



# Sunken Garden

Tanja Deman

Not nursed like the plants of a summer parterre,  
Where gales are but sighs of an evening air,  
Our exquisite, fragile and delicate forms  
Are nursed by the ocean and rocked by storms.

– Pertar Beron

**Tanja Deman's** art, as she tells us, is concerned with 'perceptions of space and her relationship to nature.' She describes her photography, collage and video works as '...meditations on urban space and landscape. Observing the legacy of modern architecture or natural sites, her work investigates the sociology of space and reflects dynamics hidden under the surface of both the built and natural environment.' Deman's practice frequently involves a painstaking process of digital collaging to combine landscapes or interiors of institutional buildings with images of natural phenomena to call into question human relationships and emotional responses to the physical world. The process of collecting these visual elements can be prolonged. A photograph of a library, theatre or auditorium can lay dormant in the artist's archive for some time before the spontaneous discovery of its natural other leads to their assemblage.

In 2015 Deman began a new series of work, *Saltwater*, entering the Adriatic Sea beside the coast of her native Croatia to explore the conditions, morphology and the effects of light on this near silent subaquatic world. The oceanic environment dictates that the method of production of the photographs for *Saltwater* and those for this exhibition *Sunken Garden*, produced in the waters around Jersey, is necessarily spontaneous. Deman has commented that underwater, subjected to the strong tidal currents and variable visibility of local waters, 'she can only take what is given by the sea.' Deman's wilful descent through the thin surface line that marks the border with an unknown environment begins a private journey that responds to the intensity of her vision of the terrestrial world.



Cover image:  
*Work No. XXI* from the series  
*Sunken Garden*, 2017.  
140 x 95cm.  
Archival pigment print

Left: *Museum Library*, from  
the series *Temples of Culture*,  
2014.  
145 x 100cm.  
Archival pigment print

Although many people regularly enter the shallow waters around Jersey for leisure, few can claim to have experienced anything more than a fleeting glimpse of what exists out of their depth beyond the soft haven of sandy beaches. For this we rely upon the vicarious means of underwater photography and film: highly coloured natural history images of marine life or dramatic human action shots of sea sports. From these categories of image, however, Deman's *Sunken Garden* series is clearly a departure.

What then is the effect of the raising of these mute, monochrome images from the depths to surround us now? At first glance the velvet grace and curve of the subjects, rendered softly through turbid waters, seems soothing, benign. Through longer repeated viewing, however, Deman's images undergo an unsettling transformation. On closer examination the oarweed in *Work No. IX* from the series *Sunken Garden* exhibits imperfections: lesions, fractures and cuts through its surface; scars of a hostile environment. In this uncanny effect of aesthetic shift – an inversion which is formally enacted through artifice in *Work No. XVIII* from the series *Sunken Garden* – crowns of seaweed take on the form of some monstrous procession. The *Sunken Garden* series is suffused with the poetic sense that the appearance of its plant forms, refracted light and the presence of Deman herself among them are performed only on the ocean's own terms. •

Gareth Syvret, 2017



*Work No. XIX* from the series  
*Sunken Garden*, 2017.  
140 x 95cm.  
Archival pigment print

The series *Sunken Garden* can  
be found at: [tanja-deman.com](http://tanja-deman.com)

*Sunken Garden*  
Tanja Deman  
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[ccagalleriesinternational.com](http://ccagalleriesinternational.com) / [archisle.org.je](http://archisle.org.je)

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