

Eco Urgency: Now or Never

Nature is all around us, making up the key elements of our surrounding environment, even in the densest neighborhoods of New York City. It surrounds the City's concrete roads, growing in pocket parks, it is alive in window boxes perched on the limestone sills of its older buildings and lines grassy strips that lie between its modern glass skyscrapers.

But as we go about our urban lives, how often do we think of the resources we consume? We are exposed to a steady, ominous drumbeat of news that tells us how the crisis of global warming already upon us will bring even greater problems in the decades to come. Many scientists argue that we are now living through the age of the *Anthropocene*, the geological period during which human activity and production have become the dominant influences in our environment, irrevocably altering what we think of as "nature." Yet on a crisp autumn day, or a day in the spring that promises warmth and light, there is a cognitive disconnect: we know the planet is changing but it is difficult for us to grasp the enormity of the change.

Eco-Urgency: Now or Never brings together artists who examine from the climate crises that looms larger each day. First presented, *Now*, at Wave Hill during Fall 2021 looked at the urgency of the present moment, raising our awareness of the climate and its immediate changes through a holistic approach that gives us an overview of its social, political, and environmental concerns. The subject of this volume the exhibition at Lehman, *Never*, presented in the Spring 2022, views our ecological crises in endlessly repeating, mournful, cycles. These artists examine the resonant patterns of history that led us to this current moment of crisis, and look at possible futures.

The exhibition investigates overlapping thematic inquiries that preoccupy contemporary artists, which include *Depicting Imminent Change* — the imagining of apocalyptic climate catastrophe; *Politics and the Land*— exploring political and economic policies that affect natural resources; *Stewardship*— focusing on the urge to collect, archive and preserve; *Decentering Human Experience* —positing the importance of animal perspectives; and finally, *Grief* which presents artistic work that is elegiac and prompts questions about what it means to memorialize what is already lost or about to be lost. To encourage our engagement and deepen our awareness of these issues, the artists in *Eco-Urgency: Now or Never* rely on research, critical analysis, observation, and direct action that are manifest as objects, videos, performances, and community organizing. There are no easy answers, yet *Eco-Urgency: Now or Never* distills the current moment, so that it can be understood, and acted on, provoke our conversation and prompt us to share ideas.



Vanessa Albury

Coral Projects, the First Five Years: 2016 to 2021, 2021

with the participation of John Torreano, Locus (Thale Fastvold and Tanja Thorjussen), Rev. Houston R. Cypress of Love the Everglades, Jeremy Olson, Gabriela Vainsencher, Donald Fortescue, Ebony G. Patterson, Waichung Wu, and Rachel Frank

Site-specific installation, dimensions variable

HD video with audio, inkjet prints, aquarium, ceramics, driftwood, aquatic plants, sketches and site-plans

Courtesy of Vanessa Albury/Coral Projects

The installation Coral Projects is focused on a group's efforts to re-wild oyster and coral populations throughout the world, with proposed and actualized underwater exhibitions. Albury, with other artists, has collaborated on various iterations of Coral Projects. In this new Coral Gables Project, she and artist Rachel Frank amplify each other's work. This Project also includes Frank's *Mini Mangrove Kernos Ceramic Vessels* placed in the Everglades by Albury and then photographed by Frank. In these sculptures, she creates evocative interpretations of still lifes, reminiscent of Everglades' mud formations. Also, sketches by both Albury and Frank propose an "ocean friendly carbon-sink material" to rebuild coral and oyster life in waterways. Albury creates floating screens from the debris of plants in the Everglades, where the shadows and light we see in water dissolve. A film by Thale Fastvold and Tanja Thorjussen from *Locus*, an Oslo-based, artist collective, shows the performance of a

“reverent honey ceremony.” Other highlights are *Burned Out Film Aquarium*, 2019, an aquarium populated by freshwater plants, rocks, driftwood and ceramics that presents both the fragility of coral reefs and oysters in waterways and how artists address this crisis with work that impacts our desire foster nature’s regrowth and regeneration.



Samantha Box
With jewelry, sugarcane and Grandma’s photograph, 2019
Photograph, 11 x 14 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Samantha Box
Collapse, 2020
Photograph, 20 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist

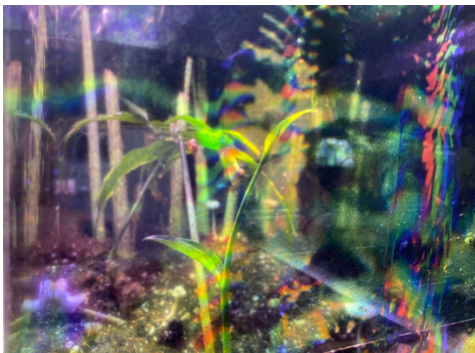


Samantha Box

Edges, 2020

Photograph, 20 x 24 inches

Courtesy of the artist



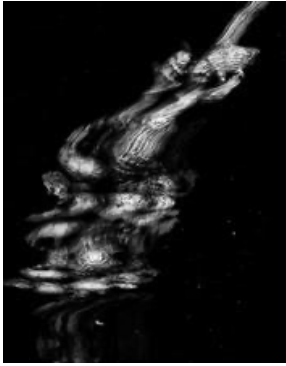

Samantha Box

Portable Homeland #6, 2021

Mixed media herbarium installation,
Dimensions variable

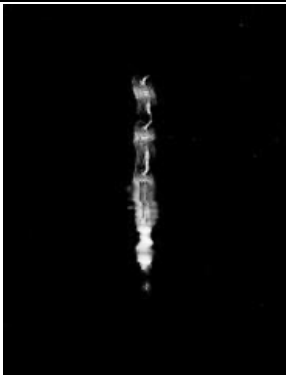
Courtesy of the artist

In *Portable Homeland #6*, Box addresses themes of accessibility and justice in a Diaspora herbarium, an “herbarium of resistance.” Her photographs and the herbarium pose the question: Can the Caribbean diaspora communities in the Bronx harness the healing quality and nurture “ethno medicine” – a knowledge of plants that heal, which is held by enslaved and indigenous peoples. Her work delves into questions of sustainability, pondering both access to these plants and the ensurance of the plants’ survival, as an act of resistance to colonial domination. The *Portable Homeland* installation is a physical manifestation of ancestral food and its use in the diaspora. Lemongrass, ginger, papaya, and turmeric are embedded within the soil, while Box fuses gem-like colored photographs to the structure to create both translucency and luminosity that wobble under the glow of a “grow light,” its color spectrum encouraging a plant to

	<p>grow. Within this composition, the artist embeds a portrait of her youthful self, which the viewer sees in abstracted flowing shapes. <i>Portable Homeland</i> becomes, then, a poignant homage to Box’s Caribbean heritage, to the complexity of colonial influence within diaspora communities, and to ongoing efforts to sustain the traditions of healing foods.</p>
	<p>Samantha Box <i>Untitled 1, 2021</i> Archival inkjet print 20 x 24 inches Courtesy of the artist</p>
	<p>Samantha Box <i>Untitled 2a, 2021</i> Archival inkjet print 20x24 inches Courtesy of the artist</p>



Samantha Box
Untitled 2b, 2021
Archival inkjet print
20 x 24 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Samantha Box
Untitled 2c, 2021
Archival inkjet print.
20 x 24 inches
Courtesy of artist



Samantha Box
Untitled 3, 2021
Archival inkjet print
20 x 24 inches
Courtesy of artist



Samantha Box
Untitled 4, 2021
Archival inkjet print
20 x 24 inches
Courtesy of artist



Nicky Enright
What on Earth? (Have You Done), 2012/2021
Mixed media, site-specific installation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Enright's striking black-and-white word installation can stop viewers cold. The question "What on earth have you done?" is repeated six times on two facing walls. Each iteration of the question, with its changing emphasis, seems to implicate viewers as to their role on the planet as well as to the meaning they give to their lives. In this installation, Enright installed the text dramatically, cropped and at a diagonal, so it maximizes the curve of Lehman Gallery's distinctive Rotunda, while simultaneously appearing to sink into the ground and rise off the wall. A level, smaller version of this text-based installation appeared at the entrance to the Wave Hill iteration of *Eco-Urgency: Now or Never*, expanding on a work from 2012 that originally appeared in the book *25 Great Sentences and How They Got That Way* by Geraldine Woods. Enright said, "I modify the emphasis of each individual word to interrogate the relationships among visual text, aural sound, and literal meaning. Although the phrase remains the same, it is tweaked by italics to subtly change the

meaning of the question/accusation. The viewer is encouraged to read and “hear” the words differently in each line, thereby changing the significance of the expression and ultimately questioning individual accountability for the climate crisis.”



Rachel Frank

Thresholds, 2019

Single-channel HD video with sculptural objects

4:19 minutes

Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio

Frank’s video *Thresholds* reflects on “wildlife corridors,” the pathways for wildlife-linking habitats that are disrupted by manmade growth. Through her explorations and contemplations of the borderlands of Arizona’s southern Sonoran Desert, Frank addresses wildlife fragmentation; migration; borders; climate change; droughts; and the changing uses of the desert. She dons her large-scale sculptures of animal heads in performances, using her body to interact with the landscape and to draw our attention to the practice of “re-wilding” — reintroducing a species into its natural environment in an effort to restore wild eco-systems. She depicts this process, sometimes joyful, sometimes traumatic from the animal’s perspective. The mournful gaze of her animals draw in the

viewer as the animals appear to plea for help to right the climate crisis.

Sentinel Offering Lekythos: Clapper Rail and Mangrove, 2021, Frank's newest sculpture, depicts the Clapper Rail, a bird that is an "indicator species," and one of the first to show the effects of climate change. Frank, cared for Clapper Rail birds and has released them into the environment in her wildlife rehabilitation work. The form of this sculpture is based on an ancient offering vessel, associated with loss or funerary rites. The vessel that once held liquids like olive oil or wine, is now engulfed by Frank's runny, sinuous shapes that echo the bird's habitat. The bird itself, perched atop the composition, appears in danger of melting. The artist completes the colors of this wetland habitat with gold leaf.



Rachel Frank

North American Sonoran

Pronghorn, 2017

Fabric, thread, acrylic, and other materials

24 x 17 ½ x 13 inches

Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



Rachel Frank

Thresholds, Saguaro Arm, 2018

Stoneware ceramic cactus with glazes, colored pencil, Plexiglas, glue, fabric, thread, wood, and hardware

18 x 24 x 7 ¼ inches

Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



Rachel Frank

Thresholds, Cholla Chain Fruit

Cactus I, 2018

Ceramic cactus with glaze and colored pencil, Plexiglas, glue, hardware

24 x 18 x 4 inches

Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



Rachel Frank

Thresholds, Cholla Chain Fruit

Cactus II, 2018

Ceramic cactus with glaze and colored pencil, Plexiglas, glue, hardware

24 x 18 x 4 inches

Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



Rachel Frank
Mylodon, Ground Sloth, 2013
Acrylic paint, yarn, and other materials
22 x 36 x 9 ½ inches
Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



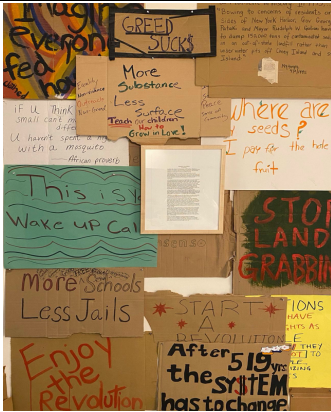
Rachel Frank
Auguring Hawk, 2017
Fabric, thread, acrylic paint, wood, and other materials
22 x 36 x 9 ½ inches
Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



Rachel Frank
Musk Ox, 2016
Fabric, thread, wool, acrylic paint, and other materials
22 x 36 x 9 ½ inches
Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



Rachel Frank
Sentinel Offering Lekythos: Clapper Rail and Mangrove, 2021
Stoneware ceramic and glazes
36 x 12 ½ x 14 inches
Courtesy of Rachel Frank Studio



Alicia Grullon



Percent for Green Bill, 2014

Letterpress print on French paper, hung on protest ephemera (ink on cardboard, various dimensions); framed bill

14 x 17 inches, ephemera, dimensions variable

Courtesy of artist

Percent for Green Bill grew out of a participatory project that addresses the impact of environmental racism and climate change in the urban setting. Grullon worked with youth from the Bronx's Hunts Point community through a commission of The Point CDC and Lincoln Center Resiliency Project that explored the resiliency of a community facing problems originating from climate change. The video *Surge* utilizes a dramatic movie preview format with Bronx imagery of cityscapes and aerial views along with a voiceover of a poem by Ayleah Evans, a teenager who participated in the program. The protest signs in the video speak to the urgency and cyclical nature of climate change issues faced in the Bronx and beyond. The voices of many community members embodied here seek a shift in approaches that remedy environmental crises as well as solutions that can be applied locally and around the globe.

	<p>Alicia Grullon</p> <p><i>Surge</i>, 2019</p> <p>Single channel video</p> <p>Courtesy of artist</p>
	<p>Allison Janae Hamilton</p> <p><i>Seven Creatures</i>, 2017</p> <p>Unique foam, mixed media</p> <p>Dimensions variable</p> <p>(AJH.16766)</p> <p>Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen.</p> <p>© Allison Janae Hamilton</p> <p>Heads bursting from the Gallery wall hold facial expressions hard to discern. Do Hamilton's <i>Seven Creatures</i> accuse, implore, or threaten us? To create this distinctive work, the artist used the same foam molds employed by taxidermists but she embellished or disrupted the natural form of each animal in some way. Shown without their usual fur and unnaturally colored, these creatures become fantastical versions of common animals with a strangely dinosaur-esque quality, but they also appear skinned, denuded, and vulnerable. The name <i>Seven Creatures</i> refers to the white-tailed deer, native to Hamilton's home in North</p>

Florida. Taxidermy is commonly displayed across the South in households and communal spaces, but Hamilton's sculpted creatures that she made to appear taxidermied, evoke an ecosystem that is tangible, endangered, and mythic. Speaking of her home state and its increasingly imperiled ecology, Hamilton says, "I grew up in the thick air, red soil and dark waterways of Florida, amongst mangroves, sawgrass rivers, and Cypress swamps. Swamps have been disparagingly depicted by Virgil and Dante as lands of the 'unfortunate dead,' and more recently in our political landscape as a metaphor for corruption that must be 'drained.' However, marshes and wetlands are intrinsic protections against hurricanes and storm floods, and teem with biodiversity operating in continuous symbiosis."



Mary Mattingly

Ash Flower, 2017

Chromogenic dye coupler prints

30 x 30 inches

Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery

Mattingly's photographs allude to complex ideas of extinction. She balances the barren background of her landscapes with an assemblage of objects, flora, and fauna in the photograph foregrounds to create both somber still lifes and poetic messages about our world. The motifs she chooses represent the toxic results of mining and chemical use. Mattingly specifically explores the contradiction of the photographic process and

its impact on the environment, while referencing the supply chain of materials needed to produce a photograph. The play of shadows cast by her still lifes suggest fleeting memories of the natural world that seen through a window look barren, like the surface of another planet— one with no ability to promote life. On close observation, Mattingly echoes the nature of mining by using pilings of rocks and minerals. The flowers in her scenes are bound, constricted, and hung from above, reading as captive nature. These profound contradictions and entanglements create multiple layers of content in the photographs embedded within her innovative use of still life.



Mary Mattingly

Enough Is When Enough, 2018

Chromogenic dye coupler prints

30 x 30 inches

Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery



Mary Mattingly

Held My Breath and Didn't Hear Anything, 2018

Chromogenic dye coupler prints

30 x 30 inches

Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery



Alexis Rockman

Gowanus, 2013

Oil on wood

72 x 90 inches

Courtesy of Sperone Westwater

Rockman presents a canvas at the scale of traditional landscape painting, encouraging the viewer to see a cycle of history in the form of Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal, infamous for its pollution. He arranges his composition scrupulously, bisecting the painting horizontally into above and below water scenes. Perched on a rock, a watchful cat observes the water below, where a disturbing beast lurks in the chemical soup of the canal. Rockman has described this animal as a composite creature made from animals that used to live in the canal. "It's sort of the ghost of the Gowanus Canal in the shape of a catfish. . . . I became obsessed with composite creatures and this whole tradition in Indian miniature paintings of a big creature made out of little creatures. Here, the animal is comprised of a diamondback terrapin, a black

bear, a manatee, an American turkey, a red fox, a harbor seal, and so on. The painting was really inspired by a dolphin that swam into the canal and proceeded to die. I was sad, and then thought, "How many things have died there over the years?" Alexis Rockman also links the toxicity of the canal and the chemicals found in many art supplies – the drains that pour into his canal are filled with vibrant red, yellow, and blue primary colors, suggesting poisonous pigments added to a palette. He suggests that the act of creation comes with a price.



Francesco Simeti

Unrelenting, 2020

Video mp4

5 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

Simeti created this video while sheltering in place in New York City, during the Covid pandemic lockdown. Developing animations, he depicted the emergence of the natural world, just as humans retracted indoors. The time-lapse quality of the film shows flora and fauna emerging and receding in slow rhythmic patterns. Christopher Cerrone, a composer, collaborated with Simeti for this piece, and his music composition adds to its meditative and foreboding mood. The mournful quality of its imagery and sound captivates the viewer and begs the question of

an unexpected and unquestionable disruption of the urban landscape as we know it.



Francesco Simeti

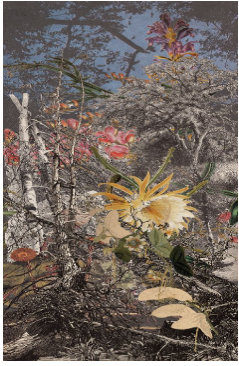
Refugium (Phyllocactus from Summit), 2019

Digital print on linen

78 x 40 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Refugium refers to a place to hide and be protected from dangers, specifically a place where non-humans can live without fear. In this digital print, Simeti contemplates the strains between humans and the natural world and examines how humans negatively impact the non-human world. He sourced imagery from newspapers, magazines, and botanical illustrations to create *Refugium*, a fragile landscape he filled with native and exotic flora, a somber environment without humans, desolate, yet a riotous landscape, where all living things thrive. This composition highlights the violent reality inflicted upon nature by humans and by the pressures of our economic structures.



Francesco Simeti
Refugium (Smuggler Notch), 2019
Digital print on linen
84 x 35 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Francesco Simeti
Refugium (Cyprus Fire), 2019
Digital print on linen
60 x 41 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Francesco Simeti
Refugium (Posted Serrulata), 2019
Digital print on linen
66 x 47 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Francesco Simeti
Refugium (Helleboraster), 2019
Digital print on linen
58 x 44 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Francesco Simeti
Refugium (Shooting Star), 2019
Digital print on linen
60 x 41 inches
Courtesy of the artist



SPURSE, Block Ecology and Flourish LAB
in collaboration with Jack Henning, PhD and
Renuka P. Sankaran, PhD, Department of
Biological Sciences Lehman College, City
University of New York, Bryan Williams and
Jezreel Deseo

More than us thriving where we are, 2020
Dimensions variable

Courtesy of SPURSE, Block Ecology, and
Flourish Lab



The interdisciplinary collectives SPURSE,
Block Ecology and Flourish LAB, work with
communities and institutions to develop
strategies to center interdependency with
nature. Their site-specific, research-based
project, presented at both Lehman College
and Wave Hill, explore untapped aspects of

living in an urban environment, including potential food sources. As a collective, the goals of SPURSE state: “We believe that art about nature is not enough; if we are to engage our ecologies in a meaningful way, we need to authentically become of the places in which we live. For us, the solution lies in a far-reaching transformative place-based rethinking of social, ecological and artistic methods. The problem today is that our transience from place to place seriously exacerbates pressing social and ecological issues. . . .Our practice of change starts by collaborating with the thriving ecology that is right under our feet. In our dense urban areas, there are ecosystems that have the potential to generate new forms of community and resilience. We largely ignore these areas of spontaneous growth preferring our cultivated and controlled landscapes. Migrating with people, “wild” species have co-evolved with us for millennia and until our present generation, foraging was what linked communities together, connecting us deeply and profoundly to each other and our environment in an active manner.” Here, SPURSE presents a large-scale drawing, originally presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, that decenters the human experience and focuses on life other than human, while also presenting a living collection of plants, commonly called “weeds”, which grow in our local urban environment. By elevating these plants to a gallery setting, we are forced to contemplate why some plant life is considered “undesirable.”



Will Wilson

Auto Immune Response (AIR) no. 5, 2004

Archive pigment print, 24 x 66 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Wilson is a Native American who spent his formative years growing up in the Navajo Nation. His ongoing series, *Auto Immune Response (AIR)*, portrays the relationship between an imagined post-apocalyptic Diné (Navajo) man and the magnificent but toxic environment he inhabits. The *Auto Immune Response* is also this artist's reminder of the many autoimmune diseases, including lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, that affect Native Americans. This environment in which the protagonist face covered with blood and dust, must wear a respirator, is so bleak that it might be the surface of the moon. Wilson describes his series as "an allegorical investigation of the extraordinarily rapid transformation of indigenous lifeways, the disease it has caused, and strategies of response that enable cultural survival." Wilson's powerful photographs tackle the interconnecting issues of Native American identity, contested land, colonization, health, and the melding of art and technology. He photographs himself in this landscape of the Navajo Nation, located across today's Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The land is the strong second character in Wilson work, as the artist reminds us of its tortured history. Corporations and the U.S. government stripped its natural resources, particularly toxic uranium ore used to build the nation's atomic arsenal between World War II and the 1980s, Despite repeating his face to create a dramatic mirroring effect, Wilson, instead, creates an image of profound

loneliness —a portrait of the artist in isolation.



Natalie Collette Wood




The Dinner After the Storm, 2021

Chicken wire, repurposed furniture, plants, moss, and digitally printed chiffon.

72 x 120 x 180 inches

Courtesy of the artist

In her work Natalie Collette Wood investigates the growing dichotomy between the natural world and the pressures of urban development in an age of climate change. Her latest installation, *The Dinner After the Storm*, suggests a bucolic backyard barbeque gone terribly awry, and recalls the freakish weather events that global warming brings, such as the “remnants” of Hurricane Ida during the fall of 2021, which killed nearly 50 people in the New York City area in a flash flood. Wood grew up in a modern city, Las Vegas, a pinnacle of discordance between the natural and manmade worlds. The desert that surrounds this city deeply impacted Wood. Both beautiful and ferocious, it shaped her respect for nature. Wood tempers her awareness of the chaos nature can cause by her interest in its beauty. Deeply inspired by historical art, she cites the storm scenes of 19th-century British landscape painter J.M.W.

	<p>Turner as an important influence in her works on canvas. One of the best-known aspects of her installations is her use of chairs, often baroque of rococo in design that she covers with succulents, moss, and weeds suggesting the poetry of decay. She often presents the chairs askew, signaling a toppled grandeur or false nostalgia. Wood is a 2008 graduate of the M.F.A. program at Lehman College.</p>
	<p>Natalie Collette Wood <i>River Meta</i>, 2021 Acrylic oil and printed paper pasted on canvas 60 x 72 inches Courtesy of the artist</p>
	<p>Natalie Collette Wood <i>Backyard BBQ</i>, 2018 Acrylic oil and printed paper pasted on canvas 48 x 60 inches Courtesy of the artist</p>
	<p>Ken + Julia Yonetani <i>Three Wishes</i>, 2014 Three sculptures, each 6 × 3 ½ inches Glass figurines, butterfly specimens, glass domes, music boxes Courtesy of the Artists and Mizuma Art Gallery</p>

©Ken+Julia Yonetani

Ken + Julia Yonetani's work delves into nature and the spiritual today, engaging the five senses and the theatricality of performance. *Three Wishes*, a seemingly whimsical presentation of illuminated butterflies, packs a punch and draws inspiration from Walt Disney's television series *Wonderful World of Color*, a 1957 episode entitled, "Our Friend the Atom." In this show, a genie offers three wishes: limitless energy, magic to conjure food, and health and peace, all suggesting the benefits of atomic power. But the artists of *Three Wishes*, in a collaboration with scientists investigating the effects of the 2011 nuclear disaster at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi power plant, created three sculptures of butterflies, 57 years after Disney's enthusiastic introduction of the atom. Their sculptures show butterflies, unwitting victims of nuclear energy gone wrong. Evident in them are mutations and high death rates from radiation poisoning. The rotating insects create a distressing viewpoint from which to ponder Disney's iconic song, "It's a Small World," a sober reminder of our global toxic connectivity