conveniences on the atmosphere. Specifically, greenhouse gas emissions from factories, automobiles, and edifices that warm our environment melt the ice to which polar bears have so expertly adapted. Dion's visual examination of the polar bear, as a case study, interrogates how the representation of a particular animal is bound to the cultural context in which it is produced. The polar bears, often collected in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, are somewhat savage, reflecting the notion of the arctic as indomitable, wild, and hostile. Today, we view the arctic as fragile and threatened, and our depictions of its wildlife appear tragic and frail. The branded cuteness of some polar bear images is part of the greatest tragedy of environmental degradation.

The strangeness of contemporary media coupled with the hopes and failures of a changing environmental movement is a central theme

in Mark Dion's South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit. Commissioned by the Miami Art Museum and presented at USFCAM, the installation imagines a vehicle replete with tools and equipment that activists could use to rescue threatened species. The following essay, written by René Morales about Dion's South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit, unravels the complexities of Dion's thinking and details the eras of thinking about nature that this artist addresses.

1 Bartram is renowned for capturing birds and plants in exquisite drawings he made in the field. He was also an inveterate seed collector who saved the Finlandia tree from extinction by saving seeds of this rare, flowering tree. For more about Bartram, see Thomas Hallock, "Male Pleasure and the Genders of Eighteenth Century Botanic Exchange: A Garden Tour," The William and Mary Quarterly, Vol, 62, No. 4. 2 For more about these excursions, see http://markdionsbartramstravels.pcah.us/.

Mark Dion, Everglades Timeline, 2006. Colored pencil on paper; 9 x 12 inches. Miami Art Museum, Study Collection. Image courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery. All rights reserved

### AN EVERGLADES TIMELINE M: Dion and Rene' Morales 1817-18: The Pirst Seminale War. Andrew Juden accuses Spine of harboring terrorists, fractales the Satire Papies of the Europiaks a Threat to finding Security and comes for empire 1821: Spain sells Florida to the United States for \$5 million 1701-1783: Spain keeps its hold on Florida through the 1832: John Somes Ruddom Winds Southern Florida, Wills birds, Rich than War of Spanish Succession asinst Britain (1701-14), the war of was or Spanish Succession assume (1718-20), and the war of The Quadruple Alliance against France (1718-20), and the war of Jenkings Ear against Girtina (1754-88)-only lose it testing British i French and Indian wor (1754-63). Regains it after the American Routethan. 1835-42: The Second Seminole War. U.S. Troops Pursue the Seminoles Throughout Florida and face the quagmire of a guervilla-type In surgency in unfamiliar territory with no exit strategy. Early 1700's: Groups of Creek indian tome south 1838: Dr. Henry Perrine, butanist and U.S. 1900: Passage of the Lacer Act, from Service and Alabama where they are placed by rumancy slaces. Europeus call the Seminals." wild animals and illesally hilled birds. 1565: British explorer John Sparke reports of 1903-1913: Large State a serpent with three heads and four feet, of the Your form South Florida Into an agricultural suggestant bisness of a great spaniel "lurking in the Florida Surveys. He adds, It is thought that There are lions and Tygles as well as unicorns, lions especially..." verslaks draining begins 1845: Florida admitted to the Union as the 27th State 1904: Governor Napoleon Bunaparte Browned declares war on the Everylades Promise \$ 250 on Women, and \$100 on Children, Feuer there to 1513: Florida under the control of the Column ribe. They Pomes de León "discovers" the an "Empire of the Every lules" 1855: Dr. John Gorrie the inverter of the Modern air conditioner dies; penniless. AD 500 to 1500: Various Indian Cultures thrive in the Productive Coastal environment 1906: Melaleuca imported rom Australia to help speed 1877: Abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe 10000 BC: Paleo-Indians settle ublishes Florida's first environmethalist Statement, 100,000 years ago: The last phase of The Ice Ages; The Florida Platform emerges from the ocean; pohr glaciers melt, re-flooding freshunter, which is 1994: Passage of the Dougles Art, renamed after s demands he name removed for Groups Protest the signing Big Sugar Must pay and reduce phosphorous relieve. Rusers must be restautation for 1918: Marging stonema 1987: Passage of the Surface Water 1962: Army Corps of Engineers Donks dis at and lot Improvement and Management (Surn) Act Continues its relentless attack on 1926: Nature takes its revenue; 2000: Passing of Federal Water The first Plan to clean the Euroshdes. the Euroshdes. Channels 4155 + mmer) Resource Acudorount Act, and 1881-107.000 Dratested and River. 48,000 acres of Marsh destroyed. a hurnisme devastates the area. Resource Academent Act, and 1989: 107,000 Protected and State Eversholes Investment Act and an to Everyhole Atlant Each 1 167: Florida Deather Cape State touch 1497: President Extensive flooding from Like 200 1: For is march value as 1990: Susarcain industry costnows ( Sentens, and small wife placed on the 450,000 acres. Senator Graham city 1971: Disneyworld opens, Florida Nature landscape National Park; first 2002: Passage of the Maxing It ... an integral component of the / Tourism Surges. Army Corps of designated for its ompleted Scaling of three Everslades ecosystem". 7.8 billion dellar Everelides Ensincers completes the quarters of Like Okerchisee. Restoration Plan but can the 1991: Florida Euceylades Straightening of Kissimae The Lake is transvened from 1929: John K. Small publishes From The source of the Everylules what Eden to sahara: Floridas Tragedy Change their destructive 1992: Every lades Park sustains 1974: Establishment at By Cypros for Florida big soger. agrib usings wherests. The Europeles herry Dawige from Hurricane Andrew. / Mational Preserve things to dry out, biodiversity soffers Mid: Pandress arrested in the Back with a bed of 1979: Out break or invesive Cattails across porther Everstides. Altre will better from which will be to \$ 17,000. Attributable to increased levels of Phosphores, a result of pullsting the market strake. Deshis Robbins Excellent Brokens Brokens, a result of pullsting the market strake.

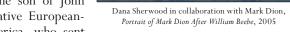
## **Troubleshooting**

by Jane Simon, Curator, USF Contemporary Art Museum

For centuries, artists have turned to nature for inspiration. Mark Dion is one of a handful of contemporary artists who use the natural works that focus on contested ground between the natural and the

For many of the works in the exhibition, Dion has focused on the landscape of Florida. Long before the recent fight to save In the nineteenth century, trained physician Henry Perrine saw the and restore what is left of the Everglades, naturalists traveled the hot and humid Florida landscape as the opportune setting for his

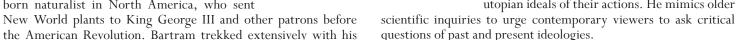
Southeast by foot and by boat, taking notes and making drawings of the plants, minerals, trees, and animals they encountered. The image of Mark Dion quoting ecologist William Beebe, by Dana Sherwood, makes several points about his objective. It shows Dion's interest in earlier encounters and explorations of the natural world; he is posing as Beebe in khaki clothing, holding a rifle and a net: ready to endure the wilds of the earth's strangest corners. It also demonstrates Dion's interest in placing himself in the shoes of botanists and zoologists who discovered facts, developed theories and ideas about nature when attitudes towards nature vastly differed. For example, Dion recently completed a project where he followed the route of naturalist and artist William Bartram throughout Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Bartram was the son of John Bartram, arguably the first native Europeanborn naturalist in North America, who sent



the American Revolution. Bartram trekked extensively with his questions of past and present ideologies. father, and despite parental misgivings about his son's mission and

ironies and inconsistencies of our fascination with animals and our destruction of natural environments and reflect his long held interest in Renaissance wunderkammern or Victorian Cabinets of Curiosities (or curio or souvenir cupboards). Rather than insist that these amassed collections are historical imprints, Dion sees them as an opportunity to play with a tradition and to create a world—and its magnitude of flora and fauna—as a platform for living intellectual forum. Another work that brings the Bartram research, analysis, experimentation, and even materials. *Mark Dion:* legend to mind is Dion's assemblage of materials and tools that Dion Troubleshooting brings together many of Dion's ecologically-themed actually used in the field—while he and artist Dana Sherwood traced Bartram's route—these include pens, paintbrushes, axes, cultural, often revealing the rift between common perception and flashlights, tweezers, guide books, rough-hewn knapsacks, and durable tarps. These items are meticulously installed making the gallery an example of field study.

vision of a tropical plant company. Perrine had been based in Mexico where he documented and studied tropical plants in detail, noting the leaf structure and water needs. With the help of a land grant from the American government, Perrine set out to fulfill his dream in 1838, settling his family on Indian Key and creating several sites with test plantings, especially agave. During one of the flare-ups of the last Seminole War, Perrine was killed in an ambush on his house in 1840. Dion focused on Perrine for a series of prints completed at USF Graphicstudio in 2010. These antique-like images were created from individually pressed samples of marine algae, and each copper plate was individually inked so each plant image could exhibit varied tones and colors. Like many of his other works in the show. Dion magines doing many of the painstaking actions of historical scientists to reveal the honest utopian ideals of their actions. He mimics older



place in society, Bartram prevailed as one of the most important Although ecology and environmentalism were entirely unknown documenters of the Southeastern United States, especially the at the time of Bartram and Perrine, these fields have come to unruly, wet terrain of Florida. Dion's works about Bartram repeat dominate our ways of thinking about the natural world. Indeed, the collecting and documenting that has continued throughout popular notions of the natural are not without the taint of ideology his career—amassing figurines of alligator bodies and postcards and pseudo-science. Dion has created a number of pieces that of alligator spectacles. For another cabinet in the same series question contemporary ideologies through images of older items. about Bartram, Dion sent postcards to Bartram's historic home One such work, Polar Bear (Ursus Maritimus) (II), 1994, brings in Philadelphia from important sites. The cards depict drawings together ten images of taxidermied polar bears in European of birds, insects, plants, and material culture. Bartram's idealistic museum collections. These bears are ferocious, grand, and highly push to document is paralleled by Dion's Sisyphean task to travel staged. Although they were captured, killed, and saved for viewing through nature when development encroaches at every bend.<sup>2</sup> in another age, to some contemporary viewers they are a bodily Dion's large cabinets give viewers a chance to piece together the reminder of global warming and the harmful effects of modern



Mark Dion Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered (alligator cabinet), 2008 Cover image: detail

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Mark Dion: Troubleshooting

January 13 – March 3, 2012 USF Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa

### Mark Dion: South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit by René Morales, Assistant Curator, Miami Art Museum

the human realm and the "wilderness" – those boundless, pristine spaces that have yet to be conquered and tamed by human hands. ("as a machine that would never break"); and to provide an antidote obsessions that we have so destructively projected onto it. to the social ills of urban life and industrialization. Amid the reality of countless habitats tainted, stripped, and overrun, however, we In a new project originated for the Miami Art Museum, Dion focuses must, today, finally acknowledge that nature does not exist on these on the Everglades – that vast stretch of territory that ran, in its original terms. Certainly there remain pockets of the world where no trail state, from Lake Okeechobee and the Kissimmee waterways near has ever been cleared, no tree cut down; but given the cumulative Orlando to the coral reefs off the Upper Florida Keys. The installation effects of recent human activity on the planet – from the buildup of consists of three parts, corresponding roughly to three major phases greenhouse gases that trap radiation within the atmosphere,

altering weather patterns, to the relentlessness with which ecosystems have been destroyed and thrown out of balance – it has become increasingly difficult to claim that there exists a place on earth beyond the reach of human influence.

If there is a single thread that runs through most of Mark Dion's complex and voluminous work, it is that what we call "nature" is, in fact, composed of two separate entities: There is, on one hand, that immense totality of living things (humans included) together with the physical environment in which they each struggle for survival; and there is, on the other hand, a purely conceptual wilderness, one that exists solely in the human imagination. Ever mutating and old as

humanity itself, this "second nature" consists not of earth, sky, and water, but of ideologies and systems of knowledge, of cultural myths and attitudes. It is simultaneously constructed and perceived through scientific, literary, and artistic representations – from natural history displays to the heroic tradition of American landscape painting. Dion's "central gesture," writes art historian Norman Bryson, "is to foreground not nature, but the interface between nature and the history of the disciplines and discourses that take nature as their object of knowledge."<sup>2</sup> Because this interface is mediated by and imbedded within the flow of human ideas, it is, and inevitably always will be, hopelessly anthropocentric. Only when this bias is fully acknowledged, Dion's work suggests, can we begin to understand our relationship team's activities for themselves. with the natural world that surrounds and courses through us.

works like On Tropical Nature (1991) and A Meter of Jungle (1992), he assumed the mythic guise of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century pioneer naturalist, undertaking journeys deep into the tropical rainforests of Venezuela, confabulation of fiction and officialdom bears a thinly veiled, ironic

Brazil, and other countries, for weeks at a time and sometimes in isolation. But unlike the explorers who preceded him into these and other jungles, Dion's primary objective was neither scientific nor utopian – his goal was neither to solve nature's riddles (he identifies Western cultures have generally assumed a clear distinction between as an artist, after all, not a scientist), nor to commune spiritually with sublime landscapes. Rather, it was to re-perform some of human history's most notable and telling incursions into the wilderness – but, Precisely because it was considered separate from humanity, virgin pointedly, in the current context of ecological crisis. In this way he nature became tasked with two important, contradictory functions: could serve, in his words, "as a magnet for critical questioning," and to serve as a limitlessly exploitable fountain of wealth and resources in so doing act out the disjuncture between nature and the desires and

in Everglades history: the period of exploration and conquest

(late 1700s – mid 1800s); the age of scientific discoveries and technological advancements, which for the first time afforded the possibility of populating the area and draining it for agricultural purposes (mid-1800s – early 20<sup>th</sup> century); and the present era, in which the Everglades has become synonymous with ecological devastation and the urgent, paradoxical challenge of artificially restoring the natural landscapes that we have misused. Throughout the broad historical arc that the installation encompasses, perceptions of the Everglades have oscillated between romantic reverence and utter disdain, between fervent calls to subdue and transform "the swamp" to impassioned pleas for conservation and restoration.

The project's most prominent component is the mobile laboratory of the "South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit." an imaginary agency comprised of individuals who rush into natural settings to rescue endangered plants and animals from developers' bulldozers, and who attempt to manage the serious epidemic of human-introduced invasive plants, which have decimated the region's native species. The vehicle is loaded with specimens and outfitted with various paraphernalia, from scientific instruments to the kind of gear one would want to have on hand while trekking through Florida's difficult terrain. Laid out in self-apparent order like a natural history display, the array works as a practical how-to guide for those who may be inspired to carry out the

Together with its conspicuously authentic-looking insignia, the Dion has gone to great lengths to demonstrate this point. In seminal Rescue Unit's uniforms (displayed on mannequins) create an aura of governmental authority. Against the backdrop of a restoration effort that for years has been hobbled by bureaucratic impasses, this

reference to the long-held dream of decisive action by policymakers, and, more generally, to the great extent to which the fate of the ecosystem has become dependant on political machinations. With a measure of icy humor, Dion thus embodies the frustration that many environmentalists have expressed upon being forced to settle for political compromises in the face of irreversible environmental damage.

This subtext is particularly pointed with regard to the Everglades, which, perhaps more than any other major natural habitat in the U.S., owes its hope for survival to the efforts of private citizens. The great figure in this respect is Marjory Stoneman Douglas (1890-1998), who, in the process of defending her beloved "river of grass," focused on community based forms of activism, while stressing goals that would be realistically achievable within the context of a baroque political process.<sup>3</sup> Stoneman's example in turn played a key role in the development of modern environmentalist strategies, helping to advance the movement beyond some of the self-defeating positions it had held under earlier incarnations (outward scorn toward government; passive or unpracticable biophilic sentimentality; an unwillingness to acknowledge human economic and subsistence needs; and so on).4 More than a recipe for direct action, Dion's Rescue Unit is a reflection on the intersection between "the system" and the vital, grassroots passions that have emerged as nature's secret weapon against despoilment.

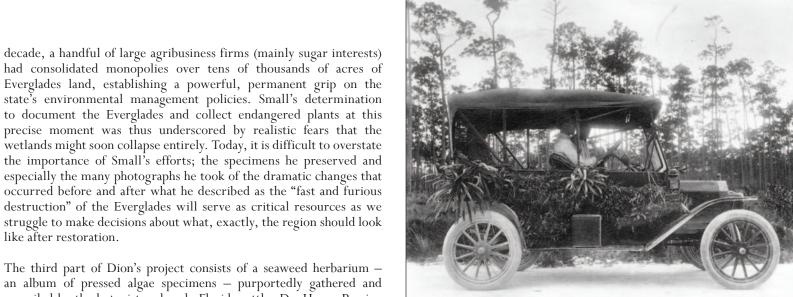
Accompanying the Rescue Unit is a series of digital reproductions of vintage photographs taken by John Kunkel Small (1869-1938), a curator of the New York Botanical Garden who identified numerous plant species in the Everglades and who authored a scathing book entitled *From Eden to* Sahara: Florida's Tragedy (1929). Spanning from 1915 to 1927, the pictures depict individuals transporting bulk shipments of orchids, bromeliads, and cacti out of the swamp by car, wagon, and boat – historical antecedents, perhaps, to the Rescue Unit's fantastical mobile laboratory. Dion's image selections present a sad irony: Throughout the time that Small was collecting samples for preservation in botanical conservatories, the future of the Everglades' famed biodiversity was facing a serious challenge from different sorts of gatherers – poachers and plant sellers. In response to the flourishing of loosely regulated markets for rare plants, pelts, and bird feathers, the number of individuals ransacking the Everglades for booty had exploded around the turn of the century. Small's photographs depict both naturalists and plant hunters engaging in the same activity, though with diametrically opposed motivations.

The images are most powerful when considered in full light of the monumental changes that humans were exacting upon the Everglades at the time.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Florida's population was growing exponentially, and new communities encroached upon ever larger portions of the region. The Army Corps of Engineers' drainage/flood control projects and the construction of Tamiami Trail were underway, choking off the crucial southward flow of freshwater from Lake Okeechobee. As the ecosystem struggled to adapt to prolonged, unnatural droughts, the declining water table fueled fires that raged across the river of grass, ravaging wildlife. By the next the

decade, a handful of large agribusiness firms (mainly sugar interests) had consolidated monopolies over tens of thousands of acres of Everglades land, establishing a powerful, permanent grip on the state's environmental management policies. Small's determination to document the Everglades and collect endangered plants at this precise moment was thus underscored by realistic fears that the wetlands might soon collapse entirely. Today, it is difficult to overstate the importance of Small's efforts; the specimens he preserved and especially the many photographs he took of the dramatic changes that occurred before and after what he described as the "fast and furious destruction" of the Everglades will serve as critical resources as we struggle to make decisions about what, exactly, the region should look

an album of pressed algae specimens – purportedly gathered and compiled by the botanist and early Florida settler Dr. Henry Perrine (1797-1840). Like many of Dion's previous subjects, including Alfred Russell Wallace and Baron Georges Cuvier, Perrine formed part of a legion of pseudo-amateur explorers who throughout the century of Darwin ventured into remote regions, often risking life and limb. As Dion has suggested in several works, the traditional figure of the early naturalist is both heroic and problematic. In the process of forging new paths through the wilderness and extricating specimens for study and eventual display, these adventurers fueled popular desire for the conquest and commodification of nature, even as they sounded loud calls for environmental protection.<sup>6</sup> Herbaria embody as well as any other kind of object the efforts of these individuals to develop and standardize methods for the classification and representation of nature. They also perfectly encapsulate hubristic, 19<sup>th</sup>-century attempts to subsume the infinite complexity of nature within parameters narrow enough to be fathomed by human reason: Here the book, a primary symbol of human culture and knowledge, is used literally to contain system of rational organization.

In 1838, after years of service as U.S. consul to Mexico, Perrine was awarded a land grant encompassing the southern tip of Florida, and moved with his family to Indian Key, off the coast of Cape Sable. In Mexico, Perrine had studied the characteristics of agave, pepper, cactus, mango, coffee, and other plant species, which he believed could be introduced to the southern U.S. and farmed on a large scale, eventually transforming the country into a competitive force in the global agricultural market. He anticipated that South Florida — with its alternating dry and humid seasons - would serve as the perfect setting to cultivate these breeds. The region may, in fact, have proven to be too well-suited. Whether or not they were introduced by Perrine himself, foreign plants such as these have competed aggressively against Florida's native species, and today they present the second gravest threat to the original ecosystem, after direct habitat loss. Just two years into his adventure, after ignoring numerous warnings of warring Seminoles, Perrine was killed in a raid at his home, and his work destroyed in a



John Kunkel Small (1869-1938), The "Weed Wagon" with a Load of Orchids, Ferns and Bromeliads (Ross Hammock, Florida), 1915

fire. Yellowed and charred, the pages of Dion's false artifact symbolize the reckless, obsessive drive with which many early naturalists plunged into the wild in order to unlock the mysteries of nature; the object also stands for the unintended damage associated with their legacies.

What emerges from Dion's project as a whole is a parable of the various mentalities and motivations, both positive and negative, which have conditioned the history of our engagement with the Florida wilderness. While the juxtapositions created by the installation's three parts reflect our evolving attitudes, they also afford a sense of how this history is contradictory and riddled with cyclical recurrences. It is here that Dion's fundamental point is imbedded. If human treatments of nature are inherently tied to our culturally determined preconceptions, then the only way to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past perpetually is physical examples of the living world and display them according to a to proceed with full awareness of the limitations of our knowledge. We must recognize the deeply ingrained cultural tropes that we have used to rationalize the domination and destruction of the living world. By the same token, we must learn to harness, to truly positive ends, the veneration of nature that is just as firmly imbedded in our history and

## Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, Inc., 1995), p. 13. Norman Bryson, "Mark Dion and the Birds of Antwerp," in Mark Dion (Phaidon Press

- See Marjory Stoneman Douglas, The Everglades: River of Grass (New York: H. Wolff, 1947).
- <sup>4</sup> See Jack E. Davis, "'Conservation is Now a Dead Word': Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the ansformation of American Environmentalism," in Paradise Lost? The Environmental History of Florida (University of Florida Press: Gainesville, 2005), pp. 297-325.
- <sup>5</sup> See Michael Grunwald, *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2006), and David McNally, The Everglades: An Environmental History (University of Florida: Gainesville, 1999).
- Miwon Kwon, "Unnatural Tendencies: Scientific Guises of Mark Dion," in Natural History and Other Fictions (Ikon Gallery: Birmingham, 1997), p. 41.

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## Exhibition Checklist — All works by Mark Dion unless noted

### The Bureau for the Centre for Surrealism The Mobile Gull Appreciation Unit

### The Mobile Gull Appreciation Unit Bureau of Remote Wildlife Surveillanc

Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY Mobile Ranger Library — Komodo National Park

### Concerning Hunting (I/V)

ourtesy of the Artist and Mildred istorical Society and Museum

Kurtz and Marlow

Concrete Jungle

## Mobile Ranger Library — Komodo National Park

## Mobile Ranger Library — Komodo National Park

96 x 84-1/2 x 39-1/2 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY

## The Ornithologist's Watchtower

## The Ornithologist's Watchtower

Courtesy of the Artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY

### Polar Bear (Ursus Maritimus) (II)

### Scala Naturae

Bonakdar Gallery, New York, N

## A Meter of Jungle

## Courtesy of the Artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY

Courtesy of the Artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, NY

## The South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit: Mobile Laboratory

## The South Florida Wildlife Rescue Unit: The Uniforms

## The Terror of Transylvania

Tree Scheme

## Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered

# Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered

# Travels of William Bartram Reconsidered (postcard cupboard)

Seattle Vivarium

Typical Avian Topography II

Dana Sherwood in collaboration with ortrait of Mark Dion After William Beebe

# John Kunkel Small (1869–1938) Automobile Loaded with Plant Specimen

John Kunkel Small (1869–1938) with Load of Cacti

John Kunkel Small (1869-1938 The "Weed Wagon" with a Load of Orchids, Ferns and Bromeliads (Ros Hammock, Florida)