

*The forest in flames* by Natalia Behaine  
Text by Daniel Gardeazabal

*I am the unfolding of time that never stops,  
of the accelerated movement which fears passivity and patience.*  
Natalia Behaine – *The forest in flames*

*The forest in flames* is a video work by Natalia Behaine that meditates on the fears and anxieties of the fast-paced world we currently live in. It is a reflection on an emotional and physical state. The work depicts the cycles that the artist has not completed, only to fit into a society that has forgotten the Self and has dedicated itself to the repetition of an accelerated life in which long processes have no place.

As Behaine wrote in her diary, “The day at La Mojarrá, when I didn’t need anything else but watching a burning tree in silence”, was when the process of *The forest in flames* began. Riddled by the ego, the constant need to produce work, exposure, show the world through social media how great her life is, inhabiting cities where the sun doesn’t shine and pollution clouds her mind, the artist felt guilty about the idle pleasure of just observing a tree on fire. She feels that not even in death do we cease to be aware of what is happening around us, that this world doesn’t allow us to let go and abandon ourselves to a natural process. This video intends to lose that guilt and remind herself to follow the pace of her own path.

Developed over a year, the video shows a forest which appears to be calm at the beginning but that grows in tension as it moves in front of the viewer’s eyes. The image is composed from the overlapping of different photographs of forests and trees taken by the artist. In this ‘digital painting’ (as the artist calls it), Behaine shows us her own inner forest, created from her memories and mental pictures, but at the same time making it any forest. The artificiality of the forest makes it more approachable; the images are not perfectly clear, but allude to what the collective ‘we’ understand for a forest.

Throughout the video, it seems that it is not the camera that moves but the forest itself, sometimes slower and sometimes faster. This is intentional and refers to a spinning world that the artist does not know how to stop, as well as the natural processes of creation and destruction. This movement also allows us to be passive observers, to take the time and behold the beauty that a burning forest has to offer.

Sound and visual cues warn the spectator about the fragility of the ego. The image trembles, the sound of breath goes faster, hyperventilating, and the whispers become almost unintelligible. The soundscape, composed by Carolina Ortiz, was made from recordings made by Behaine at La Mojarrá, a small town in the north east of Colombia. Each of the sounds, as well as the visual elements (the fog, the trembling, the sparks, etc.), has a meaning: they all depict a different stage in the fears and anxieties of the artist. The lower tones are an introduction to that physical and mental stage; the fog clouds our view of the forest, trying to stop us from contemplating the forest in peace; the trembling is the doubts about our own place in the world; and the flames and the sound of the burning forest purify. In Behaine’s work, fire has a special significance. It is not a destroying force, but a cleansing one, part of the natural cycle of birth, death and renewal. It is what reconnects her with her inner self and burns her anxieties through contemplation.

There is a strong poetic force in the words that Behaine whispers. It is a verbalisation of those same fears but, as the trees in her forest, they overlap each other making them indecipherable, just like our own voices inside our heads. It is just glimpses of those thoughts that the artist allows us to listen clearly. When she does, they give a direct message: her loneliness in a world she does not recognise anymore and, later, that she has to follow her own path at her own rhythm.

In the overexposed cities we live in, we have forgotten the idle pleasure of contemplation. We have forgotten that beyond the tall buildings and the screens of our mobile phones, nature keeps renewing itself in their cycle of creation and destruction. *The forest in flames* is not only an invitation to recover the joy of that cycle; it is also a journey through the artist's anxieties and reconciliation with the contemporary world.

*Natalia Behaine is a Colombian artist based in France. She assumes her artistic practice from contemplation and silence, using meditation as a tool to stimulate the solitary and patient observer that resides within her. She relies on nature as a source of inspiration with the objective to find the emptiness that comes with silence. She is interested in freezing fragments of time in order to maintain both the memory and the souvenir alive. The three main focuses within her practice are photography, video and literature. She uses these mediums to elaborate intricate compositions through the overprinting of images.*

*She has exhibited in different galleries, museums, and festivals in South America and Europe including Fonlad Festival of videoart and performance (Coimbra, Portugal), VAFT-Video Art Festival (Turku, Finland), Festival Internacional de VideoArte, (Buenos Aires, Argentina), New Cosmos of Photography Canon (Tokio, Japan) and Artrónica, International exhibition of Electronic Arts (Bogota, Colombia).*

*'The forest in flames' has been recently shown in several festivals across Europe, including the IVAHM Festival (Madrid, Spain), Oodaaq Festival (Rennes, France) and Videofomes (Clermont-Ferrand, France), as well as other group exhibitions. Her work is currently under care of the Colombian Ministry of Culture.*