

# HUNTER ||| DUNBAR

Hunter Dunbar Projects is excited to announce *where we walked, who we remembered*, an exhibition of recent paintings and works on paper by Oakland-based artist Shara Mays. This will mark the first one-person exhibition of Mays' work in New York City. The presentation will be on view at the gallery from September 5th to October 19th, 2024 and an opening reception will be held on Thursday, September 5th from 6-8pm.

Inspired by her walks and hikes in Northern California, Mays creates dynamic compositions that meditate on personal and ancestral relationships to nature. Mays' expressionistic paintings act as metaphors for her experiences with the environment, reflecting on the emotional resonance of these journeys through color and gesture. Many titles of her recent works are drawn from *A Darker Wilderness*, a collection of essays on nature by Black authors. These poetic fragments evoke broader connections between Black Americans and the environment, as in the title *a garden in the middle of it* (2024).

Mays draws inspiration from historically important figures in landscape and abstract painting. For example, she channels J.M.W. Turner's expressive style of depicting nature and employs his technique of scumbling, or building up layers of pale pigment over other colors, to create unique textural effects in her paintings. Mays' intuitive approach to abstraction is simultaneously shaped by the work of Joan Mitchell, Larry Poons, and Sam Gilliam. Mays transforms landscapes from traditional vistas of the sublime and grandiose to introspective and emotional expressions by way of abstraction.

In her diptych *on the other side was an orchard of peaches, cherries, quinces* (2023), Mays uses high fluid acrylic to create a ground and slowly builds up dense layers of oil with curved energetic brushstrokes, allowing the paint to drip down evocatively toward the bottom of the canvas. The title of the work is drawn from the Slave Narrative of Mary Anderson, who describes her memories from a North Carolina plantation. The scale and title of Mays' diptych imply the immersive sanctuary of nature rendered vibrant through a lyrical use of color and brushwork.

*where we walked, who we remembered* foregrounds Mays' unique approach to composition, rooted in her relationship with nature and the history of abstract painting. Personalizing these traditions, Mays says she believes her work helps her "to learn about things in this world that are indescribable, unknowable, including emotions I have no way to define or memories I no longer have access to."<sup>1</sup>

**Shara Mays** (b. 1972, Princeville, NC) received a BFA from Corcoran College of Art and Design in 2000, and an MFA from San Francisco Art Institute in 2020. She has exhibited at venues including James Cohan Gallery, New York (2024); Harper's, Los Angeles (2024); Hunter Dunbar Projects, New York (2023); San Francisco Art Institute (2021); and de Young Museum, San Francisco (2020). Her work is held in the collections of the Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington, DC; Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas; and International African American Art Museum, Charleston. Her work has been featured in publications including *Juxtapoz*, *Artnet*, and *The Guardian*.

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<sup>1</sup> Shara Mays, "The Maximalist," interview by Kristin Farr, *Juxtapoz Magazine*, July 25, 2022.