



*Zachari Logan*

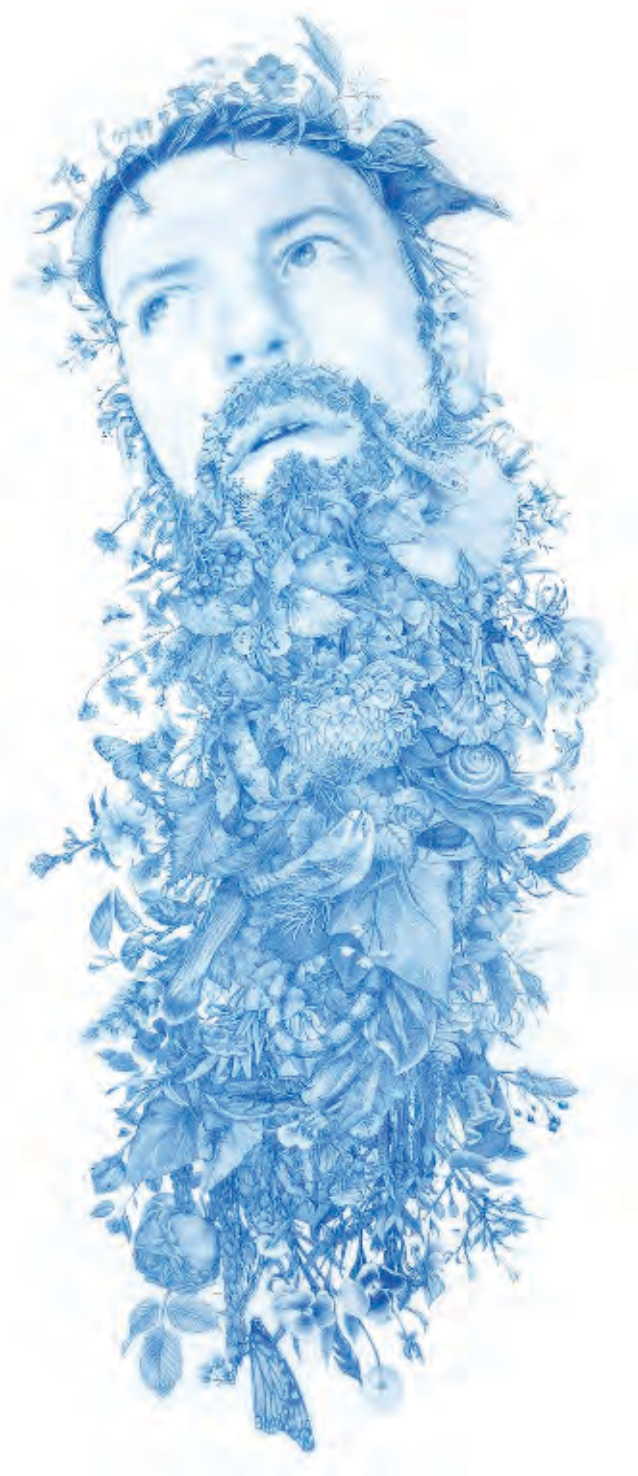
*A Natural History of Unnatural Things*

“Drawing is thinking, the way I philosophize my way through life”  
- Zachari Logan

With a virtuosity that recalls the master draughtsman of the Renaissance and Baroque, Zachari Logan uses exquisite realism with a subtle, sometimes dark humour to create meticulous drawings that weave together life-size plants, insects, birds, animals and human figures in collage-like compositions. In this exhibition the immersive quality of his drawings is further enhanced with six tactile ceramic sculptures. The work is rich with visual information, often drawing on art historical traditions in discussion of contemporary issues from masculinity to ecology. As the word play in the title suggests, *A Natural History of Unnatural Things* asks us to query the assumptions upon which we construct our beliefs about nature and what is natural.

The male body and the scale of the human figure are important elements in Logan's artwork. He often uses his own body as subject matter, in a manner similar to the performative practice of Cindy Sherman and Adrian Stimson in which “the personal is political”. The life-size nude *Adam & Eve* (2010) is exemplary of Logan's earlier research into identity, representations of masculinity in art history, and queer experience. Combining elements of masculine and feminine attributes, the figure is isolated against a plain background. The spray of Queen Anne's Lace is an early use of botanical imagery in Logan's work, connecting the figure to the landscape. In his newer series of works, Logan continues to create links with art history and to use realism symbolically, but as he widens his scope of philosophical inquiry around identity, his imagery is changing significantly. He continues to use his own body as a frame of reference, but his depiction of the body is now fragmented or implied, sometimes present only through experiential memory. He includes more contextual information, increasing the connection to nature. His figures and ground are drawn extremely realistically, but the details form a visual democracy that serves to emphasize the complexity and diversity in his subject matter.

Logan's most intricate compositions are his blue drawings. He uses industrial tools, a .05 mechanical blue pencil on drafting film, but the work is extremely organic, much more like studies by Dürer than architectural plans. Mylar has a textured surface designed to hold the detail of the finest line, which, coupled with a skin-like translucency, gives sensual life to his images. *Wild Man 3* (2013) seems united with nature; his face is peaceful, his hair and manly beard flow with plant and animal life, a jungle-like cornucopia of blossoms, snakes, leaves, birds, insects, fish and mice. *Wild Man 2* (2013) serves as a doppelgänger, adorned in a similarly verdant costume, he has a more ambivalent, searching expression. Logan describes his *Wild Man* drawings as “Natural Drag...portraying myself as a fantastical character, an embodiment of a natural process...”<sup>1</sup> Costume can be used to incorporate that which we admire, or to control that which we fear.<sup>2</sup> Logan's



*Wild Man 2*, 2012  
blue pencil on mylar  
22 x 42"  
Private collection

*Natural Drag* series also investigates the way we project a human shape onto what we want to understand. *Leshy 2* (2014) depicts a silhouette of a man made up of plants and animals in the style of Mannerist painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo. In Slavic folklore the Leshiye are masculine forest spirits, temperamental shape-shifters who lead unwary children and travelers astray. The forest provides food and materials for shelter, but it can just as easily be harmful, even for those armed with knowledge, vigilance and luck. Stories of tricksters, gods and spirits anthropomorphize the chaotic and hostile environment.

Putting great care into the choice of titles, Logan signals links between his artwork and his research into cultural history. His *Eunuch Tapestry* drawings are inspired by a set of seven late medieval wall hangings that form the core of the collection at the Cloisters in New York. Known collectively as the *Unicorn Tapestries*, they narrate the hunt and capture of a unicorn. Their symbolic

in the twilight. Our gaze flits between bright spots: butterfly wings and blossoms gleaming with colour against the velvety dark. Then, slowly, the intertwined foliage reveals hidden life: birds, animals, and a man. Leaves, wings, and bodies are life size. The man crouches, naked. The scene is dream-like, sensual. As we bring our own memories to this work and imagine ourselves as the man in the shadows, nakedness may feel romantic, or too vulnerable. In other *Tapestry* works, the man in the shadows materializes as a face at the edge of the darkness. Is he a threat or a person waiting? His presence suggests the history of outdoor “cruising” areas, parks where men met clandestinely because their sexuality was condemned as unnatural and criminalized.<sup>4</sup>

The liminal sense of these spaces is emphasized by Logan’s technique with chalk. Using black paper, he coats the page with a further ground of black chalk, and then works up his colours. Their brightness suggests life in contrast to the

what it is, our cultural values have changed.

Logan’s work seems so natural, so realistic, that especially in his drawings, it is hard to remember that each element is included with purpose—his dandelions are not growing by chance. Modelled on images from his travels, individual plants and animals share the same compositional space but come from different eco-systems. His work is a form of collage, in style of magical realism that, like Baroque still-life paintings, functions as exquisitely rendered visual essays. The immense quantity of life-forms that Logan draws and sculpts, and the equal care and detail that he gives each individual suggests he believes in an equity and inter-dependence between living things. He questions the hierarchies that Western culture has assumed since Socrates suggested that matter and spirit, human and non-human life belong to separate realms. He asks how “natural behaviour” can be the benchmark for morality? These arguments



relevance is largely lost to us. Essayist Richard Preston, in writing on the history of the tapestries, notes that in contrast to contemporary understanding, “the unicorn was a symbol of many things in the Middle Ages, including Christianity, immortality, wisdom, lovers, marriage.”<sup>3</sup> Logan’s word play changes the Unicorn to Eunuch, and is suggestive of the debilitating effect of social repression and marginalization on queer lives, castration as disempowerment in a manner similar to Germaine Greer’s usage of the word in relation to women, in the title of her 1970 book, *The Female Eunuch*.

Echoing the size and physical shape of the medieval tapestry, Logan’s *Eunuch Tapestry 5* (2015) is a chalk pastel drawing on black paper, seven feet tall and more than 20 feet wide, comprised of vertical scrolls mounted seamlessly to hang touching the floor. As if the gallery wall suddenly opened to the edge of a dense forest at night, our eyes look at the drawing and feel the need to adjust, blinking

deep unknowable shadow. I am reminded of Sarah Churchwell’s poetic translation of Virgil, “Even in the midst of paradise, loss assumes a shape. Et in Arcadia ego: beauty is not alone in the garden. Death is waiting there too.”<sup>5</sup> Logan’s ceramic sculpture extends the theme of *memento mori*. Many of his pieces, (*Fountain* 2013-15, *Circular Ditch* 2015 and *Footrest* 2015) are floral in form, but retain the look of naked clay, which Logan describes as the colour of “brittle bone matter”<sup>6</sup>. The medium of clay reflects the hand of the sculptor in a manner similar to drawing, as Logan explains, “I experience my ceramics as being a natural extension of my drawings. Everything is created through the process of hand-building. . .”<sup>7</sup> The dandelion and the ditch are motifs in both of his mediums. The ditch is a liminal space, an in-between area between the road and forest. The dandelion, which now thrives in the ditch, was once carried around the world as a domestic plant, prized for its nutritional and medicinal values. The plant is

have arisen many times over racial equality, gay rights, and gender equity. When early feminists fought for enfranchisement and challenged societal assumptions around the capability of women, the discourse and pushback centred on what was “natural” for women. We have since accepted that while biology explains how our bodies differ, we must be careful how we let this understanding influence our social contract. Logan reminds us that there is a close dance between natural science and philosophy, and without constant vigilance, our assumptions can lead us to misguided science and junk morality.

Margaret Bessai

*Seeding*, 2013  
pastel on black paper  
38 x 120”



*Seeding (detail)*, 2013  
pastel on black paper  
38 x 120"



*Root 2*, 2015  
acrylic on hand-built ceramic  
12 x 5 x 3"



*Circular Ditch*, 2015  
hand-built ceramic  
14 x 13 x 3"



*Leshy 2*, 2014  
pastel on black paper  
50 x 70"  
Private collection



*Pool*, 2015  
pastel on black paper  
59 x 84"



*Eunuch Tapestry 4*, 2014  
pastel on black paper  
84 x 96"

Notes:

- 1 *The Archive* 53, pages 21–22 Spring 2015
- 2 For example, costume is an important part of the carnivalesque rituals around death observed in the Americas during Hallowe'en and the Day of the Dead. Rituals of costume and masculinity are not limited to Western Culture's distant past. See "Europe's Wild Men": [ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/europes-wild-men/shear-text](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/europes-wild-men/shear-text)
- 3 "Capturing the Unicorn", *New Yorker* April 2005, online at: [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/04/11/capturing-the-unicorn](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/04/11/capturing-the-unicorn)
- 4 Hunter O'Hanian, exhibition essay for Leslie-Lohman, New York 2015
- 5 Sarah Churchwell, *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem, and the Invention of the Great Gatsby*. The roman poet Virgil may be the first source for the phrase, "Et Arcadia Ego" or "In the Garden, am I [Death]". It inspired a series of *memento mori* by Baroque artists Guercino and Poussin
- 6 *Zachari Logan: Feat of Clay*, *Border Crossings* Issue 134, May 2015 online at: <http://bordercrossingsmag.com/article/feat-of-clay1>
- 7 *The Archive* 53, page 23 Spring 2015



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