

SECRIST | BEACH

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NATURA NON CONSTRISTATUR

September 19 – November 15, 2025

Opening reception: Friday, September 19, 5-8PM

Artists: Whitney Bedford, Jeff Carter, Mitchell Charbonneau, Assaf Evron, Rick Leong, Morgan Mandalay, Kiki Smith, William Staples, Ena Swansea and Amy Vogel.

(Chicago) SECRIST | BEACH is pleased to present the salon invitational exhibition **Natura Non Constristatur**. *Natura Non Constristatur* brings together a group of artists that formally and conceptually explore the cultural potency of nature - specifically trees and forests - in relation to humanity. The exhibition includes an intergenerational roster of artists and was curated with the assistance of gallery artist Jacqueline Surdell. *Natura Non Constristatur* is presented concurrently with Surdell's solo exhibition *The Conversion: Rings, Rupture, and the Forest Archive* as well as a site specific installation, titled *Lumen Reliquary*, created by Andee Hess of Osmose Design. These exhibitions will be on view from September 19 through November 15, 2025 at 1801 W. Hubbard St. An opening reception will take place on Friday, September 19 from 5 to 8PM.

Natura Non Constristatur is a Latin phrase meaning "Nature Is Not Saddened." It expresses the idea that the natural world is indifferent to human suffering and misfortune. This phrase is often associated with a philosophical outlook that emphasizes the insignificance of human affairs in the grand scheme of the universe. It invites reflection on whether nature truly coexists with us - or merely endures us. As such, the relationship between humans and nature is complex and, as some would hope, deeply interconnected. We like to imagine a symbiotic bond - one of mutual support and harmony. But in this Age of Anthropocene, reality teaches us otherwise.

The artists in *Natura Non Constristatur* employ a range of approaches and materials within this dynamic that explores the profundity of our relationship to forests. Throughout recorded human existence, these woodland areas have projected a wide range of cultural and emotional feelings stirring awe and reverence while conjuring everything from mystery and divinity, to fear and comfort. Alongside these compulsions, one might also see elements akin to the spiritual realm, organized or otherwise. This intersection of nature and spirituality compounded by the notion of nature's lack of empathy creates a curious predicament ripe for exploring.

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Whitney Bedford's series of *vedute* paintings combine architectural suggestions and atmospheric paint handling to combine art historically important innovations (here, Vincent van Gogh and Édouard Vuillard) of landscapes that contextualize the sublime with a contemporary rumination on our Age of the Anthropocene.

As a temporal element, **Jeff Carter's** tree sculpture is modeled after a low-resolution topographical scan of a landscape that rotates one singular time within a year, similarly to how tree rings tell the age of a tree when cut down. This mechanical intervention, with motion almost imperceptible to the visitor, offers a critical evaluation of the current climate crisis. As humanity has evolved, so too has the earth's destruction, and so too has empathy for its existence.

Mitchell Charbonneau and **Assaf Evron** each offer unexpected angles exploring the relationship between culture and nature. Evron's scaled re-photographing of one half of a vintage stereoscopic image of a tree splintered from a cannon in World War I offers a visceral reaction to an almost unintelligible image. His work more generally probes across two and three dimensionality in ways that ruminate on ideas of, or constructions of, place, community, belief systems, and culture. Taking the form of ubiquitous tree-shaped car fresheners, Charbonneau reproduces this familiar everyday object as a conceptually heavy cast bronze objet. These "Little Trees", contextualized within the larger scheme of the exhibition, take on an outsized role questioning ideas around utility, nostalgia, aura and the commercial manipulation of natural materials.

Rick Leong's paintings adopt a classical Chinese style with graphic, flowing renderings of vegetation among mythical creatures and plant hybrids. Leong's tonal, fantastical paintings offer an ideal symbiosis, one where the natural world flourishes and humans are welcome.

Morgan Mandalay paints dynamic and volatile scenes of storms, volcanic eruptions, and rain mediated by gradients of color, blooming flowers, and welcoming interiors. The compositions in his paintings oscillate between chaos and serenity, sometimes both at once, where stories of fear, growth, and transformation emerge through cataclysmic environments.

Kiki Smith, through diverse materials throughout her career, has put forth a salient connectedness between the brain, body, animal, cosmos, personhood and human-ness. Alongside the paintings, drawings, photography, and sculpture on view in this exhibition, Smith's oeuvre perhaps best encapsulates the provocative suggestion at the core of the latin phrase: that nature may not care about us, but we care about it, and in many ways, cannot imagine ourselves without it.

William Staples similarly draws on landscape imagery, painting scenes with a reductive or sentimentally codified manner, where memories fuse with the legacies of imagery. In his work, the richness or opacity of colors, the looseness or directionality of lines, and the constriction or seemingly infinite depth of space, all allow the imagination to construct a new world from these clues.

Ena Swansea's forests are painted on a shimmering graphite-infused ground evoking a keen sense of ephemerality. Catching light as the viewer moves, the paintings respond to the eye's gaze, the natural world offering healing.

Amy Vogel has taken erasure unto her drawings of idyllic landscapes, with curious figures frolicking, oblivious, in clearings surrounded by towering trees. With her almost contradictory interventions, Vogel recalibrates the human perception of nature as a duality of beautiful and strange, durable and frail, temporal and atemporal.

For additional information on the exhibition, please visit secrestbeach.com
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