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**Ann Shelton: *A Lovers' Herbal***

**Denny Dimin Virtual**

**February 4 - March 27, 2021**

In its relationship with human beings, the plant kingdom has always locked itself closely into our virtues and our vices ... There is therefore no reason to believe that future developments in the interaction between man and plants will be all beneficent. Man's future with plants, like the past, will be filled with contradictions and threats. Plants, whether from rainforest, steppe, back yard or the hands of genetic engineers, will continue to produce commodities we have never dreamed of, new trade routes, new wealth and, no doubt, great dangers too.

Stuart, David C. (2004). *Dangerous Garden: The Quest for Plants to Change Our Lives*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p 203.

Ann Shelton's *A Lovers' Herbal* is a photographic garden of flowers and herbs exquisitely arranged and offset against a brightly colored background. The plants Shelton selected - rue, peony, pennyroyal, willow - were drawn from millenia of human history in which they were used medicinally as emmenagogues (to bring on menstruation), abortifacients (to induce abortion), or contraceptives, all of varying strengths. Some are highly toxic, while others are simple herbs. Other plants in the series such as Opium were included as they were a common component in tonics and tinctures made for these purposes. Rich with oral and ancient histories Shelton's intention is to remind us of the knowledge nature holds. Along with her research into the histories of botanical medicine, colonial practices of abortion and human relationships with plants, Shelton learned Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement, which both inspired the arrangement style and introduces one of many themes of the work, the attempted control of women's bodies.

The titles of the pieces include references to the botanical names of the featured plant, and the name of an archetype of femininity, such as The Mother, The Witch, The Sibyl, and The Nurse or the more contemporary Supermodel. Following the New Zealand-based artist's visit to the United States in 2019, Shelton made a number of works that responded particularly to our nation's

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<sup>1</sup> "Women" when used throughout this text is intended to be inclusive of people on the trans or genderqueer spectrum.

political moment, including a suite of three pink works titled “The Congress Woman,” “The Party Girl,” and “The Influencer,” which feature the “Dinner Plate Peony,” deliberately referencing Judy Chicago’s masterwork of feminist art on permanent view at the Brooklyn Museum. Other recent U.S.-influenced works include “The Justice,” inspired by Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Shelton’s work is significant in this moment not only of the politicization of women’s health and the #metoo movement, but also in the time of climate change and the coronavirus, when a naturally occurring pathogen is causing worldwide devastation and death. Her work argues that our mismanagement of nature engendered incremental loss of knowledge and understanding that we cannot easily build back, and that continues to pose a danger to human existence.

Ann Shelton (b. 1967, New Zealand) is recognised as one of New Zealand’s leading photographic artists. Shelton completed a Master of Fine Arts from the University of British Columbia (2001), Vancouver and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (1995) from Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University. In 2016 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki developed the major mid-career survey exhibition *Dark Matter: Ann Shelton* curated by Zara Stanhope, which toured to Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu in 2017. Recent exhibitions include *an invitation to dance*, Photo2021, Melbourne (2021), *jane says*, Denny Dimin Gallery, New York (2019), *Invisible Traces*, Espai d’Art Contemporani de Castelló, Spain curated by Mercedes Vicente (2014), *in a forest (excerpts)*, The Australian Center for Photography, Sydney, Australia (2012), *Dark Sky* at The Adam Art Gallery, Wellington curated by Geoffery Batchen and Tina Barton (2012), *Images Recalled (Bilder auf Abruf)*, Germany, Tobias Berger and Esther Ruelfs (2009), and *a way of calling* at Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne curated by Melissa Keys.

Ann Shelton: *A Lovers’ Herbal* will be on view on Denny Dimin Virtual from February 4 to March 27, 2021. There will be an artist talk with Ann Shelton and the critic Claire Voon on Thursday, February 11, at 7 p.m. Eastern Time.

Links:

Denny Dimin Virtual

[https://dennydimingallery.com/news/virtual\\_exhibition/ann-shelton-2/](https://dennydimingallery.com/news/virtual_exhibition/ann-shelton-2/)

Topic: In Conversation: Artist Ann Shelton and Critic Claire Voon

Time: Feb 11, 2021 07:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83634858516?pwd=WUw4c2VYZDV6dXJrZ004dGdUUUxXQT09>

Meeting ID: 836 3485 8516

Passcode: 208447