

Exhibit celebrates the pleasure of looking at nature, botanicals



PSSST! "Anthurium" by Gary Schneider features a tongue-like stamen seeming to whisper to an ear-shaped petal.

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The inspired exhibit at the Yezerski Gallery takes as its starting point artists' absorption with nature, specifically the botanical world.

It is, one of the curiosities, perhaps perversions, of our era that such absorption should come as something of a surprise.

Yet what does it mean to pay attention to and creatively re-enact the dynamics of a leaf or blossom or tree? For one thing, it means honoring our own experience, the oak leaf underfoot, the temple a copper beech in summer creates, and in a world of mediated experience that's an increasingly rare event. For another thing, it means delighting in mystery, and in a culture where conquering the un-

known is God and science comes down to the controlled experiment, mystery is merely an obstacle.

At the intersection of experience and mystery sensuality lives, and "Dream Botanicals" owes much of its success to its sophisticated, often wry celebration of the senses, particularly to the pleasure of looking at the world.

Foremost among the contributions to this eclectic exhibit are Gary Schneider's two large black-and-white photographs, one of fallen oak leaves and another of anthurium blossoms.

Schneider is to nature photography what Roy DeCarava is to urban portraiture: emotionally charged, complex and more concerned with shadow and darkness than with any traditional play of light. One has a sense with Schneider that he photographs at night using an infrared lamp; his oak leaves suggest an owl's perspective — oversized, lit only by the moon and shielding an unseen, nocturnal life.

In both "Anthurium" and "Leaf," Schneider enlarges the actual subject, thereby calling attention to the ripples and curves, hard edges and fleshy protuberances of his subjects.

The result is mesmerizing.

The anthurium seem to be whispering to each other, the incandescent tongue-like stamen of one reaches toward the ear-shaped petal of another. It's as if nature's most profound silence had been made articulate.

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Dream Botanicals
Howard Yezerski Gallery
11 Newbury Street, Boston
Through August 15