



HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN

For Immediate Release

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JULIE HEFFERNAN

NUTMEG'S CURSE

April 30 – June 5, 2026

Hirsch & Adler Modern is delighted to present *Nutmeg's Curse*, Julie Heffernan's second solo exhibition with the gallery. Across six new paintings, Heffernan engages the tradition of the Old Masters to address contemporary preoccupations with the self, the body, and ecological anxiety about the fate of the natural world. Her influences range widely from Northern Renaissance artists and Dutch genre painting to the Hudson River School, literature, mythology, and the Catholic iconography of her upbringing.

This exhibition takes its title from Amitav Ghosh's powerful critique connecting the spice trade and its controversial legacy to our contemporary climate crisis. Ghosh's book sent Heffernan back to the Dutch still-life paintings she has long admired and radically altered how she viewed the genre and the artists who painted them.

The Dutch masters rendered their botanicals with trompe l'oeil precision, but Heffernan redefines that convention. Across six new paintings, dramatically scaled roses, peonies, daisies, tulips, and poppies erupt beyond the canvas. Painted with vivid color and explosive brushwork, Heffernan's compositions are not exercises in quiet contemplation. They seduce and entangle the viewer in the disorienting scene.

Heffernan's flora also appears in various states of bloom and decay, an impossible abundance, a fantasy of plenty. But where the Dutch masters embedded their vanitas symbolism in skulls, hourglasses, and porcelain, Heffernan gives us nutmegs on the vine. Small, irresistible, devastating. The nutmeg is the object whose powdered spice launched genocidal atrocities, the forbidden fruit of its time. The Dutch masters memorialized an individual human life, while Heffernan scales up *memento mori* to the entire planet. The dying flowers are not only a reminder of human mortality. They are a warning that the world itself is in peril.

In Ghosh's view, the colonial atrocities of the past and the disasters of our present moment are not separate histories but a single unbroken line. As the eye moves deeper into Heffernan's canvases, narrative scenes unfold in miniature among the stems and petals as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope, Bosch-like in their fevered intensity, at once nightmarish and documentary. Planes crash, volcanoes erupt, cities burn. Heffernan's titles read like dispatches from an unrelenting news cycle — *LA Fires, Gaza, Venezuela, Evacuations, Eruptions*.

Heffernan's audience has come to expect self-portraits, women or men inserted as protagonist and avatar. This exhibition represents a significant shift: the central figure is absent. Yet these may be her most personal paintings to date. Her monumental blooms become her stand-in, as both still life and self-portrait, bearing witness to catastrophe. What remains is her conviction that we are slowly making our world unlivable. These paintings are a call to action. In Heffernan's hands, looking is never a passive act. It is the beginning of a reckoning.

Julie Heffernan (b. 1956) was raised in Northern California, received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in printmaking and painting from University of California at Santa Cruz, and earned a Master of Fine Arts at Yale School of Art. She is a Professor of Fine Arts at Montclair State University and Co-founder of the journal *Painters on Paintings*. In 2011, Heffernan was elected Academician to the National Academy of Design in New York and in 2014, to its Board of Governors. She is a 2017 Fellow of the BAU Institute at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France; was awarded the Meridian Scholar Artist-In-Residence Fellowship from the University of Tampa in Florida; and was the featured artist for the 2017 MacDowell Colony. In 2013, Heffernan was awarded a Milton and Sally Avery Fellowship at MacDowell and in 2012, was invited to be the Lee Ellen Fleming Artist-In-Residence at the University of Virginia. In 2010, she was the Commencement Speaker for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and in 2009, she was the featured artist at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. A recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant, a New York Foundation for the Arts grant, a Fulbright-Hayes grant to Berlin, Heffernan was also a nominee for the "Anonymous Was a Woman" award. Since 1999, Heffernan has had more than 50 solo exhibitions at museums and other venues across the United States and abroad, most recently at Catharine Clark Gallery in 2024-2025. Her work is represented in more than 25 museum and institutional collections. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

JULIE HEFFERNAN *Nutmeg's Curse* opens at Hirschl & Adler Modern on Thursday, April 30 and runs through Friday, June 5, 2026. Located on the 9th floor of the Fuller Building, at the corner of 57th Street and Madison Avenue, Hirschl & Adler Modern is open Monday through Friday, from 9:30 am to 5:15 pm. We will be open for the Madison Avenue Spring Gallery Walk, Saturday May 16, from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm.

For additional information or images, contact Shelley Farmer or Tom Parker at 212-535-8810 (phone) or shelleyf@HirschlAndAdler.com or tomp@HirschlAndAdler.com (email). Please visit our website at www.HirschlAndAdler.com for an e-catalogue of the exhibition.