

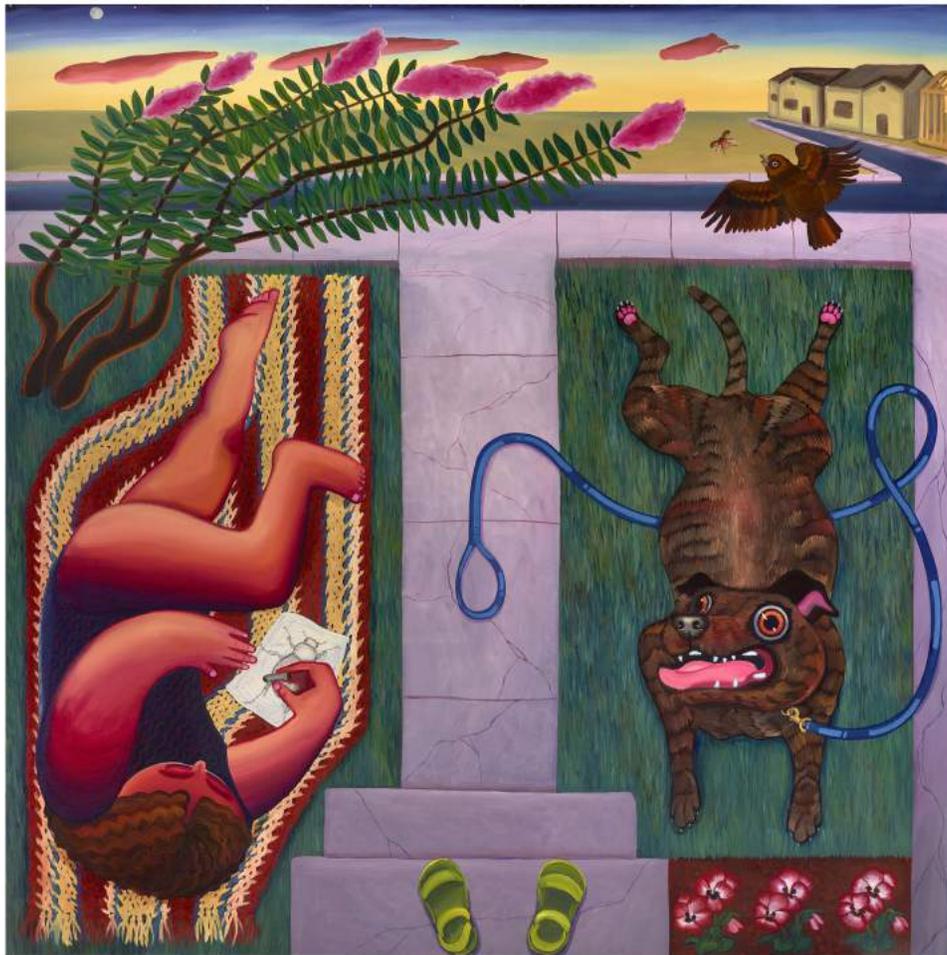
## Natalie Wadlington: Front Yards, Back Yards



*Natalie Wadlington: Front Yards, Back Yards. albertz benda, New York. September 9 through October 8, 2022. Photo: Thomas Mueller.*

In her recent solo show, *Front Yards, Back Yards*, painter, Natalie Wadlington illuminates the mythic contours of childhood, re-discovered under the restrictions of nation-wide lockdown. Illustrating the artist's recalled and invented memories, the featured works are autobiographical but extend to the transpersonal. Natalie's allegorical doubles, like children, remain absorbed within their worlds while project a maturity in communion with their suburban domestic environments.

Relevant to Wadlington's vision is the equal labor with which she completes each discreet subject of her paintings. The human form is given preference neither over the morse code of water droplets nor the shadow cast by a chainlink fence. Through this wholeness of its constituent parts, the paintings' symbolic field communicates a sentience that reflects a child's animistic perceptions.



Natalie Wadlington [American, b. 1992. *Front Yard with Crepe Myrtle*, 2022. Oil on canvas. 96 x 96 inches, 244 x 244 cm. Image courtesy the artist, Library Street Collective, Detroit; and albertz benda, New York and Los Angeles. Photo by Thomas Dubrock.

Animals not only function as intermediaries between the figures and their environment but between the viewer and the work itself. In *Front Yard With Crepe Myrtle*, the bulging geometry of a dog's eye arrests our gaze, opening our perception to the composition's surreal depth. An impeccably placed bird mediates an abrupt shift of perspective between the front yard and walkway, beyond which our line of sight recedes into an expansive suburban landscape. Through this juxtaposition, the front yard's hermetic, horizontal composition corresponds to the narrative of a world confined to a property line. Decorative elements likewise abound. Pansy triplicates extend from the walkway's base; lime green tevas anchor the calligraphy of a dog leash. It's difficult to overstate the subtlety with which Natalie orders this wide amount of variables, but they sustain and enrich one another within a soft tension that would otherwise dissolve under a less-adroit sensibility.



*Natalie Wadlington [American, b. 1992. House Outside of Town, 2022. Oil on canvas. 72 x 72 inches. 183 x 183 cm. Image courtesy the artist, Library Street Collective, Detroit; and albertz benda, New York and Los Angeles. Photo by Thomas Dubrock.*

*House Outside Of Town* further illustrates Natalie’s ability to incorporate multiple traditions within a unique whole. Conventions of Early Florentine Renaissance and American Regionalism feature prominently: the property’s tree line establishes perspective below a wild cloudscape set ablaze by the departing sun. Elsewhere, two frozen birds telegraph the quiet power of Fra Angelico above an archaic figure that echos the ham-fisted influence of Dana Schutz.

Natural light is likewise critical to Wadlington’s narrative. The liminal vibrancy of twilight is employed to indicate a departure from the linear order of the day world and cast its subjects in archetypal light; their hieroglyphic posture and form further emphasize the perennial significance of their activity.

*Putting On Dog Leash* serves as one such example where the ritualistic significance behind an otherwise mundane task is recovered through the subjects' monumentality. Similarly, *Dog Treat* does not portray the satiation of canine hunger, but the entreaty of a totem in the form of a heart-shaped offering. Certain works set a tonal contrast and catalogue a journey to the underworld in the subdued shades of night. In *Lying in Grass At Night* a gargantuan figure freezes in fear before the mystery of a bat. In *Frog At Night With Crane*, a stone bird heralds renewal before the mournful release of a frog. In *Worms After Rain*, pools of water condense the sky's macrocosm into neon gradients that illuminate the figure's beholding eyes. Natalie implies this fusion of self and environment with subtlety, crowning innocence with a depth that only the perspective of the artist's years can articulate.

Lastly, the hand-sculpted insects seen adorning the gallery's walls in tight square formations echo the Natalie's characteristic attention to her paintings' discreet elements. To her, they are a natural progression of this tendency's expression in paint. In the context of this larger body of work, these sculptures play the role of souvenirs, which substantiate the compelling evidence of Wadlington's pilgrimage to childhood.