

VINEYARD GAZETTE

Rain
showers 51°



Finding Beauty in the Smallest of Petals

Emma Kilbride Thursday, September 25, 2025 - 2:40pm

Libby Ellis knows how flowers think.

The Vineyard artist's new exhibit, *Minificence*, features miniature portraits of Island flora photographed digitally in black and white. The collection debuted at The Carnegie in August and continues through Oct. 18

For Ms. Ellis, the flowers in her work are collaborators rather than subjects. And like all collaborators, they can be unpredictable. She has seen unlikely candidates quietly demand to be photographed while the flashiest ones sometimes fall flat in the studio.

It's important to Ms. Ellis that she always lets the flower choose her.

"There's an energetic quality to it that I've learned over the years to respect," she said. "I'm following them. They just tell me what to do."

On-Island, Ms. Ellis has displayed her work at the Old Sculpin Gallery and Featherstone Center for the Arts, as well as a previous show at the Carnegie. Her work has also appeared at the Saatchi Gallery in London and received an award from the UK's Royal Horticultural Society.

The exhibit's title was inspired by a gothic architecture textbook Ms. Ellis borrowed from a neighbor. The book uses the portmanteau of "miniature" and "magnificence" to assert that small things can still be striking, which also happens to be the thesis of her collection.

"There's a magnificence of big and it's a certain physical experience of awe," she said. "I wanted to explore the magnificence of small."

Flowers have always been an artistic fascination for Ms. Ellis, but photographing them in miniature is a departure from her previous, scaled-up work. She said people often mistake the small photographs for drawings or etchings — an illusion created by their delicate contrast between dark and light and heightened by their small size.

When photographing, Ms. Ellis likes to meet flowers in the soil where they grew up. Many of the flowers she photographs are cut from her own garden, but some are plucked from neighbors' gardens. She said that buying pre-cut flowers to photograph is simply not the same.

Eight years of photographing flowers around the Island have sharply attuned her to what they want to tell her, from what kind of light they like to be photographed in, to which angles show their personalities best. She even meditates with them before taking their portraits.

The result bursts with garden life: a brash tulip, a particularly inquisitive anemone, a poppy in bloom, haloed by tight-lipped buds on wiry stems.

Ms. Ellis hopes that those who experience the portraits are able to converse with the flowers just as she does — and hear them talk back.

"Everybody has their own thoughts on what art is," she said. "I think I always felt this but didn't have the words for it: We're really seeing ourselves."