Uncover / recover
Robert Waters artistak gerra zibileko hobi komunetako lurrarena erabiltzen du sendabelarrak hazteko, oroimenari laguntzen diotenak bane, sendaketa giro bat sortu eta sustatzeko.

El artista Robert Waters usa tierra procedente de fosas comunes de la guerra civil para cultivar plantas medicinales, incluyendo unas que ayudan a la memoria, para crear y promover un ambiente de curación.
Using soil obtained from a recently exhumed mass grave from the Spanish Civil War, Canadian artist Robert Waters is cultivating 36 species of medicinal plants in Artium, a contemporary art museum in the capital of the Basque region of Spain. By physically demonstrating the metamorphosis of death into life the artist is creating both a functional healing environment and a new metaphor for Spain’s ongoing transition from fascism to democracy. Through the transformation of flesh to soil to plant back to flesh, Waters proposes an ancestral communion of sorts, where the wasted lives of victims of fascism are being perpetuated to remedy the living.

Inspired by Jorge Luis Borges’ Spanish translation of *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, and referencing the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, who was killed by Franco’s fascist regime and buried in a mass grave, Waters’ project combines the disparate fields of history, poetry, philosophy and science (anthropology, botany and medicine) to consider our inevitable connection to nature in life and death. In addition to caring for the plants during the exhibition, the artist will create medical illustrations based on those of Dr. Adrian Vander from the 1940’s, indicating how the plants being cultivated can be used to benefit our bodies. Particular importance will be given to Gingko biloba, a plant that has been proven to enhance memory. At the end of the two-month exhibition the medicinal plants will be distributed to the Basque community, where the soil and seeds originated.
About Praxis

The Spanish Civil War began on July 17, 1936, when a group of conservative generals led by Francisco Franco (the “Nationalists”) rebelled against the established government of the Second Spanish Republic. With help from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, Franco won the war in 1939, at which time his conservative authoritarian dictatorship began. While the death toll of the war was only around 50,000, the transition to Franco’s dictatorship brought with it 200,000* more murders. The majority of these executions, known as “White Terror,” were carried out by the Nationalist regime. Often pitting families and communities against one another, the war became an excuse for resolving longstanding feuds. Executions of people who were caught on the “wrong” side of the lines became widespread, and the corpses were usually abandoned or interred in common graves dug by the victims themselves.

With the death of Franco on November 20th, 1975, Juan Carlos de Borbón became the absolute King of Spain. He immediately began transitioning to democracy, with Spain becoming a constitutional monarchy articulated by a parliamentary democracy. In 1977, the first democratic government elected after Franco’s death passed an Amnesty Law, which exempts responsibility to everyone who committed any offence for political reasons prior to this date. This law ensures that all crimes committed during Franco’s dictatorship cannot be prosecuted.

In 2000, at the request of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, the first exhumation of a mass grave was carried out by Aranzadi, a non-profit scientific society and research body based in the Basque Country. Led by Francisco Etxeberria, Aranzadi have since exhumed 231 of the 2052 known mass graves in Spain, all at the request of living ancestors and carried out with the assistance of volunteers. In 2007 Spain passed the Historical Memory Law, which includes provisions of state assistance in the tracing, identification and eventual exhumation of victims of Francoist repression whose corpses are still missing.

In 2008 the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón opened an investigation into the executions and disappearances of 114,266 Spanish citizens between July 17, 1936, and December 1951, one of those people being the poet Federico García Lorca. This investigation proceeded on the basis of the notion that this mass-murder constituted a “Crime Against Humanity” which cannot be subject to any amnesty or statute of limitations. As a result Mr. Garzón was himself accused of violating the terms of the general amnesty and his powers as a jurist have been suspended pending further investigation.

In September 2010 an Argentine court reopened a probe into crimes committed during the Spanish Civil War and during Franco’s dictatorship. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Council of Europe and United Nations have all asked the Spanish government to investigate the crimes of Franco’s dictatorship.

* Figure varies greatly depending on the historian. Sources: Wikipedia, El País, Aranzadi.

PRAXIS is a series of exhibitions based on the culture of “do it yourself,” or D.I.Y. It serves as a dynamic laboratory and experimental workshop, independent and alternative to the annual programming of Artium. Emerging as a consequence of the current economic crisis, PRAXIS champions the virtues of improvisation, recycling, and above all, direct action. This final point implies that the artist takes a more profound role in the making of the exhibition, becoming an active and visible part of the exhibition as it develops over time.

The heterogeneous projects of PRAXIS embody an attitude inspired by punk subcultures of the nineteen-seventies in which artists created their own bands, released their own albums, made their own labels, sold their own merchandising, did their own self-promotion, etc. With the rise of multinational corporations, D.I.Y. culture has grown exponentially and converted into a political and social ideology, a “non-consumerist” doctrine often applied to the arts. PRAXIS attempts to reconcile the underground with the institutional, fighting against the status quo while uniting globalism and localism. In this way PRAXIS reclaims a classic motto of the D.I.Y. movement: “think globally, act locally.”

PRAXIS is curated by Blanca de la Torre.

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Robert Waters collecting soil from the exhumation of a mass grave in Oteiza, Navarra, with the assistance of Aranzadi.
Robert Waters watering medicinal plants that are being cultivated in soil procured from a mass grave from the Spanish Civil War.