

STEPHEN WIRTZ GALLERY

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Contact: Julie Casemore, (415) 433-6879, julie@wirtzgallery.com

CATHERINE WAGNER

Morphology

Exhibition dates: January 5 – January 30, 2010

Opening reception for the artist, Thursday, January 7, 2010, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Stephen Wirtz Gallery presents *Morphology*, a new series of large-scale photographic works by Catherine Wagner.

In 2008 Catherine Wagner was invited by the California Academy of Sciences to be artist-in-residence, supported by the LEF Foundation. This exhibition features selections from an on-going body of work that draws from the Academy's collections of specimens. For the works exhibited at Stephen Wirtz Gallery, Wagner spent most of her time in the Botany and Entomology departments. She began with the question of what the natural world looked like 400 million years ago, exploring the first seed-bearing plants that became huge forests. She also drew inspiration from Albertus Seba, the famous 18th Century collector of curiosities.

Wagner has photographed hundreds of plant and insect species whose relatives existed during the Devonian Age and has reconstructed them into a new form. In these works, they have been decontextualized as specimens and recontextualized as formal, calligraphic gestures that are interrelated and form a new visual language that references our connection to the landscape. She draws inspiration from the lyrical "chalk board" paintings of Cy Twombly, as well as Bay Area wind patterns and ideas of mapmaking.

Together, these photographs resemble the visual patterns of writing systems, drawing from the idea that writing is a form of representing abstract concepts. Wagner has always been interested in how knowledge is acquired and transmitted. Here she seeks to explore notions of communication through a fabricated linguistic form. These works attempt to communicate through gesture and shared experience the natural world.

The specimens in these works are grouped according to their genus but visually transcend their taxonomies. As in the collections of Seba, who indulged in fanciful arrangements of his specimens, these works are non-scientific constructions. The series as a whole comprises a modern day Wunderkammer, or cabinet of curiosities.

Wagner is also included in the SFMOMA exhibitions *75 Years of Looking Forward: The Anniversary Show* (December 19, 2009 - January 16, 2011) and *The View From Here* (January 16 - June 27, 2010), as well as the *Real and HyperReal* exhibition at the San Jose Museum of Art (Jan. 30 – August 2010).

Wagner was named one of *Time* magazine's Fine Arts Innovators of the Year for 2001. Her work is represented in numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; among others. Monographs include *Cross Sections* (2002), *Art & Science: Investigating Matter* (1996), *Home and Other Stories* (1993), and *American Classroom* (1988).

Stephen Wirtz Gallery is located at 49 Geary St., 3rd Fl., San Francisco, CA 94108, (415) 433-6879, Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday, 9:30-5:30, Saturday 10:30-5:30.