Shara Hughes

Sink In

250 ALBERTINA

Exhibition Facts

Duration	9 October 2026 – 28 February 2027
Venue	Columned Hall | The ALBERTINA Museum
Curator(s)	Angela Stief Melissa Lumbroso
Exhibits	53
Catalogue	Shara Hughes. Sink In (bilingual) Ed. Ralph Gleis & Angela Stief Available at the shop of The ALBERTINA Museum as well as at https://shop.albertina.at/ (German/English | EUR 29.90 | 128 pages)
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Opening Hours	Daily 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
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9.10.2026 – 28.2.2027

The lush fields of flowers, enchanting forests, and mystic waterfalls in Shara Hughes's paintings might have slipped out of a fever dream. Giant blossoms shoot skyward like tree tops, plants transform into strange creatures, turquoise suns glisten on the water's surface, while the stars on the horizon bathe the landscapes in a magical light. Hughes's paintings, her works on paper, and most recently her ceramics guide us through the jungle of an unbridled inner world—a world in which the familiar veers into the unknown, blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination.

Shara Hughes (*1981) is ranks among the outstanding and internationally acclaimed artists in contemporary art today. With the exhibition *Sink In*, the ALBERTINA presents the American artist's first solo museum exhibition in Austria. For around a decade, landscapes have occupied a central place in Hughes's oeuvre, evoking Georgia O'Keeffe as well as Fauvist approaches to landscape and the Expressionism of classical modernism. Hughes's landscapes are unreal places. Invented but not fictional, they are neither depictions of nature nor escapist retreats into whimsical dream worlds. Rather, they speak of an ongoing search to make the invisible visible: sensations, memories, moods, those inner states difficult to give shape to.

The artist does not paint how something looks but how it feels. Abundant vegetation, intense colors, and exuberant beauty converge with unsettling perspectives, surreal chasms, and symbolically charged motifs. These paradisiacal impressions are deceptive. A tension builds up between idyll and menace, euphoria and melancholy, driven less by narrative than the aesthetic power emanating from the works themselves. Human figures are deliberately absent from these landscapes. Hughes intentionally refrains from adding human figures, not to offer viewers an all-too-easy subject with which to identify. Instead, trees and flowers become the main protagonists of her paintings.

Sink In, the title of the exhibition, named after one of her most recent paintings from 2026, encapsulates the immersive potential of her works: the more we lose ourselves in them, the stronger the emotional pull of a universe so strange and yet all so familiar. In the exhibition, paintings and works on paper enter into a close dialogue with Hughes's ceramics. Resembling organic formations that have emerged from the imagined worlds of her paintings, they translate their forms into three-dimensional space.

Exhibition Texts

Columned Hall

Shara Hughes usually begins her paintings on the floor, initially without pursuing a fixed plan or predetermined direction. She makes her first strokes, allowing colors to blend into one another, while surrendering some control to the material. Whatever emerges by chance, changes on its own, or develops differently than expected is not automatically corrected: it might prove useful as a fresh starting point. Chance is a method that Hughes consciously employs to undermine her own authorship. At the same time, she seeks an immediate form of action, comparable to the unadulterated creativity of children. Authenticity, immediacy, and a perceived genuine artistic expression are important to her. Hughes knows intuitively when a painting is finished. On one hand, she wants to fill every centimeter of the surface with color and detail; on the other, she aims to leave space for the viewer's own imaginations. Where fully elaborated fields meet blank space arises a tension between excess and emptiness—and hence the feeling of a pervasive, open-ended experience.

Porticus

The works on paper by Shara Hughes conjure exotic and enchanted landscapes. They are not made in the studio but more often while traveling or at home. In these cases, the artist often chooses smaller, more intimate formats, rendered with various media such as wax crayons, colored pencils, and felt-tip pens. A distinctive feature is the immediacy of the drawn gesture: the lines seem exposed, like wounds on the picture plane; quick, free strokes that consolidate at points into almost abstract, ornamental planes. Unlike painting, working on paper affords a different artistic practice, despite—or perhaps precisely because of—its material irreversibility. Once a line is drawn, it can never be fully revised. And yet, Hughes finds the drawing process freer and more open to risk. Paper serves as a test bed where spontaneous inspirations can be candidly translated into visual decisions. Hughes likens this process to jotting down first thoughts: drawing follows an initial impulse, before it takes shape through conscious reflection or conceptual control.

Chapel

The motifs in Shara Hughes's most recent paintings range from a view looking up through the branches of trees to a volcanic eruption and a vista of a vast landscape. While retaining their vivid palette, some of these works move increasingly toward abstraction. These shifts are not the product of a predetermined concept, rather they reflect an intuitive and organic development in her process. Hughes's stain technique, reminiscent of Helen Frankenthaler's "soak-stain" paintings, plays a central role. It allows her to give up control while painting, which requires her to respond to forms and structures as they emerge. This interplay between intention and chance underpins her practice and is particularly evident in her ceramic works. During the firing process, unpredictable deviations from the original form arise—like shrinkage, cracking, or variations in the glaze. These material transformations are not regarded as flaws rather integrated as independent and productive facets of the artistic endeavor.

Press Images

The following images are available free of charge in the Press section of www.albertina.at.

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Shara Hughes
Pop, 2021
Oil, acrylic and dye on canvas
244 × 183 cm
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark. Donation: Fondation Croÿ Roeulx
© Shara Hughes
Photo: JSP Art Photography



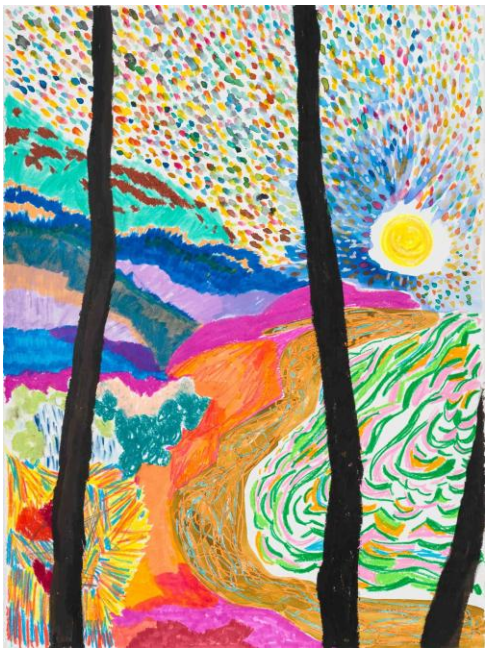
Weighted Blankets, 2022
Oil, acrylic and dye on canvas
244 × 183 cm
The George Economou Collection
© Shara Hughes
Photo: JSP Art Photography



Shara Hughes
Sink In, 2026
Oil and dye on canvas
279.5 × 183 cm
Private collection
© Shara Hughes
Photo: JSP Art Photography



Shara Hughes
Tuck, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas
203 × 167.5 cm
Kunstmuseum Luzern, Schenkung aus Privatbesitz
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Shara Hughes
Sundown, 2025
Mixed media on paper
76 × 56 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich/Vienna
© Shara Hughes
Photo: JSP Art Photography



Shara Hughes
Suns Rules, 2025
Mixed media on paper
66 × 51 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich/Vienna
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Photo: JSP Art Photography



Shara Hughes
Dutch Tree Ceramic, 2026
Ceramic with glaze
43 × 25.5 × 28 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich/Vienna
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Photo: JSP Art Photography



Shara Hughes
Dense Forest, 2026
Ceramic with glaze
43 × 20 × 20 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich/Vienna
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