

# Ada Friedman/Helen Adam

## *Ballads*

October 24—December 7, 2024  
Opening: Thursday, October 24 6-8pm

David Peter Francis is pleased to present *Ballads*, a two-person exhibition with New York City and Texas Hill Country based artist Ada Friedman and the poet Helen Adam (1909-1993), who is known for popularizing incantation in American poetry. The exhibition opens with Friedman's series *Performance Proposals*, *Helen Rides 7: Wing and Wheel Paintings* and collages by Adam. These collages may have aided Adam in creating her dark atmospheric mystical writing, poems that have helped Friedman's visual worldmaking for over five years.

Boundary-lines are irrelevant in Friedman's alive studio. Friedman's paintings are "palimpsests of the process itself" and are made through archival and material research and personal everyday encounters - journal writing, observations of light changing, collected objects traced, a headband rendered. Layers of mark-making, language, and studio-accumulation, her paintings topologically build upon themselves and simultaneously become a score for a play. Her rejection of creative distinction is paired with her questioning of temporal categorization. Friedman's work has no end point— exemplified by the evolution of the exhibition's installation, grounded by what she calls the seventh iteration of *Helen Rides*. This will consist of a play, *Helen Rides 7: The Blue Moth Choir Reunion Concert*. Previous iterations of *Helen Rides* have been staged at Safe Gallery in Brooklyn (2018) and All Saints Church in Midtown (2019).

In *Ballads*, Friedman's paintings centralize around twelve repetitious circles— as an organizing principle, there is one for each calendar month. Thus, the *Wing and Wheel* paintings reference an idiosyncratic system which those of us who subscribe to the Gregorian calendar attempt to schedule our lives around. The composition of the wheels framed by a recurrent wing shape is, to Friedman, a motif pulled from Adam's 1979 story *Riders to Blokula*, a tale of witchcraft and phantasmagoria which has served as a significant jumping-off point for her.

Time and its many incongruencies are central to Friedman's work and are among the shared interests provoking Friedman's research into the eccentric life and work of Adam. In addition, crossings between physical and astral realms - multiple worlds happening at once- and the enacting of the body as a creative force join the two. Born in Glasgow in 1909, Helen Adam, known as "Pixy Pool", had her first book of poetry published when she was only 14. After living with her mother and her sister Pat throughout Europe, Adam would move to San Francisco in 1939 where she would be in close conversation with many of the well-recognized Beat poets. A predecessor to the Beat Generation, Adam became 'a sorceress with distinct powers over and within [that] community'<sup>1</sup>, harkening a resurgence of ballad and verse. Helen's collages, some made with her sister, combine image with text; in a letter to Robert Duncan, she wrote: "I always know they would work if Pat says, 'No! No! I can't bear to look at them!'"<sup>2</sup> Much of Adam's protagonists are female-demons and carry a mixture of erotic and mythical transfiguration.

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<sup>1</sup> "Helen Adam - Poet." Scottish Poetry Library, August 21, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Adam to Robert Duncan. 20 October [1978], Robert Duncan Collection, The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York.

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Adam was known to compose her written work while riding a bicycle, which is mirrored by the parameter that guides Friedman's painted actions in this body of work, with her repetitious wheel, each traced from a hub-cap-like object she found on her block in Brooklyn. The sharing of symbol and processual sensibility joins both artists; the exhibition supposes a conversation where both ride in tandem, singing.

Ada Friedman (b. 1984) received an MFA in Painting from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College. Friedman has presented solo exhibitions at Kendra Jayne Patrick, Bern; Grifter, New York; 17 Essex, New York; and Eli Ping Frances Perkins, New York. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Zurich Backrooms, Zurich; Yeh Art Gallery at St. John's University, Queens; UT Downtown Gallery, Knoxville; Safe Gallery, Brooklyn; Alyssa Davis Gallery, New York; SITUATIONS, New York; Night Gallery, Los Angeles; and Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens; amongst others. Friedman has staged and collaborated on performances at All Saints Church, New York; Essex Flowers, New York, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (with Nick Mauss and Rosemary Mayer Estate), and Kunstverein Hannover, Hannover (with Impure Fiction). The artist lives and works between New York City and the Texas Hill Country.

Helen Adam (b. 1903, Glasgow, d. 1993, New York City) was a Scottish poet, playwright, songwriter, and artist. In 1954, she enrolled at the San Francisco State University Poetry Center under the instruction of Robert Duncan. Over the course of her career, she published countless collections of poetry and produced two versions of her famous opera, *San Francisco is Burning*. The majority of her collage and 2D print archive is held at The Poetry Collection at the University of Buffalo.

**Related program:**

*The Blue Moth Choir Reunion Concert*

Saturday November 16, 7pm at DPF

Open dress rehearsal within the gallery installation 5-6pm, doors at 6:30pm

Written, directed, choreography, set, costumes: Ada Friedman

Choir conduction, musical arrangements, music: Samuel Budin

Performers: The Blue Moth Choir (full list of participants forthcoming)

**Special thanks to:**

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Andrew Arnot and the staff at Tibor de Nagy Gallery.