

In the American Grain:

Madeleine Bialke
Emily Pettigrew
Aaron Spangler

28 November 2025 – 17 January 2026



The Morris Men, 2025

Emily Pettigrew

History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes – Mark Twain

Huxley-Parlour are pleased to present a three person exhibition, *In The American Grain*. Borrowing its title from William Carlos Williams' modernist meditation on the origins of the United States, the exhibition brings together three artists that probe the fragile and contested textures of American history. Madeleine Bialke, Emily Pettigrew and Aaron Spangler each consider the contested mythologies, lived histories, and expansive landscapes that have come to shape America's evolving identity.

Madeleine Bialke traces the confluence of environment, myth and memory. The vast landscapes described in her canvases are sites of inheritance, where trees are archives of time, each a witness to the fragility of history. Drawing imagery from the largest old growth forest acreage east of the Mississippi, in the Adirondack mountains of Upstate New York, Madeleine Bialke contends with the eternal nature of these forests that are now tested by crisis. The expansive scenes themselves are partially obscured by rhythmic foliage acting as an obfuscating screen. These new paintings feature bodies of water, drawing upon old luminist traditions of light and water as an idea of American spiritual transmutation.

New paintings by **Emily Pettigrew** blend remnants of early American life and the ghost of it today - and explore how ancient histories inevitably haunt the present. Pettigrew's practice, based in the Catskill region of New York, distills and makes tangible the presence of time. Through her economy of both composition and application of paint, she creates tableaux that speak to both the dark and raw nature of American history, as well as its desolate beauty. Referencing modern compositions and shape-oriented representation, the work continues an East Coast tradition of formal severity or bleakness.

Aaron Spangler's work mines the rugged landscapes and mythic weight of the American Midwest. The remnants of war, imperialism and religion in the American psyche serve as the foundation of his intricate reliefs. He continues the American tradition of 'whittling' folk art, as well as Native American totems. The dark value of the graphite-rubbed surfaces homogenises the subjects, so that every object becomes figural; expressively and democratically rendered, trees and burn piles therefore take on bodily associations. Like Bialke and Pettigrew, Spangler's works are also place-specific. Minnesota has long been understood as a place for free-thinkers and self-starters to come and live on their own on the outskirts of the law. Imagery of rural self-sufficiency and with a dangerous thread of religious intensity run through these works.

Bialke, co-curator of the exhibition, notes "Carlos Williams's book reveals the dead-end in the search for a singular American Identity. At the heart of this dense history is a sense of rootlessness and longing for meaning. For settlers, the idea of Nature, with its perceived vastness and age, was the most powerful force to contend with, so its representation became religious, moral, nationalistic. Eventually, the landscape became a substitute for a missing national tradition, synonymous with national pride. The American landscape became iconic just as it was disappearing, and so has only ever been a fantasy."

Williams' book, published in 1925, was less a conventional history than a lyrical excavation of the forces - violent, visionary, and contradictory - that underpinned the formation of the United States. A century later, these tensions remain unresolved, and it is within this unsettled ground that Bialke, Pettigrew and Spangler situate their work. The works see past and present coalesce as a palimpsest of American mythology revealing a narrative at once fragile, fractured, and increasingly vital today. These three artists refract the complexities of place, religion, memory, and belonging. The works do not propose a unified story but instead unearth fragments - ecological, historical, and psychological - through which the shifting contours, an overarching story of 'America' that may be seen.

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HUXLEY-PARLOUR
3-5 Swallow Street, London W1B 4DE

Opening Hours
Monday to Friday, 10:00am - 5:30pm
Saturdays, 1:30pm - 5:30pm
Entry is free

More information can be found online at www.huxleyparlour.com