

Phytopia

The visual idea of a Tree of Life is one that manifests itself in many cultures and traditions and is understood in a multitude of forms from the genealogical to evolutionary and from cultural and political hierarchies to growth forms. The exponential nature of branching structures and the diversity this represents is a metaphor for life itself. *Phytopia* seeks to harness the energies embedded in such structures and to celebrate the influence plants and organic forms have on nearly every aspect of visual culture. *Phytopia* includes a range of artists not usually seen in the same context and includes a number of works exhibited for the first time, with sculptural pieces by Derek Jarman and Paul de Monchaux, drawings by Marc Quinn and Rasheed Araeen and some 19th century Nature Prints among these.

Yu-Chen Wang's growth forms weave across wall or tables, emerging as part organic, part machine cyborg structures. Alicia Paz' artificial flower mounds offer saccharin seduction laced with poison, while Derek Jarman's films have layers of real and metaphoric seduction more sexual in nature. Jarman's delicate garden drawings are a sensitive and private adjunct to these films. Peter Fillingham conversely examines the floral metaphor of death and memento in *Poppy*. Pia Östlund's Nature Prints, inspired by the 19th century Austrian, Herr Alois Auer, Counsellor and Director of the Imperial Printing Establishment in Vienna, add infinitely fine detail to botanical visuals.

This show is conceived as a *Wunderkammer* or Cabinet of Curiosities, and will represent plant forms in a range of ways. Visceral but tight, the visual cues surrounding vegetable forms are multifarious, from growth progressions and mathematical curlicues to portrayals of gardens and botanical prints. Floral symbols abound as memento or reliquary and inform our aesthetic and ecological senses.

Karl Marx' idea of 'species being' described the importance of meaningful work for people, emphasising the fundamental importance of proximity to nature:

Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art – his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible – so also in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity. 1)

The notion of the tree, with its different branches, structures the idea for this exhibition. This exhibition explores the interconnectedness of diverse floral narratives and, like Marx's 'species being', provides a platform for a range of individual approaches covering ideas from growth to gardens; memento to metabolism; commodity to collections.

The exhibition and tour and will be accompanied by an illustrated publication.

1. Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. Karl Marx
Manuscript XXIV Estranged Labour

Participating Artists:

Rasheed Araeen	Joy Girvin	Alicia Paz
Alois Auer	Fay Godwin	Siân Pile
Karl Blossfeldt	David Heinrich Hoppe	Marc Quinn
Henry Bradbury	Derek Jarman	Hilary Rosen
Edward Chell	Paul de Monchaux	Suzanne Treister
Peter Fillingham	Rosa Nguyen	Yu-Chen Wang
Ori Gersht	Pia Östlund	

With Flicker + Pulse: A Film by Brian McClave and Tom Wichelow

Exhibition curated by Edward Chell

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