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## ARTIST EBONY G PATTERSON'S SURREAL SITE-SPECIFIC WORK AT THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

WONDROUS SCULPTURAL AND HORTICULTURAL INSTALLATIONS THAT OFFER SOCIETAL INSIGHT

Posted by David Graver, Posted on 30 May 2023

It's not only the sight of hundreds of glittering vultures perched alone or huddled in groups in front of the Enid A Haupt Conservatory at the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) that startles passersby; it's also the way these stark, shimmering



sculptures contrast the vibrance of surrounding blood-red, burgundy, purple and orange-colored blooms and the various green hues of springtime undergrowth. Together, this astonishing spectacle forms one component of *...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...*, an enveloping series of installations by visual artist Ebony G Patterson. For anyone who has dreamed of visiting this verdant wonderland in The Bronx, Patterson gives reason to do so now.

This one indelible vision acts as an introduction to the surprises that follow inside the conservatory: ghostly limbs, a sanguine pool, glass representations of extinct plant species and an exquisite array of living flowers that commune with the interventions. As an aesthetic experience, the immersive installation is unlike any other; as a large-scale work of art, it says so much more—addressing postcolonial spaces and the very nature of growth and decay.



"I said to Joanna [L. Groarke, vice president of exhibitions and programming at the NYBG], who's the curator I've been working with here over the last number of years...I'm going to give you a show that you've not had before," Patterson said in front of the conservatory during the press preview. "The NYBG has engaged with other artists before, but they haven't worked with artists who've necessarily considered plants as [an artistic] material."

Following a residency at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, in advance of this exhibition, Patterson began to think of gardens as not only a place for organic survival, but also social survival. "People often think that when I'm talking about gardens, that I'm actually talking about the site of a garden. But I'm also speaking about using the garden as a metaphor to talk about social spaces, thinking quite largely about working class spaces. A lot of working class spaces in Jamaica have the name 'gardens' next to it. It references the land in the same way that a lot of wealthy neighborhoods do."

Patterson asked herself, "what does it then mean to think about a garden as it relates to communities that are given particular kinds of care—in terms of what is thought of as a space of investment, of possibility. What does it also then mean to think about those gardens that are not given consideration for the possibility of care—but thrive regardless because that is what happens in nature, right? Things live on, irrespective of what one puts in nature's way."

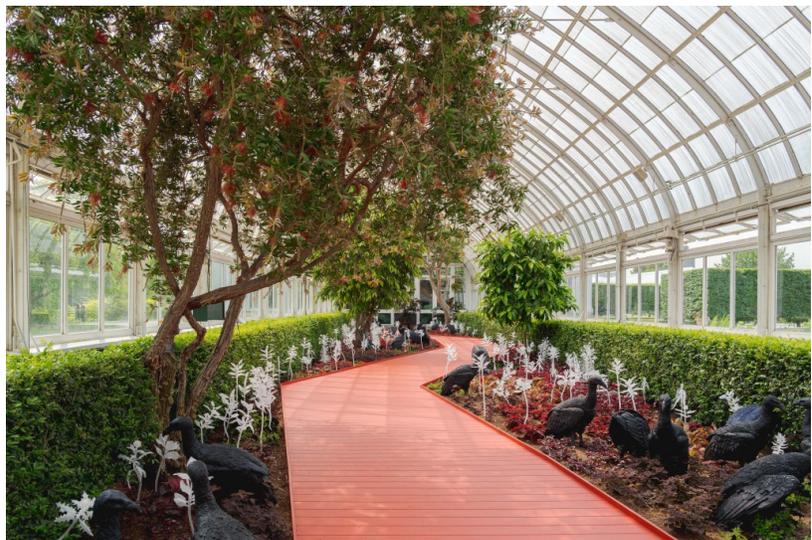




It was through an unexpected encounter with an all-white leucistic peacock at a garden in Jamaica (that she'd been going to since she was a child), that furthered the idea. "In seeing this peacock, the peacock was in molting and it was in an enclosure and it was a dark enclosure and the peacock just kind of hovered in the space, ebbing and flowing," she said. "Thinking about what the peacock is, this incredibly beautiful bird with all of its

pageantry, to see it at its ugliest moment, remained with me for a year. And so in thinking about that I couldn't help but think about the question 'what does it mean to witness your own ugliness?' For me, unpacking the garden in a moment of molting, in a moment of transformation, is about witnessing our collective ugliness and noting that even in the ugliness beauty is possible."

Beyond the conservatory and its lawn, Patterson perched awe-inspiring works in the Mertz Library—one of which must be circumnavigated for a complete vision. All of Patterson's works throughout the NYBG are the result of a multi-year engagement that has included substantial access and in-depth research. Altogether, complex societal insights blossom from stunning landscapes and monumental installations.



***...things come to thrive...in the shedding...in the molting...*** runs now through 17 September.

***Images courtesy of the New York Botanical Garden***