

## EETU SIHVONEN + ELIZABETH TIBBETTS

WITHIN THE WELL

OCTOBER 27 - DECEMBER 9, 2023

GAA GALLERY NEW YORK

Gaa Gallery New York is pleased to present *Within the Well*, a two-person exhibition featuring new work by Eetu Sihvonen and Elizabeth Tibbetts. The exhibition will open with a reception on Friday, October 27, from 6 - 8 pm.

*Within the Well* pairs the intricately rendered wall-based reliefs and free-standing sculptures of Eetu Sihvonen and the immersive oil paintings of Elizabeth Tibbetts. In a radical form of worldbuilding, their work draws from past and contemporary cultures to explore the intersections of narrative, nature, material, and craft. Drawing from various references, including speculative fiction, sci-fi, video games, and art history, Sihvonen and Tibbetts build narrative models to imagine futures, alternate realities, and spaces for the past and present.

The act of worldbuilding is one of invention and imagination. But also, an examination of and a decision to keep or leave out parts and realities of our physical world; in that decision, a critique, a question, or a reflection can emerge. Worldbuilding is a process that often involves the creation of space- geography, landscape, atmospheric conditions, and architecture, as well as the development of extant flora and fauna, their histories, cultures, and social customs. Sihvonen draws on Medieval culture, sculptural traditions, folklore, and role-playing games to propose questions concerning work, labor, and Neo-feudalism. In Tibbetts' worldbuilding, vast landscapes and architectures are animated by insectoid light beings that navigate various physical and temporal ranges.

Examining the elements of our world, Sihvonen and Tibbetts construct their own cosmologies, geographies, and the beings that inhabit these spaces. In these spaces unending architectures emerge. In Sihvonen's *Struggle Builds Character*, an infinite spiral staircase appears in and out of frame. Tibbetts' *flicker* features labyrinthine arches tracing a path that seems to be giving way to antennae. Architectural spaces and objects become archetypes and, in some instances, entities of their own agency.

Across their sculptures and paintings, anthropomorphic beings appear, often moving through cycles of birth and decay. In Sihvonen's work, it's the egg in varying degrees of intactness and fracture. Sometimes, the egg is even winged and surrounded by tableaux of objects- coins, weapons, ribbons, a band-aid. With Tibbetts, winged beings also appear in chrysalis, and insect-like light entities become the center of the story. These glowing apparitions are born from naturally forming elements- the forest, rocks, waterways, arches, and built spaces and appear moving in and out of reach.

For Sihvonen, the egg is the central character in a contemporary tale about labor, escapism, and possibility. Referencing the small "headless" egg in the foreground of *Het Luilekkerland* or *The Land of Cockaigne*, a 1567 painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Sihvonen mines the frequent and arcane symbol of the egg. In *The Land of Cockaigne*, a mythical world where everything is edible, the egg runs between two figures lying beneath a tree. It appears the growth of legs is new to the egg, and there is some kind of handle of a utensil, a knife, a fork, or a spoon protruding from its top.

In their work, Sihvonen pairs old and new stories, materials, and methods. Using digital fabrication methods, including 3D printing, video, and animation, Sihvonen alters these digital outputs using traditional methods of carving, charring, oiling, and burnishing wood. Through this pairing of modalities, Sihvonen reflects on past and present labor movements and calls attention to the interactions of labor, society, the body, and the objects and media that surround us. Through the pairing of narrative and symbolic forms, such as the egg, scarecrow, objects of war, agriculture, and commerce, with material and analog and digital outputs, Sihvonen traces many histories and paths of possibility. It's not so much a commentary of these possibilities as it proposes a question.

In Tibbetts' work, the labor of bodies is an internal and metamorphic one. Across the works in *Within the Well*, we see the evolution of her beings as they emerge and develop across each painting. The presence of sentient beings is signified in vibrational elements, insect-like, anthropomorphic, and biomorphic figures, antennas, and chrysalis-like forms. Central to Tibbetts' work is a sense of longing and the exploration of loneliness, isolation, and the ways in which the individual is part of a greater whole. Like an entomological and ecological re-imaging of the lone figure set before an expansive landscape of a Caspar David Friedrich painting, Tibbetts offers a new kind of romanticism that borrows from the past the emphasis on the enormity of nature, the individual, and the transitoriness of life.

As much as the work is about building a sense of place through depictions of specific landscapes and architectures, Tibbetts also explores the concept of time. Centered on notions of infinity, birth, decay, and life cycle, she examines different temporal spectrums and creates images that harmonize the dualities of life and death, the individual and the whole. Poetically, Tibbetts' work plays with ideas of immortality and timelessness and the fragility and inevitability of change, transformation, decay, and mortality.

In *Within the Well* Sihvonen and Tibbetts offer a mirror and escape of an alienated world. Their work provides something we don't have the exact words for yet, something in between a dystopia and a utopia, something not quite finished yet and in a process of becoming.

**Eetu Sihvonen** (b. 1994, Kotka, Finland) lives and works in Helsinki. In 2019, Sihvonen received a BFA from the Academy of Fine Arts Helsinki and studied at the Glasgow School of Art and Aalto University. Their works have been previously exhibited in the Community Centre, Paris, France; Holešovická Šachta, Prague, Czech Republic; Pitted Dates, Helsinki, Finland; and Ruis, Nijmegen, Netherlands.

**Elizabeth Tibbetts** (b. 1993, Connecticut) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She attended Chautauqua Institution in 2015 and received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2016. Tibbetts' work has been exhibited in exhibitions at Chapter NY, New York; Midwestern State Gallery, Wichita Falls, TX; Gaa Gallery, Provincetown, MA; 8 Track, Brussels, Belgium; and Local Project, Queens, NY.