

## Sue Johnson

My work is built on traditions of still life, *vanitas* and *memento mori*, artefacts of the everyday – the familiar and ephemeral.

Recent work explores ideas of the post-Edenic landscape, picturing episodes and fragments from a new book of nature. Wild nature is no longer viewed as separate from humans - as the other - but rather as locked in a new symbiotic world order. To convey this, works adopt authoritative pictorial languages as they have been used to document new discoveries (natural history watercolour illustration) or found in graphic materials in 20<sup>th</sup> century encyclopedias (charts, maps, cross-section diagrams, etc.) that have attempted to piece together a universal knowledge.

Seeing a world under the surface of things, or parallel to it, is the central ethos of my on-going project, *The Alternate Encyclopedia* (1995 – present). As a conceptual umbrella under which diverse works are deployed, *The Alternate Encyclopedia* is - in fact – a quite immaterial 'encyclopedia.' Subject matter has been grounded in authentic documents and narratives, and has looked at the intersections of art, science and popular culture, while my voice has been that of a quasi-artist-naturalist. Works often picture nature as animated and anthropomorphized, investigate the moving boundary line between what is and has been understood as artificial and natural, and comment on the uneasy relationship between an expanding human world within the 'natural' world.

Under the broadly conceived and flexible rubric of *The Alternate Encyclopedia* project, I create work from materials I collect, and I also partner with museums and libraries to create artworks in response to a particular archive or collection. The nature of the source material or archive is where I locate my motif. Genres of still life and landscape form the base but it is the archive itself that provides the narrative arc of the work. Most akin to surrealist sensibilities, my work uses the juxtaposition of typically unrelated materials to create new associations and ways of looking at *things*. The overall amalgam creates a contemporary *wunderkammer* to be constructed and held in the mind, a new kind of cabinet of curiosities.

**[www.suejohnson1.com](http://www.suejohnson1.com)**