

**The Hothouse Archives:
Plants, Pods and Panama Red**
November 16-18, 2018
School of Visual Arts, New York City

“Is it possible to be a revolutionary and like flowers?” asks the artist Camille Henrot in one of her recent artworks. Continuing in that vein of wonder about the revolutionary power of plants, Taryn Simon employed floral bouquets as a form of institutional critique. Both artist’s works are examples of the political and cultural implications of plants. They are signifiers for the recurring representation of plants in contemporary arts and culture.

The symbolic meaning of plants, their relevance for religion and the metaphorical provocations in the order of knowledge, culture and political power underline the role of plants as something more than passive objects. The symbolic meaning of plants changes over time, according to cultural developments. In the origins of Western thought in particular, nature has been represented both the embodiment of good and the epitome evil. In Ovid’s telling of humanity’s golden age, the Earth was an abundant source of nourishment and pleasure, while conversely in Christianity, a snake tempts Eve into eating a forbidden apple which precipitates the fall of humans from the Garden of Eden. Indeed, both of these themes became major preoccupations for Renaissance painters and signify the role nature, plants, greenery are major symbols in culture.

The signification of plants and nature becomes intensified and changes during the Industrial Revolution. In general, religious implications were discarded to favor images of plants and animals as savage entities. For example, the jungle, in *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, becomes a character of its own which expresses dark and savage force opposed to the European light and order. Human nature was characterized as a civil force while fauna and flora were seen as the wild and degenerative.

In the current climate, plants are undergoing radical changes due to environmental alterations and laboratory practices. From genetic selections to indoor farming, from foodstuffs and medicinal uses, plants are being re-evaluated as living entities. As sentient creatures they protect their own and engage in masquerading their identities. It has been noted that they are more like animals, only slower. They are sources of nourishment and wonder while at the same time have healing powers and even psychoactive properties.

This conference brings together artists, architects, art historians, gardeners, scientists, philosophers and cultural critics to discuss the role of plant life in contemporary culture.

The conference is part of the ongoing research cooperation between the BFA Fine Arts Department at School of Visual Arts in NYC and the professorship for Modern and Contemporary Arts at the Institute of Art History of the University of Graz, Austria. The conference will be held in New York City. The conference language is English.

Please note that unfortunately we can't cover travel expenses.

Please send a short CV and an abstract of not more than 600 words to

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Open Call ends: July 31, 2018

For further information please contact Gloria Houg at ghoung@sva.edu