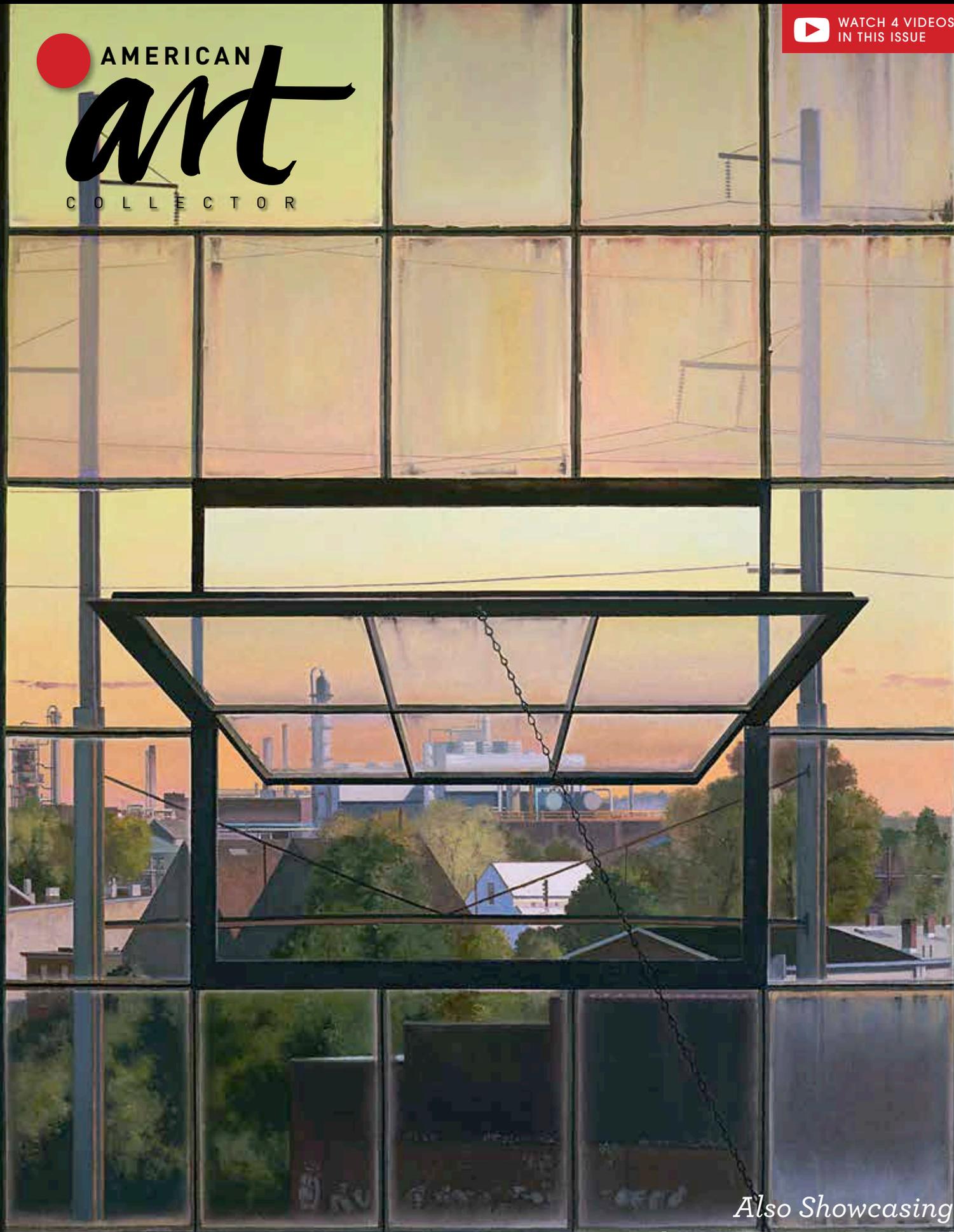


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ALYSSA MONKS

# Resolution

In Alyssa Monks' new works, transparent ghostlike figures reside within chaotic knots of vegetation, intertwining tree limbs and clusters of organic growth. Although the lines and movements create tension and unease, the figures are calm and peaceful—nature is absorbing them.

"I've always loved the human body and all its complexities. I find looking through the skin and being a little uncomfortable about what I see—marveling at its complexity and strangeness, its delicate qualities versus its strength and possibilities—so visually stimulating and intriguing. It both excites me and scares me," Monks says from her studio in Brooklyn, New York. "Tree branches really do look quite similar to the network of veins and nerves, tendons, bones in the human body. It all makes me feel connected to something larger than just my own experience."

Monks' new show, *Resolution*, opening March 24 at Forum Gallery in New York City, is a departure



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for the respected artist, whose works in the past have largely featured water, naked vulnerability or close-up ponderings of human faces in expressions of agony, ecstasy and everything in between. After tragedy in her personal life, she has found solace and calm in a new subject matter.

"Nature is a new subject for me. A surprise to me, actually. I never was interested in painting it before. My mother's illness and passing a few years ago had a great deal to do with this shift. Although I'd been fixated with trees back in college, and made of series of black-and-white photographs from double exposing trees over female figures. It was film photography, developing negatives and prints in the darkroom. I never thought I could paint it. It was way too complex to me then. It wasn't my conscious intention to revisit that idea in my current work, but it happened naturally," she says. "Much like water, I feel drawn to trees in the same kind of soothing, calming way. When my mother was nearing death, it was the trees that really gave me comfort in a way, taught me how to stand patiently, calmly and weather this storm, stay connected to those around me. It makes me very curious and inspired to think about the infinite

ways to incorporate this earthy texture into the human experience through painting. I feel this current work is just the beginning."

What's especially remarkable about Monks' new works is the lusciousness of the trees and the forest they reside in. Nature takes many forms—weightless whispers of ideas in pieces like *Absorb* and *Merge*, and then vivid, fully realized forests in a piece like *Become*—and in each form nature matches the emotional tone and mood of her figures, who are at peace with the transformation Monks has bestowed upon them.

"I choose my subjects based on who I am feeling very close to emotionally, empathetic toward or curious about. Oftentimes I will use my own body and face to get this effect because it is the easiest to access—I am in my body, I am in my experience, I am curious about my own life," she explains. "I usually go for the moment between feelings or expressions. Some emotion or experience is just starting to hit the subject, or just about to leave. I want to create a space for the viewer as well as relate, empathize or connect to the subject as well, so I choose these quieter in-between moments almost as though the subject is waiting for the viewer's response or reaction, without forcing or anticipating that response." ●

**1**  
Alyssa Monks in her Brooklyn studio.

**2**  
*Absorb*, oil on linen, 56 x 56"

**3**  
*Impermanence*, oil on linen, 66 x 56"

**4**  
*Become*, oil on linen, 50 x 80"

All images © Alyssa Monks. Courtesy Forum Gallery, New York.