ALMINE RECH

Ryan Schneider
Nocturner

Jun 27 — Aug 2, 2024 | New York

Almine Rech New York is pleased to announce Nocturner, Ryan Schneider's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from June 27 to August 2, 2024.

Vast and elemental, the allure of the Californian high desert is undeniable. The rugged landscape can be inhospitable and alien at times and mystical and magical at others. Strewn with craggy boulders, ringed by majestic mountains, and with expansive vistas as far as the eye can see, it is seductive in its unfamiliarity, its unknowability. There will always be more to discover, to explore, to conquer. For decades, artists have been captivated by the high desert's magnetic energy, its magnificent light, and its promise of solitude, of space to think, reflect, and regenerate. It's here—an hour from the nearest city—that Ryan Schneider has lived and worked for the last nine years.

Schneider's practice initially focused on figurative and still life painting, exploring deep, personal narrative in cubist compositions. Several years ago, the abundance of open space around his studio encouraged Schneider to expand his practice to include sculpture. Inspired by the primal nature of the landscape, his long-standing interest in various traditions of ancient and Indigenous art, and a foundation in Cubism and German Expressionism, he took a break from painting and picked up a chainsaw.

Working with large blocks of wood, primarily Torrey Pine, Schneider began creating upright forms that are neither object nor figure but something in between, akin to the tree spirit mythologies that enchant him. He describes his way of working as drawing or mark-making with the saw, and because the material and process were completely new to him, he had no baggage and could be completely free, improvising and exploring both the limits and potential of the three-dimensional medium. Rather than working on a canvas, he works with the wood, deeply connected to its physicality. Fresher, less labored, and more intuitive, his evocative stacked sculptures capture the primitivism of the art forms that inspired him. Borrowing from his painting practice, Schneider adds vibrant color with oil pigment sticks, animating and activating the wood sculpture.

The angular facets, deep incisions and grooves, and varying scale of Schneider's sculpture, whether the size of a human figure or smaller and more intimate, invited other explorations, such as burning the wood or casting the pieces in bronze. Once cast, form and materiality meld seamlessly and naturally, and the sculptures become not only more monolithic but something other, something solemn, something more intense, spiritual, and mysterious.

For this, his first solo show with Almine Rech, Schneider presents a holistic ensemble of wall-mounted and freestanding sculpture. Seeking a way of working and a form that would connect his paintings with his wood sculptures, Schneider created, and introduces here, a compelling new series of two-dimensional, wall-mounted carved and painted works in Sequoia wood.

With their dark, velvety colors and bold, primitive forms, these “carved paintings” give us a glimpse into an Eden at night, a “Non-Eden” with figures that slowly materialize from the darkness. The notched edges of the carved paintings are like windows that open to welcome in the balmy dusk. Bodies begin to stir. A nude woman gazes from an open window, her long hair brushing her bare breasts. Another reclines languidly in a room with mosaic-like patterns of squares and diamonds. Yet others are bathed in luminous red as the heat of the day begins to dissipate. A raised hand beckons, gestures, waves. Spare and angular in their beauty, the women recall both the visceral, haunting figures in woodblock prints by Kirchner and Schiele and the fragmented faces and bodies of Cubist painting. The women in the carved paintings observe the ”Non-Eden” beyond the frame, intrigued, meditative, and perhaps a little sorrowful at what they are seeing. A certain tension, a frisson of intrigue, maybe even trepidation, hums back and forth between the women and the indeterminate forms of the sculptures that stand freely, just outside.

Capturing the primal energy, strength, and intuitive nature of his sculpture in his two-dimensional work, whether on canvas or carved in wood, Schneider invites viewers to join the engaging, provocative conversation that reverberates from painting to sculpture and back again.

— Brooke Hodge, independent curator and writer