BLOSSOM'S **DARK** BEAUTY

BURLINGTON'S BOTANICAL BRILLIANCE BLOOMS





Few natural settings are more apt to cause reflection, or moodiness, than a garden in senescence. Flowers that in summer breezes flirted with each other in joyful color, now are memories. Yet, this flora that remains, pale and wrinkled, thinning and skeletal, invites a different perspective from the viewer — one that reflects not only on that which is gone, but on the passage of time, on mortality and rebirth.

Piet Oudolf, the renowned garden designer from the Netherlands said it well, "The garden in winter is an emotional experience, you think in terms of decay and disappearing and coming back. You feel the cycle of nature." Oudolf is the creative designer of New York City's High Line, an abandoned elevated subway rail line that is now an all-season 30-block meander through flora on the city's lower west side.

REVIEW

DARK BOTANICA

BURLINGTON CITY ARTS
135 CHURCH STREET
BURLINGTON, VERMONT

THROUGH
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The current exhibit at Burlington City Arts (BCA), "Dark Botanica," opens up that personal contemplation space where we discover that flowers are never only flowers. Upon entering the gallery, Marcie Scudder's oversize installation, "My Mother's Garden," captures the viewer's imagination. The work drapes across the ceiling and against the street-facing glass facade of the gallery as a quilt might drape casually across a bed. Made of hundreds of small hexagonal folded papers and photographs of poppies, thistle, myosotis, and stitched together to create a flow of origami flowers, the work references the artist's mother who left her a garden when she died.

Scudder notes that gardens are like mothers and daughters, a cycle of birth, blossom, death and renewal.

Alina Bliumis' work takes a different perspective on female reproduction. All eight of her watercolor paintings on exhibit are titled "Plant Parenthood," yet each references a different plant that women have used for centuries to induce abortion. The artist began this project as a political statement on the Supreme Court's reversal of Roe v Wade. Upon first viewing, the paintings appear as flowers, but closer viewing suggests a contrast between sensuality and poison as both the physical and as metaphor.

Above Left: Megan Bogonovich, *Dark Botanicals,* 2025-2026, glazed ceramics. I Above Right: Cami Davis, *Encounter,* from Poetic Ecologies Series, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 66" x 72".



Ceramicist Megan Bogonovich is represented by a series of quirky, brightly colored, spirited glazed ceramic sculptures that are displayed as a tightly clustered set on an outsize table at the center of the gallery. Part imaginary, part representational, these twisting, curling, bending, gnarling objects may bring to mind walks in the woods when one encounters fungi growing on tree bark, on decaying stumps, in the understory of fallen trees. Who among us has not experienced fascination and fear, curiosity and puzzlement at what nature produces and what humans manufacture?

Sian Fan's digital animations are short, 30-second video installations that depict the motion of pink and mauve shapes that we associate with flora in the context of the exhibition. In digital installations, the narrative changes the possibility of what we perceive. Is it nature as depicted or does it contain an embedded new narrative? Is this new territory that presents worlds on the cusp of authenticity? How do we respond to it? How do we move from visual art that is fixed to an art that interacts with us as we are processing it?



Photographer Dylan Griffin is best known for his commercial work with some of the biggest names in fashion, cosmetics and luxury jewelry. For more than 30 years, he has developed a unique style that melds his interest in nature with the business of product marketing. On view at the BCA gallery are six outsize archival pigment prints of stylized floral environments. Exquisite in their detail and composition, they invite the viewer to ponder the contrast of the abandon of a garden in the wild with the constructed scenes in these photographs.

Sage Tucker-Ketcham, a 14th-generation Vermonter, not surprisingly knows her native plants well and renders them in her new oils with clarity and precision. Those familiar with her earlier work will see these new works not as a departure, but as a maturation of style and composition. Her oils are done in hues of brown, dark mauve, subtle ochres and deep greens reiterating the overarching "Dark Botanica" theme of the exhibit. She depicts arching grasses, every variety of flower — in blossom and as seed head, weeds, gnarly twigs, featherlike ferns, weathered leaves and an occasional moon in the background illuminating her imagined cluster of an ecosystem.

Ecosystems are also integral to the work of Cami Davis whose two works on exhibit, "Poetic Ecologies, Listening for the Lyrics," a triptych, and "Poetic Ecologies, Encounter," offer a rich encounter and conversation between the natural world that we as humans inhabit and from which we separate as our societies widen the gap between what is our biosphere and what is our anthrosphere.

Many of Davis's paintings depict tangled vegetation — overlapping leaves, clusters of what appear to be milkweed pods, ferns, ethereal creatures, perhaps the dazzling translucent wing of a dragonfly, on a background of darkness that suggests a greater mystery at hand. Her color palette is muted: Browns, dark greens, an occasional dab of soft pink or teal and large swaths of luminescent gold. Davis's career spans more than 40 years and in addition to her work as painter, she has been an educator and activist.

"Dark Botanica" expands the traditional central themes in still-life painting — love, innocence, sensuality, decay to include the polemical. A flower is never only a flower. Burlington City Arts will offer a "Dark Botanica" panel discussion on Thursday, January 14, from 6 to 7 p.m.

Marta Pauer-Tursi

Above: Marcie Scudder, *My Mother's Garden*, 2016, folded paper, photography. I Below: Sage Tucker-Ketcham, (left to right) *Saying Goodbye to Today*, *Sudden Peak*, *Contemplative Parting*, 2026, all oil on canvas.