

BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Botánica

curated by Todd von Ammon

July 13 – August 29, 2017

Opening Reception: Thursday, July 13 | 5:00–8:00 p.m

Berggruen Gallery is pleased to present *Botánica*, a group exhibition by guest curator Todd von Ammon, on view July 13 – August 29, 2017. The gallery will host an opening reception on Thursday, July 13 from 5:00–8:00 p.m. Named after the *botánica* shops of the San Francisco Mission district—purveyors of a wide variety of medicinal herbs and folk medicines—this exhibition examines the many transformations of botany in contemporary art. *Botánica* explores the curious case of the still life in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, through the lens of artists whose interpretations of this subject matter range from the traditional to the idiosyncratic. Each work in the show presents a different state of organic matter, culminating into an anti-ecosystem of sorts that highlights a wide array of distinct art taxonomies. The unique materials, techniques and histories are as varied as the number of works—from generative digital video to found street detritus to oil paint. *Botánica* intends to evoke the dizzyingly wide variety of substances and objects found within the shops from which the exhibition derives its name.

Botany in traditional art historical practice is manifested in the genre of still life painting, drawing, and later photography. The long and complex history of the still life—the rise of the Dutch still life painting tradition to symbolically communicate such themes as the brevity of life (*vanitas*), and its relative ranking by the French Academy during the seventeenth century as the lowest genre because it depicts solely inanimate objects—is simultaneously challenged and celebrated in contemporary art. A number of works in *Botánica*, such as those by John Alexander, Imogen Cunningham, Ellsworth Kelly, and Sam McKinniss, closely adhere to this long-standing practice and often directly pay homage to the iconic artists we so often associate with the genre, such as Claude Monet and Henri Fantin-Latour. Contemporary art, however, has revealed its guarantee of unpredictability and flux, and oftentimes an artwork’s quality is defined by how intrepid its challenge is to common sense and the quotidian. *Botánica* investigates the various layers and meanings of the still life, in both its traditional and contemporary forms.

According to Hakuin Ekaku, one of the most influential masters of Zen Buddhism, the aim of seeing into one’s own nature can only be fully accomplished through cutting off the root of life. The term *ikebana*, or the art of flower arrangement, literally translates to “making flowers live” through initiating the plant’s inevitable death by cutting the plant at its root. The action of the “cut” in Japanese aesthetic discourse is called *kire* and is an essential tenet of the *ikebana* practice. The plant is cut at its root and removed from the earth to be arranged and placed oftentimes in alcoves in the rooms of a house where guests are received. Somewhat antithetically, the act of killing the plant is precisely what allows its true nature to come to the fore. The *ikebana* artist brings greater truth to the plant by removing it from its earthly context. *Flowers for Africa: South Sudan* (2017), a floral bouquet installation by Kapwani Kiwanga made to commemorate the independence of that African country by reproducing a flower decoration from the 2011 ceremonies, beautifully illustrates the crossover between traditional and contemporary still life practice and *ikebana*. The work is still life experienced in the flesh, recalling the Dutch *vanitas* paintings through its literal process of decay, which takes place over the course of the exhibition’s duration. Other works featured in the exhibition, such as Ryan Foerster’s vibrant and surprisingly artful C-print photographs of decomposing compost, similarly embody the seemingly incongruous notion of beauty arising from something that fundamentally represents mortality and decay. Living plants have the extraordinary ability to capture and transmute energy into the stuff of human survival—refuse and exhaust, through a process of delicate alchemy, are regenerated into fresh air and calories. All of these reactions occur far beyond the narrow field of human perception, and thus the flower or leaf is underestimated and overlooked as the organic nuclear reactor it truly is.

10 HAWTHORNE STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94105
TEL 415 781 4629
INFO@BERGGRUEN.COM
BERGGRUEN.COM

BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

Instead, it is admired in a purely decorative sense for the deceptively simple function of emitting light along the visible spectrum. Moreover, the petal and the leaf seem to be most charming when these subatomic systems have been shut down forever.

Botánica defined refers to small stores or shops within the United States that sell herbs, candles, oils, incense, powders and other materials, often paired with ritualistic practices or blessings administered by a traditional healer, called a *curandera*, to treat physical as well as spiritual ailments. The prepackaged herbal blends that these *botánicas* dispense serve a variety of different purposes: to bring money, work or love, to ward off bad luck, to seek protection or guidance. Humankind has borrowed the leaves, roots and flowers of vegetation for millennia in order to reach higher psychic and spiritual states. It is no wonder that organisms that perform such uncanny transformations of energy can dramatically alter human perception when ingested. *Bloom #6* (2011) by Fred Tomaselli—a deliriously oscillating, psychedelic form intended to invoke the mind’s drug-altered state—and *Sunset Park* (2015) by Tom Fruin—a delicately woven quilt or flag of found plastic drug bags in incongruously cheerful colors—exemplify two ways in which contemporary artists have incorporated plants and their psychic properties into their artistic practices, giving a new layer of social commentary and meaning to the traditional “still life” work. At a time when the greenness of the world holds less promise of durability than ever before, perhaps it is a worthwhile pursuit to recall the evidence that the living flower, an energy powerhouse capable of sustaining life or transforming one’s mental state, is also a potent reminder of our mortality. It is in consideration of these attributes and abilities that lie beyond the visible spectrum that we can appreciate the plant or flower for more than its very durable charm.

Full Artist List:

Yuji Agematsu
John Alexander
Theodora Allen
Facundo Argañaraz
Ernesto Caivano
James Crosby
Imogen Cunningham
Jim Dine
Ryan Foerster
Tom Fruin
Nick Goss

Daiga Grantina
Evan Holloway
Max Hooper Schneider
Parker Ito
Rashid Johnson
Ellsworth Kelly
Kapwani Kiwanga
Henri Matisse
Sam McKinniss
Beatriz Milhazes
Donald Moffett

Daido Moriyama
Dominic Nurre
Irving Penn
Jason Rhoades
Linda Ridgway
Tabor Robak
Philip Taaffe
Fred Tomaselli
Evelyn Taocheng Wang
Donald Roller Wilson
Luiz Zerbini

Botánica, curated by Todd von Ammon, July 13 – August 29, 2017. Todd von Ammon is a gallerist and curator based in New York and currently the director of Team Gallery. Previous curated shows include *Old Black, Ghost Outfit* and *Dolores* at Team Gallery; *VBS* at the Bennington College Usdan Galleries, and *Mike* at FOURAM. von Ammon’s concurrent exhibition, *Wormwood*, is on view at the Ellis King Gallery in Dublin, Ireland. He is a member of the ICI (Independent Curators International) and serves on the organization’s benefit committee. *Botánica* is on view at 10 Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, CA 94105. Images and preview are available upon request. For all inquiries, please contact the gallery by phone (415) 781-4629 or by email info@berggruen.com.

Gallery Hours: Monday – Saturday, 10:00am – 6:00pm

10 HAWTHORNE STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94105
TEL 415 781 4629
INFO@BERGGRUEN.COM
BERGGRUEN.COM

BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

About Berggruen Gallery

John Berggruen first opened his pioneering gallery in the spring of 1970 on Grant Avenue in downtown San Francisco. Berggruen Gallery opened in its new 10,000-square-foot space at 10 Hawthorne Street, an historic three-story brick building across from the recently expanded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, on January 13, 2017. The gallery specializes in contemporary art and 20th-century American and European paintings, drawings, sculpture, and limited edition prints. The gallery exhibits the work of major American post-war artists as well as established and emerging contemporary artists, such as Alicia McCarthy, Julie Mehretu, Richard Serra, Mark Tansey, George Condo, Bridget Riley, and Tauba Auerbach. In addition, Berggruen Gallery presents curated exhibitions of historic works by artists, including those of the Bay Area Figurative movement, such as Elmer Bischoff, Alexander Calder, Willem de Kooning, Mark di Suvero, Richard Diebenkorn, Ellsworth Kelly, Henri Matisse, Georgia O'Keeffe, Nathan Oliveira, David Park, Ed Ruscha, Frank Stella, and Wayne Thiebaud.

10 HAWTHORNE STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94105
TEL 415 781 4629
INFO@BERGGRUEN.COM
BERGGRUEN.COM