

## *Natural Selections*

covers a range of Christine Neill's mixed-media paintings completed during the past 12 years. These works chronicle the transition from large-scale watercolors to recent pieces which layer aqueous paint with inkjet prints on paper and the framing Plexiglas. The effects of invasive and endangered species on human life and their consequences on the earth's habitats underlie her artistic practice.



*Disappearing Cavendish*, 2017, Watercolor, archivalinkjetprint on paper and framing plexiglas, 31" x 44"

# NATURAL SELECTIONS The Paintings of Christine Neill

April 15--July 9, 2017



**Museum of Fine Arts**  
WASHINGTON COUNTY  
401 Museum Drive, City Park  
Hagerstown, MD 21740

## CHRISTINE NEILL ESSAY

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[www.ChristineNeill.com](http://www.ChristineNeill.com)

My work chronicles the ephemeral states of the natural world in layered mixed-media paintings. By combining the immediacy of fluid paint mediums with my digital photographs, I interpret a life long fascination with biology and the environment. Through metaphor and portrayal of the biotic phenomena, I note intersections where environmental and anthropological worlds meet.

My practice typically involves scrutinizing the landscape for organic matter that suggests human activity or emotive biological configuration. I then line my studio with the collected specimens, which I research before making a series of drawn studies. Drawings and watercolors are created and layered with digital imagery in Photoshop and test prints are crafted as crucial references. The digital image is printed onto the painted surface and I continue to paint/draw covering the entire print until the combined mediums produce a compositional balance. As the layers coalesce, they depart from observation in favor of expressive representation of an observed object.

When appropriate, I add an additional stratum printed onto the framing Plexiglas separated from the paper by spacers, allowing shadows from the foreground to fall on the painted and printed surface below.

The evolution of artistic and organic resources, carefully layered to transform source material into artistic meditation stands as a reminder of humanities deep-rooted connection to the earth's natural resources, despite our intellectualism. The effects of invasive and endangered species on human life and their consequences on the earth's habitat underlie my artistic practice. My work celebrates the intricacies of thriving ecosystems, yet laments threatened species. Such dichotomies, in nature such as in art, bind us together as living entities in, on, and of the earth.



## CHRISTINE NEILL BIO

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Nature has long been the subject of Christine Neill's large mixed-media paintings. She grew up in New England and after initially studying biology at Skidmore College, graduated with a BS in Art. It was a natural transition for her from the examination of biological process in a lab to metaphorically visualizing those processes as imagery in paintings and prints. She dates her interest in the effects of climate change to early studies of the environment.

In 1971 she earned a MFA at MICA's Hoffberger School of Painting where she studied with Grace Hartigan. She taught at regional colleges before accepting a full time appoint at the Maryland Institute College of Art in 1981.

In addition Neill has exhibited widely in the United States, as well as France and Japan. The honors she has received include a Maryland State Arts Council Fellowship and the Mellon Arts Grant. Her work is included in many private and public collections and is represented in Baltimore by Goya Contemporary. She and designer husband, Lew Fifield, divide their time between Baltimore and New England.



# CHRISTINE NEILL *NATURAL SELECTION*



WALL TEXT

April 21- July 9, 2017



*Three Days*, 2005, Watercolor on Paper, 42.5" x 27.5"

A stalk and brilliant blossom of the bottlebrush, *Callistemon*, sit at the front of the composition, while its buds and seedpods occupy the background. The painting's title comes from Willie Nelson's "...the three days I dream of you, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" reminding us of the rhythms of life we are all subject to.



*Crows Nest Lily*, 2006,  
Watercolor, archival inkjet print on paper, 30" x 22"

The Caribbean lily, *Hymenocallis caribea*, is found in the wild as well as being cultivated for its unusual flower and luscious scent. Native to the American tropics, the plant is in a continuous cycle of bloom and seed. In this painting, a digital image of the dried blossoms was printed onto a painting of the flowering plant.



*Aechmea caracas*, 2008,  
Watercolor, archival inkjet print on paper, 43" x 28.5"

*Aechmea caracas* is a painting of a bromeliad native to semi-tropical habitats observed growing at the edge of a beach. A digital photo of their natural surroundings, balanced between an ideal and a devastating environment, backs the entwined stalks.



*Immortals: Abreeze Hibiscus* (2008),  
*Bougainvillea Rose* (2009), *African Tulip* (2008) Watercolor on clayboard, 16" x 10"

Portraits of the 36 Immortal Chinese Poets from the Philadelphia Museum inspired this Immortal Plant series. Each has a distinct personality, yet the grouping allows viewers to make comparisons.



*Immortals: Lunaria* ((2006), *Oleander* (2008) *Solandra* (2008), Watercolor on clayboard, 16" x 10"

Examining the plants singly, we become acquainted with new species and explore unique aspects of each. When grouped they remind us of the connection we have to the ancient and enduring qualities of the natural world.



*Balance of Essence*, 2007, Watercolor on paper, 30" x 22"

This painting and *Balance of Substance* are part of a series of similarly balance stacks of rocks describe by Sedat Pakay as "a tour of earth's unknown mythology." They balance visually, if impossibly.



*Balance of Substance*, 2011, Watercolor on paper, 30" x 22"

The first line of Robert Frost's poem *MENDING WALLS*, *Something there is that doesn't love a wall...* comes to mind. Each stone has its own individual beauty while together they are functional yet mutable structures. The history of cairns, stones used as ballast, mile and tomb markers are also recalled. Utilitarian uses with metaphoric meanings.



*Five Stages of the Palm with Bees*, 2012-2014, Watercolor, archival inkjet print on paper and framing Plexiglas, 23.5" x 68"

Painted stalks, buds and blossoms of a palm tree are layered with a digital photo of palm fronds viewed from above. Palms are simultaneously in the process of reproducing and dying.

Swarming bees, crucial to the life cycle of not only palms, but numerous other plants, are printed on the inside of the Plexiglas.



*Unbalanced Nature: Flower, Leaf, Pod*, 2014, Watercolor, inkjet print on clay-board, 66" x 30" each

*Flower:* Well-meaning human decisions are often credited with introducing invasive species. Pictured are species that were imported to tropical islands to solve agricultural problems but ran amuck because their habits were imperfectly understood: yellow jackets to rid hibiscus flowers of white mites that they don't eat; mongoose that were brought into cane fields to attack rats, which are nocturnal while mongoose are diurnal.

*Leaf:* There is evidence that leafy plants ameliorate the effects of climate change through their dispersal of moisture into the air. It's theorized that an increase in trees and broad leafed plants could create cloud layers, which would shield the earth from harmful sunrays

*Pod:* Invasive Asian Water Chestnuts (inedible), painted in watercolor, are precariously stacked against a digitally printed ground of harmful giant hogweed and caterpillar tents. All are surrounded by drawings of choking Golden Dodder.



*Just Weeds*, 2014-15, Watercolor, pencil, archival inkjet print on paper, 30" x 45"

While the label *weed* has negative implications it may simply refer to a wild plant growing in the wrong place some of which become desirable when intentionally cultivated. Many weeds are in fact beneficial, having nutritional and medicinal

properties or proving crucial to the survival of insects and flora in a specific habitat. Thistles, a large family of plants with many desirous as well as noxious characteristics, were the incentive for this painting.



*Pod: Invasive*, 2015, Watercolor, archival inkjet print on paper, mounted on panel, 11" x 14"

A non-native seedpod painted in watercolor sits within layered photographs of the environment, which it has invaded and is destroying.



*Pod: Adapted*, 2015, Watercolor, archival inkjet print on paper, mounted on panel, 11" x 14"

A non-native seedpod painted in watercolor sits within a photograph of an environment to which it has become acclimated and enhances.



*Philo and Palm with Dying Bees*, 2014, Watercolor, archival ink jet print on clay-board, 14" x 11"

Bees, attracted by lush environments, are declining due to multiple risks causing die-off of the hives worker bees, including are increasing uses of pesticides, viruses, and loss of habitats. Significant economic losses may result because bees depended on to pollinate agricultural crops.



*Morphology, Canna/Case*, 2015, Watercolor, pencil, archival inkjet print on paper, 30" x 36"

Morphology is the biological study of the forms and structural relationships of living organisms. Explored here are the similarities and differences between parts of a canna plant and milkweed. Dualities are presented as symmetry through repetition or shadow.



*Morphology, Beech/Beach*, 2015, Watercolor, pencil, archival inkjet print on paper, 30" x 36"

As in the study of morphology, similarities and differences between tree and aquatic shapes, color and texture are explored here. Simple elaborations are coupled to make comparisons.



*Cloud of Witnesses*, 2015, Watercolor, pencil, archival inkjet print on paper, 37.5" x 50"

Gigantic leaves of the gunnera plant flourish above a hosts of undesirable invasive and toxic species proliferating in the muck of the understory.



*Wild Urban Thistle*, 2016-17, Watercolor, archival inkjet print on paper and Plexiglas, 24.5" x 35"

A wild, native thistle was observed growing in the garden of a Baltimore row house, a space that would normally be highly cultivated. While the owner values the plant because it will reseed itself, farmers use toxic pesticides to rid thistle from their fields. The print on the inside of framing Plexiglas is a scan of fluffy thistle seeds.



Disappearing *Cavendish*, 2017,"  
Watercolor, archival inkjet print on  
paper and Plexiglas, 31" x 44

Cultivated bananas worldwide are in imminent danger of completely disappearing, damaged by fungal diseases. 500 million people, particularly in developing countries, depend on the fruit as a staple food. The global supply is threatened because industry growers have planted just one species, the Cavendish, across continents.



*Dames de Luna*, 2017, Watercolor, archival inkjet print on  
paper and framing Plexiglas, 16" x 12"

Night blooming plants give off specific scents to attract night pollinating insects. Shapes of the moon's phases, which all living things are subject to, are printed on the inside of the Plexiglas



*Monstera Morphology*,  
2017 Watercolor, pencil, archival  
inkjet print on paper and framing  
Plexiglas, 12" x 16"

Morphology, the biological study of the forms and structural relationships of living organisms, examines similarities and differences between creatures. The leaves of the Philodendron and UVA plants pictured here were both marked by insect trails and chewing. The print on Plexi is a layer of cell structures in teal lines.



Display Case of Neill's Natural Collection

