

**First Retrospective of Photographer and Conceptual Artist  
Rosamond Purcell Opens at Addison Gallery of American Art this September**



Rosamond Purcell, *Piranha*, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, 1991. Cibachrome, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist

**Andover, MA (March 24, 2022)** – *Rosamond Purcell: Nature Stands Aside*, the first retrospective of the artist's work, which transcends the boundaries of both art and science, will be presented by the Addison Gallery of American Art in September 2022. The exhibition will feature over 150 of the artist's haunting photographs, assemblages, collages, and installations spanning Purcell's career from the late 1960s to the present day.

Throughout her more than 50-year practice, Purcell has collaborated with paleontologists, literary scholars, historians, museum curators, and erudite magicians, and has drawn inspiration from iconoclastic sources, from a 13-acre junkyard in Maine to natural history museum collections from around the world. A pioneer of fine art color photography and an inspiration to a generation of artists from Mark Dion to Sally Mann, Purcell probes the actions of time and decay as elemental to the natural world and the human condition.

Among the works in the exhibition are Purcell's lesser-known early portraits and radically experimental Polaroid prints from the 1970s and 80s, as well as her photographs of preserved animals in museums' collections, fossils, eggs, nests, specimens from medical museums, and forgotten human belongings, in addition to mixed media collages and constructions, including *Wall*, a 20-foot-long installation composed of naturally patinated scrap metal and other objects rescued from obscurity.

"This retrospective is a long overdue examination of Purcell's work, which reveals the connections between the unsettling and the sublime, the beautiful and the bizarre, the natural and the manufactured," said Allison Kemmerer, director of the Addison Gallery of American Art. "The Addison has long presented and championed photography, and Purcell's experimental Polaroid work in the 1970s was instrumental in the recognition of color photography as fine art. But just as her work straddles the intersection of art and science, Purcell herself defies any simple categorization."

"Purcell's six decades of work, while brilliantly varied and resistant to easy classification, speak eloquently to her persistent interrogation of the ways in which we attempt to understand the world around us, exposing how the barriers of logic and reason that we erect to make order out of chaos are porous and unreliable," said Gordon Wilkins, the Addison's Robert M. Walker Associate Curator of American Art and curator of the exhibition. "While Purcell is *sui generis*, her photography, scholarship, installations, trailblazing institutional collaborations, and writing have inspired a generation of artists. Now, in the year she turns 80, we will bring the full sweep of her works together for the first time, underscoring her enduring impact as an artist and a thinker."

Purcell grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and after graduating from Boston University began her career as a teacher before she began experimenting with photography when she received her first Polaroid camera in the late 1960s. In the early 1980s, she began creating the work for which she is best known, images of natural history specimens stored deep, oftentimes, in the bowels of scientific museums and research institutions around the world. Purcell was the subject of the 2016 documentary film *An Art That Nature Makes: The Work of Rosamond Purcell* by Molly Bernstein. Purcell's books include: *Book Nest*, *Illuminations: A Bestiary*, *A Glorious Enterprise: The Museum of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, and *Owls Head: On the Nature of Lost Things*, which documents Purcell's 20-year exploration of a multi-acre Maine junkyard. Her work has been exhibited throughout the U.S. and Europe and is held in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C.; the V&A in London; the Art Institute of Chicago; the National Gallery of Canada, and other institutions.

*Rosamond Purcell: Nature Stands Aside* is on view from September 1 through December 31 and is curated by Gordon Wilkins.

A full-color catalogue published in collaboration with Rizzoli Electa will accompany this exhibition with texts by Mark Dion, Christoph Irmscher, Errol Morris, Rosamond Purcell, Belinda Rathbone, and Gordon Wilkins. Support for this exhibition has been provided by the Artist's Resource Trust.

### **About the Addison Gallery of American Art**

Devoted exclusively to American art, the Addison opened in 1931 and holds one of the most important American art collections in the country. Its collection includes more than 25,000 works by artists such as John Singleton Copley, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, George Bellows, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock, Jennifer Bartlett, Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Kerry James Marshall, and Mark Bradford, as well as photographers Eadweard Muybridge, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Sally Mann, Dawoud Bey, Carrie Mae Weems, and many others. The Addison Gallery, located in a stand-alone building on the campus of Phillips Academy—a residential school of grades 9 through 12 in Andover, Massachusetts—offers a continually rotating series of exhibitions and programs, all of which are free and open to the public.

The Addison is open to the public 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, and 1 – 5 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is free. Masks are required.

For more information, call 978-749-4015, or visit the website at [www.addisongallery.org](http://www.addisongallery.org).

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