

# Adams and Ollman

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JOAN NELSON: *NEW MOUNTAINS*  
ADAMS AND OLLMAN WITH CHAPTER NY  
60 WALKER STREET, NEW YORK, NY  
APRIL 18–MAY 24, 2025  
OPENING RECEPTION: FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 6–8PM

Adams and Ollman is pleased to present *New Mountains*, an exhibition of works by Joan Nelson with Chapter NY, the artist's first solo show in New York in nearly 25 years. The exhibition's title references a 1986 quote by Ursula K. Le Guin: "...if you're underneath, if you're kept down, you break out, you subvert... all the maps change. There are new mountains."<sup>1</sup> For both Le Guin and Nelson, speaking truth to power can be a seismic event that forges, however glacially, new foundational terrain for change. Featuring new paintings alongside a selection of Nelson's intricate miniatures from 2013-14, the show will open on Friday, April 18, 2025 from 6-8 pm and will be on view at the gallery through May 24, 2025.

Nelson is known for her ongoing exploration of landscape painting rooted in an engagement with feminism, spiritualism, science fiction, and environmentalism since the 1980s. Her works depict fantastical vistas filled with atmospheric and geological phenomena –volcanic explosions, shimmering wetlands, crepuscular rays, ethereal cloudscape, mist-shrouded mountains, and ancient, entangled trees. Nelson spins these motifs into imagined worlds, utopias that hold true to the word's literal translation of "no place." Working within a square format rather than a traditional landscape orientation, she renders her maximally picturesque paintings with a mix of illusionistic detail, stylized mark-making, and painterly abstraction, drawing on historical sources as much as her own speculative visions of the past and the future. Evocative of prehistorical, post-human or extraterrestrial worlds, the ground in Nelson's work appears fertile, if always devoid of sentient life.



The broad range of pictorial styles and perspectives in Nelson's work stems from her deep engagement with how landscapes have been represented across time. She references a wide collection of paintings, etchings, exoticized renderings of foreign territories depicted in historical geography books, even amateur travel videos, weaving these varied influences into her work. Particularly generative are the grandiose, imperial visions of Romantic landscape painters like Thomas Moran, Caspar David Friedrich, Thomas Cole, and Albert Bierstadt. Nelson exposes their narratives of conquest and extraction, reframing them from a feminist and ecological lens.

Illusions of depth and distance in Nelson's work often break down upon close looking. Nelson revels in the physicality of her materials, expertly harnessing their transformative possibilities while allowing the agency of pigment, ink, and wax to guide the process. In past works, she has incorporated popular and unconventional media like glitter, crayons, and markers, glass beads, make-up, even spices, into encaustic, oil and acrylic grounds, pouring, splattering, scratching and carving on and into their surfaces. In the process of painting, she will often lay a substrate flat to allow wax, ink or paint to drip and diffuse across the surface, mirroring the erosion and accumulation of earth itself. Nelson sometimes conjures her imagery from the rivers and peaks that naturally form

# Adams and Ollman

on a microcosmic scale during the process of establishing her compositions.

Included in the exhibition are a series of works on paper depicting miniature landscapes and disembodied eyes arranged in tiny groupings, rows and sometimes stacked pairings—like portals or keyholes, offering glimpses into hidden worlds. Nelson’s engagement with miniatures dates back to the 1980s when, against the backdrop of Postmodernism, she began repainting cropped sections of historic landscape paintings at the exact scale of their reproductions on book pages. The eye acknowledges the implied viewer’s perspective in the landscape painting tradition, as well as ‘lover’s eyes,’ 18th-century mementos that historically depicted the eye or eyes of a spouse, loved one or child.

Joan Nelson (b. 1958, California; lives and works in Stamford, NY) has exhibited her work at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX; Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA; among many others. Her work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Whitney Museum of American Art, all New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Minneapolis Museum of Art, MN; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C.; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH; and Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas at Austin, TX. Nelson received her BFA from Washington University, St. Louis, MO. In 2023, she received a Guggenheim Fellowship.

<sup>1</sup> Ursula K. LeGuin, Bryn Mawr College commencement speech, 1986, published in the essay collection *Dancing At The Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, 1989.

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