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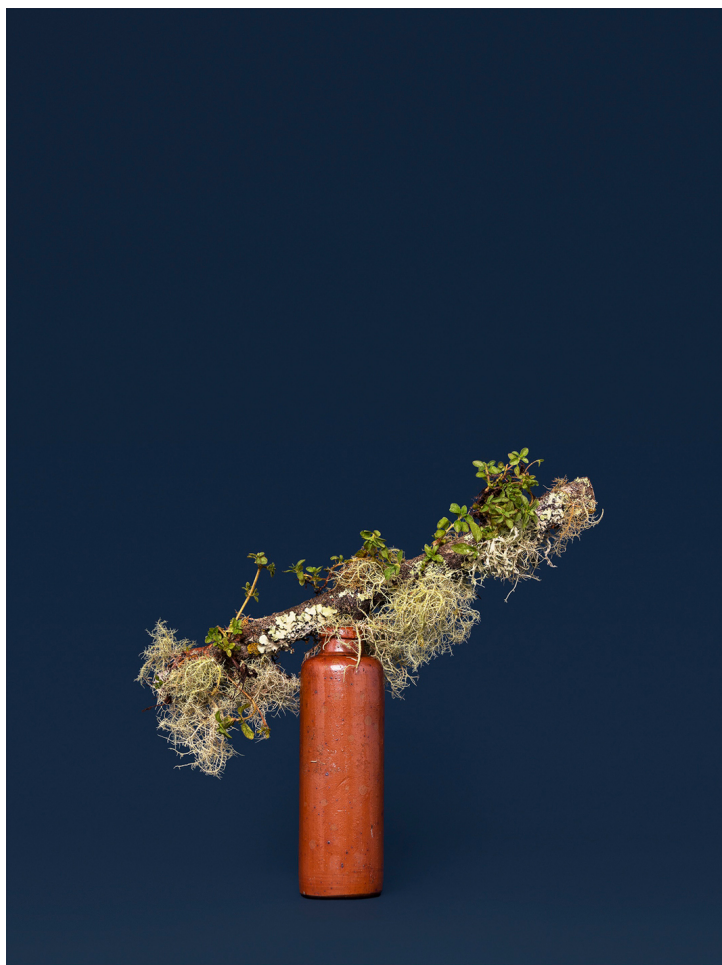
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Ann Shelton, *The Witch, Penny Royal (Mentha sp.)*, 2020, pigment print, 44 x 33".
NEW YORK

Ann Shelton

DENNY DIMIN GALLERY
39 Lispenard Street
Online exhibition

If you google “herbal abortion,” sisterzeus.com might be one of your top online search results. The throwback GeoCities-era website, which describes itself as “a women’s guide to synergistic fertility management,” offers information—after clicking through several disclaimers—about plants that could induce menstruation (emmenagogues) and abortion (abortifacients). In 2015, the New Zealand–based photographer Ann Shelton began researching and taking pictures of herbs that have historically been used to control female fertility. In her ongoing series “jane says,” started that year, Shelton shapes the floras into stunning, minimal ikebana arrangements—a metaphor, per the artist, for the regulation of

female bodies. She grows some of the plants in her lush garden in the town of Hahei. Shelton's DIY process would be a labor of love for anyone; but considering New Zealand's longtime abortion ban, it assumes political urgency. (Also in 2015, the American artist Mary Walling Blackburn created ⚔ *Anti-Fertility Garden* for a Texas nonprofit, which was filled with plants rumored to limit male potency.)

"A Lovers' Herbal" is Shelton's first solo show since New Zealand legalized abortion (for up to twenty weeks' gestation) in March 2020. This web presentation, dense with information, displays new photographs from "jane says," a short video interview, ikebana book images, and texts that detail the links between colonialism and the suppression of herbal medical knowledge.

Shelton's images balance conceptual rigor with visual pleasure. *The Witch, Penny Royal (Mentha sp.)* (all works 2020) depicts a gnarly branch arranged at a diagonal before a stately navy ground. Other photographs reveal a more tongue-in-cheek sense of humor. In *The Super Model, Iris (Iridaceae sp.)*, the flower's long and lean stalks are juxtaposed with blooms resembling spiky pom-poms. A trio of pictures—or "three sisters," as the artist refers to this grouping—were inspired by Judy Chicago's sculptural tour de force *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79. The photographs present several magenta peonies posed against an equally vivid pink backdrop. Shelton has chosen titles for these works based on modern archetypes who construct their images for public consumption—*The Influencer*, *The Party Girl*, and *The Congress Woman*. In each piece, the peonies are potted in low vases, which are dwarfed by the flowers' blushing crowns of petals.

— Wendy Vogel

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