

New York Art Life Announces Interview: NYBG Researcher and Former Humanities Institute Director Dr. Lucas Mertehikian

How the visionary scholar bridges botanical history, Latin American literature, and visual arts to redefine our relationship with the natural world.

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We're living in a very exciting moment when art and science are interconnected in understanding nature. And no place can anticipate it more than New York”

Lucas Mertehikian

Life, the premier publication dedicated to the vibrant intersections of contemporary art, culture, and intellectual discourse, is deeply thrilled to announce the publication of an exclusive and highly comprehensive interview with Dr. Lucas Mertehikian. Currently serving as a Researcher and Research Scholar at the New York Botanical Garden, and formerly the visionary Director of its Humanities Institute, Dr. Mertehikian is an internationally recognized scholar whose transformative work masterfully bridges the disciplines of Latin American literature, landscape

architecture, environmental history, and the visual arts. This expansive feature article, spanning over three thousand words, is the magnificent centerpiece of the magazine this week. It offers readers an unprecedented and profoundly enlightening look into the rapidly burgeoning interdisciplinary field of the plant humanities.

As global ecological challenges increasingly dominate contemporary cultural conversations, the necessity for brilliant scholars who can translate complex botanical histories into accessible artistic and literary frameworks has never been greater. Dr. Mertehikian stands at the absolute vanguard of this cultural movement. His impressive academic journey, which began with his studies in Latin American Literary Studies in Buenos Aires at the National University of Tres de Febrero and the University of Buenos Aires, ultimately culminated in a doctorate in Romance Languages and Literatures from Harvard University. This rigorous background provides him with a uniquely profound lens through which to view the natural world. In this exclusive interview, New York Art Life explores how his initial encounters with centuries-old botanical collections fundamentally shifted his academic focus. He eloquently reveals how historical herbaria and pressed plant specimens function not only as vital scientific records but as magnificent works of art and critical artifacts of global human exchange.

The extensive profile delves deeply into his multifaceted leadership roles and his exceptional ability to foster lasting collaborations between the hard sciences and the fine arts. During his tenure as Director of the Humanities Institute at the New York Botanical Garden from October 2023 through July 2025, Dr. Mertehikian worked tirelessly to position the esteemed institution as a dynamic cultural hub. The interview provides an illuminating discussion on his careful stewardship of the highly prestigious Larry Lederman Landscape Photography Fellowship, which he continues to coordinate today. Now in its third triumphant year under his ongoing guidance, the fellowship awards a massive twenty-thousand-dollar grant to exceptional photographers whose work explores the landscape as a complex social and cultural construct. With the application period having recently closed on February 15, the global art world eagerly anticipates the announcement of the 2026 fellow in mid-March. The interview highlights how he collaborates closely with a distinguished advisory committee, including luminaries such as Todd Forrest from the New York Botanical Garden, Jay A. Levenson from the Museum of Modern Art, and Bryan Whitney from the International Center of Photography, to nurture the creative visions of landscape photographers.



Dr. Lucas Mertehikian

Furthermore, readers of New York Art Life will discover the profound impact of his collaborative artistic endeavors worldwide. A major focus of the magazine feature is his intellectual contribution to the acclaimed exhibition, *Vanishing Trees*, by the brilliant contemporary artist Debora Hirsch. Currently captivating international audiences at Palazzo Citterio in Milan, Italy, from January 15 through April 15 this year, the magnificent exhibition uses artificial intelligence and a range of sophisticated visual techniques to explore plant extinction and botanical resurrection. Dr. Mertehikian provided the foundational critical texts for this exhibition, perfectly grounding her breathtaking visual artistry within the historical weight of the plant humanities. The phenomenal success of the Milan exhibition, which has garnered immense praise from prestigious publications such as *Rivista Arte Mondadori*, *ARTUU*, and *Il Giornale dell'Arte*, underscores the vital importance of curators and scholars who can effectively contextualize ecological fragility.

The expansive interview also celebrates the release of his newly published academic book, *The Boom of Natural History in Latin American Culture*. Released just last month in January 2026 by the University of Florida Press and co-edited with Nicolas Campisi, the magnificent volume explores how contemporary Latin American literature and visual arts are increasingly turning

toward natural history to navigate current ecological and political crises. Dr. Mertehikian passionately explains how artists and writers across the region are dismantling colonial hierarchies of knowledge by adopting the languages of science, taxonomy, and botanical exploration. This scholarly achievement is just one facet of his prolific output. *New York Art Life* gives readers an exclusive preview of his upcoming monographs, including *Unpredictable Architectures: The Politics and Aesthetics of Gardening in Latin America*, currently under contract with Brill, and *Fake Originals: Collecting Latin America*.

Another deeply compelling segment of the feature explores his involvement in monumentally important historical projects. The magazine highlights his crucial oversight during the execution of the African American Garden at the New York Botanical Garden between 2023 and 2024. Curated by the legendary food studies scholar Dr. Jessica B. Harris, this living exhibition brilliantly documented the history, resilience, and immense agricultural contributions of African Americans from the transatlantic slave trade to the present day. Dr. Mertehikian reflects on the profound educational power of physical botanical spaces to serve as living archives that honor and preserve marginalized histories, a topic he recently presented on alongside Rhonda Evans at the Council of Botanical and Horticultural Libraries Conference at Michigan State University.

In addition to his museum and archival work, the feature showcases his immense dedication to higher education pedagogy and the public humanities. As a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Master of Landscape Architecture program at Pratt Institute, he introduces a vital layer of cultural and historical consciousness into the design process of future landscape architects. The interview captures his brilliant pedagogical philosophy, in which he teaches his graduate students that planting a garden or designing a public plaza inherently involves navigating deep historical traumas and colonial legacies. The piece also delves into his fascinating literary research, specifically his upcoming essay on the anti-botany of the legendary Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. Furthermore, he discusses his wildly popular articles for *JSTOR Daily* on everyday plants like Guarana and Yerba Mate, proving his exceptional talent for translating specialized academic research into highly engaging narratives for the general public.

The Editor-in-Chief of *New York Art Life* issued a formal statement regarding the publication of this landmark interview: "We are absolutely honored to feature Dr. Lucas Mertehikian in our publication this week. His extraordinary ability to seamlessly weave together Latin American literature, historical archives, landscape architecture, and visual arts is completely reshaping how we understand our relationship with the natural world. At a time when environmental consciousness is paramount, his rigorous work serves as a powerful reminder that the botanical world is deeply intertwined with our human history, cultural identity, and artistic expression. This interview is an absolute must-read for anyone passionate about contemporary art, the environmental humanities, and the preservation of our shared global ecological heritage."

The exclusive interview also provides an exciting preview of his upcoming public initiatives, including the highly anticipated *Plant Humanities Conversations* series. Organized in collaboration with *Dumbarton Oaks*, where he previously served as a Postdoctoral Fellow and

continues to contribute externally to the Plant Humanities Initiative by providing insights into the development of public programming and editorial content, the series brings together diverse experts to discuss biodiversity and human diversity. The conversation sheds light on his extensive volunteer experience, including teaching English as a Second Language to vulnerable populations at the Cambridge Public Library, and on his linguistic fluency in Spanish, English, Portuguese, French, and Latin. He articulates beautifully how his polyglot background informed his vision during his directorship, making the Humanities Institute a deeply inclusive and profoundly welcoming space for all communities in the immensely diverse Bronx.

New York Art Life formally invites scholars, artists, environmentalists, landscape architects, and culture enthusiasts to read this deeply inspiring and intellectually rigorous conversation. The full feature provides not only a comprehensive retrospective of his impressive career thus far but also a visionary roadmap for the future of interdisciplinary environmental studies. Dr. Mertehikian stands as a beacon for how cultural institutions can ethically and creatively engage with both the historical past and the pressing ecological demands of the twenty-first century. His work demonstrates that the botanical archive is not a static repository but a vibrant, living entity with immense power to inspire transformative art, progressive literature, and equitable landscape architecture.

The complete, [exclusive interview with Dr. Lucas Mertehikian](#) is available in this week's issue of New York Art Life, in digital formats on the publication's official website. Readers are strongly encouraged to engage with the profound insights offered by one of the most dynamic and forward-thinking scholars operating at the intersection of the humanities and the natural world today. Furthermore, the publication urges its global readership to acquire his newly released co-edited volume, *The Boom of Natural History in Latin American Culture*, and to experience the masterful, critically acclaimed exhibition *Vanishing Trees* by contemporary artist Debora Hirsch, which remains on view at Palazzo Citterio in Milan.

About New York Art Life: [New York Art Life is a premier](#), globally recognized publication dedicated to showcasing the most innovative and culturally significant voices in contemporary art, design, literature, and the humanities. Based in the cultural capital of the world, the magazine provides rigorous critique, exclusive interviews, and comprehensive coverage of the exhibitions, scholars, and visionary artists who are actively shaping our modern cultural landscape. With an unwavering commitment to intellectual depth, aesthetic brilliance, and multidisciplinary discourse, New York Art Life remains an essential resource for collectors, academics, landscape architects, and art enthusiasts worldwide.

We're living in a very exciting moment when art and science are interconnected in understanding nature. There's a lot of room for experimentation in that area, and there's nowhere as New York to see what comes next.

[Link Instagram Dr. Lucas Mertehikian](#)

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