

# Oika artists in residence

Northern Greece 2023



in association with

**EcoMuseum Zagori**

## OIKA

Within these pages you will find more than documentation of an art residency. I believe these images, stories and words are essential parts of a bigger whole. The collective contributions of a place, the memories surfaced by these artists, and the art they created offer a preview of something more beautiful; a gesture toward the future.

Oika refers to the intelligence of nature as felt and expressed through humans. Embedded within this little “booklet” is the Oika of a land called Zagori. This endowment of Oika includes the generations of Earthlings who inhabited these ancient mountains, moved through the forests, drank from the streams, and grazed in the grasslands. All of this Oika now moves through the open hearts, hands and minds of these artists and into their art.

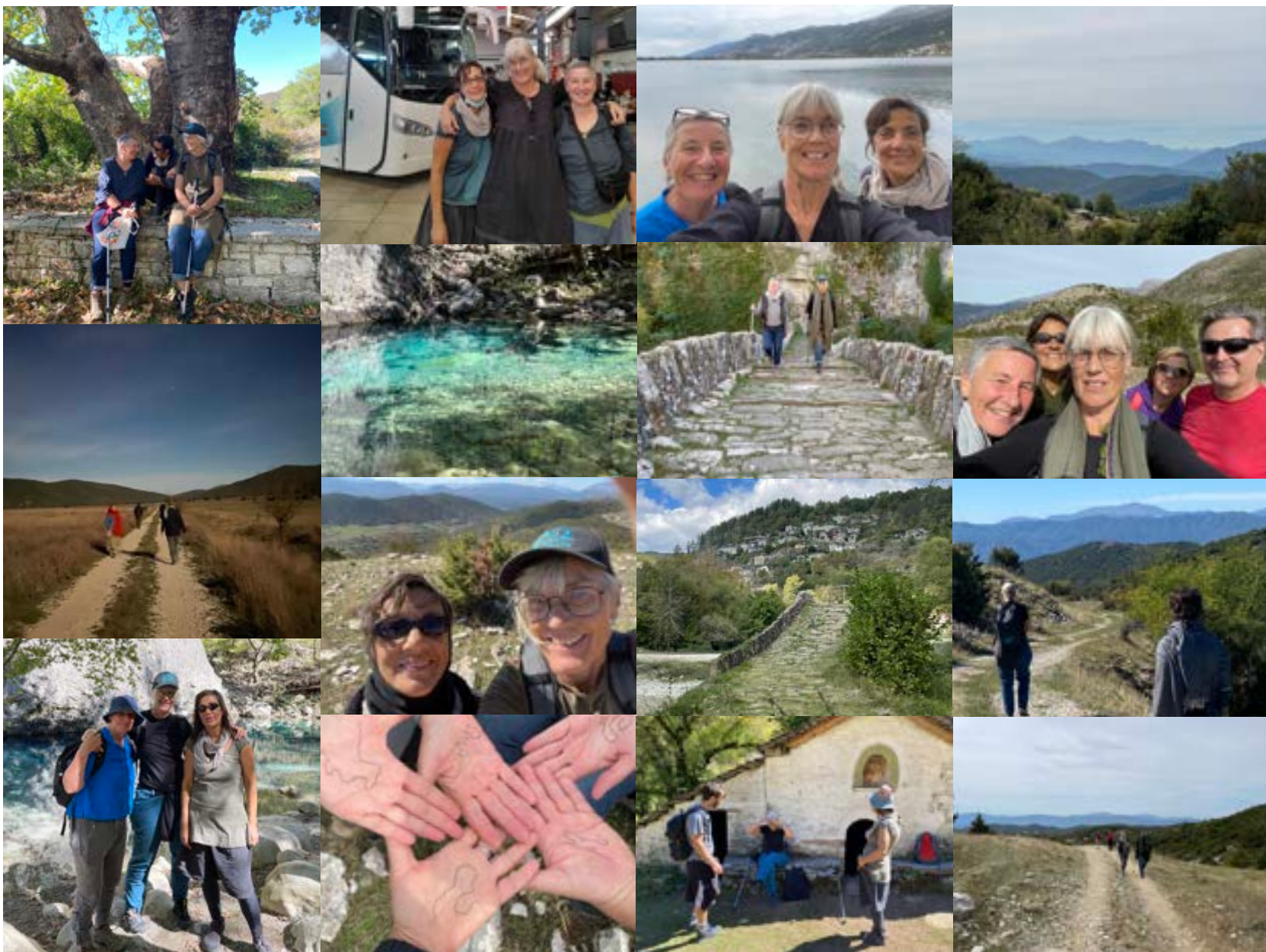
Together we hope you will feel the presence of Oika moving through these pages and into you too. And that you will then carry it further into your life. We hope you will sense how your story is a part of this larger matrix of nature’s stories.

If we can learn from these artists, as they have learned from Zagori, we will re-member ourselves with the natural continuities of Earth. We will feel at home again and fall back in love with the whole of life. This is the more beautiful future.

Rich Blundell

January, 2023

Nantucket Island



Greece • Epirus • Ioannina • Pindus Mountains • Zagori • Voidomatis River • Elafotopos • Vikos Gorge • Kipoi

# Oika artists' residency in Greece in association with EcoMuseum Zagori

Ida Larsen • Annie Rapstoff • Vicky Vergou

During the pandemic we were fortunate to discover courses on ecological intelligence organised by **Oika** and its founder member Dr. Rich Blundell. Ongoing communication led to an opportunity for an artists' residency in Northern Greece organised by **EcoMuseum Zagori**.

It was a long journey for the three of us to travel from Oxford in the UK, Southern Crete, and Athens in Greece. From the city of Ioannina we continued heading to the rural village of Elafotopos, situated in The Pindus Mountains (Πίνδος), close to the border of Albania. We stayed at an eco guest house hosted by a couple committed to working with the land and animals, shepherding sheep, working with wool, making cheese, butter and harvesting fruits.

This was a new experience in an unfamiliar environment, away from the pressures of home life, in a location supportive and sympathetic to creativity. We had time to build a shared dialogue with each other, dwell in reflective practice, allowing ideas to self-seed and grow.

This booklet narrates and archives moments of our time during the residency, making our individual concerns visible and contributing towards possible future collaborations. It has been created in appreciation for the freedom given to us; the gift of not having to produce outcomes whilst in situ.

We express our gratitude to Rich Blundell, who funded the trip in association with Panagiota Koutsoukou and EcoMuseum Zagori as well as to Geert Vermeire for bringing us together.

# IDA LARSEN

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A memory of a river

The Greek word for truth - alet-theia - does not mean the opposite of untruth, but the opposite of - lethe - forgotten.  
Truth is what you remember.



## The source of inspiration

Inspiration is like a river, it becomes “conscious” at the source, flowing slowly creating a track. On its way the river meets streams, other rivers and many hurdles, it becomes vast and curved like a fast flowing organism.

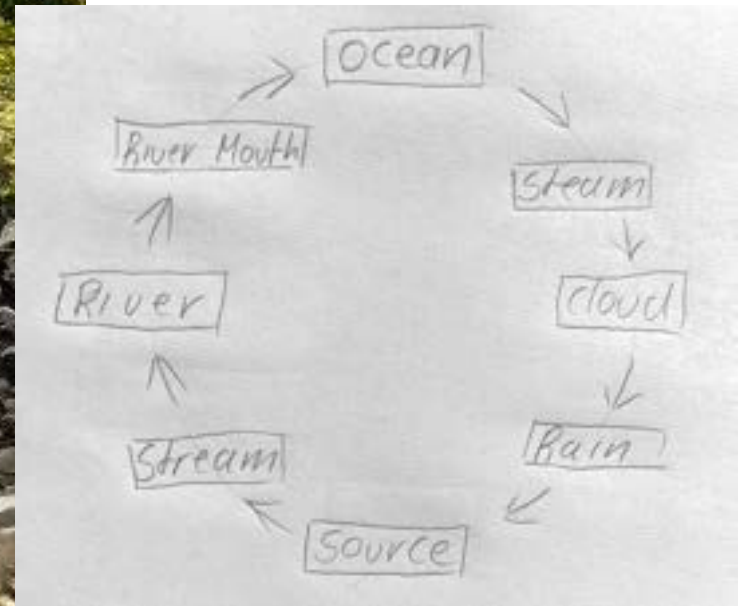
I see our stay in Zagori, as the source of my inspiration. I have chosen to focus on the dry part of The Voidomatis River. I believe that the dry path left by the river includes many layers; such as the track that the water has carved through the landscape, leaving a memory of a river in the soil. The many bridges are a memory of human existence, offered with respect and without trying to control the flow of the water.

The inspiration spreads like rings in the water, carved in a stone



## The source of the river

This is the start of the river, but not the start of the water



To the left the water is constantly running, finding its way to the sea. To the right there is the gorge.



## The gorge

The gorge is a memory of the river,  
carving its way through the landscape  
for millions of years.

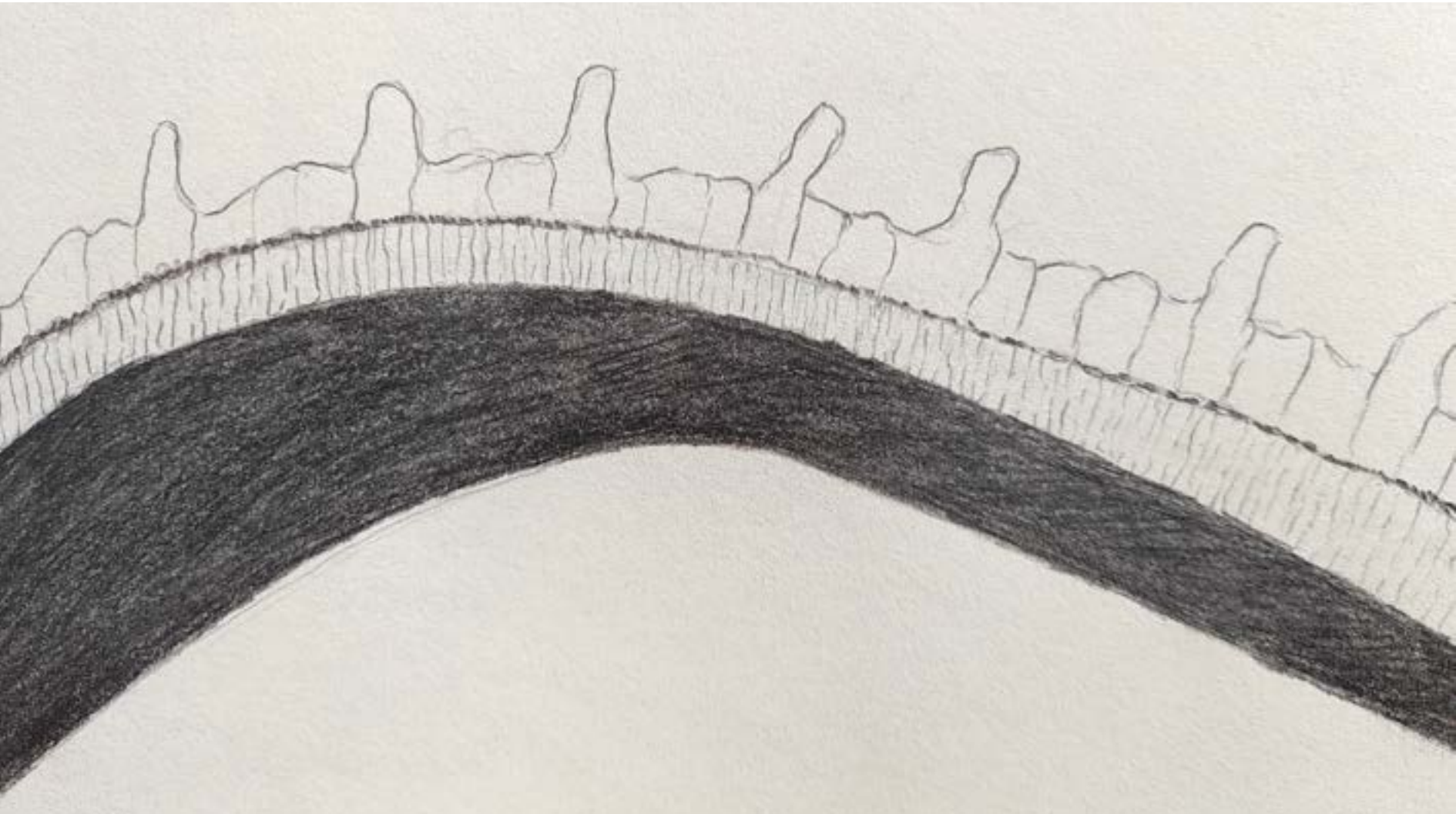
Everything that moves leaves a track.

Giant trunks of trees are left  
at the riverside  
and enormous white stones  
are transported and left  
in the riverbed.

No water is present.

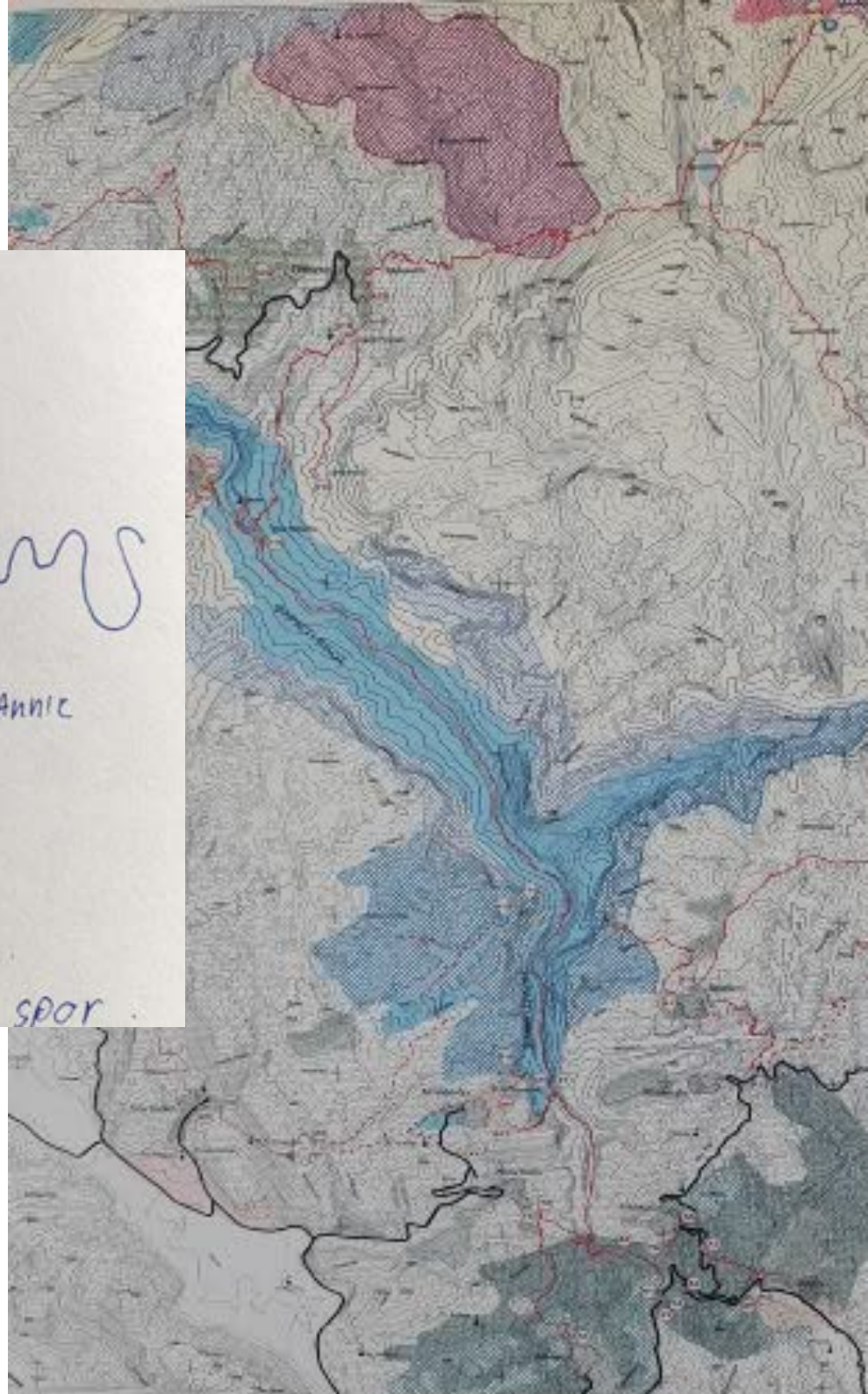
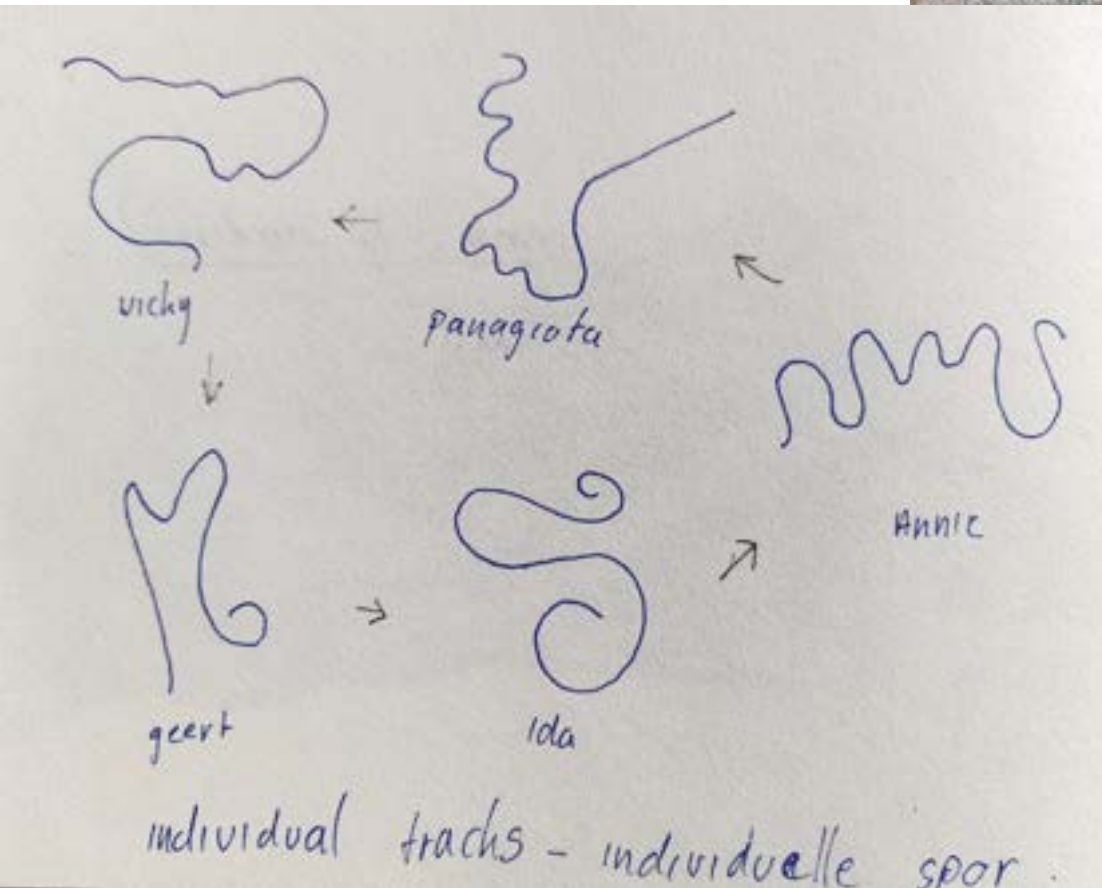


## The bridge

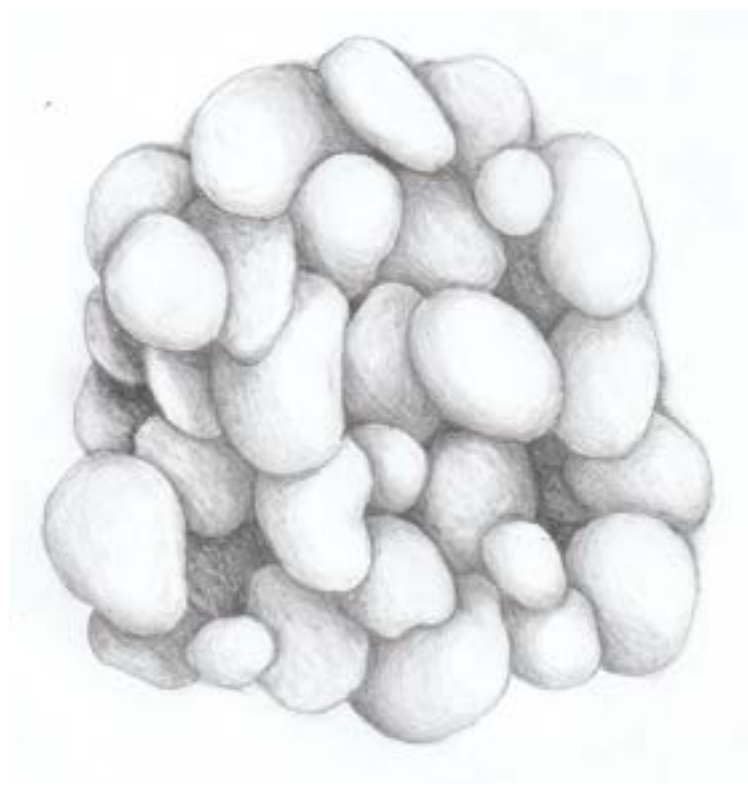


There is a track of water under the bridge  
There is a track of humans over the bridge

## The map



A map is the human memory of the river,  
created to find our way and not get lost.  
A map can never be an exact image.  
The water always finds new routes.  
The river is never the same.





*A memory of a river*

Old canvas with aluminium 130x83cm, 2022, by the artist

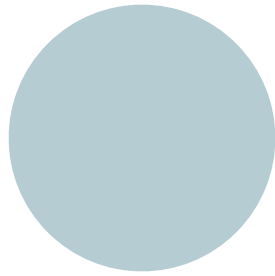
Voidomatis.

Beautiful Bullseye.

You went through my eyes, my ears,  
my nose and into my mouth.

You flowed into my veins  
and took rest in my mind.

You are stored in my DNA.



# ANNIE RAPSTOFF

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The Familiar, The Curious and The Forgotten

The pages of this booklet have enabled me to give shape to some of the interests that arose during my time in The Pindus Mountains. The work is an exchange between place and meaning making. I have included themes concerning repetition in the everyday, in actions such as walking and recurring patterns in nature. Further pages touch on responses to mountains, bridges and love. There is no particular sequence, but hopefully more an interconnection between the pages.

**Repetition** - leaf structures, the forms of plants, the seasons, cycles of life and death. The sound of footsteps merging with the constancy of the mountains - “look how they change in that light”. Colour in a sea of trees and shrubs, turning as they have done last year and the year before, maybe a week or two later this year.

**Repetition** - actions that go unnoticed, gestures and patterns often taken for granted. Rhythms of the domestic - cooking, maintenance, cleaning. The making of mountain tea, coffee, being part of making cheese pie, spreading butter day after day. Rituals - present in the smell of butter, cheese and syrupy fruits.

“**Repetition** is not repetition, ... The same action makes you feel something completely different by the end”

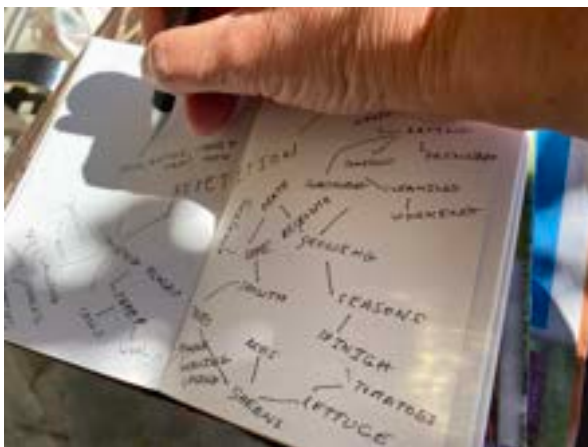
Pina Bausch





Overlapping hands,  
top of the world,  
the Albanian phone  
network, a polyphonic  
sound of bells and  
absent cows.

A silent walk with the  
full moon, an imagined  
beach on a cliff face,  
digging potatoes,  
picking Calendula,  
goose feathers.



An echo of the language of place  
Fractals sending ripples  
Transporting place within



A bridge is a route, a place of crossing, of passing through, a passage between heaven and earth, of meeting, of coming together and leaving, of entry and exit, a place to be destroyed and to prevent escape, to jump from, a place of ones' dreams, leaving where we feel trapped, a place of stability and encounter, a place of dizziness, of instability and lack of safety, a place of past movements of people, animals and produce, of history past, present and future, of work, cobble stones, feet from the past and feet yet to come.





## An exercise in enfolding a mountain

Find a mountain, reach out your arm as if you are tenderly stroking a lover, gently trace your fingers along the contours of the mountain where the crest meets the horizon.

Spine of the mountains  
merging into blurred layers  
edge upon edge  
boundaries fractured in time

Cavernous cathedral of limestone, step by step, deeply grateful to my enlivened body.



It feels dense here - the weight of the mountains, the land feels so rooted, feet are heavy on the stone paths.





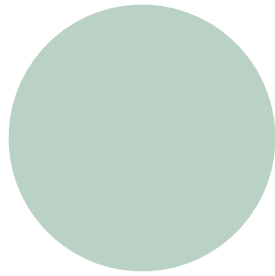
A transcription  
in stitches - a  
memory of a  
walk into The  
Vikos Gorge.  
These marks  
give physical  
form to a  
journey of  
numerous  
hesitant steps.



We sheep are individuals, we recognise faces of up to 50 people. We react to facial expressions and prefer you to smile at us rather than make an angry face. We know who we are and have particular friends in our flock.

For hundreds of years we have grazed the lands and walked with shepherds on the transhumance paths, keeping the vegetation in check and keeping the paths open for you to walk through.

An extract from *A love letter to sheep*, by the artist





# VICKY VERGOU

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An Endless Landscape

All that we are is our stories.  
Discovering forgotten pathways in deep time.  
A truthful continuity.

During the short period of the residency in The Pindus Mountains, I created a memory archive of daily Earth Stories, a diary of short poems and some drawings.

4.10.22 : At the top of the world

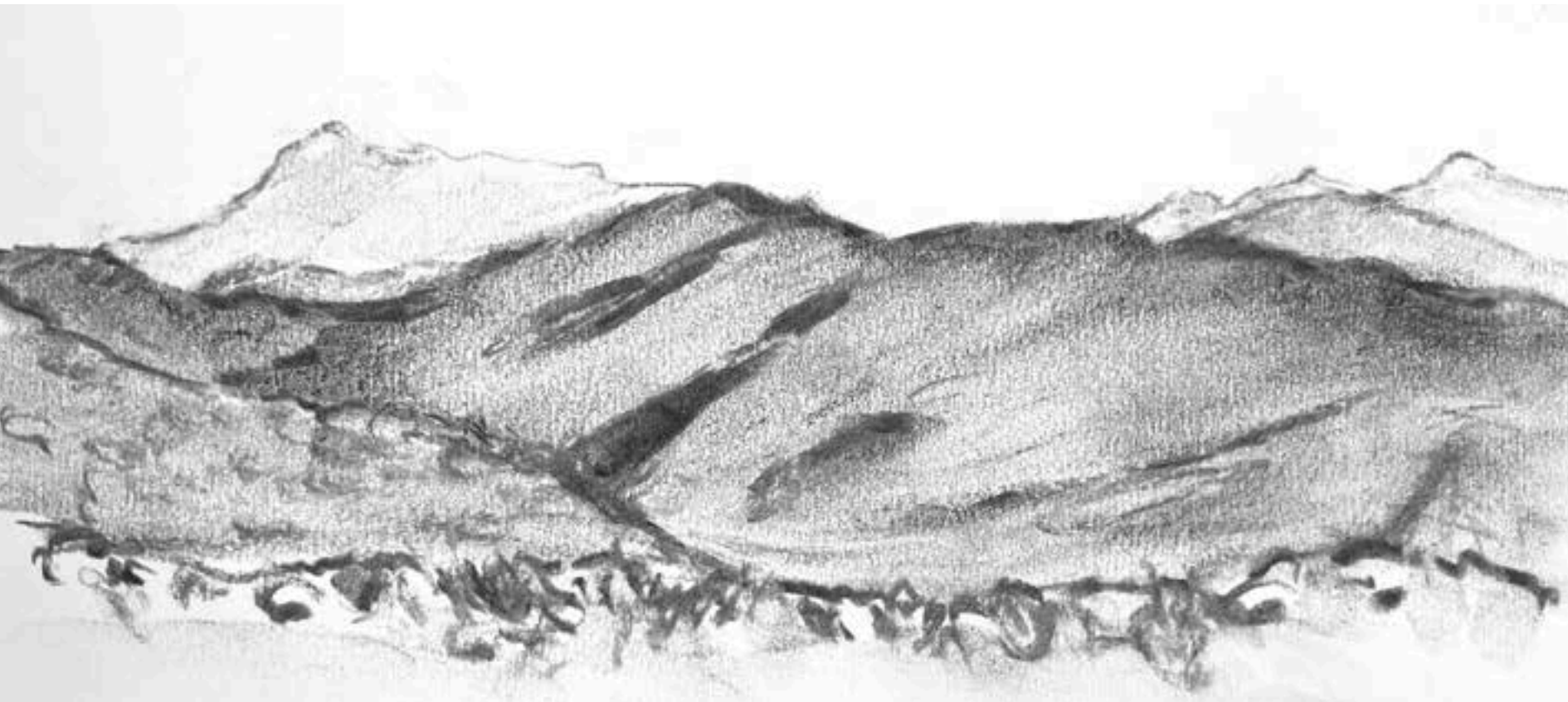


High in the mountains breathing the clear air of eternal freedom. Walking against the sun. Moving away from any buildings, searching for a spot with no signs of civilisation. Hearing my own breath and the buzzing insect in my ear. Now, I am getting back.

## 5.10.22 : Encounters

Passages connecting the past with the present, walked in time backwards and forwards by humans and animals, remaining alive through memory.

Dry rivers, pathways for mammals in summer and fish in winter.



## 6.10.22 : A shared world



Stone flowers carry memories.

Our deep relationship to  
the surroundings and our  
observations of the unseen  
create new history.



7.10.22 : In the beginning

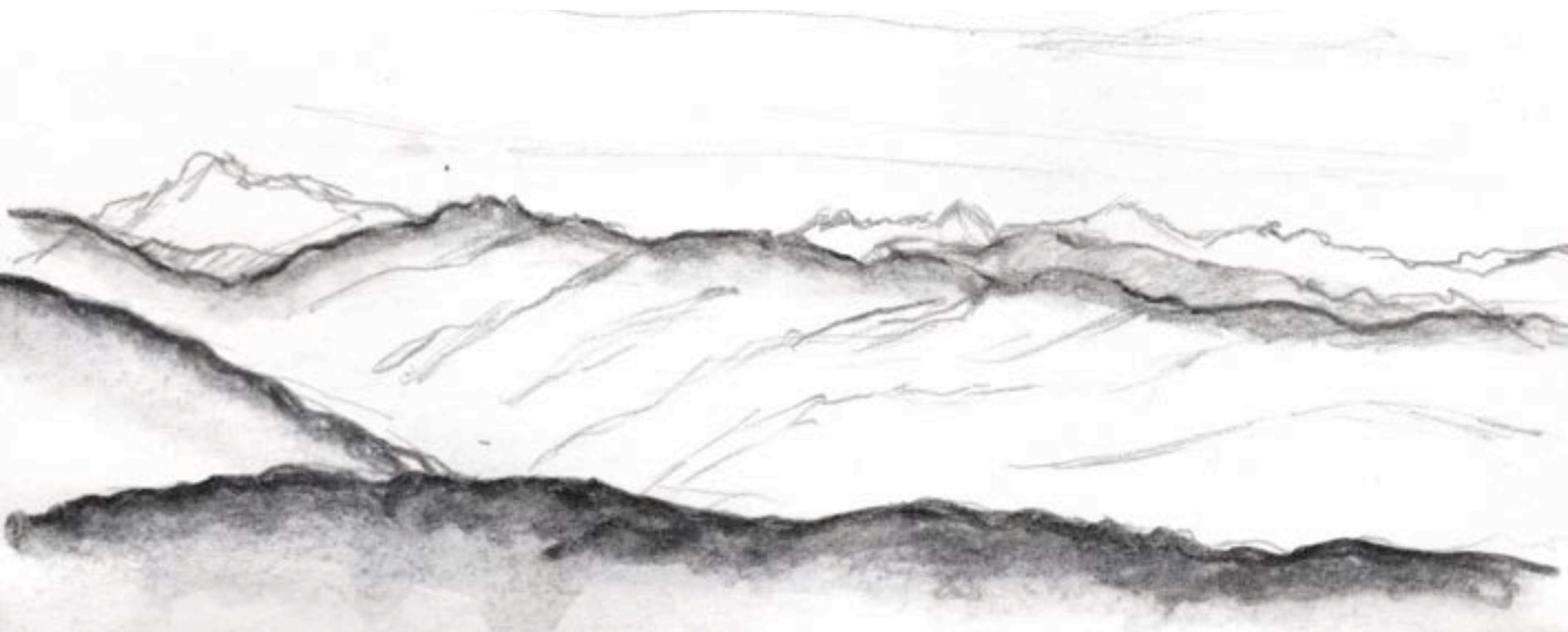


We are and are not. Banks turn from sand to rock, rivers fill up from melting ice and unforgiven rainfall; glaciers return to liquid form, lakes turning into wrinkled valleys under uncertain clouds, planet shyly changing. We will come and we will go, just like water.

From the selection of poems *Odes to Water*, by the artist

## 8.10.22: Entering Deep Time

Oxygen smells of endlessly repetitive high mountains.  
Susurrations of wild winds mimicking words of grace.  
Owning and not owning this place like any other.  
Another potential homeland.  
Bonded or unbonded, all part of this world.  
Belonging or not belonging, this is the same earth.



## A tribute

In the early 80's I came across the Dead Can Dance album "A passage in time". Besides the music this title inspired me throughout the decades that followed.

The sun decides the meaning of time on this planet.

Mountains seem to be untouched by time, yet, they are not. Instead, they share forgotten memories of other times. They host old-growth forests that tell hidden stories of evolution. Trees stand tall on stable ground, yet, they are forever changing. High winds whisper unspoken truths about impermanence.

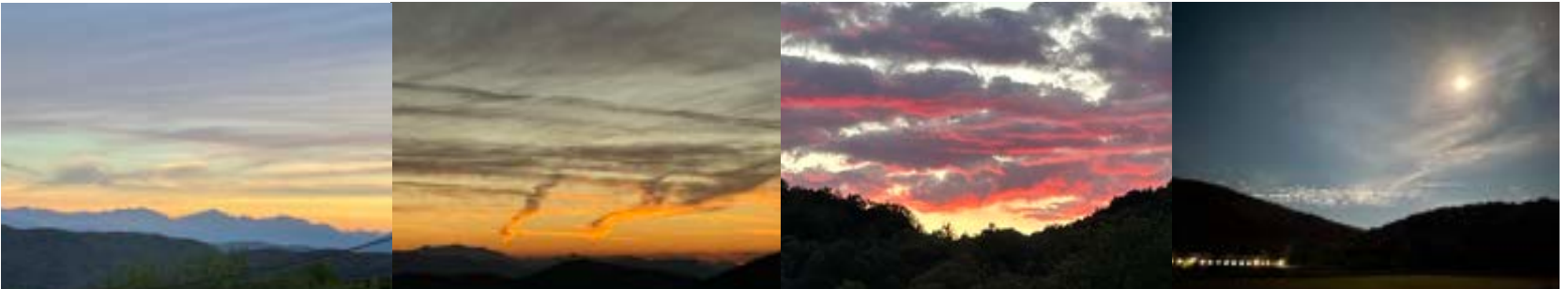
The more time I spend in a place the more I relate to its surroundings, familiarising myself, becoming an element around elements. My body temperature changes, breathing and hearing, my eye sight and all senses.

I am transforming - I am becoming.

*An extract from Odes to the Mountains, by the artist*

9.10.22 : Full moon

Under the moon  
Like a remembrance  
Where we came from  
What we are becoming  
and perhaps even  
Where we are supposed to go...



A night walk in collective silence.  
Silent thoughts and distant sounds, surrounded by wet smells of memories.  
Quiet footsteps on soil, deep loud breathing, sky reflections.  
So much air traffic in such a remote area...

Dark adaptation takes only 20-30 minutes to reach its peak.



## 10.10.22 : Departures



To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour

William Blake



# Acknowledgments

Our thanks go out to the many people involved, for their vision, energy and hard work.

To Dr Rich Blundell, founder member of Oika, who supported us in crystallising ecological principles and building further awareness. Without Rich's mentoring and Oika funding, this residency would not have been possible.

To Panagiota Koutsoukou, co-founder of EcoMuseum Zagori who shared her knowledge and enthusiasm for the Epirus Region and developed a programme of events for our week on the residency.

To Geert Vermeire, curator of Oika Art and co-initiator of Oika Zagori Field Station who was central in networking and organising the project.

To the Fine Art School of the University of Ioannina and Professor Xenofondas Bitsikas. Through his kind invitation we had an opportunity to talk to students about our art practice and process.

To Alexandros Filiopoulos, the guide of the museum, who introduced us to the geography of the area and led us on a challenging hike to the source of The Voidomatis River and into The Vikos Gorge.

To our host Lena, who is living a sustainable and ecological life, and who wisely said: "Please don't send people here, this place needs to be discovered".

Particularly memorable were the collective experiences following imaginary maps in the mountains and a silent meditative walk in the valley under the autumn full moon.

Oika: [www.oika.com](http://www.oika.com)

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*Text, images and page design:* the artists

*Graphic design:* Vicky Vergou

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