

# Monica Serra

## *The Forest for the Trees*

**October 19 - December 9, 2023**

Alexander DiJulio is pleased to present *The Forest for the Trees*, a solo exhibition by Monica Serra. Featuring oil paintings on canvas and a selection of works on paper, Serra delves into the abstract landscape. Serra's career as an artist has spanned several decades in New York with a prominent focus on portraying herself as a curious traveller who enters scenes and places unfamiliar to her as a way to process love, loss and history.

The exhibition's title stems from a renaissance period proverb from John Heywood originally published in 1546. The author proposes: "from him who sees no wood for trees/ And yet is busy as the bees/ From him that's settled on his lees/ And speaketh not without his fees". Having been later updated to the phrase we are now more familiar with "cannot see the forest for the trees", it refers to one's inability to see the bigger picture. The phrase here suggests that the artist herself may struggle to find her place in the world. A long time series called "Stepping In" inserts the figure of the artist herself into the studios of bygone artists and the intimate spaces of past lovers. The recent paintings in this show occasionally find her "stepping in" to another mysterious entity—the natural world. Alongside shadowy, windswept treescapes, cages and the silhouettes of birds and horses, she becomes one of the domesticated or perhaps one part of the untamable wild.

Serra handles her paint with a gentle hand, utilizing loose and sweeping gestures reminiscent of painters such as Karen Kilimnik and Ann Craven. Another—and perhaps more direct influence—came from mentor and friend Tom Wesselmann, for whom Serra was a muse and confidant. In an interview with Huffa Frobes-Cross for the Wesselman catalog raisonne, she describes herself as feeling "showcased somehow" and "a little uncomfortable" upon first seeing her image portrayed in a gallery exhibition. She continued to model and studio assist for him for over a decade, ultimately finding a dynamic in which she became as much a part of the creation of the work as the artist did. Much of Serra's ensuing pictures seem to mine these feelings of being a muse and the psychology of oneself becoming a part of another person's environment.

In *The Forest for the Trees*, she begins to find herself in her artworks not just directly but in a more abstract sense as well. Using stand-in's for herself in these new works has felt radical for the artist as more nuanced and metaphorical scenes emerge: empty birdcages, horses and flocks of birds. These motifs allow Serra to present herself as a different type of muse, one more archaic and eternal, the wildness of the woods.



**scan for checklist**



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