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**MORINGA,  
THE MIRACLE TREE**

John Newling

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We live on a planet that is enormously generous.

The Moringa Oleifera Tree (often called 'miracle or famine tree') is native to the foothills of the Himalayas in North West India. Gram for gram, Moringa leaves are richer in vitamin C than tomatoes and as rich in vitamin A as carrots. They contain more protein than milk and more potassium than bananas. For these extraordinary nutritional properties, its resistance to drought and its high potential as a famine plant, the Moringa has been referred to as the world's most generous tree.

In recent years great attention has been paid to the complex dynamics of ecological systems and how, in practice, we can think in terms of urban, social, political and even cultural ecologies. Many of my works are situated on this shared ground of possibility, where the artificial distinction between nature and culture will no longer make sense. Seeing nature as both affect and effect, tied into the multiple ecologies of humanity, we can re-evaluate its transformative potential

in the complex workings of everyday life. A social ecology, in a state of co-creation with the natural environment, could provide the practical grounds for addressing the question of how to properly constitute the wellbeing of contemporary life.

For many years now I have been investigating the material transformations that evolve from the transactions that weave between people, places and the environment. Many works have involved growing and studying a plant or tree species. Such works have further expanded and developed this thread of expression and research.

My work with the Moringa Oleifera Tree has developed as a relationship of meaning and materiality that constructs, cultivates and reviews a poetics of responsibility. It is a relationship that advocates an intelligent ecology based on values that are immanent in the complex workings of nature.

Such values drench the work in a complexity of intricate interactions between the tree and me. Knowledge emerges from this relationship connecting



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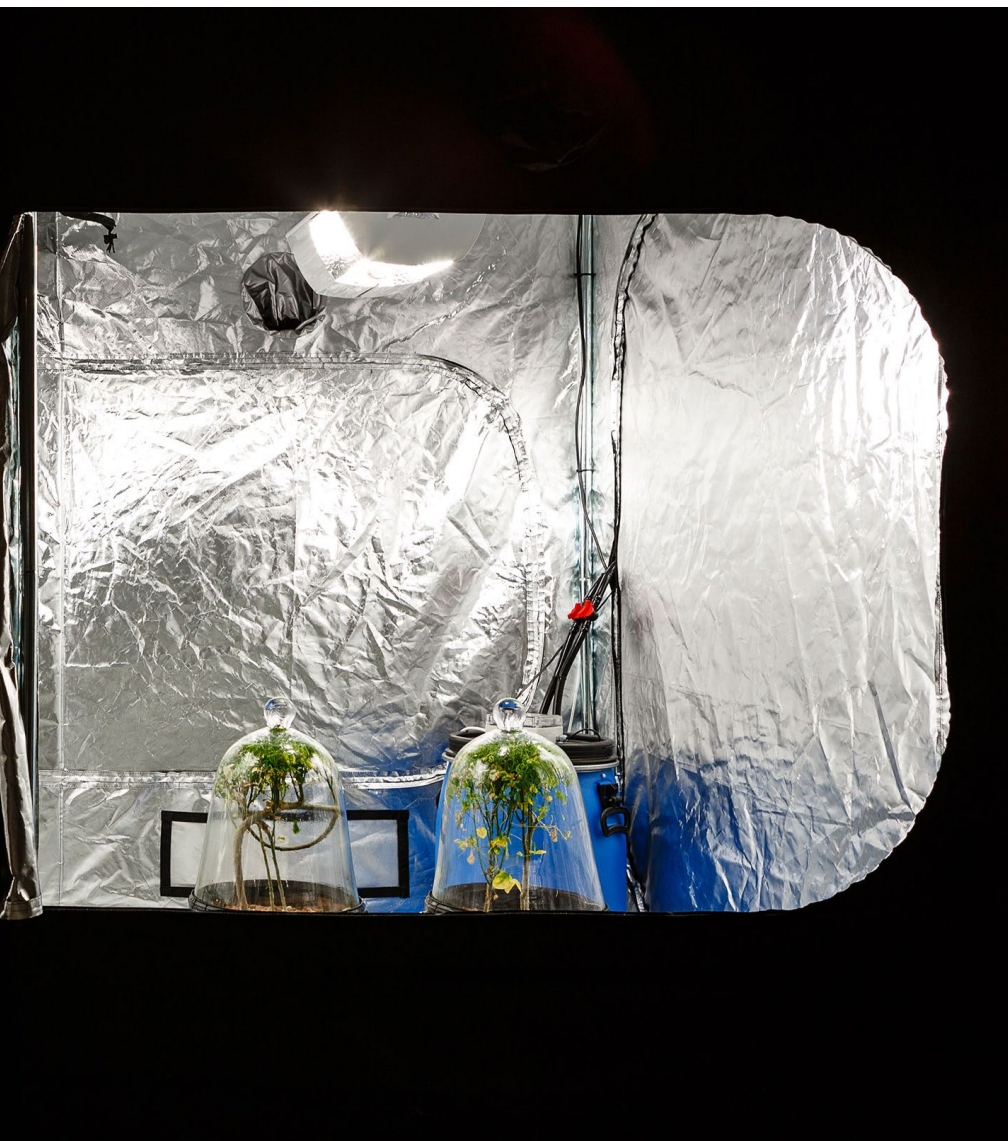
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beyond its immediacy, seeking and seeming to inform my view of many other things. Negotiating such complexities embodies the realities of uncertainty and trust that are essential constituents of many of my works.

Some of the Moringa works are small reminders that technology is not autonomous. Technology emerges from the historical coupling of nature to human nature and has the capacity to fundamentally alter the ecological balance of that relationship. The character of the tools can change, as does our ability to comprehend and control them. The sensibility that contemporary art has toward nature is a valuable lens for reviewing contemporary life. Like ecology art provides a bigger picture, explores relationships, emphasises connections, experiments with the interdependency of forms and, in the process, opens up a cultural dialogue between the uses of knowledge, social responsibility and the future of our being in the world.

Consistent throughout my experience of growing, observing and studying these trees has been a view of their beauty both as form and function. Working with them has better helped me understand love; spinning unconditionally in the core of the work.

A reoccurring sense I get from my work germinating, growing, observing and learning from the trees is that there appears at many junctions of the work a sense of a reciprocated generosity. This is not exclusive to these works but it is through them that I have become more conscious of generosity as an agent of learning and expressing that learning through my work.

The values of intensive market capitalism have caused a rift between humans and nature, which can only be bridged by a shared ecology of values. The everyday currency of contemporary art can illuminate a common creativity of sustainability if we can extend our vision beyond our back gardens into the wider social field.

At the border between art and gardening is a compost of material and metaphor, an intelligent soil enriched with a renewed belief in the values of civic responsibility. As a sign of life, many of my Moringa works are poetic situations for an emerging social ecology that will help us define our collective search for wellbeing.

On the common ground of ecological sustainability, art can both enrich and nurture a new belief in the social value of civic authority, based on our shared responsibilities as



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gardeners of the public domain.

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His works are available at [www.john-newling.com](http://www.john-newling.com).  
More details of the Moringa tree work are available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lubxDB3j9Go](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lubxDB3j9Go) and <http://miracletrees.wordpress.com/>

- [1] Moringa Oleifera, first shoot
- [2] Miracle Tree Project germination in my studio
- [3] Generosity plates at the Wellcome Collection, 2014
- [4] Miracle tree leaf pressed in the pages of a book
- [5] Miracle Tree Project
- [6] Bracelets of language constructed from scans of moringas and to be auctioned to raise money for a food bank
- [7] Growing the Moringas in the Exchange gallery, penzance