

Press Release

Charles Gaines. Numbers and Trees: The Arizona Watercolors

Hauser & Wirth Southampton
1 – 30 July 2023



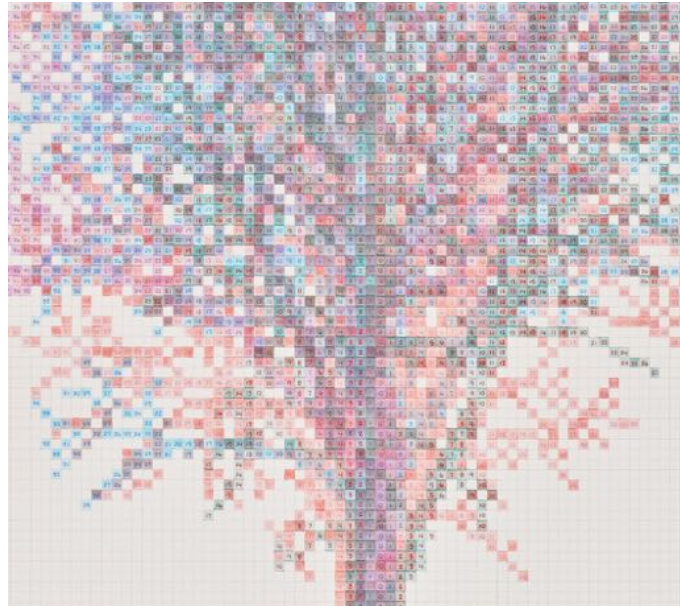
Southampton...Beginning 1 July, Hauser & Wirth Southampton will host a focused exhibition of twelve new watercolors by Charles Gaines. Inspired by cottonwood trees he photographed on a 2022 trip to Arizona, 'Numbers and Trees: The Arizona Watercolors' provides an intimate encounter with the systems and processes through which the celebrated conceptual artist develops his constantly evolving 'Numbers and Trees' series. The trees Gaines photographed during this trip will form the basis of a new series of Plexiglas works that the artist will debut in his forthcoming solo exhibition at the Phoenix Art Museum, from 10 November 2024 through 16 February 2025.

Whereas Gaines has previously produced series depicting London oak trees, palm trees and pecan trees, among other species, the Southampton watercolors are his first to represent cottonwood trees. Taking their titles from local rivers, creeks, washes and arroyos, these paintings mirror the critical nature of such waterways in creating an ecosystem where these distinctive trees can thrive. Cottonwoods, which the artist observed along the San Pedro River outside Sierra Vista AZ, generally only grow near a body of water, and are particularly noticeable in Arizona's arid climate.

Trees have been a central motif in Gaines's distinguished practice since he first began his 'Walnut Tree Orchard' series in the 1970s. His methodical examination of their forms continues in this latest series, as the artist plots each cottonwood tree by assigning it a specific color and a numbered grid that reflects the full form of the tree. For each successive work, Gaines overlays the forms of trees one at a time and in progression, following his systematic sequencing process. The artist's systems, which highlight the differences between these trees, induce the viewer to assign a meaning to these differences—a meaning that is arbitrarily determined because the differences themselves are arbitrary. These works thereby call attention to our tendency to impose categories based on subjective values and suggest the arbitrary nature of other manufactured systems in our society.

To celebrate the opening of 'Numbers and Trees: The Arizona Watercolors' on 1 July, Hauser & Wirth Southampton will host a special conversation between Gaines and Phoenix Art Museum Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs and Engagement, Olga Viso. Further details about the event, as well as registration information, are available [here](#).

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About the artist

Charles Gaines (b. 1944, Charleston SC) lives and works in Los Angeles. He recently retired from the CalArts School of Art, where he was on the faculty for over 30 years and established a fellowship to provide critical scholarship support for Black students in the M.F.A. Art program. Gaines has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in the United States and around the world, most notably at Dia Beacon, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York NY, and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles CA.

Gaines's work is included in prominent public collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York NY; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago IL; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles CA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Tate, London, UK. His work has also been presented at the 1975 Whitney Biennial and the Venice Biennale in 2007 and 2015.

In 2022 Gaines launched his most ambitious public art project yet, 'The American Manifest,' presented by Creative Time, Governors Island Arts and Times Square Arts. Unfolding in three parts over the course of two years and across three sites, the work features both performance and large-scale sculptural works to tell the complicated story of the over 400-year settlement of the United States, focusing on the country's foundations of colonialism, racial capitalism, democracy, and the legacy of Manifest Destiny. In spring 2024, the third chapter of 'The American Manifest' will be staged on the banks of the Ohio river. In the fall of 2023, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, will open a major survey of the artist's work from 1992 to the present, tracing the complex interrelation of formal innovation, conceptual rigor and political content that has characterized the second half of his career.

In addition to his artistic practice, Gaines has published several essays on contemporary art, including 'Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism' (University of California, Irvine, 1993) and 'The New Cosmopolitanism' (California State University, Fullerton, 2008). In 2019, Gaines received the 60th Edward MacDowell Medal. He was inducted into the National Academy of Design's 2020 class of National Academicians and the American Academy of Arts and Letters in May 2022.

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Caption and courtesy information:

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Charles Gaines

Numbers and Trees: Arizona Series 2, Tree #4, Kanab

2023

Watercolor and ink on paper

Unique

64.8 x 54.6 cm / 25 1/2 x 21 1/2 in

71.4 x 61.3 x 5.1 cm / 28 1/8 x 24 1/8 x 2 in (framed)

Photo: Keith Lubow

Portrait of Charles Gaines

Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Charles Gaines

Numbers and Trees: Arizona Series 2, Tree #4, Kanab (Detail)

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