

rachel uffner

BEDFORD + BOWERY

That Feeling When You Leave Your 200-Acre Tree Farm For a Tiny Greenpoint Art Studio



Shara Hughes in front of "Tree Farm", Photo courtesy of Giulia Alexandra

When **Shara Hughes** was born, her father bought her and her three brothers 200 acres of land each in rural Georgia. It was the early '80s and land was going for 10 cents an acre. Her father saw his opportunity and planted a tree farm. Shara spent a lot of her childhood on that property, learning about land and taking care of the trees. She still goes there to enjoy the space and the nature and when she moved to New York from Atlanta in August last year, land – because there's so little of it in the city – was the first thing she thought about.

"I hated it. I didn't want to be here. I knew what it was like, I knew what it was going to be. It wasn't like, some

big surprise but I moved from a ton of space to zero space and you just, lose balance," she tells me as we stand in the **American Contemporary** gallery in the East Village, looking at her latest series of paintings. The works in front of us are not her usual style. This time, Shara's made landscapes. The jam-packed and mind-bending vibrancy of her **previous work** has been replaced by a much quieter mood. No less complicated but decidedly different.

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Riffs and Runoffs, photo courtesy of Shara Hughes

“Moving here was a lot of... crowding of, um, I mean physically,” Shara laughs. “I was just trying to figure out where my grocery store was, where’s my laundry place, how do I – like, where’s my dog’s pet store? My last show was about the struggles of a relationship. That was a really heavy show, so this one, I needed it to be not really about anything besides the freedom of painting.” Most of Shara’s work has a storyline or a sequence to it. The stories are what she’s known for and the scenes are “detailed and tight but playful and loose at the same time.” Like the other work she creates in her Greenpoint studio, the landscapes in front of us are as clever as they are whimsical and I can’t help but feel sad that I can’t just walk into them and well, live there. It’s like I’m looking at a way of imagining the world that’s been swallowed up by the city, adulthood, and endless responsibilities.



Moon Pic, courtesy of Shara Hughes

“It’s an escape from reality,” says Shara when I tell her what I’m thinking. “Usually with my work there’s some kind of sadness about it, but it’s also very playful. One of the continuing themes from my work from forever is, it’s bad, but it’s not that bad.” She points out the borders she’s painted around some of the landscapes. The borders make the paintings look like windows. “And then I look out the window, the real window...” Shara trails off then smiles. “I actually love it here and I don’t want to go back to Atlanta, but it’s just about how do I deal with it.”

“Far Out” will be on show at American Contemporary at 4 East Second Street until April 26.

GIULIA ALEXANDRA

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