

# I N M A N G A L L E R Y

*For immediate release:*

Inman Gallery is pleased to present the exhibition:

## **Kristin Musgnug** ***Unnatural Histories***

Opening Saturday, April 16th  
6:00 – 8:00 pm

artist talk begins at 5:30pm

*the exhibition continues through May 15th*

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Kristin Musgnug, *Giant Reed Grass, Bolivar*, 2009  
oil on panel, 24 x 30 inches

Inman Gallery is pleased to announce the exhibition **Kristin Musgnug: Unnatural Histories** on view **April 8th - May 15th** at 3917 Main Street, our temporary location at the south end of Isabella Court. The exhibition opens with a reception for the artist **Saturday April 16th** from 6:00 – 8:00pm. The artist will lead an exhibition walkthrough beginning at 5:30pm in the gallery.

For over twenty years, Kristin Musgnug has been exploring and painting the contemporary landscape. In the late 1980's she began with paintings of the salt marshes along the coast of her native New Jersey, and continued with a series of "swamp" paintings around Houston in the early 1990's. Since then she has gone on to explore American's notions of nature in diverse locations such as the nation's manicured National Parks, and the fantasy landscapes of (now disappearing) public mini-golf courses.

Driving the work is an intense interest in the complex relationship between people and nature. Through animated, confident brushwork and an extraordinary attention to light and weather, she has created a body of work which shows us the world we live in while also inviting us to contemplate how shifting attitudes towards nature have shaped public policy over time.

In **Unnatural Histories**, Musgnug has focused her attention on exotic, invasive species in the landscape of the southeast United States. Views of forests, lakes and coastlines with tumbling piles of kudzu (introduced 1876), Giant Reed Grass (introduced 1800's as an ornamental) and Giant Salvinia (native to Brazil) are rendered in breathtakingly beautiful compositions. Over the years, the artist's emphasis on the "in-between" places around us has inevitably included a number of exotic species, but **Unnatural Histories** brings these characters to the fore. In so doing, the artist invites comparison between current and past ideas about nature.

Kristin Musgnug received her MFA in painting from Indiana University in Bloomington Indiana in 1988, and a BA in Art History from Williams College, MA in 1981. From 1988-1990, she was an Artist in Residence at the Glassell School's Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. She currently lives in Fayetteville, AR where she is Professor of Painting at the University of Arkansas.

## Project Statement: Unnatural Histories



Kristin Musgnug, Giant Salvinia, Caddo Lake, 2010  
oil on panel, 24 x 30 inches

I am interested in invasive species because passions run high around this issue, and the scientific evidence about them is not clear-cut. The rhetoric surrounding undocumented human immigration is remarkably similar to that employed in (non-scientific) discussions of invasive species. Invasive species have become shadow figures in our view of nature, serving as a locus for anxiety about our rapidly changing natural environment.

The majority of exotic species are transported on purpose, because they are useful or beautiful or remind transplanted humans of their former homes. They become unwelcome when

they start to make themselves at home - spreading into the environment on their own, and in some cases displacing or preying on native species. In the debates surrounding questions of how much, if at all, invasives should be controlled /eradicated, and whether (and how) borders should be closed to new exotic species, there is little or no acknowledgment that humans are the planet's most invasive and damaging species by far.

The tangle of emotion and science around this issue is reminiscent, to me, of the early days of the scientific revolution, when alchemy and religiously-based views of the physical world coexisted with an emerging scientific view based on direct observation. Incidentally, this period of time also saw the first large scale movement of species around the globe, as explorers ventured out of Europe to Asia and the New World, bringing back new plants and animals upon their return. It was also about this time when some of the first pure landscape (i.e., without human figures) paintings were being created, based on a combination of observation and imagination.

One of these early landscape painters was Roelandt Savery, sent by Emperor Rudolf II of Prague to the Tirol to study alpine plants and scenery. Savery's paintings mix careful observation of plants and animals with a sense of wonder and an animistic intensity. Nature is represented as both marvelous and alarming, an attitude to which we have returned in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I chose to use some of the conventions of these early 17<sup>th</sup> century paintings for this blend of scientific curiosity and imaginative invention, as well as to reference some of the historical origins of invasive species introductions. The resulting paintings are meant to be detailed but not photographic; observationally based, but not completely objective.

*Kristin Musgnug April 2011*