

My project *Pollinators* was produced as a commission from RBGE Creative and shot in 2022-3 in the vast interiors of the Glass Houses of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh, Scotland. In 2019, this iconic range of glasshouses closed to the public in preparation for a move to a new facility. *Pollinators* explores the spaces left behind, depicting the fragile and complex environments where rare plant species co-exist in a fragile harmony.

This project was shown as part of a major group show entitled 'Silent Archive' at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh from 9th Feb 12th May 2024.



Pollinators (i) Wendy McMurdo

'Painful truths, surprising revelations and fresh perspectives on humanity's complex relationships with the botanical world emerge from our exhibition Silent Archive.'

International artists reveal RBGE's archives in new ways, challenging us to discover hidden narratives and hear long-ignored voices that are preserved in our collections. Significant works that tell stories of scientific discoveries, colonial histories and cultural heritage are displayed for the first time. Plant artistry, photography, music and more help convey how these archives shape our view of history, whose past they represent and how they might inspire change.

*Silent Archive features material from RBGE's collections alongside work from artists Amanda Cobbett, Amanda Thomson, Annalee Davis, Cynthia Fan, Hannah Imlach, Işık Güner, Jacqui Pestell, Janise Yntema, Karine Polwart, Laurie Clark, Pippa Murphy, Sarah Roberts, Sharon Tingey, Shiraz Bayjoo, Sonia Mehra Chawla and Wendy McMurdo. **Silent Archive** is supported by Players of People's Postcode Lottery, the Outset Transformative Grant, and the National Lottery through Creative Scotland.'*

Press release from RBGE retrieved 29th Aug 2024:

https://www.google.com/search?q=silent+archive+rbge&rlz=1C5GCCM_en&oq=silent+archive+rbge&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBggAEEU YOzIGCAAQRRg7Mg0IARAAGIYDGI AEGIoFMgoIAhAAGIAEGKIE0gEIMzk2NGoxajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8



Project information (my text, available in the gallery space itself)

In the strange summer of 2021, I was invited to document the interiors of the breath-taking and dream-like interiors of the RBGE Glasshouses, documenting the orchids and cycads, the jade vines and the rare magnolias. I photographed the snaking paths and overhanging vegetation that tracked through the interconnected spaces. I studied the flora that both blossomed and withered there, largely out of public sight. At that time, the Glasshouses were closed to everybody but horticulturalists and research staff, remaining largely in suspension. The leaves however continued to unfurl and seeds to germinate, despite the pandemic chaos of the world outside.

During the first deep lockdown, I often thought about the gardeners there as they made their way from their homes through the empty streets of the city to the Gardens. If they stopped coming (that was not an impossible thing to imagine in 2020-21), would the plants outgrow their containment? Would they push uncontrollably against the glass, force themselves out from underneath the steel frames that contained them? That's – I decided – what would happen. Would wild creatures (foxes were already at home in the wider gardens) gain access and roam through the Glasshouses? If birds could enter and become trapped, would they batter their bodies against the glass panes of the walls, unable to find a way out? But none of that happened because the humans kept on coming. The complex heating systems were maintained; the water supply continued unabated. The gardens outside were closed to the public but life in the Glasshouses remained largely the same. The uncertainty of the outside world was at dramatic odds with their lush and burgeoning interiors. Everything in the garden continued to flourish while everything outside of the glass frames was quickly going to hell. This is something we all sensed: life as we knew it was over. The vines would continue to grow, but the humans that tended them were altered and not necessarily in a subtle way.

Moving on to 2023, the vast spaces of the original Glasshouses continue to remain in a state of perpetual slumber as the living collection awaits its impending move. Plants continue to grow profusely. Birds, insects, and even small animals continue to gain access to the Glasshouses. A black cat patrols the interiors: vines twist around the steel supports and the paths that wind their way through the entire network of spaces still hang with profuse vegetation. The environment is both dreamlike, fragile, and soon to be part of the history of the city. A memory, a dream, a phantom orchid curling and unfurling in perfumed isolation. Nearby – in empty glasshouses – the remains of ancient palms are carefully stored and labelled. They stand like silent sentinels, witnesses to our own attempts to repair and restore our exquisite garden.

Wendy McMurdo 2024



Installation view, Inverleith House, RBGE





Installation view, Inverleith House, RBGE

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The silent archive speaks

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