



Mark Ryden: The Tree Show

By Holly Meyers

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Absorbing Roman poet Ovid's tales of transformation in *Metamorphoses* and adding his own dash of art-historical figuration and contemporary pop culture, Mark Ryden broaches new terrain with *The Tree Show*. "Arcadian Gothic" might hint at the nature of this new work, and fans of Ryden will find familiar preoccupations in these new paintings, drawings and sculptures--made since his first solo show in 1998--transposed to new pastures. Never reluctant to freight his work with layers of reference that range from Renaissance landscape and Neoclassical portrait painting to occultism and literature, in his latest works Ryden combines the arcane with pop-cultural images as ground from which to make his carefully executed leaps into fantasy. Ryden's series includes depictions of oak trees consuming children, floating tree stumps with "seeing" eyes, imaginary wood nymphs and mythological characters who personify Nature herself. Ryden paints his characters with a masterful, porcelain glow reminiscent of Ingres and renders his trees with a care that evokes Audubon's botanical illustration. Several of his paintings are presented in elaborately carved frames that project their narratives beyond the canvas. *The Tree Show* offers reproductions of these paintings and sculptures alongside the fruits of Ryden's research on the tree as myth--drawing from the Buddha's Bodhi Tree to Adam and Eve, the Sephiroth of the Kabbalah and matters of ecological science. As such, this volume constitutes an enticing dossier on Ryden's encyclopedic exploration of the subject and reproduces in its entirety this series centered around the arboreal world.

Mark Ryden was born in Medford, Oregon, and received a BFA in 1987 from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

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