

CYCADIC ART

When Oliver Sacks, the neurologist, writer, and longtime admirer of ancient plants, arrived on a small island near Guam, he found what he was looking for: cycads that “seemed to be running riot, exploding in all directions, full of anarchic vitality, sheer vegetable exuberance, hubris.” The plants, which flourished in the Jurassic era and look “like a cross between ferns and palms,” are the subject of the final chapter of *The Island of the Colorblind*, his 1997 book about his work in Micronesia.

This fall the Museum of Modern Art’s Library Council is republishing the chapter in a hand-bound book. *The Island of Rota* adds visual and tactile elements to Sacks’s moving account, featuring 13 otherworldly cliché-verre prints by Abelardo Morell. Pressing cycad and fern clippings into layers of ink on glass plates, Morell built up



Abelardo Morell used plant clippings and ink to make a series of cliché-verres.

view through December 18 at Bonni Benrubi Gallery in New York.

Each of the 160 copies of the book will have on its dark, waxed cover an impression from a different softly branching sea fan, and inside, a long, bony pressing of a cycad leaf. Morell’s images and the prints, as well as an array of smooth and rough papers, suggest the heightened sense of texture and shadow that Sacks found in the genetically color-blind islanders he describes in the original book.

Jewelry designer Ted Muehling designed *The Island of Rota* and conceived of it with May Castleberry, editor of contemporary editions for the Library Council. Muehling says he wanted to suggest the strong effect the place had on Sacks and get across the “murky, fossil-like feeling” that Sacks conjures with his awed descriptions of early forests and the vastness of time. “Standing here in the jungle,” Sacks writes, “I feel part of a larger, calmer, identity: I feel a profound feeling of being at home, a sort of companionship with the earth.” —Rebecca Robertson

jagged, textured impressions that he then scanned and printed to make works that resemble chaotic landscapes. “I wanted to get a density that had a kind of *Heart of Darkness* feel to it,” the Havana-born photographer tells *ARTnews*. “I wanted that jungle-ness.” Morell made the prints with cycad clippings from the New York Botanical Garden mixed with less exotic species from his own yard in Boston. Eight of his prints are on