

Modern Nature

2 May – 7 July 2019

Alberto Baraya, Mark Dion, Simryn Gill, Derek Jarman, Hilma af Klint, Margaret Mee, Christine Ödlund, David Thorpe, Viktor Timofeev

The varied works in *Modern Nature* remind us of the imperative to look more carefully at plant-life and consider the circumstance of their cultivation and in some cases, imagined lives. Drawing has long played an instrumental role in disseminating knowledge of plants, in particular before photography. Still used extensively as a scientific aid to botanical study, drawing is a flexible medium which allows artists to explore contemporary ideas of nature. This exhibition investigates how we engage with plant-life and how this engagement is determined by current socio-economic, political, or personal agencies, or an intersection of all of these.

The exhibition brings together drawings never before exhibited in the UK by historical artists Hilma af Klint and Margaret Mee, alongside works by contemporary international artists, including self-styled botanist Alberto Baraya and explorer, activist and artist Mark Dion. Also included are unique works on paper by Simryn Gill and Christine Ödlund, diary entries by filmmaker, diarist and gardener Derek Jarman, invented botanical watercolours by David Thorpe and a newly commissioned wall drawing by Viktor Timofeev. Together, these remind us that as with most natural resources, the world's flora is something that humanity has exploited for far too long without considering the implications.

Human interest in plants - their value for food and healing - dates back to the earliest days of our species. Botany has been a scientific study since the earliest civilisations, whether these were centred in Ancient China, Greece or Rome. Historically, botanical drawing was one of few acceptable artistic pursuits for women and there are a number of distinguished female artists who led in this field. As part of the first generation of women studying alongside male colleagues in the late 19th century, Hilma af Klint drew and painted detailed observations of plant life and nature early in her career. She went on to devote her life and work to an exploration of the spiritual world – including developing a diagrammatic language to represent the energetic and emotional signature of individual plant specimens.

Drawings and gouaches by Margaret Mee made between the 1950's and 80's depict the unique and often unknown flora of Brazil. Observed and recorded on intrepid expeditions into the Amazon rainforest, they exemplify the role botanical artists have played in discovering new plant species. Notably, Mee was also one of the first to draw attention to the environmental damage enacted by large scale mining and deforestation in the Amazon Basin.

The exhibition takes its title from the diaries of the British artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman and we include a selection of his 'Garden Books'. During the same period in which London's gay scene, like New York's, was devastated by the AIDs crisis, Jarman devoted himself to creating his now famous garden in an isolated and desert-like corner of Kent, Dungeness. For Jarman, cultivating his garden and teasing life out of a barren landscape was a form of escapism, but also therapy at a time when he was battling the disease that would take his life.

Mark Dion's *Herbarium* (2010) is inspired by the work of Henry Perrine, one of the first horticulturists to study Florida's vast agricultural offerings, and to document its many plant species. This series of unique works on paper presents itself as a herbarium salvaged from Perrine's collection, which was destroyed during a Seminole Indian raid on his house - part of the fierce resistance by the American Indians to the white settlement and mass displacement imposed upon them during the 19th century. Perrine was also killed in the raid, and with him his conservation project. Himself an activist and collector, Dion frequently adopts scientific techniques and the methodologies of museum display to reveal the fragility of the natural environment, invariably due to the carelessness of man's interventions.

For nearly twenty years, Alberto Baraya has pursued his own pseudo expeditions throughout the world, collecting and cataloguing artificial plants for his *Herbario de plantas artificiales* from which he derives anthropometric studies. These artificial flowers are accompanied and annotated by detailed drawings of the specimen and information about its collector and location, replicating the methodology of earlier western botanical artists. In this way, Baraya questions how colonial Western tradition came to categorise not only plants but also the people encountered.

For Simryn Gill, an underlying concern across her varied practice is 'looking for the overlap - of connection, or separation - between us and plants'. Gill asks, 'What is the nature of that overlap? If the botanical world falters, so do we...' *Travelling Light* (2017) is a series of unique works on paper, a form of drawing made directly by wrapping sprouting coconuts in paper. These vibrantly colourful works, reminiscent of flames, offer a palpable sense of the fertility and life within this most mobile and versatile of plants.

Christine Ödlund's series *Aspects of Linnaeus's system of shape and colour* (2018) references Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus's 18th century system, which classifies plants according to their sex organs. In her works on paper, Christine Ödlund uses pigments extracted from plants, such as stinging nettle and indigo, to explore not only the chemical, but also the acoustic characteristics of plants and ways in which to bridge the language barrier between humans and plants.

David Thorpe's works update the 19th century impulse to record and celebrate flora and fauna as idealised forms, as expressed in the Arts & Crafts movement. In meticulously realised botanical watercolours, Thorpe re-imagines plant specimens as the articulation of a psychological inner space, fantastically humanoid and quietly sexual, thus extending the close identification of mankind with nature espoused by the Victorian artisans.

Viktor Timofeev's exuberant pastel wall drawing is an otherworldly depiction of flora, one that is informed by decorative reproductions of plants and flowers, in particular an iris motif on a well-loved bedspread. Like much of his work, these large drawings derive from smaller drawings and sketches, and has evolved over the course of various renditions in spaces across the world. His site-specific commission represents a science fictional, alien version of nature that has a strange anthropomorphic quality, emphasised by the blue and red palette.

Curated by Katharine Stout (Deputy Director, ICA, London and Associate Director, Drawing Room) with Jacqui McIntosh (Exhibitions Manager, Drawing Room).

Viktor Timofeev's wall drawing is kindly supported by:

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Alberto Baraya

Compared modernist studies, 2011
Photographs, found objects and drawing on cardboard
Dimensions variable
Edition 1/3
Collection Catherine Petitgas

Mark Dion

Herbarian, 2010
Hand painted acrylic wash, spitbite aquatint, à la poupée photogravure, with hand applied letterpress labels and stamps in seven parts plus colophon in bleach stained folio
41.9 x 29.2 cm each
Edition of 20, ATP
Courtesy Graphicstudio, University of South Florida

Simryn Gill

Travelling Light, 2017
Ink on paper, unique relief prints
139.7 x 73.6 cm each
Courtesy Utopia Art, Sydney and Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai

Channel, 2014
Ilfochrome print
Two works each 31.6 x 32 cm

Private Collection

Derek Jarman

Garden Book I (facsimile), 1989
Paper, mixed media and hardcover
21.6 x 21 cm
From *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*, published by Thames & Hudson Ltd. Reproduced with kind permission

Garden Book III, April, May 1989
Paper and hardcover
21.6 x 21 cm

Garden Book IV, May, June 1989
Paper and hardcover
21.6 x 21 cm

Garden Book VI, August 1989
Paper and hardcover
21.6 x 21 cm

Study for Landscape, 1966
Mixed media on paper
40.3 x 25.7 cm

All works courtesy Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, London and Keith Collins Will Trust

Hilma af Klint

No Title, 1890's
Graphite and watercolour on paper
34.9 x 24.2 cm
HaK 1328

No Title, 1890's
Graphite and watercolour on paper
34.2 x 26 cm
HaK 1322

Notebook, 1907-1912
Graphite and ink on paper
13.5 x 22 cm
HaK 1167

All works courtesy The Hilma af Klint Foundation

Margaret Mee

Philodendron arcuatum, field sketch,
near Manaus, 1977
Gouache and pencil on paper
27.7 x 23.4 cm

A tree in the Amazon, field sketch,
1967
Pencil on paper
32.4 x 22.5 cm

A view of trees in the Amazon, field
sketch, August 1967
Pencil on paper
31 x 22.7 cm

*The stems of the cactus Strophocactus
(Selenicereus) wittii*, field
sketch, Rio Negro, May 1982
Gouache and pencil on paper
29.2 x 20.3 cm

Neoregelia sp., field sketch, Negro
Uaupés, November 1964
Gouache and pencil on paper
22.6 x 30.8 cm

Catasetum 'maculata', field sketch, Rio
Manoli, 1972
Gouache and pencil on paper
28.6 x 19.7 cm

Pitcairnia caricifolia, field sketch, Rio Uaupés,
November 1964
Gouache and pencil on paper
30.7 x 22.3 cm

All works courtesy the Board of Trustees of the
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew / The Estate of
Margaret Mee

Christine Ödlund

Aspects of Linnaeus' system of shape and colour I, 2018
Plant pigment and acrylic medium on paper
72.5 x 53.5 cm

Aspects of Linnaeus' system of shape and colour II, 2018
Plant pigment and acrylic medium on paper
72.5 x 53.5 cm

Aspects of Linnaeus' system of shape and colour III, 2018
Plant pigment and acrylic medium on paper
72.5 x 53.5 cm

All works courtesy Galleri Riis and MLF |
MARIE-LAURE FLEISCH

David Thorpe

A Late Fruit Resisting, 2008
Watercolour on paper
106.5 x 71.5 cm

Collection Museum Kurhaus Kleve

Ecstatic Hangings, 2012
Watercolour on paper
101 x 42 cm

Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

Untitled, 2012
Watercolour on paper
109 x 52 cm

Private Collection, Germany

Viktor Timofeev

Godflower 7, 2019
Conté pastel on wall
450 x 730.5 cm