



Stage Right (Detail), 2023, Ink and oil on canvas, 88 x 64 inches

BACKDROP, a solo exhibition of new works by **Virginia Wagner**, curated by **Nat Roe**.

Opening: Friday, Sept 8, 2023, 6-9pm

On View: Sept 8–Oct 1, 2023

Hours: Fridays 3-6pm, Saturdays & Sundays 1-6pm, and by appointment

Artist Talk by Virginia Wagner and Musical Performance by Alison Clancy: Sunday Oct 1

Closing Party: Saturday Oct 7

10-61 Jackson Ave Long Island City, NY 11106

Radiator Gallery is pleased to present **BACKDROP**, a solo exhibition of paintings and animation by Brooklyn-based artist Virginia Wagner. The show is anchored by large, freestanding paintings constructed from reclaimed wood. The works function like stage sets, forming a broken panorama. The paintings depict theater architecture and waterways that border New York, invoking the Hudson River Valley School while playing with the genre of scenic painting.

Over the last decade, Wagner's work has focused on sites of conflict between human construction and the natural world, including flood zones, abandoned factories, and areas of desertification. **BACKDROP** deepens this investigation into Wagner's local ecosystem. In a city contending with rising waters, toxic air, and excessive waste, what role does landscape painting have to play? In an art context saturated by a kaleidoscope of content, what holds center stage?

BACKDROP takes inspiration from the immersive quality of 19th-century Romantic painting while simultaneously upending its singular vision of landscape. This genre offered an Edenic

portrait of nature as boundless in resources and ripe for colonial expansion. In contrast, Wagner's landscapes are fractured. Green space is fragmented. Floorboards are flooded.

Wagner creates tension between what is left unfinished in the execution of her paintings and what is under construction in the painted scenes. Viewers can walk around the works to observe frames built from driftwood and drowned objects. BACKDROP invites both high and low art references. By invoking scenic painting, it nods to the craft of faux finishing as well as the lineage of canonical artists who designed for opera and theater.

Wagner begins her process on the ground with poured ink, incorporating the chaos of organic forms. She then uses oil paint to develop the built environment. This creates a spatially slippery picture plane. Disparate scales elide. One area falls back into an illusionistic expanse while another flattens against the fourth wall.

The projected video, *Drift*, presents a different type of panorama: a seamless pan of Newtown Creek, the Superfund site that borders the gallery. The floating subject, made from trash and animated via stop motion, is at once constructed and discarded. Set to music by OHYUNG, it becomes a raft, a billboard, a scarecrow, a candy wrapper.

In BACKDROP, Wagner sets the stage for the human and non-human forces that shape our city's edges and remaining patches of green.

Virginia Wagner (b. 1986 Berkeley CA) is a Brooklyn-based artist and writer. She is the daughter of an entomologist and a Master Gardener. Her first job was scientific illustration. She received degrees from Oberlin College and MICA and worked in the studios of Wangechi Mutu, Julie Heffernan, Gedi Sibony, and Adam Helms, among others. Between 2019 and 2021, she was commissioned by National Geographic to make a series of paintings about climate and the arctic for two polar passenger ships. This past year, her work on 17th-century entomologist Maria Sibylla Merian was featured at apexart and received a STEAMplant grant. Currently, she is working on a commission for Guggenheim Works & Process. She received the 2016 Lotos Prize in Painting and has been granted residencies at Kaatsbaan Cultural Park, Bridge Street Theater, Guggenheim Peter B Lewis Theater, Mount Tremper Arts, Brush Creek, Byrdcliffe, VCCA, Edward Albee Foundation, Jentel Foundation, Ucross, Vermont Studio Center, and Yale Norfolk. She teaches hybrid visual art and creating writing classes at Pratt Institute.

About the Curator:

Nat Roe (b. 1986 Montclair NJ) is the Executive Director of Flux Factory, a Long Island City hub hosting an Artists-in-Residents community which collectively guides the direction of a multidisciplinary gallery. Nat was a founding co-owner of Silent Barn, a collectively directed space for living, workspace and performances which closed in April 2018 after a decade of existence. Nat has organized and performed at over 200 concerts since moving to Brooklyn in 2009. From 2008-2014, Nat DJed a weekly radio program at Jersey City's WFMU. His program was a live audio collage with noisy cut-ups of dancehall, disco and easy listening. In addition to nearly 1000 hours of audio published online, Nat has published several physical recordings. Before getting involved in collective-centric art spaces, Nat was active as an arts journalist. He has written for publications including Wire Magazine, Rhizome, Art F City, Fader, and he was the editor of WFMU's blog for several years.

Radiator Gallery 10-61 Jackson Avenue, Long Island City, NY 11101

www.radiatorarts.com / 347 677-3418

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