

THEODORA ALLEN

weald

515 WEST 27TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10001

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Kasmin is pleased to present *weald*, an exhibition of new paintings by Los Angeles based artist Theodora Allen.

For her first exhibition with the gallery and debut New York solo show, Allen presents two bodies of work: *Shields (dwale)* and *Monuments (weald)*. *Dwale* from Old Norse, meaning deep sleep or trance; *weald* from the Old English for forest. The two words are anagrams, both archaic; one is landscape and the other mindscape.

The Shield paintings are a suite of intimately scaled still lifes, each variation set within the iconic shape of medieval armor. Executed in a muted palette of jewel-toned hues, the plants are both isolated and adorned, akin to scientific botanical illustrations used in early herbals and pharmacopeia. The storied herbage belong to a world of remedies, aphrodisiacs, sacraments, and poisons. They are killers or curers, sinners or saints. As emblems they are elusive, and carry the weight of existential inquiry.

In the adjoining room, the Monument series continues the theme of plants defined through time and ideology. Realized in a near-monochrome palette, this body of work takes on the symbols of a cup, a coin, a sword, and a

branch—icons gleaned from allegorical card games of the middle ages through the 19th century. These subjects are bright white and cold, stone-like, set in a dense and overgrown forest of psychotropic plants. The luminous statuaries rest at the entrance of an arched passageway, seemingly between past and future.

Through a rigorous painting process, Allen’s evocative imagery becomes whisper thin. Translucent coats of oil paint are applied and removed, until the fabric itself shows the weather of its making. Pools of spilled watercolor are also visible among thin layers of oil paint. Allen plays with the tension between the organic lines of the watery edge against the linear and tight weave of linen. Evanescent subjects, polluted spectrums, and radiant blues animate the forces of surface and depth, darkness and light.

Drawing from music, literature, myth and nature, Allen’s still lifes highlight essentialism and contemplate the human condition. Time and place are slippery—each painting suggests a world within itself, where transformative plants and figural relics underscore our earthly existence. References to the past take the form of ruins; a shield for protection, a cup to replenish, a weapon to fight. Citing a rich fin de siècle era, these symbols mark a turning point, embodying the knowledge of the bygone while standing on the threshold of a new century. They offer the reminder that in the chaos and tumult of the present, this too shall pass. Allen’s fascination with these enduring themes are rooted in Humanist thought; they reflect on the fundamental desire to search for meaning and purpose in life, to know that which is unknowable, and the cyclical and essential nature of these pursuits.

Theodora Allen (b. 1985, Los Angeles, CA) holds an MFA in painting from the University of California, Los Angeles, a BFA in painting from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA, and has completed a residency at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME. Her work has been exhibited domestically and abroad, including at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Tucson, AZ), New Wight Gallery, UCLA (Los Angeles, CA), Blum & Poe (Los Angeles, CA), Sprüth Magers (Berlin, Germany), Almine Rech (New York, NY), and Berggruen Gallery (San Francisco, CA).

Image: Theodora Allen, *Monument, No. 1*, 2018, 67x57 inches, oil and watercolor on linen.
Photo by Heather Rasmussen.

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