



Mýkis

ROBERTA PYX SUTHERLAND

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New work by Roberta Pyx Sutherland

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Photograph, fungal spores on paper
63.5x51 cm (25x16.5 inches) Edition of 5

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Except essay *Attentiveness to Becoming: Roberta Pyx Sutherland's Inter-Species Art-Making* © Bradley A.
Clements

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Occasionally, one stumbles into wonder....





ARTIST NOTES

A proliferation of mushrooms emerged around my Okanagan studio in 2018. I was struck by mycophilia – a love and wonder of mushrooms.

Just as mushroom mycorrhizae connect and nurture many species through the forest rhizospheres (the soil area being influenced by nutrient exchange), the Mýkis series symbiotically connects many threads of my art.

My practice and studies have taken place in many parts of the world and have addressed numerous themes. However, like far-reaching networks of mycelium (the branching thread-like parts of a fungus), my practices and inspirations are intimately connected and mutually supportive.

Mycelia are the great collaborators of the forest floor; they interconnect surrounding plant species to communicate and share nutrients. Given the remarkable finding that mushrooms are humanity's closest cellular relatives, it becomes understandable that mushrooms and humans should also be drawn to collaborative expression. Collaboration – including inter-species collaboration – is vital to the well-being of humanity and the Earth. We have much to learn from mushrooms as they detoxify soil, slowly and patiently shift concrete and stone, serve as medicine to our bodies and provide nutrients to plants and animals.

Archeologists debate the cultural significance of prehistoric mushroom images found on Spanish cave walls from the Palaeolithic period (6-8 thousand years ago). Apparently there are records that the chefs of ancient Rome included mushrooms in their recipes, and they took their cultural cues from the Hellenes. The early greek tragedian Euripides, 400 B.C., wrote of the Mýkés, (fungus/mushrooms in Greek) 'they must be sons of the gods, they have come without seeds'.

Few of the world's mushroom species are known to science and their vast possibilities for artistic inspiration are uncharted. The works that make up Mýkis offer a meditation on the humble beauty, power and potential for inter-relationship that surrounds us.

ATTENTIVENESS TO BECOMING: ROBERTA PYX SUTHERLAND'S INTER-SPECIES ART-MAKING

By Bradley A. Clements

This spring a cluster of fungi unfurled from the trunk of a tree near where I live. One day I saw none; the next morning the surface of the bark had been transformed into a new landscape. I cannot verify that this happened overnight, however: it may be that I simply did not pay enough attention until the expanding orange and peach domes demanded to be noticed. Now I check on the mushrooms daily and am amazed by their morphing growth.

Roberta Pyx Sutherland's art came into my life similarly. I knew her name as a peer and pupil of Jack Wise, Pat Martin Bates, and Jack Shadbolt but was unfamiliar with her work until it burst into my awareness. Since then I have become more attuned to its subtleties, taking the time to look closely, observe change, wonder, and learn.

Pyx and the mushrooms with whom she collaborates draw me to notice states of becoming.¹ When seeing Pyx's work for the first time I was enchanted by the patterns that are too easily passed by on forest paths. But, I am ashamed now to admit, I viewed them as static entities. As the child of a gestural abstractionist I should have known better. I was raised to see movement in visual art, yet the capitalist art market subtly tells us to forget this dynamism. Commodifying art urges its redefinition as an alienable, stable product, even as the art itself cries to be experienced as a relationship that expands with every viewer, every place it inhabits, every other artwork with which it shares space and time. Like the mushrooms growing outside my front door, I needed something to abruptly enter my consciousness in order to notice it. Once I had been made to notice, though, I could begin to practice attentiveness. Therein comes the recognition of becoming.

Consider Pyx's Alphabetum series. Placing No. 1, No. XIV, and Underground in sequence, the affinity of mushrooms for one another becomes seen as if in a stop-motion animation. The form is beautiful, but the mushrooms have more to say. Moving through the series we see the spores reach from each mushroom towards the others, stretching in their abundance until they fill the space that once distanced them. Like mycelia inter-connecting forest ecosystems, the spores on the paper re-unite each entity. This is a reminder that mushrooms are social beings, as are we, and that everything – pine, lichen, ochre, raindrop, algae, frog, salmon, maggot, lynx, fern, carbon dioxide, human – is entangled in the same web of life.

Pyx and the mushrooms do not simply show us interconnection, they consciously practice and enact it. They are co-creators, neither able to express themselves on paper without the other; in conversation but neither in control of the other.

Anthropologist Anna Tsing researches with matsutake mushrooms and the ecosystems, pickers, buyers, and markets with whom they interact.² She writes of the collaborations that mushrooms facilitate. Mycelial meshworks shuttle nutrients but also information through the forest floor, even though these fungi only occasionally break into human view through the soil. Tsing attends to parallel ways in which unique and unpredictable local iterations of global relations emerge in and around us through commodity chains, migration, climate and ecosystem change, science, colonialism, violence, kinship, and spoors that float across oceans on atmospheric breezes. Tsing leads us to see how matsutake need pine forests just as humans need a livable planet, sustained by collaborations between ecosystems and their minute parts. Possibly contrary to the conservationist adage “leave no trace,” collaboration requires our active participation. It calls humans to attend to our relations: to pay mental attention to them, but also to be of tangible, reciprocal service to them. Many mushrooms teach this by thriving in deforested areas and other zones of ecological destruction. They intervene to heal these places, demonstrating the need to not only preserve pristine places but also to care for landscapes that have been hurt by greed and excess. “Leave no trace”³ makes sense when the traces we are used to leaving are destructive, but what can we learn from mushrooms about making traces that strengthen the relations on which we depend, including our inter-species and ecological relations?

Like Tsing, Pyx focuses on mushrooms but – in so doing – notices so much more.

Has this essay strayed too far from its subject of visual art? I think not. I began by suggesting that art itself seeks to stray, despite attempts to pin it down. It crosses and blurs bounds of classification, it engages in many relations.

Art grasps our attention. Meaningful art makes us more attentive. And attentiveness can enliven the care that we have – the care that we need to practice – for all of our relations.

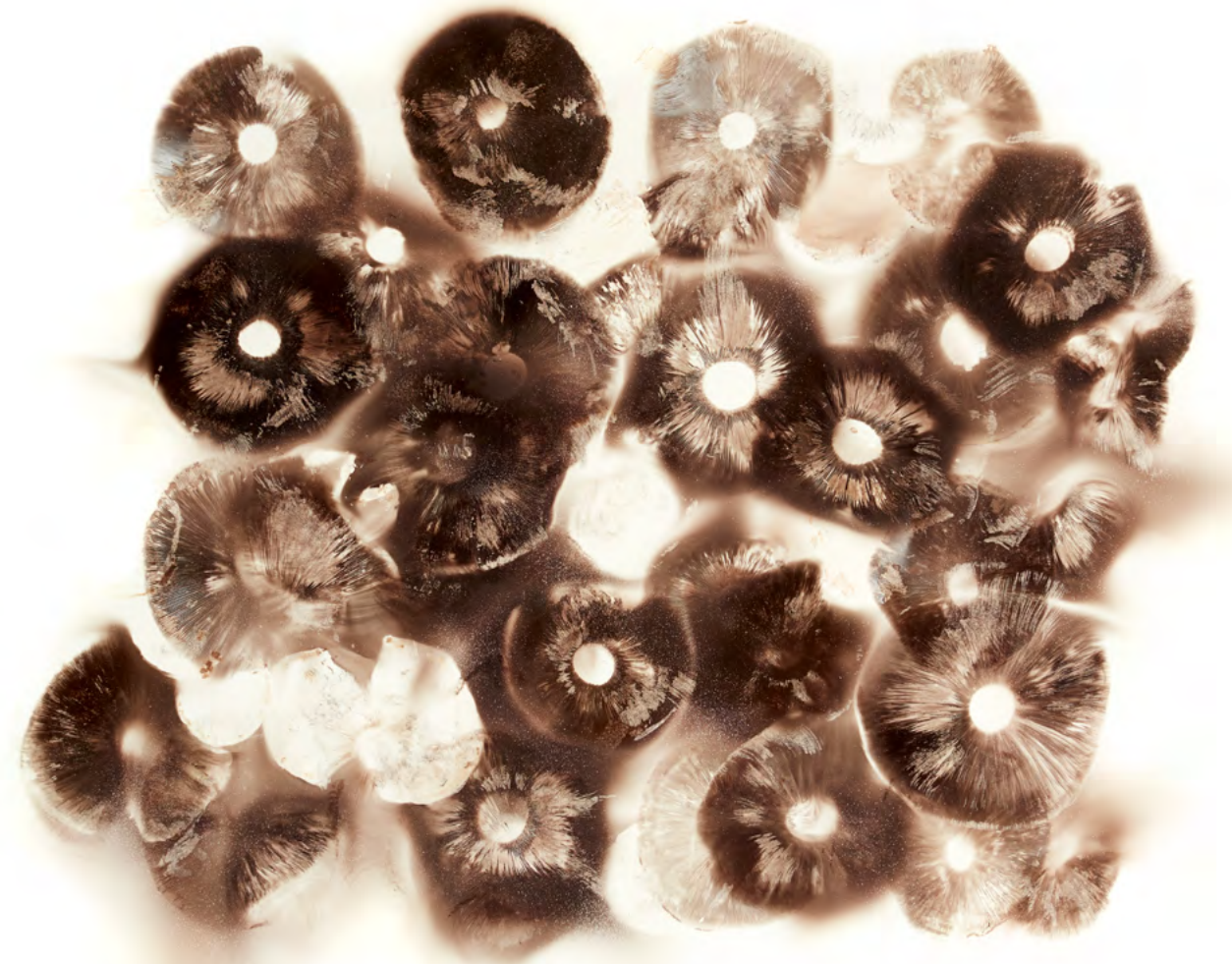
¹ What a strange phrase – states of becoming – given that a state frequently refers to a condition while becoming describes moving between conditions or, better, dissolving them. Situated on Anishinaabewaki (the territory of Anishinaabeg nations, in particular the Odaawaa) at the time of writing, I reflect on the verb-based language of this place, Anishinaabemowin. The Potawatomie botanists Keewaydinoquay and Robin Wall Kimmerer describe “puhpowee,” the Anishinaabemowin word for “mushroom,” as translating literally to “the force which ... push[es] up from the earth overnight.” This exemplifies a deeply attuned way of thinking based in becoming rather than in states – a way of thinking that might do greater service to mushrooms, to Pyx's prints, and to ecosystems and art more generally. Robin Wall Kimmerer. Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013, 49).

² Anna Tsing. The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

³ Leave no trace also suggests that “we” humans are disconnected from “nature,” that we enter and leave it as we please and that what we leave “in” nature are the only traces that effect it. As remote conserved areas burn due to urban greenhouse gas emissions it becomes clear that this is not so. We must be conscious our traces and their impacts on the beings we rely upon to survive wherever we “leave” them.



Mandala Prota
2018
Pigment print on paper
89x89 cm (35x35 inches) Edition of 3
51x51 cm (20x20 inches) Edition of 5



Gregarious Square
2018
Pigment print on paper
89x89 cm (35x35 inches) Edition of 3
51x51 cm (20x20 inches) Edition of 5

Dreaming of Matisse
2019
Fungal spores on paper with walnut ink
33x25.5 cm (13x10 inches)

Pigment print on paper
63.5x51 cm (25x20 inches) Edition of 5



Polyphyletic
2020
Pigment print on paper
71x56 cm (28x22 inches) Edition of 5



Enter Overlord
2018
Pigment print on paper
101.5x81 cm (40x32 inches) Edition of 3
63.5x51 cm (25x20 inches) Edition of 5



Alphabetum/Underground
2018
Pigment print on paper
101.5x67 cm (40x26.5 inches) Edition of 3
63.5x51 cm (25x16.5 inches) Edition of 5



Hidden Memory
2019
Pigment print on paper
51x63.5 cm (16.5x25 inches) Edition of 5



Convergence
2020
Pigment print on paper
66x63.5 cm (26x25 inches) Edition of 5



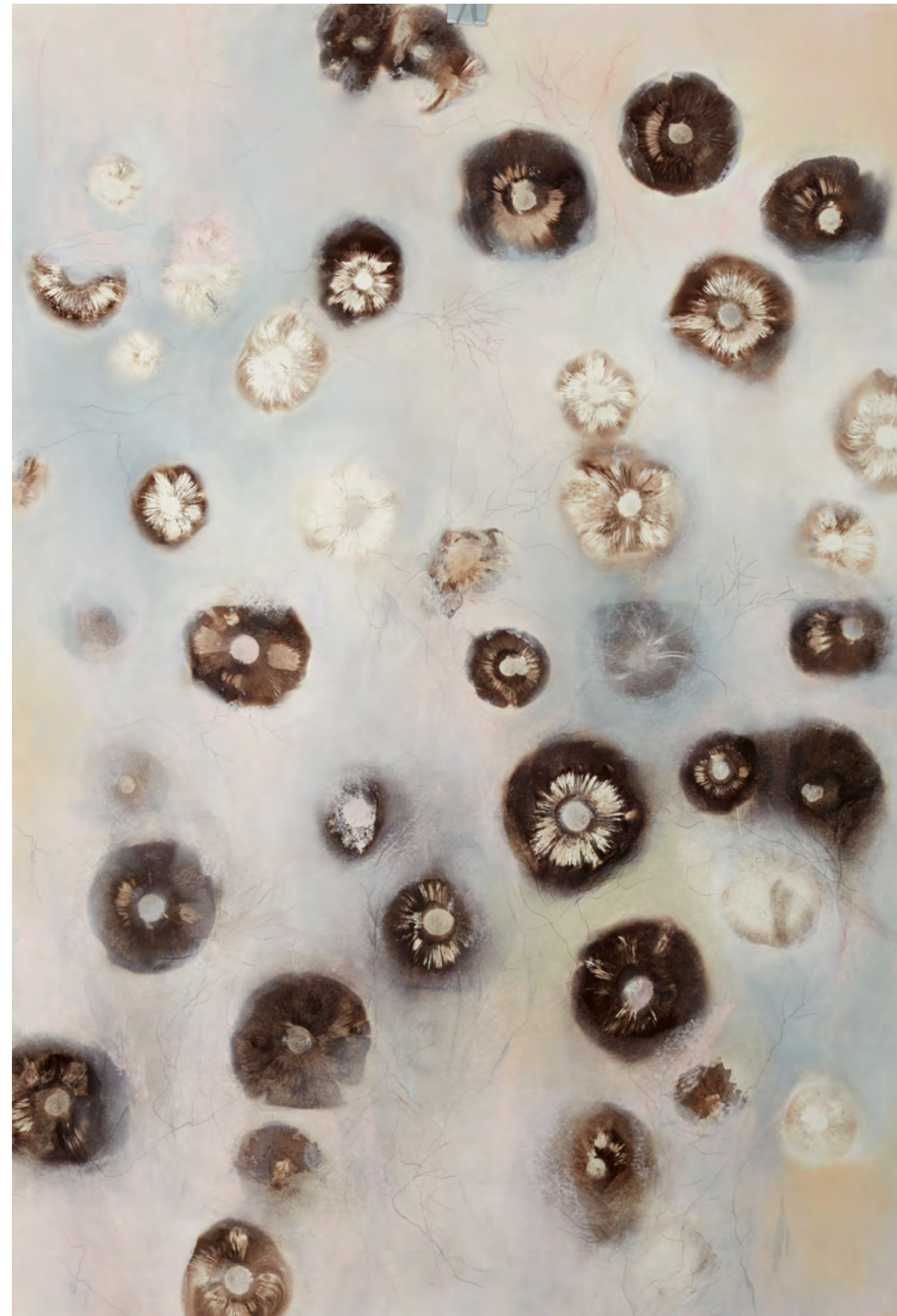
Golden Ochre
2018
Fungal spores on paper with earth pigment
101.5x67 cm (40x26.5 inches)

Pigment print on paper
101.5x67 cm (40x26.5 inches) Edition of 3
63.5x51 cm (25x16.5 inches) Edition of 5



This Floating World
2018
Fungal spores on paper with earth pigment
101.5x67 cm (40x26.5 inches)

Pigment print on paper
101.5x67 cm (40x26.5 inches) Edition of 3
63.5x51 cm (25x16.5 inches) Edition of 5



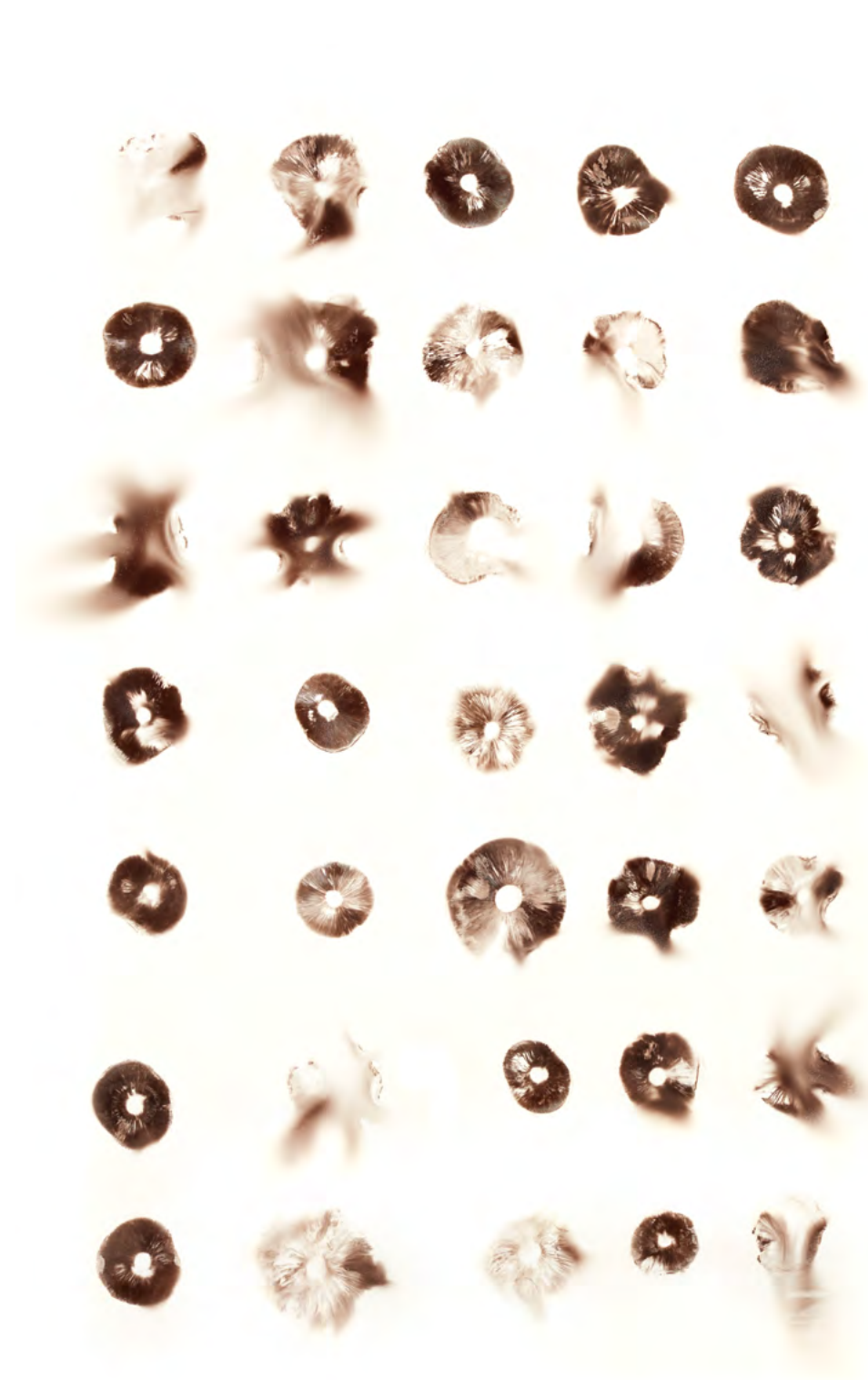
Parvus, Alphabetum No. XIV
2018
Fungal spores on paper
33x25.5 cm (13x10 inches)

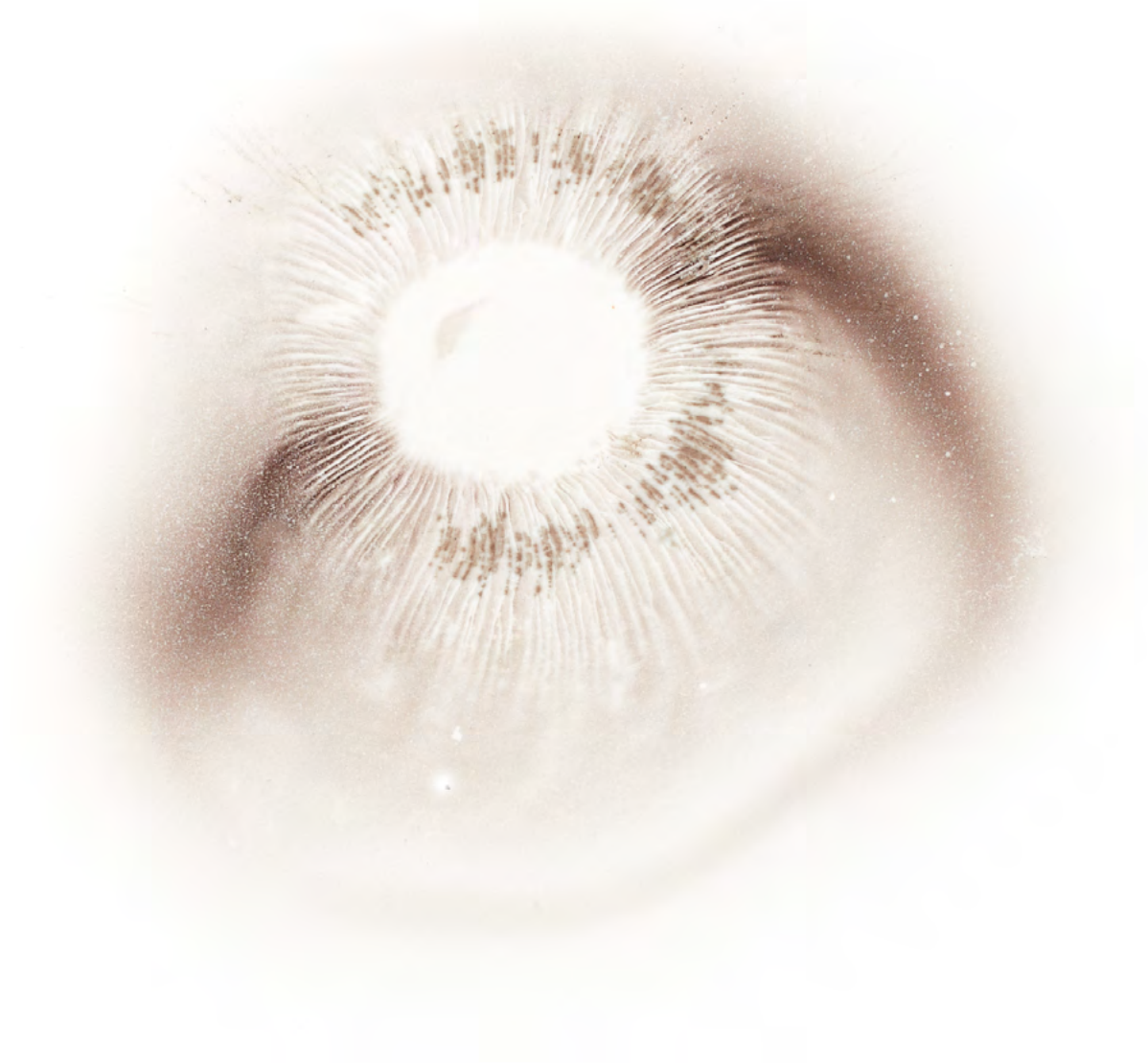
Pigment print on paper
101.5x81 cm (40x32 inches) Edition of 3
63.5x51 cm (25x20 inches) Edition of 5



Alphabetum No. 1
2018
Fungal spores on paper
101.5x67 cm (40x26.5 inches)

Pigment print on paper
101.5x67 cm (40x26.5 inches) Edition of 3
63.5x51 cm (25x16.5 inches) Edition of 5





Mandala / Within the Lotus
2018
Pigment print on paper
51x51 cm (20x20 inches) Edition of 5

BIOGRAPHY

Roberta Pyx Sutherland is a Canadian artist based on Hornby Island, British Columbia. From her first solo exhibition at the Victoria Art Gallery in the 1980's her work has focused on the relationships of cosmic patterning, divine intelligence, the environment and the interconnectivity of all life forms.

A prolific artist, Sutherland uses a wide range of media in her work including paints, pigments, natural dyes and inks, photography and handmade papers. She also creates site-specific installations, the most well-known an Andy Warhol tribute for the Hornby Island Arts Council, one of the world's largest Tomato Soup Cans. Most recently Sutherland created a Lenten installation for the Chapel Gallery of Victoria's St. Matthias Anglican Church.

She received her BFA (hon) from the University of Victoria and continues her research attending residences at the Bau Institute and Studio Ginestrelle in Italy and at Canada's Caetani House and the Banff Centre. Sutherland has also trained in Shambhala Art instruction, studied Ikebana with the Ohara School, printmaking at the University of Sheffield, UK, worked for Oxfam in East Africa where she initiated a school of ceramics, studied Zen and calligraphy in Japan and mandala painting in Nepal.

Sutherland's teachers and mentors include Jack Shadbolt, Pat Martin Bates, Jack Wise, Paula Iacucci and Masafumi Yamamoto. She has taught at the Metchosin International Summer School of the Arts, as well as mentored their artist in residence program.

Sutherland has exhibited in Canada, Mexico, Europe and the US. Her work is represented in a number of public collections including the Canada Council for the Arts, Burnaby Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Toronto Public Library, University of British Columbia, Concordia University Library, and the Bibliothèque de Genève. She is one of 50 artists featured in Canada's Raincoast at Risk: Art for an Oil-Free Coast. Publications such as Lions Roar, Culturium, the Uncertainty Club and Shambhala Sun regularly include her work in their pages.

For many years she has been represented by Editart Gallery in Geneva.

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