

Anna Laurent

b. 1979, USA. Awarded UK visa, Artist of Exceptional Talent; lives in London.

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Biography:

Award-winning flora-focused photographer and author. I am especially interested in the visual depiction of plants—as an author, throughout history, and as an artist, in contemporary practice. My photography is in the permanent collections of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, London; the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles; and is interred in a mountain in northernmost Norway, alongside Svalbard Seed Vault. In 2018 she installed a site-specific installation in South Kensington, launched in conjunction with Frieze London & a reflection on our contemporary relationship with nature. In 2019 I was awarded a UK visa as an Artist of Exceptional Talent.

My first book, *Botanical Art from the Golden Age of Scientific Discovery* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), examines the art & science of plant biology in 19th-century wall charts. The large-format book includes artifacts & research from archives in Prague, Berlin, London, Cambridge, New York, and elsewhere. Organized taxonomically, chapters compare the depiction of species within plant families, including scientific summaries of each chart. A botany primer with contextualised background, the book emulates a Victorian classroom while providing biographies of renowned illustrators & scientists.

'Dispersal' is a series of photographic portraits exploring the form & function of seed dispersal. Individually, each work is a fine art portrait illustrating the architecture of a fruit (seed pod). Collectively, the series reveals the staggering diversity of textures, colors, and forms that species have evolved in pursuit of survival & reproduction. Drawing on the botanical heritage of botanic illustration and specimen photography, my work is a study of both science & beauty. The project began in 2012 and is ongoing. I have collected all specimens, either in the wild, or at participating botanic gardens & arboreta.

'Dispersal' exhibitions include the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, London, the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, and the University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley, as well as gardens in Amsterdam, Italy, Gibraltar, Sydney, and New York City. In 2017 'Dispersal' was awarded a silver-gilt medal by the Royal Horticultural Society for a selection of works juried for the Chelsea Flower Show. In 2018 the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew commissioned a series of seed portraits to be permanently displayed alongside living plants in the Temperate House, the largest Victorian glasshouse in the world.

Education:

University College London. MSc, History & Philosophy of Science, 2019

Harvard University. BA, Literature, 2000

Commissions for permanent collections:

2019 *Agri/Culture*. Group show. Works interred in vault alongside Svalbard Seed Vault. Longyearben, Norway

2018 *Royal Botanic Garden at Kew, London*. Interpretation panels throughout Temperate House. Photographs of fruits & seeds. UK

2018 *The Exhibitionist Hotel*. Immersive installation 'Flora: Exploration to Extinction'. London, UK

2012 *Natural History Museum of Los Angeles*. Exhibition about urban biodiversity. Photographs of fruits & seeds. Los Angeles, USA

Selected Exhibitions:

2019 *Agri/Culture*. Group show. Svalbard Seed Vault. Longyearben, Norway

2018 *Evolve/Involve*. Group show. The Exhibitionist Hotel, London UK

2017 *The Fall*. Group show. Fitzrovia Gallery, London UK

2017 *Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Flower Show*. Group show & competition, juried portfolio. London UK

2017 *Royal Botanic Garden at Kew*. Group show, International Garden Photographer of the Year, London UK

2017 *Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam*, Group show. The Netherlands

2017 *Gibraltar Botanic Gardens (The Alameda)*, Group show. Gibraltar

2017 *Dispersal: Berkeley*. Solo show. All specimens collected on site. University of California Botanical Garden, Berkeley, USA

2014 *Dispersal: Arnold*. Solo show. All specimens collected on site. Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, USA

Awards:

2017 International Garden Photographer of the Year, Bronze medal. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

2017 Royal Horticultural Society, Silver Gilt. Photography Portfolio exhibited at RHS Chelsea Flower Show

Bibliography:

Journal of The Autobiography Society (cover image), vol. 35, Winter 2020
Harvard Magazine, “The Sorcery of Seed Pods”, January 2014
The Boston Globe, “The Seed Pod Army”, Kevin Hartnett, January 5, 2014
International Garden Photographer of the Year, ed. Curtis McGlinchey, Garden World Images, 2017
Botanical Research Institute of Texas, vol 10, no 2, December 2016
ArtNew, “Flower Power: On Vegetation and Verdure in Art”, Andy Battaglia, December 12, 2017
Economic Botany, New York Botanical Garden, vol 71, December 2017

Publications:

Botanical Art: From Renaissance Herbaria to the 19th Century (content director), White Star, 2018
The Botanic Wall Chart: Illustrations from the Golden Age of Scientific Discovery, University of Chicago Press, Hachette, 2016
Hymn, Laboratory Arts Collective, “Fear”, Spring 2014
Evolve, Journal of The Ecology Center, “Seed Pods as Shelter”, Issue 09 Spring 2014
Arnoldia: the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard, “Dispersal”, Volume 71, no. 2. Autumn 2013

Lectures & Talks:

2019 ‘Nature & Art’, The Exhibitionist Hotel, London
2018 Artist talk & book reading Fitzrovia Gallery, London
2017 Artist talk University of California Berkeley School of Design, USA (invited by Ronald Rael, Professor of Architecture)
University of California Botanical Garden at Berkeley, Berkeley, Calif., 18 & 25 January, 2017.
Royal Horticultural Society Wisley, UK. 19 November, 2016.
Stories & Books Café, Los Angeles, Calif. 7 November, 2016.
Westchester Garden Club, Westchester, Connecticut, 12 October, 2016.
Hartford Garden Club, West Granby, Connecticut, 7 October, 2016.
Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, Boston, MA, USA. 28 October, 2013.

Press:

“In her show ‘Dispersal’, Laurent reminds us that plants do move. Her photographs illustrate with exquisite beauty & botanical panache that these seemingly sessile organisms disperse in fantastic ways. This can only be accomplished [by] the scholar-artist, and Laurent is clearly both.” – *Michael Dosmann, Curator of Living Collections, Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University*

“The Robert Mapplethorpe of seed pods.” – *Gwen Stauffer, Executive Director, Lotusland*

“Laurent’s images testify to the many ingenious ways that life propagates itself.” – *Kevin Hartnett, The Boston Globe*

“Anna Laurent has done a series of photographs of seedpods that are aesthetically magnificent and also present superb detail.”
– *Anna Ursyn, Handbook of Research on Maximizing Cognitive Learning through Knowledge Visualization, 2015.*