

No23

GAIA'S DAUGHTERS

PAULA TURA

Gaia's daughters are all the women on Earth.
As daughters of the planet, we are the planet itself.
We are sisters of our daughters, mothers, aunties,
grandmothers, great grandmothers and so on.
We are equal.
We learn and teach, we inspire and are inspired.
We are the ancestors and the ones to come.
We are one.

In order to celebrate our sisterhood I feel the wish to express with you the path I have been walking to honour each of my ancestors with gratitude for having been guided, supported and instructed all my life.



Figure 1, Paula Tura. Reaching the sky at Booloumba Falls Walk, Connondale, Queensland, 2016. Photo: Will Aguiar

Gaia in me

I am a Brazilian artist and researcher, a yogi, supportive of non-traditional medicine, natural birth, aware parenting, unschooling, conscious nutrition and many other distinctivenesses that make each of us multiple and unique. My personal choices are closely related to my understanding that Planet Earth is my home and that we are all connected to it and its elements just like a community¹. I share the views that

“somewhere along our lives, nature touches you... and me... and all of us in a personal and special way. Its gigantic mystery reveals to us part of its purity, makes us remember a Life that is much bigger than our petty human chores”. (Campbell 2005, 19)

Being in touch with this huge mystery provided by nature and the need to understand life as something bigger - with a higher purpose than our daily activities - moved me in 1998 to start my studies in yoga and my project of yoga and meditation classes in state parks in Brazil followed by group trekking in the forest, swims in waterfalls, community meals and, by consequence, steered me towards artistic research.

Thus, after many years as a yoga teacher, from 2011 to 2014 I developed a research project for a master's degree in contemporary art, specifically using *Body art*, *Land art*², *Art Povera* and *Performance art*³. The research was carried out in forests, lakes, rivers, seas, mountains, deserts, waterfalls, documented through video and photography.

The research process helped draw closer the natural space and my body and mind, allowed me to feel myself as nature, to open a path to show, visually, that I / we are the nature that surrounds myself / ourselves even if we feel distanced from it. Throughout the process I was intensively in touch with nature and its cycles, I strictly depended on the weather and geographical conditions to do my research. I rolled in sand, climbed rocks faces, walked in mud, trekked long trails, waited for hours for sunsets, tried, experimented, sweated, cried, laughed out loud, swam in seas and waterfalls, climbed trees, squeezed between branches, was bitten by ants,

¹WE ALL STAND ON SACRED GROUND: PROMOTING A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL ETICH

² SHIFTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ART

³ BIOME: A COLLABORATION OF DANCE AND RAINFOREST SCIENCE

escaped snakes, felt the wind in the leaves and the aroma from the fruits. I lived the intense cycles of nature as if they were my own body.

Below are some of the photos from my thesis⁴ called *Body Poetics: the body in a natural environment – a contemporary proposal in visual art*.

Figure 2, Paula Tura. Woman lying on the sand. Ubatuba, Brazil,



2013. Photo Will Aguiar



Figure 3, Paula Tura. Yoga series: sun salutation, São Sebastião, Brazil, 2012. Photo Will Aguiar

Figure 4, Paula Tura, Leaf body I, Ubatuba, Brazil, 2012. Photo Will Aguiar.

⁴ <http://tede.mackenzie.br/jspui/handle/tede/1887>



Figure 5, Paula Tura. *Body Poetics*. Ruínas da Lagoinha, Ubatuba - São Paulo, Brazil 2013. Photo Will Aguiar

Unbeknownst to me, the images Woman lying on the sand (Figure 2); Yoga series: sun salutation (Figure 3); Leaf body I (Figure 4); Body poetics (Figure 5), shed light on what was to become the first steps of my Gaia's daughters project. Throughout my research for *Body Poetics*, I didn't include any theories on women, their ancestry, the planet as a living

organism or the planet cycles. My main concern was to exhibit that we are nature, and that I did with the resources and consciousness available then. It is noted on my thesis a proposal to superimpose the human body figure to the natural element: there is the contour of the body as in the photo Woman lying on the sand (Figure 2); there is the shadow of the body in the sand as in the photo Yoga series: sun salutation (Figure 3); and the proposal that the natural element mark the body as in the photo Leaf Body I (Figure Figure 4). The photo Body Poetics (Figure 5) is the only photo that distinguishes itself from the others where the body merges with the trunk of the tree, with the intention of being one of its roots. Even so, the body is placed with the intention of becoming nature.

This line of thought was essential for the development of the Gaia's daughters project because I experimented with my body all its elements and now can be nature on a less ordinary and more sublime level.

The feminine body for Gaia's daughters is the main element of study, even if it is known that it is through the body that I express myself. However, I am not only this body, I *am* through this body. And my body is the body earth, it is the body water, it is the body air, it is the body fire; that is to say my body is formed by the elements of Planet Earth. My connection to planet is not only through the body, it happens through body and soul. I am each of the elements. I am the entire planet.

On the other hand, the photos Woman lying on the sand (Figure 2); Yoga series: sun salutation (Figure 3); Leaf body I (Figure 4); Body poetics (Figure 5) allow for different interpretations and I am glad that this is so because this allows the reader to have their own impressions about the art works.

The Gaia's daughters project

The Gaia's daughters project ensued as an involuntary extension of my master's degree thesis. It has the intimate purpose of bringing women closer to the natural environment; feeling one with nature, remembering nature; proposing the recognition and narrowing the gap between the cycles and phases of Planet Earth with the cycles and phases of human life and the human body. The feminine body has the creative power to generate life and, with this, the possibility of perpetuating the lineage of ancestry, passing its knowledge, perceptions, sensitivities and millennial wisdom to each other.

This document portrays only the beginning of this project, meaning it brings part of my personal journey as one of Gaia's daughters through photos and some excerpts.

The Gaia's daughters project involves other women and is still being written, to be presented later this year as a proposal for a doctorate degree

in arts at the Sunshine Coast University. In this project I plan to interview women that I call guardian women of each of the constituent elements of Planet Earth: fire, earth, air and water. These guardian women are artists who practice using the four elements and facilitate the contact of other women with them, such as a potter who facilitates pottery workshops for women during a weekend retreat. My purpose is to discover who these guardian women are, how they became attracted to this particular element, what has led them to offer activities to other women, how does the facilitating process take place, who are the women who seek them and why. The documentary will be permeated by *Body Art*, *Land Art*, *Art Povera* and *Performance Art* in collective and individual expressions, with music, singing and dancing. Its main purpose is to weave a parallel between the elements and cycles of Planet Earth and women. It will be a film about women and for women, through art.

The visual arts, the artistic language chosen by me allows me to express my questions using the subtle - communication with the sensory perception⁵ rather than rational language. This is how I can make sense of myself, express my feelings; it is the way by which I understand the world around me; it is the way by which I understand myself, by which I make sense of the world and the world makes sense to me. My existence is based on feeling, doing, and being.

My research process is based on experimentation. The starting points are my questions and restlessness. I write down how I feel, what I think, and the way I could express what worries me. I go trekking in the forest, surfing, climbing, meditate, do yoga, all the while formulating my thoughts, until I reach the point in which, after just feeling for so long, I can start writing, drawing, experiencing the creative process. I let the flow of perceptions happen through my body, as if I absorbed all information and Gaia's energy first, to then reach the final result. Perhaps the equation below will help understand my creative process:

$$\frac{\text{restlessness} + \text{contact with nature}}{\text{internalization}} = \text{art}$$

Artists sometimes seem incoherent in their forms of written expression because they promote doubts, worries, ambiguity and lack of linearity. This is done on purpose. Perhaps the most important thing to read here is what lies between the lines. As an artist, I create works in the subtle field, for these works to awaken, communicate, dialogue and interact with what the American psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estes calls the wild

⁵ A RUBBISH ARTICLE AND SOME RUBBISH ART

nature that inhabits each woman. According to the author, this wild nature is responsible for keeping women connected with their essence, their truths, with what is alive on the planet, with their daring, secrets, intuitions and deep connections to Earth. This contact promotes restlessness and leads to the breaking of paradigms⁶.

‘Fairy tales, myths and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sigh so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature (...) It comes through the written and spoken word; sometimes a word, a sentence or a poem or a story is resonant, so right, it causes us to remember, at least for an instant, what substance we are really made from, and where is our true home’ (Estes, 1995, 4) .

The first text I wrote about Gaia's daughters was addressed to my ancestors so that I could then bond with the women who inhabit this planet with me now, and then open doors for those who will come after me.

In this text I thanked the passage of those who came before me, and who somehow are present on this planet through my body, my speech, my walks and actions. Without them I would not be here today. And it is because of them that I exist.

Gaia's daughters is the connection to earth⁷ as grounding, as recognition and appreciation of ourselves. It is an invitation to soothe oneself, minimize external stimuli, reduce consumption, value what is internal, what is unique and intrinsic to each of us⁸

Gaia's daughters is all of us answering the river calling us to plunge into its waters at dusk, to walk on its land, to light bonfires in clearings during the nights of full moon and tell stories to one another to make sense and to grow connected.

Figure 6, Family Tree. Paula Tura 2016. Sunshine Coast, Australia.



⁶ A RUBBISH ARTICLE AND SOME RUBBISH ART

⁷ WE ALL STAND ON SACRED GROUND: PROMOTING A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL ETICH

⁸ HOW GREEN WAS YOUR SCHOPENHAUER?

A statement

In order to be Gaia's daughter I must recognize my ancestors, the ones that came before me and stand with me all the way. Coming from a strong lineage of driven women, I find myself connected to their wisdom, choices, superstitions, knowledge and support. Thus, for guidance in my process of search and self-recognition as one of Gaia's daughters, I have chosen four women who are related amongst themselves, and to me: my grandmothers Linda Brollo, Emilia and Teresa and my mother Sueli.

These women are in the family tree below, with their respective husbands and children. As this text is about women, the story of my male ancestors is in a different archive and in other memories, which does not make them any less important. These women - often voiceless - needed to be recognized and valued so that I could honour my own story and, specially, have my voice echoed

Linda Brollo	Emilia	Teresa	Sueli
Paula's great grandmother	Paula's grand mother	Paula's grand mother	Paula's mother
Nelson's grand mother	Sueli's mother	Nelson's mother	Nelson's wife
1900 - 1988	1926 -	1935 - 1995	1950 - 2010

Figure 7, Table with family genealogy, birth and death information

Linda, Emilia, Teresa and Sueli have influenced and left a mark in my life. Always assertive and with clear goals often they didn't receive enough support from those around to pursue their projects and ideas, as often they were quite innovative. Linda, Emilia, Teresa and Sueli have left a legacy that I feel like recognising, acknowledging and writing about. They are unknown and at the same time very similar to a few other women on earth.

Unfortunately I don't have the opportunity to share with these women the day to day of my small family, consisting of husband and daughter.

They only know each other at a spiritual level, except from Emilia who has blessed us many times already. However, they are part of who I am, my memories, my history, my fantasies and my daily prayers. We communicate by dreams, songs and memories. My story is a story of deaths, losses and incorporeal dialogue.

In ancient Greece, nature or pre-Socratic philosophers believed that for mass to be constituted and, thus, for life to be maintained, four basic elements were essential: fire, earth, air and water. These elements are also associated with planets in astrological studies based on Greek teachings composing the zodiac.

I have been borrowing nature's elements to better describe my connection with my ancestors⁹. This has been leading me to an intimate experience with the natural environment, promoting a deep connection with myself and the world through friendship and critical reflection. It's been an amazing journey.



Figure 7, Paula Tura. Leaf tongue. Booloumba Falls Walk, Conondale, Queensland, 2016. Photo Will Aguiar.

I, Gaia, am!
the smell from the Earth
the dew on the Leaves
the blue in the Sky
the salt in the Sea
the step in the Journey

⁹ CHARACTER OF THE BUSH

the juice in the Fruit
the love in Women
I am the green that comprises you
I am the golden in your gold
I am the message in your dream
I am ancient, a messenger, a shaman
I am the light in your journey
And the wind that sways you
I am the drop in your sweat
And the dusk of your dawn
I know who you are
And I am here for you

A letter from Gaia

I am Mother Earth, creator of skies, of seas¹⁰, of mountains, of time; I am the female force that regulates life on Earth according to the Greco-Roman pantheon. I am responsible for gestations, births and caring for all life, human and animal. I understand that all women are my daughters and co-creators of this planet, specially thanks to the creative female power inherent to them. Thus, I feel honoured to have been chosen as inspiration for your narrative.

James Lovelock, a British scientist who has also worked for NASA, has developed a theory that shares my name throughout his career: the Gaia Hypothesis. It is a scientific study about Gaia, about Earth as a self-regulating planet. In his book entitled *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, he says:

‘The old Gaia was an entity that kept herself and all who lived with her comfortable through time and season. She worked so that the air, the oceans, and the soil were always fit for life.

We need to love and respect the Earth with the same intensity that we give to our families and our tribe (...) our contract with the Earth is fundamental, for we are a part of it and cannot survive without a healthy planet as our home’ (Lovelock, 1995, 8-14)

It seems to me that straightening ties with the ancestors creates a beautiful, light weave linked all the way to me, that stretches out so that more women can be interlaced in it. Your ancestors are here with me, lovingly observing you from afar. They are strong, determined and wise,

¹⁰ IN THE PHOTIC ZONE

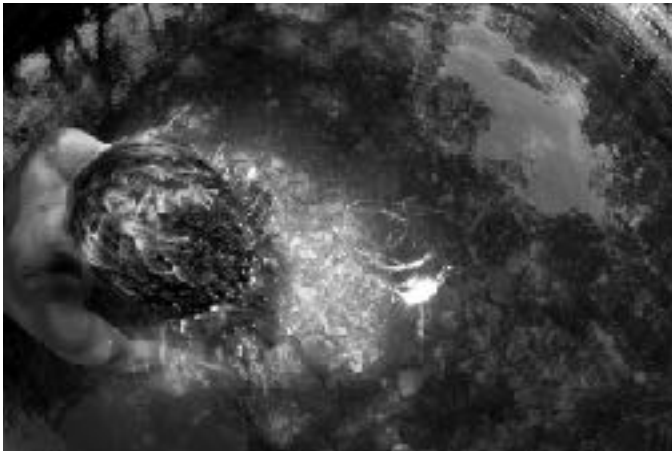
and they are here for you, just like me.

Being away from your connection with me the Earth, demands an extra level of effort to keep a balanced and healthy life as all lives on planet are regulated by the same cycles as the Earth¹¹.

Keep in mind that the path is more important than the destiny. Being present in your journey fills you with confidence and self-knowledge. I have been with you during troublesome times as well as successful times, and I will be with you again in your journey of discovery as one of my own daughters. I hope that together in this journey, we can be the goddesses of creation and transformation.

Be mindful that when we speak of Goddesses we speak of power, but not of any power, we speak of “the power that lives in every woman in the world” (Campbell¹² 2013, 16-17), a power of divinity, connectivity, uniqueness and oneness. A natural and super natural power that promotes understanding, equity, union and inner peace.

I am you. I am Gaia.



¹¹THE BOY AND THE SUNFLOWER: THE ROLE OF THEATRE IN COMMUNICATING ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES THROUGH THE CREATION OF LIVING STAGES

¹² the power we're talking about when we're talking about the Goddess are the powers that live in every woman in the world...all women are divinities...because they represent the sacred powers.

Figure 9, Paula Tura. Diving into you I. Booloumba Falls Walk. Connondale, Queensland, 2016. PhotoWill Aguiar.



Figure 10, Paula Tura. Diving into you II. Booloumba Falls Walk. Connondale, Queensland, 2016. PhotoWill Aguiar.

Gaia is the Greek goddess of the Earth
I am Gaia's daughter
My body has its own ecosystem, cycles, volume,
size, smells, sounds, movements
So has the Earth
I am the fire, the air, the water, the earth
So is the Earth
My body is an Earth Body
I am the Earth
I am Gaia

Gaia's daughters images

Throughout the text there are some photos taken for the Gaia's daughter project:

Figure 1 - Reaching the sky: I climb on a log and crawl over it. I stand up. Below me, a stream; above me, the leaves of the trees cover the sky from my point of view. My daughter wants to come up too; she isn't able to not. My husband photographs. I am naked and the warm autumn sun warms my skin. I lie on the trunk on my back, on my stomach, I sit, I get up, I want to walk to the other side but I do not, I am afraid. I stop, breathe, wait. I close my eyes and forget that I am high up. I feel like I am in an open space. In the void. In the air. My feet rooted in the fissures of the log. Each layer of the tree expanding under my feet. Pulsating its life into mine. Down there, the water. I am in the whole. I reach the sky. I open my eyes and see everything from a special angle. It happens under me, it happens next to me, it happens above me. I watch. I listen. Birds fly past. Leaves sway in the wind. I am the tree. I am time. How long. I keep the world from up here. I do not want to get down. From down below, I look up. I was up high. I want to climb up again. I want to stay there. I want to look at the whole from there. I want to be this whole who keeps everything. Again.

Figure 7 - Leaf tongue: The water in the stream is lukewarm. My feet are stuck in the mud at the bottom of the water. Around me, many colorful leaves. I choose three: green, red, yellow. I take pictures with my eyes closed, my eyes open, the leaves together, the leaves separated. I like some pictures and I hate some others. I try again. I forget about everything and start over. What was the purpose of this again? A nature tongue. Without language I do not speak. What tongue does nature speak? What is its color? What do I want to show? I want to have a tongue that speaks of nature. I want to have a tongue that speaks of beauty. I want to have a

tongue that communicates with nature and its beauty. I want to be nature's language. I want to talk about nature, its beauty, its purity. I want to communicate with what is before me to pass the message forward. I want to be one of the tellers of this millions-of-years-old story. So much responsibility!

Figure 9 and 10 - Diving into you: Camera under water. Camera over the water. Camera near the face. Camera away from the face. None of this. Forget it, that is not it. I want to dive. I want to be this water. My hair is the continuation of this water. Water flows from the soil. This water creates my hair. My hair cloaks my body. My hair of water, of seaweed, conceals my thoughts. I dive into this water to connect my hair to its source. To invigorate my thoughts. To feel the connection. I dip into you to become you. I am you. Your source is limitless. You cross rivers, go through magnificent falls on dizzy cliffs until you find the seas. My hair of water is formed by the seven seas, by all the rivers that you cross. All water is one and is in me.

I would like the photos included here to have the power to express some of the sensations I had during the research process: the taste of the leaf on my tongue, its weight, shape, size; the temperature of the water in which I am submerged; the warmth of the autumn sun on my skin through the leaves of the trees; the silence of the forest; the wind caressing my hair; the salt from the tears that ran down my face after countless frustrated attempts to establish intimate contact with nature; the joyful smile after a long and intense day of work in contact with the purest forms of life; the touch of my feet in the mud of the bottom of the lake; the smell of the dampness on the ground; the tickling of the ants walking over my body while I hug a tree, naked.

I would like to have the power to create the words that I can not find to express the communication between the pulse of natural life in contact with the pulse of life in me. I will keep trying.

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