

### **Artist Statement: Trace Elements-Sarah Schuster's work**

The figure painting titled, *'The Origin of the Species'*, frames the content of this installation. The title references Plato's idea that the Gods created souls who were equally male and female and later split into two distinct sexes. The figure in this painting is able to satisfy its own desires. The ground of the painting is painted with house paint and techniques used to decorate home interiors. The stylized "wall" painting is overlaid with a black line drawing to contrast and connect her grotesque, though sensuous, figurative invention to the idealized and classical figures of Greek vase painting. In this painting the viewer encounters a celebration of desire composed of mannered and decorative ways of representing and ordering nature. In this exhibition Sarah Schuster juxtaposes these two forces, exaggerating our control over nature while allowing threatening aspects of nature to bubble up and break through the order by using scientific illustrations that identify and organize species, technological reproduction such as Xeroxes, and deep sea fish that express uncontrollable and instinctual animal drives. There is an inevitable connection between embodiment and death even though we defend against it. Decomposition, decay and aging are clear reminders of our own mortality and what we cannot control and in the west, human progress is measured by what we perceive as advances in our ability to control or manage nature and many images born of this attitude reflect this ideology to shield us from the horror vacui.

### **Artist Statement: 'Replicants' and 'Cultivants'**

*'Replicants'* and *'Cultivants'* are two bodies of work done in tandem. The images of roses represent a triumph over nature and the deep sea fish the collective memory of our untamed origin. *'Cultivants'* is based on illustrations of roses done in the first half of the 1800s by artist and naturalist Redouté. I began by Xeroxing a set of postcards of the original paintings that I found at the Metropolitan Museum. I traced the image of each species onto four identical panels. I left the tracing in the first panel untouched. In the second panel I painted over the lines of the tracing. In the third panel I developed an underpainting, exaggerating the space and form of the drawing with the introduction of white paint, and in the fourth I did the same and added colored glazes to bring the image to life. The four paintings illustrate the development of an image. The framed Xeroxes and used tracing paper are installed like stems leading up to the four painted panels of the roses to equate the growing or cultivating of an image to the process of cultivating a seed or species. The illustrations I worked from were many generations removed from the original plants and from the original work of art and yet they appear to be realistic, raising questions about the construction of nature in works of art.

The images of the Deep Sea fish that I use in *'Replicants'* are taken from a book of images by the celebrated marine illustrator, Richard Ellis. The images of the deep sea creatures awaken instincts imprinted deep in our unconscious. The wood blocks are layered with graphite oil paint and buffed until they look like they are made of lead or stone, more substantial than the ghost-like images. The traced images appear to be etched into the surface like fossilized relatives reminding us of our original nature. Both sets of images wrap around the wooden panels defying the illusionistic window space that representational art typically relies on and creating another dichotomy between the particularity of the image and the presence of the object.