

LAGUNARIUM. AMONG THE RUINS OF VALLI DA PESCA

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Lagunarium approaches the theme of the terrarium through a wet, more-than-human visual tale. The narrator is a juvenile fish who dwells in the ruins of Valle Olivara, a valle da pesca in Lio Piccolo in the northern Venice Lagoon following the wonders and curiosities of those left to inhabit this abandoned landscape. Valli da pesca compose the millenary productive landscape of fish breeding along the margins of the Venice Lagoon, at the interface between land and water. The authors argue that the shape, function and operational patterns of the valli da pesca frame them as humid, turbid, terrariums: controlled enclosures in which specific life conditions are replicated and maintained through technical human interactions with the environment. If in other cases terrariums are crafted for scientific, aesthetic or recreational uses, the valli da pesca answer tight productive needs: breeding fish extensively to earn profit. This renders Valle Olivara not only as a miniature, controllable, replica of the larger Venice Lagoon but also as an early productive landscape, engineered to answer to economic demands.

Valle Olivara is essentially a large-scale terrarium. Venturing into this area, a feeling that the authors tried to capture through the visual element and the human-like stream of consciousness of the scaly protagonist, is a hauntological experience. Here, the spectre of an early capitalist geoengineering model lingers—as new life and unexpected interactions settle and transform this now uncovered, mutant lagunarium.

The tale tells the story of a more-than-human narrator inhabiting a former valle da pesca, an early fish farm, in Lio Piccolo. Valle Olivara, built as a smaller-scale controllable lagoon, is now abandoned and reappropriated by the larger ecosystem.

IN THE FISH TANK

Once upon a time, the boundaries of this water world seemed somewhat enclosed. (Fig 1A; Fig 1B)

Sometimes I have *déjà vu* of places I have passed by already, but it is nice here. It resembles the big world out there, but predators, waves or the pale visitors seen through the turbid waters cannot get in. I had a great juvenile time here, with thousands of siblings. Besides having to escape hungry fowl, we did not have many thoughts. We were promised that one day we could have left to explore the greater blue, a limitless body of water beyond the gate. I never saw it myself, we all just knew it—our world was made in the image of a larger one, which may be called “lagoon”.

A WET AND MUDDY TERRARIUM

One day, the water stopped flowing in the way it used to. (Fig 2A; Fig 2B)

We did not know what to think. All of a sudden those daily fresh replenishments ceased, while the gate that kept us safe and captive remained open, giving us the choice to stay or leave. We did not know what to do. Free from the action of those who kept it stable, our little world changed, became irregular: some parts were influenced by the greater world outside, some others became completely secluded, almost alien, transforming metamorphically.

A HAUNTED VALLE

All of a sudden, our world lost its lid. (Fig 3A; Fig 3B)

The decision was made by creatures we never spoke to—although we did communicate with them for a long time. Soon, the effects invaded us. We feared we would have been the last ones to populate these wetlands. The humming and singing and voicing at the other side of the water ceased. Some areas dried up in mazes of clay, and the weeds expanded reclaiming their spaces.

FOAMY FUTURES

Time flows, the world as we knew it no longer exists. (Fig 4A; Fig 4B)

In some districts, the tamarisks grew, keeping the banks stable, and the samphire thrived. New populations came, and we lived with them. Leaving the *valle*, we understood the mechanism that enclosed us from the bigger world, treating us as products, and now uncovered. Today, the very structure we live in hosts multiple species. We re-used our home, a beautiful one that was given to us, to host others and contaminate our structure. We are productive, we are alive.

Fig 1A *Underworld, others' world*. The story begins here.
Photo by the authors, 2023.



Fig 1B *Valle da pesca*. Ponds, bushes, dykes and marshes.
Photo by the authors, 2023.



Fig 2A *Chiusa*. Inside and outside.
Photo by the authors, 2023.



Fig 2B *Red tide*. Micro-algae blooming.
Photo by the authors, 2023.



Fig 3A *Casòn*. At some point, nature has taken over.
Photo by the authors, 2023.



Fig 3B *Cracking clay*. In some places, water has stopped flowing. Photo by the authors, 2023.



Fig 4A *Tamerici salmastre*. Robust tamarisks protect waters and beings,
break winds and consolidate grounds.
Photo by the authors, 2023.



Fig 4B *Mucilage proliferating*.
Photo by the authors, 2023.

