

press release for Ruth Chambers: *Tend*

For Immediate Release: January 22, 2021

Artist Ruth Chambers records the intricate biology of ephemeral flowers in vitrified clay giving new meaning to still-life

*Dig beneath the surface of these exquisite and exactingly sculpted botanical ceramics to discover intertwined histories of feminism, science, and colonial expansion in **Tend** at the Art Gallery of Regina February 5 – April 11*

Regina, SK:

The Art Gallery of Regina (AGR) opens a solo exhibition of more than sixty hand-sculpted porcelain flowers and bulbs by ceramicist Ruth Chambers entitled *Tend* on Friday, February 5, 2021. Each pale, diminutive porcelain object reproduces the plant or geophyte bulb it is modelled from in exacting and exquisite detail.

Pinned to the gallery walls or arrayed on specially-constructed specimen tables, Chambers' works couple the sensuality of art and the empirical observation of science. Marvel at the thread-like fingers of root reaching from the varicose belly of a bulb in search of water. Or, the triumphant bugle-shaped bloom of a hollyhock erupting from a sturdy stem adorned with tightly curled buds and the delicately drooping folds of a wilted petal. Each lifelike sculpture plucked, pinched, and pulled from lightly tinted porcelain clay.

Dig just below the surface of Chamber's work to unearth a rhizome of associations connecting the roots of ceramics and botany in Europe to fascinating and troubling histories of science, feminism and exploration. Her horticultural subjects may well trace their lineage to the elegiac traditions of floral still-life painting and botanical illustration.

The popular 16th and 17th-century still-life painting genres of *memento mori* and *vanitas*

depicted sumptuous fruit and flowers. Such paintings commonly included wilting flowers and rotting fruit, conveying a moralizing message about life's fleetingness and its transitory pleasures. Similarly, Chambers' rigid porcelain sculptures arrest her specimens in various stages of sprouting, blooming and withering. The impermanence of hyacinths, tulips, hollyhocks and narcissi is intensified by the very act of calcifying them in vitrified clay.

Chambers recognizes her artistic fore-bearers in the women who laboured anonymously to systematically document plants in the 18th and 19th centuries. The artist inhabits these illustrators' meticulous scientific gaze in her own detailed, observation-based inventory of plant biology.

Chambers' chosen medium of ceramics, too, requires the artist to hybridize with science. Working in porcelain takes immense technical skill, encompassing chemistry, geology and mathematics. An unbalanced ratio of ingredients, inconsistent thicknesses, or any other mistakes will manifest as imperfections that become visible only after firing. Chambers doesn't buy her materials but arduously prepares them in a multi-step, days-long process. Her delicately rendered records of wilted petal, vigorously swollen bud, and succulent stem would not be possible without her unique porcelain formulation.

Tend is a triumph of technical ability and startling beauty sprouting from the oppressive soil of its artistic and social legacies. Like the unnamed illustrators who have faded into obscurity, Chambers' ghost-like hollyhocks and chalky hyacinths are drained of their vibrant colour, a spectre of their exotic roots.

Visit the exhibition from February 5 – April 11, 2021, at the AGR. Admission is free; the gallery encourages interpretation and engagement with *Tend*'s ideas and techniques through accessibly-written self-guided tour pamphlets, audio tours, and an online exhibition catalogue featuring an essay by art historian Julia Krueger.

Seize two opportunities to learn porcelain sculpting from life from AGR exhibiting artist Ruth chambers. Chambers will conduct an online demonstration, registration \$10, on Friday, March 26 at 6 PM and an in-person workshop on Saturday, March 27 from 10 AM – 4 PM at SILT Studio, Regina. For more information, visit www.artgalleryofregina.ca

For Calendar Listings

Exhibition title: *Tend*

Artist: Ruth Chambers

Dates: February 5 - April 11, 2021

Venue: Art Gallery of Regina (2420 Elphinstone Street)

Closing reception: April 9, 2021 (by appointment)

Artist talk: April 9, 2021

Online demo: Friday, March 26, from 6 pm to 8 pm over Zoom video conference, Fee: \$10

In-person workshop: Saturday, March 27 from 10 am to 4 pm at SILT Studios (200-2275 Albert St.) Fee: \$235 members, \$275 non-members

Short Description: Ruth Chambers pinches, plucks and pulls exquisitely detailed, life-sized flowers from lightly tinted porcelain clay for her solo exhibition, *Tend*, at the Art Gallery of Regina. *Tend* draws upon the elegiac traditions of floral still-life painting and systematic enumeration of plants by unsung botanical illustrators.

[alternate short description: Ruth Chambers' exhibition *Tend* at the AGR intensifies her subjects' impermanence by arresting the delicate & the succulent in vitrified clay.]

Website: www.artgalleryofregina.ca

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Email to request an interview in English with the artist.

Links:

Images for reproduction and image credits:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4tm52th4gxd6obf/AABAPf_L-LgQrCCxxxALqfkra?dl=0

Artist's bio:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/uag9v0imnmzquu3/Ruth%20Chambers%20short%20bio.docx?dl=0>

Art Gallery of Regina's website:

<https://www.artgalleryofregina.ca/upcoming-exhibition>