



Caroline Rothwell

Ex Situ

Caroline Rothwell with work in progress in the studio
Photo: Jenni Carter

19 September – 6 October 2018

Private view: Thursday 20 September, 6–8pm

Lower Gallery, 32 St George St, Mayfair, London W1S 2EA

Curated by Nina Miall

Supported by Rachel Verghis

VerghisArt is pleased to present *Ex Situ*, an exhibition by British artist Caroline Rothwell in which she assembles an imaginary botanical archive. Taking the form of new wall-mounted and freestanding sculptures, Rothwell's archive draws on the materials and instruments of 19th-century botany, mediated by the technological revolution of the 20th century, to offer a visual register of humanity's impact on the natural world today.

The body of work presented in *Ex Situ* grows out of a residency Rothwell undertook at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge in 2015, where she encountered rare botanical specimens held in the university's herbarium. Some of these samples, such as a now-extinct cucumber found by Charles Darwin in the Galapagos Islands, have been hybridised by the artist in the 'Metamorphosis of Plants' series. Black silhouettes of these specimens, alongside others sourced by English naturalist Joseph Banks and Soviet agronomist Nikolai Vavilov, are hand-cut from industrial PVC and threaded through raw Belgian linen. Cast in relief, a disembodied female hand appears poised to either pluck or plant the

botanical hybrid in each work, engaged, like the artist, in an act of re-germination. Geometric applications of gold leaf evoke historical scientific instruments, while fictitious barcodes created by the interwoven linen and PVC suggest the evolution of nature in the digital age. Vivid and contemporary in their materiality, these new wall works harness the ecological potential of centuries-old preserved plants, conveying the adaptive resilience of nature set against global histories of trade, industrialisation and colonisation.

A series of freestanding, primary coloured sculptures entitled 'Biomorphs' conducts a similar enquiry into ideas of classification and control, nature and artifice, evolution and transmutation. Created from hydrostone, poured into stitched canvas and laminated in epoxy resin, these pieces suggest the museological aesthetic of taxidermied objects. Their organic and industrial forms are juxtaposed in vertical arrangements which stress their contemporary interdependency. Plant stems morph into convoluted networks of copper pipes, around which are propped high-gloss human tongues or microscopic lenses, suggesting a radical new taxonomy by which to understand today's genetically and technologically modified plant forms. Taxonomical arrangements of scientific specimens and instruments are also found in a series of prints, made by Rothwell following her Cambridge residency and presented here alongside their etched copper plates in old wooden plan chests.

The 'Metamorphosis of Plants' and 'Biomorphs' sculptures reveal an artist regenerating botanical specimens from the past, cultivating them through the technological advances of the 20th century, to speculate on their environmental potential for a post-industrial age. Based on the principles of *ex situ* conservation, in which an endangered plant species is offered protection outside its natural habitat, Rothwell's imaginary archive considers how our innate biophilic tendencies to collect, understand, modify and disrupt the natural world have shaped our engagement with it across centuries. In the precarious equilibrium that exists between natural and manmade systems in Rothwell's works is a formal reckoning of the environmental consequences of human endeavour in the age of the anthropocene.

A second chapter of the exhibition which builds on Rothwell's engagement with the historic exchange of ideas and specimens between the North and the South will be presented at the Chelsea Arts Club from Tuesday 25 September – Sunday 14 October.

For further information about the exhibition, please contact Nina Miall: nina.miall@gmail.com

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Exhibition hours: Monday – Sunday, 10am–6pm

Artist and curator in conversation: Saturday 22 September, 3–4pm

Frieze breakfast: Monday 1 October, 9.30am–10.30am

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Caroline Rothwell (b. 1967, in Hull, UK) works between Sydney and London. She has a wide-ranging, research-driven practice, working across two and three dimensions in a variety of media from bronze to PVC. Her work explores the intersection of art and science, nature and history, with

recent research undertaken in the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador, Kew Gardens in London, the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney, and the Museum of Economic Botany in Adelaide.

Rothwell's work is held in major public and private collections in Australasia and the UK, including: MCA Australia; University of Cambridge, UK; Nottingham University, UK; Cass Sculpture Foundation, UK; Shepparton Art Museum; University of Queensland Art Museum; State Library of Victoria; Art Gallery of New South Wales; Art Gallery of South Australia; Deutschebank; Ministry of Internal Affairs, NZ; Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand, NZ; Auckland City Art Gallery; Auckland University; Chartwell Trust, NZ; OMI International Arts Center, New York.

Recent exhibitions include: *The Lady and the Unicorn*, Art Gallery of New South Wales (2018); *Inspiracje*, TRAF0 Centre for Contemporary Art, Szczecin, Poland (2017); *Falling Suspended*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery (2017); 13th International Cuenca Biennial, Ecuador (2016); *Antipodes: Cut Apart*, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge (2016), *Turbulence*, Tolarno Galleries (2016); *Habit*, Temple Contemporary, Philadelphia, USA (2015); *Urpflanze Street Plants*, Museum of Economy Botany (2014), Adelaide; Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: *Dark Heart*, Art Gallery of South Australia (2014), OMI International Arts Center, New York (2014); *The Pulse of Time*, Future Perfect, Singapore (2013); *Elsewhere*, Djanogly Gallery, Lakeside Arts Centre, Nottingham (2004)

Significant commissions include: *Composer* for the MCA Australia sculpture terrace (2016), *Cartwheeling Youngsters*, Canada Bay Council (2015); *Youngsters*, City of Sydney (2012); *Symbiosis*, Central Park, Sydney (2012), *Dispersed* for the Contemporary Art Society at The Economist Plaza, London (2009). Rothwell has undertaken international residencies at the Cambridge University Museums, UK (2015), OMI International Arts Centre, New York (2014), and Nottingham University (2004). She has a BA from the University of the Arts, London, and an MFA in sculpture from Hunter College, City University of New York/University of Auckland.

For further information please visit www.carolinerothwell.net

ABOUT VERGHISART

Established in 2018 by Rachel Verghis, VerghisArt is an alternative platform that offers a licence for experimentation to artists and ideas, providing support for the realisation of ambitious projects. As a co-founder of Incubator, Verghis was instrumental in enabling the development of RANDOM INTERNATIONAL's celebrated installation 'Rain Room' (2012) which has since been presented at the Barbican, London, MoMA, New York, and LACMA, Los Angeles.

For further information please visit www.verghisart.com

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