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STATEMENT

*Stilleven Series*

*Stilleven*, the Dutch word for still life, also translates as “inanimate object” or “immobile nature.” In 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch still life painting, the elements in each composition originated as life studies done throughout the year: tulips from early spring, hollyhocks in high summer, grapes in the autumn. These were then combined into a miscellany that could never exist in reality. In these paintings flowers in a state of perfection do not conform to time or season. Instead, they break that bond between humans and nature, and coexist in a sovereign fantasy world. The “natural” is imposed on “nature” and time is permanently suspended.

If deconstructed, my work can also be seen as a visual journal of separate studies. My still life compositions are entirely constructed, with very few objects taken from the same photograph. They include images of reptiles taken at the Vilas Zoo, cacti at the UW greenhouse, and birds at the Olbrich Garden conservatory. There are taxidermy specimens from Aldo Leopold Nature Center, rotting apples from an orchard in High Falls, NY, toads from a nature preserve in Minnesota. I found the marble specimen on the Appalachian Trail in Maine, and the lady slippers on Wisconsin’s Ice Age Trail eleven years later.

I organize my library of snapshots by their season, subject, and predominant features. I have nearly 10,000 photos of wild mushrooms alone, broken down into categories for easier access. Taking pictures illuminates my position within the natural world while documenting the ordinary and the astonishing. This photographic journal-keeping forms an arbitrary, asymmetrical time chart that is deeply resonant for me and key to my understanding of what it means to be alive and of this world.

Early still life painting mimics but parodies our sense of the real world. Naturalism is forged with illusionism. Similarly, the “painting in” of shadows and highlights in these photographs creates an artificial atmosphere; simulated surfaces speak to the type of illusionism that attempts to “fool one’s eye.” In these staged environments, a narrative can be implied from what is joined together.

These photographs also express a personal lament and discomfort with death. They imply the fragility of natural forms in an ailing ecosystem. They include that which is wilting and that which has died. They include dirt. At times they are tinged with melancholy, at other times a wistful romanticism.