



Caitlin Franzmann *to the curve of you*

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The germ of Caitlin Franzmann's exhibition at the Institute of Modern Art (IMA), "to the curve of you," came to the artist during her daily walks along a local creek. Passing the site every day, she noticed a tall, rubbery plant with fanning leaves and delicate red flowers. She was surprised to learn that this was, in fact, a weed—the Peruvian achira or *Canna edulis* (edible canna), known in Australia as the Queensland arrowroot.

"The Brisbane City tells me you are a 'weed of waterways,'" Franzmann wrote in the text accompanying her show. "What defines you as a 'weed'?" Achira was brought from the Andes to Queensland in the mid-19th century for its potato-like rhizomes, which were used to make arrowroot flour. Over centuries the species has traveled and mutated across Africa, Asia, and South America, where it was first domesticated over 4,500 years ago and continues to be a source of food and medicine. We tend to think of weeds as ugly, bothersome species that offer nothing but the destruction of other plants; Franzmann's project offered another point of view.

Drawing on the skills of many collaborators, "to the

curve of you" comprised a text co-authored with curator Camila Marambio; liquid flower essence; a garden of weeds; and a sonic installation. To experience the latter, the visitor walked past a yellow wall into a room bathed in red fluorescent light. Ambient field recordings from Moggill Creek filled the space with heightened sounds of wind, birds, and buzzing insects. This room was designed to evoke the feeling of entering the red achira flower and, as such, three rounded, table-like structures stood in the middle of the space like fine anthers inside the petals. Franzmann placed achira seeds onto the circular tops of these sculptures, which, when wobbled slightly, create a soft percussive sound. It takes some time for the eyes to adjust after one leaves the red-lit room and, for a brief moment, the yellow wall appears bright green. In orientating the viewer to the color and sounds of achira, Franzmann probed the audience to think about ecology outside of a human perspective.

The inclusion of achira flower essence was, sadly, a less effective component of the show. This liquid was offered in little take-home vials and within a hand-blown, three-bulbed vessel. The solution was made by soaking the flowers in water, removing them, and then "setting" the mixture with brandy. Homeopath Edward Bach proposed this method in the 1930s on the basis of an unsupported theory that water molecules retain a "vibrational frequency" of any matter they encounter. Dubious as science, the essences also fell short as art. Unlike Franzmann's use of sound and light, the essences offered no immediate sensory escape apart from the faintly

pleasant smell of brandy, which many viewers mistook for the flower's scent.

The garden-as-art, a common proposition in the last decade, can easily fall prey to the pitfall of garden-as-spectacle, manifested in towering mounds or grids of indoor plants and uprooted after the exhibition's run. While such artworks might call for climate action, their underlying ideology is still one of human dominance over the natural world, as organic processes are compressed into the arbitrary cycles of museum scheduling. Unlike these green monuments, Franzmann's garden of achira and other weed species is inconspicuous yet made to last. She conceived the collection of plants specifically for the IMA's courtyard, which was designed in 2017 by the artist Céline Condorelli and architect Dirk Yates. These unshaded, concrete beds are cruel to most plants—indeed, nearly all of the native species planted by Condorelli have since died. Yet weeds thrive in tough environments. With this in mind, Franzmann worked closely with the gardener Kate Wall, who recently published *Working with Weeds* (2019), and the two led a garden tour as part of the exhibition. This remains Franzmann's forte: engaging the public in productive and educational conversations where participants are invited to share their knowledge on the subject. Ultimately, "to the curve of you" fostered slow and curious observation, for artist and viewer alike.

SOPHIE ROSE

Installation view of CAITLIN FRANZMANN's *Essence meets essence*, 2021, multi-channel audio, red lighting, yellow wall paint, timber drum shells with sounding elements of seeds, nails, felt and mylar, dimensions variable, at "to the curve of you," Institute of Modern Art (IMA), Brisbane, 2021. Photo by Louis Lim. Courtesy the artist and IMA.

