

THICKET

JUAN ARANGO PALACIOS, JOSH DIHLE, ANASTASIA KOMAR, MEVLANA LIPP, WEN LIU, ALEX MCADOO, ANNA RUTH, KRZYSZTOF STRZELECKI, ENA SWANSEA, ERIN WOODBREY

JULY 11, 2024 - AUGUST 16, 2024

GAA NEW YORK

Gaa is pleased to present *Thicket*, a group exhibition featuring Juan Arango Palacios, Josh Dihle, Anastasia Komar, Mevlana Lipp, Wen Liu, Alex McAdoo, Anna Ruth, Krzysztof Strzelecki, Ena Swansea, and Erin Woodbrey. The exhibition pairs a diverse range of artists whose works in painting, sculpture, printmaking, and weaving celebrate nature and the landscape as a place of shelter and refuge.

A thicket is a patch of woods often produced by a dense stand of trees, surrounded by masses of overgrown underbrush and clusters of prolific self-seeding plants. Life is abundant in this verdant, sheltered space. Teeming with secrets and stories, it is murmurous and alive. It is a place of respite and sustenance for wildlife and humans alike where one could easily pass by, and yet once discovered, a place one could find protection.

As an ecosystem, a thicket can be expanded into a metaphor for shelter and sanctuary. Forming a natural barrier, a thicket creates a sense of interiority similar to that experienced within architecture. Thickly populated by impenetrable vegetation, thickets provide cover to those who seek respite; they are spaces where things are hidden, intimate, and safe.

The artists in *Thicket* explore and expand this idea of a thicket through works that examine the freedom of the natural world. The pieces in the exhibition explore the experiences, activities, and emotions that play out within the lush and leafy borders of densely settled patches of vegetation. It is the stories of plants, trees, bugs, as well as the landscapes that stand behind us in moments of connection or isolation as we drive, talk, and embrace. The thicket is everything we find through touching, sensing, looking—knowledge gleaned through observing complex and intricate living systems and spaces. Together, these artists look from the overpowering to the microscopic, searching for and ultimately finding places of quiet imagination and discovery.

Juan Arango Palacios (b. 1997, Pereira, Colombia) creates vibrant visual narratives build a world of sanctuary and celebration. Highlighting the experience of marginalized communities, the artist's works are centered on uplifting the queer experience - while also exploring the artist's experiences growing up in a post-colonial context in Colombia and the United States. Raised in a traditional Catholic community in Colombia, a series of migrations brought Arango Palacios and their family to the American South in search of a better life. Moving through Louisiana and Texas, their sense of identity and belonging began to be skewed by their lack of knowledge of the English language, their unfamiliarity with American culture, and their internal struggle with a queer identity.

Arango Palacios graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2020 and has developed an interdisciplinary artistic practice exploring drawing, painting, textile-making, and ceramic sculpture. Arango Palacios' work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions at Gaa, New York, NY; Spinello Projects, Miami, FL; Selenas Mountain, Queens, NY; and New Image Art, Los Angeles, CA. They have participated in artist residencies at The Macedonia Institute in Chatham, NY; the Bed Stuy Art Residency in Brooklyn, NY; and the Yale Norfolk Summer School of Art Residency at Yale University in Norfolk, CT. Arango Palacios lives and works in Chicago, IL.

Josh Dihle (American, b. 1984) is an interdisciplinary artist who works in sculpture, painting and drawing. His intimately scaled walnut carvings of fish and objects are simultaneously jewellike and densely embellished, while nodding to the handicraft of folk art and woodworking. For him, they are the necessary extension of the drawings,

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concretions of ideas and compositions that first appear on paper. When something in a drawing proves mysterious enough to be further developed, he commits it to wood. Dihle layers one image with another, heaping form atop form, pressing bodies into space and space back over bodies. The result is a delirious concatenation of object-subject and figure-ground relationships.

Dihle received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012 and his BA at Middlebury College in 2007. He has participated in residencies including Kunstmeile Krems, Austria; Ace Hotel, Chicago, IL; Catwalk Institute, Catskill, New York; Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT; and at the Ox-Bow Summer Arts Faculty Residency, Napa, CA. Solo exhibitions include M+B, Los Angeles, CA; Andrew Rafacz, Chicago, IL; 4th Ward Project Space, Chicago, IL; the McAninch Arts Center, Chicago, IL; and Valerie Carberry Gallery, Chicago, IL. Group exhibitions include Wasserman Projects, Detroit, MI; and MASSIMODECARLO, Vspace, Milan, Italy. His work and curatorial projects have been written about in The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, New City, Artspace, The Washington Post, and Artsy, among others. Dihle is a co-director of the Chicago artist project space Julius Caesar, co-founder of COLOR CLUB, Chicago, IL and a Co-Founder of Barely Fair, Chicago, IL, and co-founder of The Sugar Hole, the world's only puppet-powered ice cream walk-up window, located at Color Club, Chicago, IL. Dihle lives and works in Chicago, IL.

Wen Liu (b. 1985, Shanghai, China) is a mixed-media sculptor whose practice focuses on loss and abandonment through the use of found materials. Liu's works look to the dialectical relationship between public recollection and private memory, and temporality and permanence. Found objects are mixed in and burned with clay to indicate lived time and memory – her sculptures wear history on their surface and leave traces of absence in order to investigate questions of loss and cultivate a sense of security and belonging.

Liu is a DCASE Individual Artists Program Grantee for 2018, 2019 and 2020 and received the Illinois Arts Council Agency 2020 Artist Fellowship Award. She attended residencies at RAiR Foundation, MASS MoCA, Vermont Studio Center, ACRE and Center Program at Hyde Park Art Center. Her work has been exhibited at Dinner Gallery, New York, NY; Roswell Museum, Roswell, NM; National Grand Theater, Beijing, China; Lubeznik Center for the Arts, Michigan City, IN; and Zhou B Art Center and Culture Center, Chicago, IL. Liu lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Alex McAdoo (b. 1987, Bellingham, WA) creates work that explores the artist's relationship with the American landscape through the lens of unacknowledged Eastern history. As a multiracial Brown American, McAdoo notes how "history can be used as one of the most powerful weapons." As such, he has researched Eastern inventors extensively, particularly Alhazen, an Islamic Golden-Age mathematician and "the father of modern optics." Alhazen's experiments and research on light and perspective changed how European painters approached image-making, which defies the prescribed Eurocentric story of art history. Using modern optical technology inspired by Alhazen's light experiments—including a 360-degree camera that records images in all directions at once—McAdoo paints landscape images he collects while traveling across the US.

McAdoo received his BFA in graphic design from The University of Utah in 2013 and his MFA in painting from The Rhode Island School of Design in 2019. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at WOAW Gallery, Singapore; Martha's Austin, Austin, TX; and Calderón Gallery, New York City, NY. He has been featured in group exhibitions at New Collectors, New York, NY; Aicon Contemporary, New York, NY; CFHILL, Stockholm, Sweden; Ambar Quijano, Mexico City, Mexico; Shin Haus, New York City, NY; and Bill Brady Gallery, Los Angeles, CA. McAdoo currently resides in Los Angeles, CA.

Mevlana Lipp's (b. 1989, Cologne, Germany) artworks glow in the dark, depicting the security of a nightlight, the neon dream of a rave party, the bioluminescent power of nature, the dawn of spiritual awakening, the phosphorescence of a galaxy-far-far-away. The works are the afterimage stinging on the retina, offering glimpses and the memory of light. Drawing inspiration from the natural world, particularly the study of flora, fauna, biology, and his experiences growing up in a small German village, Lipp creates biomorphic works that operate at the intersection of sculpture and painting. Lipp graduated from the Kuntsakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany in 2015. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at PLUS-

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ONE Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium; Capsule, Shanghai, China; and Public Gallery, London, United Kingdom. Lipp's works have been featured in recent group exhibitions at albertz benda, Los Angeles, CA; Grimm Gallery, New York, NY; PLUS-ONE Gallery, London, UK; and The Hole, Los Angeles, CA, among others. Lipp lives in Leverkusen and works in Düsseldorf, Germany.

Anastasia Komar's (b. 1986, Kaliningrad, Russia) practice is informed by her interest in the intersection between art and contemporary bioengineering. Komar seeks to elucidate aspects of our reality that increasingly affect the human experience but elude comprehension through exploring the formative processes that occur across organic, cybernetic, and inorganic realms, propelled by technological interventions. Referencing science, theology, and history, Komar combines acrylic painting executed in a wide gamut of short, vivid, and luminescent brushstrokes with advanced polymer sculptures that echo forms at once biomolecular, mythological, and mammalian.

Komar received an MA in Architecture and Environmental Design from the Moscow Institute of Architecture. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Management, New York, NY; Bank, Shanghai; and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, CA. Komar has been featured in group exhibitions at Podium, Hong Kong; Swivel Gallery, New York, NY; Kristen Lorello & Van Doren Waxter, New York, NY; Harper's, East Hampton, NY; Dunkunsthalle, New York, NY; as well as at the CICA Museum, Gimpo, South Korea. Komar has also executed several site-specific projects in New York and California. Komar lives and works in New York, NY.

Anna Ruth (b. 1994, Czech Republic) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice involves both painting and sound. Ruth creates large-format paintings and sculptures that work together to create complex environments that extend beyond the limited pictorial surface. Her works are deeply inspired by nature, and explore personal mythology, archetype, and perspective through hidden, fading figures and dreamlike, abstract backgrounds.

Ruth has had recent solo exhibitions at Pragovka, Prague, Czech Republic; Zaazrak Dornych, Brno, Czech Republic; Karpuchina, Prague; as well as a solo booth at NADA New York presented by IRL Gallery. Ruth has been featured in group exhibitions at 10n Gallery, Brussels, Belgium; Sarah Kravitz Gallery, London, UK; and Bold Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic; among others. This year she is also taking part in the SWAB Fair, Barcelona, Spain and the Turkish Contemporary, Istanbul, Turkey. Ruth lives and works in Prague, Czech Republic.

Krzysztof Strzelecki (b. 1993, Świdnica, Poland) works across a variety of media with a particular focus on ceramic vessels that explore homoeroticism and human sexuality. Growing up isolated and homosexual in rural Poland, the scenes depicted in Strzelecki's 'Cruising Fantasies' emerge from the longing for an erotic and romantic escape. Surfing the web, browsing apps, and his own personal archive of photography, the artist preserves these images of men on his captivating vessels. In an array of vivid colors and shapes, at times evoking cactus, waves, fruit, or even apartment buildings, Strzelecki creates his own world where his subjects inhabit their environments freely and unselfconsciously.

Strzelecki earned his BFA in photography from the University of the Arts London, Camberwell, UK. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles/New York; and Taymour Grahne Projects, London, UK. He has been featured in group exhibitions at Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles/New York; UTA Artist Space, Los Angeles, CA; Kasmin, New York, NY; Gaa, Provincetown, MA; and BEERS, London, UK among others. In 2023 Strzelecki presented sculptures at the British Ceramics Biennial, in Stoke-on-Trent, UK. His sculpture Olympia (2020) was acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) permanent collection. Strzelecki lives and works between Poland and London, UK.

Ena Swansea (b. 1966, Charlotte, North Carolina) is a New York-based painter whose oil and graphite work is lush with movement, darkness and light. Her evocative portraits, city scenes, and rural studies have long been associated with the cinema of dream. In her work, Swansea stills moving water, renders night skies by using light, and conjures the narrative complexities of culture and humanity—all of it a demonstrated, contemporary commitment to the history and traditions of painting.

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Swansea's paintings have been exhibited widely, including solo exhibitions at Albertz Benda Gallery, New York, NY; Ben Brown Fine Art, London, UK and Hong Kong; Gaa Gallery, Provincetown, MA; Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, PA; Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg, Germany; and 313 Gallery, Seoul, Korea, Robilant + Voena, St. Moritz, Switzerland. In 2001, she received the Hassam, Speicher, Betts, and Symons Purchase Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Swansea's work is included in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME; Cornell University's Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, NY; Boca Raton Museum of Art, Boca Raton, FL; Galerie Neue Meister/Albertinum Dresden, Germany; and Deichtorhallen, Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg, Germany.

Erin Woodbrey's (b. 1985, Portland, ME) body of interdisciplinary work utilizes sculpture, printmaking, photography, and time-based media. Presented, piece by piece, as a study of fabricated and naturally occurring units of space and time, Woodbrey's gaze wide in scope and is trained on the interrelated qualities of process, time, material, nature, the body, and architecture. Often involving a dialog on contemporary ecological discourse and new materialisms, Woodbrey's work uses seemingly insubstantial materials to depict that which is simultaneously indestructible and delicate to explore the tension between permanence and transience, growth and decay.

Woodbrey completed a BFA at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University in 2007 and received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2014. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions have been held at the Goethe-Institut, Boston, MA; Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Philadelphia, PA; Expo Chicago, Gaa, Chicago, IL; and Gaa, Provincetown, MA and Cologne, Germany. Woodbrey's work has been included group exhibitions at Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockland, ME; Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA; Good Children, New Orleans, LA; Cry Baby, Berlin, Germany; SÍM Gallery, Reykjavík, Iceland; Greylight Projects, Hoensbroek, Netherlands; Code Art Fair, Copenhagen, Denmark; International Print Center, New York, NY, and Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn, Estonia, among others. Woodbrey lives and works in Maine and Massachusetts.