



Mad Dog, Oil on canvas, H 91 x 133cm (52X36 in)

Galerie Géraldine Banier is pleased to present

A WILD WEED

CEIRRA EVANS
Solo exhibition

12 October - 10 November 2023
Opening : 12 October at 18h30

Curator : Julia Cistiakova

In her oeuvres for *A Wild Weed*, Ceirra Evans, who was born and raised in Eastern Kentucky, in the Appalachian foothills, explores personal mythologies, local folklore, and realities of everyday life in her native surroundings. All these is visualised with humour in her paintings, that present a constellation of feelings, queerness, images, experiences, beliefs, concerns, and inspirations.

The body of works conceived for the show in Paris was inspired by illustrations in the book *Young America: A Folk-Art History*—a book illuminating the social history of America from the Revolution to World War I, recorded by self-taught artists. This book—that is catalog of the same name exhibition organized by the American Museum of Folk Art in New York in 1986—gives visual description of the 19th century American history. Through this inspiration, Ceirra Evans has created a series of paintings that explore the intersection of personal and cultural memory, as well as the role of storytelling in shaping our understanding of ourselves and our communities.

¹ John Harrod is traditional music performer born and raised in Shelby County, Kentucky.

Her paintings convey an intimate realism that is both raw and tender. She depicts the beauty in the ordinary. Especially, within this exhibition, she focuses on flora and fauna of Eastern Kentucky, and describes it as her personal relationship with nature. This connection serves as a visual metaphor for the artist's own journey of self-discovery and embracing her queerness within the context of her upbringing.

The inspiration behind one of the most important artworks in the show, *In the Garden of the Lord*, as well as *Don't Need No Clothes*, comes from the album "Living in the Promised Land" by John Harrod¹. Here she plays with the theme of the Garden of Eden. It provides a rich reference that engages viewers with layered meanings and symbols: by depicting two naked women swimming, she challenges societal norms and expectations of Christianity, and shedding light on the diverse and multifaceted experiences of individuals within the LGBTQ+ community. Evans focuses on how being raised in a particular environment influences one's understanding and expression of queerness adds another layer of complexity to the exploration.



In the Garden of the Lord, 2023 - Oil on canvas, H 124 x 119 cm (47 x 49 in)

Tomato Study, Oil on canvas, H 45 x 43 cm (17X18 in)



Hotter Than Hell, Oil on canvas, H 60 x 43 cm (16x24 in)



Handguns for Sale, Oil on canvas, H 45 x 45 (18x18 in)

Going deeper in her research of local rurality, we see a strong influence of Thomas Hart Benton², the American Regionalist artist, in the *Mad Dog* and *Gotta Bite*. The *Mad Dog* provides a window into a country-road of Eastern Kentucky. The curved lines of the car and aggressive dog with brilliantly white teeth, bright-green trees that look like grapes, as well as almost surreal elements of composition in general evoke a dream-like quality, as if it's a snapshot into another world.

Gotta Bite captures the essence of a fishing trip, highlighting the humorous and sometimes frustrating experiences that come with being in nature. By depicting the protagonist catching a stick instead of a fish, the artist infuses the artwork with a sense of playfulness and irony, poking fun at the unpredictability of the natural world. The artwork also serves as a reflection on the self, as the artist draws on personal experiences of fishing this summer and reconnecting with nature. It highlights the importance of taking time to appreciate the simple pleasures of life, such as spending time in nature, and the value of finding humour and joy in unexpected moments. It's a reminder to approach the world with a sense of playfulness and curiosity, and to embrace the imperfections and unpredictability of nature.



Casper and Cash, Oil on canvas, H 71 x 58 cm (23x28 in)



Don't Need No Clothes, 2023- Oil on canvas, H 99 x 73 cm (29x39 in)

Continuing her dialogue with nature, *Smoke Follows Beauty* presents a humorous look on the experience of sitting around a bonfire in a rural setting. The title is the phrase «*Beauty attracts attention*» instead suggesting that smoke is attracted to beauty. The artwork captures the discomfort of sitting in smoke, a common occurrence around bonfires. Here again, as in *Gotta Bite*, Ceirra infuses the artwork with a sense of irony, playing on the juxtaposition between the beauty of nature and the uncomfortable experiences that come with it. It's a lighthearted take on the imperfections and unpredictability of nature, encouraging viewers to find humour in unexpected situations. Through *Smoke Follows Beauty*, the artist also acknowledges the importance of bonfires and fire smoke in rural community. It celebrates the simple pleasure of gathering around a fire with friends and family, despite the discomfort of sitting in smoke.

The theme of smoke is quite present in Ceirra Evan's oeuvres. The artist's use of smoke is significant in highlighting the relationship between nature and industry, juxtapositioning the natural world with the man-made element of smoke. Thus, *Eula's Quilt* depicts a baby with a cigarette in the mouth. The inclusion of the smoking baby, a recurring theme in the artist's shows, adds a playful element to the painting and serves as a reminder of the artist's early beginnings. And at the same time this artwork plays homage to family traditions and generational art. *Eula's Quilt* features a picture of the artist herself with a cigarette in her mouth and her grandmother's quilt, which she has in her studio. The quilt represents a craft that has been passed down through generations in Eastern Kentucky, reflecting a tradition that the artist holds dear. The painting also refers to the essence of family connections and the importance of preserving traditions. It highlights the cultural significance of the quilt-making tradition and the pride that the artist feels in carrying on her family's heritage. *Eula's Quilt* is deeply rooted in Ceirra's personal history and cultural background.

² American muralist and painter Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) was an influential Regionalist painter who avidly rejected abstraction and Modernism, and was eventually championed by populist right wing politics. The works for which he is best known focus on rural life in America, and the industrial laborer, who was depicted as the cultural backbone of the country and of Regionalism. The Regionalist movement and Benton's career garnered its greatest popularity during the Great Depression, as it projected a reassuring image of America's heartland which viewers were drawn to as a means to cope during the national crisis. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/artists/thomas-hart-benton>



Gotta Bite, Oil on canva, H 101 x 91 cm (36X40 in)



Eula's Quilt, 2023 - Oil on canvas, H 101 x 91 cm (36 x 40 in)

Evans' works capture not only the richness of the culture and landscape of her home region, but also the struggles of its people. Floods are a well known fact for the residents of Kentucky. They have been ravaging settlers in the Ohio River valley since they arrived. In response to climate crisis happening in Kentucky, Evans created new works of art, such as *Hotter than Hell*, that depicts an older woman full of sorrow. During a challenging time, the album of Grace Rogers "Cowpocalypse", a friend of the artist, has helped her to create. Evans' ability to draw inspiration from the music and channel it into her artwork showcases the deep connection between music and art and how it can be used to express emotions and experiences.

In her paintings, Evans draws from a wide range of visual and narrative traditions, including American folk art, traditional music, quilting crafts. She blends these elements together with in a rich tapestry of color, pattern, and symbolism, evoking a sense of both the historical and the contemporary. Evans' use of bright colors, and flat planes of paint creates a sense of vibrancy and energy in her work.

At the same time, Evans' works also have a deeply personal resonance. Many of her paintings feature figures drawn from her own life experience. These people are depicted with a sense of intimacy and respect, as well as an awareness of the struggles and challenges they face as residents of an economically and politically disadvantaged region. All in all, the works in this show demonstrate Ceirra Evans' skill as both an artist and a storyteller. They offer a compelling vision of Appalachia as a place of complex and multifaceted beauty, and a testament to the enduring power of memory and imagination. Through her art, she seeks to break down stereotypes of people from her region and reveal the complexity and diversity of those who call the Appalachian mountains home.

Julia Cistiakova
Exhibition curator



Smoke Follows Beauty, 2023 - Oil on canvas, H 86 x 149 cm (59 x 34 in)

about CEIRRA EVANS

Ceirra Evans
(b. 1999, lives and works in Louisville, Kentucky, USA)

Born and raised in Eastern Kentucky, Evans' body of work depicts scenes directly from her early life in the foothills of the Appalachian region. Her work tells stories of generational poverty, queerness, familial relationships and addiction. Ceirra's work uses humor and illustration to sift through the discourse critiquing the region.

Ceirra's work has been reviewed by Hyperallergic, The New Yorker and other publications. Her work is exhibited in 21c Museums in Louisville, Kentucky and Bentonville, Arkansas and in September 2023 will be exhibited in a solo show at Virginia Tech's Perspective Gallery, Blacksburg, VA, USA. Her work is held in multiple private collections in the United States and UK. Ceirra has a degree in Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies from Spalding University, Louisville, KY.



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More information >>>>

<http://geraldinebanier.fr/ceirraevans.html>



Thomas, Oil on canvas H 99 x 86cm (34x39 in)