

Wind Spirits

Tatiana Arocha

Deirdre Murphy

Rachel Sydlowski





(detail) *Vivarium*, Rachel Sydlowski, site specific installation, 2021. Photo: Spewak

Three artists consider the power and delicacy of Earth's avian creatures and the larger implications that duality poses for the natural world. Arocha's vast eponymous mural *Wind Spirits* vivifies and reconstructs vulnerable tropical forests, confronting the ecological, emotional, and cultural loss caused by extractive economies and colonial practices. Murphy's body of work *Oculus*, selected here as a six-panel composition, addresses the impact of light pollution on migration patterns and re-contextualizes the phenomenological aspects of the night sky. Sydlowski's installation presents a fantastical vivarium of rarefied birds and plants, culled from artist Kōno Bairei's 19th-century oeuvre of birds and botanicals. Bairei's works are important for determining the wildlife of Japan at that time, but Sydlowski's has re-contextualized them for her own purposes mirroring dire shifts of habitat and migration in the wake of industrialization.

Wind Spirits brings these works together, inviting viewers to reconstruct futures nourished by ecological and ancestral knowledge and to foreground interconnectivity and interdependence rather than ownership.

This exhibition was designed in partnership with Penn State's Shaver's Creek Environmental Center. Shaver's Creek is currently hosting *The Lost Bird Project*, five memorials to extinct North American Bird species. More information about the project is on view in the exhibition cases across from Student Activities in the HUB-Robeson Center.



DEIRDRE MURPHY

Oculus Major, 3 x 26 ft, oil on canvas, 2019

Oculus Major is a series of paintings exploring the migration of pathogens, bird migration and the effects of climate change on all species. Made during a BioArt residency at Integral Molecular the work combines light pollution maps, phosphorescent protein structures, virology and constellations. The artist examines relationships between art and scientific discovery, particularly illustrating interconnected patterns on both a micro and macro level. Murphy's first-hand interactions and collaborations with scientists continue to inform her studio practice. These paintings pose a mirrored likeness between illuminated, aerial images of light pollution, and a fading blanket of constellations in the celestial sphere. Murphy expresses how her use of molecular structures and flight patterns become "a language to describe my relationship to nature and... the interconnected quality in our lives, thus illuminating a path to seeing the world anew."

As humans, we have long used stars to navigate, to find our way in the largeness of the world. The artist reminds us that we are not alone in that pursuit; songbirds base their flight routes on the night sky. And while the distant stars seem beyond our reach, they are not; our actions affect change. In a nearby series of paintings, floating rectangles of color depict clusters of light pollution that –among other things– disrupt animal migrations.

Murphy's work emerges from more than a decade of interest in avian migratory patterns, and the effects of climate change and molecular biology. This deep creative inquiry into patterns in nature both visible and invisible have led to a history of collaborating with scientists from institutions including The University of Pennsylvania, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Powdermill Nature Reserve/ Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Drexel University's Academy of Natural Science and Integral Molecular Laboratory. Imagery in her work ranges from data visualization of ornithology charts to phosphorescent images of viruses, to cellular structures in petri dishes that morph into star clusters and light pollution maps to finally rest upon a Luna moth.

Oculus Major, Deirdre Murphy, 3 x 26 ft, oil on canvas, 2019. Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Bird Nest Studies, dimensions vary, 2021

Nests, are not home for birds, but only a place to raise the next generation. Staying too long can put the animals at risk of predation. Observational painting and studying are a beginning point for Murphy's practice. These studies and examples of paintings made from her collection of nests. Walking, looking for peace in nature, Murphy observed nests being built in the late spring of 2020. "These nests were strikingly similar to neuron structures and led me to ponder the essence of home as a place of sanctuary and of vulnerability. Tension and friction hold the cup nests of songbirds together, there is no glue, no nails, only pressure of twig against twig. Feathering the nest, preparing for brooding season is it's own sacred dance for these expert engineers and builders."

Nest Alchemy, 2021

Nest Alchemy is a series born out of collaborative research with Murphy and the Neuro Salon program at Lehigh University. Exploring the connections between art and neuroscience, the connections between neurons and nests grew from conversations between Murphy and Dr. Jennifer Swann. Reflecting on her experience at home during the isolation of quarantine, the artist draws connection to being stuck in the nest - a place of sanctuary yet also of vulnerability. Nests, are not home for birds, but only a place to raise the next generation. Staying too long can put the animals at risk of predation. Walking, looking for peace in nature, Murphy observed nests being built in the late spring of 2020. "These nests were strikingly similar to neuron structures and led me to ponder the essence of home as a place of sanctuary and of vulnerability. Tension and friction hold the cup nests of songbirds together, there is no glue, no nails, only pressure of twig against twig. Feathering the nest, preparing for brooding season is it's own sacred dance for these expert engineers and builders."

Deirdre Murphy earned her MFA degree from the University of Pennsylvania and her BFA degree from the Kansas City Art Institute. Murphy is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Lehigh University and taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. Murphy has been a visiting artist at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania College of Design and University of Texas, Philadelphia University, Kent State University & Dickenson College. Deirdre Murphy is represented by the Gross McCleaf Gallery (Philadelphia), Boxheart Gallery (Pittsburgh) and Zinc Contemporary Gallery (Seattle).



Bird Nest Studies, Deirdre Murphy, dimensions vary, 2021. Photo: Spewak



Nest Alchemy, Deirdre Murphy, 2021. Photo: Spewak



(installing) *Vivarium*, Rachel Sydlowski, site specific installation, 2021. Photos: Southern

RACHEL SYDOWSKI

Vivarium, site specific installation, 2021

This large-scale installation presents a fantastical vivarium, a rarefied collection of birds and plants for study and aesthetic reflection. Thousands of hand-printed serigraphs are collaged together to create a fabricated wilderness where birds have adapted to the controlled environment; nesting in unlikely places, displaying their plumage and pageantry in a truncated and finite space. Beauty is cautionary in this miniaturized depiction of an Edenic micro-cosm. Lotus flowers repeat throughout the composition referring equally to Lotus-Eaters and symbolism of rebirth, enlightenment, and perseverance. Greenery stretches and impossibly cantilevers creating a balance that cannot be sustained, its success will also be its undoing.

Kono Bairei's 19th-century collection of bird paintings, vintage botanical illustrations, and large garden urns are all part of the complex dialog of images originally sourced from open-access collections and auction catalogs. Taken out of their original contexts and transformed through a series of indirect processes related to the act of reproducibility and printmaking, the representations of birds mirror dire shifts of habitat and migration in the wake of industrialization.

Histories triumphs and tragedies are reframed with each successive generation, mirroring the values and aims of the present. Historical architecture and decorative objects form a complex coded system of social class and power, a web of clues prompting further research. Silkcreened multiples, these cut multiples become a vehicle to create environments of repetition and pattern. Pattern is an extension of power, of taming nature, a trick of the eye, it turns the unadorned into the fanciful and opulent. Decorative objects are redirection, an illusion of the wealthy, masking flaws and sending carefully crafted messages of rank from its curves and geometries. Taking cues from Gilded Age interior spaces, gardens and American vernacular architecture I appropriate motifs, decorative objects and flora and fauna using screenprinting as a primary medium. These large-scale installations, informed by history and memory, reinvent and reevaluate the past.

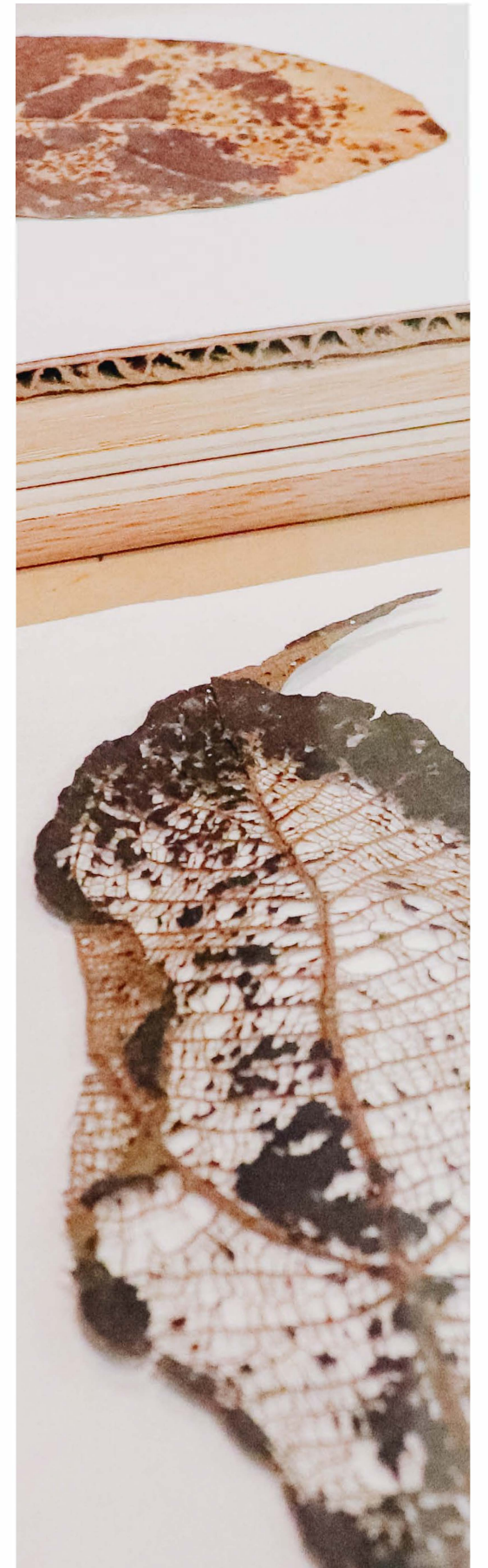
Based in New York City, Rachel Sydlowski is a visual artist and educator. Recent exhibitions include Dyckman Farmhouse Museum, Wassaic Project, Facebook Open Arts, MoCA Westport, Chashama Space to Connect: Fordham Windows Project, Wave Hill Sunroom Project Space, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York Public Library, and Lehman College Art Gallery. Curatorial projects include Lucky to be Here a digital exhibition through Longwood Art Gallery at Hostos and Bronx Council on the Arts, Intersecting Editions at The Castle Gallery, History of the Present at OSilas Gallery and Infinite Archive, NYPL at the 115th Street Harry Belafonte Library. She is currently serving as department chair of Art at Eastchester High School.



Wind Spirits, Art Alley, 2021. Photo: Spewak



Tatiana Arocha, *process and specimens*, dimensions vary, 2021. Photos: Southern





(installing) *Wind Spirits*, Tatiana Arocha, 60 x 330 inches, hand painted C-print on canvas, 2021. Photos: Southern

TATIANA AROCHA

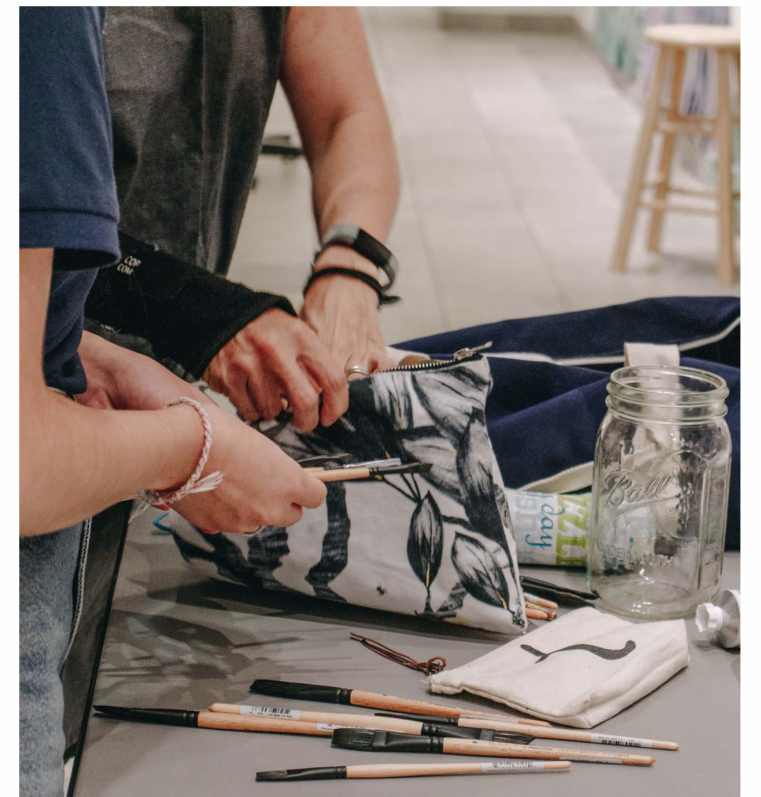
Wind Spirits, 60 x 330 inches, hand painted C-print on canvas, 2021

Collecting, recording, and studying through observation, Arocha creates libraries of textures from plants and objects found in nature through monoprinting, rubbing, pressing, and photographing. These collections of botanical study are digitized and recombined as vast new environments. Some examples of her collection are on view in exhibition case 1 near Freeman Auditorium. In her work *Wind Spirits*, there is a rain forest scene with Harpy eagles, the largest and most powerful raptors found in the Americas, but also an endangered species.

Arocha amplifies the splendor of her home also to abate the negative stereotypes associated with Colombia. Her practice is deeply personal and respectful of indigenous forestry. Her art practice explores intimacy between people and land, rooted in personal memory and her immigrant experience, and centers on exchange. Arocha's work records what has not yet disappeared but is threatened by extinction, layering her relationship to the bio-political and place-based knowledge. Influenced by-and in opposition to-the scientific texts and botanical engravings of colonial explorers, Arocha alters her archive of flora and fauna to recreate and re-imagine endangered ecosystems and to resist the violent costs of extractive economies.

Tatiana Arocha is a New York-born Colombian artist, living in Brooklyn on Lenape ancestral land. She has held residencies at The Wassaic Project, LABverde, Centro Selva, Arquetopia, and Zea Mays Printmaking. Arocha has received funding from The Sustainable Arts Foundation and Brooklyn Arts Council.

Solo exhibitions include Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, Queens Botanical Garden, and site-specific installations at BRIC, Brookfield Place/Winter Garden, MTA Arts, Goethe-Institut Kolumbien, and Hilton Bogota Corferias. She has participated in group exhibitions at Smack Mellon, Wave Hill, BRIC, The Wassaic Project, ArtBridge, KODALab, and The Clemente. Arocha studied illustration and graphic design in Bogota, Colombia. From 2000-2008, she was owner/curator of Servicio Ejecutivo, a digital-turned-physical gallery in Brooklyn.





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Deirdre Murphy
Rachel Sydlowski

August 21 – November 20, 2021
Reception: October 26, 5 – 7 p.m.
Art Alley, HUB-Robeson Center, University Park, PA

Designed by Grace Southern



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