

Jennifer Wanner's Endangered Plants

by [Portia Priegert](#)



Jennifer Wanner, "Periculum – British Columbia," 2015, hand-cut ink-jet paper collage on Stonehenge paper, 30" x 44"

Your mind may undergo a strange warp when looking at Calgary artist Jennifer Wanner's floral images. They play with familiar tropes of botanical imagery, from scientific drawings to the genteel watercolours of so-called "lady painters" of a bygone era.

Yet there's something decidedly creepy about the awkwardly jointed sprawling forms and mismatched flowers and foliage that emerge from a single root system. It's almost like Monsanto meets Audrey II, the voracious plant from *Little Shop of Horrors*, with freaky results.

Wanner soon sets things straight: Her series of 14 hand-cut paper collages to be displayed as part of *Second Nature* at the University of Lethbridge's Helen Christou Gallery until June 2, are a commentary on endangered plant species. There's one work for each province and territory, plus one for Canada as a whole, each containing many species of vascular plants that are close to disappearing.

For instance, the British Columbia collage features 50 different species, including coast manroot, a large vine-like plant, and the pink sand verbena, a tiny prostrate perennial with succulent leaves. Others include the phantom orchid, the limber pine and the coastal Scouler's catchfly.

"It's a little tongue in cheek," says Wanner, who points to recent developments in the genetic modification of plants. "But it's not that far from the truth."

Wanner will also show the series in Calgary next fall at the Glenbow Museum, along with a related body of work at the Paul Kuhn Gallery.



"Periculum – Alberta," 2013, hand cut ink jet paper collage on Stonehenge paper, 21" x 15"



"Periculum – Manitoba," 2015, hand cut ink jet paper collage on Stonehenge paper, 30" x 39.5"

Wanner, who earned a Master's degree in 2009 from Western University in London, Ont., talks of the human fascination with creating efficient systems, musing lightheartedly that if plants such as hers could be created, they would not only preserve the gene pool but also conserve space. She observes that scientists are already working to create more self-pollinating plants to cope with declining bee populations. But as with all scientific innovations, where we think we are headed and where we actually end up, can be two quite different things. She calls the series *Periculum*, a Latin word that means peril or risk.

Wanner jokes that she does "virtual fieldwork" by appropriating photographs she finds online, printing them on an ink jet printer, and carefully excising the endangered plants from their backgrounds. She then plays for hours to construct a new organism.

The finished work is almost a botanical party game, a taxonomical terror so complex that even she struggles to remember which plant is which. She's toyed with the idea of providing a key as an educational tool, as people often study her collages carefully, trying to identify the plants.



"Periculum – Canada," 2015, hand cut ink jet paper collage on Stonehenge paper, 38.75" x 24.5"



"Periculum – Yukon," 2014, hand cut ink jet paper collage on Stonehenge paper, 24.75" x 20"



Jennifer Wanner, "Herbacentrice," 2010-2012, stop-motion animation (video still), 6:02 min. (silent)

In Lethbridge, Wanner will also present her black-and-white video, *Herbacentrice*, which includes 12 short vignettes of stop-motion animation of collaged plants growing and eating each other.

Her work was included in the 2013 Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton and the Glenbow's *Made in Calgary* series.

University of Lethbridge Art Gallery

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