

Southern Artist Spotlight: Maysey Craddock

By Anna Marchetti

Broken branches, scrapped wood, tangled wires and knotted roots—these are the forms that speak to Memphis artist Maysey Craddock. Having spent the majority of her adolescence on the Alabama Gulf Coast and in New Orleans, Maysey developed a reverence for places where the land meets the sea. From an early age, she began documenting this type of landscape, keeping countless sketches that loosely outlined the marshy horizon. Beautiful, but also frightening and complex, these habitats appeared to Maysey to be a point of both life and destruction.



The Hunger in the Trees

Maysey attended Tulane University in New Orleans, where she studied sculpture and anthropology. Rivers and swampy landscapes continued to be of particular interest to her at this time. After Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana in 2005, these subjects became even more of a focus, driving Maysey to collect hundreds of images of abandoned homes and dilapidated buildings. Her method of gathering data is layered, and so, too, is her process of completing a painting. After carefully patching together pieces of found paper bags with thread, she then delicately applies gouache, a thin, water-based paint. As Maysey paints and draws, she references the photographs she has

taken, but does not adhere to them strictly, allowing a complex and often abstract network of marks to unfurl.

Sourced from collected photographs and created in part from found objects, Maysey's paintings and sculptures possess an inherent material connection to the land that inspired them. With wrinkles left unpressed and edges left unrefined,

Maysey's work appears precarious, capable of being washed or blown away from our grasp.

Her paintings do not depict a specific place, but rather illustrate environments that seem altogether familiar and strange. She has constructed settings that are ephemeral and transient, providing us only a fading impression of a place we cannot locate.

As Maysey's paintings have evolved over the past several years, architectural elements have fallen out of focus. Her newest work heavily emphasizes symmetry, often as a line of trees mirrored in what appears to be a river beneath. Sometimes her compositions are more abstract, culminating in a complex system of lines that bend and wind across the page like gnarled twigs. Several of her paintings seem to reference a topographical view of a coast or river. But again, the forms have been manipulated just enough to thwart our sense of groundedness.

Maysey's newest paintings literally reference reflection, but more importantly, they allude to a metaphorical space of contemplation. She situates us between land and sea; between body and spirit; between here and there. We are encouraged to let our imagination wander through these landscapes and get lost. By framing these ephemeral places, Maysey has asked us to engage the land, to witness its beauty and to acknowledge its pervasive depth. Gazing into these liminal territories, we begin to wonder, "Where do I stand?"