

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tom Molloy: Eagle

December 11, 2021 – February 19, 2022

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Eagle*, an exhibition of new drawings and photographs by Tom Molloy—the artist’s seventh presentation at the gallery.

Tom Molloy, for as long as he can remember, has been a careful reader of history and the news. He is interested in geopolitics, and although he is an Irish artist living in France, he pays particularly close attention to the United States—both because it has been the de facto global leader in the push for democracy, denuclearization, and human rights since the end of World War II, and because the delta between the USA’s purported ideals and real-life actions provide Molloy with some especially rich territory to explore in his artworks.

The artist is showing three new bodies of work: *Eagle*, a series of 24 small drawings based on photographs by Eadweard Muybridge; *Flowers*, five discrete pictures he made in his own garden; and *Atlas*, an installation of 13 found photographs arranged in a large circle.

In the late 19th century, Eadweard Muybridge devised a way to photograph animals in motion with a series of 12 cameras set up next to each other, triggered by electromagnetic trip wires. Tom Molloy has drawn (delicately, faithfully) a group of photographs Muybridge made of a bald eagle in flight, but with a rather surprising omission: instead of a bird, we see a raptor-shaped negative space against the gridded background from the original pictures. Such a simple transformation has surprisingly weighty conceptual ramifications. The grid becomes much more prominent without the details of the eagle dominating our attention. Art critic Rosalind Krauss wrote, “The grid is an emblem of modernity: the form is ubiquitous in the art of our century, while appearing nowhere, nowhere at all, in the art of the last one.” (Albers, Irwin, Kelly, Hesse, LeWitt, Malevich, Martin, Mondrian, Stella—ubiquitous is right.) Cities, though, have been organized with grids of streets since antiquity. And considering how the American military has named its UCAVs (Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles, i.e., weaponized drones)—Gray Eagle, Desert Hawk, Reaper, Stalker—we might imagine Molloy’s invisible raptor as a stand-in for a *manmade* predator in the sky, circling unseen above the streets of an unknown city. No coincidence, either, that the bald eagle is the national symbol of the USA.

The series of five pictures called *Flowers*, on the other hand, are the reverse of the *Eagle* drawings—backgrounds are empty, subjects are visible. We see forget-me-nots, an orange day lily, rose campions, and tall, spindly grasses isolated against the black of night—or is it a black backdrop in a studio? In fact, the artist took a black board into his garden and inserted it behind clumps of plants he then photographed, but the pictures occupy a liminal space between day/night and studio/field. The in-between zone in these images might be similar to

life itself—the span between birth and death—which would locate Flowers in a similar tradition to vanitas paintings, 17th-century Dutch still lifes symbolizing the transience of life and inevitability of death. (*Vanitas* is Latin for *emptiness*.) The pictures also point quietly to ikebana, the Japanese art of arranging flowers in hauntingly spare compositions that are traditionally tripartite: a tall, vertical section pointing toward the heavens; a stem or branch reaching horizontally to symbolize the earth; and a small bloom or two in the middle standing in for man, as he tries to negotiate a harmonious balance in an off-kilter world.

Atlas comprises 13 found photographs in frames, installed in a six-foot-wide circle on the wall; each image shows a person performing a handstand outdoors, with the horizon visible in the background. The pictures have been arranged so each pair of outstretched hands faces toward the circle's center and the horizons are roughly lined up, giving the impression of the team holding up the earth as mythological Atlas was said to. It is refreshing to see a group of people working together to support the planet. At a glance, the tone of *Atlas* seems optimistic. But is it? Each actor is pushing himself away from the ground for his own egocentric reasons; he is unaware of anyone else in Molloy's neighboring pictures. In *Atlas*, heads of state are no more than showmen. Consider the political stalemates—domestically and internationally—not only of today but of the last 50 years, while scientists have been sounding an increasingly urgent alarm for the impending climate catastrophe. Congress has been unable to pass legislation that will ensure we limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius beyond pre-industrial levels. Do the grand pronouncements from the annual UN Climate Change Conference add up to measurable progress?

Our world is becoming more polarized as objective facts are being superseded by personalized realities fed to us by algorithm. Democracy is in decline; neo-authoritarianism and isolationism are on the rise—at this moment when we are finally beginning to understand the costs of two decades of reaping the pleasures, conveniences, and profits of an increasingly interconnected, globalized information economy. Is finding common ground and figuring out how to work together—solving global problems as a global community—*not* the best way forward? As producer Laine Kaplan-Levenson recently observed on NPR's *Throughline*, "Our new normal is full of constant instability. The future feels like a swerving car on a narrow road with no guardrail, flirting with the edge of a cliff." We might do well to take a page out of Tom Molloy's book, putting our phones down—for just a moment—to have a closer look at how even our most mundane actions are helping shape the world we will be leaving for our children.

Tom Molloy was born in 1964 in Ireland and lives and works in France. He has had solo exhibitions at institutions including the Aldrich Museum (Connecticut), FLAG Art Foundation (New York), and Garter Lane Arts Center (Ireland). He was included in the 2013 Moscow Biennale and the 2011 Sharjah Biennial (United Arab Emirates). His work is included in the permanent collections of the Blanton Museum of Art (Austin), FLAG Art Foundation, Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'Arte (Turin), Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin), National Self-Portrait Collection (Ireland), Princeton University Art Museum (New Jersey), and Zabłudowicz Collection (London).