

Level & Co

# INTO *another* WORLD

CECILY  
BROWN

SHARA  
HUGHES

MATTHEW  
WONG

NICOLAS  
PARTY

DANA  
SCHUTZ



INTO *another* WORLD

Level & Co



30 East  
74<sup>th</sup> Street  
levelandco.com

Level & Co *Presents:*

# INTO *another* WORLD

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**LEVEL & CO. PRESENTS *INTO ANOTHER WORLD*,**

an exhibition of five of today's leading painters who take us to realms heretofore unobserved but strangely recognizable. The works represent an orientation towards formalist construction, brash color, gestural strokes, and representational elements that have garnered international appeal, critical plaudits, and market dominance. While the five artists may not belong to a movement or school, their works all share a bold intensity and painterly sensibility that explores the line between abstraction and allegory. The works are not pretty or decorative, but they are inviting in a way that eschews today's moralistic impulses for the many and varied influences of the past. Apart from art's more recognized functions—educational, spiritual, political—*Into Another World* takes a somewhat different tack and focuses on painting's transportive ability; an art-as-release theme as antidote for today's anxieties.

Your parent's art world has changed, quickly and irrevocably—stratified wealth and advanced technology has supercharged the market, transforming mere enthusiasts into voracious collectors, rewiring how art is shown and financed. Despite the frenzy, the calm in the eye of the storm—the works themselves—steadfastly provide respite, even if a darker reality may exist beneath the surface.

## A DIVERSIONARY TACTIC

Paul Mellon, museum progenitor (Yale Center for British Art, National Gallery of Art East Building) and nature trail builder (the enchanting Sky Meadows in Virginia's Blue Ridge), knew a thing or two about providing respite. Speaking in June, 1964, to Middleburg's Foxcroft School, he chose, of all things, Pleasure as his commencement topic, telling the assembled that "What this country needs is a good five-cent reverie."<sup>1</sup>

In our current partisan days of roiling politics, climate alarms, and wars and rumors of wars, finding that reverie has become paramount. Sports and gastronomy provide ample diversion for some, but if museum attendance is a reliable metric, the arts remain a headspring of solace.

Even in the arts subset, to each her own in the solace game. The five artists comprising this exhibition—Cecily Brown, Shara Hughes, Nicolas Party, Dana Schutz, Matthew Wong—display vastly different painting styles. Party and Wong (who died in 2019 at age 35) approach the fantasticism of Paul Klee and coloration of David Hockney, while Hughes, Brown and Schutz bring a more energetic, bravura brushstroke to their canvases, with discernable AbEx traces.

All five share a deep appreciation and study of the art of multiple cultures, the West in particular; writers and reviewers have detected the influence of a host of artists in their work. And if composition, brushstroke, line, and lighting differ in each, they all share a masterful facility for color. But

maybe their most unifying theme—Contemporary painting writ small—is the intentional, studied lack of a unifying theme; no manifesto, signature style, or imperious advocate corralling them into one tidy little group. Which frees them to explore unprecedented treatments on centuries-old themes—floral, landscape or figural. Not for nothing in this show do two artists—Wong and Hughes—pilot us down rivers we've never dreamed of.

## WHERE'S MY -ISM?

Art historians' knee-jerk reaction to slap a label on a bunch of innovating painters and place them under the scope for study is legend—Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism. (but what to call a movement forsaking Pointillism for the crisp, clear imagery of yore—Pre-Sisleyism?). Times change, and such classifications just don't work these days. As Princeton's Hal Foster has it, "In the wake of the fast and furious run of movements in the 1960s and 70s, most artists, critics and curators became suspicious of 'isms'. They seemed to be taken as brands more than as projects."<sup>2</sup> If the art world were a puddle, then long ago some booted tyke stomped it to smithereens—Contemporary's Big Bang—and sent it zooming in all directions. Which it continues to do; it's kind of hard to tag a label on something flying past you.

The artists in this show stand as a subset for painters as a whole—similar tools using similar media on similar surfaces. But that’s the water’s edge. These are five unique creators, well-versed in one another’s (and many other’s) work. But each stands alone; each a bespoke -ism.

## BY POPULAR DEMAND

From Pompeiian banquet scenes to Impressionist racetracks, opera houses and beyond, artists have long created and collectors acquired exceptional work for the unalloyed pleasure and comfort they provide. Our times do not lack for art in all forms that addresses pivotal issues; didactic and moving, they require response. Which is their task. But art has many roles to play, and there is absolute need—as well as joy—in art as escape, that beckons us, eloquently if fleetingly, into another world.

We finish where we began—a one-on-one experience with provocative artwork. Constantly engaging, constantly fresh. Work that seduces, but also surprises—that revives our attention and rewards our scrutiny. Work that is patient, lying in wait, ready to please. Or pounce.

Which is what the best art does.

*Robert Kurtz*

*Evan Beard*

President, *Level & Co*

*Hanna Poss*

Private Sales Associate, *Level & Co*

1—Paul Mellon quoted in Paul Richard, “Paul Mellon, Reveries &.” *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1985. [washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1985/05/02/paul-mellon-reveries-38/6307f516-fc33-4dc1-8b6a-c486ec1a3a81/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1985/05/02/paul-mellon-reveries-38/6307f516-fc33-4dc1-8b6a-c486ec1a3a81/). Accessed 2 July 2023.

2—Hal Foster quoted in Scott Reyburn, “The end of ‘isms’: is the art market the most powerful movement of the 21st century?” *The Art Newspaper*, December 2, 2021. [theartnewspaper.com/2021/12/02/have-we-reached-the-end-of-isms](https://theartnewspaper.com/2021/12/02/have-we-reached-the-end-of-isms). Accessed 22 July 2023.

Robert Kurtz is an independent writer.

# Shara Hughes

The sizable body of writing on Shara Hughes mentions her studying the artwork of, or being influenced by, nearly everyone: The Fauves. Georgia O'Keeffe. Yayoi Kusama. Gustav Klimt. Charles Burchfield. Judy Chicago. Hockney. Advantage the artist. It opens up her work, which nimbly straddles abstraction and representation, to an enhanced Rorschach-esque quality of multiple interpretations. Take the varicolored floral work *Just Another Pretty Face*—in the upsurging blooms you can delight in the frisky curlicues of an Alexander Calder gouache, or, given what kind of day you've had, dread the leering scrum of James Ensor's *Entry of Christ into Brussels*, as the restive flowers rear up to confront the picture plane and, by extension, you.





## Just Another Pretty Face

Shara Hughes

*Just Another Pretty Face*, 2019

Oil and acrylic on canvas

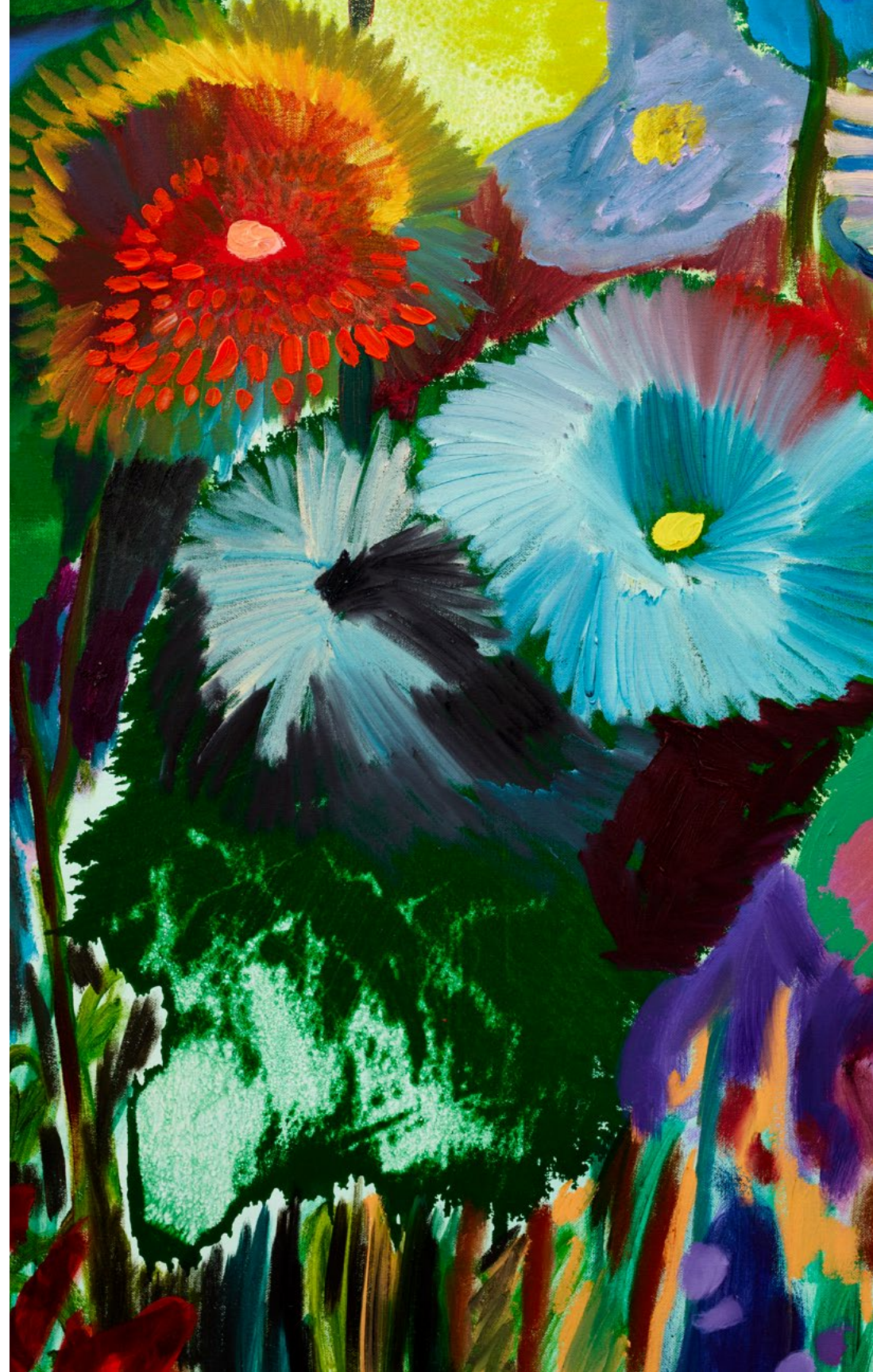
Signed, titled, and dated on the reverse

68 x 60 in. (1727 x 1524 cm)

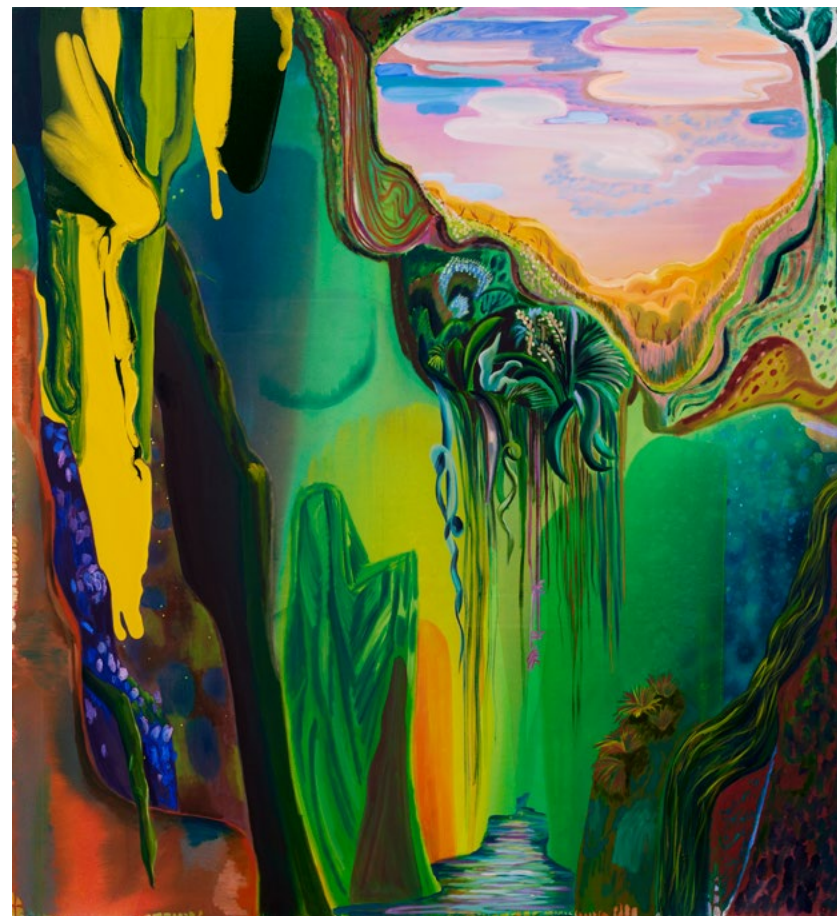


Hughes' posies are not trimmed for the vase, but remain rooted in the soil, vegetating, and can surprise you. Which might just be the point. As she states, "I liked the idea of saying, "Oh I'm doing a flower show," and it sounds like a cliché or a dead end, but again, they're actually not about flowers. Or, they are and they're not. They're tougher paintings, they're aggressive, they're not delicate. It's ugly and it's beautiful, it's wrong and it could be right—there's a lot of back and forth."<sup>1</sup>

1—Shara Hughes quoted in Alex A. Jones, "SHARA HUGHES with Alex A. Jones." *Brooklyn Rail*, June, 2019. [brooklynrail.org/2019/06/art/SHARA-HUGHES-with-Alex-Jones](https://brooklynrail.org/2019/06/art/SHARA-HUGHES-with-Alex-Jones). Accessed 13 July 2023.





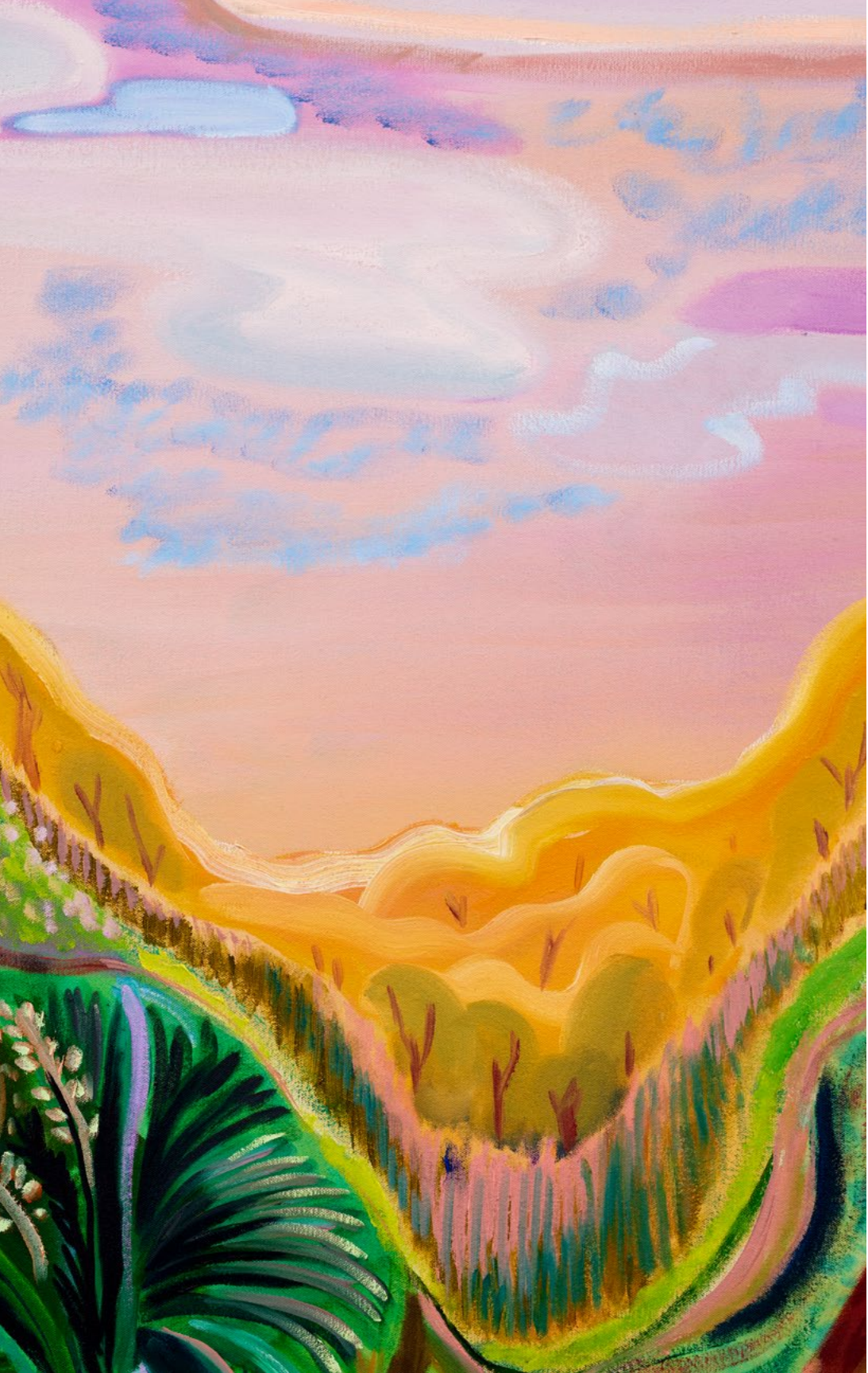


## Getting Out From Under

Shara Hughes  
*Getting Out From Under*, 2018  
 Acrylic, oil and dye on canvas  
 Signed, titled, and dated on the reverse  
 67 x 61 in. (170.2 x 154.9 cm)

“I am actively  
always  
trying to do  
something  
I haven’t  
done before.”





Perception outweighs naturalism in her work, perhaps nowhere more than in her landscapes. These fanciful scenes reveal a panoply of influences, chromatic testimony to her scholarship. *Getting Out From Under* offers steep cliffs of variegated greens and yellows bisected by a meandering river flowing to an unseen end. Snippets of Max Ernst's floppy tendrils (see below) coalesce with Helen Frankenthaler's atmospheric saturations to produce a work of transcendent beauty. Her landscapes lead the viewer ineluctably into a valley of pure imagination—"I feel like sometimes I make paintings that you can really travel "through," go down a river or something like that, and then the next painting everything is right up close in front of you," she says. "So I like being able to kind of like pull you in in one painting and push you way out and kind of like rattle you because I am actively always trying to do something I haven't done before."<sup>2</sup>



© 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris)  
 Max Ernst (German, 1891-1976)  
*Nature at Dawn (Evensong) / La nature à l'aurore (Chant du soir)*  
 1938  
 Oil on canvas  
 31.8 x 39.4 in. (81 x 100 cm)  
 Private collection

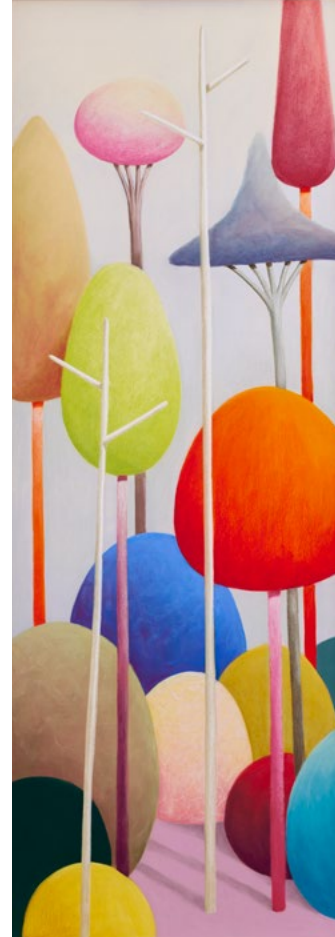
2—Shara Hughes quoted in Katie White, "Landscapes Opened a Whole New World for Me: Artist Shara Hughes on How She Subverts the Tradition of Flower Painting," *artnet*, August 17, 2020. [news.artnet.com/art-world/shara-hughes-interview-1901951](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/shara-hughes-interview-1901951). Accessed 14 July 2023.

# Nicolas Party

Swiss artist Nicolas Party has devoted himself to a deep and prolonged study of art history luminaries. A multitude of influences have been laid at his feet, and one glimpse of his voluminous studio library testifies to the wide casting of his net—Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Édouard Manet, O’Keeffe, James McNeill Whistler, Alice Neel, Francisco Goya, Gustave Courbet, Henri Matisse, Leonardo da Vinci, Félix Vallotton. Especially Vallotton, his fellow Swiss. As Party states, “Vallotton and I can’t have a conversation. But if you hang a Vallotton painting in the same room as one of my paintings, the two works will speak to each other. I don’t know if they will get along, that’s up to them.”<sup>1</sup>

1—Nicolas Party quoted in Rita Vitorelli, “Interview Nicolas Party,” *Spike Magazine*, #44, Summer 2015, [spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/interview-nicolas-party](https://spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/interview-nicolas-party). Accessed 9 July 2023.





© Nicolas Party.  
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

## Landscape

Nicolas Party  
*Landscape*, 2017  
 Soft pastel on linen  
 Signed and dated 'Nicolas Party / 2017' on the reverse  
 89.75 x 31.8 in. (228 x 80.8 cm)





This exhibition brings together two pastel on canvas works from nature, the 2014 *Trees*, and 2017 *Landscape*. Standard themes in the artist's canon, they reveal bespoke features—a severe vertical orientation, near-neon coloration, and bright lighting casting strong shadows. His design sense is pared down, but eschews simplicity. The trees in both works, owing greatly to the narrow verticality, are snug but not chockablock; a sotto voce dialog occurs between them in their expectant, still space, possibly heralded in Fra Angelico's *San Marco Annunciation*.

Finishing school in Lausanne and displeased with the contemporary art he was churning out, he returned to more conventional themes—like trees. "I think I was quite unsettled and lost with this idea of finding a context or a concept that generates the form, instead of the opposite....Then I discovered that those subjects, like trees and portraits, have been used by far the most because they are the most powerful, so full of meaning, symbolism and history. And that was very liberating."<sup>2</sup>

2—Nicolas Party quoted in Sasha Bogojev, "Nicolas Party: A Hug From On Top of You." *Juxtapoz*, Fall, 2020, juxtapoz.com/news/magazine/features/nicolas-party-a-hug-from-on-top-of-you/. Accessed 15 July 2023.



© Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper  
Félix Vallotton (Swiss and French, 1865-1925)  
*Last Sun Rays*  
1911  
Oil on canvas  
39.4 x 28.75 in. (100 x 73 cm)  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper, France



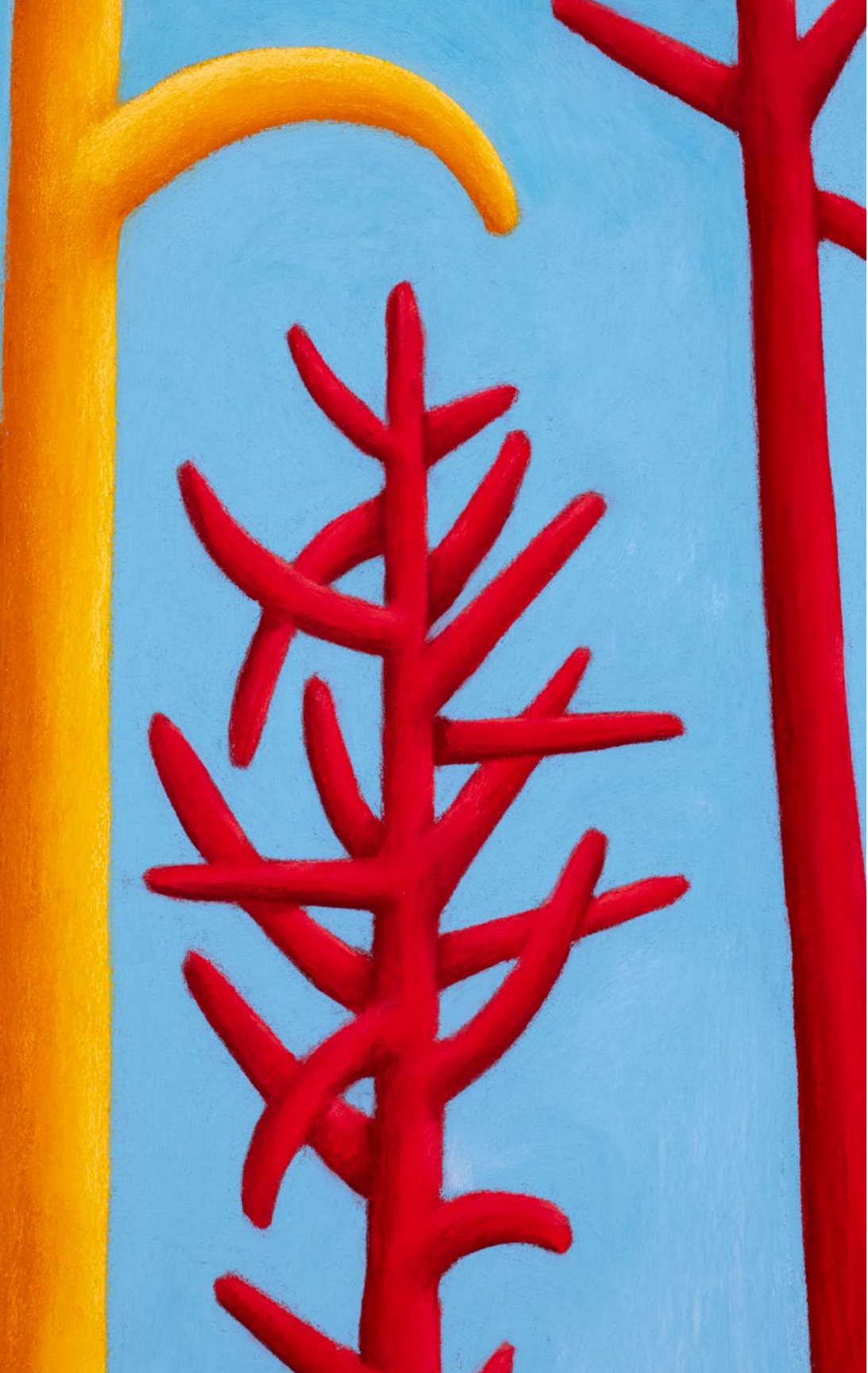


© Nicolas Party.  
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

## Trees

Nicolas Party  
*Trees*, 2014  
Soft pastel on linen  
Signed and dated on the reverse  
78.75 x 43.25 in. (200 x 109.9 cm)





It's a big and boisterous art world, with new discoveries lurking around every corner. "I came here [to Montreal] a few years ago, and I discovered Lawren Harris from the Group of Seven," he says. "There's a painting called *Log Cabin* [c. 1925], with trees and a log cabin in the back. I've been extremely influenced by those Lawren Harris trees."<sup>3</sup>



Photo MMFA, Denis Farley

Lawren S. Harris (Canadian, 1885 – 1970)

*Log Cabin*

About 1925

Oil on canvas

50 x 42 in. (127 x 106.7 cm)

MMFA, gift made possible by Constance and Laurence G. Pathy to mark the 150th anniversary of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

3—Nicolas Party quoted in Katy Donoghue, "Nicholas Party is Relishing the Transportive Power of Art." *Whitewall*, the-transportive-power-of-art. Accessed 10 July 2023.

# Dana Schutz

Dana Schutz's work has been likened to nineteenth-century stalwarts such as Ensor, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin, as well as modern painters Philip Guston and Francis Bacon. Apart from that, Schutz has recognized Courbet, Otto Dix, and Masaccio as sources. But the actual application of a historic work may not be always apparent. "I think the way that references work now is that they're all fluid. There are certain paintings that have a kind of logic to them that seem like they'd fit the subject," she states. "But there are other images in the world that could do that too. But I love looking at other paintings so sometimes they do come from there...Maybe I'm overstating this, but every painting has its own DNA – it has hints of previous works, but it ends up being its own thing."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>—Dana Schutz quoted in Benjamin Bruneau, "Dana Schutz: God Paintings." *Momus*, October 19, 2015. [momus.ca/interview-the-compressed-violence-of-dana-schutz/](https://momus.ca/interview-the-compressed-violence-of-dana-schutz/). Accessed 17 July 2023.





## God 2

Dana Schutz

*God 2*, 2013

Oil on canvas

Signed, titled, and dated 'Dana Schutz "God 2" 2013' on the reverse  
106 x 72 in. (269.2 x 182.9 cm)

“Maybe I’m overstating this, but every painting has its own DNA – it has hints of previous works, but it ends up being its own thing.”





Dana Schutz's contribution to the exhibition, the 2013 oil on canvas *God 2*, is a tatted-up, sawtooth-jawed female deity filling the picture plane with a capricious stance—snakes (weapons?) clenched in hand, crown kicked to the curb. Critics since the early 2000's have likened her work to Pablo Picasso in the manipulation of form, while the half-realized objects swirling behind her bring Kandinsky to mind. In the long Western tradition of imposing female figures, this image takes her place on a spectrum between the Knossos Snake Goddess (see below) and a DeKooning Woman.

She first received widespread notice in 2002 in a (now shuttered) LFL Gallery exhibition *Frank from Observation*, documenting the foibles of the last man on earth. She has since chronicled a clan of self-eaters lustily devouring their assorted organs, her own portrait as a pachyderm, Michael Jackson's autopsy, Bill Gates offering sylvan piggyback rides, and—fun as it sounds—members of the George W. Bush cabinet cavorting on a beach. And she's mid-career.



Archaeological Museum of Heraklion - Hellenic Ministry of Culture -  
Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.R.E.D.).  
Inventory Number AMH Y65

The "Snake Goddess" figurine with raised arms  
Faience  
Knossos, Palace  
c. 1650-1550 BC  $\pi$ .x.

# Matthew Wong

Pierre Bonnard, Caspar David Friedrich, Gauguin, and Édouard Vuillard are recurring names—among scads of others—that crop up as influences in reviews and comments on Matthew Wong’s spell-struck work. The Hong Kong-born artist, raised in Canada and shuffled back and forth between the two much of his life, was also well-versed in Australian Aboriginal painting.

A voracious reader, his studies spanned centuries, continents, and cultures, from the Nabis to Chinese literati painting. In a 2014 interview he stated, “When I’m not working, I’m at the library doing research into the history of art, figuring out where I can fit into the greater dialogue between artists throughout time, or on the internet looking at art-related websites and engaging in dialogue on social media with artists and art-world figures around the world.”<sup>1</sup>

1—Matthew Wong quoted in John Yau, “Matthew Wong’s Indelible Impressions.” *Hyperallergic*, June 19, 2021. [hyperallergic.com/654477/matthew-wong-indelible-impressions-cheim-and-read/](https://hyperallergic.com/654477/matthew-wong-indelible-impressions-cheim-and-read/). Accessed 29 June 2023.

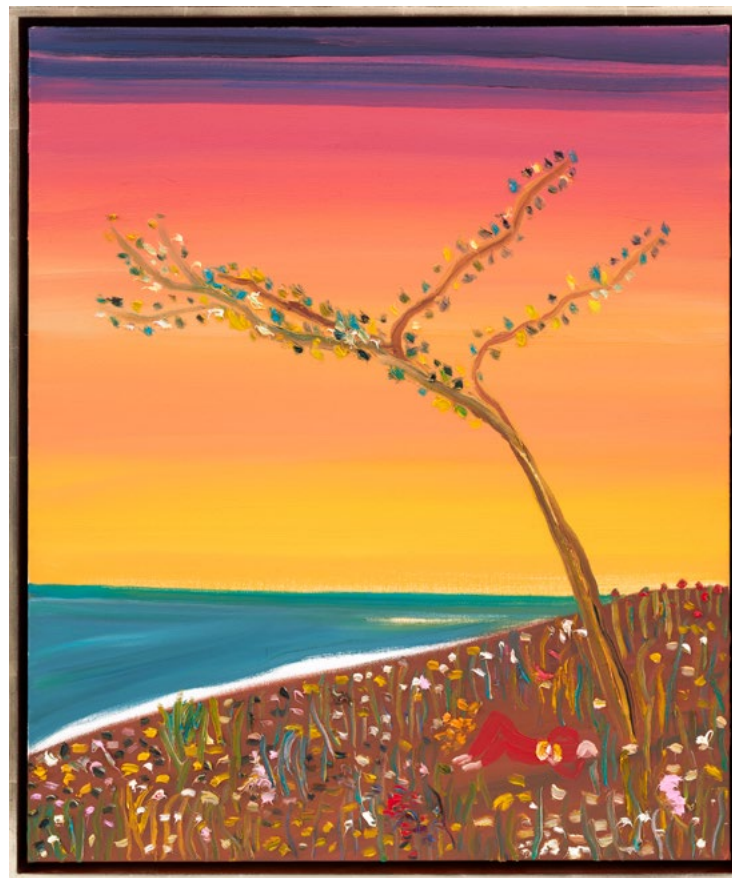




## Untitled

Matthew Wong  
*Untitled*, 2017  
 Oil on canvas  
 Signed and titled on the reverse  
 40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)





## A Dream

Matthew Wong  
*A Dream*, 2018  
 Oil on canvas  
 Signed and titled on the reverse  
 24 x 20 in. (61 x 50.8 cm)



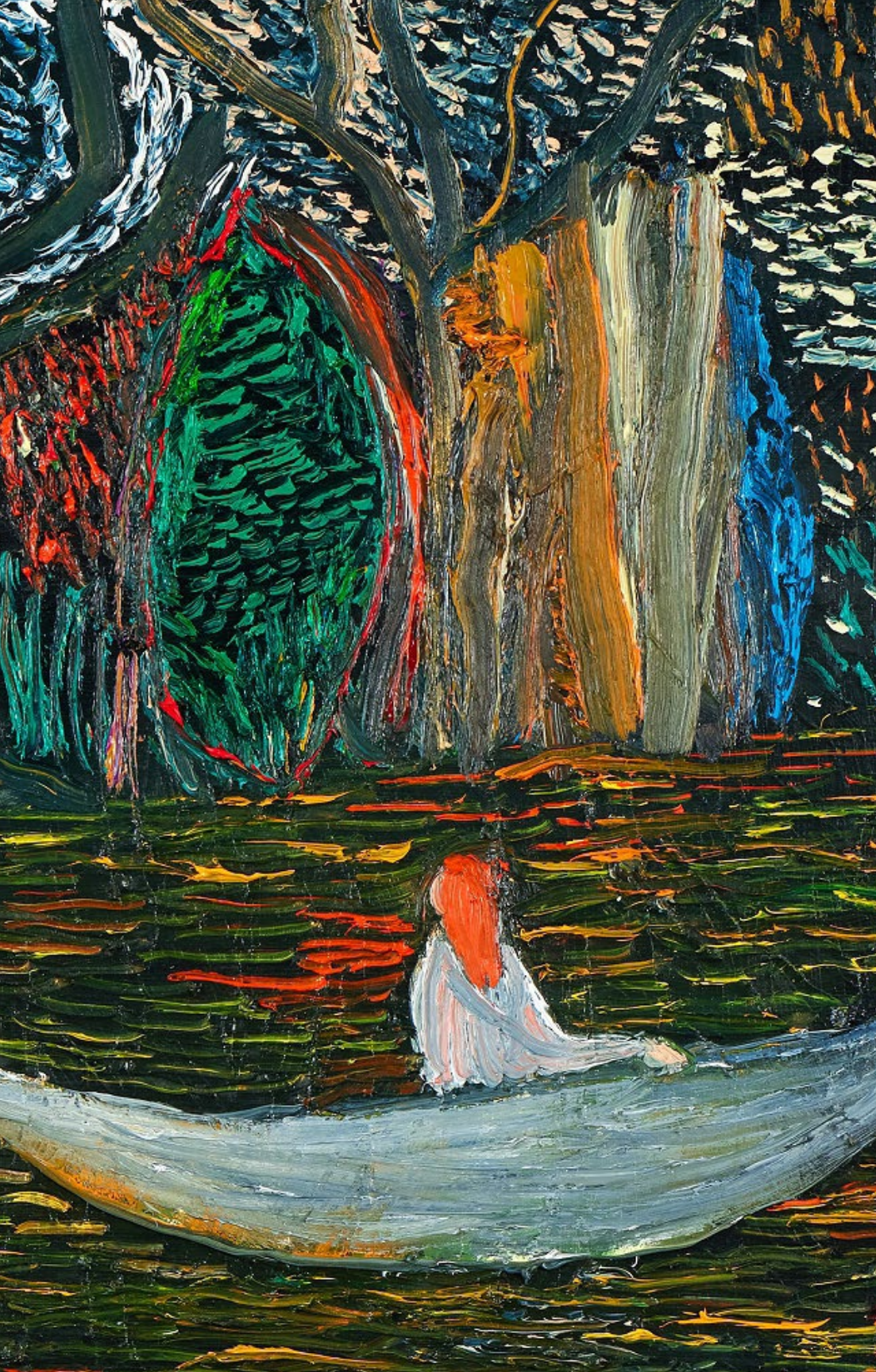


The Jungle, 2017. Image © Photograph Courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. 2023. Art © 2023 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

## The Jungle

Matthew Wong  
*The Jungle*, 2017  
 Oil on canvas  
 Signed and titled on the reverse  
 30 x 40 in. (76.2 x 101.6 cm)





Despite a career cut tragically short, Wong astounded novices and hoary art-world figures alike with the power of his design, patterning and coloration. One recurring theme—the lone figure confronted with an indifferent nature—appears here in both *A Dream* and in *The Jungle*. More often than not, as in *A Dream*, the individual is obscured, hidden, whose discovery alters the meaning of the work entirely. In this, he compares favorably to Caspar David Friedrich, who employed the same technique to great effect. In *The Jungle*, with its beguiling top-to-bottom patterning and nautical motif, conjures Klee. Likewise the ornamented *Untitled* work (see below) brings Vuillard and Bonnard to mind; in its symmetry it could double as a Wes Anderson backdrop.



Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington; © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Paul Klee (Swiss, 1879 - 1940)  
*Dampfer und Segelbóte (Dredger and Sailboat)*  
 1931

Watercolor on laid paper, on Klee's original mount  
 17.125 x 25.1875 in. (43.5 x 64 cm)

National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon



Wong's encyclopedic study, and the work it helped foster, had its effect. Jerry Saltz, *New York Magazine* senior art critic, sensed it the moment he first experienced the artist's paintings at the 2017 Frieze New York: "I just saw something that seemed to be informed by a thousand sources, like this incredible cyclotron of possible influences."<sup>2</sup>

2—Jerry Saltz quoted in Raffi Khatchadourian, "Matthew Wong's Life in Light and Shadow," *The New Yorker*, May 16, 2022. [newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/16/matthew-wongs-life-in-light-and-shadow#:~:text=Matthew%20Wong%2C%20the%20gifted%20Canadian,industrial%20in%20an%20industrial%20way](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/16/matthew-wongs-life-in-light-and-shadow#:~:text=Matthew%20Wong%2C%20the%20gifted%20Canadian,industrial%20in%20an%20industrial%20way). Accessed 3 July 2023.

# Cecily Brown

The frenetic paintings of Cecily Brown famously straddle the divide between abstraction and realism. Her work resembles photo album images of a family residing inside a tornado; faces, figures, appendages all tumble past in a boil. If initially indistinguishable, no worries—these pitching, rolling, and yawing members will surface again—and again—in short order.





## Faeriefeller

Cecily Brown

*Faeriefeller*, 2019

Oil on linen

Signed, titled and dated 'Cecily Brown Faeriefeller 2019' on the reverse  
70 x 66 in. (177.8 x 167.6 cm)





One of the largest canvases in the exhibition, the 2019 *Faeriefeller*, is based on Richard Dadd's fantastical 1855-64 oil on canvas *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke*, wherein the title character, surrounded by wondering onlookers, raises his axe to sunder an acorn for the fairy queen's new carriage. The precisely-rendered Lilliputians—enthralled by the axman's derring-do in their streamside kingdom—are abstracted and magnified beyond recognition in Brown's treatment. The orange-pink-tan-yellow-red fairies emerge and recede from the canvas surface under the swirls and squiggles of the artist's hopscotching brushwork. Coloration as design, as the artist has it—"In a way, I feel like the whole thing is driven by colour."<sup>1</sup>



© Tate, London / Art Resource, NY

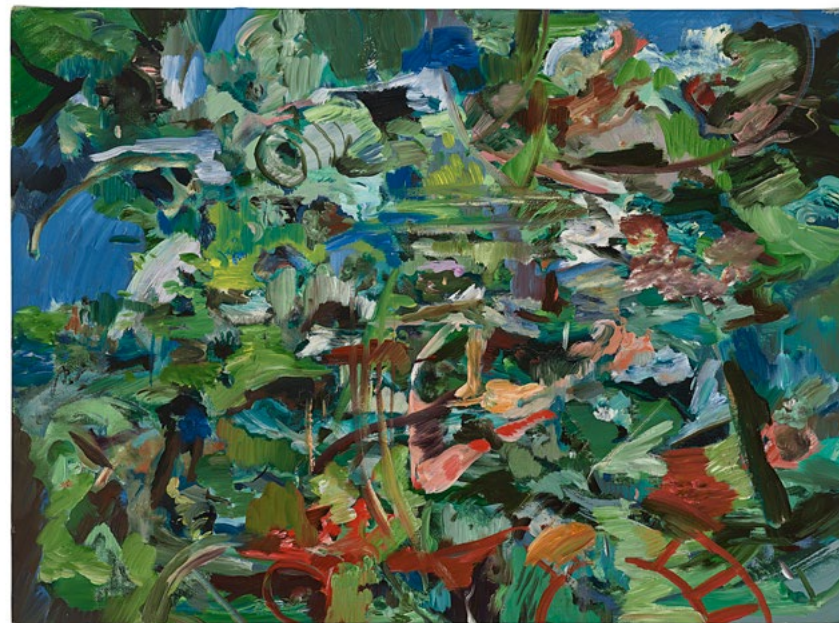
Richard Dadd (English, 1817-1886)  
*The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke*  
1855-64

Oil on canvas  
2125 x 1515 in. (54 x 39.4 cm)  
Tate Gallery/London/Great Britain

Presented by Siegfried Sassoon in memory of his friend and fellow officer Julian Dadd, a great-nephew of the artist, and of his two brothers who gave their lives in the First World War 1963.

1—Cecily Brown quoted in "Courtney J. Martin in Conversation with Cecily Brown," in Courtney J. Martin et al, *Cecily Brown*, London, 2020, page 90.





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## LOL Tinkle Battleground

Cecily Brown

*LOL Tinkle Battleground*, 2010-2014

Oil on linen

Signed and dated on the reverse

12.75 x 17.125 in. (32.4 x 43.5 cm)



The smallest work in the show, *LOL Tinkle Battleground*, reveals the influence of Chaim Soutine, an admitted Brown antecedent, especially in his gestural Expressionist brushstroke, convolving the landscape and buildings alike in his 1923 oil painting *The Leaning Tree*.

Brown's work draws on a wide range of art-historical forerunners. Her slashed, distorted style betrays DeKooning; the worlds she concocts echo the inventions Goya and Hieronymous Bosch. She has referenced herself as the progeny of Bacon and Joseph Turner. Her bravura brushwork and Old Master frothings demand and receive a focused viewing—"I always wanted to make people look slowly, and to spend time...So, [I've been] sort of using painting as a way to force people to really look at things," Brown states. "I just feel like one of painting's great strengths is that it can unfold slowly."<sup>2</sup>

2—Cecily Brown quoted in Jason Rosenfeld, "CECILY BROWN with Jason Rosenfeld." *The Brooklyn Rail*, Jan/Dec 2017. [brooklynrail.org/2017/12/art/CECILY-BROWN-with-Jason-Rosenfeld](https://brooklynrail.org/2017/12/art/CECILY-BROWN-with-Jason-Rosenfeld). Accessed 28 July 2023.





## LEVEL & CO.

Level & Co. is a secondary market gallery that specializes in Post-War and Contemporary art from Abstract Expressionism to Neo-Expressionism to 21st century masters.

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