

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present David Thorpe's first solo exhibition with the gallery. Thorpe's installations are extraordinarily handcrafted realms that linger between futuristic and historical environments. His work reinterprets turn of the 20th century culture by capturing the utopian spirit in an entirely imagined atmosphere.

The exhibition is comprised of watercolors, sculptures, and large-scale ceramic tile screens. Much like the work of the skilled artisan of the Arts and Crafts Movement (c. 1860–1910), Thorpe's pieces are ornately detailed and meticulously rendered. Honoring medieval recipes for paint and ceramic molds, each work is labor intensive and pragmatically applied with several layers of paint and glaze. Thorpe is motivated in particular by the work of William Morris and John Ruskin. Ruskin's "The Nature of Gothic" describes his theories of the ideal artist as a "Naturalist," a person who seeks the true beauty of nature by illustrating its entirety. The profound awe in nature is truthful, beautiful, and unequivocally sublime.

"...the great Naturalist takes the human being in its wholeness, in its mortal as well as its spiritual strength. Capable of sounding and sympathizing with the whole range of its passions, he brings one majestic harmony out of them all; he represents it fearlessly in all its acts and thoughts, in its haste, its anger, its sensuality, and its pride, as well as in its fortitude or faith, but makes it noble in them all." John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic," (From *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. II, published 1851-53).

Thorpe is interested in the relationship between the maker and the object, in the profound pride of the artisan and his love of the craft. These objects become animated through their execution and offer an alternative perspective with ideas of artistic production. Because these pieces are individually made by hand they are never the same. It is the aspiration or endeavor of skill in the handmade object that makes a work remarkably imperfect.

The labor in the stylized pattern work is the crux of Thorpe's oeuvre. There is a collaborative effort in working with trained artisans that Thorpe appreciates. By finding connections to professionals in their respective fields, Thorpe partners with a small set of craftsman in helping him create work that is well made and unique. Templates and designs are made to create densely organic objects that reject common function. Light sources and sounds are also integrated. In particular, finely cut leather is glued to two modular forms made of plaster. These forms, resting on wooden legs, are reminiscent of building blocks that have become completely encased with leaves and vines. From within, a source of light illuminates its hollowed form yet still conveying a mysterious void. These types of enclosures are further pronounced with the expansive ceramic screens, framing the space and creating a barrier of the artworks, like a forest of trees cloaking whatever lies inside. The

watercolors similarly appear as shields of leaves encasing themselves. Wooded areas are often used as metaphors in E.M. Forster's work; as found in *Maurice* (written from 1913-1914, posthumously published in 1971) where the lead character has discovered a place that inadvertently allows him to be true to his self and away from society. For Thorpe, Forster's "greenwood" motif links closely to the decline of the Arts and Crafts Movement, as it evolved into an outlaw movement that needed privacy and secrecy in order to survive.

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