

# REYNOLDS GALLERY

NATALIE WESTBROOK

*Canopy*

March 3 – April 14, 2017

Opening Reception  
Friday, March 3  
7 – 9 pm



*Untitled*, 2016, acrylic, watercolor, graphite and collage on paper, 22 x 30 inches

Reynolds Gallery is pleased to present *Canopy*, an exhibition of recent works on paper and paintings by Natalie Westbrook. *Canopy* opens with a reception for the artist on Friday, March 3 from 7 – 9 pm and continues through April 14, 2017.

In a whirlwind of color, texture, and material, Natalie Westbrook's paintings and collages breathe a painted vivacity into the elements of nature. Interested in the world's biological and genetic diversity, her ruminations scatter over the page in the form of loosely scribbled graphite and sweeps of acrylic. Layers of acrylic paint, colored pencil, and cut paper loosely render tropical stems, leafy ferns, and abstracted animals. Complex compositions convey a sense of motion both ravenous and unrelenting. Neon layers pulse with a chaotic verve. Yet precision emanates from hand-cut paper and markings applied with a distinct—human—necessity. As she cuts and collages paper, overlapping with colored pencil and billowy brushstrokes, her hand becomes an extension of the organic, giving life to the inanimate. She states, "for me painting is a physical act, like a dance that happens in short bursts, yielding unknown imagery before my eyes. I most often work wet-into-wet, which facilitates painting quickly. A sensitivity to surface and materiality—the shallow relief of collaged elements, or the fluidity of the paint—reflects my obsession with textures from the natural world." Just as we classify plants, animals, and bacteria, we recognize a kingdom within her strokes. The intimate relationship between her hand and the materials parallels nature and humanity and their interconnectivity, a common thread in her work.

Her curiosity in nature and its unrelenting relativity stems directly from her travels in Hawaii. Awarded travel grants and residencies to four of the five National Tropical Botanical Gardens in Maui, Westbrook fully immersed herself in the state's diverse ecology. Studying endangered species and rare plant life under the shadow of volcanoes, she experienced the raw environment, imbuing an authenticity and intensity within her work. Currently living and painting in the wetlands of New Haven, Connecticut, her native surroundings become intertwined with her memories of Hibiscus and Monstera leaves. She describes the rural habitat: "the environment pulses with morning birdsongs and the hum of unusually shaped and brightly colored insects; vibrant life emanates from the woods at all hours. We see bats and deer, and even mallard ducks when the wetlands are flooded. We witness the voracious appetite of the tiniest creatures while tending to our vegetable garden during summer. And even in the winter animal footprints in the snow mark otherwise unseen and blanketed bustling life." The ebb and flow of her backyard nature is reborn in sporadic markings as she captures an intimacy through in person observation. Working en plein air in the Spring and Summer months, she transitions to the studio during the winter, creating work primarily based on memory. This distance between memory and her creative

process lends to an ambiguity—a strangeness—in the work. Origin and place become muddled with every loose rendition of life. By expressing material and subject in an unconstrained manner, she parallels nature's inexhaustible growth. She states, "the interconnectedness of my micro and macro experiences in nature continue to evolve to evoke a cyclical, visceral and emotional exploration of known unknowns." Westbrook transports us to a forest beyond the visual.

Westbrook was born in Louisville, KY (1980), and currently lives in New Haven, CT, teaching painting and drawing at Yale University. She received her MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale University (2010) after receiving a BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art (2002) and MA in Critical and Curatorial Studies from the University of Louisville (2004). She has exhibited nationally at Robert Miller Gallery, Cathouse FUNeral, New York, NY; Interstate Projects, Brooklyn, NY; Co/Lab at Art Platform, Los Angeles, CA; among others. She received the Haleakala Artist in Residence, the Robert Schoelkopf Memorial Travel Grant, and the Carol Schlosberg Memorial Prize for Excellence in Painting. Her work is held in several private and public collections, including Markel Corporation, Red Bank, NJ; Capital One, Richmond, VA; and Art Bank Program, US Department of State, Washington, DC; and Haleakala National Park, Maui, HI. Westbrook is co-founding editor of a quarterly journal, Lookie-Lookie, which showcases work by emerging artists through interviews and reviews.

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