

**ROSA ALLISON**  
**FLYING DREAMS**  
**27 FEB – 22 MAR 2025**

*Far from the root-bound rubber plants straining their pots in the flats of Wellington, the ficus trees of Mexico City loom higher than any buildings that might hold them, dripping latex lavishly into the gutters. Rosa and I met under their canopies while she backpacked through the country, living out of a tramping pack that contained a sheaf of gouache paintings - early sketches for this body of work. After days exploring the city's galleries and alleyways, running home through flooding streets in the soak of the daily summer thunderstorms, we spent our evenings quietly. We feasted on sweet nectars - fragrant guavas and custardy sapote, tearing the crocodilian skin from the flesh of an enormous guanábana. After dinner, Rosa would light a candle and paint at the kitchen table, finding her way toward the distinctive forms immortalised in these final paintings while I curled on the couch to write. It is a true delight to see these now manifested in their fullest incarnation, and to share these dreams of flight.*



Rosa Allison's paintings in FLYING DREAMS evoke the decadent entanglements of botanical bodies. In symbolically lush jungle dreamscapes, the subconscious awakens in a sensual play of colour and form. Allison's expertise as a gardener and her recent travels in the jungles of South America are transfigured through these paintings into portraits of the more-than-human, offering insight on the plant life's potential to unlock new understandings of embodiment.

Mischievous and frolicsome, these forms of flora and fungi flirt with the shapes of limbs and arteries and other instruments of earthly pleasure - but will not conform completely to our anthropocentric logics. Those who merely walk the surface of the earth will never experience what dances just beneath their soles. Instead, these paintings see humanoid forms blending with the shapes of leaves, roots and insects. Like psychedelic rorschach tests, silhouettes might be dragonflies, seedpods, or anatomical diagrams. Tubers could as easily be the stripped venous systems of an

animal body, while thorny stems interlink like nerves. These paintings are a testament to the interconnectedness of living things above and below the soil.

Botanist Robin Wall-Kimmerer describes her journey into the scientific profession as first spurred by the question “why do asters and goldenrod look so beautiful together?” She finds that beauty is fundamental to function for these flowers - their complementary purple and gold attract bees, just as the violet and yellow hues in Allison’s *Hypnotic Rose* mesmerisingly draw the eye. Contrasting hues in crisp-edged forms and sheer layers of paint invite the viewer to linger with Allison’s floral visions. And of course the allure of flowers is all to do with pollination...

Allison’s paintings highlight the sexual function of fruiting bodies, honouring a queer vision of mother-earth’s fertility. Orbs and ovaries show us the schedule of plants on moon-time, cycled on a lunar calendar. Phallic structures of thrusting swamp reeds, eager seedlings, and upturned rose-buds add to the sensual energy of the paintings. The life-giving power of nature is evoked in yonic motifs of, as Coubert might say, *l’origine du monde...* in the visual throb of labial roses, and the concentric rings of a wound in the trunk of *The Tule Tree* (rendered undeniably erotic by the inquisitive probing of a serpentine form in *Mother*). *The Tule Tree* itself depicts a mighty Ahuehuete (Montezuma cypress) called the ‘Árbol del Tule’ growing in the church grounds at the heart of Santa María del Tule near Oaxaca. Over a thousand years old, its trunk is the widest in the world. A tree so ancient and revered is a fitting inspiration for these works as they celebrate the sacred knowledge of plants.

Like the plants in her own Brooklyn-based witch’s garden, these paintings contain the potential for both healing and poison. In thorny forms and submerged reeds, invocations of serpents invite both promise and threat. Our eyes have evolved to scan sinuous vines or shivers in the long grass to search for hidden threats, and throughout history we can find snakes sidwinding into our darkest communal dreams. Serpents are frequently figured as evil in Christian cultures - symbols of deceptive venom or slinky obscenity, beasts to be banished. Yet fear is far from the only meaning of the snake in symbolism. In Mexico, Rosa described to me the Kundalini yoga practice that seeks to awaken an inner serpent - a coil of dormant energy that can be released up through the spine. These paintings are informed by the snake’s many meanings, with the serpent standing in for both suppressed pleasures and energetic potential. Snaking shapes symbolise sexuality and irrepressible nature in forms winding freely across the canvas.

As well as the snake, the witch is a crucial character in Rosa's recent works. The connection between feminine, indigenous and herbalist knowledge and the suppression of difference as 'witchcraft' is a reminder that the history of flowers is inseparable from politics of power. In *Mugwort Flight*, a witch's hands form shapes stark as monstera leaves, over orbs of scarlet and yellow ochre. A radiant ivory figure floats above the distinctive mugwort crown - referencing the folkloric use of the herb to intensify dreams, and exemplifying a freedom of the psyche accessed through plant-magick.

*FLYING DREAMS* celebrates the release of suppressed energies, as the serpent and the witch and the tree of life join in the joy of creation. Through deep attention to their fundamental forms, these works reveal the animacy of plants, and human bodies' own attunements with the rhythms of the earth.



**Rebecca Hawkes** is a poet and painter from a farm near Methven. Her debut book, *Meat Lovers* (AUP, 2022) won Best International First Collection in the Laurel Prize and was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Awards. Rebecca is a founding member of popstar poets' posse Show Ponies, and is co-editor of the literary journal *Sweet Mammalian* and the climate poetry anthology *No Other Place To Stand*. She is the winner of Palette Poetry's Sappho Prize and Salt Hill's Philip Booth Poetry Prize, and her work can be found in journals like *Cordite*, *HAD*, *Landfall*, and *New Delta Review*. She holds a Masters' in Creative Nonfiction from the International Institute of Modern Letters, and is currently a Fulbright Scholar pursuing an MFA in Poetry in the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan.