

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jason Middlebrook: The Last Tree on the Planet

December 2, 2017 – February 3, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, December 2, 6–8 pm

Artist's talk: 7 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *The Last Tree on the Planet*, an exhibition of new sculptures and drawings by Jason Middlebrook—the artist's fourth show at the gallery.

Jason Middlebrook's new sculptures are black, powder-coated steel. Vertical, geometric, and freestanding, he is isolating the designs he has painted on slabs of wood for the last ten years and making them into three-dimensional line drawings.

The new works on paper are similarly pared down compared to previous work (but retain the artist's visual vocabulary wherein hard-edged geometric designs have come to symbolize urban development—man—in opposition to the organic, unpredictable, flowing lines of nature). Crisp, solid shapes floating in negative space function as a series of windows looking out at fiery sunrises or sunsets. Soft, spray-painted silhouettes of leaves butt up against pointed chevrons. Thin, rigid, meandering lines criss-cross at right angles, growing alongside and playing with groups of stippled wildflowers.

These speckled plants are reminiscent of several of Middlebrook's many public art projects—mosaicked goldenrod, knapweed, burdock, and daisies on the walls of a Brooklyn subway station; an octopoid tree stump and root system (that writhes above the ground) covered in glass tile. In *The Last Tree on the Planet*, Middlebrook's public work and his private studio practice, long separate, have merged into one unified mode of expression for the first time.

Middlebrook's work has always come from a deep love and respect for the natural world. More specifically, he is well known for calling attention to man's relationship with nature and our dangerous penchant for disregard and overconsumption. These concerns began when he was living in cities, surrounded by glass skyscrapers, polluted rivers, exhaust fumes, and blaring horns.

Now that he has lived in the Hudson River Valley for more than ten years, where his studio sits on a creek under a canopy of sycamore trees—*wonder* is his primary reaction to the dramas of the plants and animals that surround him. Bald eagles are a common sight on his property. A friend interested in homeopathy discovered a glade of rare medicinal plants in the forest surrounding his house. Foxes, bobcats, black bear, ticks, and turtles are Middlebrook's closest neighbors. Absorbing these experiences has solidified his passion for preservation.

Watching *Blade Runner 2049* recently, the artist was struck by a scene depicting the last tree on the planet. By isolating his paintings from the slabs of wood he has been known to paint on, Middlebrook is imagining a world without trees. What if this dystopia becomes reality? With the recent executive decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, it is not entirely improbable. But despite its darkness, Middlebrook's work is ultimately joyful—in reminding us what is at stake, he is celebrating the delights of nature and the power of conservation.

Jason Middlebrook, born in 1966 in Michigan, lives and works in Hudson, New York. He has mounted solo exhibitions at the New Museum (New York), Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Connecticut), Santa Monica Museum of Art, and SCAD Museum of Art (Georgia). He has created major outdoor artworks for the Albright Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo), Metropolitan Transit Authority (New York), Public Art Fund (New York), and Sun Valley Center for the Arts (Idaho). His work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York), Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, Princeton University Art Museum, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.