

*To Offer/To Leave*, set within the mystical confines of a swamp, creates a space of romantic melancholy and transformation, where reality fades into fantasy, and the interplay of light and shadow exposes a moment of temporal suspension. The atmosphere invites deep introspection, allowing visitors to engage profoundly with their innermost reflections. It is here that the tales of Shakespeare's Ophelia and "Swan Lake"'s Odette converge, their stories woven together to reflect a powerful narrative of defiance against patriarchal constraints, symbolizing an enduring battle for self-determination. Their narratives, beyond mere stories of unrequited love or mental collapse, are reflections of the broader struggle of those marginalized and voiceless, striving against oppressive structures. Their choices, marked by tragedy yet imbued with agency, shine forth as testaments to the need for recognizing and valuing underrepresented voices and stories in all their complexity. The work included in *To Offer / To Leave* is not only connected through these themes of the swamp, Ophelia, and Odette but also serves to amplify the exhibition's core message: the celebration of transformation, the recognition of resistance, and the acknowledgment of the deep and often unspoken struggles that shape our narratives and identities.

*To Offer / To Leave* commences proudly with *Abdicate* by Lindsay Smith Gustave. The sculpture - a white swan resting upon iridescent fabric embroidered with beaded hands and blooms invites interpretations of giving and leaving, becoming a physical and metaphorical nexus within the exhibition. *Abdicate*, further imbued with themes of death, grief, rebirth, and reinterpretation, is framed by a swamp-like enclosure crafted by Arthur Williams. The following painting, inviting a meditative gaze, is *Birds Spiral*, by New York city based artist, Robin Gammons. The painting embraces the melancholic, yet nostalgic, feeling of watching birds circle overhead against a soft blue sky.

Following, Daphne Sweet's paintings offer an ethereal and haunting environment of perpetual twilight with sentiments of enduring love and loss, celebrating the liminal spaces where beauty and sorrow intertwine. In *Wet Cigarette*, a solitary figure reflects solemnly amidst the gentle drift of swans, symbols of innocence and purity, float around her—a silent testament to a peaceful yet poignant solitude. To its right, *Big Sky Swan*, a woman and swan meld in the moonlight, a serene tableau blending reality with legend, hinting at redemption within the swamp's mystical folds. In the final canvas, *Sensitive Spirit*, the viewer captures a moment between a woman and the stillness of a destiny embraced beneath the stars. The grasses and reeds reach upward, as if in an attempt to hold onto the light, to keep the night at bay, making the scene a silent nocturne. These works, resonating with the themes of *To Offer / To Leave*, showcase the swamp as a setting for the unfolding tales of Ophelia and Odette, immortalized by Sweet's stirring strokes.

*Transplanted* by Agnes Ma presents an arresting visual metaphor within the context of the fantastical swamp presented. This sculpture features a Russian olive tree trunk while a fabricated green chain extends from its body to the wall. The tree—displaced from its native environment—echoes the dislocation of Ophelia and Odette inviting contemplation on themes of adaptation and the search for place as they are both transplanted from their natures into realms that demand transformation. Drew Austin's environmental video, *Consume Me*, which features ambient noise from Finley Baker, draws the audience into a realm where the heaviness of water and the release found in yielding to it resonates to the contemplation of affection, bereavement, and the quest for identity. This elemental odyssey melds water and air and the botanical with the bodily as luminescent marine flora sway beneath the surface—a metaphorical 'consumption'.

*Golden/Rotten*, a three dimensional hanging wall sculpture by Lindsay Smith Gustave, features a somber cloth with a meticulously beaded representation of a rotting apple, evoking themes of mourning and cyclic transformation. Similarly *Offering*, also a hanging wall sculpture, whispers the fragility and transience of existence. These simple, yet evocative works, conjures the isolation and finality of the heroines' fates as the audience is brought to the final piece included within the exhibition. Spotlights in "*Conversations Amongst Dryads*" *Nature; Always witness to mankind's tragedy* by sculptor Arthur Williams, the interplay of nature and storytelling extends through ephemeral objects sourced from the artist's backyard. The climax of *To Offer / To Leave* is heralded by the stark, impassioned presence of *Star Tessellation 2*, a painting by Robin Gammons. Here, the drama culminates in a theatrical "red death," the vivid reds and sharp angles cut through the serenity previously established. This piece stands as the final act, a dramatic and bold punctuation that encapsulates the intensity of the heroine's perspectives.

The transition from the tranquil to the tempestuous encapsulates the journey from life to death, from floating on the water's surface to being consumed by its depths—a poignant testament to the raw and elemental end of the tales of Ophelia and Odette within the embrace of the swamp's magic.

— Kiera McIntosh