

Annabel Osberg, *Autumn Ramsey*,  
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## Autumn Ramsey

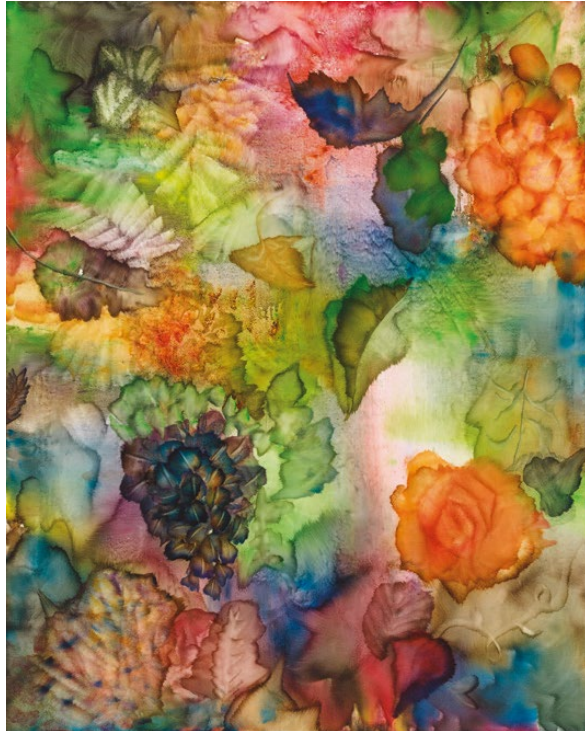
PARK VIEW/PAUL SOTO

Myriad specimens grow within the confines of Autumn Ramsey's pictures, forming tangled networks that coalesce in strange harmony. Among the painter's cultivars are bizarre blooms of rippling chevrons, foliage of striped ribbons, and vagrant curlicues in lurid colors. She also propagates hybrids of light, transparency, hue, and texture, often allowing such elements to cascade into abstraction. See, for instance, in *End Paper*, 2022, how the rainbow-haloed starburst of light toward the painting's upper left corner glints through a hole of pure white, illuminating a nearby twig and making the hazy vegetation beyond it glow almost to the point of nothingness. Further down, nascent confetti patterns dissolve into veils of luminous color that bring out the toothy materiality of the canvas's surface.

With little to indicate spatial hierarchy, it's easy to get lost in Ramsey's allover thickets of washy brushwork, which appear in a dynamic state of flux. In *She Gaze*, 2021, translucent stains form leaves of copper, purple, and olive green that fall from unseen trees, grazing a descending lilac and a floating rose of salmon gold that seems on the verge of melting. These optically seductive vestiges of representation resist the viewer's need to logically synthesize them: The paintings retain just enough information to suggest plants and other organisms, but it's difficult to make out exactly what you're looking at or to determine where one entity ends and the other begins. Staring at any given piece from a few feet away yields a curious sense of depth and motion, almost like gazing at rhythmically waving vegetation in an aquarium. If you allow the dense concatenations of foliage to engulf your field of vision, secondary elements of varying definable nature—faces, body parts, animals, objects—begin to emerge. In one moment of particular clarity, the unmistakable form of an eye pops out unexpectedly from behind a brilliant-orange blotch in *Crimson Flower*, 2021. The effect reminded me of how the narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story "The Yellow Wallpaper," forcibly sequestered for postpartum depression, keeps hallucinating that a woman is trapped in the wallpaper of her room. However, instead of the lugubrious patterns of hideous fungi that Gilman's narrator describes, Ramsey's configurations suggest

buoyant, flourishing jungles that one would thrill to explore, if only they existed in three dimensions.

The press release states that the artist has consistently built upon cultural conceptions of "the body, especially the female body" throughout Western history as "not entirely rational, and something that needs to be controlled." In light of her earlier paintings' unambiguous depictions of women, animals, and chimerical beasts (often against backgrounds similar to the compositions here), the plants in Ramsey's new work are readily understood as open-ended stand-ins for the figure.



Autumn Ramsey,  
*She Gaze*, 2021, oil  
on canvas, 30 x 24".

"Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners," Iago observes in Shakespeare's *Othello*, but in the case of women's bodies, the wills of others are often imposed to do the cultivating. Literature and language are rife with allusions to enclosed gardens and domesticated flora as metaphors for aspects of the female anatomy. Contrarily, Ramsey's botanical protagonists mostly appear to grow wild and unimpeded. The one exception is *White Flowers 2*, 2020, where a crouching nude woman is partially occluded by an overbearing giant rosebush—diminished, perhaps, by the burdensome weight of the preconceptions making it impossible for her to be fully seen. Instead of affording privacy, the ludicrous shrubbery covering her upper body draws only more attention to her milky-white lower extremities, outlined in gray on gessoed canvas left nearly bare.

Like women's bodies, canvases are often seen as things to be controlled. In art school, I remember hearing all manner of dictates: Paint shouldn't be applied too thinly, the eye should be led around the composition in a prescribed manner, and so on. Ramsey bends and, thankfully, often breaks such rules. Seemingly unconcerned with how we view them, her idiosyncratic gardens take on mysterious lives of their own, efflorescing in states of uninhibited glory.

—Annabel Osberg