

EBONY G. PATTERSON

Sarah Bahr, Up Next at the New York Botanical Garden: Vultures, The New York Times, 22 November 2022



Ebony G. Patterson, *...kiss goodbye...goodbye kiss...*, 2022. Photo © JSP Art Photography.

The visual artist Ebony G. Patterson is creating a new site-specific installation for the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, the garden announced on Tuesday.

And she hopes it will prompt visitors to think about what lies beneath the sprawling 250 acres of plants, waterfalls, rolling hills and ponds. “A garden is an embellishment on the landscape,” said Patterson, 41. “What happens when you begin to peel back the landscape and look not just between or beneath the plants but also in the soil?”

The piece, which includes a focus on glass vultures, will be on display May 27 through Sept. 17. There will also be glass peacocks and casts of extinct plant species, all springing from the artist’s desire to invite visitors to reconsider traditionally “icky” parts of nature in terms of their necessary roles and their potential as catalysts for disruption and change. “I see vultures as cleaners of land,” she said in an interview. “They consume bodies as an act of care on a landscape.”

The installation, which she began conceptualizing in 2019 after a visit to Hope Botanical Gardens in her hometown, Kingston, Jamaica, stemmed from her thinking about land as “something that needs to be consumed” for its

truth to be revealed, said Patterson, who is known for both her garden-inspired installations and for large, colorful tapestries made of materials such as glitter, sequins, beads, jewelry, toys and fake flowers.

She also sees gardens as sites of survival and renewal: For instance, there are plant species in the garden’s herbarium that have disappeared from the wild. “I’m interested in resurrecting those plants through glass,” she said. “What does it mean to sit with a ghost and to learn from a ghost?”

“Not just plant life,” she added, “but bodies that would have come through the space. Especially invisible bodies, when we’re thinking about whose stories are not told or readily identified in spaces like a garden.”