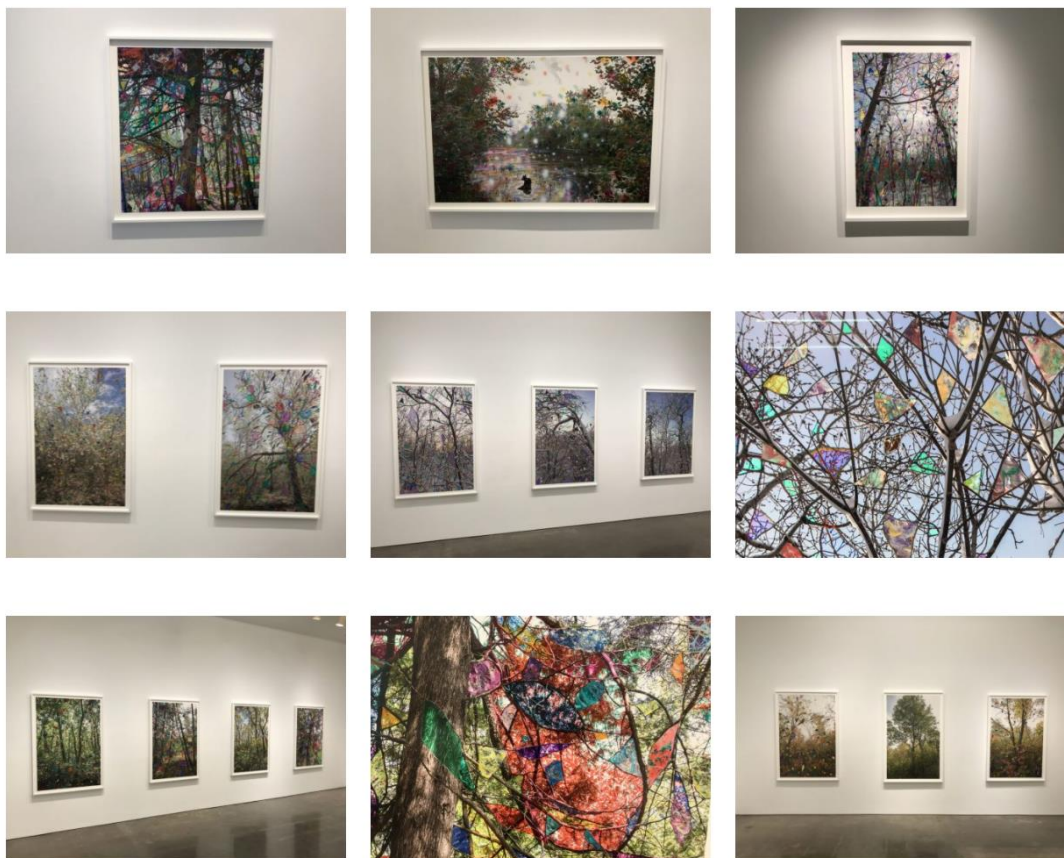


# COLLECTOR DAILY

## Sarah Anne Johnson, Woodland @Yossi Milo

By Loring Knoblauch / In Galleries October 29, 2020

**JTF (just the facts):** A total of 20 large scale color works, framed in white and unmatted, and hung in the East and West galleries, and in the small viewing area in between. All of the works are pigment prints, variously augmented by acrylic paint, oil paint, holographic tape, gold leaf, silver leaf, brass leaf, and photo-spotting ink, made in 2020. Physical sizes range from roughly 20×13 to 60×40 inches (or the reverse), and all of the works are unique. (Installation and detail shots below.)



**Comments/Context:** For the better part of the last 15 years, Sarah Anne Johnson has been experimenting with what we might call a hand-crafted version of “augmented reality photography”. In the years since she graduated from the masters program at Yale, the Canadian photographer has been starting with traditional photographs (mostly landscapes, but also some nudes and images from other genres) and layering on surface additions of various kinds. Much of this modification has come in the form of overpainting (with paint, gouache, or ink), but Johnson has also branched out to include other artistic mediums and crafts, from screen printing and embossing to stickers and neon light. All of this physical intervention has been in the name of helping us to see more than the underlying photograph can deliver on its own – dreams,

visions, hallucinations, altered states, or simply an embellished emotional quality that seems to float atop what the camera sees as real.

Trying to represent such invisible moods and spirits isn't exactly straightforward, and over the years, Johnson has arguably had mixed success. The best of her works have seemed to unlock and amplify natural elements and ideas waiting to be given voice; the weakest have felt forced, the surface decorations becoming a heavy-handed distraction. She's actively chosen to walk a wobbly artistic tightrope, and finding the right sense of aesthetic balance isn't entirely obvious – one person's enlightened energy is another's overworked kitsch. But Johnson's newest body of work, using images of the forests from her native Manitoba as her central subject matter, seems to have found the exact right note for our current moment – just as we all descend into a deeper gloom driven by the combination of the ongoing pandemic and the polarized election, her pictures have come along to deliver a radiant sparkle of joy.

Specifically, Johnson has leveraged the negative space created by the intersection of dense thickets of branches, turning the say triangle shaped space of air between three twigs into the venue for her controlled improvisations. In each tiny partitioned area, she adds in different colors and tints, including tonal reversals, holographic stickers, gold and silver leaf, and swirls of expressive paint.

What emerges is a magical kaleidoscope of color nestled in among the trees. Johnson's additions can alternately look like dappled light, glass shards, fluttering flags or confetti, swarms of butterflies, wind chimes, stained glass windows, and even fairy tale caterpillar nests, the twinkle of the light activating the fragments of color. Some works cover the entire rainbow of gloriously cascading color, while others match the tones of the surroundings a bit more closely. And in a few cases, as the shards get larger and overlap more frequently, the forest takes on an almost psychedelic character, with flares of hallucinatory light that wash and wander through the trees.



In the back gallery, the four walls of the space are matched to the four seasons. In winter, the light is crisper, and the snowy trees encourage the twilight tones of blue and purple to come forth. In spring, the color shards seem like fresh blossoms, buoyed by the optimism of new growth. In summer, the thickness of the foliage creates green Edens filled with color that tumbles down through the shadows. And in autumn, the palette turns toward yellow and orange, the color fragments seeming to fall like leaves. In each case, Johnson is sensitively responding to nature, teasing out additions that match the rhythms of the changing seasons.

Seen as a group, Johnson's transformed woodlands exude calming positivity and genuine optimism. The works capture a sense of the forest being alive, filled with hidden enchantments that the artist has now made visible – and they are places we'd like to escape to again, so we

can be enveloped in their magic. Even for the most photographically jaded, it's hard not to be seduced by their playful delight.

**Collector's POV:** The works in this show are priced between \$6500 and \$22000, based on size and including framing. Johnson's work has little consistent secondary market history at this point, so gallery retail likely remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.

<https://collectordaily.com/sarah-anne-johnson-woodland-yossi-milo/>

