

DEBORAH ANZINGER: AN UNLIKELY BIRTH
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EDNA S. TUTTLEMAN GALLERY

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“The physical structure of our world, our place within it, and the stories we create through it indicate residual syntactical relationships to space (space as in the land, and space as in raced and gendered bodies) that the project of colonialism and empire has left on culture, by shaping our person-to-person and person-to-nature relationships. In this way the aesthetics of our psychic and physical environment are molded to idealize patriarchal subject-object binaries (such as penetration of space, dominance, an ability to extract resources), and to position bodies and souls in hierarchies of value based on these concepts — all being the foundation of capitalism. The ecological paradigms and aesthetic syntax of these inherited understandings is what I attempt to erode and reshape through my current work.”

— Deborah Anzinger

“The constitutive subordination and ‘thingification’ of black peoples and natures requires not only a rearticulation of black liberation, but also a major change in the characterization and valuation of natures.”

— Danielle Purifoy

Deborah Anzinger: An Unlikely Birth brings together sculpture, video, painting, and installation in a solo exhibition by the Kingston, Jamaica-based artist. Combining synthetic and living materials, Anzinger erodes boundaries between the body and the land, reenvisioning geography and architectural space through the lens of black feminism. Her artistic approach facilitates a new way of interrogating, understanding, and reckoning with the realities of the Anthropocene — the geological period in which human activity has irreversibly affected the environment — as both psychological and social space.

The title is taken from a major work in the exhibition and speaks to the plantation as progenitor — or birthplace — of our current capitalist economies, social inequities, and ecological abuse. Undergirding this narrative is the historical exploitation of reproduction, continued infringements on reproductive rights, and devaluation of reproductive labor. *An Unlikely Birth* depicts a fabulistic landscape in which sky and land are not separate but intertwined and layered. Brush strokes appear to be computer-generated; impressionistic forms gesture toward unfinished figures; nothing is what it seems to be. A wave of synthetic afro-kinky hair unfurls from the canvas onto the wall; two aloe plants blossom from its springy coils. In Anzinger's work the natural and the artificial coalesce to become indistinguishable and equivalent. Pieces included in this exhibition weave stories of ambiguity, complexity, and pessimism and utilize the possibility of fiction.

Botanicals appear throughout the exhibition, most prominently the succulent *Aloe barbadensis*, or aloe vera. Prized for its medicinal properties and ease of growth, the aloe plant suggests both interior and outdoor spaces, including the tropical landscape of Jamaica. Aloe also figures as a metaphor for the fallacies of gender and race—and how these binaries are affixed to both human and nonhuman entities. Aloe is healing, soothing, and fleshy, but also phallic, penetrative, and able to wound. The plant here reveals and emphasizes the *un-geographic* character of the natural world—the boundary-defying ambitions of botanicals and their will to take root in places far from their land of origin. As such they hold the stories of great migrations, of changing climates, knowledges, and experiences.

Entangled among the flora are their opposites, materials such as acrylic paint and Styrofoam, which share space with more convincing stand-ins for organic matter such as synthetic hair. Embroided, complicit, and intermingled, they trouble the viewer's notion of what is "natural" while speaking to the undeniably human origins of manufactured substances. These include the plastics that will soon outnumber fish in the ocean, or the petroleum-derived microparticles that have entered the remotest reaches of the planet's terrains, the atmosphere, and our bodies—on a cellular level.

Anzinger's assemblages corral materials into the configurations we are bound to encounter outside. Yet, in

Anzinger's work, alongside the damning evidence of our Anthropogenic condition, we also find narratives, fictions, and poetry that offer possible ways out, and through, the morass. Here, beauty and pleasure exist, and organisms do more than survive. The titles of her works speak to and implicate us, pointing to spaces of resistance, reparative strategies, and humor: *Fiction as a Vessel for Reality*; *The Distraction of Symbolism*; *Inhospitable*; *Coy*; *I Told You*; *Resonant*. How has our collective exposure to and reliance upon materials and commodities reshaped our environment and climate? Why are we unable to limit our impact and implement strategies to reverse it? Anzinger's works hint at these questions while gesturing toward more nuanced relationships between place and the human and nonhuman agents that populate them.

Anzinger offers intimate networks, individual responsibility, and speculative fiction as possible correctives and remediations to the urgent, interrelated issues facing our civilization. In *An Unlikely Birth*, Anzinger considers the convergence of environmental racism and reproductive justice through an array of emblematic forms, textures, and materials, offering us opportunities to reframe the catastrophes we face while imagining openings for more equitable futures.

—Daniella Rose King, Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow

A fully illustrated publication designed by Nontsikelelo Mutiti will accompany the exhibition. It will feature essays by curator Daniella Rose King, lawyer and geographer Danielle Purifoy, and a conversation between Anzinger and King.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Danielle Purifoy. "On the Stubborn Whiteness of Environmentalism." *Inside Higher Ed*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/06/22/how-environmentalism-academe-today-excludes-people-color-opinion>.
- Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007.
- Dorothy Roberts. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage, 2017.
- T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*. New York: Sternberg, 2016.
- New Local Space, Kingston, *NLS in Podcast*, episode 26, parts 1–3: "Dayne Buddo, Deborah Jack, Pablo Guardiola, TJ Demos, Marina Reyes Franco and Ursula Biemann," January 28, 2018, <https://nlsin.wordpress.com/2018/01/28/episode-26-pt-1-nls-in-dayne-buddo-deborah-jack-pablo-guardiola-tj-demos-marina-reyes-franco-and-ursula-biemann/>.

RELATED PROGRAMS

APRIL

26	5 PM	Members Preview
	6:30 PM	Public Opening Celebration

27	2 PM	On Inhospitality: A conversation between artist Deborah Anzinger, lawyer and geographer Danielle Purifoy, moderated by curator Daniella Rose King
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This conversation will explore notions and strategies of the *inhospitable* (the name itself is borrowed from one of Anzinger's works in the exhibition) and their intersection with a number of historic struggles for emancipation, decolonization, and self-governance of the land and the body throughout the black diaspora.

MAY

8	6–7 PM	☞ Curator-Led Tour of <i>Deborah Anzinger: An Unlikely Birth</i>
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Deborah Anzinger (born 1978, Kingston, Jamaica; lives Kingston) works in painting, sculpture, and video at the intersection of black feminist, environmental, and geopolitical interrogation. She employs nontraditional materials such as living plants, afro-kinky hair, and mirrors as openings to intimate and alternative aesthetics of being in the world. Anzinger's work has been exhibited at the National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston; the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art, Brooklyn; the Royal West of England Academy, Bristol; the National Art Gallery of the Bahamas, Nassau City; and Sargent's Daughters, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, and 47 Canal, all in New York. *Deborah Anzinger: An Unlikely Birth* is her first US museum solo exhibition. A 2018 recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Grant, Anzinger founded New Local Space, a contemporary visual art initiative in Kingston that provides a place for artists to experiment with new ideas, collaborate with each other, and engage with the public.

WHITNEY-LAUDER EXHIBITION: *AN UNLIKELY BIRTH*

Curated by 2018-19 Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow Daniella Rose King
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ICA IS ALWAYS FREE. FOR ALL.

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