

# Wonderland.

## ANTON MUNAR

We hear from the Copenhagen-born artist about his first exhibit in Berlin, *The Garden Dies with the Gardener*, a moving collection that discusses the temporality of nature and art.

July 17, 2023



Anton Munar's *The Garden Dies with the Gardener* marks his debut solo exhibition with Peres Projects and his first in Berlin.

Looking at Munar's work, it is easy to become transfixed by the physicality and depth of each layer, the emotion sparked by each stroke, or the history behind the atypical canvas. Perhaps it is the blend of all that separates the Copenhagen-born artist's work from others — as he incorporates a vast array of materials into a single composition. With an undercurrent of love flowing through each piece, he creates a space of fluidity, where the interior meets the outdoors, and the fantastical meets reality.

In this exhibition, the landscape paintings featured evoke his childhood garden in Mallorca, with evergreen pine trees running throughout the collection as a central character to the story. The folktale itself is one that details the temporality of nature. As the setting he paints changes throughout the day, particularly the shadows of the trees, Munar's canvas captures a sense of dynamic movement that reflects nature's complexity and ever-changing quality. Just as such, the work of an artist is constantly changing as time moves on, taking on new meanings to each who views it from year to year. The elongated canvases that hold his work demand attention, luring you in and providing you the space and time to fully absorb yourself in its powerful layers.

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We had the honour of speaking to Anton Munar about *The Garden Dies with the Gardener*: the artistic process, why he doesn't have a favourite piece, and thematic takeaways.

*The Garden Dies with the Gardener* is on exhibit now, through September 2.

Read the interview...

## Hey Anton! How are you doing?

I'm good, thanks. Like it's been some weeks now since the opening and it was a very moving life thing. It was something I've been waiting for for a long time, but I never expected it to be this way and for family and friends to show up in the way they did means the world to me.



## When did you start painting?

I actually started painting because I was playing a lot of football and then I got injured and I didn't know what to do with the time. So I just started watching a lot of movies. I always watched a lot of movies but then I started watching films director by director and then I was quite unhappy with high school for a while so I wanted a change or to quit and then My parents said, if there was something I wanted to do instead? and I decided. Okay, maybe I'll give this art class in high school a chance because I guess that was the closest thing to cinema. I was writing these really bad scripts and every day I was feeling something else. So, every time I would return to the text, I'd written the day before it would just be something completely different altogether. So I actually then decided to myself. Oh maybe I will just paint whenever I feel a new emotion, that doesn't go with what I was already writing. And as soon as I started to paint, I started to feel how it was something that could both be sensuous, physical, and it could also have a poetic rhythm. It was also a way to be with my emotions and a space of intimacy and you didn't have to work with so many people as with Cinema, which for me was beautiful. So I think I just glued onto it immediately and then I just started to do the same thing as I did with the directors. Which was going through one Artist At A Time. And like, try and read everything, I could on that artist and look everything up and then see what art they were looking at and then see what those other artists were looking at and that way you kind of create like this whole map of influence and how everybody is connected in a way, in a very beautiful way. So that's how I started to paint.

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## How did you develop your current style of artistry?

This is a weird question because I didn't develop a style. I don't want to develop a style. I just want to try and do it as wholeheartedly as possible and be as present as possible as I can in the process. I feel like style is kind of like a quick fix like duct tape. It's not something you want to build a life on. Because it is so related to everything outside of you that for me, it was not the way for me. I need a more meditative quality to the practice.

## We would love to hear about *The Garden Dies with the Gardener*. When did you first start working on this body of work?

This exhibition *The Garden Dies with the Gardener* is an amalgamation of many things that are very dear to me. There's a personal element, which is kind of maybe more present in one's first solo exhibition, even the word solo exhibition is kind of problematic because as I was telling you before, with the way that we're all connected and as artist I feel like I could only do it because of the peers past and present and the conversation and all the support and all the people that know how the body of work has developed and changed. I think to create is to be in a constant state of becoming and also it's a way of being vulnerable. I kind of wanted to make the most existential body of work I could. But it's not a 'body of work' as such, that just makes it seem much more grandiose than it actually is. In reality it's much more like me going every day to the studio And then try to be as in tune as I can to the emotional state of a given day and from there it all starts to form.

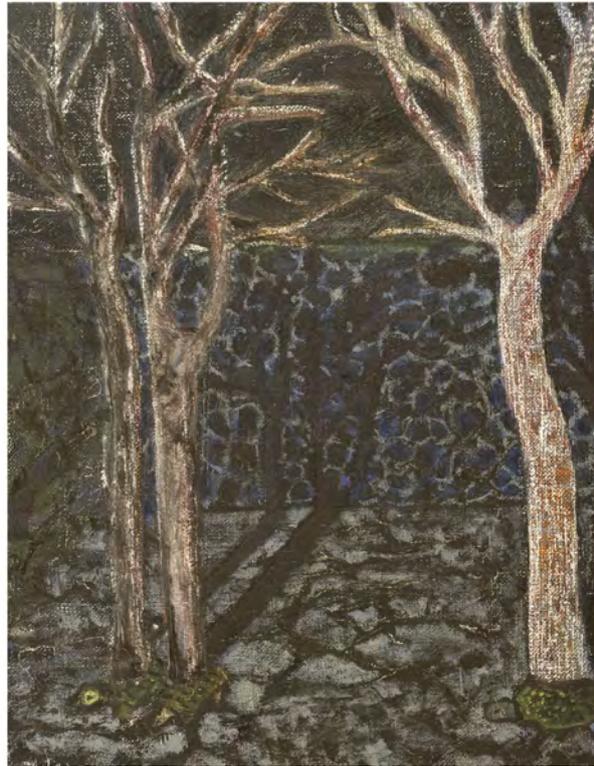
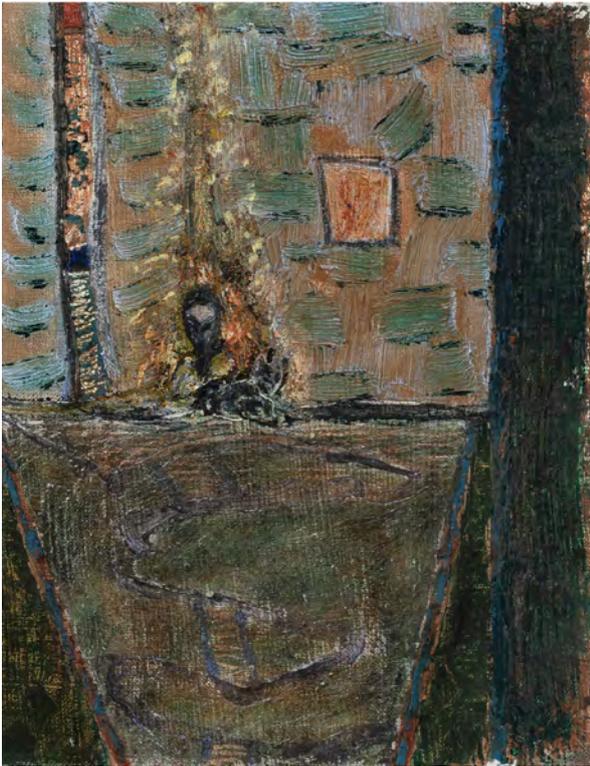


I try to just be open to the day so if I wake up and I'm feeling lost, I will try to be in that spirit and if I'm feeling more clear headed I will try to be more refined, so I think that's one of the big freedoms in it for me. Being able to in a daily manner to be in a constant attunement to the present and really hard allows me to feel connected to the world around me. And this thing about *The Garden Dies with the Gardener*, this is a thought about that for me the art dies with the artist. And that, as an artist, I feel very different to this idea from art history that there is a blossoming when the artist dies because now you have this clear view of the whole body of work and all the arc, and all the ups and downs of the practice. But as living artists, myself and my dear friends as well as a lot of other living artists of all sorts of practices and crafts, I feel it's when we are alive, that it is alive, so enjoy it while it lasts. Especially something like an exhibition which is always going to be a temporary thing.

## Thematically, what does the collection say?

I guess you'll have to try and think about it yourself. I cannot say anything about that.

# PERES PROJECTS



**You work across a variety of canvases, from canvas itself to wood, linen, and found objects. How does the base of the work impact the piece, in what it says to the viewer and/or how you approach the painting and artistry process?**

It's interesting, I feel like everything has to do with touch. It would be like what kind of Earth do you have? And what kind of plant can grow there? And what kind of climate is there? And what kind of sunlight is there and how much shadow does it need? I feel like that's what it means to me to work on different surfaces. It's kind of like that. I try to tune my senses to a different state of mind. Something that has a very strong gesso can for instance give you wonderful vibrancy of colour that would be impossible when working straight on wood. But with the wood you might get this incredible underlying brown that allows you to work with greens in a completely new way. It creates this under shadow of brown that I love and it gives like these greens so much more Earth. So it all depends honestly for me to work in all these ways, is really for me to embrace a kind of openness in the practice in relation to the surface. I don't need this kind of constant reliance on the surface. I don't need to rely on that. Every time I paint I can meet the same surface. A lot of it my practice actually has to do with maybe going off of the road that was established in the last work I touched. So you kind of are always having to attune yourself to what you're working on. And for me, for example, to work with and on found objects and drawers is something that moves me so much and there's just something inexplicable to me about working on old wood, I don't know. Maybe it's like an old religious thing, of daydreaming about working on an old pinewood panel for a church, maybe there's an ancestor thing there.

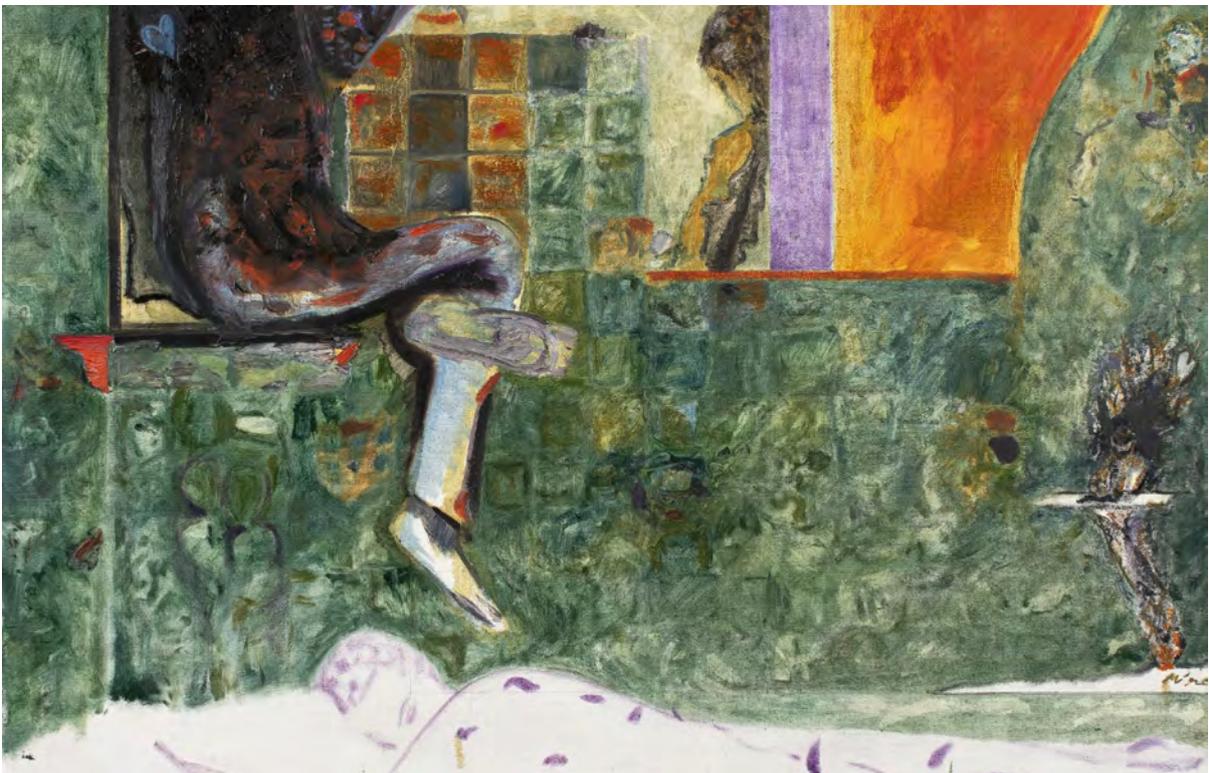
**What was the process like of curating this exhibition? How did you select which pieces to showcase and where to place them? Did you have an idea of how you'd like to show this body of work while creating it?**

I feel like, for me, it was really special to work on the show. Because as it being the first, I really wanted to kind of establish some ways of looking, some ways of being, in the space, some intimacy is. But in the end, a lot of it has gone through so much conversation, for example, with my partner Maya, and also my good friend, Pol. And so many of my friends and family, and Marius, who helped with talking about all these architectural interventions and which ones to do and how not to do it. And then it was really like, A beautiful, beautiful process. And also I realised how much help I needed. Because the studio practice is such a lonely space and I love it for that. I love that loneliness, but I really appreciate that the creation of an exhibition is a collaborative act and also everyone

# PERES PROJECTS

at the gallery, Both Nick, Yana, Javier, Max, João, Lucien, David, Felix, Claire, Neuza and Benni who helped so much with the installation and It was really fantastic, you realise like these things are not like the practice in the studio. Because there it's just me, it's just me, but then again, it's not even just me because there's somebody who makes all the different textiles I work with and others creating the paints. I feel like I'm just part of the wheel, you know. I guess I wanted to create an exhibition that was also a symbol of the deep conversation with other artists, I love for example, the wall paint and the way of deciding it was very Influenced by the colours of Brice Marden, and the way he understands olive greens and both the olive greens of the olive oil, but also the olive bluish greens of like a dried olive leaf on the inner side, not the wet side of the leaf, ah now tripping.

So, the works in the show are from a span of five years. It's very hard to talk about the selection of the works because the show for me is so much. It's so many thoughts. It's so many bodies of work and that's kind of what I wanted to do is kind of not to create an exhibition as a singular body of work, that is kind of like, very climactic when you show it and you're like, this is the moment, this is the purest moment as it is now when it's being shown.



I feel like what I want to do with an exhibition is more to create the space and an intimacy which allows one to be in the presence of one's feelings. I think that's what I want when I look at art. For that, you need time, and these works, they are made through time. Some were worked on for short periods, others for the last five years. For example, there are these drawers from 2019 which was this whole process of introducing not only found drawers but also the wood that was kind of the container for these drawers and the end to try and create something that was a bit more like a project. But then I realised that creating this project was also a bit of a problem because it ended up being too romantic. But looking at them many years later I could now meet them in a way I couldn't have back then to then show these drawers next to this big print of Vittore Carpaccio's 'Preparation of Christ's tomb' is for me just like a dream but it's a very thought of dream and also yeah I just feel like to do this exhibition is really a blessing and also allows me to be so connected to the Earth, my practice and also especially to the people in my life who informed me and to shape me and also all the artists that I think about so much and I care for so deeply.

# PERES PROJECTS

## **Is there a piece that is most special to you?**

There isn't any one piece that is more special to me, honestly. I feel like this is a trick question. Maybe it's not, maybe some people feel like this is the one piece of theirs is the one but I feel like I never have a most special one. To ask which is the most special is like asking what tree do you like the most, you know? It's like, which do you love the most, this olive tree or this pine tree? I don't know, like I love them for what they are, not for one being more special than the other.

## **How was the opening? How does it feel to see people interact with your work?**

The opening was wonderful. Honestly, it was beyond everything I could have hoped for also, the empanadas helped a lot. It's because at Peres Projects they have this beautiful tradition of serving empanadas, At their openings. And I just love it because I think of an opening as a celebration and to look at Art everyone knows like it's one of the things that at least for me can make me the most hungry. So I just love that people can look at some art then eat a little, relax, talk with their friends and then come back to work and then think about life, maybe, more. So the empanadas were key.

That's also, for example, why I wanted to make these benches for the exhibition. Because I realised that people sit on these wood radiator covers that are all along the gallery's windows. And people love to sit there in the openings and I wanted to kind of create a little spatial gesture with the benches. That kind of embraces that act and says like, yes, you are meant to sit here. Yes, this is also a beautiful way to see the exhibition. And all in all I just felt so moved to see so many people. During the whole day before the opening it had been having these summer rains and then there was Thunder throughout all the night before the opening so in a part of my brain during the day I was thinking maybe no one will show up but my friends and family but people really came through which meant the world to me.

I just feel like I was proud of this show because I felt like I had been as vulnerable as I could during the process so that I think helped it be a really beautiful opening for me and also everyone at the gallery where the kindest people and there's so much soul there so I felt really at home.

## **What are you most looking forward to in the future?**

Honestly, in the near future, I just want to work. I just want to paint, I just want to be in touch with the materials again because to create this exhibition. I spent so much time planning it, maybe too much. And I think there were so many thought processes that were involved with this exhibition that now I can't wait to get in touch with the material again and get back to the day-to-day of painting every day and seeing how things slowly grow as you touch them and then you leave things for some months and then coming back to a work and realising what it needs. And also maybe accepting that it was already perfect. Or not perfect, but it was already there.