

Walking into the dark, spare, space of the installation *Botanica absentia*, dazzling multi-colored reflections of light bounce and multiply across the four black walls and the silver, holographic vinyl floor. Set at some imaginary future point in time, this is both a memorial and a tribute to the lost tree species of planet earth.

In this future scenario, climate change has devastated earth to the point where most species of plants and animals, including humans, have either become extinct or mutated into other forms in order to survive. Trees are one of the casualties.

Botanica absentia is a futuristic museum depository and archive dedicated to lost trees. Overhead, a massive, silver-colored tree limb is suspended from the ceiling and stretches over 8 feet across the entire room. As a replica of the now extinct American redbud tree *Cercis canadensis*, the lower surface of this recreated branch is covered with facsimiles of the distinctive redbud seed pods, but made from laser cut, dichroic Plexiglas. Clusters of these pods appear translucent, transparent, and iridescent simultaneously as they dangle and move, allowing the dichroic material to catch light and throw rainbow spots of color everywhere.

Besides the branch, two other things are present in this installation. On the shorter end wall, 72 stainless steel dog tags are hung in a grid configuration that is reminiscent of cemetery grave markers. Embossed on each tag are both the common name and the botanical name of a lost species of tree. These documentary objects serve as *memento mori* (Latin: *remember that you will die*), a warning, and an elegy.

The opposite end wall, adjacent to the door, archives the last remaining redbud tree with a solitary, infused dye aluminum print of this tree placed in the center of the wall.

Extinct, *rare*, and *endangered* are all terms used in 2019 for trees that are either gone or no longer propagated naturally in the wild. Endangered trees include giant sequoias, Fraser firs, the American chestnut, and many others. At present, over 8,800 plants – 1/3 of the total native flora in the US – are listed by the US Forest Service as rare, critically imperiled, and vulnerable. Of earth's approximately 60,000 tree species, nearly 1 in 5 are threatened with extinction. Of those, over 1,900 are critically endangered and face extinction without urgent action.

Botanica absentia portrays a disturbing future. The question is, do we have the potential to avoid it?

Join the effort at www.globaltreeassessment.org and see the list of threatened trees at www.iucnredlist.org

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