

WOOD you rather be happy? at Firetti Contemporary

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Firetti Contemporary and **Amalgame Gallery** are pleased to present *WOOD you rather be happy?*, a multi-sensory exhibition featuring the work of six international artists, Sawsan Al Bahar (Syrian-Palestinian), Laura Lappi (Finnish), Toma-L (French), Taher Jaoui (Tunisian), Axel Chay (French) and Bruno Helgen (French-Indonesian), who use wood as their primary medium.

Taking inspiration from American philosopher and naturalist Henry David Thoreau, the exhibition explores the principles of transcendentalism. This philosophical movement highlights the pure goodness of nature and the individual's capacity to connect with it. Thoreau believed that nature was a crucial factor in human happiness and well-being and that immersing oneself in nature was essential for personal growth and spiritual fulfilment.

With this in mind, the exhibition invites visitors to embark on an immersive experience in an indoor forest filled with art. The diverse artworks, including installations, paintings, and sculptures, showcase the beauty and fragility of the natural world, sparking a call for change in our relationship with nature. Utilizing wood, a material with both natural and cultural significance, the artists emphasize the need for sustainability and a collective awareness to protect and preserve our planet for future generations. These artists highlight that we are all part of a vast Earth, interdependent and interconnected, and there cannot be individual well-being without nature's well-being. This is not only a moral imperative but also a prerequisite for a sustainable future for all. As the exhibition invites us to take a walk in the woods, we are reminded of Thoreau's words,

"Took a walk in the woods and come out taller than the trees."

Being connected to nature and compassionate to our planet is essential to living a happier, more worthwhile, and sustainable life.

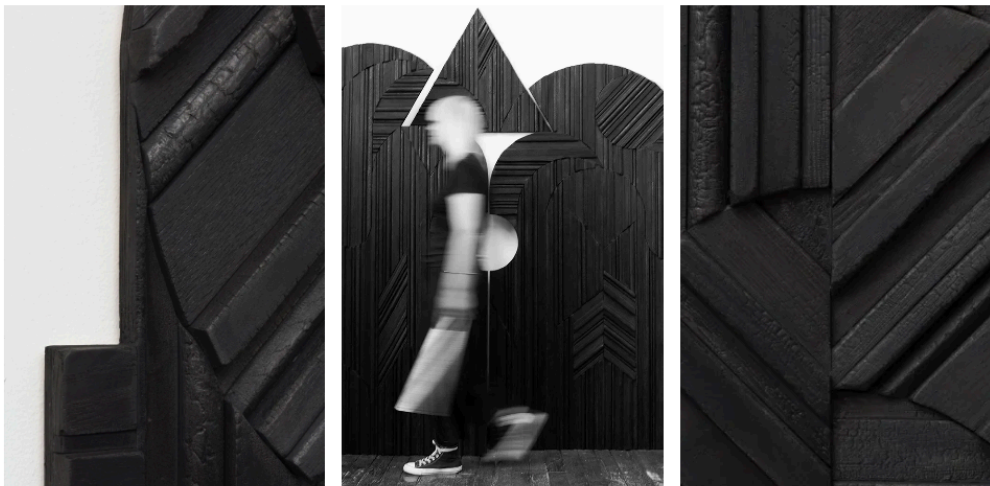


In partnership with Azraq, a UAE-based environmental group recognized by UNEA of the UN Environment Program, visitors of the exhibition will learn about the importance of nature-based solutions to climate change, with a focus on managing and restoring ecosystems in the UAE. The Magic Mangrove initiative, which has already planted 1,116 mangrove trees, will also be introduced, raising awareness of the value and dangers facing the UAE's coastal ecosystem.

The core installation of the exhibition *Untitled study for the Fall*, by **Sawsan Al Bahar**, highlights the constant change and renewal that occurs within nature. The installation is a portrait of autumn, presenting sculptures of whirling falling leaves. Through image mapping, Sawsan transforms a collection of photos of trodden tree leaves for the creation of the work in 3d-printed wood. Each leaf is imprinted with traces and layers of its environment, embedded with visual data that charts the season through moments of sunshine, drops of rain and freckles of dust. Wood, a living, breathing material that ages and changes, finds new expression. Al Bahar has chosen the species of maidenhair, misbelief and maple trees, known for their compelling histories of migration, adaptation, and endurance.

Al Bahar encourages viewers to reflect on these forms of durational change and to engage with the work, becoming part of it. The installation is an ephemeral durational work that disappears as the show continues, echoing the cyclical nature of the natural world and reinforcing the idea of renewal and change.

Taher Jaoui presents his series titled *Garden of Hope* which captures the essence of nature through the use of bold, vibrant hues and organic shapes and forms. His 10-metre-long painting has been divided into multiple artworks, as a metaphor for the idea of collective ownership. *Garden of Hope* evokes feelings of awe and wonder at the majesty of the natural world, while also emphasising the idea of our interconnectedness with nature. The use of abstract forms in his artwork allows the viewer to interpret and find their own meaning, encouraging a personal connection to the natural world, aligning with transcendentalists belief in the innate goodness of the individual and the power of nature to elevate the spirit.



Laura Lappi brings forth her signature wooden wall sculptures that are created using the ancient Japanese technique of Yakisugi, where she uses fire to preserve and finish wood, resulting in a unique and unpredictable final outcome. Her sculptures, made from mainly recycled wood, explore the relationship between architecture, spatial environments, and the human mind, highlighting the alienation from nature and how it can manifest as a sense of loss and abandonment. Lappi raises important questions about the role of fine art in understanding the roots of our cultural and physical disconnection from nature and how it can be addressed through art.

Toma-L presents his *Wood & Black Shadows* series which are perceived as a contemporary bestiary composed of shadows punctuated by waves of black and white paint on wood. Each *Wood & Black Shadows* is a raw and instinctive act reminding us that the beauty is the unexpected and the unforeseen. In nature, nothing is perfect, and everything is perfect. *Wood & Black Shadows* draws our attention to deeper sensations of shape, and movement, inviting us to visualise scenes in a more emotive way, encouraging wonderment for shapes by creating intense form, and awakening a profound love of movement. *Wood & Black Shadows* are motivating the desire to ascend the experience not only of the paint but also the material: the Wood.



Sculptures in the form of globes are brought forth by **Bruno Helgen**, which poetically illustrate the dance of the various cartographic representations of the continents, nation-states, oceans, and seas that separate them. His work reflects the ongoing dramas, whether tectonic, political, cultural, or religious, that continue to shape and define our world. Helgen's designs are made from local wood from Bali, such as teak, and are adjusted to the beauty and imperfections of the individual piece of wood. Each globe is an expression of the unique qualities of the wood's natural form. Helgen's work is a reflection of the beauty and complexity of our world, and he apologises in advance if your country has been mutilated by art, irony, or circumstance in his representation.

Axel Chay's standing sculptures serve as a tribute to the natural world and its beauty. His unique approach to using wood as a medium reflects this connection, as his pieces are inspired by the sensual curves of the forest and are polished, refined, and contorted to reach a level of perfection that reflects the sensuality of our environment. Through his art, Alex invites visitors to consider their own perceptions of the world, and how our views shape our understanding of beauty.



WOOD you rather be happy?" is more than just an exhibition; it serves as a poignant reminder that we are all interconnected and interdependent with the vast Earth around us. Our relationship with nature is fundamental to our well-being and happiness. This exhibition embodies the ethos of Thoreau's famous quote, "I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees." It inspires us to take that walk ourselves, and to fully embrace the transformative power of nature in our lives. -adds Celine Firetti.

