

MODERNISM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gallery Exhibition Schedule

Second Nature

Opening September 4, 2025

ALEXANDMUSHI	NAOMIE KREMER
UTA BARTH	LOUISE LEBOURGEOIS
LAUREN BARTONE	BRIAN MAHANY
MICHAEL BRENNAN	KRISTINE MAYS
DEBORAH BROWN	LINDSAY MCCRUM
GORDON COOK	JOHN NAVA
EDWARD CURTIS	SARAH PERRY
JUDY DATER	ANDRÉ RACZ
ELENA DORFMAN	MEL RAMOS
ALAN DRESSLER	JOHN REGISTER
MICHAEL DWECK	MICHAEL ROVNER
DAMIAN ELWES	NAOMI ALESSANDRA SCHULTZ
SHELDON GREENBERG	CAMILLE SOLYAGUA
EMANUEL GYGER	ALBERT STEINER
ROBERT PARKE HARRISON	MARK STOCK
JAMES HAYWARD	HIROSHI SUGIMOTO
WADE HOEFER	SAM TCHAKALIAN
SHAWN HUCKINS	DAVID TROWBRIDGE
JERRY KEARNS	HELENA CHAPPELLIN WILSON
SAMEH KHALATBARI	

Nature has arguably been the favorite subject of artists since the beginning of time. While some artists dedicate their practice to portraying the natural world as it appears with accuracy, others use nature loosely as a muse or starting point to employ their artistic processes. In today's world where we are inundated with content of nebulous artificiality, questioning *is this real or fake* has become second nature. While artists continue to use nature as a subject and inspiration, the question *is this nature or is this a product of a human intervention* feels more pertinent than ever when viewing art and imploring so feels instinctual.

Modernism is pleased to present *Second Nature*, a group show of 50 artworks from 1900 to contemporary, which explores the indeterminate boundary between the organic and the constructed. The exhibition brings together works that appear to authentically depict nature with seemingly blatant manipulations of the natural world. As the organic is transformed and artificial compositions mimic nature, *Second Nature* invites viewers to reconsider the divide. What appears raw may be refined and what seems fabricated, unexpectedly true to nature.

The conundrum lies within the art itself, as the appearance of the work often does not reveal the truth of its authenticity. For example, Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Devonian Period* seems to be a genuine black and white photograph of coral reef. The viewer would likely believe so, unless they were aware the image is from his *Dioramas* series, a body of photographs taken of museum exhibits. What appears to be a live and bustling ocean floor is actually a still display of marine life replicas behind glass, not submerged in water. While seemingly more real than the colorful flora scene of Damian Elwes's *Amazon Cloud Forest*, one could argue that Elwes's depiction of nature, while stylistically expressionist, is closer to real nature. Created in response to the colors of the exotic vegetative landscape he experienced when hiking a volcano in Colombia, Elwes's composition is only once removed from the original. Sugimoto's, on the other hand, is twice removed from its original, since the photograph is a depiction of a depiction of nature. Complexities such as these are dissected throughout the exhibition.



Hiroshi SUGIMOTO, *Devonian Period*, 1992, gelatin silver print
Damian ELWES, *Amazon Cloud Forest*, 2015, acrylic on canvas

MODERNISM



John REGISTER [1939-1996], *Hanalei Bay*, 1988, oil on canvas

Perhaps then we can only consider depictions of nature once removed as natural. In doing so, we would look to the sober landscapes of John Register. Both *Hanalei Bay* and *Study for Further Lane* present as earnest scenes of American Realism, taken from real places in the world. However, when we consider Register's signature process of meticulously redacting nonessential visual information to produce a more simplified distillation of the original subject, the viewer is left to wonder how true to nature his landscapes really are. Similarly, the two soft-focus photographs from Uta Barth's *Ground* series featured in the exhibition present natural landscapes, but with so much detail blurred, the classification as real nature feels complicated.

The tightly cropped composition of Mel Ramos's watercolor *Salou*, which depicts the underside of fronds of two palm trees, is rendered in such detail

that categorization as organic nature seems probable. But even if *Salou* was composed from a photograph or was a genuine plein-air study, the sterile state of the two trees hardly conveys *natural*, rather, a man-made and regularly manicured paradise resort. Without the context of their surroundings the viewer is left to speculate.

Some works in the exhibition erode the original context of natural forms to such a degree that they no longer read as nature despite being so conceptually rooted in it, like Sameh Khalatbari's *Fly of a Lifetime* and Naomi Alessandra Schultz's *Still Life with Clippings and Waste Paper Bag*. The deconstructed depictions of pastoral scenes by Shawn Huckins and Michael Brennan, though rendered with masterful realism, border surrealism in their composition and the mind refuses to compute them as natural.

Other works also modify organic forms but they still read as nature. The digitally stitched photographic tapestries of Lindsay McCrum and Elena Dorfman are clearly of human invention, but their natural origins remain undeniable. In addition to manipulating nature in form, artists in the exhibition also manipulate nature as material. In *Transmutations 1* Dorfman incorporates metals and minerals native to the places pictured in her photographs to root the work in the land it originated from and to explore the relationship between human and nature. Lauren Bartone utilizes organic material like fustic wood and the cochineal insect to dye the linen used in *Empire*.

Other artists in the exhibition also use raw nature as material such as Naomi Alessandra Schultz in her installation piece *Flagged Hedge* composed from tree branches and David Trowbridge's wall sculpture *Psalm #144* crafted



Uta BARTH, *Ground #10*, 1992-93, chromogenic print on panel
Mel RAMOS [1935-2018], *Salou*, 1985, watercolor on paper

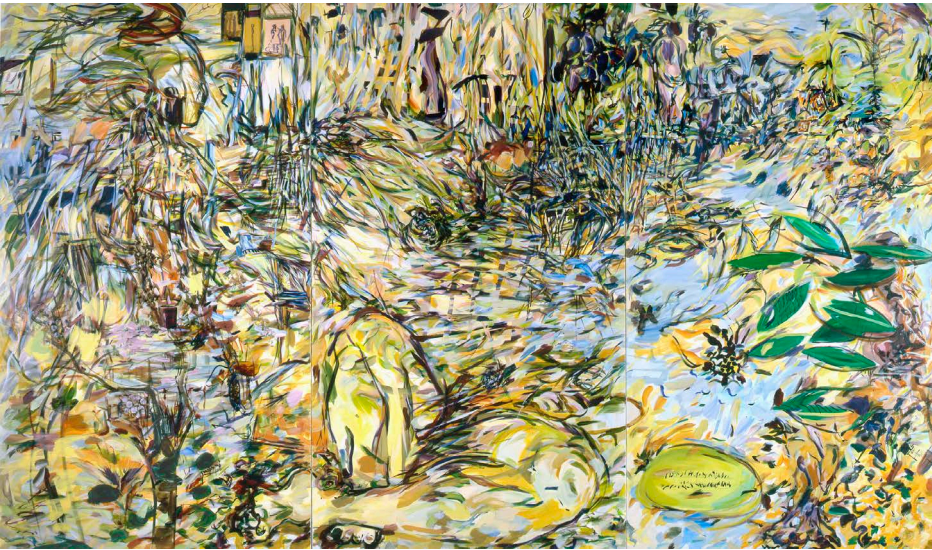
MODERNISM

partially from a tree trunk. Is it possible organic matter as material is the closest we can get to an actual representation of nature? Or does the act of alteration automatically render it unnatural?

Other works in *Second Nature* propose the possibility that human intervention does not inherently make depictions of nature unnatural. After all, aren't humans, after stripped of their modern adornments, organic forms? Amongst the nature-or-not paradoxes present in the many of the other works in the exhibition, artworks featuring humans, even though posed, may seem to be the most natural of all. Judy Dater's *Self-portrait with Petroglyph* reads prehistoric. Michael Dweck's *Mermaid 162*, *Aripeka* reminds us of the inseparability of human and nature and ALEXANDMUSHI's *Two Chairs*, *Giant Rock*, *Joshua Tree*, our position in relation to it.

Or perhaps nature simply cannot truly be portrayed representationally at all and every depiction is inherently artificial. In painting a bird, like Jerry Kearns's *SWOON*, it ceases to be a bird. While airborne, Kristine Mays's sculptures do not become any more real than a bird painted on canvas. Does the process of recreating an image from the natural world, only cause further separation from the organic form it represents? Is every depiction of nature a simulacrum? If so, nature cannot be conveyed authentically with visual forms. Perhaps the truest portrayal of nature in art is nonfigurative and Naomie Kremer's enveloping canvases of gestural abstract marks, inspired by nature, yet abstract, may be the closest we can achieve to the actual experience of nature.

Through material, process, and form, artists in *Second Nature* create confounding contradictions: natural but not, nature but also artificial. In portraying the natural world, rather inauthentically, a sort of "second nature," i.e. not the original, now once or even twice removed, emerges. And asking the question *is it nature or not* is only second nature.



Naomie KREMER, *Then and Now (French Connection)*, 2006, oil on linen, triptych
James HAYWARD, *ABSTRACT #182 (cobalt green)*, 2013, oil and canvas on wood panel

THE PUBLIC IS INVITED TO AN OPENING RECEPTION ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4TH FROM 6:00-8:00PM

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL: 415-541-0461 OR EMAIL: INFO@MODERNISMINC.COM

HI-RES IMAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.