

# Sara Angelucci

## UNDERGROWTH

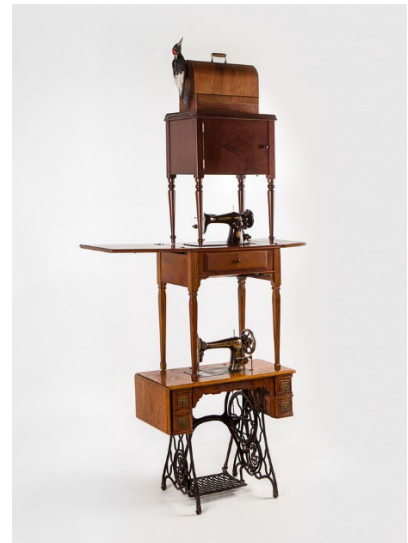
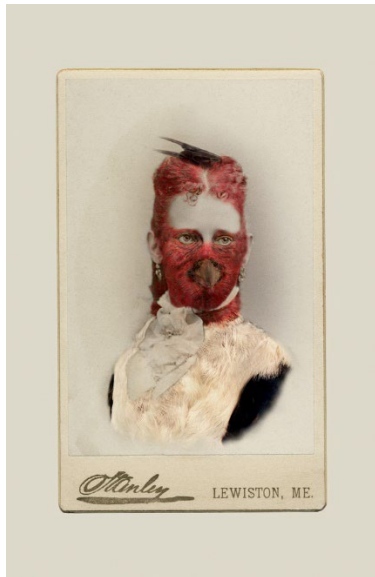
CURATED BY SHANNON ANDERSON



Sara Angelucci transforms found photographs and creates images exposing the cultural and historical conditions outside the image frame, bringing attention to the social forces that generate the language of photography. *Undergrowth* brings together several bodies of work produced over the last decade by the Toronto-based artist that examine the ways in which photographic practices have contributed to the divide between humans and nature.



This direction finds its impetus in Angelucci's series *Aviary* (2013), which combines family photo-album traditions of the nineteenth century with the era's fascination with natural science and the unbridled desire for hunting and collecting. Each image in this series carefully intermingles an image of an extinct or endangered bird with a found Victorian carte-de-visite portrait to form a strange, hybrid creature. *Aviary* points to the colonizing role the camera has played in capturing animals for consumption.



Angelucci's focus on endangered bird species continues in *Sightings (Ivory-billed Woodpecker)* (2015), which features a stack of Singer sewing machines topped by an exact replica of the eponymous woodpecker—an extinct species that the artist recreated using a 3D scan of a taxidermy specimen from the Royal Ontario Museum. The final stand for the species was the Singer Tract in Northern Louisiana, licenced to a lumber company that ultimately destroyed the bird's habitat. For the Art Gallery of Mississauga presentation of this piece, Angelucci has created a large-scale wallpaper featuring reproductions of vintage trade cards formerly issued by the Singer company that depict watercolour images of native American songbirds, thereby extending the examination of these complicated connections.



Further shedding light on colonial influences, both *Arboretum* (2016), *Black Flowers* (2021), and *The Twirl of a Butterfly's Tongue* (2022) consider the ways in which the medium has participated in the historical Western impulse to capture and classify nature.

*Arboretum* merges Victorian-era cabinet card portraits with painted forest backdrops and new images of trees taken in Southern Ontario. Angelucci's process of inverting the figure/ground relationship of the cabinet card brings attention to the pictorial tradition adopted by photography in which nature is used as a framing device subservient to the central human subject.

*Black Flowers* is based on compositions derived from a discarded science collection of early twentieth-century glass lantern slides from the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences. The artist layers these hand-coloured, black-and-white images—originally used as an educational tool to illustrate botanical lectures—to simulate Victorian mourning bouquets. Her montages reference the long-standing tradition of flowers as expressions of love and loss, and evoke the deep connection between plants and healing.



*The Twirl of a Butterfly's Tongue* is based on the same collection of lantern slides; pulling together a vast array of imagery, the video speaks to our need to categorize the world, and how science and technology have made it possible to push beyond our natural abilities in an ever-increasing and almost dizzying desire to know and experience more. Images flicker past to the rhythm of a musical score, generating a contemplative space to consider the lust for learning, the richness of the earth, and cyclical patterns of development.

Evolving from a desire to understand the vulnerable habitats we occupy and the delicate balance we disturb, *Nocturnal Botanical Ontario* (2019–ongoing) documents the vegetation surrounding Angelucci's home and studio in the Pretty River Valley, part of the Niagara Escarpment. Working at night, she documents her immediate environment when it is most elusive, using a scanner to illuminate the plant and insect life thriving under the cover of darkness. The large-scale prints created from this process reveal intricate webs of tangled native, introduced, and invasive plants in enlarged detail, highlighting the vulnerable habitats of our immediate environments, and the colonial histories they evoke.



Angelucci's video *Ghost Orchard* (2022) is also grounded in environmental engagement, this time with the land of the artist's childhood. Visiting the abandoned orchard that was once part of her family's farm near Hamilton, Ontario, she captures the overrun growth just before impending plans for urban redevelopment will cause its disappearance. Working again at night, Angelucci films the area while a slowly roving spotlight highlights the white blossoms of the remaining apple trees, causing them to appear as ghost-like emanations. They, along with a hundred-year-old willow tree, are the last vestiges of the destroyed farm. Her return to this former home comes with a renewed consideration of concepts of land ownership and colonial histories.

Throughout these various, interconnected projects, Angelucci offers thoughtful and intimate acts of attention that evolve from a place of reverence and respect, as she seeks to examine and reconcile our relationship with the natural world.



**Sara Angelucci** is a Toronto-based artist and Adjunct Professor of Photography at Toronto Metropolitan University. For the past ten years her projects in photography, video, and audio have engaged with environmental concerns exploring the plight of birds, forests, and plants. Angelucci completed her BA at the University of Guelph and her MFA at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. She has exhibited across Canada in the US, Europe, and China and been an artist in residence at the Art Gallery of Ontario, NSCAD (Halifax), the Banff Centre, and Biz-Art in Shanghai. She has been supported by the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council, and was nominated for the 2022 Scotiabank Photography Award. Her work is held in numerous public and private collections.

Presented by the Art Gallery of Mississauga

#### Image List

Still from *Ghost Orchard* video, 2022.

*Aviary Series, Short-eared Owl/endangered*, 2013.

*Arboretum Series, Sister Elms*, 2016.

*Black Flowers Series, Dhalias*, 2021.

Still from *The Twirl of A Butterfly's Tongue*, 2022.

*Nocturnal Botanical Ontario Series, Cardinal flower, Mint, Joe Pye Weed*, 2022

Still from *Ghost Orchard* video, 2022.