

HESSE FLATOW

Even In Arcadia There I Am

Curated by Andrew Gardner

January 10 – February 8, 2025

Opening Reception: January 10, 6-8 PM

“...how is it that that particular, not overly opulent, region of central Greece, Arcady, came to be universally accepted as an ideal realm of perfect bliss and beauty, a dream incarnate of ineffable happiness, surrounded nevertheless with a halo of ‘sweetly sad’ melancholy?” — *Erwin Panofsky*¹



HESSE FLATOW is proud to present *Even In Arcadia There I Am*, a group exhibition of 20 artists working in painting, ceramic, stone, textile, moving image, and photography, whose practice plays with landscape as both subject matter and material, each contemplating environments real and imagined. Marking the gallery’s first project located across both floors of the recently inaugurated Tribeca space, the show foregrounds the myth of the Arcadian idyll, in classical Western tradition the home of a pastoral Utopia, and how romantic depictions of landscape in art have long erased the uncomfortable realities of suffering, disenfranchisement, and mortal truths that belie such bucolic evocations.

The show draws its name from Nicolas Poussin’s 1637-38 painting of four human figures in the foreground of a lush landscape, each inspecting a gravestone marked with the Latin inscription, *Et in Arcadia ego*, for which the painting is named. Arcadia was mythologized first as the naturally verdant home of Hermes and Pan in ancient Greek myth, and by the 17th-century a stand-in for a romanticized and otherworldly pastoralism, an unspoiled nature freed from pain, pestilence, pillage, and plunder. But for Poussin, even a natural beauty suited to the gods couldn’t allow humans to escape the fundamental fact of their own mortality. Translated as “Even in Arcadia, There Am I,” the “I” often is said to refer to the spectre of death that looms over us all.

The mistranslation of the show’s title posits an alternative narrative, in which the “I” reorients the subjectivity of the image and the object, placing life—of the artist, of humankind, of nature itself—as an equally essential, beautiful, and terrifying fact of our mortal existence. The resources of the natural world, long mined, extracted, and rearranged according to human needs and interests, are increasingly revealed to be fleeting and finite in the 21st century. These artists are thinking about landscapes as not just something to be considered from a romantic distance, but as sites for intimate connection, radical embodiment, mournful duty, and enduring responsibility. For many of these artists, their conception of nature would have been absent from Poussin’s notion of pastoralism, who was painting at a time marked by colonial conquest and human bondage. This show therefore asks us to investigate the beauty and the frailty of natural landscapes, reinforcing how the ability to experience and exist in unspoiled nature has long been the privilege of the few.

Among the artists included in the show are those who consider landscapes as sites for ancient Indigenous knowledge and reverence, as in the work of **Esteban Cabeza de Baca**

¹ Erwin Panofsky. ‘Et in Arcadia ego: On the Conception of Transience in Poussin and Watteau,’ in *Philosophy and History, Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936, 297.

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and **Porfirio Gutiérrez**. For others, including **Ohan Breiding**, **Michael Childress**, and **Sara Stern**, landscapes are inherently and resolutely queer, sites for radical beauty, vulnerability, and visibility. Meanwhile, **Sasha Fishman**, **Linnéa Gad**, **Erica Mao**, and **Jacqueline Qiu** work in materials derived from natural ecosystems to create artworks that are resolutely of, by, and about the Earth, celebrating landscapes for their remarkable beauty and resilience. For artists like **Louise Belcourt** and **Sophie Larrimore**, landscapes can take many forms, enacting a playful dance between plant and animal, natural and unnatural. Elsewhere, **Charlotte Hallberg**, **Adrienne Elise Tarver**, and **Hana Ward** situate human figures at the center of their landscapes—in some cases, the artist themselves and in others that of female figures long marginalized in historic painting tradition. **Alina Bliumis**, **Breeze Li**, and **Alexandria Tarver** build natural worlds marked by human intervention, positioning the viewer as both the observer and the observed. And in the paintings of **Amanda Baldwin**, **Elizabeth Hazan**, and **Jonathan Ryan**, color play, exuberant form, and unexpected gesture evoke landscapes of uncommon beauty, artifice and reality colliding and merging as one.

Andrew Gardner is a writer and curator based in New York. His work focuses on a wide range of topics that grapple with the socio-political dimensions of the human-made world and where art, design, craft, technology, and the natural world converge with global histories. He has organized or contributed to exhibitions for major institutions, including The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Cooper Hewitt, and Bard Graduate Center, and has published widely, including contributing to exhibition catalogs for the MoMA, Cranbrook Museum of Art, Le Stanze Del Vetro, and Odunpazari Modern Museum (OMM).

Artist list:

Amanda Baldwin
Louise Belcourt
Alina Bliumis
Ohan Breiding
Esteban Cabeza de Baca
Michael Childress
Sasha Fishman
Linnéa Gad
Porfirio Gutiérrez
Charlotte Hallberg
Elizabeth Hazan
Sophie Larrimore
Breeze Li
Erica Mao
Jacqueline Qiu
Jonathan Ryan
Sara Stern
Adrienne Elise Tarver
Alexandria Tarver
Hana Ward