



GALERIE QUYNH CONTEMPORARY ART

WE ATE THE FOREST CHÚNG TA ĂN RỪNG

a solo exhibition by **Nadège David**

May 25 – July 27, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

“The forest eats itself and lives forever.”

– Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*

But what happens if we eat the forest?

What does it mean for the forest to be consumed, and what will be left in its wake among our stark realities of environmental degradation and ecological imbalance?

Nadège David's solo exhibition, ***We Ate The Forest***, borrows its title from the 1957 book *Nous avons mangé la forêt* (*We have eaten the forest*), which refers to the agricultural practices of Vietnam's indigenous M'Nong people and written by the late anthropologist Georges Condominas. David's new paintings, situated in our current era of the Anthropocene, thrust us into dense, saturated forests filled with myths and tales that unfold in a world populated with animals and vegetation pulsating with vitality and energy.

Drawing inspiration from the naturalist and philosopher Alexander Von Humboldt (1769–1859) who emphasized both scientific study and emotional connection with nature, David elevates nature beyond serving as a backdrop for human activity, making it the central character in the multiple and complex narratives that play out in her fantastical scenes.

In her new work, David's exploration transcends previous boundaries and delves into the significance of plants and other lifeforms with newfound intensity. This marks a notable departure from her earlier paintings, where

she explored the sensorial experience of the human body, reinterpreting flesh through the lens of perception rather than relying solely on her scientific understanding.

An installation of tree branches emerges from the void at the entrance of the gallery opening a gateway to a mysterious forest where verdant greens hover freely, evoking the imagery of a cotton candy forest. It is within this enchanted realm that David sets nature free in the world she seeks to create. Central to her practice is the exploration of the microcosm to comprehend the macrocosm. This transformative journey reshapes her forest landscapes and unveils the outlines of elusive creatures, some resembling the iridescence of an oil spill. Verdant hues deepen, tinged with a mossy slime-like quality, while whimsical images of misshapen primates, perhaps inhabitants of a distant future, evade conventional anatomical representation yet oddly seem completely ordinary.

In *The Persistent Fantasy of Substance*, the contorted form of a wounded creature dominates, its back in an eerie twist; fish heads sway from tree boughs seemingly poised for flight or ascension in *On the Need to Contain*; and a pig is carried by the forest foliage, almost protected in *I Will Crunch Your Head And Your Head*.

Within the surreal tableaux, the aftermath of curious events plays out in a post-Anthropocene microcosm of the impact of the biological, physical, economic, and political activities of our current world.

INSTALLATION VIEWS





WE ATE THE PORIES
CHUNG TÂN RỪNG

11-10-2010

© 2010





WE ATE THE FOREST CHÚNG TA ĂN RỪNG

May 25 - July 27, 2024

by Nadège David





UNION DE LA PIERRE ET DE LA RIVIÈRE



THE 3 ELEMENTAL FORMS (AIR, FIRE, WATER) AND THE 4TH (EARTH) - 1998



THE 3 ELEMENTAL FORMS (AIR, FIRE, WATER) AND THE 4TH (EARTH) - 1998



THE 3 ELEMENTAL FORMS (AIR, FIRE, WATER) AND THE 4TH (EARTH) - 1998



THE 3 ELEMENTAL FORMS (AIR, FIRE, WATER) AND THE 4TH (EARTH) - 1998



THE 3 ELEMENTAL FORMS (AIR, FIRE, WATER) AND THE 4TH (EARTH) - 1998



"AND GOD SAID TO THEM, 'BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY AND FILL THE EARTH AND SUBDUVE IT,' AND HAVE DOMINATION OVER THE FISH OF THE SEA AND OVER THE BIRDS OF THE HEAVENS AND OVER EVERY LIVING THING THAT MOVES ON THE EARTH" GENESIS 1:28

ORGANISER LE CHAOS



UNION DE LA PIERRE ET DE LA RIVIERE

ORGANISER LE CHAOS



"AND GOD SAID TO THE FISH OF THE SEA AND OVER THE BEASTS OF THE EARTH BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY AND
FILL THE EARTH AND SURVEIL THE EARTH"
OVER THE HEAVENS
MOSES ON THE MOUNT
GENESIS 1:28



LE JARDIN DE L'EDEN



LE JARDIN DE L'EDEN



LE JARDIN DE L'EDEN



LE JARDIN DE L'EDEN



















ARTWORKS



Bite the Bark

2024

found tree trunk, latex, silicon, hemp, fabric,
frog leg, crab claw, seeds, artist's hair, and eggshell
125 × 330 × 180 cm

Bite the Bark, the initial work encountered by visitors upon entering the exhibition, exudes a dual sense of benign allure and latent threat. Its long, tendril-like branches appear to reach out, either to envelop or impale the viewer as they cautiously step into the gallery space.

The central element of this work is a horizontally suspended dead tree discovered by the artist atop a mound of discarded waste in a landfill. Stripped of most of its bark and ravaged in places by human activity and termites or other insects, the wood assumes the appearance of a time-weathered skeleton, its inherent sense of mortality emphasized by its lateral orientation, as if solemnly laid (or in this case levitated) to rest.

Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that the branches host a number of strange, amorphous creatures. These beings, evolved from a combination of organic (the artist's hair, a crab claw, a frog leg) and synthetic (latex and silicon) materials, mirror the reality where almost no living organisms on the planet are free from the permeation of synthetic elements within their bodies.



WE ALL THE POWER
CHUNG TAI RING
1/2 1/2 1/2





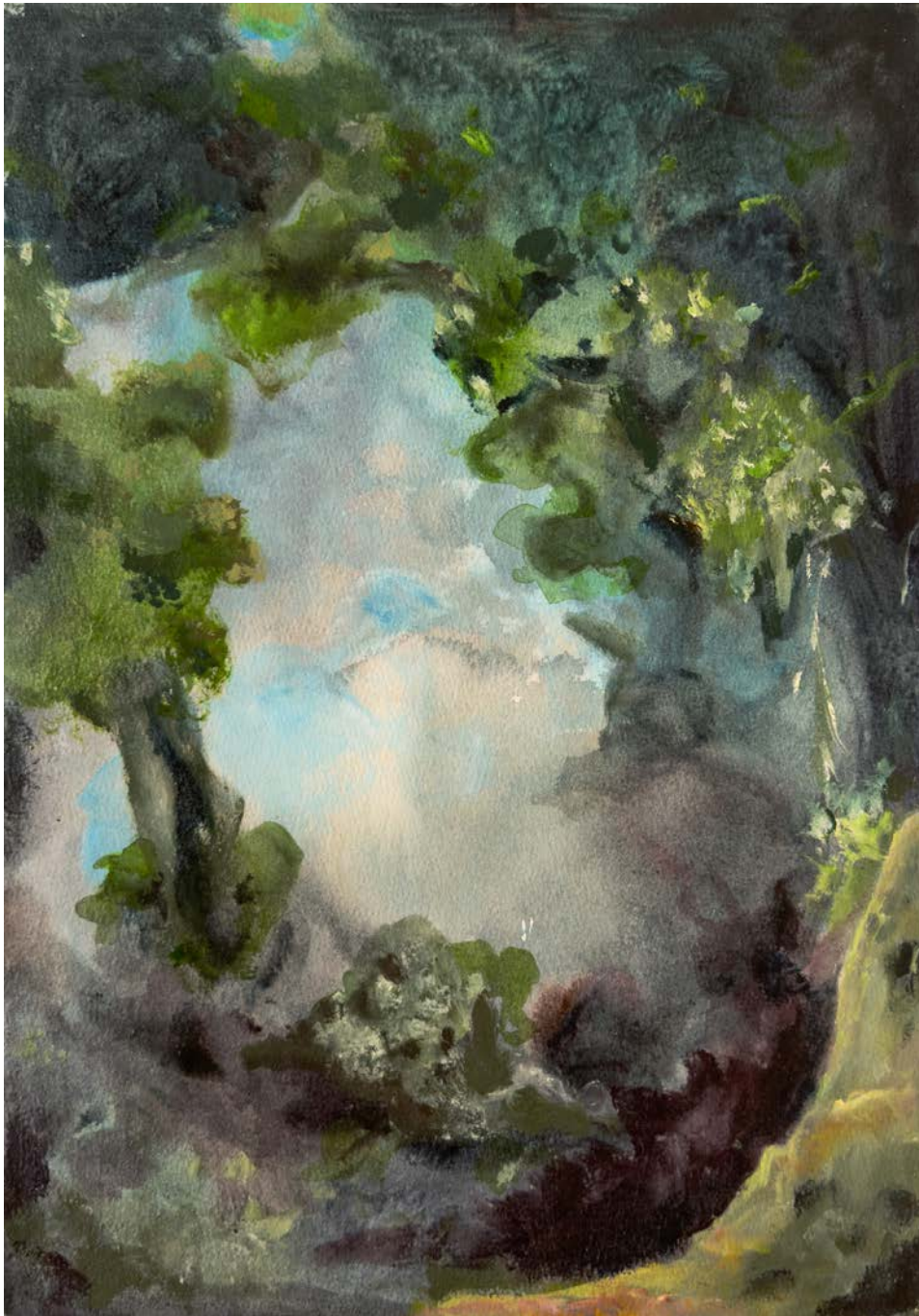
Anatomy of a Biography I & II

2024

acrylic and pastel on canvas

175 × 85 cm each

Flanking the tree are *Anatomy of a Biography I* and *II*. Painted in an arresting shade of pink and resembling mammalian creatures, these animals evoke totemic deities. Inspired by Michel Pastoureau's *Le Cochon: Histoire d'un cousin mal aimé* (*The Pig: A history of an unloved cousin*), these works underscore the pig's duality in human history as both a despised and revered creature. Despite being the most consumed animal worldwide, the pig's sacrificial significance often remains unacknowledged.



The Empty Place Of Power

2024

acrylic on paper

39 × 27 cm

In traditional portrayals from the Baroque and Rococo movements nature often served as a picturesque backdrop for human figures engaged in leisure and social rituals, exemplified in works like Fragonard's *The Swing*. However, Nadège David disrupts this narrative by entirely omitting human imagery, allowing nature to emerge as the central protagonist.

The Empty Place of Power draws from Claude Lefort's concept of democracy. Lefort proposed that democracy thrives without a fixed locus of power, where authority is diffused among the people rather than consolidated in a single entity. This title evokes a space free from traditional hierarchies or dominant figures, contemplating alternative societal structures where power is dispersed and collective.

The absence of human figures in David's work prompts reflection on humanity's relationship with the natural world. It encourages a reevaluation of power dynamics and societal norms, proposing a scenario where nature asserts its intrinsic power autonomously, independent of human influence.



The gallery on the mezzanine is akin to David's personal "analysis walls" in her studio. Reflecting her meticulous yet organic approach, the room is adorned with a tapestry of notes, images, and texts — arranged in a manner true to the artist's own research process. This immersive space merges academic inquiry with storytelling, blending myths, factual data, and anthropological research. Her works on paper focus on technical aspects, particularly her

experimentation with India ink, watercolor, and acrylic to explore their potential in rendering animal forms spontaneously and naturally. Spanning various mediums and reflecting her artistic practice from monochromatic graphite drawing to vibrant watercolor, this process embodies her belief that art transcends words alone, manifesting as vivid imagery that expresses her profound connection to the natural world.

Written text on wall mural

from left to right

- 1 Organiser le chaos
Translation: Organise the chaos
- 2 Union de la pierre et de la rivière
Translation: Union of the stone and river
- 3 And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have domination over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”
– Genesis 1:28
- 4 “Smile O voluptuous cool-breath’d earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees”
– Walt Whitman (1855)
- 5 Silent Spring, Rachel Carson
- 6 Should trees have standing?
- 7 “Quiconque aura, premier, la main embesongnee
A te couper, forest, d’une dure congee,
Qu’il puisse s’enfermer de son propre baston,
Et sente en l’estomac la faim d’Erisichton
Qui coupa de Ceres le chesne venerable

Et qui, gourmand de tout, de tout insatiable,
Les bœufs et les moutons de sa mère esgorgea,
Puis, pressé de la faim, soy-mesme se mangea”
– Ronsard (1550)

Translation:
“Whoever first lays hands on thee,
O forest, with a harsh axe to cut thee down,
May he impale himself on his own stick,
And feel in his stomach the hunger of Erysichthon,
Who felled Ceres’ venerable oak
And, gluttonous and insatiable for all,
Slaughtered his mother’s oxen and sheep,
Then, driven by hunger, devoured himself”
– Ronsard (1550)

- 8 “Only four days afterward, some Dayak saw another mias near the same place, and came to tell me. We found it to be a rather large one, very high up on a tall tree. At the second shot it fell, rolling over, but almost immediately got up again and began to climb. At a [third] shot it fell dead. This was also a full-grown female, and while preparing to carry it home, we found a young one face downward in the bog. This little creature was only about a foot long, and had evidently been hanging to its mother when she first fell.”
– Alfred Russel Wallace (Borneo, 1855)

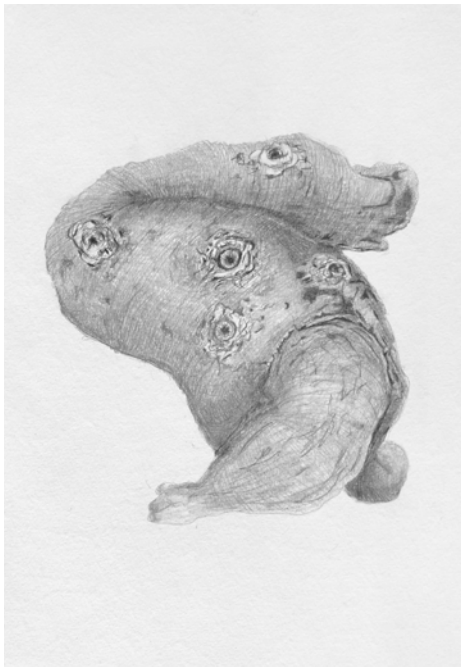


Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

39 × 27 cm each



Building on previous discoveries, the interpretation of the body and its parts is developed as amorphous forms. This series delves into the paradox of inside-out experiences, presenting body parts that are no longer identifiable yet appear strangely familiar. Traditional perceptions of anatomy are subverted, challenging the boundaries and fluidity of biological form.



Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

39 × 27 cm

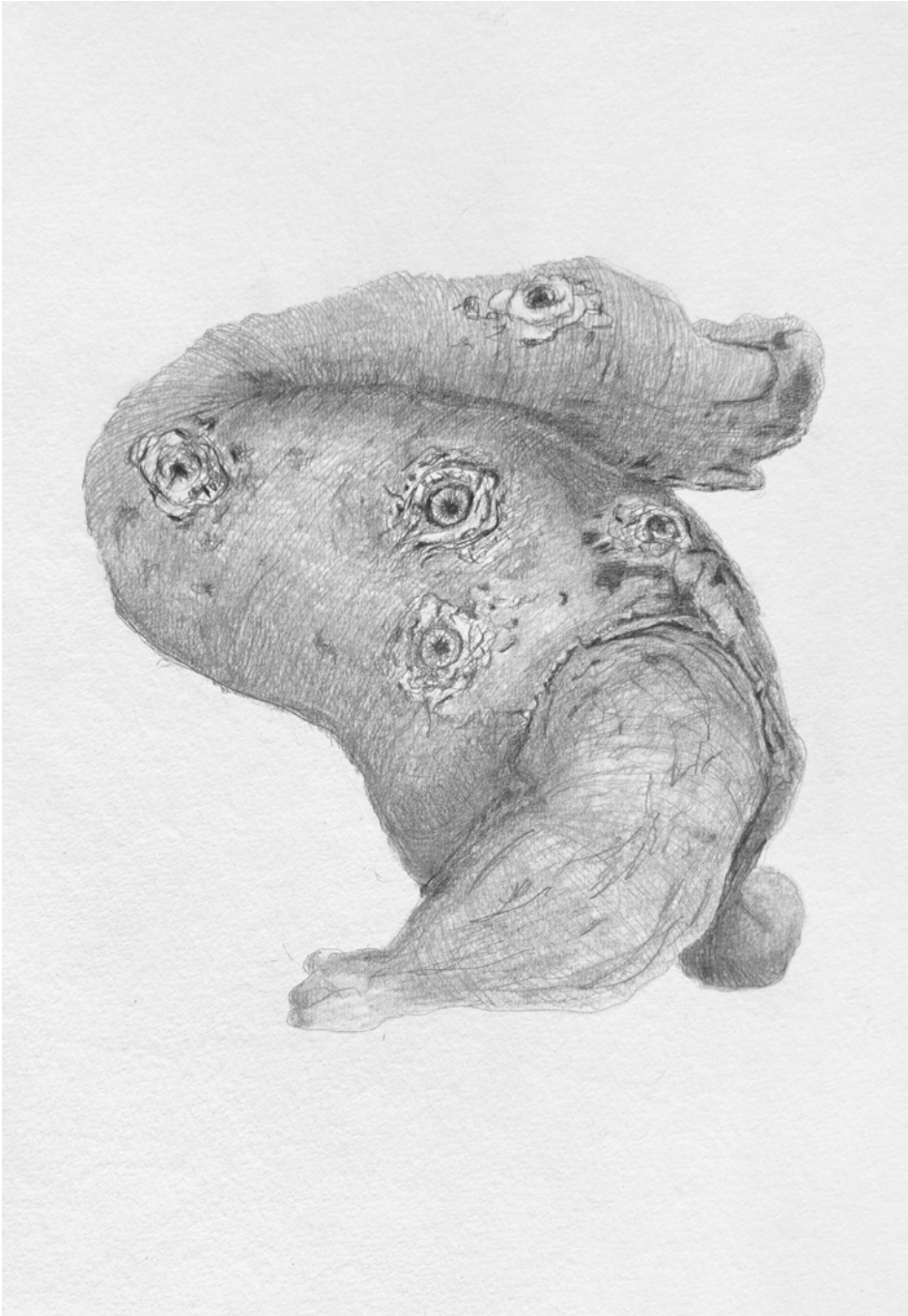


Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

39 × 27 cm



Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

39 × 27 cm



Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

39 × 27 cm



Untitled

2024

pencil and ink on paper

21 × 15 cm each

These two drawings were inspired by the New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness, released in April 2024. The declaration emphasizes the ethical implications of animal consciousness, acknowledging scientific evidence that suggests many animals, from vertebrates to invertebrates, are likely conscious and capable of subjective experiences.



Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

21 × 15 cm each

The flowers depicted here represent endangered medicinal plant species native to Vietnam.



Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm each

The black crested gibbon, an endangered species found in China, Laos, and northern Vietnam, faces a precarious existence with fewer than five subpopulations remaining. Known for inhabiting evergreen and semi-evergreen deciduous forests, these gibbons are a poignant symbol of the fragility of biodiversity.



Jenny: Dreadful and Painfully and Unpleasantly Human

2024

pencil on paper

21 × 15 cm

This drawing of a young orangutan pays homage to Jenny, the first orangutan exhibited at the London Zoo in 1837. Jenny captivated visitors, including Charles Darwin who was deeply influenced by his encounter with her. A subsequent orangutan, also named Jenny, continued to draw attention, notably from Queen Victoria who described her as “frightful and painfully and disagreeably human.”



“Simia Morio” – Menyille, Sarawak – 1855

2024

pencil on paper

21 × 15 cm

This drawing is based on an image of the preserved skin of an adult male *Simia Morio* from Alfred Russel Wallace’s meticulous collection of orangutans obtained during his expedition in Sarawak (1855). The skin was stuffed and shipped in a casket of arrack and remains folded as originally received at the National Museums Liverpool, World Museum.



Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

pencil on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

Chinese ink on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

watercolor on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm

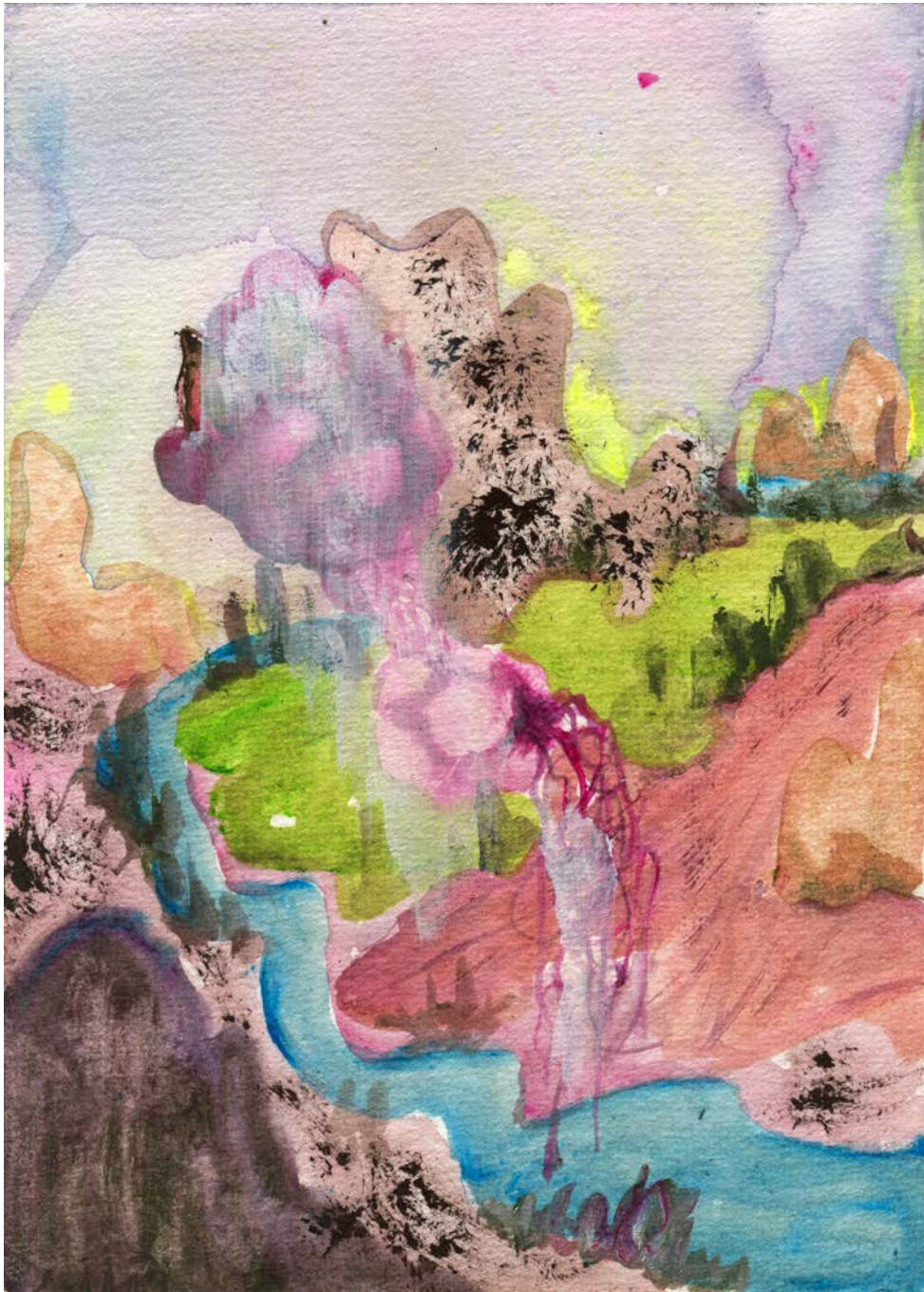


Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm

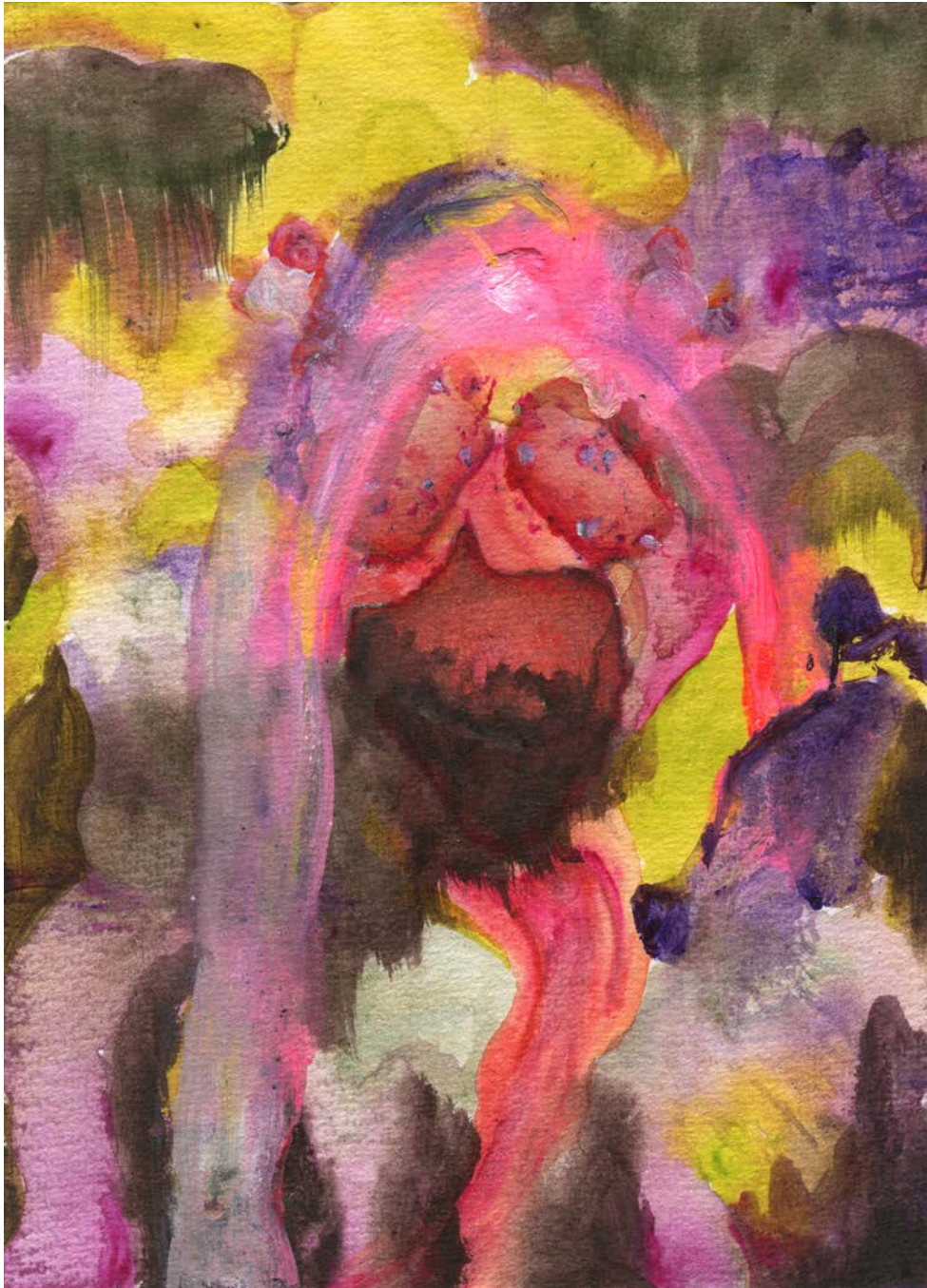


Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm



Untitled

2024

acrylic on paper

39 × 27 cm



Untitled

2023

acrylic on paper

2 panels, diameter 25 cm each





An Impeccable Mutuality

2024

acrylic and pastel on canvas, and wall mural

canvas dimensions: 60 × 30 cm

overall mural dimensions: 160 × 98 cm

Mutuality, defined as the behavior where two or more entities share the same emotions or actions towards each other, encapsulates the circular and interconnected dynamics among the actors in this installation. Each element in the mural plays a role for the others, creating a complex web of interactions.

The mural's gate-like appearance symbolizes a passage or transition into a world where nature and its elements are inextricably linked, emphasizing the continuous flow and exchange of energy and life. The wolves and deer, staples in the artist's pantheon, symbolize the themes of predation, the condition of being prey, and the inherent violence within the cycle of life.

The mural text, "IL EST IMPOSSIBLE DE SE PRETENDRE REALISTE SANS ÊTRE COSMIQUE" ("It is impossible to claim to be realistic without being cosmic"), suggests a broader, existential perspective, juxtaposing natural predation with human predation and highlights how humans, unlike other predators, often engage in concealed forms of exploitation, such as factory farming. This practice inflicts prolonged suffering, contrasting with the relatively quick deaths animals face in the wild. Additionally, human suffering is compounded by self-conscious reflection and moral considerations, a theme that ties back to previous works, including the diptych *Anatomy of a Biography* and the film *Cochon qui s'en dédit* (*The pig who goes back*) by Jean-Louis Le Tacon.





The Outrage of Callisto

2024

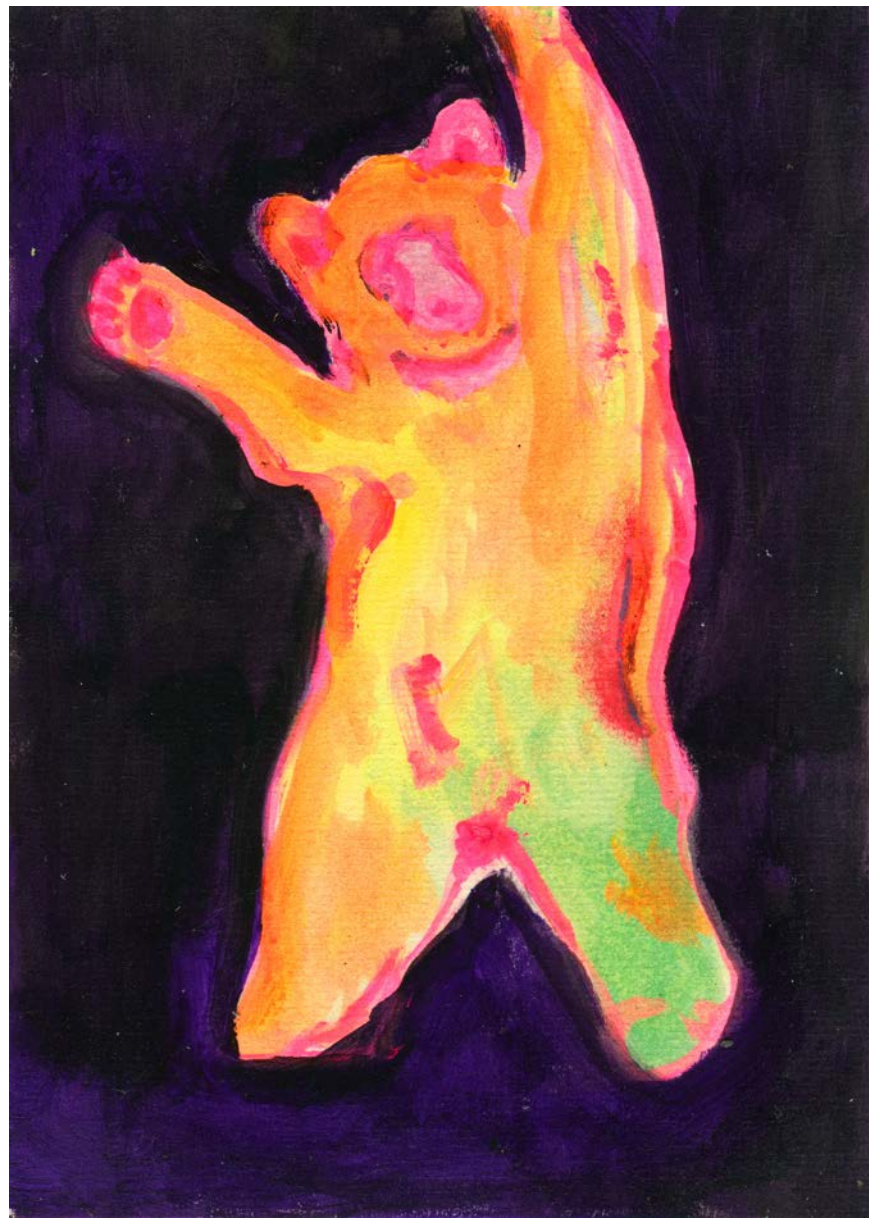
acrylic on paper

21 × 15 cm each

Drawing inspiration from Michel Pastoureau's *The Bear: Story of a Fallen King* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, this series of works on paper explores the enduring symbolism of bears in European culture. Central to the series is the myth of Callisto from Greek mythology: transformed into a bear by Hera after Zeus's seduction, she later encounters her son Arcas, a gifted hunter. As Arcas attempts to unwittingly kill his own mother, Zeus turns him into a bear and lifts them both into the sky, immortalizing them into constellations which we know today as Ursa Major and Minor. Beneath the playful depiction of bears, there lies a fraught tale of love, deception, violence and transformation, echoing through the ages in cultural narratives and mythological symbolism.



The Outrage of Callisto I
2024 | acrylic on paper | 21 × 15 cm



The Outrage of Callisto II
2024 | acrylic on paper | 21 × 15 cm



Against the backdrop of sober, dark blue walls reminiscent of historical institutions, the five paintings in this room suggest profound narratives and stories akin to expansive windows into a vibrant natural world populated with diverse living forms. Animals, flowers, trees, roots, and human-made objects like plastic bottles in *On the Need to Contain* or oil pump jacks in *The Persistent Fantasy of Substance* all merge together in these landscapes of growth, decay and renewal.

The Indolent Ignorance of Hermann challenges the ignorance of Hermann Staudinger, the German chemist who proved the existence of polymers. This reference may also allude to Staudinger's controversial support for weaponizing chemistry during World War II, aligning with Nazi Germany's policy of self-sufficiency and the addition of plastics and substitute materials to the chemical arsenal.



The Indolent Ignorance of Hermann

2024

acrylic and pastel on canvas

175 × 85 cm



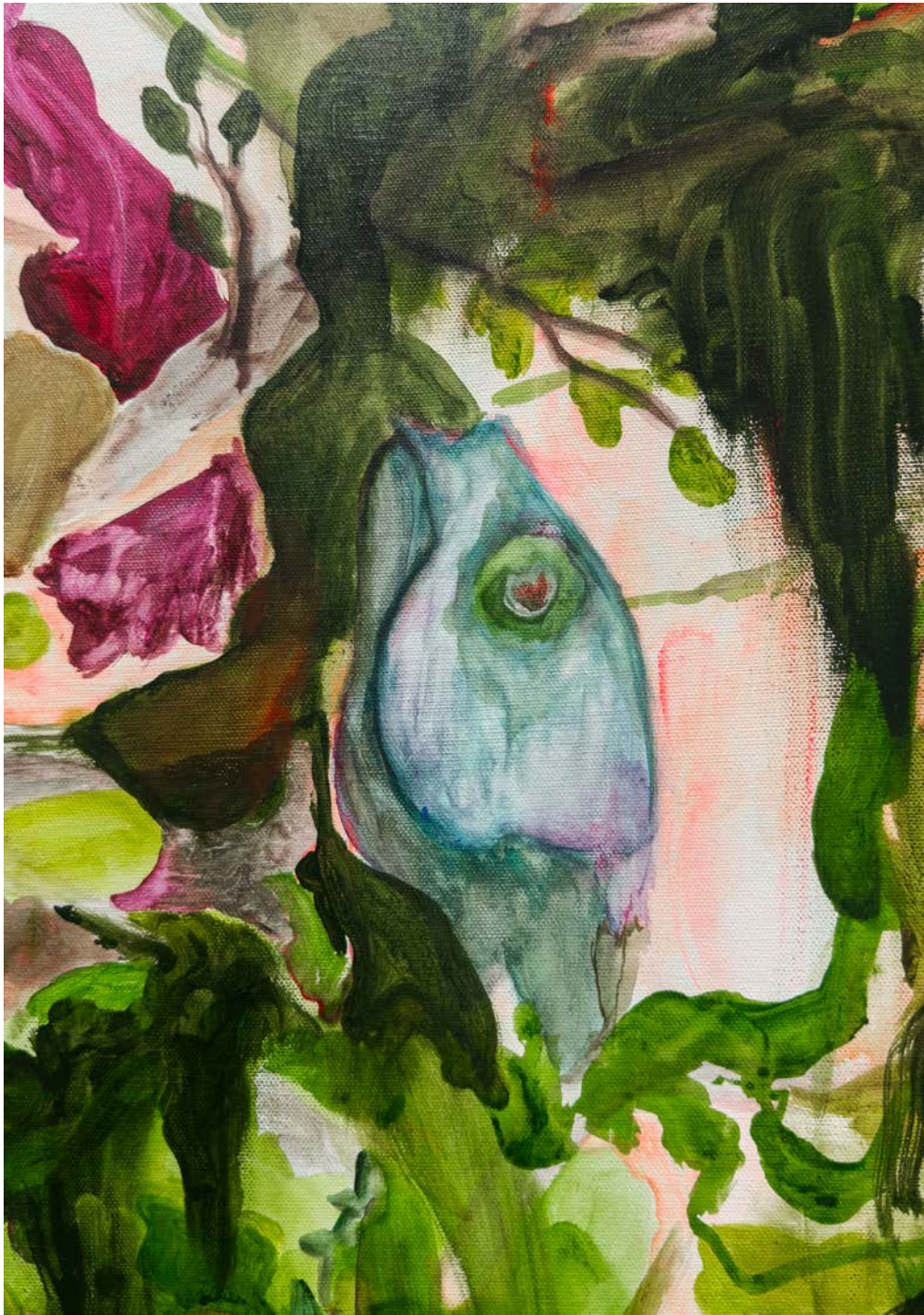


On the Need to Contain

2024

acrylic and pastel on canvas

175 × 85 cm



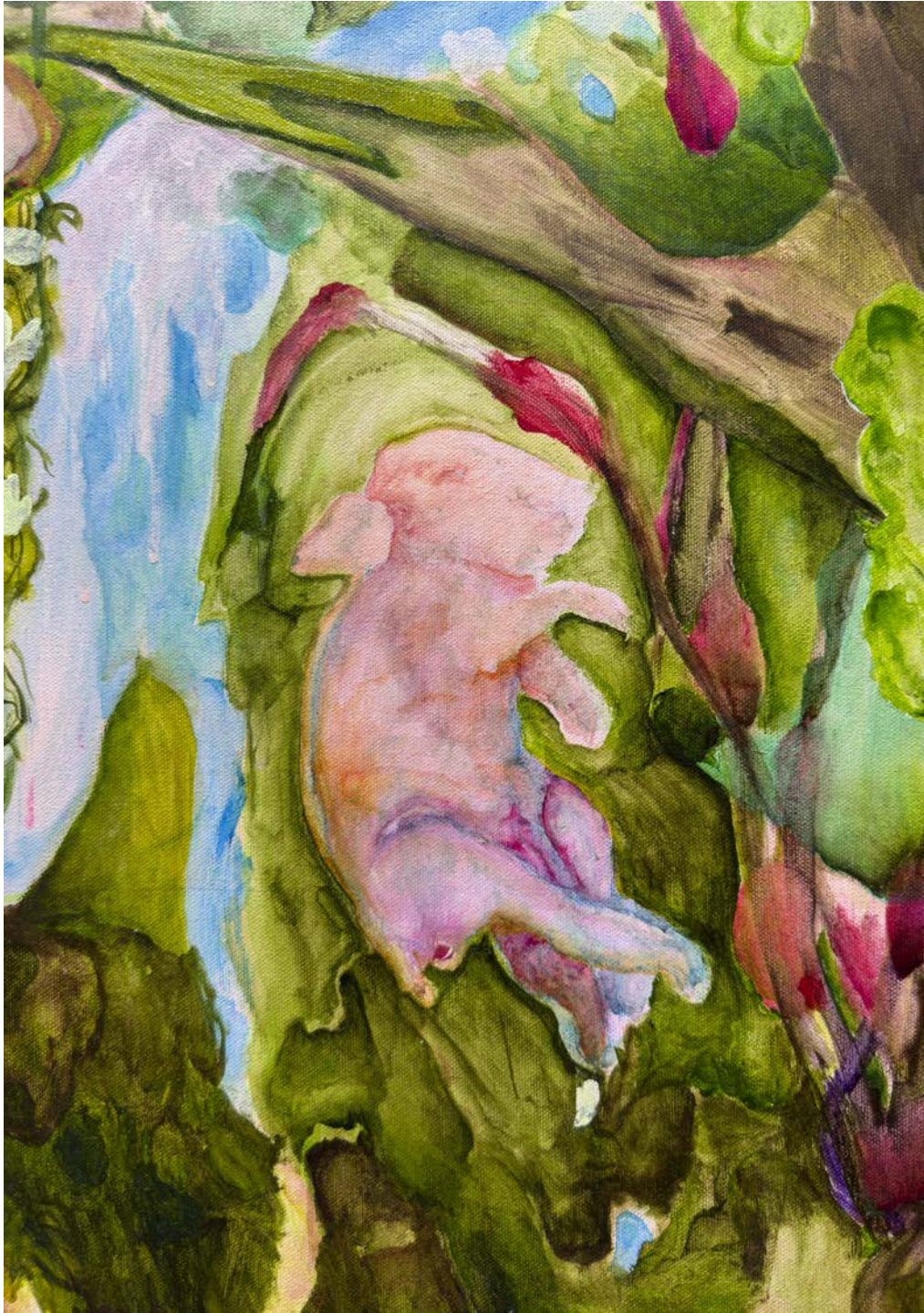


**I Will Chomp Your Head
And Your Head**

2024

acrylic and pastel on canvas

175 × 200 cm



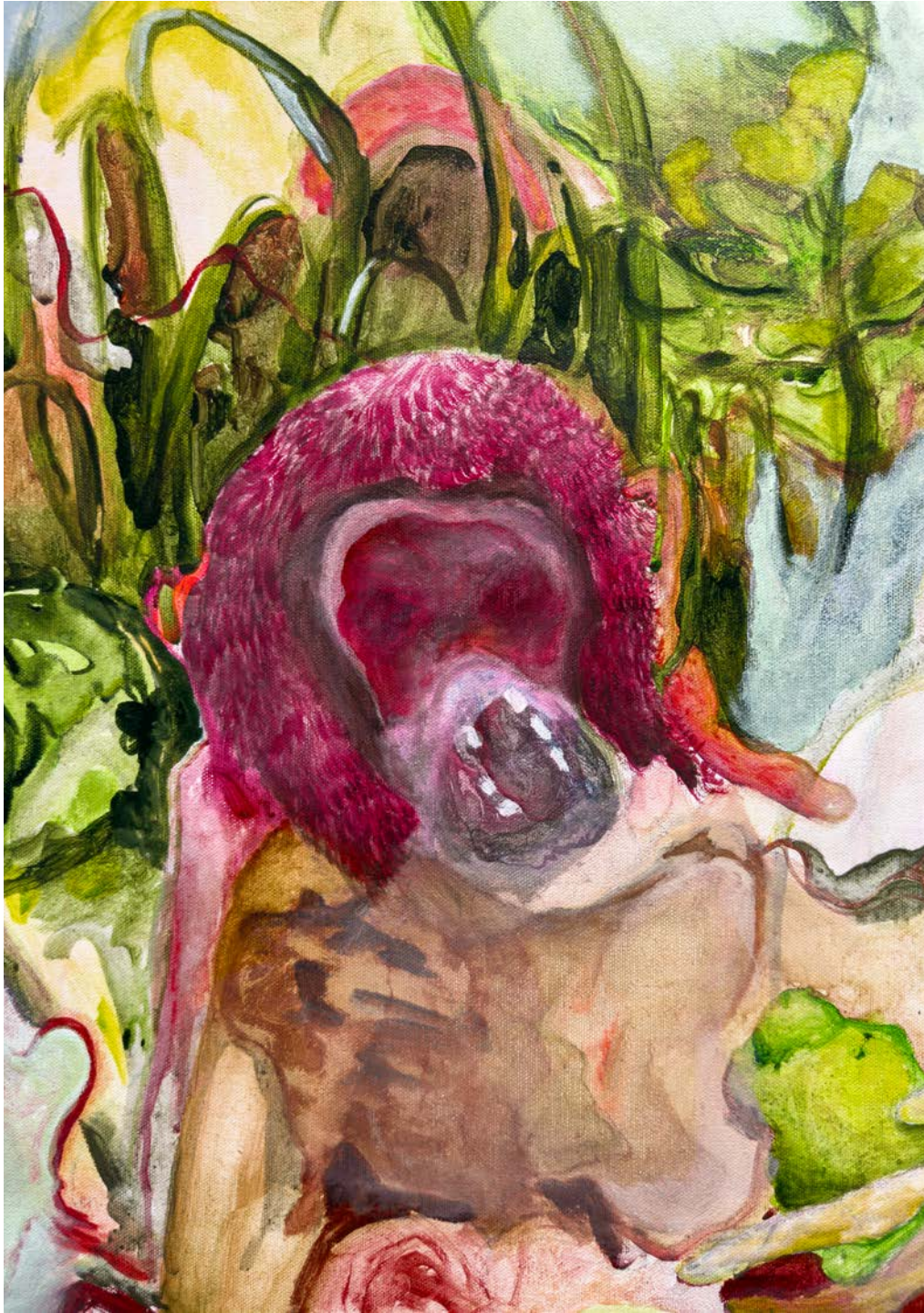


The End Of The Territory

2024

acrylic and pastel on canvas

175 × 200 cm



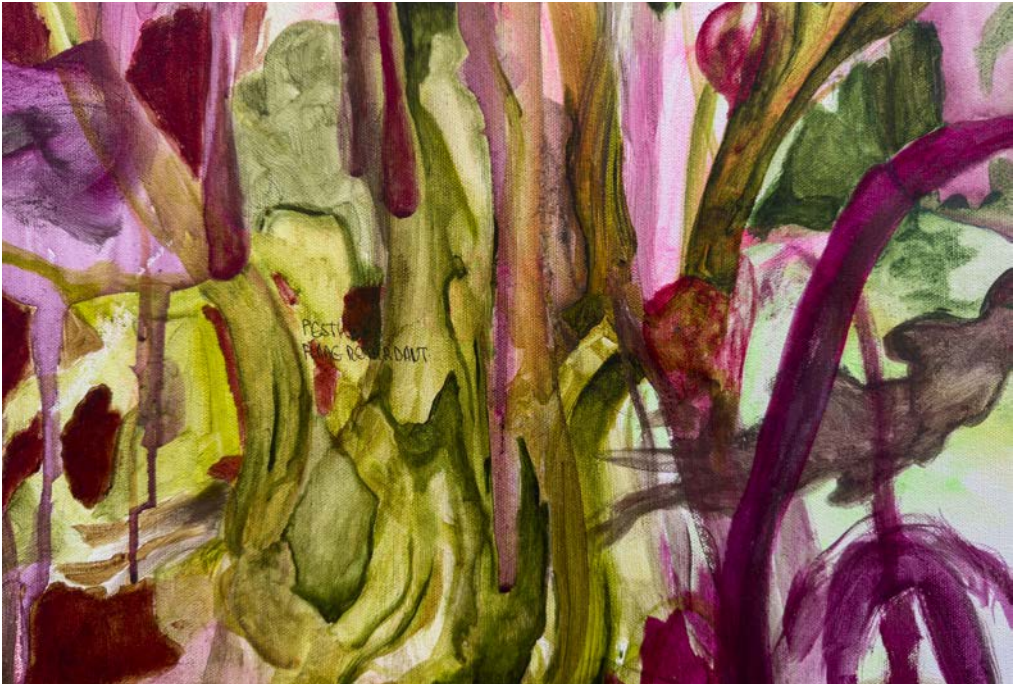


**The Persistent Fantasy
Of Substance**

2024

acrylic and pastel on canvas

175 × 225 cm



ABOUT NADÈGE DAVID

In Nadège David's work, anatomy, flesh, and nature merge in a complex configuration, erasing the hierarchies established by language and the senses, and unveiling stories of interconnected beings. Drawing from the scientific perspectives of ethology and naturalism, David's narratives play out in lush, luminous forests often populated with fantastical creatures and amorphous and hybrid life forms. The dynamic relationship between color and drawing underpins the ethos of her work. While maintaining a focus on the relationship between the individual, the body, and the world, David gradually shifts away from representing human forms in her new work, allowing for a powerful emergence of natural entities. Amid the vibrant dialogue of color and gestural figures, the environment becomes the main actor, creating its own inhabitants.

Born in 1975 in France, Nadège David received an MA in Political Philosophy at University La Sorbonne, Paris, France and an MA in Contemporary Political Philosophy, University Paris VIII, Paris, France. She was a lecturer in Sociology at Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée, France between 2001 and 2005. David's exhibitions include *Transposition*, Gallery Rhim22 × Galerie Quynh, Seoul, South Korea, *Experience sweet and relaxing dreams*, Mai's Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and *of reveries and obsessions*, *Soil-Less®*, *Carne Vale*, *Dept. of Speculation*, and *Nowhere* at Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

ABOUT NADÈGE DAVID

Born in 1975 in Poissy, France
Lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

EDUCATION AND RELATED EXPERIENCE

- 2003 MA in Political Philosophy, Sorbonne Université, Paris, France
- 2002 MA in Contemporary Political Philosophy, Université Paris VIII, Paris, France
Enrolled as a candidate in Doctor of Contemporary Political Philosophy, Université Paris VIII, Paris, France. Thesis subject: “Hannah Arendt: The Political Freedom to Face the Social Question.”
- 2001 – 2005 Lecturer in Sociology, Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée, France

SOLO AND DUO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *We Ate The Forest*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2015 *Carne Vale*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2014 *Soil-Less®*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2007 *Experience sweet and relaxing dreams*, Mai's Gallery, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *Transposition*, Gallery Rhim22 × Galerie Quynh, Seoul, South Korea
- 2023 *Neverwhere*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2022 *Dept. of Speculation*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Ainda não sabemos ao certo que florestas vamos atravessar, O Gabinete de Madame Thao, Lisbon, Portugal
- 2021 *familiar*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2018 *Alluvium*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2014 *Onward and Upward*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2012 *vis-à-vis*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Galerie Vue Privée, Singapore

- 2011 *Mise-en-Scène*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Esperantopolis, Consulat General De France, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- 2010 *of reveries and obsessions*, Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

REVIEWS

- 2023 Minh Du, “Trien lam Neverwhere – giao lo giua nghe thuat, khoa hoc va tam linh,” *ArtLive*, August 3, 2023
Hoang, Le, “Neverwhere: Coi mo cua tri tuong tuong,” *ELLE*, June 18, 2023
Minh, Ngo, “Hoi hoa: Neverwhere va su lien ket qua khu, hien tai, tuong lai,” *Bao Phu Nu*, June 16, 2023
- 2022 An Nguyen, Vuong, “Trien lam “Phong Đoan” – y niem vuot qua khoa hoc de tai cau truc lai khong-thoi,” *Navigator*, July 13, 2022
- 2021 “familiar exhibition at Galerie Quynh,” *Barcode*, March 12, 2021
- 2015 Rudzitsky, Zelda, “Esoteric And Reimagined Religious Rituals Lay The Ground For Carne Vale at Galerie Quynh,” *Saigoneer*, June 26, 2015
Hieu Thao, ““Tu biet thit” trong dong chay hoi hoa duong thoi,” *Tien Phong*, May 30, 2015
- 2014 Pham, Quyen, “Ho@s-Sol (Soil-Less®) của Nadège David – cai nhin triet ly tu goc do te bao hoc,” *soi.today*, May 22, 2014
Quang Thi, “Tim về A Dong,” *Tuoi Tre*, May 21, 2014
“Artist probes links between humans and animals,” *Vietnam News*, May 9, 2014
Lap Dong, “Thac si triet hoc Phap trien lam tranh muc Tau,” *Bao Phu Nu*, May 9, 2014

ABOUT GALERIE QUYNH

Recognized as Vietnam's leading contemporary art gallery, Galerie Quynh has been actively promoting contemporary art practice in the country for over two decades. The gallery maintains a consistent and focused program promoting emerging, mid-career and established artists in Vietnam and internationally.

Operating in a country that lacks a strong art ecosystem, the gallery is a hybrid space that serves its community through its public programs and support of art education. The gallery regularly collaborates with artists, curators, museums, and cultural organizations locally and overseas to organize talks and lectures as well as produce publications in English and Vietnamese.

In May 2014 the gallery founded the not-for-profit educational initiative Sao La directed by artists Tung Mai and Nguyen Kim To Lan. Sao La has since evolved into an independent artist collective spearheaded by To Lan and Dalat-based artist Nguyen Duc Dat.

The gallery was founded in the year 2000 by Quynh Pham and Robert Cianchi and opened its first dedicated exhibition space in 2003.



GALERIE QUYNH CONTEMPORARY ART

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