

## CAN YOU HEAR THE TREE?

Apollinaria Broche, Shuyi Cao, Mary Herbert, Alex McAdoo

15 November - 18 January 2025

The group exhibition '*Can you hear the tree?*' draws inspiration from the poem 'Can You' by the American author Jorie Graham, included in her collection *To 2040*.

The poem, which you can read on the following page, sensitively offers a new perception of *Nature*. It is not merely a beautiful landscape created to please our eyes, but a vast living organism that interacts with us as human beings. The author invites us to "tune in" to our multisensory perception and to "hear" the breath of trees, grass, and life in the soil. *Nature* is humanized and humans return to their organic essence.

The exhibition interprets this theme through the paintings of Mary Herbert and Alex McAdoo and the sculptures of Apollinaria Broche and Shuyi Cao.

**Apollinaria Broche's** bronze and ceramic sculptures present an anthropomorphic yet magical version of Nature. Her flowers are enchanted *portals*, hiding along the stems or among the petals an infinite wealth of anthropomorphic bronze details: hands, snakes, skulls, fairies, swords, and locks. Playing with an aesthetic that blends a dark/gothic aesthetics with delicacy, and realism with the fantasy, the result is magnificently grotesque, opening a magical portal to another universe. Her flowers can surely breathe, sing, and dream.

**Shuyi Cao's** sculptures, on the other hand, present a dystopian version of Nature – a hybrid object between the organic and inorganic. At first glance, the *branches* of her sculptures are apparent, but upon closer inspection, the surreal nature of these sculptures emerges: the leaves are actually seashells collected by the artist from Chinese beaches (a marine plant?), or artificial leaves created by the artist using plastics and glass – also collected on beaches after being shaped and returned by the sea. Nature and the human creator collide to form a new hybrid organism, where the organic and artificial human-made parts overlap and struggle to distinguish themselves.

Inspired by Jorie Graham's poems, **Mary Herbert** has created two large canvases for the exhibition, conceived as variations of the same melody, a déjà-vu, a temporal overlap. Each work is the result of an infinite layering of images, in a gestational process that began in January and only concluded in September. And if Jorie Graham writes, "Can you hear the tree. / No I don't mean wind, / I mean the breathing of / the tree through / bark," *breath* is undoubtedly the protagonist of Mary Herbert's canvases. The reclining body is a lifeless one (perhaps asleep, perhaps meditating), where the breath is like a soul exhaled from the body and merged with the magical and dreamlike universe that surrounds it. The white petals are like snowflakes, a fragile but romantic existence, the moon is a clock marking the seconds of this suspended time. Inhale, exhale. Nature and the human soul merge; the void is full but cannot be seen with watchful eyes. Close your eyes. Inhale. Exhale.

Similarly to Apollinaria's exploration, **Alex McAdoo's** paintings also aspire to be "*portals* to infinity." The artist depicts common landscapes, with the particularity of being distorted into a perspective vortex where reality presents a parallel upside-down world. Interestingly, each painting can also be hung "upside down" – revealing a new perspective. This duality within the painting holds conceptual importance for the artist, influenced by his Indian heritage and the scientific-mathematical culture: according to the quantum conception of the universe, there is no empty space and no material reality as we know it. The void is actually a fullness made up of atoms invisible to the human eye and infinite potential possibilities waiting to be manifested. Thus, the artist's kaleidoscopic landscapes magically draw us into a new dimension, where nothing is as it seems, and where our certainties begin to waver.

Jorie Graham  
Poem "Can You"  
from her collection  
*To 2040*

Can You

hear yourself  
breathe. Can you help  
me. Can you  
hear the fly. Can you

hear the tree. No  
I don't mean wind,  
I mean the breathing of  
the tree through

bark. Can u, say the grasses  
please hear  
us. Can we hear u hear  
the tips of water on

us, lithe &  
so heavy with light & bending  
lens-tips. Can u  
hear this e-

vaporation. Can u  
keep  
blessing, keep not  
thinking, remind

yourself of  
your own

breathing, & what  
is growing—leaves root sap, sun  
forcing the flower....  
Moving this way

you'll see you can hear  
soil breathe,  
& in it, working to get thru it,  
the worm,

& each turning of it  
by the worm, hear, &  
the breathing in it  
of the worm, hear. Moving this way

you'll hear the earth go on  
without you—  
when u are  
no longer

here, when u are

not breathing. The fish the  
water sand the  
needle in the pine. The here. Hear it  
breathing

as it turns,  
and as now in it turns  
the effort  
of this worm.