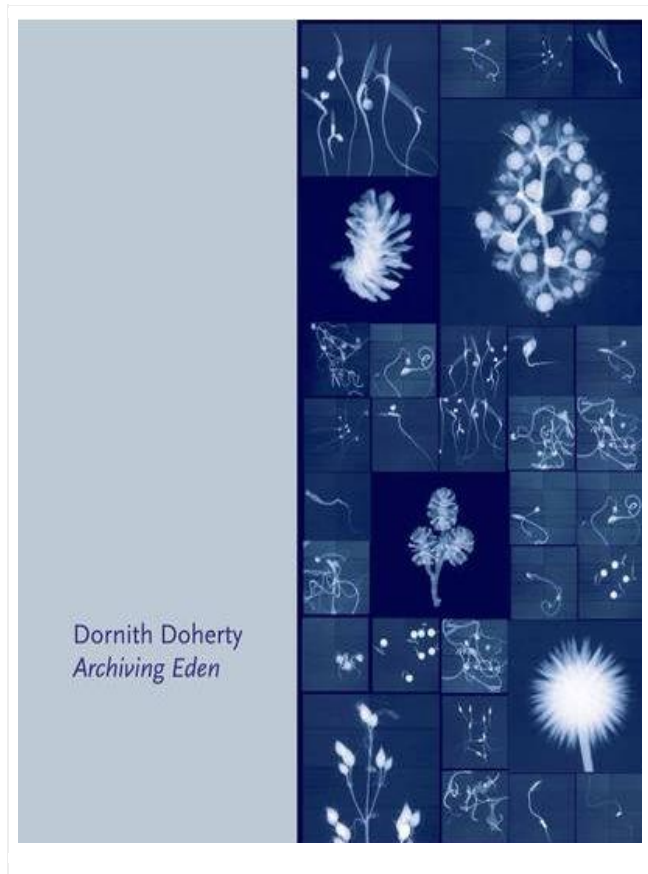


MONDAY, JULY 31, 2017

## Book of the Week: Dornith Doherty's Archiving Eden

Laura M. André picks Dornith Doherty's [Archiving Eden](#), from Schilt Publishing, as Book of the Week.



In 2015, Syrian researchers made the first ever withdrawal from the [Svalbard Global Seed Vault](#) to recover wheat, barley, and grass samples that had been lost when the Aleppo-based seed bank was destroyed in that country's civil war. That is exactly why the Svalbard "Doomsday Vault" exists. To date there are over 1,700 repositories like the one formerly based in Aleppo (which has since moved to Beirut), designed to function as natural safe deposit boxes for food crops and plant diversity in case of natural or man-made disasters.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, located on Norway's Spitsbergen Island, functions as a modern-day Noah's Ark for plant life: a mother backup for the many, more localized backups scattered throughout the world. Ten years ago, artist [Dornith Doherty](#), now a Distinguished Research Professor at the University of North Texas, read an [article about the last-resort vault](#) in *The New Yorker*. Doherty's photographic work had long focused on environmental concerns, but that *New Yorker* article led her to embark on an investigation into worldwide vaults and archives designed to preserve genetic plant material and seeds for hundreds and even thousands of years.

Doherty's resulting monograph collects both her documentary photographs of facilities and her digital x-ray collages of seeds and plants, tied together with a poetic, expository essay by Elizabeth Avedon. Beyond the spectacular cover plate and illustrated endpapers, which illustrate Doherty's digital x-ray collages of seeds and plantlets in deep Delft/indigo blues that recall cyanotypes, unfortunately the images presented in this blog post and in the publisher's promotional material absolutely fail to convey the richness of the book's content. If you can't visit the seed banks in person—which, unless you are a *bona fide* scientist or an artist with really good, hard-won connections, you can't—you absolutely must get access to this book. Only then will the simultaneous hopefulness and pessimism of this work begin to exert their effects on you. — Laura M. André



*Archiving Eden*, by Dornith Doherty. Schilt Publishing, 2017.



*Archiving Eden*, by Dornith Doherty. Schilt Publishing, 2017.



**Laura M. André** is the manager of photo-eye's bookstore. She received her PhD in art history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and taught photo history at the University of New Mexico before leaving academia to work with photography books.