

Plant ghosts: a tale of love and grief

Plants. The foundation of life on our planet and the source of my earliest memory of wonder and delight. Who are they? How do they live? What are they thinking? And why are they so beautiful? Ridiculous questions, yes. Or not.

And humans. Full of grace, poetry and heroics. And weirdly also unbelievably shortsighted, stupid and destructive. We have probably always been that way, even millennia ago, when we were fumbling around in the dirt to find pigments and make vessels.

This art. A curious celebration of my lifelong awe and love of plants, coupled with a stubborn desire to mess with color, paint, silk and clay, and a great sadness about the creatures who are already lost.

On long daily walks in my neighborhood in northern Seattle I chat with friends and neighbors, and mostly stare hard at plants as they move about in different lights. I collect bits and pieces of leaves, fruits and twigs that have fallen off, or have mostly finished growing. These pieces hold structural memories of their growth and life, and it's a structure that I want to respect and honor.

I build clay objects directly with the plant parts, and most of them reference vessels. Day after day, sometimes even week after week, or month after month, I use paintbrushes to apply many successive layers of slip. Later the plants burn off in the kiln, leaving a slightly less transient record of the same structural plant memories. They are complex little sepulchers.

The paintings on layered silks also hold memories of what I saw on walks, recent and bygone. I ask again, how do plants grow? The successive silk layers in some ways mirror the many slip layers in the clay, but here the physicality of the paint on delicate and nearly transparent silk allows me to build both color and structure.

I am comforted by the thought that plants will be on the planet for a long time. Gratefully, my art practice with plants has unexpectedly amplified my sense of empathy and hope.

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