



CURATORIAL+CO.

SUNKEN WATER GARDENS

สวนใต้น้ำ

Lilli Waters

28 January - 14 February 2026

LILLI WATERS



Lilli Waters' photographs act as autobiographical landscapes, exploring feminist ideologies inherited through her maternal lineage and the layered histories of her identity as a Thai–Australian woman. Her images intertwine plants, flowers, and water, creating ethereal still-life compositions that reflect both a deep engagement with the natural world and a connection to cultural memory. Not dissimilar to the still-life paintings of the Dutch masters, her work contains a myriad of symbols carefully constructed to articulate her humanity; self-portraits of the artist submerged in the river near her birthplace, traditional Thai fabrics floating in the water amongst waterlilies and nacre-covered shells, or pregnant bellies which embody strength and protection. Water is a recurring motif that carries through her images, acting as a thread that supports notions of rebirth and renewal. Her depiction of women in the landscape deconstructs historical perspectives, subverting the monolithic male gaze to re-contextualise what we have lost within the structures of the patriarchy.

Lilli Waters (b. 1983) holds an Advanced Diploma of Photography from the Photographic Imaging College, completed in 2002. The artist is the 2024 winner of the Julia Margaret Cameron Award and the 2022 second prize winner of the Beautiful Bizarre Art Prize Photography Award. She is a multi-year finalist in the Australian Photography Awards (2020, 2022, 2023), the Du Rietz Art Awards (2020–2025), the Ravenswood Australian Women's Art Prize (2021, 2022), the Fisher's Ghost Art Award (2020, 2025), and the Percival Photographic Portrait Prize (2020, 2022). She has also been a finalist in the National Photographic Portrait Prize, Iris Award, Churchie Emerging Art Prize, Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Art, Environmental Art & Design Prize, and the Biennale Adelaide Park Lands Art Prize. In 2020, Waters was awarded the Creative Victoria Sustaining Arts Grant, and in 2021 she was selected as one of Lürzer's Archive's 200 Best Photographers Worldwide.

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this gallery stands. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, skies, and culture. We honour the rich artistic traditions that have existed on this Country for tens of thousands of years, and we recognise that First Nations people are the first artists, storytellers, and custodians of culture. We are committed to listening, learning, and working in respectful collaboration with First Nations communities.

SUNKEN WATER GARDENS

สวนใต้น้ำ

In the photographic series *Sunken Water Gardens* สวนใต้น้ำ, I explore my Thai heritage and ancestral mythology, drawing from the Buddhist cosmology of Traiphum, the Three Worlds, encompassing the celestial (heavenly), the terrestrial (earthly), and the infernal (underworld). These ethereal underwater still-life landscapes intertwine plants, flowers, and fish to create tranquil, meditative scenes that reflect my preoccupation with the natural world while connecting to cultural memory. Offerings of flowers and water become gestures linking the living with the divine.

The compositions echo the ceremonial beauty of Phuang Malai, floral garlands traditionally crafted from jasmine, a symbolism connected to my mother's names, Mali (meaning Jasmine) and Ladawan (meaning Moonflower). Emerald green and jewel-toned fabrics form the landscapes of these photographs, inspired by Thai silks and tapestries, while gold accents and gilded textures recall the shimmering gold leaf used in traditional Thai art. Black fish drift among orchids, recalling the mythical presence of the *nāga*, water deities and protectors of thresholds, inhabiting a space that is half-aquatic and half-celestial. A chambered nautilus suspended among the roots of drifting water plants resembles fine silk threads, referencing the Thai tradition of *krathongs*, small offerings released on water to honour ancestors and seek spiritual blessings.

My connection to this lineage exists through fragments, including vignettes, family stories, fabrics passed down, old photographs, and the memory of my grandmother wearing traditional Thai dress, all traces of another world that feels both close and unreachable. I have always felt a detachment from my Thai heritage, yet I see it reflected in the way my mother looks and in gestures that feel familiar. I am deeply curious about what has been carried across generations, the weight of trauma and nostalgia, the silences, the absences, and the things never spoken but deeply felt. Through my underwater still-life photography, I explore the intersection of these cultural identities, blending traditional Thai symbolism with contemporary artistic expression.

Raised off-grid in the Australian bush, I have a deep relationship with nature that has shaped both my world view and artistic approach. Ecological concerns are integral to my practice, as the natural world's constant flux parallels the evolving identities of those who navigate multiple cultures. The decay of flowers in my underwater work serves not only as a metaphor for cultural transformation but also as a reflection on environmental fragility.

In *Sunken Water Gardens* สวนใต้น้ำ, beauty and impermanence coexist between transient realms. In these underwater worlds, time slows, and stillness encourages dialogue with nature, history, and spirit.

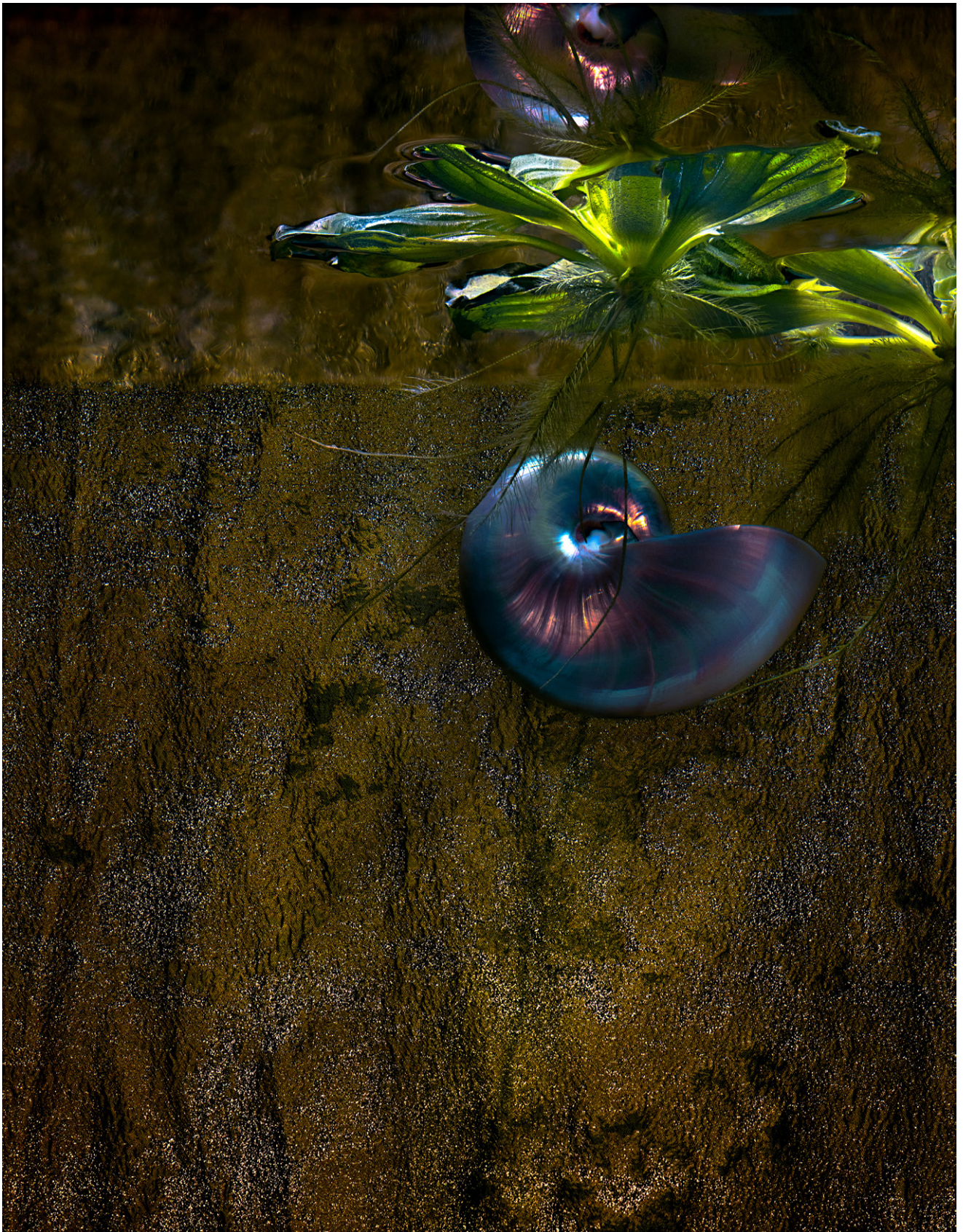
Each work is an edition of 8 + 2 AP.
More sizes available. Please enquire.



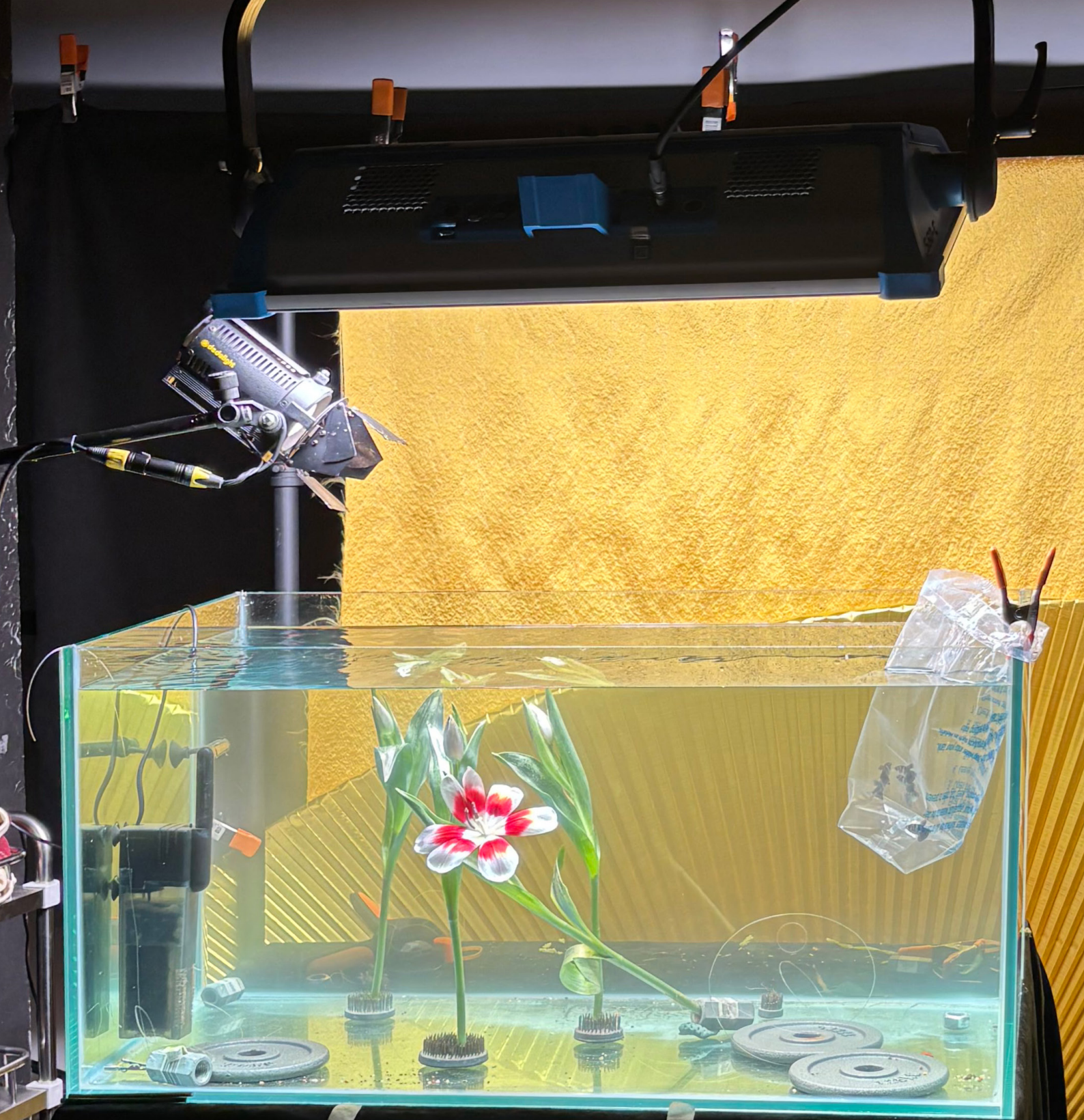
Nāga's Lanterns โคมไฟของนาค, 2025
archival pigment print on platine fibre rag paper
Image size 121.5 x 102 cm
Framed size 126.5 x 107 cm
AUD 3,800 unframed
AUD 4,600 framed



Nymphaea บัว Water Lily, 2025
archival pigment print on platine fibre rag paper
Image size 82.5 x 61.3 cm
Framed size 85.5 x 64.3 cm
AUD 2,800 unframed
AUD 3,300 framed

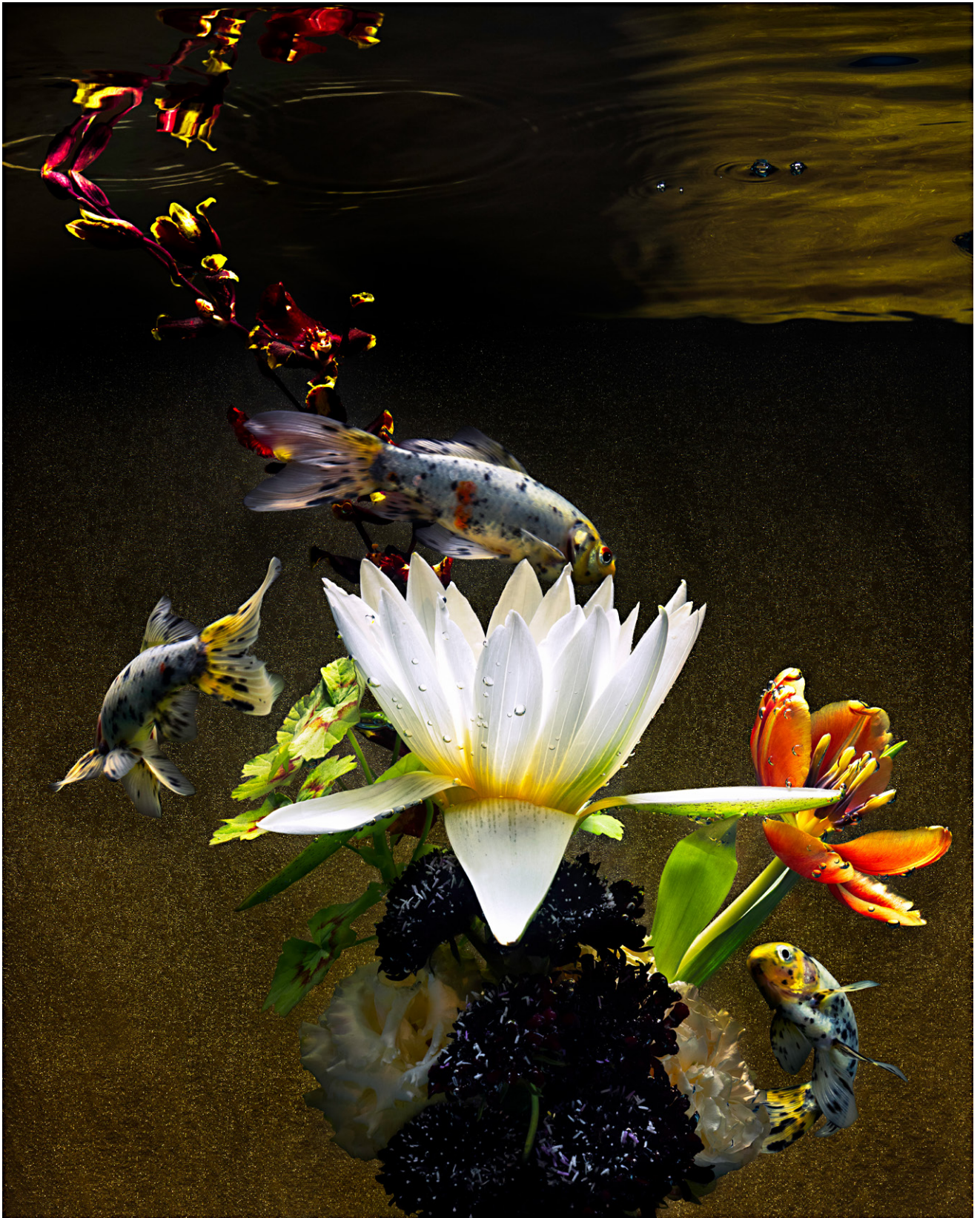


Nocturnal Vessel of Chiang Dao เขียงดาว Moonlight, 2025
archival pigment print on platine fibre rag paper
Image size 82.5 x 63.8 cm
Framed size 85.5 x 66.8 cm
AUD 2,800 unframed
AUD 3,300 framed



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~ Lilli Waters



Traiphum ไตรภุมิ Three Worlds, 2025
archival pigment print on platine fibre rag paper
Image size 82.5 x 65.8 cm
Framed size 85.5 x 68.8 cm
AUD 2,800 unframed
AUD 3,300 framed



Devaloka เดวโลก *World of the Celestial Beings*, 2025
archival pigment print on platine fibre rag paper
Image size 82.5 x 72.7 cm
Framed size 85.5 x 75.7 cm
AUD 2,800 unframed
AUD 3,300 framed



Saeng Dok Mai แสงดอกไม้ *Light of Flowers*, 2025
archival pigment print on platine fibre rag paper
Image size 82.5 x 82.5 cm
Framed size 85.5 x 85.5 cm
AUD 2,800 unframed
AUD 3,300 framed



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Profile image courtesy of the artist.