

RACHEL WOLFSON SMITH

THE FUTURE IS BEHIND US



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

AUGUST 13 - SEPTEMBER 29, 2022

AUSTIN, TEXAS

THE FUTURE IS BEHIND US

There is mystery within the work of Rachel Wolfson Smith. Her large scale drawings consisting of obsessive and dense mark-making create a world that is internal and intimate, both consuming and immersive. She builds a place that thrives at its tipping point, its balance maintained by the intricate rhythm of rest and unrest. Marks dance across the paper causing the eye to move across dense foliage that both hides and reveals stories that live metaphorically and physically within each labor-intensive gesture.

For *Women & Their Work*, Smith imagines a reality in three time periods, each moving into the past and future equally while converging in the ever-shifting present. In *The Future is Behind Us*, Wolfson Smith converts the gallery space into a time capsule, moving 150 years into the future—and predicting what that will look like based on our present—and 150 years into the past—envisioning a thriving era of Victorian enlightenment that was as technologically innovative as it was oppressive.

It is within this contradiction and dichotomy that Smith constructs the world within *Women & Their Work*. It is one where the future collides with the past as the foundation of our present continuously transforms.

A Past Revisited

A soft red hue lifts from the floor to the wall. It is the color of earth, of raw clay, and contrasts with the prussian blue of seven cyanotypes hanging in a long row on the wall. Each cyanotype has layers of silhouettes depicting plants and foliage removed from the light and developing process at different times. The sweeping forms of nature leave their mark as an aesthetic gesture rooted in the history of technological advancements—particularly photography—of which the Victorian era is known for. As the sentiment of domesticity became more valued, a thriving economy with a growing middle class offered lifestyles that enshrined the home and home-making, thus altering the role of women who were then expected to maintain the home as a decorous haven. As the sciences were more professionalized, nature also began to enter the domestic space and plants such as ferns decorated the home while nature became increasingly classified and categorized. The

messaging was about controlling nature, bringing it into the home, offering a space where women could thrive in their own oppression, just like the houseplants they cared for.

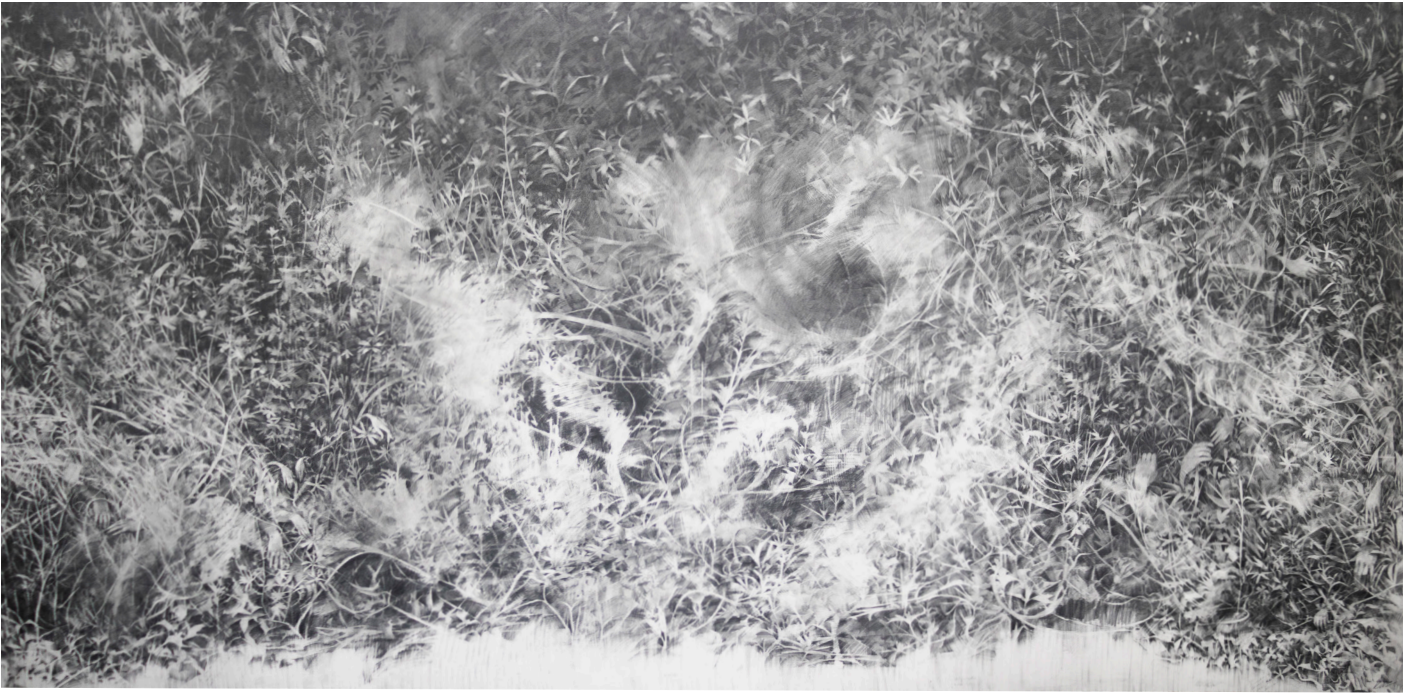
Smith's cyanotypes offer a glimpse of the visual language of the Victorian past. The hues, ranging from near whites to deep, dark blues, and the sweeping forms of leaves and vines are both a document of the natural world that is not accurate enough to be studied, but one to be admired aesthetically. This is a past where nature is observed in contained spaces and is a play on time and materials, which Smith uses to foreshadow the future through the past.

A Reality Reimagined

A long shelf lines the wall adjacent to Smith's cyanotypes of nature. On the shelf rest eight small boxes everyone can recognize as packaging for Apple products. These boxes are beautifully designed and made to protect the devices that arrive to us with a promise of future productivity, devices meant to make our present reality more streamlined and efficient so our tomorrow can be seamless. It is a cycle we continuously grapple with, as we try to



Installation View, *The Future Is Behind Us*, 2022



Caregivers, 2021
graphite on paper, 40 x 90"

Cover Panel: Installation View, *The Future Is Behind Us*

maximize time for our future-present while getting lost in the world our electronic devices construct, and the dopamine hits they incite.

In Smith's imagined world 150 years in the future, these boxes are reconceived, and the prize purchased and presented in the perfectly designed product box is a synthesized nature. Once again, nature is contained, though this future is visualized without nature, as it has slowly been eradicated and left only to be appreciated in a small box artificially manufactured and perfectly designed. In the artist's reimagining, these boxes hold white plaster reproductions of roses, flowers and vines, lifeless in their imitation, but imitation enough to offer connection.

An Ever Changing Present

Two walls set on the same line and plane bisect the space, creating a pause between the future and the past, holding down a present that also offers a window into both at once. In her signature style, Smith has represented the present in drawings on paper that show her manic mark-making, an anxiety-inducing obsessiveness that reflects the frenzied, overstimulated world we live in. Ivy runs through the compositions and pointy leaves become hands and fingers falling and grasping, arms seem to float and disappear into a thorny and dark abyss. Hands, fingers, and forearms grasp each other and swirl around, bits of fingers reach and rest.

It is a neurotic present, one where we are always grasping, where technology has consumed our lives in such a way that nature exists in the connection between people, or in the pauses from social media. The present time is represented by two drawings of ivy walls, scaling up and down, impenetrable and insurmountable. In Smith's work, the present is a narrative we have already constructed, one where the anxiety of now has already been informed by the past that has in turn informed the future.

Leslie Moody Castro is an independent curator and writer based in Texas and Mexico City.



Emotional Wall - Nothing's Wrong (left), 2022, graphite on paper, 28 x 19.5"
Emotional Wall - Melting (right), 2021, graphite and colored pencil on paper, 28 x 19.5"

Rachel Wolfson Smith

EDUCATION

- 2011 MFA, Painting, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN
Full Fellowship
- 2005 BFA, Painting, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Study Abroad: Sorrento, Italy

SOLO & TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Behavioral Science*, Liliana Bloch Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2021 *Everything is Everything*, Ivester Contemporary, Austin, TX
- 2019 *Nature Abhors a Vacuum*, Vestibule, Corsicana, TX
Reenactments of a Perpetual Cycle, Rachel Wolfson Smith & Edison Peñafiel, 100W Corsicana, Corsicana, TX
Surround Sound, Fort Worth Community Arts Center, Fort Worth, TX
- 2018 *We Can See Through Time*, Rachel Wolfson Smith & Matt Rebholz, ICOSA Collective, Austin, TX
- 2016 *Midas*, grayDUCK Gallery, Austin, TX
- 2015 *Victory Lap*, Project Space, Salem, OR
- 2014 *Egypt in Passing*, Western Oregon University Werner Center, Monmouth, OR
- 2013 *Kenar/Edge*, Halka Sanat, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2012 *Glass Wall*, Babayan Culture House, Ibrahimpaşa, Turkey
- 2011 *Grit*, Indiana University's Grunwald Gallery of Art, Bloomington, IN
- 2005 Thesis Show, MICA Brown Center & Decker Gallery, Baltimore, MD

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Dream Job*, Ivester Contemporary, Austin, TX
- 2021 *Crit Group Reunion - Chapter I: Facing the World*, The Contemporary Austin, Austin, TX
Drawing Discourse, University of North Carolina Asheville, Asheville, NC
Lawndale Lending Library, Lawndale Center for the Arts, Houston, TX
- 2020 *Maiden Voyage*, Ivester Contemporary, Austin, TX
- 2019 *Coast to Coast*, Colony + Design Milk at NeueHouse, New York, NY
Vignette Art Fair, curated by Leslie Moody Castro, The Women's Museum, Dallas, TX
Faster, Faster!, curated by Rebecca Trawick, Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art, Rancho Cucamonga, CA
- 2018 *Crit Group 2018*, grayDUCK Gallery, Austin, TX
5th Annual Regional Juried Exhibition, curated by Christina Rees, Artspace 111, Fort Worth, TX
The GO Show, Union Garage, New York, NY
- 2017 *Good Mourning Tis of Thee*, curated by Alyssa T. Wendt and Sean Gaulager, Co-Lab Projects, Austin, TX
Living for the City, curated by Philip Rogers, Gallery 701 at The Long Center, Austin, TX
WAREs for WEST, *WAREs* at Co-Lab Projects, Austin, TX

- Naissance*, curated by Philip Rogers, Gallery 701 at The Long Center, Austin, TX
- Friend of a Friend*, curated by Roberto Jackson Harrington, Pump Project, Austin, TX
- 2017 *Art City Austin Art Fair*, grayDUCK booth, Austin, TX
Uccellos, Handbuilt Motorcycle Show, Austin, TX
12th Annual People's Gallery Exhibition, City Hall, Austin, TX
- 2015 *The Blend*, Smith Fine Arts, Salem, OR
- 2012 *23rd International Juried Exhibition*, curated by Chrissie Iles, Viridian Artist's Contemporary, New York, NY,
Through the Needle's Eye, curated by Teddy Johnson and Heather Rounds, EMP Collective, Baltimore, MD
Being There, Buckham Gallery, Flint, MI
- 2011 *2011 National Juried Exhibition*, curated by Paul Resika, First Street Gallery, New York, NY
The Child Ballads, curated by Teddy Johnson and Heather Rounds, Union Docks, New York, NY
National Wet Paint Exhibition, Zhou B. Art Center, Chicago, IL
- 2010 *Visual Overload*, The Fuller Projects, Bloomington, IN
2D, A, Low Road Gallery, Greencastle, IN
- 2008 *Prince and Pilgrim*, Coach House, West Yorkshire, England
- 2004 *Sister City Exhibition*, The Vesuvius Project, Sorrento, Italy & Kumano, Japan

RESIDENCES

- 2019 100 West Corsicana Artist and Writer Residency, Corsicana, TX
- 2018 Crit Group, The Contemporary Museum Austin, Austin, TX
- 2016 Austin Fire Department AIR, Austin, TX
- 2013 Halka Sanat Artist Residency, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2012 Babayan Culture House Artist Residency, Ibrahimpaşa, Turkey

GRANTS & PUBLIC PROJECTS

- 2019 *Navaro Council For the Arts Grant x 2*, Corsicana, TX
- 2018 *The Awesome Foundation Grant*, Austin, TX
Community Initiatives Grant, City of Austin Cultural Arts Division, Austin, TX
Capacity Building Grant, City of Austin Cultural Arts Division, Austin, TX
- 2017 *Austin Fire Department Public Project*, Art in Public Places, Austin, TX
- 2015 *Eyes Got It!* winner, Austin, TX
- 2007 *Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant*, Following the Corot Trail, Tuscany, Italy



iNature - bloom (detail), 2022
clay and Macbook Pro 13 inch box, 13.5 x 10"

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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Photographs by Hector Tednoir Martinez and Sofia Ruiz courtesy of Women & Their Work

This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. Since 1978, Women & Their Work has created significant opportunities for artists and audiences to experience contemporary art through ambitious exhibitions, commissions of new work, performances and programs that inform audiences of all ages. We have actively developed the careers of more than 1,900 women artists, presenting 332 visual art exhibitions, 161 music, dance and theater events, 30 spoken word and literary performances, 16 film festivals and 787 programs & education workshops with the goal of ensuring that diverse women artists are equitably represented in all forms of art. Women & Their Work helps meet an important need in Texas providing exhibition and performance opportunities and helping to attract critical attention to the work produced here; it is the only organization of its kind in the region and one of the few organizations in

the United States that dedicates itself to the work of women artists. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *ArtForum*, and on *National Public Radio* and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2020, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art acquired the 42-year archive of Women & Their Work ensuring that our entire history of the work of women artists and our website will be preserved in perpetuity.



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