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J. John Priola Natural Light

Texts by Rita Bullwinkel, Claire Daigle
Interview by Alec Soth with J. John Priola
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A comprehensive insight into the work of the artist spanning twenty years

J. John Priola's monograph, features work from twelve different series made over twenty years time and investigates the natural and un-natural world. There is a beauty and perversity at work in this collection of images. Plants carry stories and offer information about their caretakers, perseverance, and what nature and nurture hold. The images are often portraits and evidence of what was and can no longer be seen. Photography is magic in this way, deceptively acting as a document, yet personal, seen but beyond reach. While there are different formal approaches to image making, the aspirations remain the same. Following the title *Natural Light*, all images – even seemingly studio set ups – are done with natural light, and are in color and black and white. Shifts in scale and layout show the diverse ways to look at our world and how we live in it.

From the essay by **Rita Bullwinkel**:

Photographs are themselves a form of human artifice. They rot when soaked in water. Each section of Natural Light begins with an archival nature photograph taken by J. John Priola's horticulturalist mother, and thus Natural Light contains photographs by two generations of people who have harnessed their awe of nature. What makes J. John Priola's photographs captivating is their truthfulness about our messy, flawed relationship with nature. Priola's plants are not the glossy, sappy and idealized blades of grass of the transcendentalists, but the resilient, sentient rebels of a planet that is struggling under the weight of human destruction and decay. Natural Light is a vision of plants struggling in the urban setting, but it is also a vision of the earth triumphant, of plants that have won out over their humanoid competition, of immortals that were able to shapeshift in order to survive the epoch of humankind.

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From the interview by **Alec Soth** with **J. John Priola**:

as: I want to talk about 'Parasite' on the cover and the very last picture in the book. I don't want you to analyze it, because it's so mysterious, enigmatic and beguiling. Part of me wants you to tell me exactly what you were thinking, but then I thought that it might be a bummer for the reader to have it all laid out. So this is a challenge for you, and you can feel free to ignore it. Is there a similarly beguiling anecdote from your life now, or when you were younger, that's an analogous story or something that speaks to what that picture is about?

jjp: Wow. There is a specific modus operandi behind that picture. But what you're saying about not analyzing it, that's fantastic. I think it's obvious, but not necessarily to a person who doesn't relate to the natural world that much—then it's not as obvious. But boy, an analogous story...

J. John Priola is a contemporary visual artist working in photography and video. His work has been in numerous exhibitions, such as the traveling exhibition *Picturing Eden* launching from the George Eastman Museum. It is included in collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Denver Art Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Berkeley Art Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He is the recipient of awards such as the John Anson Kittredge Fund, Aaron Siskind Foundation, and the California Arts Council. Priola has taught at the San Francisco Art Institute for 25 years. He is represented by Anglim/Trimble Gallery, San Francisco, Joseph Bellows in La Jolla, and Weston Gallery in Carmel. johnpriola.com

Exhibition

Anglim/Trimble Gallery San Francisco, January/February 2023

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Press images



01_Highway 70, 2004, from the series *Farm Sites*, 1999 – 2005
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02_Triptych Cuts, 2018
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03_Bay from the series *Foliage*, 2018
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05_Grow: SM, 2014, from the series *GROW: Houseplant Portraits*, 2014 – 2018
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07_ *Willow* from the series *Nurture*, 2014
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08_ *Gray Wall* from the series *Nurture*, 2014
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