

How like a leaf I am

–

Alexandra Baumgartner

“Alexandra Baumgartner's work is an invitation to consider our position within nature. She takes a closer look at the consequences of our relationship with ecosystems and the way we define, influence and perceive the decline of biodiversity. In her multi-layered work, she moves between documentary strategies and fiction, images, sculptures and texts: a plurality of languages fostering a form of activism.” - Salvatore Vitale

There's a tendency to think of nature as something separate from the human world: a place to go for a nice walk, somewhere to come home from – perhaps with a pretty seashell or acorn. But, as Alexandra Baumgartner points out, ‘Today, every aspect of life on earth and every particle in the air and on land is influenced by humans.’

Baumgartner's ongoing project, *How like a leaf I am* attempts to overcome the dualistic perception of nature and culture by examining the inextricable links between human and plant life and our roles and responsibilities within vulnerable ecosystems.

Rather than concentrating on melting ice caps and deep-forest species extinction, *How like a leaf I am* brings the focus closer to home. ‘Rainforests and the arctic can seem very remote. Emotionally, it's easier for me to connect with things I see every day. Many of us can't really read our natural environments and it's time to change that and realise that biodiversity loss starts in our own backyards and in the supermarkets’. By focusing on traditional knowledge and visiting community-led initiatives in Switzerland, Denmark, Italy, and Palestine, Baumgartner highlights the importance of small-scale projects and changes. This is a refreshing approach in what is often an overwhelming struggle against big business and political powers.

*How like a leaf I am* brings together exhaustive research on different plant varieties and the initiatives attempting to preserve them. The imagery ranges from still lifes to landscapes, garden sheds to sterile seed banks, at times suggesting the archival impulse of museum collections and at others the innate connection between a person

and their homeland. As Baumgartner explains, these two approaches are not so dissimilar: 'A seed is not like a blank piece of paper. It's all the plants that have been before and all the ones that will follow. And it's embedded in the histories of the people who've used it... Agriculture, I've learned, is a very complex and truly emotional subject.'

The importance of this emotional connection with the land is emphasised by a layer of text setting out numbered instructions ranging in ease from '2. Find a spot you like, sit down for a while.' to '7. Imagine being a leaf'. These worksheet-style instructions encourage spectators to not only engage with the work, but use it as a catalyst to immerse themselves in the world around them. Baumgartner has mirrored this outward looking approach in her exhibition strategies, creating a garden within the gallery to provide a suitable setting for people to spend time with both the work and the plant life that informs it. This is a project that politicises landscapes and still lifes, calling for intense engagement not only with the art itself, but with our fragile ecosystems.

Text by [Ish Doney](#).