



Molly Metz, *Memory Soup*, 2023, acrylic, Flashe, newsprint on canvas, 20 × 20 in (50.8 × 50.8 cm); *Ephemeral Knots*, 2023, gouache, beeswax, linseed oil on stoneware, 9½ × 9½ × 2 in (24.1 × 24.1 × 5.1 cm)

Molly Metz: Vernal Pool

January 18 – March 9, 2024

Reception: Thursday, January 18, 6–8PM

Molly Metz in conversation with Todd Stong
Saturday, February 17, 2024, 2PM

Vernal Pool is Molly Metz's second solo exhibition at the gallery. A vernal pool is a shallow depression containing water for only part of the year (spring), creating an ideal habitat for insects, amphibians, and reptiles. Like vernal pools, Metz's paintings teem with life. Her art is loosely based on observing nature closeup: attuning herself to the leafy forest floor while mushroom-picking, lifting up rocks and noting worms squirming underneath, peaking inside a carnivorous pitcher plant in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, or imagining cellular life under a microscope. Extrapolating from nature, Metz ventures into a fantastic realm of organic abstraction where she paints (and sometimes collages using newsprint) worm forms, threads that conjure unraveled DNA, capillary and vein-like structures, organelles, and biomorphic shapes seemingly suspended within an aqueous soup.

Moving into the three-dimensional realm, Metz presents, for the first time, ceramic, wall-based sculptures that resemble paintings in their rectangular format, but have topographic and engraved undulating surfaces accentuated by the addition of color. Just as she has been exploring the possibilities of double-sided paintings over the past few years, Metz also paints and adds texture to the reverse of the ceramic wall sculptures. In both instances, the reverse imagery is more extemporaneous and process-oriented than what is on the front and is essentially a secret as the viewer would not know what lies beneath unless they remove the work from the wall. Vessel-like painted ceramic sculptures round out the exhibition and suggest habitats for the forms found in her paintings.

Metz proposes that her art is interrelated like an ecosystem or a family whereby artworks not only depict imaginary living things but beget other art works. As in cellular division or the birth process, larger paintings might spawn smaller paintings which then morph into ceramic wall sculptures that have dimension and depth, as if the paintings are taking on new form and springing to life. While Metz sees her project as revealing a painting's consciousness—a project of animation—the ceramic wall sculptures could just as well be read as excavated, fossilized remains of once sentient organisms. Supporting this idea of generative process, one will notice, with careful looking at certain works in the show, a miniature version of the painting under observation contained within it, an embryonic microcosm of the larger picture.

Metz has a BA from Kutztown University (2014) and an MFA (painting) from Tyler School of Art (2016). *Close Closer* (2021) was her first solo show with Fleisher/Ollman. She has had solo exhibitions at Day Space,

Philadelphia and Friends Indeed, San Francisco. Metz has been featured in group exhibitions at Peep, Fjord, Pilot Projects, Woodmere Art Museum, and Space 1026 (all in Philadelphia); YUI Gallery, New York; and Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR.

Molly Metz: Vernal Pool is part of (re)FOCUS, a citywide festival recognizing women artists, January 27–May 31, 2024. The festival celebrates the 50th anniversary of *Philadelphia Focuses on Women in the Visual Arts/1974*.