



# PLANT CURE BROOKLYN

CENTRAL BOOKING in collaboration with Brooklyn Botanic Garden



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*front cover: Margot Glass, Dandelion 1 (detail), 2017*

*back cover: Susan Rostow, Fungi on the Wall (detail), 2019*

*opposite page: James Martin, Three Feet with Gentian (detail), 2019*

*frontispiece: Tessa Grundon, Medicine Cabinet (detail), 2019*

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# PLANT CURE/ BROOKLYN



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DESIRÉE ALVAREZ

CYNTHIA BACK

C BANGS

MARISA BENJAMIM

MARGOT GLASS

TESSA GRUNDON

JAMES MARTIN

AGNES MURRAY

MADDY ROSENBERG

SUSAN ROSTOW

SARAH STENGLE

KATE TEMPLE

AMANDA THACKRAY

MARY TING

JAMES WALSH

# PLANT CURE/ BROOKLYN

Curator: **Maddy Rosenberg**

**LIU** Brooklyn  
Humanities Gallery  
Brooklyn, New York

September 3 – December 13, 2019

## Plant Cure/ Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Conservatory Gallery  
Brooklyn, New York

March 3 – November 15, 2020

**CENTRAL BOOKING**

in collaboration with **Brooklyn Botanic Garden**



## PREFACE

When the Brooklyn Botanic Garden was founded more than a century ago, the New York City area was quickly being developed into a cityscape of buildings and paved roads. Creating a public garden was one way to ensure that some green space remained. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden has come to represent the very best in urban gardening and horticultural display, an urban botanic garden that connects people to the world of plants, fostering delight and curiosity while inspiring an appreciation and sense of stewardship of the environment. In the Garden, in its community, and well beyond, Brooklyn Botanic Garden inspires people of all ages through the conservation, display, and enjoyment of plants; with educational programs that emphasize learning by doing; and with research focused on understanding and conserving regional plants and plant communities.



Charles Stuart Gager, the first Director of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, was a man of extraordinary vision, a distinguished botanist, and a bibliophile. For Gager, assembling a great botanical library to support the historical and scientific study of plants was an integral part of building a great botanical garden. Through special endowments and generous gifts, Gager and those who followed built a collection of significant botanical and horticultural works that has few rivals.

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden Library provides reference services to home gardeners and the professional community alike. Located on the second floor of the historic McKim, Mead & White Administration Building, it is a convenient access point from which to learn more about all of the Library's collections and about the Garden's plant collections. The Library's holdings of archival records, photographs, botanical artwork, and rare books remain a priceless legacy of the garden. The non-circulating rare book collection comprises some fifteen hundred volumes from the 15th through the 20th century.

The artists from CENTRAL BOOKING spent many hours during their residencies contemplating the archival records, glass plate negatives, lantern slides, film-based negatives, botanical artwork, engraving plates, and the rare books from the library's legacy collection. The lantern slides of native plants from the Elsie May Kittredge Collection (1870-1954) and books and articles on the medicinal aspects and historical uses of a range of plants provided much of the inspiration for their projects. They were able to roam the gardens through the winter, into the spring and summer, to see the growth cycles of the medicinal plants before their eyes. The hours spent with the artists and their use of the collections were enriching for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's library staff; and the staff thanks them for honoring our unique holdings and bringing their content to light.

## CURATOR STATEMENT

The Plant Cure project began in 2017 with a collaboration of CENTRAL BOOKING and the New York Academy of Medicine in which five Artists in Residence re-researched their work at NYAM for an exhibition in CENTRAL BOOKING's Lower East Side space. Various documentation of their process was also displayed in vitrines in the NYAM library at the end of their research. Fourteen additional artists with work on the theme of medicinal plants were curated into the CENTRAL BOOKING exhibition and were involved with event programming as well. But Plant Cure was meant to be a project that literally grew from place to place to incorporate more artists, institutions, and collections into a connective thread, with each additional collaboration involving new work while evolving the work of past participants. Brooklyn Botanic Garden seemed to be the ideal next location for the project, a childhood place of exploration for Maddy Rosenberg, the curator and project organizer of CENTRAL BOOKING.

In February 2019, Desirée Alvarez, Agnes Murray, Amanda Thackray and James Walsh joined Maddy Rosenberg as Artists in Residence at Brooklyn Botanic Garden and began the research to produce work for Plant Cure/Brooklyn. They were given ongoing free access to the collections of the library as well as full rein to explore the gardens for five months. These artists were chosen for their distinctive and varied approaches to source material, the work revealing their own individual takes on the subject of medicinal plants. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden has its own history as a place of healing. Within its walls, whether it be as a warm sanctuary of research of its library during the cold winter months or the ability to follow the growth and paths from hibernation to full bloom of the plants of choice, the artists delved deeply. This process and research will be emphasized later in an exhibition in the Conservatory Gallery at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, scheduled for the spring of 20.



For the exhibition at the unique glass enclosed Humanities Gallery, one that itself emulates a conservatory, a selection of the final work resulting from the residencies of these artists joins a conversation with the work from ten artists from the original project: Cynthia Back, C Bangs, Marisa Benjamim, Margot Glass, Tessa Grundon, James Martin, Susan Rostow, Sarah Stengle, Kate Temple, and Mary Ting.

The installations of Desirée Alvarez are where the poet and visual artist meet in a layering of space, as each discrete cloth page informs the next. C Bangs combines fragments of text with carefully painted images, as she further explores her interest in the abortifacient properties of more plants than imagined, while the handmade instrument of Sarah Stengle plays a sweet rue-ful melody even when it stands on display, as it, too, works in a similar way to coax nature. James Walsh's delicate portrayals of Sassafras through pressed and mounted specimens, delves into the history of its varied drug and medicinal uses with a juxtaposition of the accounts of specialists and early explorers. But it is Marisa Benjamim in the television version of her "restaurant" who serves plant based food that is not only good for you, but is a tasty treat.

Kate Temple has given herself a yearly task of accumulating plant and mineral life that she treads on, spreading them into a random circle and interpreting them keenly. The skill of Margot Glass to portray the delicacy of plants is more than mere rendering, she elicits a fascination for each petal and leaf from us equal to her own. Cynthia Back's carved panels form more than a lovely decorative floral border as a deeper purpose is embedded, as the prints of James Martin also hang vertically, mimicking the body that is its source material, while engaging us with its rich combinations of body and plants entwined. Tessa Grundon hangs streams

of the unwanted plant foreigners, indicative of the invasive species innocently brought over to the continent within the medicine cabinets of immigrants, as an echo of the politics of today. For Amanda Thackray, the winding honeysuckle plant more literally evokes a narrative of medicinal help in an invasive species, one that stems from her childhood. Mary Ting explores the dark industry behind the luxury botanical medicine whose rarity is ironically leading towards its own extinction.

The sculptures of Agnes Murray have been inspired by the 19th century scientific plant models used for study purposes to formulate her own aesthetically appealing variations. Maddy Rosenberg's quest was to connect with indigenous plants of Brooklyn to shed light on curative properties of both plant and place, with lantern slides growing into the shadows of a lantern artist's book. Susan Rostow, in her determination to combine a recent foray into animation with her sculptural book objects, finds a solution natural to her by making it just another mushrooming collage element.

And though we may enjoy the aesthetics and the fragrances of many of these plants studied, explored and reinterpreted in the many dimensions of art, there is much beneath the beauty. Ever present is the knowledge of the danger that, depending on the dose: what can cure, can also kill.

—*Maddy Rosenberg*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/CURATOR, CENTRAL BOOKING

2019



**DESIRÉE ALVAREZ**

1

*I Planted Magnolias with My Mother*, 2019

installation, ink with hand-pressed woodcut and poem by artist on fabric  
 dimensions variable, 109 x 102 inches



2 **CYNTHIA BACK**

*Dandelion Border*, 2019

reduction woodcut, sekishu paper mounted on Rives BFK  
29.5 x 11.5 inches



**C BANGS**

3

*DNAabort*, 2017

acrylic with mica & colored pencil with mixed media with hand colored frame

17.4 x 13.4 inches



4 **MARISA BENJAMIM**  
*TV Show: Floristaurent, 2018*  
video, sound



**MARGOT GLASS**

5

*Dandelion Field Samples, 2019*

graphite on panel

dimensions variable: approximately 18 x 24 inches





6 **TESSA GRUNDON**

*Remediation (medicinal invasives)*, 2019

installation - Asiatic Bittersweet roots, poisonous rhetoric, invasive “weeds”

36 x 96 x 36 inches, variable





**JAMES MARTIN**  
*Knees and Ginger*, 2019  
digital print with monotype  
10 x 14 inches



8 **AGNES MURRAY**  
*Pelargonium "Shrubland Rose,"* 2019  
watercolor on Arches paper  
22 x 30 inches



**MADDY ROSENBERG**

*Urban Medicine*, 2019

lantern artist's book, digital print, mulberry paper, LED

4.75 x 6.25 inches



10 **SUSAN ROSTOW**

*Fungi on the Move*, 2019

mixed media digital frame and stop frame animation

15 x 14 inches



**SARAH STENGLE**

*Rue/d, 2019*

medicinal rue, wire hanger, resin, wood, harpstrings  
31 x 10.5 x 2.75 inches



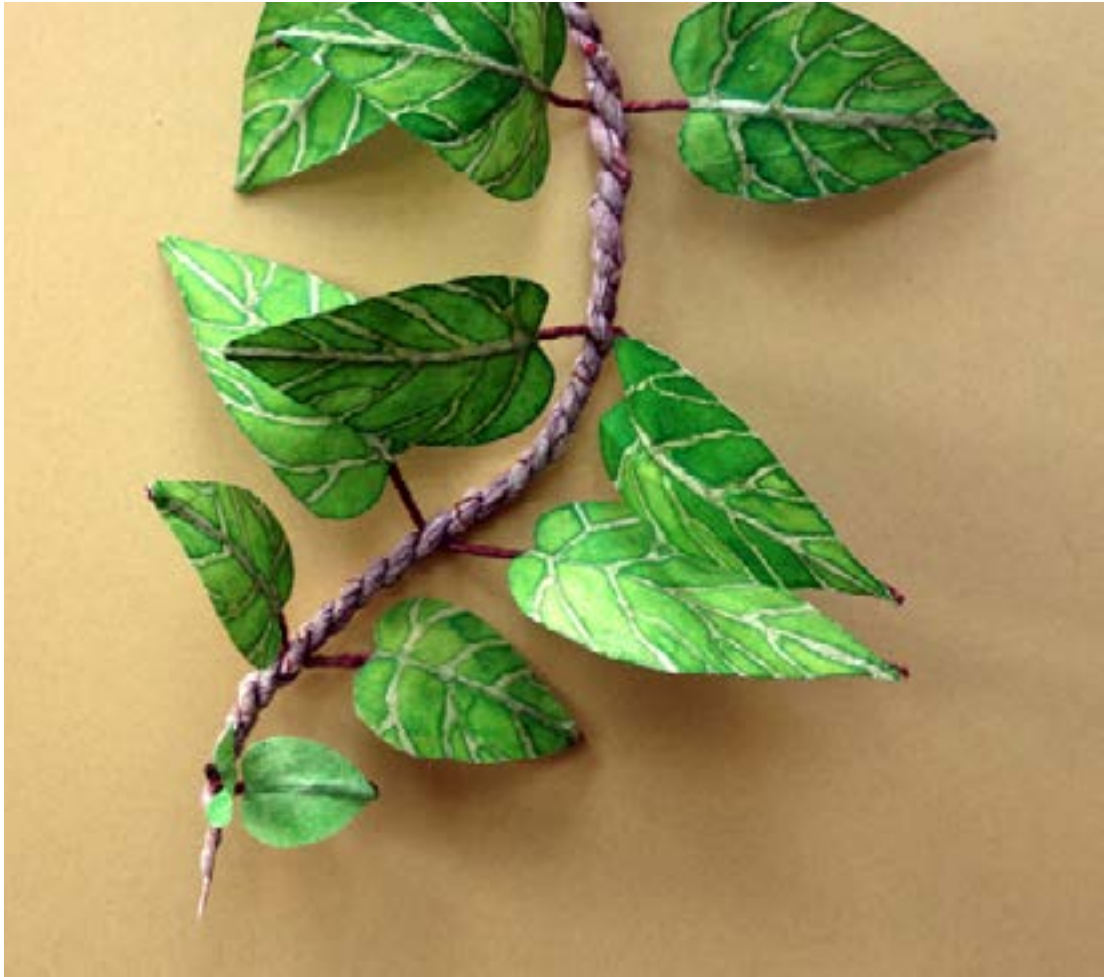
I 2 **KATE TEMPLE**

*walk drawing no. 5, Goose Pond, NH, 2012, 2013*

graphite on paper

36 x 48 inches





AMANDA THACKRAY

*Duality*, 2019

ink and watercolor on Japanese paper, steel wire, thread, wax, borosilicate glass  
installation dimensions variable



14 **MARY TING**

*Born Still/Terror Nights (detail), 2019*

ink mounted drawings, masonite, paper, ginseng, valerian root

15.5 x 17 x 4 inches





**JAMES WALSH** 15  
*Sassafras*, 2019  
 pen and plant specimens  
 12 x 18 inches





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