





Agnes Waruguru, *Time Travel Dream Sequence (messengers)*, 2023, detail







*Echoes of Our Stories*, Installation view: Agnes Waruguru

## The Start

Exhibitions are put together in different ways. Sometimes they arise from an artist's specific wish, sometimes from the desires and projections of curators. The group show *Echoes Of Our Stories* came together in a process all of its own: a slowly swelling confluence of voices. In March 2023, the first part of the group met at Quinta do Quetzal in Portugal's Alentejo. We told each other about our practices, took walks through the vineyard and the surroundings, visited the Neolithic stone formations in Evora and the prehistoric burial chamber of Zambujeiro.\* Cursory sketches were made, plant and seed searches undertaken and critical questions raised. We read an essay by botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer on *Skywoman*—one of the Northern American Iroquois and Huron's creation stories. Skywoman falls from Skyworld one day. She is caught by geese and slowly lands on the back of a turtle. Along with the plants and animals, the earth is created and made inhabitable. This creation story, so different from the Christian version of Eve created from a rib of Adam, is about a joint creation of the world. In Kimmerer's reading, it becomes a story of reciprocity, mutualism, between humans and more-than-humans. In this age of crises and its accompanying deep uncertainty, Kimmerer focuses on ancestral stories, plant teachers and cosmology as pivotal axes in the world. Her words, steeped in transformation, careful attention and decisiveness, resonated and provided a basis for the collaborative production of this exhibition and the new works that emerged.

\* The 7,000 year-old Almendres, a rock formation in Evora and Zambujeiro Dolmen's burial chamber

## Plant Teachers

A few years ago I became slightly obsessed with moss. Before then I'd hardly noticed these tiny little green plants. And when I

did see moss, I considered it not particularly useful, growing in the way as it did. It reminded me of dark, damp places, most likely crawling with infinite numbers of small insects. I ignored it, until I happened to read *Gathering Moss* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Slowly I began to understand the special role that mosses play in our world. One of the first plant species to thrive on earth, some mosses are up to 450 million years old, and although to the beginner's eye moss may look like a uniform green mush, there are as many as 22,000 different species. They are often characterized by what they lack: they have no roots, flowers, fruits, seeds or vascular systems (an internal system to absorb water).

Kimmerer, a botanist and Citizen of Potawatomi Nation, combines Western science with indigenous knowledge in her writing. She writes about mosses from these two perspectives. In the Anishinaabe language—the language of Skywoman—the words for moss *aasaakamig* and *aasaakamek* mean 'those who cover the earth'. Mosses don't require much from their environment: a little bit of light, a little bit of water and minerals, which they get from rainwater or rocks. In times of shortage, they do not die, but 'pause'. They stop growing, curl up and wait for water to return. This allows them to sustain themselves almost anywhere, not only in the moist environment of the rainforest, but also in deserts. Mosses grow together and live together. They cling to trees or rocks, where they form entire colonies. As a community, they can retain moisture much more effectively than



*Echoes of Our Stories*, Installation view: Müge Yilmaz (front), Claudia Martinez-Garay (middle left), Agnes Waruguru (back)



*Echoes of Our Stories*, Installation view: Jennifer Tee (left), Müge Yilmaz (right)

a single individual could. In addition, they protect against erosion, form a favourable bed for seeds to germinate and provide a habitat for all kinds of small insects. Because of their absorptive capacity, they take up not only nutrients from the air, but also CO<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, they are also an indicator of air pollution.

Mosses require a certain focus; only on closer examination, on your knees, or with a magnifying glass, can you study this special little plant and recognize its enormous variety. Kimmerer describes the wonderfully diverse species: ‘miniature ferns, wefts like ostrich plumes, and shining tufts like the silky hair of a baby.’ The names of the plants and individual species are of great importance. Each time Kimmerer encounters a moss species that is new to her, she comes up with her own name to suit the little plant: ‘green velvet, curly top, red stem.’ The official name will come later. The most important thing is to recognize the mosses and acknowledge their individuality. ‘In indigenous ways of knowing,’ she writes, ‘all beings are recognized as non-human persons, and all have their own names. It is a sign of respect to call a being by its name, and a sign of disrespect to ignore it. Words and names are the ways we humans build relationship, not only with each other, but also with plants.’

How different is this way of naming to the Linnaean method. Linnaeus wanted to pack everything into a single system, ignoring anything that did not fit his categories and characteristics, or forcing them into inappropriate straitjackets. His method of nomenclature ignored native plant names and botanical knowledge. His system based on typical European rationality wiped out indigenous knowledge. ‘Naming is control’ wrote novelist Jamaica Kincaid, and this is the flipside of naming.



What makes Kimmerer's approach so special is that it incorporates a self-evident reciprocity. This way of recognizing and acknowledging things also leads you to look at the environment differently once you recognize the individual plants. By looking closely, paying attention, putting what you see into words, you begin to see more. The green soup of trees, shrubs, plants, suddenly becomes layered and specific. A deeper, more intimate relationship is built with the non-human environment around you. Through Kimmerer's book, I came to understand mosses as a metaphor for our impoverished dealings with the world around us, with everything more-than-human. It is a metaphor for conditioned viewing, which places universal laws above the exception to the rule, which determines what we see and do not see, but also what we value and do not value. It is a metaphor for how we have learned to see within certain systems, and how that system, in turn is a reflection of a dominant, and at times violent, mentality.

This brings us back to mosses. 'Mosses [...] are like time made visible. They create a kind of botanical forgetting. Shoot by tiny shoot, the past is obscured in green. That's why we have stories, so we can remember.' Mosses cover and heal the land. Precisely because they are 450 million years old, they have experienced multiple extinctions, they have seen ice sheets melt. What if we envision time not as an endless line (on a continuous upwards slope) but as a circle? Then, Kimmerer argues, the answer is already there and it is just a matter of remembering it again. It is the plant teachers like moss that can guide us and show us a different way of living together. It is the stories, the cosmologies like Skywoman's, that tell us not only where we came from, but how we got here and how we can move forward. A story that proposes a more positive relation-



*Echoes of Our Stories*, Installation view Jennifer Tee



Müge Yilmaz, *A Garden of Coincidences*, 2020

ship between humans and the environment, between humans and non-humans. We need to revisit the echoes of those stories.

The exhibition *Echoes Of Our Stories* brings together the work of artists Claudia Martínez Garay, Diana Policarpo, Jennifer Tee, Agnes Waruguru and Müge Yilmaz. Five artists who all tell stories in different ways that reshape our relationship with the environment and more-than-humans. They bring to light narratives that are not widely shared, that are on the verge of disappearing, that are transmitted through ancestral knowledge and tradition, through science fiction or the body. They are stories that make us look at the world around us in a different way, not the dominant Western way, and help us make sense of that world differently. They suggest new worldviews, spiritual, healing and futuristic alternatives in which the strict dichotomies of human-nature, above-below, centre-margin are subverted.

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# Claudia Martínez-Garay

's artistic methodology could be described as that of an archaeologist. The stories she excavates are both historical and speculative. Martínez-Garay was born in the Peruvian province Ayacucho. Due to the violent war that started in

the 80's she, like many of the people from the Andean provinces, with a majority indigenous population, ended up in the capital of Lima. She grew up with—and between—two cultures, her native culture and the predominantly white westernized culture in the capital, with customs imposed by the Spanish colonists. Her films, installations, murals and collages are the result of a constant rereading of that complex and violent historical duality. One way of describing this, is through *ch'ixi*, an Aymara concept: it refers to something that both is and is not. It is a combination of identities that don't ever really mix. In her work, she reflects on that history, to which she herself has little access. Stories were told or written down in Quechua which is not considered an official language (and which she is now re-learning) or because the colonizers looted the historical objects to exhibit them in European museums. How can you understand your own identity when you don't have access to its past?

Martínez-Garay created the mural *Huaquita* for the monumental entrance to Quinta do Quetzal, which provides access to the exhibition space and restaurant, and consists of a architectural colour fields. The colours are reminiscent of ancient Peruvian architectures with animal reliefs and colourful iconography. The *Huaquita* evokes associations with the temples and stepped pyramids known as Huacas. They are places of religious importance, where offerings and rituals were performed. The shape of the doors, for instance, are specifically reminiscent of the pyramidal Inca windows. They become portals, directing your gaze before you enter the exhibition space.

In the ongoing series called *Pacha*, the artist associatively pairs elements from the Andean cosmovision to offer another perspective on our relationship with nature, time and space. Each collage offers a specific window on reality and invites the reader to uncover connections. Against the background of a mountainous land-



Claudia Martínez-Garay, *Huaquita*, 2023



Claudia Martinez-Garay, *Huaquita* (drawing), 2023





Claudia Martinez-Garay, *Huk Pacha, Iskay Pacha, Kimsa Pacha*, 2020

scape, hangs a branch with sacrifices, an apple, eaten in the shape of South America, snakes, the leaves of a coca plant and underneath it all, inside the Andean cross, a white hand with a burned match. Together these symbols reveal a hidden meaning and can be understood as a means of orientation.

In Yasmine Ostendorf-Rodriguez's book *Let's Become Fungal!* I read about 'collective amnesia' and how remembering can make us aware of the complex entanglements of time and place. But also how remembering in this context is a political act and in fact a responsibility. The images Martinez-Garay draws from official and unofficial archives, books and stories are a reminder of the past. Her works transform that socio-political reality. Her reading of history is one that recalls trauma and focuses not so much on healing as it does on restoring relationships that have been broken or lost. In a sense, Diana Policarpo works in a similar manner. Through speculative storytelling, her historical archival research and collection of images and stories, she restores connections in our collective memory that were deliberately erased over time.

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# Diana Policarpo

In her film *The Oracle*, Diana Policarpo creates a story about *Claviceps purpurea*, or the *ergot fungi*, and its role in healthcare through the ages and in relation to

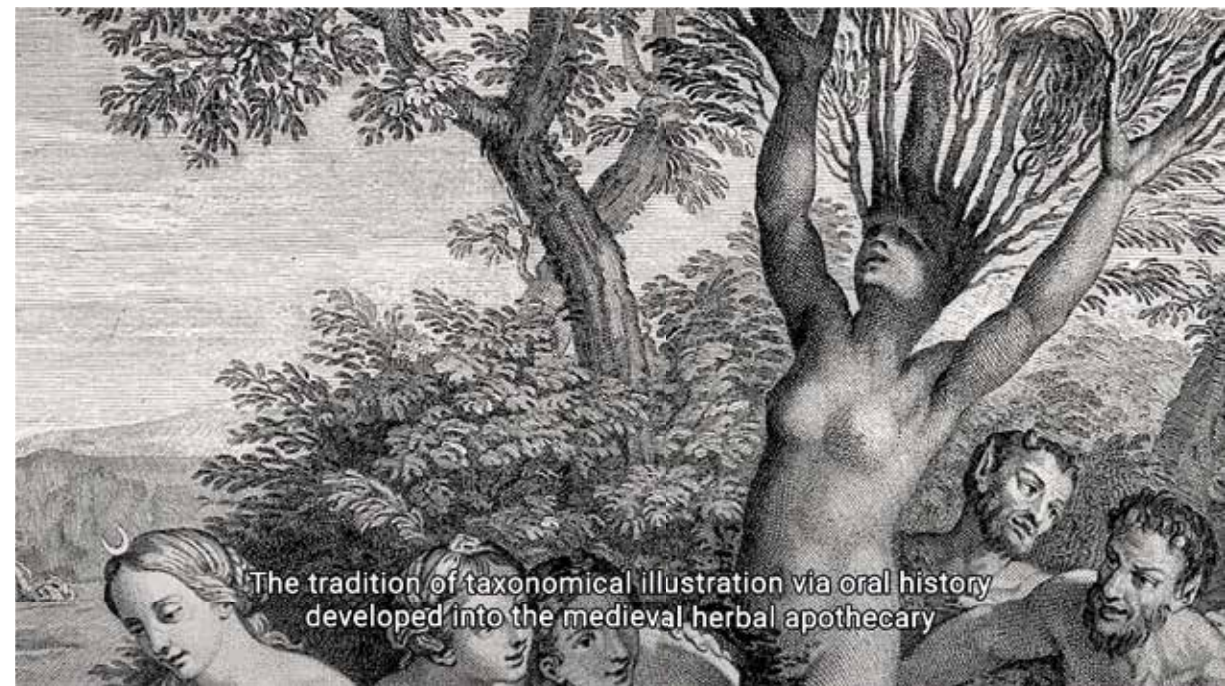
the position of women. For centuries, that healthcare was in female hands. They passed on their knowledge of medicinal plants orally, from mother to daughter and from neighbour to neighbour. For instance, they used *Claviceps purpurea* to bring on a period or, conversely, in childbirth to stem bleeding. When used incorrectly, however, for example by consuming contaminated rye bread, it could also have harmful effects, causing gangrene, hallucinations or insanity.

For Policarpo, the idea of contamination provides a way of asking complex questions about the development of care. These fungal infections are an interesting case study for thinking about redefining the relationships between humans and non-humans. After all, it is also about life forms that we cannot perceive with the naked eye, but that do affect us. When we think about ‘the self’ as an individual—in the original Latin sense of ‘indivisible’—we overlook an important part of what drives our lives. Namely, all those tiny microorganisms that co-direct us, that co-determine how we feel, as well as how we think. It is knowledge that has only recently become more prevalent. In Europe in the Middle Ages, mass poisonings took place in times of food shortages when people consumed beer and rye bread contaminated with the ergot fungi. The crooked and distorted figures painted by Hieronymus Bosch most likely did not spring from his imagination but were a depiction of one of those mass poisonings. It is also thought that the witch hunts between 1400 and 1700 stemmed from these massive and terrifying epidemics that could not be explained at the time.

The story of ergot fungus exhibits a parallel to the development of modern medicine. In *The Oracle*, Policarpo uses historical, medical prints, drawings and paintings, to narrate this complex story of ergot fungi. The women who held this important herbal knowledge, fulfilled important roles within the community. But that knowledge and their associated exceptional position was increasingly seen as suspect and slowly eliminated by the witch trials, by Catholicism but also by the capitalist system. In *The Oracle*, Policarpo manages to weave an intersec-



The symptoms of ergotism poisoning were associated with bewitchment, mass hallucinations, contractions, seizures, gangrene and the fall of body parts.



The tradition of taxonomical illustration via oral history developed into the medieval herbal apothecary

Diana Policarpo, *The Oracle*, 2020





Jennifer Tee, *Mental Plane~Physical Plane, Chancay Green*, 2018–23



Jennifer Tee, *Mineral Pearl Pineapple cloth body / Mooning*, 2023; *Transient Shroud / Being Less Human / Somnolent*, 2023

tional historical narrative that repositions the role of women and people with uteruses in the development of modern gynecology.

A visual artist as well as a composer, Policarpo addresses the visitor cognitively with her essayistic films, but also in a more sensorial manner. She calls her sound compositions ‘sound alchemy,’ and the colours of each installation are carefully composed according to the rules of chromotherapy, a practice in which colours contribute to harmony and health.

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## Jennifer Tee

Reinvigorating the impoverished relationship between humans and more-than-humans, as Kimmerer described it, is a key driving force behind recent work of

Jennifer Tee. By spending more time in nature, by meditating, but also by giving the rhythm of the seasons an important role in her working method, she takes a first step toward this. She wants to understand lost connections, not only between human and nonhuman, but also with ancestors and ancestral spirituality, the so-called ‘infinite origins’. For her collages, woven rugs, ceramic works and installations, she draws on ideological life concepts and how they can contribute to a new, more beautiful and animated world.

In the photographs in her series *Mental Plane~Physical Plane*, she does so by bringing together various elements in a performative, explosive, collage. Each work is based on a drawing or painting from the Museum of Images of the Unconscious in Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian psychiatrist Nise da Silveira began a special form of therapy in the mid-1940s at the Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional. Patients were invited to express their feelings, desires, frustrations and sorrows in drawings. The therapeutic experiment proved instrumental in the healing process. Psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung saw in these drawings of, among other things, repetitive, harmonious or circular structures and forms, a confirmation of his theory of the universal language of symbols. Tee selected some of these paintings and combined them with a mask of the Chiriguana Indigenous people



and a Cancay Peruvian mask used for burial and rites of passage. She also added a variety of organic-looking ceramic objects she made herself: a snake-like figure, an imprint of her own face in clay and a series of domes. Tee scattered gunpowder all over the scene, which she then lit and photographed at that exact moment. The bursts of fire are not a sign of destruction but rather a moment in which everything becomes connected, a reference to cosmic power.

The first *domes* Tee made as early as 2014 and are references to artists Hilma af Klint and Wassily Kandinsky, whose abstract modern works have a spiritual basis. The crescent moon, the sun, are celestial bodies that have a guiding role in our lives. In this exhibition, the domes return in relation to a more recent series of works called *Transient Shroud / Being Less Human* which consists of a platform with a net-like shroud or robe. The geometric shroud is made of pineapple waste and is large enough to be worn by or to cover a human figure. On the platform, without a performer, it is reminiscent of the snake's shed skin or the residual impression of a body and thus—as the English title also hints—a shroud. For Tee, it is another way of reanimating the depleted relationship between the human and non-human. Tee proposes we slow down, snooze, and heal these lost connections.

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## Agnes Waruguru

The sensory experience of art, as seen in Policarpo's installation, returns in Agnes Waruguru's works. She creates a sensory environment with murals and paintings

on textiles stretched across the space or directly, ceramic calabashes that can be used to make sound and music, scented flowers and bouquets that slowly wither. Waruguru's installations and individual works emerge from a process of slowing down. Mundane daily rituals such as walks through her surroundings, through the countryside, that trigger her perception and attentiveness to the non human environment. The observations are expressed in sketches, but also in written lists, instructions, poems and diary entries. 'A dream of wholeness in Parts'; 'To inherit a curse and birth it.' These are poetic, meaningful phrases that, as titles, reveal a deeper layer in her work. That deeper layer comes from the land, land-



Jennifer Tee, *Tao Magic*, 2023



Agnes Waruguru, *Time Travel Dream Sequence (messengers)*, 2023, detail





Agnes Waruguru, *I flew and swam and traveled through time*, 2022



Agnes Waruguru, *Ngomi*, 2023

scape and the idea of home. Her works are informed by the memories and traditions of her homeland Kenya, of Nairobi but also the rural Nyeri region. The slowing down returns in some of the techniques Waruguru uses: crocheting, embroidery, sewing and beadwork. These are slow techniques that mark the passing of time, but they are also techniques she learned from the women in her life, who in turn learned it from their mothers and grandmothers. Techniques that connect her work to her personal history, ancestral knowledge and traditions of women's work.

Her paintings consist of semi-abstract images that create the atmospheric suggestion of a charged landscape, in which more concrete patterns, flowers and animals such as snakes, recur. They are not planned compositions, but are much more a process that flows organically, following a feeling or intuition, not a specific direction. She paints with water and homemade pigments of flowers and home, garden and kitchen herbs mixed with more traditional paints, always on cotton and textiles, never on canvas. At Quetzal, in addition to these paintings, she displays *Time Travel Dream Sequence (messengers)*, a framed diptych (p. 7), in the format of a typical Amsterdam window, the place where she has lived in recent years. The window is a meditation on the passing of time, the light slowly changing. But also the literal rhythm of day and night. The painting is based on sketches Waruguru made during her visit to the Alentejo. Fleeting sketches of the rushing landscape from the car, but also sketches of local plants and animals. Devil's claw, for example, a plant native to southern Africa which was introduced to Europe around 1900. Because of its hooks, it sticks to clothing or fur, which has since allowed it to spread across several continents. The dried roots have medicinal properties and can reduce pain or act as an anti-inflammatory. Another recurring motif in this new work is the snake, a symbol of creation and rebirth. In the history of art, the window has always held a special place. It can be a perspective on reality, a dividing line between two realities, or perhaps even a portal. Across the space she placed ceramic calabashes named *Ngomi*, meaning the eternally sleeping ones. In Kenya they are traditionally used during ceremonies as a vessel to drink from or as a musical instrument. Waruguru created them over the course of a year as grief capsules. Their ability to amplify sound and become a vessel for emptiness reminded the artist of the different stages of losing a loved one.

Together, this environment of objects forms a dreamlike cosmos in which a sensitive story about transformation and an intimate relationship to the land is told.

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## Müge Yılmaz

When it comes to telling stories to imagine the world differently, science fiction is essential. SF stands for science fiction but also, in Donna Haraway's words, speculative fantasy: 'a mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding. Fabulating is what we need to think and imagine new relationships and a new world.' Fabulating, however, does not mean that something is not true, that it is not about telling the truth. On the contrary, SF is serious and a critical tool that can be used to imagine other configurations of knowledge production and to create new stories about the earth and earthlings. It is an important aspect of Müge Yılmaz's practice. In her sculptures, installations, stories and gardens, she looks to the deep past as well as to the imagined future. For years she has been collecting science fiction stories by women writers as well as writing SF herself. She evokes a matriarchal future world, for which she uses archetypes drawn from Anatolia. Having grown up in Turkey, she focused on a number of unusual archaeological sites: the nearly 11.500-year-old Göbekli Tepe, for example, and 9.000-year-old Çatalhöyük in south-eastern and southern Anatolia, respectively. These are mysterious sites that were probably visited for fertility rituals. But the interpretation of these places itself is a SF.

*Goddess Theory* consists of two monumental wooden sculptures that form floating beacons in space. The objects stem directly from Yılmaz' own science fiction story about a village in the year 4,000, inhabited and led by people who identify as women. They were the only survivors of an unknown catastrophe on earth, due to their traditional knowledge of how to live with nature. The two interlocking round circles refer to an ophanim, an archetypal motif from the Torah and Bible that represents spiritual evolution. The edges of the circles are covered with rows of eyes and glass jars. They're like a seedbank and contain all kinds of seeds: wheat, corn, barley and sun flowers. Seeds are food, but also stand for a



Müge Yılmaz, *Goddess Theory (Moonclock)*, 2022





Müge Yılmaz, *A Garden of Coincidences*, 2020



Müge Yılmaz, *A Garden of Coincidences*, 2020, detail

culture, for recipes, for people and land. The two beacons are surrounded by wooden CNC-cut reliefs of vultures. The vultures in the series *Gyps* are based on the arches of the matriarchal houses of Çatalhöyük, but also represent a funeral ritual, that of a sky burial whereby the deceased would be left to be eaten by vultures and go to heaven. The vultures are like artifacts referring to mythical and spiritual customs, in a time far before organized religion.

The installation *A Garden of Coincidences* located outside in the green surroundings of Quetzal Art Centre was inspired by the circular temples of Göbekli Tepe. The communities that built Gobekli Tepe 11.500 years ago, in Upper Mesopotamia, were living in a time of transition, moving from a nomadic hunter-gatherer life to an agricultural community. It is believed to have been a ritual site, probably for funeral rites. Yılmaz was inspired by the simple, yet clear and realistic low and high reliefs of animals on the pillars. Here, circular temples were found with stone pillars with realistically-carved reliefs of animals and plants. It is believed to have been a ritual site, probably for funeral rites. The six pillars of *A Garden of Coincidences*, inspired by these reliefs, were made from the trunks of elm, ash and willow trees collected through a special department in Amsterdam that collects trees that (the work was commissioned by Nest in The Hague and CBK ZuidOost). The six pillars are covered by branches and vegetation from around Quetzal, forming a covered hut. This work can be seen as a contemporary temple monument. Each pillar is a tribute to a recent ancestor who played an important role in the fight for equal rights and stood up for the environment: Ali & Aysin Büyüknohutçu, Berta Cáceres, Pippa Bacca, Berkin Elvan, anonymous Foxconn worker and Olivia Arévalo.

The temple functions as a place of gathering and anyone is allowed to enter the temple. However, due to its height of 1.20 metres, anyone taller must bow down and assume a more humble yet equal position.

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# Colophon

*Echoes of Our Stories*  
16.09.2023—30.09.2024

Curated by Aveline de Bruin and Laurie Cluitmans in close collaboration  
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QUINTA DO QUETZAL





Echoes  
of  
Our  
Stories

