

Such is our anxiety about climate change and loss of botanical diversity that there are now more than 1,400 seed banks in the world. These laboratories collect, preserve and experiment with plant material, in the hope that its DNA will help us, both very soon and in the distant future. Since 2008, Dornith Doherty has gained access to seed banks in North and South America, Europe, Russia and Australia, creating a body of work entitled *Archiving Eden*. In *Oasis*, a selection of works from this series, she draws our attention to one aspect of climate change and the related work of seed banks. That is, the increasing aridness of this earth and the quest for drought-tolerant varieties of plants.

The artworks in *Oasis* have each involved taking x-rays of seeds and sometimes of pods and leaves – a technology that's used at the seed banks to check quality. We're able to look inside these forms, visiting their inner structure, and the miniscule is rendered visible by magnification. Also, we're looking at material that's been brought from the vaults and held up to view. In these artworks, Dornith Doherty invites us to get beneath the surface, to probe with her, to look and think in different dimensions.

The artist takes the digital x-ray files from the seed banks back to her studio and creates collages that she prints on to watercolor paper. Or sometimes, she makes lenticular photographs, in which the image appears to move when viewed from different angles. In the case of 'Australia', she has clustered x-ray images of the seed-heads of plants that are native to that country and able to cope with lack of water. As if to register her appreciation of these plants' capabilities, she has formed them into a kind of bouquet. It's a celebratory gesture towards nature itself, perhaps? On the other hand, it might also suggest a single, airborne seed (like a dandelion's) – an impossible hybrid blown on the wind towards an uncertain fate.

The artwork 'Black Wattle', relating to an Australian willow that survives in the desert and enriches the soil, also comes across as an appreciation or tribute. This time the x-rays are of seedlings, formed by Dornith Doherty into a simple circle. The resulting 'plant portrait' is luminous, its symmetry compelling. Her creation of a circle – found also in works such as 'Prairie II', 'Flash' and 'Arid' – puts me in mind of circles made with stones in the landscape by the artist Richard Long, and, much further back, by stone-age civilizations. It's a gesture of reverence, as powerful as it is understated.

In another work in *Oasis*, 'Pyncantha' (another kind of wattle that can survive wildfires), the x-ray forms are arranged as if to suggest a swarming or shoaling, a dynamic of nature that is independent of humankind. 'Waning', 'Kangaroo Grass' and 'Yuma' are similar. The artist's greatest wish seems here that the plant matter should be set free, to do exactly as it will.

On this parched earth, *Oasis* is a fertile pool in which we see our world refracted.

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