

Eleanor
Harwood
Gallery

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Eleanor Harwood Gallery presents:

Chris Russell:
Wild Flowers

Exhibit & Event Dates:

Artist Talk: Saturday, November 2nd, 2PM

Opening Reception: Saturday, November 2nd, 6-8 PM

November 2nd - December 14th, 2019



Chris Russell
Higher Ground, 2019
Oil on Linen
56 in H x 46 in W

November 2nd, 2019 (San Francisco, CA) — Eleanor Harwood Gallery is pleased to present *Wild Flowers* our first solo exhibition by Portland based artist Chris Russell.

The landscapes paintings in *Wild Flowers* investigate particular outdoor places that Russell has experienced in the Northwest. Diverse climates, specific plants, lichens, rocks, and fungus frequent his paintings. The complex symbiotic relationships of these organisms interweave into maximalist landscapes. Starting from experiences and studies in nature, he then completes his larger landscape paintings in his studio by building up through gestural layers of oil paint. The work flows from realism to mysticism, as he plays with the medium of oil paint and incorporates studio time with observation outside. *Wild Flowers* reflects Russell's exploration of, and bewilderment by the wild beauty of the Pacific Northwest.

In this series, each landscape painting is paired with a still life, consisting of plants and rocks, derived from the original landscape. There is a symbiosis between the pairs of paintings, each piece informing the other. Diving into the illusion of representational landscape painting invites "make believe", as Russell forages for materials within the painted landscape.

Russell's still life paintings connect historically to Dutch still life painting, which expanded into a prominent genre in the 1600s as growing urbanization of Dutch society sparked interest in the home and materialism. The still life paintings in this show feature floral arrangements set up in incomplete or fictitious interiors. The composed, idealized spaces reference interior design and product styling that has us longing for the unattainable— an uncluttered pristine and calm life where we can stop and smell the flowers, while simultaneously embedding desire for more. These interiors reveal natural materials that are cut from the landscapes, beautiful patterns of wood grain, and stones that are polished into the objects playing pedestal to their unrefined versions, i.e. sticks and stones. Rather than challenge or vilify the making of objects, especially as Russell is using materials to make these paintings, they instead hint at the dichotomy of our desire to be submerged in undisturbed nature, and our materialistic tendencies.

Another influence on these paintings is the Japanese art of flower arranging: Ikebana. Russell says "while the long tradition of Ikebana is vaster then I fully grasp, the aesthetic sensibility has influenced me. In the same way I find comfort in rustic, minimal design, I am drawn to the gracefully imperfect silhouettes of these flower arrangements. My father was born in Japan when his military parents were stationed there, and while he was too young to have memories of the place, my grandmother always made flower arrangements influenced by their time in Japan. Having inherited some Kenzan, or flower frogs, from her, I often start the day working in my studio by arranging flowers from our garden. It is a time when I am not making for show but for myself. For this show, this morning ritual has led to new content for my paintings, just as camping and collecting rocks has before."

Connected to Ikebana is the widely appropriated Japanese aesthetic tradition Wabi-sabi, a world-view centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. The

modest, rough, asymmetric simplicity embraced by Wabi-sabi has a growing appeal in an age of slick plastic that is anything but transient.

Transience also related back to Dutch vanitas paintings. These still life paintings symbolize the transience of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death, displaying contrasting symbols of wealth, death and the ephemeral like rotting exotic fruit and wilting flowers. The lavish vanitas of the Dutch golden age—whose signifiers of wealth and colonial conquest were a blatant exposé of the inequalities of colonialism and early global capitalism, subtly seem to have been aware of the precarious and dark side of their indulgence. Dutch trade was not mutually beneficial like the symbiosis between fungi and wild orchids, but instead parasitic like the worms in the decaying fruit of their lavish still lifes.

Contemporary sensitivity may have taken strides since the Dutch golden age, but the seductive allure of materials still prevails. Russell says” As I venture outdoors to paint from sublimity, I bring a deep respect for nature, tempered by the disillusionment that my relationship is not symbiotic. While my paintings avoid historic symbols such as the skull and hourglass, there is a contemporary sense of doom and fleeting time when pairing the natural world with our materialism.”

About the Artist

Born in Boulder, Colorado, Chris Russell earned his BFA from California College of the Arts in 2006. After ten years in the Bay Area, Russell spent the summer of 2012 in Piedmont, Italy as Martin Arts artist in residence. His work has been exhibited throughout the California Bay Area, Italy and Oregon. Chris Russell lives and works in Portland, Oregon.

About Eleanor Harwood Gallery

The Eleanor Harwood Gallery opened September 2006. The programming of the gallery focuses on emerging to mid-career artists exhibiting nationally and internationally. The roster includes artists that are represented in major American and European collections. The gallery actively promotes and encourages career growth for represented artists.

Location

1275 Minnesota Street, Suite 206
San Francisco, CA 94107

Hours

Tuesdays 1:00-5:00pm, Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-5:00pm
And by appointment

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