



HIBERNA FLORES

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

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LAURIE TENNENT, PHOTOGRAPHY / LISA WAUD, INSTALLATION

CURATED BY DICK GOODY

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“A rose is a rose is a rose ...” Gertrude Stein’s semiotic-inflected phrase beautifully extrapolates on the fact that a rose is an indivisible aesthetic cul-de-sac, a fundamental adorable form. This intimates that the next best thing to a living rose is a picture of one. But what the picture actually reveals is the lack because, like a portrait, it is a memorial of sorts. The cyclical scientific *raison d’être* of a bloom is reproduction. In the wild, flowers open seasonally. In winter, they turn to dust. All we can do is commemorate them in pictures or verse, until spring.

For 30 years, Laurie Tennent has been faithfully making photographs of flowers. Her clinical approach is unaffected by adornment or artifice, owing more to the pioneers of botanical illustration than to the orchestration of the material. The consistency of her oeuvre is striking. The large scale of her photographs, the science of digital photography and the dispassionate impartiality of the manner of the capture of her images engender an extreme level of intimacy and realism in these works. Her quasi-scientific pictures scan the surface textures of the foreground like a satellite mapping territory. The remainder, anything that is not on the reproduced surface, is lost in the deep outer space of a dense black background. Seen together, her images are so coherent that they could be part of an image bank – that of an official government repository of taxonomic botanical illustrations. Necessarily, this would be implicitly impractical because of their panoramic scale. These blooming behemoths and their voluptuousness are sanguine. The blush of

indiscretion wells up as if these reproductive organs, these shameless botanical performers, are purveying sexual explicitness; which is, after all, what flowers must do. It is not that they are erotic; their excessive use of foreground color and display, their prolific promiscuous preying upon our senses, is so alarming because it is so revealing yet remains utterly unembellished.

The poetry, the beauty, the allure of flowers is compressed into their short-lived perfection; their fleeting presence is part of their magnetism. Their poised functionality as receptors for pollinators is all-encompassing. Immaculate visually encoded landing pads, only their winged visitors comprehend their inscrutable methodology. But biological expediency is largely lost to us in our contemplation of them for they exist most powerfully in our imagination. In our mind’s eye, they are synonyms for desire, love and paradoxically, death because their allure is inextricably linked to their certain demise; so brief is their floral presence. Once fertilized, everything goes to seed and we are left to await the next growing season. Flowers truly exist mostly in our memory. A poignantly discovered pressed flower, hidden in the ancient leaves of a long-shelved book, resonates because of its intoxicating archival trace back to its once living existence.

When 17th-century Dutch still life painters, like Pieter Claesz, began painting symbolically charged yeasty hunks of bread, oysters weeping onto pewter, sliced cascading lemon rinds, extinguished candles, etc., in counterpoint,



fully-formed lush flower paintings appeared as a foil against these dominant somberly prescribed *natures mortes*. Compositions by the likes of Rachel Ruysch, against a jet-black ground, flexed in full arrangement, were an amulet – an antidote for winter and thoughts of extinction.

In parallel, more scientific botanical renderings began appearing in the 18th century proliferated via printmaking. The high point may be the sequence of books named *Flora Batvia* by the Dutch agronomist and botanist Jan Kops, which first appeared in installments in 1800. A hundred years later, German biologist Ernst Haeckel created flower and animal illustrations that were more mannered, virtual cabinets of curiosities in their ordered, hyper-balanced compositions. Today they appear like premonitions of surrealism, as if Haeckel were choreographing the perfection of nature. Tennent's photographs align with his illustrations because of the stark formalism of their dark backgrounds and the economy of their shallow depth of field and surface-oriented presentation.

Yet her work is much more hyperrealist, given that she hones in on a monolithic bloom rather than a gridded collection of them. Her scrutiny of the image is unrelenting and has nothing to do with making comparisons to other similar species. The extreme scale of her work allows us to see close-up all the details and intricacies. Here we see parallels with the flourish of the Baroque, both in terms of the grandeur of the work and its innate ornateness. As the textures and patterns reveal themselves, all the tendencies of nature, modeled by elements like cell shapes and fractals, begin to emerge like the repeated melodies and

harmonies of a concerto. As we look further, the rhythm of nature asserts itself in the engulfing darkness of her manufactured surrounding jet-black universe.

The works have such authority that they resemble samples for a botanical ark. They remind us too of the vulnerability of nature and the excessive rate of botanical extinction in the world's unguarded sanctuaries. They are their own representatives in the court of natural history, vying for the chance to make a case within the environmental debate. They are images of the dead, before they disappear – funereal flowers, mocking the banality of industrial stupidity and malice. A rose is a rose, but these subversive images remind us of our own enfeeblement. Blooms, even though they are ephemeral, have an eternal pull. Plants existed long before animals, and in these Darwinian dog days, they are models for success and fecundity that will exist long after we have exited this hothouse planet.

Unlike introspective Dutch still life paintings, Tennent's mural photographs offer no symbolic judgment. They are metonyms of flowers, fragile and vulnerable, yet somehow resilient and formidable because their life force engenders seeds, which ensures longevity.

In this exhibition, the signified and signifier share the same stage. However, if we consider a photograph to be a signifier, we can discard the signified altogether. Yet if we want to understand the significance of flowers, we might consider another voyage, one into the waters of epistemology. On the one hand,



we know that flowers are biological engines designed to facilitate pollination. But on the other hand, any journey into what is signified by a flower soon becomes ideological and subjective. Here, simply put, larger than life images of flowers work the same room as occupied by the more potent real thing.

Lisa Waud, the founder of Pot & Box, creates spectacular floral installations that have been a part of our reimagining of how living things change the context of locale and the repurposing of material. For example, her *Flower House Detroit* installation (2015), transformed an abandoned Detroit home and gave it new life and focus by adorning the entire property with American-grown blooms. In the context of this exhibition, Waud's ephemeral floral workings, in midwinter, like those at the house project, give us succor and comfort. They are visceral, aromatic and physical. Their engineering, appearance and trappings are at once instantly appealing. Peak-time flowers are powerful, ostentatious and about as absolute in an ideological Kantian aesthetic sense as one could hope for. Her arrangements also place a lens on the difference between the meaning and sensations of a real flower and a depiction of one. In this context, they focus our senses on the relationship between life and art. This exhibition also ties these two things together into a singular experience.

Hiberna Flores fully embraces the German term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total artwork. It embodies the idea of creating an overarching environment or an inclusive artistic synthesis, in this case between the living flowers and the represented photographs. It provides the context and armature for the

exhibition's dynamic installation. It is comprehensive artwork. The triad of art, imitation and life cycle along in unison. One's perception of the nature of an image shifts in the context of seeing both image and object in the same room. See this exhibition on opening day, and Waud's arrangements are vehicles of allurements and enchantment. Tennent's authoritative photographs in this context become static fixed specimens, under glass, almost like sarcophagi. See it three weeks later and the context turns apex-over-base. The dying, decaying flowers become positively desiccated, but the photographs emit a powerful fecundity like massive sybaritic pylons.

Photographs preserve blooms at their peak, but live flowers themselves are mortal organisms on a scale sliding towards decay. Initially, their grandiloquent arrangements are a victory dance, but by-and-by, this contextual semiotic tango between them and their indexed photographic siblings slows to a barely rhythmic largo. This tension between object and imitation, signified and signifier, life and art, is the epistemological fulcrum feeding the anxiety surrounding the living and the dead. These polar opposites occupy the same space in an elastic shifting transitional interplay between the joy of existence and the grief of memorialization, which is in essence at the core of our preoccupation with the meaning of a photograph of the living, soon to become the dead.

– **Dick Goody**, curator

Lotus, 2004, 40 x 30 inches





Deppea Splendens, 2016, 30 x 50 inches

Tulips, 2010, 36 x 50 inches (right)







Oriental Poppy, 2014, 30 x 60 inches



White Tree Peony, 2014, 40 x 72 inches



Ranunculus, 2013, 48 x 69 inches



Peony, 2016, 28 x 50 inches



Striped Peony
Parrot Tulip
Pink Ranunculus

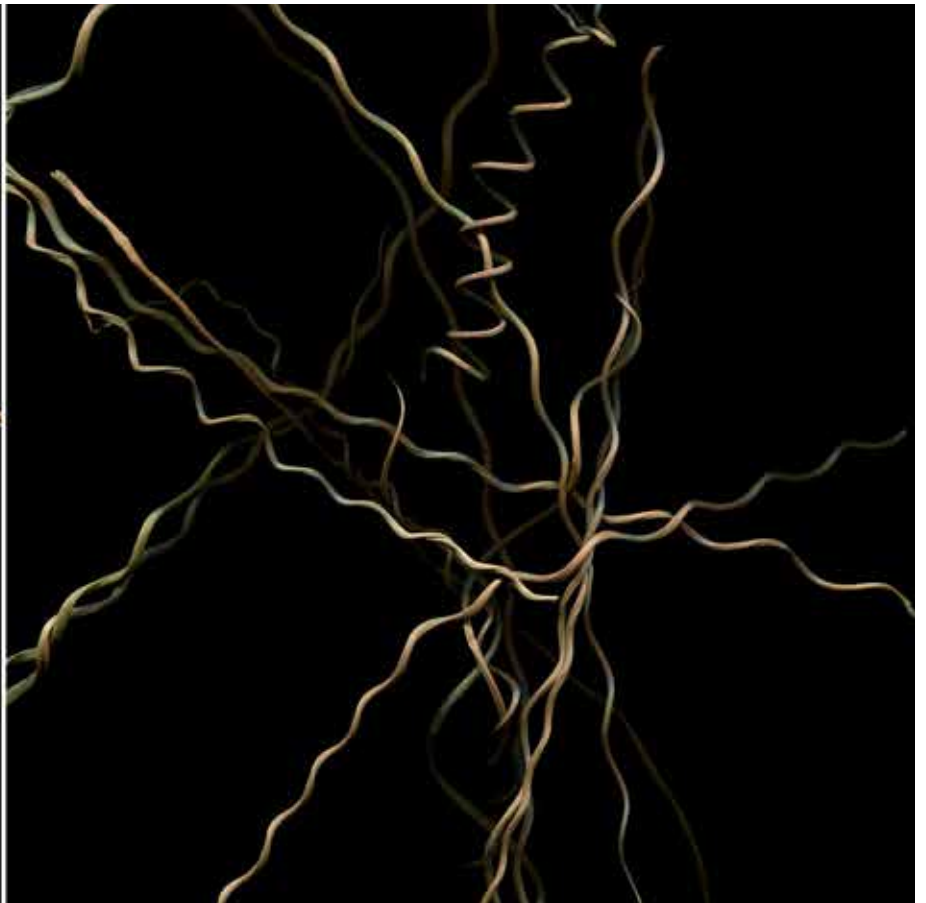
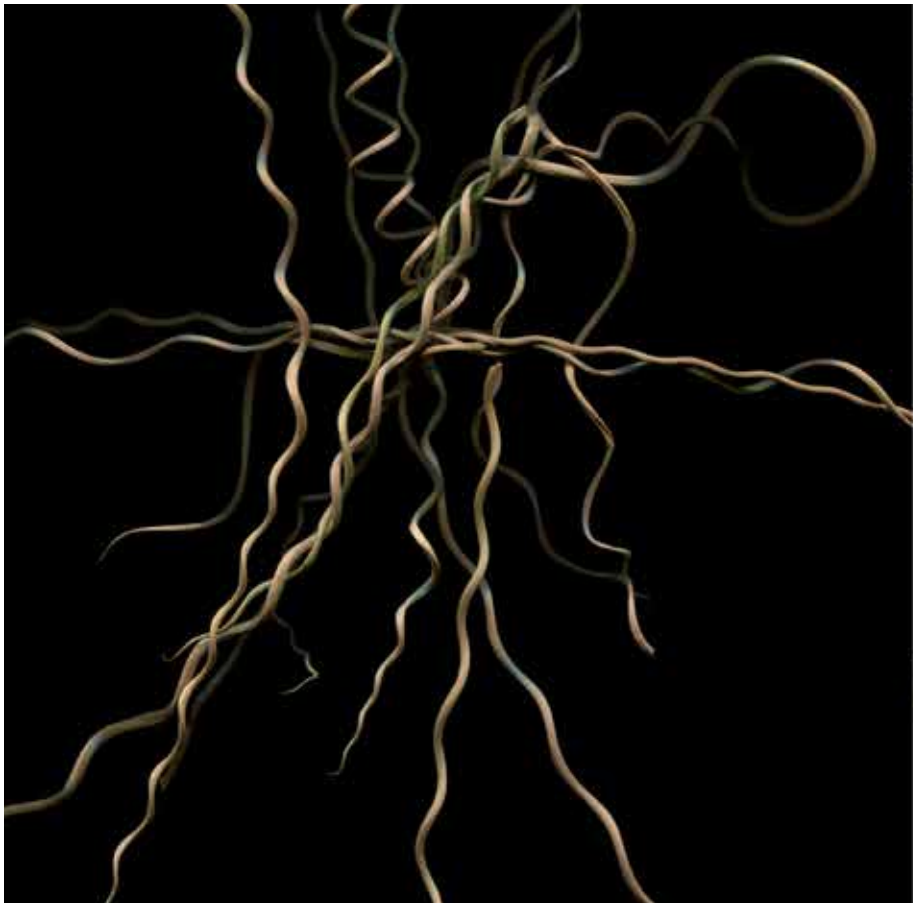
Oriental Poppy Blossom
Pink Peony
Purple Iris

Peach Iris
Yellow Ranunculus
Orange Dahlia

2016, 24 x 24 inches each







Calliandra, 2016, 40 x 60 inches (page 18-19)

Curry Grass I & II, 2012, 24 x 24 inches (top)

Columbine Study I & II, 2012, 24 x 24 inches (below)



Flower Cones, 2013, 27 x 80 inches

Stringy Pinecones, 2013, 27 x 80 inches





Astrantia, 2015, 35 x 60 inches



Gladiola, 2005, 50 x 36 inches



Veronica, 2013, 40 x 40 inches



Red Velvet Echeveria, 2016, 40 x 68 inches



Kalanchoe, 2013, 40 x 60 inches







Echeveria, 2013, 64 x 43 inches (pages 26-27)





Giant Fern I, II, & III, 2016, 40 x 180 inches (pages 28-30)



Persicaria Shoots, 2015, 40 x 35 inches



Nepenthes, 2016, 45 x 30 inches

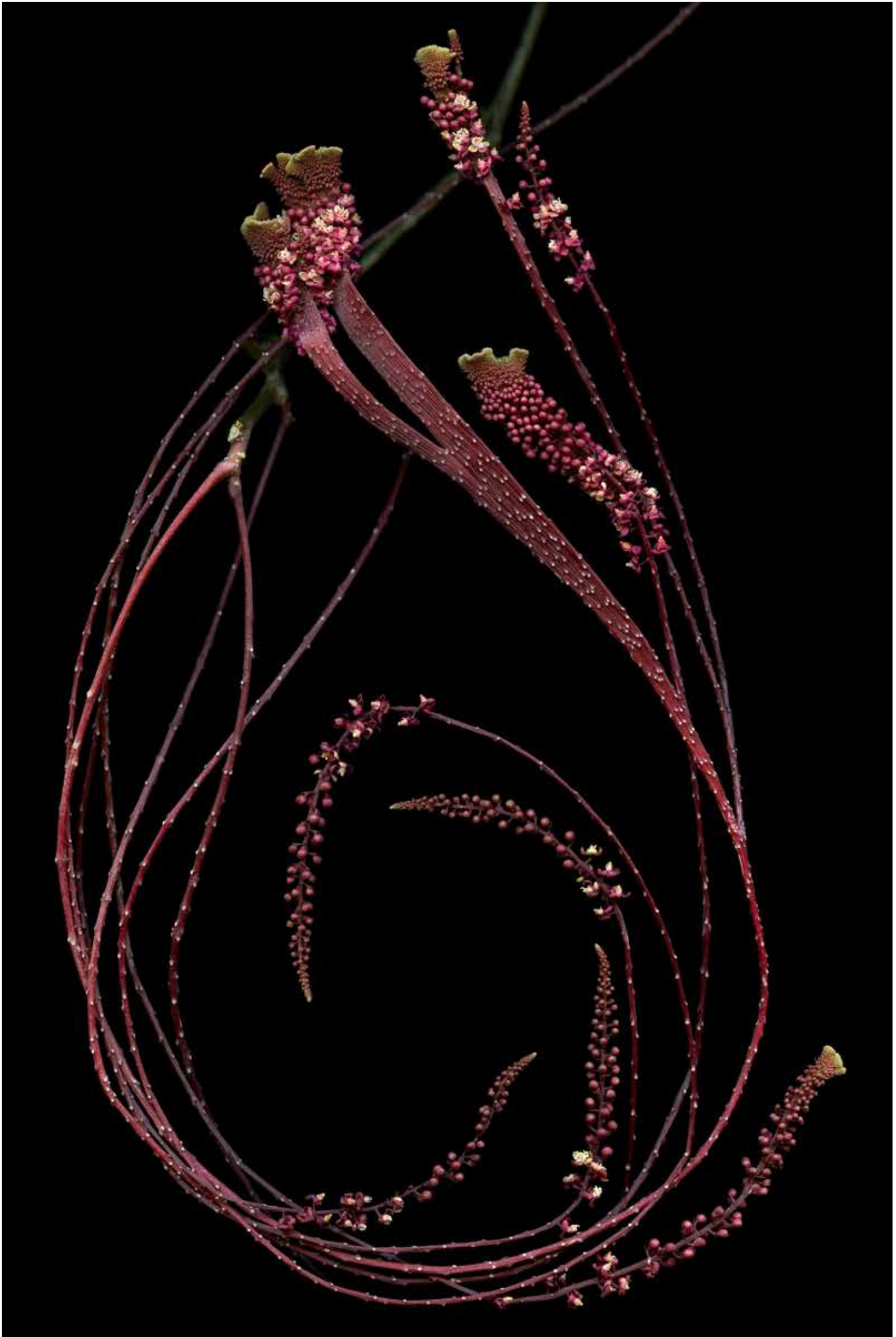




Desmanthus, 2015, 36 x 70 inches



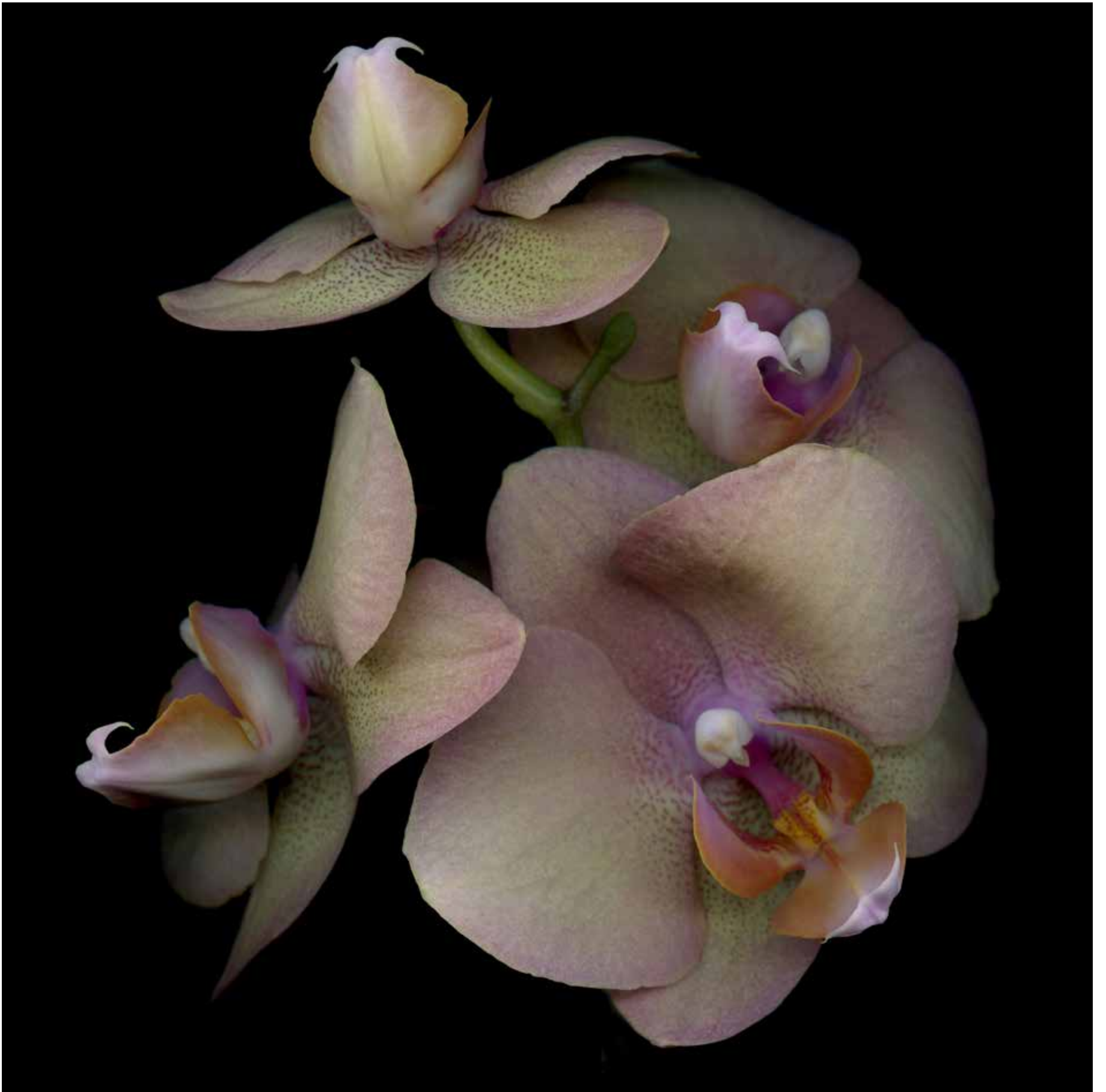
Buddleja, 2016, 45 x 30 inches



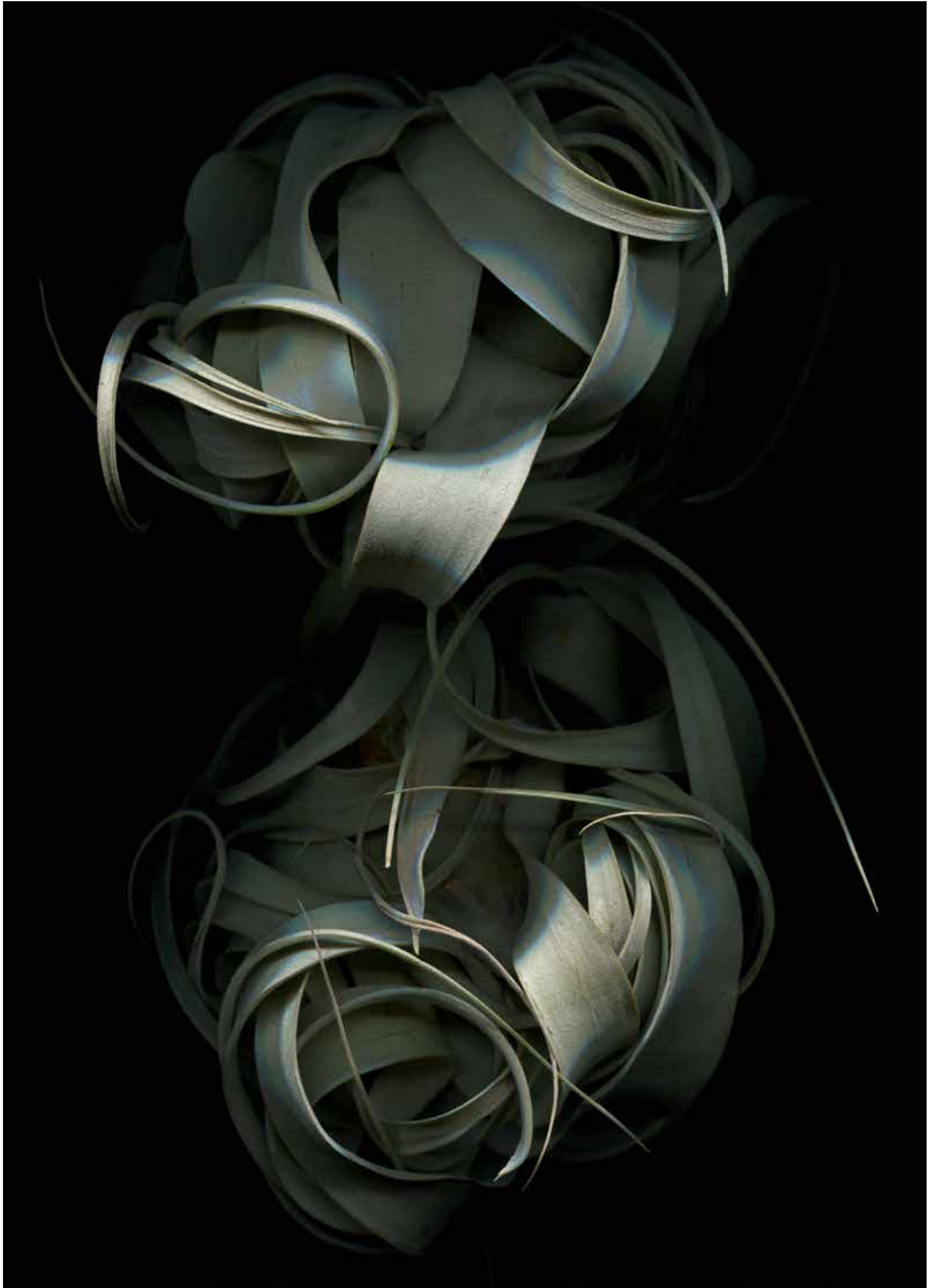
Trichostigma, 2016, 45 x 30 inches



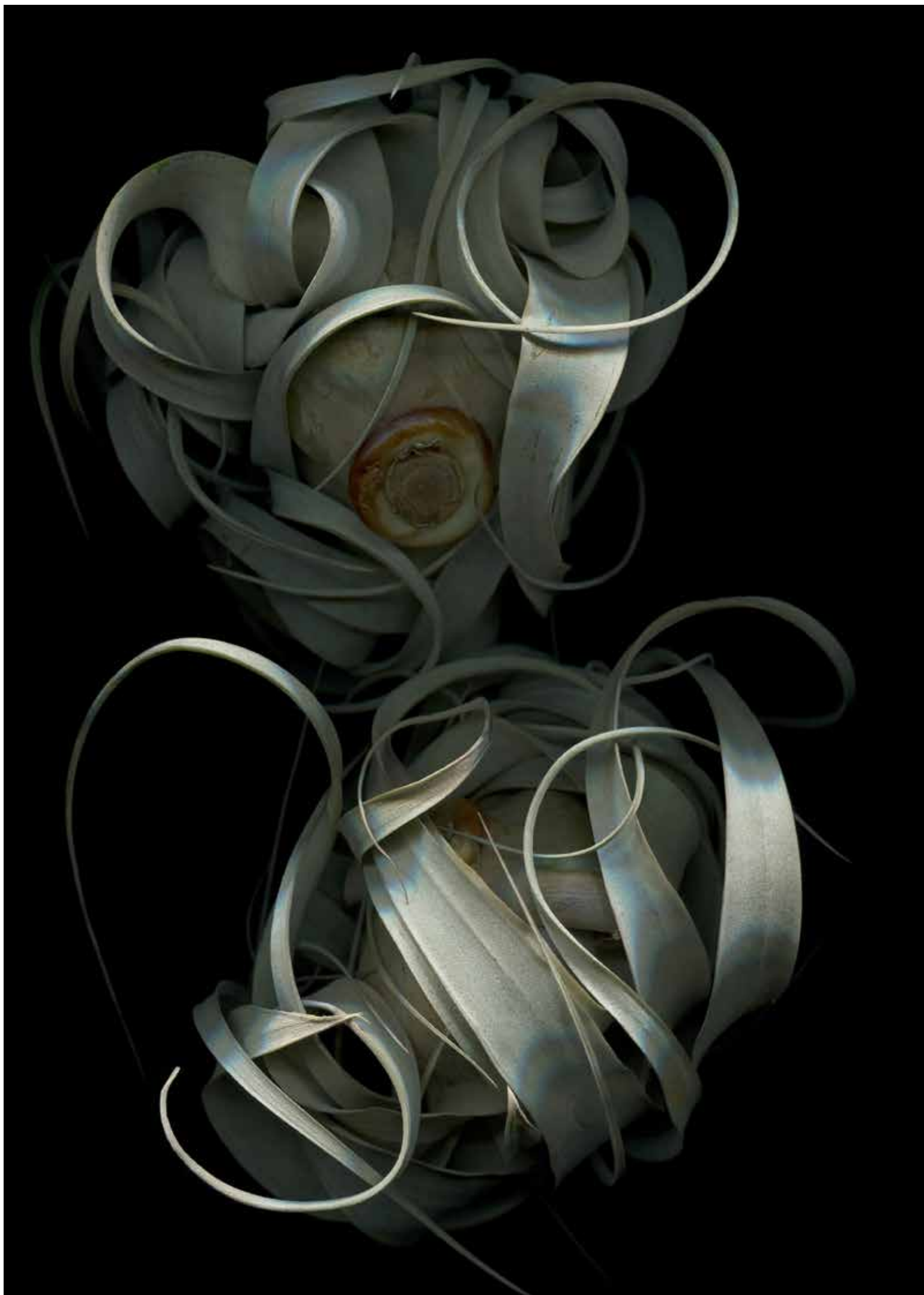
Icelandic Poppies, 2014, 60 x 40 inches



Moth Orchid, 2015, 40 x 40 inches



Epiphyte I, 2013, 43 x 60 inches



Epiphyte II, 2013, 43 x 60 inches



Trollius, 2013, 30 x 50 inches



Passion Flower, 2011, 40 x 50 inches



Croton Leaves, 2013, 36 x 50 inches



Milkweed, 2005, 35 x 60 inches



Bat Flower, 2016, 35 x 40 inches

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ARTIST BIOS

LAURIE TENNENT

Laurie Tennent is an American photographer known for her distinctive, dramatic botanical images. Tennent is represented by galleries internationally and her work is part of many public and private collections including, Detroit Institute of Arts, Kresge Foundation, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection, Chicago Botanic Garden, The Mira Goddard Collection of Photography at Ryerson University in Toronto and Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. She holds a BFA from the College for Creative Studies in Detroit and has had a commercial photography studio for 30 years. Learn more at laurietennentbotanicals.com.

LISA WAUD

Based in Detroit, Michigan, Lisa Waud is the founder and owner of Pot & Box, a floral design and horticultural decor studio. Pot & Box will celebrate its 10th anniversary in February 2017 and has become a well-known and sought-after design studio for floral event decor and botanical installations in the Detroit area. Learn more about Pot & Box at potandbox.com.

Waud is also the creator and producer of *Flower House*, a contemporary floral installation that took place October 16 – 18, 2015 filling an abandoned Detroit house with American-grown fresh flowers and living plants. The project brought together 37 designers, more than 100 volunteers, and 3,400 visitors for its three-day exhibition. The event received international media attention, including the *New York Times* and *Vogue Portugal*. Learn more about flower house online at theflower.house.

Detroit Flower Week, a *Flower House*-inspired design conference, was founded and produced by Waud. The event took place during the one-year anniversary of the installation and presented more than 30 lectures and workshops about floral design and botanical inspiration. The gathering culminated with a dinner for more than 175 guests in the Detroit Public Library set under a glorious 2500-square-foot floral canopy. Learn more about Detroit Flower Week online at detroitflowerweek.info.



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Clematis Achenes, 2016, 40 x 36 inches (on back cover)

