

Introductory Text / Introduction

Sometimes there is this diffuse feeling: Something has changed. Once familiar, now strange. Suddenly, a new scent is in the air. An old fragrance is missing. A new building blocks my view. A widened street. Fewer birds chirping in the morning. Leaves falling to the ground as early as late summer. Has my perception changed, or the thing itself? What do we mourn in these situations? Ourselves, or our habitat? A past that has passed, a lost connection to our surroundings, an uncertain future?

The term *solastalgia* is used to capture a specific feeling—one that relates simultaneously to the past, the present, and even the future. In contrast, *nostalgia* is devoted entirely to the past. Glenn Albrecht, an Australian environmental philosopher, coined this new term in the early 2000s. "In short, solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at 'home'," he succinctly summarizes the phenomenon.¹ This neologism combines the Latin word for comfort (*sōlācium*) with the Greek root *-algia*, which can denote pain, suffering, or even illness. The sensation that overcomes us when we witness environmental destruction—or experience drastic changes to places familiar to us—is the pain of absent solace: the very comfort we would otherwise derive from our familiar surroundings. This pain is particularly acute among indigenous populations, as they often face the loss of their homeland for a second time: first through colonialism, and now through climatic shifts—though climate change affects white residents in the region just as well.²

Climate change is a topic that is here to stay—regardless of how much coverage it currently receives in the news. "Solastalgia" appears to be a term that is slowly gaining ground in many spheres of life. Alongside philosophy and psychology, art is another discipline that is increasingly engaging with this sentiment—a feeling that has become more tangible thanks to this new term. Artists have long dealt with these themes—on the one hand, with their own emotional landscapes; on the other, with the relationship between society and the environment. As early as 2022, the Kunstfest Weimar featured the play "SOLASTALGIA" in its program, a work that explicitly references Glenn Albrecht's theory. The exhibition "SOLASTALGIE: Spaziergänge durch veränderte Landschaften" (Solastalgia: Walks Through Altered Landscapes) was on view at the Museum Giersch of Goethe University (Frankfurt am Main) until mid-February 2026.

"SOLASTALGIA—Forest Bathing with a Plastic Dolphin" in Ahrenshoop extends this theme into a landscape that is—and will continue to be—particularly affected by climate change. The works on display by Sophia Süßmilch, Jenny Schäfer, and Jessica Arsenau offer no simple answers, nor do they provide instructions for action. Rather, they represent a

¹ Albrecht, Glenn: "Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change", Article in *Australasian Psychiatry*, February 2007, p. 45.

² *ibid.*, p. 54.

search for orientation—one that manifests within the artworks and against which we can measure our own quest. The human psyche itself is a central motif that artists have strived to explore and visualize for centuries—if not millennia. How does climate change impact the mental health of the individual, and the resilience of society? And do we possess visual concepts to articulate this? What strategies and coping mechanisms do we employ to confront these mounting pressures? A retreat into the private sphere? Self-healing and self-care? A shifting of one's center of gravity into digital realms? A change in mindset? "Solastalgia: Forest Bathing with a Plastic Dolphin" traces these questions and explores potential answers.

The potential of solastalgia lies in how we engage with it: How can I re-establish a relationship with my environment? I can set out to develop a vision for the future, take responsibility for my living space, and attempt to protect it from further changes—or, alternatively, make it more resilient to the changes yet to come. In the case of natural processes such as droughts, solastalgia is alleviated by the onset of rain; with human-made phenomena, however, we must take action ourselves to feel less at the mercy of events.³ Culture can serve as a building block in this process—a means of confronting this "ancient, ubiquitous, yet only recently defined human malady."⁴

³ Albrecht cites as an example an organization of indigenous female rangers who remove non-native plants in their territory and care for the landscape. p. 48.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 55.

Jenny Schäfer

Jenny Schäfer's works oscillate between lightness, naivety, and a direct confrontation with our world—a world designed around hyper-consumption—yet without ever resorting to moralizing. Colours, forms, materials: In the worlds she creates, we encounter a kind of positive abundance, nourished by generosity and opulence. At times, Schäfer's works function like a time capsule, catapulting us back into the past—specifically, into our own personal histories. Simultaneously, the materials she employs raise questions: What do I buy? How sustainably do I shape my life? The remnants of a plastic beach shelter, for instance, will likely outlast us all by decades—possibly even centuries.

The scent of sunscreen in the air, sand on the skin, a gentle breeze, perfect weather, the sound of the sea. Accompanied by a fish roll and a fun, summery drink. Retreating with a book to escape the midday sun. Memories of more carefree times—and yet, still a quintessential vacation moment to be experienced right here on the Baltic coast. Despite the news reports regarding climate change—or perhaps precisely because of them. To this end, Jenny Schäfer has continued her work "Innere Oberfläche" (Inner Surface), which she originally developed for the Kulturkirche Bremerhaven. The resulting installation, "Attrappe mit unterschiedlichen Fähigkeiten" (Decoy with Varying Capabilities), combines recurring elements of her artistic practice with aspects typical of Ahrenshoop and the surrounding region. Schäfer's ceramic vases appear like the spreading tentacles of some conjured sea creature. They are partially stripped of their primary function, as they are unable to hold water. Through the artificial flowers displayed within them, the artist alludes to the loose fragments of floral arrangements—regularly washed ashore on the beach at Ahrenshoop—that remain after burials at sea. Transformed into a cave-like space draped with blankets, the beach shelter evokes memories of seaside vacations, as well as the makeshift pillow forts of childhood, remaining a temporary, fragile dwelling. Nature in its "real" form—captured by Schäfer's camera during her residency in Ahrenshoop—approaches instead quite softly and thoughtfully. Black-and-white photographs—released both as a limited edition and printed onto a beach towel found within the shelter installation—depict seagrass swaying in the wind. It is not an "either/or" scenario—not a choice between an imagined world (perhaps a world of the past, and perhaps a better one) and the factual, present-day reality right on our doorstep. The two flow into one another.

Jenny Schäfer works with text, photography, and (found) objects. This results in artist's books and installative arrangements presented within the context of exhibitions. Socially critical—yet above all driven by a delight in looking—her works expand the viewer's perception. In doing so, Schäfer does not shy away from incorporating "kitsch." A childlike joy of discovery meets multifaceted image-making processes.

From 2008 to 2012, Jenny Schäfer studied Art Education for Special Needs Schools at the University of Hamburg and the HFBK Hamburg. This was followed by studies in Fine Arts at the HFBK Hamburg, which she completed with a Master's degree in 2025. In 2024,

Schäfer was a fellow in Visual Arts and Media at Künstlerhaus Lukas. For her book „Arbeitstage“, she received the Hamburg Literature Prize for Experimental Writing. Her work has been exhibited in Graz, Hamburg, Winterthur, Vienna, and Chemnitz, among other locations. Her most recent photobooks, „Die Anrufung der Riesin“ (2024) and „Prisma“ (2025), were published recently.

Jessica Arseneau

Temporality, sleep, and dreams are central themes in Jessica Arseneau's artistic practice. Through her work, she transports us into fictional, inhabited spaces that often hover halfway between consciousness and the unconscious, between the body and the atmospheric. Employing video and installations, Arseneau examines existing temporal structures and our perception of reality within the techno-economic system that surrounds us—a system characterized by perpetual activity. Her films unfold with a slowness that leaves us in a state of suspension. We are repeatedly confronted with sleep deprivation and solitude. These can be understood as symptoms of an era in which time has become detached from its cosmic, geological, and biological conditions.

"We Killed Seasons" (2026) imagines a world in which seasons no longer exist—the title suggesting that we are the ones who killed them. The changes wrought upon our world by climate change manifest here not only on a spatial level but also on temporal and emotional ones. The physical setting itself still exists, yet it has been fundamentally altered—in parts, rendered utterly unrecognizable. How does one cope with such a profound transformation? The film features two individuals engaging in a loose conversation about this very subject: what things were like in the past, how it came to this, and what the situation is now. Additionally, a separate narrative voice attempts to provide a framework for the whole experience. In quiet scenes, the protagonists are shown interacting with their surroundings—a dead bee, a pile of leaves, a whale—all situated in places and contexts that feel unnatural, severed from their original environments. In total, five protagonists appear on screen; each is alone. Only the two individuals conversing with one another share a connection. Aside from them, there are no encounters—an absence that evokes a sense of deepening isolation.

"If everything is synchronized, it feels like everything is working. Something arrhythmic, and all is out of balance." The sun—with its meanings shifting throughout history, as well as the enduring recognition of its power—is a subject of discussion among the film's protagonists. Building upon this, they speak of weather, rhythms, and legends. According to Greek mythology, the origin of the seasons traces back to an agreement struck between the gods. This pact was forged after Hades abducted Demeter's daughter, Persephone. It was subsequently agreed that Persephone would spend part of the year with her mother, Demeter, and the remainder with Hades in the Underworld. With her comings and goings, life on Earth, too, undergoes a transformation: plants grow and wither, and the length of the day waxes and wanes. Arseneau explores the loss of temporal reference points; the film oscillates between longing, solitude, and the subtle disintegration of the psyche. The erasure of the seasons serves as a metaphor for the dismantling of essential human rhythms—a loss of natural cycles that enables the uninterrupted, round-the-clock exploitation of resources and labor.

Jessica Arseneau studied Visual Arts at the Université de Moncton in Canada and Media Art at the HGB Leipzig. In 2025, she won the Mülheimer Kunstverein Prize, and in 2024, the "Artist of the Year in Visual Arts" award at the Gala des Éloizes. Her work has been exhibited at venues including the Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin, the International Festival of Films on Art (Montreal), the Bandung Photography Triennale, the Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival, B_LA_M at the Mexican Embassy (Los Angeles), HilbertRaum (Berlin), the HFBK Gallery (Hamburg), the Vector Festival (Toronto), and the a&o Kunsthalle Leipzig.

Sophia Süßmilch

Sophia Süßmilch is a performance artist who, in her multimedia practice, employs both the paintbrush and the camera. The female body—often her own—along with forms of rebellion against norms and societal constraints, constitute central themes in Süßmilch's work. In this context, the nude body serves as both material and a recurring motif.

Scandals—such as the controversy surrounding her participation in an exhibition at the Kunsthalle Osnabrück in the summer of 2024, during which a CDU politician called for censorship—make it clear that we are still dealing here (for some) with a highly charged taboo subject.

Süßmilch captures the complexity of feelings toward this world, without offering a definitive or conclusive judgment. In her photographs—which feature herself and, at times, another person—the artist slips into a variety of roles, yet always remains recognizable as herself. Süßmilch's painting, by contrast, is less immediate. Its universalism—its "naivety"—evokes the impression that everything might, after all, turn out well, or that at the very least, a deeper logic underlies it all. Through the interplay between work and title, a new dimension opens up in her pieces: she typically adds a humorous twist, though at times she challenges the status quo or sows confusion.

In "Some Like It Hot" (2016), Süßmilch transforms into a human baked potato. Her facial expression is neutral: she stoically awaits whatever the future holds—events that, over time, will evolve in a warm, distinctly hostile direction. Together with Claudia Holzinger, Süßmilch stages herself as a snowman: stacked vertically, naked, and painted white, adorned with two twigs and a white sphere—speared with a carrot—serving as a head. The photograph's title, „I'm dreaming of a white christmas (the consequences of climate change)“, refers unreservedly to the climatic shifts that are robbing us of our beloved white Christmases. „Waldbaden“ (Forest Bathing) is more open to interpretation; here, we see the artist's torso in the foreground—her face painted white, complete with a red nose. Surrounded by trees, she appears to be crouching in a hollow within the forest. Like a mythical woodland creature or a marmot just emerging from hibernation, Süßmilch gazes directly into the camera—yet her expression remains detached and slightly perplexed. Have we caught her unawares in her attempt to escape the overwhelming demands of our modern age? Her paintings, too, leave ample room for interpretation. Animals—interconnected with one another and with hybrid human-animal entities via rhizome-like networks and lines—suggest a universalism in which all living things are (once again) inextricably linked. Psychedelic patterns and colour palettes make this world appear akin to a fever dream. The titles offer potential interpretive pathways, referencing "Mother Nature" and "real life," while simultaneously issuing a call to procreate.

Sophia Süßmilch studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Munich from 2006 to 2015. Her works were exhibited in 2018 at Belvedere 21 in Vienna; in 2020 at the Neue Galerie Graz and the Kunstpalast Düsseldorf; in 2021 at the Ludwig Forum Aachen; and in 2023 at the

G2 Kunsthalle in Leipzig and the Francisco Carolinum in Linz. Her solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Osnabrück followed in 2024. In 2022, she received the Marianne Defet Painting Scholarship. She was awarded the Bavarian Art Promotion Prize in 2018 and the Visual Arts Promotion Prize of the City of Munich in 2020.