

Artist Statement: Julya Hajnoczky

My artistic practice seeks to engage in a critical examination of human relationships with the natural world and how ecosystems are changing in our current era, by imagining and creating possible near-futures and future landscapes. Adopting and adapting the practices of scientific investigators, my multidisciplinary practice involves collecting materials following ethical foraging practices (plants, feathers, bones, fungi and lichen specimens, for example) from natural environments, for use as raw material in making work, and as reference material. I spend time investigating ecosystems and the connections within them, particularly via site visits and consultation with scientists and lay experts. I then produce large-scale still life images using a high-resolution scanner as my camera: the specimens collected during site visits are arranged on the glass, composing intimate portraits of ecosystems. While some images are idiosyncratic, made up of intuitively selected specimens based on my own observations of the site, other images are composed using materials selected based on guidance from local residents, reflecting their knowledge and familiarity with that specific landscape. The photographs, printed at a very large scale, allow the viewer to get an unusually close look at each object. The images are elegiac, dark, mourning, representing not contemporary specimens but rather, recontextualized, some last remaining pieces of a fragmented world, floating in the void, evoking a sort of future nostalgia. I am continually seeking out new ways of exploring the critical issues of biodiversity loss and climate change, calling into question the efficacy of traditional scientific methodologies in generating and transmitting knowledge.

The concepts that I seek to explore with my work – encouraging a sense of wonder, interest, and respectful stewardship with regards to the natural environment – are becoming more and more relevant. It is with increasing unease that I observe developments in human behaviour at home and abroad, at the individual and institutional level, that impact negatively on the continued functioning of the complex ecosystems that we humans are part of. I feel that one of my roles as an artist is to interpret events around me and draw attention to matters of political, social, and environmental importance, and so my artistic practice aims to cultivate a deep attention to the details and intricacies of natural ecosystems in people who otherwise take no notice, and to encourage rethinking human relationships with the natural world. My pieces attempt to frame the work of plants and animals in terms that are easier for humans to understand, and potentially empathize or identify with. I hope to inspire a sense of wonder or fascination, and encourage the viewer to consider the energy and resources that go into the constant cycle of building and decay in complex environments and ecosystems.