was a child. His involvement as an activist in various campaigns to protect the river in the 1970s and 1980s is

intertwined with his personal history, drawing on his own memories of what the river was like during his childhood. In our conversations, he recalled swimming in the Manzanares, the flocks of sheep that used to graze in the area, and the washerwomen. These are experiences that we only know through postcards and archive images. When it comes to picnics, we tend to think of them as the heart of the project. Most of them coincide with the evening sessions for creating rayograms. We've already established a bit of a routine. We arrive at the spot in the afternoon, with enough time to settle in and explore the river once more. Then, whilst we wait for night to fall, in that in-between time, it's the moment for the picnic. These are moments of conversation and also of silence amongst friends. Eating together becomes a way of inhabiting the river, of attuning our bodies to the place. We like to think that our journey along the river is also a digestive one. There are few rules: the food must be vegetable-based and fit into a lunchbox. Sometimes we prepare it with care; other times it's more improvised. Picnics are a place to get together – whether we're organising workshops or special sessions with collaborators or friends who help us out, or whether we're on our own. Through the food and the river, we forge a bond. One beautiful moment, for example, was setting up the picnic we held to mark the end of the exhibition in the gallery itself, surrounded by walls covered in rayograms. We prepared loads of delicious food inspired by all the meals we'd been making at our picnics by the river, spread the tablecloths on the floor, and gathered there to share a meal and chat about the Manzanares. Over time, these recipes and shared experiences have become part of a sort of emotional and edible archive of the project.

> **VB**: I return to Luce Irigaray, when she states, "We, bodies of water that are not all the same", defending our difference, even though we are all bodies of water. It is Astrida Neimanis who revives this idea to invite us to "think of our planetary waters both as both extensive and intimate, as both common and different, as multispecies and multigenerational."[11] All these elements, which have featured to some extent in your responses, may well be precisely what we need for an ethic of "responsivity" that Neimanis considers to be composed of curiosity, care and concern. Building on these reflections and by way of concluding remarks, how do you think *What Water Tells Us* can help drive us towards an ethic of care, curiosity and concern for our waters, but also for the lives that flow through them?

AP and DM: We like to think that care often begins with curiosity. It is difficult to care for what we do not know, what we do not see, or with which we have not formed any connection.

Perhaps one of the things art can do is precisely to open up spaces for that curiosity. By provoking questions, a sense of strangeness, or different ways of looking at what we thought we knew. In our case, the river had always been there, but the project allowed us to engage with it in a different way. And something

similar happened to many of the people who took part in the activities, workshops or gatherings. The simple act of spending time by the river, walking along it, observing it or listening to the stories that run through it gave rise to new questions.

That is why the experiential dimension has been so important to us. We have always tried to ensure that the activities take place by the river, because hearing someone talk about a place is not the same as experiencing it for yourself. A different kind of awareness emerges. And we believe that this is where an ethic of curiosity and care can emerge. Not out of obligation or fear, but out of a desire to better understand the world we live in. Once you start paying attention, it's hard to remain completely indifferent.

We are also keen to believe that these connections can be expanded. Someone might come to the project out of curiosity about an image, a walk or



Figure 6

an artistic activity, and end up wondering about sediment pollution, vanished streams, the river's rights, or the journey the water takes before reaching their home. What begins as a specific experience can open up to other forms of understanding and engagement. Perhaps the most important thing is not that people reach the same conclusions as us, but that they have the opportunity to build their own relationship with the river. And perhaps that is what we would like to see remaining after the project: learning to inhabit the world as bodies of water—that is, following the logic of what circulates, what changes, and what is shared. Accepting that living is not about standing apart, but about flowing with.

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2 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, 5.

3 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 396.

4 See Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures. Science, Environment and the Material Self*, 154-155.

5 Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures. Science, Environment and the Material Self*, 157-159.

6 See Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the Chthulucene.*

7 See Malú Cayetano (ed.), *Madrid acuosa / Aqueous Madrid*, Madrid: CentroCentro, 2022. https://www.centrocentro.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/Madrid_acuosa.pdf

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