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I intend to curate an exhibition entitled "Seed to Bloom" In the Marianne North Gallery, Kew running throughout April-June 2026 with the price included with regular ticket entry. It will combine the existing 833 paintings in the gallery with ceramic works by contemporary designer Carol Long. The exhibition will be a collaboration between these two and the seed bank to explore the importance of preserving plant species as climate change slowly destroys the earth and the diversity of plants from around the world.

The Marianne North Gallery is an ideal space for the exhibition since it has high ceilings and embodies natural lighting which beams down from second story windows alongside artificial lighting allowing each corner of the building to be illuminated and the paintings clearly seen. When walking through the double door entrance the viewer is immediately immersed into the artwork since each wall is covered by paintings aligned in rows and columns with no gaps in between. North designed it this way so there is a sense of symmetry and organisation around the gallery. To assure there are no gaps, North added wooded battens to the sides of the work and extended the paintings (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 2019). I intend to leave the gallery this way since North planned and organised the paintings to be grouped by country or place and rearranging 883 paintings would be time consuming (Major, n.d.). This creates the idea that the room will be crammed and the viewers would be overwhelmed by the number of art works but paintings are a cycle of thematic landscapes which create a scene of harmony rather than clash. Although the walls are entirely covered, there is a large floor space available for the viewers to wander around, within these spaces there will be cabinets exhibiting Longs ceramics. By being able to walk around these the viewer can experience a direct contrast between 2D and 3D art. In each corner of the gallery there are

side rooms, one which can be used as a space for staff or storage keeping the gallery clutter free, and the other to be occupied by the seed bank. Having a room dedicated to the seed bank allows the viewers to have full focus on the work and impact they have on collecting and preserving species.

I have chosen Marianne North as an main artist to curate not only because her gallery provides an intimate setting which is already full of talent and beauty for the exhibition to take place, but because of her outstanding role towards botany. I find it important to bring attention to North's work today since most scientific plant media is online whereas she produces physical media allowing current day visitors to have a sensory experience in the real world rather than online. North travelled the globe as an independent Victorian woman and conducted her paintings along the way, often travelling through dangerous locations with potentially harmful wildlife. This twisted the traditional role of a Victorian woman since they would stay at home looking after their family while her husband worked to produce a living. North also changed how botanists illustrated plants, originally they would be minimally coloured and labelled against a white background but she drew them submerged in the landscape and interacting with other wildlife such as birds and insects. For the Victorian public, entering the gallery would give them a glimpse into tropical lands which most would never be able to explore (Mills, 2015). Since photography was low quality, expensive, and not often of exotic places it helped to educate the public (National Science and Media Museum, 2020). A key work in the gallery is the painting titled '*Norpentis Northiana*' (figure 1) a species discovered by and named after North herself. After its discovery the species was planted in the hot house at Kew so visitors would see it then be able to visit the gallery and see north's painting showing how it grows in its natural environment. The painting depicts an upper and lower pitcher plant in pinks and greens, the plant takes up the foreground of the painting against a predominantly blue mountain range background creating a scene of pictorial space. It was conducted en plein air using oil paints on a board which was easy for North to transport back to England and work into without the paint drying (The

Art Story, n.d.). I intend to make this painting a highlight of the exhibition to raise awareness due to it being an endangered species. Today the species grows in a protected area in Sarawak, Borneo since when the species was discovered poachers illegally took the plants or they were taken to be cultivated in nurseries around Europe (Simpson, 1995). In addition, the plant grows on limestone cliffs and needs humidity, yet where there are limestone cliffs there are gold mines disrupting the area and compromising their space to grow so many plants die out (Simpson, 1995).

Alongside North I have chosen Carol Long, a contemporary ceramicist, this draws a contrast because North is a historical artist and they explore different media, one oil paint, one clay allowing the viewer to experience 2D and 3D art. Long explores abstracted organic and expressive forms which reflect her own personal interpretation of nature unlike the scientific view North takes. This increases the engagement in the gallery and attracts a larger audience since there is more than one media and style. Long is born and based across America while North is a British artist, this means socially and culturally they view art differently and are surrounded by different plants impacting their influences. I have chosen 4 works to display at the exhibition, '*peacock tall vase*' (figure 2), '*lidded caterpillar*' (figure 3), '*textured fern mist bowl*' (figure 4), and '*small iris bottle*' (figure 5). All works are designed in the same way by being thrown on a pottery wheel out of clay, having its form altered creating fluidity and bizarre forms, and attaching pulled handles giving the work a functional property (Long, n.d.). They are then decorated in similar colour schemes via slip trailing giving the surface of the work a texture, staining, glazes and oxides bringing in depth and colour (Long, n.d.). At first glance the works don't appear to show nature; they could be ordinary household items that are only there to serve a function, but after reading the titles of the works the nature theme is revealed. For example, '*lidded caterpillar*' appears to be a rounded jar, long in width, and painted in brown and green. After hearing its title the viewer connects the work to be resembling a caterpillar, it has curved bulges showing its soft body, supports added to the base to raise the jar off the ground creating the impression of feet,

brown pulled handles acting as antennas, and a line of slip trailed dots as the pattern on its exoskeleton. I have chosen them as a group of work since they appear to have similar styles but depict different aspects of nature ranging from plants to animals. They will be presented in cabinets in the middle of the floor space allowing the viewers to walk around and see all sides of the works. Since they are made of clay they are fragile so the cabinets will be glass ensuring no one can break the work. I feel it is important to show a modern view of plants to show how botany and art has developed over the years.

The exhibition also collaborates with the seed bank, an organisation that preserves plant seeds and DNA to work towards biodiversity, breeding plants and protecting against climate change. The seed bank contains 2.5 billion seeds from 40,000 species of plant from nearly 100 countries (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, n.d.). The far room in the gallery will be dedicated to visitors watching a 3 minute film that demonstrates the work of the seed bank then planting their own flower. The seed bank will then look after it and once grown volunteers will move the flowers into the gardens at Kew for the summer. By having the public plant flowers it saves Kew paying for gardeners so more money can be put towards the seed banks research projects and mechanisms to save the environment.

When designing the gallery, Marianne North wanted it to have a dual function as a tea room however the director of Kew denied her wishes and she painted coffee plants around the door frame as an alternative (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 2019). To encourage the public to visit, included in the ticket price there will be a table giving out tea and coffee to the visitors. Science has proven by giving the viewers refreshments they will relax so they appreciate and enjoy the gallery more (Gilbert, 2019). This also doubles as a way to give back to North for her work towards botany and a thanks for creating an inspiring place.

To conclude, the gallery creates a balance between a leisurely experience viewing beautiful visual arts and scientific teaching about the importance of plant diversity and preservation. I

hope it inspires and encourages viewers to observe plants around them, create art and look after the environment to rewind the detrimental effects of climate change that are to come in the upcoming years.

List of figures:

Figure 1: North, M. (1876). *Nepenthes northiana*. [oil on board] 50.4 x 34.8 cm.



Figure 2: Long, C. (n.d.). *Peacock tail vase*. [Clay] 22"x 13.5"x 5".



Figure 3: Long, C. (n.d.). *Lidded caterpillar*. [Clay] 7" x 11" x 4.5".



Figure 4: Long, C. (n.d.). *Textured fern mist bowl*. [Clay] 3" x 13" x 11".



Figure 5: Long, C. (n.d.). *Small iris bottle*. [Clay] 5.5" x 5" x 3".



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