



JULIA WHITNEY BARNES

STATEMENT

I am most interested in creating objects that feel both beautiful and mysterious. I want each painting to be familiar yet slightly outside of time. These works symbolize resilience to me. I want the content of the work to be a powerful experience, not only because of the historical moment in which they were made, but in that the process speaks to a kind of gutting and reconstituting. There's an object, then a ghost of the object, and then the reassertion of the object. The final work isn't the object, but instead, a record of my will to bring it back. And that is more satisfying, more hopeful, than had the original object appeared back on the paper.

In my works on paper, I approach each growing thing with equal importance regardless of whether it is a weed or rare species, wildflower or cultivated flower. I combine several species into single compositions, often to the point where the species of plants depicted are open to interpretation. I create unique blue and white cyanotype prints on thick sheets of cotton paper and then paint in many layers of watercolor, gouache and ink.

Cyanotype is a camera-less photographic printing process invented in 1842 by scientist and astronomer, Sir John Herschel, which produces a cyan-blue print when a chemistry-coated surface is exposed to sunlight. The first artist (who was also a botanist) to use it was Anna Atkins. She is cited as the very first female photographer (though made without the use of a camera) and her family was friends with William Henry Fox Talbot (credited with inventing photography) and Atkins learned techniques from him and then made her own path. She published a book *Photographs of British Algae* in 1843.

Through my use of this medium, I manipulate physical impressions of plants grown locally in my Hudson Valley garden and other nearby areas, along with intricately cutout photographic negatives. Each selected flower or plant is preserved through a pressing process in which I dissect and shape each form—akin to a specimen from a natural history museum—and then lay everything out in massive flat files in my attic studio. Given that sunlight starts the exposure process with cyanotype chemistry, I carefully arrange elaborate compositions at night and utilize long exposures under natural or UV light to create the final prints.