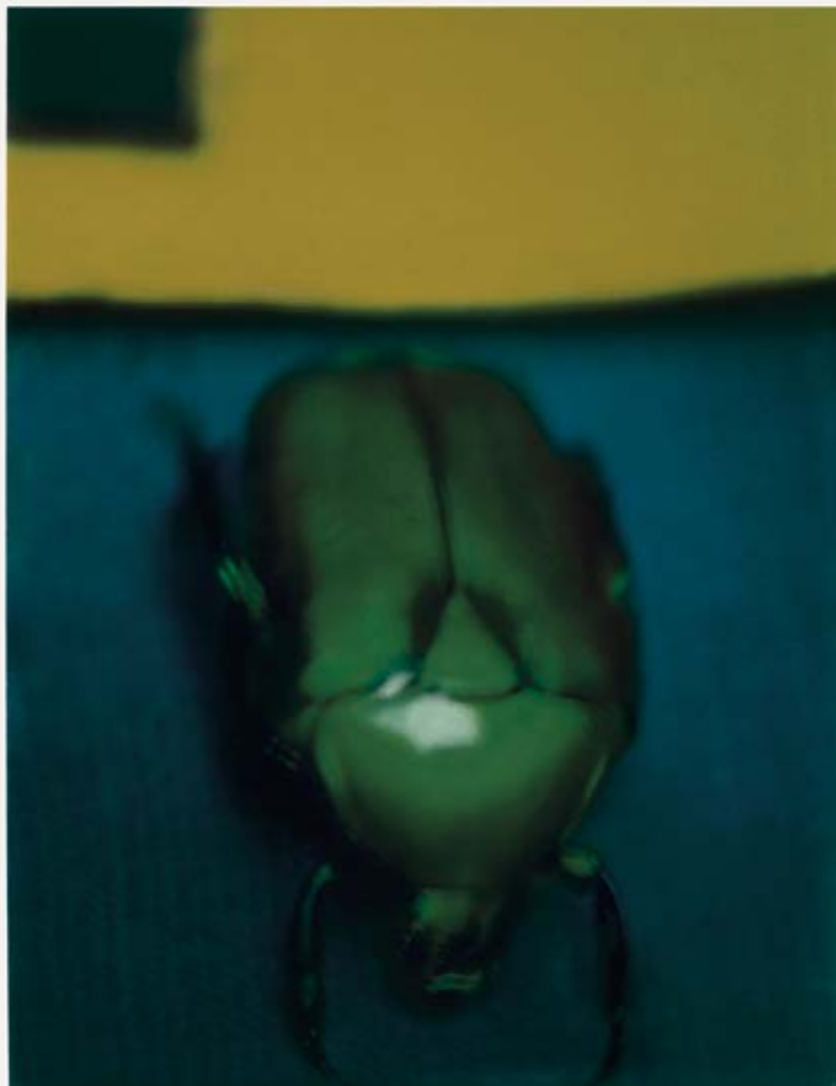


SARAH MOON
*d'après
nature*





Sarah Moon in conversation with Raphaëlle Stopin, curator of the exhibition.

14 April 2026, the artist's studio, Paris.

Excerpts from a conversation with the photographer on the themes of the garden, the light, the dark and the mirror.

Raphaëlle Stopin: Looking at your photographs, I was reminded of this quote by Michel Foucault: “The garden is the smallest plot of the world, and yet it is the whole world.” In this statement, he expresses the idea that the garden is both a real space and a space that condenses all manner of other realities—the meeting of the microcosm and the macrocosm. This inevitably brings to mind childhood, that time when we discover, particularly in the garden, a realm which, beneath our feet and our curious eyes, reveals itself to be immense, diverse and ripe for fairy tales. Does your perception of the garden include this element of childhood projection?

Sarah Moon: Yes, above all it is a refuge. And this attraction to the garden as a refuge grows stronger with time. It has something to do with memory, I suppose. Although I am a city child, there is indeed something of the order of memory, of escape, of special moments of my childhood, when nature, the garden, the sea or the countryside—that space, that territory Foucault speaks of—were already a refuge. It was sometimes a backdrop in my fashion photos, and it was only when I photographed it outside of commissions, ‘for myself’, that I made it my own bit by bit, through cropped fragments, that I became attached to it, if I may say so, to the point of never wanting to let it go. The forest, on the other hand, is not a refuge for me; don’t ask me to go there. The fear of the dark, the fear of the lack of light—that too comes from childhood; it’s absolutely certain... Why are we afraid of the dark?

It’s interesting that you say that, because there’s a very strong connection to the dark in your work.

I’ve always said that I dream in black and white, and it’s true. I very rarely dream in colour. In any case, the ones I remember are in black and white. So, I feel that my memory is in black and white.

Colour really came to the fore for me when I started photographing fashion. People would say to me, ‘It’s pictorial’; I don’t know if it is, but I was conscious of the colours I was combining.

Are these two different languages for you?

Sarah Moon, *Crépuscule*, 2005 ;
Le Poirier, 1992.
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Yes, colour is more realistic, more direct; black and white offers the possibility of greater transposition. This ties in with the act of taking a photograph, when one eye is open to the outside world through the mirror and the other is closed to the inner world, that of memory. People often tell me that my photographs are unreal, dreamlike, but I believe they have more to do with memory than with dreams. “We think we’ve been dreaming, but in fact we’re remembering”—it’s like a flash of memory. And I realise that my recent work focuses increasingly on light, sometimes white light, like the sun’s reflection on water.

For the exhibition, you also extended your explorations of the garden by travelling through Normandy, in particular wandering through Giverny, and water holds a special place in that garden! Was that what particularly interested you?

Yes, in Giverny, it was the light in the water that captivated me. Everything seemed too ordinary, but water has this power to completely change your perspective; it acts as a mirror, reflecting and reshaping contours. When I arrived, it was the first days of spring; there was this large patch of light, which was also extended by these jets sweeping the water just below the surface—something they use to prevent the water from stagnating and algae from forming. I wanted to capture it, or at least try.



Since we’re talking about this garden, which belonged to a painter, perhaps we could return to the analogy drawn between your photography and painting, and even a certain Impressionism—a kinship that arises from the prominence given to the feeling of the landscape and through your use of photography, in contrast to its transparency and mechanical obviousness. Are you a bit of a painter, after all, in the way you handle photography?

After all, as a photographer, one is really limited... It’s still just a fraction of a second. You can’t retake it. And it’s this all-or-nothing nature that I have to work with that’s difficult: it happens so often that you feel you’re seeing something but can’t capture it. And it’s that quest that never ends. I mean, even on a walk—what I call a walk—in nature, there’s all the weight of what you feel, and yet, on the film, there’s nothing. That’s the advantage of the painter: they have a much, much slower pace of expression; they can search and come back to it... transpose it.

But you blunt this sharp edge of photography by introducing a sense of the passage of time, particularly through your use of Polaroid and its imperfections. How has this film, and the way you’ve repurposed it, changed your photography? Has it brought your images closer to what you actually perceive?

started using the Polaroid on the advice of my printer, Patrick Toussaint. It was already widely used for studio fashion shoots, as was the custom at the time, especially for lighting tests. And then came the idea of using the Polaroid for outdoor shoots. I had my little darkroom and I started using the Polaroid 665; I’d take the negative side of the Polaroid. When you open it and don’t fix it straight away in a developer—because you’re

Sarah Moon, *Le Pavot*, 1997
Du début à la fin, 2001
© Sarah Moon / ADAGP, 2026

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outdoors—and you dip it in whatever you’ve got to hand, it creates surprises, accidents. And I love that. I feel as though I’ve snatched it from reality! That film had an extraordinary quality; I didn’t put the Polaroid down for years – I had a ‘Polaroidised’ eye!

But this transfiguration or transposition of reality – I’m not conscious of it; it’s more a fragment of reality that I recognise as my own.

So this happens on the surface of the film, depending on its accidents, but also in the moment—is that what you call ‘the echo’?

I always tell young photographers that photography is a state of mind. You can walk past a tree ten times and suddenly, there’s an echo between that tree and you. And that’s when you can take the photo. It’s part of the stroll; you need a kind of openness, you need to be attentive. It’s not concentration, it’s an attentive gaze, a state that allows for an encounter with chance.



Like that pine tree photographed at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, which you told me you’d walked past so many times before really seeing it. Can we talk about the work you did at the Jardin des Plantes in 2013, which led to a beautiful exhibition at the Museum?

It was a wonderful experience, truly wonderful. I have a dazzling memory of that adventure. It was a gift. Florence Drouhet had asked me to create a body of work for the National Museum of Natural History. It all happened very quickly. I was lucky enough to be able to work at the Jardin des Plantes and the Menagerie for a month, from 7am to 9pm. I had the time, and it was just the two of us – my assistant Xavier and me. I could watch the animals being fed very early in the morning and observe them coming out of their shelters. That kind of unhurried observation isn’t possible when there are people around; it requires a certain solitude.



In the exhibition, there are botanical and zoological gardens, fields, wild gardens and, in a few places, French formal gardens...

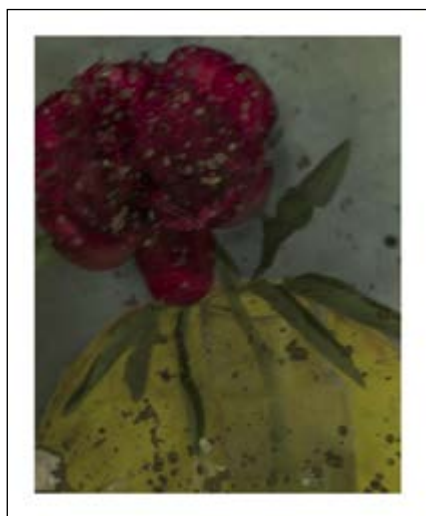
The layout of French formal gardens bores me a little; I find them authoritarian. I’ve photographed them, but they are already, in themselves, images.

The wild garden, like the one you photographed during your stay in the Cotentin, at a bend in a hiking trail, seems to correspond more closely for you—to borrow Gilles Clément’s definition—to that ‘mental territory of experience’ that is the garden, and which you would recognise as your own. There is indeed a form of organisation to this landscape, but one you discover, in the hollow of the dune, without the effect having been staged for the eye. Ultimately, it is you, through your framing, who make it a garden. This question of perspective and surprise reminds me—since I see several of them here arranged in your garden—of the mirror we were talking about earlier. Is the mirror a way for you to recreate a shortcut through what presents itself to you?

I always photograph a lot of things in mirrors. Something happens there that I can’t really control and that I haven’t planned, because of the angle

Sarah Moon, Azay le Rideau, 2001 ;
Le pin du jardin botanique, 2013 ;
Champ d’orge, 1997.
© Sarah Moon / ADAGP, 2026

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at which it's positioned. I've used it a lot in fashion, because we're always in this face-to-face situation, each in our own place.

As a way of sidestepping the obviousness of beauty, because apart from fashion, you've also used the mirror a lot in your photographs of flowers?

I've used it a lot for still lifes too. It's a long, static process... the mirror can introduce a different vanishing point, allowing you to step out of the corridor... It's funny you mention that, because I can't do flowers anymore. I've done them, and I even took that photograph, 'The Penultimate Peony', telling myself that perhaps there'll be a season when I can do one more, give myself a chance, but I'm not sure. The last time I photographed flowers, I realised I was framing them until only the stems remained in the vases, and I started photographing the vases.

Without flowers?

Without flowers. Empty vases, with water. But I stopped.



Was the mirror also to ward off too many colours? To put some distance between you and your fascination with colour? I remember that during our first discussion about the project to photograph the gardens in Normandy, you immediately said to me: "Yes, but in winter and in black and white."

I mean, when colour is imposed on me by the landscape, I'm less comfortable with it. When I create it myself, in the studio, that's fine. It's a dialogue, it's harmony. I can't do a sunset in colour, because it always exceeds what I can capture. It's too overwhelming and I end up with a postcard.

I've done a lot of colour work in fashion, and as with still lifes, I choose the backgrounds, I seek harmony, I avoid contrasts, to ultimately arrive at something that can be likened to a form of monochrome, even amidst a diversity of colours.



[...]

Sarah Moon, L'avant dernière pivoine, 2011;
Villa Médicis, 2020;
L'oiseau de mauvais augure, 2007.
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