



Fiction, 2024, inkjet transfer, acrylic and clear coat on canvas, armature wire, wood, zippers, 49 x 28 x 28 inches

DAVID KENNEDY CUTLER

Second Nature

February 28 – April 12, 2025

**Opening Reception: Friday, February 28,
6–8 pm**

“Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread. Hers are ‘forms more real than living man’, and hers the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies.”

—Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*

Has anyone warned Derek Eller Gallery that for my fifth show there, it appears as though I’m moving in? That confusion could arise, for a quotidian cast of domestic subjects, including a bed, a couch, pillows, blankets, a

robe, a pair of cut-off shorts, some sweet potatoes, wine bottles and an ensemble of houseplants will occupy the floors and walls. Uncharacteristically for me, I have been holding back works for this show in my studio since 2022, so that they might be seen for the first time alongside works completed just days ago, in the city in which I live—in the place where spatial and sacrificial real estate concerns are most poignant and palpable—and that my slice of un-still life is finally, at long last, given thirty days to reside in Manhattan.

If that gesture seems a bit sly, the simplicity ends there, and will shortly spiral out into a vast metaphorical web, or lattice, upon which the various inevitabilities of existence can and will proliferate, cloning and self-replicating themselves in perpetuity, until material reality itself has lost any claim to veracity. Lest anyone believe things are as they seem, there will be no inhabitants utilizing or maintaining the elements of this domestic milieu. Instead, the various furniture parts, textile patterns, headboard pipes, paint schemers, stalks and stems are unmoored from their pots, vases, weavings, substrates and stretchers, inducing a post-residential delirium or hyperbolic afterworld.

This hectic and haptic mess is one of my own making, having spent so much time breaking and bending disparate art genres: photography, printmaking, performance, surveillance, fiction,

painting and sculpture. What should be intentional is belied by a studio process that is very much instinctual, irrational and fraught with almost unrecoverable accidents. Each piece originates from photographs shot at home or in the studio (or gallery, when I perform), which are then fed through digital-imaging software, converted through an inkjet transfer technique into various cut and collaged layers or skins, and held together on either a prefabricated or constructed armature—where finally painting and sculpture techniques enhance and obscure any sense of origination. The result is something without fidelity to the natural world, where motifs and attributes are swapped in defiance of immutable laws of biology and gravity. My studio operates as a factory in a fever dream, a processing center where plant and potato parts unspool in ramshackle piles. The cannibalistic churn creates a compressive logic where depiction becomes disorientation.

My work is expelled and expressed from what I believe are its causal conditions: we live in an age of post-truth materiality, in a culture saturated with images, in a climate where we are expected to proliferate our physical selves endlessly through our labor and images of the self. Our daily habitat has become plural, and this inhabitation of multiple platforms and planes causes a scattering, or stuttering, of our consciousness. By perpetuating the self in perpetuity, we dissociate from ourselves, allowing chaos to become part of our internal nature.

When unconscious behaviors become habitual, those impulses are often described as a “second nature” that emerges from us, but which is also used to define us. Repetitious patterns of the most automated kind are evinced in the most fundamental levels of living: sleeping, eating, commuting, working, cleaning, collapsing. To isolate these circadian conditions gives them a temporal monumentality—in their multiplicity, they form portraits of lives lived.

As it is commonly used, second nature implies a sort of unavoidable confinement, a claustrophobia in which no change or progression is afforded—that baggage we are doomed to lug along with us life-long. However, the phrase is also a double entendre that connotes the world remade. This reading affords a sequel empowerment: second selves, second homes, second chances, second helpings. In the spirit of this interpretation I recall a seed from the art historian Martin Kemp: when reconciling Leonardo Da Vinci’s tendency to both record and defy nature, he observed that one “can take things from nature and put them together in a different way and you can invent things that nature didn’t invent, so that you act as a second nature in the world.”

This evocation allows for an off ramp from the irredeemable repetitions that cloister us: a second nature that is untethered from the constraints of our own imposition. A self-replicating afterworld, more full of life than merely alive, growing boundlessly, without any need for individuation or stoicism. A dream logic supplanting economic drudgery. Unconsciousness, unbridled.

-David Kennedy Cutler
02.03.25

David Kennedy Cutler (b. 1979, Sandgate, VT; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY) received his BFA from The Rhode Island School of Design in 2001. He was recently featured in an Artist Project in Artforum (January 2024) and received a NYFA grant for interdisciplinary work (July 2024). He has had solo exhibitions at Halsey McKay Gallery (East Hampton, NY), Essex Flowers (NYC), The Centre for Contemporary Art (Tallinn, Estonia) and Nice & Fit (Berlin, Germany). Cutler has performed in various spaces in New York including Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, Essex Flowers, Printed Matter, Halsey McKay, and Flag Art Foundation, and internationally at the Center for Contemporary Arts Estonia, among others. He has been included in group exhibitions internationally. His works are part of the the permanent collections of the Wellin Museum at Hamilton College and The RISD Museum, and his artist's books are included in the libraries of the Whitney Museum, The Yale Arts Library, and the Brooklyn Museum.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 38 Walker Street between Broadway and Church Street. Hours are Tuesday – Saturday, 10am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com.