

Lee Williams: *The Wounding*

Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, Brattleboro, VT • brattleboromuseum.org • Through November 3, 2024

Lee Williams explains that this installation “investigates the relationship between the familiar, the other-worldly, and the many layers in between.” “Wounding” may also refer to environmental degradation. In his statement, Williams mentions how the piece collectively evokes the effect of human activity on nature. Brightly colored painted dowels of various lengths emerge from clean cut and bark-covered trunks. The garish, machine-produced wood sticks out like porcupine quills, as if birthed from the source material. Williams is confronting whether or not we have a symbiotic relationship with nature, or how far we have diverged from it. Although it may appear to be a playground or a field of large Willy Wonka candy, upon closer inspection, the intensity of the work becomes clear.

Despite the difference in shape and intention, this writer could not help but think of Anne Truitt’s praetorian pastel vertical risers. Beseated by cylindrical harpoons, these hefty tree trunks, about three feet long, are set upon a jaundiced ground, resembling a toxic puddle, or chemical spill of high viscosity. Williams has three or four cut pine pieces tumbling upon each other; the foundational pine is large in circumference. The pines become smaller as they get further from the ground. The painted pieces resemble



Above: Installation view of Lee Williams: *The Wounding*. Photos by Erin Jenkins.

Fisher Price blocks, with greens, reds, yellows, oranges, and light blues—yet a darker association connects to the great plastic oceans and the micro-plastics that inhabit our bodies. The irony is that one material produces the other: humanity cannot exist without nature, yet is also a virus or an abomination derived from it.

When taken singly, you see the details; the variety in width, length, and color. Some pieces are flat like a sticker, others are long spears. Acne, pestilence, fireworks, flowers, and tropical insects merge and separate as visual interpretations. The pines are simultaneously

collapsing columns, a metaphor for deforestation, and an architectural dream. One wonders if the six pieces are lost in front of the Museum’s facade, and it’s curious how they would fare inside a white gallery space, where the flaking reddish bark and variegated pegs would stand out in relief. This writer encourages Williams to experiment with scale; one can imagine the trunks rising many feet above us, like some primordial monolith.

The title leads to shifting meanings. Who and what is wounded? It’s strange yet a fleeting thought is that these sculptures connect to Mantegna’s *Saint Sebastian*—the saintly martyr in Williams’ case being the environment. — *Bret Chenkin*