

## JOAN JONAS

### *In the Trees II*

1 October – 17 November 2018

Private view: 30 September, 5-7 pm

Joan Jonas's recent works have continued to ask questions about humankind's relationship to the environment and to other living species. She has built up a unique visual language during her long and substantial career, which she uses to speak about those matters she deems most urgent, such as growing concerns about the devastation of the planet.

*In the Trees II* includes many of the key elements of Joan's practice: the use of illusion and mirroring; the deployment of drawing on the wall, in the installation and in the video performance; even the swiping action that features in the first of this work's two videos, which is reminiscent of her early experiments with the video camera in works such as *Vertical Roll*, 1972. Jonas makes complex imagery using simple means. The first video was made by setting up a rudimentary performance space: moving images of grass and flowers were projected onto a scrim hanging in front of a wall so that the image doubles as the performer moves behind the scrim, from time to time holding a wooden bird. In another shot, drawings of trees are projected over the performer. The second video was shot onto a round mirror set in the woods of Nova Scotia as Jonas makes drawings of circles and lines.

This work was made in the wake of two recent installations, *Reanimation* and *They come to us* (made for the US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 2015), which were inspired by the novel *Under the Glacier* by Icelandic writer Halldór Laxness. Jonas was drawn to his poetic descriptions of nature, most particularly of birds and bees. She continued exploring ways to articulate her concern for nature in a subsequent work that came out of her residency at the Botín Foundation, Santander, in Spain, *Stream or River, Flight or Pattern*, 2016. This latest installation, *In the Trees II*, extends these explorations further and evolved as Joan 'began a series of bird drawings and considered the structure of trees and how they alter our sensibilities, whilst visiting the park every day with my dog'.

The relationship between nature and the artificial is another recurring theme played out in this new work, as the painterly rendition of trees is layered onto a projection of actual trees. The drawings of the birds become visible in the flickering light from the videos, and they seem to peer at Jonas's playful birdlike actions as she appears to us through the welter of painterly marks. These images simultaneously intrigue, provoke and charm the viewer. The presence of the multiple bird-drawings, each with their own character, signals Jonas's continuing interest in the lives of birds following a recent visit to a bird sanctuary in Singapore. While the image of birds in flight symbolises freedom, the fate of many birds is to be captured and kept in cages.

This exhibition follows Jonas's celebrated exhibition at Tate Modern earlier this year, which travels to the Serralves Museum, Porto in 2019.