

SUMMER WHEAT

Summer Wheat (b. 1977, Oklahoma City, OK) is known for her vibrant paintings, multifaceted sculptures, and immersive installations that weave together the history of materiality, figuration, and abstraction in both fine art and craft milieus. Each series engages individual and collective human experiences drawn from historical and contemporary sources, mediated through a variety of references ranging from ancient art and medieval tapestries, to etchings from the Renaissance, to modernist abstractions. Wheat's work examines various manifestations of labor, leisure, commerce, and class through the depiction of numerous figures and archetypes such as farmers, hunters, beekeepers, gardeners, weavers, bankers, and movie stars. The artist's densely populated "scapes" envision worlds where time seems to have collapsed and every person, regardless of social status, occupies a shared/equal space, in which both labor and leisure are paths to healing humanity. Using a tongue-in-cheek type of humor inspired by comic strips, Wheat subverts conventional hierarchical structures and stereotypes to create more expansive depictions of daily life throughout history.

For Wheat, labor functions as both a conceptual and formal connective thread that runs throughout her oeuvre. This relates to her labor-intensive process of making a painting, the term's definition, as well as its historic visual representation. Wheat's work often employs the visualization of labor as a tool to expose gender and class inequality. For example, in *Swamp Hunters* (2017), two women carry a large net filled with their game from the day—rabbits, turtles, boars, and a large bobcat. The women are bent over with the net thrown over their shoulders, the weight of the load is palpable in their tired expressions. In the background is a dense network of foliage that the women are traversing through, giving the viewer a sense of the difficult environment they must navigate to survive. Inspired by medieval tapestries and historical tableaux in which human figures often contend with the natural world, Wheat depicts the successful aftermath of the hunt rather than the battle. By omitting the violence of the kill, she conflates the traditional hunter and gatherer roles, giving them equal footing.

A signature aspect of Wheat's work is her expressive use of color and unique method of building a painting, which integrates various tools, from her fingers, to syringes, to plastic scrapers, to cake decorating paraphernalia. Using vibrant, almost fluorescent colors of acrylic paint, she combines multiple physical techniques—pushing paint through wire mesh, painting directly onto a heavily impastoed surface, or applying select embellishments—that require her to move around her canvas, working both vertically and horizontally, on the front and the back of each piece. Wheat's methods and engagement with the emotive nature of color embrace intuition and felt experience over conventional reason and logic, destabilizing the boundaries between figure and ground, representation and abstraction, portrait and landscape, and fine art and craft. The result is tactile, vivid work that engages process, form, and narrative equally, creating layered, non-linear compositions that offer alternative versions of history, mythology, and folklore.

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Wheat received a B.A. from the University of Central Oklahoma and an M.F.A. from Savannah College of Art and Design. Solo exhibitions of her work have been organized at the Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC (2021); Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO (2020); KMAC Museum, Louisville, KY (2019); Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, CA (2018); Smack Mellon, New York, NY (2018); Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA (2017); and Oklahoma Contemporary, Oklahoma City, OK (2016). Select group exhibitions featuring her work include *Yaro Pickers*, Harper's Books, New York, NY (2020); *Summer Wheat and Hiroshige Yabe*, Wasserman Projects, Detroit, MI (2019); *America Will Be! Surveying the Contemporary Landscape*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX (2019); *The Magnetic Fields*, Gio Marconi, Milan, Italy (2019); *SEED*, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, NY (2018); *More Material*, Salon 94, New York, NY (2014); *Expanding the Field of Abstraction*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2013-14); *beyond the stretcher*, deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA (2013); and *Paradox Maintenance Technicians: A comprehensive technical manual to contemporary painting from Los Angeles and Beyond*, Torrance Art Museum, Torrance, CA (2013). Wheat's work is in numerous public and private collections, including the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; The Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA; The Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC; and the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, KY. Wheat has received several awards and prizes including, the Northern Trust Purchase Prize at EXPO Chicago (2019) and the New York NADA Artadia Award (2016).