

foreign & domestic

Nicholas William Johnson

Apparatus

November 3 – December 18, 2022

Apparatus is Nicholas William Johnson's first solo exhibition in New York.

The exhibition comprises oil paintings and animations on CRT monitors of submerged and suspended landscapes populated with arrays of digitally modelled botanical forms.

Virtual suns illuminate these scenes as their images are refracted and reflected in obsidian mirrors.

Three tools of reality creation—that conjure or reveal worlds beyond our grasp—convene in this work: painting, optics, and psychotropic plants.

Each such apparatus extends and limns the contours of a reality that we can perceive.



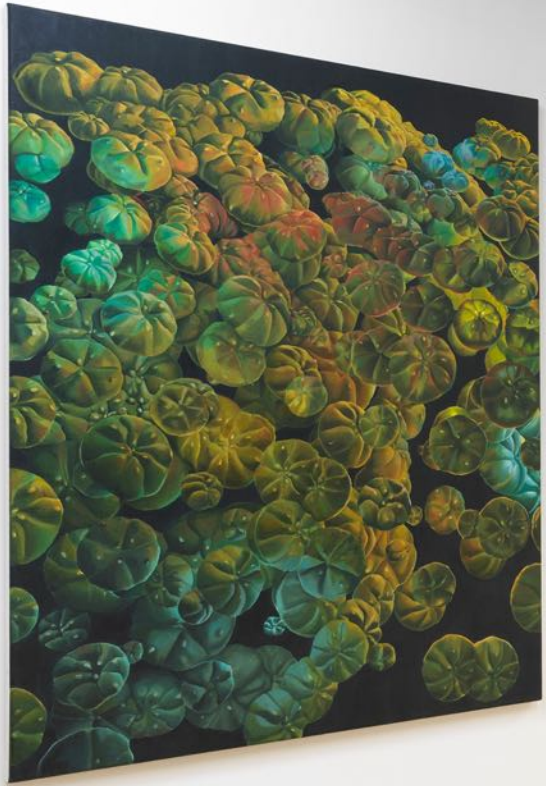


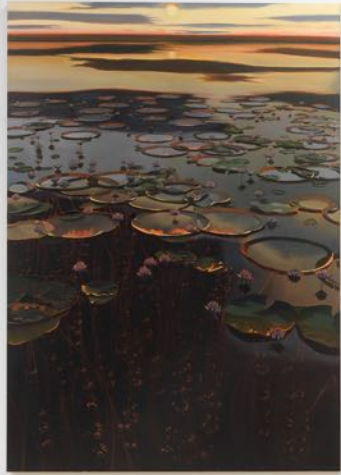






















Trinitron

SONY

LINE A LINE B

MENU/EXIT

ENTER

POWER

Nicholas William Johnson

Apparatus

November 7 – December 18, 2022

24 Rutgers Street, New York, NY 10002

Foreign & Domestic is pleased to present *Apparatus*, Nicholas William Johnson's first solo exhibition in New York. The exhibition combines oil paintings with digital animations on cathode-ray-tube monitors which appear out of a parallel virtual space. Johnson fashions specific botanical forms and arranges them into structured compositions within his simulated worlds: digital dioramas populated with psychotropic flora in liquid or gaseous suspension. These scenes are artificially illuminated and reflected in convex obsidian mirrors. The dark glassy curvature of the mirrors refracts, scatters and distorts the virtual light, subdues tonal values, and imparts an otherworldly gloss to the rendered image.

With *Apparatus*, Nicholas W Johnson extends his scholarly enquiry and painting practice to create an exhibition that weaves together disparate traditions of world creation – or apparatuses: painting, psychotropic plants and optical technologies. Through his work Johnson asks complex questions about the structure of representation, perception and meaning, as technology continues to blur and distend the boundaries between art and life, matter and simulation.

The word apparatus shares deep roots with the word 'appear': *ad-parare*, or to-make-ready. 'Apparatus' suggests the tools, equipment or systems for preparing and allowing something to appear, for rendering a part of the world visible. The word also suggests obedience and submission: an ideological apparatus, a state apparatus, the apparatus of justice. An apparatus can be bureaucratic or divine, used to control or to liberate.

Obsidian – a blade at the junction of worlds – was such an apparatus for Mesoamerican civilizations. 'Smoking mirrors' of finely polished black volcanic glass were used to peer into the future. Just as sound can reflect off a surface and echo back with a delay, so in dark mirrors images appear to have travelled from another time or place. The reflected image appears simultaneously behind the mirror's surface and behind the viewer, eluding touch behind an impermeable membrane. Obsidian mirrors were closely associated with water and the underworld.

John Dee, the court magician of Elizabeth I, famously owned an obsidian mirror smuggled from a recently colonized Mexico, which he called his 'shewstone', and others called the 'Devil's looking-glass'. Dee used his mirror to communicate with angels and the spirits of the dead, making sure to carefully stage the show-stone by a window, in natural light, before questioning the angels on natural science or hidden treasure. Dee's theatrical setup resonates with Johnson's meticulous staging of forms, lights and angles in the digital modelling environment.

Many of the plants depicted in *Apparatus* possess psychotropic qualities. The ingestion of mind-altering plants in a ritual setting inscribes altered states of consciousness into the participants' bodies, like a painter's reification of otherworldly images – mediated by optical technologies – is inscribed onto canvas. Johnson's images glide between phase states – from glossy solids through liquid oils and digital gases – they remind us that all vision is augmented, and that no pure perception exists that precedes its apparatus. Nature is always already technology, and technology itself expresses culture.

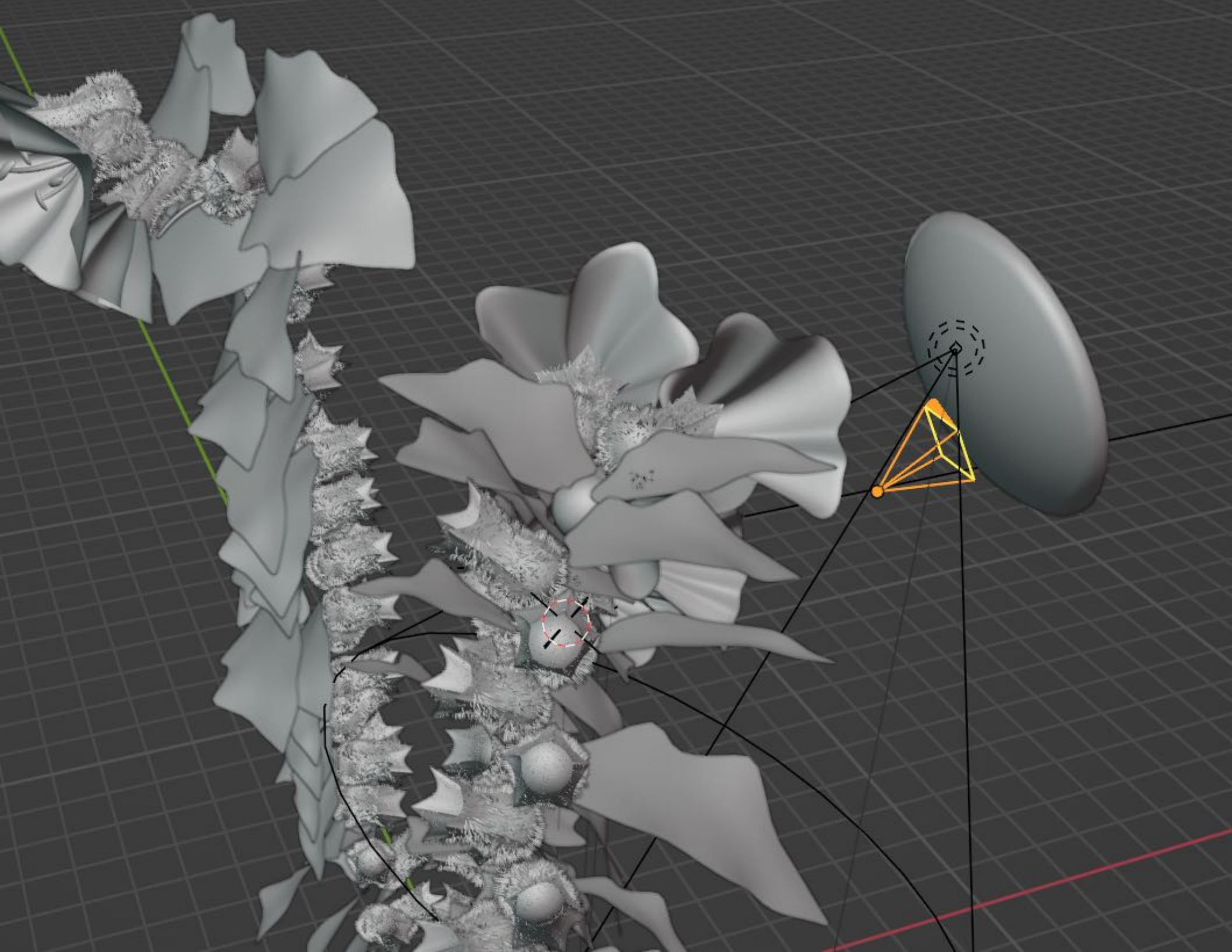
The ritual use of psychotropic plants for mediating and constructing worlds has been an important apparatus in many cultures, and has long been suppressed in the name of modern science and religion. Likewise, plants and their image are a contested site for anxieties towards nature, gender, race and the other. In our efforts to control and categorize plants we graft on a part of ourselves: plants bear witness to the violent processes of evolution and history, and possess an archival knowledge that can be transmitted to and interpreted by other sentient beings.

Four viewing terminals are installed on plinths around the gallery floor. Each monitor screens digital animations on two minute loops. The digital suns rise, fall and circle around, generating dynamic lighting effects in the obsidian mirrors. The cathode-ray-tube monitors project an anachronistic quality, with their dark convex glass and images produced by electrons colliding with a phosphorescent screen, crackling with static, to display the latest generation of digital animation. One viewing terminal screens an animation of the gallery itself, flooded with murky green water and rippling lily stems, artificially illuminated from the street, an upside-down homolog of the exhibition space which evokes the forgotten zones of a video game.

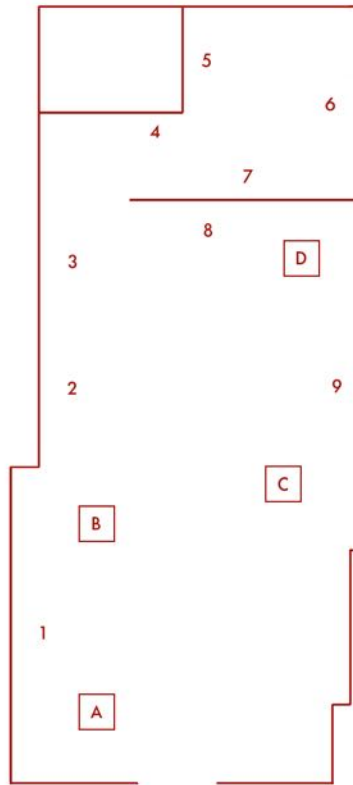
Johnson's ongoing project of illustrated encyclopedia – "with idiosyncratic entries on the history and culture of botany and botanical illustration, the language, science, symbolism, folklore and occult beliefs surrounding and associated with flowers and trees" – is represented here with a selected library of the artist's publications and commissioned texts from the past decade.

Apparatus is an exhibition about the creation of meaning, the encoding of information, and the devices used for imaging and constructing reality. By bringing together painting, optics and psychotropics, Nicholas William Johnson conjures a series of connected but distinct worlds, dreamscape vignettes for staging 'real objects of the mind'. In order to produce meaning, an apparatus must pair with a social ritual, or scaffold: painting with exhibition making, lenses with the scientific method, psychotropic plants with ceremony, dance and music. *Apparatus* proposes that the devices which frame reality do more than passively record phenomena; an apparatus reveals a set of limits within which new meanings become possible; divination becomes conjuration. The art of Nicholas William Johnson is such a transitional space to test, mingle and sublimate each apparatus into new world-producing configurations.

Nicholas William Johnson (b. Honolulu, Hawaii) lives and works in London. He studied philosophy before completing an MA in Painting at the Royal College of Art (2014). Selected exhibitions include: *Apparatus*, Foreign & Domestic, NYC (2022); *Rapture*, Peter von Kant, London (2022); *They Regard Us As We Regard Them*, Plus-One, Antwerp (2021); *Botanicalmind.online*, Camden Art Centre, London (2020); *Sticky Like A Summer Night*, House of Egorn, Berlin (2019); *Plant Communication Network*, Peter von Kant, London (2018); The John Moores Painting Prize, Liverpool Museums, UK (2018); *Inns Of Molten Blue*, Plus-One, Antwerp (2017); *The Averard Hotel*, London (2016); *The Catlin Prize*, London (2016). *New Sensations*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2015). His work has been covered by Artsy, Elephant Magazine, Nero, Studio International, Apollo Magazine, Dazed, Harper's Bazaar, The Financial Times, and The Times.



catalogue of works



1. *San Pedro Dreamstate* (*San Pedro cacti stand reflected in a convex obsidian mirror; glazed translucent in a way that suggests hallucination*), *Echinopsis pachanoi*, 2022, oil on canvas, 47 x 33 ½ in // 120 x 85 cm
 2. *Apparatus* (*Henbane viewed in a convex obsidian mirror*), *Hyoscyamus niger*, 2022, oil on canvas, 31 ½ x 25 ½ in // 80 x 65 cm
 3. *Heavenly Blues* (*Viewed in a convex obsidian mirror*), *Ipomoea tricolor*, 2022, oil on canvas, 31 ½ x 25 ½ in // 80 x 65 cm
 4. *Heavenly Blues* (*Gold; convex*), *Ipomoea tricolor*, 2022, oil on canvas, 19 ½ x 16 in // 50 x 40 cm
 5. *San Pedro Dreamstate* (*study*), *Echinopsis pachanoi*, 2022, oil on canvas, 19 ½ x 16 in // 50 x 40 cm
 6. *Tiered Structure* (*Retinal cells ref. Santiago Ramón y Cajal*), *Victoria amazonica* and *Nymphaea caerulea*, 2022, oil on canvas, 47 x 33 ½ in // 120 x 85 cm
 7. *Tracks*, 2021, oil on canvas, 47 ¼ x 35 ½ in // 120 x 90 cm
 8. *Waterlily Tiered Reality Structure* (*Viewed through a tinted glass plane with a high IOR that bends space*), *Nymphaea caerulea* and *Victoria amazonica*, 2022, oil on canvas, 47 x 33 ½ in // 120 x 85 cm
 9. *Lotus Field* (*Waterlilies reflected in a convex obsidian mirror at high altitude with an infinite horizon*) *Nymphaea caerulea* and *Victoria amazonica*, 2022, oil on canvas, 47 x 67 in // 120 x 170 cm
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- A. *Viewing Terminal*, 2022, digital animation on Sony Trinitron CRT monitor, 2 minutes
 - B. *Viewing Terminal*, 2022, digital animation on Sony Trinitron CRT monitor, 2 minutes
 - C. *Viewing Terminal*, 2022, digital animation on Sony Trinitron CRT monitor, 2 minutes
 - D. *Viewing Terminal*, 2022, digital animation on Sony Trinitron CRT monitor, 2 minutes



Nicholas William Johnson

Lotus Field

(Waterlilies reflected in a convex obsidian mirror at high altitude with an infinite horizon)

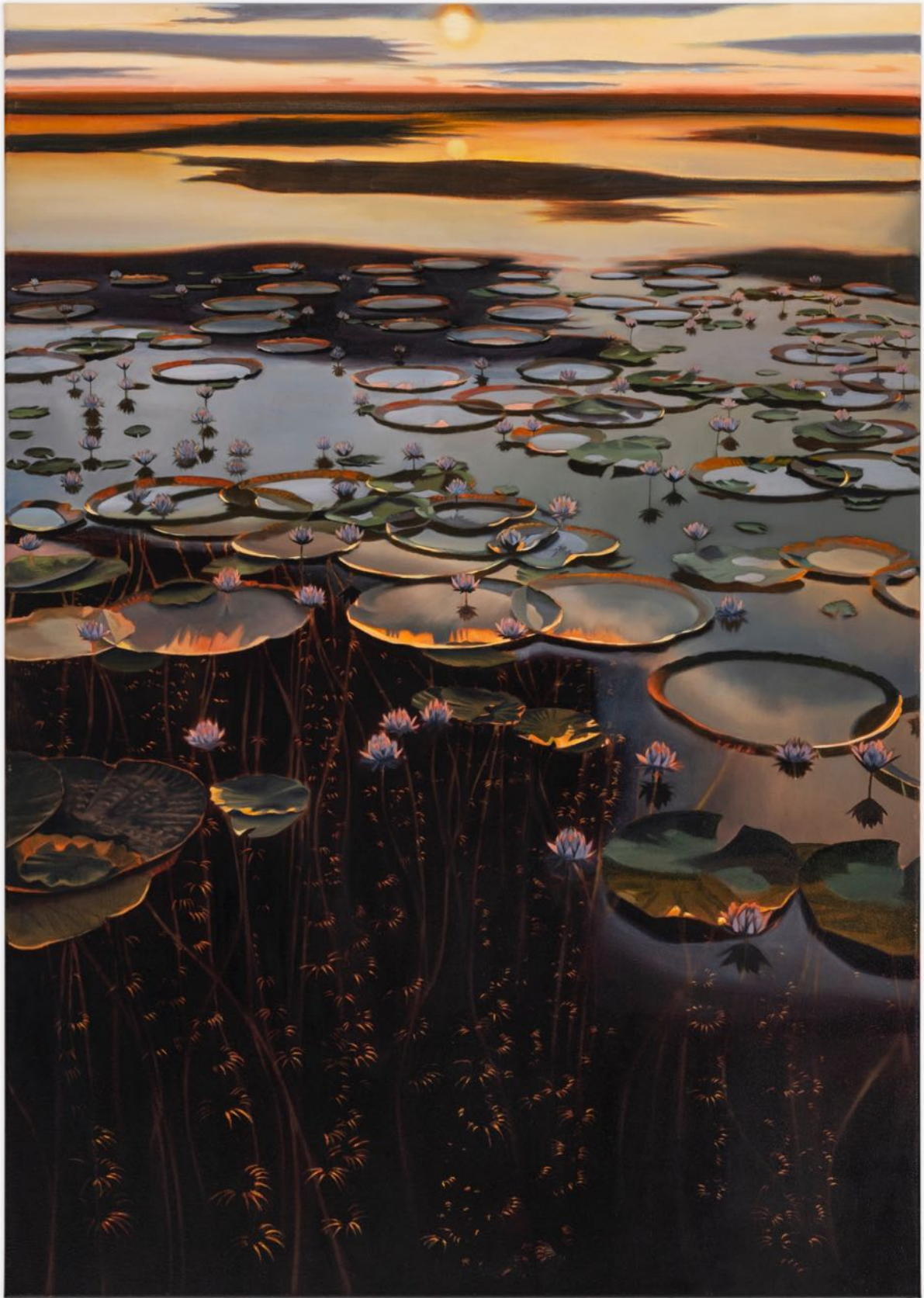
Nymphaea caerulea and Victoria amazonica

2022

oil on canvas

47 x 67 in // 120 x 170 cm





Nicholas William Johnson

Waterlily Tiered Reality Structure

(Viewed through a tinted glass plane with a high IOR that bends space)

Nymphaea caerulea and Victoria amazonica

2022

oil on canvas

47 x 33 ½ in // 120 x 85 cm





Nicholas William Johnson

San Pedro Dreamstate

(San Pedro cacti stand reflected in a convex obsidian mirror; glazed translucent in a way that suggests hallucination)

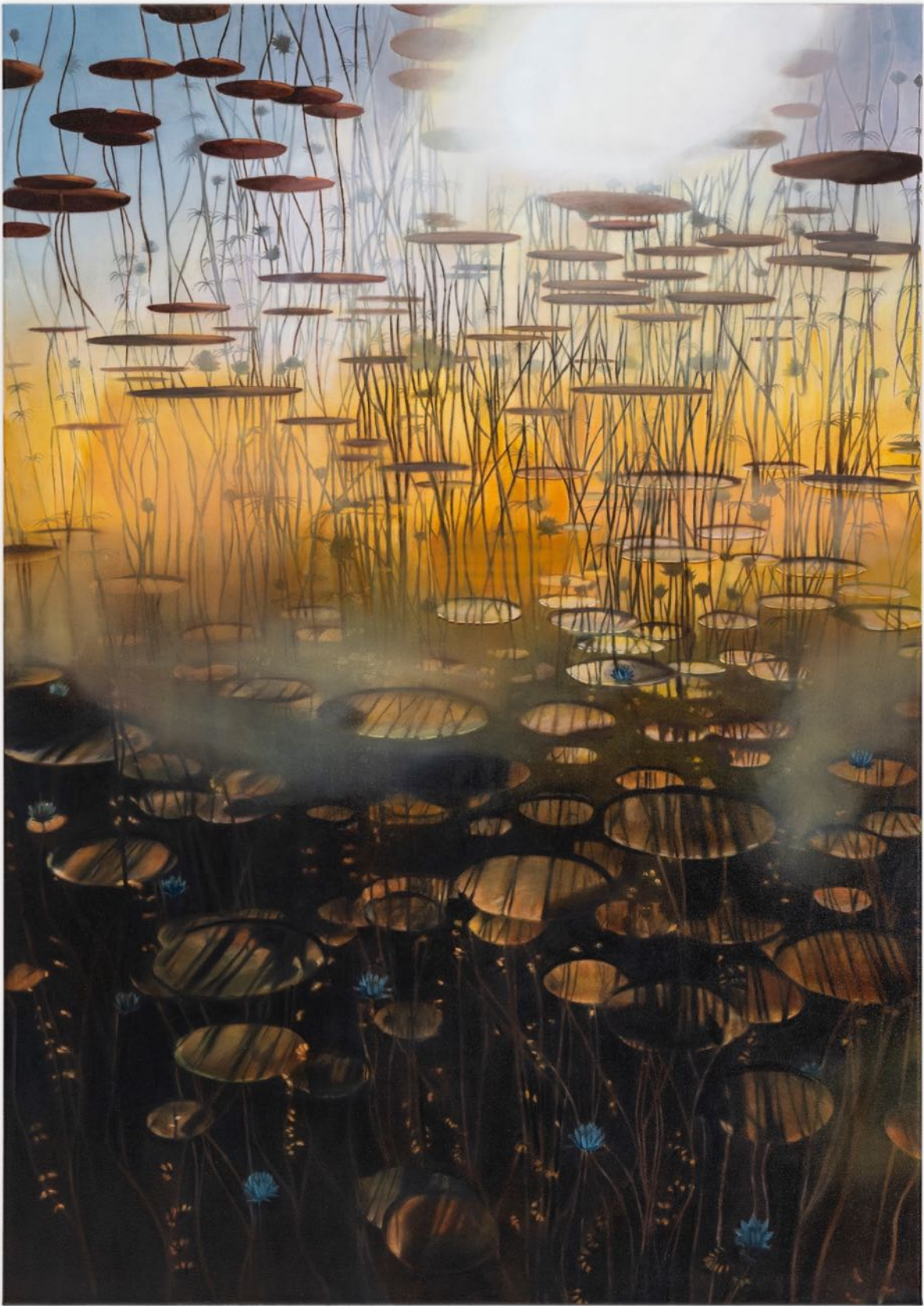
Echinopsis pachanoi

2022

oil on canvas

47 x 33 ½ in // 120 x 85 cm





Nicholas William Johnson

Tiered Structure

(Retinal cells ref. Santiago Ramón y Cajal)

Victoria amazonica and Nymphaea caerulea

2022

oil on canvas

47 x 33 ½ in // 120 x 85 cm





Nicholas William Johnson

Tracks

2021

oil on canvas

47 ¼ x 35 ½ in // 120 x 90 cm



Nicholas William Johnson

Heavenly Blues (Viewed in a convex obsidian mirror)

Ipomoea tricolor

2022

oil on canvas

31 ½ x 25 ½ in // 80 x 65 cm





Nicholas William Johnson

Apparatus (Henbane viewed in a convex obsidian mirror)

Hyoscyamus niger

2022

oil on canvas

31 ½ x 25 ½ in // 80 x 65 cm





Nicholas William Johnson

Heavenly Blues (Gold; convex)

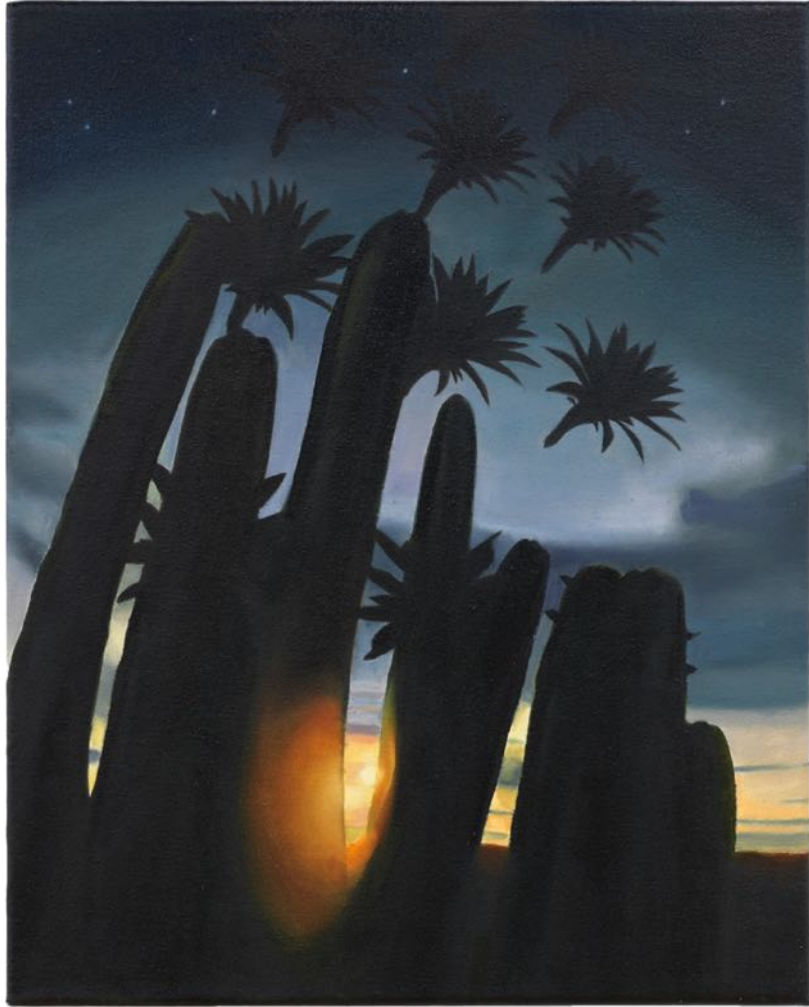
Ipomoea tricolor

2022

oil on canvas

19 ½ x 16 in // 50 x 40 cm





Nicholas William Johnson
San Pedro Dreamstate (study)
Echinopsis pachanoi
2022
oil on canvas
19 ½ x 16 in // 50 x 40 cm











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photography by Dario Lasagni and Damian Griffiths

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