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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

National Trust and National Gallery Collaborate to Showcase the Beauty of Native Plants

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands and the National Gallery of the Cayman Islands have collaborated with Los Angeles-based film makers David Hartwell and Bill Ferehawk to raise awareness about the beauty and importance of Caymanian plant life. Entitled *Homegrown*, the series of photographs showcases the native flora of the Cayman Islands and examine their intricacies and wondrous designs up close.

Captured in the summer of 2019 when the visiting artists participated in an international artist-in-residency programme at the Gallery, the 'plant portraits' illustrate a visual and compositional economy that is striking and understated in equal measure. Through a laborious process developed over several years, the artists have honed a technique of shooting their subjects on location — in this instance at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park and various venues across Grand Cayman — utilising a portable background and two lightweight LED panels to achieve an astonishing array of optical effects. Drawing out the stark beauty of the thorny shake hand, the alien-like tendrils of the ghost orchid, and the delicately trembling stamens of the 'raw bones', the photographers have fashioned a series of plant 'portraits' that speak to the uniqueness and individuality of each in turn, while also revealing their wider significance within Caymanian culture.

David Hartwell and Bill Ferehawk both live in Los Angeles and work as commercial artists in the film industry. As fine artists working together, they are known as Collective Artist Collective. Over the past decade, the artists have created numerous pieces and installations, each collaboration part of an ongoing investigation into the ways that places and histories are marked and remembered. *Homegrown* continues their multi-year conversation about place through a series of large photographic portraits of native and endemic plants of the Cayman Islands. In the artists' own words:

“Plants are powerful visual markers of a place and a culture. Our interest is in elaborating this connection, drawing upon a long tradition of botanical paintings and photographic images of plants, both from the Cayman Islands and by international photographers, such as Imogen Cunningham, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Edward Weston. Photography is the choreography of known quantities, whose limitations and predictabilities are finely orchestrated, resulting in a representation that never was. The photograph becomes an imperfect witness to events that never truly happened as depicted, but for one exception: in the photographer's mind. As such, the photographs in this series are idiosyncratic visual investigations of the specific plants we encountered. The images magnify our gaze of these plants, first through the instrument of the camera and lens, but also through the complex manipulation of their production and post-production process. The portraits of *Homegrown* are as much a portrayal of the artist's conversation about plants of the Cayman Islands as they are a record of the subjects taken.”

The initial residency was designed as a skill sharing project with local interns shadowing the photographers and a series of lectures about their practice during their time on the island. Similarly, the final exhibition, which comprises ten large format photographs with an accompanying short documentary on the unique photographic process that artists have used, provides a platform for a wide-reaching education programme which highlights the fragility of local plant life, within a cultural and historical context. “Now, more than ever, it is vital that we preserve endemic plants to ensure the survival of biodiversity within our natural environment for the betterment of local wildlife, ecologically significant habitats and for future generations”, says Laura Butz, Marketing Manager, National Trust for the Cayman Islands. “The photography featured in the *Homegrown* exhibition beautifully captures Cayman's unique native plant species. We are excited about this collaboration with the National Gallery and for the public to visit the exhibit celebrating the richness of our environment.”

The project is the latest in a series of collaborations between the National Trust and the National Gallery designed to raise awareness about the nature environment and the importance of environmental stewardship. The most visible of these projects is the popular Blue Dragon Trail, a public art project featuring large format iguana sculptures painted by local artists that draws attention to the plight of the endangered Blue Iguana.

“The National Gallery is delighted to continue our longstanding partnership with the National Trust and to work with the featured photographers to raise awareness about conservation and stewardship of the natural environment,” says Natalie Urquhart, NGCI Director. “We look forward to the next two months of workshops and panel discussions around this critical topic and to welcoming students from across the Cayman Islands to engage further with the topic through our collaborative school programme.”

A busy schedule of school tours, panels discussions, workshops and community events will support the exhibition, which runs until 19 March at the National Gallery. More information about the line-up is available via www.nationalgallery.org.ky/whatson. This programme is also supported by wider environmental resources and teaching tools which can be requested from the Education Departments of the Gallery and the Trust. To book a school tour, or for more information email education@nationalgallery.org.ky. Admission to the National Gallery and the exhibition is free. In addition to the core teams of the National Trust and the National Gallery, a special thanks is extended to the following people for their assistance with the *Homegrown* project: Paige Jordison, Joanne Mercille (National Trust Volunteer), John Lawrus and Nick Johnson (QE II Botanic Park), and Ann Stafford.

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Photo: Bill Ferehawk and David Hartwell on location at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park

Photo: The photographers use a utilising a portable background and lightweight LED panels to achieve an astonishing array of optical effects.

Photo: *Still Life with Orchid I. Myrmecophila thomsoniana* commonly known at the Banana Orchid. Photo by Bill Ferehawk and David Hartwell.

About the Artists

Bill Ferehawk is a Los Angeles based artist and filmmaker. For three years, he visited the Cayman Islands for business. His films and art installations have shown all over the world including the Whitney Museum, Walker Art Center, National Building Museum, National Art Museum Norway, Museum of Finnish Architecture, Museum of Modern Art, Wende Museum, WUHO Gallery, Neutra VDL House, and Rotterdam Architecture Biennale. His work has received grants from the Graham Foundation, National Endowments for the Arts, and National Endowment for the Humanities State Councils. He received degrees from University of California, Berkeley, Yale School of Architecture, and is co-founder of Radiant Features in Los Angeles.

David Hartwell is a Los Angeles based photographer, animator, and motion graphics artist. He was formally trained as a photographer. He specialises in the visualisation of technical and historical content for the likes of IBM, Disney, Microsoft, History Channel, Discovery, and PBS. He obtained his BFA from Art Center College of Design (Europe). His photography and artwork have shown at the Wende Museum, WUHO Gallery, Neutra VDL Studio and Residences, Louis Poulsen Los Angeles, and Palm Springs Art Museum. In 2019, David's plant photography was displayed at the National Museum of China during the 5th International Art and Science Symposium and Exhibition (TASIES 2019) organised by Tsinghua University, Beijing. David and his wife Sarah managed the Richard Neutra VDL Studio and Residences historical building in Los Angeles from 2007 to 2020. Their restoration work on the building and gardens was recognised by the U.S. Department of the Interior, naming the house a National Landmark in 2017.

About the Partner Organisations

Established in 1996, the **National Gallery of the Cayman Islands** (NGCI) is the country's leading visual arts museum and education centre, charged with promoting and encouraging the appreciation and practice of the visual arts in the Cayman Islands. This mission is achieved through exhibitions, education/outreach programmes, school tours, community festivals, and ongoing research projects. Holding up to twelve exhibitions annually at its central exhibition space, and satellite venues around Grand Cayman and the Sister Islands, the curatorial team strives to create a balance between exhibitions of quality Caymanian artwork with art from further afield. This is achieved by working with a broad cross-section of artists and ranging from site-specific work to more traditional gallery-based projects. NGCI is at the forefront of visual arts education in the Cayman Islands hosting 25+ education and outreach programmes monthly, across all

three islands. These learning experiences seek to foster creativity and to promote invaluable explorations of culture and heritage.

The **National Trust for the Cayman Islands** (NTCI) was established in 1987 and is a non-governmental organisation whose mandate under the National Trust Law (2010 Revision) includes the preservation of the historic, natural and maritime heritage of the Cayman Islands for present and future generations. We believe that our various initiatives such as education outreach and conservation programmes help shape the way towards a better understanding and increased appreciation for Cayman's unique biodiversity, built heritage and sustainability.

A key priority of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands mission is the establishment of a system of protected areas to preserve ecologically significant natural habitats and sites in Cayman's natural environment. These natural sites are essential for the survival of native plant and animal species. Currently, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands protects 12 environmental sites. Iconic nature sites include, The Mastic Trail, The Salina Reserve, Brac Parrot Reserve, Booby Pond Nature Reserve (In Little Cayman) and part of the Central Mangroves Wetlands. The NTCI currently preserves just under 6% of land in Cayman but has an ambitious target of protecting 11% and more – a target we hope can be achieved with the support of the community.