

Angelina Gualdoni

The Physic Garden

February 27 - April 3, 2021



Asya Geisberg Gallery is pleased to present “The Physic Garden,” **Angelina Gualdoni**’s fifth solo exhibition with the gallery. Continuing on the themes of her previous body of work, Gualdoni plunges ever deeper into the synergy between the mysteries of herbalism, alchemy, and historical uses of plants, and the elusive painting process. Paintings of root systems, a healer or budding pharmacist, alembic distilling laboratories, and an eerily glowing apothecary cabinet round out the exhibition. An avid forager, Gualdoni embraces the search for edible mushrooms in the wild, finding a parallel to conjuring imagery out of poured paint. “When foraging, one learns to use soft eyes and different lenses - shifting between shape, pattern, texture, color, to see through thickets and briars, sometimes losing the forest for the trees. The sensual can override the analytic, only to snap back into a delighted surge of dopamine, when one recognizes it: there, it is,” explains the artist.

Just as individual plants become distilled into potions or churned into salves, so the artist’s alchemy turns pigments, oils, and brushwork into concrete notions. A pool of color, seepage, or runny mark all suggest the vapors of a chemical reaction, and deftly weave and disperse narrative threads. Physic gardens were often grown at monasteries and large estates for medicinal and cooking purposes, with sections organized by common uses. These gardens symbolize the human attempt to gain mastery over our fate and our environment. In the eponymous painting “The Physic Garden,” we see the origin of all we imbibe - its primeval state, before we harness nature’s powers through trial and error over the millennia. Showing us what lies beneath our feet in one painting, a cross-section illustrative view in another, and a dive into an unruly compost, Gualdoni guides us to burrow and connect the tendrils of her inquiry. An old woman, dressed with an enigmatically patterned apron, represents an herbalist. We see the tools of the alchemical trade in another. The exhibition provides us a table of contents to an unearthed ancient textbook full of arcane yet necessary knowledge.

In the “Confections” series of small paintings, we see two planes: a softly dyed pattern upon which a small tarot-card like rectangle shows a plant, like pages of a scientific tome or illustrated manuscript, except here the meaning remains opaque, lacking the information required. The interplay between two and three dimensions, and the need to classify and contain the unruly and unexplainable, is perfectly conjured in these liquid works.

Adding to her already rich vocabulary of watery and more toothsome painting approaches, many works in the show share a repetitive white mark. The artist’s studio is surrounded by auto repair shops and industrial sites, a milieu where foraging means finding scraps of debris. Walking through her urban environment, Gualdoni picked up strings from the sidewalk, in an area where nary a tree could grow. Months later, she found a new way to put on paint - via the strings - with a resultant mark that evoked woodblock prints, medieval illustrations, and ancient ways of endowing line with narrative and rhythmic power. They also suggest a ghostly thread, a lacy overlay that allows the pour to throb underneath. The overall result shows the intriguing mixture of methods the artist employs to concoct her own infusions, inspired by the centuries of nuns, monks, and proto-scientists searching for curative powers among the weeds, mushrooms, roots, and flowers in our midst.



The Poison Cell, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 50" x 47"



The Herbalist, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 70" x 50.5"



Angelina Gualdoni received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, and her MFA from the University of Illinois in Chicago. Her paintings have been the subject of solo and group shows nationally and internationally at the Crystal Flowers Art Salon, NY, Trestle Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, KS, Tufts University Galleries, Boston, MA, Queens Museum, NY, St. Louis Art Museum, MO, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, The Aldrich Museum, Connecticut, the Museum de Paviljoens, Netherlands, and the Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY. Her work resides in the Saatchi Collection, as well as the MCA, Chicago, and the Nerman Museum, Kansas City. She has been the beneficiary of several grants and fellowships, including New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) in 2008 and 2015, the Daynard Faculty Research Award, Artadia, and Pollock-Krasner, and has attended residencies at Carrizozo AIR (upcoming), Vermont Studio Center, MacDowell Colony, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, International Studio and Curatorial Program, and Chateau La Napoule. Gualdoni lives and works in New York.

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