

# SI

## HYPERALLERGIC

Hyperallergic  
Natalie Haddad  
*Spora*  
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Art Review

### Ecological Art That's Literally Alive

The artworks in *Spora*, unfolding over three years at the Swiss Institute, linger in the mind, its interconnections multiplying like spores.



Natalie Haddad July 8, 2025



Installation view of *Spora* at the Swiss Institute featuring art by Li Tavor (courtesy Swiss Institute; all other photos Natalie Haddad/*Hyperallergic*)

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Exhibitions that double as interventions in an institution's physical space are often better in theory than practice. *Spora* at the Swiss Institute, however, is a rare exception. The show, which unfolds over three years (May 2023 to May 2026) is literally alive, with art that includes growing weeds and compost. The title reflects the idea of spores spreading through a space while the works — installed across the building's hallways, stairwells, elevator, and rooftop — all relate to ecology and climate change, with varying complexity. For instance, stripes painted on the walls by Hendl Helen Mirra are calls to use leftover mixed paint, thus reducing the production and shipping of the medium, but the ecological dimension isn't quite as obvious as in "Vermi-Sibyl" (2023), Jenna Sutela's sculptural compost bin.

Two of *Spora*'s main strengths are simply that the artworks are visually engaging and the deft curation sparks connections among them. In one haunting display, a wild tangle of weeds growing from a planter beneath a window from Uriel Orlow's *Welcome Weeds* series (2024–ongoing) is juxtaposed with Li Tavor's resin-coated shirt whose cranberry color takes on a stained glass quality as the daylight filters through it. An accompanying soundscape by Tavor infuses the stairwell tableau with an uncanny atmosphere of absent presence.

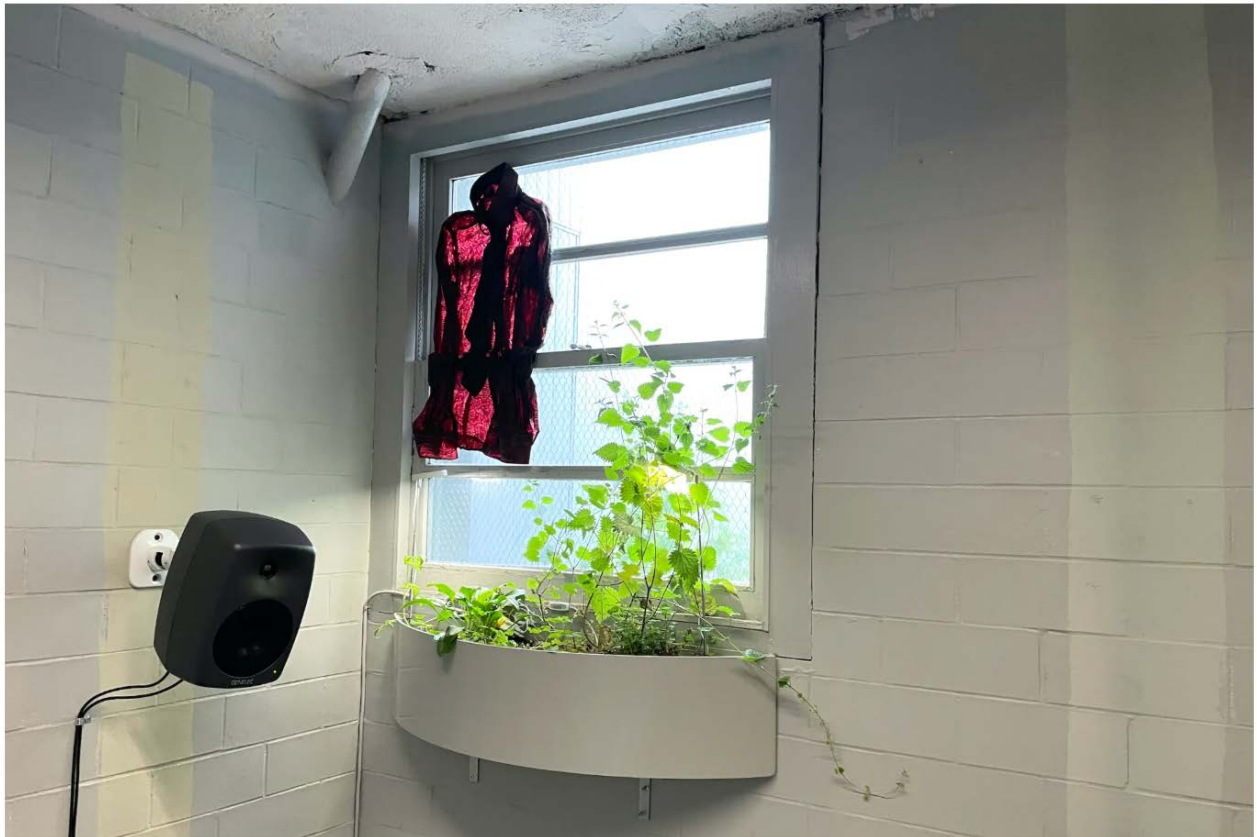


Installation view of *Spora* at the Swiss Institute showing photographs from Dionne Lee's *Walking Stick* series (2024) on a wall with painting by Hendl Helen Mirra

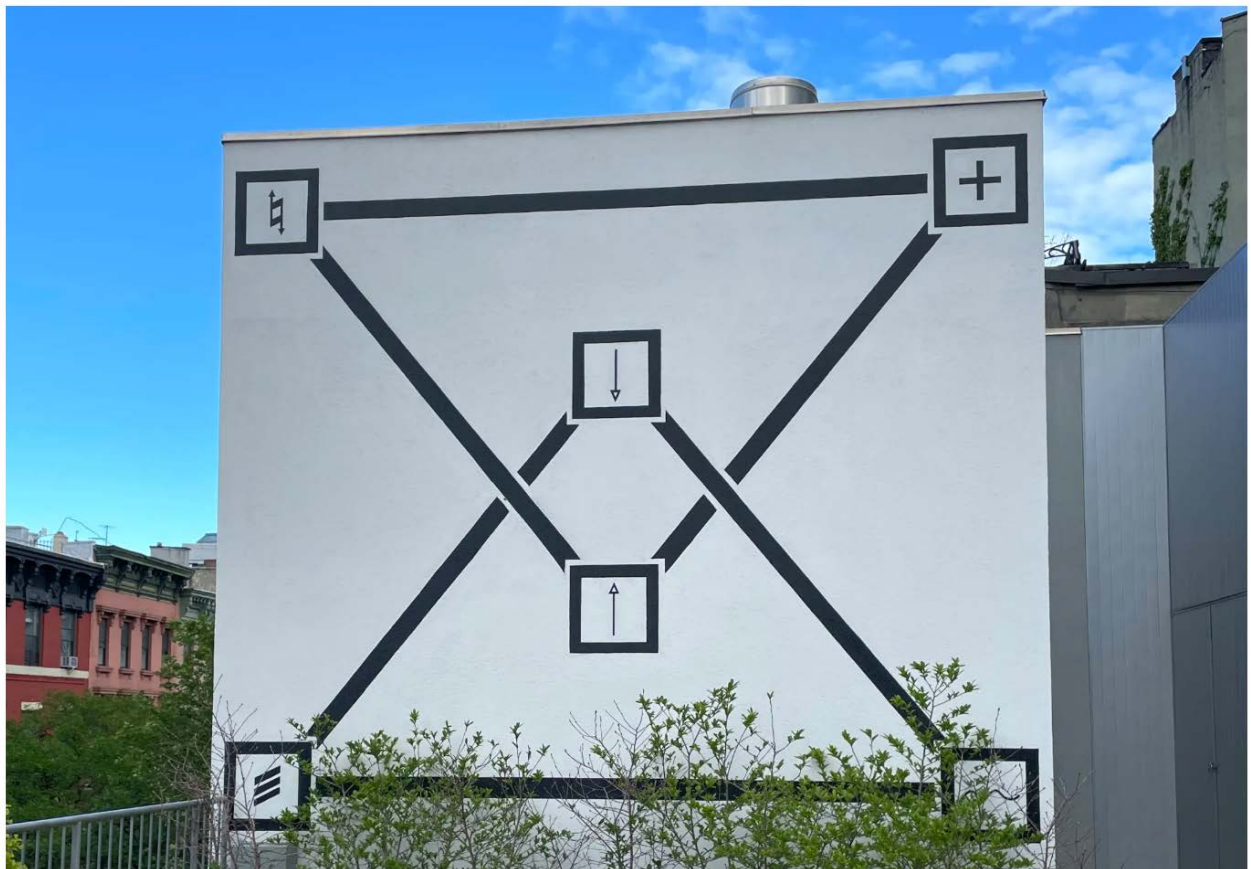
Other resin-covered clothing by Tavor (all from the 2025 series *Figures, Doors, Passages*) is in conversation with works that imply movement, such as Dionne Lee's *Walking Stick* series, black and white photos from 2024 that dramatize the shadows cast by twigs and branches. Those in turn dialog with Lee Mary Manning's photographs depicting trees or pedestrians on streets, while Mirra's patches of paint on the stairs in "Harmless mistake" (2023) draw attention to the viewer's movement through the space. (One drawback to *Spora*, and similarly installed shows, is that visitors with mobility issues may have trouble accessing areas such as stairwells.)

Bold outdoor paintings on the sides of the building announce the show to passersby; those by Raven Chacon, "Vertical Neighbors" (2024), double as a musical score, adding another dimension to the experience. *Spora* is subtler than the shows in the Swiss Institute's galleries, but it lingers in the mind, its interconnections multiplying like spores.





Installation view of *Spora* at the Swiss Institute with art by Hendl Helen Mirra, Li Tavor, and Uriel Orlow



Raven Chacon's painting on the Swiss Institute's rooftop patio



A view of Vivian Suter's painting from the Swiss Institute's rooftop patio

*Spora continues at the Swiss Institute (38 St Marks Place, East Village, Manhattan) through May 10, 2026. The exhibition was organized by Stefanie Hessler, director, Alison Coplan, chief curator, and Kɟ Abudu, assistant curator.*