

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DONALD MOFFETT: NATURE CULT (early freeze, late sleet)

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Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *NATURE CULT (early freeze, late sleet)*, an exhibition of paintings by Donald Moffett—the artist's third presentation at the gallery.

The surfaces of Donald Moffett's paintings are luscious, seductive, and almost always monochromatic. But the enchanting textures he conjures—with dense/extruded/fatty/rich/uncut oil paint or glossy pigmented resin or glistening rabbit-skin glue—belie the personal and political depths that drive Moffett's ambitions. Campaigns for justice form the core of the work, charted by Moffett's close examinations of pleasure and heartbreak—whether in the news, on the street, in the bedroom, or in nature.

Twin circumstances from Moffett's biography help elucidate his work's occasional reticence. He grew up in the Hill Country of central Texas, paying close attention to the ranch hands and farm animals on his family's land. His deep love for the environment originated there, between the cedars and oaks, big bluestem, livestock and predators, and a surly ass named Saccharine. And he studied biology and art at university, coming of age in New York—as a young gay man, artist, and activist protesting in the streets—during the height of the AIDS crisis.

In the mid-90s, he left the design collectives where he cut his teeth, and as he struck out on his own, he happened to enroll in a cake-decorating class. When he realized he could fill piping bags with oil paint rather than frosting, he began making sculptural paintings, forcing extruded paint to stand up rather than lie down. The resulting works look almost like pelts of fur. Gluttonous and maximally laden with tidily applied strands of paint, it seems only a madman could devote the time, labor, and precision required for their birthing. (Moffett *is* mad—irate!—hence the activism.) In addition to pushing paint *through* the hole of a pastry tip, Moffett's panels often have holes of their own—one, two, or many—which, earlier in his career, he would variously refer to as fuck holes, glory holes, bullet holes, peepholes, or rabbit holes. More recently, however, his empathies have turned toward climate science and the wonders of the natural world. As his interests have evolved and expanded, he has continued to extrude paint onto panels bearing holes—but now his perforated paintings are more inclined to point toward phenomena like whirlpools, honeycombs, woodpeckers, paramecia, lotus root, ice crystals, or pitted limestone.

The bulk of the exhibition comprises Moffett's resin paintings, the first of which he unveiled in 2016. Many assume complex, irregular shapes first rendered in 3D-modeling software (bulbous rhombi, for example, edged with spikes and pocked with holes). A CNC router cuts these elaborate structures out of plywood, edges are masked with tape, and surfaces are given several layers of treatment: primer, then paint, followed by clear epoxy resin, and in

some cases ultimately another pour of tinted resin. Custom-welded hardware floats the panels about five inches away from the wall—a spellbinding, slightly aggressive, physics-defying performance that continues across each work’s shiny face. The transition between the front and side of a painting is curved—as if by surface tension—to create the illusion Moffett has somehow arrested and attached a deep pool of liquid to a piece of wood and made it levitate, vertically, in front of a wall. The resin paintings are inspired by nature and point back to it. The ways Moffett amplifies their drama and magic are gentle reminders that perhaps we should do more to cast our world-weariness aside and recall how awe-inspiring a simple walk in the woods can be. (“Beauty is as much about *how* and *whether* you look as what you see,” writer John Green observed, after his two-year-old exclaimed over a seemingly mundane brown oak leaf.)

In 2007, when Moffett first made the Fleisch paintings (installed in the project room for this show), they carried no paint—only rabbit-skin glue brushed onto raw linen, zippers sewn into their surfaces (holding a gash together or letting it gape open), and perfectly round holes, neatly whipstitched, offering glimpses through the paintings. Their features are easily anthropomorphized—eyes, navels, teeth, torsos, genitalia—and yet simultaneously point to clothing, bandaging, and bondage. Moffett made these works after learning of a sensational crime from 2003, when a man who came to be known as the Kassel Cannibal posted an M4M personal ad looking for someone to consent to becoming a meal. “I lost my appetite for a lot (of anything) and concentrated on just a little (of something),” the artist remembers. “Fleisch was about starvation, as was the slaughter. It was about a starved psyche and a ravaging, hungry heart.” Moffett revisited the series in 2020, complicating them—opening them up, expanding their scope beyond their initial nightmarish focus—by brushing big, precise, sky-blue (or white) circles, puddles, and teardrops of oil paint onto their surfaces. The paintings are still about violence—but now, more than a decade later, violence upon what? Perpetrated by whom?

“The sociological [angle in my work] has been supplanted with flora, fauna, and nature in its widest sense,” Moffett said in 2019. His paintings went from “referencing fuck holes” as a younger artist, “to evoking a broader take on nature (which includes fucking),” the maturing artist explains. The titling convention he uses across his practice—a string of six numbers—marks the date he began an artwork. That date locates each piece in a specific time/place/context—both in the larger history of the world and where Moffett was physically, emotionally, and intellectually—personally—at that moment. The paintings only have beginnings. Not ends. The lack of specificity in Moffett’s minimal works allows them to hold multitudes, to continue to grasp for more and more meaning over time. “Nature Cult is a worldwide movement, powerful and fictitious, that aims to protect the biological riches of our world through art and science,” he wrote recently. Whether Moffett is fighting for social justice, climate justice, or an even more urgent cause he is yet to discover, “I will always advocate. I will always believe in being on the street—because it’s a winning strategy.”

Donald Moffett, born in 1955 in Texas, lives and works in New York. Moffett’s work is currently the subject of a major exhibition, also called *Nature Cult*, at the McNay Art Museum

(San Antonio), on view through September 11. (Moffett worked closely with McNay Head of Curatorial Affairs, René Paul Barilleaux, to conceive an interwoven presentation of the artist's paintings, artworks from the McNay's modern and contemporary collection, and material drawn from the artist's personal collection—more than 100 artists coming together to represent Moffett's "powerful and fictitious" Nature Cult.) He has had solo exhibitions at the Columbus College of Art and Design (Ohio), Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery (Saratoga Springs), and Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh). Among the museums that own his work are the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo), Blanton Museum of Art (Austin), Brooklyn Museum, Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), Henry Art Gallery (Seattle), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington DC), Menil Collection (Houston), Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Museum of Modern Art (New York), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Rhode Island School of Design Museum (Providence), Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro), and Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).