

LEAVE NO TRACE

Like a modern version of philosopher Henry David Thoreau, the artist Sam Falls treks into the wilderness, traversing many of America's national parks for aesthetic inspiration and bringing back from these solitudes notations of the natural world. Falls even submerges underwater (like sea-explorer Jacques Cousteau) to create compositions on large sheets of canvas that capture the glimmering experiences of the life aquatic. Using powdered colored pigment, morning dew, and the baking sun, Falls creates paintings that aim to "photogram"¹ the natural world, recording a fleeting moment in the atmosphere. In his metal and ceramic sculpture, Falls employs a similar method, layering scavenged branches, twigs and leaves, impressing the available flora into clay to create intricate patterns that mesh the permanence of a 2000 year old Roman mosaic with perishable "here today and gone tomorrow" organic materials.

The titanic forty-foot long painting *Untitled (Conception)*, 2018, is a panorama of the ocean floor. The multiple layers of pigments and contours of kelp, algae and sand offers an immersive experience enhanced by Falls's deferment to the improvisation of nature. Traveling the length of *Untitled (Conception)* takes the viewer off shore by creating the illusion of floating deep within an ocean kelp forest and scanning the canopy depths in high tide. Once lost within the powdery purple hues, specks of mustard yellows and crisscrossing seaweed, *Untitled (Conception)* provides evidence of the life force of nature itself.

Falls constructed two original *Untitled* paintings on-site to document Laumeier Sculpture Park's woodland trails. His distinctive painting technique uses powder pigments, as well as natural forces such as rain, dew, and mist, embracing both the accidental and the manipulated. His process is at once a performance, photograph, gestural paint mark and documentary archive. Demonstrated by his commitment to unfurl these eight-foot canvases around Laumeier's 105-acre woods, the paintings Falls does also eliminates a boundary between genres. These paintings are akin to an Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock splatter painting as well as Man Ray's Dadaist experimental dark room photograms. They are flat representations of ground cover but the horizon line is resurrected and reoriented on the canvas, offering a point of view that resembles a John Constable or JMW Turner landscape from matter that is moved, fallen, compressed and trodden instead of painted on with a brush.

Similarly, *Cleveland National Forest (B)*, 2017, is a record of the southern-most National Forest of California located near San Diego. Mainly woodlands and chaparral, Falls's painting captures a vast meadowland of scrub, arid but alive. His palette of warm undertones seem to glow from within, littered with dusty wildflowers, capturing the climate, terrain and complex history of the acreage, including a number of destructive fires. Trekking deep into the woods and working over the course of a day or overnight, Falls is at home outside. His collective time spent in often wild areas and magnified scale present within the canvas equates to the perspective of a stalking predator.

After his initial site visit to Laumeier, Falls worked with the Park's master gardener to curate a customized garden of flowers and grasses. Falls expended the bounty that resulted from their partnership on two monumental sculptures using I-beams and brightly glazed clay tiles, placed in Laumeier's Eastern Woodland. The horizontal work, *Super Bloom*, 2019, rests within a slope of recently cleared poison ivy and honeysuckle, positioned as if struck by a violent thunderstorm and left to be reclaimed by the undergrowth. Carefully inlaid with large fractured tiles, the lyrical blossoms, expressive brushstrokes and dribbles of glaze are trapped with the cold industrial material of the steel I-beam. Similarly, *Spring*, 2019, is a vertical beam with cascading vegetation, moving through numerous tints and tones, expressive, vibrant and whimsical. Here, the ceramic-lined totem is staked in the ground, posed in direct relationship to the even loftier trees on the trail, initiating the conversation regarding the natural and built environments. The two hard-edged steel towers, as a pairing, represent only a sliver of the overwhelming space and abundance of nature surrounding them. Between his organic subject and the perceived permanence of the steel I-beam, these sculptures are a bridge between sensibilities and styles. Both *Super Bloom* and *Spring* pack the automation of Abstract Expressionism inside the rigidity of Minimalism. Falls's methods also point towards the notions of chance in Process Art and even temporality, a pre-occupation with many Land Artists.

Falls' indoor exhibition and outdoor commissions at Laumeier Sculpture Park continue his current exploration in painting and sculpture drawn from his desire to employ the tools offered up by



nature, embed a multiplicity of art historical references and minimize his own role in the process of creating the work. Falls's exhibition is an examination of the density in nature, an examination that is active yet calm, cerebral and untamed.

Dana Turkovic, Curator

1. A photogram is a form of cameraless photography whereby a negative shadow image is made by placing an object directly onto the surface of photo paper or other material and then exposing it to light.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Sam Falls (b. 1984) was raised in Vermont. He received his BA from Reed College in 2007 and his MFA from ICP-Bard in 2010. He has had solo exhibitions at 303 Gallery, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Trento and Rovereto, Italy; The Kitchen, New York; Ballroom Marfa, Texas; Pomona College Museum of Art; Public Art Fund, New York; and LAXART, Los Angeles, among others. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado; Le Consortium, Dijon; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, England; Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Menil Collection, Houston; Museo MADRE, Naples; and the International Center of Photography, New York; among others. Falls lives and works in Los Angeles.

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LAUME/ER
SCULPTURE PARK

SAM FALLS

**AUGUST 24 —
DECEMBER 22, 2019**

FREE PROGRAMS

OPENING RECEPTION / COFFEE + CONVERSATION

Saturday, August 24, 2019 /
10 a.m.–1 p.m.

Join Curator Dana Turkovic for a discussion with artist Sam Falls about his current exhibition in the Aronson Fine Arts Center and new outdoor commission in the Park. Appropriate for all ages. Conversation begins at 10 a.m.

FREE FAMILY DAY

Creative Nature

Sunday, September 8, 2019 /
2 p.m.–4 p.m.

Play with shapes, textures and colors in activities that will let you get creative with nature.

COFFEE + CONVERSATION

Fall Planting

Saturday, September 14, 2019 /
10 a.m.

Celebrate autumn and prepare for next spring! Join us for a discussion on how to renovate seasonal garden beds, add sustainability through eco-friendly practices, and plant spring-blooming bulbs.

LAUME/ER /
SCULPTURE PARK

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2019 exhibitions are supported by Ken and Nancy Kranzberg, Mitchell and Joan Markow, Mary Ann and Andy Srenco, and Ellen and Durb Curlee.

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Sam Falls
detail of *Super Bloom*, 2019
Ceramic, steel I-beam
© Sam Falls, courtesy 303 Gallery,
New York; Galerie Eva Presenhuber,
New York & Zurich; and Galleria
Franco Noero, Torino.

[reverse]
Sam Falls
Untitled (Big Sur), 2018
Pigment on canvas
© Sam Falls, courtesy 303 Gallery,
New York; Galerie Eva Presenhuber,
New York & Zurich; and Galleria
Franco Noero, Torino.