

## Review: From Los Outsiders, a group show brings natural relief from crisis fatigue

At Grayduck Gallery, "Capirotada: Of a Personal Nature" offers a visual sanctuary



Rachel Comminos, "Untitled," 2020. Courtesy grayDUCK Gallery.

By Lauren Moya Ford - October 15, 2020

I was staying at my in-laws' house in northwestern Spain in March when the coronavirus hit. All of Spain went into lockdown. The Civil Guard was deployed to stop, fine, and even jail anyone who left their home without official authorization. Though many bristled against the heavy restrictions, I'd just gotten out of the hospital, so I wasn't going anywhere.

Luckily, it was spring, and luckily, my in-laws have a beautiful backyard. On the days when I felt weak, I spent hours at my window, watching the garden gradually gain back its color. And on the days when I was well, I sat outside among the sprouting leaves and flowers. As the weeks passed, I watched the camellias, azaleas, and rhododendrons come and go, and marveled at how well nature went on blooming and growing while we humans stayed completely stopped. I was stuck, sick, and far from home. Nature was my refuge.

I felt that I was back in the garden as I walked through "Capirotada: Of a Personal Nature," a group exhibition at Grayduck Gallery that is filled with vibrant images of plant life and organic forms. The show is organized by Los Outsiders, an Austin curatorial collective of artists Jaime Salvador Castillo, Michael Anthony García, Robert Jackson Harrington and Hector Hernandez.

"The natural world has a healing effect," Los Outsiders told me in a recent email, and they've found a way to bring that therapeutic force into the gallery. In this soothing show, works by Rachel Comminos, Julie DeVries, Soomin Jung, Paloma Mayorga, and Ryan Runcie offer a sort of visual sanctuary, reminding us that there's still life beyond confinement.

Sometimes healing takes place when we're in a state of awe, and Jung's densely detailed, hyper realistic drawings of flowers certainly stunned me. Her jewel-like colors are so vivid that I initially thought that the works were lit from behind. Instead, she uses brightly-hued color pencils on drawing film, a semi-transparent paper that lends a unique luminosity to the drawings.

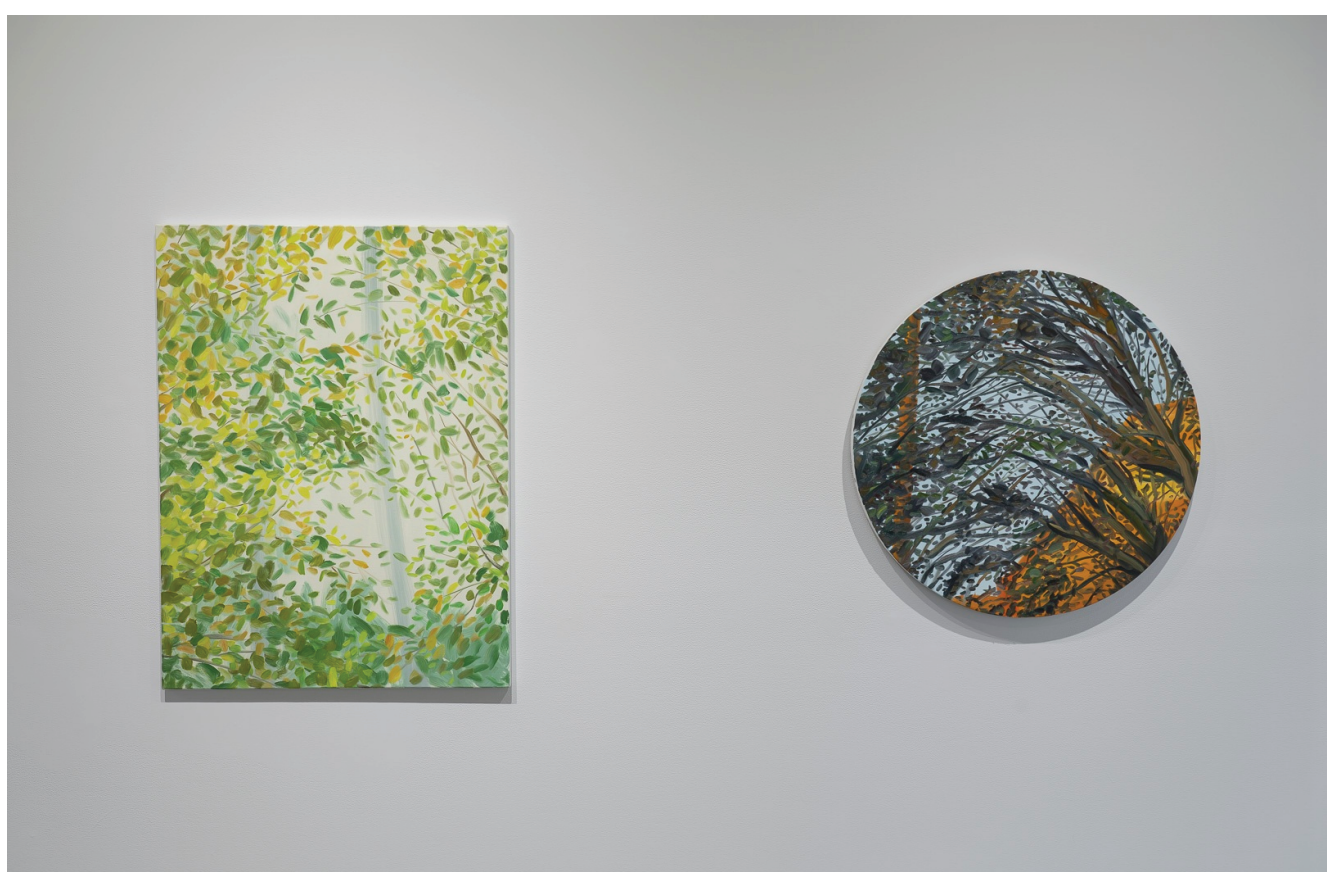
Pulling from scores of photographic references, Jung's crowded compositions imbue her lotus blooms, peonies, and cherry blossoms — subjects already rich in symbolic and cultural significance — with something entrancingly unnameable. "I wanted to deliver the ideal imagery of these meaningful flowers, somehow artificial, somehow surreal and overly beautiful, to the viewers," the artist said via email. Overly beautiful or not, Jung's works invite the eye to linger and lose itself, like the most wonderful gardens do.



Installation view of Soomin Jung "Reborn," 2019, colored pencil on drafting film, 18 x 24 inches. Courtesy Grayduck Gallery

The eye can also easily lose itself in Comminos's surprising, multisensory textiles. Experienced up close, Comminos's squishy surfaces and gumball colors delightfully disconcert my sense of sight, touch, and even taste. The artist works primarily in tufting, an industrial technique used to create rugs and tapestries. In a recent email, Comminos described her tools as "a cross between a sewing machine and a hand ... drill."

That mix of precision and power comes through in the textiles' pulsating, peeling lines and shapes, which border on slight psychedelia without feeling retro or haphazard. The works are inspired by the artist's abstract drawings, but they gain much by entering three dimensions: Comminos collects yarns from around the world, and they offer an impressive range of tones and textures.



Installation view of Julie DeVries, "Leaves For You" (left) and "Leaves at Sunset" (right). Courtesy Grayduck Gallery.

Devries's paintings are a breath of fresh air. The artist fills her breezy canvases with joyfully-dabbed, sun-dappled leaves that, though they dance for our pleasure, also impishly obscure the view. Devries's leaves might hide these places on purpose, but they quickly start to look familiar, or at least like places we'd like to be.



Installation view of three by Paloma Mayorga: "Suelta (Loose) 90," "Poderosa (Powerful) 2" and "Un tesito (A bit of tea)," all digital chromogenic print on Fuji Crystal archive paper. Courtesy Grayduck Gallery

Mayorga presents a floating world of nature and body. Using a high resolution scanner, Mayorga captures fingers, flowers, and faces melding and mingling across the slow-moving, photographic machine. Ironically, the process yields a pretty painterly print. As Los Outsiders say, this work infuses "a layer of technological intervention into introspection."

Finally, Runcie's luminous, large-scale canvases show another blend of body and botanicals. In Runcie's world, carefully-rendered roses and sunflowers float around a nude male figure who gazes thoughtfully into the distance. It's refreshing to see these delicate and dreamy pictures populated by a man since women are the ones who are so often associated with nudity and nature.

"In a global pandemic, artists retreat into their practice not as an escape but (as) a strategy to process thoughts and emotions," Los Outsiders told me. Here the artist seems to be searching for something inside of himself, and he doesn't mind us watching.

Experts say that being in nature during times of stress is therapeutic, but "Capirotada" suggests that looking at nature is, too. We could all use a nature break, whether it's through a window, in a backyard, or painted on canvas.

"Capirotada: Of a Personal Nature" is on view at Grayduck Gallery through Nov. 1.