

Botanical Drift

Walking Kew Gardens & Workshop in Economic Botany

Thursday, 5th and Friday, 6th of June 2014



David Edward Allen, Pear Trees, 2010

The miniature world of Economic Botany in Kew Gardens, its elaborate greenhouses and follies, is the site and material of this botanical drift. In this workshop phase it addresses recent advances in plant molecular biology, cellular biology, electrophysiology and ecology that have unmasked plants as sensory and communicative organisms, characterized by active, problem-solving behaviour. To better grasp how plants interact with their environment and to understand these organisms from different perspectives, we will carry out interventions into the Kew Garden systems. This series of responses is enacted directly in the living archives at Kew, including the Marianne North, Economic Botany, and colonial plant collections.

Botanical gardens, documented collections of living plants for the purposes of scientific research, conservation, display, and education, are well-tended areas infamous for their connection to European imperialism and its expansionist projects. The group's art-research will theorize the gendering of the botanical garden, the ephemeral and chaotic in 'nature', and the much-debated amateur scientist model for contemporary artists. Understanding ourselves as within the Anthropocene's age of transgenic modification we interrogate how Kew distracts from climate change with its illusion of stability. Economic histories of globalization will be unfurled through plant protagonists such as ferns, trees, sea coconuts, other rebel species, and their vegetable philosophies.

Programme

Thursday, 5th of June: Botanical Drift

Kew Gardens, meeting point: Victoria Gate

The walk will take place in any weather:

If it is hot and sunny, remember to bring sunglasses and sun protection.

If it is rainy, remember to bring an umbrella and appropriate footwear.

Free entry to Kew gardens, lunch and drinks will be provided.

10am Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, historian and artist, Cambridge / Berlin &

Petra Lange-Berndt, art historian, Department of History of Art, UCL

Labelling All Participants

Emma Waltraud Howes, artist and dancer, Berlin

Kim Berit Heppelmann, artist and designer, Berlin

Subcutaneous ‘Ha-Has’ and the Evolution of Polymorphic Animalcules

All day, various locations

Subcutaneous ‘Ha-has’ and the Evolution of Polymorphic Animalcules is a field study of the ephemeral and chaotic ‘nature’ of sensory and communicative organisms. A creature performs her ‘field science’ inspired by the survival tactics of Marianne North, while simultaneously engaging with a critical analysis of Darwin’s theories on evolution and adaptation. Shaped by life form observations of the micro and macro systems of the Kew Gardens context, a subsequent magnification of the contents becomes visible through her movements. At times grotesque, this being is characterized by an active problem-solving behavior as it is observed adapting to its environment. Between a watercolor and an oil painting this study is expressed through corporeal gestures.

Mark Nesbitt, Curator of the Economic Botany Collection

Introduction to the Economic Botany Collection

Plants & People Exhibition, Museum No. 1

Caroline Cornish, Researcher, Kew Gardens

Indigo Factory Model: Impressions of the Indigo Trade

Plants & People Exhibition, Museum No. 1

I will introduce an indigo factory model that came to Kew in 1886 from the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in South Kensington. It is an object which can be interpreted at a number of levels – the economic, the imperial, the exhibitionary, the artistic – and it has provoked a number of responses over the years. In this part of the drift will read out comments uttered and written about it by eye-witnesses representing different

perspectives – child, immigrant, drifter – and different time periods: early 1900s, 1950s and 1980s.

Bergit Arends, Independent curator, London

Watching Them Grow...

On route

Mark Nesbitt & Caroline Cornish

Useful and Curious: A Walk through Victorian Botany

Joseph Banks Building

A stroll through highlights of the Economic Botany Collection, ranging from vegetable sheep to a Wardian case.

Melanie Jackson, artist, Slade School of Art, London

Coco fesse

Joseph Banks Building

The nut of the sea coconut (*Lodoicea maldivica*) is the largest seed in the plant kingdom and bears uncanny resemblance in both shape and size to female human buttocks on one side, and belly and thighs on the other. It has long been endowed with mythological and magical properties, and high capital value. It has variously considered to be the fruit of a vast underwater forest, the buttocks of diving mermaids, and the originary plant emanating from the Garden of Eden, physically located as the Island of Preslin in the Seychelles where the palm is endemic. Artist Melanie Jackson has worked with Mark Nesbitt, curator of the economic botany collection at Kew on an illustrated essay exploring the botany, history and significance of the seed in the present moment – produced for *Botanical Drift* in the form of a zine with a pilgrim badge of the 'fesse'. Melanie Jackson will read from the publication and examine at the seed in the economic botany collection.

1pm Petra Lange-Berndt & Kath Castillo, botanist, Natural History Museum, London

Digesting Joseph Banks

In the spirit of Brazil's anthropophagia movement, we will gather to devour plants one can find in the economic botany collection or that are otherwise connected to Kew's colonial activities. Collectively we will transform exemplary specimens and their histories by letting them pass through our digestive systems and gradually return them to Kew Gardens over the day.

herman de vries, artist, Knetzgau (Germany)

I am

Various locations

Wietske Maas, artist and curator, Amsterdam & **Matteo Pasquinelli**, philosopher, Berlin

The Murder of a Buttercup (*Hortus Inversus* part I)

"One should start with the sagacity of plants" — Nietzsche

The Murder of a Buttercup is an inverted garden experience that describes the autonomous individual vis-à-vis the force of nature. The plant protagonist of this murder story, the buttercup, is found flourishing beyond the curated parameters of the official Kew collection. The scripted walk reenacts the eponymous novella by German Expressionist writer Alfred Döblin a tale which encapsulates psychopathologies of early 20th century Urban Berlin. The story supplants conventional beliefs and forms of control of the nature of "knowledge" with a headless form of plant thinking. This walk will expose how vegetal sources are complicit with human thought. We are akin to plants in that we most often act without our heads, that is to say, without an explicitly voiced command from the brain. The murder story picks a bone with the neurotic quests to control nature and reveals instead the monstrous and unframeable intelligence of plants.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll

Anus Albus Tuus, "I gave you all I then knew"

New Zealand and Australia terraced garden

This performance collapses the space/time of correspondence through which seeds and specimens were sent to Kew. The gardens are designed as a walk-through Linnean taxonomy and this is a re-enactment of the founder of Kew's naming and classifying of plants. One of Kew's collectors in the colony in New Zealand argued persistently for the inclusion of Indigenous Maori names for the plants he was collecting. This labelling drama reverses the relationship between this William Colenso and Kew's Joseph Hooker on the basis of their correspondence and Kew's omission of the Maori names once the specimens were sent to London.

Walking the Palm House

Connie Butler, artist, London & **Hazel Dowling**, artist, London

'Flora Exotica': A Pteridomantic Performance

A performance in front of the Palm House that comments on the Victorian fern craze from a feminist perspective. Using screen-printed props of oversized fans which employ the vibrant colour palate of Marianne North's radical output, to enact a sequence of coded movements within the grounds of the botanical gardens. The pair take cues from the emergence of the female botanist, Victorian 'amateur scientists' and a contemporary understanding of the artist as a 'professional amateur' to unpick fact from fiction in their research into the role of the fern within women's access to education and early feminism. Often running with mis-conceptions and the frustrations of formal institutional archive systems and educational resources, and

inspired by the Victorian experimental approach to the relationship between the arts and sciences, the pair attempt to construct an alternative reading of the Victorian Fern Craze.

4pm Philip Kerrigan, art historian and Coordinator for the University of York's Centre for Chronic Diseases and Disorders, York

The Botanical Paintings of Marianne North: Picturing the Animal within the Vegetable

Marianne North Gallery

The strikingly idiosyncratic appearance of Marianne North's paintings of plants from across the world in the eponymous gallery at Kew suggests a different conception than that which guided conventional botanical illustrations of the period. In this talk I will argue that a key influence informing her paintings was the work of Charles Darwin and in particular his writings about plant physiology. I will focus especially on Darwin's attribution of almost animal-like qualities to plants and how I believe these notions are expressed both directly and through formal and stylistic allusion in North's paintings.

Final discussion

5.30pm-7pm: Cocktails and Marianne North Nibbles

Friday, 6th of June: Botanical Drift Round Table

UCL, Department of History of Art, 20-21 Gordon Square, room 3&4, 5-7pm



The miniature world of Economic Botany in Kew Gardens is unfurled through plant protagonists: ferns, trees, sea coconuts, other rebel species, and their vegetable philosophies. Colonial plant collections are the site and material for a group of artists, historians, curators, and botanists in the *Botanical Drift*. The Roundtable Workshop makes the art-research in this series of performances and debates public. Please join us for film screenings, slide shows, and discussions around plant molecular biology, chaotic nature, gender, ecology, and plants as sensory and communicative organisms.

Everybody welcome.

With

Bergit Arends, curator, London

Natasha Eaton, art historian, UCL

Emma Waltraud Howes, dancer and artist, Berlin

Melanie Jackson, artist, Slade School of Art

Alana Jelinek, artist, University of Cambridge

Philip Kerrigan, historian of science, University of York

Petra Lange-Berndt, art historian, UCL

Wietske Maas, artist and curator, Amsterdam

Olaf Pascheit, photographer and art historian, Hamburg

Matteo Pasquinelli, philosopher, Berlin

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, artist and historian, Humboldt University Berlin

Screenings by:

Connie Butler, artist, London & **Hazel Dowling**, artist, London

Claire Loussourne, film maker and anthropologist, London

Supported by the

Center for the Study of Contemporary Art, UCL

The Institute of Making / MakeSpace, UCL

Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung

Participants

Bergit Arends

is an independent curator and PhD candidate at Royal Holloway University of London, recent projects include the touring exhibition *Galápagos* and contemporary arts at the Natural History Museum.

Connie Butler

is a London-based artist working with print, sculpture, performance, and self publishing. Interested in working with an economy of means my work often functions as simple anecdotal collages with a materiality of modest persistence. Time-based events and performed written work can create spaces for sculptural objects to inhabit; operating as both organiser, participant and facilitator of collaborative work is central. My current research focuses on overlooked utopian architecture in Portsmouth such as the Tricorn Centre; other influences come from a pre-war atelier model, and the cross pollination of art and design.

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll

Botanical Drift is part of my ongoing British Academy art-research on classification and continues my practise in site-specific, ephemeral, collaborative, performative and time-based media along with my art historical scholarship on colonial history. Recently I've been performing re-enactments of historical moments such as exhibitions in which colonial objects came to London. My postcolonial interventions have been hosted by various institutions, including the National Museum of Australia, the Marrakech Biennale, and Harvard University. www.kdja.org

Kath Castillo

studied biology at the University of London and Imperial College London. She has expertise in botanical research and curation, molecular phylogenetics, and botanical fieldwork in the UK, France, and Central and South America. She currently works at the Natural History Museum Department of Life Sciences Plants Division as a botanical research assistant.

Caroline Cornish

Caroline's doctoral thesis was on the history of the Museum of Economic Botany at Kew and she has since worked on the Economic Botany Collection, assisting Mark Nesbitt. She has published in a range of journals and books, and has a particular interest in the role of models in the nineteenth-century museum.

Hazel Dowling

I am a London-based artist who has been developing a set of concerns relating to practices of performance and the formation of subjectivity. An ongoing focus is the engagement with various forms of 'social movement', from the culture of folk song and dance, to the evolution of syncopated rhythm from slave plantation dance competitions. This research has often materialised through the process of re-creating events, documents and images found in archives. I approach each new project as a process of collaboration, deliberately seeking to work against presumed divisions or fields of specialization.

Kim Berit Heppelmann

sutures together clothing and sculpture. As a conceptual artist, process and methodology are at the center of her practice. Clothing is her artistic medium to visualise concepts drawn from her research into nature and movement. Since 2010 she runs the Berlin label kimberit and collaborates with artists from different disciplines. Her 'project clothes' and textile installations show corporeality as a medium to be redefined. Using her self-developed 'one piece method', constructing a garment from one single piece of material, she created the costume for the performance of Emma Waltraud Howes for the Botanical Drift. www.kimberit.com

Emma Waltraud Howes

is concerned with malleable boundaries. She incorporates movement, soft sculpture, drawing, and video that result in live performance and interdisciplinary installations. Her process-based research projects manifest as choreographed multiple reconfiguration of the body guided by her observations on contemporary gestures and the history of their production. The corporeal body in her work, similar to her material objects, can be seen as 'characters', emphatic subjects that serve to enunciate the purpose of dysfunctions. She frames these elements towards a reconciliation of mind-body dualisms, an optimistic proposition for incremental change informed by a background in Dance, Performance Theory, and a formal training in the Visual Arts. www.emmawaltraudhowes.com

Melanie Jackson

is an artist based in London and lectures at the Slade School of Fine Art. She pursues the intimacy of knowledge at the nanoscale through to the spectre of gargantuan monstrosities, through moving image, sculpture and printed matter. See www.melaniejackson.net for more information.

Philip Kerrigan

Philip's interests, as a researcher and research facilitator at the University of York, span the interface between the life sciences, natural philosophy and the arts. Philip completed a PhD on Charles Darwin and the Culture of Plants, His Reception and Influence in the Horticultural and Visual Realms, c. 1840-c. 1920 in 2008.

Petra Lange-Berndt

I am an art historian working as lecturer at the Department of History of Art, UCL. Research interests include the entanglements of art and science, materiality, psychedelic cultures, artists' communes and colonies and other curious matters (see www.curiousmatters.net). I have also been involved in curatorial projects and am currently working with Mark Dion in Dresden on an exhibition project involving the wunderkammer *Green Vaults*.

Wietske Maas

combines artistic pursuits with work as a producer and curator for the European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam) and as a guest lecturer at the ArtScience Interfaculty at the Royal Academy of Arts (The Hague). Wietske has exhibited and realised longer term-projects in recent years at/with Kunst Historischesmuseum Vienna, Mediamatic Amsterdam, Casco Projects Utrecht, Centraal Museum Utrecht, KAAP Utrecht, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Garaj Istanbul, FoAM Brussels, Sophiensaele Berlin a.o.

In 2007, Wietske Maas and Matteo Pasquinelli started developing a project called *Urbanibalism*. *Urbanibalism* is the experience of the city from the perspective of ingestion and as a form of life that grows autonomously from any planned 'city ecology'. Against superficial aesthetics such as food design and bioart, urbanibalism explores the greater metabolism of the city and the historical conflicts of the living matter at the basis of any culinary art.

Mark Nesbitt

is Curator of the Economic Botany Collection. Originally trained as a botanist, he spent 15 years working in archaeology before joining Kew in 1999. He has wide interests in 19th century colonial botany, and in the history and management of botanical collections.

Matteo Pasquinelli

is a philosopher (see London www.matteopasquinelli.org). He wrote the book *Animal Spirits: A Bestiary of the Commons* (2008) and lectures frequently at the intersection of continental philosophy, media theory and life sciences. His texts have been translated in many languages and he has contributed to journals and newspapers such as *Springerin*, *Multitudes*, *Fibreculture*, *Theory Culture & Society*, *Lugar Comun*, *Rethinking Marxism*, *Libération*, *Il manifesto*, *Der Freitag*. At NGBK Berlin he is co-curating the exhibition *The Ultimate Capital is the Sun*.