

## Galerie Francesca Pia

Greg Parma Smith, *Gems in the Temple*

Opening September 17, 11–21  
September 18 – November 6, 2021

The paintings in Greg Parma Smith's *Gems in the Temple* are at once deeply familiar and strikingly new. They are familiar in that they deploy the artist's habitual motifs and symbols, with characteristic thematic unity and humor. The sun and the moon, stars and rainbows, flowers, birds, dogs, and fish are painted with such detail and precision that some appear to be chiseled from pure pigment, while others are flattened into ornate ribbons that fold intricately over themselves, or dissolve into contrasting washes of thinned paint. The compositions are held together by an overstated level of skill and exactitude that tunnels deep into the subconscious resonance of natural symbols.

Whereas Smith's previous shows have depicted allegories of love or artistic process, here we are presented with a display of nature's transformative fecundity. The world of human bodies, commodities, and structures has receded from Smith's recent works, and here it has vanished entirely. In its place we have images of nature naturing: caterpillars, snails and flies merge with flowers set in bas relief; butterflies and salmon spawn in panels of cerulean blue; a nest of brilliant eggs rests in a tree hatching birds from its leaves. Titles such as *Universal Flower in Situated Cerulean Mineral Firmament* and *Banner Ducks Manifesting as Inter-Spatial Membrane* (they are as precise as the renderings) heighten this atmosphere of transformative regeneration.

With this withdrawal of the human has come a flattening of space. Linear perspective, present in the trompe-l'oeil pseudo-dimensionality of the bas relief, vies for control with a spatial order that eliminates negative space by discounting the distinction between bodies and non-bodies. While the former reaffirms the self and "creates distance between human beings and things," the latter collapses this distance to evoke natural relationships and harmonies.<sup>1</sup> But in contradiction lies hope: the space we inhabit, these paintings suggest, depends on what we can see and what we can let go.

Liam Considine

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<sup>1</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991) p. 67.