

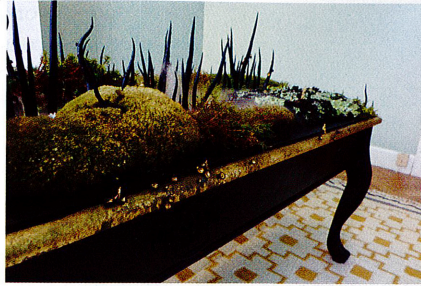
LUSH LIFE

Lamont Gallery • Exeter, NH • exeter.edu • Through May 2, 2015

If art is about “nature concentrated,” as Balzac maintained, the Lamont Gallery’s *Lush Life* exhibition reminds us that nature is not so much idealized as haunted by the human mind.

The eight artists in this exhibition (including the three-person team of Jung Mi Lee, Jon Sakata and John Ellis) explore entanglements of biology and personhood in a range of media: digital photo-imaging, fiber art, ceramics, oil painting and a cross-genre installation conflating still life with living organisms. Much of the work effectively questions the division between natural and artificial.

In a wedding of forest floor and furniture, an antique coffee table erupts in lichens, mosses and fungi in biologist/artist Natalie Andrew’s *Hidden Marriage*. The title actually references the scientific



Natalie Andrew, *Hidden Marriage*, 2012, mosses, fungi, lichens, H0 figurines, gold leaf, polymer clay, water, foggers, felt, wood, 25 x 50 x 20”.

classification of the spore-producing *cryptogams* (Greek: *kryptos*, “hidden,” plus *gameein*, “to marry”). But as elements proliferate on closer inspection—nail-like spikes, glitter, plastic beads and gems, miniature gold figure and, periodically, an obscuring veil of mist—the

eponymous “marriage” remains elusive.

In Laura Morrison’s “Regeneration” series, fiber sculptures embody the fantastic flora of a post-human planet. Her pods and “time capsules” are the imagined products of nature’s future regeneration after we’ve successfully destroyed our species along with our natural environment.

Bear Kirkpatrick’s photographs combine nature, art and portraiture in darkly beautiful

fusions. His striking, ambiguous portraits emerge from painted “costumes” incorporating actual and painted leaves and mosses that dissolve into painterly floralesque backgrounds.

Sean Beavers uses hyper-realistic landscapes and still lifes to contemporize the Dutch baroque tradition of *vanitas* painting, using natural imagery as metaphors for time and human mortality.

Gloria Calderón-Sáenz’s textured paintings imagine rivers as sites of abundant nourishment and ecological collapse, while the intricacy and apparent anarchy of climate systems inform a site-specific installation by pianists-artists Jung Mi Lee and Jon Sakata in collaboration with architect John Ellis.

Taken as a whole, the show proposes that nature, properly “concentrated” through the thoughtful lens of contemporary multidisciplinary practices, remains rich and fertile ground for wide-ranging reflection on humanity and human nature.

—Christopher Volpe