

RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC
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Andrew Raftery

Autobiography of a Garden on Twelve Engraved Plates

September 10 - November 5, 2016

Opening: Saturday, September 10, 4-6PM

RYAN LEE is pleased to announce Andrew Raftery: *Autobiography of a Garden on Twelve Engraved Plates*, featuring an eight year project of ceramics, paintings, and installation based on the annual garden that he designs, plants, and tends in Providence, Rhode Island. On view will be an installation of twelve engraved ceramic plates designed by the artist that feature annual plants during each month of the year, as well as twelve grisaille tondo paintings. The plates are mounted on hand printed letterpress wallpaper, also designed by the artist, with patterns inspired by mustard greens.

The title, which is partly in tribute to Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, addresses the notion that this project details the full life of the garden, including its inception, development, decline, and dormancy. The twelve-month narrative, satirical in nature inherent in Raftery's practice, plays to the absurdity of everyday life and the action of an "unrepentant aesthete" tending an ornamental flower garden. The garden is carefully conceived with annual plants, so each year the garden has different compositions and textures that evolve throughout the season. In thinking about his garden as art, Raftery translates the performance of gardening as a pictorial narrative through engraving on ceramics.

Developed over eight years, *Autobiography of a Garden on Twelve Engraved Plates* marks a pivotal period in Raftery's contemporary practice. Here, Raftery introduces an outdoor composition and a completely autobiographical narrative, rather than the fictional ones seen in earlier bodies of work. Initially inspired by his collection of English transfer ware, this is Raftery's first foray into ceramics. The specificity of scale and pushed him to expand his representational vocabulary of markmaking. He uses a "micro decoration" approach to simplify crosshatching techniques and discover new qualities of light and effects of atmosphere, amounting to a new printing medium. The letterpress wallpaper, *Spring Salad*, features the tight curves of the mustard greens that sprouted in May. They reference the damask pattern, a medieval reverse weaving technique, which the artist notes is pulled apart by the lightly engraved horizontal and vertical dashes that respond to the requirements of the ornamental effect. Raftery's practice is heavily research based as a curator and collector. It is both personal and objective, a constant self-reflection informed by historical research designed to democratize mediums.

Raftery has been interested in prints, particularly engravings, and their role in colonizing our world: on wallpaper, clothing, and functional objects. Since the 18th century, engraving has been used to decorate pottery, and the technique has a long history of being used for commercial illustrations and reproductions before the advent of the photomechanical reproduction. The choice to work in engraving provides Raftery with the welcome challenge of using a seemingly antiquated technique to treat contemporary subject matter. Raftery's precision— not only as a master engraver, but also as an observer of contemporary culture— allows him to create art that pays homage to the history of printmaking, while ensuring its status as a marker of the current socio-cultural climate. Raftery worked in tandem with resources at the Rhode Island School of Design, where he has been a professor since 1991, most notably with Larry Bush from the

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ceramics department, who devised the clay, formulated the glazes, and made the dyes for the RAM Press. Along with a team of students, they tripled-fired 1800 ceramic plates through the kilns. A fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Cary Leibowitz accompanies the exhibition.

Andrew Raftery received his MFA from Yale University in 1988. He has been an Associate Professor of Print Making at the Rhode Island School of Design since 1991. Raftery was awarded a 2008 Guggenheim Fellowship in Fine Arts, and is a past recipient of the American Academy of Arts and Letters Purchase Award (2006), and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award (2003). Raftery's work can be found in the collections of Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA; British Museum, London, UK; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; Davis Museum at Wellesley College, MA; Davison Art Center at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Spencer Museum of Art at University of Kansas, Lawrence; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

On view concurrently is Mariam Ghani: *The City & The City*, September 10 - November 5. Forthcoming exhibitions include new paintings by Donald Sultan, November 10 - December 23.