



L'Atlas invites

# Roots to Routes (Tallinn)

For the exhibition

## *Breathing through the eyes*

07.11.23—22.12.23

with

Aili Vint, Kristel Saan, Monika Varšavskaja, Kristina  
Õllek, Daria Melnikova, Morta Jonynaitė and Viktorija  
Daniliauskaitė

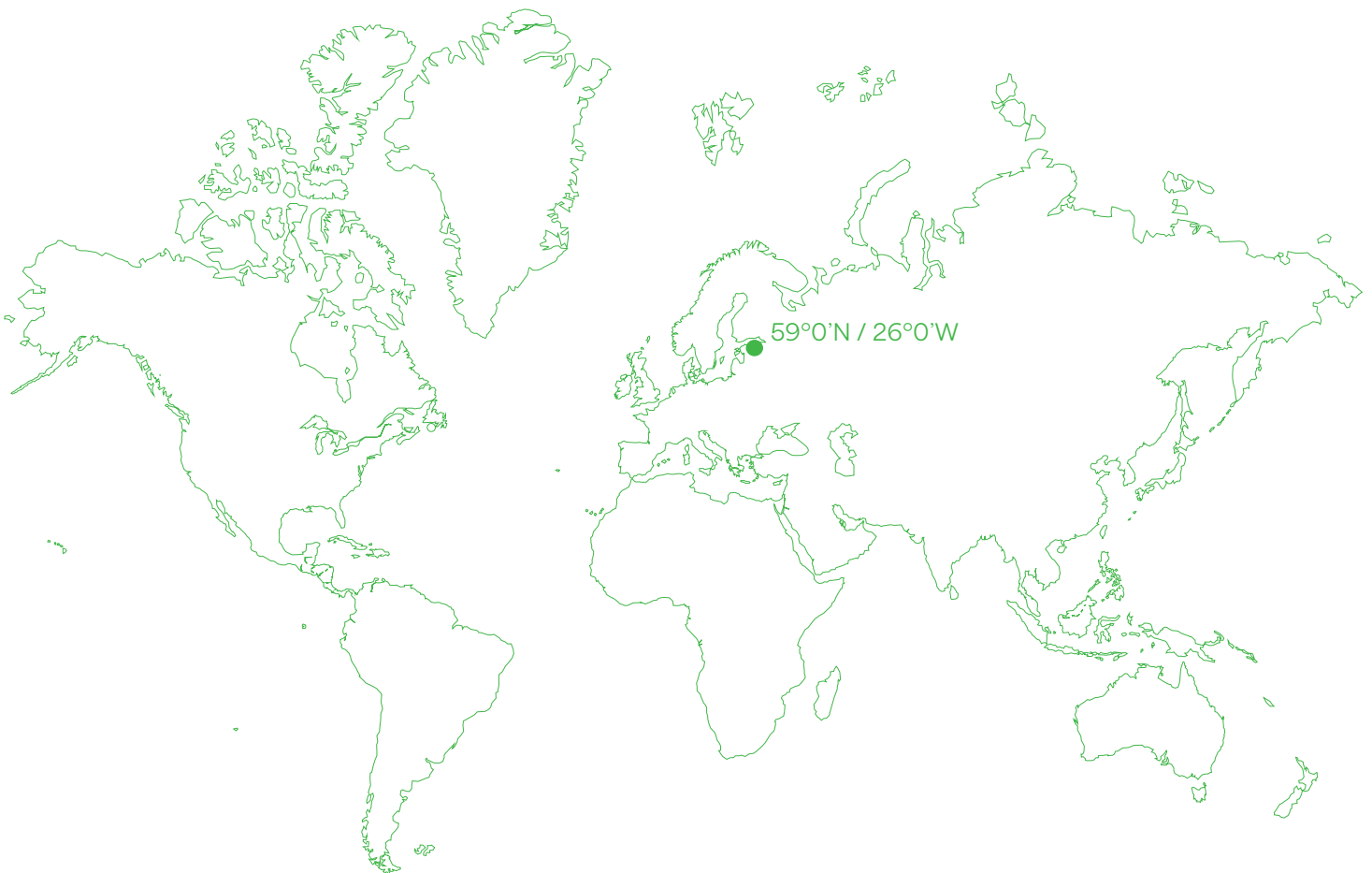
Curator Merilin Talumaa

Press pack  
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Free entrance from Tuesday  
to Saturday, 12 to 7 pm  
and by appointment  
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# I Roots to Routes

For the last exhibition of the year, L'Atlas is thrilled to invite Roots to Routes. Under the curating of Merlin Talumaa, the exhibition *Breathing through the eyes*<sup>1</sup> returns on the cultural influence of Lithuanian-American archaeologist and anthropologist Marija Gimbutas (1921 - 1994) on art and culture. It gathers together different generations of artists from the Baltic countries, most of them presenting their work in Paris for the first time : Aili Vint, Kristel Saan, Monika Varšavskaja, Kristina Öllek, Daria Melnikova, Morta Jonynaitė et Viktorija Daniliauskaitė.

The exhibition *Breathing through the eyes* touches subtly on the ideas of Marija Gimbutas, whose profound research brought attention to the ancient cultures of the Baltic region and the broader Indo-European world, especially well described in her book *The Balts* (1963). While her ideas were seen as too speculative for the academic circles during her lifetime, her ground-breaking theory challenges the prevailing perception of history, and is being evaluated anew in the light and rise of climate emergency and decolonial emancipation. The exhibition takes its inspiration from Gimbutas' ideas which have influenced contemporary perspectives on heritage, indigenous identities, and the relationship between humans and nature in the Baltic Sea area. For this exhibition, Roots to Routes highlights the works of seven women artists, whose personal and fictive stories tell a new relation to the Earth, the body, the feminine and the sacred.



KRISTINA ÖLLEK, *Mother of Micropearlastic* (detail), 2021, pigment ink print, grown sea salt crystals, showcase frame (birch) covered with sea salt, 66 x 48 cm, Edition : Unique, 1/3 + 2 AP

About :

Roots to Routes is an initiative created by curators Merilin Talumaa, Maija Rudovska and Justė Kostikovaitė, gathering a community of artists, curators and cultural producers whose trajectories are connected to the Baltic states region. Acting as a nomadic agency, its goal is to support and make visible artistic practices beyond cultural and (geo)political borders. An important part of the collaboration is to create and develop possible joint projects, aiming to build sustainable networks and forms of cooperation between various art scenes.

Roots to Routes manifests itself through exhibitions, performances, screenings, publications and commissioning. Their first collaboration started in Marseille as part of the Manifesta 13 Biennial programme *Les Parallèles du Sud* in 2020. Since then, concepts such as «belonging», «identity» and «community engagement» have been integral parts of different collaborations.

1. Kristel Saan, *Breathing through the eyes*, 2015 - 2022, archival pigment print on aluminium, 53,2 x 80 cm.

## II *Breathing through the eyes*

Research on the cross-disciplines of archaeological artefacts, linguistics, ethnography and folklore led Gimbutas to posit the thesis that prehistoric European culture was female-centred and worshipped a Mother Goddess as the giver of all life. The Goddess' power was in water and stone, in cave and tomb, in animals and birds, in hills, trees and flowers. A spiritual sense of connectedness was artfully expressed through a sophisticated symbol system and an abundance of ritual objects. Nature and body (especially the female body) were honoured in Europe for tens of thousands of years. Women had an especially strong position in societies across Eastern and Central Europe – a tendency no longer necessarily evident today.

The exhibition *Breathing through the eyes* poetically comments on the fragile materiality of our being, multiple identities, the process of change and new environmental sensibility. Gimbutas, who having opened the treasure trove of prehistory, inspired a belief in a peaceful existence in our time – to bring back to life suppressed vital elements, such as the earth, the body (health), the feminine, and the subconscious. Participating artists, through imaginative and fictitious narratives, share personal stories and beliefs that also reflect the influence of Gimbutas' theories on ancient symbolism. Their works echo these concepts through a contemporary lens, incorporating

elements such as spirals, circles, and motifs such as snakes and birds – symbols rooted in ancient European matriarchal cultures that continue to resonate in Baltic art and culture.

The exhibition directs us to consider how we might reimagine a world centred around goddess worship, with its emphasis on preserving nature, nurturing existence, and forsaking warfare. Could this theoretical concept transcend into the tangible reality of our future society? *Breathing through the eyes* seamlessly intertwines historical narratives, cultural myths, and potential scenarios, immersing us in the themes that Marija Gimbutas ignited: the celebration of life's cycles, the sanctity of the female body and labour, and the spirituality inherent in these concepts. Gimbutas' exploration of the spiritual dimensions of a harmonious Old Europe and her vision for a New Europe free from dominance and warfare feels remarkably pertinent in our contemporary world.



KRISTEL SAAN, *I only think of you, but always turn away*, 2015-2022, archival pigment print on aluminium, 130 x 145 cm, Edition : 1/5 + 2AP

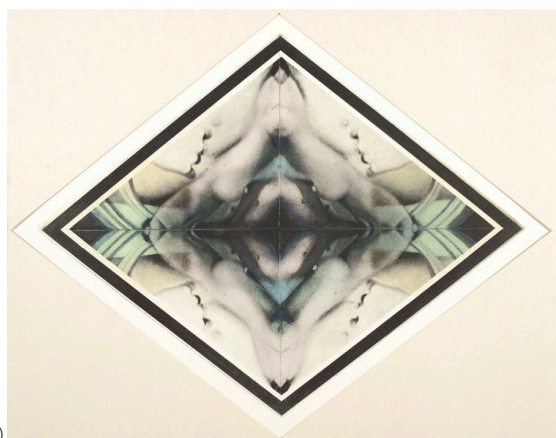
## Aili Vint

Born in 1941 in Rakvere (Estonia)  
Works and lives in Tallinn (Estonia)

Aili Vint is one of the key figures of the Estonian avant-garde of the 1960s, working as graphic artist and painter. Her artistic journey commenced in 1967 when she graduated from the State Art Institute in Tallinn, now known as the Estonian Academy of Arts. Aili Vint emerged as a resilient and determined artist, whose career took shape amidst the constraints of the Soviet era.

As part of the artist group ANK'64 Vint experimented with pop and psychedelic art, using its techniques to create her own unique bodily landscapes. Additionally, Aili Vint possesses a profound connection with the sea, a recurring theme in her paintings and various artworks.

Selection of her recent exhibitions include *Disorder* at Bozar Museum, Brussels (2018); *Through the Black Gorge of Your Eyes*, KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn (2023). Her works belong to Tretyakov's Gallery, Moscow; KUMU Art Museum of Estonia, Tallinn; Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA; among other public and private collections.



(1)

(1) AILI VINT  
*Variations D V*, 1986, colour  
etching, 50,5 x 63,5 cm



(2)

(2) AILI VINT  
*Variations A IX*, 1987, colour  
etching, 50,5 x 63,5 cm

## Kristel Saan

Born in 1985 in Tallinn (Estonia)  
Where she lives and works

Kristel Saan has seamlessly blended her background in ceramics and fine arts with the film industry and interior design work, which also translates in her installations. Poetical approach and whimsical storytelling goes back to back in her work, where objects are often totem-like. By bringing in the relics from different times and places she is letting the objects themselves hold their meaning and moment.

Kristel Saan acquired a bachelor's degree in ceramic design from the Estonian Academy of Arts. She has also studied visual arts in London at Central Saint Martins University of Art and Design. While completing her master's degree, she studied visual arts in Vancouver Canada at Emily Carr University of Art and Design and ceramics at Rhode Island School of Design.

Apart from her exhibition activities, Kristel Saan does interior and product design as well as scenography for theatre. She has also been working for the Hollywood film industry for many years creating sets and artworks for blockbuster TV Series and feature films.

Her recent solo exhibitions include *Paradise Revisited*, Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design, Tallinn (2022) and *Paradise - I Already Went and Came Back*, (AV17) gallery, Vilnius (2021).



(1)

(1) KRISTEL SAAN  
*The waves always break to the same place where they grew. And then rise again, 2021*  
- 2022, acrylic resin, wool, mixed textiles, elastic rubber band, 130 x 145 cm



(2)

(2) KRISTEL SAAN  
*I jumped from a Cruise Ship, right through the portal with thousands of pearls, 2021 - 2023. 2500 freshwater pearls, plaster mix, wood, mohair, silk, 47 x 30 cm*

## Monika Varšavskaja

Born in 1997 in Tallinn (Estonia)  
Works and lives in Paris (France)

Born and raised in Estonia, Monika Varšavskaja moved to Paris in 2017 to study at the Decorative Arts School, as she pursued her taste and talent for the culinary art. Thanks to her studies in graphic design and her background in photography, she has an expert eye to stage food and create scenographies.

work as a cooker and artist, drawing inspiration from her northern-Slavic roots.

She recently worked with the brands Amomento, Vautrait, Aesop, Hermès, Reform, Nike and Maison Alaïa.

Her work is graphic, sculptural and sophisticated, with a particular attention to shapes and colours. Her installations and buffets often go along with great brands' events, arousing surprise.

After two residencies in 2021 in Domaine de Boisbuchet and Château de la Haute Borde, she continues to



(1)



(2)

(1) & (2) MONIKA VASAŠKAJA  
Works from personal archives

## Kristina Õllek

Née en 1989 à Tallinn (Estonia)  
Where she lives and works

Kristina Õllek is working in the field of photography, video and installation, with a focus on investigating representational processes, geological matter, aquatic ecosystems, and the human-made environment. In her practice, she uses a research-based approach, but within she also incorporates her own fictitious and speculative perspectives.

With her work, she raises questions around the relationship between natural and synthetic, original and copy, and understandings of materiality by obtaining a new and reconsidered meaning. Within her recent projects she has been focusing on marine habitat and the notion of new technologies, including the geopolitical and ecological conditions associated with them.

Kristina Õllek graduated from the Estonian Academy of Arts (BA degree in 2013, MA degree in 2016; in the Photography Department, Fine Arts). She has completed her studies in Berlin

at Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee (2012) and in Rotterdam at Piet Zwart Institute (2016).

Kristina Õllek's works have been shown in various international group and solo exhibitions, including at Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (Oslo), Zeppelin Museum (Friedrichshafen), A Tale of A Tub (Rotterdam), Laurel Project Space (Amsterdam), Le Lieu Unique (Nantes), Screen City Biennial (Stavanger), Fotomuseum Winterthur, Titanic gallery (Turku), KUMU (Tallinn), EKKM (Tallinn), Tallinn Art Hall, Draakoni & Hobusepea gallery (Tallinn), ISSP gallery (Riga), Riga Photography Biennial, Zuzeum (Riga), Benaki Museum (Athens), Snehta Residency (Athens), Coherent (Brussels). Her works belong to collections such as Estonian Art Museum, Estonia; Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; European Central Bank art collection, Germany; private collections.



(1)

(1) KRISTINA ÕLLEK  
*Do you remember?*, 2023, pigment ink print  
on aluminium, cnc cutting, clay, 70×107 cm,  
Edition : 1/3 + 2 AP



(2)

(2) KRISTINA ÕLLEK  
*Feeling With the Water Jelly*, 2020,  
pigment ink print on aluminium, silicone,  
70 x 97 cm, Edition : Unique, 2/3 + 2 AP



## Daria Melnikova

Born in 1984 in Riga (Latvia)  
Where she lives and works

Daria Melnikova's work results from a meditative study of daily routine, clichés, architectural details and mere casual moments attempting to reconstruct their inner logic as well as to bring to light private experiences that once made them possible and necessary.

Melnikova runs a journeying platform called Palette that functions as a bar. Between 2022–2023, Palette used a seasonal venue – a kiosk as a part of the urban environment – an intervention in the garden meadow of the Sporta Pils dārzi in Riga. The project activated a work of art as a meeting point, where the artist meets visitors in non-institutional and informal settings.

Melnikova has held solo shows at Gallery Vartai in Vilnius (2020); Karlin Studios in Prague (2019); PLATO in Ostrava (2019); Kulturfolger in Zurich

(2018); Kim? in Riga (2017, 2014, 2011); and has participated in group shows at KHB in Bratislava (2019); Kiasma in Helsinki (2018); Rupert in Vilnius (2018); Silberkuppe in Berlin (2017); Art in General in New York (2015); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow (2014). Her works are included in the collection of Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Finland; Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga; Latvia; Zuzeum Collection in Riga, Latvia; among other public and private collections.



DARIA MELNIKOVA  
*Signs*, 2014, cendres, aluminum-zinc  
paint, 42 x 60 cm

## Morta Jonynaitė

Born in 1995 in Vilnius (Lithuania)  
Where she lives and works

By exploring the environment through tactility, Morta Jonynaitė tries to grasp different phenomena using traditional textile techniques. Hand weaving and knotting are archaic crafts with a clear grid, which she employs to weave stories that capture the moment. Presenting her work in the form of installation, she constructs intimate spaces where relationships between different experiences and participants are interconnected.

Jonynaitė has graduated from Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, BA in TxT (text, theory, textile), where she studied between 2016–2020. Her

recent exhibitions include Innocence Becomes Sharks, InTheCloset Gallery, Vilnius (2023); Restart, Kaunas Picture Gallery (2023); Hold Me Tender, Tallinn Art Hall Lasnamäe Pavilion, Tallinn (2023); JCDecaux Award 2022: Waves of Opportunity, Artists' Association Gallery, Vilnius (2022); Square Root, UMI gallery, Vilnius (2022); Le Festival International des Textiles Extraordinaires, Clermont-Ferrand (2022); Bias Cut (Skersiniai), Marcinkonys Train Station, Lithuania (2021).



(1)

(1) MORTA JONYNAITĖ  
*Never-Drying Towels K+R*, 2023, hand weaving,  
embroidery, wooden construction, 270 x 150 x  
50 cm



(2)

(2) MORTA JONYNAITĖ  
*Never-Drying Towels MJ*, 2023, hand weaving,  
embroidery, crochet, wooden construction, 250  
x 100 x 50 cm

## Viktorija Daniliauskaitė

Born in 1951 in Yakutsk (Russia)  
Works and lives in Vilnius (Lithuania)

Having graduated from the Lithuanian Art Institute (today, the Vilnius Academy of Arts) in 1974, Viktorija Daniliauskaitė immediately discarded the art clichés proposed by official art and got immersed in the search for her individual style, discovering the inexhaustible sources of folk art and new art forms.

Till today, she is often expressing her artistic visions through linocut. The tradition of linocut is often related with folk engravings and the postwar school of Lithuanian graphic art ; however, the artist intuitively realised that this technique contains yet unexplored possibilities of expression.

While connecting the heritage of folk art with 20th century modernism and

postmodernism, Daniliauskaitė built a bridge between the old tradition and contemporary modern art.

Her upcoming exhibition will be held in MO Museum, Vilnius (2024). Her works belong to the National Museum of Lithuania, Vilnius; MO Museum, Vilnius; among other public and private collections.



VIKTORIJA DANILIAUSKAITĖ  
*Black Night IV*, 1992, linocut, 24,5 × 17,5 cm, MO  
Museum collection.

# IV

# L'Atlas

Created and supported by Emerige, L'Atlas, galerie des mondes invites international galleries, foundations, or institutions to exhibit one or more artists from contemporary scenes that are underrepresented in France. In partnership with these major stakeholders in the world of contemporary art abroad, L'Atlas proposes an original and innovative model : a joint curation of the 5 annual exhibitions by Emerige's art projects Director Paula Aisemberg and the invited partner. These exhibitions come with a cultural programme (conferences, meetings,

readings, screenings, or concerts) and educational visits or workshops aimed at a wide audience. L'Atlas allows its partners to set up a branch in the heart of the Parisian capital for two months, in line with the calendar of major artistic events (fairs, biennials, etc.). L'Atlas is an open door to the world, a showcase for the most dynamic private or public actors and a meeting place for artists, professionals, and the general public

# V

# The Emerige group

As a patron of culture and a passionate defender of contemporary creation year after year, Emerige supports events in France and abroad that promote the French art scene. Through its grant "Bourse Révélation Emerige" created in 2014, it offers the young generation of visual artists the opportunity to make a name for themselves and to join leading galleries. Convinced that art can change everyday life, Emerige encourages the bringing together of culture with all audiences, especially the youngest. It supports artistic and cultural education programs such as « Une journée de vacances à Versailles », the Collège de France Foundation, the

« Festival d'Automne » and Gérard Garouste's association « La Source ». Laurent Dumas. As first signatory of the charter « 1 immeuble, 1 oeuvre », Emerige contributes to the rise of art in the city by installing a work in each building it builds. Nowadays, this is more than 60 works installed and more than 100 000 residents who have access to art daily.

# VII

# Event

Gastronomic performance

Monika Varšavskaja

Tuesday November 7  
Starting from 6pm

Tuesday November 7, from 6pm, Monika Varšavskaja will perform a gastronomic performance.

Monika Varšavskaja's gastronomic performance tackles the sense of taste and merges this with the scenography of the exhibition. The gastronomic performance revolves around the feeling of nurture holistically and ceremonially. The artist has drawn inspiration from cult-like birth rituals in 19th century Latvia and Lithuania, where after giving birth in a sauna, the grandmother of the family would sacrifice a hen with a wooden ladle for the fate Goddess Laima. Women then would kneel and eat the chicken. Among other gifts to the Goddess Laima were linen towels, woven belts, and spindle whorls. The performance encapsulates the notion of rebirth and the fragility of life, which is in eternal transformation, in constant and rhythmic change between creation and destruction, birth and death. The Baltic Goddess, Laima, remained remarkably independent in the beliefs of many areas of Europe (they were not married to a God, for example). The Baltic Laima appears in mythological songs with Dievas, the Indo-European God of the light of the sky, to bless the fields and human life – not as his wife but as an equally powerful goddess.

# VII

# Incoming exhibition

Ab-Anbar  
London, United Kingdom  
54°0'N / -2°0'W

11.01.24 - 16.03.24

In Persian, ab means «water» and anbar «reservoir». This is how the contemporary art gallery Ab-Anbar, opened in Teheran in 2014, defines itself : as the architectural expression of a physical space which hosts a malleable and life-essential content. Involved in the crossed-stories of art and history, it represents worldwide artists, whose work overcomes esthetical, political, social and psychological borders. Since 2020, Ab-Anbar is settled in London, with a new space opened in September 2023 in the historical neighbourhood of Fitzrovia. Its ambition is to support dialogue between artists, collectors, museums and curators, toward inclusion and understanding of marginalised realities.

<https://ab-anbar.com/>

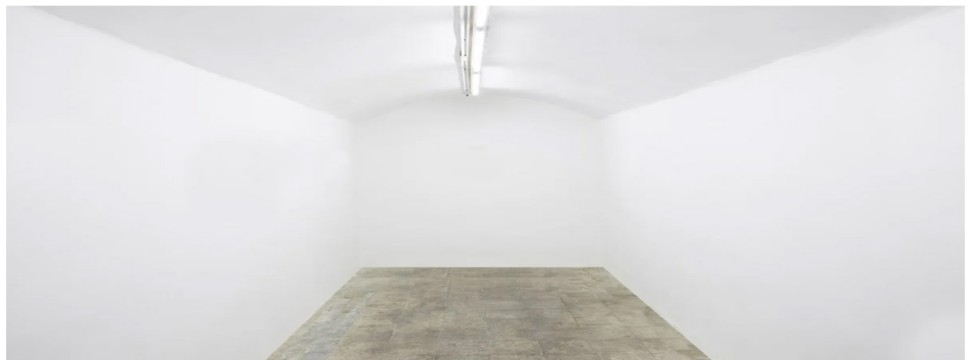


Photo : Gallery space of Ab-Anbar.

# VIII

# Practical informations and Contacts

## Contacts

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Photo : Aurélien Mole