

The Rapture of Flora

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In 2007, Marsha Kennedy presented a new body of work in an exhibition, titled *The Rapture of Flora*, at the commercial gallery, Mysteria, (later Mata Gallery) in Regina. This series of work not only introduced a new painting medium to her practice, working in encaustic,ⁱ but it also reflected a shift in focus from the human figure, narratives and landscapes of previous series to an exploration of the microscopic world of plants.ⁱ

“The Rapture of Flora celebrates the primordial creative force of the plant world. These paintings show microscopic sections of plants from early twentieth century texts and focus primarily, but not exclusively, on the sexual and reproductive organs of the plant. With the unaided eye, these images would hover beyond the eye’s visual range. Yet they beckon as we peer into the early manifestations of desire and into what feels like a transcendent reality.”ⁱⁱ

Using her customary practice of presenting her forms centred and isolated, Kennedy’s microscopic focus is on the biology of plants, of stomas, stamens, stigmas and ovules, and is reminiscent of similar artistic interests and approaches in earlier works, such as the *Elegy II* series of *The Wailings of Windswept Soil*, where she likened the

biology of humans to that of plants to emphasize our interconnectedness with the natural world. The poetry of that earlier series also returns with the titles of the paintings being taken from phrases of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s poem, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*.

This allusion to the interconnection of all things may also play out between microscopic and macroscopic, or telescopic views of forms. Paintings where the plant forms float on darkened grounds, such as *Armor, at Length, Brought Forth Blossoms and Fruit* or *The Charms of the Light*, are perhaps reminiscent of celestial bodies in space or, in direct contrast, of the subatomic universe of electrons and protons. The grounds of these works vary, from encaustic to gold leaf, the latter referencing religious icon paintings, much like the *Mapping the Land and Body* series, presenting their subject matter as sacred, transcendent and celebrated for their desire for life.

ⁱEncaustic is a historic painting medium using wax as a pigment binder.

ⁱⁱMarsha Kennedy, Artist statement, *The Rapture of Flora* (2007), Mysteria Gallery, Regina, SK.