

Sunny Leerasanthanah

Wild Things

Jun 26 through Sep 19 2026

Cuchifritos Gallery is pleased to present ***Wild Things***, a solo exhibition with AAI's LES Studio Program alum **Sunny Leerasanthanah**, on view **June 26 - September 19, 2026**. The exhibition connects early 20th-century dioramas from the American Museum of Natural History in New York to the modern-day state-sanctioned hunt of invasive Burmese pythons in the Florida Everglades. Examining these settings as ideological stages of American myth-making—one where, paradoxically, hunting and killing are encouraged in the name of conservation—expresses the determinants of what is considered natural or worth preserving within the American lexicon and landscape.

Wild Things continues Leerasanthanah's multi-year body of work exploring how the regulation of "unwanted" bodies within U.S. invasive species policy mirrors forms of exclusion, control, and containment concerning those marginalized, encompassing race, ability, sexuality, gender, class, and immigration status. Researching Theodore Roosevelt, often seen as 'the father of the American conservation movement' and an influential figure in the making of the American Museum of Natural History, as well as the practice of hunting and its significance in the formation of the "male" American identity, the works in this exhibition reckon with notions of manhood and identity formation from the individual to the State.

The project follows a throughline from the founding of the American Museum of Natural History, amid an influx of immigration to America in the late 1800s, to figures involved in the eugenics movement, narratives of a "natural world order", to current invasive species policy, government sponsored hunting initiatives, and violent enforcement/elimination of "unwanted" people with the desire and action to return to an imagined past.

Drawing from the writings of Donna Haraway, historic access to the wild/outdoors is framed as a response to the influx of immigration after 1890, along with a longing to return to an "old imagined hygienic, pre-industrial America." Haraway writes in her 1984 text, *Teddy Bear Patriarchy*: "From about 1890 to the 1930s, the [American Museum of Natural History] was a vast public education and research program for producing experience potent to induce the state of manhood," and "the true man is the true sportsman." She notes the longing of men like Roosevelt, introducing the wilderness as a place where this was possible. This claim also holds a destructive contradiction, as the founding of more National Parks at the turn of the 20th century also perpetuated the continuation of the devastating forced removal of Indigenous communities from their lands.

Using imagery of enclosures, dioramas, landscape, camouflage, and the medium of the camera, Leerasanthanah mirrors, exposes, and challenges these worldviews through recreation and a loose autoethnographic framework. Informed by the artist's experience navigating U.S. immigration policy as an "alien resident", they express feeling a closer affinity to the Burmese python, which, in Leerasanthanah's home country of Thailand, is an endangered and protected species, in contrast to its status in the U.S.

Works in the exhibition also reference Leerasanthanah's previous contributions to this series of inquiry, including projects *Certain Aliens* (2023) and *Naturalization* (2023), which not only reflected current events around anti-immigration sentiments and xenophobia in the U.S., but have also often anticipated a sharpening and proliferation of rhetoric around "the other". These films examined language used in invasive species policy and messaging, and how they are employed by the State to build a false and negative narrative surrounding the marginalized. This connection is not merely coincidental, but intended, as argued in research by writers like Banu Subramaniam [*Ghost Stories for Darwin: The Science of Variation and the Politics of Diversity*], who outlines the history of policy made as a result of invasive species rhetoric.

Within the current U.S. political landscape, more and more language for immigrants is directly borrowed from alien and invasive species analogy, with the most recent [whitehouse.gov/aliens](https://www.whitehouse.gov/aliens) mocking and comparing immigrants to invading aliens. Leerasanthanah's work examines these false nation-building mythologies and confronts the messiness inherent in identity formation, considering our interconnectedness with land and species beyond the imposed language and boundaries of the State.

About the artist

Sunny Leerasanthanah (they/them, b. Bangkok, Thailand) works across moving image, photography, and installation, integrating performance, archives, research, objects, sound, prints, books, and text. Sunny explores the permeability and thresholds of different forms of borders that shape our sense of identity, belonging, and survival. Between the living and the dead, the desired and unwanted, stranger and acquainted, fiction and reality, and between species, place, and time. Past works include inviting Thai immigrant strangers to roleplay as their late father; a satirical speculative fiction film with National Park Service characters; examination of xenophobic rhetoric through the lens of U.S. invasive species policy; a performance-lecture on the failure of various containers; mining for motifs in archival video, text, and pictures; documentation of Sisyphean sand patterns created by foraging crabs; creating image and text typologies; and transforming a PreK-12 school gallery into an immersive installation.

They have presented solo exhibitions at Cuchifritos Gallery (NY, 2026), Anne Reid '72 Gallery (NJ, 2025), Smack Mellon (NY, 2024), and John Michael Kohler Arts Center (WI, 2023). They're a recipient of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grant (2026), BRIClab Contemporary Art Residency (2026), Artists Alliance Inc. LES Studio Program (2024-25), Center for Book Arts Residency (2023), Image Text Workshop Residency (2023), Fire Island Artist Residency (2022), Queens Council on the Arts Grant (2021), Columbia University's Teachers College Scholarship (2017), Ithaca College's James B. Pendleton Grant (2015), and more. They've exhibited and screened works at SculptureCenter (NY), Asia Art Archive in America (NY), Bureau of General Services Queer Division (NY), Lubov Gallery (Projects) (NY), Handwerker Gallery (NY), Local Project Art Space (NY), and more. They've been a guest speaker at the University of British Columbia and Princeton Day School, and spoken in public programs at Asia Art Archive in America, Asian American Arts Alliance' Town Hall, Smack Mellon, Queer|Art (virtual), Urban Soils Institute, Candice Madey Gallery, Soho Photo Gallery, and more. Sunny received an MA from Columbia University and a BFA from Ithaca College.

Accessibility

If desired, a folding chair can be provided, should standing for short or long periods interfere with your viewing experience during your visit. Additionally, sound-dampening headphones and tinted glasses are available and will be provided upon request for visitors for whom the sound or lighting of the gallery space is disruptive. A quiet, off-site/off-view space can be arranged for those with a need during viewing hours. Baby strollers are welcome in Essex Market and Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space. Both facilities are wheelchair accessible, and service animals on a leash are permitted. If you have questions about accessing Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space or attending programs, please email gallery@artistsallianceinc.org.

With thanks

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