

Shipping Roots – a new exhibition at Inverleith House

A new exhibition at Inverleith House by Australian artist Keg de Souza will highlight the colonial legacy of plants when it opens next month.

Initially trained as an architect, Dr de Souza works with temporary architecture and the politics of food.

Shipping Roots will transform Inverleith House into a series of installations with the aim of immersing all visitors in sound, plants and play.

Dr De Souza enjoyed a residency at The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh last year and worked with staff there, including archivists, to share the hidden histories of three plant types which linked the UK with India and Australia.

The artist has previously had successful exhibitions in Indonesia, Canada and Japan and this is her first major exhibition in the UK which will run as part of Edinburgh Art Festival from 24 March until 27 August 2023.

The stories relate the stories of the plants to her own cultural removal. Dr De Souza is of Goan heritage and the ancestral lands there were colonised. She now lives as a settler on unceded Gadigal land in Sydney. She spent much of last year working at the Botanic Gardens studying living and

preserved collections in preparation for this exploration.

The exhibition is one commissioned for the Climate House programme and explores how plants have moved through the British Empire including eucalyptus, prickly pear and many seedlings which came to the UK in sheep fleeces.

For example, prickly pear has an interesting story to tell. Introduced as a habitat for the cochineal insect it spread rapidly. The importance of the cochineal insect was that it could be turned into a cochineal dye to dye the British Redcoats the colour of blood. The East India Company's ventures with cochineal were however a series of "missteps and mishaps".

Artist Keg de Souza said: "Having research time in 2022 to explore the libraries and herbarium at Royal Botanic Edinburgh and to work with the generous scientists and archivists here has been hugely rewarding. As I began to explore the stories behind these plants I discovered everything is interrelated. I want *Shipping Roots* to share this information and trace some of these connections whilst experiencing the stories on different levels.

"Stories that are lesser heard, highlighting some of the gaps in the archives. A lot of my work tries to highlight voices of marginalised people, First Nations narratives and colonised people, so I think the plants tell these and the transformation of the gallery is designed to do so in a multi-sensory way engaging with visitors of all ages."

Head of Creative Programmes at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh Emma Nicolson said: "*Shipping Roots* is a compelling invitation to consider how the introduction of plant material impacts landscapes and lives in a multitude of ways. Keg de Souza's work with the team here at RBGE has highlighted that art has an important part to play in linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories and discourse in a

physical space, opening up dialogues and imaginaries that could be critical in finding solutions to the climate crisis. Keg's unique thorough approach has created not just an exhibition but a lasting dialogue around the impact of the colonial legacy of these plants. This one-of-a-kind exhibition, created in a curious multifaceted, multisensory approach has resulted in one of the most rewarding projects we have had the privilege of hosting here at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh."

- Keg de Souza: *Shipping Roots*
- Climate House (formerly Inverleith House), Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
- Fri 24 Mar – Sun 27 Aug, 2023
- Open daily 10:30 – 17:30
- Admission free
- www.rbge.org.uk





Cactaceae
Cholla Pithusa. Lam.

1127.



5 *Cudders*
B.F. 1850

