

Aliki Braine  
Into The Woods

Aliki Braine | Into The Woods  
curated by Rodrigo Orrantia

Photo Oxford Festival  
14 April - 6 May 2023

Meakin + Parsons  
x Hannah Payne



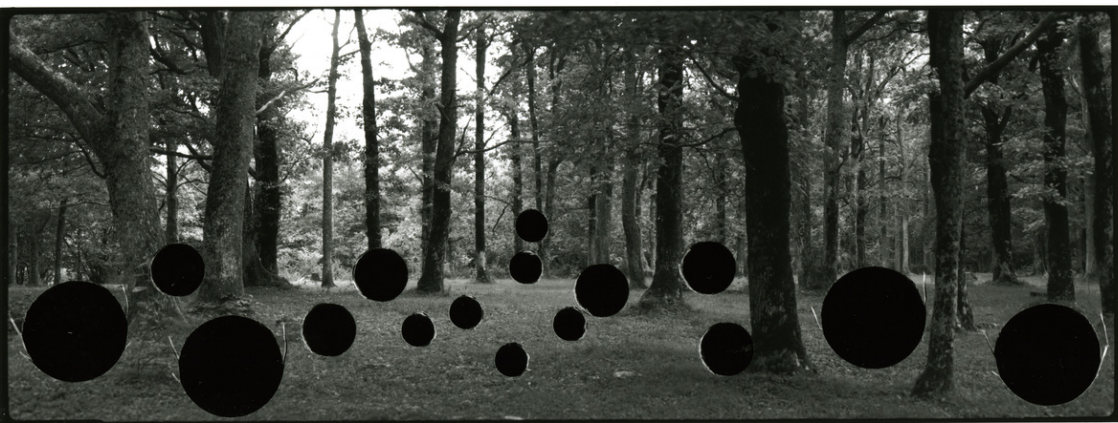
**Spotted (after Uccello)**

2022

Stickered album pages

32 x 70.5 cm

Unique Print



**The Hunt, (Panorama)**

2009

Black and white photograph  
from hole-punched negative

85 x 224 cm

Unique Print (2nd edition smaller size)

# Into The Woods

## Introduction, Rodrigo Orrantia, Curator

### The Hunt

The idea behind this exhibition stems from a work I had seen by Aliko in 2009 called 'The Hunt', inspired by Paolo Uccello's 'The Hunt in the Forest'. This celebrated painting resides in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, where Aliko visited it often as an art student.

Both works, separated by more than five centuries, led me to propose an exhibition to Hannah and Ben at Meakin + Parsons x Hannah Payne, to coincide with the Photo Oxford Festival, and its latest theme, 'The Hidden Power of the Archive'.

Both Uccello and Aliko's hunts are mesmerising images, presenting us with the mysterious setting of the forest, the former as a stage for a nocturnal hunting party and the latter a space for artistic experimentation. Aliko's work allows me to connect these seemingly divergent histories, bringing them back to a shared genesis within the sphere of art: that of an artist experimenting with the possibilities of the craft: composition and geometry, scale, rhythm, negative and positive spaces (and subsequently absence and presence), transparency and colour.

I am obsessed with the figure of the circle and find myself especially drawn to it in Alikí's work. In 'The Hunt' I feel these circles have an eerie presence, their different sizes and locations within the image giving the impression of them existing as three-dimensional spheres, or voids, in the theatrical space of the forest.

On closer inspection these circles reveal their true nature. They are actual holes 'punched out' of the surface of the photographic negative. An action of subtraction, which in turn creates a presence in the opposite world of the positive print. We can also see this in the two Hunting images which lead to 'The Hunt', tracing the first appearance of the hole-punch circles in the forest, which then become the cut circles on the larger scale print.

### **Working at the Studio**

Key to this exhibition is understanding Alikí's process, her experimentation with photography focused on the analogue process, and its materiality. Working together, we created an area to recreate the space of her studio in London. To fully understand Alikí's creative process I think it is paramount to see the tools she uses, and the materials and references she surrounds herself with whilst at work.

In this 'studio room' I included an early work of hers entitled 'Draw me a Tree... Black Out' from 2006,

which is one of the first images I saw of her work, more than ten years ago. It is still as intriguing now as it was then, the many circular punch-outs making a new sculptural object, made from empty space. A tree of pure void or pure mass, standing there, an uncanny manifestation in the middle of a field. The sheep around it graze undisturbed by its presence. I cannot help but think of the black monolith in Kubrick's 'Space Odyssey', an object from another time and dimension.

### **From Punching Out to Spotting**

Continuing along the back wall of the gallery we find a development of Alikí's hole-punch experiments. What was originally a punching-out, becomes a process of addition, bringing in a completely new creative process, working with round stationary stickers.

The game of absence/presence (of punching out and sticking in) becomes even more elaborate; evidence of this are three works included in this show: 'A Thousand Fallen Blossoms', 'Entre'acte' and 'Pieces of Sky'.

We can see how Alikí starts recomposing the fragments which had been punched out of her negatives, printing them together in different configurations. In 'A Thousand Fallen Blossoms' we see how she scatters the circular punch-outs to resemble the fallen petals of a cherry tree.

I particularly like how she has named the process of this work 'colour photograph from negative confetti'. The arbitrary position of the images in the circles allows for a completely new and haphazard reconstruction of the photographic image.

'Entre'acte' and 'Pieces of Sky' are subsequent experiments with this process, each made with 'negative confetti' of land and sky. The trope of the circle is further emphasised by framing the prints in circular frames. This emphasises the multiple nested layers of her creative process but also for me is a reminder of the playful nature of her work. The whole-punched circles are printed on a paper which is then punched out by a circular frame. The wall of the gallery becomes a new surface and each frame a new piece of a larger confetti.

'Field No 1.' brings the experiments with the addition of stickers back into the photographic darkroom, revealing the many layers as a series of intersected transparencies, creating abstract compositions, based on famous paintings from the history of Western Art. 'Field 1' is an example of this, and so is a smaller print entitled '15 Ugly Spots (after Giorgione)!'.

## **From Spotting to Shredding**

'Spotted (after Uccello)' is Alikí's return to the master's hunt, this time 'spotting' the different figures in the scene, recomposing the painting by



choosing stickers of different colours and sizes. Along with 'Shuffle (after Uccello)' these two works on paper are a part of a series developed by Aliko, working directly with commercial mass reproductions of her favourite masterpiece paintings. Integral to her practice is a passion for the history of western art, and how our generation grew to learn and love art through reproductions in books and booklet collections, years before the existence of the digital world and the internet.

Working uninterrupted through the covid pandemic, Aliko found a new source of inspiration experimenting with different ways of deconstructing and recomposing these master paintings, intervening found reproductions from art history encyclopaedia collections. 'Shuffle (after Uccello)' is another take on the Italian painter's work, recomposing his famous and multiple Battle(s) of San Romano first by cutting them into strips, and then weaving them together into an orthogonal grid.

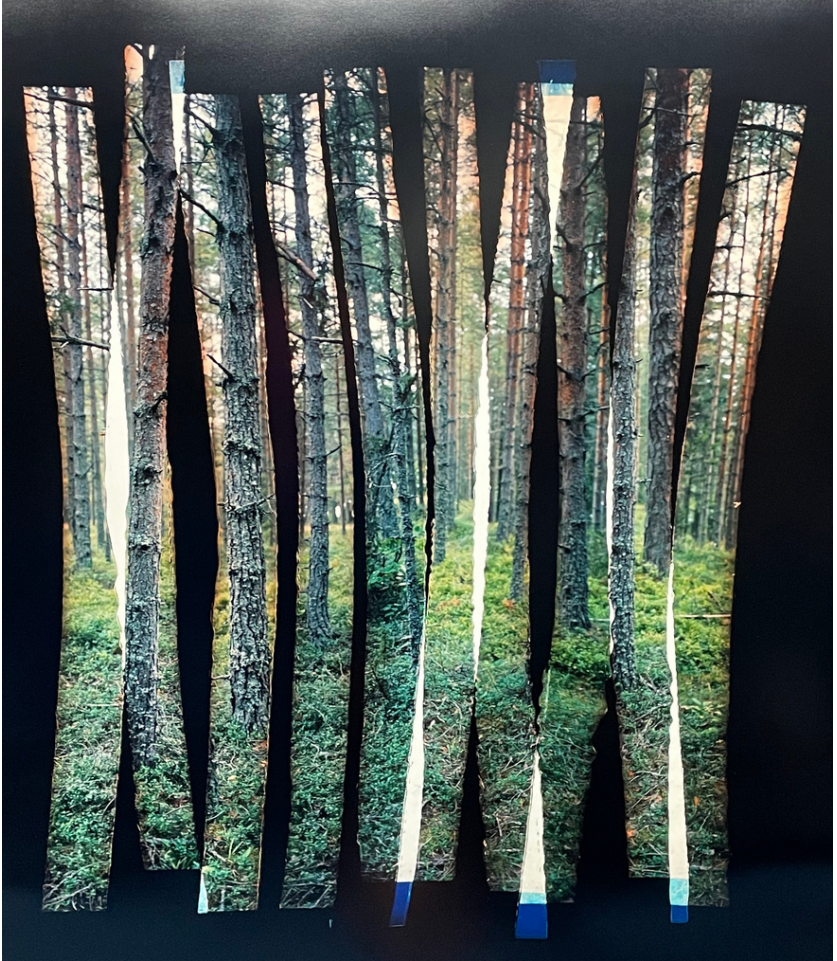
This work signals the latest turn in Aliko's work, shifting from the punch-outs and stickers, to cutting and shredding her negatives into strips. It brings us to her two final works in the gallery, created especially for this exhibition. In 'Into the Woods, Shredded' Aliko uses a hand-held paper shredder to cut her negatives into strips, which she then uses to recompose the image on the glass plate of the enlarger.

These images of forests allude to the woven strips of 'Shuffle', and the experiments with overlapping the confetti negatives. Areas of white sky contrast with abstract shapes created by the complete opacity of the overlapped negatives. The result is a total reconfiguration of the photographic image, expanding it into the material space of the print.

In this exhibition we can see how this unique combination of photographic image and sculptural object has been a constant in Alikí's work, from the punched-out trees in 2006 to the most recent shredded works almost 20 years later. It is an introduction to a disciplined practice, experimenting with the materials and processes of analogue photography. It is also an insight into Alikí's creative universe, fuelled by her passion and knowledge of the history of art, specifically western historical painting. Echoing back her views of some of her favourite artists, I can say the same of her work: there is a great mastery in creating images which seem playful and light-hearted, and at the same time so considered and rigorous in their craft.  
*(Rodrigo Orrantia)*



Into The Woods (Shredded) – negative study



**Into The Woods, Shredded (1)**

2023

Colour photograph from shredded negative

110 x 100 cm

Unique Print

# Disenchanted Forests

by John Hilliard

In person, Aliko Braine may appear to be polite and well-mannered, but as an artist she is seen to be both impolite and ill-mannered – that is, she shoots, punches and stamps in a flurry of ill-tempered fits. Fortunately, such disrespectful behaviour is directed not towards us, but to her medium of choice: photography. Particular punishment is meted out to that most delicate of materials, film itself. Normally treated with care, often with cotton gloves, in her hands it is carelessly disfigured, perforated with holes or deliberately creased and, most recently, torn to shreds.

Having studied Fine Art and Art History, her practice draws on both, frequently using old master paintings as a source of reference or transcription. One recurrent subject has been landscape, often including trees, and *The Hunt* (2009) draws inspiration from *The Hunt In The Forest* (1470), which hangs in the Ashmolean Museum. This is one of several paintings by Uccello to depict hunts or battles, and for Braine such subjects have an obvious appeal. In this case, the violence of the chase is echoed by her own brutal hole-punches in a black-and-white negative, now printed as ragged black circles that strafe the image like bullet holes. Uccello's depictions of weaponry parallel Braine's use of damage-inflicting instruments – indeed the terminology of photography ('firing off a shot'; 'capturing a subject') often has military overtones.

The forest as a site also has its dark side. If, on the one hand, it is a place of calm, of silence and of pleasing scents, then an opposite association is with the fearful events of children's stories – tales of wolves, monsters, goblins and bogeymen. Even at their most

everyday, woods may resound to the noise of saws and axes, or reverberate to the felling of a tree. In a recent work from this year, *Into The Woods (Shredded)*, a medium-format colour negative has been fed through a hand-held paper-shredder, the individual strips then re-assembled in the film-carrier of an enlarger in order to make a large print. The vertically positioned elements create their own 'forest' of reconstituted trees that are now ragged at the edges, as though attacked by a chain saw and their bark partially ripped off.

Nonetheless, just as Uccello's *St George And The Dragon* or *The Battle Of San Romano* serve up scenes of violence while delivering aesthetic pleasure, so Braine's photographic constructs display an engaging pictorialism to belie her aggressive tactics. It is, of course, just such ambivalence that is often a feature of her work.

If '*Into The Woods (Shredded)*' is painterly in its appearance, then its twinned opposite is more sculptural. I am referring to a rough study (not a finished work) where the same strips of film are now rendered in negative. Whereas the positive image has a black background, like the receding darkness of the forest itself, this study has a white background, so that the vertical shapes now appear as freestanding timbers in empty space. The red base of the colour negative film also gives them a wooden hue as they jostle in an asymmetrical cluster.

These characteristics offer a further comparison to Uccello, given that the trees, hunters and horses in '*The Hunt In The Forest*' are all formally simplified and somewhat sculptured in appearance (and therefore stylistically typical of his paintings). In '*Into The Woods (Shredded)*', in both positive and negative iterations, the trees are no longer natural but artificially reshaped. The timber has a more flattened look, so that the forest is reminiscent of a stage set.

In fact, this artifice extends backwards to the source of the original photographs, taken among rows of pines planted in grid-like formation. The location was Estonia but could have been almost anywhere because such rapid-growing man-made plantations are ubiquitous: in this instance perhaps to be pulped for paper and thence neatly ending up in the same domain inhabited by their printed images.

Uccello's trees seem just as regimented and equally theatrical, and despite the hunts and battles in progress among them, they provide a smoothly organised and calm backdrop, whereas by contrast the jagged edges of Aiki Braine's renditions have a more dangerous and unsettling feel. Impolite and ill-mannered indeed, she breaks the spell of the enchanted forest, yet perversely undermines a destructive intent by casting her own spell to conjure up an equally bewitching woodland tale.



**Shuffle (after Uccello)**

2023

Cut and woven album pages

32 x 46.5 cm

Unique Print





**Hunting (1)**

2008

Black and white photograph  
from hole-punched negative

38 x 48 cm

Edition of 3



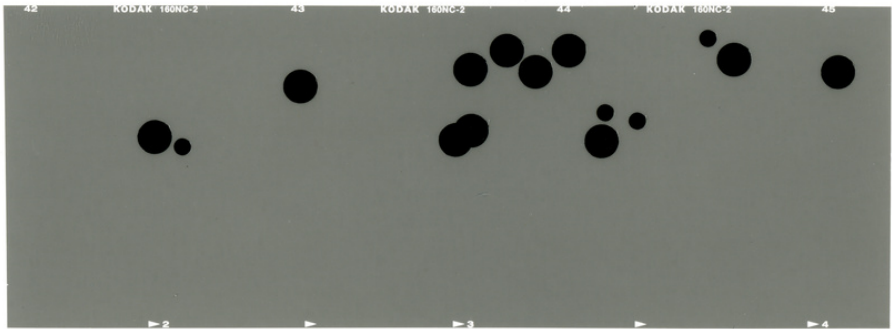
## Hunting (2)

2008

Black and white photograph  
from hole-punched negative

38 x 48 cm

Edition of 3



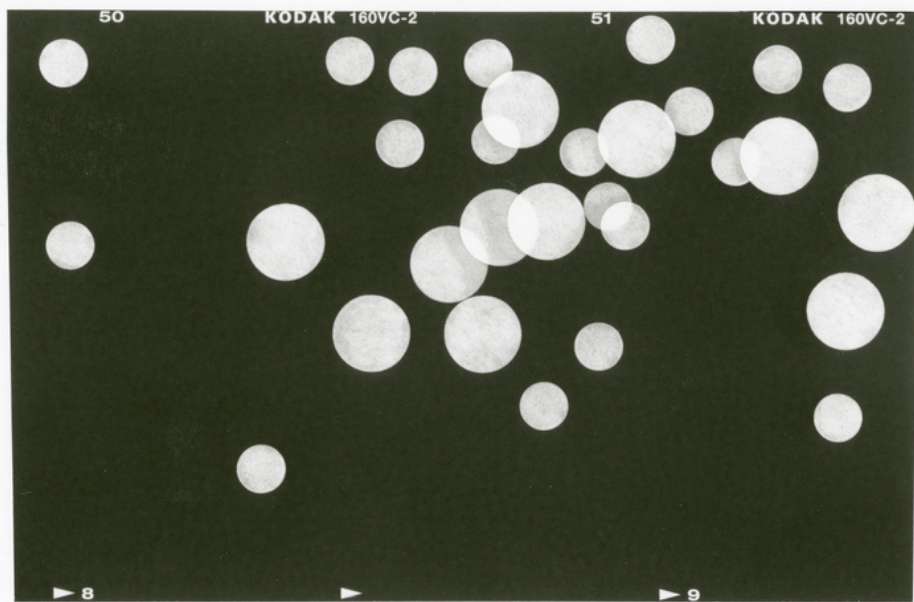
**15 Ugly Spots, (after Giorgione)**

2012

Black and white photograph from  
hole-punched negative

16 x 27 cm

Edition of 3



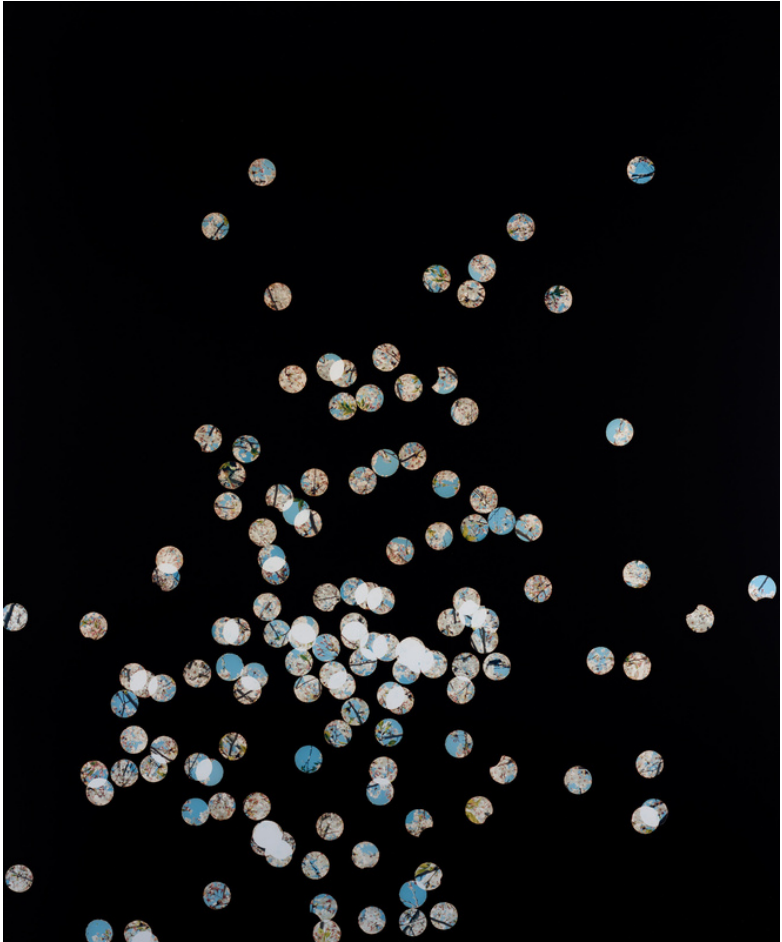
**Field No. 1**

2013

Black and white photograph from stickered negative

85 x 120 cm

Edition of 3



## A Thousand Fallen Blossoms

2023

Colour photograph from negative confetti

130 x 110 cm

Unique Print





**Draw me a tree...Blackout 1**

2006

Black and white photograph  
from hole-punched negative

95 x 117 cm

Edition of 3



## Entre'acte

2023

Colour photograph from negative confetti

Variable, 4 frames:

18.5cm dia. 24cm dia. 29cm dia. 34cm dia.

Unique Print



## A Thousand Fallen Blossoms

2023

Colour photograph from negative confetti

Variable, 6 frames:

18.5cm dia. 18.5cm dia. 24cm dia. 29cm dia.

34cm dia. 34cm dia.

Unique Print





Into The Woods, Shredded (2)

2023

Colour photograph from shredded negative

110 x 100 cm

Unique Print

Aliki Braine was born in Paris in 1976. She has an MFA from The Ruskin School of Fine Art, Oxford University, an MA from The Slade School of Fine Art, London and an MA from The Courtauld Institute of Art where she was awarded a distinction for her masters in 17th century painting.

Recent exhibitions include solo shows in London, Birmingham, Vienna, Madrid and Paris. Her work is featured in a number of recent publications including *British Art and the Environment*, Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède (Routledge, 2022), *Pauline Martin, L'Évidence, le vide, la vie; La photographie face à ses lacunes* (Ithaque Editions, 2017) and *Robert Shore, Post-Photography: The Artist with a Camera* (Laurence King Pub, 2014.) Aliki is an associate lecturer for Camberwell College of Art, University of the Arts London and a regular lecturer for Christie's Education, the Wallace Collection and the National Gallery. She lives and works in London.

## Public Programme

A series of artist led exhibition tours, and talks will take place on Thursdays at Meakin + Parsons x Hannah Payne gallery during Photo Oxford Festival.

### Artist Tours

Thursday 20th, 27th April and 4th May, 3 – 4.30 pm

Join artist Alik Braine for a tour of her solo exhibition 'Into The Woods' at Meakin + Parsons x Hannah Payne gallery, including a visit to the Ashmolean Museum to see the historical paintings from the collection that have inspired the artist's practice.

### Evening Talks

Thursday 20th, 27th April and 4th May, 6 – 7.30 pm

20th April: Alik Braine in conversation with Rodrigo Orrantia, exhibition curator.

27th April: Alik Braine in conversation with Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A).

4th May: Alik Braine in conversation with Professor Jane Garnett, Tutor in Modern History, Wadham College, University of Oxford.

***Free. Booking required, visit [mandp.art/photooxford.org](http://mandp.art/photooxford.org)***

## **Aliki Braine | Into The Woods**

curated by Rodrigo Orrantia  
at Meakin + Parsons x Hannah Payne  
to coincide with Photo Oxford Festival  
Private View: Thursday 13 April 6 – 8 pm.  
Exhibition continues 14 April – 6 May, 2023.

Location: Meakin + Parsons x Hannah Payne  
16 North Parade Avenue, Oxford, OX2 6LX  
Gallery open times: Tuesday – Friday 10 am – 6 pm,  
Saturdays 10 am – 4 pm. Sunday – Monday, closed.

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