

PRESS RELEASE

SAM FALLS

June 3 – July 28, 2023

Opening reception: Saturday, June 3, 6 – 8 pm

303 Gallery, New York



303 Gallery is pleased to present our third solo exhibition by Sam Falls. On view will be a new body of work incorporating painting, ceramics, photography, and video installation.

“...and he felt a loneliness he'd not known since he was a child and he felt wholly alien to the world although he loved it still. He thought that in the beauty of the world were hid a secret. He thought that the world's heart beat at some terrible cost and that the world's pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity and that in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower.”

— Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*

In a passage cited by Falls as personally significant from Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*, the novel's protagonist John Grady Cole hunts a deer for survival in the wilderness on his journey home and is struck with an existential meditation on time, nature, and mortality; despite all the harshness the world has shown him, Cole sees beauty and sorrow as inextricably linked and maintains a sense of hope. Falls references this perspective throughout the exhibition, contextualizing his contemplation of life's inherent sublimity and melancholia through nature's cycles.

Embracing the variable conditions of working en plein air, Falls engages the environment and the passage of time to create poetic, site-specific paintings which act as a direct conduit to the experience of being immersed in nature. Often working in solitude from dusk until dawn, Falls collects organic material and determinately arranges his compositions into botanical portraits of place and memento mori, incorporating figures and skeletal imagery to emphasize the underlying structural affinities between living things. Wind, fog, rain, and dew catalyze the different pigments which Falls overlays, with more precipitation yielding soft edges and washy layers, while more dry, windless conditions result in crisply articulated silhouettes. Repeated exposures to the elements increase the depth of field within the finished paintings, evoking the density of an old-growth forest.

Concerned with the intimacy of time and representation in relation to both the work and the viewer, the artist has also worked with durational exposures of colored canvas to the elements and specifically the sun to create life-size photograms that become primary sources of an environment over time. A new aspect to this process are works where Falls uses natural dyes made from plants and insects, such as Sequoia seeds and cochineal, to create a monochrome canvas that is then laden with plants from his surroundings in Upstate New York and left for the better part of the year to fade in the sunlight, leaving a ghostly image of the process of both decomposition and the resilience of natural material.

Along with the sun and rain, the artist takes a similar approach using the earth to create ceramics, rolling botanical cuttings into slabs of wet clay. When initially fired, the organic material turns to ash while their imprinted forms become fossilized; prismatic glazes and glass recall the vibrant landscape in full bloom. Several of these works are made as ceramic frames for large-format Fujichrome polaroids of spring flora in Central and Riverside Parks. Here Falls used the instant film to document New York City in bloom and weeks later returned to the exact flowers pictured when they died to trim and use them to make the ceramic frame to hold the picture of their life's zenith. Coupling obsolete media of polaroid film with flora frozen in time, Falls underscores the ephemerality of his subjects and, in a larger sense, the precarity of earth's resources faced with humanity's ceaseless drive to consume them.

Allusions to the built environment appear throughout the exhibition as a large-scale I-beam sculpture and the recurring motif of a split-rail fence. Inlaid with ceramic embedded with vegetation collected on hikes through Los Angeles' Griffith Park, industrial I-beams merge these wanderings into one minimalist framework, urging an appreciation for increasingly encroached-upon natural landscapes and the organic material losing ground to such geometric forms. *Permanent Smile* (2023) replicates a weathered wooden fence post found on the artist's property in upstate New York. Having grown up on a farm in Vermont, Falls spent many summers of his childhood maintaining such fences, sometimes noticing carvings of old initials from a previous era in the wood. Before casting in glass, Falls carved the wooden original with excerpts of personally poignant quotes from poems and songs by authors Emily Dickinson, David Berman, Jamie Kanzler, and others, reflecting on themes of mortality and nature.

The livestream video installation *Sunrise/Sunset (Golden Hour)* (2023) follows the perpetual synchronized rising and setting of the sun around the world. Dual live feeds from cameras, positioned globally, are programmed to project on opposing walls replicating east and west in a never-ending loop. In real-time the viewer is situated between the sun rising and setting

around the globe. Every new day ends and begins in the same instant, only to switch feeds and start the cycle again, creating a perspective both instant and infinite.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sam Falls (b. 1984) was raised in Vermont and lives and works in New York's Hudson Valley. He received his BA from Reed College in 2007 and his MFA from ICP-Bard in 2010. He has had solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (2023); the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Trento and Rovereto, Italy (2018); The Kitchen, New York (2015); Ballroom Marfa, Texas (2015); Pomona College Museum of Art (2014); Public Art Fund, New York (2014); and LAXART, Los Angeles (2013), among others. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2018); Le Consortium, Dijon (2017); Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio (2017); Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, England (2016); Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland (2015); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2015); Menil Collection, Houston (2015); Museo MADRE, Naples (2014); and the International Center of Photography, New York (2013); among others.

CONTACT

For more information on Sam Falls, please contact Katy Erdman, kathryn@303gallery.com. For press requests, please contact Kevin Hsieh, press@303gallery.com.

Image: Sam Falls, *The Brute Choir*, 2023, Pigment on canvas. Photo: Justin Craun.