



WAVE HILL SUNROOMPROJECTSPACE

May 31 – July 13, 2025

SONJA JOHN

Floral Larceny

SONJA JOHN

Born in Valhalla, NY
Lives in Bronx, NY

Detail of *Floral Larceny*, acrylic dye, spray paint, dried hibiscus pigments, and vinyl on mylar, photographic prints (hand altered large format prints on mylar as well as collage and image transfers) and custom wall-mounted light box. Courtesy of the artist.

Floral Larceny refers to a phenomenon in which insects extract nectar or pollen from flowers without aiding in pollination. Sonja John, a first generation Bronx-based artist, uses this metaphor to draw parallels to the displacement of people and plants—often stripped from their native ecosystems without regard for their ecological or cultural significance to inhabitants. In this solo exhibition, which runs concurrently with the artist's residency at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council on Governors Island, she references plants from Wave Hill's tropical collection alongside reproductions of family photos chronicling their migrations from Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, and the Philippines. Covering the Sunroom's windows with cut and collaged mylar, the artist creates effects that resemble stained glass, altering the perception of light and temperature within the space.

Motifs of breeze blocks appear alongside hanging stencils of the jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*) and dyed and collaged panels referencing agricultural produce from her family's gardens and ancestral homelands—breadfruit, cacao, star apple, Otaheite apple (pomereac or rose apple) among them. Here, the produce is chosen intentionally. Take, for example, the breadfruit. Polynesian and Austronesian travelers spread this fruit across the Pacific via canoe as their geographical reach expanded to countries including the Philippines and Hawaii. Later, colonizers brought breadfruit to Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica to feed the enslaved. The journey of this fruit closely mirrors the artist's family's migration patterns and background. The breeze block motifs also reference the decoratively perforated blocks commonly used to provide ventilation, privacy, and protection from heat—an affordable alternative to air conditioning. Influenced by Asian architectural design, breeze blocks are prevalent in warm climates across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, as well as in parts of the U.S. from Flatbush, Brooklyn to regions in Hawaii, Southern California, and Florida. Paralleling the movement of people, flora and produce, *Floral Larceny* challenges perspectives that separate labor and culture from the natural world, presenting migration and hybridity as fundamental aspects of all living systems.

Sonja John has performed and exhibited in New York City at EFA Project Space, RIO II Gallery, and Longwood Art Gallery @ Hostos, among other venues nationwide. Her mural was commissioned by The Center for Cultural Power for NYC Climate Week 2023. John's work has appeared in *n+1 Magazine*, *Them*, *Hyperallergic*, and *The Bronx Daily*, and she has received fellowships from The Studios at MASS MoCA, ChaNorth and the Vermont Studio Center. John earned a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design.

PUBLIC PROGRAM: July 13, 1:15 PM, Meet the Artist: Sun & Sorrel: A Cyanotype Workshop and Conversation.

Organized by Curator of Visual Arts Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, the Sunroom Project Space provides an opportunity for emerging artists in the New York City area to develop and present a site-specific project as a solo exhibition. The 2025 season features Sonja John, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, SuRan Song & William M. Weis III, Monica Duncan, Jennifer Tobias, Caroline Garcia and Magdalena Dukiewicz, consecutively.

THE SUNROOM PROJECT SPACE IS SUPPORTED BY THE MILTON AND SALLY AVERY ARTS FOUNDATION AND POLLOCK-KRASNER FOUNDATION. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS PROGRAM IS PROVIDED BY THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS; NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR AND THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE; AND BY THE CATHY AND STEPHEN WEINROTH COMMISSIONING FUND FOR THE ARTS..



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