

*Elemental: Images from Nature*

Tobi Kahn

My paintings are based on photographs I've taken, distilling or refining images to get to an irreducible core, a form that is singular, yet capable of evoking myriad, even infinite others. I am fascinated by fractal geometry – the way an orchid's shape corresponds to a cell or a constellation. This paradox of micro/macro animates my recent work on nature, in which I created images that resembled one another under a microscope, but also through a telescope.

In recent years, we have witnessed a world at the mercy of extreme climate change, unleashing its elements – hurricane winds, floodwaters, wildfires – in unprecedented ways. The paintings in this body of work reflect my awareness that nature is very fragile and that we are responsible for its protection.

The natural world is tragic but no less beautiful in this moment, even as it reminds us of our betrayals. The bleached forms of coral reefs offer mute testimony as they reach upward from the seabed. Calving glaciers produce a sublime spectacle as they crash into the water and disperse on the currents. Even the color of flowers, essential to attracting a dwindling number of pollinators, is changing. We are stewards of the world, not its masters.

All my life, I've been enthralled by the beauty and power of nature. Now, the vulnerability of the natural world has become the core of my work. In the coming year, I want to deepen my practice of painting as an act of care for what is disappearing; to explore the relationship of fragility to scale by making paintings that are larger than the body, sublimating our domination; and to collaborate with the viewer in travelling inward. The natural world is making its immediate claims on all of us, demanding a response.