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MY MOTHERS' GARDEN

Alysha Bailey

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## MY MOTHERS' GARDEN

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This series began with its title: *My Mothers' Garden*. Initially this related to the limited geographical nature of the project and the ako opportunity between myself and my mother-in-law. I had planned to document the plants from her garden via flatbed scanner, guided by seasonality and my mother-in-law's expert gardening knowledge. However, it became clear that each plant held the potential for a more intimate story. A story of women past, histories unacknowledged, unknown, or forgotten.<sup>1</sup> From serial killers to botanical heavyweights the images began to serve as portraits of the gardener, the plant, and the woman for which each image is titled. The project title itself became less literal and more of a universal homage.

The scanner is integral to this work because of its high resolution and the ability to position plants directly on to the glass. Deploying a contemporary enlightenment approach this methodology focused on experimentation with old technology just handled in a new way, combining scientific reason with art. Inherently, the scanner has limitations, but these are also its greatest strengths. The extreme shallow depth of field yields challenging and unforgiving results with a perspective specific to a scanner.

The glass plate plays an important role and is in fact a part of the image. Detritus, smudges, pollen, and sap all make a regular appearance, only made possible by the plants being laid directly on to a flat transparent surface.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to society's present inclination to require a quick fix of visual material, the scanner needs to take a substantive look at the object it is recording. A floral document laid upon glass, captured with a high level of digital detail, provides a unique opportunity to investigate botanical evidence and highlight photography's ability to recreate reality for evidence and argument.<sup>3</sup>

Each image in *My Mothers' Garden* is titled for the story of a woman with the intention of resurfacing the history and encouraging a contemporary dialogue. The plants provided the tool connect to these women's stories.



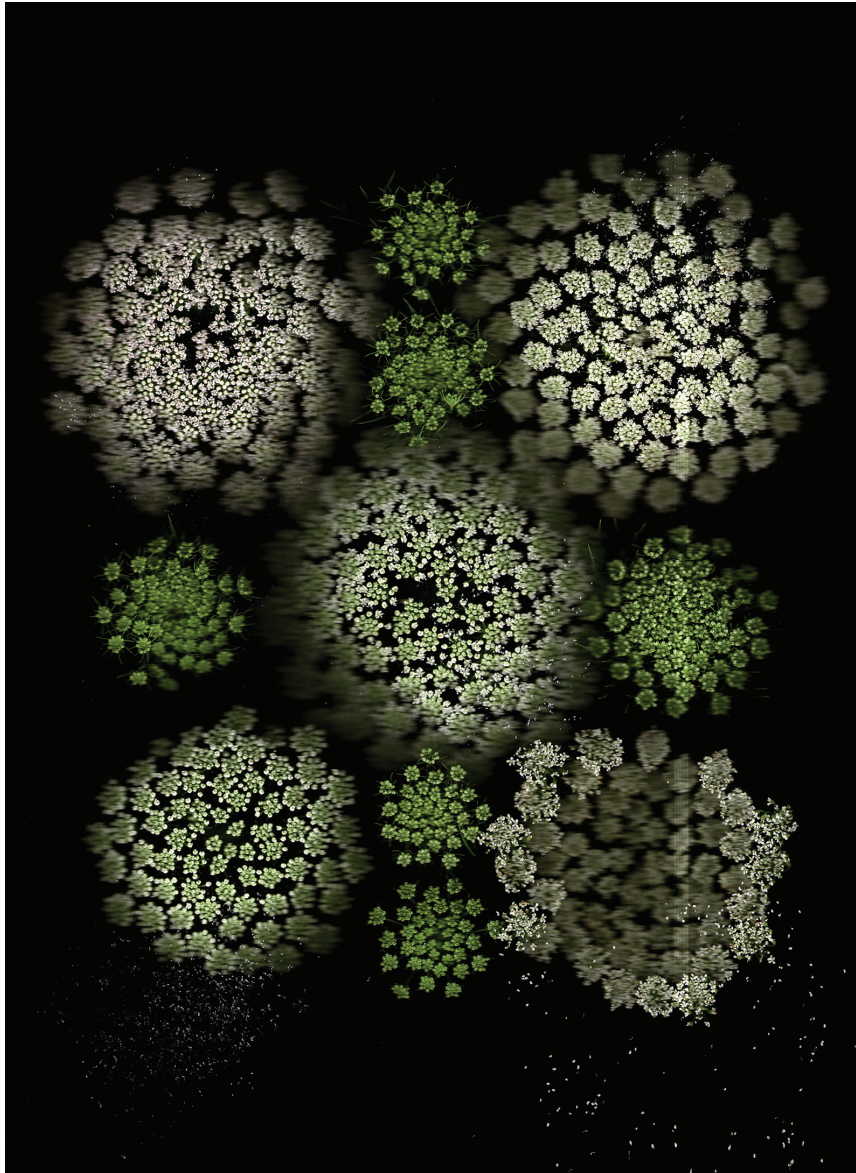


Figure 1. Alysha Bailey, *Sarah Churchill*, 2021.  
Digital ink-jet print on Epson Hot Press Bright, 1016 × 738 mm.

**SARAH CHURCHILL**  
*(False Queen Anne's Lace)*

The Duchess of Marlborough was an English courtier who became one of the most influential women of the seventeenth century. Largely through her connection to Queen Anne, she helped her husband rise into government. Eventually she fought with the Queen over political differences and was dismissed from court, but still went on to be one of the richest women in Europe.



Figure 2. Alysha Bailey, *Lucy Cranwell*, 2021.  
Digital ink-jet print on Epson Hot Press Bright, 1016 x 738 mm.

## LUCY CRANWELL

(*Kōwhai*)

A New Zealand botanist, Lucy Cranwell was New Zealand's first female curator at the Auckland Museum and the first woman to win Te Apārangi's Hector Medal. Her fieldwork, alongside Lucy Moore, was the most extensive done to date by women in New Zealand. Cranwell became an expert in pollen analysis, opening a whole new field of New Zealand's botanical past.



Figure 3. Alysha Bailey, *Beatrix Potter*, 2021,  
Digital ink-jet print on Epson Hot Press Bright, 1016 × 738 mm.

**BEATRIX POTTER**  
*(Fairy Ring Mushrooms)*

While most famous for her illustrated children's books, Potter was first an accomplished scientist particularly interested in mycology. She conducted her own research and proposed a new theory on the reproduction and germination of spores. Because of strict rules excluding women from scientific research, her work was never taken seriously in her lifetime, but her research and botanical drawings have gone on to be widely regarded.





Figure 4. Alysha Bailey, *Valentina Tereshkova*, 2021,  
Digital ink-jet print on Epson Hot Press Bright, 1016 x 738 mm.

## VALENTINA TERESHKOVA

(*Lunaria annua*)

Cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova was the first woman to enter space in 1963, two years after the first person. It would be another 20 years until a second woman went to space. While there are no physical reasons why women are less suited to space, they make up only just over 10% of all space travellers. No women have ever been to the moon.

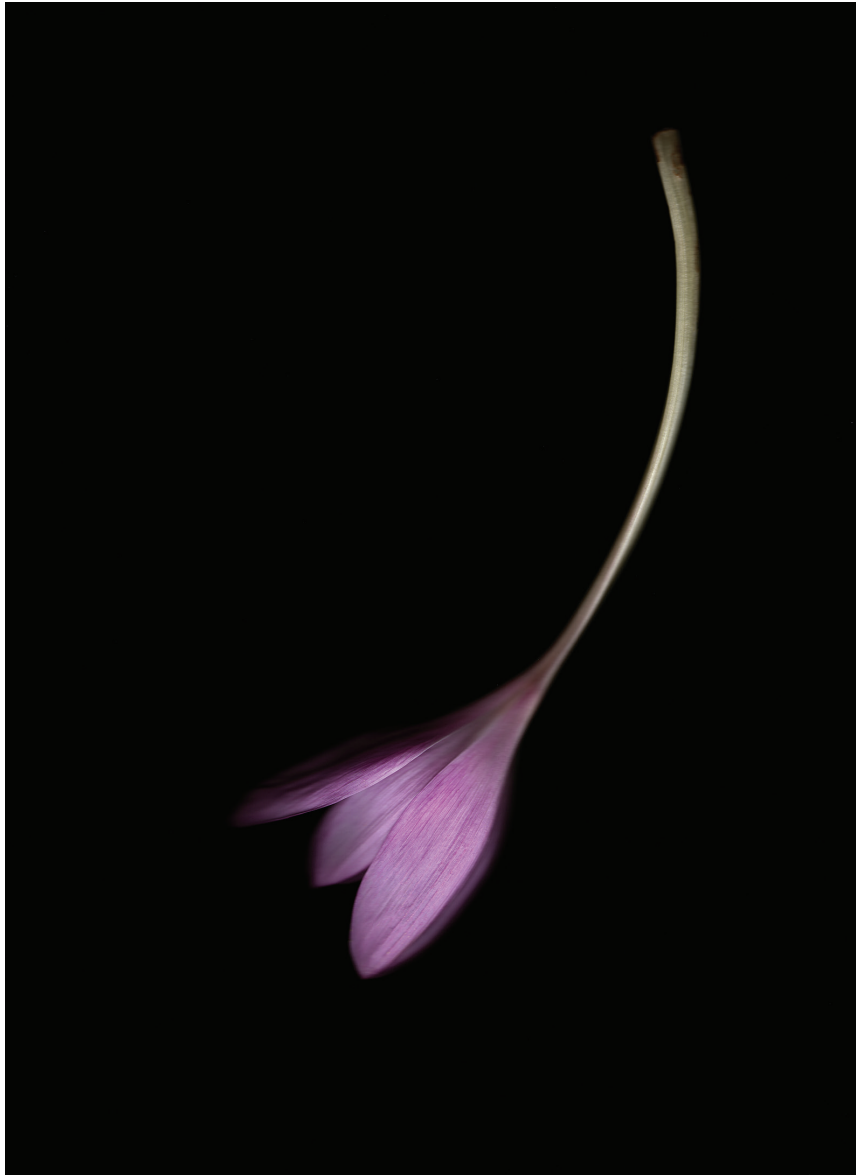


Figure 5. Alysha Bailey, *Catherine Wilson*, 2021,  
Digital ink-jet print on Epson Hot Press Bright, 1016 × 738 mm.

## CATHERINE WILSON

The serial killer Catherine Wilson was the last woman to be publicly hanged in England in 1862. Wilson worked as a nurse, befriending her elderly patients with the goal of being written into their wills, before poisoning them with colchicum. Despite being only convicted of one murder, she was suspected of seven.

The images in the series *My Mothers' Garden* were pulled from a forty-dollar domestic printer/scanner; the type we all have stashed away at the back of a cupboard. Each scan was taken with the lid open either in a blacked-out room or with a variety of external light sources that created the variation in the backgrounds. Earlier scans had included more complex compositions, but these gave way to the singular plant images which upheld the integrity of each plant. This decision also provided each large print the space to breathe within its story.

*My Mothers' Garden* explored how plants can inspire storytelling both in their environment and beyond, acknowledging the garden as a unifying place both historically and contemporarily.<sup>4</sup> The ephemerality and fragility of plants and the perpetual evolution of the garden was a constant reminder of the vulnerability of history. By freezing the garden and each plant in time, the images function as a portrait, as a document, and as monument.

**Alysha Bailey** (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6409-4067>) is an artist and photographer currently based in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Recently embarking upon further study, her current practice focuses on lensless photography. Bailey is a senior lecturer in digital photography and Head of Programmes for Art & Design Certificates and Diplomas at Te Maru Pūmanawa College of Creative Practice & Enterprise, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand.

1 Sharon Core in *MUSÉE Magazine*. February, 2016.

2 Anna Skladmann in *Public Offerings Ltd.* June, 2020. <https://www.public-offerings.com/anna-skladmann-scanning-nature>

3 Norman Bryson. *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*. (London: Reaktion Books). 1990.

4 Wayne V. Anderson. *The Many Lives of Paulette Tavorimina's Still Lives*. N.d. <https://www.paulettetavorimina.com/wayne-v-andersen>