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‘Bryan Rogers: Wallflowers’ Review: A Blooming Talent

The painter’s second show with Monya Rowe Gallery in New York extends his contemporary Art Nouveau aesthetics with more refined works and interior scenes.

By Brian P. Kelly

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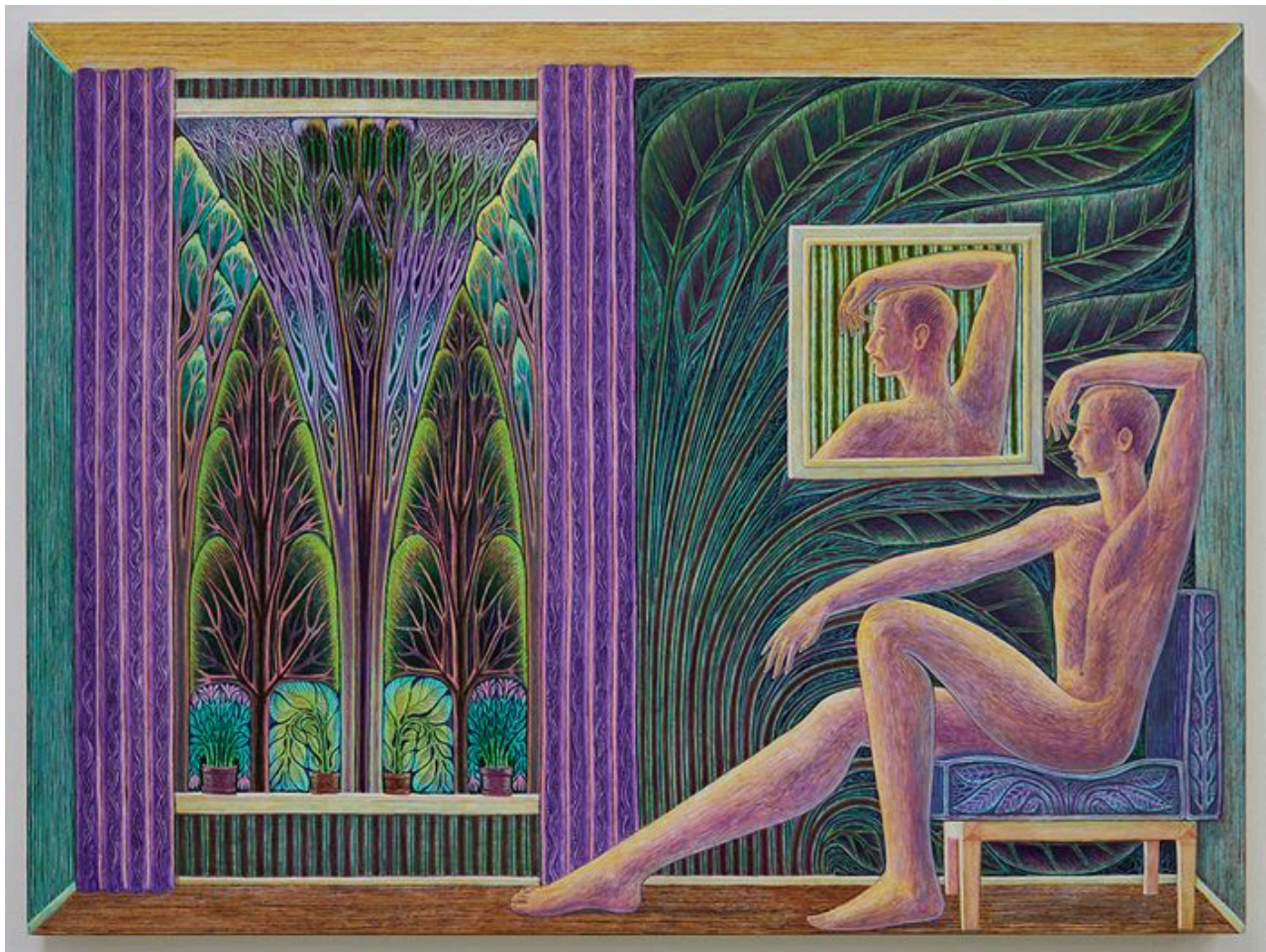
Bryan Rogers’s ‘In the Window’ (2023-24) PHOTO: MONYA ROWE GALLERY

New York

A few years ago, with Halloween approaching, a friend and I headed up to the Bronx with Woodlawn Cemetery as our destination. There for a tour of various mausoleums, we weren't on the search for spooky stories but artistic ones, specifically those behind the Tiffany stained-glass windows that ornament many of Woodlawn's structures. I was reminded of these handsome century-old works during my visit to "Bryan Rogers: Wallflowers" at Monya Rowe Gallery, a collection of new paintings that share their luminosity and Art Nouveau sensibilities—and are peppered with allusions to psychedelia, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Vienna Secession, contemporary queer culture and more.

I became enamored with Mr. Rogers's work last spring, when the gallery exhibited him at [Future Fair](#). This, his second solo outing with Monya Rowe, shows that he's been honing his craft. The details sharper, the subjects more alive, his dozen works here are more radiant than those that have come before.

Several of the most recent works here are interiors, a new subject for Mr. Rogers. While all of his previous work has played with dimensionality and space, he's created a novel challenge for himself here. Though his earlier paintings place his nude male subjects, rendered in phosphorescent hues, in head-spinning settings where they're simultaneously hemmed in by cartouche-like ovals and caressed by creeping plants or refreshed by flowing water, these venues establish a more concrete grounding for his vignettes.



Bryan Rogers's 'Mirror' (2023-24) PHOTO: MONYA ROWE GALLERY

The push and pull between the interior and exterior recurs throughout these works, often filled with hues of calming lilac, invigorating violet, energizing chartreuse and earthy juniper. In “Open or Closed?” (2023-24) a figure stands at a window looking out into an indigo night scene as he grasps patterned curtains of eggplant and heather. His face, in profile, is inquisitive yet proud, unashamed of his nakedness yet vulnerable to both the nature beyond the glass and the gaze of the viewer.

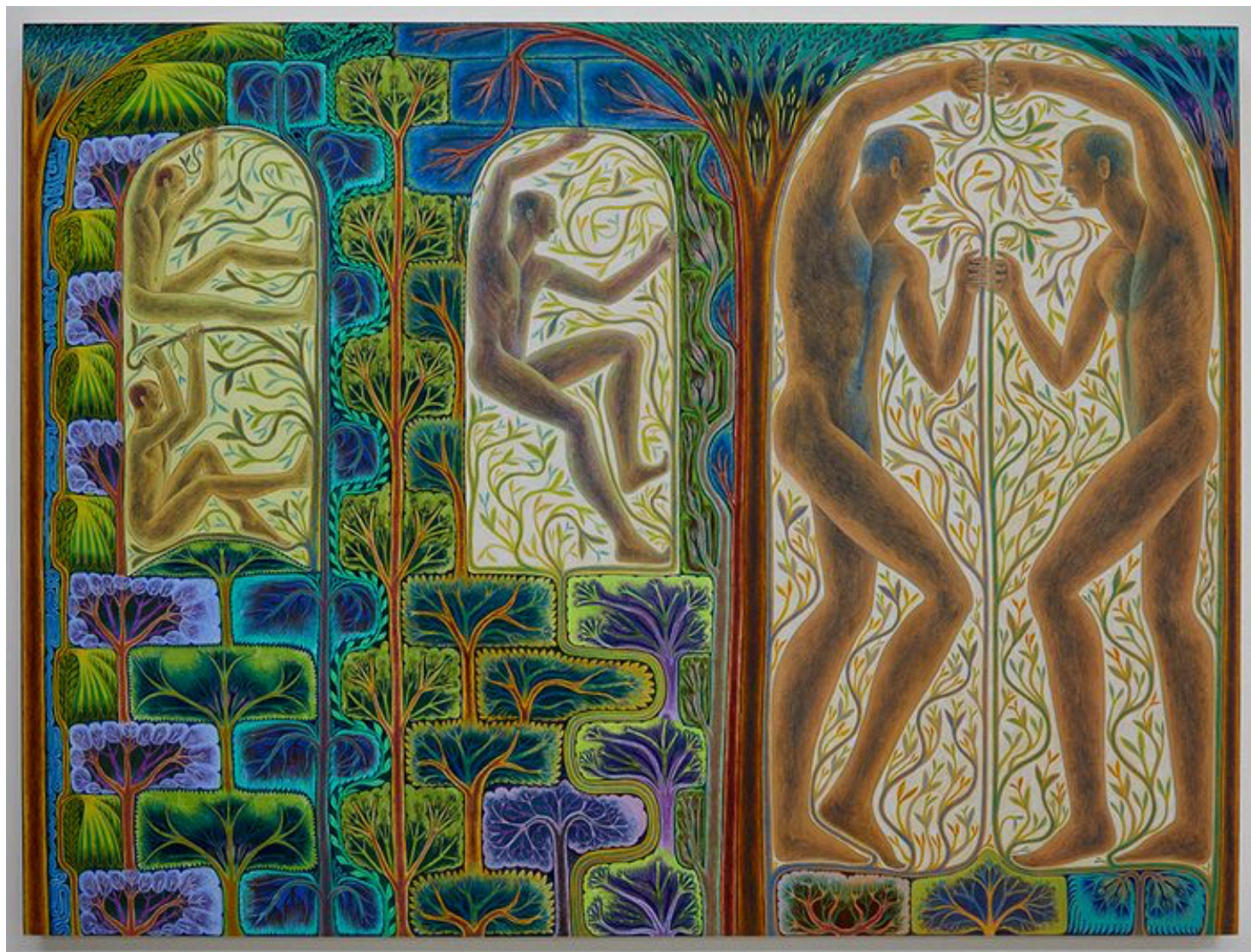
The titular object of “In the Window” (2023-24) also plays a central role, with two figures, each partially obscured by a curtain, on either side of it. As one peers in, arm raised over his head, the other hides indoors. Does he meet his partner’s gaze, or is he hidden by the drapery? This question of seeing and being seen is left unresolved, but the arching branches of the tree outside that connects these two characters leaves no doubt in our mind that whatever has caused their separation won’t last for long. The interior, with its rich wood floor, starburst wallpaper, and decoish hangings, is a celebration of texture and pattern that is a hallmark of Mr. Rogers’s paintings.



Bryan Rogers’s ‘Floral Rocker’ (2023) PHOTO: MONYA ROWE GALLERY

A similar doubling occurs in “Mirror” (2023-24), though not with two people but one, as a man reclines in a slipper chair, his profile captured in the mirror that hangs behind him—the most relaxed riff on “Whistler’s Mother” I’ve ever seen.

Also eye-catching is “Building a House” (2023), which ties together the many aesthetic threads of Mr. Rogers’s practice. Five men are ensconced in a series of portals across the panel, their lithe limbs straining against sinuous branches that sprout up from the bottom of the work as the quintet bends the supple wood into shape. Repeated arboreal motifs buzz with trippy peacock colors and his characters themselves seem to incandesce: Lean in close and you’ll notice that, behind their flesh tones, they’ve been outlined with the faintest hint of glowing colors.



Bryan Rogers’s ‘Building a House’ (2023) PHOTO: MONYA ROWE GALLERY

Also grabbing is “Floral Rocker” (2023), in which a large figure is contorted into a pretzel: His crossed legs, propped elbows and placid face acknowledge his limberness despite this tricky pose. Grasping a flower and surrounded by a sea of neon trees, fanning blooms and waving grasses, he seems utterly at peace, meditative and transcendent; the edges of his body shine almost white, giving him an otherworldly air. With the refined skills and new areas of exploration on view in this show, Mr. Rogers has proved himself a talent to watch.

Bryan Rogers: Wallflowers

Monya Rowe Gallery, through Feb. 17