

NEWCHILD

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Madeleine Bialke

Leaves Of Grass

KIAF Art Seoul, 6-10 September

"I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars" —Walt Whitman

For its inaugural participation in KIAF Seoul, Newchild presents a solo exhibition by Brooklyn-based painter Madeleine Bialke (b. 1991, Elmira, New York, US). Titled *Leaves Of Grass*, the exhibition features in the artist's distinctive visual language a collection of new paintings and drawings developed exclusively for the fair.

In *Leaves Of Grass*, the artist showcases a pictorial autobiography that explores the symbiotic relationship between human experiences and the natural world. The exhibition encapsulates personal connections and memories Bialke forged while visiting her parents' farm in Trumansburg, near Ithaca, New York. Since her formative years at the age of 10, she has roamed the expanse of an austere terrain that bears semblance to the landscapes of Minnesota, where her parents were born. Among the exhibited works is a portrayal of the Greek revival home that has etched itself into Bialke's memories. Similarly, an aged black walnut tree finds its way into one of the depicted canvases, accompanied by a swing that dangles from its bough. Bialke's skilful invocation of memory is intertwined with quintessential American ideals such as familial bonds, interpersonal relationships, and the human condition.

The works in *Leaves Of Grass* also offer a subtle commentary on the democratic essence inherent in nature, a theme resonating from the verses of Walt Whitman's poetic compilations 'Leaves of Grass' (which have, in turn, lent the exhibition its title). Nature, a paragon of democracy and unity, remains impartial towards humanity's diverse facets—racial, gendered, social, and geographical— and unifies us through our shared experience of nature. This shared encounter with nature forms a central concern within Bialke's artistic framework. The chromatic palette, reminiscent of scorched earth, serves as an allusion to the recent wildfires in Canada that have cast their ominous spectre over the northeastern expanse of the U.S. The astounding orange haze that traversed the sky from New York to Florida, transforming urban landscapes into scenes that mirrored apocalyptic visions, serves as a poignant commentary on the ever-escalating climate crisis.

Bialke's upbringing, immersed in the rhythmical cycles of nature has broadened her visual vocabulary with richness and harmony. The exhibited works weave a narrative of inspiration, drawing from nature's cycles of rebirth and growth as symbols of hope. A lifeless tree becomes the nurturer of new plants, echoing Whitman's verses of 'Leaves of Grass.'

"A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands; How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what it is any more than he. [...] Or I guess the grass is itself a child . . . the produced babe of the vegetation."

This presentation marks a significant milestone as it represents Bialke's first solo exhibition in Korea and Newchild's first participation in KIAF.

Madeleine Bialke (b. 1991 in New York) received her BFA in Studio Art from the Plattsburgh State University of New York and earned an MFA in Painting at Boston University, Massachusetts. 's

Bialke's paintings respond to our changing environment and reflect on her interest in nature and society. The tradition of landscape painting has taken numerous forms, with a changing outlook ever since the 19th century held a milestone as artists became more concerned with the profound changes in the natural world, often as a result of human influence on nature. Bialke's desire to address ecological concerns in her paintings originates from environmental connotations (extinction, domestication, global ecological devastation) but is also born out of hope, such as the natural world might encourage empathy and could become a gateway to further understanding. Her post-apocalyptic depictions of forests and landscapes are enveloped in romantic ideas of their sublimity. Growing up in Upstate New York, close to the Adirondack Mountains, Bialke became fascinated with the power of nature and humanity's smallness. Her compositions confront the viewer with a place echoing the experience of a lifestyle in close proximity to nature that is on its last leg.

Within her practice, Bialke uses colour to generate and indicate emotion. Many of the new works penetrate our psyche with wide values, abutting hues, and gradients deceptively natural that confront the viewer with a place where realism is unsettlingly familiar. Her depictions of the sky although in natural transitions are very uncharacteristic in colour: poisonous warm oranges, pinks that turn to greens, that turn to lavender, and mauves. Bialke's use of colours might actually reflect a changing environment. Sometimes atypical hues show undisturbed like polluted gradients, referencing the balance and imbalance between colour and nature in an expressionistic way. The distinctive compositions built of layers upon layers, remind us that the natural world isn't exclusively a resource for humans but a living organism.

Recent exhibitions include Art Brussels, Newchild Gallery, Brussels; Two Years and Change, OLYMPIA, New York (2023); IMMERSED, Jack Siebert Projects, Los Angeles (2023); Death Motel, Newchild Gallery, Antwerp (2022, solo); Art Antwerp, Newchild Gallery, Antwerp (2022); Bodyland, Max Hetzler, Berlin (2022); Nine Lives, Steve Turner, Los Angeles (2022, solo); Fertile Plains, Dinner Gallery, New York (2022); Madeleine Bialke, M. Florine Démosthène, Sahara Longe, Nadia Waheed, Alexander Berggruen, New York (2022); Playground of Geometry, CICA Vancouver, Vancouver (2022); Symbiosis (curated by Beth Rudin DeWoody), Berkshire Botanic Gardens, Stockbridge (2022); Roots, Sof:Art Foundation, Bologna (2022); and Long Summer, Huxley-Parlour, London (2021, solo). Madeleine Bialke was the Artist-in-Residence at North Western Oklahoma State University in 2018 and was awarded the John Walker MFA Painting and Sculpture Award in 2016. Her work is included in the collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody and Fundacion Medianoche0. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.