

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

PRESS RELEASE

Shara Hughes
Tree Farm

June 7 – July 20, 2024

Opening reception on Saturday, June 8, 6 – 8 pm

Waldmannstrasse 6, CH-8001 Zurich

Artist talk with Shara Hughes and Daniel S. Palmer, Chief Curator, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia, US
6 pm, Auditorium, Waldmannstrasse 9

Extended opening hours during Zurich Art Weekend:

Friday, June 7, 11 am – 8 pm; Saturday, June 8, 11 am – 8 pm; Sunday, June 9, 11 am – 6 pm

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Tree Farm*, the gallery's fifth solo exhibition with the New York-based artist Shara Hughes.

When Hughes moved to New York in 2014, she had been painting interiors, calculated spaces that frame figures and prop-like objects of personal significance. Soon thereafter, she left these rooms, conjuring instead exterior scenes of swamps and lakes, dense woodlands with strokes for leaves and clearings opening to patches of thunderous faraway skies. Some vistas were framed within a proscenium of branches or the aperture of a cresting wave—pictorial devices signaling the image as having been staged. Hughes has described these ongoing works from the last decade as kinds of *imaginary landscapes*, most literally in that they do not depict specific places. But this further suggests how Hughes appropriates the genre as a way to think about how one might arrange color and shape on a flat surface into something recognizable.

Hughes's paintings are about painting as much as about nature, of trees grown not in soil but sprouted, as if *sui generis*, from the sluice of underpainting. In *Tree Farm*, they flaunt their inventiveness, offering the comparative play of difference within a serial format: one tall tree per vertical canvas. Each painting seems to harbor its own light source, palette, and temperature, cultivating within these distinct atmospheres specimens that arc to the physical edges of supports as if heliotropic, crown their enclosures, or fall to the loam where undergrowth rises to meet the detumescent branches. Color is everywhere saturated and pitched to maximum expressive potential, if modulated according to its site. *Wits End* is a conflagration of reds and signal orange cut with ribbons of turquoise, lapis, and goldenrod; by contrast, *Come and Get It* is a nocturne of deep purples and red-brown hills, its gangly protagonist standing erect with so many boughs—evocative of limbs—ending in orbs that redouble the celestial flecks legible as stars.

Hughes here coaxes ever more possibilities for compositional generation from her evolving lexicon. Prismatic, faceted planes, arcing lines spaced or tightly striated and ordered, clustering daubs and dots, and transitions between these and other modes of applying paint might be endlessly recombined without yielding the same effects. And in any given instance, Hughes near-magically slips between having the paint signify and be: marks stand for foliage or snow or rock even as they visibly remain marks. Look at any section and watch aspects disambiguate and reverse. Like the psychological tool of the bistable image (most famously in Joseph Jastrow's representation of the duck that is also a rabbit, but not at the same time), Hughes's paintings point to how visual experience is organized for the maker as much as for the viewer—and how the positionality of both is very literally determinant.

The title, *Tree Farm*, refers to Hughes's family's pine tree farm in western Georgia, where she spent time as a child, amidst new growth that in time came to be large enough to fell and replant. Thus does it introduce not only the shifting perspective of passage through a prepared environment, marked by the volatility of light and weather, but also how fantasy and memory mediate the encounter. Here, Hughes is likewise exhibiting for the first time a group of tabletop ceramics. These small sculptures model arboreal varieties, knobby and slender, sprightly and manicured, their glazes crackling and lustrous by turn as befits the process of firing without controlling the

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outcome. The makeshift grove that results invites movement to see each piece from multiple vantages and to understand them in relation. As with the accompanying paintings, they continue Hughes's use of the nominal subject of landscape as a heuristic for experiments in generating form.

Accompanying the exhibition is a curated selection of paintings by the artist's father, Joe Hughes, on view in a cabinet next to the main gallery.

Suzanne Hudson

Shara Hughes was born in 1981 in Atlanta, GA, US, and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY, US. She graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design and later attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Hughes has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Kunsten Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg, DK (2023); FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY, US (2022); Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, CH (2022); Yuz Museum, Shanghai, CN (2021); Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, US (2021); Garden Museum, London, GB (2021); Aspen Museum of Art, Aspen, CO, US (2021); and Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2021). She participated in group exhibitions at institutions including NGV International, Melbourne, Australia, AUS (2024); de la Cruz Collection, Miami, FL, US (2023); Vernon House, Newport, RI, US (2023); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, US (2023); Long Museum, Shanghai, CN (2023); Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles, FR (2022); Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, US (2019); and Whitney Biennial 2017, New York, NY, US (2017).

For more information, please contact the sales team (onlinesales@presenhuber.com).

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