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Reframing Art with Nature: Flowers, People, and Art in Bloom

Abstract: In extending Bernard Stiegler's conceptualizations of life as the economy of death and Alexander Marshack's historical tracings of early-human artifacts in relation to flowers, I strive to situate and read flowers as media that they carry an embedded history and infrastructure that reflects and challenges the anthropocentrism that has cultivated, commodified, and curated blooms throughout time. In looking to theorists such as Donna Haraway and Jane Bennett, I study a specific event in which flowers are presented to the public as art: the North Carolina Museum of Art's Art in Bloom. Art in Bloom offers and sustains a complex media ecology, where paintings and sculptures readily and more permanently adorn the gallery spaces, living blooms are used as accompanying pieces of floral art for four days a year, text embeds all signifying information through the museum, money gains admittance to the space, and visitors experience the collective forces of mediation – and contribute to it by documenting their experience through personal digital photography. Such a study of flowers as both media and art must simultaneously recognize the humanist structures blooms are cultivated and commodified within, emphasizing Art in Bloom as a prime instance in which the tensions surrounding nature, gender, art, and media collide – and where traditional perceptions and understandings of what constitutes art is deconstructed and reverted for the human-oriented benefit and economic gains.

Keywords: flowers; natural media; art; museum; gender; culture; art museum; Art in Bloom.

> But the sun was shining, and some of the people in the world had been left alive, and it was doubtful whether the ridiculousness of man would ever completely succeed in destroying the world – or, in fact, the basic equanimity of the least and commonest flower: for would its kind not come up again in the spring? come up, if necessary, among, between, or out of – beastly inconvenient! – the smashed corpses lying in strict composure, in that hush infallible and sincere.
> And was not this something to be thankful for?
> Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*[1]

[1] Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha: A Novel* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1993 [1953]), 179.

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In my garden right now, two lone dahlias have survived the tirade of Carolina squirrels harvesting my bulbs. One bloom is already disintegrating: the outer petals look weathered and decayed. As soon as it arrived, it began depreciating. Their petals will brown, crust, fall, and decompose into the soil they draw nutrients from now. The very matter of the flowers, from stem to leaves to the very pollen it offers, will return to the soil it sprouted from. Winter will bring dormancy to the bulb that will revive it. Perhaps it will last another year without squirrels harvesting it. Perhaps it will bloom again. Perhaps it will not. But it is this very temporality that brings about its relevance: the death of the flower is the media magic of the flower. And yet, while we too will rot and return to the earth, these flowers and their natural world may survive and live beyond our individual lives.

We living creatures are obsessed and guided with death. In tracing our ultimate perceptions of time and memory, Stiegler emphasizes that life becomes the economy of death due to our constant awareness of ephemerality and mortality, as further emphasized by technics in of themselves.[2] Our looming death, and awareness of such, prescribes us with a sense of time as shaped by our finite being and technological environments. As such, I see that flowers serve as a mirror through which humans identify and grapple with their own inevitable mortality and finitude.

This concern, wonder, and tension over our mortality – and the relics that relay this – have been a great focus of much research. Juxtaposing my dahlia observations, Alexander Marshack situates prehistoric hominid token creation and artifacts within an understanding of "magic": "At that time the animal images were interpreted as hunting magic, and it was suggested that they were used by our apparently crude ancestors in primitive ritual to ensure the supply of food."[3] I adopt Marshack's historical and archeological framework of media, where we can perhaps study flowers as magic, art, and decoration – situating flowers as media that they carry an embedded history and infrastructure that reflects and challenges the anthropocentrism that has cultivated, commodified, and curated blooms throughout time.

In further complicating Stiegler's theoretical work on technics and Marshack's historical tracings and identifications of early-human artifacts and these frameworks in relation to flowers, I look to theorists such as Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett, and John Durham Peters, among many others, in studying a specific event in which flowers are presented to the public as art: North Carolina Museum of Art's Art in Bloom in Raleigh, North Carolina.[4] This moment and event is defined by the natural materiality of media that performs as art, while pressured due to its very temporality. Art in Bloom offers and sustains a complex media ecology; where paintings and sculptures readily and more permanently adorn the gallery spaces, living blooms are used as

[2] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 139.

[3] Alexander Marshack, "The Art and Symbols of Ice Age Man," in *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*, ed. by David Crowley and Paul Heyer (London: Longman, 1991), 15.

[4] This analysis is focusing specifically on the broad logistics of the event with specific floral pieces from the 2018 and 2019 events.

accompanying pieces of floral art for four days a year, text embeds all signifying information through the museum, money gains admittance to the space, and visitors experience the collective forces of mediation – and contribute to it by documenting their experience through personal digital photography.

Flowers as History

The history of flowers is long and extensive, spanning several hundreds of millions of years. Prior to the existence of humans and even prior to the separation of the continents, there were flowers – and the ancestral blooms to those that we continue to revere today.[5] Yet, fossilized flowers and pollen concentrations have revealed the long and intertwined history of flowers and humans.[6] This history reveals the strong and numerous correspondences between human death and the appearance of and association with flowers, as Stephen Buchmann addresses: "From the earliest times, humans have displayed two interrelated behaviors using flowers. We have buried them with our dead, but we have also adorned statues of deities with garlands or left blooms on sacred altars to propitiate the deities."[7] Past research, such as Buchmann's, has demonstrated that some of the earliest associations of flowers with humans were in funerary settings and moments. From adorning physical spaces for burials to serving as illustrative and decorative mementos for the deceased, as seen 70,000 years ago when Neanderthals buried their dead upon pine with flower bouquets[8] and how poppies were used for "death rituals" in c. 2500 BCE Spain,[9] flowers have been associated with our own deaths throughout history. Flowers are then found symbols that work in opposition to the human-manufactured symbols that Alexander Marshack argues are "made and used by men."[10] Instead of human construction for use, flowers are found, identified, and prescribed with symbolic importance, representation worth, and human-centric significance – and as emphasized through this history, this symbolic association is most strongly aligned with human mortality.

As Buchmann reminds us: "Given time, the flowers return".[11] The natural world can surpass us as individuals; thus, reminding humans of our finite existence in a natural order that does not prioritize the existence of humankind over the natural world. Ultimately, the materiality of history, death, and admiration is carried in blooms, as Jennifer Potter reminds us: "Guard it well: this slip of a flower contains our histories, yours and mine."[12]

[5] Jennifer Potter, *Seven Flowers and How They Shaped Our World*, (New York: Overlook Press, 2014), 203.

[6] Ibid, 134; Stephen L. Buchmann, *The Reason for Flowers: Their History, Culture, Biology, and How They Change Our Lives* (New York: Scribner, 2015), 106.

[7] Buchmann, *The Reason for Flowers*, 107.

[8] Ibid, 106.

[9] Potter, *Seven Flowers*, 100.

[10] Marshack, "The Art and Symbols of Ice Age Man," 20.

[11] Buchmann, *The Reason for Flowers*, 108.

[12] Potter, *Seven Flowers*, 236.

Flowers as *Flowers*

Donna Haraway's understanding of companion species is dependent on fluid foundations and a consideration that extends beyond animals: "'Companion species' is a bigger and more heterogeneous category than companion animal and not just because one must include such organic beings as rice, bees, tulips, and intestinal flora, all of whom make life for humans what it is-and vice versa."[13] This framework of understanding is furthered by Haraway's epistemological contextualization, which directly corresponds to feminized history and associations of flowers: "feminist inquiry is about understanding how things work, who is in the action, what might be possible, and how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently."[14] All the more, I draw upon Haraway's positioning and emphasis of dogs as *dogs*: "Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with."[15] I identify flowers as *flowers* in their relationship to humans. As indicated by their use as commodified objects and for medicinal purposes, flowers have been more than vessels for human-oriented symbolic systems throughout history.

This recognition of flowers as *flowers* speaks to Jane Bennett's theoretical work on thing power, or "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle."[16] With thing power, Bennett asserts that thing power gives voice to the nonhuman form. As such, we can consider the thing power of flowers as natural media that carry the capacity to be used for artistic expression, as well as the potential problems of such, and much more. In drawing from Bennett, Tyson Lewis's work focuses on the aesthetic pedagogy of things,[17] and as such I identify and position flowers as artifacts and objects of embodied, elemental media that carry the capacity to teach us of ourselves – yet carry great power and significance in themselves, independent from human and an anthropocentric hierarchy of consumption and elevation. This is seen in our history of associating flowers with our own mortality: whereas flowers will die, their seeds may come back as new blooms – or the original flower may go dormant and return once more. Perhaps humans have always seen this as a hopeful lesson and potentially reflective of our mortality.

A study of flowers such as this must recognize the humanist structures blooms are cultivated and commodified within, furthering Art in Bloom as a prime instance in which the tensions surrounding nature, gender, art, and media collide – where traditional perceptions and understandings of what constitutes art is deconstructed and reverted for the human-oriented benefit and economic gains. If flowers are indicative

[13] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 9, 15.

[14] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 7.

[15] Ibid, 5.

[16] Jane Bennett, "The Force of Things," in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

[17] Tyson Lewis, "The Pedagogical Power of Things: Toward a Post-Intentional Phenomenology of Unlearning," *Cultural Critique* 98, 98 (2018): 122–44.

of mortal beings, they also carry the anthropocentric gendered associative history that has feminized blooms throughout time. From Erasmus Darwin's explorations of human sexuality through the vehicle and allusion of the natural world *The Botanic Garden* to Georgia O'Keeffe's famously erotic blooms – flowers, and the broader natural world, have been the object and focus of much anthropomorphic understanding and framing. As such, flowers, broadly, are often associated with cultivation and commodification, emphasizing a prescribed and projected hierarchy. Yet, we see the cultivation and celebration of beautiful blooms, versus the mundane. This offers explicit commentary on societal treatments towards women and broader expectations of beauty, and this extends into the Art in Bloom event where blooms like dandelions and clover were not on display.

Art in Bloom

> It isn't enough to let the flowers bloom;
> we must decode what they have to say.
> Jennifer Potter[18]

Bringing flowers into museums as a focal event originated in the states in Boston in 1975, and has been practiced across several states since then. At the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) specifically, nearly 22,000 people attended the four-day fundraiser-exhibit in 2019, deeming the event a great success for the museum.[19] This event that the community often looks forward to all year emphasizes the importance and "power of nature" – where two elements, nature and art, that are beautiful and interesting on their own are put together to make a new affective experience for people.[20] With Art in Bloom, the museum is able to reframe how art is seen, and ultimately experienced while drawing attention to art pieces that are not recognized as "superstars."[21] This corresponds to the broader goals of the event, which are to make art more impactful and memorable while also supporting an increase in funding and patron traffic for the museum as a whole. Furthermore, the museum identifies that the flowers serve as an "equalizer" for attendees and scaffold the experience of attending an art museum, which can feel overwhelming for those that may be less familiar with the art. Yet, at the same time, one need not know anything to be able to experience art and to be able to learn from it.[22]

No taller than forty-two inches above the pedestal and with only a gallon of water, the floral sculptures are limited to prevent damage to the art pieces the museum is

[18] Potter, *Seven Flowers*, xiii.

[19] Laura Finan, Personal Interview, September 8, 2020.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

housing. Similarly, all stems, leaves, flowers, and blooms are inspected to prevent the introduction of bugs into the gallery spaces. Designers come in daily to refresh their pieces: trim, modify, replace flowers. Therefore, the sculptures are very firmly alive: they continue blooming, growing, changing, and dying over the four days. The temporality of the flowers is increased due to the body heat from patrons passing through, but also as a result of the large amount of sunlight that is available in the museum. NCMA, structurally, differs from many museums: traditionally, many are dark to help preserve art from the detrimentally eroding effects of light, yet NCMA has embraced windows and glass to try to bring nature in and collide with art.

Past scholarship by Zagacki and Gallagher has focused on the novelty and tensions embedded in NCMA's expansive outdoor Museum Park that cushions the museum facility, emphasizing nature and the natural world as a backdrop to their mission.[23] Zagacki and Gallagher, while addressing the permeability of the natural world and the human-constructed unnaturalness of production, present a definitive boundary between inside and out: the museum spreads like wet ink into the nature surrounding it outside, but it is not considered how nature may do the same – nor how the museum intends for the reversed permeability, namely through their Art in Bloom fundraiser event. Art in Bloom offers patrons the opportunity to immerse themselves in flora that thrives beyond the Carolina community and geographical region that the Museum is rooted to, much like the art itself. The flowers are only temporary in this space: as such the exhibit draws thousands and thousands of attendees, marking it as one of the most heavily trafficked events of the year for the museum. And yet, local fauna and nature reside just outside the museum doors - free and readily accessible for the public year-round, day and night.

Through this framework, NCMA's Art in Bloom event emphasizes the media on display: by putting flowers on pedestals and serves as a force of mirroring with intentional mediations of the art it is placed in direct conversation with. Through these floral extensions, traditional perceptions of what constitutes as art is challenged, as well as the very constitution of the museum's art. When accompanied by these blooms, pieces of art gain additional hues, depth, matter, scent, and natural dynamisms. Through these material differences, there is much to consider of the elevation of "art flowers" versus the greenery and landscape that the museum is cushioned in.

The below photograph reveals a key effect of the Art in Bloom exhibit: *Tar Baby vs. St. Sebastian*, a golden, life-size statue of and by Michael Richards, is positioned to the left in this photo and its floral rendition is in the center, surrounded by onlookers and patrons of the exhibit. A person, on the right, holds a camera out to document and photograph the floral sculpture (much like me, taking this photo of this piece and its scene). A couple stands together, seemingly reading the information on the pedestal. A group of individuals are gathered in the adjoining room of the gallery, where a few more individuals are walking to join – we can imagine there is another floral

[23] Kenneth Zagacki and Victoria Gallagher, "Rhetoric and Materiality in the Museum Park at the North Carolina Museum of Art," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, 2 (2009): 171–91.

sculpture hidden behind the wall of people. Conversely, *Tar Baby vs. St. Sebastian* stands alone - acting in strong juxtaposition to the floral sculpture that is modeled after it. Even more, the paintings on the wall serve as a backdrop for the floral sculpture – nearly becoming one with the wall and omitted from focus. The white blooms that are adorning the white airmen boots are nearly glowing in this scene – complimenting the golden sheen of its modeling accompaniment yet offering a strong contrast from the more stagnant pieces on the walls. But similar to both the sculpture and the backdrop painting – the flowers carry texture and offer multidimensionality.

Image 1: *Tar Baby vs. St. Sebastian* and corresponding floral rendition
copyright: Kelsey Virginia Dufresne

However, the flowers are, presumed at least, to still be alive and organic – moreover, they are both literally and physically temporal in this space. The museum only permits the housing of such pieces for four days a year. Conversely, *Tar Baby vs. St. Sebastian* is a more permanent installation, as well as a portrait of its artist, Michael Richards. As such, and as this photograph also emphasizes, attention is intended to center that which is floral and, by vital and inevitable extension, ephemeral. The pieces of art that hold a more constant and lasting presence in this space are less engaging, less attractive, less magnetic – especially so when living flowers adorn the space.

Image 2: *The Lute Player* and corresponding floral rendition
copyright: Kelsey Virginia Dufresne

Jordan Daniels's floral piece was created to accompany Gerard Seghers's *The Lute Player.* The golden bowl that holds the blooms speaks to the lavish adornments revealed in the painting. Seghers's lute player is clothed in pearls and jewelry, lace veils, and many furs. Books and manuscripts decorate the table posited to the left of the lute player – perhaps revealing the educated status of this player. That coupled with her dressings, and the lute itself, relays the social standing of this woman. The broad expanse of her chest as illuminated by the glow of the candle perhaps also demonstrates the gaze through which this piece was crafted. Conversely, Daniels's floral recreation seemingly distorts the dramatic lighting of the painting and rather emphasizes the numerous colors of the piece that are obscured. Similarly, as the flowers and leaves spread beyond the pedestal and golden bowl, nearly covering the bowl, viewers can esteem a greater sense of power and release.

The floral sculpture, hardly contained in a gold bowl with a lute that tethers this piece to its painting, draws awareness to the importance of space and spatiality. In the painting, the lute player is contained by the frame which nearly blends into the shadowy background and foreground of the piece that is not illuminated by the

sole candle that lights the woman's face. Seghers has cast his lute player as striking as she is confined. The painting sharply ends and is contained by the biting coloring that juxtaposes the subdued wall it hangs on. Conversely, the floral sculpture, save for the shadows it creates, is not contained and is not held within a specified space. The blooms and eucalyptus leaves extend well beyond the confines of the bowl and the pedestal – seemingly expanding into surrounding space and air and carving out more room than that which is afforded to or crafted by the painting. Of such, this piece seems to speak on behalf of the effect of the event as a whole: nature and that which is natural is not as easily confined as that which we strive to create.

Similar to Jordan Daniels's floral rendition of *The Lute Player*, the below floral sculpture defies the spatial restrictions of its inspiration piece. Whereas the painting offers a play with rigid linearity, the blossoms carry the warm coloring of the piece, yet break the sharp shapes and instead seem to explode and cascade from the narrow vase that holds them. Even more, this sculpture emphasizes that the floral art could fall apart before the patron's eyes: petals drop and fall like confetti on the pedestal, adding texture to the shadows created by the bright, overhead lights. The very fragile temporality of the piece and, more broadly, flowers themselves are put on display for commodified observation.

Image 3: Floral decay on display
copyright: Kelsey Virginia Dufresne

This very flower art is dependent on elemental media for survival: light and water. What role might these play here? And ultimately, how are museums unnatural spaces – or spaces that inhibit the natural? Of less focus in the exhibit are the shadows. Each piece of floral art casts a unique shadow on the white boxes they are situated upon. While many of the floral pieces are modeled after two-dimensional paintings – the pieces themselves are three-dimensional. The shadows cast them back as two-dimensional.

From the coloring to the emphasis on the vertical, this floral sculpture aligns strongly with the painting it is intended to represent. Yet, the differences are striking: the shadows cast on the pedestal emphasis a firmly three-dimensional object, whereas the painting is flat. The flower sculptures can be experienced, viewed, smelled from multiple angles; thus encouraging patrons to walk around the pedestals, whereas the painting medium facilitates one perspective and stance for viewing. Additionally, the flatness of the shape and design of the art is made all the more pointedly when compared to the depth, shadowing, and inevitable gradients in petals. The floral sculpture, while comparable in terms of coloring and shape – there is a great deviation in the fact that the flowers and stems are inherently shapely objects, carrying their organic-nature with them. Whereas the painting prioritizes symmetrical mirroring, flowers and natural objects are not perfectly symmetrical.

The fundraiser event pointedly displays the beauty of flowers for patrons. Stunning blooms and orchestrated sculptures offer lovely, constructed designs that *feel* all the more significant and beautiful due to the natural materiality the pieces rely upon. Save for the falling petals, the very naturalness of the blooms is omitted from view: patrons cannot see, nor experience, the natural decomposition, and timeliness of that which is natural. Rather, for the hour or two that attendees are able to study and photograph the floral sculptures – the flowers are cast as more permanent due to their curation. Simultaneously, the beauty of the temporal is reinforced through the nature and design of the event: four days, overriding the reality of death and decay. How different might our relationship to museums and flowers be if flowers always adorned the inside spaces? Furthermore, in considering the pressures and realities of the event as a fundraiser – how might we understand people paying to view flowers on display; what commentary on gender is occurring here? In grappling with the patriarchal positioning reinforced through the very infrastructure and media of the museum that most frequently and historically reinforces the male gaze. Perhaps there are two ways to read this event and its reinforcement of gender and sociohistorical tensions.

In viewing flowers as historically feminized, Art in Bloom can firstly be read as a collective form of installation art, yet also, perhaps, a collective feminist art experience that prioritizes a break from traditional perceptions and understandings of what constitutes as, and can serve to represent, art. In placing flowers, organic and temporary matter, on a pedestal, perhaps we are witnessing the reclaiming of gendered objects as an opportunity to infiltrate a historically elitist, intellectualized, and male-dominated space with the very materiality used to prescribe positionality. As

such, the event of Art in Bloom works against expectation: whereas museums are positioned as stagnant, quiet, still, and preserved through sensory and natural deprivation, Art in Bloom pushes against each of these forces and frameworks of museums.

Yet, and far more plausible, in considering flowers in the museum as a subversion of tradition and expectation, and thus challenging gender norms and expectations, perhaps there is no authentic refutation of the patriarchal normativity in bringing flowers inside of the museum space. Conversely, flowers become a fetishized and displayed tool for the goal of raising funds for the museum. These temporal installations are commodified nature to help serve a masculine space. As Melissa Huang writes: "Art museums exist as a highly gendered space, and this is reflected in their architecture, included artists, and subject matter of the exhibited artwork."[24] In considering both the exterior and interior of art museums, gender expectations, and prescribed normativity is pervasive throughout the entirety of the museum – and is experienced by patrons.[25] Therefore, Huang addresses how patrons are positioned as observers, and the gendered consequences of such relational behavior:

> Objects in museums arguably become feminized by their presence in the museum. Because the male gaze is so entrenched in the museum's cultural history, even objects that do not depict women are seen as being in a woman's role. To be looked at is to become feminine, to be feminized.[26]

As such, we can identify the flowers as a cultivated, curated opportunity for performativity. Flowers are thus codified into a broader genre of art – reinforcing anthropocentrism and the masculinization of the museum's gaze where flowers are placed on pedestals, organized, curated, poised, and positioned for a prescribed aesthetic appeal for a primary goal rooted in economic gain. This understanding of the event and artistic-natural intervention is reinforced by the consistent beauty of the displays: the flowers are not permitted to wilt and die on display. Rather there is great intentionality in maintaining the freshness of blooms. This corresponds directly to societal treatment towards women and girls throughout history.

Ultimately, this event is beloved, well-attended, and a significant fiscal opportunity for the museum. Simultaneously, Art in Bloom exists in tension at the crux of the potential refutations and reinforcements of gender in this space through this event and its reliance on that which is natural, and in doing so the event emphasizes the commodification of the natural world for the benefit of the museum and the more permanent art that NCMA is home to. Therefore, the hierarchy of anthropocentrism is made explicit and concrete.

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[24] Melissa Huang, "Are Art Museums Gendered Spaces?" March 26, 2014, http://www.melissahuang.com/2014/03/26/art-museums-as-gendered-spaces/, acc. on May 13, 2021.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

Digital Remediation

In furthering the complexities and tensions of Art in Bloom and the role of nature as elemental media,[27] three additional media epistemological infrastructures collide with the floral sculptures: the visual art pieces, including paintings and sculptures, the serve as the models for floral artists; the labels and comment cards as both signifiers and categorical typographic media; and the digital remediation of each and all through personal photography.[28] The art pieces themselves serve as reminders of the novelty of the blooms in this space, emphasizing a sense of deviation from that which is expected in an art museum. With the information presented through labels and captions, patrons can identify creators, as well as the art piece to which a floral sculpture is intended to align with, or challenge and extend. Through photos, patrons are able to take a piece, albeit digitized, of the moment and the museum with them beyond the confines of the gallery and the four days of blooms. Together, a multimodal and multisensory, permeable experience is created through the multiple parties, participants, and mediate materialists present. From the linguistic to the kinesthetic, patrons are offered multiple avenues through which they are encouraged to experience the flowers-as-art. Yet, the event also reinforces the prioritization of certain modes over others, as demonstrated through the exclusive utilization of typed English for identification as well as the fiscal-based ticketing system that prevents and limits access to the blooms and floral pieces.

Image 4: The materiality of nature and that of digital remediation
copyright: Kelsey Virginia Dufresne

[27] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[28] Stephen Wiley, Personal Interview, November 13, 2020.

The above photo emphasizes photographic remediation as action and opportunity for immortalization that is not facilitated by the museum, but rather by those who attend and experience the event. Made evident throughout my very own analysis, the role of photographic mediation and digital documentation is a significant outcome from Art in Bloom, while also aligning with Susan Sontag's analysis of immortalizing photography that offers mediated, constructed, and stagnant relics of pieces of reality.[29] The natural materiality of the event is made mechanical, industrialized, digital, and, perhaps, unnatural. This digital remediation of flowers, and their art, erode the spectacularity of the natural – and prioritize the unnatural and human-constructed and human-possessed.

Conclusion

Peters offers an invaluable definition of media: "Ruskin, who saw modern painting as 'the service of clouds,' defined a cloud as a mixture of something and nothing, and in this he named the heart of media."[30] Through this, we can further consider how the intervention of flowers and natural elemental media in institutionalized spaces destabilizes traditional and established hierarchies, norms, and expectations for viewers, visitors, and the other media that these spaces are home to. We also need to further evaluate the ways in which humans continually distort that which is natural to abide by our own standards and expectations – for what is lost when we condition and cultivate the natural world in such terms?

Flowers, beyond their human-oriented and socially constructed meanings and symbolic associations, demonstrate the capacity for the convergence between the natural and the unnatural, the environmental and the human-constructed, and a forceful reminder of the way/s we inhibit the world around us. Through this, I offer this analysis as an opportunity to situate Art in Bloom as one saturated with tensions concerning that which is natural and unnatural, where traditional perceptions and understandings of what constitutes art is deconstructed and reverted, yet where the naturalness of flowers and the destruction of such is placed on a pedestal for commodification. In further looking to flowers, perhaps we can strive towards satisfying Haraway's feminist framework that works to identify "how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently."[31]

[29] Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," in *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Grioux, 1977), 3, 23.

[30] Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 259.

[31] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 7.

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