

MAXIMILLIAN WILLIAM

MAGDALENA SKUPINSKA LAYÚ

Opening reception: Thursday 30 January 2020, 6-8pm
31 January – 19 March 2020

To get to know the land one has to get to know the life that comes out of it. – M.S

Maximillian William is delighted to announce Layú, a solo exhibition of new works by Polish artist Magdalena Skupinska. The show's title translates to "Land", a word originating from Isthmus Zapotec, an indigenous language spoken on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, in the southern part of the Mexican state of Oaxaca. The body of work offers a window into the process and exploration of organic materials, which the artist was exposed to when relocating her practice in the Pacific coast of Mexico over the last year.

Extending Skupinska's investigation of the natural world and its phenomena, the exhibition presents a series of works created with two main organic materials – palm and corn. Skupinska used ground corn as the pigments of her paints in its four original colours (white, yellow, red and blue). For the basis of her canvases, leaves obtained from palm trees were woven by five women from the Zapotec community in Santo Domingo Albarradas – a traditional craft passed down from generations, solely among women. This technique is not only a collective activity; it is organic, meticulous and closely tied to nature – all expressions that point to Skupinska's oeuvre. The essential character and process of these two plants are a translation of Skupinska's artistic inquiry in relation to community-based crafts through her recent consideration of Indigenous cultures. During her time in Mexico, the artist was captivated by the distinctive unprecedented energy of indigenous cultures on both a social and ecological level. Their nurtured sense of unity, balance, equality and deep-rooted respect towards nature stimulated Skupinska to use organic materials reminiscent to the characteristics intrinsic to these cultures. Corn and palm were the ideal chosen medium for the artist, as they possess universal and natural abilities that underline the inextricable codependency of humans and plants – a bond that is manifested as being kin in indigenous cultures, but overlooked in the Western World. Indeed, the weaved palm leaves, also known as petates, have a history of being fundamental to the life and death of pre-Hispanic cultures of Mexicans. Used to bury the deceased, as rugs to sleep on, as shelter or to celebrate marriages, the foundation of the petates for the basis of Skupinska's canvases denotes the undeniable liaison between nature and human beings. Functioning together to create harmony, their relationship is evoked through the patterns that are formed once the palm leaves are woven together by the craft of hand. The technique symbolizes a fusion of cultures and a more unified coexistence of their rapport, which is further fortified by the installation present in the center of the gallery. Made of Abaca fibres, the installation is inspired by 'The Three Sisters' - an indigenous planting technique that tells the story of the beneficial and inseparable relationship of the three most important food sources in Mesoamerican cultures – corn, bean and squash. The fibres strangely depict human hair and have been infused with pigments and oils of bean, squash, and corn. The arrangement and structure being held together like three heads, recalls the complemented nature of these three crops. Forming a distinct companionship, the installation expands on the notion of co-dependency and togetherness between humans and nature.

Drawing from modernist traditions through her biomorphic shapes, Skupinska's body of work stimulates the basis of our being and pays homage to the rituals and traditions of indigenous cultures. In a sensory environment of texture, colour and smell, the works as a whole highlight a closer reconnection to nature through familial intimacy. Acting as visual totems of memory and nostalgia, each painting seems as though it possesses a forgotten narrative of the natural world that we are inherently part of, and one that the artist insists on us remembering.

Notes to Editors:

Magdalena Skupinska (B. 1991) was born in Warsaw, Poland. She completed her BA in Fine Art at London's Central St Martins, and her MA in Painting at The Royal College of Arts, London. Skupinska has participated in residencies at Fundación Casa Wabi in Oaxaca, Mexico, Buenos Aires (Future Narratives curated by Juliana Gontijo, 2016) as well as Atlantic Center For The Arts (Florida 2017, under the guidance of Mc Arthur Fellow Joan Synder). Her solo exhibitions include, Elements of Silence (London 2015, Presented by Maximillian William) and DAMA Project (Turin, 2016). Recent group shows include Surface Issues, Leila Heller Gallery (Dubai, 2017) and White Memory – 1989/2018 Art in Malta and Poland (Malta, 2017). Public collections include the Zabłudowicz Collection, London and the Jumex Museum, Mexico City.

Founded in 2015, **Maximillian William** operated a nomadic programme – curating shows internationally – until opening its permanent gallery space in Fitzrovia in September 2019. At the core of the gallery's programme is its principle of engaging and facilitating emerging talent. The gallery represents a small roster of artists, all of whom it took on at early stages in their careers. It has bolstered a progressive journey with each, taking care to ensure their longevity. Maximillian William has organised solo shows in institutions such as Lever House Art Collection, NYC, Fondazione Stelline, Milan, Daelim Museum, Seoul and MEP, Paris. The gallery has produced several artist books and catalogues, with essays by renowned curators and writers such as Michele Robecchi and Lucy Soutter. Following a solo presentation by Sylvester II and Role Play, comprising Somaya Critchlow, Lens Geerk and Guston, the gallery looks forward to solo presentations by its other artists in 2020.

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Maximillian William is open to the public:

Tuesday to Friday, 10 am – 6 pm

Saturday 11 am – 6pm

By appointment on Monday

Project and Exhibition Manager: Marcell Ibarrola

Petates Crafted by: María Inés Cruz Morales, Esperanza Perez Santiago, Margarita Morales Morales, Rosa García Martínez and Olivia Martínez Luis