

# GALLERY GUIDE

## LAURA SANDERS: *FORCE OF NATURE*

May 16 – August 23, 2025

The Contemporary Dayton is proud to present a mid-career survey of artist Laura Sanders, whose lush, photorealistic oil paintings merge the genres of landscape and figurative art. Her work centers on images of women and girls immersed in natural environments—spaces that symbolize both sanctuary and vulnerability. These works explore the nuanced realities of girlhood and womanhood, addressing themes such as safety, environmental degradation, and the lingering impact of consumer culture.

Spanning from 2008 to 2024, the paintings in this exhibition also chart the passage of time. Each work features Sanders' daughter, Elena, as model—depicting her transformation from child to adult. As the years progress, so does the gaze of the subject: from innocent play to a more conscious and assertive presence, reflecting a heightened awareness of self and surroundings.

Sanders began to focus intensely on her practice following Elena's birth in 1998. A graduate of the Columbus College of Art and Design, she has spent over two decades honing a painterly language that balances rich, gestural mark-making with the illusion of photo-realism. She stages and photographs her models in natural settings, carefully considering sunlight, shadow, and the physical interaction of figure and landscape, to use as reference material for her paintings. The inclusion of man-made detritus—plastic bottles, packaging, and other synthetic objects—signals the intrusion of consumerism into nature and echoes broader environmental concerns.

The exhibition features works from her major series, including *Pools, Lakes, and Rivers*, *Fuel*, *In Our Nature*, *By Herself*, and *Her Habitat*. In earlier paintings, figures appear carefree, immersed in carefree play often in sunlit water. As they mature, the women portrayed adopt more guarded stances, returning the viewer's gaze with strength and alertness. These portraits suggest a link between environmental fragility and personal safety, offering a quiet but pointed warning. Sanders draws on a wide range of influences—from *The Luncheon on the Grass* (1862) by Edouard Manet, to the work of contemporary painters Kerry James Marshall and Kehinde Wiley. Her compositions, while strikingly photorealistic from afar, dissolve upon close viewing into expressive brushstrokes and abstract patterning, especially in water surfaces and wooded backgrounds. This duality underscores the artist's deep engagement with both material and meaning.

In conjunction with the exhibition, The Contemporary Dayton has produced a full-color catalogue in partnership with Contemporary Art Matters, Sanders' gallery in Columbus. The catalogue features an essay by Heather Jones, Curator and Director of Programs and Engagement at The Co, and an essay by New York Times best-selling author Maggie Smith. Both the catalogue and a curated selection of prints by the artist are available for purchase at The CoSHOP Pop-up Print Shop.

## Artist Biography

Laura Sanders (b. 1966, Detroit, MI) creates paintings of women and girls immersed in natural environments that merge the genres of landscape and figurative work. Her subject matter considers the complex realities of women venturing beyond perceived safe places. For a woman, experiencing solitude and a connection with nature is fraught with considerations and hesitations. Sanders articulates these fears and longings with an expressive painting style that puts forefront the tactile and luscious material qualities of oil paint. Sanders' robust use of paint creates an almost photorealistic image that, when viewed in person, reveals its construction, inviting the viewer to slow down and experience the physical evidence of the hand in the haptic marks of the paint.

Sanders has presented her paintings in solo and group exhibitions at galleries and museums across the U.S. In 2024, her work was the subject of a solo exhibition, *Her Habitat*, at Contemporary Art Matters, Columbus, OH. Her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including *Here's Looking at You*, Plato Gallery, New York, NY; *Rewilding*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; *The Scenic Route*, 1969 Gallery, New York, NY; *Shape of an Image*, curated by Sasha Bogojev, Woaw Gallery, Hong Kong; and *Xenia: Crossroads in Portrait Painting*, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, NY. Her work has been featured in *New American Paintings*, Issues 77 and 149. In 2022, she curated the group exhibition *To Die For* at Contemporary Art Matters, Columbus, OH. She has received a number of grants from arts organizations, including the Greater Columbus Arts Council's Individual Artist Award in 2011 and the Ohio Arts Council's individual Excellence Award in 2009, 2013, and 2019. She has been awarded artist residencies at the Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA, and the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, MA. Her work is held in many public and private collections, including the Pizzuti Collection, Columbus, OH; the Scantland Family Collection, Columbus, OH; the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection, West Palm Beach, FL; and the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH. In 1988, she received her BFA from Columbus College of Art and Design, Columbus, OH. She lives and works in Columbus, OH, and maintains a studio in Long Island City, NY.



Photo by Alan Geho

## Exhibition Checklist

For pricing information, please see the Welcome Desk.

*Cloud Formation*, 2024, oil on linen, 65 x 65 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Contemporary Art Matters

*Super Natural*, 2022, oil on linen, 11 x 9 inches, Collection of Laura Bolon

*Battle Field*, 2021, oil on wood, 19 x 14 inches, Courtesy of the Scantland Collection

*Goddess*, 2020, oil on wood, 18 x 14 inches, Collection of Carol Manley

*Victorine, By Herself*, 2019, oil on canvas, 50 x 64 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Contemporary Art Matters

*By Herself, Olentangy River*, 2018, oil on canvas, 19 x 30 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Contemporary Art Matters

*Life Saver*, 2014, oil on canvas, 46 x 52 inches, Courtesy of the Pizzuti Collection

*Ground Cover*, 2013, oil on canvas, 44 x 44 inches, Collection of Sarah Fairchild and Adam Hait

*Face Lit By Fire*, 2011, oil on canvas, 26 x 28 inches, Collection of Sarah Fairchild and Adam Hait

*Fire Watch*, 2011, oil on canvas, 29 x 52 inches, Collection of Steve Jeney

*Late Summer*, 2009, oil on canvas, 31 x 37 inches, Collection of Rebecca and Sebastian Ibel

*Juvenile*, 2008, oil on canvas, 41 x 54 inches, Collection of Jeffery Chaddock and Mark Morrow

*Seawater*, 2008, oil on canvas, 32 x 42 inches, Courtesy of the Pizzuti Collection

*Slack Tide*, 2008, oil on canvas, 52 x 44 inches, Collection of Steve Jeney


*Under Current*, 2008, oil on canvas, 50 x 45 inches, Courtesy of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, 21c Museum Hotels

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25 W 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Dayton, OH 45402  
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