



Daphne and Apollo: *The Chase, after Pontormo*, 2023

This publication accompanies an exhibition on view at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art from June 24 through August 20, 2023.

Acknowledgments This exhibition is made possible by the generosity of numerous friends and colleagues. Our first thanks is to the artist herself for the remarkable work she has produced; we are also grateful to David Israel, Elijah Ober, and Austin Shull for their creative support. We thank the lenders of works from the Wyvern Collection, which have provided critical inspiration for this project. For contributing their time and expertise, we express our appreciation to our Museum colleagues and, for their ongoing encouragement, we thank our Advisory Council, Dean for Academic Affairs Jennifer Scanlon, and President Clayton Rose. Finally, for critical financial resources, we acknowledge with our gratitude the Lowell Innes Fund.

Cover: Emilie Stark-Menneg, *Sleighing*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 100 in. Photo by Luc Demers.



Inside page, left: Emilie Stark-Menneg, *Daphne and Apollo: The Chase, after Pontormo*, 2023, 3D printed sculpture, 21 ⁹/₁₆ x 12 x 23 in. and accompanying augmented reality: written and directed by Emilie Stark-Menneg, animated by Elijah Ober. Photo by Luc Demers.

Scan to enjoy the AR associated with *Daphne and Apollo: The Chase, after Pontormo*.



Inside page, right: Emilie Stark-Menneg, *Daphne and Apollo: The Trees, for Pontormo*, 2023, 3D printed sculpture, AR, 28 ³/₈ x 18 ¹/₁₆ x 17 ¹⁵/₁₆ in. and accompanying augmented reality: written and directed by Emilie Stark-Menneg, animated by Elijah Ober. Photo by Luc Demers.

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Emilie Stark-Menneg. Photo by Andrew Estey.

Emilie Stark-Menneg is a Maine-based artist. She received her MFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Art and Design in 2019 and her BFA in combined media from Cornell University in 2007. Her work was recently featured in De Buck Gallery's Online Viewing Room. She has had solo exhibitions at the Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York City; Steven Harvey Fine Arts Projects, New York City; Field Projects Gallery, New York City; Allouche Gallery, New York City; Makebish Gallery, New York City; Kijidome Gallery, Boston, MA; Elizabeth Moss Gallery, Falmouth, ME; and the Leonard R. Craig Gallery, Unity College, Unity, ME. Her installation *Sing Me to Another Sound* was included in the 2015 Portland Museum of Art Biennial. Stark-Menneg has collaborated with the American poet Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon on several performances, including at the Cornell Council for the Arts Biennial and the DeCordova Museum's 2019 Biennial. Stark-Menneg was included in Shrubs, a group show at Night Gallery, Los Angeles, in January 2022. Internationally, she has shown in group shows with Woaw Gallery, Hong Kong and Nexx Asia in Taipei, Taiwan. She was recently awarded a Surf Point Foundation Residency in York, Maine.



EMILIE STARK-MENNEG'S SUPERNATURAL

BOWDOIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART BRUNSWICK, MAINE



Daphne and Apollo: *The Trees, for Pontormo*, 2023



INTRODUCTION

In a multi-sensory response to artworks at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Emilie Stark-Menneg has created a suite of pieces that explore the permeability of states of being and the complex evolution of life itself. Taking inspiration from Pontormo's *Apollo and Daphne* (1513), based on an ancient myth recorded by Ovid (described by the artist in her accompanying statement), Stark-Menneg's painting *Sleighing* (2023) juxtaposes the imagery of flight with a transition between day and night and a haunting suggestion of a *memento mori*. Indeed, the work's very title, "Sleighing," with its double-entendre—meaning both a winter activity and a stroke of violence—suggests the rapidity with which joy can transform into its opposite. The painting's racing vehicle whisks across a fertile ground of strawberries and blossoms even as it seems to lay down an icy vapor all its own. Positioned before her canvas, the artist's self-portrait brings to mind Daphne in its proximity to Apollo, just as an x-ray-like view of her bones suggests the branches of the laurel tree that takes shape from Daphne's limbs.

In similar fashion, the ravishing flora in *Sleighing* resonate with the blossoms that cover the artist's body in a second self-portrait, *Night Blum*, invoking the work of Ana Mendieta (1948–1985), and testifying to the porosity between the human body and the natural world. The point is emphasized in another group of works by Stark-Menneg, two pairs of anaglyphs (or three-dimensional photographs) and two sculptures (each a three-dimensional print), which are accompanied by an augmented reality animation. Through this ensemble, hovering between two and three dimensions and between materiality and mirage, we witness the transformation of the bodies of both Apollo and Daphne into wood, star dust, and seeds in a metamorphosis of Ovid's tale. Thus Emilie Stark-Menneg conjoins life, and death, flora and fauna, past and present into a supernatural continuum animated by the spark of the creative imagination flowing across time.

Anne Collins Goodyear
Co-Director, Bowdoin College Museum of Art

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

For *Supernatural*, I selected pieces from the Museum's collection and objects on long-term loan from the Wyvern Collection that possess an exquisite magic and materiality. In many instances, the artists attempted risky if not impossible pictorial feats, seeking to create illusionistic space and life-like representations in rare or newly adopted artistic mediums such as mother-of-pearl, minerals, Super 8-mm film, and photorefractive crystals.* These optical and technical innovations—ranging from laminated boxwood to the early use of oil paint, projections, and holograms—were coupled with a desire to represent the unknown and to explore the ultimate transformation that is the journey between life and death.

This mystical voyage is ostensibly unknowable. And so each of the works brought together here contains a secret. The *Prayer Bead with Scenes from the Life of Saint Jerome* from the workshop of Adam Dircksz (ca. 1500–30), on loan from the Wyvern Collection, was made to inspire private devotion. Its tiny three-dimensional imagery, visible only when opened, reveals the saga of the saint, carved in such immaculate detail and precision that its very execution seems mysterious, heightening its allure and spiritual power. Also revelatory is British artist Chris Ofili's series of line etchings on paper, *Black Shunga* (2008–2015). These prints waver on the edge of visibility due to a surprising combination of iridescent filigree, dark ink, and delicate line work. This dazzling alchemy conjures images of erotic bliss that seem to hover and dissolve in a single breath.

Thinking about these incomprehensible objects, their permeable boundaries, and their portrayals of spiritual and sensual metamorphoses inspired me to create a series of works that similarly explore the challenges of representing the ineffable. For each artwork I experimented with a range of materials and processes, in an attempt to develop new visual expressions and narratives.

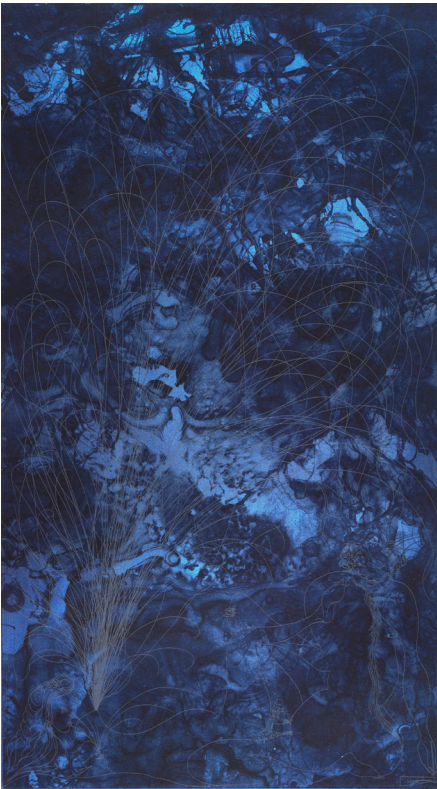
I started by researching Pontormo's painting *Apollo and Daphne* (1513), which depicts the myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which the nymph Daphne turns into a laurel tree to escape the god Apollo. Her elusiveness mirrors the conditions in which Pontormo's painting

was initially shown. The painting, adorning the side of a carriage, darted beyond the grasp of onlookers as it rolled through the streets of Florence during a midnight carnival. Flickering in the torch light, the illusionistic grisaille figures must have seemed shockingly animated and ghostly, like an early form of cinema—a kind of motion picture show. Centuries later, Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta created a haunting Super 8mm film, *Siluetas Sangrientas* (*Bloody Silhouette*) (1975), which employed another form of time-lapse to create the illusion of a body suddenly appearing and vanishing. This, in turn, creates a kind of transference, a delicate meditation on life and death. These vastly different but symbiotic artworks inspired my exploration into ephemeral constructions, from painting while riding on a horse-drawn sleigh to sewing and growing a flower costume. I then combined these dreamlike processes with materials and techniques predisposed to exhibit illusionistic qualities, such as painting, anaglyph photography, 3D printing, and augmented reality. I invite you to feel how these liminal sites transform you.

Thank you to BCMA co-director Anne Collins Goodyear for her brilliant insights and guidance and to the entire Museum staff for their welcoming presence and expertise. Thank you to Elijah Ober for 3D printing, and animating my wild dreams. To Scott Stuart for applying the beautiful sparkle paint to the sculptures. To David Israel for all the scanning. To Cathy Simmons and crew for taking me on the sleigh ride of a lifetime. To Susan Wegner for giving me a crash course on Pontormo. To Andrew Estey for documenting the performances and capturing all our *joie de vivre*. To Josh Manahan for years of the best stretchers. To Austin Shull for lighting the show and making "murky" look sexy. To my parents, Maggie Stark and Paul Menneg, two incredible artists, thank you for your unwavering love and belief. To everyone who helped along the way, hugs and gratitude. And of course, John Bisbee, for always calming my nerves and igniting my imagination, I love you.

Emilie Stark-Menneg

**A complete list of works of art in the show is available through the exhibition section of the Museum of Art's website.*



Pontormo, Italian, 1494–1557. *Apollo and Daphne*, 1513, oil on canvas, 24 3/8 x 19 1/4 in. Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Bowdoin College Museum of Art. 1961.100.9



Left: Workshop of Adam Dircksz?, Present-day Netherlands or Belgium, *Prayer Bead with Scenes from the Life of Saint Jerome*, ca. 1500–1530, boxwood, diameter of lower hemisphere: 1 7/8 in; diameter of upper hemisphere: 1 1/8 in. Wyvern Collection, 2544

Far left: Chris Ofili, *Black Shunga* from an eponymous suite of eleven etchings, 2008–2015, line etching, 26 1/2 x 17 7/8 in. Museum Purchase, Barbara Cooney Porter Fund, Bowdoin College Museum of Art. 2016.3.6. Printed and published by Two Palms, New York. © Chris Ofili. Courtesy the artist and Two Palms, New York, Photo: Doug Volle / Two Palms, New York

Right: Emilie Stark-Menneg, *Forest Flora*, 2023, anaglyph photo, inkjet print on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Photo by Luc Demers. (The three-dimensional effect of this image is best appreciated with 3-D glasses.)

Still from Ana Mendieta, *Siluetas Sangrientas*, 1975, Super-8mm film transferred to high-definition digital media, color, silent, 1:51 minutes. Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund in partnership with the New Media Arts Consortium, a collaboration of the art museums at Bowdoin College, Brandeis University, Colby College, Mount Holyoke College, and Skidmore College, 2017.11. © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong.

