

Ruby Palmer

Garden Theory

February 26 – April 18, 2026

Opening Reception
Thursday, February 26, 6-8 pm



Garden Theory, Ruby Palmer's fifth solo exhibition with Morgan Lehman Gallery, tests how structure can be drawn from wilderness without losing its unrestrained vitality. These paintings are borne from time spent looking into dense natural spaces, where growth and decay exist without hierarchy. Orientation is unstable. Rather than a fixed ground, the paintings present us with dense fields through which the eye must sift, pause, and reestablish its point of view.

Although Palmer sketches, takes notes, and photographs plants, her references fall away in the studio. The paintings are built from memory, intuition, and formal decision-making. Shapes that recall leaves, vines, or branches are organized by the felt power of composition rather than description. Pattern tightens her surfaces. Gesture opens them back up.

Palmer's process grows out of lived experience. In her twenties, the artist spent days walking the hills and mountains of Colorado with friends, searching for edible mushrooms and arrowheads. Most days yielded nothing, but this practice of deep looking sharpened her attention and patience. She continues this discipline on daily walks through woods, fields, and gardens in Upstate New York.

As Palmer describes it, "I walk my dog every day in the woods or in the fields or past other people's gardens. Certain flowers reach their season and bloom. Black raspberries become ripe. Tulip trees shed blossoms onto forest trails packed with broken leaves. A butterfly wing, dried fungi, a fallen branch, layers of leaves. There are brief shards of bright sky between branches, and the relationship between positive and negative space can produce a floating sensation. In memory, everything blends together."

Image: Ruby Palmer, *Touching Bottom (Blue)*, 2025, Flashe, acrylic, and acrylagouache on prepared linen, 38 x 48 in

Gardening and painting, for Palmer, are practices grounded in the continuity of life. Both unfold over time, shaped by forces that cannot be fully controlled. Plants inhabit fragility and invasion as much as beauty and abundance. Despite the social and political fracture of the present moment, and the ecological tumult planet Earth is undergoing, what emerges from Palmer's work is an insistence on life itself, on growth that proceeds chaotically, mysteriously, and beautifully.

Ruby Palmer (b. 1969, Boston, MA) grew up in rural Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Working across drawing, painting, sculpture, and installation, her practice often engages architectural space and material transformation. She received a BA in Painting and Drawing from Hampshire College and an MFA from School of Visual Arts, where she began expanding into sculpture and installation. In 1999, she was awarded a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant for Painters and Sculptors.

Palmer has presented solo and group exhibitions at Morgan Lehman Gallery, Turley Gallery, Onna House, and numerous institutions and venues including Opalka Gallery, Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild, LABspace, Smack Mellon, Exit Art, and the Samuel Dorsky Museum. In 2025, she completed a 320-square-foot permanent wall sculpture at Albany International Airport, commissioned by Southwest Air and fabricated from recycled airplane leather. Her work has been featured in The New York Times, Hyperallergic, Artforum, and House Beautiful, among others, and is held in private and corporate collections including Fidelity, Morgan Stanley, and Capital Group. Palmer lives in Rhinecliff, NY, and works in Red Hook, NY.