

Nature Walk

MATS GUSTAFSON

pastel and watercolor

TED MUEHLING

gemstones, gold, silver, bronze & porcelain

November 5 – December 23, 2022

The Drawing Room is pleased to announce **Nature Walk**, a two-person exhibition presenting pastels and watercolors by **Mats Gustafson** with jewelry and decorative objects by **Ted Muehling**. Encompassing the entire gallery, the installation highlights affinities between the sensibilities of artists who both identify the natural world as a profound source of inspiration. Gustafson and Muehling also share an abiding philosophy of restraint within studio practices that draw upon a synthesis of memory, close observation and simplification. Their mastery of materials – from Muehling’s precious metals and gemstones to Gustafson’s mediums of pastel and watercolor – has garnered each of them international acclaim among collectors, curators and authors.

Mats Gustafson (Swedish, b. 1951), a renowned international fashion illustrator, is also an esteemed artist whose paintings and drawings have been shown at museums and galleries in Sweden, Japan and the United States. This exhibition includes three bodies of his work on paper. The most extensive is a series of atmospheric pastels based on coastal landscapes that border the village of Sag Harbor, New York where Gustafson bought a home in the early 1990s. Created between 1997 and 2000 the drawings are infused with suggestions of hazy light conditions that blur horizons where tree lines meet their reflections. The compositions came into existence slowly as the artist distilled visual impressions and translated them into layers of powdery marks on the paper surface. Each is a fusion of places seen through veils of memory.

In contrast to the pastels, Gustafson’s watercolors involve a more spontaneous technique. Harnessing painting skills honed over decades in tandem with chance, the artist’s *Rock* watercolors depict glacial erratics that appear along the coastline, vestiges of the geological event that reshaped Long Island’s terrain over 15,000 years ago. Each composition delineates monoliths that emerge from below the surface of shallow waters: solitary forms floating as islands on the page. Another sequence of watercolors depicts silhouettes of tree trunks in the woodland that surrounds Gustafson’s studio. The magnetism of this series centers on the sensuality and anthropomorphism of the branching structures.

Mats Gustafson moved to New York in 1980, already established as an accomplished fashion illustrator. His graduate training in Sweden focused on the art of theatrical design, a strong foundation for his achievements representing the essential gesture and movement of couture garments and the figures who model them. In the early 1990s, after developing international acclaim, Gustafson built a studio behind his Sag Harbor Village home. Since 2003, he has lived on the East End year-round, and on weekends, his longtime partner, Ted Muehling, joins him there. In June 2023, Stockholm’s Millesgården Museum will launch a joint exhibition of their work.

Since childhood, **Ted Muehling (American, b. 1953)** has gathered shells and other natural artifacts along the surf's edge. Beginning in the 1970s, after graduating with a degree in industrial design from Pratt Institute, Muehling attracted attention for jewelry designs that echo organic forms such as pinecones, olive branches and insect wings. Soon, his sublime creations expanded to include spoons, candlesticks and other decorative objects, and in 1990 he opened his first shop in Manhattan.

In the ensuing decades, collaborations with E.R. Butler & Co. (1998), Nymphenburg Porcelain Manufacturer (1999), and Lobmeyr Glass (2008), fostered a broad array of exquisitely crafted functional objects created in tandem with venerated artisans specializing in bronze casting, hand-painted porcelain, and blown and engraved glass. Among the many honors Muehling has received are the Chrysler Design Award and the America Fashion Coty Award. His work is represented in public and private collections worldwide, and has been the subject of numerous exhibitions.

Celebrated for the poetic *mises-en-scènes* that have distinguished his shop since its inception, Muehling has staged selections from his vast oeuvre in dialogue with Gustafson's works on paper. Arranged on a velvet-covered table and across pedestals throughout the gallery, the selection of his decorative objects and jewelry attests to his lifelong passion and integration of the natural world. In his own words: "Rocks, shells, eggs, and insects all inspire me, and humble me as a designer... I try to keep shapes restrained, abstracting forms in nature, transforming them through the imperative to make objects that look beautiful and work beautifully."

Several of Muehling's vignettes animate the interiors of glass vitrines. Nearby, silver and bronze bells, candleholders, porcelain vessels and hand-painted glassware are clustered with jewelry on open surfaces. Lustrous strands of Akoya and Tahitian pearls combined with opal and Labradorite beads harmonize with the palette and luminosity of Gustafson's works on paper. Muehling's hand-cut earrings in amber and moonstone emphasize his meticulous attention to fashioning the contours of the objects he creates. From shimmering faceted gemstones to the undulating sculptural forms Muehling makes in gold, silver and bronze, the importance of form and patina are always in evidence. Tactile pendants inspired by clam and mussel shells, and a cast fragment of a moon snail encrusted with gems capture the essence of Muehling's perceptions.

During weekends in Sag Harbor, Muehling's walks yield troves of twigs, lichen and other elements that he collects for the cabinets of curiosities that fill his New York studio. There, his delicate finds are the basis for new castings in sterling or bronze that capture the ephemeral. Spoons, candleholders and other tabletop objects transcend their function and serve as enduring treasures.

Hours: Friday through Monday 11-5, and by appointment

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