

SILAS INOUE
Letting them grow wild



LETTING THEM GROW WILD

Text by Bluestockings (bs)

Matter is never neutral. In Silas Inoue's work it grows, decays, coagulates and ferments. His practice unfolds within an expanded ecology where organic and synthetic materials, memory and technology operate in constant dialogue with the personal and the planetary. Hair, sugar, oil, fungus, plastic, and metal are not simply materials but active participants in evolving micro-environments, constructing fragile worlds that challenge the boundaries between nature and artifice, control and surrender, belonging and estrangement.

Working across drawing, sculpture, performance and installation, Inoue integrates traditional materials with volatile or "living" substances, from microbial cultures to biodegradable composites, creating a dynamic interplay of mutating forms.

Underlying this practice is a philosophy of care and contamination. Inoue's use of natural processes and living materials reflects both sensitivity to their autonomy and an acceptance of interference. The works are never pure; they are always touched, manipulated, and altered. His studio functions as a combined workshop, laboratory, and compost heap, a site where art and life merge. By surrendering partial agency to his materials, Inoue challenges conventional notions of authorship and control, enacting collaborations between human and nonhuman forces, between intention and chance.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND ZEN

While Inoue often draws from his Danish-Japanese background, his approach is less about cultural identity

as a fixed narrative and more about hybridity as method. As an artist, he embodies the diasporic negotiation of belonging: a sensibility that allows him to play with and against cultural codes, to treat symbols as mutable, and to see ecological and aesthetic systems as fundamentally hybridized. This perspective, at once intimate and displaced, lends his works a subtle friction, a sense of looking cross-culturally at certain traditions and materials from the inside and the outside simultaneously. Inoue's self-described "quasi-Asian" position captures this condition, acknowledging that identity, like ecology, is a field of ongoing negotiation and mutation.

In his latest solo exhibition *Zen Wakarimasen* ("I don't understand Zen"; Kunsthal Thy, 2024), these conceptual and material layers coalesce. The title hints at a state of misalignment and insists upon a world that evolves through slippages and mistranslations. The "Zen" he does not understand becomes a metaphor for cultural displacement and for the diasporic subject's impossibility of arriving at total assimilation and comprehension.

In the installation, Inoue plays with the concept of the Zen garden and transforms the space into a hybrid ecosystem that draws on sci-fi terrains and mythological motifs. Set in Martian-red sand, a robot meticulously rakes the iron-rich surface around sculptural forms that suggest primordial or regenerative life; his characteristic immortal jellyfish, a mounted paper drawing of the remarkably long-lived naked mole-rat, and the bronze sculpture *Conditioner*, an enlarged millipede caught in a loop of perpetual self-pursuit. Together they compose an expansive landscape that threads deep time, biological cycles, and human temporality, where past, present, and speculative futures coexist.

Within this landscape stands a reimagined Japanese temple structure with a roof covered in a dense mix of human, artificial, and animal hair. Styled into an unruly mullet, the hairstyle evokes restless energy and sub-cultural defiance. Titled *Gene Pool*, the work resonates with evolution and heritage, not only biological but cultural too. Inoue transforms his sculptures into hybrid organisms, their surfaces alive with traces of human and nonhuman presence, mapping the circulation of genes and matter across time and space to generate new mutations on the ideas of ancestry and diaspora. The temple of hair acts as a feral living archive, a contemporary "gene pool" where materials, styles, and organisms move across borders and DNA and data flow in parallel streams. Strands, natural and artificial, carry both biological traces alongside industrial fingerprints of mass production. These divergent elements merge into a single organism that favours variation over purity. Here, materials, ideas, and organisms crossbreed into unforeseen futures, forming a cultural ecology in which identities and materials circulate, decay, and regenerate.

Seen in relation to Inoue's wider practice, the installation echoes earlier sculptural works. In *Wash* (2023), an oak bath overgrown with welded exhaust pipes, plants and industrial detritus forms a monstrous yet strangely tender organism shaped by fossil-fuel breath and metabolic excess. *Skewer* (2022) constructs a vertical cosmology of its own: a gingerbread pagoda, a burr-covered wolf's head and a butterfly larva's chrysalis poised between collapse and emergence. Along with *Zen Wakarimasen*, these works demonstrate how Inoue interrogates ancestry, material transformation, and temporality, revealing the ways globalized post-Fordist culture collapses distinctions between the sacred and the absurd, the ancient and the synthetic.

Inoue's installations suggest post-apocalyptic ecosystems where remnants of human culture continue to morph and metabolize. Yet his approach is more sensuous than dystopian. This is not a cold vision of the future, but a tactile, fragrant, changing landscape in which beauty emerges precisely from entanglement. In a time when ecology is often framed through crisis and loss, Inoue offers something more paradoxical and humane: a vision of life as co-creation and possibility. His works do not mourn the collapse of boundaries between human and nonhuman, nature and technology, past and future – they cultivate those thresholds, letting them grow wild.

DECOMPOSING MATTER

Many of Inoue's works nurture micro-ecologies, small-scale systems, where life and decay unfold simultaneously. At the heart of this practice lies an attention to contamination – not as failure, but as a condition of existence. Natural and artificial materials mingle freely; plant seeds, plastic, wood, mould, metal and fumes become kin in a shared ecology.

Inoue's use of composting methods for a new public commission for Rådhuspladsen (2026), brings microbial life directly into the sculptural process. These otherwise unseen agents transform the work from within, marking it with time and fermentation. Much like his earlier work in the series *Infrastructure* (2018–), each sculpture becomes an experiment in creation, decomposition, and transformation. Growth and decay coexist as phases of the same cycle. Layering of time is inseparable from material hybridity; every shift of form inscribes memory and possibility into the object, creating structures that are simultaneously archive, organism, and speculative

future. These temporal rhythms, marked by impermanence and the quiet drama of materials undergoing change, become part of the work's meaning. Standing before his works, one senses time stretching in multiple directions; past and future coexisting in the slow chemical reactions unfolding before our eyes, as sugar crystallizes, oil permeates wood, and mould blossoms across surfaces. The sculptures do not simply represent organic processes; they *are* those processes, unfolding materially in real time.

Inoue's sculptures and installations emerge from an intensive hands-on process. Many develop through collaborations with biologists, gardeners, programmers, welders, robotics specialists, chefs, and other experts, whose knowledge subtly folds into the material logic of the pieces. His practice is grounded in a direct physical engagement; collecting materials in forests and streets, salvaging them from second-hand sources, or encountering them during travel. Rather than pursuing technical mastery Inoue works with a DIY approach, combining intuition with self-taught craft, cultivating imperfection and tactility, a balancing act between deliberate making and accidental emergence. The result is an expressive, idiosyncratic aesthetic – works that appear both carefully composed and slightly out of control, alive with the traces of their own making.

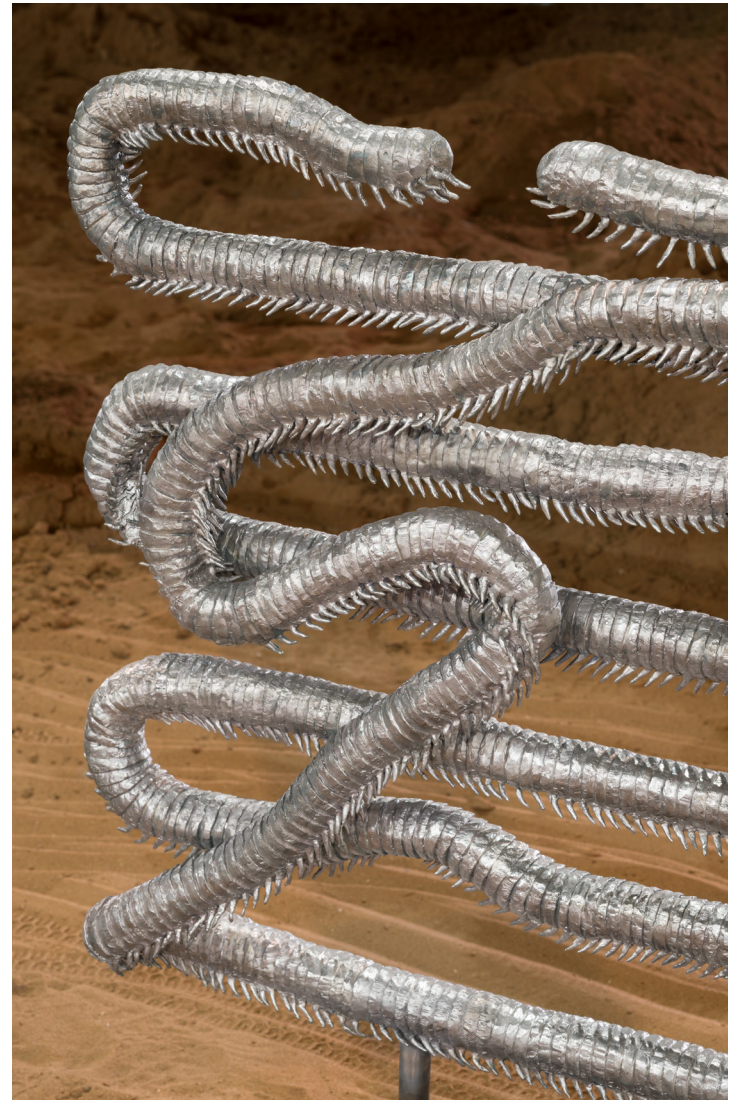
Ultimately, Inoue invites us to consider the world as an ongoing metabolism, an intricate circulation of substances, ideas, and identities. His installations and hybrid sculptures, at once temples, compost heaps, and speculative organisms, articulate an ethics of coexistence in an age defined by volatility, revealing the aesthetic potential of imperfection and the strange beauty of processes that cannot be controlled.



Silas Inoue, *Zen Wakarimasen* (installation view). Kunsthall Thy, 2024.
Photo: Jacob Friis-Holm Nielsen.



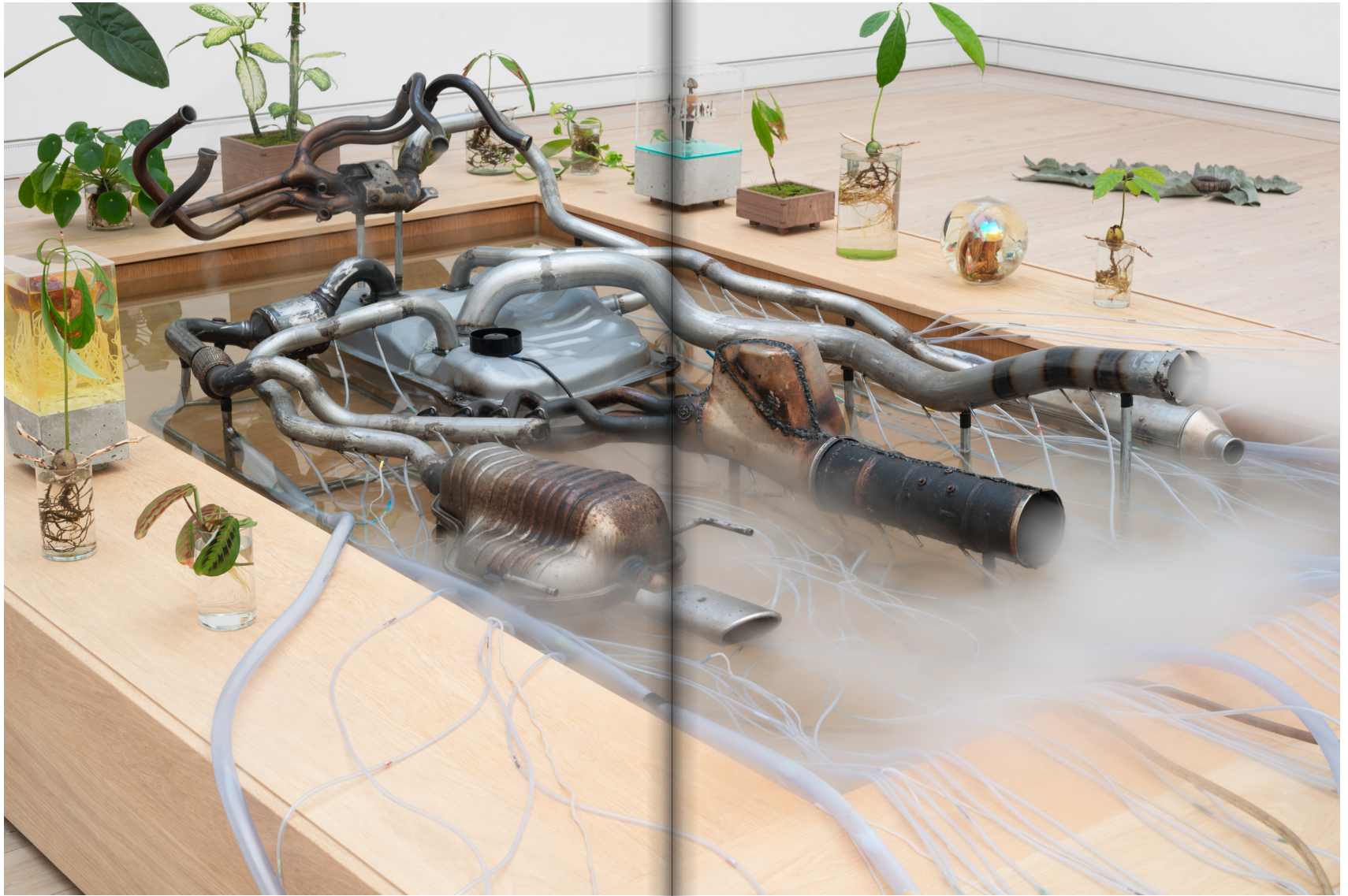
Silas Inoue, *Unearth*. Kunsthall Thy, 2024.
Photo: Jacob Friis-Holm Nielsen.



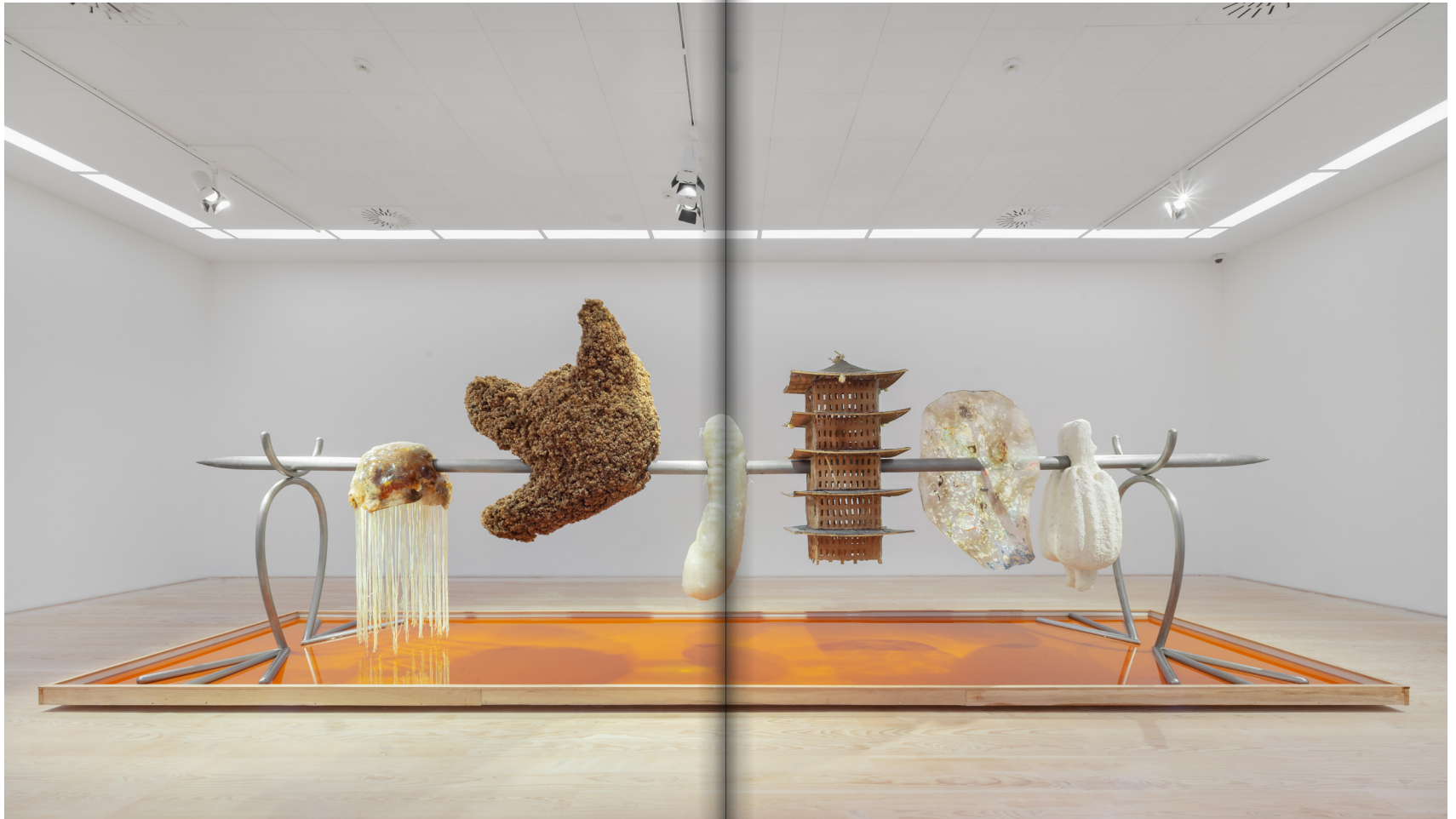
Silas Inoue, *Conditioner*. Kunsthall Thy, 2024.
Photo: Jacob Friis-Holm Nielsen.



Silas Inoue, *Genepool*. Kunsthall Thy, 2024.
Photo: Jacob Friis-Holm Nielsen.



Silas Inoue, *Wash*, 2023. In the group show *Soft Robots*, Copenhagen Contemporary, 2025. Photo: David Stjernholm.



Silas Inoue, *Skewer. Lower Lifeforms*, Horsens Kunstmuseum, 2023.
Photo: Jacob Friis-Holm Nielsen.



Silas Inoue, *Infrastructure* series (installation view). *Lower Lifeforms*, 2023, Horsens Kunstmuseum. Photo: Jacob Friis-Holm Nielsen

SILAS INOUE

Silas Inoue explores some of the ongoing discussions between nature and technology, and how these worlds merge and transform systems, bodies and environments. His works range from monstrous sculptures and total installations to detailed drawings and living microcosms. The work is driven by idiosyncratic attempts to create contact between known phenomena from the world we live in and ideas about other possible worlds.

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