

# sorry, tree

## *Practice-led Sculptural Research Project (2024–2025)*

An exhausted body encountered in the city became the origin of an ongoing sculptural research project unfolding across site, ritual, writing and exhibition.



*meeting in an exhausted body*

Sohyun Kim

# The Encounter: Exhaustion as a Site of Meeting

## *sorry, tree and the Question of a Relational Body in the Exhaustion*

**Bye sorry, tree: [Click to Video](#)**

On the cloudy, rainy morning of 19th OCT 2024



The moment I encountered *sorry, tree* - a fallen Indian Bean Tree whose roots had pierced through the plastic covering the soil - marked a shift in my artistic practice. **The tree did not simply fall.** It revealed a dense and fragile network of relations between materials, bodies (human and more-than-human), and the urban environment in which they are forced to coexist.

My research begins from this encounter. It is shaped by fragmented yet connected relationships - how bodies rupture, transform and reconfigure themselves over time, especially when they fall out of alignment with the systems that organise them. I did not approach the tree as an object to interpret, but as a body already carrying exhaustion, history and pressure.

*sorry, tree* became a site of inquiry rather than a subject to be explained. *How did its body arrive on the ground? What happens when a body no longer performs the role it was designed for?* These questions did not lead to answers. **They stayed open**, allowing me to remain with the material conditions of the tree rather than resolve them.

Planted to serve an urban function - shade, order, visual balance - the tree was expected to remain vertical, productive and contained. **Once fallen, its horizontal body disrupted this logic.** The shift from vertical to horizontal exposed a tension I had been circling in my practice: the gap between function and existence, between imposed purpose and material vitality.

**Renaming the tree as *sorry, tree* was not symbolic.** It was a way of staying with its condition. The name “Indian Bean Tree” carries a history of classification and displacement. Saying *sorry* did not attempt to correct that history, but acknowledged it. **Naming became a gesture of care.**

What stayed with me most was the exhaustion embedded in the tree’s presence. **This exhaustion was not the tree’s alone.** It appeared in the ruptured plastic that failed to contain its roots, in the disturbed soil shaped by urban planning, and in my own body moving within the accelerated rhythms of the city. Urban life demands efficiency, but neither trees, plastics, nor human bodies can endlessly sustain it.

When I carried the tree, exhaustion became physical and shared. Its weight slowed my body and altered my breath. The tree was not passive. It shaped how I moved, when I paused, and how I continued. **Exhaustion revealed itself not as failure, but as a relational condition formed between bodies.**

Here, exhaustion is not depletion. It is a threshold - *where bodies under pressure falter and, in doing so, meet.* The fallen tree is not a metaphor. It participates in the city’s rhythm while resisting efficiency and disappearance. From this point, my practice develops ways of staying with exhausted bodies rather than resolving them. **Through *sorry, tree*, exhaustion becomes a site of meeting, where relations continue despite collapse.**

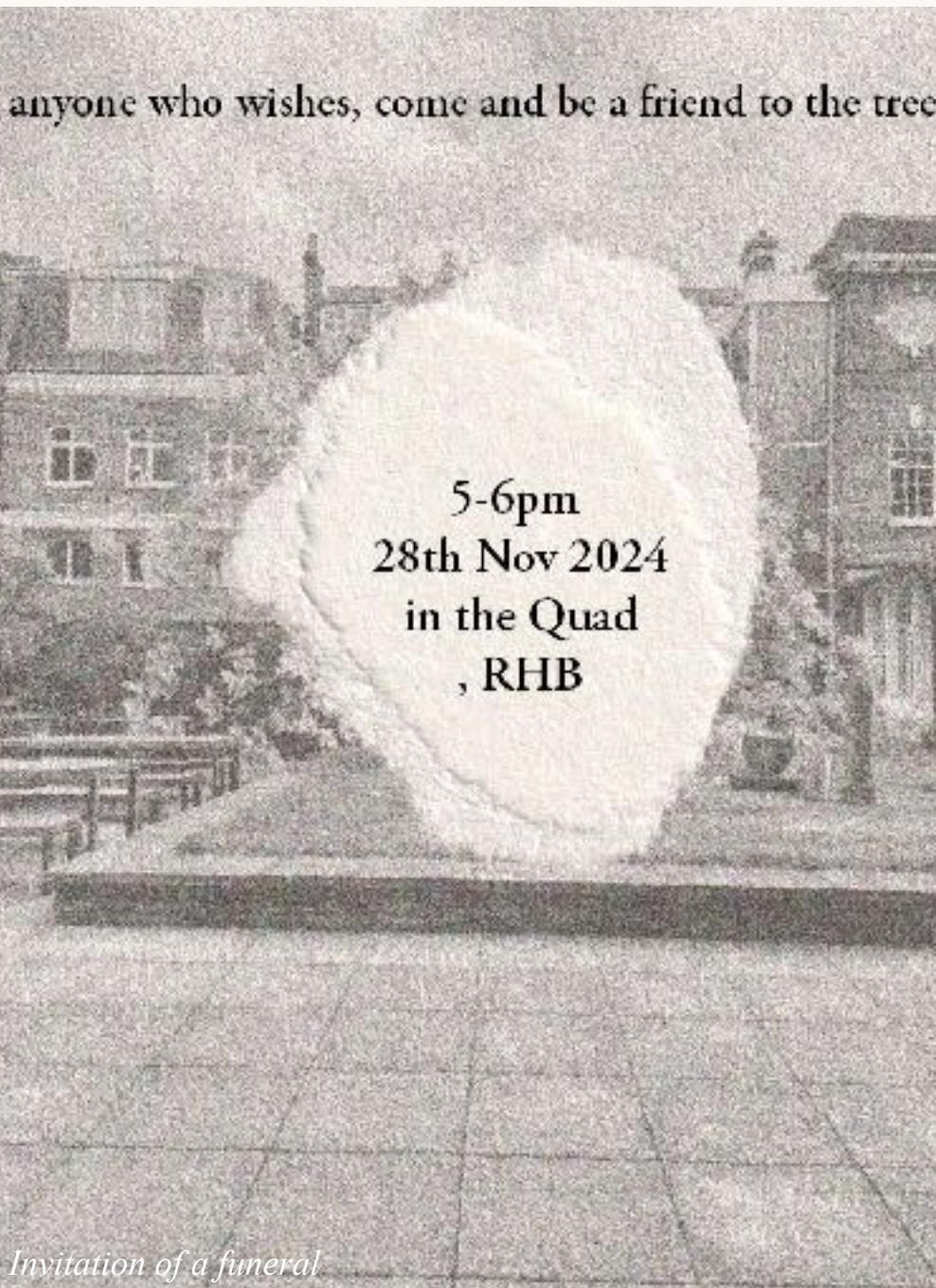
# Staying with the Ground

*Situated entanglement: Soil collected from around the roots of sorry, tree, observed under a microscope.*

*where the body continues (3/87), 2025, soil from 51°28'26.1"N 0°02'08.6"W*

# Ritual as a Method of Staying

*Sensory knowledge: Open to the unpredictable agencies of material, site and more-than-human*



**An act of gratitude with breath, soil, sound, food and weather**

**A funeral service** was held on the evening of November 28, 2024, in the same quad where they once stood, led by Sohyun and Sunny. Friends, students and colleagues gathered in the dim light to honour their life. **Chestnut cake, gingerbread and herbal tea** were served and **soil was exchanged** by bare hands. The attendees' **soft humming** echoed between the glass walls. The ceremony was less a farewell than an act of gratitude - a recognition that relation continues beyond form and that the body of sorry, tree remains in the living world.

***Bold text opens the funeral archive,  
which extends the work rather than documenting it.***

# Exhaustion as Material Condition

*Exhaustion is structural, planetary, written into the material ground of life.*

***we long to sense that Yaksumul(약수물) again, 2025, 50x65x90(cm)***

*Part of a fallen Indian bean tree (Catalpa bignonioides) collected from Goldsmiths quad on 19 October 2024,  
Pigment, Tap water from Goldsmiths (supplied by Thames Water), PVC hose, Beet root, Resin, Water pump,  
Stainless steel, Electricity and More-than-human world*



# When a Condition Takes Form

## *meeting in an exhausted body*

The phrase meeting in an exhausted body does not describe a theme. It names a condition. In exhaustion, bodies lose their autonomy. Tree, plastic, moss, water and my own body become porous and dependent on one another. Peeling the bark revealed fragile inner skins - geological, bodily and temporal layers held together without hierarchy.



***meeting in an exhausted body I***, 2025, 76x55x22(cm), Part of a fallen Indian bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) collected from Goldsmiths quad on 19 October 2024, Pigment, Natural moss on bark, Tap water from Goldsmiths (supplied by Thames Water) and More-than-human forces



***meeting in an exhausted body II***, 2025, 34x105x63(cm), Part of a fallen Indian bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) collected from Goldsmiths quad on 19 October 2024, Steel ladder, Pigment and More-than-human forces

# Breathing Sculpture

*Sculpture remains unfinished, porous, grounded. A body that continues to breath with dust, with soil, with sun, with mushroom, with wind, with debris.*



***we are river banks, finger print, tongue, bones and babies***, 2025, 50x65x90(cm), Part of a fallen Indian bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) collected from Goldsmiths quad on 19 October 2024, Tap water from Goldsmiths (supplied by Thames Water), Soft Plastic, Organic soil, Foraged moss around New Cross received from Juri, More-than-human world

## Deinstallation View

During deinstallation, ***I relocated the mosses to the research garden***. From installation to dismantling, the work continued to transform, giving rise to new sprouts that eventually returned to nature and entered another state of change.



*View of research garden at Goldsmiths University of London*

# Writing as Sculptural Extension

*Ecopoetics as embodied sensory knowledge: sorry, tree obituary moves across boundaries of discipline, language and species, insisting on implication rather than distance.*

hands. The attendees' **soft humming** echoed between the glass walls. The ceremony was less a farewell than an act of **attitude** - a recognition that **relation** continues beyond form. *You've been here longer than anyone, haven't you?* **SOHYUN** (quietly) *Thirty... maybe forty years?* and that the body of **sorry, tree** remains in the living world.

**URBAN TREE**  
*Exhaustion is not just tiredness, you know.*  
*It settles into streets, pipes, soil, and sky* Following their service, portions of **sorry, tree's** body were respectfully carried to the studio and wood workshop, where they continue to live through **breathing**. Their bark has been transformed into new skins and their branches remain intertwined with human breath and gesture.

**SOHYUN**  
*You mean... the air?*

**Click to Online Journal**

**URBAN TREE**  
*Yes.* Preceded in death by countless **urban trees** lost to *What you breathe carries the trace of extraction - dust from engines, heat from cables, the residue of everything accelerated.* that received them, the birds that continue to visit the quad and those who carry their memory through care and creation.

**SOHYUN**  
*Haraway says we must stay with the trouble.*  
*I'm trying to understand what that means for you.*

It remains in the ground that held it, in the air that moved through its body, and in the small gestures of those who stayed close.

**URBAN TREE (a low creak)**  
*For her, and for me, staying is not resignation.*  
*It's living with the mess rather than looking away.*

*sorry, tree obituary (Online journal), 2025*

# A Practice of Nearness: Holding Them in Fragile Relation

*‘Gathering Folds’ Exhibition, 2024*

*Before sorry, tree, my practice already engaged with bodies that fall out of alignment with systems.*



(Left) **body 1.3, 1.4, 1.5**, 2024, fallen branch from Oxford, bolts, resin, 6x32x43cm, 6x32x20cm, 6x32x28cm  
(Middle) **Dear garlic**, 2024, fallen branch from Oxford, bolts, resin, 19x6x30cm  
(Right) **body 1.2**, fallen branch from Oxford, bolts, resin, 6x32x31cm



**Dear Green**, 2023, 51x117x645.6cm, brick, abandoned tree from Oxford, photo from Korea, steel, resin, found concrete from Oxford

# Slowness as Resistance

*Residency in Magdalen Road Studio in Oxford, 2022-2024*

Method as entanglement with precarity: Listen to the vitality of debris, that shares authorship with more-than-human agencies. By stacking engineering bricks along the shape of forlorn branches, my works explore tension of built environment.

