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Pia Paulina Guilmoth—Flowers Drink the River

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CLAMP is honored to present *Flowers Drink the River*, a solo exhibition by Pia Paulina Guilmoth—her first with the gallery. In this deeply personal body of work, Guilmoth documents the first two years of her gender transition while living in a rural, predominantly right-wing town in Maine. Her large-format photographs reflect beauty and terror in a world where queer existence can be at turns both euphoric and deeply perilous. Haunting nocturnes replete with moths, snakes, and owls,



are animated by raw, animistic rituals, representing Guilmoth's search for beauty, sanctuary, and resistance amid the wild landscapes and intimate relationships that define her life.

Spanning themes of transformation, belonging, and defiance, *Flowers Drink the River* is an ode to trans women, queer kinship, and working-class survival in the backwoods of central Maine. Guilmoth's photographs reject easy categorization—mud-drenched bodies intertwine in the dark of night, spider silk drifts across glowing landscapes, and nocturnal creatures move through the frame like quiet witnesses. A burning house rages in the distance with a calm white horse seemingly unawares. Friends piss from tree branches like a warm summer rain. These photographs inhabit the space between land and body, pleasure and threat, inviting viewers into a world where boundaries are blurred, and survival is a necessary act of creation.

Guilmoth's photographic practice is rooted in collaboration—both with her human subjects and the natural world. She constructs delicate sculptures from spiderwebs, flowers, and other found materials, then waits as the environment intervenes, letting wind, water, and light reshape her

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compositions. This meditative approach extends to her relationship with the animals she photographs, earning their trust over weeks and months before capturing their presence on film. “Each night for a week in August, I would sit in the tall, tick-infested grass behind the orchard, covered in Scent Killer Gold, wearing a ghillie suit, holding a tray full of crushed apples in one hand and a 30-foot makeshift shutter release cable attached to my 4 × 5 camera in the other,” Guilmoth recalls. “The same family of deer would get more comfortable with my presence each night. Eventually, they were eating the ripe fruit from my hands. The following Tuesday, I would have my first HRT consultation. I was keeping it a secret, knowing there was no way I could safely transition in this place, but also no way I could hide my changing body over the following months and years.”

Guilmoth’s use of large-format photography is both a technical and emotional choice, emphasizing patience, precision, and physical engagement with the medium. “I have always embraced slowness in my life,” Guilmoth states. “Both in the place I live and the way I aspire to be. Art and being with people I love are the things that allow me to really exist in a moment.” The intricate process of setting up each shot, from building trust with wild creatures to manipulating natural elements, reflects the broader themes of her work: resilience, adaptation, and the search for beauty in unlikely places.

At its core, *Flowers Drink the River* challenges the conventions of documentary photography. Rather than approaching her subjects as an outsider, Guilmoth photographs her own community—trans and queer people navigating life in a region that often denies their existence. The result is a body of work that resists voyeurism, instead offering an intimate, deeply felt portrait of chosen family, survival, and joy. “Resistance for me is saying: ‘You can try and take everything from me—healthcare, safety, affordable housing—but you can’t take away my joy and the ability to find beauty in my life,’” she explains.

The exhibition is accompanied by a monograph of the same title published by Stanley Barker.

Image: © Pia Paulina Guilmoth; "dust," 2024; Archival pigment print.