Experimentation and visual innovation are the stimulus for my creative work. Making visible the previously unseen is like turning over a stone and finding what lies hidden there. In this way I approach photography as a painter might, using the inherent qualities of the photographic medium to create visual images and extending our traditional understanding of the medium.

The Visual Hybrid series was made in five magnificent gardens: at the three public botanic gardens in Sydney—Mt. Annan, The Royal Botanic Gardens and Mt. Tomah, at the National Trust’s Blue Mountains property Everglades in Leura, and at the Rockefeller’s private garden Kykuit, in the lower Hudson Valley, New York.

The series was created using a Holga camera and medium format colour film, the qualities of this low tech camera providing unique opportunities to effect change on the resulting images through its manual mechanism.

These hybrid images combine my ongoing interest in experimental image-making with my fascination for the plant life and garden design found in these engaging locations, making them perfect subject matter for this type of visual experimentation.

In these images many exposures were layered one over another, splicing slivers of time and space and producing hybrids based on photographic representation but which dissolve into dreamlike panoramas. These environments are composed of lush colours and textures, defying the documentary nature of photography, moving instead towards impressionistic, painterly outcomes through the method of their making.

A speculative means of image production is one I have engaged in for most of my photographic career, constantly manipulating the edges of the medium in order to extend the boundaries of possibility. These hybrids continue that approach. The content of the images cannot be calculated before they are developed except with the use of a shooting strategy which can be repeated.

The images I produce are visual hybrids, with the method of their production akin to that of a gardener, grafting and propagating plants in order to create new varieties. The photographs bring together natural and manmade elements of beauty in unexpected convergences.
The resulting images create the feeling of being visually immersed in the environments pictured. They evoke a sensation of moving through the locations with the effect of points of focus as well as peripheral vision, as you would experience when seeing the world without a camera.

When we view the real world, some things are rendered in sharp focus while others are almost subliminal. The illusion of photography is that the world is always sharp and precise, but our vision does not actually work that way.

Hybrid images have not one viewpoint but many, giving the feeling that one is scanning the environment and picking out various eye-catching elements. There is a dislocation from a grounded single viewpoint.

The resulting visual hybrids model my own perception of these locations with their attention to the unique details of the various environments combined with a sense of actually experiencing those environments.

Juliana Swatko
The Visual Hybrid is an ongoing series. It has been exhibited at Everglades Gallery in Leura, the University of Western Sydney Art Gallery and Arthere Photographic Exhibition Space, Sydney.

Juliana Swatko is a lecturer at the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney and co-ordinator of all photomedia subjects in design. Her work may be found in many collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of NSW, Art Bank and the George Eastman House: International Museum of Photography in Rochester, NY.

www.swatko.net
Mt. Tomah, pastel proteas
Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, bromeliads