

# WILDING CRAN GALLERY

Elizabeth Malaska *In the Shadow*

January 14 - March 4



Wilding Cran Gallery is pleased to present *In the Shadow*, an exhibition of new works by Portland-based artist Elizabeth Malaska.

Through her creative process, Elizabeth Malaska explores the metaphysical universe of the soul in an effort to puncture and uncover Western patriarchal perspectives of identity. The works featured throughout *In the Shadow* serve to illuminate systems of kinship and empathy between humans, plants, animals, and man-made objects. Whether rendering reflections of moonlight on water, a patchwork blanket, a discarded shoe, a solitary swan, or a mirror with no reflection, the series of four oil paintings flit between portraiture and still-life, figuration and surrealism, to allegorically unravel notions of subjective embodiment, animism, and the shadow self.

Across her body of work, Malaska pulls influence from traditional painting, mythology, nature, literature, internet screenshots, and images from modern advertising. The subjects, themes, and stories explored throughout her work are the byproduct of what the artist describes as a “homeless consciousness.” It is this nomadic sense of identity that allows Malaska to absorb and ruminate upon the ways in which our emotions, relationships, and surroundings imprint upon us, weaving threads of connection between humanity, spirituality, society, and the natural realm.

As human beings in the contemporary Western world, we have come to view ourselves in the context of a hierarchy of sentient beings. Through a personal connection to animist spiritualities, Elizabeth Malaska harnesses her aesthetic to pose questions regarding the consciousness and wisdom of animals. While a myriad of non-human subjects figure prominently across the artist’s oeuvre, *Delivered (Among the Meadow Grass)* depicts a simultaneously head-on and aerial view of a woman born from a cow. In contrast to her human subject, curled into the fetal position, Malaska’s cow looks

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directly at the viewer, elevated and centered within the canvas environment. The experimental use of zero-point perspective dislocates the viewer from the surreal nature of the scene, allowing the strikingly blue umbilical cord to serve as a metaphorical prayer of synergy, nourishment, and gratitude.

In an effort to heal and connect with a richer perception of personal empowerment and vulnerability, the exhibition of *In the Shadow* draws core inspiration from shadow work: a methodology which aims to uncover that which is repressed as an effect of trauma, pain, and suffering. Within *Captive*, a nude female figure stands within the liminal space between a wire frame bed and a wooden dresser, upon which rests an exquisitely painted conch shell. A shroud of hair covers her face, as shadows project onto a backdrop of pink curtains. A postcard facsimile of a medieval tapestry -- depicting *The Unicorn in Captivity* -- peeks from the corner of a mirror, reflecting nothing but a void.

While encountering Malaska's pieces, the viewer is left to ruminate on the implications of human subjectivity in the modern world; it can be a source of empowerment and it can also be a source of profound loneliness. Through an exploration of the spiritual essence of animals, plants, and man-made objects, *In the Shadow* opens a portal into our immense capacity for empathy, reverie, and connection. In moments of isolation, terror, discomfort, or grief, Malaska's paintings remind us that in the scheme of the natural world, our lives are intertwined and that, even in solitude, we are never alone. In fact, our teachers are all around us.

Elizabeth Malaska (b. 1978, Portland, OR) earned her BFA from California College of the Arts and her MFA in Visual Studies from Pacific Northwest College of Art. She is a 2021 Guggenheim Fellow, as well as the recipient of a Painter's and Sculptor's Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation and the Hallie Ford Fellowship from The Ford Family Foundation. Malaska's work is in the permanent collection at the Portland Art Museum, the Schneider Museum of Art, and the Hallie Ford Museum. Her work has been featured in *Ms. Magazine*, *Art in America*, *ArtForum*, and *ArtMaze* among others. She lives and works in Portland, OR. This is Malaska's first solo exhibition at Wilding Cran Gallery.