

## **HIPKISS**

*HARVEST*

DECEMBER 15, 2023 - FEBRUARY 3, 2024

GAA GALLERY NEW YORK

Gaa Gallery is pleased to present *Harvest*, Hipkiss' second solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition features new works on paper that readdress American and European landscapes through detailed drawings of extant plants, insects, and birds. The exhibition will be on view from December 15, 2023 through February 3, 2024.

The meticulously rendered depictions in *Harvest* are the result of care, observation, and the collaboration of Alpha and Christopher Mason. Working collectively under the pseudonym Hipkiss, over the last forty years, they have developed a singular style of drawing based in their shared observation of nature and fascination with narratives and wordplay. Offering magnified perspectives, their work documents and envisions plants, insects, and birds as the protagonists of a story centered around themes of abundance, loss, survival, and transformation.

Featuring graphite and colored pencil, silver ink, and metallic leaf, their work broadens the recorded histories of the natural world and charts the environmental impacts of agriculture, land use, management, and the precarity, despair, and hope therein. Inspired by German entomologist, naturalist, and scientific illustrator Maria Sibylla Merian, *Harvest* draws from her colorful notebook drawings that chronicle plants and sentient beings in an imagined real-time. Other pioneering naturalists, such as John James Audubon, Thomas Bewick, and Elizabeth Blackwell, also come to mind. In a laboriously delineated and nearly, but not so scientific, manner, their work observes the histories and lives of insects, birds, plants, and landscapes. In these works, they create allegories for the human and more-than-human condition.

For this exhibition, Hipkiss reimagines a range of ecosystems brought together to form a constellation of relationships. Separated by physical and temporal distances, these ecosystems are connected by their plant and insect inhabitants. With a focus on female protagonists in the complex lives of birds and insects, fritillary butterflies, rove beetles, finches, skylarks, and sunflower petals provide a particularly pertinent and symbolic link between stories. The work in *Harvest* traces the travels and travails of these often overlooked heroines in their everyday environments, from the irrigated farmland in Kansas, a Kurgan mound on the Pontic Steppe, an SSSI site in lowland England, a Pine barren on the Atlantic coast, to the plot of land where the artists reside in the South West of France. Through careful observation and extensive research, their work bears witness to the interrelationships connecting farmland to the forest, a prairie to a mountain, a quicksilver mine to the coastline. From ecosystem to ecosystem, plant to insect, human to landscape, their work demonstrates an interconnectedness of many small and vast parts.

The work in *Harvest* features two related bodies of work. A recent series of panoramas offers a focused view of the natural world that depicts the smallness and spaciousness of the landscapes. Here, adding to their usual, predominantly monochrome media choices, Hipkiss incorporate close-up views and abstracted perspectives marked by splashes of purple, yellow, and flecks of silver and gold. With a restrained palette and white background, the drawings visually reference a time just after the harvest. Flower heads, seed pods, petals, and insects swirl across the paper, animating the activeness of dormancy. In the series of larger works, script flows in and out of frame as if rattling in the wind or whispering an idea of what may emerge in the spring or what may be lost to winter. The drawings convey movement—twisting and momentous. With suspension and steadfastness, they reference the becoming and undoings that mark the natural processes of the body, seasons, and landscapes.

In a smaller, square format is a sequence of vignettes, *Nature Morte aux Violettes/Still Life with Violets*. This series traces the lives of fritillary butterflies with violets, in which the former cares nothing for the pretty, iconic flowers of the latter. These little tales continue to go on, unnoticed, notwithstanding the ever-present environmental crisis.

Accompanying the exhibition is a Field Guide produced by the artists, in the style of early texts by Bewick and Audubon, that acts as a narrative walkthrough of the exhibition. In a nod to Greek and Shakespearian tragedies and the parallels to the current environmental crises, the publication features Latin names and phrases to denote certain plants and insects. Each entry of the guide offers a story that weaves together ecological history, field observation, and personal reflection. In the guide, observations of the repercussions of human actions and encroachment are charted alongside and grounded by the artists' relationship and collaboration with each other and the land they care for. Their partnership serves as a register of time, overlapping their collective timescales alongside that of plants, animals, and the environment as an entity as a whole.

In a hybrid of amateur scientific observation and personal narrative, their work expands and contracts the physical and temporal effects of changing land use. From something as enormous as the agro-industrial complex to the chance sighting of a previously unknown bird, their work bears witness. Interweaving cultural and natural history, their drawings synthesize living and narrative processes. The sum of these parts tells a story of solastalgia from a perspective that holds despair and hope simultaneously.

**Hipkiss** (Alpha and Christopher Mason, b. 1964, United Kingdom) have been featured in notable institutional exhibitions at The Drawing Center, New York; La Maison Rouge, Paris; The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; La Caixa, Madrid; The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; Tate Britain, London; Whitechapel, London; and New Museum, New York, and in gallery exhibitions at David Zwirner, New York; Gaa Gallery, New York, Cologne, Provincetown; Delmes & Zander, Berlin, Cologne; Jack Hanley, New York; and Galerie Michael Haas, Berlin, among others. Their work is represented in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, John Michael Kohler Art Center, Cindy Sherman, FRAC Picardie, FRAC Midi-Pyrénées, The Kupferstichkabinett, Antoine de Galbert, and The Whitworth, among others. A two-time recipient of the DRAC Occitanie and four-time grantee of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, their work is featured in numerous publications, including *Drawing in the Present Tense*, published by Thames & Hudson in March of this year. In 2001, they emigrated to France and settled, five years later, on a nature reserve in the rural southwest of the country, where they live and work.