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Todd Murphy at MARC STRAUS



11/15/2016 by [KATE MURPHY \(HTTPS://ARTEFUSE.COM/AUTHOR/CATHERINE-MURPHY/\)](https://artefuse.com/author/catherine-murphy/)



Installation view of Todd Murphy at Marc Straus, New York, 2016

Brooklyn-based artist **Todd Murphy** makes his solo exhibition debut at **MARC STRAUS** showcasing

his recent works, which combine sculpture, painting, and photography. Raised in the South, the artist approaches his practice much like a 19th century Naturalist, drawing inspiration from the natural phenomena he documents on his world travels. Sensed in the works on display is Murphy's interest in the longstanding discussion of Man's relationship with Nature. A topic that could come across as monotonous or played out is given new life thanks to Murphy's superb execution and poetic storytelling.

Spread across three rooms on the gallery's second floor, the exhibition begins with a monumental mixed media work titled *Gracious*, which measures 108 x 180 inches and incorporates oil, plexiglass, and archival prints. Rendered with fastidious attention to detail, a tiger leaps out of the brush towards a woman who is seated on her knees. With hands rested on her lap, she calmly looks at the wild animal as if waiting for some divine message. Murphy has painted a detail layer on the plexiglass surface – best noticed on the tiger's fur and foreground brush, which gives the work a very illusionistic, tactile quality.



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The mood changes in the second room with works like *Candle Man*, which presents a gleaming orange candle set against a black background. Executed in incredible detail, you can almost sense the flame's crackle and swaying glow. Before electricity, the candle was used for reading and writing. It is not hard to imagine a Naturalist using this candle to work after returning from a day in the field. This connection is furthered with the realization that the candle seems to radiate from within a human figure. A nearby work shows a deer alone in a forest during winter. The animal stands far back in the picture plane and is surrounded by tall trees. Using only variations of black and white, Murphy has created a compelling impression that expresses the sanctity of natural world.



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The exhibition culminates in the final room, which unveils the artist's latest *Murmurations* series. Using the dress, a culturally loaded motif, Murphy starts a narrative that touches upon grand themes of nature, technology, and humanity over the past two hundred years. The skirts are clear

and shaped like bell jars that encase freestanding sculptures. *Murmurations (Regata)* is expressed through a large sailboat – a mighty object that humans control and use for travel and discovery, yet puts them at the mercy of the powerful and mysterious sea. *Murmurations (Piney Woods)* reveals a woodland forest that looks like a perfect setting for a fairytale. *Murmurations (Nocturne)* shows a similar forest enveloped by a starry night sky. There is an enchanted quality to each. As viewers, we sense that we are looking at a fragment of one's childhood memory. Behind one of the dresses, a video is projected onto the wall. The footage starts with starlings moving in murmuration, the whirling flying pattern that inspired the series' name, and moves on to show a woman, the artist's daughter, twirling in a dress. Hanging on the room's back wall is a large work presenting a white stag against a stark background. Its antlers transform into branches that reach well above the frame to create a natural silhouette against the white gallery wall. The stag appears like an apparition, another character in the fantastical story that Murphy has invited us to experience.

Todd Murphy's work will be on view at Marcus Straus through December 11, 2016.





Murmurations (Regatta), 2016 Mixed media (Oil on plexiglas with archival digital print, found objects) 84 x 60 x 7 inches



Stag, 2016, Mixed media (Oil on plexiglas with archival digital print and branches), 74 x 96 inches Branches variable dimensions

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KATE MURPHY IS A NATIVE OF PENNSYLVANIA. AFTER RECEIVING A DEGREE IN ART HISTORY, SHE MOVED TO NEW YORK CITY TO TEST THE WATERS. SHE ENJOYS WRITING ABOUT ART, CULTURE, FASHION, DESIGN, AND TRAVEL. IN ADDITION TO WRITING, KATE WORKS WITH ARTISTS, LEADS STREET ART TOURS, AND MOONLIGHTS AS AN ILLUSTRATOR.

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