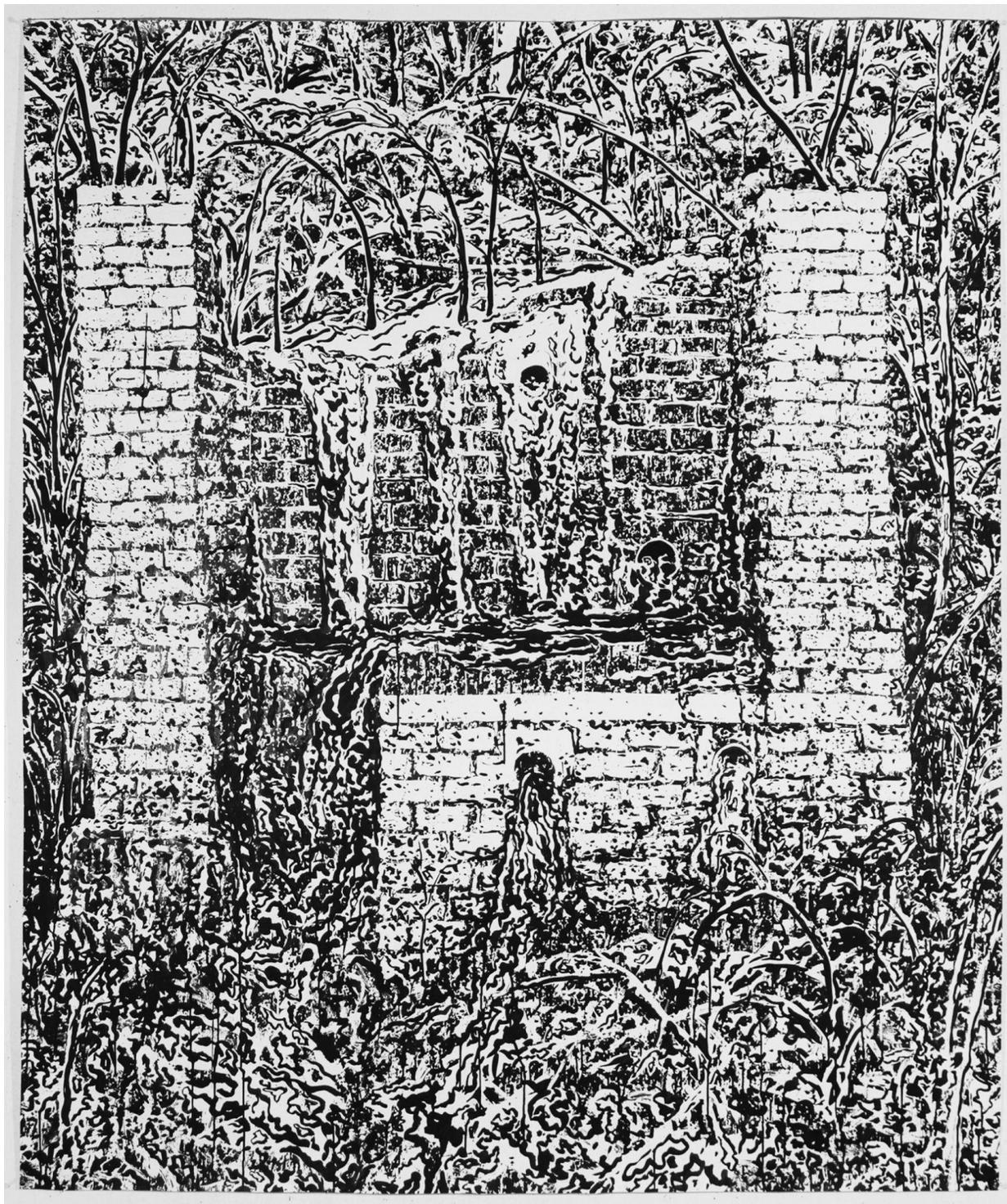


My Pet Ram
Tom Costa - "Slow Drip"
February 18 - March 20, 2022



Full of Holes, Ink on paper, 55 x 47 in, 2021,



Lovers, Ink on paper, 48 x 54 in, 2021

Nestled at the midpoint between the Lower East Side and Chinatown in Manhattan, My Pet Ram Gallery is currently exhibiting “Slow Drip,” seven black and white ink drawings by artist Tom Costa.¹ Originally hailing from the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Costa draws inspiration directly from the Virginian wilderness as well as from the landscape of his memory.² The large sheets of watercolor paper pinned to the walls are reminiscent of the nonchalance of en plein air. Bold yet ragged monochromatic brushstrokes create a similar optical illusion to that of dappled sunlight on a grassy hill. Figures, auras, and the occasional dog come into and out of focus in the maze of black strokes. It is unclear whether these paintings are portraits or

¹ “Tom Costa - Slow Drip.” My Pet Ram, 2022. <https://www.mypetram.com/tomcosta>.

² Costa, Tom. “About / Contact.” TOM COSTA. Accessed March 7, 2022. <https://tomcostastudios.com/contact>.

landscapes, a quandary which lies at the heart of their content. Either way, nature overtakes the marks that humans make on the earth. Costa's inky plantlife threatens his hidden sitters as well as the remains of human society. This plantlife is dense, both visually and contextually.

Costa's reverence for the power of nature is palpable. In *Full of Holes* water flows over a deteriorating brick wall and through open pipes. The structure almost looks sad to be reclaimed by nature, almost as if it were crying. But that's that thing about people: we personify and anthropomorphize to try to alleviate our own confusing emotions by assigning them to something that cannot protest. In *Lovers*, two figures, one reclining and one in the fetal position, lie on a bed of vegetation. The mirroring of these figures calls to mind the cycle of death and rebirth. For example, the reclining figure has throughout western art history often signalled passion, love, or sex as in many of the depictions of Venus/Aphrodite and Manet's *Olympia*.³ The second figure signals the position of a fetus in the womb as well as the burial position seen in a variety of cultures such as the Muscogee people of present day Mississippi.⁴ The shadows of limbs and leaves stretching over the white figures makes it feel as if they are decaying and returning from whence they came. However, they do not struggle against nature. They are being softly enveloped by their fate as the painted lines that separate them from the forest floor become increasingly thin. By painting both people's and man-made structures' return to nature, the artist is effectively creating a vinculum between the personified "death" of man-made structures and the death of humans themselves.

"Slow Drip" takes on Edmund Burke's philosophy on the sublime in nature, that the sublime is our strongest passion because it is rooted in fear, especially the fear of death.⁵ Costa has inadvertently tasked himself with the important mission of allowing death to be a comfortable and normal topic of conversation. In an age where the everyday is intensely anxiety-provoking, our eventual death and decay should not cause us existential fear. It is better to go gently into that good night.⁶

Edmund Burke wrote, "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully is astonishment, and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."

³ Lydia Figes and Andrew Shore. "The Art of Lying: Reclining Figures through History." Art UK, September 6, 2019.

<https://artuk.org/discover/stories/the-art-of-lying-reclining-figures-through-history>.

⁴ DiNome, William G. "Burial Customs." NCpedia, 2006. <https://www.ncpedia.org/burial-customs>.

⁵ "Edmund Burke and the Sublime." Wordsworth Grasmere, March 2, 2015.

<https://wordsworth.org.uk/blog/2015/03/02/edmund-burke-and-the-sublime/>.

⁶ Thomas, Dylan, and John Goodby. *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*. New York: New Directions, 2017.

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