

PRESS RELEASE

Sam Falls

September 20 – December 19, 2025

Opening on Friday, September 19, 6 – 8 pm

Artist talk with Sam Falls & Gianni Jetzer, 6.30 pm

Waldmannstrasse 6, CH-8001 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present the tenth solo exhibition by US artist Sam Falls.

As a young man, Sam Falls became eager to leave behind the farm in a small Vermont town where he had grown up with his mother. With a population of 3,000, the pre-Internet rural setting felt limiting, and he longed for the intellectual buzz of a big city. Eventually moving to New York, he set out to pursue his artistic ambitions. Given his desire to escape that pastoral life, it's even more striking that nature would later become central to his work. After years immersed in universities, libraries, and the urban landscape, Falls began returning to the natural world. Sleeping in a tent, he spent extended periods outdoors and discovered that he felt more at home under a starry sky than inside a city studio. What initially seemed like a departure from his roots turned out to be a return: the forests and deserts of his childhood, experienced as an only child, reemerged as a source of creative inspiration. Today, Falls doesn't maintain traditional studio practice. Instead, he embraces national parks and rural landscapes as ever-changing workspaces, where his creativity can unfold in close contact with the natural elements that continue to shape his art.

This contrasts the conditions of his artist peers, who already in 2010 had too little money to afford more than small studio spaces in the outer boroughs of Manhattan. He feels that they were all making art to survive rather than surviving to make art, and this sacrifice led them to make the same type of work: what was then called 'petit abstraction'. According to Falls, this felt "elitist, alienating, and isolated" and, at best, would have corresponded "with questions of test, rather than pursuits of beauty" or with unnecessary attempts to translate the writings of Adorno and Derrida into visual art.

The problem was that it was difficult to find inspiration and originality within the confines of his atelier because he wasn't connecting with it on an emotional level. Believing still in an avant-garde and a progressive art, he decided to leave the studio behind and ultimately work in nature. This aligns with his advocacy for decentralizing art and producing it beyond the gentrified density of the metropolis. Given his rural origins, we might be tempted to attribute the initial impetus for his work to biographical factors and view his ceaseless moving as a search for lost time. However, he doesn't only return to Vermont. Instead, like a melancholic nomad, he expands his geographical radius beyond the familiar terrain of his childhood to include spaces extending across the vast American continent.

Falls has always had a strong passion for natural spaces. Even in high school, he wanted to become a landscape photographer and admired the work of Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, and Edward Weston. However, he did not want to simply imitate them. Instead, he sought other ways to approach spaces without an intervening apparatus, aiming to capture their essence in a manner that would do justice to the spaces and the diversity of ecosystems. He planned to use the typical flora of a region as a medium and motif to characterize space in his works. Unlike Cézanne, Falls does not work parallel to nature, but with and within it. Oscillating between photography and painting, he strives for an "indexical one-to-one representation without reproduction," in which changes to the organic caused by weather, heat, cold, humidity, and dryness leave their mark. His work aims to break through the distance created by the gaze through the shutter release and engage with realities such as flora and capture the atmosphere.

That is why, Falls put aside the camera and all associated media, including the cyanotype, adopting the practices of early photography by creating collages and exposing them to light. In essence, he declared nature to be an equal partner with whom he engaged in a dialogue. Initially working in Los Angeles, he used non-biodegradable materials representative of the region, such as tires or 2x4 boards. Only then did he begin collecting plants as representatives

of nature, mortal matter that symbolizes the fear of death. When asked about the difference between photography and his approach to nature, Falls points out that as a photographer, he treated objects like dead bodies transferred to paper. Since leaving the camera, however, he has been dealing with dead matter to create a memorial object, a testament to time.

How does he go about it? He lays out large canvases outdoors and places organic material on top of them. The flora varies by place and season, for this exhibition partly made in Upstate New York, he has used native wildflowers, invasive weeds, and historic farmland grasses. In Los Angeles, he uses seagrass and kelp from the Pacific Ocean. "The plants don't have to be native. They could have been brought here from China 100 years ago or Europe 200 years ago and spread in such a way that they embody the area's essence and have become representative of it," explains Falls. After spreading the plants on the canvas, he throws pigments into the air above them. The windier it is, the more the pigments spread out. The weaker the wind blows, the flatter the pigments land, creating smaller, denser areas of color.

Knowing that weather conditions can distort the appearance of a landscape, and that these conditions tend to be atypical there, Falls takes care not to expose his nascent works to such conditions on the wrong day. As is typical of Upstate New York in the summer, it didn't rain very much, so Falls worked with the regular and excessive nighttime humidity to portray this warm period. Unlike pigments, which expand and mix when it rains, becoming lighter and more diluted so that the images appear watercolor-like, these images have more definition when the lack of perceptiation keeps the pigments from completely dissolving and merging. Additionally, they leave behind shadow images or silhouettes of objects scattered across the canvas, bearing witness to their former presence. By portraying both Los Angeles and Upstate New York through ecosystems, Falls creates a bridge between the opposite ends of the United States – 2,492 miles apart – and documents their dynamic diversity.

Essentially, Falls' work is a monument to nature's evolution over time and a different understanding of humanity. Rather than setting themselves apart from nature, people strive for harmony with it. This presupposes that he has studied and understood the area, its connections, and the processes taking place in nature.

Heinz-Norbert Jocks

Sam Falls was born 1984 in San Diego, CA, and lives and works in Los Angeles, CA, and Upstate New York. He has created his own formal language by intertwining photography's core parameters of time and exposure with nature and her elements. Working largely outdoors with vernacular materials and nature as a sitespecific subject, Falls abandons mechanical reproduction in favor of a more symbiotic relationship between subject and object. In doing so, he bridges the gap between photography, sculpture, and painting, as well as the divide between artist, object, and viewer.

In 2025, a solo exhibition by Sam Falls will be held at Simose Museum, Hiroshima, JP. Recent solo exhibitions by Sam Falls were held at Cookie Factory, Denver, CO, US (2025); MOCA Cleveland, OH, US (2023); Mori Museum in Tokyo, JP (2022); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, US (2018); Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Trento and Rovereto, IT (2018); The Kitchen, New York, NY, US (2015); Ballroom Marfa, Texas, TX, US (2015); Pomona College Museum of Art, CA, US (2014); Public Art Fund, New York, NY, US (2014); and LAXART, Los Angeles, CA, US (2013), among others. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Musée Yves Saint Laurent, Paris, FR (2024); Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, FR (2024); Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden, DE (2024); Art Basel Unlimited, Basel, CH (2024; 2019); Biennale Weiertal, Winterthur, CH (2023); Fondation Opale, Lens, CH (2020); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, CO, US (2018); Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2017); Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, OH, US (2017); Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, UK (2016); Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, SC (2015); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, US (2015); Menil Collection, Houston, TX, US (2015); Museo MADRE, Naples, IT (2014); and the International Center of Photography, New York, NY, US (2013); among others.

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