

## ***Art residency at SACO, Antofagasta, San Pedro de Atacama, Chile, 2024***

The Atacama is the driest place on the globe. Apart from its overpowering landscapes and nature reserves, it has been an area of human experimentation for centuries, which also involves the mindless exploitation of its natural resources, with a feedback effect of social and cultural erosion. The western part of the desert, around the city of Antofagasta, is marked by the stigma of saltpeter mining. The exploitation of sodium nitrate has exacerbated ethnic inequalities on the one hand, while on the other it has fed the government coffers of Chile, which has thus become an export potentate of the raw material. The Polish explorer, geologist and rector of the University of Santiago, Ignacy Domeyko, also contributed to this so-called progress. Remnants of saltpeter mining are ghost towns. According to Gilles Clemente's concept, they can be called tertiary landscapes or, more precisely, abandoned areas that are created by the cessation of an activity and evolve into secondary landscapes populated by pioneer species, of alien origin, fitting into the biome. I plan to insert myself into such a space with a hybrid species I have created, inspired by the Fabian lizard, an endangered endemic that lives in the Atacama salt pans, whose biome is being degraded by lithium mining. I will thus become a pioneering species, a mutant version of the lizard-human.

This transformation, as in Kafka's transformation, is not necessarily comfortable. The settlement of ghost towns by an entity pulled out of its original habitat illustrates the unpleasant necessity for many species associated with migration in search of a new place that does not necessarily turn out to be friendly. An extension and complement to the study of ghost towns will be to visit the eastern part of the desert - the reserves - the sites of the original habitat of the Fabian lizard. In Clemente's conception, the reserve is a different kind of third landscape that has emerged as a result of the separation of space from an area subject to anthropopression. At the same time, the existence of the reserve is due, as it were, to biological 'chance', and its flora and fauna exclude the presence of alien species. Inserting the lizard I have 'constructed' into this type of biome will not only be a kind of establishment of a dialogue with the Fabian lizard, but will also be an attempt to populate the site with a 'species' that should not be present there. Thus, the activity will become - symbolically - a manifestation of human activity, which is associated, for example, with not always positive interference in nature reserves. The juxtaposition of performances performed in different places in the desert, in areas that look completely different and at the same time have been subjected to past or present anthropopression, is an interesting juxtaposition that builds additional tension in the project. 'Lizard history' can also be understood as an exemplification of the complex relationships taking place between species, with human developmental tendencies as a backdrop, often oppressive not only towards distinct faunal and floral entities, but also towards their own - minority - tribal groups (history of colonisation of the Mapuche in Chile, for example). The project, in a distant perspective, also raises the question of the limits of predictability of the activities undertaken. How often does an activity underpinned by so-called good intentions (e.g. the extraction of saltpeter for agricultural development, the extraction of lithium to produce batteries for electric cars) contribute to the degradation of ethnic groups further down the planet? How much are we humans becoming 'Fabian lizards' straying in search of

ecosystems more favourable to life, as our existing ones have degraded? The line connecting the history of saltpeter and lithium mining bends, creating a wheel of history that rolls along an ambiguous track. The action envisages performances in 'ghost towns', Salar de Atacama and other parts of the desert and their film recording, as well as the collection of rich photographic, textual and sketch material. The material, it is intended, will become complementary and oppositional at the same time to the works realised during the artist residency at the Arctic Culture Lab in Greenland in 2022. In this sense, the project is part of an artistic theme I initiated years ago that refers to posthumanism. The methodological framework for the activities at Atacama is broadly posthumanist reflection and Gilles Clemente's concept of the third landscape.

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