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SARAH ESME HARRISON

3 FEBRUARY–5 MARCH, 2022

PUBLIC OPENING RECEPTION 3 FEBRUARY, 6–10 PM

SAINT GEORGE STREET  
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SAINT GEORGE STREET is pleased to present the UK-debut solo exhibition of NYC-based artist SARAH ESME HARRISON. This self-titled exhibition incorporates six new paintings made by the artist throughout 2021 in both the rural landscapes of Long Island, NY and in her Brooklyn, NY studio.

The paintings included in this exhibition, as with much of Harrison’s recent work, are created in two successive stages. To begin the image-making process, Harrison employs the pre-modern tradition of Plein air painting by taking her materials and tools to the rural areas of Long Island, NY; a coastal region of New York state that extends directly east of the island of Manhattan.

During this initial phase, Harrison views her engagement with Plein air painting as less of a documentative approach and more an act of visual sampling that is inherently abstracted while physically applying paint to the surface. Harrison views the acts of observation and mark-making as necessary steps to create a final image that transcends simple representation, powered by filtering one’s gaze through individual perception. Drawing visual cues from such artists as Chaïm Soutine, Lois Dodd, Édouard Manet, and Paul Thek, the Plein air aspect of Harrison’s paintings speak to a timeless human affection for nature, along with the psychological and emotional landscapes that shape one’s experience of the world.

Once the first work mode is complete, Harrison returns her partially realized paintings to her urban studio to add the imagined second plane of images. Harrison refers to this surface imagery as ‘Gates’, which (in terms of private property) serve the dual purpose of inviting the wanted in and keeping the unwanted out. Similarly, Harrison’s embellished gates invite the viewer to look into her paintings while both framing the depicted natural world behind them and separating the viewer from full envelopment. The twisted, coloured, acutely detailed, and often organic-looking motifs that make up these gates include widely diverse historical references to such luminaries as Leonora Carrington, Paul Laffoley, Ashley Bickerton, and decorative details emblematic of the middle-ages.

Walking an ever-fine line between surrealist fantasy and representation, Harrison’s layered gates guide the pace and direction of the viewer’s eye around the painting’s surface, often continuing on into new physical dimensions on the sides of the paintings as well. Harrison pushes the viewing experience further by painting on angular, non-standard sized supports to both emphasize her paintings as objects and to, as she describes, “Give a body to the painting”.

Tactile, poetic, dynamic, colourful, and quietly melancholic, Harrison's paintings are formally beautiful, historically pluralistic visual odes to the complexity of both the natural world and the perception of one's placement within it.

SARAH ESME HARRISON (b. 1990, New York, NY; lives and works in Brooklyn, NYC and Long Island, NY) received her MFA from Yale University, New Haven, CT in 2017, and BFA and BA from Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI and Brown University, Providence, RI in 2013. Selected solo exhibitions include *Sarah Esme Harrison @ Saint George Street*, Val de Loire, FR (upcoming); *Sarah Esme Harrison @ Nicelle Beauchene Gallery*, New York, NY (2021); *Souvenir Garden @ The Valley*, Taos, NM (2021); and *Rugs*, Tate 2, Providence, RI (2015). Selected recent group exhibitions include *Out of Hand @ Gildar Gallery*, Denver, CO (two-person w/ Tommy Coleman) (2018); *Close Quarters @ 1969 Gallery*, New York, NY (2017); *Yale Painting @ New Release*, New York, NY (2017); *Paris, Texas @ Artspace*, New Haven, CT (2017); *Swatch @ Olive Tjaden Gallery*, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (2017); *Coda @ Green Gallery*, Yale University, New Haven, CT (2017); *A Common Thread @ Mixed Greens*, New York, NY (2015); and *Room Service @ Motel*, Brooklyn, NY (three-person with Raque Ford and Daniel Klaas Beckwith) (2015). Harrison has received press in such publications as Artnet, Artsy, Galerie Magazine, Yale Daily Press, Artforum, AQNB, and many more.

This is Sarah Esme Harrison's first exhibition at SAINT GEORGE STREET.