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Artist Statement for *Salt: Studies in Preservation and Manipulation*

What botanist would not be filled with admiration if, after a long journey, he should find this wonderful plant. In his astonishment, past ills would be forgotten when beholding this admirable work of the creator!

–Hortus Cliffortianus

Despite the best efforts of science, authentic preservation of living matter is an impossible act. It's an ideal that stands in tension with the transient ephemerality that qualifies life. And yet—or perhaps because of it—this tension makes the humble ambitions of the botanical sciences intriguing.

In order to preserve and document specimens for future study, scientists must 'fix' the organic complexity of the botanical specimen through human intervention. In this way, botanical life can only endure as a specimen in a liminal state, the extended occupation of a pause between natural growth and decomposition. It is in this otherwise invisible moment, one reachable only through the intervention of the preservative act, that I find a deep and uncanny beauty.

In *Salt*, I emphasize the manipulation that manifests from preservation through the use of salt. This paradoxical mineral, necessary to sustain life—yet, if the delicate balance is outweighed, can extinguish it—reflects the structure of the specimen and acts to preserve it. I submerge each living plant in a bath of salt water and allow the salt to crystallize and encapsulate the living form.

Referencing early photographers and naturalists like Carl Linnaeus, William Henry Fox Talbot and Anna Atkins, I use the subjects and methods of the natural sciences as a vehicle to explore the intersections of knowledge, control and manipulation. Inspired by the intentions of botanical illustrations as a method to understand and control one's environment while maintaining a symbiotic relationship with place and identity, I seek to impress the human urge to order nature while fundamentally changing it. Using the platinum-palladium photographic process for its chemical stability and long-lasting image, these direct contact prints complicate the ideal of preservation, albeit, at the expense of the most authentic act of living matter, decay.