

# Petzel

## EMMA WEBSTER

*Rues and Leaves Themselves Alone*

April 30 – June 6, 2026  
520 W 25th Street

Petzel is pleased to present *Rues and Leaves Themselves Alone*, an exhibition by Los Angeles–based artist Emma Webster, opening Thursday April 30, 2026. The painting show, which also features a digital wander through the dioramas that inspire Webster’s landscapes, will be on view through June 6, 2026, at 520 West 25th Street.

You are on the edge of a forest where night is always falling. You are on a journey. As you walk around Emma Webster’s paintings, you explore a world. As you walk through the accompanying video game, you discover that same world again, passing through parts of the same landscapes, overlapping. These are two different renderings of the world, and neither is a perfect representation. One is brightly colorful, it’s daytime, there’s fluff and pollen floating in the air, it is the kind of comforting place one might travel to in a meditation. The other is bleaker, colder, darker, a wide-open space that is foreboding.

You are on this journey and this story revolves around you; but, without a mirrored pool to see yourself in, you will never know for certain who or what you are. At times you are far away, taking in sweeping vistas. At others you are very, disarmingly close, as though you too are a startled bird in the tree, there on the same branch, or as if you were nothing at all. Pulling in close and then peeling away – like a drone, or an astral projection, or a floating eye in the air, a virtual camera endlessly circulating through another realm.

There is something wrong with these animals. A little goat seems to grow out of the snow. A cow glows green like the mud below its misshapen hooves. A flying horse limned with red dives into a Turner sky. A deer has a double image of a head. These are dreams of animals in dreams of landscapes. They are symbols of animals, or mythical animals that only exist in our minds. They bring to mind the animals painted on the walls of caves: those too were animated by flashing light; those too were highly stylized; those too were drawn over with lines and unnatural patterns; those too followed the contours of cave walls and blended figure and ground, flattening material and immaterial spaces; those too did not have eyes; those scenes also rarely featured humans; those too evoked an imaginary space that existed in the collective imagination.

You are on a journey through a place that is not real. It is a mirage-space, or, a mythical space of pagan animal gods, or, the land of the dead, or someplace else. Like the places of visions, it cannot be represented perfectly, only proposed. These are only attempts to render a space beyond our own.

These are paintings of different sorts of space. A warped image of a sunlit woodland canopy – from a photograph of a real landscape taken by the artist – is suspended between two trees like a hanging painted sky inside the painting. Like a portal. A broken 3D scan of a plant captures parts of the background, the air around it, the emptiness, and gives it a solid, virtual weight and volume. These heavy representations of nothingness are brought into the virtual studio and manipulated as material. Presence and absence are equal: a branch adorned with green leaves and white nothings.

Emma in her mask in virtual space sculpts imaginary flora with her hands, like a god above the firmament. Sculptures and idols of animals are drawn all over, wrapped with strange materials and made into assemblages to confuse the scanner. These many different spaces are wrapped around themselves. They are held in uncomfortable tension. They vibrate. They nervously melt and mutate between two, three and four dimensions. The trees are as alive as the animals and so are the flowers and the stones. Everything is alive and it is all swirling together.

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Different kinds of space and modes of representing space are combined, collaged and smeared together, then rendered as images that break the conventions of landscape painting and illusionistic space. They are spaces that cannot really be understood. They are more like propositions, like the hypothetical spaces of complex algebra. Like when a mathematician is trying to solve a problem and sees the problem manifested as colors and forms before him.

When darkness falls, the landscapes are spotlighted harshly by an unknown source. Bright light pours down and spreads. The moon, when it appears, is always full in the sky. It is always a full moon, a magical night—or perhaps it is not the moon at all. Perhaps a new star has appeared in the night sky.

*Text by Dean Kissick*

Coinciding with this exhibition, Webster will be joined in conversation with artist Josephine Halvorson, Professor of Art & Chair of Graduate Studies in Painting at Boston University, on **Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 1pm** at Petzel. **RSVP** is required as space is limited; please email [press@petzel.com](mailto:press@petzel.com) to reserve your seat.

Petzel is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am–6pm.  
For press inquiries, please contact Karolina Chojnowska at [karolina@petzel.com](mailto:karolina@petzel.com), or call (212) 680-9467.