

Marignana Arte

fuse*

Herbario Novo. From the ancient herbaria to Artificial Botany

Curated by Federica Patti

From 12 February to 30 April 2022

Opening Saturday 12 February 6 PM

Marignana Arte, Dorsoduro, 140A (Venice)

Herbario Novo is an integral part of the broader research program undertaken by *fuse** titled *Artificial Botany* and will be presented in the Marignana Arte project room. The project explores the expressive potentials of botanical illustrations through the use of machine learning algorithms. Before the invention of photography botanical illustrations were the only way to visually archive the many species of plants existing in the world. These images were used by physicists, pharmacists, and botany scholars to identify, analyze, and classify the species. Although no longer relevant scientifically, they have nonetheless become sources of inspiration for artists who pay a tribute to life and Nature using contemporary tools and methodologies.

Artificial Botany is a work created in this spirit, drawing from public archives containing illustrations by the greatest artists in this field, including Maria Sibylla Merian, Pierre-Joseph Redouté, Anne Pratt, Mariann North and Ernst Haeckel. These illustrations have become the didactic material for a system known as GAN (*Generative Adversarial Network*) that after some training enables to recreate new artificial images with morphological features almost identical to the original images, but with details and characteristics that appear to be created by human hands. In this sense the machine re-elaborates the content creating a new language, seizing the data and artistic qualities characteristic of Man and Nature.

Refining the processing and integrating the concept of transfer learning with previously developed models, the metamorphoses performed by *Artificial Botany* appear to be able to imagine likely future evolutions, generating a special, unfamiliar imaginary of aesthetics; wandering over the latent, multidimensional space of neural networks, the system succeeds in restoring the intrinsic beauty of the morphological process, contained in the phases of transition between one form and the next one. On exhibit, a video installation and a series of prints that crystallize moments of the flow and reveal new chromatic features, also by exploring different textural supports. Works and interventions that produce a strong ambiguity with respect to “what is a thing”: a short-circuit between permanent and ephemeral, changing and lasting, unique and plural, natural, cultural, artificial and fantastic.

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The Artificial Botany series will be on exhibit during the show devoted to the XXIV edition of the *Japan Media Arts Festival* (from 13 January 2022 at Kochi, Japan), organized by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in the spaces of the Kochi City Culture Hall. The works by *fuse** will be associated with the botanical illustrations by Tomitaro Makino, considered the father of early 20th-century Japanese botany.

Moreover, from 18 January to 22 May the series will also feature in *MUTAMENTI. The Synthetic metamorphoses of fuse* and Francesca Pasquali*, installed in the spaces of *CUBO Porta Europa* in Bologna. The exhibition arises from a vast reflection around the *Artificial Botany* project and offers the opportunity to present a new body of works, associating analogical prints with video-installations, sound environments with an original antique exemplar of the herbarium painted by Ulisse Aldrovandi – thanks to the collaboration with the University Library of Bologna and Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna.

fuse* is a multidisciplinary art studio that explores the expressive possibilities offered by the creative use of digital technologies in order to interpret the complexity of human and natural phenomena. From the very beginning the main objective of the studio's research was to create multimedia installations and performances able to deeply involve the public by amplifying the emotional impact of the narration. The studio evolved over the years, tending towards an increasingly holistic approach to the creation of new projects. Trusting in a *modus operandi* that enhances pure experimentation, the aim is to create works able to inspire people, shift borders, and seek new connections between light, space, sound, and motion.

fuse* has always associated its own development with that of the communities in which it is active, supporting, promoting, and imagining projects aimed at spreading culture and knowledge. Since 2016 with this purpose it has co-produced [NODE](#), the festival of electronic music and digital arts. Over the years *fuse** has presented its works and productions on a worldwide scale in art institutions and festivals including Mutek, Today'sArt, Sónar Istanbul, Artechouse, STRP Biennial, Romaeuropa, Kikk, CosmoCaixa and the National Centre for the Performing Arts of China.

Open from Tuesday to Saturday from 11 AM to 7 PM

Sunday and Monday open by appointment only

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